

Appendix II:

**SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE 2005
CITIZENS' SURVEY**

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**2009 Comprehensive Plan Update
The Town of Smithfield**

Introduction

The Town of Smithfield has completed a formal Citizens' Attitudinal Survey in conjunction with its 2009 update of the Comprehensive Plan. The intent of the survey was to generate interest in the Comprehensive Plan Update process and to allow the Town's Planning Commission and Staff to gauge public opinion regarding several key land use policy-related issues. Citizen response to the survey was outstanding, as the Town received 722 completed surveys. This represents a response rate which is quite a bit higher than most localities in the region achieve with similar citizen surveys. The response achieved with this survey is very consistent with a similar survey distributed by the Town in support of the 1998 update of the Comprehensive Plan. Seven hundred and two (702) surveys were completed and returned as part of the earlier survey. As was the case with the 1998 survey and Plan update, this outstanding level of response and community participation enables the consultant, Planning Commission and Town Staff to make statistically significant determinations of the attitudes and desires of the entire Town by analyzing the survey responses. The Town Staff should be commended for its effort to distribute and collect the surveys. Their effort certainly has paid off in terms of encouraging community response and ensuring that public participation will play an important role in the development of the Comprehensive Plan.

The 722 responses represent an accurate cross-section of the Smithfield community. The vast majority of those surveyed (97%) live in Smithfield year-round and own their home (87%). Sixty-eight percent of the respondents are actively working, while thirty percent are retired. These figures are consistent with the latest Census estimates available which conclude that approximately sixty percent of the Town's residents are active in the labor force.

Summary of Survey Results

The following summary is designed to present the final tabulation of results from the Citizen Survey. A separate document included in Appendix I contains the actual survey tabulation results for each question. The final results of the survey reflect the general sentiment of the community regarding land use issues. These survey results have been analyzed by the Cox Company and have been used in the formulation of overall goals and objectives for Smithfield's 2009 Comprehensive Plan.

Survey Analysis

The following section is a brief summary of the most important conclusions resulting from the tabulation of responses to the Citizens' Survey:

Generally speaking, respondents to the surveys distributed by the Town are very pleased with the existing quality of life in Smithfield. Only nine percent of the respondents to the 1998 survey expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of life in Smithfield at that time. As part of the most recent survey, citizens were asked to provide feedback as to how the quality of life has been maintained or altered in the interim period. An almost equal distribution along attitudinal response was exhibited with respect to the citizen feedback on changes in quality of life in the community over the past decade. In other words, among respondents, an almost equal number of folks expressed agreement, disagreement or an ambivalent attitude towards the question. Citizens are also generally pleased with the recent performance of the local economy. Only 22% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the notion that Smithfield residents are generally better off economically than they were a decade ago. However, concerns were voiced relative to the availability of year-round employment opportunities in the community for residents, especially among young people. Fifty-three percent of survey respondents indicated that availability of such opportunities in Smithfield falls shy of their expectations.

Survey respondents expressed several additional, specific concerns about the future of the community, as well. Under the direction of the Planning Commission, these concerns will be directly addressed during the Comprehensive Plan Update. Generally, these concerns relate to issues such as the protection of natural and historic resources within the Town, housing variety and affordability, economic development and access to medical facilities.

The Citizens' Survey included an opportunity for respondents to list the three most important issues confronting the Town as it enters the Twenty-first century. The following issues were most often mentioned by respondents as being most critical to Smithfield's future:

*Percentage of Total Surveys on
Which the Issue was Listed:*

Issue:

1.	<i>Growth Management-Related Issues</i>	23%
2.	<i>Water Quality/Cost</i>	13%
3.	<i>Traffic</i>	12%
4.	<i>Affordable Housing</i>	6%
5.	<i>Taxes</i>	4%
6.	<i>School System/Education</i>	3%
7.	<i>Healthcare</i>	2%
8.	<i>Emergency Services</i>	2%
9.	<i>Loss of Small Town Appeal</i>	1%
10.	<i>Tourism</i>	1%

Citizen concern about the pace, quality and location of future growth and development in the Town emerged as a recurring theme in the survey responses. The attitude of the respondent sample towards land use and growth was clearly one that supports thoughtful, limited and well-controlled development. Only twenty-four percent of the respondents favor the encouragement of continued population growth within the Town. This is a slight decrease from the 1998 survey, when 34% of citizens supported this concept. Furthermore, several respondents specifically mentioned the need to maintain Smithfield's "small town atmosphere" and historic charm as being of paramount concern to the community. This emphasis on maintaining the character of the Town reinforces local citizens' primary concern regarding the impact of future growth. In addition to the "top ten" issues listed above, other survey responses illustrate the citizens' primary concerns for the Town's future. Several survey respondents expressed concern over the availability and quality of professional job opportunities in the area, and many others specifically mentioned the need to create opportunities that would provide incentive for the Town's young people to stay in Smithfield.

Several of the closed-ended, attitudinal survey questions prompted an overwhelming response from Town citizens. In those instances where a clear majority opinion exists, the Planning Commission will be able to make valuable inferences about community desires relative to several very important planning-related issues. The five issues receiving the strongest mandate based upon survey response were as follows: (issues are ranked in order by highest percentage of response):

Issue	Attitudinal Rank
1. The Town should set high standards to guarantee subdivisions and residential communities have properly designed and constructed streets and sidewalks, utility networks, storm drainage and site improvements. <i>(Note: this same question received the strongest attitudinal ranking in the 1998 survey as well).</i>	93% Agree or Strongly Agree
2. Zoning and land development controls should require residential subdivisions to pay the cost of new Constructing adequate utilities, sidewalks, drainage, street lights and roads, and to fund additional capital improvements necessary to support fire, rescue, police, recreation, and town administration needs associated with the new development.	88% Agree or Strongly Agree
3. The planting of trees and other public landscaping along streets should be a requirement of any new Residential subdivision development in Smithfield. <i>(Note: this same question received the third strongest attitudinal ranking in the 1998 survey as well).</i>	85% Agree or Strongly Agree
4. Protection and preservation of the Town’s waterfront areas is a high priority and should be a major goal for future land use planning. <i>(Note: this same question received the second strongest attitudinal ranking in the 1998 survey).</i>	83% Agree or Strongly Agree
5. New residential developments should be required to provide sufficient recreational improvements (i.e. tennis courts, swimming pools, playgrounds, walking trails, bikepaths, etc.) to serve the needs of their residents.	74% Agree or Strongly Agree

Citizen concern regarding the quality of future development is further evidenced by this clear and strong desire to establish and maintain high development standards to guarantee that new subdivisions have properly designed and constructed streets, utilities, storm drainage and site improvements. The surveys clearly indicate that future development should be carefully planned, designed and regulated so as to ensure that the character of Smithfield is not altered. It is interesting to note that of the five questions that received the strongest response, four speak directly to the issue of regulating future land development. The respondents' support of increased regulatory control of the design of new development is clearly underscored by these four questions. This is particularly noteworthy given the fact that the Town has implemented an entirely new Zoning Ordinance only seven years ago, and yet the sentiments expressed by citizens regarding these issues have remained consistent from those witnessed as part of the most recent Comprehensive Plan Update. Citizens also want to see future development "pay its own way" and provide its fair share of community services, including necessary recreational and utility facilities. This sentiment is also consistent with the attitudes exhibited in the 1998 survey.

The Planning Commission and Town Staff also incorporated several questions into the survey in order to gauge public opinion on several "hot button" planning issues that have surfaced in recent years. As is presented below, these questions generated some interesting responses. These responses will aid the Planning Commission in its effort to develop goals, objectives and policy statements that will accurately reflect the will of the community, provide for adequate infrastructural support of new growth and protect the Town's historic and natural resources.

Issue 1: Annexation

The majority of survey respondents are in favor of the Town exploring the viability of expanding the Town's corporate limits through a formal annexation agreement with Isle of Wight County. Slightly over 52% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the concept of exploring such a strategy as part of the Town's long term planning for future development and expansion. Only 26% of those responding disagreed or strongly disagreed with this approach.

Issue 2: Affordable Housing

Citizens expressed concern over the availability of sufficient affordable housing opportunities in the Town. Fifty-four percent of survey responses agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that affordable housing is needed in the Town to serve more low and moderate income residents. Additionally, forty-nine percent of those responding indicated that they believe that affordable housing should be a requirement of any new subdivision development. In a separate question, residents were asked to identify the housing price level considered to be affordable within Smithfield. A wide variety of housing values were provided in response. The average response was \$167,110. The most common listed prices were \$150,000, \$220,000, and \$100,000.

It is interesting to note the great disparity in the community attitudes towards what residents consider to be affordable in Smithfield as expressed in the survey results.

Issue 3: Future Land Use Planning: Recommended Allocation of Residential Densities

Citizens were asked to provide their ideal mix in terms of percentages of total future dwelling units to be developed within the Town among four residential dwelling types: single family detached homes; townhouses; multifamily/apartments; and assisted living/elderly housing. The average response called for 57% of future dwellings to be devoted to single family residences; 17% devoted to townhouses; 12% for multifamily apartments; and 20% for assisted living.

Issue 4: Smithfield Center

Citizens were also asked to rate the ongoing capability and performance of the Smithfield Center in meeting the needs of the community. Over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that the facility does meet the needs of the community, while only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Issue 5: Desirability of a New Motel or Hotel Facility

A clear majority of respondents believe that a new, privately constructed lodging facility with an associated restaurant is desired in Smithfield. Nearly 70% of those submitting a completed survey to the Town indicated that they supported such a new project, while only 17% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the concept. A Hampton Inn & Suites is expected to open by the spring of 2009.

Retail Shopping

The survey placed a major emphasis on retail shopping in the Smithfield community. Citizens were asked to list the areas they most often shopped for ten separate goods and services categories. The results show that Smithfield residents rely primarily on local merchants for their grocery, banking, pharmacy and hardware needs, and prefer to travel to Newport News or Chesapeake to do their "big-ticket" shopping. Clearly, the wider variety of stores and goods and services offered in these larger metropolitan areas attracts local residents to shop for such items as clothing, automobiles, furniture, and specialty gifts. One significant change in a retail category response from the 1998 survey worth noting is the "capture" of a significant share of the local banking business within the Town. In the 1998 survey, Newport News was listed as absorbing a significant share (31%) of the local banking business. This dominant share has dropped dramatically in the current survey results, as many more respondents do the majority of their banking in the Town. Also, surprisingly enough, respondents largely ignore Suffolk and Williamsburg when seeking regional shopping alternatives.

As a means of identifying market niche opportunities in the local retail marketplace, citizens were asked to identify additional businesses (currently not found within Smithfield) that they would like to see enter the market. The question drew a wide variety of suggestions spanning various sectors of the retail economy; however, additional restaurants and Wal-Mart were the most frequently mentioned retail uses. It was interesting to note that Wal-Mart was not mentioned as frequently as was the case in 1998. Other national “big box” retailers most frequently mentioned included Lowe’s, Target and Home Depot. Several other potential retail establishments were mentioned less frequently, but are interesting to note nevertheless. These include a newsstand and a sporting goods store. Several of the retail uses mentioned hold promise for capturing market niche opportunities in the Town, and should be considered in any formal economic development marketing that the Town might consider in future years.

Additional Attitudinal Results

While responses to the balance of the survey were more evenly distributed across the attitudinal categories, some important conclusions can be drawn from the final tabulations. The highlights of these remaining sections of the survey are presented below:

Land Use

Emphasis on the protection and preservation of historic, cultural and natural resources surfaced as a dominant theme throughout the survey responses. As mentioned above, eighty-three percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the protection and preservation of the Town’s waterfront areas are high priorities, and should be a major goal for future land use planning in Smithfield. Local citizens also support the preservation of historic sites and buildings in the Town. Seventy-one percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Town should use public funds to promote and maintain these sites and structures as a means of protecting the Town’s historic character.

Local Government Services

In the survey, residents were asked to comment on the quality of public service provisions they were currently receiving from the Town. Those services receiving the highest marks for quality and customer satisfaction were fire protection, police protection, the Smithfield Center, and garbage/recycling collection. The general community appearance and the local library were also mentioned as positives among those surveyed. Those services found to be the relatively weakest among those offered to the community are recreational activities/facilities, retail store variety, retirement housing opportunities, traffic flow and the adequacy of street lighting. Traffic flow, water quality, cost of services, and availability of medical facilities in the community received the highest levels of concern from residents.

COMPARISON OF ATTITUDINAL CHANGE OVER TIME:

A review of the 1998 Survey Results and Direct Comparison to those of the Current Survey

The Citizens' Survey affords the Planning Commission a unique opportunity to compare community attitudes regarding critical issues impacting the community over time. The current survey contains several of the same questions that were included in the 1998 Citizens' Survey. Thus, by comparing the responses to these repeated questions, the Planning Commission will be able to compare snapshots of community attitudes prior to the most recent Comprehensive Planning effort and of today. As such, it is hoped that the Planning Commission will gain insight into how citizen views on issues relating to land use, growth management, the local economy, housing, and various Town services and facilities have changed over the past decade. In short, a comparison of the results of the two surveys will provide a summary of community attitudes about where Smithfield was, where Smithfield is today, and what its citizens hope it can become in the future.

Attitudinal changes over time are readily apparent in several cases in the survey results comparison, while clear indications of consistency in views over time are exhibited as well. The following summary will focus upon those areas in which attitudinal changes have been identified so that the Planning Commission may make determinations concerning how these changes could impact the course and strategy of the ongoing Comprehensive Planning effort:

The Citizens' Survey includes eighteen attitudinal questions (i.e. questions asking the resident to react to a statement regarding a certain issue by selecting an appropriate designation on a "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" attitudinal range) that appeared in the same form on the 1998 survey. Further, both surveys contained three "open-ended questions" which encouraged respondents to write down their answers on the actual survey to "big picture" planning-related questions. In addition, a similar question was included on both surveys which asked respondents to relate their satisfaction with services and resources offered in the Town covering the same nineteen categories. Finally, both surveys included five similar demographic/census type questions seeking information about those responding so that the consultant could insure that those responding were representative of the overall community according to Census data available for the Town.

Noteworthy Attitudinal Changes

Of the eighteen repeated attitudinal questions, nine of those exhibited a significant shift in response along the attitudinal categories. The strongest shift was reflected in the questions regarding housing in the community. A significantly higher percentage (54% vs. only 30% in 1998) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that affordable housing is needed in the Town to serve low and moderate income residents. Further, responses regarding the sufficiency of existing housing in the Town in terms of meeting the needs of Smithfield citizens represented a shift in consensus.

In the current survey, 41% of all respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that *“Existing housing is sufficient to meet the needs of the citizens of Smithfield”*, while only 25% of respondents responded in a similar fashion in 1998. A slightly smaller (approximately 10%), but easily identifiable shift in attitudes is also reflected in the responses to the question regarding eldercare and assisted living opportunities. Sentiments increased in support of the notion that there currently exists an unmet need in providing these types of facilities in the community. This strengthening community support is particularly interesting given the fact that new facilities of this type have been developed in recent years, and others are currently under construction in the community. And yet, there appears to be a growing acknowledgement by the local citizenry that more opportunities exist in this housing market segment to meet the needs of its citizenry.

Another slight shift was reflected in the responses regarding ongoing population growth in the Town. Fifty-six percent of the most recent responses indicated that citizens disagreed or strongly disagreed with the encouragement of future growth. This represents an approximate 10% shift in attitudinal response over the past decade towards the “anti-growth” perspective.

In terms of the local economy, slight shifts in attitude were reflected regarding economic development and the economic well being of local residents. While 59% of 1998 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the establishment of growth and industry in commerce as a high priority and its corresponding promotion, only 48% of those responding to the recent survey concurred. This did not correspond to a direct “one-to-one” shift in attitudes towards the side of disagreement or strong disagreement with this objective, as the recent survey witnessed only a 5% increase in responses to these categories over the 1998 survey. Thus, the majority of the shift was redirected towards a centrist attitude on the issue.

A similar unequal shift was reflected in the question regarding attitudes towards the general economic well-being of residents in comparison to a decade ago. The current survey reflects an increase (by 9%) of those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that *“residents are better off economically than they were 10 years ago.”* At the same time, this represents a decrease of only 1% of total respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement than those responding to the 1998 survey. A move towards the middle in community attitudes is reflected in this comparison as well.

A relatively small, but easily definable shift in attitudes is reflected in the question regarding the government regulation of the location and density of new commercial and residential development in the Town. A shift of 5% of respondents was identified towards support of government regulation rather than leaving the decision-making to the private marketplace, as evidenced by a one-to-one shift in attitudinal responses to the question.

In terms of local government services, significant attitudinal changes were identified in two areas within the survey. A significant improvement in the citizens’ overall rating of parks and recreation facilities serving the community’s needs was noted in the most recent survey.

In 1998, 57% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that parks and recreation facilities in the Town adequately serve the community's needs. Only 38% of the participating citizens responded in kind. Further, a significantly higher percentage (28% vs. 19%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. With respect to the ongoing "public relations" effort conducted by the Town to promote tourism, the downtown area and economic development, relatively fewer respondents in the current survey agreed or strongly agreed that the ongoing efforts were effective. In 1998, the majority of the respondents agreed that the Town was doing an effective job in this area, while only 38% responded in kind in the current survey. This shift was not as dramatic as reflected in several other questions, as relatively more responses fell in the middle of the road with respect to their feelings on the Town's ongoing effort. Additionally, with respect to issues concerning the downtown area, a strong preference was again reflected in survey responses for additional parking opportunities downtown. Sixty-six percent of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that the Town should provide more parking in the downtown area (as compared to seventy percent in 1998).

Open Ended, "Big Picture" Questions

While recreational facilities received higher marks in the survey, strong sentiment was still identified supporting the development of additional facilities in the community. While this sentiment is consistent with that exhibited in the 1998 survey, a notable change in attitude towards the types of facilities preferred is reflected in the responses to this open-ended question. It is clear that today; more citizens believe that the strongest needs in Town recreation are in outdoor, active recreational facilities per the 2005 survey. Parks, playgrounds, fields, hiking, biking and walking trails received stronger support than indoor facilities such as movie theaters and bowling alleys, which dominated the previous survey responses.

The most notable attitudinal change was reflected in the question prompting citizens to identify the three most important issues facing the Town. Chief among the issues mentioned is the growing concern about water quality and cost of public water service within the Town. Heightened concerns over water supply and quality were also reflected in question 32, as more than half of the respondents (58%) rated this service as "poor", up from only 18% in 1998. While growth management and growth-related concerns still dominated the responses provided in response to the open-ended question, water quality was mentioned nearly twice as often in the current survey as was the case in 1998. Another interesting change was a significant reduction in the frequency of the listing of taxes as a critical issue by respondents.

Other significant shifts were identified in citizen ratings of traffic flow, medical facilities, and street lighting in the town. Thirty-two (32%) of all respondents in the survey rated traffic flow as "poor" and only 20% rated flow as "good". In 1998, "poor" ratings totaled only 22% of all responses, while 26% of participating citizens found the flow in Town to be "good".

Support for the availability of existing medical facilities also slipped by approximately 11% between the two surveys. Anticipating that community concern regarding access to local medical facilities has intensified in recent years, the Town Staff recommended that an open-ended question geared towards this issue be included in the survey. The Staff was particularly interested in determining what specific medical services residents considered most desirable in Smithfield. The survey response to the question yielded interesting results, as over 40% of all responses focused upon 24-hour emergency medical services (i.e. urgent care facilities) as being most desirable. This was far and away the most frequently listed response.

Generally speaking, the citizens expressed stronger support for the attractiveness and adequacy of street lighting in the Town.

Conclusion

This summary of survey responses indicates a strong and active constituency in Smithfield which is supportive of the purpose and intent of the 2008 Land Use Plan Update. The feedback generated from the survey creates an atmosphere in which the Town Staff and elected officials can operate to effectuate positive change in their community. The results of this survey will be used to develop goals and objectives for the Land Use Plan, as well as to influence the development of specific planning policies recommended for implementation.