

City of Sandpoint Survey

Prepared for: Sandpoint City Council
August 14, 2025

Our Role

Portman Square Group is committed to helping the City navigate this important planning process with transparency, accuracy, and community trust at its core. Our role is to ensure that City leadership has a clear understanding of public sentiment and reliable, detailed information to support thoughtful and informed decision-making. As a strategic communications partner, PSG has been contracted to provide the following services:

- Strategy Development: Develop a comprehensive campaign strategy outlining key objectives, target audiences, messaging, and timelines. The team will work with the City to create an effective, focused communications strategy, building on sound analysis – with the primary objective of educating the public about the city’s needs and bond initiative.
- Deployment of a Community Survey: Deploy electronic survey to City residents and voters via text, social, and digital channels to gauge sentiment and respond to voter concerns.
- Development of Educational Materials: Develop concise, educational materials which accurately communicate the project's scope, objectives, and benefits to residents, voters, other stakeholders, and media outlets. This will include crafting presentations, press releases, FAQs, and digital and social media content that highlights the need for the project and its impact on the community.



Survey Overview

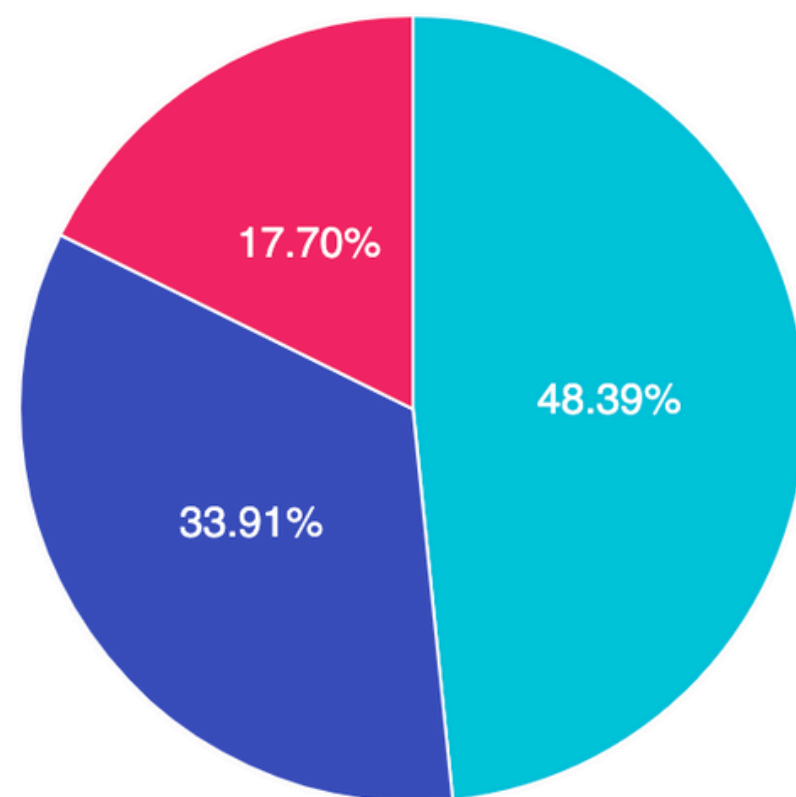
- **Total Responses:** 927 responses (671 completed, 256 partial)
 - 95% are registered voters
 - 62% have lived in Sandpoint more than 10 years
 - 86% are utility bill payers
 - Results are statistically significant
- **Survey Period:** July 28 to August 13, 2025
- **Purpose:**
 - Improve understanding of community needs and preferences
 - Evaluate public opinion regarding a November 2025 vote to support the project through a rate increase (via bond or otherwise)
- **Methodology:** Online survey distributed to residents via text, other digital channels, and through community partnerships



Community Awareness

How would you rate your awareness of the City's need to fully replace its wastewater treatment facility?

Answered: 808 Skipped: 119



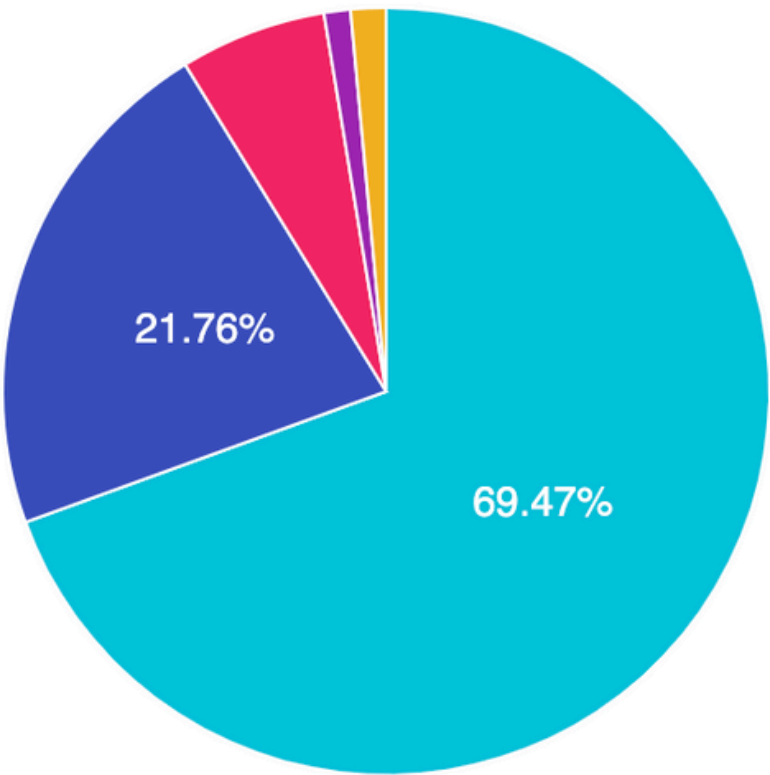
● Highly Aware ● Somewhat Aware ● Not Aware



Community Awareness

How important do you believe it is to replace the City's aging wastewater treatment facility to protect public health and the Pend Oreille River?

Answered: 809 Skipped: 118



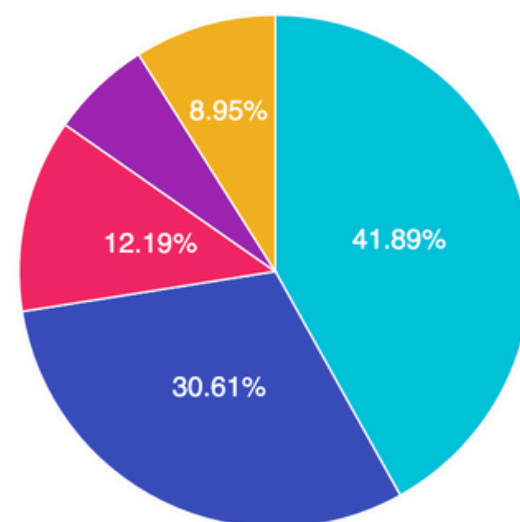
Very Important Important Neutral Not Important Not at all Important



Support for City Bonds

Would you support a bond measure on the November ballot to fund the first critical phase (\$80 million) of the Wastewater Treatment Facility Replacement Project?

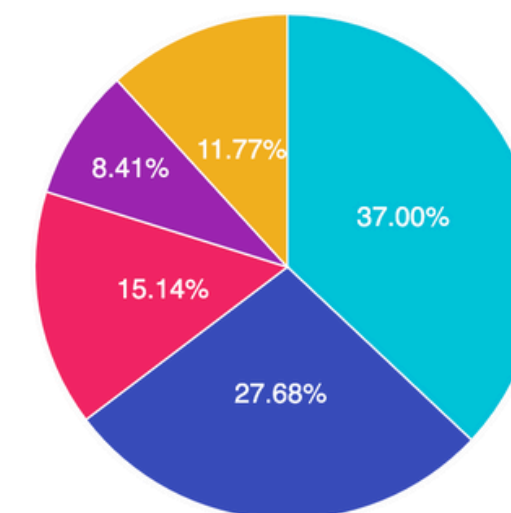
Answered: 771 Skipped: 156



Strongly Support Somewhat Support Neutral Somewhat Oppose Strongly Oppose

Would you support a bond measure on the November ballot to fund the entire Wastewater Treatment Facility Replacement Project (\$130 million), fully addressing all regulatory compliance and long-term reliability needs?

Answered: 773 Skipped: 154



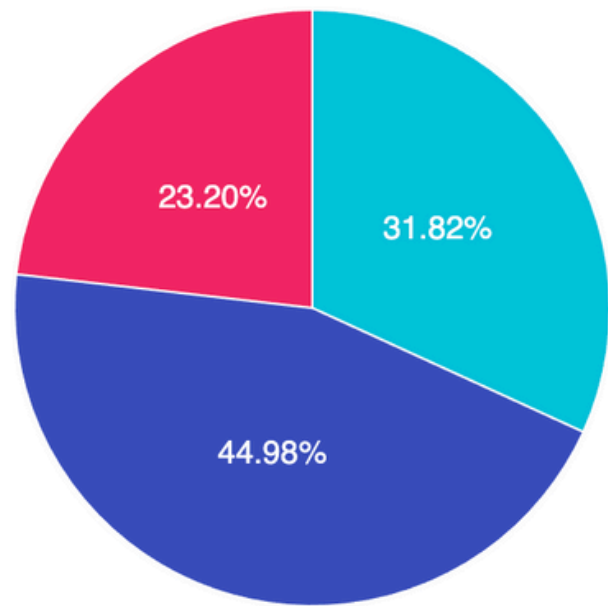
Strongly Support Somewhat Support Neutral Somewhat Oppose Strongly Oppose



Support for Rate Increase

If the City moves forward with Phase 1 only (estimated at \$80 million) total rate increases could potentially reach up to 60% (including currently projected increases). For example, if your current monthly utility bill is \$100, it could increase to approximately \$160 over five years. Would you find this rate impact acceptable?

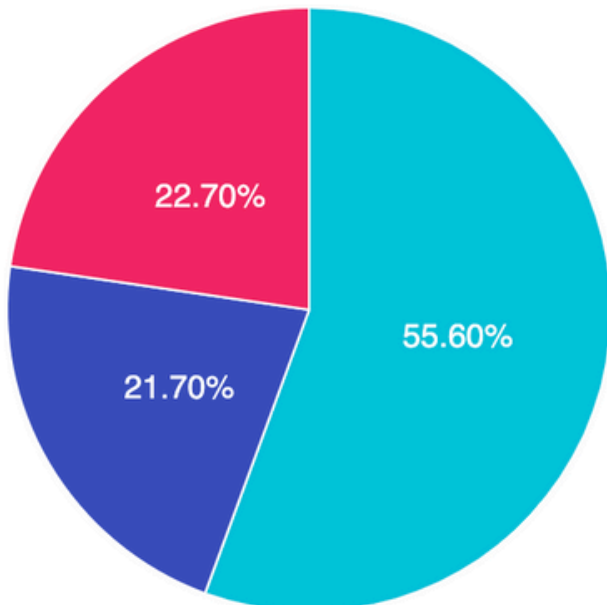
Answered: 707 Skipped: 220



Yes No Not Sure

Would you support this level of rate increase in order to complete Phase 1 of the wastewater facility replacement project, if the City is commits to aggressively pursuing available state and federal grants and low-interest loans to reduce the amount that must be borrowed and lower the rate impact?

Answered: 705 Skipped: 222



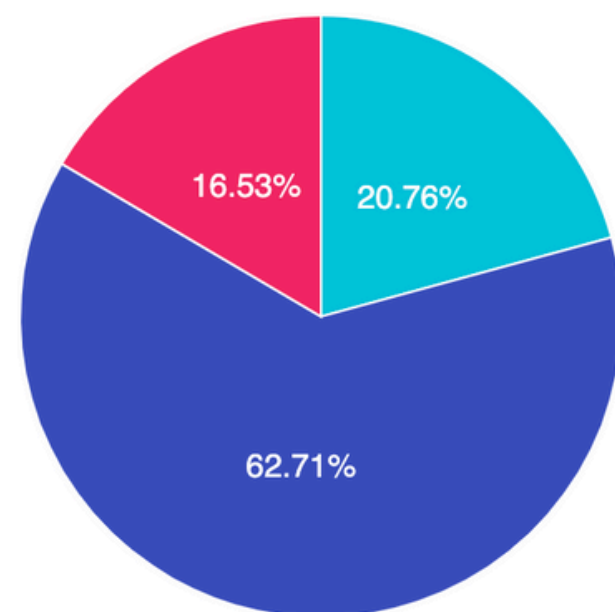
Yes No Not Sure



Support for Rate Increase

If the City moves forward with the entire project (\$130 million), total rate increases could potentially reach up to 106% (including currently projected increases). For example, if your current monthly utility bill is \$100, it could increase to approximately \$206 over five years. Would you find this rate impact acceptable?

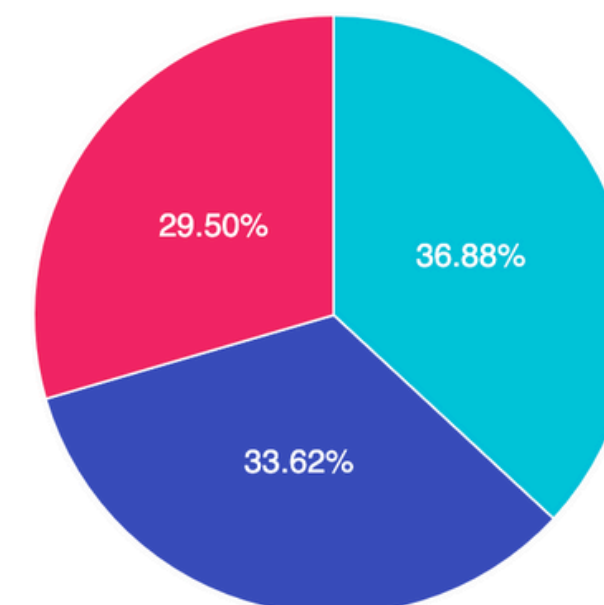
Answered: 708 Skipped: 219



Yes No Not Sure

Would you support this level of rate increase in order to fully fund the entire wastewater facility replacement project at once, if the City is commits to aggressively pursuing available state and federal grants and low-interest loans to reduce the amount that must be borrowed and lower the rate impact?

Answered: 705 Skipped: 222



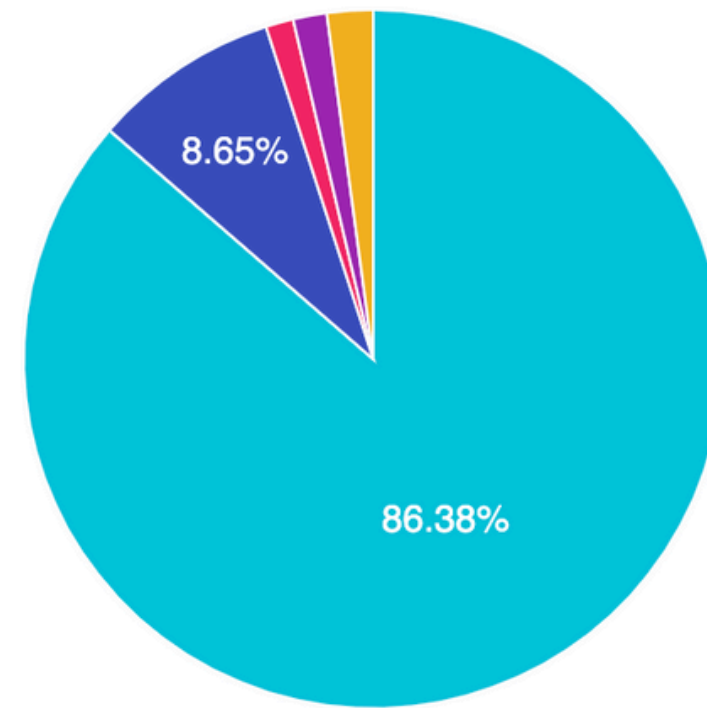
Yes No Not Sure



Community Sentiment: Grants and Loans

How important is it to you that the City pursue state and federal grants and low-interest loans before issuing debt?

Answered: 705 Skipped: 222



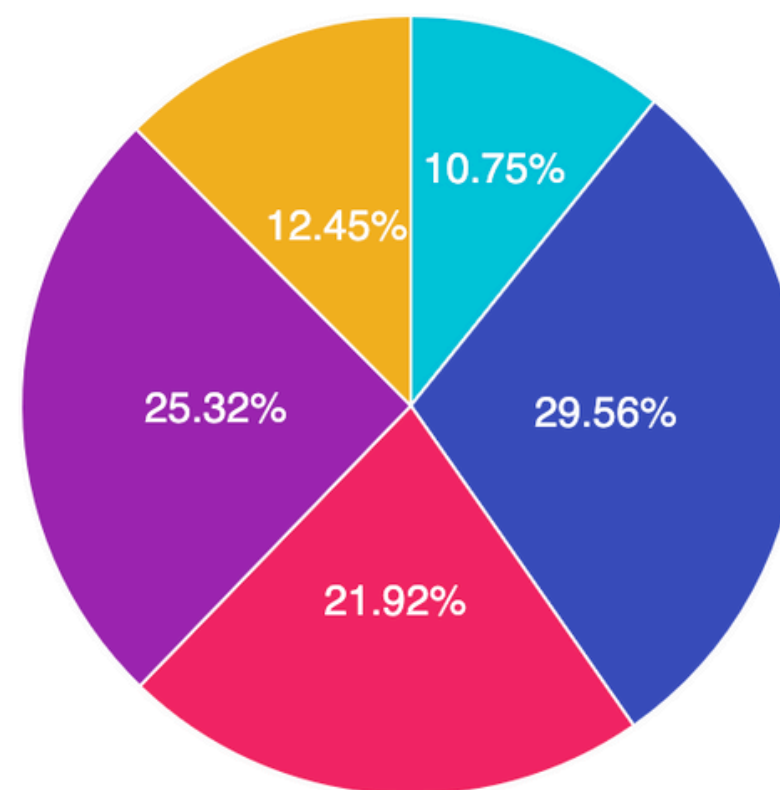
Very important Somewhat important Not very important Not important at all
Not sure



Community Sentiment: Trust

How confident are you that the City of Sandpoint will manage this project responsibly and use funds efficiently?

Answered: 707 Skipped: 220



Very confident Somewhat confident Neutral Not very confident Not at all confident



Top Community Concerns

1. Cost to Residents / Affordability (42.2%)

Residents are concerned about large rate increases, particularly for those on fixed incomes or already facing high utility bills.

2. Lack of Trust in City Leadership (27.1%)

A significant portion of respondents expressed frustration with perceived mismanagement and poor communication from past and current city leadership.

3. Developer Accountability (24.2%)

Many comments called for developers and newcomers to pay a fair share of the infrastructure costs driving the need for plant expansion.

4. Demand for Federal and State Grants (21.1%)

Strong desire for assurances that outside funds will be aggressively pursued to reduce the local burden.

5. Facility Location and Odor (15.8%)

Numerous comments raised concerns about the plant's current location near Memorial Park and the associated odor during events.



Key Survey Results

- 83% of residents are aware of the wastewater facility issue
- 69% say replacement is "very important" for public health
- 67% support a Phase 1 bond (80M); 65% support full bond (130M)
- 43% find Phase 1 rate impact acceptable; 63% if grants are pursued
- 31% find full project rate impact acceptable; 72% if grants are pursued
- 88% say outside funding is very important before issuing debt
- Only 11% are very confident the City will manage the project responsibly



Recommended Next Steps

1. Develop a Public Summary of Findings

- Publish a plain-language, visual summary of survey results and key concerns.
- Emphasize: “Here’s what we heard. Here’s how we’re responding.”

2. Launch Phase II Communications Plan

- Use top community concerns to guide content (e.g., cost, trust, developer equity).
- Include FAQs, infographics, public events, and a detailed funding explanation.

3. Reinforce the City’s Funding Strategy

- Clearly communicate grant/loan pursuit.
- Explain rate mitigation strategies and show a phased financial path.

4. Address Trust Directly

- Emphasize project oversight, transparency, and long-term rate planning.
- Consider independent advisory support or reporting structure.

Thank you.

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