

Community Budget Workshop Session Report

Summary

On January 8, 2026, the City of Santa Fe convened a Community Engagement Budget Workshop Session as part of its annual budget development process. The workshop was designed to gather resident input on funding priorities, trade-offs, and values to inform development of the proposed City budget. Participants engaged in facilitated small-group discussions and completed a series of structured exercises focused on identifying priority services, areas of concern, and considerations for balancing the budget.

Across discussion groups, participants frequently emphasized the need for affordable housing and services for unhoused residents. They also highlighted the importance of maintaining core infrastructure and basic services. Expanded and accessible transportation options were raised repeatedly. Participants described libraries, parks, and recreation as important community assets.

Participants also raised concerns about City staffing capacity. They discussed management practices. Several comments focused on the need for greater transparency and accountability in budgeting and performance reporting.

Perspectives varied across groups and individuals. Many participants expressed interest in preventative investments and continued public engagement in the budget process. This report summarizes the input received and identifies areas of alignment and divergence.

Methodology and Transparency Statement

The Budget Workshop Session was divided into ten facilitated discussion groups, each led by a City of Santa Fe employee serving as a facilitator. Facilitators used a variety of note-taking methods to capture participant comments, including written lists, discussion summaries, and exercise-based responses.

This report is based on facilitators' transcribed notes. Because facilitation styles and documentation methods varied, the input should be understood as qualitative and not statistically representative. Comments do not necessarily reflect group consensus unless explicitly noted by the facilitator.

No weighting or ranking was applied to qualitative discussion input. Themes were identified by reviewing all facilitator notes and grouping related comments. Some comments were unclear, incomplete, or tangential. These comments are retained in Appendix A for transparency but are not emphasized in the thematic findings unless similar input was expressed across multiple groups.

Participants were invited to attend from across the city, and 91 individuals registered for the workshop. A count of actual attendance was not taken. Attendance was lower than registration, which may have been influenced by cold and snowy conditions on the evening of the workshop.

Overview of Participant Engagement

The Community Engagement Budget Workshop Session was convened to inform the Governing Body's upcoming budget goal-setting discussions and to gather public input early in the annual budget development process. The workshop was designed as an informational and exploratory engagement opportunity rather than a decision-making forum.

Participants engaged in a series of exercises designed to prompt discussion of City services, funding priorities, and trade-offs. These exercises included identifying the departments or service areas most in need of funding, discussing budget-balancing scenarios, and reflecting on broader values and processes related to City budgeting.

Participants were informed that no additional resources were anticipated for the upcoming budget year and that maintaining current service levels may require difficult trade-offs.

The input reflects both individual perspectives and group discussions. In several cases, facilitators recorded differing priorities expressed by individuals within the same group. Many participants demonstrated familiarity with City services and expressed interest in how budget decisions are made, monitored, and communicated.

Participant Exercise One

Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

Activity Overview

As part of the Budget Workshop Session, participants completed the “Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most” exercise. Participants were asked to review a list of City service categories and assign each category a ranking based on perceived importance. Rankings were defined as 1 = most important, 2 = less important, and 3 = least important. Participants were also provided an “other” option to write in additional priorities not included on the original list. The exercise was designed to identify participant priorities and inform future budget discussions.

Summary of Results

Overall, the results indicate that participants prioritized affordable housing, public safety, and essential human services, with several write-in responses reinforcing these themes. Affordable housing received the highest number of “most important” rankings. Public safety services, including fire, police, and emergency management, also ranked highly.

Write-in responses most frequently emphasized transit, water, maintenance, and behavioral health–related services, suggesting additional concern for core infrastructure and health supports not explicitly listed among the predefined categories.

Lower overall priority continued to be assigned to arts and culture, redevelopment, and recreation, which received comparatively higher numbers of “least important” rankings.

Weighted Scoring Method

To allow for comparison across categories, rankings were analyzed using a weighted scoring method:

Rank 1 (Most important) = 3 points

Rank 2 (Less important) = 2 points

Rank 3 (Least important) = 1 point

Table 1. Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities
Participant Rankings by Service Area

Category	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Total Responses	Weighted Score
Affordable Housing	49	13	3	65	173
Fire	40	7	9	56	151
Youth & Family Services	31	23	3	57	142
Police	37	7	12	56	137
Streets	29	23	4	56	137
Services for the Unhoused	34	17	5	56	131
Emergency Management	29	18	7	54	130
Planning & Land Use	22	23	14	59	126
Parks	20	27	10	57	124
Library	23	21	11	55	122
Senior Services	17	29	9	55	118
Economic Development	14	28	17	59	115
Recreation	17	17	21	55	106
Redevelopment	9	23	24	56	97
Arts & Culture	8	20	29	57	93
Transit (write-in)	12	2	0	14	40
Water (write-in)	6	0	0	6	18
Maintenance (write-in)	4	0	0	4	12

Category	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Total Responses	Weighted Score
Mental Health (write-in)	2	1	0	3	8
Student Assistance Program (write-in)	1	0	0	1	3
Alcohol and Drug Recovery (write-in)	1	0	0	1	3
ESD/Trash (write-in)	1	0	0	1	3
Accessibility (write-in)	1	0	0	1	3

Thematic Findings: Exercise One

Emphasis on Housing Stability

Affordable housing remained the clear top priority, receiving the highest number of “most important” rankings by a wide margin. This result indicates strong participant concern about housing affordability and availability and suggests it is viewed as foundational to broader community stability.

Strong Support for Public Safety

Fire, police, and emergency management services consistently ranked among the highest priorities, reflecting broad support for maintaining or strengthening public safety and emergency response functions.

Focus on Core Human and Behavioral Health Services

Youth and family services, senior services, services for the unhoused, and mental health–related write-in responses point to a strong emphasis on direct support for

vulnerable populations. Write-in mentions of alcohol and drug recovery further reinforce concern for behavioral health services.

Infrastructure and Basic Services as Emerging Themes

Write-in responses for transit, water, maintenance, and solid waste services highlight participant interest in fundamental infrastructure and service delivery. Transit, in particular, received a relatively high number of “most important” rankings among write-ins, suggesting it may warrant further consideration in future engagement or budgeting exercises.

Lower Priority for Arts, Recreation, and Redevelopment

Arts and culture, recreation, and redevelopment continued to receive higher proportions of “least important” rankings. This pattern suggests that, when asked to make trade-offs, participants prioritized essential services and immediate needs over discretionary or long-term investment areas.

Participant Exercise Two

Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices

Activity Overview

As part of the Budget Workshop Session, participants completed Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices. The purpose of this activity was to prompt discussion about how service levels might be adjusted under budget constraints. Participants were asked to consider potential increases or decreases to selected service areas and to reflect on the trade-offs that may be required to balance the budget.

During the workshop, facilitators adapted the Exercise Two instructions in real time to support discussion. In some groups, facilitators discussed an option to maintain current service levels, and in others, an option to hypothetically assign additional funding was raised to prompt consideration of trade-offs. These adaptations were intended to encourage engagement but were not applied uniformly across all groups. As a result, the exercise results should be interpreted as reflecting general, directional preferences rather than precise or standardized funding choices.

The exercise was designed to encourage consideration of fiscal limitations, including the possibility of maintaining current service levels, reducing funding in

some areas, or identifying how expanded services might be supported through reductions elsewhere or additional revenues. Responses reflect directional preferences and discussion prompts rather than detailed funding decisions.

Participants were asked to assign one of four values to each service category:

- \$: Assign any additional available funding to this area
- +: Increase funding
- =: Maintain current funding levels
- -: Decrease funding

For each service category, participants could indicate whether they would be interested in increased or decreased funding. Services without a marked increase or decrease were understood to represent satisfaction with current funding levels. Participants could assign only one response per category. Responses reflect individual preferences and do not represent consensus or formal recommendations.

Summary of Results

Results from Exercise Two indicate patterns in how participants approached potential service changes under budget constraints. Participants more frequently indicated interest in increased funding for affordable housing, youth and family services, streets, services for the unhoused, and senior services. Transit, included as a write-in category, also received a relatively high number of responses indicating interest in expansion.

Responses also indicate areas where participants more frequently marked potential reductions, including arts and culture, redevelopment, and emergency management. These responses reflect directional preferences rather than specific funding proposals.

Mixed or divided responses were observed for economic development, libraries, parks, fire, and police. Arts and culture, redevelopment, and emergency management received the most responses, indicating a preference for reduced funding.

Across categories, relatively few participants selected the option to maintain funding at current levels, suggesting that many participants used the exercise to express directional preferences rather than support the status quo.

**Table 2. Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget
Participant Preferences by Service Area**

Service Area	Assign Extra Funds (\$)	Increase (+)	Maintain (=)	Decrease (-)
Affordable Housing	19	36	0	4
Arts and Culture	0	11	2	41
Economic Development	4	25	1	24
Redevelopment	7	9	0	37
Planning and Land Use	3	23	6	18
Library	4	25	2	19
Recreation	7	18	1	22
Senior Services	7	26	2	13
Youth and Family Services	8	36	2	3
Emergency Management	5	12	2	29
Services for the Unhoused	11	27	2	9
Fire	5	16	8	13
Police	4	19	7	16
Parks	14	18	1	14

Streets	12	30	2	4
Transit (Write-In)	7	10	0	1

Thematic Findings: Exercise Two

Affordable Housing and Services for Unhoused Residents

Affordable housing emerged as the most consistently raised priority across all facilitator groups. Participants emphasized housing affordability, prevention strategies, mental health and addiction services, and expanded alternative response units.

Infrastructure and Basic Services

Participants identified infrastructure maintenance as a critical priority, including roads, drainage, sidewalks, snow removal, and water and sewer systems, with particular concern for the South Side and Airport Road areas.

Transportation and Mobility

Affordable public transportation, expanded routes, improved reliability, and safer pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure were consistently raised.

Libraries, Parks, and Recreation

Libraries and parks were viewed as essential community assets, with strong support for maintenance, facility improvements, and expanded recreation opportunities for youth and families.

Public Safety and Emergency Response

Fire and emergency services were identified as foundational. Participants expressed mixed views on police funding and a strong interest in expanding non-police alternative response units.

City Staffing, Management, and Accountability

Participants raised concerns about staffing capacity, turnover, reliance on contractors, and the need for performance-based budgeting and transparency.

Budget Process, Transparency, and Community Engagement

Suggestions included mid-year budget reviews, participatory budgeting, clearer communication, and district-level engagement.

Summary of Facilitator Discussion Themes

Facilitator notes reflect a wide range of perspectives shared across discussion groups. While comments varied by group and individual, several topic areas were raised repeatedly in both general discussion and structured exercises.

Exercise One provides the clearest indication of relative service priorities based on participant rankings. Exercise Two highlights areas where participants expressed more frequent interest in increased or decreased funding. Together, the exercises illustrate areas of alignment and tension but do not capture detailed funding trade-offs or willingness-to-pay decisions.

Participants frequently discussed affordable housing and services for unhoused residents, including housing affordability, homelessness prevention, and related mental health and substance use services. Several comments referenced staffing capacity and service delivery challenges associated with these issues.

Infrastructure and basic services were also commonly mentioned. Participants raised concerns about road conditions, drainage, sidewalks, water and sewer systems, facility maintenance, and City cleanliness. Specific geographic areas, including the South Side and Airport Road, were referenced in multiple groups.

Transportation and mobility emerged as a recurring topic. Participants discussed public transit affordability, route coverage, reliability, and accessibility, as well as pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Several comments referenced the need for additional buses, bus stops, and related amenities.

Participants also discussed parks, libraries, and recreation as community assets. Comments addressed maintenance needs, facility conditions, access for residents with limited resources, and opportunities for youth and families.

Public safety and emergency services were raised across groups. Fire and emergency services were frequently described as foundational. Perspectives on

police services varied, with some comments supporting current funding levels and others expressing interest in alternative or non-police response models for mental health-related calls.

Several facilitators recorded comments related to City operations, staffing, and management. These included concerns about staffing levels, turnover, reliance on contractors, training, project timelines, and management practices. Participants also raised questions about transparency, accountability, and performance-based budgeting.

Participants shared input related to the budget process and public engagement, including interest in clearer budget information, mid-year budget reviews, participatory budgeting approaches, district-based engagement, and ongoing opportunities for community input.

Finally, some facilitators recorded comments related to economic development and local business support, including entrepreneurship, redevelopment of vacant buildings, workforce housing, and balancing economic activity with community needs.

Use of Input

The input summarized in this report reflects a range of perspectives shared by participants during the Community Budget Workshop Session. The themes presented are based on qualitative facilitator notes and are not intended to represent consensus or relative priority beyond the structured exercise results. The findings are intended to inform ongoing budget development and future public engagement efforts. Detailed facilitator notes are provided in Appendix A to support transparency and allow readers to review the input in its original, recorded form.

Appendix A: Facilitator Notes

The following facilitator notes reflect participant input as recorded during the January 8, 2026, Community Budget Workshop Session. Notes are presented in a consistent format for readability. Language has not been substantively edited, and any inconsistencies reflect the nature of real-time notetaking. The notes capture individual comments, group discussion points, and exercise responses and do not represent consensus unless explicitly stated.

Interpretive Guidance: The presence, frequency, or phrasing of comments in this appendix should not be interpreted as a measure of consensus, priority ranking, or level of support beyond what is explicitly stated in the main report.

Facilitator 1

General Comments and Discussion

- Arts and culture perceived as overfunded; Lodgers' Tax promotes tourism
- Increase funding for police, parks, and roads
- Laws and ordinances not consistently enforced
- Concerns about homelessness, drug use, and lack of mental health resources
- Need for more staff to assist people experiencing homelessness and substance use
- Deferred maintenance and poor infrastructure
- Cleaning arroyos, medians, and parks
- Overpopulated households and lack of childcare centers
- Abandoned homes and homes sinking into arroyos
- Need for more snowplow crews; private roads need better maintenance
- South Side needs more attention, particularly roads and housing
- Housing affordability concerns; raise minimum wage; more affordable builds
- Transportation challenges; need more buses, bus stops, and drivers
- Desire for green areas and shade at bus stops
- Need for more engagement opportunities on the South Side
- Job opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals and people in recovery
- Concerns about City leadership, management, and hiring practices
- Projects take too long; repairs should be done correctly the first time

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Roads
- City cleanliness and presentation
- Transportation (free buses, more bus stops)
- Substance abuse and recovery support
- Affordable housing
- Grants for recovering addicts
- Safer spaces for struggling families
- Education and inclusion of immigrant populations
- Better design and engineering
- Faster repair timelines
- Training for City employees

Facilitator 2

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Language accessibility for all communications
- Affordable housing and homelessness prevention
- Reducing commuter impacts; community over second homes
- Housing vouchers, tiny homes, and rent control
- Unhoused student assistance and eviction prevention
- Investment in social infrastructure and Housing Trust
- Education on homeownership
- Recreation center scholarships and free family access
- Code Blue temperature thresholds and alternative response grants

- Shelter capacity concerns and cost effectiveness
- Revising HUD definitions of homelessness
- Sanctioned camping areas
- Safe injection sites and accountability for transitional housing

Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices

- Free recreation access for families receiving assistance
- Wellness stipends
- Housing for City workers, teachers, and police

Facilitator 3

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Participant 1: Basic services, safety, fire, emergency, library, economic development
- Participant 2: Housing, economic development, unhoused services
- Participant 3: Affordable housing, recreation, emergency management, fire

General Comments and Discussion

- Interest in creative budgeting approaches
- Importance of retaining talented staff
- Concerns about politically appointed positions
- Transparency issues related to fee-in-lieu funds
- Risk of losing federal grant funding
- Affordable housing identified as a primary concern

Facilitator 4

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Poor road conditions on Airport Road
- Affordable housing for healthcare workers
- Park conditions and bathroom maintenance
- Library access for residents without resources
- Need for proactive services for unhoused residents
- Rethinking police role in mental health response
- Support for Alternative Response Units

General Comments and Discussion

- Desire for increased community engagement
- Interest in mid-year budget reviews
- Aligning the budget with City values
- Parks and Recreation maintenance needs
- Affordability challenges
- Preference for clearer ranking exercises

Facilitator 5

General Comments and Discussion

- Street maintenance and cleaning
- Transportation affordability and access
- Youth and family mental health and addiction services
- Recreation activities for children
- City cleanliness and appearance
- Streamlining government operations

- Stronger long-term management and planning
- Reducing reliance on contractors; improve staff retention
- Training access and use of technology
- Public outreach and internships

Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices

- Enterprise funds to reduce cross-subsidization
- Timely and appropriate use of grants
- Identifying new revenue sources

Facilitator 6

Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices

- Reduced funding from economic development and Spanish Market
- Maintain arts and culture and tourism funding
- Increase library funding
- Maintain fire and emergency funding
- Support for free public transit

General Comments and Discussion

- Value of in-person engagement
- District-based convening by councilors
- Poor conditions on South Side and Airport Road areas
- Interest in district-based budget priorities

Facilitator 7

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Facility maintenance issues (GCCC, libraries)
- Investment in neighborhood parks and amenities
- Modernization of senior services
- Emergency management integration
- Housing and unhoused services
- Transportation expansion
- Redevelopment of vacant buildings
- Flexible neighborhood planning and land use

Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices

- Willingness to pay more for housing and parks
- Rental and emergency assistance
- Multi-jurisdictional investment funds
- Neighborhood stabilization and improvements
- Scheduled bulk pick-ups

Facilitator 8

General Comments and Discussion

- Support for local businesses and entrepreneurship
- Business registration modernization
- Planning and land use reform
- Public transit prioritization and convenience
- Bike and pedestrian infrastructure
- Street maintenance and civic pride
- Police staffing concerns

- Reassessment of unhoused policies
- Senior services integration
- Airport connectivity

Facilitator 9

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Affordable housing
- Infrastructure (water, sewer, libraries)
- Transit access and safety
- Arts and culture
- Recreation for families
- Services for unhoused residents
- Fire and police as foundational services
- Water quality

Exercise Two: Balancing the Budget: Making Tough Choices

- Reduce airport funding
- Increase bus services
- Reduce planning and land use funding
- Increase youth and family services

General Comments and Discussion

- Participatory budgeting
- Long-term vision and strategy

Facilitator 10

Exercise One: Setting Budget Priorities: What Matters Most

- Accountability for promises and key performance indicators
- Questions regarding insurance premium revenue
- Police funding perceived as adequate
- Performance-based budgeting
- Leadership engagement
- Fee collection oversight
- Parks restroom facilities and maintenance

Appendix B: Correspondence Submitted Following the Workshop

Appendix B includes correspondence submitted to a Community Budget Workshop Session facilitator following the workshop. The materials are provided for transparency and additional context. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Santa Fe, workshop facilitators, or workshop participants. The correspondence was not discussed during the workshop and was not part of the facilitated exercises.

The email and letter are presented as received. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation have not been edited. Personal contact information has been redacted for privacy.

Email Transmittal

From: Jim Siebert

To: Workshop Facilitator

Email address redacted

Subject: City accounting

Date: Friday, January 9, 2026, 9:25 AM

Michael,

Pleasure meeting you. Attached is the letter to the editor that was published a few days ago. My concern is a lack of proper accounting for impact fees and fee in-lieu-of fees for affordable housing, and more recently, fees associated with the mansion tax. These funds need to be tabulated correctly, including identification of the source, the amount collected, and how and where the funds are distributed.

There is currently too much opportunity for fraud and misuse of these funds due to poor accounting.

Jim Siebert

Accounting for fee-in-lieu of

The recent accounting error by the City of Santa Fe related to the allocation of City funds for affordable housing has brought to light other possible errors involving monies collected from apartment developers through the “fee in-lieu-of” option used to offset required affordable housing in apartment projects. There should be a thorough review, available for public inspection, of monies collected under the “fee in-lieu-of” ordinance since its inception.

As a former planning consultant, I was aware of payments that were in the range of one million dollars. Given the amount of money collected through this fee, there should be a detailed and accurate accounting of the money collected on an annual basis, including identification of the development from which it was collected.

For other impact fees collected under state enabling legislation, state law requires the following:

“As part of the annual audit process, a municipality or county shall prepare an annual report describing the amount of any impact fees collected, encumbered, and used during the previous year by category of capital improvement and service area identified as provided for in Section A of this section.”

While affordable housing is exempt from impact fees under state enabling legislation, it seems reasonable to provide the public with similar procedures and information for other fees collected by the City. Given the sums of money collected during periods of high apartment construction activity, it is essential to provide a description of monies collected through the “fee in-lieu-of” option and the amount

of money received from the independent Housing Trust, which then distributes those funds for affordable housing in the community. The monies collected and the monies transferred to the Housing Trust should be equal.

James Siebert