2008 City of El Paso Citizen Survey

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Introduction

The Institute for Policy and Economic Development (IPED) at the University of Texas at El Paso was contracted by the City of El Paso to conduct a survey of citizen attitudes and perceptions about City services and general quality of life issues. This survey followed two previous surveys of a similar nature conducted by IPED in 2004 and 2006. Goals of the survey are to identify areas of focus for targeting improvements in City services and customer relations and to follow up on progress from the findings of previous surveys.

Key Survey Findings

Community Development

- ✓ The top positive image for citizens about the City of El Paso is the climate and weather.
- ✓ The top negative image about El Paso is lack of jobs and good salaries.
- ✓ The biggest strengths that can be better utilized to promote the City are its:
  - ➢ Climate and weather
  - ➢ Border location
  - ➢ Culture, history and people
- ✓ The most important *strategic initiatives* for the City to work on and improve are:
  - ➢ Economic and business development
  - ➢ Community development and quality of life
- ✓ The most important issues for elected officials to work on and improve are:
  - ➢ Jobs, employment opportunities and salaries
  - ➢ Lowering taxes
  - ➢ Roads and infrastructure
  - ➢ Better education and schools
- ✓ 28 percent are somewhat interested in a revitalized downtown while 47 percent are very interested.
- ✓ The most important City departments for *quality of life* are:
  - ➢ Community Development
  - ➢ Parks and Recreation
- ✓ 59 percent believe that El Paso is getting better as a place to live.

Transportation

- ✓ The most important *transportation initiative* for the City should be to reduce traffic congestion.
- ✓ About 63 thousand City residents (18 years & older) use public transportation to access Downtown.

Economic Development

- ✓ Two-thirds believe that the City is a good or excellent place to work or do business.
- ✓ One-half believe the City is getting better as a place to work or do business.
- ✓ 45 percent are somewhat or very satisfied regarding El Paso's current job market versus 42 percent are not satisfied.
- ✓ Contracting with local businesses is the most important consideration when the City contracts private companies for services.

Fiscal

- ✓ One-half are somewhat or very satisfied about the City's use of their tax dollars.
- ✓ The most underfunded areas in the City are:
  - ➢ Quality of life services
  - ➢ Economic development

Customer Service and Citizen Involvement

- ✓ The most satisfactory areas funded by the City are:
  - ➢ Fire
  - ➢ Airport
  - ➢ Recycling
  - ➢ Police
  - ➢ Libraries
- ✓ 19 percent initiated contact with elected City officials in the last year, primarily in-person:
  - ➢ Two-thirds are somewhat or very satisfied
- ✓ One-quarter have had contact with City departments or their personnel:
  - ➢ Overall, one-quarter were not satisfied after interacting with City employees
- ✓ Between one-quarter and one-third think the City needs to improve communication with regards to:
  - ➢ Regulations, policies and ordinances (24 percent)
  - ➢ City sponsored programs (27 percent)
  - ➢ Infrastructure projects (34 percent)

Demographics

- ✓ Results weighted by gender to reflect City gender breakdown over the age of 18:
  - ➢ 55.1 percent female and 44.9 percent male

Methodology

A telephone household survey was conducted using random digit dialing (RDD), which approximates simple random sampling. The RDD sample was obtained from a leading national sampling firm, with the sample pre-tested for fax machines and disconnects. With RDD, every household with a working phone has an equal probability of being selected for participation.

The 2008 City survey (see Appendix A) used the 2006 City survey previously developed by IPED as a basis. Several revisions were made, in collaboration with City officials, including changes to the ordinal scales for several questions, and the addition of three questions that asks citizens to rank in order of importance strategic initiatives, quality of life departments and transportation initiatives. Consequently, direct comparisons to previous surveys conducted in 2004 and 2006 are not straightforward. However, these survey instrument improvements will be beneficial for tracking future measures of citizen attitudes and perceptions about City services and quality of life issues. Wherever applicable, comparisons are made between these results and previous survey findings. Another change was that questions were grouped into sections to correspond with City "policy statements" and performance metrics, listed below:

1) Community Development
2) Transportation
3) Economic Development
4) Fiscal
5) Customer Service and Citizen Involvement

The final survey was written in English and Spanish and converted (in both languages) to electronic format to capture phone responses online by (bilingual) interviewers in the IPED Survey Research Center. The electronic version of the survey was pre-tested and verified with regard to data integrity and accuracy. Surveys were conducted in December 2007 and into early January 2008, on weekdays and Saturdays (excluding holidays and days around the holidays), between the times of 10 a.m. and 7 p.m.

A final sample size of 1,035 surveys completed by telephone was achieved. At the 95 percent confidence level, sample findings provided an accuracy level of plus or minus 3 percent. Results were statistically weighted by gender to offset any gender bias introduced by a larger sample of female respondents (females are more likely to be homemakers and to participate voluntarily).[1] Before and after weighting results did not show any significant changes in the responses. Frequencies are provided in Appendix B and crosstabulations for City-selected demographics and questions are provided in Appendix C.

[1] O'Rourke, D. and Lakner, E., Summer 1989, "Gender Bias: Analysis of Factors Causing Male Underrepresentation in Surveys," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, v1, n2, Survey Research Laboratory, University of Illinois.

Survey Findings

Community Development

Survey respondents were asked several open-ended questions about the City's images and strengths. The top two positive images for households about the City of El Paso are 1) climate and weather and 2) tranquility, peacefulness and security (Figure 1). These two responses also scored highest in the 2004 and 2006 City surveys with the exception that climate and weather has gained additional support as a positive image in the most recent survey. The Franklin Mountains and the "Star" ranked third, up from fifth in 2006; in part due to its recent refurbishment. The City's friendliness, diversity and people also ranked high as positive images.

Figure 1. Positive image that first comes to mind about El Paso

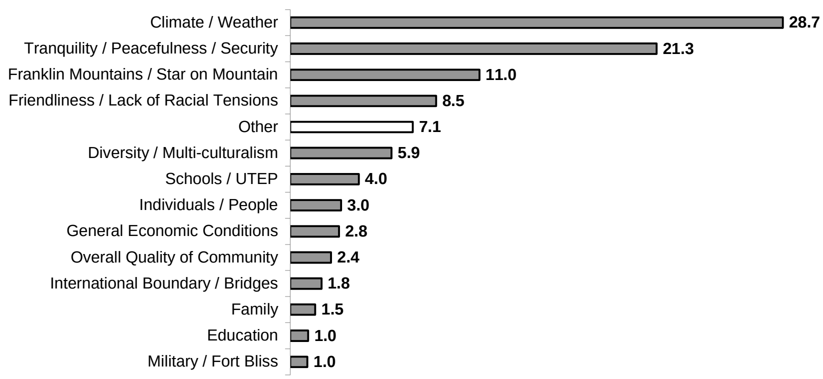
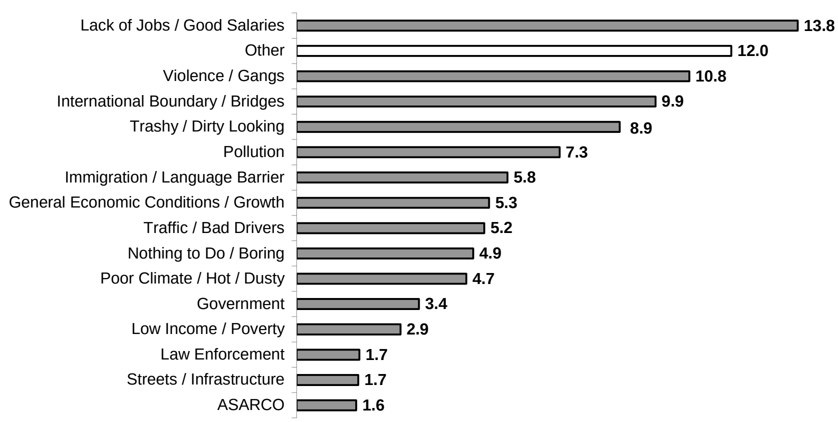


Figure 2. Negative image that first comes to mind about El Paso



The top negative image about El Paso, as indicated by one in seven respondents, is lack of jobs and good salaries (Figure 2). By comparison, in 2006, almost one in four persons regarded this category as a negative. This may be correlated to the recent structural changes occurring within the regional economy, such as BRAC expansion, the four year medical school and more effective industry recruitment and retention efforts. While the City has consistently been a low crime area, violence and gangs remain a negative issue for citizens as in previous survey findings. Border proximity, visual concerns of trash and dirtiness, as well as pollution also ranked high in the negative image category.

Similar to previous surveys, respondents were asked to list the two biggest strengths that can be better utilized to promote the City. As before, weather and climate topped responses (Figure 3). The City's border location, its culture, history and people, as well as UTEP were also noted as strengths. The same five strengths have been consistent in surveys conducted in 2004, 2006 and 2008.

Figure 3. Biggest strengths to promote El Paso

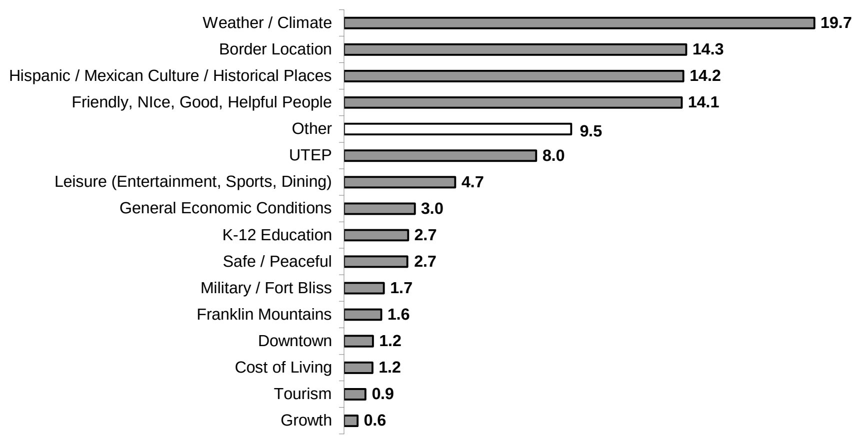


Figure 4. Knowledge of strategic plan

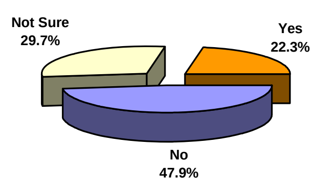


Figure 5. Importance of strategic plan

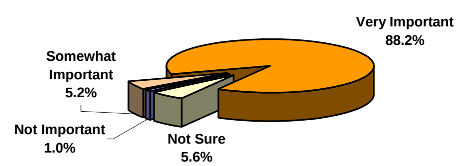


Figure 6. Knowledge of master plan

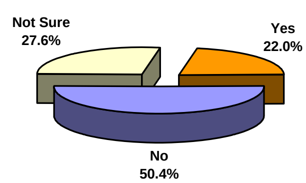
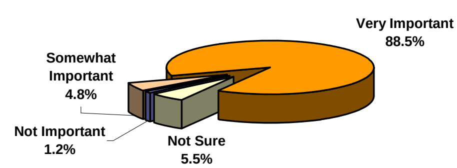
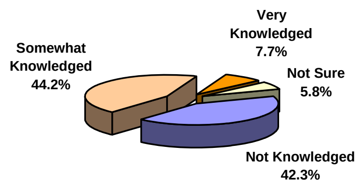


Figure 7. Importance of master plan



Citizen knowledge of the City's actions and development efforts is key to elected and non-elected officials in order to enhance service delivery. Roughly one-half of citizens surveyed indicated no knowledge of the City having a strategic or master plan. However, ninety-three percent believe that both are important to have (Figure 4 through 7). Figure 8 shows that citizens are more knowledgeable about the City's operations, programs and policies with over half being somewhat or very knowledgeable. The number of persons that responded they were not knowledgeable about City operations, seen in Figure 8, did, however, increase from previous surveys. International migration, incoming soldiers and general population growth have contributed to having limited knowledge of City operations.

Figure 8. Knowledge of City's operations, programs and policies



In Figure 9, households were provided a list of six strategic initiatives and asked to rank the most important for the City to work and improve on. The order in which these six options were asked was mixed, randomly generated by the electronic survey, in order to reduce respondent bias sometimes introduced by the order of questions. Among strategic initiatives, economic and business development ranked first, closely followed by community development and quality of life, then by taxes and spending.

Figure 9. Ranking of most important strategic initiatives for El Paso to work and improve on

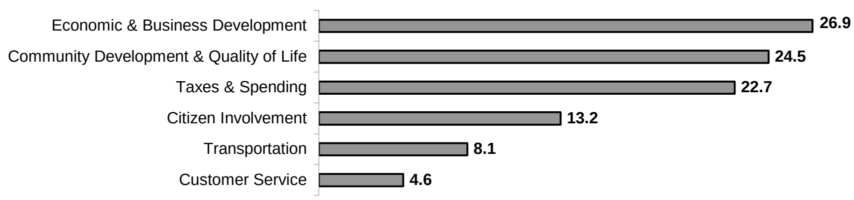
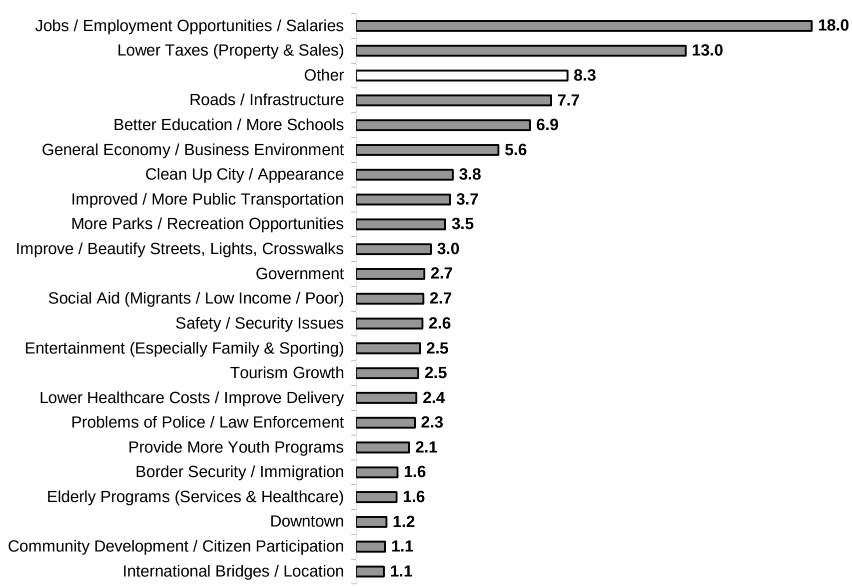


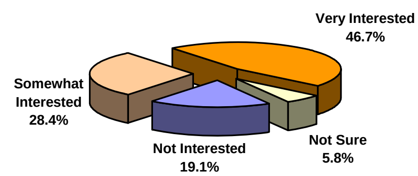
Figure 10. Most important issues for elected officials to work and improve on



When asked to provide the two most important issues that they wanted elected officials to work on and improve, employment opportunities, salaries and lowering taxes scored highest (Figure 10). Developing infrastructure as well as improving education and the economy were also noted as important issues for elected officials to work on. By comparison, jobs and education topped the list in 2004 and 2006.

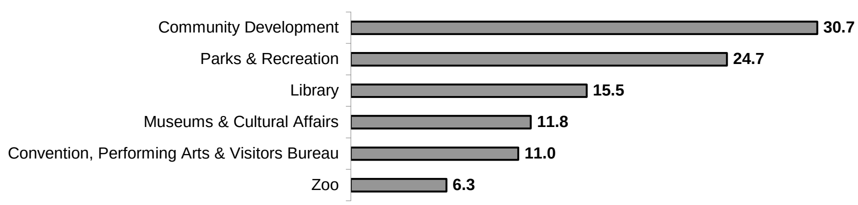
Participants were also asked about their interest in downtown revitalization. Forty-seven percent are very interested, 28 percent are somewhat interested, while 19 percent are not interested in a revitalized downtown (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Interest level in a revitalized downtown



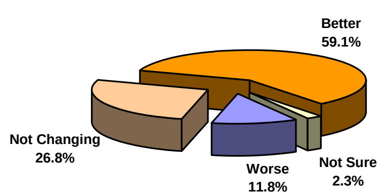
In Figure 12, households were provided with six City departments and asked to rank the most important to quality of life. The order in which these six options were asked was also random. Community development and parks and recreations ranked first and second, respectively.

Figure 12. Ranking of most important departments to quality of life



Lastly under the Community Development section, almost three in five said that El Paso is getting better as a place to live, while 27 percent believe it is not changing and only 12 percent believe it is getting worse (Figure 13).

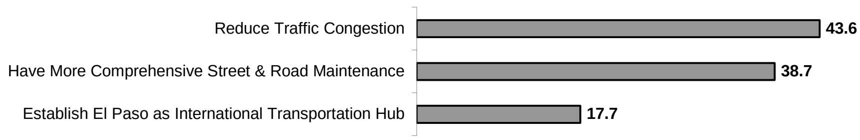
Figure 13. El Paso as a place to live



Transportation

In Figure 14, households were provided with three transportation initiatives and asked to rank what they saw as the most important for the City over the next five years. The order in which these six options were asked was also random. Forty-four percent indicated that reducing traffic congestion was most important, while 39 percent feel having a more comprehensive street and road maintenance program is most critical.

Figure 14. Ranking of most important transportation initiatives for City over next five years



Respondents were also asked how they felt about using bicycles as alternate transportation; two-thirds are somewhat or very interested (Figure 15). When asked whether they use public transportation, one in five answered yes (Figure 16). Of these persons that use public transportation, four out of five use it to transit to Downtown (Figure 17). As a representative sample of the total population of the City of El Paso, with a population of 411 thousand persons over the age of 18, this means that over 63 thousand persons within the City utilize public transportation with Downtown the final destination or an interchange point, emphasizing earlier studies finding that Sun Metro is a key component of the City's transport network.[2]

Figure 15. Use of bicycles as alternate transportation

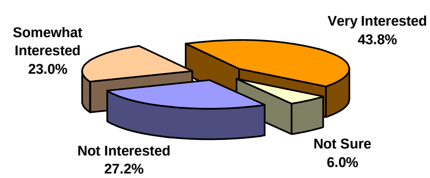


Figure 16. Public transportation use

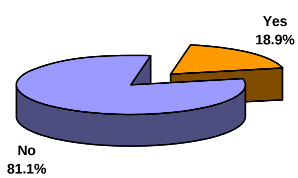
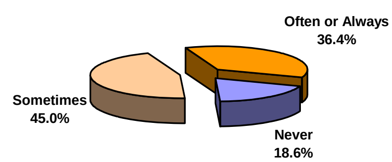


Figure 17. Public transportation to go Downtown



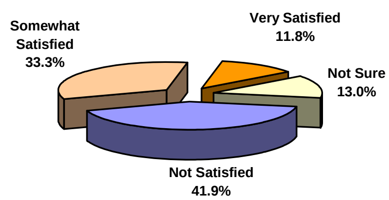
[2] Soden, D.L., McElroy, M.S. and Green, S., August 2006, "Sun Metro Fixed Route Rider Survey," Institute for Policy and Economic Development, the University of Texas at El Paso, Technical Report 2006-07, for the City of El Paso.

Economic Development

This section gauges perceptions about economic progress. Results in Figure 18 show that two-thirds believe that the City is a good or excellent place to work or do business; meanwhile half believe the City is getting better as a place to work or do business. By comparison, one-quarter of residents indicated that El Paso is a poor place to do business and 13 percent think that El Paso is getting worse as a place to do business. When asked about satisfaction levels regarding El Paso's current job market in Figure 19, more persons were "somewhat or very satisfied" (45 percent) than "not satisfied" (42 percent).

Figure 18. El Paso as a place to work or do business

Figure 19. El Paso's current job market



Respondents were further asked about the importance of three areas related to City contracts with private businesses for services. An index score is reported, calculated as the percent difference between "% Very Important" and "% Not Important," with the assumption that the "% Somewhat Important" are at some level neutral or satisfied. All three areas ranked high in responses that they are very important, with contracting with local businesses coming in first, followed by quality of work and competitive bidding. By comparison, in 2004 and 2006, open bidding and quality ranked first, respectively.

Figure 20. Importance when City government contracts private companies for services

	% Not Important	% Somewhat Important	% Very Important	% Not Sure	INDEX	RANK
Contract w/ Local Businesses	1.9	11.4	80.3	6.4	78.4	1
Quality of Work	1.7	11.3	79.3	7.7	77.6	2
Competitive Bidding	4.0	19.3	67.1	9.6	63.1	3

Fiscal

Fiscal perceptions show that almost half of residents are somewhat or very satisfied with the City's use of their tax dollars (Figure 21). Only one-third reported that they knew the City accounts for approximately 25 percent of their tax bill (Figure 22). In 2006, 18 percent knew of the City's portion of residents' tax bill.

Figure 21. City's use of tax dollars

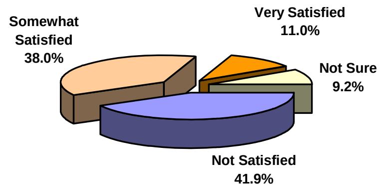
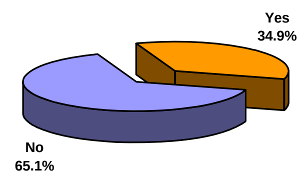


Figure 22. Knowledge that City accounts for 25% of tax bill



In Figure 23, persons were given five service areas, including examples for each, and asked to comment on how the City budgets these services. The index score reported is the difference between "% Too Low" and "% Too High." This difference between extremes indicates that more persons believe that quality of life services (such as Parks & Recreation, Museums & Cultural Affairs, Public Library, Community Development, and Zoo departments), and economic development (such as business recruitment/retention and workforce development), are underfunded, followed closely by transportation services (such as Sun Metro). Public safety was afforded the lowest index score of what the City is not spending enough funding on, perhaps influenced by the fact that El Paso has consistently been deemed one of the safest places in the nation (e.g., if the perception is that if crime is not a problem, then appropriate funding is being allocated). In the 2006 survey, economic development and quality of life services posted the most responses that thought spending was low.

Figure 23. City spending in following areas

	% Too Low	% Just Right	% Too High	% Not Sure	INDEX	RANK
Quality of Life Services	42.6	36.8	5.1	15.5	37.4	1
Economic Development	41.7	35.8	4.6	17.9	37.1	2
Transportation Services	40.9	32.0	5.3	21.8	35.7	3
Building & Planning Services	37.2	34.3	8.9	19.5	28.3	4
Public Safety	29.6	35.7	10.0	24.8	19.6	5

Customer Service and Citizen Involvement

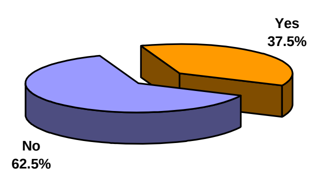
The first question under customer service and citizen involvement asked interviewees their satisfaction level with various City-funded areas. Ranks are also provided in Figure 24 with the index score calculated as the difference between "% Very Satisfied" and "% Not Satisfied." Fire, airport, recycling, police, and library, in that order, ranked highest. In 2006, the same five with the exception of recycling, which was not an option in that survey, also ranked highest. This supports a level of consistency for these City-funded areas. Museums/cultural affairs and solid waste management also scored high in both surveys. By contrast, in 2006 and in this current survey, economic development and streets were perceived as ranking lowest in efficiency. With regards to economic development, on one hand one-third of respondents indicate a low level of satisfaction, but on the other hand 42 percent believe the department is underfunded.

Figure 24. Satisfaction with the City's following areas

	% Not Satisfied	% Somewhat Satisfied	% Very Satisfied	% Not Sure	INDEX	RANK
Fire	1.9	23.2	71.7	3.2	69.8	1
Airport	5.0	29.4	58.1	7.5	53.1	2
Recycling	12.1	28.8	52.0	7.1	39.9	3
Police	12.0	35.7	48.2	4.1	36.2	4
Libraries	8.9	42.0	40.0	9.1	31.1	5
Solid Waste Management	15.7	38.0	39.2	7.1	23.5	6
Museums & Cultural Affiars	16.2	41.0	30.8	12.0	14.6	7
Engineering	14.9	30.9	22.7	31.5	7.7	8
Human Resources	18.2	34.5	20.6	26.7	2.5	9
Zoo	23.1	35.7	23.4	17.7	0.3	10
Parks & Recreation	26.5	42.6	26.4	4.4	-0.1	11
Community Development	22.7	44.6	19.1	13.6	-3.5	12
Consolidated Tax Office	22.3	29.9	18.6	29.2	-3.8	13
Sun Metro	25.6	30.4	19.7	24.4	-5.9	14
Building Permits & Inspections	21.2	30.8	15.5	32.5	-5.7	15
Planning & Development	29.2	42.5	15.3	13.1	-13.9	16
Economic Development	32.9	40.5	16.4	10.2	-16.5	17
Streets	46.0	40.8	11.8	1.3	-34.2	18

A series of questions were used to gauge citizens' interaction with City services and personnel. In 2004 and 2006, 27 and 26 percent of residents, respectively, reported having used the City's website. By the 2008 survey, the percent has increased to 38 percent (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Visited City's website



Only 19 percent of residents indicated contacting elected officials (City Council representatives or Mayor) in the past year (Figure 26). When asked to provide the method of contact, all forms, most contact was made in-person, followed by phone, e-mail and writing (Figure 27). Of the 19 percent of residents that have contacted elected City officials, two-thirds rated their contact experience as "somewhat or very satisfied," while under one-third rated the experience as non-satisfactory.

Figure 26. Initiated contact with elected City officials in the last year

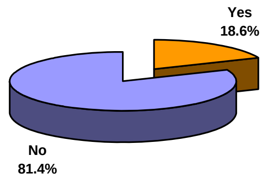
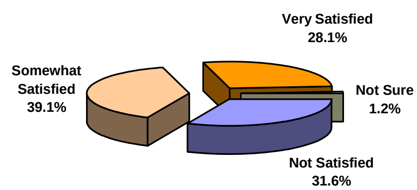


Figure 27. Method of contact

Figure 28. Experience after interacting with elected officials



Citizens were also asked if they have had contact with City departments or their personnel, excluding elected officials, in the last year. Over one-quarter answered "yes" (Figure 29). Most of these made contact with the police department, followed by departments in building permits, taxes, fire, and waste management. Similar rankings occurred in 2006, with the exception that planning and development was listed in the top five two years ago (Figure 30).

Figure 29. Contact with City departments or their personnel

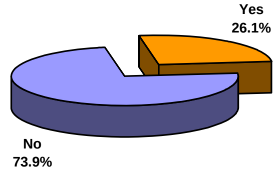
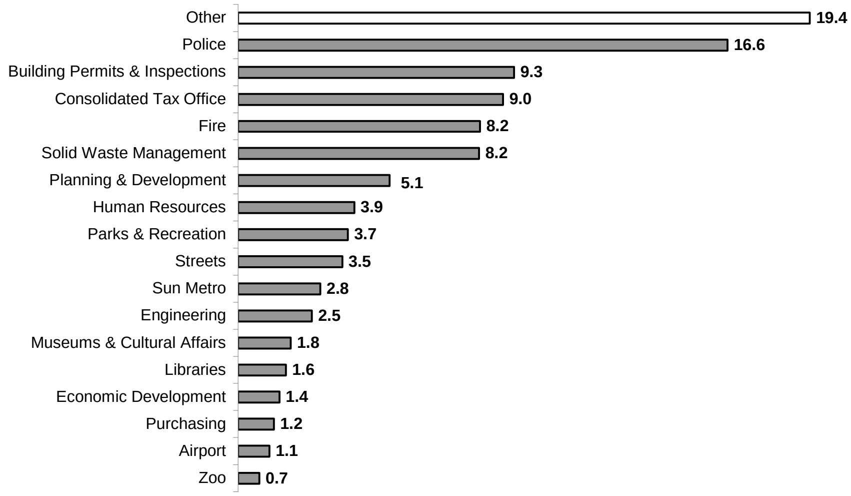


Figure 30. Departments contacted



When asked to rate their experience in various customer service matters after interacting with City employees (for those who have made contact), knowledgeable and respectful personal treatment, respectively, ranked highest (ranks calculated as the difference between "% Very Satisfied" and "% Not Satisfied." Overall, one-quarter of those surveyed were not satisfied (Figure 31). In 2006, respectful personal treatment ranked first followed by knowledgeable.

Figure 31. Experience after interacting with City employees in following areas

	% Not Satisfied	% Somewhat Satisfied	% Very Satisfied	% Not Sure	INDEX	RANK
Knowledgeable	16.1	29.0	51.5	3.4	35.4	1
Respectful Personal Treatment	16.4	29.7	51.2	2.7	34.8	2
Helpfulness	18.8	30.1	48.6	2.5	29.8	3
Your Overall Experience	24.6	31.3	44.0	0.0	19.4	4
Resolving Issues in Timely Manner	28.4	26.1	43.0	2.5	14.6	5

Figure 32 shows that citizens are split between those who believe the City is successful about communicating the regulations, policies and ordinances and those who think the City is unsuccessful. More persons further believe the City is not doing well communicating with citizens about city sponsored projects (such as parks and recreation, zoo, library, or cultural events) and infrastructure projects (such as building and road construction or damage repair).

Figure 32. City communication with its citizens in following areas

	% Not Successful	% Somewhat Successful	% Very Successful	% Not Sure	INDEX	RANK
Regulations, Policies & Ordinances	24.1	35.4	24.8	15.7	0.7	1
City Sponsored Programs	27.1	39.9	17.8	15.2	-9.3	2
Infrastructure projects	34.1	36.4	14.3	15.1	-19.8	3

Lastly, half of respondents indicated that the City provides adequate opportunities to be involved in local government (Figure 33), but only one in seven are involved in a neighborhood association (Figure 34).

Figure 33. City providing citizens opportunities to be involved in local government

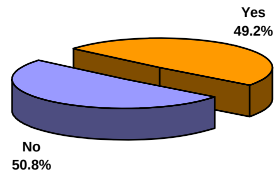


Figure 34. Involvement in neighborhood association