

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: February 21, 2012
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Public Opinion Survey update and revision

REPORT BY: Beth Pollard, City Manager

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Council receive an update regarding development of a public opinion survey and authorize restructuring the survey from 18 minutes to 20 minutes, and decreasing the survey sample from 400 to 350.

BACKGROUND

On December 19, 2011, Council authorized staff to contract with Godbe Research in the amount of \$21, 925 to develop an 18-minute public opinion survey with a randomized sample size of 400. The public opinion survey is intended to gauge voter support for potential ballot measures and City issues. The primary impetus for the survey is the concern that the City has sufficient revenues to fund services and facilities.

DISCUSSION

A kick-off meeting was held with Bryan Godbe of Godbe Research on January 13, 2012 to develop the survey based on the draft outline presented to the City Council. Drawing on his experience in conducting public opinion surveys in many cities, Godbe raised a number of items for consideration to ensure proper framing of survey questions that are easily understood and generate valid responses.

Among Godbe's suggestions was to be more focused on the number and types of tax measures included in the survey. In evaluating the options, staff concluded that the property transfer tax was the least favorable of the tax options under consideration and recommend it not be included; it is the least predictable revenue source, the potential range of increase generates a relatively low amount of funding; and property-related taxes are generally showing lower support in today's economy.

The survey includes questions relating to City issues of overall importance and questions aimed at identifying support for or against a sales tax of varying increments. A question regarding an increase in the Users Utility Tax to fund implementation of the City's Climate Action Plan is also included, along with a list of particular programs to determine priority projects such as energy efficiency, transportation, and green infrastructure. The survey also addresses the standard for two parking spaces for every new residential unit, and evaluates the relative support for funding for various capital improvement projects.

Due to the number of subjects and questions included within the survey, and the interest to maintain a survey of reasonable and standard length, staff worked with Godbe to make refinements. In prioritizing the options, staff recommends that those issues that do not require a ballot measure be removed; these issues include paid parking/parking meters, electronic billboards, and wireless facilities/towers on city property. In the case of the paid parking/meter issue, the City's Planning & Zoning Commission, Traffic & Safety Commission, and Sustainability Committee are currently working collaboratively on matters related to parking including the concept of paid parking. It is anticipated that a survey specific to paid parking will be generated and distributed to the public at large as part of the process of developing options. Public opinion on the issues that do not require voter approval also could be tested in alternate ways.

It is anticipated that the survey will be conducted in late February – early March (avoiding the school vacation week), and that staff will return to Council in April with survey results.

ANALYSIS

Staff has worked with Godbe to refine the survey as much as possible, aiming to reduce the overall survey time to 18 minutes. The survey is 20 minutes in length, and includes questions as directed by Council intended to help guide decisions on potential ballot measures.

In order to remain within budget for this project it is recommended that the survey remain at 20 minutes, with a decrease in sample size from 400 to 350. Per Godbe, the difference in margin of error between 350 and 400 interviews is negligible (5.13% at 350 interviews vs. 4.78% at 400 interviews). Additionally, they have indicated that 350 interviews are sufficient to sample the anticipated turnout for the November 2012 electorate.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

N/A.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Although it is a slightly higher expense for the survey firm, Godbe has indicated that they are willing to make the accommodation from the intended 18 minute survey with a sample size of 400 to a 20 minute survey with the sample size of 350 for the City at no additional cost.