

**State of Texas
County of Bexar
City of San Antonio**



**Meeting Minutes
City Council Special Meeting**

Municipal Plaza Building
114 W. Commerce Street
San Antonio, Texas 78205

2023 – 2025 Council Members

Mayor Ron Nirenberg
Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4
Teri Castillo, Dist. 5 | Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6
Marina Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7 | Manny Pelaez, Dist. 8
John Courage, Dist. 9 | Marc Whyte, Dist. 10

Thursday, June 20, 2024

1:00 PM

City Council Chambers

The City Council convened a special meeting in the Norma S. Rodriguez Council Chamber in the Municipal Plaza Building beginning at 1:03 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Council Members present:

PRESENT: 11 – Nirenberg, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito, Pelaez, Courage, Whyte

ABSENT: None

ITEMS

1. Briefing on the citywide and SASpeakUp surveys regarding the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget. [Jeff Coyle, Assistant City Manager; Alanna Reed, Director, Communications & Engagement]

City Manager Erik Walsh introduced the Item and Alanna Reed, Director of the Department of Communications and Engagement noting that a community budget input survey was conducted annually along with a community satisfaction survey that was conducted every two years. Reed provided a timeline for the survey and stated that the purpose of the survey was to assess

satisfaction of City services, understand residents' highest service priorities for the FY 2025 Budget given our fiscal reality, and develop recommendations for City Council based on input from residents. She reported that 1,083 surveys were completed and were designed to ensure results were statistically valid for each of the City's 10 council districts.

Ryan Murray, Assistant Director of Community Research at the ETC Institute reported that the goal was to receive 100 completed surveys in each of the 10 City council districts to ensure that results were statistically valid and reported that 1,083 surveys were completed from diverse respondents that matched the age, gender, and racial/ethnic demographics of the community.

Murray reported that 87% of residents were satisfied or very satisfied with City services which was up from 74% in 2022 and satisfaction increased in 21 of 25 of the areas measured. According to Murray, the ETC Institute maintained a large benchmarking database to provide comparisons to satisfaction ratings; the City of San Antonio had been compared to cities with a population of 250,000+ residents. He noted that Texas cities included: Austin, Dallas, El Paso, and Fort Worth. He added that on average, San Antonio scored 30% higher than average as a place to live, raise a family, work, and retire.

Additionally, the survey indicated that respondents felt that the City of San Antonio was better prepared for emergencies/disasters, provided opportunities to participate, and provided timely communication than the average for cities with a population of 250,000 or more, according to Murray. He stated that the City ranked first in all categories except animal care and the condition of City streets as compared to the other Texas cities.

Murray stated that the Budget survey, a second statistically valid survey, was designed to understand the needs and importance of City services and was designed to provide a priority investment rating (PIR). He noted that services rated as "low priority" tended to be those with already high satisfaction such as Youth Services, Metro Health, Garbage/Recycling, and Libraries. He noted that the PIR showed that streets, homeless encampments and homeless services, sidewalks, and police services were of the highest priority and Murray showed a table listing the highest priority by council district. Murray added that additional High Priority Services included: Affordable Housing, Code Enforcement, Street Lighting, and Animal Care Services (ACS).

Murray stated that in addition, 5,125 responses were received through SA SpeakUp which was not a statistically valid survey but results indicated that residents prioritized police services, affordable housing, services to assist homeless, fire and emergency medical systems.

In summary, Murray stated that San Antonio was moving in the right direction noting that satisfaction increased in 21 of 25 areas assessed and overall satisfaction with services was at an all-time high. He declared that San Antonio was setting the standard for service delivery citing customer service satisfaction (88% vs. 32% National), overall city services satisfaction (87% vs. 41% National), and San Antonio ranked first in most categories when compared to other surveyed Texas cities.

City Manager Walsh mentioned that there was an online dashboard available, noting that the survey was one piece of information used to help develop the budget priorities. While City Manager Walsh was pleased with the satisfaction survey results, he still felt there were improvements to be made and stressed the need to try and keep the scores high.

DISCUSSION:

Mayor Nirenberg was pleased that there was improved satisfaction but he still felt there was work to be done to continue to raise the bar and asked if there were comparisons with other cities outside of Texas in the dashboard. Murray stated that the dashboard did not include other cities' information and noted that each city could choose to publish their data in a dashboard. Mayor Nirenberg stated that he would ask the United States Conference of Mayors to display their surveys online.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked how many surveys were completed in Spanish and whether the survey was shared with the Neighborhood Leadership Academy (NLA). Murray stated that 12% of the surveys were received in Spanish. Assistant Director of Communications & Engagement Laura Mayes stated that the SA SpeakUp survey was distributed to stakeholders including the NLA. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked how this survey was different from past surveys. Reed noted that this survey included more definitions and a separation of homeless services from homeless encampments.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested a breakdown of overall as well as government satisfaction by service by council district. Murray referred to the online dashboard. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested a comparison of the top budget priority items between 2023 and 2024. Murray noted that homelessness dropped while streets took over as the top concern of residents.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia suggested a comparison to statewide surveys and other cities. She noted that some heavy traffic areas including state highways had issues with street conditions. Councilmember Rocha Garcia commented that there was a greater need in some council districts for sidewalks.

Councilmember Viagran was not surprised by the priorities listed for Council District 3 and was pleased with the increase in satisfaction but wanted to look at those that decreased. She recommended more community dialogue to help identify specific streets or homeless encampments needing attention. Councilmember Viagran wanted to ensure adequate compensation for people who directly worked with residents such as 3-1-1 operators, public works staff, garbage collectors, or even delegate agencies.

Councilmember Courage noted that respondent age groups were 20% each distributed by ages 18-34, 34-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+ and asked if this was consistent in each council district. He also wanted to know how many total surveys were sent out. Murray stated that the survey was sent to over 5,000 residents to ensure adequate response and ensure the 20% distribution of ages and other demographics resulting in over 100 in each council district. Councilmember Courage requested a breakdown by council district for those who answered all the questions versus those who gave partial answers.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito suggested that 1,083 respondents seemed like a low number. Murray stated that San Antonio was a large City, but the idea was to randomly sample and align the demographics of the City, and the results would hold true statistically. He noted that some cities had a larger sample size and some a smaller sample size but he felt the 1,083 was a healthy sample.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito highlighted the great work the City was doing and the overall high rate of satisfaction. Murray suggested that the numbers were high as a result of the work of the City and its engagement with residents, including the responsiveness of the City Council to the results of the budget survey. City Manager Walsh noted that breaking out homeless services from homeless encampments may have attributed to it moving to second place after streets this time, the responsiveness of City Council in setting its priorities as well as consistency of services. Councilmember Alderete Gavito noted that homeless encampments were still a high priority and suggested that more action was needed. City Manager Walsh stated that he was not surprised to see fire services, libraries, and solid waste with high rates of satisfaction as this was consistent with past surveys.

Streets and sidewalks were high on the priority, and Councilmember Alderete Gavito noted that her office received lots of calls about public works so she questioned how they could have had an improvement in the rating of public works services and suggested that a better description of their services should be included in the next survey. Councilmember Aldrete Gavito underscored the need to fund our Police Officers and Firefighters adequately based on the community's high ranking of public safety.

Councilmember Kaur expressed concern that there was not even a month to conduct the survey noting that most neighborhoods met once a month so she recommended a longer timeline next year. She asked if there was a question about whether residents had interaction with the Public Works Department in the past year and suggested that it might be important to know if the residents had direct experience. Ryan stated that while public works' ratings increased significantly, streets did not. Councilmember Kaur requested disaggregated data.

Councilmember Kaur asked if the 5,125 responses from SA SpeakUp were included in the report and requested this information by council district. Assistant City Manager Jeff Coyle stated that the SA SpeakUp survey was not rolled into ETS's statistically valid report as they were only asked to list their top four priorities; there were no questions about satisfaction in the SA SpeakUp survey. Councilmember Kaur recommended adding more questions to the SA SpeakUP to be able to get more information.

Councilmember Kaur asked if there was a way to differentiate between downtown residents of Council District 1 versus those in neighborhoods. Murray stated that there was a map of the surveys included in the presentation. Councilmember Kaur noted that Council District 1 had some of the oldest infrastructure including streets and sidewalks and requested how much it would cost to bring those within a half mile of a school up to date.

Councilmember Whyte asked which four areas did not improve. Reed stated that ACS had decreased by 3%, fire emergency response had decreased by 2%, fire prevention decreased by 1% and streets condition had decreased by 4%. Councilmember Whyte agreed that there needed to be more money for streets, sidewalks, police, and homeless encampment cleanup based on the survey results. He recommended increasing the budget for the Infrastructure Maintenance Program (IMP). Councilmember Whyte touted the benefits of a Zero-Based-Budget to find waste, duplication, outdated/ineffective programs whose funding could be used on the residents' budget priorities.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez commented that the Council District 2 results mirrored the council district's budget priorities. For next year's survey he recommended not using the names of departments but rather functions to help City Council determine the needs and suggested that only users of services could provide an accurate measure of satisfaction so he recommended including questions about use of services. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that streets, sidewalks, homeless services, street lighting, and code enforcement, ranked high for needing improvement. He supported more funding for ACS and the San Antonio Fire Department but suggested slowing the number of Police Officers being added each year as that was a large budget that would be able to help find savings for other service priorities.

Councilmember Castillo requested a list of the zip codes that participated in the survey noting that there might be different parts of the council district that recently got new streets or sidewalks, so those needs did not rate that very high. She noted the top priority in Council District 5 was services to the homeless followed by homeless encampments.

Councilmember Castillo noted there was a correlation between evictions and surrender of pets and commented that homeless encampment sweeps could have detrimental impacts on the lives of individuals impacted. She suggested a survey of people younger than age 18 noting that the San Antonio Youth Commission and Mayor's Fitness Council were excellent sources of feedback and suggested opening the survey to ages 16-18. Councilmember Castillo noted that the dashboard included a wealth of information and thanked staff for developing it.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda commented that the survey was consistent with what she was hearing from her residents and was pleased that the satisfaction rate had increased since 2022. Councilmember Cabello Havrda noted that residents really understood what was happening around them and were driving policies, so she supported use of the data in devising the Budget. She was not surprised that the fire response time, ACS, and construction were a concern and recommended more investment in those areas and recommended investing in areas that decreased. She noted that affordable housing was not even a thought several years ago and was now higher on the list.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda supported the inclusion of younger respondents in the survey and recommended including persons with special needs. Reed stated that the SA SpeakUp survey included disabilities as a demographic and allowed all ages to respond. Murray stated that there were legal reasons for surveying adults over age 18 and noted there was a separate youth survey conducted by the Parks Department. Councilmember Cabello Havrda recommended a breakdown of the priorities of persons with special needs in the dashboard.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that no one with over \$100,000 in annual income were showing up in the survey. Murray stated that 17% of the responses came from respondents at higher incomes and he stated that he would look at correcting the link. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if there was an ability for an automatic response if people made comments about state or school district functions or whether there was an opportunity to share the information with school districts and the Texas Department of Transportation.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested using surveys to educate the public or recommended the inclusion of more feedback about budget limitations in the survey or in a

marketing campaign.

Mayor Nirenberg closed the discussion by thanking staff and the consultants for their efforts.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

No Executive Session was held.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

Approved

**Ron Nirenberg
Mayor**

**Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk**