

Council Communication

Results of 2011 Citizen Satisfaction Survey

Meeting Date:	April 19, 2011	Primary Staff Contact:	Ann Seltzer
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Approval:	Martha Bennett	Estimated Time:	30 minutes

Question:

Does the Council have questions about the results of the 2011 citizen satisfaction survey?

Staff Recommendation:

None. This is an informational item.

Background:

In September 2010, Council authorized a citizen survey using the National Citizen Survey developed by the National Research Center, Inc. and ICMA (International City/County Manager Association).

The citizen satisfaction survey is important for three main reasons. First, it gives the City Council and City staff information about how the general public perceives the City programs and activities. The City usually hears from citizens on specific topics and rarely gets general feedback. The City last received this information in 2003. Second, the citizen satisfaction survey allows us to hear from people who might not come to a public meeting. In other words, it allows more people to be involved. Third, the City is using performance measures in the budget process, and citizen satisfaction is essential in every department.

In January 2011, postcards were mailed to 1,200 randomly selected Ashland households announcing that a survey will follow. The survey was mailed a week later and was followed by a “reminder” one week later. A total of 475 completed surveys were received resulting in a margin of error plus or minus 5%. This means if 60% of survey respondents report that a particular service is “excellent” or “good”, somewhere between 55-65% of all residents are likely to feel that same way. *See pages 83 through 87.*

The survey results are weighted, a “best practice” in survey research, to provide as accurate a picture as possible of the overall population. Typically, certain population groups (e.g. seniors and homeowners) tend to respond more often to surveys and other groups (e.g. renters and single males) tend to respond less often. For example, 16% of Ashland’s population is male between the ages of 18 and 34 per census data. Of this group, just 6% responded. Software using mathematical algorithms is used to calculate the appropriate weights for each population segment. In this case, the weighting of Ashland males between 18 and 34 brought the response rate up to 15%, a much closer representation of the actual population base of that group. Because of weighting, the results better reflect the sentiments of Ashland’s overall population and give a much broader picture than just groups that typically respond to surveys. *See pages 88 and 89.*



The National Citizen Survey maintains a database of approximately 500 jurisdictions whose residents evaluated local government services and gave their opinion about the quality of community life. The City of Ashland chose to have its survey results compared to the national database and to a subset of university communities with populations from 10,000 to 40,000. Comparisons to this database and the subset establish Ashland's benchmarks. *See pages 91 and 92.*

As noted in September 2010 the survey questions center on eight focus areas which are consistent with Council Values and Department Performance Measures. Listed below are selected results from each focus area and the corresponding council value. Unless otherwise noted, the benchmark rank of "much above" (the highest ranking) applies to each of the responses listed. The page number reference indicates where to locate the results in the final report.

Highlights

- Community Quality (Council Value: Community, Distinctiveness, Responsible Land Use)
 - 90% rate the quality of life in Ashland as excellent or good

See pages 7 and 8

- Community Design (Council Values: Economy, Responsible Land Use)
 - 91% rate ease of walking as excellent or good
 - 85% rate availability of paths and walking trails as excellent or good
 - 92% rate the overall appearance of Ashland as excellent or good
 - 68% rate the overall quality of business and service establishments in Ashland as excellent or good

See pages 9 through 21

- Public Safety (Council Values: Community, Basic Needs)
 - 98% feel very safe or safe in their neighborhood
 - 96% feel very safe or safe in downtown Ashland during the day

See pages 22 through 27

- Environmental Sustainability (Council Value: Natural Environment)
 - 94% rate the overall natural environment as excellent or good
 - 91% rate the cleanliness of Ashland as excellent or good

See pages 28 through 30

- Recreation and Wellness (Council Values: Basic Needs, Education)
 - 87% rate recreation opportunities as excellent or good
 - 84% rate educational opportunities as excellent or good
 - 80% have used the library at least once in the past twelve months
 - 68% rate the availability of preventive health services as excellent or good

See pages 31 through 36

- Community Inclusiveness (Council Value: Free Expression)
 - 78% rate openness and acceptance of the community towards people of diverse backgrounds as excellent or good



- 82% rate sense of community as excellent or good

See pages 37 and 38

- Civic Engagement (Council Values: Community, Free Expression, Participatory Government)
 - 82% rate opportunities to participate in community matters as excellent or good
 - 68% volunteered their time to some group or activity in Ashland
 - 83% read the City Source newsletter mailed with utility bills
 - *Benchmark:* National – “more”, University communities – “much more”
 - 35% have attended a meeting of local elected officials or other local public meeting
 - 45% had watched a meeting of local elected officials or other city-sponsored public meeting on cable television, the Internet or other media
 - *Benchmark:* National – “similar”, University communities – “much more”
 - 74% rate public information services as excellent or good
 - *Benchmark:* National – “much above”, University communities – “above”

See pages 40 through 45

- Public Trust (Council Values: Participatory Government, Diversity)
 - 60% rate value of services for the taxes paid to Ashland as excellent or good
 - 83% rate services provided by the City as excellent or good
 - 66% rate the job Ashland government does at welcoming citizen involvement as excellent or good
 - 88% who had contact with the City rate employee knowledge as excellent or good
 - 82% who had contact with the City rate employee responsiveness as excellent or good

See pages 46 through 49

When compared to the database and 31 possible characteristics, 23 Ashland characteristics rank “much above” or “above” the benchmark comparisons, five were “similar” and three were “much below” or “below”.

Lowlights

The following characteristics of Ashland received the lowest positive ratings and unless otherwise notes received a benchmark rating of “much below”.

- Community Design (Council Values: Economy, Responsible Land Use)
 - 19% rate the availability of affordable housing options as excellent or good
 - 36% of respondents rate the variety of housing options as excellent or good

See pages 13 and 14

- 12% of respondents rate employment opportunities as excellent or good

See page 18

The following Ashland services were “much below” or “below” the benchmark comparison.

- 49% of respondents rate bus or transit service as excellent or good
 - *Benchmark:* National – “below” and University Communities – “much below”
- 30% of respondents rate economic development services as excellent or good

See pages 10 and 20



When compared to the databases and of the 34 services for which comparisons were available, 26 Ashland services were “much above” or “above” the benchmark comparison, six were “similar” to the benchmark comparison and two were “much below” or “below” the benchmark comparison.

Key Drivers

Key Drivers are services that correlate most strongly with residents’ perceptions about overall City characteristics and services. If people are happy with the key drivers, they are generally happy with community characteristics and City services.

The key drivers identified for the City of Ashland are:

- Public Information Services
- City parks

See page 50 through 54

Ashland Specific Questions

The survey design allows a community to ask three additional questions specific to the community. Ashland chose to ask the following questions:

- From which of the following sources do you get information about the City of Ashland?
 - 68% indicated they use the City Source newsletter mailed with utility bills
- Which of the following services would you/do you use on the City’s website?
 - 50% rate “Let Us Know” (submit a service request) as very likely or somewhat likely
- How often to you visit downtown for the following activities?
 - 93% indicated they go downtown to dine often or sometimes

See page 55

Additional Reports

In addition to the base survey, Ashland requested:

- Demographic Subgroup Comparisons This reports helps the City identify trends in the population subgroups. For example, people who have lived in Ashland more than 20 years appear to rate the community characteristics and services lower than people who have lived here for a shorter period.
- Benchmark Comparison to University Communities with populations between 10,000 and 40,000 This report helps the City understand how Ashland community characteristics and City services rate when compared to the National database and when compared to other university communities. This report details the rankings and lists the communities used in the comparison.
- Report of Open Ended Question The City chose to include one open-ended question asking respondents “Is there anything else you would like to tell the Mayor and Council?” This report includes verbatim all the answers received and organizes the responses into categories.
- Supplemental Web Survey Results The City chose to make the survey available to the general public on the City’s website after the completed surveys were returned from the randomly selected Ashland households. The survey was available on-line during early March and 79 surveys were completed and submitted. This report details those responses.



Cost

\$9,900 Basic Survey
\$900 Demographic Subgroup Comparison (includes 4 variables)
\$650 Two additional demographic variables for comparison
\$1,100 Custom benchmark comparisons (university communities)
\$900 Survey available on-line for sample size (scientific)
\$650 Survey available on-line for general public (non-scientific)
\$50 Return surveys on disc

\$15,650 Total Cost

Takeaways

City Departments will use the information to benchmark service ratings, to establish and track performance measures, and to allocate appropriate resources. The results enable staff to monitor trends in residents' opinions and more

The City Council might use the information as they develop future Council Goals, review Council Values, continue to increase civic involvement and monitor trends in resident opinions.

Related City Policies:

Council Values
Department Performance Measures

Council Options:

- Accept the results of the Citizen Survey
- Do not accept the results of the Citizen Survey

Potential Motions:

1. I move to accept the results of the Citizen Survey.
2. I move to _____.

Attachments:

- Survey Results Report
- Demographic Subgroup Report
- Benchmark Report
- Open-ended question Report
- Supplemental Web Survey Results

Please Note: All attachments can be found here: www.ashland.or.us/citizensurvey

