



# South Wilmington PLANNING NETWORK

March 5, 2018

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Mr. Herb Inden  
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City of Wilmington  
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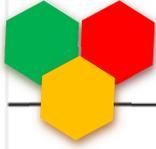
**RE: Wilm2028 Survey**

Dear Mr. Inden,

The South Wilmington Planning Network (SWPN) supports the City's efforts regarding the *Wilmington 2028 Comprehensive Plan for Our City and Communities*. We value the considerable undertaking to solicit feedback, ideas, and opinions about the city and its neighborhoods, but we have serious concerns about survey methodology and use of any results from the *Survey for Residents, Workers, and Community Members*. Though we realize that this is only one component of a larger triangulation of methods to collect data from people living, working, and traveling to and around Wilmington, our understanding is that these data will be used in decision-making and planning the course of our great city. As such, we felt it imperative to express our concern about the significant weaknesses that we believe make the survey, and its results, an extremely limited tool for public policy planning and urge the city to be extremely cautious in holding these results to be representative of the target population they are intended to describe. We briefly note our concerns in this letter.

To begin, we were surprised by the limited amount of public input on the design and content of the survey modules. Furthermore, the choice of an Internet-based, online survey to gather data from people that live, work, and participate in the daily life of the city is surprising. There are widely known issues of generalizability and representativeness for haphazard, online surveys that are due to non-probability sampling techniques, disparities in access to the Internet and a computer, and outreach to create knowledge of and motivation to complete the survey. We recognize that the efficiency and cost of such a data collection design make it attractive, but the consequent issue of evaluating any results as externally valid was of grave concern to us. We are aware of follow-up workshops where paper copies were made available to local community members to fill out, if they had yet to complete the online survey, but we are not secure in the knowledge that this did much to address our core concerns noted above.

Additionally, to the best of our understanding to date, the weighting procedure that was used to make local community response rates proportional to the size of that community in the city does not alleviate issues of response bias.



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Without more information about any weighting procedures performed, we cannot know the overall impact of non-response and response biases inherent in Internet surveys. This, of course, makes local community planning a significant challenge when it is currently unknown how response biases impacted survey results for a particular locale. With alternative probability methods of survey administration that are still relatively cost effective, including random-digit dialing of land lines and cellular phones, even a low response rate could be statistically evaluated and proper post-stratification weighting techniques implemented to enhance the sample's representativeness of known population parameters of (at least) residents of the city. It was apparent to us that the preliminary statistical results of the survey over-represented wealthier communities and white respondents in the city, which should create immediate pause given the overall demographics of city and local community residents. For example, the survey results indicated that whites made up 61% of the sample, but non-Hispanic whites make up only 27.6% of the resident population in Wilmington; blacks made up 27% of the sample, yet non-Hispanic blacks are actually 56.6% of the resident population. Additionally, survey data showed that 61% of the sample lived in households that made over \$60,000 a year, yet publicly available data show that only 54.6% of city households make over \$50,000 a year, with a median household income of \$55,000.

We urge extreme caution in the use of the survey results as we have been presented with them. These survey findings are likely the result of the significant biases inherent in an online, convenience sampling method with known generalizability issues, with only modest efforts to supplement non-response with paper copies. To reiterate, several of these issues include but are not limited to: the non-equal probability of selection of respondents; the lack of public knowledge of weighting procedures that address non-random sampling and non-response issues to more accurately represent city and local community demographics; differential access to the Internet (and/or a computer), income disparities, education disparities, and differential motivation to complete the survey; and attempts at outreach to local residents in different communities to complete the survey via the Internet or using paper copies. These survey methodology issues reaffirm our view that the results are likely not representative of the larger City of Wilmington, nor all of its local communities, and therefore not suitable for generalizability and use in planning. We welcome more information on the post-survey efforts to enhance generalizability of the results.

The SWPN is a collaborative partnership of Southbridge residents and government, nonprofit and private agencies. The mission of the Network is to serve as a vehicle for information-sharing and the leveraging of resources on collaborative projects to improve the community's quality of life.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (267) 737-8873 or via email at [brittsalen@ejinitiative.org](mailto:brittsalen@ejinitiative.org).

Sincerely,

Brittany Salen

South Wilmington Planning Network, Chair