

**COMMUNITY KEY SERVICES DIALOGUES**  
**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**  
*December 2009*

During the fall of 2009, the City of Tucson held nine Dialogues with the public on the City budget. The purpose of the Dialogues was to share information about the City's financial situation and to gather public input to help inform future budget decisions. Dialogues were held at locations throughout the community during evenings and weekends.

A total of approximately 270 people participated in the Dialogues. The format included a background presentation about City services, revenues and the current financial situation, followed by small group discussions during which participants were asked for their input on City service priorities, possible new resources, and future investments. The focus of the Dialogues was on services funded with with General Fund dollars. The following questions were used to guide the small group discussions:

- With fewer revenues to pay for services, which City services would you maintain and which would you cut?
- What additional resources, revenues, or efficiencies should be pursued?
- What should we invest in for our community's future?

City staff from throughout the organization volunteered as neutral facilitators and scribes to lead the Dialogues and record public comments. All comments were transcribed and are posted to the Dialogue website [www.tucsonaz.gov/dialogues](http://www.tucsonaz.gov/dialogues). Qualitative data analysis methods were used to synthesize the comments into common themes for each of the questions as described below.

**1. WHICH CITY SERVICES WOULD YOU MAINTAIN?**

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- The two highest priorities mentioned by Dialogue participants for services to be maintained were **Public Safety** and **Parks and Recreation**. Within Public Safety, an emphasis on prevention efforts and neighborhood-based activities was suggested. Within Parks and Recreation, support was expressed for all types of services, with particular emphasis on programs serving youth and the elderly. There appears to be a willingness for Parks and Recreation fees to be raised in order to avoid cuts to these programs.
- **Transportation and Transit** were identified as the next highest priority to maintain. Participants said that current street maintenance and improvement efforts are inadequate and additional cuts would exacerbate an already poor situation. In the area of Transit, there were suggestions for how efficiencies could be made within current funding allocations (such as smaller buses and eliminating routes with low ridership).

- **Neighborhood Investment** was also identified as a high priority. This includes efforts aimed at strengthening and improving neighborhoods such as beautification, code enforcement, planning and development, improvements to the land use code, and neighborhood communication/support services.
- Support for **Economic Development, Arts, Culture and Civic Events, Environmental Programs, Youth Programs, and Housing and Human Services**, while not mentioned as frequently, were still identified by many participants as high priorities to be maintained. Themes in these categories relate to jobs, workforce development, and maintaining events and cultural opportunities that bring dollars into the community and make Tucson a desirable place to live. Programs that address prevention activities for youth and that further environmental sustainability goals are priorities along with affordable housing and related support services.

## 2. WHICH CITY SERVICES WOULD YOU CUT?

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- While there was some mention of cuts in all of the service areas, no strong sentiment emerged to cut a particular service area completely. The predominant theme that emerged in response to this question was **efficiency** – the idea that the City needs to do a better job with current resources so that services do not need to be cut. **Public Safety** was mentioned most frequently as the service that should be done more efficiently.

Participants listed a variety of suggestions for across-the-board efficiencies such as consolidation of functions (both within the City and City/County), salary cuts, elimination of duplicated services, additional use of volunteer labor, energy and water use savings, outsourcing and downsizing.

In addition, efficiencies were identified for specific service areas including:

- *Fire* – Deploy smaller response vehicles.
- *Police* – Shift resources to prevention activities and to addressing violent and serious crime.
- *Parks and Recreation* - Cut under-utilized programs/hours and those programs that can be provided by others or the private sector. Better utilize partnerships and shared resources to provide Parks and Recreation services.
- *Transit* - Evaluate bus routes and size of buses.
- *Neighborhood Services* - eliminate duplication of efforts across various departments/organizations and Mayor and Council offices.
- *Economic Development* - Increase private sector role and accountability for economic outcomes.

### 3. WHAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, REVENUES, OR EFFICIENCIES SHOULD BE PURSUED?

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- **New and increased taxes and revenues** were the most frequently discussed topic in response to this question. Increased **sales tax**, ideally dedicated for a particular purpose, along with “**sin taxes**” or taxes on undesirable behaviors such as liquor, fast food, and plastic bottles were the most common suggestions. **Increased fines and penalties** for violations such as traffic, property maintenance, noise ordinance, etc. were also suggested. Other new/increased revenues that received support include **impact fees, landlord tax, annexation (or fees charged to non-city residents), property tax, and federal grants**. Fundraising through use of public facilities for **arts, culture and civic events** was another revenue generating idea suggested.
- **Increasing fees for services** was also a strong theme. There were many general suggestions about increasing fees across the board by **inventorying** all fees, **indexing, benchmarking** with other cities, and ensuring that users are paying **fair market value** for services. The most commonly mentioned services that would benefit from increased fees were **Parks and Recreation, Transit, and Development Services**. Even though they are not funded by discretionary revenues, increasing fees for Water and Environmental Services was also mentioned frequently.
- Strong sentiment was expressed that there is a need for **efficiency improvements** that can strengthen the City’s bottom line without new revenues. General efficiency comments focused on asking employees for suggestions, identifying innovative approaches, and looking to other cities best practices in service delivery. **Better communication** with residents and **improved customer services** including on-line options, are seen as important components of and outcomes associated with efficiency improvements.
- **City/County consolidation**, in a variety of service areas, was mentioned frequently, as was consolidation of services that the **City provides and contracts out** (e.g. Channel 12/Access Tucson and Pro-Neighborhoods/City neighborhood support), as well as looking at combining **contracted agencies with similar missions**. Better coordination and **sharing of resources**, such as between Parks and schools was also commonly expressed.
- Inviting the **community to pitch in** as well as making use of **volunteers** (inmates/those assigned to community service, kids, college students, retirees, neighborhood residents) to provide City services is recommended.
- Although not short term solutions to this issue, participants clearly recognized the importance of **economic investment, supporting and attracting businesses, and infill and reinvestment** in the City as fundamental elements of the City’s future financial viability.

#### **4. WHAT SHOULD WE INVEST IN FOR OUR COMMUNITY'S FUTURE?**

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The following issues, listed in order from most to least frequently mentioned, were identified by Dialogue participants as key investments that need to be made to put our City in a stronger position in the future.

- **The Economy** – Diversify the economy, bring in high paying jobs, revitalize downtown, develop the local workforce, support local businesses, grow green technology sectors, invest in arts, culture, and civic events and resources
- **Efficient, Effective Government** – Diversify revenues, be more efficient, look to innovation and best practices, consolidate government functions, develop regional partnerships, improve communication with the public
- **Quality Development and Improved Neighborhoods** – Preserve Tucson's uniqueness, clean up the city, grow smarter, rehabilitate older homes, revitalize older neighborhoods, increase public gathering spaces
- **Education and Prevention Programs for Youth** – Improve schools, provide activities for youth, invest in prevention, support and educate parents
- **Transportation** – Improve aging infrastructure, maintain streets, improve public transit options including investing in rail, add bike lanes, move traffic more efficiently
- **Water, Environment, and Sustainability** – Be more green, expand LEED programs, increase community gardens and local food production, invest in solar and energy efficiency, plant trees, harvest water, preserve the natural environment
- **Public Safety** – Maintain high quality services, increase neighborhood patrols and neighborhood watch, invest in prevention
- **Parks and Recreation** – Invest in parks programs and facilities, develop more green and natural spaces
- **Affordable Housing and Human Services** – Provide safe and decent places for people to live, provide support services to those less fortunate