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Council Report # 2020-72

Title: Financial Framework Survey Results

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Reviewed by: n/a

Approved by: Jennifer Moore, CAO

Strategic Plan: Leadership in Change

Council Date: August 26, 2020

Recommendation

“Whereas the Council of the County of Northumberland received Report No. 2020-72, ‘Financial Framework Survey Results’;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved That the Financial Framework Survey Results report be received for information.”

Purpose

To report on the survey results from the 2020 financial framework survey.

Background

The May 20, 2020 Council Report 2020-43 ‘Long Term Financial Planning Framework / 2021 Budget Process, Schedule & Levy Considerations’ included the commitment for facilitation of a financial framework survey. The 2020 survey for the 2021 budgetary cycle was available on the County website commencing July 10th allowing for responses up until July 31st.

Consultations

The budget process is developed annually by the Treasurer with input from the Finance department staff involved in developing the annual budget. Feedback received from Council,

the public and the operating departments is also considered in setting priorities for infrastructure, programs, services and determining any modifications to the annual process.

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

The Municipal Act Regulation 289 Yearly Budgets, Upper-Tier.

Discussion/Options

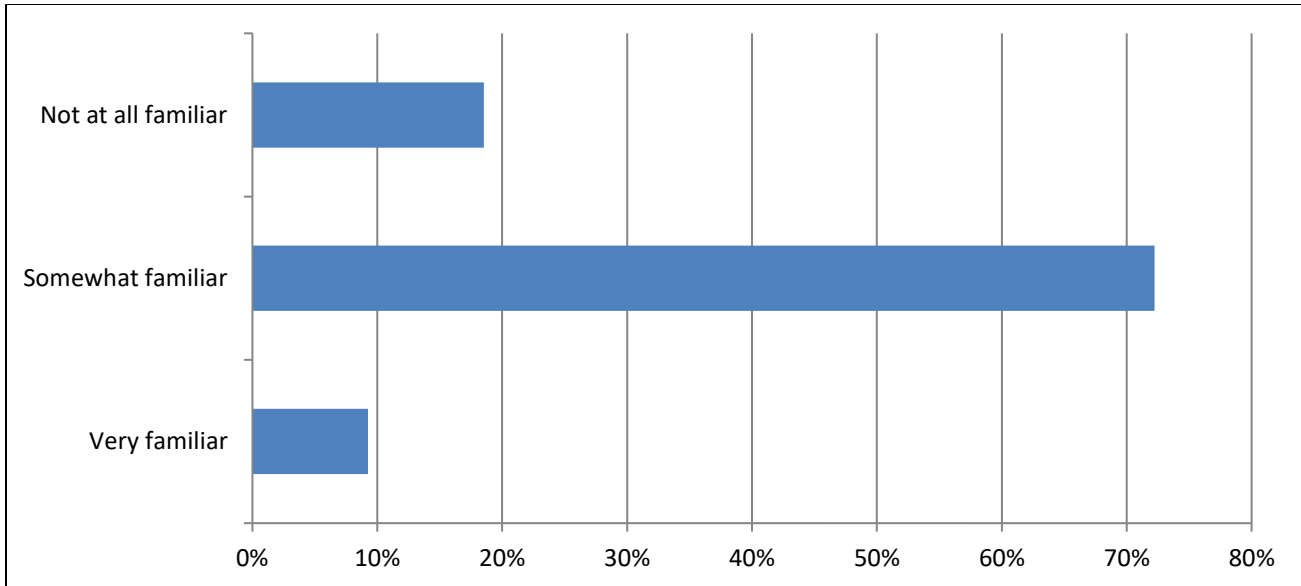
To provide for public engagement and input into the County's annual budget and long-term financial plan, staff facilitated a 2021 Financial Framework survey. The survey was advertised via social media, the County website, newspapers and a media advisory was also issued. As part of the budgetary process, staff committed to compiling results of the survey to report to Council in consideration for the 2020 budget and in development of the 2021-2029 long-term financial plan.

The survey was open on the County website for a period of 22 days with 54 responses. There was a marked decline over the 2019 survey in which there were 374 responses. However, responses were fairly aligned with that of the prior year survey. The survey was comprised of questions in which responses were selected based on pre-set options as well as requesting stakeholder input through commentary to elicit detailed feedback. The results of the responses to the pre-set questions are provided below and the feedback to the commentary questions are provided as attachments to this report. Commentary feedback is provided verbatim with the exception of instances that contain personal identifiable respondent information or is considered derogatory in nature which is removed wherever this has been recognized.

1. Familiarity with County services:

Question: Some municipally-provided programs and services are funded by the County, while others are funded by your local municipality. How familiar are you with the programs and services specifically funded by the County's annual budget?

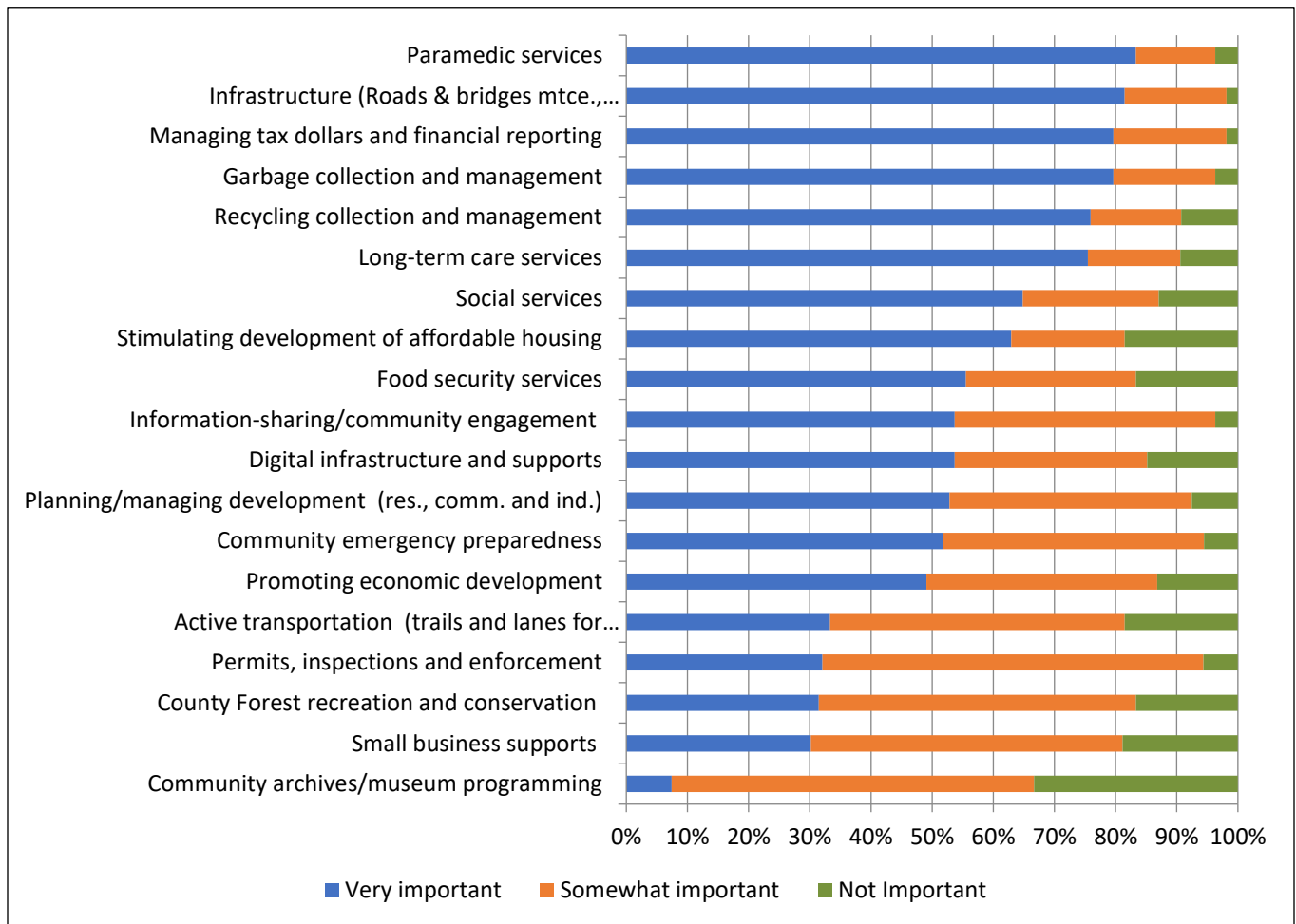
The majority at 72% indicated they are somewhat familiar followed by 19% not at all familiar and 9% very familiar. This reflects an improvement over the 2019 survey in which 51% indicated they are somewhat familiar followed by 39% not at all familiar and 10% very familiar.



2. Importance of service delivery:

Question: Below is a list of services/programs provided by the County. How would you rank the importance of the following services/programs to the community?

This question required respondents to rank each area of service delivery based upon a level of importance. Attachment A provides respondent's commentary for additional feedback to this question.



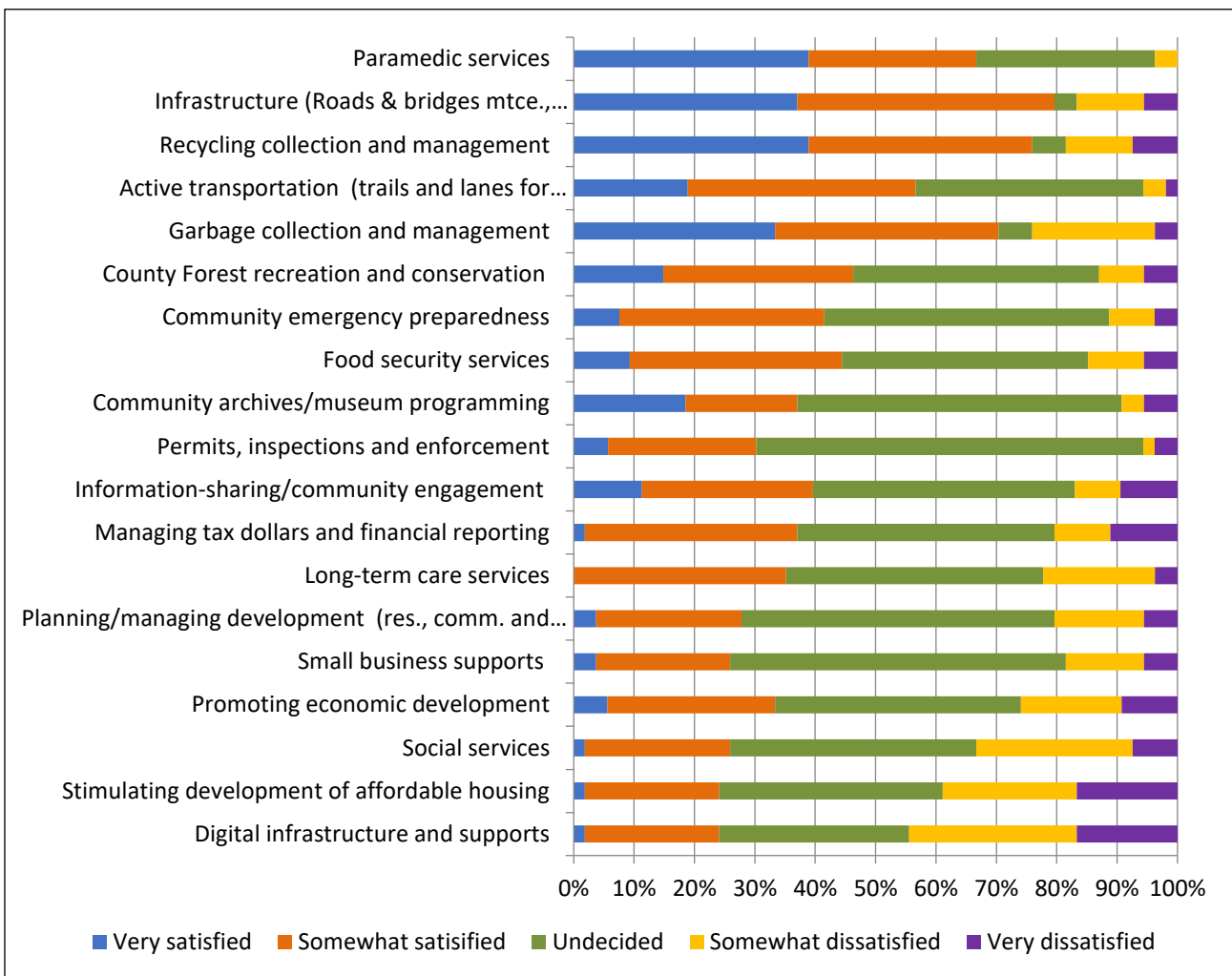
3. Satisfaction with service delivery:

Question: How satisfied are you with how these County-provided services/programs are currently being delivered in our community?

This question required respondents to rank each area of service delivery based upon a level of satisfaction. Attachment B provides respondent's commentary for additional feedback to this question.

Excluding the undecided responses, 69% of respondents are either very or somewhat satisfied with the services received, 20% indicated somewhat dissatisfied and 11% very dissatisfied.

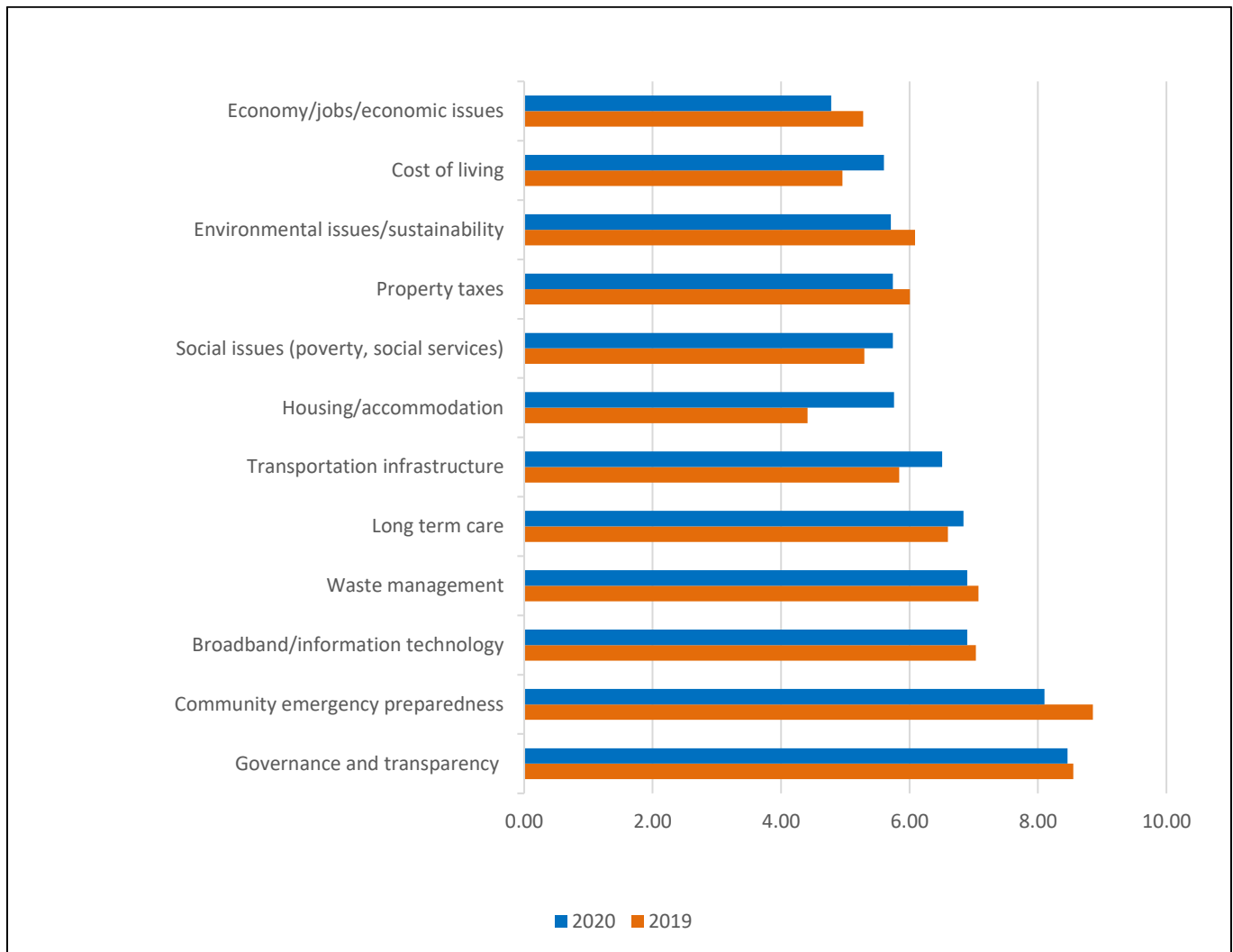
Results are sorted based on the differential between very satisfied/somewhat satisfied versus somewhat satisfied/very dissatisfied; therefore, negating any weighting for undecided responses.



4. Most important issues:

Question: Please rank the below list of items based on what you believe to be the most important issues facing Northumberland at the present time (1 being most important, 12 being the least important).

This question required respondents to rank in order the items that they deem as the most important issues to consider. The same question was posed for last year's survey; therefore, results based on average ranking for comparison purposes are displayed. Attachments C and D provide respondent's commentary for additional feedback to this question.

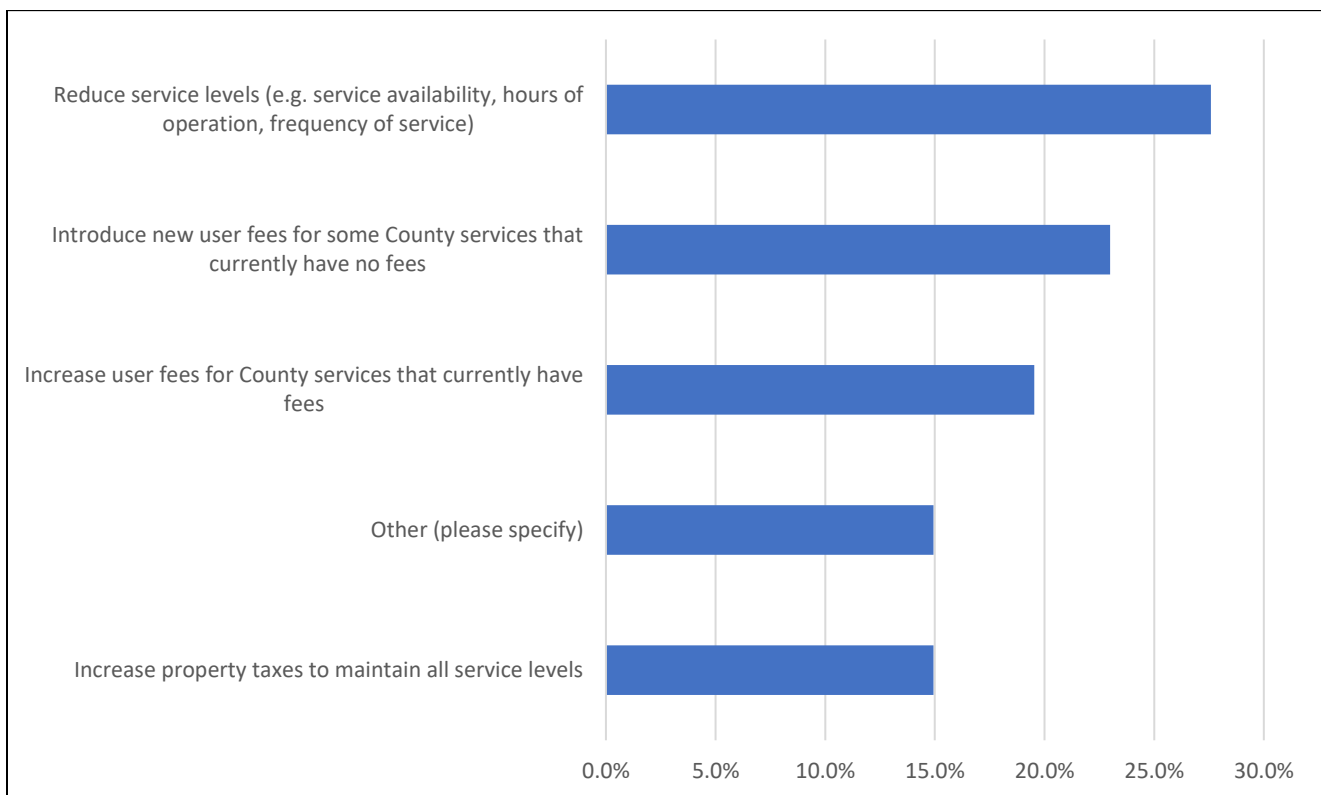


5. Balancing the budget:

Question: County Council is mindful of the need to balance effective municipal operations with the pressures facing local ratepayers. Given the impacts of COVID-19 and current economic conditions, Council has directed staff to initially target and investigate the feasibility of a 0% tax increase for the 2021 budget year.

In order to balance the 2021 County Budget, as required by law, Northumberland County has several options to consider. Which of the following options would you prefer the County use to balance its budget? You can select one option or up to three options.

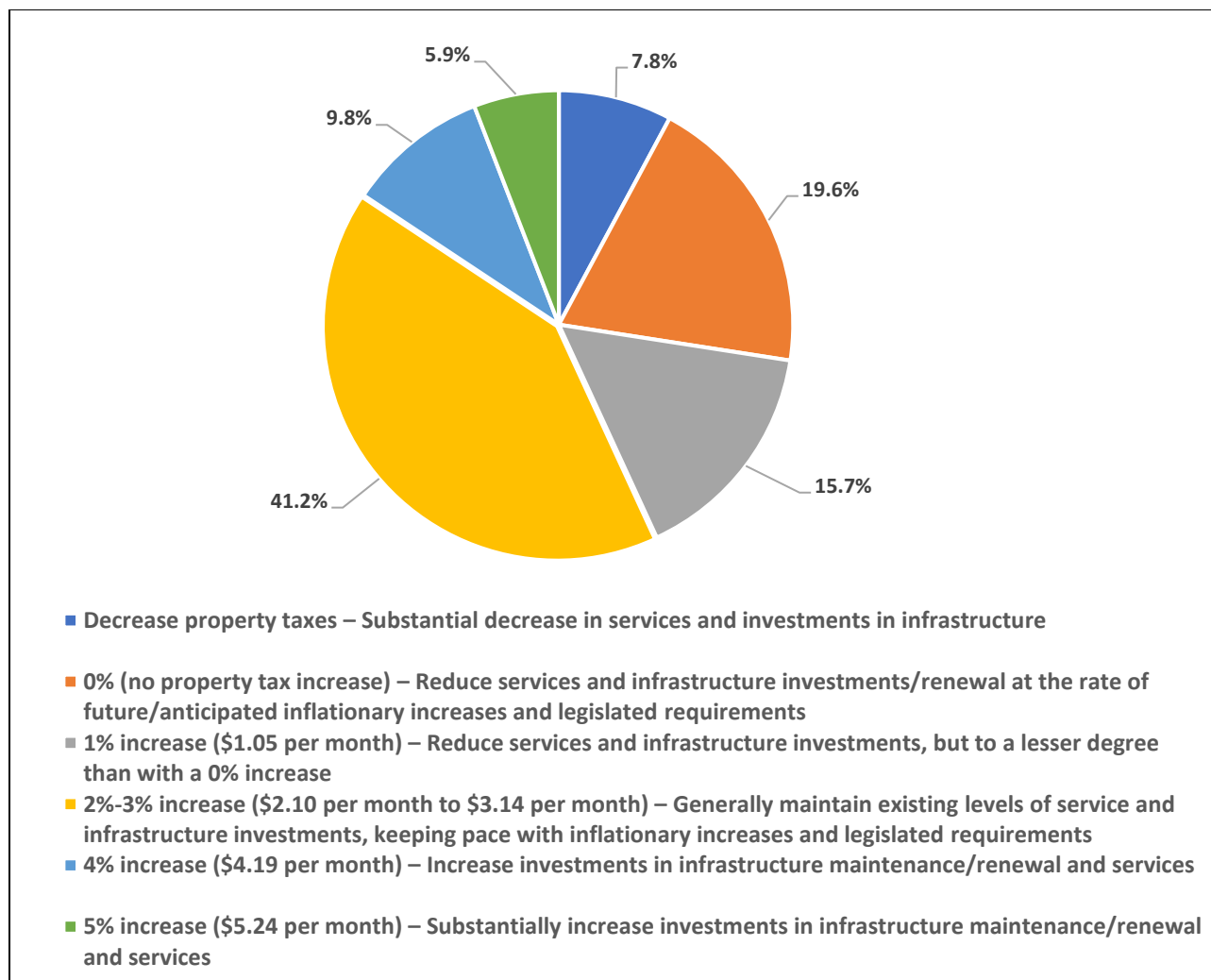
This question required respondents to select preferred options for balancing the budget. Commentary related to responses classed as 'other' are highlighted in Attachment E for other key considerations.



6. Tax increases:

Question: To maintain levels of service and to address the gap in funding required to maintain local infrastructure (roads, bridges), the County typically increases property taxes at about or slightly higher than the rate of inflation – approximately 2-3% annually. Based on your expectations for infrastructure and service levels, please tell us what annual per cent tax increase you think should be targeted for the 2021 Budget and in the long-term financial plan (2022-2032). (We have used an assumption of a typical single family home in Northumberland, not on water, which would be assessed at \$267,000 by MPAC to calculate the examples below. This is for illustrative purposes only, it does not reflect actual potential property tax increases).

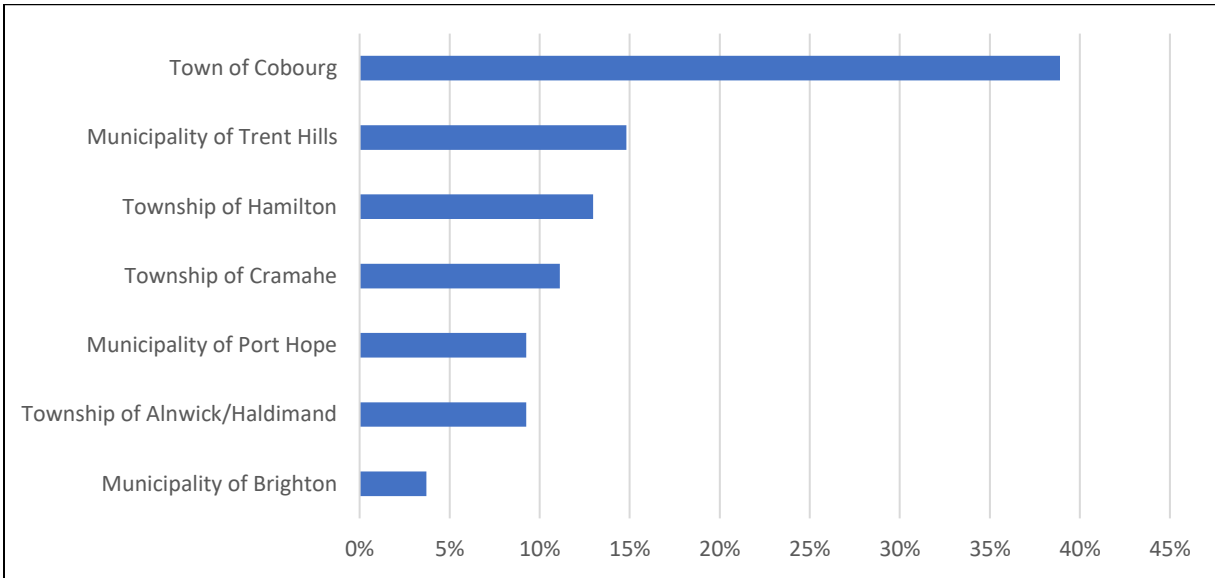
This question required respondents to select if they would be in favour of supporting a decrease, no increase or an increase to taxation in increments of up to 5%. 27% of respondents indicated they would not support increases; whereas, 73% indicated they would be in support of this. The largest proportion of respondents at 41% selected increases in the range of 2-3% which reflects typical prior year budgetary increases. MPAC assessment forms the basis for tax calculations and, as such, the current average assessed value is used for purposes of estimated homeowner tax impacts.



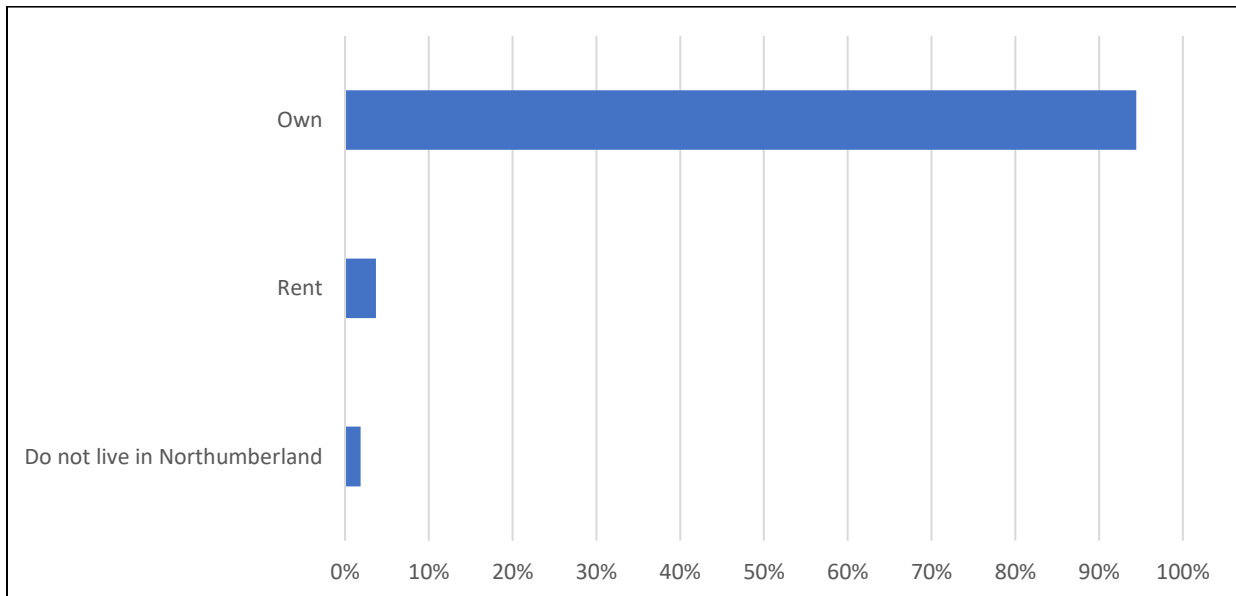
7. Demographics of respondents:

The questions below focused on respondent's demographics as well as how they became aware of the survey:

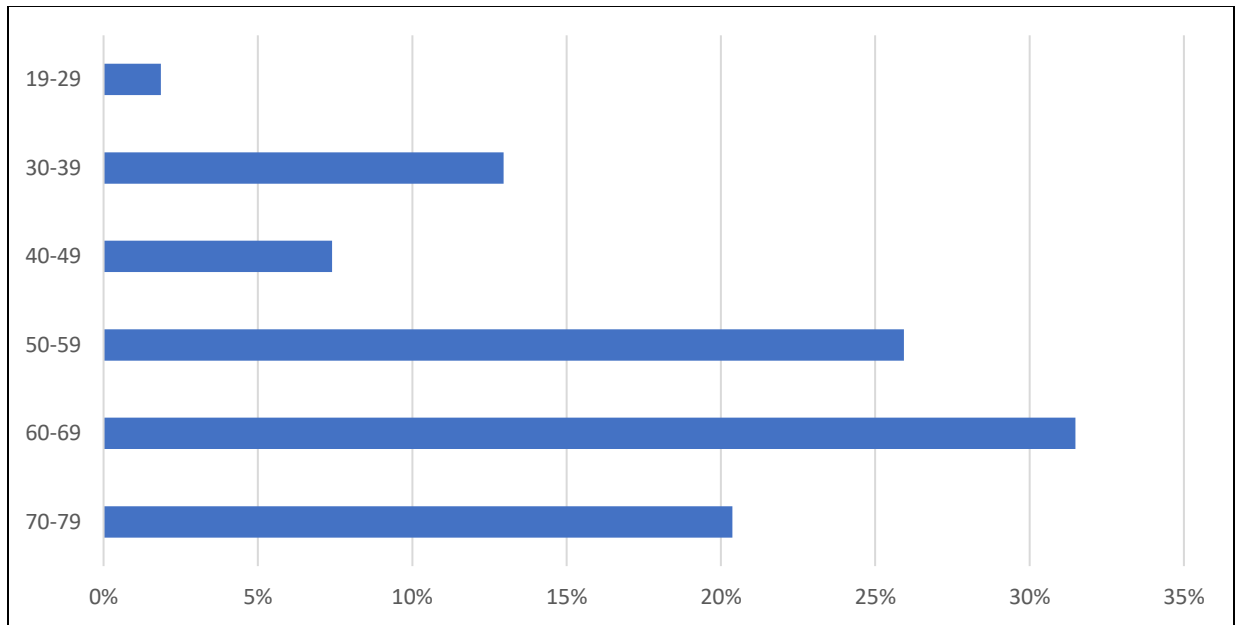
Question: Where is your home or business located if you do not live in Northumberland?



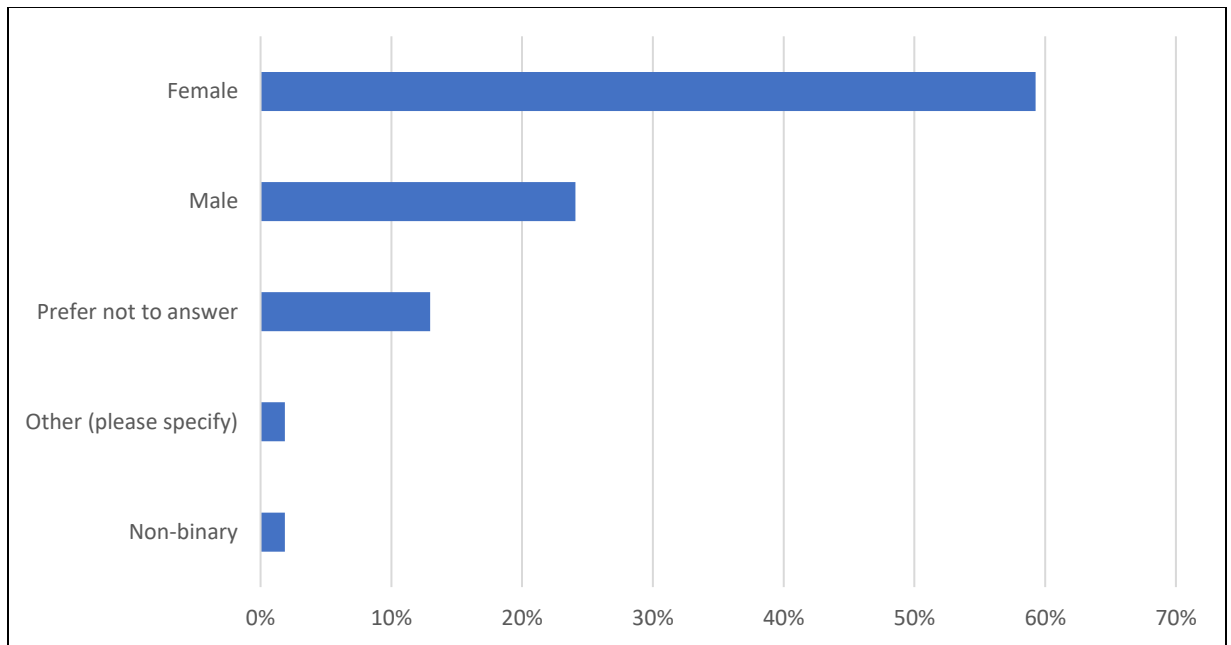
Question: If you are a resident of Northumberland County, do you own or rent your current place of residence?



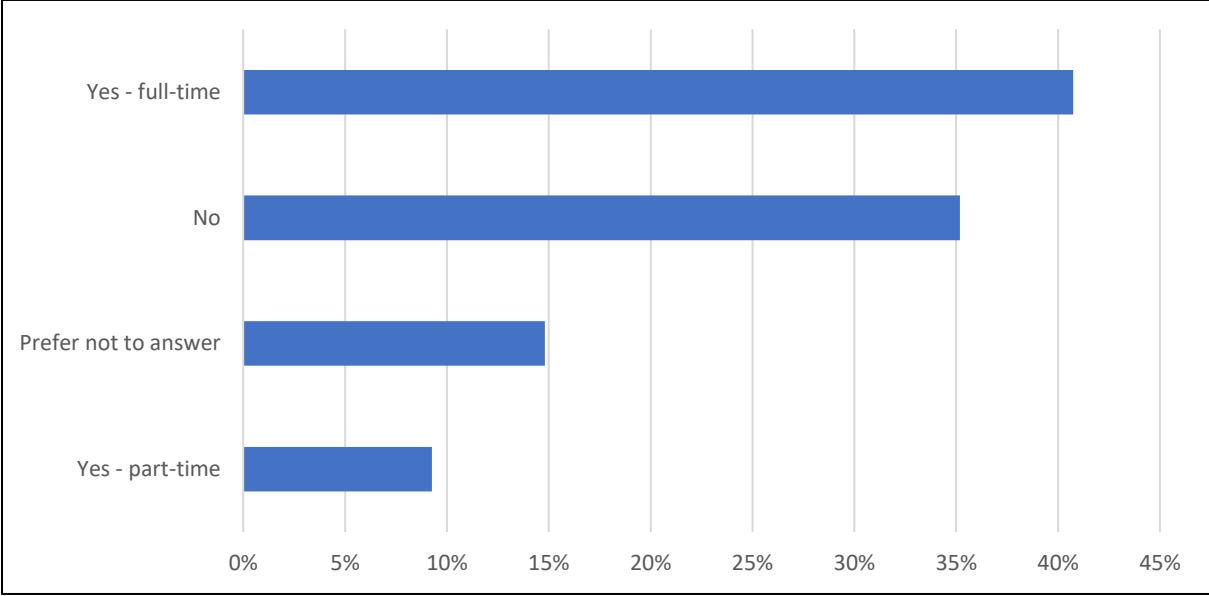
Question: In which age category do you fall?



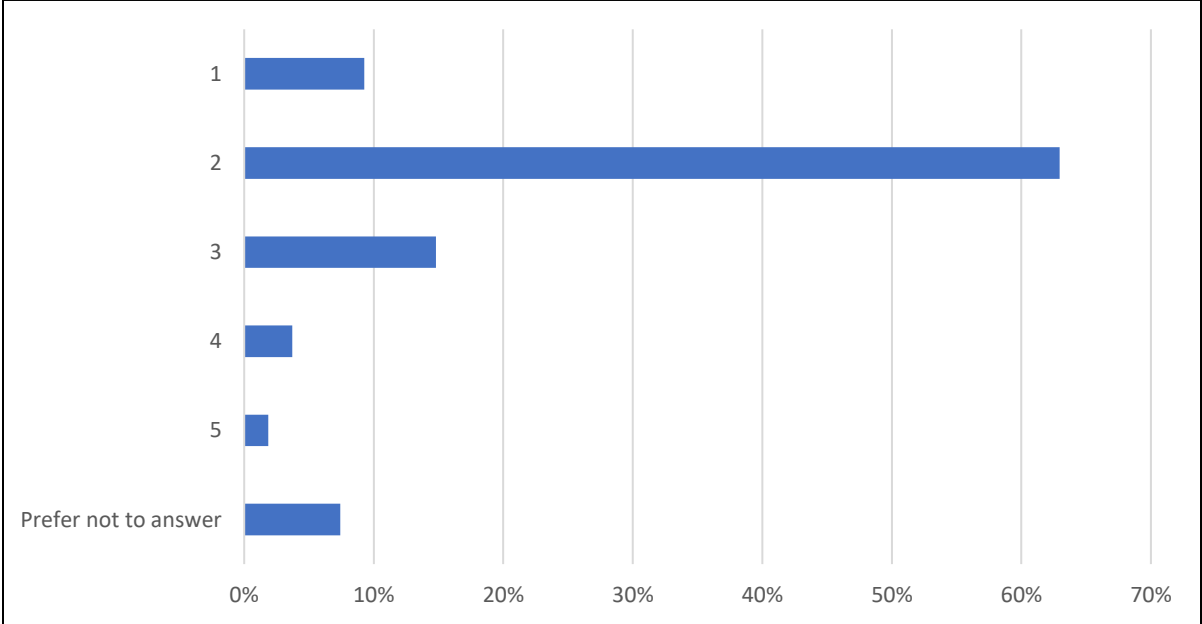
Question: How do you identify?



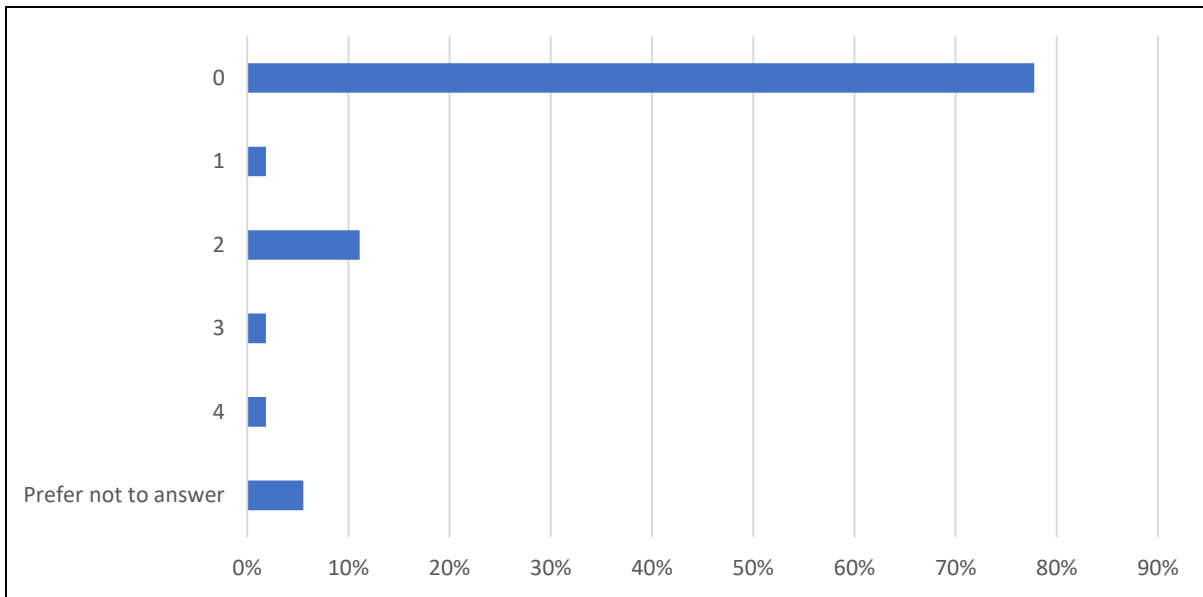
Question: Are you currently employed?



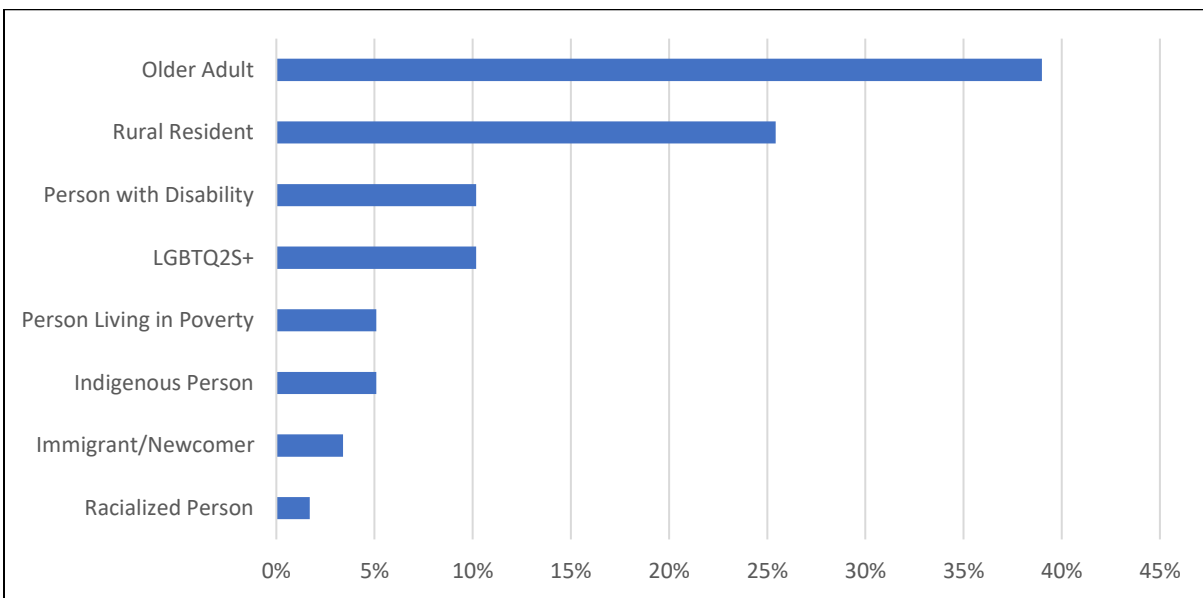
Question: How many adults (19 or older) live in your household?



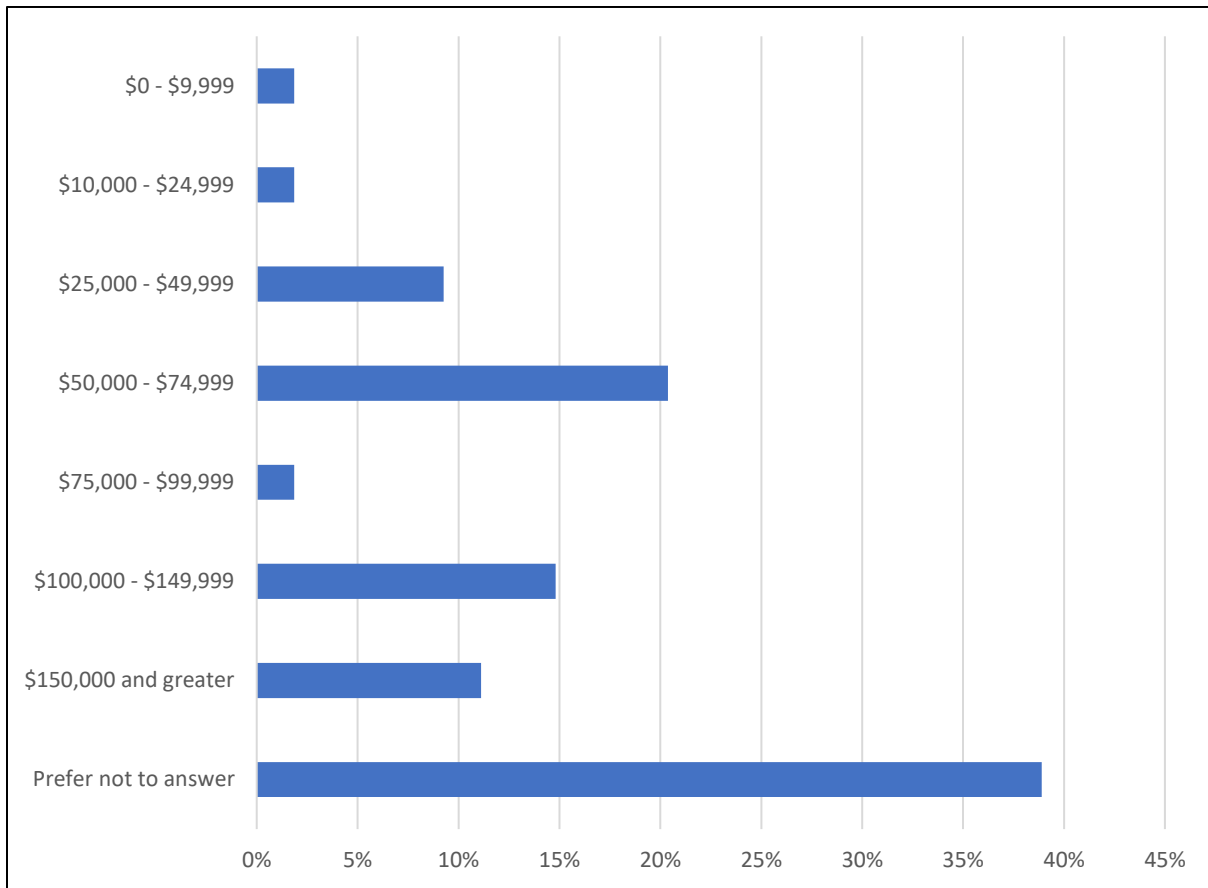
Question: How many children (0-18) live in your household?



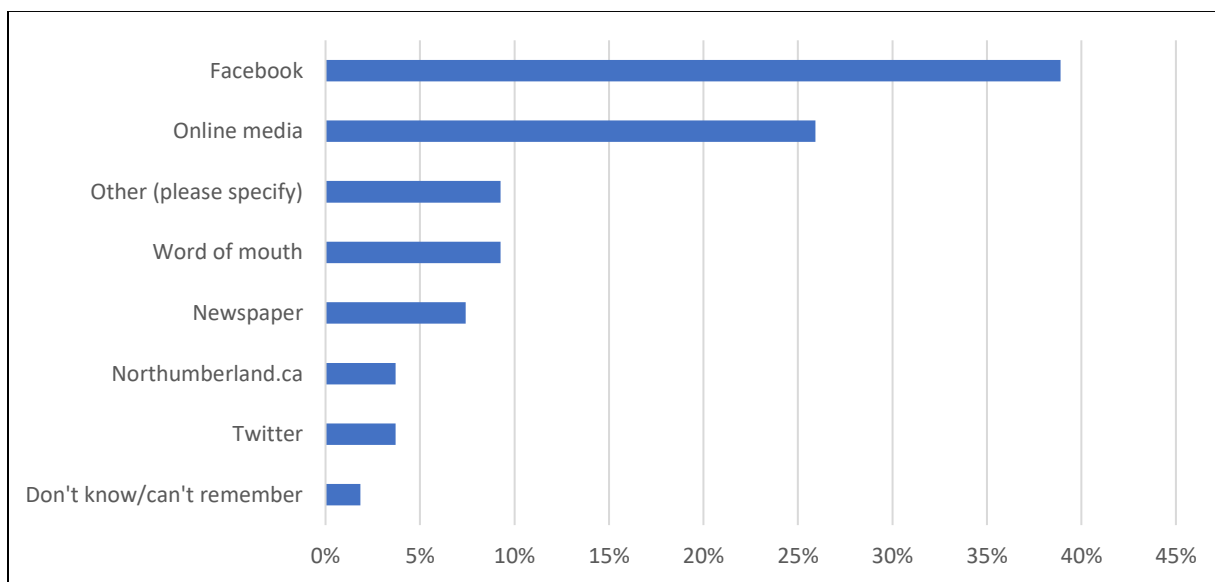
Question: Do you personally identify as someone in one or more of the following groups (select all that apply)?



Question: What is your household income?



Question: How did you find out about the 2021 Financial Framework Survey?



Financial Impact

Although the Financial Framework Survey does not have a quantifiable financial impact, public input is a key component in the County's long-term financial planning framework in establishing priorities and decision making.

Member Municipality Impacts

N/A

Conclusion/Outcomes

The Financial Framework Survey provided a means for public engagement in the County's long term financial planning model.

Attachments

N/A