

Executive Summary

Survey Background and Purpose

- ◆ The 2007 City of Wildwood Parks and Recreation Survey provided residents the opportunity to participate in the planning process for future parks and recreation developments. The survey results will be used to evaluate the City's parks and recreation needs and determining how to address them in the future.
- ◆ Three thousand randomly selected Wildwood households were mailed the 2007 Wildwood Parks and Recreation Survey. Of the 2,887 eligible households who received the survey, 1,020 responded to the mailed questionnaire, giving a response rate of 35%.
- ◆ Survey results were weighted so that respondent age, gender and ward were represented in the proportions reflective of the entire City. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points around any given percentage point for the whole sample.

Parks and Recreation Development Preferences

- ◆ Residents demonstrated a readiness for new parks to include amenities for active uses as well as passive parkland.
 - Residents completing the survey were asked to take 100% and determine what percent of new parkland should be active (such as athletic fields and courts, playgrounds, multiple-use trails, skate parks, band shells, horse arenas) and what percent should be passive (such as picnic areas, pavilions, gardens, open grass areas).
 - On average, survey participants felt 56% of new parkland should be developed as active parkland and 44% of new parkland should be developed as passive parkland.
- ◆ Additionally, while the acquisition of additional parkland and open space was a priority for residents, active recreation facilities for outdoor and indoor use were also considered important.
 - When asked to allocate \$100 among each of four parks and recreation priorities, the average distributed to each was:
 - Development of parks and outdoor recreational facilities and fields, \$31
 - Acquisition of additional parkland and open space, \$29
 - Development of active indoor recreational facilities, \$22
 - Implementation of programming utilizing existing and surrounding facilities, \$18
- ◆ When presented with a series of trade-offs, the response pattern showed that most respondents felt that park and recreation offerings should be available to the broadest audience possible, although the focus should be on meeting the needs of Wildwood residents and not on creating a regional attraction.
- ◆ While Wildwood enjoys an abundance of open space and natural lands, a majority of respondents felt acquiring additional greenways, open space and parks should be prioritized over developing recreation centers for indoor activities.
- ◆ Nevertheless, a sizeable proportion of the community desired indoor recreation opportunities and development of programs or amenities to serve specialized recreation activities.

- Most residents preferred that “Parks and recreation program offerings should be at many different levels, i.e. beginner-very advanced” (85%) than that “Parks and recreation program offerings should focus primarily on introductory levels” (15%).
 - Survey participants as a whole felt parks and recreation facilities mostly should be available for public use with minimal active programming (77% versus 23%), and that parks should offer a variety of activities at each site instead of having one primary focus (73% versus 27%).
- ◆ Relatively high importance was placed on outdoor parks and park amenities by Wildwood residents.
- Playgrounds and additional larger community or regional parks were considered “essential” or “very important” by nearly two-thirds of survey participants (69% and 64%, respectively).
 - At least half of respondents also felt that the following services were “essential” or “very important”: additional small neighborhood parks (62%), additional natural lands/open space (60%), additional multiple-use trails (56%), additional picnic areas (52%) and additional bike trails (50%).
 - Nearly half of respondents felt it was “essential” or “very important” to provide additional hiking trails or more pocket parks. Over a third felt it was important to develop a fishing lake or additional barbecue pits. Just over a quarter of respondents felt it was at least “very important” that the City provide a dog park, while nearly one in five desired additional boat/kayak river launch access points in the Meramec River area. Skate parks were deemed “essential” or “very important” by 16% of respondents.
 - The park and park amenity options given the lowest importance ratings were additional equestrian trails (10%) and an equestrian activity center or facility (9%). However, about 20% of those who lived in Ward 1 or Ward 6 considered these items to be at least very important, as did those who lived on lots that were more than three acres in area.
- ◆ Recreational facilities and amenities overall were considered less important than parks and park amenities; nevertheless, some types of facilities were regarded as “essential” or “very important” by over half of respondents; these included a multi-purpose recreation or community center (56%), outdoor ballfields (52%) or an outdoor swimming pool with swim lanes (51%).
- Almost 3 in 10 residents felt a multi-purpose recreation or community center was “essential.”
 - Open space corridors were rated as “very important or “essential” by nearly half of respondents (48%).
 - Outdoor soccer fields, an outdoor water park and outdoor tennis courts were rated as at least “very important” by more than 40% of respondents, as were an indoor swimming pool, a fitness center and space for recreation classes.
 - An ice rink (27%) and additional community meeting rooms (21%) were considered the least important, although more than 20% thought they were at least “very important.”
- ◆ When queried how important they felt it was for the City to provide programming for various types of population groups, most target groups were deemed “essential” or “very important” by a majority of respondents.

- Children ages 6 to 12 years, teenagers ages 13 to 17 years and families were the three groups given the highest priority (rated as at least “very important” by more than 70% of respondents).
 - Adults were the group with the next highest importance rating (69%), followed by people with disabilities (65%), with senior adults (ages 65 years or more, 64%) and young children (ages 0 to 5 years, 60%) given slightly lower priority.
 - Serving beginner levels (65%) and intermediate levels (62%) were deemed more important by respondents than was serving advanced/elite levels (47%).
 - Very few respondents felt it was important to serve those who live outside of Wildwood.
- ◆ The recreation activities in which members of respondents’ households had engaged in the last year was assessed through the survey. Those completing the survey were an active group; of the 27 activities included on the questionnaire, 22 were ones in which a quarter or more of respondent households had participated in the last year.
- The most popular activity was using a walking path; 73% of respondents had done so in the past year and 44% had done so at a City of Wildwood park or facility.
 - Overall, other popular activities included using a fitness center or weight room (56%), using a playground (55%), using a hiking trail (55%), using a park pavilion (52%), using an outdoor swimming pool (48%), using an indoor swimming pool (47%), using a bike trail (44%), attending a concert or play in an outdoor venue (44%) and using a golf course (44%).
 - Popular activities utilizing City of Wildwood amenities included using a playground (28%), using a biking trail (25%) and using a hiking trail (24%).
 - Some of the activities least participated in at a City of Wildwood park or facility but done more often at any location were: using a fitness center or weight room, using an outdoor swimming pool, attending a concert or play at an indoor venue, having a picnic or party at a park pavilion and using an outdoor water park.

Funding Options

- ◆ Residents were cautious in their support for funding new recreational activities; developing parks and recreation facilities and programs requires funding for land acquisition, building improvements and ongoing maintenance and operating cost. A narrow majority supported a sales tax increase for parks and recreation (52%), while only a quarter of respondents supported a property tax increase.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents were in favor of using the City’s general revenue funds, even though this might mean reducing funding for other services.
 - Support was highest for using grants and gifts that might require matching from the City (91%). Overall, respondents were most supportive of methods that involved the City partnering with other organizations and municipalities. However, sources of this type are unlikely to cover much of the costs of building and operating new recreation facilities, amenities and programs.
- ◆ When asked whether the cost of operating a new recreation center should be paid through taxes, users fees, or some combination, a large majority of survey participants (81%) felt that operating costs should be a mix between taxes and fees, with almost half (47%) indicating fees from users should pay the majority of costs and taxes the remaining costs.

- Very few respondents (3%) felt that the source of operating costs for new recreation facilities should be 100% through taxes, while 17% felt that the operating costs should be funded solely through user fees.
- ◆ Additional funding options for the future were presented to survey participants and they were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each.
 - Nearly all (95%) respondents “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed that individuals living outside Wildwood should pay higher fees for participating in recreation programs than should residents.
 - Over 85% of respondents were comfortable with the idea of the City of Wildwood seeking corporate sponsorship in order to supplement parks and recreation funding. More than 80% of respondents thought the City should pursue other funding sources such as grants and donations to operate facilities and programs.
 - Most respondents (80%) felt it was acceptable to have more profitable or popular programs subsidize less profitable recreation programs, however, over two-thirds of respondents agreed at least “somewhat” that, in general, recreation programs should pay for themselves through user fees.