



2000 Residential Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City of St. Louis Park

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of St. Louis Park. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between July 6 and August 8, 2000. The average interview took thirty-two minutes.

In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to the entire universe of adult St. Louis Park residents within ± 5.0 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Residential Demographics:

St. Louis Park is a mature, generally stable community, with a significant element of transience, particularly among a segment of younger renters. The median longevity of adult residents was 10.5 years. Thirty-four percent of the sample reported moving to the city during the past five years, while thirty percent had been there over two decades. In looking toward the future, the typical resident expects to remain in the community for another twenty years, although twenty-seven percent envisioned leaving within the next five years.

Twenty percent of the households contained seniors; in fact, seventeen percent of the households were composed entirely of seniors. Nineteen percent of the households contained school-aged children, while nine percent contained pre-schoolers. Seven percent described their households as "single parent." Seventy-two percent owned their current residences, while twenty-eight percent rented. Fifty-nine percent lived in single family homes, while twenty-three percent resided in apartment and fourteen percent, in townhouses or condominiums.

Forty-three percent were currently involved in volunteer activities for their school district, city, church, civic organization, or other public service programs. The typical volunteer spent 3.4 hours per week involved in these types of activities.

The average age of respondents was 45.2 years old. While twenty-one percent of the sample fell into the 18-34 year age range, thirty percent were at least 55 years old. Sixty-one percent of the sample were college graduates or post-graduates; only fourteen percent had no post-secondary educational experience.

Fifty-six percent of the respondents reported their households heads worked at upscale White Collar jobs — either Professional-Technical or Owner-Manager. Blue Collar households numbered six percent, while another thirteen percent reported Clerical-Sales people as households heads. Eighteen percent were headed by retirees. The median household income was calculated at \$56,000.00 annually. Ten percent reported household incomes under \$25,000.00, while twelve percent posted annual incomes over \$100,000.00.

Residents were classified according to the ward in which they lived. Twenty-nine percent resided in Ward One; twenty-two percent lived in Ward Two; twenty-five percent resided in Ward Three, while twenty-four percent lived in Ward Four. Women outnumbered men by two percent in the sample.

Quality of Life Ratings:

A solid ninety-five percent rated the quality of life as either “excellent” or “good,” forty-seven percent rating it as “excellent,” up a significant seventeen percent from the 1994 study. A small five percent posted “only fair” ratings.

Like Most and Least about the Community:

“Location” within the Metropolitan Area was the most liked feature of the city. At fifty-two percent, it outdistanced all other responses. Ten percent pointed to “Nice people,” while seven percent each liked the “neighborhood/housing” and “quiet.” Four percent each pointed to “safety” and “parks and recreational offerings.” “Location” has consistently led the list since the 1994 study.

In thinking about serious issues facing the city, fifteen percent pointed at “crime.” Eight percent worried about “traffic,” while six percent each were concerned with “quality of education,” “growth,” and “aging infrastructure.” Nine percent were concerned about the “quality of education.” Seven percent each mentioned “high taxes” or “low income housing.” In comparison with the 1994 study, “crime” had actually dropped significantly as a concern, from thirty-three percent to fifteen percent.

When asked if there were city changes which might cause them to move from the City of St. Louis Park sooner than they currently intended, forty-nine percent either were unsure or could think of no changes of this significance. “Crime,” at nineteen percent, led the list. “Poor upkeep of property” was next at eight percent, followed by the “decline of schools,” at five percent.

A solid eighty-seven percent felt the city was moving in the “right direction,” while six percent thought it was going “off on the wrong track.” “Crime,” and “growth” motivated the small number of critics, while lack of problems,” “good city planning,” “improvements,” “safety” and “sense of community” was the basis for positive responses. Ninety-five percent of the sample

would recommend St. Louis Park to others as a place to live.

City Character and Issues:

When looking at their community, St. Louis Park pluralities of residents thought there were “too many” apartment units, and also “too many” higher cost housing opportunities, even though majorities saw “about the right number.” Contented large majorities of respondents reported there were “about the right number/amount” of people living in the community, racial and ethnic diversity, income diversity, age diversity, parks and open spaces, light manufacturing industry, and service and retail establishments. Larger numbers, although short of a majority felt there were “too few/too little” affordable housing opportunities, condominiums and townhouses, trail and bikeways, and entertainment and dining establishments; in each case, though, a majority of respondents thought the community had “about the right number.”

Neighborhood Perceptions:

Residents were asked to evaluate their neighborhoods on a series of dimensions. Eighty-nine percent believed “this neighborhood was a good place to raise children.” Ninety percent would “feel comfortable in discussing neighborhood problems with my neighbors.” Ninety-two percent thought “property values are increasing in this neighborhood.” Ninety-four percent had “pride and ownership in our neighborhood,” and ninety-three percent “felt a part of my neighborhood.”

Seventy-three percent thought the appearance of housing in my neighborhood had not declined during the past few years. But, twenty-six percent said “there are blighted residences with code violations in my neighborhood.” Seventy-eight percent felt “people knew and cared about their neighbors and participate in solving problems with their business and residential neighbors.” And, sixty-one percent stated their neighborhood had an association or other organization that allows them to resolve issues amicably.

City Government and City Staff:

A large seventy-four percent felt they could have an impact of the way things were run in St. Louis Park; only seventeen percent felt they could not. Among this latter group, one-half felt they would be ignored by City Hall. Overall, then, this level of empowerment was well above the suburban area norm. St. Louis Park residents, then, were feeling connected to their local decision-makers.

Large majorities of residents with opinions approved of the policies and decisions of local public bodies or advisory commissions. By 77%-4%, they regarded the St. Louis Park Parks and Recreation Commission well. By 64%-12%, they gave a good rating to the St. Louis Park Planning Commission, and by 68%-7%, they felt the same way about the St. Louis Park City Council. A 56%-6% margin approved of the policies and decision of the St. Louis Park School

Board. And, among lesser known commissions the same pattern was found: 38%-2% in evaluating the St. Louis Park Human Right Commission; 37%-6% in judging the St. Louis Park Board of Zoning Appeals; and, 43%-7% in evaluating the St. Louis Park Board of Zoning Appeals.

Generally, eighty-four percent of the residents thought St. Louis Park local public bodies supported and adhered to high ethical standards. Similarly, eighty-three percent rated the job of the city's local public bodies as either "excellent" or "good" in addressing community needs.

Forty percent reported having a "great deal" or "fair amount" of knowledge about the work of the Mayor and City Council. A large sixty-nine percent either "strongly approved" or "approved" of their job, while only five percent registered "disapproval." Positive ratings were based upon the perception of a good job, willingness to listen to citizens, lack of city problems, and improvements during the past few years; critics pointed to an unwillingness to listen and disagreement with City Council decisions.

Thirty-one percent reported having contact with the St. Louis Park City Staff. A strong sixty-two percent rated the staff as "excellent" or "good," while eight percent rated them lower. Positive ratings were based upon staff helpfulness, staff job performance, friendliness, and lack of problems; negative ratings stemmed from lack of helpfulness, unfriendliness, and room for improvement.

During the past year, thirty-six percent had either contacted City Hall by telephone or in-person. Fifty percent of these contacts were by personal visits, while forty-seven percent telephoned and four percent used e-mail. Five Departments received nearly three-quarters of the contacts: Building Inspections, Public Works, Police Department, Planning, and Parks and Forestry. Most contacts involved obtaining information, filing for a permit or arranging an inspection, or registering a complaint.

In rating the last contact with respect to aspects of customer service, eighty-eight percent rated the waiting for the Information Desk operator to respond to them as either "excellent" or "good." Ninety-one percent rated the courtesy of the Information Desk receptionist as "excellent" or "good." Eighty-two percent rated the ease of reaching a Department staff member who could help them highly. Ninety-one percent rated the courtesy of the Department Staff as either "excellent" or "good," while eighty percent similarly related the staff's efficiency highly. Finally, eighty-eight percent thought the respectfulness of the Department staff was either "excellent" or "good." Twenty percent reported their request was handled by leaving a voice mail message; eighty-five percent said they received a timely response.

School District Board and Administration:

Twenty-seven percent reported having a “great deal” or “fair amount” of knowledge about the work of the St. Louis Park School Board. A moderate forty-six percent either “strongly approved” or “approved” of their job, while only seven percent registered “disapproval.” Positive ratings were based upon the high quality of education, perception of a good job, caring, and lack of district problems; critics pointed to a weakening quality of education and disagreement with School Board decisions.

Only seventeen percent reported having contact with the St. Louis Park School District Administration and Staff. A moderate thirty-two percent rated the Administration and staff as “excellent” or “good,” while seven percent rated them lower. Positive ratings were based upon the high quality of education, perception of a good job, friendliness, and lack of district problems; critics pointed to a weakening quality of education, poor communications, and disagreement with School Board decisions.

During the past year, thirteen percent had either contacted the School District by telephone or in-person. Sixty-four percent of these contacts were by personal visits, while thirty-five percent telephoned. Three functional areas received nearly one-half of the contacts: Teachers/School Building, Community Education, and Office of the Superintendent. Most contacts involved obtaining information, inquiring about a child, registering, or volunteering.

In rating the last contact with respect to aspects of customer service, eighty-nine percent rated the waiting for the Information Desk operator to responded to them as either “excellent” or “good.” Ninety percent rated the courtesy of the Information Desk receptionist as “excellent” or “good.” Also, ninety percent rated the ease of reaching an Administrator or staff member who could help them highly. Ninety-one percent rated the courtesy of the Department Staff as either “excellent” or “good,” while eighty percent similarly related the staff’s efficiency highly. Finally, ninety-six percent thought the respectfulness of the Department staff was either “excellent” or “good.” Twenty-seven percent reported their request was handled by leaving a voice mail message; only seventy percent said they received a timely response.

Public Safety Issues:

Ninety-eight percent said they had an overall feeling of safety in St. Louis Park. Ninety-four percent trusted the City’s public safety response and the services rendered. In particular, seventy-four percent thought the St. Louis Park Police Department responded to calls in a timely manner. Similarly, ninety-two percent believed they could rely on their neighbors for help in a safety-threatening situation, while ninety-four percent thought they could rely on city officials and staff for help under these circumstances. In fact, eighty-nine percent knew the names of their immediate neighbors on their street or in their building, and eighty-seven percent, in fact, often spoke with some of their immediate neighbors. Seventy-six percent felt safe in walking in their neighborhood alone at night, while eighty-two

percent asserted children are safe playing in the city parks. While fourteen percent noticed an increase in suspicious activities in their neighborhood during the past year, only about one-third reported their suspicions to the Police. But, twenty-three percent believed crime had increased in the apartment complexes within the city during the past two years. And, nine percent had been a victim of a property crime in St. Louis Park during the past year, the vast majority of which were reported to the city police.

Forty-five percent of the households were part of their area's Neighborhood Watch, while thirty-seven percent reported their household had participated in National Night Out activities in the community. Ninety-nine percent knew how and where to get help in a safety-threatening situation, and one hundred percent knew when and how to use the 911 emergency telephone service. Only twenty-five percent had participated in a neighborhood meeting on public safety issues, while twelve percent had participated in a city forum or meeting on public safety, and fifty-two percent had participated in neighborhood block parties.

Diversity and Inclusiveness:

A large seventy-nine percent thought the growing population diversity in the community was a "good thing." Only six percent saw it as a "bad thing," while nine percent felt it was "both good and bad," and six percent were "unsure." Residents positively viewing diversity thought they had learned from it, specifically learned about tolerance, saw it as needed for the future, and liked the heterogeneity of the city. Critics based their judgment on increased crime and tension. Fifty-five percent thought the City and School District were either "very well prepared" or "somewhat well prepared" to meet the growing diversity of residents; but, thirteen percent disagreed.

A solid ninety-five percent feel welcomed in the community. Just as solidly, ninety-seven percent feel accepted by the community. But, seventy-nine percent feel valued by the community, while nine percent do not and twelve percent were unsure.

Volunteer Activities:

As reported earlier, forty-three percent of the residents were involved in volunteer activities for their school district, city, place of worship, civic organization, neighborhood group, or other public service program. A much higher eighty-four percent, though, thought there were sufficient volunteer opportunities available in the community to utilize their talents and skills in a meaningful way. Only five percent disagreed. Sixty-eight percent felt they had adequate information about volunteer activities in the community; thirty percent felt they did not. More importantly, thirty-nine percent would like more information about volunteer activities in the City of St. Louis Park.

Forty-two percent were aware of the St. Louis Park "Children First Initiative." Among those

aware of the program, fifty-three percent also reported awareness of the set of forty developmental sets focused on by the initiative for assuring the success of city children. And, among the smaller group familiar with the assets, fifty-five percent have actively been involved in activities to help the asset-building process. At the current time, then, twelve percent of the citizenry is actively involved in the asset-building process.

Learning Opportunities:

Thirty-six percent had engaged in formal learning opportunities, usually scheduled offerings such as classes, during the past two years. Most often, they had taken Community Education classes, college classes, seminars and workshops, hobby-related classes, and professional development courses. A near unanimous ninety-eight percent reported satisfaction with the learning experience.

Forty-six percent had engaged in informal learning opportunities, usually incidental, unplanned, and unstructured opportunities, such as information from other people, reading, and social gatherings, during the past two years. The most frequent activities listed were reading, talking with others, Internet surfing, and volunteering. Again, a near unanimous ninety-seven percent reported satisfaction with their endeavors.

Fifty-four percent reported they were either “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with the formal lifelong learning opportunities available in St. Louis Park; however, forty-seven percent were either “not too familiar” or “not at all familiar” with them. Mitigating this knowledge level, though, was that seventy-five percent reported they knew how to obtain this type of information about community opportunities.

Fifty-six percent rated the range of formal learning opportunities available in the city as either “excellent” or “good,” but fourteen percent were more critical in their judgments. On a related dimension, fifty-one percent rated the quality of community-based lifelong learning opportunities highly, while ten percent were more negative in their evaluations.

City Commerce:

Residents across the community varied in their perceptions of their principal retail shopping area. Twenty-nine percent pointed to “Knollwood,” while twenty-two percent cited “Ridgedale.” “Southdale” was key for twelve percent, and “Miracle Mile” was selected by eight percent. Six percent each pointed to “Target on Highway 7,” “Target on Highway 100,” or “Downtown Minneapolis.”

The typical resident spent 36.2% of their retail shopping dollar, excluding gasoline and grocery purchases, in St. Louis Park. Forty-three percent spent less than thirty percent, while twenty-eight percent spent more than sixty percent in the city. The typical resident also purchased

goods “weekly” from business establishments in St. Louis Park. Ten percent did so “daily,” while twenty-one percent shopped there “monthly or less often.” In contrast, considering only gasoline and grocery purchases, the typical resident spent a large 85.0% of his/her dollars in the city for these two products.

Conclusions and Implications:

In this survey, St. Louis Park residents expressed some key opinion and attitude differences from earlier surveys, in addition to showing a remarkable consistency in many other perceptions. Still, there are a hierarchy of concerns City decision-makers may wish to examine in the years ahead.

1. Crime remained a key issue for many residents but has diminished in its intensity; growth-related issues, such as density, aging infrastructure, and traffic congestion have begun to rise. Worries about crime are moderating, although the aggressive marketing of Neighborhood Watch programs and the National Night Out, as well as more highlighting and fostering of neighborhood organizations, could further aid this neutralization of the issue.
2. The St. Louis Park City enterprise was very well regarded by residents. Contact levels with the City Council and City Staff were higher than suburban norms. The job evaluations of both groups proved to be strongly positive and impressive in comparison with other suburban communities. Dissatisfaction with policy-makers and policy-implementers was strikingly low. Contacts with City Hall were among the highest in the Metropolitan Area. Interactions proved to be generally positive, but there was room for improvement regarding ease of reaching a staff member who could provide help.
3. The St. Louis Park Public Schools, though, were losing their connectedness with the community. While informed citizens were generally positive in their evaluations, their base within the community has become perilously small. This can be particularly problematic in communities such as St. Louis Park, where the School District must seek support from a majority of residents having no children in the schools. In the same way, interactions with the School District were also rated highly, but again among a small group of citizens. Historically, the School District has received solid support from the community; in order to reinforce that strength, it will need to reconnect with the empty-nesters and recent move-ins within the city.
4. Citizen connectedness with city life was very high. Over forty percent currently volunteer within the city, either in the school district, place of worship, neighborhood group, or public service program. Residents know their neighbors, feel at ease with them, and more importantly, feel they can rely upon them if the need arose. Formal neighborhood associations appeared to be strong, and the participation in neighborhood activities was among the highest in the Metropolitan Area suburbs.

5. The intellectual life of the community remained vibrant. While the education level of the community would suggest a higher level than the norm, age demographics would suggest the opposite. But, over one-third were actually engaging in formal learning opportunities, while almost one-half engaged in informal learning activities.
6. In evaluating the status of current development in the community, residents did not see any “lopsidedness.” They saw a generally good balance between residential, commercial, light industrial, and recreational development. Future development preferences tended to revolve around additional quality of life amenities, rather than redressing any imbalances. Over one-third of the residents would welcome more entertainment and dining establishments, as well as trails and bikeways. The only type of basic development for which the same number of residents saw a need was affordable housing opportunities, but not apartment units.

Overall, the City of St. Louis Park remains one of the best regarded communities in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. However, this does not mean St. Louis Park has now become the “Shangri-la of the First Suburban Ring.” In view of residential expectations and concerns, the City will need to act decisively on current and future issues, in order to retain its existing reservoir of good will. While many of these may be perception rather than reality, they need to be addressed in the same proactive fashion characterizing the community to this point.