

REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: April 25, 2022

FROM: Strategy, Policy and Communications Department

DATE: April 12, 2022

SUBJECT: 2022 Citizen Survey

LOCATION: Town-wide

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the 2022 Citizen Survey report from the Strategy, Policy and Communications department be received.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The town conducts a citizen survey every two years to evaluate resident satisfaction with town programs and services, to get input on strategic priorities for decision-making and budgeting between competing priorities, and to inform value for tax dollars.
- The last citizen survey was conducted in 2019. The 2021 citizen survey was deferred to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Despite the significant challenges in dealing with the pandemic, Oakville residents continue to give the town high marks when it comes to satisfaction with their government, town programs and services, and value for their tax dollars.
 - 80% overall satisfaction with the government of the Town of Oakville. This has remained stable over the last three surveys.
 - 93% are satisfied with town services. This is nine points higher than the average score of 82% when compared to benchmark municipalities.
 - 85% said they receive good value for their tax dollars for the programs and services provided by the town.
 - 85% overall customer service satisfaction with those who had recent contact with the town.
- Regarding areas of improvement, public transit and the availability of online services were identified. Recreation programs, arts, heritage and culture

offerings; venues; and town roads and sidewalks have also been identified as areas to pay attention to over the long-term.

- COVID-19 public health measures resulted in frequent and lengthy suspensions of recreation, arts, heritage and culture offerings. Staff is confident that with the return to a more stable operating environment, these offerings will bring the high value residents enjoyed prior to the pandemic.
- Housing affordability is the top issue identified by residents followed by urban sprawl/rapid development and COVID-19.
- This report provides a summary of the 2022 citizen survey results, which will also be available on the town's website, and shared through social media, the town's e-newsletter and digital screens at town facilities. The full data set will be available through the town's open data catalogue.
- Ward-specific results will be shared through Council's information package the week of May 2, 2022.

BACKGROUND:

The town-wide citizen survey process began in 2001. Surveys were conducted in 2004 and 2007 before the town decided to move to a biennial survey. In 2021, Forum Research Inc. was selected through a competitive request for proposals to conduct the town's 2022 Citizen Survey. Forum Research Inc. is a well known leader in market research and has extensive experience conducting satisfaction surveys for municipalities.

Citizen input into strategic priorities for Council is solicited through the town's Citizen Survey. The survey provides the town with quantitative data to help Council and staff understand residents' service priorities as well as track the town's progress in implementing Council's strategic plan. The survey also helps to support the town's budget process and decision-making by providing valuable input from residents on:

- Identification of key town priorities
- Satisfaction with the scope and delivery of selected town services
- Allocation of budget between competing priorities, and
- Tolerance for new taxes or user fees

Building on the data collected in nine surveys over the last 20 years, overall results indicate that satisfaction with key town programs and services remains very strong. Results show that Oakville residents continue to believe they receive good value for their tax dollars and this helps contribute to the high overall satisfaction rating for the government of the Town of Oakville. Lorne Bozinoff, President and CEO and Win Stec, Project Manager, Research and Analytics from Forum Research Inc. will present the results to Council on April 25, 2022.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:**Methodology**

The citizen survey process includes two distinct elements: a comprehensive 27-minute telephone survey of 811 randomly-selected residents (59% cell and 41% land line) conducted between January 24 to February 6, 2022 to gather quantitative data, and an online survey for qualitative research available during the same period to provide residents with opportunities to provide their input into the citizen survey process. Key findings from the research are outlined in this report. A summary of the phone survey and online survey is available as Appendix A.

Phone survey results were statistically weighted by age to ensure that the sample reflects the target population according to 2016 Census data, rendering an overall margin of error of $\pm 2.93\%$, 19 times out of 20. Results have been weighted by age only, as the sample closely matched other demographic variables.

Key Findings

Despite the challenges experienced in managing the pandemic over the last two years, Oakville residents give the town high marks when it comes to satisfaction with their government, town programs and services, and value for tax dollars. Overall satisfaction with the government of the Town of Oakville is strong at 80%, remaining stable over the last three surveys. Residents express high satisfaction with the quality of town services (93%) and with the service they receive when interacting with the town (85%). More than 8 in 10 (85%) also said they receive good value for their tax dollars for the programs and services provided by the town.

Livability

- Oakville residents' overall perceptions of livability remained strong in 2022. A clear majority of residents (74%) believe livability is better in Oakville than in most other areas of the GTA.
- In terms of quality of life and changes over the last three years, 11% think the quality of life in Oakville has become better, 51% say it stayed the same and 33% say it has become worse. Further analysis indicates that residents are more likely to say they would recommend the town than they would not.
- When residents were asked the features or characteristics that make Oakville livable, the top three qualities identified were parks/recreation opportunities/sports teams (28%), the small-town/community/family atmosphere (18%), and safety/low crime (16%). These top three have generally remained in the top three since 2009.
- When asked about the most important issue facing the town, residents identified affordable housing (19%), urban sprawl/rapid development (16%), and COVID-19 (14%) as the top three issues. Compared to previous surveys, there has been a sharp increase in affordable housing which is up 12%, while traffic/congestion, which was the top issue in 2019, decreased by 7%.

- While COVID-19 was identified as one of the most important issues facing the town, more than three quarters of residents (78%) were satisfied with how the town adapted its services to the pandemic.
- The combination of affordable housing and urban sprawl/rapid development as top issues and transit as a primary area for improvement is indicative of the changes and challenges facing the town.

Satisfaction with town services and attributes

- Residents express high satisfaction with town services at 93%. It is only three points lower than pre-pandemic satisfaction and notably, nine points higher than the average score of 82% compared to benchmark municipalities.
- The top three rated services were parks and green spaces (93%), harbours and waterfront areas (90%) and public library services (87%). Although availability of parking (71%) and public transit (61%) were the lowest ranked, the 2022 score for parking remained the same while the score for public transit increased by 2% compared to 2019.
 - Overall, 11 of 12 town services scored over 70%, with eight of these scoring over 80%.
- A statistical analysis was done to gauge the difference between how satisfied residents are with each town service and the impact of the service to residents' overall service satisfaction (i.e., perceived importance). Findings highlight two primary areas of improvement: public transit and availability of online services. While satisfaction with public transit and online services increased from 2019 (transit up 2% to 61% and online services up 1% to 79%), residents have identified them as primary areas of improvement.
- Three other services identified by residents that may need attention in the long-term to maintain current high satisfaction ratings:
 - Town roads and sidewalks (81%)
 - Recreation programs (81%)
 - Arts, heritage and culture offerings and venues (82%)
- The pandemic created significant challenges in the offering of town programming over the last two years. Since March 17, 2020, recreation facilities were closed a total of 39 weeks; and the museum and theater were closed a total of 58 and 82 weeks respectively. When facilities were permitted to open, public gathering limits continued to restrict access to approximately 50% capacity for indoor services and outdoor capacity restrictions were also in effect.
- As the province returns to a more stable environment and public health restrictions are lifted, staff is confident that these offerings will bring the high value residents have always enjoyed.
- The top three rated town attributes were a feeling of being safe (95%), the overall appearance of the community (92%) and the feeling of belonging (87%).

- Overall, eight of the 10 attributes scored over 75%.

Priorities and planning

Residents were asked to identify their top priorities within six key areas. The top priorities within each key area are highlighted.

Response to climate change:

- Protecting and maintaining parks, trails and greens spaces (20%)
- Encouraging reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (10%)
- Waste management (6%)

Economic Growth:

- Attracting new companies to Oakville to create more local job opportunities (12%)
- Providing support for the commercial areas of Downtown Oakville, Kerr Village and Bronte Village (8%)
- Improving traffic congestion for employees and goods movement (8%)
- Providing support for existing Oakville companies to expand globally to create more local job opportunities (8%)

Parks amenities and recreation programs:

- Offering park space for unstructured use, such as green space or trails (22%)
- Keeping the cost to participate in town programs affordable for all (16%)
- Maintaining/improving existing facilities (10%)

Ease of traveling within Oakville:

- Adding and widening roads and bridges (17%)
- Increasing the frequency of public transit (16%)
- Creating year-round paths for walking and cycling (11%)

Governing and managing the town:

- Ensuring open and accountable government decision-making (15%)
- Ensuring cost efficient delivery of town programs and services (8%)
- Making it easier to view, apply for and access town services online (8%)
- Providing more online opportunities for public input (8%)

Controlling the rate and type of growth in Oakville:

- Protecting the character of existing neighbourhoods (21%)
- Ensuring the town implements sustainable development standards (14%)
- Ensuring a mix of housing types throughout the town such as rentals and seniors facilities (13%)

Value for money and taxes

- Overall, 85% say they receive good value for their tax dollars for the programs and services provided by the town. Oakville is well above average when compared to benchmark municipalities with the mean being 76%.
- When asked about their preference for an increase or decrease in taxes or user fees, about 6 in 10 (62%) opted for an increase in order to maintain service levels or add new services and facilities. Compared to 2019, slightly more residents preferred an increase in taxes or user fees (increase of three points). Of these residents, another 6 in 10 (62%) preferred an increase to user fees, while 24% preferred an increase to property taxes.

Information and service use

- When finding information about the town, the majority of residents (58%) say they use the town's website most often.
- When looking at interactions with the town over the last 12 months, most residents used the town's website (61%, up from 45% in 2019). The top reasons were to find information (16%) and to request a service or permit (12%).
- Residents who interacted with the town using the town's website in the past 12 months indicated they have visited it 9.5 times on average. Almost 9 in 10 of these residents (89%) were satisfied with the website.
 - When asking about barriers while visiting or interacting with the town's website, almost 6 in 10 residents (59%) stated they have not experienced any barriers, while the most reported barrier was difficulty to navigate (27%).

Satisfaction with customer service

- Of residents who had contact with the town within the last 12 months, a vast majority (85%) said they were satisfied with the service they received (54% said they were very satisfied). This is only three points lower than pre-pandemic satisfaction at 88% in 2019. Residents offer very positive assessments of the service they receive from town staff:
 - Town employees are respectful (89%)
 - Information from the town was easy to understand (89%)
 - Town employees are knowledgeable (86%)
 - It was easy to find the information they needed (86%)
 - Service was provided in a timely manner (85%)
 - Residents could easily find the right person to deal with their question/problem (81%)

To inform Oakville residents of the 2022 Citizen Survey results, information will be posted to the town's website and communicated through the town's social media and e-newsletter. A summary highlighting key findings will be displayed on digital

screens at the community centres. The full data set will also be added to the town's open data catalogue.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

The 2022 Citizen Survey involved two key components of public consultation. The first component was a random telephone survey of a representative sample of 811 residents from January 24 to February 6, 2022. The second component involved an online survey conducted during the same period. The phone and online surveys were promoted through the town's website, social media, town's e-newsletter, email distribution lists, advertisement in the Oakville Beaver, and digital screens at the community centres.

(B) FINANCIAL

The town's citizen survey is conducted biennially and each survey costs approximately \$50,000, including communicating the results.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

The town's citizen survey assists departments in evaluating their programs and services and provides valuable input into the next Strategic Plan for Council, budget allocation and business planning process.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- Inspire public confidence through open, accountable and efficient delivery of government services.
- Foster a community environment that engages residents of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- To be the most livable town in Canada.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

In the 2022 Citizen Survey, residents were asked what the town should prioritize in our response to climate change. This helps the town understand and align with community priorities.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Results of telephone survey and summary of online findings

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