

Citizen Study for  
The Town of Oakville

Prepared for  
The Town of Oakville

Prepared by  
Environics Research Group

June 2001

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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

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The survey was conducted by telephone among a representative sample of 801 residents of the Town of Oakville between May 23 and June 2, 2001. The questionnaire was designed in consultation with the Town of Oakville.

The survey was designed to provide baseline data in the following areas:

- Residents' attitudes and opinions toward quality of life issues, and toward municipal issues such as property taxes and user fees
- Current levels of satisfaction with municipal services
- Current preferences regarding spending priorities
- Residents' perceptions and expectations vis-à-vis specific municipal planning priorities

The margin of error for a sample of 801 is 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that margins of error for smaller subsamples are larger.

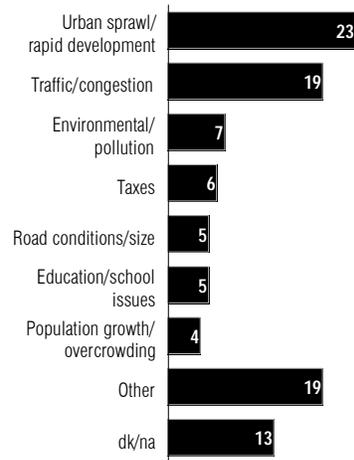
# THE LEADING ISSUES

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When residents of Oakville are asked to name, top-of-mind, the single most important issue facing their community today, the largest proportions by far name urban sprawl/rapid development and the often-related issue of traffic congestion; there is also concern over road conditions and population growth/overcrowding.

Smaller – but noteworthy – proportions mention environmental pollution, taxes and education issues. Two percent or fewer (each) mention a number of other issues.

## Most Important Issue Facing Oakville June 2001



### Q.1

*In your opinion, what is the single most important issue facing Oakville today?*

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# ASSESSMENT OF OAKVILLE AS A PLACE TO LIVE

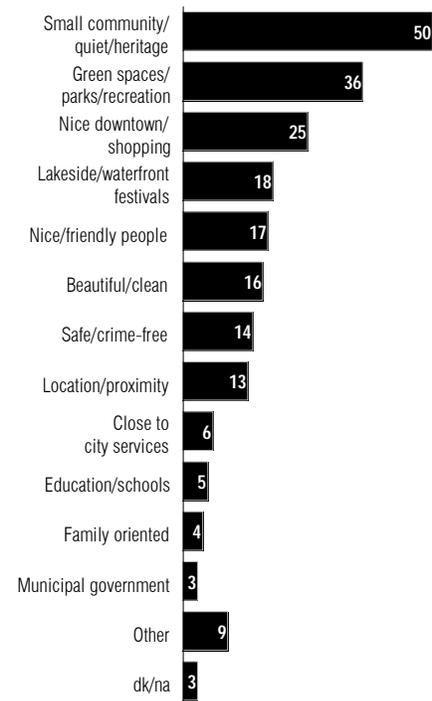
## Likes and Dislikes

The survey results indicate that residents place a high value on having a sense of small-town community and heritage and that they are concerned about the impact that growth is having – and will have – on their ability to enjoy the peace and quiet of life in Oakville.

When residents are asked to name the two or three things they like most about the community of Oakville, the largest proportion mention a sense of being in a small, peaceful, historic community. Significant proportions also mention the presence of parks and green spaces, the pleasant downtown, the lakefront and the events that take place there, the friendliness of the people, the town’s beauty and cleanliness, the sense of being safe from crime, and the location of the Town.

### Like Most About Oakville

June 2001



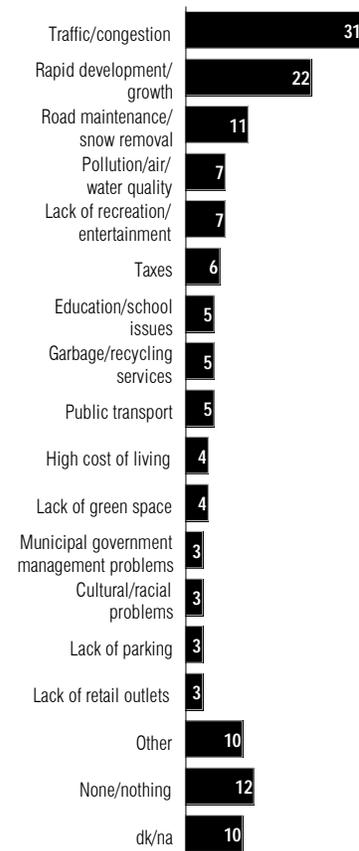
Q.2

Thinking about the whole community of Oakville, what are the two or three things you like the most?

When residents are asked to name the two or three things they dislike most about the community of Oakville, the largest proportions mention traffic congestion and rapid development. Much smaller proportions mention road maintenance, air and water quality, a perceived lack of recreation and entertainment facilities, taxes, education issues, garbage recycling services and public transit.

### Dislike Most About Oakville

June 2001



Q.3

Thinking about the whole community of Oakville, what are the two or three things you dislike the most?

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## Comparative Rating

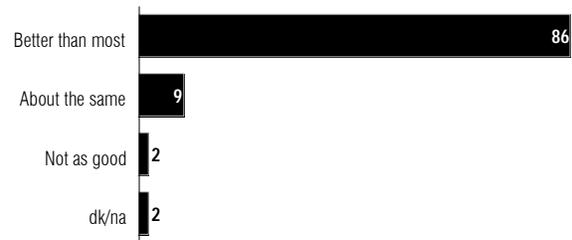
Clearly, most Oakville residents feel very lucky to be living where they are. The overwhelming majority, 86 percent, say that Oakville is generally a better place than most areas of the Greater Toronto Area in which to live. Nine percent say it is about the same as other areas and just two percent think the Town compares unfavourably with other areas of the GTA.

## Specific Quality of Life Measures – Gap Analysis of Importance and Satisfaction

Further confirmation of the generally high levels of satisfaction reported by Oakville residents is found in the combined results of two questions designed to explore residents' perceptions regarding specific quality of life measures and how the Town of Oakville rates along these same dimensions. In most cases, large majorities of residents believe that the Town is doing a good job of delivering on the quality of life measures that are important to them. However, there is some concern in the areas of environmental protection, living environment and provision of social services – on these measures, there are gaps between perceived importance and the Town's performance. At the same time, it should be noted that, on all measures, majorities give the Town a passing grade.

## Oakville Compared to Other GTA Areas

June 2001



Q.4

*Thinking about Oakville as a place in which to live, would you say that it is generally better than most areas of the Greater Toronto Area, not as good as most areas of the Greater Toronto Area, or about the same as most areas of the Greater Toronto Area?*

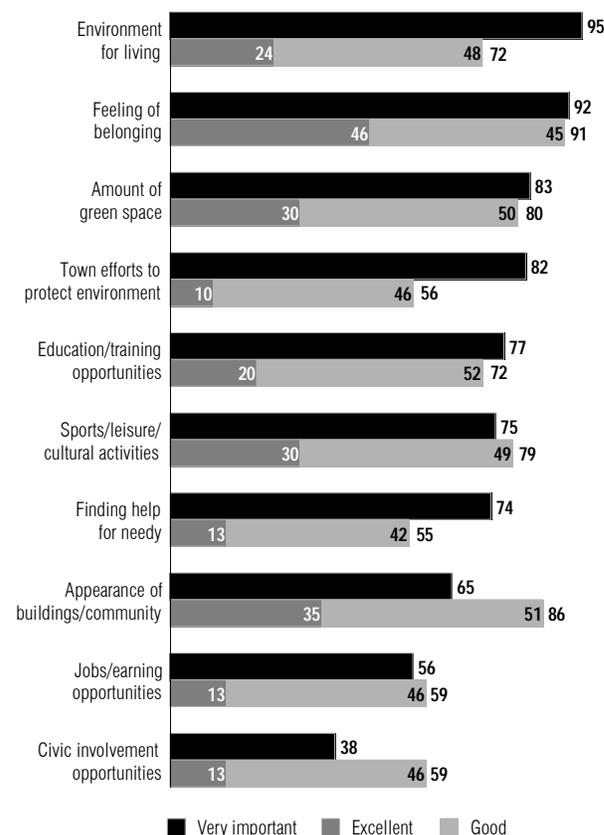
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First, residents were asked to rate the importance of ten factors in making any community a good place in which to live and work and then to rate The Town of Oakville on each of these factors. From the adjacent graphic, it is clear that residents attach the greatest importance to the environment in which people live (e.g., clean water and air and adequate shelter) and having a feeling of belonging and being safe in one's neighbourhood. On the next tier of importance are the amount of green space that's available for the use of residents, the efforts that the Town government makes to protect the environment, the opportunities people have for education and development of new skills, the opportunities for recreation, sports, leisure and cultural activities, the community's ability to find help for people in need, and the quality of buildings and overall appearance of the community. Of least importance are the kinds of jobs and earning power that are available for residents and the opportunities residents have to get involved with organizations and local government.

When residents were asked to rate the performance of the Town of Oakville on each of these measures, the Town gets its highest marks in the areas of providing a feeling of belonging and being safe, the quality of buildings and overall appearance of the community, the amount of green space, and the opportunities for recreation, sports, leisure and cultural activities. The Town gets somewhat lower marks on all the other dimensions, but, it should be noted, there is no area for which fewer than 55 percent give a rating of "good" or "excellent."

There are three areas for which there are significant gaps between the proportions who rate the dimension as "very important" and the proportions who give it a rating of "good" or "excellent." These are Town government efforts to protect the environment, the environment in which people live (e.g., clean water and air and adequate shelter) and the community's ability to find help for people in need. For all the other areas, the results suggest the Town is meeting or exceeding citizens' expectations.

## Quality of Life Measures – Gap Analysis June 2001



### Q.6a-j

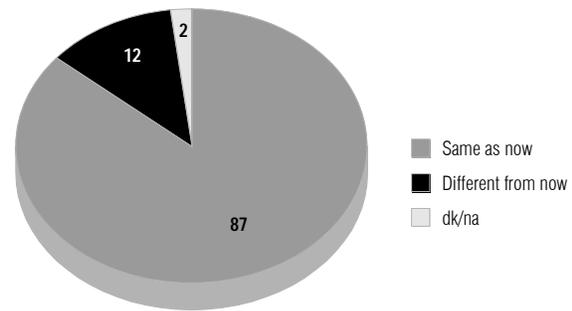
Now I would like to ask you a two-part question. i) First, in general, how important are each of the following factors in making any community a good place in which to live and work? ii) Second, how would you rate The Town of Oakville on each of these areas?

## Future Outlook

Oakville residents want their town to remain unchanged. When asked to look ten years into the future, almost all residents, 87 percent, say they would like Oakville to be much the same as it is now. Just 12 percent would like it to be quite different from what it is now.

Among the relatively few who would like to see changes, the largest proportions mention a desire for better road maintenance and accessibility to transportation, improved aesthetics and more green space, improved Town services, less development/fewer businesses, changes to Town government or bureaucracy, more recreation services, less traffic, more development/businesses and better public transportation.

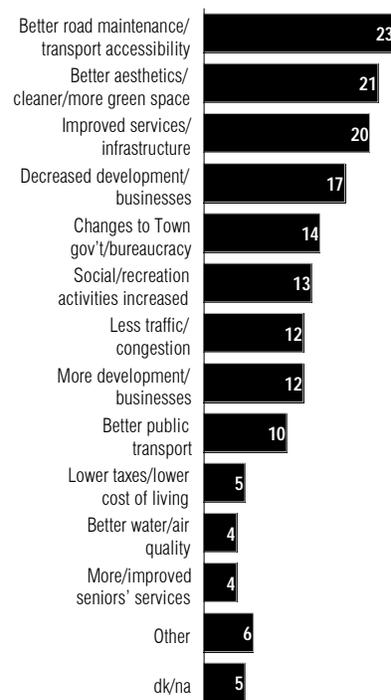
## Preferences for Future of Oakville June 2001



*Q.18a*

*Thinking ahead ten years from now, would you like the Town of Oakville to be ...?*

## Changes Most Like to See for Future June 2001



*Q.18b*

*What are the one or two changes that you would most like to see?  
Subsample: Respondents who want Oakville to be different ten years from now*

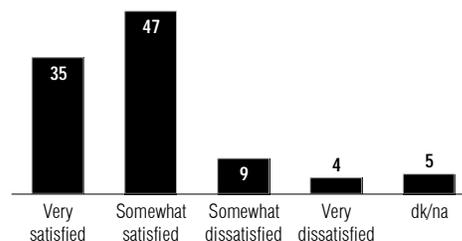
# SATISFACTION WITH TOWN OF OAKVILLE GOVERNMENT

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## Overall Satisfaction

Residents express high levels of satisfaction with the Town of Oakville government. A large majority of 82 percent say they are satisfied, including 35 percent who say they are very satisfied. Only 13 percent express dissatisfaction and five percent offer no opinion.

Town of Oakville Government  
June 2001



## Satisfaction and Spending – Oakville Services

Majorities or pluralities report being satisfied with the Town's delivery of all of the services included in the survey and majorities or pluralities are satisfied with current levels of spending for all of these services. However, there is significant minority support for spending more on the Town's network of roads and on winter road maintenance. There is very little support for spending cuts in any of the areas included in the survey.

Q.5

*Would you say that you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the Town of Oakville government?*

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The highest rated services are parks, fire fighting, libraries, cultural venues, and the number of woodlots and trails and the lowest rated services are services for seniors and public transit. Approximately one-third say they are dissatisfied with the Town's performance in the areas of winter road maintenance, winter sidewalk maintenance and the network of roads in Oakville – although, in each of these cases, satisfaction outweighs dissatisfaction by a wide margin. About two in ten say they are dissatisfied with litter pick-up, public transit, and road and sidewalk maintenance outside the winter season. Again, however, it should be noted that satisfaction far outweighs dissatisfaction.

Just under half of residents would like to see increased spending on Oakville's road network – opinion is almost evenly divided between those who favour increased spending and those who would like to see current levels of spending maintained. Four in ten favour increased spending on winter road maintenance. About three in ten say the same of winter sidewalk maintenance, services for seniors and public transit.

Satisfaction and Spending – Town Services  
June 2001

SERVICE	SATISFACTION			SPENDING		
	SATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	DON'T USE/ DK/NA	SPEND MORE	SPEND LESS	SPEND THE SAME
Parks	89	9	2	21	4	74
Fire fighting services	88	1	11	17	2	73
Public library services	86	7	6	24	3	69
Cultural venues such as the Oakville Museum, galleries and the Performing Arts Centre	86	6	8	17	9	70
Number of woodlots and trails in the Town	84	11	4	25	4	68
Garbage collection at curbside	81	15	4	14	3	81
Recreational programs	80	8	11	18	3	72
Outdoor sports fields	79	9	11	16	4	73
Road and sidewalk maintenance during the spring, summer and fall	78	21	1	24	4	71
Maintenance of boulevards and curbside grass	77	21	3	21	7	70
Bush and leaf collection at curbside	77	15	7	14	5	77
Other indoor recreational facilities, such as gyms and swimming pools	76	14	10	22	6	66
Litter pick-up in parks and on boulevards	73	25	2	25	2	70
Fire education services	71	10	20	21	3	64
Arenas	70	8	21	12	8	68
Winter sidewalk maintenance	65	31	3	31	6	61
The network of roads in Oakville	63	35	1	46	2	50
Winter road maintenance such as sanding and snow clearing	63	36	1	40	2	56
Cemeteries	58	2	40	5	5	64
Services for seniors	54	8	38	30	1	47
Public transit	50	21	29	28	5	54

*Q.7a-u*

*Now I would like to ask you another two-part question about specific services.*

- i) First, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following services as it is currently delivered by the Town of Oakville?*
- ii) Second, keeping in mind that taxes may increase if spending increases, do you think the Town of Oakville should be spending more, spending less, or spending the same on each of the following services?*

## Satisfaction and Spending – Regional Services

Large majorities of residents are satisfied with police services, ambulance services, water safety and hospital renovations and new health care facilities. About half are satisfied with social welfare assistance services, public housing, mental health services and child care services; it should be noted that two in ten or fewer are actually dissatisfied with these services and from three to four in ten either say they do not use the services or offer no assessment.

Large majorities favour maintenance of current spending levels for police and ambulance services. Opinion is divided as to whether there should be spending increases or maintenance of current spending levels in the areas of water safety and hospital renovations and facilities. Clear pluralities favour maintenance of current spending levels for the other regional services.

## Satisfaction and Spending – Regional Services

June 2001

SERVICE	SATISFACTION			SPENDING		
	SATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	DON'T USE/ DK/NA	SPEND MORE	SPEND LESS	SPEND THE SAME
Police services	90	7	3	22	4	71
Ambulance services	77	3	20	17	1	70
The safety of the water you drink	75	19	6	46	1	50
Hospital renovations and new health care facilities	75	19	6	47	2	47
Social welfare assistance	53	13	34	18	12	49
Public housing	53	15	32	22	12	47
Mental health services	51	9	40	22	2	51
Child care services	50	13	38	26	6	47

### Q.8a-b

i) Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with ...? ii) And, keeping in mind that taxes may increase if spending increases, do you think the Regional Municipality of Halton should be spending more, spending less, or spending the same on each of the following?

## Rating Customer Service at Town of Oakville

A majority of 57 percent of residents report some kind of experience with Town employees; 42 percent report no such experience.

About four in ten (each) say they have personally visited or telephoned an Oakville municipal office, community centre or library within the past year in order to conduct business or obtain municipal services. About two in ten report making such contacts by e-mail and one in ten report faxing a municipal office.

Approximately eight in ten residents agree that “Town employees are courteous,” that “services are dependable and accurate,” and that “Town employees are knowledgeable.” Seven in ten agree that “you can easily find the right staff to deal with your situation.” In all these cases, agreement tends to be slightly higher among those who report having contacted a municipal office or facility within the past year; those who report no such contact are more likely to simply not express an opinion on the question.

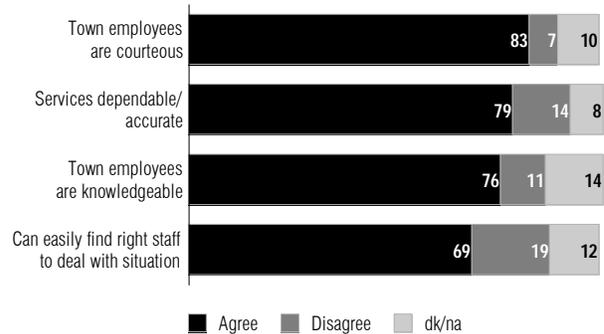
## Contact with Municipal Office, Community Centre or Library June 2001



### Q.14a

*Within the past year, have you visited, telephoned, faxed or e-mailed any Oakville municipal office, a community centre or a library in order to conduct business or obtain municipal services?*

## Experience with Town Staff June 2001



### Q.15a-d

*Based on your recent contact with the Town or on what you have read or heard, would you agree or disagree with the following statements? Town employees are courteous ... Town employees are knowledgeable ... You can easily find the right staff to deal with your situation ... Services are dependable and accurate.*

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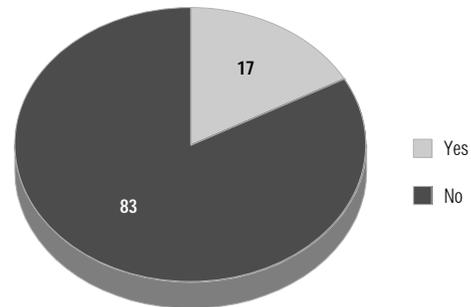
## Accessibility of Councillors

Relatively few residents, just 17 percent, report having contacted a member of the Oakville Town Council within the past year; 83 percent say they have made no such contact.

A majority of 54 percent of residents agree that “Town Council members are accessible”; 13 percent disagree and 33 percent offer no opinion. However, among those who contacted a Council member, 75 percent agree with the statement; 18 percent disagree.

## Contact with Town Council Member Within Past Year

June 2001



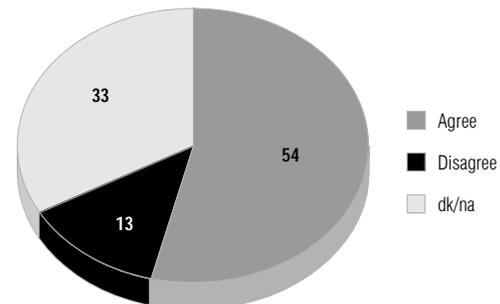
Q.14b

*Within the past year, have you contacted any member of the Oakville Town Council?*

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## Town Council Members Are Accessible

June 2001



Q.15e

*Based on your recent contact with the Town or on what you have read or heard, would you agree or disagree with the following statements? Town Council members are accessible.*

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## Preferred Sources of Town Information and Use of Website

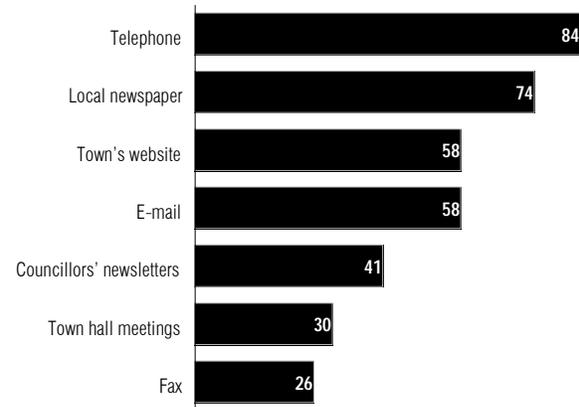
The survey results suggest that residents are most likely to use the phone or the local newspaper when looking for information from the Town of Oakville government. Six in ten (each) indicate that they would use the Town's website or e-mail; among these, there is noticeably more openness to using the website to register for services than there is for using it to pay taxes, user fees or fines (that is, for a financial transaction with the Town).

When residents are asked how they might look for or get information from the municipal government of The Town of Oakville, substantial majorities say that they would phone, check the local newspaper, use the Town's website or e-mail the Town. About four in ten say they would likely check their ward newspapers and about three in ten (each) would go to a Town hall meeting or send a fax to the Town.

Among those who are likely to use the Town's website or e-mail, three-quarters would use the website to register for services, but about half would use it to pay taxes, user fees or fines.

## Likely Ways to Access Information from Town of Oakville Government

June 2001

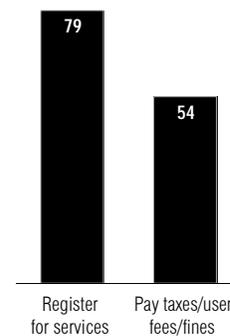


Q.16a-g

*Thinking about the ways that you might look for or get information from the municipal government of The Town of Oakville, would you likely, or not likely, use each of the following ...?*

## Likely Uses of Town Website

June 2001



Q.17

*Is it likely or not likely that you would use the Town of Oakville's website in order to ...?*

*Subsample: Respondents who are likely to use e-mail or the Town's website to get information*

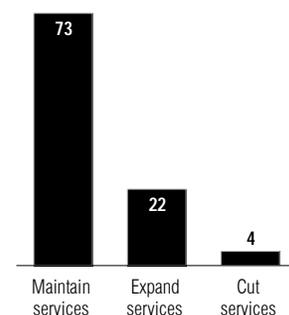
# PREFERRED APPROACH TO DELIVERY OF SERVICES

A substantial majority of residents want the Town government to maintain existing levels of services, even if this means increasing taxes. At the same time, there is a consensus that any expansion of services should be paid for by user fees. There is virtually no support for service cuts.

When residents are asked to choose among three overall strategies for managing Town services, a majority of 73 percent say the Town should maintain existing levels of services; among these, a large majority of 70 percent say they favour maintenance of current service levels even if it means higher taxes and a similar proportion, 67 percent, say they favour maintenance of current service levels even if it means higher user fees.

## Strategies for Managing Town Services

June 2001

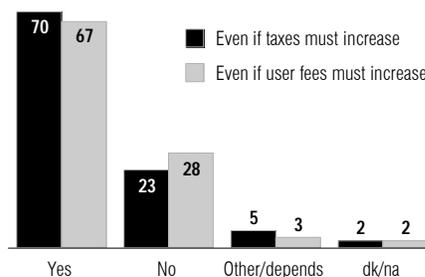


Q.12a

*Thinking about overall strategies by which the Town should manage its services, which of the following would be your first choice? Do you think the Town of Oakville should ...?*

## Maintain Services

June 2001



Q.12d

*Do you think the Town of Oakville should maintain services even if it means taxes are increased?*

*Subsample: Respondents who think the Town of Oakville should maintain existing services*

Q.12e

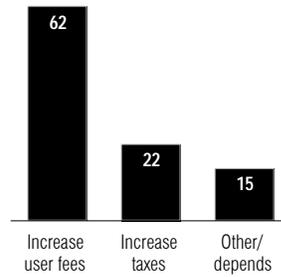
*Do you think the Town of Oakville should maintain services even if it means user fees are increased?*

*Subsample: Respondents who think the Town of Oakville should maintain existing services*

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Among the 22 percent of Oakville residents who favour an expansion of services, a clear majority of 62 percent say this should be financed by increasing user fees rather than taxes. Among the four percent who favour service cuts, a large majority think this should lead to property tax cuts.

### Strategies for Expanding Town Services June 2001



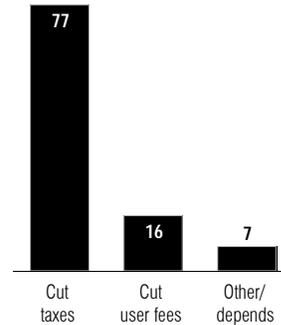
Q.12b

*And how do you think the Town should do this? Do you think the Town of Oakville should ...?*

*Subsample: Respondents who think the Town of Oakville should expand existing services*

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### Preferences if Town Services Are Cut June 2001



Q.12c *And if the Town cuts services, which one of the following do you prefer ...?*

*Subsample: Respondents who think the Town of Oakville should cut existing services*

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### Collection of Grass Clippings

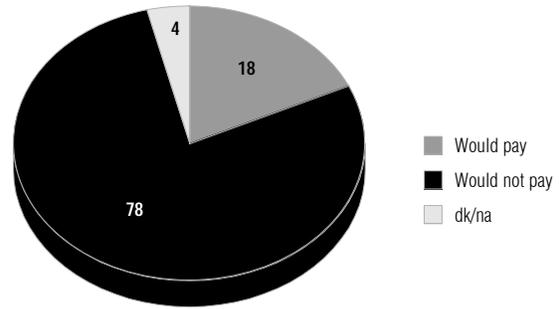
Eighteen percent of residents say they would pay an additional user fee in order to have their grass clippings picked up with their other garbage. Most residents, 78 percent, say they would not pay extra for this service. Interest in the service is higher than average among residents of Ward 5, but even here, a large majority are not willing to pay an additional fee.

### Controlling Weeds on Public Land

Residents tend to favour the use of fewer chemicals to control weeds on public lands, but a significant minority believe the Town is using an appropriate amount of chemical weed control substances.

A slight majority of 54 percent of residents believe the Town of Oakville should be using fewer chemicals in its efforts to control weeds on public property; 36 percent think the Town is using an appropriate amount of chemicals in its weed control program. Only six percent would like to see greater use of chemical weed control.

User Fee for Grass Clippings Pick-up  
June 2001

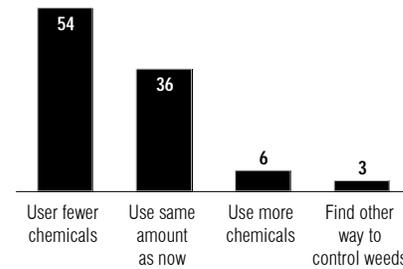


Q.9

*Currently, the Town of Oakville does not pick up grass clippings. Would you or would you not pay an additional user fee to have your grass clippings picked up with your other garbage?*

### Weed Control on Public Land

June 2001



Q.10

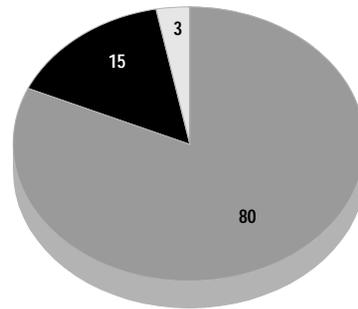
*Currently, the Town of Oakville uses both chemical and non-chemical means of controlling weeds on public land. Do you think the Town should use {rotate} more chemicals, use fewer chemicals or continue using the same amount of chemicals as it does now?*

## PREFERRED USE OF PARK SPACES

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Oakville residents clearly favour open green spaces over sports fields. An overwhelming majority of 80 percent say they prefer that the Town keep more of its park areas as open green spaces, treed areas and trails. Relatively few residents, 15 percent, would like the Town to use its park space to develop more sports fields, such as ball diamonds and soccer fields.

Park Space  
June 2001



- Keep more as open spaces/treed areas/trails
- Use for more sports fields
- Both

### Q.11

*Thinking about the planning and use of the Town's park space, which one of the following do you most prefer: keeping more of the park areas as open green spaces, treed areas and trails, or using park space to develop more sports fields, such as ball diamonds and soccer fields?*

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# OAKVILLE BUS SYSTEM

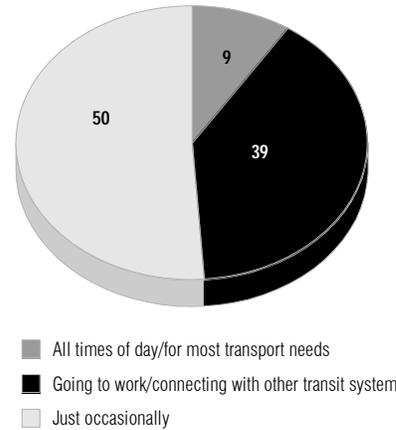
Most residents who use the Town's bus system use it only occasionally or to commute to work. About one-quarter of residents express some interest in Sunday bus services.

A minority of 42 percent report that they or someone in their household has used Oakville's bus system within the past year; 57 percent report no household use of the bus system.

Among those who report household use of the system, 50 percent say the most frequent user in their household uses the bus system only occasionally; another 39 percent say that person usually uses the system just to get to work or to connect with another transit system, such as the GO train. Nine percent say the person uses the system at all times of the day.

A majority of 74 percent of Oakville residents say they would never use the Town's bus system if it were to operate on Sundays; 19 percent say they would use it occasionally and seven percent say they would use it regularly.

Pattern of Bus System Use  
June 2001

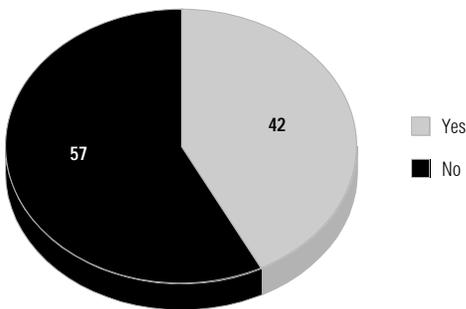


Q.13b

Thinking about the person in your household who uses the bus system the most, does that person take the bus at all times of the day, to get most places where he/she cannot walk or bike, usually just to get to work or to connect with another transit system, such as the GO train, or just occasionally?

Subsample: Respondents who said that they, or a member of their household, have used Oakville's bus system in the past year

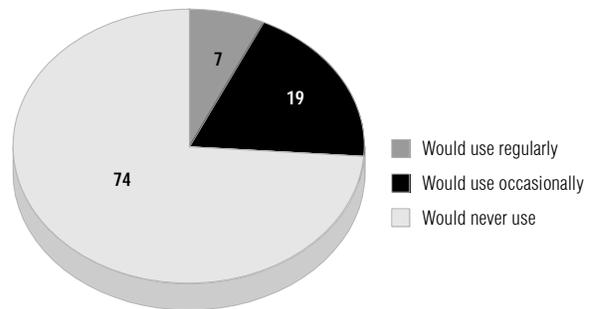
Use of Oakville Bus System in Past Year  
June 2001



Q.13a

Within the past year, have you or members of your household used Oakville's bus system?

Potential Sunday Use of Bus System  
June 2001



Q.13c

Thinking about most Sundays, would you or someone else in your household use Oakville's bus system if it were to operate on Sundays?

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

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The survey finds Oakville residents are very proud of their community – almost everyone agrees that it out-ranks all other areas of the Greater Toronto Area as a place in which to live and almost everyone would like it to stay the way that it is.

It is also very clear, when residents are asked about the leading issues facing their community and about what they like and do not like about living in Oakville, that they place a high value on the overall ambiance of the Town as a historic, peaceful community. As a result, they are very concerned about factors that they see as threats to that ambiance, namely, rapid development and traffic congestion.

Overall, Oakville residents are very satisfied with the way in which the Town is being managed: more than eight in ten say they are satisfied with the Town of Oakville government. In addition, most residents offer positive assessments of Town employees and Town Councillors, and these assessments tend to be higher than average among those who have actually had recent contact with these people.

Furthermore, when residents were asked to rate the importance of ten factors in making any community a good place in which to live and work and then to rate The Town of Oakville on each of these factors, large majorities of residents believe that the Town is doing a good job of delivering on the quality of life measures that are important to them. At the same time, there is some concern in the areas of environmental protection, living environment and provision of social services – the three measures on which there are notable gaps between perceived importance and the Town's performance.

In addition, majorities or pluralities report being satisfied with specific services that are delivered by the Town and majorities or pluralities are satisfied with current levels of Town spending on all of these services. However, it should be noted that there is significant minority support for spending more on the Town's network of roads and on winter road maintenance.

Similarly, residents are generally quite satisfied with delivery of regional services; lower satisfaction ratings tend to come more from a lack of experience with certain services (e.g., child care services) than with actual

dissatisfaction. Majorities or pluralities favour maintenance of current spending levels for most of these services, but residents are divided as to whether there should be spending increases or maintenance of current spending levels in the areas of water safety and hospital renovations and facilities.

The survey finds very little support for spending cuts – only about one in ten or fewer say there should be lower levels of spending on any of the specific services included in the survey. Moreover, when residents are asked to choose among three overall strategies for managing Town services, more than seven in ten say the Town should maintain existing levels of services – even if it means higher taxes – and another two in ten favour an expansion of services; virtually no one chooses the option of cutting services. At the same time, there is a consensus that any expansion of services should be financed through user fees, not higher property taxes.

On the question of where residents go to get information from the Town of Oakville government, most say they are likely to use the phone or the local newspaper, but about six in ten (each) indicate that they would use the Town's website or e-mail; among these, there is noticeably more openness to using the website to register for services than there is for using it to pay taxes, user fees or fines. These results are similar to those found in other surveys: people are still somewhat reluctant to use the Internet for financial transactions.

On the question of residents' preferences regarding management of park space, there is an overwhelming preference – 80 percent – for developing green spaces over sports fields. To a lesser extent, there is also a feeling that the Town should cut back on its use of chemicals to control weeds on public land, although a significant minority of one-third think the Town is probably using the appropriate mix of chemical and non-chemical weed control measures and very few think there should be greater use of chemicals.

In other areas of inquiry, the survey finds residents are mostly unwilling to pay extra to have their grass clippings collected at curbside. Nor is there a great deal of interest in Sunday bus service – about one-quarter indicate they would use such a service.