

## *2018 Forest Hills Residential Survey*

### **I. Overview**

In the Spring of 2018 the Public Policy Institute (PPI) at Western Carolina University (WCU) facilitated a survey concerning community issues for the Village of Forest Hills, NC. In total, 171 households were contacted either through email addresses provided by Forest Hills or by mailing addresses provided by the Jackson County Tax Office. We contacted those with listed email addresses first and invited them to take an on-line survey. This provided 31 responses which were recorded electronically. We then mailed out paper copies to residents for which we did not have email addresses or that did not respond to the email invitation. Forty-two respondents returned the completed paper survey. The on-line survey responses and paper versions, which had identical questions, were combined into one dataset, providing a total of 73 usable responses, a response rate of 43%.

Of the respondents, 75% were fulltime residents of Forest Hills, 23% were property owners but did not themselves reside in the Village, and 1% (one respondent) indicated he/she was a seasonal resident. The length of residency in the Village ranged from less than one year to 53 years, while the average time a respondent had lived in Forest Hills was 25 years. About one-fifth (19%) had lived in the Village for 10 years or less. The majority of respondents (53%) had two people living in their residence, about another third (31%) lived alone and 10% reported having children under 18 living in the home.

Questions focused largely on public services. Residents were asked what new services they would like to see available in Forest Hills, what changes they would like to see to existing services, and other concerns they may have about the village (see the Appendix for the full survey instrument). This report is provided to the elected village council and may be distributed to the public as needed.

This project and other Public Policy Endeavors are made possible through the support of Western Carolina University, the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs, the WCU Print Shop, contributions from private donors, and the hard work of our students, including graduate assistants from the Master in Public Affairs program.

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## II. Survey Results

### A. Services

The survey asked several questions about services that residents would like to see in Forest Hills and potential improvements to services currently offered. We asked respondents to select which services they would like to see from a list of seven options which were suggested from the town council. Respondents could select as many or as few choices as they wanted and they were also free to include other services not listed in an open-ended response. Table 1 displays the results of those services requested by respondents. Indicated in Table 1 are both the number of respondents that marked each choice as well as the percentage of respondents for each service in parentheses from all the respondents that answered this question. Overall, better access to high-speed internet service was the most often included choice from respondents, followed by recreational spaces (such as walking trails and picnic areas), and then water and sewer service. Fourteen respondents selected “Other” and 11 of these provided an open-ended response. These open-ended responses varied greatly with no clear trends.

**Table 1: Additional Services**

Service	Number (Percentage)
Cable	14 (20%)
Electric	5 (7%)
Emergency Services	14 (20%)
High-speed Internet	29 (41%)
Recreational Spaces	23 (32%)
Sidewalks	19 (27%)
Water/Sewer	22 (31%)
Other	10 (14%)

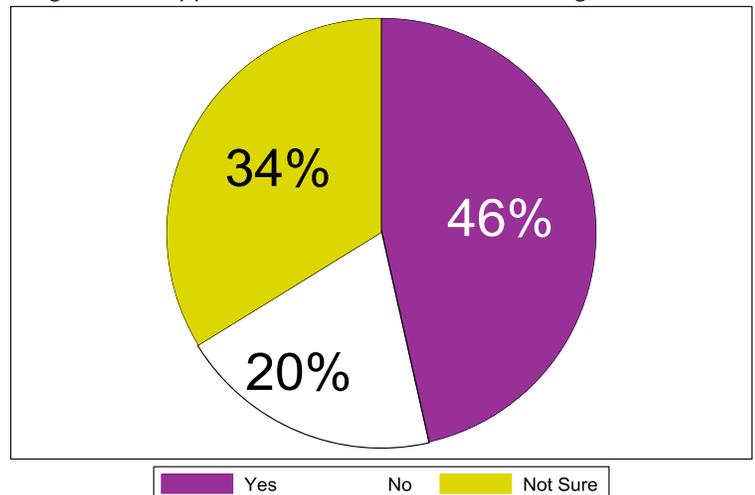


We also asked residents to select which one service they would most like to determine which service they felt was most important. Here, they could only select one answer choice from a list. When asked which one service they wanted, the top three choices most often given included recreational spaces (28%), high-speed internet (25%), and then water/sewer (22%).

In another question, we asked respondents which Forest Hills services (if any) they would like to see changed. This was an open-ended question where residents were free to include anything they wanted. In total, 30 respondents included an answer to this question. While these did vary, we categorized them into some broad categories. Five respondents’ comments concerned law enforcement (such as speeding or noise ordinances). Another five indicated that they did not want the Village to do anything else and/or wanted to keep the Village small. Other responses to this question included the need for better clearing of the roads (three respondents), more pedestrian areas (three respondents), and another three respondents were not aware of what services were provided by the town.

Lastly, we asked residents if they would support additional public funding for additional services. Here, 33 respondents (47%) indicated that they would support more public funding, 14 respondents (20%) said they would not, and 24 respondents (34%) said that they were not sure, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Support for Additional Public Funding for Services**



## B. Concerns and Other Comments

Next we asked residents about their concerns regarding Forest Hills. We presented a checklist of seven issues, again based in part on suggestions from the elected council members. Respondents could check as many of these issues as they wanted and an open-ended response was available for a respondent to add a concern that was not on our list. Table 2 displays the overall results for this questions. As shown in Table 2, the most often concern raised by respondents was speeding as 25 of the 61 respondents that answered this question indicated that speeding was a problem. Other frequent responses included noise (20 respondents (33%)), litter (19 respondents (31%)), loose dogs (15 respondents (25%)), and road conditions (15 respondents (25%)). Of those that said they had a concern that was not on our list, ten provided more detail in an open-ended response. These ten responses varied greatly without a clear trend, although the most common issues out of these ten answers was that three did mention concerns over potential development in and near Forest Hills.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number (Percentage)</b>
Loose Dogs	15 (25%)
Noise	20 (33%)
Litter	19 (31%)
Road Conditions	15 (25%)
Speeding	25 (41%)
Suspicious Individuals	9 (15%)
Other Ordinance Violations	5 (8%)
Other Concerns	10 (16%)

**Table 3: Other Comments**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number (Percentage)</b>
Development Concerns	5 (18%)
Road Improvement	3 (11%)
Water/Sewer	2 (7%)
Housing Upkeep	3 (11%)
More Residential Participation	6 (21%)
Other	9 (32%)

For those respondents that indicated noise was a concern, we gave them the opportunity to provide more detail in an open-ended response about noise.

Twenty respondents provided more information on noise, with most (13 or 68%) indicated that “partying” or other noise from college students was the issue, four (21%) stated that vehicles were the cause of the noise, and two (11%) said that barking dogs were the source of their noise concerns.

We asked a last open-ended question to allow respondents to share any other comments, information or suggestions that they may have and 28 respondents offered some additional comment. Again, the responses varied greatly, but we were able to put these comments into five general issue areas, with the rest placed in the “other” category. The results are displayed in Table 3. Most interesting may be the fact that six of the 28 respondents that provided a reply to this question indicated that they would like to see more means of participation for residents. These responses included such things as more open meetings, resident newsletters, a suggestion for an electronic sign at the entrance, and a dedicated place for social gatherings and meetings.

## III. Conclusions

In sum, the PPI was pleased with the response rate and the range of information provided by property owners in Forest Hills. Respondents’ concerns were varied, but there appears to be strong interest in better high-speed internet, recreational spaces, and water/sewer options. Speeding, noise, and litter appear to be the most common concerns of residents, with some voicing concern over development and growth. While we hope these survey results are helpful for long-term planning, we encourage town leaders to continue to seek public input as the town moves forward in meeting the need of its residents.

## APPENDIX: Question Wording

### VILLAGE OF FOREST HILLS COMMUNITY SURVEY (please clearly mark your responses)



1. What new services would you like to see available in the Village of Forest Hills? (Check all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cable                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational spaces (walking trails, picnic area, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency services (police, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water, including sewer                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High-speed internet               |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                       |  |

2. Of the possible services listed above, which **ONE** would you most like to see implemented? (check only one)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cable                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational spaces (walking trails, picnic area, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency services (police, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water, including sewer                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High-speed internet               |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                       |  |

3. Would you support additional public funding to add any of the above services?

- Yes       No       Not Sure

4. Are any of the following a concern of yours in Forest Hills?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loose dogs             | <input type="checkbox"/> Speeding                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noise (Specify: _____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Suspicious individuals     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Litter                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ordinance violations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Road conditions        | <input type="checkbox"/> Any other concerns _____   |

5. If any, what Village of Forest Hills services would you like to see changed? (Use the back if needed)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Please share any other comments, information, or suggestions you may have concerning the Village of Forest Hills (use the back of this page if needed):

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Demographic Information:

Do you live in Forest Hills (check one)?  Resident  Property owner but reside elsewhere

How long have you lived/owned property in Forest Hills? \_\_\_\_\_

If a resident, how many people reside in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

If a resident, how many children under 18 live in the home? \_\_\_\_\_