

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2006 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 February 10<sup>th</sup> and March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The typical respondent took 24 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 Minnetonka resident has lived in the city for 16.4 years. Nineteen percent moved there during the past five years, while 40% resided there for more than twenty years. Twenty-six percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 17% of the households are composed exclusively of senior citizens. Thirty percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. The typical Minnetonka adult resident is 51.6 years old. Twelve percent are under 35 years old, while 19% are 65 years old or older. Women outnumber men by two percent in the sample.

Seventy-five percent own their present residences. The typical residential property has an approximate value of \$314,500.00. Twenty-seven percent post values of under \$250,000.00, while 50% 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-two percent of the City rate their quality of life as “excellent,” while another 47% rate it as “good.” Only one percent rate their quality of life lower. “Excellent” ratings are virtually unchanged during the past year.

“Location” is the most liked aspect of living in Minnetonka, at 31%. The “natural environment,” at 13%, and “rural setting,” at nine percent, place second. Rounding out the list, “good schools,” “parks and trails,” and “attractive housing and strong neighborhoods,” each at seven percent, form a third tier.

An unusually high 29% report there is “nothing” they like least about living in the community. This level of civic boosters is the highest across the Metropolitan Area. Two issues emerge at moderate levels: “high taxes,” at 15%, and “traffic congestion,” at 15%.

***Awareness and Participation in City-Sponsored Programs and Events:***

Ninety-four percent of the sample are aware of the curbside recycling program; a large 75% also use it. Eighty-nine percent report awareness of the leaf drop-off program; usage is 41%. Eighty-nine percent are aware of the brush drop-off program; forty-eight percent use the program. Eighty-nine percent are aware of special drop-off days, with 51% participating in them. Sixty percent are aware of “Minnetonka Mike,” with a usage rate of 21%. Fifty-one percent are aware of the City’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, while 13% participated in it. Finally, 44% are aware of the Eco-Fair; the participation rate is 11%.

***City Service Ratings:***

Minnetonka residents award four city services a positive rating of 85% or higher: police services, recycling service, snow plowing, and water and sanitary sewer services. Next, residents assign an 80% favorable rating to recreational services and programs. Three services are given favorable ratings in the seventy percent range: trail maintenance, park maintenance, and fire protection. Further, residents award three services positive ratings in the fifty percent range: pavement repair and patching on city streets, community planning, and domestic animal control for dogs. Forty-eight percent rate senior services positively. In the cases of community planning, domestic animal control for dogs and senior services, the inability to rate the service exceeds 30%.

In comparison with the past few years, pavement repair and patching on city streets shows significant slippage – 13% in one year – in its positive rating. Suggested changes or improvements needed to raise service evaluations to either “excellent” or “good” are “fix potholes,” mentioned by 35% of those critical of services, followed by “faster road work,” and “stop just patching roads,” each posted by 11%.

In rating the general value of city services in terms of property taxes paid, 15% give services a rating of “excellent,” and 55% rate them as “good.” Critical judgments — “only fair” or “poor” — are still a low 16%. “Excellent” ratings, though, declined nine percent in one year. A plurality of 45%-37% favor an increase of city property taxes *if needed to maintain city services at their current level*. Support decreases by nine percent since the 2005 study. 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. Forty-six percent choose “street maintenance” for the increase, up 12% since the last study, while 21% select “police and fire protection,” down nine percent. Nine percent indicate “parks,” while eight percent point to “some other city service.” The two top priorities have headed the list consistently for the past four years.

Thirty-four percent have been involved in or observed a situation where a member of the

Minnetonka Police Department was present. Among this group, 87% rate the way the situation was handled as either “excellent” or “good,” while the same percentage think the response time was “prompt.” Only eight percent think there are unsafe areas in the community: “anywhere at night,” Purgatory Park, and near the apartment complexes are their major concerns. This small group of residents would feel safer if there are “more police patrols” and “better lighting” in specific areas.

When considering the greatest public safety concerns in the city, one issue continues to dominate: “speeding and other traffic violations,” pointed to by 22%. “Burglary” is in second place, at 14%. “Drugs” are cited by 12%, while “underage drinking,” “juvenile crime” and “identity theft” are indicated by five to six percent each. Twenty-six percent of the sample think there are no serious public safety problems at the present time, over twice the level seen in last year’s study.

Speeding on residential streets is considered in more detail, and 58% feel it is an issue of concern. Of those stating a concern, 94% see it as at least “somewhat serious.”

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

### ***Environmental Protection Issues:***

In general, 76% of the sample think Minnetonka does “about the right amount” in protecting the environment. Only 12% state it does “too little,” while a small two percent rate the City as doing “too much.” By a 69%-21% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect wetlands, ponds and streams. Similarly, by a 78%-13% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect forested areas.

### ***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 12% rate the City as unsuccessful, while another nine percent think the City has been neither.

Seventy percent see residents as having appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process, up four percent from the 2005 study; fifteen percent feel residents do not, while 15% are also uncertain. Critics would like to see more “listening to residents,” “earlier communications about projects,” and “avoidance of eminent domain.”

Fifty-one 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, consistent with

the last study. Thirty-nine percent are “less likely” to do so under this condition, while 13% report it makes no difference to them.

Thirty-nine percent of the residents would be “more likely” to support a higher density development if some affordable housing units are included in the development, down 12% since the 2005 study. Forty percent are “less likely” to do so under this condition, while 15% report it makes no difference to them.

Fifty-six percent believe the City currently possesses an adequate mix of housing to meet the needs of all residents. Even so, by a 61%-28% majority, residents favor the City requiring developers to provide a broader range and mix of housing prices in new housing developments; support has decreased by seven percent over the past year.

### ***Parks and Recreation System:***

Usage and ratings of six components of the Minnetonka Park System were measured. Forty-two percent visited the Minnetonka Senior Center during the past year, 11% higher than in the 2005 study. Among visitors, 97% award it positive ratings. Forty-one percent report visiting the Williston Fitness Center during the past year. Among facility users, 76% rate it positively and 24% view it negatively, almost identical to the 2005 results. Seventy-eight percent report using the city’s trails; among users, 97% view them favorably. Sixty-six percent visited the Minnetonka Community Center during the past year; among visitors, 97% rate the Center highly. Forty-five percent visited Gray’s Bay Marina during the past year; ninety-four percent of the visitors rate the facility as either “excellent” or “good.” Thirty-four percent visited the Arts Center on 7 during the past year, with 96% of the visitors rating it highly.

Thirty-five percent report household members use Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreational programs or offerings. Among program users, a nearly unanimous 98% report satisfaction with the programs or offerings.

Seventy-one percent of the sample report household members are likely to attend an outdoor music or theater performance at a new performance area on the Civic Center Campus; in fact, 25% are “very likely” to do so. Sixty-two percent of the residents likely to attend performances expect to go to the new facility at least on a monthly basis.

Thirty-one percent of the sample report owning a dog. Forty-six percent of the dog owners in Minnetonka expect to use the off-leash park at least weekly. The typical dog owner is willing to pay \$10.00 for a permit to use the off-leash dog park; thirty-nine percent are willing to pay \$15.00 for a permit.

Twenty-seven percent of the sample state they received notification of a park renewal in their neighborhood. Among those notified, 60% completed and returned the survey about desired amenities, up six percent in one year, and 19% attended planning meetings. A solid 77% of the

meeting attendees are satisfied with the process, down from the 90% level in the 2005 survey.

***City Staff:***

Thirty-five percent report they have had “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Minnetonka City Staff, identical to the 2005 level. A solid 68% rate the City Staff as either “excellent” or “good,” while 13% see them as “only fair” or “poor.” Positive ratings declined by eight percent since the 2005 study.

During the past year, forty-eight percent visited or contacted Minnetonka City Hall either in person or on the telephone. The most common contacts occur with the Police Department, Planning Department, Street Maintenance, Building Inspection, and the General Information Desk. Ninety-six percent rate the waiting time for the City Receptionist positively, while four percent are more negative. The courtesy of the City Receptionist is viewed favorably by 97%, with three percent more critical. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either “excellent” or “good,” while 11% see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Ninety-four percent judge the courtesy of the City Staff highly, while six percent disagree. And, 88% rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with 11% viewing it lower. Again, in comparison with other suburban areas, these ratings remain outstanding.

***Communications System:***

Print media about the City of Minnetonka and its activities again proves to be the dominant source of information used by the citizenry. The “Minnetonka Memo” and city mailings are used by 66%, while “The Sun Sailor” and other local newspapers are used by 19%. Six percent rely upon the “City’s website,” while four percent cite “cable television.” The preferred means of receiving news follow these patterns, with a slight change in emphasis: seventy-seven percent prefer a mailed newsletter, specifically the “Minnetonka Memo,” while 12% choose local newspapers. Ten percent prefer e-mail or the city’s website.

The “Minnetonka Memo” ranks first, at 33%, on the list of principal sources of information for learning about road construction projects. Nineteen percent use local newspapers, while 12% rely upon “signs on the streets,” and nine percent from “driving around.” Sixty-six percent rate the City’s efforts highly in keeping them informed about road projects in a timely manner, while 32% are more critical in their evaluations.

The city newsletter, “Minnetonka Memo,” is received by a very large 95% of the residents. Among them, 90% award its content and format high grades. The “Minnetonka Memo,” again, proves to be a very effective communications device.

Seventy percent report seeing articles on environmental issues in the “Minnetonka Memo;” ninety percent of the articles’ readers rate them favorably. More impressively, 45% report they

changed their everyday behavior as a result of reading these articles.

Similarly, 79% recall receiving the “Recreational Services Brochure,” which covers the offerings of the Hopkins-Minnetonka Park and Recreation Departments. A solid 83% of the readers rate the brochure’s usefulness as “excellent” or “good.” This publication continues to have an unusually high core audience.

Seventy-four percent of the households in the community subscribe to cable television. Thirty-one percent of the subscribers watch Minnetonka City Council Meetings on Channel 16. 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 home, work, or both locations. Thirty-two percent use a dial-up connection, while 61% have a broadband connection. Thirty-nine percent of those without wireless internet service are at least “somewhat likely” to subscribe to a service if it were available. By a 57%-18% margin, residents with internet access favor the City of Minnetonka owning and operating a wireless internet service supported by subscriber fees.

A large 55% of those on-line report accessing Minnetonka’s website for information about city services, news, and events; over one year, web site access has increased by nine percent. Among website visitors, 84% evaluate the content highly, 72% consider the site easy to use, a 10% decrease in one year. Twenty-one percent of the web site users have registered for a City recreation program; among registrants, 92% find the process to be clear and easy. Additionally, 46% are at least “somewhat likely” to pay water and utility bills on-line through the City’s website using a credit card.

Only 20% of the community, though, report being at least “somewhat likely” to pay their water and sewer utility bill over the telephone using a credit card. Almost three-quarters of the sample, however, are unwilling to pay any fee to use a credit card for paying their quarterly water and sewer utility bills.

### ***Final Thoughts:***

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2006 study of the Minnetonka community:

- Minnetonka residents remain very satisfied with their quality of life, and the city ranks among the top four communities across the Metropolitan Area. This ranking has been maintained by the city for over ten years.
- 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 95% satisfaction in each case.

- Tax hostility in the community has markedly increased during the past year. This finding reverses the multi-year decline in tax hostility over the past four years. In fact, concern about property taxes translates directly into a decrease in the value rating awarded to city services, as well as willingness to increase property taxes to maintain city services at their current levels.
- Solid majorities of residents still think the City is doing enough in protecting the environment, and also contains about the right amount of natural open space. A significant majority of residents give positive ratings to City efforts protecting wetlands, ponds, streams and forested areas. 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; in fact, the success rating is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.
- City Staff continues to be viewed favorably by the citizenry. Among those having opinions, the approval rating is 84%. 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. Only eight 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, 58% 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 – in fact among the finest in the Metropolitan Area. 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 23%, still well ahead of other suburban communities. Also, and consistent with the technology-mindedness of the population, the 46% reach of the website is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The City of Minnetonka, for the seventh consecutive year, ranks among the top four 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. But, it is clear that, for the first time, State fiscal policies are exacting a toll, albeit moderate, on their perceptions of City government.