

OVERVIEW

As you may have noticed, the Winnetka Caucus Survey was different this year. Based on a small pre-survey, an attempt was made to identify topics of greater interest to younger and/or more recent residents. That, combined with more frequent reminders from the Communications Committee, resulted in a 73% increase in this year's response rate along with more balanced residency profiles and greater participation from parents with children in the schools.

Additionally, an effort was made to dig deeper into the reasons behind survey selections. To this end, more reliance was placed on soliciting comments. Indeed, nine of the Board-related questions on the Survey asked *only* for comments, five sought only vote results, and nine asked for both. Consequently more than 8,000 total comments were received from residents. The tabulation of vote counts is relatively straightforward, while searching for underlying themes, and creative suggestions, has been more complex. Each Caucus Committee has sought to distill the most relevant comments and ideas for its respective Board, but useful insights are no doubt still floating in the wash, and we encourage you to review the comments to specific questions of interest at: https://dee4c93d-2cf1-442e-8bac-03a122597673.filesusr.com/ugd/334825_117bbc852ace4d9f972d3ba245042046.pdf

With regard to the summaries below, we use ☒ to denote voting results, and “#” to indicate the number of comments submitted for each question.

VILLAGE

Summary: While there is not a consensus on the action(s) to be taken, an overwhelming number of residents feel that action must be taken to increase the vibrancy of the downtown business districts.

Question: 17

☒ When presented with eight alternative uses for the current Post Office space, residents gave the highest rank to outdoor dining (3.64), and the lowest to an Omnimax theater (1.70). The other choices, in descending preference, were greenspace/park (3.41), outdoor music venue (3.16), commercial development (2.68), public swimming pool (2.60), residential development (2.21), and an indoor music hall (2.20).

“405” A significant plurality of comments (68) expressed a clear preference for a “multi-use” approach to redevelopment (i.e., some combination of the elements presented in the original question, with perhaps other possibilities as well). The idea of a boutique hotel or inn received 16 positive comments. Ideas for various sorts of community food garden got 8 endorsements. A total of 27 residents expressed a desire for more affordable/senior/low-income housing. While it's difficult to summarize such a broad spectrum of opinion, residents seem generally to be looking to enjoy a broader array of experiences in our public spaces, and more outdoor social interaction in a vibrant, interesting, and engaging Village center. Additionally, based on comments in this question and other survey questions, residents want a use that will broaden the tax base of the Village.

Question: 18

☒ 64% of Village Residents either somewhat or strongly agree that the Village should levy fines on commercial buildings after 6 months of vacancy and apply the revenue as rent subsidies to potential tenants, while 28% somewhat or strongly disagreed.

“486” Comments in favor of a fine focus on the need to motivate building owners to fill empty storefronts, provide added Village support for local business, and remedy actions of specific landlords that may be standing in the way of quickly leasing space. The comments opposing this approach include doubts about the legality of the proposal, a preference for promoting rather than penalizing businesses, faith in the markets to solve the problem, and an approach that would offer tax incentives for full occupancy rather than tax breaks for empty buildings.

Question: 19

When asked if the Village should continue to prioritize and fund the Bikeway Master Plan, 75% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed, and 19% somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Question 20

The town, overwhelmingly (85%), would encourage a friend to move to Winnetka. “977” Positive feedback was largely based on: quality of schools; safety of the community; proximity to the lakefront; and ease of transportation. Negative feedback referenced: taxes being too high (most referenced); poor downtown development; lack of diversity of residents; and rents being too high for businesses.

Question 21

“909” When asked whether the COVID-19 experience has changed their thinking about what’s important to Winnetka residents, some did not directly answer “yes” or “no”, and some who answered “yes” gave the same answers as those who answered “no”. Still, a number of general themes emerged:

- Slightly less than two-thirds of respondents answered the pandemic did not change their thinking about Winnetka.
- Many people stressed the importance of the sense of community within Winnetka.
- Some people complained about inadequate measures being exercised, encouraged or enforced for social distancing and/or wearing masks within the village.
- The importance of outdoor activities during the pandemic was highlighted. Comments were made about the need to: Allow use of parks and tennis courts; Create safer biking and walking trails; Allow use of beaches (some want to limit beach use to residents); Provide more open spaces.
- The community is valued for lack of crime and safer places to walk and allow children to play and congregate.
- There were numerous complaints oriented to the schools and the ineffectiveness of e-learning.
- The need to find ways to support local businesses via local patrons and/or Village support.
- More assistance should be provided to local restaurants such as creating more seating capacity on sidewalks and closing streets for seating (closing streets was also mentioned as a way to promote other local businesses).

Question 22

“404” When asked to provide other comments or suggestions there were many general and specific ideas. The single most mentioned comment (38%) was that the Village Council needs to act to get rid of empty storefronts, promote business development, and revitalize downtown.

LIBRARY

Summary: An overwhelming number of comments mentioned the need to “keep the library open” during the pandemic. Many responders voiced an opinion that the library should stay open under any circumstance without much regard for health. Others stressed that requirements applicable to other retail establishments should apply to libraries as well, i.e. wearing of masks, occupancy limits and physical distancing. While quite a few responders were not interested in, or too busy to use the library services, many responders also did not seem knowledgeable of the breadth and intensity of services offered by the library. Some libraries do use volunteers for delivery of books to the elderly or disabled. Would the Friends group be interested in assuming more direct responsibility?

Question 11

Adults were most interested in programs in history:

PROGRAM	IN-PERSON	VIRTUALLY	NO INTEREST
Book Clubs	21%	16%	63%
Arts and Crafts Tutorials	28%	15%	58%
Historical Talks	32%	30%	38%
Food and Drink Tutorials	26%	20%	54%
Computer Classes	22%	22%	56%
Financial Classes	12%	21%	68%

Question 12

Families were most interested in Arts and Crafts and Live Performances:

	IN-PERSON	VIRTUALLY	NO INTEREST
Story times	34%	5%	60%
Books Clubs	25%	11%	64%
Science and Technology	34%	14%	52%
Arts and Crafts	43%	8%	49%
Live Performances	47%	6%	46%
Games such as Chess, Dungeons & Dragons, etc	25%	8%	68%

Question 13

When asked about a preferred method of communication with the Library, more than 80% favored a dedicated email address.

Questions 14 (COVID-related Concerns “669”), 15 (Re-imagine the Library in the context of a pandemic “501”), and 16 (Other Suggestions “230”) are summarized as a group, below (940 total comments):

- The library should spell out to the community: the source of income, legal responsibility, involvement with other library districts, and history of establishment of Winnetka-Northfield.
- Some people will follow library news on the web, others by mail, but no one will read it if it is too long and complicated.

- The library should communicate the cleaning procedures and the safety measures so we know those in the library are safe. Temperature checks during outbreaks. Perhaps provide information, when it is known with certainty, of how long the virus lives on paper or hard cover services.
- There should be a senior manager at the front desk every day. Library management is invisible. The hourly workers and volunteers seem to be the only face of the Library.
- Create a community co-working space: conference rooms with video conferencing capabilities to serve as a resource for students/parents who now take classes/work remotely.
- Virtual book groups or maybe a librarian to join your book group remotely.
- Special senior helpline. Reach out to senior resident/card holders to join a special service group. Provide training to seniors on various ways to connect. Create senior hours in the library.
- Tutorials for digital content
- Exchanges with libraries in more diverse areas
- Online classes and virtual meetings
- Digital classes/events in collaboration with D36
- Tutoring services
- Mental health best practices
- Support for student virtual learning
- Conference rooms with videoconferencing capabilities
- Online check in system to limit number of patrons
- Return boxes around the village
- Quiet room in the library, address noise concerns

PARKS

Summary: Residents are asking for a greater variety and volume of activities, but also do not want an increased tax burden.

Question 6

Approximately 56% of respondents favored giving Paddle Tennis additional green space for new courts. 30% were opposed.

Question 7

When asked if the use of Centennial Beach should be switched from Dog Park to resident swimming, about 54% answered in the affirmative, and 37% in the negative.

Questions 8 (Facilities and Services “640”), 9 (COVID-related Concerns “546”) and 10 (Other Suggestions “428”) are summarized as a group, below (1600 total comments):

- **A Dog Park and the existing Dog Beach** generated a significant number of comments. Approximately 52 residents stressed the need for a Dog Park, especially with the rising lake

waters at Centennial Beach. Thirty-seven residents felt that the Dog Beach should be kept AND a Dog Park established in the village.

- Sticking with a **beach theme**, numerous residents spoke out against what they called poor maintenance at the beaches. Some said the beaches were not cleaned well and that trash was not picked up regularly. Also numerous people said that WPD should offer better food options at the beaches, as Wilmette and Glencoe do.
- The need for maintenance and increased cleanliness of the **Green Bay Trail** was mentioned by residents. There was also the suggestion of the WPD developing another walking trail to give Winnetka residents more options.
- **Pickle ball** appeared on many residents responses as a recreational offering they would like to see. It was suggested for Nielson Tennis Center and the neighborhood parks. People felt strongly it should be free of charge.
- The idea of the WPD developing a **recreational pool** space (either indoor or outdoor) came up several times. That might be an indicator of how many younger residents answered the Caucus Survey as residents who have lived in the Village for a longer period of time likely remember that funding for a pool has failed in two previous referendums.
- More than a dozen residents suggested that, during times of isolation in the pandemic, that **Winnetka Parks be opened** (with posted warnings, and/or social distancing instructions) and individuals be allowed to choose to let their families use the parks or not.
- A creative suggestion from a small number of respondents was that **the WPD allow Park spaces – like Hubbard Woods or Dwyer Park – to be available for outdoor restaurant dining**. The thought was that helping local restaurants with this added space could save local businesses and help increase a shared sense of community among diners.
- More than one resident also suggested that the WPD create **more outdoor evening events** for families – like movie nights or music performances. The respondents seemed to feel that events outdoors would make social distancing easier, and also help increase a shared sense of community among residents taking part.

SCHOOLS

Summary: Residents are passionate and proud about the quality of our schools. There is a recognition of the need to continually invest in maintaining that quality. However, the support for investment fragments the further the investments moves from curriculum or health and safety issues to other infrastructure expenditures. Additionally, there is a desire to maintain the neighborhood elementary schools, but a willingness to explore consolidation of Skokie School and Washburn as a means of controlling costs.

Question 23

Asked to rank their preferences for five options related to the improvement of overall student education, a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math courses (the STEM curriculum) received the highest rating (4.15); followed by student development in leadership, conflict resolution, and communication (3.42); expanded creative writing, the arts, and music programming (3.35); investment in better school facilities and buildings (2.82); and the option to keep the schools as they are (2.26).

“387” Themes that emerged in the comments included:

- The sentiment that health and safety issues such as the lack of air-conditioning and lead in the water should be addressed in school buildings. Basic investments have been delayed, and can no longer be ignored.
- Community members also believe the schools need to invest in technology, as the perception is that they have not kept pace with broader advancement and lack the basic electrical and building requirements to power said technology.
- Yet such investment in the school needs to be smartly prioritized because community members are concerned about the tax burden.
- Outside the context of the ranked choice vote, Math and Grammar/English were the most commonly cited curriculum areas with a perceived need for improvement.

Question 24

After taking into account the recent failed referendum and an expectation that future bond proposals should be reduced in scope, respondents were asked to rank their preferences on ten specific categories of capital improvements, with the following results: Replace water pipes to address lead levels (4.14); Upgrade electrical capacity and improve technology access (3.86); Enhance safety and security (3.41); Improve ADA accessibility and equitable access to all facilities (3.21); Upgrade HVAC systems (3.19); Complete Health/Life safety projects (3.07); Improve library resource centers (2.70); Upgrade or improve general site conditions (2.68); Provide additional space for multi-purpose cafeterias (2.58); and, Improve parking and traffic circulation (2.17).

Question 25

When asked to describe their positions on the tradeoff between keeping five neighborhood schools on one hand, and the cost of their upkeep and maintenance on the other, the majority of respondents favored some form of consolidation: 49.5% chose the broader option to “Consolidate the schools” in order to reduce the burden of five schools; 9% opted for “Building a new K-8 School” to bring the school count from 5 to 1; and 36.7% voted to “Maintain all 5 Schools” and incur the higher tax burden that comes with more facilities.

“474” The most generally acceptable form of consolidation expressed in the comments was at the middle school level, i.e., keeping all three elementary schools and combining Skokie and Washburne.

Question 26

When asked for opinions about a future D36 school referendum, the majority of respondents expressed a willingness to support something reasonable, but the broader Illinois tax milieu will play a role: Roughly 52% of respondents cited support for a modest and reasonable school referendum; Another 15% are generally supportive, unless a graduated state income tax passes; The remaining 33% are not supportive and/or chose to write-in their individual suggestions.

“156” Many comments noted that there are critical investments that need to be made in the district, but the appetite for a large investment is low. The community would like to have a compelling case for each requested investment, in order to determine its level of need.

Question 27

When asked to express their preferences with regard to six options for educating during the course of the pandemic, respondents ranked the following priorities when it comes to funding: Personal protective

equipment and related supplies (3.68); Improvements to remote learning delivery (3.62); More custodians to disinfect the facilities (3.33); Social-emotional support/counseling (2.91); More staff to allow for required social distancing (2.88); and, Willing to accept none of the above (2.02)

Question 28

“394” With regard to “Other” D36 issues:

- The community largely feels it is important to have children return to in-person learning in the fall, provided that proper guidelines are put in place to protect students and staff.
- If in-person learning is not feasible, remote learning is not an adequate substitute in its current form. If remote learning is required going forward, community members expressed a need for several modifications.