

Residents Want More Efficiency, Taxes On 'Choices'

Assembly holds budget priority meeting in light of Mayor Sullivan's announcement the Municipality faces a multi-million dollar shortfall.

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska (KTVA-CBS 11 News) In light of Mayor's Dan Sullivan's announcement the Municipality faces another a multi-million dollar budget gap next year, the Anchorage Assembly met Wednesday to present a finalized report on where the community thinks budget priorities should be.

The report is called "Bringing the Public to the Table" and research started back in August. About 350 community members participated in the report.

Viewpoint Learning, the outside consultant hired to do this study, says the majority of folks that participated want to maintain city services, demand efficiencies and do not want to raise property taxes.

The goal was to open up a dialogue about what the community hopes to see for the city budget from a long-term point of view.

First and foremost, the study says Anchorage residents think there is a lot of money being wasted in government operations and they want that addressed.

After that, if it's still necessary to tax, the report says the community is more interested in taxing things people do rather than what they own.

"Property tax would be something people have, or a sort of state of being, whereas taxing alcohol, or a sales tax even, is taxing a choice. Something people purchase or something people choose to do, a fee on using a particular facility and those kinds of things are more of the actions people take that are of their choice as opposed to income or property taxes," says Heidi Gantwerk, Vice President for Viewpoint Learning.

Some of the new taxes suggested were an alcohol excise tax, a sales tax and an increase in user fines.

Mayor Dan Sullivan says it was worth the \$25,000 the Municipality spent on the study and the results reinforce they are on the right track by increasing government efficiencies.

"Just as an example, we just reorganized our community planning and development organization into a more streamline structure that has two key elements: the Planning Department and the Public Works Department. It's going to save the city about \$650,000 a year," says Sullivan.

The study cost at least \$50,000 with at least half of that sponsored by private funding.

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