

Decision Resources, Ltd.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2005 City of Lakeville Study

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Lakeville. Professional interviewers gathered responses across the community between April 7th and 28th, 2005. The average interview took forty-one minutes. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to the entire universe of adult Lakeville residents within ± 5.0 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Residential Demographics:

Lakeville remains a high growth, young, relatively upscale community, although signs of a slight decrease in the growth rate are occurring. The median longevity of adult residents is 8.0 years. Twelve percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past two years; seventeen percent have been there over two decades. Almost 60% of the sample come from two locations prior to moving to the community: thirty-six percent report moving from Dakota County communities, while 23% moved from Hennepin County cities. Seven percent relocated from rural Minnesota, and 19% came from outside of Minnesota – in relatively equal measure from the Upper Midwest, Midwest, and West. Seventy-seven percent of the sample either has no plans to move, or feel they would remain in Lakeville for at least ten years. And, 14% report they might move from the community during the next five years, consistent with previous surveys.

Forty-nine percent of the households contain at least one school-aged child. Additionally, 21% report pre-schoolers. The average age of respondents is 43.1 years old. Sixty-one percent of the sample falls into the 35-54 years old age range, while 21% report ages over 54 years old. Women and men are equally represented in the sample.

Forty-one percent of the respondents report their household heads work at upscale White Collar jobs -- either Professional-Technical or Owner-Manager. Blue Collar-led households number 19%; twenty percent report Clerical-Sales people as household heads. Retirees head 12% of the households in the city. Fourteen percent of the sample report home businesses, and 21% of the households use some form of telecommuting. Fifteen percent of the respondents working outside the home hold a job in Lakeville, itself. Another 15% report Bloomington or Burnsville as job destinations. Minneapolis-based jobs are posted by nine percent. The median household yearly income is \$76,375.00, approximately \$14,500 higher than the current Metropolitan Area suburban norm. In general, then, Lakeville still must be classified as a young and growing "outer-ring" suburban community.

Residents are classified according to both the precinct and the school district in which they reside. Twenty-nine percent reside in Precincts 1-4; thirty-five percent, in Precincts 5-9; thirty-seven percent live in Precincts 10-14. Seventy-one percent of the sample resides in Independent School District 194; eleven percent lives in Independent School District 192, while 18% reside in Independent School District 196.

Community Character:

“Available housing,” “high quality schools” and “rural, small town character” are the major reasons offered for settling in the community. Twenty-three percent mention “available housing,” while 20% cite “high quality schools,” and 16%, “rural and small town character.” Only 14% are disappointed about the current quality of the factors that drew them to the community. But, a solid 95% rate the quality of life as either "excellent" or "good;" the 47% rating the quality as "excellent" places Lakeville among the top decile of cities within the Metropolitan Area.

“Location” within the Metropolitan Area is the most liked feature of the city, at 25%. “Small town ambience” ranks second, at 19%. “Nice people” and “strong neighborhoods” rank third, at 11% and 10%, respectively. On the other hand, “growth” at 26% is the most unpopular feature of the community. “Roads and traffic congestion” follow at 19%. Only nine percent are troubled by “high taxes.” But, it is noteworthy that a very high 23% report there is "nothing" they dislike about the community; this "booster" segment is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area. The trade-off between growth and the maintenance of small town ambience and open space is still the greatest worry currently facing residents.

Seventy-five percent agree that Lakeville is “‘home,’ not just another place to live.” Twenty-one percent, though, report “Lakeville is just a place to live; I’d be just as happy elsewhere.” Reinforcing this cohesive image, 79% feel the strength of community identity has increased or remained about the same while they were residents. A very low 18%, in comparison with other growing suburban communities, see a “decrease.” In the years ahead, then, the City needs to continue watching for the development of a disaffected segment of the populace; so far, though, they have done an exemplary job.

Tax Climate and City Services:

Lakeville residents are generally receptive to current trade-off between city property tax levels and quality city services. When considering the value of city services — quality versus cost — 73% rate it highly, while 23% are more critical.

City service evaluations are very positive overall. “Police protection” and “park maintenance” score approval ratings of 90% or higher. “Fire protection,” “storm drainage and flood control,” and “animal control” post approval ratings of between 80% and 89%. Just behind, at 79%, is the positive rating of “street maintenance.” Particular irritants for residents are “potholes,” “loose animals,” and “flooding.”

Municipal Liquor Stores:

Ninety-one percent are aware the City of Lakeville manages and operates all liquor store facilities within the community. A lower 74% are aware the profits from the liquor operation provides money for Lakeville city services and assists in reducing taxes. A large 84% report visiting one of Lakeville's liquor stores. Among store customers, at least 90% rate "customer service," "product selection," "location" highly. Eighty-one percent similarly rate "restricting sales to minors," while 74% feel the same about "prices." "Convenience," cited by 84%, is the main reasons they shop at Lakeville liquor stores.

Public Safety Issues:

If they could direct the Lakeville Police Department to place a greater emphasis on certain activities, 34% would prioritize "drug enforcement" and 27% would stress "patrol of neighborhoods." Fifteen percent would place a greater emphasis on "crime prevention" and 12% choose "traffic enforcement."

Eighty-eight percent feel safe in their neighborhood walking alone at night; only 10% feel unsafe. Among residents who would feel unsafe, 49% urge "more police patrolling," while 18% see a need for "more street lights." Eighty-two percent of the sample is unable to specify other areas in Lakeville where they do not feel safe walking alone at night or think there are none.

Forty-seven percent of the households in Lakeville have a child currently in school. Among this group, 40% are aware of Lakeville's School Resource Officer Program. For those aware of the SRO Program, 81% rate it favorably, while only nine percent see it unfavorably. Just nine percent report calling the Fire Department about a fire or rescue/emergency situation; of this group, 92% award the Department high ratings for the provided service, while six percent are more critical. Seventy-eight percent are aware of the City's fire prevention activities. Forty-six percent of the households in the community have members who attended at least one of the fire prevention activities. Most of those aware of the activities learned about them through the schools or the local newspaper.

Perceptions of the Neighborhood:

A very solid 91% rate the condition and appearance of homes in their neighborhood as either "excellent" or "good." Only nine percent rate their local area lower. Critics point to "messy yards," "rundown homes," and "poor lawn care."

City Codes:

Sixty-six percent feel the severity of enforcement of City Codes on nuisances is “about right.” But, 24% feel it is “not tough enough.” “Messy yards,” “junk cars,” “weeds and tall grass,” and “outside storage” are the cause of over 80% of the dissatisfaction.

Parks and Recreational Issues:

Lakeville residents remain committed outdoor enthusiasts. A high 69% use the smaller neighborhood parks, while 63% visit larger community parks. Fifty-nine percent use city trails. While lower than the other components, 41% use city athletic facilities. In the case of each component, over 90% of those holding opinions rate it as “excellent” or “good.” Park facilities, then, continue to be viewed as a highly prized community asset by Lakeville citizens. In fact, by a 67%-21% margin, residents support Lakeville establishing movable skate parks throughout the city.

Twenty-four percent feel the park trails are adequately lit at night; however, the same percentage feels they are not. The remaining 52% are uncertain. Thirty-four percent feel safe walking on the park trails at night; sixteen percent do not feel safe, primarily because there is “not enough light” and they are “secluded.” The remaining 50% did not have an opinion on this issue. But, only 19% would make lighting more trails at night either a “top priority” or a “high priority.”

Lakeville Area Arts Center:

Fifty-eight percent of the sample attended events at the Lakeville Area Arts Center. Sixteen percent report attending “The Taste of Lakeville,” 15%, to “a concert or play,” and 12%, to the “Lakeville Arts Festival.” Thirteen percent participated in more than one of these events. In the future, 67% are at least “somewhat likely” to attend concerts. Fifty-six percent are likely to attend plays, while 55% are likely to see performances of comedians. Forty-seven percent would be likely to attend children’s theater performances. Three types of advertising of the Lakeville Area Arts Center are noticed by large percentages of the residents: seventy-eight percent note advertising in the local newspapers, while 69% recall them in the Lakeville Parks and Recreation Brochure, and 61%, in the “Lakeville Community Education News.”

Lakes and Recreation:

Seventy percent of the sample indicates household members used at least one of the four major lakes in the community during the past two years. Seventy-nine percent visit Lake Marion most often, while 10% more frequently use Orchard Lake, and 7%, Crystal Lake. Sixty-one percent consider the quality of water in the most visited lake as “excellent” or “good,” while 32% feel it is “only fair” or “poor.” In general, 75% feel the City of Lakeville's emphasis on environmental concerns is “about right,” while only ten percent see it as “too low.” Those critical of the City’s emphasis point to “losing wetland areas,” “losing open space,” and “too much growth.”

City Government and City Staff:

Residential empowerment within the community is very solid. Sixty percent report they could have a say in the way the City of Lakeville runs things, if they wanted. But, 34% think they cannot. This group of unempowered citizens is at the Metropolitan Area suburban norm.

The Mayor and Council are awarded a job approval rating of 80% and a disapproval rating of six percent, the highest in the Metropolitan Area. But, dampening this somewhat, 55% of the community feel they know “very little” about the Mayor and the City Council, implying many of the ratings are based upon generalized feelings that things are “going well.” Since the number of uninformed residents stabilized during the interim between the last studies, the City should be even more aggressive in highlighting City Council actions and activities in the city newsletter, on the Internet, and on cable television programming.

The City Staff receive a job approval rating of 76% and a disapproval rating of eight percent; the approval rating is among the top of the Metropolitan Area suburbs. “Poor communications,” “lack of listening,” and “room for improvement” are the three major reasons for low evaluations posted by this small group of critics. The 36% of the residents reporting first-hand contact with the staff is also somewhat higher than comparable suburban areas. The City Staff, then, continues to serve an unusually large percentage of the population and, even more importantly, does it well.

Economic Development:

The zoning and land use decision-making process is deemed “adequate” in providing for residential input by 50%. The 29% who rate the opportunity for input as “inadequate” suggests “more venues for community involvement” and “more responsiveness on the part of the City.” On a related issue, 69% feel the City is well planned for the future; 15% disagree, while seven percent feel concern for the future only some of the time, and nine percent are unsure. Critics of the planning process point to the “fast growth rate of the community” and “instances of poor planning.”

Sixty-four percent are interested in giving the City input for the City’s Comprehensive Land Use Plan. A large 37% would prefer to give their input through “surveys in the mail,” while 18% prefer “e-mail.”

Residents were asked about their top preference from a list of housing and development options. Thirty-six percent favor single-family homes, while 28% support more “commercial opportunities, retail stores and shops.”

By an overwhelming 87%-18% split, residents decisively feel Lakeville’s current housing supply is an adequate mix of all types of housing. Among those thinking the current mix inadequate, 53% would like to see more “starter homes” and 24% would prefer more “middle income single family homes.” Similarly, a decisive rating is awarded to the community’s success in encouraging “life cycle housing:” seventy-one percent rate the City’s efforts as “excellent” or “good,” while 22% see them as “only fair” or “poor.”

Residential shopping habits were examined in some detail. Forty-seven percent of the sample says they make most of their household purchases in Apple Valley, while 31% make them in

Lakeville. Thirteen percent are drawn to Burnsville. On average, 62% report purchasing goods or services from Lakeville establishments on a “weekly” basis; eight percent make purchases daily, while 30% more sporadically. Lakeville shoppers are primarily oriented toward three areas: Lakeville Crossing, by 30%; Timbercrest, by 23%; and, Downtown Lakeville, by 21%.

If they could choose types of retail or service businesses to come to the community, 41% would like “restaurants.” Ten percent would prefer “clothing stores,” while nine percent would prefer “discount stores.” Sixteen percent, though, want “no further businesses.”

Transportation Issues:

Ten percent report regularly using public transit or the HOV lane on I-35W. Eight percent use the HOV lane, while two percent take public transit. If it were available, 21% are either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to use “bus service from Lakeville to Downtown Minneapolis.” Seven percent are at least “somewhat likely to use “senior bus services,” while four percent are similarly inclined about “bus service for physically challenged or disabled residents.”

By a resounding 75%-13% margin, residents favor in concept the City providing peak and non-peak bus service to Downtown Minneapolis, senior bus service, and bus service for physically challenged or disabled residents. Support decreases to 50% if a property tax increase of about \$40.00 per year were necessary to fund the service.

At 82%, “I prefer to drive my own vehicle” is the main reason residents give for not using public transportation for their travel needs. Sixty-seven percent state, “public transportation does not go where I need to go.” Sixty-one percent maintain, “public transportation is inconvenient.” But. Only 12% report, “I have safety concerns about public transportation.”

City Communications:

During the past decade, the City developed an extensive and focused communications system. Fifty-one percent consider “This Week Life and Times” stories their principal source of information about City government and its activities. Twelve percent rely upon the “Sun Current; nine percent, on Channel 16; and, eight percent, on “Messages.” A very high 82% feel adequately informed about City government and its activities; only 15% disagree. Critics would like to see more information on “development projects,” in particular.

Fifty-six percent of the residents report seeing the “Messages” page in “This Week Life and Times.” And, 70% of those citizens regularly read the newsletter. Among readers, information about “road construction,” “community events,” and “current news” are the types of information they like most. Readers suggest more information about “development projects” and “community events,” although two-thirds have no suggestions for more inclusions. An almost unanimous 99% of the readers think the current weekly format provides useful information. And, only 11% of current readers would be more likely to read the newsletter if it were in a more convenient location in the newspaper. Thirty-one percent of the sample would be more likely to read the City newsletter if it came in a different form, other than in the newspaper; fifty-three percent of this group prefer inclusion in the quarterly utility bill, while 35% would favor direct mail.

Eighty-three percent of the households have access to the Internet through a home or office computer. Of this group, 37% visit the City's website. Website visitors sought "general information," "parks and recreation offerings," "information about codes and ordinances," "news about community events," and "specifics about development projects." Seventy-seven percent offer no suggestions for additional information on the website, while seven percent urge more information on "community events." Sixty percent of the website visitors would be interested in using it to conduct business with the City on-line – "filing or requesting a police report," "utility bill payment," and "dog license applications" prove to be very popular additions. Only 29% of residents having Internet access report at least being "somewhat interested" in receiving the newsletter via e-mail; they would like to see "parks and recreation classes" and "road construction updates and information" included in an e-mailed newsletter.

Nine percent of the households sampled report moving to the community during the past two years. Of these new residents, 80% recall receiving a welcome packet in the mail, including the "Resident Guidebook." Seventy-five percent of those receiving the guidebook deem it as at least "somewhat helpful," while 15% are critical. Twenty-three percent of the new arrivals report receiving new resident information from other sources; "Welcome Wagon" is the major source of that information.

By an overwhelming 70%-14% majority, residents support the City of Lakeville offering high-speed Internet access; in fact, 29% feel "strongly" that way. A majority of supporters are willing to pay \$25.00 per month for this service.

Sixty-four percent of the sampled households report currently subscribing to cable television, while 22% have satellite television, and 14% have neither. Of the cable subscribers, 53% at least "occasionally" watch Lakeville Government Channel 16. In comparison with other areas, this audience level is higher than the norm.

Seventy percent of the Channel 16 viewers at least "occasionally" watch live or re-broadcasts of Lakeville City Council Meetings; similarly, 69% either "frequently" or "occasionally" watch the "Bulletin Board" listing of meetings, events, and information. Fifty-three percent watch "Focus on Lakeville" and 52% view Lakeville Police Department's "LDP Journal." Forty-five percent at least "occasionally" watch the "Lakeville Messages" program. Thirty-one percent watch "Lakeville Kids and Government," while 23% "occasionally" tune in to Lakeville Fire Department's "On-Call." Ninety-three percent could suggest no additional government-related programming they would like to see offered on Channel 16.

Conclusions:

In general, Lakeville residents remain extraordinarily satisfied with their community. The rate of growth is still an issue, but does not dampen general ratings. The key issue facing decision-

makers in the future remains balancing growth and development with natural ambience and the efficient provision of city services. In balancing the needs and wants of citizens against the concerns of taxpayers, particularly in the provision of city services, Lakeville City government and staff continue to strike an excellent balance, when compared with other suburban communities. But, as growth continues, greater uneasiness has been expressed, particularly directed at residential development. To combat these feelings, the City may need to more aggressively inform residents about the ways in which services have met the challenge.

Overall, Lakeville residents continue to grade the city enterprise highly. Service and job performance ratings remain solid in comparison with other suburban communities and exemplary when compared with other “high growth” areas. If the City Government wishes to stay ahead of the curve, as it has done so well in the past, it will need to continue to play a key role in protecting those core values that attracted — and continue to attract — residents to Lakeville. This will not only require a focus on development and its consequences, particularly traffic congestion, but an expansion of communications efforts, particularly through electronic channels, to keep residents abreast of current changes and future plans.