

Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Lara Biggs, City Engineer
CC: Edgar Cano, Public Works Agency Director
Subject: Civic Center/Police Fire Headquarters Public Engagement Update
Date: December 9, 2024

Recommended Action:

Staff will provide an update regarding public engagement about the civic center.

Council Action:

For Discussion

Summary:

On October 25, 2021, the City Council approved a contract with AECOM for feasibility consulting services related to the renovation or replacement of the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center and the Police/Fire Headquarters (PFHQ). This study evaluates several alternatives for the relocation/renovation of both the Civic Center and the PFHQ, as shown in the table below (the original costs and escalated costs are provided).

Alt. No.	Description	Est. Cost (01/2024 dollars)	Est. Cost (12/2024 dollars) ¹
1	Rebuild PFHQ on current site Renovate Civic Center	\$158.7M	\$163.4M
2	Rebuild PFHQ on current site Lease downtown office space for Civic Center	\$147.1M	\$151.5M
3	Rebuild PFHQ on Farmers Market site Lease downtown office space for Civic Center	\$132.7M	\$136.6M
4	Rebuild PFHQ at 2100 Ridge Renovate Civic Center	\$136.5M	\$140.6M
5	Acquire 906 University Place; develop integrated Civic Center and PFHQ	\$134.7M	\$138.7M
6	Acquire Farmers Market site; develop integrated Civic Center and PFHQ	\$120.4M	\$123.9M

Note 1: Costs were escalated using the Engineering News Record Building Construction Index for Chicago.

On April 29, 2024, the City Council directed staff to complete public engagement related to the project. The public engagement plan that was developed included the following:

1. Online poll available to all that wished to participate
2. Statistically validated, targeted phone survey (of registered voters)
3. Four listening sessions

The public engagement focused on getting feedback on what community members valued in how city hall services are provided and accessed. The results of the public engagement are discussed later in this memo.

Validation of Existing Building Challenges and Renovation Costs:

Some community members have expressed concerns about the validity of the challenges of reusing the existing building and the renovation cost. Several reports were completed regarding the Civic Center in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Staff reviewed these reports to determine if they had findings similar to those in the recent AECOM report.

In July 1998, Doyle & Associates provided a “Civic Center 2000+” report. This report looked at three options:

- Build a new Civic Center on private land
- Demolish existing building and build a new Civic Center on the same site
- Renovate the existing building

Renovating the existing building was found to be the most expensive option at \$15.3M in 1998 dollars. Escalating that cost to the present day using the Engineering News-Record Building Construction Cost Index indicates an equivalent price of \$47.5M versus the current AECOM estimate to renovate the Civic Center of \$64.6M. The escalated Doyle report cost

does not account for the additional 26 years of building deterioration/aging or that the building has since been landmarked. It also does not include compliance with the City's Climate Action Resilience Plan (CARP) nor the City's current building code requirement that renovations comply with LEED-Gold standards. The Doyle report also documents serious life safety building code violations as well as the extensive ADA violations present in the building, and it should be noted that both building codes and ADA regulations have become more stringent since 1998. Neither of these have been significantly addressed in the last 26 years. The complete Doyle report is located [here](#) on the City website. A final reason that renovation is so much more costly than other options is that the existing building is roughly 40% larger than is needed for city hall operations, as new construction would likely result in a smaller building.

In 2003, U.S. Equities Realty provided a brief analysis of costs as well as the potential financial benefits of redevelopment of the site. In that report, the estimated cost of the Civic Center renovation was \$20.5M in 2003 dollars. Escalated to today, the cost is \$57.9M. The text of the U.S. The Equities Realty report is located [here](#) on the City website.

Other past Civic Center reports were not as comprehensive as the Doyle report but looked at partial solutions instead. However, they tended to validate the costs and extent of the renovations needed to make the building safe and compliant with modern building codes and the ADA. These reports are located on the City's website.

Preservation Tax Credits

Community members have proposed that state and federal preservation tax credits could make the renovation cost of the existing Civic Center more affordable. Staff and AECOM are investigating this option further. The findings will be presented to the city council at a later date.

Potential Options for Relocation:

AECOM identified several locations for relocating the Civic Center and the PFHQ; these include:

- 909 Davis (for Civic Center lease only)
- Farmers Market site (owned by Northwestern University)
- 906 University Place (owned by Northwestern University)

Since then, several additional sites have been identified as potential options. The current sites that are considered the most likely options are as follows:

1. 909 Davis - This is where city hall services are being relocated. It is under private ownership but is regarded as a good candidate for a long-term lease. The annual rent and operational expenses are approximately \$2.3M. By comparison, if the City were to renovate the Civic Center for \$64.6M, the annual bond payment would be \$4.5M for 20 years. By the end of 20 years, additional capital projects will be needed, so while the bond amount may change, it is likely to continue indefinitely.
2. 1703 Orrington Avenue (Main Library Site) - The City owns the Evanston Public Library building. Constructed in the late 1990s, it needs a major renovation in order to continue in the same use, estimated at 18.3M. However, the library staff has indicated that only approximately half of the current space is needed to provide library services.

The remaining space is similar to the amount necessary to provide city hall services. Relocating city hall into the building would significantly increase the renovation cost but would be less expensive than building a new standalone building or renovating the existing Civic Center. Additional investigation is needed to determine a budget price for this option.

3. 1801 Maple Avenue / 906 University Place - The two Northwestern University-owned properties are located on the northeast corner of Maple and Clark, across the street from the Maple Avenue Parking Garage and Hilton Garden Inn. 1801 Maple was built during the Research Park era and provides six floors of laboratory space. The adjacent 906 University serves as Northwestern University's "shop" building, which includes carpentry services. The City approached Northwestern University to determine its plans for the two properties. The University is willing to discuss the disposition of the properties. Due to its layout and structure, police and fire operations are ideally suited for the 1801 Maple building. The 906 University Place property could be demolished to provide additional support facilities, including secure parking for police vehicles. These properties are located across the street from the proposed Church Street Plaza residential redevelopment/potential city hall office condominium, which would provide an opportunity for a civic campus consisting of the primary city hall operations, police, fire, and a parking structure.
4. 900 Clark Street - The Church Street Plaza ownership is leading a team considering the redevelopment potential of the far north end of the movie theater development, across the street from the Maple Avenue garage entrance. The owner approached the City regarding constructing a 56,000-square-foot city hall on part of the ground floor and floors two through five. The upper floors would be residential. The preliminary test fit includes a mix of workspaces and private offices for over 200 staff, meeting rooms, and council chambers with a reception area. Combining the multifamily development with the construction of Evanston's new City Hall significantly reduces costs relative to a standalone building, as fixed costs are distributed across a larger project. This decrease in construction costs would likely provide a substantial financial benefit compared to other standalone City Hall options, either renovation or new construction. Maintenance costs for building systems, plumbing, roof, etc., would be shared, which could also provide a significant annual cost benefit. The resulting lower capital commitment would give the City more financial capacity for future capital improvement plans, including Police/Fire HQ. The developer initially offered the space for \$43 million as an office condominium, available for occupancy as early as January 2028. Preliminary conversations with the developer indicate they are open to either ownership or leasing arrangements. The staff has yet to initiate negotiations and will await direction from the City Council.

The staff has vetted these options as reasonable solutions that are likely more cost-effective than renovating existing facilities; however, additional investigation is still needed to obtain more accurate, comparative budget estimates.

Public Engagement Results:

AECOM and their sub-consultant, Teska Associates, completed the open poll and the listening sessions. Impact Research completed the targeted survey.

The targeted survey was completed October 18-21, 2024. Four hundred registered voters participated in the survey. Key findings of the survey were that most residents aren't hearing a lot about the Civic Center project and aren't visiting the Civic Center often as they prefer digital services. Low cost to taxpayers is a top priority for the Civic Center project, followed by nearby public parking and transit. Residents want the Civic Center to offer basic services such as free Wi-Fi, vehicle registration and sticker services, and parking ticket and moving violation adjudication services.

A separate open poll that anyone could opt into was available from October 7 to November 24. To participate, the user was required to provide a unique email address, but the information provided was processed anonymously. The poll used a variety of question formats, including open-ended, multiple-choice, ranking, and rating, to understand priorities for using city hall and City functions. 755 people completed the poll.

Four listening sessions were held. A summary of the four sessions is as follows:

Date	Format	Language	Attendees In-Person	Attendees Online	Attendees Total
10/29	Hybrid	English	7	16	23
11/14	In-person	English	14	N/A	14
11/20	Hybrid	Spanish	8	26	34
11/21	Virtual	English	N/A	8	8
	Total				79

Information in the listening sessions was gathered through discussion and live polling through individual cell phone and paper surveys.

Key findings from the open polling and listening sessions were:

- Participants generally wanted the City to be cost-conscious and focus on providing core services but did not prefer the option to focus on cost above all else.
- Participants wanted enhanced accessibility with nearby access to free public parking and transit.
- From the Spanish session, the most stated need for a city hall was to have more people providing services that can speak Spanish so that city services can be more readily accessed.
- Community members want free or low-cost access to community meeting spaces, especially for non-profit groups.
- Community members would like the city hall to be well-connected to the rest of the City through its location and access to transit. They would also prioritize ADA accessibility. A number of people who currently drive to the Civic Center would prefer to walk, bike, or take transit if there is a reasonable alternative.

The attached memo, provided by Teska Associates, which led the public engagement, provides a more detailed discussion.

Summary of Overall Public Engagement Findings:

Findings from the overall public engagement are summarized in the table below.

Engagement Method	No. of Participants	How do People Prefer to Access Government?	Key Findings of Community Concerns
Poll	755	Online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nearby free public parking 2. Minimizing costs with a focus on primary services (balancing costs and quality) 3. Nearby access to transit
Listening Sessions	79		
Targeted Survey	400	Online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low cost to taxpayers 2. Nearby public parking 3. Nearby access to transit

Next Steps:

Staff is recommending the following next steps:

- Get an additional evaluation, including budget pricing, regarding the potential conversion of 1801 Maple to accommodate a new Police/Fire Headquarters.
- Get additional evaluation regarding the potential conversion of the Main Library to accommodate a new city hall and maintain library services, including budget pricing.
- Investigate the feasibility of using preservation tax credits to assist in financing a potential renovation of the existing Civic Center building.
- Present additional follow-up information to the City Council in January for discussion of best options for renovation or relocation.

Attachments:

[DRAFT Teska Evanston Civic Center Engagement Summary Memo](#)



Memorandum – DRAFT

To: Lara Biggs, Bureau Chief - Capital Planning/City Engineer, City of Evanston
Shane Cary, Project Manager/Architect, City of Evanston

From: Michael Blue, FAICP, Principal, Teska Associates, Inc.
Erin Cigliano, AICP, Principal + Designer, Teska Associates, Inc.
Maggie Eickhoff, Community Planner, Teska Associates, Inc.

cc: Chris Brewer, Vice President, Economics + Advisory, AECOM

Date: December 3, 2024

RE: Evanston Civic Center Engagement Preliminary Findings

The City of Evanston is evaluating the future of its civic facilities, including City Hall, the Police Department, and the Fire Department. A recent study examined the feasibility and costs of various options, such as renovating existing buildings or relocating. To better understand the community's use of and priorities relating to City services, a series of Listening Sessions and an online Community Poll were facilitated by Teska Associates, Inc. In addition, the City conducted a survey with the same objectives and similar questions (described toward the end of this memorandum).

Questions, activities, and discussion as part of the Community Poll and Listening Sessions were developed to identify (1) how community members prefer to interface with their government, (2) what their top priorities are related to city services and functions, (3) how these priorities rank in relation to broader community goals and initiatives, and to (4) generate an understanding surrounding the balance and tradeoffs of city hall priorities with respect to cost.

This report summarizes the findings from this engagement process, providing valuable insights to inform the City Council's decision-making.

- The **Civic Center Community Poll** was open for seven weeks, from October 7 to November 25, 2024, **receiving 755 responses**. The poll used a variety of question formats, including open-ended, multiple-choice, ranking, and rating to understand priorities for usage of city hall and City functions.
- Four **Community Listening Sessions** were hosted in various formats, languages, and locations to maximize access and participation by the Evanston community. In total, **79 community members** participated in the in-person, hybrid, and/or virtual sessions. All sessions included large and small group discussion and an optional interactive budgeting exercise.

Engagement Themes

This collective outreach yielded feedback that can be categorized into five thematic categories, which are expanded upon and supported by engagement findings in the section that follows. While there is an inherent overlap between the themes and their subcomponents, the general priority of the themes is reflected in the order in which they are presented below.

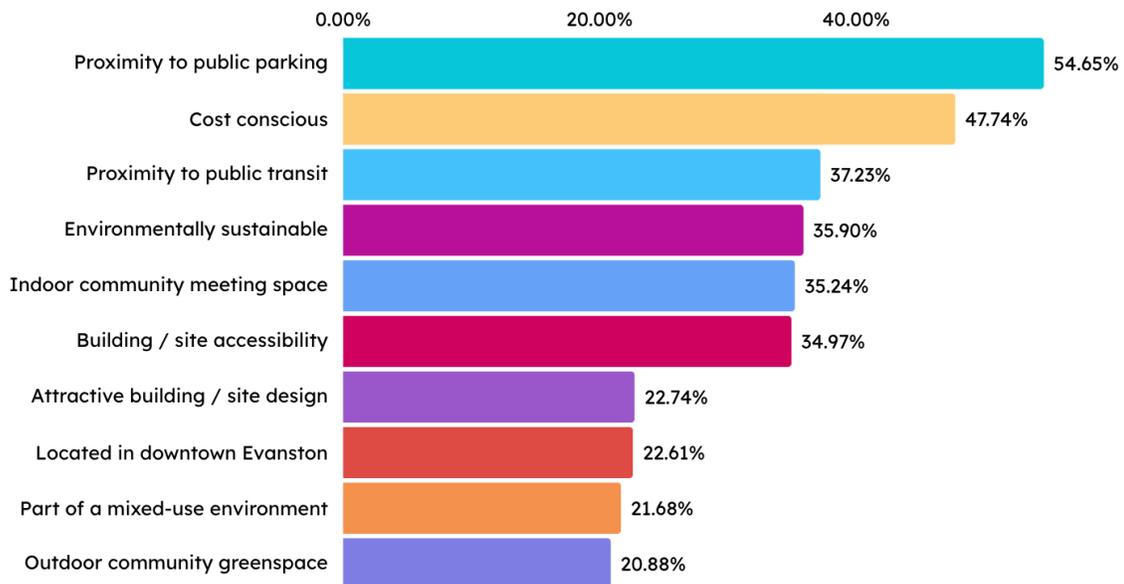
1. **Smart Spending**
2. **Enhance Accessibility**
3. **Inclusive Services**
4. **Foster Community Connectivity**, and
5. **Multi-Modal Mobility**

1. Smart Spending: Poll and listening session participants promoted responsible spending when it comes to future civic center solutions. Responses highlighted striking a balance between cost and overall value, with participants stressing the importance of cost efficiency, while also acknowledging the need for a long-term solution. In closed- and open-ended poll responses, as well as listening session discussions, respondents supported a focus on primary services and functions. Minimizing all costs (saving money above all else) and investing for the long term (spending more now to support a longer lasting facility) were raised, however, minimizing costs with a focus on core needs was the leading feedback.

- Being “Cost conscious” was the second-most popular civic center priority from the Community Poll (just after “proximity to public parking”). 48% of poll participants selected cost consciousness as a top four priority when considering what matters to them most.
- In open-ended responses to the Poll, participants mentioned cost as a key consideration for not only the creation of a new civic center and its amenities, but also the cost to the user for those amenities (i.e., affordable or free meeting spaces, free parking, etc.).
- When asked to prioritize cost in relation to the importance and potential added benefits of a civic center project, the plurality of Poll respondents (42%) answered that the City should try to balance cost and quality. The second most popular response was that the City should invest for long-term value (30%), indicating that efficiency and functionality are highly important. Similar points of emphasis came out of the Listening Session discussions.
- When ranking civic center amenities among other community priorities, such as affordable housing and lead pipe replacement, civic center amenities ranked last. This finding is consistent both in online poll results and in live listening sessions wherein participants were asked to work in groups to rank priorities.

Figure 1: Priorities for Civic Center Features (online Community Poll)

Please select your top four or fewer priorities from the list below:



2. Enhance Accessibility: This theme includes physical accessibility, accessible design, and convenient parking. Physical access to the building should be easy, especially for seniors and people with disabilities. Participants in the engagement activities noted that ADA accessible building features and amenities like free parking on the premises are necessary to create an accessible civic center. Responses emphasized accessibility for those with disabilities, seniors, and people for whom English is not their first or primary language.

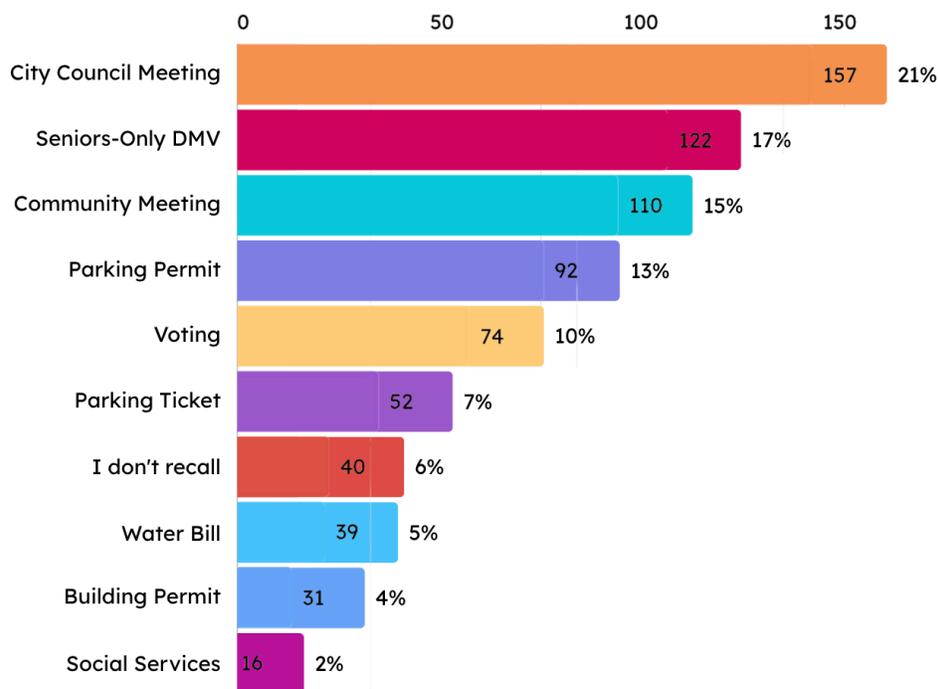
- ‘Access to Public Parking’ was the top-ranked priority regarding civic facilities, receiving 55% of votes. ‘Proximity to Public Transit’ (37%), ‘Environmental Sustainability’ (36%) and ‘Building / Site Accessibility’ (35%) all followed closely as other top priorities. (Note that Poll participants were allowed to select up to four priorities, thus results reflect the percentage of participants who chose the option as one of their top four priorities, *thus the total percentage is over 100%.*)
- Free and accessible public parking was a repeated priority across the Community Poll and the Listening Sessions. A desire for “free parking” at a city hall was expressed at each of the Listening Sessions.
- Participants in the Spanish-language Listening Session noted that conducting business at the existing civic center can be difficult as there are few or no employees who speak basic Spanish. A desire for bilingual assistance was expressed by this group.
- When asked whether participants would access civic center services online if that was an option, 4 out of 5 (82%) said they would.

3. Inclusive Services: Participants mentioned the importance of prioritizing existing city services at a civic center, such as voting, wheel tax payment, attending public meetings, and the senior DMV services. They also proposed exploring the potential of adding additional available services in

the future, such as DMV services for all ages, and police and fire offices. Participants expressed that keeping the focus on core services rendered by the City is important at a future civic center.

- Most people who have been to the civic center in the last six months visited in order to attend a City Council meeting (21%), use seniors-only DMV services (17%), attend a community meeting (15%), obtain a parking permit (13%), or to vote (10%).
- The amenities that ranked most highly on the Community Poll are primarily those that already exist at the current civic center.
- Open-ended responses favored use of the civic center for standard City services, with some extension of currently offered services (i.e., in-person 311 help and DMV services for populations other than seniors). Some responses in the Community Poll and Listening Sessions noted that Evanston currently has public facilities that host some amenities, such as meeting and event spaces, which can also be used for these functions.

Figure 2: What was the purpose of your visit to City Hall (online poll)



4. Foster Community Connectivity: Respondents suggested including meeting rooms, lounges, and other accessible spaces for civic and non-profit groups to regularly meet. Suggestions included designing areas where neighbors can connect with each other, both in planned events and in casual conversations. Participants regularly ranked meeting spaces and rooms as a top priority for any future civic center solution. There is some desire for a “third space” that fosters interactions among the community.

- The top ranked potential civic center amenity in the Community Poll was meeting space for civic groups (received a vote from 60% of participants).
- Meeting space was mentioned in the interactive voting activity at every Listening Session.
- Indoor community meeting space was the top-ranked priority in the Listening Session introductory budgeting activity.

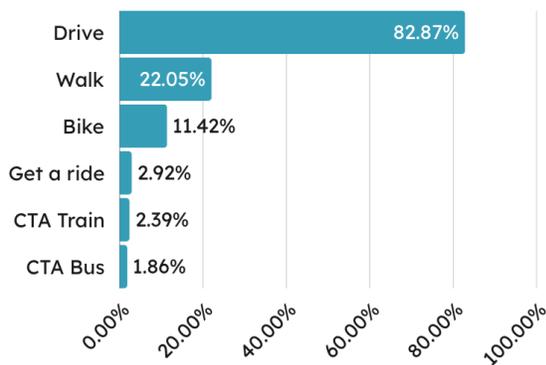
- When asked if they generally see value in civic centers including space for other uses, such as cafes, healthcare services, childcare, and more, 47% of Poll participants said yes.

5. Multi-Modal Mobility: In addition to being accessible for those with disabilities or other concerns, there is a desire for the future civic center to be accessible by a number of means, including driving, walking, biking, and taking public transportation. Whether the civic center is relocated or stays at its current location, respondents found it is important to consider options to make the civic center well connected to the rest of the city.

- While the vast majority of participants typically drive to city hall (83%), 18% of that 83% would prefer to use another mode of transportation, such as transit or walking.
- “Proximity to public transit” is ranked third in the Community Poll as a priority for city hall, just after “proximity to public parking” and “cost consciousness.”
- Site accessibility by transit (CTA train and bus), is noted as a desired feature. Poll results show that many more people drive to the current civic center than walk or take transit. When asked for a preference, the percentage of those wishing to walk or bike grew significantly.

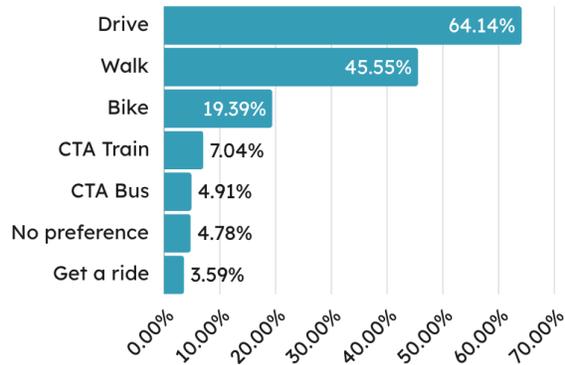
Figure 3: Priorities for Accessing a City Hall (online poll)

How do you usually get to City Hall?



The remaining 2.79% of responses noted either a taxi, car service, other mode, they don't recall, or don't go to City Hall.

How would you prefer to get to City Hall?



The remaining 3.32% of responses noted either a taxi, car service, other mode, or they don't go to City Hall.

Supplemental Survey by Impact Research

The City of Evanston also procured a separate survey, designed and conducted by Impact Research. Impact Research conducted a survey of 400 registered voters in Evanston from October 18-21, 2024, and notes that the margin of error for a sample of this size is +/- 4.9 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. 79% of these surveys were conducted via cell phone, and 21% were conducted via landline. The results of this survey were largely consistent with the online Community Poll and Listening Sessions.

- The Impact survey found that two-thirds (66%) of participants had been to the civic center fewer than three times, consistent with the online Poll findings of 69%.
- The Impact survey found that three-quarters of participants (75%) would prefer to do civic center business online, consistent with the online poll finding that a majority of participants would prefer to do business online (82%).
- Amenities and civic center improvements ranked lowest among community priorities, consistent with the online Poll and Listening Sessions findings.
- Both the survey and Poll found that participants would like a "middle ground" or balanced cost solution for the future of the civic center.

Two elements from the Impact survey findings were different from the online poll:

- The desired amenity of free Wi-Fi ranked higher among participants in the Impact survey.
- The Impact survey asked about an additional community priority not included in the online Community Poll: "Reducing taxes, fines, and fees." This priority was ranked highly in the Impact survey, second only to affordable housing.

Additional Considerations

It should be noted that while the intention of this outreach program was to consider needs and priorities for how residents use City services and a city hall facility, a number of Listening Session participants expressed a desire that—no matter the findings of this input—the current civic center be renovated and continue to serve its function or be adapted for another use. These concerns were echoed by some open-ended responses in the Community Poll, though responses online largely remained focused on amenities and costs. It was noted to Listening Session participants that no decision had been made on those questions and that understanding how residents want to use a city hall was a precursor to deciding on a location.

In both the Poll and Listening Sessions, participants who mentioned the desire to stay at the civic center building at 2100 Ridge noted their reasons as being related to fiscal responsibility or cost consciousness, the existing proximity to free and ample public parking, the co-location of a large green space (Ingraham Park), and the building's location near a CTA Purple Line station and bus line. Some also mentioned the aesthetic or historic significance of 2100 Ridge.