



PARKS AND RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

City of Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department

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Contents

READING/INTERPRETING THE REPORT	2
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	3
METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY.....	4
DETERMINATION OF THE SAMPLE	4
DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	4
QUESTIONNAIRE CONTENTS	5
RESULTS OF THE STUDY: DEMOGRAPHICS	7
DESCRIPTION OF THE POPULATION.....	7
Gender.....	7
Age	7
Income and Employment	8
Household composition.....	8
Demographic Overview	9
RESULTS OF THE SURVEY: GENERAL FINDINGS	10
RECREATION INTERESTS.....	10
PERSONAL OPINIONS.....	13
Opinions about recreation facilities	14
Opinions about programs and administration	15
Opinions about health-related issues.....	17
Opinions about funding recreation.....	18
AREAS OF IMPORTANCE.....	20
INFORMATION ABOUT PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES	25
ATTENDANCE.....	27
REASONS FOR NON-USE.....	30
SUMMARY.....	33
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CURRENT AND THE PREVIOUS STUDY	35

READING/INTERPRETING THE REPORT

This report is the final outcome of the Needs Assessment Study (henceforth referred to as “study”) that was commissioned by the Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department (henceforth referred to as “BCPRD”) in 2013. In reading/interpreting this report, it is important to note that the results are presented in several ways. First, there is a narrative description of the findings, which then are supported by tables of data. **Key findings and summaries are underlined in the body of the report.** Recommendations are made across the entire body of the report and are always supported by data. *All recommendations are presented in italics in the body of the report.*

The tables and numbers in the report should be considered carefully. Since there were several questions that addressed similar issues, these items were distributed in different parts of the questionnaire. When combined, these pieces of information together make up the entire report and results. *In many cases, the importance attached to a particular piece of numeric data must be interpreted along with other similar questions in the instrument.* Moreover, before drawing specific conclusions, it is important to recognize that a universal yardstick cannot be used to interpret the results. For example, the results from one section of the questionnaire may suggest that a particular facility, considered by 40% of the respondents to be needed in Battle Creek, is in fact a significant necessity because most of the other facilities listed in that section received far less endorsement. On the other hand, a particular activity that is considered necessary by 40% of the respondents may be very insignificant in a particular section if there were other activities that received far more support. It is the ranking, as presented in the tables that is most important. Consequently, it is impossible to try to find one percentage as the cut-off point for all the questions. Each question needs to be considered separately and as a part of the section to which it belongs.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The study was designed to elicit interest, behavior, demographic, and attitude information from the citizens served by the BCPRD concerning recreation and leisure. It is important to note that the study was intended to obtain information from the entire community and not any specific user group. The objective of the study was to obtain the relevant information that will help the BCPRD do its job more effectively by enabling it to be more responsive to the recreation needs of the residents of Battle Creek. Additionally, the information can also be used to better organize the internal workings of the BCPRD to stay in tune with the current and future needs of the community. This also implies that the BCPRD will benefit by learning about the residents' awareness of the recreation activities within Battle Creek. In summary, this study was not a user's survey, but a more comprehensive assessment of the recreation needs, attitudes and opinions of the residents of the entire community. Thus, it should be noted that the primary goal of the study was to obtain information about Parks and Recreation in Battle Creek.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

Determination of the Sample

While it is desirable to question all of the residents of Battle Creek, it is not possible to do so due to a variety of constraints including cost, available time and access. However, using the principles of random sampling, it was possible to collect data from a part of the population and then make projections about the entire population. For this reason, a statistically viable and reliable random sampling procedure was used for this study. Given the fact that it was a random sample of the population, it is possible to claim that, within a small margin of error (3.00%), the sample is reliably representative of the community as a whole.

In this case, a sample of 6,500 addresses was selected from a complete list of addresses in Battle Creek. Addresses were chosen randomly from this sampling frame so that every address had an equal chance of being selected. The addresses then were used in mailing the questionnaires to city residents.

Development of the Questionnaire

Numerous people were invited to meet with the research staff resulting in several focus group meetings and a number of personal interviews that helped to identify issues relating to parks and recreation in Battle Creek. The meetings were moderated by MLL staff. The MLL staff also held meetings with key city leadership. Overall, the meetings were well attended.

All of the background information gathered in these meetings was used to produce the first draft of the instrument, which contained questions and items specific to the community, as well as some items from the study conducted by MLL in 1997 and 2008. These early drafts were then reviewed by the consulting team, as well as by the members of the BCPRD. After a thorough review, a final draft of the questionnaire was approved by the BCPRD.

Questionnaire Contents

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to elicit respondent interest in various recreation categories such as “aquatics,” “gardening,” “indoor fitness,” etc. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in each of the categories. Examples of activities within each category were listed so respondents would know what each category meant. Respondents were also asked to indicate if they had participated in any of the recreation activities within the past 12 months.

The next section, labeled, “Attendance,” dealt with the level of use of parks, and attendance at the recreation programs by the respondents. Different types of recreation uses were listed and the respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they had engaged in each use in the past twelve months. Next, there was a section designed to elicit reasons for not using or attending recreation facilities and programs. A list of possible barriers was provided and respondents were asked to indicate if each applied to them and the members of their family. The choices included items such as “lack of information,” “lack of cleanliness,” etc.

The respondents were also asked to indicate their level of availability to participate in recreation activities. The questionnaire offered a section that listed hours of the day for all the days of the week. Respondents were requested to indicate when they were most likely to be available for leisure activities. The questionnaire included questions related to availability for both the adults and youth of Battle Creek.

Respondents then were asked about the best ways of keeping informed about public recreation opportunities. They were provided with a list that included items such as cable television, seasonal brochures and word of mouth, and respondents were asked to evaluate them as either “effective” or “not effective.”

The next section, labeled, “Areas of Importance” listed items that were indicated as needs in the various meetings. These included both programmatic and facility additions. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of each item.

The next section of the questionnaire dealt with personal opinions of the respondents. There was a series of statements for which they could indicate their level of agreement on a four-point scale that ranged from “strongly agree” to

“strongly disagree,” with a fifth “don’t know” option. There were several general areas of personal opinion.

The items dealt with issues such as:

- Respondents’ personal knowledge and feelings about the BCPRD and its offerings,
- Specific improvements that the BCPRD could make in its services,
- General recreation and health issues related to the BCPRD,
- Opinions about the effectiveness of marketing and publicity efforts of the BCPRD, and
- General questions about the quality of life in Battle Creek.

This was followed by a section that was designed to understand what the respondents considered the top priorities for BCPRD. This section included items like “neighborhood recreation” and “centralized facility,” and respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of the priority item.

Respondents were then provided a section that solicited opinions about funding recreation in Battle Creek. Several funding options like “corporate sponsorships,” and “property taxes” were offered and the respondents were asked to indicate their support for each method on a four-point scale that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” with a fifth “don’t know” option.

The last section of the questionnaire included general demographic questions concerning gender, age, marital status, household composition, length of residence in Battle Creek, and where generally the respondent lives in the community.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY: DEMOGRAPHICS

Description of the Population

A set of questions was designed to elicit demographic information such as age, marital status, gender, etc. These questions can provide information about a community's makeup and therefore its possible recreation needs. It is useful to note that the percentages reported and tabulated sometimes add up to 101% or 99% due to the effects of rounding off decimals.

Gender

The sample was made up of 38% male and 62% female. The Census reports a distribution of 48% males and 52% females (see, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Battle-Creek-Michigan.html>). There is a larger portion of women in the respondent pool. The data analysis presented in this report is based on the un-weighted data. Many of the variables were tested with both weighted and un-weighted data and there was minimal difference in the outcomes. In order to remain true to the data, the un-weighted analysis is presented here, but the weighted data is also available for analysis.

Age

The questionnaire provided different age categories and the percentages are reported below. This places the median age in the 45-54 age group which is slightly higher than what is reported for Census for Battle Creek but in line with the Michigan state data.

Age Category	
18-24	2%
25-34	8%
35-44	14%
45-54	18%
55-64	20%
65-69	18%
70-74	7%
Over 75	13%

Income and Employment

The household income distribution varied from under \$25,000 to over \$125,000 per year, with the median income being in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range which matches the latest Census information. The respondents also indicated that 92% had one or more working adult in the household. The specific income categories were as follows:

Income Category	
Under \$25,000	18%
\$25-50,000	26%
\$50-75,000	18%
\$75-100,000	20%
\$100-125,000	10%
Over \$125,000	7%

Household composition

The results show that 78% of the households have two adults in the home. Furthermore, nearly 62% have one or more children under five years of age, 62% have at least one child in the five to ten year range, 53% of the respondents indicated that they have at least one child in the eleven to fourteen year age range, and finally 43% claimed they have at least one child in the fifteen to eighteen year

age range. Thus, in total, nearly all of the respondents indicated that their household has at least one child under the age of eighteen. The respondents indicated that 57% were married. Nearly 81% of the respondents claimed to be white, with the rest being primarily a mix of African-Americans and Hispanics, with 6% claiming to be African-American. About 44% claimed to have a grandchild living in Battle Creek. The respondents also indicated that nearly 98% had a high-school or higher degree. Nearly a third of the respondents claimed to have a pet dog and nearly a quarter of the respondents claimed to have a pet cat. Given the importance of the Internet in marketing activities, the respondents were asked about relative ease of access to the Internet. Only 7% claimed that they had no access. Most of the respondents claimed that a desktop computer, a laptop computer or a cell phone was their primary device for accessing the Internet. Finally, in order to assess the portion of respondents that were using private facilities for recreation, they were asked to select from a list of competing recreation and leisure service providers. The data suggests that nearly a quarter of the respondents use programs offered by the school districts, religious institutions and the YMCA. Nearly 15% of the respondents also indicated that they were going to neighboring cities and sports clubs/private clubs.

Demographic Overview

The results reported in this document are obtained from respondents who represent a somewhat affluent family-oriented segment of the population. Most of the respondents have children and are in the “middle-income” range. These results are consistent with information available from other sources such as “City-data” which maintains updated information about most US cities. They report the same portion of ethnicities, income, and household composition. Thus, the respondents to the survey can be considered to be generally representative of the community.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY: GENERAL FINDINGS

The following sections of this report describe the findings about the various recreational needs of Battle Creek residents. The questionnaire was used to explore recreation and leisure interests as well as what residents believe should be areas of emphasis for additional facilities and programs in Battle Creek. Moreover, information was gathered concerning opinions about various recreation-related issues, including factors that limit the use of facilities and how recreation programs should be funded. Personal opinions about recreation and health-related issues were also collected. Unless otherwise specified, numbers in parentheses refer to the percentage responding positively to a question. Furthermore, it should be noted that the percentages are estimates and can vary between plus or minus three to five percentage points.

Recreation Interests

The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the level of interest they have for each of fifteen different categories of recreational activities. Examples of specific activities pertaining to each general category were provided. The scale included the options, “interested,” and “not interested.” The results are described in terms of the percentages of respondents who showed interest in a particular recreational activity by selecting the “great interest” or “some interest” option. The respondents were also asked to indicate if they had participated in any of the recreation activities listed under each category. The results presented in Table 1 are arranged in descending order to highlight the most widely shared leisure interests at the top of the table.

Special events appears at the top of the ranking, with nearly three-fifths (63%) of the respondents indicating an interest in one- or two-day events, festivals, shows and fairs. These interests are consistent with the widespread need for neighborhood. This is also supported by the fact that nearly 34% the respondents participated in special events. Therefore, *the BCPRD should ensure that it provides opportunities and spaces for their residents to participate in special events.*

Fitness-related activities appeared next in the ranking. Nearly 56% of the respondents report that they have an interest in fitness activities that can be done indoors like aerobics, and nearly the same portion of respondents showed an interest in fitness activities that can be done outdoors like running, walking and biking. The emphasis on biking is also reflected in the fact that almost 93% of the respondents indicated a need for trails and walking areas and a large number of respondents supported promotion of physical fitness activities. (Table 1). It is important to note that although there might be an interest in these activities, only between 36% and 41% of the respondents indicated that they have participated in these activities over the past year. Given the strong interest in fitness, *the BCPRD should consider offering more fitness-related activities and facilities for their residents.*

About 52% of the respondents also showed an interest in active recreation including sports and athletics. Residents indicated an interest in activities like baseball, soccer, swim lessons and open swim. These are considered the more traditional recreation activities and the respondents indicated that nearly 34% had participated in these activities over the past year. Therefore, *the BCPRD should consider providing opportunities for its residents to enjoy the active recreation that would include traditional sports activities.*

More than 50% of the respondents were interested in wellness and self help facilities. However, only 25% had participated in these activities in the past year. Since more than half of the respondents showed an interest, *the BCPRD should consider providing various self help and wellness facilities.*

Activities that relate to nature are also significantly popular, with about 50% of the respondents showing an interest in environmental recreational activities like nature walks and about 55% in gardening. The need for parks is consistent with this interest and the need is particularly critical because less than a third of the respondents indicated that they have participated in such activities. This interest in nature-related activities is also reflected in the fact that nearly 76% of the respondents claimed that community parks ought to be an important priority. Therefore, *the BCPRD should consider offering more activities and facilities related to environmental recreation.*

About 40% to 50% of the respondents also indicated an interest in slightly specialized activities related to aquatics and adventure activities. Only half the

population has mentioned never participating in aquatic programs in other parts of the study. Since the remaining half show an interest in water games, therefore, *the BCPRD should consider providing opportunities for its residents to enjoy the range of activities included in these categories.*

The remaining recreation activities are of interest to less than half of the respondents and should remain lower in priority. This does not mean that these kinds of activities, such as family activities, opportunities for the special needs population and extreme sports should be ignored, but they should only be supported once the more popular interests have been accommodated and/or if there is sufficient interest among a small, dedicated group of residents to support such activities. *The BCPRD should first focus on those activities in which most residents are interested. Subsequently, those interests that are supported by a smaller subgroup of residents should be accommodated.*

The results from these items are presented in the following table. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each response option for each activity type.

Table 1: Recreation Interests

Category	Percent Interested	Percent Participated
Special events	63%	34%
Indoor fitness	56%	36%
Outdoor fitness	56%	41%
Gardening	55%	29%
Sports and athletics	52%	34%
Wellness and self help	52%	25%
Environmental	50%	23%
Adventure activities	48%	29%
Aquatics	43%	20%
Outdoor sports	39%	15%
Family fitness activities	32%	12%
Activities for the disabled	29%	7%
Extreme sports	20%	5%

Personal Opinions

This section of the questionnaire contained several opinion statements with which respondents could agree or disagree. A four-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” was provided, along with a fifth “don’t know” option in case the respondents did not have enough experience with a particular issue to form an opinion about it. For the sake of simplicity of presentation, the results have been collapsed into the categories “agree,” “disagree” and “don’t know,” but BCPRD can use the Web-based tool if more detail is needed to discriminate between levels of agreement or disagreement. These opinion items were generated in part on the basis of the focus group meetings with staff and

residents, and they reflect some of the larger issues surrounding the operation of BCPRD facilities and programs. Although the items were arranged somewhat randomly in the questionnaire, the results are presented here around major topic areas.

Opinions about recreation facilities

Four of the items in the opinions section of the questionnaire address the facilities maintained by the BCPRD. More specifically, the items tap into the residents' opinions about parks and recreation facilities in Battle Creek and considered alongside the facility-related ideas for new parks and recreation they will help the staff further understand what preferences and needs there may be.

Almost all residents considered greenspaces and walking trails as an important component of healthy communities. More than 70 % have marked facilities of walking and parks as areas of importance. *The BCPRD should thus strive to provide greenspaces for a better community life.*

Most residents agreed that the preservation of green space and parks add to the quality of life in Battle Creek. Nearly 89% of the respondents felt that open spaces are an important contributor to enhancing the quality of life in the community. This is especially important since 64% of the respondents also agreed that they were satisfied with the maintenance of the parks. The data from the study also shows that there is significant interest in passive recreation and open spaces offer the opportunity for such recreation. Based on these results, *the BCPRD should continue to provide well maintained park spaces for its residents that add to the quality of life of the residents.*

The next set of opinions is related to type of facilities that people prefer. Nearly 60% of the respondents agreed that they prefer smaller neighborhood parks as opposed to a large centralized park. The respondents also indicated that there is an interest in seeing more health and wellness related activities at Full Blast. The data suggests that *the BCPRD should consider building smaller parks with space available for passive recreation before going for centralized all-purpose facilities.*

The other facility related issues reflected that nearly 17% of the respondents did not feel safe in the parks. Even though 61% felt safe, the fact that some perceive the parks as unsafe could have a negative impact on the image of the BCPRD. *The BCPRD should ensure that the facilities are safe, and promote the*

fact that residents can expect a safe facility. The results from the facility-related opinion items are presented in the next table.

Table 2: Opinions about Recreation Facilities

	Agree	Disagree	DK
Greenspaces/parks and walking trails are an important component of healthy communities	93%	2%	5%
The preservation and maintenance of greenspace parks adds to quality of life	89%	3%	8%
The Full Blast recreation center should be used for programs and services that promote health and fitness activities for youth	84%	1%	15%
BCPRD does a good job of maintaining parks in the community	64%	23%	13%
BCPRD programs and facilities are safe	61%	17%	22%
Battle Creek has the right amount of parks and greenspace	61%	24%	15%
I prefer larger centralized parks to smaller parks closer to my home	24%	60%	16%

Opinions about programs and administration

Some items in the opinions section of the questionnaire address issues related to programming and general operations of the BCPRD. More specifically, the items tap into the residents’ opinions about how the BCPRD responds to programmatic needs of the community and the perceptions of the community with respect to the way the BCPRD handles its internal activities. Generally, nearly 76% respondents felt that improvement and maintenance of existing facilities should be a top priority for BCPRD and only 31% of the respondents felt that BCPRD should also place emphasis on the construction of new facilities.

More than 65 % of the respondents felt that BCPRD should offer its resources to other recreation providers while similar number of respondents felt that there needs to be more recreation opportunities in Battle Creek. This finding is particularly important since it shows that nearly 64% of the respondents felt that there is a need for more recreation opportunities. This finding needs to be considered in connection with the specific area of importance that the respondents

indicated in other parts of the study. Around 64 % of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of the facilities provided by BCPRD. As such, the *BCPRD should examine the areas of importance and consider offering the recreation opportunities that are high in priority and consider collaboration opportunities while maintaining and improving the quality of the programs.*

The respondents also felt that the BCPRD should be responsive to the community needs of physical recreation and promote the opportunities provided by BCPRD. Nearly two-fifth of the respondents either were unaware of recreation opportunities provided by BCPRD while more than one-fifth believe that the BCPRD needs to be more responsive to the recreation needs of the community. A good portion of the respondents were unsure about how to respond to these items suggesting that the BCPRD could put some emphasis on providing appropriate and good recreation opportunities while promoting its offerings. These are perceptual issues, and do not reflect the actual quality of offerings, but suggest that there is a need to reshape the perception of the community with regards to BCPRD. The data also suggests that a large portion (about 40%) were unsure about the quality of the BCPRD staff and this could be related to a lack of awareness about the offering of BCPRD. Based on all this data, it is safe to say: *BCPRD should work towards promoting the opportunities that should be of high quality and suitable for the community.*

The results from these questions are presented in the next table.

Table 3: Opinions about Programs

	Agree	Disagree	DK
BCPRD should leverage its resources and extend its reach by partnering with other recreation providers in the community”	68%	9%	23%
I believe there is a need for more recreation opportunities in Battle Creek	64%	18%	18%
The quality of programs and facilities offered by the BCPRD is good	64%	11%	25%
BCPRD is responsive to the physical recreation needs of the community	61%	23%	16%
BCPRD staff is courteous and helpful	50%	8%	42%
I am generally aware of the BCPRD programs and activities	50%	38%	12%

Opinions about health-related issues

There was a section of the questionnaire that focused on the perceptions related to the health and fitness issues. The respondents were offered several different items about health. More than three-fifth of all the respondents considered the fitness and health related programs as areas of importance.

Respondents felt that it was important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. While 87% of the respondents settled for obesity being a problem in the community, 80% agreed that they and their family were in relatively good health, and 78% of the respondents felt that there was a need for more opportunities to be physically active. Nearly 77% also felt that they needed to exercise more to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Overall, nearly two- third of the people felt that Battle Creek was a healthy place to live in.

The respondents also felt that BCPRD could play a role in promoting a healthy lifestyle in Battle Creek. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents felt that primary role of BCPRD should be to encourage people to lead a healthy lifestyle, just as 60% of the respondents felt that people in Battle Creek would lead a healthier lifestyle if there were more opportunities to exercise in the City. This finding is congruent with data from other parts of the study where people have indicated an interest in participating in activities that promote good health. Around

74% of the people feel that greater access to recreation programs would encourage a healthy lifestyle. This is supported by the fact that 61% of the respondents prioritized the increase in access to these facilities. While half the population of Battle Creek supports presence of dog parks to improve quality of lifestyle, more than one-third of them disagree with this point. As such, *BCPRD should consider offering opportunities for exercise and activities that help to satisfy the community need to live a healthy life.*

The results related to health and fitness is presented in the next table.

Table 4: Opinions about Health

	Agree	Disagree	DK
I believe that overweight/obesity is a problem in the community	87%	3%	10%
I consider myself to be a healthy person	83%	14%	3%
I believe my family and I are generally in good health	80%	15%	5%
I believe the people in Battle Creek would experience a better quality of life if there were more opportunities to be physically active.	78%	12%	10%
My family and I need to exercise more to live a healthier life	77%	16%	7%
I believe the primary role of the BCPRD is to encourage physical fitness and healthy lifestyles	75%	12%	13%
I believe there is a need for greater access to recreation programs and services that encourage healthy lifestyles	74%	9%	17%
I feel that there is a problem with the quality of health and wellbeing in my community	72%	12%	16%
I feel that, in general, Battle Creek is a healthy place to live	63%	25%	12%
People in Battle Creek would experience a better quality of life if there were more opportunities to exercise	60%	20%	20%
Having dog parks would help to the quality of a healthy lifestyle in my community	52%	35%	13%

Opinions about funding recreation

There was a section of the questionnaire that focused on funding issues to assess how the community felt about different funding mechanisms. The

respondents were offered several different options including items like “bond issues,” and “sales taxes” so that the respondents could express their opinions about each option on a four-point scale similar to the personal opinion questions.

Respondents felt that user fees were an acceptable way for paying for recreation opportunities. About 63% of the respondents felt that non-residents should be required to pay a higher user fee while 60% of the respondents were willing to pay more user fees for additional use facilities and participate in programs. However, only 37% of the respondents were willing to pay more tax for more programs. In contrast, more than half the population reprovved the payment of extra taxes. Thus it is clear that reasonable user fees could be an appropriate way of funding BCPRD activities. The BCPRD could use this as a way to support activities that would be of special interest to parts of the community. This being the case, *the BCPRD should consider developing a fee schedule for some of its activities, keeping in mind that the resident fee needs to be lower than the non-resident fee just as resident fees need remain in line with local economics.*

The respondents also were partly satisfied with the value they get for their tax dollars. Only 56 % claimed satisfaction from the facilities received against their tax and less than three-fifth of the respondents were willing to support a dedicated millage for BCPRD instead of general taxes. The data from the “Areas of Importance” portion of the study also reflect that respondents are only willing to support activities and facilities that serve the “greater good” with tax dollars. As such *BCPRD should be careful about levying new taxes for recreation activities and facilities and should also provide satisfying recreational opportunities.* .

The results related to funding are presented in the next table.

Table 5: Opinions about Finances

	Agree	Disagree	DK
Non-residents should pay a higher fee for BCPRD programs and services	63%	27%	10%
I would be willing to pay more in user fees for additional BCPRD programs and services	60%	28%	12%
I am satisfied with the recreation opportunities I receive for my tax dollars	56%	27%	17%
I would be willing to support a dedicated Parks and Recreation millage in lieu of general taxes for BCPRD programs and services	45%	38%	17%
I would be willing to pay more in general taxes (property, income, etc.) for additional BCPRD programs and services	37%	53%	10%

Areas of Importance

One section of the questionnaire was designed to determine the importance of various facilities and services in the community. Several recreation facilities and several programs were listed for the respondents, and they were asked to indicate how important the service or facility is for them or their family. These results can help the BCPRD prioritize its future additions in terms of what the community perceives as necessary; they can also help the BCPRD recognize areas that may be perceived as necessary simply because residents are not aware of existing provisions. The items were listed in alphabetical order in the questionnaire but they have been thematically arranged for ease of analysis and presentation. The items listed included things that might be completely new to the community as well as some things that are already available. The objective of this section was to develop a measure of the current and future needs for things that are already available and things that might become available in the near future. The respondents were asked to indicate how each item ought to be funded – by tax or user fees.

Areas of necessity (over 70% support)

To begin with, neighborhood parks were highest in the list. Almost 71% of the respondents indicated a need for neighborhood parks. With passive recreation being important to the respondents, the need for neighborhood parks should be considered to be a key priority for the people in Battle Creek. As such, the *BCPRD should focus on providing safe and clean neighborhood parks*.

The respondents also indicated the importance of trails of different kinds. Around 60% to 70% of the respondents indicated that it was important to have walking trails, linear trails and bike trails. In other parts of the result, maximum number of citizens viewed walking to be an important activity for them whilst fitness activities were considered to be a high-priority category of recreation activities with more than 40% of the respondents indicating that running and jogging are important activities for them. Nearly 60% of the respondents also indicated the importance of bike lanes that could be used for transportation to complement the importance of linear trails. *This being the case, the BCPRD should explore ways to add different kinds of trails throughout the city*.

The respondents also indicated the importance of water-related activities and facilities. Nearly half of the respondents indicated the importance of swimming and swimming pools. These findings are consistent with the general interest in fitness and wellness as reflected in other parts of the results as well as aquatics being chosen by 43% of people as important recreational activities. The *BCPRD needs to offer swimming, aquatic activities and facilities for the community*.

The respondents also indicated the importance of different kinds of athletic facilities. Between 40% and 50% of the respondents indicated a need for baseball fields, soccer fields, tennis courts and basketball courts while 55% supported fitness classes as imperative. Sporting activities are also indicated to be important in other parts of the data. This represents that the community has a strong interest in active sports and need the facilities for these activities. It is also related to the fact that these activities often provide opportunities for family recreation which is also in high demand in most communities. These findings suggest that *BCPRD needs to provide facilities for active recreation and sports including athletic fields*.

The respondents also indicated the importance of gardens and animal parks. Around 40% marked dog parks as important while more than half considered community gardens as crucial. Although these items are little lower in rank as

compared to some of the other areas of importance, *they still need to be considered by the BCPRD since they represent facilities that are popular in most communities.*

The respondents also indicated the importance of some special interest activities and facilities that would be of interest to some distinct groups within the community. This includes the interest in rollerblading, ice hockey, strength training, off-road biking, boating, ice skating, golf, and bowling. Since less than two-fifths of the respondents indicated an interest in these opportunities they could be addressed after the more pressing needs have been met. These are not the top priorities for the BCPRD, but the *BCPRD should try and address the special needs of the smaller groups once the more widespread needs have been taken care of.*

The respondents also generally indicated that items that would be of greater general interest and is likely to serve the “public good” should be funded by taxes, and the more specialized interest areas ought to be fee supported. This is especially important to note since the data from the study also suggests that more than half the respondents are willing to support programs with user fees. The results are summarized in the following tables.

Table 6: Areas of Importance (40% and above)

Facility/Program	Percent who claim needed	Fee to Tax Ratio (less than 0 means pay by tax, more than 1 is pay by fee)
Neighborhood Parks	71%	0.24
Walking	71%	0.67
Fitness Walking	68%	1.42
Linear Trails	67%	0.38
Baseball Fields	60%	1.28
Bike Trails	59%	0.51
Bike Lanes	57%	0.45
Fitness classes	55%	5.08
Non-motorized trails	54%	0.45
Community gardens	52%	1.24
Swimming	52%	3.11
Basketball Courts	51%	1.14
Swimming Pool	50%	2.95
Jogging	45%	1.00
Soccer Fields	45%	1.12
Running	43%	0.83
Dog Parks	41%	1.12
Tennis Courts	41%	1.45
Strength Training	40%	4.55

Table 7: Areas of Importance (39% and below)

Facility/Program	Percent who claim needed	Fee to Tax Ratio (less than 0 means pay by tax, more than 1 is pay by fee)
Volleyball	37%	1.50
Bowling	36%	7.50
Off-road Biking	36%	1.03
Boating	36%	3.40
Golf	36%	12.21
Weight Lifting	35%	4.00
Cross fit training	33%	6.33
Ice Skating	33%	8.56
Disc Golf	31%	2.37
Ice Hockey	30%	15.23
Skate Parks	29%	1.52
Kayaking	27%	6.50
Rollerblading	27%	1.73
Shuffleboard	26%	1.65
Lacrosse Fields	24%	2.80
Horseshoes	21%	3.92
BMX Biking	16%	3.39
Geo Caching	12%	7.00
Active video games	8%	9.61
Pickleball	7%	4.75

Information about Parks and Recreation Opportunities

The next section of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate which methods of communication would be the most effective in keeping them informed about parks and recreation programs and activities. The scale included the options, “effective,” “ineffective,” and “don’t know.” The results are described in terms of the percentages of respondents who selected the “effective” and “ineffective” options.

Direct mail or Newsletter appears at the top of the ranking, with 83% of the respondents indicating this type of communication as being effective while 17% indicating it as non-effective. This preference is also reflected in the fact that 71% of the respondents indicated that they also like to receive information through special mailings sent to homes. Residents recognize the importance of having Battle Creek activities listed in print for them and the convenience of having this listing sent to their home, therefore the *BCPRD should try to keep residents informed of upcoming recreation activities through direct mailings of upcoming programs, activities and services.*

Notification through department Web sites appeared next in the ranking. Nearly 76% of the respondents recognized that information placed on the website are an effective way of keeping them informed of ongoing recreational and leisure activities. *BCPRD should ascertain that Departments regularly update their websites with forthcoming amusement events.*

Information mailed with utility bills is also significantly popular. More than three-fifth of the respondents indicate that mailings with water bills is an effective method for keeping them informed of the upcoming season’s programs and activities. The popularity of this method should be considered alongside the popularity of direct mail. *BCPRD should consider using mailings with utility bills to promote their activities and facilities.*

Advertisements of any kind appeared next. More than two-thirds of the respondents affirmed public notice on billboards, flyers and newspapers as effective methods. *Therefore public announcements through leaflets and marquees are a great way publicizing events.*

A significant number of respondents feel that mass media should be used for promotion and publicity. Around 50% to 65% of the residents supported new media technologies such as the Web and direct e-mails as information channels and other mediums like television and radio advertising for communication with the population. In addition, many people in the community read the newspaper on a daily basis. Therefore, the *BCPRD should consider marketing information about parks and recreation opportunities through all the mass media channels including the Web.*

The respondents feel that word of mouth and flyers in school are moderately effective. More than half of the residents surveyed felt that word of mouth is a good way of getting information to the community.

The residents feel that messages through phones are futile when trying to inform about events. More than two-third of those surveyed alleged that text messages and voicemails were ineffective. More than 88% of the people claimed access vision as ineffective. *Therefore, BCPRD should not waste time in these modes of reporting channels and instead should use the other methods of informing.*

The results from these items are presented in the following table. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each response option as effective or non-effective for each method of communication.

Table 8: Information about Parks and Recreation Opportunities

Information method	Percent claiming the method effective	Percent claiming the method ineffective
Direct Mail (Newsletter)	83%	17%
Department Website	76%	24%
Special mailings to homes	71%	29%
Mailing with water bills	69%	31%
E-mail announcements	66%	34%
Newspaper ads	65%	35%
Flyers in public places	65%	35%
Marquees/Billboards	63%	37%
TV ads	56%	44%
Word of mouth	55%	45%
Social Media	54%	46%
Radio ads	52%	48%
Flyers in schools	46%	54%
Applications for mobile phones	40%	60%
Voicemail/phone messages	40%	60%
Text messages	31%	69%
Access Vision	12%	88%

Attendance

One section of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate how many times they and/or their family have visited various facilities in the past 12 months. The scale included the options, “never,” “1 to 2 times,” “3 to 6 times,” “7 to 12 times,” “13 to 24 times” and “more than 24 times.” The results are described in

terms of the percentages of respondents who indicated never having visited facilities in the last year. The results presented in Table 8 are arranged in order to highlight the least number of people never having visited facilities at the top of the table or in other words the facilities that maximum number of people had visited are kept at the top.

Parks in general were the most widely visited facilities in Battle Creek. Only one-fourth of the respondents indicated never visiting parks in the past 12 months. The respondents also indicated that they frequently visit Bailey Park. The data shows that more than 60% of the residents visit neighborhood parks and Bailey Park. The importance of parks is also reflected in the need for neighborhood parks and the BCPRD *should ensure that the population has access to parks.*

Linear paths were also quite popular with the respondents. Only 36% of the people have denoted that they have never participated in this facility. This is consistent with the interest in fitness, walking and trails in general. Given this large level of popularity, the BCPRD *should make a concerted effort to maintain and promote the linear paths.*

Nearly 40% of the respondents also indicated participating in water activities and visiting the Willard Beach. Around 46% of the respondents indicated participating in water activities while 41% agreed to having visited the beach. The BCPRD *should ensure that the aquatic activities are kept available to the population.*

Some of the special service facilities are also quite popular with the respondents. Around 64% of the respondents indicated never visiting the Riverside Park, Full Blast and Golf Course and similar number of people pointed out never having participated in the Youth Sports Programming. Overall these facilities are popular to nearly third the respondents and the finding is consistent with the general levels of recreation interest in the community. Also nearly half the population has chosen building of centralized facilities at Full Blast and Bailey Park in other parts of the survey. So even though their popularity is not great, the BCPRD *should make a modest effort to maintain and promote the specialized facilities for the special groups interested.*

Specific locations like the Rink, Woodland Park and programs such as the pre-school programming, after-school programming and summer camps were used less often. Over 70% of the respondents indicated that they have never participated

in these facilities within the past 12 months. These are special sites and focused programs that could have a good attendance by a loyal clientele, but the general population might not be frequent users of these facilities. The BCPRD should be careful about keeping these sites in good condition, even if they are ranked lower in the list of sites. This study was designed to provide information about the community-wide recreation needs and interests and was not intended to be a user study. As such, the low attendance figures reflect that there is an opportunity to attract more people to the facilities and programs offered by the BCPRD. There are specific barriers to attendance, as discussed in the next section, but the BCPRD should be able to overcome some of those barriers to boost the number of people visiting the facilities and participating in the programs. It should be noted that the attendance figures do not reflect how close to capacity each facility is. Indeed, if the facilities are operating close to capacity, and the attendance level is reported as low here, it is an indication that more facilities should be considered before trying to attract more people to the current facilities.

The results from the attendance items are presented in the next table.

Table 9: Attendance

Activity/Facility	Percent saying never participated
Parks in General	25%
Neighborhood Parks	30%
Bailey Park	35%
Linear Path	36%
Water Activities	54%
Willard Beach	59%
Riverside Park	64%
Full Blast (Recreation Center)	64%
Youth Sports Programming	64%
Binder Park Golf Course	66%
After School Programs	73%
Woodland Park	74%
Pre-School Programming	76%
The Rink (Ice Arena)	80%
Summer Camp	82%

Reasons for Non-use

After the “Attendance” section, another part of the questionnaire was aimed at investigating the possible factors that limit residents from participating in organized recreation activities offered by the BCPRD. The results are described in terms of the percentages of respondents who selected each option as a reason why they or their family have not participated in programs, activities, and/or not visited facilities.

The most important factor affecting participation is lack of information. About a third (35%) of the respondents said they have not participated in programs or attended facilities because they were not acquainted with the events or facilities. This is not an unusual reason for non-attendance, and in the case of Battle Creek this is especially important since 38% of the respondents also indicated, elsewhere in the questionnaire, that they were generally unaware of the recreation opportunities in the City. The actual lack of information, along with the perception that the BCPRD does not promote its services could lead to fewer people attending events and coming to facilities.

The issue of cost is also important since the second most important factor affecting participation is cost. About a fifth (20%) of the respondents said they have not participated in programs or attended facilities because of high cost. In an economic climate where people have to watch household expenses in view of rising fuel costs along with the increasing cost of daily needs, it is important to consider ways in which recreation activities can be made more affordable. As such, the BCPRD should take into account ways in which different financing options can be considered as indicated in the funding section of this report. The perception of high cost could also be related to a lack of information about the true cost of participating in recreation activities. The BCPRD should *make good efforts to keep residents well informed about recreation opportunities and the costs in order to spark participation in programs and events.*

Around 12% to 17% of the respondents were also concerned about the quality of the facilities where activities were offered. 17% of people found deficient restrooms in the facilities while 15% felt there were better facilities elsewhere. 13% to 15% of the residents blamed the lack of cleanliness and

maintenance of the facilities and the monotony of the programs as hindrance to their involvement. Similar number the respondents found the facilities unsafe. It is likely that the locations are indeed safe, but the perception of lack of safety could become very damaging to a recreation agency. Most of these are perceptual issues and it is important for the *BCPRD to ensure that the community has the correct information about quality and safety of the facilities.*

Next was the health of the residents. Nearly 13% of the residents implied their ill health as a barrier to participation. 58% of the respondents prioritized need of information on nutrition through different programs. However age could also be a factor that resulted in weak physical conditions. Nevertheless with so many of the participants requiring various fitness activities and selecting health related activities as the top areas of recreation, *the BCPRD should strive to ensure better health conditions of its residents through various fitness programs.*

Next in ranking was inconvenient timing of activities. About 12% said they did not participate in BCPRD programs and activities because the programs were offered at inconvenient times. It is possible to correct this issue by providing more information about the timing and comparing when activities are offered as compared to when people are available to recreate. The data from this study suggests that the best time for families to relax is between 5 to 8 in the evening on every day of the week besides all day on weekends with about a third of the respondents indicating this to be their best time. Very few (less than 10%) of the adults indicated that early morning (6 to 8 am) on weekdays were convenient. Less than 10% of the youths were free for entertainment activities on weekdays. The BCPRD should *examine the times when people are available and offer activities that are available at times that are more convenient to the community.*

The remaining factors like lack of parking, inconvenient locations, registration problems, cancellation of programs were not considered significant limitations since about one-tenth or less of the respondents cited these factors as reasons for non-use. While they are the lowest-ranked issues relative to the others, they should not be ignored but the other factors need to be addressed first. One of the reasons for non-attendance was that the respondents felt that there were better facilities elsewhere. This means that the BCPRD has a fair amount of competition and it would be worthwhile for BCPRD to explore why the population is drawn to the competing facilities and programs.

The results from the reasons for non-use are presented in the next table. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who indicated each response as a reason for limited participation in programs and/or not visiting facilities.

Table 10: Reasons for Non-use

Barrier	Percent saying yes
Lack of information	35%
Cost	20%
Lack of restrooms	17%
Better facilities are available elsewhere	15%
Lack of variety of programs	15%
Lack of cleanliness	13%
Lack of maintenance	13%
Location does not appear safe	13%
My physical condition does not allow me to participate	13%
Inconvenient timing of activities	12%
Lack of parking	12%
Inconvenient location	12%
I am not sure what specific things I need to do to be healthier	7%
Difficulties with registration	2%
Programs get cancelled	2%
Language/Cultural barriers	0%

SUMMARY

This section of the report takes some of the key recommendations from each section of the report and suggests a plan of action for the BCPRD. Some of these can be achieved in the short term, while others need to be considered as long-term plan elements.

Facilities: The results clearly suggest that the BCPRD needs to emphasize maintenance of its facilities along with the development of neighborhood parks. The following recommendations address this issue:

- *BCPRD should ensure that it provides opportunities and spaces for their residents to participate in special events and enjoy passive recreation.*
- *BCPRD should continue to provide well maintained park spaces for its residents that add to the quality of life of the residents.*
- *BCPRD should consider building smaller parks with space available for passive recreation before going for centralized all-purpose facilities.*
- *BCPRD should explore ways to add different kinds of trails throughout the city.*
- *BCPRD should bring in variation in the programs offered to trigger interests and increase participations.*

Programming for fitness and health: The results clearly suggest that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important to the respondents and thus the BCPRD should consider the following recommendations as important components of its future plans:

- *BCPRD should consider offering more fitness-related activities and facilities for their residents.*
- *BCPRD should consider offering opportunities for exercise and activities that help to satisfy the community need to live a healthy life.*
- *BCPRD should consider providing opportunities for its residents to enjoy the active recreation that would include traditional sports activities.*

Financial issues: The respondents had specific feelings about the way in which BCPRD should be funded and how its funding should be used. To that end, the BCPRD should consider adopting the following recommendations:

- *BCPRD should consider developing a fee schedule for some of its activities, keeping in mind that the resident fee needs to be lower than the non-resident fee just as resident fees need remain in line with local economics.*
- *BCPRD should be careful about levying new taxes for recreation activities and facilities and should also provide satisfying recreational opportunities.*

Administrative issues: Based on the data, the BCPRD should consider the following as recommendations for action with respect to the way in which it performs its activities. These are important issues since there is an opportunity for BCPRD to better showcase its activities and functions in the community to gain the respect it deserves:

- *BCPRD should try to keep residents informed of upcoming recreation activities through direct mailings of upcoming programs, activities and services.*
- *BCPRD to ensure that the community has the correct information about quality and safety of the facilities.*
- *BCPRD should examine the times when people are available and offer activities that are available at times that are more convenient to the community.*
- *BCPRD should try and address the special needs of the smaller groups once the more widespread needs have been taken care of.*

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CURRENT AND THE PREVIOUS STUDY

Recreational Interest

- 1) The general level of interest among the recreation activities has shown a 9 % decline in general although the priority of the residents in terms of the interest in the activities has not shown any change.
- 2) Participation has also shown a general decline of approx 3% among all activities with the exception of “Indoor Fitness” and “Wellness and Self Help” which have shown a growth of approx 6% in Participation.

Opinions about Recreation Facilities

- 1) The awareness about the safety of BCPRD programs and facilities and the maintenance of the parks has improved with a 10% decline in the number of people with DK (Don't know) response to queries about safety and maintenance.
- 2) There has been a significant (17%) increase in the no. of residents believing that Battle Creek has the right amount of parks and greenspace
- 3) The preference for larger centralized parks to smaller parks closer to home has shown an increase by 10 percentage points.

Opinions about programs and administration

- 1) The general perception about the quality of programs and facilities offered by the BCPRD being good and BCPRD being responsive to the recreation needs of the community has improved by 12 %.
- 2) 14% more respondents feel that BCPRD should extend its resources by lending support to other recreation
- 3) There is a 15% decline in the no. of people feeling that there is a need for more recreation opportunities in Battle Creek

Opinions about Health

- 1) There has been around 10% decrease in the number of people opining that increase in opportunities to exercise would lead to a better lifestyle.

- 2) There has been a small increment in the number of people considering Battle Creeks as a healthy place to live from the previous survey.
- 3) However there has been average of 8% increase in the number of people with Don't Know responses in their health related opinions.

Opinions about Finances

- 1) There has been a substantial growth of 12% in the willingness to pay more for extra services and 15% increase in the support of dedicated Parks and Recreation millage.
- 2) Satisfaction of the number of people with regards to the recreational opportunities received against their taxes has gone up by 9% from the previous study.

Areas of Importance

- 1) Activities such as swimming, golf, ice hockey, etc were previously fee based and they continue to be so. This means the residents feel that these areas might not be important for everyone and only those interested should pay for the facility separately.
- 2) Seven records like fitness walking, baseball and soccer fields, basketball and tennis court, community gardens, rollerblading were previously considered as important for everyone and hence were voted taxable. But the current trends show that there has been a general decline (average of 15%) in the importance of these activities. This is further bolstered by the fact that residents have opted fees as a mode of funding for these areas instead of taxes.
- 3) Trails, running and jogging activities continue to be important to the majority of the residents and so they stick with taxing as the means of funding.

Information about Parks and Recreation Opportunities

- 1) There has been a considerable increase (average of 20%) in the number of people deeming the ineffectiveness of informing channels like Direct mail, advertisements, billboards, word of mouth, etc.
- 2) Updates through websites, emails and social networking sites have seen a significant rise of more than 40% in the number of people choosing them as effective modes. Also 39% more people have found flyers in public places as effective. Percentages of choosing effectiveness of cell phone messages have also increased by 27%.

Attendance

- 1) There has been an increase of 14% in the use of neighborhood parks as compared to the previous survey.
- 2) School programs have seen an increase in the attendance by an average of 13% with more number of people attending pre-school activities.
- 3) Water activities have also seen a rise of 12% turnout.
- 4) Visits to Willard Beach, Bailey Park and Riverside Park have decreased by an average of 6%.

Non-use reason

- 1) There is no change in the lack of information being the highest barrier to participation.
- 2) 9% less people find activities costly while for 8% more people locations appear safer in comparison to the previous report.
- 3) Lack of restrooms and parking as barriers to non usage of facilities has increased by an average of 2.5%.
- 4) Rest of the obstacles have seen an improvement by an average of 3% i.e. around 3% less people consider them as barriers.