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City of Seattle Office of Housing Survey Results

**Prepared by:
EMC Research, Inc.
March 2009**



Project Goals

As part of its broader mission to help build strong healthy communities and increase opportunities for people of all income levels to live in the city, the Seattle Office of Housing wanted to better understand:

- 1. Seattle residents' overall attitudes about the relative importance of low income housing assistance compared to other City priorities;*
- 2. Residents' perception of the benefits of low income housing assistance to the wider community;*
- 3. Residents' support for and priority level assigned to the broad goals of the Office of Housing;*
- 4. Residents' attitudes about different types of low and moderate income housing programs and services, including which programs and services they feel should be the highest priority for funding; and*
- 5. The impact of the current economic climate on attitudes about these programs and on residents' willingness to continue funding them through a Housing Levy.*

Project Approach

EMC Research was hired to design and implement a research program that would provide statistically valid information relevant to the Office of Housing's project goals.

1. EMC, in consultation with Office of Housing staff, designed, edited and finalized the survey instrument. The survey was pre-tested to ensure accuracy and respondent comprehension.
2. EMC fielded the survey in mid March 2009, completing 800 total interviews with an average interview length of 18 minutes. EMC's fulltime Field Director managed the data collection process, including monitoring interviews to ensure the quality and integrity of the data collected. All interviewers were trained professionals calling from a central location. Interviewers were fully briefed on the project and survey instrument and were overseen by a project manager for the duration of the calling.
3. EMC weighted the data to ensure that it accurately reflects the adult (age 18+) population of the City of Seattle in terms of geography and other key demographics (age, gender, income, ethnicity, homeownership).
4. EMC provided the Office of Housing with topline results and a full set of crosstabs constructed using SPSS statistical software.
5. EMC Principal Andrew Thibault and Senior Analyst and Vice President Ian Stewart analyzed the data and collaborated on developing a presentation and full report on the research results. As part of this project, EMC remains available to present the research results and provide briefings upon request.

Summary of Methodology

- **Telephone survey**
- **March 16-22, 2009**
- **800 Total Interviews, $\pm 3.5\%$ margin of error at the 95% confidence interval**
- **Average interview length of 18 minutes**
- **Results weighted to accurately reflect adult (age 18+) population in the City of Seattle**

Summary of Key Findings

Seattle residents overwhelmingly believe that it is important to continue investing in low income housing programs and assistance.

- By a 49-point margin (73% to 24%) residents chose the statement: “In this economy, it’s more important now than ever to make sure we keep investing strongly in low income housing programs and assistance” over “Times are really tough right now and we just can’t afford to spend as much on low-income housing programs as we could in the past.”
- Only one-in-five residents (22%) agree with the statement that “Seattle already spends enough to help low income residents” while 57% disagree with this statement.
- “Providing housing assistance to low income and homeless families” ranks fourth on a list of seven priorities for the City (73% say it’s a high priority), above relieving traffic congestion, fighting global warming and reducing taxes.

Summary of Key Findings

Most residents agree that investing in low income housing is a good use of taxpayer dollars and has broader positive impacts for the city and its residents.

- Three fourths of Seattle residents agree that building low income housing (78%) and providing emergency rental assistance (72%) are good uses of taxpayer dollars.
- Strong majorities also agree that investing in low income housing keeps neighborhoods vibrant and diverse (71%), helps other homeowners by promoting stability (77%), is good for our economy (74%), and helps the environment by enabling workers to live near their jobs (74%).

When asked about overall housing program goals, residents place a higher priority and intensity on housing for homeless families and emergency rental assistance than on providing loans to first-time homebuyers or foreclosure prevention programs.

- The overall housing program priorities that residents see as most important are: housing for homeless individuals/families (76% high priority), housing for low wage workers (73%), and emergency rental assistance (70%).

Summary of Key Findings

In terms of specific programs or types of services residents feel should be a priority for funding, there is particularly strong backing for programs that provide broad support for residents to help them become self-sufficient and succeed in staying housed. Housing for low income seniors is also a strong priority.

- The elements that residents see as the highest priorities are:
 - Provide counseling, health care, and other services to low income residents who are disabled or can't live totally independently (84% priority);
 - Combine housing assistance with case management and other services like childcare, legal aid, and financial classes to help families become self-sufficient and succeed in staying housed (79%);
 - Provide emergency short term rental assistance to prevent people from becoming homeless (78%); and
 - Build housing for low income seniors (77%).

Summary of Key Findings

All of the information presented in the survey about low-income housing programs and services is seen as important by a majority of residents. The ideas of accountability and addressing both short term needs and long term barriers to stable housing are powerful concepts and information that residents want to hear.

- The information that is seen as most important is:
 - financial counseling for first-time home buyers who get loans (85% important. NOTE: there is hesitation to support loan programs in this environment, so this information reassures people that there is accountability and mechanisms to ensure long-term success);
 - A permanent place to live, whether renting or owning, gives people a greater stake in their community (84% important);
 - the City partners with non-profits to address both the immediate crisis and longer-term barriers to stable housing. The program provides on-going support and maintains contact with clients to give them the best chance at long term housing stability (82% important).

Summary of Key Findings

Even in the current economic environment, a strong majority of Seattle residents support continuing the low income housing levy.

- Initially, nearly two thirds of residents (64%) say they believe the low income housing levy should be continued. After hearing about the types of programs and services the levy funds, 83% say they the levy should be continued.

A strong majority of residents support all three Housing Levy options described (\$167m, \$145m, and \$107m). [Note that these questions come after significant discussion of the benefits of these programs and after telling residents that this is a continuation of an expiring levy. Many voters will not have the benefit of this information -- these questions do not reflect and are not designed to be a ballot test .]

- Support is at 72% overall for the \$167M levy, but strong support is only at 36%.
- Looking at residents who do not support the \$167M levy, reducing the amount to \$145M increases support by 6 points (78% overall, 37% strong support). Lowering the levy to \$107M increases support another 2 points (80% overall, 37% strong).

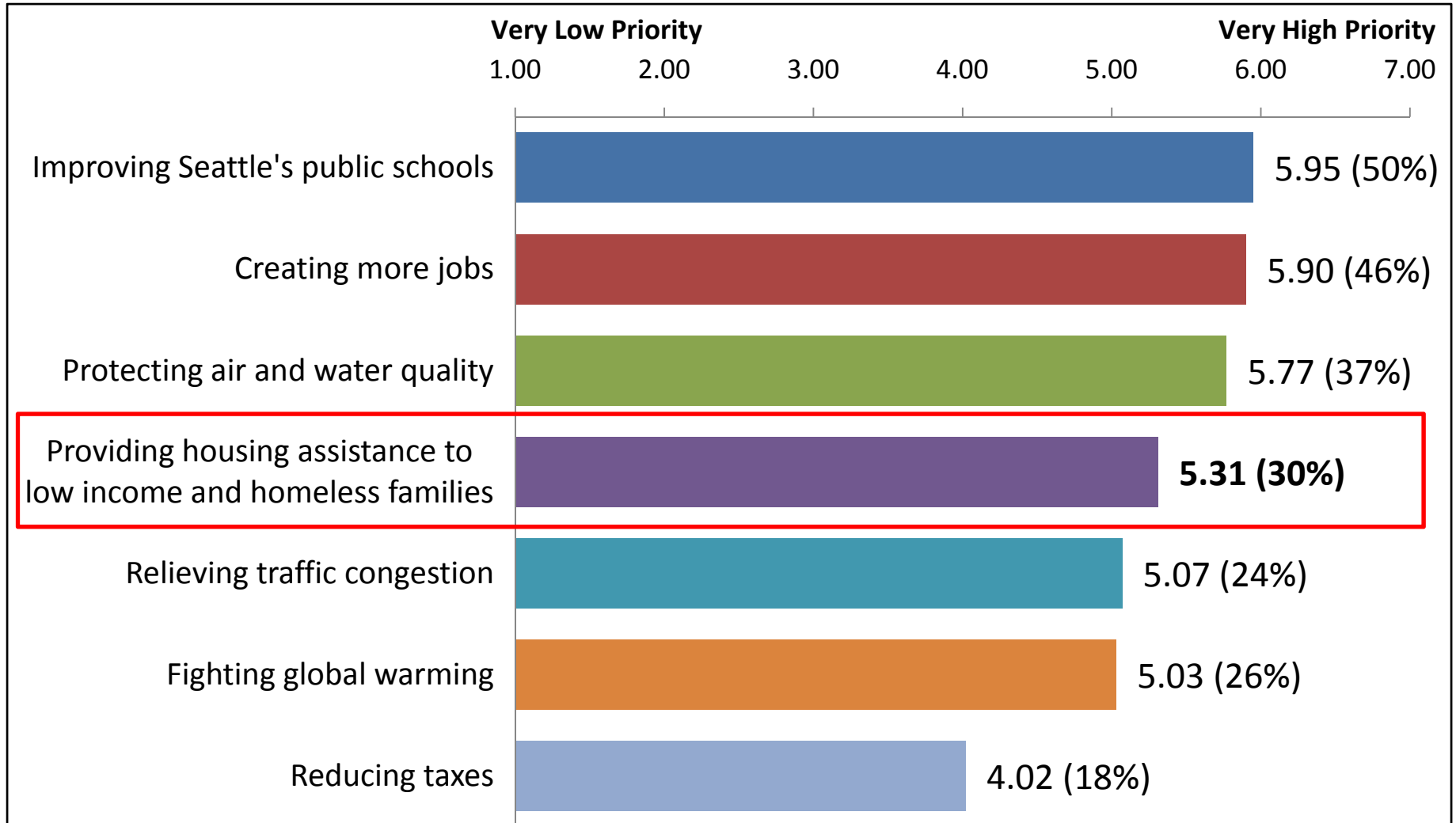
Summary of Key Findings

When asked to choose between the three funding options (\$167m, \$145m, and \$107m) at the end of the survey, a majority (53%) choose the \$167m option. [Again, given all the information provided about the goals of the levy and the impact of these programs, it is natural for respondents to gravitate towards the option that helps the most people. This should not be taken to mean that voters, many of whom will not have the benefit of this information, will pass a \$167M levy.]

A majority of residents (60%) say including a provision that gives the city flexibility to “direct money...where it is needed most instead of the money being directed to specific programs” is a good idea – 29% say this is a bad idea.

Housing Assistance Attitudes and Priorities

Priorities for City



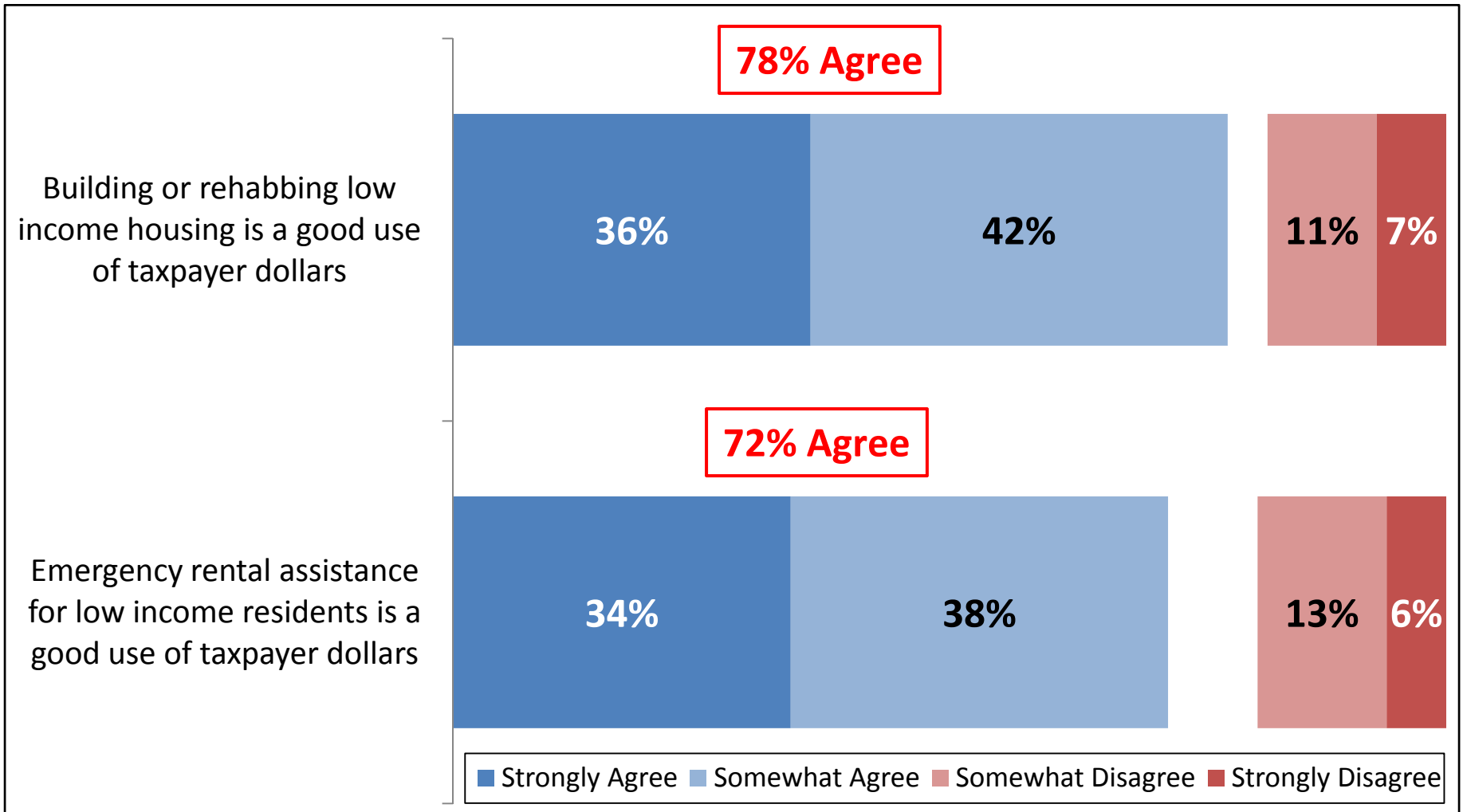
Key Finding

Providing assistance to low income and homeless families is seen as a high priority by a strong majority of Seattle residents and ranks just behind improving schools, creating jobs, and protecting air/water quality as top City priorities.

Low income/homeless assistance ranks higher than relieving traffic congestion or fighting global warming, with a strong majority of residents in every demographic subgroup ranking it as a high priority.

Residents see reducing taxes as the lowest priority for the City – only one-in-four (26%) residents say reducing taxes is a high priority.

Good Use of Taxpayer Dollars?



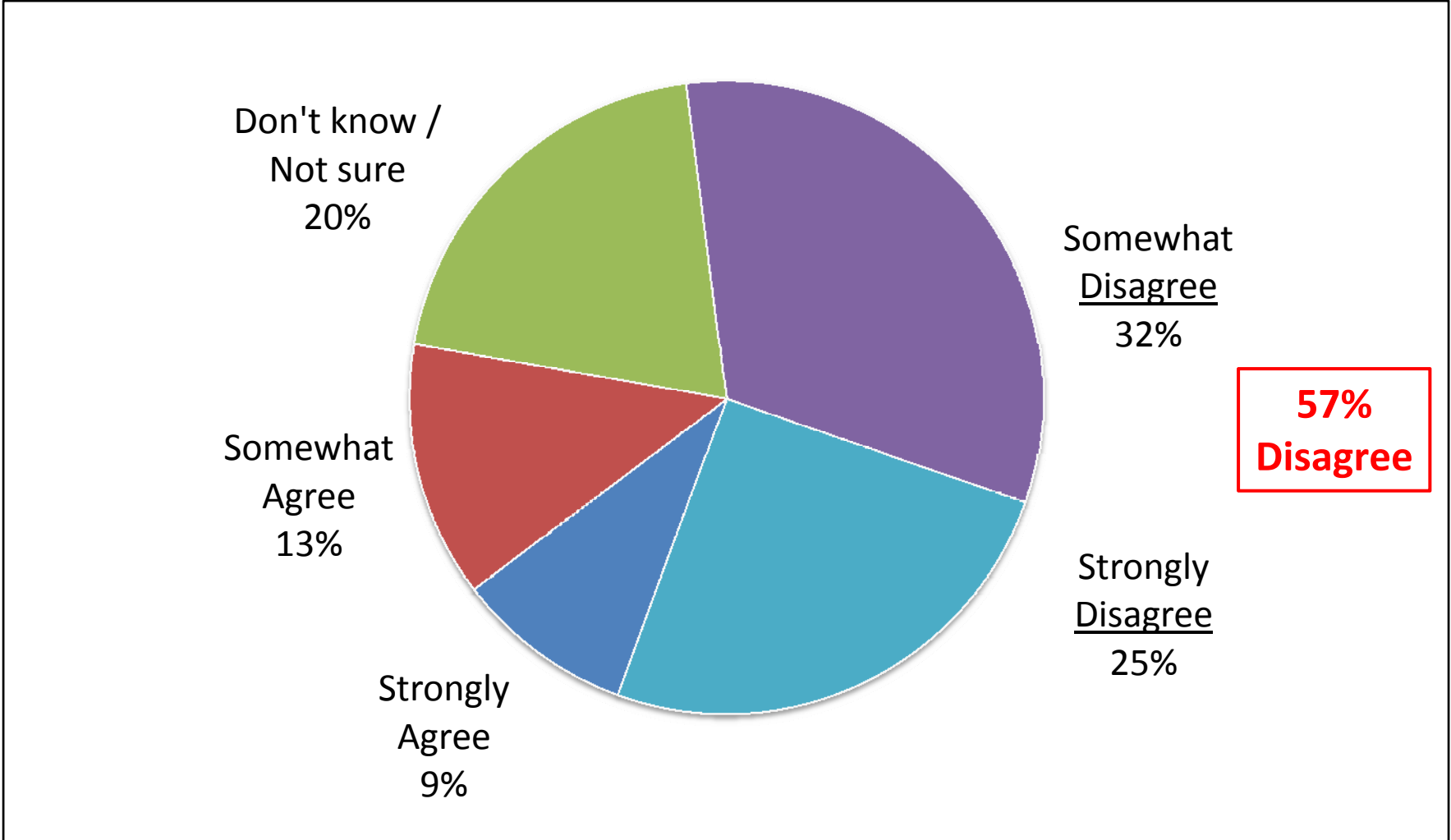
Key Finding

Seattle residents clearly see the value of low income housing and emergency rental assistance, with strong majorities (78% and 72%) agreeing that each is a good use of their taxpayer dollars.

This support is consistent across major subgroups with roughly two-thirds or more agreeing that these functions are a good use of their taxpayer dollars.

Fewer than one-in-five (18% and 19%) disagree and even among these residents, there is very little intensity of opinion (7% and 6% strongly disagree).

Seattle already spends enough to help low income families?



Key Finding

There is not a perception that the City currently spends too much on low income housing programs and assistance.

Only about one-in-five (22%) Seattle residents think the City already spends enough to help low income families, and again there is little intensity among these residents (9% strongly agree).

A majority (57%) of residents disagree that Seattle spends enough to help low income families and another 20% are not sure one way or the other.

Impact of Economy

Which statement is closest to your opinion, even if neither one is exactly right?

73%



24%



In this economy, it's more important now than ever to make sure we keep investing strongly in low income housing programs and assistance.

Times are really tough right now and we just can't afford to spend as much on low-income housing programs as we could in the past.

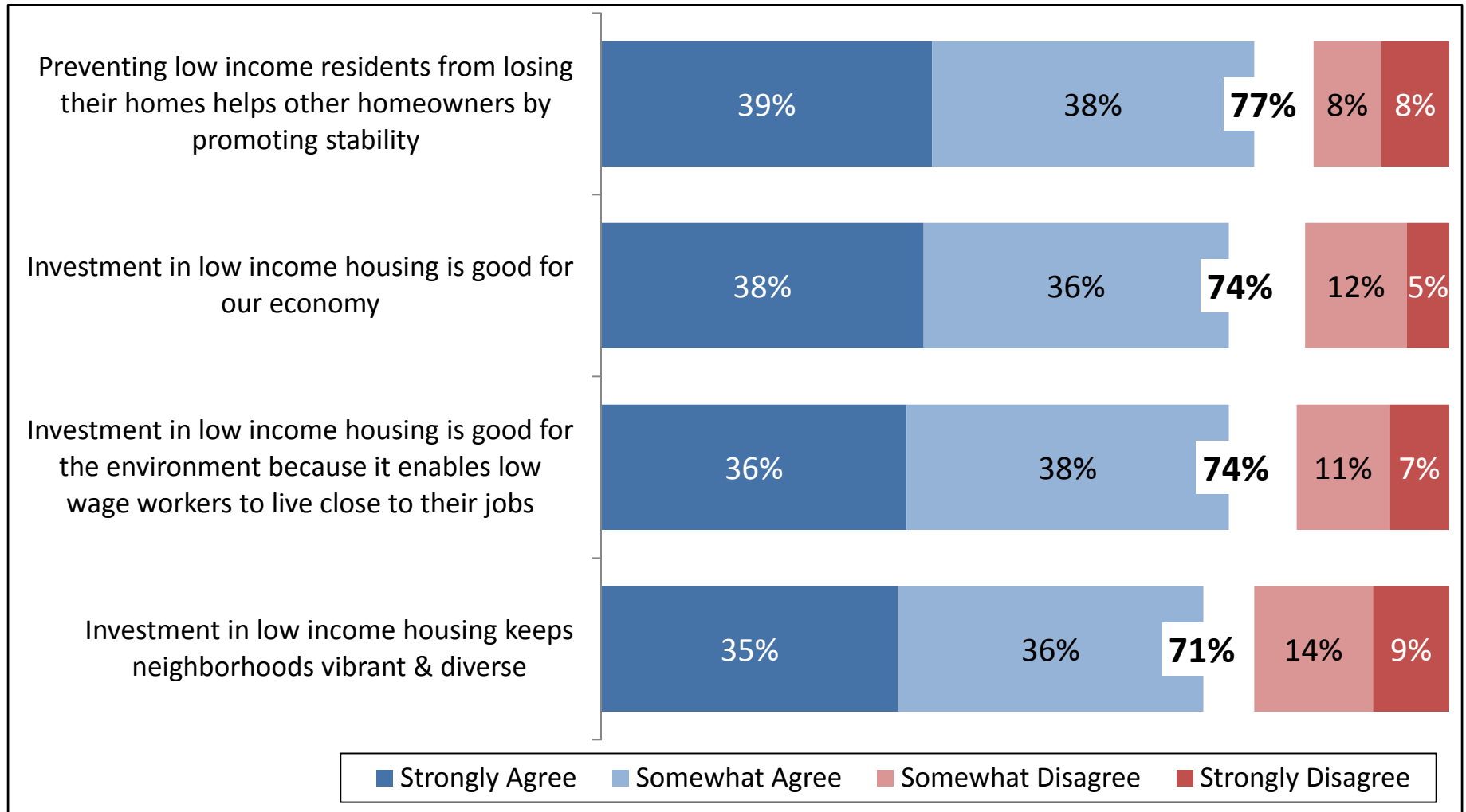
Key Finding

Current economic conditions have not reduced support for low income housing programs and assistance.

By a wide margin (73% to 24%) Seattle residents feel that the bad economy makes it more important to invest in low income housing programs and assistance. This attitude is consistent across major subgroups.

Only one in four (24%) Seattle residents feel that the City should cut back on low income housing programs because of the economy.

Broader Positive Impacts

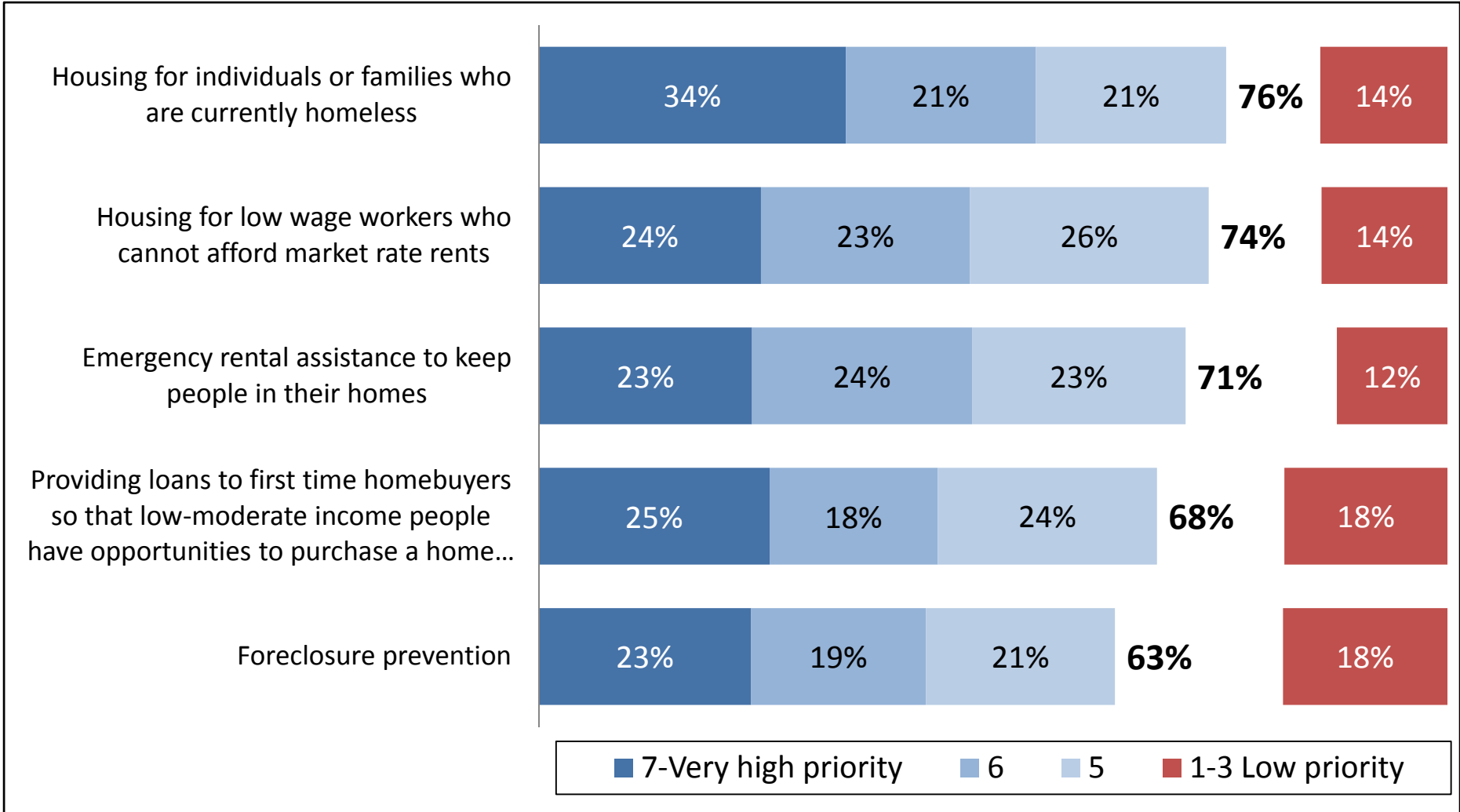


Key Finding

Residents overwhelmingly agree that low income housing programs and assistance have broader positive impacts that benefit surrounding neighborhoods and communities and the City as a whole.

This appreciation of the indirect benefits – in terms of the economy, the environment, neighborhood stability, and neighborhood diversity – is a key reason that the Housing Levy has enjoyed such strong support over the years.

Housing Program Goals



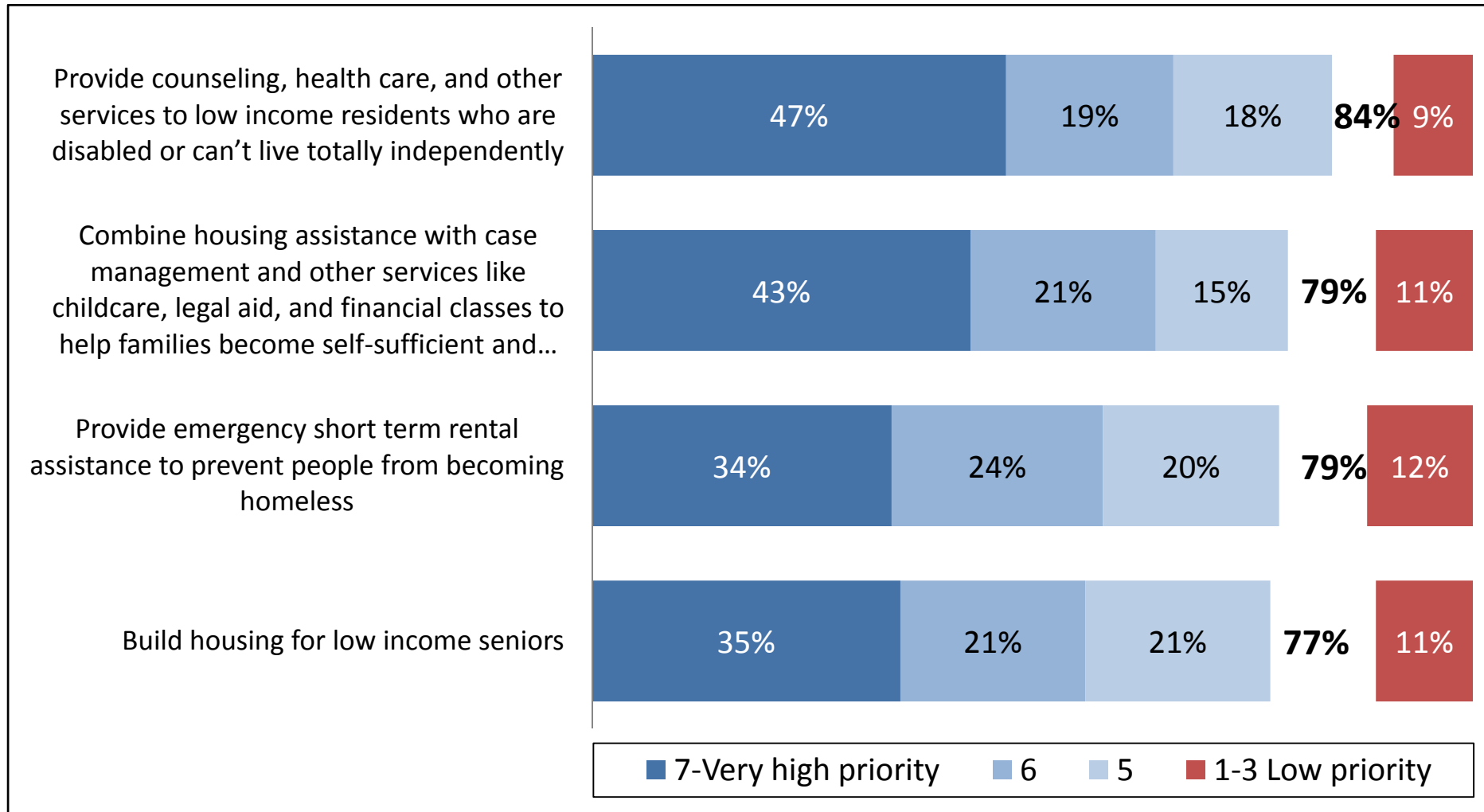
Key Finding

A strong majority of Seattle residents support all five of the housing program goals tested in the survey.

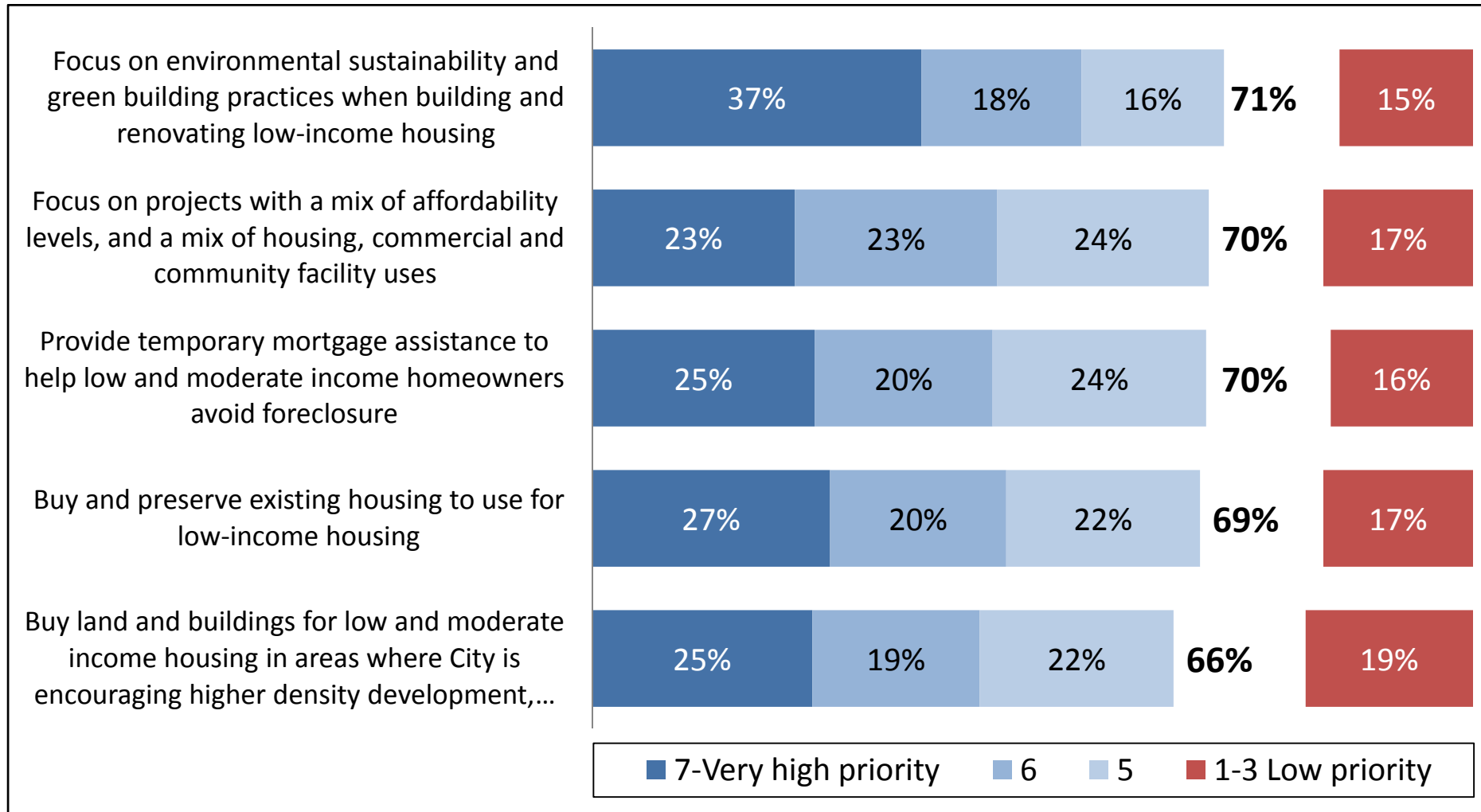
Overall support and intensity of support is highest for helping those most at risk -- providing housing for homeless individuals and families (76% Priority / 34% Very High Priority). There is also strong support for helping low wage workers and those who need emergency rental assistance, although the intensity of support is lower.

Loans for first time homebuyers and funds for foreclosure prevention rank lower but are still seen as a priority by a strong majority of residents. This is not surprising given recent events surrounding the housing market.

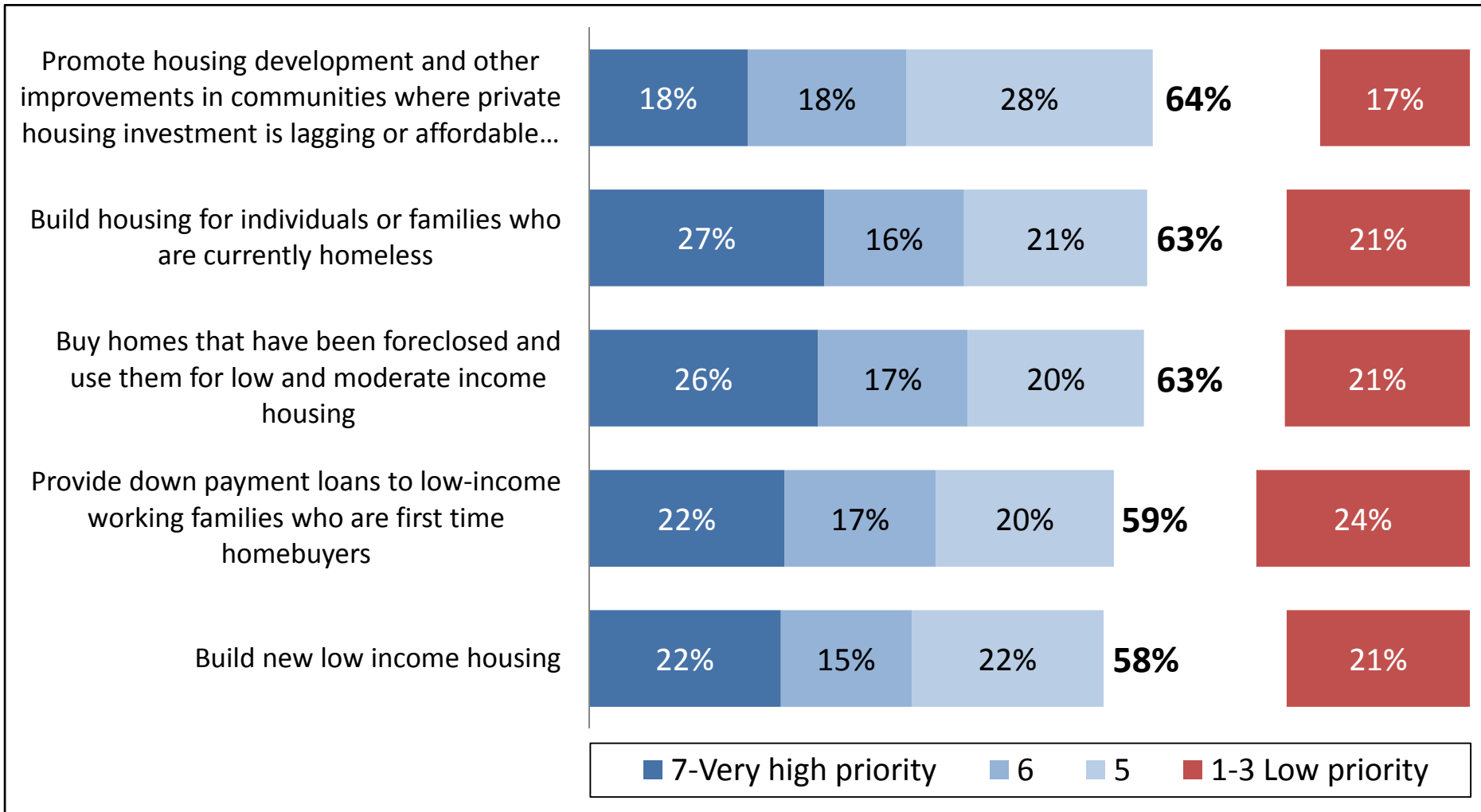
Specific Program/Service Priorities



Specific Program/Service Priorities (cont'd)



Specific Program/Service Priorities (cont'd)



Key Finding

A strong majority of Seattle residents believe all of the housing programs/services tested in the survey are a high priority for funding.

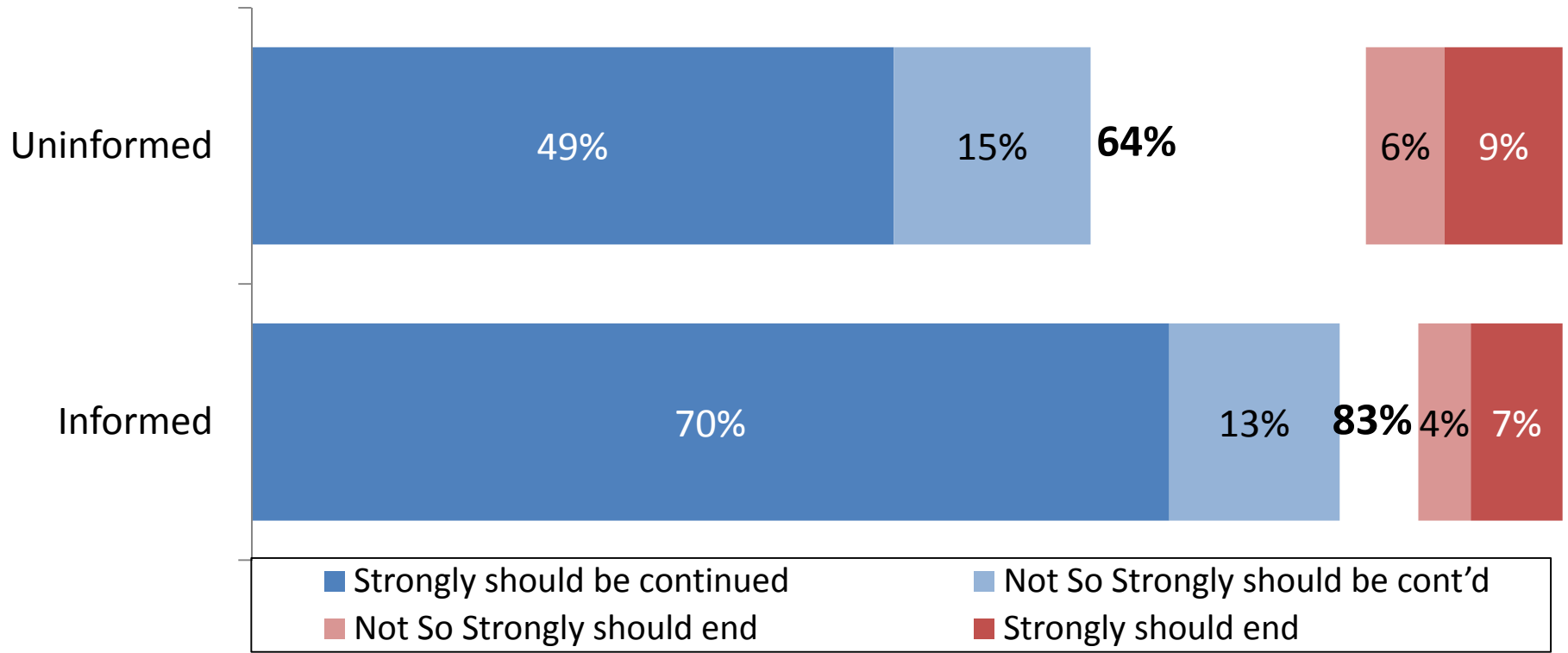
Overall support and intensity of support is highest for programs that combine housing assistance with other services (case management, child care, counseling, financial classes) to give residents the best chance at succeeding in staying housed.

Seattle residents have a very sophisticated attitude about housing assistance that combines support for programs that help the most needy who are in crisis (housing for the homeless, emergency rental assistance) backed up by programs that will help ensure the long term success of assistance efforts.

Housing Levy Options

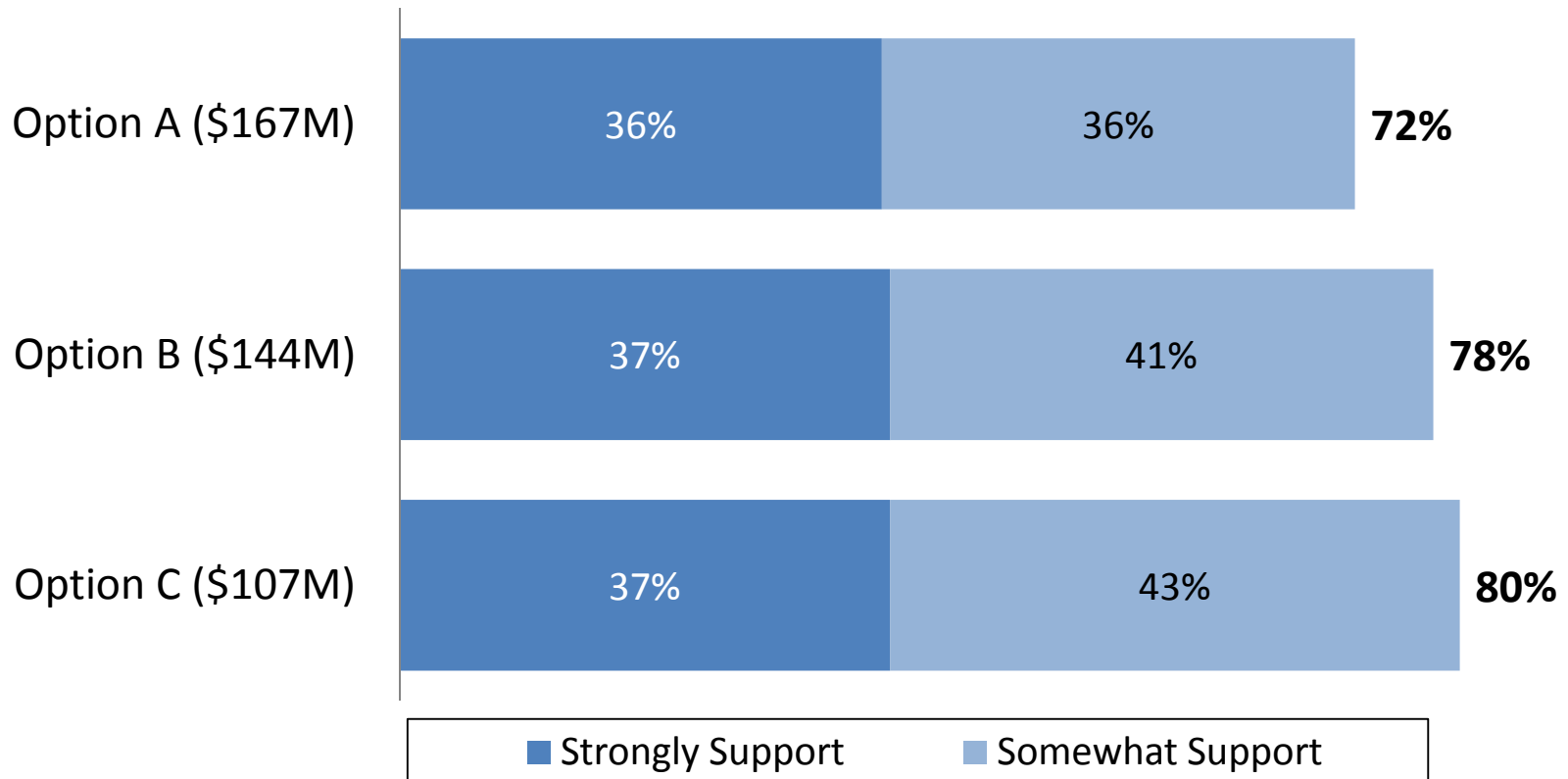
Levy Renewal

As you may know, in two thousand two (2002) Seattle residents renewed the low income housing levy which will expire in December two thousand and nine (2009). In general, do you think this levy should be continued, or should it end?



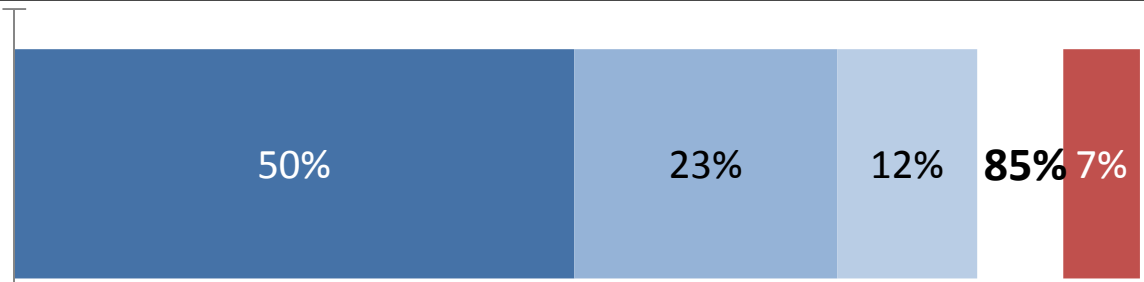
Levy Options

The low income housing levy helps fund affordable rental housing for seniors, formerly homeless individuals and families, and low-income residents and helps provide emergency rental assistance to prevent eviction or homelessness. The city is considering different options to continue this housing levy.

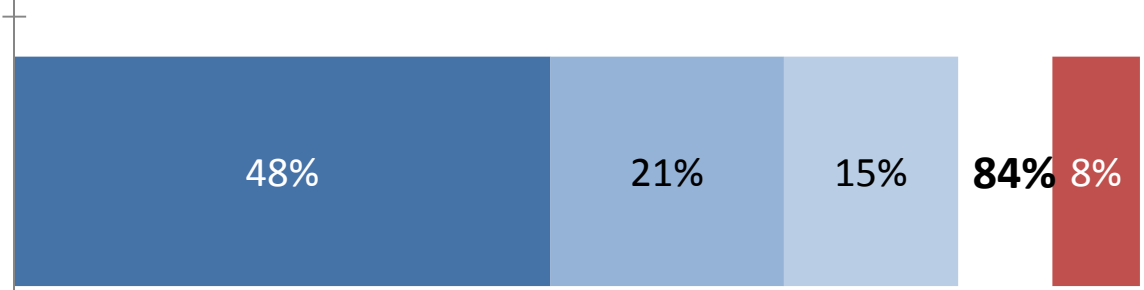


Importance of Information about Programs

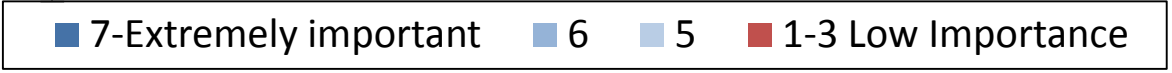
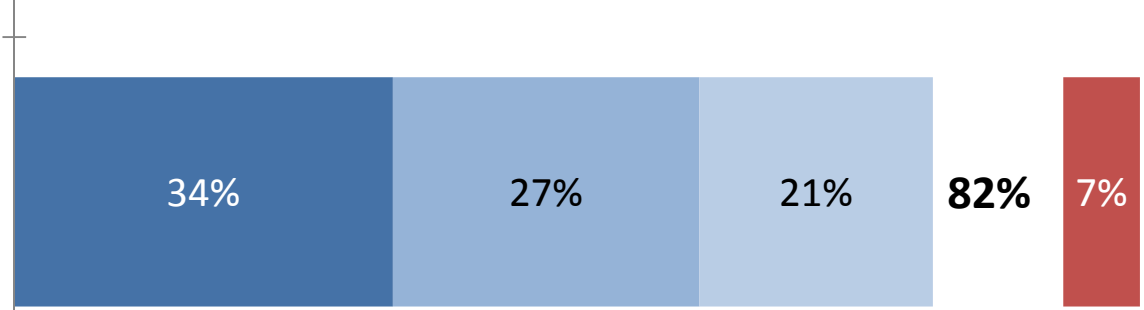
As part of the down payment loan program, the City works with nonprofits and banks to ensure homebuyers are well prepared. All participants must take homebuyer education courses, which involve significant financial counseling; participants may only...



Whether renting or owning, having a permanent place to live empowers people to have a stake in their community. Residents are more inclined to care about their neighborhoods and neighbors, are more engaged civically and their kids do...



The City partners with non-profits like the Gates Foundation to address both the immediate crisis and longer-term barriers to stable housing. The program provides ongoing support and maintains contact with clients to give them the best chance at...



Importance of Information (cont'd)

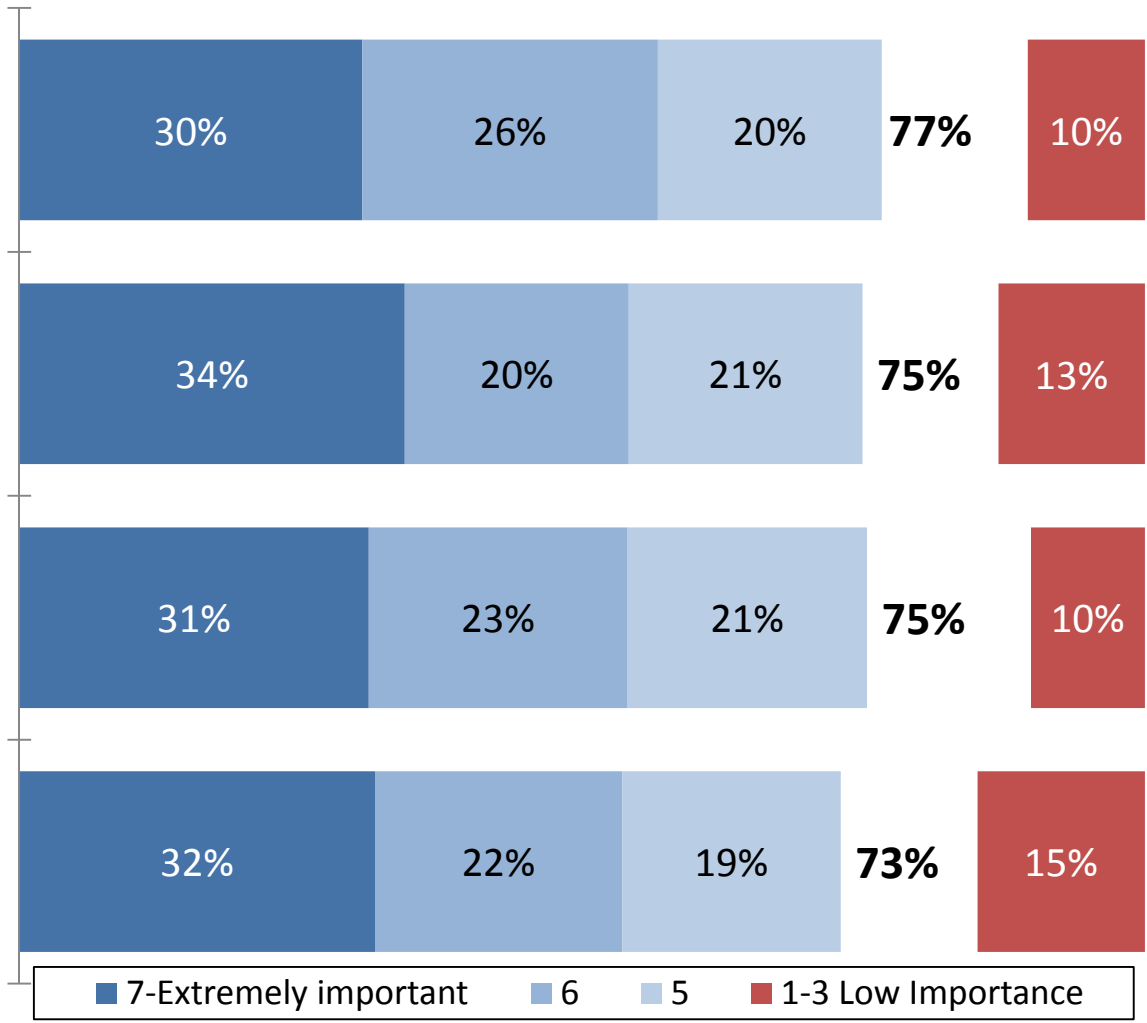
Emergency rent assistance helps bridge the gap and get people back on their feet over the long term – 77% of households assisted are still in stable housing 6 months later.

And given the state of the economy...

The City has a Housing Levy Oversight committee made up of private sector and non-profit community leaders who make sure your tax dollars are spent as efficiently and effectively as possible.

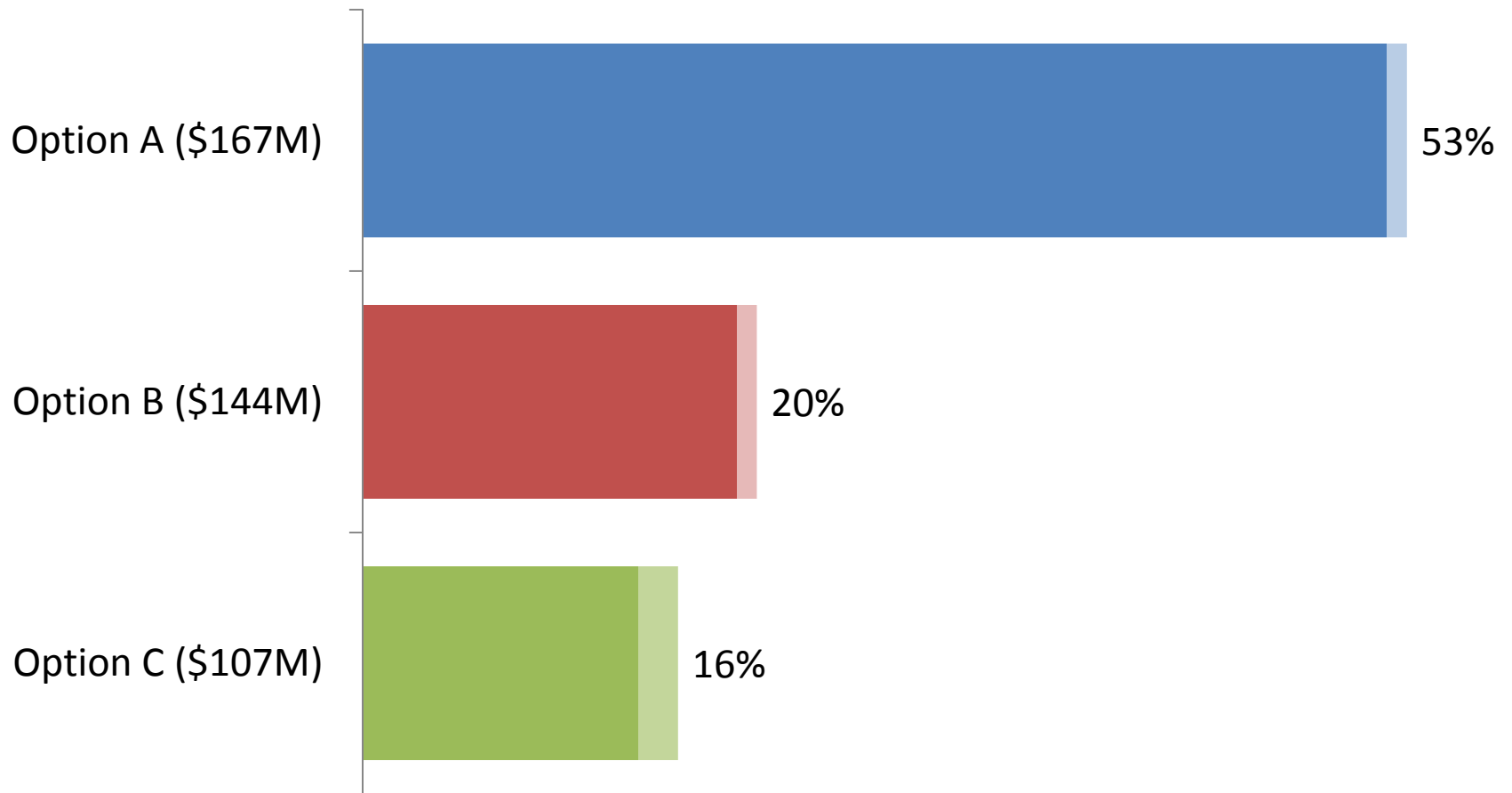
For low income rental housing that the City funds, the City leverages, on average \$3 of non-city funds for every \$1 of housing levy dollars invested. In the past six years, the Housing Levy has brought \$250 million of...

Housing funded by the housing levy is “green” housing, which helps the environment and provides healthier housing for the residents.



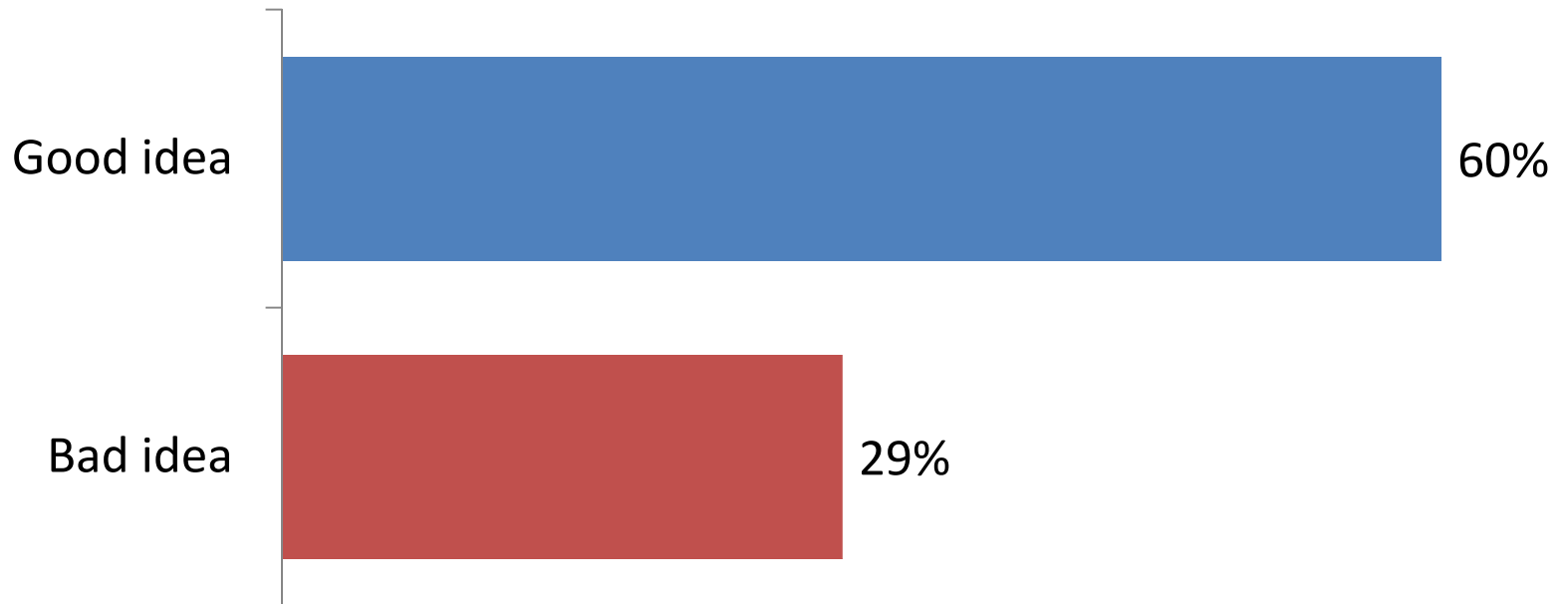
Preferred Levy Option

And which of the three options do you prefer most?



Dedicate Funds or not?

Given the changing economy, some people have suggested that we should include a provision in this levy to give the City the ability to direct money for housing assistance to where it is needed most instead of the money being dedicated to specific programs. This could include things like a fund to buy abandoned properties for use as low income housing, providing assistance to homeowners to prevent foreclosure, and provide emergency rental assistance. The City's housing department would determine which of the various programs to implement according to economic conditions. Do you think giving the City this additional flexibility with the levy money is a good idea or a bad idea?



Key Finding

Not surprisingly, support for continuing the Low Income Housing Levy increases as residents learn more about the programs and services it funds, but even when asked initially, a strong majority (64%) support continuing the levy.

Strong majorities support all three levy options tested in the survey. Lowering the levy amount from \$167M to \$145M results in an additional 6% of support from those who were initially opposed or undecided. At \$107M support increases another 2%.

After hearing detailed information about the programs and services the levy could fund and the impacts of those programs, not surprisingly, residents gravitate towards the levy option that would help the most people.

NOTE: These questions were asked after respondents heard significant information about the goals and potential positive impacts of the housing program and after they heard that this was a continuation of an existing levy. These questions were not designed to measure voter support but rather which options residents prefer in the context of knowing more about housing programs goals. Most residents will not have the benefit of this information when they vote.