



## Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

### MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 17, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the 2020 Alexandria Resident Survey Results.

ISSUE: Results of the 2020 Alexandria Resident Survey.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive the results of the 2020 Alexandria Resident Survey.

BACKGROUND: The City conducted a resident survey in January and February 2020 to collect data on residents' satisfaction with City services (the survey was distributed and collected before the COVID-19 emergency). The survey, developed in conjunction with the National Research Center (NRC) and the International City and County Managers' Association (ICMA), included standardized questions to allow comparison to other jurisdictions and questions specific to Alexandria's needs. The survey was last conducted in 2018 and is planned to occur every two years.

This presentation provides meaningful highlights of the survey results including comparisons with jurisdictions nationally and statistically significant demographic differences as well as changes from the last (2018) survey. For the comprehensive results, detailed reports are attached. Results from the survey will be used to inform decisions, track progress on the City's Strategic Plan, and indicators in the City's performance dashboards.

The survey was distributed by mail to a random, representative sample of 3,000 Alexandria households; of that sample, 634 returned surveys, equaling a 22% response rate. The survey should be considered statistically representative of the Alexandria population at large with a 95% confidence interval and a margin of error of +/- 4% for all respondents. This year, the survey was offered in the city's top four languages: English, Spanish, Arabic, and Amharic. However, all surveys were completed in English. Recipients received four reminders to complete the survey. A random sample sought to ensure that the survey was completed by a diverse group of residents across Alexandria. To that end, if under or over reporting occurred, survey responses were weighted to reflect the city's demographics based on data from the US Census Bureau. Details regarding the methodology can be found in the attached Technical Appendices report.

DISCUSSION: Alexandria continues to be a place where residents want to live. Most residents (91%) would recommend living in Alexandria to others, and 91% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Compared to other jurisdictions, Alexandria is perceived as having a higher overall image and reputation. While most questions were ranked similar to comparator jurisdictions, the city as a place to retire (46%) was lower than other jurisdictions. It also declined from the previous survey in 2018, as did residents rating Alexandria's sense of community (60%); although the rating is similar to comparison jurisdictions.

As part of the survey, residents are asked what they perceive to be barriers to living in Alexandria. The largest perceived barriers that residents reported were age (12%), race (11%), and national origin (8%). The lowest perceived barriers were sexual orientation (4%), gender identity (4%), and religion (5%).

Overall, residents feel safe in their community, with 96% feeling safe in the downtown/commercial area (i.e. Old Town) during the day and 95% feeling safe in their neighborhood during the day. Public safety services also were rated highly; notably fire services, with 95% of residents indicating satisfaction. In 2020, there was a statistically significant increase in residents reporting satisfaction with the quality of the City's emergency preparedness services to 69%. Areas for improvement include residents with three days of emergency supplies (53%) and residents who have discussed an emergency plan with their household (41%). In addition, animal control services declined from 2018 to 69% positive.

At the request of the Police Department, the survey included questions about contact with police officers and on community policing, the results were mostly positive. About 26% of all residents indicated having contact with the police in the last 12 months. Of those who had recent contact with a police officer, 89% rated that experience as good or excellent. For community policing, 83% of residents rated the Police Department's collaboration and responsiveness positively. There was a decline in residents' ratings of police relationships with the community; however, more than three quarters still feel positive.

Mobility realized some positive results and some areas for improvement. The highest ranked items were satisfaction with street signs (82%), ease of walking (77%), and availability of paths and walking trails (76%). Ease of walking was also rated higher than comparator jurisdictions. Satisfaction with bus and transit services was down from 2018 to 74%, but it was ranked higher than comparator jurisdictions, as was ease of travel by public transportation (61%). Several other survey questions declined from last year including the overall ease of getting to places you usually visit (68%), traffic enforcement (59%), ease of travel by car (48%), traffic flow on major streets (34%), and ease of public parking (31%). While low and in decline, these ratings are similar to comparator jurisdictions except for public parking and ease of travel by car, which were lower than comparators.

The city's economy and affordability had mixed results, with the economy receiving some of the highest rankings in the survey and affordability receiving some of the lowest. The highest rated items were residents purchasing products in Alexandria (98%), Alexandria as a place to visit (91%), and dining opportunities (88%). Several aspects of Alexandria were ranked higher than comparison communities including, Alexandria as a place to visit (91%), Alexandria as a place to work (83%), the vibrancy of the City's downtown (79%), shopping opportunities (77%), and employment opportunities (64%). While the economy is strong, there are several opportunities for improvement regarding affordability. The cost of living ranked below national comparators and was at 18%. Further on this point, although displayed in other themes in the report, is the availability of affordable quality child care/preschool is lower than comparators (40%), as is the availability of affordable quality housing (18%).

Within education and enrichment, public library (87%) and historic preservation services (86%) ranked highest. There was an increase in residents' rating of the opportunity to attend cultural/arts/music activities in the city compared to 2018. However, City sponsored special events (70%), museums (70%), out of school activities for youth (61%), adult educational opportunities (59%), K-12 education (50%), and availability of quality child care/preschool (40%) all declined from the last survey. K-12 education and availability of quality child care/preschool were also below national comparisons.

The top-rated questions in the built environment were the city's historic character (88%) and public places where people want to spend time (81%). Residents' rating of the City's storm water drainage was down from 2018 to 62%. However, it is still considered similar to comparators. Residents who did not observe a code violation was also down from the last survey, but it was higher than comparison jurisdictions. Housing was an area for improvement with both the variety of housing options (43%) and the availability of affordable housing (18%) down from 2018.

Within the natural environment, recycling at home (87%), garbage collection (82%), and the cleanliness of Alexandria (79%) were ranked highest. Areas of decline from the previous survey include residents' rating of yard waste pick-up (72%), air quality (72%), making your home more energy efficient (64%), recycling services (63%), with the latter two rated lower than comparison jurisdictions.

Government and community engagement included questions focused on civic engagement and government operations. Top community engagement questions included resident reading or watching local news (86%) and voting in local elections (84%). There was a decline from 2018 in the rating of opportunities to volunteer (75%). While similar to comparator jurisdictions, less than 20% of residents contacted their City elected officials, watched (online or on television) a local public meeting, or attended a local public meeting.

The City also included question's regarding resident contact with City employees other than law enforcement. About 47% of residents indicated having contact with a City employee in the past 12 months, an increase from 2018. Of those who had recent contact with a City employee, 83% had a positive overall impression of the employee. Additionally, 88% indicated that the employee was knowledgeable, and 87% rated them as responsive and courteous. Perception of City of Alexandria service quality (77%), perceptions of government honesty (59%), acting in the best interest of the community (57%), the responsiveness to requests, questions and comments (56%), treating all residents fairly (55%), transparency to the public (52%), and contacting City staff for help or information (41%) all declined slightly in 2020 but were similar to

the 2016 survey.

Results of the recreation and wellness show that more people ate five portions of fruits and vegetables a day (88%) and had a flu shot (66%) than in 2018. Several questions declined from 2018, including perceptions of recreation programs or classes (77%), availability of quality food (69%), health services (69%), availability of preventative health services (66%), reported being in very good/excellent health (65%), and availability of mental health care (51%). However, these ratings are similar to comparison jurisdictions.

The resident survey also included questions on where the Alexandria community should focus for the next two years. Overall, feelings of safety, economic health, and ease of travel were rated most important for future focus.

The City also received the survey results disaggregated by demographic groups including sex, race/ethnicity, age, rent or own, and income. Statistical analysis was completed to identify which questions showed differences within groups. Income and race/ethnicity showed the greatest number of questions with differences. Disparities of note include a 16% percentage point difference between men and women on the openness and acceptance of the community towards people of diverse backgrounds. There was a 25% gap between those residents who are age 55+ and those aged 18 to 34-years in working within the City of Alexandria. Non-white residents felt 23% less positive about the police's efforts to foster community relationships. Residents who own their home were 19% more likely to vote in local elections than renters. Furthermore, residents with income over \$150,000 were 36% more positive about the City's recreational opportunities than those residents who make less than \$50,000. The Office of Performance and Accountability will be undertaking a further analysis of responses related to race and ethnicity.

The results of this resident survey will be posted on the City's website at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Performance> along with this presentation and attached reports. New this year, the City is releasing an interactive dashboard, where users can explore the results from the most recent survey, past surveys, and demographic breakdowns.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The survey has been completed and there is no further direct cost. Additional cost associated with any actions taken as a result of survey data are not immediately evident.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Community Livability Report
2. Trends over Time Report
3. Technical Appendices Report
4. PowerPoint Presentation

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