



City of Covington
**CITIZEN OPINIONS OF CITY
AND CITY GOVERNMENT**

October, 2009

ER
ELWAY RESEARCH, INC.



City of Covington

Citizen Opinions of City and City Government

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of a telephone survey conducted by Elway Research for the City of Covington. The survey interviewed Covington residents about the quality of life in Covington, priorities for the future, and the level of satisfaction with city government and city services. Specifically, the following subjects were addressed:

- Perceptions regarding the overall quality of life in Covington; feelings of safety; and the appropriateness for families.
- Preferred priorities for City government.
- Satisfaction with various departments and services, including specific on police service.
- Inclination to support or oppose a list of projects that would probably require more taxation.
- Sources used and desired, to get information about City government.

Demographic information was included in order to profile those with certain opinions.

This report includes Key Findings and a narrative summary of the findings, with analysis. The narrative is followed by annotated charts of the pertinent survey results. A complete set of cross-tabulation tables is presented under separate cover.

METHODS

SAMPLE:	300 adult heads of households inside the city limits of Covington. Every household in Covington was called in which there is at least one registered voter and for which we were able to obtain a telephone number.
TECHNIQUE:	Telephone Survey
FIELD DATES:	October 22-27, 2009
MARGIN OF ERROR:	±6% at the 95% confidence interval. That is, in theory, had all similarly qualified Covington residents been interviewed, there is a 95% probability that the results would be within ±6% of the results in this survey.
DATA COLLECTION:	Calls were made during weekday evenings and weekend days. Trained, professional interviewers under supervision conducted all interviews. Up to four attempts were made to contact a head of household at each number in the sample before a substitute number was called. Questionnaires were edited for completeness, and a percentage of each interviewer's calls were re-called for verification.

It must be kept in mind that survey research cannot predict the future. Although great care was employed in the design, execution and analysis of this survey, these results can be interpreted only as representing the answers given by these respondents to these questions at the time they were interviewed.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

In interpreting these findings, it is important to keep in mind the characteristics of the people actually interviewed. This table presents a profile of the 300 respondents in the survey.

Note: Throughout this report, percentages may not add to 100%, due to rounding.

GENDER:	45% Male 55% Female
AGE:	10% 18-34 21% 35-44 25% 45-54 19% 55-64 22% 65+
LENGTH OF RESIDENCE:	2% 0-1 Year 21% 2-5 Years 23% 6-12 Years 19% 13-20 Years 34% 20+ years
OWN / RENT:	92% Own 6% Rent
HOUSEHOLD TYPE:	43% Couple with children at home 34% Couple with no children at home 6% Single with children at home 16% Single with no children at home
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME:	9% \$35,000 or less 14% Over \$35,000 to \$50,000 18% Over \$50,000 to \$74,000 14% \$75,000 to \$99,000 21% \$100,000 or more 23% No response

KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ **2 in 3 respondents said their tax dollars were being “well spent,” a high proportion for local governments.**
- ◆ **Residents generally satisfied with life in the city in most ways, but not usually to the utmost degree:**
 - 53% rated the city’s quality of life in the top three points of the 10 point scale, but only 9% said that it was a “10,” or “excellent.”
 - Almost all agreed with three positive statements about the city, but usually not “strongly:”
 - 95% agreed that “Covington is a good place for families”
 - 62% “agreed;” 33% strongly agreed.
 - 91% agreed with “I feel safe in my neighborhood,” (60%; 31%).
 - 93% agreed with “I feel safe in Covington” (62%; 31%).
- ◆ **Just over half (53%) said that the City was doing a “good” (43%) or “excellent” (10%) job of keeping them informed.**
 - 4 in 10 said “only fair” (32%) or “poor” (11%).
 - Two in 3 get their information about city government from the Covington Reporter.
- ◆ **The same proportion (53%) rated the city’s performance in providing residents “the opportunity to be involved in decisions” as “good” (43%) or “excellent” (10%).**
 - 37% said “only fair” (26%) or “poor” (11%)
- ◆ **“Grades” for most services ranged from “B-” to “C.”**
 - The highest went to police services, including:
 - 3.1 for “overall feeling of safety in the community,”
 - 3.0 for “overall quality of police service,” and
 - 3.0 for “the time it takes them to respond to a call.”
 - The lowest averages were:
 - 2.2 on the 4-point scale for “Zoning and Land Use Planning,”
 - 2.3 for “Streets and Traffic System,”
 - 2.4 for “Recreation Programs,” and
 - 2.4 for “Permit Services.”

- ◆ **Many respondents did not know enough to grade many services, including:**
 - Permit services (34% said they did not know),
 - Customer service at city hall (33%),
 - The aquatics programs (32%), and
 - "Emergency preparation" (30%).

- ◆ **1 in 3 had contact with a city agency or official in the last 12 months; those that had any contact tended to give it an average "B" grade.**

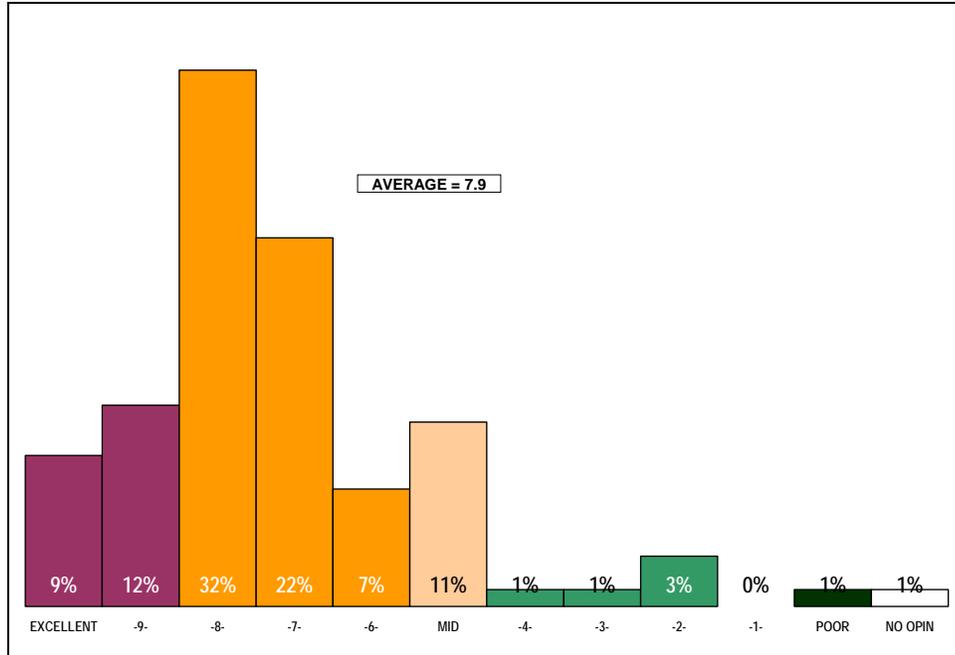
- ◆ **Police Response, Traffic Enforcement, and "Communicating with the public" were the top priorities for the City government:**
 - "Police Response" was named a "top" priority by 39%, and a "high" priority by 41%.
 - "Traffic Enforcement" (26% Top and 35% High).
 - "Communicating with the Public" (25% Top and 37% High).

- ◆ **Streets had highest level of potential support among possible programs requiring tax increases.**
 - Of 8 services tested that would require a tax increase, 4 had potential support of more than 50%, including:
 - 66% for "Improved streets and traffic flow,"
(31% strong support; 35% said "maybe");
 - 56% for Parks, Trails and open Space
(20% "strong and 36% "maybe")
 - 56% for sidewalks (16% strong and 40% "maybe")
 - 53% for "more recreation" (21% strong and 32% "maybe")
 - Improved streets and traffic flow was the only service included that had more "strong support" than "strong opposition."
 - The strongest opposition was to commuter rail and a town center:
 - 60% opposed Commuter Rail (39% strongly), and
 - 63% opposed a town center (34% strongly.)

FINDINGS

Major findings are presented in the following section in the form of annotated graphs and bullets. The full results are in detailed cross-tabulations under separate cover.

Average Quality of Life: 8 on a 10 Point Scale

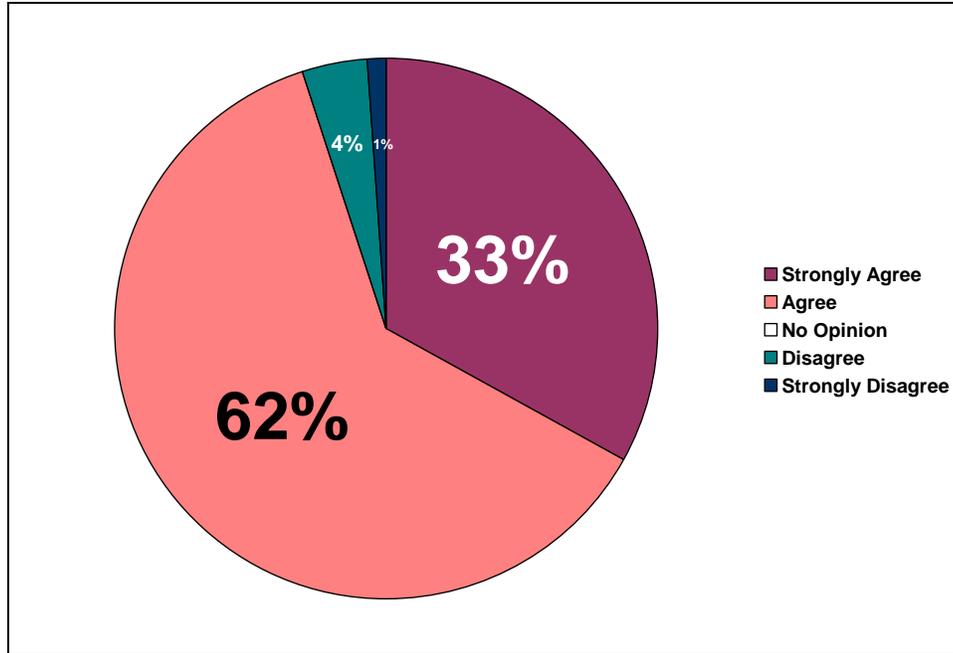


Question 3: Overall, how would you rate the quality of life in Covington? Please give a rating on a scale of zero to 10, where 10 means you think the city has an "excellent" quality of life, a "0" means it has a "poor" quality of life. A rating of 5 is in the middle.

◆ **Satisfaction with the overall quality of life in Covington went up in the middle incomes:**

- The average ratings from those with incomes both under \$50,000 and over \$75,000 was "7". This compares to
- A "9" average from those with annual household incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000.

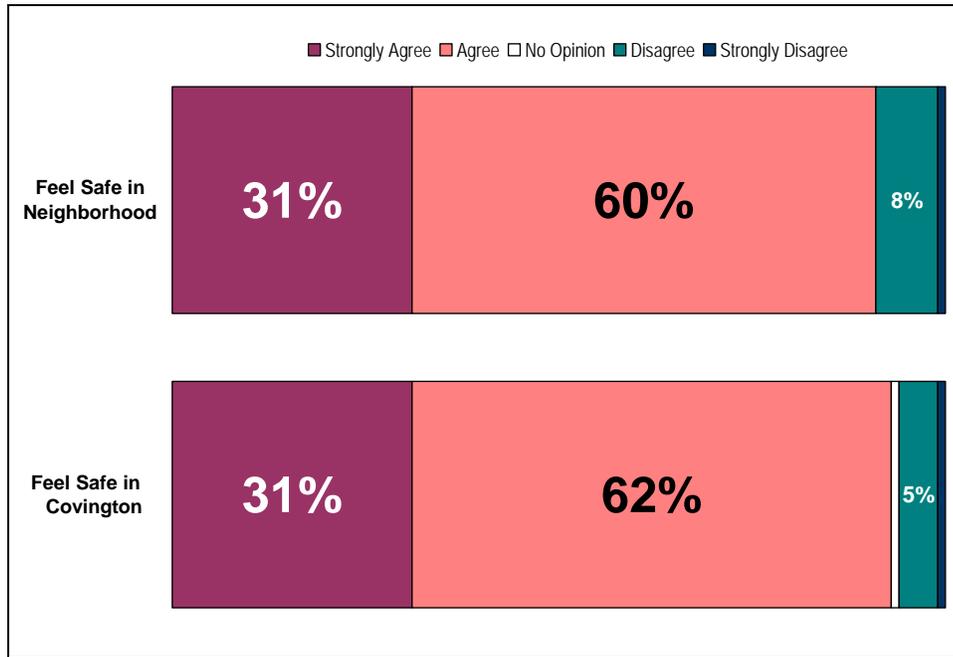
Almost All Agreed That Covington is Good for Families



Question 4a: I am going to read a series of statements about life in Covington. For each one, tell me whether you Agree Strongly, Agree, Disagree or Disagree Strongly. The first one, is Covington is a good place for families?

- ◆ **Younger respondents were most likely to strongly agree:**
43% of respondents under age 34 strongly agreed that Covington was a good place for families, compared to 28% age 45 and older.
- ◆ **Those with the lowest incomes also tended more to strongly agree:**
39% of those with incomes under \$50,000 strongly agreed vs. 29% of those with higher incomes.
- ◆ **Even 9 in 10 of those who had thought the overall quality of life was "7" or lower still agreed that Covington was a good place for families.**
- ◆ **Those with and without children living in the household agreed similarly to this statement.**

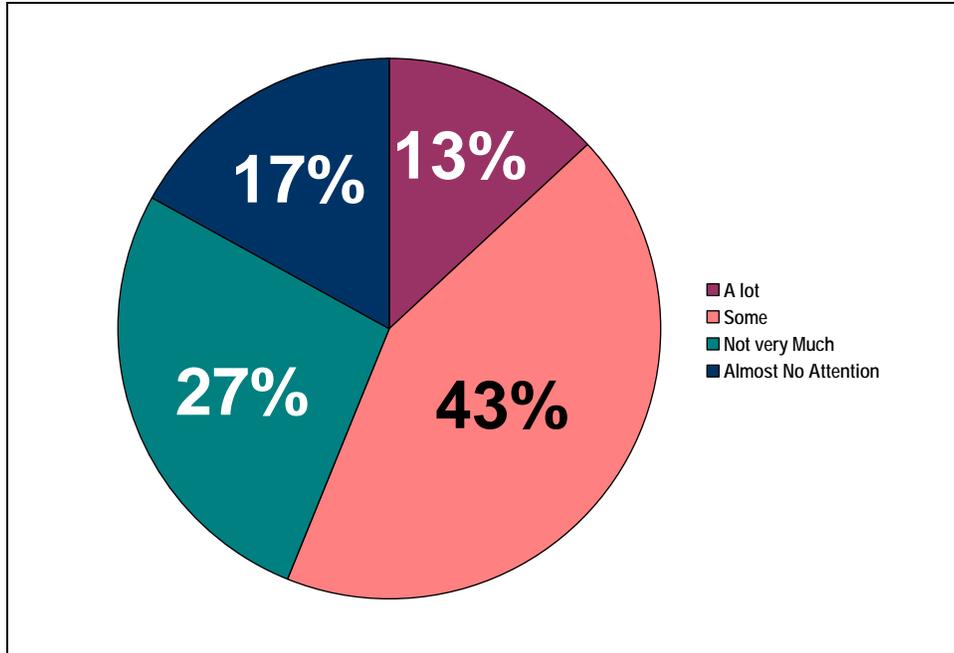
Almost All Feel Safe



Question 4b and 4c: I am going to read a series of statements about life in Covington. For each one, tell me whether you Agree Strongly, Agree, Disagree or Disagree Strongly. 2.) I feel safe in my neighborhood; 3.) I feel safe in Covington.

- ◆ **There was a slight tendency for households without children to feel safer:**
 - 34% without children in the household strongly agreed that they felt safe in their neighborhood, vs. 28% of those with children.
 - 34% strongly agreed that they felt safe in Covington, vs. 28% of those with children.

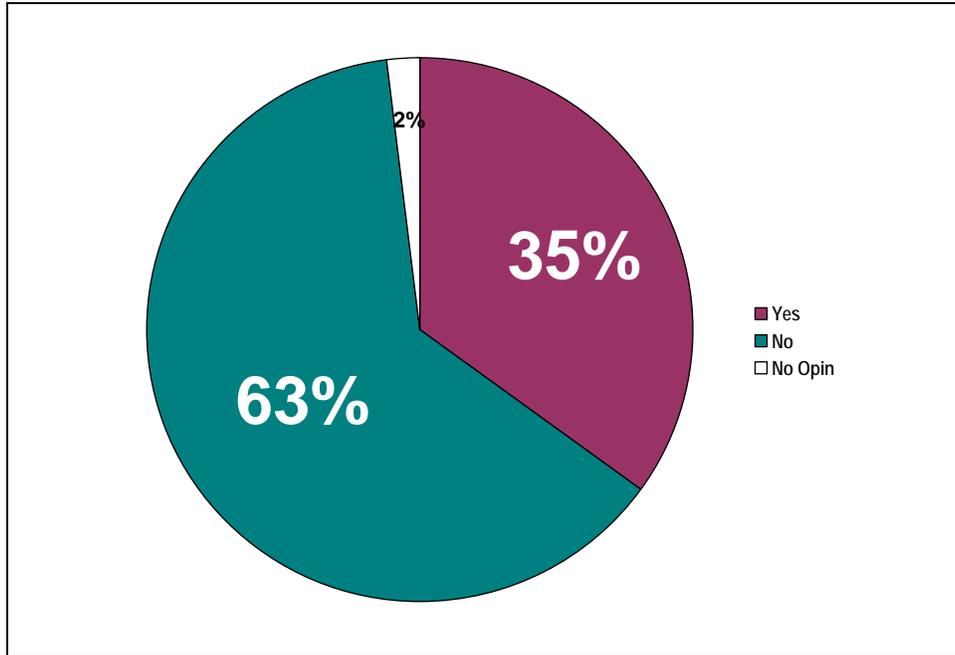
Most Paid At Least Some Attention to City Government



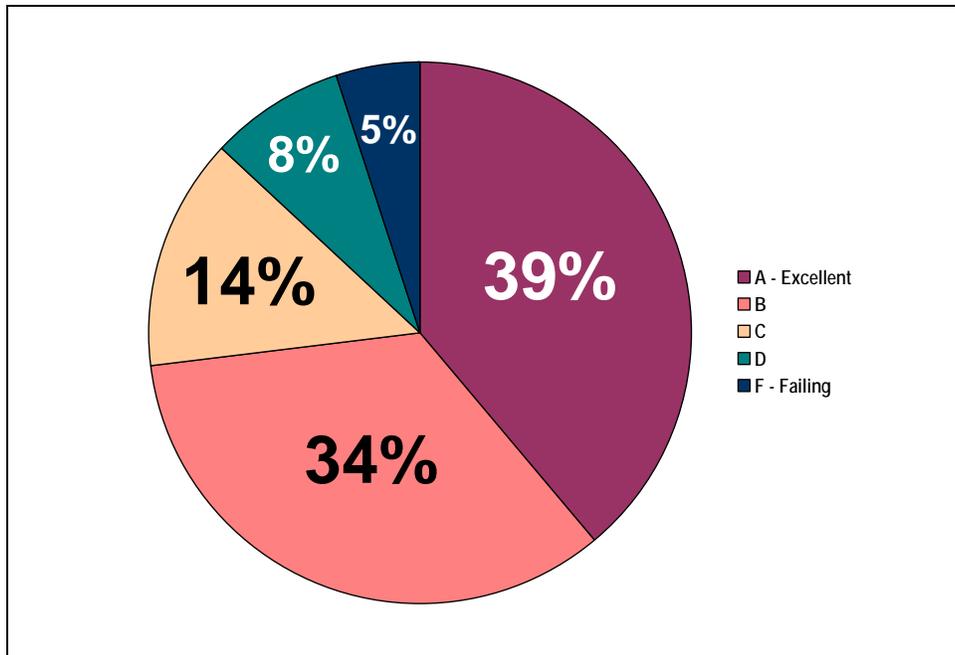
Question 5: Let's talk about the City Government. First, in general, how much attention would you say you pay to Covington City government? Would you say you pay...?

- ◆ **Most likely to have paid a lot of attention were those 65+:**
19% said that they paid a lot of attention, compared to 7% of those under 35.
- ◆ **Most likely to have paid almost no attention were those under 35:**
33% did, compared to 13% over 65.
- ◆ **Another 30% of those under 35 paid “not very much” attention, bringing the total to 63% of the youngest group who paid little or no attention.**

2 in 3 Had No Recent Contact: Grade Averaged "B"



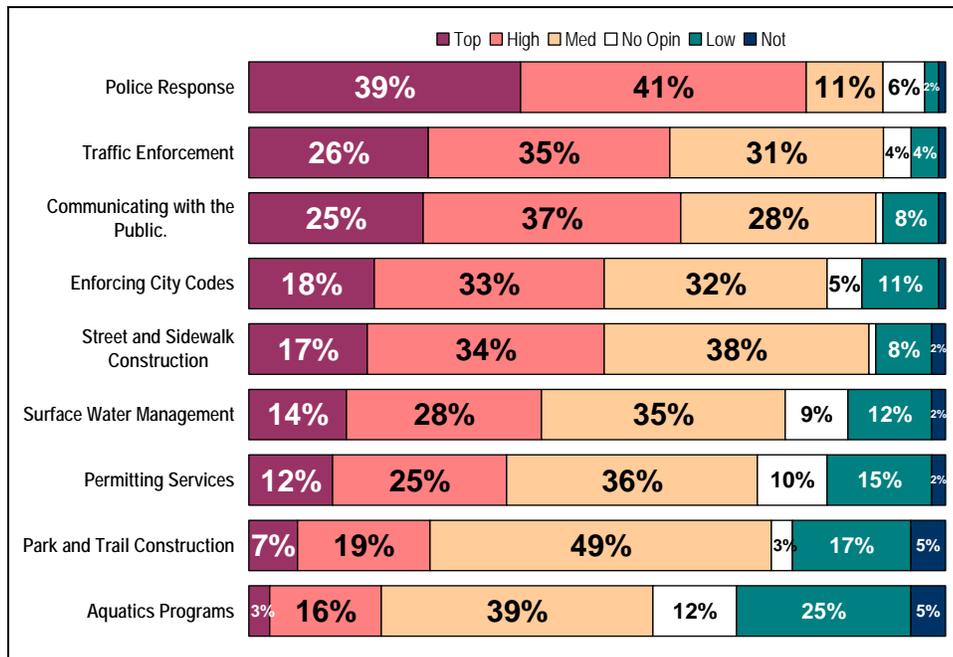
Question 6: Have you had any contact with a city agency or official in the last 12 months?



Question 7: If you were to give that person a letter grade for helpfulness and courtesy, what grade would you give him or her: A for Excellent, B Good, C Satisfactory, D Unsatisfactory, F for Poor?

- ◆ **Most likely to have had contact were ages 55 – 64 (45% did) and those with household incomes of \$75,000 or more (40%).**

Police, Traffic, and Communication Top Priorities



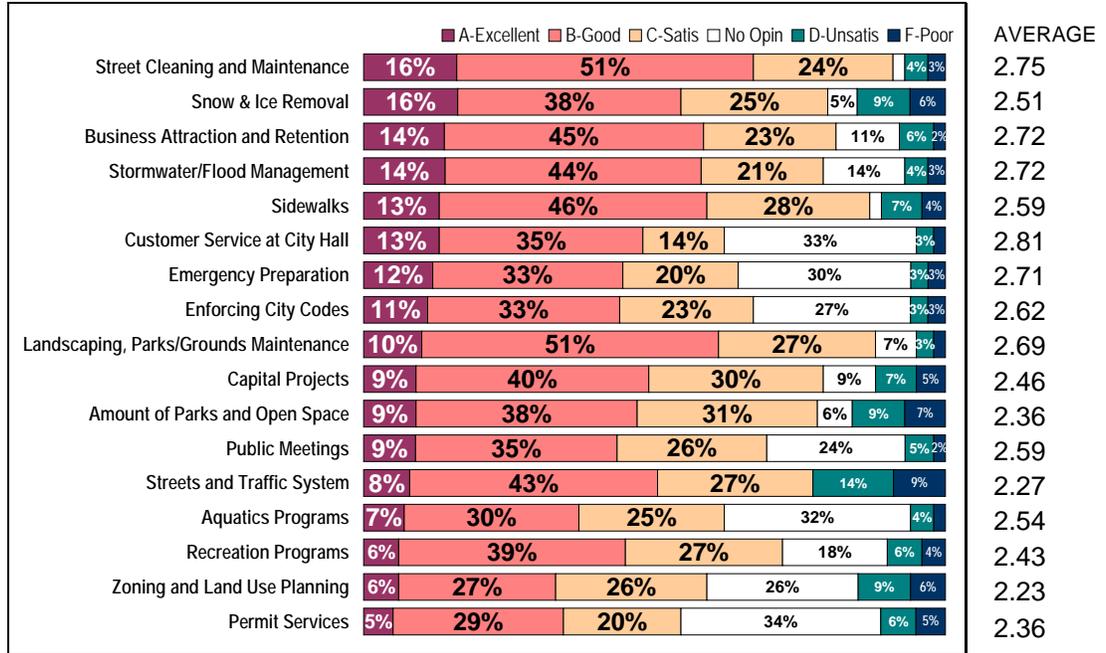
Question 8: Next I am going to read a list of areas of responsibility for Covington city government. I would like you to rate each one in terms of its priority for city government. As I read each item, tell me whether you think that should be a Top Priority for Covington City Government, A High Priority, Medium, Low or that should Not be a priority for Covington City Government. The first one is...?

◆ **There was a variety of demographic differences:**

- Those under age 45 were more concerned with street and sidewalk construction (20% gave it a “top” rating, vs. 11% of those older.)
- Women were more likely than men to give “top” ratings to “enforcing city codes (22% vs. 13%).
- Surface water was particularly not a top priority for those 65+ (only 7% said “top,” compared to 16% of those younger.)
- Traffic enforcement was more of a priority with lower income groups:
 - 39% with under \$50,000 in income said “top,” vs.
 - 27% with \$50,000 to \$75,000 and
 - 14% with \$75,000 or more.
- Concern with police response also went down with income, from
 - 50% of those with under \$50,000 calling it a “top” priority, to
 - 42% with \$50,000 - \$75,000 and
 - 25% with \$75,000 or more.

◆ **Not surprisingly, those who paid at least some attention to city government more often named communication as a "top" priority (29%, compared to 19% who paid not much/no attention.)**

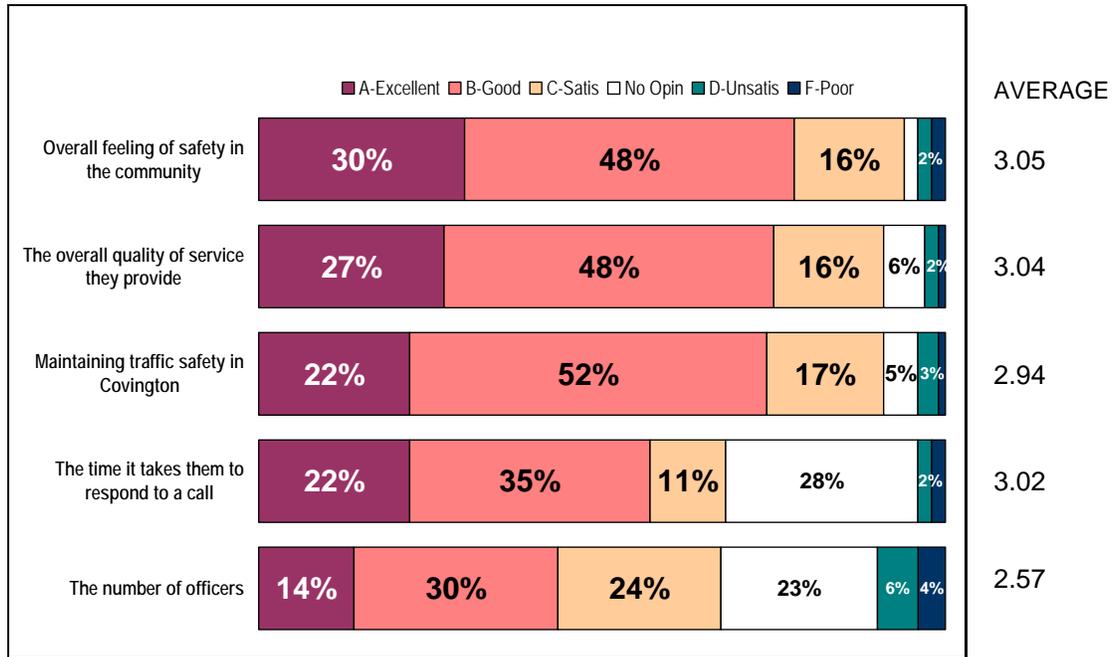
"B-" to "C" Averages Earned by Most Services if Grade Given; Many Not Sure How to Grade



Question 9: Now let's talk about some *specific* areas that Covington City Government operates using tax dollars. As we did before I'd like you to give Covington City Government a letter grade for each area: **A** for Excellent, **B** for Good, **C** for Satisfactory, **D** for Unsatisfactory, **F** for poor. What grade would you give the city for...?

- ◆ **The services with the highest proportions of "A" grades were "street cleaning/maintenance" and "street cleanings/snow removal):**
 - 16% gave an "A" for each, with 95% or more able to rate them.
- ◆ **The highest average was given to Customer Service at City Hall:**
 - It was 2.8 on the 4-point scale, among those giving a rating.
- ◆ **The most bad grades (D and F) went to "Streets and Traffic System:"**
 - 14% gave it a "D," and 9% an "F," with the average 2.3, or "C."
- ◆ **The youngest respondents were least likely to know enough to give grades.** For example:
 - 53% could not grade customer service at city hall,
 - 50% said the same about permit services.
 - 43% about enforcing city codes.
 - 40% about public meetings.
 - 37% about zoning land use.
 - 37% about police response time.

Most Police Services Graded "B"



Question 10: Let's talk specifically about police services in Covington. Using the letter grades as before, what grade would you give police services in Covington for...?

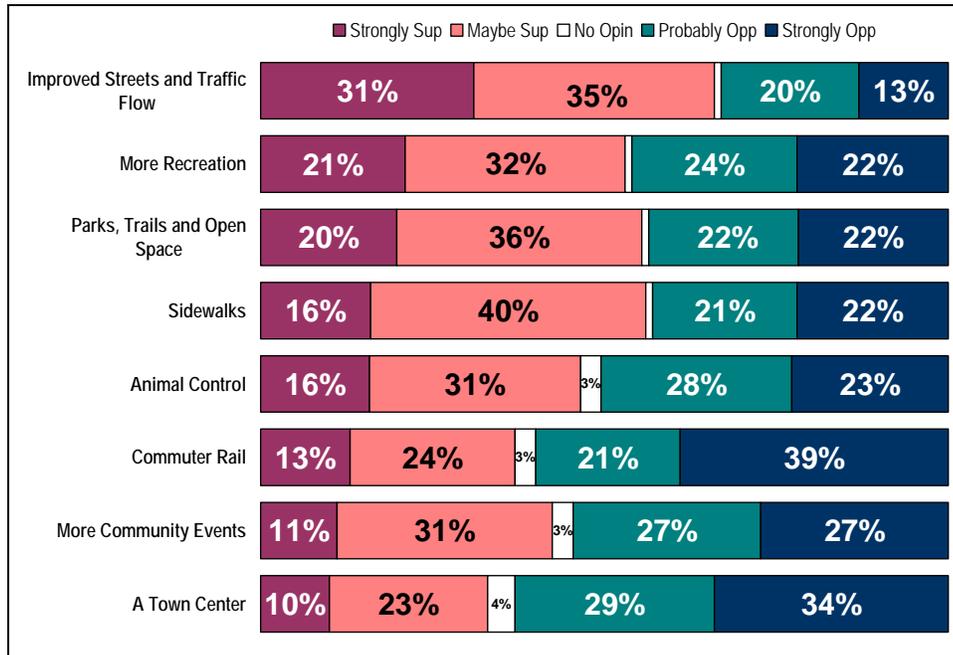
◆ **Those who had rated the "overall quality of life" in Covington highly (8 to 10) gave better grades to some police services:**

- 40% gave the "overall feeling of safety" an "A," vs. 18% of those who rated the quality of life lower, and
- 38% gave the overall quality of police service an "A," vs. 14%.

◆ **Again, lack of knowledge was centered on those younger:**

- 33% of those under 55 did not know enough to grade response time, compared to
- 22% of those 55 or older.
- However, all ages were equally likely to have no opinion about the number of officers.

Tax Support Strongest for Streets & Traffic



Question 11: Now I am going to read a list of things that some people have said they would like Covington city government to do. Of course, all city services cost money. So as I read this list, please tell me how willing you would be – if at all – to support an increase in taxes to maintain, improve or provide that service. Tell me if you would be Strongly Inclined to support, Maybe Inclined to support, Probably Inclined to Oppose or Strongly Inclined to Oppose?

◆ **Most likely to strongly support streets/traffic were:**

- Those with children living at home (40%) and
- Those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000 (42%).

◆ **Support for commuter rail went down with age:**

21% of those under age 45 strongly supported commuter rail, vs. 12% of 45-54 year olds, 9% of those 55-64, and 6% 65+.

◆ **Considering all the proposals together:**

34% of respondents opposed almost all of the proposals, 25% supported all or almost all, and 41% said "maybe," or a mix of support and "opposed" responses.

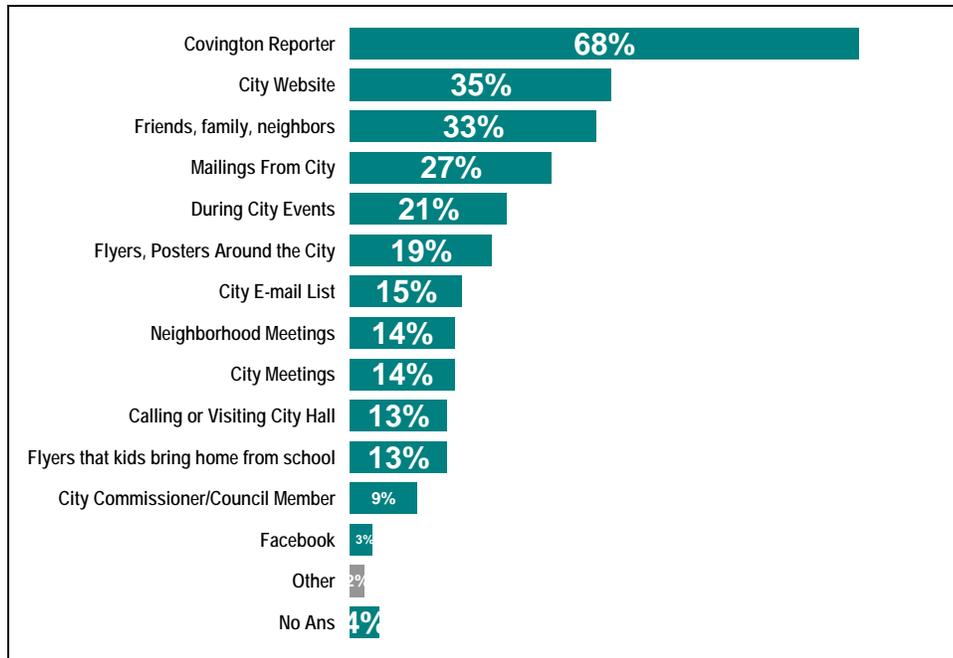
◆ **Those age 65+ were most often opposed:**

57% of this age group always or almost always were opposed, vs. 24% of those younger.

◆ **Those with children still at home were most supportive of all:**

30% always or almost always were supportive, vs. 20%. 27% were always or almost always opposed, vs. 41%.

The Covington Reporter Dominated Information Sources



Question 12: In terms of keeping citizens informed about what is happening in city government -- How good a job do you think the City of Covington does at that? Would you say...?
 Question 13: We are interested in how people get information about City Government here in Covington. Which of the following have been useful to you to learn about city government?

◆ **Usefulness of the Covington Reporter went up with income:**

78% of those with incomes of \$75,000+ named the Reporter, vs. 73% earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and 60% with under \$50,000.

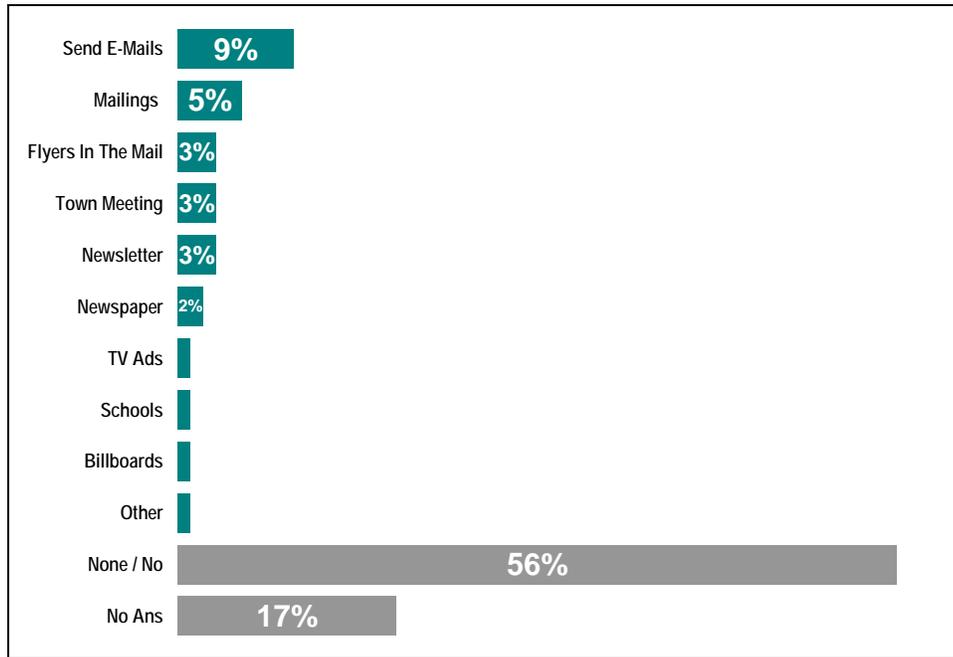
◆ **Usefulness of the web site went down with age:**

46% of the youngest (under age 45) found the web-site useful, vs. 38% of 45 – 54 year olds, and 12% of those age 65 or older.

◆ **Respondents who said that they paid at least some attention to city government were more likely than others to find several sources of information useful, including:**

- Meetings (21%, vs. 6% of those not paying much attention),
- E-mail (20% vs. 10%),
- Mailings (17% vs. 9%),
- Neighborhood meetings (17% vs. 9%), and
- The City Commissioner/Council (13% vs. 4%).

Most Could Not Think of Other Information Sources

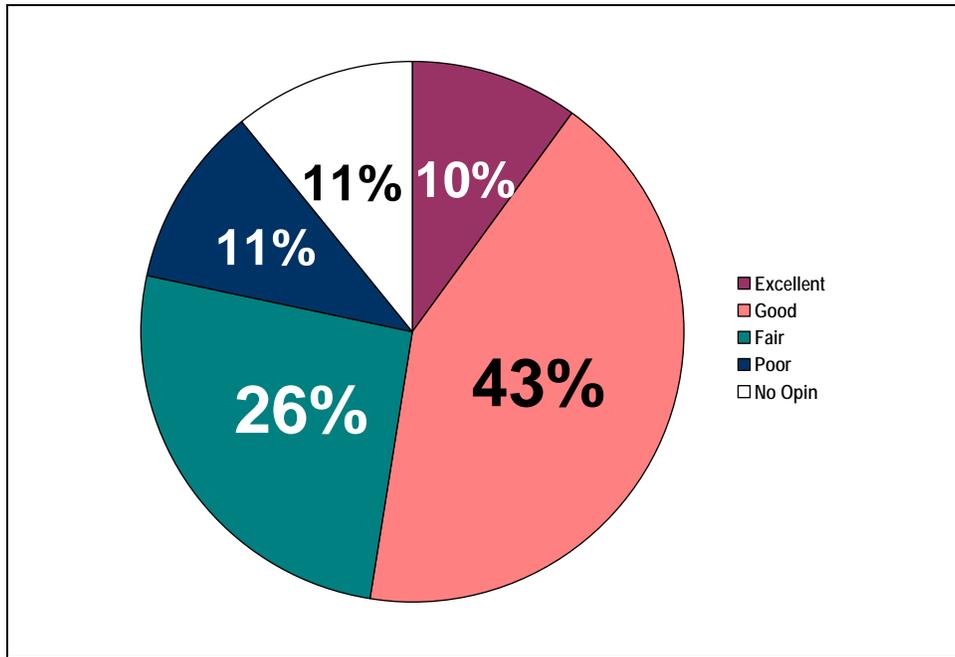


Question 14: Are there any other ways you think the City can use to communicate with our residents that we aren't already doing? [IF YES] What would those ways be?

◆ **E-mails showed the most variation, being desired more by:**

- Those with the highest incomes
18% of those with incomes of \$75,000+ vs.
9% with middle incomes and
1% with less than \$50,000,
- Men:
14%, compared to
5% of women, and
- Those with children in the household (12% vs. 5% without children).

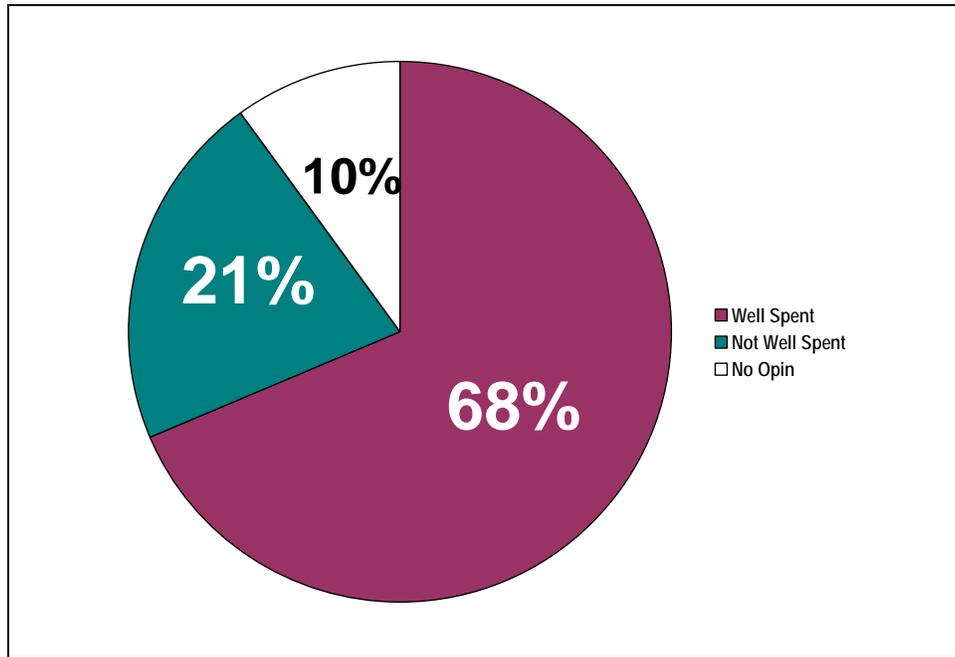
Most Think Opportunity to Be Involved Good+



Question 15: How would you rate the city's performance in providing residents the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect city government? How good a job do you think the City of Covington does at that? Would you say...?

- ◆ **Those with the highest impressions of Covington's overall quality of life (8 to 10 on the 10-point scale) were most likely to think more highly of the opportunity to be involved:**
 - 63% said that it was good or excellent, vs.
 - 40% of those who rated the quality of life lower.
- ◆ **Interestingly, responses did not vary according to how informed the respondent felt.**
- ◆ **There were no demographic variations.**

Over 2 in 3 Think Their Local Tax \$ Well Spent



Question 16: Finally, thinking now about all the things we have talked about, as a citizen of Covington, do you think that your tax dollars are being well spent here? Or not?

◆ **Most likely to say "well spent" were:**

- Those who rated the overall quality of life an 8 to 10:
81% did, compared to
54% who rated it 7 or below
- Those with children:
73%, compared to
63% with no children at home.

DISCUSSION

The City of Covington is thought by its residents to be a safe, family-friendly place to live. Very few residents are dissatisfied with the city, and two in three survey respondents said that their city tax dollars are well spent by the city government.

Just over half of these respondents said they paid attention to city government and just one-third had had any direct contact with it. However, more than half said that the city does a good job of providing them with opportunities to be involved and more than half said the city does a good job keeping them informed. Only about a quarter could think of any other way city government could communicate with them.

Of those who did have direct contact with city government, most had a good experience: nearly three-quarters graded their experience an “A” (39%) or a “B” (34%).

Traffic is clearly on the minds of Covington residents. “Streets and traffic system” ranked 13th on a list of 17 city services graded by survey respondents. Of all the services graded, “street and traffic system” received the most “D” and “F” grades. “Traffic enforcement” was ranked as the #2 priority for city government. And “improved streets and traffic flow” garnered the highest level of potential support among eight city improvements that would require a tax increase.

The police department was a particular focus of these citizens. Most respondents said they feel safe in Covington and rate the overall quality of police service quite high, and they clearly want to keep it that way. Police response time was graded a solid “B” (although it had the highest number of people who could not answer at 28%), and was rated as the top priority for city government.

Overall satisfaction with Covington city government is quite good – particularly among those who have contact with the city. An obvious challenge is increasing citizen awareness of city government and its services. Many city services were unknown to a quarter or more of these respondents.

APPENDIX
