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*Public Opinion Research
& Strategy*

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City of Alameda

FROM: Curtis Below, Dave Metz & Miranda Everitt
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RE: Summary Results from a Recent City of Alameda Survey

DATE: February 13, 2016

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed 600 telephone interviews with registered City of Alameda voters likely to participate in the November 2016 election to assess their views on life in Alameda, Alameda City government, and several potential ballot measures (a ½ cent general purpose sales tax measure, a utility users tax modernization, and a 25 dollar annual parcel tax dedicated to City parks).¹

The survey results found that while California’s drought and the cost of housing are among voters’ top concerns, most feel good about life in Alameda and where it is headed in the future. Furthermore, most voters appear to be largely satisfied with City services – particularly public safety and parks facilities – though opinions are more mixed about street maintenance.

Voters also appear to be generally inclined to support a ½ cent general purpose sales tax measure – one that has a 50 percent plus one vote threshold – with 63 percent indicating they would vote “yes” on such a measure. Support for a utility users tax (UUT) modernization measure – also a majority vote threshold measure – appears more tentative, with 52 percent initially indicating they would vote “yes” on such a measure and 23 percent undecided. However, support for a UUT modernization measure increases to 68 percent after background information is provided. Voters appears less inclined to support a 25 dollar parks parcel tax measure at this time. Such a measure has a two-thirds vote threshold and only 49 percent of voters participating in this survey indicated they would vote “yes” on a parks parcel tax.

Key specific findings from the survey include the following:

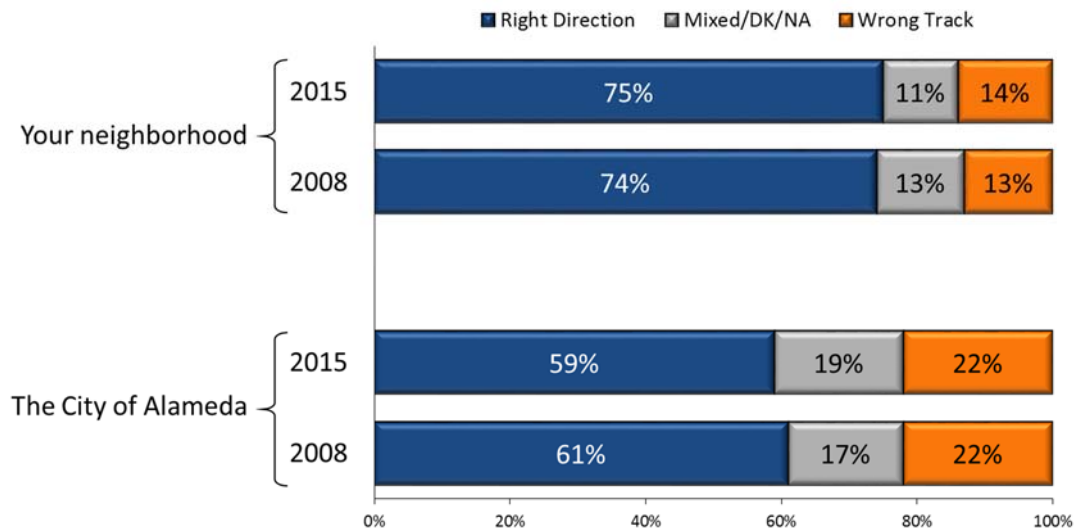
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- Voters are optimistic about the City, and even more so about their own neighborhoods.** Survey respondents were asked if they felt things in the City and the own neighborhoods were, “generally headed in the right direction” or “pretty seriously off on the wrong track.” As shown in **Figure 1**, solid majorities expressed positive sentiments about both the overall City and their own neighborhoods, perceptions that were nearly identical to those measured in a past 2008 survey. However, voters appear more optimistic about their own neighborhoods (75% “right direction”) than the overall City (59% “right direction”).

FIGURE 1:
General Impressions of Life in Alameda

Would you say that things in _____ are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?



- California’s drought and the cost of housing are seen as two of the most pressing issues facing Alameda.** Survey respondents were presented with a number of potential problems facing the City and asked to indicate how serious of a problem they felt each to be. Two issues stood out with roughly seven in ten indicating they were “extremely” or “very” serious problems – California’s drought (72%) and the cost of housing (69%) (**Figure 2** on the following page). Traffic congestion followed at nearly 50 percent (47%), while all of the other issues garnered more intense reactions from less than two in five voters.

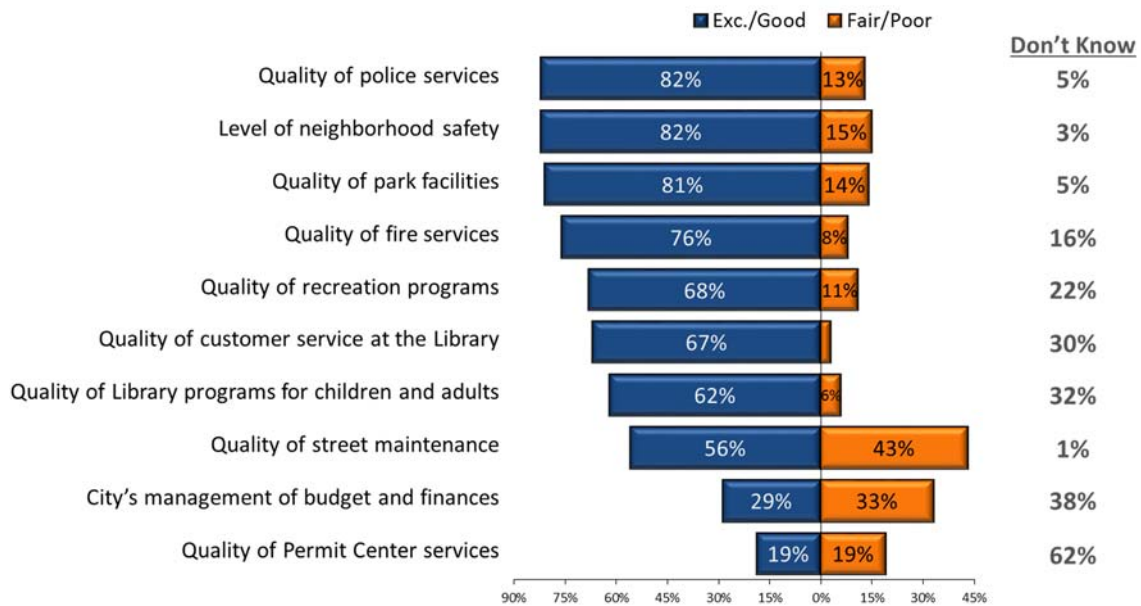
**FIGURE 2:
Seriousness of Perceived Problems Facing Alameda**

Problem	Extremely/Very Serious Problem (%)
Current drought conditions in California	72%
The cost of housing	69%
Traffic and congestion on local streets and roads	47%
Too much growth and development	38%
A lack of parking in commercial districts	24%
Waste and inefficiency in local government	18%
The amount people pay in City taxes	15%
A lack of parks and open space	11%
Gangs and youth violence	10%
Crime	9%
The condition of the local economy	8%

Concerns about crime, government waste, City taxes, and the local economy were all seen as less pressing than when last assessed in 2008. The only issues also tested in 2008 that appear to concern voters more now were the cost of housing and traffic congestion.

- Voters appear satisfied with most City services, particularly public safety and park facilities.** A number of specific services – most of which align with the City’s officially adopted performance metrics – were presented to survey respondents, and they were asked to indicate whether they think the City is doing an “excellent, good, only fair, or poor job in providing that service.” Nearly all of the services presented were viewed as “excellent” or “good” by majorities of voters, with more than three-quarters saying as much for police services, neighborhood safety, park facilities and fire services (**Figure 3** on the following page). Only the quality of street maintenance generated significant numbers of respondents (43%) indicating they felt the service was “only fair” or “poor” (31% “only fair” and 11% “poor”). A plurality (33%) felt similarly ambivalent about the City’s financial management (23% “only fair” and 10% “poor”), though nearly two in five (38%) were unsure. A majority (62%) were unfamiliar with the City’s Permit Center.

**FIGURE 3:
Perceptions of Specific City Services**

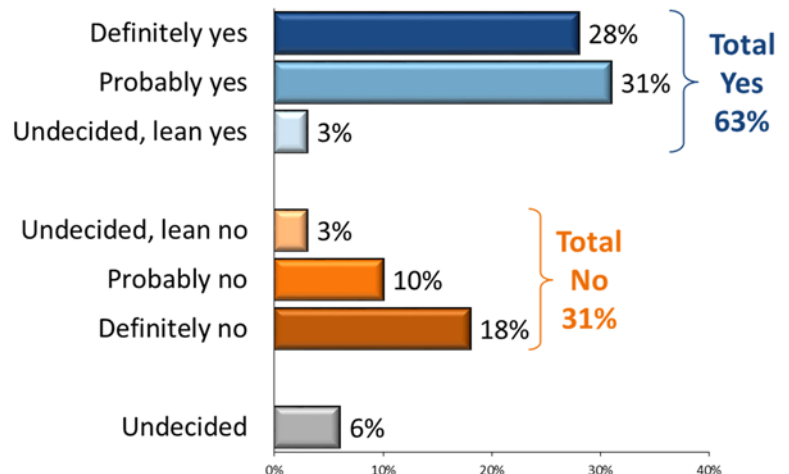


- More than three in five voters appear willing to support a ½ cent general purpose sales tax measure.** Half of the survey respondents were presented with a hypothetical 75-word ballot question establishing a ½ cent general purpose sales tax for 15 years. Those indicating they would vote “yes” on such a measure were the election held today outnumbered those indicating they would vote “no” by a two-to-one ratio – 63 to 31 percent – with only six percent undecided (**Figure 4**). After hearing a number of arguments both in favor of and in opposition to the measure, overall support changed little at 61 percent “yes” and 35 percent “no.”

**FIGURE 4:
Reactions to a Potential ½ Cent General Purpose Sales Tax Measure**

City of Alameda Essential City Services Measure

To maintain Alameda’s financial stability and to fund essential City services such as police response to violent crimes, burglaries, and other safety needs; 911 emergency medical and fire response; pothole, street and storm drain repairs; neighborhood park maintenance; and other City services, shall the City of Alameda enact a ½ cent sales tax for 15 years, providing about \$3.6 million annually, requiring independent audits, public review of spending, and all revenues controlled locally?

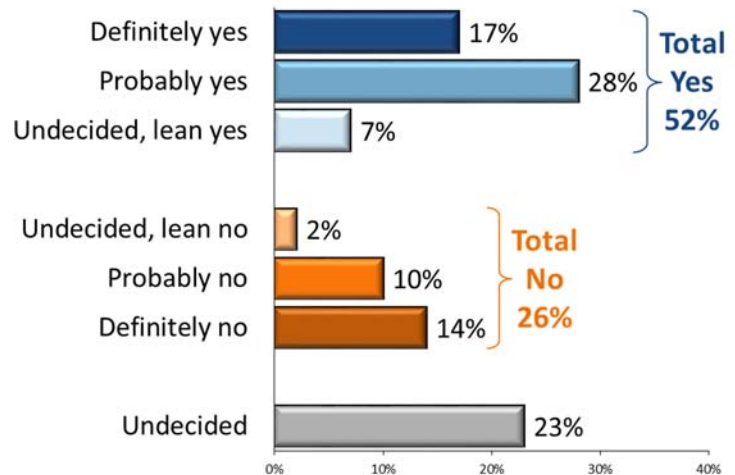


- A slim majority of appears willing to support a UUT modernization measure, with many undecided.** The other half of the survey respondents were presented with a hypothetical 75-word ballot question modernizing the City’s existing UUT to treat taxpayers equally regardless of communications technology used without increasing tax rates. Interestingly, support for such a measure was more tempered than support for a ½ cent general purpose sales tax measure. As shown in **Figure 5**, 52 percent indicated they would vote “yes” on a UUT modernization measure, and one-quarter (26%) indicated they would vote “no.” Notably, nearly one-quarter (23%) said they were undecided, suggesting that this topic area is unfamiliar to many voters.

**FIGURE 5:
Reactions to a Potential Utility Users Tax Modernization Measure**

City of Alameda Utility Users Tax Modernization and Essential City Services Protection Measure.

To maintain financial stability without increasing tax rates and fund City services such as police protection; 911 emergency/fire response; pothole/street/storm drain repairs; neighborhood park maintenance; and other City services, shall the City of Alameda modernize its existing utility users tax to treat taxpayers equally regardless of communications technology used, with senior/low-income exemptions, independent audits, public spending review, and locally controlled revenues?



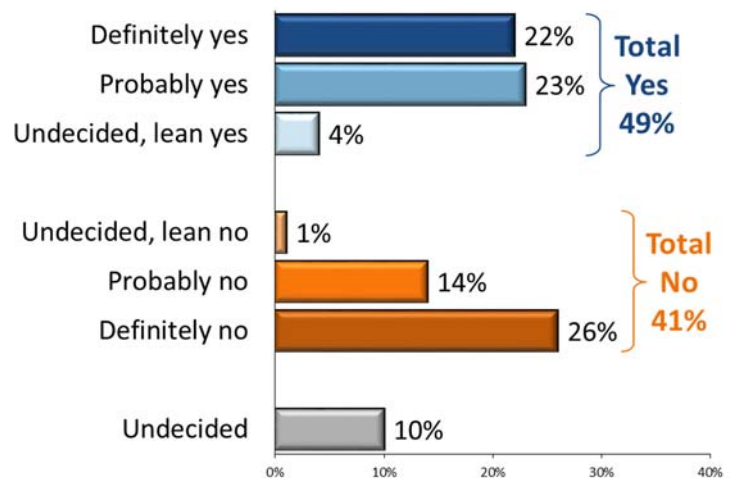
Anticipating this level of confusion, survey respondents were provided additional background information about the history of Alameda’s UUT, how it has been impacted by the adoption of new technologies, and how this measure would propose to address this issue. After hearing this explanation, support increased notably to 68 percent “yes” and only 22 percent “no,” though this support was still someone tentative (25% “definitely yes”). After hearing a number arguments both in favor of and in opposition to the measure, overall support settled in at 64 percent “yes” and 27 percent “no.”

- **Slightly less than one-half of voters expressed support for 25 dollar parks parcel tax measure.** All survey respondents were presented with a hypothetical 75-word ballot question establishing an annual 25 dollar parcel tax benefiting the City’s parks. While a plurality (49%) indicated they would vote “yes” for such a measure, nearly as many (41%) indicated they would vote “no” (10% were undecided) (**Figure 6**). Notably more indicated they would “definitely” vote “no” (26%) than “definitely” vote “yes” (22%).

FIGURE 6:
Reactions to a Potential \$25 Annual Parks Parcel Tax Measure

City of Alameda Park Improvement Measure.

To maintain community and neighborhood parks throughout Alameda by repairing aging/deteriorating playgrounds, athletic fields and recreation facilities; repairing/providing clean restrooms; improving park pathways/safety lighting; opening and maintaining new parks, like the Jean Sweeney Open Space Park; ensuring parks are well-maintained and available to the entire community, including youth and seniors, shall the City of Alameda establish a \$25 per parcel tax, providing about \$500,000 annually, requiring independent audit and public review of spending?



Taken together, these results suggest that Alameda voters are generally satisfied with life in the City and City government, though they harbor pointed concerns about the drought and the cost of housing, and would like to see improvements made to street maintenance. Both a ½ cent general purpose sales tax measure and a UUT modernization measure appear potentially viable, though a UUT measure would require far more public education as it is an unfamiliar and complicated subject matter. However, voters do not appear inclined to support a parks parcel tax to repair and improve parks at this time, though they strong feelings about the high quality of City parks suggests they may be more receptive to a measure focusing exclusively on park maintenance.

ⁱ **Methodology:** Form December 9-14, 2015, FM3 completed 600 telephone interviews (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2016 voters in the City of Alameda. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/-4.0% at the 95% confidence level, and +/-5.7% for half of the sample; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.