

Town of Cary
2012 Biennial Survey Focus Group Report
Executive Summary

Growth

The two focus groups expressed similar opinions in regards to the major issues with growth in Cary. The key ones were related to the byproducts of growth – traffic and schools. Traffic and congestion into RTP was discussed as well as the somewhat limited availability of access roads to the area. As for the schools, the key concerns were mainly redistricting and overcrowding. Although the respondents recognized schools as a Wake County issue, they felt the growth in Cary was a contributing factor. The loss of greenspace was also viewed as a problem with building and development in Town. There was a feeling that Cary may be losing its small town feel as it grows. The building of new malls and commercial development was viewed as damaging older malls and the downtown area. In addition, there was worry that new residential developments were hurting the real estate values of existing homes. The respondents wanted the infrastructure to keep pace with growth. The level of growth was not viewed as consistent across the Town. The respondents noted the western part of Cary (and western Wake County) were the regions of highest growth. Other areas saw less growth but higher levels of traffic. There was also concern about the lack of sidewalks in older neighborhoods compared to newer ones. This was viewed as a rather significant safety issue. Another safety issue mentioned was bicycling in Town due to small bike lanes and lack of knowledge of the rules of the road by both the bicyclists and drivers. Finally, there was a considerable level of discussion on the lack of senior housing in Cary in one of the focus groups. The respondents noted the lack of first-floor master bedrooms in housing developments. They felt the Town should give more incentives for appropriate senior developments in the future.

Overall, the Town was viewed as doing an effective job with growth by both focus groups. On the positive side, the Town was perceived as concerned about greenspace/trees, lighting, and signage in newer developments. It was felt the Town was careful about planning for growth and maintaining the infrastructure for ideal growth. Hemlock Bluffs, Koka Booth Amphitheater, and Bond Park were mentioned as well-planned projects. The negatives mentioned were road maintenance, lack of coordination with other communities especially Davis Drive construction into RTP, annexation that was not on friendly terms, Maynard Road expansion, lack of sidewalks in older neighborhoods, developers not connecting greenways in newer developments, and the cost of the greenway walking bridge over US 1 North. There was also concern that older neighborhoods were neglected for newer ones, especially the roads.

The participants suggested several infrastructure improvements the Town could utilize to better manage growth. These include:

- Better cooperation and the use of joint projects with Morrisville and Apex.
- Providing incentives for developers to construct effective senior communities and also providing incentives to improve existing neighborhoods.
- Judicious issuing of building permits in light of the present economic situation.
- Continuation of policies that make developers share in the infrastructure costs of new communities.
- Improving transportation for seniors.
- Improving the somewhat negative perception that Cary has regarding annexation.
- Renovation Cary Towne Mall to keep it vibrant.

Safety

In terms of safety, the participants mentioned familiarity with vandalism and break-ins such as smash-and-grabs in the area. However, they felt complacency by the residents were a contributing factor as people leave their houses unlocked, cars unlocked, and garage doors open because they felt safe in Town. None of the participants had their personal safety threatened in the past two years and all indicated they did not perceive major safety issues in the Town. In addition, not all safety issues were crime related as the topic of traffic safety (i.e., speeding and accidents) was discussed by the participants at length.

The focus group members were very complimentary to the Cary Police Department. They noted the police were an excellent information source and this is where they generally first hear about crime in their area. They noted the police came door-to-door and gave out handouts on how to improve safety and increase patrols in neighborhoods with any crime issues. Other sources of information about crime were crime notes from the Town, neighborhood mail lists, emails, Cary News, and neighborhood watch flyers. Only 3 of the 15 participants subscribed to the Town's news and safety email lists or Twitter. Several of them would like information on these sources and felt BUD would be the best method to communicate with them on how to subscribe. It was appreciated that the Town gave out crime notices as informational and not as a scare tactic.

Several suggestions were made by the participants to help Cary make residents feel safer in the Town. These include:

- Promote the services the police offer that help citizens to be safer especially the police making presentations in neighborhoods.
- Increase police patrols in neighborhoods and greenways.
- Maintaining a presence at the Cary Town Mall substation where possible drug activity takes place.
- Increased usage of emails and Cary's website to inform citizens of safety issues and crime prevention. It was suggested using BUD to inform residents on how to subscribe to the email lists.
- Partnering with homeowner's associations to obtain email distribution lists to distribute information on safety.
- Disseminate information on non-violent crimes as well as violent crimes.
- Improve traffic safety especially speeding.

Leaf Collection

One of the main issues the participants had with leaf collection was the frequency of the collection. It was suggested that weekly collections were needed in November and December instead of the present intervals. Both focus groups indicated they could find the information on collection times/dates and there were no customer service issues. However, in one of the focus groups it was indicated debris was left on the streets after collection and the Town did not collect as scheduled due to changes in collection windows. There was also concern that the timing could be off for the collections. The collections did not coincide with the leaf falloff and this left leaves on the streets for extended periods. Yard maintenance firms were also viewed as a problem in that they did not follow the collection windows when gathering leaves for residents.

Several suggestions were made by the participants to help Cary improve on leaf collection in the Town. These include:

- More frequent collection in November and December and better timing with leaf falloff.
- Using subcontractors to assist with storage and collection during higher volume times.
- Moving January collection to later (possibly March) or add an additional later collection.
- To improve understanding of the collection process have the Public Works Department publicize their point of view in terms of volume collected, cost, number of subdivisions, and the maturing of trees in the area.
- Examine methods to keep residents from piling the leaves on the street too early before collection. In addition, keep leaves on the curb not on the street.
- Work with homeowner's associations to keep yard maintenance firms following the Town's collection schedules.

Bond Referendum

In terms of distributing the information concerning the bond referendum, the participants suggested BUD, email, and Cary News were the preferred methods. They indicated an email or a sticker/notice on BUD directing them to Cary's website would be effective. In addition, they would prefer the information on the referendum in Cary News be placed on the front page and not buried in the paper. Television was also mentioned especially a news conference on WRAL. Cary Channel 11 was suggested by one of the focus groups; however, the other group felt the viewership was too low for it to be effective. Other suggestions included direct mail to residents, the use of flyers, information booths at events in Town, and meeting with Town officials in various neighborhoods. The participants felt the use of multiple information sources was needed because not all residents get email or visit the Town's website. As for informational sources not to use, the participants indicated robo-telephone calls, direct mail (due to cost), buried articles in Cary News, and television (except for news conferences on WRAL and Cary Channel 11) as sources to avoid.

The participants would like the Town to give them specific information on each aspect of the bond referendum and the value given to the residents. For example, the transportation component should give details on every street affected and a justification (i.e., present or future value) for the spending. They would also like to know how this translates to a dollar increase in taxes for a resident and possibly a benchmark of taxes in neighboring communities as a comparison. There was also a desire to see a sample ballot of the bond referendum so there will be no surprises when they vote. Finally, the participants wanted to know when the tax increases will end in relation to the term of the bond.

Overall the participants indicated the Town is spending taxpayer's dollars wisely and appropriately. They noted the Town was operating at a surplus while other areas such as Durham and Raleigh were not doing as well. There were a few items mentioned when asked about projects the Town should not have pursued. These included the electronic signs, the greenway walking bridge over US 1 North, and unnecessary signage on the greenways.

Communication

There was a level of consensus that information can be difficult to find on the Town's website at times. The participants indicated difficulty finding information on greenway maps, an event selling rain barrels/compose bins, classes/activities offered by the Town, building permit information, and events not sponsored by the Town. The participants generally agree the information was available on the website but buried in numerous layers or categories. They suggested the website be organized by function not department since most residents do not know which department the information would be listed under. On the positive side, the participants could not think of any opportunities they missed because they could not find appropriate information about it.

It was suggested emails were a very effective method to get information out to residents. Cary was complimented for not sending out excessive emails and keeping them concise and informational. It was recommended that the information could be tied to "Likes" on Facebook so it could be tailored to their tastes and sent directly to them. BUD was also suggested as an effective information source. Cary News and Independent Weekly were seen as useful to give information on events and activities in Town in possibly a pull-out section. The participants would also like at least a month's notice on activities in Town, especially weekend activities. News Channel 14 was mentioned for the community activities section but they would like to see the information displayed longer. It was also suggested to publicize all events and activities in Town regardless if it was sponsored by the Town or not, possibly mimicking a website such as ParkGeek.com. The Town could also disseminate information at cultural events to be more proactive.