

# Milwaukee County Parks Survey Findings Report

February 2017

*Surveys issued in 2016 in support of the Parks with Purpose master planning initiative*

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## STATISTICALLY-VALID HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

### INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2016, ETC Institute administered a household survey on behalf of Milwaukee County Parks to support the Parks with Purpose master planning campaign. Based in Kansas, ETC is a leading expert in the administration of statistically-valid household surveys specifically in the field of parks and recreation.

The household survey was administered as part of the County's efforts to create two master plans: the *10-Year Parks System Master Plan* and the *2050 Park & Open Space Plan*.

The *10-Year Parks System Master Plan* is a shorter-term plan that will provide recommendations for facilities, programs and services, maintenance and operations, administration, and management of the Milwaukee County Parks System.

The *2050 Park & Open Space Plan* will address long-range considerations including the preservation of environmental corridors, conservation lands, recreational use of water bodies, and will make recommendations on the distribution of parks facilities throughout the County based on anticipated population scenarios. Additionally, the *2050 Park & Open Space Plan* will serve as an update to the 1991 Milwaukee County Parks and Open Space Plan.

Both plans will support Milwaukee County's vision as a model government in the way it serves residents and strengthens community.

The results of the 2016 household survey will aid the County's resident-driven planning approach to identify future priorities related to the long-term sustainability of the parks, trails, and recreation facilities that make up the world-class Milwaukee County Parks System.

### METHODOLOGY

ETC Institute mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in Milwaukee County in August of 2016. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. Residents who received the survey were given the option of returning the survey by mail or completing it on-line.

Ten days after the surveys were mailed, ETC Institute sent emails and placed phone calls to recipients to encourage participation. The emails contained a link to the on-line version of the survey to make it easy for residents to complete the survey. To ensure that all participants resided in Milwaukee County, those who completed the on-line survey were required to enter their home address prior to submitting the survey. ETC Institute then matched the addresses that were entered on-line with the addresses that were originally selected for the random sample. If the address from a survey completed on-line did not match one of the addresses selected for the sample, that survey was not counted.

In order to achieve a reliable precision rate, Parks goal was to obtain at least 384 completed surveys from residents. This goal was achieved and exceeded with 600 completed surveys returned. At this participation rate, the survey results have a precision rate of +/- 4% at the 95% level of confidence.

ETC Institute's findings report contains the following sections:

- Charts depicting the overall survey results (Section 1)
- Priority Investment Rating (PIR) that identifies priorities for facilities and programs (Section 2)
- Benchmarking analysis comparing the County's results to national peer agencies (Section 3)
- Tabular data showing the overall results for all questions on the survey (Section 4)
- The household survey as issued to residents of Milwaukee County (Section 5)

## COMMON QUESTIONS

### **How was the sample selected?**

The sample was an address-based sample, meaning that the selection was based on the respondent's home address and not by phone number. This is important because it ensured that all households in the county had an equal probability of being selected. In this scenario, households that do not have phones and/or landlines are selected at the same rate as those with landlines. Of the 418,053 households in the County, 1% (or 4,180) were selected at random to receive this survey.

### **How accurate is the data?**

In order to obtain results that have an accuracy of at least +/- 5% at the 95% level of confidence, the industry standard for attitude and opinion surveys, a total of 384 completed surveys were needed. County residents completed 600 surveys which means the survey results have an accuracy of at least +/- 4% at the 95% level of confidence. In order to reduce the margin of error to +/- 3%, the County would have had to nearly double the sample size to 1,067 surveys. The level of effort on this project was appropriate given the negligible decrease in the margin of error that would have occurred by doubling the sample size.

### **How did households complete the survey? And how many responded?**

A total of 4,180 households were selected for the survey. Of these, 600 responded which is a 14.4% response rate. This is a good response rate for a survey of this length, particularly considering that the national average for response rates to similar community surveys is about 10%.

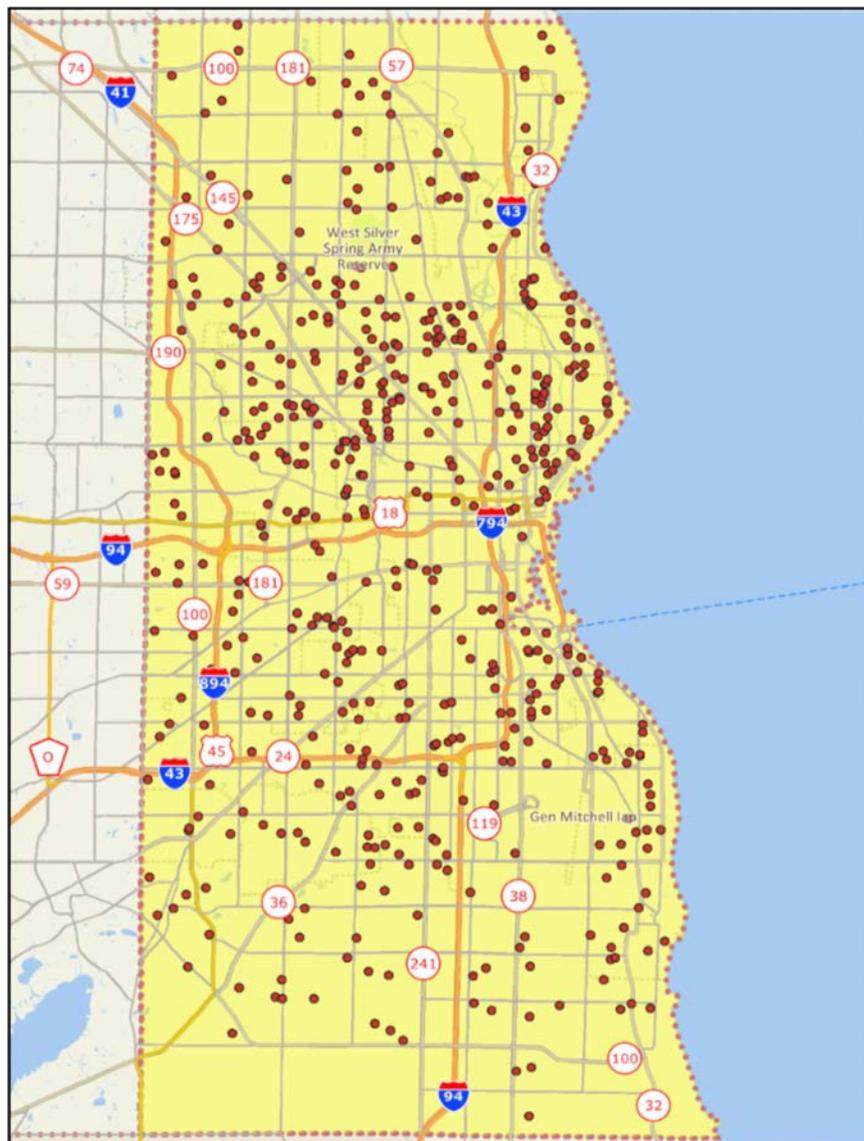
### **How do we know the survey is representative of the County's population?**

To ensure that results of the survey were representative of the County's population, ETC Institute monitored the demographic composition of the sample compared to the 2010 Census for Milwaukee County. The table below shows how the survey sample compares to the 2010 Census. For all demographic attributes that were assessed, the composition of the survey sample was within +/-3% of the 2010 Census. Since the sample was randomly selected and the demographic composition of the sample is similar to the 2010 Census, we can reasonably conclude that our sample is representative of the County's population.

DEMOGRAPHIC	SURVEY SAMPLE	2010 CENSUS	DIFFERENCE
White	62.30%	65.10%	-2.80%
African American	24.50%	26.80%	-2.30%
Hispanic	11.30%	13.30%	-2.00%
Asian	3.50%	3.40%	0.10%
Over 65 among those 18 and older	15.50%	15.30%	0.20%
Male	47.30%	48.30%	-1.00%
Female	52.70%	51.70%	1.00%

*Demographics of household survey participants compared to 2010 census participants.*

**Was resident participation in the survey equitably represented?**



*Map detailing the areas of County participation during the 2016 Parks with Purpose household survey.*

## KEY FINDINGS

**Key Finding #1: By a wide margin, providing large parks with a variety of experiences is the most important service for the Milwaukee County Park system to provide. This is also what Milwaukee County Parks does best.**

Basis of Finding: In survey question #2, respondents were asked to rank their top three most important services/facilities that Milwaukee County Parks provides to their household.

48% of respondent households indicated that “provide large parks with a range of experiences” is one of the three most important services/facilities for Milwaukee County Parks to provide. 29% of households indicated large parks were the #1 type of park and facility to provide. The next most important service was “provide walking, hiking, biking and nature trails” with 13% of households indicating that was their #1 most important service/facility. 37% indicated this within their top 3 most important parks and facilities.

Further, 85% of respondents said that at least 75% of this need are met by County Parks today – the highest share of any service provided.

Reference: ETC Findings Report pp. 4; 37-40.

**Key Finding #2: Milwaukee County Parks provides the services households agree they should provide.**

Basis of Finding: In survey question #1, 15 types of services/facilities provided by Milwaukee County Parks were listed. At least 75% of respondent households *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that Milwaukee County Parks should provide 14 out of the 15 services/facilities listed, which included parks, trails, facilities and services. Golf was the one service in this list of 15 where fewer than 75% percent agreed. Slightly less than 50% *strongly agreed* or *agreed* Milwaukee County Parks should provide golf courses.

Importantly, the percentage of households “strongly agreeing” that Milwaukee County Parks should be providing the service/facility was higher than the percent who indicated “agreed” in 14 out of the 15 types of parks, trail, facilities and services. Per these findings, residents decisively indicated the importance of Parks providing these 14 services to the community.

Reference: ETC Findings Report pp. 4; 35.

**Key Finding #3: Milwaukee County Parks exceeds the national average in “satisfaction with overall value received,” but opportunities exist to move from good to great.**

Basis of Finding: In survey question #9, a total of 68% of households indicated they were either *very satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with the overall value received from Milwaukee County Parks. This is higher than the national average of 63% for this question.

When comparing only the number that answered *very satisfied*, Milwaukee County residents totaled 22% whereas the national average is 29%. While still favorable, this finding suggests there is an opportunity to strengthen satisfaction.

Reference: ETC Findings Report pp. 9; 29; 55.

**Key Finding #4: Areas of opportunity to strengthen satisfaction may be deferred maintenance, marketing, and security.**

Basis of Finding: In survey question #8, respondents were asked to identify reasons preventing their use of Milwaukee County parks, facilities, and services more often. The top four responses are listed below, along with comparisons to the national average.

BARRIERS TO PARKS FACILITY/PROGRAM USE	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MILWAUKEE COUNTY 2016
Restrooms are not well maintained	n/a	40%
Facilities are not well maintained	7%	38%
I do not know what is being offered	24%	32%
Security is insufficient	9%	30%

It is very common for *security is insufficient* to be related to *facilities are not well maintained*. Often times there is a perception that when facilities are not well maintained there is a lack of attention, which adds to the sense of security being insufficient.

Reference: ETC Findings Report pp. 9; 30; 54-55.

**Key Finding #5: Households feel it is more important to repair and improve existing parks and facilities rather than build or acquire new ones.**

Basis of Finding: In survey question #5, respondent households were asked how they would invest \$100 among five categories:

INVESTING \$100 FOR IMPROVING MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARKS	AVERAGE RESPONSE
Repair and improve existing parks, trails, natural areas, gardens, etc.	\$30.97
Repair and improve existing sports facilities, community centers, swimming/aquatic facilities, golf course, etc.	\$24.73
Develop new passive recreation facilities (trails, picnicking areas, gardens, etc.)	\$15.79
Develop new active recreation facilities (sports fields, aquatics, golf courses, etc.)	\$14.51
Acquire additional parkland or open space	\$13.99
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$100.00</b>

Respondent households indicated that it was more important to them to invest in the repair and improvement of the current system rather than the development of new facilities or acquisition of additional parkland.

Reference: ETC Findings Report pp. 7; 50.

**Key Finding #6: To ensure success over the long term, households are most supportive of partnering with local universities, private businesses, and non-profits.**

**Basis of Finding:** In survey question #17, from a list of 10 potential actions to support the park system’s operations and financing, three options garnered the most support by a wide margin: *partner with local universities to operate facilities and provide services* (49%), *allow private businesses on park land* (45%), and *partner with non-profits to operate facilities and programs* (45%).

**Reference:** ETC Findings Report pp. 15; 64-65.

## OTHER FINDINGS

In addition to asking the primary questions of the household survey, additional questions were queried more specifically about built facilities, recreational programs/services, and other concerns. These findings are summarized below.

### Facility Needs

Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 29 recreation facilities and amenities and rate how well their needs for each were currently being met. The three recreation facilities with the highest percentage of households indicating a need were:

FACILITY	PERCENT OF COUNTY HOUSEHOLDS EXPRESSING NEED	PERCENT OF THOSE HOUSEHOLDS THAT HAVE AN UNMET NEED
Walking, hiking, and cycling trails on hard surfaces	78%	20%
Small neighborhood parks	74%	26%
Large regional parks	68%	15%

### Facility Importance

In addition to assessing the needs for each facility, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents placed on each facility. Based on the sum of respondents’ top four choices, the three most important facilities to residents were:

- walking, hiking, and cycling trails on hard surfaces (47%)
- small neighborhood parks (35%)
- and walking, hiking, and cycling trails on soft surfaces (30%).

### Programming Need

Respondents were also asked to identify if their household had a need for 22 recreational programs and rate how well their needs for each program were currently being met. The three programs with the highest percentage of households indicating a need were:

PROGRAM	PERCENT OF COUNTY HOUSEHOLDS EXPRESSING NEED	PERCENT OF THOSE HOUSEHOLDS THAT HAVE AN UNMET NEED
Farmers’ market	71%	43%
Special events	61%	44%
Adult fitness and wellness programs	53%	57%

### **Program Importance**

In addition to assessing the needs for each program, ETC Institute also assessed the importance that residents place on each program. Based on the sum of respondents' top four choices, the three most important programs to residents were:

- farmers' market (47%)
- special events (31%)
- and adult fitness and wellness programs (29%).

### **Addressing Deferred Maintenance**

When asked to identify one out of three options for resolving deferred maintenance and repair issues (Q18), respondents indicated:

- develop partnerships with for-profit & non-profit agencies (57%)
- increase tax & fee revenues from various sources (17%)
- not sure (19%).

### **Tax and Fee Revenues**

Respondents were asked to indicate three sources from a list of six that Milwaukee County could use to help pay for deferred maintenance and repair issues (Q15). Those that received the largest support were:

- Increase park user fees by 10% (42%)
- Seek state approval to increase sales tax (39%)
- Impose parking fees at lakefront parking lots (39%).

### **Reducing System Size**

Respondents were asked to indicate three potential actions they most support, from a list of 11, to reduce the size of the Milwaukee County parks system to match current available funding (Q13). Based on the sum of respondents' top three choices, the three statements which respondent supported the most were:

- transfer some existing neighborhood parks to municipalities (36%)
- close down some low performing swimming pools (35%)
- close down some existing golf courses (30%).

## **ANECDOTAL ONLINE SURVEY COMPARISON**

As part of the Parks with Purpose community input process, PROS Consulting conducted an anecdotal online survey (powered by SurveyMonkey) for a better understanding of the characteristics, preferences, and satisfaction levels of Milwaukee County residents in relation to facilities, amenities and recreation programs. The online survey questions correlated to questions issued earlier that year through a statistically-valid household survey. The survey was available from October 10th through November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and received a total of 933 responses.

While the questions asked in the web survey were similar to those asked in the statistically-valid household survey, some revisions for clarity and brevity were made to the web survey questions. The web survey was available from October 10 through November 18, 2016 and received a total of 933 responses.

The anecdotal online survey was not a statistically-valid representation of County residents, but rather an opportunity for the public to share thoughts, which closely reflected the results from the statistically-valid household survey issued by ETC.

Below is a summary of how the web survey results aligned with the major findings of the statistically-valid web survey.

STATISTICALLY-VALID SURVEY KEY FINDINGS	ANECDOTAL WEB SURVEY RESULT	CONSISTENCY BETWEEN SURVEYS
1. By a wide margin, providing large parks with a variety of experiences is the most important service for the Milwaukee County Park system to provide.	Half (50%) of participants indicated that providing “large regional parks” with a “variety of experiences such as trails, boating, picnicking, etc.” was among their top most important services for Milwaukee County Parks.	Yes
2. Milwaukee County Parks provides the services households agree they should provide.	At least 75% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that Milwaukee County Parks should be providing 13 out of the 15 types of parks, trails, facilities or services indicated.	Yes
3. Milwaukee County Parks exceeds the national average in “satisfaction with overall value received,” but opportunities exist to move from good to great.	Thirty-five percent of web survey participants indicated they were very satisfied. This varies from the 22% with that response on the household survey. Because web survey respondents tend to be more familiar with – and supportive of – parks, this discrepancy is not surprising.	Somewhat
4. Areas of opportunity to strengthen satisfaction may be deferred maintenance, security, and marketing.	The top five reasons preventing use of parks cited by participants relate to maintenance (36% for facilities, 31% for restrooms), not knowing what is offered (33%), being too far from a residence (27%), and insufficient security (17%). Not knowing what is offered was a more frequent response than insufficient security.	Yes
5. Households feel it is more important to repair and improve existing parks and facilities rather than build or acquire new ones.	While the response options of this question varied slightly from the household survey, both showed a preference from participants to maintain, repair, and refurbish parks and facilities. Household survey respondents said they would spend an average of \$55.61 (out of \$100) on maintenance and repairs. The web survey average was \$60.	Yes
6. To ensure success over the long term, households are most supportive of partnering with local universities, private businesses, and non-profits.	Partnering with local schools and universities also received some of the most support from web survey respondents (89% very supportive or somewhat supportive). Formalizing and expanding fundraising efforts also received support in the web survey (96%), whereas it ranked lower in the household survey.	Yes

Milwaukee County Parks Household & Online Survey Findings Report