

2002 Survey of Loudoun Residents

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Section I. Introduction	5
Section II. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	7
Section III. Usage and Satisfaction with Selected County Services	9
Section IV. Opinions of Loudoun Residents	11
Section V. Conclusions	14
Appendix A. 2002 Survey Instrument	
Appendix B. Frequency Responses	
Appendix C. Comparison of Selected Responses	

2002 Survey of Loudoun Residents Executive Summary

A telephone survey of 1,010 Loudoun County residents was conducted in November 2002 to update demographic information and obtain opinions about key issues. Similar surveys were conducted in 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001, affording the opportunity to analyze changes over time for a few specific variables. Key findings are as follows:

Demographics

Respondents indicated that Loudoun's basic demographic profile is changing. Loudoun County is becoming more ethnically diverse and more affluent.

- More than a third of the respondents have lived in Loudoun for three years or less.
- As in past years, the majority of new Loudoun residents have moved from Fairfax County (41 percent), followed closely by residents moving from outside the Washington, DC area (39 percent).
- Respondents indicated that their major reason for relocating to Loudoun was location of work site, followed by housing affordability and Loudoun's rural character.

Usage and Satisfaction with Selected County Services

Of the surveyed households:

- 92 percent indicated that someone in their household had used at least one of the designated services during the past two years.
- 97 percent reported satisfaction with fire and rescue services.
- 96 percent expressed satisfaction with public libraries.
- 94 percent were satisfied with the public schools.
- 93 percent reported satisfaction with parks and recreation facilities.

Opinions about key issues

Of the surveyed households:

- 97 percent felt safe in their neighborhoods.
- 95 percent rated Loudoun's quality of life as good or excellent.
- 82 percent believed Loudoun County provides good value for the tax dollar.
- 54 percent identified Loudoun's single biggest problem as growth and development (down from 67 percent in 2001 and 71 percent in 1999).
- The second leading issue identified as Loudoun County's biggest problem was traffic/transportation. Over 25 percent of the households identified traffic/transportation as the central issue (up from 17 percent in 2001 and 12 percent in 1999).
- 34 percent of households surveyed felt that the single best thing about Loudoun was its rural character and countryside.

Willingness to Increase Property Taxes to Support Selected County Services

Surveyed households were asked if they would be willing to pay higher property taxes to maintain or increase levels of service in four selected areas:

- 67 percent of respondents were willing to pay increased property taxes to support fire and rescue.
- 64 percent were willing to pay more to support law enforcement.
- 56 percent were willing to pay more maintain or increase levels of service in public schools.
- 42 percent of respondents were willing to pay increased property taxes to support public transit in Loudoun.

Section I. Introduction

Purpose and Scope

In November 2002, the County Administrator commissioned a telephone survey of a random sample of 1,010 households in Loudoun County. There were several principal purposes for conducting a scientific survey of Loudoun County residents at that time:

- To update key demographic characteristics about Loudoun County residents that were obtained in similar surveys conducted in 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001;
- To find out critical information about the users of specific County services and their satisfaction with those services; and
- To provide the Board of Supervisors with additional input from residents regarding key issues and programs as it addresses strategic initiatives and plans for Loudoun County.

Methodology

The 2002 Survey of Loudoun Residents was designed to be a telephone survey of approximately 10 minutes duration that would provide key demographic and attitudinal information. A marketing research firm, Decision Data Collection, Inc., was retained to conduct the telephone survey of Loudoun households in November 2002.

The survey instrument, based in part on previous surveys, was modified to reflect current information needs and was further reviewed by Decision Data Collection's statistical experts. Upon completion of the survey, Decision Data Collection provided the data directly to Loudoun County for tabulation and analysis.

The survey solicited responses from a stratified random sample of 1,010 Loudoun County households. This represents approximately 1.4 percent of all households in Loudoun County and indicates that the data should be within +/- 3 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Decision Data Collection has indicated that they were able to achieve an extremely high percent cooperation level of 69.8 percent from Loudoun residents. This indicates a strong willingness on the part of Loudoun County citizens to communicate with County government and the Board of Supervisors about important issues.

Report Organization

The focus of this report is to summarize key responses about County services and to highlight important information that may be of critical use to the Board of Supervisors in its development of land use and fiscal policies.

This report is organized in five sections that reflect the key purposes of the survey. Section I introduces the report and discusses background and methodology. Section II provides a brief overview of key demographic characteristics of survey respondents. Usage and satisfaction patterns of services and programs are discussed in Section III. Section IV summarizes general opinions of how residents feel about Loudoun and their willingness to pay increased property taxes

to support selected county services. The survey's conclusions are discussed in Section V. A copy of the complete survey instrument is provided in Appendix A. Tables showing frequency tabulations for key questions are provided in Appendix B. Appendix C provides a comparison of responses to key questions from the 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2002 surveys.

Section II.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

For certain key demographic variables, such as household characteristics, racial composition and mobility, the most current and reliable source of data available is the 2000 Census. According to the Census Bureau, Loudoun County's population increased by 97 percent from 1990 to 2000.

Survey research provides an opportunity to collect other demographic information for comparison with historic trends and for benchmarking with projections. Many of the demographic questions in the survey were also asked in the 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001 Surveys of Loudoun Residents. This provides a baseline for evaluating trends, as well as a measure for assessing the validity of survey responses.

Location of Respondents

One-half of the households surveyed were in the eastern Loudoun zip codes of Ashburn, Sterling, Potomac Falls, South Riding, Dulles, Chantilly, and Great Falls. Twenty-five percent lived in the Leesburg zip code area and the remaining 25 percent resided in the other western Loudoun zip codes. This distribution is reasonably consistent with other population estimates of Loudoun County. In addition, this is proportionate to the distribution of respondents who participated in previous surveys.

Household Characteristics

The average size of surveyed households equaled 3.0 persons per household. This is higher than the 2.8 persons per household reported by the 2000 Census for Loudoun County.

Racial/Ethnic Characteristics

Eighty-five percent of the respondents classified their race as white. This is lower than in previous surveys and slightly higher than current 2000 Census counts, which report an 83 percent white population. The black population represented 5 percent of the respondents and 3 percent of respondents were Hispanic -- slightly less than 2000 Census counts of seven percent and six percent respectively. Asians accounted for 6 percent of the respondents -- a response rate that approximates 2000 Census counts.

Income

More than 19 percent of households surveyed reported an annual household income between \$75,000 and \$100,000. Nearly 44 percent reported a household income greater than \$100,000. This is higher than incomes reported in previous surveys.

Housing Characteristics

More than 68 percent of households surveyed lived in single-family detached housing, 22 percent lived in townhomes or duplex units, and 10 percent lived in multi-family units. The current

estimate of housing unit distribution in Loudoun County is 55 percent single-family detached, 26 percent townhomes, and 19 percent multi-family. 87 percent of total respondents own their home, which is higher than 2000 Census counts for home ownership patterns (79 percent). Ownership is highest (94 percent) for households in single-family detached homes. According to the survey, 69 percent of households living in multifamily units rent their units and nine percent of households living in townhomes are renters.

Length of Residence

More than 32 percent of households surveyed have lived in Loudoun for three years or less. More than 31 percent have lived in Loudoun from four to ten years and more than 36 percent have lived in Loudoun for more than ten years.

Prior Residence

Only nine percent of survey respondents were born in Loudoun County. Of the remaining 91 percent who moved to Loudoun County from other areas, almost 41 percent relocated from Fairfax County. Thirty-nine percent of respondents relocated from areas outside the Washington metro region. These figures were similar to those obtained in previous surveys.

Section III.

Usage and Satisfaction with Selected County Services and Programs

An important aspect of any quality services program is measuring the degree of customer satisfaction with the services provided.

Since 1992, the Loudoun County government has measured citizen satisfaction through a Service Response Card system, in which customers have been encouraged to complete response cards indicating their degree of satisfaction regarding the service provided. Many individual departments and agencies have also conducted surveys of their customers. While the response card system and some of the departmental surveys have been "self-selecting," and the samples of customers surveyed has therefore not been truly random, the surveys have nonetheless been extremely useful in providing a measure of the quality of county services.

To supplement the information received through these methods, it was highly desirable to periodically survey a random sample of households to find out how many households are using certain services, and how they rate their level of satisfaction with the services they use. With a truly random sample, Loudoun County is able to obtain a more accurate evaluation of the quality of its services as rated by those who use the services.

Use of County Services

For eight service categories – building and development services, fire and rescue services, mental health/mental retardation/substance abuse services (MH/MR/SAS), parks/recreation, senior services, public libraries, public schools, and Sheriff's Office – respondents were first asked if someone in their household had used the service in the last two years. If the answer was yes, then they were asked additional questions about their satisfaction with that service. If they had not used the service, they skipped any additional questions regarding that service and proceeded to the next question.

Of the 1,010 surveyed households, 92 percent indicated that someone in their household had used at least one of the specified services during the past two years. The following discussion summarizes, by service type, the characteristics of the responses received in the survey. Obviously, for some services – such as fire and rescue and Sheriff's Office – the number of users was a smaller portion of the population than for other services – such as public libraries and public schools – which are targeted to serve a broader population on a more consistent basis.

In general, satisfaction levels with the county services were similar to those obtained in the 1995, 1997, and 1999 surveys. Questions regarding satisfaction with services were not included in the 2001 survey.

Building and Development Services

Only 20 percent of respondents indicated that they had used building and development services in the past two years. Of the respondents who used building and development services, 76 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they used.

Fire and Rescue Services

Only 22 percent of respondents had used fire and rescue services in the past two years. Over 97 percent of users of fire and rescue services were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of service they received.

MH/MR/SAS

Less than three percent of respondents have used MH/MR/SAS in the past two years. More than 82 percent of respondents who used the services were satisfied or very satisfied.

Parks and Recreation Facilities

Use levels for parks and recreation facilities were extremely high – almost 71 percent of all respondents had used facilities in the past two years. Ninety-three percent of respondents who used parks and recreation facilities expressed satisfaction.

Senior Services

Less than five percent of respondents reported using senior services in the past two years. Of the respondents who used senior services, 83 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they used.

Public Libraries

Seventy-five percent of all respondents indicated that they had used the public libraries within the past two years. The level of satisfaction by users of public library services was very high – 96 percent of respondents who used the libraries were satisfied or very satisfied.

Sheriff's Office

Less than 24 percent of survey respondents have used the services of the Sheriff's Office in the past two years. Eighty-eight percent of respondents who have used the Sheriff's Office services indicated they were satisfied with the services they received.

Public Schools

Over 40 percent of respondents reported using the public schools within the past two years. Ninety-four percent of those who had used the public schools reported satisfaction.

Section IV.

Opinions of Loudoun Residents

In conducting its annual review of Loudoun County's fiscal plan, the Board of Supervisors actively seeks input from individuals who live and pay taxes in Loudoun County. The Board of Supervisors receives comments from the public in many different ways, including public meetings and hearings, the telephone comment line, e-mail, and personal correspondence and conversations.

A scientific telephone survey of a random sample of households is an excellent way for Loudoun County policymakers to obtain an accurate representation of opinions and priorities held by residents of different parts of the county. The results of this survey promise to be another useful means for the Board of Supervisors to gauge public opinion in conducting its review of the county fiscal plan.

The following discussion summarizes responses to several questions that address residents' opinions regarding key elements concerning living in Loudoun, and important issues facing Loudoun County.

Reason for Locating to Loudoun

Several factors were found to be highly influential in decisions to locate in Loudoun County.

From 1995 to 2002, the top two factors influencing the decision to locate in Loudoun continue to be location of work site and housing affordability. In 2002, almost 29 percent of the respondents cited location of work site and 24 percent cited housing affordability as important factors. These responses reflect the growing importance of Loudoun's employment base as well as Loudoun's competitive housing prices. In addition, 17 percent of respondents indicated that they were influenced by an appreciation for the rural character of Loudoun.

Responses to this question differed by location of residents. For the greatest percentage (32 percent) of the households in central Loudoun, location of work site was the most important location factor. Housing affordability was the most important factor cited by respondents in eastern Loudoun zip codes (31 percent), and rural character was the most important factor for respondents from western Loudoun (29 percent).

Safety in Neighborhood

Over 97 percent of respondents indicated that they felt "safe" or "very safe" in their neighborhoods. The findings in 2002 are consistent with the other survey years. Only 0.1 percent of all respondents reported feeling "very unsafe."

Overall Quality of Life

Respondents measured the quality of life in Loudoun very positively. Ninety-five percent indicated that they would rate the overall quality of life in Loudoun County as "excellent" or "good."

Value for the Tax Dollar

Eighty-two percent of respondents indicated that Loudoun County provides good value for the tax dollar. A greater proportion of respondents from eastern Loudoun zip codes felt they received good value from their tax dollar (85 percent), compared with 74 percent from western Loudoun zip codes.

A high proportion (88 percent) of respondents who have relocated to Loudoun from Fairfax County indicated that they received good value for their tax dollar in Loudoun County. A smaller percentage, (81 percent) from areas outside the metro region felt they received good value for their tax dollar. This number is higher than reported in previous surveys.

It appears that, for many respondents, there was a relationship between Loudoun's quality of life and the value they received from their tax dollar -- 93 percent of respondents who rated Loudoun's quality of life as excellent also felt they received good value for their tax dollar.

Biggest Problem Facing Loudoun

Not surprisingly, responses to this question were predominantly oriented toward issues of growth. More than 54 percent of all respondents indicated that they felt growth and development was the greatest problem in Loudoun (down from 67 percent in 2001 and more than 70 percent in 1999). An additional 25 percent indicated that traffic and transportation was the biggest problem (up from 17 percent in 2001 and 12 percent in 1999).

Sixty-two percent of respondents from western Loudoun zip codes cited growth and development as the biggest problem facing Loudoun, while 48 percent of respondents from eastern Loudoun zip codes felt growth was the major issue.

Best Thing About Loudoun

Thirty-four percent of the respondents felt that the single best thing about Loudoun County was its rural character, open space and countryside. Other positive attributes of Loudoun County as indicated in the survey included location and proximity to shopping and the city (13 percent), neighborhood/community (10 percent), and beauty/scenic views (9 percent).

Forty-one percent of respondents living in western Loudoun zip codes identified Loudoun's best feature as the rural character, open space and countryside, followed by 13 percent who identified Loudoun's beauty/scenic views. The top two choices of respondents living in eastern Loudoun zip codes were rural character, open space and countryside (26 percent) and close proximity to shopping and other amenities (15 percent).

General Growth Management Efforts

76 percent of the respondents said they supported the efforts of the Board of Supervisors to manage growth in Loudoun County, compared with 84 percent in 2001. 79 percent of respondents in eastern Loudoun, 78 percent of respondents from central Loudoun, and 71 percent of respondents from western Loudoun supported the Board's growth management efforts.

Almost 75 percent of respondents replied that they support the purchase of development rights by the county from landowners on a voluntary basis to preserve open space, a slight decline from 81 percent in 2001. Support for the purchase of development rights was highest in western Loudoun County (76.4%), but was also high in central (75.6%) and eastern Loudoun (73.2%).

Willingness to Increase Property Taxes to Support Selected Services

To provide additional input for the Board of Supervisors to consider in its budget deliberations, the 2002 survey included four new questions regarding the willingness of residents pay increased property taxes to support specified county services.

- ?? ***Public Transit:*** In response to the question “would you be willing to pay higher property taxes in order to support public transit in Loudoun County, such as bus and rail?” 42 percent of respondents replied “yes.” Support for an increase in property taxes for public transit was highest in eastern Loudoun (47 percent) and lowest in western Loudoun (36 percent).
- ?? ***Public Schools:*** Fifty-three percent of respondents said that they would be willing to pay higher property taxes in order to maintain or increase current levels of service for public schools. Support was highest in eastern Loudoun (57 percent) and lower in central and western Loudoun (49 percent).
- ?? ***Fire and Rescue:*** Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported a willingness to pay higher property taxes to maintain or increase current levels of service for fire and rescue services. Support was highest in eastern Loudoun at 66 percent, compared to 62 percent in western Loudoun, and 58 percent in central Loudoun.
- ?? ***Law Enforcement:*** Sixty-four percent of respondents said that they would be willing to pay higher property taxes in order to maintain or increase current levels of service for law enforcement. Sixty-eight percent of respondents in eastern Loudoun and 61 percent of respondents in central and western Loudoun said they were willing to pay higher property taxes to support law enforcement services.

Section V. Conclusions

As with the 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001 surveys, the 2002 survey develops a demographic profile of Loudoun households and provides updated information about opinions of Loudoun residents. Though the profile is diversifying, general opinions from previous surveys are generally consistent with the 2002 findings.

One recurrent theme in Loudoun County is growth. Growth is identified by some as an opportunity, but by many others as the biggest problem facing Loudoun County. Traffic and transportation problems continue to rank second on the list of problems facing Loudoun County and are rapidly increasing in importance to residents.

Residents continue to feel safe in their neighborhoods, good about the value of their tax dollars and positive about the overall quality of their community.

As Loudoun County continues to attract residents with high expectations for their families and living environment, the County will continue to be challenged to meet the needs and desires of all residents.

