

APPENDIX  
"Citizen Opinion Survey"

**City of Jackson and Jackson County  
Parks and Recreation Survey Report  
January 1995**

**Purpose**

In November 1994, the Region 2 Planning Commission was authorized to conduct a survey of opinions about parks and recreation facilities throughout Jackson County. The survey was prepared as a cooperative effort between the City of Jackson and Jackson County. The information gained from the survey will be used by the City and County as they prepare the 1995-2000 Park and Recreation Plans for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The survey was distributed to a random sample of households throughout the county. This method was used so that opinions could be collected objectively from users as well as from non-users of parks and facilities. The survey was intended to provide an evaluation of existing facilities as well as to find out what residents would like to see in the future. The survey also asked how residents would like to pay for their parks.

**Survey Sample**

There are 53,660 households in Jackson County. About 26% of these households are in the City. According to Jim Dingman of the Jackson Community College's Community Research Center, a total sample size of 400 to 500 households will yield results accurate to within 5%. To ensure that level of response, it was decided to create a sample of 2600 households, 26% of them in the city.

To create this random sample, two methods were used. Different methods were required for the city and the county because the sources of information were different. To create the city sample, a printed copy of the assessor's list of properties was used. This list includes all properties in the city and lists them by property tax stencil number. There are 15,600 properties on this list. It was decided to manually select stencil numbers from this list and enter them into the City's computer system to generate mailing labels. Because this list is not sorted into residential and non-residential properties, and because the list does not identify businesses by name, it would not be known which properties were ineligible until the mailing labels were printed. Assuming that some names would have to be eliminated, it was decided to collect 900 stencil numbers. This meant selecting every 18th number on the assessor's list. These stencil numbers were entered into the city's computer and mailing labels were printed. These labels were then reviewed and the business addresses were eliminated. The final city sample was 695.

For the County, a computer data base was created that included all of the residential properties within the county (excluding the City). Households for the sample were then selected according to the first letter of the property owner's first name. Choosing the letters to be used was done by drawing them from a hat. Every letter of the alphabet had an equal chance of being drawn. As a letter was drawn, all of the first names beginning with that letter were sorted out. Additional letters had to be drawn until the sample size was reached. The letters picked were F, Q, V, W, and Z. The final county sample was 1973.

### **Survey Design**

Ten questions were used, along with a request for descriptive information about the respondent. A copy of the form is attached to this report. The questions were designed to be easy to understand and to answer. Survey forms were printed on a single sheet, in two different colors, to distinguish between city and county respondents. Each survey was mailed along with a self-addressed, postage paid envelope in which the survey was returned. They were mailed on November 18, 1994. Respondents were asked to return them by December 1, 1994. Most of the surveys we received, were returned in the first week. We extended the deadline to December 15 to take in the 50 or so latecomers. The results are based on 524 surveys, a return of almost 20%.

### **Survey Results**

The results of the survey are attached to this report. Where percentages are used, they are based on the total number of surveys returned. For example, the first question asks respondents to give an overall rating to city and county parks/recreation facilities. The rating categories were "excellent", "good", "fair", "poor", and "no opinion". Out of the 524 surveys returned, 96 respondents (18.3%) rated parks as excellent.

The results are also calculated for "county only" and "city only" responses. For the first question, 68 county residents rated parks as excellent. This equals 17% of the county total of 400 responses. For city residents, 28 rated parks as excellent. This is 22.6% of the 124 city responses.

While it is tempting, we should not make assumptions about why questions were not answered. We cannot assume that the 55 respondents who did not answer question #1, did not answer because they had no opinion. Perhaps they could not decide how to answer, so they left it blank. Or perhaps they read through the entire survey first, before answering any questions, and forgot to come back to the first question.

## Profile of Respondents

Before we can draw some conclusions from the survey answers, it is important to know something about the respondents. Knowing some of the characteristics of the respondents will give some perspective about the answers. It is important to remember however, that simply knowing something about the persons who answered the survey does not mean that we can infer something about persons who did not answer the survey.

However, we can compare the respondent profile to the 1990 census profile of county residents. We asked respondents their age, sex, ethnic background and income. Compared to the 1990 census profile of county residents, including the city, we find the following:

**Age** - The average age of the respondents is 53. The 1990 census does compute an average age, only a median age. The median age for the county is 33, but of course this includes all of the children in the county. To compare the average age of the respondents to the rest of the county's adult population, it was necessary to eliminate persons under 19 from the county's total population and work with the census age ranges. According to the census, persons between the ages of 45 to 54 make up 15.8% of the county's adult population. However, most the county's adult population is younger. Persons 19-44 make up 61% of the adult population, while persons 55 and older, make up 31% of the population. Therefore, it appears that the respondents were older than the rest of the adult population.

**Sex** - A slightly larger proportion of women responded to the survey than there are in the general population.

**Ethnic Background** - Whites are over-represented in the survey responses. While 90.5% of the county population is white, 97.1% of the respondents identified themselves as white.

**Household Income** - The survey responses under-represent the population with a household income below \$10,000. Survey respondents with household incomes under \$10,000 equalled 4.7% of the respondents. The 1990 census shows that 15% of the county population has a household income below \$10,000.

Similarly, the survey over-represents households with incomes over \$50,000. Over 29% of the respondents have household incomes over \$50,000 compared to the 1990 population of 20%.

## **Interpretation of Results**

The results of the survey provide insight into the opinions of county residents concerning their parks. To add a little more depth to the numbers, the following interpretation of the results is offered.

### ***Overall Rating***

The first question asked respondents to rate the City and County parks and recreation facilities. Seventy-two percent of the respondents rated them as good or excellent. Only 2% rated them as poor. City respondents rated parks a little better than did county residents, with 79% rating them as good or excellent and less than 1% rating them as poor. Seventy per cent of the county respondents rated parks as excellent or good.

It is important to remember that the survey did not ask the respondents to distinguish between city and county parks. Consequently, while we can sort the responses of city residents from county residents, we cannot assume that opinions from city residents are only about city parks, or that opinions from county residents are only from county parks. For instance, a respondent may live outside of the city but close enough to use city parks. This respondent's comments would be tabulated as a county response but it reflects an opinion about city parks.

It is clear however, that the residents of Jackson County generally approve of their park and recreation facilities. This can also be seen when looking at how often respondents visit parks.

### ***Park Use***

The second question asked respondents how many times a year they visit a city or county park or recreation facility. More than 50% of the respondents visit parks 1-10 times a year, and 16.4% visit parks over 20 times a year. Only 8.4% never visit parks.

The respondents that visit parks more than 20 times a year do so mostly to participate in sports. Those who visit the park less than 10 times a year, visit mostly to attend special events.

City residents seem to visit parks more often than do county residents. This may be explained by the nature of city and county living. City living is at a greater density than outside of the city. City residents typically have less open space around their houses which may cause them to seek out parks more often than their county counterparts.

This can also be explained by the answers to the survey's third question: "Why do you visit a park/recreation facility?" For city residents, the most important reason to visit a park is to enjoy being outdoors. For county residents, it is to attend special events. Overall,

24.2% of the respondents cited special events as the number one reason to visit a park. To enjoy the outdoors is the second most popular reason (20.2%)

Respondents were asked in question 4 to rank the reasons that discourage them from visiting parks. This question generated the fewest responses of any question. This may suggest that there is nothing that will discourage someone from visiting a park, or at least none of the alternatives provided. However, as noted earlier, it is not a good idea to infer explanations from non-responses.

Nevertheless, for those who did respond, the number one reason they would be discouraged from visiting a park was a concern for personal safety (19.8%). The second most popular reason was the distance from home (16.4%). It is interesting to note that 15.3% of the city residents are discouraged by a concern for personal safety, compared to 21.3% of county residents.

### ***More Activities***

When asked to identify activities that they would like to see more of (question 5), respondents overwhelmingly asked for more walking/hiking/biking trails. The second most requested activity was community festivals, and the third was for more picnic/camping facilities. Both city and county respondents favor more trails over all other choices. The activities in the least need of expansion are baseball, soccer, softball or basketball. It is important to remember that the question was asked in terms of what the respondent would like to see more of, not in what activities he/she participates. This means that these activities are amply available. It also reflects the age of the respondent.

Respondents were also asked to identify activities/facilities that they have seen in other areas that they would like to see in Jackson. There were over 200 suggestions ranging from antique festivals to zoos. A printout of these responses was given to the parks staff for their information.

### ***Funding***

It is easy to make suggestions about how to improve parks. It is not as easy to be prepared to pay for them. In answer to question 7: "Would you like to see the money spent for parks and recreation facilities increase, stay the same or decrease", respondents are generally split between increasing park funding (44.5%) and keeping it the same (42.2%). City residents are more interested in an increase in spending (53.2%) than are county residents (41.5%). Overall, only 2% of the respondents want less money to be spent.

In these times of fiscal restraint it is remarkable that taxpayers recommend an increase in spending. Parks clearly have the support of the community.

The survey also asked if this increase should be spent to improve existing facilities or to develop new ones. Almost 60% of the respondents recommend improvements be made to existing facilities rather than investing in new ones. This supports the general satisfaction with parks that is indicated throughout these results. Improvements should be made, more money should be spent, and some activities should be added, but generally, there are enough parks and facilities.

To raise this money and to pay for parks in the future, almost 30% of the respondents favor a park millage. Another 13.2% said they weren't sure about supporting a millage, but only 17.7% were against a millage. The question did not offer a millage proposal, so respondents could not estimate their personal tax burden. However, it is still remarkable that there is support in the community for an increase in taxes to support parks.

Residents were also asked if they would support an increase in user fees to offset park costs. As with a millage, 30% of the respondents support an increase in user fees. Unlike a millage, a larger percentage of the respondents oppose an increase in user fees 21.4%, and 9.7% answered that they did not know if they favored an increase in user fees.

When asked if there should be "no change" made to the way parks are funded, 21% of the respondents agreed. These are obviously the same respondents who do not support a park millage or an increase in user fees. It should also be noted that more than half of the respondents did not answer this question.

### **Other Comments**

The survey offered respondents the chance to make other comments about parks. Generally, the comments fall into three categories: maintenance, new ideas, and compliments.

**Maintenance** - The two most frequently cited complaints were about the excessive amounts duck and goose feces at Cascades Park and the need to improve bathroom facilities overall.

**New ideas** - The most frequently mentioned new idea is for the development of walking and biking trails. Also frequently mentioned is a need for concession stands

**Compliments** - Many respondents expressed appreciation for the parks.

# PARKS AND RECREATION SURVEY CITY OF JACKSON AND JACKSON COUNTY SUMMARY OF RESULTS

On November 18, 1994, over 2600 surveys were mailed to residents in Jackson County. As of December 15, 1994, 524 surveys were returned, 400 from county residents and 124 from city residents. The results are presented below. Percentages are based on the number of surveys returned.

1. Generally speaking, how do you rate the City and County parks and recreation facilities? (please circle one).

Percent Response	ALL	COUNTY	CITY
Excellent	18.3	17.0	22.6
Good	53.6	52.7	56.4
Fair	15.7	17.2	10.5
Poor	1.9	2.3	.8
No opinion/ no response	10.5	10.8	9.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

2. How many times have you visited any of the City or County parks or recreation facilities within the last year?

Percent Response	ALL	COUNTY	CITY
None	8.4	8.8	7.3
1-10	53.2	53.6	50.8
11-20	19.5	18.3	22.5
+20	16.4	15.3	19.4
No response	.5	4.0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Please answer the next two questions by putting a "1" next to the most important item; a "2" next to the second most important item; a "3" next to the third most important item; and so on.

3. Why do you visit a park/recreation facility?

	Percent Responses					No resp.	Total
	1	2	3	4	5		
<b>ALL</b>							
Closeness to home	13.2	20.0	16.0	8.0	6.9	35.9	100.0
Special events	24.2	16.2	17.6	8.6	1.9	31.5	100.0
Participate in sports/games	13.7	6.1	8.4	10.9	12.4	48.5	100.0
Enjoy the outdoors	20.2	22.5	18.9	4.4	1.7	32.3	100.0
Use playground equipment	7.6	8.2	6.5	9.2	16.8	51.7	100.0
<b>COUNTY ONLY</b>							
Closeness to home	13.5	19.5	16.5	6.5	7.8	36.2	100.0
Special events	26.0	15.5	16.0	9.3	2.2	31.0	100.0
Participate in sports/games	13.8	6.0	9.0	11.2	12.0	48.0	100.0
Enjoy the outdoors	18.3	23.8	18.7	4.7	1.8	32.7	100.0
Use playground equipment	8.0	8.5	6.7	9.3	16.3	51.2	100.0
<b>CITY ONLY</b>							
Closeness to home	12.1	21.8	14.5	12.9	4.0	34.6	100.0
Special events	18.6	18.6	22.6	6.4	.8	33.0	100.0
Participate in sports/games	13.7	6.4	6.4	9.7	13.8	50.0	100.0
Enjoy the outdoors	26.6	18.5	19.4	3.2	1.6	30.7	100.0
Use playground equipment	6.5	7.3	5.6	8.9	18.5	53.2	100.0

4. What discourages you from visiting a park/recreation facility?

	Percent Responses					No Resp. Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>ALL</b>						
Distance from home	16.4	9.0	6.1	5.2	5.3	58.0 100.0
Concern for personal safety	19.8	9.0	6.1	4.0	4.2	56.9 100.0
Nothing interesting to do	9.9	9.7	9.5	5.3	3.8	61.8 100.0
No parking	7.3	7.3	9.5	6.7	6.6	62.5 100.0
Too expensive	7.4	7.6	5.9	4.0	7.3	67.8 100.0

**COUNTY ONLY**

Distance from home	17.0	9.0	6.0	4.8	6.0	57.2 100.0
Concern for personal safety	21.3	10.2	5.2	3.5	4.3	55.5 100.0
Nothing interesting to do	10.0	11.0	10.2	5.8	3.5	59.5 100.0
No parking	7.0	8.0	10.7	6.7	4.3	63.3 100.0
Too expensive	7.5	7.3	6.7	4.7	7.5	66.3 100.0

**CITY ONLY**

Distance from home	14.5	8.9	6.5	6.5	3.2	60.4 100.0
Concern for personal safety	15.3	4.8	8.9	5.7	4.0	61.3 100.0
Nothing interesting to do	9.7	5.6	7.3	3.2	4.8	69.4 100.0
No parking	8.1	4.8	5.6	6.5	4.0	71.0 100.0
Too expensive	7.3	8.9	3.2	1.6	6.5	72.5 100.0

5. Is there an activity that you would like to see more of in the park/recreation facilities? Please check no more than 3 that apply.

Activity	All	Number of Responses		All	Ranking	
		County	City		County	City
Walking/hiking/biking trails	305	232	73	1	1	1
Soccer	19	16	1	10	9	12
Water slides	112	88	24	4	4	5
Picnic/camping	176	128	48	3	3	3
Golf	53	40	13	7	7	7
Baseball	15	10	5	11	10	11
Basketball	20	8	12	9	12	8
Boat ramps	66	53	13	6	6	6
Community festivals	232	178	54	2	2	2
Beaches	110	83	27	5	5	4
Softball	15	10	5	12	11	10
Volleyball	42	31	11	8	8	9

6. What have you seen at parks or recreation facilities in other cities or counties, that you would like to see here?

Activity	# of Comments	Comments
Trails	36	
Soccer	2	
Water slides	4	
Picnic/camping	18	riverside, covered, gas grills
Golf	2	driving ranges
Baseball	1	
Basketball	6	Gus Macker
Boat ramps	8	
Community festivals	15	band concerts, craft shows, amusement parks, flea markets, air shows, ethnic festivals.
Beaches	1	
Softball	0	
Volleyball	3	
<b>Other issues</b>		
Restrooms	14	cleaner, fewer portajohns
Safety	9	more patrols
Concession stands	4	
Horseback riding	7	
Fishing pier/ponds	5	
Excercise trails	5	
Zoo/learning farm	6	
Flower gardens, greenhouse	5	
Nature center	4	
Water fountain	3	
Tennis	3	
Canoe livery	2	
Pet walks	2	
Roller blade	2	
Museum, historical info	2	
Dirt bike trails	1	
Christmas lights	1	
Cabins for rent	1	
Tobogan slide	1	

7. Generally speaking, would you like to see the money spent for parks and recreation facilities increase, stay the same or decrease? (Please circle one.)

Percent Response	ALL	COUNTY	CITY
Increase	44.5	41.5	53.2
Stay the same	42.2	44.0	37.1
Decrease	2.1	2.5	.8
No response	11.2	12.0	8.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

8. If you would you like to see more money spent on parks/recreation facilities, should it be used to improve existing parks/recreation facilities, or to add new parks/recreation facilities? (please circle one).

Percent Response	ALL	COUNTY	CITY
Existing	59.2	58.8	68.6
New	12.2	10.8	16.9
No Response	28.6	30.4	14.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

9. How should parks and recreation facilities be funded in the future?

**MILLAGE**

	ALL	COUNTY	CITY
Yes	29.4	29.5	29.0
No	17.7	16.5	21.0
Don't know	13.2	14.7	8.1
No response	39.7	39.3	41.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**INCREASE USER FEES**

	All	County	City
Yes	30.0	29.5	31.5
No	21.4	21.0	22.6
Don't know	9.7	10.3	8.1
No response	38.9	39.2	37.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**NO CHANGE**

	All	County	City
Yes	21.0	20.0	24.2
No	6.9	5.5	11.3
Don't know	14.7	15.8	11.3
No response	57.4	58.7	53.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

These are the results of the respondent descriptions. They represent the city and the county residents.

Average Age 53

Sex Male - 208

Female - 220

Ethnic Background (please check one):

<u>0</u>	Asian	<u>2</u>	Hispanic
<u>6</u>	Black	<u>5</u>	Native American
<u>424</u>	White		

Annual household income (please check one):

<u>20</u>	less than \$10,000	<u>65</u>	\$10,000 - \$20,000	<u>63</u>	\$20,000 - \$30,000
<u>63</u>	\$30,000 - \$40,000	<u>81</u>	\$40,000 - \$50,000	<u>118</u>	over \$50,000