2016 City of Houston Citizen Survey: A Report of Findings

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Executive Summary

This report reviews findings from a survey of more than 3,000 subscribers to the City of Houston's *CitizensNet* conducted between November 28 and December 28, 2016. Survey respondents rated 20 city services and 9 quality of life measures for the city of Houston. Response to the survey was sufficiently large to produce a reliable and valid sample of city residents, and allowed us to generalize about service and quality of life ratings citywide, by council district and by demographic subpopulations. With few exceptions, survey respondents were demographically representative of Houston's population and of Houston's City Council Districts. Approximately half of the survey's respondents expressed interest in participating in future City of Houston surveys.

Survey findings show that city residents are generally in agreement regarding their evaluations of key city services and of the current quality of life in Houston. Average ratings for the majority of city services were "good" or "fair"; few services received average ratings of 'poor." There were some notable differences across council districts and subpopulation in ratings of city services, including Affordable Housing, Bus Services, Animal Control, and Sidewalks. The average rating for overall quality of life in Houston was 'good'. Quality of life ratings differed most in regard to respondents' neighborhoods as places to live. A comparison of city service and quality of life evaluations shows that older respondents and those who have lived in Houston longer are more likely to rate both city services and quality of life in Houston higher than respondents who are younger and those who have moved to Houston more recently. Overall, however, there was considerable agreement about both city service and quality of life ratings across demographic measures, including race and ethnicity and council districts.

1. Introduction

At the request of the City of Houston's Finance Department we have undertaken to study public perceptions of services provided by the City of Houston. To fulfill this objective we designed and fielded a online survey of subscribers to the City of Houston's *CitizensNet*. More than three thousand unique subscribers (N=3,309) completed the survey between November 28 and December 28, 2016, with fully completed surveys from 2,233 persons who live in the City of

Houston.[1] In this report we describe the findings from the survey in terms of specific city services as well as respondents' assessment of quality of life (QoL) in Houston. We break out our findings by council districts and notable demographic differences among respondents.

The report proceeds in the following way. Section 2 reports respondents' evaluations of twenty specific city services including average citywide ratings for each service and notable findings at the council district level. Complete city service evaluations by council district can be found in the appendices to this report. Section 3 reports respondents' evaluations of quality of life in Houston along nine dimensions. We present trends across QoL dimensions at both the citywide and council district levels. Complete results of the QoL evaluations for council districts are located in the appendices. Section 4 reports the significant demographic correlates of city service evaluations, and Section 5 reports demographic correlates of respondents' evaluations of overall QoL in Houston.

2. *Evaluation of City Services*

Respondents were asked to evaluate twenty distinct services provided by the City of Houston. Specifically, they were asked whether the city's provision of each of these services was 'poor' (1), 'fair' (2), 'good' (3) or 'excellent'(4) (respondents were also allowed to respond 'don't know'). City service ratings were calculated for only those respondents who answered 'poor,' 'fair,' 'good' or 'excellent' ('don't know' responses were excluded from this calculation). Average ratings for each of these city services can be found in Table 1.

Four city services received ratings of 'good' (i.e., scores ranging between 3.0 and 3.9). The majority (N=13) of city services received scores of 'fair' (2.0-2.9). Three city services received ratings of 'poor' (1.0-1.9). The average rating for all 20 city services was 2.4.

City services whose average rating was 'good' (i.e., average score of between 3.0 and 3.9) were: Fire services (3.2), Emergency Management Services (3.2), Garbage Collection (3.0), and Libraries (3.0). Services whose average rating was 'fair' (i.e., between 2.0 and 2.9) include: Parks (2.9), Emergency Preparedness (2.9), Police services (2.8), Water and Sewer services (2.6), Public Health services (2.6), Traffic Signals (2.6), Recycling services (2.5), Bus services (2.5), Light Rail services (2.4), Affordable Housing (2.4), Traffic Enforcement (2.3), Animal Control (2.3) and Land Use (2.2). City services that received average ratings of 'poor' (i.e., between 1.0 and 1.9) include Flood Control (1.9), Street Repair (1.9) and Sidewalks (1.9).

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[1] An analysis of survey responses fails to show that the date on which a respondent completed the survey is related to their responses to each survey question.

Table 1: Average Ratings by Service

Service	Rating
Good	
Fire	3.2
EMS	3.1
Garbage	3.0
Libraries	3.0
Fair	
Parks	2.9
Emergency prep.	2.9
Police	2.8
Water and Sewer	2.6
Public Health	2.6
Traffic signals	2.6
Recycling	2.5
Bus	2.5
Light rail	2.4
Affordable housing	2.3
Traffic	2.3
Animal	2.3
Land use	2.2
Poor	
Flood prevention	1.9
Streets	1.9
Sidewalks	1.8

2.1 District Level Evaluations of City Services

One benefit of surveying subscribers to *CitizensNet* is that we are able to obtain a sufficient number of completed surveys by council district to provide us with a statistically valid representation of district residents. The exception to this is District J, in which we were only able to complete 24 surveys. In the remaining 10 Districts we completed, on average, 220 surveys per district, an ample sample size for making valid generalizations about district residents' opinions.[2]

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[2] We have observed a similar paucity of survey responses from residents of District J in other surveys using *CitizensNet.* We suspect that the subscription rate to *CitizensNet* among District J residents is low.

Average ratings of city services by residents are remarkably similar across council districts. There are, however, a few exceptions. The difference between the lowest and the highest score (i.e., range) by district was notable for three city services: Affordable Housing (30%), Bus services (23%) and Police services (20%).

For Affordable Housing, the highest ratings were 3.2 in District J, and 2.9 in Districts I and E. The lowest ratings were 2.0 in District B and 2.1 in District H. Average ratings of Affordable Housing by council district can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Ordered Ratings of Affordable Housing
By Council District

District	Rating
J	3.2
I	2.9
E	2.9
K	2.6
D	2.5
G	2.5
F	2.4
C	2.3
A	2.3
H	2.1
B	2.0

For Bus Services, the highest ratings were 3.2 in District I, 2.9 in District I and 2.8 in District E. The lowest ratings were 2.3 in District G and 2.4 in Districts E, B, and H. Average ratings of Bus services by council district are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Ordered Ratings of Bus Services
By Council District

District	Rating
I	3.2
D	2.9
A	2.8
C	2.6
K	2.5
F	2.5
J	2.5
H	2.4
B	2.4
E	2.4
G	2.3

For Police services, the highest ratings were 3.3 in District I, 3.1 in District J and 2.9 in Districts E, G, K and H. The lowest ratings were 2.5 in District D and 2.6 in Districts B. Average ratings of Police services by council district are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Order Ratings of Police Services
By Council District

District	Rating
I	3.3
J	3.1
E	2.9
G	2.9
K	2.9
H	2.9
C	2.8
A	2.8
F	2.8
B	2.6
D	2.5

3.   Evaluation of quality of life in Houston

Survey respondents were asked to rate quality of life in Houston along nine dimensions. Respondents could select from five answer choices: 'poor' (1), 'fair' (2), 'good' (3), 'excellent' (4) and 'don't know' (5). Quality of life ratings were calculated for only those respondents who answered 'poor,' 'fair,' 'good' or 'excellent' ('don't know' responses were excluded from this calculation). Average respondent ratings of the nine quality of life dimensions are reported in Table 5.

Quality of life dimensions that respondents rated as 'good' (i.e., average score between 3.0 and 3.9) included: Houston as a Place to Work (3.3), Houston as a Place to Live (3.1), Respondent's Neighborhood as a Place to Live (3.1), and Overall Quality of Life in Houston (3.0). Quality of life dimensions that respondents rated as 'fair' (i.e., between 2.0 and 2.9) included: Houston as a Place to Raise Kids (2.8), Houston as a Place to Retire (2.5), Natural Environment (2.5), Overall Feeling of Safety (2.5) and Ease of Getting Around Houston (2.3).

No quality of life dimensions had average ratings below 'fair' (2.0).

Table 5: Quality of Life in Houston Ratings

QoL Dimensions	Rating
Place to work	3.3
Place to live	3.1
Neighborhood	3.1
Overall quality	3.0
Raise kids	2.8
Place to retire	2.5
Natural environment	2.5
Feeling of safety	2.5
Getting around	2.3

Regarding quality of life metrics, we asked two broad questions: What specific dimensions of QoL shape Overall Quality of Life for Houston residents? and Do these defining aspects of QoL vary across council districts? Examining the relationships between respondents' ratings of the Overall Quality of Life in Houston and each QoL dimension provides partial answers to these questions.

We asked which dimensions of QoL most shape respondents' ratings of the Overall Quality of Life in Houston. To answer this question we compared ratings for each specific dimension of QoL with ratings of Overall Quality of Life, at both the citywide and individual council district

levels. Table 6 reports the percentage of respondents that rated the Overall Quality of Life in Houston as 'excellent' and also rated as 'excellent' one of the specific QoL dimensions.

Table 6: Percentage of respondents who rated specific QoL Dimensions
And Overall QoL in Houston as 'excellent'

QoL Dimension	% Excellent
Place to work	84%
Place to live	80%
Neighborhood	71%
Place to raise kids	60%
Place to retire	48%
Natural Environment	29%
Safety	27%
Getting around	22%

Three specific QoL dimensions are closely related to respondents' evaluations of Overall Quality of Life in Houston: Houston as a Place to Work, Houston as a Place to Live, and Respondent's Neighborhood as a Place to Live. For example, among respondents who rated the Overall Quality of Life in Houston as 'excellent', 84% also rated Houston as an 'excellent' Place to Work.

It is worth noting that Ease of Getting Around the City received the lowest rating as a dimension of QoL in Houston, but it does not appear to define residents' overall evaluation of their quality of life in the city.

3.1   Quality of life in Houston by Council Districts

As Table 7 shows, there was little variation across council districts in how respondents rated Overall Quality of Life in Houston. The average Overall Quality of Life rating across council districts was 3.0 ('good'). When we examine specific QoL dimensions, we again see little variation across council districts, with one notable exception, Respondent's Neighborhood as a Place to Live. The range in respondent ratings for "Your neighborhood as a place to live" ranged from a low of 2.3 ('fair') in District D to a high of 3.5 ('good') in District E.

Table 7: Average Quality of Life Ratings by Council District

QoL Dimensions	Council District										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Place to Live	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.3
Neighborhood	**2.9**	**2.5**	**3.3**	**2.3**	**3.5**	**3.0**	**3.4**	**3.0**	**2.7**	**3.0**	**3.1**
Raise Kids	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.9	2.7	3.0	2.9	2.9
Place to Work	3.3	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.4
Place to Retire	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.8	2.5	2.8
Feeling Safe	2.5	2.3	2.7	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.7
Getting around	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.6	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.3	2.5
Natural environ.	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.8	2.6	2.6
Overall QoL	**2.9**	**2.8**	**3.1**	**2.9**	**3.1**	**2.9**	**3.0**	**2.9**	**3.0**	**3.0**	**3.1**

Table 8 reports the percentage of respondents by council district that rated the Overall Quality of Life in Houston as 'excellent' and also rated as 'excellent' specific QoL dimensions. We see the same relationships between specific QoL dimensions and Overall Quality of Life in Houston at the district level. Specifically, respondents who rated Houston as 'excellent' in terms of Overall Quality of Life also rated Houston as an 'excellent' Place to Work and Place to Live as well as their individual Neighborhoods as 'excellent' Places to Live. District exceptions to this broad pattern include District A, where only a small percentage of respondents who rated Overall Quality of Life in Houston as 'excellent' also rated the city as an 'excellent' Place to Work. Respondents from Districts D and J who rated Overall Quality of Life in Houston as 'excellent' were significantly less likely to rate Houston as an 'excellent' Place to Live. Respondents from Districts B and D who rated Overall Quality of Life in Houston as 'excellent' were significantly less likely to rate their Neighborhood as an 'excellent' Place to Live.

Table 8: Percent of respondents by Council district who rated specific QoL Dimensions
and Overall QoL in Houston as 'excellent'

QoL Dimensions	Council District										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Place to Live	**73**	**99**	**77**	**39**	**83**	**92**	**86**	**84**	**98**	**52**	**83**
Neighborhood	**64**	**30**	**77**	**25**	**90**	**80**	**84**	**60**	**71**	**97**	**69**
Raise Kids	44	68	58	65	64	65	63	62	55	0	58
Place to Work	**38**	**69**	**78**	**70**	**97**	**81**	**92**	**96**	**99**	**100**	**72**
Place to Retire	22	92	38	38	54	71	48	37	55	95	62
Feeling Safe	20	35	29	51	29	21	22	31	26	64	36
Getting around	11	2	17	21	16	16	23	16	0	32	35
Natural environ.	42	30	18	38	35	24	33	29	34	64	33
Overall QoL	**64**	**30**	**77**	**25**	**90**	**80**	**84**	**60**	**71**	**97**	**69**

4. *Demographics of City Service Evaluations*

We analyzed the relationships between the evaluation of city services and respondent
demographics, including: race and ethnicity, age, gender, income, length of residence in
Houston, work status and homeownership. Table 9 reports these findings. A positive sign (+)
indicates that persons of this demographic rated the city service highly. Conversely, a negative
sign (-) indicates that persons of this demographic rated the city service poorly. Finally, empty
cells indicate that there was no statistically significant relationship between the demographic and
the evaluation of that city service. For example, the positive sign for Age and Police service
evaluations means that older respondents were significantly more likely to positively rate Police
services than were younger respondents.

Table 9: Significant Relationships between Respondents' Demographics and Rating of Services

Service	Black	Anglo	Hispanic	Retired	Home owner	Age	Female	Yrs in HOU	Income
Fire		+				+			
Police						+			
EMS		+	+		+	+			
Traffic									-
Streets	+				+		+		-
Garbage		+					+	+	
Animal	-							-	
Sidewalks		-			+			+	-
Signals							+		
Recycling	+	+	+		+	+		+	-
Flooding						+			
Water/Sewer		+				+			
Parks		+	+		+	+			
Land Use									-
Emerg. Prep.	+				+		+		-
Libraries		+					+	+	
Bus	-							-	
Light Rail		-			+			+	-
Public Health							+		
Afford Hous.	-	+	+		+	+		+	-

Age: 1:18-24, 2:25-34, 3:35-44, 4:45-54, 5:55-65, 6: 66-74, 7: 75+
Years in Houston: 1: less than 2 years, 2:2 to 5 years, 3:6 to 10 years, 4:11 to 20 years, 5:More than 20 years.
Income: 1: less than $25,000, 2: $25,000-$49,999, 3: $50,000-$99,999, 4: $100,000 or more

Police services: Only older respondents were significantly more likely to rate Police services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Police services.[3]

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[3] These findings were generated from a multiple regression analysis in which the relationship between different demographics (e.g., age and income) were controlled for when estimating the relationship between a demographic and respondent evaluations. Statistically significant relationships were defined as P<.1.

Fire services: Only older respondents and Anglos were significantly more likely to rate Fire services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Fire services.

EMS services: Four demographics, including, Anglos, Hispanics, older persons and homeowners, were significantly more likely to rate EMS services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of EMS services.

Traffic Enforcement: Respondents with higher income levels were significantly more likely to rate Traffic Enforcement poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Traffic Enforcement.

Street Conditions: African-Americans, homeowners and women were significantly more likely to rate Street Conditions highly, while respondents of higher income levels were more likely to rate Street Conditions poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Street Conditions.

Garbage Collection: Anglos, women and respondents who have lived in Houston longer were more likely to rate Garbage Collection services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Garbage Collection services.

Animal Control: African-Americans and respondents who have lived in Houston longer were more likely to rate Animal Control services poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Animal Control services.

Sidewalks: Homeowners, and respondents who have lived in Houston longer were more likely to rate Sidewalks highly, while Anglos and persons with higher incomes were more likely to rate Sidewalks poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Sidewalks.

Traffic Signals: Only women were more likely to rate Traffic Signals highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Traffic Signals in Houston.

Recycling: African-Americans, Anglos, Hispanics, homeowners, older respondents and respondents who have lived in Houston longer were significantly more likely to rate Recycling services highly, while respondents with higher income levels were more likely to rate Recycling services poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Recycling services in Houston.

Flood Control: Only older respondents were significantly more likely to rate Flood Control services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Flood Control services.

Water and Sewer: Only older respondents were significantly more likely to rate Water and Sewer services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Water and Sewer services.

Parks: Older respondents and women were significantly more likely to rate Parks highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Parks.

Land Use: African-Americans, Hispanics and older respondents were significantly more likely to rate Land Use services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Land Use services.

Emergency Preparedness: Older respondents, women and respondents who have lived in Houston longer were significantly more likely to rate Emergency Preparedness services highly, while retired respondents were more likely to rate Emergency Preparedness services poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Emergency Preparedness services.

Libraries: Only older respondents were significantly more likely to rate Libraries highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Libraries.

Bus services: African-Americans, homeowners and older respondents were significantly more likely to rate Bus services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Bus services.

Light Rail services: African-Americans, older respondents and women were significantly more likely to rate Light Rail services highly, while respondents with higher incomes were significantly more likely to rate Light Rail services poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Light Rail services.

Public Health services: African-Americans, Hispanics and homeowners were significantly more likely to rate Public Health services highly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Public Health services.

Affordable Housing: Homeowners, older respondents, and respondents with higher incomes were significantly more likely to rate Affordable Housing services highly, while African-Americans were significantly more likely to rate Affordable Housing services poorly. No other demographic was significantly related to ratings of Affordable Housing in Houston.

5.   *Demographics of overall quality of life in Houston*

We analyzed the relationships between respondents' ratings of the Overall Quality of Life in Houston and the same demographics reported in Section 4 (i.e., race and ethnicity, age, gender, income, length of residence in Houston, work status and homeownership). Table 10 reports these findings. As before, a positive sign (+) indicates that persons of this demographic rated Overall Quality of Life in Houston highly. Conversely, a negative sign (-) indicates that persons of this demographic rated Overall Quality of Life in Houston poorly. Finally, empty cells indicate that there was no statistically significant relationship between the demographic and the rating of Overall Quality of Life in Houston.[4]

Older respondents, women, respondents who have lived in Houston longer and respondents with higher income levels were significantly more likely to rate Overall Quality of Life in Houston highly. No other demographic, including race and ethnicity, was significantly related to rating of Overall Quality of Life in Houston.

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[4] These findings were generated from a multiple regression analysis in which the relationship between different demographics (e.g., age and income) were controlled for when estimating the relationship between a demographic and resident evaluations. Statistically significant relationship were defined a P<.1.

Table 10: Significant Relationships between Respondents' Demographics
and Rating of Overall Quality of Life in Houston

Demographic	Overall Quality of Life in Houston
Black	
Anglo	
Hispanic	
Retired	
Homeowner	
Age	+
Female	+
Years in Houston	+
Income	+

6. Conclusion

A survey of *CitizensNet* subscribers has produced a sufficiently large, reliable and valid sample of City of Houston residents with which to generalize about service and quality of life ratings citywide, by council district and demographic subpopulations.

Underrepresentation of council districts (e.g., District J) and other subpopulations (e.g., Hispanics, younger persons) can be remedied with more aggressive surveying of *CitizensNet* subscribers and use of sample weighting methods.

There was sufficient interest among survey respondents to participate in future surveys needed to support a permanent panel of Houstonians for periodic surveying.

The substantive findings from this survey suggest a nascent consensus about the City's performance of key services and the overall quality of life in the City. Though ratings of

services and quality of life vary across council districts and subpopulations, there is considerable agreement on what the city does well and what services the city needs to improve.

It is noteworthy that the strongest correlates of service and quality of life ratings were resident age and length of residence in the city. Persons who are older and lived in the city longer rate city services and quality of life higher than younger and more recent arrivals to the city.

With a few exceptions (e.g., animal control, affordable housing, mass transit and sidewalks) there was considerable agreement about service and quality of life ratings among racial and ethnic groups.