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Survey reveals tax priorities among Matthews residents

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Improvement	Percentage Accepting of Some Tax Increase	Average Tax Increase Rate Supported	Demographic Differences⁷
Increasing greenways, multi-use paths and sidewalks throughout town for pedestrians and bicyclists	73%	0.84 cent	Older Residents (-)
Improving condition of streets/pavement	70%	0.62 cent	None
Increased fire and rescue services	70%	0.75 cent	Older Residents (+) Females (+)
Increased police service	70%	0.78 cent	Older Residents (+) Females (+)
Development of new parks or increased amenities within existing parks	69%	0.78 cent	Females (+)
Increasing street network through town to improve connectivity	55%	0.63 cent	None
Making streets look more attractive	50%	0.57 cent	None

Justin Vick

MATTHEWS – Results from the town's latest citizen survey reveal residents' attitudes toward property tax increases.

At least 69% of respondents were OK with some sort of tax increase if it pertained to greenways, multi-use paths and sidewalks; street and pavement improvements; increased fire and police protection; and park additions and improvements.

Fewer respondents were OK with tax hikes for increasing the town's street network (55%) and making streets look more attractive (50%).

Western Carolina University's Public Policy Institute mailed 3,330 surveys to property owners to gauge their attitudes about the town. They received 536 usable surveys back for a 16.2% response rate.

Residents who were white, older and with higher incomes were slightly overrepresented in the survey results when compared to Census data, according to Western Carolina student Matthew Wilson.

Results from the tax question would be more appropriate for setting priorities rather than justifying an increase, according to Western Carolina student Hannah White.

Town Manager Hazen Blodgett is recommending a property tax increase from 0.28 to 0.295 to add seven staff members to the police, fire and public works departments. This would add \$45 to the tax bill of a \$300,000 home.

The survey outlined the top three perceived needs:

- Properly managed growth and development (50%).
- A need to maintain a small town feeling and identity (42%).
- Vibrant, pedestrian-friendly downtown (40%).

High numbers of survey respondents believed Matthews was a good place to live (98%), good place to raise children (95%), safe place to live (94%) and good place to retire (73%).

Majorities believes Matthews has a good business environment (69%) and is responsive to the needs of citizens (69%).

“With people living in Matthews for longer periods of time, they were statistically more likely to give positive assessments than those who have lived for less time,” Wilson said.