

## Vashon Population

I ran into my college roommate in downtown Seattle this week. He is now chief demographer of King County. He subsequently researched a few questions I asked about with the following results:

°Population of Vashon Island according to official census data declined between 2010 and 2015. He is skeptical of this result. He noted that Latino population may well be rising rapidly.

°School age population on Vashon Island according to State officials has been in a state of irregular decline for the past 15 years although the most recent data (2015) shows a slight uptick. He does not know whether these numbers include imported students or not.

°Building permits on Vashon have been very low (fewer than 100 per year) in recent years.

He of course has responsibility for all of King County and I got the impression he thinks Vashon is very sleepy demographically compared to other parts of the county. This is consistent with other conclusions I have heard from him over the past 35 years.

## Survey Results

I worried about **biases** in the survey. One key metric I wish had been included was the average age of respondents. That would permit a comparison with a statistic we know of the general population: that the average age of the island is about 53 years. I calculated from the age data that was included that the average age of respondent households was about 40 years. This suggests to me that the survey is biased toward a younger population. As we have discussed, it also had a bias against speakers of Spanish, who constitute roughly 5% of the island population yet were less than 0.1 percent of respondents. Otherwise the survey appeared unbiased; different parts of the island appeared fairly represented, for example.

I have included a table showing the **popularity of VPD facilities** based on the survey. The survey left those surveyed in the dark as to how they should report their use of facilities such as the pool that are not available year round. It appears that some answered "every day" if they went every day the pool was open and others gave differing responses if they attended every day it was open, but of course not every day of the year. Moreover, it is obvious that many people claimed to be using a facility (e.g. Spring Beach) when they were not. Practically nobody uses Spring Beach.

For these reasons, I tried a different approach. What are the facilities that practically everyone uses at least once in a while, as indicated by the their indication that they do not never use the facility? In a separate document I have ranked the facilities according to this criteria.

By this criteria, Pt. Robinson is the most popular, with only 4% of residents saying they never go there. By the same criteria, Lost Lake, Spring Beach, and the Northend Boat Ramp are the least popular with more than two thirds saying they never use these facilities. (I would guess the actual number is closer to 100%). These are not surprises.

Many of the facilities receiving the most funding and discussion from the Board are only moderately popular by this criterion. Vashon Commons, VES and the pool are used by at most 50% of the population, although the survey indicates frequent use by those who do use these facilities. Those who use the facilities often have the biggest reason to show up at Board meetings or contact VPD, but it is debatable whether they should influence policy more than the users of arguably more popular facilities. It is not that one group is more diligent than the other. If 100 people use a facility once a year they may not have a good reason to show up; if 10 people use a facility five times a year, they have more reason to show up. So we could be getting in this example representatives of people who show up collectively 50 times per year and not representatives of those who show up 100 times a year. We should not conclude the 100 people are lazy or something; they, like the 50 who do show up, are being rational in their use of time. It does suggest that the widespread anger toward VES was partly a reflection of the fact that in the greater scheme of things it is never used by a large segment of the island population that might have believed that facilities and programs they do use were being squeezed or eliminated to make room for VES spending. The pool and Vashon Commons are similar in this regard.

With regard to what facilities respondents want, there appeared to be a correlation between cost and desire. Bill Amerling noted that island residents would say they wanted a Lamborghini if offered a choice. Indeed, the \$10 million estimated costs of a community center was among the most popular (you could get a Lamborghini for a mere \$200,000) while kiosks were only one fifth as popular while costing \$6,000. When an option was expensive and unpopular that was worth noting. Fisher Pond ADA trail (\$1,000,00) got only a 2% response, campgrounds (\$1,000,000) 5% and VES lighting (\$530,000) 7% are examples. It was hard to find examples of the opposite: cheap, popular upgrades. One possibility is a dog park: wanted by 11% of respondents, it was listed as costing \$150,000. (These figures do not include possible grants or annual operating costs.) I had hoped that with the survey listing costs, respondents would do an internal cost-benefit analysis, but that did not appear to happen.

### **Individual comments**

Many had comments, positive or negative, about the survey itself. Survey respondents added many comments in addition to their answers to specific questions. Many comments reflected repetition of responses given elsewhere (no to VES, yes to a pool), while others were more original and addressed wish lists or deferred maintenance items not included in the survey. For example, one person suggested a boardwalk similar to that in Ruston. Another wondered about acquiring KVI beach. Several mentioned preserving wildlife. Others noted that biking was not included in the survey.