

# Quality of Life in Bellevue

What makes a healthy, vibrant community? For most people, it's usually a combination of factors – some very tangible, like high-quality public services, restaurants and shops, beautiful parks and beaches, or good schools; some factors are part of a personal perception, such as feelings about safety, helping neighbors in need, or civic engagement. During the data collection phase of the *Needs Update*, residents who participated in the phone and consumer surveys were asked to rate their satisfaction with living in Bellevue. In many of the Community Conversations, participants offered their comments about the quality of their lives here. Those participating in the phone survey were also asked to rate community-wide problems. Other departments in the city such as Planning and Community Development through its Neighborhood Outreach Program and the Finance Department, through its Performance Measures Program, “Vital Signs,” also ask residents their opinions about Bellevue’s livability and its health as a city.

This section of the *Needs Update* summarizes the key findings from the phone survey and qualitative information from other sources that indicate how residents perceive the quality of life in Bellevue, what makes the city “livable” for them, and also what community issues were of most concern. One important note is that some

of the information in this chapter was collected early in 2009, just as the economic downturn was beginning to affect some Bellevue residents, who may have lost their jobs, saw losses in their stock portfolios, or were affected by the mortgage crisis. As a result, the data in this chapter may not completely illustrate the true level of growing need in the community.

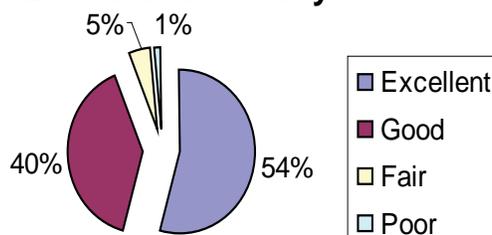
## Perception of the Quality of Life in Bellevue

- Nearly all (94%) respondents to the 2009 Human Services phone survey said that the quality of life in their community was either “excellent” (54%) or “good” (40%). Just 5% rated it “fair” and only 1% rated it as “poor.” This is not significantly different compared to 2007, but the proportion of respondents (54%) who rate their community as an “excellent” place to live has increased significantly since 2001 (44%).

“Overall, this is an excellent place to live. It is calm and good for everyone; cops patrol the parks, so it is safe.”

*Community Conversation, B-GLAD, LBGTO group for youth*

**Overall Satisfaction with the Quality of Life in Bellevue**  
**2009 Phone Survey**



- Surveys conducted by the city for other purposes also found similar results. For example, in the 2008 Budget Survey, the majority of respondents (95%) say the quality of life in the City is either “good” or “excellent.” A similarly high percentage (96%) of respondents rate the quality of life in their own neighborhood as “good” or “excellent.” In the *2008 Performance Measures Survey*, conducted in February 2009, 94% rated their neighborhood as either “excellent” or “good.”
- The consumer survey also asked respondents the question about satisfaction

with living in the community. In 2009, 83% of respondents to the consumer survey rated Bellevue as “good” or “excellent”, slightly less than the 87% who rated it as such in 2007. Still, this is a significant increase from prior years; between 1999-2005, only about 80% of respondents rated living in Bellevue as “good” or “excellent”.

### Community Assets

Similar to previous years, Bellevue residents in several Community Conversations and in written comments on the consumer surveys identified some of the community assets they believe exist:

- Diversity
- “A good place for everyone: safe and calm”
- Clean city, including streets and parks
- Safety, low crime rate
- Good social services
- Very good schools

“I grew up in Bellevue, and I always knew I would be coming back. I am always treated with dignity and respect.”

*Community Conversation, HERO House participant*

### Factors That Influence Respondents’ Choices

Not surprisingly, in the phone survey certain factors such as age, race and the perception of problems in the community affect how people rate their community as an excellent place in which to live:

- Respondents to the phone survey who perceive that there are no moderate or major problems existing in the community are significantly more likely to say their community is an excellent place in which to live when compared to those who perceive there to be one or more moderate or major problems in their community (60% compared to 48%). The prominence of excellent ratings is weakest among respondents who perceive eleven or more major/moderate problems in their community (only 43%).

- Those with incomes of \$75,000 or greater are significantly more likely to say their community is an “excellent” place in which to live (65%) than are those with incomes less than \$25,000 (43%).
- Respondents who are aged 65 and older are significantly more likely than residents age 18-34 to consider their community to be an excellent place in which to live (59% vs. 42%).

Caucasian respondents are significantly more likely than non-Caucasian respondents to report their community as an “excellent” place in which to live (57% vs. 44% respectively).

Respondents living in single family dwellings are significantly more likely to rate their community as an excellent place to live than are those living in multi-family dwellings (62% vs. 46%).

### Perception of Community Problem Areas in Bellevue

In the phone survey, respondents were asked to rate 33 potential problem areas as to whether they felt these were problems for individuals and families in the community. The last time a new “community issue” question was added was in 2005: *People not knowing how to manage their personal finances*. When interpreting these ratings it is important to note that these reflect people’s perceptions, which may not necessarily reflect the actual prevalence of problems. A variety of factors such as local or national media attention or positive or negative personal experiences with an issue may have affected respondents’ ratings. Another factor to consider is that the term “your community” was not defined in the survey. The manner in which respondents interpreted this phrase likely varied from one person to another.

The majority of respondents to the phone survey (85%) rated at least one of the 33 problems mentioned as being a moderate or major problem in their community. This is very similar to the findings in 1999 (89%), 2001 (87%), 2003 (88%), 2005 (85%) and 2007 (88%). Topping the list of unproblematic areas were racial or ethnic discrimination, shortage of recreational facilities

or programs, crime and violence, homelessness, effects of gang activities, illiteracy and hunger.

There are nine areas that can be considered to be among the top tier of most frequent problem areas in the community. These areas, listed below, received a “major” or “moderate” problem rating from at least three out of ten respondents (30%):

- Lack of affordable housing (29% major, 29% moderate)
- Lack of affordable medical insurance (27% major, 21% moderate)
- Unemployment (16% major, 28% moderate)
- Lack of affordable medical care (19% major, 22% moderate)
- People not knowing how to manage their personal finances (15% major, 22% moderate)
- Lack of affordable dental care (14% major, 20% moderate)
- People having jobs that do not pay enough for the basics of food, shelter and clothing (12% major, 22% moderate)
- Inadequate public transportation (13% major, 20% moderate)
- People not speaking or understanding English well enough to function in society (9% major, 21% moderate)

Generally, those problem areas ranked in the first tier in prior years tend to stay in the first tier. For example, since 1999, and each survey year thereafter, *lack of affordable housing*, has been ranked as the top problem within the

first tier. Only a few changes are seen in 2009 when looking at those areas ranked in the first tier of community problems. Although it was a first tier problem in 2007, *lack of affordable childcare* is a second tier problem in 2009.

However, unemployment, new to the first tier in 2005, and dropping to the third tier in 2007, is again a first tier problem in 2009, third behind *lack of affordable medical insurance* and *lack of affordable housing*.

A detailed table of community problem areas listed in descending order by rating is included in Appendix A.

### Difference in Prevalence of Community Problems Between Survey Years

As shown in the table below, between 2007, the year in which the last phone survey was conducted, and 2009, there were five problem areas in which there were significant differences in the perceived prevalence of major and moderate problems. In contrast, the period between 2001 and 2003 had seven, between 2003 and 2005, there were four, and between 2005 and 2007, there were only two.

As the table illustrates, in the areas that had significant changes, respondents felt there were more serious problems in one (*unemployment*) and less serious problems in the others (*affordable housing*, *lack of affordable childcare*, *lack of quality childcare*, and *child neglect*) between 2007 and 2009. These issues will be explored in more depth in other sections of

| Community Problem Areas      | Percentage of Respondents Rating Problem as Moderate or Major |        |        |        |        |        |        | Statistically Significant Differences between Survey Years in Percentages Rating Problem as Moderate or Major |
|------------------------------|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
|                              | 1997  | 1999   | 2001   | 2003   | 2005   | 2007   | 2009   |   |
| Lack Of Affordable Housing   | 56.25%  | 69.25% | 68.27% | 61.54% | 60.27% | 69.37% | 57.82% | Significantly lower in 2009 than 2007.  |
| Unemployment                 | 13.75%  | 12.35% | 13.46% | 51.36% | 30.25% | 16.71% | 43.76% | Significantly higher in 2009 than 2007.   |
| Lack of Affordable Childcare | 34.75%  | 36.56% | 37.50% | 38.01% | 32.96% | 31.79% | 24.72% | Significantly lower in 2009 than 2007.  |
| Lack of Quality Childcare    | 22.00%  | 25.18% | 21.63% | 23.76% | 18.06% | 19.95% | 14.29% | Significantly lower in 2009 than 2007.  |
| Child Neglect                | 19.50%  | 14.29% | 14.42% | 14.93% | 11.29% | 15.31% | 9.07%  | Significantly lower in 2009 than 2007.  |

this report, but overall, one can only speculate why in each case, respondents felt differently this year than two years ago. The fact that the economic recession and dramatically increasing unemployment rates both locally and nationally have affected many households may have affected the change in perception about unemployment, making it a higher priority. The past two survey years, there was a significant drop in the rating of unemployment as a major or moderate problem. Lack of affordable housing continues to be a highly publicized need and the top community problem but surprisingly, it was rated significantly lower in 2009 compared to 2007. The other three problem areas that showed significant decreases are all related to children. One possible reason for the decrease could be that over half (52%) of respondents to the survey were age 55 or older, and may not

available from surveys since 1995, there is a rich source of information regarding community perceptions of problems. As shown in the table below, only one problem area shows an increasing trend over time: *lack of affordable medical care*. *Lack of affordable medical care* was also on the rise in 2005, which is congruent with the experience that many people have, particularly those newly unemployed or those with minimal coverage and high medical bills.

### Perception of Community Members' Accessibility to Services

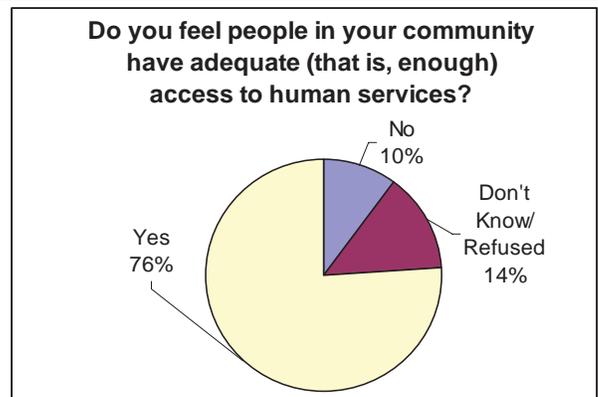
Of the total 441 respondents to the 2009 phone survey, the majority (76%), believe that people in their community have adequate access to services. This was similar to the responses in 2007, 2005 and 2003 and the same as the response in 2001.

| Community Problem Areas  | Percentage of Respondents Rating Problem as Moderate or Major |        |        |        |        |        |        | Declining or Increasing Trend |
|--|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|
|  | 1997  | 1999   | 2001   | 2003   | 2005   | 2007   | 2009   |                               |
| Lack Of Affordable Medical Care  | 30.75%  | 42.37% | 40.38% | 49.55% | 42.89% | 46.87% | 41.27% | Slightly increasing           |
| People Having Jobs That Do Not Pay Enough For The Basics Of Food, Shelter & Clothing | 34.50%  | 42.62% | 36.54% | 37.33% | 39.50% | 38.75% | 34.24% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Lack Of Parenting Skills   | 36.75%  | 31.96% | 31.97% | 27.38% | 27.99% | 25.52% | 26.53% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Drug Abuse   | 39.00%  | 31.48% | 33.65% | 29.86% | 26.19% | 28.07% | 24.94% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Lack Of Services For Children & Youth/Teens  | 27.75%  | 28.09% | 27.64% | 25.79% | 21.44% | 18.56% | 18.82% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Alcoholism   | 31.75%  | 23.97% | 23.80% | 24.43% | 20.32% | 20.65% | 16.78% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Domestic Violence  | 26.50%  | 22.76% | 20.43% | 20.81% | 19.64% | 20.88% | 16.55% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Crime & Violence   | 27.75%  | 27.36% | 25.00% | 22.62% | 18.06% | 19.03% | 17.46% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Racial Or Ethnic Discrimination  | 23.75%  | 21.55% | 19.95% | 20.81% | 16.48% | 16.47% | 12.70% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Effects Of Gang Activities   | 25.50%  | 20.10% | 18.03% | 19.23% | 14.00% | 14.62% | 14.51% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Poor Quality Public Education, K – 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade                            | 22.75%  | 28.09% | 22.84% | 20.14% | 20.09% | 15.78% | 14.06% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Homelessness   | 15.50%  | 14.53% | 10.82% | 16.52% | 14.45% | 16.47% | 14.97% | Slightly decreasing           |
| Physical Abuse Of Children   | 15.75%  | 14.04% | 14.18% | 13.12% | 11.06% | 11.83% | 8.62%  | Slightly decreasing           |
| Lack of Affordable Medical Insurance   | n/a   | n/a    | n/a    | 55.66% | 52.82% | 52.44% | 47.85% | Slightly decreasing           |

have as much direct experience with the needs of families with young children.

### Increasing or Declining Trends

In addition to monitoring the significant changes between survey years, it is also important to monitor community problem areas that show increasing or declining trends. With data



The 45 (10%) individuals who indicated that there is not adequate access in 2009 were asked what services they believe people have difficulty accessing. The most commonly mentioned are lack of health care/medical/dental insurance, (36%) general information regarding services (16%) and housing services (13%). One notable change compared to 2007 was that in that survey, 22% of the 45 respondents listed transportation as a service that was difficult to access; in 2009 it fell to only 9% of the respondents. And not surprisingly, in the past five surveys conducted, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009, lack of general information regarding services is mentioned among the top two areas that people have difficulty accessing.

A detailed list is shown in the table below.

communities. These include:

- residents in the 18-34 and 55-64 age groups
- those who have incomes under \$25,000
- women
- those who have experienced a large number of household problems, and
- those who have lived in Bellevue 11 or more years

Because it is not possible to determine why these differences in the phone survey exist through speculation alone, efforts have been made to engage community members from a larger number of these population groups in discussions to gain additional information. Comments from single adults, youth or people living in low-income households who may have been under-represented in the phone survey, for example, have been obtained in Community

| <b>Type of Services Respondents indicated that People have Difficulty Accessing</b> |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <i>Note: May total more than 100% due to allowance of multiple responses</i>        |                                    |
| <b>Type of Service</b>  | <b>% of Respondents<br/>(n=45)</b> |
| • Health Care/ Medical/ Dental Insurance  | 36%                                |
| • Lack of General Information Regarding Services                                    | 16%                                |
| • Housing Services  | 13%                                |
| • Counseling / Mental Health  | 11%                                |
| • Transportation  | 9%                                 |
| • Elder Care / Services for Seniors   | 9%                                 |
| • Income or Financial Assistance  | 7%                                 |
| • Legal Services  | 7%                                 |
| • Food and Shelter for Homeless   | 4%                                 |
| • Services for Immigrants or non-English speaking residents                         | 4%                                 |
| • Employment Services   | 4%                                 |
| • Child Care  | 2%                                 |
| • Family Health (Domestic Violence, Divorce, Parenting, Etc.)                       | 2%                                 |
| • Other   | 11%                                |

### **Groups of Residents That Tend to Perceive More Problems in the Community**

Based on the findings from the 2009 phone survey, certain segments of the population tend to perceive more of the problem areas as moderate or major problems in their

Conversations, Consumer Surveys and Key Informant Interviews.

### **Other Problem Areas Perceived to Exist in the Community**

During the past six survey cycles, an increasing number of respondents reported that there were

no other problems in the community than those listed in the survey. In 2001, 73% reported that there were no other problems, and in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 roughly 80% stated this. When asked this same question in 1999, 55% said there were no additional problems.

### Other Community Problems

Of the 78 (18%) respondents who said there were additional problems in the community, the most common responses related to traffic or transportation problems, which is consistent with findings from other Bellevue surveys. Between 1999 and 2003, the percentage of respondents citing traffic and transportation issues as a human service need in their community dropped significantly from 63% to 30%. Although not a significant increase, the percentage of respondents citing traffic and transportation issues as a need has steadily increased since then (32% in 2005 and 39% in 2007). However, it has again declined significantly in 2009 to 24%.

- Individuals of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with diverse sexual orientations, and
- Low-income individuals or families

Nearly a third of respondents (29%) report that the community completely supports young children under six years old. More than one in five respondents feel that the community completely supports older adults (26%), youths between the ages of six and eleven (25%), individuals of diverse racial/ethnic background (23%), and individuals with disabilities (21%). The table below shows the full distribution of baseline responses for this question.

### Community Support

In 2009, a series of questions were added to the survey assessing the level to which the community supports the needs of specific populations. Residents were asked to indicate the “degree” to which the community supports the following population segments:

- Young children under 6 years old
- Youth (6-11 years)
- Teens (12-18 years)
- Older adults (Seniors)

| 2009, All Respondents                              | 1<br>Support<br>Completely | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5<br>Does not<br>support at all | DK /<br>Refused |
|--|----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Young children under 6 years old                   | 29%                        | 27% | 15% | 8%  | 3%                              | 19%             |
| Older adults (Seniors)                             | 26%                        | 28% | 23% | 10% | 4%                              | 9%              |
| Youth (6-11 years)                                 | 25%                        | 29% | 20% | 7%  | 2%                              | 17%             |
| Individuals of diverse racial / ethnic backgrounds | 23%                        | 30% | 24% | 9%  | 5%                              | 8%              |
| Individuals with disabilities                      | 21%                        | 28% | 29% | 9%  | 2%                              | 11%             |
| Teens (12-18 years)                                | 19%                        | 25% | 26% | 10% | 3%                              | 17%             |
| Individuals with diverse sexual orientations       | 14%                        | 17% | 26% | 9%  | 7%                              | 26%             |
| Low-income individuals                             | 10%                        | 19% | 34% | 18% | 8%                              | 11%             |