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**Date** December 2, 2024 **Report No.** 2024-709

**To** Chair and Members  
Estimates Committee

**From** Michael Bradley  
Chief Administrative Office (CAO)

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### 1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item

Item For Consideration

### 2.0 Topic 2025 City Budget Priorities – Public Engagement Campaign Findings [Financial Impact: None]

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### 3.0 Recommendation

A. THAT Report 2024-709, 2025 City Budget Priorities – Public Engagement Campaign Findings BE RECEIVED.

### 4.0 Executive Summary

The City of Brantford’s “Let’s Talk Brantford Budget 2025” campaign was implemented to inform a Year 2 check in of the City’s Multi-Year budget process. The campaign also aligns with the community’s input regarding a long-term vision for the city as outlined in the ongoing “Brantford 2050 Vision” initiative. Conducted from October 15 to November 15, 2024, the Budget Priorities public engagement campaign focused on fostering transparency, inclusivity, and alignment between short-term financial decisions impacting the City’s 2025 budget and Brantford’s broader long-term strategic goals.

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Key findings included participants prioritizing increasing investments in affordable housing, road improvements, and public safety, while areas like arts and cultural programs were viewed as opportunities for budget savings. Public concerns highlighted downtown issues such as homelessness, drug addiction, and safety, with mixed opinions on raising taxes to address these challenges.

In tandem, a majority of respondents who contributed to the visionary “Let’s Talk About Brantford 2050” engagement campaign emphasized preserving green spaces, expanding public transit, promoting sustainability, enhancing public health resources, and supporting affordable housing as top priorities for the city’s future. Residents who completed the vision survey also acknowledged the importance of fostering a connected community through inclusivity, innovation, and cultural and recreational amenities.

This integrated approach to public engagement ensures that both immediate budget planning and long-term community development reflect the current priorities and aspirations of Brantford’s residents.

## **5.0 Purpose and Overview**

The purpose of this report is to present the findings and insights gathered from the “Let’s Talk Brantford Budget Priorities 2025” and “Brantford 2050 Vision” engagement campaigns, to help inform Year 2 of the City’s Multi-Budget planning process. By aligning short-term budget priorities with the community’s long-term vision, this campaign is meant to enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in Council’s decision-making. This report outlines the engagement strategy and key findings to inform Council’s decisions regarding the allocation of resources to address community priorities in 2025 and beyond.

Furthermore, this report summarizes the outcomes of two integrated public engagement initiatives: the “Let’s Talk Brantford Budget Priorities 2025” campaign, conducted from October 15 to November 15, 2024, and the first phase of the “Brantford 2050 Vision” engagement process, which focused on shaping the City’s long-term development goals. Together, these initiatives invited residents to share their perspectives on municipal priorities, resource allocation, and strategies for addressing critical issues, including transit and infrastructure, sustainability, housing, public safety, and inclusivity. This report provides an analysis of survey participation, key themes, and public feedback, to inform immediate budgetary decisions, together with the broader aspirations of Brantford’s community.

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## 6.0 Background

A transparent budgeting process invites citizens to understand how municipal budgets work, contribute their thoughts on priorities, and impact how public funds are spent. An open and inclusive budget process facilitates increased citizen understanding of current issues and government processes, ensures fairness and responsibility, enhances decision-making, and increases public support for Council's decisions.

As part of Year 2 of the City's current Multi-Year Budget process, Communications and Community Engagement staff were directed to implement a Let's Talk Brantford Budget 2025 Budget Priorities campaign that ran from October 15 – November 15, 2024. The engagement findings outlined in this report also include findings from the first phase of the Brantford 2050 Vision Engagement process. Aligning short-term budget priorities with the City's long-term vision, this approach leverages the momentum of the 2050 Vision initiative, now in its second phase of community engagement with stakeholder interviews and public focus groups.

## 7.0 Corporate Policy Context

The multi-year budget process is guided by the 2023-2026 Council Priorities and Strategic Themes related to Community Engagement:

- Develop strategies to build trust amongst Council, while evolving the corporate culture.
- Focus on productive and collaborative partnerships.
- Develop a planning and implementation schedule and commit resources for various projects related to City assets.
- Effectively and consistently engage with the community.

This initiative is also consistent with the City's ongoing objective to ensure Brantford citizens will be engaged in, and informed about their community and City government.

## 8.0 Input From Other Sources

Input was received from the City's Finance Department, the Senior Leadership Team and representatives of the Laurier Brantford Faculty of Human and Health Sciences.

## 9.0 Analysis

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## **9.1 Let's Talk Brantford Budget Priorities Engagement Findings**

The objective of the City's "2025 Budget Priorities Survey" was to align the City's 2025 budget check in with current community needs and priorities. The survey invited residents to share their perspectives on budget priorities for 2025, focusing on how the City should allocate resources to address community priorities and enhance quality of life for residents. Input was collected on various municipal service areas, including infrastructure, public transit, affordable housing, public safety, and environmental initiatives. Participants were asked to rank priorities, identify areas for increased or reduced funding, and offer suggestions for improving resource allocation.

Conducted between October 15 and November 15, 2024, the survey attracted 3,062 residents to visit the Let's Tak Brantford 2025 City Budget Priorities project page, 902 people explored materials on the page in detail, and 345 people provided direct input by completing the survey. The survey participation was primarily made up of long-term residents, with 70% of respondents having lived in Brantford for over a decade. The most actively engaged age groups were 30-44 (33.4%) and 45-59 (32.6%).

Key findings of the survey highlighted "Transit and Infrastructure" as the respondents' highest priority, followed by "Business and Industry" and "Supporting Vulnerable Citizens." A majority of respondents supported increased funding for affordable housing, road and infrastructure improvements, and public safety, while areas such as arts and cultural programs were identified for potential funding reductions. Public feedback emphasized the importance of addressing homelessness, drug addiction, and public safety issues downtown, along with improving transit and addressing housing affordability.

Responses to tax implications on residents were mixed, with half of the respondents expressing a willingness to support increases for essential services, while others preferred reallocating existing funds to the identified priority areas.

### **9.1.1 2025 Budget Priorities - Social Media Comments Summary**

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Comments on the City's social media posts regarding the Brantford 2025 Public Engagement Campaign focused on residents' concerns about infrastructure, housing, and healthcare. Many residents highlighted the need to address traffic congestion by improving road infrastructure, widening roads, building new bridges like the Oak Park Road extension, and improving traffic calming measures. The comments demonstrated strong support for enhanced public transit options, such as improving Brantford Transit and introducing GO Train service.

A number of residents expressed frustration with rapid housing development without corresponding investments in schools, healthcare, and public infrastructure. Many advocated for preserving green spaces, revitalizing the City's downtown, and ensuring that development respects Indigenous heritage.

Healthcare was identified as a significant concern, with calls for a new hospital, more doctors, and improved healthcare services for the community. Affordability issues, including rising housing costs and the need for rent control, were also recurring themes.

Substantial criticism was directed at project delays, high costs, and perceived unnecessary bureaucracy, with many urging quicker decision-making and more efficient governance. Many comments also emphasized the need for more immediate solutions, citing pressing current needs over long term planning.

Residents who commented online also expressed a desire for more entertainment options and festivals to enhance Brantford's livability and cultural appeal, alongside balanced development that prioritizes healthcare, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

## **9.2 Let's Talk about Brantford 2050 Engagement Findings**

The first phase of the "Let's Talk About Brantford 2050" initiative ran on Let's Talk Brantford from June 26 – July 31, to gather extensive public input on the City's priorities and future development goals. Over the course of this campaign, more than 5,800 people visited the project page, with 1,507 informed, and 665 engaged participants completing the survey.

This survey collected input from residents on shaping Brantford's future by identifying priorities across various themes, including preserving valued

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aspects of the city, improving transportation infrastructure, promoting sustainability and climate action, enhancing public health and well-being, supporting affordable housing, and fostering economic growth through innovation and technology. It also explored ways to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, expand cultural and recreational amenities, and enhance education and lifelong learning opportunities. Additionally, residents were asked to rank key priorities and share any further ideas for fostering a connected, thriving community by 2050.

Respondents highlighted the preservation of green spaces and parks as the most valued aspect of Brantford, followed by historic landmarks and architecture, sustainability, and community inclusivity.

In terms of transportation, participants prioritized the expansion of Brantford Transit and improved traffic management systems, with eco-friendly modes such as electric buses and bicycles also ranking highly. Regarding sustainability, a majority of respondents called for the preservation of natural habitats and investment in renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydro power. Public well-being was identified as a critical area of focus, with increased access to healthcare services and expanded mental health resources receiving the highest priority ranking.

Affordable housing was also identified as a priority concern, with suggestions including the construction of more affordable housing units, implementation of rent control policies, and expanded supportive housing programs. With respect to economic development in the city, a majority of respondents highlighted the need to expand food production and distribution, grow the tech industry, and invest in renewable energy sectors. Cultural and recreational improvements identified included the expansion of parks, the promotion of music venues and theatres, and the development of additional sports and recreation facilities.

Brantford Vision 2050 respondents offered additional insights, such as the importance of age-friendly and accessible housing designs, as well as expanding reliable transit connections to the Greater Toronto Area.

### **9.3 Brantford 2050 Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups Engagement Findings**

The Brantford Vision 2050 initiative is a comprehensive community planning project focused on shaping a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant

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future for the city by engaging residents and community leaders across key City service areas including, transit, diversity, business, culture, and sustainability. Through consultations, focus groups, interviews, and surveys, it incorporates the community's aspirations and priorities into the City's long-term municipal goals.

### **Interviews with community leaders**

The stakeholder/community leader interviews conducted for the Brantford Vision 2050 project highlighted key priorities and challenges across six thematic areas including, transit and infrastructure; fostering a welcoming and diverse community; business and industry; tourism, sport, and culture; supporting vulnerable citizens; and climate and sustainability. Overall, interviewees envisioned Brantford as a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive city by 2050, emphasizing interconnectedness, proactive leadership, and leveraging existing resources.

Recurring themes included the need for more reliable and accessible transit, both within the city and to neighbouring communities. Stakeholders also stressed the importance of preserving Brantford's green spaces while enhancing infrastructure for walkability and cycling. There was a strong focus on economic growth, recommending investments in affordable housing and supportive services to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations such as seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income workers. Lastly, the participants highlighted the value of integrating cultural heritage into community life, enhancing local arts, and improving public engagement related to decision-making processes.

### **Resident focus groups**

The focus groups conducted for the Brantford Vision 2050 project engaged 48 participants across diverse demographics, including youth, older adults, and newcomers to the community. Participants collectively expressed a vision of Brantford as a family-friendly, prosperous, and inclusive city with a balance of urban development and green spaces by 2050.

Key insights included the demand for improved public transit with better inter-city connections, accessible routes, and extended service hours to address the needs of students, shift workers, and financially vulnerable residents. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining Brantford's "small-town feel" while addressing disparities in community

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investments, such as green space development and support for local businesses. Additionally, they highlighted the need for inclusive recreational spaces, greater promotion of volunteerism, and a more transparent and participatory public engagement process.

A more detailed update regarding this initiative will be shared with Council in a dedicated report during the December 2024 cycle.

## **10.0 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications**

There are no climate and environmental implications associated with this report.

## **12.0 Conclusion**

The “Let’s Talk Brantford Budget Priorities 2025” and “Brantford 2050 Vision” engagement campaigns were provided as opportunities for members of the community to provide input into municipal planning, intended to align the City’s short-term budget decisions with its long-term vision. The engagement campaign findings highlighted critical priorities such as improving transit and infrastructure, addressing housing affordability, enhancing public safety, and fostering sustainability. These insights reflect immediate concerns as well as respondents’ recommendations for shaping a more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient future for Brantford.



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Attachments (if applicable)

Copy to:

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required  yes  no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk  yes  no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?  yes  no