

2025 City of Oakland Resident Budget Priorities Survey

Fielded and presented by the Budget Advisory Commission
February 26, 2025



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Key Takeaways

1. **Oaklanders are frustrated**

- a. Satisfaction living in the community has declined
- b. Satisfaction with local government is at a record low

2. **The community has three broad priorities: safety, housing, and cleanliness.**

- a. These priorities are consistent across almost all demographic groups
- b. For safety and cleanliness, people are asking for basic services: fire protection; emergency responders that arrive in a timely manner; cleanup of graffiti / dumping.

3. **People want values-aligned solutions to improve basic services** (e.g., not a 'police state')

4. **There is a generational difference in what to preserve in the budget**, with youth often having different first priorities

5. **The proposed sales tax is not a sure pass.** Across all districts except D1, a greater share of respondents indicating they would not vote for the sales tax. Undecideds could flip the ratio.

Context

Motivation & Methodology Highlights

Context on Oakland's Biennial Budget Priorities Survey

- **Background**

- Mandated by Oakland's Consolidated Fiscal Policy (Section 3, Part 1)
- Due to budget constraints, the City did not have funding available for an outside consultant. BAC members created and fielded the survey as volunteers.
- Given the budget crisis, this survey is particularly important as city leadership must make difficult decisions.

- **Goal:** Provide the Mayor and City Council with useful information on community satisfaction, concerns, and priorities to inform difficult decisions for the FY 25-27 budget

- **Design Objectives**

- Prompt hard choices: the city cannot afford everything, so what is most important?
- Ask questions with person-centric framing, rather than city department-centric
- Assume minimal understanding of how Oakland's budget works
- Include longitudinal questions to understand some changes over time
- Reach out to all parts of Oakland's diverse community

Methodology Highlights

- **Connecting with the community**

- **6,748** community members responded to survey, 5x the 1,270 polled in 2023.
- Survey **primarily administered online**, plus in-person collection with people living outside
- Conducted in **3 languages**: English, Spanish, and Chinese
- Incorporated **input from other cities** on how to best structure budget surveys
- Collaborated with City departments and **over 75 community organizations** to increase reach across the Oakland community

- **Analyzing the data**

- Like in previous budget polls, we used **industry-standard weighting** techniques to account for data bias due to self-selection / disproportionate representation of some populations
- **Overall results have $\pm 2\%$ margin of error** with 99% confidence interval; segmented results have variable higher margin of error due to smaller sample sizes
- Sometimes percents add up to a 101 or 99 due to rounding error
- Not all graphs are included; scan QR code or use [link to code repository](#) for full analysis code and all graphs

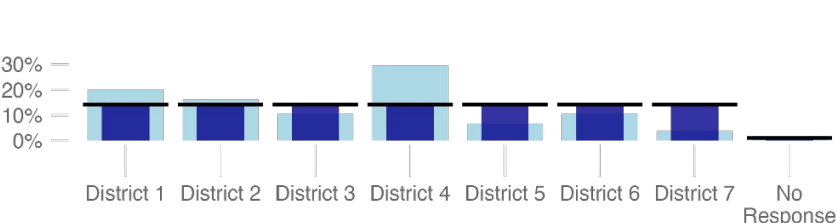


Results

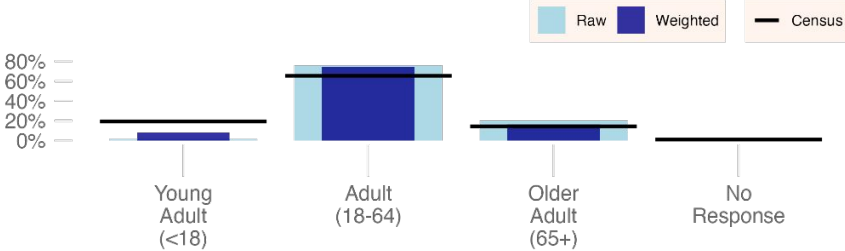
Overall and by-district

Survey Respondent Demographics

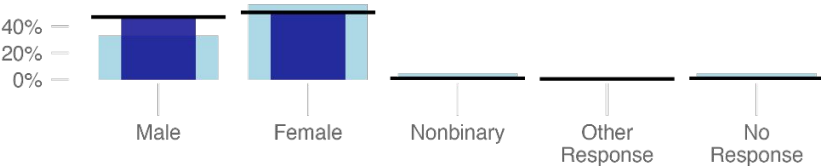
District (250-2k respondents each)



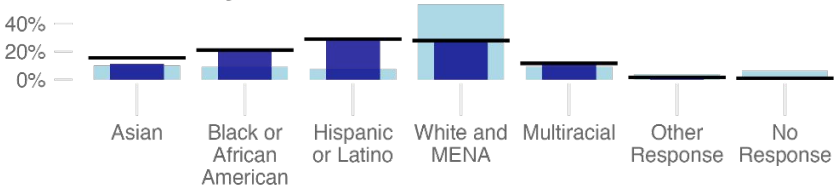
Age (100-2k respondents each)



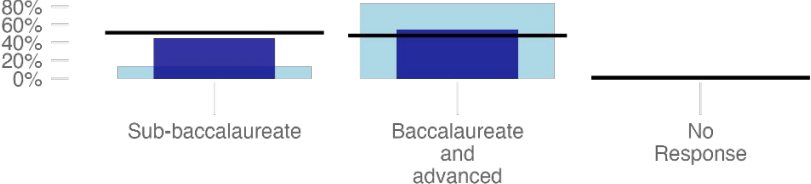
Gender



Race/Ethnicity

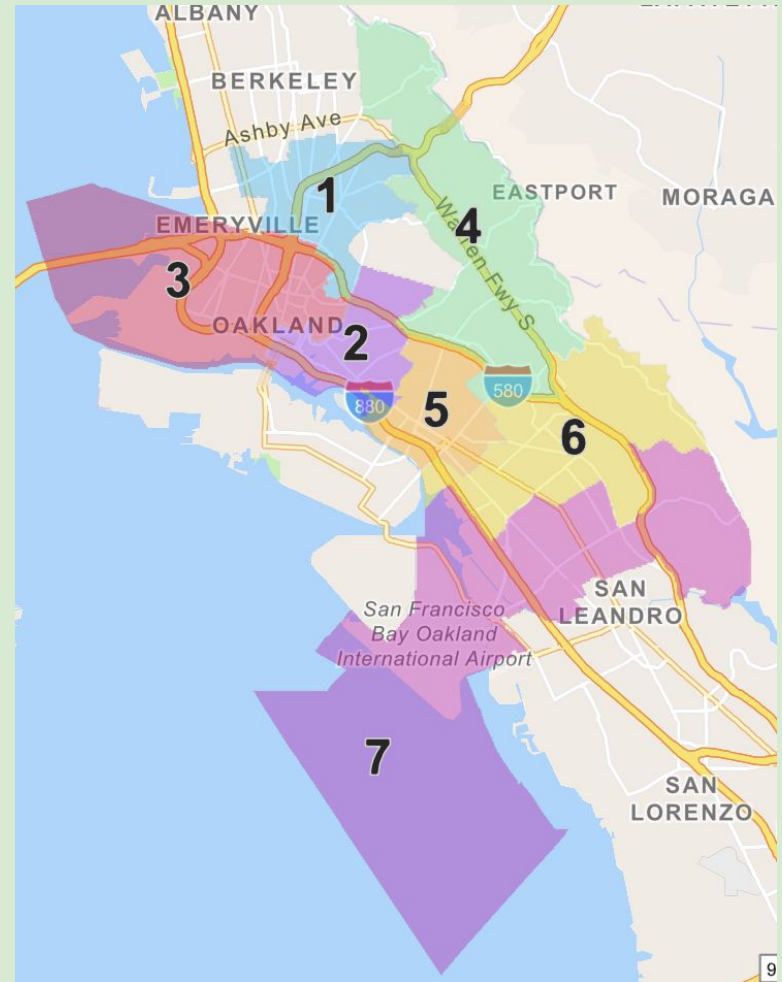


Education



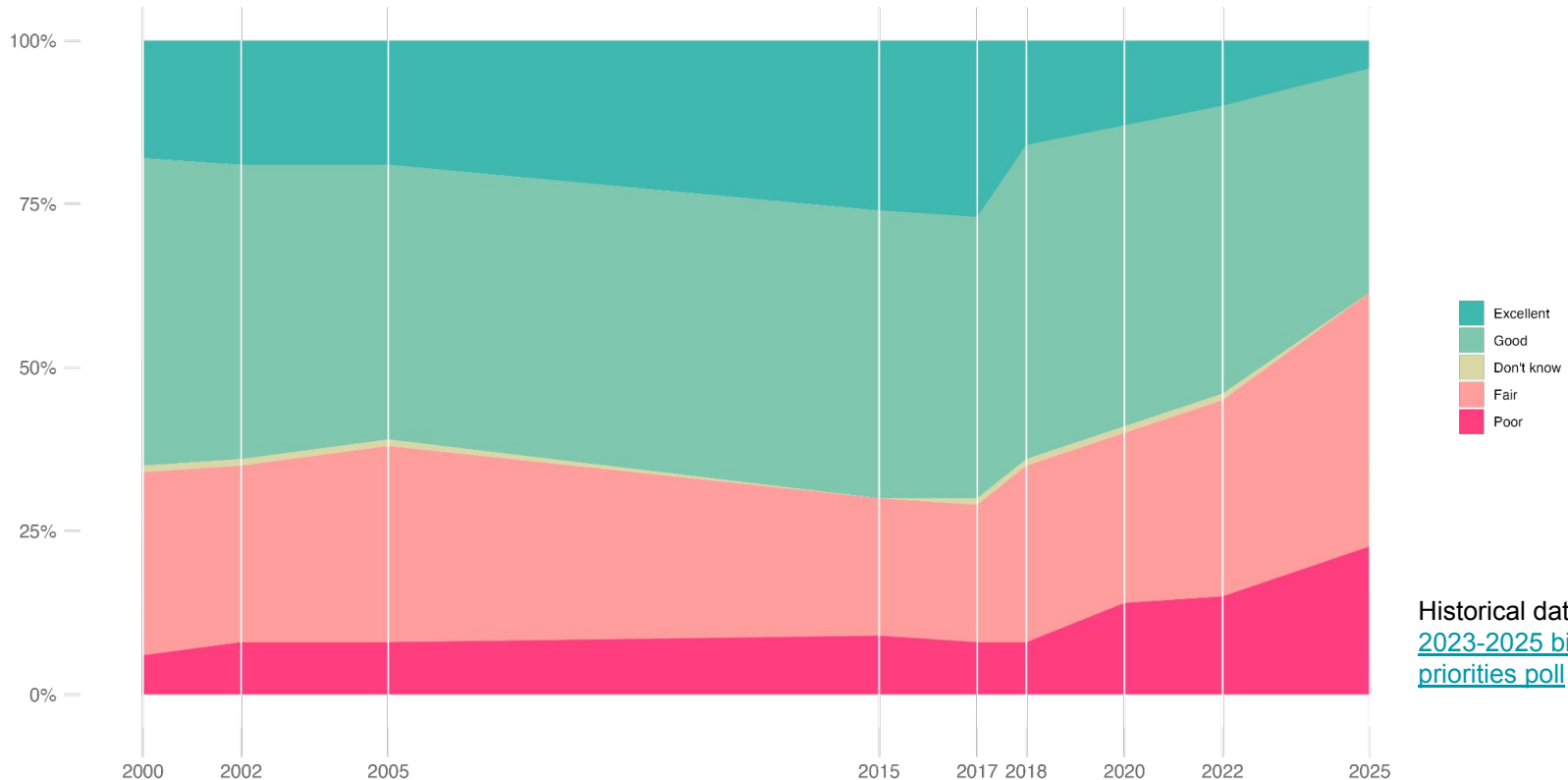
Survey results included in this presentation for Oakland overall use weighted responses. Results for specific districts use raw counts and percentages.

Overall City of Oakland



Community satisfaction with life in Oakland is declining

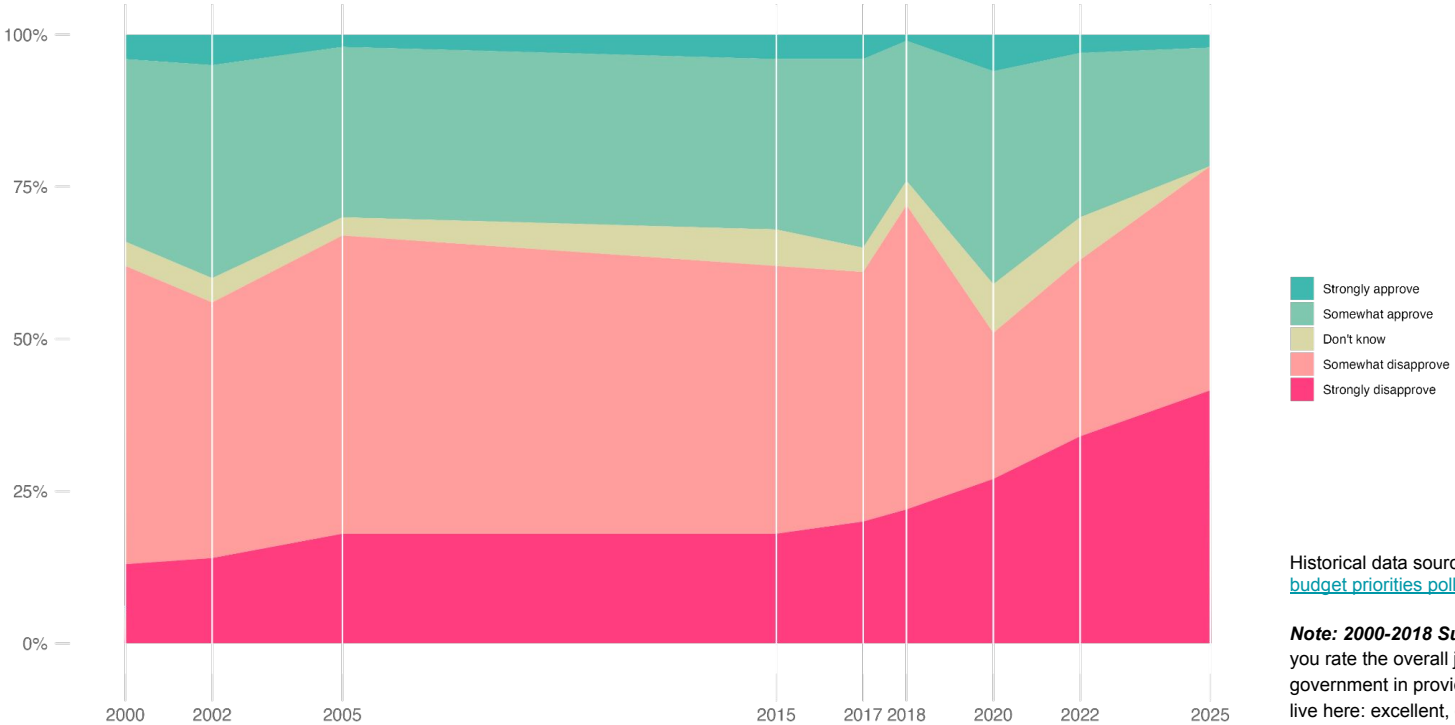
Q2: Generally speaking, how would you rate Oakland as a place to live?



Historical data sourced from [2023-2025 biennial budget priorities poll](#)

Frustration with city government is at a record high

Q3: Do you *approve or disapprove of the overall job being done by Oakland City government in providing services to the people who live here?*



Historical data sourced from [2023-2025 biennial budget priorities poll](#)

Note: 2000-2018 Survey Language was "How would you rate the overall job being done by Oakland City government in providing services to the people who live here: excellent, good, only fair or poor?"

Representative Quotes: Frustration with Leadership

“The Oakland administration seems more focused on virtue signaling than addressing real issues.”

“We are watching closely, and not adverse to recalling city council members if they fail to deliver on their fiduciary responsibilities to all of Oakland versus just the few.”

“City leadership could do a better job of managing current funds and actually listening to residents about our needs. “

“I would like to see council members **EFFECTIVELY** manage a budget from a city that has significant wealth. There is no reason Oakland should be bankrupt while no improvements to quality of life are being made. Where is the money going?”

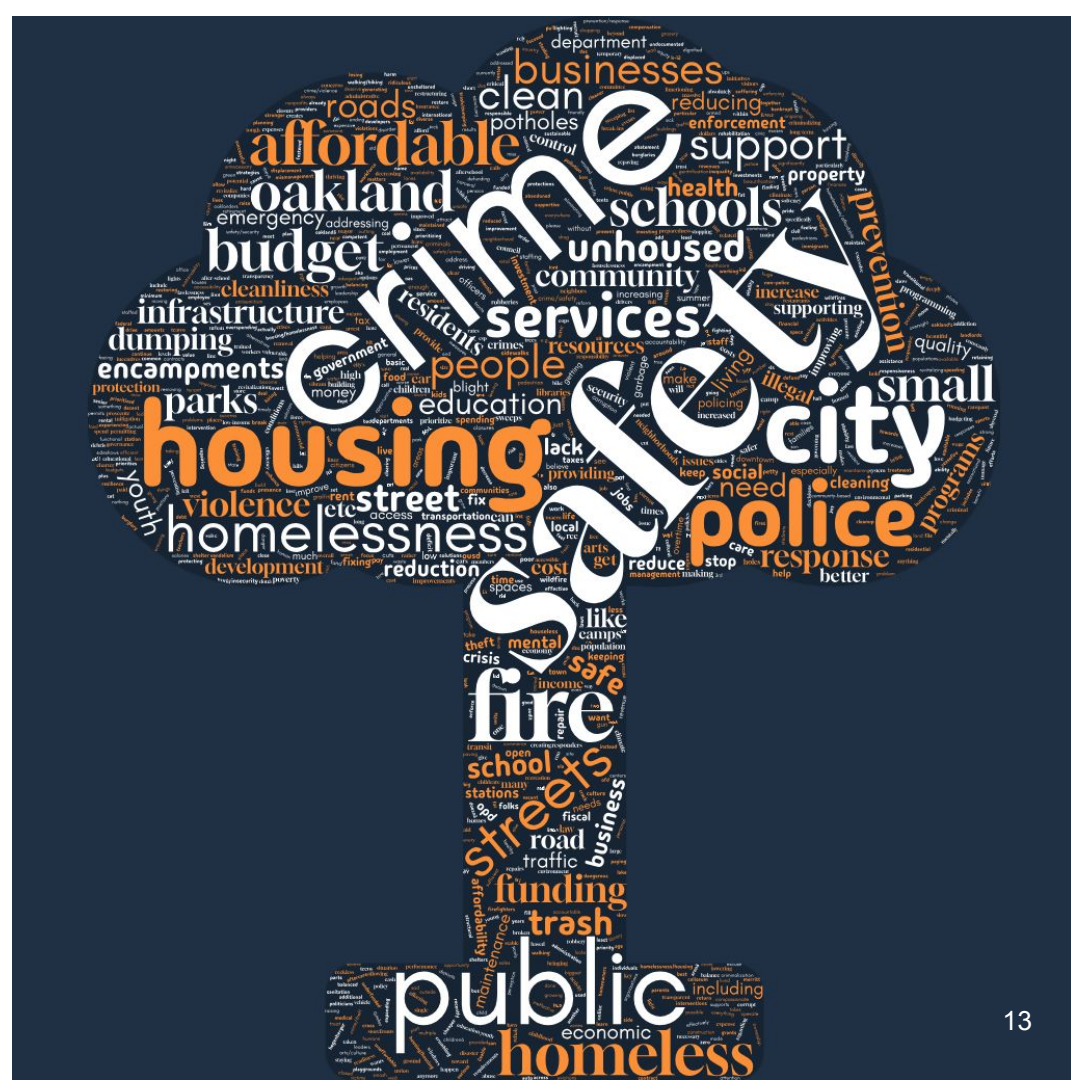
Q4: In the next two years, what are the two most important issues facing the city?

Two key themes prevail throughout

1. Anxiety about **safety***
2. Concern for **homelessness and affordable housing**

Both issues are often connected with comments around 'blight'

* The word 'public' is used almost exclusively in conjunction with the work 'safety'



People want basics delivered with care and respect

“I would like to see the city of Oakland prioritize affordable housing and homelessness as well as public safety and violence prevention measures. Addressing the housing crisis is critical, with funding for affordable housing initiatives needed in the coming years, as well as for services for the homeless, including shelters, transitional housing, and mental health support.”

“Safety for all residents and visitors (e.g., decreasing crime without violating people or using excessive force, helping those with mental health and drug issues attain care and support); improvements to the infrastructure and supports (e.g., supporting homeless people, fixing streets).”

“I would like to see basic city services, such as the fire departments and police, responsibly funded. Without establishing these basic services and imparting a sense of safety to the residents and business owners of Oakland, all other well meaning City Council agenda items are bound to waste precious funding and fail.”

Safety comments focus on two themes

The community is frustrated by a lack of response / enforcement, and feels powerless

- “We need to reduce crime. It's ridiculous how unsafe it feels to live in Oakland. I'm always worried about my safety and my property.”
- “The general feeling of a lack of safety that comes from prevalent evidence of property crime (broken glass everywhere) trash everywhere and just vibe of lawlessness. Keep our public spaces clean and functional.”
- “The crime is out of control! I am afraid to go anywhere in Oakland, and travel to Contra Costa County to shop and visit. I live in fear all the time I will be attacked.”
- “The two most important issues facing Oakland residents that I would like to see prioritized is our safety and Oakland police. Recently there has been some news of if crime doesn't involve any weapons then police won't come. And that is not making the Oakland residents feel safe at all...”
- **Note:** Over 50 specific mentions called for a reduction in response times. In contrast, phrases like ‘defund the police’ mentioned fewer than 10 times.

The community connects crime with a loss of business / public space vitality

- “Give me a place to shop, dine and spend my money in Oakland because I don't even feel safe going to my local favorite pizzeria (Diamond Slice) or drug store (CVS). My neighbors also feel the same- we drive out to Alameda to spend our money most of the time.”
- “The concept of crime should encompass littering and all associated forms of refuse, as well as the city's infrastructure like roads, sidewalks and beautification.”
- “Crime, specifically the crime that deters merchants: building smash ins, overt shoplifting. Homelessness and the blight it brings”
- “The message needs to be clear to criminals that crime will not be tolerated in Oakland. Then hopefully people will want to visit Oakland, live in Oakland and run businesses in Oakland.”
- “Aggressively pursue criminals that execute crimes that make Oakland unsafe, expensive to live in, or erode the basics of a decent quality of life. This includes not just violent crimes, but also personal (home, auto, etc) and business theft, even petty in magnitude...”

Housing comments focus both on affordable housing and finding real solutions for people living outside

Affordable housing

- “We need to prioritize public housing and or funding land trusts that protect and provide affordable housing. The fear of houselessness, and the hours we work together survive are prohibitive to maintaining the balance we need to literally just live as long as we should.”
- “Support for the unhoused population and preventing people from losing housing, creative use of abandoned large construction projects and vacant or neglected commercial properties; e.g. 40th st @ Shafter.”
- “Affordable Housing and Homelessness: Oakland is facing a severe housing crisis, with a significant rise in homelessness and a lack of affordable housing options. Prioritizing funding to build more affordable housing, support homeless services, and provide resources for individuals experiencing homelessness is crucial to ensuring that all Oakland residents have access to safe and stable living conditions.”

Treating people who are unhoused in a humane manner

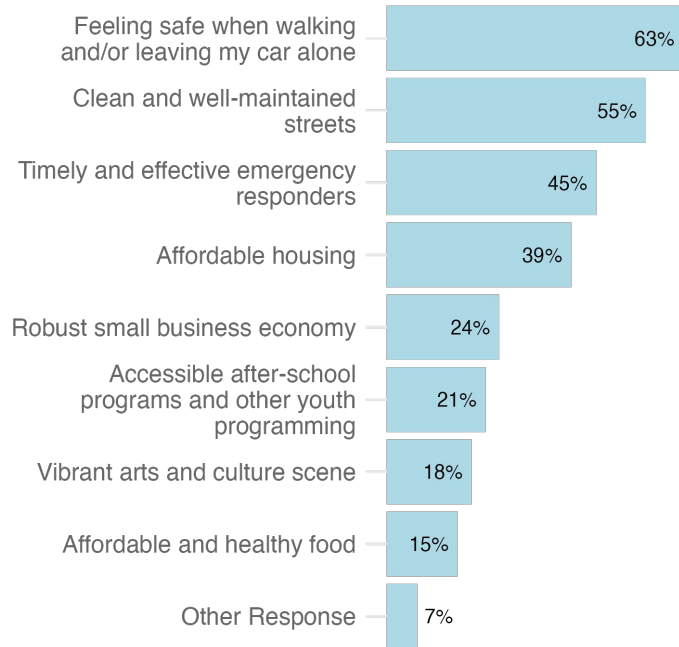
- “Services for the poor, the homeless and immigrants. HUMAN SERVICES not criminalization.”
- “We need non-carceral Mental health services for unhoused residents, general non-carceral care services for unhoused residents.”
- “Stop the sweeps of homeless encampments, our unhoused residents deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.”

Some connection between homelessness, crime, and blight, with a nod to ‘cleaning up the camps’

- “The crime needs to be addressed and it needs to be a nice place to live. Not riddled with encampments and trash everywhere. It looks like a 3rd world country in some parts.”
- “The homelessness and addiction/ lack of rehab centers and how dirty the city is.”
- “1. regular ongoing clean up of trash and homeless/unhoused encampments; 2. increased police availability, presence, deterrence, and follow up.”

Safety and infrastructure maintenance are top concerns

Q5: Which of the following are most important to you to make Oakland a place you are happy to call home? Choose up to 3



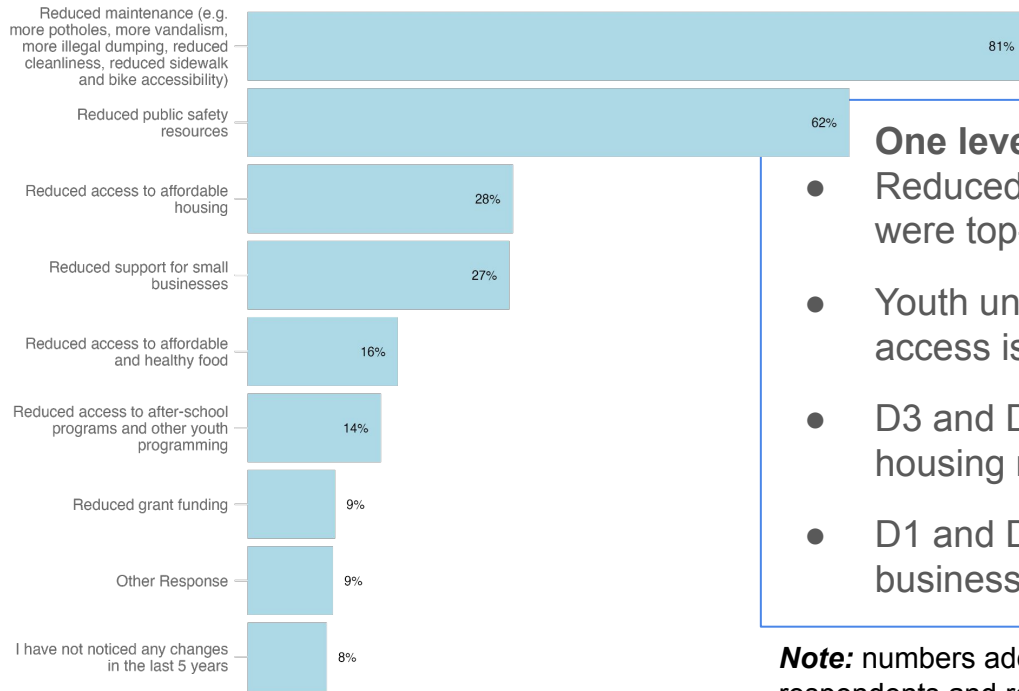
One level deeper...

- Feeling safe, clean streets, and effective emergency responders were top 3 across most groups
- For some groups, affordable housing was more important than emergency responders:
 - Youth under 18
 - Districts 3 and 5
 - Oaklanders without college degrees

Note: numbers add up to >100% because the percentages are of out of all respondents and respondents could choose up to 3 answers

Oaklanders see more blight and fewer safety resources

Q6: In the last 5 years, how has Oakland's budget most impacted your household and work?
Choose up to 3



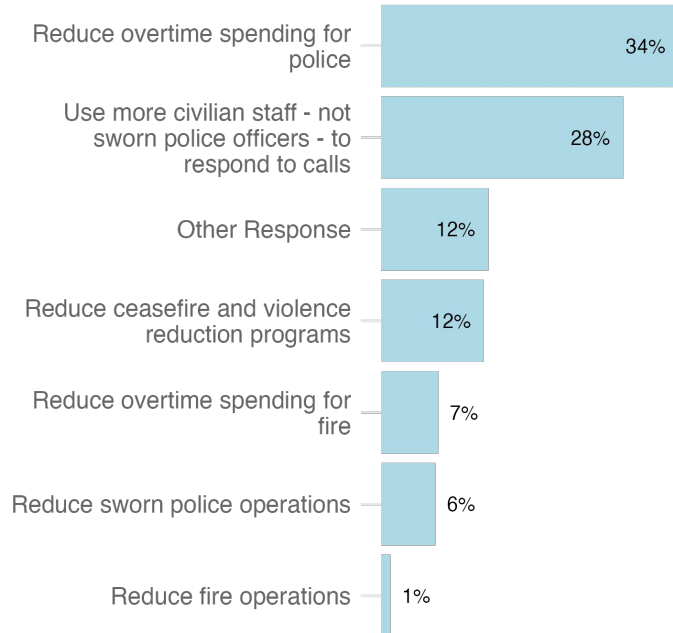
One level deeper...

- Reduced maintenance and reduced public safety were top-cited impacts across most groups
- Youth under 18 noticed affordable housing and food access issues more
- D3 and D5 noticed reduced access to affordable housing more
- D1 and D4 noticed reduced support for small businesses more

Note: numbers add up to >100% because the percentages are of out of all respondents and respondents could choose up to 3 answers

Oaklanders support reduced police overtime and creative approaches to emergency response

Q7: For **public safety**, which of the following would you support reducing funding?



Themes from “Other” responses

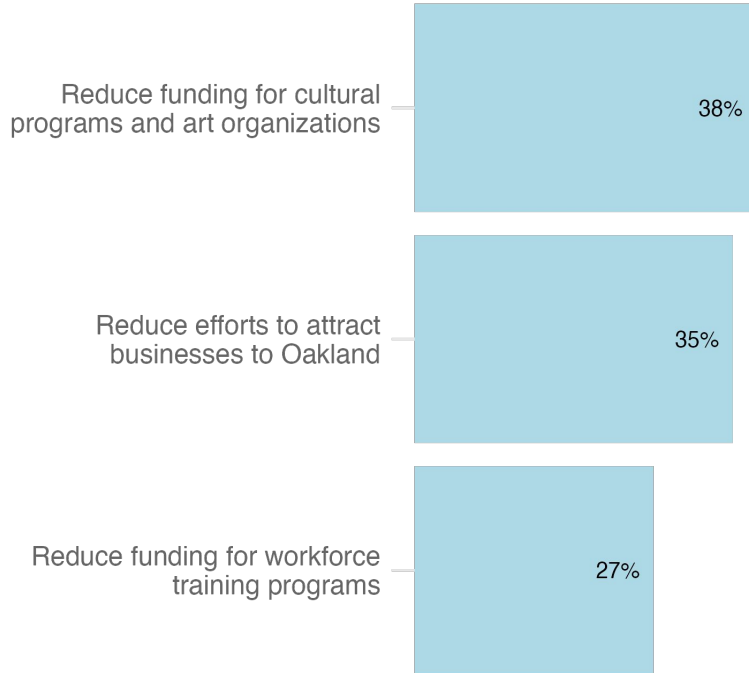
- 70%+ reiterate the desire to use more civilian staff
- Some calls to ‘eliminate middle management’
- A few voiced not to cut funding at all given safety issues

One level deeper...

- Prioritization was mostly aligned across groups
- Residents of D4 and respondents over 65 chose increased use of civilian staff as #1 choice

Oaklanders prioritize keeping workforce training funds intact

Q8: For *economic growth*...which of the following would you support reducing funding?

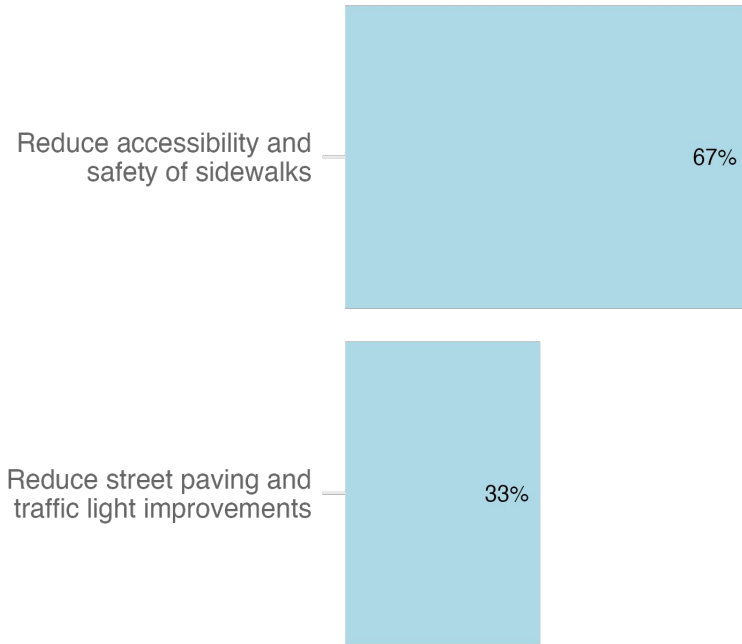


One level deeper...

- Youth and residents of D1 and D3 would rather reduce efforts to attract businesses than reduce funding for cultural programs and art organizations

Adults prioritize funding for good streets

Q9: For *transportation*...which of the following would you support reducing funding?

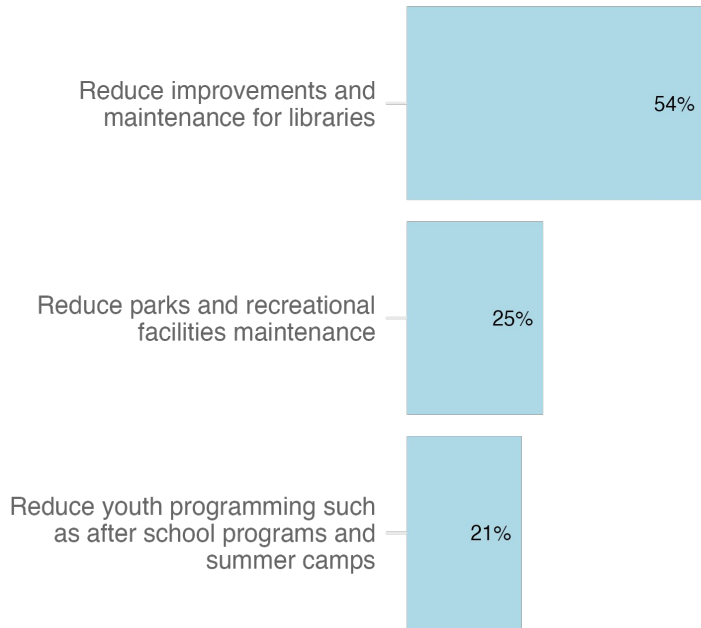


One level deeper...

- Prioritization largely the same across groups with one notable exception
- Youth prioritize preserving accessibility and safety of sidewalks more than preserving street and traffic light improvements

Forced to make a choice, respondents would reduce library funding

Q10: For youth and community investments... which of the following would you support reducing funding?

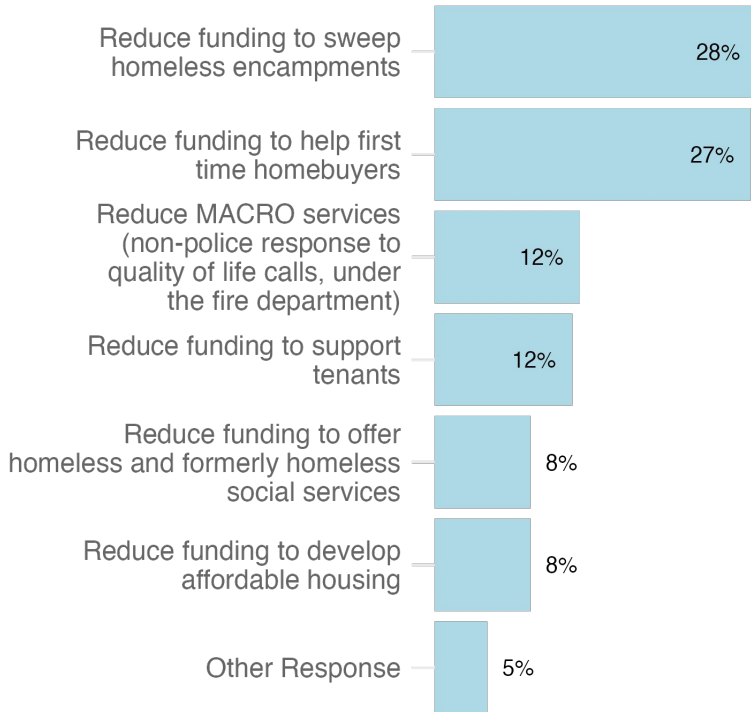


One level deeper...

- Mostly consistent prioritization order across groups
- Residents of Districts 2 and 5 prioritize maintaining parks more than youth programming

Funding for encampment sweeps is not popular

Q11: For *housing and homelessness investments*...which of the following would you support reducing funding?

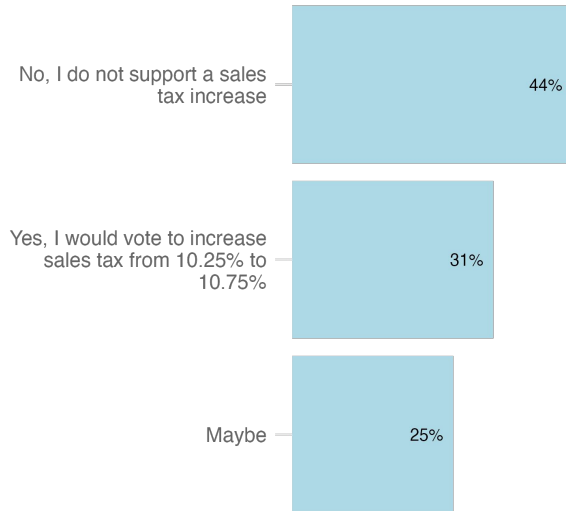


One level deeper...

- Residents of Districts 3 and 7 prioritize reducing homeless sweeps as first choice
- Adults over 65 and residents of Districts 1, 2, 4, and 6 opted to reduce funding for first-time homebuyers as first choice

The sales tax proposal does not receive strong support

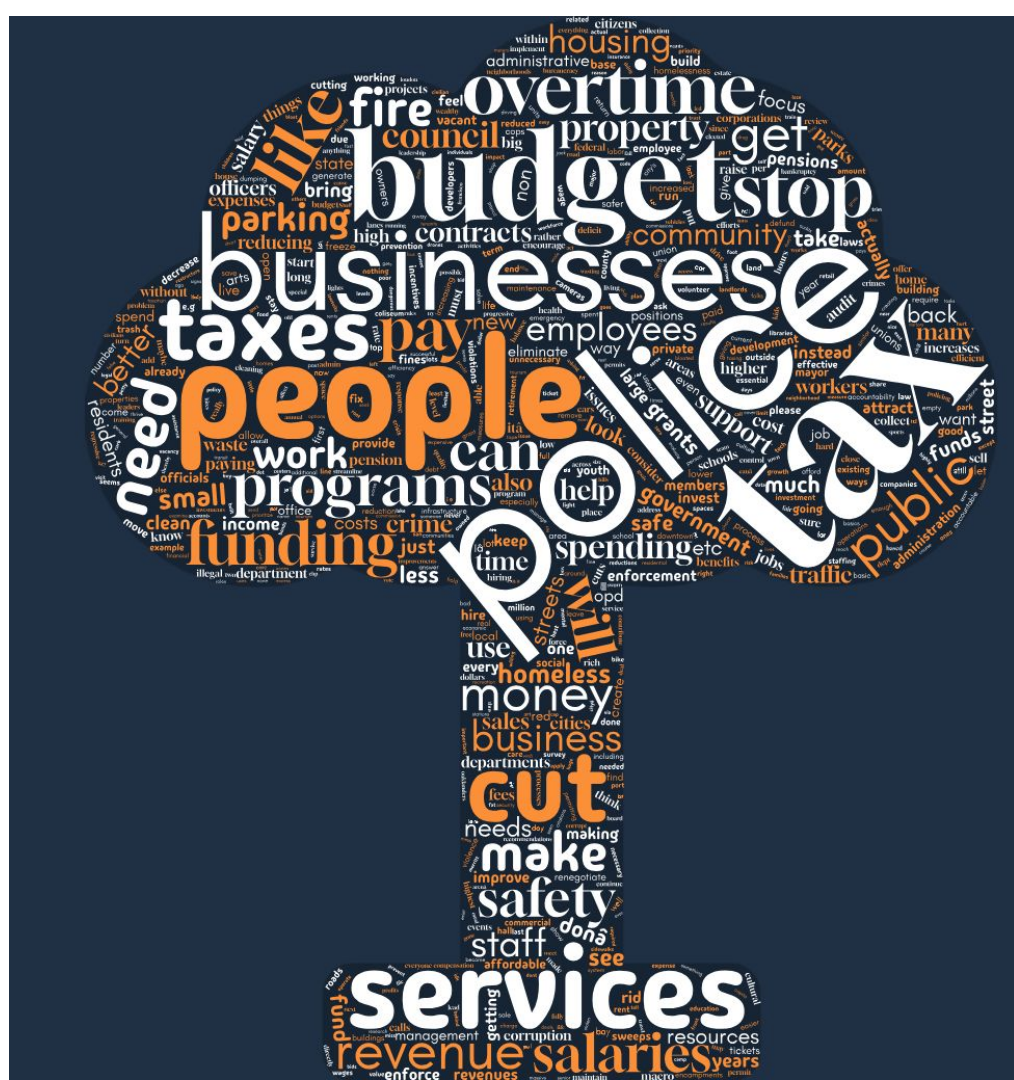
Q12: On the April 15 special election, you will be asked to vote on an increase on sales tax in Oakland from 10.25% to 10.75%. That's an extra 50 cents on a \$100 purchase. This sales tax increase is expected to raise \$20-\$30M/year for the City of Oakland. Would you vote in support of this sales tax increase?



“City Council needs to make sure that taxes are collected and that departments that function to collect revenue and taxes are actually doing that before asking residents for more money.”

Oaklanders want new approaches to policing and balancing the budget

Q13: What are other ways that the City could reduce expenses or increase revenues?



Respondent themes for balancing revenue and expenses

Q13: *What are other ways that the City could reduce expenses or increase revenues?*

Theme	Themes / Sample Quotes
Reduce Police Overtime & Find Creative Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes: almost 100 comments about reducing police overtime • “Safety (Police and Fire Departments, including Violence Prevention/Ceasefire etc) All of this while ideally reducing overtime, staying on budget: in other words an innovative approach to obtaining old-school goals. Safety for all.” • “Transfer more OPD duties (and budget) that don't require a badge/gun to non-sworn staff allowing the city to hire up faster regardless of academies and at lower cost per employee.”
Consider Progressive Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes: over 60 comments about adding progressive tax structures • “Make business tax rates progressive, progressive property transfer tax rates for high-value properties, introduce progressive-rate city income tax for those working in Oakland.”
Responsible Budget Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Improve parking law enforcement. Increase police enforcement of traffic laws, fix it tickets, permit and street cleaning enforcement. The city does a poor job of enforcing existing revenue screens. I have never gotten a parking ticket in Oakland.” • “Pass a balanced budget. The Budget management (including the prospective sale of the Coliseum) was so poorly thought through.”
Leverage Businesses to Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Get out of the way of business - make it easier to open businesses or build housing by streamlining and reducing permits...for health and safety. Listen to businesses and make reforms that will help them stay in business and generate tax revenue for the city.” • “Many businesses have left due to crime. People are afraid to come spend money in Oakland because of crime. Oakland offers so much but it needs to be safe before people and businesses will spend money here.”
Other Cut Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes: MACRO, city management numbers / salaries, unions, police as mentioned above. • “Cut out all spending increases that came from federal COVID funds. Reverse all salary increases going back to 2020. Restructure pension programs so that it is defined contribution.” • “Flatten / eliminate administration levels. Freeze pay increases for 3 years, after that pay can't go up more than cost of living average.” • “Cut non-profit funding, cut payroll and union benefits. Cut all discretionary spending for pet programs and focus on BASIC SERVICES!”²⁶

City/BAC Collaboration Opportunities and Next Steps

Continued community engagement

- The BAC will share survey results with the community through in-person and online forums
- It's important for the City to increase community outreach to: youth (<18), sub-baccalaureate residents, and Districts 5 and 7

Finding solutions together

- The BAC has committees researching creative solutions for public safety, housing, and long-term liabilities
- The BAC is actively recruiting members with experience in community listening, labor, legal, finance. We have 8 openings and there are at least 17 applications in the pipeline for Council recommendations and Mayoral appointees.