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Introduction

From October 4th to November 15th, 2021, the City of Prince George used a budget simulation exercise called Citizen Budget for their 2022 budget consultation, as part of updating its Five-Year Financial Plan, in accordance with the Community Charter. This plan includes budgets for operating and capital expenditures for all departments within the municipality.

The aim was to gather public input to identify priorities for city spending and ideas for how Prince George can deliver a balanced budget, as mandated for municipal governments by provincial legislation while maintaining (and enhancing) services most important to citizens.

Participants were tasked with increasing, decreasing or maintaining their property tax funding for different budget categories, while staying within a balanced budget, in the same way, that a city official would. Participants also voted on a sliding scale how important or unimportant each service was to them.

Ethelo used the results to generate a particular set of funding changes that are predicted to have the most community support. This report explores the engagement process and results.
Overview

Participation

Over the 4 weeks that the engagement was live, the online platform garnered...

- 1,710 PAGE VIEWS
- 552 UNIQUE LOCAL PARTICIPANTS*
- 517 COMPLETIONS (≥ ⅓ OF QUESTIONS COMPLETED)
- 30% COMPLETION RATE
- 335 COMMENTS

*All participants were authenticated following the closure of the engagement based on their IP address, device ID, and voting patterns, to ensure respondents were local and singular in their votes. 90 participants were removed, 7 of which were staff and, 35 of which shared one IP address (potentially shared internet).
CONSENSUS
Consensus (Ethelo score) is a measure of the overall strength of the decision, considering both support (higher is better) and conflict (lower is better).

SUPPORT
Support is the average value of the votes, where the value of a totally opposing vote is 0 and a totally supportive vote is 100.

CONFLICT
Conflict is a measure of the level of disagreement in a group. Higher conflict scores represent internal resistance and risk of failure.

APPROVAL
Approval is the percentage of people who gave a positive vote rather than a neutral or negative vote. Approval above 50% is a traditional "majority".
Below is the budget breakdown that would be most widely supported by participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE AREA</th>
<th>SENTIMENT</th>
<th>APPROVAL</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Services</td>
<td>5% increase</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Protection</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bylaw Enforcement</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow &amp; Ice Control</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads &amp; Sidewalks</td>
<td>5% increase</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transit</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation &amp; Community Services</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks, Trails, &amp; Beautification</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracting &amp; Retaining Business, Facilitating Development</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Planning &amp; Infrastructure</td>
<td>Keep the same</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Services</td>
<td>5% decrease</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This scenario would be most widely supported by participants. The algorithm analyzed more than 50,000 budget design scenarios to identify this plan.

**INCREASE BUDGET/TAX TOTAL BY 0.58%**

| CONSENSUS  | ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆ | SUPPORT     | ★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆ | CONFLICT    | ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆ | APPROVAL    | ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆ |
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Police Services?

BEST SCENARIO: 5% INCREASE

VOTE DISTRIBUTION

- Decrease 15%: 52 (10.0%)
- Decrease 10%: 32 (6.1%)
- Decrease 5%: 41 (7.9%)
- Keep the Same: 181 (34.7%)
- Increase 5%: 102 (19.5%)
- Increase 10%: 55 (10.5%)
- Increase 15%: 59 (11.3%)

Option suggested in best scenario. (The best scenario usually cannot contain all most popular budget choices due to constraints.)
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Fire Protection?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

**VOTE DISTRIBUTION**

- Decrease 15%: 25 (5.1%)
- Decrease 10%: 34 (6.9%)
- Decrease 5%: 52 (10.6%)
- Keep the Same: 287 (58.5%)
- Increase 5%: 61 (12.4%)
- Increase 10%: 8 (1.6%)
- Increase 15%: 24 (4.9%)

*n=491*
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Bylaw Enforcement?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

- **CONSENSUS**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **SUPPORT**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **CONFLICT**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **APPROVAL**: ★★★★★★★★★★

**VOTE DISTRIBUTION**

- Decrease 15%: 68 (13.5%)
- Decrease 10%: 54 (10.7%)
- Decrease 5%: 80 (15.8%)
- Keep the Same: 171 (33.9%)
- Increase 5%: 78 (15.4%)
- Increase 10%: 26 (5.1%)
- Increase 15%: 28 (5.5%)

n=505

★ Option suggested in Best Scenario
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Snow and Ice Control?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

- **CONSSENSUS** ★★★★★★★★★ ★★★★
- **SUPPORT** ★★★★★★★★★ ★★★★
- **CONFLICT** ★★★★★★★★★ ★★★★
- **APPROVAL** ★★★★★★★★★ ★★★★

**VOTE DISTRIBUTION**

- Decrease 15%: 17 (3.4%)
- Decrease 10%: 20 (4.0%)
- Decrease 5%: 49 (9.7%)
- Keep the Same: 220 (43.6%)
- Increase 5%: 128 (25.3%)
- Increase 10%: 42 (8.3%)
- Increase 15%: 29 (5.7%)

**n=505**

Option suggested in Best Scenario
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Roads and Sidewalks?

**BEST SCENARIO: 5% INCREASE**

- **CONSSENSUS**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **SUPPORT**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **CONFLICT**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **APPROVAL**: ★★★★★★★★★★

---

**VOTE DISTRIBUTION**

- **Decrease 15%**: 15 (3.0%)
- **Decrease 10%**: 19 (3.8%)
- **Decrease 5%**: 39 (7.8%)
- **Keep the Same**: 196 (39.4%)
- **Increase 5%**: 135 (27.2%)
- **Increase 10%**: 44 (8.9%)
- **Increase 15%**: 49 (9.9%)

- **n=497**

★ Option suggested in best scenario. (The best scenario usually cannot contain all most popular budget choices due to constraints.)
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Public Transit?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>(% of Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase 15%</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 15%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 10%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 5%</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the Same</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 10%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 5%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Option suggested in Best Scenario*
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Recreation and Community Facilities?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

- **CONSSENSUS**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **SUPPORT**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **CONFLICT**: ★★★★★★★★★★
- **APPROVAL**: ★★★★★★★★★★

**VOTE DISTRIBUTION**

- Decrease 15%: 43 (8.6%)
- Decrease 10%: 43 (8.6%)
- Decrease 5%: 103 (20.6%)
- Keep the Same: 184 (36.9%)
- Increase 5%: 68 (13.6%)
- Increase 10%: 27 (5.4%)
- Increase 15%: 31 (6.2%)

n=499

* Option suggested in Best Scenario
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Parks, Trails, and Beautification?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 15%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 10%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 5%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the Same</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 5%</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 10%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 15%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=503* Option suggested in Best Scenario
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Community Support services?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 15%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 10%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 5%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the Same</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 5%</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 10%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 15%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Option suggested in Best Scenario*
Voting Results

Attracting & Retaining Business, and Facilitating Development

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for attracting/retaining business and facilitating development?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 15%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 10%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 5%</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the Same</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 5%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 10%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 15%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=503

Option suggested in Best Scenario
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Community Planning and Infrastructure?

**BEST SCENARIO: KEEP THE SAME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 15%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 10%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease 5%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the Same</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 5%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 10%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase 15%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Option suggested in Best Scenario*
Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Corporate Services?

BEST SCENARIO: 5% DECREASE

VOTING DISTRIBUTION

- Decrease 15%: 117 (23.4%)
- Decrease 10%: 121 (24.2%)
- Decrease 5%: 139 (27.9%)
- Keep the Same: 107 (21.4%)
- Increase 5%: 12 (2.4%)
- Increase 10%: 1 (0.2%)
- Increase 15%: 2 (0.4%)

*Option suggested in Best Scenario*

VOTING RESULTS

Corporate Services

- Consensus: ★★★★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Support: ★★★★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Conflict: ★★★★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
- Approval: ★★★★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
Importance of Services

On a scale from 1 to 100, how important are these services to you?

- Police Services: 65.5
- Fire Protection Services: 64.7
- Snow and Ice Control: 64.3
- Roads and Sidewalks: 62.9
- Parks, Trails, and Beautification: 56.1
- Recreation and Community Services: 51.6
- Community Planning and Infrastructure: 50.2
- Community Support services: 46.9
- Bylaw Enforcement Services: 46.5
- Attracting & Retaining Business, and Facilitating Development: 44.1
- Corporate Services: 34.0
Voting Results: Satisfaction
Satisfaction with Services

On a scale from 1 to 100, how do you rate the City’s performance in providing these services?

- Fire Protection: 72.9
- Parks, Trails, & Beautification: 58.9
- Snow & Ice Control: 57.6
- Police Services: 54.7
- Recreation & Community Services: 52.8
- Roads & Sidewalks: 49.3
- Public Transit: 47.6
- Community Support Services: 47.4
- Attracting & Retaining Business, Facilitating Development: 43.4
- Corporate Services: 43.3
- Bylaw Enforcement Services: 42.5
- Community Planning & Infrastructure: 36.9
Voting Results: Infrastructure Investment
Please indicate the category(ies) of infrastructure that you feel should be the City’s highest priority(ies) for investment.

- Roads: 358 (74.4%)
- Stormwater drainage: 268 (55.7%)
- Sidewalks: 249 (51.8%)
- Nature parks and trails: 200 (41.6%)
- Energy – heat and electricity: 169 (35.1%)
- Playgrounds: 109 (22.7%)
- Outdoor recreation facilities: 108 (22.5%)
- Pools: 80 (16.6%)
- Performing Arts: 79 (16.4%)
- Arenas: 69 (14.3%)

n=481
Participants
How did you hear about this survey?

- From the news media: 180 (37.0%)
- From a social media post by a friend/business/organization I follow: 109 (22.4%)
- From one of the City's social media channels: 89 (18.3%)
- From a friend: 53 (10.9%)
- From the City's website: 43 (8.8%)
- I received an email from the City inviting me to participate: 30 (6.2%)
- From a City Council meeting or from a Councillor: 10 (2.1%)

n=486
How long have you been living in Prince George?

- **Less than 1 year:** 8 (1.6%)
- **1-2 years:** 15 (3.0%)
- **3-5 years:** 42 (8.4%)
- **6-10 years:** 69 (13.9%)
- **More than 10 years:** 364 (73.1%)
"Maintaining and enhancing the spaces and services that make Prince George an attractive and desirable place to live - including maximizing the quantity and quality of green space available to ALL residents, and ensuring adequate access to these spaces and services. Looking to the future by way of being proactive and responsible in developing, enhancing, promoting and leading in local renewable energy solutions to do at least our fair part in addressing the global climate crisis."

"Increasing supports and services for the homeless, dealing with the tent city and downtown safety. Increase training, specifically cultural competency, for all public service employees that deal with those that are houseless, have addictions or mental health issues. Work with the Province and Federal Government on a mental health strategy."

"Environmental services. It is a huge liability for a city not to have environmental services that manage the city's environmental liabilities."

"Whatever budget is established, the main objective of the city should be to stay within that budget."
What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?

Method
Comments are coded by tone and type.

Breakdown by tone
- Positive: 28.4%
- Neutral: 24.9%
- Negative: 46.7%
What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?

Sample comments coded as positive:

"Please consider creating a sidewalk that continues from foothills blvd to the hart highway similar to college heights, there is currently no sidewalk to the hart and would love to see a walking trail from the north nechako up"

"The city should focus on implementing progressive solutions to combat the homelessness problem downtown. Putting money into solutions that "treat the disease, not the symptoms" is what PG should be aiming at. Implementing programs and infrastructure today that take people off the streets could help reduce the budget for the police force over the next five years. A clean downtown would be a great opportunity to bring in more businesses and improve the desirability to live in PG which would benefit everyone."

"Outdoor parks and activities, Throughout covid indoor venues, have not been able to be used yet still cost money to run and staff. Outdoor parks are safe to use and have minimal upkeep compared to buildings."
What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?

Sample comments coded as neutral:

"How will the mayor and council plan to rectify the situation of overspending on the pool and firehall? How will they assist the homeless?"

"Keeping within the budget"

"How to cut the size, scope and role of government in our lives?"
What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?

Sample comments coded as negative:

"Cutbacks on wages on upper management and stop the insane spending on useless things. Needs major budgeting and stop increasing taxes"

"the snow control in this city is absolutely terrible. There is a disconnect between the amount we spend on snow control and with what we get out of it. The alley behind my house gets cleared before the road does. I do not understand how we spend so much and get so little. That whole system and budget needs to be revisited."

"We need more enforcement, much more police. Our downtown is a mess and we need police and services to help clean it up. It's the only way to attract and keep businesses downtown. Crime is rampant throughout PG and beside the tent encampment."
Sentiment Analysis

What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?

**Breakdown by type**
- Policy recommendation: 63.7%
- Value judgment: 14.5%
- General: 9.8%
- Observation: 7.8%
- Question: 4.1%

**Sample Question:**
What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?
What do you feel are key topics the City should consider as it establishes its 2022 budget?

Breakdown by topic (top ten most mentioned):

- Government efficiency concerns: 41 (24.1%)
- Homelessness crisis: 35 (20.6%)
- Funding for the arts: 25 (14.7%)
- General safety: 20 (11.8%)
- Crime concerns: 18 (10.6%)
- Fixing & maintaining roads: 17 (10.0%)
- Increasing police services: 15 (8.8%)
- Holding council & staff accountable: 13 (7.6%)
- Sidewalk issues: 13 (7.6%)
- Snow removal: 12 (7.1%)

n=170
How high would you rate this process, on a scale of 1 - 10? (1=awful, 10=excellent)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=196
Friend Referral

Would you refer this process to a friend?

- Yes: 78.7%
- No: 21.3%

Why?

- "All of residences should have a say on where our money is spent"
- "It's important for the citizen's voices to be heard"
- "Easy, quick survey. Allows me to share my opinions without having to go to a council meeting or compose a letter."

Why not?

- "I believe that council and staff will not use this information."
- "I think it's a narrow and simplistic view of how to address a budget but it seems to be the only way to have input."
Would you support the collective budget outcome that is described on the group results page?

Yes 58.3%

No 41.7%
Would you be more likely to support a government decision if you knew it was based on the results of a process like this?

- Yes: 77.4%
- No: 22.6%
Would you like to see Ethelo be used for other processes in your community?

- Yes: 79.4%
- No: 20.6%
Did you learn anything new by participating in this process?

- Yes: 42.3%
- No: 57.7%
Feedback

Where can it improve?

What were some of the weak points of the process, which the organizers could improve to make it better for next time?

"Things were lumped together in ways that did not make sense. I.e I would like to see more funding for sidewalks and libraries, but not the things they were grouped with. Also, more funding for police is vague. I would like to see more foot patrols, not just a blanket budget increase. Same with corporate services, some things could use more support, but the city does NOT need all of their catered lunches!"  

"I'm not sure I agreed with the groupings, things were oversimplified. Specific areas should have been separated."  

"Provide more room for insight into the topics. For example, I view Police as very important but I do not want their budget to increase. Why? they are clearly very important for a safe community but they are not able to put many criminals away so why would we need more?"  

"Define what is covered in the different processes. (Roads and sidewalks - is this repaving, adding new ones, etc)"

"It was too vague. Would a 15% increase in police mean for downtown foot patrols or just higher salaries?"

"It's a good start, but more information needs to be provided for people to make an informed choice. Show us what a +5% increase to parks would mean. Tell us what we lose if we reduce community services by 10%."
What did you like?

Are there any aspects of the process that you liked, that you'd like us to keep and perhaps expand upon?

"We really have to solve the Homelessness problem"  8

"We get to tell city council how they have wasted taxpayers' money on pools and parkades/condos while turning downtown into a crime infested wasteland."  8

"Clean up downtown Get a hold on crime."  6

"We've been dealing with the crime downtown in non-punitive way for decades. It hasn't worked!"  5

"Being able to inform the city as many seem out of touch to the crime and safety issues facing citizens."  5

"The basic process is excellent. Identifying preferred areas for infrastructure spending is good."  4

"I just hope the council reads these comments and actually listens to the people."  4

"I like selecting the parts most important to me."  3

"I like the transparency of seeing actual budget dollars allocated to service areas."  3

"This process of seeking public input is itself a powerful tool and it can help thoughtful people understand and appreciate the realities of preparing a complicated budget such as the city’s."  2
Final Comments

Any final thoughts or feedback? We'd love to hear it!

"The city needs to get back to basics. We have a gold plated pool being built in a downtown people are scared to walk in! Less glitter and a lot more elbow grease is needed."  16

"This city has a long way to go, unfortunately during covid it has regressed. Waste at city hall is legendary, and we spend far too much time catering to developers that don't live within city limits anyway! We need to focus on the residents of PG, not the residents of who choose to live out of town for less taxes."  11

"The city should find some way, any way, to keep the patios downtown and encourage more. We need people downtown to make it safe."  10

"We have to solve the Homelessness problem. Many have to learn to engage in discussions without being obnoxious or rude. If you don't maintain good roads, sidewalks and underground sewers pipes etc.....there will always be a problem to fix. Band aiding the problem is only temporary and it is costly to do over, over and over again."  10

"Be transparent with every dollar"  4
Thank you!