

Strategic Direction #4:
Effective and Efficient Services

Customer Service Data

Executive Summary

2004 ALBEMARLE COUNTY CITIZEN SATISFACTION SURVEY

CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
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In June and July 2004, the Center for Survey Research 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 determine their satisfaction with the government's efforts to achieve its Strategic Planning goals, to determine their 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.

The Center for Survey Research (CSR) also conducted studies, similar in purpose, for the County of Albemarle in 2002 and 1994. Whereas the 2004 survey was not designed to be completely comparable with the 2002 or 1994 surveys, we did draw comparative conclusions wherever possible.

Summary of Method

The questionnaire was developed in conjunction with key members of the Albemarle County staff. CSR also took special care to include comments and the opinions of Albemarle County Board of Supervisors and the county executive staff in the survey development process. Two pretests were 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 June 9th through July 1st and resulted in 714 completed interviews, a response rate of 30.4 percent. During the analysis phase, respondents' self-reported area of residence showed that several lived in the City of Charlottesville or in surrounding counties. Those were eliminated from the data set as ineligible. The final number of completed interviews of Albemarle residents was 707, and yields a sampling error of ± 3.7 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: length of residence in the County, employment status, presence of children under 18 in the household, education level, household income, race/ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, homeownership, type of home, and geographic area of the County. 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 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, which is not significantly different from the mean of 7.92 in the 1994 survey or the mean of 8.10 in the 2002 survey.
- Approximately 71 percent rated the County's quality of life an "8" or better.
- Approximately 16 percent rated the County a "10."
- Those most likely to give a high rating to the County were those who had lived in Albemarle longer, older residents, females, homemakers, those with higher household incomes, homeowners, those living in single family homes, and those who live out in the country, specifically in Rural Areas 3 and 4 (the southwest and southeast areas of the county).

Government Strategic Plan and Spending

In general, Albemarle County residents are satisfied with the effort of local government officials to reach the goals set out in the Strategic Plan. To

report results on satisfaction with the County's efforts to achieve their goals, we combined the percent "very satisfied" with the percent "somewhat satisfied."

- Citizens were most satisfied with the local government's efforts to make the County a safe and healthy community (94%), create learning opportunities for all ages (93%), and provide effective, responsive and courteous service to customers (90.8%).
- Residents were least satisfied with the local government's efforts to promote the development of affordable places to live (48.1%), protect and preserve the County's rural character (67.6%), and provide needed infrastructure (68.6%).

About 8 in 10 residents (80.4%) are satisfied with the job the County is doing in giving them value for their tax dollars.

Satisfaction with Services

Overall, citizens of Albemarle County are very satisfied with the services they receive from the County. Once again, to report results on satisfaction, we 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 from 92.8 percent in 2002, but is significantly higher than 84.0 percent in 1994.
- Similarly to 2002, residents were most satisfied with public safety items, with fire protection (95.9%), emergency services (94.3%), safety in business areas (92.6%), and police protection (92.4%) ranking in the top five services based on satisfaction.
- Library services were the second most highly rated service (95.0%).
- The satisfaction rating for the quality of education in the County schools was 85.0 percent, which was up slightly (albeit not to a statistical significant degree) from 2002 when it received a satisfaction rating of 83.7 percent.

- Items related to growth management had lower satisfaction ratings, with efforts to preserve open space (63.7%), efforts to support adequate housing (56.5%), efforts to manage growth (56.4%), and public transportation services (45.8%) all near the bottom of the list.
- Satisfaction is lowest for safety for walkers and cyclists on streets, trails and sidewalks (55.3%), recycling services (54.2%) and public transportation (45.8%).
- Whereas there were no significant *increases* in satisfaction from 2002, there were significant *decreases* in satisfaction on nine different items: keeping citizens informed about County government programs and services, efforts to manage growth, ease of getting around by car, ease of getting around by public transportation, efforts to protect natural resources and the environment, efforts to preserve open space, emergency rescue services, safety for walkers and bicyclists on streets, trails, and sidewalks, and efforts to support adequate housing.

Contact with the County

In general, citizens of Albemarle County reported positive experiences when contacting County departments. Again, to report results on satisfaction, we combined the percent "very satisfied" with the percent "somewhat satisfied."

- During the past 12 months, 45.7 percent of respondents contacted at least one County department.
- 83.5 percent were satisfied overall with their experience contacting the County.
- 81.5 percent were satisfied with the helpfulness of County employees.
- 84.9 percent agreed that the length of time that they had to wait to receive service was well within reason.

Planning and Growth

Impressions of County officials' efforts to plan for and manage growth are somewhat mixed.

- Approximately 70 percent of those interviewed favor the County's policy of concentrating growth in development areas.
- Approximately 60 percent agree that the government offers planning for growth and development necessary to provide a high quality of life.
- When asked about specific services related to growth planning and management while maintaining the high quality of life in Albemarle County, residents were more impressed. The majority indicated they were satisfied with efforts to provide adequate services (83.4%), facilities (85.3%), and infrastructure (73.4%) to keep up with the needs of its residents due to population expansion.
- Current residents of Albemarle County are most likely to believe that public utilities, faster emergency response times, and a variety of housing types would be significant draws for those considering living in urban areas of the County. Citizens are least likely to believe having a mix of commercial, residential and/or office uses, bikeways, and neighborhood or corner stores would be significant attractions.
- Slightly less than half of the respondents (46.5%) indicated they had gone outside of the County or Charlottesville in the past month for the primary purpose of shopping. Of those who did travel outside of the area for shopping, the most popular destination was the Richmond Area, followed by Staunton/Waynesboro, and Northern Virginia. The majority of purchases made outside of the area were clothes, followed by groceries and housewares.

Conclusion

The Center for Survey Research presents these findings with the hope that they will be of help to the government of Albemarle 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 Board of Supervisors, executive management, and employees of Albemarle County can take pride in the high level of satisfaction the citizens express. While this survey has indicated that Albemarle residents are clearly pleased with their quality of life and with their local government, there are several services for which satisfaction decreased significantly since 2002, many of which are related to issues concerning growth and development.