CITY OF PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

Have Your Say Survey Report

August 2025

City Controller
Christy Brady, CPA

Ensuring transparency, accountability, and fiscal integrity in city government

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Why the Controller's Office Conducted the Review

In February 2025, the Philadelphia City Controller's Office launched the *Have Your Say* City Services Survey to better understand how residents perceive municipal services and quality of life across the city. Feedback from this survey is intended to help city leaders understand respondents' experiences, assess departmental performance, and identify pressing community priorities.

What the Controller's Office Found

Survey results reveal a city where satisfaction with services and quality of life varies sharply by income, age, and zip code. Residents are calling for safer neighborhoods, cleaner streets, better housing options, and more transparent, responsive governance. Key findings include:

- The Fire Department received the highest satisfaction rating, followed by the Water Department and Revenue Department. The Department of Licenses & Inspections (L&I) and Office of Property Assessment (OPA) received the lowest marks, with higher-income residents most critical of those services. Older adults (60+) were the most satisfied overall; residents aged 45-59 were least satisfied.
- Public Safety emerged as a top concern, with the lowest ratings in areas such as Frankford and Kensington. Lower-income residents and those aged 45-59 reported the lowest sense of safety. Common concerns included gun violence, car theft, drug activity, and slow police response.
- Street cleanliness was frequently criticized. Respondents pointed to trash build-up, illegal dumping, and inconsistent or infrequent street cleaning.

What the Controller's Office Recommends

This survey highlights a gap between residents' expectations and the services they receive, as expressed through both quantitative ratings and detailed open-ended feedback. While departments like Fire and Water earned strong public trust, dissatisfaction with L&I, OPA, and sanitation services point to the need for urgent improvement.

The City Controller's Office views these results as an important tool for transparency and accountability. This feedback will be shared with city departments, elected officials, and the public to help guide data-driven decisions and ensure that resident voices are at the center of city policy and performance.

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Introduction

The Philadelphia City Controller's Office launched the *Have Your Say* City Services Survey in February 2025 to better understand public sentiment regarding municipal services and overall quality of life. A total of 551 respondents participated, representing all regions of the city, a range of income levels, and diverse demographic groups.

This survey invited respondents to share their views on public safety, education, city services, and quality of life. Feedback from this survey is intended to help city leaders understand respondents' experiences, assess departmental performance, and identify pressing community priorities.

Methodology

Participation Requirements and Timeline

The *Have Your Say* survey was open from February 19 through May 30, 2025. Eligible participants confirmed three criteria: Philadelphia residency, age 18 or older, and valid zip code. Participation was anonymous and flexible, allowing respondents to skip questions. The education section was only visible to parents or guardians, resulting in 242 responses for that portion.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative questions were included in the survey. Quantitative data was measured on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating low satisfaction and a need for improvement, and 5 indicating high satisfaction and no improvement needed. Qualitative (open-ended) responses were reviewed and analyzed thematically, meaning common ideas and concerns were grouped into key categories to identify overarching trends.

The survey achieved 551 valid responses, exceeding standard benchmarks for municipal research reliability[1], and well above the 385 minimum needed to achieve a ±5% margin of error at a 95% confidence interval. The education section had a ±6.3% margin of error.

In the Race/Ethnicity section, totals exceed the number of respondents because participants could select more than one race or ethnicity, consistent with U.S. Census reporting guidelines.

Demographic Representation

The survey was promoted through multiple channels to reach residents across Philadelphia's diverse communities. Responses were collected at 94 community events, as well as through online distribution on the City's website, social media, and email outreach to neighborhood and community organizations. Materials were available in multiple languages, and community partners were encouraged to share the survey with underrepresented groups.

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[1]SAMHSA. (2006). Standards and guidelines for statistical surveys. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/standards_stat_surveys.pdf

Demographic Respondents Overview

Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Survey respondents reflected diverse gender and racial identities. A majority identified as female (56%), followed by male (43%), and approximately 1% selected "Other."
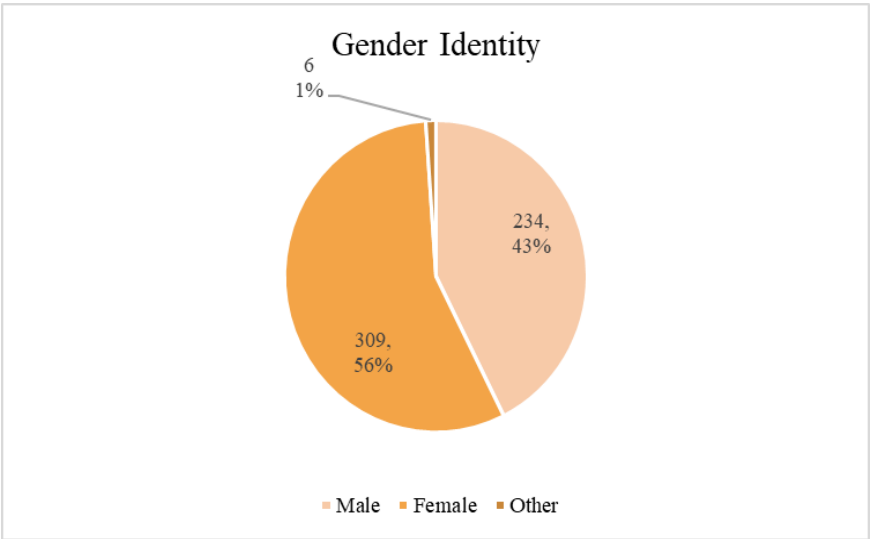

Respondents also represented a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Black, White, Latino, Asian, and multiracial individuals. This diversity enabled meaningful analysis across identify groups.
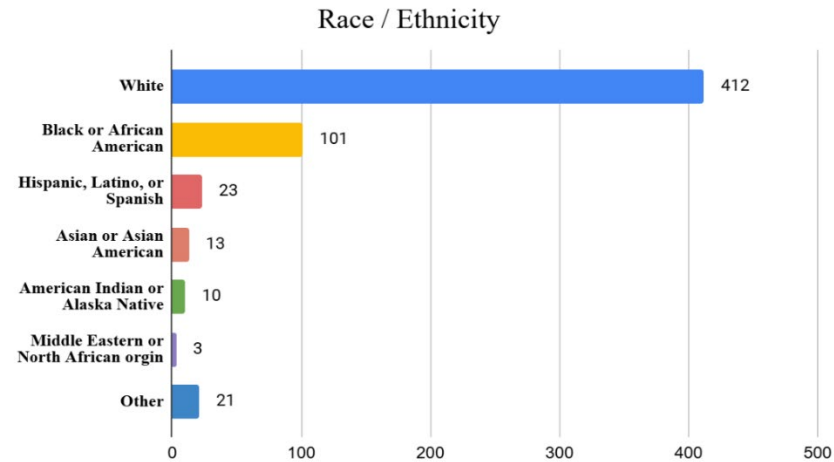
Income and Housing Status

Respondents reported a wide range of household incomes. The most common income brackets were $75,001–$100,000 and $100,001–$150,000, each comprising 18% of responses. Both lower and higher income households were also well represented, allowing for robust income-based comparisons.

Total Household Income

Income Bracket	Value
$200,000+	70
$150,001-$200,000	55
$100,0001-$150,000	97
$75,001-$100,000	98
$50,001-$75,000	94
$25,001-$50,000	64
$25,000 or below	49
Other	16
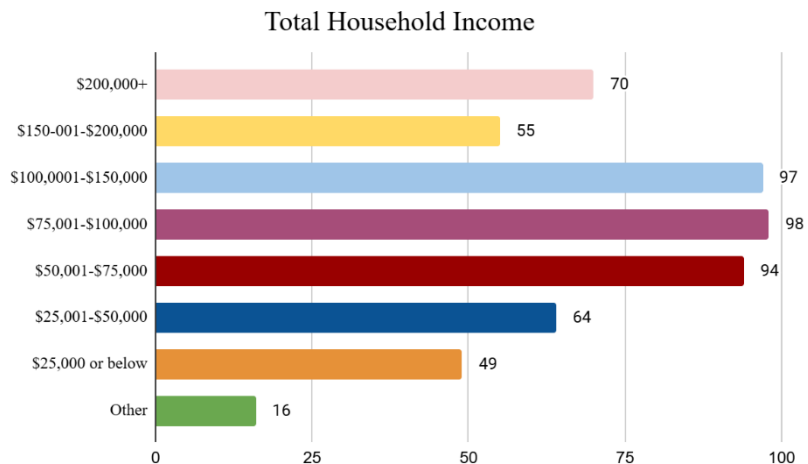
Regarding housing, 75% of respondents were homeowners, 21% were renters, and a small number selected "Other" or lived outside the city.

Housing Status

- Homeowner (in Philadelphia)
- Renter (in Philadelphia)
- Live outside the city
- Other
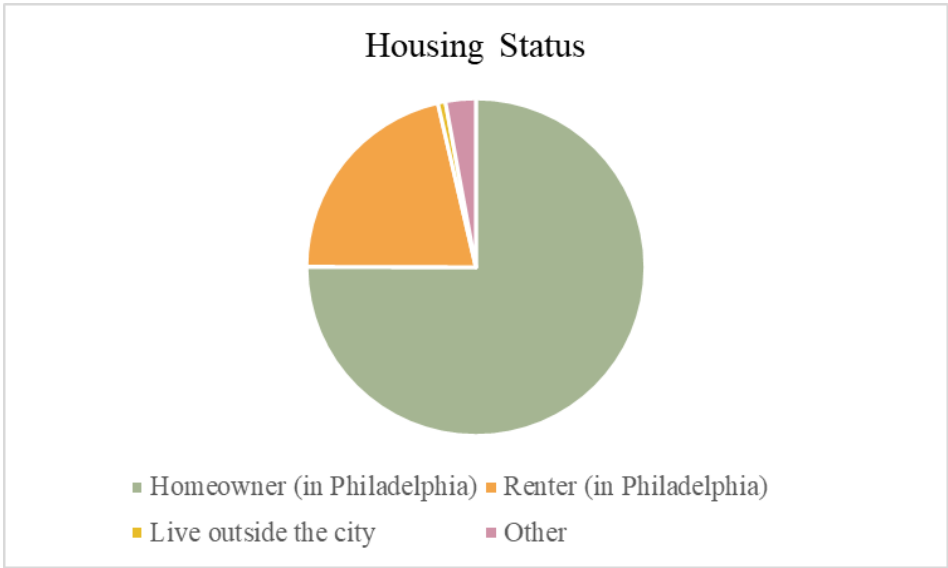
Zip Code Representation

Responses came from 56 zip codes, including 46 within Philadelphia. No respondents from ZIP codes 19109, 19122, or 19127 participated in the survey.

Responses by Zip Code

Top 5 Zip Codes	Total Respondents	Bottom 5 Zip Codes	Total Respondents
19147	66	19150	2
19136	33	19153	2
19143	33	19102	1
19111	30	19110	1
19146	25	19126	1

Key Differences by Demographics

Income-Based Differences

Income was a strong predictor of satisfaction. Respondents earning under $25,000 annually reported lower levels of personal safety, greater reliance on walking or SEPTA for transportation, and a higher likelihood of using public schools. Despite greater structural challenges, this group rated certain departments, notably Licenses & Inspections (L&I) and the Office of Property Assessment more favorably.

Higher-income respondents (above $100,000) were more likely to drive, report shorter school commutes, and choose private or parochial schools for their children. They expressed greater satisfaction with neighborhood safety and cleanliness but were more critical of taxes and city spending, especially in open-ended responses.

Age-Based Differences

Young adults (18–29) expressed the highest satisfaction with public safety, city services and public transit. They were also more likely to walk or use SEPTA.

Respondents aged 45–59 reported the lowest satisfaction across several indicators, including safety and cleanliness, and were least likely to feel safe in their neighborhoods. Adults over 60 reported moderately high satisfaction with city services and noted shorter commutes and greater reliance on carpooling or paratransit.

Zip Code-Level Patterns

Geographic location strongly influenced satisfaction levels.

- High-satisfaction areas: Residents in zip codes 19143 (Southwest Philadelphia) and 19115 (Northeast Philadelphia) expressed high satisfaction ratings with services and neighborhood safety.

- Low-satisfaction areas: Residents in zip codes 19151 (Overbrook) and 19102 (Center City West) reported lower satisfaction with city services, citing infrastructure and public safety issues.

Open-ended feedback in neighborhoods with lower overall satisfaction ratings frequently highlighted concerns such as cleanliness, crime, and aging infrastructure. In contrast, those from areas with higher satisfaction ratings focused more often on systemic issues like policy, public education, and government transparency.

City Department and Program Satisfaction Rating

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the performance of nine major city departments and programs. Ratings used a 1–5 scale (1 = low satisfaction, 5 = high satisfaction). Respondents were most satisfied with the Fire Department and Water Department, and least satisfied with the L&I and OPA.

Average Satisfaction Rating by Department

Department	Average Satisfaction
Fire Department	4.3 / 5.0
Water Department	3.6 / 5.0
Revenue Department	3.3 / 5.0
Sanitation Division of Streets	3.3 / 5.0
Police Department	3.1 / 5.0
311 System	3.0 / 5.0
Department of Streets	2.9 / 5.0
Office of Property Assessment	2.8 / 5.0
Department of Licenses and Inspections	2.7 / 5.0

Differences by Income, Age and Zip Code

Satisfaction by income level varied across departments. Respondents earning under $25,000 reported the highest satisfaction scores for the Departments of Licenses & Inspections, Property Assessment, Revenue, and Sanitation. Satisfaction declined as income increased. Respondents earning over $100,000 reported the lowest ratings, particularly for Licenses & Inspections and Property Assessment.

Income Level by Department Satisfaction

Income Level	L&I	OPA	Revenue	Sanitation (Streets)
Under $25,000	3.2 / 5.0	3.0 / 5.0	3.3 / 5.0	3.5 / 5.0
$25,000–$49,999	3.0 / 5.0	2.9 / 5.0	3.2 / 5.0	3.4 / 5.0
$50,000–$99,999	2.9 / 5.0	2.6 / 5.0	3.3 / 5.0	3.2 / 5.0
$100,000 and above	2.6 / 5.0	2.5 / 5.0	3.1 / 5.0	2.8 / 5.0

Respondents over age 60 reported the highest levels of satisfaction across nearly every department. Conversely, those aged 45–59 reported the lowest satisfaction and raised concerns about inconsistent service, weak law enforcement, and poor communication. These concerns were also reflected in their open-ended feedback.

Age Range	Revenue	Water	L&I	Property	PPD	Fire	Streets	311	Sanitation
18-29	3.4 / 5.0	3.7 / 5.0	2.7 / 5.0	3.1 / 5.0	2.3 / 5.0	4.3 / 5.0	2.8 / 5.0	2.9 / 5.0	3.1 / 5.0
30-44	3.1 / 5.0	3.5 / 5.0	2.4 / 5.0	2.7 / 5.0	2.6 / 5.0	4.2 / 5.0	2.6 / 5.0	2.8 / 5.0	3.2 / 5.0
45-59	3.1 / 5.0	3.3 / 5.0	2.7 / 5.0	2.6 / 5.0	3.3 / 5.0	4.3 / 5.0	2.6 / 5.0	2.9 / 5.0	3.2 / 5.0
60-74	3.5 / 5.0	3.8 / 5.0	2.9 / 5.0	2.8 / 5.0	3.7 / 5.0	4.3 / 5.0	3.0 / 5.0	3.1 / 5.0	3.3 / 5.0
75+	3.6 / 5.0	3.8 / 5.0	3.2 / 5.0	3.4 / 5.0	3.8 / 5.0	4.5 / 5.0	3.6 / 5.0	3.4 / 5.0	3.7 / 5.0

Zip code-level analysis revealed significant disparities in service satisfaction. In areas with low ratings, respondents described problems such as trash buildup, poor infrastructure, and unresolved complaints. In areas with higher ratings, respondents cited more reliable communication and services.

Zip Code	Satisfaction by Departments	Zip Code	Satisfaction by Departments
19151	2.6 / 5.0	19153	3.6 / 5.0
19119	2.8 / 5.0	19132	3.6 / 5.0
19138	2.8 / 5.0	19110	3.7 / 5.0
19129	2.8 / 5.0	19115	3.7 / 5.0
19154	2.8 / 5.0	19126	3.8 / 5.0

Public Safety Perceptions

Public safety remains a top concern across neighborhoods and demographic groups. While many respondents indicated they felt safer in their own neighborhoods than in Center City, this trend was not consistent citywide.

The average neighborhood safety rating across Philadelphia was 3.2, slightly higher than the Center City average of 3.1.

Highest Neighborhood Safety Ratings by Zip Code

Zip Code	Reported Safety
19123 (Northern Liberties/Spring Garden)	4.1 / 5.0
19128 (Roxborough/Manayunk)	3.8 / 5.0
19125 (Fishtown)	3.8 / 5.0
19104 (University City)	3.8 / 5.0
19147 (Queen Village/Bella Vista)	3.7 / 5.0

Lowest Neighborhood Safety Ratings by Zip Code

Zip Code	Reported Safety
19149 (Lower Northeast)	1.9 / 5.0
19124 (Frankford)	2.1 / 5.0
19134 (Port Richmond/Kensington)	2.2 / 5.0
19114 (Far Northeast)	2.4 / 5.0
19136 (Mayfair/Holmesburg)	2.5 / 5.0

Income strongly influenced safety perceptions. Respondents earning less than $25,000 reported the lowest sense of personal safety, while those earning over $100,000, reported the highest.

Safety Perception by Income Level

Income Level	Reported Safety
$25,000 or below	2.4 / 5.0
$25,001 - $50,000	3.1 / 5.0
$50,001–$75,000	3.1 / 5.0
$75,001–$100,000	3.5 / 5.0
$100,001–$150,000	3.4 / 5.0
$150,001–$200,000	3.4 / 5.0
$200,001+	3.5 / 5.0

Respondents aged 45–59 reported the lowest perceived safety.

Average Feeling of Neighborhood & Center City Safety by Age

Age Group	Neighborhood Safety	Center City Safety
18-29	3.7 / 5.0	3.5 / 5.0
30-44	3.4 / 5.0	3.3 / 5.0
45-59	2.8 / 5.0	2.8 / 5.0
60-74	3.3 / 5.0	2.9 / 5.0
75+	3.3 / 5.0	3.2 / 5.0

Street Cleanliness

Street cleanliness was one of the most frequently cited concerns. Satisfaction levels varied widely by neighborhood. Residents from zip codes 19107 (Center City), 19148 (South Philadelphia), and 19151 (Overbrook) reported the lowest satisfaction with the cleanliness of the streets.

Most Satisfied Zip Codes by Cleanliness

Zip Code	Cleanliness Score
19115	3.3 / 5.0
19116	3.1 / 5.0
19114	2.9 / 5.0
19120	2.8 / 5.0
19152	2.6 / 5.0

Least Satisfied Zip Codes by Cleanliness

Zip Code	Cleanliness Score
19122	1.7 / 5.0
19148	1.7 / 5.0
19131	1.6 / 5.0
19151	1.3 / 5.0

Education & School-Related Findings

Only respondents who currently or previously had a child enrolled in a Philadelphia school answered this section. We received 242 responses. School satisfaction was generally high, but varied by commute time, school type, and income level.

Commute Time and School Satisfaction

Commute Times	Average School Satisfaction
Under 15 minutes	4.3 / 5.0
15 - 30 minutes	4.1 / 5.0
30 - 60 minutes	3.9 / 5.0
More than an hour	3.8 / 5.0

School transportation also varied significantly by household income. Respondents in the lowest income bracket (under $25,000) reported walking as the most common method. As income increased, respondents reported more diverse and flexible transportation methods - including SEPTA, school buses, carpooling, and driving.

Transportation Method by Income Level

Income Level	Most Common Transportation Methods
$25,000 and below	Walking
$24,001 - $50,000	SEPTA
$50,001 - $75,000	SEPTA, carpool, driving
$75,001 - $100,000	SEPTA, walking, carpool, driving
$100,001 - $150,000	Walking, carpool, driving, school buses
$150,001 - $200,000	Carpool, driving, school buses
$200,001 and above	SEPTA, walking, school buses

School type also varied by income. Public schools were the most commonly selected option across nearly all income levels. The exception was households earning between $100,001 and $150,000, who were more likely to select parochial schools. Higher-income families reported broader access to school choice, with more respondents in these brackets selecting private or parochial institution.

School Type by Income Level

Income Level	Most Common School Type
$25,000 and below	Public
$25,001 - $50,000	Public
$50,001 - $75,000	Public
$75,001 - $100,000	Public
$100,001 - $150,000	Parochial
$150,001 - $200,000	Public
$200,001 and above	Public

Perceptions of school quality followed predictable patterns based on school type. Private schools received the highest average satisfaction rating (4.5), followed by parochial schools (4.1), and public schools (3.9). While these ratings do not necessarily reflect objective measures of school performance, they likely reflect parental expectations, available resources, and perceived safety and academic rigor.

Perceived School Quality by Type

School Type	Average Quality Rating
Parochial	4.1
Private	4.5
Public	3.9

Trends from Open-Ended Responses

The final section of the survey invited respondents to share open-ended feedback. The most frequently mentioned issued fell into five categories:

1. Public Safety and Criminal Justice

Public safety was the most commonly cited concern. Respondents described a growing sense of insecurity, referencing gun violence, car thefts, youth crime, and open-air drug activity. Several respondents expressed fear about walking or biking at night due to harassment, robbery, or reckless driving. Many voiced frustrations with a perceived lack of consequences for criminal behavior and dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system, and with police presence and response time. Many respondents called for more community-based policing and stronger neighborhood safety strategies.

2. Cleanliness, Sanitation, and Infrastructure

The second most common concern was the city's cleanliness. Respondents described Philadelphia as dirty, pointing to trash buildup, illegal dumping, graffiti, and a lack of public trash cans. Common complaints included infrequent street cleaning and overflowing trash cans or lack thereof. Many noted that poor sanitation affected perceptions of safety, tourism, and neighborhood pride. They viewed improvements in this area as foundational to broader quality-of-life gains.

3. City Governance and Tax Policy

Many respondents expressed frustration with city governance, particularly around transparency and responsiveness. A common theme was dissatisfaction with how public dollars are spent and poor follow-up on constituent concerns. Complaints about Philadelphia's tax structure were widespread, with respondents describing wage and business taxes as burdensome and outdated.

Some noted that high taxes drive businesses out of the city and fail to translate into visible improvements in city services.

4. Housing Affordability and Displacement

Concerns about housing affordability were also widespread. Respondents across all income levels shared worries about rising rents, gentrification, and displacement. Several described personal experiences with eviction or the loss of long-standing community anchors. Many called for a robust affordable housing strategy, urging the city to adopt a "housing first" model that prioritizes more tenant protections, expanded homeownership opportunities, and greater investment in deeply affordable rental units.

5. Unsafe and Inaccessible Streets

Respondents frequently described streets as unsafe, citing reckless driving, poor infrastructure, and inadequate enforcement. Specific issues included dangerous intersections, potholes, insufficient bike lanes, and unreliable SEPTA service.

Conclusion

This survey highlights a gap between residents' expectations and the services they receive, as expressed through both quantitative ratings and detailed open-ended feedback. While departments like Fire and Water earned strong public trust, dissatisfaction with L&I, OPA, and sanitation services point to the need for urgent improvement.

The City Controller's Office views these results as an important tool for transparency and accountability. This feedback will be shared with city departments, elected officials, and the public to help guide data-driven decisions and ensure that resident voices are at the center of city policy and performance.