

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2009 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 2nd and 18th, 2009. 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 $\pm 5.0\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.

RESIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHICS:

The typical adult resident of the City of Minnetonka has lived in the city for 19.1 years. Eighteen percent moved there during the last five years, while 36% have resided there for more than twenty years. Twenty-two percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 15% of the households are composed exclusively of senior citizens. Thirty-five percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. The typical Minnetonka adult resident is 50.8 years old. Thirteen percent are under 35 years old, while 19% are 65 years old or older. Women and men are equally represented in the sample.

Seventy-nine percent own their present residences. The typical residential property has an approximate value of \$298,000.00. Thirty-two percent post values of under \$250,000.00, while 42% state values of between \$250,000.00 and \$400,000.00. Twenty-six percent live in Ward Three, while 24% percent reside in Ward One. Twenty-five percent each reside in Wards Two and Four.

QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES:

“Housing” is the most often cited feature which drew residents to the city, at 26%. “Closeness to work” and “schools” rank next, at 17% and 19%, respectively. Ten percent also mention “closeness to family and friends.”

Fifty percent of the City rate their quality of life as “excellent,” while another 48% rate it as “good.” Only three percent rate their quality of life lower. “Excellent” ratings are consistent with the previous three studies. Not surprising, given a nearly unanimous 98% feel welcomed in the community.

Features of Minnetonka liked most by residents include “the Lake,” “good schools,” and

“convenient suburban location.” “Shopping” and “natural beauty” are also ranked highly by respondents. An impressive 33% are “boosters” who dislike “nothing” about living in Minnetonka. However, “traffic congestion” and “street maintenance” are mentioned by one-quarter of the respondents.

Following the trend in other suburbs, a 60% majority feel closest to their “neighborhood.” Twenty-nine percent, though, feel closest to the “City of Minnetonka as a whole,” and 11%, to their “school district.”

CITY TAXES AND CITY SERVICES:

Minnetonka residents award eight city services a positive rating of 90% or higher: police services, trail maintenance, park maintenance, fire protection, recycling service, snow plowing, water and sanitary sewer services, and natural resources management. Three services are given favorable ratings in the eighty percent range: community planning, domestic animal control for dogs, and recreational services and programs. Further, residents give pavement repair and patching on city streets a positive rating of 68% and a negative rating of 31%. While the most negative evaluations are given to this service, they are somewhat lower than the suburban norm of 42%. Finally, senior services are awarded an overall favorable rating of 42%; but, among those having an opinion, the positive rating is a unanimous 100%. A solid 67%, up 20% in one year, urge the City of Minnetonka to “fix potholes” and “resurface the roads.”

In rating the general value of city services in terms of property taxes paid, 14% give services a rating of “excellent,” and 62% rate them as “good.” Critical judgments — “only fair” or “poor” — are a low 10%. A plurality of 41%-36% oppose 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” for cuts.

If they could increase the budget by one percent, opinions again divide about prioritization. Forty percent choose “street maintenance” for the increase, while thirty percent select “police and fire protection.” Ten percent indicate “parks and trails,” while another 10% point to “some other city service.” The two top priorities have headed the list consistently for the past three years.

The City of Minnetonka, continuing an over fifteen year trend, consistently rates among the top five Metropolitan Area communities for services provided to its residents. In this study, the trend in positive ratings of city services shows an average increase of six percent over last year’s study.

PUBLIC SAFETY:

Twenty percent have had personal contact with an employee of the Minnetonka Police Department. Twenty-seven percent each report their contact was at a community event or for

public service information. Twenty-three percent report the situation involved emergency services. Among this group, 91% rate the way the situation was handled as either “excellent” or “good.” On a related topic, only three percent think there are unsafe areas in the community: “trails,” at 60%, dominate the list. “Loitering people” and “darkness” made them feel unsafe. “More lights” and “more patrols” were the suggestions for increasing safety.

When considering the greatest public safety concerns in the city, one issue continues to dominate: “speeding and other traffic violations,” pointed to by 19%. “Burglary” is in second place, at 10%. But, a 55% majority of the sample believe there are no serious public safety problems at the present time. Speeding on residential streets is an issue of concern for 43%, with most feeling it is either “very serious” or “somewhat serious.” Seventy percent think speeding on residential streets has “stayed about the same” during the past year; twenty-six percent feel it has “gotten worse.” Thirty-one percent also think that traffic volume on residential streets is “too high.”

Only 19% have heard about the City’s “Ready Minnetonka” program. Eighty-one percent think their family is either “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” for an emergency. Nineteen percent are either “not too prepared” or “not at all prepared” for an emergency, either for the “lack of information” or “not concerned about an emergency.”

CITY HALL:

Thirty-two percent report they have had “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Minnetonka City Staff. A solid 66% rate the City Staff as either “excellent” or “good,” while eight percent see them as “only fair” or “poor.” Positive ratings decreased by eight percent since the 2008 study.

During the past year, 37% visited or contacted Minnetonka City Hall either in person or on the telephone. The most common contacts occur with the Police Department, Water and Sewer Services, Street Maintenance, Recreation Services, and the General Information Desk. Ninety-six percent of the respondents rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either “excellent” or “good,” only three percent see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Ninety-nine percent judge the courtesy of the City Staff highly, while one percent disagree. And, ninety-eight percent rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with three percent viewing it lower. Again, in comparison with other suburban areas, these ratings are outstanding.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND RECREATION ISSUES:

In general, 82% of the sample think Minnetonka does “about the right amount” in protecting the environment. Only 12% state it did “too little,” while one percent rate the City as doing “too much.” By a 87%-11% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect wetlands, ponds and streams. Similarly, by a 86%-9% margin, residents rate the City positively

in its efforts to protect forested areas.

Overall, 80% think the amount of natural open space in the city is “about right;” 16% see “too little,” while only one percent state there is “too much.” By a 91%-8% majority, residents favorably rate the overall quality of the natural environment in Minnetonka. But, by a 63%-35% margin, they are more divided about water quality in city lakes, ponds and streams.

Eighty-three percent of the sample think the City of Minnetonka has been “successful” in maintaining the balance between the rights of individual property owners to reasonably develop their properties with the interest of the wider community. Only two percent think the City has been “unsuccessful.” A comparatively large 73% feel Minnetonka residents have appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process. The small percentage of dissenters, nine percent in all, would suggest “better listening to residents” and “more convenient times for input.”

Usage and ratings of six components of the Minnetonka Park System were measured. Twenty-two percent visited the Minnetonka Senior Center during the past year; among visitors, 95% award it positive ratings, while five percent are more negative. Twenty-nine percent report visiting the Williston Fitness Center during the past year. Among facility users, 96% rate it positively and four percent view it negatively. Thirty-one percent visited the Arts Center on 7 during the past year; all visitors rate the facility favorably. Fifty-six percent visited the Minnetonka Community Center during the past year, and all visitors were favorably impressed. Thirty-eight percent visited Gray’s Bay Marina during the past twelve months; seventy-one percent rate the Marina highly, while 29% are more critical. Finally, seventy-one percent report using the city’s trails; among users, 99% view them favorably. Trail users primarily use them for recreational purposes, rather than to go to a specific destination.

Twenty-three percent see a need for more trails in the community. Support is highest for new trails “through parks and natural areas” and “along residential streets.” Interest in using trails to get to specific destinations was limited: the most interest was expressed in getting to or from city parks in the area. Respondents likely to use trails to access specific destinations are split about having trails constructed along their property: by a 50%-45% margin, residents narrowly support a trail along their property.

Thirty-eight percent report household members use Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreational programs or offerings. Among program users, a solid 99% again report satisfaction with the programs or offerings.

Thirty percent of the sample reports currently having a dog. Forty percent of dog owners would use an off-leash dog park at least “weekly.” And, the typical dog owner would be willing to pay \$12.50 for a yearly permit to use the park.

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES:

Seventy-three percent see residents as having appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process, nine percent feel residents do not, with 18% uncertain. Critics would like to see more “listening to residents” and “more convenient times for input.”

Seventeen percent report the presence of foreclosed homes or properties in their neighborhood. Most residents are not concerned about the presence of foreclosures, but seven percent worry about lower property values.

COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES:

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” is relied upon by 78%, while “The Sun Sailor” and other local newspapers are used by nine percent. Seven percent rely upon the “City’s website,” while “word of mouth” is favored by only three percent each. Preferred means of receiving news follow these patterns, with a slight change in emphasis: seventy percent prefer a mailed newsletter, specifically the “Minnetonka Memo,” while 12% opt for the Internet and seven percent like the newspaper.

The city newsletter, “Minnetonka Memo,” is received by a very large 95% of residents. Among them, 97% award its content and format high grades. In fact, 50% report they have changed their everyday behavior based on reading articles in the publication. The “Memo,” again, proves to be a very effective communications device.

Similarly, 80% recall receiving the “Recreational Services Brochure,” which covers the offerings of the Hopkins-Minnetonka Park and Recreation Departments. A solid 86% of the readers rate the brochure’s usefulness as “excellent” or “good.” This publication continues to have an unusually high core audience.

Eighty-six percent of the sample have access to the Internet at either home, work, or both locations. A large fifty-nine percent of those on-line report accessing the City of Minnetonka’s website for information about city services, news, and events. Among website visitors, 96% evaluate the content highly, and 91% consider the site easy to use. Forty-three percent of the web site users have registered for a City recreation program; among registrants, 97% find the process to be clear and easy. Only 17% report using the new website feature, “My Minnetonka,” primarily for receiving information about specific projects, such as road reconstruction and new development.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2009 study of the Minnetonka community:

- Minnetonka residents remain very satisfied with their quality of life, and the city again ranks among the top five communities across the Metropolitan Area.
- City services continue to be the one of the most highly rated in the Metropolitan Area. Overall, the average positive rating given city services by residents holding opinions is a very high 96.1%. If “pavement repair and patching on city streets” is not considered, which is the only city service registering a split rating, the average increases to 98.3%. Even in the case of “pavement repair and patching on city streets,” the negative rating of 31% is still 14% lower than the suburban norm.
- In line with much of the Metropolitan Area, tax hostility in the community somewhat increased. By a 41%-36% plurality, residents oppose a property tax if it were needed to maintain city services at their current level.
- Solid majorities of residents still think the City is doing enough in protecting the environment, as well as having 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. Finally, the City 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 is once more viewed favorably by residents. Among those having opinions, the approval rating is 89%. And, among those who contacted or visited City Hall, Staff is awarded positive ratings of at least 96%, among those posting opinions, on three quality service dimensions.
- Concerns about safety again prove lower than in many other communities. Only three 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, but cited by only 19%. But, 55% think there are “no serious” public safety problems.
- The communications system within the City remains highly successful. The “Minnetonka Memo” is the key source most relied upon for information about City government. The newsletter, in particular, continues to be both well read and highly evaluated for content and format. Consistent with the technology-mindedness of the population, the 57% reach of the website is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The City of Minnetonka again ranks among the top five highest rated Suburban communities. The reservoir of goodwill established over past years remains surprisingly undiminished, even though other suburban communities have suffered losses of confidence. Part of this resiliency can be attributed to the top-notch communications system the City has established.