

Council Study Session

February 15, 2022

Agenda Item	Community Survey Schedule and Questions Discussion	
From	Joseph Lessard	City Manager
Contact	Joe.lessard@ashland.or.us	
Item Type	Requested by Council <input type="checkbox"/> Update <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request for Direction <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/>	

SUMMARY

The City Council’s subcommittee on the community survey has reviewed possible approaches for developing questions and will report its preliminary findings for City Council discussion and guidance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review and provide comment on the updated survey schedule and on the conceptual approach for the survey questions. The suggested approach is for the survey to be focused toward serving as a community input tool on potential policy questions the City Council is likely to consider as part of its decision and oversight responsibility in the City’s budget process.

NEXT STEPS

City Council’s feedback on the suggested approach will be forwarded to the Southern Oregon University (SOU) consultant team for refinement and drafting of the survey’s questions. The SOU team will focus on assuring the questions are valid for accomplishing the intent of City Council’s approach, are not biased in their language and, that the responses to the questions provide useful information for the City Council’s budget decision making. The focus of the survey will be to survey which General fund programs have higher and lower values to residents and the trade-offs that they are willing to make. This should generate information that is specific enough to help the Council with its decision making on expenditures and internal allocation of resources among broad spending areas but will not have the survey respondents directly indicating the allocations.

It is important to emphasize that the survey will be relatively short – two sides of an 8 ½” by 14” sheet of paper. There will be limited space for questions and necessary context information. This makes it’s important to consider how questions should be drafted based upon previously tested and valid questions that can be most effective in soliciting policy/budget guidance from survey respondents. The SOU team will work with City staff to add necessary context to the questions and informative graphics as are appropriate and available.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

Attachments:

- Revised Budget Survey Description and Timeline
- Conceptual Draft – Questions/Approach



City of Ashland Budget Priorities Survey

Proposal

*Eva Skuratowicz, Ph.D., Karen Miller-Loessi, Ph.D., and Dr. Dan
Rubenson, Ph.D.*

REVISED FEBRUARY 8, 2022

*City of Ashland Budget Priorities Survey
Project Overview and Timeline
Deliverables from City of Ashland*

Overview

Dr. Eva Skuratowicz, Director of the Southern Oregon University Research Center (SOURCE), Dr. Karen Miller-Loessi, Senior Research Associate of SOURCE, and Dr. Dan Rubenson, Professor Emeritus of Economics, will head the project team to construct, administer, analyze, and report on the outcomes of a population household-level survey of residents of Ashland, Oregon, on questions related to budget priorities. The research project team will include student research assistants who will work under the supervision of Dr. Miller-Loessi, Dr. Rubenson, and Dr. Skuratowicz.

The questions on the one-page, double-sided survey will be constructed in consultation with the City of Ashland. These questions will be oriented around asking the respondent to make choices between budget alternatives. Dr. Rubenson will work with the City of Ashland Finance Department to understand the budget, which will inform the construction of the survey. In addition, Dr. Rubenson will do a literature review of previous research on city budget surveys.

In order for the respondents to understand the implications of what they are choosing, the SOURCE research team will work with the City so that the research team itself can understand the implications. This will guide how the survey questions and responses are constructed. The City will construct a webpage that will contain a full discussion of the impacts of each decision on the survey. SOURCE will have the final review of the wording on the website.

The population household-level mail-in survey will be part of a two-stage administration process. The City will provide all utility addresses (11,000) to SOURCE. SOURCE will create a color postcard to be sent to all utility addresses which will announce the upcoming mailing of the survey. This will alert residents/property owners that a survey is coming and give them contact information for questions. An introductory postcard is best practice for survey administration and is done to increase response rate. The City will provide appropriate logos for the postcard. In addition, bad addresses will become apparent as those postcards will be returned to SOURCE. The City will also run a robust public relations campaign that will commence before the survey is mailed out to encourage Ashlanders to fill out the survey.

SOURCE will construct the survey in its entirety and will work with the City of Ashland City Council, Mayor, and staff on the content of the survey. SOURCE will have the final determination on how the survey constructed, including the wording.

The survey will be sent out to all viable Ashland utility addresses. This will mean that those people who pay the utilities will get the survey. This is more likely to be the taxpayer, who is the target for this survey. There will be only one round of surveys and the surveys will be anonymous. SOURCE will recruit student research assistants for data entry. Those research assistants, under supervision, will enter the data from the surveys. In order to construct the budget, we are assuming, but not guaranteeing, a 30% response rate (3,300 surveys returned). Five previous SOURCE surveys, which

used random or stratified random samples, had the following response rates: 24%, 22%, 35%, 54% and 55%. As the budget priorities survey will be a household-level population survey, the City's public relations campaign will be very important in maximizing the response rate.

SOURCE will analyze the data from the surveys and prepare a report for the City. Dr. Miller-Loessi will be responsible for the analysis phase of the project, which will involve supervising the research assistants in logging the surveys and entering the responses. She will verify entries for accuracy and perform statistical analyses of the data using the IBM SPSS Statistics software package. Dr. Miller-Loessi, Dr. Rubenson, and Dr. Skuratowicz will prepare a final report of the findings and present it to the City.

Timeline

February

- City works with SOURCE to construct the survey questions. Everything on survey will be finalized by the end of the second week of March.
- SOURCE starts recruiting student research assistants for data entry.
- City makes available staff from the Finance Department to assist Dr. Rubenson in understanding the budget and the implications of survey questions.

Feb 14

- Council discusses the areas/programs to be included in survey

March

- City provides utility addresses to SOURCE.
- City prepares public relations campaign to encourage Ashland households to fill out survey.
- City constructs the webpage that will contain a full discussion of pros and cons. Webpage finished before the 3rd week of April.
- SOURCE creates color introductory postcard.
- SOURCE has color introductory postcards printed.

3rd week of March

- Spring break for SOU
- Council approval tentative March 21 or 22

4th week of March

- SOURCE mails out introductory postcards to all utility addresses.

4th week of March – 1st week of April

- SOURCE pilots the survey and makes changes based on feedback from pilot respondents.
- City launches public relations campaign.

2nd week of April

- SOURCE has the surveys printed.

3rd week of April

- SOURCE mails out surveys to all viable utility addresses.

1st week of May

- Student research assistants start to enter data from survey responses.

3rd week of May

- Cut off for survey receipt

2nd week of June

- Data entry and verification completed.

2nd half of June

- Data from survey cleaned and analyzed.

July

- SOURCE writes final report.

Last week of July

- SOURCE presents findings to the City.

City of Ashland Deliverables

1. Utility addresses for all Ashland residences
2. Guidance on the survey questions
3. Access to Finance Department to understand the budget and implications of cutting various programs
4. Full discussion of the implications of cutting various programs on a City of Ashland sponsored webpage
5. Public relations campaign encouraging Ashlanders to fill out the survey
6. Logo to use on postcard and survey

CONCEPTUAL DRAFT – Feb. 10, 2022
Questions/Approach for the Ashland Community Survey

This survey is intended to help open a community dialog on how the City of Ashland can address questions on how to fund City programs that are funded in its general government fund, its General Fund.

The General Fund of the City provides for services such as Police, Fire, community planning and development regulation, parks and recreation, information technology, Municipal Court, and a portion of general city administration. It is funded by primarily through property taxes, franchise fees, licenses and permits, fines and forfeitures, grants from the state and federal government, and user fees that are charged to direct users of the services provided by the General Fund departments. Other revenues the City collects are legally usable only for the specific reason for which it was collected, such as for utility operations of the electric utility, water and wastewater service, telecommunications, and the stormwater fund, and are not available for use to cover General Fund expenditures.

The costs of maintaining General Fund supported operation are rising due to things like inflation, changing environmental conditions, changing technology requirements, state or federal mandates, COVID-19 pandemic impacts, liability payments to the state public employee pension plan for investment shortfalls and, competition from other communities in hiring the skilled employees necessary for City operations. It is forecast the General Fund will experience an imbalance between its available revenues and projected expenditures within the current two-year adopted budget. This shortfall is expected to grow over time creating a “structural deficit” problem unless steps are taken to reduce General Fund expenditures or find additional revenues.

The City of Ashland is seeking input from you, as a citizen of Ashland, on your ideas for addressing the its deficit problem. The following survey questions are intended to help the City prioritize its expenditures and revenue options for future budget decisions. Please take a few moments to consider the following questions and, thank you for taking time to help your City.

1. Vision (confirm)

It is important for the City of Ashland to set a long-term commitment to success, or Vision, that best represents what its citizens expect see as defining the community’s quality of life. The following vision statement is derived from past City Council strategic planning efforts. Please give one or two comments and/or suggestions on what the Vision could be or should include:

Ashland is a resilient, sustainable community that lives within its means and maintains the distinctive quality of life for which is has become known. The City will continue to be known for its small-town welcoming neighborliness that also stresses environmental conservancy, fosters artistic expression and for supports the expression of ideas. It will plan and direct its services with a mind to continuously fulfilling this Vision for the long-term; a future view of not less than the next ten years.

- a) I like the proposed Vision
- b) Write-In suggestion/comment
- c) Write-In suggestion/comment

2. Values (rank 1-6/8)

It is important the City of Ashland reflect the community's values in how it conducts business and in the services it provides. The following are Values have been identified by the City Council as important. Please rank them as to priority and you can also provide up to two additional values items you may also wish to include in your ranking.

- Maintaining Ashland's high quality of life
 - Focus on community sustainability actions
 - Be a family friendly community
 - Provide excellence in governance
 - Modernize Infrastructure
 - Create economic opportunity
- a) I like the proposed Values
b) Write-In suggestion
c) Write-In suggestion

3. Priorities (rank 1-7/9)

It is also important the City of Ashland's current policy and funding priorities reflect the Vision and Values that represent the community. The following are priorities the City Council has identified as important. Please rank them as to your priority and you can also provide up to two additional items you may also wish to include in your ranking.

- City government affordability & right sizing service delivery
 - Emergency Preparedness, including reducing wildfire and smoke risk
 - Environment resilience, including addressing climate change and water conservation
 - Increase availability of affordable housing
 - Social and racial equity
 - Economic development
 - Homelessness services
- d) I like the proposed Priorities
e) Write-In suggestion
f) Write-In suggestion

4. Budget Suggestions/Comments

The City of Ashland's General Fund accounts for the revenues and expenditures for several core city services, including the Police, Fire, Park and Recreation and City Administration Departments. Expenditures in the General Fund are projected to exceed available revenues by the end of the City's current biennium budget (fiscal years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023). To prevent this imbalance, the budget will be managed to align expenditures, include service levels, with the available revenues. This "structural deficit" is anticipated to grow over time and must be addressed in the next biennium budget (fiscal years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025). The following questions are asked to help the City Council receive community input on several topics important to manage future expenditure or revenue

questions. Please provide input on each of the following questions and, you can also add up to two additional policy priorities that should be considered.

- A. Should the City focus Police Department staffing and funding on one or more of the following functions?
 - a. Emergency response/police patrol
 - b. Community policing
 - c. Downtown patrol
 - d. Major crimes investigation
 - e. Write-In suggestion

- B. Should the City focus Fire Department staffing and funding on one or more of the following functions?
 - a. Emergency response - urban fire & rescue
 - b. Wildfire prevention
 - c. Life Safety
 - d. Medical Emergency response alternatives
 - i. Paramedic medic service,
- or -
 - ii. Ambulance transport service only
 - e. Write-In suggestion

- C. The City's Community Development Department conducts state mandated planning and building inspection on behalf of the City of Ashland. It also reviews building and land development projects by the public and private property owners to assure they comply with the City's development standards. Some of the services provided by the Department are optional and subject to City Council funding decisions. Should the City focus its Community Development staffing and funding include one or more of the following optional functions?
 - a. Long-range City planning
 - b. Downtown planning
 - c. Code Compliance
 - d. Affordable housing
 - e. Weather emergency housing
 - f. Write-In suggestion

- D. The City's Community Development Department charges fees charged on development projects, including building projects, to cover the cost of its services to review plans and assure they comply with City development standards. It has been suggested that the cost of doing a development project within the City of Ashland is too costly and prevents some economic development projects from being attracted to the City of Ashland. The City currently collects approx. 65% of its direct costs for review and approval of development projects. Should the City of Ashland reduce its fees on development and, if so, what level of service costs should be covered by the City instead of charged to development projects?
 - a. 0%
 - b. 0-25%
 - c. 25-50%
 - d. 50-75%
 - e. 75-100%

- f. Write-In suggestion
- E. Should the City focus its Parks and Recreation staffing and funding on one or more of the following functions:
- a. Parks land maintenance
 - b. Open space & trails maintenance
 - i. Parks building/facilities maintenance (including Daniel Meyer Memorial Pool, Ashland Rotary Centennial Ice Rink, Calle Guanajuato, the Nature Center and the Grove)
 - c. Oak Knoll Golf Course
 - d. Senior Services (including information and referral in need of resources, benefits application assistance, senior phone buddy, caregiver resources, blood pressure checks & low-income foot care)
 - e. Write-In suggestion
- F. Should City Recreation (including fitness classes and social activities/events) and Senior Services funding be set to accomplish the following:
- a. Fully fund the cost of such programs
 - b. Partially fund the cost of these programs with the balance paid by participant fees; if so, what percentage of cost should the City fund? _____
 - c. Charge fees to cover the full cost of these programs
 - d. Write-In suggestion
- G. Historically, the City of Ashland has funded and managed its parks, open space and recreation programs under the separately elected Parks Commission or Recreation Commission established under the City Charter. No other city charter in Oregon establishes elected park or recreation commissions as responsible for overseeing or managing its city's parks, open space lands or recreation programs. It has been suggested, because of the historic approach the City of Ashland has used, that a new property taxing district, separate from the City of Ashland, be authorized by public vote to be responsible for funding and managing those properties held by the City for park and open space purposes. The new district would have its own elected board of directors and would take over the functions currently assigned to the City's Park Department under the Ashland Park Commission and Ashland Recreation Commission.

Note: Currently the City of Ashland funds its park, open space, and recreation operations in its General Fund, which also funds the Police, Fire, Community Development and City Administration departments of the City. The City Council is limited in the level of funding it can generate from property taxes and must balance its funding between all General Fund uses. Creation of a new taxing district solely dedicated to parks and recreation is very likely to increase property taxes for City of Ashland residents and businesses over time.

Should the City propose a public vote of its citizens to create a new taxing district solely to fund and manage the City's parks and open space, and provide public recreation programs?

- a) Create a new taxing district to fund and manage park and open space lands and, provide recreational programming for the City of Ashland

b. Continue to have the City of Ashland own and manage its park and open space lands and provide recreation programs under the current Park and/or Recreation Commissions

- or -

c. Continue to have the City of Ashland own and manage its park and open space lands and provide recreation programs under management of the City Manager, reporting to the City Council

d. Write-In suggestion

H. Should the City continue its practice of funding community grants, and if so, for what?

a. *To be further developed*

b. Write-In suggestion

c. Write-In suggestion

I. The City has several Commissions that have been crated over time to develop policy recommendations for the City Council on a variety of issues. The following commissions, in addition to those established by the City Charter (Park Commission, Recreation Commission, Planning Commission, etc.) continue to meet at least periodically and require City staff and/or other resources to operate. Should the City consolidate or reduce the number of Commissions that fall within their authority to manage, if so, which Commissions do you think could be consolidated or eliminated?

Keep Consolidate Eliminate

a) Airport Commission

b) Ashland Water Advisory Ad-Hoc Committee

c) Band Board

d) Climate Policy Commission

e) Community Center & Pioneer Hall Ad-Hoc Committee

f) Forest Lands Commission

g) Historic Commission

h) Housing and Human Services Commission

i) Municipal Audit Commission

j) Public Arts Commission

k) Social Equity and Racial Justice Commission

l) System Development Charge Review Committee

m) Transportation Commission

n) Tree Commission

o) Wildfire Safety Commission

p) Write-In suggestion

J. Beside reducing costs, the City may propose and/or adopt new revenue sources to help address is General Fund imbalance between expenditures and revenues. The following new alternative revenues may be considered by the City Council. Please identify which revenue source proposal you would prefer, if any.

- a. Special Levy Property Tax for emergency services and/or parks and recreation maintenance. Special levies are good for up to 5 years.
- b. Food & Beverage Tax – Remove spending constraints that limit its use to park capital uses (land acquisition, repairs, replacement, etc.) and remove its expiration (currently sunset is 2030) to make the funding available for all General Fund uses (Police, Fire, Parks and Recreation, Community Development, City Administration, etc.)
- c. Police Ticket Tax – This would be added to tickets issued by the Police Department. The City does not currently have this tax.
- d. Local Gas Tax – Added to gasoline sales within the City. The City does not currently have this tax. State gasoline taxes support the City’s Street Fund as required by law (the 2021 state tax contribution was \$1.5 million).
- e. Marijuana Tax – The City’s current portion of this tax (\$175,000 in 2021) is dedicated to the City’s Housing Fund (\$100,000 in 2021) and the General Fund (\$75,000 in 2021).
- f. Fees Changes *(to be further developed)*
 - i. Increase the Public Safety Support Fee. Currently used to support the Police Department, a fee increase could support the Fire Department. The Police fee is currently \$1.50 per month per customer of the City’s Electric Utility.
 - ii. AFR Fee– is \$3.00 per month per customer
 - iii. Storm Drain Fee– not a flat rate but residential is \$5.43 per month
 - iv. Street User Fee – not a flat rate but residential is \$9.56 per month
 - v. Ambulance Transport Insurance Fee – a potential fee whereby the City would provide
 - vi. Special Event Permits
 - vii. Banner Permits
 - viii. Development Fees
 - ix. Franchise fees – all franchise fee revenue is transferred to the general fund. It is not detailed on monthly bill Electric (10%), water (8%), wastewater (8%)
- g. Write-In suggestion
- h. Write-In suggestion
- i. Write-In suggestion