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AGENDA COVER MEMORANDUM

AGENDA DATE: June 7 or 8, 2011

PRESENTED TO: Board of County Commissioners

PRESENTED BY: Jennifer Inman, Sr. Management Analyst

AGENDA TITLE: **IN THE MATTER OF REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE 2011
LANE COUNTY RESIDENT SURVEY**

I. MOTION

Report and discussion only.

II. AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

The final reports and results are in for Lane County's 2011 Resident Survey. The standardized survey covers several focus areas. Overall, the 2011 survey results are similar or slightly improved from 2009.

III. BACKGROUND

a. Board Goals

In August of 2008, the Board adopted Goals which included promoting outstanding constituent services, building public trust through communication and engagement, and developing a strategic plan and future goals for the County. One of the action items toward these goals was implementation of the National Citizen Survey to establish baseline data, following up with the same survey every two years to identify trends and measure change.

b. Background – the National Citizen Survey (NCS)

The *National Citizen Survey*, conducted by the National Research Center and developed in partnership with the International City/County Management Association, has been administered in hundreds of local governments around the country. The survey instrument was developed with the help of a blue-ribbon panel of national experts and tested in several pilot cities.

In 2008, the County selected the NCS format as it offered several advantages:

- Specialization in local government management and research
- Survey instrument that has been rigorously tested and extensively used
- High quality and highly efficient survey administration and analysis including data weighting, benchmark comparisons, and key driver analysis
- Opportunity to compare results to 500+ other local jurisdictions
- Ease of use, ability to customize for Lane County, and low impact on staff time
- Comparatively low cost for service provided

Unlike polling regarding specific policies or prioritization of services, the Resident Survey covers a wide range of services across many funds. Taken together, the focus areas speak to resident opinions about life in Lane County as well local government services. Lane County government may or may not have a direct influence on the characteristics and services evaluated in the survey. The 2009 Survey Steering Committee felt that when the County was not the primary service provider, it was often a party to regional planning and decision making that does have a direct impact on County residents and an impact on how they perceive County government.

Focus Areas:

- Community Quality
- Community Design
- Public Safety
- Environmental Sustainability
- Recreation and Wellness
- Community Inclusiveness
- Civic Engagement
- Public Trust

The NCS is a mail survey sent to 3000 randomly selected households. Results are statistically weighted to reflect the proper demographic composition of the entire community. The survey is customized for Lane County to the extent possible while still remaining standardized and comparable to other communities. Lane County opts for a large sample size to assure a sizeable response rate from each of the commissioner districts. In addition to the final report, we receive geographic (by district) and demographic subgroup reports.

c. History – 2009 Baseline

Lane County first conducted this survey in 2009, establishing baseline data to which we can now compare. The following executive summary of result does not include results for all focus areas. The complete 2009 Resident Survey reports are available on the [Lane County website](#).

2009 Community Quality

- Most residents believe Lane County has a good quality of life, is a good place to live, and they plan on staying in Lane County for the next five years

2009 Community Characteristics

- Recreational opportunities, the overall natural environment, and opportunities to volunteer were rated very highly
- Employment opportunities, availability of affordable quality child care and affordable quality house received the least positive ratings
- Compared to the benchmark comparison (norms), of the 26 characteristics measured, 12 were above norms, two were similar, and 12 were below

2009 Civic Engagement

- High level of civic engagement including participating in local government meetings, voting, volunteerism, and helping friends and neighbors
- Public information services, however, while a key driver or influencer of resident opinions, fell behind norms

2009 Public Trust

- Less than half rated the overall direction being taken by Lane County as “good” or “excellent”, much lower than norms
- Lane County employees got high marks with most respondents rating their overall impression of employees as “good” or “excellent”

2009 Service Quality

- The highest service quality scores were for recycling, bus or transit services, storm drainage, recreation programs, and services to low-income people
- Service quality ratings for other services were below norms

d. Analysis

Comparing Survey Results

Some services tend to be thought better of by residents in many communities across the country. For example, fire services tend to be rated higher than road repair. Rather than compare between services, the better comparisons are of a service over time or between communities (benchmark, geographic, or demographic).

Key Driver Analysis (KDA)

Popular in private sector consumer research, key drivers are identified by statistical analyses of predictors of behavior. By using KDA in local government surveys, we can identify less obvious, but more influential services that are most related to residents’ ratings of overall quality of services. By showcasing or targeting improvements to key drivers, even when they are not core/priority services, the County can focus on services with the greatest likelihood of influencing residents’ opinions about overall service quality.

Asking Budget Questions

Over the last six years, the County has made several attempts at gathering community input on General Fund service prioritization, resource allocation, and service reductions. Board and budget committee members, citizens, and the media have all looked to surveys or polls of residents to guide budget decisions, particularly when much needed or loved services may be cut.

The County’s bi-annual Resident Survey, however, does not attempt to seek guidance from residents on what to cut. While the overall results are intended to be used to guide County direction and goal setting, which have budget and resource implications, the survey is not designed to identify priorities for saving or cutting specific services.

Dr. Thomas Miller, founder of the National Research Center, offers some perspective on asking budget questions in surveys. It holds true to Lane County’s experience attempting to integrate service priorities with state and federal mandates and the impact of leveraging. The following is excerpted from his book, *Citizen Surveys for Local Government: A Comprehensive Guide to Making them Matter*.

“Attempts to capture the public’s budget priorities through surveys rarely succeed ... Reasoned decisions about dollar allocations are too hard to make with the meager background information provided in most citizen surveys.

Budget priorities are clearer when respondents are forced to trade funding of one service for funding of others. Unfortunately, the methods for identifying trade-offs are rather complicated and are not easy to explain in a survey. The best that budget questions can do is to give a broad sense of budget priority, not guidance for specific dollar allocations.

... public managers can compare service evaluations (both the absolute rating and comparison to a benchmark) with residents’ assessments of the importance of each service to the quality of life in the community using key driver analysis. No dollar questions are posed, per se, but services can be targeted for funding increase when they are considered to be very important but are found to be flagging in quality.”

2011 Resident Survey Executive Summary

In January and February, 3000 households received an invitation from the Board of Commissioners to participate in the County’s 2011 Resident Survey. 906 completed surveys were obtained for a 32% response rate. This sample size resulted in a margin of error +/- 3%. The complete final report, as well as geographic and demographic subgroup reports, are available on the Lane County website.

Overall results are similar or slightly better than in 2009 and improved in comparison to the national benchmarks. No focus areas had decreasing ratings.

Community Quality

- Most residents believe Lane County has a good quality of life, is a good place to live, and they plan on staying in Lane County for the next five years

Community Characteristics

- Recreational opportunities, the overall natural environment, and opportunities to volunteer were rated most favorably
- Employment opportunities, availability of affordable quality child care and affordable quality house received the least positive ratings
- The three most favorable and least positive community characteristics are the same in 2011 as they were in 2009
- 66% said the availability of affordable quality food was “good” or “excellent”, above benchmark – a new question in 2011
- There was no change compared to benchmarks

Civic Engagement

- High level of civic engagement including participating in local government meetings, voting, and helping friends and neighbors
- Volunteerism remains much higher than the national benchmark
- Public information services, remains a key driver, and while improved from 2009, remains below benchmark

Public Trust

- As in 2009, less than half rated the overall direction being taken by Lane County as “good” or “excellent”, lower than the national benchmark
- Lane County employees got high marks again with most respondents rating their overall impression of employees as “good” or “excellent”

Service Quality

- In 2009, only 20% of services evaluated were rated above or similar to benchmarks. In 2011, 42% of services evaluated were rated above or similar to benchmarks.
- The highest service quality scores were bus or transit services, recycling, storm drainage, preservation of open space, availability of historic sites, and services to low-income people
- Mental health services, county parks, and crime reporting all improved from below benchmark in 2009, to similar to benchmark in 2011

IV. Next Steps

The survey results can be used in several ways to inform County leadership over the next two years. A natural next step for leadership is to identify focus areas, goals, and to establish targets for measure against. The Board is currently in preparation for strategic planning discussions. The results of this survey can inform that process. Results of the 2013 survey can be used to measure change in goal areas.

The attached chart illustrates three ways of assessing our performance results. It's provided as a quick view tool to take forward into future planning sessions.

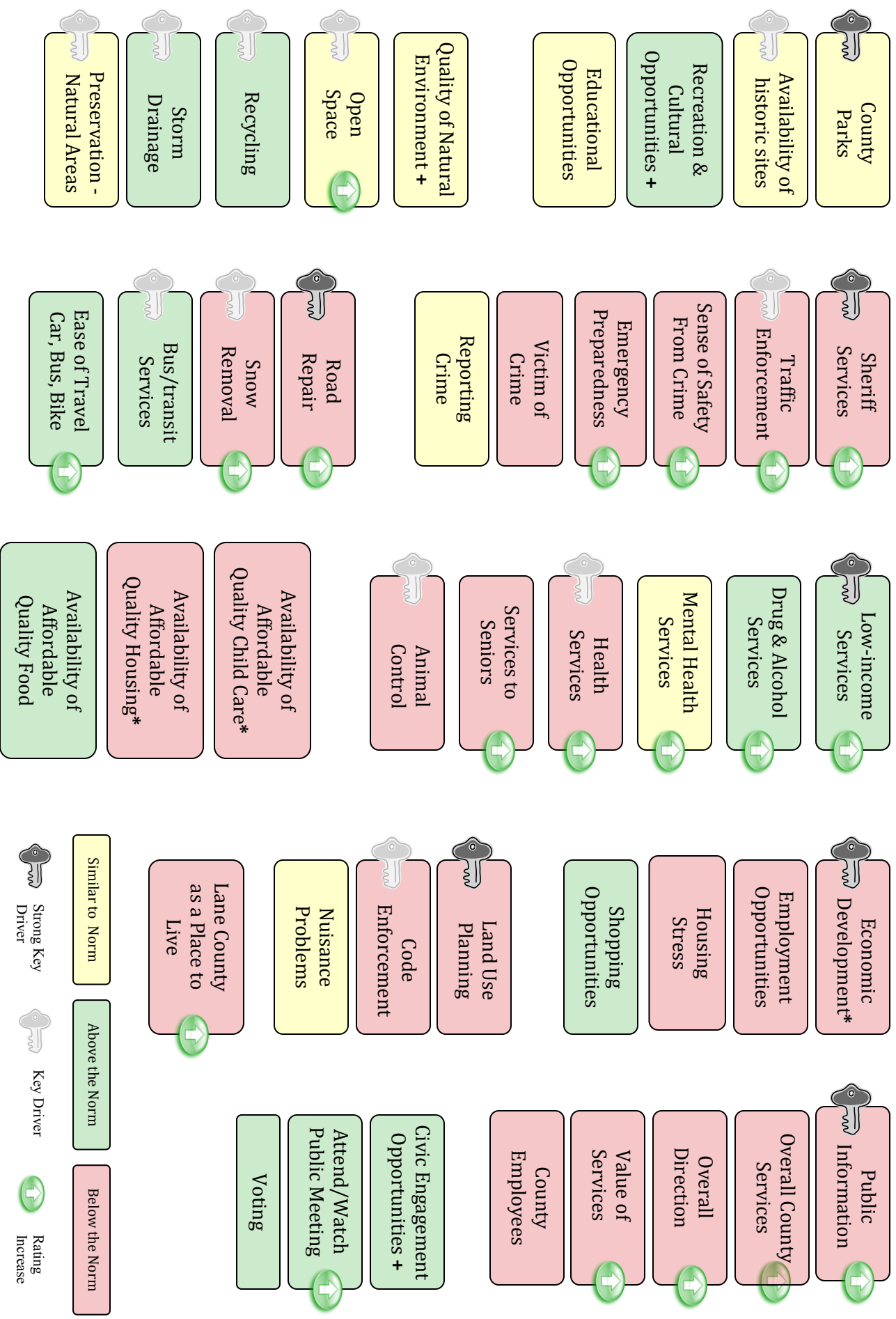
- a) Comparison of Lane County's results against those of other communities via the national benchmarks
- b) Identification of key drivers
- c) Trends for Lane County comparing 2011 to 2009 results

V. Attachments

Overview Chart of 2011 Survey Results

All complete reports for 2011 and 2009 can be found on the [Lane County website](#).

Overall Results - Lane County Resident Survey 2011



* Least Favorable Rating + Most Favorable Rating

