

Derry Survey Committee
August 31, 2015

The Derry Survey Committee met on Monday, August 31, 2015, beginning at 10:00 a.m., in Room 207 of the Derry Municipal Center to continue discussions about a community wide survey. Present were Town Councilor David Fischer; Susan Hickey, ITA/HR/CFO; Doug Rathburn, IT Director; Elizabeth Robidoux, Planning; Owen Provencher, and Michael Layon, Chair. Matt Cohen was unable to attend.

Michael stated the objective for this meeting was to develop the five bucket list topics, create a timeline for development of the survey and rollout, and if time allowed, discuss the importance of respondent demographics. In discussing the process, the question was asked if the draft should be open to public comment. Mr. Fischer felt the best way to proceed is to present the overall topics to Town Council, acknowledging that the public will have an avenue to provide input, but the Committee will have the final say on the end product.

In looking at the prior Master Plan survey results, Mr. Fischer noted the top three responses had to do with reducing the property tax burden (63%), preserving agricultural lands/open space (51%) and attracting new retail (43%). Those may be the three areas to obtain more information. Questions should be asked with an action item attached. For example, "Would you like to promote economic development in Derry by hiring an Economic Development Director?" The Committee needs to make sure the questions are understandable. Michael advised SurveyMonkey costs \$300.00. The request will need to be made to Town Council for the funds.

Michael discussed potential timelines. At the next meeting he suggested working on the wording of the five topics and by October 12, perhaps finish writing the questions. Five to ten people should be identified to take a test survey and provide feedback to ensure they were on the same page as the Committee members with regard to the intent behind the wording of the questions.

The Committee discussed the length of time the survey should be available to the public. One to two weeks may not be enough time. It was felt that some sort of incentive would be very beneficial. Local businesses could be approached (perhaps with something official on town letterhead), requesting they provide gift certificates. The vendors who participate would be listed in the paper. Survey participants would be eligible to win a gift certificate from one of the vendors just for completing the survey. The Committee will look into ways to accomplish this. If unique identifiers or numbers can be provided at the end of the survey, those could be placed in a 'hat' and pulled to award the gift certificates. Owen was aware that SurveyMonkey did not directly have the ability to allow participants to be part of a contest per se, but he will research further to see if there is a method to assign a participant number at the end of the survey.

The Survey Committee discussed methods to raise awareness and advertise the survey. All Boards and Committees can provide information about the survey, information can be posted at the libraries, on the Cable station, and through social media. Doug felt social media would have the largest impact and be a key to the success of the survey. Businesses could also be asked to promote the survey.

The survey should be developed, closed, and the results analyzed in time to present the results to Town Council so that they can have the information available during budget discussions. Liz asked if the time frame could be pushed up so that the department heads could utilize the responses while preparing

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their budgets in January. The responses could assist the department heads in assigning priorities. It was felt the survey could be completed by the end of 2015. Owen felt it would make sense to utilize the gift certificates as incentives that people could use during the holiday season. If the survey was taking place during primary season, that could also be used to advantage by putting a twist on the PR.

The Committee reviewed the suggested topics developed by each member. Owen listed economic development, the rating of public services (responsiveness, enforcement, effectiveness), and lifestyle. Suggested questions would be how long have you lived in Derry, why did you choose to live here and would you choose to move here. There could be a ranking system from a list of the top three things a resident likes about Derry; answers might be the schools, recreation or access to jobs.

Matt forwarded his suggestions as he was unable to attend the meeting. His topics included downtown restoration/improvement, land conservation and the budget. Liz suggested the respondent profile be placed at the end of the survey. Community services and facilities might be helpful to see how the residents feel about them to determine perceived shortfalls. Economic development – the funding of a position – was another topic. She suggested ranking the importance of priorities for the town such as creation of year round tourism, enticing high end and emerging industries such as nanotech firms and the like. Doug suggested land conservation and asking what could be done to improve the existing conservation lands. He has recently been working on a project involving the conservation lands and it has become apparent the town has wonderful properties but access to the properties is a problem. For Economic Development he felt it would be helpful to know what types of business the residents would like to see in town. The smaller, niche type businesses and Nano breweries are doing very well.

Mr. Fischer said he was interested in the “what”. What do the residents want the town to do? The “how” is administration’s job. His topics included: should we continue to gradually reduce the property tax burden, increase efforts to attract new retail and promote Derry by hiring a new full time director of economic development/public relations, continue to preserve agricultural lands/open space, increase efforts and financial support to revitalize downtown, develop new town initiative to promote local business and a sense of community (Taste of Derry and downtown seasonal holiday decoration contests such as a scarecrow festival), and should we continue to fund/support the Taylor Library? He also felt the survey should ask “What are the two things that you think are most important to help improve your community?” Mr. Fischer would like to find out if the reason people want economic development is to lower taxes or to add to the number of businesses in town. His vision is a revitalized downtown that is walkable, and has attractive consumer options.

Michael’s topics included family, services, business and economic development, and schools and other educational opportunities. He proposed economic development as a topic for one entire meeting.

It was felt that events such as Taste of Derry where the downtown was closed off for an evening and perhaps a scarecrow festival would be of benefit. The question was asked how does one define a sense of community. Owen thought it might be helpful to ask what Derry’s role is regionally. What is Derry’s brand? Rather than competing with other towns, what business can we get that will thrive here and not somewhere else? Doug noted Derry has a downtown. Many surrounding communities do not. The town needs to capitalize on that. Mr. Fischer said he would like to find out if people want to spend money on renovations that will attract people to Derry. Do people want to spend money on the changes? It was also noted that the purpose of economic development must be defined. With regard to community services, Mr. Fischer said people like the services. He does not want to get a lot of yes

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answers because those types of answers are not helpful. If the survey asks open ended questions such as what two things could be done to improve the community, the responses may focus on two items that will help provide direction and priority.

The next meeting will be held on Monday, September 14, 2015, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 207. The focus of the meeting will be economic development and downtown revitalization.