

Council Communication

September 2, 2014, Business Meeting

Direction to staff regarding questions for citizen survey

FROM:

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SUMMARY:

Every other year, the City of Ashland contracts with the National Research Center to conduct a citizen satisfaction survey. As part of the survey, the City can ask three locally generated questions, including one open-ended question. The questions are optional and not required. Staff seeks direction on what questions, if any, to ask in the next survey, which will be conducted this fall, with results reported in January.

BACKGROUND AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

The City of Ashland has, for many years, participated in the National Citizen Survey, a collaborative effort of the National Research Center and the International City/County Management Association. The survey provides a statistically valid reading on how Ashland citizens feel about the City's strengths and weaknesses, as well as how we're doing in terms of service delivery. The survey is conducted by mail, with questionnaires sent to 1,200 households. Because the National Citizen Survey serves about 500 jurisdictions nationwide and uses a standardized set of questions, results obtained in Ashland can be benchmarked against other cities whose characteristics are comparable to ours. We are benchmarked against all communities nationally and more specifically against university communities with populations of 10,000 to 40,000.

The last survey, conducted in 2012 and reported to the Council in 2013, found that ratings given by Ashland citizens on quality of life, neighborhood as a place to live and Ashland as a place to live were "much above" both national and university community comparators. In general, Ashlanders are much more satisfied with quality of life and City services than citizens in our comparator communities.

The City is permitted to add three locally generated questions to the survey, one of which can be an open-ended question. Staff has generated a number of suggested questions and has solicited suggestions for questions or topic areas from Council. Those suggestions are attached. Note that the actual questions will be written by the National Research Center so as to appear in proper form.

One area in which Ashland did not measure up well against other communities in the last survey was in economic sustainability. With much of the discussion in the Council's recent strategic planning work centering on economic development, staff suggests asking an economic development question. In addition, as Council is aware, there have been internal discussions about addressing our space needs in and the seismic vulnerability of City Hall and staff suggests a question related to that.



FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND REQUESTED ACTION:

This item is on the agenda for discussion and direction to staff only.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

Suggested questions and topics



Proposed Citizen Survey questions

1. (Agree/disagree with the following statements)
 - The City should focus its economic development efforts on building upon the existing tourism-based economy.
 - The City should focus its economic development efforts on attracting and retaining high-tech businesses.
 - The City should focus its economic development efforts on attracting new industrial development on its vacant industrial lands.
 - The City should focus its economic development efforts on making it easier for businesses to grow and develop in Ashland.
 - The City should focus its economic development efforts on workforce development, so Ashland residents are better able to compete for jobs available locally.
2. The City has run out of room in its existing City Hall building, which is seismically vulnerable. Please tell us how you feel about the following statements (Agree/Disagree)
 - Ashland should address its space needs by keeping City Hall downtown, even if it is a more expensive option.
 - Ashland should keep City Hall downtown only if it is no more expensive, or less expensive than other options for addressing space needs.
 - Ashland should move City Hall to 1175 E. Main Street, where it will be closer to the Police Department, Electric Utility, Municipal Court and the City Council meeting chambers.

(NOTE: Two other respondents suggested a City Hall-related question.)

3. Ashland, like many cities, struggles with the question of whether social services are a core function of municipal government. The city awards social service grants, funds the community resource center, employs a full-time housing specialist and runs a senior center that provides services to senior citizens. Which of the following statements most closely mirrors your opinion?
 - Ashland spends too little on social services and should spend more, giving them the same weight as other core City functions.
 - Ashland spends too much on social services and should cut back and use the money for other core City functions.
 - Ashland spends just the right amount on social services.
4. Rate the City's web site in terms of ease of use and ability to locate desired information.
5. A question posed by the Parks Commission about the parks system.
6. Future of the Imperatrice property.
7. Future of the library levy. Among other things I am interested to know if citizens want us to use the levy to increase hours above 40 per week or to target specific programming not covered by the county. If we keep the levy at \$0, we need to know if folks will support renewing the levy when it comes up for renewal in 2 (?) years.

8. Do we have an appropriate balance between the interested in encouraging affordable housing and maintaining citizens' current property values?

9. Do we have the right balance in encouraging economic development and regulating commerce to ensure our land use and environmental goals are met?

10. Short term rentals in residential zones?

11. Additional steps the City should take to deal with the problems resulting in and resulting from homeless persons in the City.

12. Would you be more likely to volunteer for a City commission or committee if you knew that your time commitment was limited to a total of four meetings per year?