

Appendix A - Summary of Budget Engagement Comments

The following is a summary of comments left from three sections of the budget engagement. The total number comments received was the equivalent of 27 pages. The comments have been broken down into the following areas:

- What do you like best about Courtenay and what can Courtenay do better?
- Department specific comments, these comments were recorded in the body of the survey and would be related to a specific department in question in that section of the survey.
- Your suggestions, in the survey there was an opportunity to provide “your suggestions” this section required a comment on what was being suggested and then adding an estimated cost for the suggestion.

Summary of What do you like best about Courtenay and What can Courtenay do better

Overall, the comments express a mix of positive and negative sentiments about Courtenay. Here are some key themes:

Positive Aspects:

1. Access to Nature: Many appreciate the natural surroundings, parks, trails, and outdoor recreation opportunities.
2. Small Town Feel: Some value the small-town vibe and community closeness that Courtenay has maintained.
3. Cultural and Recreational Opportunities: Residents appreciate the variety of cultural and recreational services, local businesses, and downtown ambiance.
4. Proximity to Outdoor Amenities: The location is praised for its proximity to outdoor amenities, such as beaches, mountains, and recreational activities.

Concerns and Areas for Improvement:

1. Homelessness and Safety: There are recurring concerns about homelessness, safety issues in downtown areas, and the impact on the community's atmosphere.
2. Housing Affordability: Many comments highlight the need for more affordable housing and criticize current housing policies, including opposition to new rental developments.
3. Traffic and Infrastructure: Some residents express dissatisfaction with traffic flow, the need for more roads or a third bridge, and concerns about road and bridge maintenance.
4. City Management and Decision-Making: Criticisms include inefficient city management, perceived overspending on certain projects like bike lanes, and a call for better fiscal planning.

Specific Requests and Suggestions:

1. Indoor Pickleball Facility: There is a noticeable demand for more pickleball facilities, with suggestions for indoor courts.
2. Public Safety: Residents emphasize the importance of public safety and suggest increased policing and enforcement of bylaws.
3. Homelessness Solutions: Calls for practical solutions to address homelessness, including designated facilities away from downtown areas.
4. Community Engagement: Some comments express frustration with a perceived lack of responsiveness from city officials and a desire for more community input.

It's important to note that opinions vary, and these summaries capture a range of sentiments expressed by the community.

A summary of Department Comments

The comments can be summarized into several key themes:

1. **Housing and Social Services:**

- Build emergency, social, and coop housing, committing to a specific number of units per year.
- Support drug rehab and mental health over-policing, incorporating emergency services.
- Improve cold weather shelters and ensure safety in specific areas.
- Provide spaces for the unhoused, support safe bike lanes, and enhance pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.
- Advocate for free or affordable recreation for children.
- Work with neighboring regions, considering amalgamation for long-term benefits.

2. **Financial Management:**

- Avoid budget expansion beyond inflation rates.
- Allocate remaining funds towards addressing homelessness.
- Propose free rehabilitation services, including a rural farm for rehab and a mental health facility.

3. **Critique on Current Spending:**

- Oppose spending on bike lanes and traffic calming, suggesting a focus on infrastructure and road repairs.
- Question the high budget for city utilities, calling for cost reductions and efficiency improvements.
- Criticize the allocation of funds for administrative purposes, suggesting salary freezes and expense cuts.
- Express concerns about high property taxes and the need for responsible spending.

4. **Community Services and Recreation:**

- Advocate for additional community justice workers and criticize spending on bylaw enforcement.
- Suggest using surplus funds for a safe injection site.
- Call for fair wages and benefits for casual employees running recreation programs.
- Emphasize the importance of social planning over parks and trails during times of financial strain.

5. **Development and Permitting:**

- Propose minor increases in development permit fees for faster processing.
- Oppose building permit fees, suggesting free permits for longer waiting periods.
- Suggest increasing the number of permits issued rather than increasing costs.
- Express concerns about the current length and cost of the permitting process.

6. **Property Taxes and Revenue:**

- Oppose property tax increases beyond inflation rates.
- Suggest raising property taxes by a specific percentage and taxing churches, abandoned lots, and slumlords.
- Propose increasing dog licensing fees and introducing a fuel surcharge on specific heating sources.

7. **Recreation Fees and Facilities:**

- Express concerns about the affordability of recreational opportunities due to fee increases.
- Advocate for plans and facilities related to pickleball, emphasizing the sport's popularity.
- Call for a break-even operation in recreation services and user-pay principles.

8. **Water Usage and Fees:**
 - Discuss the political unpopularity of water meters but suggest increased fees for installation preparation.
 - Highlight the need for water conservation and equitable charging based on usage.
9. **Emergency Services:**
 - Advocate for more funds towards emergency services, particularly fire and police.
10. **Debt Management:**
 - Propose paying off existing debt before saving more, considering interest rates.
11. **Solid Waste Management:**
 - Criticize the new garbage collection system and suggest alternatives.
 - Propose increasing efforts to educate the public on recycling.
12. **Transportation:**
 - Advocate for increased biking infrastructure.
 - Express concerns about current transit services, suggesting improvements and more frequent services.
13. **Public Works and Water Management:**
 - Suggest cutting spending on water during droughts and issuing fines for water waste.
 - Recommend less spending on managers and more on necessary equipment and qualified staff in public works.

A summary of Your suggestions

The comments express a range of concerns and suggestions for improving various aspects of the community in Courtenay. Here's a summary:

1. **Housing Initiatives:**
 - Build emergency, social, and cooperative housing, committing to a specific number of units annually.
 - Support drug rehab and mental health services over policing.
 - Provide safe spaces for the unhoused to set up tents or park trailers.
 - Work on plans to avoid flooding and improve cold weather shelters.
2. **Transportation and Infrastructure:**
 - Build safe bike lanes, enhance pedestrian and bike-friendly areas, and improve public transit safety for all ages.
 - Consider amalgamating with neighboring areas for more efficient governance and resource allocation.
 - Increase parkland, especially along the water, and encourage tree planting in residential areas.
 - Address garbage bin size issues and prioritize infrastructure maintenance.
3. **Budget and Spending:**
 - Avoid budget expansions beyond inflation rates and allocate resources wisely.
 - Redirect funds from certain areas (e.g., special interest groups) to essential infrastructure and road repairs.
 - Explore cost-effective measures, like volunteer involvement, to accomplish community tasks.
4. **Social and Recreational Facilities:**
 - Provide free or low-cost recreation for children.
 - Build future recreation centers near schools and accessible by public transportation, walking, and biking.

- Consider funding for a safe injection site, community justice workers, and mental health facilities.
5. **Specific Recreational Requests:**
 - Allocate funds for permanent pickleball courts, indoor tennis facilities, and a dedicated dog park.
 - Support more spending on biking infrastructure and sporting facilities.
 6. **Concerns about Administration and Spending:**
 - Express concern about administrative costs and suggest decreasing overhead.
 - Call for fiscal responsibility, avoiding unnecessary expenses and focusing on essential services.
 - Criticize perceived overspending on certain initiatives, suggesting a re-evaluation of priorities.
 7. **Community Engagement and Transparency:**
 - Address the need for better communication and transparency, ensuring surveys work on all smartphone operating systems.
 - Call for visible progress on issues like homelessness and downtown safety.
 8. **Social and Cultural Investments:**
 - Allocate funds for indigenous staff support, art and cultural placemaking, food forests, and community gardens.
 9. **Economic Development:**
 - Encourage faster and easier residential building approvals to increase housing supply and attract new residents.
 10. **Taxation and Financial Management:**
 - Advocate for responsible financial management, lower taxes, and affordability for residents.
 - Suggest exploring revenue-generating ideas, like creating a housing authority similar to Whistler's model.

In summary, the comments reflect a diverse set of opinions and suggestions, emphasizing the importance of housing, transportation, budget allocation, and community well-being.