

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2008 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 15.0 years. Seventeen percent moved there during the past five years, while 33% resided there for more than twenty years. Twenty-two percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 16% of the households are composed exclusively of senior citizens. Thirty-four percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. The typical Minnetonka adult resident is 51.2 years old. Thirteen percent are under 35 years old, while 18% are 65 years old or older. Women outnumber men by four percent in the sample.

Seventy-seven percent own their present residences. The typical residential property has an approximate value of \$332,500.00. Twenty-two percent post values of under \$250,000.00, while 43% state values of between \$250,000.00 and \$400,000.00. Twenty-six percent live in both Wards Three and Four, while 24% percent reside in Ward One. Twenty-five percent reside in Ward Two.

Quality of Life:

Forty-seven percent of the City rate their quality of life as “excellent,” while another 49% rate it as “good.” Three percent rate their quality of life lower. “Excellent” ratings are virtually unchanged during the past year.

“Location” – closeness to family and friends and closeness to job – is the factor which drew 37% to the community. “High quality schools,” cited by 19%, and “quality housing and strong neighborhoods” posted by 17%, follow. “Natural ambience” ranks next, at 15%. Minnetonka attracts residents interested in a prime location, good schools, quality housing, and abundant natural resources.

“Open space and rural ambience” and “closeness to shopping” are the most liked aspects of living in Minnetonka, at 14%. “Housing and strong neighborhoods” and “parks and trails”

follow at eight percent each. “Friendly people,” “Lake Minnetonka,” “location,” “good schools,” and “quiet and peacefulness” are each mentioned by six or seven percent.

An extreme and unusually high 37% 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. Only one issue emerges at moderate levels: “high taxes” at 17%, while two issues rank as minor concerns, “growth” at six percent and “too much growth” at seven percent.

City Service Ratings:

Minnetonka residents award six city services a positive rating of 85% or higher, consistent with the 2007 result: police services, park maintenance, recycling service, snow plowing, water and sanitary sewer services, and recreational services and programs. Next, residents assign 83% favorable ratings to fire protection and natural resources management. Two services are given favorable ratings in the seventy percent range: trail maintenance, community planning, and domestic animal control for dogs. Further, residents award a 64% positive rating to pavement repair and patching on city streets, while 52% similarly rate senior services. In the cases of trail maintenance, community planning, fire protection, domestic animal control for dogs, natural resources management, and senior services, the inability to rate the service ranges between 15% and 48%. Only one suggested change or improvement needed to raise service evaluations to either “excellent” or “good” is “fix potholes,” mentioned by 66% of those critical of services.

In rating the general value of city services in terms of property taxes paid, 16% give services a rating of “excellent,” and 64% rate them as “good.” Critical judgments “only fair” or “poor” are still a low 14%. “Excellent” ratings remained almost constant during the interim between the last two studies. A plurality of 50%-34% 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 2007 study, and now crosses the majority line. Respondents opposing a tax increase for service maintenance tend to target “parks and recreation programs” for cuts, but overwhelmingly feel “cutting waste” can be achieved without service reductions.

If they could increase the budget by one percent, opinions again divide about prioritization. Forty-five percent choose “street maintenance” for an increase of 10% since the last study, while 21% select “police and fire protection,” down 16% in one year. Nine percent indicate “parks,” while 14% point to “some other city service.” The two top priorities have headed the list consistently for the past five years.

Twenty-five percent had personal contact with an employee of the Minnetonka Police Department, consistent with the 2007 study. Among this group, 30% called for emergency services, 26% for public service information, 18% were at community events, 13% for traffic violations, and 12%, called for the investigation of a crime. Eighty-seven percent think the way the situation was handled as either “excellent” or “good.” Only five percent think there are unsafe areas in the community: trails, parks and Ridgedale 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 23%. “Drugs” and “juvenile crime” are in a distant second place, at five percent each. But, a very large 52%, up eight percent 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 42% feel it is an issue of concern, down six percent since the 2007 study. Most concerned residents rate their concern as “somewhat serious.” While 27% of the sample thinks speeding on residential streets has “gotten worse,” 68% see it as “about the same.” Twenty-six percent also think traffic volume on residential streets is too high.

Twelve percent heard of the City’s “Ready Minnetonka” program. Seventy-nine 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 thinks Minnetonka does “about the right amount” in protecting the environment. Only 12% state it does “too little,” while a very small three percent rate the City as doing “too much.” By an 89%-7% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect wetlands, ponds and streams, up six percent in one year. Similarly, by an 87%-7% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect forested areas, another increase of six percent since the 2007 study.

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

Development and Redevelopment Issues:

An impressive 71% 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 10% rate the City as unsuccessful, while five percent think the City has been neither.

In assessing four potential policies the City of Minnetonka could consider with respect to the

natural environment and development, two garner majority support, one receives a narrow plurality, and one is narrowly opposed. By a 61%-32% margin, residents support “preventing the cutting down of any trees in privately-owned wooded areas.” By a 53%-39% margin, residents also support “only preventing the cutting down of larger, high-quality trees in privately-owned wooded areas.” A narrow plurality of 49%-43% supports a policy mandating “when a new home is built, preventing the cutting down of trees outside of the area for the house and driveway.” Finally, by a narrow 48%-43% result, residents oppose “preventing the cutting down of trees to make room for an addition onto an existing home.”

Sixty-three percent prefer two separate homes on a large residential lot, while only six percent favor one larger building, perhaps a duplex, on a large residential lot. Twenty-three percent prefer neither, while nine percent are uncertain.

Sixty-four percent see residents as having appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process, down 15% from the 2007 study; 14% feel residents do not, while 23% are also uncertain. Critics would like to see “earlier communications about projects,” and “decision-makers listening more.”

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.

Sixty-one percent are “less likely” to support redevelopment in Minnetonka if it would be near their home; but, 22% report they would be “more likely” to do so. Three major concerns are expressed about redevelopment projects: impact on the natural environment, loss of open space, and traffic.

Ten years from now, 69% foresee themselves living in their current homes. Twelve percent expect to live in a different home in Minnetonka, while nine percent see themselves in a different home outside of Minnetonka. Among the small group expecting to be in a different home in the community, 57% will move to a single-family home, and 25% will opt for a condominium. They split in seeking a yard, cited by 37%, or maintenance-free living, preferred by 33%. Amenities in the home motivate 16%.

By a 46%-46% split, Minnetonka residents split in their support of the City approving new apartments, condominiums and senior housing. Supporters split 55%-42% in preferring apartments, condominiums, and senior housing located in higher traffic areas instead of being located throughout the city. Among the 42% preferring locating this type of housing throughout the community, 66% would still support the approval of apartments, condominiums, and senior housing if it were built in or near their neighborhood, while 33% would not support this location. And, by a 69%-24% margin, supporters would limit this type of housing to three or four stories rather than eight or nine stories to allow for more open space around the complex.

Parks and Recreation System:

Usage and ratings of six components of the Minnetonka Park System were measured. Twenty-five percent visited the Minnetonka Senior Center during the past year, eight percent lower than in the 2007 study. Among visitors, 96% award it positive ratings. Thirty-five percent report visiting the Williston Fitness Center during the past year. Among facility users, 94% rate it positively and 6% view it negatively, 10% more positive than the 2007 results. Sixty-two percent report using the city's trails; among users, 92% view them favorably, down five percent in one year. Fifty percent visited the Minnetonka Community Center during the past year; among visitors, 96% 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 94% of the visitors rating it highly.

Eighty-nine percent of trail users rate their ability to get where they want to go on as "excellent" or "good," while 11% see it as "only fair" or "poor." A majority of trail users think "no areas" should be added or expanded in the city's system.

Forty-seven percent of Minnetonka residents are likely to use the trails to go to city parks. Twenty-seven percent are likely to use the trail system to go to a shopping area, while 21% indicate they are likely to use trails to go to schools. Among those likely to use the trails for this purpose, by a 70%-28% margin, residents would support the construction of a trail along their properties.

Thirty-nine percent report household members use Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreational programs or offerings. Among program users, a nearly unanimous 91% report satisfaction with the programs or offerings.

Thirty-three percent of the households in the City of Minnetonka have dogs. Thirty-two percent of the owners expect to use a new off-leash dog park at least a few times each week. A majority of dog owners would pay \$15.00 for a yearly permit to use the off-leash dog park.

City Staff:

Thirty-one 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 eight percent see them as "only fair" or "poor." Positive ratings remain unchanged from the 2007 study.

During the past year, 33% visited or contacted Minnetonka City Hall either in person or on the telephone, down five percent since the 2007 study. The most common contacts occur with the Police Department, Water and Sewer Department, Recreation Services, and the General

Information Desk. Ninety-four percent of the respondents rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either “excellent” or “good,” while five percent see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Ninety-three percent judge the courtesy of the City Staff highly, while five percent disagree. And, 92% rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with eight percent 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” is relied upon by 69%, down nine percent from last year, while local newspapers are used by 11%. 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: sixty-five percent prefer a mailed newsletter, specifically the “Minnetonka Memo,” while 10% prefer e-mail, and seven percent like the city’s website.

The city newsletter, “Minnetonka Memo,” is received by a very large 97% of the residents. Among them, 91% award its content and format high grades. More impressively, 40% report they changed their everyday behavior as a result of reading articles related to stormwater and water quality. The “Minnetonka Memo,” again, proves to be a highly effective communications device.

Similarly, 82% recall receiving the “Recreational Services Brochure,” down five percent since the 2007 study. A solid 81% of the readers rate the brochure’s usefulness as “excellent” or “good,” down 11% in one year. This publication continues to have an unusually high core audience.

Eighty-one percent of the sample has access to the Internet at home, work, or both locations. A large 60% 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 84% consider the site easy to use. Twenty-six percent of the website users have registered for a City recreation program; among registrants, 92% find the process to be clear and easy. Seventy-seven percent of the city’s website visitors also are at least “somewhat likely” to use a new feature allowing residents to provide comments and ask questions about specific development projects.

Final Thoughts:

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2008 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 sixteen years.

- City services continue to be the one of the most highly rated in the Metropolitan Area. Of the 13 services rated, 11 post positive ratings over 95% among those holding opinions.
- Tax hostility in the community improved slightly 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 residents express some ambivalence about development and redevelopment. A 61% majorities support actions to prevent the cutting down of any trees in privately-owned wooded areas, even more than the 53% support for a restriction applying to larger, high-quality trees. Residents are split about prohibitions on the prevention of tree cutting to make room for a home addition and prevention of tree cutting outside of the area for the house and driveway for new homes. They strongly prefer two separate homes on a large residential lot rather than one larger building, such as a duplex. They are less likely to support redevelopment if it is near their homes by an almost 3-to-1 margin. Residents split evenly on approving new apartments, condominiums, and senior housing in the community. The 46% support prefers locating new residential development of this type in higher traffic areas and limits of three or four stories.
- City Staff continues to be viewed favorably by the citizenry. Among those having opinions, the approval rating is 90%. And, among those who contacted or visited City Hall, the Staff is awarded positive ratings of at least 92% on each of three quality service dimensions.
- Concerns about safety again prove lower than in other communities. Only five percent, consistent with the 2007 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, 42% see traffic speeding on residential streets as an issue of concern, down seven percent in one year, and less than one-third 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. 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. Consistent with the technology-mindedness of the population, the 49% reach of the website is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The City of Minnetonka, for the ninth consecutive year, ranks among the top four highest rated communities in the Metropolitan Area. Further, unlike many other suburban communities, tax hostility appears to be declining. With a 37% “city booster” core, the City possesses a uniquely huge reservoir of goodwill that will serve it well in the future.