



## **City of Chattanooga, TN**

### **Resident Input for FY 2022 Budget**

Custom Executive Report prepared by Zencity

December 2020

#### **Introduction**

This report provides an overview of resident feedback regarding the City of Chattanooga, TN's FY 2022 budget. The report analyzes budget survey and online Zoom sessions collected by the City in the Fall of 2020 as well as organic social media and local media discourse in Chattanooga between March and December 2020. 160 Chattanooga residents participated in budget input during the Fall of 2020 representing all 9 City Council Districts. 78 residents attended an online Zoom session, separating into small discussion groups moderated by a member of City leadership. 82 residents completed an online survey on their own time. No residents chose to respond via paper survey available curbside at Chattanooga Public Library branches. In addition, 18,827 social media interactions regarding the City budget were included and analyzed separately.

#### **Executive Summary**

- Following the events of 2020, interest in rethinking investment in public safety emerged as a main theme in both survey responses and on social media. From improving community-police relations to investment in response teams trained to handle various types of mental health crises, the data revealed that an enhanced sense of safety and trust in law enforcement is paramount for residents.
- Demands for investment in minority and low-income communities surfaced across various topics, specifically in response to the "Growing Economy" and "Smarter Students" survey questions. Initiatives that raised interest were stronger support for job creation, employment programs, support for small businesses, and the need for affordable housing.
- The need for investment in education, specifically public education resources and workforce training, appeared in both survey responses and as a focal point in social media discourse.

- The most prominent topics in response to the city’s surveys for each of the Mayor’s priority areas were the following:

**Growing Economy**

Workforce training and development and support small and minority-owned businesses emerged as the most prominent themes regarding growing Chattanooga’s economy.

**Safer Streets**

Increasing resources for mental health emergencies led feedback concerning the sense of public safety and policing.

**Stronger Neighborhoods**

The leading theme in building stronger neighborhoods were requests for more community events and gatherings.

**Smarter Students and Stronger Families**

Increasing resources for Youth & Family Development as well as after school programming led resident comments for this priority area.

- Zencity’s keyword analysis reveals the following top areas of concern by district:

**District 1:** Affordable housing and relief during the economic crisis

**District 2:** Increasing investment in public education

**District 3:** Creating more opportunities for employment

**District 4:** Increasing funding for mental health resources

**District 5:** Investing in job creation and employment programs.

**District 6:** Increase business development and job creation

**District 7:** Invest in community-based efforts to reduce crime

**District 8:** Increase support for people experiencing homelessness.

**District 9:** Increase trust between the police and the community.

- The most prominent issues discussed on social media platforms and local news were the budgets of the Chattanooga Police Department and Fire Department

## **Methodology**

The City of Chattanooga asked for the community's input on the upcoming Fiscal Year 2022 budget via online input sessions, an online and paper survey, and by analyzing online organic discourse.

In November 2020, the City hosted three online public input sessions via Zoom to get feedback and ideas on how to improve results in the Mayor's priority areas -- Safer Streets, Growing Economy, Stronger Neighborhoods, and Smarter Students & Stronger Families. 78 residents attended these sessions and participated in small group discussions to discuss the priority issue areas.

The City also sought resident input through an online survey and a paper survey. 81 residents responded to the online survey. No residents completed the curbside, paper survey.

The City has also been working since March 2020 with Zencity to collect and analyze organic resident feedback on local and social media. Zencity helps Chattanooga aggregate and understand hundreds of thousands of data points that residents have with and about life in Chattanooga. This data is anonymously collected from public forums and channels.

The City asked Zencity to help analyze and compile this summary report of resident feedback from the various resident feedback channels to help inform the creation of the FY 2022 budget.

## Overview of Online and Zoom Survey Responses

The charts below identify the key themes and issues raised in the city’s online survey and Zoom sessions regarding the FY 2022 budget within each priority area.

### Growing Economy

A growing local economy supported by diverse businesses ensures the health and well-being of any city. To provide a high quality of life for our residents, we must work to provide Chattanoogaans access to economic opportunity.

#### *Growing Economy: Key Themes and Issues*



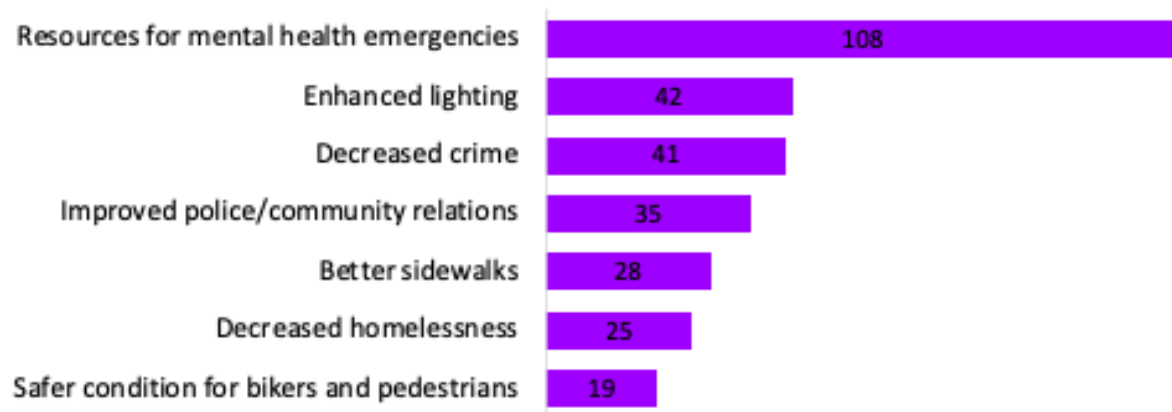
#### *Selected Quotes*

- “Investment in internships and training for youth entering the workforce. More options for internships & increased City internships”
- “Helping small business owners transition from brick and mortar to online. Adapt to COVID friendly practices”
- “Increase wages for all, especially minorities”
- “Job training and new skill sets - providing education for new opportunities as they develop”

## Safer Streets

A safe city requires neighborhoods that provide safe paths, are well lit and well maintained, provide economic opportunity for all citizens, and include Police Officers and Fire Fighters who are a part of the community.

### *Safer Streets: Key Themes and Issues*



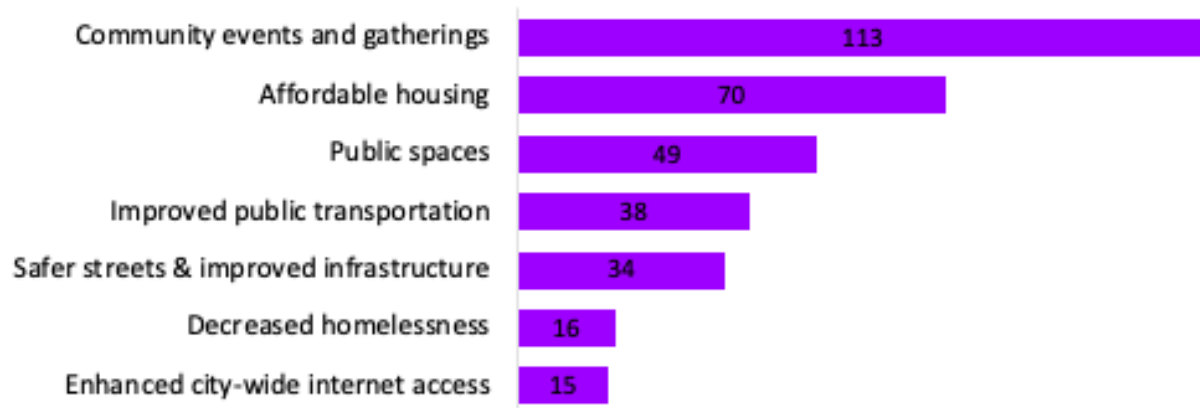
### *Selected Quotes*

- “Supports and resources for those in crisis, mental health, substance abuse, homelessness to help crime prevention”
- “Concern about crime response for those people with crisis situations, more options for police officers when addressing crimes”

## Stronger Neighborhoods

Stronger Neighborhoods are those in which people have an affordable, quality home and a feeling connectedness to others. These neighborhoods emerge in a built environment that creates a sense of space and facilitates health and wellbeing.

### *Stronger Neighborhoods: Key Themes and Issues*



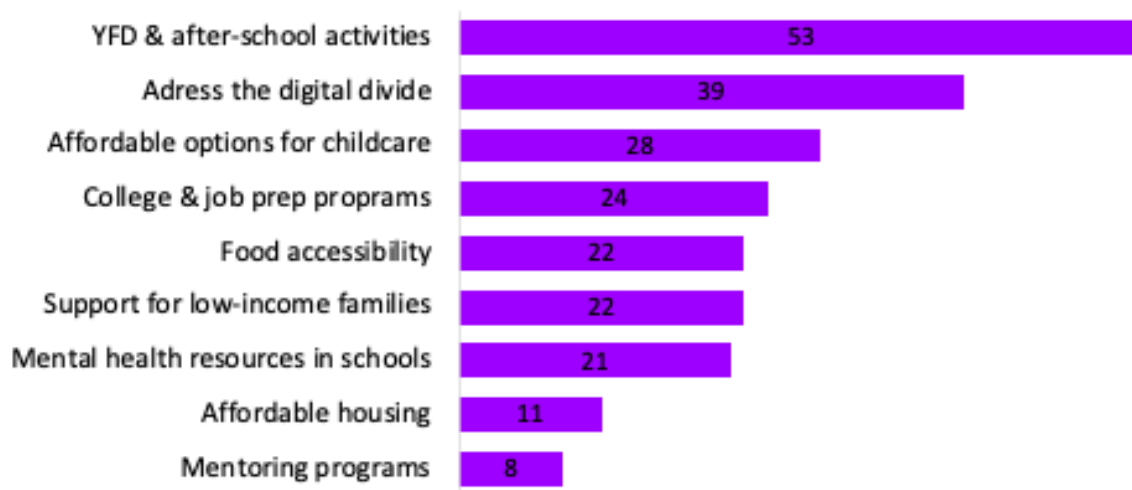
### *Selected Quotes*

- “Revamp / reinvest in community centers and recreation center (YFD Centers) - updating furniture, painting. Southside development center - more resourceful library”
- “Create high quality affordable housing”
- “Fund more government programs for subsidized housing”

## Smarter Students & Stronger Families

Mayor Berke has placed a new emphasis on ensuring Chattanoogaans of all generations, especially young people, have an opportunity to succeed. Although our public schools are the responsibility of Hamilton County Government, the City of Chattanooga can support children and their families through partnerships with these schools and local non-profit agencies that provide critical direct services.

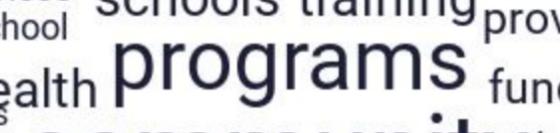
### *Smarter Students & Stronger Families: Key Themes and Issues*



### *Selected Quotes*

- “Expand capacity of YFD centers to engage more students after school”
- “Online learning - working parents - more technology classes and training (Tech Goes Home) at libraries or rec centers”

The word clouds below represent the most commonly mentioned terms in responses to the online survey organized by respondent's residence district.<sup>1</sup>

A word cloud of various services and programs. The word 'community' is the largest and most central. Other prominent words include 'programs', 'schools', 'training', 'support', 'police', 'housing', 'create', 'mental', 'access', 'invest', 'reduce', 'funding', 'provide', 'small', 'services', 'school', 'health', 'areas', 'jobs', 'promote', and 'housin' (partially cut off). The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the center.

## A word cloud featuring various terms related to affordable housing. The most prominent word is 'affordable' in the center. Other large words include 'housing', 'programs', 'youth', 'wages', 'police', 'income', 'climate', 'health', 'education', 'resources', 'stock', 'emotional', 'businesses', 'livable', 'root', 'small', 'centers', 'causes', 'access', and 'free'. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the central 'affordable' word.

*Secondary theme: Improving community policing and transferring police resources to mental health crisis services.*

[illegible]

*Secondary theme:* Increasing opportunities for employment and higher-wage jobs.

pay support areas  
services streets  
opportunities  
free promote small

*Secondary theme: Increasing investment in education.*

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## A word cloud of terms related to mental health services. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the center. The most prominent words are "health" and "mental", which are the largest. Other words include "residential", "housing", "affordable", "transport", "schools", "ambulances", "facilities", "circles", "funding", "stop", "neighborhoods", "traffic", "training", "emergency", "police", "tax", "areas", "built", "encourage", "finance", "crim", "art", and "parks". The words are in various shades of gray and black, with different font sizes and orientations.

*Secondary theme: Need to address homelessness and affordable housing.*

## A word cloud featuring terms such as 'community', 'jobs', 'downtown', 'areas', 'training', 'decrease', 'citizens', 'businesses', 'schools', 'wage', 'invest', 'teachers', 'access', 'women', 'promote', 'create', 'law', and 'especially funding'. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping cluster, with 'community' and 'jobs' being the most prominent.

*Secondary theme: Increase school funding and resources.*

workers wage programs provide  
park social businesses income  
small funded community law  
activities

*Secondary theme: Address issues of crime using community policing.*

community

support mental centers provide  
wage schools police programs  
free access citizens pay affordable  
income health small  
jobs housing funding training  
businesses decrease fund services

*Secondary theme:* Increase support for people experiencing homelessness

add taxes jobs support  
health homeless provide  
invest free  
outreach low-cost foster wage business rent  
areas low-income  
businesses communities

*Secondary theme: Increase availability of affordable housing.*

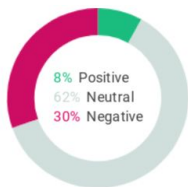
opportunity safety access schools companies address:  
 businesses disabled affordable  
 school educate vocational  
 provide invest training health  
 areas housing decrease adult  
 technology wage support create  
 neighborhood community promote  
 citizens children communities

*Secondary theme: Invest in creating better job opportunities.*

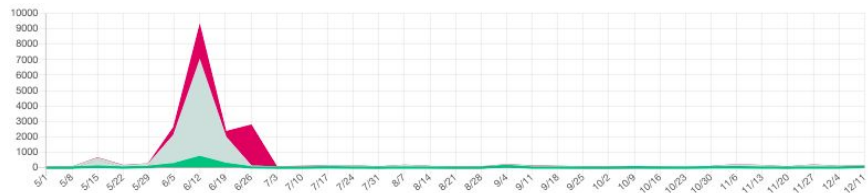
## Zencity Data: Budget discourse on social media

Since May 2020, discourse on social media directly related to the budget generated 18,896 interactions, .006% of the total city discourse.<sup>2</sup>

### Sentiment Analysis

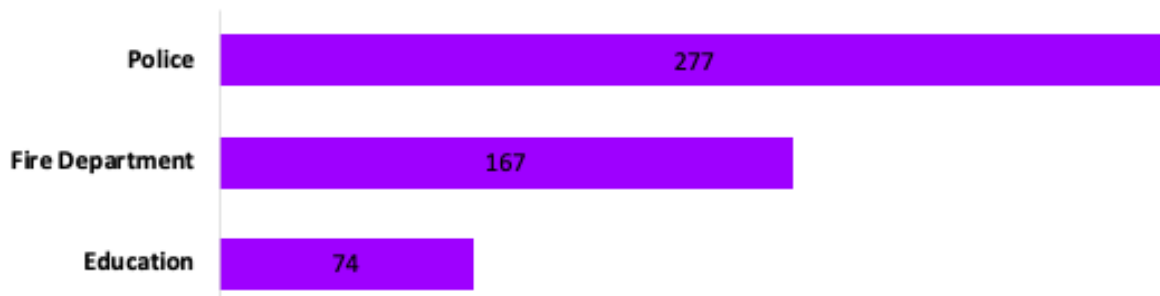


### Discourse over Time



Sentiment regarding the city budget was nearly 3.75x more negative than positive (30% and 8%, respectively)). We note that 95% of all negative sentiment was expressed over the months of June and July following George Floyd's death and increased scrutiny of the police budget.

### Discourse Breakdown - since August 2020



Since August, after the discourse following George Floyd's death decreased, discourse on the budget elicited about 1,300 interactions. The leading areas of discussion were the following:

- **Police** (277 interactions)
  - Online debate centered around the city council's police budget deliberations and the share of the city budget that is allocated to the police.

<sup>2</sup> Social media interactions include comments, 'likes', emojis, and shares to social media posts.

- Many commenters called on the city to allocate police funds to youth programs and mental health support, while others opposed defunding police and a rise in crime rates.
- **Fire Department** (167 interactions)
  - The department's struggles due to the city's tight budget elicited support for increased funding.
  - A common theme called to reallocate funds from the police to the fire department
- **Education** (74 interactions)
  - Parents expressed a need for increased funds to support online learning.
  - Some commenters said parents did not need extra financial support to facilitate online learning.

This section presents an overview of all online conversations in Chattanooga over the last 9 months to identify focal points of interest. The most discussed topics were the following:



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**About Zencity**

Zencity helps local government leaders better understand their residents' priorities and shape policies and messaging accordingly. Using advanced AI, Zencity transforms data from all of the touchpoints that residents have with their local government into actionable insights.