



DECISION RESOURCES, LTD.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

2008 City of Saint Louis Park Residential Study

Residential Demographics:

Saint Louis Park is a mature, highly stable community, with a significant element of transience, particularly among a segment of younger renters. The median longevity of adult residents is 16.8 years. Twenty percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past five years, while 41% have been there over two decades. Three reasons are given by 66% of the sample for moving to Saint Louis Park: affordable housing, proximity to work, and high quality schools.

Only four percent of the sample expect to move out of Saint Louis Park during the next five years; in contrast, 84% intend to remain in the community for at least ten years. Most potential move-outs cite “higher-end housing” as the reason for leaving.

The average age of respondents is 50.7 years old. While 20% of the sample fall into the 18-34 year age range, 20% are at least 65 years old. Twenty-three percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 17% are composed only of senior citizens. Twenty-five percent of the city’s households contain school-aged children, and eight percent report the presence of pre-schoolers.

Whites compose 81% of the sample. Nine percent are African-American, while three percent are Asian-Pacific Islander, and another three percent are Hispanic-Latino. Eighty-seven percent report only English is spoken in their household. Spanish is also spoken in six percent of the households. Women outnumber men by four percent.

The median household income is \$58,500.00 annually. Seven percent report household incomes under \$25,000.00, while nine percent post annual incomes over \$100,000.00. Fifty-nine percent live in single family homes, while 21% reside in apartments and 15%, in townhouses or condominiums. Sixty-six percent own their present residence.

Residents are classified according to the Ward in which they live. Twenty-seven percent reside in Ward One; 26% live in Ward Two; 25% reside in Ward Three, while 23% live in Ward Four.

General Perspectives:

A solid 97% rate the quality of life as either “excellent” or “good;” seventy-nine percent rate it as “excellent,” a 40% increase since the 2006 study. The “excellent” rating is the highest across the Metropolitan Area suburbs. Respondents rating the quality lower than “excellent” advise the City Council to lower taxes and increase police patrolling.

“Location” within the Metropolitan Area is the most liked feature of the city. At 25%, it outdistances all other responses, but is much lower than the 2006 level of 46%. Twelve percent point to “friendly people,” while 13% like the “shopping and services.” “Strong neighborhoods” are next at ten percent. Eight percent each point to “sense of community” or “high quality schools.”

In thinking about serious issues facing the city, 18% point to “high taxes.” Ten percent worry about “lack of school funding,” and 11% cite “rising crime.” Nine percent indicate “traffic congestion.” Seven percent are concerned about “too much growth.” Seven percent are “boosters,” who feel there are “no” serious issues facing the community today.

Public Safety Issues:

Ninety-six percent say they have an overall feeling of safety in Saint Louis Park; only four percent feel unsafe. But, in nearby areas to their homes, 65% feel safe in walking in their neighborhood alone at night, while 34% disagree.

Fifty-three percent of the households are part of their area’s Neighborhood Watch, up nine percent in two years. Sixty-six percent report their household participates in National Night Out activities in the community, an increase of 24% since 2006. A solid 87% can rely on their neighbors for help in a safety-threatening situation, and 62% participated in neighborhood block parties.

Contact with the Fire Department during the past two years is limited at seven percent. Among those reporting contact, 96% rate the quality of service as either “excellent” or “good.” Eighteen percent report contacting the Police Department during the past two years. Among those having contact, 89% rate the service favorably, and 12%, unfavorably. Fifty percent of the dissatisfied point to “slow response,” while 38% report “too much speeding.”

Eighty-one percent report awareness of STEP, the Saint Louis Park Emergency Program.

City Services and Taxes:

Seventy-five percent of the residents view city services as either an “excellent” or a “good” value for the property taxes paid; only 11% rate the value as “only fair” or “poor.” Compared with communities previously lived in, a very solid 84% see them as “excellent” or “good,” while only four percent are more critical. While evaluating specific city

services, the mean approval rating is 87.2%, an exceptionally high rating. Among those having opinions, over 90% rate police protection, fire protection, recycling and brush pick-up, storm drainage and flood control, park maintenance, city-sponsored recreation programs, animal control and snow planning as “excellent” or “good.” Exactly 80% of the residents with opinions award high ratings to city street repair and maintenance and street lighting.

Environment and Energy Issues:

Ninety-one percent think, in general, the City of Saint Louis Park’s emphasis on environmental concerns is “about right.” This is the highest level of satisfaction among Metropolitan Area communities. By a decisive 77%-15% majority, residents think the City should promote the use of alternative energy resources, such as wind power. By an even more solid 83%-9% majority, residents think the City should promote the construction of energy-efficient public buildings. In fact, 61% still support the City of Saint Louis Park undertaking these measures even if they cost taxpayers more.

City Hall:

A very large 81% feel they can have an impact of the way things are run in Saint Louis Park; only eight percent feel they cannot. Among this latter group of only eight percent, 84% feel they would be ignored by City Hall. Overall, this level of empowerment is at the top of Metropolitan Area suburbs. Saint Louis Park residents, then, are feeling connected to their local decision makers.

Fifty percent report having a “great deal” or “fair amount” of knowledge about the work of the Mayor and City Council. A large 70% either “strongly approve” or “approve” of their job, while only seven percent register “disapproval.” Positive ratings are based upon the perception of a “good job,” “good communications,” and “lack of city problems.” Critics point to “too much redevelopment” “poor financial management,” and “poor communications.”

During the past year, 27% either contacted City Hall by telephone or in-person. Sixty-four percent of these contacts were by personal visits, while 35% telephoned and only one percent used e-mail. Five Departments received nearly two-thirds of the contacts: Building Inspections, Licenses and Permits, Absentee Voting, Public Works, and Garbage and Recycling.

In rating the last contact with respect to aspects of customer service, 93% rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either “excellent” or “good,” while 97% similarly rate the staff’s courtesy highly. Finally, 94% think the promptness of the response is either “excellent” or “good.”

Community and Neighborhood:

When looking at their community, a majority of residents think there are “about the right number” of apartment units, single family homes for rent, higher cost housing opportunities, affordable housing, starter homes for young families, “move-up” housing, condominiums and townhouses, and senior housing. But, 33% each think there are “too many” apartment units and condominiums and townhouses. While 42% think there are “about the right number” of part-time job opportunities in the community, 30% think there are “too few.” And, while 28% think the number of full-time job opportunities is “about the right number,” 44% see “too few.”

Ninety-eight percent think homes in their neighborhood are well-maintained. Ninety-five percent report people have pride and ownership in their neighborhood, and 95% also feel a part of their neighborhood. Ninety-four percent think their neighborhood is a good place to raise children, and 86% feel comfortable in discussing neighborhood problems with their neighbors. Ninety-two percent, up 20% in two years, think the appearance of housing in their neighborhood has improved during the past few years. Eighty-nine percent would feel comfortable in discussing neighborhood problems with their neighbors. Eighty-three percent assert people know and care about their neighbors and participate in solving problems with their business and residential neighbors. But, despite the current housing bubble, 60% feel property values are increasing in their neighborhood, while only 21% disagree.

A very large 94% rate the overall aesthetics, the pleasing appearance, of residential neighborhoods as either “excellent” or “good.” Only six percent are more critical in their judgments. A similarly large 91% rate the overall aesthetics of commercial and retail areas in Saint Louis Park highly, while only nine percent view them negatively. A modest number of residents point to “Texa-Tonka” and Knollwood” as specific areas in Saint Louis Park where aesthetics should be improved. Similarly, 90% say there are no properties in their neighborhood they consider to be a problem; “poor yard maintenance” is the key definition of a problem property. About 50% of the respondents say they are aware of home improvement programs offered by the City to residents: remodeling and architectural advice, energy rebates, and loans and financing.

Sixty-eight percent rate general redevelopment in the City of Saint Louis Park as either “excellent” or “good;” but, 17% rate it as “only fair” or “poor.” Higher ratings are based on “good city planning,” “city needs redevelopment,” and “improving appearance of the community.” Lower ratings stem from “too many apartments and condominiums” and “too much growth.” By a 65%-18% margin, residents support the continued redevelopment in the City of Saint Louis Park. Reasons for support and opposition mirror the reasons given for the rating of the general redevelopment in the community.

Community Diversity:

Seventy-seven percent think the growing population diversity is a “good thing,” while seven percent each see it as either a “bad thing” or “both good and bad.” Reasons for

seeing growing diversity as a good thing include “teaching tolerance,” “embracing diversity,” “way of the world,” and “brings variety to the local economy.” Reasons for seeing it as a bad thing are “rising crime” and “too much diversity is not a good thing.”

Eighty-two percent think the City is either “very well” or “somewhat well” prepared to meet the growing diversity of residents; only five percent disagree. Agreement is based on “rising crime,” “language barriers,” and “not enough affordable housing.” Personally, 97% feel welcomed in the community. And, 99% feel accepted by the community.

Transportation Issues:

Fifty-nine percent leave the City of Saint Louis Park on a regular or daily basis to go to work, school, or shopping. Similarly, 90% of these commuters traveling outside of the city rate the ease of their commute as either “excellent” or “good,” while 10% see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Ninety-six percent, an increase of 20% since the last study, rate the ease of getting from place to place within the city as either “excellent” or “good,” while only four percent rate it lower. Eighty-one percent are aware Hennepin County is proposing the construction of the Southwest Light Rail line connecting Eden Prairie and Saint Louis Park to Downtown Minneapolis. And, a comparatively high 56% report they are “likely” to regularly use this service.

Children in Saint Louis Park:

Fifty-six percent are aware of the Saint Louis Park “Children First Initiative.” Among those aware of the program, 46% also report awareness of the set of forty developmental assets focused on by the initiative for assuring the success of city children. And, among the smaller group familiar with the assets, 46% have actively been involved in activities to help the asset-building process, an increase of 11% since the 2006 study. At the current time, then, 12% of the citizenry are actively involved in the asset-building process.

Parks and Recreation Issues:

Ninety-three percent feel the existing recreational facilities offered by the City meet the needs of their household. Similarly, 93% also think the current mix of City park and recreation programming meets the needs of their household. Forty-one percent leave the city for park and recreational facilities or activities elsewhere, particularly for trails. A large 87% think the City has enough places for residents to meet with family, friends and business associates. Ninety-two percent think a strong arts and cultural presence is either “very important” or “somewhat important” to the quality of life in a community; in fact, 40% feel it is “very important.”

Communications:

The “Sun Newspaper” and “City Newsletter,” each at 33%, dominate the principal sources of information about City government and activities. Ten percent use the “city’s website,” double the 2006 level. Television is used by seven percent, and the “grapevine” is relied

upon by only four percent. Thirty-three percent each prefer to receive their information through the “Sun Newspaper” or the “City Newsletter.” Twelve percent opt for the “website,” while 10% prefer “mailings.”

Ninety-two percent report receiving the “Park Perspective,” the City’s bi-monthly newsletter. A very high 95% report household members regularly read it. The reach of the City Newsletter is 87% across the community. Twenty-nine percent watch City Council or Planning Commission Meetings either “frequently” or “occasionally.”

Forty-one percent accessed the City’s website. Among those accessing the website, a solid 95% were able to find what they sought. Website visitors would like to see more “recycling information” and “general City information.” But, 41% of the visitors report, however, the website is “fine as is.”

Concluding Thoughts:

In this survey, Saint Louis Park residents express an optimism and satisfaction unique among Metropolitan Area suburbs, not to mention within the inner suburban ring. A very small percentage of residents, particularly renters, plan to leave the City of Saint Louis Park within the next five years; but a comparatively large percentage, 84%, plan to remain in the community for at least 10 years. One of the major successes of the community lies in the way it has embraced diversity. Another success is the sense of community and connectedness fostered over the years.

1. High taxes and crime remain key issues for many residents, but continue to diminish in its intensity; maturity-related issues, such as redevelopment, aging infrastructure, and traffic congestion continue to rise. Worries about crime are moderating, though, as greater participation in Neighborhood Watch programs, block parties, and the National Night Out occurs.
2. The Saint Louis Park City enterprise remains very well regarded by residents. Contact levels with the City Council and City Staff are higher than suburban norms. The job evaluations of both groups are strongly positive and impressive in comparison with other first-ring suburban communities. Dissatisfaction with policy-makers and policy implementers is very low. Interactions with City Hall prove to be uniformly very positive. More impressive, though, is the 81%, highest in the Metropolitan Area, who believe they can have a say about the way things are run in this community.
3. Saint Louis Park registers the highest “excellent” ratings across the Metropolitan Area. At 79%, this City rating exceeds the Metropolitan Area norm by 35%. Residents rating the quality of life as lower than “excellent” suggest two actions to significantly improve it: “Lower property taxes” and “more police patrolling.” Underpinning the quality of life rating is the connectedness among neighbors: residents feel at ease with them, and more important, feel they can rely upon them if

the need arose. In addition, participation in neighborhood activities is among the highest among Metropolitan Area suburbs.

4. Residents rated city services uniformly high. In every case, ratings exceeded Metropolitan Area suburban norms. Eighty-four rate Saint Louis Park city services as either “excellent” or “good.” By almost seven-to-one, residents also consider the value of city services for the taxes paid to be very favorable. Residents rate the City highly on its environmental emphasis, endorse its promotion of alternative resources, and also back the promotion of construction of energy-efficient public buildings
5. In evaluating the status of current development in the community, residents do not see any “lopsidedness.” Instead they see a generally good balance of various types of development. But, they would assign a greater priority to attracting both full-time and part-time job opportunities. The overall aesthetics of the city is viewed very positively, and no area is cited by meaningful numbers of residents as needing improvement.
6. The communications linkage between the City and its residents is impressive. The City newsletter, “Sun Newspaper,” and the City’s website are relied upon by 84% of the residents. The reach of “Park Perspective” is 87% of the city’s households, among the highest in the Metropolitan Area. A comparatively high 41% of the households accessed the City’s website, while 29% watch City Council or Planning Commission Meetings at least “occasionally.”

Once again, the city enterprise is viewed exceptionally strongly. City services are well-regarded. City government and staff are rated very positively. Residents rate their quality of life impressively high and place a value on maintaining the diversity, sense of community, and strong neighborhoods that are a hallmark of Saint Louis Park. The City established a great reservoir of goodwill across the community in the past, and has clearly extended this to remarkably high levels; this level of citizen trust will surely serve Saint Louis Park well in the years ahead.

Methodology:

Decision Resources, Ltd., contacted 400 randomly selected households in the City of Saint Louis Park. Residents were interviewed by telephone between November 11th and 20th, 2008. The average interview took 26 minutes. The results of this sample may be projected to the universe of all adult residents of the City of Saint Louis Park within $\pm 5.0\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.