

Staff Report

Report To: City Council

Report From: Michelle Palmer, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Operational Effectiveness

Meeting Date: October 18, 2021

Report Code: CM-21-021

Subject: Citizen Satisfaction Survey

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-21-011 respecting Citizen Satisfaction Survey, City Council receives the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- The majority of residents rate their quality of life as either good or excellent (74 per cent), expressed satisfaction with the services delivered by Owen Sound (75 per cent), and receive good value of city programs and services for their tax dollars (75 per cent).
- Public input is a key driver for decision-making, and informs policy decisions, budgetary spending, and continuous improvement.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Strategic Priority: Collaborative City - KR4 - Develop and implement an engagement framework policy and tool to increase public input on projects / initiatives by June 2022.

Background:

Public engagement through statistically significant surveys and other engagement tools offer an opportunity to hear from citizens about their top-

of-mind issues of importance and satisfaction with City services and builds stronger relationships with the public. The initial report to Council ([CM-21-011](#)) provided information on the primary objectives, methodology to be utilized as well as sample questions. This type of statistical information, when used along with other data, serves as an important tool to inform resources and budget planning as well as to ensure that organizational priorities are better aligned with citizen needs.

Forum Research Inc. was retained through a competitive process in accordance with the City's Purchasing by-law. Forum Research Inc. is a leader in conducting citizen satisfaction surveys for municipalities throughout the province, which provided invaluable support during the development of the City's first statistically relevant Citizen Satisfaction Survey.

Analysis:

Citizen satisfaction reflects citizen perception to better understand citizen needs and expectations in order to effectively prioritize and implement improvements with respect to delivery of services and the citizen experience.

Purpose and Methodology:

The survey was conducted between July 12 and July 30, 2021, by telephone (cell phone and landline), and the sample was drawn using random digit dialing among residents and property owners of Owen Sound. In total, 401 interviews were completed yielding statistically robust findings that were weighted by age and gender according to latest census data to reflect the population of the City of Owen Sound.

The objectives of the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey were to:

- Determine the overall impressions of and identify top-of-mind issues toward the quality of life in the City;
- Determine the level of satisfaction with and perceived importance of services provided by the City;
- Identify citizen perceptions and expectations concerning property taxes, investment, and overall decision-making and priority-setting within the City;
- Determine the level of satisfaction with City communications, how citizens would like to receive information and preferred ways of engagement in the future;

- Determine the level of satisfaction with City service channels, how citizens would like to receive services and preferred ways for service provision in the future; and
- Utilize the results of the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey to compare with a municipal norms database and set a baseline.

Supplemental Online Survey:

The telephone survey was accompanied by an adjunct online survey to provide an opportunity for those residents who were not selected for the telephone survey to participate. The online questionnaire was completed by 908 individuals. While this approach offers additional opportunities for citizen participation and engagement, it cannot be directly compared to the primary survey as the sample size and respondent characteristics are not representative of the general population and suffer from self-selection bias. Compared with statistically robust random sample surveys, the self-selected method typically reports lower satisfaction rates. The results of the online survey are therefore typical and consistent with this expectation, finding slightly lower levels of satisfaction than were reported in the statistically valid survey.

2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey Results:

Quality of Life in Owen Sound

Three quarters (74 per cent) of Owen Sound residents rate their quality of life as either good or excellent and nearly half (46 per cent) think the quality of life has stayed the same over the past three years. In line with the percentage of residents who rate their quality of life as either good or excellent, the majority also think that Owen Sound is a welcoming and inclusive community (76 per cent), as well as an accessible community (79 per cent). However, only one quarter (25 per cent) of residents were enthusiastic about recommending Owen Sound to others as a place to live.

Satisfaction with Services

Three quarters (75 per cent) expressed satisfaction with the services delivered by Owen Sound. Parks and trails (87 per cent) were the top service overall that residents were satisfied with followed closely by Fire (83 per cent). However, other services such as roads and sidewalks (46 per cent) and winter maintenance of sidewalks (45 per cent) were services that residents were least satisfied with.

Importance of Services

Fire Services and winter roads maintenance were the services that most residents think are important (93 per cent). Airport services being the least important to residents is consistent with the low frequency of usage of Owen Sound Billy Bishop Airport.

Prioritizing Services for Review

While survey respondents may rate certain areas as important, research shows that this is not always the most reflective of what is really driving overall satisfaction. A gap analysis was conducted to identify the difference between the perceived importance of each service and level of satisfaction. Although individual satisfaction scores of services are important, it is through understanding the correlation between satisfaction and importance that identifies which services should be prioritized for improvement.

The services which have relatively lower satisfaction scores, but are stronger drivers of satisfaction for the City's overall level of service (aligned by Strategic Priority) are:

- By-law (Safe City)
- Winter maintenance-Sidewalks (A City that Moves)
- Garbage and recycling collection (Green City)
- Downtown revitalization (City Building)

Services, such as fire and police services, as well as recreation facilities have higher individual satisfaction, but lower impact on overall satisfaction scores.

Communication

In the past 12 months, 2 in 5 residents (41 per cent) have contacted the City with a majority (74 per cent) being satisfied with the quality of the service. Residents who have interacted with or contacted City staff were most likely to do so via telephone (82 per cent) or email (50 per cent). The main reasons for contacting the City were to make a property/by-law complaint (13 per cent), inquire about building permits (10 per cent), or report a problem (9 per cent).

When it comes to receiving communications from the City of Owen Sound, residents would prefer to do so by email (52 per cent) or physical mail / inserts (34 per cent). While the majority of residents (72 per cent) are aware that they can watch live council meetings on Rogers cable or online, more than two thirds (68 per cent) who are aware, have either never or rarely watched Council meetings.

Spending and Taxation

The majority of residents (75 per cent) said they receive good value of city programs and services for their tax dollars. In order for the City to balance cost of services with taxation, most residents would prefer to maintain taxes or reduce services and programs (44 per cent). Of the 92 respondents who provided an opinion on which service they would reduce in order to maintain taxes, the services which were most identified were police and fire services (26 per cent). The majority of citizens (62 per cent) also said that services and programs should be available for everyone through property tax revenues rather than through user fees.

How will we use these findings?

Satisfaction research such as the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey is critical for the City to understand citizen's perceptions. The City will use the findings of this survey in the following ways:

- Informing the Service Review being undertaken in 2022 (contingent upon budget approval);
- Informing the development of the long-term strategic plan (2050 Vision) being initiated in Q4/2022 (contingent upon budget approval);
- Informing budget planning by identifying gaps, maximizing efficiencies in aligning resources and investment decisions;
- Being transparent by publicly sharing data on citizen experience and service delivery;
- Supporting the Council priorities of "Service Excellence" and "Collaborative City" by collecting, sharing, and using data to directly improve service delivery and inform the engagement framework policy; and
- Use other program data to correlate and analyse program specific findings to further understand citizen perceptions versus known operational service levels.

Overall, the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey provides valuable baseline data. This survey was the first of its kind for the City and serves as a starting point of capturing statistically valid, comprehensive data that can be measured over time on citizen's perceptions of satisfaction and importance of services provided. Over time, the Citizen Satisfaction Survey will be refined to measure the impact of the strategic plan priorities and support improved data-based decision making with respect to resource and budget allocation more precisely.

It is important to recognize that the Citizen Satisfaction Survey also collects data on topics that are beyond the sole responsibility of Owen Sound's municipal government. As reflected in the survey findings, some of the most important issues facing Owen Sound today, such as affordable housing and homelessness, require a concerted community-wide response and are not the sole purview of one organization or level of government.

Financial Implications:

Funding for the Citizen Satisfaction Survey was included in the approved 2021 Capital budget.

Communication Strategy:

Communications form an integral component in this citizen engagement process as a methodology to encourage participation and to provide information to the public.

Space on the City's website has been dedicated to this [process](#) and will now be updated to include a copy of the presentation of the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey Report.

Consultation:

Director of Corporate Services, Director of Community Services, Director of Public Works and Engineering, Director and Chief Curator Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Fire Chief and Police Chief.

Attachments:

None

Recommended by:

T. Simmonds, City Manager
Senior Leadership Team

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Tim Simmonds, City Manager at tsimmonds@owensound.ca.