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INTRODUCTION

Every year, the City of Madison decides where and how they will divide their municipal budget for the following year. This budget determines which city services and infrastructures stay funded, receive more funds, or take budget cuts. The governor and state legislators are the ones who decide how this money is spent, and they often make these decisions with little input from the communities they serve. Starting in 2019, the Madison People’s Budget was imagined as a means for creating Community Control over these budgets.

Budgets are not meaningless numbers; they are statements on value and worth. Resource distribution can make or break the livelihoods of the people living in our city. Budgets are moral documents that should reflect the needs of those who are most vulnerable in Madison. By emphasizing the voice of the people—the voices of those that the budget is meant to serve and support—we strive to articulate a budget that directly reflects our community’s needs.

By prioritizing the perspectives of low to no-income Black, Southeast Asian, disabled, queer, trans, and gender non-confirming folks, we can produce a people’s budget that imagines a world without police, prioritizes quality affordable housing, addresses food insecurity, economic displacement and all of the other systemic disparities that flourish under the government’s current budgeting model. Freedom Inc. has put in the work of listening to the people by surveying the community for their budgeting priorities and hosting focus groups to discuss the results of the survey (a detailed analysis of the survey begins on page 4). This city will not work for the people if it is not shaped by the people. In order for us to build a safer and more equitable society, we must begin answering the demands of those most directly affected by police violence, racial capitalism, and settler colonial violence.

This Madison People’s Budget report begins with an outline of our timeline and goals for the project. We then discuss the results of our survey and provide a detailed analysis of what community members identified as priorities. Lastly, we discuss the concept of Community Control and conclude with some of the narratives and findings emerging from our engagements.
Timeline & Goals

Timeline
We gathered data from over 1,500 Madison residents and asked them to weigh in on the most crucial social structures at stake in next year’s budget. From August to November of 2020, we asked Madisonians about the kinds of resource investments they want to see in the budget for the 2022 city budget. We then held a number of community meetings to hear particularly from Black, South-east Asian and other POC folks on their budgeting priorities.

The City of Madison has already released their 2022 budget kick-off in which Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway said that the city will prioritize dismantling systemic racism. Individual city agencies have made their budget requests and in late August, the mayor will release her office’s proposed executive budget, which will then come before the finance committee to be debated and commented on by the public. Finally, beginning in November, the city council will finalize the 2022 Adopted City Budget.

Goals
When we reached out to our community members for their input, we wanted to find out what matters to the communities who will be impacted by these budgets. The budget for Madison covers these general categories of city services and infrastructure: development, housing and planning; fire and emergency services; libraries and programming; police services; and public health services. We offered respondents the major categories of spending and asked them to prioritize these areas based on what would make their communities great places to live. Doing this gives us a direct insight into what it is that people actually want from their governments. By starting with a “community first” approach, we can gain insight into what it is the city needs from the perspective of people who live ordinary lives.

We need the city to recognize that our citizens deserve the right to control how their money is spent. They deserve the right to have their voices heard and their needs met. This survey is just the beginning of what robust community engagement in our city’s budget could look like, and we will continue to push for the voices of the people to be meaningfully included in our budgetary decisions going forward.
Our 2020 survey offered Madison community members the opportunity to participate in the budgeting process by deciding how to allocate funds to city services based on their own values and priorities. This unique opportunity allowed the community to participate in a process they have historically been excluded from and to decide for themselves how their tax dollars could best serve them. While city officials claim to maintain open communication around budgeting...
priorities, issues of accessibility and a lack of responsiveness to community demands continue to prevent people from meaningfully participating in this essential part of state and local governance.

Our survey reached community members across the city with around 900 of the 1500 participants reporting a verifiable neighborhood. Another roughly 500 responded to the location question, but only provided general descriptors such as “downtown” or “campus”. The map below displays the 900 respondents who provided a specific neighborhood in response to this question.

East-side Madison neighborhoods were overrepresented in our sample, which is significant as these tend to be whiter more affluent neighborhoods (see demographics data in the following section). Realizing this incentivized us to actively seek out more Black, Southeast Asian and other POC voices through our community-specific listening sessions that were hosted around some of the underrepresented neighborhoods. The results of these sessions are reported below in the “People’s Budget Narratives” section on page 11.

Community members’ budgeting allocations were vastly different from the city’s 2021 adopted Capital and Operating budgets, which have continued to over-prioritize non-essential policing services that criminalize poverty and bring harm into our communities. At the same time, our community survey indicates that the services that the city did cut in response to decreased revenue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were more popular than policing services. There were no significant variations in budgeting priorities between neighborhoods.

Below are the results of our survey.

Demographics

The Madison People’s Budget survey received 1501 responses, 1423 of whom identified as residents of the City of Madison. A majority of respondents were women with 65% of respondents identifying as women, 26% as men, 6% as non-binary/third gender, and 0.6% as another gender identity.

Racial demographics of respondents generally reflected city demographics (see table for details). 37% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+ and 57% did not. Lastly, 91% of respondents said English was their primary language spoken at home, with 3.8% using Spanish, 2% Hmong,
0.2% Khmer, and 2.3% using another language.

Budgeting Priorities

In order to identify community members’ budgeting priorities, we asked: “If you had $100 to spend across the following service categories, what dollar amount would you budget to each category?” Below is the graph of People’s Budget responses compared to the city’s 2021 adopted budget:

When given the opportunity to choose, Madisonians regularly chose housing, jobs, healthcare, and schools as the things that would most improve their lives. The infrastructure of policing and punishment through jails and law enforcement were overwhelmingly chosen as the least important parts of a safe community.

Community members were also asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 with one being “Not at all significant” and five being “very significant” what would make their community a great place to live. The highest rated categories were “jobs that pay a living wage” (4.82 average), “housing for all residents” (4.82), and “access to better healthcare and mental wellness” (4.82). The lowest rated categories were “More police, vehicles, weapons, and surveillance equipment” (1.32) and “more jails and detention facilities” (1.36).
WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE?

**Most Popular**
- Housing for all our residents: 4.82
- Healthcare and mental wellness: 4.82
- Jobs that pay a living wage: 4.82

**Least Popular**
- More police & equipment: 1.21
- More jails and detention: 1.22
- Other: 3.63

- Housing for all our residents
- Quality food for all our residents
- Reliable and affordable public transportation
- Access to better healthcare and mental wellness
- Access to live music, art exhibits, and plays
- Jobs that pay a living wage
- More jails and detention facilities
- More police, vehicles, weapons, and surveillance equipment
- More parks/recreation
- Better Schools
- Other
<table>
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<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>HOUSING</th>
<th>QUALITY FOOD</th>
<th>TRANSPORTATION</th>
<th>HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL WELLNESS</th>
<th>LIVE MUSIC, ART EXHIBITS, AND PLAYS</th>
<th>JOBS THAT PAY A LIVING WAGE</th>
<th>JAILS AND DETENTION FACILITIES</th>
<th>POLICE AND EQUIPMENT</th>
<th>MORE PARKS &amp; RECREATION</th>
<th>SCHOOLS</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very significant (5)</td>
<td>1310</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>1302</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>1155</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all significant (1)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1269</td>
<td>1307</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
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The function of the police in any society is to enforce the will of those in charge (the ruling class). Police enforce the mandates and demands of those in power, even the unspoken mandates that reproduce discrimination based on class, race, and gender, and ability. As such, a classist, racist, sexist, and queer-phobic ruling class will always produce police departments that reflect those biases. The only way for police to represent the interests of the people they are policing is to seat control over police firmly in the hands of the community. This is Community Control. The current power dynamics wherein the ruling class dictates how the police operate in an effort to protect white supremacy and heteropatriarchy is inherently violent, particularly to Black, brown and Indigenous communities. Community Control involves empowering the most affected communities to hire and fire police officers, determine policing policies, as well as how much funding the department should receive, if any at all.

At a time like the present, when there has been an overwhelming pressure to #DefundPolice, Community Control would allow us to fulfill those demands in order to protect ourselves and our communities from police violence and terror. Similarly, if the community sees fit to completely disband a police department, Community Control would allow for this to happen. As such, Community Control is also an abolitionist strategy.

“Tinkering around the edges or pursuing minor reforms when the opportunity for fundamental transformation of society is within our grasp not only sells short the valiant efforts of those who rebelled and put their lives on the line to make this moment, but is an outright betrayal of those suffering under the boot of police and other oppression.”

- M Adams
Madisonians know what their communities need to thrive. Community Control is the engine of meaningful change in our city, and the budget is one of the most crucial places where we can make these interventions happen. By demanding budget changes that reflect the community’s desire to #DefundPolice, we can reassert Community Control and prioritize funding to meet the needs of our community like affordable housing and better healthcare.

For more info on Community Control, see M Adams and Max Rameau’s article: Black Community Control Over Police.
People’s Budget Narratives

In the process of collecting our data for this report, we conducted detailed interviews with groups of people that represent the folks that we primarily serve in the community: Black women, youth, queer, trans, and intersex folks and our community elders. When talking to these groups, three distinct areas for intervention became apparent: Conditions, Solutions, and Investments. Here we are articulating the ways in which our community understands these three concepts as they relate to city budgets and community infrastructure. They encompass the core ideals at the heart of our mutual aid work. Our community already has an intuitive understanding of what they need to thrive.

The budget for the city should prioritize the betterment of the lives of its residents. There is, however, no meaningful inclusion of the community in the actual decision making processes for our budgets. When deciding how to improve communal infrastructure and people’s lives, there is no one more equipped to speak on the real conditions of life in Madison than the people who live here. The communities that we represent are able to succinctly articulate the physical realities of their lives and what it would take to change them. When we talk about the conditions of the People’s Budget, we talk about the daily challenges that contribute to the erosion of community health. The conditions of housing and food instability, over-policing, low wages, and dearth of enrichment and care for children directly prevent us from living and thriving as we should.

Our focus group participants stressed that if we want healthy communities, we need to invest directly into affordable housing and quality food sources for all income levels. We should be able to guarantee housing for people who cannot afford it, have safe places for children to go when they are out of school, and convenient transportation for folks to get around. We cannot respond to requests for improved quality of life with harsher penalties and regulations. People in our communities should be able to live, work, and go to school without fear of being harassed by the police or evicted from their homes.
These conditions have solutions. The people know what it will take to improve their lives, and the city must listen to their requests if they want to make meaningful changes in the lives of Madisonians. One of the biggest contributors to the conditions that participants described were wages and wage inequality. Money is at the root of many problems for the communities we serve. The people deserve a raise in the minimum wage so that they can improve their quality of life. If someone’s wages are cut or they are in crisis, their lives will spiral. Their housing, their wellbeing, their ability to find new work, care for their children, pay their bills, everything can be destroyed if they aren’t receiving a stable income that allows them to live a dignified life. The pandemic showed us that these problems cannot be fixed by two small government checks. If we want to make generational change that uplifts the city, we have to give people long-term financial security that is not dependent on their capacity to work long hours for minimal pay.

Focus group participants also noted that for our youth, there are very few safe places for congregation in Black neighborhoods. Clean parks, recreation centers, and care facilities need to be built in these areas so that our children and teenagers have safe, reliable places to go while their families work. People need more affordable healthcare clinics closer to the communities that need them and more effective and regular transportation for folks to get around the city.

All of the solutions noted by our people show us that we need investment in these underserved areas. These solutions - better healthcare, higher minimum wage, safe places for youth - require that the city invest in community infrastructure. We need the city to commit to making our neighborhoods safer by providing more street lighting and bus routes. If the city wants to improve the health of our communities, they need to invest in permanent affordable housing for people suffering homelessness, illness, or any other crisis. If we want our youth to flourish in school, we need the city to commit to ending police involvement with youth and putting more money into community programs and infrastructure. If we want our city to be safer and healthier, the city must devote funds to assistance programs for struggling people.

These conditions have solutions, but we cannot make these changes without investments into wages, housing, transport, and community centers. There is no reason for people to continue suffering from food insecurity, homelessness, unemployment, or interpersonal violence stemming from underfunded neighborhoods and social support programs. We have the resources to make these changes - the city must spend it appropriately.
CONCLUSION

A People’s Budget is crucial to making meaningful changes within our most underserved communities. The inequalities and inequities that create poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and unsafe communities started decades ago. We cannot fix these systemic problems with one-time payments of aid money. The city of Madison must listen to the needs of its people and put money where the community says it is needed. We need grocery stores, parks, community centers, street lights, bus stops, and affordable housing; we do not need more police, we do not need differently trained police, and we do not need community outreach from police. We need to focus on healing the traumas of our communities and the varied impacts of the pandemic; we do not need to criminalize people based on their zip codes. We need to listen to and support one another through direct mutual aid and government-level interventions. We keep us safe. Until the City of Madison recognizes and addresses the harm it has created through years of inequitable budgeting, we will be left to fend for our communities.