

Survey: Most Moscow residents are pleased with their town

City government, job opportunities and housing prices identified as areas to improve

By David Johnson of the Tribune

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MOSCOW - This is a great place to live, although more affordable housing and better job opportunities are sorely needed, according to new survey results.

And, as it has in the past, city government received an average grade in the biennial survey. "The ratings of city government indicate that satisfaction has decreased overall," according to a report about the survey results, which was presented Monday to members of the city's administrative committee by Jen Piffner of the administration department.

The survey, the fourth of its kind conducted by the city since 2002, solicited answers to questions from 1,200 randomly selected households. A total of 356 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 32 percent.

"The vast majority of all residents (94 percent) rated the overall quality of life in Moscow as good or excellent," according to the survey report. The percentage was two points higher compared to surveys taken in 2002, 2004 and 2008.

The latest survey was distributed by mail in November and December.

"On the questions of job opportunity and access to affordable housing, the city of Moscow saw relatively low ratings," according to the report. About 24 percent of residents rated job opportunities as good or excellent, while 30 percent rated access to affordable housing as good or excellent. The jobs and housing-access categories were significantly lower than other indicators influencing quality of life in Moscow, according to the report.

"The economic base, types of employment available and income versus cost of housing probably contribute to this overall low ranking," according to the report.

City Supervisor Gary Riedner said the repeated surveys offer elected officials and city staff a good opportunity to track trends and work on areas of government and

city services that need improvement, as well as continue doing jobs that are viewed as favorable by residents.

"Over 93 percent of residents feel fairly safe or very safe from violent crimes," Pfiffner said, "and over 85 percent feel the same regarding property crimes."

The safety factor, according to the survey report, was one of the more significant indicators influencing quality of life.

Citizens also appear to be satisfied with fire protection in the city, with 91 percent of respondents saying they feel fairly safe or very safe from fires.

Of problems affecting quality of life in Moscow, growth was considered most serious, according to survey results. Taxes and traffic came in second and third. "No more than 5 percent considered any of the issues to be an extreme problem," Pfiffner said.

One problem, according to the survey report, seems to be a lack of involvement by citizens in government. Of those surveyed, 84 percent said they have only once or never attended a city council or committee meeting in the past year. The same percentage said they only once or never contacted a city councilor regarding city matters.

"Overall, 77 percent of respondents rated city services as good or excellent," City Councilor Bill Lambert said, reading from the survey report. "That's a pretty high rating." He said many of the surveys were returned by people who've lived in Moscow for at least 20 years.

Lambert said the survey underscores the fact that city government often deals with and responds to a minority of people who show up at meetings and otherwise take an active role in city government. The surveys, he said, provide elected officials and staff with a voice from perhaps the majority of citizens.

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