

## **Deliberation Day 2007 Report**

### **Falls Church City: What Are We Becoming?**

Date of Event: March 17, 2007  
Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School  
Falls Church, Virginia

Sponsored by

Citizens for a Better City  
Falls Church League of Women Voters  
Village Preservation and Improvement Society

#### **Online Survey results: Common ground on engagement and information sharing**

Deliberation Day participants, organized in eleven groups of eight to twelve people per group, made eighty-eight written suggestions for what individuals, community organizations and City government should do to respond to what Falls Church City is becoming. The subsequent online survey consolidated similar suggestions into 42, divided in three categories:

- Information sharing, with 11 suggestions
- Citizen and community involvement, with 18 suggestions
- City policy-making, with 13 suggestions.

Respondents scored each of the 42 suggestions as one (only) of the following:

- Most Important (3 points)
- Less Important (2 points)
- Need More Information (1 point)
- Unimportant (-2 points)
- Bad Idea (-3 points)
- No Opinion (0 points)

The survey found the greatest common ground in four suggestions for citizen and community involvement, and in the top five suggestions for information sharing.

#### ***Citizen and community involvement***

- Vote (Rank=1, Average score= 2.91 which rounds to 3, for a rating of Most Important)
- Volunteer for boards and commissions (Rank=2, Average score=2.57, Rating=Most Important)
- Take responsibility to organize, be pro-active, get neighbors and young people involved; join community groups; attend and make voices heard at City Council and boards & commissions; write letters and make phone calls. (Rank=3, Average score=2.53, Rating=Most Important)
- Recruit for City boards and commissions (Rank=7, Average score=2.36, Rating=Less Important)

#### ***Information sharing***

- [Have more] transparency [in] advertising, to ensure the community is well-informed and has a chance [to] provide input to decisions; build trust. (Rank=4, Average score=2.52, Rating=Most Important)
- Reach out to newcomers and neighbors to publicize City Council meetings, work sessions, etc. (Rank=5, Average score=2.37, Rating=Less Important)
- Better use of City website; use a “board documents” system for policy and background material; add discussion boards. (Rank=5, Average score=2.37, Rating=Less Important)
- Develop welcome package and activities – use current residents in outreach to new residents, including renters. (Rank=7, Average score=2.36, Rating=Less Important)
- Hold education forums on City issues; City Hall Open House or road shows (Rank=9, Average score=2.35, Rating=Less Important)

By contrast, there was less common ground on what the direction of City policy-making should be. No suggestion on City policy-making received a rounded average rating of Most Important. The top-rated City policy-making suggestion, which ranked tenth, overall, was “Look far ahead in order to maintain a distinct character and charm for the City”. The second-ranked (twelfth overall) was “Make sure most groups are represented”.

The results should be regarded with caution, due to the lack of a representative sample of City residents and a corresponding bias. Substantial numbers of the survey respondents have served on City Council (6%), the School Board (8%), a board or commission (42%) or a combination of those (45%). A plurality of the survey respondents have lived in the City more than twenty years (36%). The respondents overwhelmingly own their homes (96%). By contrast, a City-commissioned survey in 2006 found that only 27% of City residents moved to their present residences in 1989 or earlier, and that a sizeable 31% of City residents rent, rather than own.

Accordingly, the online survey found that what is of most concern to its respondents -- the people most actively engaged in the City’s civic life -- is that more people in the City need to be actively engaged in its civic life.

A final indicator of the high level of citizen involvement among respondents is the narrow band into which City policy-making suggestions were ranked. The thirteen City policy-making suggestions ranked between ten and thirty, with one low-rated (40<sup>th</sup>) exception. The highly-engaged and knowledgeable respondents to the survey found plenty of common ground on what to do about improving citizenship and information sharing in the City, but much less common ground on what policies the City should adopt.

May 11, 2007  
City of Falls Church, Virginia

Deliberation Falls Church City

[www.dfccva.org](http://www.dfccva.org)

*A chance to be heard and a reason to listen*