



# BudgetSpeak Report

October 2015

Written by Citizens Academy  
with input from the  
participating councillors

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# Acknowledgements and Thanks

We would like to acknowledge and thank all those involved in designing and organizing the BudgetSpeak sessions, the thoughtful individuals who helped develop the content, and the tireless work of those involved in collecting the data and drafting this report.

## THANK YOU TO:

Councillors Tobi Nussbaum, Mathieu Fleury, Catherine McKenney, and Jeff Leiper, and their dedicated staff.

Isabelle Jasmine, Deputy City Treasurer, Corporate Finance, for presenting the budget data.

The City Treasurer's office for sharing the budget data requested for the group exercises.

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The Citizens Academy volunteers and staff: Judith Watling, Manjit Basi and Laine Johnson.

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# Introduction

For the second time in 2015, BudgetSpeak sessions were held in four wards: Rideau-Rockcliffe, Rideau-Vanier, Somerset, and Kitchissippi.

The sessions were hosted by Councillors Tobi Nussbaum, Mathieu Fleury, Catherine McKenney, and Jeff Leiper. The intention was to continue to experiment with how citizens' voices can be better incorporated into the City Budget process.

Citizens across four wards showed up and stepped into lively discussion, asked thoughtful questions, and made insightful comments and recommendations. These recommendations, both on budget and process, will support the Councillors in informing their own opinions and representing their wards to their Council colleagues. No doubt, influencing a City Budget is not a short-term task, but these incremental steps are meaningful in supporting progressive change towards more effective engagement in shaping the budget and our city.



# Setting the Context

Cities are increasingly dealing with complex challenges that cannot be solved by one organization or sector. The City Budget is a priority document – what we pay attention to and where we put our money will influence what our city will ultimately become. Progressive Councillors have expressed interest in better-involving citizens in sustainable public problem solving to ensure multiple voices are heard.

To assist in animating a deeper engagement process within their Wards, Councillors Nussbaum, Fleury, Leiper, McKenney, and Chernushenko partnered with Citizens Academy in February 2015. A non-partisan, not-for-profit organization, Citizens Academy is dedicated to catalyzing civic engagement by supporting collective learning, connecting and taking action in Ottawa.

Citizens Academy designed a consultative process for the February 2015 sessions that provided an opportunity to both learn and share reflections on the budget material. The learning portion, Budget 101 was a condensed version of a budget curriculum offered by Citizens Academy in their Civics Boot Camp program. By working in small groups and reporting back to the larger room, citizens were able to test their assumptions, communicate their ideas and identify priorities that were important to them.

Close to 200 citizens participated. The key learnings were three-fold:

- A two and a half-hour information and discussion session cannot cover the complexity of the city budget – especially if discussions included those portions of the budget that have limited or no discretionary flexibility.
- Greater amount of information and clarity about different expenditure envelopes is required in order to deliberate well.
- Engagement needs to be timely to ensure citizen recommendations and concepts have the possibility of influencing change.

The February BudgetSpeak sessions were the beginning of the experi-

ment. Since then, incremental changes have been initiated in the City's Budget consultation process that better allow for meaningful citizen contribution:

- A change from four City-led consultations to Councillor-led consultations;
- A Budget 101 was implemented by the City's Finance Department prior to the consultations;
- An online Budget Town Hall was hosted by Mayor Jim Watson;
- Budget consultations in October 2015 were conducted before tabling of the draft budget – allowing greater opportunity for citizens to influence and have their say;
- Representatives from the City's Finance Department were available for October 2015 Ward led consultations to explain the budget and address citizens' questions throughout the evening.

The February BudgetSpeak also created a forum for citizen priorities to get traction. For example, several participants strongly recommended that the Light Rail Transit (LRT) design include public toilets. City staff is now reviewing options to have public toilets included at Bayview and Hurdman LRT stations.

## BudgetSpeak Methodology

To generate thoughtful discussion and recommendations in the consultation, citizens need an understanding of the budget process, revenues and expenditures, terminology, and budget limitations. To provide this, sessions included a learning component of Budget 101, led by the Treasurer's office and a deliberation component of small group exercises facilitated by Citizens Academy.

These sessions were limited to two hours. Respecting feedback from the February sessions while maintaining the integrity of the event as a Budget consultation, the October BudgetSpeak zoned in on five major expenditure areas: Transit, Parks and Recreation, Community and Social Services, Emergency Services, and Public Works. These areas were

selected for their relative weight; each absorbs more than 5% of the Operational Budget. Within these expenditure areas, City Council has some discretion on prioritizing expenses for certain services.

Thus, the intention was to understand what services citizens wanted to improve and how they proposed to fund those services. A representative of the City Treasurer's Office remained present throughout the session as an expert resource. A particularly unique feature regarding budget information was the fact that all parties involved in BudgetSpeak were able to work together and offer, for the first time, a secondary layer of information about expenditures in specific service envelopes that supported a deeper level of conversation.

Following a question and answer session, participants reflected on their personal priorities and then worked in small groups to make recommendations for service areas they chose to improve and how they would pay for those services. Responses were captured using a variety of methods including individual responses, small group discussion, plenary discussion, and electronic voting.

Over 50 people participated in the BudgetSpeak held on Oct. 7 at the St. Laurent Complex and over 35 people participated in the BudgetSpeak held on Oct. 8 at Makerspace North.

Although BudgetSpeak sessions were publicized widely, the overall diversity and representativeness could have been improved with longer lead-time. A more deliberate outreach strategy and improved communication around purpose and outcome could increase participation in future BudgetSpeak conversations.

# Summary of Key Recommendations by Participants

Key recommendations are categorized as relating either to the content of Budget 2016 or to the consultative process. These recommendations are a summary of findings from both the East and West BudgetSpeak sessions.

## Budget 2016

Citizens were open to discussing tax increases and sliding fees for service to maintain and/or increase service delivery levels. More specifically, participants recommended:

- Increase taxes by 3 – 4% (see polling results section) (N.B. participants were surprised at the ease of consensus in both small group discussions and plenary discussion, and questioned whether consensus was indicative of a lack of diverse perspectives, while also wondering whether agreement around tax increases may be difficult to achieve more broadly in each Ward and across Wards);
- Increase available Affordable Housing to support the homeless and those at risk of homelessness;
- Introduce a sliding scale for Public Transit fares;
- Invest in Complete Streets, tree maintenance, a network of public washrooms, and incentivize active modes of transport;
- Focus on retrofits and increased energy efficiencies to reduce long-term costs; and
- Create a vision and long-term investment strategy to guide social service spending.

## Consultative Process

Overall, citizens enjoyed the interactive process and valued the opportunity to deliberate with their peers. There is interest in deepening understanding and lengthening deliberation. More specifically, participants requested:

- Increased clarity, transparency, and specificity with Budget data in order to deliberate well. Select participants in both sessions felt limited by the five expenditure areas selected;
- Increased time for dialogue and deliberation;
- Ongoing opportunities for dialogue to better understand how budget decisions shape the type of city we have;
- A better understanding of how the Council's Strategic Priorities relate to the annual budget and how those decisions are made; and
- A better understanding of the relationship between federal, provincial and municipal governments. A broader context would support wiser and more strategic recommendations, as well as provide an understanding as to where citizens can further pursue policy areas of interest.

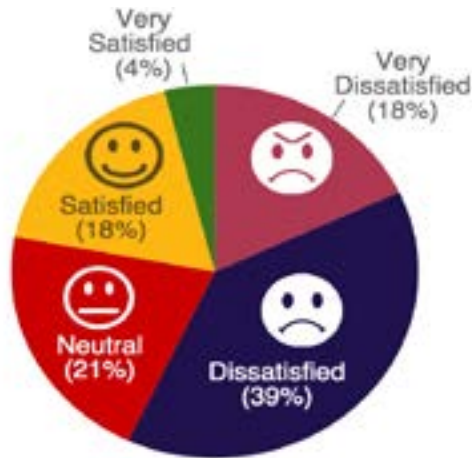
# Group Recommendations Summary\*

Expenditure Area	What should be improved?	How would you pay for it?
Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public washrooms</li> <li>Sliding scale fees</li> <li>Improve customer relations through driver training and working conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roll transit fees into taxes</li> <li>Use CRA information to determine eligibility for lower fees</li> <li>Explore lowering senior manager salaries</li> </ul>
Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affordable housing</li> <li>Child care subsidies</li> <li>Support vulnerable groups and vulnerable programs</li> <li>Council should create an overall vision and investment strategy for this envelope</li> <li>City innovation lab</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply equity lens to determine funding strategy</li> <li>Increase taxes</li> <li>Subsidize using funds from high-profit/secure revenue streams e.g. HydroOttawa</li> </ul>
Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bylaw enforcement</li> <li>Improve dispatch efficiencies</li> <li>Prevention e.g. community policing, education in high-risk areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enforce/increase fines</li> <li>End only services required, not all</li> <li>Explore using uber model to better use part-timers for fire and paramedics</li> <li>Fewer police cars, more bikes</li> </ul>
Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete Streets (winter-maintained)</li> <li>Sustainable/effective housing materials</li> <li>Ongoing tree maintenance</li> <li>Pilot ski lane on sidewalks in winter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal solar roofs</li> <li>Increase parking rates</li> <li>Retrofit buildings to increase energy efficiencies</li> <li>Reduce snow plowing/ leaf blowing</li> </ul>
Parks and Recreation	<p>Parks (Rideau-Rockcliffe/Vanier only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More parks/animated programs</li> <li>Better use of underused green space</li> <li>At risk youth and seniors programs</li> <li>Increase rec staff training</li> </ul> <p>Arts &amp; Culture (Somerset/Kitchissippi only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arts &amp; Culture should be separate from Parks and Rec</li> <li>Library: More funding for central and branches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with existing professionals, e.g. Soccer Ontario instead of city duplicating programs</li> <li>User fees on sliding scale</li> <li>Increase high-end user fees</li> <li>Position Arts and Culture as a program in CSS or Health</li> <li>encourage financial stability of A&amp;C through strategic investments</li> <li>Library could be a PPP</li> </ul>
Other (Rideau Rockcliffe/ Vanier only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>present draft budgets at 2%, 3%, 4% tax increases</li> <li>free buses for seniors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased taxes and parking fees to absorb transit costs</li> </ul>

\* For a breakdown of group recommendations by session, see Appendix A.

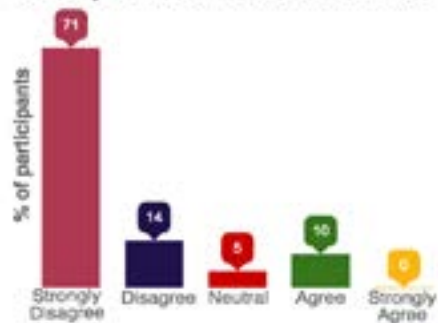
# Somerset/Kitchissippi Polling Results

## How satisfied are you with City Services?

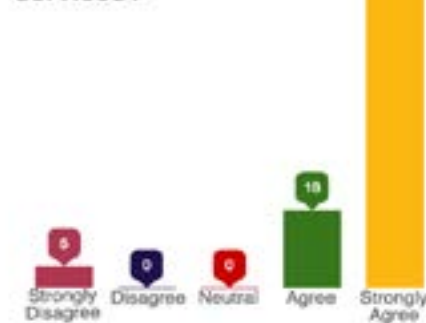


Keeping in mind that a 1% increase roughly amounts to \$36 / year for the average homeowner (with a property valued at \$370,000)...

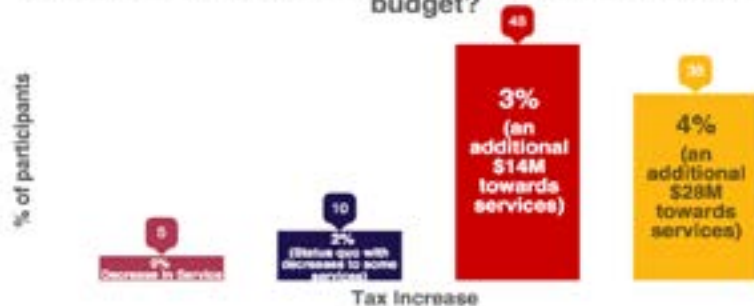
To what extent do you agree to have services frozen (or decreased in some areas) in order to keep the tax increase to 2%?



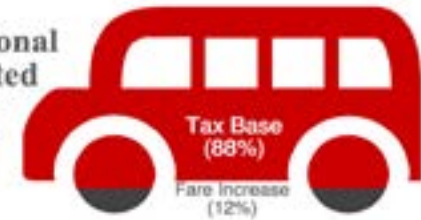
To what extent would you agree to increase taxes above 2% to improve services?



What level of tax increase would you recommend for the 2016 budget?



How should additional revenue be generated to mitigate transit budget pressures?

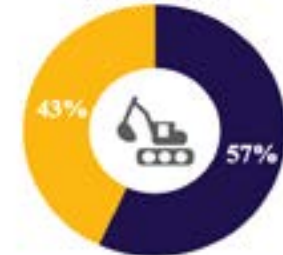


How should the City of Ottawa adjust spending in 5 key operating budgets?

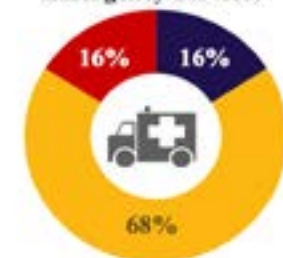
Legend for spending adjustments:

- Increase Spending (Dark Blue)
- Maintain Existing Spending (Yellow)
- Decrease Spending (Red)

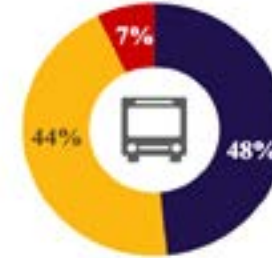
Public Works



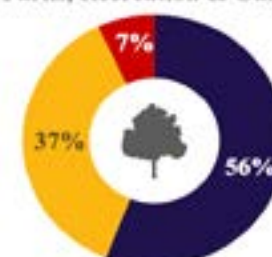
Emergency Services



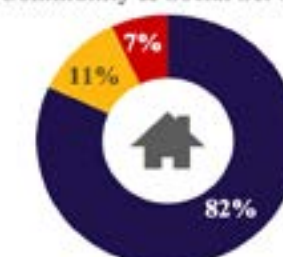
Transit



Parks, Recreation & Culture



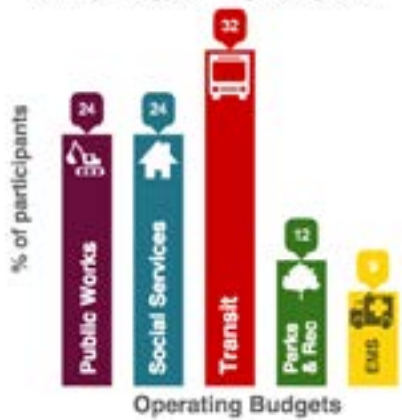
Community & Social Services



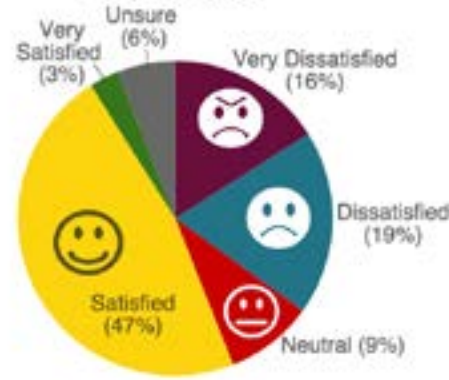


# Rideau-Rockcliffe/Rideau-Vanier Polling Results

What is your priority out of the 5 major operating budgets?



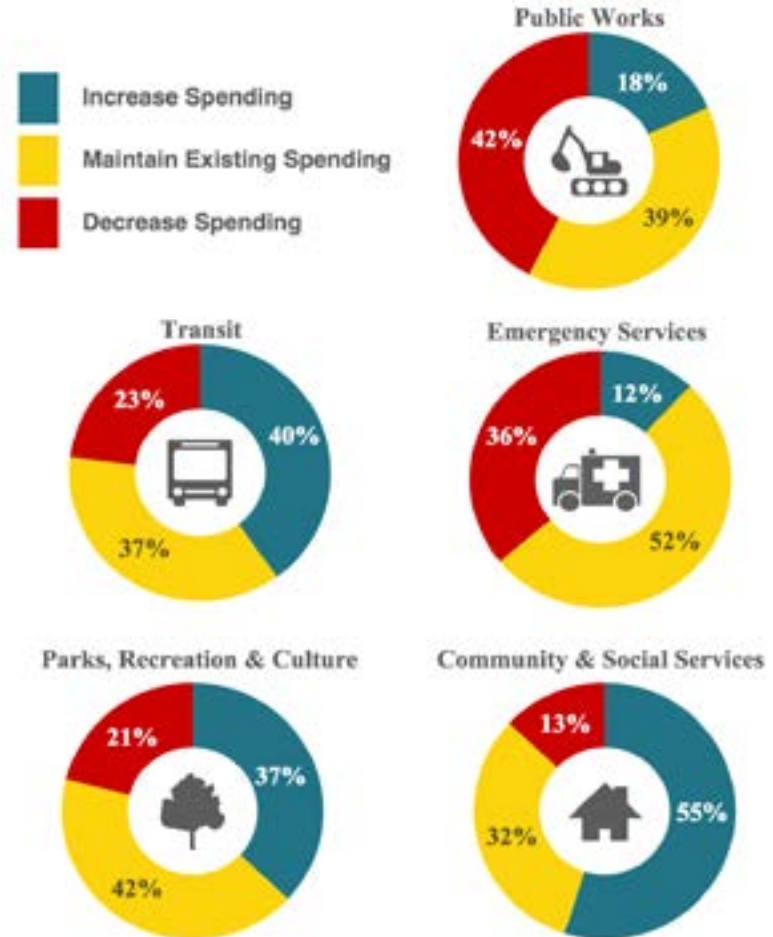
How satisfied are you with City Services?



How should additional revenue be generated to mitigate transit budget pressures?



How should the City of Ottawa adjust spending in 5 key operating budgets?



Keeping in mind that a 1% increase roughly amounts to \$36 / year for the average homeowner (with a property valued at \$370,000)...

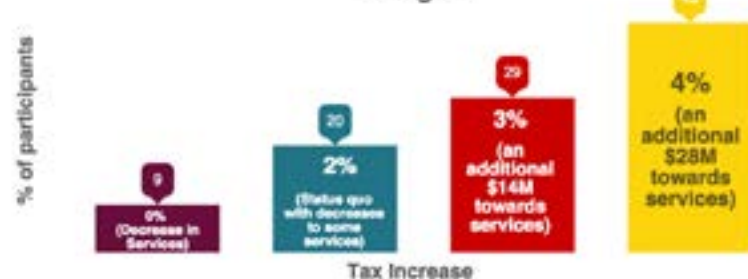
To what extent do you agree to have services frozen (or decreased in some areas) in order to keep the tax increase to 2%?



To what extent would you agree to increase taxes above 2% to improve services?



What level of tax increase would you recommend for the 2016 budget?



# Summary Remarks From the Councillors

This report is a vehicle to share with you what we have learned through the process of hosting two BudgetSpeak consultations in 2015, capture the findings from the Fall 2015 session and articulate how the information captured will be used moving forward.

We continue to learn through offering these sessions. Some things have remained consistent – residents want to be included in the budgeting process and come ready to express problems but also roll their sleeves up and identify solutions. They routinely express a desire to be better informed. This means both having a better understanding of what is behind the numbers and ensuring they are presented in a way that can be understood and related to.

Newly expressed by the participants at the Fall 2015 round of consultations is a willingness to absorb increased taxes beyond the 2% stated in the budget directions in order to enhance services. We also heard that there is a desire to better understand the funding relationship between the provincial and federal government and the municipality in order to provide more strategic recommendations.

We are committed to continuing to engage with our residents in new ways and apply the lessons learned from each session to future consultations and to advocate for progressive changes to processes. Including a representative from the treasurer's office was an important first step in providing greater clarity around the budget numbers presented. There is still more that needs to be done. And we will continue to work with the Treasurer's office to present the numbers and set the context in a more relevant fashion to ensure greater clarity for participants in the 2017 sessions we host.

Doing engagement differently is something that many of our residents have expressed a desire for at the doorstep, on the phone, and by email. These sessions have been experiments in new models of engagement on the complex topic of the City of Ottawa's budget. These

events have and will continue to drive our conversations on the budget with our council colleagues; they shape our understanding of what is most important to our residents and they identify the tradeoffs residents are prepared to make.

We want to thank those that participated in person and contributed to this report. The report is available on our website and the results will be shared with our Council Colleagues, the Mayor and the City Treasurer.



# Appendix A.

## Rideau-Vanier & Rideau-Rockcliffe Wards

Expenditure Area	What service should be improved?	How would you pay for it?
Community & Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase Affordable Housing</li> <li>• Increase Child Care Subsidies</li> <li>• Prioritize vulnerable groups and operating costs of supportive programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct pilot with alternative financial models</li> <li>• An intervention is needed at many levels.</li> <li>• Look at increasing property tax revenue to 3% or 4%.</li> <li>• Consider community financing and other innovative funding models.</li> <li>• Redirect profits from other services such as Hydro Ottawa. Tax index on revenue.</li> </ul>
Parks, Recreation & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase animation of parks and under-utilized public spaces like the waterfront</li> <li>• Increase youth programming</li> <li>• Increase trees in parks</li> <li>• Increase Senior programming</li> <li>• Increase capacity of recreation staff so they can impact change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-allocate funds to better reflect programs needed in different neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Partner with existing professionals, e.g. Soccer Ontario instead of city duplicating programs</li> <li>• Explore models in other cities (Western Canada has some good models) that have been creative in delivering programs.</li> </ul>
Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free bus transportation. What would be the cost of doing so?</li> <li>• Lower transit fares for seniors and other groups experiencing economic marginalization.</li> <li>• Increase ridership through more frequent scheduling and branding</li> <li>• Improve Transit Stop Safety: Increase winter maintenance; Better lighting at pedestrian crossings</li> <li>• Better training for drivers re: aging populations and people living with disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll transit fees into taxes</li> <li>• Increase parking fees</li> <li>• Sliding scale based on income</li> <li>• Lower manager salaries.</li> <li>• Merge Gatineau and Ottawa transit services</li> </ul>
Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase safe, connected, winter-maintained multi-modal bike/pedestrian routes.</li> <li>• More public washrooms</li> <li>• Decrease Asphalt; Increase quality of maintenance materials to protect investments.</li> <li>• Increase quality of tree maintenance</li> <li>• Increase commitment to and delivery of Complete Streets.</li> <li>• Decrease # of STOP signs and increase # of YIELD signs.</li> <li>• Pilot commuter ski lanes. (South, west sidewalks)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surcharge on impermeable parking lots.</li> <li>• Rent and retrofit municipal roofs with solar panels.</li> <li>• Increase parking rates.</li> <li>• Retrofit buildings to increase energy efficiencies</li> <li>• Decrease snow blowing/leaf blowing budgets.</li> </ul>

Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase By-Law Enforcement (Within existing resources)</li><li>• Increase Emergency Response Time.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Escalate Fines</li><li>• Have zero tolerance</li><li>• Dispatch Model; Send services required, not all</li></ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase preventative policing, community policing. Focus on outreach and engagement.</li><li>• Table draft budgets at 2%, 3%, and 4% tax increases.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decrease police cars on patrol.</li><li>• Increase bike and foot path patrol vs. car patrol</li></ul>

# Kitchissippi & Somerset Wards

Exenditure Area	What service should be improved?	How would you pay for it?
Community & Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affordable Housing – Increase housing support services</li> <li>Council needs to create a long-term investment strategy for service delivery to vulnerable populations and Community Health Resource Centres</li> <li>Increase community economic development for youth</li> <li>Improve low-income health-related benefits</li> <li>Improve addiction services</li> <li>Improve child care for vulnerable populations</li> <li>Increase support for community-led initiatives that strengthen neighbourhood development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equity lens needed for budget decisions</li> <li>Increase taxes 3% - 4%</li> <li>Wage and space subsidies</li> <li>Work with other levels of government</li> <li>Create a city innovation lab to generate creative, efficient, sustainable solutions</li> </ul>
Parks, Recreation & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase investment to community delivered programs vs. City delivered programs</li> <li>Arts &amp; Culture Programs should be separate from Parks and Recreation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-allocate funds from city delivery to community delivery</li> <li>User fees on sliding scale</li> <li>Increase high-end user fees</li> <li>Change management model</li> <li>Share resources across organizations</li> <li>Position Arts and Culture as a program in CSS or Health</li> <li>Encourage financial stability of A&amp;C through strategic investments</li> </ul>
Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease transit fees to spur ridership</li> <li>Provide low-income bus passes</li> <li>Increase rural/suburban connector buses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoned fares</li> <li>Work with Province for sliding scale based on income</li> <li>Hedge gas prices</li> </ul>
Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase washrooms in LRT plans and at bus stops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease senior manager salaries</li> <li>Decrease budgets for ticketing and policing</li> <li>Address driver/staff working conditions to decrease benefits/sick days</li> </ul>
Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevention education in high-risk topics – fire in particular</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enforce by-laws and fines for tree protection, parking, waste dumping, snow removal etc.</li> <li>Consider scheduling efficiencies; use Uber model to use part-timers for fire and paramedics</li> <li>Increase taxes</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase funds for Central Library project and branches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase taxes</li> <li>Sliding scale user fees</li> <li>P3 Partnerships</li> </ul>