



Experience **LIFE** in the Park

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CITY OF ST. LOUIS PARK COMMUNITY SURVEY OF FUTURE CIVIC AND/OR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEEDS AND INTEREST

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Background & Objectives

The primary objective of the survey was to give all residents of the City of St. Louis Park the opportunity to respond to a survey that would assist the City in determining top priorities for future civic and/or recreational facilities needs and interests.

During 2005 – 2007 the City of St. Louis Park was involved in a Visioning process. As a result, the City Council developed four Strategic Directions. One of the strategic directions was “St. Louis Park is committed to being a connected and engaged community.” From that strategic direction, one of the focus areas was to explore the creation of a multi-use civic center, including indoor/winter use. From the Visioning process, staff compiled some preliminary information on this topic. This survey was designed with input from the Visioning process, staff and Council. The results of the survey will be used to help determine priorities for long-term planning of community parks, recreation and civic facilities. The upcoming city-wide phone survey of residents may be used to further test some of the ideas that result from this survey.

Methodology & Who Responded

The survey was administered online and via paper. One-thousand fifty-five (1,055) people responded. The City should be pleased with this response level as it reflects quite positively on the City. Whereas all residents were given the opportunity to respond, keep in mind that respondents to an open survey are typically those that are most involved and interested in the subject. That is, residents who feel strongly – either positively or negatively – tend to be the ones that respond to an open survey. (Note: respondents were asked to respond to the survey from the perspective of their household.)

Key Results

Clearly public parks and recreation are important to residents. Nearly ninety percent of respondents (89.9%) strongly agree or agree with the statement: Public parks and recreation are important to my household’s quality of life. In terms of how the City is doing, over seventy-two percent (72.3%) strongly agree or agree with the statement: The City of St. Louis Park is doing a good job of providing for my household’s park and recreation needs. While the majority of residents say the City is doing a good job, there is more that can be done to meet the needs and expectations of residents.

When asked to rate how important it is to add a particular facility among a list of 16 facilities, the five rated the highest are:

1. Trails for walking, biking, rollerblading, etc.
2. Indoor recreation space/gyms for multiple uses
3. Natural open space
4. Lighted athletic fields (existing fields)
5. Indoor playground (play area; play equipment, etc.)

Interestingly, when asked to select *exactly* three facilities that are *most important* to add, trails again came out on top, but the order changed from there:

1. Trails for walking, biking, rollerblading, etc.
2. Swimming pool – indoor
3. Indoor recreation space/gyms for multiple uses
4. Indoor playground (play area, play equipment, etc.)
5. Natural open space

While the two lists are not identical, it is clear that the top priority for future community park, recreation and civic facilities is trails. By examining the responses to open-ended questions, one gains greater insight into specific issues about trails. The most frequent comments include the need for north/south trails; trail connections; and that trails (and in some cases sidewalks) are needed to get to park and recreation facilities safely.

After trails, an indoor park/recreation facility is a priority for respondents. Many people envision such a facility serving a number of desired functions – indoor recreation space, indoor playground, fitness equipment, track and pool. Respondents often mentioned the need for an indoor park much like those in other communities, such as Edinborough in Edina.

Natural open space is also a priority for respondents. One respondent described its importance by saying *“Not to give any more green space away - it is what makes SLP special.”*

Respondents were asked about limitations to use of public parks and trails and participating in recreation activities or programs. As one might expect, lack of time is cited most frequently. In terms of limitations that the City can directly address, respondent most often said:

- Facilities are not suited to my needs
- Programs are not to my liking
- Cost of programs & facilities

In an effort to understand how to best allocate resources by age group, respondents were asked to indicate how important they think it is to provide additional recreation facilities and/or gathering places by age group. Respondents see the greatest need in the 13 – 17 year old age group, followed closely by those in the 6 – 12 year old age group. Next in line in terms of priority are seniors. Young children, under 5 years old, were the lowest priority for which to provide additional recreation facilities.

Respondents were asked *“If you think more public gathering places (e.g., Rec Center, coffee shops, parks, etc.) are needed, what types of things would you want to be able to do in those places?”* The most frequent response was an indoor play & fitness area. Some went on to say that it should be a space that would have classes for activities such as exercise, yoga and cooking; and that it should be an indoor space with greenery and provide the opportunity to walk indoors. People also talked about an interest in having a place to socialize, hold meetings, and rent space for personal events (e.g., weddings). Additionally, they commented that a public gathering place should be a place with a coffee shop and healthy food. Last, some people specifically said the Rec Center should be upgraded for a better public gathering place.

The survey asked respondents about user fees and taxes. Specifically, they were asked if the City is not able to pay for “What’s missing in parks and recreation” under the current budget, how much would they be willing to pay in additional user fees or taxes to add what’s missing? Over four-fifths of respondents said they would be willing to pay more to add what’s missing. Roughly one-third of respondents said they would be willing to pay \$9/month additional; approximately one-quarter said \$6/month and \$3/month.

At the end of the survey, many people acknowledged the good work the Parks and Recreation Department is doing and noted their appreciation for conducting the survey/asking for their opinion.