



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Alissa Farrell, Administrative Services Director

CC: Patrick Quick, Strategy and Innovation Director

THROUGH: Diane Foster, Assistant City Manager

MEMO DATE: June 6, 2022

MEETING DATE: June 13, 2022

RE: 2022 Aspen Community Survey Results

REQUEST OF COUNCIL:

No formal Council action is requested at this time. This memo is to provide City Council with a summary of the results of the recent 2022 Aspen Community Survey. The survey vendor, Elevated Insights (EI), is presenting key findings at the June 13, 2022 work session. In addition, extensive survey details are available in the Attachment as the Full Findings Report.

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND:

Since 2006, the City of Aspen has distributed a community survey to Aspen residents to gather aggregate information on the status of community outcomes, the quality of City services, and community sentiment. In 2019, the City transitioned the survey to increase the focus on the City of Aspen's strategic focus areas and at this time, the City commissioned Elevated Insights (EI) a strategic insights agency to help update the survey method and approach while utilizing the survey as a barometer on satisfaction within each strategic focus area.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic along with the timing of recent community surveys completed by ACRA and Pitkin County, the Aspen Community Survey was strategically delayed, preventing overlap in the field. With this in mind, the City of Aspen Community Survey was sent out in February through March of 2022. A wide-ranging communication plan ensued to promote the survey including Spanish language notifications and a Spanish survey option. Because of the expansive communication net that was cast, 678 completed responses were received. This is an increase from 439 in 2019 which translates to 54% additional respondents from 2019. The growth in survey responses resulted from the communications plan and represents robust community participation and engagement along with a more diverse demographic of responses.

The overarching goal of the community survey is to gather a statistically valid number of confidential responses to help the City understand the current outlook of the community. The aggregate feedback will be available to the public online and can be used by Staff and Council to evaluate and guide City direction. To track trends, some of the survey questions remain unchanged year to year. Others are updated to provide feedback on emerging needs and issues such as the impact of the COVID pandemic.

In differentiating this year's survey, further improvements were made. For 2022, enhancements made to the survey include but are not limited to:

- **Streamlined length of survey** – The length of the survey was shortened which yielded a higher completion rate. Questions were more strategically focused and results of the survey along with the analysis continue to become increasingly helpful in developing a roadmap for City improvements.
- **More broad-based community response** – Through Spanish translation services and Spanish language responses along with a significant increase in 18–34-year-old respondents, a more representative outcome of the Aspen community was received.
- **Strategic Focus Area described in survey questions.** The City of Aspen's current strategic focus areas include (as named and described in the survey):
 - Make Aspen Livable (City government ensures Aspen is a great place to live and work, including access to childcare, healthcare, housing, recreation, internet, and transit)
 - Foster Economic Vitality (City government develops a healthy, diverse local economy through commercial and residential development and local shopping)
 - Customer-Focused Government (City government continuously improves services and processes based on feedback, best practices, and innovation)
 - Ensure a Safe Community (City government ensures Aspen is a safe City to live, work, and visit)
 - Maintain City of Aspen's Financial Health (City government responsibly manages taxpayer dollars, community investments, and financial reserves)
 - Support Community Engagement (City government regularly shares information that is helpful and trustworthy, is responsive, encourages and listens to feedback, and provides meaningful ways to participate)

For the 2002 survey with the size of 678 respondents and the City of Aspen population of about 7,100; the Margin of Error (MoE) was determined to be +/- 4% with a 95% level of confidence for most questions, clarifying how well the survey results reflect the views of the entire Aspen population.

Describing the strategic focus areas within the survey likely contributed to shifts in satisfaction. Meaningful drops in satisfaction highlight which strategic focus areas may need further exploration or community discussions to fully understand community desired direction.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was isolated and analyzed within the Full Findings Report (Attachment), highlighting that while the pandemic accounted for some of the City's decrease in satisfaction, the pandemic did not fully account for the City's drop in satisfaction. Additionally, the impact of economic inflations is an area that may have influenced the survey results. Further follow up on these variables is necessary to refine the most appropriate and relevant actionable steps for the long term and sustainable betterment of the Aspen community.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that many of the recommendations provided in the Full Findings Report (Attachment), complement the current direction of the City.

See below for an excerpt of how the strategic focus areas were clarified in the 2002 community survey:

For each of the following City of Aspen priorities below, please rate your level of satisfaction with how the City of Aspen is doing to:

Select one for each option

Make Aspen Livable (Ensures Aspen is a good City to live and work in year-round. This includes access to childcare, healthcare, housing, recreation, internet connectivity, and transit.)



Ensure a Safe Community (Ensures Aspen is a safe City to live, work and visit year-round.)



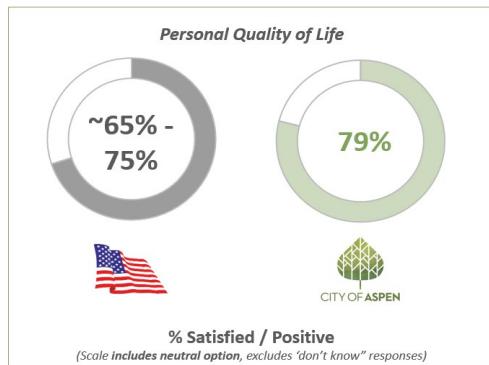
Maintain City of Aspen's Financial Health (Responsibly manages revenue streams, community investments, and financial reserves.)

DISCUSSION: General Findings

In comparison with other jurisdictions in the United States, respondents rated the *Quality of Life*, as well as their *Satisfaction with City Services* are about in line with the national benchmark data. About 4 in 5 residents are satisfied with their *Personal Quality of Life*. Positive aspects of living in the City of Aspen include health/wellness, safety, and environment. About half of residents are satisfied with the quality of services provided by the City of Aspen, about 1/4 are neutral with their satisfaction of City services, and about 1/4 are dissatisfied with *Quality of City Services*. While this is in line with average satisfaction with City services in the US, this represents a 9-point reduction in satisfaction in *Quality of Life* and a 19-point reduction in satisfaction with *Quality of City Services* vs. 2019 and the lowest satisfaction recorded since the City started measuring these metrics in 2006.

Figure 1: Overall Ratings of Quality of Life and Satisfaction with City Services

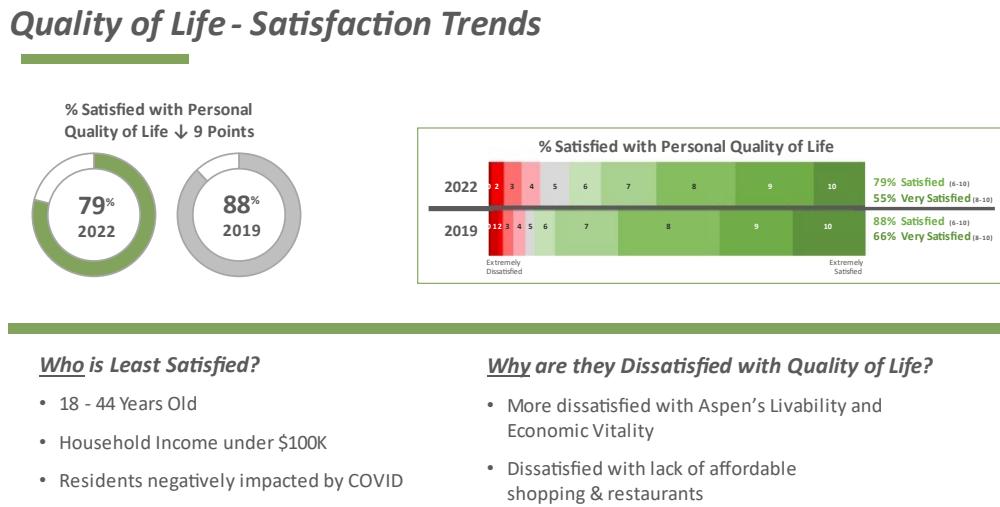
Personal Quality of Life



Satisfaction with City Services



Figure 2: Quality of Life – Satisfaction Trend Analysis

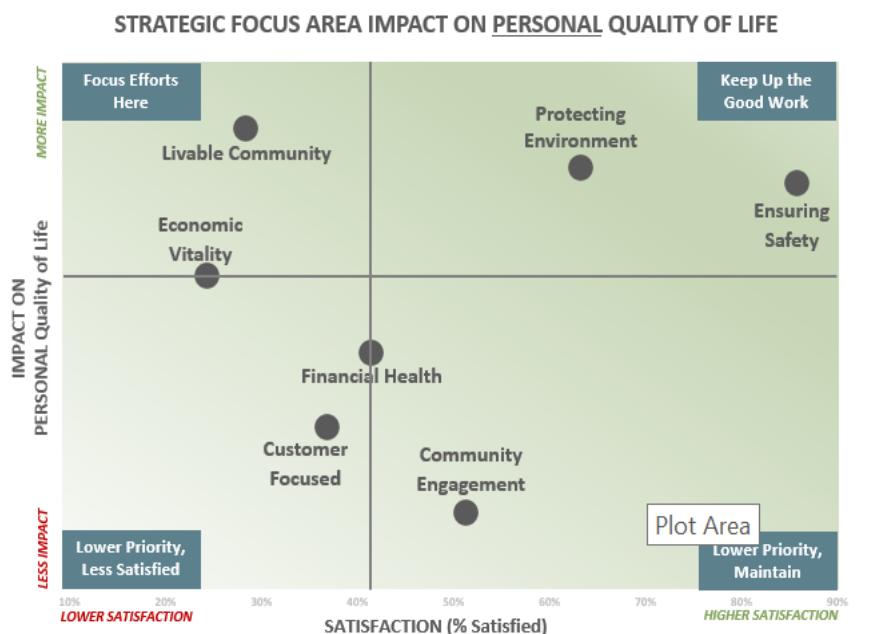


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In comparing 2019 and 2022, the decrease around *Quality of Life* is attributed to a dissatisfaction with the lack of affordable shopping and restaurants along with Aspen's livability and Economic Vitality.

Moreover, in assessing COVID-19's impact on *Quality of Life* in Aspen, 39% of respondents stated that their *Quality of Life* is worse now than before the pandemic while 24% concluded their *Quality of Life* is better now versus before COVID-19.

Figure 3: Key Driver Analysis – What Impacts Personal Quality of Life



Since 2019, EI has begun to conduct an additional level of analysis to help ascertain where it is most important to assess further. This analysis is called, Key Driver Analysis and delves into the correlation between satisfaction levels for each of the Strategic Focus Areas and the values of an overarching dependent variable. This can be helpful in identifying dependent variables where satisfaction may be low with a service or topic but where an action to address that same low rating may not have the same level of impact on overall satisfaction as taking action related to a different Strategic Focus Area. In reviewing the Key Driver Analysis, *Making Aspen a Livable Community of Choice* and *Economic Vitality* are areas that have the lowest satisfaction and the most impact on *Personal Quality of Life*. Therefore, improving Aspen's *Livability* and *Economic Vitality* are more likely to improve the personal quality of life for the community.

Respondents dissatisfied with their *Personal Quality of Life* are especially dissatisfied with affordable shopping, restaurants, and housing and shared many challenges with affordable living in the City of Aspen. They are less likely to trust the City of Aspen to look out for their interests.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that within the demographic analysis of *Personal Quality of Life*, those dissatisfied with their *Personal Quality of Life* are more likely to have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the above, Council may consider the below key findings:

- 88% of residents report positive physical health.
- 77% report positive emotional well-being.
- 86% of respondents are satisfied with the City of Aspen for *Ensuring a Safe Community*.
- 63% are satisfied with the City for *Protecting the Local Natural Environment*.
- Satisfaction with City performance by Strategic Focus Area is varied and has dropped in all areas except Safety vs. 2019.
 - 86% are satisfied with the City of Aspen for *Ensuring a Safe Community*.
 - 63% are satisfied with the City for Protecting the *Local Natural Environment*.
 - 29% are Satisfied with the City's efforts to *Make Aspen Livable*.
 - Only 25% are satisfied with the City for *Fostering Economic Vitality*.
- About half of residents are satisfied with the quality of services provided by the City of Aspen, about 1/4 are neutral with their satisfaction of City services, and about 1/4 are dissatisfied with quality of City services.
- Community seeks more affordable living, more affordable housing, and reductions or changes with development.
 - 1 out of every 3 respondents shared that living in Aspen needs to be more affordable, sharing a genuine need for affordable restaurants, retail, bars, groceries, recreation, parking, and public transportation.
 - 31% shared specific needs with affordable housing – for the whole community.
 - 28% passionately shared desired changes with development including reducing development, helping local restaurants, bars, and retail stay in business, and increased controls over commercial developers.
- Widening gap between disparate groups and reduced sense of community.
 - Some residents are asking the City to help reduce economic inequalities between visitors and locals.

Figure 4: 2022 Satisfaction by Strategic Focus Area:

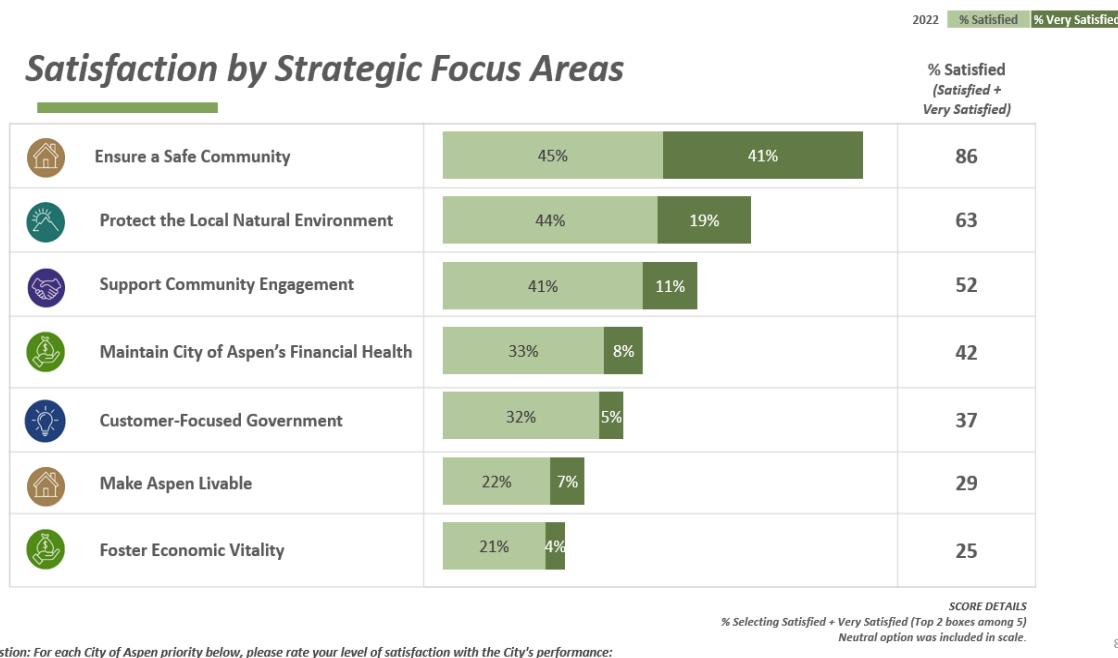
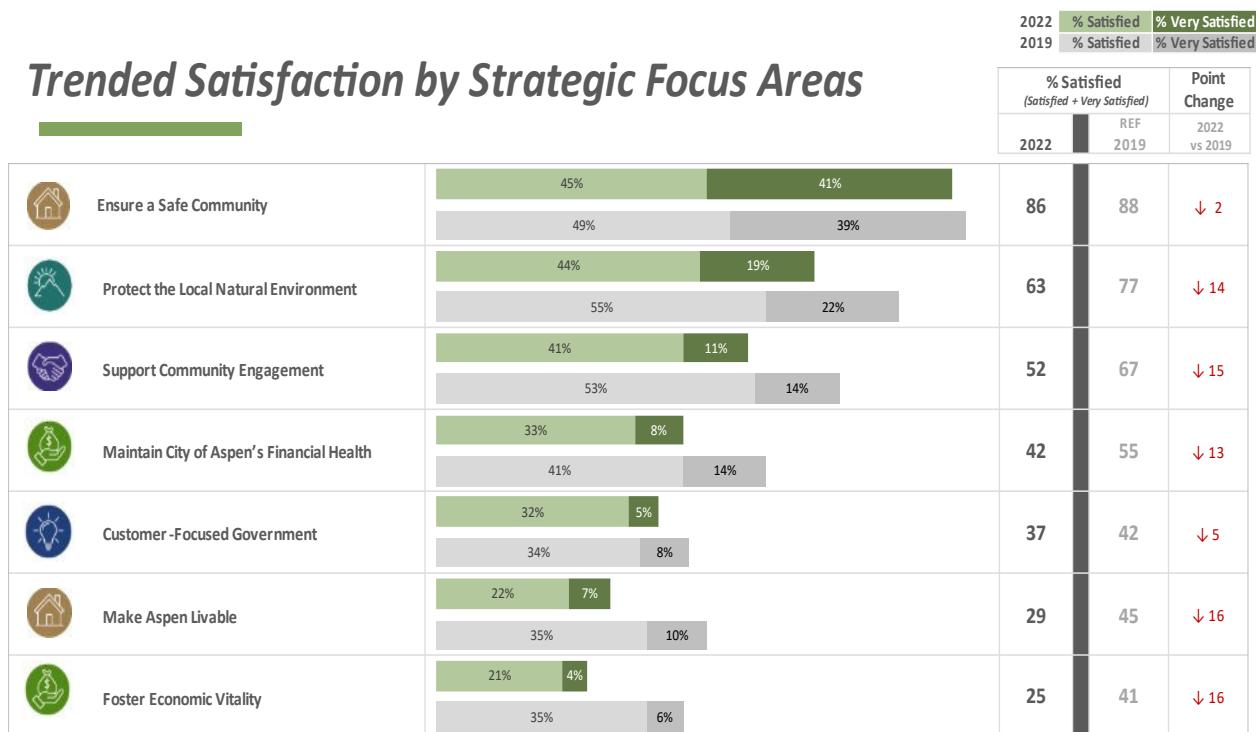


Figure 5: Trended Satisfaction by Strategic Focus Area – Comparison of 2019 to 2022:



Question: For each City of Aspen priority below, please rate your level of satisfaction with the City's performance:

Specific findings by Strategic Focus Areas include:

- About half of the respondents agree that the City provides a welcoming environment for involvement (56%) and provides value overall for the taxes paid (49%).
- About 1/3 of respondents agree that the City matches spending with community priorities (32%) and that the City can be trusted to look out for residents' interests (30%).
- 81% are dissatisfied with affordable shopping opportunities in Aspen.
- 69% are dissatisfied with commercial and residential development.

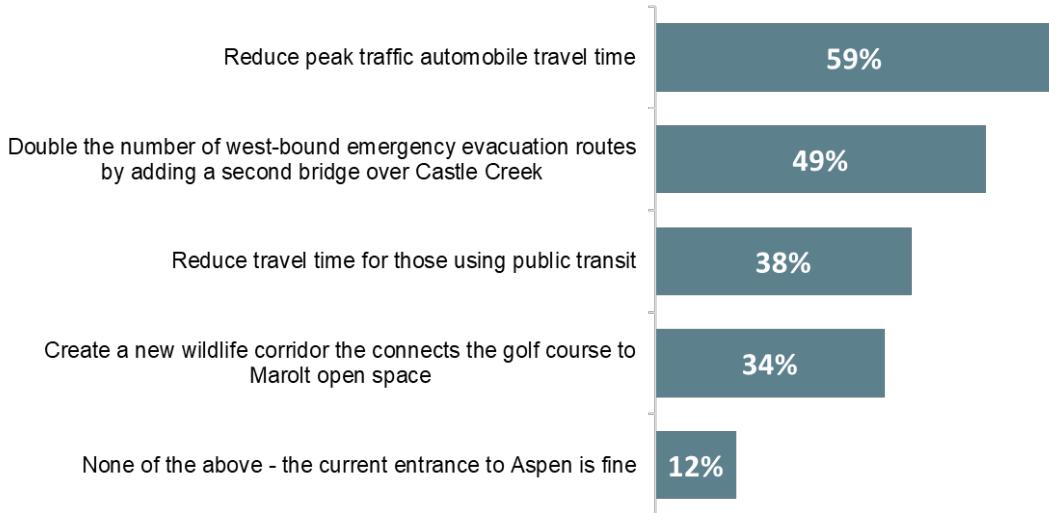
Furthermore, for the 2022 Community Survey, specific questions and areas of interest were included. These areas of interest are:

- Infant Care and Early Childhood Needs
- Community Policing
- Evacuation Concerns
- Castle Creek Bridge Priorities
- Parks & Open Space Amenities

In summary, 62% of survey respondents stated that they would like the same amount of community policing, and 37% are very or extremely concerned regarding evacuating the City in the event of emergency. Many placed an importance on taking action on infant and early childhood needs. Moreover, trails (88%) and open spaces (83%) were important to the largest proportion of residents while 69% felt recreation facilities and programs were important.

For the Castle Creek Bridge Replacement, responses are as follows:

Top Castle Creek Bridge Replacement Priorities



EI Summary of Recommendations:

Based on the results of the survey, EI as an objective evaluator and with the understanding of the lack of deep knowledge around current community issues, has developed the following high-level summary of recommendations for Staff to further evaluate:

- **Enhance communication** in the goals and priorities for the City of Aspen

- **Focus on improving affordability and reducing income equalities.**
- **Prioritize continued efforts to address affordable housing for the community (workforce and community).**
- **Further involve the community with commercial and residential development decisions.**
- **Focus on bringing diverse groups together to strengthen sense of community.**
- **Continue community policy efforts** with an emphasis on patrolling (on foot and/or on bikes) and wildlife interaction education.
- **Develop a plan for the Castle Creek Bridge replacement**, prioritizing reducing peak traffic automobile travel time and increasing evacuation routes.

The comprehensive listing of the recommended items can be found in the Full Findings Report (Attachment).

It is important to recognize that many of the City's departmental work plans currently are aligned with many of the initiatives stated above including but not limited to:

- Development and completion of a **city affordable housing strategic plan**.
- Coordination of **diversity, equity and inclusivity** training, gap analysis and continued community listening sessions.
- Continuation **community policing efforts**.
- Continuation of **communication and community engagement initiatives** with further refinements.

To optimize EI's recommendations and for the continual betterment of the Aspen community, the current listing is under review by the Strategy and Innovation Office (SIO), City Manager's Office and Department Directors.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS:

No funds are being requested.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

The survey was administered electronically, reducing paper usage. A paper option was available for those who requested it.

ALTERNATIVES:

Information only. No alternatives are proposed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Information only. Recommendations based on the survey results are provided in the Full Findings Report in the Attachment. No formal recommendations are being brought forth by Staff at this time.

However, the survey is intended to assist the City in its continual effort to identify and respond to feedback as well as to provide data in helping determine the priorities for the community through future strategic work plan development, policy analysis and recommendations, and through the annual budget planning processes.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS:

None.

