

Powering Up Your Communications with Public Opinion Research

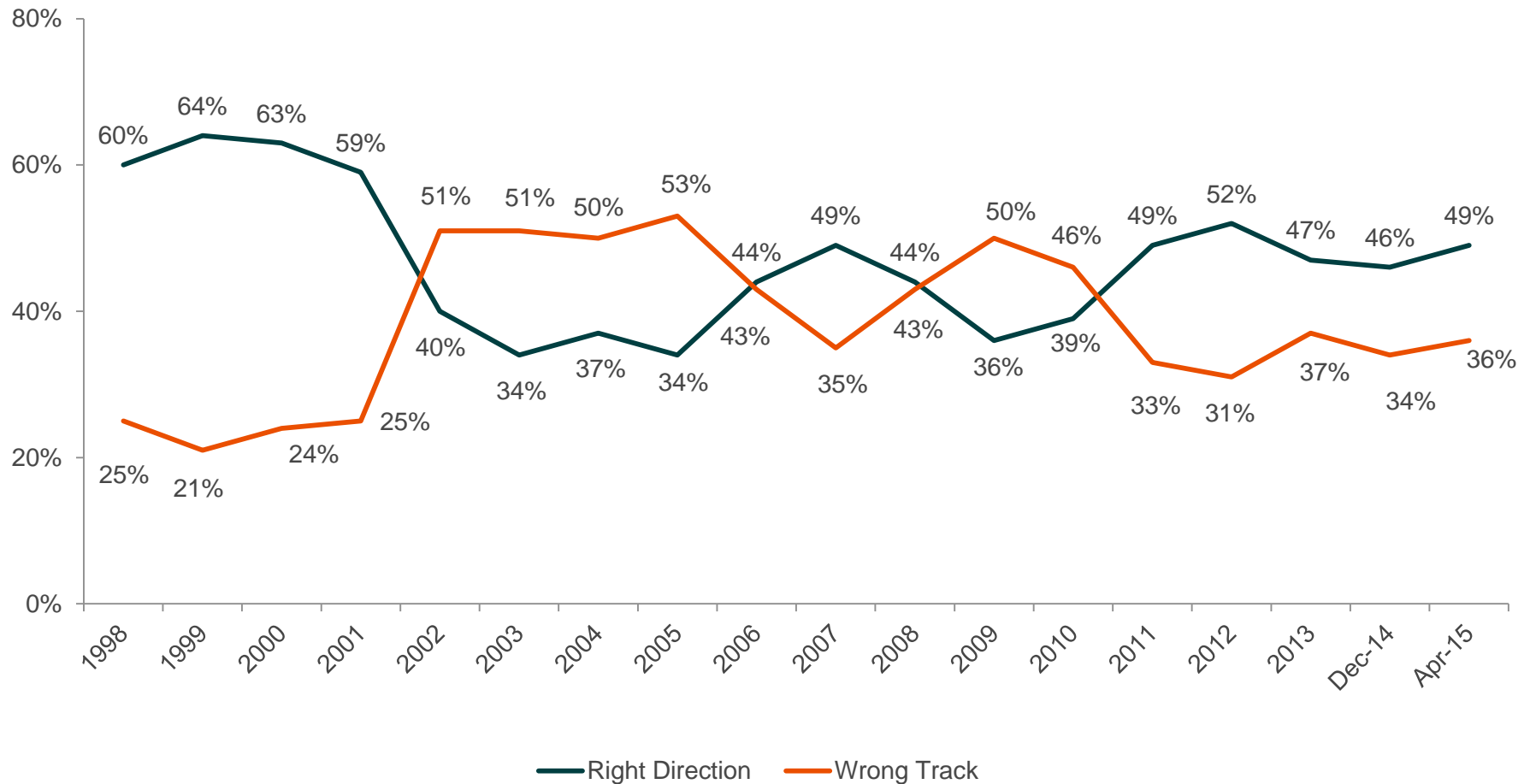
**April 23, 2015
The Resort at Welches**



More information about

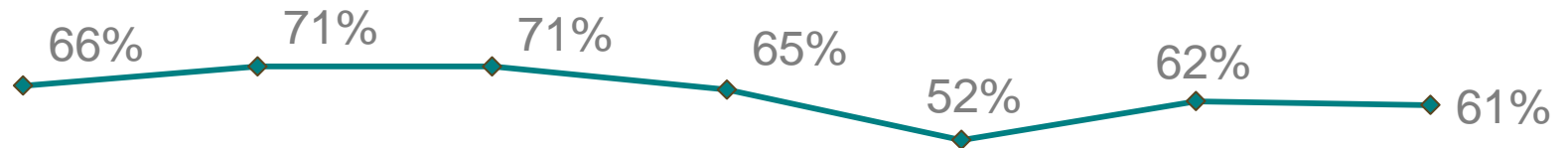
- **MOOD OF THE STATE**
- **WATER AS AN ISSUE**
- **WATER VALUES**
- **TALKING ABOUT WATER**
- **USING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**
- **CASE STUDIES**

Mood of the state



Concern about finances

How worried are you about your personal financial situation?



March 2011 Sept 2011 Jan 2012 April 2013 Sept 2014 Dec 2014 April 2015

◆ Somewhat/very

Awareness of the ABC's of government

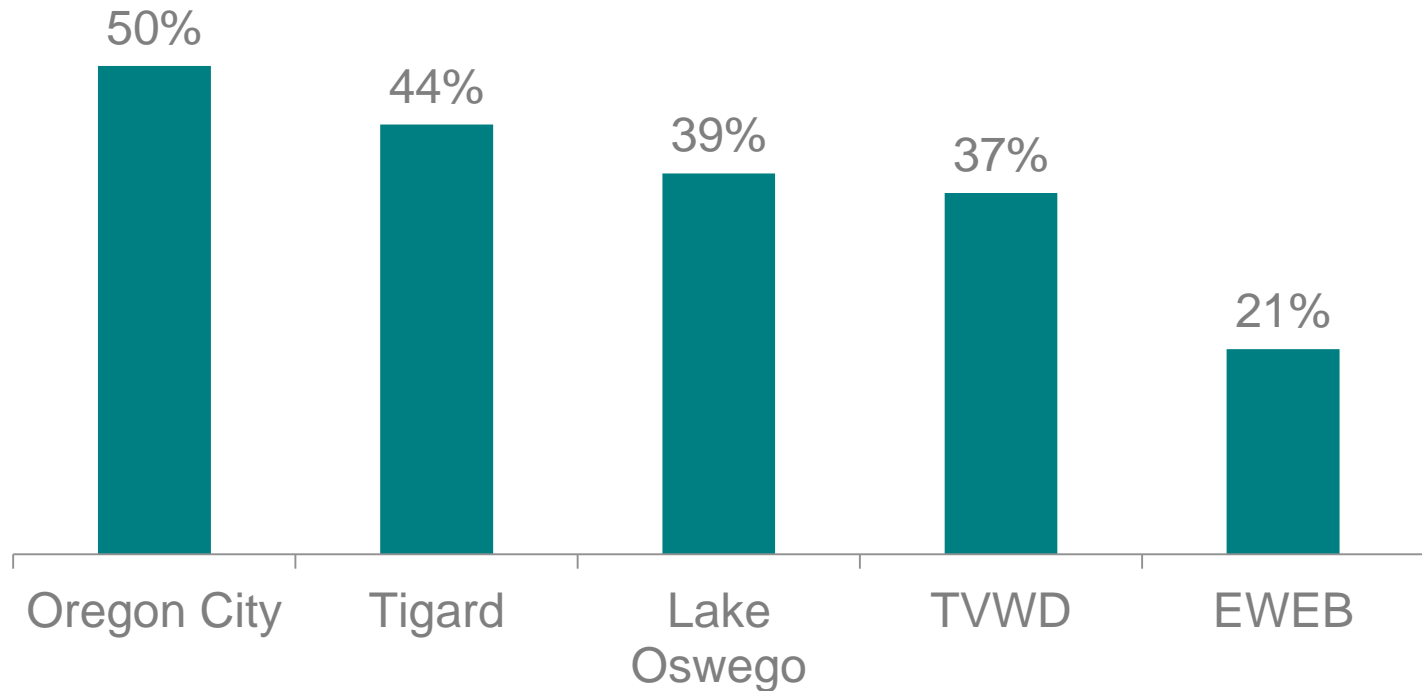
47% Oregonians don't know the number of US Senators who represent the state

50% Oregonians cannot name the three branches of government

37% of Oregonians cannot name any tax that pays for state government services

Awareness of water source

Percent who don't know the source of their community's drinking water



Infrastructure quality

Voter grades of Oregon's public infrastructure

- Major roads and highways: C
- Water and sewer systems: C
- Railroads: C
- Public school buildings: C-
- Bridges: C-
- City streets: D+

Water values

Public health and safety – top priority; high concern about children, pets, and wildlife

Purity – treat water as little as possible; concern about long-term environmental and personal health consequences of water treatment

Reliability – adequate supply to meet the needs of today and the future

Cost – low rates

Water values

Economic growth – clean, reliable water necessary for business; both supply and waterways

Recreation – safe for swimming, fishing, and other recreational activities

Natural beauty – preserving it for their area

Legacy – resource for future generations

Talking about water

1) Link to VALUES

Public health and safety

Purity

Reliability

Cost

Economic growth

Recreation

Natural beauty

Legacy

Talking about water

2) Don't use "INFRASTRUCTURE"

Confusion about the word
Hard to connect to values

Talking about water

3) Make it LOCAL

Elevates importance (motivation)

Starting too broad (people feel individual action can't make a difference)

Mention specific waterways

Talking about water

4) Tell the story about using rate payer money wisely

Connect the dots; show how you are being efficient, not wasteful

It's about repair and maintain

Get the word out early about life expectancy of pipes, systems, etc.

Talking about water

5) Mention partnerships

Small businesses

Nonprofits

Other governments

Talking about water

6) Use effective messengers

University scientists, “experts”

Small business owners

Moms

Youth

Government officials/politicians???

Talking about water

7) Use multiple communication sources

Billing inserts

Newsletters

Website

Social media (for alerts, emergencies)

Talking about water

8) Know your changing demographics and communications

Growing Latino and Asian population

Aging population

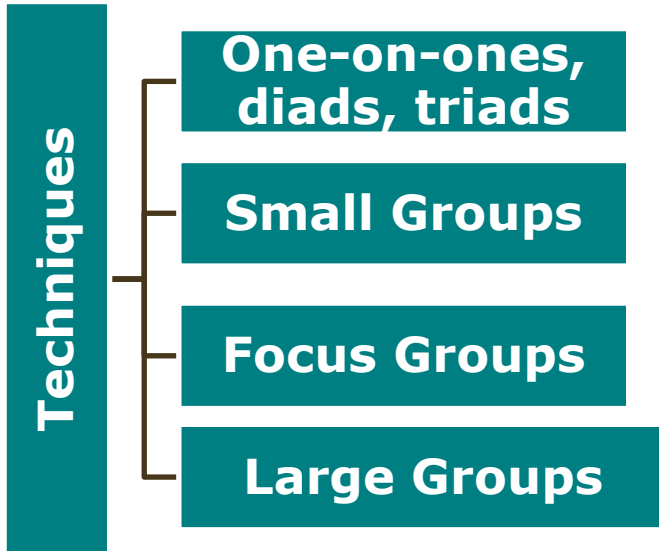
Differences in values and beliefs across generations

The value of opinion research

Opinion Research can provide:

- Current demographic and psychographic information
- Issue awareness and knowledge levels
- Values and beliefs
- Behavior
- Message development
- Message testing/targeting
- Message control
- Initiative or proposal testing
- Program evaluation
- Monitoring changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behavior over time
- Public education/relations

Qualitative Techniques



More Than Focus Groups

Project Stages

Video

Advantage & Disadvantages

Best in Combination With Quantitative Research

Focus groups

- Small group discussions of 6 – 10 people
- Typically recruited randomly to be representative of the population of interest – general public, likely voters, or key audience
- Best for uncovering:
 - general awareness
 - motivations and barriers
 - assessing how people think through and solve problems
 - understanding the everyday language people use
 - to test stimulus materials
- Live viewing and video clips often reality checks for policy makers

Focus groups

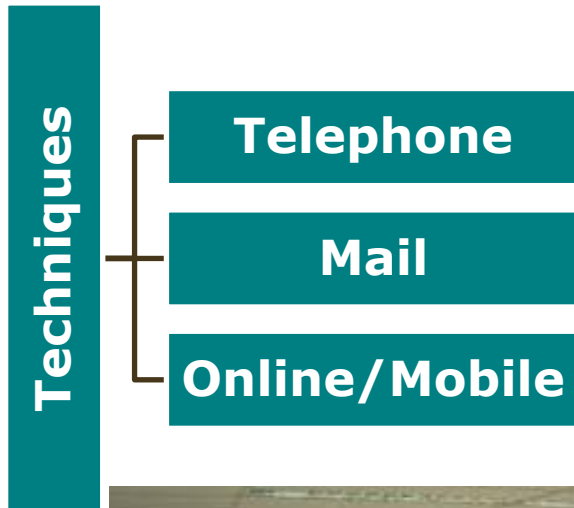
ADVANTAGES

- Feasible in almost all communities
- Hear range of perspectives from everyday people
- Greater sense of the intensity of attitudes
- Possibility to uncover ideas or issues that were not previously considered

DISADVANTAGES

- Less able to make generalizations
- Interpretation of findings is subjective
- Results may be seen as less credible to decision-makers, media, and the public

Quantitative Techniques



Project Stages

Tradeoff Methodologies

Advantage & Disadvantages

Best in Combination With Qualitative Research

Telephone surveys

- Still gold standard, but challenges
- Telephones are nearly universal and can control for many key demographic variables
- Declining participation rates make it especially difficult to complete studies in small communities
- Questionnaires typically 5-15 minutes
- Fielding time takes 3-7 days
- Costs driven by sample size and questionnaire length

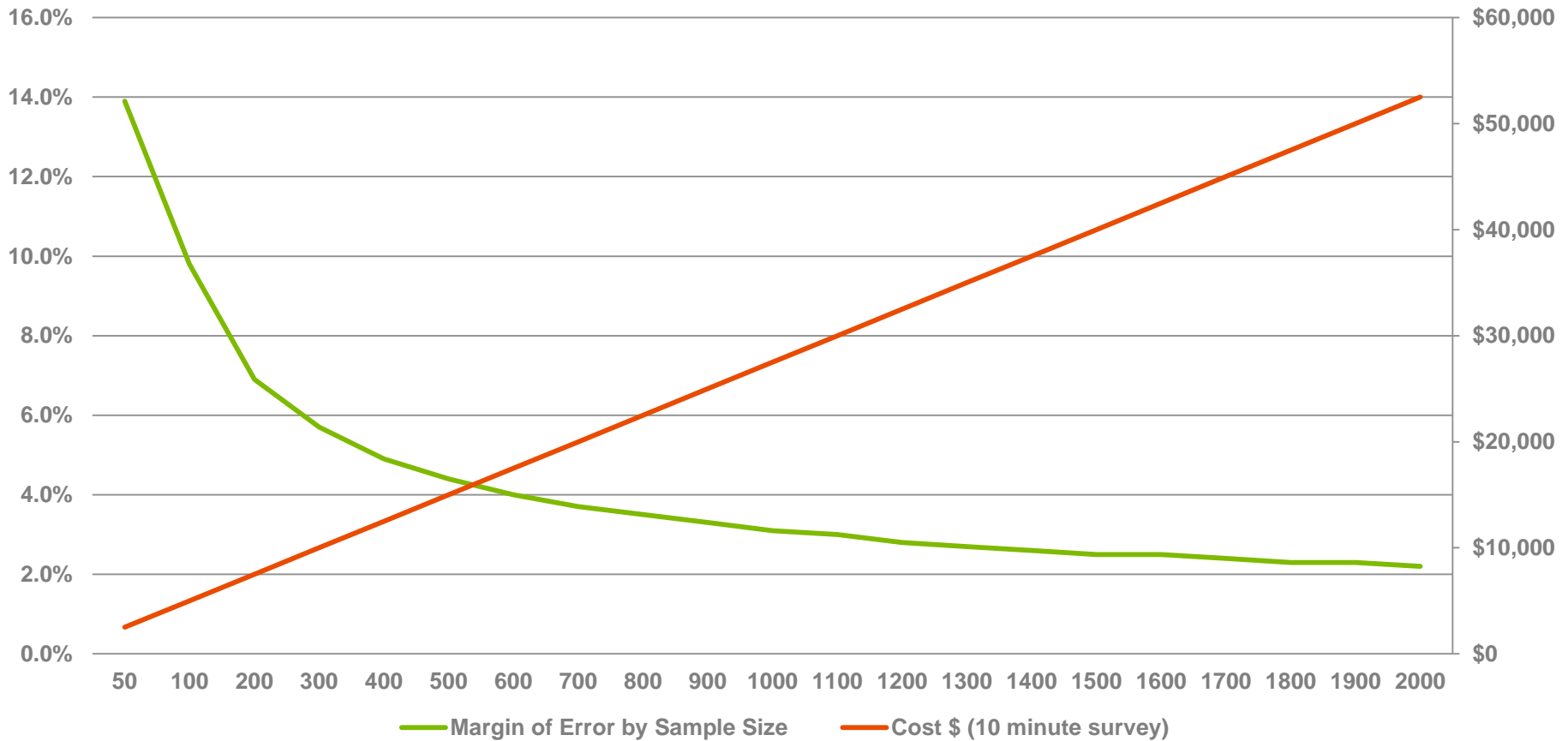
Telephone surveys: sample size

Questions to determine sample size:

- What is your tolerance for error?
- Who is audience for the survey data?
- How important are demographic differences?
- How many issues must the survey cover?
- What are the sample limitations?
- What is your budget?

Telephone surveys: cost

Cost by Sample Size & Margin of Error



Telephone surveys: pro & con

ADVANTAGES

- Quantify information
- Possible make generalizations
- Identify differences in attitudes among key groups
- Often considered more credible among decision-makers, media, the public

DISADVANTAGES

- May ask the wrong questions
- Declining response rates make it difficult in smaller communities
- Cost

Online surveys

- **Rapidly evolving methodology**
- **Probability vs. non-probability samples**
- **“Scientific” studies limited to large metropolitan areas and larger geographies**
- **Community engagement tool in all communities**
- **Ability to include audio and visual make it a powerful tool for media and communication studies**

Significant infrastructure needs!



Stop the Drain

about the campaign

What
is the
SWIP

What
are the
OPTIONS

What
you can
DO

[news](#) • [blog](#) • [faq](#) • [reference materials](#) • [contact us](#)

BEND'S SURFACE WATER IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (SWIP) IS A \$68 MILLION DOLLAR DRAIN ON...



Rate Payer's Pockets

The SWIP will cause City of Bend water users to see their rates rise by 40% in the next five years....

[Read More »](#)



Tumalo Creek

Bend already takes too much water out of Tumalo Creek. This project will reduce the creek's flows even further....

[Read More »](#)



Bend's Future

The SWIP is Bend's biggest public works project ever. But it is not necessary, it relies on incomplete studies with misleading information, and....

[Read More »](#)

Petition to Stop the Drain

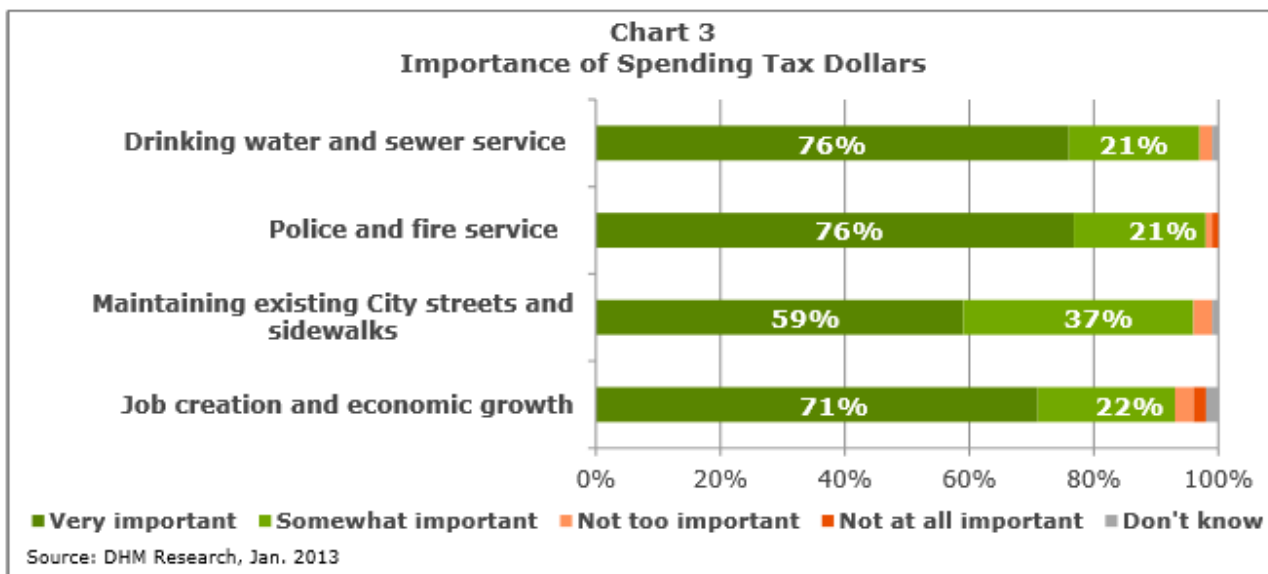
I wish to state my opposition to the proposed City of Bend's Surface Water Improvement Project (SWIP), which would cost Bend nearly \$70 million, reduce flows in Tumalo Creek, and raise rate-payers' bills more than 40% in the near future. I believe this project is misdirected and the process should be reopened for public participation and reassessment of alternatives.

[sign here](#)



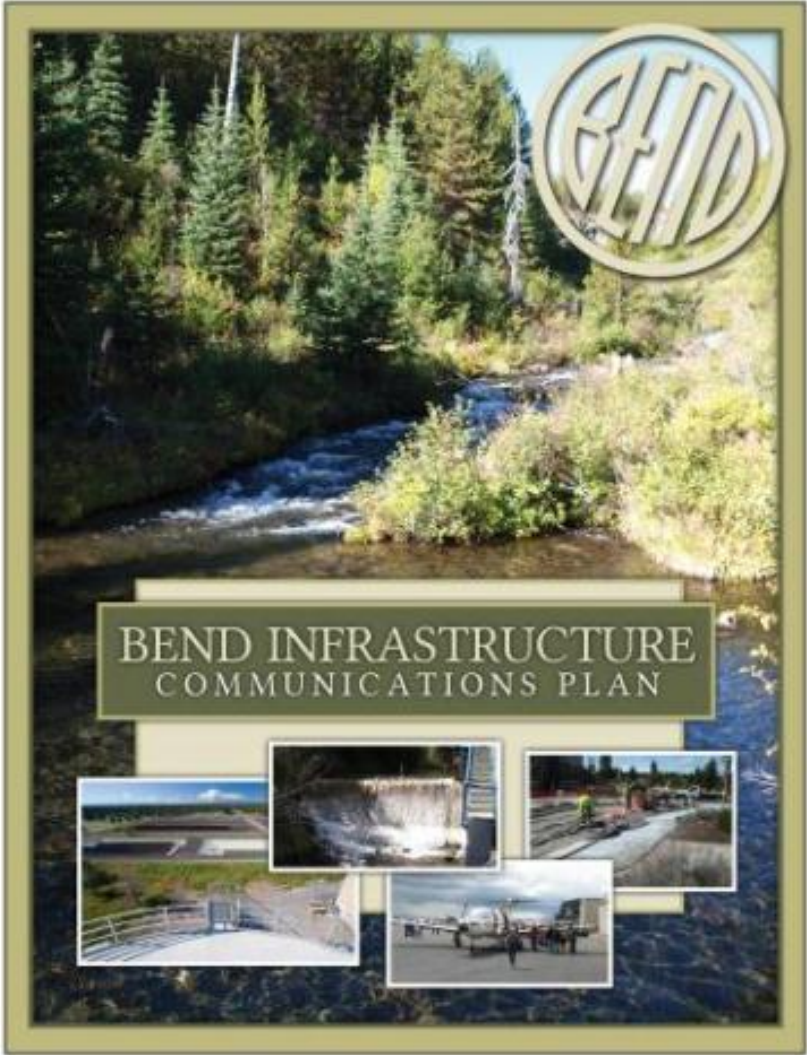
Telephone poll completed in 2013

- Valuable information for policymakers: **the public does value infrastructure investment!**



2013 Telephone Poll Results (DHM)

- **Services least likely to be cut by residents: water, sewer, public safety**
- **Six in ten residents would consider paying more**





**Projects now
moving forward.
*That means more
water in Tumalo
Creek.***

Failing Old-Aged Water Pipes



Loss of Revenue to Fix the Problem

A 1996 City Charter amendment enacted by Oregon City voters required the City (in 2014) to **rollback water rates to near-1994 levels.**

The Charter also **restricted water rate increases to no more than 3% per year**—even if there is a water emergency.



New City Charter
amendment

Required a vote
of the people



- Public opinion research conducted early: October 2012
- Telephone survey of Oregon City registered voters

Oregon City Charter Survey

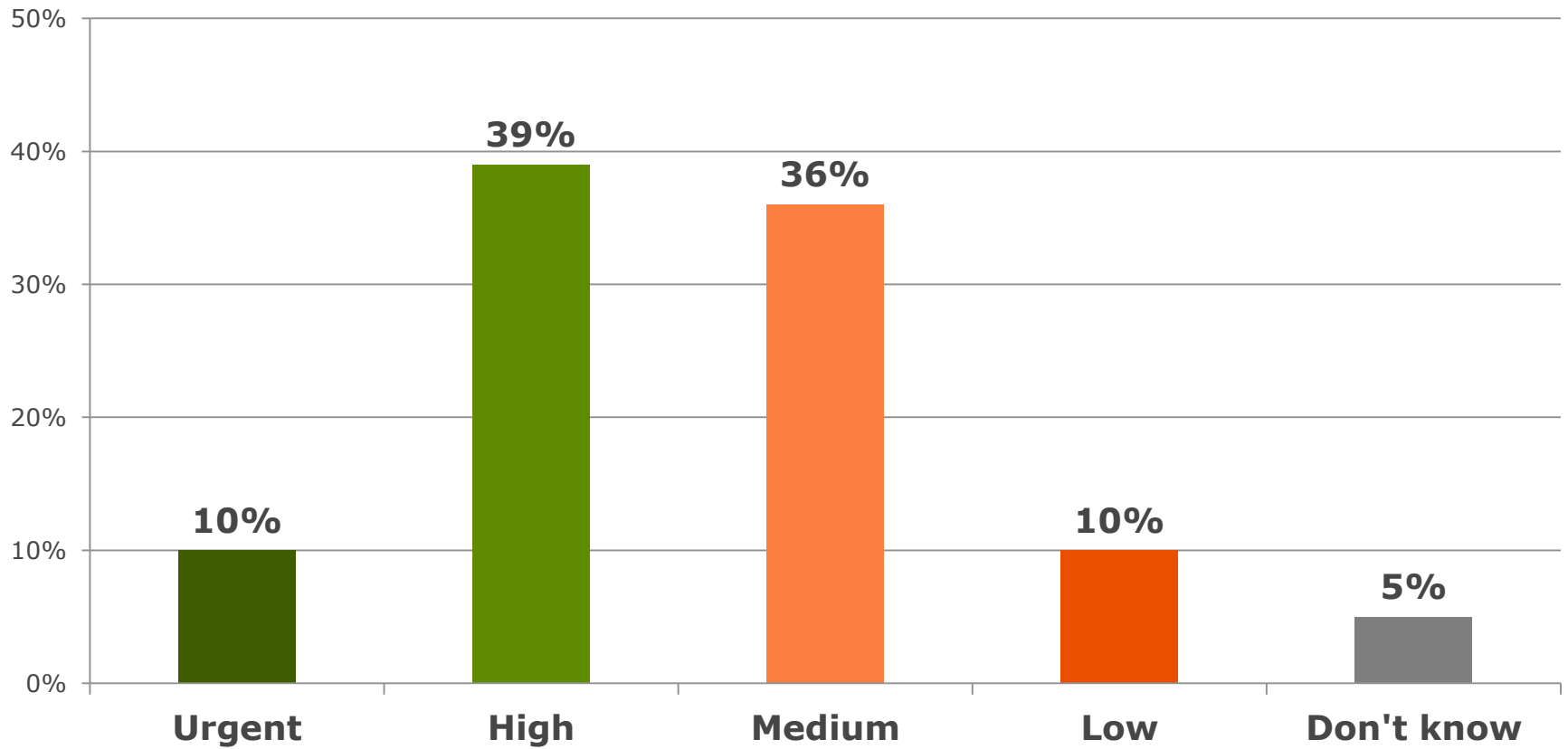
Perceptions of Water
Service and Support
for Charter
Amendment Options

PREPARED FOR
Oregon City
October 2012

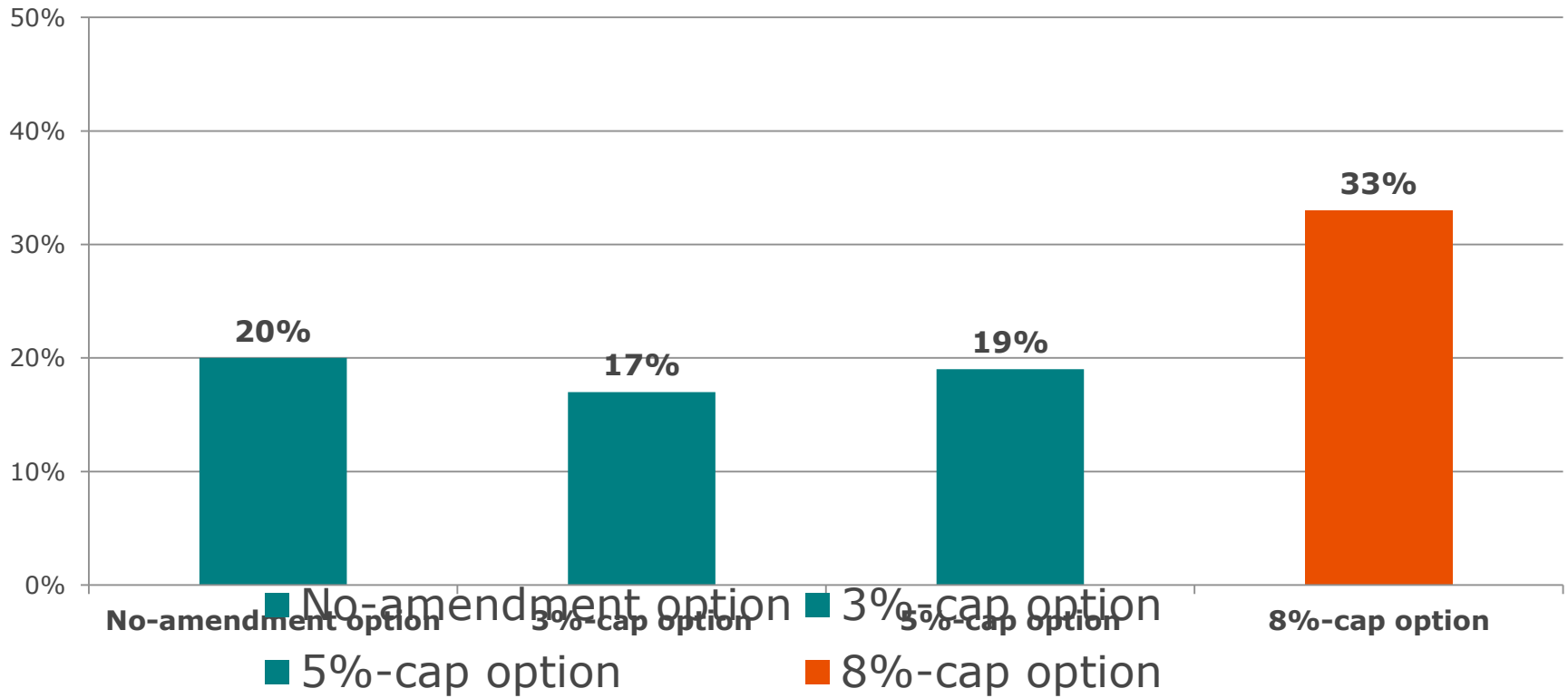
www.dhmresearch.com

- ✓ **63%** could not name the Clackamas River as the source of Oregon City's water
- ✓ **71%** were not aware of any services provided by the South Fork Water Board
- ✓ **85%** were not at all aware of the city's charter amendment related to water rates

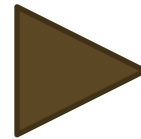
Priority Of Pipe Replacement



Most Preferred Charter Amendment Option (Phone/Online)



Community education was needed for an informed decision.



There was a clear mandate to **fix the problem.**

The **no-amendment option** was unacceptable to two-thirds of respondents.



Oregon City Water

A Reliable Water Future

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH OREGON CITY'S WATER SYSTEM?

1. Failing Old-Aged Water Pipes

Many of Oregon City's aging pipes are at the end of their useful life and need replacement. There are 154 miles of water pipes; some pipes are over 100 years old.

OLD-AGED PIPES break and cause water service outages and ongoing water loss.

OLD-AGED PIPES restrict the flow of water needed to fight fires.



OLD-AGED PIPES are encrusted with rust, causing discolored water at homes and businesses.

2. Loss of Revenue to Fix the Problem

A 1996 City Charter amendment enacted by Oregon City voters requires the City (in 2014) to rollback water rates to near-1994 levels. The Charter also restricts water rate increases to no more than 3% per year—even if there is a water emergency.

The 20-year old water rates will not support the needed operations and maintenance of Oregon City's water system nor will it support replacement of old-aged water pipes.

Clean and reliable water is essential to public health, safety, and a strong economy.



WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

The Commission is considering a new City Charter Amendment to support replacement of old-aged water pipes and support responsible funding of Oregon City's water system.

New City Charter Amendment

The City Charter amendment would remove the water rate rollback provision, retain a cap on annual water rate increases, and provide for small, steady water rate increases of \$2 to \$3 for the average household monthly water bill. The amendment would allow Oregon City to:

- ✓ Adequately fund water system needs;
- ✓ Retain accountability to ratepayers;
- ✓ Provide for predictable rate increases; and
- ✓ Yield enough money to pay for water projects and routine system operations and maintenance.

Water Pipeline Replacement Benefits

NEW WATER PIPES don't leak or break.



NEW WATER PIPES provide adequate firefighting flows and high quality drinking water.

May 21, 2013 Oregon City Ballot

Measure 3-423

PASSED

YES: 2,369 51.8%

NO: 2,205 48.2%



Invest in public opinion research to learn what your community members value.

It is critical to the success of strategic communications plans and public outreach efforts!

