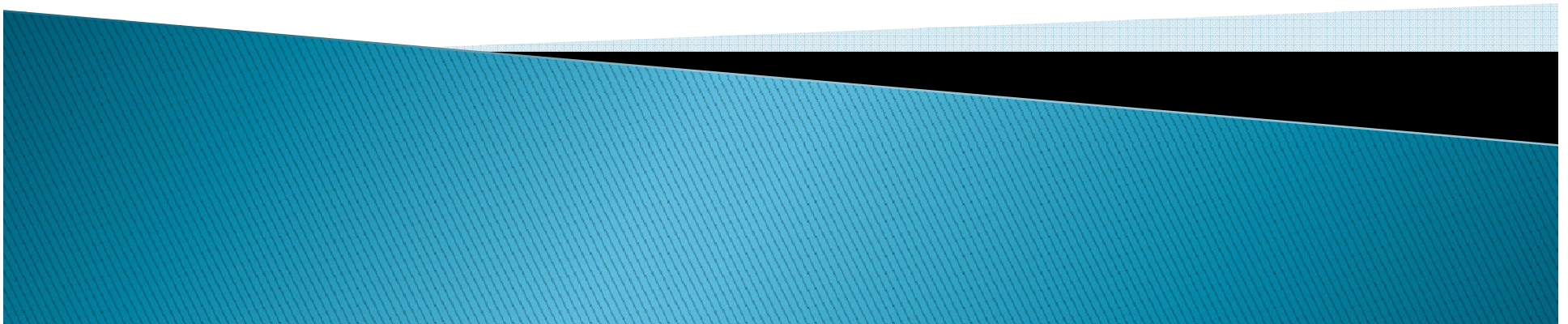


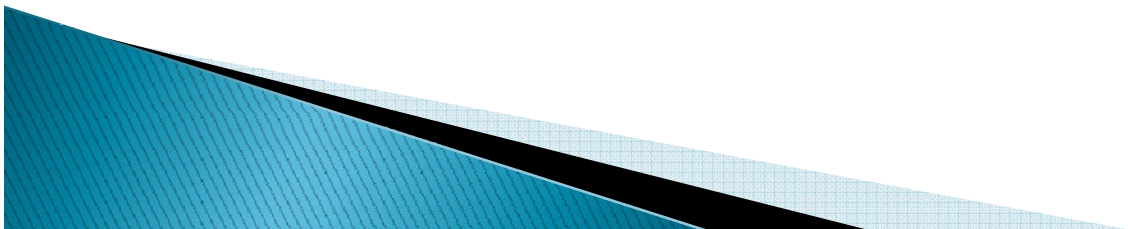
Focus Groups to Assess Support for a ¼ Cent Sales Tax for Public Safety and Infrastructure

Presentation of Findings
By ETC Institute
January 21, 2009



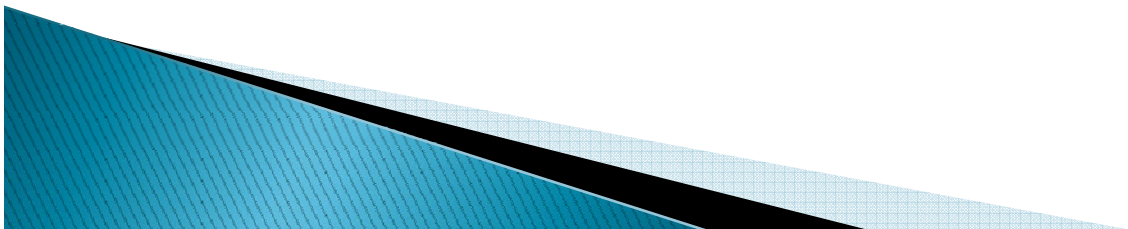
Agenda

- ▶ Purpose
- ▶ Methodology
- ▶ Conclusions
- ▶ Findings
 - How funding for major county services should change
 - Importance of funding specific types of projects that could be included in a future sales tax
 - Willingness to support a sales tax
 - Preferred allocation for the tax
 - Preferred type and length of tax
 - Impact of other issues on support
- ▶ Recommendations
- ▶ Questions



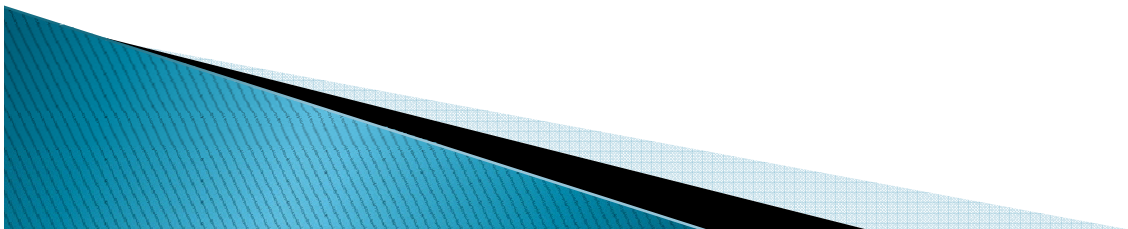
Purpose

- ▶ To determine whether the County should continue to pursue plans to present voters with a proposal for a $\frac{1}{4}$ cent sales tax for public safety and infrastructure
- ▶ To determine the types of projects and services that should be funded
- ▶ To determine the preferred type of tax



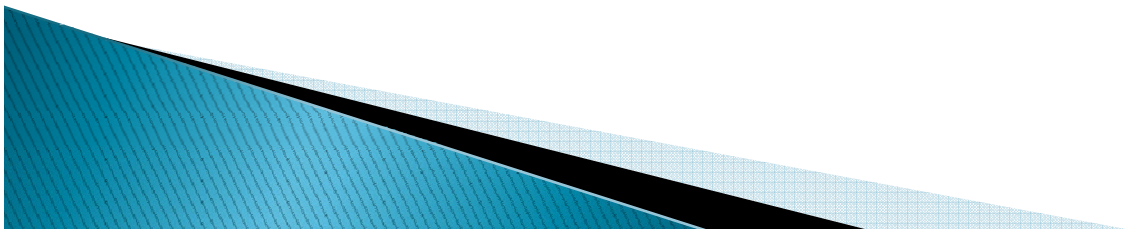
Methodology

- ▶ **A total of 20 residents participated in two focus groups**
 - 12 people attended a meeting at the Turner Recreation Center on January 18
 - 8 people attended a meeting at the Reardon Center on January 19
- ▶ **Participants were selected by the Mayor and County commissioners**
 - Not a random sample
 - Participants were generally more involved in and more familiar with local governmental issues than the “average” resident
- ▶ **The overall composition of the meetings reflected the diverse demographics of the County**
 - 11 men
 - 9 women
 - 12 Whites
 - 5 African-Americans
 - 3 Hispanics
 - Age range of participants: 30–80 years
 - All commission districts were represented



Bottom Line Up Front: Conclusions...

- ▶ The County should move forward with plans to present voters with a ¼ cent sales tax for public safety and infrastructure
- ▶ The tax should include funding for
 - More specialty police officers (narcotics, SROs, etc.)
 - Curbs and sidewalks
 - Repairs to sanitary and storm sewers
- ▶ To the extent possible, infrastructure improvements should be completed in a coordinated manner that will help enhance the overall appearance/aesthetics of neighborhoods
- ▶ County should pursue a “dedicated” sales tax for 10–20 years

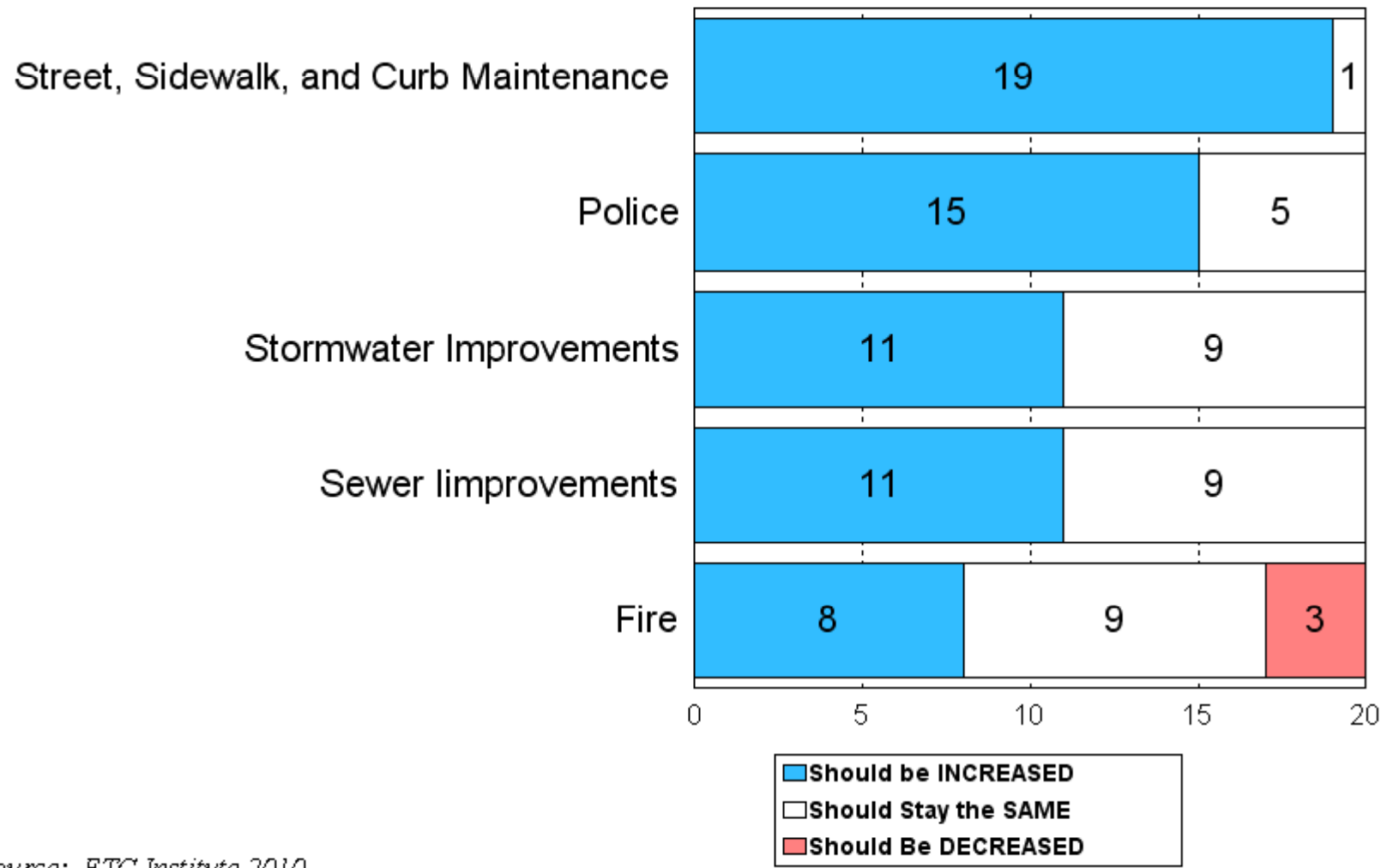


Findings:

How should funding for major county services change?

How Focus Group Participants Thought Funding for Major County Services Should Change

by number of respondents



Source: ETC Institute 2010

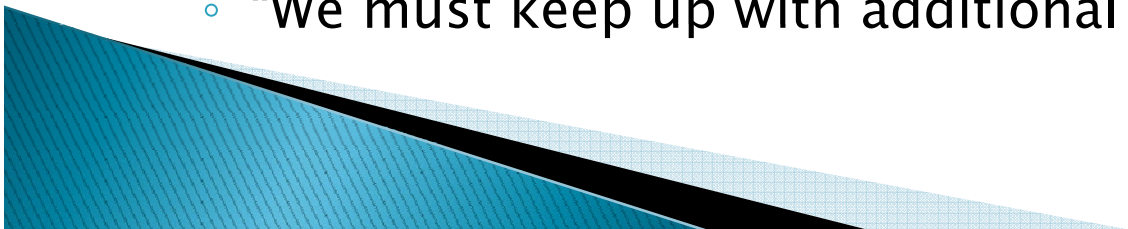
Reasons Residents Thought Funding For Various Services Should Be Increased

► Police:

- “We have had a high crime rate that has existed for a long time.”
- “The community is growing and police coverage needs to grow proportionately.”
- “We need more specialized officers, especially for narcotics.”
- “We need more SROs at the schools.”

► Fire:

- “The equipment and facilities are wearing out and it is a risk to the firemen.”
- “Some areas of the County are not covered well.”
- “We must keep up with additional growth in the County.”



Reasons Residents Thought Funding For Various Services Should Be Increased

▶ Street and Road Maintenance

- “Bad sidewalks and curbs make it appear that no one cares about this part of town (State Avenue).”
- “Sidewalks and streets are not maintained, grass is not mowed and there is too much trash.”

▶ Stormwater Management/Flood Prevention:

- “The Argentine area has always had stormwater management problems.”
- “The Federal government is asking cities to step up to the plate to update infrastructure, so we need to step up.”
- “In some areas the infrastructure is 80 years old.”

▶ Sewer improvements:

- “With just an average rain, sewers back up.”
- “We have an aging infrastructure that needs to be repaired.”



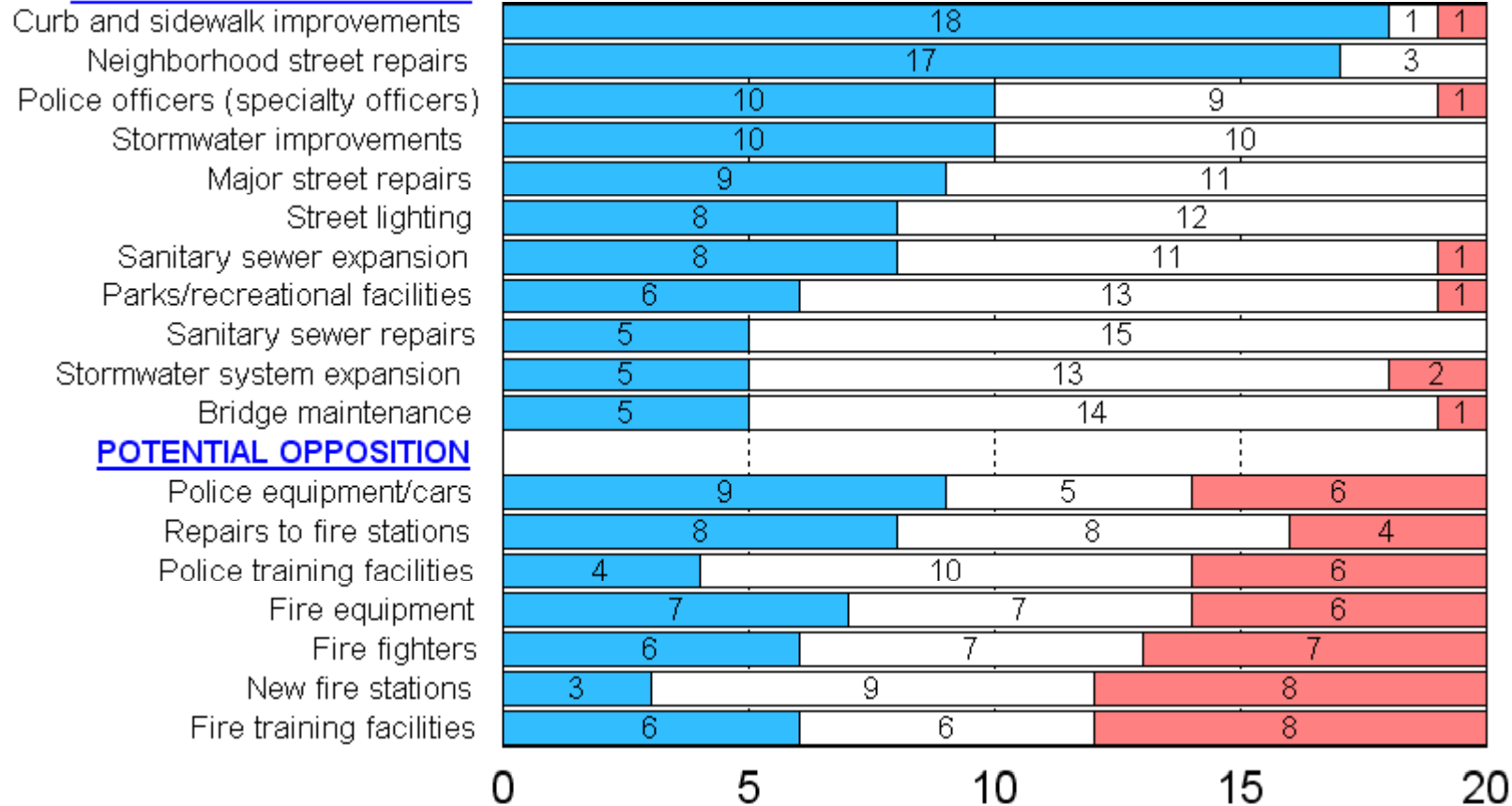
Findings:

How important is it to fund specific programs and services that could be included in a future sales tax?

How Important Focus Group Participants Thought It Was for the County to Increase Funding for Specific Projects/Services

by number of respondents

GENERALLY SUPPORTED



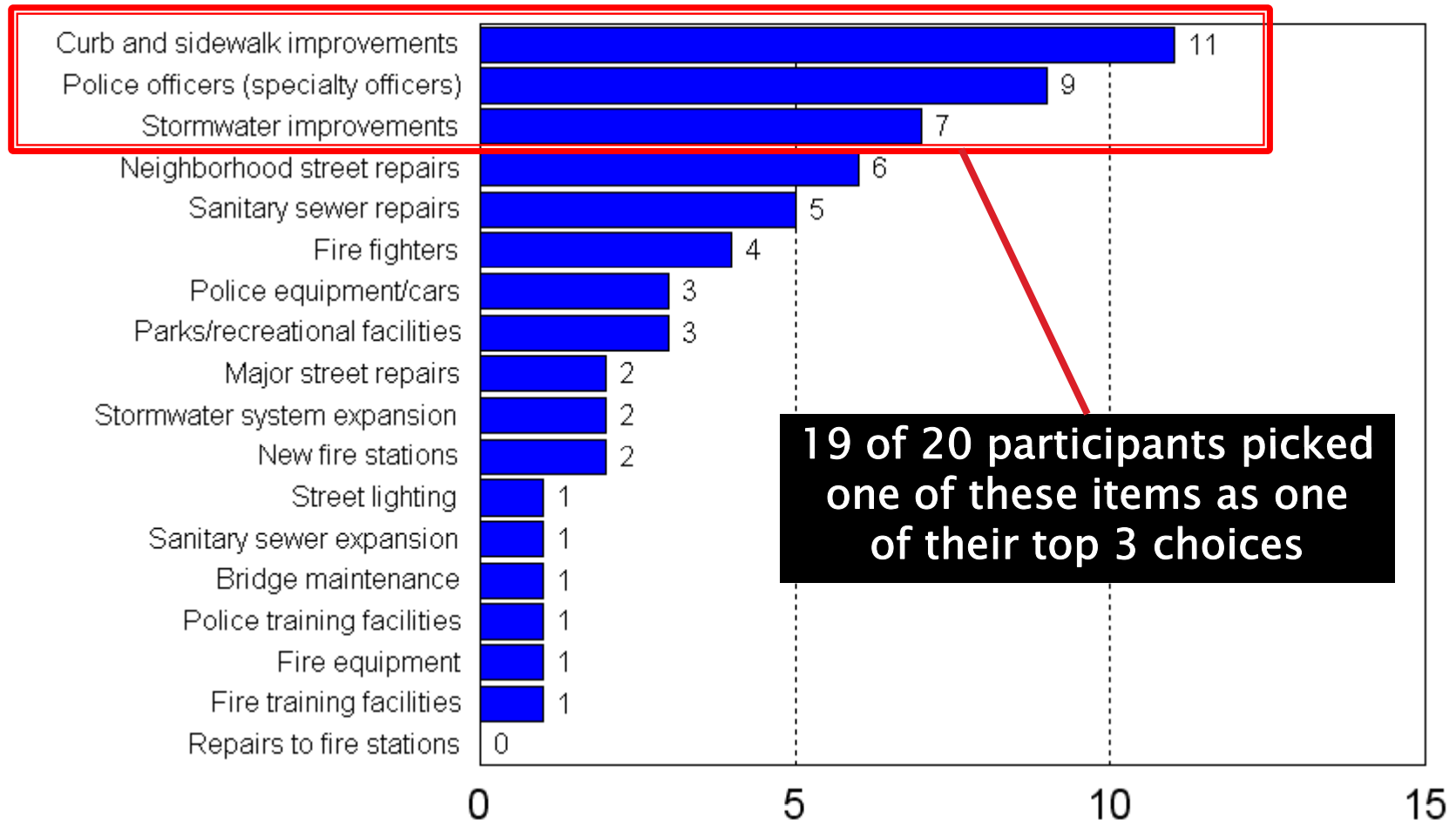
Source: ETC Institute 2010

Findings:

Which projects and services would residents be most willing to have funded by a future sales tax?

Projects and Services that Focus Group Participants Would Support Most on a Future Sales Tax

by number of respondents who selected the item as one of their top three choices



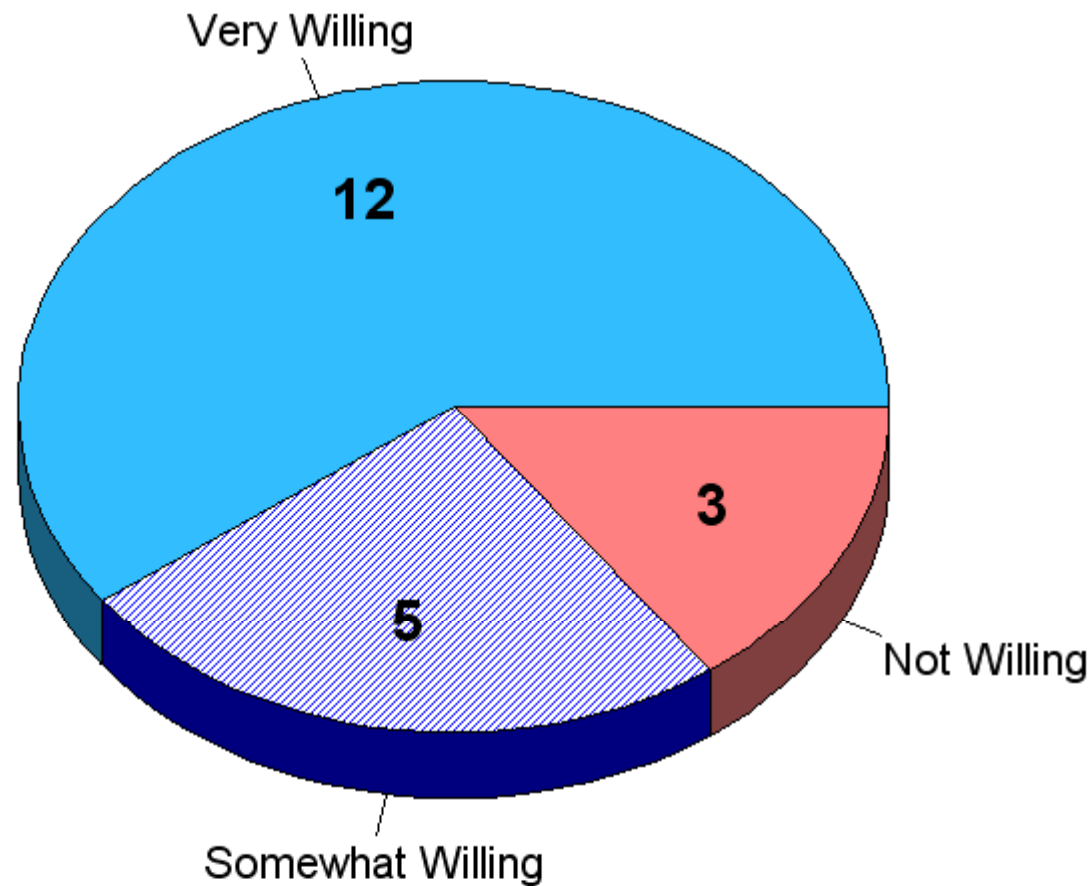
Source: ETC Institute 2010

Findings:

How willing are residents to support a future sales tax ?

Willingness of Focus Group Participants to Support a 1/4 Cent Sales Tax if it Included Funding for More Police Officers, Curbs/Sidewalks, and Storm/Sewer System Improvements

by percentage of respondents



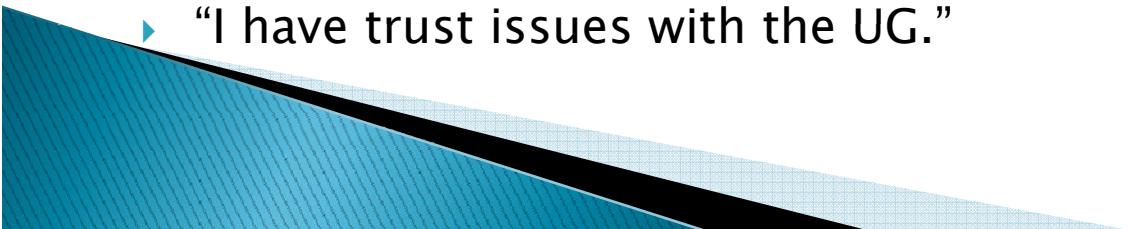
Source: ETC Institute 2010

Reasons Residents Were Not “Very Willing” to Support a Sales Tax

Those who were “somewhat willing” said:

- ▶ “I need to know how the sales tax would make us compare to other areas in the Metro so that shoppers will not be dissuaded from shopping here because of a higher sales tax.”
- ▶ “I need some assurances of accountability; how can we be sure they will actually do these projects.”
- ▶ “I need more information about the actual cost and specific projects that will be funded. I want to know that they are really needed and that we have tried other options.”

Those who were “not willing” said:

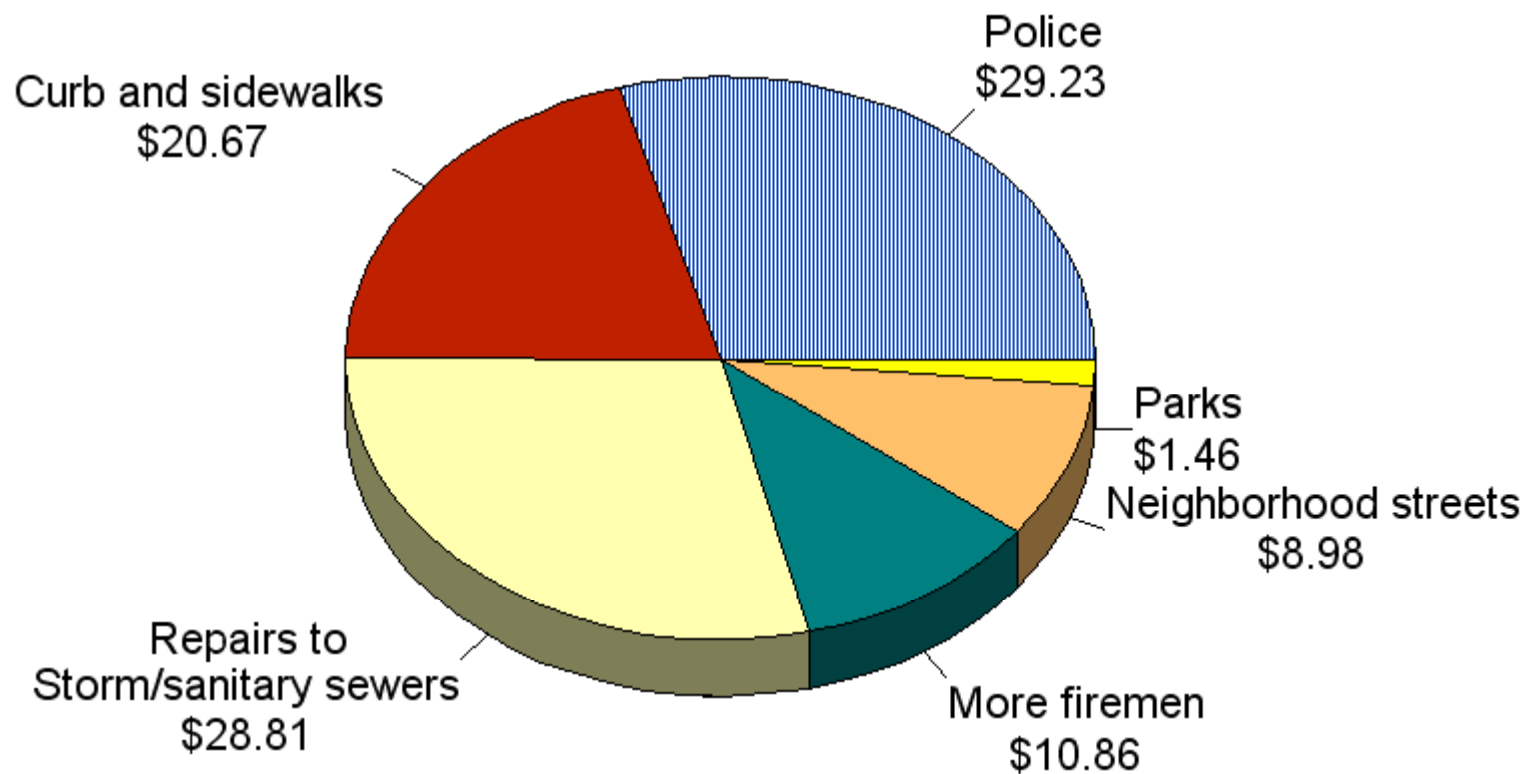
- ▶ “My community (northeast) has gotten nothing for all these years, I doubt it is going to change.”
 - ▶ “Senior citizens on social security can’t afford more taxes; taxes are already too high.”
 - ▶ “I have trust issues with the UG.”
- 

Findings:

How would residents like to see funding for a future sales tax allocated ?

How Focus Group Participants Would Allocate \$100 from a ¼ Cent Sales Tax for Public Safety and Infrastructure

mean distribution for all respondents



Source: ETC Institute 2010

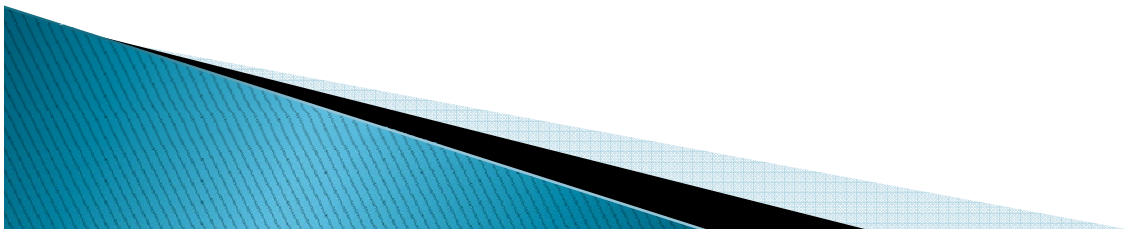
Findings:

What type of tax should the County present to voters?

Preferred Type of Tax

▶ Preferred Type: Dedicated

- 12 (60%) participant preferred a dedicated sales tax
- 8 (40%) preferred a general purpose tax
- Some participants were concerned about accountability
- 5 of the 12 participants who said they would support a dedicated sales tax would not support a general purpose sales tax
- All of those who supported a general purpose tax were also willing to support a dedicated tax



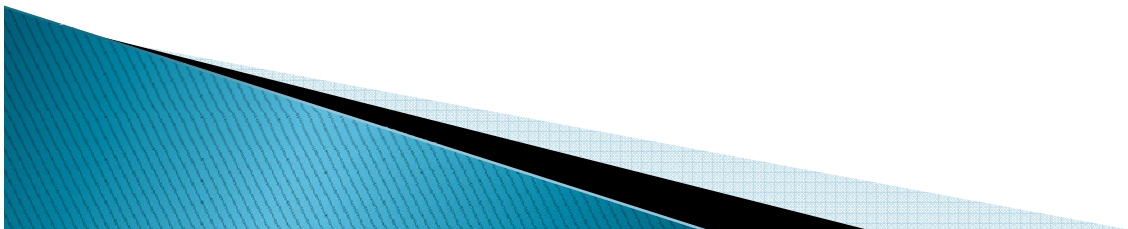
Findings:

How many years should the sales tax last?

Preferred Length for the Tax

▶ Preferred Length: at least 10 years

- 3 participants would probably not support the tax
- Of the remaining 17 people, 16 indicated that they would support a tax that lasted at least 10 years, assuming:
 - There were assurances that the tax would be used for the projects promised
- 7 participants indicated that they preferred the 10-year time frame because it would hold the County accountable
 - They felt the tax would be renewed if the County did a good job implementing the tax and they were not sure that they would support a tax that lasted more than 10 years
- 5 participants were concerned that 10 years was not enough time
 - But all of these people would still support the 10-year tax



Findings:

What Impact Would the State Sales Tax and Cigarette Tax Proposals Have on Support for the County Tax?

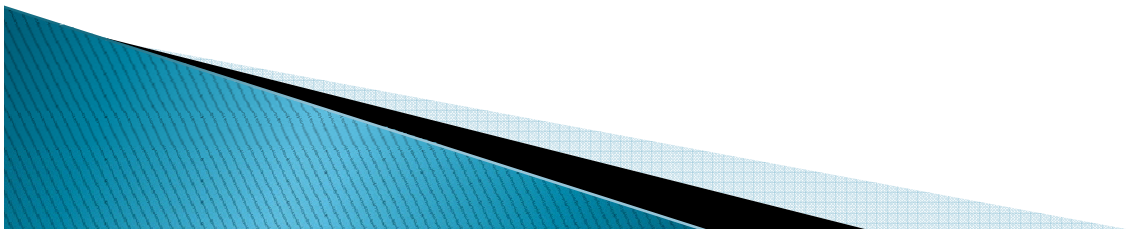
Impact of State Initiatives

▶ State Sales Tax:

- Only 3 participants indicated that a 1% state sales tax would make them less supportive of the proposed County sales tax
- Most of the participants did not think the proposed state sales tax would affect their level of support
- 4 people suggested that the County implement its sales tax before the State sales tax just to be safe

▶ Cigarette Tax:

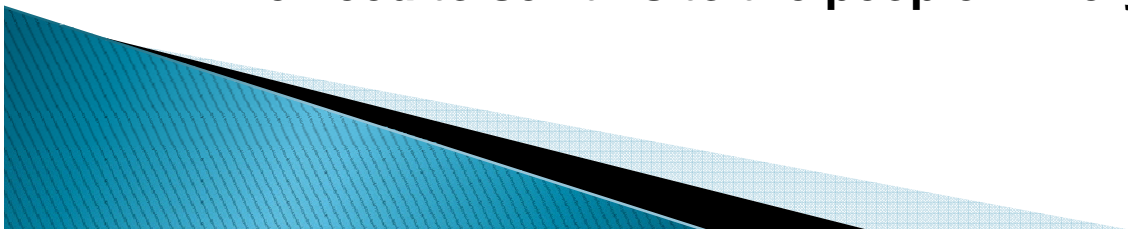
- None of the participants thought the proposed 55-cent per pack tax on cigarettes would make the less supportive of the County sales tax



Closing Comments

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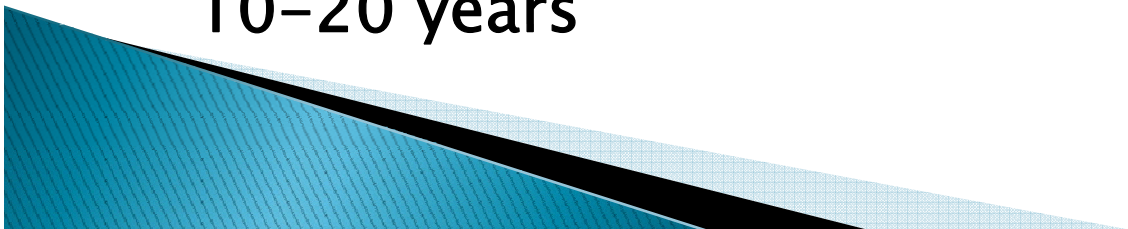
- ▶ **“Have there been other considerations for funding? Have we done our homework? Is this really needed?”**
- ▶ **“Make sure that the sales tax goes to the issues as promised. Accountability is very very important.”**
- ▶ **“Police and Fire need to be the main focus. I know we have other needs, but we need to be sure the community is safe.”**
- ▶ ***“I appreciate this kind of a process and respect my fellow participants.”***
- ▶ ***“I hope and pray that the UG listens to what the citizens have said, and especially these focus groups.”***
- ▶ ***“My bills are going up so I just can’t support any more tax increases. Tax increases are really hard on seniors.”***
- ▶ ***“With all the new things that are coming to this area, we should support tax for the betterment of our community.”***
- ▶ **“We need to sell this to the people. Everything else has been tried.”**



Recommendations

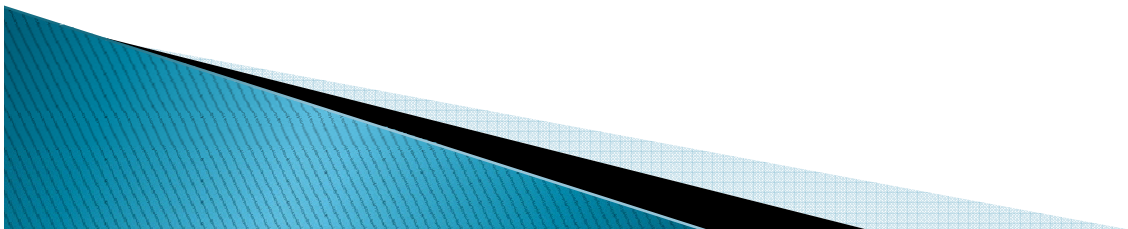
Recommendations...

- ▶ The County should move forward with plans to present voters with a ¼ cent sales tax for public safety and infrastructure
- ▶ The tax should include funding for
 - More specialty police officers (narcotics, SROs, etc.)
 - Curbs and sidewalks
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- ▶ To the extent possible, infrastructure improvements should be completed in a coordinated manner that will help enhance the overall appearance/aesthetics of neighborhoods
- ▶ County should pursue a “dedicated” sales tax for 10–20 years



Other Issues to Address...

- ▶ County should not rely solely on the results of these focus groups to predict the likely outcome of the sales tax
 - Focus Groups are not a scientific sampling of the voting population
- ▶ County will need to do a good job educating the public about the need for the sales tax
 - The County will need to explain that other options have already been tried
- ▶ County will need to address issues about how the sales tax will affect the County's competitiveness with other communities
 - Will the higher sales tax hurt local business?



Questions??

THANK YOU