



# City of Willows Survey Results

*Key Findings from a Survey  
Conducted January 21-February 21, 2022*



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY









# Introductions of Subject Matter Experts

- The Lew Edwards Group is an Engagement and Communications expert that specializes in assisting public agencies with community conversations and fiscal sustainability approaches
  - *Catherine Lew*, Co-Founder and Principal Consultant at LEG, has over thirty years of expertise advising nonprofits, public agencies, special districts and educational institutions
- FM3 Research is a firm that conducts as many as 500 public opinion surveys and 160 focus groups annually to provide strategic insights and advice to its clients on policy and customer satisfaction.
  - *Curtis Below*, Chief Operating Officer and Partner at FM3, has over 15 years of experience advising government agencies, nonprofits, and business entities locally and statewide.

# Project Objectives

- To conduct an objective, statistically valid community survey of Willows residents in a post-COVID environment.
- ✓ Nearly 300 respondents completed the study, an outstanding number for a community the size of Willows.
- Understand the local community's COVID needs.
- Evaluate the local community's customer satisfaction and service priorities during these challenging times.
- Assess community's perspectives on budgeting, fiscal management and fiscal approaches.
- Report back to the City Council and public on perspectives and engagement approaches moving forward.

# Survey Methodology

Dates	January 18-February 21, 2022
Survey Type	Multi-modal Voter Survey
Research Population	Registered Voters in Willows
Total Interviews	298
Margin of Sampling Error	±5.7% at the 95% Confidence Level
Contact Methods	 Telephone Calls  Email Invitations  Text Invitations  Postcard Invitations
Data Collection Modes	 Telephone Interviews  Online Interviews

*(Note: Not All Results Will Sum to 100% Due to Rounding)*

# Interview Collection

- Email invitations and reminders were sent to everyone in the sample with a valid email address, in waves of approximately 1,000 at a time between 1/18 and 2/16.
- Postcards were mailed to the full sample on 1/21.
- Those with a cell or landline number received 7 to 8 phone calls at different days and times between 1/27 and 2/5.
- FM3 provided personal, technical assistance to more than 30 survey respondents to ensure they could access and complete the survey
- With the assistance of our team, the City created a Facebook post to advise residents that the survey was being conducted.

*This variety and volume of attempted contacts is unique in our research and led to a very high response rate. As a point of comparison, statewide surveys to represent the opinions of 30 million California voters often have sample sizes of 600 – only twice as large as what we obtained in Willows for a population a small fraction of that size.*

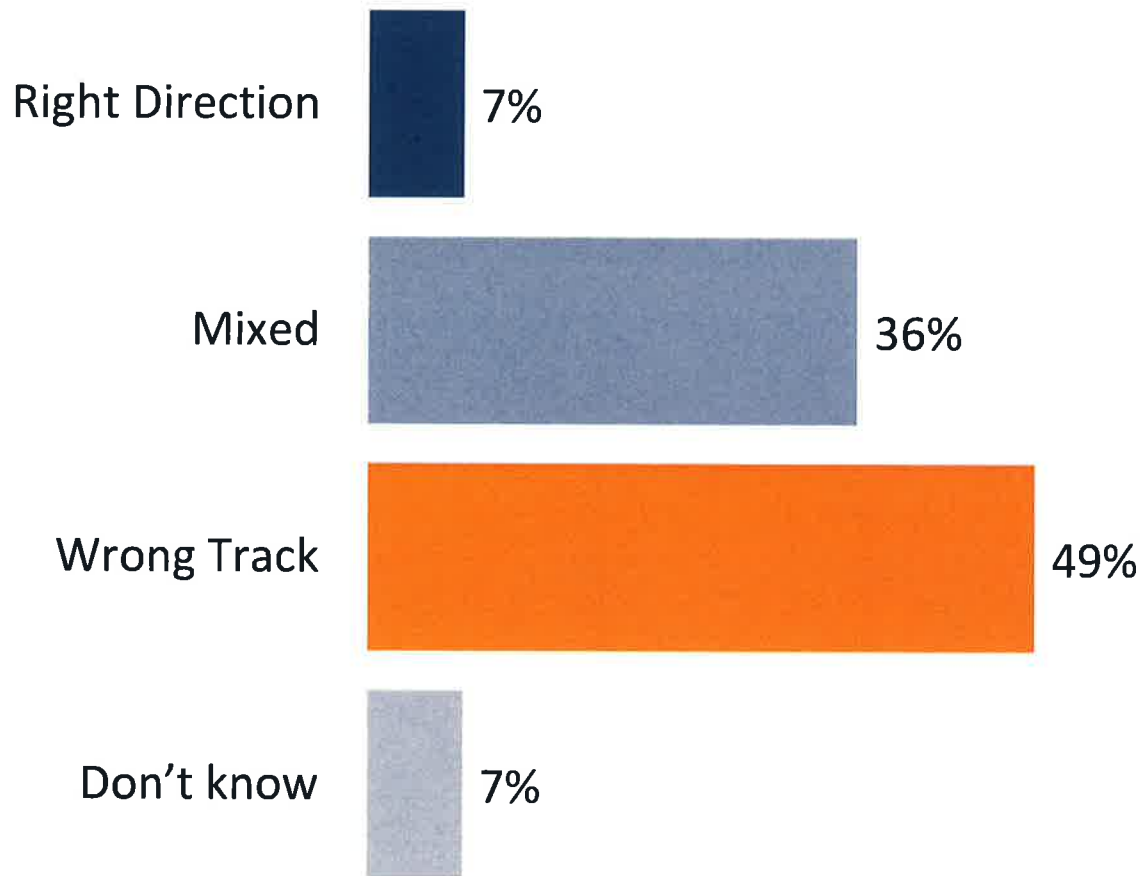


# **Views of Life in Willows**



# While nearly half of survey respondents feel misgivings about the City's future...

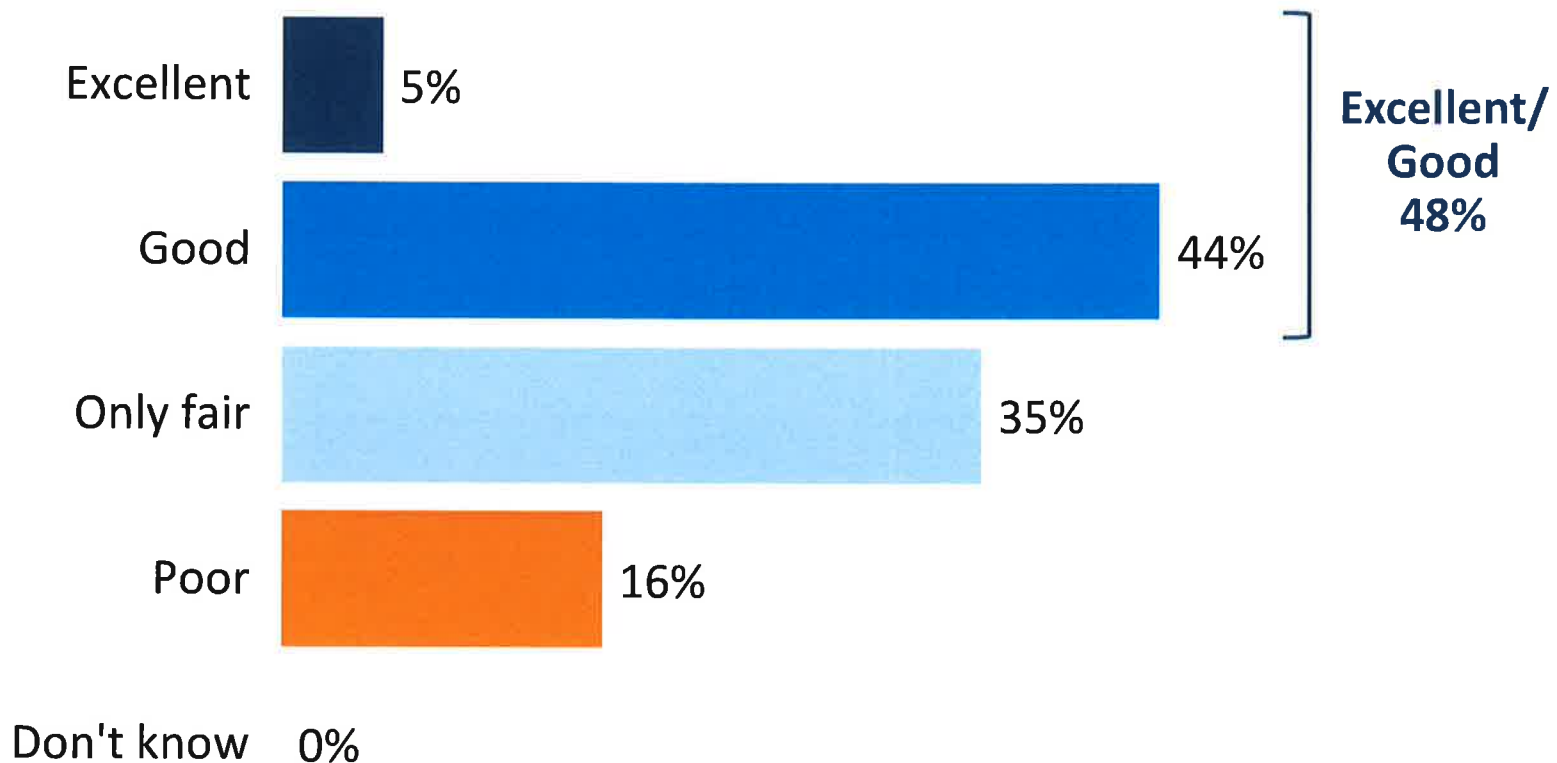
*Would you say that things in the City of Willows are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?*



**This is not unique to Willows – cities across the U.S. and especially in the West have seen increasing shares of voters express pessimism on this question, driven by economic uncertainty, inflation, the pandemic and many other anxieties.**

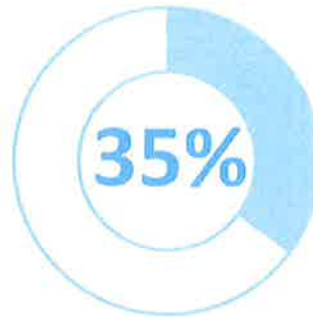
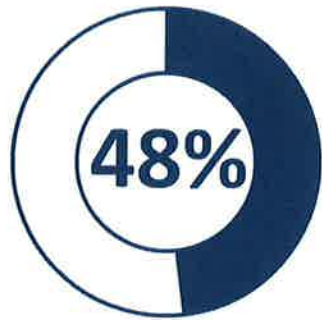
# ...nearly half also rated Willows an "excellent" or "good" place to live.

*Generally speaking, how would you rate Willows as a place to live: is it an excellent place to live, a good place, only fair, or a poor place to live?*





# Older respondents were more likely to rate quality of life highly than younger ones.



**Excellent/Good**

**Only Fair**

**Poor**

Democratic Men

Liberal/Moderate Independents

Ages 40-49

Men Ages 55+

Republicans Ages 18-54

Women Ages 18-54

Independents Ages 55+

Moderates

Democratic Women

Republicans Ages 55+

Ages 18-39

Conservative Independents

Ages 55+

Four-year College Graduates

Independents Ages 18-54

Conservative Independents

High School Educated

Independent Women

Liberals

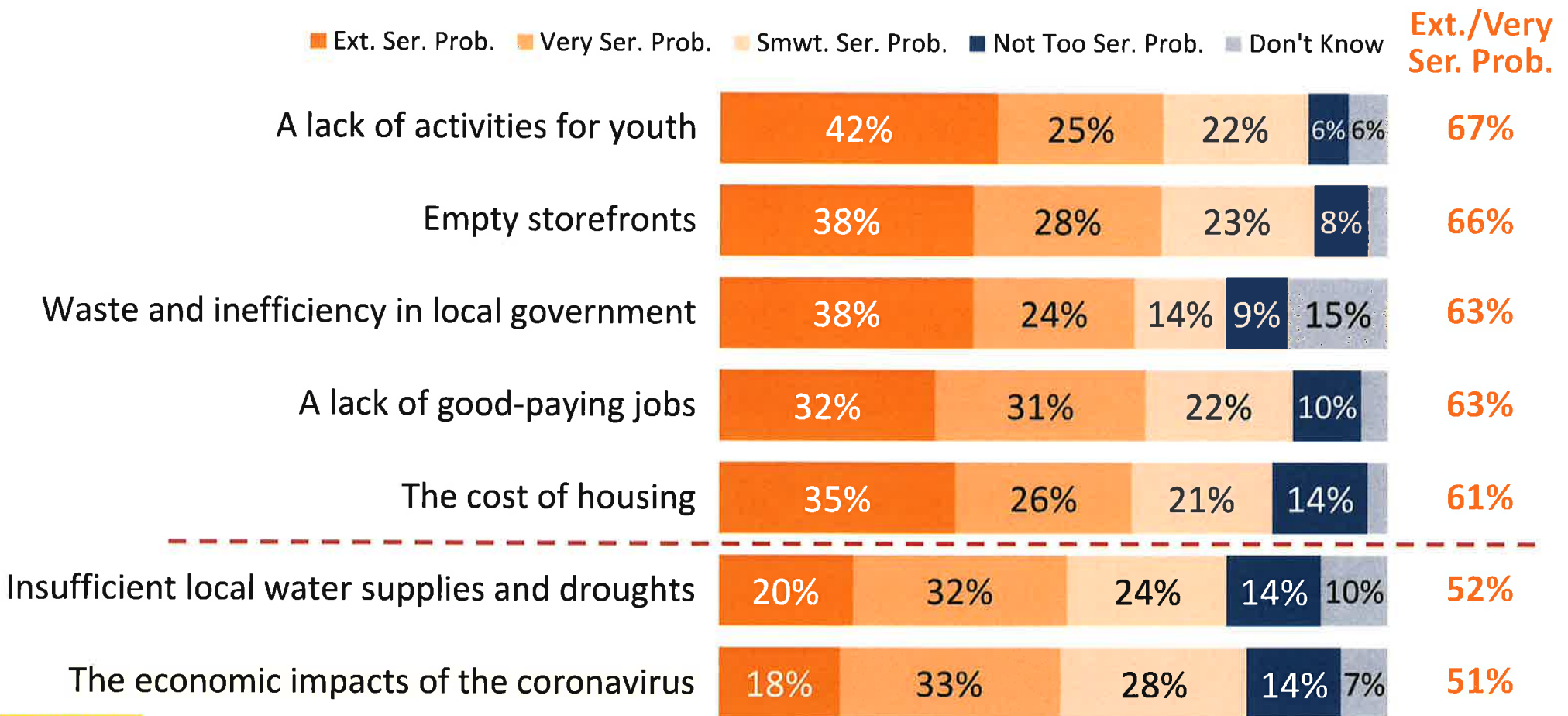
Republican Men and Women

Non-College Educated Men

Men Ages 18-54

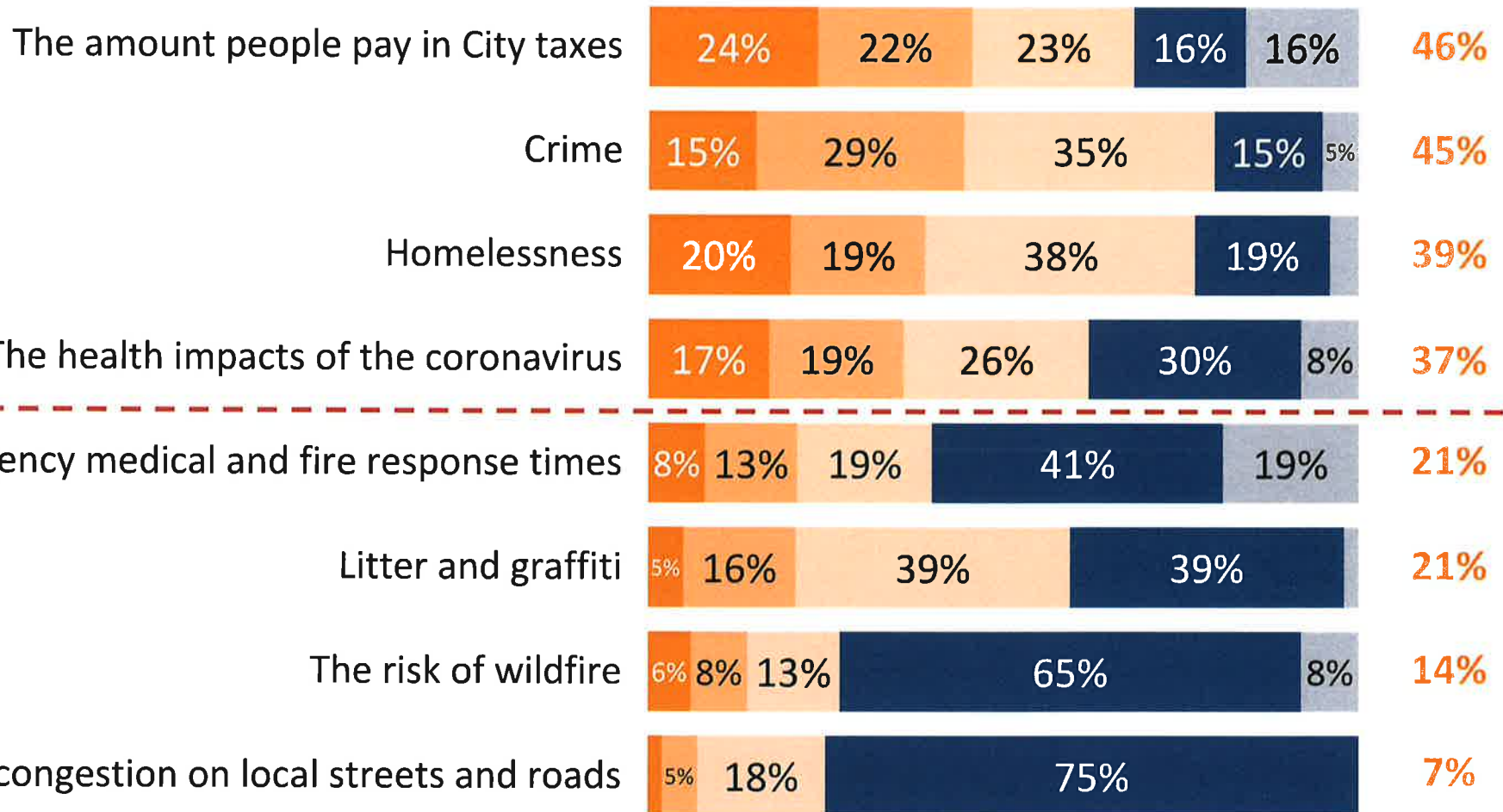
# A lack of activities for youth, empty storefronts, government waste, jobs and housing costs were key concerns.

*I'd like to read you some problems facing the City of Willows that other people have mentioned. Please tell me whether you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, somewhat serious problem, or a not too serious problem in Willows.*



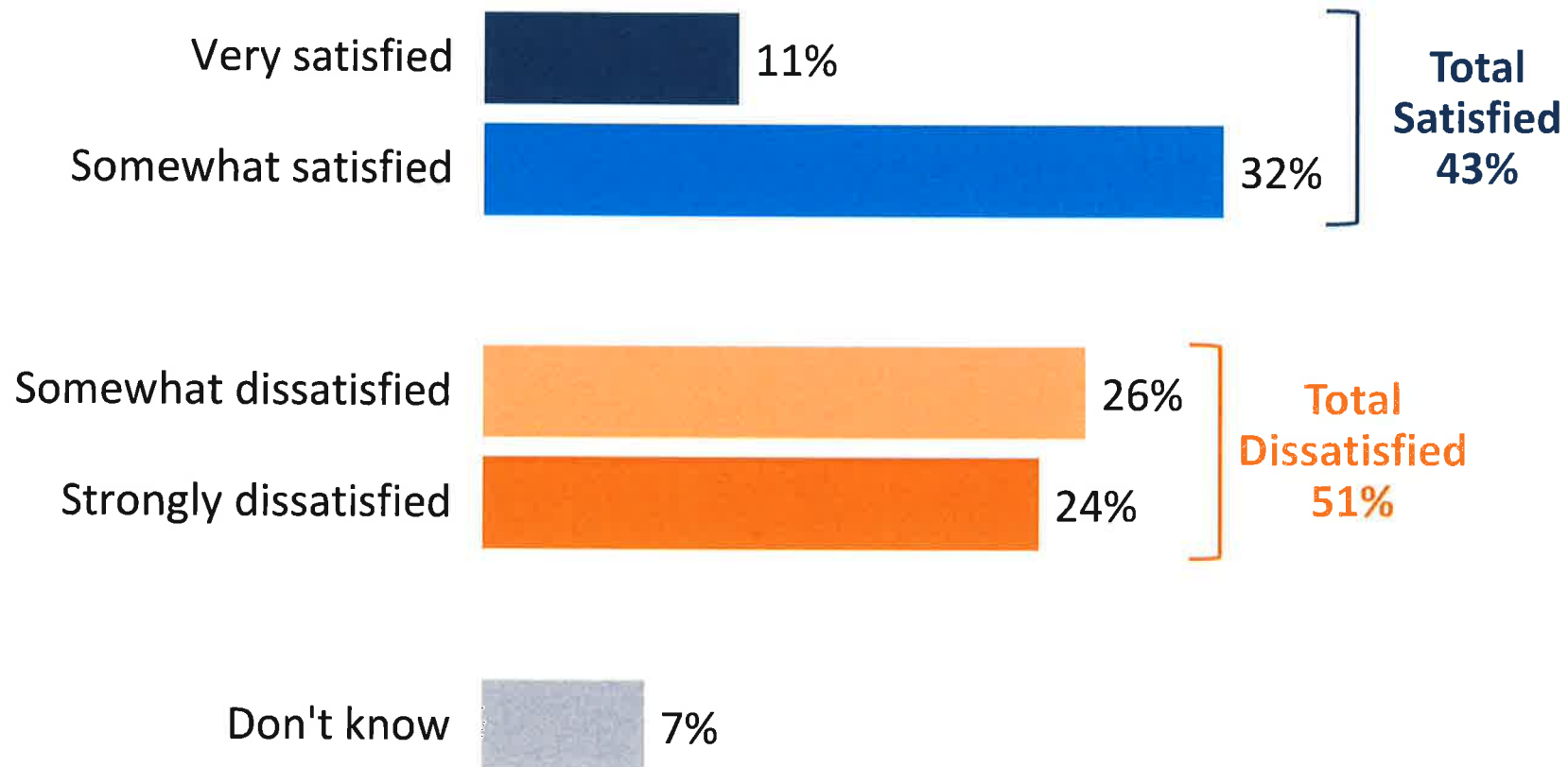
# The risk of wildfire and traffic congestion on local streets and roads appear less concerning.

■ Ext. Ser. Prob. 
 ■ Very Ser. Prob. 
 ■ Smwt. Ser. Prob. 
 ■ Not Too Ser. Prob. 
 ■ Don't Know 
 Ext./Very Ser. Prob.



# While half of the survey's the respondents expressed misgivings about city services, broadly speaking, ...

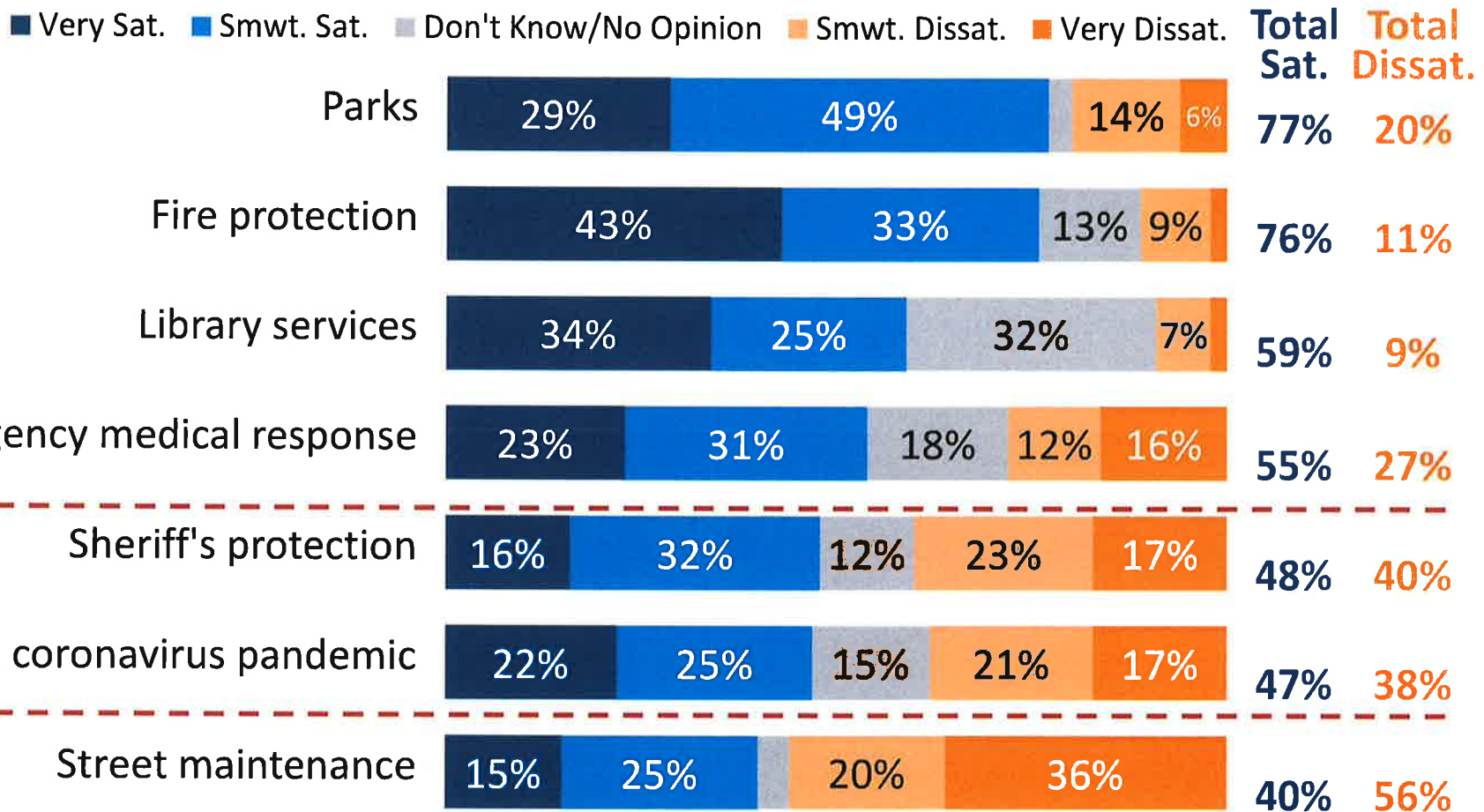
*I would like you to tell me how satisfied you are personally with the job being done in providing [City services, overall].*





# ...those opinions varied dramatically by specific service, with strong satisfaction for parks, fire and library services and more critical views of street maintenance.

I am going to mention some services and programs provided to City of Willows residents. I would like you to tell me how satisfied you are personally with the job being done in providing that program or service: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied.



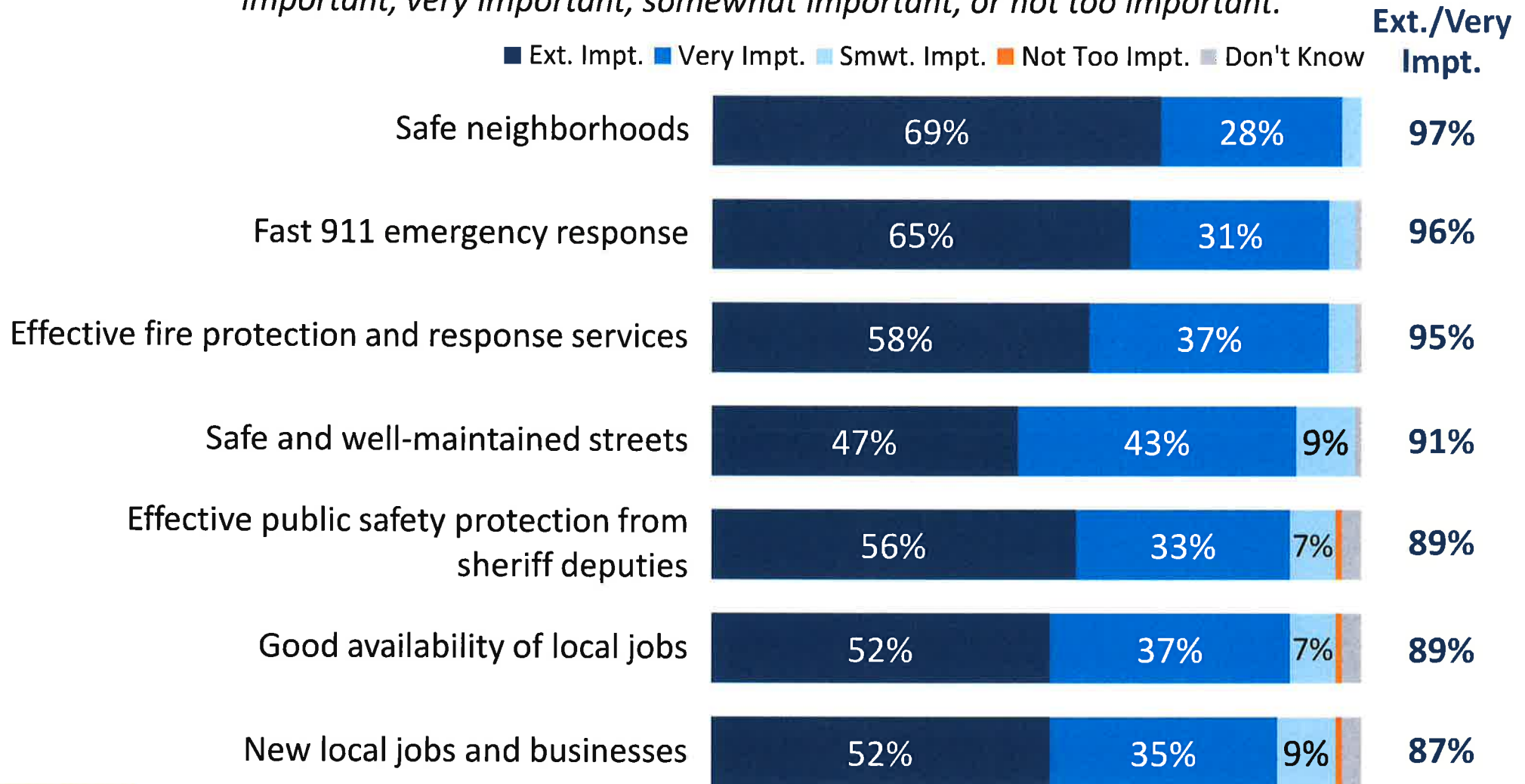


# **The Community's Budget Priorities**

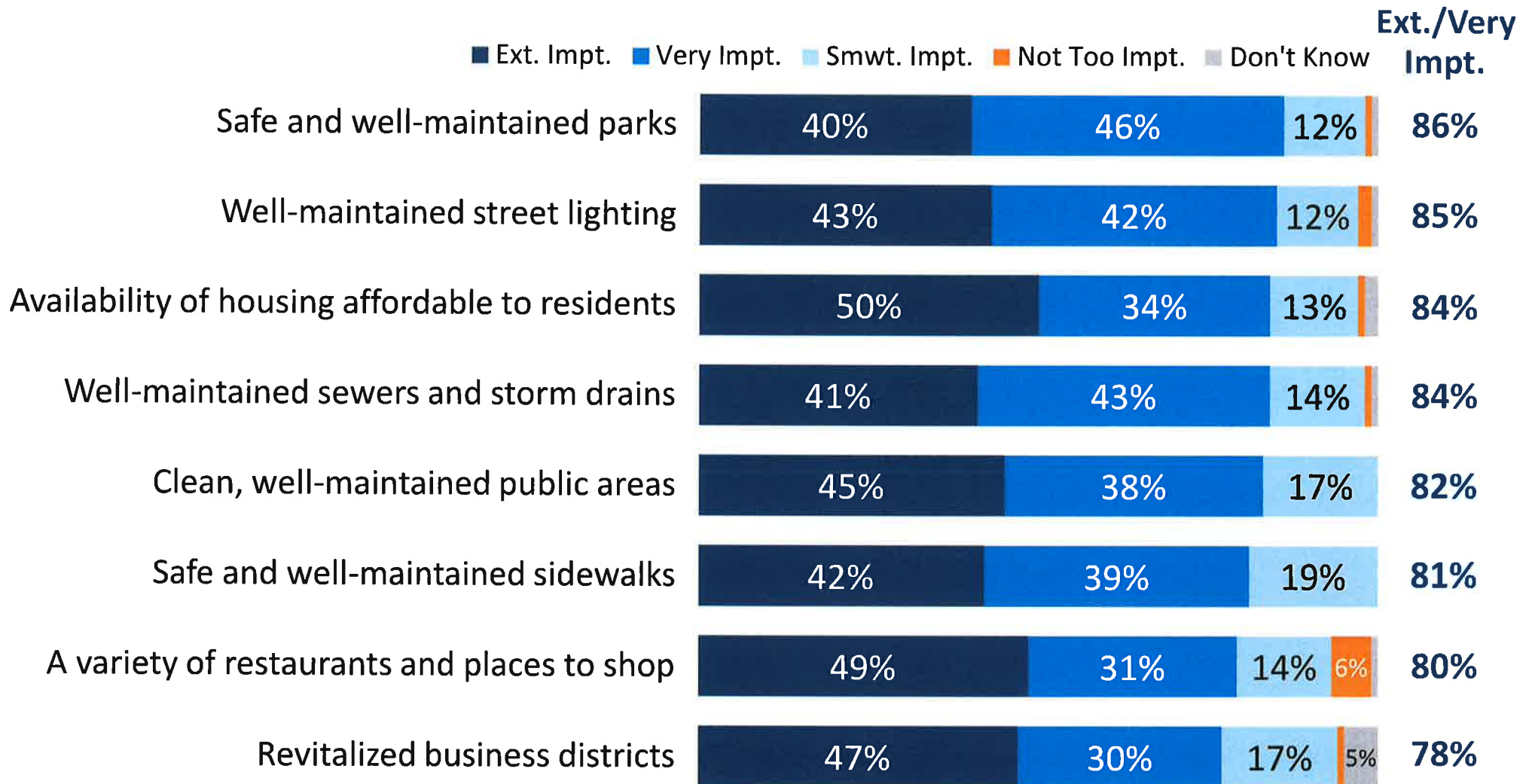


# Safety, well-maintained streets, and a healthy economy are key aspects of quality of life.

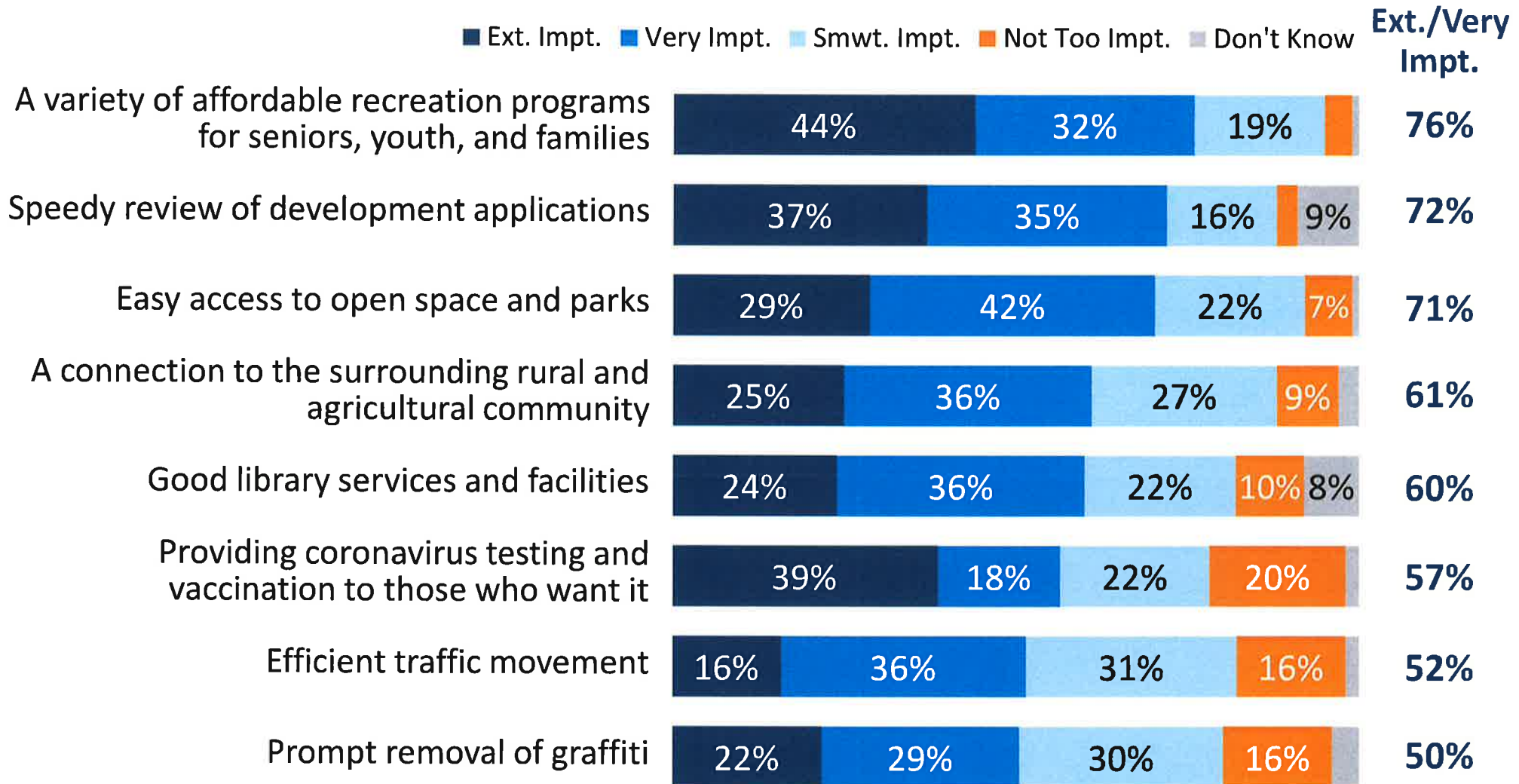
*I am going to read you a list of aspects of life that could make Willows a good place to live. Please tell me how important each one is to your quality of life: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.*



# Broad majorities also value parks, sidewalks and sewers; and housing that is affordable.

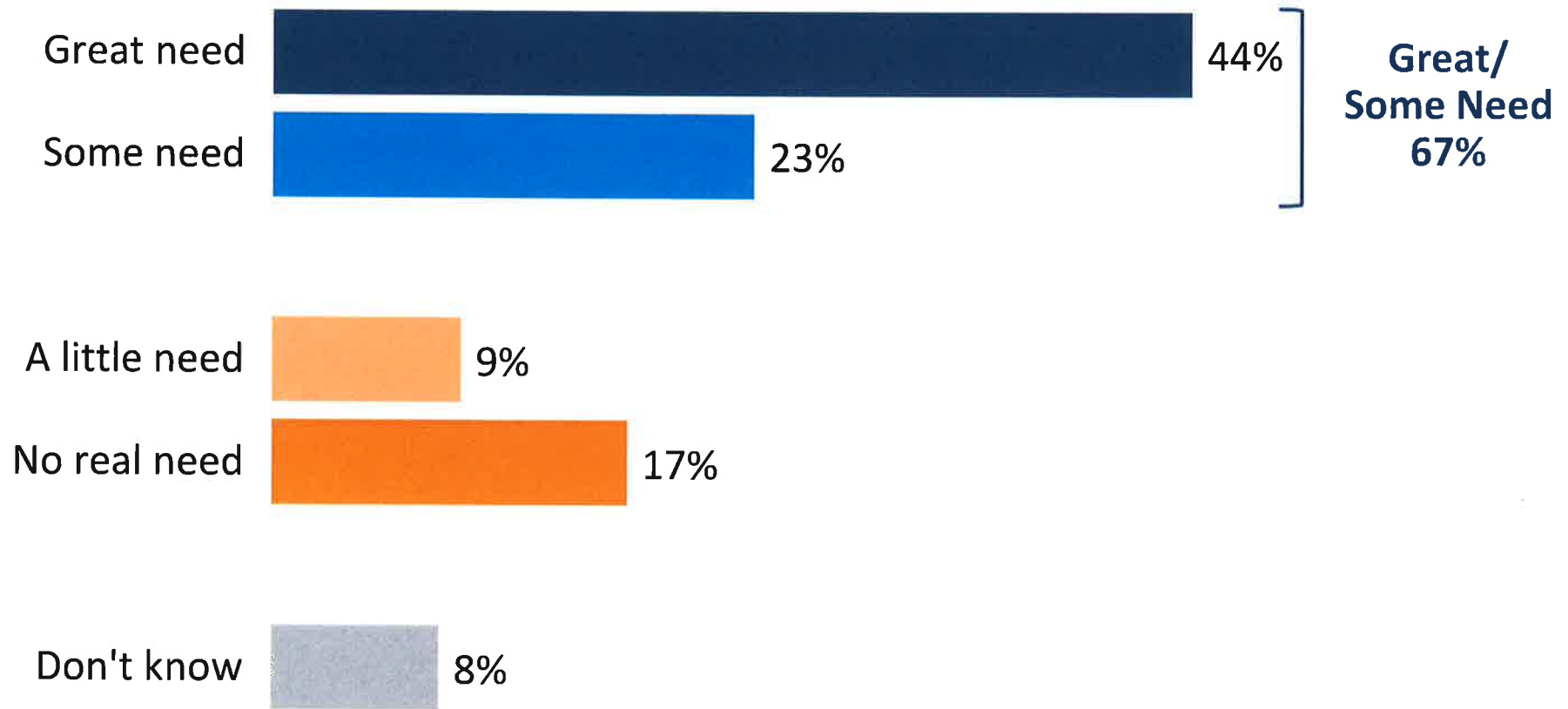


# Somewhat less-valued items include efficient traffic movement and prompt graffiti removal.



# Two-thirds said they believe the City has at least “some” need for additional funding for services Willows residents need and want.

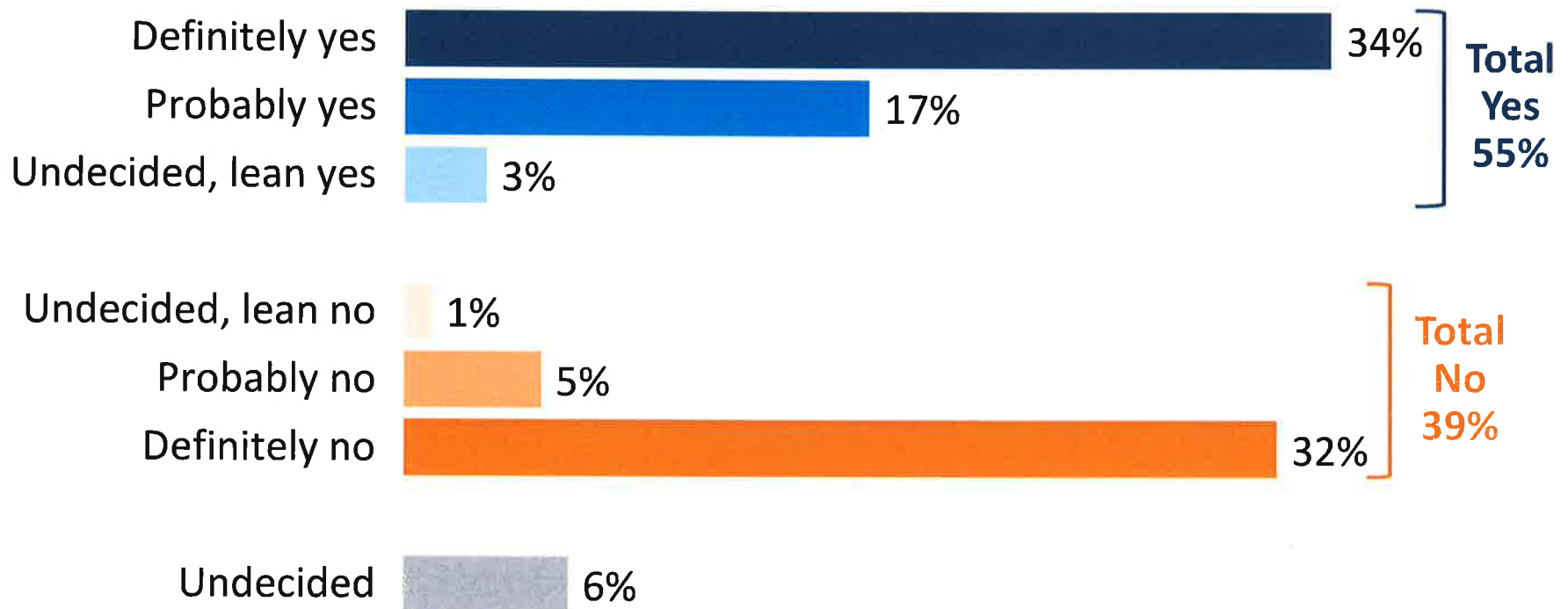
*In your personal opinion, do you think there is a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funds to provide the level of local community services that Willows residents need and want?*





# More than half of respondents supported a conceptual, simple-majority requirement revenue measure to fund critical city services.

Some people have proposed that the City of Willows might need additional revenue to maintain the local quality of life and provide funds for City services, such as emergency 911 and medical response; sheriff's patrols; street, sidewalk, storm drains, and park maintenance; libraries; economic development programs; and recreation programs for seniors, youth, and families. One way to generate such funds—funds that Willows would have complete control over—could be through an increase to the City's sales tax of up to 1 cent.



# Given the choice, respondents preferred using emergency reserves over making cuts by a 27-point margin.

*I am going to read you two statements.  
Please tell me which one comes closer to your personal opinion.*

The City of Willows should use some of its emergency reserves to avoid reducing City services



**OR**

The City of Willows should save its emergency reserves for true emergencies, even if it means reducing some City services



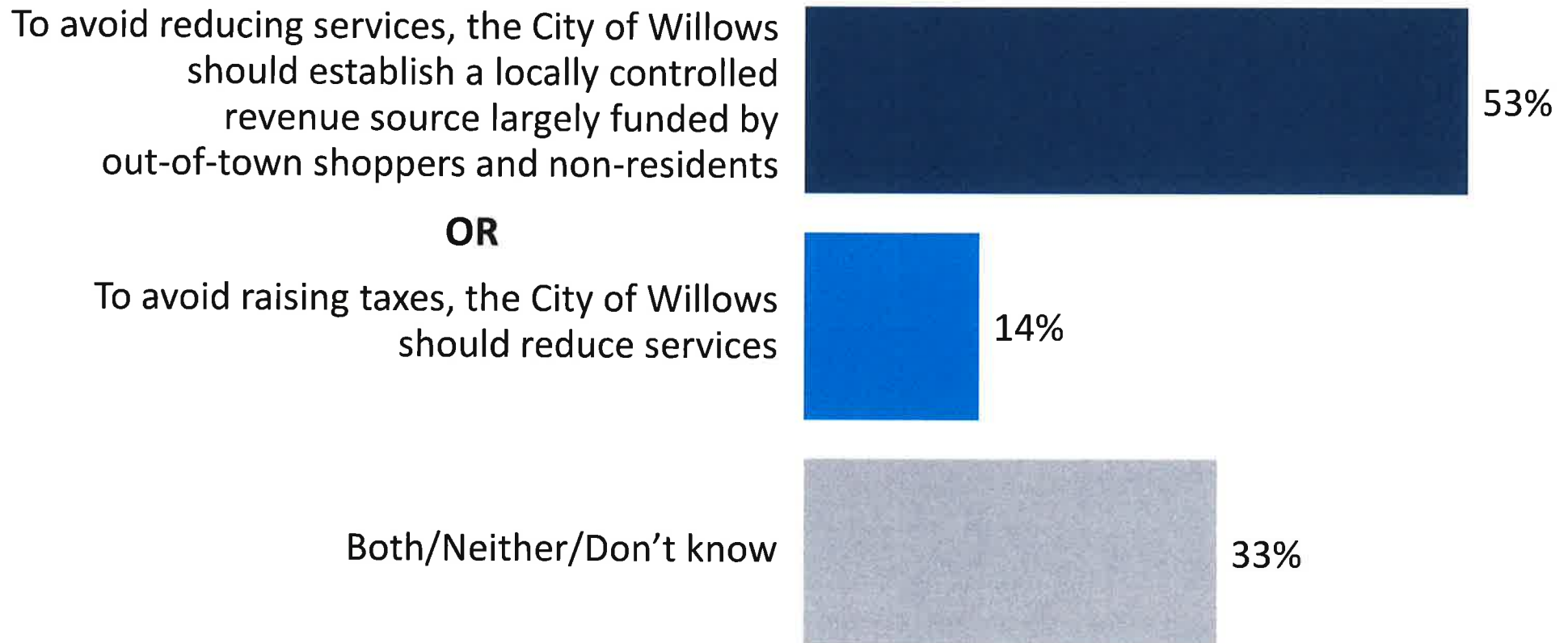
Both/Neither/Don't know





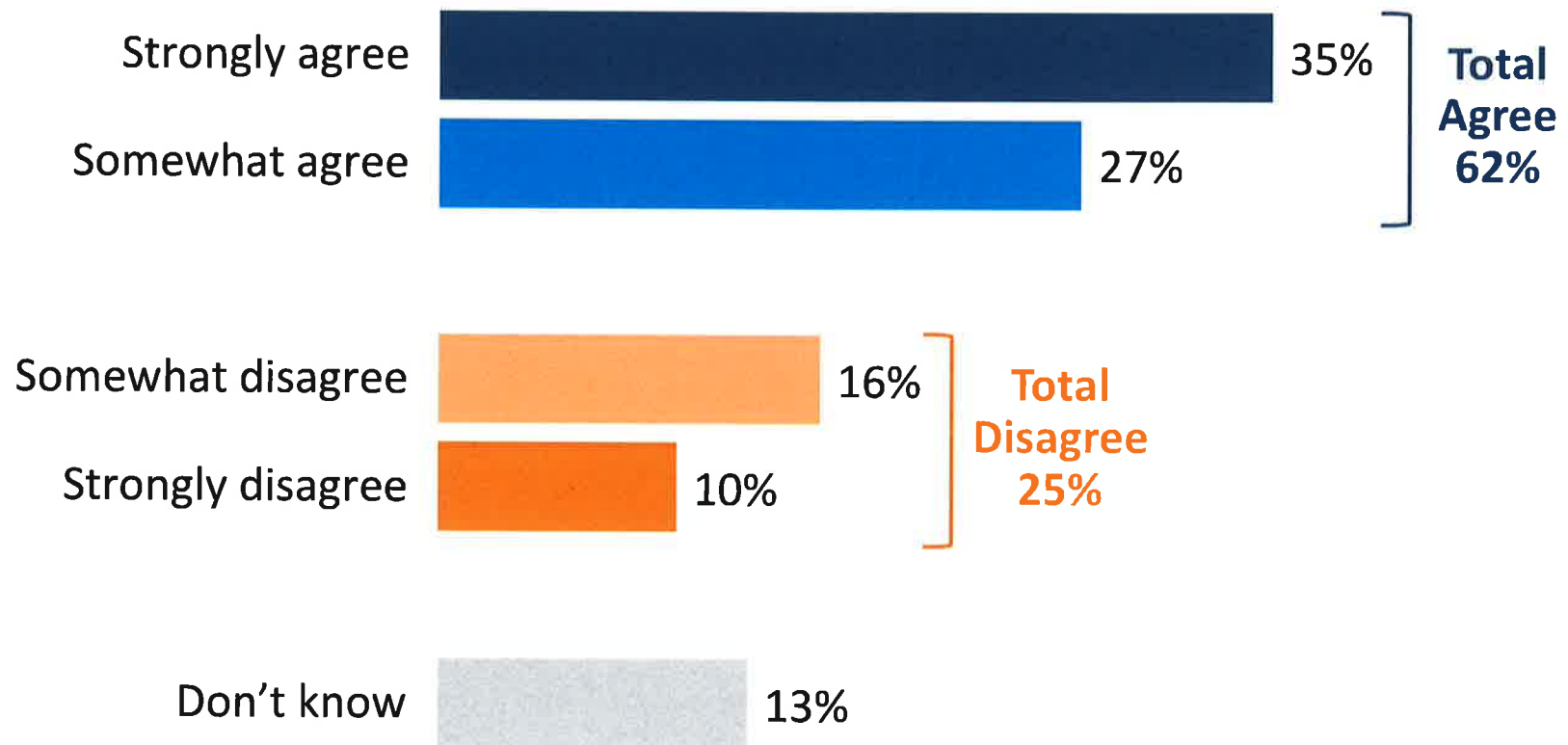
# By a 39-point margin, respondents preferred establishing a locally controlled source of funding over reducing services.

*I am going to read you two more statements.  
Please tell me which one comes closer to your personal opinion.*



# Three in five believe taxes are too high in the City.

*Taxes are too high, and I cannot afford to pay any more even for City services*

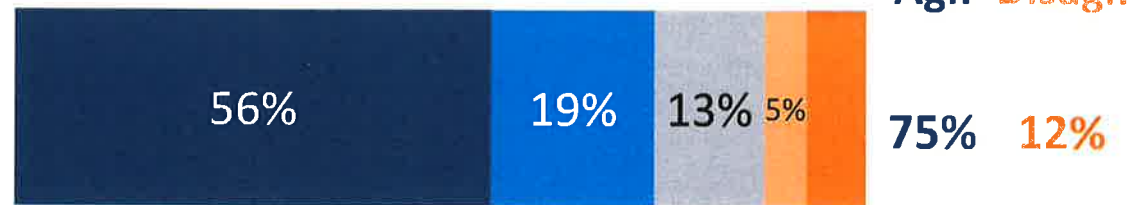


# Respondent were largely unaware of recent Willows pension reforms and trust in the City's fiscal management needs to be built.

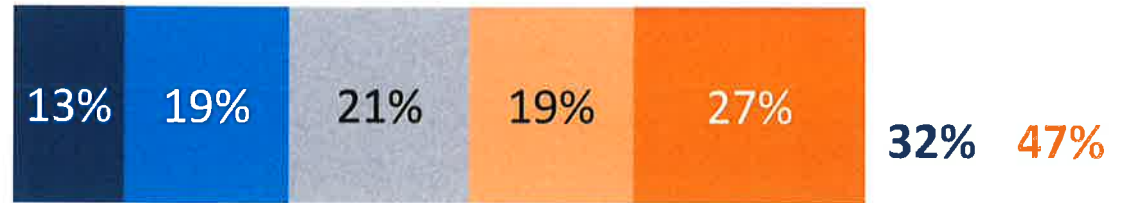
*I am going to read you a number of statements about life in Willows. Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.*

■ Strng. Agr.  
 ■ Smwt. Agr.  
 ■ Don't Know  
 ■ Smwt. Disagr.  
 ■ Strng. Disagr.  
 Total Agr.   Total Disagr.

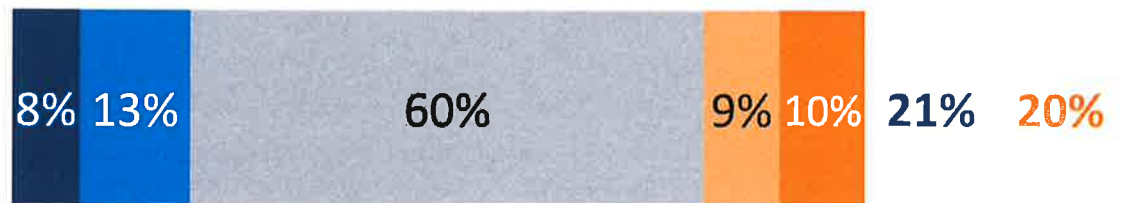
City government tends to waste and mismanage our tax dollars



Without additional funding, the City will have to cut essential services



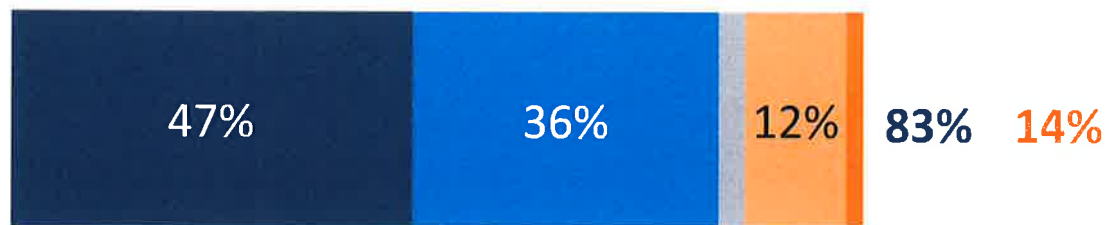
The City has enacted pension reform saving taxpayer money and protecting City services



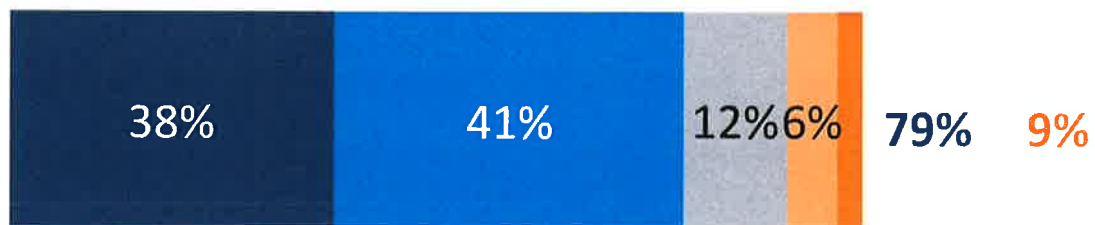
# Respondents broadly agreed that roads need repair and the City should work to restore cut positions.

■ Strng. Agr.  
 ■ Smwt. Agr.  
 ■ Don't Know  
 ■ Smwt. Disagr.  
 ■ Strng. Disagr.  
 Total Agr.   Total Disagr.

The roads in Willows are in need of repairs and have too many potholes



Investing in infrastructure repairs and maintenance now will save Willows money in the long run



The City should work to restore positions cut during the pandemic's economic slowdown, including firefighters and workers in recreation, code enforcement, and public works



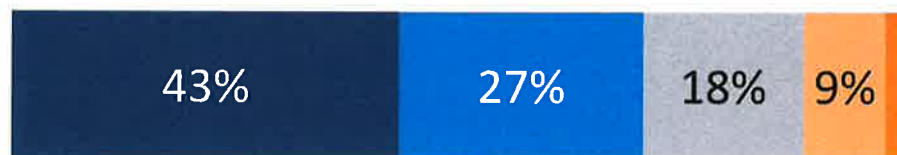


# While they understand the City relies on volunteer firefighters, most were not aware that there are not enough professionals to enter a burning building without waiting for those volunteers.

■ Strng. Agr. ■ Smwt. Agr. ■ Don't Know ■ Smwt. Disagr. ■ Strng. Disagr.

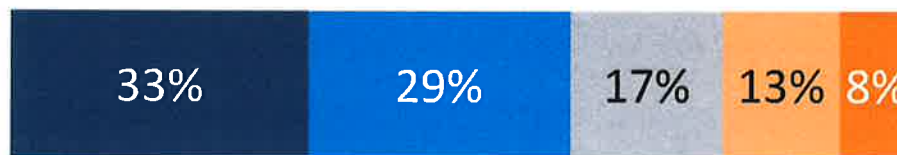
**Total Agr.** **Total Disagr.**

The City relies heavily on volunteer firefighters to respond to emergency calls



**70%** **12%**

The City should charge non-residents their fair share for the fire and medical services they use



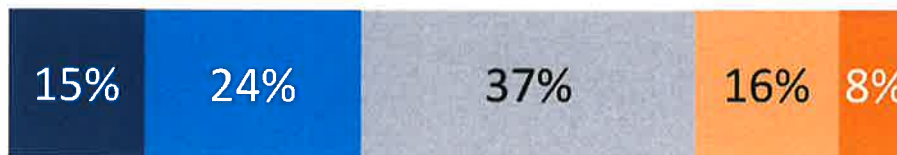
**62%** **21%**

There are not enough professional firefighters to enter a burning building without waiting for volunteers to show up



**43%** **16%**

Not all first responders are trained to address medical emergencies without assistance



**39%** **24%**

# Few knew that Willows covers costs for library and fire protection services for people outside the City, or that Orland has a higher sales tax.

■ Strng. Agr.  
 ■ Smwt. Agr.  
 ■ Don't Know  
 ■ Smwt. Disagr.  
 ■ Strng. Disagr.

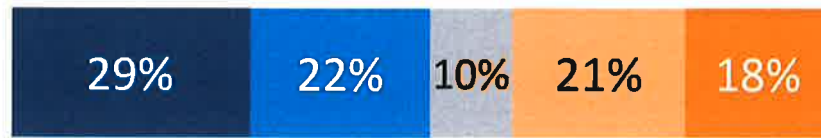
**Total Agr.**   **Total Disagr.**

The City of Orland is in better financial shape than the City of Willows



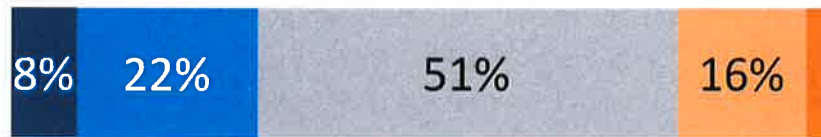
**70%**   **4%**

Out-of-town visitors passing through on I-5 or shopping at Walmart should pay their fair share for using our streets and other services



**50%**   **39%**

Willows covers the costs for a significant portion of the library services used by residents who live outside the city



**30%**   **19%**

Willows covers the costs for a significant portion of the fire protection services used by residents who live outside the city



**27%**   **20%**

The City of Orland has a higher sales tax than the City of Willows



**18%**   **10%**





# Conclusions

# Conclusions and Key Takeaways

- These survey results suggest many are feeling pessimistic about the overall direction of the City.
- Some of the most concerning issues are the cost of housing, empty storefronts, a lack of good-paying jobs and of activities for youth, and waste and inefficiency in local government.
- Half rate Willows as an “excellent” or “good” place to live, and only 16% rate it as a “poor” place to live.
- A wide variety of services rate quite highly as important to quality of life: fast 911 response, safe neighborhoods, safe streets, good jobs availability, fire protection and response, and recreation for youth, seniors and families.
- Ratings of City services are highest for parks, fire protection, library services and emergency medical – and relatively few are aware of challenges with fire department staffing or demands on people from outside Willows on library services.
- Majorities are dissatisfied with street maintenance.
- Most appear largely unaware that Willows has been implemented pension reform or that the City is covering costs for people out of town.
- While two-thirds feel the City has an appreciable need for funding to improve services and address local concerns, there does not appear to be a unified vision for how to address these budget limitations.

# Recommendations to the City of Willows

- We hope City Council/staff find this community input helpful—thank you to those who participated!
- Our team recommends the City continue to focus on 911/public safety, job creation, fire prevention and recreation for all ages in your budget priorities.
- The community is eager to see improvement in street maintenance in particular, amongst overall city services.
- Long-term, the community would benefit from more information on the City's work to implement pension reform, and its ongoing fiscal management. We encourage continued updates and engagement of the community on those issues to build public confidence and trust.

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