

## Survey: Many willing to pay for services

By DEENA WINTER / Lincoln Journal Star  
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Lincoln's mayor released preliminary results of an online city survey Wednesday that showed two-thirds of respondents willing to raise their property taxes to some degree to save certain city programs — especially pools and libraries.

Mayor Chris Beutler said many respondents said they'd support a property tax increase of less than \$1 per month — or the equivalent of a 1-cent increase in the city's property tax levy. So does that mean he intends to propose such an increase when he unveils his budget proposal in July?

Beutler wouldn't say.

"I do not regard this finding as a mandate for raising property taxes."

A property tax increase might be a tough sell on the Lincoln City Council, where three recently elected members pledged not to increase property taxes during these tough economic times.

Although the value of the survey has been questioned since it was not scientific, Beutler said the results are important to him.

"Surveys have limitations that must be recognized," he said, but he added it would be unfair to ignore the opinions of more than 1,800 people who took the survey.

"They recognize that we can't have it all," he said. "They were not willing to write the city a blank check."

Coby Mach, head of the Lincoln Independent Business Association, has questioned the validity of the survey because it was not scientific and often gave no options other than a tax increase or program cut.

He said he felt some vindication when Alan Tomkins of the Nebraska Public Policy Center — which helped coordinate the survey — acknowledged the online survey was not a cross-section of the community.

Mach said the \$47,000 cost of the "Taking Charge" initiative (which also included an all-day budget discussion with 111 residents) could have been better spent elsewhere. It was paid for by a grant from the Sloan Foundation.

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