

TOWN of CARY

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Executive Summary

The results of 2006 Cary's Biennial Citizen Survey were positive with citizen input generally indicating 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 $\pm 5\%$. However, there was a decrease in the overall grades from the 2004 Biennial Survey in several areas.

The Town Government staff received good marks for the service dimensions of *courteous* (B), *professionalism* (B), *knowledgeable* (B), *promptness of response* (B-), and *ability to resolve issues* (B-). An area of concern is that 4 means and associated grades declined slightly this year while only 1 mean and grade improved from 2004.

The Town earned an average mark for the maintenance of streets and roads. The grade fell from a C to a C- this year. This mean has declined in the past two consecutive survey periods. The Town earned more solid marks for the cleanliness and appearance of several public areas including *parks* (B+), *greenways* (B), *streets* (B-), and *median/roadsides* (B-). However, the means decreased slightly this year in regards to all four areas. On a positive note, only one of the grades for these public areas (*greenways*) actually declined despite the four mean decreases.

The Cary Police Department profile garnered solid grades again this year; although, the Department experienced a slight decline on the performance dimensions measured. The means for 6 of the 8 dimensions measured decreased and 4 of the grades declined. Even with the decline, all the grades remained high and two of the means did increase from 2004. The grades for the service dimensions included *competence* (B+), *courteous* (B+), *fairness* (B+), *response time* (B), and *problem solving* (B). In addition, the grades for *efficiency of the person contacted* (A-), *competence of the person contacted* (A-), and *courteousness of the person contacted* (A-) all remained high and unchanged this year; although, two of these three means decreased.

The Cary Fire Department maintained their excellent ratings in 2006 on *fairness* (A+), *courteous* (A), *response time* (A), *competence* (A), and *problem solving* (A-). The means increased for 3 of these dimensions while two decreased. As for grades, two of the grades improved and none declined indicating a degree of improvement this year.

The Parks & Recreation Department earned continued strong marks for *instructor quality* (A-), *ease of registration* (A-), *facility quality* (A-), *overall experience* (A-), *cost or amount of fee* (A-), and *program quality* (B+). However, there were declines in 4 of these while 2 of them increased. The impact of this decline was minimal in that only 1 grade decreased and the other 5 remained unchanged from 2004. One additional aspect to consider was the decline in participation from 36.0% to 26.7% this year. Overall, Parks & Recreation had very good results with a slight decline in ratings and participation from 2004.

The respondents were positive in their rating of the overall operation or management of Cary. This represented a slight drop off from 2004. The mean decreased from 7.63 to 7.27 and the grade declined from a B to a B-. The responses for Cary as an overall place to live also decreased slightly from 8.31 to 8.09 with the grade remaining unchanged and very strong at A-.

When the respondents were asked what is the most important issue facing Cary, the predominant response was high level of growth. Other important issues included traffic/roads, schools/school rezoning, and construction (in that order). The respondents were then asked what actions they would take to improve Cary if they were the Mayor, Town Manager, and Town Council all rolled into one. The primary responses were to slow down growth and development. This was followed by improving traffic/improving roads, improving schools, and better public transportation.

Most respondents (57.3%) felt that the quality of life in Cary was about the same over the past two years with a slant toward the quality of life improving (30.6% indicated somewhat or much better). However, this positive slant has decreased from 2004 when the improved percentage was 41.6%.

Cary's municipal tax rate was perceived as "about right" when compared to other localities with a leaning toward the tax rate being on the high side. This year, this leaning to the high side declined slightly. The mean declined from 3.34 in 2004 to 3.26 on a 5-point scale.

The major information sources used by the respondents include Raleigh News & Observer, television, Cary News, word-of-mouth, BUD, radio, and Cary's website (in that order). This year, Cary News and Cary's website increased in usage while word-of-mouth and radio have decreased. Two new sources examined this year, Independent Weekly and CaryNow.com, finished low in the ratings. Internet access in Town continues to grow. This year, 94.3% of the respondents had internet access (58.4% at both home and the office) with 84.2% having high-speed connections. As for the 2005 Cary Community Candidate Forums on Cary TV 11, the Forums were watched (in whole or in part) by approximately 14% of the respondents.

The respondents felt very safe in Cary again this year. The mean was 8.10 on a 9-point scale with 97.5% answering above the midpoint of 5. This mean declined slightly from 2004 when it was 8.23. Two new safety questions this year examined perceptions for feeling safe in home neighborhoods and feeling safe in public places around Cary. Both received high mean scores of 8.22 and 7.90, respectively. Overall, there was a perception of a high degree of safety in Cary.

There has been slight decline in Cary's communication efforts with citizens. Respondents felt somewhat less informed about government services, projects, issues, and programs that affect them this year. The mean declined from 6.63 to 5.78 this year on a 9-point scale. There was also somewhat less satisfaction with Cary making information available to citizens concerning important services, projects, issues, and programs. This year the mean fell from 7.15 to 6.63. Finally, the respondents were also less satisfied with the opportunities Cary gives them to participate in the decision-making process. In this case, the mean declined from 6.62 to 6.19. Keep in mind, the overall scores remain solid with high percentages of responses above the midpoint of 5.

The survey also contained a question asking the respondents if they are satisfied that Cary is achieving its goal of being the "best local government of its size in North Carolina." Overall, there was a significant reduction in support for this statement. The mean decreased from 2004 and the mark declined a full letter grade from B- to a C- this year and represents an area of concern.

Solid Waste Services received good marks from the sample this year. The curbside services experienced a small decline in ratings while the call-in services received higher ratings. Curbside garbage, recycling, and yard waste all experienced a decline in their means this year. However, the overall mean scores remain very good (all above 7.50) with high percentages on the satisfied side of the scale. The call-in services of computer recycling, used motor oil recycling, and bulky trash all improved this year. Some of them experienced a significant improvement (computer recycling and used motor oil recycling). Christmas tree and leaf collection services both received very good ratings with a slight decline for Christmas trees and slight improvement for leaf collection. Finally, the satisfaction with the Citizen Convenience Center declined somewhat this year with the mean decreasing from 8.01 to 7.48.

A set of questions on storm drains revealed there were still a degree of uncertainty acceptable materials that can enter the drains. The respondents were accurate concerning rainwater from a home's gutters in that 87.6% indicated it was acceptable. They were inaccurate regarding the runoff from sprinklers/irrigation systems (68.1%), rinse water from washing a car (49.6%), and to a lesser degree water from draining a swimming pool (28.1%). On the positive side, the respondents were more accurate in three areas this year as compared to 2004. The percentages improved for runoff from sprinklers/irrigation systems (84.5% to 68.1%), rinse water for washing a car (63.1% to 49.6%), and natural vegetation (17.5% to 6.5%). The respondents continued to be very accurate for grease/oil (1.2%) and paint (1.0%). In regards to what happens to the materials that make it into the drains, over 62% of the respondents could not identify that these materials go directly into streams and creeks. Most thought the water went into the wastewater treatment plant or they were unsure where the materials ended up.

A new set of questions this year examined the emergency preparedness of the respondents. When asked their transportation method in the event of a mandatory evacuation of Cary, almost 96% would have access to private transportation with 4.0% who would need public transportation to leave Town. A majority of the respondents (95.0%) would live with family or friends or have the financial resources to move into a motel/apartment/home in the event of an evacuation. There were 5.0% who would need to stay in an emergency shelter. As for the pet situation, most of the respondents would take their pets with them or board them in the event of an evacuation. However, there were 1.8% who would have to leave them behind since pets are not allowed in emergency shelters. The respondents were asked how many individuals in their household have medical conditions requiring daily access to life-saving medical services. In this case, 82.3% did not have anyone needing these services, while 10.3% had 1 individual and 7.0% had 2 in the household. Approximately half (48.8%) of the households possessed a 3-day emergency kit consisting of food, water, prescriptions, flashlight, radio, and important papers. There were 45.6% who had a family emergency plan for getting together if a disaster struck during work or school. The results indicate a number of individuals would need public transportation and access to an emergency shelter. In addition, a large number of households would have individuals who would need the availability of life-saving services. Even at 1.8%, this represents a considerable number of pets left behind.

The respondents indicated a degree of support for the availability of town-wide Wi-Fi service in Cary with a mean of 5.97 on a 9-point scale with 28.3% indicating it was very important. Approximately 71% felt that the Town Government and private business should share the responsibility to build, operate, and pay for the service. The areas that Wi-Fi would increase visitation the most (in order) would be downtown Cary, Town Community Centers, Town Parks, Cary shopping centers, facilities such as Koka Booth Amphitheatre or SAS Soccer Stadium, and C-Tran.

There was a relatively high level of support for aquatic programming in Cary. The mean was 6.46 on a 9-point scale with 34.2% indicating it was very important. Approximately 63% felt that the Town Government and private business should share the responsibility to build, operate, and pay for the programs. Although, there were 20% who believed the Town Government should shoulder the responsibility alone. There was mixed support for adding 1 cent to the current property tax of 42 cents to pay for the aquatic programming. The mean was 4.67 on a 9-point scale with 33.1% indicating they were not supportive at all. The respondents indicated the most important activities (in order) to offer at a Cary aquatics facility were safety instruction, health programs, fitness lap swimming, training for swim teams, competitive swimming events, family fun activities, athletic activities, and kayaking/canoeing, or similar instruction. The respondents were then asked which of these activities they would participate in if available in Cary. The most used based on at least weekly participation (in order) would be fitness lap swimming, health programs, training for swim teams, safety instruction, family fun activities, competitive swimming events, kayaking/canoeing or similar instruction, and athletic activities.

In conclusion, there were only 3 grades that improved this year, 13 grades that declined, and 16 grades that remained unchanged. This represents a decline in the overall service level as perceived by the respondents. The final average for the Cary service dimensions this year was 7.71 (B). When using the same set of common item means, the final average in 2004 was 7.92 (B+) and in 2002 it was 7.71 (B). This represents a slight grade decline and the overall profile more approximates the one from 2002. Even though there has been a decline, the overall marks are still very good and solid with a B average. Again, the key issues appear to be controlling the high levels of growth and development, improving roads/streets, and improving the school system.

