

## **Arvada City Council Meeting Workshop, January 25, 2016**

Notes taken by Susan Shirley

Councilmembers present were Mayor Marc Williams, Mayor Pro Tem Bob Fifer, and Councilmembers Don Allard, Nancy Ford, Dave Jones, and John Marriott. Councilmember Mark McGoff was absent.

The topics of tonight's workshop were a summary of the results of the 2015 Arvada Citizens' Survey, and updates to the revised neighborhood grant program.

### **Citizens' Survey**

First up was Chelsey Farson of the National Research Center in Boulder, which carries out the surveys. Surveys are sent to a random selection of 2400 Arvada households, or about 4.8% of Arvada households; of those, the response in 2015 was 785 surveys returned, or 34% of all surveys sent out, and about 1.6% of all households. Because the National Research Center weights the responses according to demographics, this is a statistically significant number of responses, they say, and given the 10-page length of the survey, quite a strong response rate when compared with many other communities. There is a three percent margin of error in the results.

Here are the eight key findings:

1. As has been the case for a number of years, Arvadans respond that they have a high overall quality of life. Quality of community has high scores as well, as a good place to live and raise children, with high satisfaction given as to the quality of the neighborhoods.
2. Strong sense of personal safety--92% of us feel very safe or somewhat safe. This, said Farson, is much higher than elsewhere nationally or in other Front Range areas. Only 13% of respondents said they or members of their household had been crime victims in the past 12 months.
3. In the evaluation of city or non-city services, there were some declines when compared with the 2013 results. Street maintenance, ease of car travel, sidewalk maintenance, new street construction, ease of bicycle travel, government-assisted affordable housing, city building inspection, and government outreach services (social media and other communication) all were areas in which residents perceived a less satisfactory result than in prior years. Also, in services provided by agencies other than the City, several areas were found needing of some improvement: youth programs (a perennial problem dating back through the surveys since 1997), street maintenance, and high-speed internet.
4. Arvada personnel--still receiving a high satisfaction rating.
5. Traffic! Surprise! Especially traffic volume, and traffic movement. Traffic had actually begun to slip in the relative ratings of problems, but made a comeback in the 2015 survey.
6. Residents voiced concerns about growth and housing: only 26% rated affordable housing "excellent" or "good," compared to 45% in 2013; and quality of housing was rated as "excellent" or "good" by 49%. The biggest problems were seen as growth and lack of entry level housing, a concern throughout the Front Range, says Farson.
7. Residents generally support improvements which would make biking/walking easier. At

the same time, the majority of respondents don't bike or walk to school or work, but only for recreation. Councilmember John Marriott asked to have some clarification, analyzing whether more of those people would commute by bike or on foot if it were only made easier.

8. Sustainability: overall, this received a 60% level of support, which is considered high. Top priorities, as seen from the results, are street maintenance, followed by new street construction, open space, and ease of walking/biking.

Councilmember Nancy Ford had some incisive questions for Farson. First, she asked if the data could be broken down by districts, and an effort made to understand why different districts answered in the ways they did. For example, if residents in one district use the bus more than in other districts, is that because the bus routes are better there? Or is it because of socioeconomic reasons, or other reasons?

Ford would like to be able to use the data to improve current services. She also asked when comparing Arvada to other Front Range cities, if National Research looks at what differences exist between Arvada and other cities. Farson said there definitely are cities which are more similar, or less similar to Arvada; for example, residents of a city of 5,000 households will give very different answers than those who live in a city of 100,000 households.

Ford asked if the 34% response rate is normal for most communities. Farson said the rate generally runs 20 to 40 percent, and is declining. She also said most surveys are about five pages, so for Arvada to have as good a response as we do, with a ten-page survey, is remarkably good, unique in fact.

Ford wondered if Farson knew what made the difference between the 2/3 who did not respond, and the 1/3 who did. Farson said, given that the ones who don't respond are the ones no one hears from, there's no way to know for sure. But they do know that younger people have a lower response rate, as do people who rent their homes, as well as those who are more dissatisfied for one reason or another. Because this would cause bias in the results if not addressed, the results are weighted in comparison to census data.

Mayor Marc Williams asked if it would be helpful to shorten the survey. Farson said that's definitely an option, and usually results in a higher response rate. The number of surveys sent out could be increased as well, so that even a 34% response rate would be based on a larger number and therefore, presumably, a more accurate reflection of the whole population.

Williams also remarked that the continuity of the surveys over a long period of time is "very valuable, and helps us shape our priorities, focus and targets," especially in understanding the growing divide between the southeast and northwest parts of town, and how to best address differing needs in those communities.

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### **Neighborhood Grant Program:**

In past years, there has been growing dissatisfaction with the grant program on the part of some Councilmembers. In general, they have identified problems with what they perceive as HOAs using taxpayer money for deferred maintenance, or for projects which will only benefit homes in the HOA and which will not be accessible to the community at large. In an attempt to retain the program but

without those shortcomings, Senior Planner Kevin Nichols and other staff have made some initial changes, which they brought to Council for feedback.

There is a City Council strategic result that by 2019, half of the neighborhoods identified in 2013 as lacking neighborhood organizations, which amounts to about 30,000 households, will be organized. It's being emphasized that the Neighborhood Grant program can function as a nice "carrot" to entice neighborhoods to organize and liaise with the City. To my knowledge, no one in officialdom has yet suggested that an even better carrot might be a long-standing commitment not to go breaking our hearts by blindsiding us with unwelcome projects, and to extend notification guidelines beyond the current paltry four hundred feet. So we could, you know, trust them enough to want to liaise with them.

But back to the grant program, and its potential as an incentive; because, in Nichols' words, "It is really a challenge to organize neighborhoods."

A key feature of the program is the concept of the recipients of the grants providing a match to those funds, either in cash, in sweat equity, or both; or in the case of certain older neighborhoods, perhaps contributions to the foodbank or something along those lines.

Nichols said HOAs are not being ruled out under the revised rules, but need to be held to a strict standard. Funds should not be given for what should be covered by HOA dues, or for deferred maintenance items, and there needs to be a public benefit to the projects funded--for example, a community garden which is accessible to the neighborhood and not just members of that HOA. There are also limits so that a neighborhood can only receive funding once per calendar year and not more than two years in a row.

Criteria to show a neighborhood has organized are that there is a structure, regular meetings, officers, and established goals. Nichols said his staff helps neighborhoods put all that together.

Because 1980 was when HOAs began to be more prevalent, pre-1980 neighborhoods will be given more weight when considering requests.

There will be outreach the first quarter of 2016, projects could begin in early summer of 2016 if funds are made available by City Council, and any projects approved would need to be completed by the end of the year.

Councilmembers Fifer and Marriott said they are in favor of going forward. It might be remembered that they were two of the most vocal opponents to the program before the more restrictive rules were put in place.

City Manager Mark Deven said he will see what funding sources can be identified, and will bring the grant program back for Council approval.

The workshop was adjourned at about 7:15.