

Appendix 3: Detailed Discussion of Questionnaire Data

There were 437 responses to the Facilitation of Community Choices Committee questionnaire, which was available to all members of the Amherst community. The questionnaire was available on-line at www.amherstchoices.org and also on paper. There were stacks of questionnaires available at the Jones Library during the month of October alongside the FCCC budget display, paper questionnaires were handed out at every public forum and presentation, and they were downloadable/printable from our web site. In addition, both our handout and our questionnaire were included in the packet sent to all Town Meeting members in mid-October. Information about our work and an invitation to participate in the feedback process was posted on area blogs (including school blogs) and sent via email to numerous constituencies throughout Amherst. The FCCC made every attempt possible to reach as many respondents as possible, but only a fraction of our community responded. Since the Committee did not collect demographic information on the questionnaire, it is not possible to say whether or not the questionnaire respondents are representative of the community at large. At the same time, it is also not possible to conclude that the questionnaire results are NOT representative of Amherst. At best, the conclusions drawn from the questionnaire results can be said to represent the opinions of those who did respond.

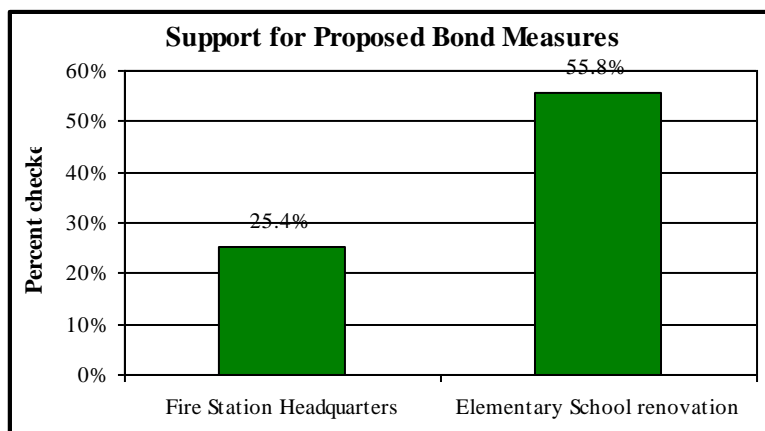
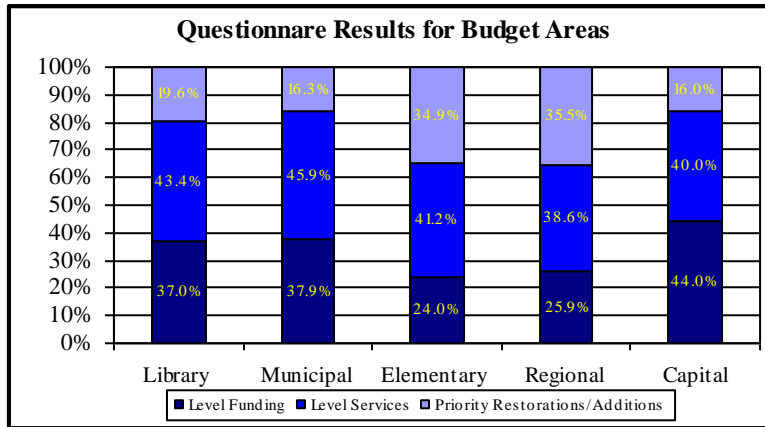
Responses were submitted between September 30, 2008 and November 13, 2008, after which the collection period was closed. Of these responses, 134 arrived on paper (30.7%) while another 303 (69.3%) were submitted on-line. All of the data that arrived on-line was useable for analysis. Some of the data submitted on paper, however, were not. The paper responses were hand-entered into an Excel database, and in some cases, it was not clear which option a respondent was marking, so no data were entered for that field. In addition, some of the paper responses had answers submitted for Question 6 (potential gap-closing measures) that were inconsistent with the question, and thus were not entered. This question asked respondents to rank, from one to six, the six potential gap-closing measures. Thus, each respondent should have used a rank of one only once, a rank of two only once, etc. When ranks were used more than once, therefore, the data were not entered.

Of the 437 responses, 239 (54.7%) contained a response to Question 8—the open-ended question regarding a respondent’s idea for fixing Amherst’s budget gap. These responses were discussed throughout the body of the text and were also presented verbatim in Appendix 3.

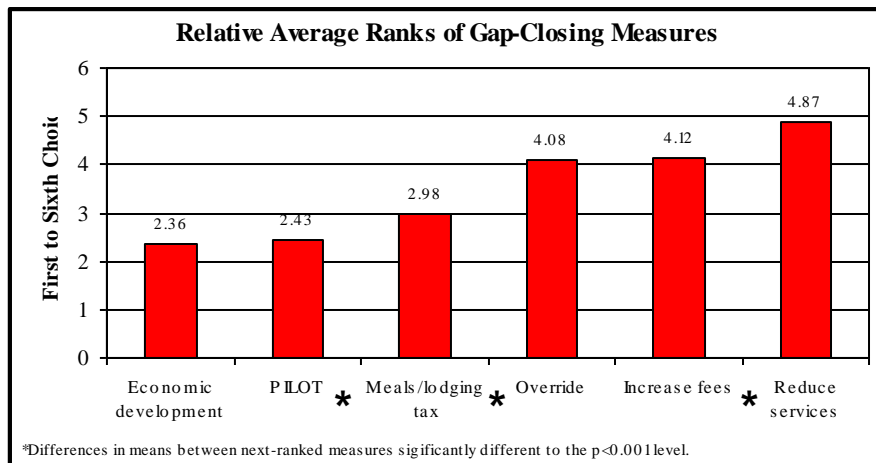
This appendix presents additional analyses of the quantitative data beyond the summary statistics presented in the body of the report. All of the raw data are stored in the Town Manager’s Office and are available both in Excel and SPSS format.

Summary Results

Overall, the respondents to the survey preferred a Level Services budget for the Library (43.4%), Municipal (45.9%), Elementary (41.2%), and Regional (38.6%) budgets and a Level Funding budget for Capital (44.0%). For both school budgets there was also a strong leaning toward Priority Restorations/Additions (34.9% for Elementary and 35.5% for Regional).

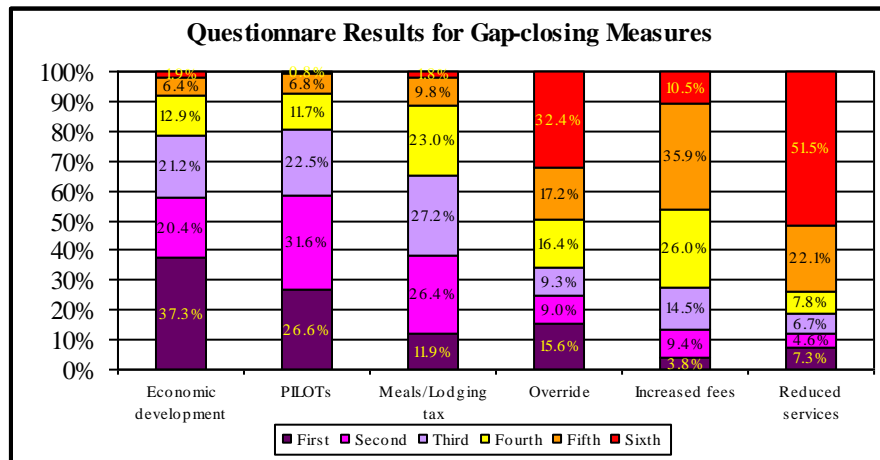


While only 25.4% of respondents indicated support for a bond measure to fund a new fire station headquarters, 55.8% indicated support for a bond measure to renovate the elementary schools.



The highest ranked potential gap-closing measure was Economic Development (average rank—2.36), followed closely by PILOTS (2.43). An increase in the Meals/Lodging Tax ranked 2.98. The rank for Override and Increased Fees were nearly tied with ranks of 4.08 and 4.12, respectively. Ranked last,

with an average rank of 4.87, was Reduce Services/Expenditures, exclusively⁶. There are some statistically significant differences between means for some measures. The Increase in Meals/Lodging Tax was significantly different than the measures ranked above or below it. In addition, there is a statistically significant difference between Increased Fees and Reduce Services/Expenditures. No significant differences between means exist between Economic Development and PILOTs (which effectively share an overall rank of being the second choice option) or between Override and Increased Fees (which effectively share an overall rank of being the fourth choice option).



The individual rankings for all six potential gap-closing measures can be seen above. For Economic Development, 37.3% chose it as their first-choice option and 78.9% of respondents ranked it their first, second, or third choice option. Over half of the respondents ranked Economic Development, PILOTs, and increased Meals/Lodging Tax as one of their top three options while fewer than 40% of respondents ranked an Override, Increased Fees, and Reduced Services as one of their top three options. The of respondents (51.5%) ranked Reduced Services/Expenses as their sixth choice, followed by the 32.4% that ranked an Override as their sixth choice.

Analysis by Date

A number of additional analyses were performed on the data in order to better understand the responses from the public. Since our public engagement process was occurring simultaneously with the unfolding national economic crisis, our Committee wondered whether the timing of the response affected the results. Accordingly, the data were analyzed based on response date, with the date of October 15th being chosen as the date of interest. By October 15th, it was decided, the full measure of both national impact (i.e. the massive financial bailout) and state impact (i.e. Governor Patrick's announced cuts) would have been fully communicated to the public.

An analysis by date revealed no statistically significant difference based on date of response. Those that completed the questionnaire on or after October 15th were just as likely to recommend a Level Services budget for the Library, the Municipal Government, and both the Elementary and Regional Schools and

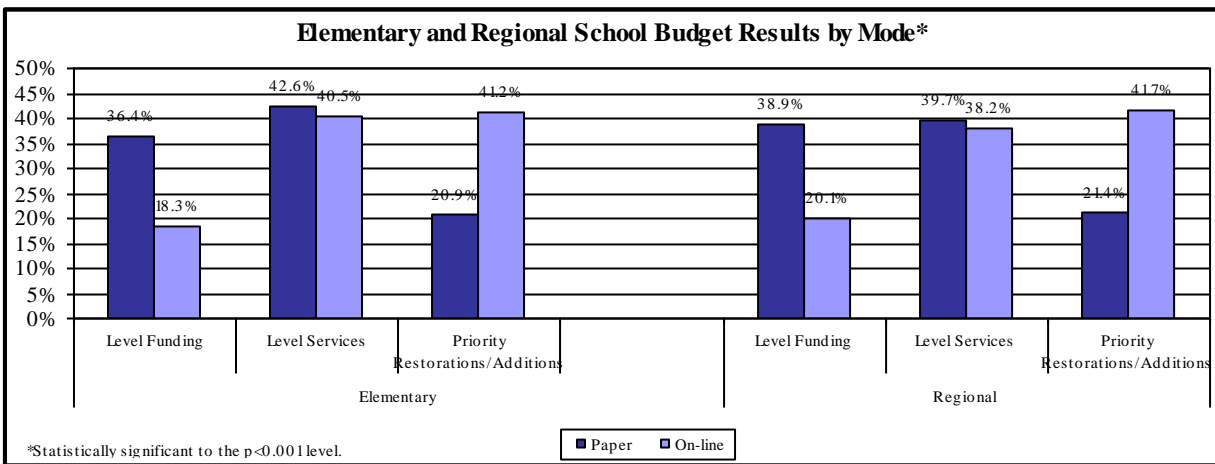
⁶ In hindsight, the Facilitation of Community Choices Committee realizes that the inclusion of the word "exclusively" in this choice alone most likely, by definition, contributed (in part) to the low rank of this option. No other choice in the suite of options required respondents to consider it to the exclusion of all other choices. Thus, it might have been the case that ANY "exclusive" choice would have naturally been ranked last as most open-ended comments mention a combination of a multiple types of reductions and/or revenue-generating ideas to close the budget gap. Clearly, the public (and indeed this Committee) favors a balanced approach to solving Amherst's budget crisis.

as likely to recommend Level Funding for the Capital budget as were those who completed the questionnaire prior to October 15th. They were no statistically significant differences in willingness to support the two proposed bond measures based on date of questionnaire completion. Finally, the relative ranks of the potential gap-closing measures remained the same, regardless of the date of questionnaire completion.

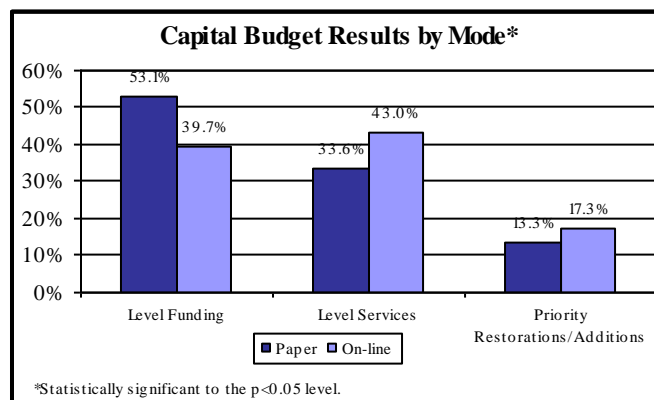
While date of completion is not an exact measure (especially for those surveys which arrived on paper and were date-stamped according to their arrival date at Town Hall), nor is the date of October 15th a definitive date on which the national and state financial situation changed, it is a good proxy. To allow for some variation in date of impact, the data were also analyzed with October 14th as the date of interest, but the results were similar to those when using the October 15th date.

Analysis by Mode of Response

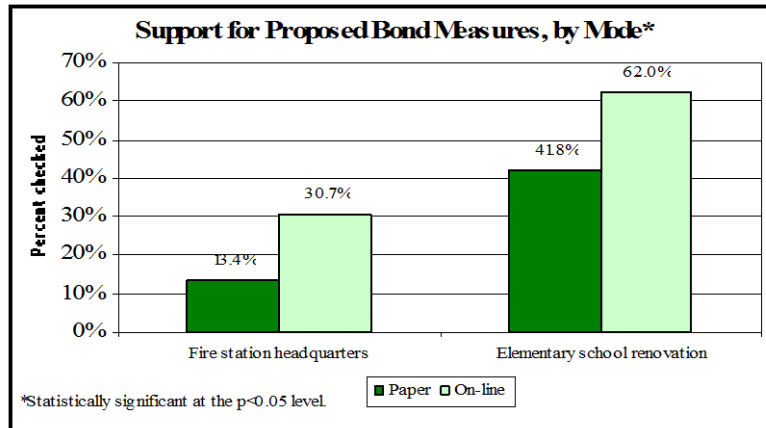
There were, however, some significant differences in responses by mode of response, which should be kept in mind when soliciting information in this way from the public in the future. Respondents who submitted their thoughts on paper were more likely to favor a Level Funding scenario for both the elementary and regional schools than were on-line respondents, and less likely to favor a Priority Restorations/Additions scenario for both budgets.



Similarly, respondents who submitted on paper were more likely to favor a Level Funding Capital budget and less likely to request either a Level Services or a Priority Restorations/Additional budget for Capital spending.



Respondents answering on paper were also less likely to indicate support for either of the two proposed bond measures.



Relative Ranking of Potential Gap-closing Measures, by Mode of Response		
	Paper	On-line
Economic development*	2.78	2.20
PILOTs	2.41	2.44
Increased Meals/Lodging tax*	2.70	3.08
Override	4.26	4.01
Increased fees	4.15	4.11
Reduce services/expenditures	4.61	4.97

*Statistically significant to the p<0.01 level.

With respect to the potential gap-closing measures, the mode of response resulted in statistically significant differences for both Economic Development and for Increased Meals/Lodging Tax. For those who responded on paper, PILOT had the highest rank (2.41) followed by Increased Meals/Lodging Tax (2.70) and then Economic Development (with a rank of 2.78). On-line respondents, however, ranked Economic Development highest (2.20) followed by PILOTs (2.44) and Increased Meals/Lodging Tax (3.08). The relative rankings of both an Override and Increased Fees were opposite depending on mode of response, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Relationship Between First-choice Gap-Closing Measure and Resulting Gap

The Committee found some degree of dissonance between the fact that the of respondents supported a Level Services budget for all but the Capital budget (where Level Funding was preferred) and the fact that the highest-ranked potential gap-closing measure was Economic Development. A measure that, at best, would generate a moderate increase in revenue and then not immediately. To examine this more closely, a value equal to the projected gap in FY10 was assigned to each individual budget scenario. Thus, all Level Funding scenarios were given a value of \$0, the Level Services scenarios were given

values, and the Priority Restorations/Additions scenarios were each given their values as projected by the area budget managers for FY10.

Mean FY10 Gap by First Choice Gap-closing Measure		
	Number	Mean gap
Economic development	132	\$3.1M
PILOTs	95	\$2.6M
Increased Meals/Lodging tax	40	\$2.9M
Override	58	\$4.1M
Increased fees	13	\$2.2M
Reduce services/expenditures	26	\$0.4M

To a certain extent, there is some degree of dissonance between scenario choice and first-choice gap-closing measure. Increased Fees is a potentially low-impact gap-closing measure, but those who ranked that choice their first (admittedly, only 13) had a mean average gap in FY10 of \$2.2M, well beyond the scope of what could be raised through increased fees. Similarly, the 132 people who ranked Economic Development number one had a resulting FY10 budget gap of \$3.1M—more than the currently projected \$2.7M gap. An even larger mean gap (\$4.1M) was seen among the 58 respondents who ranked an Override as their first choice, but at least we can assume that those who ranked an Override as number one would be willing to vote for one and thus increase revenues significantly and immediately. Similarly, there was only a \$0.4M mean FY10 gap for those who ranked Reduce Services/Expenditures as number one. Clearly, in this case, there is a direct correlation between the mean gap and the preferred method of closing the gap.

Budget Choices

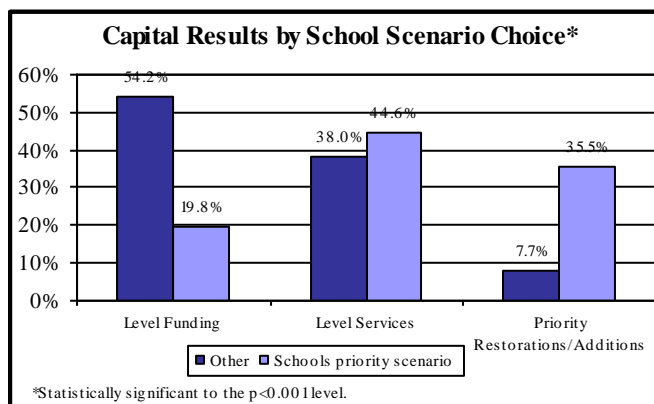
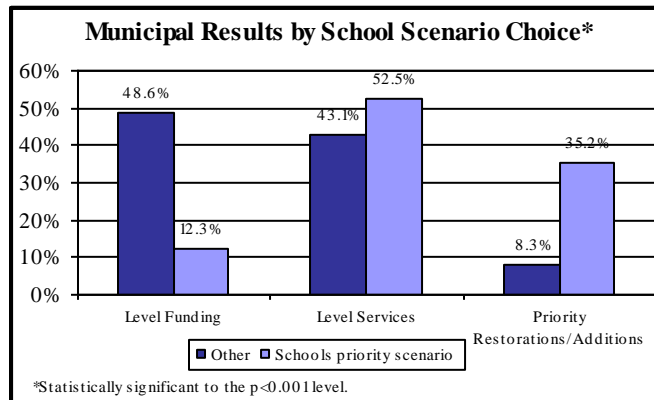
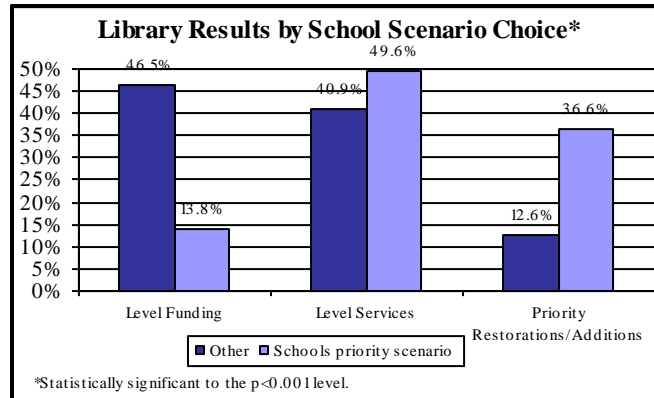
Early on in our public outreach program, the possibility was raised that individual respondents might “just check Priority Restorations across the board.” In response to that issue, the table below illustrates the number and percent of respondents who checked all of one type of scenario. It was clearly not the case that most people checked one scenario for all five budget areas. Instead, 70.9% provided a mixed response based on individual budget areas.

Scenario Choice Among Respondents		
	Number	Percent
All Level Funding	60	13.7%
All Level Services	37	8.5%
All Priority Restorations/Additions	22	5.0%
Mixed scenario response	310	70.9%
No response to these questions	8	1.2%

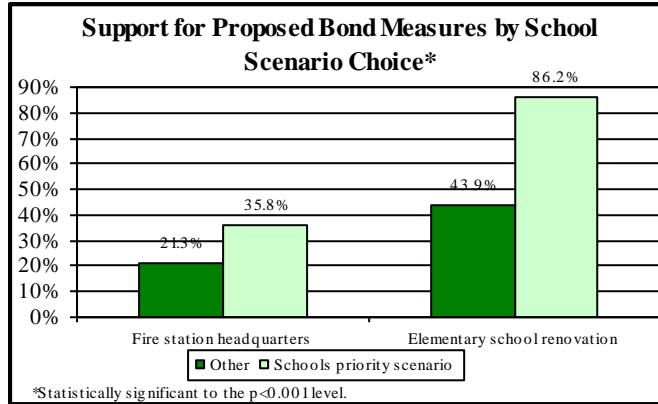
Analysis of Priority Restorations/Additions for Schools

The two areas of the budget for which respondents leaned toward Priority Restorations/Additions budgets were both the Elementary and the Regional Schools. In total, 132 respondents favored this scenario for both these budget areas. Because these two areas represent the of Amherst’s budget, an analysis of the data by this characteristic was conducted.

The analysis shows that respondents who chose Priority Restorations/Additions for both the Elementary and Regional budgets are statistically different than those who chose a mix of other budget scenarios for the schools. Those who chose the Priority scenario for the schools were also more likely to favor a Priority scenario for the Library, the Municipal Government, and Capital budgets.



They were also more likely to support both proposed bond measures and 86.2% of them indicated support for the proposed elementary school renovation.



In addition, respondents who chose Priority Restorations/Additions for both school budgets were significantly different with respect to their chosen potential gap-closing measures. Among these respondents, an Override ranks third, compared to a rank of fifth (rounded) for those who chose a mix of other options for the school budgets. On the other hand, they ranked both Increased Fees and Reduce Services/Expenditures higher than did respondents who chose a mix of other options for the school budgets. This suggests that a portion of the Amherst community both supports a Priority scenario for both school budgets but is also willing to pay for it in the form of increased property taxes. Even so, however, an Override still ranked below Economic Development and PILOTs although not far behind Increased Meals/Option tax as the top three choices.

	Other	Schools priority scenario
Economic development	2.38	2.33
PILOTs	2.38	2.53
Increased Meals/Lodging tax	3.00	2.92
Override*	4.52	3.09
Increased fees*	3.93	4.56
Reduce services/expenditures*	4.59	5.51

*Statistically significant to the p<0.001 level.