



ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
AFTER-ACTION REPORT

BALANCING ACT BUDGET INPUT FOR FY22 FISCAL YEAR
INPUT GATHERED FROM APRIL 16 – MAY 2, 2021

PREPARED BY

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS TEAM



PUBLIC RELATIONS TEAM

VISION

Living up to the American fundamental premise that government closest to the people governs best and through effective communication and engagement, citizens would be equipped with the knowledge necessary to address needs in their community

MISSION

To effectively engage communities in order to inspire a more informed, empowered citizenry

PRIORITIES

- ➔ Maintain an effective media presence and engagement strategy to inform the public
- ➔ Promote transparency and accountability by responding to citizen inquiries and requests
- ➔ Empower citizens by fostering innovative methods to communicate with their government

BACKGROUND

The City of Athens was 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.

The previous year, Spring of 2020, 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 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 could be found on the City of Athens web page at www.AthensTN.Gov/BudgetInput. The simulation was active from April 16 to May 2nd, 2021, (17 Days) to coincide with the City's budget calendar. The budget workshop with the city council was scheduled for May 4th, 2021.

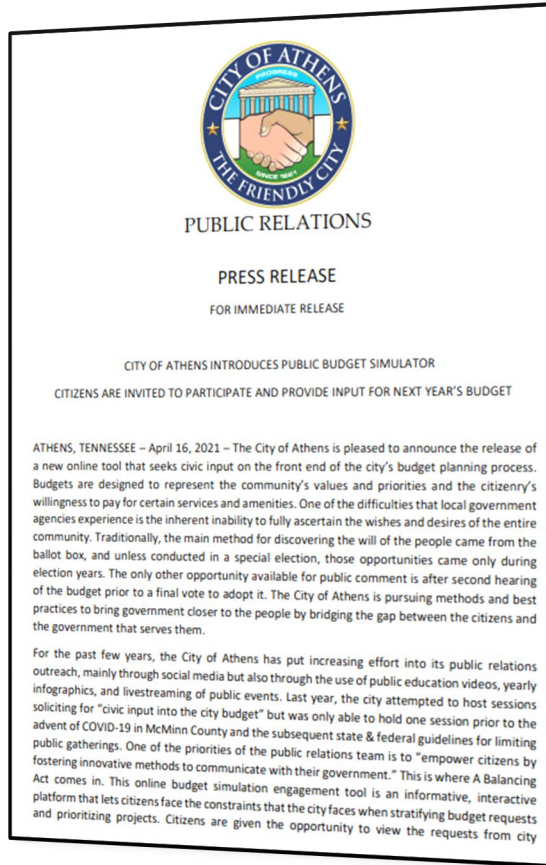
CITY OF ATHENS

2021-2022 BUDGET CALENDAR

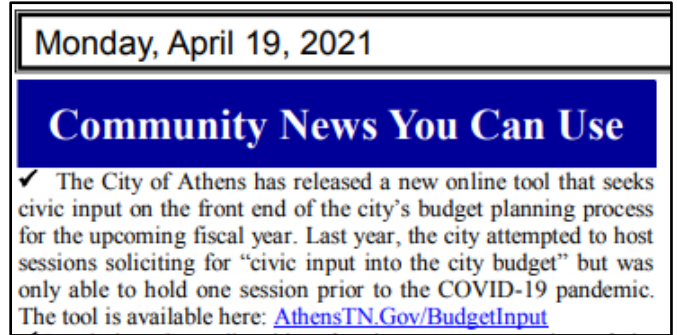
March 2, 2021	Budget packages distributed to city departments Budget worksheets mailed to outside agencies
March 22, 2021	Completed Special Appropriations budget requests due to Finance Department
March 22, 2021	Completed departmental budget requests submitted to Finance Department and copy to City Manager.
March 29, 2021	Compiled budget requests due to City Manager
April 14, 2021	Departmental Budget Hearings
April 15, 2021	Departmental Budget Hearings
April 30, 2021	Receive School Board Budget
April 30, 2021	Distribute budget worksheets to Council
May 4, 2021	Special Budget Study Session with City Council at 5:30 p.m.
May 10, 2021	May Study Session
May 18, 2021	Council Meeting – First reading of budget ordinance
June 7, 2021	June Study Session & budget will be an agenda item
June 15, 2021	Council Meeting – Second reading of budget ordinance

PROMOTION OF THE BUDGET ENGAGEMENT SIMULATION TOOL & TAXPAYER RECEIPT

Official Press Release – 16 April 2021



Morning Fax - 19 April 2021



Daily Post-Athenian – 19 April 2021
(Digital & Print)



City of Athens Facebook Page (April 16 & 22)




Also presented to various clubs & committees:

- Athens Council Advisory Committee
- Athens Kiwanis Club
- Athens Optimists Club
- etc.

SIMULATION ANALYTICS SUMMARY OF SESSIONS

(Proprietary analytics gathered by A Balancing Act)

Total Pageviews 

Average Time on Site

Total Simulation Submissions

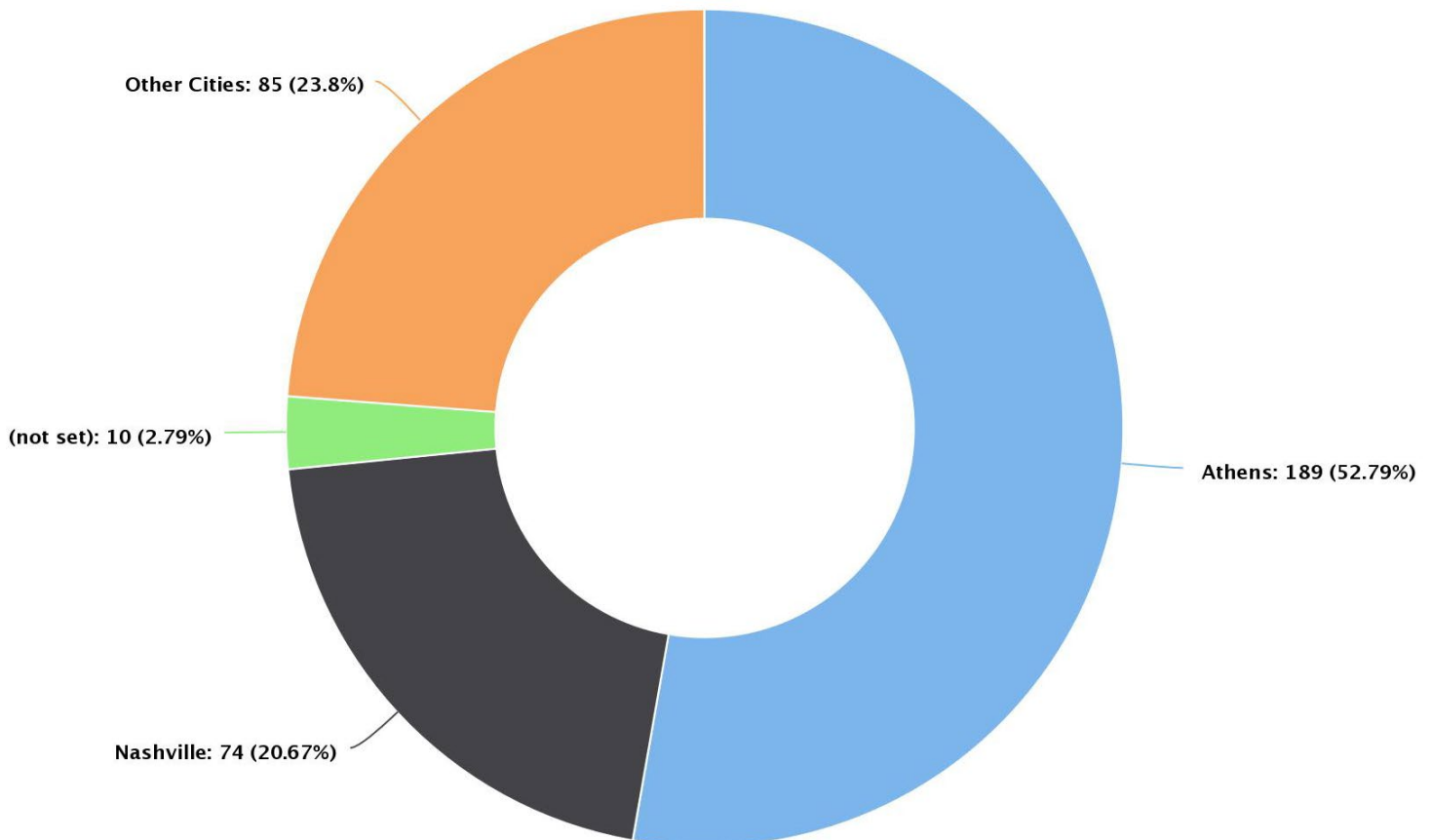
451

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42

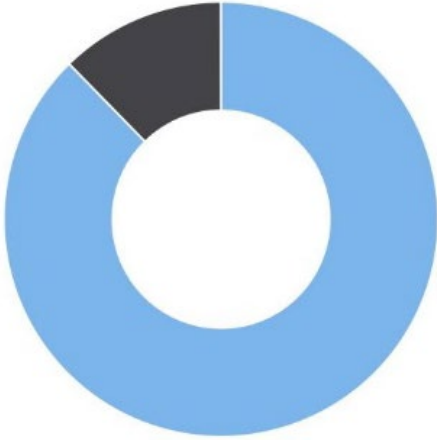
Sessions by City

Based on where Google Analytics thinks the user is when accessing the simulation.



* Note: This doughnut chart displays what google analytics was able to obtain from users. There were 454 users that accessed the simulation, but google only obtained location information from 358.

New vs. Returning



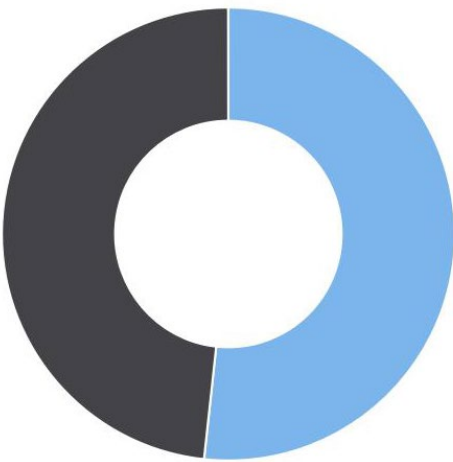
● New Visitor ● Returning Visitor
87.67% **12.33%**

Sessions by Age



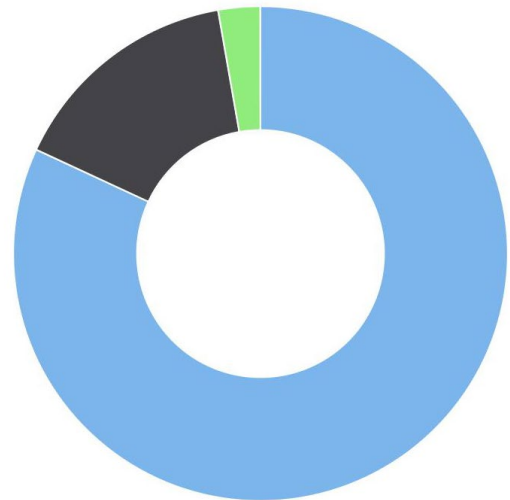
● 25-34 ● 35-44 ● 45-54 ● 55-64 ● 65+
19.81% **24.53%** **24.53%** **14.15%** **16.98%**

Sessions by Gender



● female ● male
51.72% **48.28%**

Device Types



● mobile ● desktop ● tablet
81.92% **15.34%** **2.74%**

SIMULATION SUMMARY OF AVERAGES ACROSS ALL SUBMISSIONS

Top Revenue Increased

Average of All Increases Across All Submissions

TAX REVENUE	\$57,143
INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVENUE	\$0
CHARGES FOR SERVICES	\$0

Top Expenses Decreased

Average of All Decreases Across All Submissions

PUBLIC SAFETY / LEGAL SERVICES	-\$125,152
GENERAL GOVERNMENT	-\$97,738
INFRASTRUCTURE	-\$30,294

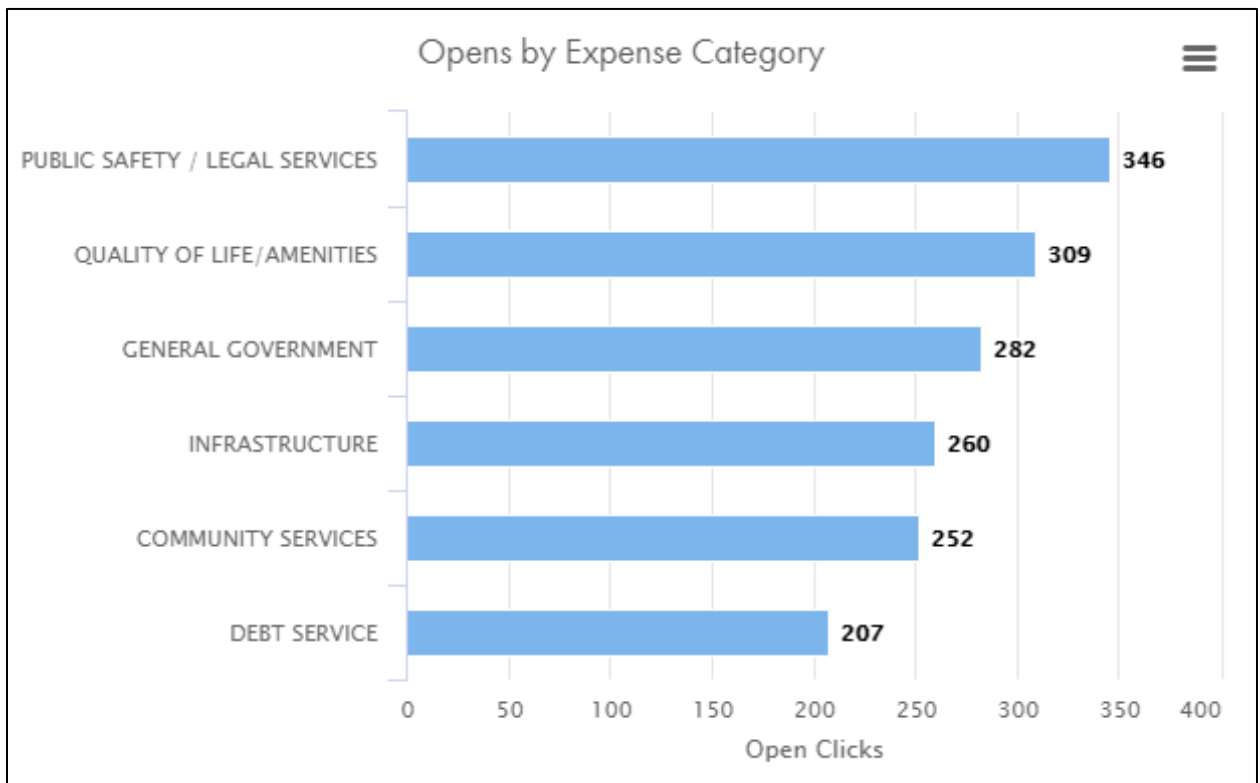
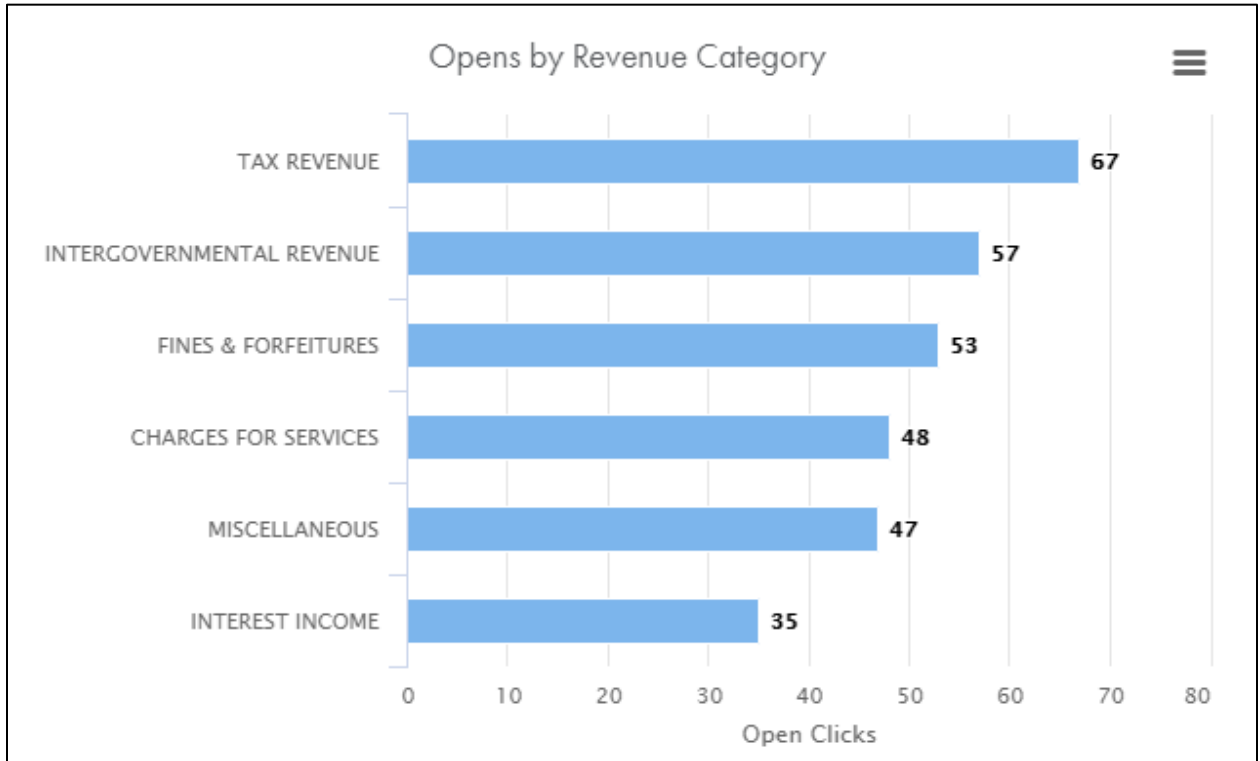
Top Expenses Increased

Average of All Increases Across All Submissions

QUALITY OF LIFE/AMENITIES	\$106,232
PUBLIC SAFETY / LEGAL SERVICES	\$53,500
INFRASTRUCTURE	\$44,286

“OPENS” BY REVENUE & EXPENSE CATEGORIES

Both charts respectively display how many clicks to “open” a category. Overall, this data is indicative of the categories that users spent more time on reviewing.



SIMULATION LEVEL ANALYTICS SUMMARY OF SUBMITTALS

(Report prepared by Public Relations Team Staff)

Number of Submittals: 42

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS:

Residency

Yes – Live within City Limits:	33	(78.6%)
No – Visit, Work, Live Outside City:	9	(21.4%)

Age Ranges (Generational Categories based off Pew Research Center)

19-22 (Generation Z):	5	(11.9%)
23-38 (Millennials/Generation Y):	20	(47.6%)
39-54 (Generation X):	13	(31.0%)
55-73 (Baby Boomers):	3	(7.1%)
74+ (Silent Generation):	1	(2.4%)

Gender

Male:	18	(42.9%)
Female:	24	(57.1%)

Education Level

High School Diploma:	3	(7.1%)
Some College, No Degree:	8	(19.0%)
Associate degree:	9	(21.4%)
Bachelor's Degree:	15	(35.7%)
Graduate Degree:	7	(16.7%)

REVENUE CATEGORIES BREAKDOWN BY RESPONDENTS

In August 2019, citizens of Athens voted by referendum to increase the local sales tax rate to 2.75% as an indication of the citizens' willingness to pay for the new school building project. Therefore, the only tax revenue category enabled for increase/decrease was the Property Tax subcategory.

Property Taxes

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$6,330,000	\$6,387,143	\$57,143	0.90%

Comments

- [Sales Tax] Where is the additional money from the sale tax increase going? At one time, there was to be approximately, \$400,000 additional collection than what was to be budgeted for the school project. Sales tax revenue is stronger than projected. We should be able to see where this additional revenue is being utilized.
- [Other] A breakdown of what constitutes "other" would be nice.
- [Charges for Services] Parks & Rec Programs should be offered at no charge to residents of the city.
- [Miscellaneous] An explanation of this amount would be nice.

EXPENSE CATEGORIES BREAKDOWN BY RESPONDENTS

Public Safety / Legal Services

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$5,706,900	\$5,634,043	-\$72,857	-1.28%

Comments:

- [Police Patrol Services] Protecting our citizens should be of the utmost importance. Pay and equipment should be a priority so we can get experienced officers and not all new graduates. Some with experience would help the perception.
- [Police Special Services] I cut this because I think we should only focus on drugs such as Meth or Pills. I think it's a waste of time to focus on Marijuana since the country will likely be legalizing this nationally within the next 10 years. Why should we destroy a young person's life for that? Also, instead of just throwing drug offenders in jail why don't we try and think of some ways to get these people into rehab or some type of program to help them turn their lives around?
- [Fire Suppression Service] Need more fireman

Quality of Life/Amenities

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$4,522,500	\$4,612,104	\$89,604	1.98%

Comments:

- [Athens City Schools] Our schools are a joke, I would add money to this if I actually thought it would make a difference but I don't. If I had children in high school then I would gladly jump through whatever hoops I needed to in order to send them to Walker Valley or even just home school them (even if that meant moving away). Maybe it's time we start looking into voucher programs?
- [Athens Area Council of the Arts] I'm not a tremendous fan of the Arts Center here but I recognize that art is vital for societal health. Would like to see them offer more than just Musicals and drawing classes though, maybe if we threw them a couple extra bucks then they could hire on someone with some fresh ideas.
- [Parks Maintenance] We have some very nice parks (maybe too many) but I am not sure if there is enough emphasis on their upkeep. Seems we could do better there. Not sure if it is budget constraints or managing of the resources in place.
- [Parks & Recreation Programs] Would like to add the \$2,042 to parks.

Infrastructure

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$3,553,800	\$3,296,800	-\$257,000	-7.23%

Comments:

- [Street Construction] The stretch of Green St. that runs through TWU is a disaster. It's too skinny and is just asking for a lawsuit. I avoid that road like the plague and I'm sure it reflects very poorly on our downtown especially when we have events such as Pumpkin Town. On a side note, I really love the new LED lights the city has been installing... except for the ones that are purple. It looks like either like someone messed up the settings and they need to adjust the hue or someone decided to cheap out and buy some Chinese knockoffs to save a buck. This reflects poorly on us and I'm embarrassed by them.
- [Street Cleaning] Seems like a big line item for the way the streets in many areas look. Could the current inmate population be utilized in some of these services?

Community Services

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$849,500	\$499,290	-\$350,210	-41.23%

Comments:

- [Economic Development Authority] It's no secret that our youth move away because there is very little opportunity for financial growth. Me and my friends always considered Athens as a great place to retire to but that's about it.
- [Juvenile Services] \$66K is a lot for a service that is funded by the county. I'd like to know how this money is spent.
- [Main Street Athens] This is a program that we can actively see the fruits of. A lot of places are getting remodeled and we need more of that. We still have a long way to go.

General Government

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$3,876,800	\$3,332,162	-\$544,638	-14.05%

Comments:

- [City Administration] I've never been a fan of bloated administrations, let's cut their budget for just one year and see if everything they do is really merits a 10th of the budget. I'm willing to bet they can survive off much less.
- [Information Technology] Is there a website or database of GIS data for Athens that citizens can access?

- [Purchasing/Public Relations] Let's invest in this. Familiarize yourself with some younger faces in the community who can help you with Social Media, Web Development, Video Production, and Graphic Design. Hiring younger people for this is highly advised because they are more in-tune with modern trends and technology and it will simultaneously encourage more young people to either stick around rather than moving to Knoxville or even to get involved with government and social programs.
- [Human Resources] That number looks pretty high for a two-person department...

Debt Service

Original Budgeted Amount	Avg. Submitted Amount	Difference	PCT Change
\$1,000,000	\$1,027,381	\$27,381	2.74%

Comments: None

EXIT QUESTIONS:

Was this budget simulation tool easy to use?:

Yes: 37 (88.1%)
No: 1 (2.4%)
N/A: 4 (9.5%)

How difficult was it to balance the budget?

Somewhat Difficult: 6 (14.3%)
Neutral/No Opinion: 9 (21.4%)
Somewhat Simple: 10 (23.8%)
Very Simple: 13 (31%)
N/A: 4 (9.5%)

What services/amenities does the City of Athens not currently provide that you would like to see in the future?

- Curbside Recycling
- Something for homeless, shower, meals, clothing, job opportunity help.
- Help the American Legion find a permanent home.
- Pickleball courts for the seniors in Athens
- We need recreation areas for our youth and children that are indoors like community centers we see in other cities. The YMCA should not be the only option for people in our city to have access to winter activities such as indoor swimming, indoor basketball, etc. Other cities smaller than ours have indoor community centers that charge very small daily use fees for swimming, gym access, indoor sports, etc. I would love to see this as an option for our community.
- More juvenile services. Counselor, detention center,
- Cut back on police service if all they are going to do it sit and monitor speeds. Waste of money. They need to actually patrol the neighborhoods and businesses.
- A youth resource center and/or Boys and Girls Club to provide something for children, especially teens 13-18 years old, to do in the summer. Lodging near downtown (hotel, Airbnb) for tourists/visitors. A weather alarm/warning system (sirens).
- More recreational sports-tennis, golf, etc or learning opportunities for kiddos. Resurfacing tennis courts at Ingleside is needed.
- Bike lanes could improve the safety of biking as an affordable transport method for residents. They would also compliment existing bike friendly parks. Roundabouts in place of traffic lights would improve traffic flow.
- I would like to see more programs dedicated to the homeless, addicted, food insecure, and disabled. I'd like to see narcan initiatives with first responders and homeless shelters for the

displaced in our community. Heavy policing does not fix the broken parts of our community. Put more funding into community and social work projects.

- The structure of literally every department is an abomination. The attempts made have been futile or non address by top leadership within the city. This has trickled down to the services provided. While somewhat somewhat sustainable, there will be another mass exodus in the near future.
- City transportation. Maybe a city bus.
- Boys and Girls Club, Safe places for our youth
- Anything that would bring in younger people/families
- Not sure
- Homeless shelter
- Curbside Recycling
- More stuff for kids to do
- Generally I am proud of the services/amenities our city offers - the quality of life enhanced by our local nonprofits rivals that of mid-large sized cities. My concerns are less with the services/amenities than the approach city council has taken in pandering to bad actors in our community. When I watch City Council meetings I am a bit dismayed at the poor decorum allowed to tarnish the professionalism projected by our City employees. We have experienced remarkable growth in the last several years. From where I sit, our City Manager has been the most visible, vocal leader fighting to protect our citizens from the spread of COVID-19 and the city council and city school board have successfully completed a deal generations in the making to build a much needed school. These are huge milestones in a challenging year - this should be celebrated. These accomplishments (not even citing a long list of achievements in recent years) are testament to the strength of our city manager and staff. There was entirely too much discussion on the vote to hire a project manager - frankly, I was appalled by the suggestion of hiring an intern and have heard numerous citizens echo this concern. I am pleased with the path our City is on and want our staff to be able to do their jobs with encouragement and support from City Council.

What services/amenities would you say the city needs to improve or cut back on?

- Municipal pool
- We need to improve on our fire department. Not enough people on trucks
- Animal Shelter does not need as much funding. I do not support it at all. Care about the animals but DO NOT agree with the way it is being ran and I believe it needs all new people.
- Seth Sumner's travel budget and no more international travel on the taxpayers dime.
- We have too much of the same thing
- The codes enforcement needs a massive overhaul, especially concerning the upkeep of the cemeteries. Last year some of the cemeteries were untouched, and when I questioned about them, I was told the services were contracted out and those landscapers must not be showing up. I asked if we were still paying them despite their lack of services, and was told that we

were. This is unacceptable. We should not be paying any company for services that are not rendered. There are plenty of houses that are in horrendous shape in Athens that have been reported to codes enforcement that are still in disrepair years later. 2 are near the building site of the new school!

- Admin pay
- The city attorney should definitely make more. Spend more on use for the fire department as well.
- An additional community pool; an additional fire station; a small outdoor amphitheater.
- It seems like a lot for street cleaning and that sort of thing but I couldn't see the details.
- The image of city parks could be greatly improved by increased maintenance, specifically maintaining mulching.
- Definitely cut back on city manager and His trips.
- Administration cost lowered, library funding decreased
- I feel like it is not necessary to have a city manager, a city mayor, and another person assisting the city manager. If the city manager is not able to manage the city then he should not be city manager. It seems wasteful when this city really needs the funds. We have a serious drug issue in this city and it would be better if the additional funds were put toward rehabilitation services or additional police salaries. We all know the officers are not paid enough.
- Cut back on non essential training and travel. If there is no need or direct relation to this current or direct future mission of the city, we should cut it back.
- Spending unrelated to togetherness and police spending
- Better roads
- Improve on economic development programs, maintaining roads, community programs
- More stuff for kids to do. There also needs to be 3 more fireman 1 for each shift. Trash department needs to do a better job not leaving trash cans tipped over when empty.
- I appreciate the transparency and access to this budget and do not pretend to have the expertise to evaluate what spending is appropriate for our services. I trust our City Manager and Mike Keith and am grateful for their fiscal management.
- Improve park maintenance, roads pay for police officers.
- The downtown area needs to be kept cleaner - blow off sidewalks, keep the grass/weeds cut back. The corner space beside Johnson's Furnishings needs to be mowed - maybe concrete the area or add flat bricks and a few tables and chairs.

What current services/amenities would you say the City is doing well in providing or should provide more of?

- Trash pickup is great
- Our fire department
- Need to provide more for teens to do.. would cut down on the drug problem. Kids end up on drugs because there isn't anything for them to do in this town.
- The city needs to help the American Legion.

- I appreciate and enjoy any and all events sponsored by the City as well as the Main Street beautification projects. I think our downtown looks better today than it has in decades.
- Parks and recreation
- Downtown Wifi is an added benefit. The annual residential clean-up day is great.
- I volunteer at the Shelter so would love to see the new shelter sooner than later. I feel like more paid staff members are needed, even if they are part time. I pay tuition for my kids to go to Athens City Schools so okay with the money going to the school. Even though they will be in high school and not get use of the new facilities. I'm feel like you can't go wrong when you invest in kids. Which leads to my last statement: please keep the funding going to Juvenile Services and consider increasing. The work they do to help youth in our community and City of Athens is more valuable than you think. It is greatly needed program.
- Continuing to increase and improve sidewalks has made a big difference in the walk ability of our community. The addition of the new school is a wonderful investment in the future of our community.
- Should provide more to tri county and the library
- Police, fire and dispatch. Dispatchers need a raise I heard what they make and it's pathetic.
- I really appreciate the city's commitment to education, but I feel that the new building is poorly planned. Only time will tell.
- Fire department needs more staff.
- The city is doing well at staying the same. There is not enough visible collapse to show. Even if there was, there would not be an effort to bring a shift in attention. This city plateaued a few years ago and does not have the direction to rise again.
- More economic development
- Park services are good, animal shelter is good but could be renovated
- Good roads and pretty streets
- Trash, debris pick up is great
- N/A
- City Council seems to spend a great deal of time tending to the noisy concerns of perhaps 3-6 destructive citizens (and I'm not sure all of them are even City residents). I applaud this tool as a way to seek input from all residents and I encourage you to concentrate on our broader population when considering community feedback. The disruptions allowed at public meetings reflect poorly on the good work our City employs and elected officials are doing. Most citizens are happy to see progress, even with costs associated - evidenced by the vote to fund the school building project through a tax increase. The City staff should be supported and allowed to do their jobs (which they do well) without so much distraction and disruption. It's discouraging and distracting to engaged citizens who follow city business with interest and I can't imagine how it feels to our devoted employees.
- Community amenities are what separate us from other cities.
- I feel they do a good job overall.