

**REPORT TO
THE CITY OF SACO, MAINE**



**City of Saco
Citizen Satisfaction Survey**

November 2007

PREPARED BY



Pan Atlantic SMS Group
RESEARCH • STRATEGY • TRAINING

5 Milk Street, Portland, Maine 04101
Telephone: (207) 871-8622 • Fax: (207) 772-4842
www.panatlanticsmsgroup.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES.....	1
II. METHODOLOGY.....	2
III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS.....	3
IV. FINDINGS	
• Overall Satisfaction with the City of Saco	14
• Policing and Public Safety	29
• Parks and Recreation	38
• Public Works / City Maintenance	49
• City Codes and Ordinances	56
• City Management	59
• Planning and Economic Development	71
• Communications	78
• Other	87
II. DEMOGRAPHICS	95
APPENDIX A – SURVEY INSTRUMENT	

I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Pan Atlantic SMS Group, a full-service market research and consulting firm located in Portland, Maine, was commissioned by the City of Saco to conduct a quantitative research project with a random sample of Saco residents to benchmark two citizen satisfaction surveys previously conducted in November, 2004 and November, 2005.

Saco, a Southern Maine coastal community of approximately 16,800 residents, requested the development and implementation of a government performance measurement survey and report as a next step toward improving its accountability to the residents of Saco and overall achievement of its strategic plan. In an effort to continually improve levels of service and the satisfaction of residents, the City of Saco decided to conduct this research project so that these results could be benchmarked against the 2004 and 2005 data.

To that end, Pan Atlantic SMS Group conducted a community attitude survey of Saco residents. The primary objective of this research is to determine residents' levels of satisfaction with various departments within the city government and with the City of Saco overall. In order to reach this objective, the research conducted focused on the following key issues:

- Overall satisfaction with the City
- Satisfaction levels with the following city departments:
 - Policing and Public Safety
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Public Works / City Maintenance
 - City Codes and Ordinances
 - City Management
 - Planning and Economic Development
 - City Communications
- General citizen assessments of and opinions on various city issues
- Demographic questions relating to the survey population

II. METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the stated objectives of this research project, a telephone survey was conducted with residents of Saco. Telephone interviews were conducted with a randomly-selected sample of 400 adults using a computer generated list of all Saco residential phone listings.

The average length of survey administered was 15.5 minutes.

Respondents did not qualify for participation in the survey if they do not live within the City of Saco. They were also disqualified if they or any member of their household work for the City, serve on a City board or committee, or work for a market research, public relations, or advertising firm. Surveys were conducted between October 8th and October 20th, 2007.

The final survey instrument used (see Appendix A) was approved by the City of Saco prior to being fielded. Results were tabulated and analyzed using standard statistical methods. The total results of this study command statistical validity to the 95 percent confidence interval level with a margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percent. In other words, if the study were to be replicated, 95 times out of 100 the results would be within 4.9 percentage points of the results achieved for the current survey. The margins of error for specific sub-samples are significantly higher.

Sub-samples can also be affected by respondents answering “don’t know,” to one or more questions, in that these respondents cannot be included in mean response calculations. While it may provide interesting data in and of itself, a response of “don’t know” cannot be categorized. The result is a reduction in the sample size, which can have a dramatic effect on the utility of the data. When a sample size is reduced, the data becomes less useful in terms of how it can be generalized to the population. A representative sample is used to approximate the attitudes and opinions of the population at large, but as a given sub-sample gets smaller, it becomes less appropriate to extend findings from that sub-sample to the overall population. Therefore, special care should be taken in considering the percentages involved for each item in this report.

Results were obtained for overall satisfaction with the City, as well as for satisfaction with specific City departments. Any significant differences in viewpoints by population segments are illustrated through the use of charts in this report.

The following report presents an analysis of the survey findings. “Mean response” findings are reported throughout this document. In each case, the scale used is a 5-point scale, where 1 is low and 5 is high. Please note that figures may not always add up to 100.0% due to the rounding of decimals.

Detailed statistical cross tabulations bound in a separate volume accompany this report.

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The tables used in this Executive Summary section outline the **mean responses** for each question. Higher mean responses indicate more positive ratings. Unless otherwise noted, the scales for each question are 1 to 5.

Overall Satisfaction with the City of Saco

The following set of questions used a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “poor” and 5 means “excellent”.

	2004	2005	2007
Image of Saco as a place to live	4.32	4.33	4.35
Image of Saco as a place to raise children	4.25	4.28	4.29
Overall feeling of safety in Saco	4.24	4.27	4.22
Overall quality of life in Saco	4.14	4.16	4.21
Overall image of Saco	4.01	4.04	4.12
Overall quality of service received from City employees	3.97	3.98	4.06
Image of Saco as a place to work	3.58	3.43	3.67

- **Respondents demonstrated a high level of overall satisfaction regarding the City of Saco: six of the seven statements have mean responses that fall between “good” and “excellent.”**
- Respondents rated the “image of Saco as a place to live” and the “image of Saco as a place to raise children” highest among the statements tested.
- In general, female respondents and those with two or fewer people in their household rated their satisfaction with these aspects of Saco higher than their demographic cohorts.

Policing and Public Safety

Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction regarding several aspects of policing and public safety listed in the table below. Each issue was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “very dissatisfied” and 5 means “very satisfied”, with the exception of attitude toward interaction with the Saco Police Department, which used a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “very cautious” and 5 means “very comfortable”.

	2004	2005	2007
How quickly rescue personnel respond to emergencies	N/A	N/A	4.51
How quickly fire personnel respond to emergencies	N/A	N/A	4.50
The overall quality of fire services	N/A	N/A	4.49

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The overall quality of ambulance services	N/A	N/A	4.47
The City's efforts to enhance fire prevention	4.26	4.23	4.28
The overall quality of police services	4.20	4.21	4.24
The City's overall efforts to prevent crime	4.08	4.05	4.11
Neighborhood policing, including domestic violence prevention	4.03	3.87	4.09
The enforcement of local traffic laws	3.75	3.75	3.88
Attitude toward interaction with the Saco Police Department	4.18	4.36	4.27

- **Respondents demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with policing and public safety: eight of the nine statements have mean responses that fall between “good” and “excellent,” and respondents reported a favorable attitude towards their interaction with the Saco Police Department.**
- Respondents rated the quality and speed of fire, ambulance, and rescue personnel highest among the aspects of policing and public safety.
- In general, female respondents, those who are 55 years of age or more, those who have lived in Saco 25 years or more, and those who have two or fewer in their household rated their satisfaction with these aspects of Saco higher than their demographic cohorts.

Parks and Recreation

Respondents were then asked to rate their level of satisfaction regarding aspects of the Parks and Recreation Department using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “very dissatisfied” and 5 means “very satisfied”.

	2004	2005	2007
Other City community events, such as the Sidewalk Art Fair and Pumpkin Fest	4.34	4.38	4.40
The maintenance of City parks and athletic facilities	3.96	3.94	4.07
The reasonableness of fees charged for recreational programs	3.75	3.98	4.04
The overall quality of City parks	3.85	3.97	3.95

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The overall quality of City recreation programs and facilities	3.70	3.86	3.94
The availability of, and access to, City community centers	3.64	3.66	3.90
The walking and biking trails in the City	3.67	3.69	3.88
The City's youth and adult recreation programs	3.66	3.72	3.88

- **Since 2004, the mean responses have increased for the following aspects of parks and recreation: “the overall quality of City recreation programs and facilities” (3.70 to 3.94), “the reasonableness of fees charged for recreational programs” (3.75 to 4.04), “the availability of, and access to, City community centers” (3.64 to 3.90), “the City’s youth and adult recreation programs” (3.66 to 3.88), and “the walking and biking trails” (3.67 to 3.88).**
- Respondents rated their satisfaction with “other City community events, such as the Sidewalk Art Fair and Pumpkin Fest” highest of the aspects regarding Parks and Recreation.
- Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that the City of Saco offers a wide enough variety of recreational facilities to meet the needs of citizens. These results are similar to those found in 2004 and 2005.
- More than one-half (56.6%) of those surveyed indicated that they make use of recreational facilities at least once a month. **The percentage of respondents who indicated that they “never or almost never” made use of the City’s recreational facilities in the past year has decreased from 2005 (28.5% versus 19.8%).**

Public Works / City Maintenance

Respondents were then asked to rate their level of satisfaction regarding aspects of the Public Works Department using the same satisfaction scale.

	2004	2005	2007
The maintenance and preservation of the character of downtown Saco	4.15	4.23	4.32
The overall ease of using the City’s recycling program	4.26	4.36	4.32
The overall cleanliness of City streets and other public areas	4.22	4.26	4.25
The maintenance of City buildings and facilities	4.08	4.11	4.14
The overall quality of trash collection services	4.20	4.34	4.12
The overall quality of City wastewater treatment	4.01	4.21	4.11

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Snow plowing and removal on city streets during the past 12 months	4.05	4.03	4.02
The City's Public Works Department	3.85	3.97	3.90
The maintenance of City streets	3.71	3.76	3.80
The maintenance of sidewalks in the City	3.73	3.82	3.79

- Respondents are most satisfied with “the maintenance and preservation of the character of downtown Saco” (4.32), “the overall ease of using the City’s recycling program” (4.32), and “the overall cleanliness of City streets and other public areas” (4.25).
- In general, respondents who have lived in Saco 25 years or more and those who are 55 years of age or more rated their satisfaction with these aspects of Saco higher than their demographic cohorts.

City Codes and Ordinances

Respondents then rated their levels of satisfaction regarding City codes and ordinances and the enforcement of these codes and ordinances. Again, the same satisfaction scale was used.

	2004	2005	2007
The enforcement of codes designed to protect public health and safety	3.73	3.76	3.91
The quality of new construction in the City	3.75	3.69	3.88
The timeliness and ease of the City’s permitting process	3.73	3.49	3.82
The overall enforcement of City codes and ordinances including the Building Inspection Department	3.64	3.63	3.81

- Although there are only minimal differences in the mean responses for these questions, respondents indicated the highest level of satisfaction with “the enforcement of codes designed to protect public health and safety” (3.91), followed by “the quality of new construction in the City” (3.88).
- **Since 2004, mean responses have increased for “the enforcement of codes designed to protect public health and safety” (3.73 to 3.91) and “the overall enforcement of City codes and ordinances including the Building Inspection Department” (3.64 to 3.81).**
- It should be noted that twenty-six percent to forty-six percent of the respondents “don’t know” how to rate their level of satisfaction regarding these code enforcement and ordinance issues.

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

City Management

Using the scale of 1 to 5, respondents rated their level of satisfaction regarding issues associated with City management.

	2004	2005	2007
The ease of voting in the City of Saco based on your experience the last time you voted in Saco	4.36	4.40	4.41
The ease of doing business in person at City Hall	4.02	4.11	4.22
The City's administration, including the Administrator's Office, Finance Department, and City Clerk's Office	3.73	3.86	3.90
The City's Assessing and Valuations Office	3.51	3.62	3.64
The quality of the information you receive regarding the City budget and the use of taxpayer dollars	3.34	3.55	3.64

- Respondents are most satisfied regarding “the ease of voting in the City of Saco based on [their] experience the last time [they] voted in Saco” (4.41), followed by “the ease of doing business in person at City Hall” (4.22).
- In general, respondents who are 55 years of age or more and those who have two or fewer people in their household rated their satisfaction with these aspects of Saco higher than their demographic cohorts.
- Nearly sixty percent (57.0%) of the respondents consider a wait somewhere between three and eight minutes a reasonable amount of time to wait in line to process a transaction at City Hall

Website Use

- Forty-four percent (43.9%) of respondents indicated that they access the City of Saco's website, at least occasionally. These results are similar to those found in 2005.
- The most common types of information being accessed by users of the website include: “Parks and Recreation Department information,” “school information / budget,” “property valuations / Assessor's Office,” and “vehicle registration / Department of Motor Vehicles.”
 - **There has been increase in the percentage of respondents who indicate using the website to access information on “school information / budget,” “transfer station information,” “trash / dump information,” and “real estate / housing.”**
- Two-thirds (66.5%) of the respondents said that they are “not at all likely” to conduct business with the City of Saco over the Internet in the next one or two years. **Since 2004, respondents have become slightly less likely to indicate that they would conduct business with the City of Saco over the Internet (29.3% to 23.0%).**

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Interaction with City Employees

- A total of 83.0% of respondents reported that the City employee with whom they had interacted most recently was either “very professional and courteous” (61.3%) or “somewhat professional and courteous” (21.8%). **These results are similar to those found in 2004 and 2005.**

Planning and Economic Development

Using the same satisfaction scale as in previous sections, respondents rated their satisfaction level regarding a couple of aspects of planning and economic development in Saco.

	2007
The timeliness of the City’s reviews of subdivision and site plan applications	3.60
The administration of site plan and subdivision permitting and economic development programs by the Department	3.49

- **Overall, respondents reported their level of satisfaction with regard to planning and economic development as being between “neutral” and “somewhat satisfied.”**
- Sixty percent (59.8%) of respondents have “never” sought a site plan or subdivision permit, or attended a public hearing related to Planning or Economic Development in the City of Saco.
- A total of 45.0% of respondents indicated that the City’s overall planning for growth in Saco is “good” or “excellent.”
 - **The mean response for this question was 3.51, which is an increase from the mean responses in 2005 (3.20) and 2004 (3.27).**
- **The percentage of respondents who indicated that the level of growth in Saco is “about right” has increased from 48.0% in 2004 to 60.5% in 2007.**

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Communications

Respondents then rated their level of satisfaction regarding communications from the City.

	2004	2005	2007
City programs and services	3.48	3.49	3.65
Local issues and public involvement opportunities	3.45	3.46	3.56

- The mean ratings for the communications issues tests fall between “neutral” and “somewhat satisfied,” indicating that those surveyed generally feel favorably about the City of Saco’s communications efforts.
- **For communications regarding “City programs and services,” the mean response has increased from 3.48 in 2004 and 3.49 in 2005 to 3.65 in 2007.**

The Pepperell Post

- Approximately one-fifth of respondents (19.3%) indicated that they have read or seen *The Pepperell Post*. Approximately half of these respondents saw or obtained the newsletter at City Hall. **This is an increase from 2005. There has been a decrease since 2005 in the percentage of respondents who indicated accessing the newsletter on the City’s website. Of those who have read or seen *The Pepperell Post*, a total of 74.0% rated it as either “very valuable” or “somewhat valuable.”**
- Approximately one-fifth (21.1%) of those who do not currently receive the newsletter via email indicated that they would be interested in doing so. These results are similar to those obtained in 2005.

Budget Information

- Nearly sixty percent of respondents (58.0%) get their information about the City budget from “newspapers”. Fifteen percent (15.3%) of those surveyed indicated that they get City information by “word of mouth,” 11.3% use the “Internet,” and 6.8% watch “local access television.”
- **Since 2004, the percentage of respondents who get their information about the City budget and the use of taxpayer money from the newspaper has decreased (67.0% to 58.0%).**
- Channel 3 (local access) was watched by 47.2% of respondents in the month prior to the survey. Most of those who watched Channel 3 watched it for less than an hour in that time.
 - **Since 2004, the percentage of respondents who reported that they “did not watch” Channel 3 in the past month has increased (from 42.5% to 51.5%).**

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Other

The final portion of the survey included some general questions about the City and its services.

Property Taxes

- Respondents were asked to describe their opinion regarding the value of Saco's property taxes relative to the services that the City provides. The highest percentage of respondents (44.0%) indicated that Saco property taxes are "about right" relative to the City services they receive. **The mean response for this question is similar to the mean responses recorded in 2004 and 2005.**

Departmental Funding

- Respondents were asked to name one or two departments for which they would like to increase funding, assuming that current budget levels for any City Department were not being cut. Overall, the departments mentioned most frequently (1st and 2nd choices combined) were the "Police Department" (41.0% overall) and the "Fire and Ambulance Department" (40.8% overall), followed by the "Parks and Recreation Department" (18.1%), and the "Public Works Department" (10.1%). **These results are similar to the findings of the 2004 and 2005 surveys.**

Image Statements

- More than three-fourths (76.8%) of those surveyed indicated that they either "strongly agree" (36.3%) or "somewhat agree" (40.5%) that the following statement created by a panel of Saco residents symbolizes the City of Saco: "Saco is a city that provides families of all kinds with a community that values its heritage, cherishes its environment, balances its growth, and offers a concerned and caring spirit." **The mean response to this question (4.08) is similar to the mean response in 2005 (4.06).**
- More than six in ten (61.5%) of those surveyed indicated that they either "strongly agree" (21.5%) or "somewhat agree" (40.0%) that the following statement created by the Saco City government summarizes its role with regard to the citizens of Saco: "Building the trust and confidence of citizens in our integrity and competence." **The mean response to this question has increased from 3.58 in 2005 to 3.72 in 2007.**

Comment

The satisfaction levels recorded in this benchmarking survey are very good and continue to show widespread progress.

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS

- **Similar to the 2004 and 2005 studies, the satisfaction ratings recorded across all sections of this survey indicate a consistent, and, in several instances, a rising level of satisfaction among Saco residents with City services and administration. In nearly every applicable case, the average response to a given question was positive. While some questions yielded more positive responses than others, it should be noted that no clearly negative results were obtained.**

Saco residents have the most positive feelings about:

- ✓ How quickly (1) fire and (2) rescue personnel respond to emergencies (mean = 4.51 and 4.50, respectively)
 - ✓ The overall quality of (1) fire and (2) ambulance services (mean = 4.49 and 4.47, respectively)
 - ✓ Their most recent interaction with a non-emergency City employee (mean = 4.48)
 - ✓ The ease of voting in the City of Saco based on your experience the last time you voted in Saco (mean = 4.41)
 - ✓ City community events, such as the Sidewalk Art Fair and Pumpkin Fest (mean = 4.40)
 - ✓ The image of Saco as a place to live (mean = 4.35)
 - ✓ The maintenance and preservation of the City of Saco (mean = 4.32)
 - ✓ The overall ease of using the City's recycling program (mean = 4.32)
 - ✓ The image of Saco as a place to raise children (mean = 4.29)
 - ✓ The City's efforts to enhance fire protection (mean = 4.28)
 - ✓ Attitude towards interaction with the Saco Police Department (mean = 4.27)
 - ✓ The overall quality of the City's police services (mean = 4.24)
- Ratings of City customer service are generally very positive, as illustrated, for example, by respondent reactions to the question relating to their most recent contact with a non-emergency City employee. Efforts aimed at improving customer relations with residents have continued to be successful. (83% cite City employees as being very or somewhat professional and courteous.)
 - Since 2005, the following factors have shown the most improvement: (Based on the use of a 5-point scale)
 - ✓ The timeliness and ease of the City's permitting process (mean increased 0.33)
 - ✓ Image of Saco as a place to work (mean increased 0.24)
 - ✓ The availability of and access to City community centers (mean increased 0.22)
 - ✓ The quality of new construction in the City (mean increased 0.19)
 - ✓ The overall enforcement of City codes and ordinances, including the Building Inspection Department (mean increased 0.18)
 - ✓ The enforcement of codes designed to protect public health (mean increased 0.15)
 - ✓ The maintenance of City parks and athletic facilities (mean increased 0.13)

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

- It should be noted that four of the items for which statistically significant mean increases in satisfaction have been recorded relate to City codes and ordinances.
- Particular attention should be paid to issues for which the average response is close to “neutral”. Because the mean results fall within a fairly limited range of ratings (in most cases between “3” and “4” on a scale of 1-5), small changes become more meaningful. For example, a satisfaction rating of 3.5 and a satisfaction rating of 4, while not especially disparate on the scale, might indicate a significantly different level of satisfaction. The recommendation would be to focus improvement efforts on issues that, in comparison to other items in their section, have a mean response level closer to 3.0.
- In contrast to the 2005 survey, there was only one mean rating below a 3.5 (on the 5-point scale) on this occasion (on the issue of “the administration of site plan and subdivision permitting and economic development programs by the Planning and Economic Development Department”).
- The only area where there was a decline in satisfaction with any degree of statistical significance was “the overall quality of City wastewater treatment” – mean rating decline of 0.10.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Communications

Mean ratings of City communications on: (1) City programs and services (2) Local issues and public involvement opportunities increased by 0.16 and 0.20 respectively.

This indicates a good level of improvement in this area.

- Overall readership of the City’s newsletter has not increased to any degree, and still remains on the low side (19.3%).

Additionally, overall readership of *The Pepperell Post* (City newsletter) online remains low. Those who do use the newsletter in general find it to be a valuable source of information.

The City should promote the newsletter, and, in particular, the online version, so that a higher percentage of citizens are better informed of City business.

2. Budget Information

- Nearly sixty percent of respondents (58.0%) get their information about the City budget from “newspapers.” Fifteen percent (15.3%) of those surveyed indicated that they get City information by “word of mouth,” 11.3% use the “Internet,” and 6.8% watch “local access television.” Since 2004, the percentage of respondents who get their information about the City budget and the use of taxpayer money from the newspaper has decreased (67.0% to 58.0%).

The City of Saco should continue to promote the fact that detailed budget information is available online and also that it can be obtained in a briefer format via the City newsletter.

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

3. Policing

The mean response for “neighborhood policing, including domestic violence prevention” has increased since 2005 from 3.87 to 4.09, and the mean response for “the enforcement of local traffic laws” has increased since 2004 and 2005 from 3.75 to 3.88. The City of Saco should continue its efforts to improve residents’ level of satisfaction with neighborhood policing, the enforcement of traffic laws, and citizens’ attitudes towards interaction with the Police Department.

4. Satisfaction with Saco as a Place to Work

The mean response for “image of Saco as a place to work” has increased from 3.43 in 2005 to 3.67 in 2007. The City of Saco should continue its efforts to improve residents’ image of Saco as a place to work.

5. Public Works / City Maintenance

The mean response for “the maintenance and preservation of the character of downtown Saco” Saco has increased since 2004.

The City of Saco should continue its efforts to improve residents’ level of satisfaction with regard to the maintenance of City streets and sidewalks.

6. City Management

Since 2004, mean responses have increased for “the quality of the information you receive regarding the City budget and the use of taxpayer dollars” which increased from (3.34 to 3.64), “the ease of doing business in person at City Hall from (4.02 to 4.22), and “the City’s administration, including the Administrator’s Office, Finance Department, and City Clerk’s Office” (3.73 to 3.90). There has also been an increase since 2004 in the mean response for “the City’s Assessing and Valuations Office” (3.51 to 3.64).

The City of Saco should continue its efforts to improve residents’ level of satisfaction with the City’s Assessing and Valuations Office and the quality of information received regarding the City budget and use of taxpayer dollars.