

# Memorandum

**To:** Annie Kolb-Nelson, Matt Manguso  
**From:** Bruce Brown  
**CC:**  
**Date:** Monday, March 9, 2020  
**Subject:** Landfill Online Survey Results Summary – Draft 1

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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this survey was to hear from a representative sample of households identified as “located near the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill.” A total of 3,695 addresses met this criterion, and King County Solid Waste Division (KCSWD) provided them with an opportunity to participate in an online survey about their experience living near the landfill.

More specifically, the survey asked questions around several major topic areas:

- What do people want to know about the landfill?
- How does living near the landfill affect them, and what would make it better?
- How do people want to communicate with KCSWD?
- How much do people trust KCSWD, and what would increase trust?

The survey results will be used for future landfill planning, to inform communications, and to improve the experience of those who live near the landfill.

## **METHODS**

Survey questions were developed through a collaborative effort between KCSWD and PRR and were programmed online using PRR’s Qualtrics online survey platform.

The survey was conducted from February 7 through February 23, 2020. A survey invite letter was mailed on February 6, 2020 to each of the 3,695 addresses. The letter explained the purpose of the survey, indicated the survey could be completed in either English or Spanish, and provided the URLs for the English and Spanish language versions.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a unique access code for each address was included in the letter. The use of a unique access code ensured the survey could be completed only once from each address. A reminder postcard was mailed one week after the initial survey invite letter.

A total of 85 letters were undeliverable by the post office, resulting in 3,610 potential survey respondents. A total of 700 people completed the survey, resulting in a 19% response rate.

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<sup>1</sup> One person requested and was provided a paper version of the survey along with a postage paid envelope.

Percentages in this report summarize frequencies for survey questions. Bi-variate cross-tabulation correlations were analyzed to identify statistically significant relationships among variables. Responses to open-end questions were reviewed to identify key themes.

Only statistically significant relationships are reported. To achieve the cut-off for statistical significance, correlations had a 0.05 significance level (a 95 percent confidence level) and a coefficient (a measure of the relationship between variables) of  $\geq 0.15$  for a positive relationship or  $\leq -0.15$  for a negative relationship. Together, these criteria indicate a relatively strong relationship for the statistical findings reported below.

## **RESPONDENT PROFILES**

- Two-thirds (67%) have lived near the landfill for 10 or more years.
- While some (13%) live less than a half mile from the landfill, a quarter (25%) live a half mile to a mile away. The remainder (63%) live more than a mile away.
- Ages of respondents tended to be older with nineteen percent 44 years of age or younger, and almost three-quarters (72%) between 45 and 74 years of age.
- Gender leaned more toward males (57%), 42% being females, and 2% identifying with a gender(s) not listed.
- Three percent were of Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx origin.
- Most (88%) identified as White, with 4% identifying as Asian or Asian American, and another 7% identifying as mixed race.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### *1. What do people want to know about the landfill?*

Of most importance, respondents want to know what the plans are for the future of the landfill, what the plans are for after it closes, how full is the landfill, and what is being done to protect the environment. They also want accurate information on the water quality around the landfill, what the health impacts are of living near the landfill, and what is being done to control the odor/smell.

### *2. What are the impacts of living near landfill and what would make it better?*

Almost all respondents said they experience some kind of negative impact associated with living near the landfill. The most salient impact was the odor/smell. Other major impacts include truck traffic, equipment noise/vibration, and litter. In addition, some respondents report concerns about decreased property values, spoiled views, and impacts to their health by living near the landfill.

Short of closing the landfill, addressing the odor/smell problem would be the best way to improve living near the landfill. In addition, respondents said less food/paper/plastic waste in the landfill, better pest/bird management, and litter control would also improve the situation.

### *3. How do people want to communicate with KCSWD?*

Most want to be kept informed about the landfill, with most wanting quarterly or twice-yearly communication from KCSWD. The most preferred methods of receiving information from KCSWD are through either email or postal mail. Other frequently identified methods include the public meetings and the KCSWD website.

Similarly, most report wanting to communicate with KCSWD through email, public meetings, the comment section on the KCSWD website, and postal mail.

4. *What do people think about the twice-a-year public meetings?*

About a fifth of respondents (19%) had attended the public meetings. The top reasons for attending the public meetings include influencing what happens next at the landfill, learning about updates on the landfill, and asking questions about the landfill.

Most do not feel the public meetings meet their needs, but nonetheless believe the public meetings should be continued. More than a quarter of respondents were open to the idea of online public meetings. The preferred frequency of public meetings was either twice a year. Recommended improvements for the meetings include changes to the substance, structure, and outcomes of the meetings.

5. *How much do people trust the KCSWD and what would increase their trust?*

About half of the respondents trust the KCSWD *somewhat* and about a quarter *do not trust at all*. Reasons for not trusting KCSWD include the perceptions that KCSWD does not take action (closing the landfill, addressing the smell/odor, not putting the community first) and poor communication (not keeping residents informed, not really listening to concerns, not making sure the decision process is open and transparent)

## **DETAILED RESULTS**

### **WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE LANDFILL?**

The topics of most importance are:

- What are the future plans for the landfill? (19%) – especially those who:
  - Want to be kept informed about the landfill
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Go to the public meetings to ask questions
- What are the plans for after the landfill closes? (17%) – especially those who:
  - Want to be kept informed about the landfill
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Go to the public meetings to ask questions
- How full is the landfill? (16%) – especially those who:
  - Go to the public meetings to ask questions
  - Go to the public meetings to influence what happens next with the landfill
- What's being done to protect the environment (14%) – especially those who:
  - Indicate that less food, paper, and plastic waste in the landfill (more recycling) would make living near the landfill better
- How is KCSWD using technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? (12%) – especially those who:
  - Want to receive information from KCSWD more frequently
  - Want to communicate with King County
  - Go to public meetings to say what they need
  - Go to public meetings to ask questions about the landfill
  - Indicate that less food, paper, and plastic waste in the landfill (more recycling) would make living near the landfill better
  - Are female
- What are the climate change impacts? (8%) – especially those who:
  - Are female

- How to prevent food, paper, and plastic waste from getting into the landfill (8%) – especially those who:
  - Go to the public meetings to say what they need
  - Go to the public meetings to influence what happens next at the landfill
  - Want to keep the public meetings
- Other important things they want to know about (8%)
  - What is being done to control odors?
  - What are the health impacts?
  - When will the landfill close?

### HOW DOES LIVING NEAR LANDFILL AFFECT THEM AND WHAT WOULD MAKE IT BETTER?

Only three percent of the respondents said living near the landfill does not affect them. The most frequently mentioned impacts of living near the landfill are:

- Smell/odor (39%) – especially those who:
  - Want to receive information more frequently
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Are less likely to think the public meetings meet their needs
  - Want more frequent public meetings
  - Have lower trust of KCSWD
  - Live closer to the landfill
- Truck traffic (25%)
- Equipment noise or vibration (15%) – especially those who:
  - Want to receive information more frequently
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Have attended public meetings
  - Attend public meetings to influence what happens
  - Are less likely to think the public meetings meet their needs
  - Want more frequent public meetings
  - Have lower trust of KCSWD
  - Live closer to the landfill
- Litter (10%) – especially those who:
  - Want to be kept informed through public meetings
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Have attended public meetings
  - Attend public meetings to say what I need
  - Attend public meetings to influence what happens next at the landfill
  - Are less likely to think the public meetings meet their needs
  - Want more frequent public meetings
  - Have lower trust of KCSWD
  - Live closer to the landfill
- Other perceptions of living near the landfill (9%)
  - Health impacts
  - Reduced property values
  - Spoiled views
  - Leaching into the water table
  - Traffic noise and road degradation
  - Garbage dropped by eagles
  - Noise pollution

Not surprisingly, when asked what could make living by the landfill better, “no smell or odor” was chosen by many respondents (40%). Other solutions chosen included:

- Less food, paper, and plastic waste in the landfill (14%)
- Better pest/bird management (11%)
- Better litter control (10%)
- Other things that would make living near the landfill better (13%)
  - Close the landfill
  - Stop expansion of the landfill
  - Limit operations to reduce noise at night

## HOW DO PEOPLE WANT TO COMMUNICATE WITH KCSWD?

- The vast majority (92%) of people want to be kept informed about the landfill. Those more likely to want to be kept informed are those who:
  - Report that faster responses to their questions and concerns would make it better living by the landfill
  - Have less trust of KCSWD
- Most people want to be kept informed either quarterly (50%) or twice yearly (26%). Sixteen percent want to be kept informed monthly. Those who want to be kept informed more frequently are especially those who:
  - Have less trust of KCSWD
  - Live closer to the landfill
- The most preferred ways of being kept informed are:
  - Email (27%) – especially those who:
    - Do not want to be kept informed by postal mail
    - Want online public meetings
    - Are less likely to want to communicate with KCSWD through in-person public meetings
  - Postal mail (26%) – especially those who:
    - Do not want to be kept informed by email
    - Think the public meetings meet their needs
  - Public meetings (11%) – especially those who:
    - Want to communicate with KCSWD
    - Have attended the public meetings
    - Go to public meetings to ask questions about the landfill
    - Have less trust of KCSWD
    - Are likely to prefer using email to communicate with KCSWD
  - Solid Waste Division website (11%) – especially those who:
    - Want to keep the public meetings
    - Trust the Solid Waste Division more
    - Live closer to the landfill
  - Flyers (8%) – especially those who:
    - Want to be kept informed by postal mail
  - Social media (King County Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (7%) – especially those who:
    - Prefer social media to communicate back to KCSWD
- About half (48%) want to communicate with King County about the landfill – especially those who:
  - Want to receive information more frequently
  - Report smell/odor impacts them
- The most preferred ways of communicating with King County about the landfill are:
  - Email (33%) – especially those who:

- Want to know what the plans are for after the landfill closes
- Public meetings (17%) – especially those who:
  - Are less likely to prefer online public meetings
- Comment section on the Solid Waste Division website (16%) – especially those who:
  - Want to be kept informed on the Solid Waste Division website
  - Are less likely to have attended the public meetings
  - Are less likely to prefer postal mail as a way of communicating with KCSWD
  - Are more likely to prefer online public meetings
  - Live closer to the landfill
- Postal mail (14%)
- Social media (8%) – especially those who:
  - Are younger

### WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE TWICE-YEARLY PUBLIC MEETINGS?

- Almost a fifth (19%) of respondents had attended the twice-a-year public meetings about the landfill – especially those who:
  - Want to receive information more frequently
  - Attend to say what they need
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Live closer to the landfill
- The most frequently mentioned reasons for attending the public meetings are:
  - To influence what happens next with the landfill (28%) – especially those who:
    - Live closer to the landfill
    - Report equipment noise and vibration impact them
    - Report litter impacts them
  - To learn about any updates to the landfill (28%)
  - To ask questions about the landfill (23%) – especially those who:
    - Want to know what the plans are for the landfill
    - Want to know how full the landfill is
    - How is KCSWD using technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
    - Report faster response to questions or concerns could make living by the landfill better
    - Have lower trust of KCSWD
  - To say what they need (14%) – especially those who:
    - Want to know about how to prevent food, paper, and plastic waste from getting into the landfill
    - Who want to receive information more frequently
    - Have lower incomes
- Most do not think the public meetings meet their needs. A third (32%) indicated the meetings do not meet their needs at all, while another third (36%) said the public meetings slightly meet their needs. Another third (32%) believe the public meetings meet their needs moderately well (28%) or completely meet their needs (5%). Those who are more likely to think the public meetings do not meet their needs are those who:
  - Go to the public meetings to say what they need
  - Report that the smell/odor impacts them
- Those who reported the public meetings *did not meet their needs at all* or only *slightly met their needs* explained their rating by stating concerns that dealt with:

- Substance of the meetings (information mismatch, uncertainty that they are being told the truth, staff need to be prepared to answer honestly, staff need to understand the problems people have)
- Structure of the meetings (need accurate notes from meetings, need longer/more frequent meetings)
- Outcome of the meetings (not sure concerns are listened to, not sure meetings impact decisions, no solutions implemented, promises not kept)
- Nonetheless, about two-thirds (64%) think the public meetings should be continued and half (50%) think the meetings should be held twice a year. Another quarter (25%) think the meetings should be held quarterly, while another fifth (21%) think the meetings should be held once a year. Those who think the public meetings should be held more often are those who:
  - Report smell/odor has an impact on them
  - Report equipment noise or vibration has an impact on them
  - Report litter has an impact on them
- When presented with a series of options other than the public meetings, half (49%) stated that no other options were acceptable and the public meetings should remain. However, twenty-eight percent were open to an online public meeting. Those more open to an online public meeting are those who:
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD through the comment section on the Solid Waste Division website

#### HOW MUCH DO PEOPLE TRUST KCSWD AND WHAT WOULD INCREASE TRUST?

- A slight majority (51%) of people reported trusting the Solid Waste Division “somewhat.” However, a little more than a quarter (27%) “do not trust the Solid Waste Division at all,” while almost a quarter (22%) trust the Solid Waste Division “a lot” (18%) or “completely” (4%).
- Those who trust KCSWD less are those who:
  - Are less likely to prefer getting information from the KCSWD website
  - Are less likely to want to get information from the public meetings
  - Want information more frequently
  - Want to communicate with KCSWD
  - Are more likely to have attended the public meetings
  - Are more likely to report that the public meetings do not meet their needs
  - Are more likely to report the public meetings should not be continued
  - Are more likely to report being impacted by the smell/odor of the landfill
  - Are more likely to report being impacted by equipment noise/vibration
  - Are more likely to report being impacted by litter
  - Live closer to the landfill
- When asked what could be done to increase trust, those who reported they *do not trust at all or trust somewhat* explained their rating by stating concerns that dealt with:
  - KCSWD not taking action (not closing the landfill, not addressing smell/odor, not putting the community first)
  - Communication issues (not keeping them informed, not really listening to their concerns, not making sure the decision process is open and transparent)