

Final Report of the Centralia Citizen Survey of 2016

SUMMARY

The results from the 2016 Centralia Citizen Survey have been tabulated and it is notable that the responses to questions repeated from last year are remarkably consistent. Again citizens gave a majority of favorable responses to most of the services rated. More people participated this year than the first year of the survey (2014) but not as many as last year, due in part to not having an online option. (145 surveys this year 9% participation, 202 surveys a 12% participation rate in 2015 and 122 and 7% in 2014).

Library service was the most supported service in 2016. Library Service finished a very close second in 2014 to Garbage Collection. Garbage Collection was not added to the survey this year because the City was in the first weeks of a new trash service and many people were upset with the change. We will survey again next year once citizens have a chance to evaluate an entire year.

Once again sidewalks are the greatest concern. The staff and Board of Aldermen have been working on solutions and the Comprehensive Plan will address a plan for sidewalk repair and improvement, but the results have not improved the opinion of city sidewalks.

METHODS

In October of 2016 a survey was distributed to the citizens of Centralia as an enclosure with the City Newsletter in the same manner as in the previous two years. The City Newsletter is mailed out twice a year in the April and October utility bills. Approximately 1,697 bills were mailed and 145 surveys were returned for a 8.54% return rate. We did not include an online component this year as only 20 surveys were completed that way last year. There was no attempt to assess income, sex, race or any other demographic criteria and so it is not possible to determine if the survey is representative of the Centralia community. In addition participation was entirely voluntary. This year, no incentive was offered to improve participation and citizens were required to mail or hand deliver surveys at their own expense.

The first 17 questions asked the respondent to rate 16 areas of service on a four point scale (Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor). Sewer service was inadvertently placed in the survey twice. The survey also allows for a response of "Don't know" for each of the seventeen categories. In addition, some people left questions blank. A copy of the survey is attached at the back of this report. The questions were modeled after the National Citizen Survey and so some very general comparisons can be made to other cities that have published their results online. Many categories were repeated from the 2014 and 2015 surveys.

The survey was kept to one page to minimize the time required to complete the survey and to score the survey. We added questions on general opinions about the quality of life in Centralia for the first time this year.

There was a need to interpret some responses. Where a respondent marked in between two choices, the higher score was taken. We accidentally put Sewer Service in the survey twice and found about 10% of respondents scored it differently the second time and almost always lower. With the exception of the last four questions about general livability, we can compare results to previous years. +-

RESULTS

This section is divided into three charts: The 17 questions about services – favorable opinion; 17 services by weighted rank score; and Livability questions by favorable opinion.

The results of the first 17 questions are summarized below.

Survey	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	DON'T KNOW	BLANK	Excl/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Favorable Opinion*
Public Library	75	52	2	0	14	2	127	16	98.4%
Park Maintenance	53	82	3	0	6	1	135	9	97.8%
Fire Services	55	62	5	0	21	2	117	26	95.9%
Recreation Facilities	57	67	8	0	6	7	124	14	93.9%
Water Service	52	75	6	3	2	7	127	8	93.4%
Electric Service	54	81	8	2	0	0	135	8	93.1%
Recreation Programs	51	56	8	3	26	1	107	34	90.7%
7. Sewer Service	43	78	11	3	5	5	121	16	89.6%
13. Sewer Service	34	74	12	3	9	13	108	21	87.8%
Police Department	45	73	12	6	7	2	118	19	86.8%
Animal Control	31	74	21	13	2	4	105	23	75.5%
Street Lights	22	78	30	13	2	0	100	32	69.9%
Snow Removal	27	66	28	13	8	3	93	36	69.4%
Building Code Enforcement	10	41	24	28	39	3	51	63	49.5%
Nuisance Abatement	7	45	41	35	8	9	52	49	40.6%
Storm Drainage	7	47	46	34	5	6	54	51	40.3%
Sidewalk Maintenance	10	35	51	45	4	0	45	55	31.9%

*Favorable Opinion is a Good or Excellent rating; excludes blanks and “Don’t Know”.

Overall the results show a favorable opinion where a Favorable Opinion is the percentage of Excellent and Good ratings is divided by the responses that gave an opinion (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor) of the services provided in Centralia. Twelve of sixteen services had score of over more than 69% favorable. It is not unusual for parks, libraries and basic utilities to score high, although our library scores exceptionally high. The maintenance of the sidewalks has the lowest percentage of Favorable Opinions (31.1%). This is an area that the City has been working on strategies, but clearly more implementation of these strategies is necessary. That said sidewalks tend to score lower than many services, but 31.1% is very low. It should be noted that during the Comprehensive Plan meetings, data was presented by the Mid-Missouri Regional Planning Commission (MMRPC) staff that showed that Centralia has a greater percentage of streets in poor condition than comparable small cities in mid-Missouri, but Centralia also has a much more extensive network of sidewalks. In other words the problem is a result of our long standing insistence of good infrastructure for pedestrian traffic. Code Enforcement, Nuisance Abatement and Storm Drainage also scored low. The enforcement of weeds and trash abatement is a difficult issue everywhere and typically scores lower. Based on handwritten comments, the low score for Building Code Enforcement may be more related to derelict buildings than actual code enforcement. The City has been aggressive this year, issuing ten demolition permits and eight were for residential houses, but there are more to take down.

Survey	Score
Public Library	1.29
Fire Services	1.36
Recreation Programs	1.38
Recreation Facilities	1.56
Park Maintenance	1.57
Water Service	1.68
Electric Service	1.71
Sewer Service (both times)	1.74
Police Service	1.76
Building Code Enforcement	1.94
Snow Removal	2.08
Animal Control	2.09
Street Lights	2.21
Nuisance Abatement	2.65
Storm Drainage	2.70
Sidewalk Maintenance	2.85

If you give a value of 1 to Excellent, 2 to Good, 3 to Fair and 4 to Poor, the rankings are similar to the favorable opinions but there are several services that scored better or worse. This scoring gives more weight to excellent and poor ratings. The top and bottom score didn't change, but

Of the 17 services surveyed, the citizens of Centralia feel that the sidewalk system is an area that needs the greatest amount of attention. In last year's survey we delved into that a bit deeper and found that repairing sidewalks was a greater concern than building new ones (see 2015 Survey Results).

The other areas of concern are nuisance abatement and storm drainage as in previous years. These areas tend to score lower in most cities if you look at results from other towns that collect similar data, but the scores are low enough to be of concern. We added Building Code Enforcement and although it scored low in Favorable Responses, it also had a very high number of "Don't Know" responses. There were several comments in the margins about dilapidated housing, and two comments specifically about the Narraganset Building.

The four questions about how people feel about the town were largely positive, except there were concerns expressed about the town's appearance by many. People who responded to the survey felt very good about raising a family in Centralia as 90% of those that gave an opinion said that it was a good or excellent place to raise a family and there was only one respondent that replied "Don't Know."

Survey	EXCL	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	DON'T KNOW	Excl/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Favorable Opinion*	Score
Place to Raise a Family	48	78	12	2	1	126	13	90.0%	1.76
Overall Level of Safety	33	94	13	5	0	127	13	87.6%	1.93
Quality of Life	34	89	14	4	1	123	15	87.2%	1.90

Overall Appearance	16	82	38	7	0	98	38	68.5%	2.25
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*Favorable Opinion is a Good or Excellent rating; excludes blanks and “Don’t Know”.

The final question asked about what business Centralia should try to attract. While many people listed more than one response, fifteen of the 65 that gave a response mentioned restaurant in one way or another and 14 mentioned hotel, motel or bed and breakfast. Manufacturing or industry was mentioned eight times and two others said support of Hubbell was important. Jobs or just “Business” was mentioned, new grocery stores and more options for shopping all received multiple mentions. Two responses mentioned day care.

COMPARISON TO PREVIOUS YEARS

The responses from year to year show remarkable consistency of the scores. For example Sidewalk

	Average Favorable Response	Average Rank score	Years Evaluated
Garbage Collection	98.55%	1.46	2
Library Service	98.78%	1.37	2
Fire Services	97.43%	1.41	2
Recreation Facilities	94.11%	1.57	2
Park Maintenance	95.10%	1.62	2
Water	94.63%	1.63	3
Electric Services	94.12%	1.66	3
Sewer Services	91.37%	1.68	3
Recreation Programs	89.43%	1.58	2
Recycling	88.42%	1.82	1
Police Department Services	83.01%	1.74	3
Animal Control	78.21%	1.93	3
Street Lighting	71.78%	2.17	3
Snow Removal	65.79%	2.19	3
Building Code Enforcement	49.51%	1.94	2
Nuisance Abatement	43.29%	2.55	3
Storm Drainage	44.02%	2.63	3

Street Maintenance	45.08%	2.72	1
Sidewalk Maintenance	33.47%	2.83	3

Maintenance has ranked as the lowest score in favorable opinion and average rank score each of the three years it was evaluated, with the percentage of citizens scoring it as Excellent or Good (the definition of a “Favorable Opinion) 37.4% in 2014, 31.1% in 2015 and 31.9% in 2016. The average rank score (where a value of 1 is assigned to Excellent, 2 to Good, 3 to Fair and 4 to poor and then these scores are averaged) for Sidewalk Maintenance was 2.90 in 2014, 2.74 in 2015 and 2.85 in 2016. The average of the scores are found in the chart above. Garbage collection (evaluated in 2014 and 2015) was the most popular city provided utility scoring 99.2% and 97.9% in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The Library had even higher average rank scores, with the highest ever in 2016 at 1.29 and 1.44, virtually tied with Garbage Collection.

Many of these services could be compared to national data if the City could afford to participate in the National Citizens’ Survey. A very cursory glance at other cities suggests that Centralia would match up well. but based on looking at other cities that participate in that survey, the City of Centralia seems to measure up favorably. So police and street maintenance typically score lower than the Library or the Water Utility. In addition the score for the Police Department has seen a steady increase in the favorable opinion from 2014 to 2016 (78.0% to 84.3% to 86.8%) but the average rank score has been more level (1.77 to 1.68 to 1.76), but all very good scores. Water, Electric and Sewer have all been steadily highly regarded, never getting below an 88.7% or above a 96.6% favorable rating.

Participation was down slightly this year with only 145 surveys being turned in, but still better than the first year where 122 surveys were submitted. Again, fairly consistent.

In 2015 we experimented with placing the survey on line and received 21 of the 202 surveys submitted via the Internet. We may repeat the Internet venue next year.

SUMMARY

The annual Centralia Citizens’ Survey has provided us with data from an unscientific, and relatively small sample of participants, but based on anecdotal reports and the consistency, it is likely that it represents a relatively accurate picture of the opinions of our citizens, at least among those engaged in civic life. In January or February of 2017 we intend to conduct a longer and more in depth survey of the citizens as part of the Comprehensive Plan update. Some questions will overlap with the annual survey sent out in the October newsletter. It will be interesting to see if the results track well with these data.

Overall I think the results show that the citizens are relatively happy with the services provided by the City, especially the parks, the utilities and the emergency responders. In addition the Library is extremely popular, but the vote to increase the property tax levy in 2014 was excellent proof of that. The “livability” questions support the idea that people are generally happy with Centralia as place to live and raise a family. But the data are consistent with a desire to improve the appearance of the town with better sidewalks, better streets, better nuisance abatement (weeds and trash), better building codes enforcement and also improvement in storm water sewers. The Board of Aldermen have already begun to take action in several ways. The Board is pursuing an ordinance to restrict the parking of vehicles in the front yard; insisting on stricter enforcement of trash and debris nuisance ordinances, increasing the funds available for demolition of derelict residential properties; spending money on building new sidewalks and approving in concept the idea of seeking bids for sidewalk maintenance throughout the City.

City staff encourages the Board to continue to support the idea of an annual Centralia Citizens' Survey.



City of Centralia Citizen Survey

Please complete and return to City Hall by Monday, October 31, 2016.

❖ How do you rate the quality of each of the following Centralia services?

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
1. Water Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Street Lighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Nuisance Abatement (weeds/unlicensed vehicles, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Sidewalk Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Animal Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Library Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Sewer Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Electric Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Snow Removal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Fire Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Police Department Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Park Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Sewer Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Building Code Enforcement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Recreation Facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Recreation Programs and Classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Storm Drainage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Overall, the appearance of Centralia is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Overall, the quality of life in Centralia is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Overall, the level of safety in the City of Centralia is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Overall, for a place to raise a family, the City of Centralia, it is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

THE HIGHEST PRIORITY BUSINESS FOR THE CITY TO ATTRACT IS:
