

DECISION RESOURCES, LTD.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

2009 City of Brooklyn Center Residential Study

Residential Demographics:

Brooklyn Center is a mature, highly stable community, with a significant element of transience, particularly among a segment of younger renters. The median longevity of adult residents is 17.0 years. Seventeen percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past five years, while 44% have been there over two decades. Seventeen percent of the sample expect to move out of Brooklyn Center during the next five years; in contrast, 61% intend to remain in the community for at least ten years.

The average age of respondents is 47.5 years old. While 21% of the sample fall into the 18-34 year age range, 21% are at least 65 years old. Twenty-nine percent of the households contain seniors; in fact, 19% are composed only of senior citizens. Forty percent of the city's households report school-aged children and pre-schoolers. Sixty-seven percent own their present residence.

Sixty-two 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.” Only 36% of the city's households are “managing comfortably” or “managing very well.”

Caucasians compose 58% of the sample. Nineteen percent are African-American, while nine percent each are Hispanic-Latino or Asian-Pacific Islander. Women outnumber men by two percent.

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

General Perspectives:

Sixty-five percent rate the quality of life as either “excellent” or “good;” only six percent rate it as “excellent.” While positive ratings are at the Metropolitan Area average, the “excellent”

rating is the lowest across the Metropolitan Area suburbs.

“Location” within the Metropolitan Area is the most liked feature of the city. At 29%, it outdistances all other responses. Ten percent each point to “friendly people” and “quiet and peaceful.” “Strong neighborhoods” and “good schools” are next at eight percent each.

In thinking about serious issues facing the city, 40% point to “rising crime.” “Losing businesses” is next, at 11%, followed closely by “Brookdale Mall,” at nine percent. Seven percent cite “high taxes,” while six percent focus on “foreclosures.”

Seventy-five percent call Brooklyn Center “home,” and 20% regard it as “just a place to live.” Fifty-two percent favorably rate the strength of community and neighborliness, while 42% are more critical. Sixty-two percent feel a closer connection to their neighborhood; seventeen percent choose their school district, and 13% are closest to the City of Brooklyn Center as a whole.

The City receives a mixed rating on its current direction. Forty-seven percent feel things “are off on the wrong track,” and 46% think the City is “generally headed in the right direction.”

Public Safety Issues:

Forty-six percent think there are areas in the City of Brooklyn Center where they do not feel safe. Particular areas of concern are “Brookdale” and “Brooklyn Boulevard.” They urge “more patrolling”

In nearby areas to their homes, 65% feel safe in walking in their neighborhood alone at night, while 34% disagree. Only thirty-six percent of the city’s households are part of their area’s Neighborhood Watch. Seventy-two percent think the amount of police patrolling in their neighborhood is “about the right amount,” while 77% feel similarly about the amount of traffic enforcement by the police in their neighborhood. Twenty-nine percent think traffic speeding in their neighborhood is either “very serious” or “somewhat serious.”

There are four key public safety concerns facing Brooklyn Center: “youth crime and vandalism,” mentioned by 25%; “violent crime,” at 18%; and, “drugs” and “residential crimes, such as burglary and theft,” each chosen by 15%. The specific violent crime people are most concerned about is “shooting.”

City Taxes and Services:

Fifty-three percent think the city portion of their property taxes to be “high.” Twenty-three

*City of Brooklyn Center
Executive Summary
April, 2009*

percent see them as “about average” in comparison with neighboring cities. Only three percent consider them to be “low.” A mixed rating occurs on the values of city services. When considering property taxes paid and the quality of city services received, 45% award them favorable ratings, while 34% are more critical in their judgments.

By a 55%-21% margin, residents oppose an increase in city property taxes if it were needed to maintain services at current levels. A majority of opponents think service cuts are unneeded and can be avoided by reducing waste. And, by an very large 70%-8% margin, residents oppose an increase in city property taxes to enhance current city services or offer additional city services. When evaluating specific city services, the mean approval rating is 80.7%, an average rating. Among those having opinions, over 90% rate fire protection, recycling pick-up, and emergency medical response as “excellent” or “good.” Between 80% and 89% similarly rate police protection, storm drainage and flood control, and park maintenance. Between 70% and 79% rate city-sponsored recreation programs, animal control, snow plowing, and street lighting favorably. Sixty-eight percent rate city drinking water highly, and 65% similar rate city street repair and maintenance.

City Hall:

A moderately large 53% feel they can have an impact on the way things are run in Brooklyn Center; but, 39% feel they cannot. A majority of Brooklyn Center residents, then, are feeling connected to their local decision-makers.

Thirty-seven percent report having a “great deal” or “fair amount” of knowledge about the work of the Mayor and City Council. A large 65% either “strongly approve” or “approve” of their job, while 23% register “disapproval.” Thirty-two percent report having “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Brooklyn Center City staff. Fifty-four percent rate the staff highly, while 22% are more critical in their judgments.

During the past year, 33% either contacted City Hall by telephone or in-person. Four Departments received over two-thirds of the contacts: Police Department, Public Works Department, Building Inspections, and General Information.

In rating the last contact with respect to aspects of customer service, 91% rate the waiting time for the receptionist to help them as either “excellent” or “good,” while 92% similarly rate the staff’s courtesy highly. Finally, 87% think the ease of obtaining the service they needed is either “excellent” or “good.”

Community and Neighborhood:

When looking at their community, a majority of residents think there are “about the right number” of condominiums or townhouses, starter homes for young families, “move-up” housing, higher cost housing, affordable housing, parks and open spaces, trails and bikeways, and service establishments. But, 40% think there are “too many” affordable rental apartments and 27% rate the number of rental homes the same way. Majorities think there are “too few” retail shopping opportunities, entertainment establishments, and dining establishments. Twenty-eight percent each also think there are “too few” luxury rental apartments and senior housing.

Fifty-eight percent rate the general redevelopment in the City of Brooklyn Center negatively; only 23% award it a positive rating. Two perceptions lead to these unfavorable conclusions: the City is not doing anything and Brookdale is still empty. Even so, by a significant 88%-4% margin, residents support the continued redevelopment of the community. They would like efforts focused on attracting more retail opportunities and a grocery store. They would strongly oppose attracting more apartments, low income housing, and bars. And, by an impression 80%-11% margin, residents support the City providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development.

Sixty-four percent rate the general condition and appearance of homes in the community highly; however, 36% are more critical. Over the past two years, 74% think the appearance of their neighborhood has remained about the same. Ten percent feel it improved, and 17% see a decline.

Significant majorities believe that City code enforcement is at “about the right” level of toughness. Noteworthy minorities of 28% to 36% consider the enforcement of weeds and tall grass codes, junk cars on residential property ordinances, and messy yards on residential property codes to be “not tough enough.”

Fifty-three percent are aware of homes or properties in their neighborhood that are in foreclosure. The greatest worries center around “crime and vandalism” as well “poor upkeep.”

Community Diversity:

Forty-eight percent think the growing population diversity is a “good thing,” while 40% see it as either a “bad thing” or “both good and bad.” Reasons for seeing growing diversity as a good thing include “teaching tolerance,” “embracing diversity,” “way of the world,” and “brings variety to the local economy.” Reasons for seeing it as a bad thing are “rising crime” and “too

much diversity is not a good thing.”

Sixty-three percent think the City is either “very well” or “somewhat well” prepared to meet the growing diversity of residents; seventeen percent disagree. Disagreement is primarily based on the “need for more police,” “language barriers,” and “lack of school funding.”

Parks and Recreation Issues:

Ninety percent of the users of trails, larger community parks, and smaller neighborhood parks award these facilities positive ratings. Eighty-four percent feel the same way about baseball fields, and 82% rate soccer fields highly. Seventy-six percent give “excellent” and “good” ratings to basketball courts, and 75% each rate the Community Center and football fields the same way. Seventy percent of the park users rate playground equipment highly. Sixty-seven percent post favorable ratings about the ice rinks, and 63% post similar ratings of the tennis courts. Overall, the average positive rating of Brooklyn Center park facilities is a moderately high 78.4%.

Ninety-four 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. Twenty-three percent report household members participated in City park and recreation programs. The most popular are “baseball or softball,” at 33%, as well as “basketball,” “swimming,” and “soccer,” at 10% each. A nearly unanimous 99% report satisfaction with their experience.

Twenty-six percent leave the city for park and recreational facilities or activities elsewhere, particularly for hiking or walking and community center offerings. The “City Newsletter,” cited by 48%, is the principal source of information on parks and recreation and facilities in Brooklyn Center. The “Park and Recreation” brochure follows at 14%, and the local newspaper ranks next, at 12%.

Community Center Issues:

By a 53%-29% margin, residents support the remodeling of the Community Center. This level of support, however, is lower than the norm for the successful passage of a bond referendum. But, if the Community Center were remodeled, 51% of city households are at least “somewhat likely” to use the facility.

In discussing potential additions to the Community Center, more than 60% support the inclusion of four facilities: “space for teen programs,” “space for senior programs,” “an indoor swimming pool,” and “an indoor walking/running track.” The two top priorities for inclusion are “an indoor swimming pool” and “a teen center.” Opposition is high against the inclusion of “indoor soccer fields.”

Communications:

The “City Newsletter,” at 58%, dominates the principal sources of information about City government and activities. Twenty-two percent rely upon the “local newspaper.” Fifty-seven percent prefer to receive their information through the “City Newsletter.” Twenty-one percent opt for the “local newspaper.”

Ninety percent report receiving the “City Watch,” the City’s quarterly newsletter. A very high 91% report household members regularly read it. The reach of the City Newsletter is 82% across the community.

Sixty-eight percent currently subscribe to cable television. Among subscribers, 22% report at least “occasionally” watching City Council or Planning Commission meetings.

Seventy-one percent of households in the community have access to the Internet. Fifty-six percent connect to Comcast Cable High Speed Internet, 26% use DSL, and 10% have a dial-up modem. Forty-nine percent of those on the Internet accessed the City’s website. Among those accessing the website, a solid 96% were able to find what they sought. Website visitors would like to see more “crime information,” “redevelopment plans,” and “news and events.”

A solid and comparatively high sixty-two percent rate the City’s overall performance in communicating key local issues as either “excellent” or “good.” But, 32% rate its communications efforts lower.

Concluding Thoughts:

In this survey, Brooklyn Center residents express a unique mixture of present concerns together with an optimism and hopefulness about the future. The two key issues troubling residents are rising crime rates and commercial/retail redevelopment. Also, these two collide when residents consider the Brookdale Mall. Even so, population shifts will not have a major impact on the city. About 17% of city residents, particularly renters, plan to leave the City of Brooklyn Center

within the next five years; but a comparatively large percentage, 61%, plan to remain in the community for at least 10 years.

1. Redevelopment and crime are key issues for many residents. As a result, residents approve of City actions to guide redevelopment and would support using financial incentives to attract certain types of offerings. Similarly, citizens also endorse the addition of more police officers to address crime problems. As a starting point, the City should encourage greater participation in Neighborhood Watch programs, block parties, and the National Night Out to better organize neighborhoods on preventive measures.
2. The Brooklyn Center City enterprise remains very well regarded by residents. Contact levels with the City Council and City Staff are higher than suburban norms. The job evaluations of both groups are strongly positive and impressive in comparison with other first-ring suburban communities. Dissatisfaction with policy-makers and policy-implementers is very low. And, interactions with City Hall prove to be uniformly very positive.
3. Residents rated city services satisfactorily. In every case but one, ratings exceed Metropolitan Area suburban norms. At 80%, positive ratings of police protection are almost 15% lower than the suburban norm. Given current concerns, and their relationship to police efforts, the value rating of city services is a weak 45% positive to 34% negative.
6. In evaluating the status of current development in the community, residents only see “lopsidedness” with respect to the large number of affordable rental apartments. With respect to other types of housing, they see a generally good balance of various types of development. But, they would assign a greater priority to attracting retail shopping opportunities, entertainment establishments, and dining establishments.
7. Communications linkage between the City and its residents is solid. The reach of “City Watch” is 82% of the city’s households, among the highest in the Metropolitan Area. A comparatively high 35% of the households accessed the City’s website, while 22% watch City Council or Planning Commission Meetings at least “occasionally.”

The city enterprise is viewed strongly. City services are well-regarded. City government and staff are rated very positively. Residents rate their quality of life satisfactory and place a value on maintaining the diversity, sense of community, and strong neighborhoods that are a hallmark of Brooklyn Center. The City established a great reservoir of goodwill across the community in

the past, and has clearly extended this to present; but, perceived inaction on the Brookdale Mall, has the potential in the short term to damage the connection to the community.

Methodology:

Decision Resources, Ltd., contacted 400 randomly selected households in the City of Brooklyn Center. Residents were interviewed by telephone between February 3rd and 17th, 2009. The average interview took 26 minutes. The results of this sample may be projected to the universe of all adult residents of the City of Brooklyn Center within $\pm 5.0\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.