

MEMO

TO: Town of Irvington, Planning Commission & Town Council
FROM: Will Cockrell, EPR, P.C. - Senior Planner
DATE: September 2, 2022

RE: Town of Irvington's Community Survey and Next Steps

PURPOSE: This memo introduces the Town of Irvington Community Survey Report, which documents and records responses from its recent surveying effort. The Town Council and Planning Commission will hold a joint work session on Tuesday, September 13, to receive a presentation on those results and begin a discussion on the next steps.

BACKGROUND: In January 2022, The Town of Irvington contracted with EPR, P.C. to facilitate a three-phased planning process that includes the development of a community survey. The consultants took a tour of Irvington on February 16 before attending a Town Council and Planning Commission joint meeting. In the ensuing weeks, EPR worked closely with the Planning Commission to craft a refined set of survey questions that met the Town's stated objectives. On March 15, EPR presented a draft report to the Planning Commission that included draft questions. Numerous survey iterations evolved between the Town and Consults, finetuning the hardcopy and digital instruments. The survey went live on June 1 and closed on July 15, resulting in nearly 400 responses, statistically significant with the Town's approved sample frame (target audience).

DISCUSSION: While a survey is an effective way to reach a larger group of people, it should be part of a more holistic engagement process to be most valuable. Surveys are not referendums or elections. However, these instruments help localities collect opinions on goals, opportunities, community needs, and other topics. Surveys also have limitations with collecting "deep data" that gives nuance and greater meaning to responses. Only interviews, public meetings, and community discussions can reveal that depth. In this case, Irvington should use the survey as a strategy to guide further community discussion and gain consensus on key issues.

The consultants and Town officials took various precautions to validate the results with the hardcopy and digital versions. The team used all industry best practices to ensure quality data and to limit abuses. EPR implemented measures to prevent or restrict duplicate responses and carefully reviewed every submitted survey to flag concerns or potential abuse. As a result, these practices brought a high level of confidence in the survey's accuracy and validity.

Overall, the survey showed two main themes. First, the Town is engaged and has strong opinions about Irvington's future. This conclusion suggests that further engagement efforts would be well-attended. Second, there are many conflicting opinions on the various topics expressed in the survey. The Town appears to be split on several key issues including future growth, economic development, public sewer, and taxes. As outlined in the Town's scope of work, the next steps would be to audit the comprehensive plan with these survey results and pursue additional engagement strategies with the Town residents and property owners to gain some consensus on these divided issues.

ACTIONS: Town Council and the Planning Commission should review the survey report and provide guidance on the next steps for facilitating an engagement effort. EPR will present an engagement plan at the September 13 meeting for consideration. Please direct any comments, concerns, or questions to Tom Chapman, who will consolidate feedback and correspond with EPR.