

To: Lori Allshouse, Bob Tucker, County of Albemarle
From: Tom Guterbock, Director, Center for Survey Research
Date: August 2, 2007
Re: Survey of County Residents by Charlottesville Tomorrow

On July 30, 2007, Charlottesville Tomorrow [CT] released results of a June 2007 telephone survey they sponsored, asking Albemarle County voters their opinions on issues related to development and protection of rural areas. The report includes a few comparisons with results of CSR's 2006 *Albemarle Citizen Satisfaction Survey*. In general, the two surveys cover different topics, but Charlottesville Tomorrow's report draws a contrast between the two studies on page 13 of their report. The two pairs of most closely related items are:

- 1) Questions about citizen input or participation. The 2006 CSR survey found 81.3% satisfied, while the 2007 CT survey found only 51.9% satisfied.
- 2) Questions about protecting rural areas. The 2006 CSR survey found 65.7% satisfied, while the 2007 CT survey found only 48.9% satisfied.

In response to your inquiry, I'd like to clarify the probable reasons why these results differ.

I. *Question wording*. The most important and obvious difference between the surveys is that the questions are worded differently. The following table contrasts the wordings used.

TOPIC	C'VILLE TOMORROW	CSR/ALBEMARLE COUNTY
Citizen participation	[#19] How satisfied are you with the actions of the County Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission to create genuine public participation in growth and development decisions?	[soc_b_12] How satisfied are you with the County government's efforts in providing opportunities for citizen input on issues that come up in the County?
Rural protection	[#20] How satisfied are you with the leadership of the County Board of Supervisors to make well considered decisions on the protection of the rural countryside?	[physb_1] How satisfied are you with the County government's efforts to protect and preserve the County's rural character?

These questions use different phrasing and actually reference different objects for rating. For example, CT's question on citizen participation identifies the BOCS and the Planning Commission, while the CSR question asks about County government in general. Similarly, the CT question on rural protection identifies the BOCS and asks about their leadership and

quality of decision-making, while the CSR question asks about the overall outcome of decisions by the County government as a whole. It is to be expected that these different questions will produce different opinions from respondents.

II. *Study population and sampling frame.* The CSR survey used Random-Digit Dial sampling to reach a sample of households in Albemarle County that have working landline telephones. This gives equal probability of inclusion to households that are listed in the directory and those that are not. No other qualifiers were put on responding households. The CT survey targets registered voters. CT started by acquiring a list of registered voters, and then back-matched these names to an electronic version of the telephone directory. To be included in the CT survey, a household had to (1) include one or more registered voters (2) have its number listed in the phone book and (3) have sufficient correspondence between the voting record and the phonebook record to allow a match to be made. Voters, as a group, and directory listed households, as a group, differ from the general population in certain known ways: they tend to be older, are more likely to be homeowners, are less likely to be minorities, and are less transient and higher in income and education than the population in general. A comparison of the demographic profiles between the two surveys indicates that the CT sample is indeed older, more rural, better educated, higher income, and more likely to be homeowners than the CSR sample is. For example, CT's final sample included 89 percent homeowner, while CSR's final sample had 66 percent. In the CT sample, 53.7% of respondents said they live "out in the country" or in "a rural village," compared to 45.1% of the CSR sample.

III. *Selection of respondent within the household.* The CSR survey uses a 'minimally intrusive' selection method to pick one adult at random from among adults within a sampled household, whether or not that person answered the phone. This is because the person who answers the phone in a household is not a random pick from among household members. CT interviewed whoever answered the phone (and did not, in fact, check whether that person was a registered voter). The result is that CT's survey sharply oversampled females (61.7% female). CSR's survey also oversampled females, to a lesser degree, but final results in the CSR survey are post-weighted to reflect the gender composition of the study population (53%). It is to be noted that, according to the CSR survey, opinions about the County's performance in preserving rural areas do differ significantly by gender.

IV. *Non-response bias.* All surveys are subject to possible error if those who choose to respond to the survey are different from those who do not respond—if that difference in some way affects their answers to the survey questions. The CT survey was introduced, quite straightforwardly, as "a survey to find out what you think about growth and development issues, and about the rural countryside in Albemarle County." It is possible that persons who were uninterested in this topic declined to participate, and it also possible that rates of survey response differed somewhat according to how the interested people viewed the topic. In contrast, the CSR survey is introduced as "a survey to find out how satisfied people are with the services that [county government] provides." While this topic is more interesting to some respondents than to others, that difference is not likely to affect the answers to questions about rural development policies.

V. Question order and survey context. CSR's survey was a general survey about planning priorities and service satisfaction. Questions about rural preservation and land use came up in the survey as just a few of many services and issues that were asked about. The CT survey is more focused on land use issues and on preservation of the rural countryside. For example, the first eleven substantive items on the survey (series #2) all deal with "farms, fields and forests, the rural countryside." All of the statements in the series (except item 9) express positive views about the countryside or rural preservation policies. It is likely that this context tended to activate respondent's concerns about rural preservation as they considered their answers to subsequent questions about policy.

In sum, the large differences between the surveys are readily accounted for when we consider that the questions and the question context are different, the study populations and the sample selection methods differ, the demographics of the final samples differ, and that factors like non-response effects and context effects may be operative in one survey more than in the other. These surveys were conducted for quite different purposes, and each should be understood and interpreted accordingly.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Guterbock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas M. Guterbock, Ph.D.
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Professor of Sociology
Research Professor of Public Health Sciences