

Final Report of the Centralia Citizen Survey of 2015

SUMMARY

The results from the 2015 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 (202 surveys a 12% participation rate in 2015 versus 122 and 7% in 2014) and we were able to gain greater depth of understanding on the sidewalks (which had the lowest ranking for citizen's satisfaction in 2014 and again in 2015) and the City's recycling program – a recycling which suffers from low participation.

Once again Garbage Collection received the highest percentage of favorable opinions with 97.9% of those who gave an opinion compared to 99.2% in 2014. Likewise sidewalks maintenance finished with the lowest percentage of favorable opinions again with 31.1% (37.4% in 2014) and the only service surveyed where the "Poor" rating was the most frequently selected, which was also the case in 2015.

It also appears that survey respondents would like to see the broken sidewalks repaired before new sidewalks were constructed to replace gaps or broken sidewalks were removed. The survey data also indicates that the rate of recycling reported is higher among those who returned a paper survey over those who filled one out online and both are much higher than observed rates. Several options for increasing recycling were offered and

METHODS

In October of 2015 a survey was distributed to the citizens of Centralia as an enclosure with the City Newsletter in same manner as in 2014. The City Newsletter is mailed out twice a year in the April and October utility bills. Approximately 1,682 bills were mailed and 182 surveys were returned for a 10.8% return rate. In addition the survey was made available online and 20 surveys were completed online. We make the assumption that those 20 surveys were unique households giving us 202 surveys for 1,682 residential utility accounts. 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 expected to mail or hand deliver surveys at their own expense. We did have several surveys arrive postage due.

The first 11 questions asked the respondent to rate 11 areas of service on a four point scale (Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor). The survey also allows for a response of "Don't know" for each of the eleven 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. All eleven categories were repeated from the 2014 survey and seven were eliminated to make space for additional questions. The seven categories eliminated

with three park and recreation categories, the library, the fire department, the recycling program and street maintenance. All except street maintenance (45.1% favorable opinion) did well in the 2014 survey.

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 sidewalk maintenance and recycling to probe a little deeper into citizen opinions. We hoped to gain an understanding of what citizens felt were the highest priorities for sidewalk maintenance and to what extent the condition of sidewalks affected their use for exercise. The recycling questions were geared toward understanding how the City could increase participation.

There was a need to interpret some responses. The top section was relatively easy, except in one or two cases where a resident marked more than one box. However in the sidewalk maintenance and recycling section, the way the questions were asked and the formatting of the survey instrument allowed citizens to interpret the question many ways and the responses on individual written surveys were sometimes difficult to interpret. For instance when ranking the priorities for sidewalk maintenance, many respondents listed multiple #1 priorities or simply made one or multiple check marks. The directions were not clear enough to prompt 1 -4 or 1 – 5 rankings whereas the online format forced respondents to submit answers in the manner intended by the City. Despite this, some useful trends did seem clear.

RESULTS

This section is divided into four sections: The 11 questions about services; The sidewalk maintenance priorities; recycling questions; Additional comments.

The results of the first 11 questions are summarized below.

Survey	Excl/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Favorable Opinion*	2014 % Favorable	Responses	BLANK	Opinions	Don't Know
5.GarbageCol	188	4	97.9%	99.2%	194	8	192	2
6.Water	185	12	93.9%	96.6%	199	3	197	2
8.Electric	187	13	93.5%	95.8%	201	1	200	1
7.Sewer	172	16	91.5%	93.9%	195	7	188	7
1.Police	145	27	84.3%	78.0%	183	19	172	11
2.AnimalControl	149	31	82.8%	76.3%	199	3	180	19
10.StreetLight	146	51	74.1%	71.3%	198	4	197	1
9.SnowRemoval	117	64	64.6%	63.3%	191	11	181	10
3.NuisAbate	77	89	46.4%	42.9%	189	13	166	23
11.StormDrain	83	94	44.4%	47.4%	187	15	187	10
4.SidewlkMnt	56	124	31.1%	37.4%	197	5	180	17

*Favorable Opinion is a Good or Excellent rating; excludes blanks and "Don't Know".

The maintenance of the sidewalks has the lowest percentage of Favorable Opinions (31.1%) 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). Five respondents left question #4 blank and 17 citizens responded "Don't Know" on sidewalks. The rankings change very slightly if you add in the Don't Know and rank by percentage of favorable responses but all rankings drop, because only neutral opinions are added. Electric Services moves ahead of Water Services 93.03% to 92.96% because more people don't know how they feel about the water service or they left the question blank. Similarly Storm Drainage gets a 44.4% favorable response compared to 40.7% for Nuisance Abatement. If you give a value of 1 to Excellent, 2 to Good, 3 to Fair and 4 to Poor, The rankings are the same as favorable opinions except that Nuisance Abatement has a weighted average score of 2.66 and Storm Drainage has an average score of 2.56. Going by the weighted average scores Garbage Collection is 1.484 and Sidewalk Maintenance is 2.994. The 20 online surveys tracked well with the written surveys but generally scored everything lower. Garbage Collection, Water and Electric Services all received weighted average scores of 1.9. The bottom four online by weighted average were Sidewalk Maintenance 3.1, Snow Removal and Nuisance Abatement 3.0 and Storm Drainage 2.9. The 20 surveys were way to few to draw any conclusions but the fact that they tracked very well with written surveys indicates that it is valid to include them in the survey.

Of the 11 services surveyed, the citizens of Centralia feel that the sidewalk system is an area that needs the greatest amount of attention. In order to gain a little more depth of understanding additional questions were asked and the results are described in the next section.

The other areas of concern are nuisance abatement and storm drainage. 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. However, the information included here is not very probing. As mentioned in last year's report, nuisance abatement includes weeds, dangerous buildings, derelict vehicles and other items. We received one specific comment about the Narragansett Building, one about high weeds along state highways and one about hoarders. It is also notable that only 166 respondents rated Nuisance Abatement on the Excellent to Poor scale with 23 people responding that they "don't know" how well the City performs at this service and an additional 13 that just left the question unanswered. Once again Animal Control scored well at 76.3% favorable, but there were three comments specifically about cats, and one other generally about people keeping track of their animals. We also had four comments about the need to improve street maintenance.

The scores over all are very good. The fact that four of eleven services received over 90% favorable opinions and four more received overall favorable rankings shows that overall citizens seem pleased with city services. The questions are similar to questions that cities have been using for years. Since we did not pay for the national survey and the national benchmarks, it is not possible to make exact comparisons, but Centralia services score higher than average. The percent of favorable responses for snow removal, although relatively low at 64% is about the

national average while the Electric Service at 95.8% is very high, nationally about 75% favorable is average.

Sidewalk Maintenance

In both the 2014 and 2015 surveys, sidewalk maintenance was rated lower than any of the other services. At the retreat of the Board of Aldermen in November of 2014 staff was directed to ask additional questions about the citizens priorities for sidewalk maintenance. We asked if they walked for exercise and if the condition of the city sidewalks affected their choices about where and if to walk. Finally we asked if citizens knew that the Centralia City Code puts the responsibility for maintaining a sidewalk on the property owner and if respondents knew that the City offers an assistance program.

Because the handwritten survey did not sufficiently force the respondent to rank the possible answers from 1 to 4 or even 1 to 6 with two additional priorities, it is difficult to score this section. No matter how the scores are analyzed, however, it is clear that repairing damaged sidewalks is the highest priority. The 20 online surveys did force a 1-4 ranking and 11 of the 20 ranked it as the #1 priority. The average rank was 2.00 for the 20 online surveys. Forty-four of the respondents that turned in paper surveys did rank from 1 -4 and two respondents added a fifth under other and ranked 1-5. Of these 46, exactly half ranked fixing “Broken sidewalks that should be fixed,” as the top priority. The average rank for all 66 who ranked 1-4 or 1-5 are shown below.

All surveys (on-line or paper) that ranked at least four distinct priorities (N=66)

	Broken sidewalks that should be fixed	Broken sidewalks that should be removed	Gaps in the sidewalks in neighborhoods	Gaps in the sidewalks on major roads
Priority 1	34	12	8	14
Priority 2	17	18	22	8
Priority 3	11	19	18	18
Priority 4	4	16	17	25
Priority 5	0	1	1	0
Weighted Average	1.77	2.64	2.71	2.74

Of the 87 respondents to the hard copy version of the survey that indicated a clear set of priorities, 46 placed fixing broken sidewalks as the top priority. When you include the online surveys 57 of 107 listed fixing broken sidewalks as the highest priority. A clear set of priorities means those that checked one item (which was scored as a Priority 1), or only assigned a 1, 2 or 3 to one selection.

One way to analyze the data was to give 5 “priority points” for a priority rank of 1, down to 1 point for a priority rank of 5, with the understanding that 41 of 87 paper surveys did not clearly indicate more than three priorities. Looking only at the paper surveys “Broken sidewalks that

should be fixed” is still clearly the favorite (334), but fixing the gaps in the neighborhood sidewalks moves in to second place (213) followed by “Broken sidewalks that should be removed” (190) and “Gaps in the sidewalk system on major roads” (172). When the on-line surveys that forced a 1-4 ranking are added priorities 2 – 4 are difficult to determine (below).

Priority points for all surveys

	Broken sidewalks that should be fixed	Broken sidewalks that should be removed	Gaps in the sidewalks in neighborhoods	Gaps in the sidewalks on major roads
Priority 1	57	14	13	20
Priority 2	21	26	28	10
Priority 3	13	19	20	19
Priority 4	4	16	17	25
Priority 5	0	1	1	0
Priority Points (#1 rank = 5 pts, #5 rank = 1 pt)	416	264	272	247

Fifteen respondents on paper listed other priorities or other comments. Three people suggested that the City should be involved in snow removal at some level. Two respondents encouraged better ADA accessibility, and other comments included listing trees pushing up sidewalks should be a chief concern and one person listed “need walking/bike path around the City” as his/her top priority.

When asked if people walk for exercise at least once per week, 70 of 106 respondents chose “Yes” (only 10 of 20 online). Of those seventy, 50 respondents said that their route is affected by sidewalks, 18 said, “No,” and 2 didn’t answer that question. Of the 36 who did not walk for exercise, ten said that the condition of the sidewalks was at least partially to blame, 19 indicated the condition of sidewalks did not make a difference and seven didn’t answer.

Finally we asked if citizens knew that sidewalk maintenance was the responsibility of the property owner (by Centralia City Code section 30-47). Overall 103 respondents (20 online) answered the question with 55 (10 online) indicating “Yes” (they knew property owners had that responsibility) and 48 (10 online) indicated that they did not know that. The final question asked if respondents were aware that the City had an program to assist with the cost of repairs. Only 26 (5 online) were aware and 77 (15 online) reported that they were not aware of the assistance program.

Recycling questions

In the 2014 survey 24 of 122 respondents marked “Don’t Know” on their evaluation of the City’s Recycling Service and an additional four that left it blank. This summer we studied participation rate and found that fewer than one in six households put recyclable at the curb on either of two

weeks when the City intern observed set out rates. Danielle Sims (or her mother during volleyball camp) rode the route for two full weeks in the recycling truck recording how many houses set out for recycling for each block. Because survey data indicated a lack of understanding of the program, and direct observation showed us we had low weekly participation rates, we included three additional questions about recycling.

We asked if people currently set recyclables out curbside for City pickup. On the paper survey a space was provided, but spaces for “Yes” and “No” were not included, but the online survey forced a Yes/No choice. Results for online, paper and total respondents were Yes – 7 online, 34 paper and 41 total; No – 13 online, 28 paper and 41 total. Clearly the 82 people who answered yes or no report a MUCH higher participation rate than observed.

We then asked two questions targeted to those who did not use the City’s system currently, but it is not clear that is how paper surveys were completed. Ninety-six responses were submitted on paper and thirteen online to the question of what would increase their participation. Again the question was only offered online to those who said that they did not recycle, but paper surveys indicate some who do recycle answered they question. The survey allowed respondents to choose more than one option and did not ask them to prioritize.

The most popular response was to add a recycling container. In the current system, however, that would mean either five or six containers per household or some kind of container with multiple compartments that could be individually tipped into the city’s recycling dumpsters pulled by a trailer. In a simpler sorting process, a cart might be a viable idea.

What would increase the chance of your household participating in recycling	
A recycling cart	59
Not having to sort as much	47
More/better info	27
Nothing, I'm not going to use curbside recycling	20
Other	10

We also asked why people didn’t participate. A summary of the answers (and the number of time similar answers were given) are seen below. The number in parenthesis is the number of similar or identical responses. Generally speaking, 27 people either felt the program was too complicated or found hauling their recyclables to another location (usually Columbia by the comments) easier than curbside recycling.

If you do not currently set out recyclables for curbside pickup by the City, why not?

Too complicated, too much sorting, no room for storage (14)	Wasn't collected or recyclables thrown away (6)	Need to take more items (2)
Don't want to/too lazy/too hard (14)	Want a cart, lack a container (5)	New to town (2)
Take the material elsewhere (13)	Positive comments (4)	Want a dropoff location (1)
Didn't know/understand (11)	Participate sometimes (2)	Physically unable to recyclables (1)
Don't have enough recyclable material (8)	Bi-weekly collection makes it hard (2)	Opposes the "Green Movement" (1)
<i>Multiple reasons (8). Each was also individually recorded</i>		

We then asked if the City were to add an additional material to the collection mixed paper was far and away the favorite. Since the City trailer has six containers, and since we can now combine all glass, there is a potential for adding a new item. If we keep the current system, we could add mixed paper and if the survey is a good representation of popular opinion, we could increase our diversion rate.

Material to be added to the recycling program	
SOP sorted office paper	3
OCC (Old corrugated cardboard)	60
Mixed paper	91

Finally we asked how people would react if we switched to a two-bag comingled (one for cans, plastics and glass, and one for paper and one for newspaper, office paper and OCC and cereal boxes) system. We offered five options online and on paper, but once again people "colored outside the lines" and so we counted these additional options. Some respondents that submitted paper surveys indicated that they weren't sure or said that they didn't care, they would recycle either way.

These results coupled with the responses that indicate that too much sorting is a problem, suggest that the City should pursue a comingled system. Of the 157 responses, both on paper and online, 58.7% indicated that a comingled system would encourage them to recycle. Only 18.5% said that they would not like the change, and three respondents said that they would actually stop participating. The Mid-Missouri Solid Waste Management District offers grant money for waste reduction. These data suggest that submitting a grant for a two-hopper recycling truck (one for fiber materials and one for plastic, glass, aluminum and bimetal cans) to facilitate the switch to a

two-bag system is a good idea. We already have at least one outlet for such a program at the City of Columbia and possibly others.

If the city went to a two-bag recycling system to make collection more efficient which best describes your reaction?

Response	Total	Online responses only
Yawn, I'm not recycling anyway	24	4
I'd prefer that and recycle more	57	4
I'd prefer that and start recycling	34	6
I'd still recycle, but I wouldn't like it	29	5
I'd stop recycling	2	0
DON'T KNOW*	7	0
I'd still recycle – no change*	3	0

** not an option for online.*

One item that came up in the recycling survey both in the open response to question 2b (If you don't recycle, why not) and in general comments was the desire to add a drop off location. Past experience in Centralia has been that a drop off location is a place for general dumping of garbage, tires, and even animal carcasses. Still, if a location could be found, it seems that the container would be used by some.

CONCLUSIONS

More people participated in this year's survey. We received 182 responses on paper (either hand delivered or mailed) on time and an additional three after we tabulated the data, compared to 122 last year. We also had 20 people respond on line. This is despite having a longer and more complicated survey. This could indicate that people are beginning to trust the City's process.

Generally speaking people are satisfied with City utilities and the police and animal control. The City does need to address issues with our sidewalks, as it scored the lowest two years in a row. The City will also need to improve on our nuisance abatement. Nuisance abatement, however, covers several areas and perhaps more questions are needed to parse out if people are dissatisfied with building code enforcement, weed and brush control enforcement, enforcement of other nuisances or a combination.

The responses to where to prioritize sidewalk repair is somewhat unclear except that repairing existing sidewalks is the top priority. We did learn that many respondents walk and they want better sidewalks. The respondents were split between filling in gaps on major roads or filling in

gaps in neighborhoods. We also learned that half of those responding do not know that they are responsible for maintaining the sidewalk in front of their house. This might be even lower among the people that did not respond to the survey. Even fewer knew that the City had a program to assist with sidewalk repairs.

We asked citizens, “Do you currently set out recyclables for curbside pickup by the City?” Half of respondents said they did (34 of 66 on paper and 7 of 16 online). Perhaps people want to recycle and occasionally do and so they reported they recycled. Perhaps the people who recycle are the more civically minded and therefore more likely to respond to surveys, but empirical evidence shows that about 12% or 193 households. Perhaps people think recycling is good and *want* to be recyclers even if they don’t. The data show that providing carts and simplifying the system would gain the most new participants. The idea of going to a two-bag or dual-stream recycling system seemed to have support, and it would work well with the City of Columbia’s Material Recovery Facility where we are currently taking most of our collected materials. The data also indicate that more information about our recycling program is needed.

In conclusion the City of Centralia would like to thank the citizens who responded to the survey. The data were discussed at the retreat and will have an impact on policy decisions. We are looking at sending out an RFP for sidewalk construction and increasing our expenditures in FY2017. The City will be applying for a grant from the Mid-Missouri Solid Waste Management District to purchase a truck with a two-chambered compactor, or split-hopper truck to allow us to move to a more efficient and simpler recycling program.

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

Survey	EXCL	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	DON'T KNOW	BLANK	COMPLETED	Excl/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Responses	Opinions	Favorable Opinion*
5.GarbageCol	103	85	4	0	2	8	202	188	4	194	192	97.9%
6.Water	95	90	12	0	2	3	202	185	12	199	197	93.9%
8.Electric	96	91	11	2	1	1	202	187	13	201	200	93.5%
7.Sewer	90	82	14	2	7	7	202	172	16	195	188	91.5%
1.Police	65	80	25	2	11	19	202	145	27	183	172	84.3%
2.AnimalControl	62	87	20	11	19	3	202	149	31	199	180	82.8%
10.StreetLight	44	102	38	13	1	4	202	146	51	198	197	74.1%
9.SnowRemoval	35	82	44	20	10	11	202	117	64	191	181	64.6%
3.NuisAbate	14	63	55	34	23	13	202	77	89	189	166	46.4%
11.StormDrain	17	66	47	47	10	15	202	83	94	187	187	44.4%
4.SidewlkMnt	9	47	60	64	17	5	202	56	124	197	180	31.1%

Continued from above

Survey	Responses	favorable response	don't know%	TOTAL AVG.	ONLINE AVG.
5.GarbageCol	194	96.91%	1.03%	1.484	1.90
6.Water	199	92.96%	1.01%	1.579	1.90
8.Electric	201	93.03%	0.50%	1.595	1.90
7.Sewer	195	88.21%	3.59%	1.617	1.95
1.Police	183	79.23%	6.01%	1.791	2.42
2.AnimalControl	199	74.87%	9.55%	1.889	2.00
10.StreetLight	198	73.74%	0.51%	2.102	2.40
9.SnowRemoval	191	61.26%	5.24%	2.271	3.00
3.NuisAbate	189	40.74%	12.17%	2.657	3.00
11.StormDrain	187	44.39%	5.35%	2.556	2.90
4.SidewlkMnt	197	28.43%	8.63%	2.994	3.10



City of Centralia Citizen Survey

Please complete and return to City Hall by Friday, October 30, 2015



❖ 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. Police Department Services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Animal Control	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Nuisance Abatement (weeds/unlicensed vehicles, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Sidewalk Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Garbage Collection (solid waste)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Water Services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Sewer Services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Electric Services	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Snow Removal	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Street Lighting	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. Storm Drainage	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Last year the responses indicated that citizens were not happy with the City sidewalks so the next questions are about sidewalks:

1. Please rate the problems with the Centralia sidewalk system.

Use 1 to indicate the highest priority the City to address in your opinion, 2 the highest priority and so on.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Broken sidewalks that should be fixed | <input type="checkbox"/> Broken sidewalks that should be removed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gaps in the sidewalk system in neighborhoods | <input type="checkbox"/> Gaps in the sidewalk system on major roads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (_____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (_____) |

2. Do you walk for exercise at least once per week? Yes No
- a. If you **do**, is your route affected by the condition of City sidewalks? Yes No
- b. If you **don't** walk for exercise weekly, is the condition of the sidewalks partly to blame? Yes No
3. Did you know that sidewalk maintenance is the responsibility of the *PROPERTY OWNER*? Yes No
4. Did you know that the City has a program to assist with the cost of repairing sidewalks? Yes No

RECYCLING QUESTIONS

The City is considering making some changes to the bi-weekly curbside recycling program.

1. Do you currently set out recyclables for curbside pickup by the City?
- a. If **not**, why not? _____
- b. If **not**, what, if anything, would increase the chance you would participate? **Check all that apply**
- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A recycling cart | <input type="checkbox"/> More/better info | <input type="checkbox"/> Not having to sort it as much (co-mingled) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (_____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing. I'm not going to use curbside recycling. | |
2. If the City adds another material to be collected, my first choice (**select only one**) would be:
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Cardboard (boxes-OCC) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed paper (OCC + office + news + cereal boxes) |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
3. If the city went to a two-bag recycling system to make collection more efficient which best describes your reaction? Yawn, I'm not recycling either way. I'd prefer that and maybe recycle more.
- I'd prefer that and start recycling. I'd still recycle, but I wouldn't like it. I'd stop recycling.