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TO: Issaquah City Council

FROM: Autumn Monahan, Assistant to the City Administrator

RE: National Community Survey Results

DATE: Sept. 3, 2019

EXHIBITS: Community Livability Report
Dashboard
Trends Over Time
Technical Appendices
Demographic Comparisons
Geographic Comparisons
Supplemental Online Survey Results
Presentation

Introduction

The City of Issaquah contracted with the National Research Center (NRC) to conduct the National Community Survey (NCS) beginning in early April and continuing through late May. The total cost was \$24,165.

At Tuesday's Council meeting, staff will present a summary of its latest NCS results, which provide an accurate picture of resident perspectives on local government services, policies and community quality of life. This presentation aims to brief the council on the survey methodology, latest results and a review of trends.

Survey Methodology

Since 2014, Issaquah has selected NCS to survey our community, as it has the only database of its size that contains people's perceptions about government service delivery and quality of life.

This is the third time that the City has participated in the NCS; the previous surveys were completed in December 2014 and May 2017. NCS has found that surveying every two years is ideal for tracking trends. Surveying annually is usually not enough time to "move the needle;" however, surveying every three years can make it difficult to determine what is causing a change in trends.

The survey was sent to 3,200 randomly selected households (127 were returned as undeliverable). Twenty-one percent of the households in the sample participated, which is a typical response rate for similar types of surveys.

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a "level of confidence" and accompanying "confidence interval" (or margin of error). A traditional level of confidence, and the one used by NRC, is 95%. The 95% confidence interval can be any size, and quantifies the sampling error or imprecision of the survey results because some residents' opinions are relied on to estimate all residents' opinions.

The margin of error for the Issaquah survey is no greater than plus or minus four percentage points around any given percent reported for all respondents (643 completed surveys). For subgroups of responses, the margin of error increases because the number of respondents for the subgroup is smaller.

The City also publicized a separate, online survey link that made it possible for any Issaquah household to participate, including those not selected for the randomized, scientific sampling. The results of the two sample sets were kept separate.

Topics Covered

The survey measured residents' opinions about three types of attributes that make a community livable: community characteristics, governance and participation. These attributes were assessed by asking residents questions about safety, mobility, the natural environment, the built environment, the economy, recreation and wellness, education and enrichment and community engagement.

The City also posed three custom questions:

- Connection to neighbors and neighborhood
- Sources of City information
- Use of alternate transportation modes

Alignment with Strategic Plan

For the past several years, Issaquah has used this survey data to track service delivery, as well as help inform some key priorities. Data from previous NCS surveys was also used in the development of the Strategic Plan.

Moving forward, our use of the data will be more formalized, as this every-other-year survey will also be one essential data point as Issaquah starts to implement its newly-adopted Strategic Plan.

According to NCS, their clients (including our neighbors Bainbridge Island, Bellevue, Edmonds, Kirkland, Redmond and Woodinville) use their survey results most frequently for identifying areas of priority and/or lower-rated areas and earmarking funds; or, to identify strategic planning areas.

In future years, many of Issaquah's results will be used to evaluate performance on success measures outlined in the Strategic Plan's "plan, do, check and adjust" cycle.

Meanwhile, many of the community's priorities and/or concerns reflected in the survey results are proactively identified in the Strategic Plan's goals. While there's a wealth of information we will continue to analyze, here are some brief highlights:

Mobility

- While 8 in 10 respondents were pleased with paths and walking trails (an above-average rating) and 7 in 10 positively rated the ease of walking in the city, about half of residents or less gave favorable reviews to the overall ease of travel in Issaquah, ease of travel by car and traffic flow; these ratings were lower than the national benchmarks.

Growth and Development

- When compared to 2017, ratings in 2019 declined for the overall quality of new development in Issaquah.

Environmental Stewardship

- The natural environment is a top priority for the Issaquah community in the coming two years.

Social and Economic Vitality

- In total, 8 in 10 residents gave favorable reviews to the overall economic health of the city, which was higher than average. Only 2 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to cost of living, which was below average; further, the rating for employment opportunities decreased from 2017 to 2019. Affordable quality housing was also lower than the national benchmark, at a 16 percent positive rating. When compared to 2017, ratings in 2019 declined for health and wellness opportunities.

City Leadership & Services

- About 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of City services. Almost all aspects of Governance received positive ratings from at least half of residents, and all were rated similar to or higher than the benchmark. About three-quarters of residents gave favorable marks to the customer service provided by the City employees, which was on par with the benchmark comparisons, but a decrease from 2017.

Infrastructure

- Public places received a 75 percent positive rating, which is similar to the national benchmark. Meanwhile, City parks received a 90 percent rating, while street repair was 55 percent (on par with national benchmark).

2019 Results

Issaquah received many ratings to be celebrated:

- 93 percent rated the city as an excellent or good place to live.
- 90 percent rated the quality of life in Issaquah as excellent or good.
- About 9 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to Issaquah as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of the city.
- About 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of City services.

As in 2017, residents identified safety, mobility and the natural environment as priorities for the Issaquah community in the coming two years.

Of the 134 topics for which comparisons were available, 113 topics were rated similarly in 2017 and 2019, 19 topics showed a decrease in ratings and two showed an increase in ratings.

For the following tables, examples of “percent rating positively” answers include excellent/good; very/somewhat likely; yes; and always/sometimes.

Higher rating in 2019 vs. 2017 (differences are greater than five percentage points)

Topic	Percent rating positively			2019 vs. 2017	Comparison to national benchmark		
	2014	2017	2019		2014	2017	2019
Natural areas preservation	64%	59%	66%	Higher	Similar	Similar	Similar
NOT under housing cost stress	70%	56%	71%	Higher	Similar	Lower	Similar

Lower rating in 2019 vs. 2017 (differences are greater than five percentage points)

Among the topics with a lower rating from 2017 to 2019, all but two remained on par with the national benchmark (adult education and read or watched local news were lower).

Topic	Percent rating positively			2019 vs. 2017	Comparison to national benchmark		
	2014	2017	2019		2014	2017	2019
New development in Issaquah	64%	47%	42%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Employment opportunities	42%	44%	38%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Health and wellness	79%	88%	82%	Lower	Similar	Higher	Similar
Adult education	47%	46%	37%	Lower	Similar	Lower	Lower
Openness and acceptance	72%	75%	64%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Opportunities to participate in community matters	69%	67%	60%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Opportunities to volunteer	78%	74%	67%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Customer service	84%	83%	77%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Treating all residents fairly	73%	67%	62%	Lower	Higher	Similar	Similar
Emergency preparedness	60%	65%	51%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Snow removal	71%	67%	59%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Traffic signal timing	54%	52%	47%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Power utility	82%	84%	76%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Utility billing	68%	75%	67%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Cable television	57%	63%	57%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Economic development	71%	63%	58%	Lower	Higher	Similar	Similar
Economy will have positive impact on income	41%	36%	31%	Lower	Higher	Similar	Similar
Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate	18%	27%	19%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
Read or watched local news	80%	79%	73%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Lower

Higher than national benchmark 2019

Topic	Percent rating positively			2019 vs. 2017	Comparison to national benchmark		
	2014	2017	2019		2014	2017	2019
Place to raise children	92%	90%	93%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Overall appearance	90%	86%	89%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Paths and walking trails	80%	80%	83%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Overall natural environment	86%	89%	89%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Higher
Air quality	94%	92%	89%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Overall economic health	79%	84%	82%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Preventative health services	79%	82%	80%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Health care	75%	80%	77%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Recreational opportunities	74%	79%	80%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Higher
K-12 education	86%	90%	87%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Bus or transit services	63%	66%	63%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Drinking water	82%	81%	82%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Higher
Storm drainage	80%	78%	81%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Health services	84%	86%	85%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Stocked supplies for an emergency	51%	49%	53%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Used public transportation instead of driving	48%	51%	48%	Similar	Higher	Much higher	Much higher
Carpooled instead of driving alone	60%	61%	57%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Recycled at home	95%	97%	98%	Similar	Higher	Higher	Higher
Did NOT observe a code violation	74%	74%	70%	Similar	Much higher	Much higher	Higher

Lower than national benchmark 2019

Topic	Percent rating positively			2019 vs. 2017	Comparison to national benchmark		
	2014	2017	2019		2014	2017	2019
Overall ease of travel	61%	56%	56%	Similar	Similar	Lower	Lower
Travel by car	50%	39%	42%	Similar	Similar	Lower	Lower
Traffic flow	24%	18%	19%	Similar	Lower	Much lower	Lower
Affordable quality housing	34%	20%	16%	Similar	Similar	Lower	Lower
Cost of living	32%	21%	17%	Similar	Similar	Lower	Lower
Adult education	47%	46%	37%	Lower	Similar	Lower	Lower
Contacted Issaquah employees	31%	34%	34%	Similar	Lower	Lower	Lower
Participated in religious or spiritual activities	28%	26%	26%	Similar	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
Read or watched local news	80%	79%	73%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Lower

Demographic Findings

- Respondents who earned \$150,000 per year or more, had lived in Issaquah for five years or less, or who had children in the home were more likely to give positive ratings to general aspects of Community Characteristics than other residents.
- Residents who had lived in Issaquah for more than 20 years tended to report feeling less safe in their neighborhood during the day and in Issaquah's downtown/ commercial area during the day than residents who had lived in the city for less time.
- Residents who were white alone, not Hispanic tended to give higher ratings to aspects of economy, such as Issaquah as a place to work and to visit, than those who were Hispanic and/or another race.
- Survey participants with children in the home were more likely to give positive marks to aspects of Community Engagement, including opportunities to volunteer and to participate in community matters, than those without children.
- Those who had lived in Issaquah for five years or less were more pleased with aspects of government performance (such as the overall direction of the City and overall confidence in City government) than residents who had lived in the city for longer periods of time.
- Respondents age 55 or older were less likely to use alternate modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, carpooling or using public transit, than residents who were younger.
- Residents who earned less than \$50,000 per year tended to report lower levels of health than those who earned more; they were less likely to have consumed healthy foods, engaged in physical activity or to report being in very good or excellent health.
- Residents who had lived in Issaquah for five years or less or who were age 18-34 were less likely to participate in aspects of Community Engagement (such as contacting Issaquah elected officials, volunteering or interacting with their neighbors) than their counterparts. They were also less likely to agree with a series of statements regarding feeling connected to their neighbors and neighborhoods.

Geographic Findings

- Residents of Issaquah Highlands tended to give higher ratings than those who lived in other subareas of the community. This was particularly true in the facets of Mobility and Built Environment, as well as for aspects of government performance and public trust.

Key Conclusions – What Did We Learn?

NCS noted several conclusions in its Community Livability Report:

- Issaquah residents continue to rate their quality of life positively.
- Safety remains a priority to residents and earns high marks in Issaquah.
- Mobility remains is a significant concern.
- Community engagement may also be a potential area of focus. Most of the lower ratings, however, were similar to national benchmarks, and include:
 - Opportunities to participate in community matters and to volunteer
 - Openness and acceptance
 - The job Issaquah government does at treating all residents fairly
 - Campaign for an issue, cause or candidate
 - To have read or watched local news (lower than benchmark)

Next Steps

Our next steps with this survey data include:

- Answering council questions related to the survey.
- Sharing the results with the community.
- Further analysis with City departments to help inform city work plan items.
- Using this information to help inform future planning efforts, including the development of success measures for the newly-adopted Strategic Plan.

Reports Provided

The attached exhibits include:

- Community Livability Report: Overview of survey results.
- Dashboard: Two-page chart to track trends, benchmarks and ratings.
- Trends Over Time: Comparison of 2014, 2017 and 2019 results.
- Technical Appendices: Complete survey responses and the following benchmark comparisons:
 - National benchmark: Reflects the average response from residents from more than 600 cities nationwide.
 - Peer benchmark: Reflects a subset of similar jurisdictions in Washington, Oregon and California with median household income \$80,000 - \$120,000. Examples of cities include Bainbridge Island, Bellevue, Edmonds, Kirkland, Redmond and Woodinville.
- Demographic and Geographic Comparisons: Data is cross-tabulated based on respondents' geography and demographics.
- Supplemental Online Survey Results