Summary Title: Discuss Process for 2020 National Citizens' Survey

Title: Discuss Process for 2020 National Community Survey

From: City Manager

Recommendation
Staff recommends that Policy and Services Committee discuss the process for the 2020 National Community (formerly Citizen) Survey, to possibly make recommendations for the type and method, i.e. paper, online, basic survey, custom questions, as well as any other questions or concerns regarding this data gathering activity.

Executive Summary
Since 2003, the City of Palo Alto has contracted with National Research Center, Inc. (NRC), to survey Palo Altans about their opinions regarding their quality of life, with city services, their perception of the environment and regional issues, and as a way to see how Palo Alto compares to other cities who also participate in this same survey. The value of the comparisons using identical surveys across all jurisdictions, and the data collected has typically been in benchmarking, for use in annual budget planning, and for community awareness of local issues as well as satisfaction levels with city services and programs.

This survey was overseen by the City Auditor’s Office and transitioned to the City Manager’s Office in 2019. No survey was administered in 2019 as the transition took place.

Discussion
The National Citizen Survey (now renamed National Community Survey) is an enterprise of Polco, who purchased NRC in 2019, and the International City/County Management Association. The survey is statistically valid and is seen as a standard in municipal government, though not every city conducts a survey annually; some conduct on a regular schedule of 2-3 years or more.

Palo Alto has added custom questions which have been specifically designed to better understand certain issues. One example is whether the household plans to purchase a new car and whether that vehicle will be gas- or electric-powered. Other questions are open-ended,
such as “As a resident of Palo Alto, what one thing does the City do well and should maintain?” Note that creation of additional questions can add to the costs and length of the survey. The company is also offering questions related to COVID-19, and staff will explore what they are offering as it relates to that subject. Also, some questions in the standard survey are not relevant in Palo Alto, such as questions about snow removal. These are normally removed prior to survey administration.

The City of Palo Alto has used the paper version in the past. Originally, the survey had a response rate of 51%, though in 2018 it was 21% (see PDF pg. 61 of https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/68528). There is now an online-only option, though the community demographics may not make that the best choice.

**Timeline, Resource Impact, Policy Implications (If Applicable)**

The City aims to have a new contract to conduct the survey in place within a short time; staff has been in conversation with the vendor to discuss options for administering the survey and best practices for results.

The survey would need to be released and compiled in September-December to have results available in time for the 2021 Council Retreat (generally in late January/early February). Policy and Services may wish to use the results for their annual task of discussing the preferences regarding the priority setting process for the retreat.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

In the past, no discussion has come to Policy and Services prior to administering the survey. As Policy and Services plays a role in discussing how the Council will set their priorities as part of their annual retreat, this discussion can help to begin the data gathering that will inform those priorities. As in 2020, additional opportunities for community input will be made available closer to the retreat date and the Policy and Services discussion. In an effort to improve transparency, staff would like the Committee members’ suggestions for this valued activity.

If directed, staff will request additional custom questions for inclusion in the survey from Council in the time following this meeting.

**Environmental Review**

This does not qualify as a “project” and no review is needed.