

Appendix I: Public opinion

A statistically-valid survey was conducted by Management Learning Laboratories (MLL) in November 2010 to solicit demands, preferences, feedback and opinions about parks and recreation services from the general public.

Questionnaires were mailed to a total of 6,000 randomly-selected households and 421 usable responses were returned. The margin of error was +/-5%. Following is a brief summary of the findings.

I.1 Leisure interests, participation and needs

The most frequently visited park - was Fort Steilacoom Park, with almost 80% of respondents visiting that facility at least once in the past 12 months. Trailing this regional park was American Lake Park (60%). The most well-used

neighborhood park was Active Park, but only a third of the respondents had visited it. Lakewood should ensure these parks and facilities are well-maintained and remain attractive to the community.

Major recreation pursuits - included outdoor fitness activities, such as walking and jogging. Among all respondents, 77% participated in outdoor fitness activities at least once per year, and 52% attended community special events. Other recreation activities, such as arts programs and youth and adult sports, were sparsely participated. Lakewood should offer outdoor fitness opportunities to encourage walking and jogging.

Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) being an immediate neighbor - many military families who reside off-

base choose to call Lakewood home. It is estimated that Lakewood has a current military population of about 7,200. Of those families surveyed with at least one member serving in the military, about 66% used the recreation facilities and programs within the Base, 50% visited facilities and programs in neighboring cities and 40% held memberships in private health clubs and gyms.

Special events - 44% of the respondents indicated that they had participated in at least one special event in 2010. Lakewood should continue to provide special events on a regular basis.

I.2 Barriers to participation

Lack of time - was the most outstanding barrier to participation (49%). Lakewood may further explore with the residents the best time schedule for future programming.

Disinterest or lack of information - aside from the lack of time for recreation pursuits, major barriers to participation included a disinterest in the opportunities provided (34%); a lack of information (32%) and insufficient restrooms (29%).

One in four respondents felt either better facilities existed elsewhere or a lack of program variety. Specifically, about half of the population aged 45-54 and about 40% over 70 years of age expressed the most disinterest in Lakewood's programs and facilities. About 40% of those aged 25-44 perceived the lack of

information as a barrier to participation.

Lakewood should consider the future needs revealed in the MLL Needs Assessment Study to design programs attractive to the community. A concerted effort should be made to promote programs and facilities using the preferred modes of communication revealed in the Study.

Cost (20%) and perceptions of safety (19%) - also appeared to be barriers. Lakewood should consider offering financial assistance to customers and potential users with financial needs. The safety of parks and facilities should also be improved.

I.3 Communication preference

Source of information - the most preferred method to receive information continued to be the

traditional direct mailing out of printed brochure to households (74%). Other effective means of communication included newspaper (46%) and signs in parks (38%). Lakewood should continue with the direct mailing of brochures to the community.

Electronic and digital media - received endorsements from nearly a third of the respondents. These media included direct emails (35%) and city website (31%), which respondents ranked slightly higher than flyers. Lakewood should consider reaching out more to those aged 25-44, the Generations X and Y, via digital means of communication. Lakewood should expand the use of digital modes for dissemination of information.

Signs in parks - were also considered effective by

about a third of the respondents.

I.4 Future needs

The following findings reflected those respondents who would both “use the programs/facilities in the next 24 months” and “consider them important for the community at large”:

The top 5 parks and facilities rankings were:

- Multi-use trails and sidewalks
- Restrooms in parks
- Neighborhood parks
- Dog parks
- Playgrounds and picnic shelters

The two top facility needs identified above would mostly be desired by residents aged between 25 and 54 (ranging from 32% to 39% within their own age groups). Restrooms, in particular, would be needed to serve the older adults aged between 65

and 69 (over 40%). Among various groups, Asians (50%) appeared to appreciate trails more.

As for neighborhood parks, those aged 25-34 would need the most (close to 38% within this age group), followed by those aged 35-54 (about 32%) and 18-24 (almost 29%). More than three-quarters of Caucasians would welcome a park close to their homes.

The top 5 recreation program rankings were:

- Outdoor concerts/movies
- Festivals/ special events
- Family recreation
- Fitness classes
- Outdoor recreation and fishing

Outdoor concerts and movies would mostly be preferred among 45-54 (34% within this age group), followed by age groups 18-24 (29%) and 35-

44 (24%). Almost 27% of Hispanics would attend outdoor concerts/ movies, followed by both Caucasians and Asians (around 20% each). Close to 30% aged 35-54, 29% Asians and 23% Caucasians would welcome special events and festivals for the family to enjoy.

I.5 Level of Service (LOS) opinions

The survey also sought opinions about the Lakewood's level of services. Some of the findings can serve as baseline data to benchmark with other cities of similar sizes participating in the International City/County Management Association's Center for Performance Measurement.

Satisfaction level - almost 80% stated that the parks, facilities and programs visited had satisfied their needs. Among all

respondents, 83% felt that Lakewood provided an essential service; 76% indicated the work of the department added to the quality of life in Lakewood; and 63% was satisfied with the quality of parks and recreation programs offered by Lakewood.

Quantity - a large majority of 85% felt that parks and facilities were conveniently located; implying that the current park level of service (the half-mile service radius) was very reasonable and acceptable. Less than 70% was satisfied with the quantity (number) of parks and facilities in the community.

Quality - over 80% was satisfied with the quality (condition and appearance) of parks and facilities. The current level of maintenance should continue at its current level.

Preferences - when respondents were asked to give an opinion on their recreation preferences, nearly all (93%) indicated that preservation and conservation of open space was important. About 70% preferred neighborhood parks rather than a large centralized park for convenient access.

Safety - over 60% found the levels of safety of parks and facilities satisfactory. To address safety issues, 65% supported installing lights and 57% wanted more police presence.

Recreation programming - 60% felt that Lakewood was an important provider of recreation for the whole family. About 58% felt that the variety and the range of programs offered were good. Half of the respondents thought recreation opportunities were fairly provided across the community. The directions respondents

offered included more partnership with schools (86%) and more activities for the entire family to participate together (48%).

Communication - among all respondents, 45% felt that Lakewood was responsive to community recreation needs; and only 34% found that communication was easy. While 62% felt that the brochure was simple to understand and 54% considered program advertised was good, only 40% felt that registration for programs was easy.

I.6 Public perception/opinion on administration and finances

Confidence - in general terms, almost two-thirds (62%) of the respondents showed confidence in the leadership of the Department. Their confidence is echoed by the fact that over half

(55%) was satisfied with the management of the department, and half considered department staff courteous and helpful.

Finances - 75% of respondents supported corporate sponsorships for events and 62% for corporate logos and signage at facilities and events. Almost 64% showed their willingness to pay for play, 71% felt the need for reduced fees to serve needed families and households and 54% supported a higher fee for non-residents. A majority (63%) was satisfied with the recreation opportunities received for the tax dollars; and 60% supported the issuance of capital bonds for park improvements.

Park District - creating an independent Park District with its own taxing authority has been seen as a solution to secure

sustainable financing. Voters have formed 7 metropolitan park districts in Washington State from 2002 to 2005 after the introduction of state legislation to allow them to do so. Six more have been formed since 2009. Today, there are a total of 14 park districts in Washington.

Only 30% of Lakewood residents were ready to support an independent Park District. Among those who supported the idea, 53% was male, 70.3% had a household income of less than \$49,999 and 68.7% aged between 25 and 54.

Understanding and interpretation of the above needs and aspirations of the community had provided a solid foundation on which the vision, mission, goals and strategies were developed for this Legacy Plan.