



Santa Lucia Chapter
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January 4, 2013

Re: Goal Setting and the 2013-2015 Financial Plan

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council,

The Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club and its members who reside in the City of San Luis Obispo have supported the City's Open Space program for decades. It was therefore with great interest that we read of the more than 2,100 responses to the detailed survey the City sent to 25,000 city residents and business owners as part of its LUCE update process. Respondents were asked this question, which is also at the heart of your goal setting/budget process:

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being less and 5 being more, do you think the city should provide less, about the same, or more of each of the following services? If you think the city should provide more or less of a certain service, indicate whether you would be willing to pay more for it or whether you would divert funds from that use to other services.

When staff collated the more than 2,000 responses received, they found that just four service areas were supported by a majority of respondents who approved of seeking additional facilities and services: 58% support acquiring and maintaining open space for peaks and hillsides, 54% support acquiring and maintaining more open space land for the city's greenbelt, 53% support more open space land for creeks and marshes, and 50% would like more bike lanes.

Further: "Despite support for some services, only a slight majority of respondents said they would support paying more for just two; 54% for open space for peaks and hillsides, and 52% for open space for the City's Greenbelt."

To a survey question seeking input on the most and least important aspects of "quality of life," respondents overwhelmingly rated the natural environment (air quality, open space) as having the highest impact on quality of life (71.1%). This was true for all categories of respondents, including the employed (74.7%), retired (69.2%), students (69%), and owners of businesses in the city (73.4%). The "runner up" was "crime levels," at a significantly lower 62.9%. Even "job opportunities" rated only 38.2%, and "housing opportunities" 35.3%. At the bottom of the list were "Shopping opportunities," rated a mere 15.7%; and "entertainment opportunities," at 16.9%.

That's what we call a mandate. Natural open space is clearly the top priority of city residents, and the role the results of this survey should play in your Goal Setting process is obvious.

Thus we were more than a little puzzled to hear that Staff proposes that these 2,100 responses from residents and business owners be excluded from the Goal Setting process. This would be disrespectful to the thousands of residents and business owners who responded to this survey at the City's request, and would represent an obvious waste of city funds at a time of painful budget cuts.

We support Staff's proposal to use the 279 responses it received from the separate Community Priorities Survey (SLO City 2013 Financial Plan, Goal-Setting Agenda Packet). In addition to these responses, we strongly urge that the City Council not exclude the 2,100+ LUCE Update survey responses from residents and business owners, specifically the responses to the question of which services the city should increase or decrease, and for which residents and business owners are willing to pay more.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,

Andrew Christie
Chapter Director