

THE MORRIS LEATHERMAN COMPANY

Executive Summary 2017 City of Brooklyn Center

City Demographics:

Brooklyn Center is a dynamic community, with longer-term residents in parity with relative newcomers. The median longevity of adult residents is 9.9 years. Twenty-eight percent of the sample moved to the city during the past five years, while 27% resided there over two decades. Fourteen percent expect to move out of Brooklyn Center during the next five years; in contrast, 67% intend to remain in the community for at least ten years.

The average age of respondents is 46.9 years old. While 26% fall into the 18-34 year age range, 17% are at least 65 years old. Twenty-three percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 16% are composed only of senior citizens. Thirty-seven percent of the city's households report school-aged children and pre-schoolers. Sixty-one percent own their present residence.

Thirty-nine percent of the households report experiencing financial stress – either “monthly expenses are exceeding income” or “monthly expenses are being met but little or no savings is being set aside.” In contrast, 61% of the city's households are “managing comfortably” or “managing very well.”

Caucasians compose 48% of the sample. Twenty-four percent are African-American, while 14% are Asian-Pacific Islander, and 11% are Hispanic-Latino. Women outnumber men by two percent. Eighty-three percent of the residents are native-born citizens, while three percent have been in the United States for three years or less.

Residents are classified according to the precinct in which they live. Thirty-five percent reside in Precincts One, Six, and Seven – South Brooklyn Center. Thirty-two percent live in Precincts Two and Five – Central Brooklyn Center. Thirty-four percent reside in Precincts Three and Four – North Brooklyn Center.

Quality of Life Issues:

Eighty-seven percent rate the quality of life as either "excellent" or "good;" fourteen percent rate it as "excellent." While positive ratings are above the Metropolitan Area average, the "excellent" rating, of 18%, is at the norm for Metropolitan Area suburbs.

"Housing and neighborhoods" is the most liked feature of the city. At 26%, it outdistances all other responses. Fifteen percent point to "closeness to family," while 13% cite "closeness to job," and 11% like the community's "quiet and peacefulness." Nine percent value the "small town ambience" and eight percent like "closeness to shopping."

In thinking about serious issues facing the city, 22% point to "rising crime," down 10% from the 2013 results. "Lack of jobs" follows next, at 11%, and nine percent point to "lack of businesses." Eight percent consider "high taxes" to be the most serious issue, while seven percent each point to "foreclosures" and "low income housing."

The City receives a solid rating on its current direction. Eighty-four percent think the City is "generally headed in the right direction," while only ten percent feel things "are off on the wrong track."

Eighty-seven percent feel welcome to share their thoughts and opinions with the City of Brooklyn Center; only six percent do not feel this way, primarily because they believe the City will not listen to them. Similarly, eighty-eight percent feel accepted, valued and welcome in the community; nine percent disagree. Among those answering the question, 85% feel youth opinions, teens in particular, are valued in the city; fifteen percent do not feel this way, due to their perceptions "youth are not listened to" and "youth are not taken seriously."

Neighborhood Issues:

Seventy-six percent favorably rate the strength of community and neighborliness, while 25% are more critical. Fifty-nine percent, up 10% in four years, feel a closer connection to their neighborhood; twenty-five percent are closest to the City of Brooklyn Center as a whole, down 11% in four years, and nine percent choose their school district.

Eighty-nine percent report satisfaction with their level of involvement in activities and meetings in their neighborhood and the city; only four percent are dissatisfied. The small subgroup of dissatisfied residents suggest two potentially helpful actions by the city: "communicate more information about opportunities and events" and "schedule more opportunities or events."

Eighty-six think people “have pride and ownership in our neighborhood,” but 11% disagree. Similarly, 89% are “proud to live in Brooklyn Center,” while nine percent disagree. Disagreement stems from two perceptions: “crime” and “rundown properties.”

Diversity Issues:

Forty-one percent, up nine percent in four years, think the growing population diversity is a “good thing,” while 10% see it as “both good and bad,” and 19% view it as a “bad thing.” Twenty-nine percent, though, are “unsure.” Reasons for seeing growing diversity as a good thing include “learn about other cultures,” “teaching tolerance,” and “brings ethnic restaurants and services to the community.” Reasons for seeing it as a bad thing are focused on “rising crime.”

Seventy-six percent think the City of Brooklyn Center is “well prepared” to meet the growing diversity of residents, while only seven percent think it is “not well prepared.” The small percent of the sample thinking the city is unprepared point to “residents feel afraid or uncomfortable,” “not enough police,” “language barriers,” and “need for more social services.”

Development Issues:

When looking at their community, at least 60% of residents think there are “about the right number” of starter homes for young families, “move-up” housing, senior housing, affordable housing, service establishments, and retail shopping opportunities. But, while 28% think there are “too many” affordable rental apartments, 23% see “too few.” Similarly, while 24% think there are “too many” luxury rental apartments, 23% take the opposite position of “too few.” The number of rental homes also shows a split: twenty-six percent think there are “too many,” and 25% think there are “too few.” Perceptions about the number of condominiums and townhouses result in a more on-sided difference: thirty-three percent think there are “too few,” and 11% think there are “too many.” Exhibiting the same pattern, twenty-eight percent see “too few” senior housing opportunities, while only five percent see “too many,” and 52% consider the number to be “about right.”

Sixty-two percent, down six percent in four years, rate the general redevelopment in the City of Brooklyn Center favorably; while 31% award it a negative rating. Two perceptions lead to these favorable conclusions: “brings jobs to the community” and “looks nice.” Negative ratings stem from “lack of business in the City,” “high taxes,” and “empty buildings.” Similarly, by a significant 84%-12% margin, residents support the continued redevelopment of the community. While still a solid majority, “strong support” dropped by 10% since the 2013 study. In general, residents do not significantly support efforts focused on any one type of development, and are much more apt to indicate there is no type of development they would like to see in the city.

Similarly, while most residents do not strongly oppose any single type of development, there is some antipathy toward attracting more low income housing. But, by an impressive 83%-13% margin, residents support the City providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development.

Seventy-six percent believe the City of Brooklyn Center currently has about the right amount of dining establishments; fourteen percent see “too few,” particularly “family sit-down restaurants” and “fine dining,” and nine percent see “too many.” Eighty-two percent think the City has about the right amount of entertainment establishments; eight percent feel there are “too few,” particularly a “bowling center,” “movie theater,” or “generally family-oriented opportunities,” and eight percent think there are “too many.”

At 36%, “jobs” is viewed as the greatest need in Brooklyn Center to provide economic stability for all city residents. “Resources for small business development,” ranks second at 15%; closely followed by “development assistance for new businesses,” at 14%, and “transportation to jobs,” at 13%.

Housing and Neighborhood Issues:

Sixty-four percent, down 18% in four years, of the sampled households regularly participate in the curbside recycling program. And, 60%, also down 18% since the last study, have taken actions to reduce their household energy use – primarily using less electricity, deploying CFL light bulbs, adjusting thermostats, and buying energy efficient appliances.

Eighty-six percent rate the general condition and appearance of homes in the community highly; fifteen percent are more critical. Over the past two years, 65% think the appearance of their neighborhood has remained about the same. Twenty-three percent feel it “improved,” and 11% see a “decline.”

Significant majorities believe City code enforcement is at “about the right” level of toughness. Noteworthy minorities of 30% to 35% consider the enforcement of messy yards on residential property codes, deteriorated commercial property ordinances, noise codes, and properties with vacant homes code enforcement to be “not tough enough.”

Sixty-three percent are aware of vacant homes or properties in their neighborhood. The greatest worries about these properties center on “crime” and “poorly kept properties.”

City Taxes and Services:

Forty-seven percent think the city portion of their property taxes to be "high." Thirty-four percent see them as "about average" in comparison with neighboring cities. Only one percent considers them to be "low," and 18% are "unsure." A very positive rating occurs on the values of city services. When considering property taxes paid and the quality of city services received, 76% award them favorable ratings, while nineteen percent are more critical in their judgments.

By a very high 69%-12% margin, residents support an increase in city property taxes **if** it were needed to maintain services at current levels. A large plurality of opponents, 41%, thinks service cuts are unneeded and can be avoided by reducing waste. And, by a large 57%-24% margin, residents oppose an increase in city property taxes to enhance current city services or offer additional city services. Among residents supporting this latter tax increase, 27% would use the funds to enhance police services, 16% would use funds for "street repair," 13% would use funds for a "water treatment plant." The typical supporter would support a property tax increase of 19.00 per year to enhance city services or offer additional city services.

When evaluating specific city services, the mean approval rating is 82.5%, a comparatively strong rating. Over 90% rate police protection and fire protection as either "excellent" or "good." Between 80% and 89% rate recycling pick-up, park maintenance, city-sponsored recreation programs, animal control, emergency medical response, city drinking water, city street repair and maintenance, and snowplowing as "excellent" or "good." Between 70% and 79% rate storm drainage and flood control, maintenance of city buildings and facilities, property maintenance enforcement and street lighting favorably.

Eighty-three percent rate the quality of city drinking water as either "excellent" or "good," while 17% see it as "only fair" or "poor." Negative ratings stem from three perceptions about drinking water: "poor taste," at 59%, "cloudiness," at 23%, and "bad odor," at 14%. In the same vein, 84% rate the water quality in city lakes, streams and rivers as "excellent" or "good," while 16% rate it as "only fair" or "poor."

Public Safety Issues:

Thirty-six percent think there are areas in the City of Brooklyn Center where they do not feel

safe. Particular areas of concern are "retail parking lots," "retail stores, including Brookdale" and "low income housing areas." They urge "more police patrolling" and "more street lighting."

In nearby areas to their homes, 71% feel safe in walking in their neighborhood alone at night, while 25% disagree. Only thirty-six percent of the city's households are part of their area's Neighborhood Watch. Eighty-one percent think the amount of police patrolling in their neighborhood is "about the right amount," while 74%, a drop of 10% since the 2013 study, feel similarly about the amount of traffic enforcement by the police in their neighborhood. Thirty-five percent think traffic speeding in their neighborhood is either "very serious" or "somewhat serious;" that reflects a five percent increase since the 2013 study.

Four key public safety concerns face Brooklyn Center: "youth crime and vandalism," mentioned by 18%; "drugs," at 15%; and "traffic speeding" or "traffic volume on residential streets," each chosen by 10%. The small subgroup, seven percent, viewing "violent crime" as their greatest concern cites "shootings," "domestic abuse," or "robbery and muggings."

Parks and Recreation:

Over 92% of the users of each Park and Recreation System components rate them highly. In fact, the average user favorability rating is 97.2%. And, 86% of park users, rate playground equipment highly; this level is eight percent lower than the 2013 study.

Ninety-seven percent feel the existing recreational facilities offered by the City meet the needs of their household. Similarly, 94% also think the current mix of City Park and recreation programming meets the needs of their household. Thirty-five percent, up 10% since the 2013 study, report household members participated in City Park and recreation programs. The most popular are "baseball or softball," "youth summer programs," and "swimming." A nearly unanimous 99% rate the quality of these programs as either "excellent" or "good."

Only eight percent leave the city for park and recreational facilities elsewhere; a similar nine percent leave the city to participate in park and recreation activities. The "City Newsletter," cited by 37%, is the principal source of information on parks and recreation programs and facilities in Brooklyn Center. The "City Website" is next, at 17%, with the "Park and Recreation Catalog" following at 14%. Preferences for receiving information about parks and recreation programs and facilities follow current patterns of information receipt.

Fifty-eight percent of the sample is aware the City runs the Centerbrook Golf Course. Seventeen percent of respondents indicate members of their household played the golf course during the past two years. Ninety-eight percent of Centerbrook golfers rate their experience as either “excellent” or “good.” Most aware non-users of the golf course cite “lack of interest” or “lack of time” as their reasons for not using the facility.

“Centennial Park,” at 14%, and “Palmer Lake Park,” also at 14%, are most often named as the facility people consider to be their neighborhood park. “Evergreen Park” follows at nine percent, and “Happy Hollow Park” or “Willow Lake Park” appears next on the list, at six percent each. While 42% say there is no improvement needed in their neighborhood park, 18% want “more lights,” 12% urge “more restrooms,” and 11% wish for “updated equipment.”

Physical Activity:

Sixty-two percent engage in physical activity or exercise on a regular basis. Among active residents, the median amount of physical activity or exercise in a week is typically 90 minutes. Twenty-seven percent report “60 minutes or less” as their typical engagement, while 24% see it as “61 minutes to 90 minutes.” Twenty percent engage in physical activity or exercise for “91 to 120 minutes” per week, and 29% do so “more than 120 minutes” each week. In identifying the two activities they participate in most often, 82% choose “walking,” 42% indicate “jogging or running,” 17% select “biking” and 15% say “swimming.” Nine percent most often participate in “fitness classes or working out at a fitness center,” and six percent engage in “team sports, such as softball.”

City Hall:

Ninety-four percent are satisfied with their level of involvement in activities and meeting in their neighborhood and city; only one percent are “somewhat dissatisfied.” In fact, 26% are “very satisfied”

A very large 83%, up 11% in four years, feel they can have an impact on the way things are run in Brooklyn Center; only seven percent feel they cannot. A solid majority of Brooklyn Center residents, then, are feeling connected to their local decision-makers.

Forty-three percent, an increase of six percent since the 2013 study, report having a “great deal” or “fair amount” of knowledge about the work of the Mayor and City Council. A very large 83%

either "strongly approve" or "approve" of their job, while only eight percent register "disapproval." Thirty-two percent report having "quite a lot" or "some" first-hand contact with the Brooklyn Center City staff. Eighty-five percent rate the staff highly, while only seven percent, a drop of 15% in four years, are more critical in their judgments. Both the City Council and City Staff ratings remain among the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

During the past year, 25% either contacted City Hall by telephone or in-person. Four Departments received over three-quarters of the contacts: Police Department, Public Works Department, General Information Desk, and Parks and Recreation Department.

In rating the last contact with respect to aspects of customer service, 93% rate the waiting time for the receptionist to help them as either "excellent" or "good," while 94% similarly rate the staff's courtesy highly. Finally, 93% think the ease of obtaining the service they needed is either "excellent" or "good." All of these ratings are above the 80% connoting "high quality customer service" in the public sector.

Communications Issues:

The "City Newsletter," at 32%, is the most used principal source of information about City government and activities. Twenty-three percent rely upon the "City Website." Eighteen percent rely upon the "local newspaper," while 12% watch "cable television." Thirty-five percent prefer to receive their information through the "City Newsletter." Twenty-two percent prefer the "City Website," 15% indicate the "local newspaper," and 12% prefer "cable television." Preferences, then, are in line with the currently used communications network.

Sixty-seven percent, down 11% since the 2013 study, receive the "Sun Post" newspaper. Seventy-one percent, down 14% in four years, report receiving the "City Watch," the City's quarterly newsletter. A high 88% report household members regularly read it. The reach of the City Newsletter is 62% across the community, down 13% since the 2013 study.

Sixty-eight percent currently subscribe to cable television. Among subscribers, 26% report at least "occasionally" watching City Council meetings.

Seventy-nine percent of households in the community have access to the Internet. Fifty-nine percent connect to Comcast Cable High Speed Internet and 29% use DSL. Sixty-five percent of those on the Internet accessed the City's website. Among those accessing the website, everyone was able to find what they sought. While 60% were unable to suggest information they would like to see on the website or view it as fine as is, 15% would like to see "crime statistics" posted.

City information could also be effectively broadcast on social media. Five sources stand out in terms of their potential: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, e-mail blasts, and text blasts.

A very high 83% rate the City's overall performance in communicating key local issues as either "excellent" or "good." Only 12% rate its communications efforts lower. These ratings of a communications system remain at the top of the Metropolitan Area.

Conclusions:

In the conclusions to the 2013 study, it was pointed out

This study shows the most remarkable turnaround in 25 years of conducting city surveys in the Metropolitan Area. Three years ago, the City was in a downward spiral – overwhelming concerns about city issues, a loss of faith in city government leaders, and a hopelessness of ever moving to a more positive future. All of these problems have changed direction and, now, residents are both proud of their community, hugely satisfied with city government and services, and ready to move forward.

In this survey, it is abundantly clear that the gains four years ago were not "flukes," and have solidified, if not further improved.

Specifically, in this study:

1. The overall positive quality of life rating stabilized at 87%. In fact, "excellent" ratings increased to 18%.
2. Although "crime" still remains an issue, its intensity has diminished. In this study, "crime" is the most serious issue for 22% of the residents, down ten percent since the 2013 study, and the focus continues to shift from "violent crime" to "drugs," "youth crimes and vandalism," and "traffic speeding and traffic volume in their neighborhoods."
3. Community cohesiveness markedly improved in four years. The already good ratings of the strength of community identity and the sense of neighborliness have stabilized at a high level. Feeling a closer connection to the city as a whole dropped to 25%, but closer connections to their neighborhood rose by an identical amount, to 59%. And, thinking

things in Brooklyn Center are generally heading in the right remained at a comparatively high 84%.

4. In four years, community opinions about redevelopment remained positive, but showed a decrease in intense support. A 62%-31% positive rating is the general view of redevelopment efforts. Lack of businesses and empty buildings are a key part of the negative evaluations. Eighty-four percent, a 10% decrease since the 2013 study, support continued redevelopment in the City. By an 83%-13% majority – one of the highest margins in the Metropolitan Area – residents support providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development. Respondents would target condominiums or townhouses and senior housing as top needs. During the past four years, the need for more entertainment establishments or dining establishments diminished. In fact, “jobs” are perceived to be the greatest need in Brooklyn Center to provide economic stability.

5. Lack of tough code enforcement still remains a community concern. Residents would prioritize four types of codes for tougher enforcement: properties with vacant homes, messy yards on residential property, deteriorated commercial property, and noise.

6. Continuing the results of the 2013 study, property tax hostility remains at comparatively low levels. Again, 76% rate the value of city services positively. By a 69%-12% margin, a major shift from the 50%-35% margin in 2013, residents would favor an increase in the city portion of their property tax if it were needed to maintain city services at their current level. Again in 2017, by a 57%-24% margin, respondents remain opposed to a property tax increase to enhance current city services or offer additional city services. But, the opposition dropped from 69% to 57%, while support increased from nine percent to 24%.

7. City services are also highly rated. Five city services garnered positive ratings above 90% among residents able to make a judgment: police protection, fire protection, recycling pick-up, city-sponsored recreation programs, and EMS. Eight city services received positive ratings between 80% and 89%: storm drainage and flood control, park maintenance, maintenance of city buildings and facilities, animal control, city drinking water, building and construction inspections, city street repair and maintenance, and snow plowing. Only two city services receive positive ratings between 74% and 79%: property maintenance enforcement and street lighting. The overall average positive rating for city services is 86.7%, still one of the highest in the Metropolitan Area.

8. The Park System remains the community’s “jewel in the crown.” The average positive rating among users of each of the 11 components of the system is 95.5%. This rating is among the top 10% in the Metropolitan Area. Both the available recreational facilities and the current mix of programming satisfy the needs of at least 94% of the households in

Brooklyn Center. Visitors of larger community parks and smaller neighborhood parks give the playground equipment there an 86% positive rating. Among players of the Centerbrook Golf Course, 17% of the sample, 98% rate their experience as either “excellent” or “good.”

9. Sixty-two percent of city residents engage in physical activity or exercise on a regular basis. The typical resident engages in such activities about 90 minutes per week. Most residents participate most often in walking or jogging and running, hence the importance of trails and sidewalks in the community.

10. City Government and Staff improved dramatically during the past four years. Empowerment among respondents increased from 72% to 83%. Job approval ratings of the Mayor and City Council continued at their already high levels, this year at 83%. Job performance ratings of the City Staff also continued at their already high levels, this year at 85%. Customer service ratings of Brooklyn Center City Hall employees further improved to 13% higher than the threshold indicating high quality service.

11. Eighty-three percent rate the City's overall performance in communicating key local issues to residents as either “excellent” or “good;” only 12% are more critical. This magnitude of favorable judgments is still the highest in the Metropolitan Area. The City's highly effective communications system also explains the comparatively low level of uncertainty on nearly all of the survey's questions.

Brooklyn Center Continues to do an exemplary job of communicating with residents. During the past four years, this solid communications network became a major asset. Most citizens are generally content and continue to view their City and its services in a positive light. Concerns about the direction and future of the city are relatively low. With the “City Booster” percentage at 16%, or almost triple the suburban norm, a reservoir of goodwill is already established and been augmented. Residents of the City of Brooklyn Center show the fundamental support and optimism to buttress decision-makers in their future policy choices and decisions in both the short-run as well as the long-term.

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a sample of 400 randomly selected adult residents residing in the City of Brooklyn Center. Professional interviewers conducted the survey by telephone between January 12th and 31st, 2017. The typical respondent took 29 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The results of the study are projectable to all adult City of Brooklyn Center residents within ± 5.0 % in 95 out of 100 cases.

