

# ALBEMARLE CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS

February, 2009

## UVA CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH CONDUCTS CITIZEN SURVEY

In August and September, 2008, the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at the University of Virginia conducted a telephone survey of 767 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 evaluate

the importance of a number of County services, to determine their level of satisfaction with these services, to measure citizen opinion about how the County is managing growth, and to measure change in key indicators.

This year the survey included cell phone users for the first time to produce a more representative sample, particularly among younger 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.

positive attitude towards county government by our citizens.

I look forward to working with citizens and staff towards the best possible future for Albemarle County.

*Robert W. Tucker, Jr.  
County Executive*

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### Survey Highlights

- Quality of life scored 8.01 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 fire protection, public facilities, safety in business areas and library services.
- 92.8% of all respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with county services.
- 80% of 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 for our current strategic plan.

The most recent survey focuses on priority issues for county residents, 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.

I thank those citizens who took time to complete the survey, and I appreciate the efforts of our employees that have translated into high satisfaction levels with our services and a generally

## QUALITY OF LIFE IN ALBEMARLE COUNTY

Overall, 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 8.01, not a statistically significant difference from surveys taken in 1994, 2002, 2004 and 2006, showing that a high level of satisfaction has remained fairly constant over the past fourteen years. Approximately 73% rated the County's quality of life an "8" or better.

Residents who lived in Albemarle County for two years or less were

asked their three most important reasons for moving to the County.

The most important features are listed below starting with the highest rated:

|  |
|--|
| <b>To take a job in the area</b>       |
| <b>Presence of family in the area</b>  |
| <b>Physical beauty of landscape</b>    |
| <b>Cost of housing</b>                 |
| <b>Quality of schools</b>              |
| <b>Overall quality of life</b>         |
| <b>Convenient commute</b>              |
| <b>To attend college or university</b> |

- More than one quarter (25.9%) of respondents moved to Albemarle County to take a job
- Another 10.9% already have family here
- Retirement is just under 2% of the total responses

Residents who lived in the County for more than two years were asked what three features would be most important to them if they decided to move within the County. The following were the top ranked features:

- Convenient urban amenities
- Quality public schools
- Ease of transportation
- Rural lifestyle
- Beauty of the landscape

## IMPORTANCE OF COUNTY SERVICES

To measure how important various services are to county residents, respondents were asked to rate the importance of providing resources to 38 local government services on a scale of "very important", "somewhat important", or "not that important".

Of the listed service items, providing quality education for school children had the highest rating.

Residents found promotion of tourism, regulation of outdoor lighting, and support of cultural and entertainment opportunities to be least important.

Some services have shown a statistically significant drop in rated importance since 2006 including:

- Cultural and entertainment opportunities
- Protecting natural resources and the environment
- Providing learning opportunities for adults
- Providing library services
- Dealing with growth and development

The following chart lists the top ten service items ranked by importance. The difference in percentage among some of these items is so small that it is almost indistinguishable.

|   |
|---|
| <b>▲ Quality Education</b>              |
| <b>▲ Police Protection</b>              |
| <b>▲ Emergency Rescue Services</b>      |
| <b>▲ Fire Protection</b>                |
| <b>▲ Water Resource Protection</b>      |
| <b>▲ Residential Safety</b>             |
| <b>▲ Fair Property Tax Assessment</b>   |
| <b>▲ Public Facilities</b>              |
| <b>▲ Business Area Safety</b>           |
| <b>▲ Services for the Disadvantaged</b> |

*Citizens were most interested in providing quality education to school age children, police protection, emergency rescue services and fire service.*

## SATISFACTION WITH COUNTY SERVICES

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

For the most general question, overall satisfaction with County programs and services, 92.8 percent of our respondents said they were satisfied. This finding is not significantly different from the 2004 or 2006 rating, and continues to reflect the significant improvement from the 1994 results when only 84.3 percent said they felt satisfied.

Similarly to 2006, residents were most satisfied with public safety items - fire protection (95.5%), business area safety (93.8%), residential area safety (92.7%), emergency rescue services (92.5%) and police protection (91.1%) - ranked in the top ten services based on satisfaction.

Public facilities, tourism promotion efforts and library services were among the top five rated services.

The satisfaction rating for the quality of education in the County schools was 84.8%, with a level of 92% for those with children in public schools.

Residents were least satisfied with recycling services (52.2%), affordable housing (56.5%), managing growth (60.8%), and efforts making it easy to use public transportation (61.6%).

There were four areas that saw significant increases in satisfaction from 2006:

- Preserving and protecting the County’s rural character

- Protecting natural resources and the environment
- Making it easy to get around by car
- Ensuring safety in business areas

Satisfaction was highest for . .

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| ▲ Fire Protection       | 95.5% |
| ▲ Public Facilities     | 94.0% |
| ▲ Business Area Safety  | 93.8% |
| ▲ Tourism Promotion     | 93.8% |
| ▲ Library Services      | 93.6% |
| ▲ Residential Safety    | 92.7% |
| ▲ Emergency Rescue      | 92.5% |
| ▲ Historic Preservation | 91.3% |
| ▲ Police Protection     | 91.1% |
| ▲ Adult Learning        | 90.4% |

## CONTACT WITH THE COUNTY

**O**n the whole, citizens of Albemarle display a positive attitude toward their government. During the past 12 months, 38% of respondents have contacted the County government for some type of information or service.

These residents were asked how satisfied they were overall with their experience. Most residents, 72.7%, reported being very or somewhat satisfied.

In 2008, respondents contacted the Finance Department more of-

ten than the Police Department, which is the opposite of the 2006 results. Overall, the departments contacted most frequently by citizens were Finance, Community Development and Police.

*79% of residents surveyed said they were satisfied with County efforts to keep them informed about programs and services*

Seventy-nine percent of County citizens reported that they are satisfied with the job the County is doing in keeping them informed about programs and services, a significant increase from 74.9% in 2004 and similar to the 2004 level.

Approximately 88% of all respondents have access to the Internet, and of that number, 66.5% have used the County website at least once in the past year. Over 42% of those respondents who are aware of AMail, the County’s e-news service, have signed up to receive news bulletins.

## VALUE FOR TAX DOLLAR

Respondents were also asked to rate the County efforts in giving them the value for their tax dollars. The vast majority (80%) reported being satisfied with the return on their tax dollars.

**Our Mission . . .**

Providing the highest level of public service to our citizens

**Our Values . . .**

Integrity Innovation  
Stewardship Learning

The complete results of the survey are posted on the county 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 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, Tom Foley and Bryan Elliott.

Ms. Lori Allshouse, Manager of Strategic Planning and Performance, oversaw the project with assistance from county staff. The Housing Office, Community Development Department and School Division developed and included specific questions in the survey.

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

## MANAGING GROWTH

Citizens of Albemarle County continue to favor major growth management policies of the County, but remain concerned about the impacts of 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 over 75% of residents saying they are in favor of that approach.

This indicates continued strong support as indicated by the 2006 survey when almost 73% of those surveyed supported the County's growth management approach.

New questions in this year's survey targeted satisfaction with residential and business development and how it is integrated into transportation systems and with the locations of public facilities.

Residents are more satisfied with how development is coordinated with community (84.5%) than with transportation systems (62.5%).

*Over 75 % of those surveyed support the County's efforts to direct growth into designated development areas while restricting development in the rural areas.*

Those residents living in urban areas (92.4%) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the coordination of development with community facilities than those living in more rural areas (79.7%), but there was no significant difference between areas noted for other growth issues covered in this section.

## TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Over 70% of those surveyed favored spending more County tax money on roads. Those who favored increased spending on roads were asked a follow-up question—"Are you willing to pay an increase in taxes to fund transportation?" Nearly 60% (58.2%) of these respondents said yes.

About two-thirds (66.5%) of respondents were in favor of Albemarle spending more County tax money on bike paths and sidewalks.

As might be expected, suburban dwellers (74.7%) favored increased spending for bike paths and sidewalks more often than did those out in the country (60.4%)>