

# CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS

October 2004

## UVA CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH CONDUCTS CITIZEN SURVEY

In June and July, 2004, the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at the University of Virginia conducted a telephone survey of 707 residents of Albemarle County, Virginia, on behalf of the County's Board of Supervisors and executive management.

The purposes of the survey were to determine residents' opinions about quality of life in Albemarle County, to assess citizen satisfaction with

Albemarle's efforts to achieve strategic planning goals, to determine citizen satisfaction with a number of services the County provides, and to measure citizen opinions about the way the county is managing growth.

The survey calling was conducted June 9 through July 1, 2004, and resulted in 707 completed interviews. CSR used Random Digit Dialing (RDD) to contact County residents.

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.

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### Survey Highlights

- Quality of life scored 7.96 on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best possible place to live and 1 the worst.
- Residents were most satisfied with efforts to make the County a safe and healthy community and efforts to create lifelong learning opportunities.
- 90.6% of all respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with county services.
- 8 in 10 residents surveyed said they were satisfied with the value of service they receive for their tax dollar.

## SUMMARY COMMENTS

The Citizen Survey is critical to the County's customer service and strategic planning efforts. Results of past surveys helped identify priority goals that are elements of our current strategic plan.

The most recent survey focuses on citizen satisfaction with our progress towards those goals, as

well as helping us identify and respond to areas where we can improve our services to the public.

We will continue surveying on a regular basis to measure our progress on important citizen issues.

I appreciate the efforts of our employees that have translated into high

satisfaction levels with our services and a generally positive attitude towards county government by our citizens. I look forward to working with citizens and staff to continue our progress towards providing the highest level of public service to our residents.

*Robert W. Tucker, Jr.*  
*County Executive*

## QUALITY OF LIFE IN ALBEMARLE COUNTY

**F**irst of all, it is clear that Albemarle residents very much like Albemarle County as a place to live. 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 7.96, not a statistically significant difference from surveys in 1994 and 2002, showing that a high level of satisfaction has remained fairly constant over the past ten years.

Seventy-one percent rated the County's quality of life an "8" or better.

Sixteen percent rated the County a "10."

Those most likely to give a high rating to the County were those who are women, those who had lived in Albemarle longer, those who were older, those who owned

their homes, the highly educated and the most affluent. Rural residents rated the County higher than those living in the development areas.

Those residents who rated the county a "10" were asked what were the main things they liked about Albemarle County. Almost everyone said that they enjoyed the environment and geography of the county.

They also liked the sense of community, proximity to Charlottesville, the availability of entertainment, and good health care. Many remarked about the appeal of a quiet rural area combined with cultural opportunities more typically available in urban areas.



## REACHING STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

**T**o measure how well the county is doing in its efforts towards achieving priority goals identified in its strategic plan, respondents were asked if they were "very satisfied", "somewhat satisfied", "somewhat dissatisfied", or "very dissatisfied" with progress towards a list of goals. CSR staff combined the percent of very satisfied with the percent of somewhat satisfied to create an overall satisfaction level.

94 percent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the county's efforts in making Albemarle a safe and healthy community.

93 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the County's efforts in creating learning opportunities for all ages, while 91 percent

cited satisfaction with how county staff were providing effective, responsive and courteous service to customers.

*Citizens were most impressed with the county's efforts in making Albemarle a safe and healthy community, creating lifelong learning opportunities and providing effective, responsive and courteous*

County residents also expressed satisfaction with efforts to provide high quality education to people of

all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to use education to prepare people for the workforce, to provide needed public facilities and to distribute funding to services in a fair way. All of these items garnered a satisfaction rating in the 80th percentile for the survey respondents.

Residents were least satisfied with the county's efforts to promote the development of affordable places to live, with a satisfaction level of 48 percent for this item.

Respondents were also less satisfied with the county's efforts to protect and preserve the County's rural character and to provide needed infrastructure, which were ranked at 68 percent and 69 percent satisfied respectively.

## SATISFACTION WITH COUNTY SERVICES

**T**o report results on satisfaction with County services, CSR combined the percent “very satisfied” with the percent “somewhat satisfied.”

For the most general question, overall satisfaction with County programs and services, 90.6 percent of our respondents said they were satisfied. This finding is not significantly different than the 2002 rating, and continues to reflect the significant improvement from the 1994 results when only 84.3 percent said they felt satisfied.

Public safety items showed a very high level of satisfaction, with levels of satisfaction at 90 percent or better for emergency rescue, police and fire protection, and safety in business and residential areas. The

highest level of satisfaction was for fire protection at 96 percent.

The only safety-related item to show a lower satisfaction level was safety for walkers and bicyclists, at 55 percent.

The satisfaction rating for the quality of education in the County schools was 85 percent.

Efforts to promote tourism in the area and library services both scored in the 90th percentile for satisfaction.

Almost 70 percent of respondents reported satisfaction with the county’s effort to assure economic growth and job opportunities.

Concerns about the changing nature of the county were reflected in lower rates of satisfaction with

the county’s efforts to manage growth, which ranked at 56 percent in satisfaction.

Efforts to conserve open space were ranked at 64 percent, while efforts to protect water sources and to protect natural resources and the environment both were ranked in the mid 70 percent of satisfaction.

### Satisfaction was highest for . .

▲ <i>Fire Protection</i>	95.9%
▲ <i>Library Services</i>	95.0%
▲ <i>Emergency Rescue</i>	94.3%
▲ <i>Safety in Business Areas</i>	92.6%
▲ <i>Police Protection</i>	92.4%

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS GOVERNMENT

**O**n the whole, citizens of Albemarle display a positive attitude toward their government.

About 80 percent said they were satisfied overall with the value they received from Albemarle County for their tax dollar.

Considering the interaction of taxes and services, almost two-thirds of our respondents (64 percent) favored keeping taxes and services at their current level.

87 percent of respondents were satisfied with efforts to make it more convenient to access County services and information, and 80 percent were satisfied with opportunities they had for citizen input.

*80% of residents surveyed said they were satisfied with the value of service they receive for their tax dollar.*

County citizens reported that they are satisfied with the job the County is doing in keeping them informed about programs and services, although that number declined from 81.7 percent in 2002 to 74.9 percent in 2004.

The survey also measured how pleased citizens were with the quality of contact they had with the County. Most citizens were quite satisfied with the helpfulness of County employees, with 81.5 percent reporting that they were either somewhat or very satisfied.

85 percent of respondents were pleased with the timeliness of service received from county staff, agreeing that the length of time they had to wait for service was well within reason.

In summary, 83.5% of citizens were satisfied overall with their experience contacting the County.

**Our Mission . . .**

Providing the highest level of public service to our citizens

**Our Values . . .**

Integrity Innovation  
Stewardship Learning

The complete results of the survey will be posted on the website: [www.albemarle.org](http://www.albemarle.org)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All those connected with this project are grateful to the Albemarle County residents who gave their time and candid responses in answer to many questions about their opinions on a variety of issues. This project received enthusiastic support from Robert W. Tucker, Jr., Albemarle County Executive, and from his two assistant County Executives, Roxanne White and Tom Foley.

Ms. Lori Allshouse, Strategic Planning Coordinator, oversaw the project with assistance from an active and involved citizen survey project team that included John Beta, Human Resources; Lee Catlin, Community Relations Office; Wayne Cilimberg, Community Development Department; Steven Allshouse, Management and Budget; Paul McWhinney, Social Services; Pat Mullaney, Parks and Recreation; Michael Culp, Information Technology; and John Oprandy, Fire Rescue.

In addition, the members of the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors gave their supports and advice to this project. Thanks also to the Albemarle County Community Development Department for supplying maps and other geographic information.

## PLANNING GOALS

Citizens of Albemarle County continue to favor major growth management policies of the county, but are increasingly concerned about the impacts of continued growth and development.

The county's policy of concentrating growth in areas designated for development while restricting development in rural areas continues to enjoy solid support, with approximately 70% of residents saying they are in favor of that approach. However, this is a significant decline in support from the 2002 survey where almost 80 % of respondents said they favored concentrated growth.

While the vast majority of County residents are satisfied with the current standard of living, there are concerns that growth will impact the quality of life. Results of responses regarding the County's success in providing resources for a high quality of life are listed below.

Government Activity	% Agreeing (strongly and somewhat)
Planning for growth and development to provide a high quality of life	61.2
Level of services to provide high quality of life	83.4
Level of facilities to provide high quality of life	85.3
Infrastructure to provide high quality of life	73.4

One way to direct and manage growth is to provide services that will make urban areas more attractive as places to live than rural areas. To help guide the county in identifying appropriate services, citizens were asked to rate a variety of services in terms of attracting people to live in urban areas.

The following list ranks those services in order of their overall attractiveness to respondents:

- Public utilities
- Faster emergency response times
- Variety of housing types
- Easy access to public transportation
- Pedestrian-friendly commercial areas
- Sidewalks
- Natural area trails or greenways
- Leaf pick up and snow removal
- Work close to where you live
- Walkable destinations

Almost half of the survey respondents reported making a trip outside the Charlottesville/Albemarle area in the month preceding the survey for the primary purpose of shopping, with Richmond, Staunton/Waynesboro and northern Virginia being the most popular shopping destinations.

Residents shopping outside the area were most likely to be buying clothing, housewares and groceries.