



The on-line budget survey

Overview

I sent this survey to fewer than 200 individuals. Most of those people live in the First Ward. Over the past 27 months, I've created email list to keep in touch with First Ward neighborhoods and to respond to requests. Some people on this list are outside the First Ward.

The survey was designed for this audience.

I've routinely requested that people feel comfortable sharing any information with their own lists. With the invitation to take the survey, I also asked them to share the link and invite others to take the survey.

I anticipated as few as 50 and as many as 150 returns.

773 people responded to the survey.

AnnArbor.com published the link to the survey, and invited anyone and everyone to respond. This provided much more data than I had anticipated, but also showed me some weaknesses in the survey instrument.

I did not use a random sample. Those who responded were self-selected. They decided that they wanted to tell a member of Council what they thought (some quite forcefully in the comments sections). There were no significant demographics questions (age, gender, income, voting history) that would indicate civic and community involvement. This is a snapshot of what 773 people were thinking at the time they took the survey and how they reacted to the survey questions themselves.

The survey was anonymous. No email addresses or web links were captured. Some people wrote to me after taking the survey and asked for a copy of the white paper on the budget I had authored. Others wrote to me to give me their direct opinions on issues related to the budget.

I'm not a professional survey designer, and this was the first time I'd used Zoomerang. I tested the survey form, and asked others to test it. Unfortunately, I didn't test to see what would happen if a respondent changed his or her mind on a question. That turned out to be a frustrating experience for some who took the survey, as the form didn't allow anyone to change their mind.

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Data Interpretation

94% of those who took the survey identified themselves as living in Ann Arbor.

Once AnnArbor.com invited even more responses, I was concerned that First Ward constituents would be less active participants.

However, that did not prove to be the case; the First Ward remained at the top of activity throughout the process.

42 people — including at least one County Commissioner — took the survey knowing they didn't live in Ann Arbor, but still wanting to share their opinions.

Table 1

Combined results of Q1: Do you live in Ann Arbor and Q2: What Ward do you live in?

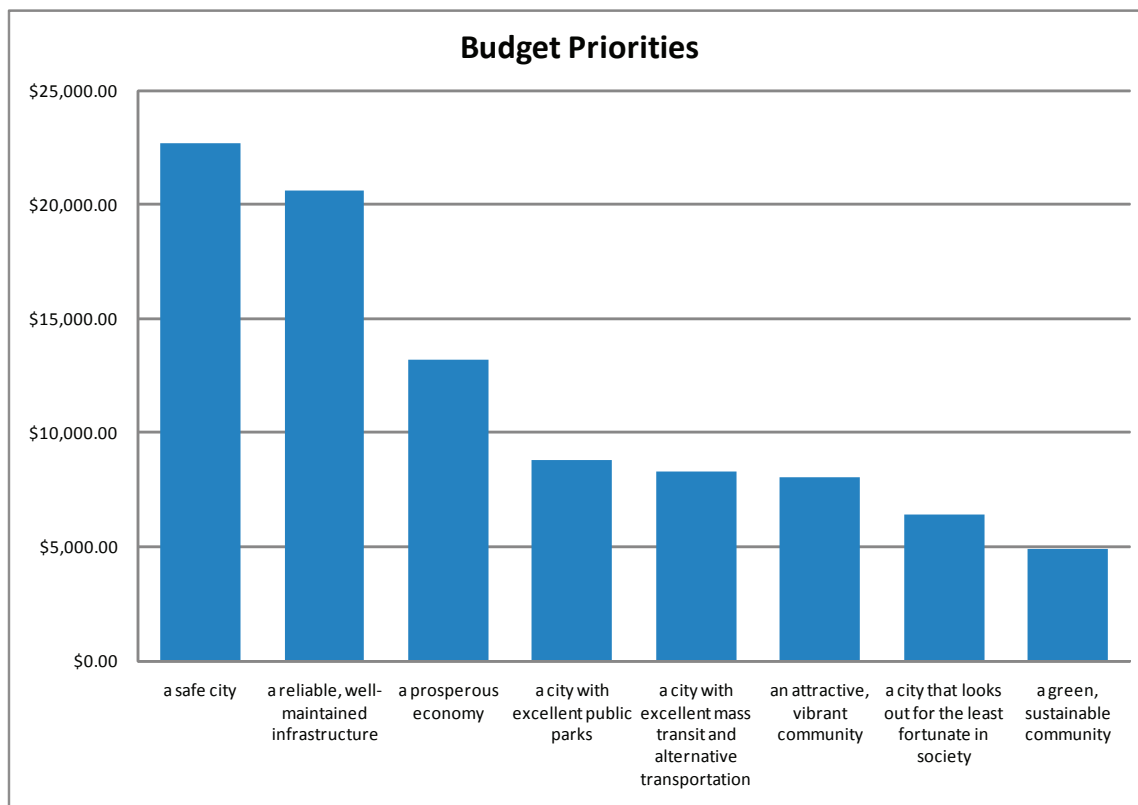
| | City | Outside Ann Arbor |
|---------------|------|-------------------|
| Ward 1 | 145 | 1 |
| Ward 2 | 84 | |
| Ward 3 | 99 | 1 |
| Ward 4 | 133 | 3 |
| Ward 5 | 146 | 1 |
| don't know/NA | 118 | 42 |

Just wanted to say that although I checked that I don't live in Ann Arbor, I hope you're still considering our opinions--I'm a business owner in the city though I live in Ypsilanti, and all of these things affect us and the city that we work in and do business in.

Budget Priorities

92% of respondents predicted that the City would have less (68%) or the same (24%) amount of money in the budget in 12 months. That means that they expect the budget for the next fiscal year (that starts in July, 2011) will be as small or smaller than the budget that starts in July, 2010. This is one of the reasons I'm concerned about establishing priorities for the budget.

The chart below reflects what I called the 'put your money where your mouth is' question — Question 4. I asked survey respondents to imagine they only had \$100 to spend, and they had to prioritize. Not everyone followed directions or



understood that the values statements [were](#) priorities. But when I looked at all of the answers, the results were still clear.

This is a snapshot of the values the survey respondents placed last week on these visions for Ann Arbor. In times of limited means, a safe city with a reliable infrastructure that is an economic powerhouse wins out over the other considerations.

The survey was released the same day as a major article on employee benefit levels was published in AnnArbor.com. That article definitely affected the comments that people shared about priorities.

On Question 5, I asked about strategies to address the projected budget shortfall that has received so much media attention:

Question 5: The city currently provides many services to its residents, but will not generate enough revenue to continue providing services at current levels in the future. Please check one of the following three strategies to indicate where the city of Ann Arbor should place the highest priority to address its budget shortfall

| | |
|---|-----|
| Reducing city employees' compensation and retirement benefits | 403 |
| Reducing existing city services | 173 |
| Raising additional revenue, including taxes or fees | 197 |

Service Priorities

I asked questions to determine service priorities. Because both Police and Fire safety services have been in the news quite a bit reductions in service have become signification considerations. Below is the table of values respondents placed on safety services.

While most respondents were consistent about safety services ('not at all acceptable' grew as 'completely acceptable' decreased), passions ran high when it came to

Comments:

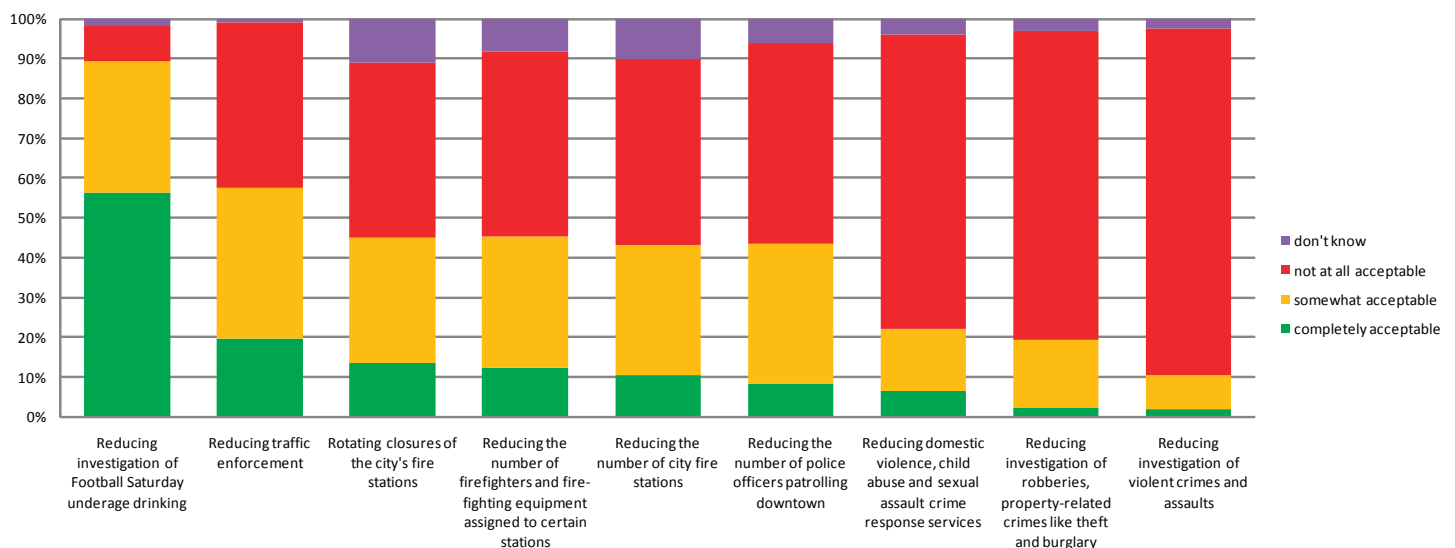
Cut employee health benefits and retirement benefits. Where else can a high school graduate retire with over \$100,000/year. These our our former firefighters. Get out of the golf business! Eliminate "extra" City social service funding and let the County do that! Lobby Lansing to change pro-union worker comp and arbitration rules. Sell the park out on Plymouth Road outside the City. Develop Huron Hills as dense condo housing. Cut the size and pay of the Council in half. Why does each ward need 2 Councilpersons? You asked. Good luck!

Reduce pay for employees and cut back on benefits and retirement luxuries. Live within the funds received instead of further taxation.

Here are some new ideas being discussed by other communities:

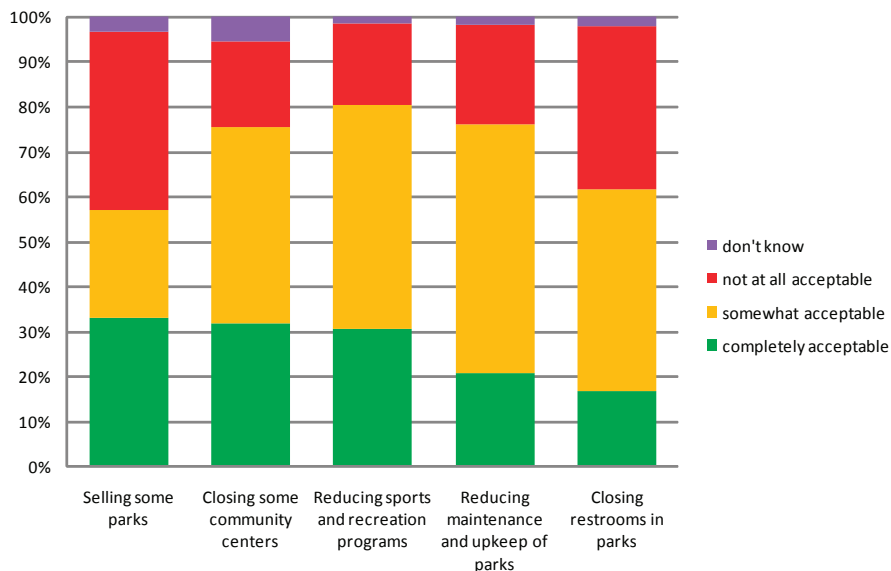
- Turning off street lights from 12 pm to 6 am or putting them on motion detectors.
- Using more community volunteers for services -- such as adopt a street, etc. In lieu of raises or cost of living adjustments, give people more credits toward retirement.
- Increase costs of water, sewer, electrical, etc. Increase fees to individuals using park services, etc.
- Consider investing in income-producing activities such as wind turbines (that are placed on land outside of the city)

Safety services reduction approval options



parks. The number and percentage of those who found selling parks ‘completely acceptable’ were highest; those who found this idea ‘not at all acceptable’ were also highest. Any sale of park land must go before the voters in a general election, of course.

Parks service reduction approval options (includes sale of park land)



How about increasing fees for parks and rec courses instead of eliminating them? Small surcharges on tax for sporting and music events (\$0.25). Reducing facility fees by reducing heating/cooling expenditures. Trim the fat in the budget!

Maint. of parks could be done with volunteers for a year.

Contract out City legal services, parks maintenance, street maintenance, snow removal. Eliminate the environmental coordinator position. Stop paying the mayor and council these should be viewed as volunteer positions. Stop inspecting rental housing.

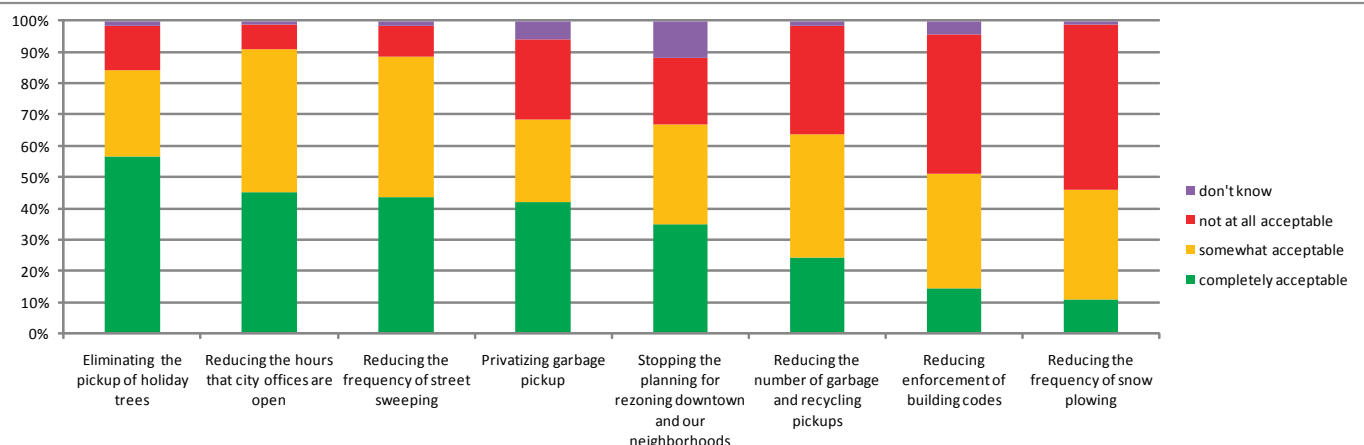
Consolidate services (including public safety) with those of other municipalities. (e.g. make fire districts; library districts; contract with the county for snow plowing); consider operating revenue-generating services like ambulances or negotiate a revenue-share with HVA for first response assistance; privatize services (like garbage collection) where possible.

Other Ideas — 1

Some comments, however, echoed ideas already circulating within the city.

The Council is already considering privatizing garbage pickup, at the recommendation of city staff. The city is also looking at ways to increase volunteer involvement with parks and other maintenance, including new ways to involve neighborhoods in the community.

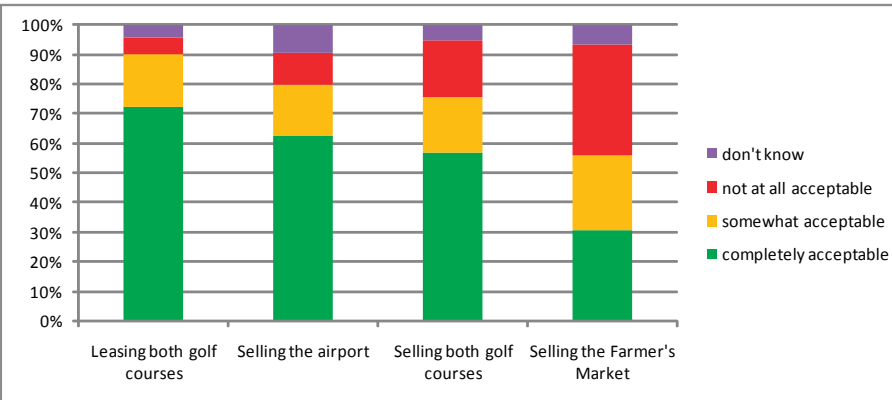
Enterprise funds (the golf courses, the airport and the farmer’s market) are supposed to stand alone. There’s been some coverage in the press lately to indicate that the



golf courses fail that test; I wondered how strong the support was for each enterprise fund becoming completely separate from Ann Arbor's budget.

Other Ideas — 2

Strong supporters of finding a solution for the golf courses weren't necessarily golfers.



Lease both golf courses to an independent contractor.

Hard to evaluate whether we'd lose more revenue selling golf courses that we would gain in reduced expenses.

Park and open space are important but pools and golf should be self supporting.

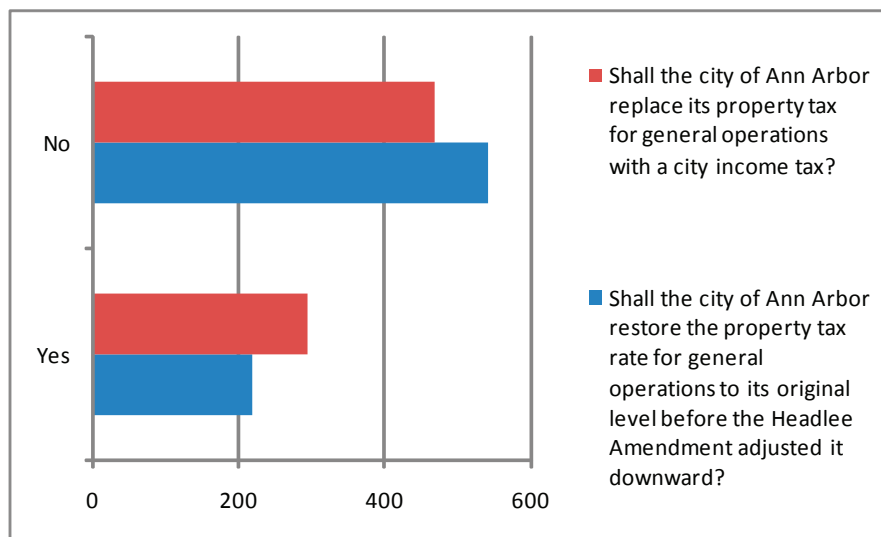
Remove golf courses from this list, they should just included within the Park and Rec budget. No need to break these out?

I don't care what happens to the golf courses, so long as the land isn't sold without a vote.

Revenues

I asked about both a Headlee override and an income tax that would affect Ann Arbor residents and those who work in Ann Arbor but live outside. I forced a YES or NO vote, but left the option for comments. This was the only revenue question I asked on the survey.

The results are dramatic.



Starting 1/1/10 U of M requires employees making over \$50,000...ish to help pay the health insurance premiums of employees making less than that amount. This is in addition to the annual premium increase.

At age 65, U of M requires employees to go on Medicare and leave the U of M private insurance plan. Are City employees required to go on Medicare so the Federal government can absorb their health care costs instead of the City and taxpayers paying for their health care?

If a U of M employee retires at age 62 and is not age-eligible for Medicare, they may continue their U of M private health insurance but must pay for the entire premium themselves; there is no more U of M contribution. When a City employee retires before age 65, do they have to pay for their own City-provided insurance or does the City/taxpayers foot the bill?

If the City offers more than one health insurance plan, does the City have a ceiling on the amount it will pay for that plan and let the employee decide how much they want to pay and choose a plan accordingly?

Should City employees rethink getting all the cash they can now and think toward the future that if the City has to declare bankruptcy so it can discharge it's financial responsibility for their pension plan, how much more cash they would lose if their pension plan amount was reduced through bankruptcy versus how much cash they lose now by taking pay cuts or paying more for health insurance and health care. Tell them to ask employees in the private sector such as airline pilots whose pension payments were supposed to be generous until the airlines declared bankruptcy and their annual pension payment dropped to the Federal government minimum through the Pension Benefit rescue.

If the City privatized garbage pickup, would property taxes go down or would the City still be looking for a way to hang on to that money by developing a millage to replace the trash pickup millage?

When offering early retirement packages, please remember, reducing salary and benefit packages doesn't automatically translate to savings to the City if the retirement pay and benefit package exceeds the salary and benefit package and someone has to be hired to replace the retiree even at a lower salary.

Before leasing the golf courses, make certain it won't cost the City more.

When talking about reducing trash, yard waste, etc., pickups, if taxpayers have to haul their own stuff over to Ellsworth, doesn't that defeat the purpose of A2 being a green city because you'll have all these cars driving to drop their stuff off instead of one truck coming through a neighborhood.

The comments gave me a more nuanced view.

On Headlee, people wrote:

aaaaargh,.....i just don't know. arguments on both sides make sense...
can you explain this further? I cannot answer without more information. I have only selected "no" because I am forced to choose an answer.
can't say, don't know enough
Could be a Yes after service priority and financial reduction plans are done.
I am not familiar enough with the implications of this proposal to answer
I don't have enough information to evaluate that question - what was the rate then and what it is now? I voted no because the survey wouldn't let me exit without an answer.

And on the income tax, some of the same people wrote:

Again, not sure about the revenue impact differences or what other cities have done this. I was forced to answer this, but I need to know more.
How would this vary per person if not based on property attributes which are usually a fair assessment of the people who live there (in terms of income).
Not sure about this, either, but I don't think it would hurt people who work in the city to share a small amount of the burden for upkeep of infrastructure.
I don't know enough about what the cost benefit of this would be to answer.

My budget agenda

I had my own agenda in asking for responses to this survey. Members of Council routinely hear from people who volunteer their opinions on a variety of issues, including the budget. It's easy to think that we're hearing from everyone, and getting a well-balanced picture of our constituents' priorities.

I needed to expand that circle, but I also needed to focus on those items to affect the budget discussion right now. The questions I asked were directly related to the budget meetings Council has been holding in January, February and March.

Your agenda

21 people directly mentioned the Stadium bridge, and the need to replace it.

61 people mentioned the arts — some in very negative terms, other positively.

Several mentioned the library lot (more than once!), the Fuller Road Transit Station, the Police/Court addition to City Hall.

Sell new city hall.
items costing more than an established amount such as building the city hall,
constructing underground parking should have a referendum for all residents to vote prior to spending so much money.
Tightening the belt to achieve affordability; stick to the basics. Things like that new city hall, that the people voted down, is just one embarrassment. Priorities in the city are askew and STOP taxing, taxing, taxing and trying to squeeze every red cent out of the residents especially when it covers non essential luxuries! Get back to the basic NECESSITIES - police, fire, service to the residents.

Comments:

Stop this sort of surveying. You are elected as a representative, not as a delegate. Be courageous. Do your research but Learn to vote your conscience with the information you have. We need leadership, not groveling followership that has and is so devaluing representative democracy locally and nationally in the US.

Sabra, thanks. You are doing a fabulous job.

This survey presents a few false choices and omits others. It's a typical political ploy to make us think that's it's too hard for elected officials to do what's right.

What have you missed? Where does one start with what you miss on a regular basis?

It's very simple Sabra, You need the core services in these tough economic times. No need to be giving money away for FITS or what the Mayor deems important like bike lanes etc.

Forced selection of a yes/no response and lack of some choices will distort results. The selection allowing choice of three, one of which was reducing services, was better explained by the list of potential services to reduce. Missing from the list of services or other budget items is the major projects that are underway or under consideration: Police/Courts building, Library Lot Parking structure, potential bonding for a structure on top of the library lot, Fuller Road Transit Center, Stadium Bridges, and change to a more costly approach to recycling, requiring purchase of expensive new equipment. Where are these items in the list of things that can be changed, that will improve the status of the budget? Lack of discussion of these means that the survey is incomplete, and will give a distorted picture of what is possible in terms of managing funds available for use. I chose answers for 6, and 9, only to allow submission of the survey, but prefer not to answer the questions as yes/no. What will you do with that information?

Eliminate free parking for google. Eliminate TIF financing for the DDA and LFDA, fund these from the general fund instead as appropriate. Put a halt on new capital improvement projects.

Thanks for your work on this, I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt Sabra, by assuming you are a person of good faith.
But I'm keeping an eye on all of you.

Budget Priorities for Ann Arbor

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Budget Survey

Page 1 - Heading

Community-Based budgeting is a process to help ensure that a city's budget decisions reflect the values and priorities of the community. This can be accomplished through gathering responses to a survey, holding community meetings, setting priorities, and following the guidance received through all of this public contact. The first step is a survey. Please fill out the survey and return it. Pass it along to others, too. The more people I hear from, the better picture I get of the community's priorities.
 Thank you!

Page 1 - Question 1 - Yes or No

[Mandatory]

Do you live in Ann Arbor?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Page 1 - Question 2 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

[Mandatory]

What Ward do you live in?

- ☐ Ward 1
☐ Ward 2
☐ Ward 3
☐ Ward 4
☐ Ward 5
☐ don't know/NA

Page 1 - Question 3 - Rating Scale - One Answer (Horizontal)

12 months from now, do you predict that the city will have more money or less money available to put into its budget?

More money

About the same

Less money

don't know



Page 1 - Question 4 - Rating Scale - Matrix

[Randomize]

Imagine you are in charge of Ann Arbor's city budget. I would like you to tell me how you would prioritize city spending. Assume you have 100 dollars to spend on the following goals. You can spend the money on all of the goals, some of the goals, or only one of the goals -- but you cannot spend more than the 100 dollars. How you divide the money will help me determine the city's priorities.

| | \$0 | \$20 | \$30 | \$40 | \$50 | \$60 | \$70 | \$80 | \$90 | \$100 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A safe city | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A prosperous economy | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| An attractive, vibrant community | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A green, sustainable city | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A reliable, well-maintained infrastructure | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A city with excellent public parks | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A city that looks out for the least fortunate in society | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| A city with excellent mass transit and alternative transportation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Page 1 - Question 5 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

[Mandatory] [Randomize]

The city currently provides many services to its residents, but will not generate enough revenue to continue providing services at current levels in the future. Please check one of the following three strategies to indicate where the city of Ann Arbor should place the highest priority to address its budget shortfall

- ☐ Reducing city employees' compensation and retirement benefits
- ☐ Reducing existing city services
- ☐ Raising additional revenue, including taxes or fees

Page 1 - Heading

Here is a list of specific services provided by the city. Please tell me whether you would find each of the following to be completely acceptable (1), somewhat acceptable (2), or not at all acceptable (3). If you don't know anything about the service or you don't have an opinion, check (4).

Page 1 - Question 6 - Rating Scale - Matrix

[Randomize]

Reducing services

| | completely acceptable | so |
|--|-----------------------|----|
| Reducing enforcement of traffic laws | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing investigation of robberies, property-related crimes like theft and burglary | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault crime response services | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing investigation of violent crimes and assaults | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the number of police officers patrolling downtown | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing investigation of Football Saturday underage drinking | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the number of city fire stations | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Rotating closures of the city's fire stations | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the number of firefighters and fire-fighting equipment assigned to certain stations | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing maintenance and upkeep of parks | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing sports and recreation programs | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Closing restrooms in parks | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Closing some community centers | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Selling some parks | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing enforcement of building codes | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Stopping the planning for rezoning downtown and our neighborhoods | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the number of garbage and recycling pickups | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Eliminating the pickup of holiday trees | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Privatizing garbage pickup | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Selling both golf courses | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Leasing both golf courses | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Selling the airport | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Selling the Farmer's Market | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the hours that city offices are open | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the frequency of snow plowing | <input type="radio"/> | |
| Reducing the frequency of street sweeping | <input type="radio"/> | |

What have I missed? Have you some suggestions?

Please tell me your view on issues you consider most important for Ann Arbor's quality of life.

Shall the city of Ann Arbor restore the property tax rate for general operations to its original level before the Headlee Amendment adjusted it downward?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Additional Comment

Shall the city of Ann Arbor replace its property tax for general operations with a city income tax?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Additional Comment

I really appreciate your help.

Thank you very much!
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The City's Budget

