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PRESS RELEASE

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CITY OF ATHENS INTRODUCES PUBLIC BUDGET SIMULATOR

CITIZENS ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE AND PROVIDE INPUT FOR NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET

ATHENS, TENNESSEE – April 16, 2021 – The City of Athens is pleased to announce the release of a new online tool that seeks civic input on the front end of the city's budget planning process. Budgets are designed to represent the community's values and priorities and the citizenry's willingness to pay for certain services and amenities. One of the difficulties that local government agencies experience is the inherent inability to fully ascertain the wishes and desires of the entire community. Traditionally, the main method for discovering the will of the people came from the ballot box, and unless conducted in a special election, those opportunities came only during election years. The only other opportunity available for public comment is after second hearing of the budget prior to a final vote to adopt it. The City of Athens is pursuing methods and best practices to bring government closer to the people by bridging the gap between the citizens and the government that serves them.

For the past few years, the City of Athens has put increasing effort into its public relations outreach, mainly through social media but also through the use of public education videos, yearly infographics, and livestreaming of public events. Last year, the city attempted to host sessions soliciting for "civic input into the city budget" but was only able to hold one session prior to the advent of COVID-19 in McMinn County and the subsequent state & federal guidelines for limiting public gatherings. One of the priorities of the public relations team is to "empower citizens by fostering innovative methods to communicate with their government." This is where A Balancing Act comes in. This online budget simulation engagement tool is an informative, interactive platform that lets citizens face the constraints that the city faces when stratifying budget requests and prioritizing projects. Citizens are given the opportunity to view the requests from city



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departments and provide comment and submit their suggestions on how they themselves would balance the budget.

Accompanying the budget simulator is a feature called the Taxpayer Receipt. Based off assessed property value and the amount of spending conducted within the City of Athens, this feature provides an approximate tax receipt that calculates how much of an individual's taxes go to which services.

Athens City Manager C. Seth Sumner stated, "The City exists to provide the services that our citizens want and want to pay for; I'm very proud of our staff's work to offer this new tool that can be available to all Athenians to provide their own thoughts toward improving services, and it also gives citizens an idea of the "balancing act" performed annually by staff and the City Council to maintain our high level of fiscal responsibility while meeting the varied needs of our community. I hope everyone who wishes to have their opinions heard takes a few moments to explore this budget simulator and the taxpayer receipt."

The budget simulator and taxpayer receipt features can be found on the City of Athens web page at www.AthensTN.Gov/BudgetInput. The simulation is currently active and will run until May 2nd, 2021 to coincide with the City's budget calendar.