

# THE CITY OF WESTLAKE VILLAGE 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN

# VOLUME THREE

2015 Residents' Survey Results



# THE SURVEY

## Introduction

In the summer of 2004, the City of Westlake Village embarked upon the "2015" Community Assessment and Strategic Planning process. The objectives of the process were twofold. The first was to better understand what residents value about Westlake Village, as well as their priorities and concerns for the City -- now and in the future. The second objective was to use the information gained through the community assessment to develop a Strategic Plan that would help realize residents' desired vision for the City by guiding future planning, policy and service-related decisions.

As it should be, the "2015" Community Assessment and Strategic Planning process has been broad in its scope, soliciting input from community and business leaders, long-time residents as well as relative newcomers, past and present Council members, City staff, and various community groups. To help structure and organize both the Community Assessment and the development of a Strategic Plan, the 2015 Committee was formed -- which consists of a diverse group of residents, two City Council members, and select City staff.

**Purpose of Survey** The objective of this survey was to provide both the 2015 Committee and the City Council with a statistically reliable understanding of residents' opinions on a host of matters that are relevant to the Strategic Plan. In addition to helping develop and refine the Strategic Plan, the research results and analyses will provide Council and staff with information that can be used to make sound, strategic decisions in a variety of areas,

including service improvements and enhancements, measuring and tracking internal performance, public outreach, and budgeting.

To assist it in this effort, the City selected True North Research to design the research plan and conduct the study. Broadly defined, the study was designed to:

- ★ Gauge residents' perceptions of the quality of life in the City
- ★ Identify key issues of concern for residents
- ★ Measure residents' overall satisfaction with the City's efforts to provide municipal services
- ★ Identify the recreational programs and facilities that residents are most interested in using
- ★ Explore resident interest in a proposed Community Center, as well as the types of amenities that may be included in the Center
- ★ Gather opinions about planning matters such as design review and traffic circulation
- ★ Determine the effectiveness of the City's communication with residents
- ★ Assess how residents prioritize among potential capital and service improvements that may be funded by the City, and
- ★ Collect additional background and demographic data that is relevant to understanding residents' perceptions, needs and interests.

***Disclaimer** The statements and conclusions in the survey report are those of the authors (Dr. Timothy McLarney and Richard Sarles) at True North Research, Inc. and not necessarily those of the City of Westlake Village. Any errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.*

## Key Survey Findings

The following is an outline of the main factual findings from the survey. For the reader's convenience, the findings have been organized according to the section titles used in the body of the survey. Thus, if our readers would like to learn more about a particular finding, a copy of the complete survey report is available for review at the City Hall offices and on the City's website ([www.wlv.org](http://www.wlv.org).)



### Quality of Life & Satisfaction

- ★ Ninety-eight percent (98%) of Westlake Village residents rated the quality of life in the City as excellent (75%) or good (23%). Only 2% felt that the quality of life in the City is fair, and less than 1% of respondents said it is poor.
- ★ Ninety-five percent (95%) of Westlake Village residents surveyed indicated they were either very satisfied (66%) or somewhat satisfied (29%) with the job the City is doing to provide municipal services. Less than 4% were dissatisfied.
- ★ When asked what one change the City could take to make Westlake Village a better place to live, now and in the future, only one topic -- limit growth/preserve open space (13%) -- was mentioned by more than 10% of respondents. It is instructive to note, moreover, that the most common response to this question was 'not sure', and that nearly 10% of respondents also indicated that no changes are needed -- everything is good.
- ★ Ninety-two percent (92%) of residents feel safe walking alone in their neighborhoods after dark.
- ★ Eighty-nine percent (89%) of residents feel safe walking alone on major streets and roads in Westlake Village after dark.
- ★ Eighty-two percent (82%) of residents feel safe walking alone in commercial areas of the City after dark.

## Key Survey Findings

### Parks, Recreation & Events

- ★ Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents reported that at least one member of their household had visited a park or recreational facility in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- ★ Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents reported that at least one member of their household had participated in a recreation program offered by the City of Westlake Village in the 12 months prior to the interview.
- ★ When asked to rate their household's interest in 16 different recreation, education and community programs, respondents expressed the highest level of interest in special events like Concerts in the Park and the 4th of July celebration (91% very or somewhat interested), followed by cultural programs, plays, music and theatre performances (86%), adult exercise programs (69%), adult education classes (65%), and guided nature hikes for families (58%).

### Community Center

- ★ Forty percent (40%) of residents indicated that it is either extremely important (15%) or very important (25%) that the City develop a Community Center that will serve as a central gathering place for residents. An additional 43% indicated that it is somewhat important that the Center be constructed, whereas 14% stated that it was not at all important to develop the Center.
- ★ Among the amenities that may be incorporated in the proposed Center, residents assigned the highest priority to facilities dedicated for teen use (54% high priority), followed closely by an open space park surrounding the Center for passive recreational use (53%), outdoor space to host local events like the Farmers' Market (48%), and facilities dedicated for senior use (46%).

### Design Review

- ★ When asked if the City should be more restrictive, less restrictive, or about the same as it is now in limiting the size of homes that residents are allowed to build based on homes in the surrounding neighborhood, most residents (56%) preferred that the City continue with its current approach. Twenty-one percent (21%) preferred more restrictions, 15% preferred a less restrictive approach, and 8% were unsure.

## Key Survey Findings

### Traffic

- ★ Ninety-three percent (93%) of residents rated traffic circulation in residential areas of the City as either excellent or good.
- ★ Eighty-one percent (81%) of residents rated the overall traffic circulation in the City as either excellent or good.
- ★ Seventy-five percent (75%) of residents rated traffic circulation on major streets in the City as either excellent or good.
- ★ When asked if speeding vehicles are a problem in their neighborhood, 21% stated that they are a big problem, 36% a moderate problem, 22% a small problem, and 21% offered that speeding vehicles are not a problem in their neighborhood.
- ★ Among respondents who viewed speeding vehicles as at least a small problem, the most commonly mentioned action that they would like the City to take to reduce vehicle speeds in their neighborhood was increased enforcement (37%), followed by installing speed bumps (16%).
- ★ Nearly one-third (30%) of residents indicated that at least one member of their household would make regular use of the proposed fixed-route shuttle service that would serve key destinations in the greater Westlake community.

### Schools

- ★ Nearly two-thirds (66%) of respondents indicated that they do not have any school-aged children in the home.
- ★ Nevertheless, when informed that the City has annually provided about \$500,000 in direct and indirect support to the Las Virgenes Unified School District and asked if the City should provide more money, less money, or about the same amount in the future, the majority of respondents (53%) preferred that the City provide a comparable amount in the future. Twenty-nine percent (29%) favored the City increasing the amount, 6% indicated that the City should reduce the amount, and 13% were unsure.

### Spending Priorities

- ★ When provided with 14 projects that are candidates for future City spending and asked to indicate the priority they would assign to each, respondents indicated that the top priority is establishing a calendar of special events like Concerts in the Park and a 4th of July fireworks celebration, followed by improving street lighting where needed, building the proposed Community Center, creating a network of walking trails throughout the City, and creating more parks for active use, with sports fields, courts and outdoor recreation facilities.

## Key Survey Findings

### Communication

- ★ Residents' most frequently cited source of information for City news, events and programming was the Acorn (mentioned by 51% of respondents), followed by the City Newsletter (41%), the City's website/Internet (12%), Ventura County Star (12%), and direct mail flyers (10%).
- ★ Eighty-three percent (83%) of residents said they were satisfied with the City's efforts to communicate with residents through newsletters, the Internet, the City's cable channel, and other means. Only 12% reported that they were dissatisfied, and most of these respondents indicated that they were just 'somewhat dissatisfied'.
- ★ Twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents indicated that they had visited the City's website in the 12 months prior to the interview.
- ★ Respondents held mixed opinions regarding the quality of the cell reception at their home. One-quarter (25%) of respondents rated the cell reception as very poor, 13% rated it as poor, 17% as fair, 22% as good, and 20% rated the reception at their home as excellent.



## Survey Conclusions

As noted in the Introduction, this study was designed to provide the City of Westlake Village with a statistically reliable understanding of its residents' values, priorities, needs and concerns as they relate to the City's 2015 Community Assessment and Strategic Planning process. As such, it provides the City with information needed to help develop and refine the Strategic Plan as well as make sound, strategic decisions in a variety of areas -- including service improvements and enhancements, measuring and tracking internal performance, budgeting and planning. Whereas subsequent sections of this report are devoted to conveying the detailed results of the survey, in this section we attempt to 'see the forest through the trees' and note how the collective results of the survey answer some of the key questions that motivated the research. *The following conclusions are based on the True North's interpretations of the results, as well as the firm's experience conducting similar studies for government agencies throughout the State.*

### **In what ways are the survey results consistent with the initial work of the 2015 Committee?**

In most respects, the survey results are a confirmation of the 2015 Committee's initial work with respect to developing the City's Strategic Plan. This is especially true for the over-arching theme of the Committee's work, which is one of maintaining -- rather than changing -- the character of the City.

Westlake Village residents clearly share the 2015 Committee's positive assessment of the City. In fact, Westlake Village residents

are the most satisfied resident group that True North has ever encountered -- both in terms of the overall quality of life in the City, as well as with respect to the City's efforts to provide municipal services. The overwhelming majority of residents rated the quality of life in the City as either excellent (75%) or good (23%), and 95% of residents indicated that they are satisfied with the City's provision of services.

Given the exceptionally positive assessment of the City, it is thus only natural that, when provided with an opportunity to suggest changes to the City, more than one-quarter of residents could not suggest a desired change or indicated that no changes are needed. The changes that were suggested, moreover, often centered on keeping things the way they are now by limiting growth, preserving existing open space, and limiting future commercial and industrial development.

In terms of specific goals and strategies that have been discussed by the Committee and that were tested in the survey, residents were receptive -- if not outright enthusiastic -- about most. In particular, strengthening the sense of community in the City through expanding the schedule of special events and providing enhanced cultural, recreational and community programming was wildly popular. Residents were also supportive of creating and enhancing community facilities, including the proposed Community Center, a network of walking trails, and more parks for both passive and active use.

## Survey Conclusions

### **In what ways do the survey results suggest changes to the Committee's initial work?**

Although the survey results do not outright contradict any of the goals or strategies developed by the 2015 Committee to date, they do suggest several caveats or refinements. For the reader's convenience, we have organized this discussion according to the topics shown below in bold type.

**Limit size of remodels (mansionization):** The majority of residents prefer that the City continue with its existing approach to limiting the size of residential remodels -- just 21% favored a more restrictive approach.

**Implement innovative, resident-friendly traffic calming measures:** Although nearly two-thirds (65%) of residents think that implementing traffic calming measures in the City is at least a medium priority, it is important to recognize that the vast majority of residents also perceive traffic circulation within the City to be either excellent or good and that measures to calm traffic should not negatively impact circulation. Moreover, although a majority of residents (57%) indicated that speeding vehicles are a big or moderate problem in their neighborhood, most residents expressed a desire for increased enforcement rather than a 'public works' solution to the problem, such as speed bumps or additional stop signs/stop lights.

**Naturalize the Lindero flood control channel:** Although viewed by a majority (55%) of residents as at least a medium priority for the City, naturalizing the Lindero flood control channel ranked well below many of the other projects, programs and improvements tested in the survey -- including expanding community programs, improving street lighting, and building more community facilities. Considering the expense of naturalizing the channel, the survey results suggest that the City should only embark upon this project if the higher priority projects already have sufficient funding.



# THE SURVEY

## Survey Conclusions

**Increase methods and tools for citizen communication and involvement and expand the City Newsletter and build on the mailing list:** Residents were generally quite satisfied (83%) with the City's existing efforts to communicate with them through newsletters, the Internet, the City's cable TV channel, and other means. Although expanding the City's newsletter and mailing list is definitely a solid strategy for improving city-resident communication, the Strategic Plan does not specifically reference the City's website as a potentially valuable tool for communicating with residents and improving civic engagement. Based on the survey results, it appears that the City's website is currently an under-utilized tool. Just 28% of residents indicated that they had visited the City's website in the 12 months prior to the interview, which is markedly lower than what True North has found in other cities. If the goal is to increase resident access to information about the City and involve them in the decision-making process, the City should explore ways to increase resident use of the City's website.

### **Are there any specific goals or strategies that should be considered -- or reconsidered -- by the 2015 Committee?**

When drafting a Strategic Plan, there is naturally a tension between providing too much detail and not enough. Although the 2015 Committee has done an admirable job of balancing this tension, the survey results suggest three potential additions for the Committee's and Council's consideration:

**Street-lighting:** Improving the street lighting with the City, where needed, was among the most popular improvements tested in the survey -- second only to establishing a calendar of special events. This improvement should be incorporated in the Strategic Plan along with the specific public landscaping improvements that are already specified.

**Improve cell reception:** Residents have come to rely on cell technology to stay connected to their families and friends, their work, and their local government. The survey results indicate that many residents in Westlake Village are frustrated with the poor cell reception at their homes. Improving cell phone reception throughout the City is a task that merits consideration as a specific strategy in the Strategic Plan.

**Affordable, entry-level housing:** Despite discussing the concept at some length, the 2015 Committee did not include creating entry-level affordable housing as a specific goal or opportunity within the initial outline of the Strategic Plan. According to the survey, just over half of residents consider this program to be at least a medium priority for the City -- and less than 16% indicated that the City should not spend money on an affordable housing program in the future. Given the level of public support for this program, perhaps it should be included in the Strategic Plan if it is expected that higher priority programs will have sufficient funding.

# THE SURVEY

## Survey Methodology

It is important to note that the study proceeded in two phases.

In the first phase, households were selected at random from the City using a random digit dial (RDD) sampling methodology. This method ensured that both listed and unlisted households had an equal probability of being chosen. It also ensured that new residents and new developments had an equal opportunity to participate in the study, which would not be true if the sample were based on a listed telephone directory. Once selected, residents were provided with the opportunity to participate in the survey over the telephone or online at a secure website hosted by True North. As designed, a total of 400 interviews were completed in the first phase. These interviews constitute the Main sample as they represent a statistically reliable, representative cross-section of the Westlake Village adult population. The results discussed in the body of this report and the crosstabulations in Appendix A are based on the Main sample.

To accommodate the City's interest in allowing all residents the opportunity to participate in the strategic planning process -- not just those who were selected at random for the Main sample -- the second phase of the study made an identical (but separate) survey available to interested residents between September 26 and October 21, 2005. All households in the City were mailed a postcard inviting them to participate in the survey online at a secure website. For those who preferred to complete the study by mail, they were provided with a means of requesting a hardcopy. The postcards

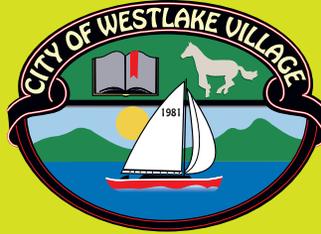
included two unique PINs for each household, thereby preventing non-residents from accessing the online survey and preventing resident households from participating more than twice. If a household needed additional PINs, they were instructed to contact the City. A total of 272 residents participated in this second phase of the study, which constitutes the Supplemental sample.

The Supplemental sample represents a self-selected, non-random group of interested residents and is not representative of the City's adult population. For this reason, the results for the Supplemental sample were analyzed separately and are presented in the crosstabulations in Appendix B. The question-by-question analysis, key findings and conclusions of this report are based on the Main sample findings only -- not the Supplemental sample.





*"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." - Eleanor Roosevelt*



## THE CITY OF WESTLAKE VILLAGE

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