

## MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Scott Hugill, Assistant City Manager

Via: John J. Caulfield, City Manager

Date: January 28, 2010

Subject: **City of Mountlake Terrace Community Satisfaction Survey Summary**

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### OVERVIEW

In November 2009, the City of Mountlake Terrace initiated a Community Satisfaction Survey in partnership with The National Citizen Survey™ program and sponsored by the International City/County Management Association in cooperation with National Research Center, Inc (NCR), to administer a survey to Mountlake Terrace residents during the fall and winter of 2009.

The purpose of the survey was to assess citizen satisfaction with the delivery of major city services as part of the City's on-going effort to identify and respond to the needs and concerns of residents consistent with one of the City Council's Goals, which is to, "Develop and Implement More Effective Communication and Outreach with the Community." The results will also help determine priorities for the community and represents the second citywide opinion tracking study conducted for the City.

The NRC is a research firm that specializes in performance measurement and evaluation and is the same firm that facilitated the City's 2007 community satisfaction survey. They conduct survey research by mail, phone, in-person and on the Internet and analyze new and existing data sets using sophisticated inferential techniques or simple descriptive statistics. The NRC, in conjunction with ICMA, operate a unique service that administers, analyzes, and reports results from customizable citizen surveys. They are able to provide this service at a relatively low cost through careful standardization and automation of the survey process. Each of their clients are able to compare their results with results from other jurisdictions across the United States.

### METHODOLOGY

In communities today, residents expect their local government officials to be well informed about customer perspectives. Surveying the community is not only a good idea, but a necessity for today's responsive local government, especially given the current economic conditions. To this end there are many reasons and benefits for conducting a Community Satisfaction Survey.

#### *Reasons*

- To measure service performance
- To benchmark service quality ratings
- To assess community needs
- To make long-range, short-term, or strategic plans

- To demonstrate the receptivity of our local government
- To evaluate potential policies or community characteristics
- To create a trendline for future surveying

### ***Benefits***

- Citizen surveying bridges the gap between the government and citizens who don't come to meetings, but do vote, pay taxes, and make decisions about where to live and build their businesses. It is important to hear from a broad cross section of residents.
- The best way to encourage good performance is to measure it, and the best indicator of government performance is citizen satisfaction.
- Surveying is how progress is measured. Surveying is not a one-time event – a trendline is created with the first survey, which was conducted in 2007. In following years (typically every other), declining scores will tell us where to focus improvements; rising scores will show services that are improving.
- Surveys done by professionals come with analysis and explanation that put local scores in perspective. Surveys done by outside contractors are free of bias and establish a neutral benchmark that all parties can accept.
- Surveying is always done in the context of planning for the future -- balancing priorities, setting new objectives, preparing the next budget, improving services.
- The cost of surveying is repaid with interest in terms of citizen satisfaction with government, staff commitment to change, and conservation of resources.
- Community surveys provide an important means for evaluating and assessing the level of citizen satisfaction with City services and programs, and they offer important information to decision makers as they determine how resources should be allocated and whether local policies should be revised.
- By tying the results of citizen surveys to performance measurement, the City demonstrates its commitment to transparency and accountability in its delivery of services.

The five-page survey was administered by mail to a random sampling of 1,200 households. 323 households responded to the survey (28% response rate), and the results have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 5%. The city thanks the residents who completed and returned the surveys. Their input is valuable and will be considered as the city develops its plans.

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

The results of the survey are based around respondents' reports about eight categories: community quality, community design, public safety, environmental sustainability, recreation and wellness, community inclusiveness, civic engagement and public trust. Each section begins with residents' ratings of community characteristics and is followed by residents' ratings of service quality. For all evaluative questions, the percent of residents rating the service or community feature as "excellent" or "good" is presented.

The survey results also contain comparisons with prior years' results. In this report, we are comparing this survey's data with results from the 2007 survey. Differences between years can be considered "statistically significant" if they are greater than eight percentage points. Trend

data for represents important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines. Deviations from stable trends over time especially represent opportunities for understanding how local policies, programs or public information may have affected residents' opinions.

Where comparisons were available, the City of Mountlake Terrace results were noted as being "above" the benchmark, "below" the benchmark or "similar to" the benchmark. This evaluation of "above," "below" or "similar to" comes from a statistical comparison of the City of Mountlake Terrace's rating to the benchmark. The benchmark is taken from NRC's database of comparative resident opinion that is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in citizen surveys from approximately 500 jurisdictions whose residents evaluated local government services and gave their opinion about the quality of community life. For most questions compared to the entire dataset, there were more than 100 jurisdictions included in the benchmark comparison.

The following is the summary of results of Mountlake Terrace's Community Satisfaction Survey, as provided from the data and information provided by NRC:

**What We Do Well**

**Quality of Life**

- Sense of Community
- Overall Quality of Life
- City as a Place to Live
- City as a Place to Raise Children
- City as a Place to Retire
- Neighborhood as a Place to Live
- Remain in Mountlake Terrace for the next 5 years
- Recommend living in Mountlake Terrace to someone who asks

**Characteristics of the Community**

- Openness and Acceptance
- Recreational Opportunities
- Sense of Community
- Natural Environment
- Preservation of Natural Areas

**Access**

- Affordable Quality Housing
- Variety of Housing Options
- Affordable Quality Child Care

**What We Need to Improve On**

**Quality of Life**

- City as a Place to Work

**Characteristics of the Community**

- Educational Opportunities
- Overall Image/Reputation
- Overall Appearance
- Opportunities to Attend Cultural & Social Events
- Shopping Opportunities
- Employment Opportunities
- Overall Quality of Business and Service Establishments

**Access**

- Quality Health Care
- Quality Food
- Quality Health Services

## **What We Do Well**

### **Mobility**

- Ease of Bus Travel
- Ease of Car Travel
- Ease of Walking
- Ease of Bicycle Travel
- Availability of Paths & Walking Trails
- Traffic Flow on Major Streets

### **Public Trust**

- Welcomes Citizen Involvement
- Receive Good Value for Taxes
- Listens to Citizens
- Overall Direction of the City

### **Services Provided By Government**

- City/Local Government

### **Public Safety**

- Neighborhood Safety
- Downtown Safety
- Fire Services
- Ambulance/Emergency Medical Services
- Fire Prevention and Education
- Police Services
- Crime Prevention
- Traffic Enforcement
- Municipal Court

### **Transportation**

- Bus/Transit Services
- Amount of Public Parking
- Street Cleaning
- Street Lighting
- Traffic Signal Timing
- Sidewalk Maintenance
- Street Repair

### **Leisure Services**

- City Parks
- Accessibility of Parks
- Public Library Services
- Recreation Programs/Classes
- Recreation Centers/Facilities

## **What We Need to Improve On**

### **Mobility**

- Ease of Rail or Subway Travel

### **Public Trust**

### **Services Provided By Government**

- County Government
- State Government
- Federal Government

### **Public Safety**

- Emergency Preparedness

### **Transportation**

- Snow Removal

### **Leisure Services**

### **What We Do Well**

#### **Utility Services**

- Recycling
- Yard Waste Pick-Up
- Garbage Collection
- Sewer Services
- Drinking Water
- Storm Drainage

#### **Planning and Code Enforcement Services**

- Land use, Planning and Zoning

#### **Services to Special Populations / Other Services**

- Public Information Services
- Services to Seniors
- Services to Youth

#### **Mountlake Terrace Employees**

- Courtesy
- Knowledge
- Responsiveness
- Overall Impression

### **What We Need to Improve On**

#### **Utility Services**

#### **Planning and Code Enforcement Services**

- Animal Control
- Code Enforcement
- Economic Development

#### **Services to Special Populations / Other Services**

- Volunteer Opportunities

#### **Mountlake Terrace Employees**

- Overall, citizens feel the city is doing an excellent or good job of delivering city services. City services rated were able to be compared to the benchmark database and of the 33 services for which comparisons were available, 19 were above the benchmark comparison (58%), nine were similar to the benchmark comparison (27%), and only five were below (15%).
- 84% of respondents rate Mountlake Terrace as a place to live as excellent or good, 80% rate Mountlake Terrace's neighborhoods as an excellent or good place to live, and 73% rate the overall quality of life in Mountlake Terrace as excellent or good, all increases from the previous survey.
- Almost all report they plan on staying in the City of Mountlake Terrace for the next five years providing evidence that the City of Mountlake Terrace offers services and amenities that work.
- A high percentage of residents (73%) rated the City of Mountlake Terrace as an "excellent" or "good" place to raise kids and a majority (55%) rated it as an excellent or good place to retire.
- Most residents (55%) felt that the local sense of community was "excellent" or "good."

- A majority of survey respondents (66%) felt the City of Mountlake Terrace was open and accepting towards people of diverse backgrounds.
- Citizens have trust in city government and a majority felt that the value of services for taxes paid was excellent or good. This was higher than the benchmark comparison of other cities.
- A majority rated the overall direction being taken by the City of Mountlake Terrace as “good” or “excellent.” This was higher than the benchmark comparison of other cities.
- Public information services were rated very favorably and higher than the benchmark comparison of other cities.
- Those residents who had interacted with an employee of the City of Mountlake Terrace in the previous 12 months gave high marks to those employees. Nearly all rated their overall impression of employees as “excellent” or “good.” These employee characteristics are higher than the benchmark comparison of other cities.
- Areas of greatest satisfaction are community safety, police services, fire & EMS services, utility services (water, sewer, storm water, garbage/recycling), recreation facilities and programs, city parks, and street cleaning. In addition, most of these service ratings improved over the last survey.
- Services found to be influential in ratings of overall service quality were street cleaning, traffic signal timing, and traffic enforcement. By targeting improvements in these areas, the City can focus on the services that have the greatest likelihood of influencing residents’ opinions about overall service quality.
- The service of land use, planning and zoning was rated similar to the benchmark.
- The percent of residents that used Mountlake Terrace recreation centers was greater than the percent of users in comparison jurisdictions. However, recreation program use in Mountlake Terrace was lower than use in comparison jurisdictions.
- Services to more vulnerable populations (e.g., seniors or youth) ranged from 56% to 67% with ratings of “excellent” or “good.” Services to youth were above the benchmark, while services to seniors were the same.
- The overall quality of the natural environment was rated as “excellent” or “good” by 66% of survey respondents and it was similar to the benchmark.
- More residents in Mountlake Terrace compared to other jurisdictions believed that retail growth was too slow (63%) and more residents believed that job growth was too slow (81%).
- Only 20% of Mountlake Terrace residents expected that the coming six months would have a “somewhat” or “very” positive impact on their family. The percent of residents with an optimistic outlook on their household income was the same as comparison jurisdictions, which is reflective of the current economic recession.

- Ease of travel was given favorable rating with ease of car travel being the most positive rating, followed by ease of walking in Mountlake Terrace. These ratings tended to be favorable when compared to the benchmark and had remained the same or improved since 2007.
- The availability of affordable housing was rated as “excellent” or “good” by 51% of respondents, while the variety of housing options was rated as “excellent” or “good” by 56% of respondents. The rating of perceived affordable housing availability was better in the City of Mountlake Terrace than the ratings, on average, in comparison jurisdictions.
- Areas for improvement include: ease of rail or subway travel; economic development to include employment opportunities, shopping opportunities, business opportunities, and cultural activities; community appearance, image and reputation; and snow removal. However, most of these service ratings did improve over the last survey.

## CONCLUSION

The Community Satisfaction Survey has: provided the City with information and an understanding of our community’s opinions; helped to increase communication between City leadership and the community; and measured the community’s satisfaction with the overall operation of the many services provided by the City.

Overall, the strengths, challenges and opportunities represented from the survey results provide a more accurate assessment and perspective from our community. Though there is always room to improve, results from the survey demonstrates that the City continues to be headed in the right direction, has the trust of the community, has a strong and positive quality of life, and has very responsive, knowledgeable, and courteous employees. When compared to other cities, the City of Mountlake Terrace ‘does many things well’ — typically “similar to” or “above the” norm. The results are an impressive reflection upon the City and the community we serve.

The survey results will assist the City in determining how resources should be allocated with a particular focus toward helping the City balance priorities, set new objectives, prepare the next budget and improve services.

- cc      Community Satisfaction Survey (prepared by NRC)
- Survey Background
  - Executive Summary
  - Community Ratings
  - From Data to Action
  - Appendix A: Complete Survey Frequencies
  - Appendix B: Survey Methodology
  - Appendix C: Survey Materials
- Community Satisfaction Survey Benchmark report (prepared by NRC)