

Town of Cary 2010 Biennial Survey Focus Group Report

Methodology

In January/February 2010, the Cary Biennial Citizen Survey was conducted examining numerous issues related to the functioning and operation of Cary as well as current issues related to the Town. The results of this survey were analyzed by BKL Research that examined specific issues from the survey in order to gather more detailed insights. They found that they would be willing to participate in a focus group session (44% of the sample agreed to participate) and 10 were selected.

The composition of the groups was controlled in respect to two factors, age and gender. Participants were balanced by age and gender in each session. All the participants owned homes. A total of 6 participants were in the first session and 4 in the second. Appendix A has the roster of participants for both sessions including their age groups and Appendix B contains the minutes for their involvement.

The sessions were held on May 15th at 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. at the Town Hall in Cary. The first session lasted 1 hour. A relatively structured set of questions was used for both groups (Appendix C) including core questions, although discretion was allowed to explore other areas of importance during the sessions. Appendix D contains the minutes of both focus groups.

Growth in Cary

1a. Growth in Cary showed up again in this year's survey as a concern, even though the population is growing compared to the recent past, probably due to the recession. How much do you think concern about growth did more to educate citizens on what the actual growth rate is as it changes over time?

Session 1

The respondents did not think educating the citizens on the actual growth rate would make a significant difference. Some expressed a concern and stated it is not necessarily a bad thing. Several of the participants agreed with this sentiment. Another member expressed concerns about growth. This individual indicated Cary generally has stringent development standards especially the requirement of buffers around developments. This individual expressed concern about the apartment-type units of recent developments instead of single family homes. This would cause the individual to be concerned. This participant stressed the need for goals in growth not just growth for growth's sake, but was satisfied with the current growth. The participant was satisfied for the infrastructure especially water, community centers, greenways, and parks. The participant was satisfied with the quality of life aspects. Overall, this group generally agreed Cary is doing a very good job with growth.

Session 2

The participants were supportive of Cary publicizing the actual growth rate. One participant mentioned how Cary went from a sleepy little bedroom town to a big community. It was felt that publicizing the actual growth rate would be a point of reference to residents. When asked if they knew the recent growth rate in Cary, none could recall the exact rate. There was a concern for widespread growth such as moving into Chatham County and felt the infrastructure could not handle it.

1b. What about growth do you think concerns folks? For example, is it the byproducts of growth?

Session 1

The participants were primarily concerned about resources and environmental aspects. The water and growth in the region. Several of the participants were concerned about the loss of greenspace and the 540 area was noted as a region where trees were leveled for development. One other participant mentioned lights with development and the impact on traffic flow citing Cary Parkway. However, this participant also mentioned places.

Session 2

The key concern for the participants was infrastructure items such as police and fire. They noted the impact on Cary or Morrisville. A participant referred to this as spider web growth. Another member cited the impact on the line. This individual wanted more defined lines of development where whole areas or sections are brought up. The concern was for Durham developing around the lake and the impact on the water.

1c. How much of the concern is growth in Cary, growth in Wake County, or growth in the Triangle?

Session 1

The conversation centered on the Wake County issue of schools. One participant questioned why the whole county since the issues vary from region to region and one size does not fit all. Many of the participants mentioned moving to private schools. One member indicated the School Board does not seem to be consistent with the issues and reassignments. The participants were surprised when one other member indicated parents of Wake County public school parent surveys and give their opinions. The participants noted that half of the children for elementary school in Wake County are in private schools and these parents are not surveyed. The issue was discussed and one participant stated that only 1 of 8 eligible children was actually assigned to attend in the neighborhood. Another participant commented that all residents are affected by schools through Cary starting its own school system and increasing local taxes. Toward the end of the conversation, growth in the county or Triangle was more of a concern. Several participants felt the recession may have had a breathing period.

Session 2

The participants generally focused on growth issues in Cary; although, one member indicated more of the conversation centered on demographic changes in Cary. One participant was concerned with the impact on schools. The participant noted the growth in the 90's was young people starting families. This forced schools to be built and the impact on resources is from baby boomers and retirees. There was concern for the resources that are being provided for many retirees are moving here to be near their children and this is driving more adult day care. Schools have been apartments and multi-family units for this group. The Town was perceived to be offering good recreation. The participants saw a need for services for the in-between seniors who are less independent. The participants also expressed some concern for the increased level of retail development in Town of Cary.

1d. When you think about what the Town government has done regarding growth over the last year, what has been the most negative?

Session 1

The participants thought the Town was doing a very good job with growth in the past two years. They mentioned several capital projects such as downtown development and reduced development due to the poor economy. The Town had put \$70-\$80 million of new projects on hold. The participants also complimented the Town on the new posts erected in Cary.

Session 2

The conversation turned to roads and streets in Cary. One participant indicated the roads were better than they were actually worse. A participant suggested the Town used stop signs and traffic lights too much. This individual cited how long the traffic lights take on Tryon Road and Cary Parkway. Another participant thought the Town was doing a good job with growth.

1e. What do you think the Town should be doing to better manage growth?

Session 1

Several participants had concerns about development on the outskirts or fringes of Cary. They felt that development could be too expensive. Several participants agreed the Town should work to fill in the gaps since infrastructure items are in place. The participants stressed the need for more balance between growth and infrastructure. One member noted developers prefer to build 100 houses instead of a few. One member mentioned money away from the area and having too much influence. Toward the end of the conversation one participant noted a growth problem while other areas did not have growth. There was concern that building too many houses was a problem but another member stated market forces would determine the amount of building.

Session 2

One participant indicated the Town needed a new post office and several others agreed. The participants discussed community policing. They liked the concept of having police officers and captains that can be contacted. One participant mentioned that was discussed in more detail was the perception the Town had eliminated the required buffer between developments with the loss of mature trees and greenspace in newer developments. They mentioned Maynard Road and noted this occurring. One other member suggested road construction should be completed as soon as possible.

1f. What would be the ideal situation in Cary?

Session 1

The participants preferred controlled growth in Cary. They stressed the need for infrastructure like roads, water, and schools. Water and housing turnover were also mentioned as contributing factors. A member who regularly evaluates the impact of the growth stressed the need to have an ultimate goal for trying to inhibit growth such as what they did in Chapel Hill. This resulted in negative consequences that were too expensive to live in.

Session 2

The participants expressed a concern for having too many houses for sale in the area and its impact on the growth cessation period put in place by Mayor Lang. This participant also stressed the number of spaces for sale while there continues to be development. The idea of stopping growth for a while was appealing to this member. The concept of slow, steady, controlled growth was the theme of the conversation. Environmental aspects in future developments were also discussed.

Traffic

2a. Now let's talk traffic. Are most of the problem spots more in Cary or outside Cary. Can you identify any problem spots on weekdays, weekends, or specific times of day?

Session 1

The participants mentioned several specific areas in Cary and other general concerns for traffic. One area mentioned was the intersection of Highway 55 and 540. This member also complimented the Town for responding quickly to alter the intersection after a serious accident occurred. The area around Cary Elementary was also mentioned as a concern. The Town was going to put a circle in to help the problem but it had been delayed. There was a long line of cars at the intersection of Harrison & Maynard and Davis & High House were cited as examples. A participant thought that it would be better to stop traffic from backing up years earlier. Another member was not sure it was needed as much as it was in Town. Another issue was the fact that lanes change into left or right turn only especially in the area around Cary Elementary. The participants felt this was not a concern for residents but it makes the Town needed to warn drivers of the lane change.

Session 2

The participants mentioned several areas inside of Cary as traffic problems. One area mentioned was the intersection of Highway 55 and 540. Highways 55 and 540 were mentioned for poor traffic light timing with the main problems occurring during the hour. Two other areas viewed as problem areas for traffic backups due to light timing were High House Drive and the intersection of Green Level to Durham was also viewed as a road in poor condition. One of the participants mentioned that some of these issues may be State concerns.

2b. What ideas do you have for how the Town should improve traffic?

Session 1

One participant indicated synchronizing lights with the new fiber optic network can be a problem for Farm. The participant wanted more intelligent traffic lights that would operate independently when was present. It was thought that Lochmere Drive works that way. There were concerns for Cary traffic light cycle paired with a short left-turn lane. This causes a backup for those in the straight lane. Several participants indicated it is only a problem for approximately three hours a day and t participant indicated Davis & High House does not have the same problem and works more efficient center lane for overflow. Preston Corners & High House was also mentioned as a problem area b lanes. Again, the lack of left turns was discussed.

Session 2

The participants suggested better synchronization of traffic lights especially for areas such as High Davis. The use of roundabouts was also mentioned. One participant thought they would work well moving without stopping it like speed bumps. Several participants noted the lack of bike lanes. They nonexistent in certain areas. They stressed they served to slow traffic especially when turning ac through lanes such as on Evans & Aviation. They would like to see more signs telling drivers in a there was a call to increase the length of the acceleration ramp for drivers pulling off the Beltline t

Street Maintenance

3a. Another of the concerns raised in the survey was street maintenance, things like fixing potholes. Who do you think is responsible for paving streets and fixing potholes in Cary?

Session 1

It was correctly answered that it depends on the street.

Session 2

It was correctly answered that it depends on the street.

3b. The correct answer is that it depends on the street. Some streets are owned by the State (State Road) and some are private streets. With this in mind, let me throw out a few names and you tell me whether they are maintained road, or a private road that's maintained by the people who live along it. First, State Road is a State road? How many think it's a Town road? Any of you think it's private?

Session 1

There were two participants who correctly identified that it was a State road while two other participants were not sure and did not answer.

Session 2

Only one participant correctly identified that Kildaire Farm was a State road while the other six were surprised to find it was a State road not a Town road.

3c. Let's do another one. Raise your hands if you think Maynard Road is a State road? How many think it is private?

Session 1

Only one participant correctly identified that Maynard Road was a State road while four believed it was private and did not respond. In addition, the participants seemed surprised when informed it was a State road.

Session 2

The same pattern emerged in this group, only one participant correctly identified that Maynard Road was a State road while four believed it was a Town road. The participant who identified it as a State road admitted he recently read that in the past it was a State road when told it was a State road.

3d. Two more. Raise your hands if you think Cary Parkway is a State road? How many think it is private?

Session 1

There was more uncertainty as to Cary Parkway. Only one participant thought it was a State road while three believed it was a Town road. The three other participants were uncertain and did not respond.

Session 2

In this group, one participant identified Cary Parkway as a State road while the other six perceived it as a Town road.

3e. Last one. Raise your hands if you think Academy Street is a State road? How many think it is private?

Session 1

There was more certainty for Academy Street. There was only one participant who thought that it was a State road while six identified it to be a Town road.

Session 2

All seven participants correctly identified Academy Street as a Town road.

3f. So, while no one likes potholes, there is an equity issue that the Town would like your thoughts on. State roads maintained – once through our state taxes and once through our local taxes. (Cary) which is letting the State know when they need to come fix a pothole or make other repairs.

Session 1

The participants felt the Town should keep doing what they are doing by informing the State about them repair the road. The residents should only pay once. One participant was not sure if the Town they repair the road for the State. The participants were concerned if the Town were to make the repairs that were their responsibility. One of the members was unsure who to contact when they the road was Town or State maintained. Another participant directed them to the Town's website. On the Town's website the participants were very complimentary. They mentioned they use it to get information up for events. Several of the participants receive email notifications.

Session 2

In the initial conversation, a participant indicated Cary should repair it and be reimbursed by the State. If there was no reimbursement, the participants all agreed the Town should not repair the roads. There are emergency situations when the road could cause damage to cars. One participant thought the State is reported within 72 hours.

Revenue and Spending

4a. Okay on to money. We heard some conflicting ideas in the survey this year and want to get your thoughts on. Town to keep taxes and fees low and slow growth but at the same time spend more on road projects. As you can imagine, the revenues the Town gets from consumer spending, like sales tax, because of the economy's impact on citizen spending habits and the Town hasn't raised property taxes down too. The revenues that come from sales taxes and growth make up a big part of the Town's better things. Keep in mind that to live within its means without raising your taxes, the Town may have to cancel or delay indefinitely many projects, like improving downtown. So, we'd like your thoughts on citizens wanting the Town to slow growth even further, not raise taxes, yet still pay for improvements.

Session 1

The participants felt you cannot have slow growth, not raise taxes, and add new improvement projects. An online survey to ask the public which projects to pursue with the funds that are available like a millage rate would be a concern with the online survey and how many citizens need to participate to make it valid. Downtown revitalization should be actually voted on by the public just like in an election. There are some areas in Cary are low compared to other areas and they may possibly be willing to pay more for keeping streets clean if they were careful to indicate this does not endorse a tax increase. Other members expressed concern about projects that are not needed. They stressed the need for the Town to be as efficient as possible for the money.

Session 2

A participant stressed that Cary must live within its budget just like everyone else. The Town needed to avoid wasteful projects were mentioned (flashing yellow lights and informational signs) and it was stressed that it was important to balance it. The participants all agreed Cary has done an overall good job in the past two years living within its budget.

4b. Are there certain types of projects or activities that you think should have a higher priority than new projects? Should the Town should focus more on maintenance and upkeep of existing facilities and focus less on new projects? How do you balance between the two or what?

Session 1

The participants all agreed the Town should focus on upkeep and maintenance of existing facilities and not start everything new. One participant said everything now and they are very happy here. One other participant thought the economic conditions were not good and back and evaluate the need for certain projects.

Session 2

All the participants agreed the Town should first focus on maintaining the existing services and facilities before you look to add any additions. Another member said you have to maintain it properly before you look to add any additions. Another member said you have to have and make things high quality rather than spend money a bit here and there and not have anything. Things they would like to see Cary spend money on, the participants mentioned more police/EMS, more greenways, parks, and activities provided by the parks & recreation department. They were very complimentary of the greenways, parks, and activities provided by the parks & recreation department. They also mentioned the recycle bins provided by the Town.

4c. Staying with this for a few more minutes, do you generally agree or disagree with the things the Town is spending money on? Do you think the Town is spending money wisely and appropriately?

Session 1

All the participants agreed the Town was spending money wisely.

Session 2

The participants all felt Cary was spending money wisely. They noted the Town has not raised taxes for a long time. When asked about the tax rate compared to other areas they felt Cary was low. When asked how they have lived, they felt the tax rate was good. However, a couple of the participants indicated the tax rate was high in the areas they had lived in but the rate was reasonable.

4d. Is there anything that sticks out in your mind as something you wish the Town hadn't or would have done differently?

Session 1

The conversation started with the Town spending more on roads but the participants recognized the member felt needed road repairs sometimes take too long. The participants had a relatively difficult time pursuing. One item with a degree of discussion was the aquatic center and its usage. However, they provide activities for everyone and to attract people to Town such as the soccer facility and baseball field. They gotten carried away with adding amenities compared to Raleigh with the new convention center and other tier facilities that they can be proud of and they add a wow factor for visitors. Another member wanted to add facilities and overspend. There was a conversation concerning the usage of facilities and the aquatic center compared to the soccer and baseball facilities. The participants recognized the facilities are a good use of money into Town. Overall, there was agreement the Town is pursuing appropriate projects.

Session 2

One participant indicated the new flashing yellow lights for left turns and the informational signs. They were given time. The only comment was to improve snow removal.

Communications

5a. The Town is very interested in having citizens participate in the governing process. They want to make decisions on programs, projects, policies, and laws. They want these decisions to reflect the needs of the community. They want you to be happy with how things are going. So, let's start by defining involvement in Town government, what kinds of things come to mind?

Session 1

The participants indicated voting was a key method to get involved. One participant stressed going to meetings and watching the meetings on Cary TV, a few of the participants indicated they watch occasionally. The participants mentioned the Council. One of the participants noted there are only 4 districts representing 140,000 residents. Each council member represent an increasing number of people and areas. It was suggested more districts would help address the specific problems in different regions. This was highly supported by the other participants.

Session 2

The conversation started with one participant mentioning involvement would mean attending the meetings. They brought up Channel 11. Several of the members had concerns about the interest level generated by the meetings. The participants mentioned that the information displays were horizontal and vertical, no focus on Channel 11 was a good way to get quick information on what was happening in Town. Other members mentioned Town. They thought with emails and Channel 11 you can stay very well informed. Advisory panels were involved. Finally, one other member was complimentary to BUD for giving Town information.

5b. Generally speaking, how interested are you in being involved in Town government? Talk about how interested or somewhat interested? Depends on the issue?

Session 1

There was limited discussion with the participants indicating the issue would be the key reason to the focus group reflected more involvement than most residents.

Session 2

The participants were more concerned about staying informed than involved; although, two of the degree. The concern was for their neighborhood and one member indicated the police and fire do them. There was a comment to add an online suggestion box to communicate with the Town and also agreed with the statement that the level of involvement depends on the issue.

5c. What kinds of things would motivate you to get more involved?

Session 1

The participants all generally agreed they would get involved if the Town did something or proposed the participants then stated they were not involved due to apathy, but because they were satisfied agreed. Several participants noted the Town is a great retirement area and a good place to raise live compared to previous places they lived, all agreed it was better. One participant stated senior overburden schools and result in fewer families as long as Cary does not turn into Florida.

Session 2

The participants generally indicated it would depend on the issue and how it affected them. Several participants. The issue of schools was brought up and suggestions were made that Cary start the also concerns for redundancy of police, fire, EMS services with outlying communities. Two participants problems. One member had water runoff from a daycare built in their area but the Town could not problem with creek flooding from development in the area and it was resolved.

5d. Outside of participating in the survey and this focus group, how many of you had some level of involvement in the past two years – raise hands.

Session 1

None had involvement in Town issues in the past two years.

Session 2

Three of the participants had involvement with the Town in the past two years.

5e. What were you involved in, what did you do?

Session 1

Not applicable.

Session 2

One member had involvement through their homeowners association (HOA). They had an issue member would have preferred more specifics from the Town as to what is right and wrong for the police speaking with the neighbors. Another participant indicated the police were very helpful in s community. One other participant contacted the Town concerning signage and the number of wo

5f. Do you think you benefited from the experience? How?

Session 1

Not applicable.

Session 2

See responses from 5e. It appears all benefited from the involvement and interaction with the To
Town to give more definite advice to their homeowners association.

5g. How did you find out about the issue and how to get involved?

Session 1

Not applicable.

Session 2

With the exception of the signage issue, the two other participants were involved due to the fact th

5h. Finally and real quick. How many people who read print media are reading it online?

Session 1

All of the participants indicated they read print media both hard copy and online.

Session 2

The participants indicated Cary News was their major source of information about the Town. All of the members who indicated they also read online. One member stated he reads online during the week. Another member indicated they read online emails from the Town as their primary news source.

Other Comments

6. In closing, is there anything else about the Town of Cary government that you'd like to share?

Session 1

The participants were concerned about their email address being accessed by others when they use the service. Several members indicated they are getting unsolicited emails. They would have liked to have signed up. They would like the Town to find a way around the Freedom of Information provisions.

Session 2

There were several comments by the participants. One member wanted to know where to get the water. They were complimented for being very approachable. There was a comment that Cary should stay Cary. There was also a call for Cary to fight to protect the water supply at Jordan Lake. The participants liked the way the town was run. One participant would like to know how to change days. There were several compliments on the land use. One participant noted one participant of building the sewage plant in someone else's backyard (New Hill). One participant noted the cisterns for the water issues. The restrictions on garage size were viewed as too narrow for two cars. In addition noted that Cary was wonderful to work with and the inspector made the contractor do the work.