

CHAPTER 8: Concluding Summary

This report provides a wealth of information about the opinions of Spotsylvania County citizens. Residents talked openly with CSR interviewers about their likes and dislikes related to Spotsylvania County services and efforts by the local government to manage growth and development. The results of this Spotsylvania County 2004 Citizen Survey suggest that residents have definite opinions on the direction local governmental policies are going. The following is a concluding summary of the survey results.

Quality of Life

It is very clear that Spotsylvania residents are content with the County, on the whole. Rating quality of life in the County on a scale of 1 to 10, the mean score was 7.10.

Strategic Planning Goals

This survey included questions about 18 strategic planning goals that the County government feels are important to strive toward to maintain a high quality of life for its residents. As with any governments' budget, funds are limited and the priorities of those receiving the services are important to know.

Spotsylvania citizens feel strongly that the goal of protecting the quality of education in public schools should be considered the top budget priority for County government officials. Reducing traffic congestion was ranked second in importance followed by safety services, including fire and rescue and law enforcement. According to residents of Spotsylvania, protecting water quality is the 5th most important goal to be funded.

Goals considered of somewhat less importance in terms of budget priority by the citizens of Spotsylvania County include controlling the growth rate of the area, efforts to bring higher paying jobs to the area, and preserving natural resources and open space. Tied for 9th place in terms of budget priority on the list of 18 were the goals of supporting recreational programs for youth, and maintenance and repair of roads.

The lower half of the ranked list included primarily goals related to entertainment and recreation

and items related to infrastructure. Making streets safer for walkers and cyclists was ranked 11th in terms of importance, followed by preservation of historic buildings and places, and providing parks and recreational facilities. Infrastructure items, including public transportation, promoting economic growth, and providing drainage and storm-water improvements were near the bottom of the list. The two items that are considered the least important in terms of budgetary priority by Spotsylvania citizens are support for cultural and entertainment opportunities and funds dedicated to improving the Spotsylvania County museum.

Satisfaction with Services

Overall, satisfaction with County-provided services is relatively high, with 76 percent of residents reporting satisfaction with services in 2004. More than 80 percent felt that the level of service remained consistent over the past 12 months, with 8.4 percent indicating they thought services had improved compared to a year prior to the survey, and 10.7 percent saying services had gotten worse.

Citizens of Spotsylvania County are most satisfied with its public safety services including fire protection, emergency medical services, and the Sheriff's Department, with an average of more than 85 percent indicating satisfaction with these services. In addition, the majority of Spotsylvania citizens who have had to call 9-1-1 in the past 12 months reported satisfaction with the assistance they received from the dispatcher, the response time, and the help provided at the scene of the emergency.

Items related to growth and development issues had far lower satisfaction ratings. Less than a third of residents are happy with the rate of growth in the area and only a slightly higher percentage feel County officials are doing a good job planning how land will be used and developed. Almost three-quarters favor the County policy of concentrating growth in designated development areas of the County while restricting development in rural areas. Less than half of our respondents reported satisfaction with efforts to bring new jobs and businesses to the County.

Despite relative satisfaction with the visual appearance of new development, the majority of Spotsylvania residents are in favor of design standards for commercial buildings.

When it comes to preservation efforts, less than two-thirds believe the County is doing a satisfactory job conserving the area's natural resources and historic places and only 42 percent feel that farmland and forests are receiving adequate protection. Evidence of support for preservation efforts is backed by the fact that over 80 percent of residents are in favor of the establishment of a "Purchase of Development Rights" program for conservation easements.

Only slightly more than half of Spotsylvania residents are satisfied with information and opportunities for citizen input on programs and issues affecting the County.

Although less than half of Spotsylvania County citizens are satisfied with the current public transportation system, almost three-fourths favor expanding local bus service and over two-thirds support subsidies for commuter bus and train services.

Although less than 30 percent of citizens of Spotsylvania County are familiar enough with the Department of Social Services to rate it, two-thirds of those gave it satisfactory marks.

Other County-provided services received varying levels satisfaction ratings, with County parks and recreation facilities and library services receiving high marks. Less than two-thirds of those interviewed are satisfied with litter control and less than half indicated they were satisfied with the programs designed to assist the County's elderly population.

Approximately half of Spotsylvania residents watch the public access channels 16 or 17, and of those who do, over 90 percent are satisfied with them as a source of information on the County or schools.

Finally, of the approximately 70 percent of residents who are Spotsylvania County water customers, most rate the water quality as good to excellent. Approximately one in five respondents, however, rated the quality of water as only fair or poor, indicating that water quality may be an area of concern for some in the County.

Contact with the County

Citizens of Spotsylvania County are quite pleased with their contact with County departments. Of the 43.8 percent of respondents that had contacted

the County during the 12 months prior to the survey, more than 80 percent reported that they were satisfied with the courtesy, helpfulness, and knowledge of County employees. Furthermore, 77.6 percent were satisfied with the efficiency and promptness of services. Those who used the automated phone system were less pleased, however, with more than half indicating they were dissatisfied with their experience.

The vast majority of those who contacted either the Treasurer's Office or the Commissioner of Revenue reported being satisfied with their experience.

General View of Government, Taxes, and Schools

Overall, Spotsylvania County citizens are satisfied with the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by the County government and almost 60 percent indicated that they trust the County government to make the right decisions.

When it comes to taxes and services, residents are happy with the status quo. In other words, most would prefer to see the level of taxes and services stay the same, but 22.7 percent would like to see an increase in both. Another 7.8 percent would like to see taxes and services cut.

The majority of Spotsylvania children attend public school and satisfaction with the school system is high. More than 42 percent said they were very satisfied with the public schools in the area and another 38.3 percent are somewhat satisfied, for a total satisfaction rating of 90.3 percent.

Employment and Commuting

Approximately two-thirds of the survey respondents are employed, but two-thirds of those work outside of the County limits. As a result, the average commute is quite high, with the median commute for someone working outside of the County being 45 minutes. Most respondents would therefore prefer to work in the County if jobs similar to their current position were available within Spotsylvania County.

Conclusion

The Center for Survey Research presents these findings with the hope that they will be of help to the government of Spotsylvania County as it continues to move forward with its strategic planning

and decision-making. This initial survey of the County's residents can serve as a baseline against which future efforts at improvement can be assessed. We believe that the citizen opinions expressed here can be a useful tool in governing. The Board of Supervisors, administrative staff, and employees of Spotsylvania County can take

pride in the high level of satisfaction the citizens express. Whereas this survey has indicated that Spotsylvania residents are clearly pleased with their quality of life and with their government, it does demonstrate some significant areas of dissatisfaction and thus some room for improvement, especially in the area of growth and development.