

3.4 PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

A comprehensive public opinion survey was conducted in the Summer of 2005 to understand current attitudes of Carson City residents about parks and recreation, and to put them in perspective with other City-wide issues. Three thousand surveys were sent to randomly-selected households in Carson City¹. Approximately 900 surveys were returned, giving the survey a statistically valid result of a 95% to 99% confidence level². The key results are provided in this section, and in following sections.

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with Carson City's parks, trails, and recreation facilities. They were also asked for their opinions about need for improving existing facilities and the relative desirability of potential new recreation facilities for Carson City. (Few questions were asked about recreation programs, since the Department does extensive surveying of program participants after each season).

In an effort to reach our fastest growing population, a Spanish version of this survey was distributed to the Hispanic community through Hispanic businesses, students at Empire Elementary School, social organizations, churches, and community events. While it was understood that this survey was not "statistically valid", staff felt that this effort was critical to gauge the needs of this special population.

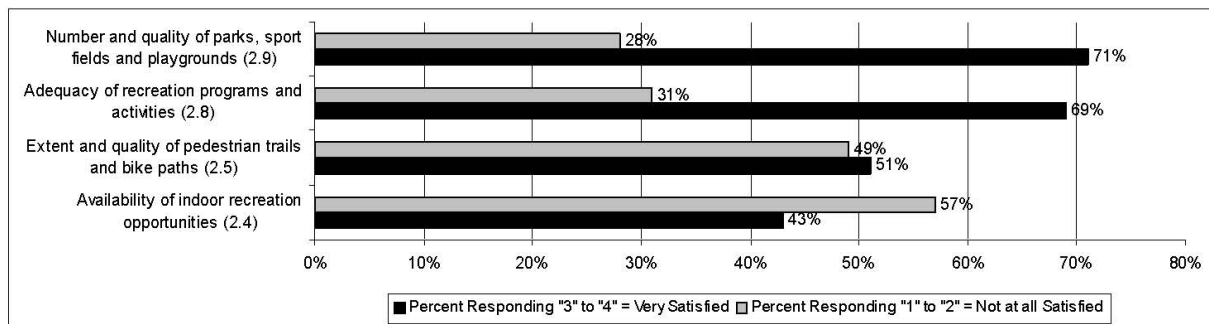
A complete list of the results from the Carson City survey can be found in the *Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan Public Opinion Survey Results - Summer 2005*, a separate document available from the City. Within the Opinion Survey Summary is provided an extensive list of the 'write-in' responses (i.e., to "Other" choices in the survey) that yielded a very informative list of unprompted answers (answers not selected from a list of choices). These comments provide additional insights, particularly the repetitive comments that suggest themes that should be tested in future surveys.

Several key areas of insights gained from the survey are described below:

3.4.1 GENERAL SATISFACTION

In general, residents are well satisfied with parks and recreation facilities and programs and do not see recreation needs rivaling other city issues such as traffic improvements and growth management. However, residents do strongly desire a variety of recreation improvements.

1. Please rate your household's satisfaction with the following recreation services as they relate to Carson City as a whole. Use a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means "Not At All Satisfied" and 4 means "Very Satisfied."



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1 Based on the City's current voter registration list.

2 According to University of Nevada Reno, Cooperative Extension Department who formatted and tabulated the surveys. Confidence level is a measure of the degree to which the survey reflects the results that would be obtained if 100% of households had been sampled.

3.4.2 PATHWAYS

The results from the survey indicated a broad list of possible recreation improvements. Carson City residents were most interested in seeing improvements made to Carson City's pathways system, including constructing new sidewalks and off-street walking/bike paths within the City and enhancing trails located outside of the City's developed area. Off-street walking/bike paths were rated as the single most important issue for the City to improve. In several other questions, trails emerged as the most desired recreation facility. Improving sidewalks in neighborhoods and on-street bike lanes followed closely behind as being rated the single most important amenity for the City to improve.

A separate document, the Unified Pathways Master Plan, addresses these needs and desires.

3.4.3 CULTURAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

A surprising insight from the survey was the number of homes that participate in performing arts in Carson City, and the importance they attach to the cultural arts in general. Although they don't participate often, many households participate. Over 75% of Carson City residents surveyed stated that at least one member from their household participated in cultural and theater events. Only 15% of respondents said that they never attend productions in the Community Center Theater and 49% stated that they attended productions more than twice each year.

Over 50% of respondents felt that more money should be spent to improve the Community Center Theater—with 18% (almost 1/5th of households) stating that more money should be spent “even if taxes had to be raised.”

3.4.4 DETERRENTS TO PARK USAGE

When asked in Question 10 about levels of park usage, and reasons for their level of use, the majority of residents indicated they “just don't use parks much.” Other, smaller numbers reported lack of play equipment and restrooms as reasons. However, in the “other category” there were a significant number of write-in comments indicating that their primary reason for not using City parks more frequently was because dogs were not permitted. In a separate question(#9), 53% of respondents indicated they owned dogs, and only 4% exercised them in parks. Many of the residents who were surveyed indicated a desire to have Carson City's parks allow dogs.



In the Public Opinion Survey, off-street walking/bike paths were rated as the single most important issue for the City to improve.



The public opinion survey indicated that a surprisingly high number of households are involved in cultural arts events such as those held at the Bob Boldrick Theater at the Community Center.



“Write in” comments from the Public Opinion Survey suggest that one deterrent to more usage of parks is because dogs are not permitted in many parks.

Clearly, restroom availability, play equipment and maintenance are important to levels of park usage. Also, better information about the parks in which dogs are allowed, and allowing dogs in more parks (obviously with enforcement of dog management rules), might allow more residents to make use of parks with their pets.

3.4.5 NATURAL PARK EMPHASIS

By many measures, Carson City has a lower area-per-capita of traditional parks than other communities, especially in the category of Neighborhood parks. On the other hand, Carson City currently has a relatively high level of natural parks including Carson River Park, Riverview Park, and Linear Park. The survey tested opinions about the desire for traditional vs. natural parks. According to the survey, respondents were more in favor of spending additional money to improve Carson City’s natural parks rather than spending money to improve its neighborhood and community parks—53% of Carson City residents would like additional money to be spent to maintain or improve the quality of Carson’s natural parks. Six percent of survey respondents felt that improving natural parks was the single most important issue facing the City while 9% thought that it was the second most important issue. Sixty-two percent of survey respondents felt that it was either “important” or “very important” for Carson City to add more natural parks to the City.

Many other survey results are incorporated into the discussions in later chapters regarding specific facilities.

3.4.6 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

1. Conduct follow-up public opinion surveys every 3 to 5 years to track local trends and attitudes.

