

Citizens generally pleased with King Township, survey shows

By Mark PavilonsEditor

A survey of residents shows a high level of satisfaction with the municipality. The 2023 Citizen Survey was conducted in February and 95% of residents agreed the quality of life in King is good. This, staff noted, is 2% higher than the national municipal standard. Nine in 10 agree that King is a great place to raise a family and people feel safe. The vast majority – 80% – are satisfied with the quality of municipal services. The results of the survey will help staff and council with future planning and strategies, including the 2023-2026 Corporate Strategic Plan. The 2023 Citizen Survey was the first comprehensive, statistically valid (96% confidence level) Township-wide survey to gain feedback from its citizenry. This means the survey's findings are considered accurate and reliable in representing the entire population, staff said. The 2023 Citizen Survey was conducted through Ipsos Research, a global leader in survey-based market research and public opinion polling. The Township greatly values the opinions, perceptions, and feedback of its residents, according to the staff report. Citizen engagement during changing times is critical for King to emerge as a strong and more resilient Township that delivers high quality municipal services, while continuing to respond to citizen needs.

Surveys are an important source of statistically valid, reliable, and relevant citizen feedback as they collect information that informs strategic decision making and business planning. The opinions and data gathered will help King understand:

- How the Township is performing in its ability to provide and maintain a strong quality of life for citizens and citizen satisfaction with municipal services and programs.
- How have citizen needs changed or evolved in consideration of the pandemic, and what are the top priorities across our community.
- What services have benefitted from being reimaged and what service offerings or levels may benefit from being modified or adapted.

How citizens like to receive services and information, and their preferred means of delivery and engagement. Virtually all (95%) citizens rate the overall quality of life in their community positively. This figure is slightly above the Canadian municipal norms rating of 93%. Citizens overwhelmingly believe that King is safe and a great place to raise a family (94%). Other perceptions of life in King are viewed positively, with 8 in 10 agreeing that King is a welcoming community and economically vibrant. When asked in an open-ended format to describe the most important issues facing the community, in their own words, a variety of responses emerged. Those that topped the list include municipal governance, taxation, and user fees (17%), traffic congestion (15%) and, urban development and complete communities (13%). The vast majority (80%) of citizens indicate satisfaction with the quality of services provided by King. Additionally, 7 in 10 agree that the Township offers services that meet their needs. Regarding specific services, virtually all respondents agree on the importance of fire and emergency services (99%), roads (99%), land use / community planning and engagement (95%). Those who are using Township services (within the past 12 months) report top levels of satisfaction with the library (97%), fire and emergency services (96%), heritage, culture, and arts programs (93%), and waste collection (91%). The survey also found high levels of satisfaction with those who have used Clerk's (93%) and Public Works (78%) permitting services, as well as ServiceKING (85%). In terms of Township infrastructure, citizens gave the highest ratings to park amenities (82%), sidewalk condition and maintenance (78%) and streetlighting (76%). Areas with potential to improve citizen satisfaction levels include by-law and regulatory enforcement, land use and community planning and, roads and transportation services. Overall, a majority (56%) of citizens feel they get good to very good value for their tax dollars. It is important to emphasize the geographic context of King. King has three core urban areas, with the majority of land being rural and significant distance between urban and rural communities. As such, tax dollars used to fund services, programs or infrastructure in certain areas are not as widely utilized or accessed by all citizens in King, given the significant size of the rural population. When asked how they want to see the Township address the increased costs of maintaining service levels and infrastructure, citizens are evenly split between maintaining tax levels by cutting or reducing services or, increasing taxes in-line with inflation to maintain services at their current levels. Regarding infrastructure, residents have a strong support (76%) for funding investments through new or increased user fees, as compared to an increase to the tax rate. Over two-thirds (63%) of citizens reported they have contacted King at some point within the past 12 months. Those who did, top contact methods were direct phone call, in-person, and email. King scored between 70-80% in satisfaction levels relating to the overall level of service received, professionalism, responsiveness, and ability to resolve or address issues. Top reasons

for contacting King include requests for information (32%), by-law enforcement (24%) and/or to make a payment (21%). When it comes to service delivery models, most citizens (69%) believe King Township should offer even more services online and feel the Township should move towards a default cashless service (61%). Four in five (80%) citizens indicate satisfaction with the quality of information and communications received from the Township. Preferred methods of communication include email (76%), mail (51%), King.ca (website) (42%). In terms of engaging with the Township, top preferences for engagement include: King.ca (website), surveys and/or public open houses where observations can be made about presented information. Overall, the 2023 Citizen Survey provides valuable baseline data. This survey was the first of its kind for the Township and serves as a starting point of collecting statistically valid, comprehensive data that can be measured over time, staff noted. It is also important to recognize that the 2023 Citizen Survey (and future surveys) also collects data on topics that are beyond the sole responsibility of the Township of King. As reflected in the survey findings, some of the most important issues facing King today, such as traffic congestion, require a concerted community-wide response and are not the sole purview of one organization or level of government. Councillor David Boyd said the survey is a "big step forward" as King strives for service excellence. "It's a great tool that will serve council well," he said. Staffer Meghan Ditta noted they gained a lot of valuable insights. Councillor Jennifer Anstey noted that road conditions made it in the top three, and a new roads needs report is coming in June, hopefully to respond to residents' concerns. Councillor Debbie Schaefer wanted to know what it cost to conduct the survey, and staff noted the price tag was \$48,703. Councillor Mary Asselstine said she can't wait to see what staff can draw out from all of the data. Overall, the results of the 2023 Citizen Survey are positive, with almost all citizens rating the quality of life as good or very good and agreeing King is a great place to raise a family and is safe. Issues associated with taxation, traffic and development are cited as top of mind issues for citizens. Eight in ten citizens are satisfied with the quality of services provided by the Township, though there is room to maximize the value citizens receive for their tax dollars. Citizens are split on whether to increase taxes in line with inflation or to maintain current tax levels and reduce services, and in general more likely to prefer user fees over tax increases to fund infrastructure investments. Almost two thirds of citizens say they have contacted King in the past 12 months, and the vast majority who did were satisfied with their interactions. The insights obtained from the survey, independently and analyzed with other data sets, will help the Township continue to make data-driven decisions aimed at enhancing the life of citizens, the staff report concluded. For information about the survey, including more results and methodology, visit king.ca/citizensurvey. "I hear from people all the time what a fantastic place King is, so it's gratifying to see this revealed by the survey. We will take time to look at the results to see what we're doing well and which opportunities there are to make King an even better place to live, work and play," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. CAO Daniel Kostopoulos echoed his sentiments. "Public engagement through statistically valid surveys offers an opportunity to hear from citizens about issues important to them, preferences for accessing Township services and satisfaction with services, all while building stronger relationships with the between the Township and the community."