

The Morning Call
Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion

Allentown Citizen Survey

KEY FINDINGS REPORT

April 30, 2004

FINAL DRAFT

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Allentown residents generally have a favorable view of the city as a place to live, yet there is a substantial majority of residents giving the city a negative review in terms of quality of life.
2. When asked to compare Allentown to two years ago, more residents indicated that the city was a worse place to live than those who found the city has gotten better over that time frame.
3. City residents gave mayor Roy Afflerbach's job performance fairly negative ratings, with about 3 out of 10 Allentonians indicating that the Mayor has performed poorly in his position
4. While slightly better than ratings of the mayor, Allentown residents give City Council mediocre job performance ratings.
5. A majority of city residents feel safe in their neighborhoods, yet substantial minorities in areas such as the center of the city expressed concern regarding their safety.
6. The service of the Allentown Police Department is generally viewed positively by city residents.
7. About half of city residents would like to see the city actively pursue the construction of a new minor league baseball stadium in Allentown, with about 4 in 10 opposing such efforts.
8. While generally dissatisfied with the quality of the Allentown Public School system, residents expressed concerns about the adequacy of funding for the city schools, with about half supporting increases in property taxes if the money went to improving Allentown schools.
9. Although most residents of the city plan to remain in Allentown in the next five years, about 4 out of 10 Allentonians with a college degree indicated that they are likely to move away from the city by 2009.
10. In an examination of City residents preferences for the upcoming presidential election, John Kerry has a significant lead over George Bush among likely voters within Allentown

METHODOLOGY: The following key findings report summarizes data collected in a telephone survey of residents of City of Allentown residents between March 29 and April 19, 2004. Individual households throughout Allentown were selected randomly for inclusion in the study. The sample of phone numbers used in the survey was generated by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, PA. Interviewing was conducted by the staff of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion, with 459 surveys completed. This number of completions results in a margin of error of +/- 4.3% at the 95% confidence interval. However the margin of errors for sub groups (i.e. women, college educated, parents) is larger due to smaller sample size. Percentages throughout the survey have been rounded upward at the .5 mark, thus many totals in the results will not equal 100%. Because of an undersampling of Hispanic and Latino citizens, the data was weighted to more closely mirror the actual racial breakdown among city residents. The survey questionnaire was designed by Christopher Borick, Ph.D. of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion in consultation with staff members of the *Morning Call*. Analysis and report writing were completed by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion under the direction of Dr. Borick.

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN ALLENTOWN

Overall, residents of the city of Allentown rate life in the city fairly positively, with about 2 out of 3 residents rating life here as either excellent (5%) or good (60%). While generally positive, a substantial percentage 32% of city residents indicated negative views of living in Allentown, with 9% rating the city as a poor place to live. The complete breakdown of quality of life ratings are found in Table One below.

Table One

Ratings of Quality of Life in the City of Allentown

Quality of Life Rating	Percentage Responding
Excellent	5%
Good	60%
Not So Good	23%
Poor	9%
Not Sure	2%

While residents are generally positive about the quality of life in the city, there is noticeable variation across the various sections of Allentown. For example, while only 25% of residents in the West Side rated quality of life negatively (16% “not so good”, 9% “poor”), their counterparts in Central City and South Allentown were more negative about local quality of life. More

specifically, 37% of residents in Central or South Allentown rated quality of life in the city as either “poor” or “not so good”.

In contrast to their generally positive appraisal of quality of life in Allentown, they were more pessimistic about the direction of the city over the past two years. More specifically, 44% of citizens surveyed indicated that life in the city was worse than two years before, in comparison to 31% who said life was better. A full breakdown of responses is presented in Table Two below.

Table Two
“Compared to Two Years ago
What is the Direction of Quality of Life in Allentown”

Direction of The City	Percent Responding
Much Better	5%
Somewhat Better	26%
Somewhat Worse	29%
Much Worse	15%
Staying the Same	18%
Not Sure	8%

Once again, the respondent’s area of residency had a significant impact on their views regarding the direction of the city, but in an opposite direction from perspectives on overall quality of life. As can be seen in Table Three, West End residents were the least likely to indicate that life in Allentown is better than two years ago, while other areas of the city had more positive views on the direction of life here.

Table Three
“ Citizens Ratings of the Direction of Quality of Life in Allentown
by Area of Residency

Area of The City	Getting Better	Getting Worse	Staying the Same	Not Sure
West Side	21%	43%	31%	6%
Central City	33%	44%	11%	12%
East Side	43%	44%	7%	5%
South Side	33%	49%	15%	5%

PERCEPTIONS OF MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

Allentown residents gave mediocre ratings to the performances of both the mayor and city council. As can be seen in Tables Four and Five, a large majority of city residents rated the performance of the city’s executive and legislative institutions in the good to fair categories.

**Table Four
Ratings of The Performance of Allentown Mayor
Roy Afflerbach**

Mayor’s Performance	Percentage Responding 2004	Percentage Responding 2003
Excellent	4%	6%
Good	23%	37%
Fair	29%	26%
Poor	29%	19%
Not Sure	16%	12%

**Table Five
Ratings of The Performance of Allentown City Council**

Council Performance	Percentage Responding 2004	Percentage Responding 2003
Excellent	2%	2%
Good	28%	36%
Fair	34%	30%
Poor	13%	12%
Not Sure	23%	20%

For the performance of Mayor Roy Afflerbach, city residents tended to be fairly negative, with almost 3 (29%) out of 10 rating his work poor. These numbers also mark a general decline in satisfaction from a survey in 2003 conducted by Muhlenberg College and The City of Allentown Urban Observatory. Interestingly, the party affiliation of the citizen made no difference in how Allentonians viewed the Mayor. However, the length of a citizen’s residency in Allentown does have an impact on perceptions of the Mayor. Most notably, long term residents of the city (living in Allentown 20 or more years) were most critical of Afflerbach, with 40% rating his mayoral performance as poor. Conversely, for the newest residents of the city (10 or less years in the city), only 11% rated the mayor’s work as poor.

**Table Six
Ratings of The Performance of Allentown Mayor
By Length of Residency**

Length of Residency	% Rating Mayor Poor
---------------------	---------------------

0-4 years	13%
5-9 years	9%
10-14 years	31%
15-19 years	19%
20 or more years	40%

While measures of satisfaction with City Council showed less volatility since 2003, there was a noticeable 8% drop in the percentage of city residents who rated council’s work as either excellent or good.

SUPPORT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BASEBALL STADIUM

Over the past six months there has been considerable discussion regarding the construction of a new minor league baseball stadium in Allentown. While there have been numerous options discussed, Allentown citizens generally support city government pursuing this endeavor. More specifically, 49% of individuals surveyed indicated that they either strongly or somewhat agree that the city should pursue construction of a new minor league baseball stadium, with 42% disagreeing with this option. A full breakdown of responses follows in Table Seven below.

**Table Seven
Citizen Agreement that The City Should Pursue Construction of a New Minor League
Baseball Stadium**

Level of Agreement	Percentage Responding
Strongly Agree	28%
Somewhat Agree	21%
Somewhat Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	31%
Not Sure	9%

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE SERVICE AND CRIME

One of the most important issues facing the City of Allentown is the problem of crime and perceptions of safety. In this survey we examine the issue of public safety by gauging citizen satisfaction with police services and concern over neighborhood safety. First, Allentown residents give generally positive ratings to the service of city police department. As is noted in Table Eight, slightly over two out of three Allentonians rated the service of the APD as either excellent or good, with only about one in five rating police service as either fair or poor.

Table Eight

Ratings of The Service of the Allentown Police Department

APD Performance	Percentage Responding
Excellent	14%
Good	53%
Fair	21%
Poor	5%
Not Sure	7%

While city residents are generally positive towards police service, there is significant variation among residents of different races. Most notably white resident were most likely to rate city services positively, with 75% indicating the police service is either excellent or good. In comparison, only 55% of African Americans, and 49% of Hispanic/Latino residents identified police services as excellent or good.

As for perceptions of neighborhood safety, almost 7 out of 10 (68%) of city residents reported that crime is either not too big of a problem or not a problem at all in their area of the city. Conversely, just under one out of three residents reported crime being either somewhat or a big problem in their neighborhood. A full breakdown of responses follows in Table Nine.

Table Nine

Extent of Crime Problem in Your Neighborhood

Extent of Problem	Percentage Responding
Big Problem	9%
Somewhat of a problem	23%
Not too big of a problem	42%
Not a problem at all	26%
Not Sure	>1%

Looking closer at the findings we see that the respondents area of residency plays a big role in determining their perceptions of neighborhood safety. For example, while only 25% of West Allentown residents reported that crime is either somewhat of a problem or a big problem in their neighborhood, 57% of their counterparts in Central Allentown maintained the same position. A breakdown regarding concern with neighborhood safety follows in Table Ten.

Table Ten

**“ Citizens Ratings of the Problem of Crime in Their Neighborhood
by Area of Residency**

Area of The City	Big Problem	Somewhat of a Problem	Not Too Big of a Problem	Not a Problem at All
West Side	9%	17%	41%	43%
Central City	20%	37%	28%	15%
East Side	5%	26%	47%	21%
South Side	4%	19%	46%	30%

RATINGS OF ALLENTOWN SCHOOLS

Along with crime, public education has been a focus of much local attention in recent years. More specifically, the quality of the public school system in Allentown has been brought under scrutiny both from the state government and the media. Therefore this study sought to examine the current state of public attitudes regarding Allentown’s school system. From Table Eleven below one can see fairly low levels of public support for the quality of public education in the city. Most specifically, one out of four Allentonians rated the public schools as poor.

Table Eleven

Ratings of The Quality of the Allentown School System

Performance Rating	Percentage Responding
Excellent	3%
Good	26%
Fair	28%
Poor	26%
Not Sure	17%

When looking closer at the breakdown of responses the findings indicate that white Allentonians are least likely give high marks to city schools, with 25% rating the schools as excellent or good. Comparatively, 44% of African Americans and 35% of Latinos gave Allentown schools positive ratings of excellent or good.

While not very favorable in their perceptions of school quality in the city, Allentown residents were mildly supportive of paying more property taxes if the money was directed to improving educational quality in the city. The survey results indicate that a slight majority of city residents (53%) would support an increase of property taxes if it only went to increasing educational quality in the district. Conversely, 41% of Allentown residents expressed disagreement with the possibility of increased property taxes earmarked for educational improvement. A full listing of responses on this question follow in Table Twelve.

Table Twelve

**Level of Agreement for Increasing Property Taxes if the Money
Went Only to Improving Allentown Schools**

Level of Agreement	Percentage Responding
Strongly Agree	27%
Somewhat Agree	26%
Somewhat Disagree	13%
Strongly Disagree	28%
Not Sure	5%

As might be expected, Allentown residents with children under the age of 18 are more supportive than resident’s without school age children. For example, while 50% of city residents without children 18 years old or younger opposed increasing property taxes to improve school quality, only 22% of Allentonians with children in this age category indicated opposition to that fiscal possibility. In addition, individuals who own homes in the city were more hesitant to support this proposal, with 43% supporting the tax increase compared to 68% of individuals who do not own their home. Finally, individuals who vote most regularly in city elections were the least likely to support increased property taxes to aid public schools, with 47% of regular voters supporting this measure, compared to 64% of individuals who rarely or never vote in city elections.

THE LIKLIHOOD OF STAYING IN ALLENTOWN

A challenge facing many areas in Pennsylvania, and particularly the state’s urban centers, has been the ability of areas to maintain their young individuals and college educated citizens within their borders. Thus this study sought to measure citizen intent on staying in Allentown over the next five years. The findings indicate that 1 in 3 Allentown residents expect to leave Allentown within the next five years. A breakdown of all responses follows in Table Thirteen.

**Table Thirteen
Likelihood of Remaining in Allentown for the Next Five Years**

Likelihood of Staying	Percentage Responding
Certain to Stay	31%
Likely to Stay	32%
Likely to Move	23%
Certain to Move	12%
Not Sure	3%

Looking closer at the characteristics of city residents who are likely or certain to leave Allentown in the next five years some disturbing trends emerge. First, 50% of individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 expressed that they are likely or certain to leave the city in the next half decade. While high mobility is most expected in this age group, it poses a challenge for the city to keep many of Allentown’s younger generations within the city. Perhaps more troubling, the city’s college educated population is most likely to leave Allentown, with 41% of individuals with a bachelors degree indicating they are certain (13%) or likely (28%) to move from the city between

2004 and 2009. Comparatively, only 29% of individuals with educational attainment of a high school diploma or less indicated a high likelihood of leaving Allentown. Such findings confirm fears of a “brain drain” in the city, and add to the urgency of the challenge of keeping young, educated citizens in Allentown.