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Date November 24, 2025 **Report No.** 2025-602

To Chair and Members
Estimates Committee

From Maria Visocchi
Director, Communications, Community Engagement and Customer Service

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic **2026 City Budget Priorities – Public Engagement Findings [Financial Impact - None]**

3.0 Recommendation

A. THAT Report 2025-602, 2026 City Budget Priorities – Public Engagement Campaign Findings BE RECEIVED.

4.0 Executive Summary

The City of Brantford’s “Let’s Talk Brantford 2026 City Budget Priorities” public engagement campaign was conducted from October 1 to November 12, 2025, to inform Year 3 of the City’s Multi-Year Budget process. The goal of this engagement was to ensure alignment between resident priorities and Council’s decision-making and check in with residents to identify any new insights or emerging trends. A total of 1,028 residents visited the online project page, and 264 completed the survey.

A 2025 versus 2026 year-over-year findings comparison identifies several areas of consistency alongside some emerging differences. Transit and infrastructure remained the top-ranked municipal priority for the second consecutive year, receiving the greatest number of first-place rankings in both surveys. Supporting vulnerable citizens also continued to be an important service area, although 2026 feedback showed increased polarization, with many respondents ranking this category either first or last. Residents continued to express concerns about road conditions, public safety, housing affordability, and pressures associated with rapid growth.

While the survey highlights that healthcare falls within the jurisdiction of the provincial government, healthcare was highlighted more significantly in the 2026 open-ended feedback, with residents frequently citing the need for a new hospital, and improved access to family physicians. Concerns about property taxes also increased, with more residents calling for fiscal restraint and “basic budgets.” In addition, traffic congestion, particularly in West Brant, was referenced more frequently, with many comments highlighting the need for improved construction staging and better access to Highway 403. Collectively, these findings indicate that while major themes remain consistent, other areas of focus have intensified.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings from the “Let’s Talk Brantford Budget 2026” public engagement campaign to inform Estimates Committee in its deliberations for Year 3 of the City’s Multi-Year Budget. The survey invited residents to share their views on municipal priorities, funding allocations, service expectations, and areas for improvement. As the survey followed the same question structure as the 2025 campaign, this report and corresponding Appendix, also provides a year-over-year comparison that identifies both continued priorities and emerging trends, to strengthen Council’s understanding of how community sentiment is evolving over time.

6.0 Background

The objective of the City of Brantford’s Multi-Year Budget process is to ensure transparent, responsible, and well-informed financial planning.

For the 2026 budget process, the City launched a public engagement campaign driven by education. Recognizing that informed participation leads to stronger and more constructive input, this year’s consultation approach emphasized the

use of the new OpenBook platform as the educational foundation of the campaign. This informative tool helps residents better understand how the City budget functions, what projects and services are funded, and the trade-offs that must be considered in allocating limited resources across multiple community priorities.

As part of this process, OpenBook links were aligned with the 2026 Budget Priorities Survey, available from October 1 to November 12, 2025, on the Let's Talk Brantford platform. This engagement opportunity provided residents with a structured means to express their views about current municipal service needs and long-term financial pressures. Because the 2026 survey mirrored the structure of the 2025 initiative, staff were able to compare results across two years, allowing for a clearer assessment of changes in resident sentiment year over year.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

The 2026 Budget Priorities engagement initiative aligns with the 2023–2026 Council Priorities, particularly those related to community engagement and transparency. These priorities emphasize strengthening trust in municipal decision-making, fostering productive partnerships, ensuring that planning and implementation processes remain accountable, and improving public understanding of municipal services and budgeting. Engagement opportunities support Council's commitment to ensuring that Brantford residents remain informed about and engaged in their local government.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

Input was received from the City's Finance Department, and the Senior Leadership Team.

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Let's Talk Brantford Budget Priorities 2026 – Engagement Findings

To encourage public engagement by making complex budget information more accessible and transparent, this year staff implemented two new budget tools called OpenBook and Budget Book, both of which are directly connected with the City's internal budgeting software, Questica. These two platforms allow budget information to be presented on the LTB project page and the City's

website through visualizations, showcasing budget data with interactive charts, tables and graphics.

Survey participation was led by residents aged 30 - 44 and 45 - 59, who collectively represented more than half of all respondents. All five wards were represented, with the greatest participation coming from Wards 1 and 2. Nearly 70% of respondents reported that they had lived in Brantford for more than ten years, which continued the demographic trend observed in the 2025 engagement cycle.

9.1.1 Service Area Rankings

Respondents were asked to rank six service areas based on their perceived importance. Transit and infrastructure once again received the highest number of first-place rankings, confirming that residents continue to prioritize the City's transportation network, road conditions, and overall infrastructure performance. Supporting vulnerable citizens received a similarly high level of attention, although feedback in 2026 showed greater polarization, with this category appearing among both the highest and lowest rankings. Business and industry remained a mid-level priority, while climate and sustainability and tourism, sport and culture were lower overall.

9.1.2 Funding Preferences

Residents expressed broad support for increasing funding for road and infrastructure improvements, public safety, public transit, economic development, and in many cases affordable housing. However, some respondents indicated that they believed affordable housing had received excessive investment in recent years, marking a noticeable shift from the 2025 findings. Several participants also indicated that areas such as arts and culture, environmental initiatives, and social services should receive less funding. As in 2025, there was no consensus on property tax increases; however, comments in 2026 contained more concerns about rising taxes and a stronger call for fiscal restraint.

9.1.3 Qualitative Themes

Residents' open-ended responses highlighted several recurring concerns. Many residents expressed frustration with road

conditions, traffic congestion, and delays caused by construction, particularly in West Brant. Traffic flow issues and the need for additional highway access points were repeatedly mentioned. Healthcare emerged as a significantly more important topic in 2026, with residents frequently emphasizing the need for a new hospital, increased availability of physicians, and improved diagnostic services. Public safety remained a major concern, with residents calling for increased police visibility and stronger enforcement, especially in the downtown area. Concerns regarding property taxes and the need for more prudent spending were more strongly expressed than in 2025, with many individuals calling for “basic budgeting” and reductions in nonessential capital projects. Feedback on housing and homelessness revealed mixed attitudes: while many residents stressed the urgency of addressing homelessness and housing affordability, others believed these areas had become disproportionately funded.

9.1.4 Year-Over-Year Comparison: 2025 vs. 2026

As detailed in Appendix A, a comparison of the 2025 and 2026 Budget Priorities Surveys reveals several consistent patterns alongside notable shifts in resident sentiment. Although fewer surveys were completed in 2026, overall engagement remained comparable to the previous year. Transit and infrastructure continued to be rated as the most important municipal service area, with residents again emphasizing the need for road repair, improved traffic management, and better planning of construction-related detours. Public safety also remained a significant concern in both years, though comments in 2026 expressed heightened frustration with crime and policing capacity.

While the survey highlights that healthcare falls within the jurisdiction of the provincial government, healthcare concerns noticeably increased in 2026, with repeated calls for a new hospital and improved healthcare access. Attitudes toward affordable housing also shifted: while a majority of 2025 respondents supported increased housing investment, a larger segment of 2026 respondents compared to 2025 argued that housing has been overfunded. Finally, although property tax concerns were present in both years, comments submitted in 2026 emphasized affordability more strongly and contained more

direct calls for spending reductions. Together, these changes suggest that while core priorities remain consistent, certain pressures, particularly healthcare, congestion, and fiscal restraint have grown more prominent.

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 findings from the 2026 Budget Priorities engagement campaign continue to demonstrate that residents place strong importance on infrastructure, public safety, and housing, while also indicating growing concerns related to healthcare access, traffic congestion, and rising property taxes. The year-over-year comparison reveals both continuity and change in resident sentiment, offering a clearer understanding of how community priorities are evolving as the City grows. Staff will continue to refine engagement methods to ensure that residents remain informed, confident, and meaningfully involved in the municipal budgeting process.



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Attachments

Appendix A:
2026 Budget Priorities – Public Engagement Campaign Findings Qualitative Data

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