

The Bolton 2019 Community Survey: Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION

The Town of Bolton has many exciting possibilities and eventualities on the horizon of the 2020s and beyond, including the development of new town office spaces, the expansion and solidification of current town programs and offerings, the potential for new economic development, and more. With all of these topics in mind and more, in late 2019 the Board of Selectmen authorized a small amount of money to be put towards conducting a community-wide survey that would seek to gain input on relevant municipal topics, build benchmark ratings of town offerings to use as an evaluation tool in future years, and otherwise seek to learn what the town can do to improve services for residents based on resident feedback. The high response rate to the survey suggests that Bolton has a significant number of residents that are truly passionate and care about the happenings of the town. Any and all questions about the full report, the 2019 Community Survey, or the Executive Summary can be sent to the Administrator at townadmin@boltonct.org.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The 2019 Bolton Community Survey was specially designed and tailored in an effort to collect as much data about current town services and public opinion as possible while simultaneously setting a benchmark for future surveys to be measured against. While over 100 questions were considered for inclusion in the survey, the final draft included only 55 questions as a means of helping to ensure a high probability of survey completion by residents and other participants. The survey was, for the most part, administered online (870 responses) with another 41 being submitted via pen and paper for a grand total of 911 responses. Options were used in Google Forms, the web device used to collect online responses, to require that respondents answered all multiple-choice questions. While this was a risky decision and may have led to fewer people submitting completed surveys, it did ensure that each online response was completed thoroughly, which ultimately led

to a low margin of error for most questions (+/- 2.90%). For more information, please see the full Community Survey Report.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the 2019 Community Survey, the authors of this report hereby recommend that the Board of Selectmen review, consider, and possibly implement the following policies and general courses of action.

Please note that the recommendations are numbered for purpose of reference, and that the numbers have no bearing on the level of importance or consideration that should be assigned to each recommendation. Numbers appearing in parentheses indicate which question(s) the recommendation is based on.

Communications

1. Social media expansion should continue in a way that captures interest and viewership across all demographics (2, 3).
2. More information about the variety of social media outlets and how to use them should be shared with the public (3).
3. Physical media should continue to be utilized to ensure that those without internet access are kept informed of Town happenings (2).
4. The development of a regular hard-copy town magazine should be considered (2, 4, 5).
5. More information about pre-existing programs and events should be shared widely before new programs and events are developed (6, 17).
6. The format, duration, and content of the Administrator's Report on local cable channel 5 should be reconsidered (6).

Land Use & Economic Development

7. Commercial development and senior housing developments should be pursued as high-priority new construction projects (7).
8. Work that can be done to make it easier for businesses to relocate to major Bolton thruways, including Route 44 and Route 6, should be pursued.
9. Businesses that can incorporate themselves into an attractive, walkable commercial district; including a coffee shop, more restaurants, small shops/retail, and pharmacies; should be encouraged to relocate to designated commercial development areas.
10. Town branding and marketing should likely incorporate elements that highlight its natural beauty and small, tight-knit community (10, 39).

Environment & Waste Collection

11. A balance between land preservation and development should be maintained (11).
12. Regular land preservation should be prioritized and pursued (12, 13).
13. Solar and other renewable installations in town should be pursued (13).
14. Door-to-door composting and other eco-friendly actions that would help reduce waste to be sent to landfill should be explored and considered (14, 15).

Recreation

15. New recreational programs that are developed should focus on activities not currently offered in town (16).

Town Grounds & Facilities

16. The creation of space that will allow for new recreation, leisure, and community-based activities to be held is generally desirable (19, 21).
17. Information about all parks, especially Freja Park, should be more widely shared in order to promote effective usage and to make the town's investment in those spaces worthwhile (20).
18. Accessibility to parks and trails should be addressed (21).
19. Historic buildings and sites should continue to be preserved (23).

Library

20. An adjustment of the Library's hours of operations should be considered, with possible changes including keeping the Library open on Saturdays year-round and on Fridays in general.
21. New incentives, offerings, and programs (with a special emphasis on children and educational programs) should be considered at the Library to increase the number of individuals who utilize its services and the frequency at which those individuals visit (26, 27).
22. The Library's digital services, programs, and web presence should be evaluated and Library staff should develop and execute a plan to improve their favorability ratings (28).

Senior & Social Services Center

23. The Senior Center should develop and execute a plan to increase the number of individuals around town who use their facility (29, 31).
24. A plan should be developed and executed to improve the Senior Center's favorability ratings (30, 31).

Shared Services

25. The concept of developing a new community center, to be shared between Bolton and a neighboring town, should be pursued for the sake of improved offerings and financial efficiency (32).
26. Further sharing of resources between schools, police departments, and other town services should be reviewed and considered (34).

Quality of Life

27. The Town should do its best to act on these recommendations and the recommendations outlined in other reports to help residents see progress being made on the issues that matter most to them (35, 38).
28. The Town should work to market itself as a more retirement-friendly community (37, 38).
29. The Town should do more to improve accessibility and lift negative perceptions around Town services (39).

General & Customer Service

30. The Town should review the priority ratings of each of its services and consider ways to adjust future funding levels to match the priorities of the public (40).
31. The Town should review services that received “failing” satisfaction ratings, including and most notably Police Protection, and develop and execute a plan to improve those services to passing levels (41, 42).
32. Town staff should keep up its high-quality customer service and do more to market this feature of the government (44).
33. Town officials should seek to reduce tax burden if possible, either through cuts, cost reduction through efficiency, or through economic development (45).

Demographics

34. Town staff and/or officials should consider a way to welcome new residents to town as a means of helping newer arrivals feel at home among a considerable number of residents who have lived in town for over 20 years (46).
35. The Town should develop and execute a plan to connect underrepresented groups; including but not limited to young residents, senior citizens, males, and people of color; with local programs and services while empowering all to become involved with local government (47, 49).
36. Town staff should work to find streamlined ways to connect residents with nearby jobs (48).
37. The Town should remain as open to communications from people in need as possible, and should continue to offer programs that help families and individuals in poverty (53).

APPENDICIES

Appendix A: a copy of the 2019 Community Survey.

Appendix B: all open-ended responses.

Appendix C: a link to all Town social media pages.

Also published: the full report, titled “The Bolton 2019 Community Survey: Results, Commentary, and Conclusions.”