

Executive Summary

On October 17, 2003, an eight-page survey was mailed to 1,400 randomly selected City of Victoria citizens. The purpose of the 2003 Citizen Survey was to investigate what City of Victoria citizens thought about their quality of life in their communities and in the downtown area, local government's delivery of services and facilities, and the value they receive for their money. By the November 11, 2003 response deadline, 544 completed surveys were received, giving a high response rate of 39.7%, and low sampling error of $\pm 4\%$, 19 times out of 20. Usually, response rates for citizen surveys of this kind are between 25% to 40%. The low sampling error of $\pm 4\%$ means that with this sample size, we can be 95% confident that the results will fall within $\pm 4\%$ points of what they would be if the total population within the boundaries of the City of Victoria were surveyed.

The main body of this report provides the reader with a brief introduction on its background, objectives and methodology, followed by the survey results. Readers are encouraged to look at the attached Appendices to understand the data in the survey results and to form their own opinions. Appendices include respondent characteristics, survey methodology, statistical tables, some of which include results broken down into demographic sub-groups, verbatim responses to open-ended questions, and the survey instrument used for this study.

Several on-going themes emerged during the data analysis process, which revealed the vision and values of citizens living within the boundaries of the City of Victoria. Findings are briefly summarized below.

Quality of Life

The majority of citizens gave high ratings to the overall quality of life in Victoria with an average score of 86 (out of 100). It is also seen as a safe place to live and a very good place to retire (90) and raise children (80).

Citizens appreciate Victoria for its climate and geography (44%), atmosphere and lifestyle (23%), and parks, greenspace and flora (9%).

The social challenges, especially street population (18%), transit, transportation and traffic (16%), and cost of living and housing (11%) are the main things that participants most dislike about living in Victoria.

Some key issues and concerns regarding quality of life measures include:

- High feelings of personal safety in neighbourhoods during the day with an average score of 89 out of 100, but reduced to an average score of 63 at night;
- High feelings of personal safety in the downtown area during the day, with an average score of 78 out of 100, but reduced to an average score of 41 at night;
- Perceived lack of safety and security in the home from burglary with an average score of 67 out of a 100; and

- For respondents feeling unsafe, the main factors contributing to the perceived sense of threat comes from various groups who live or situate themselves on the streets (45%), and from the perceived increased levels of criminal activity (24%).

Downtown Likes/Dislikes and Activities

In terms of downtown activities and services:

- Two popular downtown activities citizens participate several times a year include shopping with an average score of 60 (out of 100) and taking part in leisure activities with an average score of 55.
- Citizens most like the amenities and services (31%) available in the downtown area, as well as its atmosphere and lifestyle (17%).
- Citizens (51%) consider the street population, which contributes to a negative downtown atmosphere as the most disliked feature of the downtown core, followed by parking issues downtown (20%).

Service Delivery and Usage Rates of Services

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction levels with local government services, as well as indicate the importance of the services provided. In this regard,

- A majority of services (41 out of 71) received high levels of satisfaction and high levels of importance among participants.
- Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with fire fighting services (91% are satisfied or very satisfied), Beacon Hill Park (91%), free City parkades on Sunday (90%), floral displays and landscaping (88%), garbage collection (88%), City parkade "First Hour Free" program (85%), citizen recycling (85%), school fire safety program (83%), other City parks (83%), beaches and waterfront areas (83%), and maintenance of water distribution systems (82%). These services were also deemed as very important.
- Services that citizens were least satisfied with, but considered them high in importance include ease of finding parking downtown (only 28% are satisfied or very satisfied), programs and services for the economically disadvantaged (37%), economic and business development (40%), ease of travel by bicycle (44%), noise control (44%), managing land use change in neighbourhoods (44%), city communications via voice mail and the phone system (45%), bylaw enforcement (47%), and programs and services for youth (48%). All services in this category rated between 74% to 86% for level of importance.
- The parking enforcement (47% are satisfied or very satisfied) and Taxed Boulevard Program (53%) rated as both low in satisfaction and low in importance.

Citizens were also asked to indicate how often they used specific City services and facilities. Results show that:

- Beacon Hill Park was the most accessed facility with an average score of 55 (out of 100), followed by other City parks with an average score of 45.3.
- Attendance to public meetings about city matters was the least used service with an average score of 6.9 (out of 100).
- Dropping off garden waste at Garbally Yard was another least used facility/service with an average score of 7.1 (out of 100).

When asked to rate the level of satisfaction with customer service provided by City staff members,

- Citizens gave an average score of good (75 out of 100) to very good (91) to City staff for referring citizens to the right people and for being easy to reach, as well as responsive, courteous, polite, knowledgeable and understandable.

Local Government

Citizens were asked about future tax options, spending on capital projects and their perception of City governance. Results show that:

- Forty-five percent of respondents preferred to pay the same amounts in taxes as they do now with the same or reduced level of City services.
- When respondents were asked to allocate \$100 among 10 capital projects, citizens preferred to see 17% of the funds allocated to the city sewer, drainage and water systems, 15% to affordable housing, and 10% to environmental protection and enhancement. All other projects were allocated 9%, with the exception of roads and traffic calming at 7%, and City buildings and related infrastructure at 6%.
- Forty-eight percent of respondents believed they receive good value for the City taxes they pay.
- Forty-three percent of respondents were pleased with the overall direction that the City is taking.

Citizen-City Communication

Citizens were asked a number of questions regarding communicating with the City and the quality of communication between citizens and City staff members. Results show that:

- Citizens learn about City government issues through their local newspaper (64%) and TV (52%) and radio (39%) stations.
- The community newspaper (average score of 75 out of 100), public opinion surveys (71), and public meetings and hearings (69) are preferred ways for citizens to participate in the policy, decision, and budget making processes.
- Citizens awarded the City an average score of 63 (out of 100) for welcoming their involvement in City issues and gave the City an average score of 55 for listening to them.
- While 68% of citizens have Internet access in their homes, 11% access the City website to learn about City issues.

Summary of Citizens' Vision and Values

When citizens were asked how they would like to see Victoria developing in the next ten years, 72% of citizens expressed that they would like to see Victoria much the same as it is now.

Some key issues and concerns citizens would like the City to address include:

- The presence of street people, especially in the downtown core (for example, panhandling, homelessness, and illegal activities);
- Affordable housing and cost of living issues;
- Transportation issues;
- Parking in the downtown area;
- Issues associated with city sewage, drainage and water systems;
- Creating a safe and clean environment; and
- The beautification and revitalization of neighbourhoods and the downtown area.