

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2010 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 3<sup>rd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The typical respondent took 31 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 14.3 years. Eighteen percent moved there during the past five years, while 31% have resided there for more than twenty years. Twenty-three percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 16% of the households are composed exclusively of senior citizens. Thirty-six percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. The typical Minnetonka adult resident is 50.4 years old. Sixteen percent are under 35 years old, while 18% 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 \$298,000.00. Thirty-three percent post values of under \$250,000.00, while 45% state values of between \$250,000.00 and \$400,000.00. Twenty-five percent live in both Wards Two and Four, while 24% percent reside in Ward One. Twenty-six percent dwell in Ward Three.

### ***Quality of Life:***

Fifty-five percent of the City rates their quality of life as “excellent,” while another 42% rate it as “good.” Two percent rate their quality of life lower. “Excellent” ratings are up five percent from their 2009 levels.

“Open space” is the most liked aspect of living in Minnetonka, at 22%. “Good schools,” at 13%, and “closeness to friends and family,” at seven percent, follow. Six percent each point to “strong neighborhoods” and “good city services.” “The Lake,” “quiet and peaceful,” “convenient location,” and “shopping opportunities” are each posted by five percent.

An 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. Only two issues emerge at moderate levels: “high taxes,” at 16%, and “street maintenance,” at 12%.

***City Cohesion:***

Sixty percent of the sample reports their neighborhoods have scheduled activities for residents. The most popular neighborhood activities include “National Night Out,” “garage sales,” and “block parties.” But, only 15% would be interested in more neighborhood activities, particularly “garage sales,” “block parties,” “children’s events,” and “picnics or cook-outs.”

Thirty-five percent of the sample had an outdoor recreational fire on their property during the last year. The typical household had an outdoor fire once or twice a month during the appropriate seasons. By a decisive 71%-21% majority, residents oppose the City prohibiting outdoor recreational fires. But, a narrower 48%-45% plurality, residents oppose the City restricting the time and frequency of outdoor recreational fires.

Ninety-one percent of the sample is aware of the Summer Festival; fifty-six percent report household members participated in it. Ninety percent report awareness of the Farmers Market at the civic center campus; sixty-one percent report they visited the Market. Eighty-five percent are aware of the City and Fire Department Open House, but only 25% participated in this City-sponsored event. Eighty-four percent report awareness of the Burwell House Ice Cream Social, with 40% actually participating in the event. Seventy-five percent are aware of “Kids Fest;” twenty-seven percent participated in this event.

***City Service Ratings:***

Minnetonka residents award seven city services a positive rating of 90% or higher, consistent with earlier results: police services, park maintenance, fire protection, recycling service, snow plowing, water and sanitary sewer services, and natural resources management. Favorable ratings between 80% and 89% are posted for three services: trail maintenance, community planning, and recreation services and programs. Next, residents assign a 79% favorable ratings to domestic animal control for dogs. Finally, residents award a 59% positive rating to pavement repair and patching on city streets, while 52% similarly rate senior services. In the case of senior services, the inability to rate the service is a high 48%. The only suggested change or improvement needed to raise service evaluations to either “excellent” or “good” is “fix potholes,” specified by 81% of residents critical of services.

In rating the general value of city services in terms of property taxes paid, 13% give services a rating of “excellent,” and 65% rate them as “good.” Critical judgments – “only fair” or “poor” – are a low 10%. A solid majority of 61%-30% opposed an increase of city property taxes *if needed to maintain city services at their current level*. This level of opposition is the highest during the past ten years.

If they could increase the budget by one percent, opinions again divide about prioritization. Fifty-three percent choose “street maintenance,” for an increase of 13% since the last study, while 16% select “police and fire protection,” down 14% in one year. Fifteen percent indicate

“parks and trails,” while eight percent point to “some other city service.”

Forty-six percent are aware of the permanent reduction of the city budget by two million dollars and the elimination of six percent of city staff positions. By a decisive 76%-11% majority, residents support the actions taken. A small four percent report noticing differences in the city services offered in the community, particularly with respect to “slower street maintenance.”

By a narrow 44%-40% margin, residents favor the City making a shift from quarterly to monthly billing for its water and sewer services. If the City were to offer the option of on-line billing and payment for water and sewer services, 47% report they would be at least “somewhat likely” to use it.

### ***Public Safety Issues:***

Thirteen percent report calling 9-1-1 during the past three years. “Medical emergencies” and “reporting a disturbance” are the major reasons for using the 9-1-1 line. Ninety-three percent of the callers are “satisfied” with the response they received.

Seventeen percent had personal contact with an employee of the Minnetonka Police Department, consistent with the 2009 study. Among this group, 32% called for emergency medical services, 25%, for answering a general question, 19%, traffic violations, and 15%, called for the investigation of a crime. Ninety-one percent think the way the situation was handled was either “excellent” or “good.” Only six percent think there are unsafe areas in the community: trails and shopping center parking lots are their major concerns. They feel unsafe because of “loitering kids,” “no lights,” and “past crime scenes.” This small group of residents would feel safer if there are “more police patrols” and “better lighting” in these 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 17%. “Juvenile crime” ranks second, at 10%. But, a very large 55%, consistent with the 2009 level, think there are no serious public safety problems at the present time. Forty-three percent of the residents expressing specific concerns report they contacted the police about this issue.

“Juvenile crime,” at 14%, “burglary,” at 10%, and “drugs,” at eight percent, are considered to be the greatest public safety concerns facing the community ten years from now. In addition, traffic-related issues – “distracted driving,” “speeding,” and “congestion” – are pointed to by 17%.

Speeding on residential streets is considered in more detail, and 52% feel it is an issue of concern, up nine percent from the 2009 study. Most concerned residents rate their concern as “somewhat serious.” While 23% of the sample thinks speeding on residential streets has “gotten worse,” 75% see it as “about the same.” Forty-one percent report awareness of the increased presence of Minnetonka Police for traffic enforcement; in fact, 79% rate this increased presence

as “about right” in terms of visibility.

Thirty-nine percent heard of the City’s “Ready Minnetonka” program, up eight percent since the 2009 study. Seventy-one 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, 81% 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 two percent rate the City as doing “too much.” By an 86%-11% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect wetlands, ponds and streams. Similarly, by a 91%-7% margin, residents rate the City positively in its efforts to protect forested areas.

Eighty-nine 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. Similarly, 82% rate the water quality in city lakes, ponds and streams highly, while 16% are more critical in their judgments.

Seventy-one percent saw information provided by the City on environmental issues. A very high 91% found the information to be “helpful.” While 68% report they have done “nothing” during the past year to reduce runoff and pollutants from entering lakes and wetlands through the storm sewer system, 12% are “using safer products on their lawns.”

***Development and Redevelopment Issues:***

An impressive 70% 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 three percent rate the City as unsuccessful, while 14% think the City has been neither.

At least 70% do not view visual or auditory pollution as a problem in Minnetonka. Thirty percent see “eyesores on residential properties, such as external storage of personal property” as a problem. Twenty-nine percent each view “maintenance and upkeep of residents’ yards” and “noise” – particularly “loud music” and “barking dogs” as a problem. Twenty-eight percent see “maintenance and upkeep of residential homes” as a problem. And, 19% consider “maintenance and upkeep of business properties” as at least a “minor problem.” Among residents seeing these concerns as a problem, 48% reported the issue to the city – but, only 64% were satisfied with the

response they received.

Seventy-seven percent see residents as having appropriate opportunities for input into the zoning and development decision-making process, while seven percent feel residents do not, and 17% are uncertain. Critics would like to see “more opportunities for input,” “allowing residents to vote on a proposal,” and “decision-makers listening more.”

Fifteen percent of the respondents used public transportation during the past two years. Seventy-four percent of the users view the benches at public transit stops to be at least “somewhat important;” in fact, 36% see them as “very important.”

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

Usage and ratings of six components of the Minnetonka Park System were measured. Twenty-three percent visited the Minnetonka Senior Center during the past year; among visitors, 96% award it positive ratings. Thirty-four percent report visiting the Williston Fitness Center during the past year. Among facility users, 86% rate it positively and 14% view it negatively. Seventy-two percent report using the city’s trails; among users, 98% view them favorably. Forty-nine percent visited the Minnetonka Community Center during the past year; among visitors, 96% rate the Center highly. Thirty-seven percent visited Gray’s Bay Marina during the past year; 97% of the visitors rate the facility as either “excellent” or “good.”

Trail users do so for “recreational purposes” rather than “to go to a specific destination.” Eighty-seven percent primarily use trails for the former purpose, while only one percent use them for the latter purpose. A relatively small 11% report they use them both for recreational purposes and destination-specific purposes.

During the past year, 40% of the households in Minnetonka used any of the Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreational Programs or offerings. Ninety-six percent report general satisfaction with the experience.

### ***City Staff:***

Thirty-three percent report they had “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Minnetonka City Staff. A very solid 73% rate the City Staff as either “excellent” or “good;” only ten percent see them as “only fair” or “poor.” Positive ratings increased seven percent from the 2009 study.

During the past year, 38% 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 Department, Recycling, Recreation Services, and the General Information Desk. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents rate the ease of reaching a City Staff member who could help as either

“excellent” or “good,” while two percent see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Ninety-nine percent judge the courtesy of the City Staff highly, while only two percent disagree. And, 97% rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with two 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 66%, down 12% from last year, while local newspapers are used by nine percent. Fourteen percent rely upon the “City’s website,” double the 2009 level, while only two percent cite “cable television.” The preferred means of receiving news follow these patterns, with a slight change in emphasis: sixty-one percent prefer a mailed newsletter, specifically the “Minnetonka Memo,” while 13% prefer e-mail, and nine percent like the city’s website.

The city newsletter, “Minnetonka Memo,” is received by a very large 98% of the residents. Among them, 92% award its content and format high grades. The “Minnetonka Memo,” again, proves to be a highly effective communications channel. Similarly, 86% recall receiving the “Recreational Services Brochure,” up six percent since the 2009 study. A solid 78% of the readers rate the brochure’s usefulness as “excellent” or “good,” down eight percent in one year. This publication continues to have an unusually high core audience.

Eighty-six percent of the sample has access to the Internet. A large 66% of those on-line, up seven percent in one year, report accessing Minnetonka’s website for information about city services, news, and events. Among website visitors, 87% evaluate the content highly, down nine percent from the 2009 level, and 81% consider the site easy to use, down ten percent from last year. Forty-one percent report viewing meetings from Minnetonka’s website; thirty-nine percent registered for a City recreation program from the website, with 96% finding the process to be clear and easy. Thirty-five percent of Internet users are either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to use social media to keep informed about city activities or contact city staff.

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

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2010 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 nineteen years.
- City services continue to be some of the most highly rated in the Metropolitan Area. Of the 13 services rated, 12 post positive ratings over 95% among those holding opinions. The only service not exceeding the 95% threshold – pavement repair and

patching – still post a positive rating 20% higher than the suburban norm. Despite the permanent reduction of the City budget by two million dollars and the elimination of six percent of city staff positions, an amazingly limited four percent report they saw any differences in the quality of city services.

- Tax hostility in the community increased markedly during the past year. This finding is consistent with most other suburban communities. Opposition to a tax increase to maintain city services at their current level jumped 20% in one year.
- 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.
- Visual and auditory pollution are not viewed as major issues in the community. Similarly, residents are generally opposed to restrictions on activities like outdoor recreational fires, finding both prohibition and restriction unacceptable.
- City Staff continues to be viewed 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 extraordinarily positive ratings of at least 97% on each of three quality service dimensions.
- Concerns about safety again prove lower than in other communities. Only six percent, consistent with earlier studies, 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” and “juvenile crimes” are considered to be marginal problems. But, a 54% majority considers none of the potential problems to be a concern in the community.
- 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 57% reach of the website is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The City of Minnetonka, for the twelfth consecutive year, ranks among the top four highest rated communities in the Metropolitan Area. With a 39% “city booster” core, the City possesses the most stable and uniquely high reservoir of goodwill in the Metropolitan Area; one which has served it well in the past and will continue to do so in the future.