



ZENCITY TEMPERATURE CHECK REPORT

# ARPA Funding

Prepared for Lorain, OH

# Introduction

The following report reviews resident input into how the City should best use federal funding provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) through an analysis of responses to a survey designed by Zencity and deployed by the City of Lorain. The survey was conducted between July 19 and September 13, 2021, and included 12 closed-ended and 1 open-ended question.

The survey received a total of 1,544 responses, 407 (26%) of which came from an online form and 1,137 (74%) of which came from a printed version which was distributed by and whose responses were tabulated by the City. Zencity combined both forms of responses and used the resulting totals as the basis for all calculations in this report.

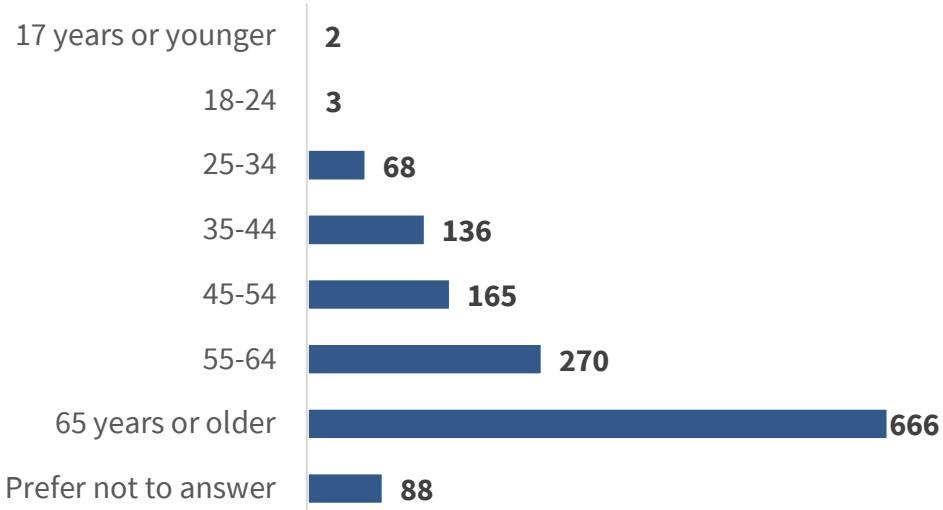
The following analysis includes: Results of each closed-ended question; Results of the open-ended question; Related social media discourse analysis; Main takeaways and recommendations.

## Executive Summary

- Concerns about public safety, public works related issues, and the local economy emerged as the most popular priority areas identified by residents.
- Overall, residents expressed more support for funding areas that require the City to implement new policies and invest in community-facing departments than policies that provide direct financial assistance to private individuals.
- Residents also expressed support for further investment into the City's parks and recreational facilities.
- Some also pointed to traffic enforcement, vacant buildings, and expensive water bills as areas of concern.

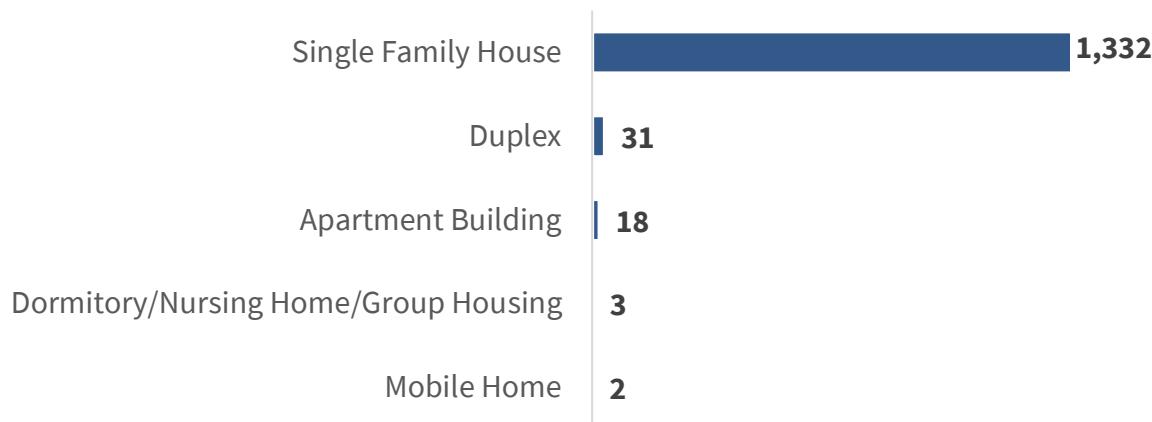
# Demographics

## Age



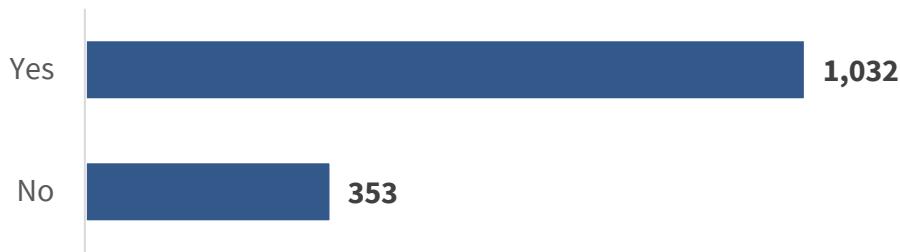
**Nearly half (48%) of all respondents were 65 years or older**, while those under the age of 35 made up only 5% of all respondents.

## Current Housing Situation



At 96%, **nearly all respondents lived in a single family house**.

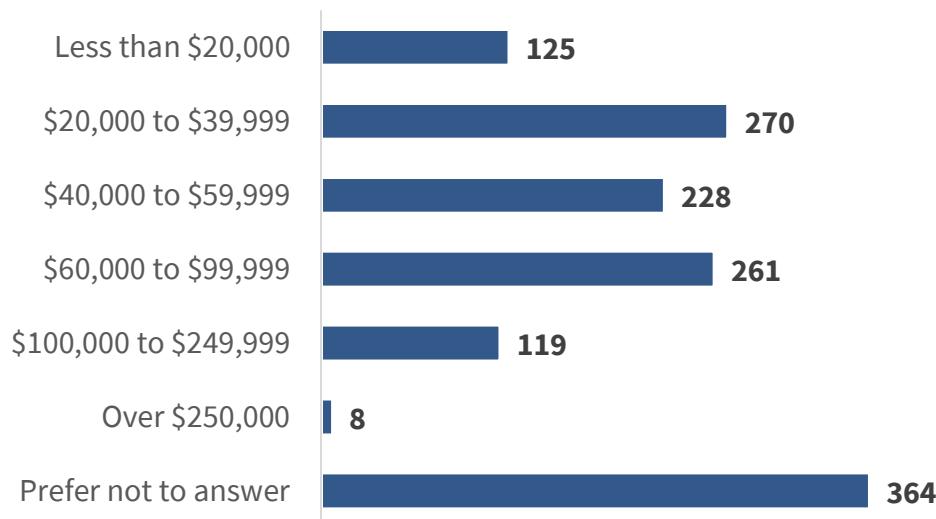
### Do any children under the age of 18 live in your household?



**Three-quarters (75%) of all respondents reported having a child under the age of 18 living in their household.**

Notably, there was **a considerable difference between those who took the survey online** and those who submitted responses to the physical copy of the survey. Of the online respondents, only 39% had a minor in their household, but of the paper respondents, 77% did.

### Total Annual Household Income



More than a quarter (26%) of all respondents preferred not to report their total annual household income.

Of those who did report, **more than a third (39%) earned less than \$40,000 per year and nearly two-thirds (62%) reported earning less than \$60,000**. The largest cohort of reporting respondents (27%) earned between \$20,000 to \$39,999 per year.

## RESULTS ANALYSIS

# Closed-Ended Questions Analysis

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**1**

Please rank the following opportunities to use rescue funds.

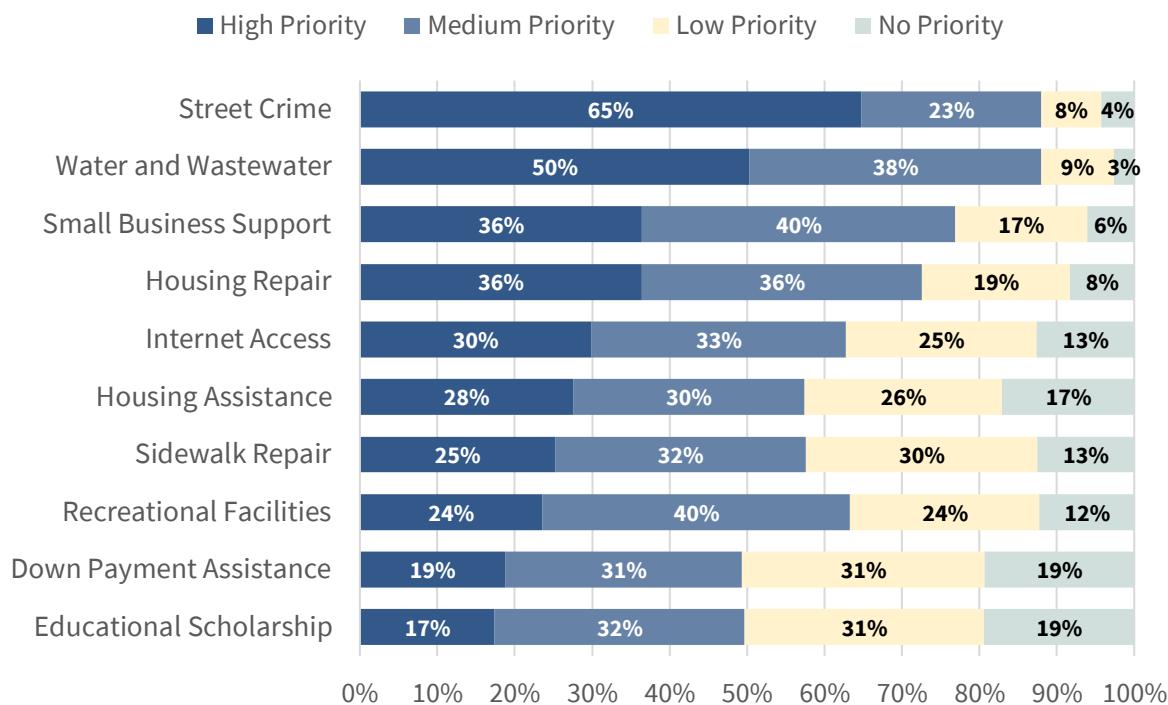
Residents were asked rank the priority of **10 proposed uses of ARPA funding:**

- 1.1 **Street Crime:** Create a street crimes unit to combat gun violence in the city.
- 1.2 **Water and Wastewater:** Improve water and wastewater facilities in the city.
- 1.3 **Housing Repair:** Rebuild Lorain's housing stock (Create a grant that will help Homeowners rehabilitate and repair their homes.)
- 1.4 **Down Payment Assistance:** Provide down payment assistance for qualified low- and moderate-income families to purchase new housing in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.
- 1.5 **Housing Assistance:** Provide assistance to residents with rent, mortgage, and utility bills due to the pandemic.
- 1.6 **Sidewalk Repair:** Create grants for homeowners to repair their sidewalks.
- 1.7 **Small Business Support:** Assist small businesses impacted by the pandemic.
- 1.8 **Educational Scholarship:** Establish educational scholarship for families that have suffered financially because of COVID- 19.
- 1.9 **Recreational Facilities:** Partner with the Lorain City Schools to improve outdoor recreation facilities in the city.
- 1.10 **Internet Access:** Work with Lorain City Schools to provide greater access to the internet for underserved families in Lorain.

A summary of resident responses is presented in the graph on the following page, in descending order of the share of high-priority responses.

As seen, **residents overwhelmingly identified Street Crime as an area of concern**, with nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents assigning the highest priority to this issue. Comparatively, **the establishment of an Educational Scholarship for families impacted by COVID-19 was the least popular proposed funding area** (17% high priority).

## Proposed Uses of ARPA Funds: Resident Priorities



A deeper dive into the priority rankings reveals **the following additional takeaways**:

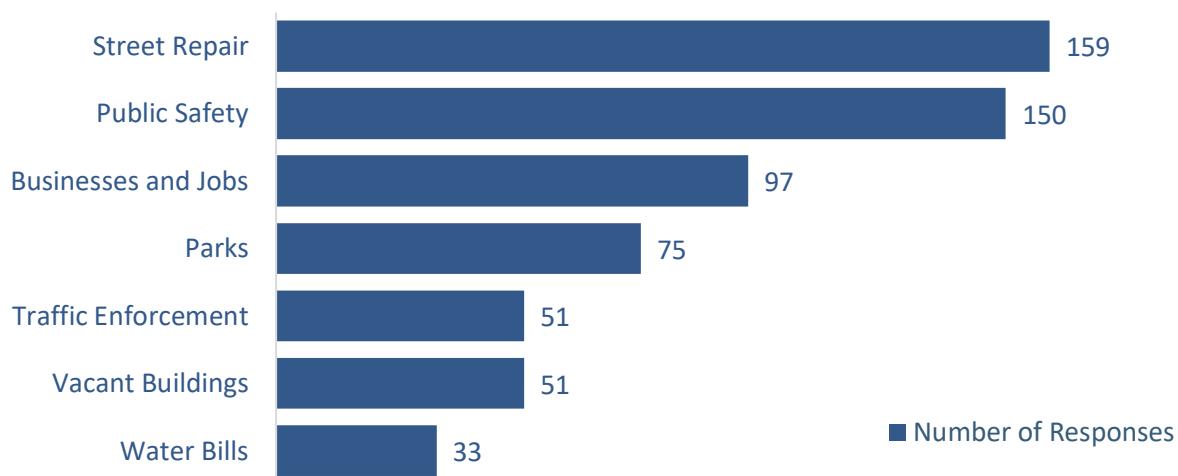
- More than three-quarters of all respondents assigned medium- or high-priority levels to the top-three proposed uses of ARPA, indicating that **most residents are keen to see the City invest its resources in addressing Street Crime, Water and Wastewater, and Small Business Support**.
- Proposed investments into areas dealing with Public Works and Repairs (Water and Wastewater, Housing Repair, and Sidewalk Repair) **ranked relatively higher than direct financial transfers** (Housing Assistance, Down Payment Assistance, and Educational Scholarship).
- Although Recreational Facilities ranked eighth in terms of the highest priority ranking, when combined with the share of medium-priority votes, it ranked fifth, suggesting that **residents are still relatively invested in funding the City's recreational spaces**.
- Half of all respondents assigned low priority or no priority** to a proposed Down Payment Assistance plan and an Educational Scholarship.

## RESULTS ANALYSIS

## Open-Ended Question Analysis

**2**

What other or more specific needs should the city take into account as part of the budget-planning process?



When asked what the City should consider as part of its budget-planning process, [789 respondents offered input through free-text responses](#). Analysis of these responses reveals that some of the common themes included:

- **Street Repair** (159 responses): The most popular piece of feedback — which was voiced in more than a fifth of all free-text responses — was that the City needs to better maintain and repair its roads.

*“By repairing all the bad roads in town. Lorain has the worst roads I've come across.”*
- **Public Safety** (150 responses): Many also called for increased funding for the Lorain Police Department and cited a perceived lack of safety in the community.

*“Safety of [its] citizens is the number one priority of government and the funds should be spent on bolstering the police department in officers and necessary equipment to fulfill the role.”*
- **Businesses and Jobs** (97 responses): Residents also highlighted the need to better develop the local economy in order to attract businesses and stimulate employment and job growth.

*“High priority attracting medium to large businesses to Lorain (improve investments and employment in Lorain).”*

- **Parks** (75 responses): Nearly a tenth of responses pointed to park improvement, safety, and maintenance, as well as more playground equipment and recreational facilities, such as skate parks.

*“The city should consider working towards making its parks and common spaces safe and clear for folks to utilize.”*

- **Traffic Enforcement** (51 responses): Some urged the City to invest more resources into combatting unsafe driving practices, enforcing traffic laws, and improving overall traffic flow.

*“Create/increase traffic enforcement unit. Speeding has gotten out of control, especially on main roads.”*

- **Vacant Buildings** (51 responses): Others called for continued demolition of abandoned and decrepit buildings and homes.

*“Keep removing abandoned buildings and houses.”*

- **Water Bills** (33 responses): Finally, some lamented expensive water bills, many of whom also called for discounts for senior citizens and low-income households.

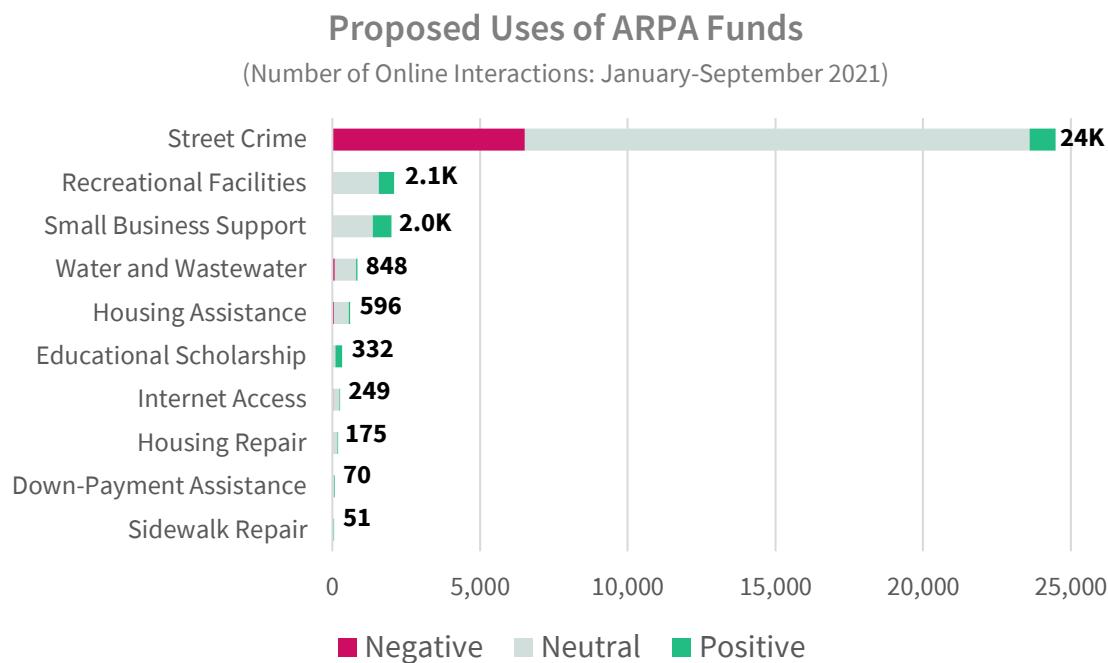
*“Make our water bills affordable!”*

## COMPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS

# Social Media Discourse Analysis

From January 1-September 14, 2021, 30,882 interactions — accounting for approximately 8% of the City’s overall social media discourse — came from conversations relating to the ten proposed uses of ARPA funding surveyed in Question 1.

As shown in the graph below, conversations about Street Crime accounted for the overwhelming majority of online discourse about proposed uses of ARPA funds. At 24K interactions, it reached a discourse volume of nearly 12x greater than the second-most discussed area (Recreational Facilities).



Although it garnered the lowest discourse volume at only 51 interactions, Sidewalk Repair exhibited the highest share of negative sentiment out of all ten issues (37%). On the other hand, Recreational Facilities and Small Business Support ranked in the top three in terms of both positive sentiment (24% and 31%, respectively) and discourse volume (2.1K and 2K, respectively).

Online discourse about the ARPA Funding survey itself garnered 76 online interactions. More than a third (39%) stemmed from official channels and another 49% came from a city council member’s Facebook page. Most interactions consisted of “loves”, “likes” and “shares”, though a few commenters voiced that they would like to see investment into law enforcement, road repairs, and small business support.

# Conclusions

The survey results outlined above reveal several key takeaways about how Lorain residents believe the City could best appropriate ARPA funds to maximize impact in the community:

**Concerns about residents' sense of safety and the City's crime rate emerged as consistent priorities** in responses to both the closed-ended and open-ended questions. Furthermore, it attracted substantially more online interest in the social media discourse than all other issues surveyed.

As such, this survey indicates that **public safety is at the forefront of residents' minds**, and many support using ARPA funds to invest in the Lorain Police Department, reduce gun violence, and combat street crime.

Additionally, although homeowner grants for repairing sidewalks ranked in the bottom half of priorities in the closed-ended question, a desire to see the City **maintain and fix local roads emerged as the most common piece of feedback** in the free-text responses.

Accordingly, **residents feel more strongly that the City and its appropriate personnel should use ARPA funding to repave roads** rather than indirectly providing funds to residents so that they can independently fix neighborhood sidewalks.

Free-text responses also provided greater insight into the high priority levels given to Water and Wastewater and Small Business Support.

Specifically, in the open-ended question, **residents complained more about the cost of water** rather than water quality and wastewater treatment. And while many also explicitly called for support for small businesses, **more pointed to attracting investments into the local economy and promoting employment opportunities**.

Finally, the fact that nearly two-thirds of respondents assigned high- or medium-priority levels to Recreational Facilities and that nearly a tenth of free-text responses called for improvements to local parks indicates that there is **substantial support for improving the City's parks and recreation options — a sentiment expressed in the City's Parks Temperature Check survey in May 2021**.

Overall, **the survey responses indicate that residents are most supportive of funding areas that require the City to implement new policies and invest in community-facing departments** rather than policies that provide direct financial assistance to private individuals. In particular, addressing public safety, public works, and economic issues emerged as the most salient priority areas for Lorain residents.