Public Statement | 3rd Annual Citizen Survey

After reviewing information regarding a Council Member providing an earlier draft version of the survey to a citizen, I decided to share a public statement regarding the 3rd Annual Citizen Survey. The purpose of my statement is to bring clarity and to debunk those whose favorite past time is speculating and sharing misinformation about myself and other City Council Members.

As a Council Member I represent everybody. I do not represent a clique, nor do I have a speechwriter. I feel that one of the most important jobs of a Council Member is to aggregate information from multiple sources of citizen input and use the aggregate data when preparing to deliberate the various agenda items addressed by the Council. For me these sources include responses from eblasts, one on one meetings with citizens, social media information, town halls and most importantly city surveys. The varied sources provide me greater input from a broader demographic. Rather than relying solely on input from townhall meetings, or public hearings which are so notorious for presenting a vocal minority position that the TML Handbook for Council Members and Mayors explicitly cautions council members from being swayed from such events.

If we took a head count on how many people actually attend a council meeting it is not a packed house. We may have 1 or 2 consistently. Sometimes we may have 10 and on certain meetings we may have a topic that we will have 40 to 50 people in attendance. But that is very rare. Our last town hall meeting we had approximately 40 people. 14 spoke. And only 9 of those who spoke were citizens of McLendon-Chisholm.

On September 5, 2018 a Council Member stated his biggest take away from the Town Hall meeting is that citizens expect and deserve a plan. He believes they have all the information they need to make a decision and it points towards a merger. The truth is we received more response from the 2nd Annual Citizen Survey that supports the City’s direction to start a city owned fire department. The Town Hall did not showcase the actual input from citizens as well as sharing a presentation that was not verified or had an approved budget. See page 61 on the 2nd Citizen Survey that shows 67.17% SUPPORT out of 471 responses from 1,968 invitations were asked, “Would you support the City forming a Fire/Rescue/EMS department, led by an experienced and qualified full-time Chief whose focus will be to build the largest, best, equipped, most highly trained all-volunteer department in Rockwall County? This department will welcome all career emergency services professionals, who reside in McLendon-Chisholm and surrounding areas and gratefully utilize their skills to support our volunteers in situations such as major motor vehicle accidents or structure fires?

The survey would also serve as a guide before taking steps to plan and/or revise plans for the city. On September 11, 2018 the City Council voted in favor of issuing the 2018-2019 Citizen
Survey. At that time a request was made to all Council Members and Mayor Short to contribute questions they felt needed to be included on the survey.

This request for the Mayor and Council to participate in compiling questions for the survey was repeated at numerous Council meetings following the September 11, 2018 meeting.

Council Members Larkin and Bloom along with Mayor Short have on numerous occasions stated their opposition to the survey for various reasons among which were; questions are repetitive, not actionable by the Council, and too expensive. However, rather than solving their perceived problems with the survey, they have chosen not to provide “fresh” questions to reduce the level of repetitiveness or questions they feel would obtain actionable citizen input, thereby making the survey, in their eyes, cost effective.

Mayor Short did not provide questions. Council Member Bloom did not respond until his March 11, 2019, email where he expressed his disapproval of the survey but did not offer questions or solutions. Council Member Larkin sent an email on January 21, 2019 stating his objections to the survey questions but offered none of his own. He repeated his objections in his email dated March 11, 2019, while yet again offering no questions of his own.

Last night Council Member Larkin stated that “he and Council Member Bloom were the only ones to respond to Lisa’s request for feedback on the survey questions.” I assume this was to distract from their lack of involvement since September 11, 2018.

The survey conducted by the city is similar to city elections and ballot initiatives, since respondents have complete control over their participation. Unlike a random sample poll, where a small sample is selected at random where everyone within the designated group has a chance of being selected, self selecting surveys like this one invites participation from the entire citizenship.

**Anonymity Increases Reliability**

Bottom line, people are often afraid to tell researchers or in our case the City Council what they really think. This is what is called "social desirability bias" — the idea that respondents give polling answers that for whatever reason they think will reflect well upon them. Instead, more people prefer the safe confines of an election booth to the risk of expressing their true feelings openly.

Respondents in previous surveys articulated the same kinds of sentiment where they talk of a familiar relationship with the very ones whose actions they rail against in the comment section of an anonymous survey. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the only way to discover the real feelings and opinions of people inside this community is through a mechanism that helps to ensure and protect a respondent’s anonymity.

**Focus on Reliability**
For populations of less than 100,000, like McLendon-Chisholm, self-selecting surveys are the ideal way to gather public opinion. Though they take significantly more time to conduct, the results are typically more reliable than a random sample poll because respondents are demonstrating, by their participation, higher levels of interest in what is going on in the city than those who opt out.

A self-selecting survey, like this one, is a far more reliable way to sample the views of voters, since those who respond are likely to be the same ones to show up at the polls.

Recently, it has come to my attention that a former mayor created a sample survey and provided the results in a letter to Planning & Zoning. The results were listed but only 5 replied to this survey. And this same person gave the City Council criticism he is against our Citizen Survey. Then on January 8, 2019 he gave some ideas of what he would like to see in this next Citizen Survey. Which it was noted and applied in this current Citizen Survey. Then he continues to be against the Citizen Survey.

Well, as much as I can tear apart every point that was made in the emails. It is clear to me based on the evidence and discussion that Council Member Herman Larkin is not interested in representing the entire citizenry nor does he think that inviting the citizenry to participate in being informed about their local government. His actions alone by facilitating meetings and skirting the process of the City Council appointing citizens to committees is the same type of influences that continues to happen that got this City in trouble of the City Hall bond debt.

The intent of the Citizen Survey was to go out and solicit about upcoming events as well as invite citizens to get involved in their community.

To answer questions regarding the cost of the survey. I’m going to give you two figures. The City Administrator is going to make some purchases that I am not going to participate in.

The total amount of people who will be invited are 2603 Registered Voters and Property Owners
Online Survey Application Costs: $899.00 (Annual fee)
Postcard Printing: $166.03
Postcard Stamps ($0.35): $911.05

TOTAL EXPENSE: $1,976.08

Or

2603 Registered Voters and Property Owners
Online Survey Application Costs: $899.00 (Annual fee)
Postcard Printing: $166.03
First Class Letter Stamps ($0.55): $1,431.50
City Council vs City Administrator To Create The Survey

Having a member from the city council spearhead the creation of a citizen survey costs the City budget is $0. However, if the City Administrator being involved in the creation of a citizen survey takes her time away from her current assignments and responsibilities as City Administrator. So in discussion of the process this was addressed to prevent a walking quorum as well as an understanding of the role that will later be administered by the City Administrator by her being involved in having access to the application to upload the URIDs, prepare the postcard invitations with URID which is the key that the respondent would use to take the online survey. In addition to this I will mention that the lists were provided by the City Administrator which she obtained from the Rockwall County Elections office and Rockwall County Appraisal District.

Last year there was some issues where we had multiple invitations that were sent for the same person or married persons, because the lists were not scrubbed. So to assist in combining these two lists I spent many hours removing multiple names such as Mr. and Mrs. Joe Brown. So it will be just Mr. Joe Brown and Mrs. Jenny Brown. They should each receive their own invitation with their own URID #. That is what should happen when it is properly labeled through a mail merge and labeling the postcards.

**The Costs for having a third party contractor.**

There was an official presentation that was held on November 8, 2016 by a Fort Worth consultant (redacted) which would have produced a survey but the costs were over $10,000 and that didn’t include the invitation list that we have. There were other methodologies presented and it would not be as comprehensive as the surveys that we have. Months ago the City Administrator also made a similar suggestion, but again this was suggested after the fact of the Council agreeing to do a Citizen Survey on September 11, 2018 and for the purpose of the City Council to contribute their information to the Citizen Survey.

**Questions with Actions**

As I briefly mentioned earlier about the fire department question. It was put on there because in October 2017 I presented a presentation that included a legal question to be answered. Such as can the fire department topic be placed on the general election 2018 ballot. Our city attorney gave the legal answer and said no. However, he confirmed my request that I listed in the presentation can we pose a question in the Citizen Survey. And he said yes. So we did. The survey was created between November 2017 – January 2018. It was released in January 15, 2018. We received the results just after February 15. The former mayor gave us a sneak peak through the State of the Cities address which happened at the end of February 2018. The City Council proceeded to establish a city owned Fire Department.
There is a number of questions regarding the budget that was also asked. Such as since we do have unspent amount of monies we wanted to know what do the citizentry want us to do with the money? The City Council took action on it and we fulfilled that answer in 2018.

51% from the first City Survey respondents didn’t want a Tax Rate increase to support the MCVFD budget.

44% only supported the City’s Budget to increase the Fire Department Budget.

In our second survey:
65.89% we had support for allocating some of the monies budget for public safety to secure additional emergency medical services through Rockwall County EMS.
73.35% supported a feasibility study to determine the future needs for Rescue/EMS services and facilities as the City grows.
39.23% supported to put funds towards a city owned Rescue/EMS department and paying down the city hall debt.
25% Put the funds towards a city owned Rescue/EMS department.
21.11% Put money toward paying down the debt on the City Hall.
27% Waste Connections received 5 stars for their value.
31% Waste Connections received 4 stars for the value. That’s 58%.
56% rated 4 to 5 stars for their customer service.
42% rated 5 stars for their day of pickup.
59% rated their time 4 to 5 stars of their pickup.
50% rated their bulky items pickup with 4 to 5 stars.
60% rated 4 to 5 stars for Recycling.

Survey Results and Web Traffic
801 users have visited the citizen survey link on the website.
610 users have visited the 2017 – 2018 citizen survey link on the website.

Finally, there are a significant amount of new questions in this survey. From informing the citizentry what your local government has done in 2018 as an option to participate to share that you are or not aware. This is the appropriate place to share that information. We should be the first ones to say here is what we have done. It’s a cost-efficient method, because if we were to include that on a printed piece such as a newsletter that would be several pages of content. IF we were to do another newsletter we can easily make reference to the survey results or go to the link to the website.

There are questions that are different than last year and forward thinking about our economics. I have been criticized and that is quite alright. Everyone has a right to their opinion. Even though I have opposition on this Council I’m still going to try to facilitate a transparent government. And even if this Council doesn’t want the public to know what has transpired in 2018. I will find a way to have that information published. We had 23.83% that responded out of 1,968 last year. I’m hoping to continue to be above average in the response participation. Your opinion does matter. I encourage every person that receives an invitation to take the citizen survey.