

Illinois Park Districts: Citizen Perspectives

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Executive Summary

In 1980, Dr. Joseph J. Bannon and his colleagues at the University of Illinois conducted a series of studies to evaluate park districts in the state of Illinois. The overall purpose of those studies was to gather information from a variety of sources for a comprehensive analysis of park districts to address concerns suggested by opponents to the park district method of delivering local leisure services. As part of that series of studies, a study of citizens residing in a park district was conducted. The results of that study are reported in **“Special Report 3: Survey of Citizens in Illinois Concerning Park District Services,”** by Dr. Joseph J. Bannon, Department of Leisure Studies, University of Illinois, 1980. Findings from that study indicated that a vast majority of Illinois citizens residing in a park district: used parks and recreation facilities, were satisfied with the park district, felt the park district served true community interests, were satisfied with staff performance, disagreed with consolidating park district with a larger governmental unit (e.g., city/village or county government), felt informed about programs and services, felt an opportunity for public input was provided, and indicated that programs and services would suffer if consolidated with the city or county government. Overall, the findings of the “1980 Citizen Study” confirmed that Illinois citizens are very supportive of park districts as the unit of local government responsible for providing parks and recreation services.

In today’s political environment, there is always a pressing need to have current evaluative information available. After 25 years, there is a need for current evaluative information from those citizens that are served by a park district in the state of Illinois. In cooperation with the Illinois Association of Park Districts, the Office of Recreation and Park Resources, Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, University of Illinois conducted a state-wide survey of households in Illinois residing in park district areas as a follow-up to the “1980 Citizen Study” noted above. Households residing within park district boundaries throughout the state of Illinois were asked to participate in an evaluation of their local park district. The intent of the study was to provide current information to update some concerns suggested by opponents to the park district method of delivering local park and recreation services identified in the “1980 Citizen Study” and extend the information to include benefits and effectiveness of park districts, as well as satisfaction with public services in the community. Attributes of a park district that were evaluated included use of park districts, satisfaction with park districts, benefits of park districts, effectiveness of park district operations, and feeling/attitudes toward consolidation with a larger unit of local government (e.g., city/village or county). This information was used to address the following concerns:

1. Do residents use the programs, facilities and park areas of their local Park District?
2. Are residents satisfied with Park District programs, facilities and park areas?
3. What are the perceived benefits of a Park District to the community and to participants?
4. What is the perceived effectiveness of Park District operations?
5. Can park and recreation programs and services be better provided by a special district (Park District) or consolidated government (City/Village or County)?

A random sample of Illinois households residing in a park district area was selected to participate in the park district evaluation study. Those households selected to participate in the study were mailed a questionnaire seeking information about their attitudes and feelings about their local park district. Data collection took place from July through October 2006. Over three hundred usable questionnaires (302 questionnaires) were returned for an overall response rate of 32%. The results of the random sample of 302 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-5%; that is, the true population value is within +/-5% of the sample value.

Do residents use the programs, facilities and park areas of their local Park District?

In communities that have a park district, the park district is the primary provider of park and recreation programs, facilities and park areas. The household questionnaire results indicated that the vast majority of Illinois households had utilized programs, facilities, and parks provided by their local park district during the past year. In terms of recreation providers (e.g., park districts, forest preserves, country clubs, private fitness centers, YMCA/YWCA, churches, etc) in a community, park districts were used more frequently than other park and recreation service providers.

Are residents satisfied with Park District programs, facilities and park areas?

Nearly nine out of every ten households in Illinois were satisfied with the programs, facilities, and park areas. A majority of households expressed satisfaction with the mission/purpose of the park district and were just as satisfied with the services provided by the park district as with other local public services. For example, household respondents were just as satisfied with police, fire, and library services and more satisfied than with streets/sewers, public schools, mass transit, and city planning services.

What are the perceived benefits of a Park District to the community and to participants?

Park districts have been recognized as contributing substantially and significantly to advancing the quality of life in many communities. Park districts provide opportunities for all citizens of the state of Illinois, including citizens of all ages, races and those physically and mentally challenged, to participate in park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas. The park district provides several benefits to the community and to individuals participating in programs and activities of the park district. The household questionnaire results indicated that the majority of Illinois households agreed that a park district improves property values in the community. Almost one-half of the household respondents agreed that a park district enhances the opportunity to recruit business and industry to the community. Results from the household questionnaire indicated that citizens realize several benefits from participating in park district programs, visiting park district facilities, and park areas. The vast majority of respondents rated the importance of several perceived benefits

from participating in park and recreation programs and services as important. These benefits included enjoying the outdoors, improving health, relaxing/releasing tension, being with family, and being with friends.

What is the perceived effectiveness of Park District operations?

As indicated by the findings from the household questionnaire, the park district is effective in its operations. Respondent felt the park district has done an excellent job of informing the public about park and recreation program and activities, offering affordable recreational opportunities for the residents of the community, protecting open space, providing opportunities for improving health/wellness in the community, and serving people with disabilities. A majority of respondents indicated that park districts manage tax dollars responsibly, agreed there is ample opportunity to provide input to park district projects, felt safe in park district areas, and were satisfied with park district staff.

For many of the effectiveness items evaluated by respondents, a substantial proportion of respondent households (ranging from 9% to 48% depending on the specific question) indicated they did not know the effectiveness of the specific park district operation. For example, park districts work closely with other local units of government. As indicated by the household questionnaire results, almost one-half of the respondents did not know how effectively the park district was working with other local units of government. The park district has the opportunity to build on its effectiveness of informing the public about parks and recreation services by providing additional information to the public about actual park district operations. Households that were able to express an opinion or attitude were consistently more positive toward the park district—a direct indication that an informed public is more supportive of the park district than an uninformed public.

Can Park and Recreation Programs be Better Provided by a Special District (Park District) or Consolidated Government (City/Village or County)?

There is strong citizen support for the park district as the unit of government that should provide recreation programs, facilities, and park areas in their community. The household questionnaire results indicated that a vast majority of respondent households believe park and recreation programs can be better provided by a park district whose only purpose is park and recreation services and believe a park district as a separate governmental unit can serve true community interests in parks and recreation.

There is strong support for the park district, as compared to city/village government, as the unit of government that would provide greater opportunity for citizen input. The household questionnaire results indicated that a vast majority of respondent households believe the park district as a separate governmental unit can provide greater opportunity for resident input than could be provided by the city/village government and believe if the local park district was consolidated with city/village government, residents would have less opportunity to express their interests and desires for programs and services.

A majority of household respondents felt that park and recreation programs and services would suffer if consolidated with city/village or county government. Conversely, only about ten percent of the respondents felt park and recreation programs and services would improve. Furthermore, nearly eight out of every ten respondent households indicated that the park district would be the best local governmental unit to provide park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas.

Conclusion

The study provided much needed state-wide evaluative information about how park districts are performing from the perspective of those households served. The conclusion of this study is that residents across the state of Illinois are very supportive of their local park district. The services of the park district are used by a majority of households in the community; there is a high level of satisfaction with park district programs, facilities, staff, and park areas; and the park district provides several benefits to the community and participants. There is strong support from the citizens that park districts are the best provider (compared with city/village and county government) of park and recreation programs and services and if consolidation occurred with a larger governmental unit (e.g., city/village or county government), park and recreation programs and services would suffer. Respondent households representing households in the state of Illinois have expressed such a high degree of satisfaction with park districts that any change in the type of governmental authority would not be the popular will of the citizens. These findings are very consistent with the "1980 Citizen Study."

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I. Introduction

A. Background

In 1980, Dr. Joseph J. Bannon and his colleagues at the University of Illinois (U of I) conducted a series of studies for the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) to evaluate park districts in the state of Illinois. The overall purpose of those studies was to gather information from a variety of sources for a comprehensive analysis of park districts in Illinois to address concerns suggested by opponents to the park district method of delivering local leisure services. This information provided the background for what has become known as the “Park District White Paper” prepared by Dr. Joseph J. Bannon, University of Illinois, in 1980.

As part of that series of studies, a survey of citizens residing in a park district service area in the state of Illinois was conducted. The overall purpose of the study was to conduct an evaluation of park districts across the state of Illinois from the perspective of those citizens served. Citizens residing in five park districts in the state of Illinois, one in each region of the state, were selected to participate in the study. The citizen survey information was used to address concerns suggested by opponents to the park district method of delivering local leisure services. The following questions were addressed:

- Are park districts serving or providing a true community need?
- Are park districts, as an autonomous governmental authority, too narrow in purpose to represent true community need?
- Are park district employees as efficient and as effective in completing their duties as city/county employees?
- Could the services and facilities presently provided by special park districts be more economically and efficiently provided through the consolidation of park districts with general purpose government?
- Would park district programs be improved if consolidated with general purpose government?
- Is the park district too small of a governmental unit to maintain an informed public about its services and facilities?
- Are the program, services and facilities of a park district determined by special interest groups representing a relatively small percent of the community’s population?

The results of that study were reported in “**Special Report 3: Survey of Citizens in Illinois Concerning Park District Services,**” by Dr. Joseph J. Bannon, Department of Leisure Studies, University of Illinois, 1980. Findings from the citizen survey indicated that a vast majority of Illinois citizens residing in a park district: used parks and recreation facilities, were satisfied with the park district, felt the park district served true community interests, were satisfied with staff performance, disagreed with consolidating park district with a larger governmental unit (e.g., city/village or county government), felt informed about programs and services, felt an opportunity for public input was provided, and indicated that programs

and services would suffer if consolidated with the city or county government. Overall, the findings of the “1980 Survey of Citizens Study” confirmed that Illinois citizens are very supportive of park districts as the unit of local government responsible for providing parks and recreation services.

B. Current Study

In cooperation with the Illinois Association of Park Districts, the Office of Recreation and Park Resources, the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, University of Illinois conducted a state-wide survey of households in Illinois residing in park district areas as a follow-up to the “1980 Citizen Study.” The intent of the study was to provide current information to update some concerns suggested by opponents to the park district method of delivering local park and recreation services identified in the “1980 Survey of Citizens Study” and extend the information to include benefits and effectiveness of park districts, as well as satisfaction with public services in the community. The concerns addressed included:

- Do residents use the programs, facilities and park areas of their local Park District?
- Are residents satisfied with Park District programs, facilities and park areas?
- What are the perceived benefits of a Park District to the community and to participants?
- What is the perceived effectiveness of Park District operations?
- Can park and recreation programs and services be better provided by a special district (Park District) or consolidated government (City/Village or County)?

C. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to conduct an evaluation of park districts across the state of Illinois from the perspective of those households served. This state-wide evaluation assessed households’ attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with local park district programs, facilities and parks. The household survey information was used to address concerns suggested by opponents to the park district method of delivering local park and recreation services.

D. Objectives

The following objectives were designed to meet the stated purpose:

- to identify level of household participation in park district programs, facilities, and park areas,
- to determine household satisfaction with park district programs, facilities, park areas, and staff; as well as other public services in the community,
- to determine community and individual benefits of a park district,
- to determine the effectiveness of park district operations,

- to identify respondent attitudes toward consolidation of local units of government, specifically park districts, and
- to develop an information data base for planning, evaluations, policy, and monitoring for the future.

II. Study Procedures

A sample of households in the state of Illinois was selected to participate in the study. The primary data collection instrument for the study was a mail-back questionnaire. Specific information about the sample selection, questionnaire development and implementation, and response rate is presented in the following sections.

A. Sample

The target population consisted of all households in the state of Illinois that are located within the boundaries of a park district. The research team worked with Survey Sampling, a well known and respected survey sampling firm, to select the sample for the study. A random sample of 1,100 households was selected. The sample was then adjusted for households located in a county without a park district, as 29 of the 102 counties in the state of Illinois do not have a park district within the county. Fifty-eight households (5.3%) were removed from the sample as they resided in a county without a park district, yielding an adjusted sample of 1,042 households. A questionnaire was mailed to each of the 1,042 remaining households. This sample was further adjusted by removing households from the sample that did not fall within the boundary of a park district.

B. Questionnaire Development

An 8-page questionnaire was developed to collect information to meet the stated objectives of the study. This information included use of park districts, satisfaction with park districts, benefits of park districts, effectiveness of park district operations, and feeling/attitudes toward consolidation with a larger unit of local government (e.g., city/village or county). The research team and representatives of IAPD worked closely together in developing the questionnaire to assure the information needs of IAPD were addressed. The questionnaire was pretested prior to implementation. The questionnaire was formatted for clarity and ease of answering. It was bound in booklet form with an attractive cover with photographs representing programs, facilities and park areas. (Appendix A).

C. Questionnaire Implementation

Each of the 1,042 households selected to participate in the study was sent a questionnaire. Data collection took place over a three-month period, beginning in late July and concluding in mid October. The study design called for a total of four mailings to each household selected. The first mailing, sent on July 24, 2006, consisted of a personalized but very short advance-notice letter sent to all households selected in the sample. The purpose of this mailing was to get people interested enough to open the questionnaire when it arrived. The letter explained that a questionnaire was being sent to their household, briefly stated why the survey is being done, and explained the value of their participation. The initial mailing also included a question and answer sheet to further explain the study. One week after the

advance-notice letter a second mailing consisted of a personalized cover letter, questionnaire, and a return postage-paid envelope. Approximately one week after the questionnaire was mailed, a third mailing, a follow-up postcard was sent to all individuals in the sample. This postcard served as a reminder for those who had yet to return their questionnaire and also as a thank you for those who had completed and returned the questionnaire. The fourth and final mailing consisting of a cover letter, questionnaire, and return postage-paid envelope was sent on August 22, 2006. This mailing was sent to all individuals who had not yet responded. A copy of all mail correspondence is located in Appendix B.

To insure confidentiality, each questionnaire was given a unique identification number that could be matched to a name on the sample list. Once the questionnaire was returned, the household's name was removed from the mailing list to maintain an up-to-date record of nonrespondents for the fourth mailing. Only those households who had not returned their questionnaire were sent one or more follow-up mailings. Data collection was terminated on October 15, 2006. Once the questionnaires were returned, they were examined for completeness and accuracy prior to entering the data into the computer. The data were then coded and checked for accuracy prior to analysis.

D. Questionnaire Response Rate

Following the procedure outlined above, an initial sample of 1,100 households was selected to participate in the study (Table 1). Adjustments to the initial sample (not in county with a park district—58 households) yielded a working sample of 1,042 households. Further adjustments to the sample included removing households not within a park district boundary, wrong address, etc. These adjustments yielded an final adjusted sample of 958 households. Of the adjusted sample size, 302 useable questionnaires were returned for an overall response rate of 32%. The results of the random sample of 302 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-5%, assuming lack of nonresponse bias.

Table 1. Sample Selection, Adjustments, and Response Rate	
Characteristic	Total
Initial household sample selection	1,100
Adjustments¹ not in county with park district	(58)
Number of questionnaires sent	1,042
Number of questionnaires returned	386
Adjustments² not in park district boundary	(52)
Adjustments³ wrong address, non-deliverable, etc	(32)
Useable Questionnaires Returned	302
Adjusted Sample Size⁴	958
Response Rate⁵	32%

¹ Adjustments to initial sample for those households residing in a county without a park district (29 counties).

² Adjustments to initial sample size for those households residing in a county with a park district; however, residence is outside the park district boundary.

³ Adjustments to sample size include questionnaires that were identified as (wrong address, moved left no forwarding address, etc.) or the questionnaire was returned but not useable.

⁴ Adjusted sample size was calculated by subtracting adjustments from initial sample selection (1,100 – (58 + 52 + 32)) = 958.

⁵ Response rate was determined by dividing the number of useable questionnaires returned by the adjusted sample size (302/958).

E. Nonresponse Considerations

A short telephone interview was conducted with a random sample of 50 nonrespondent households. The telephone survey was kept short and composed of selected items from the questionnaire previously sent to sample participants (Appendix C). The purpose of this follow-up was to investigate the potential for nonresponse bias; i.e., are respondent and nonrespondent households different. Table 2 presents the comparison of selected questions for respondents and nonrespondent households. There appears to be little difference between respondent and nonrespondent households, yielding greater confidence that the study results can be generalized to the population of households residing in park districts across the state of Illinois.

Table 2. Comparison of Respondent and Nonrespondent Households		
Question	Respondents	Nonrespondents
	N=354	N=50
Q1. Do you live in an area that is within a Park District?	85%	82%
	N=302	N=41
Q3a. During the past year, have you or anyone in your household attended any Park District Program?	48%	46%
Q3b. During the past year, have you or anyone in your household visited any Park District facilities?	60%	63%
Q3c. During the past year, have you or anyone in your household visited any Park District parks?	77%	73%
Q7. Overall, are you satisfied or unsatisfied with the Park District?	88%	90%
Q25. How many people live in your household?	Average 2.7	Average 2.4
Q11. Which unit of local government do you think would be the best provider of park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas?	Park District 79% City/Village 18% County 3%	Park District 76% City/Village 22% County 2%
Q21. Gender	Male 50%	Male 56%

III. Study Findings

The purpose of this section is to present the findings of the study. Frequency distributions for all questionnaire items can be found in Appendix A. The findings are organized into six sections based on the study objectives:

- A. Household Use of Recreation Programs, Facilities, Park Areas, and Providers**
- B. Household Satisfaction with Park District and Other Public Service Providers in the Community**
- C. Perceived Benefits of Park Districts**
- D. Household Attitudes About Park District Operations**
- E. Attitudes About Park District and Consolidated Government**
- F. Household and Respondent Characteristics.**

A. Household Use of Recreation Programs, Facilities, Park Areas, and Providers

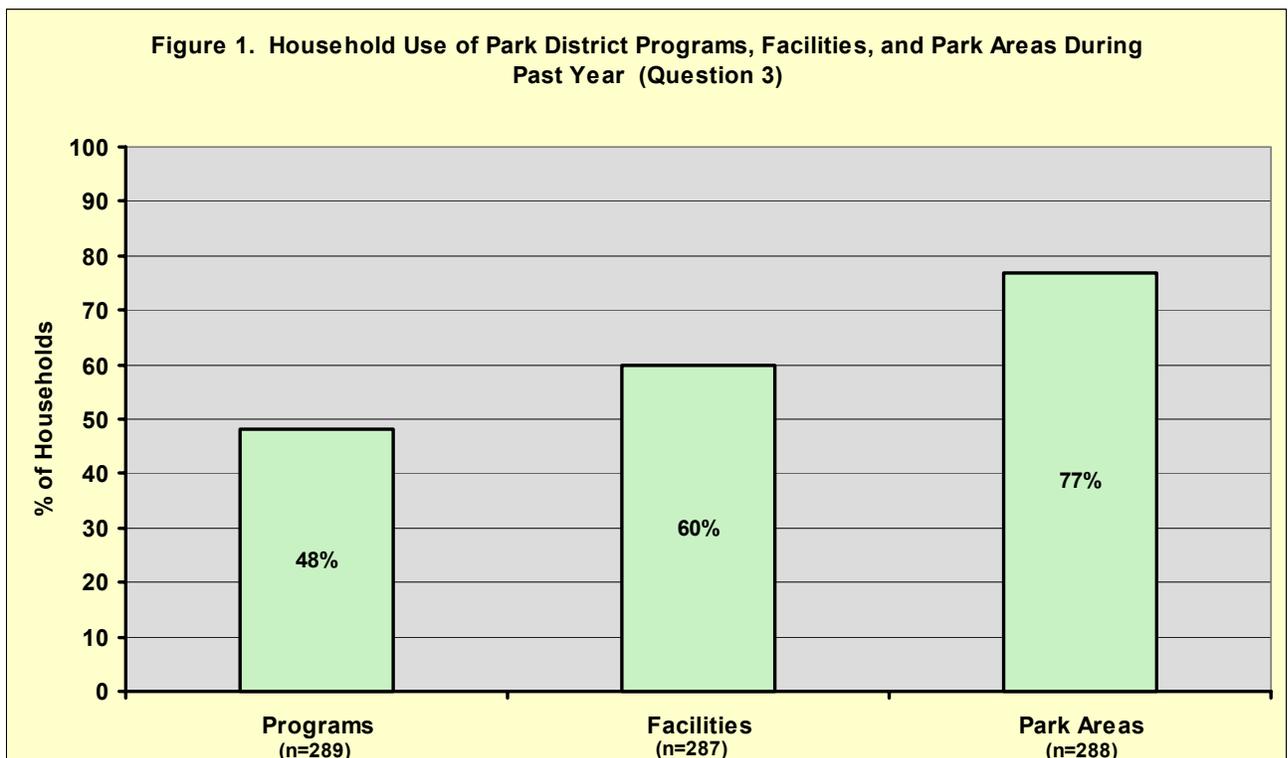
Concern: “Do residents use the programs, facilities and park areas of their local Park District?”

Questions 3 and 4 of the citizen survey sought information to address this question. Respondents were asked to indicate (1) household use of park district programs, facilities, and park areas during the past year and (2) household use of different providers of park and recreation services during the past year.

1. Household Use of Park District Programs, Facilities, and Park Areas

Respondents were asked the following question “**During the past year, approximately how many times have members in your household visited or participated in the following at your park district?**” (Question 3) The list of items included (1) participated in park district programs (2) visited park district facilities and (3) visited park district park areas. Response choices included five categories: none, 1-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-25 times, or more than 25 times. For purpose of presentation, responses were grouped into one of two categories, participated or did not participate.

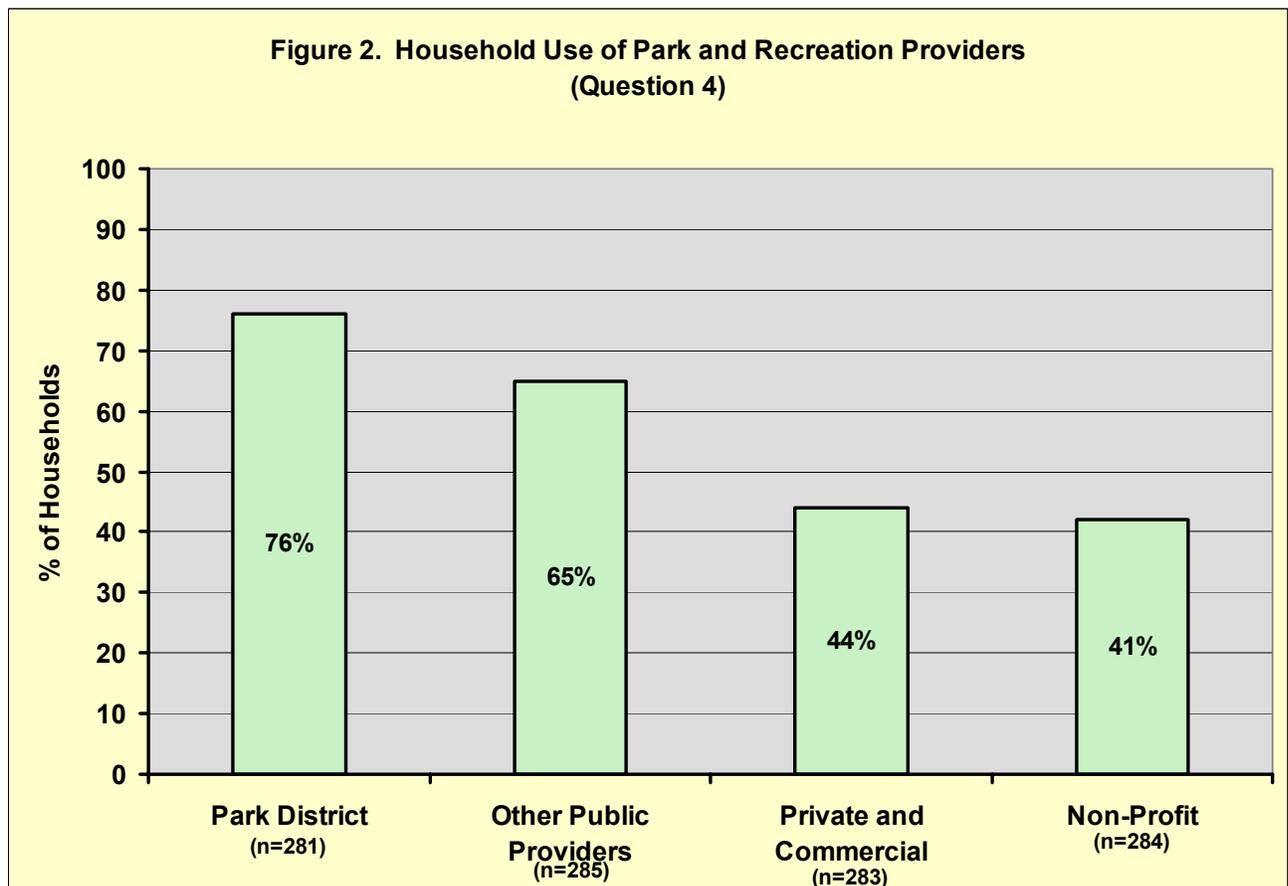
During the past year, 77% of respondent households visited at least one park district park area, 60% visited at least one park district facility, and 48% participated in at least one program offered by a park district (Figure 1).



2. Household Use of Various Park and Recreation Providers

There are several different types of providers of park and recreation programs and services, ranging from public to private as well as non-profit providers. Respondents were asked the following question “**During a typical year, about how many times does your household rely on the following providers for parks and recreation?**” (Question 4) The list of providers included (1) park districts, (2) other public areas (e.g., forest preserves, conservation district, etc), (3) private/commercial (e.g., country club, private fitness center, etc), and (4) non-profit (e.g., YMCA/YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, church, etc) during the past year for parks and recreation. Response choices included five categories: none, 1-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-25 times, or more than 25 times. For purpose of presentation, responses were grouped into one of two categories, used or did not use a specific provider.

During a typical year, respondent households rely on park districts more than any other recreation provider for recreation opportunities. Park districts were the most popular provider of park and recreation opportunities for respondent households in the community. Three out of every four respondent households (76%) indicated using park districts during a typical year while 65% used other public areas, 44% used private/commercial providers, and 41% used non-profit providers (Figure 2).



B. Household Satisfaction with Park District and Other Public Service Providers in the Community

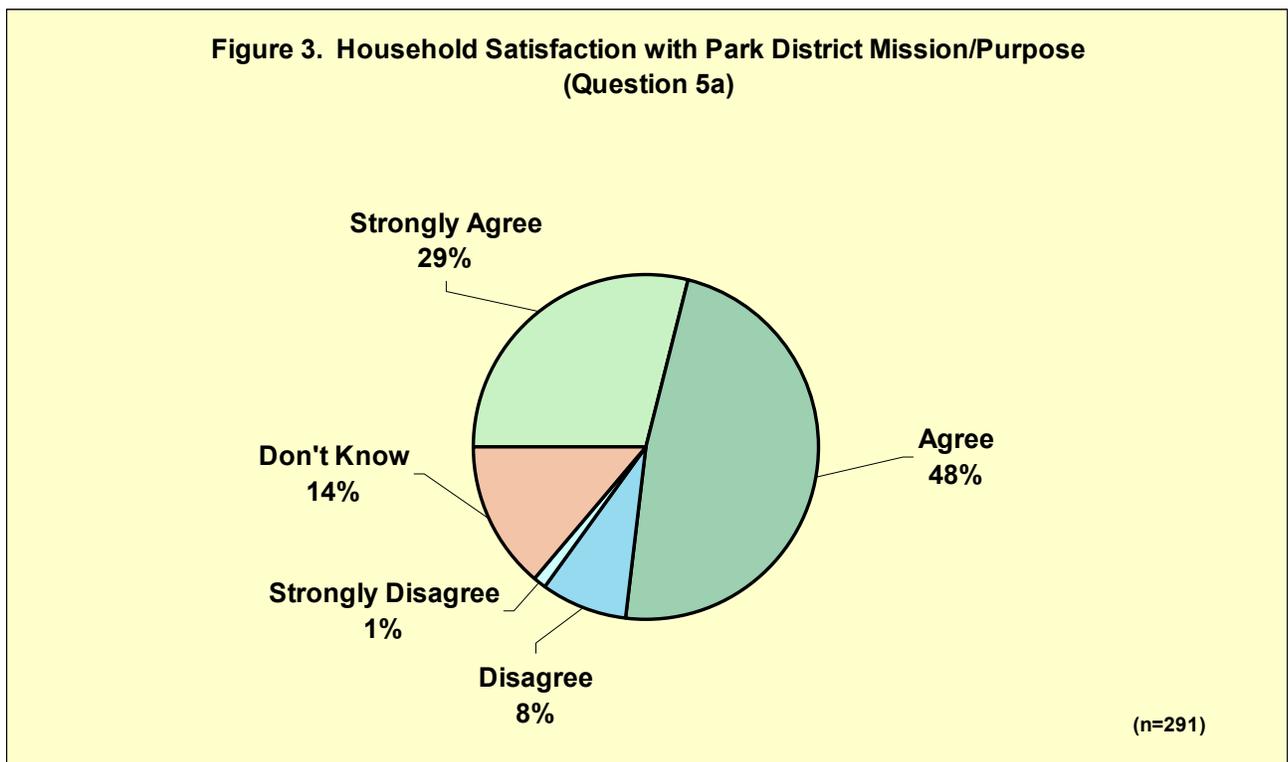
Concern: “Are residents satisfied with Park District programs, facilities and park areas?”

Questions 5a, 6, 7, and 12 of the citizen survey sought information to address this question. Respondent households were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with park district (1) mission/purpose (2) programs (3) facilities (4) park areas (5) staff and (6) an overall measure of respondent household satisfaction with park districts was also obtained. In addition, household respondents were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with selected public services in their community.

1. Household Satisfaction with Park District Mission/Purpose

Respondent households were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement “**I am satisfied with the mission/purpose of the park district.**” (Question 5a) Respondents rated the statement on a 4-point agreement scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree; a “don’t know” option was also available.

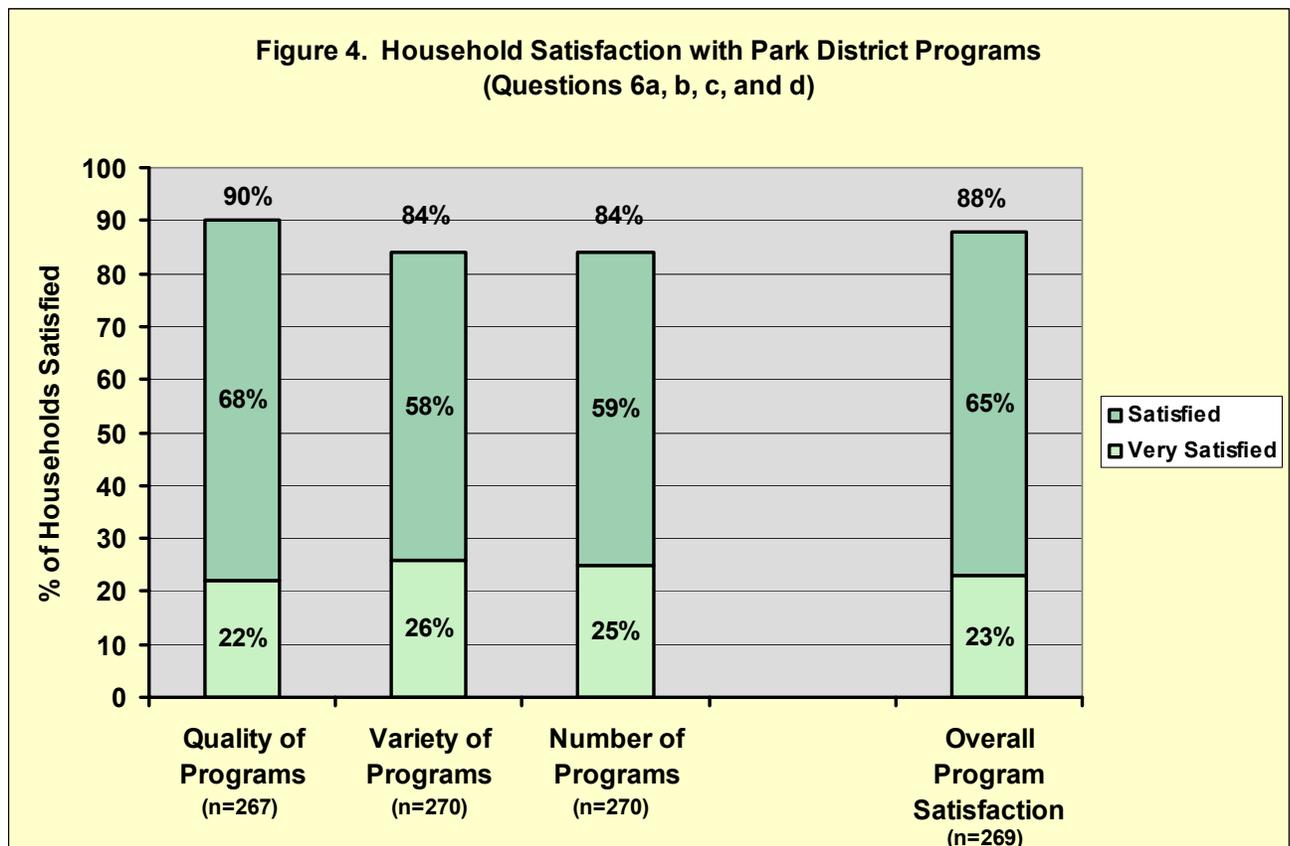
Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondent households agree with the mission/purpose of the park district, 9% disagree, and 14% of the respondent households indicated that they did not know (Figure 3).



2. Household Satisfaction with Park District Programs

Respondent households were asked “**How satisfied is your household with your park district’s programs?**” (Questions 6a, b, c, and d) Items rated by respondents included (1) quality of programs (2) variety of programs (3) number of programs and (4) overall program satisfaction. Respondents rated satisfaction with each item on a 4-point satisfaction scale where 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=satisfied, and 4=very satisfied.

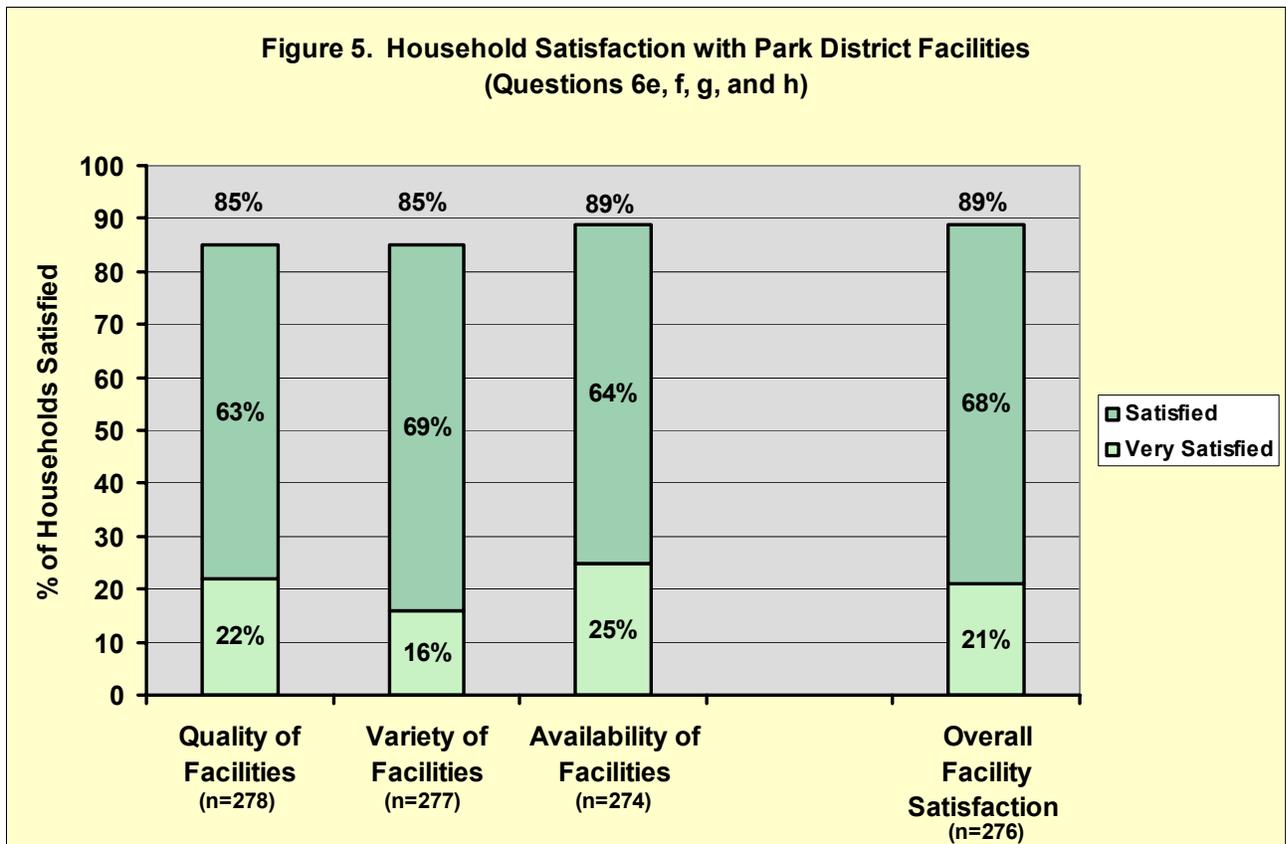
A large majority of respondent households are satisfied with the quality of programs (90%), variety of programs (84%), and number of programs (84%) offered by the park district. Overall, nearly 9 out of every 10 respondent households (88%) are satisfied with park district programs (Figure 4).



3. Household Satisfaction with Park District Facilities

Respondent households were asked “**How satisfied is your household with your park district’s facilities?**” (Questions 6e, f, g, and h) Items rated by respondents included (1) quality of facilities (2) variety of facilities (3) availability of facilities and (4) overall facility satisfaction. Respondents rated satisfaction with each item on a 4-point satisfaction scale where 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=satisfied, and 4=very satisfied.

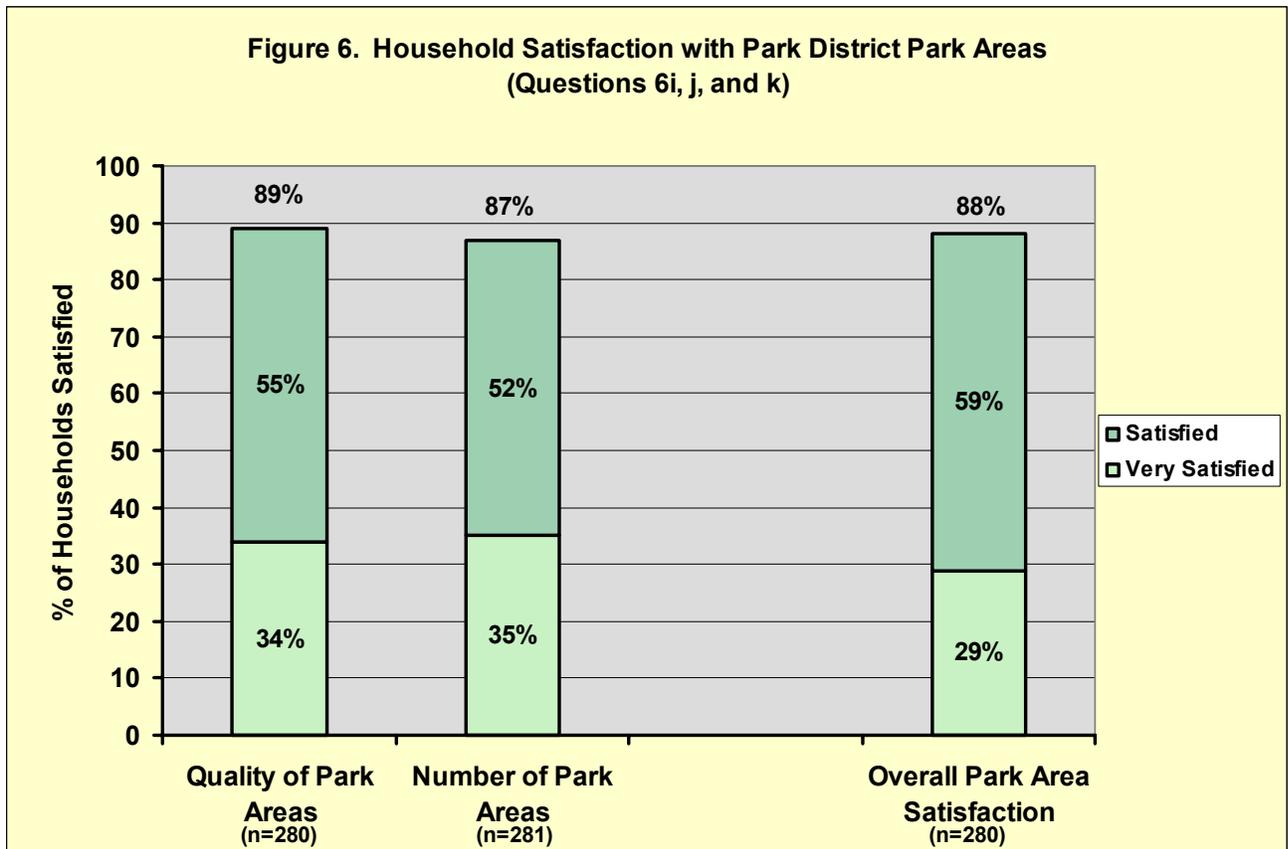
A large majority of respondent households are satisfied with the quality of facilities (85%), variety of facilities (85%), and availability of facilities (89%) offered by park districts. Overall, nearly 9 out of every 10 respondent households (89%) are satisfied with park district facilities (Figure 5).



4. Household Satisfaction with Park District Park Areas

Respondent households were asked “**How satisfied is your household with your park district’s park areas?**” (Questions 6i, j, and k) Items rated by respondents included (1) quality of park areas (2) number of park areas and (3) overall satisfaction with park areas. Respondents rated satisfaction with each item on a 4-point satisfaction scale where 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=satisfied, and 4=very satisfied.

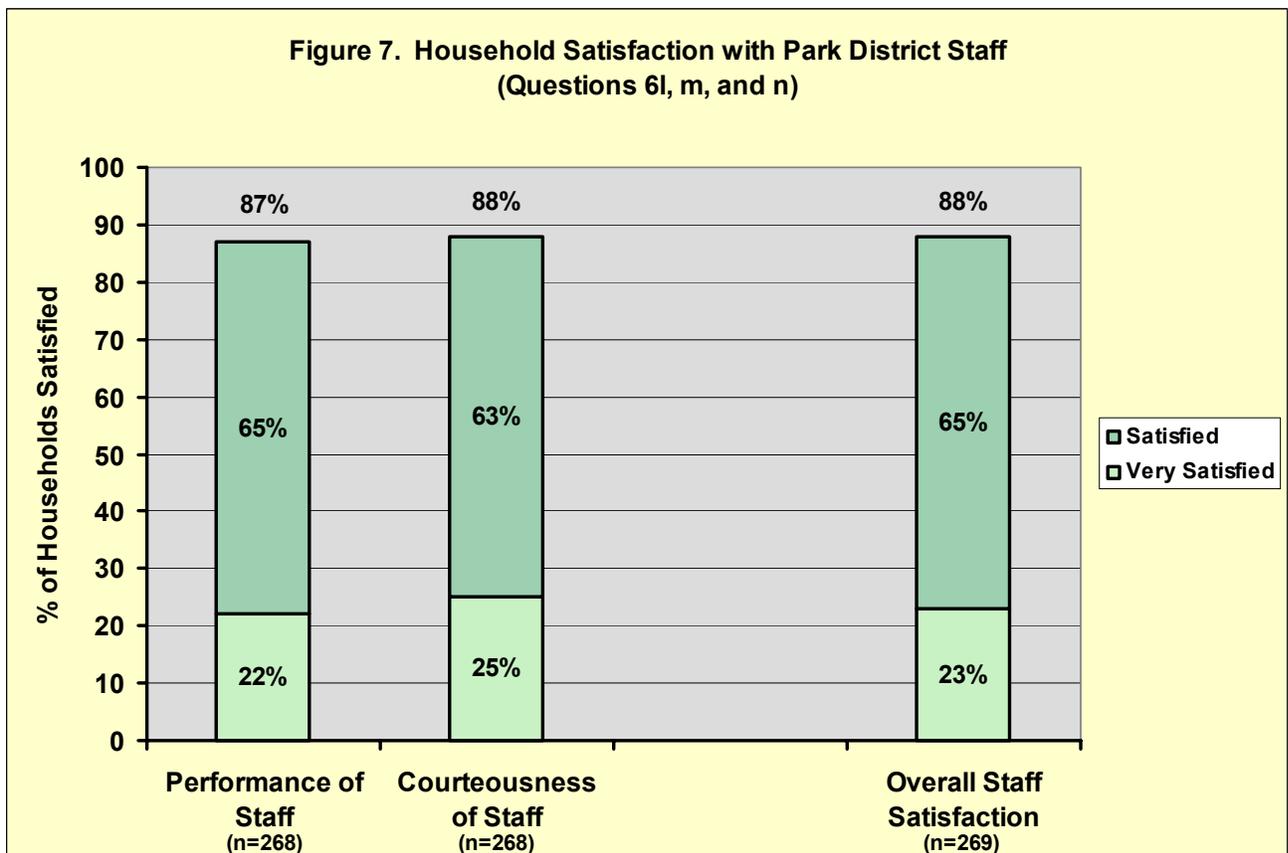
A large majority of respondent households are satisfied with the quality of park district park areas (89%) and number of park areas (87%). Overall, 88% of respondent households are satisfied with park district park areas (Figure 6).



5. Household Satisfaction with Park District Staff

Respondent households were asked “**How satisfied is your household with your park district’s staff?**” (Questions 6l, m, and n) Items rated by respondents included (1) performance of staff (2) courteousness of staff and (3) overall satisfaction with park staff. Respondents rated satisfaction with each item on a 4-point satisfaction scale where 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=satisfied, and 4=very satisfied.

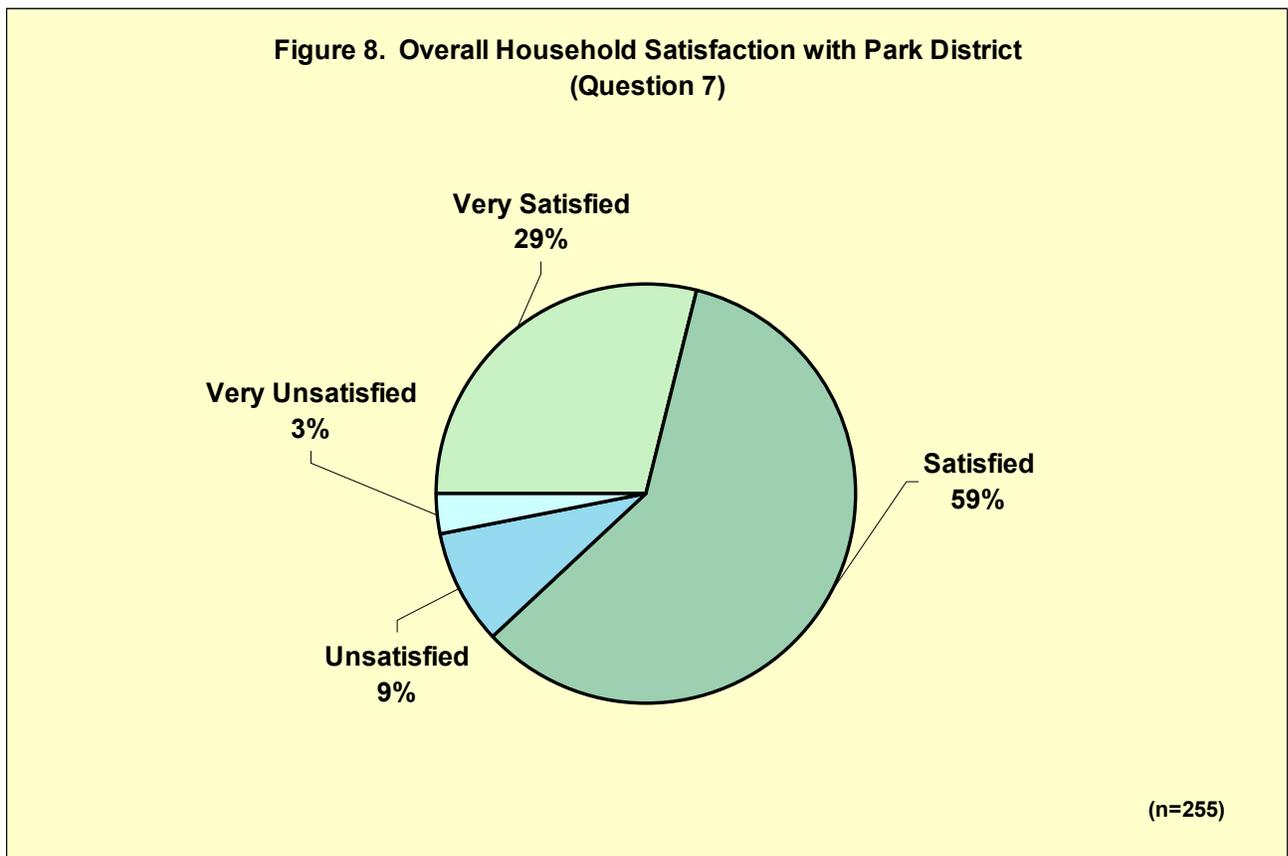
A large majority of respondent households are satisfied with the performance of park district staff (87%) and courteousness of staff (88%). Overall, 88% of respondent households are satisfied with park district staff (Figure 7).



6. Overall Household Satisfaction with Park District

Respondent households were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with the park district by the following question “**Overall, how satisfied is your household with the park district?**” (Question 7) Respondents rated overall satisfaction on a 4-point satisfaction scale where 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=satisfied, and 4=very satisfied.

Overall, nearly 9 out of every 10 households (88%) are satisfied with the park district (Figure 8).

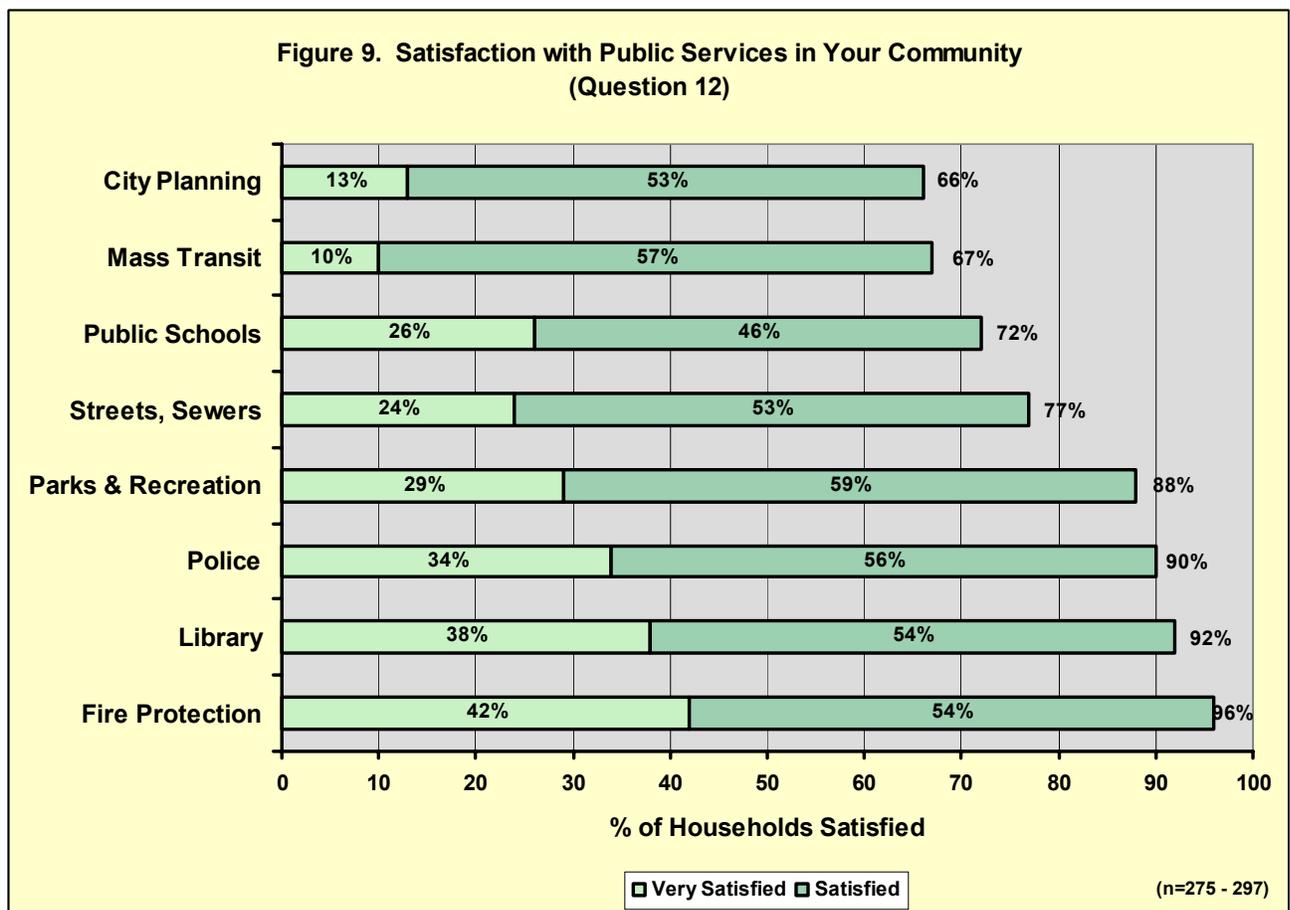


7. Household Satisfaction with Selected Public Services in Your Community

In an effort to compare the household satisfaction level of park and recreation services with other public services in a community, respondent households were asked “**How satisfied is your household with the following (eight) public services in your community?**”

(Question 12) Respondents rated satisfaction for each of the eight public services on a 4-point satisfaction scale where 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=satisfied, and 4=very satisfied.

Figure 9 displays respondent households’ satisfaction ratings for the eight public services. The majority of respondent households are satisfied with all eight public services. The public services with the highest satisfaction rating were fire protection (96%), library (92%), police (90%), and parks and recreation (88%). Compared to other public services in the community, household respondents are as satisfied with park and recreation services as with police, library, and fire protection services. Household respondents are more satisfied with park and recreation services than with streets/sewers, public schools, mass transit, and city planning services.



C. Perceived Benefits of Park Districts

Concern: “What are the perceived benefits of a Park District to the community and to participants?”

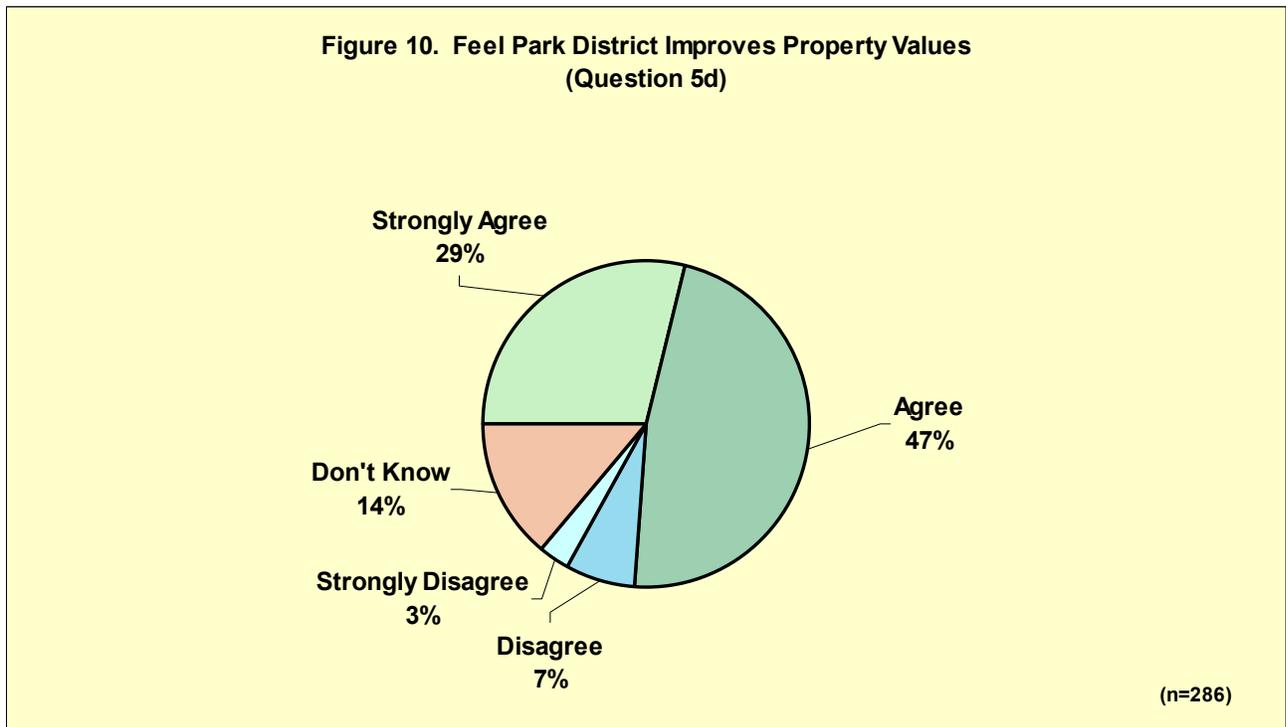
Questions 5d, 5e, and 20 of the citizen survey sought information to address this question. It is well established that a variety of community and participant benefits have been linked to park district programs, facilities, and park areas. To investigate potential benefits of a park district, household respondents were asked to rate (1) their agreement/disagreement with two potential benefits to the community (improves property values and enhances recruiting business/industry) and (2) the level of importance of eight potential benefits to participants.

1. Perceived Benefits to Community

Property Values

Respondents were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement “**The park district improves property values within the community.**” (Question 5d) Respondents rated the statement on a 4-point agreement scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree; a “don’t know” option was also available.

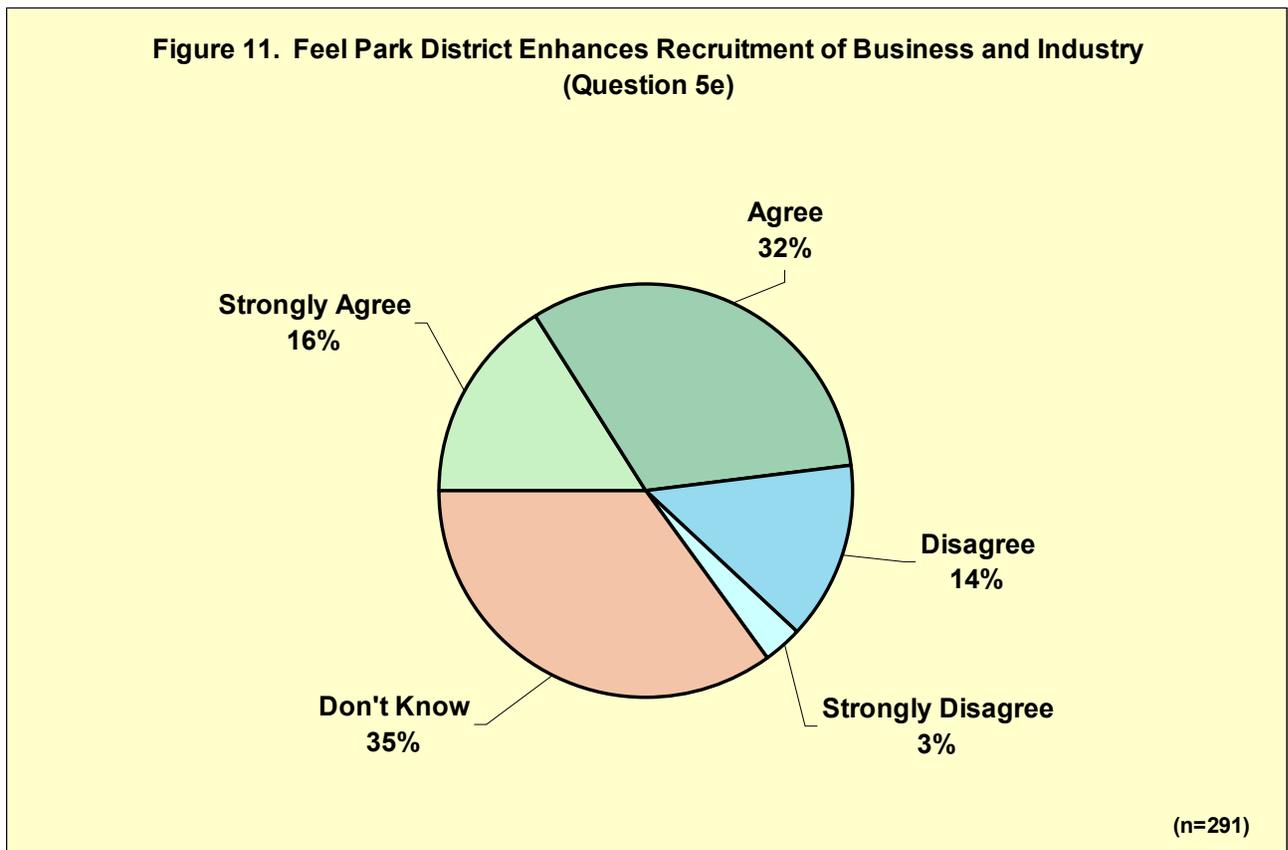
A majority of respondent households (76%) agree that a park district improves property values in a community (Figure 10). One out of every ten respondent households (10%) disagree that property values are improved while 14% don’t know.



Recruit Business and Industry

Respondents were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement “**The park district enhances the opportunity for the community to recruit business and industry.**” (Question 5e) Respondents rated the statement on a 4-point agreement scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree; a “don’t know” option was also available.

Nearly one-half of the respondent households (48%) agree that “the park district enhances the opportunity for the community to recruit business and industry,” while 17% disagree (Figure 11). It is worth noting that one out of every three respondent households (35%) did not know if park districts enhance the opportunity to recruit business and industry to the community.

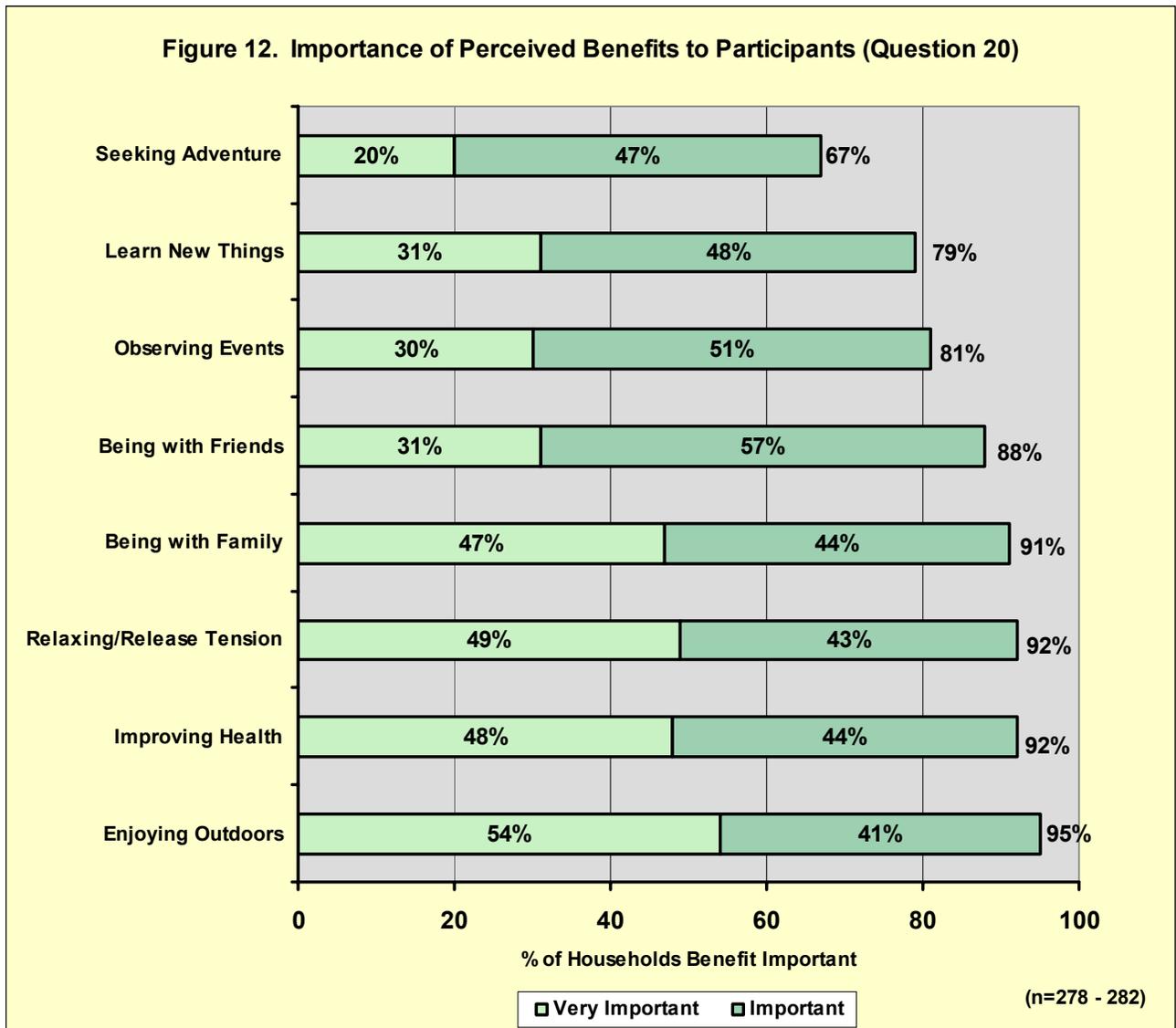


2. Perceived Benefits to Participants

Household respondents rated the importance of eight potential benefits from participating in park district programs, facilities, or park areas. Respondents were asked “...**how important is each of the following benefits to your household?**” (Question 20)

Respondents rated the importance of each potential benefit on a 4-point importance scale where 1=very unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=important, and 4=very important.

A majority of respondent households indicated all eight of the perceived benefits are important. The perceived benefits rated as most important by respondent households were enjoying outdoors (95%), improving health (92%), relaxing/releasing tension (92%), being with family (91%), and being with friends (88%) (Figure 12).



D. Household Attitudes About Park District Operations

Concern: “What is the perceived effectiveness of Park District operations?”

Questions 5b, 5c, 5f, and 19 of the citizen survey sought information to address this question. Household respondents were asked to rate two sets of items about park district operations. The first set of questions asked household respondents to rate the effectiveness of a set of eight items pertaining to park district operations. The second set of items, attitudes about park district operations, requested household respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with three statements pertaining to park district operations.

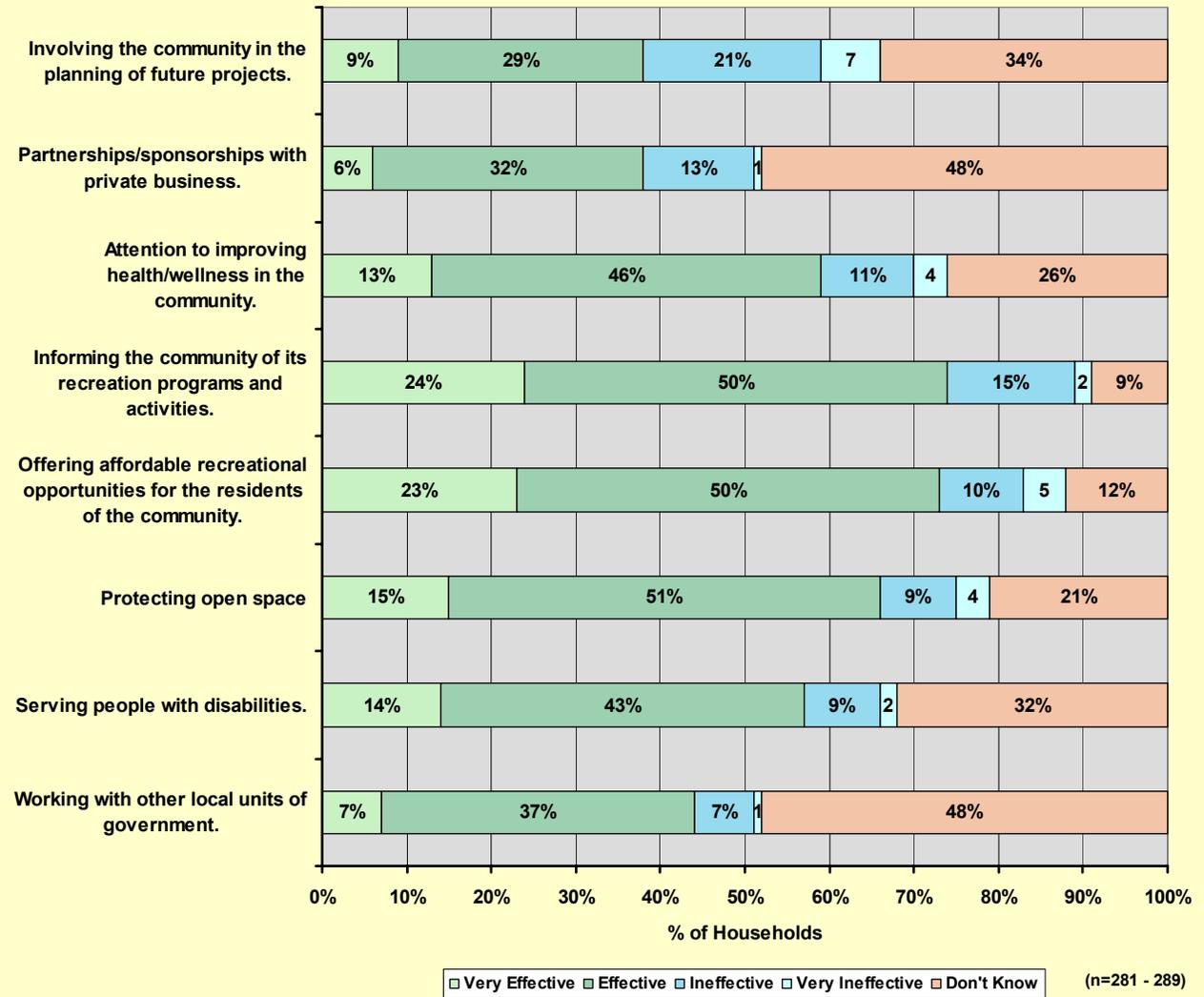
1. Perceived Effectiveness of Selected Park District Operations

Household respondents were asked “**How effective is your park district as it relates to (a selected set of eight park district operations)?**” (Question 19) Respondents rated the effectiveness of each park district operation on a 4-point effectiveness scale where 1=very ineffective, 2=ineffective, 3=effective, and 4=very effective; a “don’t know” option was also available.

The perceived effectiveness of various park district operations ranged from a low of 38% (involving the community in the planning of future projects and partnerships/sponsorships with private business) to a high of 74% (informing the community of its recreation programs and activities) (Figure 13). A substantial proportion of respondent households (ranging from 9% to 48% depending on the park district operation) indicated they did not know the effectiveness of the park district operation.

Park district operations perceived as most effective by a majority of household respondents included “informing the community of its recreation programs and activities” (74%), “offering affordable recreational opportunities for the residents of the community” (73%), “protecting open space” (66%), “attention to improving health/wellness in the community (59%), and serving people with disabilities (57%). Those park district operations rated as least effective included “working with other local units of government” (44%), “partnerships/sponsorships with private business (38%) and “involving the community in the planning of future projects” (38%).

**Figure 13. Perceived Effectiveness of Park District Operations
(Question 19)**

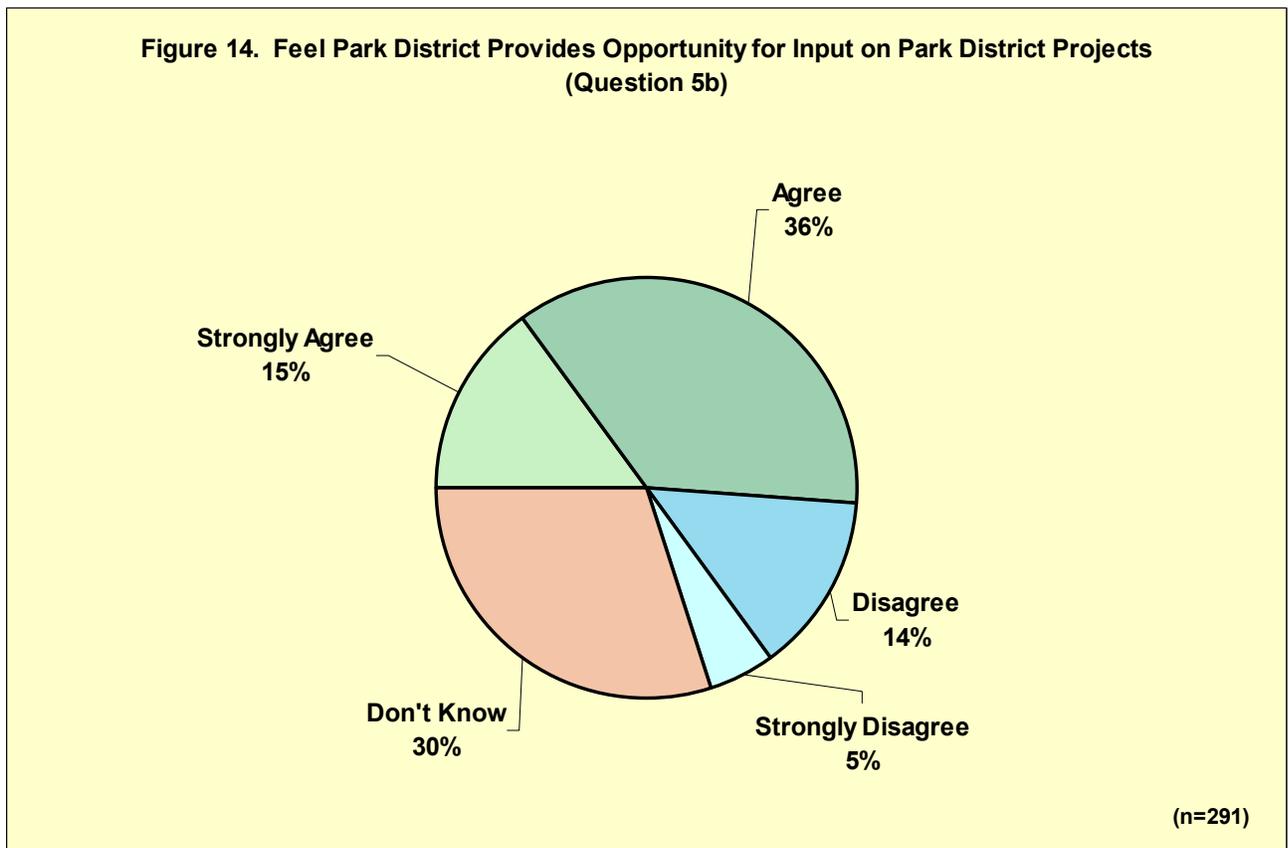


2. Attitudes About Park District Operations

Respondent households were asked about their agreement or disagreement with three sets of items: (1) opportunity for citizen input (2) management of tax dollars and (3) safety in parks. Respondents rated each statement on a 4-point agreement scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree; a “don’t know” option was also available.

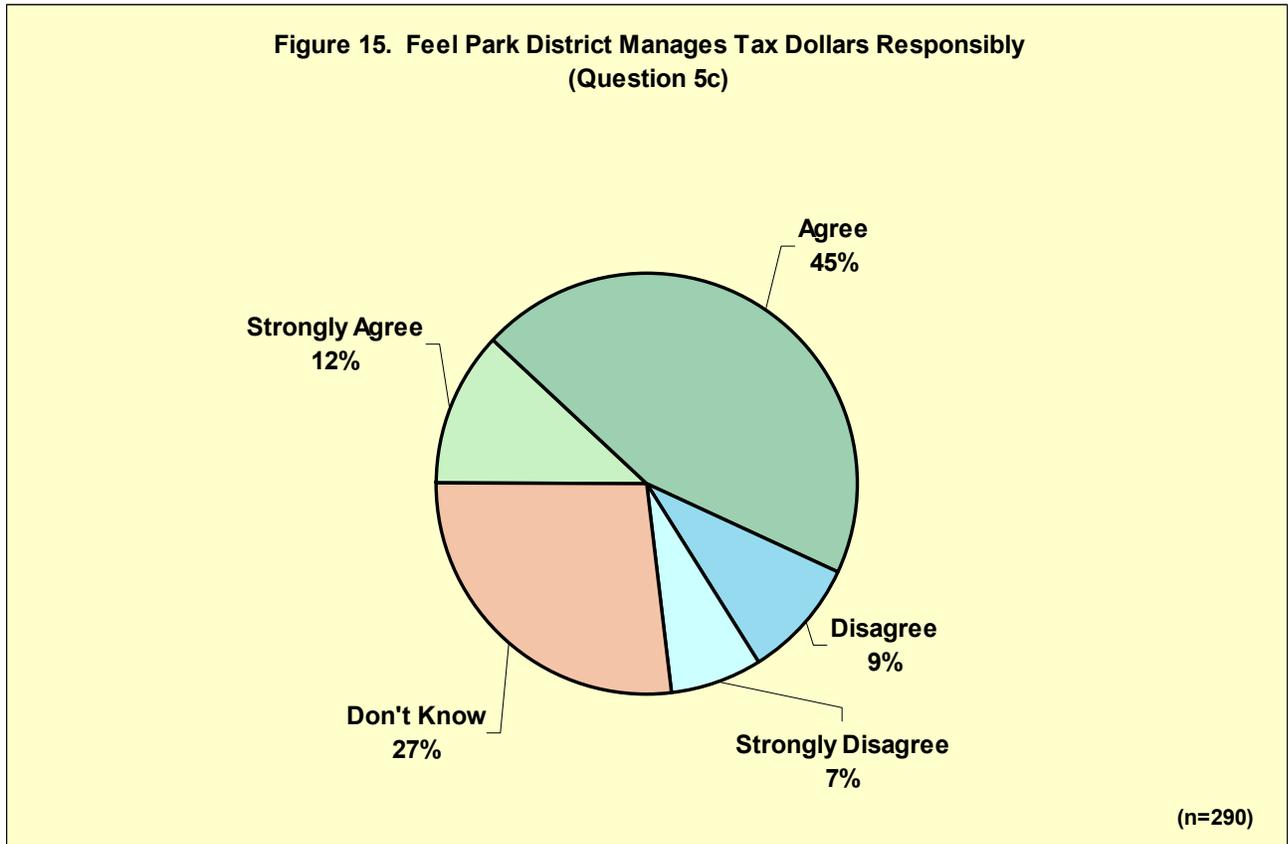
Opportunity for Citizen Input

Fifty-one percent (51%) of respondent households agree “**There is ample opportunity to provide input for park district projects**” (Question 5b), while 19% disagree (Figure 14). It is worth noting that nearly one out of every three respondent households (30%) did not know if there is an opportunity to provide input for park district projects.



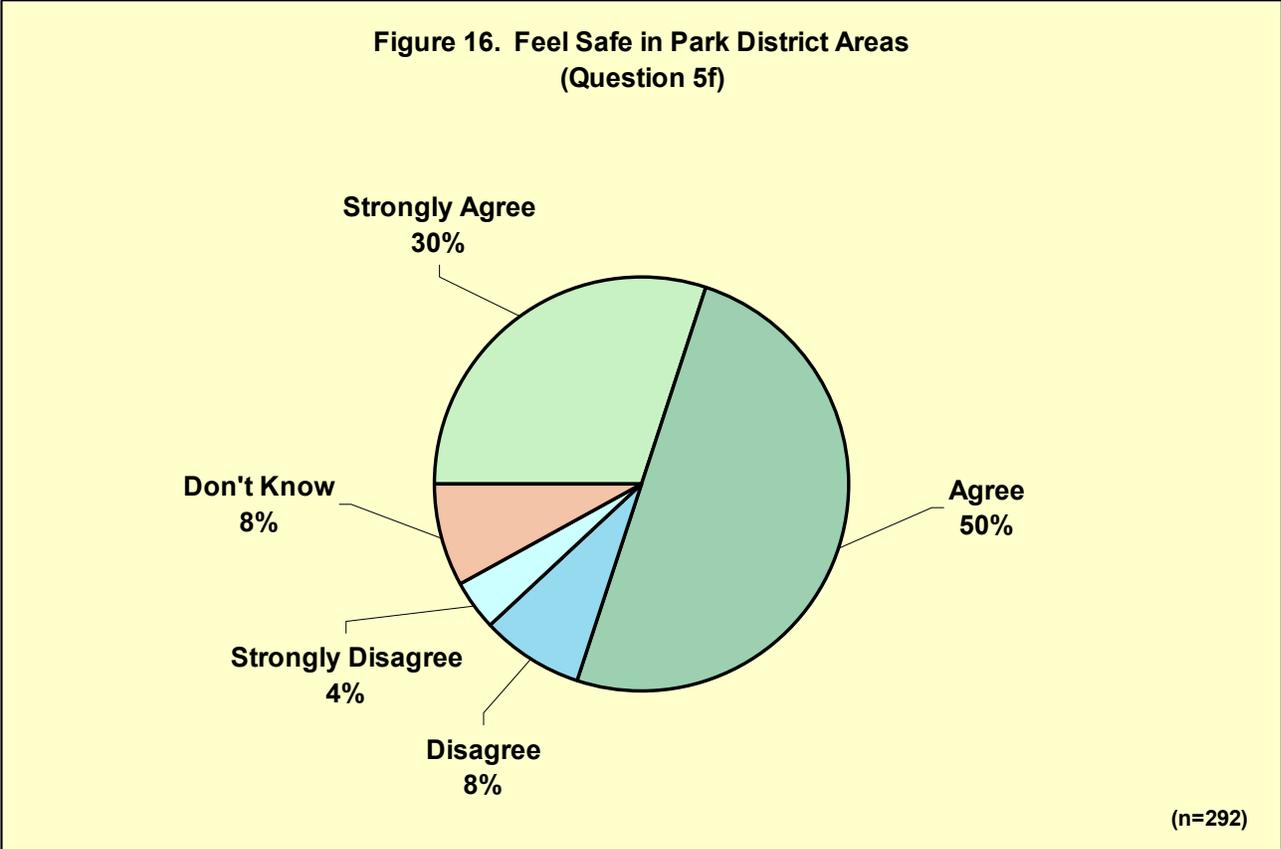
Management of Tax Dollars

A majority of respondent households (57%) agree that “**The park district manages tax dollars responsibly**” (Question 5c), 16% of the respondents disagree, while 27% of the respondents don't know (Figure 15).



Safety in Parks

Eight out of every ten households (80%) agree that “I feel safe in park district areas” (Question 5f), 12% of the respondents disagree, and 8% of the respondents indicated that they did not know if areas were safe or not (Figure 16).



E. Attitudes About Park District and Consolidated Government

Concern: “Can park and recreation programs and services be better provided by a special district (Park District) or consolidated government (City/Village or County)?”

Questions 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14 of the citizen survey sought information to address this question. Respondent households were asked: (1) their attitudes about best government provider for park and recreation services (2) their attitudes about park district consolidation with a larger governmental unit and (3) their awareness of park district open meetings.

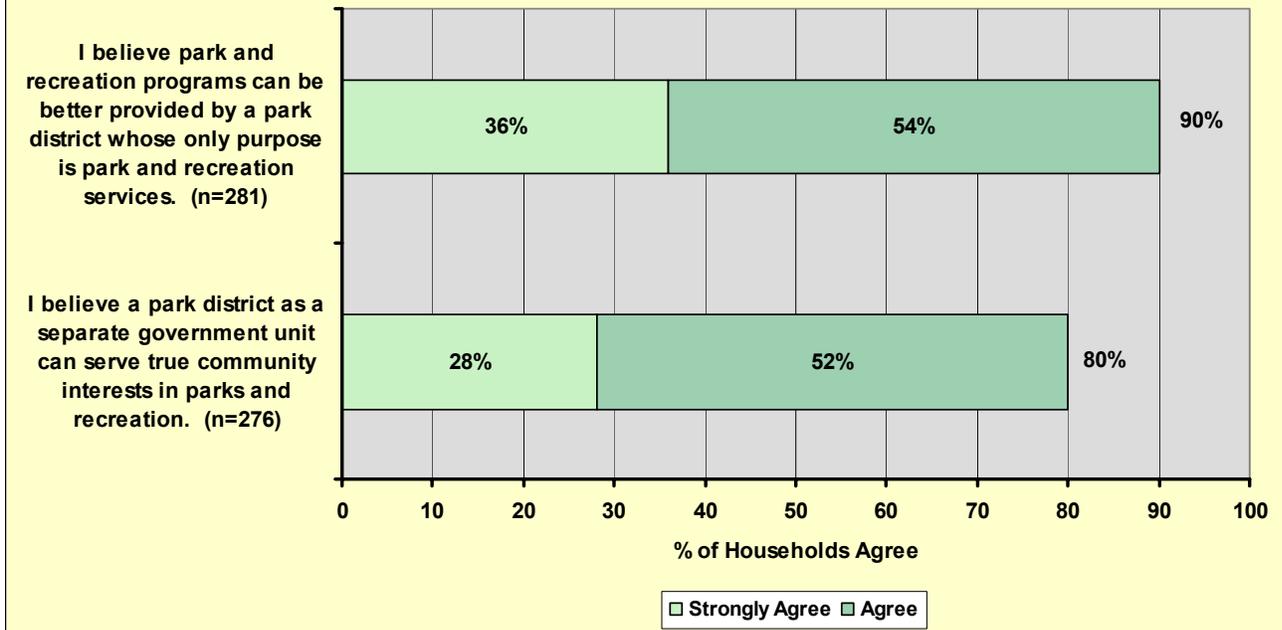
1. Attitudes Concerning Whether Park and Recreation Programs Can Best be Provided by a Special District or Consolidated Government

Provision of Park and Recreation Programs and Services

Respondent households were asked about their agreement or disagreement with two statements: (1) **“I believe park and recreation programs can be better provided by a park district whose only purpose is park and recreation services” (Question 8a)** and (2) **“I believe a park district as a separate governmental unit can serve true community interests in parks and recreation.” (Question 8d)** Respondents rated each statement on a 4-point agreement scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

Figure 17 displays the results of two statements assessing respondent household feeling about the most appropriate unit of government for providing park and recreation services. Nine out of every ten respondent households (90%) believe park and recreation programs can be better provided by a park district whose only purpose is park and recreation services. Eighty percent (80%) of respondent households believe a park district as a separate governmental unit can serve true community interests in parks and recreation. Responses to both statements indicate strong support for the park district as the unit of government that should provide recreation programs, facilities, and park areas in their community.

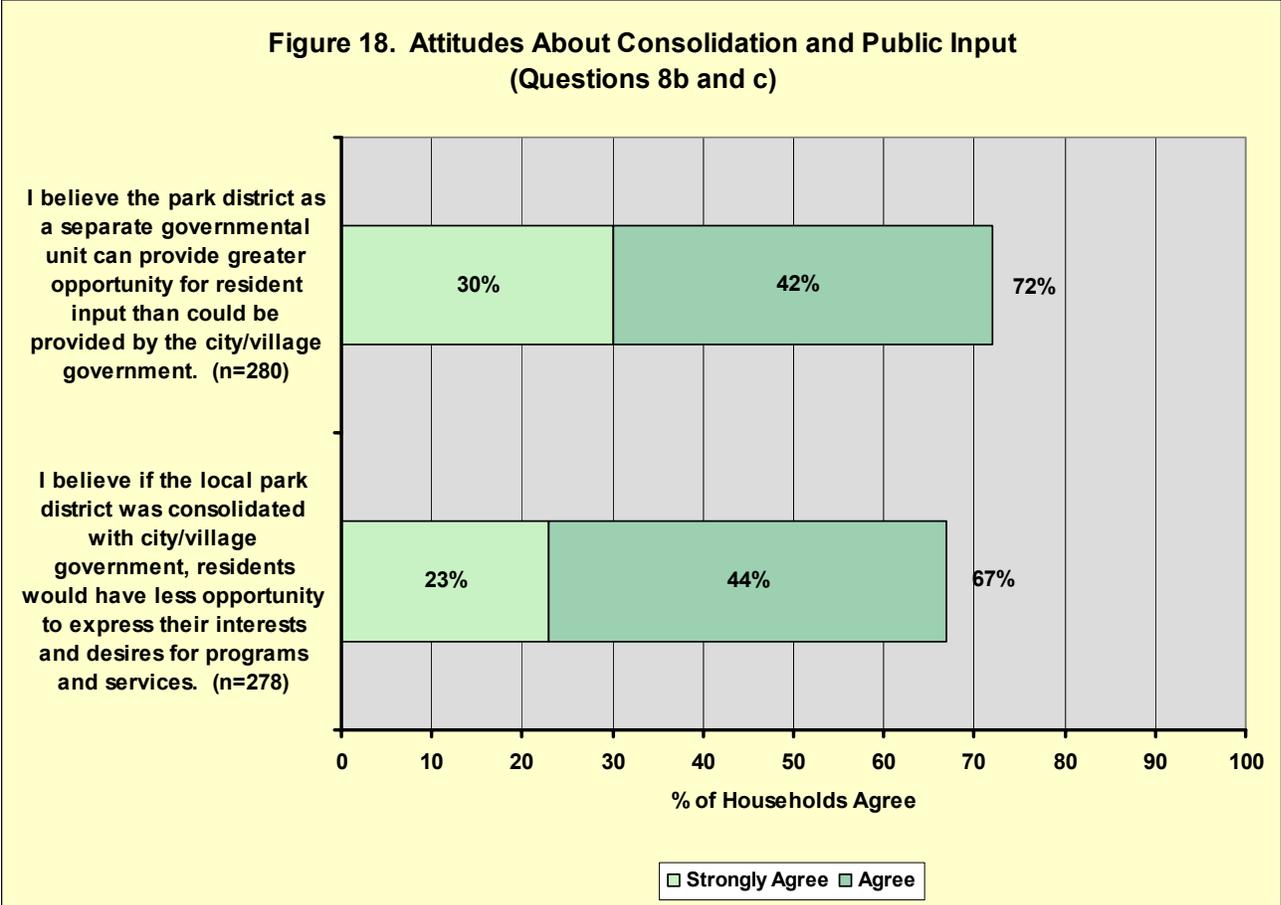
**Figure 17. Feelings About Park District as a Special District
(Questions 8a and d)**



Opportunity for Citizen Input

Respondent households were asked about their agreement or disagreement with two statements: (1) **“I believe the park district as a separate governmental unit can provide greater opportunity for resident input than could be provided by the city/village government”** (Question 8b) and (2) **“I believe if the local park district was consolidated with city/village government, residents would have less opportunity to express their interests and desires for programs and services.”** (Question 8c) Respondents rated each statement on a 4-point agreement scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

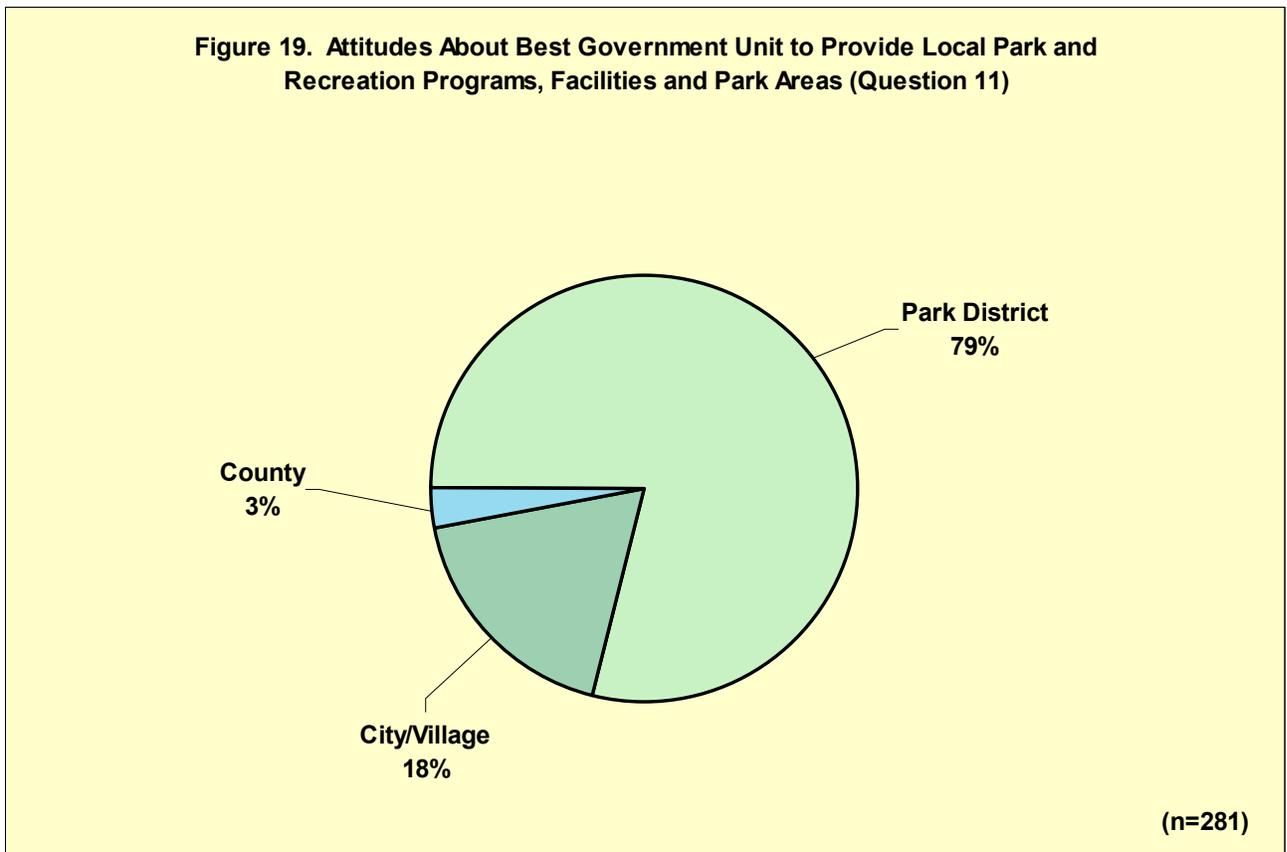
A majority of respondent households (72%) believe the park district as a separate governmental unit can provide greater opportunity for resident input than could be provided by the city/village government (Figure 18). Sixty-seven percent (67%) of respondent households believe “if the local park district was consolidated with city/village government, residents would have less opportunity to express their interests and desires for programs and services. Responses to both statements indicate strong support for the park district, compared to city/village government, as the unit of government that would provide greater opportunity for citizen input.



Best Government Unit to Provide Local Park and Recreation Programs, Facilities and Park Areas

Respondent households were asked “Which unit of local government do you think would be the best provider of park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas?” (Question 11) Respondent choices included: (1) park district (2) city/village or (3) county government.

Nearly eight out of every ten respondent households (79%) indicated that the park district would be the best provider of park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas (Figure 19). Eighteen percent of respondent households felt the city/village government would be best provider while only 3% felt the county government would be the best provider.

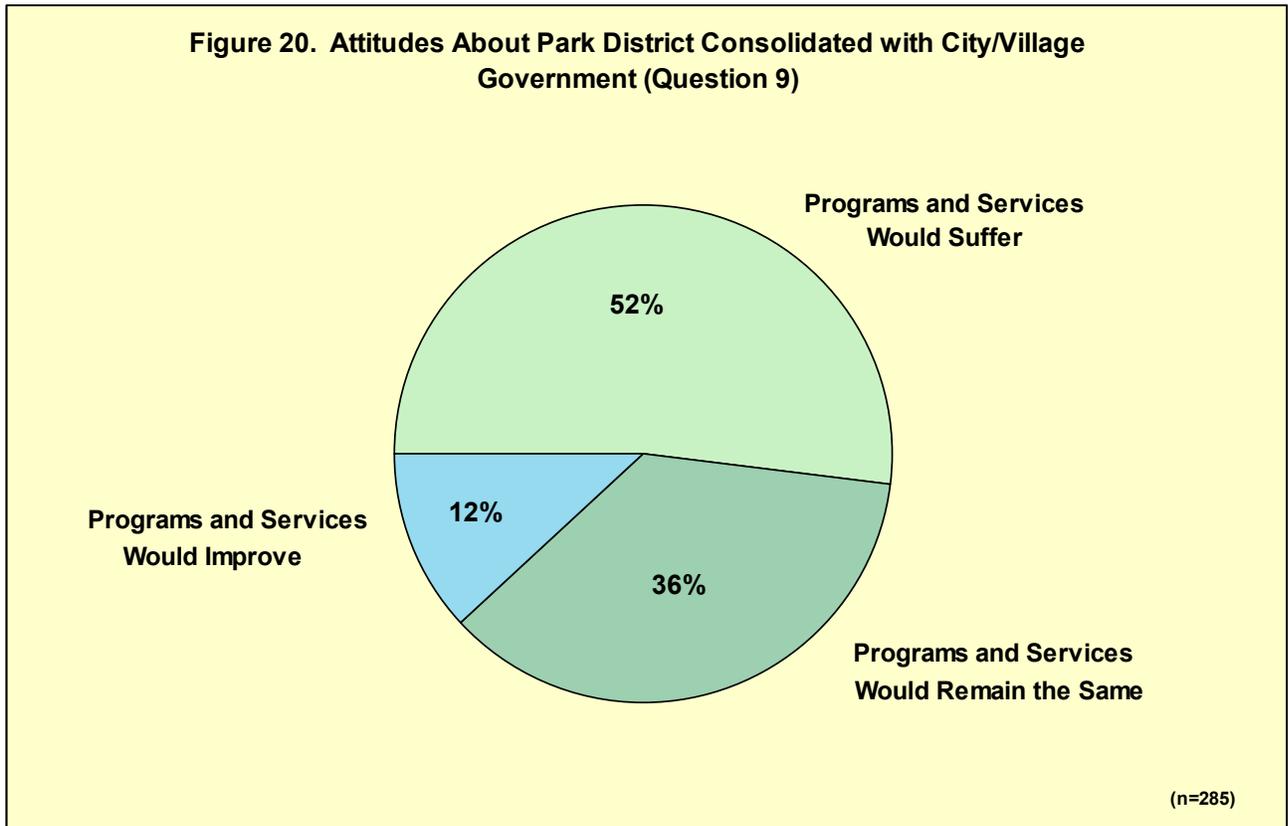


2. Attitudes Concerning the Effects of Park District Consolidation with a Larger Governmental Unit

Park District Consolidation with City/Village Government

Respondent households were asked “If park district programs, facilities, and park areas were consolidated with city/village government, do you think park and recreation programs and services would (1) suffer (2) remain the same or (3) improve?” (Question 9)

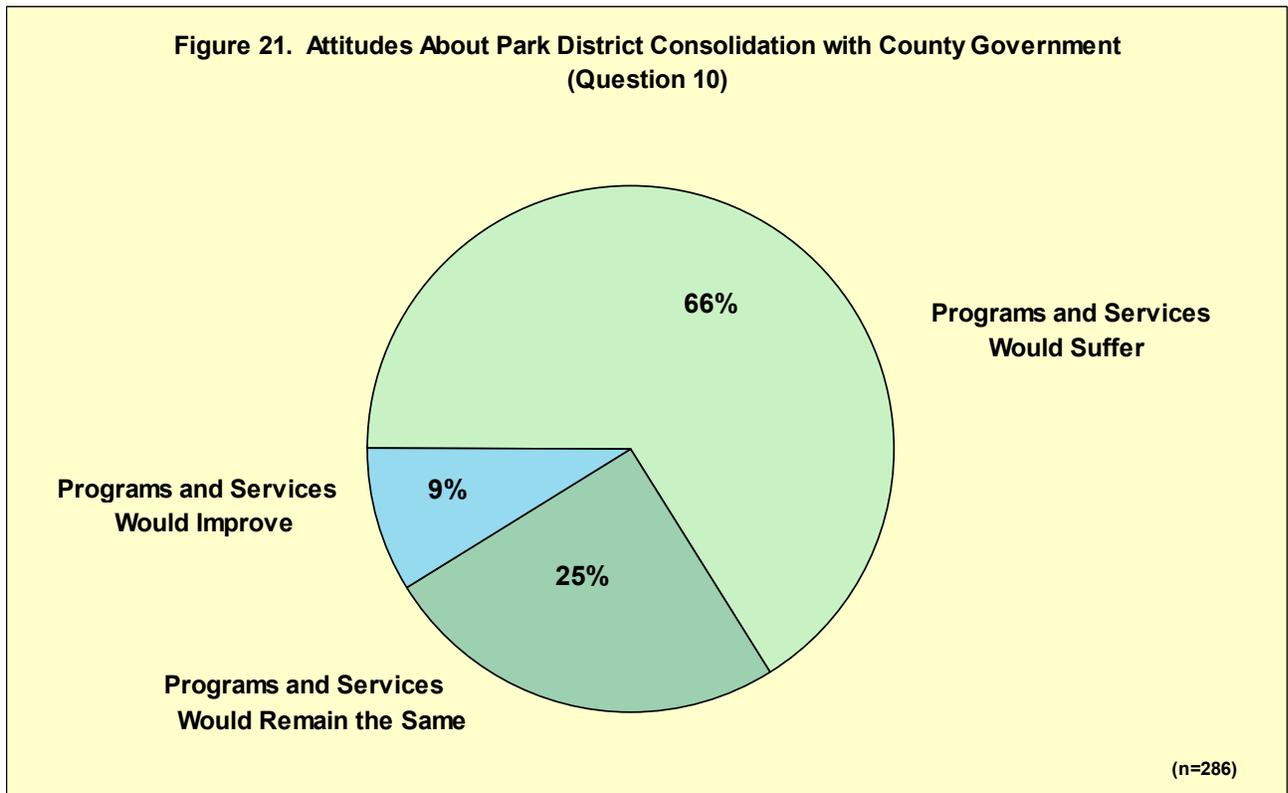
Only 12% of household respondents felt park and recreation programs and services would improve if consolidated with city/village government. On the other hand, a majority of household respondents (52%) indicated that park and recreation programs and services would suffer if the park district was consolidated with city/village government (Figure 20).



Park District Consolidation with County Government

Respondent households were asked “If park district programs, facilities, and park areas were consolidated with county government, do you think park and recreation programs and services would (1) suffer (2) remain the same or (3) improve?” (Question 10)

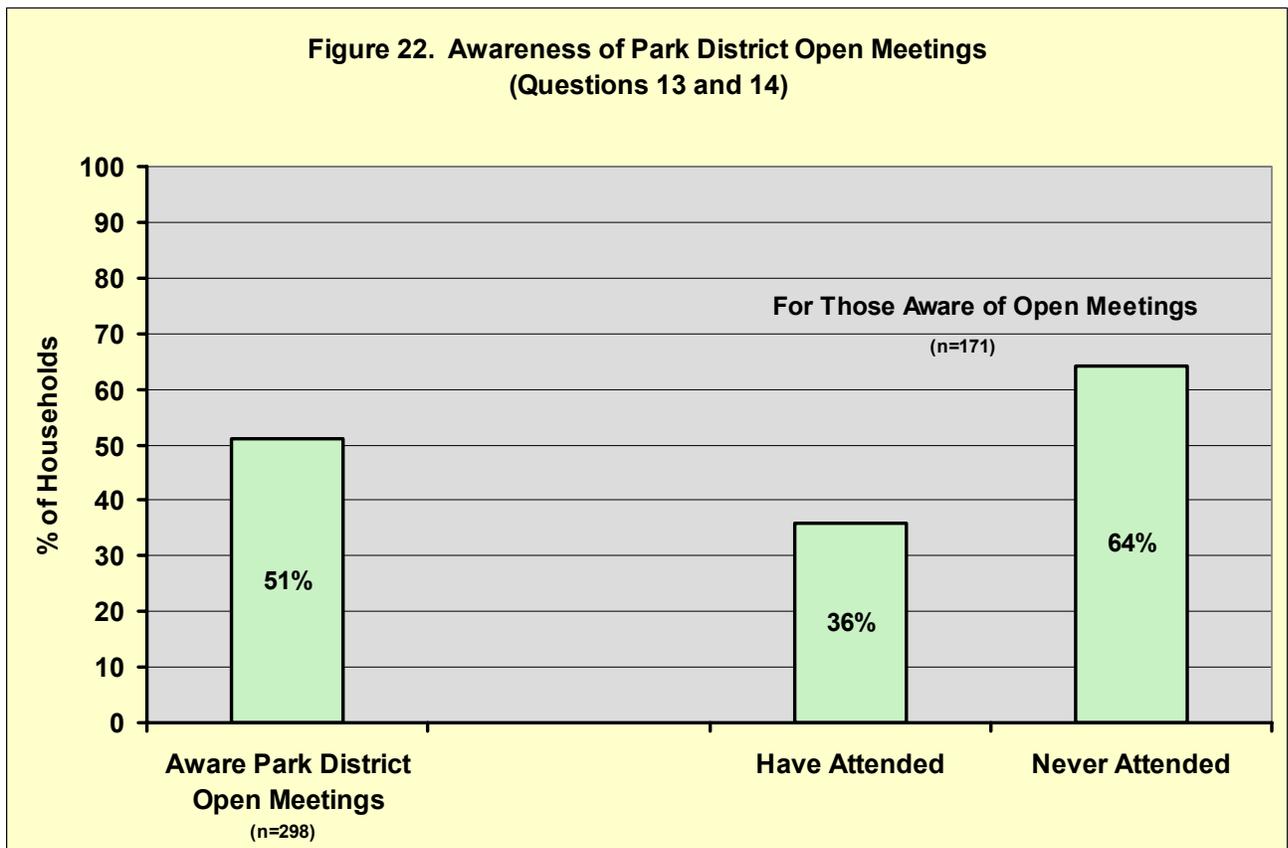
Sixty-six percent (66%) of household respondents indicated that park and recreation programs and services would suffer if the park district was consolidated with county government while only 9% felt they would improve (Figure 21).



3. Awareness of Park District Open Meetings

Respondents were asked the following question “Are you aware that your park district holds open meetings which are available for you or members of your household to attend and voice your interests and concerns?” (Question 13) Respondents who were aware of park district open meetings answered the following question “Have you or members of your household ever attended an open meeting of your local park district?” (Question 14)

One-half of the respondent households (51%) indicated they are aware that the park district holds open meetings which are available for the public to attend and voice their interests and concerns (Figure 22). For those respondent households that are aware of park district open meetings, 36% have attended at least one meeting.



F. Household and Respondent Characteristics

1. Household Characteristics

Household characteristics are summarized in Table 3. These characteristics included number of people in household, the type of family unit, and total household income. The average number of people in the household is 2.7 people, a majority of households (66%) have children, and 30% of the households have a total household income of \$100,000 or more.

Table 3. Household Characteristics		
Household Characteristic	Sample Value	Illinois Population Value
Number in Household	Range 1 – 8 people Average 2.7 people	Average 2.7 people
Family Unit	%	%
No children	34	32
Children	66	68
Total Household Income	%	%
<\$15,000	7	14
\$15,000 to \$34,999	12	23
\$35,000 to \$99,999	51	49
\$100,000 to \$149,999	18	9
\$150,000 to \$199,999	7	3
\$200,000 or more	5	3

Note: Illinois Population Value is for information purposes only and comparisons with the Sample Value should not be made. The Illinois Population Value includes information from all 102 counties in the state, the Sample Value includes counties with a park district; that is, 73 of the 102 counties (29 counties do not have a park district in the county).

2. Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics are summarized in Table 4. These characteristics included gender, age, years lived in park district, race, and education. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents were male, with an average age of 56 years, have lived in the park district for an average of 24 years, 82% were white, and 47% hold at least a bachelor's degree.

Table 4. Respondent Characteristics		
Respondent Characteristic	Sample Value	Illinois Population Value
Gender	%	%
Male	50	49
Female	50	51
Age	Range 22 to 92 Average 56	Not Applicable
Years in Park District	Range 1 – 91 yrs Average 24 yrs	Not Applicable
Race	%	% ¹
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	<1
Asian	3	4
Black or African-American	6	15
Hispanic or Latino	8	14
White	82	80
Other	1	1
Education	%	% ¹
Less than 12th grade	3	18
High School/GED	20	27
Some college, no degree	22	22
Associate degree	9	6
Bachelor's degree	23	17
Graduate or professional degree	23	10

¹ Total adds to more than 100% since Hispanic/Latino may be of any race.

Note: Illinois Population Value is for information purposes only and comparisons with the Sample Value should not be made. The Illinois Population Value includes information from all 102 counties in the state, the Sample Value includes counties with a park district; that is, 73 of the 102 counties (29 counties do not have a park district in the county).

IV. Summary

The following is a summary of the key findings of the study:

A. Household Use of Recreation Programs, Facilities, Park Areas, and Providers

Concern: “Do residents use the programs, facilities and park areas of their local Park District?”

- During the past year, 48% of the households have participated in a park district program, 60% have visited a park district facility, and 77% visited a park district park area.
- Park district is the most used provider of park and recreation services and programs in the community, 76% of the respondent households rely on park district recreation services and programs during a typical year. A significant proportion of households also rely on other recreation service and program providers; 65% use other public areas, 44% use private and commercial programs and services, and 41% use non-profit providers.

B. Household Satisfaction with Park District and Other Public Service Providers in the Community

Concern: “Are residents satisfied with Park District programs, facilities and park areas?”

- Three out of every four households (77%) are satisfied with the mission/purpose of the park district.
- A large majority of household respondents are satisfied with the park district programs (88%), facilities (89%), park areas (88%), and staff (88%).
- Overall, 9 out of every 10 household respondents (88%) indicated they are satisfied with the park district.
- Compared to other public services in the community, household respondents are as satisfied with park and recreation services (88%) as with police (90%), library (92%), and fire protection services (96%). Household respondents are more satisfied with park and recreation services (88%) than with streets/sewers (77%), public schools (72%), mass transit (67%), and city planning services (66%).

C. Perceived Benefits of Park Districts

Concern: “What are the perceived benefits of a Park District to the community and to participants?”

- Three out of every 4 household respondents (76%) agree a park district improves property values in the community.
- Almost one-half of the household respondents (48%) agree a park district enhances the opportunity to recruit business and industry to the community while 35% don't know.
- Nearly 9 out of every 10 household respondents rated the importance of several perceived benefits from participating in park and recreation programs and services as important, enjoying the outdoors (95%), improving health (92%), relaxing/releasing tension (92%), being with family (91%), and being with friends (88%).

D. Household Attitudes About Park District Operations

Concern: “What is the perceived effectiveness of Park District operations?”

- Park district operations perceived as most effective by a majority of household respondents included “informing the community of its recreation programs and activities” (74%), “offering affordable recreational opportunities for the residents of the community” (73%), “protecting open space” (66%), “attention to improving health/wellness in the community (59%), and serving people with disabilities (57%). Those park district operations perceived as least effective included “working with other local units of government” (44%), “partnerships/sponsorships with private business (38%) and “involving the community in the planning of future projects” (38%).
- A substantial proportion of respondent households (ranging from 9% to 48% depending on the park district operation) indicated they did not know the effectiveness of the specific park district operation.
- Fifty-one percent (51%) of respondent households agree there is ample opportunity to provide input for park district projects. It is worth noting that nearly one out of every three respondent households (30%) did not know if there is an opportunity to provide input for park district projects.
- A majority of respondent households agree that the park district manages tax dollars responsibly (57%), while 27% of the respondents don't know.
- Eight out of every ten households (80%) agree that they feel safe in park district areas.

E. Attitudes About Park District and Consolidated Government

Concern: “Can park and recreation programs and services be better provided by a special district (Park District) or consolidated government (City/Village or County)?”

- Nine out of every ten respondent households (90%) believe park and recreation programs can be better provided by a park district whose only purpose is park and recreation services. Eighty percent (80%) of respondent households believe a park district as a separate governmental unit can serve true community interests in parks and recreation.
- A majority of respondent households believe the park district as a separate governmental unit can provide greater opportunity for resident input than could be provided by the city/village government (72%) and believe if the local park district was consolidated with city/village government, residents would have less opportunity to express their interests and desires for programs and services (67%).
- Nearly eight out of every ten respondent households (79%) indicated that the park district would be the best provider of park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas.
- Only 12% of household respondents felt park and recreation programs and services would improve if consolidated with city/village government. On the other hand, a majority of household respondents (52%) indicated that park and recreation programs and services would suffer if the park district was consolidated with city/village government.
- Sixty-six percent (66%) of household respondents indicated that park and recreation programs and services would suffer if the park district was consolidated with county government while only 9% felt they would improve.
- One-half of the respondent households (51%) indicated they are aware that the park district holds open meetings which are available for the public to attend and voice their interests and concerns. For those respondent households that are aware of park district open meetings, 36% have attended at least one meeting.

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Instrument—An 8-Page Questionnaire

Illinois Park Districts: Citizen Perspectives

This questionnaire asks for viewpoints about your household's local park district programs, facilities and park areas. **You are being asked to respond for your household.** In particular, we would like to know your household's recreation participation patterns and satisfaction with the park district. The information you provide about your household will help in the evaluation and future planning of park districts throughout the state of Illinois.

Section 1: Current Participation & Attitudes

1. What is the name of your local park district? (Fill in the blank) used as a screening question

2. How long have you lived in this park district's area? (Fill in the blank) Average = 24 years

3. During the past year, approximately **HOW MANY TIMES** have members in your household visited or participated in the following: (Circle one number for **EACH**)

Household Participation	More than 25 times	6-10 times	3-5 times	1-2 times	None
Park District Programs (e.g., aerobics, baseball, soccer, and other programs)	13%	9%	6%	20%	52%
Park District Facilities (e.g., community centers, swimming pools, and other facilities)	13	9	14	24	40
Park District Park Areas (e.g., local parks, trails, greenways, golf courses, and other park areas)	27	17	14	19	23

4. During a typical year, about **HOW MANY TIMES** does your household rely on the following providers for parks and recreation? (Circle one number for **EACH**)

Recreation Provider	More than 25 times	6-10 times	3-5 times	1-2 times	None
Park District	28%	14%	13%	21%	24%
Other public areas (e.g., Forest Preserve, Conservation District, etc.)	8	11	19	27	35
Private/Commercial (e.g., country club, private fitness center, etc.)	21	5	8	10	56
Non-Profit (e.g., YMCA/YWCA, Boys/Girls Club, church, etc.)	11	5	6	19	59

5. What is your household's **ATTITUDE** toward the park district? Please indicate your household's level of agreement for each of the following statements. (Circle one number for **EACH** statement)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
I am satisfied with the mission/purpose of the park district	29%	48%	8%	1%	14%
There is ample opportunity to provide input for park district projects	15	36	14	5	30
The park district manages tax dollars responsibly	12	45	9	7	27
The park district improves property values within the community	29	47	7	3	14
The park district enhances the opportunity for the community to recruit business and industry	16	32	14	3	35
I feel safe in park district areas	30	50	8	4	8

Section 2: Satisfaction with Park District Programs, Facilities, & Park Areas

6. How **SATISFIED** is your household with your park district's programs, facilities, and park areas. For each of the following statements, please indicate your household's level of satisfaction. (Circle one number for **EACH** statement)

Statement	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
Park District Programs				
Quality of programs	22%	68%	7%	3%
Variety of programs	26	58	11	5
Number of programs and activities	25	59	11	5
Overall satisfaction with programs	23	65	8	4
Park District Facilities				
Quality of the facilities	22	63	11	4
Variety of facilities	16	69	12	3
Availability of facilities	25	64	9	2
Overall satisfaction with facilities	21	68	8	3
Park District Park Areas				
Quality of the park areas	34	55	7	4
Number of park areas	35	52	9	4
Overall satisfaction with park areas	29	59	7	5
Park District Staff				
Performance of staff	22	65	8	5
Courteousness of staff	25	63	8	4
Overall satisfaction with staff	23	65	7	5

7. Overall, how **SATISFIED** is your household with the park district? (Circle one number)

29% Very satisfied
 59 Satisfied
 9 Unsatisfied
 3 Very unsatisfied

Section 3: Opinions about Providers of Public Recreation

8. We would like to know your household's **OPINION** concerning who should provide recreation programs, facilities, and park areas in your community. For each of the following statements, please indicate your household's level of agreement. (Circle one number for **EACH** statement)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe park and recreation programs can be better provided by a park district whose only purpose is park and recreation services	36%	54%	9%	1%
I believe that the park district as a separate governmental unit can provide greater opportunity for resident input than could be provided by the city/village government	30	42	25	3
I believe if the local park district was consolidated with city/village government, residents would have less opportunity to express their interests and desires for programs and services	23	44	28	5
I believe a park district as a separate governmental unit can serve true community interests in parks and recreation	28	52	16	4

9. If park district programs, facilities, and park areas were consolidated with city/village government do you think – (Circle one number)

52% park and recreation programs and services would suffer
 36 park and recreation programs and services would remain about the same
 12 park and recreation programs and services would be improved

10. If park district programs, facilities, and park areas were consolidated with county government do you think – (Circle one number)

66% park and recreation programs and services would suffer
 25 park and recreation programs and services would remain about the same
 9 park and recreation programs and services would be improved

11. Which unit of local government do you think would be the best provider of park and recreation programs, facilities, and park areas? (Circle one number)

79% The park district
 18 The city/village government
 3 The county government

Section 4: Satisfaction with Local Public Services

12. How **SATISFIED** is your household with the following public services in your community? (Circle one number for **EACH** public service)

Public Service	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
City Planning	13%	53%	25%	9%
Fire	42	54	3	1
Parks and Recreation	29	59	10	2
Police	34	56	7	3
Public Schools	26	46	21	7
Streets, Sewers, and Lights	24	53	18	5
Mass Transit	10	57	25	8
Libraries	38	54	6	2

13. Are you aware that your park district holds open meetings which are available for you or members of your household to attend and voice your interests and concerns? (Circle one number)

51% Yes
49 No (Skip to Question 15)

14. Have you or members of your household ever attended an open meeting of your local park district? (Circle one number)

36% Yes
64 No

15. Are you aware that your city/village government holds open meetings which are available for you or members of your household to attend and voice your interests and concerns? (Circle one number)

78% Yes
22 No (Skip to Question 17)

16. Have you or members of your household ever attended an open meeting of your city/village government? (Circle one number)

42% Yes
58 No

17. How well informed is your household about programs and services provided by the city/village government? (Circle one number)

12% Well informed
46 Informed
37 Not very well informed
5 Not at all informed

18. Which local government representatives do you believe members of your household have more contact with?
(Circle one number)

- 31% The park district
- 63 The city/village government
- 6 The county government

Section 5: Effectiveness & Benefits of Park District

19. How **EFFECTIVE** is your park district as it relates to: (Circle one number for **EACH** statement)

Statement	Very Effective	Effective	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Don't Know
Working with other local units of government	7%	37%	7%	1%	48%
Partnerships/sponsorships with private businesses	6	32	13	1	48
Attention to improving health/wellness in the community	13	46	11	4	26
Protecting open space	15	51	9	4	21
Serving people with disabilities	14	43	9	2	32
Informing the community of its recreation programs and activities	24	50	15	2	9
Involving the community in the planning of future projects	9	29	21	7	34
Offering affordable recreational opportunities for the residents of the community	23	50	10	5	12

20. A variety of benefits have been linked to park district programs, facilities, and park areas. Some of the benefits are listed below. Based on the experiences of your household, how **IMPORTANT** is each of the following benefits to your household? (Circle one number for **EACH** statement)

Benefit	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Improving health	48%	44%	7%	1%
Being with friends	31	57	11	1
Enjoying the outdoors	54	41	4	1
Being with family	47	44	7	2
Relaxing/releasing tension	49	43	5	3
Observing events (e.g. cultural, athletic)	30	51	16	3
Learning new things	31	48	19	2
Seeking adventure	20	47	28	5

Section 6: Household Demographics

The following information is helpful in providing us with the ability to describe different groups of households so that better management and planning can be made. Your answers will be used for statistical purposes and will not be identified with you personally.

21. Are you: (Circle one number) 50% Male 50% Female

22. What year were you born? (Fill in blank) Average age = 56

23. What is your race? (Circle one number):

0%	American Indian and Alaska Native
3	Asian
6	Black or African-American
8	Hispanic or Latino
82	White
1	Other (please specify): _____

24. Which best describes your family unit? (Circle one number)

22%	Single, no children
12	Married/Couple, no children
10	Single, with children
56	Married/Couple, with children

25. How many people (including yourself) live in your household? (Fill in blank)

 Average = 2.7 Number of people that live in your household

26. What was your approximate **TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME** before taxes in 2005? (Circle one number)

7%	Less than \$15,000
12	\$15,000 to \$34,999
51	\$35,000 to \$99,999
18	\$100,000 to \$149,999
7	\$150,000 to \$199,999
5	\$200,000 or more

27. Please check the highest level of formal education which you have attained. (Circle one number)

3%	Less than 12 th grade
20	High school/GED
22	Some college, no degree
9	Associate degree
23	Bachelor's degree
23	Graduate or professional degree

Appendix B: Correspondence with Households

Advance Notice Letter

July 24, 2006

Dear

How important are your community's parks and recreation programs to your family? The University of Illinois is conducting a statewide study that provides households an opportunity to evaluate their park district. Your household has been selected to participate in this study.

Within the next few days, your household will be receiving a questionnaire in the mail. Your participation is important to the success of the study. Please complete and return the questionnaire in the postage paid envelope that will be provided at your earliest convenience.

A "Question and Answer" sheet is enclosed that provides specific information about the study. If you have other questions, please contact me at (217) 244-3891 or by e-mail at rrhall@uiuc.edu.

Thank you in advance for your help with this important study.

Sincerely,

Robin Hall, Director
Office of Recreation and Park Resources

Enclosure

Question and Answer Sheet (sent with Advance Notice Letter)

Illinois Park Districts: Citizen Perspectives Questions and Answers

Who is doing the study?

This study is being conducted by the Office of Recreation and Park Resources at the University of Illinois.

Why is the study being done?

The purpose of the study is to determine citizen attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with local park district programs, facilities and park areas.

How was I selected to participate in the study?

Your name was randomly selected from a list of all households within the state of Illinois.

How many people are being asked to participate in the study?

Of the more than 4.2 million households in the state of Illinois, only 1,000 were selected to participate in the study. It is important to hear from all the households selected because we have found that people's opinions do vary on the issues we ask about. Since you represent many other households similar to you, your response to the questionnaire is very important to the success of this study.

Will my name be used?

ABSOLUTELY NOT! Our records are confidential. Your household will never be associated with your responses. Responses to the questionnaire will be reported in broad categories, such as, "86 percent of the respondents were very satisfied with their park district." The only reason we keep any record of your household is to mail you reminders in case you forget to fill out the questionnaire. Each questionnaire will have an identification number so we will know who to mail reminders to. After your questionnaire is returned, you will be removed from our mailing list.

How long will it take to complete the questionnaire?

For most people this questionnaire takes 15 - 20 minutes to complete.

How will the information from the study be used?

Information from the study will be used to assist in the evaluation and future planning for park districts throughout the State of Illinois.

What if I have additional questions?

If you have additional questions, please contact me (Robin Hall) at (217) 244-3891 or by e-mail at rrhall@uiuc.edu. I will be happy to talk with you about this study.

Cover Letter Sent with First Questionnaire Mailing

July 28, 2006

Dear

A few days ago, we sent you a letter regarding your household's selection to participate in a study of park districts in the State of Illinois. The results of this important study will assist the 356 park districts throughout Illinois in the evaluation and future planning of park and recreation services within their communities.

Your help is needed. We invite an adult member of your household to complete the enclosed questionnaire. Your household was one of a few selected out of over 4.5 million households in the State of Illinois. For this reason, it is very important to the success of the study that your questionnaire be completed and returned in the postage-paid envelope.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please take the time now to complete the questionnaire – the questionnaire takes 15-20 minutes to complete. Your name and address will be kept confidential. When we receive your questionnaire, your name will be removed from our mailing list.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (217) 244-3891 or by e-mail at rrhall@uiuc.edu. I appreciate your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Robin Hall, Director
Office of Recreation and Park Resources

Enclosures

Postcard Reminder

Dear Household:

A few days ago you should have received a questionnaire concerning your household's attitudes and satisfaction with your local park district. Your response is important to the success of this study. If you have already returned the questionnaire, thank you. If not, we hope to hear from you soon.

If you have lost your questionnaire, have not received one, or have any questions, please contact me at (217) 244-3891 or rrhall@uiuc.edu.

Sincerely,

Robin Hall, Director
Office of Recreation and Park Resources

Cover Letter Sent with Second Questionnaire Mailing

August 22, 2006

Dear:

A few weeks ago, we sent you a questionnaire regarding your household's attitudes and satisfaction with your local park district. As of yet, we have not heard from you. The questionnaire will be used in the evaluation of the 356 park districts in Illinois and aid in the future planning efforts of these local recreation providers.

In case you've lost or misplaced the questionnaire, we've enclosed another one. Please complete the questionnaire and return it in the postage-paid envelope at your earliest convenience. Your response is important, **we need your help!!** If you have already returned the questionnaire, thank you. If not, we hope to hear from you soon.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (217) 244-3891 or by e-mail at rrhall@uiuc.edu. I appreciate your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Robin Hall, Director
Office of Recreation and Park Resources

Enclosures

Appendix C: Nonrespondent Telephone Instrument

Introduction

Hello, may I please speak to Mr. or Mrs. _____? My name is XXXXX. I am calling from the University of Illinois and the Office of Recreation and Park Resources. We are conducting a study of citizen perspectives and viewpoints of park districts in Illinois. I would like to ask you a few questions concerning park districts that should only take 2-3 minutes. (Remember, the people have already received the mailings)

1) Do you live in an area that is within a Park District?

82% Yes
18% No (STOP and thank person)

2) During the past year, have you or anyone in your household attended any Park District programs?

46% Yes
54% No

3) During the past year, have you or anyone in your household visited any Park District facilities?

63% Yes
37% No

4) During the past year, have you or anyone in your household visited any Park District parks?

73% Yes
27% No

5) Overall, are you satisfied or unsatisfied with the Park District?

90% Satisfied
10% Unsatisfied

6) How many people live in your household?

Average 2.4

7) As a final question, which unit of local government do you think would be the best provider of park and recreation programs, facilities and park areas? Do you think it should be the park district, the city/village government, or the county government?

<u>76%</u>	Park District
<u>22%</u>	City/Village Government
<u>2%</u>	County Government

(Male 56%; Female 44%)

Thank You for Helping with the Study