

For Immediate Release
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Survey confirms broad public trust in the MPRB; citizens want governing independence maintained

Residents place high value on facilities, services

A landmark survey commissioned by the Minneapolis Parks Foundation illustrates just how important the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is to its residents and its pivotal role in the city's quality of life. The survey report was presented at the June 17 meeting of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board of Commissioners.

There is an overwhelming public perception that the Minneapolis Park System is the "jewel in the crown" of the city and the current governance structure should be preserved, summed up Dr. Bill Morris, president of Decision Resources Ltd., which conducted the survey. "The results are the most positive we've seen in any polling we've done not only in Minnesota, but the nation. It's a sweeping mandate for maintaining an independent Park Board."

The survey conducted April 28 through May 15 queried Minneapolis residents on their general perceptions of the Park System. Notable results presented during Morris' presentation are:

- 99 percent see the parks and lakes as a unique and valuable asset for the city.
- 99 percent think the Park System plays an important role in serving the public by offering free or low-cost recreational facilities and activities.
- 96 percent favorably rate the quality, overall appearance and maintenance of the Minneapolis Park System.
- 96 percent think the parks and lakes play a key role in the physical health and wellness of city residents.
- 94 percent report existing parks and facilities meet the needs of households.
- 94 percent say the Minneapolis Park System contributes to the economy by increasing the value of properties near parks.
- A very high 48 percent report there is "nothing" they dislike about Minneapolis parks. In comparison, other "Least Liked" issues (such as too crowded, unsafe, lack of parking, high fees and maintenance) were all six percent and below.

"The average score for resident perceptions was 97 percent and the consistency of such positive results, one after the other after the other, is what differentiates the Minneapolis parks from any other system across the state," Morris said.

A Public Mandate to Maintain Park Board Independence

"The strong public support of the Park Board and its reputation for excellence is not surprising," said Tom Nordyke, President of the Board of Commissioners. "In addition, there has been particular interest in the Park Board's independence due to the recent unsuccessful effort by several Minneapolis City Councilpersons to eliminate the Park Board and have parks overseen by the City Council."

The survey determined that 82 percent of the respondents decisively supported an independent Park Board compared to seven percent that opposed an independent Board. The report stated that the Park Board has 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."

MORE

Of the arguments presented to respondents for maintaining an independent Park Board four emerged as particularly persuasive:

- The Minneapolis Park Board is responsible for just the operation of the park system and not additional services. (90 percent)
- 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. (81 percent)
- The Minneapolis Park Board holds land in the city in a public trust so it is preserved and not developed. (86 percent)
- If the City Council oversaw and operated the parks, they might sell parkland to raise revenue for the city in difficult economic times. (86 percent)

“The survey reinforces the perception that there’s a huge public trust in the organization. They don’t want the independence of the Park Board to be compromised because they don’t want their park system compromised,” said Cecily Hines, President of the Minneapolis Parks Foundation.

“We have accomplished amazing things during tough economic times and the survey confirms that,” said Jon Gurban, MPRB Superintendent. “In addition to the great value the public places on our services and facilities, they sent a clear message about who should have responsibility for managing our city’s most valuable asset. We are grateful for the faith the public has placed in us and are committed to maintain our park system so it continues to enhance our city’s quality of life.”

“The Foundation commissioned the survey to gain a better understanding of usage patterns and preferences so that as the Foundation selects where to place its efforts and resources, it is well informed about community needs and desires,” said Hines. “We also realized that given the current discussions about the independent management of our parks, a survey of this kind would be very useful and informative for the citizens of Minneapolis.”

Decision Resources Ltd., Minnesota’s foremost public affairs research firm, conducted the phone survey to 600 randomly selected adult residents across Minneapolis. Dr. Morris is widely considered one of Minnesota’s leading analysts of public opinion and political trends. The results of the study are projectable to all residents on the City of Minneapolis within ± 4.1 percent in 95 out of 100 cases.

The Minneapolis Parks Foundation is an independent non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that advocates for, invests in and visions for the future of the Minneapolis park system.

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Copies of the following are available online as attachments to this news release under “News and Events” on the MPRB home page, www.minneapolisparcs.org.

- Decision Resources PowerPoint Presentation to Park Board
- 2009 Residential Study of the City of Minneapolis Executive Summary

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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.