

**Town of Cary  
2016 Biennial Citizen Survey  
Executive Summary**

The results for the Town of Cary's 2016 Biennial Citizen Survey were exceptionally positive for the Town. The respondents continued to give high marks for the level of service provided to them in Cary. A total of 401 residents were surveyed and the resulting margin of error was  $\pm 5\%$ . The telephone survey methodology included listed, unlisted, and wireless numbers in the sampling frame. The results will be compared to the 2014 Biennial Survey.

The Town Government staff received very high marks for the six service dimensions resulting in the best overall ratings the staff has earned for any year. The means increased for all six service dimensions and this resulted in grade improvements for *professionalism* (B+ to A-), *knowledgeable* (B to A-), *helpful* (B+ to A-), and *overall quality of customer service* (B to A-). The grades for *courteous* (A-) and *promptness of response* (B+) remained unchanged. Four of the means this year were the highest earned to date for those services resulting in very impressive ratings for the staff.

The Town's rating for maintenance of streets and roads improved this year with the grade moving from a C to C+. This is the highest grade the Town has earned thus far for this challenging service. The three streets/roads mentioned most often as needing attention were Maynard Road, Cary Parkway, and Kildaire Farm Road. Also mentioned were Chatham Street, High House Road, and Harrison Avenue. The key issues were potholes and rough pavement.

The cleanliness and appearance of public areas continued to earn very high marks with every mean increasing and all were statistically significant improvements. The grades improved for *parks* (A- to A), *greenways* (A- to A), and *streets* (B+ to A-); while the grade for *median/roadsides* remained an A-. More impressive was the fact all the means were the highest earned to date by the Town. This resulted in the best ratings earned by the Town for the cleanliness and appearance of public areas.

The Cary Police Department garnered strong marks again this year with all the means increasing from 2014. The grades improved for *response time* (B+ to A-), *fairness* (B+ to A-), and *problem solving* (B to B+), while the grades were unchanged for *courteous* (A-) and *competence* (B+). The mean for *response time* was the highest ever earned for this service dimension by the Police. Overall, the grades for the Police Department were very good and have improved to a great extent from 2014.

The Cary Fire Department continued to earn the highest marks for any department examined in the survey. The Department maintained a grade of A+ for all the service dimensions including *competence*, *courteous*, *fairness*, *problem solving*, and *response time*. The means increased from all the service dimensions and the means for *competence*, *fairness*, and *problem solving* were the highest ever earned by the Department. Overall, the Fire Department continues to earn exceptional ratings.

The Parks & Recreation Department earned very good ratings this year but there was a slight decline. The means decreased for 5 of the service dimensions and increased for one other. This resulted in grade declines for *facility quality* (A to A-), *ease of registration* (A to A-), *program quality* (A to A-), and *cost or amount of fee* (A- to B+). The grades remained the same for *instructor quality* (A-) and *overall experience* (A-). However, none of the mean decreases reached statistical significance. Even with the decline, the overall grades were excellent for Parks & Recreation with the lowest grade a B+. In addition, the level of participation in the programs increased from 27.9% to 29.5% this year.

The respondents were positive in their rating of Cary as a place to live; although, the mean decreased slightly from 8.23 to 8.11 this year. This is the third consecutive survey where this mean has fallen. Even with the decline, the grade remained excellent and unchanged at A- with 97.6% of the responses on the “desirable” side of the scale and only 0.6% on the “undesirable” side. There was also a slight decline in the ratings for quality of life in Cary. While most of the respondents (68.1%) perceived the quality of life as unchanged, the better/worse percentage was 22.9% versus 8.9%. Last year, this better/worse percentage was stronger at 25.7% versus 7.9%. When asked the most important issue facing Cary, the respondents answered the key issue was controlling growth (126 comments) followed by traffic/improving roads (64 comments), crime/safety (34 comments), schools (31 comments), and infrastructure concerns (17 comments). In 2014, controlling growth was also the most important issue with 151 comments followed by traffic/improving roads (76 comments), schools (41 comments), and revitalizing downtown (18 comments). The major change was the growing concern for crime/safety and the infrastructure this year while controlling growth, traffic/improving roads, schools, and revitalizing downtown garnered fewer total comments.

The respondents felt very safe in Cary overall this year. The mean was 8.06 on a 9-point scale with 96.0% answering on the “safe” side of the scale. This mean has decreased slightly from 2014 when it was 8.15 and this represented the third consecutive survey where this mean has declined. The respondents also felt safe in their home neighborhoods (mean of 8.37 with 97.5% on the “safe” side of the scale). This mean was generally unchanged from 2014 when it was 8.36. Finally, the mean for safe in public places around Cary increased minimally from 7.87 to 7.89 this year with 93.5% on “safe” side of the scale. In summary, there continued to be a perception of a high degree of safety throughout Cary even with the decline in ratings of safe in Cary overall.

Cary’s municipal tax rate was perceived as “about right” by 58.7% of the respondents when compared to Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham. However, the mean increased from 3.27 in 2014 to 3.36 this year using the 5-point scale. This indicated an increase in the skewing of the taxes being somewhat high. This was evident in the percentage of responses of taxes perceived as being on the “high” side increased to 35.6% from 26.7% in 2014.

Several barriers to citizen involvement in local government were examined. The most significant barrier was *too busy – don’t have time* with mean of 4.75 on a 9-point scale. Two other key barriers were *don’t know about opportunities* (4.14) and *timing is inconvenient* (3.32). This mirrors the top three barriers in 2014.

The top ten major information sources (in order) used by the respondents include word-of-mouth, BUD, Cary’s website, Cary News, television, Raleigh News & Observer, Cary’s Citizen website, radio, Facebook, and Cary email list services. There were a few changes from 2014 reflecting the growing importance of social media and decline of traditional media. Declining in importance were Cary News, television, Raleigh News & Observer, and radio. Gaining importance were Cary’s website, Cary’s Citizen website, Facebook, and Cary email list services. Word of mouth remained the top information source this year while BUD moved from 4<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>. Three sources examined for the first time this year generally ranked low in usage including LinkedIn (14<sup>th</sup>), Nextdoor (16<sup>th</sup>), and Instagram (20<sup>th</sup> or last). The most used new potential media sources were Pinterest and Snapchat; although, the means indicated limited usage for both these sources.

The large majority of respondents who use Wifi perceived no problems with its availability in Cary. The only areas mentioned more than once as having availability issues were the airport (6 comments), stores while out shopping (3 comments), and the library (3 comments).

There has been an improvement in the effectiveness of Cary's communication efforts with citizens as compared to 2014. The respondents felt generally well informed about *government services, projects, issues, and programs that affect them*. The mean improved from 6.52 in 2014 to 6.68 this year with 70.9% on the "informed" side of the scale. There was also a strong level of satisfaction with *Cary making information available to citizens concerning important services, projects, issues, and programs*. This year's mean was 7.33 which increased from 7.07 in 2014 and this increase was statistically significant. There were 83.6% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. The mean this year tied for the highest mean the Town has earned to date. Finally, the respondents were also satisfied with the *opportunities Cary gives them to participate in the decision-making process*. The mean also rose this year from 6.56 to 6.67 with 69.2% on the "satisfied" side of the scale.

Solid Waste Services continued to receive very good marks again this year. The respondents gave a grade of A- for *curbside garbage collection, curbside yard waste collection, loose leaf collection, and curbside recycling collection* this year. These were the same grades earned in 2014.

The Town Council focus areas earned very good ratings this year with a striking level of improvement. In addition, all the mean increases were statistically significant this year. The focus areas will be discussed in order of ranking. The highest level of satisfaction was for the overall job the Town is doing on *Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources*. The mean this year was 8.00 improving from 7.61 in 2014. There were 95.2% of the respondents on the "satisfied" side of the scale. The job the Town is doing on *environmental protection* continued to earn high marks with the mean increasing from 7.53 to 7.74 with 95.5% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. The respondents were also satisfied with the *Town being effective in keeping Cary the best place to live, work, and raise a family*. The mean increased from 7.49 to 7.72 with 92.3% on the "effective" side of the scale. There was an increase in the level of satisfaction with the job the Town is doing on *transportation*. The mean increased from 6.94 to 7.20 with 84.1% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. The job the Town is doing on *planning & development* increased as well improving from 6.60 to 7.16 with 83.4% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. Finally, Cary earned a higher rating for the job the Town is doing on *downtown revitalization*. The mean increased from 6.58 to 7.00 with 77.8% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. As an indication of how successful the ratings were this year, the means for 5 of the 6 focus areas were the highest earned to date by the Town.

There were 79.4% of the respondents who had visited downtown in the past year down from 85.6% in 2014. The two major reasons they visited downtown was for restaurants and shopping. Other prominent reasons included visiting the area/pleasure, business/work, library, theater, and art/art center. Those who had not visited downtown indicated the major reasons were no interest/don't like it and nothing down there. The respondents indicated the most effective amenity/activity to bring them downtown would be cafes/restaurants. In addition, shopping opportunities, festivals, outdoor performances, concerts, and farmer's market rated high in terms of effectiveness. Other amenities/activities with a degree of effectiveness (in order) included coffee shop, bars/pubs, ice cream/yogurt shop, preserve/reuse historic buildings, museums, additional art exhibition space, and public art.

Finally, the Town earned good marks for the job they are doing with senior citizens and citizens with disabilities. The mean for the job the Town is doing with seniors was 7.56 with 86.1% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. The mean for the job the Town is doing for citizens with disabilities was 7.58 with 86.0% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. There were 9.8% of the respondents who had someone living at home legally disabled.

In conclusion, there were 11 grades that improved this year, 12 grades that remained unchanged, and 4 grades that declined for the 27 common service dimensions. This included 4 of the mean increases that were statistically significant while none of the decreases reached significance. The final average for the 27 graded Cary service dimensions this year was 8.30 remaining a grade of A-. For comparison, the final average on common service dimensions in 2014 was 8.18 (A-), 2012 was 8.36 (A-), 2010 was 8.25 (A-), in 2008 was 8.19 (A-), and in 2006 was 7.92 (B+). Overall, the Town of Cary continues to receive an excellent report card from its citizens with 22 grades in the A range, 4 grades in the B range, and only one grade in the C range. This year's ratings represent the second best results the Town has earned only exceeded by the exceptional 2012 results.