

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON FEBRUARY 5, 2013
FROM:	ART ZUIDEMA CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT:	COMMUNITY PULSE CHECK

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the City Manager, the following report on community perceptions in London **BE RECEIVED** for information.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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- None.

BACKGROUND

City Council and Civic Administration regularly engage with Londoners to better understand their perceptions of and aspirations for our community. This understanding is a critical input that shapes the policies and programs of the City of London. Understanding our community enables us to ensure that the work we do adds value to Londoners.

The City of London uses a variety of tools to better understand our community, including community engagement processes, focus groups, satisfaction surveys, general service feedback, social media interaction, and demographic analysis.

For the first time in 2012, Civic Administration engaged a research firm, Environics, to conduct a citizen perception survey to “get the pulse of Londoners.” Many large municipalities undertake similar surveys on a regular basis. Administration partnered with other municipalities in this work to reduce costs.

London’s results from this survey are attached as Appendix A. The survey was conducted late 2012 to 500 Londoners seeking general perceptions of the economy, municipal services and overall quality of life. The survey sample was controlled for demographic and other variables, and based on the sample size relative to London’s size, is considered to provide 95% confidence that it is representative of the London population.

Administration reviewed the results of the Environics survey in the context of other surveys, studies, feedback through engagement processes, and other information sources from the past year that focused on London. The objective of this work was to obtain a more holistic understanding of Londoners; specifically, to understand their perceptions of and aspirations for our community.

This report provides a few general observations from the results of the survey. These

observations are provided for consideration only, and are not exhaustive of the survey results.

Londoners enjoy a high quality of life.

The survey results demonstrate that Londoners enjoy a high quality of life. When asked to rate the quality of life in London, 77% of respondents considered it to be 'good' or 'excellent'. An additional 21% view the quality of life as 'fair' with only 2% describing it as 'poor'. A Statistics Canada survey (2011) provides an even more favourable perspective, with 93.6% of Londoners being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with life in London.

When asked what factors have the greatest impact on quality of life, the top replies were: good local services, quality of and access to food and clean water, a strong economy, a low cost of living, available and affordable housing, a low crime rate, and a strong sense of community.

However, the survey results indicate that 28% of Londoners believe the quality of life has declined over the past two years while only 13% believe that it has improved.

Other comparative studies such as the Macleans *Best Places to Live* rankings also demonstrate that London offers a high quality of life. London consistently ranks among the top cities in Ontario.

Londoners are clear on what they like about their city.

When asked about the most appealing aspects of London, the top responses included parks and open spaces, location and being close to amenities, "close knit" or high community spirit, safety, excellent schools, clean, and "just the right size".

The ability to walk to important locations, and parks and open spaces, were by far the most common responses when asked about what factors have the greatest impact on the vitality of neighbourhoods.

The state of the economy is a significant concern for citizens.

When asked what is the most important local issue facing London, almost half replied the economy and unemployment. Further, almost half (46%) of Londoners believe the economy is getting weaker. More than half (55%) say their personal financial situation is about the same as it was six months ago. Half (50%) of Londoners expect their personal financial situation to stay the same over the next year, while 32% expect it to get better and 18% expect it to get worse.

It is important to note that the timing of the survey is particularly important. When the survey was conducted, London's unemployment rate had received recent media attention. This may inflate the number to some degree, but the result still demonstrates that the economy is a concern for Londoners.

Londoners are generally satisfied with City of London services.

In 2012, Metro News conducted an independent survey of Londoners to assess satisfaction with the City of London's services. The survey showed that Londoners are generally satisfied with municipal services. The largest number of survey respondents gave London's services a 7 or 8 out of 10 when asked about overall satisfaction.

The Environics survey showed that Londoners are also generally satisfied when they access City of London services. 81% of respondents who had used a service reported that they “received what they needed” in accessing a City service.

Overall citizens report a positive experience with City staff, with most saying that staff were courteous, they were treated fairly, and staff were knowledgeable and competent. Some individual service areas also conduct regular satisfaction surveys which overall demonstrate positive results.

Perceptions aside, the performance of the City of London’s services consistently rank positively when compared to peer municipalities. In the most recent Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI) report, which measures city services across 16 municipalities, London’s services were on par or better than those in peer municipalities in 75% of service areas.

Many Londoners are unaware of what services the City of London provides.

One of the more concerning results from the survey is that almost half of Londoners do not identify that they access City of London services. When asked if they have used a local government service in the past year, only 54% of respondents said ‘yes’. Presumably, close to – if not all – Londoners access City of London services on a daily basis in drinking water, driving on roads, riding buses, using street signs, garbage pickup, etc.

When asked what is the most important thing that local government does for them, the second most common response (21%) was ‘I don’t know’. This demonstrates that there is room for improvement in building an understanding in the community of what services the City of London provides.

Londoners believe they receive value for their tax dollar, but are divided on their perceptions about taxation.

Londoners generally believe that they receive value for their tax dollar. 61% of Londoners believe they receive ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’ value. 33% describe the value for tax dollar as ‘fairly poor’ and 7% describe the value as ‘very poor’.

When asked about increasing taxes or cutting services, Londoners were fairly evenly divided into four categories: 28% would like to cut existing services to maintain taxes, 27% would like to increase taxes to maintain services, 22% would like to increase taxes to expand or improve services, 21% would like to cut existing services to reduce taxes.

It is important to note that this survey was conducted prior to the release of any of the 2013 budget documentation, so it does not reflect specific opinions from Londoners about the 2013 budget.

There is room for improvement in how Londoners feel overall about their local government.

When asked if they are satisfied with local government in London, 4% report being ‘very satisfied’, 42% report being ‘somewhat satisfied’, 41% report being ‘dissatisfied’ and 13% report

being very dissatisfied. Additional survey work could be undertaken to further understand the sources of dissatisfaction.

Londoners are invested in our community, and are willing to contribute to its future.

There are many positive indicators that show that Londoners are engaged and invested in the future of the city. The participation in ReThink London is an excellent example. This is the largest planning engagement process in Canada, because of the high level of involvement from Londoners. Other broad community engagement processes such as Age Friendly London, the London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy and other landmark initiatives have put London on the map as an active and engaged community. Recent initiatives such as the Julian Campaign are initiating community discussions about the value of municipal services.

There are also many engagement processes that have been initiated independently of the City of London. Initiatives such as Hack the Vote, Pints & Politics, the London Youth Advisory Council, and so many other community efforts aim to engage citizens in local government. Engagement on social media engagement is also continuing to increase rapidly. In the past five months, there have been over 100,000 tweets using the #ldnont hashtag by over 10,000 Twitter users. Together these are encouraging signs that Londoners are invested in their community and its future.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding citizens' perceptions of and aspirations for our community enables us to ensure that the City of London continues to create value for Londoners in the services that we provide. The Senior Leadership Team and Operations Management Team have reviewed the survey results to build an understanding about the perceptions of Londoners within all service areas.

The survey identifies a number of areas for improvement and future monitoring, and work is underway in effort to address the issues raised. Council recently approved the Service London Implementation Plan which identifies strategies to improve how the City of London provides customer services, and includes regular surveying to measure improvement over time.

Conducting perception and satisfaction surveys on a periodic basis will assist in understanding citizens' perceptions of and aspirations for our community understanding, and to show changes and improvement over time. Regular reports will be provided to Council as this work proceeds.

PREPARED BY:	RECOMMENDED BY:
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cc. Senior Leadership Team
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