

population. In the random voter survey, which included multiple ballot questions, the survey results correlated with the voters' preferences on the questions. Legislators used this information to identify priorities and create programs in their next budget cycle.

Mr. Silvestro pointed out that there are many ways to do citizen surveys. Coordinating with census counts often yields high response rates. A community can structure the survey period to require a response with the census information, or to allow responses at different locations and according to different deadlines. Responses themselves can be counted by machine at the rate of 60,000 in three hours. One factor Cambridge needs to consider in coordinating its survey with the election is voter turnout; in 2000, only 8 percent of the Cambridge electorate voted in the primary.

Councillor Murphy stated that the 2000 election was not a good indicator for voter response and that the statistics for 1998, which was a presidential primary, would serve as a better baseline for voter turnout in the 2002 primary.

Councillor Maher asked if it is legal to conduct the survey at polling places on election day. Ms. Bonislowski and Ms. Neighbor responded that, according to their research with the Secretary of State, the city could not conduct the survey within polling places. The survey would have to be done outside the specific polling site. Surveys could be handed to voters exiting the polling place. The rule prohibiting activity within 150 feet of a polling place would not apply to a survey. Councillor Maher pointed out that this was important to know, since it indicated that the Bedford, New Hampshire model of conducting a survey within election sites would not work in Cambridge. Cambridge has 33 precincts and 28 polling sites; conducting a survey during the election would therefore require 28 additional set-ups on voting day.

Ms. Bonislowski stated that, since many polling places are located at public sites such as schools and Cambridge Housing Authority sites, conducting the survey in conjunction with the election would reach a broader population than just voters.

Councillor Maher asked about the possibility of including the survey in one of the mailings that the Election Commission will be sending out before each election to every voter household, perhaps with a request that voters bring the completed survey to the polls. This would require a change from the current postcard format used by the Election Commission to notify voters about their polling places, but it could be done. According to Ms. Bonislowski, the mailing would have to be done three weeks before the election, which for the primary means the week of August 25; to meet this deadline, the material would have to be ready for printing by the first week in August. In response to a question from Councillor Murphy, Mr. Rossi estimated that the cost would be about \$30-35,000 for the mailing.

Councillor Davis raised another possibility: running the survey simultaneously, once at the polls where people would get the survey and drop it off, and once through a mailing to every household.

Councillor Murphy asked what was done with the last citizen survey conducted approximately two years ago. Mr. Rossi said that there were three parts to that survey: (1) a number of facilitated community meetings held by the Government Operations Committee; (2) a statistically valid 15-minute in-depth phone survey of 400 residents that cost approximately \$17,000; and (3) a community mailing included as part of the biannual city newsletter sent to 50,000 residents, which resulted in 200 responses. At that time, it was agreed that the city would follow up with a resident survey and a report to the City Council every two years.

Councillor Maher recalled that in the previous goal-setting process, there were nine community meetings. Attendance was low, considering the large amount of effort by the city for a modest amount of feedback.

In response to a question from Ms. Bowdoin regarding the goals for the current survey, the group members stated their goals and discussed the differences between the prior and current surveys. Several members of the group raised the concern that the idea of the current survey was to reach a broader audience. Councillor Maher responded that the Council must set goals and hold city management accountable. As part of this process, the Council wants to know what the public thinks about city services. To get at this information, the Council needs to determine the level of inquiry that's necessary: a check-in, or an in-depth survey? If the surveys indicate dissatisfaction with some aspect of city service, that can become the focus for the Council. Having surveyed the residents once, the city does not need to begin the process all over again, but rather to check in periodically. The Council also wants to provide the public with an opportunity to express its opinions about goals for the city.

Councillor Davis identified at least two goals for a survey: (1) to gather information on what people really think and to get the fairest representation of this, and/or (2) to increase public access to government, by inviting all who want to participate to fill out surveys. If only a small number of citizens is surveyed, this doesn't further the goal of a broad invitation for public participation. She emphasized that, in any event, there must be meaningful questions in order to elicit useful information.

Councillor Davis emphasized that part of the goal of the current survey is to give citizens the option to participate and to get buy-in to city policies that are based on survey results. She pointed out that there are two related, but distinct issues, one being what questions to ask and the other how to deliver the questions. A sample survey could make people feel that they were not asked for their opinion and therefore work against these goals. She added that, since the client in this undertaking is the public, the survey should produce information on whether the public is well-served. Councillor Davis stated that there was not a lot of follow-up on the last survey. It is important to know what information was gathered, what the city did with it and whether we can build on it in this project. She suggested that this group review the questionnaire from the last survey and any follow-up and build on these earlier efforts.

Mr. Silvestro pointed out that doing a targeted survey will eliminate thousands of potential responses and create an "omission factor" that might alienate the public.

Councillor Murphy stated his interest in the survey as the desire to know what the public really thinks. To really listen to the public, the city needs more in-depth and specific data, and to elicit as much data as possible with open-ended questions. All of this is not possible to do in a survey of thousands of people. Councillor Murphy preferred a statistically valid survey with a smaller distribution and more depth. He pointed out that conducting a larger number of surveys with short formats cannot acquire meaningful information about what citizen issues are and what to do about them. He would be comfortable with a 300-500-person, statistically valid phone survey rather than a canvassing of as many citizens as possible.

City Clerk Drury asked the group to consider whether the purpose is still to choose between scheduling extensive community meetings or providing some other opportunity for citizens to speak on the goals.

Councillor Maher pointed out that there is currently a major initiative underway with regard to university relations. There has been preliminary discussion of a process with extensive community meetings and opportunities for public participation. The group needs to consider whether additional public forums are necessary given these upcoming neighborhood meetings. Councillor Maher suggested that perhaps it would make more sense to expedite the survey process at this point and get as much feedback as possible from a smaller number of citizens. Alternatively, referring to Councillor Murphy's preference for more information through a small sample, Mr. Maher suggested reserving the idea of an in-depth phone survey for later in the term.

The group also considered the issue of how the format and delivery of the survey can affect the amount of information the public will provide. In response to Councillor Maher's question about how questions should be framed, Mr. Silvestro provided the example of Methuen's two-page Second Annual Resident Survey, which this group can modify as desired, after it decides the questions it wants to ask and the appropriate format. Mr. Silvestro emphasized that a short Methuen-style survey did not have to be the end of the process. The city could get a guideline for action through a brief survey, which would identify what issues citizens have with services. Where they indicate dissatisfaction, the city could follow up and get more data through phone surveys. Surveying what people need, through a brief, general, broad-based survey, will identify the "squeaky wheel" that needs improvement. Asking people to provide details in writing, however, will get fewer responses, since many will not fill out detailed surveys.

Mr. Rossi pointed out that there are trade-offs between the number of respondents and the amount of information gained, and stated that the group needs to decide what level of analysis it wants. A short survey can produce more responses because it is easy to complete, whereas a 3 or 4 page survey may end up in the rubbish. Mr. Silvestro described a four-page survey on what citizens value and why, as a 50-minute exercise, whereas the two-page survey used in Methuen required five to ten minutes to complete.

Councillor Davis stated that any survey should include a way that residents can indicate if they have no information or experience on a particular service or issue. Mr. Silvestro pointed out that one option is for respondents to leave a response line blank and that, in one survey, 6 percent of respondents did that.

Among the options that group members suggested for distributing the survey were including it as part of the city census, the city elections, and the city newsletter, and/or in separate mailings, and making it available at sites such as City Hall, libraries and schools, and the city's website.

Councillor Maher said that he believed that distributing the survey with the city census was a good idea, but that the timing was too late for this year, since the City Council wanted survey results when they set priorities. Since the primary may have a high voter turnout, it would be useful to combine the survey with elections this time, but in the future to tie surveys into the census.

Addressing the option of including the survey with the census, Ms. Spears stated that if the city wanted to include the survey with the city census in the future, a survey could be mailed with the census in January for return in February. Results would be available well in advance of the Council's October review.

Councillor Davis said that conducting a survey in January for the October goal setting risked being outdated, since things can change quickly and dramatically. Referring to the events of September 11, 2001, she stated that a survey should capture the mood of the city when it is setting its goals, and that the city should pick a time for the survey that makes the most sense in terms of current information.

Councillor Maher pointed out that although the city census is issued in January, it can be delayed until forms are ready, which can produce more timely information. It is also worth considering the example provided by Mr. Silvestro, of a 100 percent return of surveys on a census sendout. Councillor Maher asked the group to consider whether it would be more efficient to tie the survey into the election or to the newsletter.

Mr. Gintell, 9 West Street, Cambridge, expressed extreme concern about tying the survey in with the election. He described the small number of voters relative to the population, the dominance of one political party, and the small numbers who actually participate in elections. Even if there is a good turnout at the primary, he believes that conducting the survey at polls would lead to a very biased sampling. Switching his focus to the questions to be asked, Mr. Gintell recommended that the City Council decide what they wanted to know and have the questions reflect this. The questions should then be distributed through regular City Hall meetings, community meetings, the internet, and public locations; phone sampling could also be useful.

In response to Mr. Gintell's concerns, Councillor Davis suggested that any self-selection bias at the polls could be fixed by mailing out additional surveys to households.

As an additional concern about coordinating the survey with the election, Ms. Neighbor pointed out that the Election Commission usually sends out brightly colored postcards, which do not need to be opened. Including a survey would require a different format and some indication that the mailing is time-sensitive.

Councillor Davis expressed concern that there could be a lot of confusion for voters because of the new precinct system. The current notice is just a postcard, with no effort required. Adding the survey to the notice may add to the confusion. She does not want to overload the voters.

Councillor Davis inquired whether it would be useful to highlight and include the survey in the upcoming city newsletter. She suggested using the city newsletter again for a survey, but making the survey a more prominent part of the newsletter. Since the newsletter will be sent out regardless of whether a questionnaire is included, it is cost-effective to add the survey. In addition, the city could save money by marking the survey "postage paid on return".

Ms. Bonislawski offered another possibility: a "merge and purge" of two mailings, one to voter households for the polls, and the other to street lists.

As part of a general discussion about how to get residents' attention in a mailing, Mr. Rossi emphasized that the mailing should catch their eye with color or an issue that is important to them, such as resident parking permits; alternatively, the mailing could be personalized, or include a self-mailer.

Councillor Maher stated that today's meeting was not meant to address the content of questions, and reserved further discussion of this issue for a later meeting, to which everyone agreed.

Mr. Rossi outlined some preliminary figures on the costs of various options, estimating that 50,000 questionnaires with return envelopes would cost \$25,000-35,000, a phone survey \$20,000, plus additional, unspecified costs if the city staffs tables at polling places. Mr. Silvestro stated that the cost for mailing the survey should be less than the \$50,000 budgeted because the city had already budgeted for election mailings.

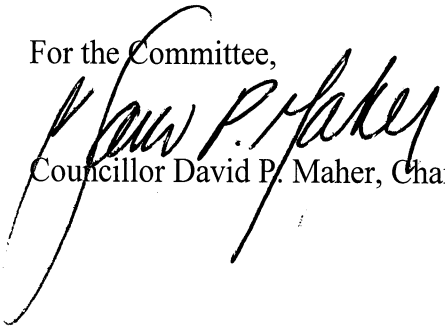
To assess the costs and benefits of different methods of conducting surveys, Councillor Murphy asked for information on the costs of the eight or nine public meetings conducted in the last survey, and pointed out that such meetings involved a heavy investment of staff time. Deputy City Manager Rossi will research and provide the requested information. He pointed out that generally, the use of staff time for public meetings is very expensive and time-consuming and, without repeat meetings, produces a small turnout.

In closing, Councillor Maher outlined the steps for the next meeting as follows. Mr. Rossi will provide (1) a brief presentation on the last survey, including a copy, plus

any reports and analysis, (2) data on the costs of the last survey and on the costs of the various distribution options discussed for this survey, and (3) a description of how the surveys were used in the city's planning over the last two years.

Councillor Maher scheduled the next meeting at 2:00 P.M. on May 29, 2002. Councillor Maher thanked those present for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 2:20 P.M.

For the Committee,


Councillor David P. Maher, Chair

City of Cambridge

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND RULES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor David P. Maher, Chair
Councillor Anthony D. Galluccio
Councillor Brian Murphy
Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves
Councillor Timothy J. Toomey

In City Council June 10, 2002

The Government Operations and Rules Committee held a public hearing on May 17, 2002, beginning at 1:15 p.m. in the Ackermann Room for the purpose of discussing the coordination of a citizen satisfaction survey for goal-setting purposes with the upcoming primary election on September 17, 2002.

Present at the hearing were Councillor David P. Maher, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Brian Murphy, Henrietta Davis, Vice-Mayor, City Clerk D. Margaret Drury and Elaine McGrath, Cambridge City Clerk's Office. Also present were Artis Spears, Election Commissioner, Julia Bowdoin, City Manager's Office, Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, Darleen Bonislowski, Election Commissioner, Teresa Neighbor, Executive Director, Election Commission, John Gintell, 9 West St., Cambridge, MA. 02139, citizen, and John Silvestro, LHS Associates, Inc., 13 Branch St., Methuen, MA. 01844.

Councillor Maher convened the hearing and explained the purpose, which was to discuss the planning for public involvement and public feedback on city services, for the City Council goal-setting process in the fall. The committee must consider how to involve as many citizens as possible, and how to get responses expeditiously in order to use them in the budget and goal processes. The City Manager delivers his budget message to department heads in November; the City Council aims to have its goals settled by that time so that they can be incorporated into the Manager's message and the budget planning process. Councillor Maher pointed out that getting this information in November would be too late to be able to use the survey results for setting the goals for the FY 04 budget. However, conducting the survey at the time of the September primary would work very well in terms of the goal setting and budget schedules.

Mr. Silvestro of LHS Associates, which is a vendor of voting machines to the city, summarized work he has done on similar surveys for other towns, including response rates, formats and costs. He described surveys for two towns which were included with their census mailouts and which yielded responses of 40 to 65 percent. Two other towns had conducted citizen surveys in conjunction with elections. In one, surveys were handed out to voters at polls, with a 100 percent response rate. In another, the town conducted a random survey of voters, by having a table in the polling place at which anyone who wanted a survey could get one; there was a 10 percent response rate using this method. Mr. Silvestro indicated that some statisticians questioned the results of the voter surveys for being non-random and skewed toward that specific, self-selected

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Committee Report#2

Committee Report from Councillor
David Maher, Chair of the
Government Operations and
Rules Committee, for a meeting
held on May 17, 2002 for the
purpose of discussing the
coordination of a citizen
satisfaction survey for
goal-setting purposes with the
upcoming primary election on
September 17, 2002.

In City Council June 10, 2002

**REPORT ACCEPTED.
PLACED ON FILE.**