

Section 1:
Executive Summary

Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey

Executive Summary Report

Overview of the Methodology

The City of Columbia conducted a Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey during March and April of 2010. The purpose of the survey was to establish priorities for the future improvement of parks and recreation facilities, programs and services within the community. The survey was designed to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout the City of Columbia. The survey was administered by a combination of mail and phone.

Leisure Vision worked extensively with City of Columbia officials in the development of the survey questionnaire. This work allowed the survey to be tailored to issues of strategic importance to effectively plan the future system.

Leisure Vision mailed surveys to a random sample of 3,000 households throughout the City of Columbia. Approximately three days after the surveys were mailed each household that received a survey also received an electronic voice message encouraging them to complete the survey. In addition, about two weeks after the surveys were mailed Leisure Vision began contacting households by phone. Those who indicated they had not returned the survey were given the option of completing it by phone.

The goal was to obtain a total of at least 600 completed surveys from City of Columbia households. This goal was far exceeded, with a total of 753 surveys having been completed. The results of the random sample of 753 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-3.5%.

The following pages summarize major survey findings.

Major Survey Findings

- **Visiting Park City Parks.** Eighty-seven percent (87%) of households have visited City of Columbia parks during the past year. This is significantly higher than the national benchmarking average of 72%.

Of the 87% of households that have visited City parks during the past year, 95% rated the physical condition of the parks they've visited as either excellent (41%) or good (53%). This is higher than the national benchmarking average of 85% of households who rated the physical condition of parks as either excellent or good. In addition, 5% of households rated the physical condition of parks as fair and less than 1% rated them as poor.

- **City Parks and Recreation Facilities Visited.** The City of Columbia parks and recreation facilities that the highest percentage of households have used/visited during the past 12 months are: walking, hiking, and biking trails (70%), picnic shelters (50%), playgrounds (47%), nature trails (41%), and activity and recreation center (38%).

- **Reasons Preventing Households from Using City Parks and Recreation Facilities.** The most frequently mentioned reasons preventing households from using City of Columbia parks and recreation facilities are: “we are too busy or not interested” (26%), “household uses facilities from other organizations” (13%), and “location of City facilities not close to my home” (12%).

- **Participation in City Recreation Programs.** The City recreation programs that the highest percentage of households have participated in over the past 12 months are: special events (28%), youth and adult sports (26%), aquatics (22%), fitness/exercise classes (14%).

- **Need for Parks and Recreation Facilities.** The parks and recreation facilities that the highest percentage of households have a need for are: walking and biking trails (76%), park shelters and picnic areas (70%), small neighborhood parks (68%), large community parks (66%), nature trails (55%), and playground equipment and play areas (51%).

- **Most Important Parks and Recreation Facilities.** Based on the sum of their top four choices, the parks and recreation facilities that households rated as the most important are: walking and biking trails (37%), small neighborhood parks (33%), large community parks (22%), playground equipment and play areas (20%), nature trails (17%), and park shelters and picnic areas (16%).

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- **Need for Recreation Programs.** The recreation programs that the highest percentage of households have a need for are: special events/festivals (46%), adult fitness and wellness programs (42%), nature education programs/outdoor adventure (33%), and youth learn to swim programs (28%).
- **Most Important Recreation Programs.** Based on the sum of their top four choices, the recreation programs that households rated as the most important are: special events/festivals (29%), adult fitness and wellness programs (26%), youth learn to swim programs (16%), youth/teen sports programs (15%), and nature education programs/outdoor adventure (15%).
- **Recreation Programs Participated in Most Often at City Facilities.** Based on the sum of their top four choices, the recreation programs that households participate in most often at City of Columbia parks and recreation facilities are: special events/festivals (25%), youth/teen sports programs (12%), and adult fitness and wellness programs (11%).
- **Ways Respondents Learn about Programs and Activities.** The most frequently mentioned ways that respondents learn about Columbia Parks and Recreation Department programs and activities are: “Leisure Times” Activity Guide (63%), newspaper articles/advertisements (47%), from friends and neighbors (47%), and parks and recreation website (35%).
- **Actions Most Willing to Fund.** Based on the sum of their top four choices, the actions that the highest percentage of respondents are willing to fund with their parks and recreation tax dollars are: fix-up/repair older park facilities/shelters/playgrounds (47%), upgrade/improve existing pools/sports fields/golf courses (29%), acquire land for preservation & develop walking/hiking trails (28%), and acquire land to preserve open space & protect the environment (26%).
- **Level of Satisfaction with the Overall Value Received from the Parks and Recreation Department.** Seventy-five percent (75%) of households are either very satisfied (41%) or somewhat satisfied (34%) with the overall value their household receives from the City of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department. Only 5% of households are either somewhat dissatisfied (3%) or very dissatisfied (2%). In addition, 14% of respondents rated the Parks and Recreation Department as “neutral”, and 6% indicated “don’t know”.

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- **Level of Support for Renewing the 1/8-Cent Park Sales Tax for 5 Years.** Eighty-three percent (83%) of respondents are either very supportive (63%) or somewhat supportive (20%) of renewing the 1/8-cent parks sales tax for 5 years. Only 7% of respondents are not supportive of renewing the 1/8-cent park sales tax for 5 years, and 10% indicated “not sure”.
- **Level of Support for Renewing the 1/8-Cent Park Sales Tax for 10 Years.** Seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents are either very supportive (57%) or somewhat supportive (22%) of renewing the 1/8-cent parks sales tax for 10 years. Only 9% of respondents are not supportive of renewing the 1/8-cent park sales tax for 10 years, and 12% indicated “not sure”.
- **Level of Priority of Maintaining Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities.** Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondents feel City officials should place either a very high (43%) or high (34%) priority on maintaining existing parks and recreation facilities. Only 4% of respondents feel that maintaining existing City parks and recreation facilities should be a low or very low priority, and 19% feel it should be a medium priority.
- **Allocation of \$100 for the Parks Sales Tax.** Respondents would allocate \$45 out of \$100 for maintaining the condition of existing parks, trails, and facilities. The remaining \$55 was allocated as follows: acquiring, protecting and preserving parks, green space and stream corridors (\$21), new park/facility development (\$17), and trails – new construction, improvements, acquisition and connections (\$17).
- **Change in Use of Public Parks and Recreation Facilities During the Past Year.** During the past 12 months, 54% of households have used public parks and recreation facilities the same amount. In addition, 25% of households have made greater use of public parks and recreation facilities, and 12% have made less use of public parks and recreation facilities.