

Citizens Speak out on the City of Tallahassee Budget February 2011

TallahasseeVoices



TallahasseeVoices is a pro bono internet survey panel sponsored by Kerr & Downs Research, which is solely responsible for information contained within TallahasseeVoices' reports.

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The following media partners have graciously agreed to provide coverage of results of TallahasseeVoices' surveys: WCTV, WFSU-FM, and the Tallahassee Democrat.

The present survey on local issues was conducted in February 2011. 528 of the 6,000 panel members responded. Results were weighted to reflect the demographics of the 90%+ local residents who have access to the internet at home, work, or school.

Editorial Opinion

- TallahasseeVoices founder, Phillip Downs, Ph.D., offers a few comments about this survey:
- The City's operational budget from 2003 to 2007 increased 56% or 14% per year. While the City has held firm on the budget since 2007, the budget for 2011 is \$180,000,000 higher than it would have been if increases in the 2000s had been no more than increases in the 1990s.
- A family of 4 would pay \$3,600 less each year in City taxes and fees if the budget had increased during the 2000s at the same rate it increased during the 1990s.
- The rapid increase in the City budget from 2003 to 2007 was a result of extra money coming in from various sources including property taxes. While City leaders can be commended for putting the brakes on budget increases the past few years, the damage was already done. Every citizen now pays \$900 more per year because of the City's spending spree from 2003 to 2007.
- In other surveys we have asked citizens what they thought they received as a result of the spending increases in the mid 2000s. The overwhelming response was "nothing" or "I don't know."
- The City is comprised of smart, well-intentioned leaders and employees, yet budget creep turned into budget leap from 2003 to 2007 – we have all been paying, and will continue to pay, the price for this lack of financial oversight until the budget is brought back into alignment.
- While the forgoing comments are my personal observations, the remainder of this report reflects the views of our 6,000 TallahasseeVoices panelists.

Summary

- 72% of residents think the City budget has increased too much in the past 10 years
- Only 26% of residents think City services increases justify City budget increases in the past 10 years
- Only 40% of residents think the Mayor, City Commission and City Manager have been good financial stewards in the past 10 years.

Summary

- 75% of residents think future City budget increases should be tied to increases in inflation and population
- 78% of residents gave the City negative ratings on managing the budget from 2003 to 2007, and 71% gave the City negative ratings since 2007
- 76% of residents think City budget increases should be discontinued until the budget returns to “normal” levels

TallahasseeVoices panelists were shown the following figures provided by the City of Tallahassee before answering questions:

Operating Budget

1990	\$284,658,500
1991	305,017,100
1992	343,126,150
1993	350,232,900
1994	358,718,658
1995	329,072,300
1996	352,932,650
1997	349,803,150
1998	395,640,350
1999	403,466,350
2000	427,271,700
2001	437,978,200
2002	459,416,650
2003	467,640,350
2004	539,200,488
2005	579,095,352
2006	657,377,214
2007	730,344,596
2008	730,471,882
2009	729,760,080
2010	672,902,423
2011	714,185,141 estimate

To help panelists answer survey questions, TallahasseeVoices summarized the City’s operating budget over the past 20 years and compared it to increases in the City’s population + increases in the cost of delivering services (Consumer Price Index – CPI).

TallahasseeVoices recognizes that the CPI does not provide exact measures for increases in providing City services, but the CPI provides a good estimate.

- The City of Tallahassee operating budget **grew 151%** from \$284 million in 1990 to \$714 million in 2011 or **7.1%** per year.
- The City **population grew 38%** from 124,773 in 1990 to 172,574 in 2011 or **1.9%** per year.
- The Consumer Price Index from 1990 to 2011 grew **2.3%** per year.

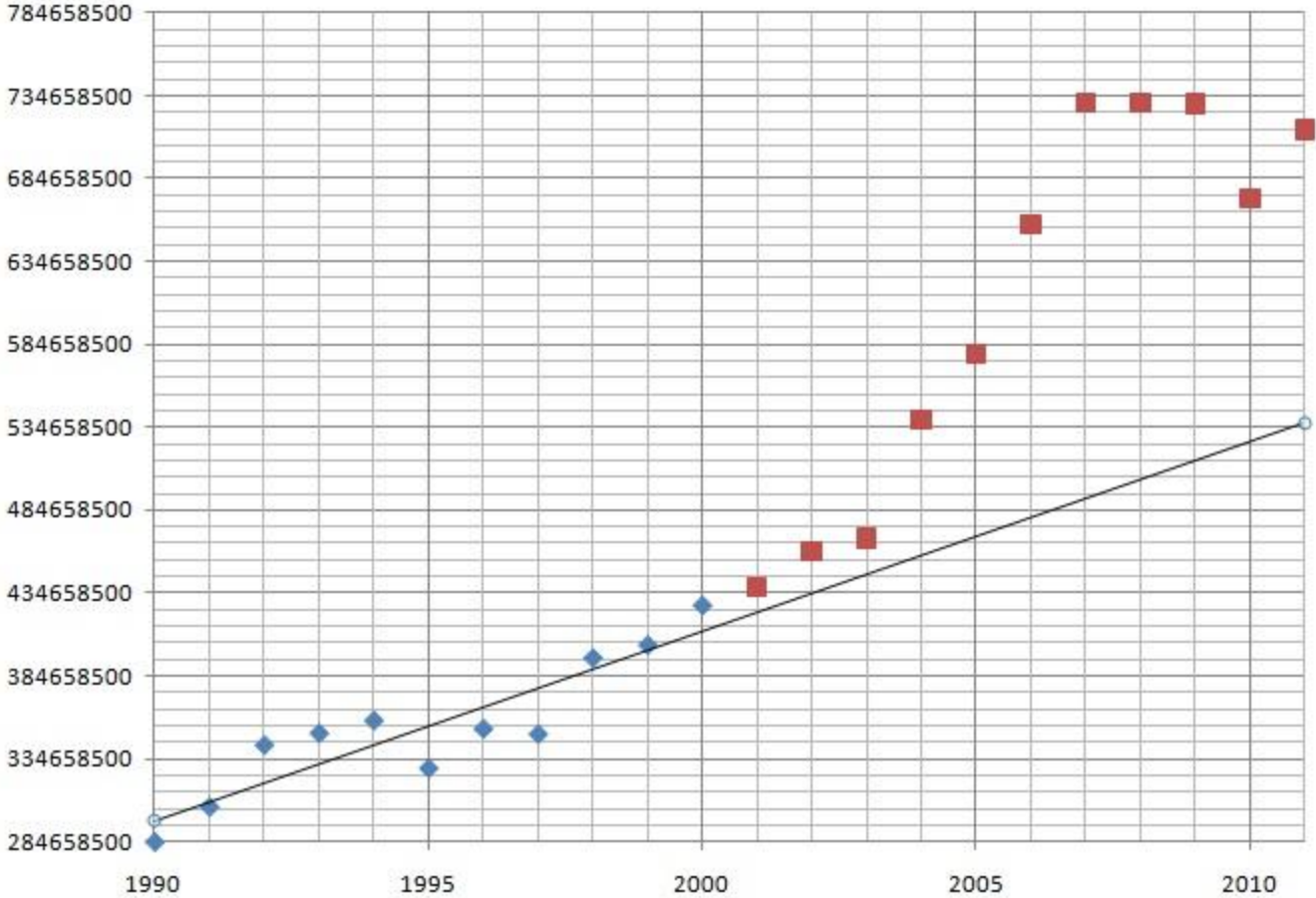
Adding the annual increase in population (1.9%) + the annual increase in CPI (2.3%) results in an annual increase of 4.2% per year.

That is, if City operating expenditures had kept pace with population increase + increases in the cost of delivering services (CPI), then the City’s operating budget would have increased **4.2%** per year from 1990 to 2011.

Instead the City’s operating budget increased **7.1%** per year from 1990 to 2011.

Actual city expenditures		City expenditures if spending had grown at the rate of population + CPI increases	
<i>City budget</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>City budget</i>	<i>Year</i>
\$284,658,500	1990	\$284,658,500	1990
\$427,271,700	2000	\$404,215,070	2000
\$714,185,141	2011	\$598,092,786	2011

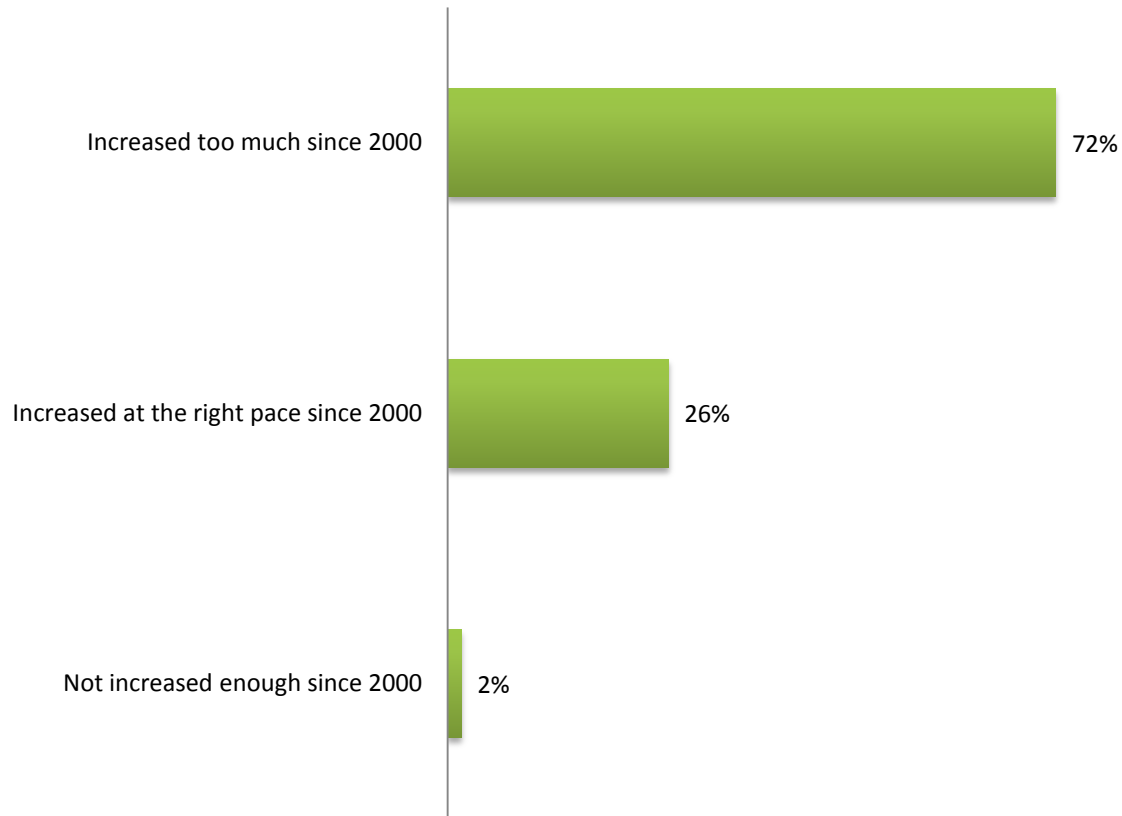
TallahasseeVoices panelists were shown the following graph depicting the City of Tallahassee’s budget from 1990 to 2011. The trend line was statistically determined based on 1990 to 2000 City budget figures. The trend line shows how the budget would have increased from 2000 to 2011 **IF** the City budget had continued to increase at the rate it increased from 1990 to 2000. The trend line illustrates how the City budget deviated from historic norms in the early 2000s and then increased rapidly starting in 2004. In 2011, the budget is \$150,000,000 more than what would be predicted by historic trending. According to this trend line, the City operating budget should be about \$535 million in 2011 – instead it is \$714 million.



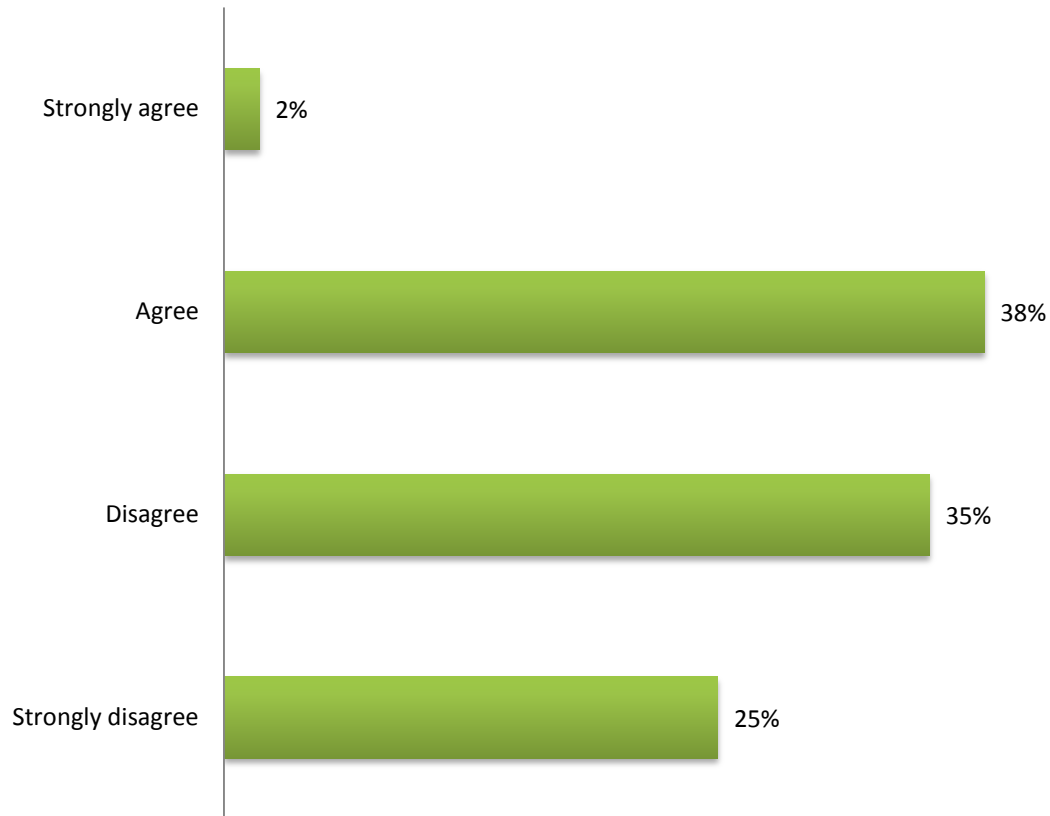
Some argue there is no way to justify increases in the City of Tallahassee’s operating budget from 2000 to 2011 and that the current budget is \$100,000,000 larger than it should be. Some argue that increases in the number and quality of City services from 2000 to 2011 justify budget increases from 2000 to 2011. With which group do you agree?



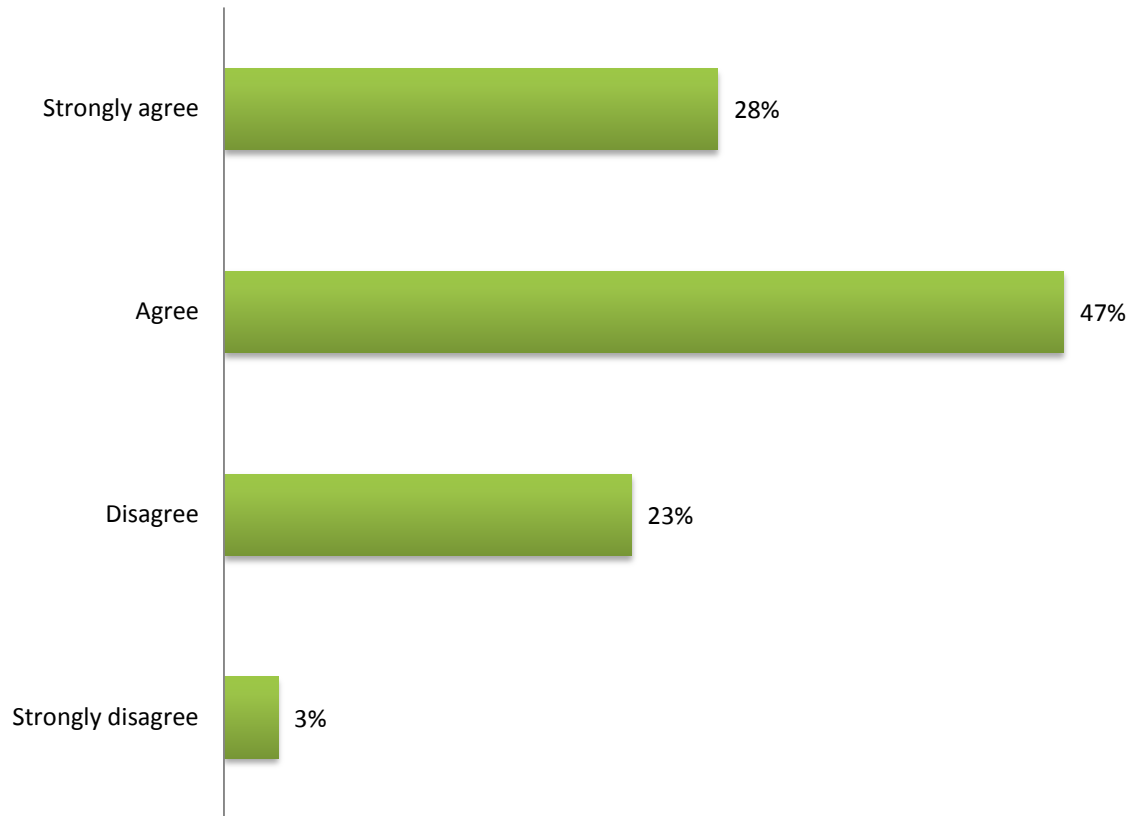
The City of Tallahassee budget has:



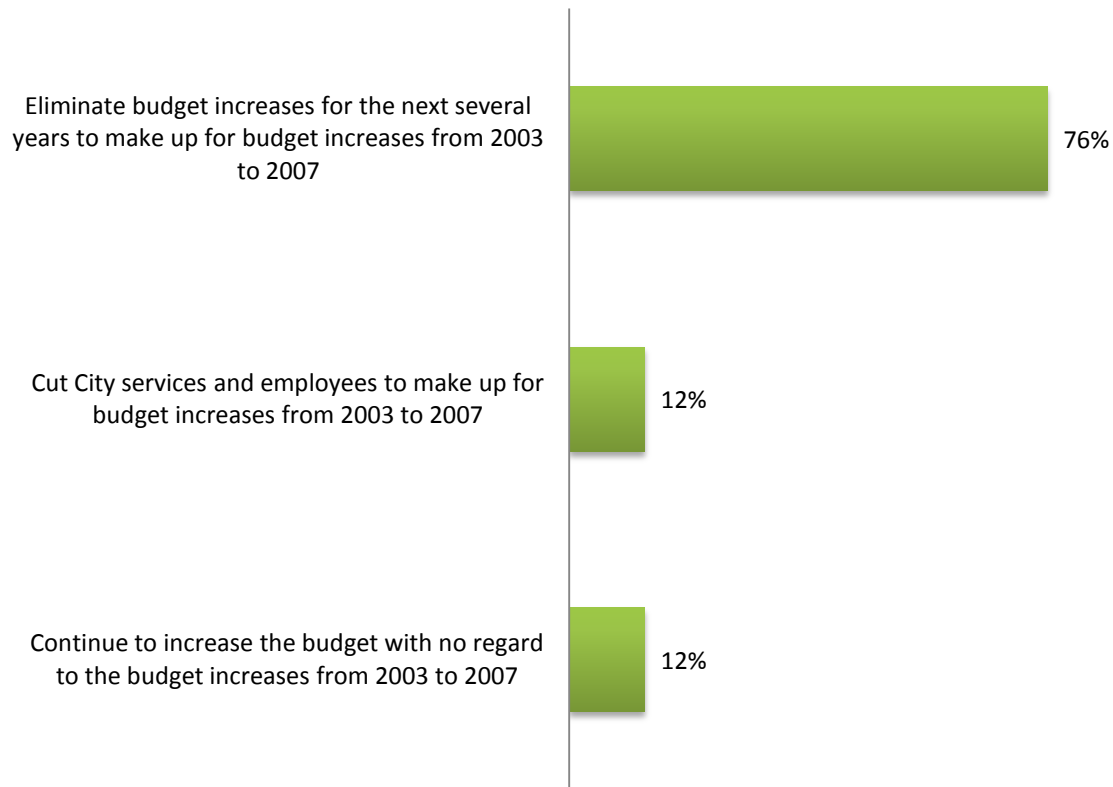
Over the past 10 years, City Commissioners, Mayors, and City Managers have been good financial stewards of taxpayers' money.



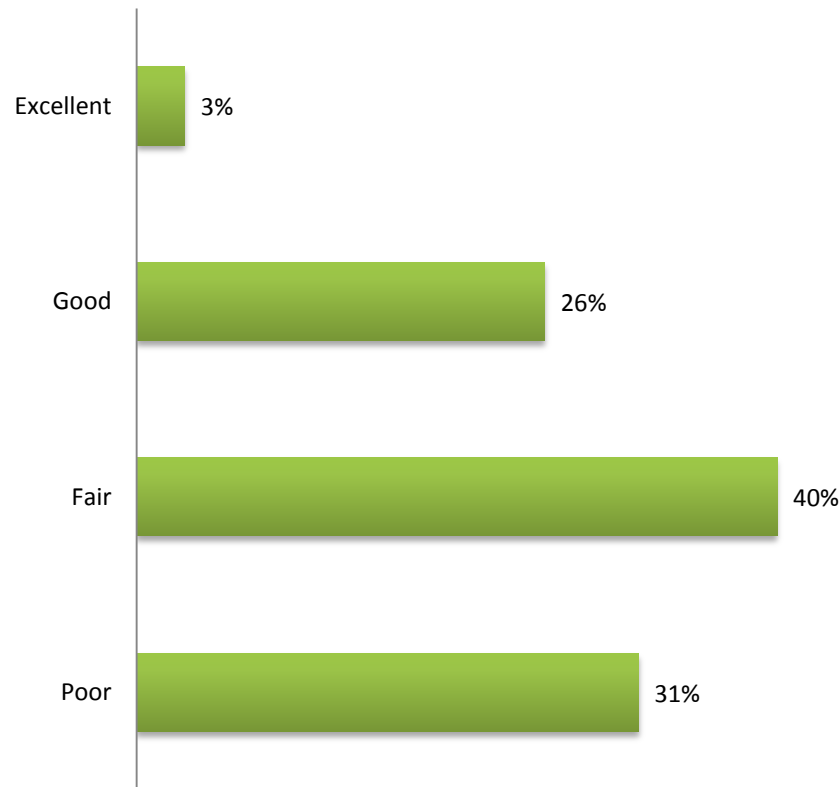
Future City budget increases should not be any greater than population increases + CPI increases.



With which of these positions do you agree?



How do you rate City leaders' performance in managing taxpayers' money since 2007?



How do you rate City leaders' performance in managing taxpayers' money from 2003 to 2007?

