

PRESS RELEASE

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Overland Park Survey Verifies Long-Held Community Priorities

Overland Park, Kan. – Results of a community scan of Overland Park voters, released today by the Overland Park Chamber Foundation and Home Builders Association of Greater Kansas City (KCHBA), indicate priorities are largely unchanged from 2012.

Will Ruder, executive vice president of the KCHBA, said, “The KCHBA and Chamber Foundation initiated the survey project earlier this year, raising the money to support this from the business community. We believed it important to determine if the changing demographics, sustained growth and current pandemic have changed the community’s long-standing quality of life priorities and views on taxation. This information provides meaningful data for our organizations’ strategic planning and for community leaders as we contemplate the city’s comprehensive plan.”

The survey of 500 Overland Park registered voters was conducted by Neil Newhouse, partner and co-founder of Alexandria, Virginia-based Public Opinion Strategies. Public Opinion Strategies conducted a similar Johnson County community scan in 2012.

Major themes emerged from the survey, indicating that despite the uncertainty created by the pandemic over the past 18 months, Overland Park voters still believe quality of life issues are important to the community’s success. Retaining top-priority status is pre-K-12 schools, followed by crime and public safety. Closely ranked and rounding out the top five priorities are improving access to mental health care, economic development and job growth, and improving access to quality health care. Interestingly, “keeping the mill levy low” fell toward the bottom of the list of priorities.

Voters overwhelmingly expressed confidence in local leaders; with 75% saying the city is heading in the right direction and giving retiring Overland Park Mayor Carl Gerlach a 65% approval rating. Overland Park’s city government was judged responsive to its citizens’ needs by 76% of respondents, with 74% agreeing the community is growing at the right speed.

There is division of opinion on whether housing options are limited, with 56% believing an appropriate variety of housing options exist. Voter opinion is also divided on whether too many apartment complexes are being built (45% too many apartments/50% more needed). This issue is divided by partisanship and length of residency. However, there is significant support (64%) for policies to ensure smaller, lower-cost residences can be built throughout the city.

Highlights of tax questions revealed:

- There is consensus from 72% of voters that, for the city services received, the level of city taxes paid are “about right;”
- Only 11% of voters recognize their city property taxes are less than neighboring cities and fewer than half think it’s important their taxes are significantly lower than their neighbors’;
- The renewal of the 1/8-cent sales tax dedicated to neighborhood and city street reconstruction is strongly supported with 86% favorability;

- Providing mental health education and services, at 84%, topped the list of priorities for which voters would be willing to pay higher taxes;
- 82% of voters would pay higher taxes to improve pre-K-12 education through lower class sizes and all-day kindergarten;
- 77% of voters favored paying higher taxes to increase teacher salaries in local schools;
- Infrastructure improvements also rated highly with voters – 76% would pay more to maintain and improve city thoroughfares and neighborhood streets and 72% would pay to improve highway infrastructure, although 55% were not willing to pay higher taxes specifically to eliminate chip seal as the method to maintain neighborhood streets;
- Expanding higher education offerings in Johnson County to include more trade and tech certifications, bachelor's, master's, and PhD programming resonated with 64% willing to pay more taxes; 63% were willing to pay more taxes specifically for Johnson County Community College to expand its offerings;
- Of 15 issues tested, only four failed to hit the 50% mark for raising taxes – improving arts and cultural amenities, eliminating chip seal, creating engaging, sustainable public gathering/entertainment spaces and building a new city hall.

Johnson County Community College (JCCC) has an overwhelmingly favorable image in the community (94%), with 77% of voters agreeing the college is critical for economic development and 86% saying JCCC is preparing a workforce that is ready for the jobs and careers of today and in the future. The University of Kansas Edwards Campus is similarly held in high regard with a 74% favorability rating and 67% assessment on preparing the workforce.

“It’s gratifying to see consistency in the 2021 survey results compared to the scan we conducted in 2012,” said Tracey Osborne Oltjen, president & CEO of the Overland Park Chamber and Foundation. “The 2020 Federal Census validates that growth has continued in our community. Despite changing demographics and the challenges of the continued pandemic, our voters’ priorities are consistent with what has made Overland Park strong: commitment to educational excellence, public safety, quality jobs, infrastructure and access to health care. We’re excited to see an awareness of new priority issues like access to mental health care and housing variety. The KCHBA and Chamber will continue advocating on such initiatives with the knowledge we represent not only our members, but also the will of our larger community on these important quality of life issues.”

To view a summary of the survey, [click here](#).

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The HBA is the voice of the housing industry and source for housing information.

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