



# Public Engagement Survey 2024

FINAL REPORT

This report was developed for the Town of Onoway in May 2024 with full objectivity, placing survey results through an objective lens to ensure accuracy, and to analyze responses for thematic relevancy.

2024 Catalyst Communications





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# Executive Summary

In February 2024, the Town of Onoway began undertaking a process to conduct a Public Satisfaction Survey for two key purposes:

1. To gauge Onoway resident satisfaction with current services provided by the Town organization.
2. To gain an understanding of specific resident opinions of value to the Town's budgeting process.

Surveys of this nature are considered best practice in local government, providing important insights on areas of both municipal operations and governance. Surveys of this nature establish a baseline of current public sentiment, allowing Administration to identify areas in which improvements and/or efficiencies may be warranted, as well as areas in which the Town is currently excelling. Both are important to know, and allow the Town to focus on achieving municipal excellence in both the short- and long-term.

From a governance perspective, engagement efforts of this nature support Council in its goal of serving the community as a whole.

Though engagement is only one input of many, as Council must consider all governance tools and information available and pertinent to any decision being made, results of meaningful engagement ensure that the public perspective is incorporated into that decision-making process as appropriate.

Council's [2023-2032 Strategic Plan](#) includes five core pillars, each of which is addressed in some way by undertaking this process, including for two pillars in particular:

## Service Excellence

- Develop a service inventory and identify priority services that make living and working in Onoway attractive by consulting with residents and the business community.
- Evaluate the efficiency and accessibility of all municipal services to provide value to residents.

## Good Governance

- Value and embrace a healthy respect for democracy through all our actions, policies, and values.

## Financial Sustainability

- Set up public engagement opportunities to be transparent to the community about Onoway's financial position, challenges, needs, and opportunities.

This is the first engagement process of this nature undertaken by the Town, with plans to further bolster comparable processes in the future. The expectation is that by creating consistency in engagement – and by ensuring that residents understand the value of engagement – the number of residents taking part in engagement increases from one process to the next.

This survey garnered a total of 59 responses from throughout the community, representing approximately 6.1% of the Town's total population, based on a total population of 966 (*Statistics Canada 2021*). This exceeds industry best practice of securing a minimum 5% engagement for communities with populations comparable to that of the Town.

Respondents were provided with appropriate context to the various areas explored through this survey, with that information helping residents to better understand some of the opportunities and challenges being faced by the Town, and by municipalities across Alberta – in some cases, across Canada.

Thank you to all residents who participated in the Town of Onoway's 2024 Public Engagement Survey. We appreciate the time, effort, and thoughtfulness put into responding to this survey, and commit to considering residents' input appropriately moving forward.

## How we engaged

This 2024 Public Engagement Survey was launched on April 8, 2024, and closed on April 26, 2024. While initial plans included the survey being launched earlier, the dates were reassessed to account for Easter and Spring Break, ensuring that there were as few barriers to access for residents to participate in the survey as possible.

The survey was promoted through various means to garner as many responses as possible. This includes the survey being accessible through the Town's website, Social Media, media release, print advertising, and more.





## Section 1 – Demographics

Respondent demographics were collected to provide context to the survey responses, and focused on just two core areas: age and connection to the Town.

### Age Group

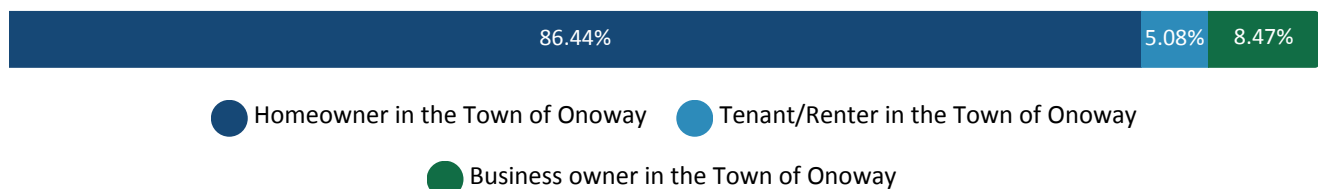
Age	Survey Participants	Census Demographics
>18	1.69%	25.88%
18-24	0.00%	4.65%
25-34	8.47%	11.90%
35-44	15.25%	12.42%
45-54	28.81%	12.42%
55-64	20.34%	11.38%
65+	22.42%	22.26%

#### Contextual Information

The ages of those who participated in the 2024 Public Engagement Survey are not fully reflective of the age demographics of the Town of Onoway, when compared to the age demographic figures presented by Statistics Canada (2021). That said, these figures are fairly closely aligned, and to a greater extent than is often seen in municipal surveying. The most notable variance is in the age category of 45-54, representing 28.8% of survey respondents but just 12.4% of the Town's total population.

This is not surprising. It is quite typical that the most prominent group of respondents to engagement of this nature is either the 33-44 or the 45-54 age category. This is due to the fact that these are the age demographic groups which are typically most impacted by municipal service delivery, as they are homeowners in the community, with children impacted by local youth amenities and aging parents impacted by seniors services. While this is not a hard and fast rule, it is quite typical to engagement processes of this nature.

### Connection to the Town



#### Additional Responses

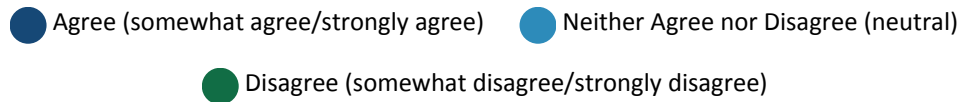
Survey respondents were given an additional category to select of "Other." Respondents who selected this category were asked to provide additional information, providing context to their connection to the Town. For this survey, just two respondents selected "Other," with one response stating they are both a homeowner and business owner in the Town of Onoway, and the other specifying they are a homeowner in the Town. As such, those two respondents were added to the category, "Homeowner in the Town of Onoway."

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population:  
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Onoway&DGUIDlist=2021A00054813014&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>



## Section 2 – Living in Onoway

Survey respondents were asked to rank each of the following statements on a scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Responses to each of these statements has been broken down as a bar graph below, using the following legend:



**The Town of Onoway is a great place to live.**



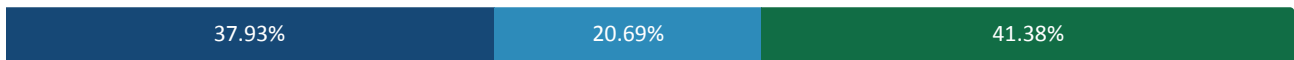
**The Town of Onoway is a safe community.**



**The Town of Onoway is a good place to raise children.**



**The Town of Onoway is a good place to retire.**



**The Town of Onoway is a good place to do business.**



**The Town of Onoway is a welcoming community.**

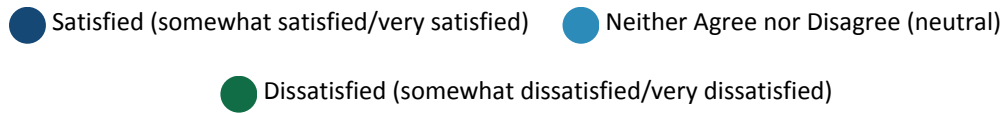


**The Town of Onoway meets its residents' needs.**



## Section 2 – Living in Onoway

Survey respondents were asked to rank each of the following statements on a scale from “Very Satisfied” to “Very Dissatisfied.” Responses to each of these statements has been broken down as a bar graph below, using the following legend:



### Adult cultural, recreation, and leisure programming



### Bylaw Enforcement (ie. animal control, traffic, property standards)



### Children’s cultural, recreation, and leisure programming



### Community emergency preparedness



### Economic Development



### Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)



### Fire Services



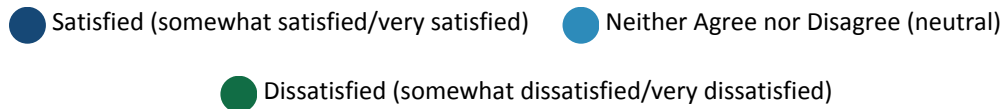
### Onoway Public Library



### Parks and open spaces and infrastructure maintenance



## Section 2 – Living in Onoway



### Seniors cultural, recreation and leisure programming



### Snow removal and winter maintenance



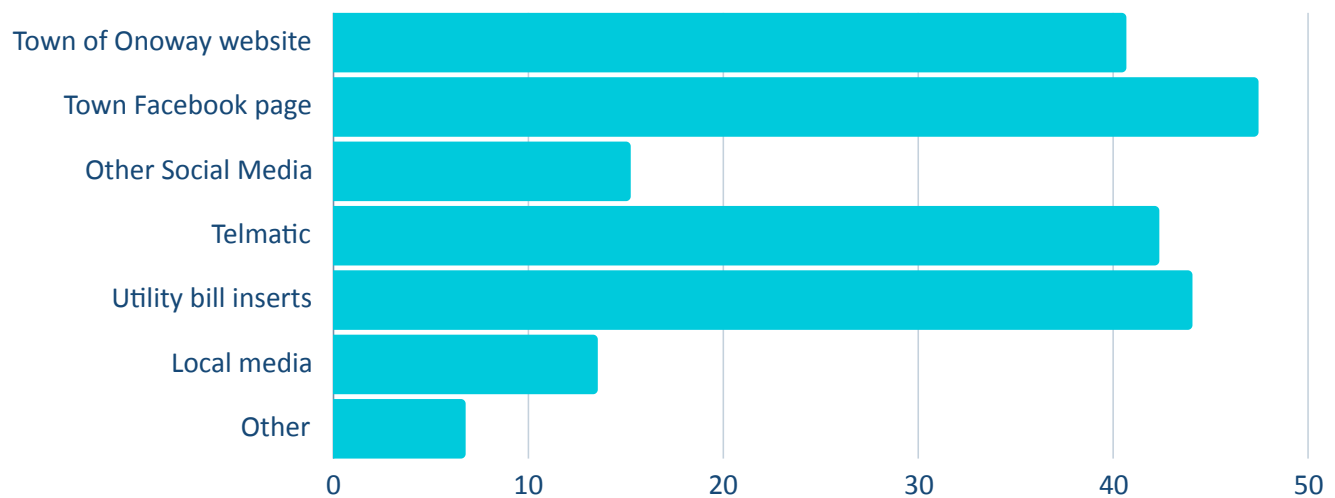
### Summer road and sidewalk maintenance



### Waste and recycling collection



What's your preferred method of receiving Town communications? (Select all that apply)



### Additional Responses

Survey respondents who selected "Other" were asked to specify what method(s) of communications they prefer in receiving information from the Town, with 50% noting email as their preferred method of communication, with 25% pointing to text messages, and 25% saying they have no specific preferred method.

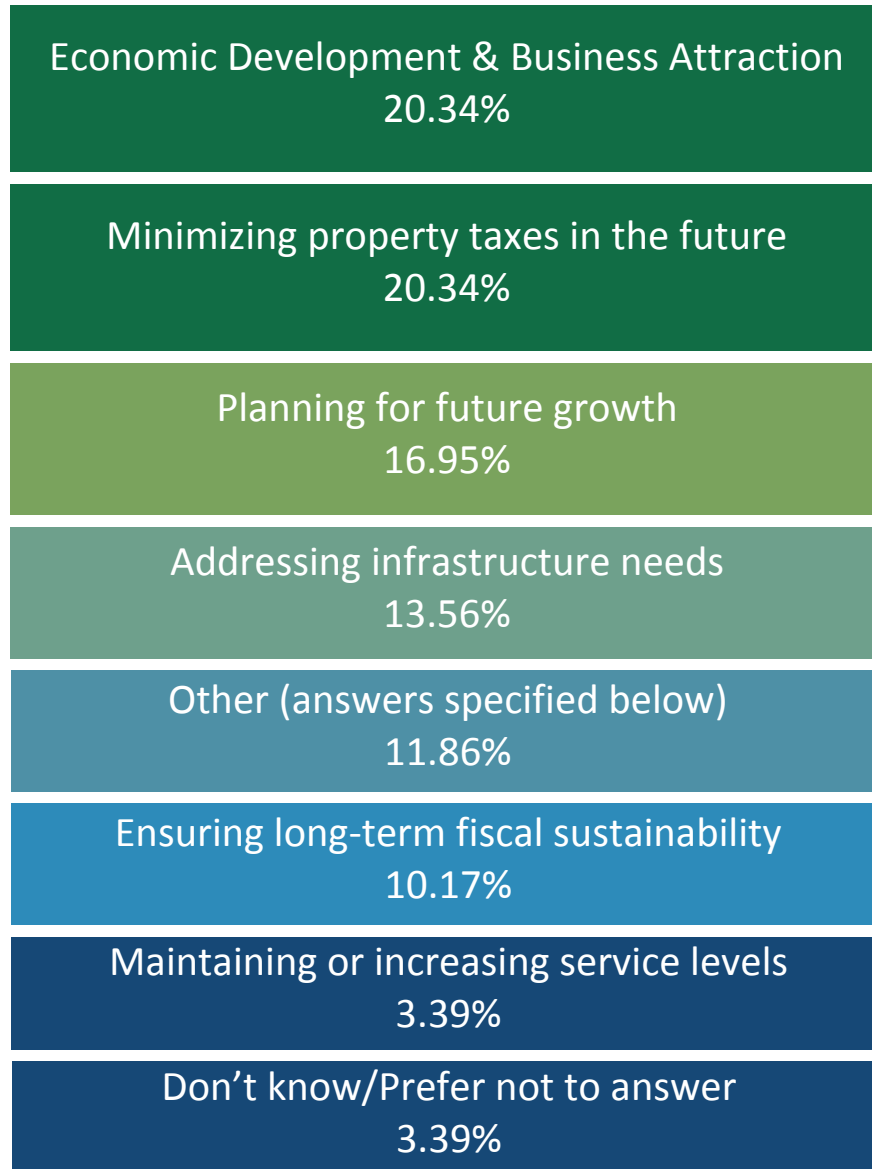
### Respondent Comments

Survey participants were asked to provide additional comments on local service delivery, which have been included as an appendix to this report.



## Section 3 – Budget Considerations

As the Town of Onoway prepares for the future, which of the following is most important to you?



### Additional Responses

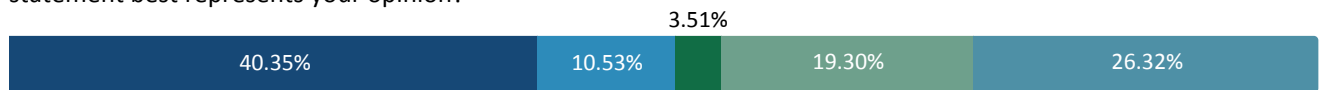
Survey respondents were given an additional category to select of “Other.” Respondents who selected this category were asked to provide additional information to specify their area of top priority, with those unaltered responses including:

- All of the above
- All of these are important. You should have done your jobs.
- Give us back our firehall
- Paving the alleyways. It will dramatically reduce the amount of dust in town.
- The fire department

## Section 3 – Budget Considerations

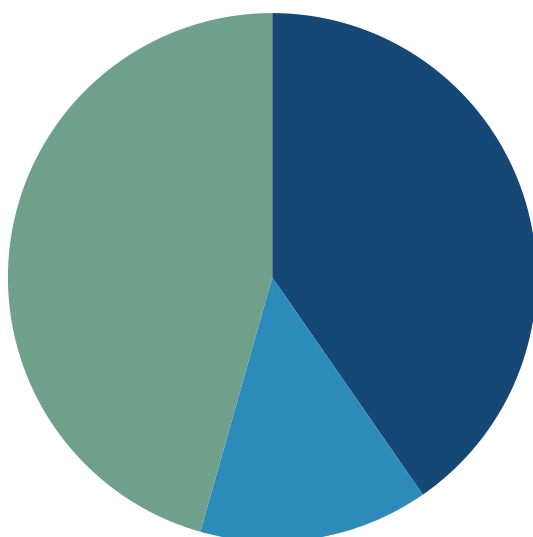
For questions specific to the residential tax rate, survey participants were provided with the following context: Throughout Alberta, and across Canada, municipalities have been grappling with growing infrastructure deficits as many areas of public infrastructure nears the end-of-life cycle. This issue has been worsened by reduced infrastructure funding from other levels of government.

Recognizing the delicate balance between municipal services and the need for infrastructure investment, which statement best represents your opinion?

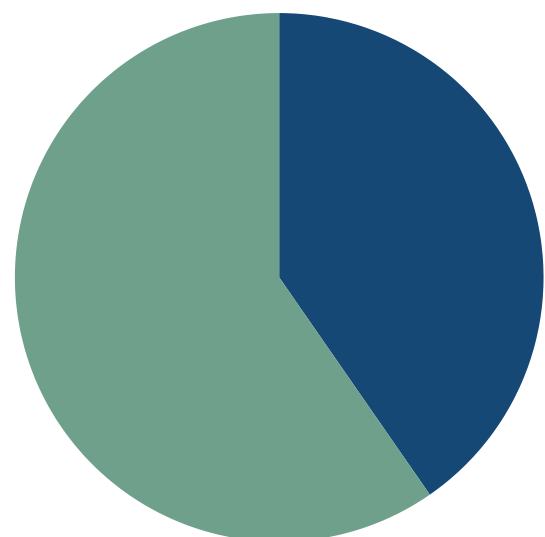


- I don't want taxes to increase.** I understand this means service levels could decrease, and infrastructure funding may not increase.
- I am OK with slightly higher taxes** to maintain current services levels. This means infrastructure needs will continue to be underfunded.
- I am OK with slightly higher taxes** to fund infrastructure needs. This means service levels may decrease.
- I am OK with a tax increase** so that service levels are maintained and infrastructure needs are adequately funded.
- I am OK with a tax increase** so that service levels are increased and infrastructure needs are adequately funded.

Removing the focus of tax dollar allocation, this further breaks down as follows:



- Don't want taxes to increase.
- OK with a slight tax increase.
- OK with a tax increase.



- Don't want a tax increase.
- OK with a tax increase.

## Section 3 – Budget Considerations

Survey respondents were asked, for each of the following Town services, please tell us if the Town should increase, maintain, or decrease its budget. Responses to each of these statements has been broken down as a bar graph below, using the following legend:

● Increase budget    ● Maintain budget    ● Decrease budget

### Adult cultural, recreation, and leisure programming



### Bylaw Enforcement (ie. animal control, traffic, property standards)



### Children's cultural, recreation, and leisure programming



### Community emergency preparedness



### Economic Development



### Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)



### Fire services



### Onoway Public Library



### Parks and open spaces infrastructure and maintenance



### RCMP resources



## Section 3 – Budget Considerations

● Increase budget   ● Maintain budget   ● Decrease budget

### Seniors cultural, recreation, and leisure programming



### Snow removal and winter maintenance



### Summer road and sidewalk maintenance



### Support for local community groups/organizations



### Town-produced events (ie. Centennial)



### Utilities (water, wastewater, stormwater)



### Respondent Comments

Survey participants were asked to provide additional comments on Town budgeting, which have been included as an appendix to this report.







## Section 4 – Analysis

This consultation process was undertaken in a largely proactive manner to include community input as part of the budgeting process, and in consideration of ongoing Town service delivery. There are many considerations to be pulled from this report, and it is encouraging that this process has set a baseline for where resident opinions currently stand.

Engagement results were reviewed and analyzed with full objectivity, free of bias or preconceived notion. This survey received 59 responses, representing 6.3% of the Town of Onoway's population (based on a total population of 927 in 2022). This is a notably strong turnout for a first survey of this nature and scope, with anything above 5% population engagement considered strong and appropriately representative of the larger population. Still, as the Town of Onoway continues this engagement process year-over-year, it will be a core goal to increase participation rates, ensuring that as many resident voices are heard as possible. **For the 2025 engagement process, a goal of 7.5% representation (69 survey respondents) is appropriate and realistic.** Hopefully, that figure will be surpassed.

As consultation methodology was limited to surveys, it is worth mentioning that survey responses anecdotally tend to skew negative compared to responses collected through engagement processes such as open houses, focus groups, and workshops. By nature, surveying is a process that appeals to negative sentiment through opt-in participation and anonymity; it is typically those residents with stronger opinions who choose to participate. It is important to keep this in mind but it does not, in any way, bring to question the validity of the responses collected through this process.

Engagement results were analyzed for trends, which were discovered through statistically relevant information in benchmarking questions, as well as through respondents' personal comments. The analysis that follows explores key areas that have emerged through survey responses.



## Section 4 – Analysis

## Building Community

There is progress to be made in residents' assessment of the Town as a place to live, play and work; that said, the baseline generated through this initial engagement process does not show an overly negative picture. Instead, it shows room for growth through specific avenues. Nearly 75% of survey respondents stated that the Town of Onoway is a great place to live, or that they have no opinion on the issue. Similarly, nearly 80% of respondents held positive or neutral stance on whether the Town of Onoway is a safe community, and close to 75% feel as though the Town is a good place to raise children. These areas can be improved upon through value-proposition understanding in bolstered public communications, and in improvements tied to specific areas of service delivery, as outlined later in this report.

There are two areas of relative concern in this first section of survey analysis:

- 41% of respondents **do not** feel that Onoway is a good place to retire.
- 62% of respondents **do not** feel the Town meets its residents' needs.

These opinions largely go hand-in-hand. As residents see more value in Town service delivery and affordability – whether in reality or in perception – residents will feel more comfortable with the prospect of retiring locally.

## Local Economy

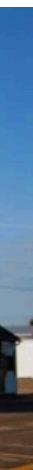
Resident opinion on the state of the Town's economy is an area that must be addressed over the coming year. Nearly half of survey respondents do not currently feel that Onoway is a good place to do business (49.2%). Similarly, 64% of survey respondents stated they are dissatisfied with the Town's current level of economic development being undertaken.

This negative perception is a snapshot in time. There are steps being taken by the Town towards improved economic development, industry attraction and business retention, which are likely to play into residents' perceptions of the Town as a place to do business. However, those Town initiatives had not yet reached the point of progress that they impacted resident opinion at the time at which this survey was undertaken.

This foray into increased economic development efforts aligns with respondents ranking economic development and business attraction as their No. 1 priority, tied with minimizing future property tax increases. Naturally, the two go hand-in-hand, with increased commercial and industrial assessment resulting in mitigated residential taxes.

## Key Takeaway

As the Town moves forward with its plans for increased Economic Development activities, it is imperative that these efforts be communicated to residents proactively and emphatically.



## Section 4 – Analysis

### Taxation

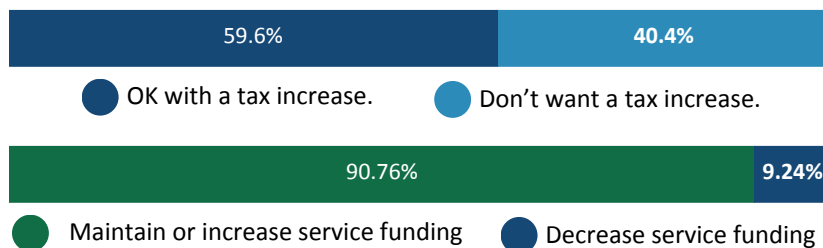
As noted, minimizing future residential tax increases is tied as a top priority for respondents, with comments painting a picture in which residents do not necessarily feel they are getting a level of service aligned with the current level of taxation. Whether this opinion is based in reality or in perception, this is a public sentiment that needs to be addressed over the coming year, with a goal to improve residents' opinions of Town services in the next public engagement survey of this nature.



Also noted, increased economic diversification

would help to mitigate future residential tax increases, with economic development tied as the other top respondent priority uncovered through this engagement process. That said, it is interesting, then, that long-term fiscal sustainability ranked low amongst priority options – second-last only to maintaining or increasing service levels. This, too, stands against residents' desire for maintained or increased service funding seen when accounting for all services combined, with 90.76% of respondents noting they would like to see maintained or increased service funding, and less than 10% pointing to a desire for service funding decreases. The area that saw the most prominent desire for decreased funding levels was Town-produced events (25.86% desire for decreased budget).

Meanwhile, looking at budget considerations, residents overwhelmingly opined that funding should be maintained or increased across all areas of service delivery. Similarly, when asked whether they would tolerate a tax increase, the majority of survey respondents (59%) noted that they were comfortable with higher taxes to one extent or another.



### Key Takeaway

Survey participants who spoke against increased taxes also requested maintained or increased services

This is not an anomaly specific to Onoway. It is quite common across municipalities that residents voice a general desire for decreased residential taxes, while simultaneously seeking improved service levels requiring increased spending. Similarly, survey participants ranked “Preparing for future growth” and “Addressing infrastructure needs” as third and fourth amongst top priorities, respectively – both of which take a considerable amount of investment. This lack of consistency between stated desired overall tax rate versus per-service funding anecdotally shows a disconnect between residents' current understanding of the municipal budgeting process vs. municipal government's role.

Across municipalities, organizations should make every effort to ensure that residents are informed on the role of municipal government, including in areas of budgeting, operations, strategy, and governance. These efforts should be embraced in Onoway, with future engagement results acting as a potential indication of progress made in this area over time.



## Section 4 – Analysis



### Conclusion

There are many considerations heading into future budget deliberations and in relation specifically to the Town's service delivery levels, as represented by those who opted to participate in this year's Public Engagement Survey. It is unlikely that Budget 2025, in any form, will satisfy all – or potentially even the majority – of local residents, based on the results of this engagement process. Still, consultation efforts of this nature are crucial to developing a Town approach that aligns with residents' desired future state.

There are no key recommendations developed through a report such as this, though it is clear based on respondent input that an increased level of communications between the Town and its residents would help solve some of the issues of perception prominent in the community. This is particularly true in the area of economic development, on which respondents strongly stated they do not feel the Town is doing enough at this time. It is encouraging, therefore, that the Town does have plans in place for increased economic development activity.

As Council moves towards Budget 2025 deliberations, it is also suggested that the Town embrace current trends in communicating municipal finances effectively to the public, including that:

- Any residential tax, business tax, or utility rate change be communicated to residents in terms of dollar value, ensuring that residents and business owners have a strong understanding of the potential impacts of any budgetary decisions on their pocketbooks on a monthly basis.
- The Town make an effort to show the public how Public Engagement Survey results were used as part of the decision-making process.
- Reasons for any significant budget changes, and the benefit those shifts bear for residents and/or the community as a whole, are clearly outlined to residents.
- Ongoing, regular updates are provided to residents throughout the year on initiatives being undertaken by the Town, and the positive impacts seen in the execution of Budget 2025.

Finally, it is suggested that budget engagement of this nature continue to be executed on an annual basis, including that consultation result analysis include year-over-year trend identification.





## Appendix 1 – Respondent Comments – Services

Survey respondents were asked whether they have any suggestions/comments for the Town of Onoway to consider related specifically to service delivery. The following comments are provided verbatim, without edits, in the order in which they were submitted; please note that not all survey respondents choose to provide written comment.

No.

Crack down on the homes that never clear the snow from their sidewalks. It's infuriating to see the same properties every year with treacherous sidewalks. I clear mine and both Neighbors' typically. They'll often return the favour. It's not that difficult.

Bi law enforcement needs to be proactive and not reactive.

Our taxes are way to high for the services and businesses here.

Better organics and yard waste collection. More complete sidewalk / trail coverage so you can walk safely everywhere.

Please do something for the children there is next to nothing for kids in this town. The town can't grow without future residents

Give us back our fire station

No

Infrastructure needs developing badly, lots of potential wasted in this town.

Better road Maintenance, I have a big hole at the end of my driveway on the towns road for example, and more Infrastructure. To draw other people in, sidewalks Etc.

Remove Onoway Regional from town of Onoway

no

More recreational opportunities and increase residential and commercial development. What happened to the church and houses. Tear down the community hall it's useless and caretaker is most difficult and rude when it comes to renting. Put a little strip mall there. Expand AHS there. Anything but another hall.

More things for children, or more playgrounds.

This Town is stagnet, no incentives to live here or for new businesses no move here. Poor Town Council and Town Admin. Shame on them!

Get the cats under control and give the kids something to do around here

The new organic cart and recycling rules are extremely limited and we preferred the old provider much better. Winter road maintenance has gone downhill since we moved here and yet we've had less snow. There is also less and less activities or options for children, especially teens in town.

I suggest we keep our own fire department instead of going with the county's fire department.

Leave the the fire dept that is currently here, permanently here.

Lower taxes, this place is getting too expensive for the level of services provided. Not worth the cost!

Need alot of work on the parks and some sort of walking trails.

Bulletin? Other local papers? Posted flyers?

## Appendix 1 – Respondent Comments – Services

The failure to inform and include the public on important matters is a failure

I think the Town of Onoway could do a better job of making Onoway a welcoming place to open a business and invite local population growth.

Councillor ( one in particular) needs to stop working against the team. Needs to be a team member or quit. We see through the miss information that is hurting our community.





## Appendix 2 – Respondent Comments – Budgeting

Survey respondents were asked whether they have any suggestions/comments for the Town of Onoway to consider related specifically to municipal budgeting. The following comments are provided verbatim, without edits, in the order in which they were submitted; please note that not all survey respondents choose to provide written comment.

Town needs growth. Too little being done to add to community. I'd agree with tax increase as long as business/rec amenities are improved.

Quit wasting money replacing sidewalks. Concrete costs more than asphalt. Patch the sidewalks and pave the alleys.

I don't see the need for bylaw if they are not going to be proactive. Relaying on citizens of Onoway to report issues when the Bylaw officer sees the same issues as they drive by and refused to do anything unless I called in and reported the problem.

Decrease bylaw enforcement. All they do is set up speed traps to fulfill quotas.

the firehall needs to be in onoway

I'd like to see a swimming pool in Onoway. My former home town in Alberta has a swimming pool and it's a great asset to that community for its children and seniors too. And I must say our town taxes are over double what my dad pays for his similar home there as mine. And they've a Subway and a few more stores and restaurants too. Would be nice if Onoway could try to attract more businesses to set up here.

The fireball for the fire department

No

Stop wasting money! Build community spirit - not break it down. Be more transparent to the rate payers, involve them in all dealings. Consult with the rate payers rather than dictate. Stop the backroom deals. Do more for town. Stop destroying the economic viability of Onoway! Provide a forum for more input from the rate payers. Stop ating like our federal government. Do the right thing! Keep our Fire Department!!!

no

Set an education standard to run for council

Get some houses built!! Our population has not grown 8n years.

Not knowing the budget for any of the above as there is no transparency with this administration, my answers are mainly increase.

None

I do not wish to see any increase in taxes. What we pay already for services provided is extremely, extremely high. I think the town should be able to find a way to maintain or increase ALL levels of services without any increase in taxes. Services have gone downhill specifically since we moved here yet taxes have gone up. The failure to maintain or increase levels of service within the current budget is a town council issue that should be addressed without putting residents on the hook for internal issues and failures.

You all should have stayed within your means. We wouldn't be sitting in the situation we are now. Close to 700,000 dollars spent on termination of contracts. Current administration not doing their jobs, legal fees. Shame on this current council and administration for the position we are in and Lord help us if we have something major come up.

Make this an affordable place to live again. Tax only the people that want to increase services.



## Appendix 2 – Respondent Comments – Budgeting

This is a very vague survey. It is hard to answer honestly without having all the facts and figures in front of me. Eg: How much tax increase/decrease? How much increase/decrease in the budget are we talking to each of the specified areas? This is very misleading..... Also, what are the increase/decrease in services? (Eg: RCMP)

Increase Economic Development to increase population.

Just do the job your paid for. You've squandered our Towns reserves.

While infrastructure is important, I think that the Town can generate the property tax revenues it would need to build and maintain infrastructure if it encouraged investments in the area. By building the community, more people are likely to move to Oneway and contribute to budgets through their own property taxes. We already pay more in property taxes than people in much larger municipalities like Fort McMurray, but we do not have anything like the infrastructure they have there.

Ensure that funding to organizations not only be fair but appear to be fair.

I would like to see the town work on water and sewer for the west end of town, Also side walks there..

