



# Community Budget Forums: Data Report

**Public Forums:**  
September 24, 2015  
October 13, 2015

**Report Date:** October 23, 2015

## Community Forum Overview

Montpelier will continue to face major budget challenges in the coming years. With the Council approved “steady state capital plan,” the City needs to spend an additional \$500,000 per year to reach a sustainable rate of infrastructure funding. This is \$1M more than the City spent three years ago. The municipal tax rate, while remaining stable for several years, remains relatively high compared to other communities in Vermont and elsewhere. This creates a challenge for our residents, businesses, and for future development.

To engage the community in finding solutions to these challenges, Community Budget Forums were held on September 24, 2015 and October 13, 2015. At the first forum participants brainstormed ideas on core community values to be considered during the budget process. At the second forum, participants reviewed the ideas contributed and set key priorities for the City to consider as they build future budgets. Additionally, in the interest of soliciting feedback from those not able to attend evening meetings, two on-line surveys were available.

## Key Findings

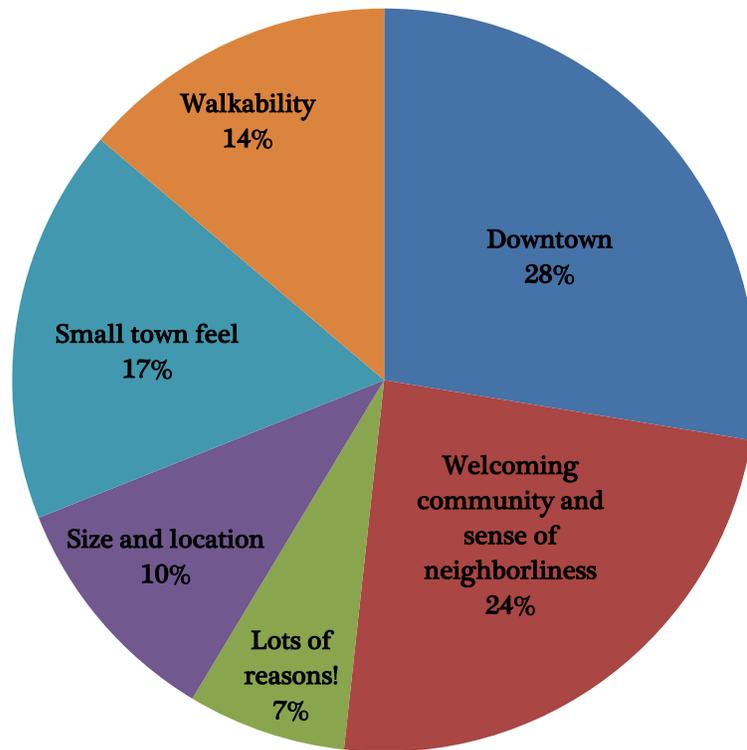
Respondents were asked to prioritize the core values to consider during the budget process. Four values were shared by a third or more of respondents.

Values	% indicated this was a top 3 priority
Keep Montpelier affordable for all	51%
Focus on improving and maintaining our infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, bridges)	46%
Focus on housing development (all levels) as a long term way to grow municipal revenue	39%
Focus on business and economic development as a long term way to grow municipal revenue	35%

Respondents were asked to prioritize the ideas for reducing spending or increasing revenue that should be implemented with future City budgets. One idea was shared by 42% of the respondents and another seven were shared by a third to a fifth of the respondents.

Budget Ideas	% indicated this was a top 3 priority
Implement a local option rooms, meals, and alcohol tax	42%
Increase regionalization	32%
Reduce City staff (City Hall, Police, Fire)	30%
Focus on business growth and economic development (long term solution) ADD: Explore land-based taxation	27%
Focus on core services (public safety, public works) and get rid of the fluff	25%
Implement a vacant housing/apartment/storefront penalty	22%
Implement a local option sales tax	20%
Develop new housing (long term solution)	20%

We also asked respondents what they loved about Montpelier.



## **Analysis – Forum #1**

Three key questions were posed:

- What core community values are crucial to consider in building budgets for the future of the City?
- Given the financial challenges and infrastructure needs facing the City, what are your ideas around property taxes and other revenue sources or ways to reduce costs in the city budget?
- Are there key services, programs or functions of the city government that should be seen as key priorities to protect or enhance in the future?

Approximately 40 people attended the Forum (not counting staff or facilitators.) 55 individuals completed the survey. Of these, 39 were from Montpelier and didn't attend the Forum. There were 235, 224, and 158 responses respectively per question.

### **Summary of all values that emerged from Forum #1 and the associated survey:**

- Keep Montpelier affordable for all
- Focus on improving and maintaining our infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, bridges)
- Maintain our current level of public safety service (police and fire)
- Maintain our current Parks and open spaces and create new spaces where possible
- Focus on housing development (all levels)
- Focus on housing development (affordable)
- Focus on business and economic development
- Maintain and enhance our current community services (Senior Services, Recreation)
- Focus on services for vulnerable populations
- Protect our natural resources (quality water, river access)
- Ensure that our downtown is beautiful and vibrant
- Maintain focus on Net Zero Montpelier
- Complete current projects (1 Taylor, bike paths)
- Enhance our stormwater mitigation
- Enhance our tourism efforts and marketing
- Keep our neighborhoods protected and the size they are now
- Be an inclusive, civically engaged community

### **Summary of all budget ideas that emerged from Forum #1 and the associated survey:**

Reductions

- Reduce City staff
  - City Hall (Clerk's Office, Assistant City Manager, Planning Department)
  - Fire Department
  - Police Department
- Increase regionalization

- Find more efficiencies in City services
- Focus on energy efficiency improvements
- Reduce City budget by 5%
- Reduce City budget by 10%
- Focus on core services (public safety, public works) and get rid of the fluff

#### New Revenues

- Implement a local options tax
- Develop new housing
- Increase fees for non-residents
- Increase parking fees
- Raise property taxes to maintain current services
- Focus on business growth and economic development
- Give residents the opportunity to “contribute” to key priorities

## Analysis – Forum #2

Participants and survey respondents were asked to prioritize their top 3 values and top 3 budget ideas from the above lists. Additionally, at the forum, a few other ideas were added (indicated by “ADD” below.) 26 people attended the Forum (not counting staff or facilitators.) 134 individuals completed the survey. Of these, 116 were from Montpelier and didn’t attend the second Forum.

Top 3 values that are crucial to consider in building budgets for the future:

Values	Total	% indicated this was a top 3 priority
Keep Montpelier affordable for all	72	51%
Focus on improving and maintaining our infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, bridges)	65	46%
Focus on housing development (all levels) as a long term way to grow municipal revenue	55	39%
Focus on business and economic development as a long term way to grow municipal revenue	50	35%
Maintain our current level of public safety service (police and fire)	27	19%
Ensure that our downtown (ADD: and neighborhoods) is beautiful and vibrant	25	18%
Focus on housing development (affordable) as a long term way to grow municipal revenue	20	14%
Protect our natural resources (quality water, river access)	19	13%

Values	Total	% indicated this was a top 3 priority
Maintain and enhance our current community services (Senior Services, Recreation)	17	12%
Maintain focus on Net Zero Montpelier	12	8%
Complete current projects (1 Taylor, bike paths)	12	8%
Be an inclusive, civically engaged community (ADD: With increased voter turnout)	12	8%
Enhance our tourism efforts and marketing	10	7%
Maintain our current Parks and open spaces (ADD: and waterfront) and create new spaces where possible	9	6%
Focus on services for vulnerable populations	9	6%
Keep our neighborhoods protected and the size they are now	9	6%
Enhance our stormwater mitigation	3	2%
ADD: Promote the arts	2	1%
ADD: Need larger spaces (2,000 ft and handicapped accessible)	1	1%
ADD: Make our community a community that attracts younger people	1	1%

Top 3 ideas for reducing spending or increasing revenue that should be implemented with future budgets:

Budget Ideas	Total	% indicated this was a top 3 priority
Implement a local option rooms, meals, and alcohol tax	59	42%
Increase regionalization	46	32%
Reduce City staff (City Hall, Police, Fire)	42	30%
Focus on business growth and economic development (long term solution) ADD: Explore land-based taxation	39	27%
Focus on core services (public safety, public works) and get rid of the fluff	36	25%
Implement a vacant housing/apartment/storefront penalty	31	22%
Implement a local option sales tax	29	20%
Develop new housing (long term solution)	28	20%
Reduce City budget by 10%	24	17%

<b>Budget Ideas</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% indicated this was a top 3 priority</b>
Focus on energy efficiency improvements	21	15%
Increase fees for non-residents	17	12%
Temporarily freeze on City employee salary increases	15	11%
Reduce City budget by 5%	15	11%
Increase parking fees	6	4%
Raise property taxes to maintain current services	6	4%
Give residents the opportunity to donate to key priorities	5	4%
ADD: Identify efficiencies to cut costs	3	2%
ADD: Enhance marketing for business, tourism, residents (long term solution)	2	1%
ADD: Hiring freeze	0	0%