

PRESS & GUIDE

Survey says: Most Dearborn residents quality of life is excellent in city

By Sean Delaney, Press & Guide Newspapers

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DEARBORN - City officials say a recent survey conducted by Shreck & Associates has provided an intriguing look into the minds of Dearborn residents, who were polled via phone throughout the month of February.

Of the city's 400 registered voters who took part in the survey, 83 percent said the quality of life in Dearborn was excellent or good, while only 1.1 percent found it poor or very poor.

"You don't see these kinds of results in any other city," said Bill Shreck, who presented the results of the survey Monday to the Dearborn City Council and Mayor Jack O'Reilly.

According to Shreck, almost half the respondents could name nothing they liked least about Dearborn (49.1 percent). In fact, 41.3 percent said nothing when asked what they liked least (7.8 percent). The other answers were across the board in small numbers with residents ranking taxes at 6 percent, culture at 5.8 percent, took little commercial development at 5 percent, empty houses/home upkeep at 3.5 percent and parking at 2.8 percent.

Crime was not a major issue, Shreck said, as it was mentioned by only 1.5 percent of respondents, a majority of whom have lived in Dearborn for at least 21 to 30 years.

"This survey is slanted slightly toward an older demographic," O'Reilly said Monday. "It's still perfectly valid, but it's something we need to keep in mind."

The survey was conducted via phone, Shreck said, and targeted individuals who still use landline phones. Residents who rely on their cell phones to communicate are typically not included as their numbers are often unlisted.

"Also, many of us won't answer our cell phones if we don't recognize the number," said Dearborn Councilman Bob Abraham.

While the survey may not be representative of everyone in Dearborn, Shreck said the results are still reliable.

"Having 400 people respond is still a good sample size," he said.

Of those 400 respondents, almost two-thirds (65.1 percent) said they receive their information on the city from the mail (45.8 percent), the city calendar (11 percent) or both (8.3 percent). The remainder use cable TV (14.5 percent) or newspapers (10.3 percent) to get their information.

Online sources, like e-mail or the Internet, have not made much headway as an information source (2.3 percent), but Shreck said this should increase through time. Almost 95 percent of respondents believe there is value in getting this information, and 88.3 percent feel the quality of information they receive from the city is excellent or good.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents thought the best way to improve city communications was to mail more items directly to residents. Only 5.3 percent mentioned they wanted to receive more information online, while only 8.8 percent would like to conduct more city business on the Internet.

Although 18.5 percent of respondents under 45 said they would like to use the Internet for city business, 62.5 percent of respondents 18 to 25 said they would.

"I think that number is a bit low," said Councilwoman Suzanne Sareini. "It's clear that young people are using the Internet more."

The survey also showed that almost 71 percent of respondents agree they get their money's worth for their tax dollars, while 14.5 percent disagree and 13.5 percent are not sure. Only 40 percent of respondents agree the city of Dearborn no longer has the money to provide the services it used to in the past.

To save money, 84.3 percent of respondents said they would support having City Hall open four days a week from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. instead of five days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"That's something we're looking into," O'Reilly said. "I'd rather do that than have to lay people off."

Approximately two-thirds of respondents could not name anything the city could do to save money in an open-ended question, while 4.9 percent mentioned reducing services, 4.1 mentioned eliminating or cutting back on underutilized facilities, 3.4 percent said close pools, 3.1 said eliminate Homecoming, 2.8 percent said reduce staff and 2.8 percent said sell or close Camp Dearborn.

When asked whether the city should allow people to bring their dogs to city parks and to Camp Dearborn as long as they clean up after them, keep them on leashes and stay on paved walkway paths, approximately 62.5 percent of respondents said they would support allowing dogs in parks, while 18.8 disagreed.

"You have to remember that people walk their dogs on every sidewalk in Dearborn without any problem," O'Reilly said. "This shows that a majority of people are reasonable about it."

Respondents were split on going to Fairlane Town Center, Shreck said. When asked if when they need to shop at a mall, they regularly shop at Fairlane Town Center, 43.8 percent agreed, 55 percent disagreed and 1.3 percent were not sure.

When asked why they didn't shop at Fairlane, 11.5 percent of total respondents preferred other shopping venues, 8.8 percent mentioned crime or safety issues, 8 percent don't drive or get out much, 7.8 just don't like Fairlane, 6.5 percent mentioned the clientele or culture of the mall (anything from age to race to ethnicity) and 3.5 percent just don't like malls.

"I think we're all aware that the atmosphere at Fairlane isn't the same atmosphere as at Twelve Oaks," O'Reilly said. "But when we have people from out of town who go to the mall without any expectations of what it was in the past, they enjoy it. So for people who haven't been there in 10 or 15 years, I say go take another look."

In addition to Fairlane Town Center, respondents were also asked about what they thought Dearborn is most known for. Approximately 24.8 percent said Ford Motor Co., while 13 percent mentioned the city's neighborhoods.

When asked what they liked best about living in Dearborn, 29.3 percent ranked city services at number one, followed by safety and community. Only 2.5 percent of those surveyed ranked schools as the thing they liked best, Shreck said.

"I'm concerned, but I think we have to keep in mind that most of our respondents weren't school-age parents," Abraham said.

Of those residents surveyed, approximately 37.3 percent reside in East Dearborn, while 30.3 percent live in Southwest Dearborn. Northwest Dearborn accounts for 25.3 percent of respondents, while Springwells and the South End made up 3.3 and 4 percent, respectively.

For more on the results of the citizen survey, see future editions of the Press & Guide.