



CITY OF
FOLSOM
DISTINCTIVE BY NATURE

2022 Community Listening Initiative

Executive Summary



Introduction

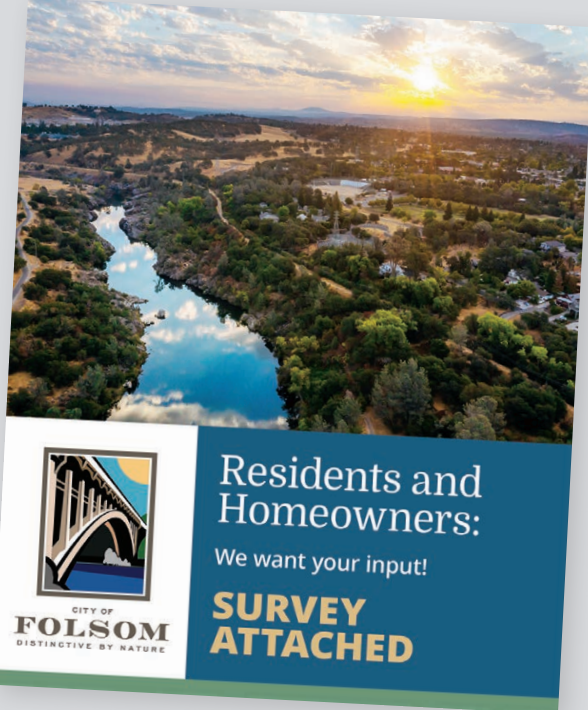
The City of Folsom works hard every day to provide essential and high quality city services to its residents, including rapid response 911 emergency medical, police, and fire services, quality parks and trails, vibrant arts and recreational programs, safe streets and roads, a variety of social services, library, economic development, disaster preparedness, and more. Public engagement and listening are important commitments as the City strives to continuously improve the delivery of its services to the community.

In 2022, the City took its commitment to listen and learn from Folsom residents to a new level. To protect Folsom's high quality of life, provide options to City leadership to stay in alignment with its community while managing resources wisely, and to inform a 2023 City-sponsored Strategic Planning Process, the City of Folsom conducted a Community LISTENING Initiative in the spring and summer of 2022. This document provides an executive summary of the listening results emerging from the City's 2022 process.

The City's portal into listening started with a "two-way mailer" sent to every Folsom resident household. The mailer included a message from City Manager Elaine Andersen, inviting input on city services as well as three strategic questions. Community members could provide input via hard-copy return postcard or via an online survey accessible from the City's website. The City's goals were simple: 1) engage Folsom residents as stakeholders in the City's future; 2) elevate the conversation about vital city services, including weighing in on City services priorities; and 3) obtain community input on Folsom's strengths, challenges, and vision for the city in the next five years.

In addition to the two-way mailer, City staff also engaged residents via the City's popular weekly e-newsletter, a series of e-blasts, online digital ads, and other City-sponsored public engagement activities.

The Response: The City's 2022 Community LISTENING Initiative generated a phenomenal response, with nearly 5,000 Folsom residents weighing in. Completed surveys included more than 12,000 individual comments about Folsom city services, as well as city strengths, challenges, and aspirations for the city in the words of Folsom residents.



SURVEY RESULTS

The City's two-way mailer inviting resident input was sent to every Folsom household in late May 2022, asking residents to rank city services in priority order and provide input on City strengths, challenges, and their 5-year vision for Folsom's future. Input was received by the City between May 31 and June 24, 2022. Residents shared their opinions via hard-copy return response postcard sent by US Mail or online survey accessible from the City's website. The response from Folsom residents was extraordinary—up to ten times higher than similar efforts have achieved recently in other California cities.*

OUTBOUND *(City to Residents, Inviting Input)*

28,926 City Mailers (with surveys) Sent

43,070 City E-Messages Sent to Residents

785,453 City-Sponsored Digital Ad Impressions

5,733 Digital Ad Clicks Confirmed

INBOUND *(Residents to City, Providing Input)*

3,919 Online Completed Surveys Received

939 Mail-in Completed Surveys Received

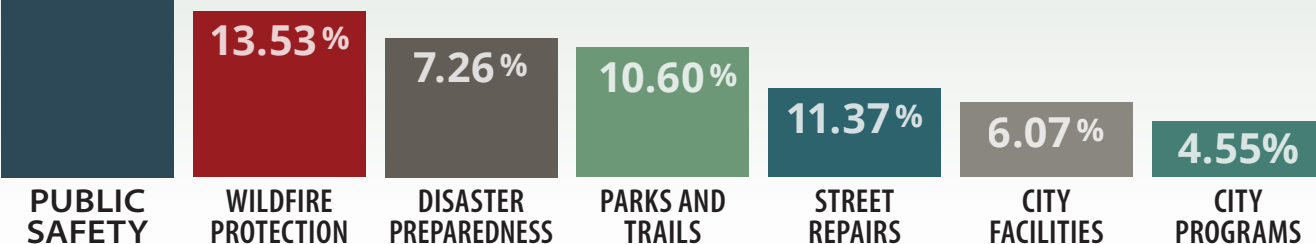
4,858 Total Completed Surveys Received

12,750 Total Individual Comments Received

46.60%

City Services Priority Ranking

This chart summarizes city services priorities submitted by Folsom residents who took the opportunity to weigh in and share their opinions as part of the City's 2022 Listening Initiative. These results provide an anecdotal complement to (not a replacement for) the statistically valid 2022 opinion research conducted by Godbe Research on behalf of the City.



CITY SURVEY

Take this survey online. Scan the QR code or go to: www.folsom.ca.us/FolsomListens.



Please rank these City of Folsom priorities in order of their importance to you (1 = most important, 7 = least important).

- ▶ **PUBLIC SAFETY:** Provide 911 emergency medical and firefighter response, crime prevention, and neighborhood police patrols.
- ▶ **WILDFIRE PROTECTION:** Implement wildfire prevention strategies and provide fire protection services.
- ▶ **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:** Work to mitigate, prevent, and prepare for potential disasters and emergency situations.
- ▶ **PARKS & TRAILS:** Maintain existing City parks and trails. Build new high quality parks where they have been planned.
- ▶ **STREET REPAIRS:** Repair potholes; improve City streets/roads, sidewalks, drainage, and street medians.
- ▶ **CITY FACILITIES:** Provide and maintain City of Folsom amenities, including the library, sports complex, aquatics center, and the Folsom City Zoo Sanctuary.
- ▶ **CITY PROGRAMS:** Provide a wide array of recreation programs serving youth and adults alike.

What are the City's strengths? _____

What are the City's biggest challenges? _____

What do you want most for Folsom in the next five years? _____

Add your comments here or on the online survey. Contact information is optional:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

City Strengths

"Small Town" and "Family-Friendly" Feel. Residents take pride in Folsom's contrast to other (larger, more impacted) communities like Sacramento, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area. Most common descriptors included: "safety," "cleanliness," and "Folsom's people" as major positives, including the friendly and kind nature of Folsom neighbors, which often doesn't exist in larger communities. Many residents also complimented the City's public safety organizations (police and fire departments), stating in various ways that they have a good deal of trust in these organizations to keep their families safe.

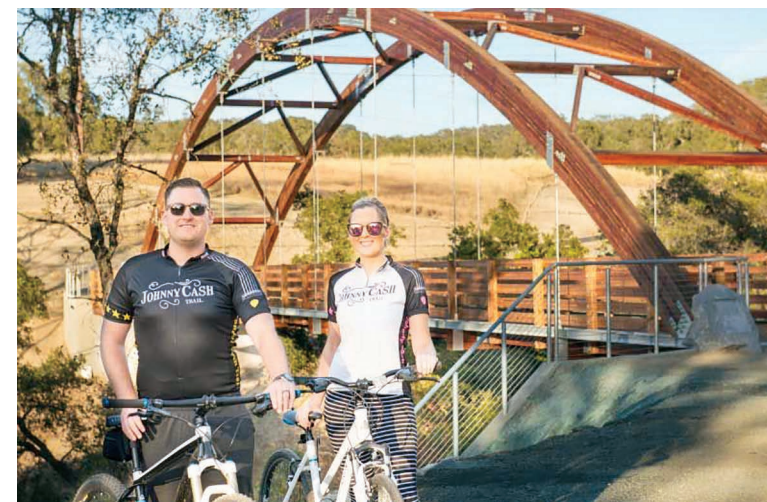
Access to City Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Nature. In large numbers, residents believe that the City's abundant access to parks, trails, and open space distinguishes Folsom from other communities. Specific mention of parks, trails, Folsom Lake, and various outdoor activities were among the strengths identified most often by respondents.

Other Strengths Mentioned Repeatedly. Strong public schools; effective management of the City and City facilities (the Library especially); a strong, diverse local economy; and quality local amenities and entertainment (including the Zoo Sanctuary), shopping, restaurant venues, etc.

From a Smaller Segment of Residents:

Political Balance. Some respondents liked that the City holds a sense of "political neutrality", expressing hope that Folsom would maintain balance and not go the way of other more extreme cities in California that define themselves on either end of the political spectrum.

Growth Management. Some residents appreciated the City's handling of recent growth issues, including the South of Highway 50 development, noting that the City has done what it can to maintain and protect the local quality of life as the city grows. (Note: this is not a sentiment shared by all Folsom residents.)



In their own words...

"I love Folsom! It is such a great city to raise a family and I feel so blessed to live in this great city."

"Natural landscape, neighborly and 'good Samaritan' residents, tidiness, programs it offers to its residents, small town feel. My kids can play out in the street with neighbor kids. I know and have friendships with my neighbors."

"Given the tremendous growth in Folsom, in many ways it still feels like a small town. As someone who grew up in Folsom in the '70s, I appreciate the efforts to maintain that 'hometown feel.'"

"We have lived here almost 30 years. Through its growth, the town still maintains a small-town feel."

"I hope that the City continues to be forward thinking. I hope that city plans are continually updated and the City continues to have conversations with the community. This survey alone is such an awesome step, I applaud city staff for sending out this survey. Thank you and I am so very happy to be part of this community."

"Our very capable and competent police force and fire department are the city's strength... Included also are the well-maintained parks and cleanliness/upkeep of the city, maintaining the "Distinctive By Nature" slogan."

"I love our FPD and their response to any questions, and emergency and non-emergency situations."

"Hats off to our police department, fire department, and city workers. A great job accomplished by all!"

"The City is very clean and welcoming. I have yet to speak to a city employee who wasn't helpful, courteous, respectful, patient, responsive, knowledgeable, and honest."

* Actual "listening results," interpretation and comparison to other cities reported by strategic communications consultant CliffordMoss, which provided project management guidance to the City of Folsom for this 2022 LISTENING Initiative.

City Challenges

Growth Management. While a small segment of residents identified the City's handling of growth and development as a strength, the majority of respondents identified "growth management" as a clear challenge, noting a range of growth-related issues that they view as problematic.

Two Camps Concerned About Growth. In this Folsom listening exercise, "anti-growth" sentiments fell into two categories. Some residents expressed that they are against further development in all its forms, stating that the development in recent years has been "too much, too fast." Others accept the idea that most communities grow over time, observe that the City has encountered various challenges managing Folsom's growth, and would like to see future growth managed more proactively and effectively so challenges are addressed early, before the future growth actually happens.

South of Highway 50 Project. Many respondents pointed to the South of Highway 50 project as growth that was not as well-planned and/or well-executed as it should have been. Residents called out a number of problems here, including: traffic (both congestion and enforcement), an increase in the City's unhoused population, and a loss of many aspects of what residents love most about Folsom like its abundant open space and small-town feel. Many residents specifically stated that they were upset that their water rates had increased due to the South of 50 development, adding that it gave them pause or made them lose trust in the City.

Public Safety, Homelessness, and Affordable Housing. Residents are concerned about public safety in light of recent development and increased homelessness. Significant differences of opinion reside in the community about how best to handle these issues, especially unhoused individuals, and whether providing services to those facing difficulties is the right answer for Folsom. Many residents do not feel safe utilizing trails and parks due to the presence of unhoused individuals. The construction of new affordable housing also emerged as a divisive issue; many connect affordable/low-income housing with higher rates of petty crime. Residents are split on solutions to these problems. Some simply want to remove the unhoused, eliminate low-income housing, and stop providing services like job programs and mental health services. Others believe the City can and should continue providing intervention programs and solutions, and look for ways to do more to help those in need.

Other Challenges Expressed. A smaller set of residents mentioned other specific challenges, including: fire safety and the threat of wildfires; the need to repair local roads; City administration/management issues; and some senior citizens mentioning affordability of senior apartments and services. Note, however, that these challenges paled in comparison to the vast majority of responses on "City Challenges," which landed on "managing growth" and its related issues.

In their own words...

“Growing and building too fast. We need to stop building and let the communities catch up. Too much traffic. Not enough undeveloped land left. We are bulldozing all of our beautiful open spaces and making a concrete jungle.”

“Homelessness and its impact on safety, quality of life, cleanliness, individual needs, and services. Also, South of 50 growth and its impact on the city and how to incorporate these new residents into the existing Folsom community.”

“The influx of too many new homes and apartments with no increase in water supply and medical services not up to handle the same. Even though they are high density they still add more people using water that we already don't have. We are already getting rid of our lawn so we can use less water and the city is allowing all the new water users thus canceling out that.”

“Less focus on building NEW construction and more focus on NEW/updating/expanding infrastructure.”

“Just 6-8 years ago it was a different place. Peaceful, clean, and quiet. Bigger is not better.”

“When the City opted to build south of highway 50, I believe that the residents were told that water rates would not increase. Well, that was not the case. More costs, as in recent utility bills, will cause many to leave the City or shop elsewhere.”

“From my perspective, our city is challenged with providing adequate housing for our “homeless” people and those who cannot afford the high rents.”

“Maintaining what Folsom has. Growth is important but just because we have space doesn't mean you have to fill it up with buildings and houses. How about improving what we have.”

Vision For the City

Proactive Management of City Challenges. A small minority expressed liking things the way they are in Folsom. However, many more residents want the City to address challenges proactively—especially growth management—to protect Folsom's small town, family-friendly feel, and abundant amenities. Many residents are generally okay with some continued development, but they want the City to make sure services keep up with any growth that occurs, and they want to make sure that the City stays focused on maintaining service levels as future growth occurs.

Residents expect transparency from the City—especially on the City budget and solutions identified to address growth.

Most importantly, residents want their quality of life protected. Maintaining public safety, reducing homelessness, water preservation, and traffic congestion and enforcement are the key issues residents mentioned most often that they would like to see improved within the next five years. Affordable housing currently stands out as a particularly polarizing issue. Some residents want to cease construction of any new affordable or dedicated low-income housing in Folsom; others want to see the City's affordable housing options continue and increase.

Conclusions

Folsom residents hold wide-ranging opinions about their city and how best to protect its high quality of life moving forward. Community members of all backgrounds and beliefs acknowledge many things that the City is doing well. However, they also see significant challenges and room for improvement over the next five years and beyond. The overwhelming sentiment is that City Hall has work to do to maintain valued services and programs as the community continues to evolve and grow. Above all, Folsom residents believe the City should be doing everything within its power to avoid over-development that infringes on the natural beauty and family-friendly environment that Folsom residents hold dear.

The findings reported in this Executive Summary provide important anecdotal evidence to inform future City planning efforts. In public service and the public arena, LISTENING MATTERS. This was the goal of the City's 2022 Initiative. The City invited input—and Folsom residents weighed in responding in extraordinary numbers. This community input can help improve on delivery of services and maintaining the high quality of life that makes Folsom a desirable place to live, work, and raise a family. An Appendix to this document is available for review, including all comments from the nearly 5,000 survey responses in raw, unedited form, providing extra evidence for the conclusions presented in this document. The City thanks all who participated in this listening exercise and looks forward to using the resulting input to inform strategic planning and decisions that will maintain and protect Folsom's uniqueness and high quality of life for years to come.



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