

Results of the Bend Metro Park and Recreation District Household Survey

Prepared for

Bend Metro Park
and Recreation District

by

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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

The Bend Metro Park and Recreation District (BMPRD) provides park and recreation services to residents of the greater Bend area. BMPRD is in the process of updating its long-range parks and recreation master plan. The master plan is intended to identify facility and program needs over a 20-year period. It includes a five-year development plan.

To supplement its analysis of parks, recreation, and facility needs, the BMPRD contracted with ECONorthwest to conduct a survey of registered voters within the District. The survey was intended to solicit opinions about parks and recreation needs and future recreation programs and investments. More specifically, the District wanted the survey to provide a preliminary test of voters' willingness to support funding of proposed facilities.¹ The survey in this project was intended to get information about needs that would allow the District to design and test a specific funding proposal after this project is completed.

This project was a specific survey of opinions and attitudes of registered voters and their households in the BMPRD service area. While the survey was intended to gather data about residents' recreation participation patterns and use of BMPRD facilities, *it is not a formal assessment of park, recreation, and facility needs.*

METHODS

ECONorthwest conducted a mailed survey to a random sample of 1,344 registered voters in the BMPRD service area during August and September 2000. While the survey was sent to registered voters, the responses were for the voter's households.

We received a total of 412 valid responses by the survey response deadline; a 31% response rate. According to the official population estimates from the Center for Population Research and Census (CPRC) at Portland State University, the City of Bend had a 1999 population of 50,650 persons. The sample size allows inference of the results to all households in the district at a 95% confidence level with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. What this means is that if we conducted the survey 100 times, we would expect to obtain results within $\pm 5\%$ of the results from this survey 95 of those times.

¹ As a follow up to this survey, the District will probably conduct a phone survey with a few specific questions to test funding packages for a potential ballot measure.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

PARTICIPATION PATTERNS AND FACILITY USE

- District residents participate in a broad range of recreational activities.
- Outdoor recreation activities are most popular among District residents; more than 60% of survey respondents indicate they or someone in their household participates frequently in outdoor recreation activities.
- Walking/hiking are the activities participated in by the greatest percentage of survey respondents.
- Survey results suggest that most District households use a variety of District facilities. Respondents reported using trails, River Park, and neighborhood parks most frequently and BMPRD recreation programs and rental facilities least frequently.

SATISFACTION WITH BMPRD

- The majority of survey respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with District parks, facilities, and services. Age was not a big factor in level of satisfaction, however female respondents indicated a higher level of satisfaction than other respondents as did respondents that indicated higher incomes and levels of income.
- The majority of respondents indicated that the District provides about the "right amount" of parks, facilities, and services. A small percentage of respondents indicated the District provides "too much" service. Notably, about 40% of respondents indicated they felt the district does not provide enough parks or facilities.
- Respondents think youth programs are important. Children and teens were rated the highest priority populations and youth programs rated substantially higher than other types of programs.
- Public river access, neighborhood parks, and trails were rated the most important facilities.
- Survey results suggest that activities that respondents' indicate they do not participate in are not necessarily unimportant from a parks and recreation system standpoint. For example, only 16% of respondents indicated they had one or more household members that participated in youth activities, yet youth activities were rated among the most important services.
- A majority of respondents were either supportive or very supportive of all five of the District's long-range goals. The goal of adequate funding received the highest level of support.
- Nearly half the survey respondents indicated they would be willing to pay more for new services. About 34% would not be willing to pay more, while about 16% said it depends.
- Respondents aged 40-59 were most supportive of funding new facilities. About 60% of the respondents in this age range indicated a willingness to pay more.

- Respondents that answered "it depends" on the funding question, had concerns about how much it would cost, how the money would be collected, and what it would be spent on.

CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions draw on both the survey results (responses to the close-ended questions reported in Chapters 2-4) and the written comments (responses to the close-ended questions, reported in Appendix B) to identify key themes and issues, as follows:

- **Positive view of the District.** Nearly 80% of survey respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with District parks, facilities, and programs. Moreover, about 20% of written survey comments reflect a positive view of the District and encourage the District to "keep up the good work."
- **Development of the trail system.** More than 75% of the survey respondents indicated they walk/hike for recreation. Many respondents also engage in other trail-related activities (running, cycling, etc.).
- **Acquisition of open space.** The survey results show strong support for additional open space. Moreover, written survey comments suggest that the District play a more active role in preservation of natural areas through acquisition of open space.
- **Support for youth programs.** Youth programs emerged as a theme in the comments. Children and youth were rated the most important populations and youth programs were rated the most important programs. Moreover, a number of the written survey comments addressed youth activities.
- **Minor improvements to facilities and operations.** The survey results suggest that respondents' want nice and well-maintained facilities. While we didn't directly ask respondents' to comment on how well the District does in facilities maintenance, many comments reflected different aspect of the District's facilities and operations.
- **Address the "dogs in parks" issue.** The survey did not ask specific questions regarding dogs, however, dogs emerged as a minor theme in the written comments. Several respondents requested the District enforce the leash and scoop laws. Several other respondents requested the District establish one or more "dog parks" where dog owners can let dogs run off-leash.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey results suggest residents are relatively satisfied with District programs and may be willing to pay for new services provided the District is responsive to their perceived needs. The suggestions provided below reflect a combination of our interpretation of the survey results and our professional judgment.

- **The package should reflect the priorities of District residents.** The key themes that emerged from the survey results were (1) youth programs, (2) trails, and (3) open space. The survey results suggest that packages that reflect some combination of these elements will get more support.
- **The package should reflect the priorities and capacity of the District.** The District needs to consider the goals of the long-range plan as well as its internal capacity to meet demand as it considers different options.
- **The package should be specific.** The survey results identified a sizable percentage (more than 20% of all survey respondents) of people that could be classified as "swing" voters (respondents that indicated their support of funding for new services depends on a variety of factors). These individuals will carefully evaluate any request forwarded by the District against their own perceptions of "needs." The package should be explicit as to what it is funding, and why those facilities are needed.
- **The survey results did not point to support for any one specific facility.** We do not interpret this to mean that voters will not support specific facilities; rather, the survey did not ask explicitly about specific facilities. It is our opinion that a funding program should include specific facilities as part of the comprehensive package.
- **The package needs to meet demonstrated needs.** Bend is expected growth by 50% in the next 20 years. That growth will certainly create demand for additional recreational services. The District, however, needs to be clear on why new facilities are needed, and more importantly, why new funding streams are needed to keep up with growth.
- **The funding request must fall within a reasonable cost range.** Voters want to see value for their money. They also do not want to be burdened with substantial new taxes. The survey results, however, suggest that voters will support additional fees—up to a point. The survey results are surprising in this respect: households with higher incomes generally indicated a higher willingness to pay. They also suggest that most households are willing to pay between \$25 and \$50 annually.
- **The package needs to consider operations and maintenance.** The survey results suggest that respondents' support allocation of revenues for facility operations and maintenance (O&M). It is less clear whether they would support funding O&M costs through a ballot initiative. It is our opinion that the initiative should focus on capital improvements, and the District needs to be clear that sufficient O&M revenues will exist for all facilities.

NEXT STEPS

The survey results suggest the District has a reasonable chance of passing a funding initiative—if it is carefully crafted. The household survey was a

solid first step in better understanding District residents' opinions, attitudes, and concerns. While the survey provides information useful in crafting a funding package, the results are not specific enough to determine precisely what that package should be. Moreover, we discourage the development of policy or programs based solely on survey results. Few decisions are simple enough that survey results provide a definitive answer. At a minimum, the District should consider long-term growth and demographic trends, recreational participation trends, the stated goals and objectives of the long-range plan, cost, political viability, and internal capacity. There are certainly other considerations the District will want to consider; the factors listed above are intended to be a starting point.

Because the survey does not ask respondents about specific development packages, we recommend the District follow some variation of the steps described below:

1. Conduct additional technical analysis.
2. Refine survey results in focus group meetings.
3. Develop conceptual funding packages.
4. Refine conceptual funding packages in a second round of focus group meetings.
5. Conduct an opinion poll to test voter support.
6. Submit ballot initiative.

We do not include public education as a separate step in the process described above. Public relations and education should be an ongoing dialog the District shares with its constituents. If voters are not knowledgeable about issues facing the District, they are less likely to be supportive of new services.