

## Topline Analysis of 2011 Thetford Town Poll

The Town Meeting held in 2011 was the first time we put together a poll to suss out some opinions on specific issues. Hopefully, this will also serve to benchmark opinions for comparison in future years. 161 people answered the poll, about half on paper (primarily at Town Meeting) and half online. Interestingly, there wasn't a great deal of difference in opinions between those two polling methods.

Here are some general findings from looking at the data:

- 1) People are surprisingly happy with government in Thetford, with 94 percent indicating that they think things are run openly and fairly. You see this in questions such as the perceived performance of the selectboard and other officials, as well as people's sense of how things are going generally in town. Other general statements also showed similar positive response (96 percent think it's a great place to raise kids), but one stood out as an anemic response: only 59 percent said it was a good place to run a business.
- 2) When comparing how things are going in a general sense, 42 percent of Thetford residents say that things are going well or somewhat well in the U.S. 77 percent think this about Vermont. 86 percent said this was true here in town.
- 3) Of the various town departments and other related bodies, people generally think that things are done efficiently and well, but there are some specific departments that were much more apt to attract more scrutiny. In particular, the Recreation Department, Secondary Schools and the State Police and local force were more likely to be singled out for areas that might warrant some additional savings or functional improvement. 72 percent of people said that the town could find savings in the Rec Department. 62 percent said the same about secondary education (compared with 46 percent saying the same about elementary education). 61 percent thought savings could be found in the local PD.
- 4) Perhaps the most interesting result of the survey was brought out with the last question, which asked residents how they thought of Thetford: a group of villages; a group of people; or a bedroom community within the Upper Valley. The question was designed to see at what level of scale people thought of themselves as local residents: in the region, the town or among a group of specific people. The biggest number thought of themselves as residing among a group of "quirky people" here in town, driving down their sense of identity and place to the people themselves. More people who filled out surveys at Town Meeting thought they were a resident of a village among a federation of villages. Interestingly, the only group that said they identified Thetford as a "bedroom community" was precisely the group (retired and people who have always lived here) who do NOT work in neighboring towns. This may suggest that the identity of Thetford as a bedroom community is more of a negative statement made primarily by long-time locals. It certainly doesn't seem shared by people who do actually work out of town.

- 5) A good majority of people thought the selectboard was conducting the proper types of discretionary work, given the list of things they've done in the past couple of years. A list of key efforts was used to see if the town generally agreed with the prioritization of management time. Only 6 percent said these were the wrong types of items, and 17 percent suggested some additional priorities or indicated that one or more were less appropriate. The suggestions indicating what other priorities might be pursued tended to include items over which the selectboard doesn't have control (such as school-related ones), although there were some good town ideas in there as well.
- 6) For those who answered that Thetford is not the right town for them (17 out of the 161), they were surprisingly similar in demographics to those that said Thetford was the right place. Some differences, however:
  - They were generally more negative in most assessments.
  - They were slightly more apt to be people who said they lived in town longer.
  - They were much more likely to term Thetford a "bedroom community."
  - They were more apt to be negative about how things were going in the nation, but they held that things in the state were going better than things in town.
- 7) Women were strikingly similar to men in most answers. A few differences:
  - Less likely to think Thetford is environmentally protected
  - Less likely to think that people of different backgrounds are comfortable with one another here
  - More apt to want to find savings in recreation and less likely to want to find savings in schools and libraries
  - More likely to find the selectboard "very well run" than men, and more likely to find it "very poorly run" than men as well.
  - More likely to be most positive for local Fire, FAST and Police, but more negative on the State Police
- 8) People who lived in Thetford always or more than 25 years had some differences:
  - Less apt to find Thetford's environment protected
  - Less apt to think people of different backgrounds got on well
  - Much less optimistic about the nation's prospects, but on par with the other groups for the state and town
  - More apt to say we could find savings at schools
  - Much more likely to suggest some additional selectboard priorities

The Excel spreadsheet with all of the data, along with this quick analysis and a graphic version in PDF is available on the town website at <http://www.ThetfordVermont.us>. If you happen to peruse that data and find other interesting trends, we'd love to hear it at [selectboard@ThetfordVermont.us](mailto:selectboard@ThetfordVermont.us). Also do feel free to throw questions on this survey our way.