

Olympic Research and Strategy

Lake Forest Park

**Community Survey** 

# **Study Background**

The City of Lake Forest Park is facing a \$1.5 million annual budget shortfall driven by rising costs for essential services such as public safety, and infrastructure maintenance. Limited by a 1% annual property tax revenue cap, the city has implemented cost-cutting measures but still faces tough decisions. Previous levy proposal of 2021 has not passed, highlighting the need to understand community concerns and priorities prior to introducing a temporary levy in 2025.

# **Study Objectives**

Understand why previous levy efforts were unsuccessful.



Identify a levy structure and positioning that resonates with residents to address the budget shortfall.

Gauge community reactions to a temporary levy option as a potential solution.

Develop effective messaging and communication strategies for introducing a potential 2025 levy.





# Methodology

## Multi-methodology

- Address-based paper survey with QR code and unique pin for online survey option
- Telephone survey option
- Post-notification post cards sent after the paper survey to encourage participation
- Paper surveys and post cards were sent to 5,395 households
- Online survey offered in both English and Spanish

## Data collected between: November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

- 526 (online) and 413 (mail-in and phone-in) surveys were collected.
- Respondents who are not registered to vote, not planning to register, and/or unlikely to vote in the next election were removed from the total respondent data set.
- Duplicate respondents (those responding both online and through mail) had their second entry deleted.
- A total of (918) surveys are included in the final data set.

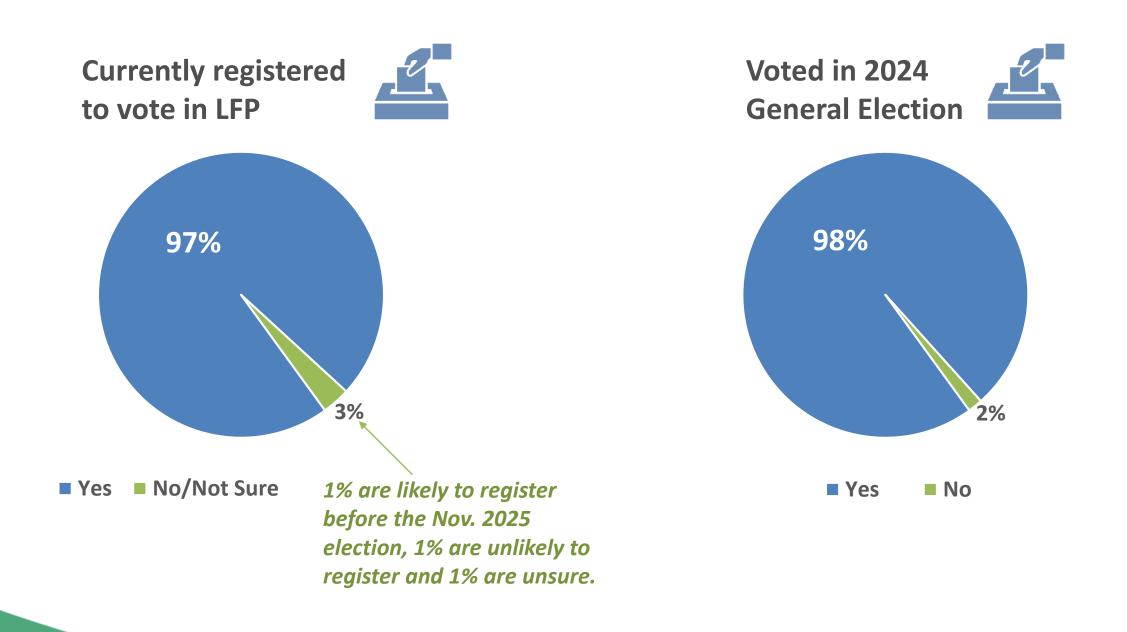
## Response rate – 17.02%

Confidence interval of +/-2.95% (95% confidence level, assuming worst case scenario)





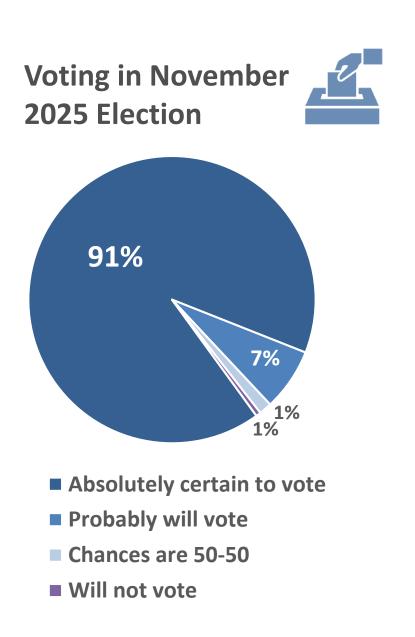
LFP survey respondents are highly engaged voters. Nearly all are currently registered to vote in LFP, voted in the 2024 general election, and are certain or likely to vote in the November 2025 election.



30

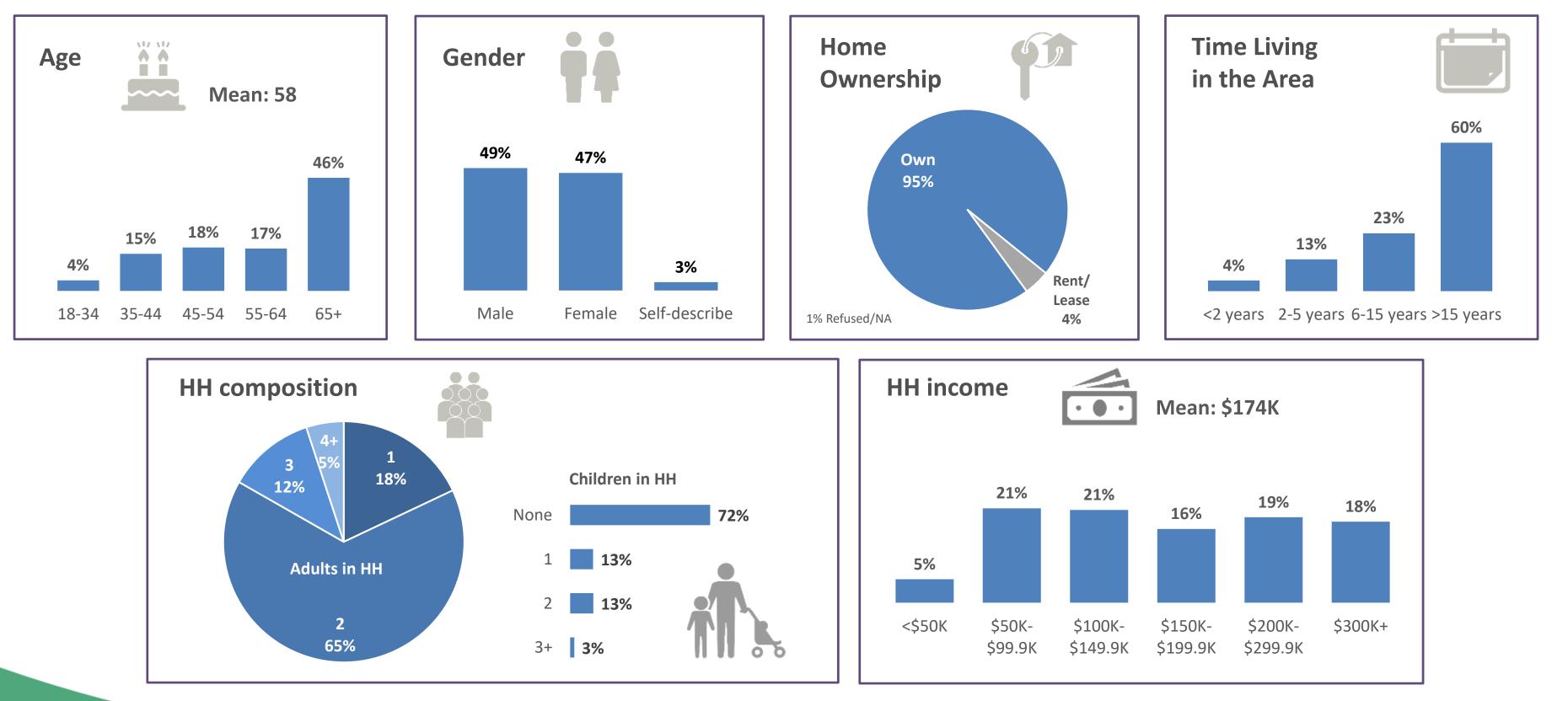


LAKE FOREST PARK WASHINGTON



Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# **Demographic Overview of Survey Respondents**

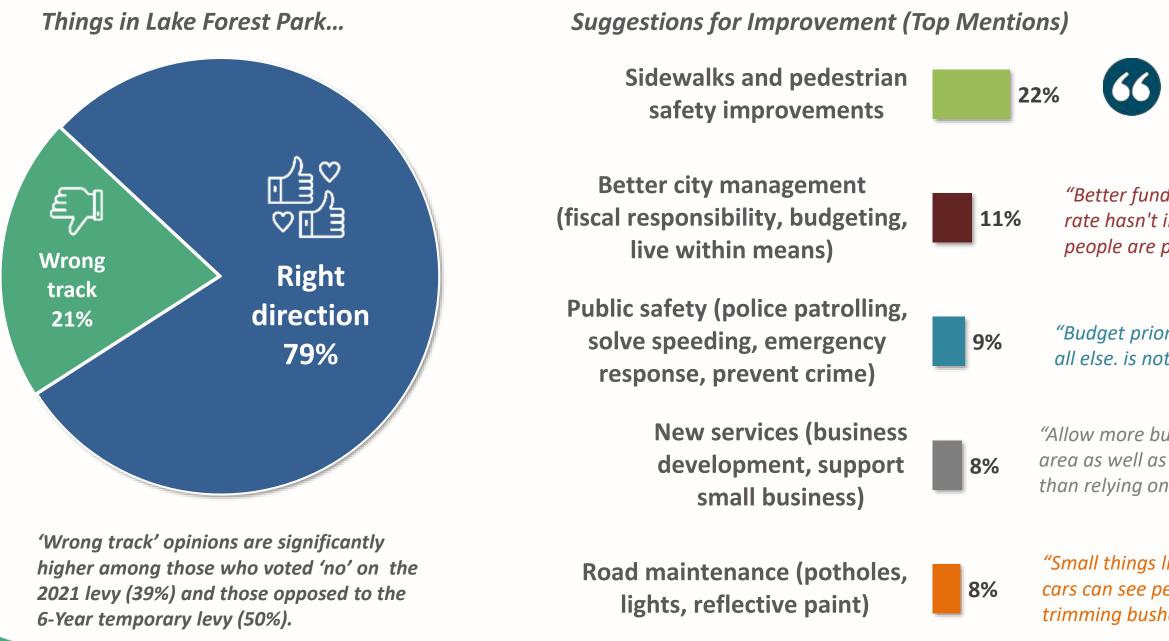




LAKE FOREST PARK



# Four out of five believe things in Lake Forest Park are going in the right direction. Sidewalks/pedestrian safety leads as the top suggested improvement.



12



AKE FOREST PARK

"I see kids and parents and elderly walking on busy streets because there are no sidewalks. Perkins is a nightmare. The roads around it are nightmares. Please fix this..."

"Better funds management, spend money wisely. While the property tax rate hasn't increased, property values have significantly increased meaning people are paying a lot more tax today."

"Budget priorities- city hall, police, crime prevention- excessive expenses on all else. is not putting money to core services."

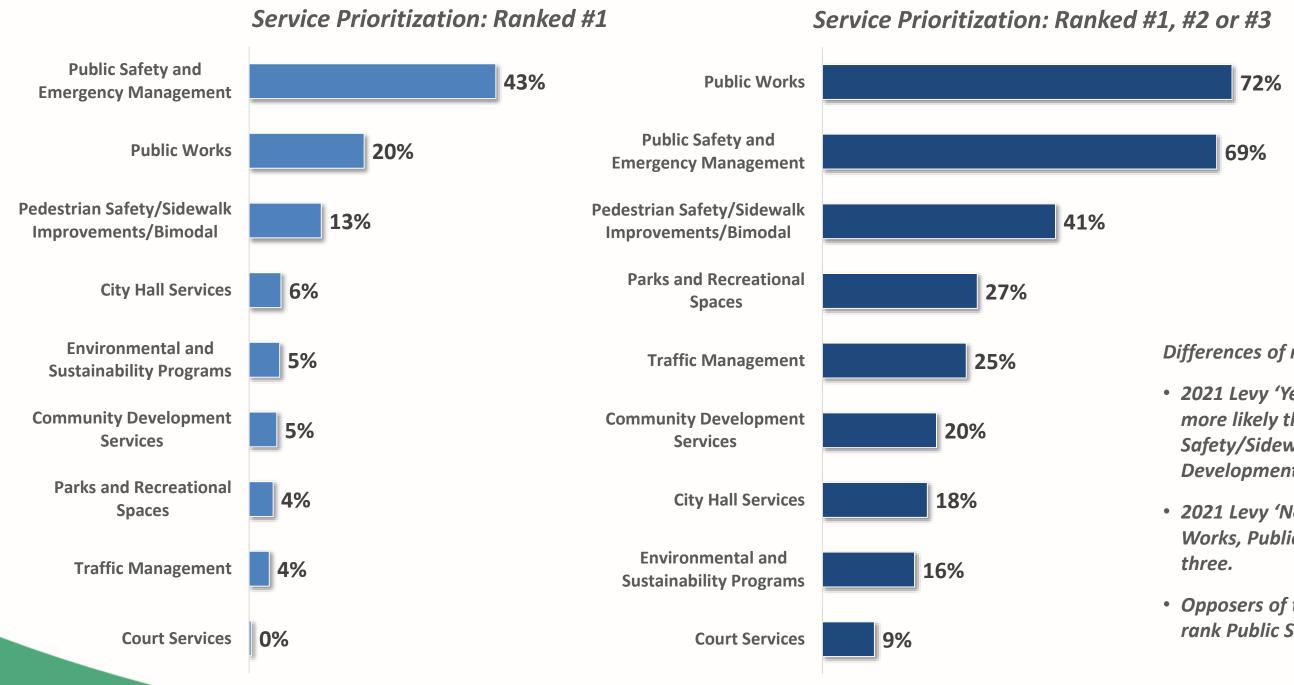
"Allow more businesses, restaurants, shops to build and establish in the town center area as well as other parts of LFP. Bring in more revenue for the city with retail rather than relying on property taxes and traffic tickets."

"Small things like repainting crosswalks, adding lights to crosswalks so cars can see people walking at night, some roads don't have streetlights, trimming bushes/shrubbery around street signs to increase visibility."



Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# Public Safety/Emergency Management stands apart as the #1 prioritized service, followed by Public Works and, more distantly, Pedestrian Safety.



13



LAKE FOREST PARK WASHINGTON

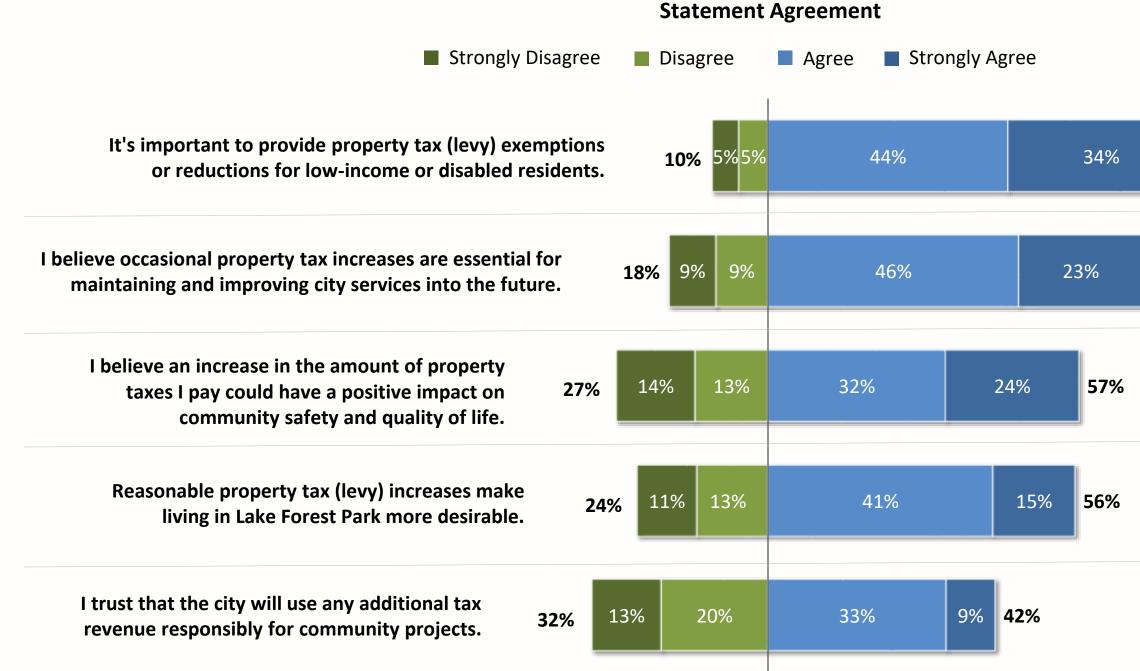


Differences of note...

- 2021 Levy 'Yes' voters and Supporters of the proposed 6-Year Levy are more likely than their counterparts to rank Pedestrian Safety/Sidewalks/Bimodal, Parks and Rec Spaces, and Community Development among their top three.
- 2021 Levy 'No' voters are more likely than 'Yes' voters to rank Public Works, Public Safety, Traffic Management, and Court Services in their top
- Opposers of the proposed 6-Year Levy are more likely than Supporters to rank Public Safety and Traffic Management in their top three.

Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# Over three fourths feel it is important to have tax exemptions or reductions for some residents, and two thirds agree occasional tax increases are essential for maintaining and improving services.



Only ratings of agree (4-5) or disagree (1-2) are shown. (Ratings of neither agree nor disagree (3) are not shown.) The **bold** percentages represents the corresponding net total Agree / Disagree.

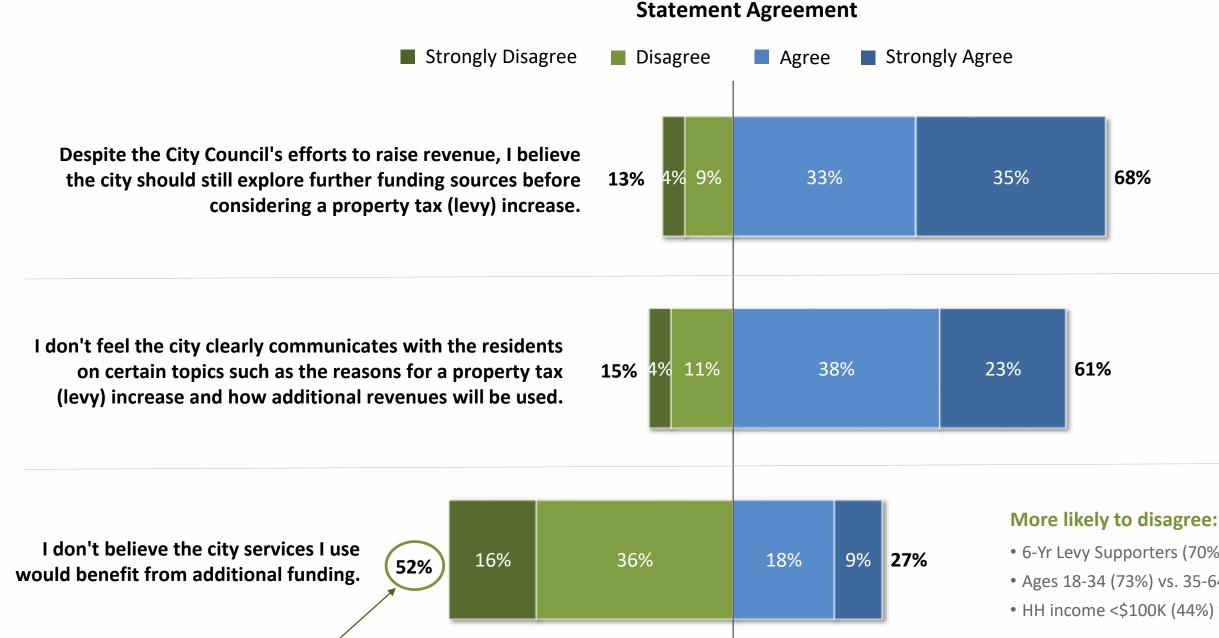


LAKE FOREST PARK

78%	More likely to agree: • 6-Yr Levy Supporters (83%) vs. Opposers (65%) • Women (83%) vs. Men (74%) • HH income <\$100K (89%) vs. >\$100K (77%)
68%	<ul> <li>6-Yr Levy Supporters (90%) vs. Opposers (23%)</li> <li>Women (73%) vs. Men (65%)</li> <li>HH income &gt;\$100K (73%) vs. &lt;\$100K (62%)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>6-Yr Levy Supporters (80%) vs. Opposers (7%)</li> <li>HH income &gt;\$100K (63%) vs. &lt;\$100K (48%)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>6-Yr Levy Supporters (78%) vs. Opposers (13%)</li> <li>HH income &gt;\$100K (62%) vs. &lt;\$100K (47%)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>6-Yr Levy Supporters (60%) vs. Opposers (6%)</li> <li>HH income &gt;\$100K (47%) vs. &lt;\$100K (33%)</li> </ul>

Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

## Most believe the city should have explored all other options before asking for a property tax increase. They don't feel the city has clearly communicated the reasons for requested tax increases and how additional revenues will be used.



Half DISAGREE, indicating that they DO BELIEVE the city services they use would benefit from additional funding.

Only ratings of agree (4-5) or disagree (1-2) are shown. (Ratings of neither agree nor disagree (3) are not shown.) The **bold** percentages represents the corresponding net total Agree / Disagree.



LAKE FOREST PARK WASHINGTON

## More likely to agree:

• 6-Yr Levy Opposers (91%) vs. Supporters (55%)

## More likely to agree:

• 6-Yr Levy Opposers (77%) vs. Supporters (52%)

- 6-Yr Levy Supporters (70%) vs. Opposers (16%) • Ages 18-34 (73%) vs. 35-64 (55%) or 65+ (46%)
- HH income <\$100K (44%) vs. >\$100K (57%)

## More likely to agree:

- 6-Yr Levy Opposers (64%) vs. Supporters (9%)
- Men (30%) vs. Women (21%)
- HH income <\$100K (35%) vs. >\$100K (23%)

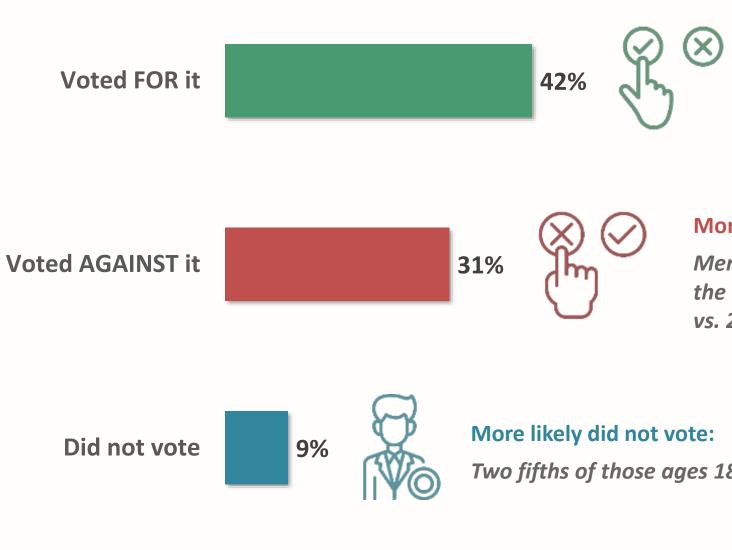


# **Close to four in five were aware of the 2021 Levy proposal and its** objectives, but just two in five say they voted for it.

No 23% Yes 77%

Aware of 2021 Levy

Awareness was significantly higher among ages 35 and older (78%); more than half (55%) of residents ages 18-34 were unaware of the levy.



Note: 18% did not recall

2021 Levy Voting Behavior



LAKE FOREST WASHINGTON

## More likely voted for it:

Women were more likely than men to vote for the levy (50% vs. 37%); as were higher income households vs. their counterparts (47% vs. 33%).

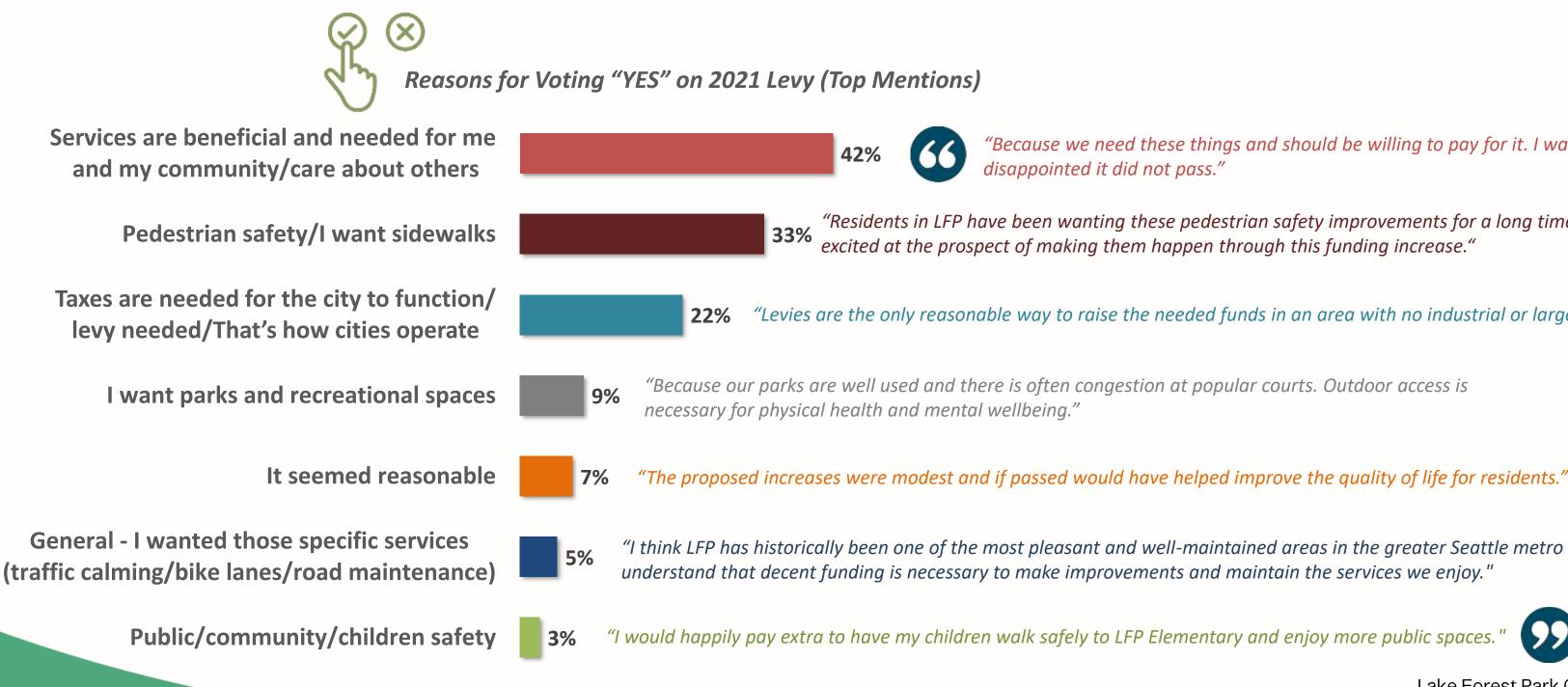
## More likely voted against it:

Men were more likely than women to vote against the levy (39% vs. 20%); as were residents 65+ (34% vs. 29% ages 35-64 and 14% ages 18-34).

Two fifths of those ages 18-34 did not vote on the 2021 proposal.



## Those who voted in favor of the 2021 levy did so primarily because they felt the services were beneficial and necessary for themselves and the community, they wanted pedestrian safety improvements, and/or they felt that the taxes were necessary for the city to operate.





Because we need these things and should be willing to pay for it. I was very

"Residents in LFP have been wanting these pedestrian safety improvements for a long time, and I was excited at the prospect of making them happen through this funding increase."

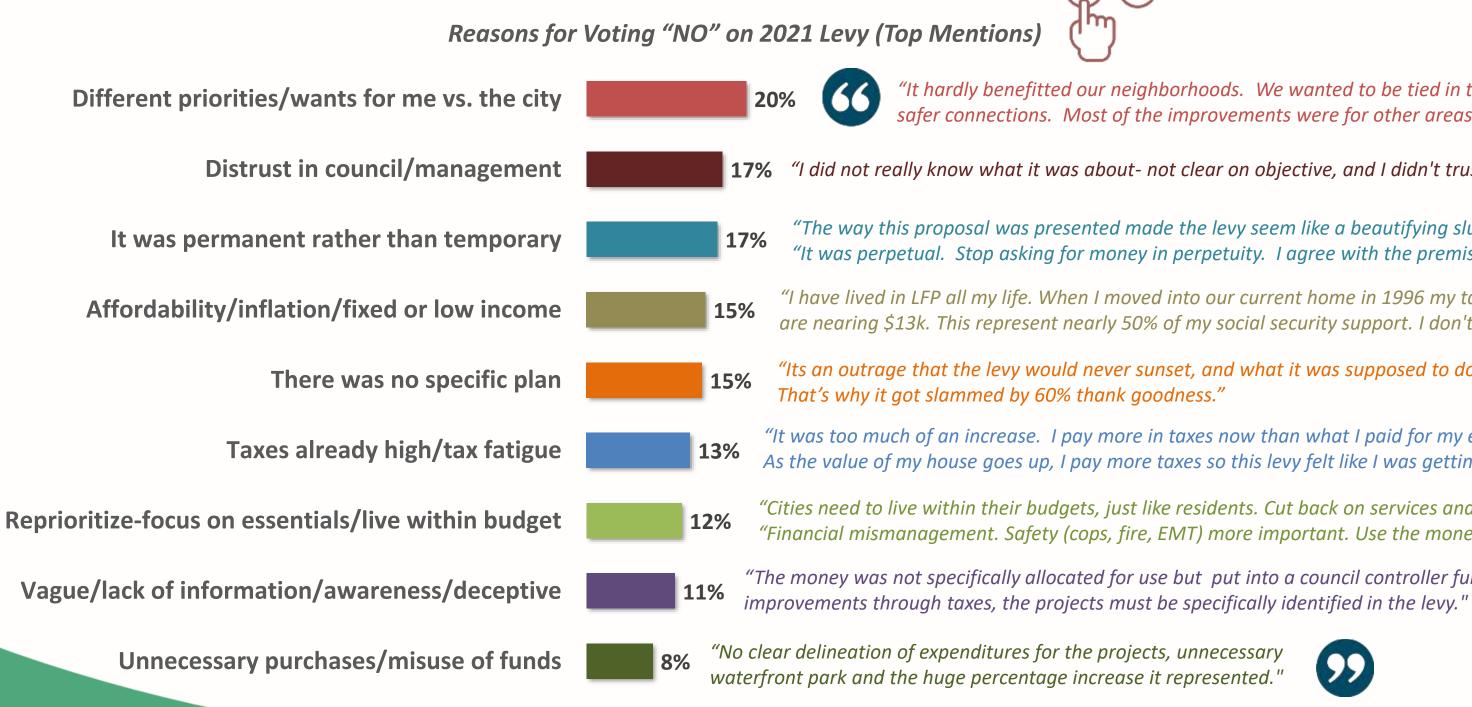
"Levies are the only reasonable way to raise the needed funds in an area with no industrial or large commercial base."

"I think LFP has historically been one of the most pleasant and well-maintained areas in the greater Seattle metro area. I



Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

## Those who opposed the 2021 levy did so primarily because they didn't see a match between the city's priorities and theirs, they mistrust city management, the levy was permanent and the plan lacked specifics, and they felt their taxes were already high, especially those with fixed/limited income.





"It hardly benefitted our neighborhoods. We wanted to be tied in to the center of the city with some safer connections. Most of the improvements were for other areas of the city."

"I did not really know what it was about- not clear on objective, and I didn't trust LFP to manage those funds acceptably."

"The way this proposal was presented made the levy seem like a beautifying slush fund that had no end." "It was perpetual. Stop asking for money in perpetuity. I agree with the premise, not the funding mechanism."

"I have lived in LFP all my life. When I moved into our current home in 1996 my taxes were under \$4k. Today they are nearing \$13k. This represent nearly 50% of my social security support. I don't want to get taxed out of LFP!"

"Its an outrage that the levy would never sunset, and what it was supposed to do was vague to say the least.

"It was too much of an increase. I pay more in taxes now than what I paid for my entire mortgage when I moved to LFP. As the value of my house goes up, I pay more taxes so this levy felt like I was getting a double whammy."

"Cities need to live within their budgets, just like residents. Cut back on services and provide what you can afford." "Financial mismanagement. Safety (cops, fire, EMT) more important. Use the money you already collect wisely."

"The money was not specifically allocated for use but put into a council controller fund. If you want to pay for



Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# Those who voted in favor of the 2021 levy think that the main *barriers* to its passing were a lack of information and full transparency of how the money would be utilized, and the fact that people, in general, resist paying more taxes.

## Barriers to 2021 Levy Passing: Among Those Who Voted "YES" (Top Mentions)







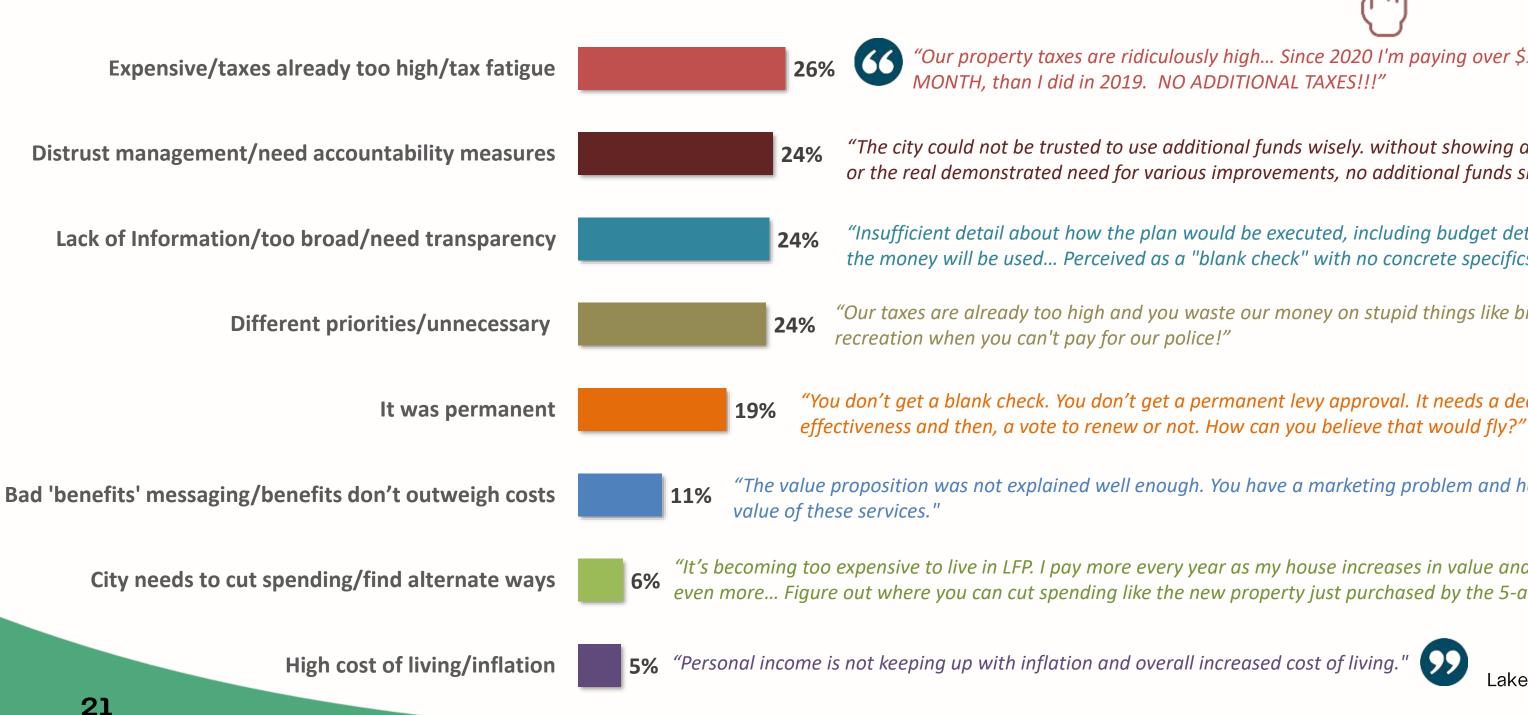
"I think residents would like to see how our town is spending the revenue they have before just voting to give the town more money. Fiscal responsibility requires transparency..."

"People can't stand tax increases because they see them as a slippery slope. The wording of the levy must spell out very

"1. Disinformation 2. The anti-prop 1 campaign got an early start and promulgated fuzzy math and lack of community spirit."



Those who voted against the 2021 levy cited their existing 'high' tax burden, distrust of city management/lack of accountability measures, lack of information/transparency, having different priorities or feeling the levy was unnecessary, and the fact that it was to be permanent among the top barriers to its passing.









"Our property taxes are ridiculously high... Since 2020 I'm paying over \$1000.00/mo. more, EVERY MONTH, than I did in 2019. NO ADDITIONAL TAXES!!!"

"The city could not be trusted to use additional funds wisely. without showing a sincere effort to cut spending or the real demonstrated need for various improvements, no additional funds should be requested."

"Insufficient detail about how the plan would be executed, including budget details about cost/shortfall and where the money will be used... Perceived as a "blank check" with no concrete specifics."

"Our taxes are already too high and you waste our money on stupid things like bike lanes and expanding parks and

"You don't get a blank check. You don't get a permanent levy approval. It needs a deadline, then a review of

"The value proposition was not explained well enough. You have a marketing problem and haven't convinced public of the

*"It's becoming too expensive to live in LFP. I pay more every year as my house increases in value and then you want to increase my taxes even more... Figure out where you can cut spending like the new property just purchased by the 5-acre park. That was a waste of money."* 



Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# Given the budget shortfall, most residents, in total, would prioritize addressing policing needs, hiring a grant writer to secure external funding, and improving/ maintaining the city's parks.

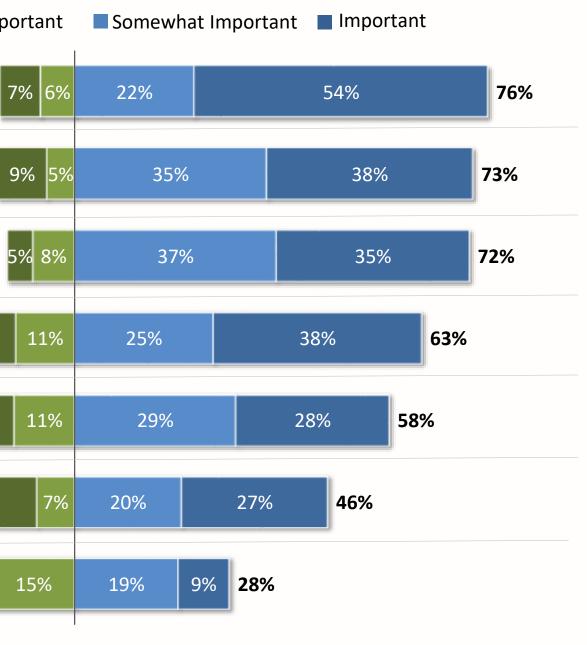
## **Priorities for Addressing Budget Shortfall – Among TOTAL**

Unimportant Somewha	at Unimpc
Maintaining the current police force, hiring new police officers and replacing aging patrol vehicles, some of which are over 10 years old and have over 100,000 miles on them.	13% 7
Hiring a grant writer to help the city secure external funding to support vital projects such as traffic, parks, stream restoration and other community initiatives. This role can aid in reducing reliance on local tax revenue.	14%
Improving and maintaining the city's parks to ensure they remain accessible and well-used by the community.	13% 5
Expanding sidewalk installations and improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and connectivity within the community.	15%
Funding and implementing Clean Water Act programs for public education and pollution prevention, to protect local waterways.	<b>6</b> 13%
Aligning with other similar cities' tax rates. Currently Lake Forest Park has a lower tax rate than Kirkland, Shoreline, Kenmore, and Bothell.	26%
Hiring new positions, such as a Climate Manager, to lead the city's efforts in addressing climate change impacts and developing initiatives to mitigate these risks. 56%	

Only ratings of important (4-5) or unimportant (1-2) are shown. (Ratings of neutral (3) are not shown.) The **bold** percentages represents the corresponding net total Important / Unimportant.

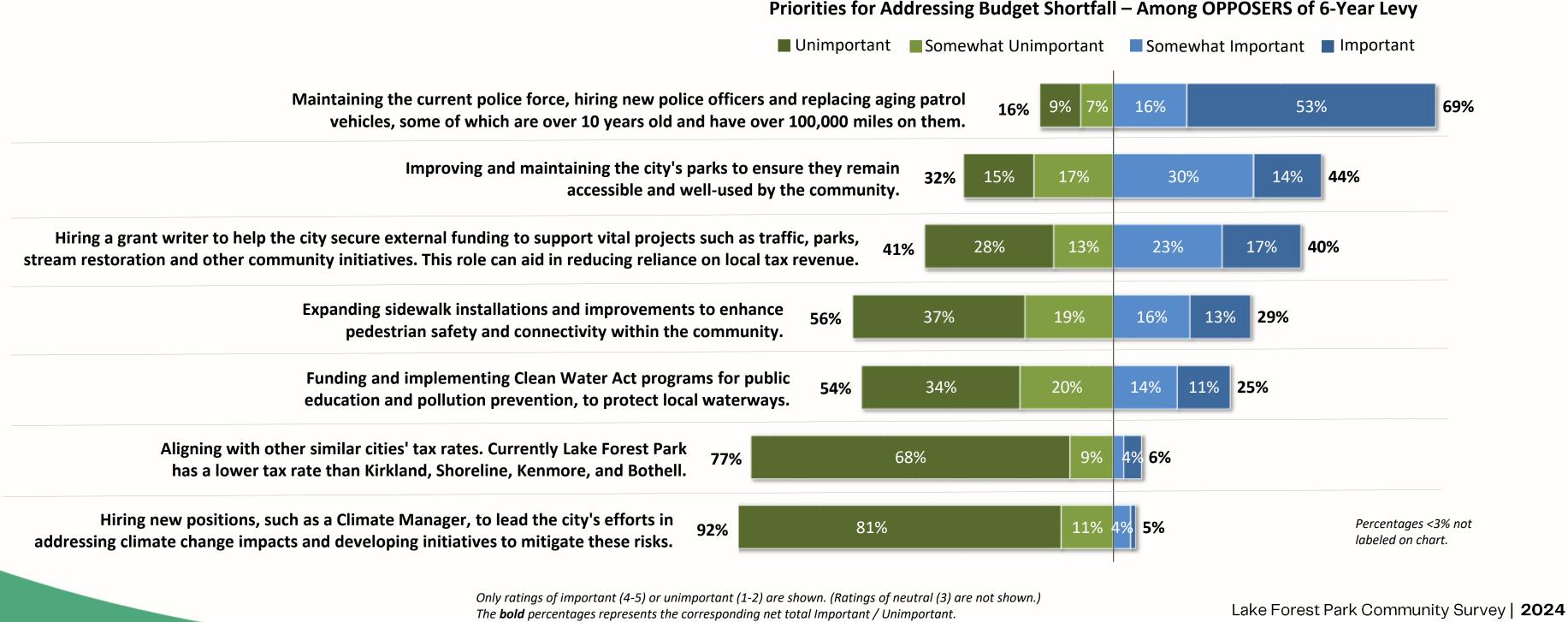


LAKE FOREST PARK WASHINGTON





# Seven in ten who oppose the 6-year levy feel it is important to address policing needs, but only a minority of the opposed feel it is important to address other needs, especially aligning with other cities' tax rates or hiring new positions to address climate impacts.

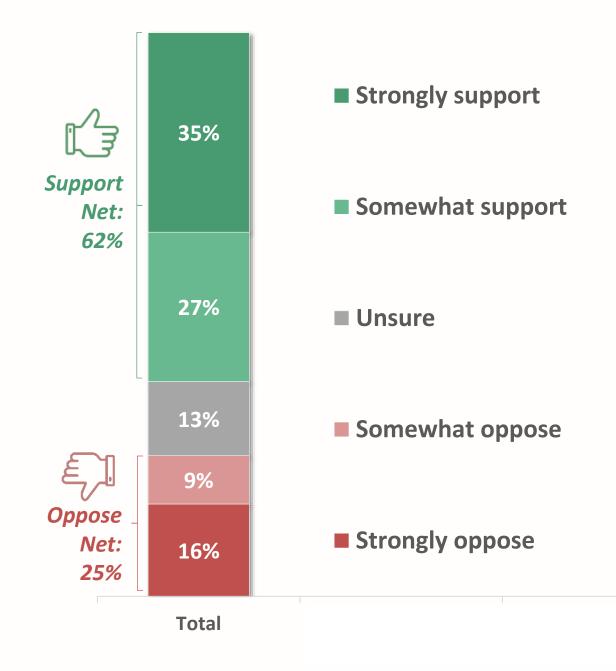




# In total, three fifths support the idea of a six-year LFP temporary levy and a quarter oppose it.

## More likely to support the levy (net):

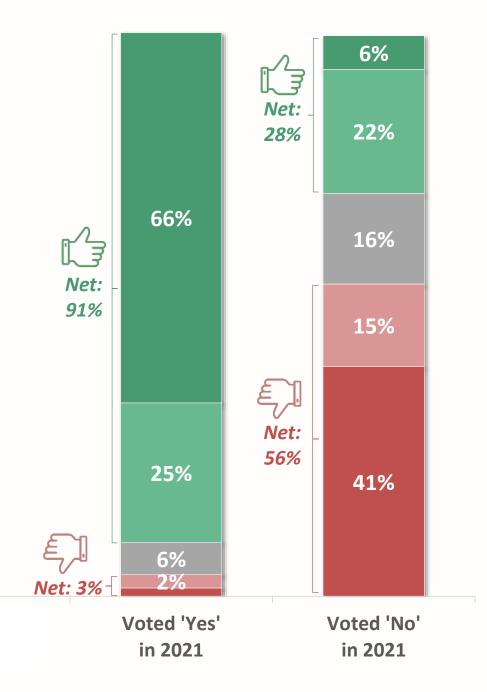
- 2021 Levy 'Yes' voters are more than three times as likely as 'No' voters to support the six-year levy at a rate of 91% to 28%.
- Support is higher among younger (70%) and middle-aged (66%) residents than those age 65+ (57%).
- Higher income households (69%) are more *likely to support the levy than households* with income under \$100K (48%).





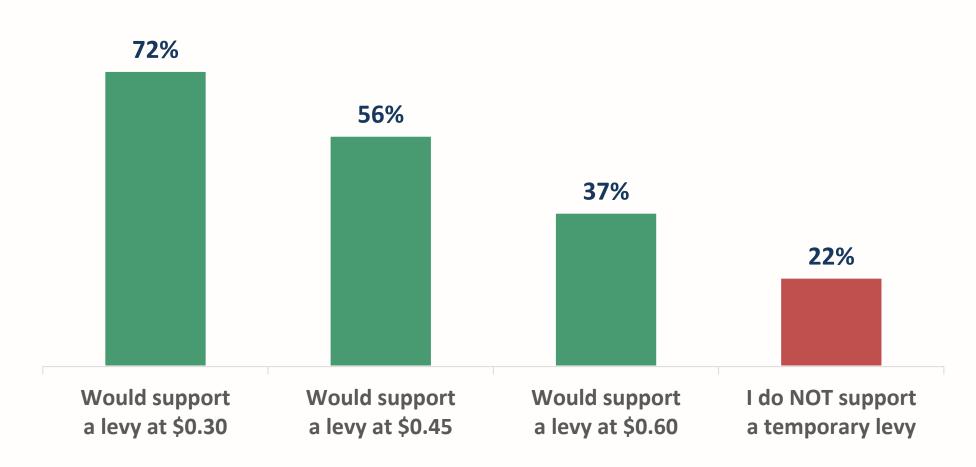
LAKE FOREST PARK WASHINGTON

## Reaction to a City of Lake Forest Park Seeking a Six-Year Temporary Levy





# While seven in ten would support a levy of \$0.30 to partially address the budget shortfall, support falls to just over half at the \$0.45 rate, and fewer than four in ten at the \$0.60 rate.



**Reaction to Proposed Levy Rates\*** 

\*See Notes section for full description of each option shown.



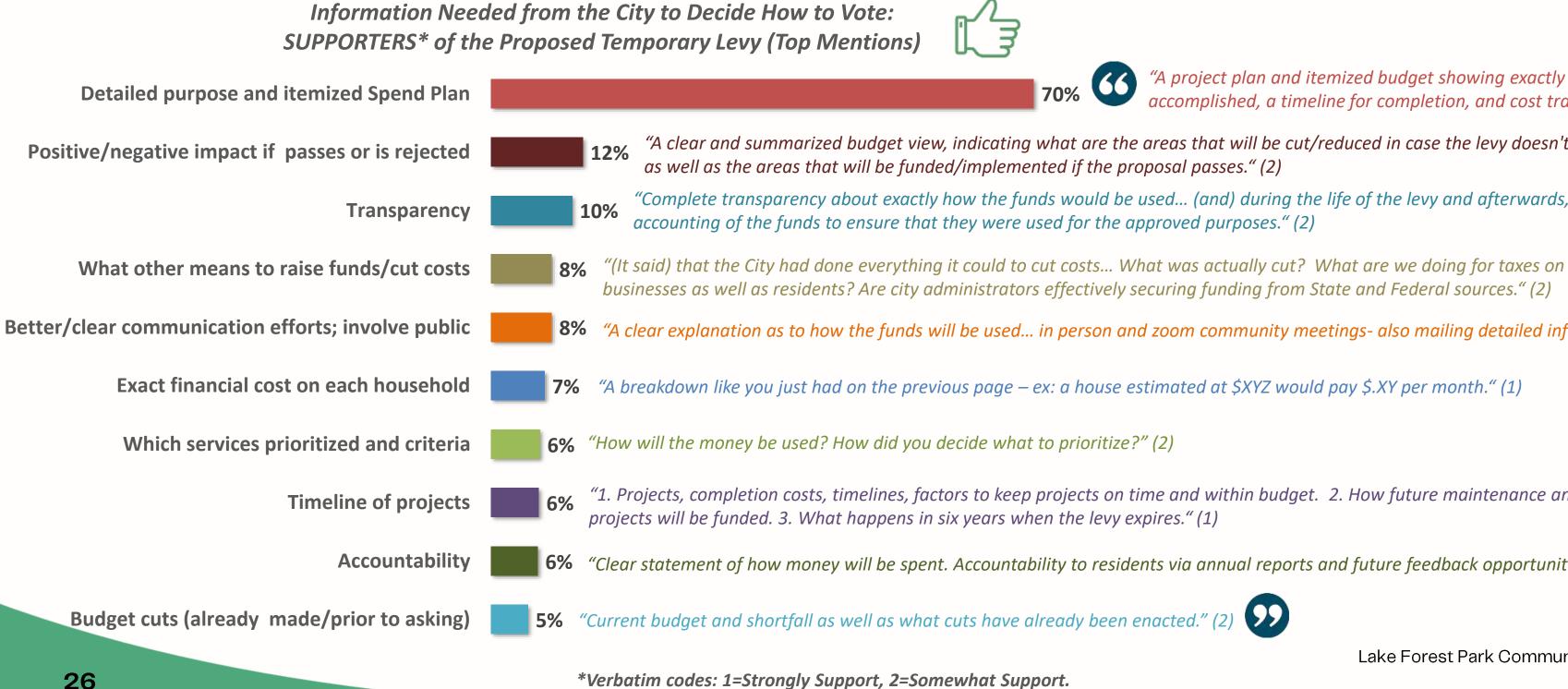
LAKE FOREST PARK WASHINGTON

## More likely to oppose any levy:

Households with income <\$100K were more likely than higher income households to oppose any levy (30% vs. 17%); as were residents 65+ (26% vs. 18%-20% of middle aged or younger).

Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

## Those who support the proposed levy primarily want the city to provide them with details on its purpose and specifics regarding what will be included in the spending plan, itemizing each project and its cost, location, rationale, and timeline.





"A project plan and itemized budget showing exactly what would be accomplished, a timeline for completion, and cost transparency." (1)

"A clear and summarized budget view, indicating what are the areas that will be cut/reduced in case the levy doesn't pass,

"Complete transparency about exactly how the funds would be used... (and) during the life of the levy and afterwards, a full

8% "A clear explanation as to how the funds will be used... in person and zoom community meetings- also mailing detailed information." (1)

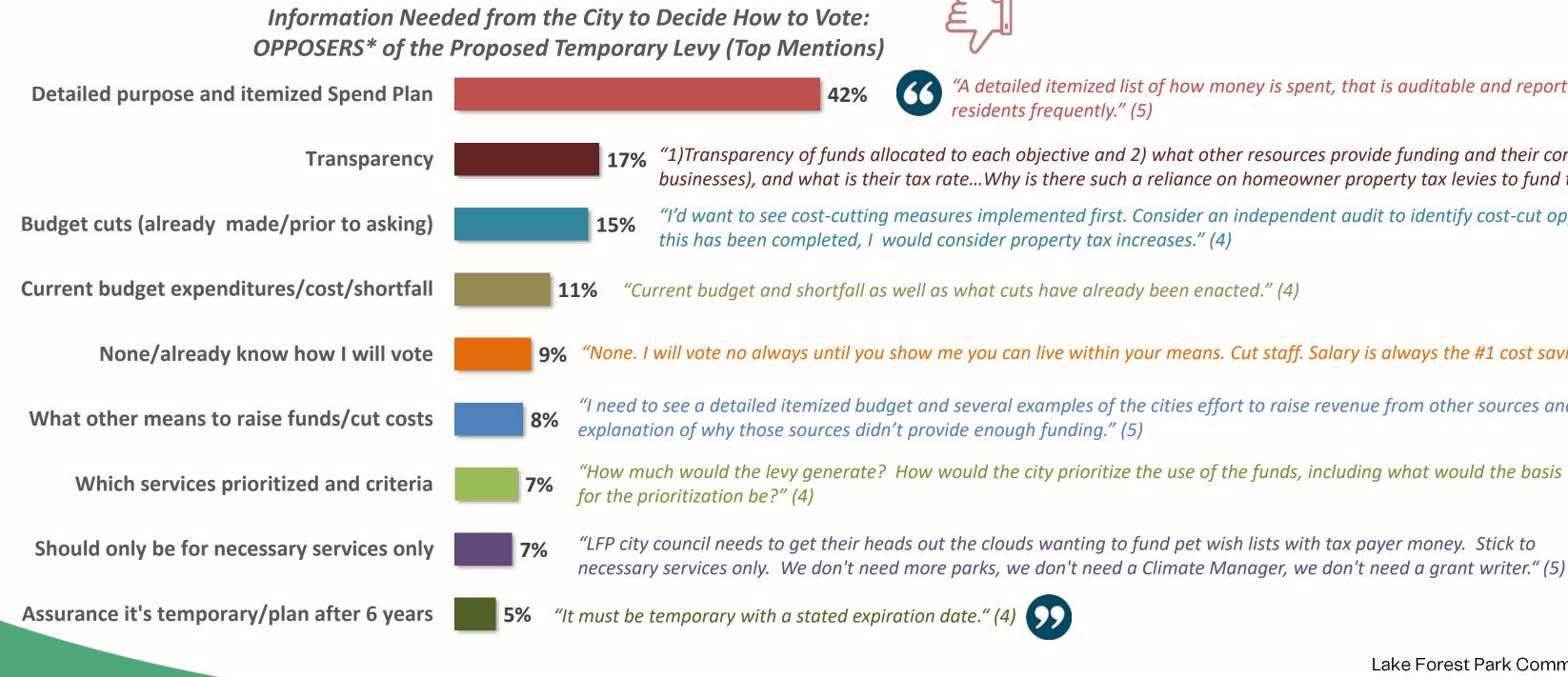
"1. Projects, completion costs, timelines, factors to keep projects on time and within budget. 2. How future maintenance and operation of

"Clear statement of how money will be spent. Accountability to residents via annual reports and future feedback opportunities." (1)



Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# In addition to an itemized spending plan, those who <u>oppose</u> the proposed levy want the city to transparently provide information on what budget cuts have already been or will be made, details on the current budget and shortfalls, and information about other means for raising funds and cutting costs.



\*Verbatim codes: 5=Strongly Oppose, 4=Somewhat Oppose.



"A detailed itemized list of how money is spent, that is auditable and reported on to

17% "1) Transparency of funds allocated to each objective and 2) what other resources provide funding and their contributions (i.e., businesses), and what is their tax rate...Why is there such a reliance on homeowner property tax levies to fund the City?" (5)

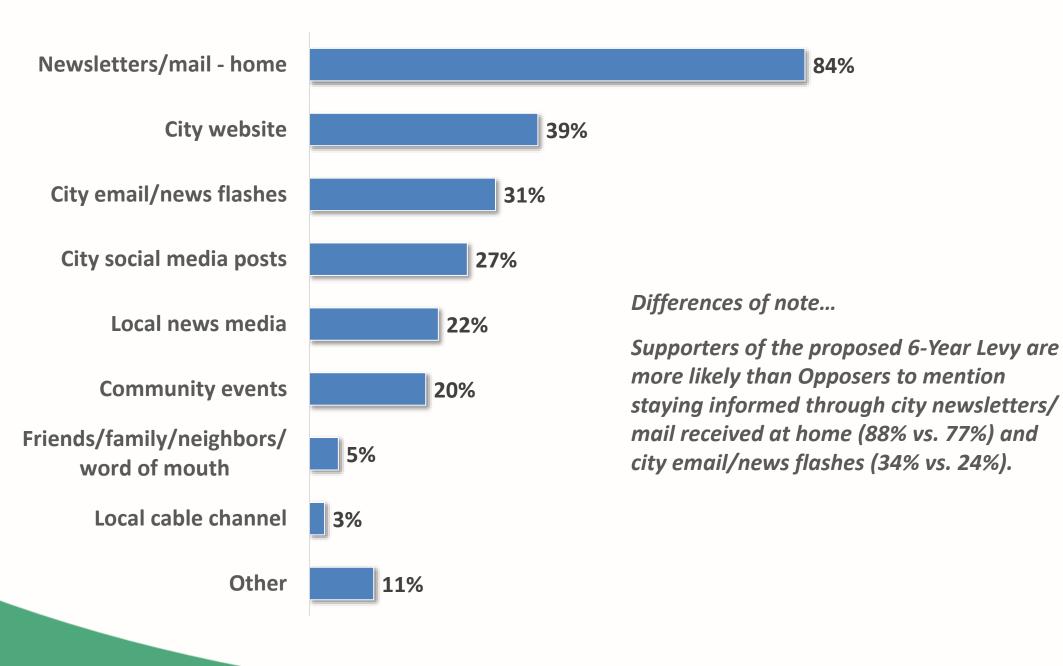
"I'd want to see cost-cutting measures implemented first. Consider an independent audit to identify cost-cut opportunities. After

"None. I will vote no always until you show me you can live within your means. Cut staff. Salary is always the #1 cost saving measure." (5)

"I need to see a detailed itemized budget and several examples of the cities effort to raise revenue from other sources and an

Lake Forest Park Community Survey | 2024

# Most stay informed about city services through newsletters/mail received at home. Mailed newsletters and email hold top spots for their *preferred* method of city engagement.



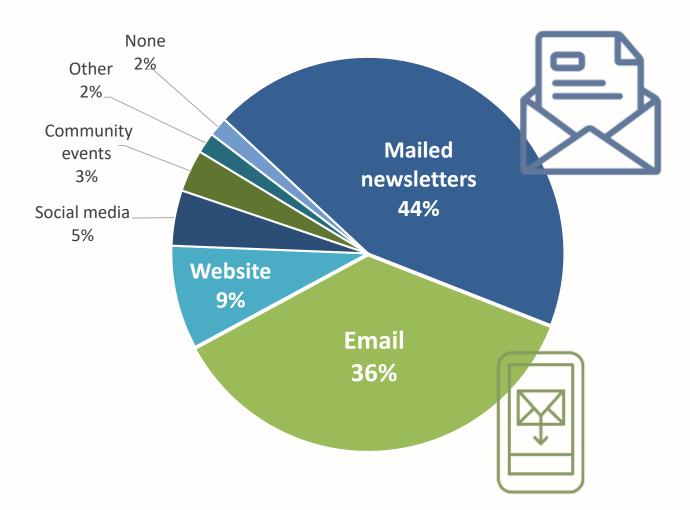
City Engagement / Staying Informed

28



WASHINGTON

## First Choice for City Engagement







# Questions?



