

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2007 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 1st and 14th, 2007. The typical respondent took 25 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The results of this study are projectable to the universe of adult Minnetonka residents within +/- 5.0 % in 95 out of 100 cases.

Residential Demographics:

The typical adult Minnetonka resident has lived in the city for 15.1 years. Fifteen percent moved there during the past five years, while 36% resided there for more than twenty years. Twenty-seven percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 18% 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 50.8 years old. Fourteen percent are under 35 years old, while 21% are 65 years old or older. Women outnumber men by two percent in the sample.

Seventy-eight percent own their present residences. The typical residential property has an approximate value of \$322,000.00. Twenty-six percent post values of under \$250,000.00, while 46% 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:

Forty-eight percent of the City rate their quality of life as “excellent”, while another 50% 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 17%. Just behind, “rural setting and open space” and “parks and trails” follow at 13% and 12%, respectively. The “natural environment”, at nine percent, and “safety” and “shopping opportunities”, at seven percent, form a third tier.

An extreme and unusually high 39% report there is “nothing” they like least about living in the community. This level of civic boosters is again the highest across the Metropolitan Area.

Three

issues emerge at moderate levels: “high taxes” at 14%, “growth” at 11%, and “traffic

congestion” at 10%.

Awareness and Participation in City-Sponsored Programs and Events:

Ninety-six percent of the sample is aware of the curbside recycling program; a large 90% also use it. Seventy percent are aware of the City’s 50th Anniversary Celebration, while 24% participated in it. Fifty-eight percent are aware of the Eco-Fair, while the participation rate is 22%. Fifty-six percent report awareness of “Minnetonka Mike;” twenty-five percent used the system. Fifty-four percent report awareness of volunteer opportunities related to natural resources; eleven percent actually volunteered.

City Service Ratings:

Minnetonka residents award seven city services a positive rating of 85% or higher, up from the four services similarly rated in the 2006 study: police services, park maintenance, fire protection, recycling service, snow plowing, water and sanitary sewer services, and recreational services and programs. Next, residents assign an 81% favorable rating to trail maintenance. Two services are given favorable ratings in the seventy percent range: community planning and domestic animal control for dogs. Further, residents award a 64% positive rating to pavement repair and patching on city streets, while 55% similarly rate senior services. In the cases of trail maintenance, park maintenance, community planning, fire protection, domestic animal control for dogs, and senior services, the inability to rate the service ranges between 13% and 49%.

Suggested changes or improvements needed to raise service evaluations to either “excellent” or “good” are “fix potholes”, mentioned by 31% of those critical of services, followed by “faster road work”, and “stop just patching roads”, posted by 18% and 19%, respectively.

In rating the general value of city services in terms of property taxes paid, 13% give services a rating of “excellent”, and 69% rate them as “good”. Critical judgments “only fair” or “poor” are still a low 15%. “Excellent” ratings remained almost constant during the interim between the last two studies. A plurality of 47%-40% margin favors an increase of city property taxes *if needed to maintain city services at their current level*. This margin remained relatively unchanged since the 2006 study. Respondents opposing a tax increase for service maintenance tend to target “parks and recreation programs” for cuts.

If they could increase the budget by one percent, opinions again divide about prioritization. Thirty-five percent choose “street maintenance”, for a decrease of 11% since the last study, while 37% select “police and fire protection”, up 16% in one year. Thirteen percent indicate “parks”, while six percent point to “some other city service”. The two top priorities have headed the list consistently for the past four years.

Twenty-seven percent had personal contact with an employee of the Minnetonka Police

Department, down seven percent since the 2006 study. Among this group, 91% rate the way the situation was handled as either “excellent” or “good”, while 98% think the response time was “prompt”. Only four percent think there are unsafe areas in the community: trails, everywhere at night, eastside apartments, and parks are their major concerns. This small group of residents would feel safer if there are “more police patrols”, “people around”, 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 27%. “Juvenile crime” is in second place, at eight percent. But, a very large 44%, up 18% in one year, think there are no serious public safety problems at the present time.

Speeding on residential streets is considered in more detail, and 49% feel it is an issue of concern, down nine percent since the 2006 study. Of those stating a concern, 96% see it as at least “somewhat serious”. While 27% of the sample think speeding on residential streets has “gotten worse”, 70% see it as “about the same.”

Twelve percent heard of the City’s “Ready Minnetonka” program. Seventy-seven percent report their family is prepared for a major emergency. Those not prepared cite either a lack of information or a lack of concern.

Once again, 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, 79% of the sample think Minnetonka does “about the right amount” in protecting the environment. Only 16% state it does “too little”, while a very small one percent rate the City as doing “too much”. By an 84%-15% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect wetlands, ponds and streams, up 15% in one year. Similarly, by an 81%-14% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect forested areas, an increase of 13% since the 2006 study.

Ninety-one percent rate the overall quality of the natural environment in Minnetonka as either “excellent” or “good”. Only nine percent are more critical in their evaluations.

Development Issues:

An impressive 76% 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

nine percent rate the City as unsuccessful, while ten percent think the City has been neither.

Seventy-nine percent see residents as having appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process, up nine percent from the 2006 study; eleven percent feel residents do not, while 11% are also uncertain. Critics would like to see “earlier communications about projects”, and “limits on growth”.

Forty-six 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 12% report it makes no difference to them.

Thirty-seven percent of the residents would be “more likely” to support a higher density development if some affordable housing units are included in the development. Forty-six percent are “less likely” to do so under this condition, while 14% report it makes no difference to them.

Seventy-one percent believe the City currently possesses an adequate mix of housing to meet the needs of all residents, up 16% in one year. Even so, by a 54%-41% 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.

Redevelopment Projects:

Residents report they would be very concerned about two aspects of a redevelopment projects. Sixty-one percent are “very concerned” about the impact on the natural environment, while 58% are “very concerned” about the loss of open space.

Updating the Comprehensive Guide Plan:

Residents give varying importance ratings to the City of Minnetonka’s current goals. Seventy-five percent award “extreme importance” ratings to “natural resources, including the protection of water resources and woodlands, open space, parks and trails”. Just behind, 74% similarly rank “public safety, including personal and business safety and hometown security”. Forty-five percent regard “transportation, including roadway and transit services to meet residential and business needs” as “extremely important”. Thirty-two percent feel the same way about “building community, including activities that encourage understanding and involvement”, while 27% rate “development, including policies that encourage redevelopment in the community’s interests”.

Next, residents were asked to rate how well the City is doing in achieving each goal. Fifty percent rate the City’s efforts as “outstanding” on “public safety”, and 39% think the same about “natural resources”. Less than 20% rate efforts on “transportation”, “development”, and

“building community” as “outstanding”.

In the next ten to twenty years, residents suggest two issues for city leaders to consider. Twenty-seven percent suggest “protect open space” and 16% place “limiting growth” on the agenda.

Parks and Recreation System:

Usage and ratings of six components of the Minnetonka Park System were measured. Thirty-two percent visited the Minnetonka Senior Center during the past year, 10% lower than in the 2006 study. Among visitors, 100% award it positive ratings. Thirty-seven percent reported visiting the Williston Fitness Center during the past year. Among facility users, 86% rate it positively and 14% view it negatively, 10% more positive than the 2006 results. Seventy-eight percent report using the city’s trails; among users, 97% view them favorably. Sixty percent visited the Minnetonka Community Center during the past year; among visitors, 98% rate the Center highly. Forty-three percent visited Gray’s Bay Marina during the past year; 95% 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 97% of the visitors rating it highly.

Thirty-three percent report household members use Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreational programs or offerings. Among program users, a nearly unanimous 96% report satisfaction with the programs or offerings.

Thirty-six percent of the households in the City of Minnetonka have dogs. Thirty-one percent of the owners expect to use a new off-leash dog park. A majority of dog owners would pay \$10.00 for a yearly permit to use the off-leash dog park.

Thirty-four percent of the sample state they received notification of a park renewal in their neighborhood. Among those notified, 57% completed and returned the survey about desired amenities and 17% attended planning meetings. A solid 83% of the meeting attendees are satisfied with the process.

City Staff:

Thirty-nine percent report they had “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Minnetonka City Staff. A very solid 74% rate the City Staff as either “excellent” or “good”, only six percent see them as “only fair” or “poor”. Positive ratings increased by six percent since the 2006 study.

During the past year, 38% visited or contacted Minnetonka City Hall either in person or on the telephone, down 10% since the 2006 study. The most common contacts occur with the Police Department, Planning Department, 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 two percent more critical. Ninety-four percent of the respondents rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either “excellent” or “good”, while six percent see it as “only fair” or “poor”. Ninety-seven percent judges the courtesy of the City Staff highly, while two percent disagree. And, 93% rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with seven percent viewing it lower. Again, in comparison with other suburban areas, these slightly improved 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” is relied upon by 78%, up 12% from last year, while local newspapers are used by nine percent. Four percent rely upon the “City’s website”, while two percent cite “cable television”. The preferred means of receiving news follow these patterns, with a slight change in emphasis: seventy-nine percent prefer a mailed newsletter, specifically the “Minnetonka Memo”, while six percent each prefer local newspapers or the city’s website.

The city newsletter, “Minnetonka Memo”, is received by a very large 98% of the residents. Among them, 93% award its content and format high grades. The “Minnetonka Memo”, again, proves to be a highly effective communications device.

Eighty-four percent report seeing articles on environmental issues in the “Minnetonka Memo”, up 14% in one year; ninety-five percent of the articles’ readers rate them favorably. More impressively, 57% report they changed their everyday behavior as a result of reading these articles, an increase of 12% over the 2006 level.

Similarly, 87% recall receiving the “Recreational Services Brochure”, up eight percent since the 2006 study. A solid 92% of the readers rate the brochure’s usefulness as “excellent” or “good”, also up eight percent in one year. This publication continues to have an unusually high core audience.

Sixty-seven percent of the households in the community subscribe to cable television. Twenty-nine 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 percent of the sample has access to the Internet at home, work, or both locations. Thirty-four percent use a dial-up connection, while 61% have a broadband connection. A large 55% of those on-line report accessing Minnetonka’s website for information about city services, news, and events. Among website visitors, 91% evaluate the content highly and 82% consider the site easy to use. Twenty-seven percent of the website users have registered for a City recreation program; among registrants, 98% find the process to be clear and easy.

Final Thoughts:

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2007 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 fifteen years.
- City services continue to be the one of the most highly rated in the Metropolitan Area. Of the twelve services rated, nine post positive ratings over 95% among those holding opinions.
- Tax hostility in the community remained relatively stable during the past year. This finding is atypical, since most other communities are showing a significant increase in property tax hostility.
- Solid majorities of residents still think the City is doing enough in protecting the environment. A significant increase in the majority of residents giving positive ratings to City efforts protecting wetlands, ponds, streams and forested areas occurred. 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 remains 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 93%, a nine percent increase during the past year. And, among those who contacted or visited City Hall, the Staff is awarded positive ratings of at least 93% on each of five quality service dimensions.
- Concerns about safety again prove lower than in other communities. Only four percent, one-half the level in the 2006 study, 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 outstrips all other types of crimes. But, 49% see traffic speeding on residential streets as an issue of concern, down nine percent in one year, and less than one-fifth of this group see it as a “very serious” concern.
- The communications system within the City remains highly successful - among the finest in the Metropolitan Area. In fact, there is significant improvement during the past year in an already exemplary system. The “Minnetonka Memo” is the one source primarily relied upon for information about City government. The newsletter, in particular, is read by almost all residents and is highly evaluated for content and format. And, electronic media has a wide constituency. The reach of City Council cablecasts is almost 43%, a 20% increase over 2006 levels and still well ahead of other suburban communities. Also,

and consistent with the technology-mindedness of the population, the 55% reach of the website is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The City of Minnetonka, for the eighth consecutive year, ranks among the top four highest rated communities in the Metropolitan Area. Further, unlike many other suburban communities, tax hostility appears to have peaked. With a 39% “city booster” core, up 10% in one year, the City possesses a uniquely huge reservoir of goodwill that will serve it well in the future.