

Presentation

Agenda Item #	1
Meeting Date	July 7, 2014
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Reviewed By	

Discussion Item	Presentation of Resident Survey Results
Background	<p>The City contracted with National Research Center, Inc. to conduct a survey of residents. This is the third such survey conducted by NRC for the City since 2007.</p> <p>On July 7, staff will present the results of the resident survey. The complete survey is available for review online.</p>
Policy	The City Council is interested in learning community opinions on service delivery via a professionally designed, random survey of City residents.
Fiscal Impact	N/A
Attachments	<p>Executive Summary</p> <p>The complete survey report and supplemental analysis is available online:</p> <p>http://documents-takomapark.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resident-survey/2014-resident-survey.pdf</p> <p>http://documents-takomapark.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resident-survey/2014-resident-survey-supplemental-analysis.pdf</p>
Recommendation	Hear the presentation.
Special Consideration	

Survey Background

Survey Purpose

The City of Takoma Park, Maryland contracted with National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) to conduct a community-wide resident survey. The 2014 Takoma Park Resident Survey serves as a consumer report card for Takoma Park by providing residents the opportunity to rate the quality of life in the City, as well as the community's amenities, service delivery and their satisfaction with local government. The survey also permits residents to provide feedback to government on what is working well and what is not, and to communicate their priorities for community planning and resource allocation. This was the third implementation of the Takoma Park Resident Survey, with the first conducted in 2007 and the second in 2009.

The survey's focus on the quality of service delivery and the support for issues facing the City helps the City Council, staff and the public to set priorities for budget decisions and lays the groundwork for tracking community opinions about the core responsibilities of Takoma Park government, helping to assure maximum service quality over time.

This type of survey gets at the key services that local governments control to create a quality community. It is akin to private sector customer surveys that are used regularly by many corporations to monitor where there are weaknesses in product or service delivery before customers defect to competition or before other problems from dissatisfied customers arise.

Survey Methods

Households received four mailings each beginning in February 2014. The first mailing was a prenotification postcard announcing the upcoming survey. A week after the prenotification postcard was sent the first wave of the survey was sent. The second wave was sent one week after the first. Completed surveys were collected over the following weeks. The survey mailings contained a letter from the City Council inviting the household to participate in the 2014 Resident Survey, a questionnaire in both English and Spanish, and a self-mailing envelope. The fourth and final mailing was a reminder postcard asking residents who had not yet completed and returned the survey to do so.

About 5% of the surveys were returned undelivered because the housing unit was vacant or the postal service was unable to deliver the survey as addressed. Of the 2,862 remaining households, 1,071 completed the survey, providing a response rate of 37%.

Survey results were weighted so that respondent age, gender and Ward of residence were represented in the proportions reflective of all Takoma Park adults. More information about the survey methodology can be found in *Appendix F: Survey Methodology*. A copy of the questionnaire received by respondents can be found in *Appendix G: Survey Materials*.

How the Results Are Reported

For the most part, frequency distributions (the percent of respondents giving each possible response to a particular question) are presented in the body of the report. On many of the questions in the survey, respondents could answer "don't know." The proportion of respondents giving this reply is shown in the full set of responses included in *Appendix B: Responses to Survey Questions*. However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in the body of the report. In other words, the tables and graphs in the report body display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item. Questions where more

than 20% of respondents reported “don’t know” have been identified in the commentary of the report.

For some questions, respondents were permitted to select multiple responses. When the total exceeds 100% in a table for a multiple response question, it is because some respondents are counted in multiple categories. When a table for a question that only permitted a single response does not total to 100%, it is due to the routine practice of percentages being rounded to the nearest whole number.

Precision of Estimates

The 95% confidence interval (or “margin of error”) quantifies the “sampling error,” or precision of the estimates made from the survey results. A 95% confidence interval can be calculated for any sample size, and is ± 3 percentage points for this survey with 1,071 respondents. A 95% confidence interval indicates that for every 100 random samples of this many residents, 95 of the confidence intervals created will include the “true” population response. This theory is applied in practice to mean that the “true” perspective of the target population lies within the confidence interval created for a single survey. For example, if 75% of residents rate a service as “excellent” or “good,” then the 3% margin of error (for the 95% confidence interval) indicates that the range of likely responses for the entire community is between 72% and 78%. This source of uncertainty is called sampling error. In addition to sampling error, other types of “error” such as non-response error may also influence or bias results (i.e., those who did not respond to the survey may have different opinions about the issues covered than those who did respond).

Comparing Survey Results Over Time

Takoma Park has up to three years of data about resident perceptions of quality of life and quality of services delivered by the city. These comparisons to previous survey results are shown in the body of the report. Where differences in results from 2009 to 2014 are four percentage points or greater (or three points on the 100-point scale), they can be considered significantly higher or lower.

Putting Evaluations onto a 100-point Scale

Although responses to many of the evaluative or frequency questions were made on four- or five-point scales with 1 representing the best rating, the scales had different labels (e.g., 1=“excellent” or 1=“very effective”). To make comparisons easier, many of the results in this summary are reported on a common scale where 0 is the worst possible rating and 100 is the best possible rating. If everyone reported “excellent,” then the result would be 100 on the 0-100 scale. If ratings were all “good,” the result would be an average rating of 67. An average rating of 33 would be equivalent to “fair” and 0 would be “poor.” The new scale can be thought of like the thermometer used to represent total giving to United Way. The higher the thermometer reading, the closer to the goal of 100 – in this case, the most positive response possible. The 95% confidence interval around a score on the 0-100 scale based on all respondents typically will be no greater than plus or minus two points on the 100-point scale.

Benchmark Comparisons

An average rating of about 67 for service quality is at the “good” mark on a 100-point scale that goes from “excellent” to “poor.” Few services actually receive ratings as high as 67 on the 100-point scale, and service ratings range widely. Certain kinds of services tend to be thought

better of by residents in many communities across the country. For example, police protection tends to be better received than pothole repair by residents of most American cities. Where possible, the better comparison is not from one service to another in Takoma Park, but from Takoma Park services to services like them provided by other jurisdictions. This way we can better understand if “good” is good enough for Takoma Park service evaluations.

NRC’s database of comparative resident opinion is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in citizen surveys from approximately 500 jurisdictions whose residents evaluated local government services. In this report, these national benchmark comparisons have been provided when similar questions on the Takoma Park Resident Survey are included in NRC’s database and there are at least five jurisdictions in which the same question was asked, though most questions are compared to more than 100 jurisdictions. Where comparisons are available, Takoma Park results are noted as being “higher” than the benchmark, “lower” than the benchmark or “similar to” the benchmark. This evaluation of “higher,” “lower” or “similar to” comes from a statistical comparison of Takoma Park’s rating to the benchmark (the average rating from all the comparison jurisdictions where a similar question was asked). In instances where ratings are considerably higher or lower than the benchmark, these ratings have been further demarcated by the attribute of “much,” (for example, “much less” or “much above”). Differences of more than two points on the 100-point scale between Takoma Park’s ratings and the average based on the appropriate comparisons from the database are considered “statistically significant,” and thus are marked as “higher” or “lower” the benchmark. When differences between Takoma Park’s ratings and the national benchmarks are two points or less, they are marked as “similar to” the benchmark. In addition to the information provided in the body of the report, more detailed tables showing the comparative data are included in *Appendix E: Benchmark Comparisons*. These tables show the number of communities to which Takoma Park was compared and where Takoma Park’s average rating fell in the rank order of these communities’ ratings.