

# City of Saint Paul <br> Department of Parks and Recreation <br> Community Interest Survey 

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# Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation Community Interest and Opinion Survey Results 

## Executive Summary

Nearly all of the individuals responding to the survey who use parks report that, overall, they are either satisfied or very satisfied with the condition of park amenities, regardless of whether they are considering regional parks, city parks with recreation or community centers, or one of the many passive parks operated by the city.

When it comes to a consideration of particular amenities, all are thought to be in good condition with the exception of basketball courts and park restrooms, which are, on average, thought to be in only fair condition. However, when asked about their satisfaction with these amenities, in all except three instances, over three-quarters of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the amenity. The three amenities with lower satisfaction ratings were indoor fitness/exercise facilities, outdoor courts and skateboard parks, but it is important to note that even these amenities had $68 \%$ of users reporting that they were either satisfied or very satisfied. In general, respondents are satisfied with the park amenities available to them.

Respondents were also asked to prioritize investment in these amenities. Two items playground equipment and small neighborhood parks - were ranked as "highest priorities." Three items- tennis courts, fishing areas and boating areas - were identified as "low priority" amenities to invest in, with all other items, except golf courses, ranked as priorities. Golf courses were alone in being identified as "not a priority."

When asked to rank potential actions to improve parks, two actions were identified as "very important" - repairing older park facilities and connecting existing trails. Once again, respondents rated golf courses low with "upgrade existing city golf courses" identified as a "very unimportant" potential action.

Respondents' were also asked about their participation in Parks and Recreation programs, and the importance of these programs to them and members of their households. Of households that had participated in such programs, more than a third (37\%) rated the programs as excellent with approximately half more (49\%) rating them as good.

## Introduction

Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation conducted a community interest survey in late summer 2016 to better understand residents' park and recreation usage, satisfaction and priorities for future investment. The department engaged Civic Consulting MN pro-bono partner QEM, Inc., to administer, analyze and report survey results.

An online survey was sent to Parks and Recreation e-delivered news bulletin subscribers. The subscriber lists for two Parks and Recreation e-lists - `Parks and Recreation Updates' and the `Parks and Recreation News, Events and Activities' - were used. The first survey mailing was sent to these subscribers on August $17^{\text {th }}$. Reminders were sent on August $26^{\text {th }}$ and September 2, 2016, and the survey was closed on September 9, 2016. The result was a 17\% "opened" rate for these emails, which means that 4,762 surveys were successfully delivered. Of these, 1,382 responses were received for a $29 \%$ response rate.

The survey examined 6 main areas of interest. These included park usage, condition of park amenities and satisfaction with those amenities. Respondents were also asked to prioritize investment in these amenities and to rate the importance of various actions that might be taken to improve the Parks and Recreation system. Finally, the survey examined respondents' participation in Parks and Recreation programs and the importance of these programs to them and members of their households.

Breakdowns of respondents by zip code and by household type are given in Table 1 and Figure 1, Appendix A*. Approximately $91 \%$ of respondents reported being residents of Saint Paul with the remaining $9 \%$ living in either Minneapolis or suburban areas. Where appropriate, analyses were done to compare overall responses to those of just Saint Paul residents. No significant differences in average responses were found when the $9 \%$ of non-residents respondents were removed. Thus, results are reported using all responses.

## Park Usage by Type

Survey recipients were asked to characterize their household's park usage. Three types of park Regional Parks, Parks with Recreation/Community Centers, Passive Park/Green Space - were included. Of these, the largest percentage of respondents (96\%) reported using regional parks. Nevertheless, parks with recreation or community centers and passive parks/green space were still used by the vast majority of respondent with $93 \%$ and $90 \%$ reporting usage, respectively. Given the nature of the survey recipients - individuals subscribed to Parks and Recreation ebulletins - this high percentage of usage should not be surprising. However, it is interesting to note that, of the three types of parks surveyed, regional parks had the highest reported usage by this group of individuals.

[^0]Those who report using these three types of park also report that, on average, they visit regional parks a few times a year, while the other two types of park are visited, on average, a few times a month. Households without children differ significantly from households with children in that the former tend to use regional parks more frequently while the latter report that they are more frequent users of parks with recreation or community centers. The complete distribution of park usage is reported in Table 2.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to indicate which park or recreation center they visit most often. This optional question received 1113 replies (multiple locations could be identified by a single respondent). Como Park/ Zoo/ Conservatory was mentioned most frequently ( 407 write-ins), while Highland Park (261), Phalen (121) and Edgecumbe (118) were all identified by at least $10 \%$ of those who answered this question. All write-in data is contained in the Supplement to the survey.

## Usage and Condition of Amenities

Survey recipients were asked to characterize the condition of park amenities on a scale from "excellent" to "poor" with "I/we don't use this" as an option. Because of this last option the results give us two pieces of information. First, we can see the rate at which respondents use each amenity and, second, we can also see, of those who use the amenity, the rating of its condition. The first of these, amenity usage, is given in Figure 2, below.

# Figure 2. Percent of total respondents reporting amenity usage 



We asked those who use the amenity to rate the condition of that amenity on a scale from excellent to poor. Respondents typically report that amenities are in good condition. This was true for each of the amenities we asked about except for two: basketball courts and park restrooms. These two amenities were, on average, thought to be in fair condition. A complete account of the ratings breakdown for each amenity can be seen in Table 3.

When we split respondents into two groups - household with and households without children we saw that both groups agree on all of these rating except for one: community center buildings. While this amenity received an overall average rating of "good," it did so largely because of the households without children. Households with children, on the other hand, were more likely to give community center buildings a slightly lower average rating of "fair."

Nevertheless, when asked to give an overall rating of the condition of amenities in each of the three types of park - regional parks, those with recreation or community centers, and passive parks - park users reported that, in general, the amenities are in good condition. Table 4 supplies the rating breakdown for each type of park.

## Priorities for Investment in Amenities

Survey recipients were then asked to tell us how they would prioritize investment in each of the amenities listed. Again, respondents were given the opportunity to "opt out" by indicating that they had "No opinion" about a particular amenity. Of those with opinions, two items Playground Equipment and Small Neighborhood Parks - typically received "highest priority" rankings for future investment. Three items on the list - Tennis Courts, Fishing Areas and Boating Areas - were most commonly identified as "low priority" amenities to invest in, while Golf Courses were alone in being identified as "not a priority." All other items were, on average, characterized as a "priority" for investment. Figure 3, below, shows the overall average response by item and responses broken down by household type.

When we examine the prioritization of these amenities by household type, we do see significant differences although most, if not all, are to be expected. So, for example, households with children ranked investing in playground equipment significantly higher than did households without children. The latter, however, ascribed more importance to investment in walking trails. A similar trend was seen with outdoor swimming pools and ice-skating rinks, as well as athletic fields, all of which were ranked significantly higher for households with children. Households without children on the other hand ranked off-leash dog parks as a significantly higher priority than households with children.

Figure 3. Investment priorities for nineteen amenities. ( 3 = high, 2 = moderate, $1=$ low, $0=$ not a priority)


## Satisfaction

When it comes to overall satisfaction, of those who reported usage of the three park types, nearly all (96\%) reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with Regional Parks, while 83\% felt similarly about city parks with recreation or community centers and nearly all (90\%) were satisfied or very satisfied with passive parks and green space.

Respondents were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the particular park amenities that they do use. Across all categories (see Appendix B, Survey Instrument, Item 5 for complete list) respondents most commonly reported satisfaction with all amenities. (See Table 5 for a breakdown of the distribution of responses.) In fact, in all except three instances, over threequarters of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied. The three amenities with lower satisfaction ratings were indoor fitness/exercise facilities, outdoor courts and skateboard parks, but it is important to note that even these amenities had $68 \%$ of users reporting that they were either satisfied or very satisfied. In general, respondents are satisfied with park amenities.

## What is Missing from Parks?

Respondents were given the option of identifying anything that they thought was missing from the parks they visit. This was an optional, write-in item. Six hundred and sixty respondents replied, in some cases providing details of numerous things they think are needed. These responses can be found in the Supplemental Report, which contains all write-in responses. While no strong themes emerged, splash pads, restrooms and recycling were all mentioned with greater frequency than other suggestions.

## Actions to Improve Parks and Recreation System

We asked respondents to tell us about their priorities for thirteen different potential actions to improve the Parks and Recreation system. (See Appendix B, Survey Instrument, Item 8) Each action could be rated on a scale of "very important" to "very unimportant" with the option of being "not sure." Two actions were identified as "very important" - repairing older park facilities and connecting existing trails. A number of actions were, on average, rated as "unimportant" (developing new athletic fields, new off-leash dog parks and new outdoor ice-skating rinks) with one action - upgrade existing city golf courses - rated as "very unimportant." All other actions were rated as "important."

It is important to note that, much as with Investment Priorities, there are differences of opinion on these actions when we consider responses by household type. Figure 4 shows the overall ranking of items surveyed along with the rankings for each type of household. While particular items may move up or down in rank for household type when compared with its overall ranking, it is important to note that the items rated as "very important" remain so with one change, it now includes "upgrading existing neighborhood recreation centers" for households with children.

Figure 4. Importance of actions- average score
3 = very important, $2=$ important, $1=$ unimportant, $0=$ very unimportant


## Parks and Recreation Programs

More than two-thirds of respondents (67\%) reported that either they or a member of their household had participated in a Parks and Recreation program within the last year. Of households that had participated in such programs, more than a third (37\%) rated the programs as excellent with approximately half more (49\%) rating them as good.

Figure 5. Rating of overall quality of programs


Of the 566 respondents who provided a reason for not participating in programs ${ }^{\dagger}$, the most commonly cited reason was a preference for unplanned or unstructured activities (183 responses). Respondents also said that the programs were difficult to learn about (145 responses) or were offered at inconvenient times ( 153 responses). These were the three most commonly cited reasons. All responses can be found in the Supplement.

Respondents were asked to consider a number of particular program types. None were rated, on average, as "very important", however quite a number were identified as "important." The majority of these were youth programs. They included summer camp, fitness and wellness, art/dance/performing arts, sports, and learn to swim programs. Also identified as important were adult fitness and wellness programs, family programs and nature programs. Computer training was typically reported as being "not important."

An open-ended question asked respondents to indicate which programs, activities or services they would like to see offered at City parks and recreation centers. Six hundred and forty eight write-in responses were provided (see Supplement). A word cloud of responses is presented in

[^1]Figure 6, Appendix A. One can see that among the most common responses were fitness programs for both youth and adults, including yoga and swimming. However, there were over a thousand suggestions.

## Communication

We asked survey recipients to tell us how they learn about the City's parks, trails, programs and activities. Parks and Recreation's website (953 responses), brochures (612) and email bulletins (547) were among the most highly chosen responses. Community education catalogs (497 responses), flyers at park facilities (379) and friends and neighbors (562) were also frequently identified. The most frequent write-in answer was Parks and Recreation Facebook page. A complete list with frequency of response is provided in Table 6. A complete list of write-in responses is available in the Supplement.

## Appendix A - Tables and Figures

Table 1
Number of responses by zip code/ area
Zip Code Responses

| 55101 | 21 |
| :--- | :---: |
| 55102 | 97 |
| 55103 | 41 |
| 55104 | 230 |
| 55105 | 204 |
| 55106 | 130 |
| 55107 | 58 |
| 55108 | 110 |
| 55114 | 8 |
| 55116 | 166 |
| 55117 | 115 |
| 55119 | 60 |
| 55130 | 21 |
| Minneapolis + | 42 |
| West Suburbs | 43 |
| North Suburbs | 36 |
| South Suburbs |  |

Figure 1. Breakdown of Respondents by Household type
Which household type best represents your household?


Table 2
Distribution of park type usage for those who use parks (by percent of users)/ (Averages in green.)

|  | Almost daily | A few times a week | A few times a month | A few times a year |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Regional Parks | 10 | 21 | 31 | 38 |
| Parks with Recreation/ <br> Community Centers | 11 | 31 | 33 | 25 |
| Passive Park/ <br> Green Space | 20 | 28 | 29 | 24 |

Table 3
Respondents' rating of amenities.

|  | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Athletic fields | 7 | 60 | 25 | 8 |
| Basketball courts | 5 | 44 | 42 | 9 |
| Biking trails | 14 | 61 | 21 | 4 |
| Boating areas | 7 | 54 | 34 | 5 |
| Community centers | 13 | 53 | 29 | 6 |
| Fishing areas | 7 | 48 | 38 | 8 |
| Golf courses | 20 | 61 | 17 | 2 |
| Off-leash dog parks | 16 | 52 | 24 | 7 |
| Outdoor ice-skating rinks | 12 | 52 | 29 | 8 |
| Outdoor swimming pools | 35 | 49 | 13 | 4 |
| Park restrooms | 4 | 46 | 40 | 10 |
| Parking lots | 8 | 60 | 27 | 4 |
| Picnic areas | 12 | 65 | 20 | 3 |
| Picnic shelters | 14 | 64 | 20 | 2 |
| Playground equipment | 17 | 56 | 21 | 5 |
| Tennis courts | 8 | 47 | 31 | 14 |
| Walking trails | 61 | 16 | 2 |  |

Table 4
Overall rating of the condition of the City Parks and Recreation amenities at each of the three types of park (Averages identified in green.)

|  | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor |
| :--- | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| Regional Parks | 21 | 67 | 11 | 1 |
| Parks with Recreation/ Community Centers | 12 | 59 | 25 | 4 |
| Passive Park/Green Space | 13 | 64 | 21 | 2 |

Table 5
Respondents' satisfaction with amenities. (Averages identified in green.)

|  | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Athletic fields | 7 | 76 | 13 | 4 |
| Beach areas | 6 | 73 | 18 | 3 |
| Biking trails | 13 | 74 | 12 | 1 |
| Boating areas | 5 | 81 | 11 | 3 |
| Community centers | 13 | 65 | 18 | 4 |
| Fishing areas | 4 | 77 | 16 | 3 |
| Golf courses | 13 | 80 | 5 | 2 |
| Indoor swimming pools | 19 | 67 | 12 | 3 |
| Indoor fitness/ exercise facilities | 10 | 58 | 25 | 7 |
| Off-leash dog parks | 13 | 64 | 17 | 7 |
| Outdoor swimming pools/ Water parks | 29 | 58 | 10 | 3 |
| Outdoor courts | 4 | 66 | 26 | 3 |
| Outdoor ice rinks | 10 | 65 | 20 | 5 |
| Outdoor amphitheater | 10 | 70 | 18 | 3 |
| Picnic areas | 10 | 79 | 10 | 1 |
| Picnic shelters | 10 | 78 | 10 | 1 |
| Playground equipment | 12 | 66 | 18 | 4 |
| Skateboarding parks | 6 | 62 | 21 | 11 |
| Walking trails | 19 | 71 | 9 | 2 |

Figure 6. Programs, activities or services respondents would like to see offered


Table 6
How respondents learn about the City's parks, trails, programs and activities

|  | Number of <br> Responses | Percent of <br> Total |
| :--- | :---: | :---: |
| Parks and Recreation website | 953 | $69 \%$ |
| Parks and Recreation brochure | 612 | $44 \%$ |
| Friends and neighbors | 562 | $41 \%$ |
| E-mail bulletins | 547 | $40 \%$ |
| Community education catalog | 497 | $36 \%$ |
| Flyers at park facilities | 379 | $27 \%$ |
| Parks and Recreation staff | 234 | $17 \%$ |
| School flyers/newsletters | 226 | $16 \%$ |
| Newspaper | 185 | $13 \%$ |
| Other | 95 | $7 \%$ |
| Radio | 42 | $3 \%$ |
| Cable access television | 15 | $1 \%$ |

# Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation Community Interest Survey 

Help us plan the future of parks in Saint Paul! The Department of Parks and Recreation would like your input to help determine park and recreation priorities for our community. Your responses will help us understand how you prioritize investments in your parks and your park and recreation needs. This survey should take approximately $10-15$ minutes to complete. We greatly appreciate your time.

* Required


## The Department of Parks and Recreation oversees three different types of City Parks. When filling out this survey, please keep the following distinctions in mind.

Regional Parks -- These include: Cherokee, Como, Crosby Farm, Harriet Island, Hidden Falls, Indian Mound, Lilydale, Phalen and Raspberry Island

Parks with Recreation/Community Centers - All City parks other than regional parks with permanent public buildings such as community centers, restroom facilities, picnic pavilions and recreation centers.

Passive Park/Green Space - Parks with no permanent buildings. This category includes parks with athletic fields, walking trails, playgrounds and picnic areas. Also included are mini-parks which sometimes have only benches.

1. 2. On average, how frequently does your household use: *

Mark only one oval per row.

2. 2. Based on your experiences, please rate the condition of each of the following amenities. * Mark only one oval per row.

3. 3. Overall, how would rate the condition of the City Parks and Recreation amenities at: * Mark only one oval per row.
Regional Parks
Parks with Recreation/ Community
Centers
Passive Parks/Green Spaces
4. 4. How would you prioritize investment in these amenities? *

Mark only one oval per row.

5. 5. How satisfied are you with the following? *

Mark only one oval per row.

|  | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied | I/we don't use this |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Athletic fields | $0$ | $\square$ | $0$ | $\square$ | ) |
| Beach areas | ) | $\square$ |  |  |  |
| Biking trails | $0$ |  |  |  |  |
| Boating areas |  |  |  |  |  |
| Community Centers |  | ) | ) | ) |  |
| Fishing areas |  |  | ) | ) | ) |
| Golf courses | $0$ |  | $0$ | $\bigcirc$ | ) |
| Indoor swimming pools |  | $1$ |  | $\bigcirc$ | $\bigcirc$ |
| Indoor fitness/exercise facilities | $\square$ |  | $\square$ | $0$ | $\square$ |
| Off-leash dog parks | $\square$ | $\square$ | $D$ | $\square$ | $\square$ |
| Outdoor swimming pools/water parks |  | $\square$ | $\square$ | $\square$ | $0$ |
| Outdoor courts |  | $2$ | $2$ | $2$ | $2$ |
| Outdoor ice rinks |  |  |  |  | ) |
| Outdoor amphitheater |  |  |  |  |  |
| Picnic areas |  |  | $0$ | $0$ | $\bigcirc$ |
| Picnic shelters |  | $0$ | $D$ | $0$ | $0$ |
| Playground equipment |  |  |  | $2$ |  |
| Skateboarding parks |  |  | $2$ | $2$ | $2$ |
| Walking trails | $\square$ | $\square$ | $\square$ | $\square$ | $\square$ |

6. 6. Overall, how satisfied are you with: *

Mark only one oval per row.

7. 7. Is there anything that you think is missing from the parks you visit?
$\qquad$
$\qquad$
$\qquad$
$\qquad$
$\qquad$
8. 8. How important is each of the following potential actions to improve the Parks and Recreation system? *
Mark only one oval per row.

9. 9. Has any member of your household participated in any City Parks and Recreation programs in the past year? *
Mark only one oval.

10. 10. How would you rate the overall quality of the program(s)? *

Mark only one oval.I/we don't participateExcellentGoodFairPoor
11. 11. If nobody in your household participates in Parks and Recreation programs, why not? (Check all that apply)
Check all that apply.The programs are not interesting.The programs are not offered at convenient times.It is difficult to find transportation to get to these programs.My/our preference is for unplanned or unstructured activities.I find it difficult to learn about these programs.Registration is complicatedCosts are prohibitiveOther:
12. 12. How important to members of your household are the types of recreation programs listed below? *
Mark only one oval per row.

13. 13. How do you learn about the City's parks, trails, programs and activities? (check all that apply) *
Check all that apply.Parks and Recreation brochureParks and Recreation websiteParks and Recreation staffFlyers at park facilitiesNewpaperRadioCable access televisionCommunity education catalogFriends and neighborsSchool flyers/newslettersE-mail bulletinsOther:
14. 14. What programs, activities or services would you like to see offered at your City Parks/ Recreation Centers?
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....................................................................................................

$\qquad$
..............................................................................................................................
15. 15. Which City Parks/Recreation Centers do you and members of your household visit most often?
$\qquad$

$\qquad$
$\qquad$
$\qquad$
16. 16. Which household type best represents your household? *

Check all that apply.Household with children under 18Household without childrenOther:
17. 17. What is your home zip code? *

## Thank you for your help!


[^0]:    *All tables and figures are contained in Appendix A unless otherwise noted.

[^1]:    ${ }^{\dagger}$ Respondents could check as many responses as were applicable. An "other" category provided an opportunity for write-in responses.

