



**City of Kingston  
Report to Council  
Report Number 25-029**

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**To:** Mayor and Members of Council  
**From:** Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer  
**Resource Staff:** Lana Foulds, Director, Financial Services  
**Date of Meeting:** January 20, 2025  
**Subject:** 2025 Budget Engagement Results

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**Council Strategic Plan Alignment:**

Theme: Financial measures/budget

Goal: See above

**Executive Summary:**

The 2025 budget engagement process commenced in June 2024, with the launch of the 2025 Budget Get Involved Kingston project page and the budget engagement survey. This report provides an overview of the engagement tools and activities that were utilized and summarizes the feedback received during the 2025 budget engagement process.

Survey results and other engagement feedback were collated and forwarded to the respective departments/agencies for consideration during the 2025 budget development process and will provide input into future budget processes.

This report also speaks to future budget engagement plans and a shift from a fixed annual timeline to a more dynamic approach that will incorporate year-round elements of information sharing and education while providing residents with varying opportunities for input.

**Recommendation:**

This report is for information only.

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**Authorizing Signatures:**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF

FINANCIAL OFFICER & CITY TREASURER

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**Desiree Kennedy, Chief  
Financial Officer & City  
Treasurer**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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**Lanie Hurdle, Chief  
Administrative Officer**

**Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:**

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Growth & Development Services	Not required
Jennifer Campbell, Commissioner, Community Services	Not required
Neil Carbone, Commissioner, Corporate Services	
David Fell, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Infrastructure, Transportation & Emergency Services	Not required

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**Options/Discussion:****Background**

The City of Kingston's budget process offers the community an opportunity to learn about the municipal budget process and provide input on priorities and service levels, as well as influence the allocation of public resources.

Building on lessons learned from previous engagements and guidance from the City's Public Engagement Framework, the 2025 engagement plan was implemented throughout the summer to early fall of 2024.

The benefits of budget engagement, the selection of engagement tools, and the public interest in participation, have to be evaluated against the investment of staff time to plan and implement engagement activities. Budget engagement participation has declined over the previous couple of years, and it has become more challenging to engage the community on budget-related issues. In response, a portion of the City's 2025 engagement process included a consultation on how to better engage citizens and increase participation in the open budget process more effectively.

**Budget engagement survey**

The budget engagement survey launched May 31, 2024, on the Get Involved Kingston webpage. The community was provided opportunities to engage online, by phone or by email. The survey closed on September 13, 2024, with 531 surveys completed (up from 151 in 2023 and 450 in 2022).

The survey included questions covering a variety of topics that allowed for both closed and open-ended responses – value received for tax dollars, property tax increases in relation to service levels, and the level of user fees for various services and programs. The survey also included questions to solicit feedback on what tools and approaches would be more likely to appeal to residents in encouraging increased participation in the budget engagement process (i.e., in-person activities, virtual sessions, interactive tools, information resources).

Legislative requirements for ongoing asset management planning will require public engagement on current and proposed asset levels of service. With the objective of increasing our community's awareness of asset management principles and the impacts on municipal budgets, the budget engagement survey polled respondents with introductory questions on asset conditions and asset investment levels to support and supplement the full public engagement process happening in early 2025.

**Pop-up events**

Two in-person pop-up events were held – one on June 1<sup>st</sup> at the Cataraqui Centre and one on June 13<sup>th</sup> at Springer Market Square. Exhibit A provides illustrations of the resulting interactive activity boards as well as additional comments submitted by residents at the in-person events.

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Visitors had the opportunity to talk with and ask questions of City Finance staff and to participate in interactive activities. One activity included placing a sticker on a whiteboard to indicate how they would rate the overall value received for their tax dollars on a range from poor to excellent.

A second activity provided respondents with the opportunity to balance competing priorities by determining where budget dollars should be spent. Each person was provided with three green stickers to affix to the desired category based on where they felt the City should spend more in order to increase the quality or quantity of the service or accelerate the progress of the strategic priority; and three red stickers to indicate where the City should reduce the spending of tax dollars. Service areas and priorities were summarized under four main categories:

- Getting around:
- Enforcement and Emergency Services
- Life in the community
- Kingston's 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities

In addition to the two in-person pop-ups, a stationary display was set up at the Senior's Centre that included the same two interactive activities listed above, as well as the opportunity to complete the survey.

### **Ideas tool**

In response to the declining participation noted over the last couple of years, staff utilized the "Ideas tool" feature on the Get Involved Kingston Budget page to solicit suggestions on how to increase participation in the budget engagement process - what tools and activities will generate the most interest and how staff could encourage participation from an expanded and more diverse cross section of residents. Others could see ideas once posted and show their support by "liking" their favourite ones.

All budget engagement activities were promoted through the Get Involved Kingston budget engagement page, social media, news release, and the Get Involved Kingston email newsletter.

### **Who we heard from**

Based on the Get Involved Kingston engagement statistics, 532 participants completed surveys or submitted future engagement ideas, and 1,500 participants visited the project page. The pop-up events had approximately 100 participants taking part in the interactive activities.

### **What we heard**

Exhibit A to this report summarizes the 2025 budget engagement results.

Of note from the survey, 73% of respondents felt they were getting fair, good, or excellent value for their tax dollars. Just over 38% fell between the good and excellent value categories. Similar results were seen from respondents participating in a similar activity at the pop-up engagements.

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When surveyed on the challenges of balancing property tax rates with increasing demands for services, 45% of the respondents were in favour of increasing property taxes at an inflationary level to maintain services and 17% of the respondents were in favour of increasing property taxes by more than inflation to expand and enhance services.

Survey respondents were also polled on their support for increased user fees for specific services if this meant a reduction in the level of support from property taxes. Of note, ice rental fees and cultural programming fees received the highest number of responses for supporting an increase in fees and transit and recreational fees received the higher number of responses for not supporting an increase.

When surveyed on the satisfaction of current condition of municipal assets, participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of the assets for most programs and services, except roads and sidewalks which had a higher percentage of respondents that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the condition of those assets. Roads and bridges received the highest priority rating for prioritizing improvements and maintenance.

Survey responses also provided useful and creative suggestions on effective budget engagement tools that could encourage increased participation in future budget engagement processes, with the Get Involved Kingston project webpage, surveys and regular email updates getting the highest number of votes. Staff will review and incorporate this feedback in developing future budget engagement plans and will continue to review other practices and techniques that will increase the level of public engagement on budget-related topics.

The second in-person pop-up activity provided respondents with the opportunity to balance competing priorities by determining where budget dollars should be spent. In total, 345 stickers were placed on City services and strategic priorities. The top three areas of increased investment (green stickers) were:

- Support housing affordability (33)
- Road and sidewalk maintenance and replacement (14)
- Outdoor recreation facilities (12)

The top three areas of reduced investment (red stickers) were:

- By-law enforcement (30)
- Police services (24)
- Garbage and recycling collection (12)

## Feedback

It is important to ensure that participants feel that their feedback is valued and has influenced the subject matter at hand. Survey results and other engagement feedback were collated and forwarded to the respective departments/agencies for consideration during the 2025 budget development process and will provide input into future budget processes.

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**Future engagement strategies**

Since 2020, when Council endorsed an open budget process through [Report Number 20-098](#), the community has been encouraged to participate in the municipal budget process and to increase their awareness and understanding of the budget challenges and constraints.

Staff will continue to integrate targeted budget engagement into the overall annual budget process; however, future engagement plans will consider a shift from a fixed annual timeline to a more dynamic approach that also incorporates year-round elements of information sharing, outreach, and education. This broader approach to engagement will provide residents with continuous opportunities for input, will integrate with other engagement activities, will better align with the City's planning and budget processes, and will ultimately lead to more informed and inclusive decision-making.

Process improvements for sharing engagement results and feedback will be explored to ensure consistent and ongoing communication with stakeholders, City departments and Council. Staff will ensure Council is aware of future budget engagement activities in advance in order to help promote engagement efforts with their constituents.

**Existing Policy/By-Law**

[Municipal Act, 2001](#), s. 290(1) as it pertains to the annual budgeting process.

[City of Kingston Public Notice Policy](#)

**Notice Provisions**

There is no legislated notice provision related to the budget engagement process.

**Financial Considerations**

None

**Contacts:**

Lana Foulds, Director, Financial Services & Deputy Treasurer, 613-546-4291 extension 2209

**Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

Kelsey Pye, Communications Officer, Communications and Customer Experience

**Exhibits Attached:**

Exhibit A – 2025 Budget Engagement Results

## 2025 Budget Engagement Results

### Budget engagement survey

The budget engagement survey was launched on May 31st on the Get Involved Kingston webpage. The community was provided opportunities to engage online, by phone or by email. The survey closed on September 13th with 531 surveys completed (up from 151 in 2023 and 450 in 2022).

The following provides a summary of the survey response highlights. Responses were shortened for brevity and clarity. Feedback that did not follow the City of Kingston’s Guidelines for Participation was omitted.

1. In 2024, the average residential property valued at \$328,100 paid \$3,847 in property taxes for all municipal services, including roads, sidewalks, pathways and trails, winter control, fire, police, recreation, parks, transit, garbage and recycling. How would you rate the overall value received for your tax dollars?

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Response percentage</b>
Excellent	30	5.6%
Good	178	33.5%
Fair	183	34.5%
Poor	132	24.9%
Prefer not to answer	8	1.5%
Total	531	100.0%

2. Due to the ongoing cost of maintaining service levels and supporting infrastructure, the City must balance property tax rates with increasing demands for services. Please indicate which of the following statements comes closest to capturing your point of view.

Response	Number of Respondents	Response percentage
Increase taxes at an inflationary level to maintain services	240	45.2%
Increase taxes by more than inflation to expand and enhance services	91	17.1%
No tax increase, even if it means reducing some services	175	33.0%
Prefer not to answer	25	4.7%
Total	531	100.0%

3. A user fee is a charge that an individual pays to access a specific service. Most services that have user fees associated with them, such as recreational programming and transit, are also subsidized by tax revenues. The services listed below are supported by both user fees and taxation.

Programs or Services	Support an increase	Do not support an increase	Undecided
Recreation (sports fields and park fees)	258	243	29
Arenas (ice rental fees)	343	157	30
Recreational programming (e.g., fitness / aquatics)	267	237	25
Transit fares	136	371	22
Cultural programming fees (e.g., Grand Theatre, museums)	307	193	29
Garbage bag tags	275	233	21



4. How satisfied are you with the current condition of the following municipal assets in our community?

<b>Programs or Services</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
Roads	11	119	103	204	94
Sidewalks	25	201	127	143	35
Parks	96	282	95	50	8
Pathways and trails	66	266	117	68	14
Sportsfields	78	230	206	14	3
Recreation facilities - arenas	72	226	214	14	5
Recreation facilities – aquatics and fitness centres	62	190	211	52	16
Community centres	64	206	224	29	8
Libraries	157	235	110	22	7
Transit – buses, bus stops and shelters	48	203	171	83	26

5. Which types of municipal assets do you believe should be prioritized for improvement or maintenance in our community? (Select up to three)

Response	Number of Respondents
Roads and bridges	364
Sidewalks	217
Parks	126
Pathways and trails	130
Sports fields	21
Recreation facilities – arenas	14
Recreation facilities – aquatics and fitness centres	87
Community centres	63
Libraries	97
Transit – buses, bus stops and shelters	232
Other (please specify)	44

Those who selected “Other” specified the following (summarized by theme):

- Active transportation – cycling, multi-use paths, secure bike parking
- Recreation – splash pads, waterfront activities and multi-use outdoor facilities
- Infrastructure – arts facilities, public washrooms, buried infrastructure, green construction
- Transportation – traffic flows, parking and bus delivery parking, traffic calming and enforcement

- Housing – additional and diverse subsidized housing units, social housing and emergency shelters
  - Solid waste – more public bins, discounted or no cost large item disposal
  - Green spaces – community gardens, edible forests, conservation areas and preservation methods
  - Improved front-line staff resources
  - Increased winter operations
  - Airport services
  - Animal control
  - Alternative or green energy sources through local micro-grids
6. What budget engagement tools and/or activities do you think are most effective for engaging the community in the municipal budget process? Note: Respondents could select more than one tool. There were 527 respondents.

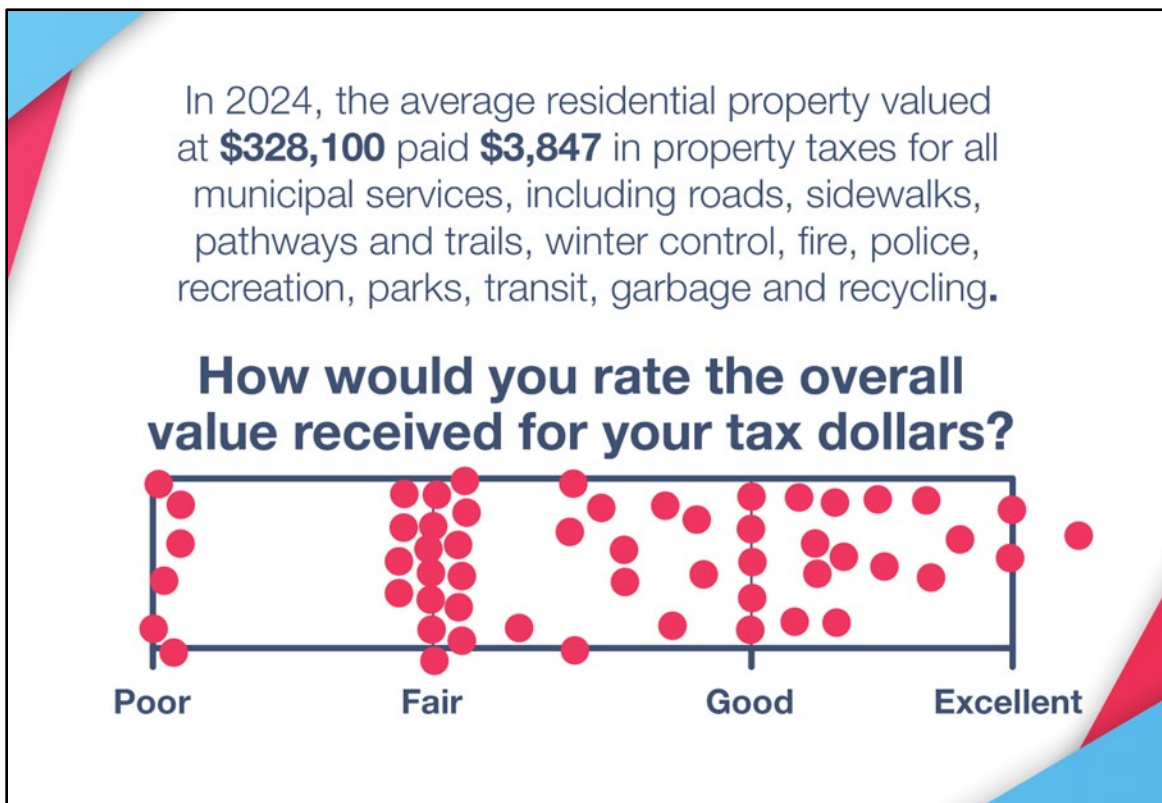
<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Get Involved Kingston project webpage	308
Budget open house	174
Virtual presentations	176
In-person pop-up events	139
Interactive activities	123
Surveys	357
Special speaking/information sessions	72
Participation in focus groups	183
Receiving regular updates through email	319
Other tools or events (please specify)	35

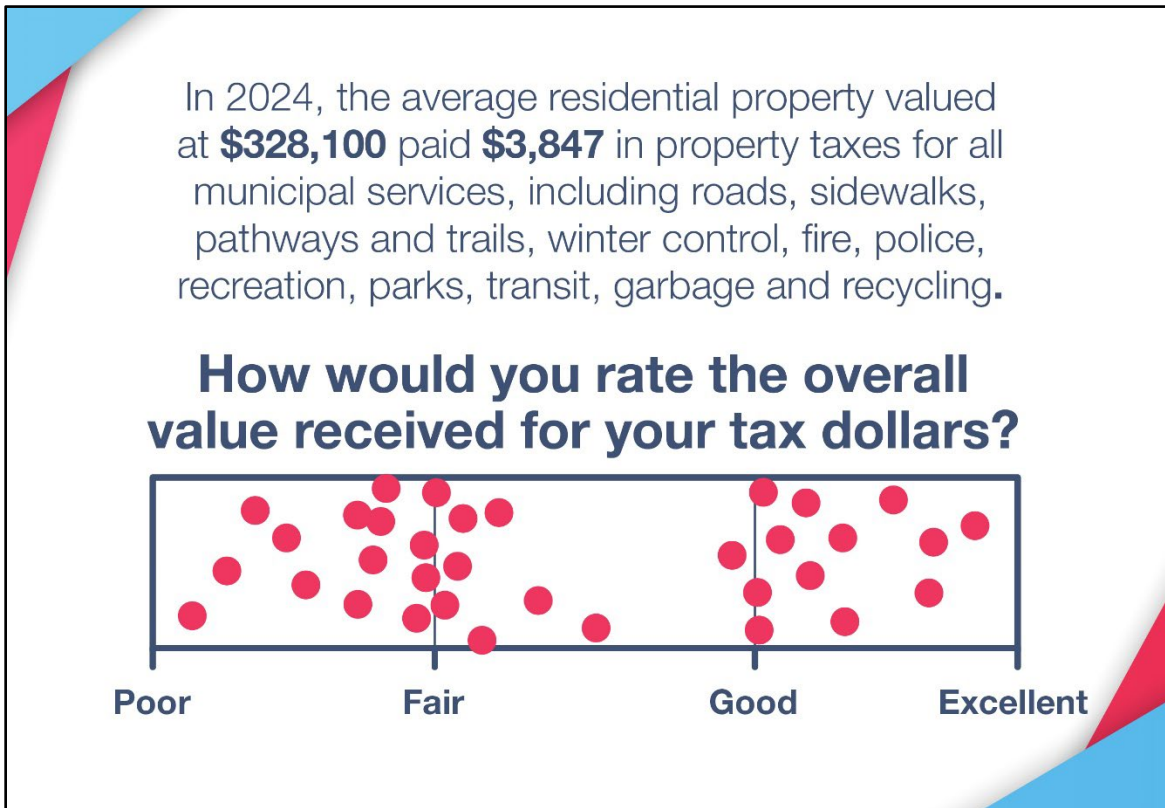
Those who selected “Other tools or events” specified the following:

- Offline promotion/engagement for those who do not have access to the Internet
- Social media (free or sponsored advertisements)
- Council – in-person district sessions, newsletters finance committee
- Opportunities for community feedback – referendum votes for major spending events or budget process, incentives for participation
- Collaborate with organizations around Kingston to promote engagement
- Make budget more visible for residents to access

### In-person pop-up events

Two in-person pop-ups were held – one at Springer Market Square and one at Cataraqi Centre - as well as a stationary display set up at the Senior’s Centre. At all sessions, residents were asked to provide input by placing a sticker on a display board indicating how they would rate the value received for their tax dollars. The results from each pop-up location are provided below:





As a second activity, participants were given three green stickers and three red stickers. They were asked to consider how they would balance competing priorities by determining where budget dollars should be spent and to place a green sticker in areas where they would like to see an increase in spending in order to increase the quality or quantity of service, or accelerate the progress of the strategic priority, and a red sticker where they would like to see a reduction in spending. Participants were asked to use both their red and green stickers in order to simulate balancing a budget.

In total, 345 stickers were placed on City services and strategic priorities.

The top three areas of increases (green stickers) were:

- Support housing affordability: 33
- Road and sidewalk maintenance and replacement: 14
- Outdoor recreation facilities: 12

The top three areas of decreases (red stickers) were:

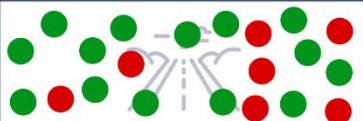



- By-law enforcement: 30
- Police services: 24
- Garbage and recycling collection: 12

Have your say in balancing priorities by determining where budget dollars should be spent.





**Instructions:** Add a **green** sticker next to the service area or strategic priority where you think the City should spend more in order to increase the quality or quantity of the service, or accelerate the progress on the strategic priority.

Add a **red** sticker next to the service area or strategic priority where you think the City should reduce spending.

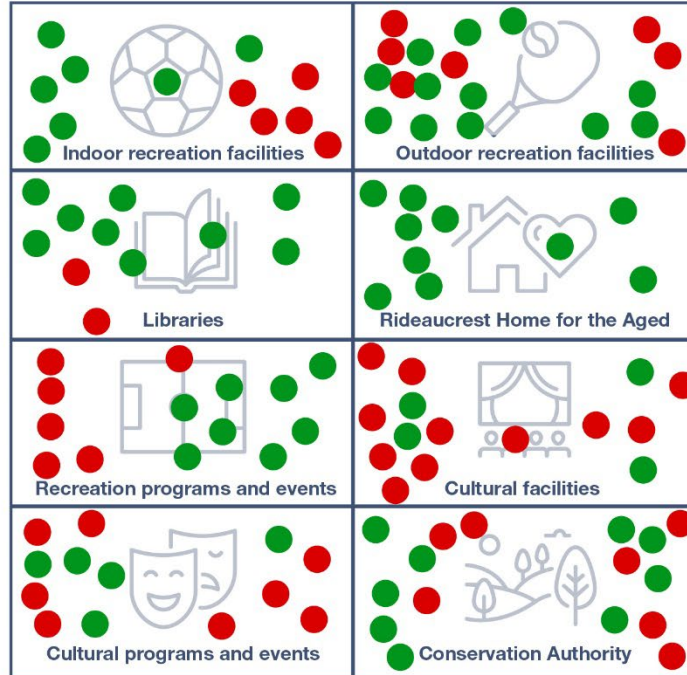
### Getting around

 <p>Road and sidewalk maintenance and replacement</p>	 <p>Road and sidewalk snow clearing and removal</p>
 <p>Public transit</p>	 <p>Multi-use pathways and trail maintenance and development</p>

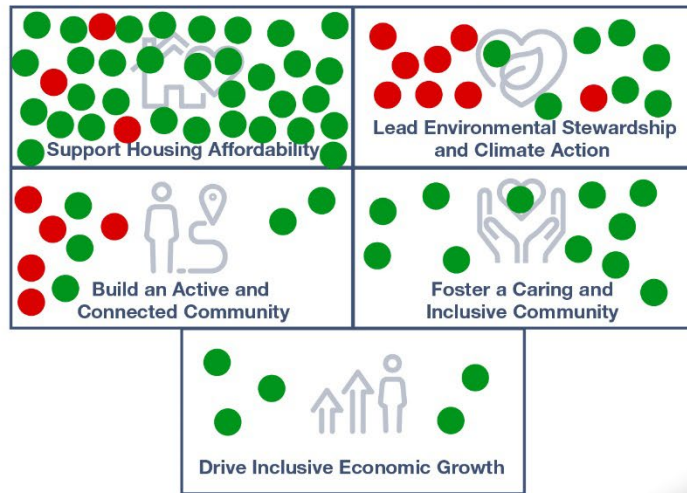
### Enforcement and Emergency Services

 <p>Fire &amp; Rescue</p>	 <p>Police Services</p>
 <p>Garbage and recycling collection</p>	 <p>Bylaw Enforcement</p>

### Life in the community



### Kingston's 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities



The following are additional comments submitted by residents at the in-person events. Responses were shortened for brevity and clarity. Feedback that did not follow the City of Kingston's Guidelines for Participation was omitted.

- More seating available in public spaces
- More garbage bins in public parks
- Communicate road closures more effectively
- Cater more to locals and less to tourists
- Increased accessibility
- Increased traffic calming
- Safe crosswalks on Montreal Street
- Lights in Confederation Park don't work
- Don't close Ontario Street permanently
- No tall buildings downtown
- Fix lefthand turn traffic light at King West and Portsmouth
- Do not support new walkway at Confederation Basin swimming area

## **Ideas Tool**

The 2025 budget engagement utilized the "ideas tool" feature on the Get Involved Kingston Budget page. This tool provides the opportunity for the community to engage with each other by submitting creative ideas in response to a variety of questions. Others can see ideas once posted and show their support by "liking" their favourite ones.

The following are comments submitted by registered Get Involved Kingston participants through the Ideas tool. Feedback that did not follow the City of Kingston's Guidelines for Participation were omitted.

Question: What other ways can the City engage residents on the budget? Are there opportunities for us to bring more people into the conversation?

There were four responses to this question, of which one provided a budget engagement idea:

- High-level monetary prioritization survey: In a survey/ranking format, list all the high-level line items with the associated amount, projected amount and allow participants to provide their allocations.