

2014 New Hanover County Citizen Survey  
Executive Summary

**Summary and Purpose**

In October of 2014, New Hanover County conducted the second biennial Citizen Survey. The first survey was conducted during December of 2012. Four thousand citizens were randomly selected to gather statistically valid data regarding:

- Satisfaction and perceptions about New Hanover County as a community
- Satisfaction and perceptions about New Hanover County Government / Services

Survey Results will be used to:

- 1) Assess progress on the New Hanover County Strategic Plan.
- 2) Inform program and budget priorities.
- 3) Inform ongoing community initiatives (e.g. Comprehensive Plan, Community Health Assessment survey).
- 4) Assess public perceptions of New Hanover County and County programs.
- 5) Compare results to 2012 to understand how we are doing.

**Survey Methodology**

The survey was conducted during October and November of 2014. Four thousand residents were randomly selected from the list of registered voters. Surveys were mailed to selected residents by Insight Research via first class mail. A cover letter signed by the Chairman and County Manager was printed on the first page of the 4-page survey brochure. Additionally, for the first time, an electronic version of the cover letter and survey was made available / accessible via the web and actively promoted.

The survey included questions that addressed:

- 1) The performance of NHC government and the quality of life in the community
- 2) Citizen priorities
- 3) Citizen awareness, engagement and community participation (civic, social, volunteer, and NHC government)
- 4) Respondent demographic, housing, and healthy behavior information

**Key Findings**

Survey Response / Respondents

- Of the 4000 surveys mailed, 3800 surveys were delivered, and 1132 mail surveys and 259 internet surveys were completed. This equates to a mail response rate of 29.8%. This response rate was significantly higher than a typical community survey, which averages ~20%, and is nearly double the response rate seen in in 2012 (567 completed surveys, and a 15.8% response rate).
- Compared to 2012, respondent demographics tended to skew older, more highly educated, and have higher incomes. Respondents were more likely to own their own homes rather than rent,

and were more likely to be self-employed or a business owner. Respondents were also more likely to be long term residents of the county. Fewer respondents reported having children at home.

#### New Hanover County government continues to make positive progress

- Perceptions about the quality of County services, the effectiveness and efficiency of County government, County government spending tax dollars wisely, and NHC as a great place to do business have improved slightly from 2012. There was also greater agreement / consistency in the responses (smaller standard deviation).

#### New Hanover County continues to be a very desirable place to live

- 81.3% of respondents agree New Hanover County has a great quality of life.
- 72.9% of respondents would recommend New Hanover County to friends and family as a great place to live.
- 79.3% of respondents agree that it is very likely they will still be a resident of New Hanover County in 5 years

#### Community Priorities and Trade-Offs

- “Promoting a strong, diverse economy and high quality job growth” continues to rank as the single highest priority. However, compared to 2012, its importance relative to other priorities has declined somewhat.
- “Reduce and prevent crime” was identified as the second highest priority. The percentage of respondents reporting that they “feel safe and secure” in their community has likewise declined as compared to 2012.
- “Prepare students to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world” was identified as the third highest priority, up versus 2012.
- 58.4% of respondents would be willing to pay additional taxes to provide funding towards their top priority.
- Assuming no tax increases, 28.7% of respondents would take funding from quality of life programs (“create and support a vibrant and culturally diverse community”) to support their highest priority. Additionally, 18.8% of respondents would reduce funding to programs that support a “planned environment that builds community and protects natural resources.”

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- One of the key drivers (or predictors) of citizen perception about quality services and spending tax dollars wisely has to do with how effectively NHC listens to its residents. Respondents identified this as an area for improvement.
- Respondents rated providing “residents with the information they need to get involved with the community” as an area for improvement.

A more detailed analysis is available in the full report.