

Town of Cary 2008 Biennial Citizen Survey Executive Summary

The results of 2008 Cary's Biennial Citizen Survey were very positive. The respondents gave high marks for the services provided by the Town of Cary. A total of 405 residents were surveyed and the resulting margin of error was $\pm 5\%$. The results showed improvement from the 2006 Biennial Survey in most areas examined.

The Town Government staff received very good marks for the service dimensions of *courteous* (A-), *professionalism* (A-), *knowledgeable* (A-), *promptness of response* (B), and *ability to resolve issues* (B-). There has been significant improvement since 2006. This year all the means increased and the grades improved in 4 of the 5 dimensions measured.

The Town continued to earn an average mark for the maintenance of streets and roads. The grade remained the same as 2006 when it was a C-. However, the mean has increased this year to the point the grade now borders on a C. The streets/roads mentioned most often as needing attention by the respondents were Maynard, Cary Parkway, and Kildaire Farm. The key issue was the potholes for these streets. There were 51.9% of the respondents who felt traffic in Cary was the same as other areas inside the Triangle; although, there were 37.2% who felt traffic was better in Cary and only 11.0% who indicated it was worse.

Cleanliness and appearance of public areas showed improvement this year. The means and grades increased for all 4 public areas examined including *parks* (A-), *greenways* (B+), *streets* (B), and *median/roadsides* (B). These means represent the highest earned for these public areas to date.

The Cary Police Department earned very strong marks with a significant increase in performance. The means and the grades improved for all the service dimensions. The grades were *courteous* (A), *competence* (A-), *fairness* (A-), *response time* (A-), and *problem solving* (B+). The means represent the highest grades the Police Department have earned.

The Cary Fire Department maintained their excellent ratings in 2008 earning the highest grades given to any department examined in the survey. The grades were exceptional for *competence* (A+), *problem solving* (A+), *response time* (A+), *fairness* (A+), and *courteous* (A). Of the 5 service dimensions measured, there were 4 means and 3 grades that improved this year.

The Parks & Recreation Department earned an impressive grade of A- for all the service dimensions including *instructor quality*, *ease of registration*, *program quality*, *overall experience*, *facility quality*, and *cost or amount of fee*. The means improved for 4 or the 6 dimensions with 1 of the grades improving. The primary programs in which the respondents participated were baseball, Lazy Days, basketball, classes, and senior citizen activities. There were approximately 11,000 school-age children who would participate in Parks &

Recreation programs specifically designed for year-round school students during track-out periods. In addition, there were approximately 2,500 disabled individuals who would benefit from recreation services that accommodate people with disabilities.

The respondents felt Cary was a very good place to live. The mean (8.10) was approximately the same as last year with 94.5% on the “desirable” side of the scale. If converted to a grade, then the mean would equate to an A- again this year. Most of the respondents (51.0%) felt the quality of life in Cary was the same over the past two years. However, there was a slant toward the quality of life getting worse. This year 26.1% were on the “worse” side of the scale versus 22.9% on the “better” side. This is the first time this has occurred. The respondents indicated growth and traffic were the key reasons. When the respondents were asked what is the most important issue facing Cary, the predominant response was the high level of growth with 215 comments. There were three other key issues and they were traffic/improving roads (68 comments), water concerns (62 comments), and school issues (60 comments). Other issues included improving the infrastructure (11 comments), taxes (8 comments), construction (7 comments), crime/safety (7 comments), and improving planning (7 comments). For comparison, the most important issues in 2006 were growth (178 comments), traffic/roads (77 comments), and schools (63 comments).

The respondents indicated they felt very safe in Cary again this year. The mean was virtually unchanged at 8.09 on a 9-point scale with 98.2% answering on the “safe” side of the scale. The respondents also felt very safe in their neighborhoods. The mean was 8.29 (8.22 in 2006) with 99.2% on the “safe” side of the scale. Finally, the respondents indicated a high perception of safety in public places around Cary. The mean was 8.04 (7.90 in 2006) with 97.8% on the “safe” side of the scale. Overall, there was an exceptionally high perception of safety around Cary.

Cary’s municipal tax rate was perceived as about right by the respondents when compared to other localities (Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham). There was a slight leaning for the tax rate being on the high side in 2006 that has diminished this year. The mean declined from 3.26 to 3.06 (midpoint is 3). Those who perceived the tax rate on the “high” side of the scale decline from 28.1% to 18.9% while those perceiving the rate on the “low” side increased from 7.5% to 13.2% this year. Overall, the tax rate is considered appropriate with a reduction of the slanting for the high side.

The information sources most used by the respondents include Raleigh News & Observer, television, word-of-mouth, Cary News, BUD, radio, and Cary’s website (in that order). The only changes from 2006 was word-of-mouth switched places with Cary News moving into 3rd place overall. One new source examined this year was blogs/message boards/social media which finished rated 11th out of the 14 sources examined. Internet access in Cary continues to grow. This year, 96.0% (94.3% in 2006) had internet access (58.8% at both home and the office) with 93.8% (84.2% in 2006) having high-speed connections.

There were 77.0% of the respondents who were subscribers to Time-Warner Cable. The

subscribers were asked about their viewership of the Town's cable programming. Approximately 54% watch at least sometime during the year meetings of the Cary Town Council, School Board, or Wake County Board of Commissioner. In addition, Cary TV's Electronic Bulletin Board Message was watched by approximately 34% of the respondents at least sometime during the year. BUD-TV and Wink were the least watched of the Town's programming. BUD-TV was watched by approximately 28% of the respondents at least sometime during the year and Wink was watch by approximately 27% of the respondents. As for the 2007 Cary Community Candidate Forum, it was viewed by 30.5% of the respondents. This has increased significantly from only 14.3% in 2006.

There has been an improvement in Cary's communication efforts with citizens. Respondents felt somewhat better informed about government services, projects, issues, and programs that affect them this year. The mean increased from 5.78 to 6.09 this year with 61.7% on the "informed" side of the scale versus 16.6% on the "not informed" side. There was also a higher degree of satisfaction with Cary making information available to citizens concerning important services, projects, issues, and programs. The mean increased from 6.63 to 6.87 with 77.8% on the "satisfied" side of the scale and only 6.1% on the "dissatisfied" side. Finally, the respondents were more satisfied with the opportunities Cary gives them to participate in the decision-making process. In this case, the mean increased from 6.19 to 6.36 with 66.4% on the "satisfied" side and only 10.4% on the "dissatisfied" side.

Recycling and curbside services received very good marks this year. Curbside recycling showed improvement with a mean of 7.74 (7.56 in 2006) and 90.0% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. Curbside garbage service earned an even higher rating of 8.19 (7.65 in 2006) with 94.6% of the "satisfied" side of the scale. This is the highest rating to date for curbside garbage service. There was also a relatively high degree of support for adding chipboard and junk mail to the curbside recycling program. The mean was 6.49 with 62.4% on the "support" side of the scale and only 19.1% on the "no support" side.

A set of questions on storm drains revealed there was still a degree of uncertainty concerning acceptable materials that can enter the drains. The respondents were mostly accurate regarding rainwater from a home's gutters in that 68.6% indicated correctly that it was acceptable. There was a degree of inaccuracy regarding two unacceptable items including water from draining a swimming pool (17.6%) and grass clippings, leaves, and other natural vegetation (8.2%). On the positive side, the accuracy for water from a swimming pool has improved from 28.1% in 2006. On the negative side, the accuracy for grass clippings, leaves, and other natural vegetation has decreased slightly from 6.5% in 2006. The respondents continued to be very accurate for grease/oil (0.2%) and paint (0.2%).

A new set of questions examining Instant Runoff Voting Method indicated a degree of misunderstanding of the method. The mean was 5.83 with 58.6% on the "understand" side of the scale and a rather high 30.6% on the "not understand" side. There was a high degree of support for continuing to use the method in light of the savings to the taxpayers. In this case, the mean was 7.21 with 68.8% on the "support" side of the scale and only 7.2% on the

“no support” side.

The results were somewhat mixed for emergency preparedness. There were fewer respondents who possessed a 3-day emergency kit consisting of food, water, prescriptions, flashlight, radio, important papers, and contact information. The percentage of respondents having the emergency kit fell from 48.8% in 2006 to 42.3% this year. On the positive side, there were more respondents who had a family emergency plan this year increasing from 45.6% in 2006 to 49.5% this year.

The primary language spoken in the home by the respondents was primarily English (95.8%) with limited use of other languages including Hindi/Gujarati (1.2%), Korean (1.0%), Spanish (0.7%), and Chinese (0.7%). In addition, the number of adults in the household who cannot read due to the fact they cannot see, did not learn, or for any other reason was very limited in that 99.5% of the respondents were literate.

The respondents indicated that a sense of community with their neighbors was very important to them. The mean was 7.76 with 87.5% on the “important” side of the scale and only 3.1% on the “not important” side. The sense of community actually felt with their neighbors was generally strong as well. The mean was 6.64 with 70.1% on the “strong” side of the scale and 15.4% on the “weak” side. The respondents indicated they interact frequently with their neighbors from just saying hello to visiting them to exchanging favors. The most frequent interaction was once/twice a week or everyday.

There were seven focus areas of the Town Council examined in the survey. The highest level of satisfaction was for the job the Town was doing with parks, recreation, and cultural programs. The mean was 7.46 with 87.6% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and only 0.9% on the “dissatisfied” side. There was a limited number of suggestions to improve parks, recreation, and cultural programs with no theme evident.

The job the Town is doing on environmental protection ranked second among the focus areas examined. The mean was 7.04 with 80.0% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and only 3.5% on the “dissatisfied” side. The suggestions to improve environmental protection focused on stopping excessive water usage/abuse, recycling more items, and stop cutting down the trees. The effectiveness of Town Council in keeping Cary the best place to live, work, and raise a family ranked third. The mean was 6.85 with 77.0% on the “effective” side of the scale and only 4.1% on the “ineffective” side. The suggestions to improve the effectiveness focused mostly on controlling growth. Other suggestions included listening more to citizens, school issues, and safety. The level of satisfaction for the job the Town is doing on transportation rated fourth with a mean of 6.66. There were 72.9% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and 11.1% on the “dissatisfied” side. The suggestions to improve transportation centered on synchronizing lights, adding sidewalks, improving C-Tran, widening roads, and improving public transportation. Ranking fifth was the job the Town is doing on downtown revitalization. The mean was 6.55 with 69.7% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and only 6.9% on the “dissatisfied” side. The suggestions to improve downtown revitalization focused on not seeing any results downtown and/or speed things up, it is a waste of money, and leave downtown unchanged. The job the Town is doing on

planning & development ranked sixth. However, the ratings were not as strong as the other focus areas. The mean was 5.93 with 61.1% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and 18.4% on the “dissatisfied” side. The suggestions to improve planning & development focused on controlling growth/development, improving the infrastructure, and not giving developers so much influence. The lowest rating focus area was the job the Town was doing on school issues. The mean was 5.73 with 49.0% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and 15.3% on the “dissatisfied” side. There was also a large percentage (35.6%) of neutral responses as well. The suggestions to improve school issues focused on ending school reassignments, Cary being more of an advocate for citizens, ending year-round school, and Cary starting its own school system.

In conclusion, the results were very positive and have shown significant improvement since 2006. There were 17 grades that improved this year, 0 grades that declined, and 10 grades that remained unchanged. This represents a significant increase in the overall service level as perceived by the respondents. The final average for the Cary service dimensions this year was 8.16 (A-). When compared to the same set of common item means, the final average in 2006 was 7.90 (B+). This represents a significant mean and grade improvement. Overall, the respondents gave the Town very strong marks for 2008. The most important issue to the respondents this year was controlling the high levels of growth and development. The other key issues were traffic/roads, water problems, and school issues.