City of WHITEWATER

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MEMORANDUM

To: Common Council
From: Becky Magestro, Chief of Staff
Date: November 5, 2026
Re: Follow up on Community Survey questions and concerns.

This memo provides follow-up information from ETC Institute regarding questions raised at the October 20, 2026, Common Council meeting about the Community Survey's methodology and respondents' affiliations with the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. It also addresses a resident's concerns during public comment about the survey's statistical validity and potential bias toward University students.

Survey Distribution and Verification

ETC administered the 2026 Community Survey to a random sample of Whitewater households. The sample was selected from a list of residential households within the City's GIS boundary. Each selected household received a seven-page survey, a cover letter, and a postage-paid return envelope. Households could respond by mail or online. Online respondents were required to provide their home address, which ETC verified against the original sample list. Responses from individuals outside the random sample were kept separate and excluded from the statistically valid results. ETC also conducted follow-ups with sampled households and used targeted social media advertisements to encourage participation.

Sample Size and Statistical Reliability

ETC's goal was to obtain at least 500 completed surveys; 512 residents responded. ETC reports a margin of error of approximately ±4.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This means that, in repeated random sampling using the same method, approximately 95% of the resulting confidence intervals would contain the actual population value. The margin of error describes sampling uncertainty; it does not account for every potential source of survey error, such as differences between households that responded and those that did not. The methodology and sample size support using the survey to inform City planning and decision-making.

University Affiliation and Respondent Profile

The respondent profile does not support the specific claim that University students made up a disproportionately large share of survey respondents. Only 5% identified as students, while 50% reported no University affiliation.

Affiliation with UW–Whitewater	Percentage
No University affiliation	50%
Alumni	25%
Family member of a student	8%
Staff	6%
Other	4%
Undergraduate student	3%
Faculty	3%
Graduate student	2%

Percentages total 101% due to rounding.

Additional respondent characteristics show that 63.7% own their home, fewer than 1% live in student housing, and respondents are distributed relatively evenly across the reported age categories, at approximately 20% per category. ETC noted that the survey was conducted during the summer months, when fewer students may have been on campus or living in the area. This timing may have affected student participation. Determining whether students were underrepresented would require comparing their share of respondents with their share of the population the survey was designed to represent.

The results provide useful feedback on residents' experiences and priorities and should be considered alongside other public input as the City evaluates services and future investments. Please also see the additional memo from City Manager John Weidl, dated September 4, 2026, outlining a proposed first step for acting on the Community Survey results.