



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY

**TO** Interested Parties

**FROM** FM3 Research

**RE:** City of Riverside Community Issues Survey

**DATE** June 30, 2021

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently conducted a survey of residents of the City of Riverside that examined community satisfaction and funding priorities.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the study was to test the level of support for a potential measure that may appear on an upcoming City of Riverside ballot. Two versions of the measure were tested: one was the previously recommended ballot question (hereafter referred to as the alternative version 1 measure), and the other by the Riverside Charter Review Committee (hereafter referred to as the CRC) (see **Appendix A**). To test both measures, a random half of the sample of respondents were asked to indicate how they would vote on the previously recommended version, and the other random half of the sample were asked to report on how they would vote on the CRC version.<sup>2</sup> A simple majority (50+1%) is required for passage.

Key findings from the study include:

- **Two-thirds initially support the alternative version 1 measure that amends the City of Riverside’s Charter to protect local funding without raising taxes or utility rates by continuing an existing voter-approved budget procedure that transfers a portion of the City’s utility revenue to the General Fund for use on services such as 911 response times, street repairs and addressing homelessness (see Figure 1).** Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated that they would vote in favor of re-authorizing the transfer, exceeding the majority-vote threshold necessary for passage and well outside the survey’s margin of error. In contrast, only 22% indicated they would oppose it, and an additional 12% were undecided.
- **Just over a third of respondents indicated they would initially vote to support the CRC’s recommended measure to establish a fixed amount that is transferred from the City’s utility revenue to the General**

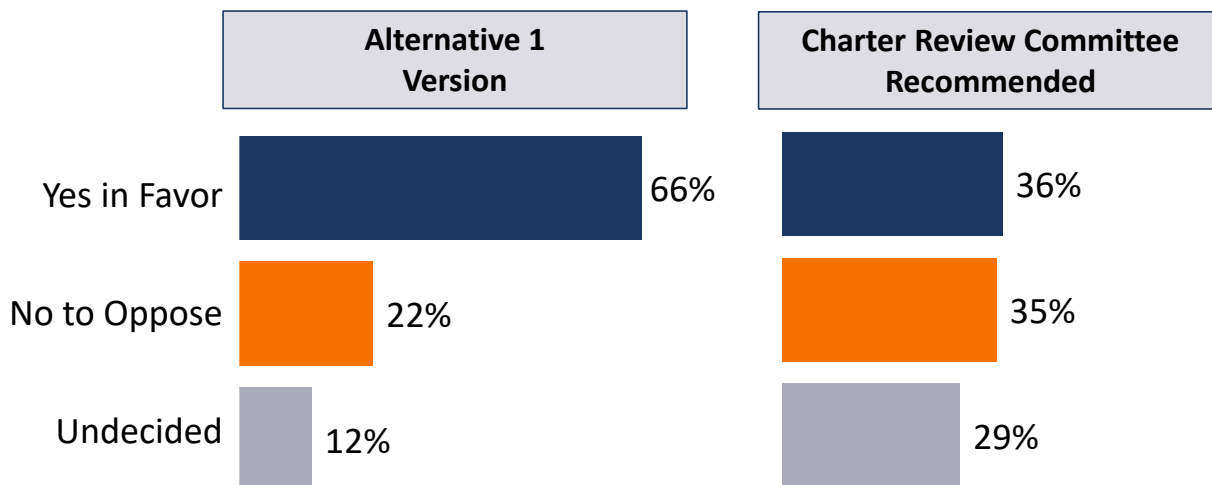
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<sup>1</sup> Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) conducted a dual-mode survey online and by telephone (cellular and landline) between June 19-28, 2021, among a random sample of 605 voters registered in the City of Riverside who are likely to participate in a 2021 Municipal Election. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error for this study is +/-4.0% with a 95% confidence interval for the full sample, and +/-5.7% for half the sample.

<sup>2</sup> Each respondent received only one version of the two potential ballot measures and were not informed that another potential version existed. Respondents were randomly selected to receive a particular version of the measure in order to ensure both groups are representative of the demographics in the City of Riverside.

**Fund and reduces the amount transferred by \$1 million annually.** Thirty-six percent of respondents indicated they would be in favor of this measure, while nearly the same percentage indicated they would vote no against it (35%). Approximately, three-in-ten respondents were undecided.

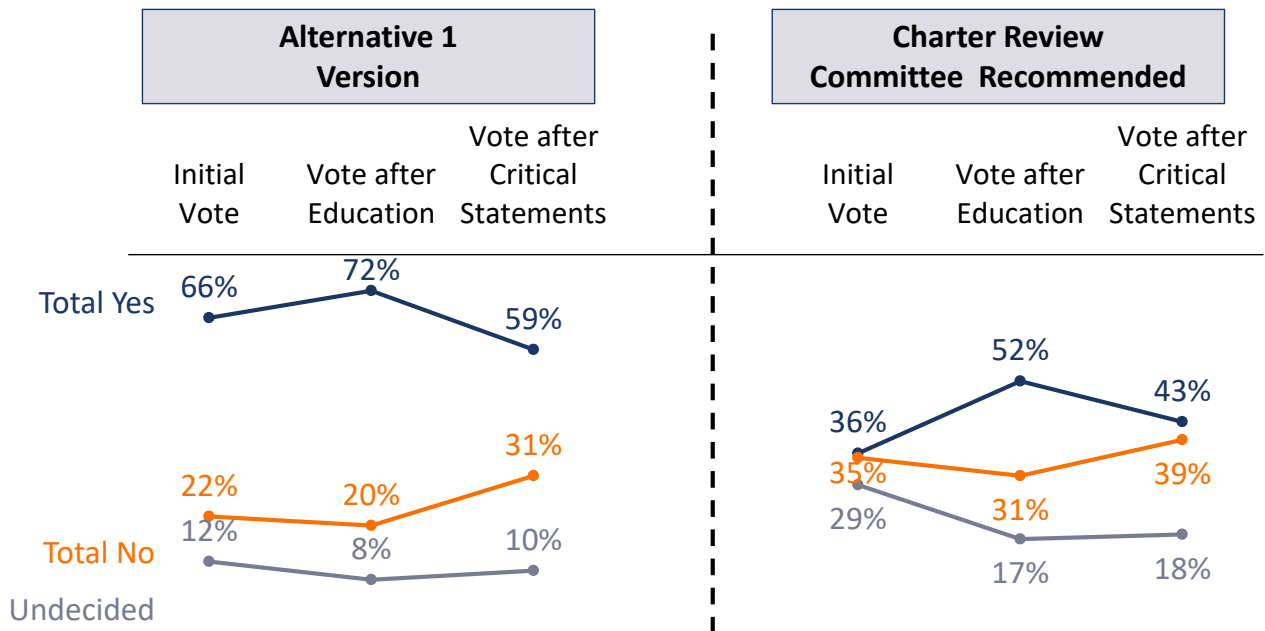
**Figure 1: Support for City-Recommended and CRC-Recommended Ballot Measures**



- **After receiving all information about the measure, a majority remain in favor of the alternative version 1 measure’s ballot language, but less than half are supportive of the CRC-recommended version.** Respondents received a variety of statements and information about the measure, including the mechanics of the measure, how the funds transferred to the City’s General Fund could be spent and what some opponents of the measure may say about it. After all information was given, **59% indicated they would vote yes in favor of the alternative version 1**, while 31% indicated they would vote no against it—remaining above the required threshold for passage (see **Figure 2** on the following page).

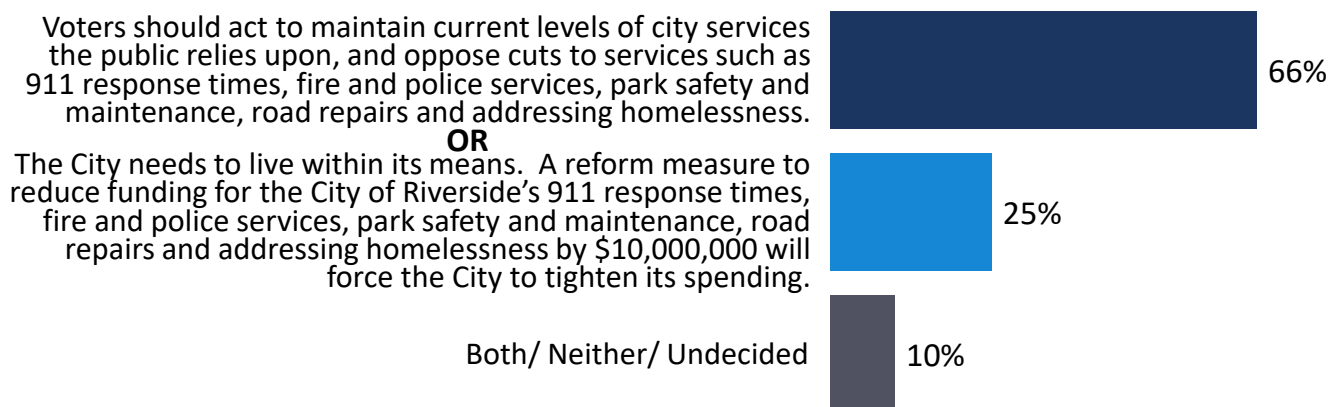
Among respondents who received the CRC-recommended version, after hearing more about how the measure would improve the City’s fiscal management by requiring a decrease in the transfer of funds from the Riverside Public Utility to the City’s unrestricted General Fund to pay for various services as well as statements from potential opponents, **42% of respondents supported the CRC measure -- below the simple majority threshold needed for passage and outside the survey’s margin of error.** Nearly four-in-ten (39%) indicated they would vote no against the measure, and 18% remained undecided.

Figure 2: Vote Progression for the Previously Recommended and CRC- Recommended Ballot Measures



- Respondents also agree that voters should act to maintain current levels of city services rather than reducing funding and forcing the City to tighten its spending.** When asked to choose between the two viewpoints, two-thirds of all respondents (66%) chose maintaining current levels of City services and opposed cuts to services such as 911 response times, fire and police services, and addressing homelessness. In contrast, only a quarter (25%) prefer reducing funding for such services by \$10,000,000 to force the City to tighten its spending. Approximately 10% either did not agree with either statement, felt they needed more information, or were unsure (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3: Respondents’ Opinion on Maintaining Current Levels of City Services or Reduce Funding to Tighten Spending



Overall, survey results indicate that a large majority (66%) support the alternative version 1 measure that would protect local funding for essential services by amending the City Charter and allowing the City to continue transferring funds from electric rates to its General Fund. Respondents are initially split about the CRC-

recommended measure to reform the City’s fiscal management by establishing a fixed amount that is transferred from the City’s utility revenue to the General Fund, with nearly equal levels of support and opposition. After hearing all information, support for the alternative version 1 measure remains above the required threshold for passage. However, support for the CRC-recommended measure does not reach a simple majority. Lastly, most respondents agree that voters in the City of Riverside should act to maintain current levels of city services on which the public relies and should oppose cuts to such services.



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# Appendix A

## **ALTERNATIVE VERSION 1 BALLOT MEASURE LANGUAGE:**

**CITY OF RIVERSIDE SERVICES PROTECTION MEASURE:** To maintain 911 response times, fire, paramedic, police, street repairs, parks, senior services; address homelessness; maintain other general services, shall the measure amending City of Riverside's Charter to continue collecting in electric rates and maintain the voter-approved fund transfer (established 1968), limited to 11.5% of gross revenue, providing approximately \$40,000,000 annually to City of Riverside's General Fund not increasing tax or utility rates, until ended by voters, requiring audits/ funds controlled locally, be adopted?

## **CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED BALLOT MEASURE LANGUAGE:**

**THE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT OF 2021:** Shall the measure, beginning January 2022, discontinuing the 11.5% tax on electricity, replacing it with a \$38 million fixed amount transferred from Riverside Public Utility to the unrestricted general fund which amount will be reduced annually by \$1 million until this reduction reaches \$30 million and continuing until ended by the voters, be adopted?