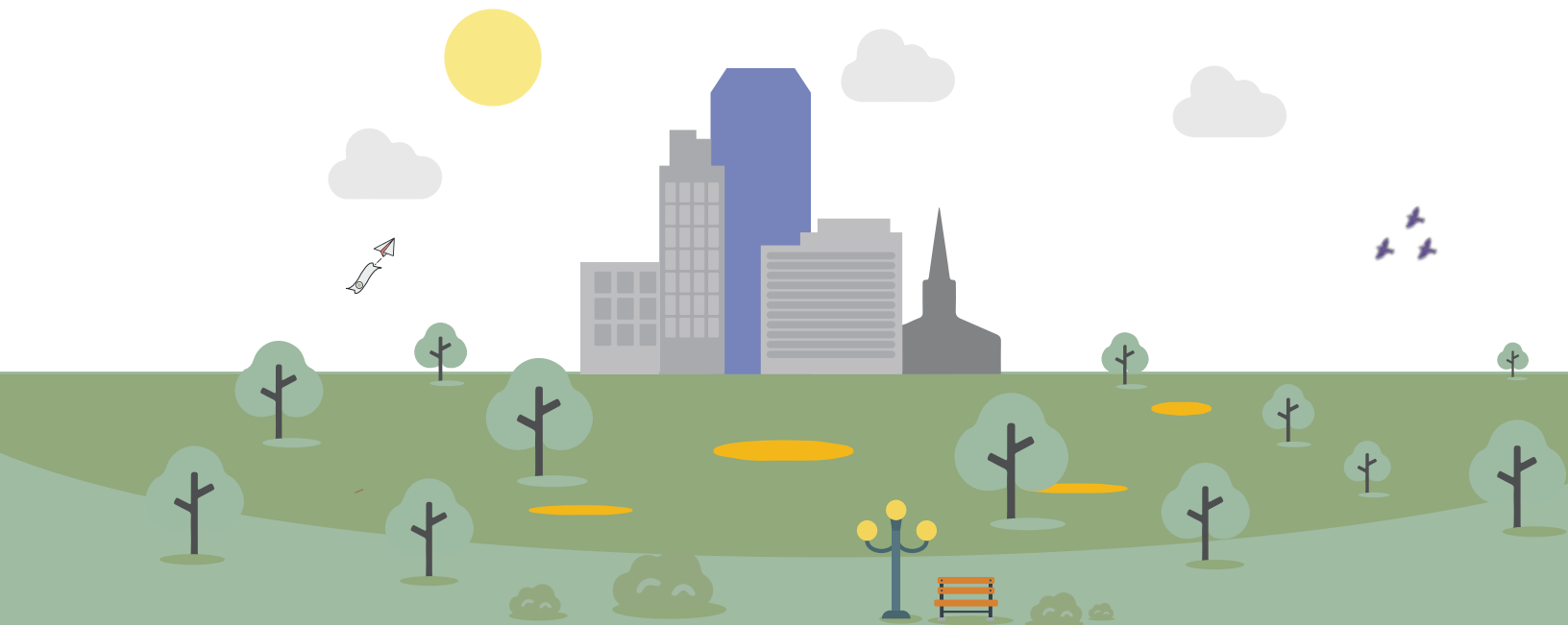# Public Input Research

Draft of Final Report – Jan 11, 2022

Thanks

This report would not be possible without the support of many LFUCG officials and Lexington residents that gave their time to this process.

A very special thank you to District 4 Council Member Susan Lamb and Lexington Chief Information Officer Aldona Valicenti who stewarded this process alongside us from the beginning.

We would also like to acknowledge:

- Drs. Iuliia Shybalkina, JS Butler, & Alan Bartley for their work on survey creation and data analysis.

- Stacey Maynard, Jennifer Sutton, Kelley Farley, Abb Allan, & Kendra Thompson for their generosity in helping us build our process and recommendations.

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- Current and Former Council Members and surveyed LFUCG employees.

This report was written by Kit Anderson and Richard Young.

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Introduction & Executive Summary

In 2021, CivicLex launched a new project in partnership with the Lexington–Fayette Urban County Government that focused on the public input process for items brought before the Urban County Council. The goal of this partnership was to understand the barriers to public participation in Lexington's local legislative process and to generate a series of recommendations to address any issues in the public input process.

Currently, the public can best provide recognized feedback by:
  · Emailing their Council Representatives or City Staff
  · Showing up to give public comment in meetings

Neither of these options are truly adequate – emails are not part of the public record and Council Meetings only occur on Thursday evenings at 6pm. Also, because the meetings that the public are likely to attend are mostly procedural and take place at the end of the legislative process, the comments made by the public often have no impact on the final legislation.

This process needs improvement for a couple of reasons:
  · First, it is detrimental for a community's faith in its elected leaders and its city government. If residents don't think their opinion is being taken seriously or if the process is prohibitively confusing, they will have less trust in their representatives, and increasing skepticism that the city government is looking out for its community.
  · Second, it's an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars and wasteful for legislators and city staff. Last minute opposition to a matter before council derails months of work by staff and consensus building by Council. Not only is this demoralizing for City staff, but it can also lead to a waste of taxpayer resources if the issue must move backward in the process, requiring additional staff time.

In order to understand the limitations of the current public input processes, CivicLex partnered with researchers from the University of Kentucky's Martin School for Public Policy and Transylvania University to conduct two surveys.

The first survey focused on public perception of the process. The second survey focused on gathering the relevant opinions of LFUCG employees who routinely engage with the public.

Once CivicLex and its research partners completed the survey process, we generated a series of recommendations based on the provided input, best practices from other communities, and advice from LFUCG officials and experts in governmental/resident communications.

Part One: Public Survey

CivicLex's Public Input Survey reached a statistically significant sample of Lexington-Fayette County residents - 1,032 individuals. The sample was more likely to be white and female as compared with Lexington as a whole, but sampling weights can be used to address this disparity.

Survey respondents were, on average, not very engaged with LFUCG. The main reasons for this lack of engagement are that many of the respondents don't know what issues are going before Council (45.8%) and/or don't know how to participate (41.9%). Some also reported that their opinion would not make a difference in the final result (32.6%).

Of those that had engaged with city government in the past, most reported that they were motivated to do so by an issue in their neighborhood (77.1%). Most of these respondents directly engaged with the city through governmental representatives (79.9%) and/or through direct action like protesting, letter-writing, or petition signing (66.9%).

Regardless of past engagement with city government, many respondents indicated a desire to be more involved with city government (73.4%) and a majority think that their options for weighing in on city issues are inadequate (55.5%).

Respondents had clear thoughts on ways to improve the process for engaging with city government on legislative items. A majority of respondents indicated that they would like to have opportunities to provide public input outside of city meetings (63.8%) and have a better way to track items through the entire legislative process (58.9%). When asked to pick their most important priority, a plurality of respondents indicated that there should be more options for providing input virtually (18.3%).

Part Two: LFUCG Staff Survey Overview

CivicLex worked with LFUCG's Chief Information Officer and Division of Human Resources to target the LFUCG Staff Survey to key staff across city government who regularly engage with the public on legislative items. In total, CivicLex requested a survey response from over 150 LFUCG staff members, and received a response from 78.

The LFUCG staff respondents closely mirrored the demographics of the broader Lexington survey in that they tended to be more white and more female. They also tended to be older and more well-educated than the public survey respondents and Lexington, broadly.

LFUCG staff see resident engagement with city government in a similar way to how the public sees it. Most of the LFUCG staff say that the ability for the public to engage with city

government is important or very important (87%). A majority of LFUCG staff respondents said that they want the public to be more engaged (68.8%) and they also believe that the public wants to be more engaged with city government (64%).

In general, LFUCG employees responded that the current options for public input are only somewhat effective (average 3.2/5) and only somewhat productive (average 2.9/5). They also think that the current input they receive tends to not be somewhat or less representative of the wider public sentiment (87.5%).

Of the LFUCG staff who are working on public issues, most reported public input sometimes or frequently impacting the direction of the issues they were working on (75%). They also reported that this engagement was only somewhat helpful (average 3.1/5).

LFUCG staff responses to why the public doesn't participate were similar to the public survey responses, but more pessimistic. LFUCG staff and the public agree that many people don't participate because they don't understand what issues are coming before city government and they don't understand how to participate. However, most employees said that the top reason that the public didn't engage with city government was that they thought it wouldn't matter (81.3%). This is substantially higher than this response was for the public (32.6%).

Additionally, the idea that the public is not interested in participating is much more prevalent in staff responses (52%) than the public responses (8%).

LFUCG staff also agreed with the public on what options to increase public input would be most helpful. A majority of city staff said that more options for virtual input (65.3%), allowing formal public comment outside of city meetings (61.4%),
and a better way to track legislation (52%) would all be helpful and impactful. When asked to just pick one option, a plurality of staff said that more options for virtual input would be the most helpful (23.4%).

LFUCG staff had clear thoughts on where in the legislative process public input should occur. When presented with a map of this process, LFUCG staff wanted input to occur earlier in the process – in Council Committees or Council Work Sessions. 84% of LFUCG staff respondents indicated that public input would be most helpful at Council Committee meetings. They also thought this would be the most impactful place for residents to provide input to have that input incorporated (69%).

Recommendations

In looking at the data from these surveys, national best practices, and conversations with experts, CivicLex is making several recommendations across three categories - process changes, technology changes, and the addition of educational resources.

Process Changes

1-a. Move Public Comment for items on the agenda to the beginning of meetings. A clear piece of feedback we heard in focus groups and open responses from the public survey is that residents who do show up to public meetings sometimes leave feeling frustrated when public comment is at the end of the agenda. We recommend moving public comment for items on the agenda to the beginning of all meetings, including Council Meetings.

1-b. Allow Public Comment for items on the agenda for all Council Committee, Work Session, Council, and Committee of the Whole meetings. One clear takeaway from the public survey was that most members of the general public do not understand when they are allowed to give public comment in meetings and when they can't. We recommend that LFUCG allow Public Comment for items on the agenda at all public meetings, including Council Committees, Work Sessions, Council Meetings, and Committees of the Whole.

1-c. Hold separate meetings specifically designated for public education and input that are outside of city hall. Throughout the survey, residents said they wanted to know more about what items were up for consideration in city hall and wanted more ways to weigh in on those issues. Based on our research, we recommend that LFUCG holds one additional monthly public meeting to present on items coming up before Council and to solicit public input on these items. We also think these meetings could be outside of city hall, and potentially spread out across the 12 Council Districts.

1-d. Restructure the Council schedule to better position public input to be helpful and effective. The primary issue here is that the public is currently directed - implicitly and explicitly - to provide public input at the Thursday Council Meetings at 6pm, which, according to LFUCG staff, is the least helpful and effective time to provide public comment. We recommend that Council Work Sessions be moved to weekday evenings and LFUCG should direct the public to consider these as their primary public comment opportunity. This could possibly be traded with moving existing Council Meetings to the daytime.

Technology Changes

2-a. Utilize stop-gap measures to provide virtual input on high-impact legislation. While the public and staff both expressed clear interest in virtual public engagement, robust public input technologies can be expensive and take awhile to implement. We recommend that LFUCG uses low-cost, stop-gap tools to gather public input on high-impact legislation while it considers implementing more robust and comprehensive public input and deliberation technologies.

2-b. Provide additional options for on-the-record virtual public comment for meetings. Both the public and LFUCG staff agree - an easy way to address a lack of public input on legislative items is to provide more opportunities for virtual public comment. We recommend that LFUCG allow for virtual public comment via email or voice message for items on the agenda, and that those comments are entered into the public record.

2-c. Implement user-friendly technologies that allows for legislative tracking and public input. Over the past 10 years, new technology has emerged that allows residents to track legislative items and provide verified digital input on said items. We recommend that LFUCG adopts a robust, online legislative input system.

Educational Resources

3-a. Create a public guide to LFUCG's legislative process. The legislative process can be cumbersome and confusing for the general public. We recommend that LFUCG publicly posts a detailed guide to how its legislative process works on its website.

3-b. Create online resources that explain how to provide effective public input. As we have stated earlier, the public and LFUCG staff agree that it is not clear how a resident should go about weighing in on an item advancing through council. We recommend that LFUCG create a single page on its website that explains how to come to city hall, provide public comment in city meetings and virtually, tips for an effective public comment, and more.

3-c. Create in-chamber resources that help residents understand how Council Meetings work and the best tips for public comment. Public meetings can be confusing for many who attend, and often, people haven't done research of how it works in advance.We recommend that LFUCG create print and digital resources that are available to attendees in public meetings for public meetings work and how to participate.

3-d. Create resources that help residents understand what issues are being discussed by Council. One of the most significant challenges described by the public in our survey was not knowing what was even being discussed by council until after the fact. We recommend that LFUCG create an up-to-date page on its website of what major items are being discussed in Council Committee, Work Sessions, and Council Meetings.

3-e. Provide a better user experience for residents in city hall. When residents arrive at city hall, where to go and who to talk to can be confusing. We recommend LFUCG examine ways to make city hall more friendly and approachable for residents.

Public Survey

Survey Structure and Design

The first step in our process was to create and release a survey that gathered public feedback on providing input to LFUCG. We designed this survey in consultation with Drs. Cory Curl and Iuliia Shybalkina of Martin School of Public Policy, Dr. Alan Bartley of Transylvania University Department of Economics.

The questions were developed after a series of 4 focus groups, conducted by CivicLex. These focus groups were designed to be a check on the development of the survey questions and protocol, to make sure there were no gaps in the questions that we asked and in the multiple choice responses offered. The focus groups targeted four different types of Lexington residents:

1. **Highly engaged:** This group already participates in formal public engagement with the city on a highly consistent basis. They email council, give public comment, and attend meetings on a weekly basis. Examples could include individuals involved with formal advocacy organizations or resident groups.

2. **Moderately engaged:** This group engages occasionally in formal and informal ways with the city. They write op-eds, email council and give comment occasionally, and lead informal advocacy movements. Examples could include residents that engage with activism individually or in small coalitions that aren't formal organizations.

3. **Likely to be engaged:** This group doesn't currently engage with city government on any sort of consistent basis, but are involved in advocacy or other civic activities. They attend civic meetings, participate in civic life on social media, and may vocalize their opinions frequently - but rarely to the city in a direct way.

4. **City Employees:** This group consists of city employees that engage regularly with the public as part of their job. They regularly interact with Lexington residents, lead meetings, gather input, and process feedback.

Once the survey tool was designed, we released it to the general public for three months, from April 2021 to June 2021. We recruited survey respondents through a variety of channels:

- Over 100 posters and flyers were placed throughout the city, in high-traffic locations like laundromats, gyms, libraries, grocery stores, hair salons, and coffee shops.
- Placement in community media and the newsletters of LFUCG Councilmembers.
- Direct outreach through affinity and constituent groups.
- Online, promoted Facebook posts were used to reach Lexington residents outside of CivicLex's typical audience.

All marketing materials highlighted the prizes being offered raffle style to survey takers - gift cards to Kroger, Ramsey's, Wilson's, and Starbucks.

The public survey asked respondents to give their ZIP Code, and we used in progress data on which ZIP Codes were less represented to target our marketing geographically.

Survey Structure

The public survey was structured into groups of the following question types. For the full survey, please see the appendix at the end of this document.

1. **Demographic Questions:** these questions were designed to get basic demographic information to understand the sample audience. We asked questions specifically about the age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, ZIP code, and neighborhood of respondents.
2. **Basic Engagement Questions:** these questions were designed to help us assess the respondent's current level of participation in local government. We asked questions that included if the respondent knew their Council Member, how often they engaged with Lexington's city government, and more.
3. **Extended Engagement Questions:** these questions were only available to respondents who indicated in the survey that they engaged in the past with LFUCG. The questions were designed to understand the motivation and mechanisms that cause people to engage in local government.
4. **4-Point Assessment Questions:** These questions were designed to evaluate the current state of public input for LFUCG. We asked respondents to indicate if they trust local government to make decisions in fair way, how they understand their options for input, and more.
5. **Recommended Improvement Questions:** These questions were designed to get feedback on how Lexington's public input methodologies could be improved. We asked respondents about ideas for improving the current ways that people provide input as well as potential new ways to provide input.

Demographic Responses

CivicLex's Public Input Survey reached a statistically significant sample of Lexington-Fayette County residents - **1,032 individuals.**

Demographic Overview

The respondents to the survey were more likely to be white, well-educated, young, and female than Lexington-Fayette County as a whole. 82% of the survey respondents identified as being white, compared with 70% of Lexington's Population. The Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino population were both underrepresented in the sample, with 9.3% and 4% of respondents respectively, compared with 14.5% and 7.2% in Lexington. Respondents who identified as Asian American or Pacific Islander represented 3.2% of survey respondents, compared with 4% of the broader Lexington population.

The most significant disparity in the surveyed demographics was gender identity - over 74% of respondents identified as female, as compared with 51% of the population. While there is little city-wide data on the number of individuals who identify as non-binary or an "other" gender, we found that our percentage of respondents in this identity (4%) was higher than expected.

Race/Ethnicity of Public Input Survey Respondents (n = 1032)

6%
1%
4%
3%
8%
1%
77%
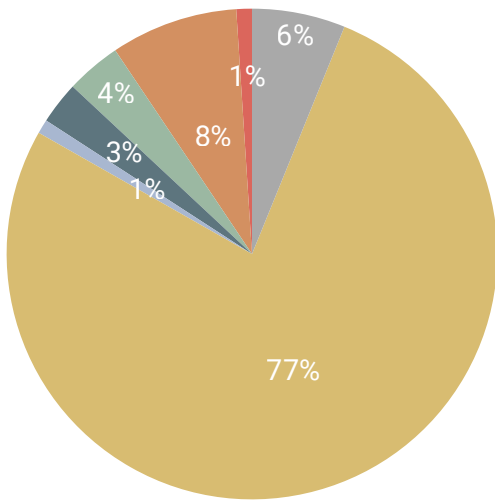
● Did not Answer   ● White
● Native-American   ● Asian or Pacific Islander
● Latino or Hispanic   ● African-American / Black
● Other

**Gender Identity of Survey Respondents (n = 1032)**

5%
2%
22%
70%
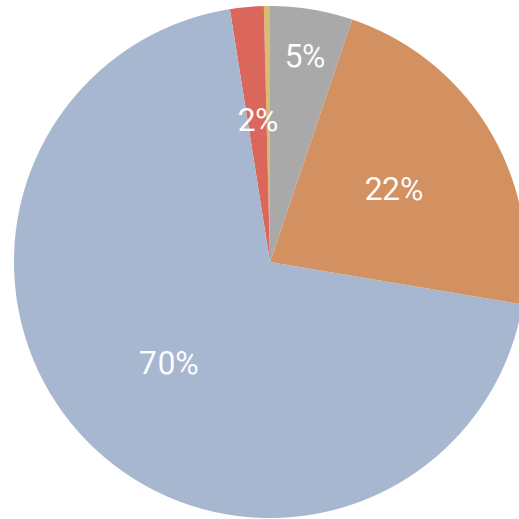
● Did not Answer   ● Male   ● Female
● Non-Binary   ● Other

Survey respondents are also more likely to be more well-educated than Lexington's average population. 68.6% of respondents report having a college degree, in contrast with the average of 45% of degree holders in Lexington as a whole.

Age

Our age demographics more or less lined up with Lexington's demographics with one notable exception - those under the age of 20 were highly underrepresented. Less than 2% of our respondents reported being under this age. Given the stake that this group of individuals has in Lexington's future, we were disappointed with this result. CivicLex is actively developing programming for K-12 students in Lexington in partnership with Fayette County Public Schools, and we hope to increase youth involvement with civic issues like Public Input through that process.

Age of Public Input Survey Respondents
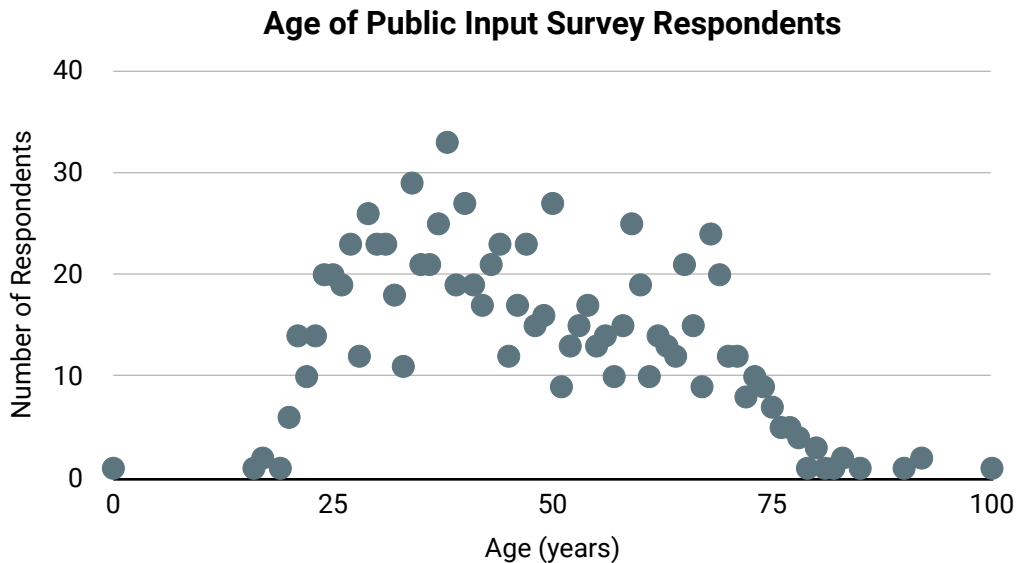
Geography

Lastly, we found that, geographically, our sample of Lexington was fairly representative. The 40502 ZIP code was slightly overrepresented, which, as one of the most affluent and engaged ZIP codes in Lexington, was not surprising. This is a common result in past CivicLex city-wide surveys. The chart on the following page depicts ZIP Code Representation in the Public Input Survey. The blue bar represents the proportion of respondents in the survey with a given ZIP code, and the grey bar represents the proportion of residents in Lexington with the same ZIP. As you can see, 40505 and 40508 are also overrepresented in the survey. 40515 and 40517 are the most underrepresented ZIP codes in the survey, followed by 40513 and 40514.

Engagement

Of the total respondents, we found that only 11% reported being "very engaged" with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government (LFUCG). This result is the lowest of all the categories of engagement - over 18% of respondents reported not engaging at all, and not being interested in doing so. Interestingly, we found that 42% of respondents didn't know who their Lexington Urban County Council member was, which is very close to the same number of people that reported not engaging with LFUCG.

ZIP Code Representation in Public Input Survey

- Proportion of Respondents in Survey
- Proportion of Lexington's Population
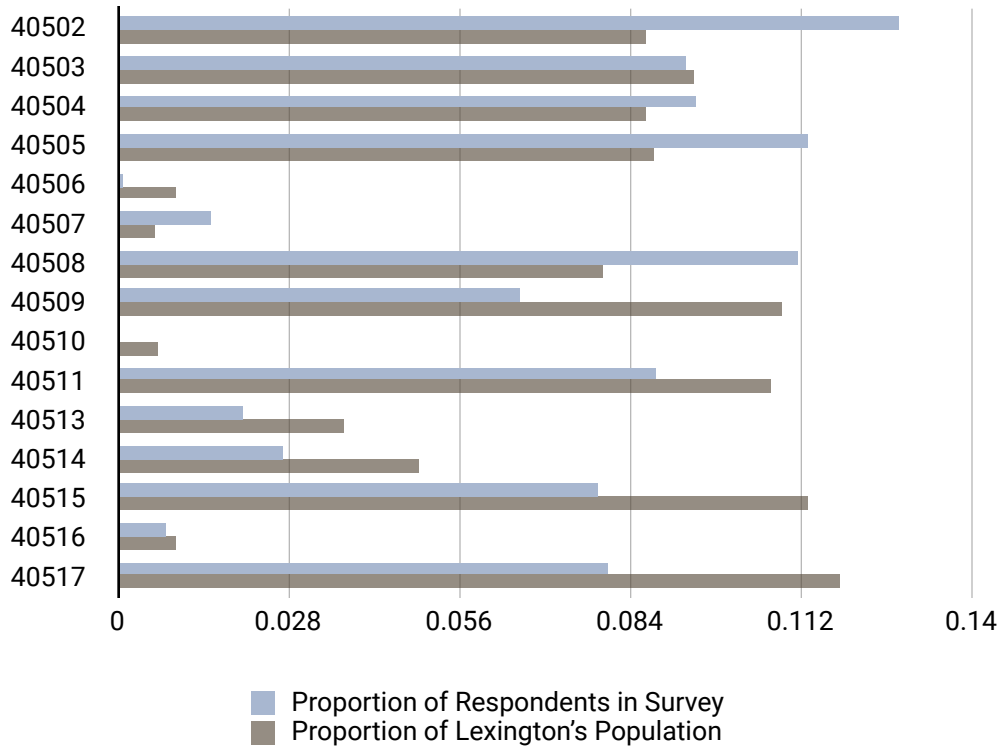
In the data we found a significant correlation between knowing who your Council Member is and engaging in local government. 72% of respondents who **do not know** who their Council Member is report that they have never engaged with city government. 74% of respondents who **do know** who their Council Member is report that they frequently or sometimes engage with local government. This trend is also visible in the chart below, where you can see that the vast majority of respondents who frequently engage with Lexington's City Government know who their Councilmember is, along with a substantial portion of those who engage sometimes.

How often would you say that you engage with Lexington's City Government?

- Does not know who their Councilmember is
- Knows who their Councilmember is
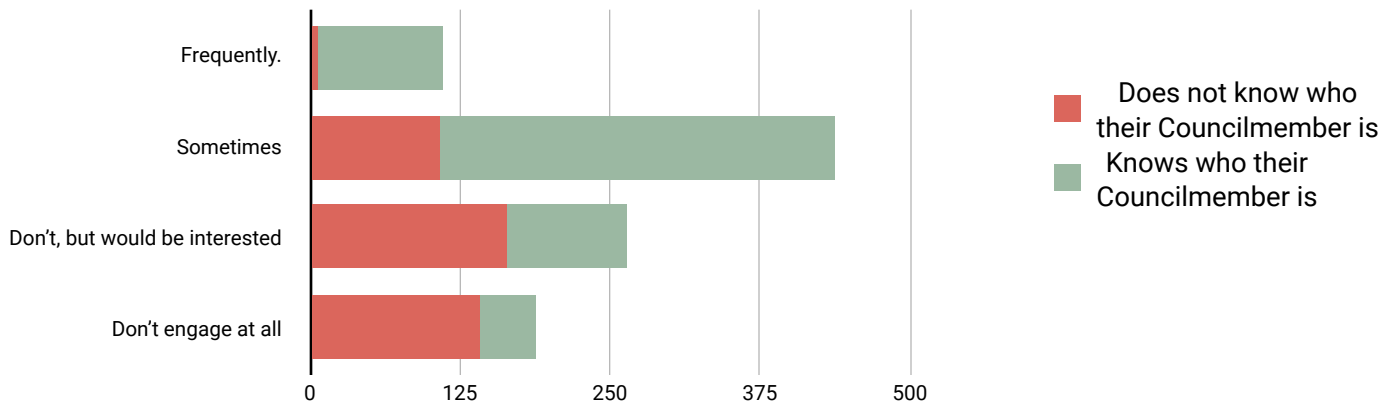
Engaging with local government

The Public Input Survey asked a series of questions about how residents feel about their options for weighing in on city issues, including:

- *Do you feel like your options for weighing in on city issues are adequate?* (Question 12)
- *Do you want to be more engaged with city government?* (Question 13)
- *How much of the time do you think you can trust Lexington's city government to make decisions **in a fair way?** (Question 15)
- *How often do you think those decisions are what is **best for Lexington?** (Question 16)
- *How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?* (Question 17)
- *How convenient are city meeting **times**?* (Question 18)
- *How convenient are city meeting **locations**?* (Question 19)
- *How seriously do you think governmental representatives take your input?* (Question 20)

Do you feel like your options for weighing in on city issues are adequate?

56% of respondents report that yes, they do think their options for weighing in on city issues are adequate, and 46% report that they are inadequate. This is a glass half full situation - from this dataset, it would be fair to say that "Over half of residents who took this survey are content with their public input options". However, it would also be fair to say that "almost half of Lexington Residents in this survey do not think that current options for public input are sufficient".

Diving deeper, a comparison with the question "*How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?*" (Question 17) reveals that the more someone understands their current options for participating in, the more likely they are to say that those options are adequate. 63% of respondents who understand their options "very well" rate those options as adequate, while only 21% of respondents who "barely understand" options respond that they are. See the chart on the next page for more detail.

It is also important to note that, due to the branching logic structure of this survey, **Questions 12 and 13 were only asked to respondents that already engage with local government to some degree.** Specifically, the logic jump happens at the question "How often would you say you engage with Lexington's City Government". Respondents who answer frequently or sometimes are the only ones who received this set of questions.
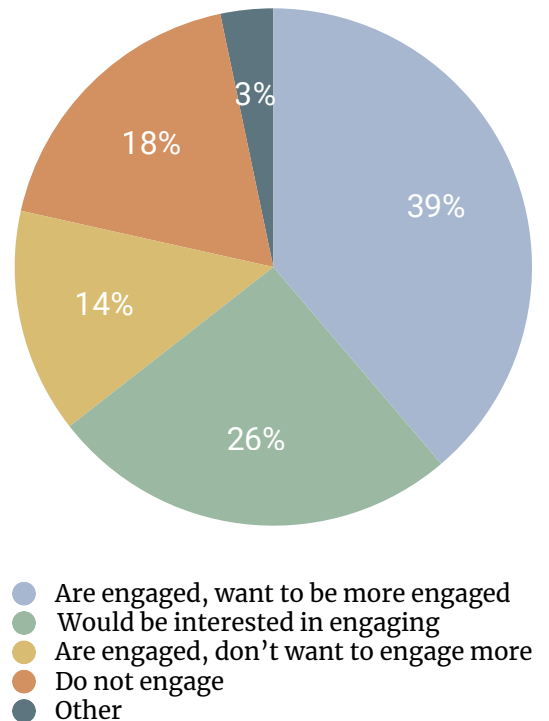
"How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?" vs. "Do you feel like your options for weighing in on city government are adequate?"

Legend: Yes, adequate · No, not adequate
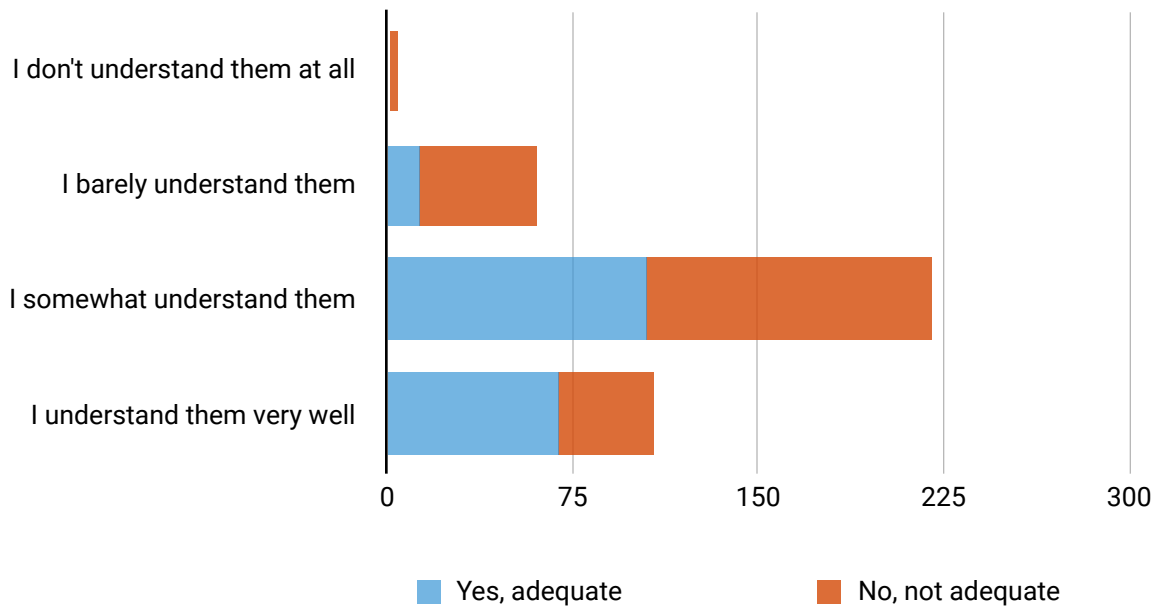
Do you want to be more engaged with city government?

73% of respondents report that yes, they do want to be more engaged with city government, and 27% report that they do not. This is one of the most substantial answer differences in the entire public input survey - most respondents do want to be engaged with local government.

Like question 12, this question was only asked of respondents who already have some level of engagement with local government. As you can see in the chart to the right, if you add the respondents who answered affirmatively to this question with respondents who answered "I don't engage, but I would be interested in doing so!" to Question 4, you find that 65% (or the majority) of respondents are interested in increasing their current level of engagement, and a very small slice of the pie (only 16%) are not currently engaged and not interested in changing that.

Legend:
- Are engaged, want to be more engaged
- Would be interested in engaging
- Are engaged, don't want to engage more
- Do not engage
- Other

Four–point assessment questions

Of these questions, four are asked of the entire survey body and follow the same 4 point scale for answer choices. These four questions are **4 point assessment questions** in the survey. They are a useful baseline for evaluating the current effectiveness of LFUCG's public input, and can also be explored in relation to other questions (demographics, geography, previous engagement level) to help understand what makes people feel the way they do. These four assessment questions will come up throughout the report, and are summarized in the table below.

4 point Assessment Question (AQ) Overview

	Survey Average
How much of the time do you think you can trust Lexington's city government to make decisions in a fair way? (AQ 1)	2.9
How often do you think those decisions are what is best for Lexington? (AQ2)	2.9
How well do you understand your options to participate in city government? (AQ3)	2.6
How seriously do you think governmental representatives take your input? (AQ4)	2.4

How much of the time do you think you can trust Lexington's city government to make decisions in a fair way?

Number of Respondents = 848
Average = 2.9 out of 4

Cells that are within one standard deviation of the average (2.4) are colored grey. Cells below one standard deviation of the average are colored red, and cells one standard deviation above the average are green.

It is noteworthy that both of the extreme ends of this question – that the respondents either always or never trust LFUCG to make decisions in a fair way – only account for 11% of the total responses. Most respondents seemed reluctant to give a strong verdict one way or another throughout the survey. This makes sense in light of following questions like Question 17, *How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?* Most respondents do not really understand how they can participate in city government, and many also report that not understanding what issues are up for debate as a reason for not participating. An all around lack of understanding of how LFUCG operates on a daily basis seems to be contributing to the tepid nature of respondent's trust in local government.

Subgroup	Score
Options for weighing in on city issues are adequate	3.1
Options for weighing in on city issues are NOT adequate	2.7
City meeting locations are very inconvenient	2.6
City meeting locations are very convenient	3.2
Pick 1 improvement: more education	3.1
Pick 1 improvement: more languages	2.7
African American/Black respondents	2.6
White respondents	2.9
Don't engage at all in city government	3.0
Sometimes engage in city government	2.8
Doesn't engage: transportation is difficult	2.6
Doesn't engage: not really interested	3.1

DRAFT

How often do you think those decisions are what is best for Lexington?

Number of Respondents = 846

Average = 2.9 out of 4

Respondents were given the same set of 4 multiple choice responses to this question: never, not often, some of the time, and always. The breakdown is similar to the fairness question, but with an even higher proportion (76%) reporting "some of the time". The proportion of respondents who believe that fair decisions that are best for Lexington are being made either some of the time or always is almost identical - 82% for fairness and 83% for best for Lexington. Further, of the 845 respondents who answered both questions, 687 answered the same number to both (over 80%), 154 differed by one point, and only 4 differed by two or more points.

Subgroup	Score
Options for weighing in on city issues are adequate	3.1
Options for weighing in on city issues are NOT adequate	2.7
City meeting locations are very inconvenient	2.6
City meeting locations are very convenient	3.2
Pick 1 improvement: more education	3.1
Pick 1 improvement: more languages	2.7
African American/Black respondents	2.6
White respondents	2.9
Don't engage at all in city government	3.0
Sometimes engage in city government	2.8
Doesn't engage: transportation is difficult	2.6
Doesn't engage: not really interested	3.1

DRAFT

How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?

Number of Respondents = 846

Average = 2.6 out of 4

Respondents were given four multiple choice answers for this question: *I don't understand them at all, I barely understand them, I somewhat understand them,* and *I understand them very well.* By assigning point values to these answer choices, the average is a 2.6 out of 4, indicating that the average respondents is somewhere between barely and somewhat understanding their options to participate in city government.

A fairly small portion – 14% of respondents – report that they don't understand their options for participating in city government at all. However, it is important to consider the overall characteristics of the survey population. It is likely that many residents who do not understand their options for participating in city government at all would not be interested in taking a survey about public input, regardless of the incentives offered.

How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?
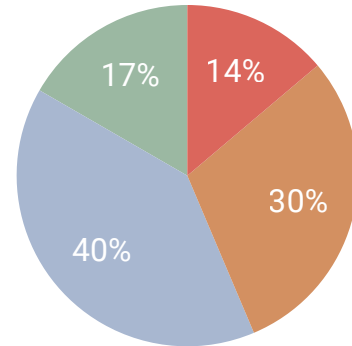
- ● I don't understand them at all
- ● I barely understand them
- ● I somewhat understand them
- ● I understand them very well

Subgroup	Score
Know who CM is	2.9
Do not know who CM is	2.2
City meeting times are very inconvenient	2.5
City meeting times are very convenient	3.1
Met in person with a government representative	3.3
Trust city gov to make decisions in a fair way always	2.8
Trust city gov to make decisions in a fair way some of the time	2.5
Pick 1 improvement: more language options	3
Pick 1 improvement: earlier information	2.5
Feel input is taken very seriously	3.0
Feel input is taken not seriously at all	2.3
Don't engage but would be interested in doing so	2.1
Engage frequently	3.3

How seriously do you think governmental representatives take your input?

Number of Respondents = 848

Average = 2.4

The average score of this assessment question is **2.4 out 4,** which ties it for the lowest score of the six assessment questions alongside How convenient are city meeting times. 41% of respondents, or 351 people, report that they think government representatives take their input Somewhat Seriously, followed by 32% who think their input is taken Somewhat not Seriously. Almost exactly half (49.9%) of respondents think their input is taken either not seriously or somewhat not seriously. Only 18% of respondents report that they don't think their input is taken seriously at all.

What determines the responses to this question? The chart below details an assortment of subgroups of respondents and their average response to the How seriously do you think Government Representatives take their input. Cells that are within one standard deviation of the average (2.4) are colored grey. Cells below one standard deviation of the average are colored red, and cells one standard deviation above the average are green.

| Group	Score
Given public input in a Council Committee Meeting	2.2
Given public input in a Council Meeting	2.5
Respondents between the age of 70 and 80	2.9
Respondents under the age of 30	2.3
Respondents who know who their Councilmember is	2.6
Respondents who do not know who their Councilmember is	2.2
Male respondents	2.5
Female respondents	2.4
Nonbinary respondents	1.7
City meeting times are very inconvenient	1.9
City meeting times are very convenient	3.0
Don't understand options for participating at all	2.1
Understand options for participating very well	2.7

How convenient are city meeting times?

Number of Respondents = 840

54% of respondents answered that city meeting times are either somewhat or very inconvenient, while 46% answered that they are either somewhat convenient or very convenient. The most severe category – that city meeting times are very inconvenient – represents only 13.7% of respondents.

This alone is a decent result – it is impossible to schedule meetings in a time and place that is convenient for everyone, and meeting convenience for half of the respondents could certainly be worse. However, the convenience level of city meetings times and locations becomes much more significant in comparison with other questions in this survey, particularly the ones that ask respondents to rate their faith that LFUCG is making decisions in a fair way and that those decisions are what is best for Lexington.

Thus far, the convenience of city meeting times is the **strongest predictor we have found for how respondents rate their faith that LFUCG is making decisions in a fair way and that those decisions are what is best for Lexington**. There is a stronger correlation between the convenience of city meeting times and these metrics than there is between the metrics and race, gender, education level, ZIP code, current engagement level, or any other variable in this dataset. This is evident in the chart below – respondents who state that city meeting times are very inconvenient rate the "best for Lexington" question .**7 points** lower than those who find meeting times very convenient.

4 point assessment questions vs. How convenient are city meeting times?
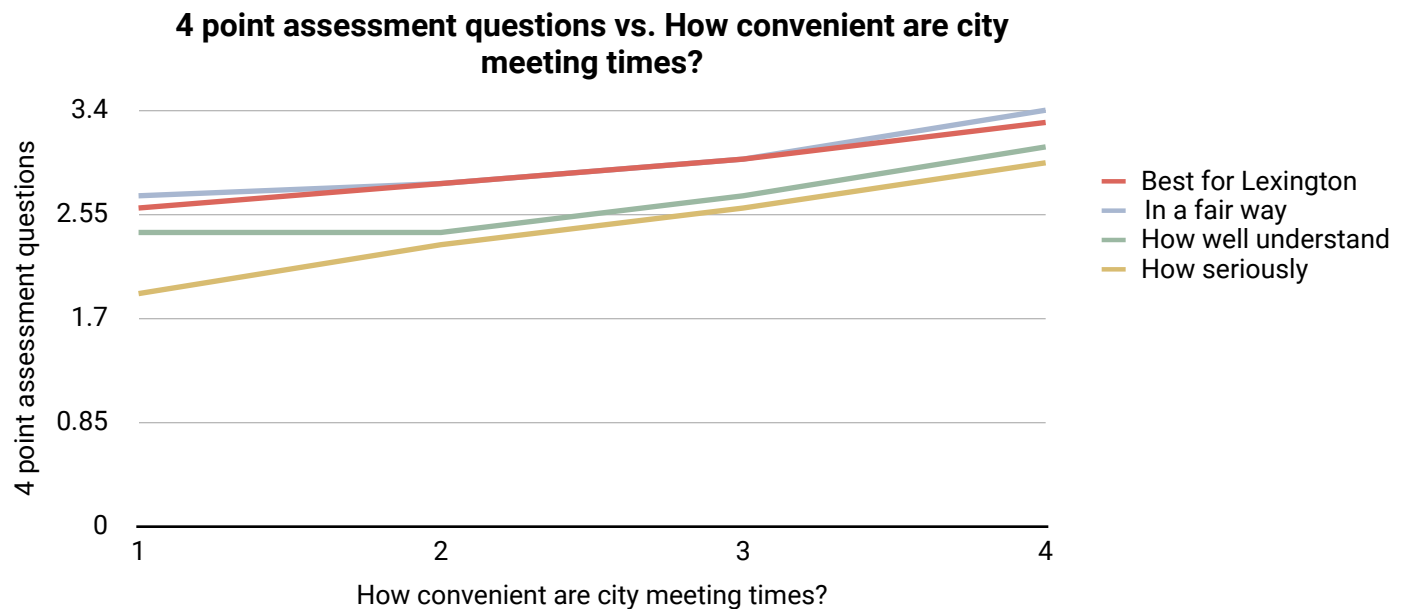
How convenient are city meeting locations?

Number of Respondents = 838

The convenience of city meeting locations follows that of city meeting times, but has a slightly less exaggerated effect. 45.4% of respondents indicated that city meeting locations are either somewhat inconvenient or very inconvenient, as opposed to 54% with city meeting times. City meeting locations are a strong predictor of the 4 point assessment questions, but less so than city meeting times. All in all, this survey indicates that both city meeting times and locations are important predictors of civic outcomes, but that time is the more significant of the two.

4 point assessment questions vs. How convenient are city meeting locations?
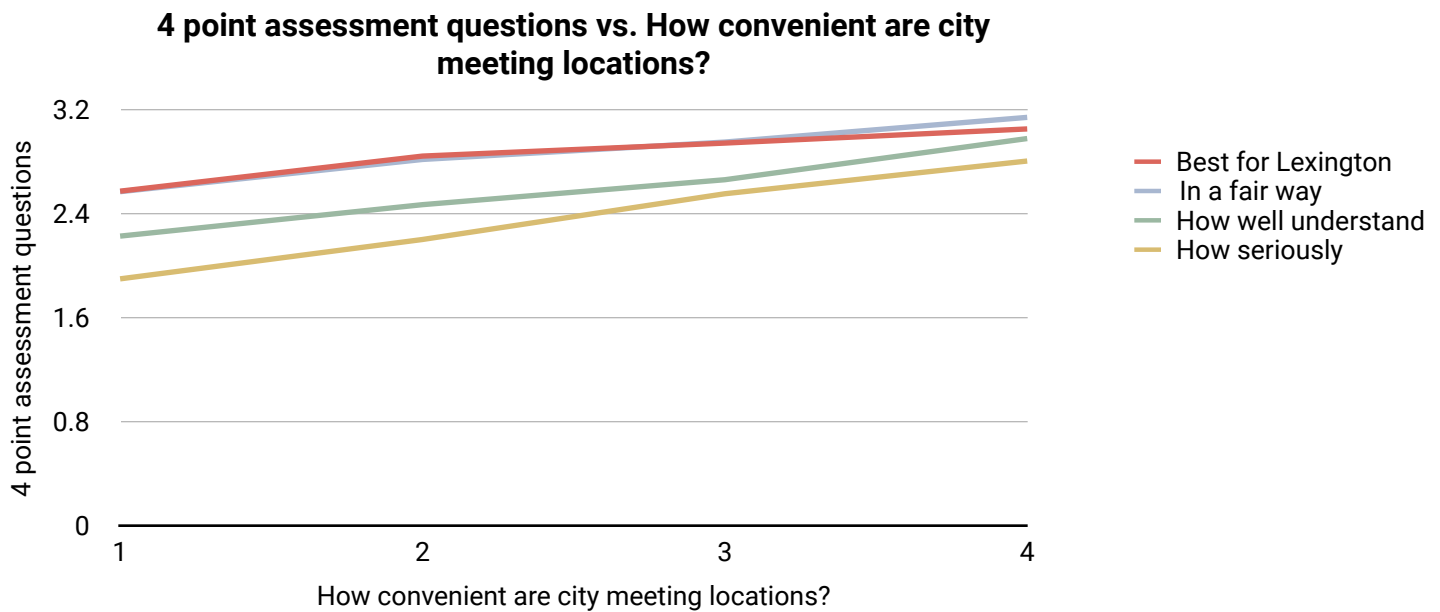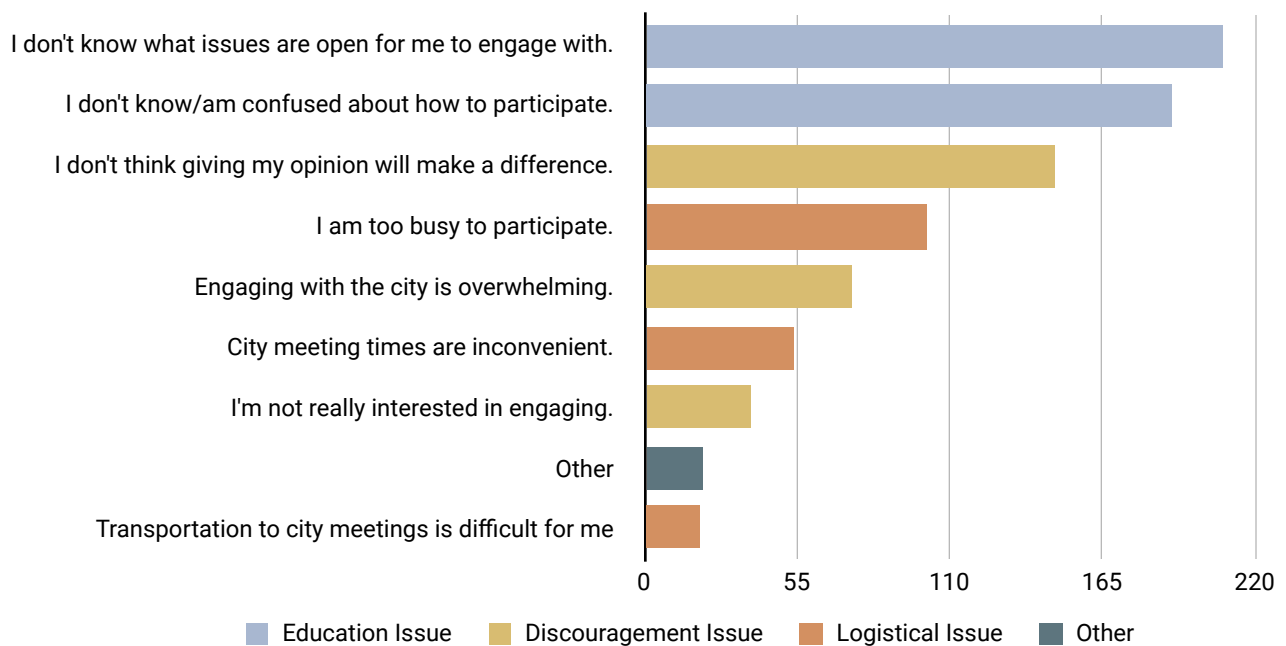
Why don't people engage?

Before we get into why people do engage with local government in Lexington, let's start with why people **don't** engage, or **Question 5** of the survey.

We found that the plurality of respondents that do not participate in local government (49%) don't do so because they **don't understand what issues are actually open for them to engage with.** This tells us that the level of civic education related to issues moving through the local legislative process is low and that current strategies for providing this information are relatively inadequate. 41% of these respondents don't participate because they are **confused about the process.**

Some respondents who do not participate in local government don't do so because they are pessimistic about whether or not their engagement will matter. We found that this was the case for 32% of respondents.

The answer choices that cover a respondent just being altogether disengaged – not interested, too busy, or overwhelmed – were not reported as the biggest obstacles to engagement. Most respondents who answered that their engagement "makes no difference" also cited that they are either confused about how to engage or confused about what issues they can give input on. Specifically, 22% of respondents answered that they are too busy, and 16% of respondents answered that it is too overwhelming.

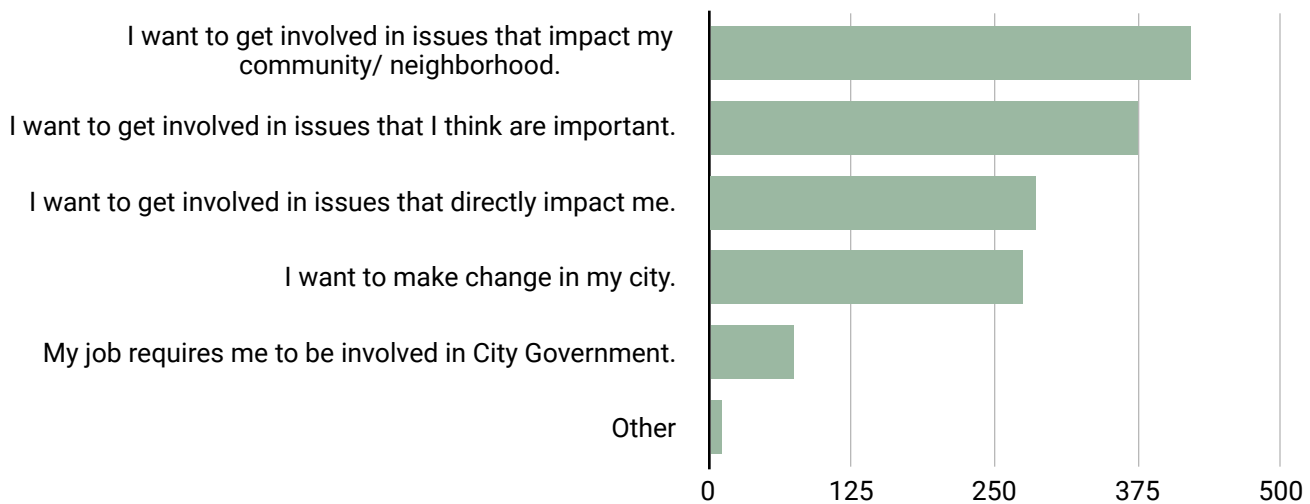**Why don't you engage [with local government] more?**

Why do people engage?

In the set of multiple choice responses inside **Question 7,** we found that people are most likely to engage with local government if an issue is going to impact their community or neighborhood. What was surprising about this is that people report being almost 50% more likely to engage with local government if an issue impacts their community than if it impacts them individually. 77% of respondents that do engage with local government do so because a particular issue is going to impact their community/neighborhood. Only 53% of respondents report engaging with local government because an issue will impact them directly.

Other reasons for engaging with local government included thinking an issue was important (68%), making change in the city (50%), and having a job that requires it (13%).

What motivates you to engage with local government?

I want to get involved in issues that impact my community/ neighborhood.	
I want to get involved in issues that I think are important.	
I want to get involved in issues that directly impact me.	
I want to make change in my city.	
My job requires me to be involved in City Government.	
Other	

0   125   250   375   500

How do people engage?

While most people recognize "public input" as the public comment that takes place in council and committee meetings, we found that was actually the least common way that respondents who engage with local government do so.

Almost 80% of respondents report directly reaching out to government officials. 70% of respondents report reaching out to their District Council Member and 40% report reaching out to other members of the Urban County Council, including Council At Large positions. In

addition to Council Members, 50% of respondents report reaching out to members of city departments and 44% of respondents report reaching out to staff in the Mayor's Office.

Giving Public Comment (Question 8)

The 30% of respondents who do regularly engage with local government and have given public comment have done so at a variety of different meeting types. The number one most common meeting for respondents to have given public comment at are Council Meetings. The full list is below. Please note that the percentages associated with each meeting type will not add up to 100%, as many survey takers have given public comment at more than one type of meeting.

1. Council Meetings (69% of respondents who have given public comment)
2. Planning Commission Meetings (46%)
3. Task Force or Subcommittee Meetings (37%)
4. Council Committee Meetings (33%)
5. Council Work Sessions (28%)
6. Other (10%).

The fact that the number one venue for public comment is a Council Meeting is a concerning but understandable trend – Council Meetings tend to receive the most publicity, but as illustrated in this report, they are the very last step for a legislative decision and whatever negotiation might be happening on a given item is almost certainly completed by the time it reaches a Thursday Evening Council meeting. This fact likely contributes to the trend we have observed in this data that people who are more engaged in Local Government are actually slightly less likely to think it makes decisions in a fair way (add citation?) – if you show up to a meeting to give public comment on an item but it is signed into law directly afterwards, it is difficult to feel like you have made an impact.

In a similar vein, the two meeting types that are arguably the most effective places to give Public Comment – Council Work Sessions and Committee Meetings – are the least popular choices. These are places where ordinances and other legislative items are not fully decided – and neither are the Councilmembers voting on them. Directing residents to share public comments earlier in the process, during these meetings, is a simple and effective way to increase their impact.

Reaching out to Government Representatives (Question 9 & 10)

433 survey respondents reported reaching out to Government Representatives as a way of providing public input. Of this group, 86% report reaching out to their District Councilmember (375 respondents). The full list is as follows:

1. District Councilmember (86%)
2. City Department Staff (63%)
3. Mayor's Office Staff (55%)

4. Councilmembers outside of respondents' district, including At-Large (51%)
5. Other (<1%)

This breakdown makes sense - A respondent's District Councilmember is a good place to start for public input, and they can often refer residents to other parties that might be helpful to contact. One interesting component is that non-district and particularly At-Large Councilmembers are 4th on the list. Educating more residents about At-Large Councilmembers, and the fact that they represent all Lexington residents similarly to the Mayor, would be a helpful tactic for increasing the effectiveness of public input.
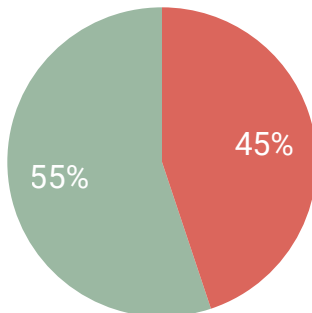
Input via Phone

37%

63%
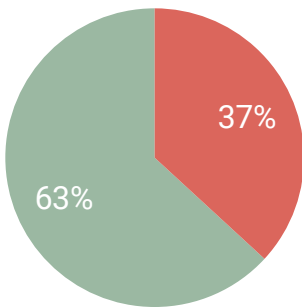
● Not Very Seriously + Somewhat Not Seriously
● Somewhat Seriously + Very Seriously

Input in Person

39%

61%
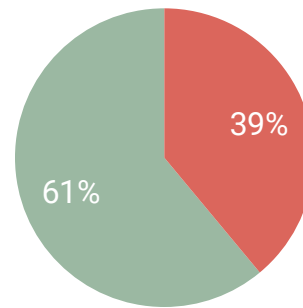
● Not Very Seriously + Somewhat Not Seriously
● Somewhat Seriously + Very Seriously

Input via Social Media

45%
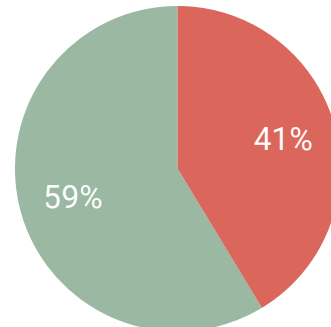
55%

● Not Very Seriously + Somewhat Not Seriously
● Somewhat Seriously + Very Seriously

Input via Email

41%

59%

● Not Very Seriously + Somewhat Not Seriously
● Somewhat Seriously + Very Seriously

In terms of the format of how residents have reached out to these government representatives, 87% of respondents report using email as their communication of choice. The full breakdown is:

As you can see in the charts above, respondents who reach out to government representatives via phone are the **most likely** to report that their input is taken seriously, and respondents who reach via social media are the **least likely.**

Engaging in Direct Action (Question 11)

358 of the survey respondents report engaging in direct action as a way of giving input into local government. Of these 358 respondents, 75% have led or signed a petition, 72% have participated in a protest or demonstration, and 27% have published letters to the editor or blog posts. We investigated who specifically has reported engaging in direct action, and found that starkest difference between respondents who have engaged in direct action and the general survey population is age. The average age of a respondent who has engaged in direct action is 47, while the average age of respondents who have given public comment is 54, and who have reached out to government representatives directly is 51. There is not a significant variation of race, gender, or education level, of respondents who have participated in direct action and the general survey population.

Of the methods for engaging with local government (directly reaching out to representatives, direct action, and giving public comment), respondents who have engaged in direct action tend to score LFUCG the lowest on the 4 point assessments. In the table below, metrics that are one standard deviation (or more) lower than the average are colored red, and metrics that are one standard deviation (or more) higher than the average area colored green.

4 point Assessment overview of methods for engaging

	Survey Average	Reaching out to gov. rep.	Public Comment	Direct Action
How much of the time do you think you can trust Lexington's city government to make decisions in a fair way?	**2.9**	2.85	2.8	2.78
How often do you think those decisions are what is best for Lexington?	**2.9**	2.85	2.82	2.77
How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?	**2.6**	3.19	3.25	3.10
How seriously do you think governmental representatives take your input?	**2.4**	2.58	2.44	2.46

Improving Public Input

The public input survey gave respondents nine multiple choice options for suggested improvements to engaging with local government, in addition to a write in "other" option. These options are listed below in the order of their popularity.

1. Providing public input/comment outside of city meetings (63.8%)
2. A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process (58.9%)
3. More options for virtual public input/comment (58.3%)
   More ways to communicate directly with government officials (53.45)
4. More education options about the issues in city government (52.8%)
5. A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input (46.3%)
6. Earlier information about city meetings (41.1%)
7. More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington (40.4%)
8. More language options in city communications (24.7%)
9. Other (1.7%) *See attachment 1 for "Other" responses*

The survey then asked respondents which of those same improvements they would personally use. The popularity of improvements in this question almost exactly mirrors the previous question, with the exception of "More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington" being slightly more popular than "Earlier information about city meetings".

Finally, we asked respondents to pick **just one** method for improving public input. The number one choice for this question was more options for virtual public input, with 18.3% of respondents choosing that as their number one option. See the chart below for further detail*.

We also investigated *who* suggested each of these different improvements. We found that this varied across factors like –

- **Level of Engagement:** More engaged respondents were more likely to suggest each option, across the board - people who are more engaged seem to want even more engagement options
- **Race/ Ethnicity:** The suggestions with the most popularity variation by race/ethnicity were More Language options (Non white respondents were **1.5 times more** likely to suggest than white respondents) and a better way to track issues (non-white respondents were **1.2 times less** likely to suggest than white respondents)

- **Gender**: Nonbinary and female respondents were much more likely to suggest more virtual options (32% of Nonbinary respondents vs. 19% of Female respondents vs. 11% of male respondents). Male respondents were more likely to suggest earlier information being available about city issues and more meetings outside downtown.

We also investigated if any of the specific improvements were and other metrics to see if they varied according to various characteristics. With the assistance of JS Butler and Dr. Yulia Shybalkina from the University of Kentucky's Martin School, we also investigated if the answers to these questions (15 and 16) correlate with other responses in this survey. We found that:

- There is no relationship between the degree of engagement of respondents (*Question 4 - how often would you say you engage with local government?*) and how respondents rate LFUCG making decisions in a fair way.
- More engaged respondents assess the best for Lexington question lower, indicating they are less satisfied with the decision making process.
  - The average response on best for Lexington for those who engage rarely/never is 2.95, while the average for those who engage sometimes/frequently is 2.83
- The fairness question is evaluated statistically significantly lower by Black respondents. Specifically, black respondents rated fairness .3 points lower on average.
- Nonbinary respondents also significantly rated fairness .42 point lower on average.
- Older respondents rate fairness higher by .002 points per year of age
- Females are slightly more likely (.1 points on average) to rate fairness higher than men
- Hispanic/Latino respondents did not indicate the same negative fairness ratings as black and Asian American respondents
- Fairness is rated the highest by older females and lowest for younger black and non-binary respondents

City Staff Survey

Survey Structure and Design

The LFUCG staff survey was open for over one month, from February 9 to March 22. The questions and structure were designed by CivicLex, in consultation with Drs. Cory Curl and Iuliia Shybalkina of Martin School of Public Policy, Dr. Alan Bartley of Transylvania University Department of Economics.

CivicLex worked with LFUCG's Chief Information Officer Aldona Valicenti and District 4 Council Member Susan Lamb to understand what specific information would be helpful to glean from city workers. Once we identified this, we worked with CIO Valicenti and CM Lamb to identify city staff members that would be appropriate to ask these questions of.

The LFUCG staff survey is structure into several question groups

1. **Demographic Questions:** these questions were designed to help us understand who is taking the survey and who we might be missing.
2. **Assessment Questions:** these questions were designed to help us understand how city workers felt about local government's current methods for the public to provide input.
3. **Impact Questions:** these questions were designed to help us understand how public input impacts the work of governmental officials.
4. **Improvement Questions:** these questions were designed to help us understand how local government officials think the public input process could be improved.
5. **Perception of the Public Questions:** these questions were designed to help us understand how local government workers perceive how the public thinks of engaging with government.

The Survey Population

78 LFUCG staff members answered the Public Input Survey for city staff. The survey asked LFUCG staff what Division or office they work in, as well as demographic information.

Of the 78 respondents:
- 8 work in Code Enforcement
- 12 work in or with the Urban County Council
- 4 work in Environmental Quality and Public Works (EQPW)
- 4 work in Grants and Special Programs
- 4 work in LexCall

- 4 work in the Mayor's Office
- 10 work in Planning
- 7 work in Purchasing
- 10 work in Social Services
- 10 work in other departments, including engineering, the CAO's office, and custodial. *Note: if a division had less than 4 responses, they were included in the other category to preserve anonymity*

Survey population Demographics

CivicLex also collected demographics for the city staff survey respondents. The demographics mainly mirror the demographic of the broader public survey. The staff respondents skewed female, with 71% of respondents identifying as female, 27.4% identifying as male, and 1.6% identifying as nonbinary.

In terms of race/ethnicity, almost 82% of respondents identified as White. 17% as African-American/ Black, 7% as Latino or Hispanic, and 2% as Asian or Pacific Islander. *Note, the percentages of these totals add up to greater than 100% because respondents were able to select multiple races/ethnicities.*

Both the average and median age of LFUCG staff respondents was 45. The youngest respondent was 24, and the oldest was 74.

For education level, no LFUCG staff respondents reported having a high school diploma or less. 16% report some college but no degree, 6.3% report an Associate's Degree, 41.3% with a Bachelor's Degree, 33.3% with a Graduate Degree, and 3.2% with a Doctoral or Professional Degree.

LFUCG Staff Reflections on the Current State of Public Input

How important do you think it is for the public to be able to provide input on items going before Council?
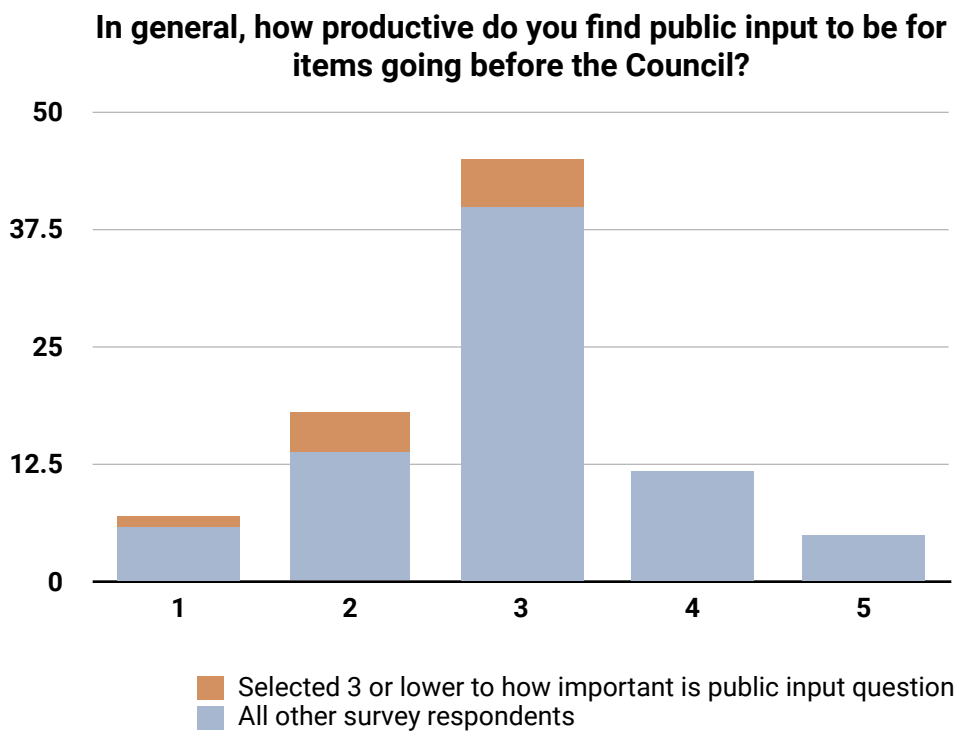
Number of respondents = 77
Average = 4.6

The average response to this question was 4.6, indicating that most LFUCG staff seem to agree that public input is either important or very important. 87% of respondents selected 4 or 5 on the scale. No respondents selected a 1 or 2, and 13% selected a 3. There does not seem to be a

single defining feature of the respondents who selected a 3 for this question - they follow a similar breakdown for all other survey questions.

The one question these respondents consistently score different is "In general, how productive do you find public input to be for items going before the Council?", as illustrated in the graph below. No respondent who selected a 3 or lower on this question rates the productivity of public input higher than a 3 out 5. This suggests that LFUCG who find public input to be more productive also rate it as more important. This makes sense, although it does seem to indicate that some LFUCG staff don't feel that public input has an inherent value, regardless of outcome. Rather, the actual products of how the process goes dictate their feelings towards the concept as a whole.

In general, how productive do you find public input to be for items going before the Council?

Legend:
- Selected 3 or lower to how important is public input question
- All other survey respondents

How effective do you think the current options are for the public to provide input on items going before Council?

Number of respondents = 76
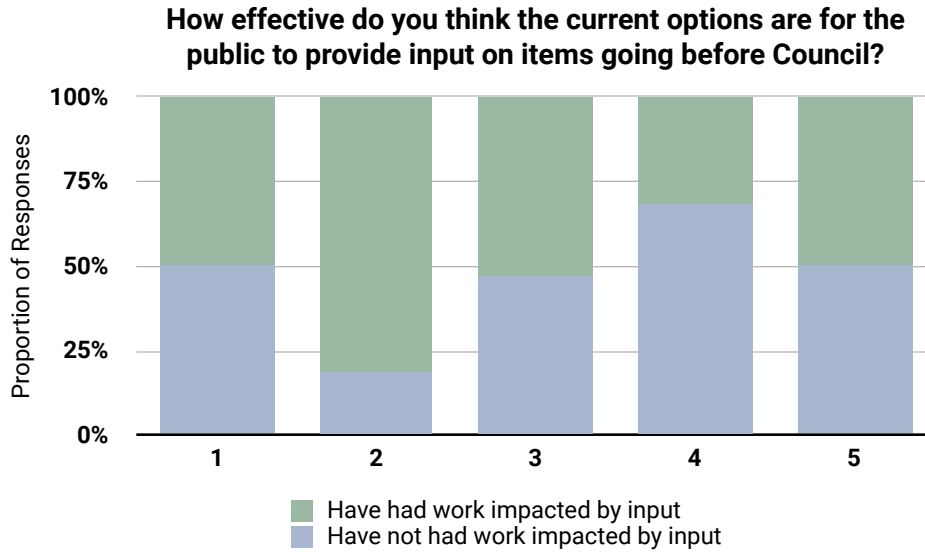*Average score = 3.2*

The average response to this question is was 3.2, indicating that most respondents think that the current options for public input are moderately effective. It is interesting to compare these responses with the responses to the question "Have you ever had an item before the Council that you worked on receive public input?". As you can see in the graph below, respondents who

have had their work impacted by public input are more likely to rate the current effectiveness of public input lower than respondents who have not been impacted by public input. The average score on this question from respondents who have had their work impacted by public input is 3, while the average score from respondents who have not is 3.5.

How effective do you think the current options are for the public to provide input on items going before Council?

How effective do you think the current options are for the public to provide input on items going before Council?

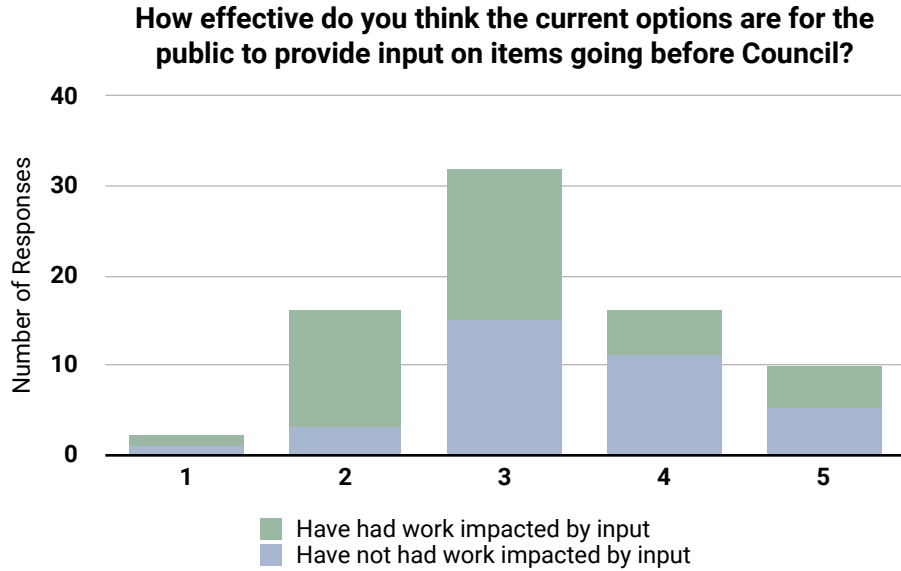*Of the input that is typically provided, how representative do you think it is of the general public sentiment?*

Number of Respondents = 77
Average score = 2.7

The average response to this question was 2.7, indicating that most respondents think that current public input is not very to somewhat representative of the general public sentiment. This question received the lowest average score of the four 5 point scale questions about the current state of public input in this survey. We chose to compare this response set with answers to the question "Do you think the general public wants to be more engaged with issues coming before the Council?". We found that respondents who do think the public wants to be more engaged in local government were more likely to rate the current representativeness of public input higher, as you can see in the graphs below.

How representative do you think public input is of the general public sentiment?

How representative do you think public input is of the general public sentiment?
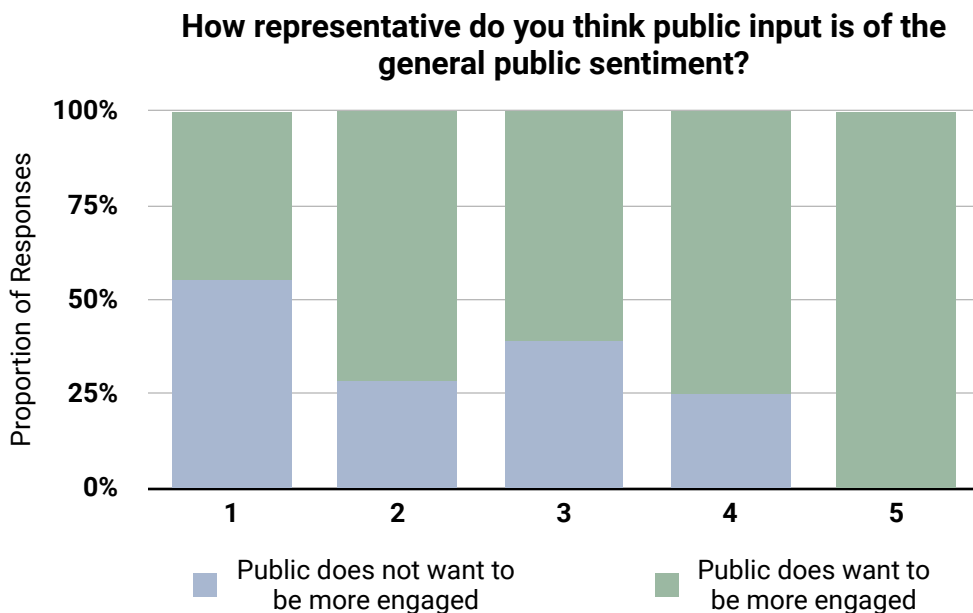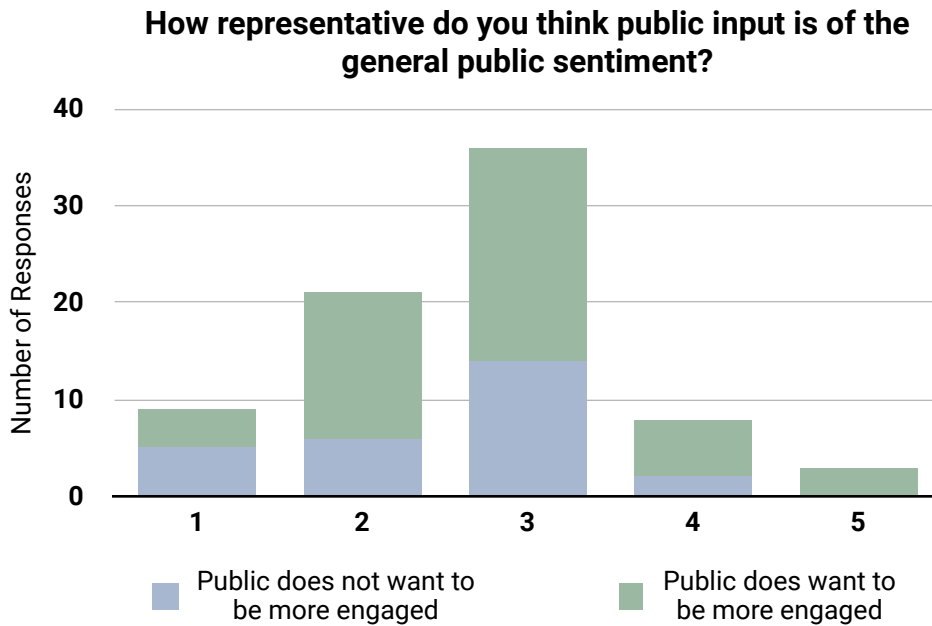
How does current public input impact the work of LFUCG staff?

Have you ever had an item before the Council that you worked on receive public input?

77 out of 78 respondents answered this question. 41 respondents, or 53% have had an item before Council that received public input, and 36 respondents or 47% have not. The divisions of respondents that report the highest levels of public input are Environmental Quality and Public Works, the Mayor's Office, and Planning. The Divisions with the lowest reported levels of Public Input are Code Enforcement, Social services, and LexCall.

(For respondents who have received Input) Think about all of those items for a minute. In what ways did the public provide input on them?

Of the 41 respondents who have received public input on an item before Council, the most common way to receive input is via emails from residents (8), followed by phone calls from residents (18%) and Public Comment in Council meetings (18%). There are a few interesting trends indicated in this data.

Council Meetings are the most commonly reported meeting for receiving public input (18%), followed by Council Work Sessions (15%), Council Committee Meetings (13%), Task Force/ Subcommittee meetings (10%) and Planning Commission meetings (7%). This is slightly concerning when compared with a later survey question that asks where in the legislative process respondents think is most and least helpful to receive public input. Council Meetings (first and second readings) are consistently ranked as the least helpful place to receive public input, but are currently the most popular option. Conversely, Council Committee Meetings are ranked as the most helpful place to receive public input, but are the least popular of the Council-wide meetings.

We also compared what avenues respondents reported receiving public input in with how they feel about the overall effectiveness, productivity, and representativeness of public input. We did not find a significant variation in the average scores of public input based on the type of input received – there is a total variation of .36 points (on a scale of 1 to 5) between the highest and lowest scores of the various methods.

How often would you say that public input caused an impact on the direction of your items?

(Multiple choice with options Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Sometimes, and Frequently)

The responses to this question indicate that Public Input does often have an impact on the direction of legislative items. The most commonly selected response for this question was Sometimes, with 39% of all answers. This was followed closely by Frequently, with 37% of answers. Only 2 respondents answered rarely, and only one answered never.

By assigning numerical values to the answer choices (never = 1, rarely = 2, occasionally = 3, sometimes = 4, frequently = 5), we are able to see which departments and divisions report the highest level of impact from public input. As you can see in the table below, respondents from the Mayor's Office report the highest impact of public input, followed by Planning and Council. The divisions and departments that do receive public input but report the lowest impact are Purchasing and Social Services.

Division and if they have received Pubic Input

| Division or Department	Number of Respondents	% Received Public Input
EQPW	4	100%
Mayor's Office	4	100%
Planning	10	100%
Council	12	92%
Total	78	53%
Grants and Special Programs	4	50%
Other	10	40%
Unknown	5	40%
Purchasing	7	29%
Code Enforcement	8	13%
Social Services	10	10%
LexCall	4	0%

Lastly, how helpful did you generally find that input to be?

On a scale of 1–5, 1 being not helpful and 5 being very helpful

Of the respondents who have received public input on a legislative item, the average helpfulness rating is 3.1 out of 5, which we interpret as being moderately helpful. It is interesting to compare this question with the question "How often would you say that public input caused an impact on the direction of your items?", which has an average of 4.0. This indicates that current public input is more impactful than it is helpful.

Inside this question, there are 4 respondents who indicated that Public input is not helpful at all, and 6 respondents who indicate that Public Input is a 2 out 5, which can be interpreted as almost never helpful. We investigated the characteristics of these 10 respondents, who seem to have the least positive experience with public input. Interestingly, 8 out of these 10 respondents still selected that they want the public to be more engaged with local government (higher than the average across the survey population of 69%). This suggests that a negative experience thus far has not diminished these LFUCG staff member's belief in the importance of public input - a heartening result. There are several other shared characteristics in this group of staff respondents, including that they do not rate the question "How well do you think the public understands their options to participate in local government?" Higher than a 2 out of 5.

How Important do you think it is for the public to be able to provide input on items going before Council? vs. How helpful do you generally find [the public input you have received] to be?
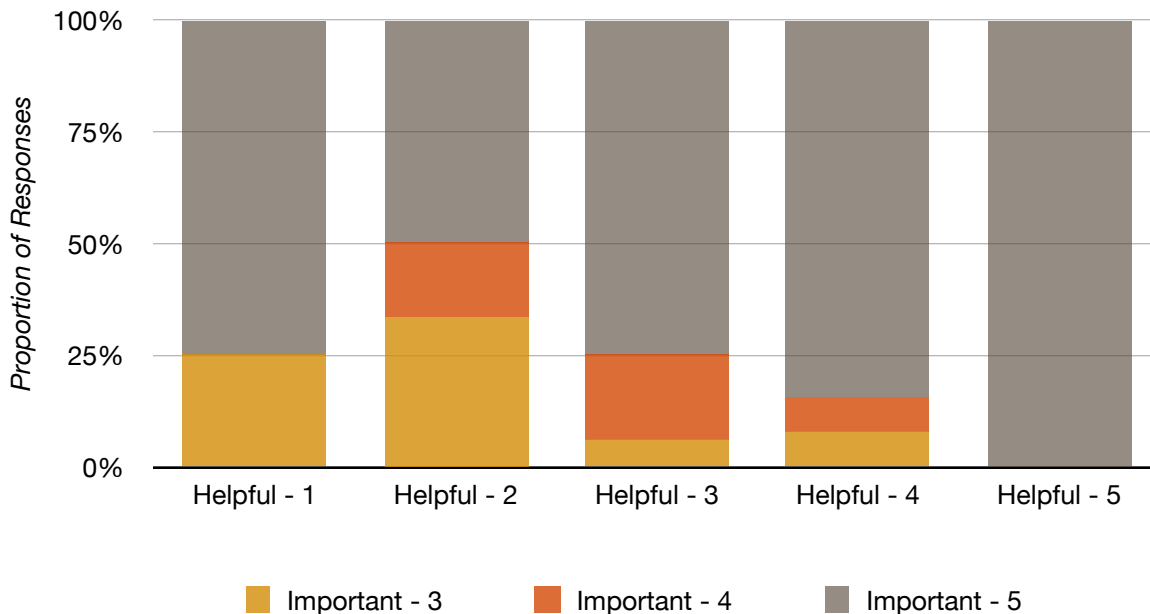
Ranking Potential Improvements to Public Input

The LFUCG staff survey also asked respondents to give feedback on how the overall public input process could be improved. Specifically, they were given a legislative map (image below) of how an item is passed before council, and asked where in the process would be the best place to receive public input.
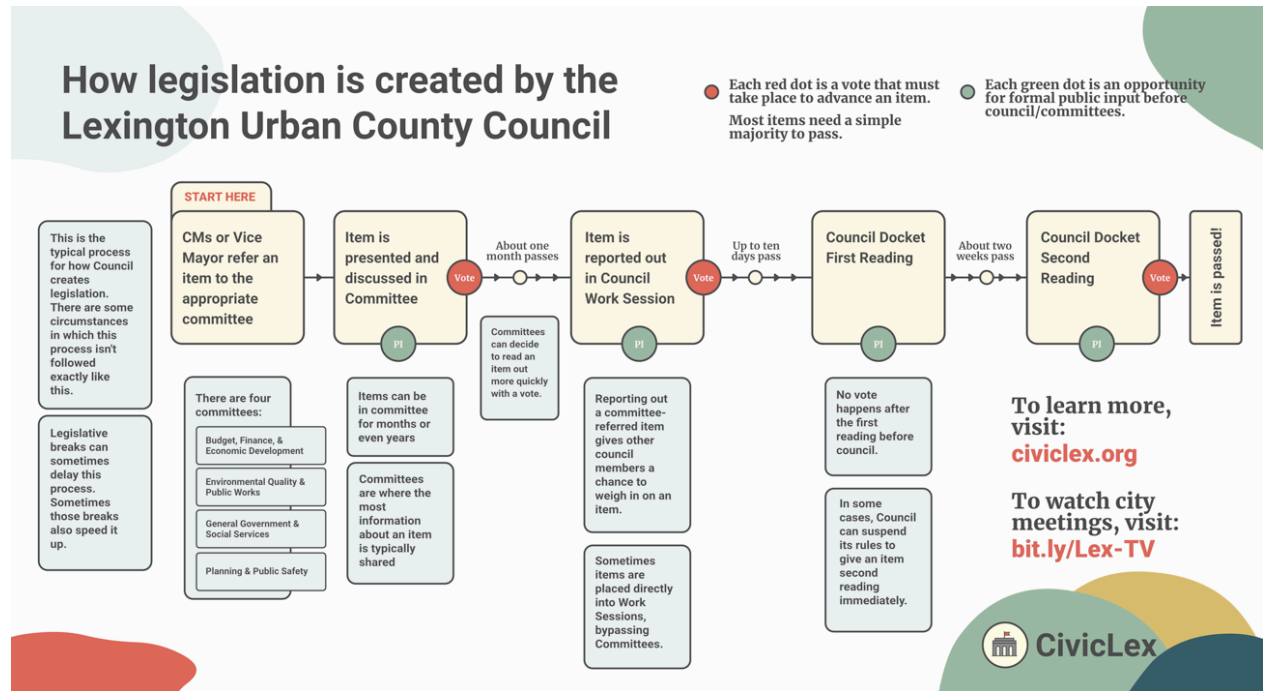
Take a look at the map. Of the four opportunities for public input, which do you think would be the most helpful for your job?

Which do you think would be the most effective for residents trying to impact a change?
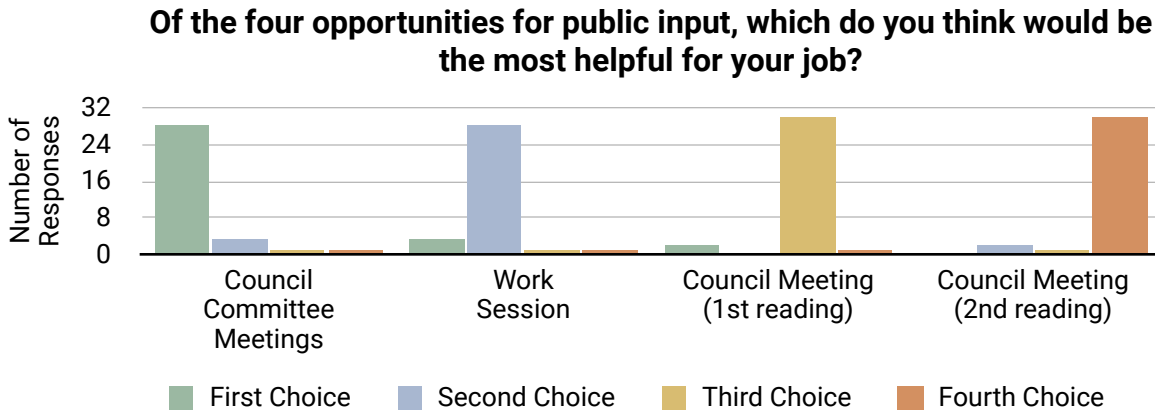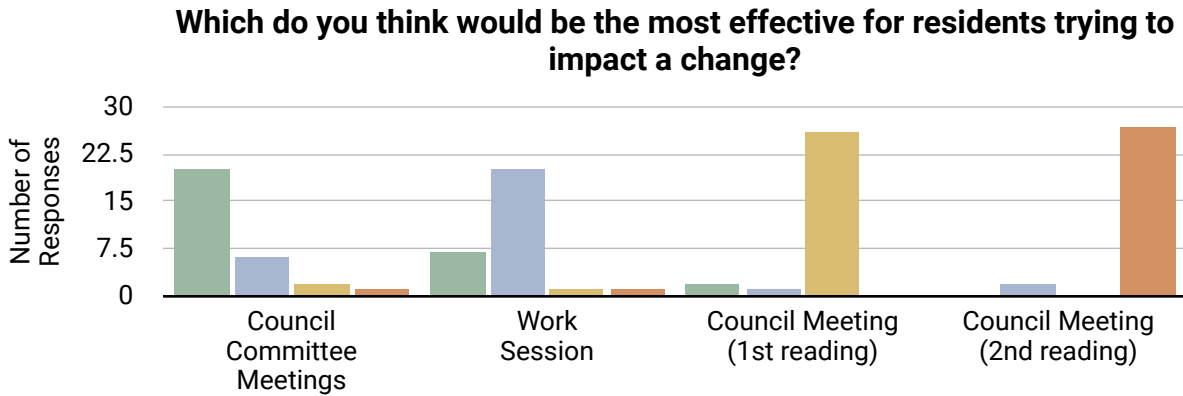
The vast majority (85%) of respondents **chose Council Committee Meetings as the most helpful place to receive public input.** Beyond that, 94% of respondents chose Council Committee Meetings as either the first or second most helpful place for public input. This is one of the strongest findings of the survey process – increasing outreach and public input for Council Committee Meetings is one of the most direct ways to improve the current state of public input in LFUCG. The full ranking is:

1. Council Committee Meetings (#1.24 on average)
2. Council Work Sessions (#2 on average)
3. Council Meeting First Readings (#2.9 on average)
4. Council Meeting Second Readings (#3.85 on average)

As you can see in the graph on the following page, each opportunity for input has one ranking – first, second, third, or fourth – that is significantly more popular than all other choices. **Overwhelmingly, LFUCG staff rated opportunities higher the earlier in the legislative process that they take place**. Far and away the most popular place for the public to give input according to LFUCG staff is Council Committee Meetings, which also happens to be one of the least popular places for it to actually happen. According to our survey of the general public, the only type of meeting that receives public input less is a Council Work Session, the option most LFUCG staff rank as the second most place to impact a change via public input.

Of these four opportunities for the public to provide input, which do you think would be the most effective for residents trying to impact a change?

The responses to this question are a slightly less exaggerated version of the responses to the previous question. The same four opportunities are ranked by respondents as–

1. Council Committee Meetings (#1.45 on average)
2. Council Work Sessions (#1.86 on average)

3. Council Meeting First Readings (#2.83 on average)
4. Council Meeting Second Readings (#3.86 on average)

As with the previous question, Council Committee Meetings are ranked as the top option for public input, followed by Council Work Sessions.

How much of the time do you think the public trusts LFUCG to make decisions in a fair way?

Number of respondents = 41
Average score = 2.8 out of 4

The numeric average rating for this question is a 2.8 out of 4. This is very similar to the rating of 2.9 out of 4 from the actual public survey. This indicates the LFUCG staff have a fairly strong grasp on how much faith the public has in their local government - the match between staff response and public responses is even stronger in the next question, about how often the public trusts LFUCG to make decisions that are best for Lexington.

The responses to this question also vary according to different characteristics of the survey takes. By Divisions, Code Enforcement, EQPW, Purchasing, and Social Service all averaged the highest, most optimistic, rating of a 3 out of 4. Council Office, Planning, and 'Other' division ranked in the middle between 2.7 and 2.8. The divisions with the lowest estimation of the public's confidence in LFUCG were Grants and Special Programs (2.5) and the Mayor's Office (2.3).

Another interesting finding is that the more frequently a respondent is impacted by public input, the lower they rated this metric. In the chart below, the Y axis represents the average rating that respondents gave for how often they think the public trusts LFUCG to make decisions in a fair way (teal dots) and make decisions that are best for Lexington (orange dots). The X axis is a numeric representation of the question "How often would you say public input has caused an impact on the direction of your items?", in which 1 represents never and 5 represents frequently.

How often do you think the public thinks those decisions are what is best for Lexington?

Number of respondents = 41
Average score = 2.9 out of 4

Fair Way and Best for Lexington Score vs. Frequency of Public Input
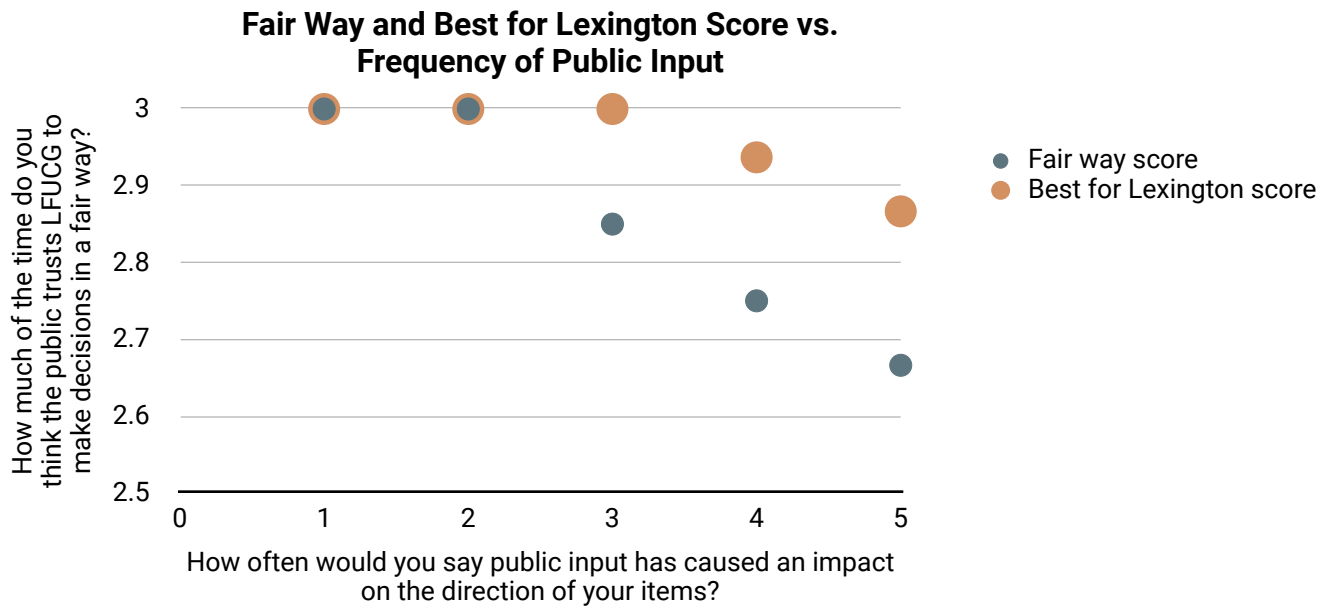
The numeric average of this question is a 2.9 out of 4, which is exactly the same as the average from the public version of our survey. This is another indicator that LFUCG staff have an accurate understanding of how the public feels about their current methods for giving input on legislative items, and of their general feelings towards local government.

There is some variation within this question according to different characteristics of the survey takers. Specifically, we found that the average score of all divisions was a 3 out of 4, except for the Urban County Council Office and the Mayor's Office, both of which rated this question as a 2 out of 4 on average. This means that that the two divisions that are based on the work of elected (rather than appointed) officials both consistently score the public's faith in LFUCG making decisions that are best for Lexington a full point lower than all other divisions surveyed.

How well do you think the public understands their options to participate in city government?

Number of respondents = 41
Average score = 1.8 out of 5

This is the lowest averages score of all of the 5 point questions LFUCG staff were asked to rate as a part of this survey. The public version of this survey asked Lexington residents how well they understand their options to participate in city government and gave an average answer of 2.6 out of 4. Converting both of these ratings to percentages, we see that LFUCG give a score of 36% understanding, while the public give themselves a score of 65% understanding. **This is the most significant difference between LFUCG staff opinion and Public Opinion in the entire**

survey process. Members of the public have almost twice as much confidence in their understanding of participating in city government than LFUCG staff do.

This result could suggest several different things. One noteworthy possibility is that the public knows about *some* aspects of participating in city government, and feel reasonably confident about the methods they are familiar with. However, it is possible that in reality, LFUCG staff are aware of other methods for participation that are not even on the general public's radar, and rate the general knowledge of the public lower accordingly.

How convenient do you think city meeting times are for the public?

Number of respondents = 41
Average score = 2.2 out of 5

LFUCG staff respondents rated that city meetings times are not very convenient for residents, with a numeric average of 2.2 out of 5. By converting this to a proportion, we see that LFUCG staff respondents a time convenience score of 44%, while the actual public rated the convenience of city meeting times as 2.4 out of 4, or 60%. This is good news – it means that city meetings times are, on average, more convenient to members of the public than LFUCG staff currently believe.

It is possible that the LFUCG staff respondents had specific sectors of the public in mind that they do not hear from as often when they were rating the convenience of city meeting times. However, the public version of this survey did not find a significant variation of the convenience of city meeting times for resident by education level, race/ethnicity, gender, or ZIP code. The most significant demographic determining factor we found for the convenience of city meetings times was age, in that resident under 50 are more likely to rate the convenience of city meeting times lower than residents over 50.

How convenient do you think city meeting locations are for the public?

Number of respondents = 40
Average score = 2.2 out of 5

Similar to the question of city meeting times, LFUCG staff gave this question an average score of 2.5 out 5 or 44%, which is substantially lower than the public rating of 2.6 out of 4 or 65%. Again, it seems that city meetings locations are more convenient to the public than LFUCG staff currently believe.

What do you think are the main reasons that some residents don't provide input to LFUCG?

Number of respondents = 75

The number one reason LFUCG staff think that some residents don't give input is that they don't think their opinion will make a difference. In reality, members of the public reported that this is the third most frequent reason why they don't engage with local government. In general, LFUCG have a fairly accurate understand of why some members of the public don't engage – there is no reason with more than 3 degrees of difference between the lists from LFUCG and from the public. The least accurate understand LFUCG staff have is the ranking of "[members of the public] are not interested in engaging" as the third most common reason why they don't engage, when in reality this was reported as seventh in the public survey. LFUCG staff also underestimated the importance of the public knowing what issues they can engage with – they ranked it third, while the public ranked it as the number one most common reason for not engaging.

LFUCG staff reasons why they think residents don't provide input:

1. They don't think their opinion will make a difference. (↓2)
2. They are confused about how to participate. (=)
3. They don't know what issues they can engage with. (↑2)
4. They're not interested in engaging. (↓3)
5. They are too busy to participate. (↑1)
6. City meeting times are inconvenient. (=)
7. They are overwhelmed by engaging with the city. (↑2)
8. Transportation to city meetings is difficult. (=)
9. Other (=)

Members of the public reasons why they don't participate in local government:

1. I don't know what issues are open for me to engage with.
2. I don't know/am confused about how to participate.
3. I don't think giving my opinion will make a difference.
4. I am too busy to participate.
5. Engaging with the city is overwhelming.
6. City meeting times are inconvenient.
7. I'm not really interested in engaging.
8. Transportation to city meetings is difficult for me.
9. Other
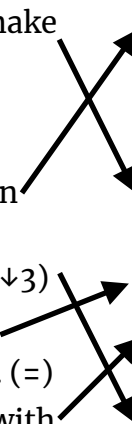
Which of the following options do you think would improve how the city engages with residents?

This question gave 9 options of ways to improve how the city engages with the public. This was a multiple choice question, where respondents could pick as many options as they liked. The top suggestion of the 1,200 residents survey was **a way to provide public input outside of city meetings.** This choice makes sense, especially when compared with our findings about the importance of the convenient of city meeting times and locations. Being able to give public

input outside of these narrowly scheduled opportunities was the public's most popular method for improving public input. A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process was the next most popular improvement. The survey did not ask respondents about their familiarity or experience with Legistar, but we feel safe in saying that a more user friendly legislative tracking software would improve the public's relationship with LFUCG.

In the chart below, the bars are abbreviated with the following shorthand

· Input Outside City = Providing public input/comment outside of city meetings
· Track Issues = A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process
· Virtual Options = More options for virtual public input/comment
· Communicate Directly = More ways to communicate directly with government officials
· More Education = More education options about the issues in city government
· Full time support = A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input
· Earlier info = Earlier information about city meetings
· Outside downtown = More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington
· More language options = More language options in city communications
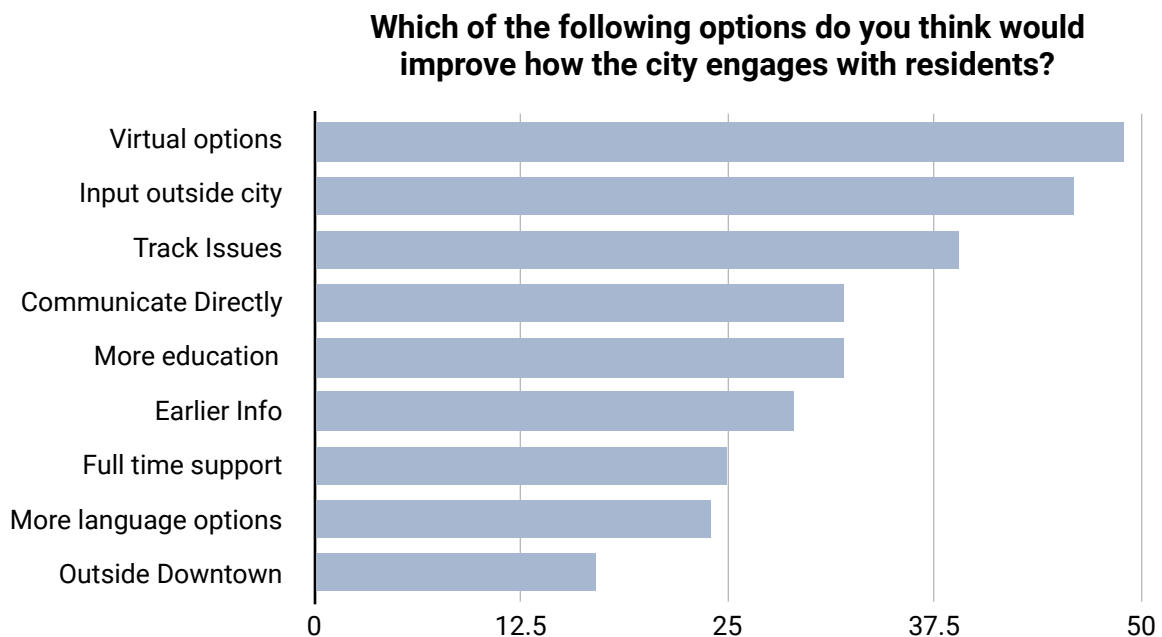
Which of the following options do you think would improve how the city engages with residents?

Recommendations

In looking at the data from these surveys, national best practices, and conversations with experts, CivicLex is making several recommendations across three categories - process changes, technology changes, and the addition of educational resources. Each of these sets of recommendations are designed to build on each other in order, meaning easy-to-change and low-impact items come first in each section.

1. Process Changes

1-a. Move Public Comment for items on the agenda to the beginning of meetings.
A clear piece of feedback we heard in focus groups and open responses from the public survey is that residents who do show up to public meetings sometimes leave feeling frustrated when public comment is at the end of the agenda. This forces them to wait for meetings that can be an indeterminate length of time, and often, decisions are already made before the public comment portion even begins.

We recommend moving public comment for items on the agenda to the beginning of all meetings, including Council Meetings.

1-b. Allow Public Comment for items on the agenda for all Council Committee, Work Session, Council, and Committee of the Whole meetings.
One clear takeaway from the public survey was that most members of the general public do not understand when they are allowed to give public comment in meetings and when they can't. In many meetings, like Council Committee meetings, public comment is up to the discretion of the chair. Sometimes, residents will show up to meetings, expecting to be able to give comment, and will be turned down.

By making it explicit that public comment is open in all regular meetings of the Council, this issue could be largely resolved. To address lengthy stretches of public comment, LFUCG could start meetings early, or even host a separate meeting for public input immediately prior to existing meetings.

We recommend that LFUCG allow Public Comment for items on the agenda at all public meetings, including Council Committees, Work Sessions, Council Meetings, and Committees of the Whole.

Here's a good example: The City of Denver, Colorado holds an open public comment meeting every Monday before its scheduled Council Meeting.

1–c. Hold separate meetings specifically designated for public education and input that are outside of city hall.

Throughout the survey, residents said they wanted to know more about what items were up for consideration in city hall and wanted more ways to weigh in on those issues. City employees also said that they felt residents didn't often fully understand issues that were up for discussion. We also see strong correlations between the timing and location of public meetings and residents' trust in government.

Based on our research, we recommend that LFUCG holds one additional monthly public meeting to present on items coming up before Council and to solicit public input on these items. We also think these meetings could be outside of city hall, and potentially spread out across the 12 Council Districts.

Here's a good example: The City of Fort Worth, Texas holds biweekly meetings specifically for public presentations/input. This is in lieu of providing opportunities for public comment on items not on the agenda at the end of meetings.

1–d. Restructure the Council schedule to better position public input to be helpful and effective.

The primary issue here is that the public is currently directed - implicitly and explicitly - to provide public input at the Thursday Council Meetings at 6pm. If there is a clear takeaway from the LFUCG staff survey, it is that the public providing comment on legislation when it arrives in these meetings is largely harmful and ineffective. When residents show up directly before an item passes through its second reading and that item gets derailed, it is frustrating for LFUCG staff, wasteful of government resources, and disempowering for residents.

While LFUCG staff recommended Council Committee Meetings as the best time for public input to arrive, we have heard from many current and past Council Members that these meetings are critical for deliberation. While we do think Public Comment should be allowed to happen in Committee meetings, we think that they are not the best meetings to direct most people to for input.

Therefore, we recommend that Council Work Sessions be moved to weekday evenings and LFUCG should direct the public to consider these as their primary public comment opportunity. This could possibly be traded with moving existing Council Meetings to the daytime.

2. Technology Changes

2-a. Utilize stop-gap measures to provide virtual input on high-impact legislation.

While the public and staff both expressed clear interest in virtual public engagement, robust public input technologies can be expensive and take awhile to implement. Stop gap measures like publicly-posted survey tools could be used to gather virtual input for high-impact legislation while more robust recommendations from this category are implemented. The public input process for the American Rescue Plan Act shows that LFUCG has already demonstrated a robust ability to gather public input for legislation.

We recommend that LFUCG uses low-cost, stop-gap tools to gather public input on high-impact legislation while it considers implementing more robust and comprehensive public input and deliberation technologies.

2-b. Provide additional options for on-the-record virtual public comment for meetings.

Both the public and LFUCG staff agree - an easy way to address a lack of public input on legislative items is to provide more opportunities for virtual public comment. This could include pre-recorded video public comment, entering emailed public comment into the public record, or providing new systems for resident engagement with legislative items. Currently, emails to Council Members about legislative items are not entered into the public record, although they are open to public record requests.

We recommend that LFUCG allow for virtual public comment via email or voice message for items on the agenda, and that those comments are entered into the public record.

Here's a good example: Cities as large as Seattle, Washington and as small as Tempe, Arizona provide the option for virtual public input through email, voicemail, and other options. There are resources for virtual public comment in meetings from the National League of Cities (NLC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

2-c. Implement user-friendly technologies that allows for legislative tracking and public input.

Over the past 10 years, new technology has emerged that allows residents to track legislative items and provide verified digital input on said items. While Legistar is useful for those with technical experience, it is confusing and cumbersome for the general public. We think that LFUCG could bolster public input by adopting new technologies to allow residents to track items moving through Council and provide input on them as they advance.

We recommend that LFUCG adopts a robust, online legislative input system.

Here's a good example: Cities across the country use software like PublicInput, CitizenLab, and Bang the Table to provide alternative options for residents to track and comment on items advancing through the legislative process.

3. Educational Resources

3-a. Create a public guide to LFUCG's legislative process.

The legislative process can be cumbersome and confusing for the general public. In research for this project, we found that the only publicly-available description to the legislative process in LFUCG is inside the Code of Ordinances. Providing resources on how the legislative process works would help residents understand the process broadly, and when to participate.

We recommend that LFUCG publicly posts a detailed guide to how its legislative process works on its website.

3-b. Create online resources that explain how to provide effective public input.

As we have stated earlier, the public and LFUCG staff agree that it is not clear how a resident should go about weighing in on an item advancing through council. In research for this project, we found very few resources on LFUCG's website that explain how to provide public input on legislative items broadly, or on how to provide public comment in Council meetings.

We recommend that LFUCG create a single page on its website that explains how to come to city hall, provide public comment in city meetings and virtually, tips for an effective public comment, and more.

Here's a good example: The City of San Jose, California provides a clear understanding for how to participate in various city meetings, including Council, Council Committees, Community Meetings, and Boards and Commissions on a unified public input page on their website.

3-c. Create in-chamber resources that help residents understand how Council Meetings work and the best tips for public comment.

Public meetings can be confusing for many who attend, and often, people haven't done research of how it works in advance. They can walk into a process that is at best disorienting and at worst disempowering. Providing an in-chambers resource for residents who attend meetings would make it easier for people to orient themselves during meetings. This information could also include tips for giving an effective public comment, a guide for who in government to talk to for important issues, and more.

We recommend that LFUCG create print and digital resources that are available to attendees in public meetings for public meetings work and how to participate.

3-d. Create resources that help residents understand what issues are being discussed by Council.

One of the most significant challenges described by the public in our survey was not knowing what was even being discussed by council until after the fact. While other recommendations in

our report also address this item, we think that a simple, regular public posting of the items advancing out of Council committee or regular in-person workshops could help residents understand what issues are up for debate.

We recommend that LFUCG create an up-to-date page on its website of what major items are being discussed in Council Committee, Work Sessions, and Council Meetings.

3-e. Provide a better user experience for residents in city hall.

When residents arrive at city hall, where to go and who to talk to can be confusing. In focus groups and survey data, we heard from a number of residents in greater detail that the experience of showing up to city hall is daunting for many. We think that LFUCG could make city hall much more accessible by adding signage and art to make the space more friendly. Some cities even provide a "greeter" service in city hall, which uses college interns or retirees in city hall to welcomes residents before important meetings.

We recommend LFUCG examine ways to make city hall more friendly and approachable for residents.

Here's a good example: In 2014, The City of Boston, Massachusetts created a new program paying College students to serve as greeters in city hall, helping visitors get oriented to the building and know where to go for different services and offices.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Public Survey Questions

Demographic Questions help us understand who is taking the survey and who we might be missing. Specifically, the survey asked:
- **What is your age?**
- **Which of the following races/ethnicities do you identify with?**
  - African American/ Black
  - Latino or Hispanic
  - Asian or Pacific Islander
  - Native American
  - White
  - Other (fill in)
- **Which of the following genders do you identify with?**
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-Binary
  - Other (fill in)
- **What is the highest level of education that you currently hold?**
  - Less than a high school degree
  - Completed high school or obtained a GED
  - Some college but no degree
  - Associate's Degree
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Graduate Degree
- **What ZIP code do you live in?**
- **What do you call your neighborhood?**

Basic Engagement Questions, that help us assess the respondent's current level of participation in local government. These were:
- **Do you know who your Lexington Urban County Council Member is?**
  - Yes
  - No
- **How often would you say that you engage with Lexington's City Government?**
  - Frequently
  - Sometimes - when something I care about comes up
  - I don't engage, but I would be interested in doing so!
  - I don't engage at all.
- **Can you let us know why you don't engage much with Lexington's city government?**
  - I'm not really interested in engaging.
  - City meeting times are inconvenient.

- I am too busy to participate.
- Transportation to city meetings is difficult for me.
- I don't know/am confused about how to participate.
- I don't know what issues are open for me to engage with.
- Engaging with the city is overwhelming.
- I don't think giving my opinion will make a difference.
- Other (fill in)

Extended Engagement Questions, specifically for respondents who report that they have engaged with LFUCG before. These were:
- **When you have engaged with City Government in the past, has it been about a single issue, or multiple subjects?**
  - I've engaged on a single issue
  - I've engaged on multiple subjects
- **What motivates you to engage with city government?**
  - I want to get involved in issues that directly impact me.
  - I want to get involved in issues that impact my community/neighborhood.
  - I want to get involved in issues that I think are important.
  - I want to make change in my city.
  - My job requires me to be involved in City Government.
  - Other (fill in)
- **When you've engaged which of the following ways have you done so?**
  - I've given public comment in a meeting.
  - I've directly reached out to government representatives.
  - I've engaged in direct action - protests, petitions, letters, etc.
  - Other (fill in)
- **At what types of meetings have you given public comment?**
  - Council Meetings
  - Council Work Sessions
  - Council Committee meetings
  - Task Force / Subcommittee meetings
  - Planning Commission Meetings
  - Other (fill in)
- **What types of government representatives have you reached out to in the past?**
  - Your District Council Member
  - Council Members that aren't your District CM
  - Mayor's Office Staff
  - City Department Staff
  - Other (fill in)
- **How did you reach out to them?**
  - Email
  - Phone
  - In-person meetings
  - Social Media
  - Other
- **How have you engaged in direct action in the past?**

- I've participated in protests or demonstrations
- I've led or signed petition efforts
- I've published letters to the editor or blog posts
- Other (fill in)
- **Do you feel like your options for weighing in on city issues are adequate?**
  - Yes
  - No
- **Do you want to be more engaged with city government?**
  - Yes
  - No

4 Point Assessment questions, that evaluate the current state of public input for LFUCG.

These were:
- **How much of the time do you think you can trust Lexington's city government to make decisions in a fair way?**
  - Always
  - Some of the time
  - Not often
  - Never
- **How often do you think those decisions are what is best for Lexington?**
  - Always
  - Some of the time
  - Not often
  - Never
- **How well do you understand your options to participate in city government?**
  - I understand them very well
  - I somewhat understand them
  - I barely understand them
  - I don't understand them at all
- **How seriously do you think governmental representatives take your input?**
  - Very seriously
  - Somewhat seriously
  - Somewhat not seriously
  - Not very seriously
- **How convenient are city meeting times?**
  - Very convenient
  - Somewhat convenient
  - Somewhat inconvenient
  - Very inconvenient
- **How convenient are city meeting locations?**
  - Very convenient
  - Somewhat convenient
  - Somewhat inconvenient
  - Very inconvenient

Recommended Improvement questions, that ask respondents to rank and give feedback on possible changes to the Public Input System.

- **Which of the following options do you think would improve how the city engages with residents?**
  - More ways to communicate directly with government officials
  - Providing public input/comment outside of city meetings
  - A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process
  - Earlier information about city meetings
  - A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input
  - More education options about the issues in city government
  - More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington
  - More options for virtual public input/comment
  - More language options in city communications
  - Other (fill in)
- **Which of those options would you personally use?**
  - More ways to communicate directly with government officials
  - Providing public input/comment outside of city meetings
  - A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process
  - Earlier information about city meetings
  - A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input
  - More education options about the issues in city government
  - More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington
  - More options for virtual public input/comment
  - More language options in city communications
  - Other (fill in)
- **One last question with these options... if you had to pick just one, which one would be the most helpful to you?**
  - More ways to communicate directly with government officials
  - Providing public input/comment outside of city meetings
  - A better way to track issues through the entire legislative process
  - Earlier information about city meetings
  - A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input
  - More education options about the issues in city government
  - More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington
  - More options for virtual public input/comment
  - More language options in city communications
  - Other (fill in)

Appendix 2: LFUCG Staff Survey Questions

1. Do you work for the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government?
2. Which LFUCG Division or Office do you work in?
3. How important do you think it is for the public to be able to provide input on items going before Council? (Scale from 1-5)
4. How effective do you think the current options are for the public to provide input on items going before Council? (Scale from 1-5)
5. Of the input that is typically provided, how representative do you think it is of the general public sentiment? (Scale from 1-5)
6. In general, how productive do you find public input to be for items going before the Council? (Scale from 1-5)
7. Which of these options best describes your feelings about the general public's engagement with items going before Council?
   1. I want the public to be less engaged
   2. I think the current level of engagement is sufficient
   3. I want the public to be more engaged
8. Do you think the general public wants to be more engaged with issues coming before the Council?
   1. Yes
   2. No
9. Have you ever had an item before the Council that you worked on receive public input?
   1. Yes
   2. No
10. Think about all of those items for a minute. In what ways did the public provide input on them?
    1. Public Comment in Council Meetings
    2. Public Comment in Task Force / Subcommittee meetings
    3. Public Comment in Planning Commission Meetings
    4. Emails from Residents
    5. Phone Calls from Residents
    6. Participation in Stakeholder or Community Meetings
    7. Other
11. How often would you say that public input caused an impact on the direction of your items?
    1. Frequently
    2. Sometimes
    3. Occasionally

4. Rarely

5. Never

12. Lastly, how helpful did you generally find that input to be? (Scale from 1-5)

13. Take a look at the map below. Of the four opportunities for public input, which do you think would be the most helpful for your job?

   1. Council Committee Meeting
   2. Work Session
   3. Council Meeting (First Reading)
   4. Council Meeting (Second Reading)

14. Of these four opportunities for the public to provide input, which do you think would be the most effective for residents trying to impact a change?

   1. Council Committee Meeting
   2. Work Session
   3. Council Meeting (First Reading)
   4. Council Meeting (Second Reading)

15. How much of the time do you think the public trusts LFUCG to make decisions in a fair way?

   1. Always
   2. Some of the time
   3. Not often
   4. Never

16. How often do you think the public thinks those decisions are what is best for Lexington?

   1. Always
   2. Some of the time
   3. Not often
   4. Never

17. How well do you think the public understands their options to participate in city government? (Scale from 1-5)

18. How convenient do you thin

19. k city meeting times are for the public? (Scale from 1-5)

20. How convenient do you think city meeting locations are for the public? (Scale from 1-5)

21. What do you think are the main reasons that some residents don't provide input to LFUCG?

   1. They're not interested in engaging.
   2. City meeting times are inconvenient.
   3. They are too busy to participate.
   4. Transportation to city meetings is difficult.
   5. They are confused about how to participate.
   6. They don't know what issues they can engage with.

7. They are overwhelmed by engaging with the city.

8. They don't think their opinion will make a difference.

9. Other

22. Which of the following options do you think would improve how the city engages with residents?

   1. More ways for residents to communicate directly with government officials

   2. Allow residents to provide formal public comment outside of city meetings

   3. A better way for residents to track issues through the entire legislative process

   4. Letting residents know information about city meetings

   5. A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input

   6. More education options about the issues in city government

   7. More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington

   8. More options for virtual public input

   9. More language options in city communications

   10. Other

23. One last question with these options... if you had to pick just one, which one would be the most helpful to you?

   1. More ways for residents to communicate directly with government officials

   2. Allow residents to provide formal public comment outside of city meetings

   3. A better way for residents to track issues through the entire legislative process

   4. Letting residents know information about city meetings

   5. A dedicated, full-time person in city government to assist residents with providing input

   6. More education options about the issues in city government

   7. More city meetings outside of the Government Center / away from Downtown Lexington

   8. More options for virtual public input

   9. More language options in city communications

   10. Other

24. What is your age?

25. Which of the following races/ethnicities do you identify with?

26. Which of the following genders do you identify with?

27. What is the highest level of education that you currently hold?

28. Is there anything else about public engagement you want to share with us?