



Legislation Details (With Text)

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 6, 2016
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:
Consideration of the Results of the 2016 Alexandria Community Survey.

ISSUE: City Council receipt and discussion of the 2016 Alexandria Community Survey, which collected data on resident satisfaction with City services and priorities.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive and discuss the 2016 Alexandria Community Survey.

BACKGROUND: In order to collect data on residents' satisfaction with services and priorities to assist with the current City Strategic Plan development process, the City conducted a community survey in December 2015 and January 2016. The survey, developed in conjunction with the National Research Center (NRC) and the International City and County Managers' Association (ICMA), included both standardized questions to allow comparison to national benchmarks, and questions specific to Alexandria needs. Results will be used to guide the City's budget process, as well as to provide additional indicators for performance reports. The last survey the City conducted was in 2009.

The survey was distributed by mail to a random, representative sample of approximately 1,400 Alexandria residents, who had the option to return the survey by mail or complete it online. Recipients received up to five reminders to return their feedback. The survey was available in English and Spanish, although only one response in Spanish was received. A random sample sought to ensure that the survey was completed by a diverse group of residents across Alexandria and should be considered statistically representative of the Alexandria population at large. There were 357 completed responses, which provides a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$.

DISCUSSION: NRC's analysis indicated that 83% of respondents rated the overall quality of life in Alexandria as excellent or good, and more than 90% gave Alexandria positive ratings as a place to live.

Overall, Alexandria had very strong economy ratings, with many aspects being rated higher than comparison communities including the vibrancy of Alexandria's downtown area, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities, Alexandria as a place to visit and the City as a place to work. The cost of living in Alexandria was rated favorably by fewer than 2 in 10 respondents, and only 21% of respondents rated the availability of affordable quality housing as excellent or good. Both ratings ranked in the 9th percentile of responses nationwide.

An overall feeling of safety was rated highly by about 8 in 10 residents, with at least 9 in 10 feeling safe in their own neighborhoods and downtown. At least 8 in 10 respondents said they had not reported or been the victim of a crime in the previous 12 months. About 3 in 10 said they had contact with a police officer in the past 12 months, and of those 9 in 10 rated the officer as excellent or good. Only 46% of respondents said they had 72 hours of food, water, medicine, and other supplies in case of emergency, and only 39% said they had discussed a household emergency plan with all members of the household.

Despite the region's well-known traffic congestion, overall ease of travel was favorably rated by about three-quarters of City residents and was similar to communities elsewhere. About 7 in 10 or more residents gave excellent or good ratings to the availability of paths and walking trails, ease of walking, travel by bicycle and public transportation and bus or transit services, all ratings that were higher than ratings in similar communities. Alexandria residents also reported higher than average levels of participation for public transportation (83%) and walking (71%). The only aspect of mobility rated lower than the national average was public parking, viewed as positive by only about one quarter of respondents for a ranking in the 11th percentile nationwide.

Less than half of respondents had a positive or negative opinion of K-12 education in Alexandria: 180 respondents (52%) indicated "Don't Know" when asked about their view of K-12 education. Among those who did have a positive or negative opinion, most (52%) rated K-12 education positively, which was in the 19th percentile compared to other communities. These results are likely influenced by the fact that approximately 86% of Alexandria households do not have children enrolled in the Alexandria City Public Schools.

When asked about priorities for the City, about 80% of respondents indicated that housing affordability would be an essential or very important area for Alexandria to focus on in the future, 77% supported parking and traffic management, and 68% supported pre-K and child care.

In terms of governance, 83% of respondents rated City services overall as excellent or good, which was similar to the national benchmark. Perhaps owing to the large percentage of federal employees in our region, nearly 6 in 10 (higher than the national average) gave positive ratings to the services provided by the federal government. Nearly 7 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings to customer service provided by City

employees, and about half said they had contact with City employees. At least half of respondents gave favorable ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, the government welcoming resident involvement, confidence in the City government, and treating all residents fairly. Almost 6 in 10 gave positive ratings for the overall direction of the City, acting in the best interest of Alexandria, and being honest. Nearly 8 in 10 ranked public information services as excellent or good. All of these ratings were similar to national benchmarks. The City included a custom question about transparency, with 50% of respondents rating government transparency as excellent or good.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Alexandria, some provided by City government and some by partner agencies. The highest ratings went to public safety services, which is consistent with the national average. Notably, animal control services were rated highly by 84% of respondents, which was higher than in most communities. Alexandria's bus and transit services were also rated highly by more respondents than in most communities. The lowest score went to cable television services, which were rated excellent or good by only 32% of respondents. This was the lowest rating for cable television of all but one of the 167 communities for which NRC asked this question.

When asked if demographic characteristics created barriers to living in Alexandria, fewer than 1 in 10 cited barriers based on religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, national origin, or disability. Just above 1 in 10 cited barriers based on race or age. Based on the housing and cost of living responses, it would appear that housing affordability is the largest barrier to living in Alexandria.

FISCAL IMPACT: The survey has already been completed, and there is no further direct cost. There could be a cost associated with any actions taken as a result of survey data.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Community Survey
2. Powerpoint Presentation

STAFF:

Greg Useem, Chief Performance Officer
Jonathan Mahlandt, Senior Performance Analyst