

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2004 City of Minnetonka Study

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Minnetonka. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between March 7th and 18th, 2005. The typical respondent took twenty-six minutes to complete the questionnaire. The results of this study are projectable to the universe of adult Minnetonka residents within $\pm 5.0\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.

Residential Demographics:

The typical adult resident of the City of Minnetonka has lived in the city for 14.6 years. Twenty-three percent moved there during the last five years, while 34% resided there for more than twenty years. Twenty-five percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 17% of the households are composed exclusively of senior citizens. Thirty-three percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. The typical Minnetonka adult resident is 52.0 years old. Nine percent are under 35 years old, while 22% are 65 years old or older. Women outnumber men by two percent in the sample.

Eighty-one percent own their present residences. The typical residential property has an approximate value of \$314,500.00. Twenty-eight percent post values of under \$250,000.00, while 44% state values of between \$250,000.00 and \$400,000.00. Twenty-six percent live in Ward Four, while 24% percent reside in Ward One. Twenty-five percent each reside in Wards Two and Three.

Quality of Life:

Fifty-five percent of the City rate their quality of life as excellent, while another 41% rate it as good. Only two percent rate their quality of life lower. Excellent ratings are unchanged during the past year.

Awareness and Participation in City-Sponsored Programs and Events:

Ninety-four percent of the sample are aware of the curbside recycling program; a large 78% also use it. Ninety-one percent report awareness of the leaf drop-off program; usage is 47%. Eighty-eight percent are aware of the brush drop-off program; forty-five percent use the program. Eighty-six percent are aware of special drop-off days, with fifty-three percent participating in them. Sixty-two percent are aware of Minnetonka Mike, with a usage rate of 21%.

City Service Ratings:

Minnetonka residents awarded three city services a positive rating of 90% or higher: recycling service, snow plowing, and water and sanitary sewer services. Three services are given favorable ratings in the eighty percent range: police services, park maintenance, and fire protection. Further, residents give two services positive ratings in the seventy percent range: trail maintenance and recreation services and programs. Minnetonka residents give another three services positive ratings in the sixty percent range: pavement repair and patching on city streets, community planning, and domestic animal control for dogs. Finally, senior services are awarded an overall favorable rating of 42%; but, among those having an opinion, the positive rating is an overall 93%.

In comparison with the past few years, community planning, domestic animal control for dogs, and recreational services and programs showed the significant slippage five percent or higher in their respective positive ratings. But, the decrease results from higher uncertainty rather than an increase in dissatisfaction.

Changes or improvements needed to raise service evaluations to either excellent or good are fix potholes, mentioned by 47% of those critical of services, followed by faster road work and better animal control, each posted by seven percent.

In rating the general value of city services in terms of property taxes paid, 24% give services a rating of excellent, and 50% rate them as good. Critical judgments only fair or poor are a low 15%. A majority of 54%-34% favor an increase of city property taxes *if needed to maintain city services at their current level*. Respondents opposing a tax increase for service maintenance tend to target parks and trails and recreation services for cuts.

If they could increase the budget by one percent, opinions again divide about prioritization. Thirty-four percent choose street maintenance for the increase, while thirty percent select police and fire protection. Fifteen percent indicate parks, double the 2004 level, while nine percent point to some other city service. The two top priorities have headed the list consistently for the past three years.

Thirty-nine percent have been involved in or observed a situation where a member of the Minnetonka Police Department was present. Among this group, ninety percent rate the way the situation was handled as either excellent or good, while eighty-eight percent thought the response time was prompt. Thirteen percent think there are unsafe areas in the community: anywhere at night, parks and trails, the Ridgedale Center parking lot, and other parking lots are their major concerns.

When considering the greatest public safety concerns in the city, one continues to dominate: speeding and other traffic violations, pointed to by 30%. Burglary is in second place. Drugs are cited by 10%, while underage drinking and identity theft are indicated by eight percent each. Twelve percent of the sample think there are no serious public safety problems at

the present time, about one-half the level seen in last year's study. Speeding on residential streets is considered in more detail, and 93%, an increase of 41% over the 2004 level, rate it as an issue of concern. Among the half of the sample feeling this way, 28% see it as very serious.

The City of Minnetonka, continuing an over fifteen year trend, consistently rates among the top five Metropolitan Area communities in terms of the services provided to its residents..

Environmental Protection Issues:

In general, seventy-three percent of the sample think Minnetonka does about the right amount in protecting the environment, down five percent since the 2004 study. Only 12% state it did too little, while six percent rate the City as doing too much. By a 76%-16% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect wetlands, ponds and streams. Similarly, by a 70%-16% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect forested areas.

By an 81%-14% majority, residents support more stringent requirements for the protection of natural open spaces. Overall, 72% think the amount of natural open space in the city is about right; 23% see too little, while only two percent state there is too much. By a 75%-17% majority, residents support more stringent requirements for the protection of trees and forested areas. And, by a 77%-15% margin, they also support more stringent requirements for the protection of natural open spaces.

Development Issues:

An impressive 77% believe the City of Minnetonka has been successful in maintaining a balance between the rights of individual property owners to reasonably develop their properties, with the desire of the wider community to preserve the natural environment and its surroundings. Only eight percent rate the City as unsuccessful, while another six percent think the City has been neither.

Sixty-six percent see residents as having appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process, down 8% from the 2004 study; nineteen percent feel residents do not, while sixteen percent are uncertain. Critics would like to see more listening to residents, follow through on residents' ideas, advertise meetings, and more timely information.

Residents rate the importance of each of a set of improvements for inclusion in the Minnetonka Creek Visioning Plan. Eighty-five percent think access to the creek area for passive recreation activities, such as trails and observation areas, is either very important or somewhat important. Eighty-three percent feel the same way about restoring natural resources. This priority also has the highest level of strong support. Flood control and hydrology improvements is deemed important by 78%, while access to the creek area for active

recreational activities, such as playgrounds and picnic areas, is very important or somewhat important to 76%. Finally, seventy-one percent regard enhancing historic amenities in the Burwell/Minnetonka Mills area as important.

Fifty-four percent of the residents would be more likely to support a higher density development if the buildings were clustered to protect more of the environment, up 9% since the 2004 study. Thirty-three percent are less likely to do so under this condition, while nine percent report it makes no difference to them.

Fifty-one percent of the residents would be more likely to support a higher density development if some affordable housing units are included in the development, up 5% since the 2004 study. Thirty-four percent are less likely to do so under this condition, while ten percent report it makes no difference to them.

Sixty-one percent believe the City of Minnetonka currently possesses an adequate mix of housing to meet the needs of all residents. Even so, by a 68%-24% majority, residents favor the City requiring developers to provide a broader range and mix of housing prices in new housing developments; support has increased by eight percent over the past year.

Solid majorities of respondents support providing financial incentives and tax breaks to direct and encourage the development of two types of housing: by 85% 10%, they endorse incentives and tax breaks for senior housing; by 81%-17%, respondents support these types of incentives for first-time homes. On the issue of incentives and tax breaks for rental units, residents split 47%-46% against their provision.

Parks and Recreation System:

Usage and ratings of three components of the Minnetonka Park System were measured. Thirty-one percent have visited the Minnetonka Senior Center during the past year, seven percent higher than in the 2004 study. Among visitors, 94% award it positive ratings, while four percent are more negative. Thirty-nine percent report visiting the Williston Fitness Center during the past year. Among facility users, 77% rate it positively and 23% view it negatively, reflecting a six percent decrease in favorable ratings. Seventy-three percent report using the city's trails; among users, 97% view them favorably.

Thirty-three percent report household members used Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreational programs or offerings, a return to pre-2004 levels. Among program users, a solid 92% again report satisfaction with the programs or offerings.

Thirty-one percent of the sample state they received notification of a park renewal in their neighborhood. Among those notified, 54% completed and returned the survey about desired amenities, down seven percent in one year, and seventeen percent attended planning meetings. An impressive 90% of the meeting attendees are satisfied with the process.

City Staff:

Thirty-five percent report they have had quite a lot or some first-hand contact with the Minnetonka City Staff, up eight percent over the 2002 level. A very solid 76% rate the City Staff as either excellent or good, while 10% see them as only fair or poor. Positive ratings improved by 11% since the 2004 study.

During the past year, forty-five percent visited or contacted Minnetonka City Hall either in person or on the telephone. The most common contacts occur with the Police Department, Assessor's Office, Street Maintenance, Building Inspection, and the General Information Desk. Ninety-five percent rate the waiting time for the City Receptionist positively, while five percent are more negative. The courtesy of the City Receptionist is viewed favorably by ninety-nine percent, with two percent more critical. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either excellent or good, while ten percent see it as only fair or poor. Ninety-six percent judge the courtesy of the City Staff highly, while four percent disagree. And, eighty-eight percent rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with nine percent viewing it lower. Again, in comparison with other suburban areas, these ratings are outstanding.

Communications System:

Print media about the City of Minnetonka and its activities proves to be the dominant source of information used by the citizenry. The Minnetonka Memo and city mailings are used by 69%, while The Sun Sailor and other local newspapers are used by 13%. Five percent rely upon the City's website, while cable television and word of mouth are favored by four percent each. Preferred means of receiving news follow these patterns, with a slight change in emphasis: seventy-two percent prefer a mailed newsletter, specifically the Minnetonka Memo, while 11% opt for the Internet and nine percent like the newspaper.

The city newsletter, Minnetonka Memo, has received by a very large ninety-six percent of the residents. Among them, eighty-six percent award its content and format high grades. The Minnetonka Memo, again, proves to be a very effective communications device.

Among readers, sixty-six percent recall seeing articles regarding environmental issues, including the effects of storm water on the quality of city wetlands and other water bodies; ninety-two percent rate those articles positively, while six percent rate them negatively. Based on the articles about storm water, 80% had picked up litter in their neighborhood. Fifty-six percent of the readers had swept up fertilizer, grass clippings or leaves than landed on the street or driveway. Thirty percent of the readers cleaned out the neighborhood storm water drain gate, when filled with debris and garbage.

Similarly, eighty-two percent recall receiving the Recreational Services Brochure, which covers the offerings of the Hopkins-Minnetonka Park and Recreation Departments. A solid

eighty-four percent of the readers rate the brochure s usefulness as excellent or good. This publication continues to have an unusually high core audience.

Seventy-two percent of the households in the community subscribe to cable television. Twenty-seven percent of the subscribers watch Minnetonka City Council Meetings on Channel 16 either frequently or occasionally, equivalent to 19% of the community s households. While having a smaller reach than print media, city programming on cable television draws a comparatively large number of residents.

Eighty-four percent of the sample have access to the Internet at either home, work, or both locations. Forty-six percent each use a dial-up connection or a broadband connection. A large forty-six percent of those on-line report accessing the City of Minnetonka s website for information about city services, news, and events; over one year, web site access has increased by ten percent. Among website visitors, eighty-eight percent evaluate the content highly, an increase of eight percent over the 2004 level, and 82% consider the site easy to use, a solid 13% increase during the same interim. Twenty percent of the web site users have registered for a City recreation program; among registrants, ninety percent find the process to be clear and easy. Only eighteen percent of the web site users have sought information or input on natural resources or storm water issues; among those doing so, everyone rates its usefulness positively.

Final Thoughts:

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2005 study of the Minnetonka community:

Minnetonka residents remain very satisfied with their quality of life, and the city ranks among the top three communities across the Metropolitan Area.

City services continue to be the one of the most highly rated in the Metropolitan Area. Basic services police protection, fire protection, and snow plowing among those holding opinions, post positive ratings exceeding 94% satisfaction in each case.

Tax hostility in the community continues a downward trend. For the second time, a majority of 54% support a property tax increase *if it were needed to maintain city services at their current levels*. During the same time period, opposition declined from 38% to 34%.

Solid majorities of residents still think the City is both doing enough in protecting the environment and contains about the right amount of natural open space. A significant majority of residents also give positive ratings to City efforts protecting wetlands, ponds, streams and forested areas. In addition, residents favor more stringent requirements for the protection of trees and forested areas as well as natural open spaces. The City also continues to be viewed as successful in maintaining the balance between the rights of individual property owners and the interests of the wider community.

City Staff continues to be viewed very favorably by the citizenry. Among those having opinions, the approval rating is 88%. And, among those who contacted or visited City Hall, the Staff is awarded positive ratings of at least 88%, among those posting opinions, on each of five quality service dimensions.

Concerns about safety again prove lower than in other communities. Thirteen percent believe there are areas in the community where they feel unsafe. And, in reacting to a list of potential public safety problems, speeding and other traffic violations again outstrip all other types of crimes. In fact, 60% see traffic speeding on residential streets as an issue of concern, and about one-quarter of this group see it as a very serious concern.

The communications system within the City remains highly successful. The *Minnetonka Memo* and the *Sun Sailor* are the two sources primarily relied upon for information about City government. The newsletter, in particular, continues to be both very well read and highly evaluated for content and format. And, electronic media has come into its own. The reach of City Council cablecasts is almost 20%, still well ahead of other suburban communities. Also, and consistent with the technology-mindedness of the population, the 39% reach of the website is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The City of Minnetonka, for the sixth consecutive year, ranks among the top three highest rated communities in the Metropolitan Area. Further, when local governments are being viewed negatively both at the State Legislature and elsewhere, Minnetonka residents continue to exhibit pride in their city and confidence about its future.