Memorandum

To: City Council

From: Mick Horton, City Treasurer
Scott Hugill, Assistant City Manager

Via: John J. Caulfield, City Manager

Date: February 2, 2012

Subject: Presentation of 2011 Community Satisfaction Survey Results

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OVERVIEW
In November 2011, the City of Mountlake Terrace initiated a Community Satisfaction Survey in partnership with The National Citizen Survey program and sponsored by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in cooperation with National Research Center, Inc (NCR), to administer a survey to Mountlake Terrace residents during the fall and winter of 2011. We will present information on the survey at the February 2 work/study session.

The purpose of the survey was to assess citizen satisfaction with the delivery of major city services as part of the city's on-going effort to identify and respond to the needs and concerns of residents consistent with the City Council's goal to develop and implement more effective communication and outreach with the community. The results will also help determine priorities for the community and represents the third citywide opinion tracking study for the city.

The NRC is a research firm that specializes in performance measurement and evaluation and is the same firm that facilitated the city's 2007 and 2009 community satisfactions surveys. They conduct survey research by mail, phone, in-person and on the Internet and analyze new and existing data sets using sophisticated inferential techniques or simple descriptive statistics. The NRC, in conjunction with ICMA, operates a unique service that administers, analyzes, and reports results from customizable citizen surveys. They are able to provide this service at a relatively low cost through careful standardization and automation of the survey process. Each of their clients is able to compare their results with results with other jurisdictions across the United States.

METHODOLOGY
In communities today, residents expect their local government officials to be well informed about customer perspectives. Surveying the community is not only a good idea, but a necessity for today's responsive local government, especially given the current economic conditions. To this end there are many reasons and benefits for conducting a community satisfaction survey.

Reasons

- To measure service performance
- To benchmark service quality ratings
- To assess community needs

- To make long-range, short-term, or strategic plans
- To demonstrate the receptivity of our local government
- To evaluate potential policies or community characteristics
- To create a trend line for future surveying.

Benefits

- Citizen surveying bridges the gap between the government and citizens who don't come to meetings, but do vote, pay taxes, and make decisions about where to live and build their businesses. It is important to hear from a broad cross section of residents.
- The best way to encourage good performance is to measure it, and the best indicator of government performance is citizen satisfaction.
- Surveying is how progress is measured. Surveying is not a one-time event – a trend line is created with prior surveys conducted in 2007 and 2009. Declining scores will tell us where to focus improvements; rising scores will show services that are improving.
- Surveys done by professionals come with analysis and explanation that put local scores in perspective. Surveys done by outside contractors are free of bias and establish a neutral benchmark that all parties can accept.
- Surveying is always done in the context of planning for the future – balancing priorities, setting new objectives, preparing the next budget and improving services.
- The cost of surveying is repaid with interest in terms of citizen satisfaction with government, staff commitment to change, and conservation of resources.
- Community surveys provide an important means for evaluating and assessing the level of citizen satisfaction with city services and programs, and they offer important information to decision makers as they determine how resources should be allocated and whether local policies should be revised.
- By tying the results of citizen surveys to performance measurement, the city demonstrates its commitment to transparency and accountability in its delivery of services.

The five-page survey was administered by mailing a random sampling of 1,200 households. 325 households responded to the survey (29% response rate), and the results have a 95% level of confidence, with a precision of +/- 5%. The city thanks the residents who completed and returned the surveys. Their input is valuable and will be considered as the city develops its plans.

SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the survey are based around respondents' replies in eight categories: *Community Quality, Community Design, Public Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Recreation and Wellness, Community Inclusiveness, Civic Engagement, and Public Trust*. Each section begins with residents' ratings of community characteristics and is followed by residents' ratings of service quality. For all evaluative questions, the percent of residents rating the service or community feature as "excellent" or "good" is presented.

The survey results also contain comparisons with prior years' results. In this report, we are comparing this survey's data with results from the 2007 and 2009 surveys. Differences between years can be considered "statistically significant" if they are greater than eight percentage points. Trend data represents important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines. Deviations from stable trends over time especially represent opportunities for

understanding how local policies, programs or public information may have affected residents' opinions.

Where comparisons were available, the City of Mountlake Terrace results were noted as being "above" the benchmark, "below" the benchmark or "similar to" the benchmark. The evaluations of "above", "below" or "similar to" comes from a statistical comparison of the city's rating to the national benchmark. The benchmark is taken from NRC's database of comparative resident opinion that is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in citizen surveys from approximately 500 jurisdictions whose residents evaluated local government services and gave their opinion about the quality of community life. For most questions compared to the entire dataset, there were more than 100 jurisdictions included in the benchmark comparison.

The following is the summary of results of Mountlake Terrace's Community Satisfaction Survey, as provided from the data and information provided by NRC:

What We Do Well	What We Need to Improve On
Quality of Life	**Quality of Life**
City as a Place to Live	Neighborhood as a Place to Live Overall
Quality of Life	City as a Place to Raise Children
Remain in Mountlake Terrace for the next 5 years	Housing Costs 30% or More of Income
Recommend living in Mountlake Terrace	City as a Place to Work
Sense of Community	
City as a Place to Retire	
Availability of Affordable Quality Child Care	
Availability of Affordable Quality Housing	
Variety of Housing Options	
Characteristics of the Community	**Characteristics of the Community**
Openness and Acceptance	Recreational Opportunities
Recreational Opportunities	Overall Appearance
Sense of Community	Shopping Opportunities
Preservation of Natural Areas	Employment Opportunities
	Overall Quality of Business and Service Establishments
	Quality of Overall Natural Environment
Access	**Access**
Affordable Quality Housing	
Variety of Housing Options	
Affordable Quality Child Care	
Mobility	**Mobility**
Ease of Walking	Ease of Rail Travel
Ease of Car Travel	
Ease of Bus Travel	
Ease of Bike Travel	
Availability of Paths and Walking Trails	
Receives Good Value for Taxes	Overall Image or Reputation of City
Overall Direction of City	
Welcomes Citizen Involvement	
Overall Impression	

What We Do Well	What We Need to Improve On
Services Provided By Government	**Services Provided By Government**
City/Local Government	State Government
County Government	Federal Government
Public Safety	**Public Safety**
Downtown Safety	Emergency Preparedness
Neighborhood Safety	
Environmental Hazard Safety	
Crime Safety	
Police Services	
Crime Prevention	
Fire Services	
Ambulance/Emergency Medical Services	
Fire Prevention	
Traffic Enforcement	
Municipal Courts	
Transportation	**Transportation**
Bus / Transit Service	Street Lighting
Traffic Signal Timing	
Sidewalk Maintenance	
Snow Removal	
Street Lighting	
Street Cleaning	
Street Repair	
Traffic Flow on Major Streets	
Leisure Services	**Leisure Services**
Recreation Center/Facilities	Recreational Opportunities
Recreation Programs/Classes	
City Parks	
Utility Services	**Utility Services**
Sewer Services	
Drinking Water	
Storm Drainage	
Yard Waste Pick –Up	
Recycling	
Garbage Collection	
Planning and Code Enforcement Services	**Planning and Code Enforcement Services**
Animal Control	Code Enforcement
Land Use, Planning and Zoning	Economic Development
Services to Special Populations / Other-Services	**Services to Special Populations / Other-Services**
Public Information Services	Volunteer Opportunities
Services to Seniors	
Services to Youths	
Mountlake Terrace Employees	**Mountlake Terrace Employees**
Courtesy	
Knowledge	
Responsiveness	
Overall Impression	

Overall, citizens feel the city is doing an excellent or good job of delivering city services. *City Services* rated were able to be compared to the benchmark database and of the 31 services for which comparisons were available, 16 were above the benchmark comparison (52%), 10 were similar to the benchmark comparison (32%), and only 5 were below (16%).

80% of respondents rate Mountlake Terrace as an excellent or good place to live, 74% rated their neighborhood as an excellent or good place to live, and 74% said their overall quality of life in Mountlake Terrace as excellent or good, all consistent with prior surveys.

Almost all citizens said they plan on staying in Mountlake Terrace for the next five years and would recommend living in Mountlake Terrace, providing evidence that the city offers service and amenities that work.

The city's transportation, including paths, trails, walking, biking, bus and car travel were all rated above the national benchmark.

Transportation and Parking Services were all rated at or above the national benchmarks, with the exception being *Street Lighting*, which rated below.

The variety of housing options and affordability were rated similar and above national benchmarks. While 48% cited that their housing costs were more than 30% of their personal income, which is known as "Housing Stress".

47% rated the overall appearance of the city as excellent or good, this is below the national benchmark, but this number has been steadily climbing compared to the prior year's numbers.

Code Enforcement was rated below the benchmark, but at the same time only 13% of citizens reported that run-down buildings, weed lots, or junk vehicles were a problem, which is better than the national benchmark.

Land Use, Planning and Zoning was rated above the benchmark showing a steady increase over prior surveys.

The areas of *Economic Sustainability and Opportunities* were all rated below the national benchmarks. Citizens also felt that *Retail* and *Job Growth* were too slow.
The *Economic Development* rating was also below the benchmark.

Community and Personal Safety areas were similar or above the national benchmarks.

The city's *Public Safety Services* were all rated at or above the national benchmark. The only exception was *Emergency Preparedness*, which was rated below the benchmark,

Utility Services rated above the benchmark, the only exception was the *Garbage Collection*, which rated similar.

Parks and Recreation Services rated at or above the benchmark. The *Recreational Opportunities* rated below the benchmark.

The ratings of *Community Quality and Inclusiveness*, which include *Sense of Community* and *Diversity*, show the city is a place to retire and has affordable childcare which is rated at or above the benchmark. The city as a place to raise children was below the benchmark.

The area of *Civic Engagement* showed that the city is below the benchmark in volunteerism, participation in civic groups and attending or watching public meetings.

Our citizen's *Use of Information Services* rated above the benchmark for usage of the city's website and reading the *"City Happenings"*.

Citizens have trust in city government and a majority felt that the value of services for taxes paid was an excellent or good value. We rated above the benchmarks in those areas.

The residents who had interacted with an employee of the city gave high marks to those employees. Nearly all rated their overall impression of employees as excellent or good. Those employee characteristics are higher than the benchmark comparisons.

Services found to be influential in ratings of overall service quality were *Police Services, Code Enforcement and Street Cleaning.* By targeting improvements in these areas, the city can focus on the services that have the greatest likelihood of influencing residents' opinions about overall service quality.

Areas for improvement include:

- Street Lighting
- Overall Appearance of the City
- Code Enforcement
- Economic Development (working and shopping opportunities)
- Emergency Preparedness
- Natural Environment
- Recreational Opportunities
- Civic Engagement Opportunities (e.g., participation in a club or civic group, community volunteerism)

However, most of these service ratings have shown steady improvement over past surveys.

CONCLUSION

The Community Satisfaction Survey has provided the city with:

- Information and an understanding of our community's opinions
- Helped to increase communication between city leadership and the community
- Measured the community's satisfaction with the overall operation of the many services provided by the city.

Overall the strengths, challenges and opportunities represented from the survey results provide a more accurate assessment and perspective from our community. Though there is always room to improve, results from the survey demonstrates that the city continues to be headed in the right direction, has the trust of the community, has a strong and positive quality of life, and have very responsive, knowledgeable, and courteous employees. When compared to other cities, the City of

Mountlake Terrace "does many things well", typically "similar to" or "above the" norm. The results are an impressive reflection upon the city and the community we serve.

The survey results will assist the city in determining how resources should be allocated with a particular focus toward helping the city balance priorities, set new objectives, prepare the next budget and improve services.

ATTACHMENTS

- Community Satisfaction Survey (prepared by NRC)
- Community Satisfaction Survey Benchmark report (prepared by NRC)