

MINNEAPOLIS PARKS FOUNDATION

2009 Survey of Minneapolis Residents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

General Perspectives on the Minneapolis Park System

Three features of the park system are most highly valued: well-maintained, at 23%; trails, by 16%; and, open spaces, at 11%.

A very high 48% report there is “nothing” they dislike about the Minneapolis Parks.

Ninety-six percent, the highest level in the Metropolitan Area, rate the quality of the Minneapolis Park System favorably. Similarly, 96% rate the overall appearance and maintenance of the Minneapolis Parks favorably.

Ninety-nine percent see the parks and lakes as “a unique and valuable asset for the city.” The same percentage thinks “Minneapolis Parks play an important role in serving the public good, by offering free or low-cost recreational facilities and activities to everyone.” Ninety-six percent feel “the Minneapolis Parks and Lakes play a key role in the physical health and wellness of city residents.” Ninety-four percent feel “the Minneapolis Park System contributes to the economy by increasing the value of properties near parks.”

Ninety-one percent think “the Minneapolis Park System contributes to the economy by drawing adults and families from other Metropolitan Area cities to parks and facilities not offered in their own city.” Ninety percent feel “the Minneapolis Parks and Lakes play an important positive role in the emotional and psychological health of city residents.”

Eighty-six percent report “if the costs and amenities of two homes you liked were virtually identical, closeness to a park would be an important factor in your decision between the two homes;” but, 13% disagree. And, 63% “think there is a need for Minneapolis to acquire more land to preserve and develop as parks, playing fields and natural areas;” however, 30% disagree.

Park System Facilities

In a 2003 study, the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board conducted a citywide survey with a number of identical questions included on the current study; whenever statistically appropriate, a comparison is shown. Usage levels of particular facilities both increased and decreased during the interim six years. The usage level, change from 2003, and positive rating by visitors are arrayed in the table below:

| <i>Park Facility</i> | <i>HH Usage</i> | <i>Change from 2003 Study</i> | <i>Positive Rating</i> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Larger regional parks | 82% | +13% | 100% |
| Trails or bikeways | 66% | +17% | 98% |
| Smaller neighborhood parks | 65% | +6% | 98% |
| Gardens and natural areas | 50% | +3% | 98% |
| The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden | 43% | +2% | 100% |
| Beaches | 38% | -8% | 92% |
| Ballfields | 29% | -1% | 97% |
| Swimming pools and water parks | 28% | +1% | 97% |
| Neighborhood recreation centers | 25% | -12% | 100% |
| Wading pools | 19% | 0% | 92% |
| Golf courses | 17% | -7% | 100% |
| Tennis courts | 15% | NA | 87% |
| Outdoor ice rinks | 14% | -7% | 100% |

The average positive rating for a Minneapolis Park System facility is 97.0%, the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

The four park facilities used most often are: “Riverfront,” by 13%; “Wirth Park,” at 13%; “Minnehaha Park,” by 12%; and, “Lake Calhoun,” at 10%.

A very solid 97% feel existing parks and facilities offered by the Park Board meet the needs of their household members. In fact, only 31% report their household members currently leave the city for park and recreation facilities or activities, such as “fishing and boating,” “camping,” and “skiing.”

Park System Services

Again, where appropriate, a comparison with the 2003 study undertaken by the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board on the importance of Park System services is shown. After six years, Minneapolis residents viewed several services as more important now and others as less important. The table below lists each service, the percentage of respondents seeing the service as “very important,” and the change from the 2003 study:

| <i>Service</i> | <i>“Very Important” Percentage</i> | <i>Change from 2003 Study</i> |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Maintaining the quality of water in city lakes | 71% | -12% |
| Youth sports programs offered at the neighborhood recreation centers | 66% | +11% |
| Providing police protection in the parks | 64% | -6% |
| Maintenance of street lighting on the parkways | 56% | +11% |
| Programs that appeal to adults over 55 offered at neighborhood recreation centers | 50% | -7% |
| Trimming trees in the parks and along parkways and city streets | 42% | +20% |
| Warming houses for outdoor skating rinks | 35% | +12% |
| Outdoor ice skating rinks | 33% | +14% |

“Maintaining the quality of water in city lakes,” “youth sports programs offered at the neighborhood recreation centers,” and “providing police protection in the parks” are assigned the greatest importance by respondents.

Respondents on the whole oppose increasing fees for services to avoid major budget cuts. In comparison with the 2003 study commissioned by the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board, support for fee increases dropped significantly. A narrow majority favors only one fee increase: by a 52%-47% margin, residents support “imposing a surcharge on recreation fees for non-Minneapolis residents.”

Among households containing individuals over 55 years old, ten percent report the senior’s participation in recreation programs offered by the Minneapolis Parks. All participants rate the programs highly.

Among households containing pre-schoolers or school-aged children, 49% report the children’s participation in recreation programs offered by the Minneapolis Parks. Again, all participants rate the programs highly.

Park System Governance

Fifty-seven percent are aware the Minneapolis Parks are run and operated by an independent Park Board.

Residents decisively rejected a proposal to change the current structure governing parks and recreation services. By a 76%-7% margin, respondents support maintaining an independent elected Park Board for the Minneapolis Parks. Eighteen percent, though, are uncertain.

Two arguments in favor of maintaining the current structure are particularly persuasive: “The Minneapolis Park Board is responsible for only the operation of the Parks system;

the Minneapolis City Council is responsible for many departments, such as police, fire, and street maintenance. Our parks are too important an asset to become just another department in city government;" and, "The Minneapolis Park Board holds land in the city in a public trust so it is preserved and not developed. If the City Council oversaw and operated the parks, they might sell parkland to raise revenue for the city in difficult economic times." In each case, 47% finds the statement "very persuasive." No argument in favor of changing the current structure is found to be "very persuasive" by more than 8% of the sample.

After hearing arguments on both sides, support for the current governance structure increases by six percent; the margin is now 82%-7%, with 12% unsure. There is no increase in support of changing current government relationships.

Corporate Sponsorship

By a 72%-13% majority, residents support the Minneapolis Parks offering sponsorship of Park and Recreation facilities to private companies or non-profit organizations. About one-half of the already small level of opposition changes their position if the sponsor recognition were designed by the Park Board and done in a consistent and discreet format throughout the park system.

Taxes and Park Services

The typical respondent believes the percentage of the property taxes they pay going to the operation of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation System is 4.9%. Thirty-one percent estimate the property tax share greater than five percent. Thirty-five percent report they are unsure about the Park and Recreation System's share.

By a 44%-35% margin, residents oppose a property tax increase to maintain Minneapolis Park and Recreation System services at their present levels. And, by a 59%-18% majority, residents also oppose a property tax increase to enhance Minneapolis Park and Recreation System services.

When considering the property taxes they pay and the quality of the services provided by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation system, a very high 83% rate it as an "excellent" or "good value;" only six percent see it as an "only fair" or "poor value."

Sources of Information about Minneapolis Parks and Services

Minneapolis residents rely upon several sources of information about Minneapolis Parks and its activities. Twenty-three percent rely upon "local neighborhood newspapers," while 16% use "websites." Twelve percent hear the information from "family and

friends,” and 11% each use “park brochures” and “mailings.” Ten percent read the “Star Tribune” newspaper.

Twenty-seven percent would prefer to receive information in “mailings to their home.” Nineteen percent like “park publications and newsletters,” while 16% opt for “information on the website.” Fifteen percent prefer to read “local neighborhood newspapers.”

Conclusions

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation system is viewed by city residents as the “jewel in the crown” of the community. Ratings by park facility visitors are extremely high, in comparison with other communities across the Metropolitan Area. Services are rated as important components of living in the City. The current governance structure for the System is rated very highly; in fact, over 75% of respondents **oppose** the elimination of an independent elected Park Board and the merging of services into City Government, with the City Council providing oversight.

Residents, though, are in a quandary about service levels and fees/taxes: they consider all current services to be “important,” if not “very important” and resist cuts, but they also are not particularly supportive of any proposal to raise fees. Corporate sponsorships, though, are supported by a majority as a revenue enhancement. In any case, decision-makers will need to proceed very carefully in approaching this two-horned dilemma.

Over the past six years, the Park Board and Park System have established not only a deep and broad reservoir of goodwill among Minneapolis residents, but also an optimism that this valuable asset will continue in the future to be governed well.

Methodology

The study contains the results of a survey administered to 600 randomly selected adult residents across the City of Minneapolis. Professional interviewers conducted the survey by telephone between April 28th and May 15th, 2009. The typical respondent took twenty-three minutes to complete the questionnaire. The results of the study are projectable to all adult residents in City of Minneapolis within ± 4.1 % in 95 out of 100 cases.

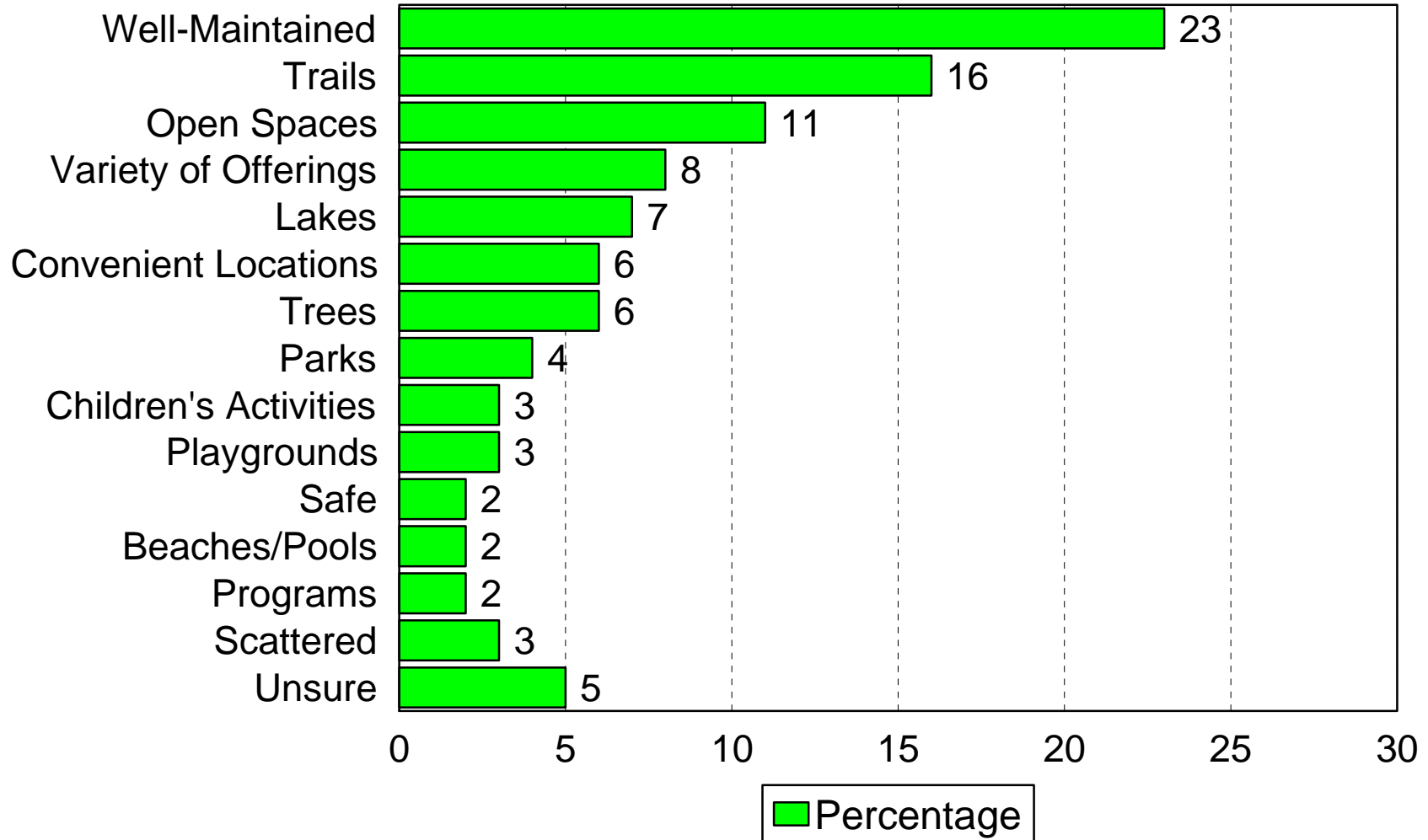
Minneapolis Parks Foundation

2009 Residential Study of the City of
Minneapolis

Decision Resources, Ltd.

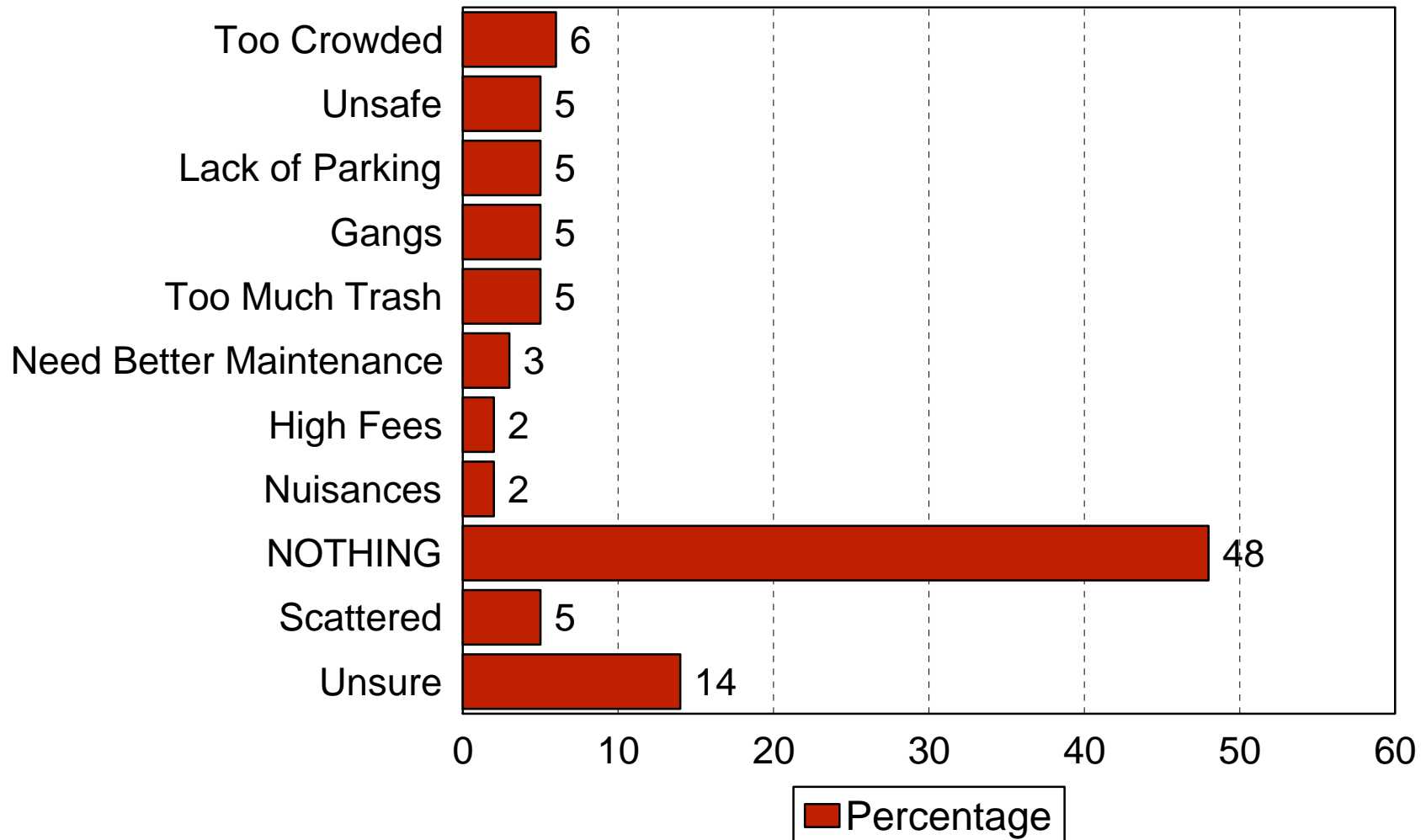
Like Most about Minneapolis Parks

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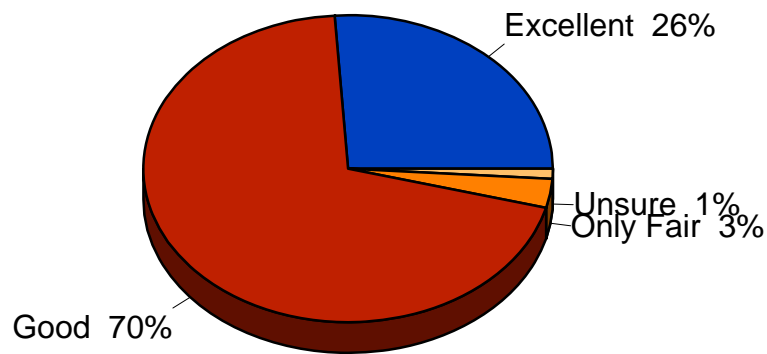
Like Least about Minneapolis Parks

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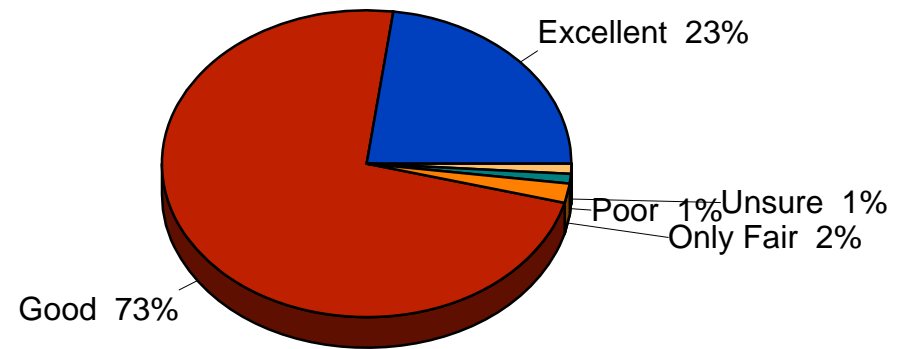


Ratings of Minneapolis Park System

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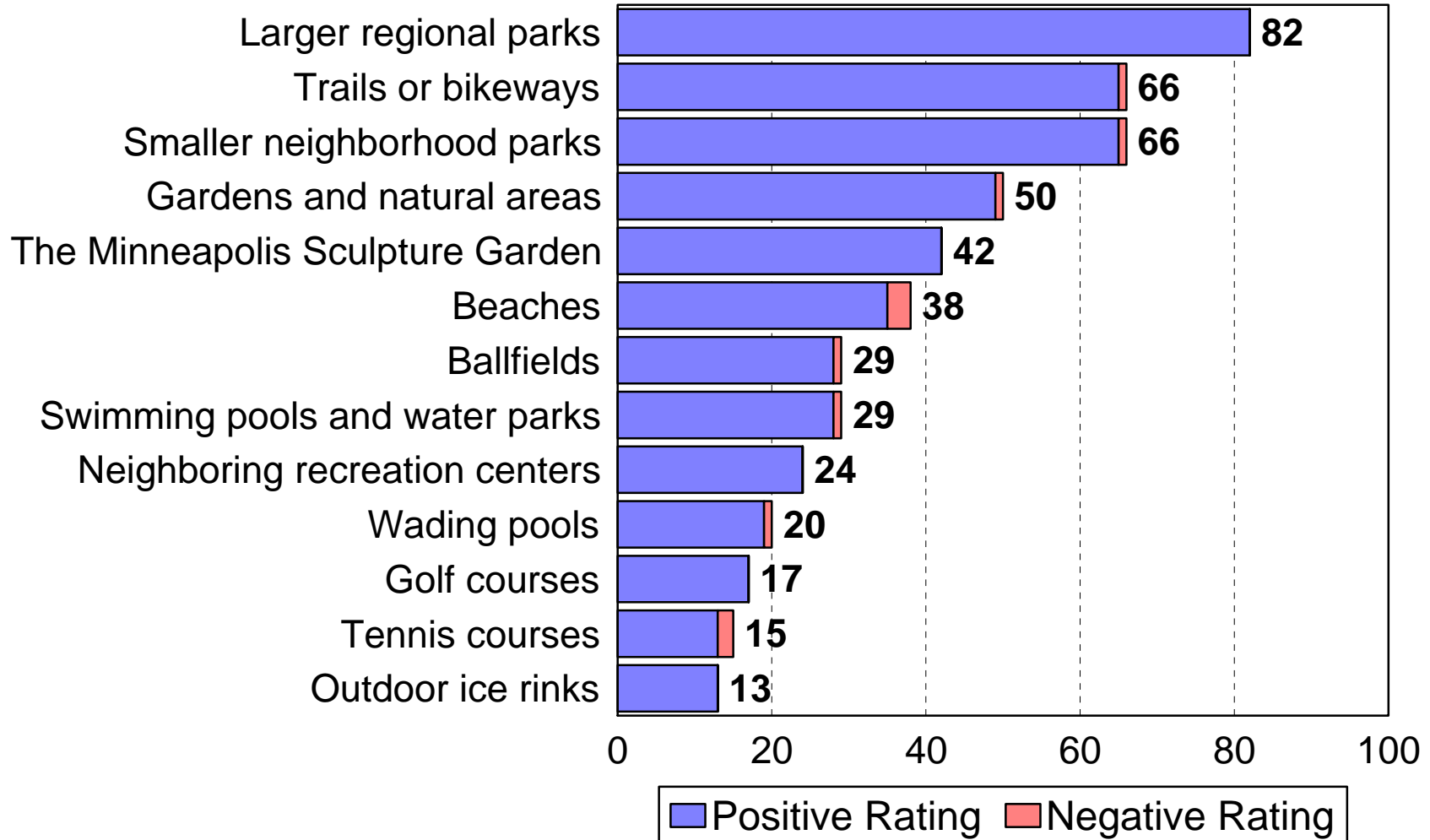
Quality of Minneapolis Park System



Overall Appearance and Maintenance of Parks

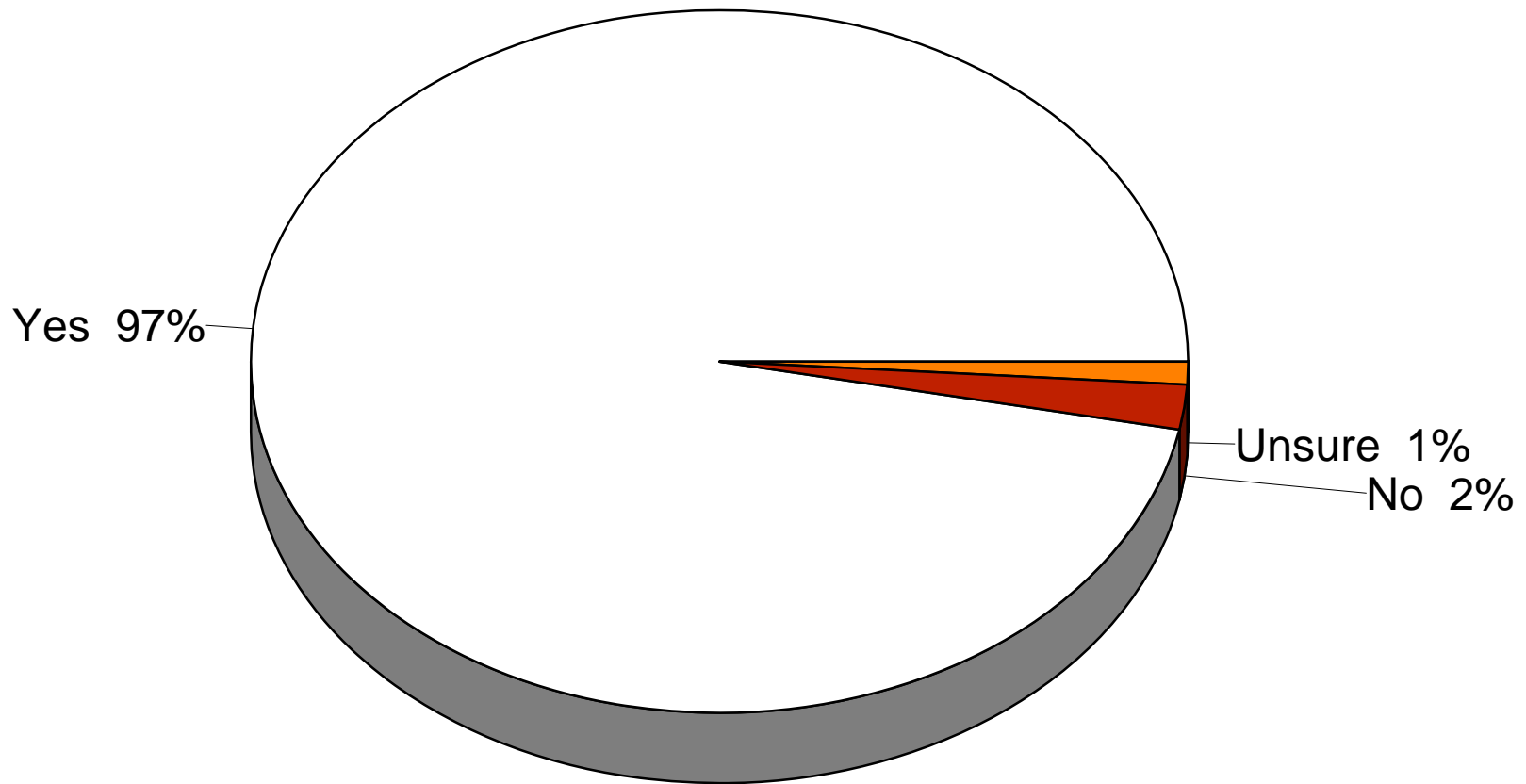
Use and Rating of Components

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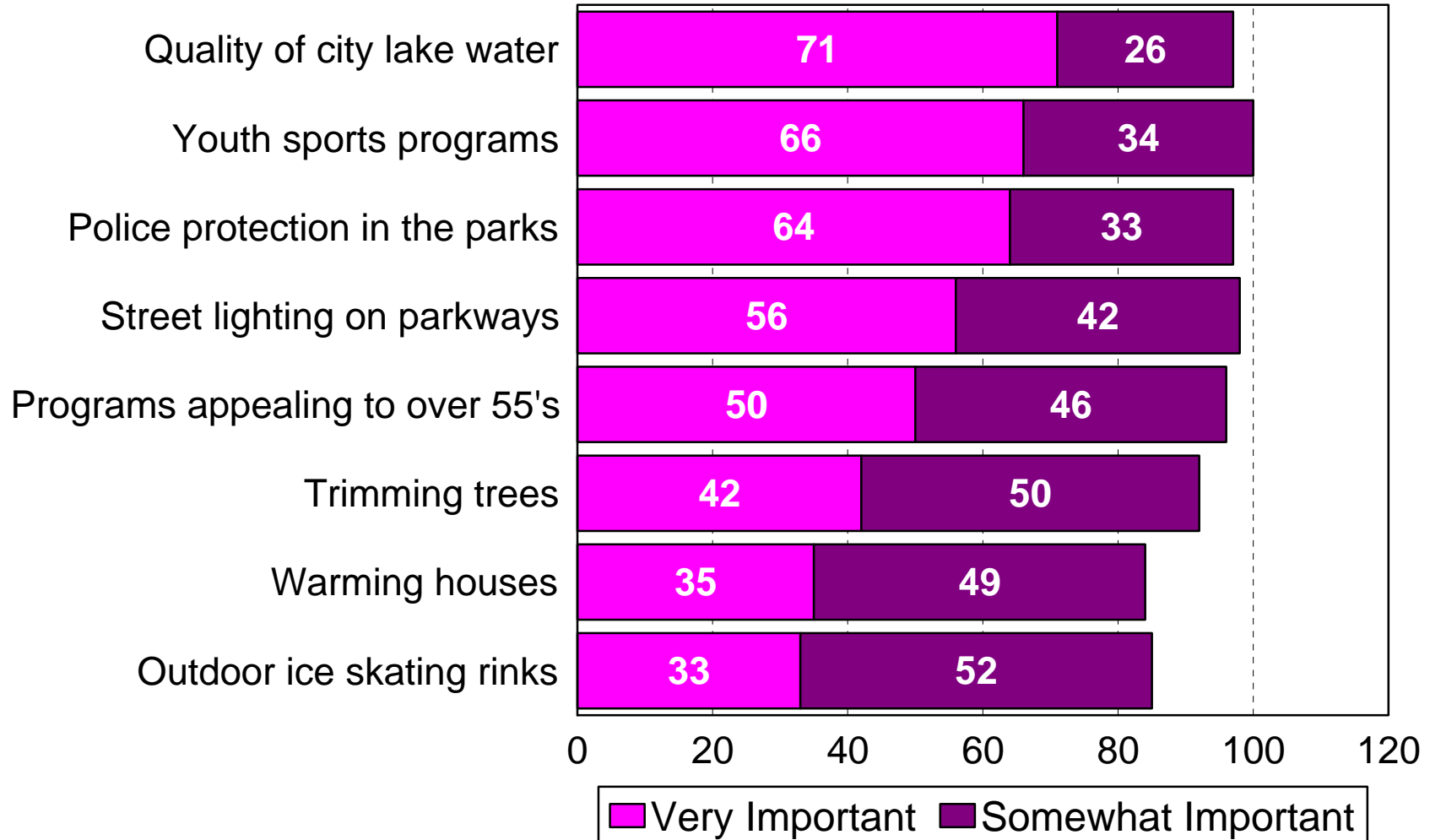
Meet Needs of Household

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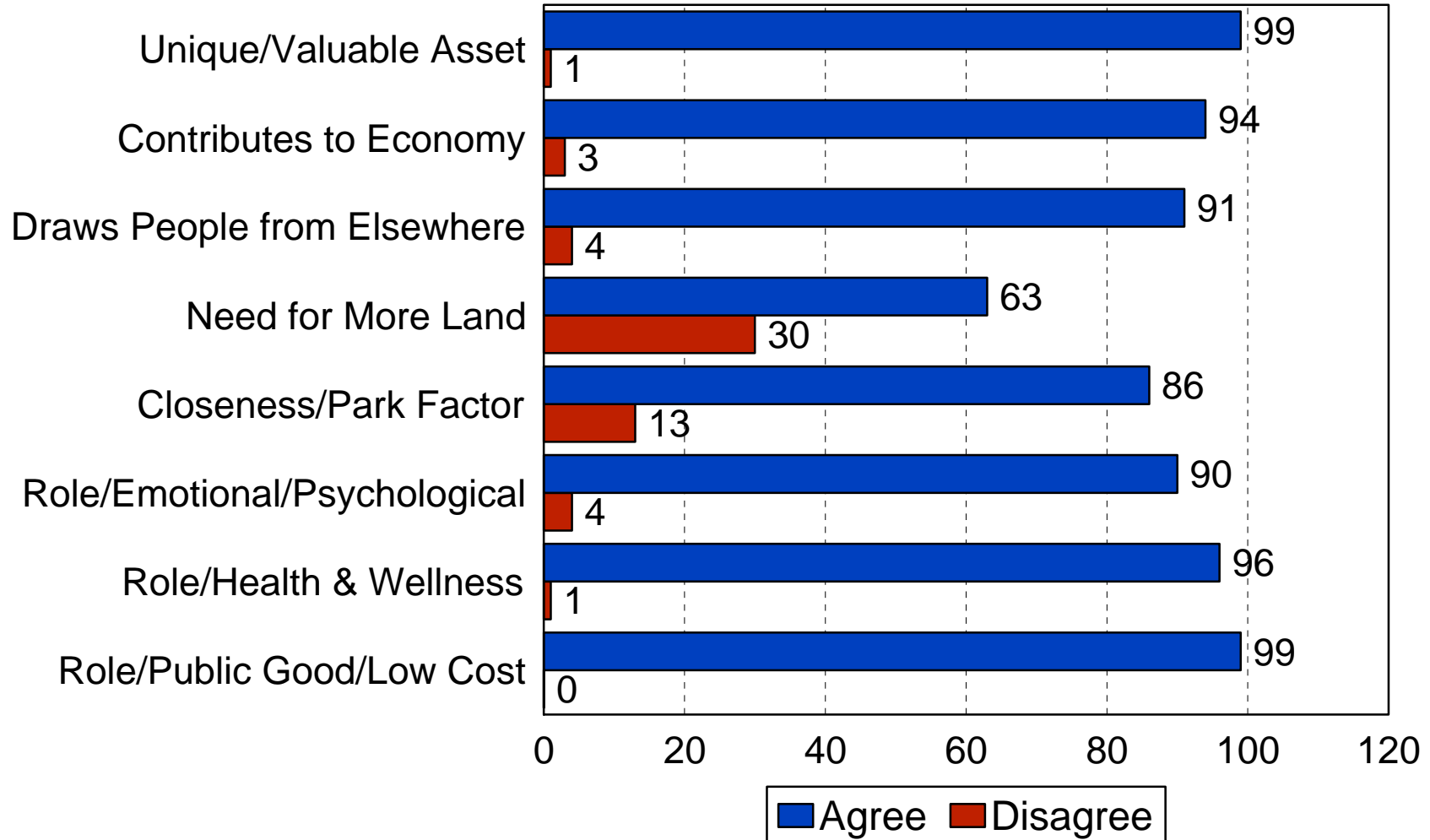
Importance of Current Services

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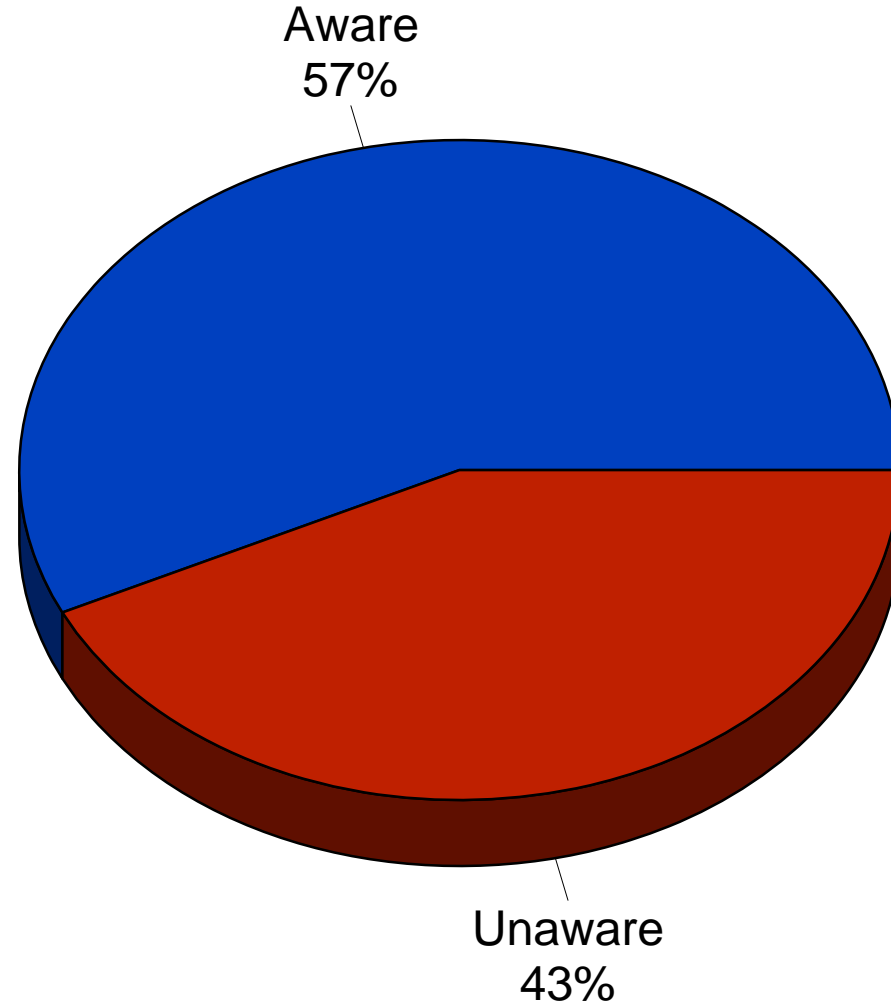
Perceptions of the Park System

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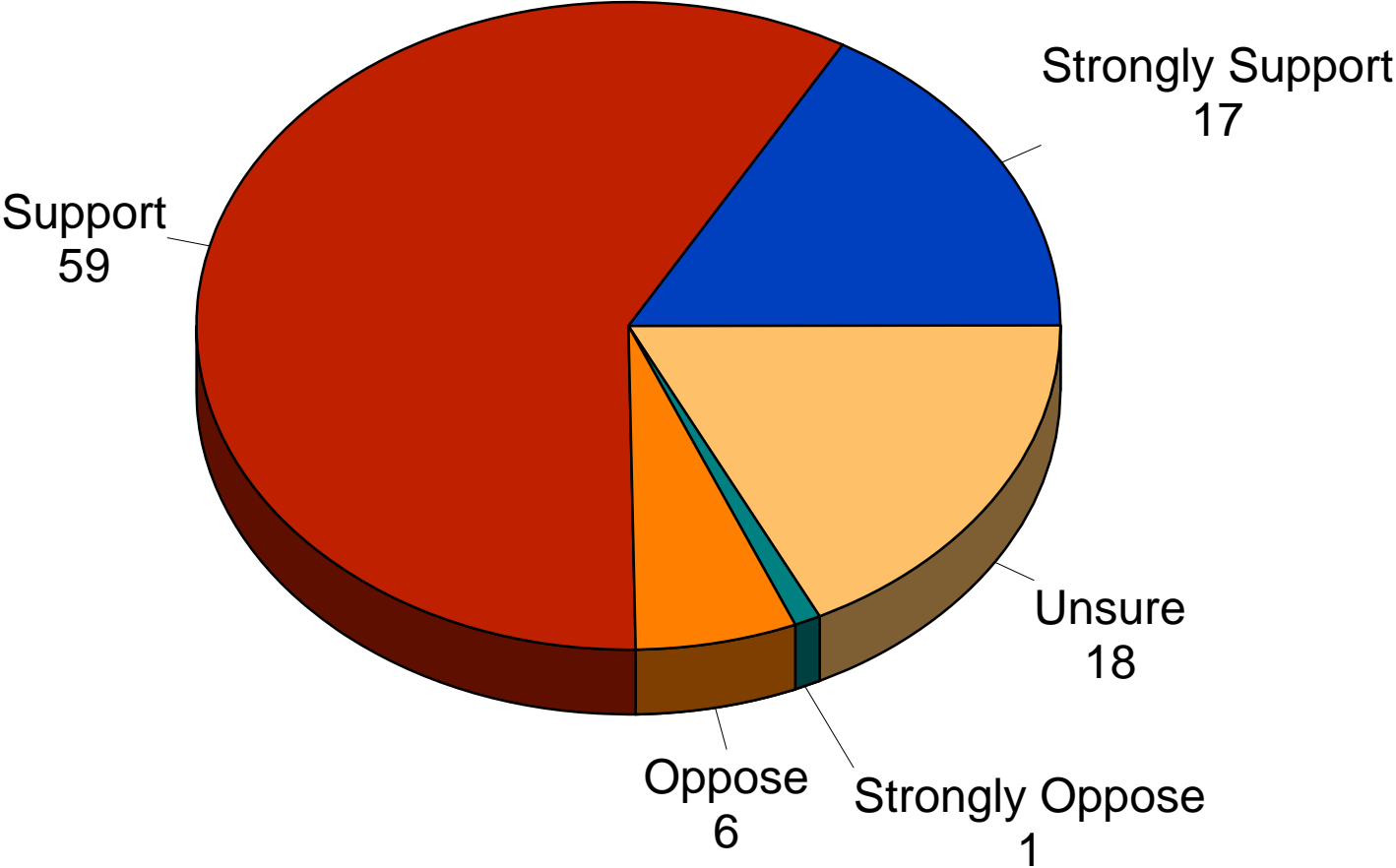
Awareness of Park Board Independence

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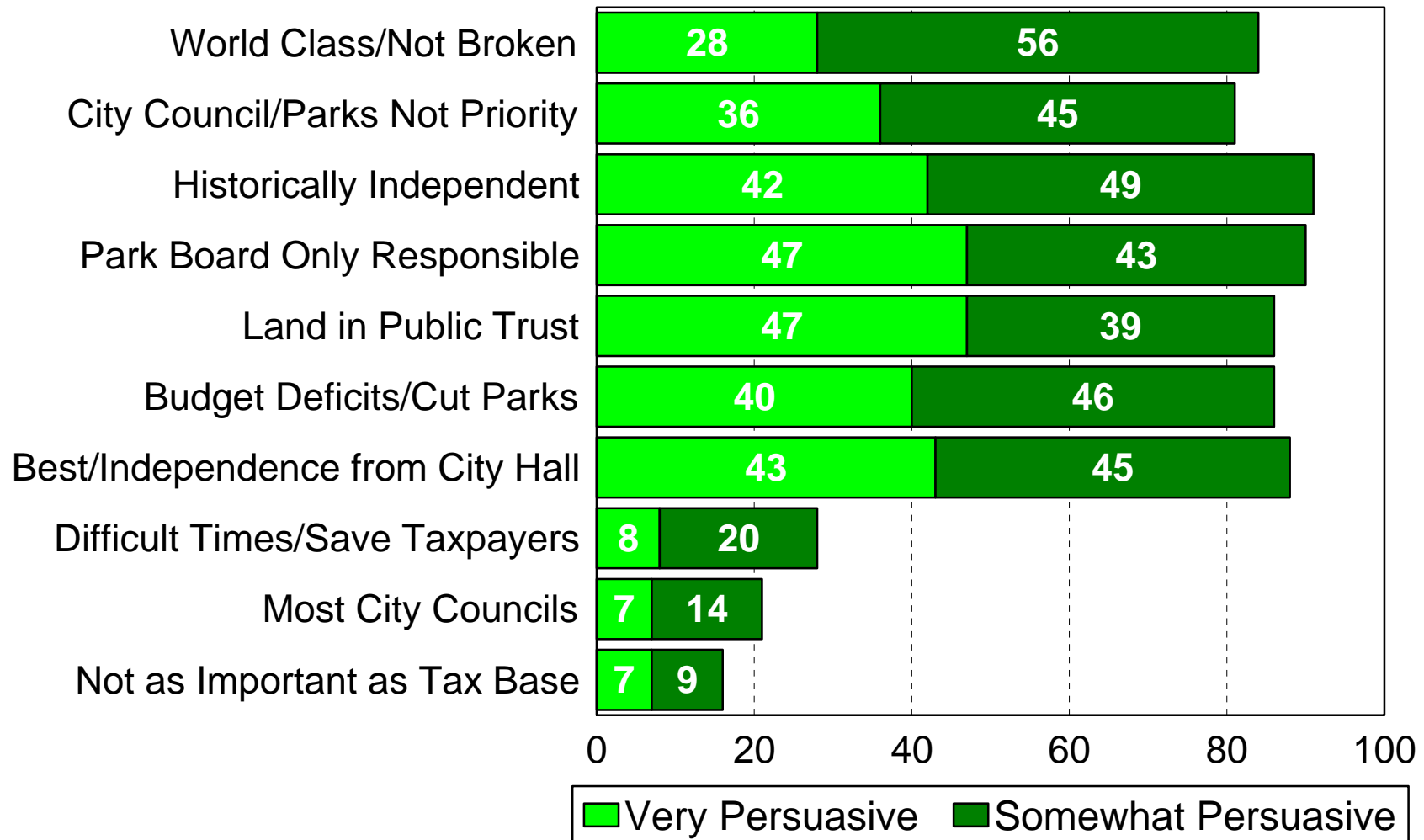
Maintaining Independent Elected Park Board

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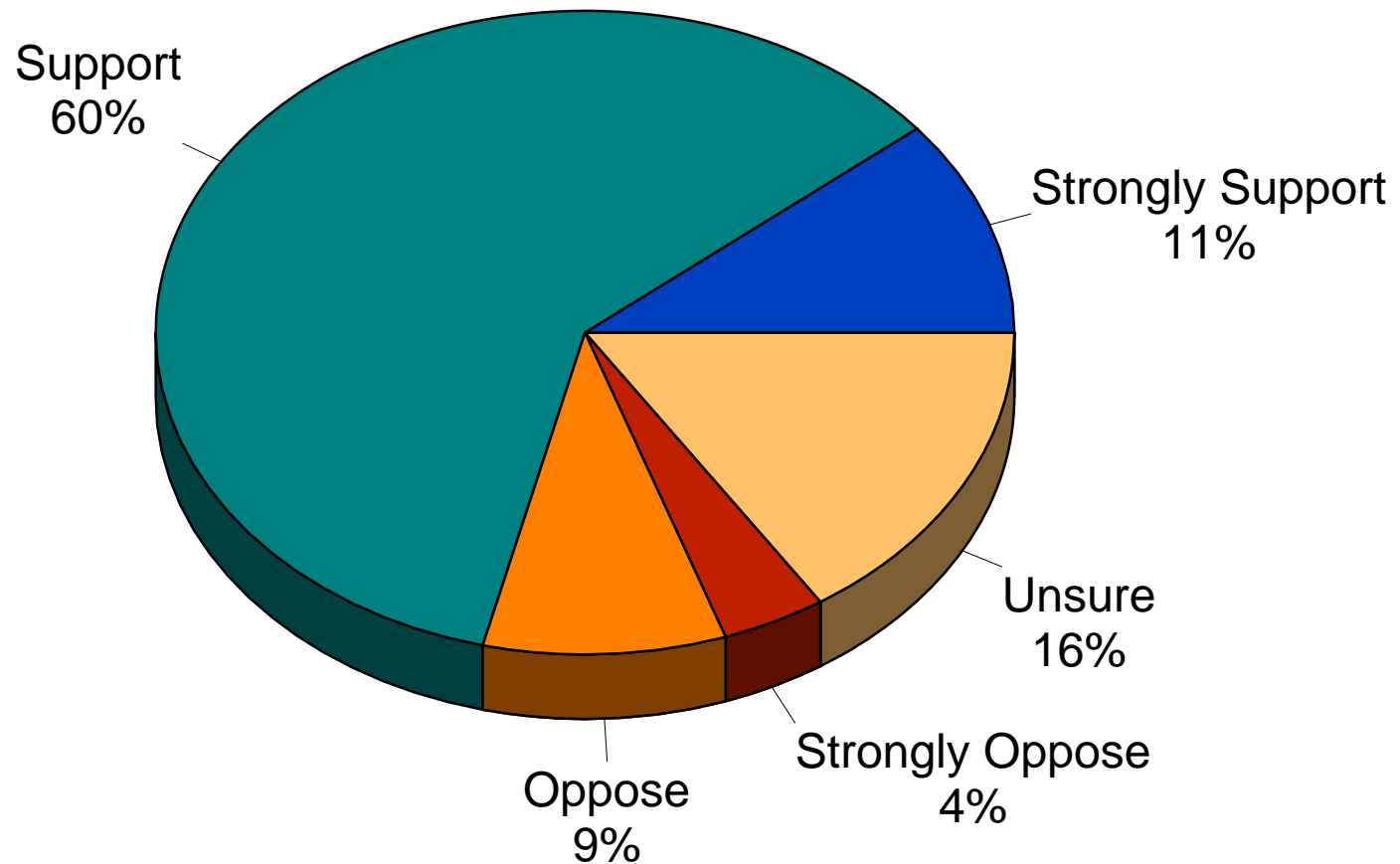
Arguments about Independence

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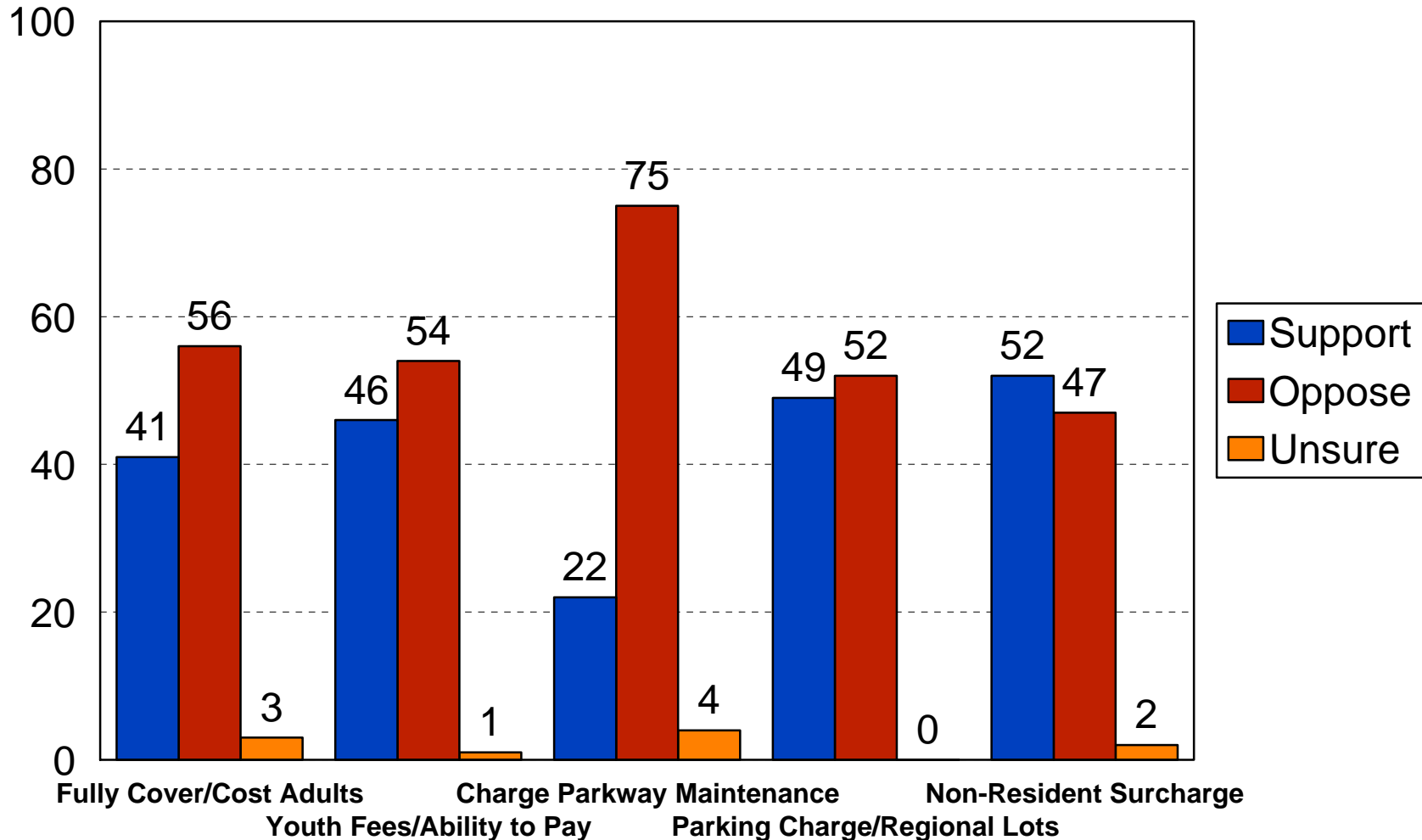
Park and Recreation Facilities Sponsorships

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Potential Fee Increases

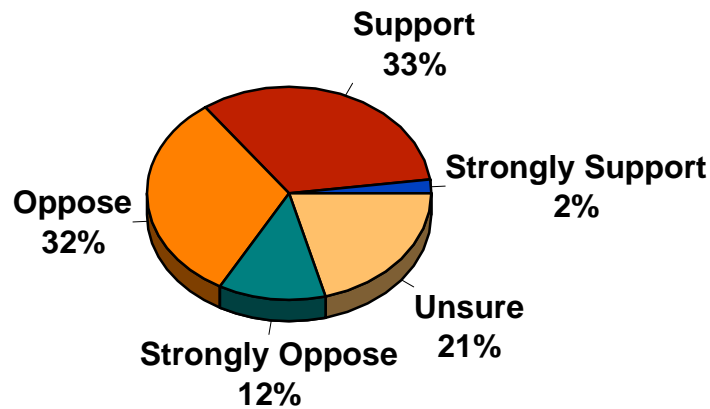
2009 Minneapolis Parks Foundation Study



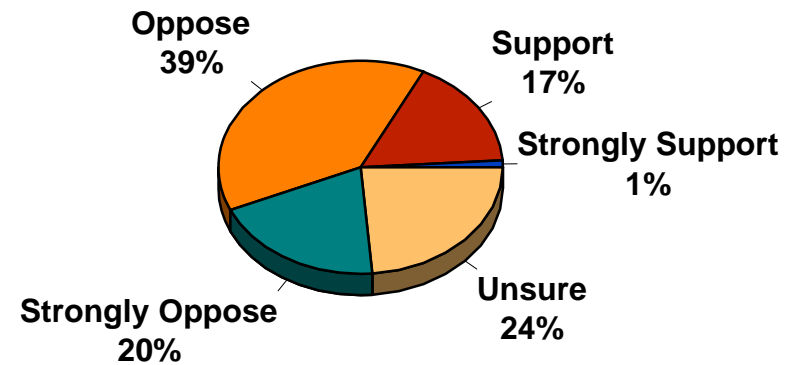
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Property Tax Increases

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**Maintain Services
at Present Levels**



Enhance Services

Value of Facilities and Services for Taxes Paid

2009 Minneapolis Parks Foundation Study

