



**City of Sun Prairie
Fall 2025 Community Survey
Comment Analysis**

This comment analysis report identifies the prevailing themes in the City of Sun Prairie’s community survey. A major theme is identified when participants reference similar suggestions, ideas, or concerns. *Because these themes represent diverse opinions, they may not align with each other.*

Of the 2,168 total survey respondents, 1,130 participants (52%) left at least one comment.

Comment frequency:

- 440 respondents wrote one comment.
- 327 respondents wrote two comments.
- 182 respondents wrote three comments.
- 105 respondents wrote four comments.
- 76 respondents wrote five comments.

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If you would not support the referendum, what are the main reasons?

High Tax Burden: Respondents state that property taxes are already too high and that an additional increase creates an unsustainable financial burden that will price some residents out of their homes. There is specific concern for seniors, those on fixed incomes, and households whose wages have not kept pace with inflation.

Demand for Fiscal Responsibility: Comments assert that the City government must exercise greater fiscal discipline and operate within its existing budget. This includes calls for cutting wasteful spending, prioritizing essential services over “wants,” and improving operational efficiency. There are suggestions that Sun Prairie needs to manage its finances like a household or business, making difficult cuts before asking taxpayers for more money.

Spending Priorities: Comments reflect a lack of confidence in the City’s leadership, planning, and financial decision-making. Respondents question Sun Prairie’s spending priorities, citing specific projects like the library expansion, funding for non-profits, or public transit as examples of wasteful or unnecessary expenditures. The sentiment is that the government does not use existing taxpayer money wisely and cannot be trusted with more.

Growth Strategy Concerns: Respondents express that the City’s rapid growth, particularly the approval of numerous apartment complexes, strains public services. There is a belief that new developments, often receiving tax incentives (TIF), do not contribute their fair share to the tax base. Comments suggest this strategy leaves existing homeowners to shoulder the financial burden of the increased demand for services.

Referendum Fatigue: Comments communicate frustration with the frequency of requests for tax increases via referendums. The cumulative impact of these referendums contributes to opposition to another increase.

Is there any other information you would need before making a decision?

Detailed Budget Transparency: Respondents request more detailed information about the City's current budget and spending, specifically line-item breakdowns. Comments express an interest in understanding how the City's budget got to a deficit and desire clear, specific plans for how any new funds will be allocated. This information is seen as essential for understanding where taxpayer money goes and for building trust in fiscal management.

Information on Budget Cuts: Respondents ask for evidence that Sun Prairie is actively pursuing and implementing cost-saving measures before requesting more funds from taxpayers. They want to know what expenses have been or can be cut, where efficiencies can be found, and what specific actions are being taken to live within the existing budget.

Consequences of a "No" Vote: Respondents request clear information on the specific, tangible consequences if the referendum does not pass. They want to know precisely which services, programs, or positions the City Council will reduce or eliminate to balance the budget. This information helps them weigh the direct impact of a "no" vote against the cost of a tax increase.

Impact of Development: Respondents question the financial impact of the City's growth, particularly the proliferation of apartment buildings and new businesses. They seek information on how much these new developments contribute to the tax base and whether they are paying their share for the increased demand on services. There is a sense that the financial burden of growth is not being fairly distributed.

Personal Financial Impact: Respondents express a need for clear and understandable information about how the proposed tax increase will personally affect them. They seek specifics on the exact cost increase based on their property value and clarification on how the increase is calculated over multiple years. This theme highlights concerns about affordability, the cumulative financial burden on households, and the need to clearly translate the potential tax increase in ways that are easily understood.

No Additional Information Needed: Some respondents state that they do not need any more information to make their decision. These comments indicate that their minds are already made up, with the sentiment predominantly against any tax increase. This theme reflects a firm opposition to the referendum, regardless of additional details provided.

Cost-Cutting Options

Improved Efficiency: Respondents express a desire for Sun Prairie to operate more efficiently and manage its budget with greater discipline. Comments point to perceived waste and suggest that all departments should be reviewed for potential cost savings. There is a sentiment that the City should adopt practices similar to a private business, focusing on accountability, productivity, and living within its means before asking taxpayers for more money.

More Information: Respondents state they lack the necessary information, context, or expertise to make informed recommendations about where to cut staff or services. Comments indicate a need for more details on departmental responsibilities, budgets, and the potential impact of any reductions.

City Planning: Comments reflect concerns that the City's rapid growth, particularly the increase in apartment buildings, is unsustainable and strains public services. Respondents question planning decisions and suggest that development negatively impacts the community's character and finances. The comments call for slowing growth and ensuring that new developments do not create a financial burden on existing taxpayers.

Alternative Solutions: Instead of cutting services, respondents propose addressing the budget shortfall by leveraging volunteers, privatizing certain services like the museum or aquatic center, and finding new revenue streams. Other ideas involve increasing fees for developers, pursuing grants, or forming public-private partnerships.

Opposition to Cuts: A group of respondents expresses direct opposition to cutting any staff or services. These comments convey a willingness to pay more in taxes to maintain the current quality of life and community amenities. The perspective is that all services are valuable and contribute to making Sun Prairie a desirable place to live.

Public Transportation: Respondents identify the public bus system as a service to reduce or eliminate due to perceived low ridership. The comments describe buses as running empty and suggest that scaling back or cutting the bus service is a logical place to find savings.

Initiatives: There is a sentiment that departments and initiatives related to sustainability, climate, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are not essential. Respondents view these programs as secondary to core government functions, especially during times of budget constraint. The argument is that these roles can be eliminated or their functions absorbed by other departments to save money.

Library Staffing Levels: There are questions about the staffing levels and expenditures at the public library, especially following its recent expansion. Respondents feel the library is overstaffed or that its budget is excessive compared to other needs. Suggestions range from reducing staff to having the library's foundation cover more of its operational costs.

Investments in Services

Library Staffing Requests: Respondents question the scale of recent library spending, particularly the expansion project. They express that enough taxpayer money has been allocated to the library and resist requests for additional staff, with some recalling that the expansion was not supposed to require new hires. Comments suggest the library is a lower priority compared to essential services.

Alternative Solutions: Suggestions include creating robust volunteer programs, utilizing student interns for summer or part-time work, and charging user fees for specific services to offset operational costs. This is seen as a way to maintain services without increasing the tax burden on residents.

City Growth Criticism: Respondents connect the need for increased services and staff directly to the Sun Prairie's growth, particularly the construction of apartment complexes. They state that this expansion strains public safety resources and infrastructure without a corresponding increase in revenue to cover the new demands. The sentiment is that the City should slow or stop its growth until it can adequately fund the services required by the current population.

Opposition to Increased Spending: These comments express a refusal to support any new spending or tax increases, regardless of the justification. Respondents state that the City must operate within its existing budget, just as households do. They view any proposal for a referendum or service expansion as fiscally irresponsible when the city is already facing a budget shortfall.

Parks/Public Works Concerns: These comments share dissatisfaction with the performance and management of Public Works, Streets, and Parks departments. Specific complaints include poor road conditions, inefficient snow removal, wasteful spending on street dividers or forestry practices, and under-maintained parks.

Police Department Budget: Respondents scrutinize the role and funding of the police department, with some suggesting a re-evaluation of its priorities and staffing. A portion of these comments advocate for hiring social workers or mental health professionals instead of more sworn officers to handle crisis intervention calls. Others suggest police should focus exclusively on law enforcement and eliminate community outreach activities to reduce overtime and expenses.

General Fiscal Responsibility: These comments center on the belief that the City mismanages its funds and must find internal efficiencies and cut waste before asking taxpayers for more money. Respondents suggest actions like implementing hiring freezes for administrative roles, reviewing employee productivity, and eliminating non-essential programs.

Public Safety Services: These comments identify police, fire, and EMS as core, essential government functions that must be fully funded. Respondents prioritize public safety above other services like the library or parks. They express concern about crime, officer burnout, and the need for adequate staffing to protect a growing community.

Funding to Invest in Services

Demand for Cuts: Residents express that the City needs to operate within its means, similar to how a household manages its budget. They call for the City to cut non-essential spending, reduce “bloat,” and find internal efficiencies before requesting more money from taxpayers.

Opposition to Tax Increases: Respondents voice opposition to any increase in property taxes. They suggest that taxes in the community are already too high and have been rising steadily. Residents, particularly those on fixed incomes like seniors, express that they cannot afford further increases and that the rising cost of living is making the city unaffordable. Some indicate that continued tax hikes will force them to move out of the community.

Need for Transparency: Respondents feel they lack sufficient information to make an informed decision. They request more clarity on how funds are currently spent and how any new revenue would be specifically allocated. These comments include calls for detailed budget breakdowns and suggestions for public meetings or town halls.

City Growth Management: Respondents connect the City’s budget shortfall to its growth and perceived mismanagement. They question why the tax revenue from new construction, especially apartment buildings, is not sufficient to cover the increased demand for services. A recurring idea is to increase the tax burden on businesses, developers, and owners of apartment complexes. The sentiment is that these entities should contribute a larger share to cover the service demands they create.

Service Prioritization: These comments express a willingness to support funding, but only for specific, essential services. Public safety, including police, fire, and EMS, is a common priority for which respondents would consider a tax increase. However, they suggest reducing or not expanding funding for services they deem less critical, such as the library or parks.

Alternative Revenue Sources: Respondents suggest the City explore other funding mechanisms instead of relying solely on residential property taxes.

Impact of Other Tax Increases: Comments suggest that recent increases in taxes that residents pay to other taxing entities are an issue in supporting a separate increase from the City.