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"From the Supervisor" column
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

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Town Survey Results Now Online

Responses will help prioritize initiatives and guide future decision-making

The firm engaged to conduct our Community Survey presented the results at our Town Board meeting on July 2. You can find the presentation, along with the response data for each survey question on the Town website at www.townofpittsford.org/2019-resident-survey-results.

As you may recall, we commissioned this town-wide survey of residents to understand your thoughts about Town services and to identify what issues matter most to you. The results will help guide us as we prioritize Town initiatives and consider how our municipal services and policies should evolve in the future.

We felt it very important to hear from as many residents as possible. The firm that conducted the survey developed an extensive outreach plan to do so. A postcard with the survey details and a unique user code was mailed to each household in Pittsford. The code ensured anonymous participation for respondents and enabled advance registration for the survey so users could receive an email with a direct link to the survey once it was live. Online notices about the survey began in February and survey information was posted on the Town website as of March 1 and updated in April once the survey was underway. Before the Survey opened in April, informational poster boards and flyers were placed at Town Hall, the Pittsford Community Library and the Spiegel Community Center, and in the Senior programs area of Spiegel. The Town posted multiple notifications on its Facebook page, from February through the survey's conclusion on May 20.

For those who didn't have a computer or didn't want to take the survey online, we made paper surveys available at the Library, the Community Center and at Town Hall. Online access to the survey was available at the Library and the Community Center.

The survey covered a range of topics, including Housing/Development, Sustainability, Town Services, Parks and Recreation, the Library, and Aging in Place/Senior Services. Importantly, the participation rate from our residents was above average for surveys of this type, according to the survey firm. This produced statistically significant data, accurate to a level of 95% accuracy.

Key findings of the survey include the following.

- People love living in Pittsford. On a scale of 1 to 10, the Survey revealed an overall happiness rating of 8.6
- People overwhelmingly want to maintain the character of the Town – from green space to services to neighborhoods, across the board, those characteristics that make Pittsford a place where people aspire to live.

- Residents are interested in more housing options for people of age 55+, including more affordable housing for people in that demographic.
- Although residents support the cut in Town taxes we delivered last year, 71% of respondents said they'd be willing to consider paying more in tax if it went to pay for acquiring more land for the Town's Greenprint Plan, in order to mitigate additional development of open green spaces not already protected.
- 75% of residents want the town to keep current zoning provisions for single-family homes.
- Residents overwhelmingly support the Town's initiatives to make Pittsford easier and safer to get around on foot and by bicycle, including new sidewalks, planned trail improvements and the joint Town-Village Active Transportation Plan.
- Residents broadly support the idea of a Community Choice Aggregation program, which has potential to offer electricity from sustainable sources at a lower price than they pay currently. However, only 26% are willing to pay more for electricity from green sources.
- 86% of residents support the Town's initiative to provide for Refuse Districts for garbage collection in neighborhoods that want them, provided that the cost is lower than what they currently pay.
- About 76% of residents would support a solar farm in the Town, with about half of those stating they'd support it if it were out of sight.
- The Pittsford Community Library enjoys overwhelming support: 71% of respondents rated it at 8 out of 10 or better, with 40% of respondents rating our library, its staff and services with a 10 out of 10.
- Residents are aware of the Town's recreation programs and strongly approve of our renovated Spiegel Community Center.

The data deriving from our survey has tremendous importance and influence in shaping future policy choices and municipal goals for Pittsford. Particularly encouraging is the strong public support the survey reveals for our current and recent major policy initiatives. From leadership in sustainability and environmental issues, increasing walkability and community connections with new sidewalks and trail improvements, and outstanding Library and Recreation facilities and programs, to our recent initiative to permit Refuse Districts for less expensive garbage collection, the survey reveals a high level of public satisfaction and support for all of these and more.

The data shows strong support for a provision I insisted upon in our draft Comprehensive Plan: to explicitly state as a goal making provision to encourage more housing in Pittsford for people in their retirement years and at a lower cost than generally available now. Pittsford's not just a place where so many aspire to move to – it's a place where people want to stay. The survey showed strong public support for this concept. As we move forward, as the Town refines its zoning laws on the basis of the Comprehensive Plan, we can explore provisions such as changes to setbacks, lot sizes, building height requirements and other details to help make new patio homes, and other housing styles desired by people in their retirement years, available at a lower cost than what might be available today.

A telling statement of what people want is their economic behavior. In many ways, how we spend our money tells the story of our goals and priorities. The Pittsford we know and live in is a place where quality of life is considered so good, our schools are so excellent, town services are so strong, where both the built environment and natural environment are regarded as so appealing, that people are willing to pay a premium to live here. Property values are higher. So "more affordable" senior

housing in Pittsford inevitably is likely to be more costly than such housing elsewhere in the region. The point is that there are steps we can take to make such housing in Pittsford available at lower cost than it is today for our residents who plan on spending their retirement years here.

As I say frequently, the only way to make sure that Pittsford remains one of the best and most desirable places to live in the State of New York, and even in the country, is to seek continuous improvement. Improvement in keeping with the essential character of Pittsford, which is defined by all of us as residents. Through careful fiscal management, we've been able to carry forward these improvements with a 2019 budget that cut the Town tax levy for this year, and cut the Town tax rate by 6.6%. I'm now working on the Town budget for 2020 and we're on track for a further town tax cut for next year.

On behalf of the entire Town Administration and staff, many thanks to all of you who took time to respond to the survey.

If you'd like to discuss our survey results, or any other topic, please do stop by Town Hall or reach me directly by phone at 248-6220 or by email at bsmith@townofpittsford.org. I look forward to hearing from you.