



Northwest Survey & Data Services

## Summary of Results *City of Grants Pass Survey*

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### **Introduction**

The City of Grants Pass uses a variety of methods to inform its' citizens and to encourage active participation in city government. As part of these efforts Grants Pass has for many years conducted an annual survey to assess the opinions of residents on the quality of city services, the quality of life in the city, and attitudes toward immediate issues currently before the city government. Working closely with the Grants Pass Assistant City Manager, Laurel Samson, Northwest Survey & Data Services (NSDS) planned and implemented the 2007 annual telephone survey of Grants Pass residents.

### **Survey Results**

This report summarizes the major survey results. Readers can look at the Topline Frequencies section of the report for the exact question wording and the summarized responses to each question. Readers may refer to the tables in the Banners section of this report for more detail and to find cross-tabulations of each question with a wide range of demographic information. In addition, readers should look at the open-ended responses inside the Narrative Responses section, where respondents give narrative answers to questions. The open-ended questions asked what they enjoy about living in Grants Pass; what they would like to change; what was wrong with any city services they rated as poor; and what they thought might improve the City newsletter. Additionally, new questions about a series of possible bond measures and levies were also asked. Finally, readers should look at the Annual Trends section to see graphs which reflect changes in the responses from 1998 through 2007 to the standard questions.

For information on how this survey was conducted please see the Sample and Methods Report section.

#### **Grants Pass as a Place to Live**

In general, residents think Grants Pass is a great place to live. When asked to rate living in Grants Pass on a five point scale, where one is "poor" and five is "excellent," 79% of respondents give Grants Pass a rating of four or five (see Banner Table 28). This score is one percent higher than last year and only 3% lower than the highest rating of the last 10 years (82% in 2005). In addition, the percentage of respondents who gave Grants Pass an "excellent" rating as a place to live improved 3.6% from last year. Only 7% of respondents gave Grants Pass a rating of one or two as a place to live.

The belief that Grants Pass is a great place to live is stronger among older respondents. For every age-group of respondents the percentage who give Grants Pass a rating of "excellent" as a place to live goes up. For those 34 or younger, 29% gave Grants Pass an "excellent rating, while by age 65 or older, 57% rated Grants Pass as 'Excellent.'"

This pattern of generally favorable responses is repeated when respondents were asked to rate how safe they felt living in Grants Pass. On a five-point scale, where one was "not at all safe" and five was "very safe," 71% of respondents gave a rating of four or five and only 8% gave a rating of one or two. This feeling of safety is improved 3% from last year. At the same time the percentage of respondents who felt the City to be unsafe has stayed the same. Put in some perspective, these feelings of safety have increased after two years of slight declines and are at almost exactly the same level as they were in 2000.

Perhaps more important than the high number of people who feel safe in Grants pass is the fact that almost no one feels unsafe. Only 8% of the people report any sense of feeling unsafe and only 1.5% say they feel "not at all safe."

The feeling of Grants Pass as an unsafe place is highest among those who live in the Northwest portion of the City (15%) and by those ages 45-54 (13%). In addition, men continue to be slightly more likely to express that they feel unsafe than do women, (9% vs. 7%). Nevertheless, a vast majority of all groups feel safe living in Grants Pass. See Banner Table 29.

This general feeling of safety was further reinforced by responses to a follow-up question where respondents were asked to compare the safety of their neighborhood to other neighborhoods in Grants Pass. On this question, 56% of respondents felt that their neighborhood was safer than other neighborhoods while 10% felt their neighborhood was "less safe." This perception of living in a neighborhood that is safer than others improved from last year, while at the same time the percentage of people who feel their neighborhood to be "less safe" went down. In addition, people's comparative feeling of safety in their neighborhood varied somewhat depending on what section of Grants Pass they lived in. The percentage of respondents who were likely to feel that their neighborhood was "less safe" was much higher in the Southwest (15%) and lower in the Southeast (5%) and the Northeast (5%).

There was also significant variation between respondents who own their own home and those who rent, with homeowners more likely to feel their neighborhood is safer than others (59% vs. 49%). However, unlike last year renters were only slightly more likely than home owners to feel their neighborhood was less safe than others (11% vs. 9%). For renters this is a huge decrease in the percentage of people who feel their neighborhood is less safe, down from a very high 25% last year. See Banner Table 30.

### **Grants Pass Growth Rate**

Toward the end of the survey, respondents were asked their opinion about the rate of growth in the City. A large majority of respondents (58%) now feel that Grants Pass is growing at "too fast" a pace. A minority of respondents (36%) felt the city was growing at "about the right pace", while only 4% felt the City was growing "too slowly." Over the ten years that NSDS has conducted this survey for the City, the responses to this question have changed significantly. The percentage of respondents who feel the City is growing "about the right pace" steadily declined from 1999 through 2006. At the same time, the percentage of respondents who feel the City is growing at "too fast a pace" increased about 5% each year from 2000 to 2004 and then jumped 7% in 2005 and an even larger 10% in 2006.

This year, 2007, marks the first time in seven years that residents of Grants Pass have increased their support for growth. However, the increased support for growth came almost exclusively from men, whose belief that Grants Pass is growing "too fast", declined from 64% last year to 47% this year.

It is also important to point out that a substantial majority of respondents still feel that Grants Pass is growing too quickly and that 2007 is the third year in a row in which the majority of residents have held this opinion.

### **What People Would Like to Change and What They Enjoy about Grants Pass**

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked what they would like to change about Grants Pass and what they like most about Grants Pass. The responses to these questions cover a wide range of topics, however, the most common changes people would like to see include limits to growth and population; control over housing prices; more and better paying jobs; improved shopping, including a wider variety of stores; reduction in crime; activities for teens and young adults; improvements in traffic control and roads; and increased policing, particularly for speeding and drug use. Many people express a fear that Grants Pass is losing its small town feel and want to see changes that will preserve the town as they would like to see it.

The things people enjoy about Grants Pass are first and foremost the weather or climate and the scenery. In addition many people list outdoor pursuits and nature issues, in particular the river and the parks. Finally, many people like the nature of the City and value highly the small town atmosphere and the friendly attitude of other residents.

For more information see the Narrative Responses Section.

### **Grants Pass City Services**

Respondents were asked a set of questions about 13 city services that people could reasonably be expected to have opinions about, even if they had not contacted the service providers directly. Grants Pass residents feel that these services generally provide excellent or close to excellent service on a five-point scale where one indicated "poor" service and five indicated "excellent" service (See Banner Tables 1-13). Of the 13 services respondents were asked about, 9 services received "good" or "excellent" ratings

by over 50% of respondents, and the tenth (recreation programs) by 48%. The three services that did not get high ratings were Planning, where only 16% gave this department "good" or "excellent" ratings, Building Inspection, where only 27% gave these scores, and Code Enforcement, where 39% gave ratings of 4 or 5. For the last five years the same 10 services were highly rated and Building Inspection and Planning have had low ratings. This was the first year the survey asked about Code Enforcement, following last year's survey were specific questions about the importance of enforcing codes.

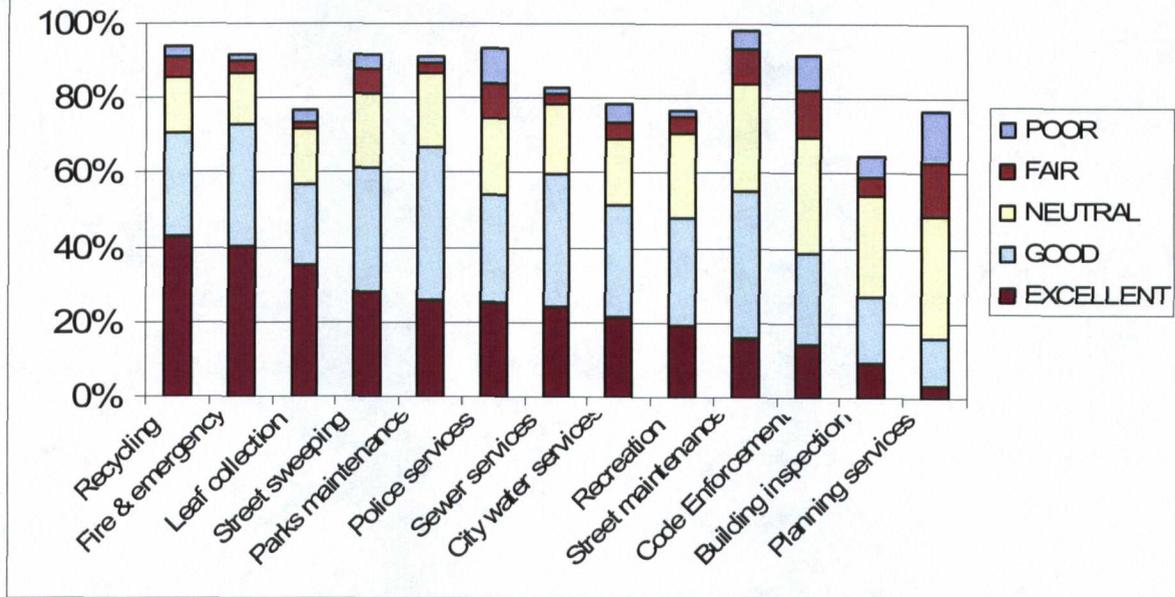
However, the lower rated services, Building Inspection, Planning, and Code Enforcement, were also services where large numbers of respondents reported that they did not know how to rate the services (presumably because they had no experience with the service). In the case of building inspections, 36% of respondents were unable to provide a rating, and an additional 27% gave a neutral rating, which may also be an indicator of difficulty in giving a rating. The case of Planning was similar, where 23% of respondents felt unable to provide a rating, and an additional 32% gave a neutral rating. Code Enforcement was similar to Planning, with 8% unable to give a rating, 31% giving a neutral rating

Additionally, in the case of Planning, 38% of respondents also rated the service as "fair" or "poor." This was the largest percentage of low ratings given to any of the city services measured and is 11% greater than it was just two years ago. Code Enforcement also had a large number of people (22%) thinking the service is either "poor" or "fair."

Even though they were among the 10 highly rated services, five city services (street maintenance, city water, sewer, recreation programs, and leaf collection) also had large numbers of respondents (30% - 46%) who could not give a rating or gave a neutral rating, depending on the service.

It is also important to note that Grants Pass services rarely received a large number of "poor" ratings. With the exception of Planning Services and Code Enforcement as previously discussed, the ratings of "poor" range from 9% to less than 2%. However, when a respondent did give a rating of "poor" for any city service, they were then asked to explain why they thought that service was "poor." Most commonly, the comments reflect personal interactions the respondent had with the service in question, or with a belief that city government is inefficient. However, there are quite a number of specific comments on Police services and the low priority given to property crimes. In addition, the comments about the Planning Department speak specifically to the reason planning is rated poorly by so many respondents. Almost all comments about the Planning Department are about the respondent's ever increasing concern with city growth, or about the difficulties respondents see in obtaining services and permits. For more detail see the narrative responses to these questions in the Topline section of the report. See Figure 1 for departmental ratings.

**Figure 1: City Department Ratings**



For most of the thirteen services, there were significant differences in how they were rated based on the characteristics of the respondent. The most significant difference was between men and women. Women were much more likely to give higher ratings for services. Additionally, respondents aged 55 or older and those who have been residents of Grants Pass for five years or less generally gave higher ratings than their counterparts. See Banner Tables 1-13 for examples.

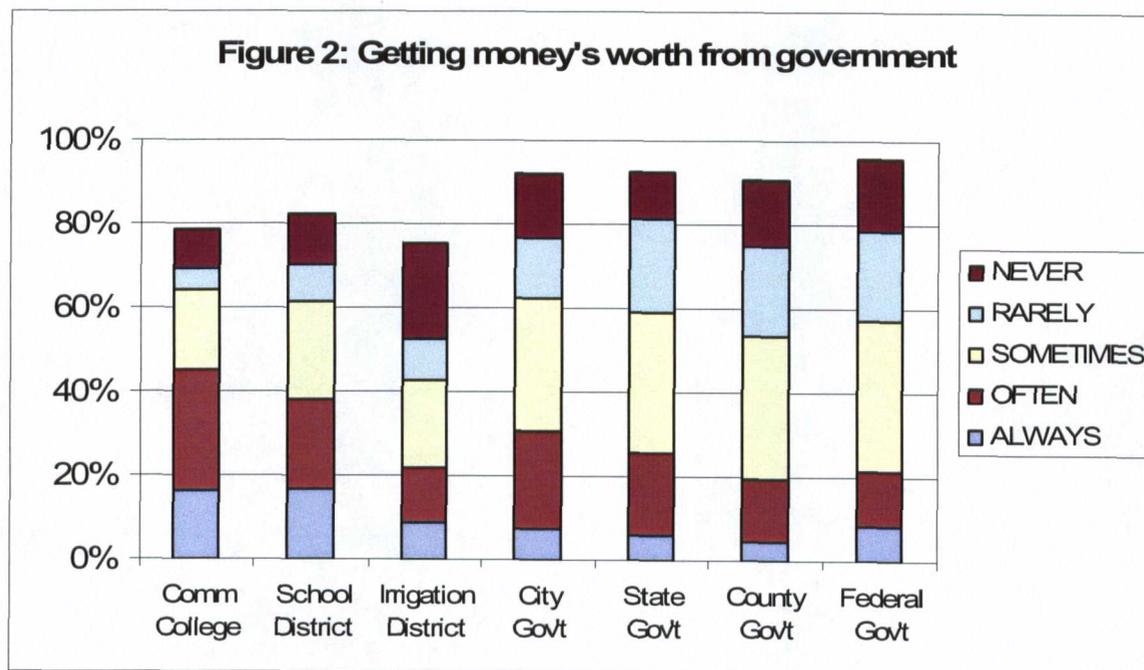
**Attitudes Toward the Value of Government**

Respondents were asked about their attitudes toward the value of four levels of government: Federal, State, County, and City. In addition, they were asked about the value of the school district, the local community college, and the local irrigation district. For each of these institutions, respondents were asked how often they felt they were getting their money's worth, using the response scale: "never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always." Respondents more often believe that they get their "money's worth" from the smaller and more local units of government over the larger units. See Banner Tables 14-20.

Respondents ranked the Federal, State and County governments lower than others; only 20% - 26% of respondents felt that they "always" or "often" got their money's worth. The greatest support for the idea of getting your money's worth from government was with the Grants Pass City Government where 31% of respondents felt that they "always" or "often" got their money's worth. This is a decrease from the ratings the City government received in 1998 and 1999, but exactly in line with the ratings the City received for the last seven years, since 2000.

Interestingly, those residents who feel they “always” get their money’s worth from the Grants Pass City Government almost always feel Grants Pass is an “excellent” place to live. At the same time, those who find it “easy” to participate in Grants Pass city government and those who feel the pace of growth is “about” right, are more likely to feel they get their money’s worth from city government.

For the other three governmental institutions, respondents held widely different views about their value. At the high end, 45% of respondents felt they always or often got their money’s worth from the Community College, while at the other extreme only 22% of respondents felt they always or often got their money’s worth from the Irrigation District. The School District received a higher rating than other general forms of government, with 38% of respondents feeling that they got their money’s worth. See Figure 2 for a comparison of the various levels of government.



### Participation in City Government

Respondents were asked a series of questions about public involvement and public information (see Banner Tables 21-26). The majority of respondents (54%) felt that the City of Grants Pass provides adequate opportunities for participation and influence in city decisions. Interestingly enough, this belief exists even though only 19% have attended some form of local government or public meeting on city issues during the past 12 months. In fact, those who have not attended public meetings are more likely to feel that it is easy to participate in city government than are those who have attended public meetings, 53% versus 46% – a finding that has been true for the last five years.

Even though attending public meetings may not be popular, almost twice as many respondents (37%) have volunteered their time on projects or activities that they feel were designed to make Grants Pass a better place to live. There are variations based on personal characteristics in those who are more likely to volunteer. Respondents over 65 are less likely to have volunteered (31%), while those between ages 35 and 54 are much more likely to be volunteers (44%). In addition, residents in the Northeast section of the city are least likely to volunteer (28%), as are respondents who have been residents for five years or less (28%). It is also interesting to note that those who volunteer are more likely to have attended a city meeting when compared with those who do not volunteer (23% vs. 16%). See Banner Table 22.

Forty-four percent of respondents feel that the City does an excellent or good job of informing them about city issues and 70% answer affirmatively that the City meets their information needs. The score for informing residents about city issues increased slightly from last year, while the score for information needs increased significantly and is now in line with the score in 2005.

The most useful source of city information was reported to be articles in the local newspaper (49%), followed by the City newsletter (15%), television, radio and the internet. Public meetings were thought to be of very low value for informing citizens, with only 1% of respondents listing such meetings as the most useful way to keep up with city issues and activities.

In past years there may have been confusion among respondents between the local newspaper and the City newsletter. This year this distinction was made clear and the newsletter showed itself to be the main source of city information for many people. In addition, respondents were asked about their awareness of the City newsletter, and 46% of people claimed to be familiar with the newsletter.

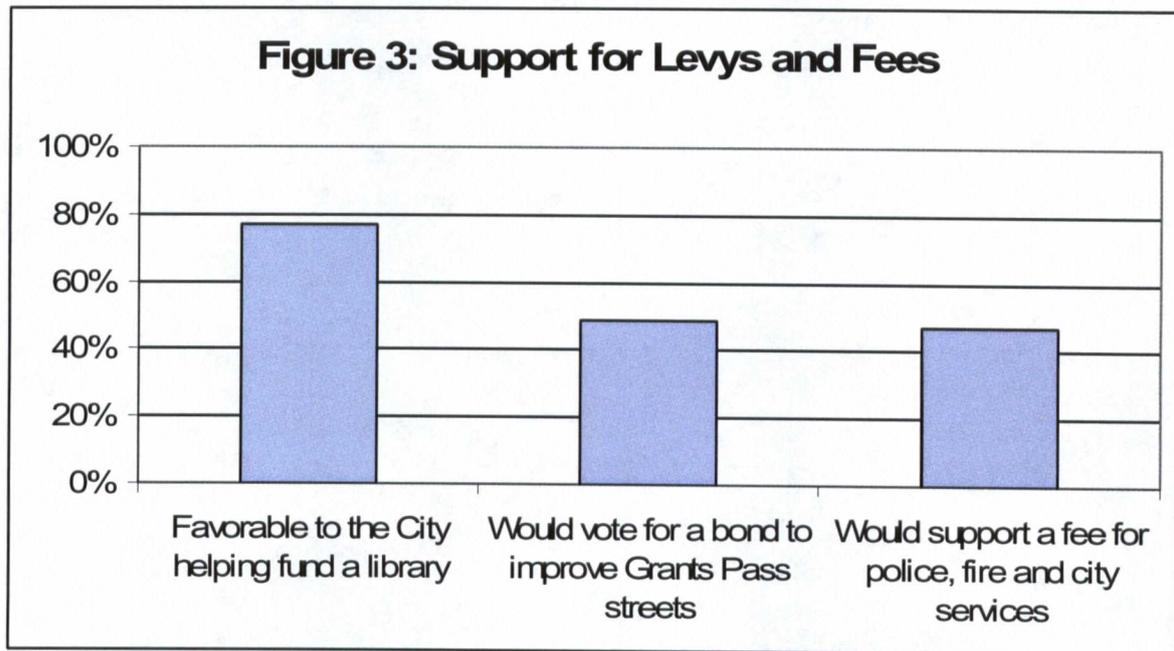
Respondents were also asked for suggestions on how the City newsletter might be changed or improved. Most respondents did not provide any response to this question and the vast majority of those who did thought the newsletter was good the way it is. One person thought if it were distributed by a different means it might get more use, and another thought it often failed to give enough lead time about upcoming events. See the Narrative Response Section for more information.

### **Support for Levies and Fees**

Each year the City of Grants Pass adds a series of questions to the survey on issues of immediate concern to the City Council. The first question this year concerned a proposal to replace the current police and fire property tax levy with a flat monthly household fee. Prior to asking whether or not people would support such a change, information was given to them about the current assessment, which in many cases would be higher than the proposed fee. This idea had support from less than a majority of respondents (47%), with 35% in opposition and 18% undecided.

The second question this year asked respondents whether or not Grants Pass should provide supplemental assistance to the County's efforts to reopen the county library in Grants Pass. This idea was overwhelmingly popular, with 77% of respondents wanting the City to assist with library funding.

The final new question this year asked if respondents would support a bond for improving some of the streets in Grants Pass. Respondents were also given examples of specific streets that need improvement. Support for a street improvement bond was 49%, with 33% in opposition and another 13% saying their support would depend on the cost of the bond. Another 4% said they were unsure. It would appear that the success of this measure would depend to a great degree on the extent to which people in Grants Pass felt the cost of improvements was justified. See Figure 3 for the support levels for each of these three measures.



### Conclusions

Once again this year's survey continues to show that residents of Grants Pass like the community they live in very much and have a high opinion of local government and the services it provides. Residents also feel informed and able to participate in their government. In addition, they generally feel safe in their neighborhoods.

However, this year's survey continues to show a substantial increase in the concerns about growth and the desire to see limits on growth and development. For the third year a clear majority of respondents think the growth rate is too fast and many oppose one or more aspects of development or the outcome of development. At the same time concerns about possible crime and violence remain high, as well as the desire for increased

policing and criticisms about the police. All of this shows that the change in attitudes about growth and its outcome, opinions that have been steadily growing for the past several years, remain at very high levels. Concern about growth remains the primary community issue in Grants Pass.

Finally, since the City has been asking many of the questions in this survey for a number of years, the trends and changes in public attitudes are worth examining. For the fourth year, this report now contains a section including annual trend graphs. Please see this section for a long-term perspective of reoccurring issues regarding city services, growth, and attitudes about living in Grants Pass.