



Soda Springs Survey Analysis

Sept. 9, 2019

The outreach and overall representation of the community is sufficient for the city to use the survey response as a reasonable guide to public opinion. The survey reached nearly 10 percent of your residents which is a relatively high number for a survey sampling. However the demographics do soften this to some degree as your responses are weak in a few demographic areas including youth, women and potentially household size.

Questions 1 & 2 - Do you live in Soda Springs city limits and what is your zip code? Of the 367 total responses, 269 identify as city residents, nearly 10% of your population (3,038 2017). This would be considered statistically valid and even more so if demographic responses also show a balanced percent of residents by age, household and gender. The analysis below indicates that age and household with two exceptions are pretty balanced however gender is not.

Questions 16, 17 & 18 - Demographic data including gender, age and size of household

Nearly 2/3 of respondents were female with males making up a little over 1/3. (Female 233; Male 124; Unknown 10). Age is spread fairly evenly other than youth but for statistical accuracy you would want to compare this to percent of each age group in the population.

AGE: 18-29 = **63**; 30-39 = **93**; 40-49=**73**; 50-59=**54** 60+= **75**, plus **1** under 18 and **8** unknowns.

Household size appears to have adequate representation across all sizes with perhaps households of one being underrepresented if many seniors live on their own. Cross tabulate with your census data to know how accurately these reflect the population percentage within each group for Soda Springs. The unknowns for both age and household size are not large enough to impact an analysis.

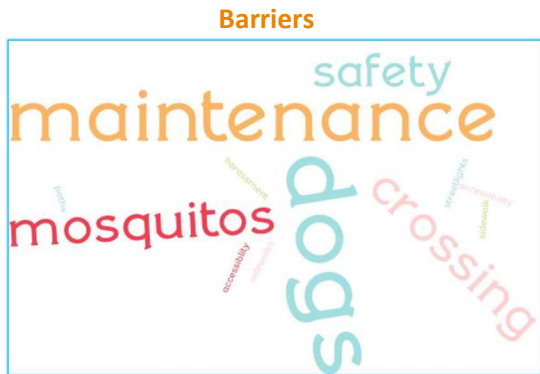
HOUSEHOLD SIZE: Nine = 1; Eight = 5; Seven = 12; Six = 31; Five = 55; Four = 68; Three = 46; Two = 107; One = 22 unknowns = 19

Of the 367 total responses 266 provided zip codes identifying as 83276 which is largely Soda Springs. The remaining responses provide less reliable data as these zip codes are scattered both within and outside Idaho, however the largest number of these are regional (SE ID) with 23 in other 832 zip codes; 10 are in 834 zip codes (Idaho Falls and north) and one from Jerome. Only 7 are out of state.

This means you did not reach many visitors or tourists. You may want to conduct outreach targeting this audience if you move forward with future specific planning i.e. downtown revitalization, Enders Hotel, etc. Based on the many responses related to tourism this seems to be a topic of interest to your community.

Question 3- What would encourage you to walk more? These results are fairly split (30 – 49%) across possible improvements and perceived barriers but it does suggest that your residents like to walk and likely would walk more with some improvements to infrastructure. This suggests the city should look at its infrastructure from the perspective of making it more walkable starting with getting more clarity around both what and where residents would be willing to invest and how much of the Public Works budget they are willing to apply towards

improvements and what trade-offs they are willing to make to get these improvements. Comments could be grouped generally into barriers or desires for walking. Barriers represent a very small percent of comments but included here to show that maintenance appears significantly on both. (Word clouds and list breakout attached.)



Question 4- What city services do you use? City services are well used with the exception of fire and the airport. Over 50% of respondents say they use all other city services. Roads and parks are heavily used at over 90%. Sidewalks are third highest use at 76%, 10% higher than the next which is the library. This use raises the importance of comments in the responses to question 3 about the sidewalks. The fact that fire received less than 50% should be viewed as positive since this is a service people want but hope they never have to use.

Analyzing this information through the lense of the next two questions is what really provides the city with an indepth perspective of respondents’ views on city services and amenities.

Question 5 – How would you prioritize city amenities? These priorities tells us that while some services may be used more they are not necessarily considered to be the city’s highest priority. It is not a surprise that while police and fire are not the most used services these are considered to be the highest priorities of the city. Most citizen would view these services as essential to a city. The ranking of roads accurately reflects their use - coming in a close 3rd to police and fire - as do parks, library, recreation, shooting complex and the airport.

The two outliers are sidewalks and trails. Both receive much more use than prioritization. Trails, pathways, outdoor recreation and sidewalks come up throughout the survey in various ways with comments about needing more or better maintenance can be found in responses to several questions. The survey suggests the city needs to take a close look at these amenities and do more outreach to better understand what the community wants and would be willing to pay for or where they would recommend changes. Police and fire are high priorities but would services be negatively impacted with reductions?

	USE	PRIORITY	ranking out of ten
Roads	91.55%	7.05	3
Parks	90.74%	6.51	4
Sidewalks	76.02%	4.76	7
Library	66.76%	5.92	5
Walking trails	62.40%	4.53	8
Recreation	60.49%	5.36	6
Police	55.04%	7.73	1
Shooting complex	54.77%	3.27	9
Fire	48.23%	7.27	2
Airport	3.54%	2.61	10

The airport recieves the lowest both for use and importance. This suggests the average resident does not see much value in the airport, recieving by nearly double the highest number of lowest two rankings, and that perhaps the city

might want to assess what value the airport brings to the city and who wants and uses it. Does it break even or is it a burden on the city budget? What is its return on investment in terms of attracting business and/or tourism? How does it serve the community? How well is its value communicated to the residents? Is the city doing all it can to use it as an economic development tool? These are questions the city should consider in assessing the value of the airport and whether this should remain a city owned and operated facility or perhaps they should look into public private partnership so the area businesses who are benefitting from this facility are also providing some of the expense of operations.

RECOMMEND: The city look closely at the current level of each service and the current maintenance for roads, sidewalks, parks and trails, water and sewer (these have been raised elsewhere in the survey). Then bring the findings to the residents to get clearer direction.

Question 6 - Are there additional amenities you would like to see currently not provided by the city? Over a third of respondents skipped this question. There is clearly a lot of support for recreation facilities with an emphasis on a rec center and a pool. It's unclear how many want an indoor/outdoor facility but based on the overall comments we would say either or both. A community center also came up many times which some comments include with the recreation center but not all. There is also mention of a need for more opportunities for shopping and eating.

RECOMMEND: Consider creating a Recreation District. Cascade had similar desires related to recreation so created a district which enabled them to build a recreation center with an outdoor pool and Pickle Ball courts and an indoor recreation facility with workout equipment, classroom space for things such as yoga, dance, etc. Cascade is much smaller than Soda Springs but might provide an example of a way forward.

Question 7 – Would you support an increase in either city fees or property taxes for improved city amenities?

There is not a majority that would support any increase in funding to make improvements for city services/amenities but if you combine either or both with a fee increase you have 57% support for fee increases. Comments reflect the need to be very transparent about what the increase would be for and to engage the residents in such a decision. There is some sentiment for using existing budgeted dollars more efficiently and considering long term cost of any new facility as current ones are not well-maintained. It seems the key to support is clearly identifying what, why and how. Comments provide deeper perspective on what these results are truly saying and suggest that for the right purpose and clear, transparent process that links desire (question 6) with funding need the city may find support for some funding increase.

Question 8 – Why do you think Soda Spring is not attracting some of the regional growth? A lack of housing and shopping are clearly what most people believe is contributing to Soda Springs' population decline with each getting over a 70% response. Not enough employment or dining options are also both significant with slightly over 50% agreeing with this reason. Concerns with the school system is next with nearly 40% identifying this as a reason. To take a closer look at this concern it might be useful to compare Soda Springs' schools with others in the area where growth is occurring, if that growth is families with school age children. Others drop from 30% to less than 10% for lack of health care which actually can be turned into a positive; touting a community's health care system can be a good marketing tool.

RECOMMEND: To better understand this challenge it would be useful to learn where people who work in/near Soda Springs live and why they choose to live where they do. A recommendation would be to ask area employers if they would be willing to include their employees in such a survey. Such a survey might confirm these results or provide additional information regarding schools, etc. If not you could at least get basic information of where their employees live.

Question 9 – What type of housing is needed most in Soda Springs? There is little disagreement on the need for more housing with under 6% saying none is needed. A strong majority think single family housing is the way to go

with over 60% (not including another 7% on acreage). Another 10% prefer smaller lots over large lots and when you add the over 26% for townhomes and apartments it seems that perhaps there is a need for more affordable housing in order to create greater choice. This would mirror the response to question 8 regarding a lack of housing options as the number one reason since today most growth is either millennials, who may be getting into their first house or still renting, and retirees who often are looking to downsize.

Question 10 – What would you like to see in Soda Springs’ future? Housing is emerging as a consistent theme throughout the survey taking the lead again as it ranks most important for Soda Springs’ future. Jobs and retail rank second and third with both emerging as a guide for the city’s future. Dining appears strong here as well but this time paired with downtown revitalization. These three are very connected and likely won’t be successful without a coordinated effort to do all three. Communities that focus on revitalizing their downtowns do so with the intent of bringing more people downtown to help grow their retail sector which in turn provides jobs. Consider these responses together with questions 5 and 6 for a deeper perspective and clearer picture.

Question 11 – Do you support the sale of unused or under-used city owned property with no historic value and no plans for future use? Responses clearly indicate strong support for the city to sell *appropriate* parcel/s for appropriate use/s. The comments indicate support is dependent upon which parcel/s and what the future use would be for the parcel. Lots of comments in addition to the “maybes” suggest even with this strong support there are locations of concern especially Kelly Park and properties nearby and interest in knowing what the city would do with revenue.

RECOMMEND: As no specific parcels were identified with the question, the city should put together a process to vet properties and uses with citizens. Such a process should include, at a minimum:

- 1) which properties the city feels no longer serve a purpose for the city
- 2) how the city sees the property being used in the future, i.e. the zoning and/or other regulation the city would put on the parcel
- 3) presenting these to the public for comment
- 4) bring results back to public for final comment
- 5) what revenue this would bring to the city and how the city intends to use that revenue

Question 12 – Preferences for possible city actions regarding the Enders Hotel including whether or not to sell it or keep it. There were several options and layers to this question so one needs to pull it apart and compare these layers in order to understand what it may be telling the city. We have attempted to do this for you on the excel spreadsheet as well as with some word clouds. The one thing that does seem clear is there is strong community desire to use this building somehow to create some sort of gathering place – whether selling it to pay for a new rec center, sell it as a mixed used commercial place with restaurant, hotel and other attractions to help revitalize the downtown, or to keep it and create a community center plus city hall.



While there does seem to be more support for the city to continue to own the Historic Enders Hotel, opinions regarding what to do with it are fairly wide-ranging, so the level of support more accurately would depend upon proposed use and how the city would operate (lease or run internally) the building. The percentages are as follows when you add the two “sell” options and the two “keep” options together.

- 44% - sell
- 64% - keep
- 30% - no opinion plus other

There are clearly strong feelings regarding this historic value and the desire to preserve the structure shared across those would sell and those who would keep it, but it is unclear how widely these feelings are shared.

Enough concern is expressed about ensuring it is not a tax burden for those who want it to have a more commercial use, i.e. hotel, office space, restaurant that the city should pay attention to this. But there are also a significant number that would like it to become a new city hall and/or community center.

What the survey brings clearly into view is that the city needs to determine how this gift can best serve the community. It has enormous potential to become an important anchor for downtown revitalization either as a community gathering place or new city hall. Once this has been determined then depending upon that use, i.e. community center, new city hall or other public space, it should become clear to the city whether it makes more sense to sell or keep the building. The city should pull together financial data around these three opportunities to share with the community at-large. What does it cost the city today? What would it sell for with and without deed restrictions? Would this be enough to build a new recreation center? How much could the city sell its current building for if it were to move city hall to the hotel? How much of the building would the city use and what might the income be from leasing the remaining space? Which option does the most for the city? This and other information would help reveal the viability of the various options and guide a more fruitful conversation.

RECOMMEND: The city engage in a community process to determine the best use for the building and allow that to guide the decision as to whether to sell it or not. A good process will build community support behind the best choice.

Question 13 – Rank the value statements in terms of how important each is to you for your community to embody. Ranking for values has *Small town feel* rising to the top, however when you combine strongly agree and agree *Peace of Mind* is quite close with *Quality of Life* and *Active Lifestyle* right behind, with the remaining three very close to one another. The main take away is that all the value statements received positive response with more than 50% ranking each of them favorably. The committee should be able to confidently draft a final vision statement based on these but may want to see how elements of the top four could somehow be combined into one statement. There is a fair amount of overlap so this should be possible.

- Strongly agree and agree combined.
- Small town... 81.74%
- Peace of Mind... 80.21%
- Quality of life.... 77.6%
- Active Lifestyle... 77.38%
- Plan for Future... 64.11%

Visionary... 63.38%
Diversity... 63.21%

Question 14 – Why do you choose to live in Soda Springs? Work, family and small town are why a large majority of people live in Soda Springs. While no one reason received 50% these three all got over 40% and together are 128% (people could choose all that applied). No other answer even received 30%. The next two closest reasons include people who live there for the access to open space and outdoor recreation and those who grew up there and returned.

While “small town feel” got the second highest percent, this is subjective and may not mean the same thing to these respondents. Some of the comments largely reflect these percentages but offer additional insight into what “small town feel” might mean to respondents. There are also significant number of comments about the outdoors, the beauty and access.

Question 15 – Would you support a bond to fix the city’s water, sewer, power and streets in a concerted effort over 5-7 years? Not quite 50% support a bond to fix city services more quickly however the “no” response is very low at less than 10%. The fact that so many selected “no comment” suggests the city should review comments carefully to look for best way forward on a bond. Clearly there might be support with a good process that engages residents in the decisions about how much and other details.

Conclusion

A fair amount of redundancy was built into this survey and if you look for what is similar across the responses you’ll find more direction. We created a word cloud for some of the questions to help you see some of the correlation between questions. For example, with *Small Town Feel* as the top choice in the value ranking, it is not a surprise that “the small town feel” is the second highest reason people live in Soda Springs but what does this mean in terms of the question about attracting growth? This is why reviewing the many comments and finding the commonalities among all the answers will provide the best direction for developing action items for the comp plan. Many expressed their appreciation for the outdoor recreation opportunities which is something the city should consider as they look to the future and determine how to grow and develop.

Some key themes emerged through the survey and the workshop we conducted in May.

Maintenance:

There is clearly a feeling that maintenance is inadequate in a variety of areas. Real concern over water is something the city is aware of and looking for solutions. Parks and other “public spaces” such as sidewalks need some attention but just what and how much is less clear. Concerns ranged from beautification to snow removal. Road maintenance also came up fairly often.

Housing:

There is clear need and desire for more housing but further work needs to be done to determine how to create housing choice and where various types of housing belong.

Recreation Center:

Soda Springs wants a recreation center and probably a pool. The city should get to work on figuring out how to make this happen. There are some opportunities within this that potentially overlap with other concerns and desires. Some comments on the city making better use of the wonderful hot springs resource it has. We recommend taking a look at what Ouray, Colorado has done turning a similar resource into a wonderful public, community asset but also an amazing tourist attraction.

Downtown/Main-street Placemaking:

The community wants gathering space – both informal, i.e., more restaurants on Main Street to hang out, as well as formal, i.e., meeting rooms and event space in some community center or other place. This desire could fuel support for downtown revitalization as well as activation of the Enders Hotel.

Overall we believe both the workshop and the survey indicate a desire for the city to become more proactive on growth and development and bringing Soda Springs into the future. There is some underlying distrust from past efforts that resulted in non-action, however with good outreach that produces clear direction from the community the results of the survey and workshop suggest the city would receive financial support through fees/taxes/selling excess properties as well as community partnerships support to address the outcomes resulting from deeper planning efforts. Use the comp plan as a guide to identify these further actions. Break down planning/outreach efforts into smaller segments, i.e., how we should use the Enders Hotel and what role that plays in revitalizing our downtown.

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