

Town of Cary
2014 Biennial Survey Focus Group Report
Executive Summary

Growth

The two focus groups expressed similar opinions in regards to the major issues concerning growth in Cary. The key ones were associated with the byproducts of growth – traffic/roads and schools. The Town’s roads were considered to have problems with potholes and ineffective repair methods. Schools were regarded as always being in catch-up mode and behind population growth. Both groups stressed concern for continued high density developments such as apartment complexes, townhomes, and small lot sizes including zero lot lines. Single-family homes were considered the more appropriate development to alleviate congestion. It was felt the infrastructure was not keeping up with growth in terms of roads, schools, and parks. This included the older areas of Cary but also new areas such as western Cary. It was felt the older areas are being neglected especially the regions surrounding downtown Cary.

The concerns for growth were generally for the Town of Cary, not Wake County nor the Triangle; although, both were considered issues as well. The western part of Cary was cited several times as the area with the most growth problems. One group mentioned Cary may have lost some of its “prestige” or “wow factor” due to the congestion, traffic and other growth-related issues. This growth is affecting the quality of life overall and may dissuade new residents moving in the area. There was concern for overdevelopment of similar businesses in the same area. This could be causing older businesses to close due to excessive competition in the area. It was suggested the Town employ better planning to counteract this situation.

The possible solutions for growth mentioned by the focus groups were to focus on single family developments with minimum square footage requirements with the exception of retirement communities. The use of impact fees was suggested by one of the focus groups. The participants suggested more concern for pedestrians and bicyclists when widening roads and adding new developments. The use of pedestrian overpasses/underpasses, bike lanes, and synchronizing traffic lights could help alleviate this problem. It was recommended the Town not just be concerned with getting commuters from point A to B, but also consider the impact on residents in the area in road construction or widening.

Customer Service

All the participants agreed the Town has very good customer service. Most of them had recent contact with the Town staff and graded those interactions with very high marks. The reasons for the contact included moving into Town, parks & recreation programs, animal control, home renovations, rezoning information request, police contact, and Town Council interaction. Most of these interactions were very positive. However, there were a few negative interactions that included how the police handled an auto accident, police not responding to a strange truck in a neighborhood call, a fence ordinance issue (resolved positively), and the fire department not being able to respond to a call in a cul-de-sac due to parked cars. The respondents mentioned several companies with the best customer service to emulate including Dyson, KitchenAid, and Disney. All of these companies went above and beyond what was expected to keep customers satisfied. All the participants agreed that Cary goes above and beyond expectations as well.

Safety

The participants indicated they generally feel safe in public areas around Cary. There was agreement that some of the safety concerns are derived from what people see or hear outside of Cary and this impacts their perceptions. However, there were some instances which made the participants feel somewhat less secure. This included driving/traffic concerns, people coming into Cary who are not residents, and somewhat aggressive panhandling situations.

The participants were worried about aggressive driving such as cars running red lights, not stopping for right turn on red, and ignoring pedestrians. There were also safety concerns at the malls especially around closing time if their children are there. Some of the key areas mentioned for safety concerns were Kildaire Farm/Maynard, Crossroads, Cary Towne Center Mall, Route 55, I-40, and some areas of the greenways (termination points). Greenways could also have pedestrian safety issues at crosswalks.

The only time any of the participants had personal safety issues in public was with individuals aggressively begging for money usually in parking lots around Town. The focus group members use numerous information sources to hear about crime including word-of-mouth, newspapers, Cary's website, television, neighborhood watches, homeowners associations, and Facebook/Twitter. They did not remember many safety related news stories or events concerning the Town that stood out. They did mention concealed gun carry laws in Cary, two murders of a domestic nature, and break-ins around the community. The key suggestion to help citizens feel more secure was increase police visibility and patrols. They were not certain the unoccupied police cars were a deterrent to crime. In addition, Cary could give more information on crimes in the area on their website and by expanding the email alert system.

Communications

The participants agreed the Town does an excellent job of communicating with them. None of them regretted missing anything because they did not know about it. They agreed they could find the information they needed on the Town's website and that numerous other information sources were readily available. There were only two instances where the participants felt they did not find the information quickly. These were for a program that helped elderly with home rehabilitation grants and recycling bin information. The focus group members indicated BUD, Town mailers especially in neon green, and Cary email alerts were effective at gaining their attention. The use of online news sources was common among the participants including the websites for WRAL, News & Observer, and Cary. There were a few comments to improve Cary's information dissemination including adding an Ask.com style component to the website. There also suggestions for Cary email alerts to add the ability to click on for more in-depth information and including inserts in BUD for specific information. One participant said they cannot think of another town that does a better job with communication and the other respondents agreed with the statement.

Website

The consensus among the focus group members was that Cary's website was effective and relatively easy to navigate. Virtually all the participants had visited the website for numerous reasons. There were comments that the website almost contains too much information but the fact that the information was available to them was appreciated. The participants agreed the Town's website compares favorably with other websites they visit.

The members indicated a few possible improvements to the website; although, they do not recommend major changes. They prefer familiarity and consistency in the website so residents using it will not feel lost. The suggestions include:

- Adding more pictures especially of parks
- Adding a greenway app
- Making it more interactive with social media
- Adding a dog park cam
- Adding a news and announcement section for current events
- A section on how to get involved with the Town and details on the processes that proposals must go through before approval
- Including an FAQ section and Ask.com style component
- Adding a section where the resident can find their Council representative by entering the resident's address
- Eliminating hard copy mailing of bills when they are paid online to save money

Both of the focus groups were enthusiastic for the updated wakegov.com website and felt this would be a good website for Cary to emulate. Other favorite websites were Drudge.com, MSN, and MSNBC for their format. However, the new "big box" heading format was not favored but the older smaller heading with 4 or 5 stories under each to click on was the desired format.

Other Comments

The participants discussed several aspects related to Cary. First, there was concern for reclaimed water for irrigation not being available throughout the Town. This resulted in higher water bills for some areas especially in older parts of Town. Second, the issue of Cary subsidizing a new hotel in a downtown area the Town had banked land for a downtown park. Some participants felt this was a waste of valuable downtown space and questioned whether taxpayer monies should subsidize private industry. In addition, there was also concern for the high cost of the downtown movie theater and how it can recoup the investment. Third, the participants would like to have bicyclists held to same laws as automobile drivers. There were comments that larger groups of cyclists can be very aggressive and disobey traffic laws. They suggested more police enforcement of bicyclists. Fourth, it was suggested the Town work to link bike lanes together as well as the greenways such as Raleigh has done. Finally, Cary Parkway from High House to 54 has numerous unrepaired potholes.