

**Town of Cary
2012 Biennial Citizen Survey
Executive Summary**

The results for the Town of Cary's 2012 Biennial Citizen Survey were very positive. The respondents continued to give high marks for the services provided by the Town. A total of 402 residents were surveyed and the resulting margin of error was $\pm 5\%$. The results showed a significant level of improvement from the 2010 Biennial Survey.

The Town Government staff continued to receive high marks for the service dimensions of *courteous* (A-), *professionalism* (B+), *knowledgeable* (B+), and *promptness of response* (B+). All these means increased from 2010 and one grade improved (*courteous*). The grades for two new service dimensions of *overall quality of customer service* (B+) and *helpful* (B+) were also very good.

The Town improved this year for the maintenance of streets and roads. The grade increased from a C- to a C this year. The mean was the highest earned by the Town to date. The streets/roads mentioned most often as needing attention by the respondents were Maynard, Kildaire Farm, Walnut, Green Level Church, and High House. The key issue was the potholes and poor pavement for these streets.

The cleanliness and appearance of public areas earned very high marks again this year. The Town continued to earn an A- for keeping Cary *clean and forever green*. The public areas examined in the survey also earned high marks for *parks* (A), *greenways* (A-), *median/roadsides* (B+), and *streets* (B+). The means increased for all these public areas and reached their highest mean scores thus far. In addition, the grade improved for *parks* moving from A- to A. Overall, this was the most successful year for public areas.

The Cary Police Department continued to earn very strong marks that has shown improvement from 2010. All the service dimensions earned impressive grades for *courteous* (A), *competence* (A-), *fairness* (A-), *problem solving* (A-), and *response time* (A-). The means increased for all these service dimensions and the grade improved for *courteous* (A- to A). The means represent the highest ratings the Department has earned for all the service dimensions. Just as with public areas, the ratings represent the most successful year for the Police Department.

The Cary Fire Department continued to earn the highest marks for any department examined in the survey. The Department earned an A+ for all the service dimensions including *response time*, *problem solving*, *courteous*, *fairness*, and *competence*. In addition, the grade improved for *response time* moving from A to A+. However, the means declined slightly for *courteous*, *fairness*, and *competence* this year while the mean for *problem solving* was unchanged. The mean decreases were not of a magnitude to lower the very high grades that remained at the A+ level.

The Parks & Recreation Department earned its strongest marks to date. The grades are very high for *overall experience* (A), *ease of registration* (A), *instructor quality* (A), *program quality* (A), *facility quality* (A), and *cost or amount of fee* (A-). The means increased for all six service dimensions and three grades improved from A- to A for *ease of registration*, *instructor quality*, and *program quality*. All of the means were at the highest level the Department has earned. On the other hand, the level of participation in Parks & Recreation programs has decreased from 36.4% in 2010 to 24.1% this year.

The respondents were positive in their rating concerning Cary as a place to live. The mean decreased slightly this year from 8.28 to 8.25 with the grade remaining an A-. There were 98.6% on the “desirable” side of the scale this year compared to 96.5% in 2010. As to quality of life, most of the respondents (70.9%) perceived the quality of life as the same. However, 23.9% indicated it was better compared to only 5.3% who indicated it was worse. This is a major improvement from 2010 when the percentages were 15.3% better versus 7.5% worse. The respondents indicated the most important issue facing Cary was controlling growth (137 comments) followed by traffic/improving roads (59 comments), schools (47 comments), crime/safety (12 comments), revitalizing downtown (11 comments), and high taxes (11 comments). In 2010, controlling growth was the most important issue with 161 comments followed by schools (53 comments) and traffic/improving roads (35 comments).

The respondents felt very safe in Town of Cary overall again this year. The mean was 8.22 on a 9-point scale with 98.7% answering on the “safe” side of the scale. This mean has decreased slightly from 2010 when it was 8.29, but it still represents the third highest rating garnered by the Town. The respondents also felt safe in their home neighborhoods (mean of 8.38 with 97.4% above “safe” side of the scale). This mean has also decreased slightly from 8.41 in 2010. However, this year’s mean represents the second highest earned by the Town. Finally safe in public places around Cary (mean of 8.19 with 99.0% on the “safe” side of the scale) represents the highest mean earned improving from 8.18 in 2010. Overall, there continues to be a perception of a high degree of safety in Cary.

Cary’s municipal tax rate was perceived as “about right” by 71.4% of the respondents when compared to other localities. The mean decreased slightly from 3.10 in 2010 to 3.02 this year (using a 5-point scale) indicating less skewing to the taxes being slightly on the “high” side. This year, the percentage of responses of taxes being on the “high” side decreased from 18.8% in 2010 to 15.7% this year and the percentage on the “low” side increased from 10.2% to 12.9%. In addition, there were 69.6% of the respondents who would support adding to the tax rate over the next ten years to pay for over \$196 million in major Town projects. A large proportion (46.0%) of the respondents would support a 1-3 cent increase, especially 2 cents chosen by 21.7% of the respondents.

Several barriers to citizen involvement in local government were examined. The most significant barrier was *too busy, don’t have time* with mean of 5.08 on a 9-point scale. Other barriers with some degree of impact were *don’t know about opportunities* (4.09) and *timing is inconvenient* (3.63). This mirrors the top three in 2010.

The major information sources used by the respondents include Cary News, word-of-mouth, BUD, television, Raleigh News & Observer, and Cary’s website (in that order). There were a few changes from 2010. These include BUD moved from 4th to 3rd and television moved from 5th to 4th while the News & Observer fell from 3rd to 5th overall. Two new information sources, Twitter and Cary’s Citizen website finished last or 15th and 11th, respectively. The most used new media source was Facebook followed by YouTube. However, the means were lower for all of the new media. Two new media sources examined for the first time this year were Google Plus and Ustream. They had very low means and ranked at the bottom in regards to usage. In terms of smart phones, 54.5% own or plan to purchase one in the next year. The type of smart phone was generally iPhone (51.6%) or Android (25.3%). When asked if they would use their smart phone for online banking or purchases, 41.0% responded “yes” and 13.5% “maybe”. The primary telephone service(s) used at home by 78.5% of the respondents was a combination of 2 or more services from among cell phone, traditional landline, or voice over internet. There were also 10.9% who had cell phone service only, 8.8% with traditional landline only, and 0.3% with voice over internet service only. Most of the respondent’s

daily internet activity was spent on either a laptop computer (41.8%) or desktop computer (33.6%) followed by mobile phones (17.4%) and a tablet (7.2%). As for the 2011 Cary Community Candidate Forum on Cary TV 11, the Forum was watched (in whole or in part) by only 9.4% of the respondents down from 17.0% in 2010.

There have been significant increases in effectiveness of Cary's communication efforts with citizens. Respondents felt much more informed about government services, projects, issues, and programs that affect them this year. The mean increased from 6.59 to 6.88 this year on a 9-point scale. There were also higher levels of satisfaction with Cary making information available to citizens concerning important services, projects, issues, and programs. This year the mean increased from 6.95 to 7.33. Finally, the respondents were more satisfied with the opportunities Cary gives them to participate in the decision-making process. In this case, the mean increased from 6.68 to 7.01. These represent the highest ratings earned for communication efforts by the Town.

Solid Waste Services continued to receive solid marks from the sample this year. However, all the means fell off somewhat from 2010. The department continued to earn high means for curbside garbage collection (8.46), Christmas Tree collection (8.37), curbside yard waste collection (8.25), and curbside recycling collection (8.24). The rating for curbside leaf collection had a larger decline as the mean fell from 8.18 to 7.95. Even with the decline, the overall ratings rank as the second best the Department has earned to date.

A set of questions on storm drains revealed there continues to be a degree of uncertainty concerning acceptable materials that can enter the drains. The respondents were generally accurate in regards to *rainwater from a home's gutters* in that 70.4% (70.1% in 2010) indicated it was acceptable. However, there was a higher degree of inaccuracy for *water from draining a swimming pool* increasing from 11.6% to 16.8% of respondents who believed it acceptable. On the positive side, *grass clippings, leaves, and other natural vegetation* improved in accuracy moving from 10.5% to only 3.0% this year. *Grease, oil, and paint* continue to be assessed accurately.

The respondents were less accurate for the proper disposal methods for used cooking oil and grease. There were only 21.4% (down from 28.3% in 2010) who responded accurately to *save it and call the Town to come and pick it up*. There was also a large and increasing degree of inaccuracy for *put it your recycling cart or bin for collection* increasing from 14.3% to 47.4% this year. On the positive side, there has been improvement for *put it in your garbage cart or bin for collection* (decreased from 53.0% to 1.8%), *pour it down the kitchen sink drain* (25.3% to 15.6%), and *pour it out in the yard* (25.0% to 17.1%). The respondents remain very accurate for *flush it down the toilet* and *pour it down the storm drain*.

The Town Council focus areas all earned strong ratings this year. Satisfaction with the overall job the Town is doing on Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources continued to improve with the mean increasing from 7.68 to 7.87 this year with 91.2% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. In addition, the respondents were satisfied with the Town being effective in keeping Cary the best place to live, work, and raise a family. The mean improved 7.65 to 7.83 with 93.1% on the "effective" side of the scale. The job the Town is doing on environmental protection continued to earn high marks that showed a slight decline from 2010. The mean decreased from 7.67 to 7.62 this year with 88.6% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. There was significant improvement for satisfaction with the job the Town is doing on transportation. Transportation improved from 6.73 to 7.07 with 80.8% on the "satisfied" side of the scale. The job the Town is doing on planning & development also improved from 6.73 to 6.82 with 75.6% on the "satisfied" side. Finally, the Town also received higher ratings

for the job the Town is doing on downtown revitalization. The mean improved from 6.64 to 6.80 with 71.3% on the “satisfied” side. With the exception of environmental protection, the ratings this year were the highest earned thus far for all the focus areas.

There were 78.9% of the respondents who had visited downtown in the past year. The two major reasons they visited downtown was for shopping and restaurants. Other prominent reasons included the art center and library. The respondents who had not visited downtown indicated the major issue was no reason to visit/nothing there. Other reasons included schedule/work/too busy and not interested. The respondents indicated the most effective amenity/activity to bring them downtown would be cafes/restaurants. In addition, shopping opportunities and festivals also rated high on effectiveness. Other amenities/activities with a degree of effectiveness (in order) included shopping opportunities, festivals, concerts, museums, coffee shop, public plaza, 1,100 seat performance center, movie theater, and ice cream shop.

There was a relatively solid level of support for the Town using taxpayer’s dollars to pay for the infrastructure to create and maintain a Farmer’s Market in Cary. The mean was 6.93 with 73.5% on the “support” side of the scale and only 9.5% on the “not support” side. There was also a level of support for the Town incorporating sustainable practices in its buildings and operations. The mean was 6.71 with 66.9% on the “support” side of the scale and only 9.4% on the “not support” side. When the respondents were asked if they plan to purchase or lease a plug-in vehicle in the next two years, only 2.5% answered “yes” and 3.3% answered “maybe”.

In conclusion, there were 8 grades that improved this year, no grades declined, and 19 grades that remained unchanged for 27 service dimensions. In fact, 18 of the means were the highest earned to date for these service dimensions. This represents a significant improvement in the overall service level provided by the Town as perceived by the respondents. The final average for the 27 graded Cary service dimensions this year was 8.36 (A-). This represents the highest overall mean the Town has earned. For comparison, the final average on common service dimensions in 2010 was 8.25 (A-), in 2008 was 8.19 (A-), and in 2006 was 7.92 (B+). Equally impressive are the gains made in the six Town Council focus areas. The mean has improved from 7.18 in 2010 (omitting schools) to 7.34 this year. Overall, the Town of Cary continues to receive a very good report card from its citizens. This report card has shown significant improvement from 2010.