

Chapter 2: Community Values





Community Values

Survey Results

The Mt. Vernon Comprehensive Plan was made available to the public beginning in early January of 2009. The goal of the surveying process was to determine how the general public feels about the current condition of the City of Mt. Vernon and what it should focus on in its Comprehensive Plan.

Residents were given two different options to participate in the surveying process. First, they were given the opportunity to access the survey via the internet on the City of Mt. Vernon's webpage. The second option was to obtain a hard copy of the survey at a number of different locations around the City, including: Kroger's, Rose Lane, C.E. Brehm Library, the Muni West Building, City Hall, and at the Downtown Development Corporation's building. Residents were also able to drop off their completed surveys to these same locations, in addition to the Times Square Mall.

The results and replies obtained from the surveys proved to be very beneficial. By collecting the surveys and tabulating and organizing the results, many areas of concern among citizens were brought to the attention of the members of the Comprehensive Plan sub-committees.

The following are some of the themes that became evident when analyzing the responses given. There are also specific examples of some of the questions and answers that helped identify what the residents value in the City of Mt. Vernon, and what issues they would like to see addressed in the future and in the Comprehensive Plan.



Theme #1 - Desire for more jobs in Mt. Vernon

One of the first themes that presented itself was the apparent lack of jobs in the City of Mt. Vernon. Many of the participants in the survey agreed that the lack of employment opportunities in general was the most common obstacle when seeking employment. Others felt that the jobs offered do not match the applicants education level, or that there were not enough professional jobs being offered.

Question #12		
What do you believe are the MOST common obstacles individuals encounter when seeking employment in Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Lack of educational opportunities to acquire skill level for local jobs	14.3%	26
Lack of employment opportunities in general	84.1%	153
Lack of jobs matching education level	45.1%	82
Lack of jobs matching experience	24.2%	44
Lack of professional jobs	33.0%	60
Poor health benefits offered with jobs	20.9%	38
Poor retirement benefits offered with jobs	7.7%	14
Travel long distances for adequate work/play	23.1%	42
There are no employment obstacles	0.0%	0
Other	6.0%	11

The desire for more job opportunities presented itself further in the survey as well. In a later question, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the most influential area of economic development the City could address is the attraction of new businesses, which in turn would lead to the creation of more jobs. However, not only did participants indicate a desire for the creation of more jobs, they also pointed out that it was important to retain the businesses currently located within the City.

Question #15		
Which of the following ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT areas do you feel is the most influential to the City of Mt. Vernon? (check no more than TWO choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Improving skills of local workforce	28.8%	53
Attracting new businesses	78.3%	144
Retaining current businesses	62.0%	114
Promoting more tourist-related activities	17.9%	33
Other	1.6%	3

Another question also revealed that the participants wanted more job opportunities. In an infrastructure-related question, participants felt that the future expansion/development of roads for retail, business, industrial growth and job development was the most important transportation infrastructure project the City could address. In particular, the expansion of roadways around the new I-57 interchange could lead to more commercial and industrial job opportunities.

Question #18		
Which TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS do you feel are the most important for Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Residential street upgrading	55.7%	103
Main/arterial road upgrading	38.9%	72
Sidewalk upgrading	45.9%	85
Pedestrian & bicycle paths	43.8%	81
Future expansion/development of roads for retail, business, industrial growth and job development	63.8%	118
Other	5.4%	10

Not only are the residents of Mt. Vernon asking for more job opportunities, they are seeking more high-paying jobs as well. In Question #7 from the survey, participants were asked to select from a list of general issues which were the three most important to them. The top two responses were both related to the lack of applicable job opportunities in the area. The number one concern was the attraction and development of new business and/or industry, which again would lead to the creation of new jobs. The second most popular response was the attraction of more high-paying jobs for some of the more qualified residents of Mt. Vernon.

Question #7		
Which of the following general issues are the most important to Mt. Vernon's future? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Attract high-paying jobs	44.9%	83
Attract/development of new business and industry	78.9%	146
Grow in population	16.2%	30
Manage the location of new development	10.3%	19
Market the City's assets	9.2%	17
Preserve its history	9.2%	17
Provide/enhance recreational opportunities	33.0%	61
Provide recycling programs	9.7%	18
Quality health care	17.3%	32
Quality telecommunications, internet service, and broadband	6.5%	12
Quality streets and roads (update old and develop new)	21.6%	40
Quality water and sewer (update old and develop new)	8.6%	16
Quality sanitation (trash pickup)	1.6%	3
Retain and bring back our youth to live here	17.8%	33
Variety of housing types for all ages	7.0%	13
Other	20.0%	37



Theme #2 - Desire for more youth activities in Mt. Vernon

A second theme that arose from the survey results was the lack of youth activities available to the teen and pre-teen citizens of Mt. Vernon. Currently it appears the main activities that most children participate in, outside of school functions, are 1) Going to the roller skating rink, 2) Hanging out at the mall/shopping, 3) Bowling, or 4) Going to the movies. Our participants felt that these activities alone are not enough to keep children/teenagers off the streets and out of trouble and that the City needs to provide more opportunities to keep kids entertained.

Question #26		
Which of the following do you feel are important HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES for Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Provide youth services that guide children towards good behaviors	64.6%	115
Quality local health care facilities	56.7%	101
Educate the public on health issues	17.4%	31
Reduce chronic and acute community conditions (smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, etc.)	32.6%	58
Easy access to human services (counseling, treatment, emergency housing, etc.)	54.5%	97
Other	10.1%	18

Along with Question #26 and its responses, Question #24 further emphasizes the need to educate the youth of Mt. Vernon about public safety and awareness. By creating more positive opportunities and activities for the youth, the City of Mt. Vernon would be giving its children and teenagers something to occupy their free time while at the same time educating them on various safety issues and concerns.

Question #24		
Which of the following do you feel is important to PUBLIC SAFETY AND AWARENESS in Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Develop pro-active public safety strategies (stop crime before it happens (police/fire safety))	40.8%	73
Provide adequate funding and staffing for public safety departments	34.6%	62
Educate and involve the public and students on the process of public safety	24.6%	44
Create more positive opportunities and activities for youth	50.8%	91
Respond time of 5 minutes or less in all areas of the city for fire and police	30.2%	54
Decrease the number of repeat offenders	49.7%	89
Quality fire protection	9.5%	17
Quality medical emergency service	15.1%	27
Quality ambulance service	6.7%	12
Other	3.9%	7

As a solution to the lack of youth activities available in Mt. Vernon, the participants agreed that offering an athletic complex for all ages would be a nice way to offer children and teenagers alternative forms of entertainment, while at the same time giving them a place to exercise and expend energy. Along with the results of Question #25 on the following page, many residents chose to mention the need for a recreation center in the final, open-response question of the survey:

“A new rec center can bring recreational activities, keep kids out of trouble, bring money to Mt. Vernon, focus on positive things, hold conferences and expos to help build up community and attractions for newcomers to our area.”

In addition to the desire for an athletic complex for all ages, the participants indicated a strong aspiration for quality park facilities and a convention center. Also high on the list of recreational and cultural activities important to the citizens of Mt. Vernon are the preservation and protection of natural, cultural, and historic resources for future generations, and the desire for the City to provide inclusive, diverse, inviting, and inspiring recreational and cultural activities and opportunities for all residents.

Question #25		
Which of the following do you feel are important RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES for Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Preserve and protect natural, cultural, and historic resources for future generations	34.2%	63
Provide inclusive, diverse, inviting, and inspiring recreational and cultural activities and opportunities for all residents	34.8%	64
Foster year around community entertainment activities	31.5%	58
Develop a convention center	37.0%	68
Provide more tourist attractions in the City	19.6%	36
Provide an athletic complex for all ages	46.7%	86
Provide more historical attractions	5.4%	10
Provide specialty shopping	20.1%	37
Provide quality park facilities	37.5%	69
Other	4.3%	8



Theme #3 - Desire for improved living conditions

A third theme that presented itself in the survey results was the desire for improved living facilities in the City of Mt. Vernon. On more than one occasion was there mention for a need of upgraded utilities or services offered. In Question #20, participants indicated that they would like to see the basic transportation infrastructure system maintained and expanded. In particular, the roads, streets, and sidewalks were of main concern. Along with that, providing reliable utility services came in second on this question.

Question #20		
In your opinion, which of the following QUALITY OF LIFE PROJECTS are the most important for Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Need for broadband/fiber optic lines	20.5%	38
Create better transportation networks (get where you want to go faster)	31.4%	58
Maintain and/or expand railway and airport facilities	15.1%	28
Maintain and expand roads, streets, and sidewalks	63.2%	117
Improve traffic safety	17.3%	32
Provide and maintain accessible City park/green space	31.9%	59
Provide reliable utility services (water, sewer, cable, electric, gas, phone, internet)	43.8%	81
Provide recycling facilities	22.2%	41
Provide bike trails	19.5%	36
Other	8.6%	16

Question #22 also proved that the participants wanted an increased quality of living within the City. Creating attractive neighborhoods and creating/enforcing maintenance codes for rental properties tied for the most important aspects of housing in Mt. Vernon. Not far behind these two, though, was the necessity to provide quality housing for all income levels. Creating affordable housing turned out to be a key focus for the Quality of Life sub-committee as well. Question #21 gave further indication that the City needs more restrictive housing codes, both rental and owner-occupied housing.

Question #22		
Which of the following do you feel are important to Mt. Vernon's future in HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS? (check no more than THREE)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Enforce housing codes	37.0%	68
Provide training on how to be a successful homeowner or renter	12.0%	22
Develop strong neighborhood associations	27.2%	50
Provide quality housing for all income levels	42.4%	78
Create attractive neighborhoods	47.3%	87
Work with neighborhood associations to improve quality of life	19.6%	36
Increase home ownership	18.5%	34
Maintenance codes for rental property	47.3%	87
Maintenance codes for resale homes	10.9%	20
Other	6.0%	11

Question #21				
Which of the following HOUSING/BUSINESS CODES do you feel is the most important for Mt. Vernon? (check no more than THREE choices)				
Answer Options	Less-restrictive codes	No change	More-restrictive codes	Response Count
Owner-occupied housing	18	42	57	117
Rental housing	9	20	96	125
Business	32	35	25	92
Other				68

Not only is the aesthetic look and feel of neighborhoods important to the residents of Mt. Vernon, their safety is also of great concern. When asked what the most important aspect of their ideal neighborhood was, 72% of the participants mentioned that safety is their number one concern. Many of the student surveys indicated the same. From the results of Question #7 from the Grade School Survey, 65% of the children indicated that safety is the number one most important aspect of their ideal neighborhood. Similarly, from Question #14 from the High School Survey, 66% of the teenagers pointed out that safety is the number one aspect of their ideal neighborhood as well. In short, a safe neighborhood is important to and affects every age group in the City of Mt. Vernon. Parents want to know that their children will be safe when playing outside and kids want to know that they can go outside and play without putting themselves in any sort of danger.

Question #27		
Which is the most important to your IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD? (check no more than THREE choices)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Safety	72.0%	134
Neighborhood parks	7.0%	13
Good local schools	53.8%	100
Housing affordability (using no more than 30% of your income on housing costs)	16.1%	30
Resale value of housing	11.3%	21
Pedestrian connectivity (good sidewalk system)	16.7%	31
High levels of home ownership	12.4%	23
Well maintained houses and yards	43.0%	80
Good public infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, lighting, etc.)	42.5%	79
Noise levels	10.2%	19
Other	4.8%	9



The Residents of Mt. Vernon...

- Place an extremely high emphasis on safety within their neighborhoods
- Are concerned about the types of activities available for their children
- Are hardworking citizens that are seeking employment in a wide variety of industries
- Value education and quality educational facilities for all ages and abilities
- Desire more open spaces to enjoy the arts, entertainment, and outdoor recreation the City has to offer
- Are in need of more affordable housing to attract more residents to the City
- Value aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods and structurally sound environments
- Consider adequate infrastructure a must for future growth and expansion of the City