

Memorandum

To: Town Council
From: Gabi Rae, Director of Communications & Community Engagement
Date: Jan. 29, 2025
Re: 2025 Community Survey



Biennially, in odd numbered years, the Town prepares and conducts a survey of the community on numerous important topics. The survey results are intended to inform decisions and priorities of the Town Council and the administration of programs and projects by Town staff. To ensure scientifically significant results, the Town partners with an expert vendor in the field. Our vendor for the survey in 2025 will be Polco (a company that provides the technical tools powering the survey expertise by the National Research Center). This company is widely known as a leader in nationwide municipal surveys and has been our partner in the Community Survey since 2013.

The 2025 Community Survey will have two ways for residents to participate: the Benchmark Survey and the Open Participation Survey. These two surveys will include an identical set of questions, the difference is that the Benchmark Survey uses a scientific and controlled method for collecting data from a specifically chosen sample of the community while the Open Participation Survey can be taken online by *any* interested resident. The Benchmark Survey results will be weighted to increase representation, and the data will be analyzed and presented through a scientific lens by the experts at Polco.

For the Benchmark Survey, in the past the Town has sent 4,000 surveys to a random sample of community members and typically receives a 20-25% completion rate, which is considered very good by Polco. More detailed information about Polco's sampling methodology can be found in the attached document.

This year, the Communications & Community Engagement team will spend more time and resources on educational materials explaining the scientific basis for conducting a survey with a valid sample size in addition to the traditional messaging encouraging people to check their mail for a survey. Opportunities for all residents to participate in the Open Participation Survey will be advertised through the weekly digital newsletter, the monthly utility bill newsletter, social media, website alerts, physical posters at Town facilities and local businesses, at any tabling opportunities at events, and other creative means. While the data collected in this Open Participation survey is not considered statistically valid, the data gathered mirrors the data gathered in the statistically valid Benchmark Survey. In 2023 there was a total of 904 responses to the Benchmark Survey and 910 people completed the Open Participation Survey – the data show consistent responses from both surveys.

As currently structured, the Town pays Polco \$23,000 to provide this service. Following Council's feedback during the retreat, staff asked Polco to provide pricing to distribute a survey to every household in Erie. The price received was an additional \$20,000 bringing the total to \$43,000. Polco advised against this option as it does not provide any more

validity to the survey data. Staff agree with Polco and also has concerns about the precedent it may set for any future surveying we do with other consulting firms. The cost could very quickly become untenable.

The National Community Survey has a standard set of questions that are asked by municipalities across the country and act as another benchmarking tool. It also has a small space for customized questions that are intended to be timely in nature. We asked Department directors to discuss the upcoming survey with their staff to identify themes/concepts or questions that should be asked of the community this year. We then simplified and prioritized all submitted questions to fit the space allotted. It is best practice to create the most succinct survey possible to ensure greater participation and more accurate answers from the survey-takers.

The Council should note that as the experts, our Polco representatives will also review the wording and presentation of our questions to ensure they follow best practices for survey writing. The questions may be re-written to ensure a more accurate data set. The Town can prepare and administer additional surveys for program- or project-specific data collection in the future.

Attached is a draft of our 2025 National Community Survey which includes all recurring questions and our set of custom questions (pages 4-5). Previous survey questions and results can be reviewed at www.erieco.gov/CommunitySurvey.