

City of Wahpeton
2006 Citizen Survey
Summary Report



March 12, 2006

Written Summary Prepared By
Jane P. Priebe, CEcD, Director
Wahpeton Economic Development

survey. *n.* A series of verbal questions or a questionnaire used to gather data about consumer attitudes or behavior.

B ACKGROUND

The first “Citizen Survey” for the City of Wahpeton was conducted in January of 2005. More than 250 surveys were returned of the 597 that were distributed at random. The Response Rate came in at a very high 45%. In addition to the Citizen Survey, five other surveys were conducted throughout the year: A Leadership Survey consisting of 9 questions; the Wahpeton High School Seniors Survey [a Citizen Survey tailored for 18 year olds]; the Business Retention & Expansion Questionnaire and Interviews; a survey of Wahpeton and Breckenridge Businesses through the Chamber of Commerce newsletter and a survey of NDSCS students.

This second citizen survey, using random addresses from the Public Utilities listing, was conducted in January 2006. The survey instrument stayed pretty much the same with only changes in text. The survey would take the respondent approximately 20 minutes to complete. What follows is a summary report on the 183 surveys returned of 863 sent out. This signifies a return rate of 21.2%. More surveys were sent this year and mailings went to every 3rd person on the Wahpeton utility listing whereas every 5th person was sent a questionnaire in 2005. Typically, the response rates obtained on citizen surveys range from 25% to 40%. Only a few of the questions are highlighted below. For a comparison of 2005 and 2006 reporting, see the Appendix Section.

Understanding the Results

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a “level of confidence” or margin of error. The 95 percent confidence level for this survey is generally no greater than plus or minus 5 percentage points around any given percent reported for the entire sample. Total population of the city according to the 2000 Census was 8,586. Included in our population total are the students of the North Dakota State College of Science.

Use of the “Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor” Response Scale

The scale on which respondents are asked to record their opinions about service and community quality is “excellent”, “good,” “fair” or “poor” [EGFP]. While symmetrical scales often are the right choice in other measurement tasks, we have found that ratings of almost every local government service in almost every jurisdiction tend, on average, to be positive, that is, above the scale midpoint.

EGFP is more neutral because it requires no positive statement of service quality to judge [as agree – disagree scales require] and, EGFP intends to measure absolute quality of service delivered or community quality [unlike satisfaction scales which ignore residents’ perceptions of quality in favor of their report on the acceptability of the level of service offered]. The percentages in parenthesis and **in color** [example: **{25%}**] are those ratings from the survey conducted in 2005 and are meant to be used as a comparison when not stated otherwise.



Wahpeton’s survey contained many questions related to quality of life of the residents in the community from air quality to taxes to feeling safe. The questionnaire assessed these amenities by rating the community and the involvement of the respondents in civic and economic arenas.

- **QUALITY OF LIFE**

When asked to rate the overall quality of life in Wahpeton, 60% of those surveyed thought it was “good” compared to 65% in 2005. However, more people felt Wahpeton as an excellent place to live in the 2006 survey, up 4% over last year’s total.

- **RATINGS OF COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS**

Once again the highest rated characteristic of Wahpeton was ease of car travel at a combined excellent and good rating of 74%. Access to affordable quality health care came in second, followed by air quality, and ease of walking in the

city. When asked about potential problems, the concerns rated by the highest proportion of respondents as a “major problem” were drugs, taxes and lack of growth in that order. These were the same top three problems identified last year. Sidewalk quality and quantity and consistent/offensive odors were viewed as more of a problem [18% and 15% respectively] than run down buildings, weed lots and junk vehicles but by a slim margin [13%].

- **PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY**

When evaluating safety in the community, 47% {41%} of respondents felt “very safe” from fire and even higher ratings were given “somewhat safe” in the violent crime and property crime categories. A very high combined rating of 80% {75%} of those surveyed feel “very safe” in their neighborhood during the day.

As assessed by the survey, 9% {16%} of households reported that at least one member had been the victim of a crime in the past year. This is a 7% drop over last year.

- **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in the civic, social and economic life of Wahpeton during the past year was assessed on the survey. Among those completing the questionnaire, 73% reported they read a newspaper 30 times or more per year. This is the same percentage as last year. Fifty-eight percent {50%} recycle while 45% {44%} visit the public library once or twice annually and 40% {46%} watch a meeting on cable TV a couple of times each year. The majority of citizens surveyed [both in 2005 and 2006] visit a neighborhood or city park 3-10 times in a 12-month period.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Various aspects of municipal government are evaluated each year by Wahpeton residents. The only requirement in completing the survey is to be a resident at least 18 years of age and the head of the household. The questionnaire focuses on Economic Development Services, Police Services, Fire, Public Works, General or

Administration, and Library. Respondents were asked to rate how *important* they believed each of these services are for Wahpeton and were then asked to rate how *satisfied* they were with that service. A 1 to 5 scale was used with 1 meaning “very important” or “very satisfied” and 5 meaning “very unimportant” or “very dissatisfied.” Ranking of city services can be found in the Appendix section Page 11 and are compared with the top ten items of 2005. With fewer surveys returned, written comments also were down. A sampling of the types of ‘Comments’ made can be found on pages 13 and 14.

- **SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF WAHPETON**

Responding to fire calls was of major importance in 2005 to those surveyed bringing in an average 1.50 rating. In 2006, however, providing quality drinking water was the most important service the city of Wahpeton provided bringing in a rating of 1.46. Respondents in 2005 ranked “Promoting Attainable Housing’ {2.52} as low importance whereas ‘Technology Options’ at the Library were of low importance in 2006 coming in with a 3.05 rating.

The city service receiving the highest rating of 1.99 was the Public Works Department’s ability to provide ‘Quality Drinking Water’. In 2005 it was the Fire Department’s ‘Quick Response to Fire Calls’ {1.89}. Receiving a very low rating in 2005 was the category of ‘Assisting Small Business Start-ups’ {3.07}, however, ‘Keeping Streets Free of Snow and Ice’ received the lowest satisfaction rating in 2006, that of 4.28. This low score was probably due to an ice storm in November 2005 and the difficulty the whole area had in making streets safe to travel.

Ideally, those services with a high importance rating would also be rated high in satisfaction. Oftentimes this is not the case. City leaders pay particular attention to those services that are rated high in importance, but low in satisfaction. The following summary measures the distance between importance and satisfaction and **where the city should focus its efforts.** The initials identify city departments. **Please Note:** For comparison, the TOP TEN categories of 2005 immediately follow the 2006 ratings.

2006 CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS		IMP	SATIS	DISC
1	Keeping streets free of snow and ice - PW	1.70	4.28	2.58
2	Attracting new businesses - ED	1.81	4.09	2.28
3	Maintaining existing streets, curbs and sidewalks - PW	1.80	3.62	1.82
4	Revitalizing downtown area - ED	2.26	3.96	1.70
5	Marketing of the Community - ED	2.09	3.68	1.59
6	Management of storm water to prevent flooding - PW	1.67	3.22	1.55
7	Assisting small businesses/start-ups - ED	2.31	3.86	1.55
8	Enforcing the laws related to juvenile delinquency - PD	1.88	3.30	1.42
9	Improving streets and intersections - PW	1.98	3.40	1.42
10	Solving crimes - PD	1.83	3.23	1.40
11	Enforcing existing building and code standards - PW	2.20	3.60	1.40
12	Job retention - ED	2.23	3.61	1.38
13	Promoting attainable housing - ED	2.40	3.69	1.29
14	Expanding existing businesses - ED	2.51	3.71	1.20
15	Making improvements for pedestrians and bicycles - PW	2.27	3.44	1.17
16	Keeping streets clean - PW	1.97	3.07	1.10
17	Preventing fires through safety inspections - FD	2.07	3.16	1.09
18	Responding to citizens calls - PD	1.62	2.63	1.01
19	Policing of community through patrols - PD	1.90	2.90	1.00
20	Preventing the sale of tobacco/alcohol to minors - PD	1.98	2.98	1.00
21	Preventing fires through school/adult education - FD	2.10	3.05	0.95
22	Providing information on City services and major issues - AD	2.13	3.00	0.87
23	Painting/Maintaining crosswalks - PW	2.05	2.89	0.84
24	School CounterAct program - PD	2.93	3.68	0.75
25	Enforcing traffic and parking laws - PD	2.27	3.00	0.73
26	Providing quality sewer services - PW	1.58	2.25	0.67
27	Responding to fire calls - FD	1.58	2.21	0.63
28	Promoting/providing support for community events - AD	2.34	2.92	0.58
29	Providing quality drinking water - PW	1.46	1.99	0.53
30	Offer a variety of books/magazines/audio/visual materials -LIB	2.60	3.08	0.48
31	Children's material/area - LIB	2.86	3.34	0.48
32	Offers technology options - LIB	3.05	3.52	0.47
33	Adult material/area - LIB	2.86	3.19	0.33
34	Hours of operation allow me/my family to visit often - LIB	2.70	3.01	0.31

ED=Economic Development; PD=Police Dept.; AD=Administration; FD=Fire Dept.; PW=Public Works Dept.; LIB = Library

TOP TEN IN 2005-CORRECTED		IMP	SATIS	DISC
1	Attracting new businesses - ED	1.54	3.92	2.38
2	Keeping streets free of snow and ice - PW	1.59	3.31	1.72
3	Job retention - ED	1.70	3.08	1.38
4	Assisting small businesses/start-ups - ED	1.92	3.29	1.37
5	Maintaining existing streets, curbs and sidewalks - PW	1.72	3.06	1.34
6	Marketing of the Community - ED	1.87	3.19	1.32
7	Revitalizing downtown area - ED	2.15	3.41	1.26
8	Solving crimes - PD	1.44	2.70	1.26
9	Enforcing the laws related to juvenile delinquency - PD	1.57	2.67	1.10
10	Expanding existing businesses - ED	2.14	3.18	1.04

Administration is covered under the heading of General Services and ‘Providing information on City services and major issues’ and ‘Promoting/providing support for community events’ ended up in the middle of the Importance and Satisfaction ratings, the same as last year.

The city overall received a 58% {62%} ‘good’ rating, and Park & Recreation showed a 41% {30%} ‘excellent’ and 50% {59%} ‘good’ on their ratings. And slipping just a little was the rating for the Federal and State governments which showed 39% and 43% in 2006, but had better ratings in 2005 of 43% and 47% respectively.

Defined services such as water utility, sewer utility and residential waste collection services received very high combined ‘excellent’-‘good’ ratings of 93%, 89%, and 87% in that order.

- **WEB SITE**

More and more individuals access a community’s website to view issues, search for contact information and get answers on their own. When asked how the City’s website rated in terms of its ability to solve problems, the bulk of responses or 38% checked ‘Fair’.

- **CITY OF WAHPETON DEPARTMENTS**

Impressions of city departments and those individuals employed within were assessed on the questionnaire. Those who had been in contact with a City of Wahpeton employee in the past year gave the Library and Police departments very high marks in customer service satisfaction.

- **PUBLIC OPINION**

A segment on rating public opinion included four statements:

1. I receive good value for the City taxes I pay; 46% {48%} somewhat agree
2. I am pleased with the overall direction that the City is taking; 43% {43%} somewhat agree
3. The City government welcomes citizen involvement; 37% {45%} somewhat agree
4. The City government listens to citizens; 39% {41%} somewhat agree

So what do the above numbers say? At face value, citizens agree to a greater degree in 2006 that they receive good value for taxes paid and are pleased with the overall direction of the City. And while the percentages for ‘somewhat

agree' have slipped for numbers 3 & 4 above, the Strongly Agree percentages were higher in 2006 [16% & 8%] than in 2005 {9% & 4%} meaning citizens have stronger feelings about City government listening to their needs and welcoming their involvement.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- **CITY COUNCIL GOALS RANKED**

Respondents were asked to rank the 2005 city council goals with 1 as the highest priority and 5 as the lowest. This ranking did not follow a scale of EGFP or the 1 to 5 scale of high importance/satisfaction to low importance/satisfaction, so many respondents only ranked one of the issues listed and left the rest blank, or didn't rank them at all. We interpreted the results to mean that a category receiving for example a 32%-11%-5%-10%-44% in the first column, the 44% would decide that goal in the row as number 1. Using this method, the outcome was as follows:

1. Decrease Drug/Substance Abuse by Supporting SEMCA[drug task force]
2. Financial Planning for Flood Mitigation
3. Industrial Park Creation
4. Implement Realignment of Duties
5. Construct a Recreation Center

By comparison, the Wahpeton City Council had ranked these goals in 2005 as follows:

1. Financial Planning for Flood Protection
2. Industrial Park Creation
3. Implement Realignment of Duties
4. Construct a Recreation Center
5. Decrease/Drug Substance Abuse by Supporting SEMCA

At this writing, efforts have continued to plan ahead for flood protection; the early stages of a Westside industrial park were completed; implementation to realign key staff positions has been completed and the city's efforts to educate residents regarding drug abuse are on-going. Constructing a Recreation Center was not achieved in 2005;

however, architects have been interviewed recently and await the building committee decision to move forward.

- **RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

Ninety-eight percent of those who submitted completed surveys live within the city limits of Wahpeton and 97% {76%} of them are employed. Those responding to 'when' they moved to Wahpeton totaled 172 answers. Fourteen moved here in 1950 or earlier. Nineteen moved here in the decade covering 1951-1960. Twenty-one residents came here between 1961-1970; 52 during the years of 1971-1980; 29 moved here during the 80's and 34 between 1991 and 2000. In summary, thirty-nine percent {33%} of those returning a survey moved to Wahpeton between 1900 and 1974 and 92% {91%} live in a house.

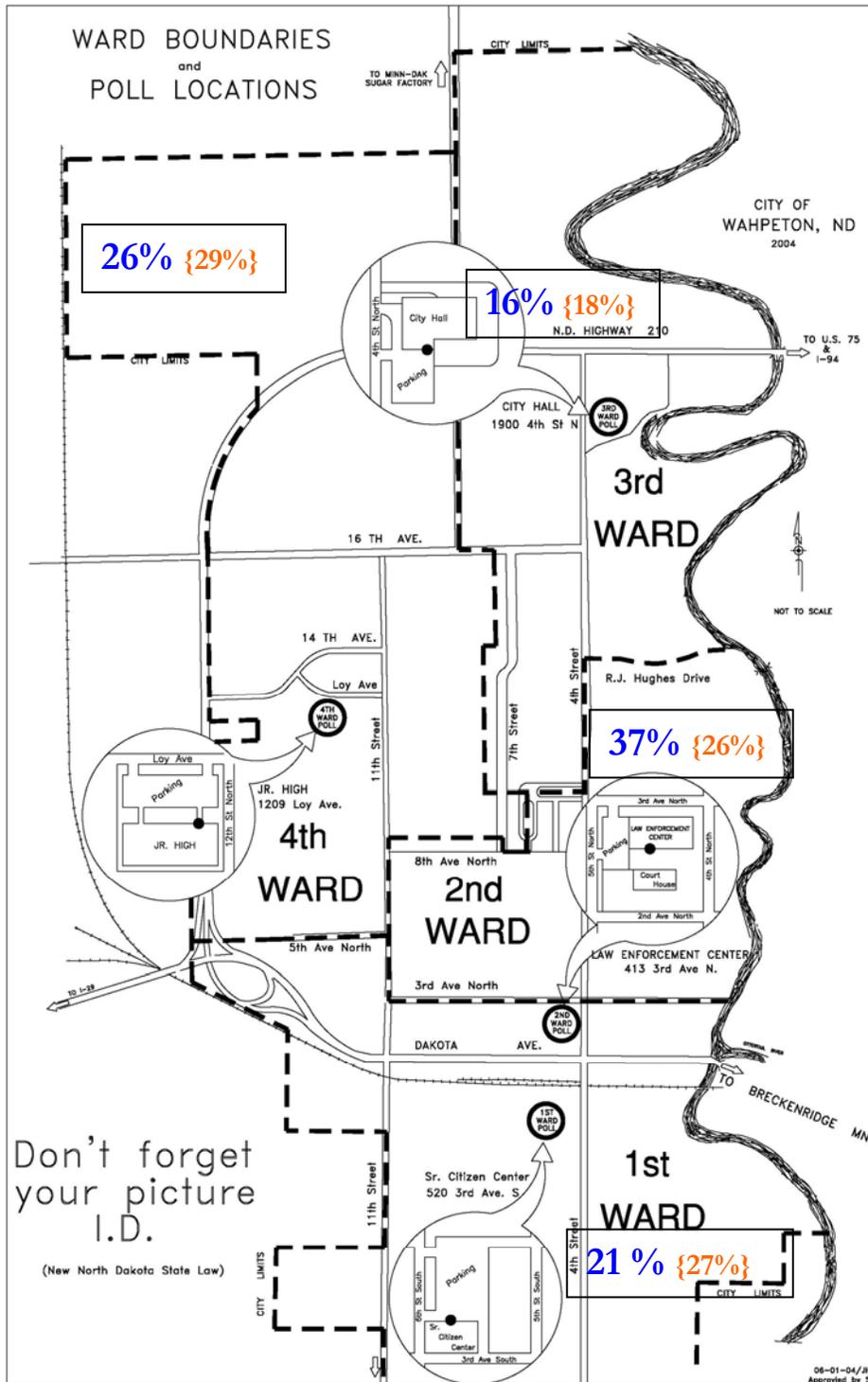
Twenty-eight {25%} percent of the respondents have some college education, 21% {22%} hold associate degrees, 27% {18%} have bachelor degrees and 11% {15%} of the respondent population have a masters or PHD.

In addition to being well-educated, 29% have annual earnings in the \$25,000 - \$49,999 and 24% say they have incomes in the \$50,000-\$74,999 range. The majority surveyed in 2005 also fell in this range. For the most part, respondents are white, male, and between the ages of 45 and 54 {same findings in 2005}. A very high 97.8% {90%} of those surveyed participate in elections and that same percentage is likely to vote in the next City election, however, as found in 2005, a very high percentage would not consider running for an elected office.

Answers to questions about number of children under the age of 12, teenagers, and members 65 years of age or older in the household can assist the city in preparing for educational, recreational and housing opportunities should the results show an increasing demand for these services. For the 2006 survey where 183 responded, 80% {74%} do not have children under the age of 12 in their household; 79% {same} do not have teenagers living with them; and 33.8% {24%} do have people over the age of 65 among the members of the household. This last statement shows a 9.8% INCREASE of members in the household over the age of 65. The city needs to be aware of the aging population and work to add a variety of housing options for its seniors.

- WHERE IN THE CITY DO YOU LIVE?

Percent by Area of City: Valid Responses Only



APPENDIX

Importance-Satisfaction Ratings: Respondents were asked to rate City Services on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being of high importance and 5 would be a rating of low importance. Ranked in order is the ‘average’ response....

MOST IMPORTANT TO LEAST	RATING
1 Responding to fire calls - FD	1.24
2 Providing quality drinking water -PW	1.29
3 Responding to citizens calls - PD	1.33
4 Providing quality sewer services - PW	1.38
5 Management of storm water to prevent flooding - PW	1.43
6 Keeping streets free of snow and ice - PW	1.47
7 Solving crimes - PD	1.52
8 Attracting new businesses - ED	1.57
9 Enforcing the laws related to juvenile delinquency - PD	1.57
10 Maintaining existing streets, curbs and sidewalks - PW	1.59
11 Policing of community through patrols - PD	1.69
12 School CounterAct program - PD	1.75
13 Preventing fires through safety inspections - FD	1.75
14 Preventing the sale of tobacco/alcohol to minors -PD	1.76
15 Children's material/area - LIB	1.76
16 Preventing fires through school/adult education FD	1.77
17 Improving streets and intersections - PW	1.77
18 Offer a variety of books/magazines/audio/visual materials - LIB	1.80
19 Enforcing existing building and code standards -PW	1.81
20 Keeping streets clean - PW	1.81
21 Marketing of the Community - ED	1.83
22 Job retention - ED	1.84
23 Painting/Maintaining crosswalks -PW	1.87
24 Providing information on City services and major issues -AD	1.92
25 Assisting small businesses/start-ups - ED	1.93
26 Adult material/area - LIB	1.95
27 Hours of operation allow me/my family to visit often - LIB	1.99
28 Enforcing traffic and parking laws - PD	2.03
29 Making improvements for pedestrians and bicycles - PW	2.04
30 Offers technology options - LIB	2.04
31 Revitalizing downtown area - ED	2.06
32 Promoting attainable housing - ED	2.06
33 Promoting/providing support for community events - AD	2.10
34 Expanding existing businesses - ED	2.15
2005 RESULTS-CORRECTED	
1 Responding to fire calls - FD	1.18
2 Responding to citizens calls - PD	1.31
3 Providing quality drinking water -PW	1.31
4 Providing quality sewer services - PW	1.40
5 Solving crimes - PD	1.44
6 Management of storm water to prevent flooding - PW	1.45
7 Attracting new businesses - ED	1.54
8 Enforcing the laws related to juvenile delinquency - PD	1.57
9 Keeping streets free of snow and ice - PW	1.59
10 Policing of community through patrols - PD	1.61

HIGHEST SATISFACTION TO LOWEST	RATING
1 Responding to fire calls - FD	1.49
2 Providing quality drinking water -PW	1.71
3 Providing quality sewer services - PW	1.94
4 Children's material/area - LIB	2.01
5 Responding to citizens calls - PD	2.02
6 Adult material/area - LIB	2.06
7 Offer a variety of books/magazines/audio/visual materials - LI	2.07
8 Hours of operation allow me/my family to visit often - LIB	2.10
9 Preventing fires through school/adult education FD	2.25
10 Offers technology options - LIB	2.27
11 Preventing fires through safety inspections - FD	2.32
12 School CounterAct program - PD	2.36
13 Preventing the sale of tobacco/alcohol to minors -PD	2.38
14 Policing of community through patrols - PD	2.46
15 Promoting/providing support for community events - AD	2.51
16 Enforcing traffic and parking laws - PD	2.57
17 Painting/Maintaining crosswalks -PW	2.59
18 Enforcing the laws related to juvenile delinquency - PD	2.60
19 Providing information on City services and major issues -AD	2.62
20 Solving crimes - PD	2.65
21 Keeping streets clean - PW	2.80
22 Management of storm water to prevent flooding - PW	2.81
23 Enforcing existing building and code standards -PW	2.93
24 Job retention - ED	3.05
25 Making improvements for pedestrians and bicycles - PW	3.09
26 Improving streets and intersections - PW	3.12
27 Expanding existing businesses - ED	3.17
28 Promoting attainable housing - ED	3.25
29 Assisting small businesses/start-ups - ED	3.25
30 Marketing of the Community - ED	3.26
31 Maintaining existing streets, curbs and sidewalks - PW	3.29
32 Revitalizing downtown area - ED	3.57
33 Attracting new businesses - ED	3.65
34 Keeping streets free of snow and ice - PW	3.80

2005 RESULTS-CORRECTED

1 Responding to fire calls - FD	1.47
2 Providing quality drinking water -PW	1.68
3 Providing quality sewer services - PW	1.96
4 Responding to citizens calls - PD	1.98
5 Children's material/area - LIB	2.03
6 Preventing fires through school/adult education FD	2.09
7 Preventing fires through safety inspections - FD	2.16
8 Adult material/area - LIB	2.19
9 Offer a variety of books/magazines/audio/visual materials - LIB	2.21
10 Offers technology options - LIB	2.27

C OMMENTS

General comments were invited in the survey document for questions 1 through 21. There were fewer comments made in 2006 compared to 2005. Listed on the following page are some of the questions that solicited the largest written response.

Regarding Questions on **Ease of Walking in City/Sidewalk Quality, Quantity, and Maintenance** – 49 {76} comments total:

- Would be nice to have a bike path and sidewalk along 11th Street
- Sidewalks are poor
- Newer areas do not have sidewalks
- Need more walking/riding paths like 16th Avenue
- Love bike path along 16th Ave
- Many times you need to walk on streets because of availability or conditions of sidewalk
- I'm not convinced that voice mail works with City Hall officials. Poor response to messages [actually- no response].

Regarding **Air Quality and Consistent Offensive Odors** – 31 {59} total comments fielded:

- Bad allergies since moved here
- Except for the city ponds
- It stinks some days
- Smell from sugar beet factory
- Wood smoke in the air when shoveling sidewalk in winter
- Moldy straw bales
- City Lagoons seem to be the worst with a North Wind
- Offensive odors is a major problem for those living near the pump station on 16th Ave-7th St
- Lift Stations

Regarding **Keeping Streets Free of Snow and Ice** - 25 comments made:

- Very poor job removing snow and ice
- Try working on ice on warm days. It has been tough we know.
- Crews do a great job
- Slow to plow-Quick to sand, needs improving
- Let's use some sand/salt on the streets
- Better plow management. If it snows in the morning, the snow is all packed down before plows go out at night
- We live in a snow county. Get used to it...you may need to work add/long hours on occasion to properly remove snow and ice.

Regarding **Taxes** – 24 {22} comments:

- We pay taxes on the zoo. [Very high] and should get a free family pass because of the tax we pay on it
- Taxes too high for people on fixed income

- Property taxes out of line!
- High taxes to the homeowner
- Assessment values unfair
- Includes fees and hidden taxes
- Much too high a property tax as related to other cities

Regarding **Shopping Opportunities or Reason for Lack of Growth** – 20 {53} comments received:

- Shopping is BAD!
- Not enough had been done years ago to attract more businesses to the downtown area. A lot of work needs to be done to improve the shopping quality. We are way behind.
- Wahpeton is attempting to do the impossible, that is build a Box Retail Store and revitalize downtown....
- No Walmart or Kmart type stores
- Very limited. Walmart will really help. Fergus Falls blows Wahpeton away in shopping....
- I know merchants would stock more but everyone loves to leave town
- A lot more effort could be put towards small business. They might grow to be big with lots of jobs.

Regarding **Construction of a Recreation Center** – 13 comments were received:

- A recreation center is a fine goal but not attached to NDSCS
- Convention center is needed. Opposed to a Rec Center affiliated with NDSCS
- We need indoor tennis courts
- First use what we have
- We need other things besides that rec center which the state will own at the city's expense at a later date
- I am confused on recreation center issue.