

**Town of Cary  
2010 Biennial Citizen Survey  
Executive Summary**

The results for the Town of Cary's 2010 Biennial Citizen Survey were very positive. The respondents gave high marks for the services provided by the Town. A total of 401 residents were surveyed and the resulting margin of error was  $\pm 5\%$ . The results showed a significant level of improvement from the 2008 Biennial Survey.

The Town Government staff continued to receive high marks for the service dimensions of *professionalism* (B+), *courteous* (B+), *knowledgeable* (B+), *promptness of response* (B+), and *ability to resolve issues* (B). The results reflect a slight decline from the 2008 survey. Three grades declined this year for *professionalism*, *courteous*, *knowledgeable* all from A- to B+. This was offset by grades that increased for *promptness of response* (B to B+) and *ability to resolve issues* (B- to B). The means for these two dimensions were the highest ever earned to date..

The Town continued to earn an average mark for the maintenance of streets and roads. The grade remained approximately the same as 2008 when it was a C-. The streets/roads mentioned most often as needing attention by the respondents were Kildaire Farm, Maynard, Cary Parkway, and High House. The key issue was the potholes for these streets.

The cleanliness and appearance of public areas earned very high marks. The Town earned an A- for keeping Cary *clean and forever green*. Several public areas earned high marks including *parks* (A-), *greenways* (A-), *median/roadsides* (B+), and *streets* (B+). The grades improved for three of the public areas including *greenways* (B+ to A-), *median/roadsides* (B to B+), and *streets* (B to B+). The respondents indicated Cary Parkway, Maynard Road, and Kildaire Farm Road as public areas that need attention and the problem was again potholes.

The Cary Police Department continued to earn very strong marks. All the service dimensions earned a grade of A-. These included *courteous*, *competence*, *response time*, *fairness*, and *problem solving*. The means increased for *response time* and *problem solving* with the scores representing the highest earned to date by these two dimensions. The increases resulted in the grade improving for *problem solving* (B+ to A-). The slight decrease in the mean for *courteous* (8.43 to 8.40) resulted in the grade declining from A to A-. When asked about which police district the respondent resided in, approximately 98% indicated they don't know.

The Cary Fire Department continued to earn the highest marks for any department examined in the survey. The grades were exceptional for *courteous* (A+), *fairness* (A+), *problem solving* (A+), *competence* (A+), and *response time* (A). This year, there was one grade that improved for *courteous* (A to A+) and one that declined for *response time* (A+ to

A).

The Parks & Recreation Department earned continued strong marks that have improved from 2008. The grades were very high for *facility quality* (A), *overall experience* (A), *ease of registration* (A-), *program quality* (A-), *instructor quality* (A-), and *cost or amount of fee* (A-). The grades improved for *facility quality* (A- to A) and *overall experience* (A- to A) this year. The level of participation in Parks & Recreation programs increased from 32.8% in 2008 to 36.4% this year.

The respondents were positive in their rating concerning Cary as a place to live. The mean improved this year from 8.10 to 8.28 and the grade remains an A-. Most of the respondents (77.1%) perceived the quality of life as the same. However, 15.3% indicated it was better compared to only 7.5% who indicated it was worse. As for recommending Cary, the respondents indicated they would recommend Cary to others as a place to live with a mean of 8.27 on a 9-point scale and 95.0% responding on “likely” side of the scale. There was slightly less support for recommending Cary to others as a place to visit with a mean of 7.06 with 75.4% on the “likely” side. Finally, the respondents were more apt to recommend Cary to others as a place to do business with a mean of 7.64 and 86.8% on the “likely” side of the scale.

The respondents indicated what they liked best about Cary was the safety, small town feel, convenience, and family friendly aspects of the Town. What they liked least was traffic, growth issues, too many rules/regulations, and roads/streets. When the respondents were asked what is the most important issue facing Cary, the predominant concern was the high level of growth. Other important issues included school concerns and traffic/improving roads.

The respondents felt very safe in Cary again this year. The mean was 8.29 on a 9-point scale with 98.7% answering above the midpoint of 5. This mean has improved from 2008 when it was 8.09. The respondents also felt safe in their home neighborhoods (8.41 with 98.3% above the midpoint) and safe in public places around Cary (8.18 with 97.3% above the midpoint). Both of these means improved from 2008 when they were 8.29 and 8.04, respectively. Overall, there was a perception of a high degree of safety in Cary.

Cary’s municipal tax rate was perceived as “about right” by 71.1% when compared to other localities. The mean increased slightly from 3.06 to 3.10 on the 5-point scale. This year, the responses of taxes being on the “high” remained unchanged. However, the responses on the “low” side decreased while “about right” responses increased. Approximately 70% of the respondents indicated they did not support raising property taxes five cents to allow the Town to move ahead with several projects. There was more support for a three cent increase in property taxes with 42.5% indicating they would vote in favor of it. However, 57.5% would not vote for the increase. One final question asked the respondents if they favored the Town delaying projects for several years until the economy improves versus raising property taxes now by a few cents. There was overwhelming support (77.4%) for delaying the projects until the economy improves.

Several barriers to citizen involvement in local government were examined. None of the barriers earned a mean above the midpoint of 5 on the “barrier” side of the scale. The most significant barrier was *too busy, don't have time* with mean of 4.63 on a 9-point scale. Other barriers with some degree of impact were *don't know about opportunities* (3.84) and *timing is inconvenient* (3.73).

The major information sources used by the respondents include Cary News, word-of-mouth, Raleigh News & Observer, BUD, television, and Cary's website (in that order). This year, the information sources that gained importance were Cary News (4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup>), word-of-mouth (3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>), BUD (5<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>), and Cary's website (7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>). The sources that declined were Raleigh News & Observer (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>), television (2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>), and radio (6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>). The respondents were asked about their use of several social media sources that Cary may use to communicate with citizens. The means were very low for all of the social media. The most significant was Facebook with a mean of only 2.54 on a 9-point scale. In addition, the respondents were asked about their potential usage of three new internet based utility bill services. All the services garnered some degree of interest. Electronic bill presentment had the highest mean of 5.22 on a 9-point scale with 31.4% who indicated they would frequently use the service. Online bill analysis (5.13 with 26.1% who would frequently use) and online bill comparison (4.93 with 22.4% who would frequently use) also had some level of interest. As for the 2009 Cary Community Candidate Forums on Cary TV 11, the Forums were watched (in whole or in part) by 17.0% of the respondents. This was down from 30.5% in 2008.

There have been relatively large increases in effectiveness of Cary's communication efforts with citizens. Respondents felt much more informed about government services, projects, issues, and programs that affect them this year. The mean increased from 6.09 to 6.59 this year on a 9-point scale. There were also higher levels of satisfaction with Cary making information available to citizens concerning important services, projects, issues, and programs. This year the mean increased from 6.87 to 6.95. Finally, the respondents were more satisfied with the opportunities Cary gives them to participate in the decision-making process. In this case, the mean increased from 6.36 to 6.68.

Solid Waste Services received excellent marks from the sample this year and have improved from previous years. The department earned high means for curbside garbage collection (8.58), Christmas Tree collection (8.50), curbside recycling collection (8.37), curbside yard waste collection (8.37), and curbside leaf collection (8.18). These were the highest means earned to date for all of these services.

A set of questions on storm drains revealed there were still a degree of uncertainty acceptable materials that can enter the drains. The respondents were accurate concerning rainwater from a home's gutters in that 70.1% indicated it was acceptable. There was a degree of inaccuracy for water from draining a swimming pool and grass clippings, leaves, and other natural vegetation. There were 11.6% who indicated water from a swimming pool was acceptable; however, this has improved from 17.6% in 2008. The accuracy declined slightly for grass clippings, leaves, and other natural vegetation from 8.2% in 2008 to 10.5%

this year thought it was acceptable. The respondents were less accurate for the proper disposal methods for used cooking oil and grease. There were only 28.3% who responded accurately to *save it and call the Town to come and pick it up*. There was inaccuracy in the acceptable percentages for *put it your garbage cart or bin for collection* (53.0%), *pour it down the kitchen sink drain* (25.3%), *pour it out in the yard* (25.0%), and *put it in your recycling cart or bin for recycling* (14.3%).

The Town Council focus areas all earned higher means this year. Satisfaction with the overall job the Town is doing on Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources improved from a mean 7.46 to 7.68 with 88.8% on the “satisfied” side of the scale. In addition, satisfaction with the job the Town is doing on environmental protection improved from 7.04 to 7.67 this year with 91.4% on the “satisfied” side of the scale. The Town was perceived as effective in keeping Cary the best place to live, work, and raise a family. The mean improved significantly from 6.85 to 7.65 with 89.8% on the “effective” side of the scale. There was also a significant improvement for satisfaction with the job the Town is doing on transportation and planning & development. Transportation improved from 6.66 to 6.73 with 72.1% on the “satisfied” side of the scale and planning & development improved from 5.93 to 6.73 with 75.8% on the “satisfied” side. The Town also received slightly higher ratings was satisfaction with the job the Town is doing on downtown revitalization. The mean improved from 6.55 to 6.64 with 71.4% on the “satisfied” side. There was greater improvement for satisfaction with the job the Town is doing on school issues. The mean improved from 5.73 to 6.27 with 59.6% on the “satisfied” side.

The respondents were asked if they supported the Town seeking a change in state law that presently requires the Town to give citizen's email addresses to third parties when requested. There was overwhelming support for the Town to seek the change in state law with approximately 88% responding yes.

In conclusion, there were 9 grades that improved this year, 5 grades that declined, and 13 grades that remained unchanged. This represents an improvement in the overall service level as perceived by the respondents. The final average for the 27 graded Cary service dimensions this year was 8.23 (A-). This represents the highest overall mean the Town has earned. When using the same set of common item means, the final average in 2008 was 8.16 (A-) and in 2004 it was 7.90 (B+). Even more impressive are the gains made in the seven Town Council focus areas. The mean has improved from 6.60 in 2008 to 7.05 this year. Overall, the Town of Cary continues to receive a very good report card from its citizens.