



Views on McLean

A Report by the McLean Citizens Association Regarding Its Survey of McLean Area Residents September 23, 2014

The McLean Citizens Association (MCA) is a non-profit association that has served since 1914 as the unofficial town council for the 31,000+ households in the greater McLean area. MCA provides a forum in which all McLean residents can discuss ways to resolve community problems and countywide issues affecting the area.

*The MCA Board of Directors meets on the first Wednesday of every month at the McLean Community Center at 7:30 pm, unless otherwise announced. The MCA's President, Sally Horn, can be reached at:
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Between the Fall of 2013 and the Spring of 2014, the McLean Citizens Association (MCA) distributed a questionnaire to McLean area residents to better understand their views on various aspects of life in McLean. The goal of the questionnaire was to: (1) find out what residents like and dislike about McLean so that MCA could formulate efforts to improve McLean; (2) broaden MCA's outreach in McLean; and (3) encourage MCA membership.

While the survey is not scientific, it provides valuable insight into the views of McLean area residents about our community, including its strengths and the direction that residents would like to see it move in the future.

The results reflect resident concerns about issues on which the MCA is already focusing, such as transportation, parks and open spaces, pedestrian access, and improving downtown McLean. The survey responses also identified other issues and concerns that the MCA will take into consideration going forward.

The MCA believes the survey provides critical insight for MCA members, local governmental officials, and residents living in this part of Northern Virginia. We hope that you find it helpful and thank all of you who participated.

SUMMARY

The MCA questionnaire was completed by 282 people, which included current MCA members and other local residents. The questionnaire was filled out online using SurveyMonkey.com and through completion of paper questionnaires; distribution was made through the MCA website, outreach to a number of local newspapers and Supervisor Foust's office, and at MCA meetings. Participation was self-generated; recognized public research standards were not used to generate statistically relevant data.

The results reveal discernible preferences among those who participated regarding keeping the small town feel of McLean, reducing traffic congestion, and improving the appearance of and amenities within downtown McLean. Additional preferences expressed by sizeable numbers of participants addressed McLean area public schools, the police and fire departments, the library and community center, and athletic facilities for sports other than soccer. Spending (both more and less) and taxes were a priority for some, as well.

The survey asked respondents to indicate their preferences and concerns by choosing from a list of subjects and to provide narrative comments. The discussion below shows the percentage of responses to each question and summarizes narrative comments from respondents. When responses to different questions were duplicative, the Report combines the responses and lists them by subject matter.

DISCUSSION -- MCLEAN COMMUNITY CONCERNS

(Survey questions are printed verbatim in boldface type)

Question: What do you like about McLean? Check all that apply. 282 responses
(respondents could choose more than one answer)

- Convenient location:** (92%)
- Sense of community:** (40%)
- Downtown McLean amenities (restaurants, shops, and other service providers)** (48%)
- Established residential neighborhoods and subdivisions:** (63%)
- Low crime rates:** (77%)
- Outdoor amenities (athletic fields, parks, playgrounds, trails):** (47%)
- Cultural offerings (art galleries and performing arts):** (28%)
- Schools:** (63%)
- Other (please specify):** See highlights below.

[These results are also shown graphically in Figure 1 on the next page.]

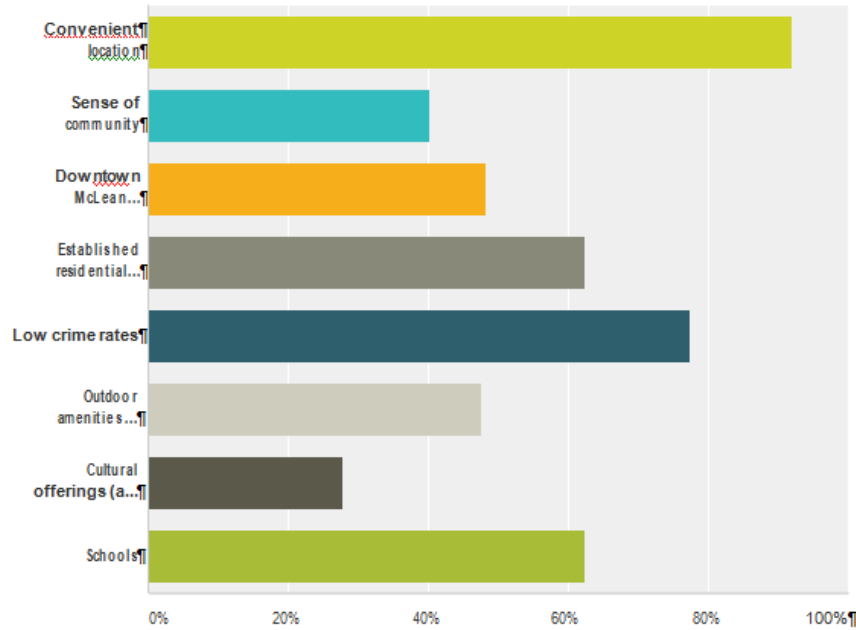


Figure 1: What Do You Like About McLean?

As reflected in Figure 1, the top three ranked choices were: Convenient Location (92%), Low Crime Rate (77%), and, in a tie for 3rd place at 63%, Schools and Established Residential Neighborhoods and Subdivisions.

Some highlights of the “Other “ narrative comments to Question 1: There were 34 narrative comments. Several respondents expressed their appreciation for the amenities in the McLean area, such as the local school system; the Police and Fire Departments; available parks, woods and green spaces and facilities such as the Dolley Madison Library and the McLean Community Center. Others stated they liked the McLean area for more intangible reasons, such as the proximity to DC and Reagan and Dulles airports, the prestige of the community, the ambience and people, the level of sophistication, the “small town” feeling – both big and yet small, privacy of neighborhoods, and the fact that some businesses have been here for many decades.

Question: What would you change about McLean? Please indicate which options you support and rank them. 276 responses (respondents could choose more than one answer)

- It is fine as it is:** (6%)
- More pedestrian-friendly (e.g., bike paths, trails, and traffic lights throughout):** (67%)
- More cyclist-friendly (e.g., bike paths, trails and traffic lights throughout):** (35%)
- More athletic fields (specify sport(s) in the “Other” field below:** (6%)
- More indoor recreational and meeting facilities (at McLean Community Center and Downtown McLean:** (12%)
- More residential density in downtown McLean (e.g., more mid-rise apartments/condos)** (16%)
- More shops and restaurants in downtown McLean** (59%)

- Revitalize and/or redevelop McLean neighborhoods (12%)**
- Protect McLean from urbanization (48%)**
- Improve schools (provide top 3-4 priorities, e. g., smaller class sizes, fewer trailers, standardized tests, more effective instruction). (20%)**
- Limit new spending and thereby limit new taxes (20%)**

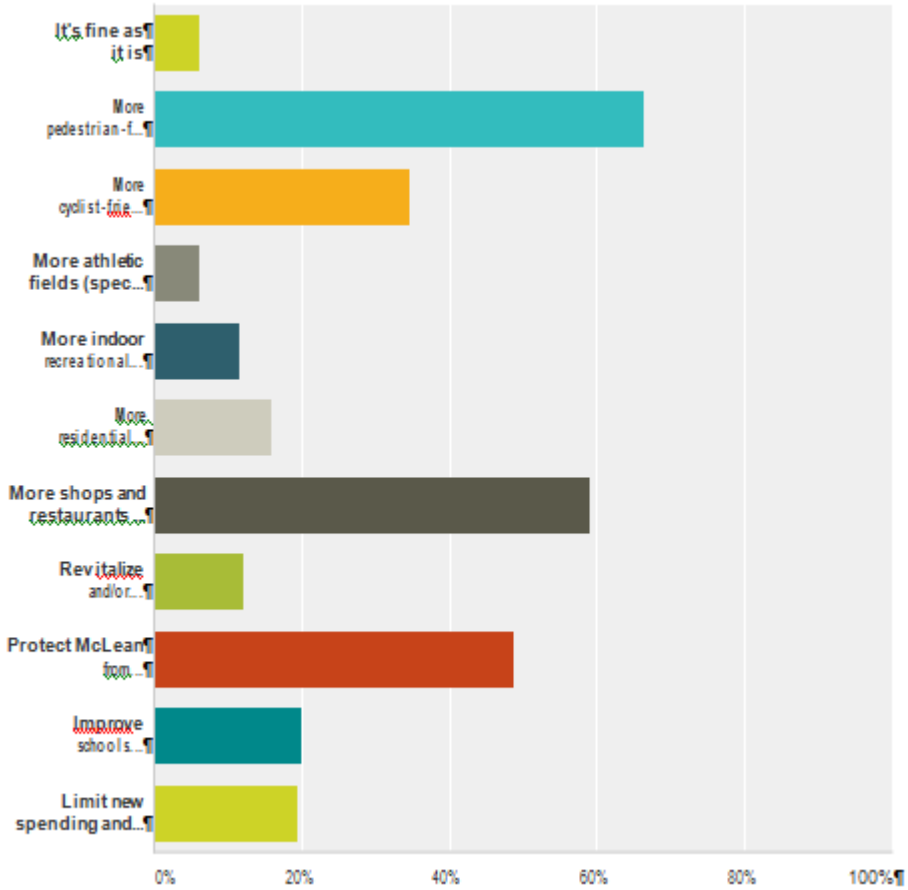


Figure 2: What Would You Change About McLean?

Given the listed choices, shown in Figure 2, the top three were: the McLean area should be more pedestrian-friendly (e.g. sidewalks, trails and traffic lights throughout) (67%); there should be more shops and restaurants in downtown McLean (59%); and McLean should be protected from urbanization (48%). No other choice generated more than 20%, other than the choice that the McLean area should be more cyclist friendly (e.g., bike paths, trails and traffic lights throughout) (35%).

These top priorities were also reflected in the narrative responses. The discussion below summarizes these narrative comments, as well as the narrative responses to the questions in the survey that asked what issues and concerns the respondents would like MCA to address (130 responses) and what additional thoughts or comments the respondents had. (70 responses).

Narrative responses to these questions were combined and divided into six categories: (1) appearance and retail options of downtown McLean and the McLean area; (2) parks, facilities, and recreation; (3) schools; (4) taxes/spending; (5) transportation, and (6) other. Several subjects produced emotional comments, both pro and con, including schools, soccer fields, and taxes/spending.

Subtopics below are listed in alphabetical order, not in order of importance. Asterisked items() indicate the comment was mentioned more often than other comments.*

Appearance and Retail Options of Downtown McLean and the McLean Area

Of the narrative responses to the survey, there were far more comments (122) relating to the appearance and amenities of Downtown McLean and the McLean Area than any other topic. Many of these comments supported revitalizing McLean and providing more restaurant and retail choices.

The following summarizes these comments:

*1. Descriptors: There were a number of survey responses that reflected concern with the appearance of downtown McLean. Examples of responses are: Ugly; no personality; dump; non-descript; not cool; sprawling; tawdry; shabby; concrete jungle.

*2. Revitalization: A number of narrative responses called for its revitalization. Examples included: Need a compelling town center; like its small town atmosphere; looking for a village-like ambience; looking for a more walkable downtown, green spaces; outdoor sitting and eating areas; tavern; bars; more charming; pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly; public art; more accessible; outside eating; more trees and landscaping; hide power lines.

*3. Density/Urbanization: There were also a number of narrative responses that addressed concerns about density and urbanization of McLean, particularly because of the growth of Tysons. Examples included: Lower density; no high rises; more residential density; put big growth and high rises at Tysons, not McLean; too much urbanization; no new high rises or dense residential areas; replace some of the banks, dry cleaners, and high-end restaurants; adding a couple of stories to the existing retail areas would be great and would introduce the potential for smaller residential units of high quality; use smaller lots to build lower cost housing for teachers, civil servants (police, fire), and young families starting out (and develop proposals for other ways to accomplish this); don't want Tysonsization; enforce zoning of residential property to protect existing neighborhoods from overdevelopment.

*4. More Restaurants/Shops : Some respondents advocated for establishment of various stores including: Target, Coldwater Creek, Panera, Marvelous Market, Kentucky Fried Chicken, fast food, more variety, family-friendly (to take T-ball team after a win), local and organic food restaurants, deli, burger, pizza, bakery, and a 5 & 10 cent store.

*5. Less Restaurants/Shops: Too many Chinese restaurants, high-priced restaurants, banks, nail salons, dry cleaners, gas stations.

6. Housing for the elderly and down-sizing people; more affordable housing.

7. Dolley Madison Library and McLean Community Center are inaccessible.

8. Less asphalt and impervious surfaces.

9. More amenities and cultural offerings.

10. Put parking behind stores; stores nearer to sidewalks; terraces at shops.

11. Build a Supervisor's Office/government center and more meeting rooms.

12. Don't build the roundabout at Old Dominion and Chain Bridge Road.

13. Ban all banner/flag type advertising – they look terrible; clean the gutters and medians on Route 123 between the George Washington Parkway and Tysons Corner.

14. Get moving again on downtown McLean redevelopment.

15. New government buildings are embarrassing – too big and too grand.
16. Need better building restrictions, e.g., the ugly brick mansion on Route 123 has been in a state of build for more than five years; restrictions on PODs, such as the one at the American Legion on Balls Hill Road which has had a POD at their parking lot for five years.
17. Make McLean like the City of Falls Church, not like the city that Tysons is becoming; the livability of McLean could die from the traffic that Tysons explosive growth may cause.
18. Revitalize Chesterbrook Shopping Center
19. Upgrade and clean Safeway.
20. Live music on weekends.
21. Cool pub for people in their '30s and '40s.
22. McDonalds: No drive through from Old Dominion Drive -- make only entrance on the side street.
23. Encourage businesses to take over vacant space, such as the original McDonalds, Blockbuster's, Marvelous Market, and Chicken Out.

Parks, Facilities, and Recreation

There were 52 narrative responses to that address local parks, facilities, and recreation. The following summarizes these comments:

- *1. More: Indoor basketball; lacrosse; football; baseball; soccer; track; volleyball; adult full-service gym; skate park; indoor fitness center in downtown McLean; outdoor community swimming pool; facilities for older kids; lights for tennis courts; rectangular athletic fields; aerobics; dog parks.
- *2. Less: Soccer fields (soccer rules with an iron fist!) and athletic fields.
- *3. McLean Community Center: Duplicate bridge; exercise room with access limited to McLean residents; educational and cultural programs; black box theater; adult ballet classes for two hours in the evening and on Saturdays; zuma classes; evenings of weight exercise classes for stroke victims; training facilities for people who want to learn new job skills; improve the quality of vendors (especially the Christmas show, which seems to have lost some quality); more classes at night for those who work; more meeting space; lack of transparency and empire building; intellectual-content courses (not yoga and pottery) for seniors similar to the Encore Learning program in Arlington.
- *4. Parks/Green Spaces: McLean parks are too small and over-developed; more pedestrian and bicycle trails, especially between dead-end streets (courts, cul-de-sacs, etc.); don't fill up remaining green spaces; more trees; it's senseless to put in more parks and recreation areas where one must drive to them; keep McLean Central Park from becoming an urban park.
- 5. Support Tysons/Pimmit Regional Library and Dolley Madison Library.
- 6. Revitalize Pimmit Trail and other trails.
- 7. Create a senior citizens day care center with transportation.

Schools

The narrative responses included 34 comments regarding local schools, as summarized below:

- *1. Class Size: 22 of the 34 narrative responses expressed concern about the class sizes in area schools and that the schools are too crowded.
- *2. Funding: Responses indicated a varied perspective on school funding. Here are some examples: spend more, even if it means more taxes; spending is off the chart and they always want more; schools never want anything audited; less administration; schools are a high priority, but not the only priority in sustaining our community; increase teachers' and school employees pay; more funding for hiring and keeping specialists/teachers (drama, music, science lab, foreign languages, etc.).

*3. Testing: Do not use student test scores to evaluate teachers -- use peer-review approach similar to Montgomery County's PAR program; reduce standardized testing; focus on the whole child, not just SOL/test scores.

*4 Facilities: fewer trailers; better facilities; long overdue renovations due at Langley High School; need a new elementary school at Tysons; Spring Hill E.S. is too crowded,

5. Later start time for high schools.

6. Miscellaneous: More student-centered and technology instruction in the classroom; reduce the pervading attitude of pushing children to achieve at young ages, which is too stressful; improve quality of teachers and get more parental involvement; more and different options for after-school activities.

Taxes/Spending

There were 17 narrative responses relating to budget and taxation issues. These responses are summarized below:

*1. More: Spend more to provide food, heat, and support for the poor; McLean needs more of everything – it's time to stop living on a shoestring budget; spend more on schools, even if it means more taxes; raise property taxes; McLean is poorly funded overall.

*2. Less: Use tax dollars more wisely so taxes don't have to increase; limit new spending or lower spending and taxes; stop building white elephants; live within the budget; there are not enough funds in the budget to maintain what already exists – stop spending more and raising taxes; if people want something, they can spend their own money on it; real estate taxes are way too high; don't raise taxes for the McLean Community Center; keep more of our tax dollars.

*3. Funding and Fiscal Prudence. Use a variety of tax instruments that will help us manage year-to-year; McLean should be a chartered city or have the same authority as Fairfax County; we need greater flexibility than what the Virginia law currently provides; taxes are our investment in our community.

Transportation

There were 95 narrative responses that related to transportation issues (e.g., traffic, pedestrian and cyclist routes, public transit, etc.). A summary of these responses follows:

*1. More Pedestrian and Bicycle Friendly: There were numerous comments expressing concerns about these issues. Examples include the following: I would love not to get in my car every day; biking in McLean is virtually impossible; difficult to do errands on foot because there are too many parking lots to walk through; more pedestrian-friendly walkways at Chain Bridge Road and Old Dominion; do a better job integrating bikes and cyclists into car traffic; encourage public sites/larger buildings to allow pedestrian/cyclist passage at least during daytime (Franklin Sherman fences force many to go a long way around to get out of Salona Village).

*2. Traffic Control: Many respondents expressed concerns relating to traffic in the McLean area. These included the following examples: reduce the number of stoplights; better synchronize stoplights; poor traffic control around the "apron" area of Tysons; place an island in front of the Chain Bridge Shopping Center to prevent cars from crossing Chain Bridge Road between the shopping centers – make it right turns only from both shopping centers; stop putting dividers in streets like Ingleside and Route 123; reduce speeding; add speed bumps where appropriate; reduce cut-through traffic; redesign roads for more efficient movement of cars.

*3. Disabled/Elderly: More transportation -- taxis are too expensive and Metro access is unreliable and not flexible enough for doctor appointments, shopping, yoga class, haircuts, etc.

*4. Road Improvements: Add an extra lane to Chain Bridge between Great Falls and Davidson (that can be converted to parking for Lewinsville on the weekend); create bike lanes and sidewalks to get to the new Metro stations; add a one-way exit at McLean Hamlet for the National Counter-Terrorism Center so employees can get directly onto the Beltway/Toll Road; improve road maintenance – grass cutting, litter removal, tree trimming; keep medians clear of trash; more huts at bus stops to protect riders from the elements.

*5. Parking: Improve parking on Fleetwood – too many commercial vehicles park there too long; better parking at Metro stations; set aside satellite parking areas at Metro stations with frequent shuttle service.

*6. Sidewalks: On Ingleside Road, fill gaps between existing sidewalks (Forest Villa Lane near Poplar Place, Somerset Drive to connect to Ramshorn Drive, Stoneham Court, and Long Meadow Road; Dolley Madison on the south side between Elm Street and Kirby Road; Old Dominion Drive near Kirby Road overpass and connecting sidewalks along Kirby; near Spring Hill Recreation Center, particularly toward the new Spring Hill Metro Station; the full length of Route 123 from the George Washington Parkway to Lewinsville Road).

7. Create a long-range redevelopment plan in all areas within a one-mile radius of the new Silver Line Metro stations.

8. Route 123, the primary route into Washington, is not capable of handling the rapidly increasing volumes, and traffic jams are already routine.

9. Lack of another bridge (or bridges) across the Potomac is congesting the local roads with many Maryland license plates; better transportation options are needed between McLean and Maryland.

10. More public transportation on Georgetown Pike.

11. Ask FAA to have helicopters fly at a higher altitude so windows don't rattle.

12. Build a streetcar that connects downtown McLean with Tysons Metro and Vienna.

13. No flyover near the toll road.

Other

*1. Residential Studio Units (RSU): Support and opposition was expressed regarding micro apartments (Residential Studio Units or RSUs) in McLean. Among comments of those opposed were: schools are already overcrowded, traffic is terrible – we don't need to squeeze in three people in 500 square feet; no low income studios in residential neighborhoods – keep them in high density areas like Tysons and around Metro stations. Others called for allowing RSUs to enable moderate-income persons and families, such as service personnel, to live in or near McLean.

*2. Make McLean more friendly to aging citizens; expand opportunities for senior citizens; more buses for the elderly going into McLean and back to the suburbs; more volunteers helping elderly and disabled people shoveling snow and other jobs.

*3. Keep McLean small; no more tall buildings that block out the sun.

4. It's hard to accomplish much without a formal presence, i.e., a true government for the community rather than just a "postal presence."

5. Change is inevitable. However, we must try to minimize the impact of the law of unintended consequences.

6. The extreme footprints of teardown replacement housing are too high and overwhelming to their neighborhood.

7. Reduce builder infill.

8. Crime will increase due to Metro and the Tysons development.

9. Encourage more of a racial mix.

CONCLUSION

The responses to the MCA survey reveal considerable information about the preferences and concerns of citizens in the McLean area who participated. An overwhelming number of respondents enjoyed the convenient location and low crime rates of the area, and numerous respondents expressed appreciation for the established residential neighborhoods in the McLean area. Many survey respondents also supported the area school systems, but a number also expressed concern about class sizes. Another matter of significant concern was the lack of infrastructure for pedestrians and bicycles. Further, the survey indicated a widespread desire to protect McLean from the urbanization effects from encroaching development in Tysons and maintain the “small town” feel of McLean, but at the same time to expand the restaurant and retail choices in McLean. Not surprisingly, there were also a large number of comments and concerns relating to traffic in the McLean area.

These survey results will help to inform the MCA as it continues its 100 years of work representing the approximately 31,000+ households in the Greater McLean area. Many of the resolutions and other accomplishments of the MCA in the past years have already addressed issues that were identified as matters of concern by survey respondents. However, the survey responses also indicated related issues and concerns that the MCA will take into consideration going forward.

Citizens who would like more information about the survey can contact MCA President, Sally Horn, at the number and email address on the first page of this Report. Those who would like more information about the MCA or who are interested in joining the MCA are encouraged to visit the MCA website, www.mcleancitizens.org.