

City of South Bend

Budget Feedback

2023



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**BUILD
THE
BUDGET**



Letter from the Mayor



Dear Neighbor,

This year, the City team continued our “Build the Budget” engagement program to encourage public feedback on the 2023 budget.

This is the second year we've done this participatory budgeting engagement sprint in late summer and early fall. Any way we can get more residents shaping City planning is a win!

Just like last year, the City Administration hosted public meetings, coded hundreds of 311 voicemails, collected online survey responses, and facilitated engaging budget games and trivia sessions at festivals and events.

I'm pleased to say that Build the Budget 2023 broke last year's record. We saw almost 900 resident engagements this season, beating last year by a healthy margin.

This report will share the major takeaways from the different facets of the Build the Budget program. We believe we've crafted a budget proposal that aligns well with the resident feedback we've seen.

Our proposed investments will build stronger neighborhoods, give us infrastructure we can be proud of, and make South Bend a safer city for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Mueller". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

James Mueller
Mayor, City of South Bend

“I would love to see continued budget amount on reduction of gun violence in our city, as well as the county and continued funds towards projects for youth engagement and youth activities. I would like to continue to see the city collaborate with the South Bend Community School Corporation to improve our schools as far as their ability to provide great education for our youth compensation that's comfortable for our teachers and staff, and just invested effort to collaborate for the safety of our children in their education..”

- Voicemail 158

“I would like to see the budget contain more funding to tear down the dilapidated homes around the City of South Bend and more money in the budget to pave the roads. I live on Locust Rd and there's three to four, six potholes on our road alone. So I'd really appreciate that being considered. Thanks.”

- Voicemail 163

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. Sometimes only 1-2 residents would come to a budget hearing. 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 2023 budget season the City of South Bend continued the "Build the Budget" initiative from last year to increase resident engagement on the budget planning process. Our goal was to try new things and demystify the annual budget process itself.

Using games, an online form, voicemails, and community meetings, we deployed several ways for residents to voice their ideas and build the budget.

In total we had **898** resident engagements:

136 online survey responses

179 people engaged with in-person budget table (stopped, asked questions, picked up material)

292 in-person budget game participants (envelope wall and trivia game)

285 voicemails collected by 311

6 residents attended the Community Action Group

Executive Summary

Across the 898 engagements, several themes surfaced over and over. Residents who participated in Build the Budget want:

Well-maintained infrastructure for roads and utilities

71 residents who left a voicemail mentioned improving roadways, typically citing specific problem streets in their neighborhood. Residents who responded to the online survey prioritized roads and utilities as top strategic initiatives as well.

Beautiful and functional neighborhoods across the City

In voicemails and survey responses, residents expressed desire for more beautiful and functional neighborhoods: better curbs and sidewalks, landscaping, neighborhood street lighting, better alleys, tree maintenance programs, etc.

Safer communities through violence intervention initiatives

Residents mentioned public safety and violence intervention initiatives as top priorities to keep supporting with city funds. This theme came across voicemails, the online survey, and in-person activities.

Greater housing affordability

The top priority mentioned at in-person activities was affordable housing for all and for people experiencing homelessness.

This report goes into further detail about the themes and information collected.

If you have ideas to improve budget engagement ahead of next budget season so we can get engagement numbers up even more, please email sbit@southbendin.gov.





How Residents Built the Budget

The Online Survey

136 residents submitted responses through an online survey, accessing the survey via QR code or shared link. Our hope was to deploy an online feedback opportunity that would be easy and fast for residents too busy to attend an in-person hearing or community action group. Online survey engagement went down compared to last year, though overall budget engagement across all modes still increased.

The goal of the survey was to prompt residents' preferences when managing a limited amount of funds. Residents were asked to allocate a fictional \$100 across several budget priorities. Residents were also presented with a list of investment areas, asking which ones the city should increase, maintain, or reduce. 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 we want!

How Residents Built the Budget

Community Action Groups

6 people attended a Community Action Group (CAG) in September 2022:

- September 22, 2022 at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center

Residents and City staff volunteered to facilitate these meetings and lead focus groups for budget feedback. In future, given the low turnout for the in-person option compared to last year, the City will explore ways to improve outreach or change our approach to these meetings.



311 Voicemails

Residents also had the option to leave a voicemail via 311 with an idea for the 2023 budget.

By the end of the day on September 26th (when feedback was closed), the City had received **285 budget feedback voicemails**.

City staffers listened to each voicemail and coded them by category/priority topic.

How Residents Built the Budget

Build the Budget Envelope Walls

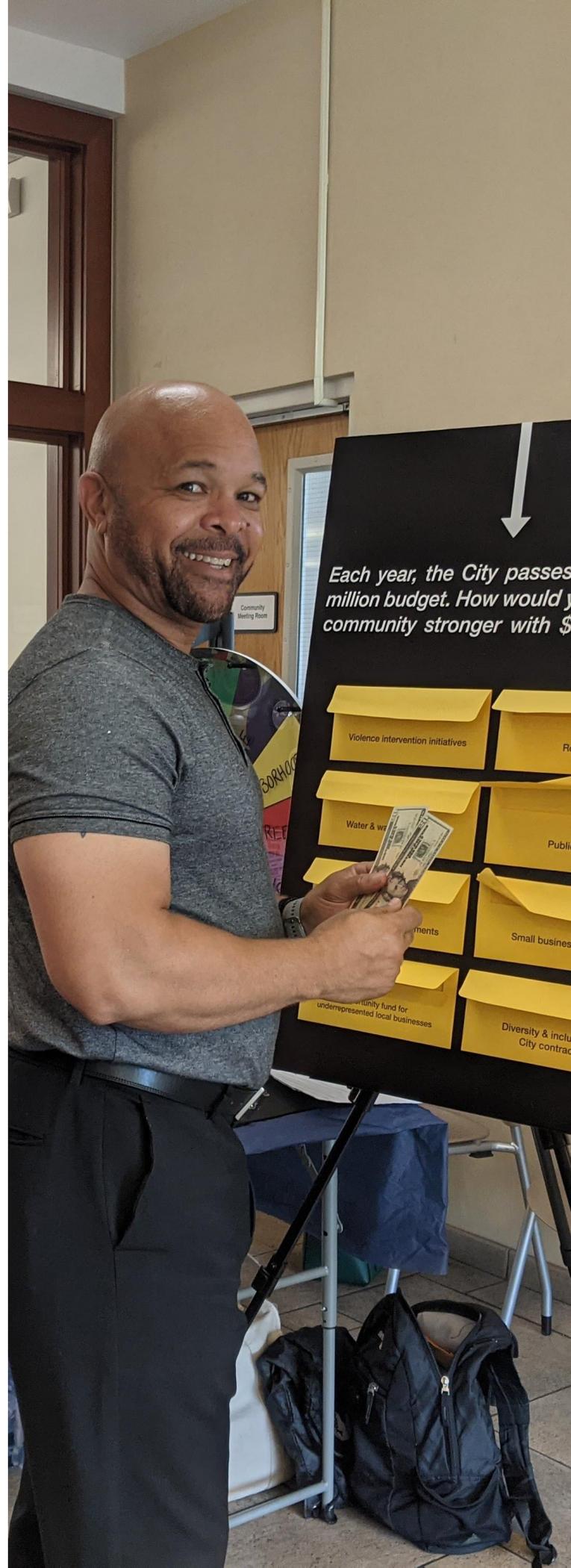
To mirror the information collection of the online survey, the City created two interactive envelope walls to display at public events.

Participating residents each received \$100 in fake bills to allocate across strategic spending categories in the 2023 annual budget.

The envelope walls went to **11 public events** in August and September:

- 2 community events (First Fridays and Art Beat in downtown South Bend)
- 1 Community Advisory Group meeting (Martin Luther King Jr. Center)
- 1 City event (South Bend 2045 Plan Kick-Off at the Technology Resource Center)
- 7 libraries (Francis, Wester, LaSalle, Centre, River Park, Tutt, Main branches of St. Joe County Public Library system)

\$15,660 in fake money were allocated by residents who participated in the envelope wall game. We believe the total funds not being divisible by \$100 can be attributed to a few incomplete resident allocations.



How Residents Built the Budget

Budget Trivia Game

While it didn't collect feedback, the budget trivia game was an eye-catching, fun way for residents to learn a fun fact about the city budget. Residents spun the budget trivia wheel, landed on a category, and had an opportunity to answer a question and win a "Build the Budget" t-shirt.

Sample Trivia Question: How many tons of trash does the City pick up in a week? Over or under 100 tons? Answer: Over! 568 tons of trash are collected per week by the solid waste team in Public Works.

This game didn't help us learn about resident priorities, but it turned out to be an effective way to draw people into a conversation about the city budget and quickly demonstrate its scale and importance. Often, after playing, residents completed the online survey or participated in the envelope walls.



“I think the budget should be used towards infill in our city of South Bend. We need more housing. more towards the affordable housing side with the water taps and sidewalks and curbs. Thank you“

- Voicemail 169

“I would like to see something, a program or something, that could assist us [seniors] financially as far as like major ticket items, well, within reasonable amount, like your AC unit and things of that nature. So that's just one of the suggestions. So if we can implement more programs and or systems for our senior citizens, who are strapped for the most part, financially, is my suggestion.

- Voicemail 43

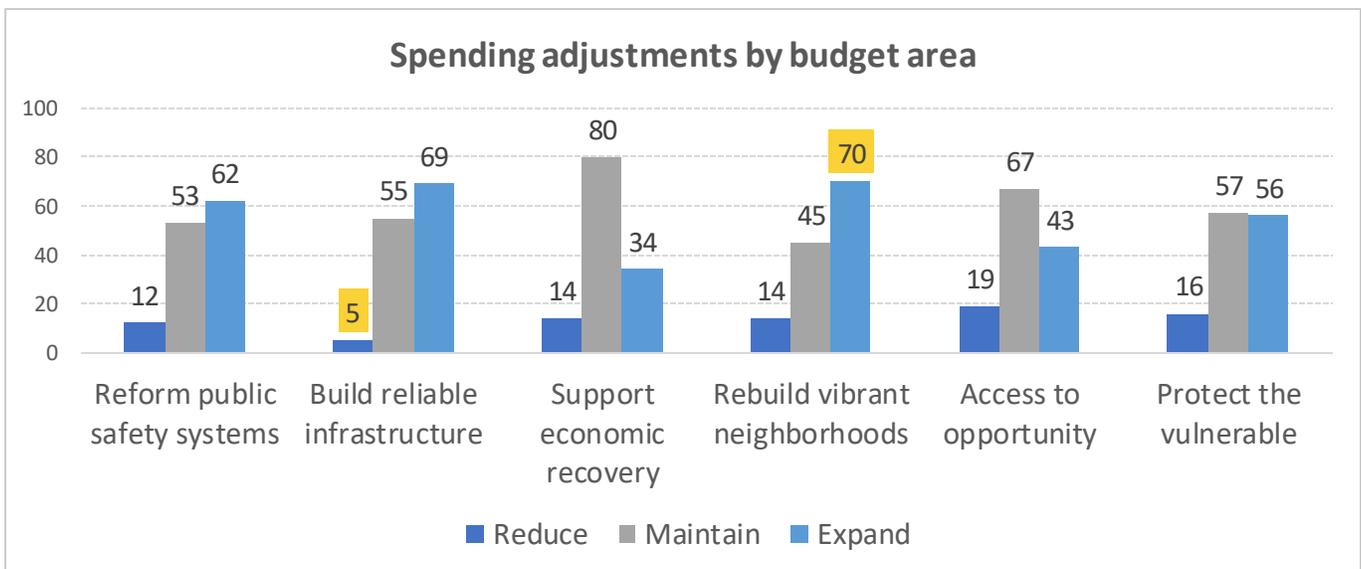
Resident Feedback

Online Survey Results

For context, below is a breakdown of the online responses by council district for the online survey. Districts 5 and 3 had the most engagement this year. Some respondents did not answer this question because it was not required.

Council District	2023 Budget responses	2022 Budget responses
Canneth Lee (District 1)	13	40
Henry Davis, Jr. (District 2)	12	18
Sharon McBride (District 3)	19	19
Troy Warner (District 4)	18	33
Eli Wax (District 5)	31	19
Sheila Niezgodski (District 6)	9	11
(blank)	34	0
Grand Total	136	140

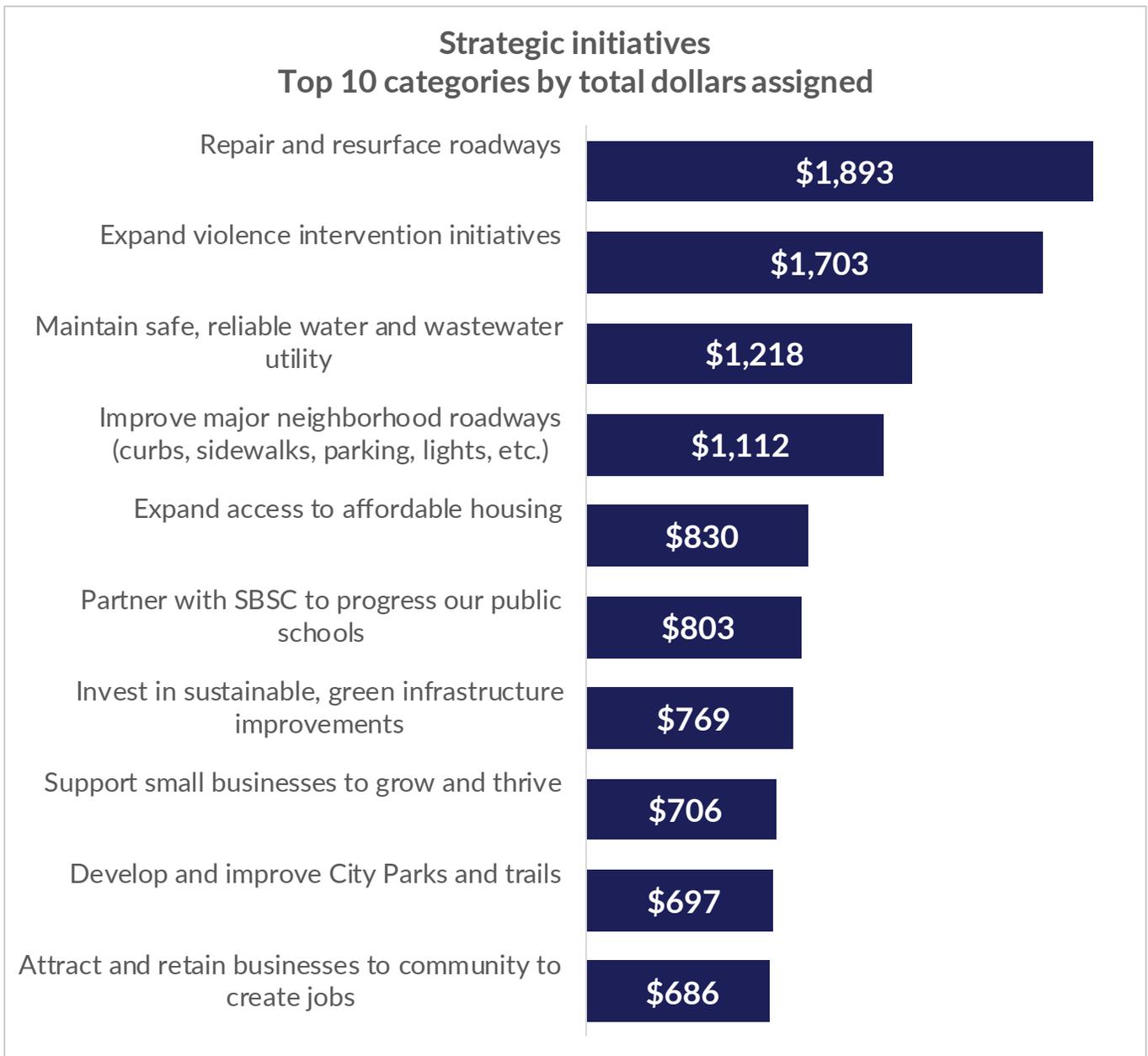
When asked whether to expand, maintain, or reduce broad budget areas, survey responses were below. Rebuild vibrant neighborhoods was the response with the most answers to expand (70). Build reliable infrastructure had the least number of answers to reduce (5).



Resident Feedback

When asked how 2023 strategic budget dollars should be allocated, survey respondents prioritized **roadways, violence intervention initiatives, and utilities.**

See the top ten categories below.



Resident Feedback

Compared to last year’s responses, survey respondents prioritized violence intervention initiatives more. Respondents’ top priorities were still roads and utilities for the 2023 budget.

See the top ten categories compared to the 2022 budget responses below.

Rank	Strategic initiatives	2023 Budget responses		2022 Budget responses	
1	Repair and resurface roadways	\$	1,893	\$	1,648
2	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$	1,703	\$	887
3	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$	1,218	\$	1,502
4	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$	1,112	\$	1,620
5	Expand access to affordable housing	\$	830	\$	813
6	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$	803	\$	750
7	Invest in sustainable, green infrastructure improvements	\$	769	\$	1,039
8	Support small businesses to grow and thrive	\$	706	\$	553
9	Develop and improve City Parks and trails	\$	697	\$	897
10	Attract and retain businesses to community to create jobs	\$	686	\$	513

Resident Feedback

Strategic Initiatives for the 2023 Annual Budget Top 10 Categories by District

Canneth Lee (District 1)		
Rank	Strategic initiatives	Total \$
1	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$198
2	Repair and resurface roadways	\$110
3	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$108
4	Expand access to affordable housing	\$105
5	Develop and improve City Parks and trails	\$100
6	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$85
7	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$79
8	Focus on accessible housing as top priority in addressing homelessness in the City	\$79
9	Support small businesses to grow and thrive	\$64
10	Attract grocers to local "food deserts"	\$53

Henry Davis, Jr. (District 2)		
Rank	Strategic initiatives	Total \$
1	Repair and resurface roadways	\$131
2	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$126
3	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$102
4	Attract and retain businesses to community to create jobs	\$99
5	Expand access to affordable housing	\$98
6	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$77
7	Focus on accessible housing as top priority in addressing homelessness in the City	\$71
8	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$70
9	Support small businesses to grow and thrive	\$61
10	Promote diversity & inclusion in City contracts	\$61

Resident Feedback

Strategic Initiatives for the 2023 Annual Budget Top 10 Categories by District

Sharon McBride (District 3)		
Rank	Strategic initiatives	Total \$
1	Repair and resurface roadways	\$221
2	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$164
3	Invest in sustainable, green infrastructure improvements	\$154
4	Develop and improve City Parks and trails	\$152
5	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$148
6	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$146
7	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$145
8	Support small businesses to grow and thrive	\$132
9	Focus on accessible housing as top priority in addressing homelessness in the City	\$112
10	Attract and retain businesses to community to create jobs	\$80

Troy Warner (District 4)		
Rank	Strategic initiatives	Total \$
1	Repair and resurface roadways	\$273
2	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$220
3	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$199
4	Expand access to affordable housing	\$199
5	Focus on accessible housing as top priority in addressing homelessness in the City	\$170
6	Develop and improve City Parks and trails	\$112
7	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$108
8	Invest in sustainable, green infrastructure improvements	\$80
9	Fund local skill building programs for career development	\$71
10	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$63

Resident Feedback

Strategic Initiatives for the 2023 Annual Budget Top 10 Categories by District

Eli Wax (District 5)		
Rank	Strategic initiatives	Total \$
1	Repair and resurface roadways	\$605
2	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$387
3	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$308
4	Support small businesses to grow and thrive	\$252
5	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$204
6	Attract and retain businesses to community to create jobs	\$202
7	Invest in sustainable, green infrastructure improvements	\$153
8	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$143
9	Expand access to affordable housing	\$125
10	Fund local skill building programs for career development	\$121

Sheila Niezgodski (District 6)		
Rank	Strategic initiatives	Total \$
1	Expand violence intervention initiatives	\$129
2	Attract and retain businesses to community to create jobs	\$111
3	Invest in sustainable, green infrastructure improvements	\$105
4	Improve major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	\$73
5	Partner with SBSC to progress our public schools	\$64
6	Repair and resurface roadways	\$63
7	Maintain safe, reliable water and wastewater utility	\$45
8	Expand access to affordable housing	\$45
9	Develop opportunity fund for underrepresented local businesses	\$39
10	Develop and improve City Parks and trails	\$35

“I would like to request funds for the City budget to continue to help with the homeless population and to continue to help with supported living. For those on the edge of our society, these funds are critical. We're relying on nonprofits. The City needs to help as much as we can with that affordable housing and work with public housing. We need to spend money on those priorities. Thank you so much.”

- Voicemail 69

“I noticed that on the south side of South Bend...there's really not much by way of parks in that area....But for like a woman who wants to work out after work, who wants to work in an area that's safe where she's not going to get hit by cars, where she doesn't have to worry about something happening, you know, she wouldn't want to go in a forested area. Having something nice and open with a running track that, you know, isn't that far of a drive would be really nice.”

- Voicemail 165

Resident Feedback

September 2022 CAG Meeting

Throughout the CAG session, residents chose most often to prioritize the following of the mayor's priorities for the 2023 budget:

- Housing. Specifically permanent housing and support for homelessness, subsidized home repair, new housing and expanded access to affordable housing
- Public Safety
- Build vibrant neighborhoods
- Infrastructure - in particular building up green, sustainable infrastructure

When conversations deviated from the pre-selected categories, residents proactively mentioned the below priorities:

- Mental health support
- Partnering with the Department of Health for more public health programs and improvements. A specific problem mentioned was infant/maternal mortality rates.
- Crisis response team
- West Side revitalization and investment
- Green spaces, athletic courts, recreation, and public/community centers – especially pools



Resident Feedback

311 Voicemails

Build the Budget collected and categorized 285 voicemails. 50 messages had no message recorded. 28 messages did not discuss the budget.

The City therefore analyzed 207 voicemails. Across those 207 voicemails, there were 41 unique mentions of various priority topics. “Other” topics were strategic initiatives not listed in the Build the Budget survey. We grouped the unique mentions into the categories below.

- Infrastructure
- Neighborhoods
- Safety
- Community
- Business

Residents mentioned Neighborhoods and Infrastructure the most as top priorities, followed by Safety, Community, and Business.

Topic	Category	# of mentions
Major neighborhood roadways (curbs, sidewalks, parking, lights, etc.)	Neighborhoods	38
Other: Beautify neighborhoods	Neighborhoods	34
Roadways	Infrastructure	33
Other: Traffic calming	Safety	23
Public Safety	Safety	16
Partner with SBSC for our public schools	Community	13
Other: Vacant and abandoned properties	Neighborhoods	10
Other: City administration	Infrastructure	9
Accessible housing for homelessness	Neighborhoods	9
Other: Solid Waste service	Infrastructure	8

Resident Feedback

One benefit of collecting priorities via voicemail was capturing the unique tone, ideas, and expression of South Bend's residents.

We've spread quotes from voicemails throughout this report. We think they add a personal lens to many of the important priority areas being weighed this budget season.



“I think a great idea for the budget would be to utilize the funds on the west side of town to improve homes, the street, the alleyways, which are mainly vacated and full of weeds. Thank you”

- Voicemail 203

“We're in a time of great need for our planet and for the environment. So anything that could be a useful and cognitive and thoughtful devotion of that of those funds towards bettering South Bend's impact environmentally, whether that's cleaning up the water, or if goes into the St. Joe river, or our trash use, or perhaps some of the, you know, more pressing environmental needs in lower income areas.”

- Voicemail 79

Resident Feedback

Build the Budget Envelope Walls

For the envelope wall activity, we asked residents to allocate \$100 dollars in fake bills across different strategic initiatives for the 2023 budget. 153 residents participated in this activity.

Residents who completed this activity in-person prioritized housing the most, followed by sustainable infrastructure.



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Conclusion

We'd like to thank every resident who provided ideas, thoughts, and feedback during Build the Budget.

Citywide, the four big themes that surfaced from this feedback were:

Well-maintained infrastructure for roads and utilities

Beautiful and functional neighborhoods across the City

Safer communities through violence intervention initiatives

Greater housing affordability

If you have ideas to improve budget engagement ahead of next budget season so we can get engagement numbers up even more, please email sbit@southbendin.gov.

This report was primarily authored by Becky Phung, 2023 Build the Budget Project Manager and Design Specialist for the Department of Innovation & Technology. Thank you for all your hard work, Becky!

