



City of South Bend

Budget Feedback 2025



Published September 23, 2024

Many thanks go out to South Bend residents for their feedback, members of the common council for their continued support since 2021, and the Office of Mayor for their guidance. Special thanks to the 23 city staff members who volunteered their time to help table, code voicemail responses, and assist in design work this year.

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**BUILD
THE
BUDGET**



Letter from the Mayor



Dear Neighbor,

For the fourth year running, the City team continued our “Build the Budget” engagement program. This outreach and data collection season has become a recognizable staple in the late summer and early Fall. We're pleased to see residents participate year after year.

Just as before, the City Administration collected online survey responses, coded hundreds of 311 voicemails, and facilitated budget feedback and trivia sessions at festivals and events.

Yet again, our team saw engagement numbers soar. We saw almost 1,600 resident engagements this season, beating last year by a healthy margin. This number is nearly double the first year we did this program in 2021.

This report will share the major takeaways on resident priorities and ideas. We were pleased to see that our proposed 2025 budget is aligned with this year's feedback.

James Mueller
Mayor, City of South Bend

A handwritten signature of James Mueller in blue ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and matches the printed name above it.

Executive summary

The City of South Bend spends hundreds of millions of dollars each year on everything from vehicles to public safety to staff salaries.

Influencing the budget means influencing the future of our city – how much we pave, what we repair, and how our neighborhoods are supported. It's an important process that deserves more engagement and attention.

Unfortunately, resident involvement has been low in past budget cycles. This isn't because residents don't care about their city or the budget; traditional ways of engagement often required people to go out of their way to meet the City *where we are* instead of the other way around.

For the last four years, the City of South Bend has run the "Build the Budget" initiative, meeting resident *where they are*, and soliciting feedback in innovative ways. Our goal is to demystify the annual budget process itself.

Using an online survey, voicemails, and tabling at community events, we deployed several ways for residents to voice their ideas and build the budget with the number of responses rising each year!

70

Online survey responses

+

161

Budget feedback voicemails

+

1,315

In-person envelope wall participants

=

1,546

Resident feedback total

Executive summary

This year, 1,546 engagements were recorded, nearly 2% of the City population. Across the 1,546 engagements, five themes surfaced over and over. These priorities were consistently mentioned by residents through all three forms of engagement.

Residents who participated in Build the Budget want:

1 Resurfacing & repairs for roadways and streets

In the online survey, the Roadways category had the most money allocated to it. Roadways and alleys was also two of the most frequently mentioned across voicemails. Residents often cited streets they want to see repaired in their neighborhood; with some noting work they've seen already seen done through the Rebuilding Our Streets Initiative and expressing a desire for it to continue.

2 Housing accessibility, availability, and affordability

Investing in housing for unsheltered residents was the highest priority at community events. Expanding housing supply and increasing affordability were mentioned at in-person events and voicemail and is a growing priority.

3 Improve sidewalks and curbs

Online survey and voicemail participants were eager to see better neighborhood infrastructure, especially repairing sidewalks and curbs. Like roadways, a few participants cited sidewalks they would like to see repaired.

4 Safer communities

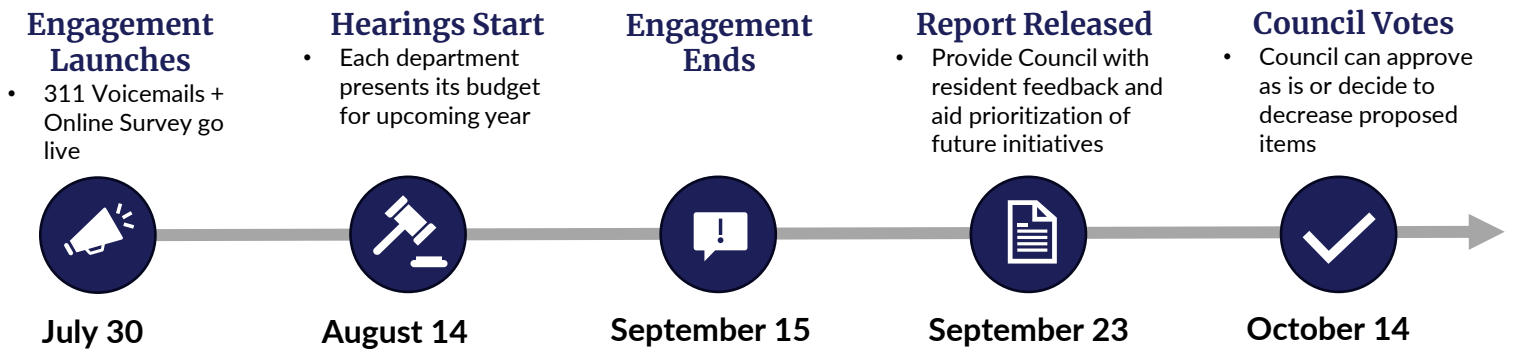
Violence intervention initiatives and Increasing police officers (including community resource officers) were top priorities that residents want to see continued support for with city funds.

5 Investment in recreation opportunities, especially for youth

Residents highlighted what an asset public parks and recreational spaces/programming are to the City's quality of life. They also expressed an increased desire for the City to focus on youth programming during summer and after schools.

Resident Engagement Timeline

Build the Budget engagement ran for seven weeks, from July 30– September 15. Check out the timeline below to see how Build the Budget was promoted to residents and what events we took the budget table to this year.



Date	Event	Location	Visitors
★ July 30	Meet the Mayor	Howard Park	31
★ August 2	First Friday	Downtown	69
★ August 6	National Night Out	South Bend Police Station	41
★ August 10	Art Beat	East Bank	176
★ August 17	Linden Ave Farmers Market	Charles Black Center	36
★ August 29	Cubs Game	Four Winds Field	22
★ September 6	September First Friday	Downtown	61
★ September 4 -13	Utility Lobby	Colfax Office	9
★ September 14-15	Fusion Fest	Howard Park	872

How Residents Built the Budget

The three forms of engagement draws from different segments of the population and is presented differently to residents, which leads to top categories being slightly different across each platform.

The online survey and envelope walls present residents with a list of twenty strategic categories prepared by the Mayor's Office. This year's list is the same with apart from one reworded category¹ allowing us to compare responses from last year.

The Online Survey

The survey was available through a link posted to the City website, Facebook, Instagram, and through QR codes printed on promotional materials. **70 residents completed an online budget feedback survey**, less than previous years.

Our goal was to offer an accessible feedback opportunity that is more comprehensive than the tabling envelope walls.

The goal of the survey was to assess residents' preferences when managing a limited amount of funds. Residents were asked to allocate a fictional \$100 across strategic categories. Residents were also presented with a list of four investment areas, asking which ones the City should increase, maintain, or reduce. Many residents also offered extensive and constructive feedback in the open-ended portion of the survey.

This mimics the difficulty of the City budget process: there are always tradeoffs and there is no such thing as infinite money to support everything residents want.



311 Voicemails

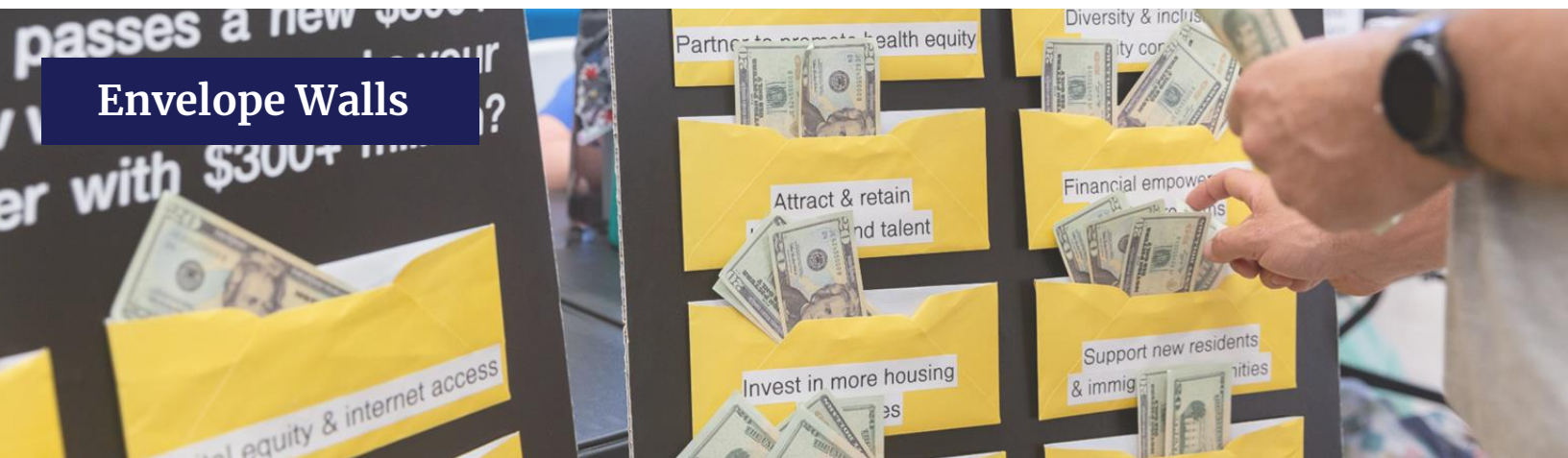


Residents also had the option to leave a voicemail via 311 suggesting what they want to see prioritized in the 2024 City Budget. Liaisons would ask residents at the end of the call if they would like to provide feedback.

The City received a total of 190 voicemails **with 161 of those providing relevant feedback.**

City staffers listened to each voicemail and coded them by category/priority topic. Because voicemail feedback is more open-ended, many responses contain feedback outside of the strategic categories, and residents also offer feedback for public investment at specific locations. Each response contained an average of 1.6 topic mentions, meaning nearly half of residents felt strongly about one issue.

Envelope Walls



To mirror the information collection of the online survey, the City created two interactive envelope walls to display at public events.

Like the survey, participating residents each received \$100 in fake bills to allocate across strategic spending categories in the 2024 annual budget.

Over August and September, the envelope walls went to **9 public events.**

\$131,040 in fake money was allocated by roughly **1,315 residents** who participated in the envelope wall activity, a three-fold increase from last budget year. The increase can be attributed to the Fusion Fest table placement at a high traffic area in addition to volunteer enthusiasm.

Sample Trivia Question: How many total vehicles does the City own? Over or under 1,000?

Answer: Over! The city had 1,053 vehicles in 2023



Budget Trivia Game

The budget trivia game is an eye-catching, fun way for residents to learn about the city budget. Residents spin the budget trivia wheel, land on a category, and get an opportunity to answer a question and win a prize, ranging from tote bags, pens and pens. Residents who answered a trivia question incorrectly were still always offered a sticker or candy for kids.

This game didn't help us learn about resident priorities, but it was an effective way to draw people into a conversation about the city budget and various city operations. After playing, residents were asked to participate in the envelope wall activity.



This year included new prizes for residents to win!

“I’d like the budget to continue to go towards some of the improvements...like street, sidewalks, and sewers and things that normally the City can do. I think [the City] has the responsibility of making sure all that gets done.”

- Voicemail 5

“The City could use itself as an opportunity to learn practices that retain good workers and lower waste...”

- Survey 25

“I would like to see the City budget used for neighborhood improvements: streets, sidewalks, trash off the corners. Perhaps [we need] City trash cans on the corners.”

- Voicemail 116

“Enhanced code enforcement with early intervention, prompt follow-up, fast remediation, and actual collection of fines... Lax enforcement, especially in gateways and downtown, sends the wrong message to our community and visitors.”

- Survey 1

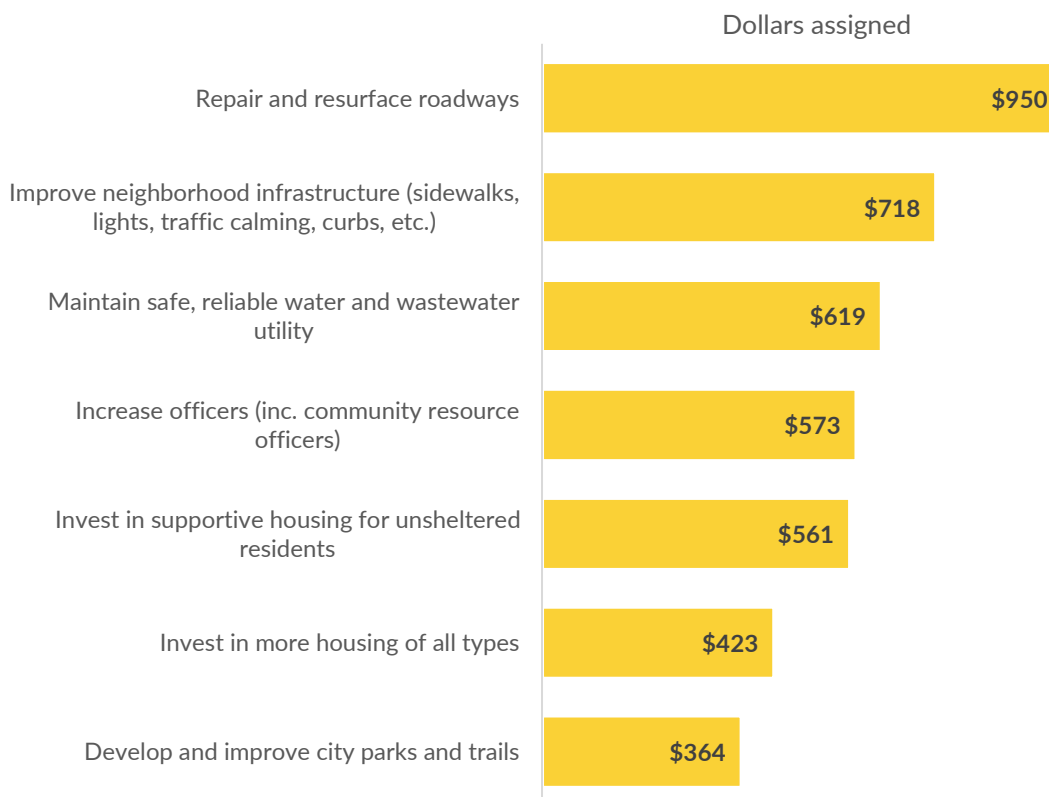
Resident Feedback: Online Survey

Strategic Spending Priorities

South Bend residents' top priorities in next year's budget are continuing to repair roadways and improve neighborhood infrastructure. Compared to last year's survey, there is little change in proportion for each category other than *increase officers* and *violence intervention* slightly declining.

See the top seven categories below.

Online Survey Strategic Spending Priorities Top categories



More details about the online survey responses can be found in Appendix A.

Resident Feedback: Online Survey

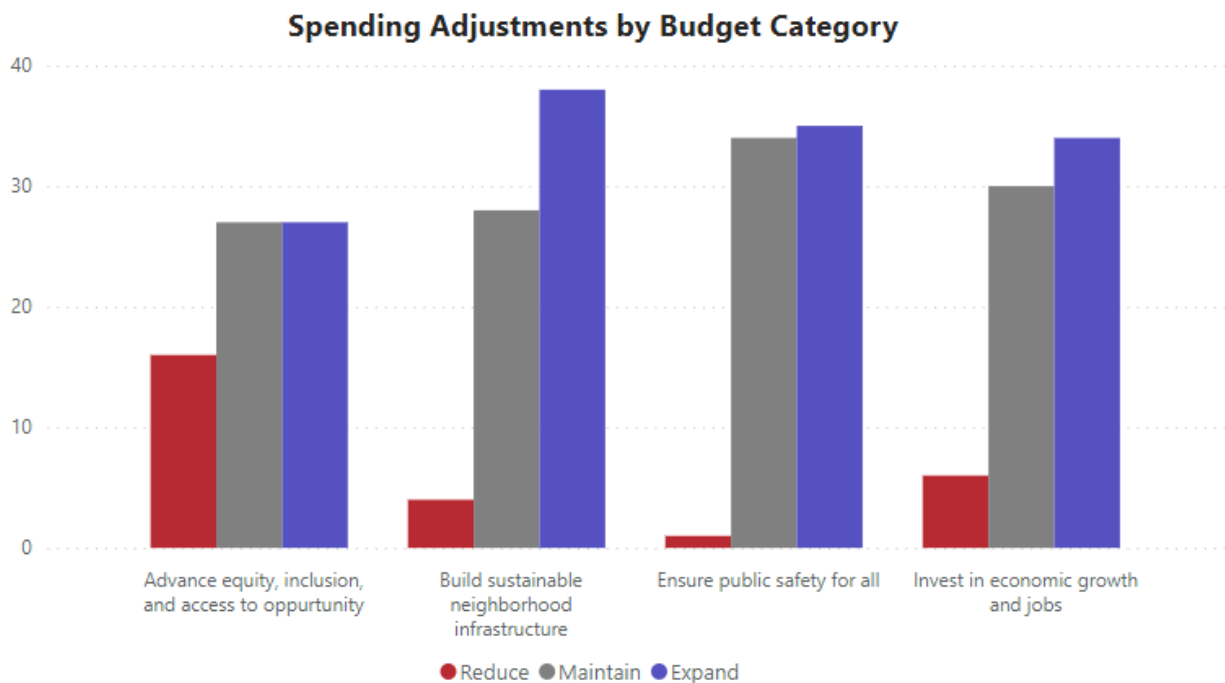
Spending Adjustments

Survey respondents were also asked how they would adjust spending across four broad civic priorities based on their current perceptions of City operations. Those categories were:

1. Ensure public safety for all
2. Build sustainable neighborhood infrastructure
3. Invest in economic growth and jobs
4. Advance, equity, inclusion and access to opportunity

For each civic priority, respondents could select to Reduce, Maintain, or Expand spending.

The chart below provides details on the spending adjustments indicated by respondents.



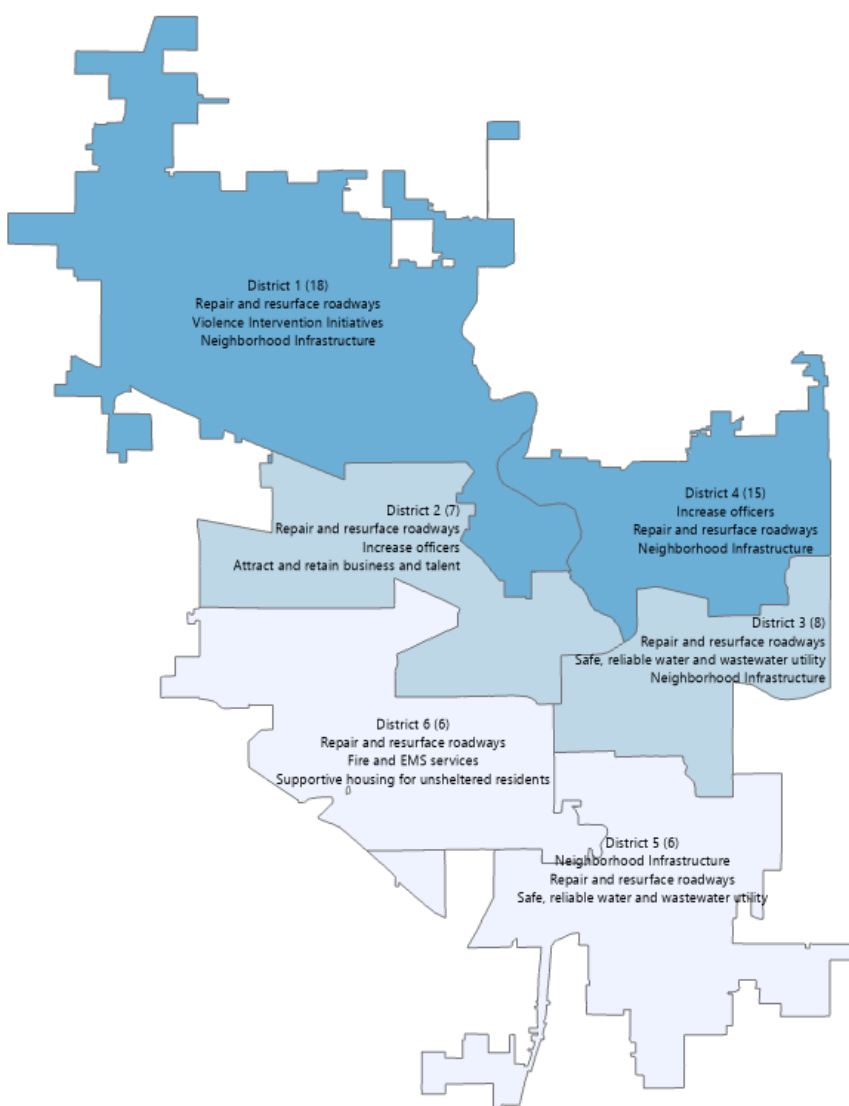
Takeaways

- Build sustainable neighborhood infrastructure for all had the most Expand responses. District 1 and 5 are most in favor of expanding.
- Ensure public safety for all has more Maintain responses and less Expand responses compared to last year.
- Advance equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity has the most Reduce responses but has less reduction in proportion compared to last year. District 4 is the most in favor of reducing.

Resident Feedback: Online Survey

Survey Responses by Council District

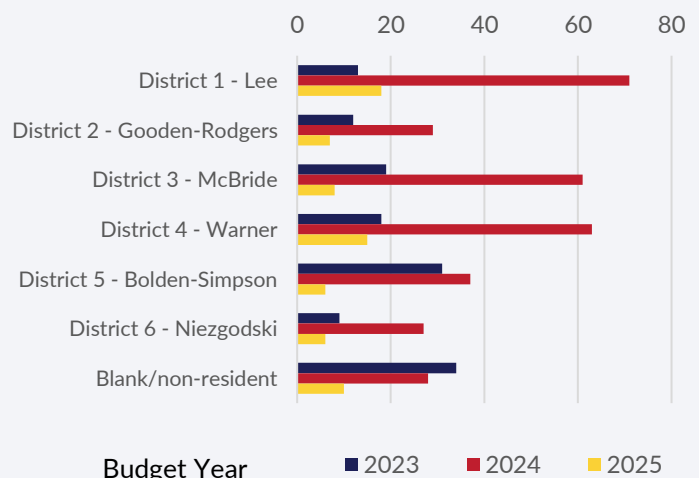
The map below includes **the top three strategic priorities and number of responses in parenthesis of each district** from the online survey. Darker hue represents larger response rate.



Notable takeaways:

- **Repair and resurface roadways** was a top 3 category for all districts.
- **Increase Officers**, **Neighborhood Infrastructure**, and **Water/Wastewater Utility** were also top categories for most districts.
- District 4 and 2 responses allocate more towards **Increase Officers**.
- The online survey responses favor categories that have *traditionally* been a part of the City budget: public works and public safety.
- District 1 and 4 continue to provide high response rates, but District 3 had significantly less than previous years.
- There were 5 responses from people who did not live in South Bend and 5 unknowns.

Online Survey Responses by Council District
Past three years



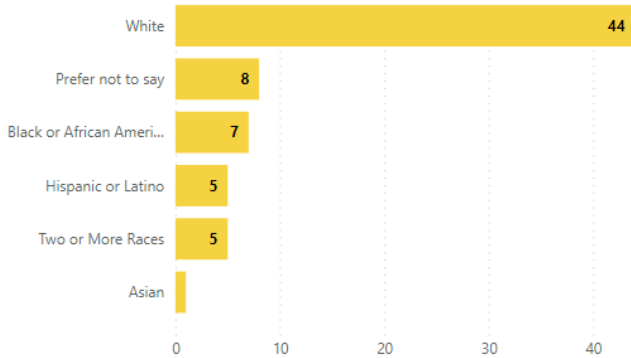
Resident Feedback: Online Survey

Survey Demographics

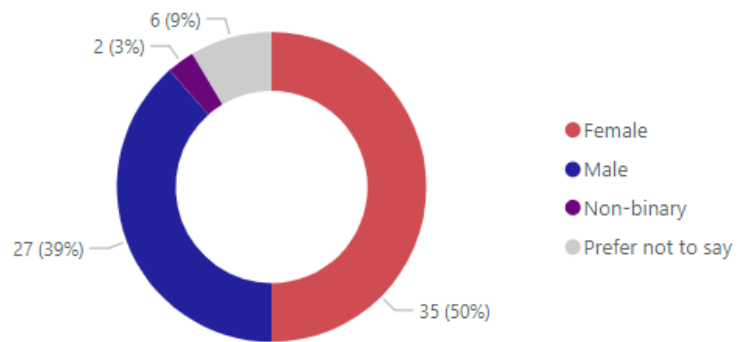
The survey asks residents for demographic information to better understand how well survey respondents represent our community. White residents are overrepresented (70% in survey compared to 50%), while Black residents (11% to 26%) and Hispanic residents (7% to 16%) are underrepresented in the survey².

Men are slightly underrepresented in the survey.

Race and Ethnicity of Survey Respondants



Gender of Survey Respondants



2: [US Census South Bend Profile](#)



“I would like to see the budget go to affordable housing for the working middle class and safe neighborhoods.”

- Voicemail 134

“I would like to see cleaner streets and less litter . I would like to see better sidewalks and not have the burden be on the owner to pay.”

- Voicemail 25

“[I would like to see] Western Avenue beautification...the medians need an overhaul with beautiful trees and grass. What we have now is crumbs of pavement.”

- Survey 45

“I like what I’m seeing with the parks and green areas that have been updated...[I would like to see] places for children to go.”

- Voicemail 174

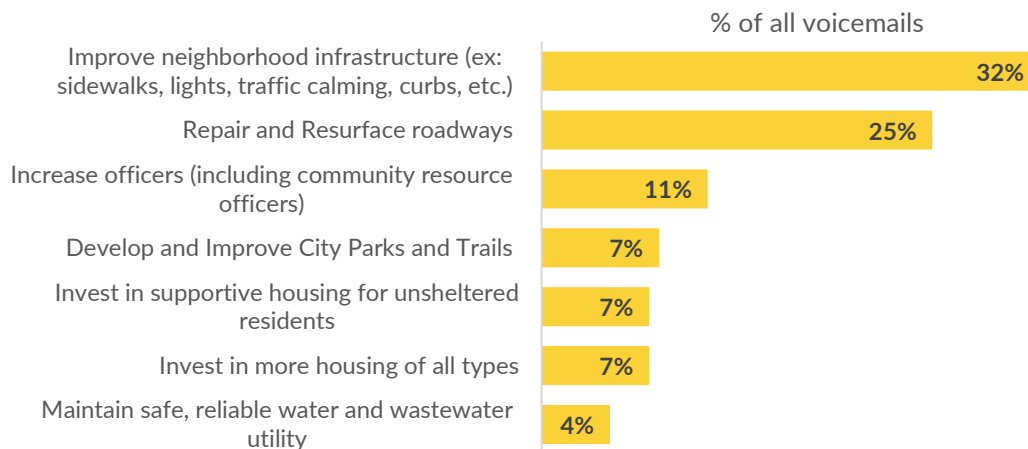
Resident Feedback: 311 Voicemails

311 Voicemail Overview

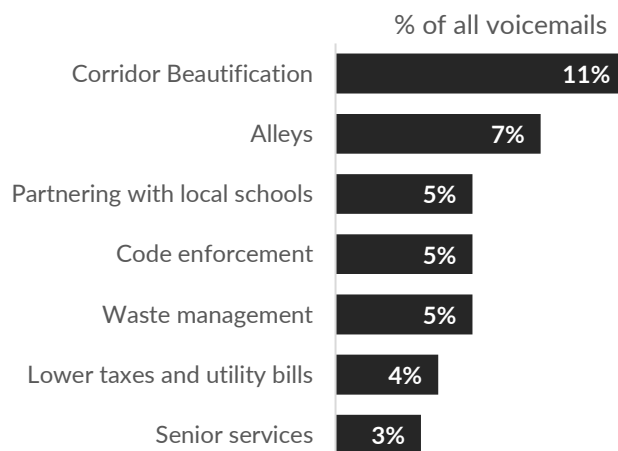
Across the 161 voicemails, there were 79 strategic category mentions and 82 mentions of other resident priorities that were not encapsulated by the existing categories presented in the online survey/envelope wall.

32% and 25% of voicemail messages mentioned improving **neighborhood infrastructure** and **repairing roadways**, respectively. There was a minority of voicemails that were critical of the City's traffic calming measures.

311 Voicemail Strategic Spending Priorities Most mentioned categories



Most mentioned other topics



More details about the 311 voicemail responses can be found in Appendix B.

Resident Feedback: 311 Voicemails

Other Topics

The top resident concerns beyond the strategic priorities are **beautification** (particularly of Lincoln Way or Western Ave corridors for residents entering from west of South Bend), **alley grading** and **improving schools**. Some residents were unsatisfied with the material chosen for most alleys—loose gravel alleys are most of South Bend’s alleys. Others were worried about the quality of local public education, which, to note, is not managed by the City administration.

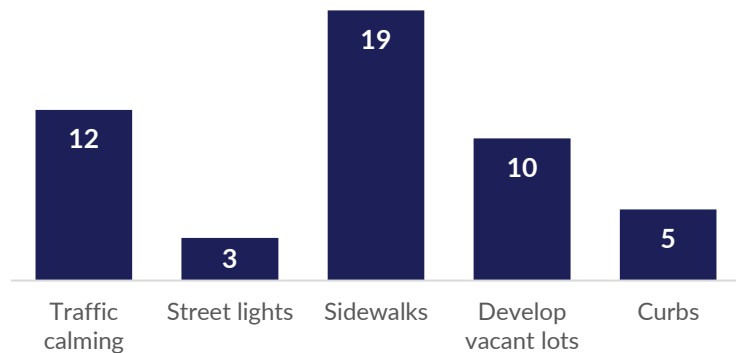
Residents who mentioned **code enforcement** want the City to be more active in issuing citations for properties in violation, and 5% of callers voiced concerns about property tax rates.

Neighborhood Infrastructure

When a caller brought up a neighborhood infrastructure topic, the voicemail was coded by infrastructure subtype shown in the right. Response rate for traffic calming and streetlights fell from last year, but mentions of fixing sidewalks rose. A few respondents requested the City to fix curbs after street resurfacing projects.

“Developing vacant lots” was a new subcategory added this year.

Neighborhood Infrastructure Mentions by subcategory

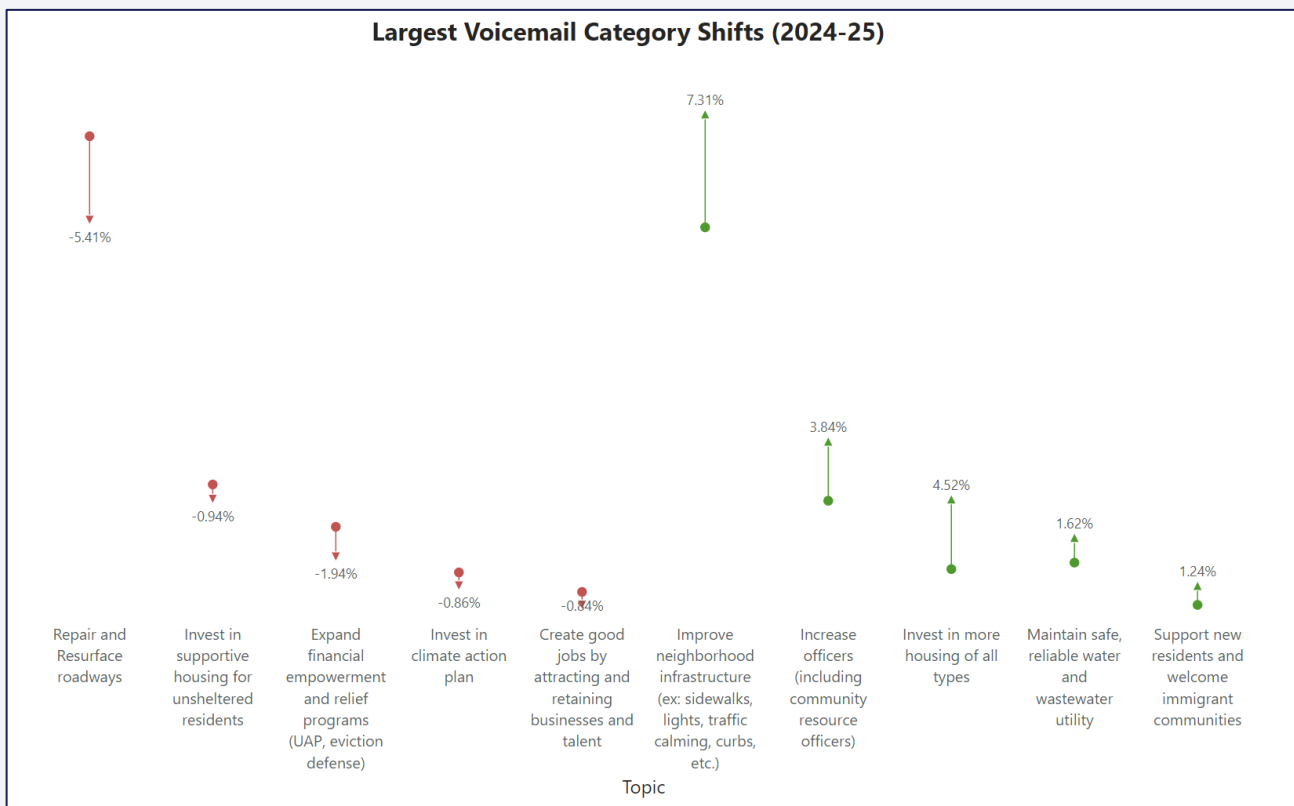


Resident Feedback: 311 Voicemails

Changes in Resident Sentiment from Last Year

Voicemail responses has shown the greatest change in category mentions compared to the other engagement types. **Improve Neighborhood Infrastructure** increased more in mentions driven by sidewalk requests and developing vacant lots. This is followed by a modest proportional increase for **Increase Officers** and **Investing in Housing**.

On the other hand, Roadways decreased dramatically, followed by Financial Empowerment. This could potentially be attributed to increase in resident satisfaction over recent roadway investment and changes in personal financial situations since the pandemic.



Since the response rate varies year over year, the chart above compares the change in proportion for each category e.g. last year Neighborhood Infrastructure was mentioned 25%—this year it is 32% hence a 7.3% increase.

“Youth programming is key to keep kids off the streets and out of dangerous situations... for example, involving youth in climate-change adaptation work to develop key life success skills and mentorship experiences”

- Survey 66

“[I would like to see] more collaboration with schools to promote education as the primary means to reduce crime.”

- Comment at Fusion Fest

“20-40 year olds end up living with parents because they can't afford to live on their own. Affordable apartments for this age range should be considered. ”

- Survey 31

“More bike infrastructure and better public transport with wider and more frequent coverage.”

- Survey 10

Resident Feedback: Envelope Wall

Envelope Wall Overview

The Envelope Wall engagement was by far the most popular this year with **1,315 residents participating**. Two-thirds of participants were from Fusion Fest alone. Anecdotally, many of our participants came from young families and residents who enjoy attending VPA and DTSB programming. Even though residents were limited to five categories (each resident was given five fake \$20 bills), the parity of dollars distributed was high relative to other activities i.e. low variance among categories.

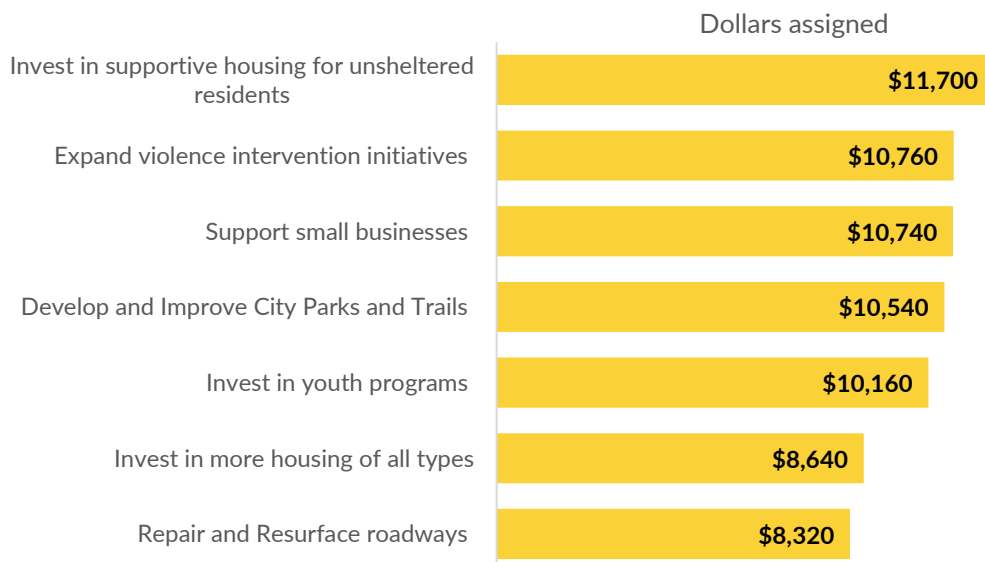
Envelope Wall themes this year include more investment for the **housing** categories, **recreation: Developing parks and youth programming**, and **investment in small businesses**. Hearing from residents, many were concerned about housing affordability (themes include increased rent, housing scarcity, and high property taxes).

Subcategory and Other topics

A handful of residents specified increasing the number of Community Resource Officers and 911 dispatchers under **Increase Officers**. Other participants indicated investment towards mental health services under the **Health Equity** category.

Other topics residents suggested were partnering with local schools, food security (with respect to programs like Linden Ave Farmers Market), and Childcare.

Envelope Wall Strategic Spending Priorities Top categories



More details about the envelope wall responses can be found in Appendix A.

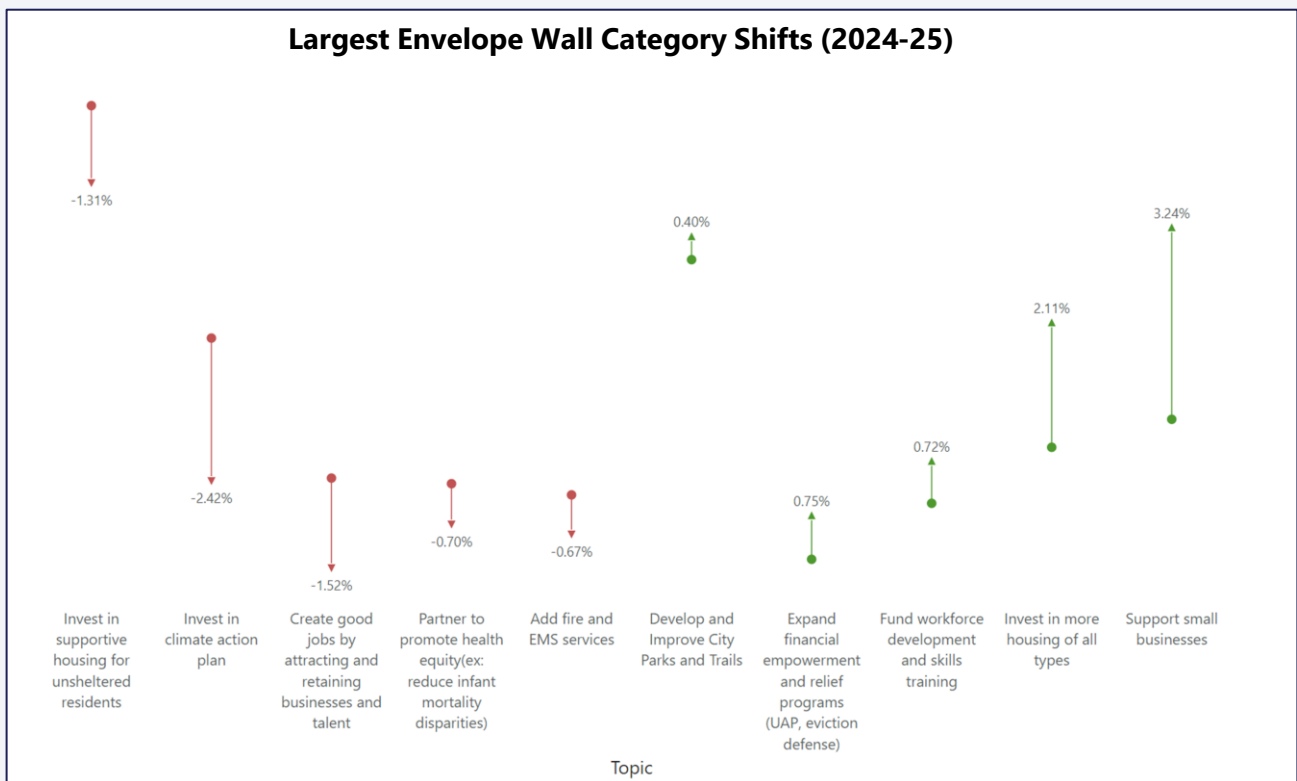
Resident Feedback: Envelope Wall

Changes in Resident Sentiment from Last Year

Residents largely invested the same proportion of dollars in the list of strategic categories. Top increases include **Supporting small businesses** and **Investing in housing**.

Investing in Climate Action, Attracting business and talent, and Investing in housing for unsheltered residents fell from last year.

Neighborhood infrastructure responses are not as high compared to voicemail responses and unchanged from last year. Residents calling 311 might be reporting an issue with their streetlight or curb with that issue salient when recording the voicemail. Another theory is that the envelope does not list examples of neighborhood infrastructure for Envelope Walls participants.



Since the response rate varies year over year, the chart above compares the change in proportion for each category e.g. last year Support Small Business received 5% of all dollars allocated—this year it is 8.2% hence a 3.2% increase.

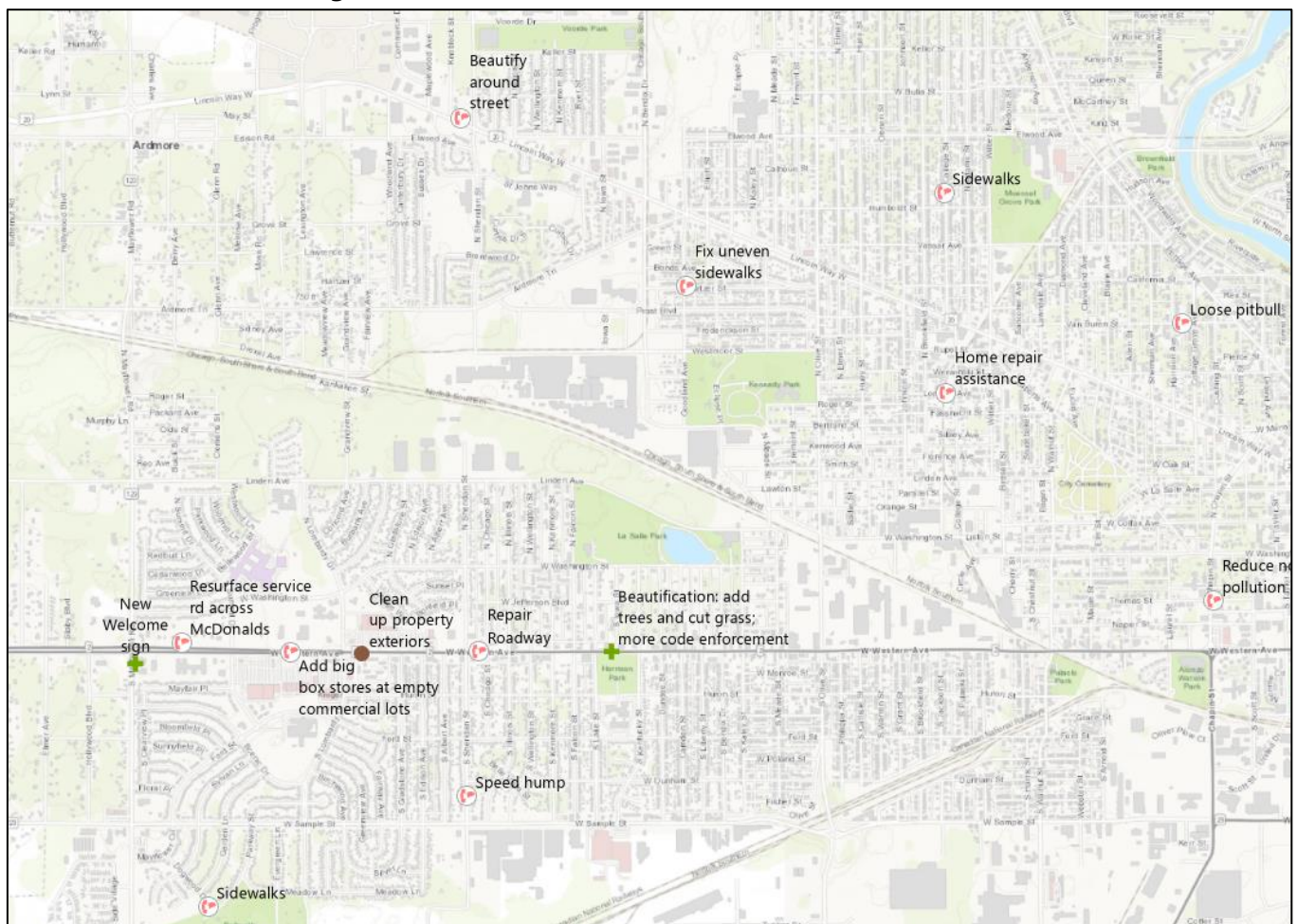
Resident Feedback: Feedback Geography

Geographic Overview

Many residents asked for the City to look at specific investments near their home or around their neighborhood. The maps display location-specific requests that would not be fulfilled by a standard service request but are within the City and Council’s scope to investigate. Each location is represented by a symbol indicating form of engagement. Many of these comments originated from the Budget Voicemail recordings.

The goal for this map is to share resident ideas for their neighborhoods in an easily understood way in relation to city-wide feedback in previous sections.

West and Northwest Neighborhoods



Form of Engagement

	Online Survey
	Table
	Voicemail

Resident Feedback: Feedback Geography

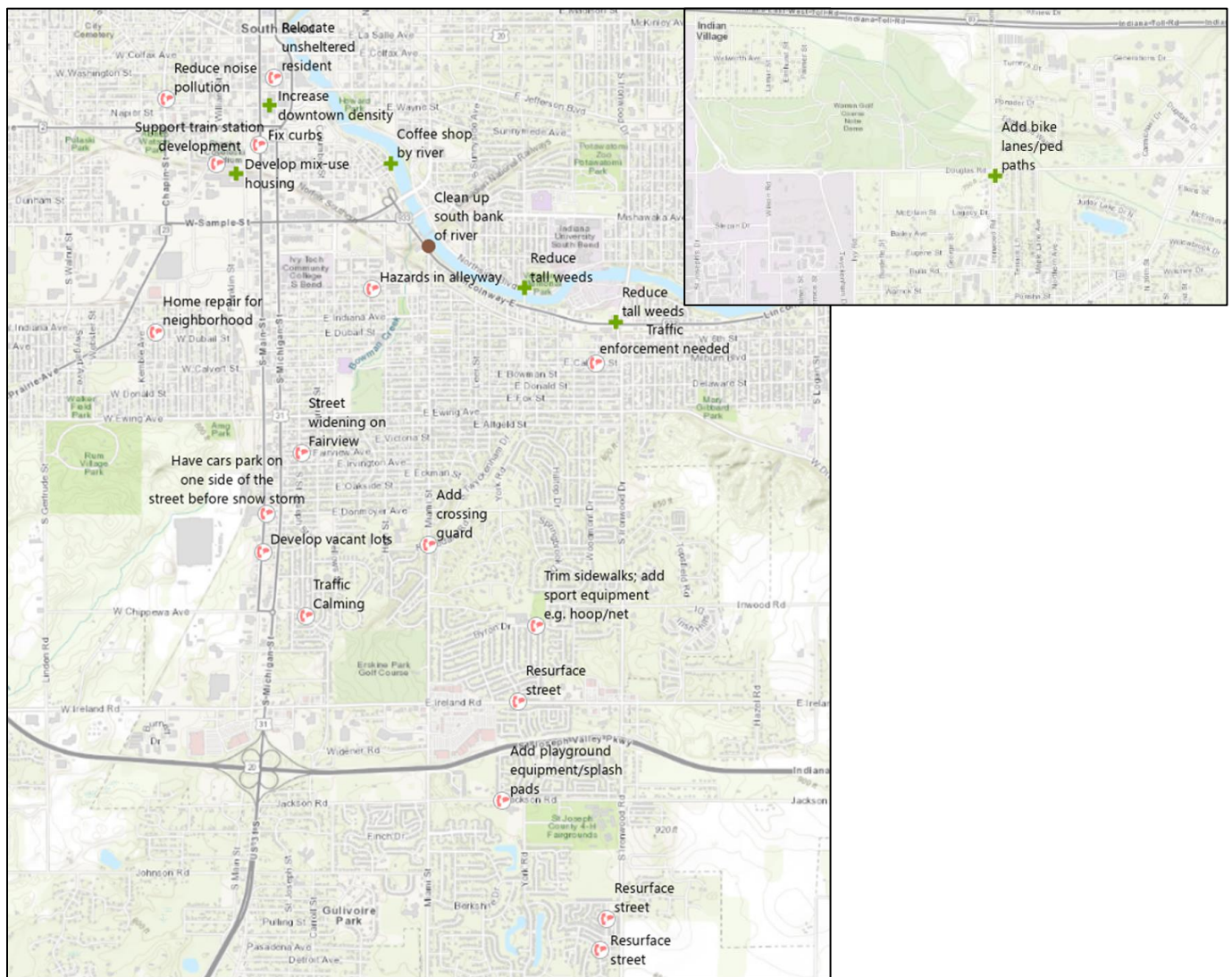
Feedback Themes

Nearly all location-based requests were for the Western/Southern side of the St. Joe River. Residents are eager on beautifying the corridor on Western and Lincoln Way with varying ideas.

Feedback near downtown are focused on unsheltered residents and increasing density. Near the St. Joe river, residents would like to see more grass trimming near right-of-ways.

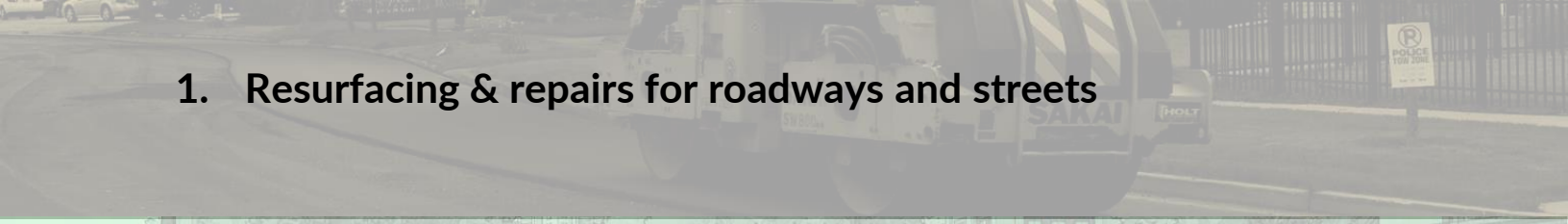
Downtown and Southern Neighborhoods

Far Northeast Neighborhood



Conclusion

Comparing responses across the three platforms, the report's conclusion reaffirms resident sentiments over the last few years: Support for Roadways remains steady, while investment in housing and youth programs has slightly risen.



1. Resurfacing & repairs for roadways and streets




2. Housing accessibility, availability, and affordability



3. Improve sidewalks and curbs



4. Safer communities



5. Investment in recreation, especially for youth

Looking forward to Build the Budget 2026, some recommendations include updating categories to better reflect resident sentiment e.g., corridor revitalization, code enforcement, and public transit. Providing clarifying information to residents at events for some categories: Climate Action details, health equity program proposal could be useful. To improve online survey uptake, it would be best to partner with Common Council on distributing the survey and encourage residents to take the survey each year if they filled out a survey in the past.

If you have ideas to improve budget engagement so we can continue to engage with more residents next budget season, please email sbit@southbendin.gov.

“I want to see positive youth [services] come back into the City.”

- Voicemail 66

“I would like to see extended services through the Police Department. With more police, that provides greater opportunity for them to communicate and engage with the community. With less police you aren’t able to build trust within the community.”

- Voicemail 131

“I would like to see the city develop reintegration programs for people who are released from jail”

- Survey 17

“I would like to see more services and resources available for our bilingual families and our Hispanic population. I feel like it’s very limited and I would like to see those resources increased.”

- Voicemail 146

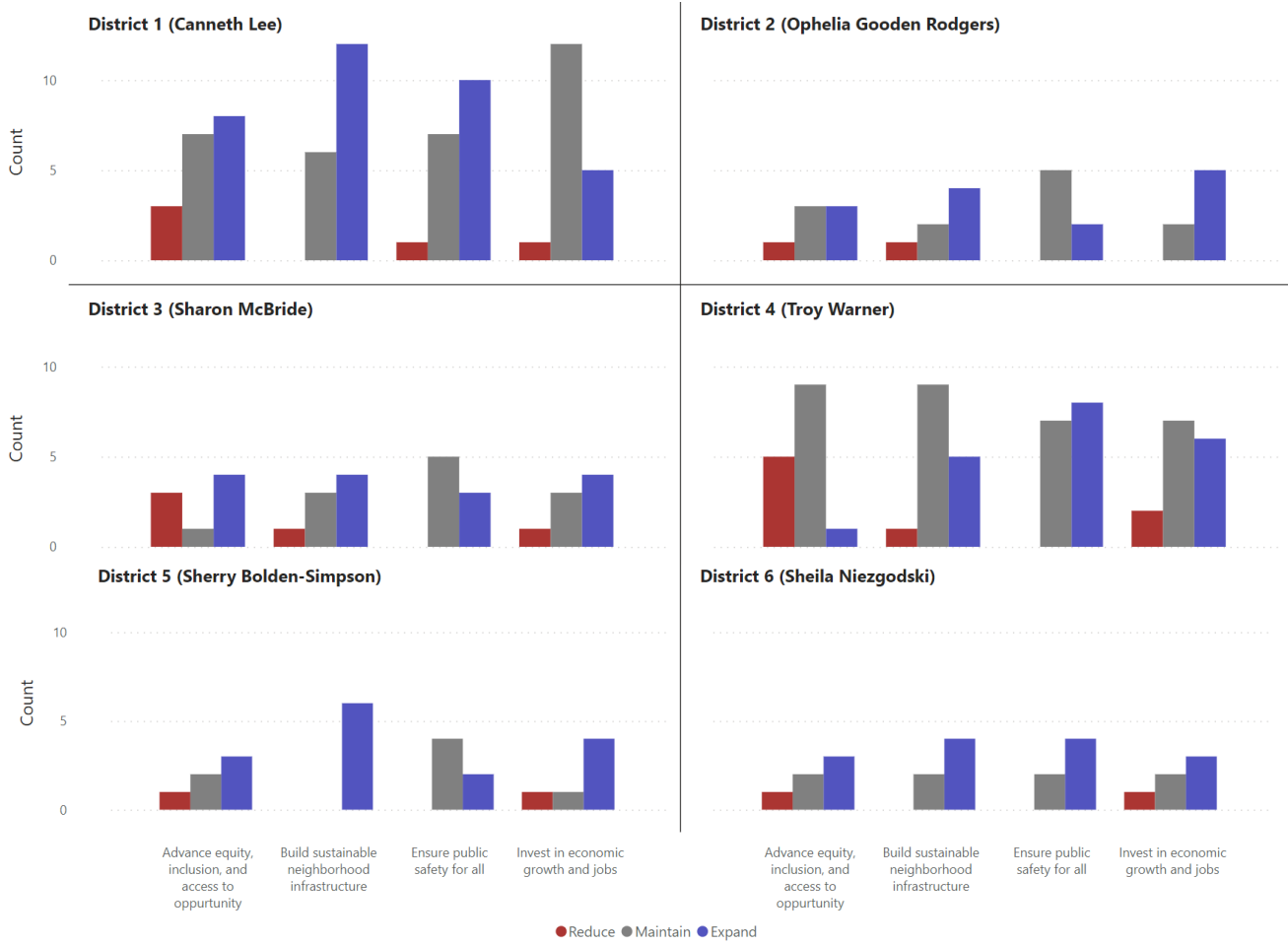
Appendix A: Online Survey and Envelope Wall

Envelope Wall and Online Survey Detailed Response Totals

Topic Subtopics	Envelope Dollars	% of Envelope Total	Online Dollars	% of Survey Total
Invest in supportive housing for unsheltered residents	\$11,700	9%	\$561	8%
Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$10,760	8%	\$351	5%
Support small businesses	\$10,740	8%	\$239	3%
Develop and Improve City Parks and Trails	\$10,540	8%	\$364	5%
Bike Lanes	\$40			
Invest in youth programs	\$10,160	8%	\$262	4%
Invest in more housing of all types	\$8,640	7%	\$423	6%
Low-income housing	\$20			
Repair and Resurface roadways	\$8,320	6%	\$950	14%
Improve neighborhood infrastructure	\$7,800	6%	\$718	10%
Increase officers	\$6,820	5%	\$573	8%
911 Dispatchers	\$20			
CROs Only	\$40			
Support new residents and welcome immigrant communities	\$6,020	5%	\$118	2%
Fund workforce development and skills training	\$5,580	4%	\$210	3%
Invest in climate action plan	\$5,120	4%	\$218	3%
Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$4,540	3%	\$619	9%
Expand financial empowerment and relief programs	\$4,380	3%	\$202	3%
Partner to promote health equity	\$4,160	3%	\$172	2%
Lead Testing	\$20			
Mental Health Clinics	\$160			
Add fire and EMS services	\$3,940	3%	\$351	5%
Promote diversity & inclusion in city contracts	\$3,900	3%	\$113	2%
Create good jobs by attracting and retaining businesses and talent	\$3,200	2%	\$277	4%
Better alternatives for returning residents	\$20			
Advance digital equity and internet access	\$2,700	2%	\$152	2%
Improve City's customer service	\$1,260	1%	\$129	2%
Other	\$760	1%	N/A	N/A
Childcare	\$100			
Corridor Beautification	\$60			
Community Events	\$20			
Food Security	\$120			
Handicap Accessibility	\$40			
Partnering with Schools	\$300			
SBARC	\$60			
Senior Services	\$40			
Transpo	\$20			
Total	\$131,040	100%	\$7,000	100%

Appendix A: Online Survey and Envelope Wall

Online Survey Spending Adjustments by Council District



Appendix B: 311 Voicemail

Budget Voicemail Detailed Response Total

Topic Subtopics mentioned	Mentions	% of total voicemails
Improve neighborhood infrastructure	51	32%
Curbs	5	
Develop vacant lots	10	
Sidewalks	19	
Street lights	3	
Traffic calming	12	
Repair and Resurface roadways	40	25%
Better road construction planning	2	
Increase officers (including community resource officers)	17	11%
Community resource officers only	2	
Traffic enforcement	4	
Develop and Improve City Parks and Trails	12	7%
Bike lanes	1	
Clean up river bank	1	
Invest in supportive housing for unsheltered residents	11	7%
Invest in more housing of all types	11	7%
Home Repair Program	1	
Low-income housing	3	
Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	7	4%
Invest in youth programs	5	3%
Expand financial empowerment and relief programs	5	3%
Expand violence intervention initiatives	5	3%
Support small businesses	4	2%
Add fire and EMS services	3	2%
Improve City's customer service	2	1%
Support new residents and welcome immigrant communities	2	1%
Invest in climate action plan	2	1%
Fund workforce development and skills training	1	1%
Partner to promote health equity	1	1%
Create good jobs by attracting and retaining businesses and talent	0	0%
Promote diversity & inclusion in city contracts	0	0%
Advance digital equity and internet access	0	0%
Other	82	
Corridor Beautification	17	11%
Alleys	12	7%
Partnering with local schools	8	5%
Code enforcement	8	5%
Waste management	8	5%
Lower taxes and utility bills	6	4%
Senior services	5	3%
Transpo	3	2%
Handicap accessibility	2	1%
SBARC	2	1%
Snow plow	2	1%
Traffic flow	2	1%
Public swimming pools	1	1%
Community events	1	1%
Improve service request tracking	1	1%
Food security	1	1%
Extend Downtown YMCA lease	1	1%
Inflation	1	1%
Legalize marijuana	1	1%

Appendix C: Strategic Spending Categories

Category Changes for Build the Budget 2025

Previously (2024): Invest in housing to address homelessness

Current (2025): Invest in supportive housing for unsheltered residents

All remaining nineteen strategic priority categories remain unchanged.

Examples of current City initiatives that fall under a strategic priority category

Topic	City Initiative
Repair and resurface roadways	Rebuilding Our Streets
Improve neighborhood infrastructure	Curb and Sidewalk Reimbursement Program , Council Sidewalk Allocation, Lampost Lighting Program
Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	
Increase officers	
Invest in supportive housing for unsheltered residents	Cooling/Warming Centers
Invest in more housing of all types	
Develop and improve city parks and trails	
Expand violence intervention initiatives	Group Gun Violence Intervention
Add fire and EMS services	
Create good jobs by attracting and retaining business and talent	High Skill Immigration Fund
Invest in youth programs	
Support small businesses	Small Business Assistance Suite
Invest in climate action plan	City Climate Action Plan
Fund workforce development and skills training	Upskill SB , Purdue Manufacturing Extension Partnership
Expand financial empowerment and relief programs	Utility Assistance Program , Eviction Defense Program
Partner to promote health equity	Mental Health Crisis Center
Advance digital equity and internet access	South Bend Open Wi-Fi , SenseSB
Improve city customer service	
Support new residents and welcome immigrant communities	
Promote diversity and inclusion in city contracts	Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) Certification Workshop

**BUILD
THE
BUDGET**

