

City survey respondents encourage development

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Content

The city of Lancaster recently shared the results of its Comprehensive Plan Survey with City Council at its July 25 meeting.

A total of 356 responses were recorded, which is about 4% of the city's total population. Jason Epley, president of Benchmark Planning in Charlotte, presented the data to council.

Results

Survey respondents were made up of city residents (42%), city property owners (21%), city employees or city business owners (44%) and non-city residents (39%). About 60% of respondents were ages 25-64.

The survey asked several different short answer and multiple-choice questions, including but not limited to top concerns, pace of growth, availability of transportation, city aesthetic appearance and opinions on city services.

The biggest consensus amongst respondents was the desire for more public parks and recreation spaces in terms of development, which 70% voted for. Only 3% of respondents voted that recreation parks and open spaces "are excellent," 41% agreed they are "adequate to meet my needs" and 56% voted that "more options and amenities are needed."

Nearly 60% voted that their quality of life in the city is "average," 7% said it is "high" and 36% said it is "low." The top five concerns in chronological order are crime, growth and development, parks and recreation, housing affordability and schools and education.

While other areas of the county, like Indian Land, often receive negative reviews of the explosive growth in developments, 57% of city of Lancaster respondents voted that overall growth is "too slow." Sixty-nine% also voted that the aesthetic appearance in the city "needs a

lot of improvement.”

Public services, like the fire and police departments, water/sewer/utilities and sanitation and garbage pickup, received high praise. But street and sidewalk maintenance was a different story, with 68% being unhappy with sidewalk maintenance across the city.

Council plans for future

City Council already had several action items in the works, even before the survey results were presented.

“I think it’s so very important that community engagement determines how we want to develop our community in the future, because if you live in a community that you love, you want it to look good,” said Councilwoman Jackie Harris.

Lancaster Mayor Alston DeVenny even joked about the survey not including a question to gauge support on raising city taxes to meet the various items requested.

Council began addressing the sidewalk issues at its Feb. 14 meeting, when Keck and Wood Engineering presented the Sidewalk Master Plan. The project will install new sidewalks on East Arch Street from the fire station to Glenwood Avenue. The project will cost roughly \$600,000, and funding will come from a \$500,000 grant, along with \$188,000 from the city engineering fund.

The downtown revitalization project mentioned in several council meetings aims to tackle abandoned Main Street storefronts. Marketing and development manager Alize Thomas presented council with the downtown rehabilitation grant program at the July 25 meeting, which hopes to “encourage and support building and business owner investment in the upgrade of existing buildings.”

Council also voted to fund the renovation of the Municipal Justice Center Park next to the Lancaster Police Department at the March 14 meeting. The renovation will cost about \$1.5 million and aims to make the park more accessible to all children, especially those with disabilities.

Along with sidewalk concerns, Harris in particular has brought up concerns about poor road and sidewalk conditions in her area, District 3. Harris said she has both reached out to appropriate parties to ensure they are aware of problem areas, and publicly advocated for accessible walkways to be prioritized. She has said that the lack of sidewalks on the S.C. 9 Bypass forces many pedestrians to attempt to cross four lanes of fast-moving traffic.

Councilwoman Tomonica Marsh shared that she had learned that a community member attempted to ride his bike over a rough patch of sidewalk, before falling over and hitting his head, prompting a safety concern.

What’s next?

The city’s comprehensive plan has four next steps. First, a draft plan for meeting suggested goals is in the draft process through August.

The Planning Commission will hold workshops in September and possibly October.

There will be a public meeting to review the draft plan in October and the adoption process will take place from November to January 2024.

“We’d like to be able to hear from people in an open discussion,” DeVenny said. “It’s one reason you get into politics, is you have some vision for where you want the community to be.”