

Executive Summary

2004 SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY CITIZEN SATISFACTION SURVEY

CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
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In December 2004 and January 2005, the Center for Survey Research at the University of Virginia conducted a telephone survey of 843 residents of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, on behalf of the County's Board of Supervisors and administrative staff. The purposes of the survey were to determine residents' opinions about quality of life in Spotsylvania County, to determine which strategic planning goals are considered to be of higher budgetary priority, to determine residents' level of satisfaction with a number of services the County provides, and to measure citizen opinion about the way in which the County is managing growth and transportation issues.

Summary of Method

The questionnaire was developed in conjunction with key members of the Spotsylvania County staff. CSR also took special care to include comments and the opinions of the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors and the County administrative staff in the survey development process. A pretest was conducted to refine the survey instrument and adjust the length. CSR used Random Digit Dialing (RDD) to contact County residents. The survey calling was conducted December 1st, 2004 through January 7th, 2005 and resulted in 843 interviews, yielding a sampling error of ± 3.4 percent.

Data analysis for this survey included breaking down the responses for all opinion items by demographic subgroups in order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between them. Statistically significant differences are those that probably did not result merely from sampling variability, but instead reflect real differences within the County's adult population.

The following demographic variables were used in our subgroup analysis: age, the presence of children in the household, education level, employment status, gender, homeownership status, household income, length of residence in Spotsyl-

vania County, marital status, race, school attendance, type of school, and type of home.

Significant differences in survey responses by subgroup are discussed in the full report. The survey results are briefly summarized below.

Quality of Life

First of all, it is clear that Spotsylvania residents are very fond of Spotsylvania County as a place to call home. Respondents were asked to rate the quality of life in the County on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best possible place to live, and 1 being the worst.

- The mean rating was 7.10.
- Approximately 44 percent (44.2%) rated the County's quality of life an "8" or better.
- About six percent (6.4%) rated the County a "10."

Strategic Planning Goals

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of each of eighteen strategic planning goals the County might pursue, on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 represents the highest budget priority and 1 represents the lowest budget priority.

- Spotsylvania County residents feel most strongly that protecting the quality of education in its public schools should be the number one goal, with a mean priority rating of 8.87.
- Reducing traffic congestion is considered the second most important goal by Spotsylvania residents, with a mean priority rating of 8.59.
- Safety services are also important to citizens of Spotsylvania County, with fire and rescue services (mean 8.35) and law enforcement services (mean 8.29) ranked as the third and fourth most important goals in terms of funding priority.
- Improving the Spotsylvania County Museum (mean 5.09) and supporting cultural and entertainment opportunities (mean 5.64) were the least important of the 18 goals for residents of the County in terms of budget priority.

Satisfaction with Services

Overall, citizens of Spotsylvania County are very satisfied with the services they receive from the County. To report results on satisfaction, the percent "very satisfied" and the percent "somewhat satisfied" were combined.

- For the most general question, overall satisfaction with County programs and services, 76 percent of our respondents said they were satisfied.
- The majority of residents (80.9%) said their level of satisfaction had not changed over the past 12 months, although 8.4 percent felt that the level of service by the County had improved over the year and 10.7 percent indicated less satisfaction with County services now than a year ago.
- Residents are very satisfied with public safety services provided by the County, with the vast majority indicating satisfaction with fire protection (89.6%), emergency medical services (84.3%), and protection provided by the Sheriff's Department (83.0%).
- Satisfaction with 9-1-1 services is also very high, with the vast majority of those who reported having called 9-1-1 in the past year indicating they were satisfied with the assistance they received from the person who took the call (95.3%), the response time (81.9%), as well as the help at the scene (87.0%).

A key area of concern for many Spotsylvania residents is growth and development within the County.

- Less than a third (32.5%) of citizens are satisfied with the rate of growth Spotsylvania County is experiencing and 73.1 percent say they favor concentrating growth in designated development areas while restricting development in rural areas.
- Only slightly more than a third (36.8%) are satisfied with the job the County is doing in planning how land will be used and developed in the County.
- Almost half (48.7%) of respondents indicated they are satisfied with the efforts by the County to bring employment opportunities and new businesses to the area.
- Approximately two-thirds (63.3%) say they are satisfied with the visual appearance of new development in the area and 70.4 percent say they favor the institution of design standards for commercial buildings.

Residents of Spotsylvania County strongly support preservation efforts, with over 80 percent (83.5%) being in favor of the use of public funds for the establishment of a "Purchase of Development

Rights" program for conservation easements. When asked about current preservation efforts by the County, views are mixed.

- Only 42 percent feel the County is doing a satisfactory job preserving farmland.
- Over 60 percent (61.9%) report satisfaction with the efforts by the County to preserve its natural resources as well as historic places (63.1%).

In regard to citizen information and participation, half (50.8%) of Spotsylvania residents are satisfied with the job the County is doing in keeping citizens informed about County government programs and services. More than half (54.1%) of residents are satisfied with the opportunities for citizen input into issues that come up for discussion in the County. Slightly more than half (52.2%) of those interviewed are satisfied with the opportunities for citizen input on the planning process in the County.

Less than half of Spotsylvania County citizens are satisfied with the current public transportation system, but there is strong support for the service.

- Nearly three-fourths (73.9%) of those interviewed said they favor expanding local bus service.
- More than two-thirds support subsidies for commuter bus (66.1%) and train (70.4%) services.

Other County-provided services received varying satisfaction ratings.

- Over 90 percent (91.3%) gave County library services high marks.
- Over 80 percent (83.9%) are pleased with the parks and recreation services provided by the County.
- About six out of ten (61.4%) report satisfaction with County litter control and beautification efforts.
- Less than half (47.5%) of residents are satisfied with County-run programs for its seniors.
- Of those who are familiar with the Department of Social Services, almost two-thirds (61.8%) give it a satisfactory rating.
- Only half (50.6%) of the citizens of Spotsylvania check the public-access television stations for information on the County or schools

at least once a month, but of those who do, over 90 percent (90.9%) report satisfaction with the information they receive from these sources.

- Seventy percent of County residents are Spotsylvania Water Department customers and approximately half (49.9%) rate the water quality as excellent to very good, and another third (30.7%) rated it as good.

Contact with the County

In general, citizens of Spotsylvania County reported positive experiences when contacting County departments. Again, to report results on satisfaction, the percent “very satisfied” and the percent “somewhat satisfied” were combined.

- During the past 12 months, 43.8 percent of respondents contacted at least one County department.
- The great majority were satisfied with the courtesy and helpfulness (83.6%), efficiency and promptness (77.6%), and knowledge (80.7%) of County employees.
- Those who used the automated phone service to contact the County were much less likely to have had a positive experience, with less than half (48.4%) reporting satisfaction with the system.
- Approximately two-thirds (67.9%) of respondents had called or visited the Treasurer’s Office and approximately a third (37.3%) of respondents had contact with the Commissioner of Revenue in the past 12 months. The vast majority were highly satisfied with their experience with these constitutional offices (90.6% and 92.8% respectively).

Government, Taxes and Schools

In general, citizens of Spotsylvania County are satisfied with the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by the County government.

- Almost 60 percent (56.6%) of respondents said that they trust the County government to “do what is right” at least most of the time.

- The majority of residents (59.8%) would prefer that the level of taxes and services stay the same, but 22.7 percent would like to see an increase in both and 7.8 percent would like to see a decrease in both.
- Approximately 80 percent (88.8%) of children in Spotsylvania attend public schools and parental satisfaction with the school system is high, with 80.5 percent of respondents saying that they were satisfied that the school system provides efficient and effective services.

Employment and Commuting

Approximately two-thirds (65.1%) of the employed residents of Spotsylvania must commute outside of the County for their jobs.

- The median commute time for Spotsylvania residents who work outside the County is 45 minutes.
- The majority of residents (76.5%) would prefer to work in Spotsylvania County if jobs similar to their current position were available.
- Those with professional/higher paying jobs are the most likely to have to commute outside of the County for work.

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. We believe that the citizen opinions expressed here can be a useful tool in governing. The results reported here can serve as an important baseline against which future citizen surveys can be compared. 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 local government, there are serious concerns related to issues of growth, development and transportation.