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Report 2022-105

Report Title: 2023 Budget Survey Results

Committee Name: Finance and Audit

Committee Meeting Date: July 5, 2022

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Finance

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Finance

Approved by: Jennifer Moore, CAO

Council Meeting Date: July 20, 2022

Strategic Plan Priorities: Economic Prosperity and Innovation
 Sustainable Growth
 Thriving and Inclusive Communities
 Leadership in Change

Information Report

“**That** the Finance and Audit Committee receive Report 2022-105 ‘2023 Budget Survey Results’ for information; and

Further That the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information.”

Purpose

To report on survey results from the 2023 Budget Survey.

Background

The June 15, 2022 Council Report 2022-090 'Long Term Financial Planning Framework / 2023 Budget Process, Schedule & Levy Considerations', included the commitment for facilitation of a budget survey. The 2022 survey for the 2023 budgetary cycle was available on the County website commencing May 5th allowing for responses up until May 31st.

Consultations

The budget survey is one of the primary opportunities for the County to engage with taxpayers to help identify budget priorities for the coming year. The budget process is developed annually by the Treasurer with input from the Finance department staff involved in developing the annual budget. Feedback received from Council, the public and the operating departments is also considered in setting priorities for infrastructure, programs, services and determining any modifications to the annual process.

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

The Municipal Act Regulation 289 Yearly Budgets, Upper-Tier.

Discussion/Options

To provide for public engagement and input into the County's annual budget and long-term financial plan, staff facilitated a 2023 budget survey. The survey was advertised via social media, the County website, newspapers and a media advisory was also issued. As part of the budgetary process, staff committed to compiling results of the survey to report to Council in consideration for the 2023 budget and in development of the 2024-2032 long-term financial plan.

The survey was facilitated through the County's public consultation portal on the County's JoinIn Northumberland website for a period of 27 days with 144 contributors. It would be difficult to compare to the 2022 budget consultation that was facilitated via a participatory budget simulation tool as it was a completely different platform utilized, and different method of consultation; however, for purposes of comparing participation and engagement, there were 77 individuals who completed the simulation tool, and approximately 220 people who accessed it. In 2020, when a similar survey was done to this year, there were 54 contributors, and in 2019 there were 374. Responses this year were fairly aligned with that of the 2020 survey. The survey was comprised of questions in which responses were selected based on pre-set options as well as requesting stakeholder input through commentary to elicit detailed feedback. The results of the responses to the pre-set questions are provided below and the feedback to the commentary questions are provided as attachments to this report. Commentary feedback is provided verbatim with the exception of instances that contain personal identifiable respondent information or is considered derogatory in nature which is removed wherever this has been recognized.

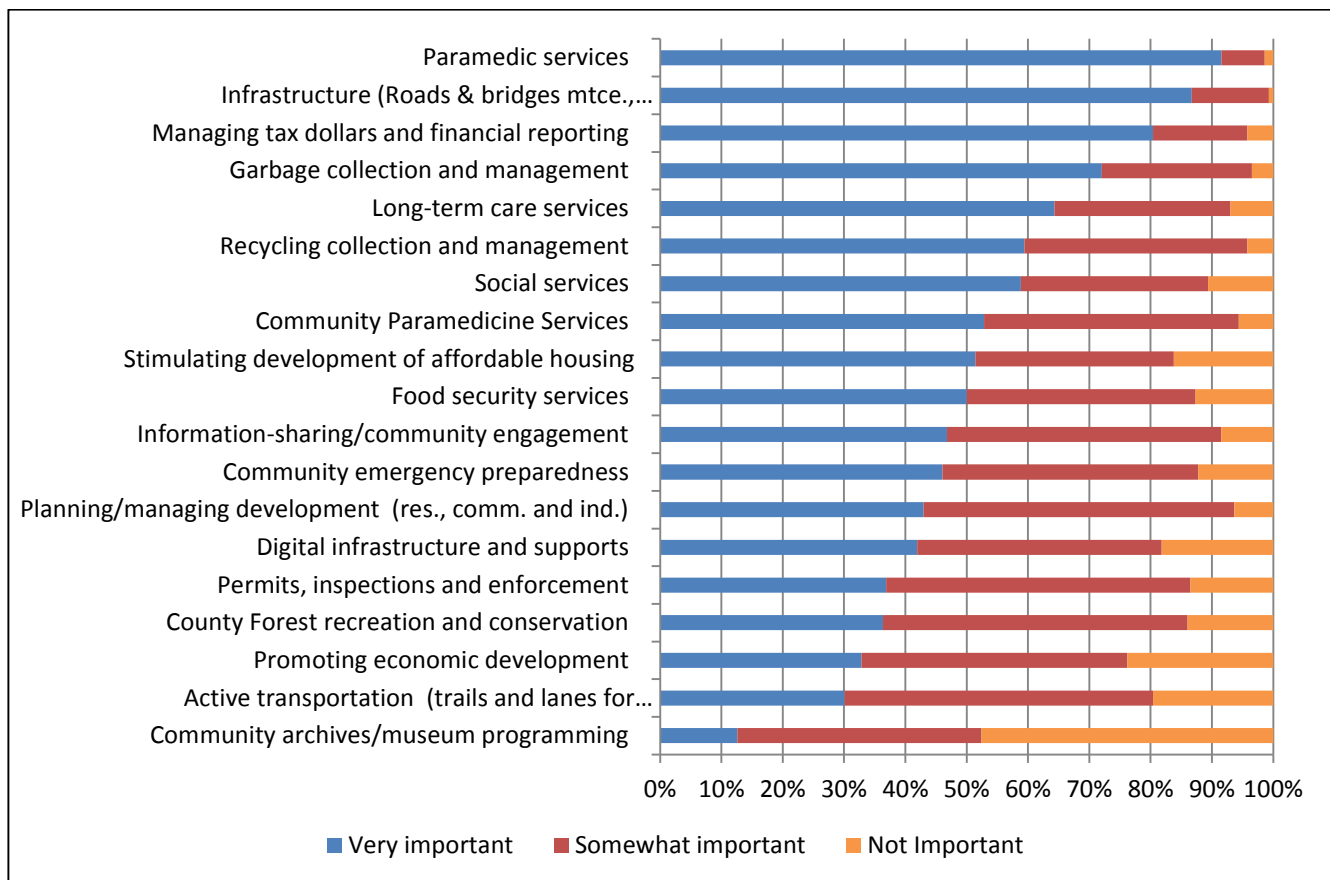
1. Importance of service delivery:

Question: Below is a list of services/programs provided by the County. How important do you think the following services/programs are to the community?

This question required respondents to rank each area of service delivery based upon a level of importance. Appendix 1A provides respondent’s commentary for additional feedback to this question.

In 2022, the top 4 service delivery rankings were the same as in 2020 (Paramedic Services, Infrastructure, Managing Tax Dollars and Financial Reporting, and Garbage Collection and Management). The 5th most important ranked service/program in 2022 was Long-term Care Services (6th in 2020), which switched positions with Recycling Collection and Management (5th in 2020).

In 2022, small business supports were included with economic development so the same 5 least important ranked services/programs remained the same with the positions changing slightly.



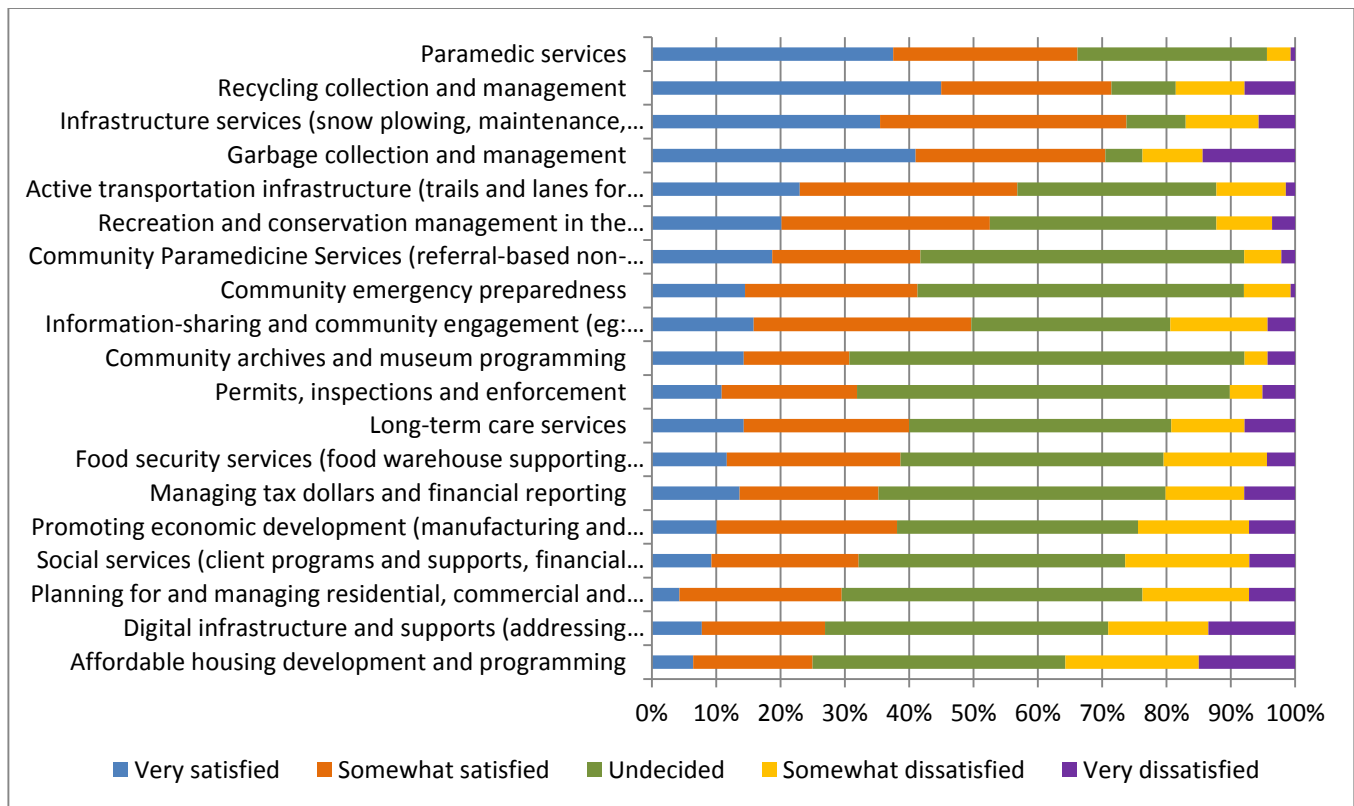
2. Satisfaction with service delivery:

Question: How satisfied are you with how these County-provided services/programs are being delivered in our community?

This question required respondents to rank each area of service delivery based upon a level of satisfaction. Appendix 1B provides respondent’s commentary for additional feedback to this question.

In 2022, excluding the undecided responses, 71% (2020 - 69%) of respondents were either very or somewhat satisfied with the services received, 19% (2020 - 20%) indicated somewhat dissatisfied and 10% (2020 - 11%) very dissatisfied. Primarily, the ranking of satisfaction for each service delivery area is consistent with responses in the 2020 survey.

Results are sorted based on the differential between very satisfied/somewhat satisfied versus somewhat satisfied/very dissatisfied; therefore, negating any weighting for undecided responses.

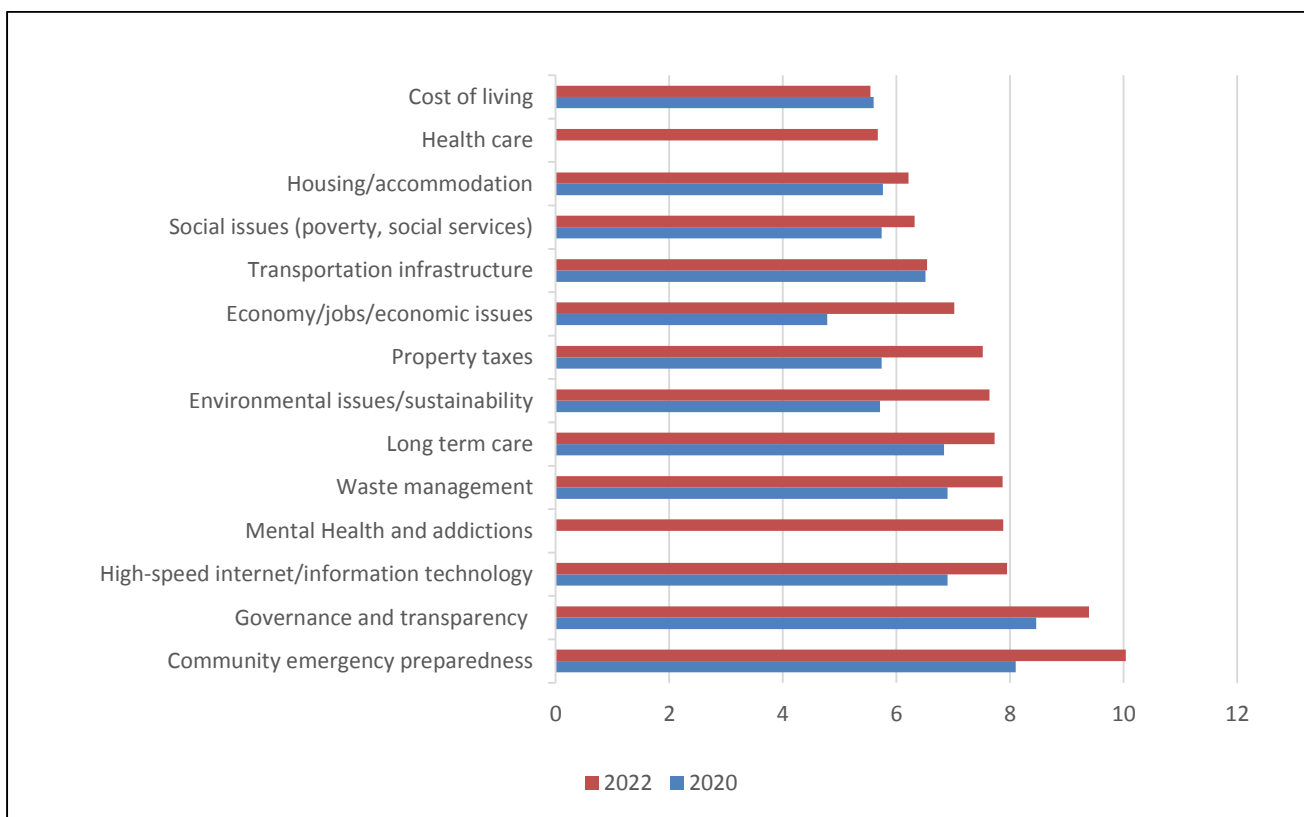


3. Most important issues:

Question: From your perspective, what are the most important local issues facing Northumberland at this time? (Please rank the below list of items using a scale of 1 to 14, with 1 being most important).

This question required respondents to rank in order the items that they deem as the most important issues to consider. The same question was posed in the 2020 survey with the exception of two items; therefore, results based on average ranking for comparison purposes are displayed as applicable. The 2020 survey had 12 issues for ranking with 2022 adding Health Care and Mental Health and Addictions for ranking on a total of 14. Appendix 1C and 1D provide respondent's commentary for additional feedback to this question.

Overall, the responses in 2022 show a very similar pattern to that of the 2020 survey.



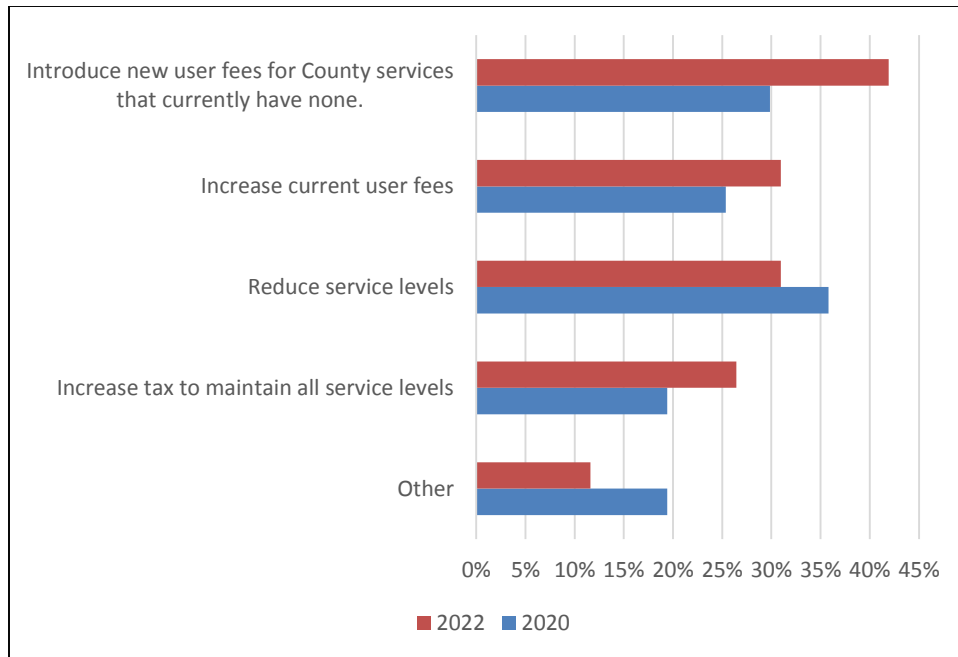
4. Balancing the budget:

Question: In order to balance the 2023 County Budget, as required by law, Northumberland County has several options to consider. Which of the following options would you prefer the County use to balance its budget? (Note: User fees are dollars you would pay to the County to access specific services, such as waste bag tags, tipping fees for waste disposal at community recycling centres, and building permits and inspection fees) Please mark your preferred boxes below. You may select one option or up to three options

This question required respondents to select preferred options for balancing the budget.

Respondents in 2022 preferred to a larger extent to introduce and increase user fees and to increase taxes as opposed to reducing servicing levels versus the 2020 survey.

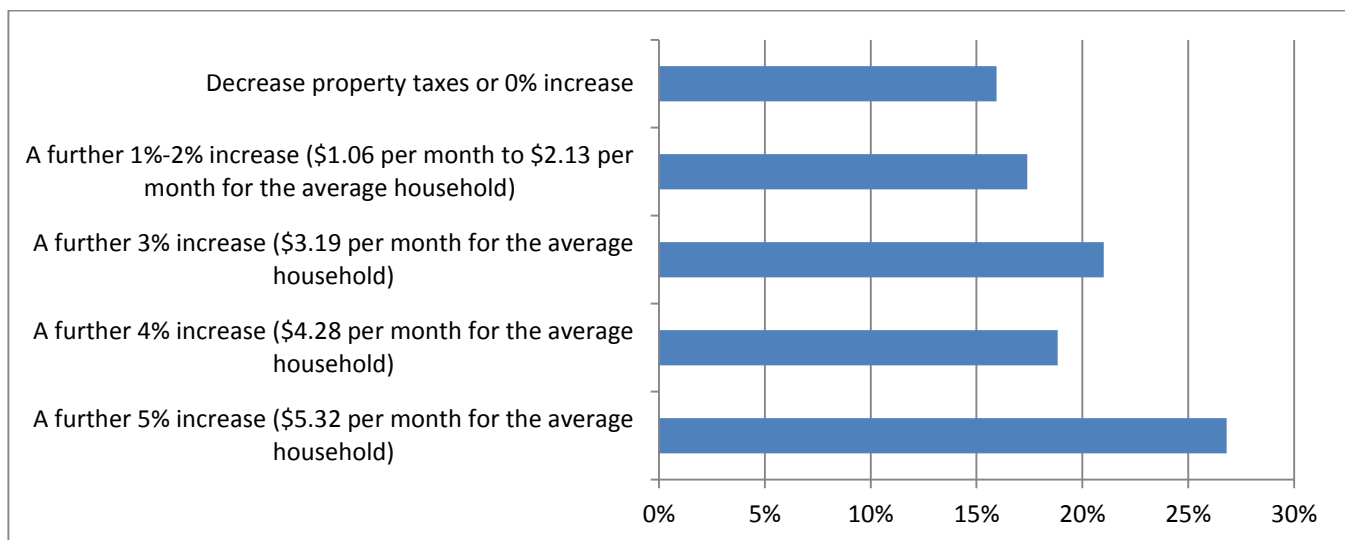
Commentary related to responses classed as 'other' are highlighted in Appendix 1E for other key considerations.



5. Tax increases:

Question: To maintain levels of service and to address the gap in funding required to maintain local infrastructure (roads, bridges), the County has typically increased property taxes at about or slightly higher than the rate of inflation – which, in the past, has been approximately 2-3% annually. With the rate of inflation in Canada at a 31-year high of 6.7% (March 2022 12-month change), costs for standard operations have increased. Inflation for activities related to infrastructure maintenance/renewal is even higher – at around 15%. In the table below, we have used an assumption of a typical detached single-family home in Northumberland, not on water, to calculate examples of the impact of various property tax increases and decreases in the current environment. Based on your expectations for infrastructure and service levels, please tell us what you think the property tax level should be in 2023 by selecting your preferred option below. (NOTE: This is for illustrative purposes only. It does not reflect actual potential property tax increases.)

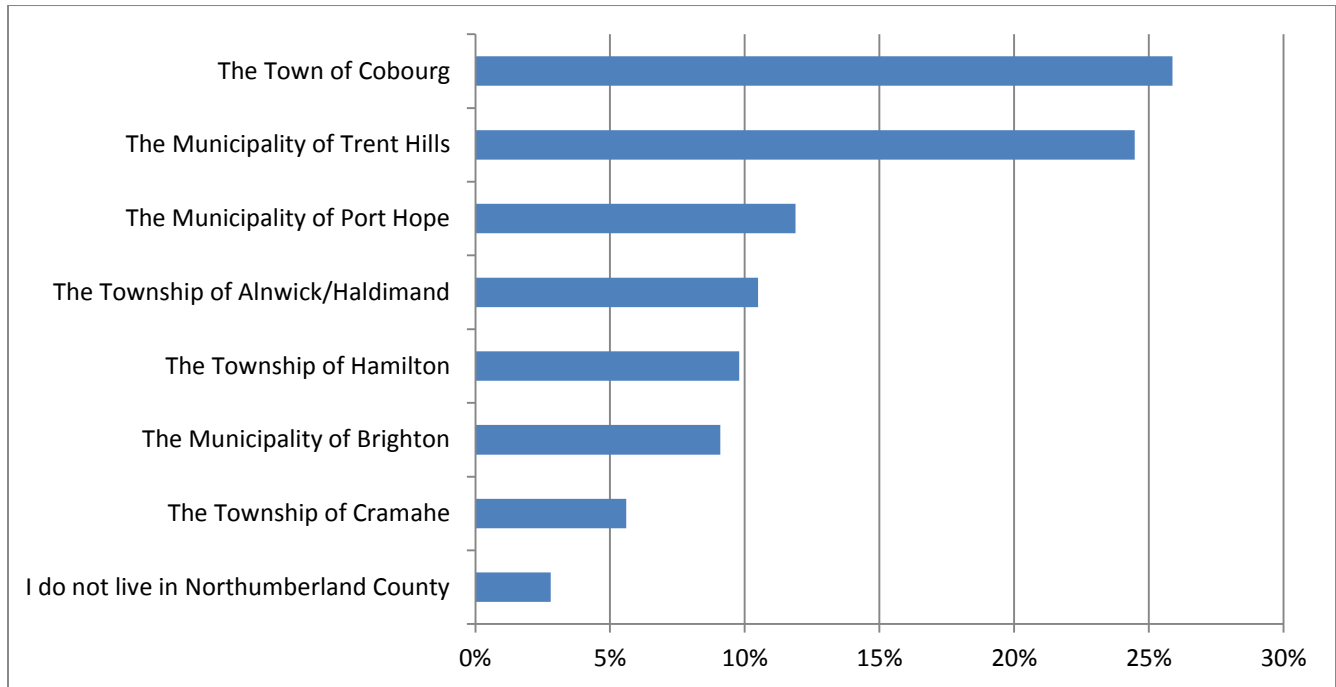
This question required respondents to select if they would be in favour of supporting a decrease or 0% increase, or an increase to taxation in increments of up to 5%. 16% (2020 - 27%) of respondents indicated they would not support increases; whereas, 84% (2020 - 73%) indicated they would be in support of this. The largest proportion of respondents at 27% (2020 - 6%) selected an increase of 5% likely in recognition of current inflationary pressures as prevalent in the media. MPAC assessment forms the basis for tax calculations and, as such, the current average assessed value is used for purposes of estimated homeowner tax impacts.



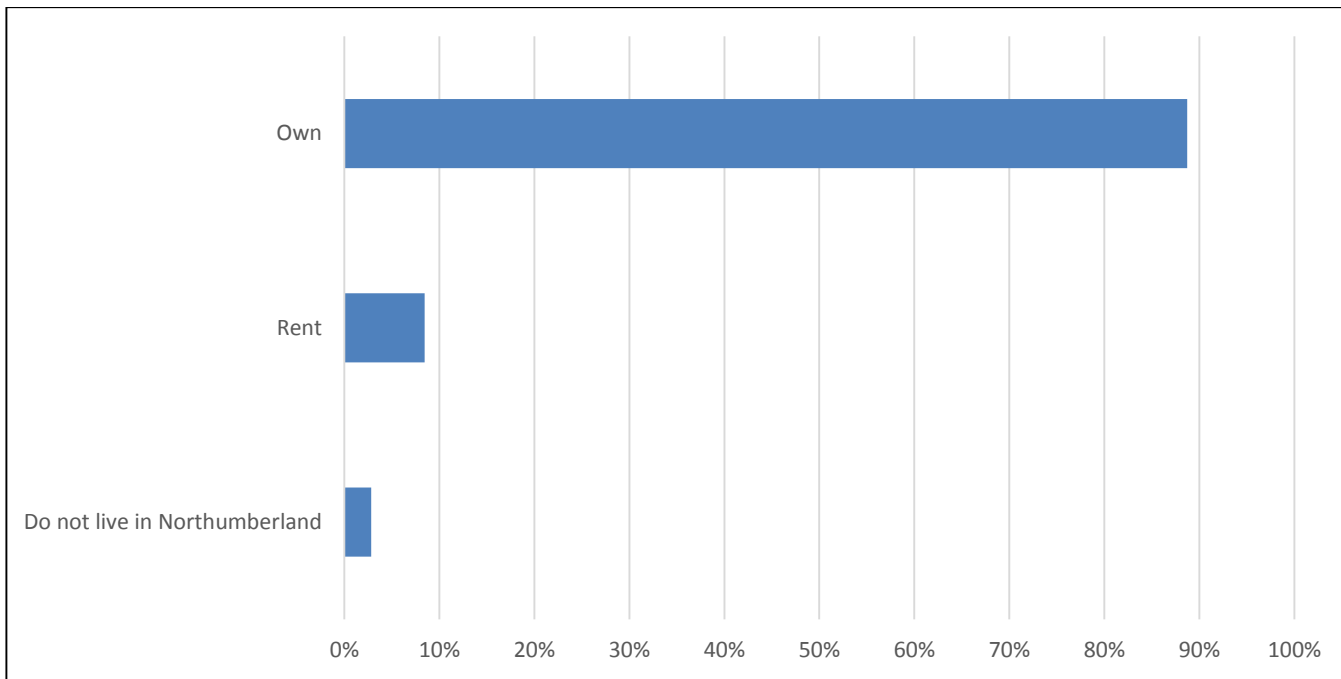
Demographics of respondents:

The questions below focused on respondent's demographics as well as how they became aware of the survey:

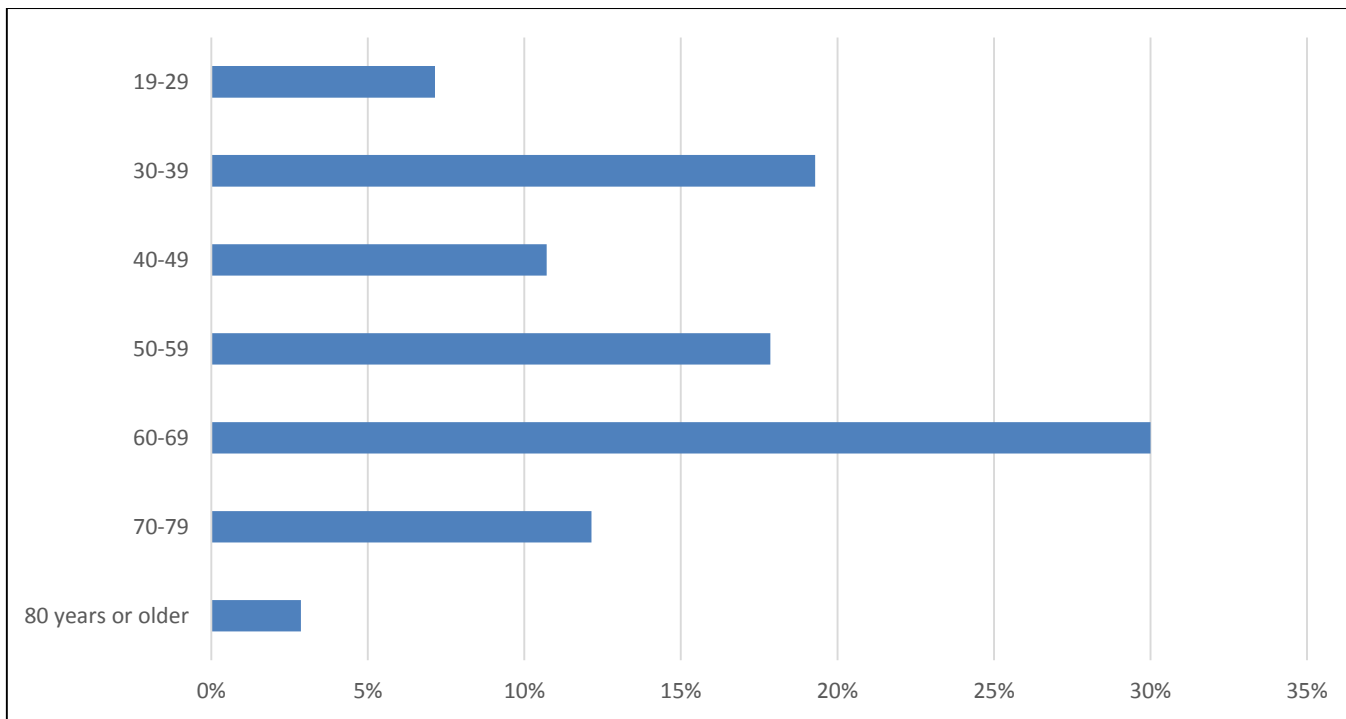
Question: In which local municipality do you live? (Note: if you do not live in Northumberland County but you do own a business in the community, please indicate in which municipality your business is located)



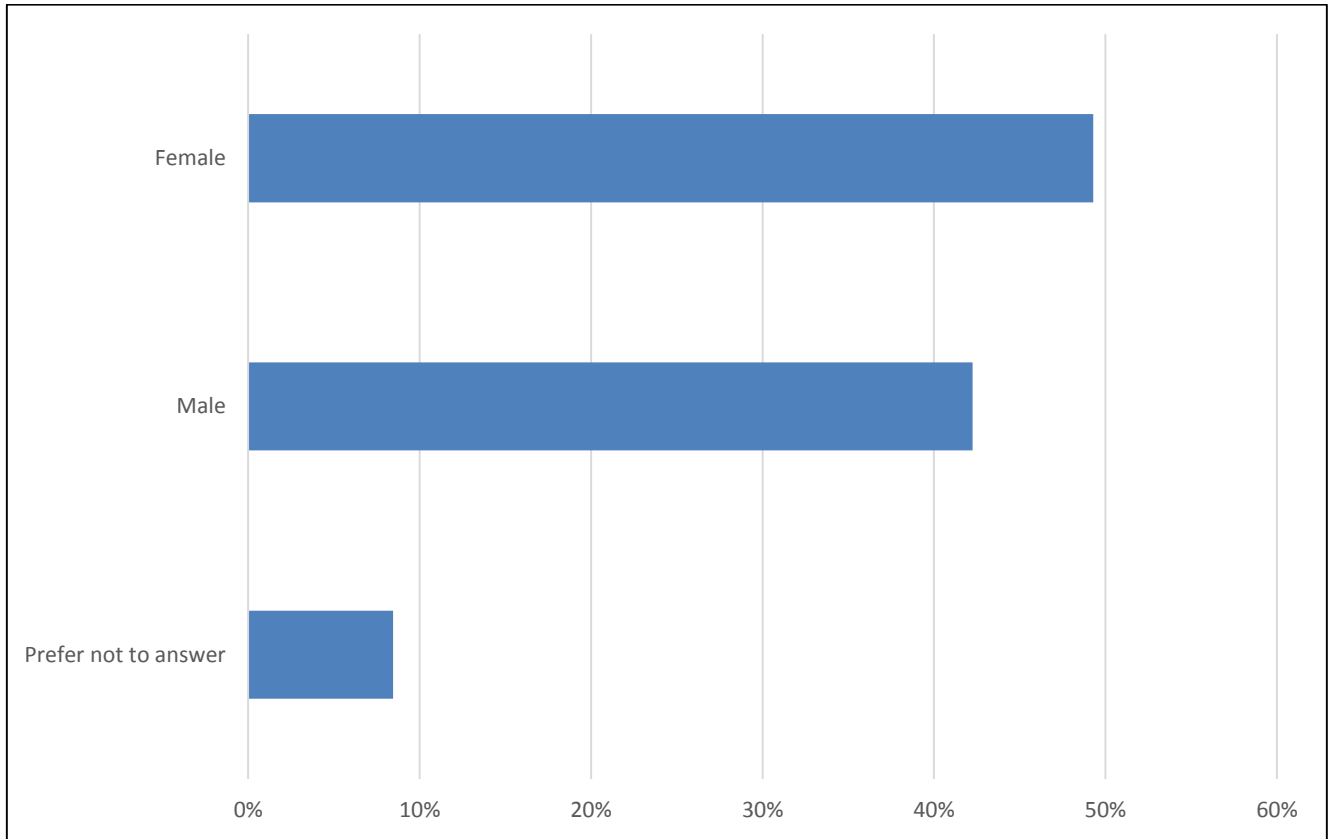
Question: If you are a resident of Northumberland County, do you own or rent your current place of residence?



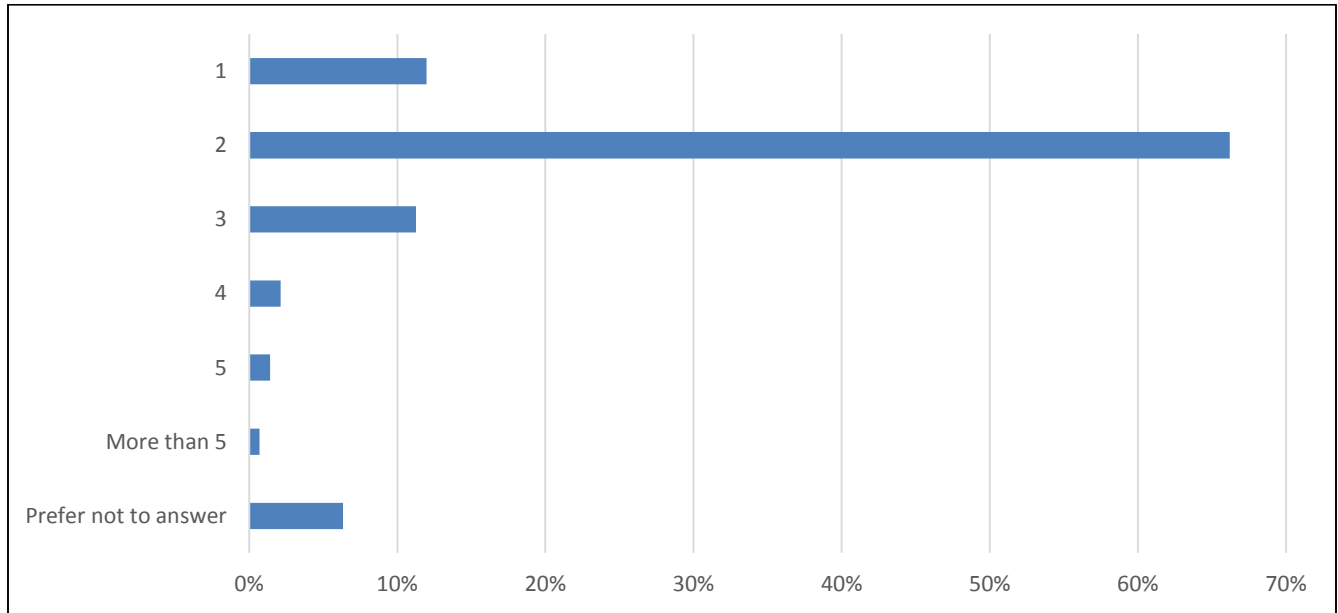
Question: In which age category do you fall?



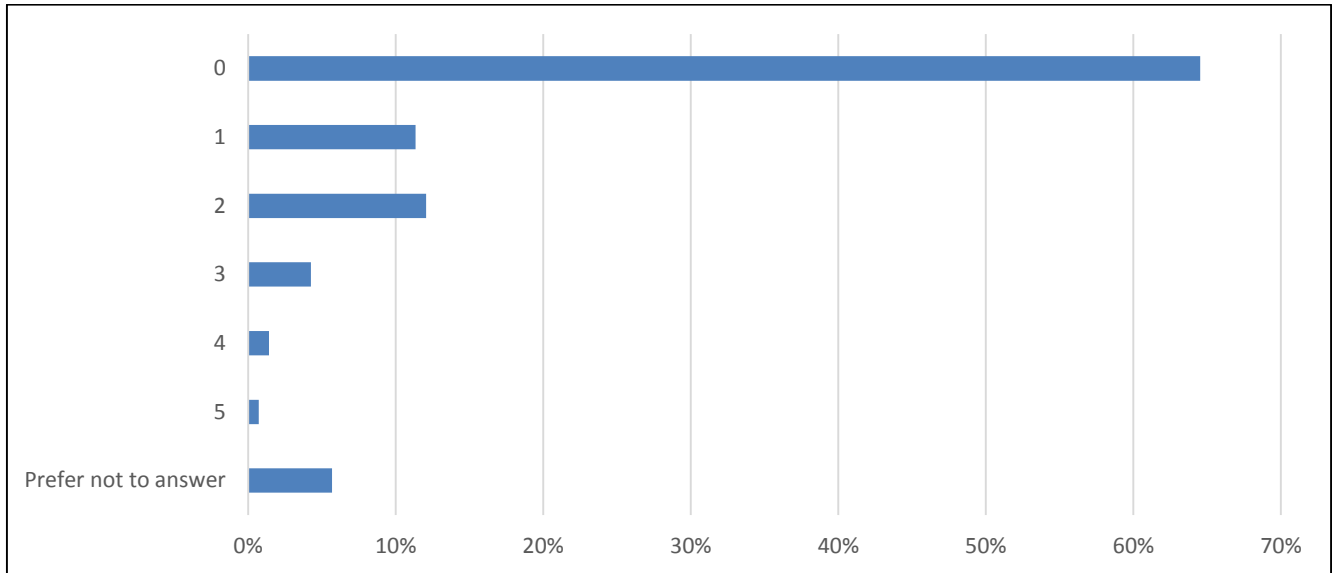
Question: How do you identify?



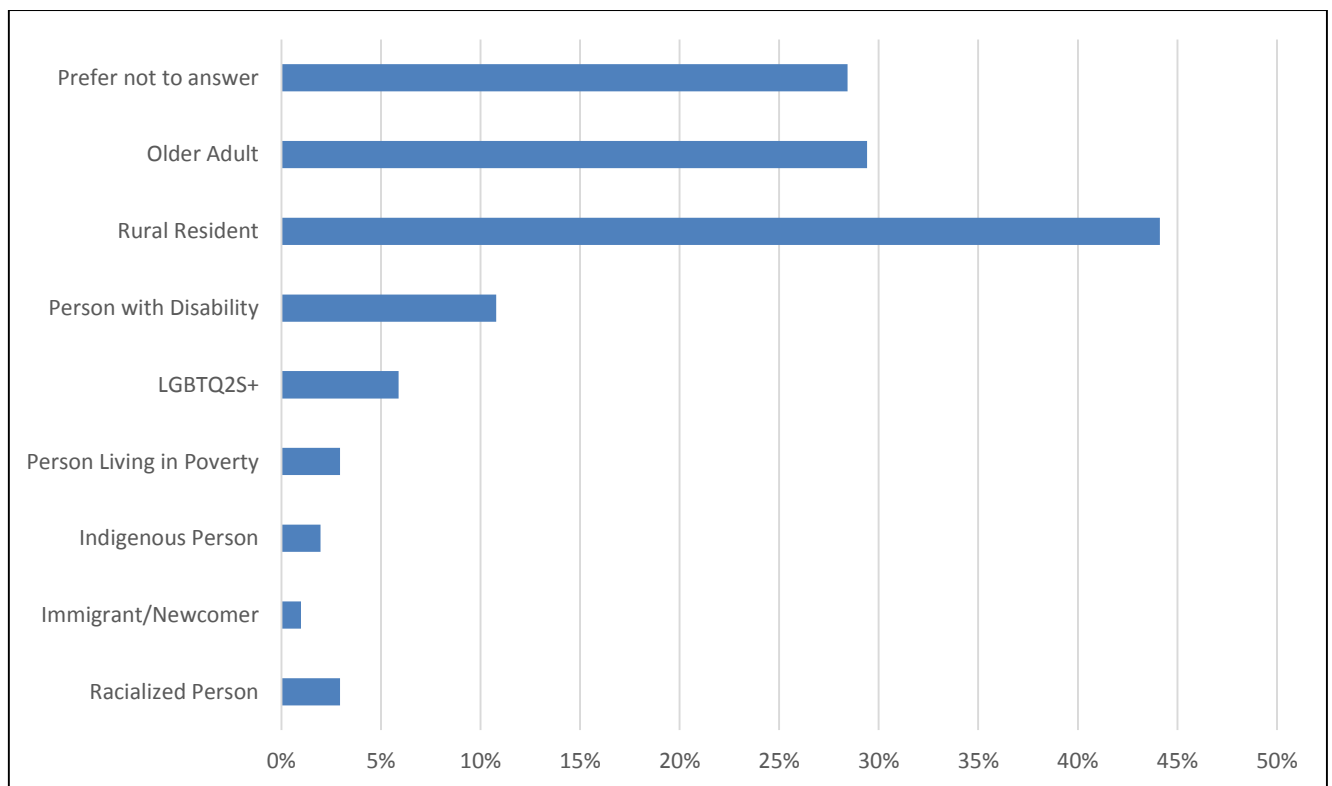
Question: How many adults (19 or older) live in your household?



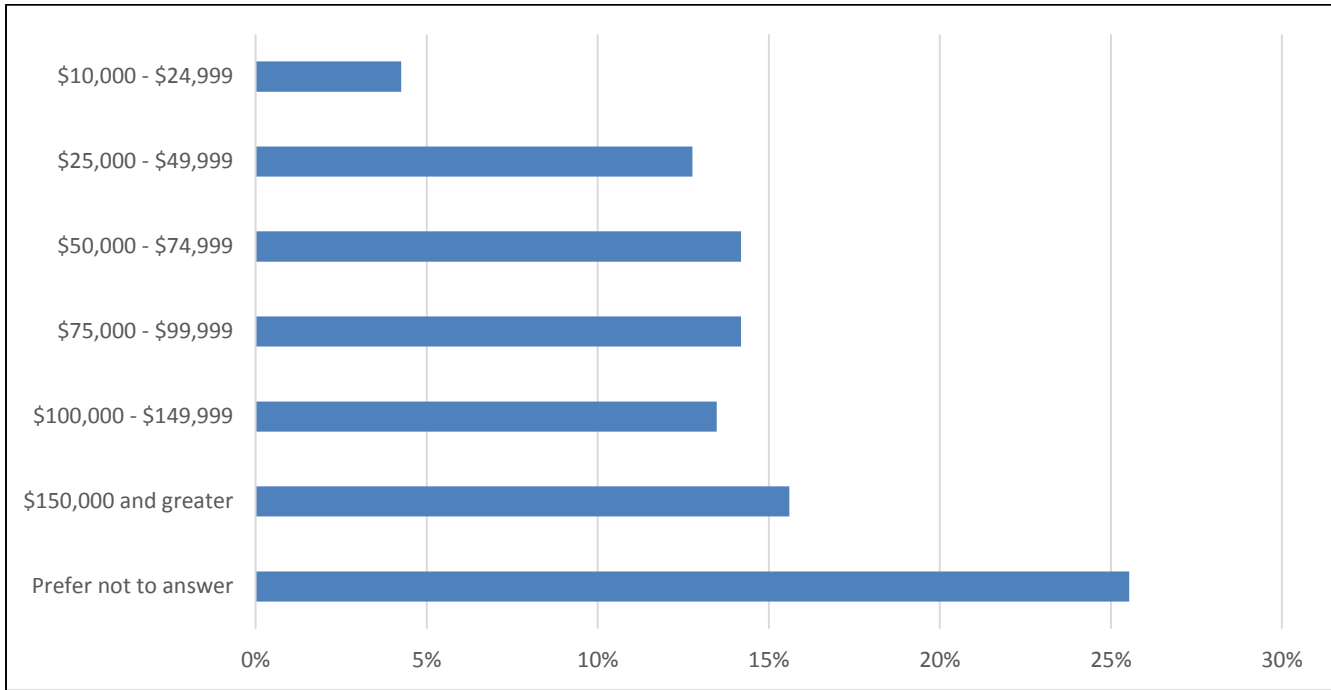
Question: How many children (0-18) live in your household?



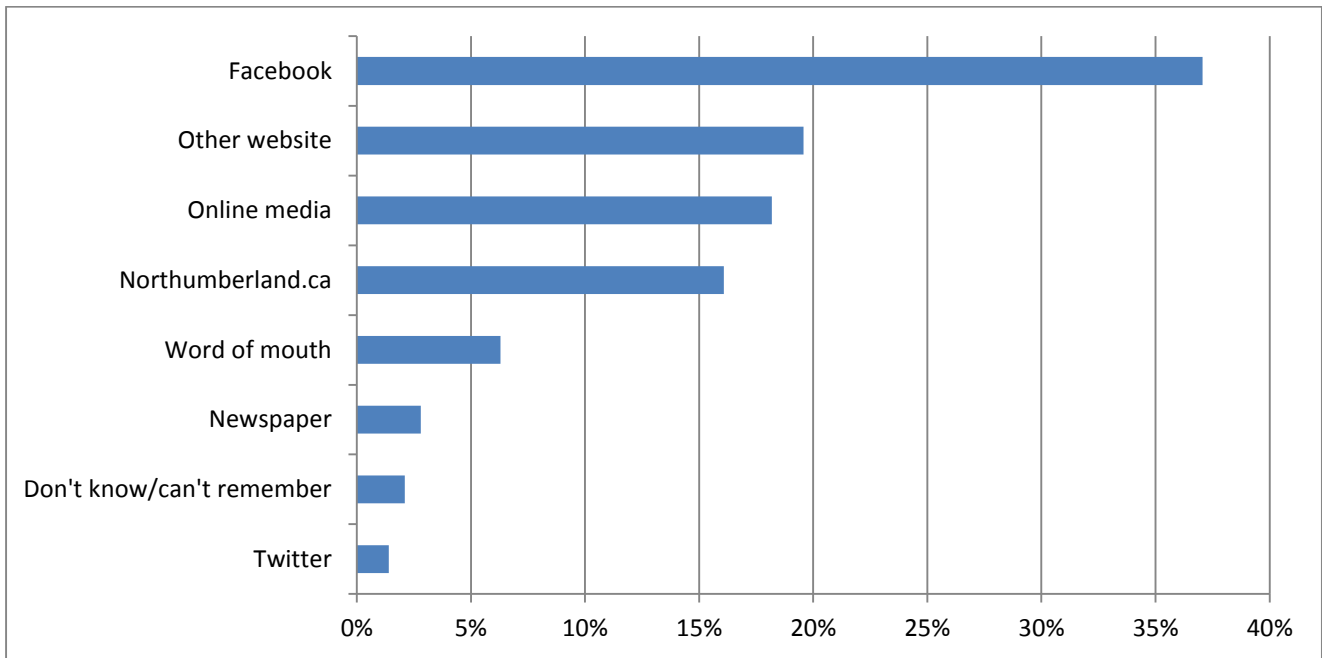
Question: Do you personally identify as someone in one or more of the following groups (select all that apply)?



Question: What is your household income?



Question: How did you find out about the 2023 Budget Survey?



Financial Impact

Although the Budget Survey does not have a quantifiable financial impact, public input is a key component in the County's long-term financial planning framework in establishing priorities and decision-making.

Member Municipality Impacts

N/A

Conclusion

The Budget Survey provided a means for public engagement in the County's long-term financial planning model.

Attachments

- 1) Appendix 1 – JoinIn Northumberland – Survey Responses
- 2) Appendix 2 – Email Responses