

# 2016 RESIDENT SURVEY

**CITY OF MONTGOMERY**

August 3, 2016

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# 2016 RESIDENT SURVEY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Montgomery conducted its first full resident survey in June 2016. The survey was prepared by staff using sample surveys from other communities. The primary objectives of the survey were to establish a service level baseline by which to compare future surveys in order to track service level improvements; to gather information from residents on how they feel about the City of Montgomery; and to discover where residents believe the city should be focusing its resources.

According to the State Demographer, the estimated households in the City of Montgomery as of 2016 are 1198. Based on residential utility accounts, it is closer to 1225 households. Approximately, 1225 printed surveys were mailed to each postal address as well as an electronic version of the survey was available on the City of Montgomery's website. Respondents were asked to complete the survey by July 8, 2016. A total of 323<sup>1</sup> responses were received for a response rate of 26%. The majority of completed surveys were returned to city hall, with 52 residents completing the survey on-line. Staff then entered the information into the evaluation tool for analysis.

Overall, respondents see the City as generally an OK community; not excellent, but not poor either. They indicate that while there are some good things about the city, there are also a number of things that are not so good. For example, the City's library is viewed as good to excellent, rating a 4.15 out of a possible 5, on average, whereas the streets received a very poor rating with an average assessment of 1.93 out of a possible 5.

The wide disparity in ratings gives the City plenty of room to improve. City Council and staff will use this information as a basis to prioritize and begin to improve services, to address the concerns raised in the best and quickest manner possible, and to maintain the aspects of Montgomery that are functioning well.

The City wants to thank all the residents who took the time to complete the survey and offer your suggestions and opinions regarding how the City is or is not meeting your service expectations.

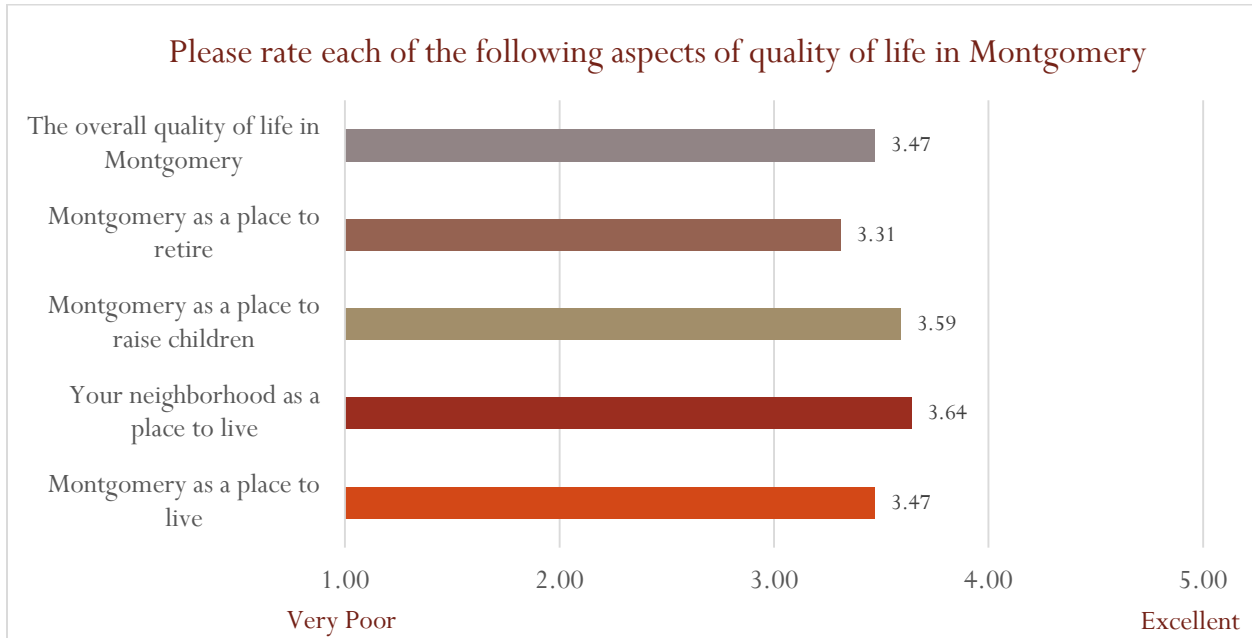
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<sup>1</sup> Survey respondents were not required to answer any or all questions. As a result total response to each question varies.

## View of the City

The survey began by asking how respondents viewed the City in terms of a place to live, raise children, retire and the overall quality of life.

Respondents rate Montgomery’s overall quality of life as fair leaning toward good. On the one-to-five point scale, quality of life received an average rating of 3.46 (40% responding “fair” and 44% responding “good”). Respondents indicated Montgomery as a fair place to live (3.67); a fair place to raise children (3.57) and a fair place to retire (3.31).



QUESTION 1 – 319 RESPONDENTS

The next question asked more specific attributes about the City such as sense of community; educational or recreational opportunities; opportunities to volunteer, participate in local decision making, attend family oriented activities, etc.; shopping; getting around the city by car, bike or foot; and overall image of the community. Respondents rated these components between poor and fair. Educational opportunities received an average rating of 3.49 whereas ease of access to shopping received an average rating of 2.58. In terms of how the City looks and its overall image and reputation, respondents rated these as less than fair at 2.80 and 2.97 respectively. The following table shows how residents feel about each of the community factors.

**Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Montgomery as a whole**

Answer Options	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Rating Average
Sense of community	6	52	125	100	24	3.27
Overall appearance of Montgomery	32	83	122	71	6	2.80

Variety of housing opportunities	14	53	129	101	8	3.12
Ease of access to shopping opportunities	56	95	95	60	8	2.58
Recreational opportunities	39	85	110	69	9	2.76
Educational opportunities	9	29	103	132	32	3.49
Opportunities to participate in social events and activities	10	56	110	110	22	3.25
Opportunities to attend family-oriented events/activities	10	52	126	96	19	3.20
Opportunities for senior/older adult activities	22	63	135	70	14	2.97
Opportunities to volunteer	8	34	123	104	36	3.41
Opportunities to participate in community matters	17	39	109	111	28	3.31
Ease of car travel in Montgomery	30	34	78	128	42	3.38
Ease of bicycle travel in Montgomery	30	52	99	91	28	3.12
Ease of walking in Montgomery	24	57	96	99	35	3.21
Availability of paths, walking trails and sidewalks	53	76	79	83	15	2.77
Traffic flow on major streets	11	32	113	124	26	3.40
Availability of affordable quality child care	11	33	117	89	10	3.21
Availability of open space	10	24	127	119	18	3.37
Air quality	17	29	93	136	33	3.45
Quality of overall natural environment in Montgomery	6	23	123	137	19	3.45
Overall image and reputation of Montgomery	29	63	118	89	11	2.97

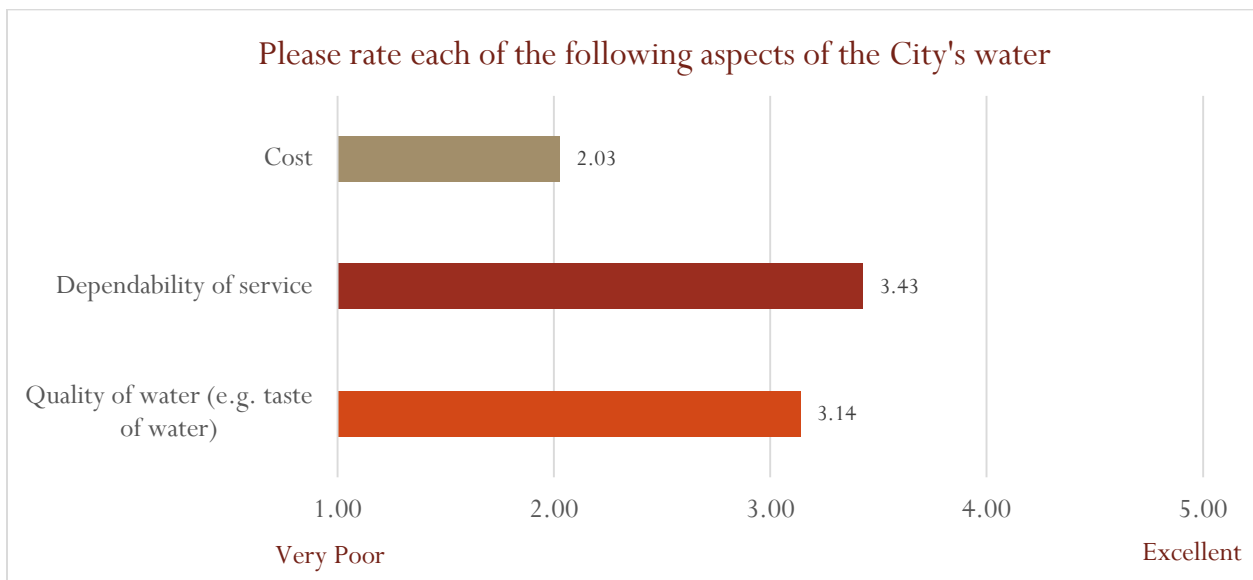
QUESTION 2 – 322 RESPONDENTS

If the values were rounded, each of the factors listed would rate 3, or fair. There are a couple of areas of concern to note in the table above, specifically ease of access to shopping, recreational opportunities and availability of paths, walking trails and sidewalks. The City can work to address these low ranking factors by working to establish and implement a trail / sidewalk improvement and expansion program; continue to work on attracting additional businesses; and looking at ways to add recreational activities possibly in partnership with the school or other organizations.

## Quality of City Services

Respondents were asked to rate a variety of city services from the quality and cost of water to quality and response of public safety to maintenance of streets.

In terms of city water dependability, respondents indicated it to be fair to good with an average rating of 3.41. Taste also received a solid rating of fair with an average rating of 3.14. Not surprisingly, 41% of the respondents view the cost of water to be very poor e.g. too high, with an average rating of 2.02. The decision to increase the rate for water beginning in 2016 was not an easy decision for the Council to make, but it was a necessary action as the water fund lost money each year and the sewer and general fund are unable to keep subsidizing the water fund. For the water and sewer fund to operate without subsidy, it would need to generate revenue at roughly 120% of operations and debt. Before the rate increase, the water fund was generating about 57% of the operations and debt resulting in a significant deficit. With the increase, the fund is at 80% and growing.

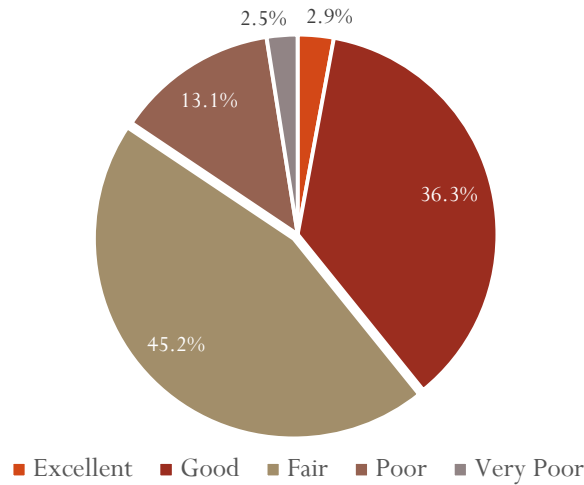


QUESTION 3 – 309 RESPONDED

Knowing the residents feel the rates are too high will help the Council to consider alternatives such as restructuring bonds and looking at conservation rates as a way to lessen the impact of future water rate adjustments.

With regard to the overall quality of service provided by the City, 84% of respondents rated city services fair to excellent (45% fair, 36% good, 3% excellent) where as 16% responded that services provided were very poor to poor (13% poor and 3% very poor).

Overall, how would you rate the quality of services provided by the City of Montgomery?



QUESTION 5 – 314 RESPONDENTS

When quality of service is broken down by individual service component, a wide disparity exists between street maintenance at the low end with 47% rating it as very poor to 54% rating fire department overall service as “good.”

The table that follows shows how respondents feel about individual services provided by the City and within the community.

Answer Options	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Rating Average
Fire Department’s response to calls	0	2	32	152	101	4.23
Ambulance response to calls	0	3	40	132	109	4.22
Fire Department overall service	0	1	40	155	94	4.18
Ambulance overall service	1	4	41	134	104	4.18
Montgomery Library	1	3	49	152	104	4.15
Fire Department’s visibility in the community	2	11	49	159	77	4.00
Fire Department’s education and prevention programs	1	7	59	151	66	3.96
Police Department’s response to calls	7	13	61	159	54	3.82
Public Schools	8	12	70	147	54	3.78
Police services overall	12	28	68	140	48	3.62
Street signs and street marking	11	17	90	170	27	3.59
Police visibility in the community	15	30	80	130	53	3.57
City Highlights newsletter	7	18	103	137	32	3.57
Police education and crime prevention programs	14	36	75	122	43	3.50
Private Schools	8	31	94	104	40	3.49
Traffic enforcement	18	29	77	134	30	3.45
Street lighting	13	28	102	144	26	3.45
Building Inspections	5	29	104	118	15	3.40

Montgomery parks	10	32	123	126	21	3.37
Sanitary sewer services	15	33	108	125	21	3.34
Services to seniors	9	33	126	104	18	3.31
Preservation of natural areas and open space	7	28	140	99	14	3.30
Snow removal	30	45	96	120	24	3.20
Services to youth	16	40	120	87	18	3.18
Cable television	21	49	98	93	21	3.16
Land use, planning and zoning	16	46	120	88	10	3.11
Storm drainage	43	53	112	88	11	2.91
Sidewalk / Trail maintenance	50	70	105	64	10	2.71
Code enforcement	66	61	98	66	14	2.68
Street sweeping/cleaning	68	78	92	58	12	2.57
Alley maintenance	75	85	85	45	7	2.41
Road conditions	116	80	75	34	6	2.14
Street maintenance and repair	148	83	54	24	8	1.93

#### QUESTION 4 – 321 RESPONDENTS

We asked respondents to rate a few non-city provided services including the Library, public school, private school, and cable television. For the most part, respondents rated these very well.

83% of the respondents rated the library as good to excellent (49% good, 34% excellent);

69% of respondents indicated public schools were good to excellent (51% good, 18% excellent);

52% indicated the private school is good to excellent (38% good, 17% excellent);

Cable was rated fair to good by 68% of respondents (35% fair, 33% good).

Looking at the responses, the City has room for improvement specifically in the area of street maintenance, code enforcement, alley maintenance, and sidewalk/trail maintenance. These items appear to correlate to the residents overall view of the city – bad streets, sidewalks, and alleys combined with weedy or junky lots and property lead to poor ratings for the City’s overall image and reputation.

Clearly there is room to improve in a few of our core services specifically in the area of street and sidewalk maintenance.

The City Council took great strides in street maintenance in 2015 when they created the Street Improvement Fund and allocated \$275,000 to the fund in 2015 and another \$125,000 in 2016. Added to this amount is a one-time allocation from the State of Minnesota of \$38,000 dedicated to street maintenance for a two year total to this fund of \$438,000. The Council is planning to add between \$150,000 and \$200,000 per year to this fund over the next several years and is lobbying state legislators for street maintenance money from the gas taxes.

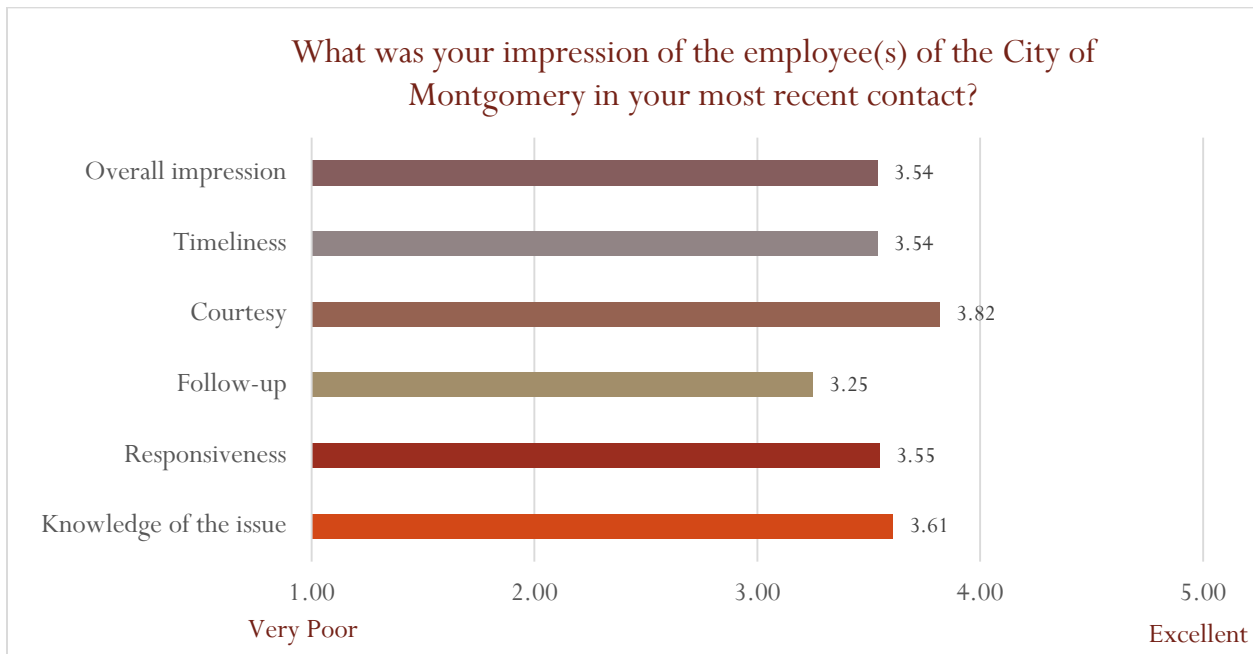
The Public Utilities Committee is working to identify streets in the City for improvement. They are looking at those streets that are in rough shape but have relatively good underground infrastructure for rehabilitation via mill and overlay or reclamation. Depending on how the review of the underground

utilities goes, rehabilitation projects could begin as early as 2017 with additional projects in 2018, 2019 and major reconstruction projects as soon as 2021.

Along with these rehabilitation projects, general maintenance including chip sealing and crack filling will continue on a regular schedule as well as making sure there is a crew available to mill and fill potholes on those streets that are further down the rehabilitation schedule.

The other area having a significant impact on residents and visitors perception of the community is code enforcement, specifically as it relates to brush, weeds, tall grass, junk and debris, etc. Based on the results of the survey and the clear concerns the community has about this issue, the City will make concerted efforts to improve enforcement of the zoning, blight, and other maintenance codes.

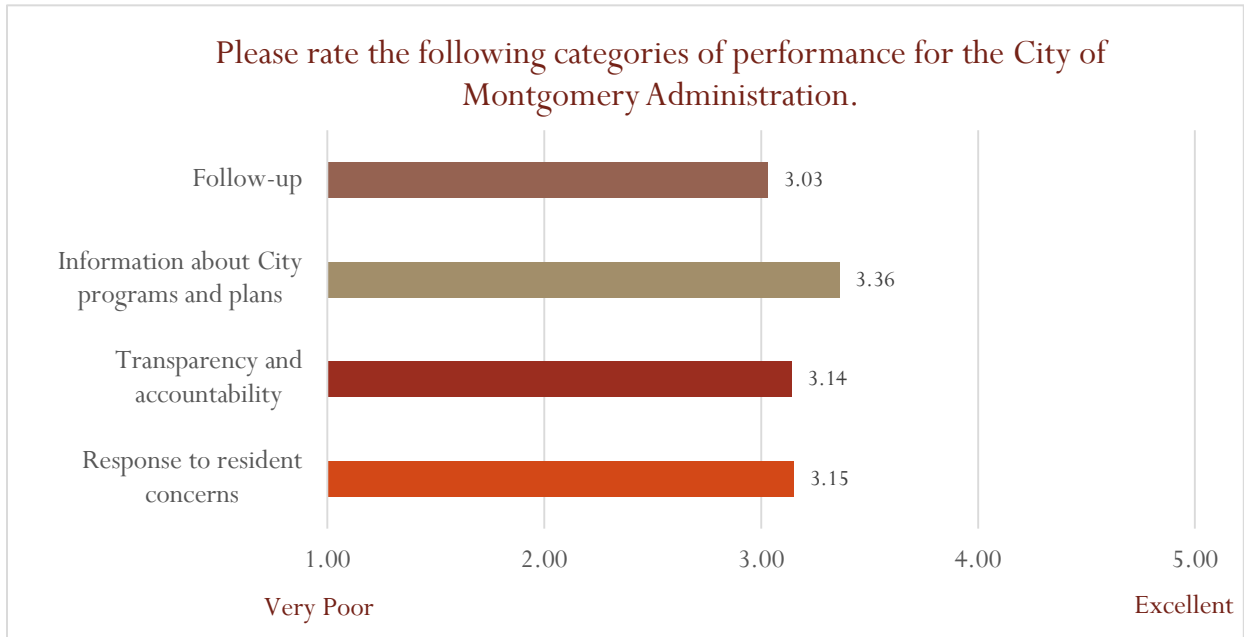
The last aspect of City services evaluated the level of customer service provided and how well the community feels city administration is working in terms of knowledge, follow-up, concern for resident issues, transparency, etc. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported having contact with an employee of the City and generally feel staff are doing a fair to good job in all aspects.



QUESTION 7 – 204 RESPONDENTS



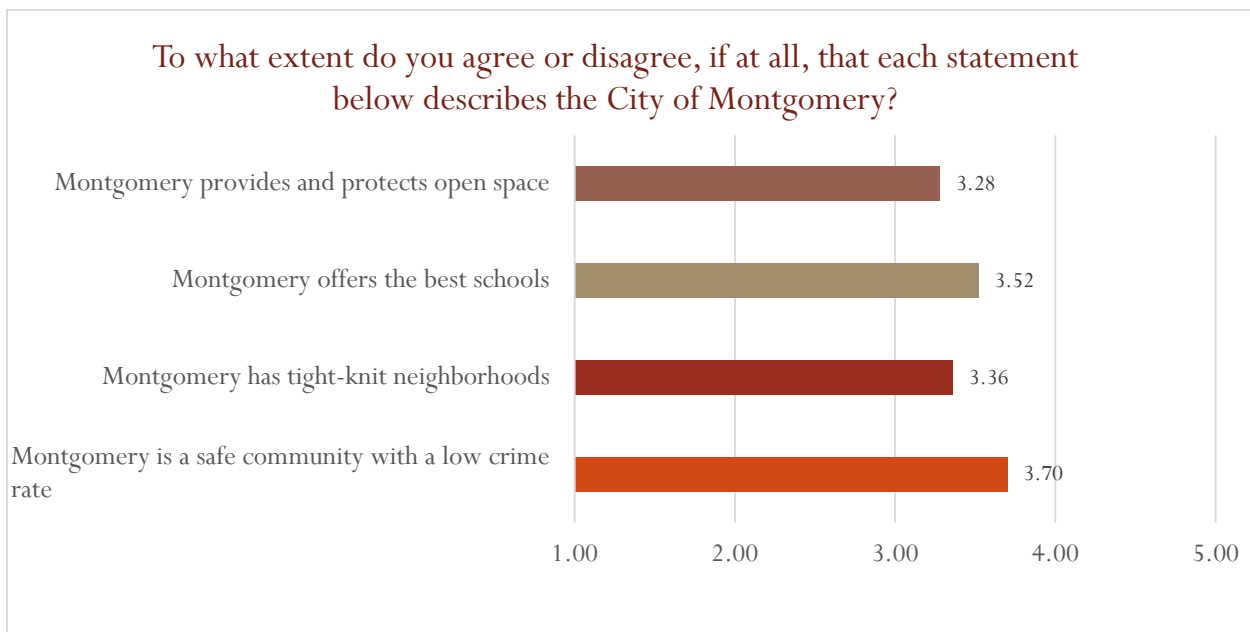
Residents feelings about administration is also rated as a soild fair. The one aspect that appears to be in need of improvement is follow-up.



QUESTION 8 – 204 RESPONDENTS

## Views on the Community

The next section of the survey asked respondents to rate how they felt about the community such as quality of schools, having tight-knit neighborhoods, quality of housing, and feelings of safety.

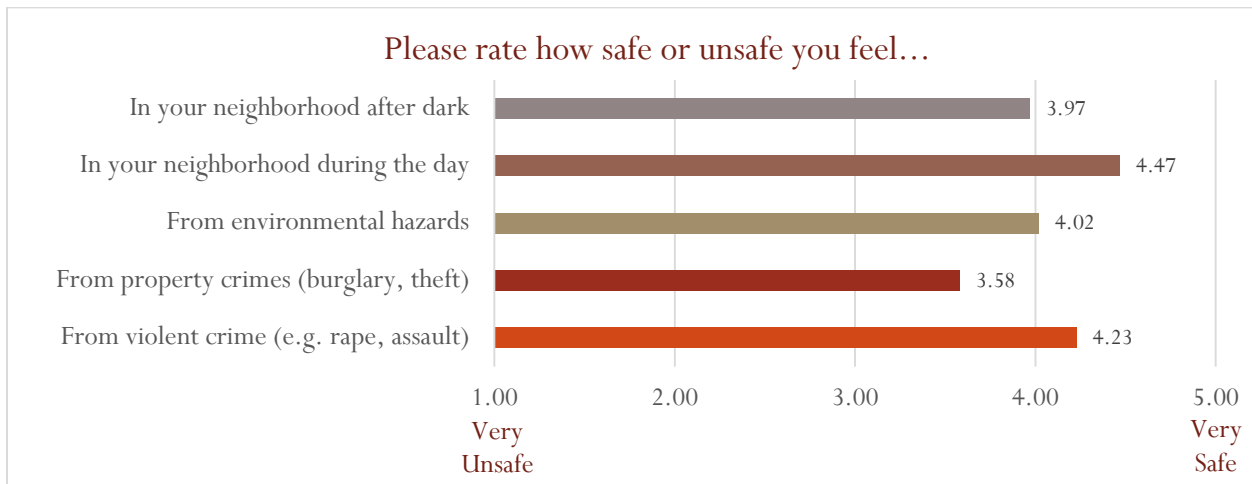


QUESTION 9 – 311 RESPONDENTS

In terms of being a safe community, 70% of respondents somewhat or strongly agree that Montgomery is a safe community with a low crime rate. This correlates to a question about being a victim of crime, where 88% reported not being or knowing someone who has been a crime victim in the past 12 months.

When it comes to the question on having tight-knit neighborhoods, there was a more neutral feeling with 31% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement and 36% somewhat agreeing. This response tracks with the question about Montgomery having a Strong Sense of Community with residents rating this statement at just above “fair.” Another indicator to community unity and feeling is the frequency neighbors get out and talk to each other. Over 50% reported talking to their neighbors several times a month or less. Only 18% reported talking to their neighbors on just about every day. Based on the results, there is not a very good feeling of community in the City and this is an area that can be improved.

Notwithstanding the amount of interaction between neighbors, the residents do feel Montgomery is a safe community with 70% somewhat or strongly agreeing with this statement. When asked about how safe they felt from violent crime, 80% of the residents feel somewhat or very safe from violent crime (30% somewhat safe and 50% very safe). An equally high number, 83%, feel safe in their neighborhood during the day and feeling safe in their neighborhood at night decreases only slightly to 77%.



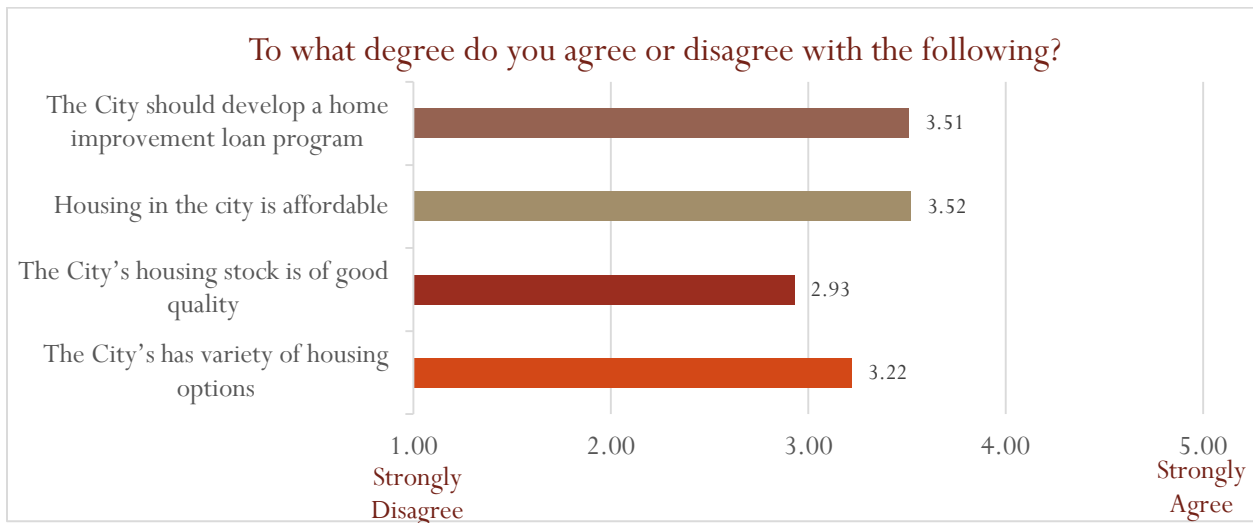
QUESTION 13 – 306 RESPONDENTS

## Views on Housing

The City wanted to know how residents felt about the type, quality, value, and variety of housing opportunities in the community.

On the question of the variety of housing options in the city, 45% of the residents indicated some to strong agreement with this statement whereas, 28% somewhat or strongly disagreed. When it comes to having a housing stock that is of good quality, 34% of the residents disagree with this statement and 30% agree. We then asked about affordability and 54% of the residents indicated that they believe housing in Montgomery is affordable. Finally, we wanted to know if residents have any interest in the City looking at establishing

some type of home improvement loan program. Fifty-one percent of the residents agreed with this statement and 38% were neutral. Only 11% disagreed that the city should pursue a home improvement program.



**QUESTION 10 – 309 RESPONDENTS**

The next question in this grouping addressed to what extent rundown buildings, junk and debris, weed filled lots and property, and junk vehicles are a problem in the community. The residents solidly feel that each of these issues is somewhat to a major problem in the community. This sentiment is strongly supported by resident's response to the question about code enforcement where 74% of the residents reported this aspect of city service to be fair to very poor.

**To what degree, if at all, are the following a problem in Montgomery?**

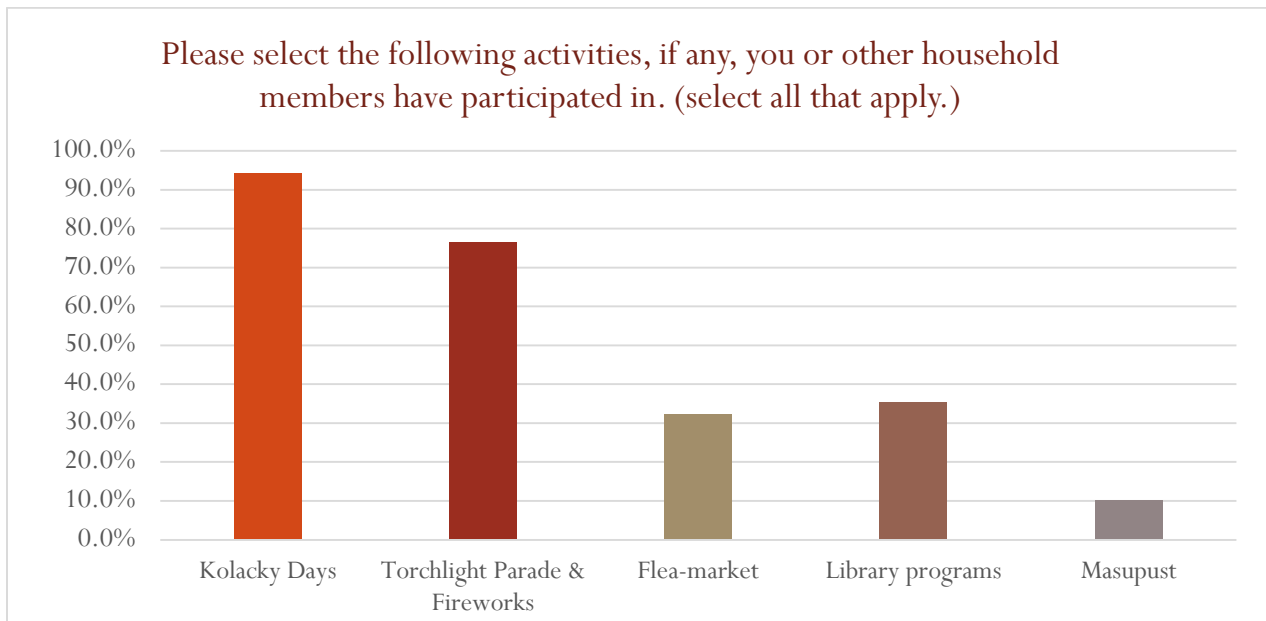
Answer Options	Major Problem	Somewhat of a problem	Not a problem	Don't Know	Rating Average
<b>Rundown Buildings</b>	120	131	33	26	2.31
<b>Junk and debris</b>	92	136	51	31	2.15
<b>Weed filled lots / property</b>	94	119	60	39	2.12
<b>Junk Vehicles</b>	75	113	71	53	2.02

**QUESTION 11 – 314 RESPONDENTS**

### Participation in the Community

The City was interested in knowing how involved residents are in the community, what city facilities residents' use and what events are popular.

Not surprisingly, over 90% of the residents participate in Kolacky Days and 76% enjoy the Torchlight Parade and Fireworks. This makes sense as these are two premier events in the community. The Flea-market is enjoyed by just over 32% of the residents and over 35% of the residents participated in programs offered at the library. A dedicated few, 10%, participate in Masupust.



**QUESTION 17 – 271 RESPONDENTS**

In the last 12 months, over 85% of the residents recycled more than 13 times. This is an excellent participation rate and shows the program works.

Participation in other areas of the community wasn't as prolific. Roughly 70% of the residents visited a city park 1-12 times in the past 12 months; 54% of the residents never attended a meeting of elected officials with only 29% attending one or two in a year. Fifty-three percent of the residents visited the city's website 3-12 times and 42% never visited the site. Volunteering and participating in a group or organization in the community followed these trends as well. When it comes to helping a neighbor, 62% do this on a regular basis.

**In the last 12 months, about how many times, if ever, have you or other members of your household participated in the following activities in Montgomery?**

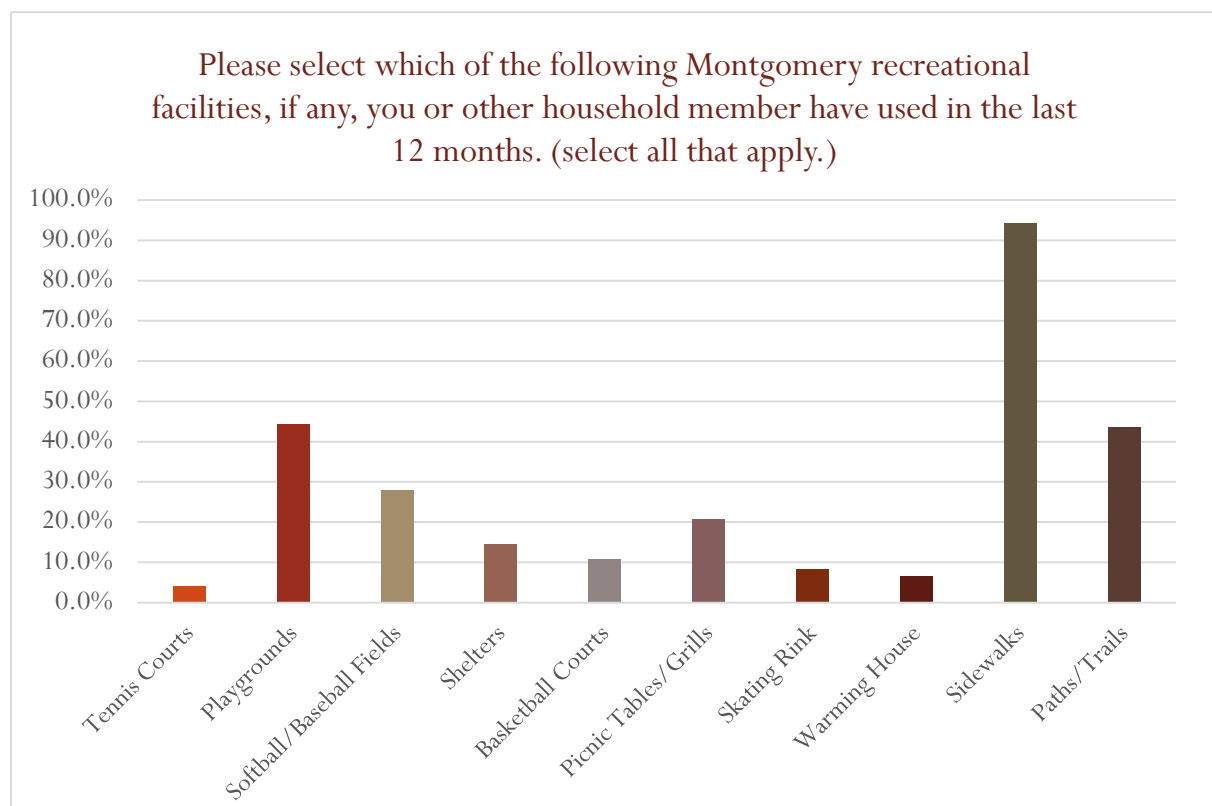
Answer Options	Never	Once or twice	3 to 12 times	13 to 26 times	More than 26 times	Rating Average
Visited a Montgomery Park	24	107	105	37	29	2.80
Attended a meeting of local elected officials or other local public meeting	159	86	43	6	3	1.68
Watched a meeting of local elected officials on Cable television	220	48	28	3	0	1.38
Visited the Montgomery Website	126	85	74	12	4	1.95
Recycled used paper, glass, cans, or cardboard	20	7	19	43	212	4.40
Volunteered your time to a group or activity in Montgomery	125	65	51	20	38	2.27
Participated in religious or spiritual activities in the City	99	46	54	27	74	2.77
Participated in a club or civic group in Montgomery	146	57	44	26	28	2.11

<b>Provided help to a friend or neighbor</b>	12	57	131	59	44	3.22
<b>Visited the Montgomery Library</b>	73	78	87	32	36	2.61

QUESTION 16 – 308 RESPONDENTS

When it comes to recreational facilities, sidewalks get the most use from the residents with 94% of residents indicating they use the sidewalks. Playgrounds (45%) and paths / trails (44%) were the next most frequently used facilities.

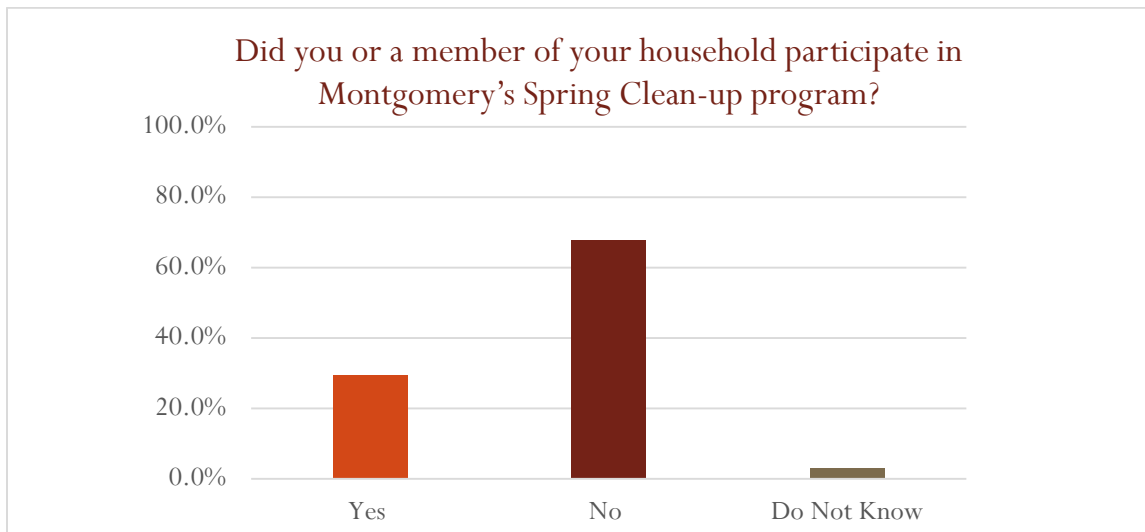
Some respondents commented in this section that they didn't realize the City had some of these facilities or, more often, that the facilities were unusable. The only other facilities to get close to 30% usage by the residents are softball / baseball fields at 28%.



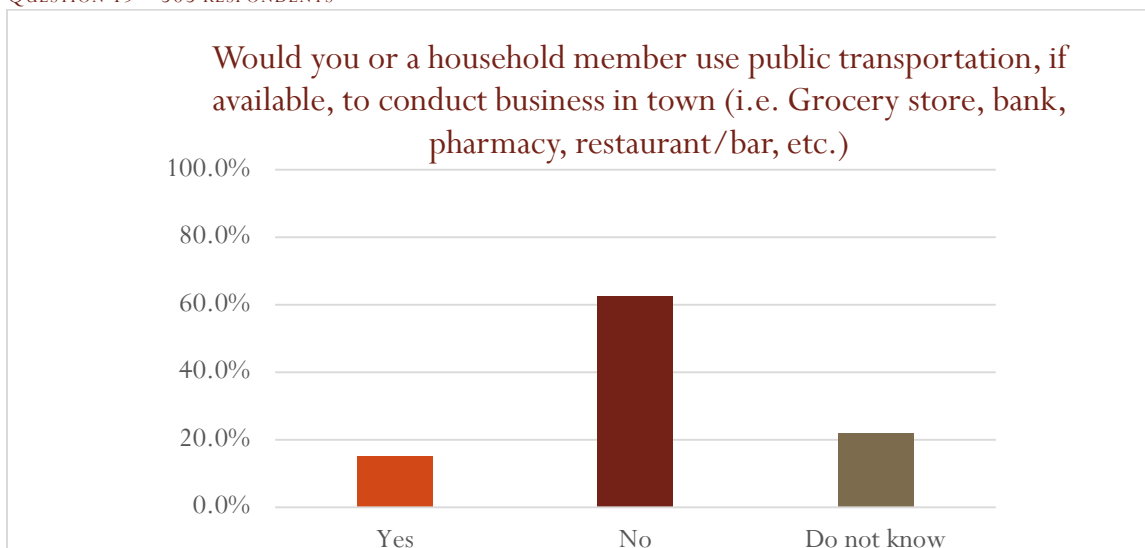
QUESTION 16 – 261 RESPONDENTS

The last two items related to participation were about the spring clean-up and whether or not residents would use or know someone who would use public transportation if offered.

About 1/3 of the residents (30%) participated in the spring clean-up and an even smaller segment of the residents (15%) would use public transportation if offered while another 22% are unsure.



QUESTION 19 – 303 RESPONDENTS



QUESTION 21- 303 RESPONDENTS

## Community Priorities

The survey solicited information on what the community feels the City should focus its efforts on going forward. Said a different way, where should tax dollars be allocated.

The Council establishes priorities as part of the budgeting process. For the past three years, Council has maintained the same top priorities:

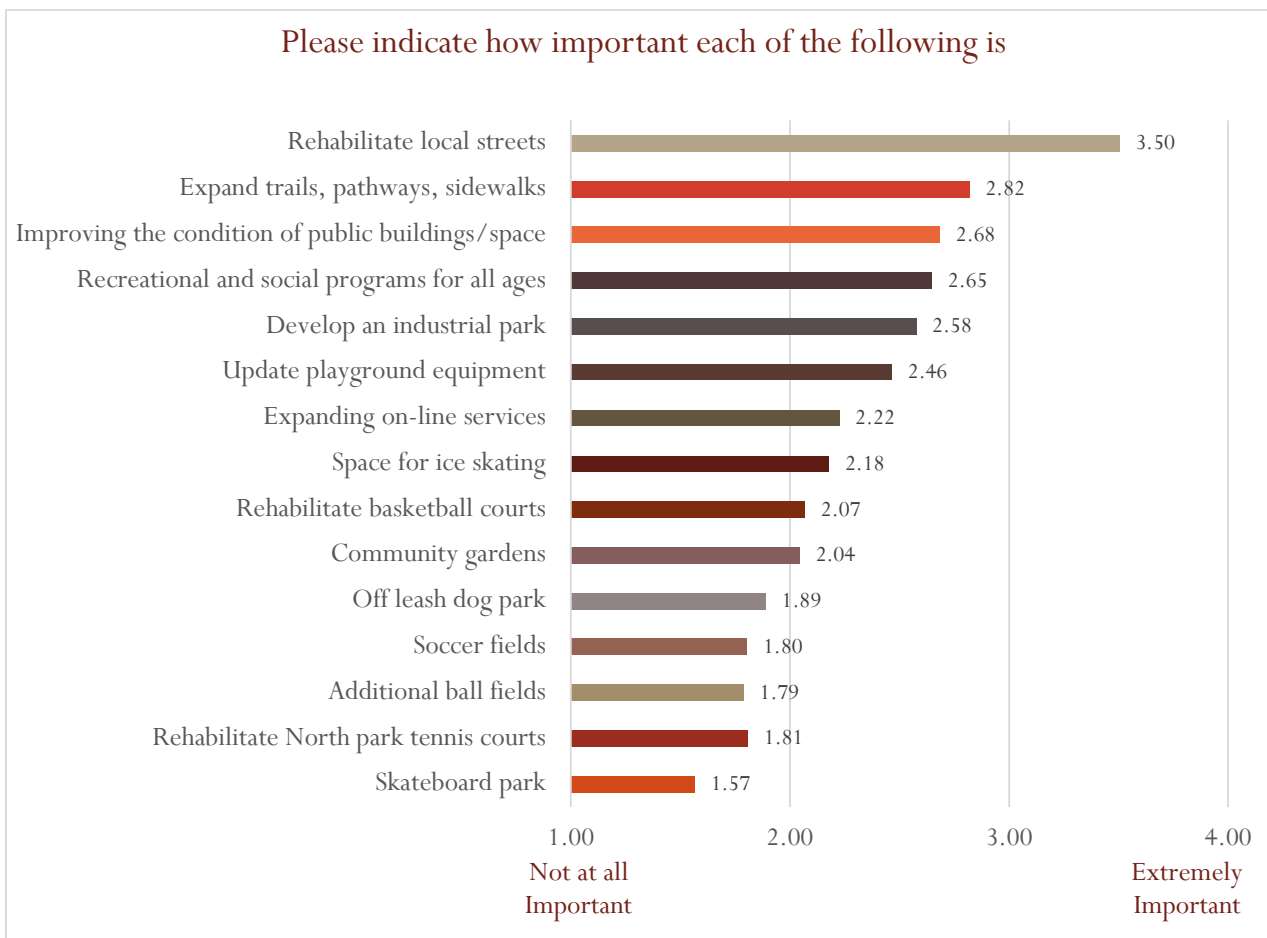
- 1) Street improvements
- 2) Sidewalk, trails, and parks
- 3) Limit levy growth
- 4) Economic Development (business attraction, expansion, retention)
- 5) Public Facility improvements (added for 2017)

6) Create a town square (added for 2017)

Residents view of the priorities mirrors those of the council very closely. Residents identified five priorities the City should allocate resources towards. These are listed below in order of importance.

1. Rehabilitate Local Streets
2. Expand trails, pathways, sidewalks
3. Improve the condition of public facilities/space
4. Provide recreational / social activities for residents of all ages
5. Develop an industrial Park

Each of the items above received an average rating of 2.5 or higher making them very or extremely important.

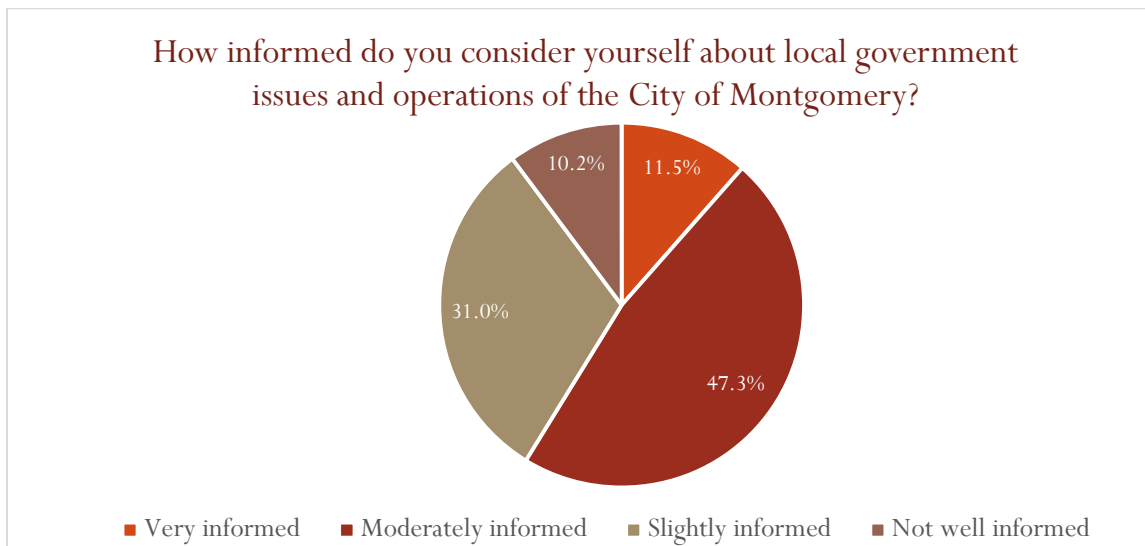


QUESTION 22 – 310 RESPONDENTS

## How Informed are Residents

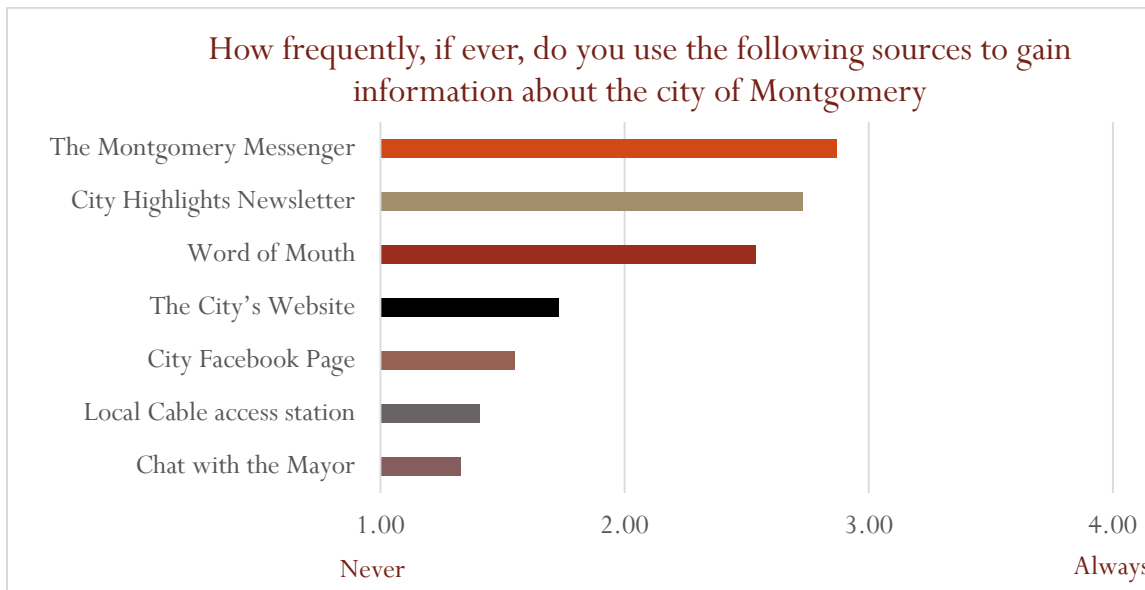
Knowing how the City is doing in keeping residents informed about what is happening in the community and what issues City Council is discussing is important. The City wants to make sure residents are as informed as possible about what is happening with the City and why certain decisions are made.

Most residents reported they are moderately informed (47%) about what is going on with their local government and another 31% indicated they are slightly informed.



QUESTION 23 – 313 RESPONDENTS

In terms of where residents obtain their information, residents rely on the Montgomery Messenger, word of mouth, and the city newsletter “City Highlights.”



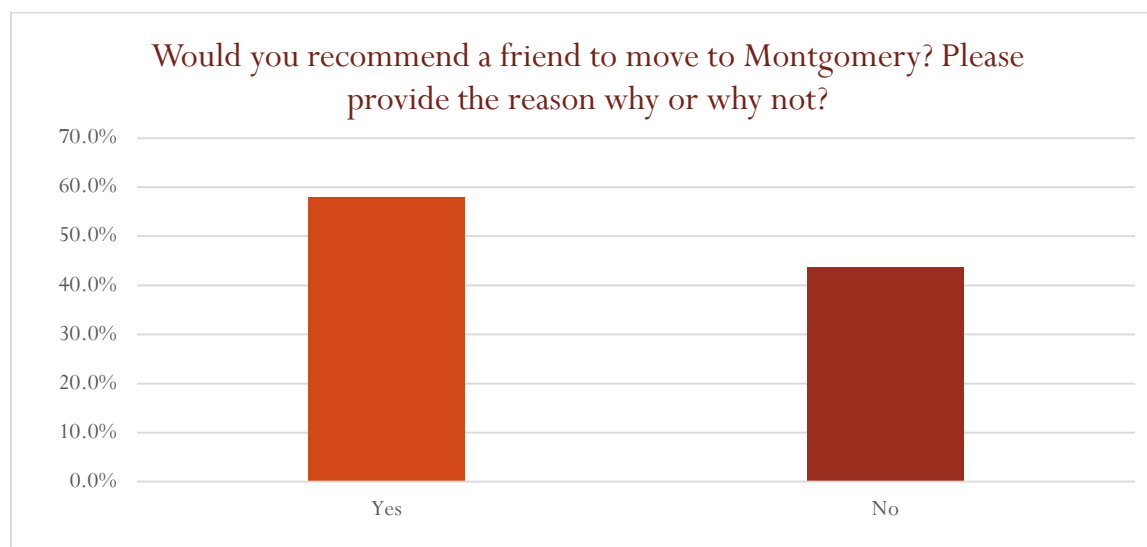
QUESTION 24 – 314 RESPONDENTS



## Montgomery as a Place to live

The final question asked was whether or not current residents would recommend Montgomery as a place to live to a friend. More than half (57%) of the residents would recommend Montgomery and 43% would not. To understand why respondents would or would not recommend Montgomery, the question was left open ended for the respondent to fill in.

What was found was not surprising and these comments reflect the overall responses. What was interesting is even though people would recommend Montgomery; they also identified areas that were of concern.



QUESTION 25 – 290 RESPONDENTS

### What Makes Montgomery a good place?

The most common responses supporting Montgomery as a good place to live included, small town feel, nice and friendly people, good schools, safe, and quiet.

### Why not Montgomery?

There are two main reasons cited for not recommending Montgomery, 1) street conditions and 2) utility rates. The general sentiment is the streets are in “terrible” condition and the utility rates are way too high. Other common statements include lack of shopping opportunities, lack of jobs, limited recreational opportunities, and no restaurant options.

### Demographics

The survey asked respondents to provide a bit of personal information to get an idea of who responded to the survey.

64% of the respondents have lived in Montgomery for 20 or more years and 84% reside in single family detached homes. The vast majority, 89%, of the respondents owns their home and do not have children under 18 living in the home, 74%. Women made up the majority of the respondents and while the age of respondents was relatively evenly distributed, 57% were 55 or older. 69% of the respondents have a household of 2 or fewer occupants.

## CONCLUSIONS

What did the City learn from the resident survey and how will the City address what it learned?

### What Was Learned

- We learned that overall, the City is an OK place to live and raise a family; it's not great, but it's not bad either. By addressing a few areas of major concern, we can begin to make Montgomery a better place to live, raise a family and possibly retire.
- We learned that the quality of the services we provide are also OK and while some services rate well, the majority could be better.
- We learned almost universal dissatisfaction with the quality of the city's roads and that the cost for utilities, specifically water, is believed to be unreasonably high.
- We learned that in addition to poor streets and high utility cost, residents feel the city could use more shopping options, eating establishments, recreational activities, and job opportunities.
- We learned that the residents feel the city is safe, offers good schools, affordable housing, has a good library, and generally friendly people.
- We discovered the city has a problem with run-down and vacant buildings and a general lack of community.
- We found that residents agree with the Council that improving the roads, expanding sidewalks and trails, improving public facilities, and creating social programs for residents of all ages are priorities.

### Acting On What Was Learned

#### *Street Improvements*

The City Council has begun to take steps to address the most critical of issues facing the city; that being the condition of the roads. The council created a street improvement fund in 2015 and allocated \$275,000 to this fund. In addition, the state legislature provided the city with a one-time allocation of \$38,000 for street improvements. Another \$125,000 will be moved into the street improvement fund in 2016 for a total balance of \$438,000 at the end of 2016.

Having funds for street improvements was an issue for several years as the council made the decision to eliminate the deficit in the general fund first. Now that there are funds available and a commitment to continue to fund a street program, the next step is to identify those roads to be rehabilitated and implement the plan.

The Public Utilities Committee (PUC) has been working with staff to identify areas of the community to begin the street program. The selection is based on current road condition and if there have been water or sewer issues in the area. Once the areas have been identified, the sewer and storm sewer will be televised to assess their condition and a plan will be developed for rehabilitation based on the results of the televising.

The City plans to be rehabilitating streets in 2017 and continuing until 2020. This should result in about 1/3 or a bit more of the street miles to be rehabilitated. The majority of the streets identified for rehabilitation from '17 to '20 are not anticipated to be full reconstructions. By 2020, a few bonds will have expired allowing the city to undertake another major project similar to the recently completed 5<sup>th</sup> Street project.

### ***Expansion of sidewalks and trails***

Like the situation with the streets, City Council has not had available funds to adequately address improvements to the sidewalks let alone plan to expand. The City has applied for a safe routes to school grant that would help add and improve sidewalks and connect additional areas of the City.

Moving forward, the Park Commission is working on a park plan with a consulting firm that should provide a good overview of where the parks and trails can be improved. Furthermore, as streets are rehabilitated, there may be the possibility of adding new sidewalk and improving the sidewalks that already exist.

The City will continue to work with the school district in planning and applying for safe routes to school funds in order to leverage additional funds for improved and expanded sidewalks.

### ***Utility Rates***

The City is well aware that the utility rates increased significantly in 2016 and many residents feel the rates are too high. The City's audit has a continual note regarding the inadequacy of the water fund in particular. In 2015, the City received a note from the Public Facilities Authority which financed a major portion of the water plant. The letter cited the recent audit which showed the City's rates were not adequate to meet financing requirements and the City was at risk of defaulting on the loan agreement. Because the water fund has continually had a significant shortfall, the PUC studied the rates and found to cover all current debt, pay regular operations and to begin to build a fund balance, the base rate had to increase.

To improve cash flow and in an effort to improve the overall position of the funds, the Council is planning to restructure two of the larger bond issues. In addition to improving overall cash flow, this action should result in slowing of rate growth and implementation of conservation rates.

### ***Public Facilities***

The City Council has taken the first step in addressing public facilities and space needs. The Council hired an engineering and architecture firm to conduct a complete space needs assessment and to provide the City with options to meet current and future space needs. The study is to be completed in late summer of 2016 and Council will then consider options to satisfy the space needs.

Funds were allocated from the State legislature to perform the study and preliminary planning. The City will make use of those funds for this process. Implementation of the plan should begin as early as 2017.

### ***Service Delivery***

As stated throughout this document, city staff can improve their service delivery in several areas. Staff will review the areas where enhancement can be made and begin to prioritize programs that need improvement.

Staff will then begin to develop strategies and action steps to make to improve our service delivery. There may be possible budgetary impacts depending on the area that needs attention.

To measure progress, the City will conduct additional surveys, generally every other year, to see if our efforts are making a difference or if we need to make additional adjustments to our service delivery methods.

### **Final Word**

In the end, this survey provides the City will excellent information for future action to build a better and more involved community residents can be proud to call home.