

Citizen Input on Parks and Recreation in the
City of Hugo, Minnesota

Vol. 1: Summary Report

Prepared for Hugo, MN

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Introduction

The City of Hugo, Minnesota, is a fast growing city on the eastern edge of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Hugo is at a turning point in providing parks and recreation services to its growing population. Long-term management of the new Rice Lake Park and Athletic Complex as well as other opportunities for new parks have necessitated gathering the opinions of citizens to determine the future of parks and recreation in Hugo. In 2009, staff at the City of Hugo contacted the University of Minnesota's Community Growth Options (U-CGO) program to analyze citizen's interest in current and future parks and recreation amenities in Hugo. The analysis presented in this report is based on focus group input, a community survey, and feedback at the community-wide open house.

The goals of the project included the following:

- a) Help the City of Hugo educate residents about current Parks and Recreation facilities and programs at the Open House and Focus Groups.
- b) Assess, with input from Hugo citizens and city staff, if and when a Parks and Recreation Department should be created. If so, identify what a Parks and Recreation Department would entail.
- c) Determine, with input from the citizens of Hugo, if and when the city should offer recreational programming.
- d) Identify what additional parks and recreation amenities the citizens of Hugo would like to see now and in the future.
- e) Create a report that outlines next steps the Parks and Recreation Sub-Committee, Parks Commission or Hugo Athletic Association and the City Council of Hugo should begin undertaking.

Methodology

To obtain citizen's input on parks and recreation in the city of Hugo, a survey was created to determine citizen attitudes and willingness to pay for current and future parks and recreation amenities. A focus group was also held with volunteer citizens to spend 2 hours discussing their thoughts and feelings regarding current and future parks, recreation, programs and facilities in Hugo. The survey was conducted as a mail survey with the assistance of the Minnesota Center for Survey Research at the University of Minnesota, with funding from U-CGO. Surveys were sent to a sample of 710 households out

of the 4,595 households located within Hugo. Surveys were asked to be completed by the head of the household or the co-head of household. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

Respondents answered questions about whether or not they had visited parks and recreation facilities in Hugo, as well as if they or anyone in their household had participated in a recreation program offered to Hugo residents; what they thought about the fees associated with the recreational programs; the quality of the recreational programs; what new recreational programs should be offered; and how well the parks and recreation facilities in Hugo were maintained. In addition, they answered questions related to what facilities Hugo should build in the next five years and how they should be paid for; willingness to pay taxes for new facilities; willingness to pay fees to visit a facility; the importance of parks to the overall quality of life in Hugo; the types of parks that should or should not be built; and demographic information about themselves.

Mailing and data collection were conducted from December 4, 2009, to February 5, 2010. Surveys were mailed out twice and followed Minnesota Center for Survey Research's mail survey protocol.¹ The first survey was mailed on December 6, 2009. This mailing was followed up with a postcard reminding recipients of the survey about the importance of their input on parks and recreation and asking them to fill out and return the survey. Recipients who did not return their surveys after the first mailing or after the reminder postcard were mailed a second survey (identical to the first) on January 6, 2010, as a final attempt to receive a response. Of the 710 surveys mailed, 25 surveys were returned to sender thus leaving a sample size of 685. Questionnaires were completed and returned by 346 households, with an overall response rate of 50.5%.

Response frequencies for all respondents can be found in Appendix C, response frequencies for rural residents of Hugo can be found in Appendix D, and response frequencies for urban residents of Hugo can be found in Appendix E.

¹ Minnesota Center for Survey Research's approach to mail surveys is based on the definitive protocol established by Donald A. Dillman in *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method*. New York: Wiley, 1978.

Overall Survey Results

Demographics

The gender of survey respondents was approximately equal; males constituted 48.4% of respondents and females 51.3%. An overwhelming majority of respondents own their own home (99.4%) compared to a small minority of renters (0.6%). Most survey respondents indicated there were two people living in their household (including themselves) (42.7%). The next highest number of individuals in a household was three (15.7%). Survey respondents were also asked how many people within their household were in certain age groups. The large majority of survey respondents were household with adults 20-64 years old (48%). The second highest age group of survey respondents was teenagers 13-19 years old (15%).

Survey recipients were asked how many years they have lived in Hugo. The highest percentage of respondents have lived in Hugo for 4 years (11%); the second highest percentage was 2 years (8%). Roughly one-fifth of respondents were born in each of the decades 1960-1969 (20.8%), 1950-1959 (19.4%), and 1970-1979 (18.2%). The highest income ranges for respondents were \$100,000-\$150,000 (23.6%); 50,000-\$74,999 (22.2%) and \$75,000-\$99,999 (23.6%).

Current Citizen Parks and Recreation Usage

In response to the question: "In the last 12 months, has anyone in your household visited any of the following Hugo park or recreation facilities?" survey respondents were most likely to select a City of Hugo sidewalk or trail area (66%), a Hugo neighborhood park (58%) or an athletic field (30%) or playfield (31%) in Hugo. In addition, one-quarter of the residents surveyed responded that they have visited Oneka Elementary School Gym. Survey respondents indicated that they visited an area ice arena (7%) or an outdoor hockey rink (8%). This suggests that many fewer Hugo residents visit ice arenas or hockey rinks.

In response to the question: "In the past 12 months, has anyone in your household done any of the following activities at a Hugo park or trail area?" survey respondents were most likely to select walking (67%), bicycle riding (47%), used children's playground equipment (47%), and running (33%). Survey respondents were least likely to select played horseshoes (1%), cross-country skiing (2%), used outdoor volleyball courts (3%), ice skating (10%), basketball (14%).

A majority of survey respondents (82.7%) responded no when asked if anyone in their household had registered for a recreation program in the last 12 months; a smaller percentage (17.3%) answered yes. Reasons survey respondents did not register for a recreation program were: no interest (26.9%); have not received enough information about the programs (22.5%); or respondents did not have enough time (18.2%). This result suggests that the City of Hugo could benefit from better marketing of the recreation programs currently offered.

Survey respondents that answered yes to if anyone in their household had registered for a recreation program in the last 12 months participated in programs offered by White Bear Lake Area Schools or Community Services & Recreation Department (14.2%). A small percentage participated in programs offered by Mahtomedi Public Schools or Community Education Department (1.2%). A majority of survey respondents indicated that the programs their household participated in were located in Stillwater (16.6%) and the White Bear Lake area (11.8%) and in the City of Hugo (7.8%).

Survey respondents who answered yes to if anyone had participated in a recreational program were then asked which specific recreation programs anyone in their household had participated in during the last 12 months. Most respondents indicated that they participated in organized team sports (9.2%); sports instruction—tennis, T-ball, K-ball (4.9%); swimming lessons (3.8%); dance (2.6%) and arts and crafts (2.6%). Recreational programs with the fewest responses were performing arts/concerts in the park (0.6%); senior clubs (0.6%); adult team sports—Oneka gym (0.9%); and drama (1.4%).

When respondents who answered yes to if anyone in the household had participated in a recreation program were asked how they felt about the fees they were charged for the recreational program they registered for, most thought the fees were about right (84.9%). About 1 in 10 respondents (9.4%) thought the fees were too high, and 5.7% thought the fees they were charged were a bargain. Comments from respondents who thought that fees were too high included the following:

- Swimming fees are too high (pool is already there, fees should just be for extra staff costs!).
- My family didn't know that our city has these programs offered.
- WBL senior ETS charged \$2 for 1 hour where I can go to other places to get more time for less.
- Seems pointless to charge tax payers to use school for underschool age kids.

- Talking with other parents from other districts, I have found White Bear School's summer programs to be more expensive

Finally, respondents who answered yes to if anyone in the household had participated in a recreation program were asked how satisfied they were with the quality of the recreation program offered to Hugo residents. Most answered that they were satisfied (70.9%) or very satisfied (21.6%). Respondents who were dissatisfied (3.6%) or very dissatisfied (3.6%) accounted for four individuals out of 346 respondents. Their explanations included:

- Could be more offered in Hugo
- Sometimes bad coaches!
- I didn't realize there was more offered
- Didn't know about all the programs

Survey respondents were then asked if they had participated in any recreational activities at facilities, parks or trails outside of the City of Hugo. More than half of the respondents (57%) answered yes. The locations and facilities these residents visited included:

- Plymouth: ice skating
- White Bear Lake: outdoor rinks, YMCA, running, soccer, basketball, dog park, tennis, dog beach, walking
- Forest Lake: swimming, ice skating
- Big Marine
- St Croix River
- Square Lake
- Forest lake Transit Center
- North East: YMCA
- Tamarac Nature Center: hiking
- William O'Brien State Park
- Whitewater State Park
- Nisswa: paved trails
- Mahtomedi: ice rinks
- Stillwater: walking trail, gateway trail
- Roseville: volleyball
- St Paul: skating
- Blaine: swimming, golf, hockey,
- Shoreview: walking, swimming
- Como Park Fields: Lacrosse
- Otter Lake School: softball
- Maplewood: swimming lessons
- Bloomington: water park & pool

- Scandia: hockey
- Lino Lakes: bike trails

Future Parks and Recreation

The survey then asked about what future programs Hugo residents should be offered. From a list of activities, respondents were asked whether more programs, the same amount of programs, or fewer programs should be offered for each. With respect to more programs being offered; those activities chosen most frequently included fitness/wellness (40%) and performing arts/concerts in the park (32.8%). Swimming lessons (28.6%); one-time special events (23.5%); organized team sports (23.1%) and arts and crafts (21.8%) were also chosen by more than one-fifth of respondents. More than one-quarter of respondents felt that the same amount of the following programs should be provided by Hugo: organized team sports (27.6%); open gym—Oneka gym (27.2%); and sports instruction—tennis, T-ball, K-ball (27%). Those activities chosen most frequently for fewer programs included drama (11%); Tot Time (8.2%); dance (8%) and adult team sports—Oneka gym (8%).

Survey respondents were asked what new facilities Hugo should build within the next five years. For each type of facility listed, respondents were asked to choose one of the following regarding whether a new facility should be built: yes, even if it raises my taxes; yes, only if it does not raise my taxes; no, this facility should not be built, and don't know.

The following facilities scored high with survey respondents even if it raised their taxes: public indoor swimming pool (24.2%); paved trails (22%); nature preserve (20.4%); public health/fitness facility (19.1%); public swimming beaches (18%) and public outdoor ice rink (17%).

Facilities respondents felt should be built without raising their taxes include: picnic shelter (42.1%); public outdoor ice rink (40.2%); fishing pier (39.8%); unpaved trails (38.9%) and paved trails (38.9%).

When survey respondents were asked which facilities should not be built in Hugo in the next five years the highest scores were: indoor racquetball courts (41.8%); indoor tennis courts (40%); skateboard facilities (40%); public golf course (40%); Frisbee golf course (39.3%); and meeting rooms (36.3%).

Survey respondents were asked if they thought more park land should be acquired to serve the present population of Hugo. Almost half responded

they agreed (26.9%) or strongly agreed (20.4%) that more park land should be acquired to serve the present population and about one-third (32.8%) indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed.

When asked if they thought more park land would need to be acquired to serve the population of Hugo in the year 2020, most survey respondents agreed (34.7%) or strongly agreed (24.7%) that more park land will need to be acquired. Survey respondents were also asked if they thought Hugo should develop the park land Hugo has before Hugo buys more park land. Responses were split fairly evenly between neither agree or disagree (26.5%) and strongly agree (22.6%).

Survey respondents were also asked how much more they were willing to pay in taxes to build and operate the new facilities from the previous question. Although about one-quarter (27.4%) suggested they were not willing to pay any more taxes for any new facilities, sizeable percentages were willing to pay \$11-\$20 per year extra in taxes a year for new facilities (23.5%) or \$21-\$50 per year in extra taxes for new facilities (22%).

Respondents were then asked if they would be willing to pay a fee for the use of a new facility each time they visited. Most respondents (62%) said they would be willing to pay a fee. Of those who said they would be willing to pay a fee, a majority (60.7%) said they would be willing to pay \$2-\$4 per visit.

Finally citizens were asked what they felt was the most appropriate way to meet increased park operating costs. More than half (54.5%) felt that use fees should be increased. About one-quarter (22.8%) said taxes should be increased. A small percentage (6.9%) felt that park services should be reduced.

Attitudes Toward Parks and Recreation

About one-third of survey respondents (35.2%) said parks and recreation are important to the overall quality of their life as a Hugo resident. When asked how much they felt parks, open space, and trails enhance the value of property in Hugo, a majority (56.6%) said very much.

Survey respondents were then asked their feelings about two distinct types of parks. Park A contains a large tract of land with picnic areas, hiking/biking/riding/cross country ski trails and a nature center. Park B contains athletic fields, an outdoor hockey/skating rink, tennis courts, a playground and a recreation center for indoor sports and programs. Park A

would be considered a “passive” park and park B would be considered an “active” park. Survey respondents were then asked which type of park they feel Hugo needs more of. About one-third (31.6%) thought Hugo needs more parks like park A, one-quarter (25.8%) felt Hugo needs more parks like park B (25.8%), and another one-quarter (25.2%) felt Hugo needs more of both kinds of parks (25.2%). When asked if individuals should be charged an admission fee to use parks like park A, most survey respondents (42.4%) said no. When asked the same question about parks like park B, most survey respondents (43.1%) agreed that people should be charged a fee.

Survey Comments

Survey recipients were asked to add any additional comments they had about Hugo Parks and Recreation programs and facilities. What follows is a sampling of comments respondents made about Hugo parks and recreation programs and facilities.

- I'd like to see horse trails of at least 10-20 miles long developed
- Dog park!
- We are told to think about our use of future parks, etc. however, I think they are necessary to maintain a healthy living environment and quality of life.
- I live in the southeast corner of Hugo away from parks and all facilities, but I believe in them
- When developing land for new housing, plot with more land per house, we have 20 acres and have our own parks and recreation. Why should I be taxed for parks use people with small lots? More property with new houses!
- Would like to see horseback riding trails in the Hugo Parks.
- I am a big advocate for sports for our youth. I do think the Hugo area could use an ice arena facility
- Unlock park restrooms if fields are being used for games/sports teams. Coaches should have keys
- I wish I knew more of what I could be using
- I think picnic areas in residential parks are wasteful. I would rather see basketball courts or tennis courts. These types of sporting facilities would be a better use of space.
- I would love to see more walking, hiking, biking trails as well as skate skiing trails. I would expect a user fee for CC ski trails.
- Parks are more important than the crazy trees on 14/8 that need watering during water bans and need sprinkler systems that squirt on vehicles.
- Fix downtown! It's an eyesore!

- Happy that the park in Oak Shore Park was finally done! Wish Clearwater Creek Preserve was NOT open to hunting. "Tweaking" needs to be done at OSP. Wish the horseshoe thing was never put in; its in the wrong spot!
- We moved from the city to the country to get away from many of the things you want here. Why not go to State Parks or County Parks that we already paying for? No cluster housing please! I am on 6 acres and we should have 10 acre minimums!
- More soccer fields or even a soccer complex
- Would like to see more nature oriented spaces with trails. Buy the land now because it's not going to get any cheaper.
- We need a dog park! An indoor dog park would be especially nice in the winter.
- Bigger government is a concern for me and I would like to see more visibility and accountability with decisions that lead to higher taxes and bigger government. The recent Hugo audit concerns me.
- Please have a bus that us older folks can use to be taken to different shopping centers
- It would be really nice to have an indoor facility for fitness and swimming. There is nothing close to Hugo other than the YMCA.
- I wish we had a YMCA
- We cannot keep spending, buying, building when we have greater needs in Hugo.
- We need a dog park
- I love Hugo, I love the parks and trails and use them on a regular basis.
- There could be more skating rinks. In the summer unsupervised teens prowl the graveyard and streets by our city hall, many neighbors have witnessed them, drunk, racing vehicles and breaking windows.
- It would be nice to have more for our family to do in Hugo. There is nothing really here as far as recreation and this would help more families here to live healthier lifestyles.
- Thanks for doing this survey, I feel you care about residents
- Better parks = better people
- The city needs to control their spending and work within their budget; don't need higher taxes.
- Let's go back to the "good old days" when we had the basics of public playgrounds and parks and used our imaginations and had thrilling wonderful times!
- I applaud Hugo's efforts. I know parks and parkland is not cheap but are in integral part of the community.

- We really need a paved trail from Heritage Pond Blvd. on Elmcrest to the Victor Hugo shopping center. Traffic is deadly and people walk/run on that road.
- I would be willing to pay for outdoor facilities if I was able to use them with my children and they weren't always being used during peak hours.
- Consider taking a close look at the city of Shoreview. Shoreview has a great balance of open space, recreational activities, dog parks, community center, hiking/biking trails and an outdoor hockey rink.
- Swimming lessons for the kids
- I wish we had a dog park
- Plow the streets better!—less parks!
- Need a walking/biking path along Bald Eagle Lake.
- We need more trails, look at Shoreview for example.
- We would probably have better facilities if we didn't have the same old Mayor and City Council that does nothing for the newer Hugo citizens year after year. Hugo is not a farming community!
- City land should be clearly marked "BOW HUNTING ONLY" when hunting is allowed during hunting season!!!
- I think at this point there are an adequate number of facilities and programs.
- If anything—making the main focus of trails or wider lanes for the influx of out of the area bike riders would be important. Open space for nature & observers is important.
- Playground equipment I needed in Heritage Ponds.
- Please don't develop Lion's park or the corn field property to the west of it. It would ruin the whole point of living in Hugo.
- We need more outdoor ice rinks! 3 or 4 locations within the city.
- Consider an off-road bike park (fees charged as a season pass)
- We NEED PLOWED WALKWAYS (MILES OF THEM) FOR WALKERS TO USE IN THE WINTER!!!
- I'd like a large park that can connect to the gateway trail. Like Pine Point Park.
- Need more indoor stuff locally to get through the cold ass winter. I hate driving out of town to fulfill this.
- Please fully utilize all parks—buildings (State, County, School District & Local) Less government.

Additional responses can be found on the individual returned surveys, which are in the possession of the City of Hugo.

Urban versus Rural Survey Results

This section of the report will focus on the differences between the urban and rural residents of Hugo. According to Hugo city staff, the urban boundary for Hugo is defined by the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA). For purposes of this survey, residents who live outside the MUSA were considered rural, while those who live within the MUSA were considered urban.

There were 346 households that responded to the survey, with 238 households in the urban subgroup and 108 households in the rural subgroup.

The demographics of rural and urban respondents were very similar to the overall survey respondent results but did differ in some areas.

Households age groups differed from urban to rural Hugo. In urban respondents, 21% of households contained individuals 0-12 years old. In rural respondents, 18% of households contained individuals 0-12 years old. Urban respondents household contained 11% of 13-19 year olds while rural respondents households contained 10%. Rural respondents households appear to be older than urban respondents households with 59% of rural households containing individuals 20-64 and 56% of urban households contained individuals 20-64. This is also apparent in households with individuals 65+; urban had 12% of respondent's households while rural had 13% of respondent's households containing this age group.

When asked how many years you have lived in the City of Hugo, there were stark differences between urban and rural residents. Urban residents centered around living in Hugo for 2 (9.2%) to 5 (8%) years. Rural residents highest percentage of respondents lived in Hugo for 20 (6.5%) or 25 (6.5%) years.

Incomes were also different from rural to urban Hugo residents. The income with the highest percentage of urban respondents was \$75,000-\$99,999 (21%). For rural respondents, the income with the highest percentage of respondents was \$100,000-\$150,000 (21.3%).

Most urban residents were born from 1960-1969 (22.3%). Most rural residents were born from 1950-1959 (32.4%).

Current Citizen Parks and Recreation Usage

In response to the question, "In the last 12 months, has anyone in your household visited any of the following Hugo park or recreation facilities?" urban and rural survey respondents answered similarly, and were most likely to select a City of Hugo sidewalk or trail area or a Hugo neighborhood park.

In response to the question, "In the past 12 months, has anyone in your household done any of the following activities at a Hugo park or trail area?", again urban and rural survey respondents answered similarly, and were most likely to select walking, bicycle riding or that they used children's playground equipment. Urban and rural survey respondents were least likely to select played horseshoes and cross-country skiing.

A majority of urban and rural survey respondents responded no when asked if anyone in their household had registered for a recreation program in the last 12 months. Reasons survey respondents did not register for a recreation program differed between urban and rural residents: both selected "no interest" as their highest reason, but urban survey respondents also selected "have not received enough information about the programs" as their highest. This result suggests that the City of Hugo could benefit from better marketing of the recreation programs currently offered.

Among survey respondents who answered yes to if anyone in their household had registered for a recreation program in the last 12 months, a majority of survey respondents from the urban area of Hugo indicated that the programs their household participated in were located in the White Bear Lake area and a majority of rural residents indicated the activities they participated in were located in the City of Stillwater. A significant proportion of both urban and rural residents said their household participated in programs offered by Stillwater Area Schools of Community Education.

Survey respondents who answered yes to if anyone had participated in a recreational program were then asked which specific recreation programs anyone in their household had participated in during the last 12 months. Among urban respondents, the highest participation rate was for organized team sports. Among rural respondents, the highest participation was in senior clubs; family time and adult team sports (all with equal percentages).

When respondents who answered yes to if anyone in the household had participated in a recreation program were asked how they felt about the fees they were charged for the recreational program they registered for, both urban and rural respondents generally felt as though the fees were about right.

Finally, respondents who answered yes to if anyone in the household had participated in a recreation program were asked how satisfied they were with the quality of the recreation program offered to Hugo residents. Both urban and rural answered that they were satisfied with recreational programs.

Survey respondents were then asked if they had participated in any recreational activities at facilities, parks, or trails outside of the City of Hugo. More than half of both urban and rural respondents answered yes they had visited a recreational facility, park or trail outside of the City of Hugo.

Future Parks and Recreation

The survey then asked about what future programs Hugo residents should be offered. From a list of activities, respondents were asked whether more programs, the same amount of programs, or fewer programs should be offered for each. With respect to more programs being offered, among urban survey respondents the activities chosen most frequently included fitness/wellness; swimming lessons; performing arts/concerts in the park and organized team sports. Rural respondents gave high ratings to fitness/wellness; performing arts/concerts in the park; and swimming lessons.

With respect to those activities for which the same amount of programs should be offered, among urban respondents, the activities chosen most frequently included organized team sports; open gym—Oneka gym; and sports instruction—tennis, T-ball, K-ball; whereas among rural respondents the activities mentioned most frequently included music lessons; open gym—Oneka Gym; adult team sports and sports instruction.

With respect to those activities for which fewer programs should be offered, among urban respondents the activities chosen most frequently included drama, whereas among rural respondents the activities chosen most frequently included drama; arts and crafts; family time and trips.

Survey respondents were asked what new facilities Hugo should build within the next five years. For each type of facility listed, respondents were asked to choose one of the following regarding whether a new facility should be built: yes, even if it raises my taxes; yes, only if it does not raise my taxes; no, this facility should not be built, and don't know.

The following facilities scored high with urban survey respondents even if it raised their taxes: public indoor swimming pool and paved trails. Among rural respondents, an indoor swimming pool and a nature preserve scored highest.

Among those facilities that respondents felt should be built without raising their taxes, urban respondents chose fishing pier and a public golf course most frequently, whereas rural respondents chose unpaved trails, paved trails, public outdoor ice rink, teen center and senior center most frequently.

Among those facilities that respondents thought should not be built in Hugo in the next five years, urban residents most frequently chose indoor racketball courts and a skateboard facility, whereas rural residents chose indoor tennis courts; indoor racketball courts and a public golf course.

Survey respondents were asked if they thought more park land should be acquired to serve the present population of Hugo. The largest percentage of both urban and rural respondents indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed.

When asked if they think more park land will need to be acquired to serve the population of Hugo in the year 2020, most urban and rural survey respondents agreed that more park land will need to be acquired. Survey respondents were also asked if they thought Hugo should develop the park land Hugo has before Hugo buys more park land. Most urban and rural respondents agreed that Hugo should develop the park land Hugo has before it buys any more.

Survey respondents were also asked if they were willing to pay more in taxes to build and operate any new facilities. About one-half of urban residents felt that they should pay \$0 in new taxes (23.1%) or \$11-\$20 in new taxes (23.1%). The majority of rural residents felt they should pay \$0 in new taxes.

Citizens who were sent the survey were then asked about whether they would be willing to pay fees for the use of a new facility each time they visited. Interestingly the majority of both urban and rural respondents said that they would be willing to pay a fee to use a new facility and a majority of both urban and rural respondents indicated they would be willing to pay \$2-\$4 in fees.

Finally citizens were asked what they felt was the most appropriate way to meet increased park operating costs. The most frequent answer among both urban and rural survey respondents was that use fees should be increased.

Attitudes Toward Parks and Recreation

The attitudes toward parks and recreation of urban and rural survey respondents closely matches the overall survey results.

Resident Focus Groups Format

The focus group was composed of 13 community residents, with a graduate research assistant from the University of Minnesota serving as moderator. A staff person from the City of Hugo insisted on being present in the focus group, and interrupted the group's discussion at several points. The presence of a city employee during the focus group almost certainly biased the responses of the participants, who would have been more reluctant to provide responses critical of the city.

Upon arrival, each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire asking for basic demographic and background information.² A discussion guide was used to guide the focus groups.³ The questions on the discussion guide were deliberately kept general, both to avoid making assumptions about participants' views and to cast the net as wide as possible in stimulating discussion among the community residents present. Due to the large size of the focus group, discussion was not as in-depth as would have been preferred.

The following questions were used to stimulate discussion. Overall it appeared the focus group participants each came to the focus group with their own agenda and topic of concern for Hugo parks and recreation and programming, and many of the participants were more interested in promoting their agenda than participating in a free-flowing open discussion.

- 1) Introductions, where do participants live, how long have they lived in Hugo and what brought them to Hugo and what has kept them here? → follow-up favorite Hugo park/program/facility or trail?

Residents have lived in Hugo from 4 months to 43 years with a group average of 5.9 years. The focus group was relatively older with the average year of birth being 1954. Reasons for why focus group participants moved to

² See Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire with de-identified results.

³ See Appendix C for the full guide; individual questions are reproduced at the start of each summary section.

Hugo include moving closer to family, Hugo seemed like a nice place to live, liked the rural quality of Hugo, moved to a single-level home to age in, liked the undeveloped aspect of it, and a desire on the part of several residents raised in small towns to move back into one. Focus group participants expressed that reasons they have stayed here include great place for kids, great amenities for sport fields; interested in the development of the community; Hugo is an exciting community and we want to be a part of it; love the people. Favorite park/program/facility or trail include: all the trails (cross-country skiing, rollerblading, biking); kayaking; sledding hill; nice to have trails for kids that are safe and away from traffic; really happy with all the parks.

2) How do Hugo parks, recreation facilities, programs and trails benefit the community?

Focus group participants felt that these amenities add to the quality of life because you don't have to travel to access the parks and recreation amenities. They also felt they relate to preventing crime. The focus group agreed that when youth are engaged in sports and recreational activities they are less likely to be out causing trouble and vandalizing. Health was a big discussion point in regards to how parks, recreation facilities, programs and trails benefit the community; the more of these local amenities the more opportunities to live a healthy lifestyle. Focus group participants expressed interest in creating more trails like Hardwood Creek that "go for a distance" and one where people can walk, run or bike for a long distance without having to worry about traffic.

3) What do you think is important to offer at Hugo parks, facilities, programs and trails? → What future or immediate improvements should be made to facilities or programs to benefit the community? Why?

Focus group participants each seemed to discuss their own agenda for what is important to offer at Hugo parks, facilities, programs and trails; there wasn't much consensus among the group other than focus group participants felt Hugo needed more of these types of amenities. Specific concerns include: more open space and larger swaths of open space; dog parks; larger parks (like Como Park); more multiple-use parks; (consensus on) new community center—more fitness options; more medium sized neighborhood parks; indoor walking trail (user fees charged); keep water flowing in Clearwater Creek and stock it with fish; gymnastic or gymnasium facility; skateboard park; level trails for older people.

An excellent suggestion was made during the focus group of holding a yearly “get to know your Hugo parks” open house to let residents know more about the parks, facilities, programs and trails offered in Hugo. Another suggestion was to promote the parks in the local newspaper (*The Hugo Citizen*) with a feature story every two weeks on a park, facility, program or trail.

4) What types of recreation programs are you currently active in? Where? Why? What other programs could be offered or what is missing from Hugo programs? What would be better times to offer programs?

Several focus group members indicated they travel to White Bear Lake to use their facilities (ice skating, fitness) and specifically for yoga. A few members of the group also stated that they participate in senior aerobics in White Bear Lake and would love to see these programs offered in Hugo (these are usually held during the day because seniors don't want to drive at night). Other groups members stated they used Centerville for gymnastics and for swimming for their kids. Another member in the focus group plays racketball in White Bear Lake.

Times that would work better for people would be 5:30 or 6:30 pm during the week with options for weekend classes. A former fitness instructor in the focus group suggested having a morning class for stay-at-home parents and an after-work class/program for working adults. Focus group participants that currently use programs outside of the City of Hugo pay upwards of \$80 for classes. The focus group indicated that this would be a good way for the City of Hugo to pay for programs. The focus group also agreed that ideally Hugo would have a recreational complex that would be used for both programs and other activities so people could take a class/program while their kids played in the gym, swam, or did arts-and-crafts.

The focus group felt strongly that residents of Hugo should receive resident discounts at White Bear Lake recreational facilities.

5) Additional Comments?

Please add more tennis courts! Directional signs would be a great idea for letting people know where parks, facilities and trails are within Hugo. Create more winter programs that rent sleds, cross-country skis and poles to help Hugo citizens embrace the winter more. Update the park dedication fees and increase these fees to increase the funding for parks and facilities. Increase opportunities for volunteers to participate in planning for parks and recreation (i.e., help establishing a dog park). Set up a foundation for Hugo parks and recreation and do some fundraising.

Conclusion

Overall the City of Hugo research project was a successful project. The Open House was well attended and was an excellent opportunity to promote parks and recreation efforts in Hugo, as well as to make contacts for the focus groups.

The survey was also successful. The response rate of 50% was excellent, especially given that the survey was conducted over the Christmas–New Years holiday season, which generally results in poor response rates. A 50% response rate means that results from the surveys can be used with confidence that they represent a statistically accurate measure of Hugo citizen perceptions and opinions with respect to parks and recreation.

The focus group was successful in assessing motivations for why citizens of Hugo feel the way they do about parks and recreation. In the future, focus groups would be more successful if they were kept smaller (8 participants maximum) and if they were run exclusively by an outside facilitator to prevent bias.

The results of this report were presented to the Parks and Recreation Committee on February 10, 2010.