

# City of Mercer Island

## City Budget Survey Summary Report

May 2006



# Purpose and Methodology

- ◆ The purpose of the survey was to help the City understand voter priorities, evaluate the City's performance in a variety of service areas, and establish baseline measurements to track changes in these figures over time.
- ◆ This survey is intended to be a "tracking" survey, based on the content of a 2004 survey conducted by EMC. When possible, figures have been compared with results from the 2004 Budget Survey, and a previous 2002 EMC voter survey about the Community Center.
- ◆ Four hundred and two (402) interviews were conducted among registered voters in the City of Mercer Island for the 2006 survey.
- ◆ The margin of error for the 2006 and 2004 overall results is  $\pm 4.9$  points. The 2002 survey has a  $\pm 5.7$  point margin of error (300).
- ◆ Trained, professional telephone interviewers calling from a central, monitored location conducted the interviews during the evening and weekend hours of April 18 - 20, 2006.
- ◆ Results were weighted when necessary to accurately reflect the demographics of voters on Mercer Island.

## Key Findings

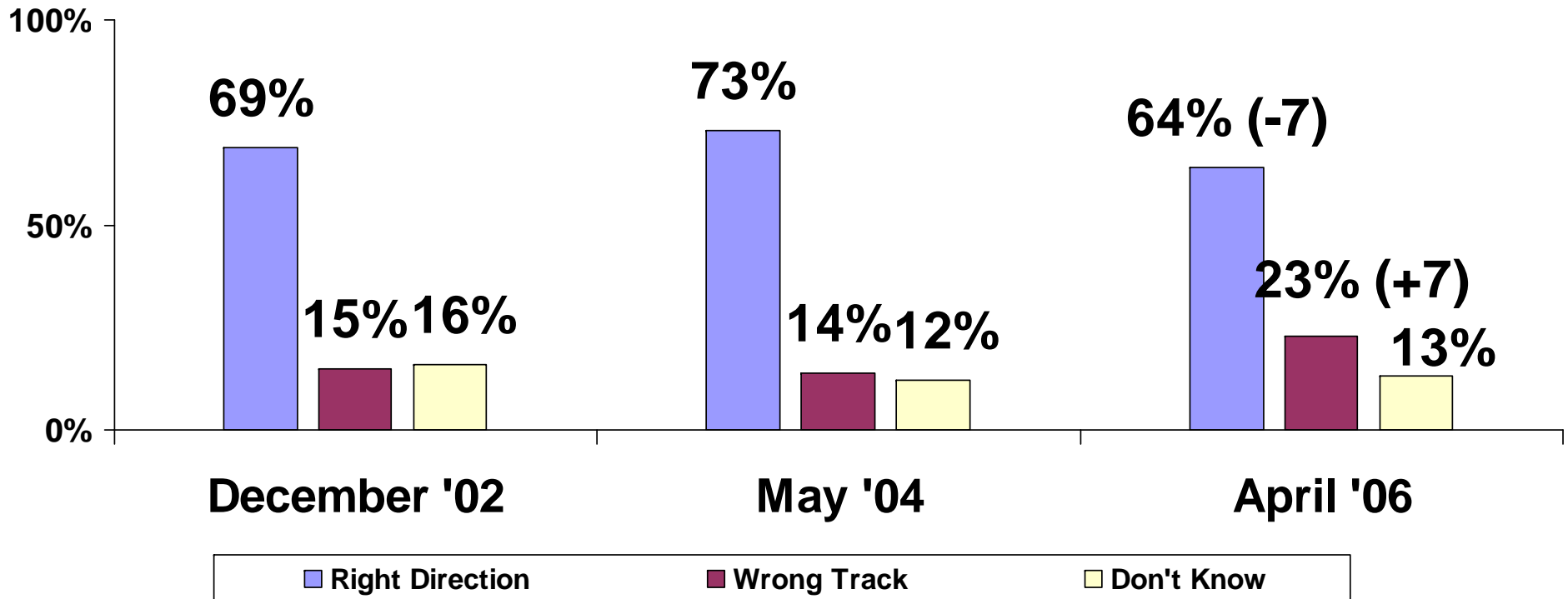
- 1. Voters trust the City to spend tax dollars responsibly, a rating that has improved since 2004.**
- 2. Voters have few concerns about City finances.**
- 3. Traffic, transportation, and overdevelopment concerns are prevalent among Island voters and have grown since 2004. They have had the largest impact among North End voters.**
- 4. Voters are more likely than in 2004 to think taxes overall and their property taxes are “about right”.**
- 5. A strong majority of voters are in favor of the city enforcing its rules to regulate property owners, and disagree that the City unfairly restricts how they use their property.**
- 6. The vast majority of voters that have experienced the City’s permitting were satisfied with the service they received.**
- 7. Voters are now divided in the abstract on whether taxes should be cut or increased to keep up with services. But the “informed” gap, once they learn how much this costs, has grown more in favor of increasing taxes to maintain services.**

# General Issue Environment

## Right Direction / Wrong Track

Q4 – Do you feel things on Mercer Island are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

### Right Direction / Wrong Track



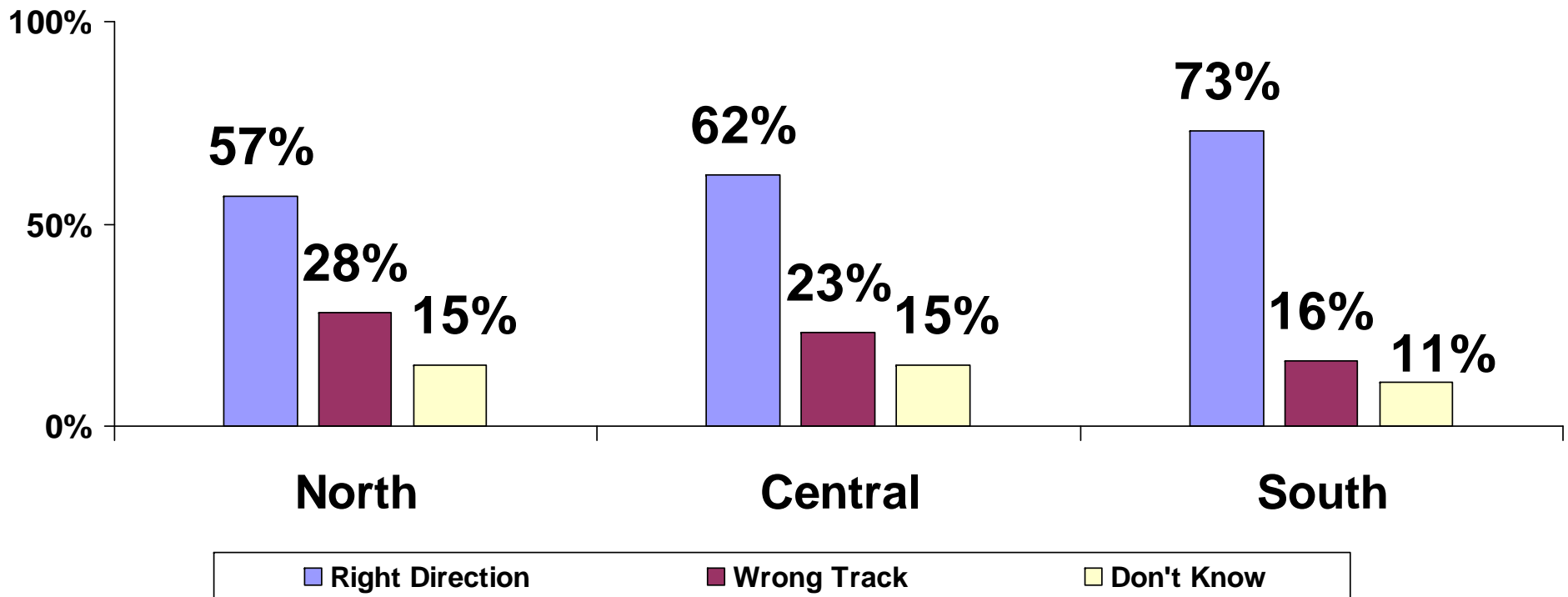
The 2006 figures are lower than the previous two surveys, and have declined a net 14 points since 2004. Despite this, only a quarter (23%) of voters feel that things on the Island are “on the wrong track”.

# General Issue Environment

## Right Direction / Wrong Track by Area

Q4 – Do you feel things on Mercer Island are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

### Right Direction / Wrong Track

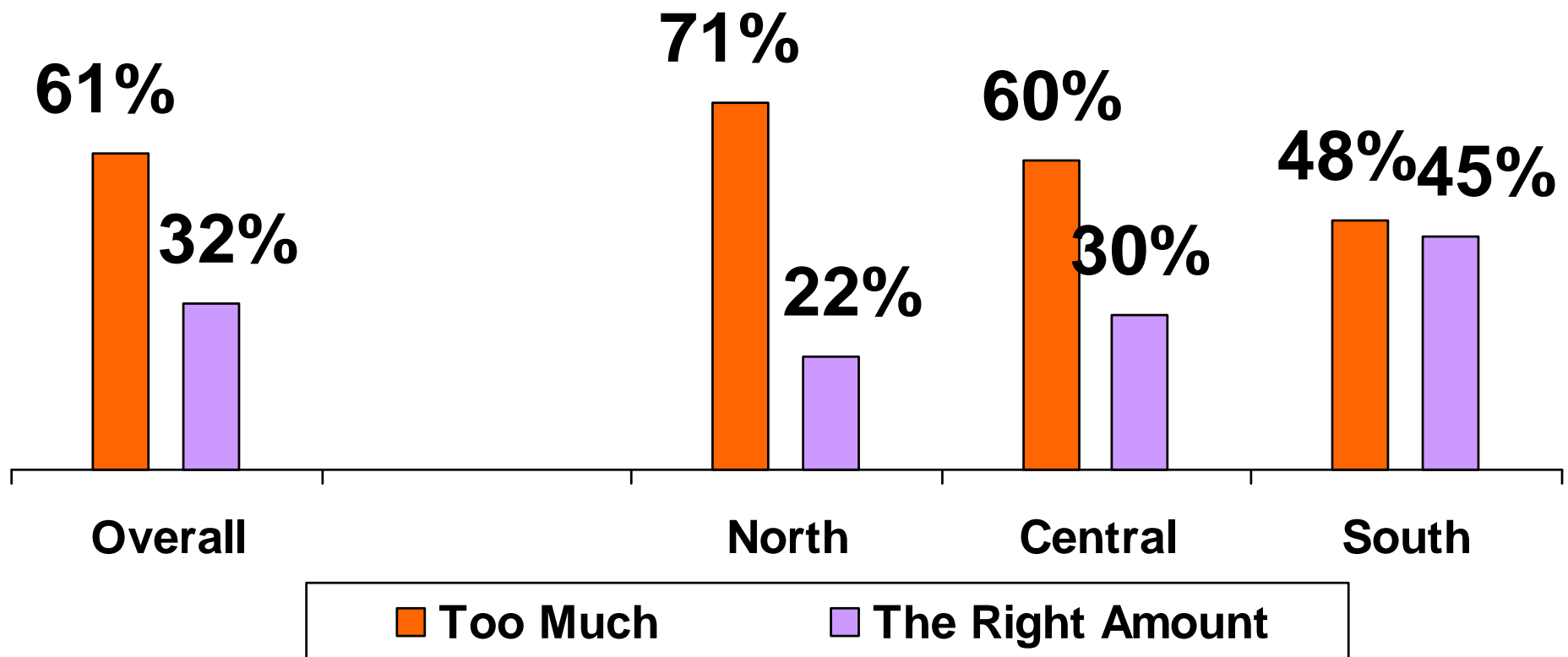


This chart compares the general outlook of voters based on geography. While opinions in South and Central Mercer Island are similar to the 2004 figures, opinion of voters in the North have declined significantly

2004 North: 73% Right / 16% Wrong / 10% DK.

# Development on the Island

Q50. Has there been \_\_\_ amount of development on the Island?



Voters in the North Island are the most likely to say there has been too much development on the Island.

# Most Important Problem

## 5. What do you think is the most important problem facing Mercer Island today?

|                                | <u>2004</u> | <u>2006</u> |       |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Overcrowding/Overdevelopment   | 23 %        | 28%         | ↑ 5%  |
| Transportation/Traffic         | 14 %        | 24%         | ↑ 12% |
| Education                      | 15 %        | 7%          | ↓ 8%  |
| High Taxes/High Cost of Living | 10 %        | 6%          | ↓ 4%  |

Concerns over traffic and transportation increased by 12 percentage points since 2004, well outside the margin of error.

# What are the priorities?

## Priority of items tax dollars could be spent on

2006

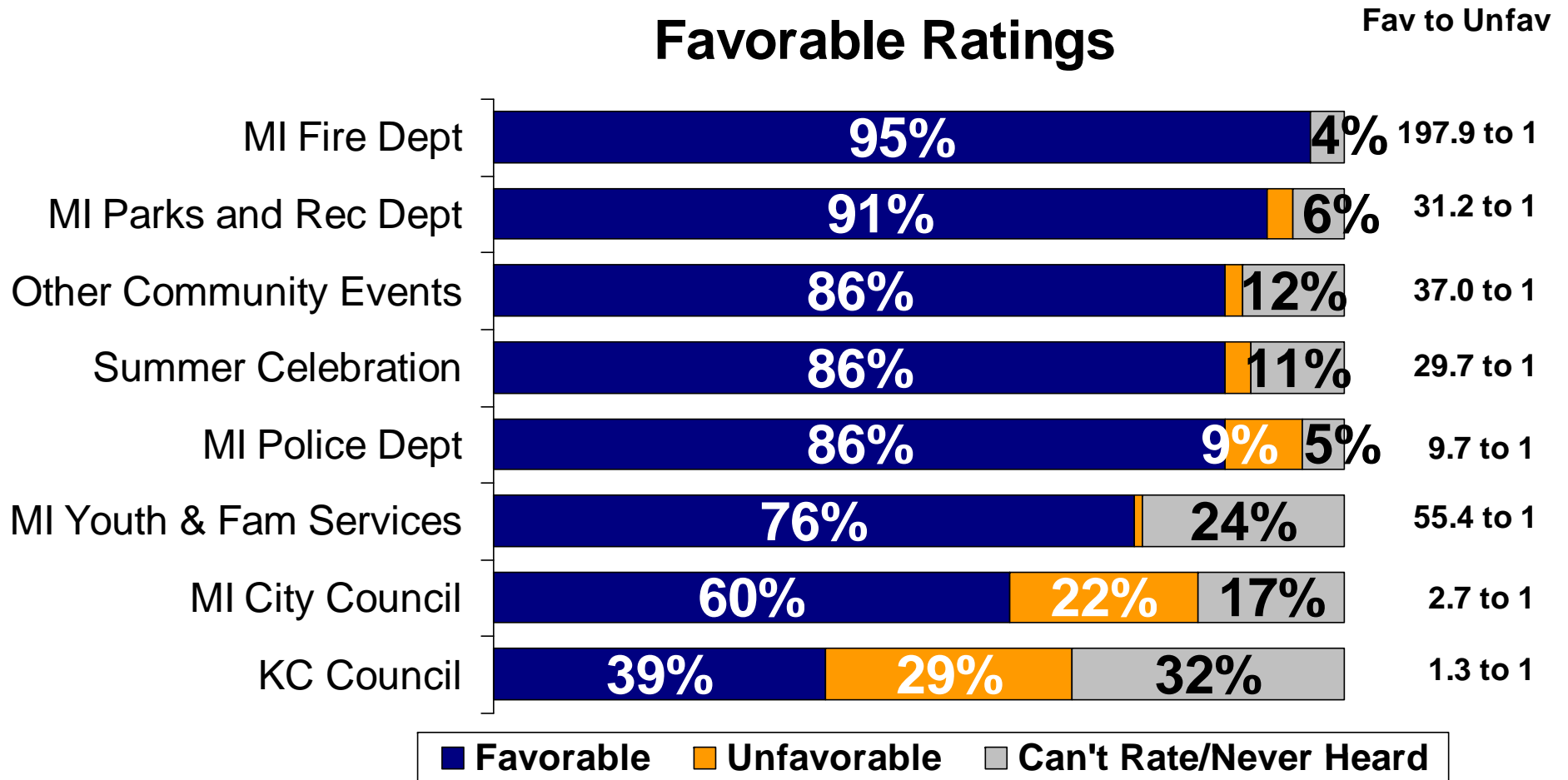
| Rank | Item  | 2004 | 2006 |
|------|---|------|------|
| 1    | Ensuring prompt fire and medical aid call response          | 6.62 | 6.55 |
| 2    | Preventing crime and protecting the community               | 6.32 | 6.27 |
| 3    | Maintaining roads and sidewalks                             | 5.52 | 5.75 |
| 4    | Maintaining parks, trails, and open space                   | 5.47 | 5.59 |
| 5    | Keep police in touch w/school thru resource officers & DARE | 5.44 | 5.46 |
| 6    | Promoting traffic safety                                    | 5.44 | 5.44 |
| 7    | Providing recreation programs for families w/children       | 5.23 | 5.27 |
| 8    | Providing recreation programs for seniors                   | 5.09 | 5.19 |
| 9    | Social services, mental health, temp crisis clothing/food   | 4.99 | 5.03 |
| 10   | Resolving permit and construction disputes fairly           | 5.02 | 4.93 |
| 11   | Processing building & constr permits in a timely manner     | 4.86 | 4.69 |

Only two items (9 and 10) switched positions since 2004.

Mean rankings for all items stayed within or were just outside the margin of error; in other words, voter priorities on the issues the City could spend tax dollars on has not changed.



# Favorable Ratings

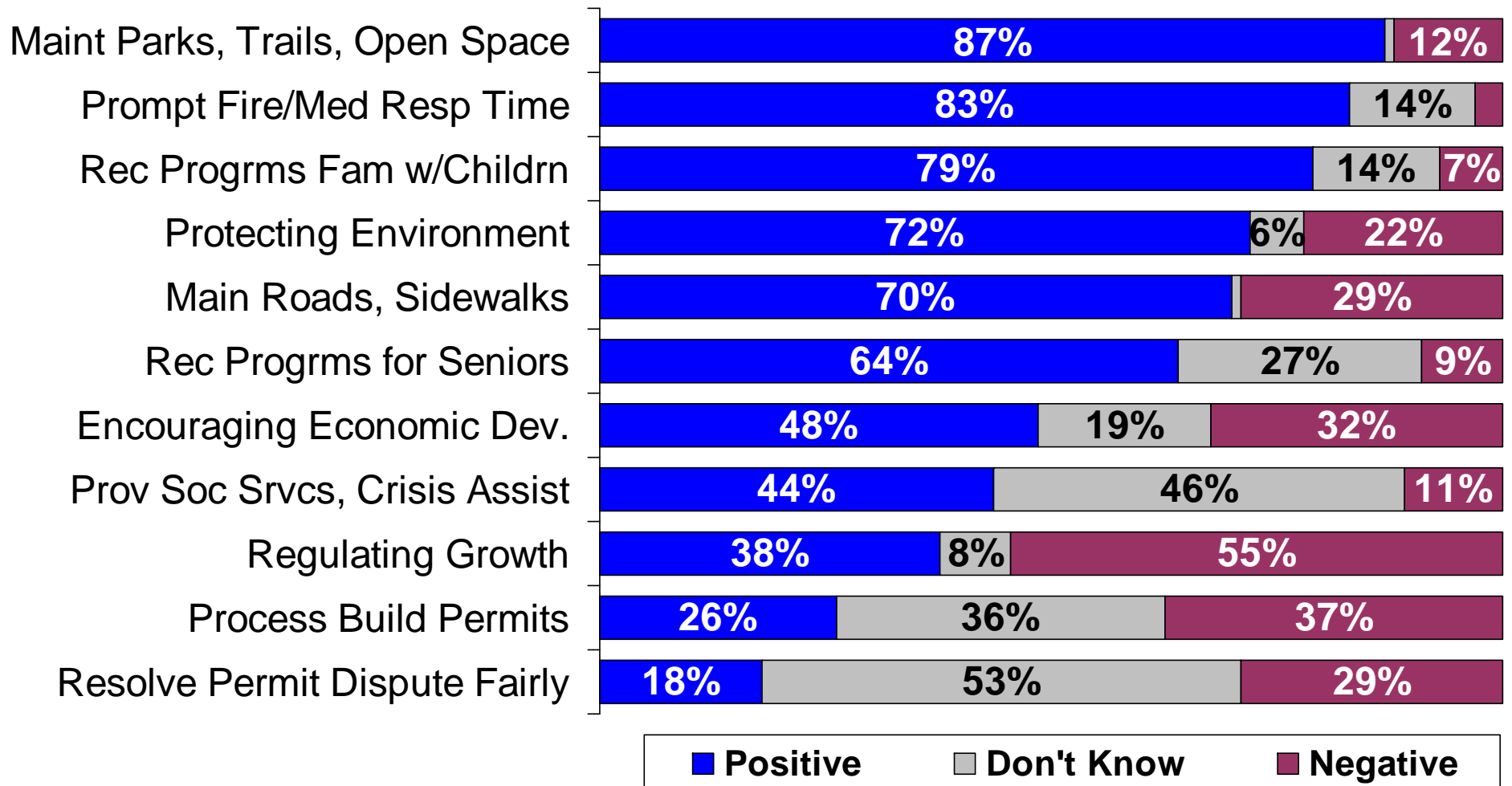


**Ratings for the City Council are still solid, while ratings for other City agencies and events continue to be outstanding.**

**Favorable ratings on these items have remained stable or improved since 2004.**

# City Job Ratings

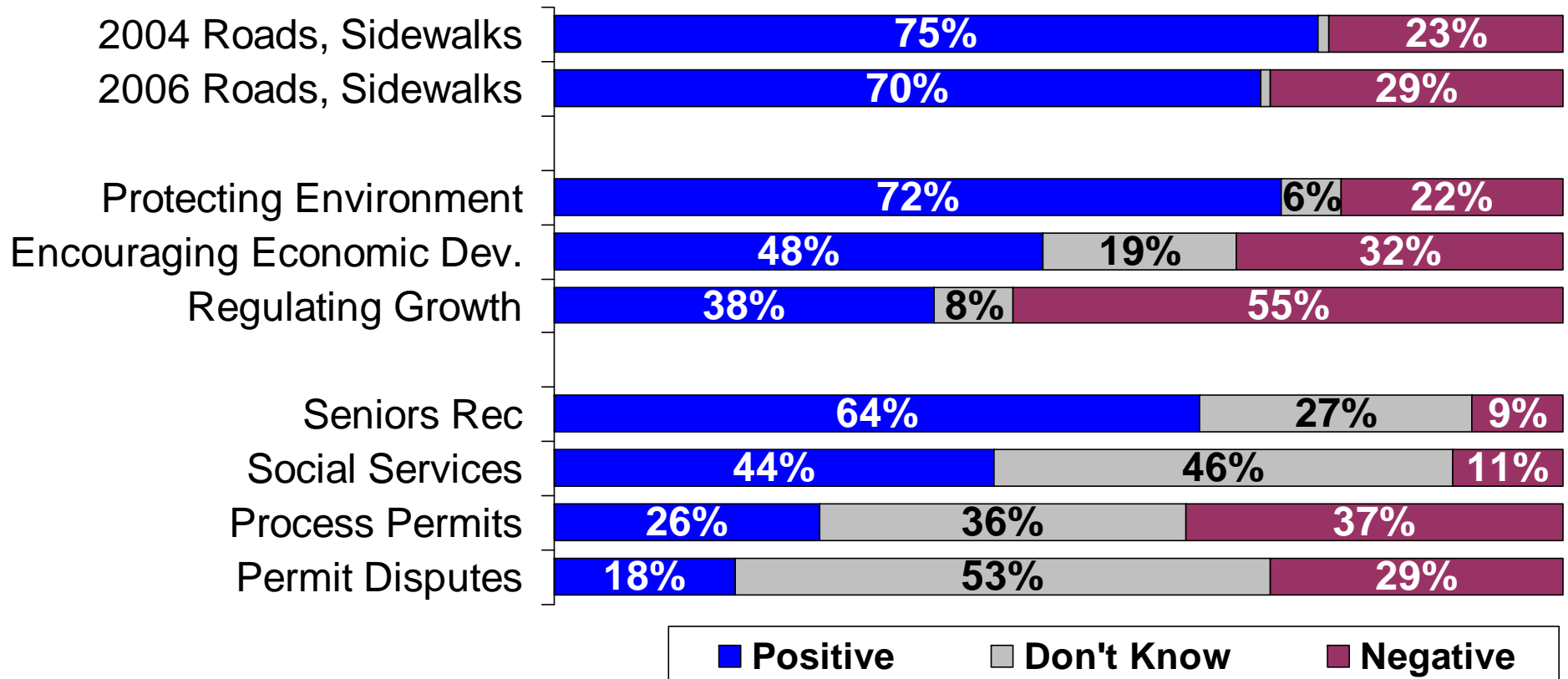
Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing...



All items remained steady or improved from the 2004 figures except maintenance for roads and sidewalks.

# City Job Ratings – Movement, New Figures, and DK

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing...



Drop for Roads/Sidewalks is a net 11 points, though still overwhelmingly positive.

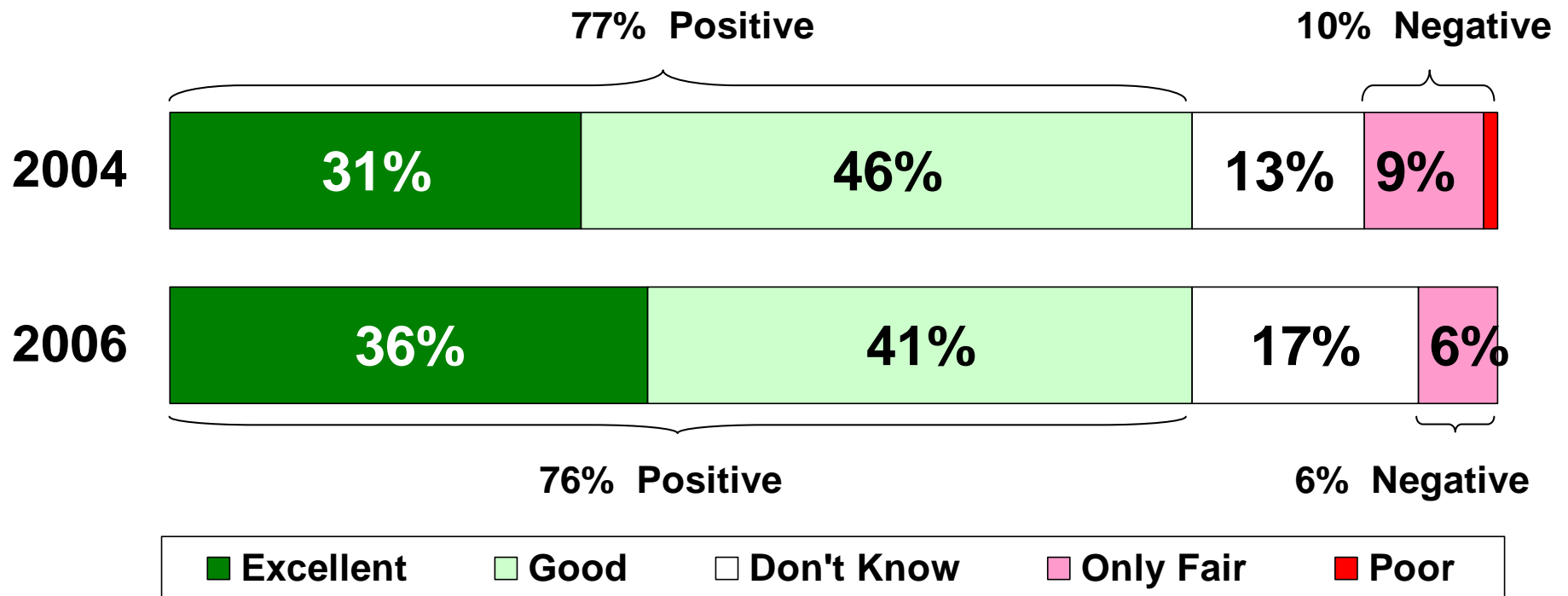
The three center items are new. Voters give the City strong ratings environment, moderate ratings economics, and negative ratings on regulating growth.

The bottom four items have high levels of “don’t know” responses.

# City's Financial Health

How would you rate the overall financial health of the City of Mercer Island?

## MI's Financial Health

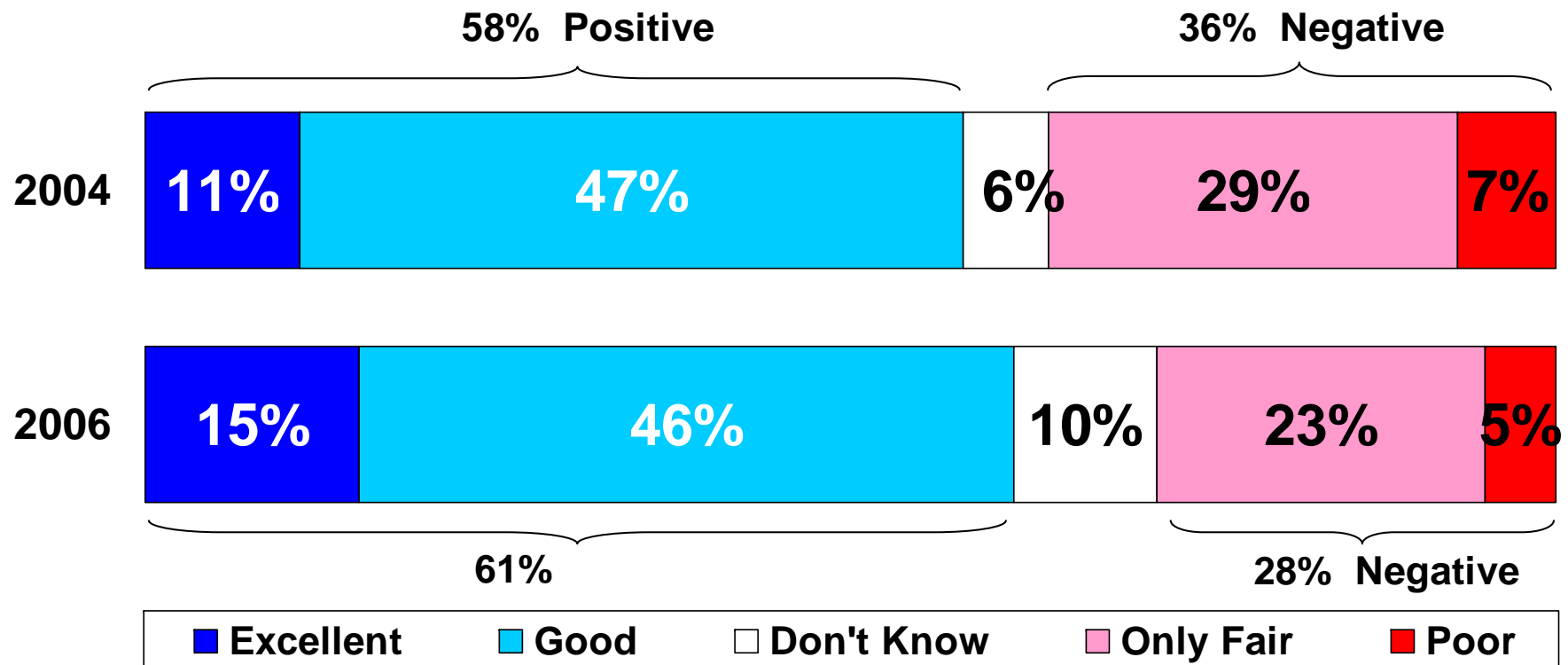


Voters overwhelmingly rate Mercer Island's financial health positive. This measurement has improved since 2004 figure, with 5 additional percentage points moving to "Excellent".

# City Using Tax Dollars

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, how would you rate the job the City of Mercer Island is doing using tax dollars responsibly?

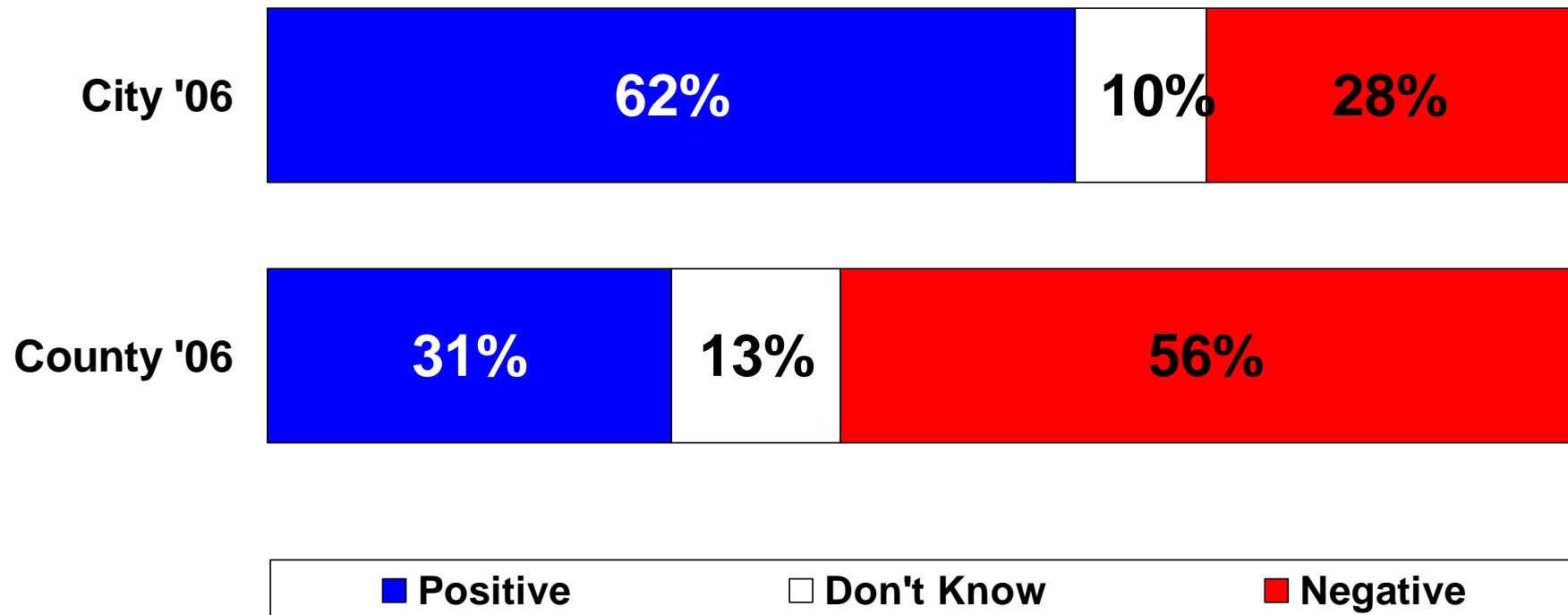
## City Using Tax \$ Responsibly



A majority of voters continue to say the City is doing a good job using tax dollars responsibly. This figure has improved a net 12 percentage points since 2004.

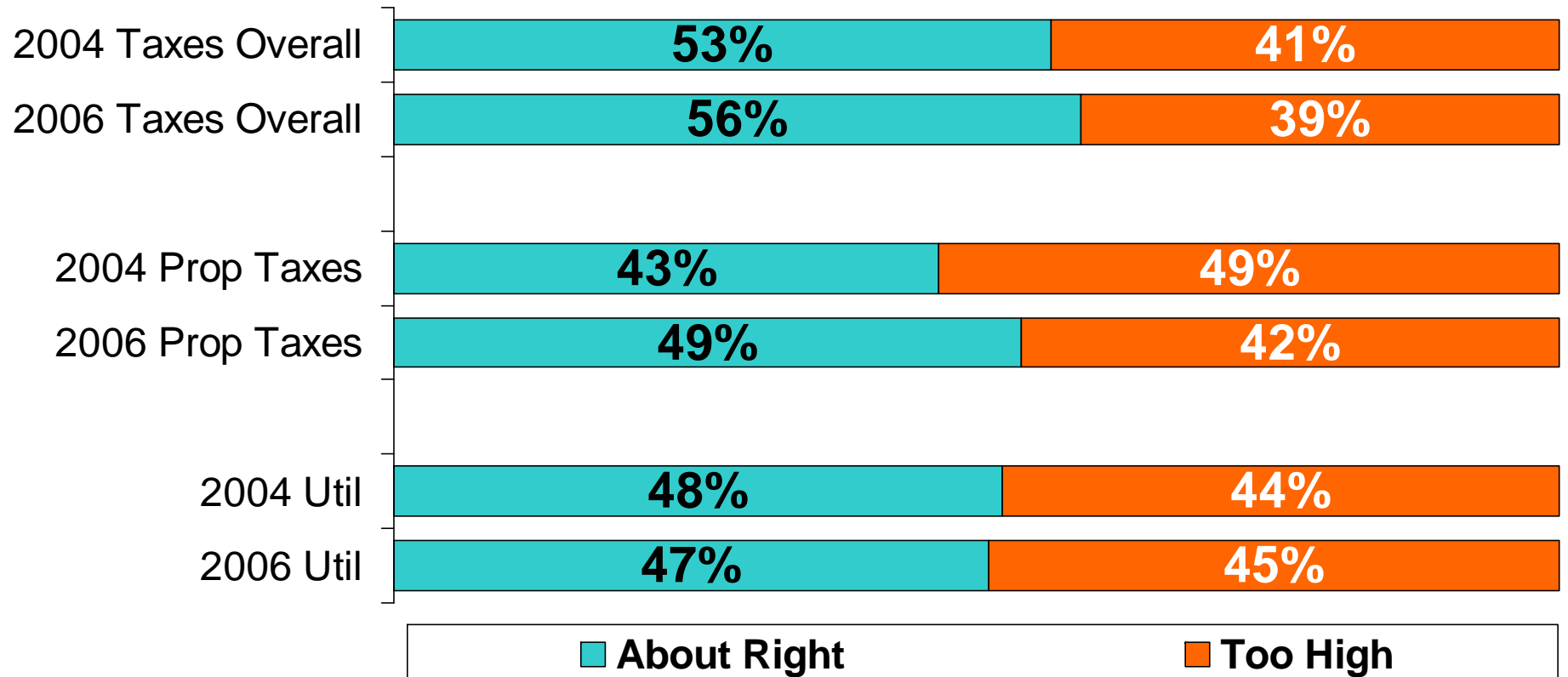
# City versus County Using Tax Dollars

## City versus County Using Tax \$ Responsibly



**Voters are much more inclined to think the City is more responsible in using their tax dollars than King County.**

# Taxes and Rates

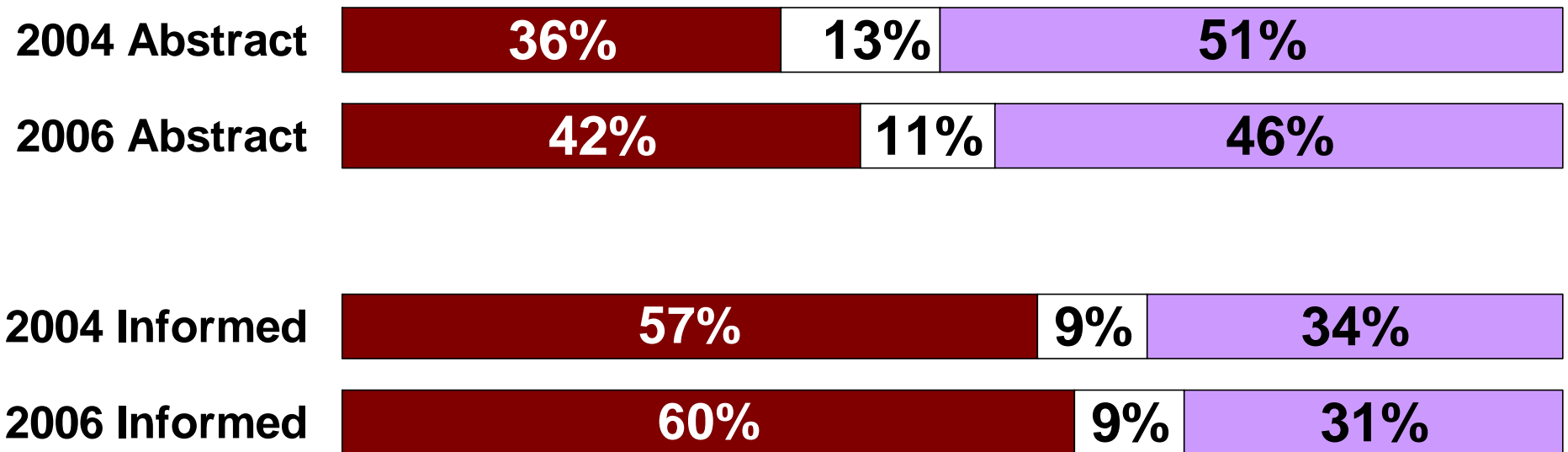


**Voters are more likely to believe property taxes and taxes overall are “about right”; property taxes moved towards “about right” by a net 13 percentage points.**

**Utility ratings remain unchanged.**

# Which should the City Do?

## If you had to choose for the City



■ Increase taxes to maintain services   □ DK/Oth   ■ Taxes same & cut services

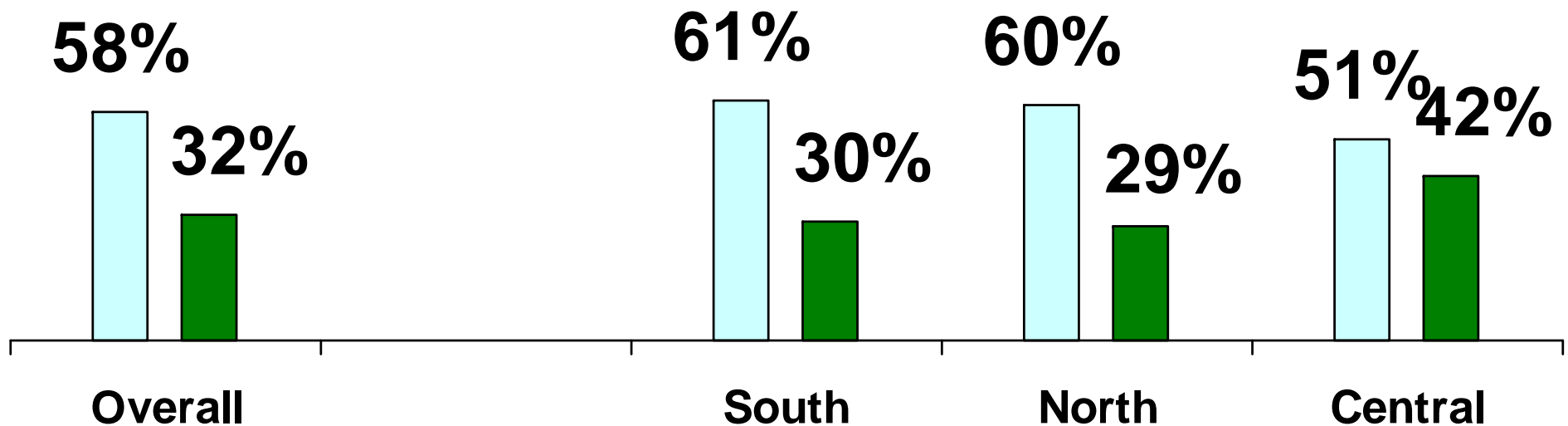
Voters are now evenly divided on the level of taxation in the abstract, that is, without being told how much it costs to increase taxes to maintain services.

As in 2004, a strong majority of voters think taxes should be increased to maintain services once they learn how much it costs.



# Rights of Property owners and City Rules

Q51. Which comes closest to your view?

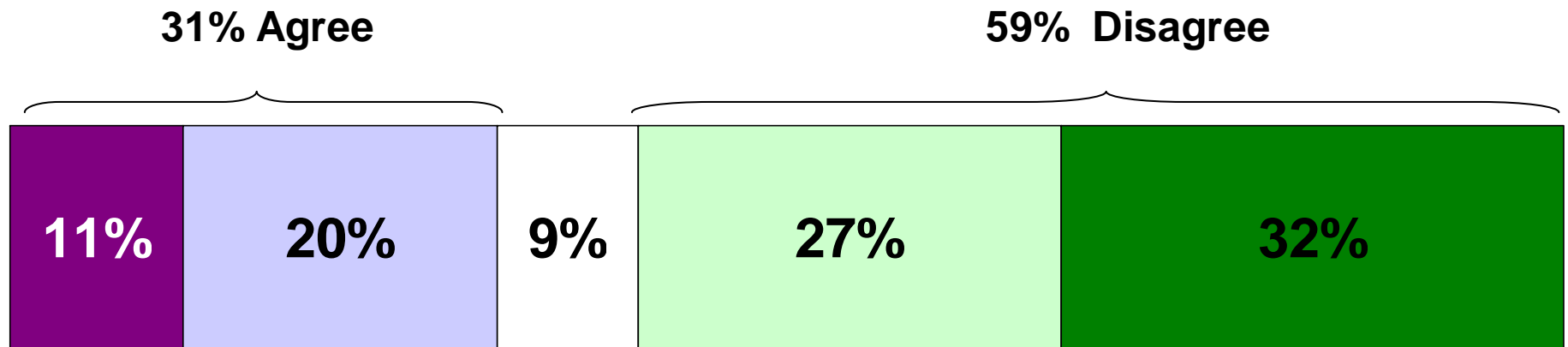


- Enforce City rules and regulate prop owners to protect env and oth prop owners
- City protect rights of prop owners to do what they want w/their property

A majority (58%) of voters think the City should enforce its rules and regulate property owners to protect the environment and other property owners. A third (32%) think the City should protect the rights of property owners to do what they want with their property.

# Personal Property Experience

**Q52. Thinking about your own experience, I'd like to read you the following statement. The City of Mercer Island unfairly restricts how I use my property.**



■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ DK ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

**In this question, voters are read a statement and asked if they agree or disagree, and how strongly. A majority of voters disagree with this statement.**

**A third (32%) strongly disagree, indicating intensity on the “disagreeing” side.**

# Permitting and Satisfaction

**Last 5 years, work on your home that required an MI permit?**

Yes (N=157) **39 %**  
 No/DK 61 %

**Require permit from City for work to be completed?**

Yes (N=138) **84 %**  
 No/DK 15 %

**77% Satisfied**

**23% Not Satisfied**



■ Very Satisfied   
 ■ Somewhat Satisfied   
 ■ Not Very Satisfied   
 ■ Not At All Satisfied

These three questions are designed to investigate voter experience with City permitting. The vast majority (77%) of voters that have had to get a permit were satisfied with the service they received from the City.