



MEMO

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Joseph A. Fivas

DATE: November 4, 2010

SUBJECT: Citizen Survey

Summary:

In March of 2010, the Mayor and Town Council established 'Goals and Initiatives' for the Town of Indian Trail. One of these 'Goals' were to conduct a 'Comprehensive Citizen Survey' to evaluate the needs, expectations, priorities, and the level of service that is provided for community residents. On September 28th, the Town Manager reported to the Town Council that staff was collecting information on potential consultants to prepare and implement a citizen survey. The Town Manager indicated that within the next few meetings he would have a recommendation for a consultant to perform this survey.

We feel it is important to complete this process in February so that this survey can be used for budget discussions. All of the consultants have indicated that it usually takes 12-14 weeks to complete these kinds of surveys. Therefore, time is of the essence to begin this process.

Process:

Town staff looked at eight consultants who currently, or in past, have done community surveying. Many of the consultants focus much of their business on survey work for private businesses. After the initial analysis, staff chose

three consultants to get bid quotes to write, collect information, and analyze the information for a comprehensive citizen survey. The three consultants selected were National Research Center, ETC Institute, and BKL Researching & Consulting. Town staff reviewed these proposals to determine who was going to provide the Town with the best service, the best product, and the most competitive price. We also wanted to make sure that the survey would be easy to read and to interpret for elected officials and citizens.

We are also aware that Council wanted staff to look at options that would allow for all community households to have a survey. We discussed this option with the consultants; they indicated that the advantage to doing this approach is to have more information. However, the big con is the meaningful cost increase. They indicated that the cost increase in almost every case offsets too greatly the benefit of the larger dataset, and that the publicity angle also isn't worth spending an additional \$20,000 to \$40,000. They indicated that probability sampling is a valuable tool at the disposal of survey researchers – it means that by sampling a relatively small percentage of all households, they can approximate quite closely what everyone thinks about community topics. In a way, it means that how many households are sampled is less important than how they are sampled. With 1,000 completed surveys returned from a well-drawn sample, your margin of error will be plus or minus 3 percentage points around your overall results for any one question. By contrast, 4,000 completed surveys have a margin of error of 1.5 percentage points – this can be a very expensive point and a half in precision.

Staff did receive some cost quotes for doing 11,500 households. The consultants we did request a cost quote from, we found that the costs did have a substantial increase. Due to these prohibitive costs; we followed the recommendations from these professional consultants on survey sample size to determine an overall cost for our quotes. If the Town Council would like to allocate resources for a larger survey size, all of the companies said they would be happy to work with the Town.

Cost Quotes for Survey:

All of these groups use a random sample size of approximately 400 to 600 returned surveys. They indicate this is appropriate sample size for our purposes.

National Research Center: Total Cost: \$21,800

Includes: one site visit and benchmark comparisons.

Website: <http://www.n-r-c.com/index.html>

ETC Institute: Total Cost: **\$15,650**

Includes: one site visit, GIS analysis, national and state benchmark comparisons, reports with formal summary & charts, and Importance-Satisfaction Results

Website: <http://www.etcinstitute.com/Default.aspx>

BKL Researching & Consulting: Total Cost: **\$18,900**

Includes: phone survey

Website: <http://www.bklresearch.com>

Recommendation:

After interviewing these consultants, reviewing their products, and evaluating the costs, staff and I recommend contracting with ***ETC Institute*** to perform our Town survey.

For our Town purposes, this group has the most comprehensive product, the easiest to review and analyze, it had great recommendations from other North Carolina communities, it has a GIS function which can give data based upon different neighbors (not just overall community), and has the best price.

ETC Institute ranked the best in all evaluated categories of the three consultants we choose to review.

Staff will give an overview of the ETC product at the Nov 9th Council meeting to review a sample of the product that the Town of Indian Trail would get from this purchase.

If this product is approved by the Town Council, staff will request issue areas from the Mayor and Town Council that could be incorporated into question areas in this document. Staff will work carefully with these experts to have them draft questions to survey citizens on these areas of interest. It is critical that this consultant be able to help us with drafting the appropriate questions. We hope to have this process completed in approximately 12-weeks so that the Mayor and Town Council can have this completed document in February for the beginning of budget discussions. Council will have the opportunity to review the survey before it is sent to community residents.

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