

June 1, 2008

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KERN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS UNVEILS THIRD REGIONAL QUALITY-OF-LIFE SURVEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Organization: Kern Council of Governments
What: Kern Regional Survey Results
When: Tuesday, July 28, 2009
Where: Bakersfield, California

Things are looking up! Four out of five Kern County residents are at least “somewhat satisfied” with the quality of life in their communities and hold a generally positive attitude about their futures, according to the most recent Kern COG community survey.

As in 2008, the 1,200 person random telephone survey examined attitudes about community growth, traffic, housing, government services and other quality-of-life issues throughout Kern County. The demographics included 600 Central Valley residents from places like Arvin, Bakersfield, Shafter, Wasco, McFarland and Delano; and 200 responses each from residents in western Kern (Maricopa, Taft, McKittrick), eastern Kern (Mojave, California City, Ridgecrest) and the mountain communities of Tehachapi, Frazier Park and the Kern River Valley.

With Kern’s population expected to double to nearly 1.5 million people by 2040, Kern COG has conducted the surveys to determine residents’ attitudes about how that growth should be addressed and what impact it will have on the region in general.

Overall satisfaction with quality of life in the 2009 survey (78 percent) is consistent with the results of the 2008 survey (79 percent); however, there was a 7 percent decline in the residents who reported being “very satisfied.” An increase in the “somewhat satisfied” responses largely accounts for this change, so the results suggest that residents’ attitudes toward the quality of life in their city or town are quite resilient given the economic downturn.

The results reveal that mountain region residents are more satisfied with quality of life in their city or town (91%), than those of West Kern (76%), the Central Valley (78%), and East Kern (80%). It is important to note that at least three out of four residents are satisfied with the quality of life across these regions.

Looking ahead to the next 20 years, 38 percent of those surveyed think quality of life in their city or town will be “better;” 24 percent think it will “stay about the same;” and 33 percent think it will be “worse.” A majority of the “stay about the same” responses came from those who are satisfied with the current quality of life, which can be interpreted as a fairly positive outlook of the future.

The results suggest that residents are slightly less pessimistic about the future than when surveyed in 2008 – there was an 8 percent decline in the residents who reported that quality of life will be worse. Additionally, attitudes toward the future have returned to levels observed in the 2007 survey.

Compared to 2008, Kern residents are slightly more pessimistic about their communities’ future owing mainly to concerns about job availability and economic pressures; however, 79 percent still reported at least being “somewhat satisfied” if not highly satisfied with their cities or towns.

Similar to the 2008 survey, residents said creating more high paying jobs; maintaining and improving basic local services such as education, public safety, and road maintenance; and improving air and water quality are the most important issues facing the future of Kern County.

The survey assessed 26 quality of life issues in Kern County grouped into four topic areas: (a) Services, Safety and Equity; (b) Natural Resources; (c) Growth and Development; and (d) Mobility. Each topic area ranked among the top issues of importance, suggesting Kern residents recognize a diverse set of priorities.

All four issues related to services, safety and equity scored above average, consistent with the 2008 survey. Public safety and education again emerged as priorities.

In natural resources, six of the nine issues earned average or above average importance scores. However, issues related to air quality and open spaces were rated as less important than they were in the 2008 survey. Although this topic area remains a priority, current economic conditions could be slightly redirecting residents’ concerns.

Similar the 2008 survey, growth and development varied according to the specific issue. Although creating more high paying jobs and diversifying the local economy were among the most

important issues to residents, housing development was less important. Additionally, diversifying the local economy was the only issue of the 26 tested in the survey to increase in importance from 2008.

Residents rated maintaining local streets and roads as among the relatively most important issues; however, other issues in the mobility area were among the least important issues, including improving public transportation to other cities and expanding local bus services. Further, of the six issues related to mobility, five declined in importance from 2008.

A follow-up question on important issues was included and the results are consistent with the 2008 study. When considering population increases expected over the next 20 years, two-thirds of residents mentioned one of the following as the single, most important issue for the future of Kern County: quality of jobs; crime rate or gang violence; environmental issues, such as air pollution and water contamination; education; and streets, roads, and freeways.

The community survey was conducted over a 12-day period between February 26 and March 9 in both English and Spanish by Godbe Research of San Mateo. Roughly 45 percent of respondents identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino; 42 percent Caucasian; 4 percent African-American; 4 percent Asian and 4 percent other. About 23 percent of respondents fell into the 25-34 age bracket, with 21 percent aged 35-44; 16 percent 18-24; 17 percent 45-54; 10 percent 55-64 and 12 percent over 65.

The complete 257-page survey, including appendices, is available at www.kerncog.org.

Arrangements for copies may also be made through:

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