

2024

TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Organizational Summary and
Recommendations



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Our Town-wide survey and focus groups led us to understand two things:

1. We are doing a lot of things right.

- Employees are skilled at solving problems and feel competent.
- They enjoy strong teamwork and good relationships with colleagues.
- Our Town values are significant and meaningful to them.
- There's a strong sense of acceptance and inclusion.
- Employees believe they make a positive impact on the community.
- Supervisors are supportive.

Overall, employees enjoy the work they do and the people they do it with.

2. There are some things we can do better.

- Employees want better pay and benefits, and clear paths for career advancement and pay progression.
- They want leadership to integrate Town values into how they make decisions and motivate employees.
- They want a greater understanding about budget decisions and resource allocation.
- Employees face emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, often due to public disrespect, not enough staff, and confusing policies and processes.
- They say they feel disconnected from leadership and the decision-making process.
- Employees want management to address poor performance and bad behavior consistently and promptly.

We are taking some steps to improve in these areas, and we have a lot more to do.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL NEXT STEPS



Employees want better compensation, more avenues for career advancement and pay progression.

Recommended Actions:

- Conduct the Pay & Classification Study and include recommendations in the FY25-26 Manager's Recommended Budget.
- Conduct Wellness program review by end of FY24-25 and implement recommendations.
- Conduct an assessment of our overall benefits by end of calendar year 2025 and include recommendations in the FY26-27 Manager's Recommended Budget.

Employees want to see our RESPECT values woven into everything we do.

Recommended Actions:

- Incorporate deeper discussion of values into New Employee Orientation, ASAP.
- Create RESPECT training modules for leadership, supervisors, non-supervisors, begin offering in Spring/Summer 2025.
- Create an internal campaign to reintroduce and operationalize RESPECT values, aim to launch in Spring/Summer 2025.

Employees want to understand more about the budget and how resources are allocated.

Recommended Actions:

- Beginning with FY26 budget, create an internal communications plan for the annual budget season, to include:
 - Budget Basics sessions that explain how the budget is developed
 - Overview of key issues influencing that year's budget development
 - How updates will be shared throughout the budget process

Employees want support in dealing with resident incivility and rudeness.

Recommended Actions:

- Create a TOCH Customer Service training that incorporates de-escalation and how we address resident incivility, aim to launch in Spring 2025.
- Review departmental protocols for handling/escalating complaints, create organization-wide standards and best practices, ASAP

Employees want to understand how decisions are made – and how they influence them.

Recommended Actions:

- Create an employee internal website to house policies and procedures and share updates on major initiatives and projects, aim to launch late Summer/early Fall 2025.
- Create internal engagement and communications plans for major organization-wide initiatives.
- Train departmental leadership on the importance of “explaining the why,” ASAP.
- Strengthen relationship between Town Manager and Employee Forum, begin conversations about how to do that in Fall/Winter 2024.

Employees want feedback on their performance – and they want problematic behaviors and poor performance addressed quickly and consistently.

Recommended Actions:

- Train all supervisors on how to provide effective feedback, aim to launch training in Spring/Summer 2025.
- Create a giving/getting feedback training module for NEO, aim to launch in Spring/Summer 2025.
- Commit to launching new Performance Management system by end of calendar year 2025.

SUMMARY OF ORGANIZATION-WIDE SURVEY RESULTS

In many ways our organization is doing quite well. We have improved in several areas since our last survey. Our employees say they like the team climate and relationships they have with their colleagues. They feel confident in their abilities. They like the contributions they make.

The hotspots they reported all point to a need to improve organizational trust, reinforce our common RESPECT language, and improve the clarity, consistency, and equity of our operations and decision-making. Good communication, coupled with focused efforts in key areas, will help employees have an even more positive experience in the workplace.

Highlights	Hotspots	Mixed Results
Self-Efficacy (3/3)	Citizen Incivility (0/4)	Autonomy (1/4)
Diversity Climate (5/5)	Employee Engagement (0/3)	Commitment (1/3)
Inclusion (3/3)	Exhaustion (0/4)	Communication (4/5)
Values (RESPECT) (3/3)	Silence (0/3)	Psychological Safety (3/6)
Social Support (3/3)	Top-Down Decisionmaking (0/3)	Reason for Staying (6/7)
Supervisory Practices (7/7)	Turnover Intention (0/1)	Resources (3/5)
Teamwork (3/3)		Rules (5/6)
Team Climate (3/3)		Satisfaction with Job Rewards (4/6)
		Voice (2/3)
		Work-Life Balance (2/3)
		Workplace Incivility (3/4)

The ratio refers to how many questions in that category were answered as “good” or “excellent.”

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS & THEMES



Our focus groups provided additional information about the highlights and hotspots from the survey:

Highlights

- Most employees report good relationships with their colleagues and enjoy making a positive contribution to the community.
- Most employees say they know their jobs well and feel like they can be successful and solve problems that arise.
- The Town's diversity and inclusion efforts have helped strengthen workplace teams and the sense of belonging.
- Employees appreciate the work that's been done so far in improving employee pay and would like to see more.

Hotspots

- Employees don't feel consulted about decisions that affect them and don't understand the "why" of some decisions. They say there is too much top-down decision-making.
- Exhaustion comes from multiple factors, including resource scarcity, compassion fatigue, interactions with hostile community members, and inconsistent interpretation and application of town policies and procedures.
- It seems that the Town doesn't adequately address issues of poor work performance and bad behavior. This creates more work for people who are performing well and is demoralizing for them.
- There are 'pockets' of employees throughout the Town whose experience with our Town values and organizational culture differ from the overall positive survey results. Some say they do not understand our culture and values. Others report that Town values are used more for disciplinary purposes than as a way to work collaboratively and guide professional interactions.

Our focus groups also allowed us to take a deeper dive into the issues of exhaustion and centralization:

Employee Exhaustion comes in several types:

- Emotional: influenced by public incivility and an inability to adequately respond to community needs and interests due to resource scarcity and lack of various supports.
- Mental: affected by ill-defined decision-making processes, inconsistent policy interpretation and application, and desire for better pay.
- Physical: reports of high workloads because not all staff are held equally accountable for their work and because staffing levels in general aren't in line with workplace expectations.

Increasing Centralization becomes problematic when employees report:

- Being left out of important decisions that directly affect them. Examples include changes in reporting structures; changes to job responsibilities or special assignments; or changes in leadership or critical organizational policies, processes, or priorities.
- A lack of clarity about the level of involvement they can expect to have in various types of decisions.
- Not getting enough information about the “why” of certain decisions.
- Having to consult with leadership about what they consider relatively straightforward issues.

Finally, the focus groups revealed two factors that we have been reflecting on – change in the organization and in the community.

Change in Town Leadership and Organizational Structures

The Town values have been our guiding workplace principles and common language for almost 15 years. We have used them to organize teams, evaluate job performance, structure difficult interactions, and recognize achievements. However, the last 6–8 years have seen many changes in our workplace.

- 2 years of restrictive COVID operations
- New workplace structure with flexible schedules and remote work
- Approximately 55% of our employees have been here less than 6 years

- Leadership changes: 3 Town Managers, 3 Parks and Recreation Directors, 3 Planning Directors, 2 TS Directors, 3 Ombuds, 2 Library/Cultural Arts Directors, 2 BMD Directors, 2 Economic Development Directors, 2 Police Chiefs, 3 Fire Chiefs
- Significant reorganizations—CAPA, Communications, Mobility and Greenways, Stormwater, Public Housing/Affordable Housing, Parking, Manager’s Office, Emergency and Risk Management

Maintaining an organizational culture and common language while experiencing this level of turnover and change at the leadership levels takes time and sustained effort. It’s a credit to the resilience of our team members that we have continued to provide the high level of service that has come to characterize our organization.

Larger Community Trends and Changes

- Chapel Hill’s population is concentrating towards the two extremes—older, more affluent, and less diverse at one end; younger, less affluent, and more diverse at the other end. This dichotomy might explain some of the communication challenges and service level expectations and needs that create difficulties for staff.
- Chapel Hill is also affected by the general tenor of public discourse occurring nationally. It’s becoming more and more difficult to agree on common interests and what data we use to make decisions.