

DECISION RESOURCES, LTD.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *City of Golden Valley Residential Study*

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Golden Valley. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between November 27th and December 11th, 2006. The average interview took twenty-seven minutes. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to the entire universe of adult Golden Valley residents within \pm 5.0 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Residential Demographics:

Golden Valley still retains the characteristics of both a mature, generally stable community combined with a significant element of transience, particularly among a segment of younger renters. The median longevity of adult residents is 14.8 years. Twenty percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past five years, while 25% have lived there for over three decades. In looking toward the future, the typical resident expects to remain in the community for at least another ten years, although seven percent envision leaving within the next five years.

Forty-six percent of the households have individuals at least 55 years old; in fact, 39% of the households are composed entirely of over 55 year olds. Nineteen percent of the households with seniors in residence report participation in senior programs offered by the City of Golden Valley. Virtually all of the participants rate their experiences positively and see no specific offerings missing from the current array.

Thirty-three percent of the households possess school-aged children and/or pre-schoolers. Eighty-two percent own their current residences, whereas eighteen percent rent.

The average age of respondents is 54.3 years old. Fourteen percent of the sample fall into the 18-34 year age range, with 28% 65 years old or older. Thirty-seven percent of the households are headed by up-scale White Collar job holders — Professional-Technical or Owner-Manager positions. Eighteen percent of the households are headed by Clerical-Sales people, while 15% are headed by Blue Collar job holders. Twenty-seven percent of the households within the community are headed by retirees.

Residents are classified according to the precinct in which they live. Twenty-seven percent reside in Precincts 1 or 2; twenty-four percent in Precincts 3 or 4; twenty percent in Precincts 5 or 6; and, 30% in Precincts 7 and 8. Sixty-three percent are in the Robbinsdale Public School District, and 37% live in the Hopkins Public School District. Women outnumber men by six percent in the sample.

Quality of Life Ratings:

A solid 97% again rate the quality of life as either “excellent” or “good;” fifty percent rating it as “excellent,” unchanged from the 2001 study. A small three percent post “only fair” or “poor” ratings. Ratings, then, held constant during the five-year period.

“High Quality” and “Low Quality” Aspects of the Community:

In thinking about “high quality” aspects of Golden Valley, 22% point to “city services,” while 18% cite its “sense of community.” “Park and recreation system” is critical to 13%, “safe” is key to 12%, while “location” is mentioned by nine percent. Seven percent consider “schools” as a high quality aspect of Golden Valley, and “well-maintained city” is posted by five percent.

In discussing “low quality” aspects of the city, 16% are unable to respond to the query. Thirty-five percent are “boosters” — residents who see no “low quality” aspects of the community. This “booster” level is almost five times higher than the Metropolitan Area suburban norm, and is consistent with the 2001 study results. “Lack of retail and dining opportunities” and “crime” top the list at only eight percent each, followed by “rundown housing and neighborhoods” at seven percent.

Issues facing the Community and its Direction:

In thinking about serious issues facing the city, 25% point to “high taxes,” twice the level in the 2001 study. “Crime” and “school funding” follow at nine percent each. Seven percent cite “too much growth,” down from its 2001 level. Eighty-six percent feel the city is moving in the “right direction,” unchanged from the 2001 study. Twelve percent think it is going “off on the wrong track.” In general, residents endorse the direction of the city and its recent policies.

Property Taxes and City Services:

On the issues of property taxes and city services, residents take a very cautious approach. They split — 43% to 37% — in opposition to an increase in their property taxes if it were needed to maintain city services at their current levels; in 2001, residents split in favor of a property tax increase by a 47% to 43% margin. When asked about the property taxes in Golden Valley compared with nearby areas, 57% feel they are “high,” a jump of 26% in five years. Twenty-three percent report they are “about average,” one-half the level in the 2001 study.

Seventy-seven percent rate Golden Valley city services as “excellent” or “good” in comparison with neighboring communities. Only eight percent see them as “only fair” or “poor,” while 16% are unsure. Seventy-three percent consider the value of city services in terms of property taxes paid as either “excellent” or “good,” down eight percent from the 2001 level. Fourteen percent rate it lower. Reflective of the increase in concern about property taxes, the perceived value of city services has slightly dropped.

City Services Evaluations:

City services evaluations are very positive. Police protection, fire protection, park maintenance, communications, snow plowing, and city street repair and maintenance score approval ratings of ninety percent or higher. Recycling and brush pick-up, storm drainage and flood control, animal control, and street lighting finish above the eighty percent positive threshold. City-sponsored recreation programs and Neighborhood Watch Programs exceed the seventy percent approval level; these lower approval ratings are due to uncertainty rather than to negative ratings. Five city service ratings improved by at least 10% since the last study: storm drainage and flood control, animal control, communications, street lighting, and city street repair and maintenance. In almost every case, these city service approval ratings are above or at the suburban norm.

Eighty-six percent participate in the curbside recycling program by separating recyclable items from the rest of their garbage. Modest percentages suggest expanding the type of items picked up and providing larger bins.

In discussing the enforcement of city codes, large majorities give high marks on two aspects. Sixty-nine percent think the enforcement of codes limiting the number of vehicles parked on a residential property is “about right;” nineteen percent say the enforcement is “not tough enough.” And, 68% think the enforcement of codes limiting the storage of RVs on a residential property as “about right;” twelve percent think it is “not tough enough.”

By a 64%-19% margin, residents oppose changing from the current garbage collection system in which residents may choose from several different haulers to a system where the City chooses a hauler for the whole community. However, by a 65%-20% margin, residents favor continuing to allow individual choices, but requiring all haulers to pick-up garbage on the same day in a neighborhood.

Inflow and Infiltration:

Forty-seven percent are aware of the issue of "Inflow and Infiltration." But, only 38% are aware the Metropolitan Council is charging cities for the added sewer system volume caused by Inflow and Infiltration, raising sanitary sewer fees and increasing city utility bills.

Residential and Non-Residential Property:

Seventy-two percent rate the general condition and appearance of industrial and commercial properties as either "excellent" or "good;" twenty-seven percent, however, rate them as "only fair" or "poor."

A solid 72% would support licensing single and two-family residential properties when used for rental purposes, to assure the homes are well-maintained and safe. Only 15% oppose this proposal.

A large 83% think Golden Valley's current housing supply is an adequate mix of all types of housing; fourteen percent disagree. Respondents seeing the mix as inadequate register a need for more "low income housing" and more "affordable housing."

Seventy percent view the significant remodeling, additional property subdivisions, and the tearing down and reconstruction of homes in Golden Valley as a "good idea." Twenty-two percent, though, label this trend as a "bad idea." As a precaution, residents support a city ordinance limiting the size of residential additions and new construction by a 64%-22% margin.

City Government and City Staff:

Sixty-one percent feel they could have an impact on the way things are run in Golden Valley; thirty-two percent think they could not. Overall, this level of empowerment is above the suburban area norm and the result is relatively unchanged from the 2001 study. Golden Valley

residents, then, feel 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, down 13% from the 2001 level. Fifty-seven percent either “strongly approve” or “approve” of their job, while only twelve percent register disapproval. The eight percent decrease in approval ratings reflect an increase in uncertainty, not negativity. Positive ratings are based upon the “perception of a good job” and “lack of city problems;” critics point to an “unwillingness to listen” and “disagreement with City Council decisions.”

Thirty-five percent report having contact with the Golden Valley City Staff; this level of contact is unchanged from the 2001 study. Fifty-eight percent rate the staff as “excellent” or “good,” down 14% from the 2001 level, while only six percent rate them critically, one-half of the 2001 level. These results reflect an increase of uncertainty, from 16% in 2001 to 36% in 2006. Positive evaluations are based on the “perception of a good job,” “helpfulness,” “friendliness,” and “lack of problems in the community;” negative judgments are based upon “room for improvement” and “perception of a poor job.”

Parks and Recreation Issues:

Usage of the various components of the park system vary markedly. During the past year, 65% of the households used community parks and/or neighborhood parks, down 11% in five years. Sixty-one percent used the city’s trails, while 51% visit open spaces and natural areas. Thirty-three percent report using the Brookview Picnic Shelters. Twenty-six percent each visited the Brookview Golf Course or the Brookview Community Center. Only 13% report household members went to the Davis Community Center, also known as the Meadowbrook Community Center. Ninety-four percent feel the existing recreational facilities offered by the City meet the needs of their household, while a very small four percent feel they do not.

Twenty percent of the sample, one-half the level in the 2001 study, report household members participated in City park and recreation programs. The most popular programs are “softball/baseball,” “soccer,” “children’s activities,” and “golf.” Satisfaction with the offerings remains virtually unanimous. Ninety-four percent view the current mix of City park and recreation programming as meeting the needs of their households; only three percent disagree.

Twenty-two percent say household members currently leave the city for park and recreational facilities and activities elsewhere; this level is 44% lower than the 2001 level. The most popular were “lakes,” “swimming pools,” and “walking trails.” This level of recreational “leakage” to other communities is about 60% lower than the suburban norm.

Streets and Sidewalks:

Sixty-one percent rate the City's sidewalk system as either "excellent" or "good," while 25% rate the system either "only fair" or "poor." The major reason for negative ratings is the "lack of existing sidewalks."

Public Safety Issues:

While 50% report there are no areas in the community where they would feel unsafe walking alone at night, 49% indicate there are such unsafe areas within the city. Twenty percent of the residents feeling there are unsafe areas specifically point to "Theodore Wirth Park." But, 57% of this group think "everywhere" in the community would be unsafe walking alone at night. Seventy-one percent feel safe in their immediate neighborhood walking alone at night, down 10% from the 2001 level.

Eighty-three percent, nine percent higher than in 2001, think there is "about the right amount" of traffic enforcement by the police in their neighborhood, while 14% say there is "not enough" and one percent, "too much."

On a related public safety issue, a very high 84%, up 14% since 2001, know the Golden Valley Fire Department operates as a paid on-call organization. Eight percent report there are members of their households who would consider becoming a firefighter in the city; no enticement, though, would change the mind of households who would not consider this opportunity.

Transportation Issues:

Fifty percent leave Golden Valley on a regular or daily basis to go to work, a decrease of five percent in five years. Seventeen percent do not leave the community to go to work, while 34% are currently unemployed or retired. Eighty-five percent of residents leaving the city rate the ease of getting to and from work as either "excellent" or "good;" sixteen percent are more negative in their evaluations. Similarly, 91% rate the ease of getting from place to place within the City of Golden Valley favorably; only eight percent are more critical.

Fourteen percent of the sample report using public transportation during the past two years. Among public transit users, 83% rate their experience favorably, while 16% are more negative in their evaluations. Favorable ratings increase by ten percent in five years. Only 18% of the

current non-users would take public transportation if there were more routes and destinations offered. Among these potential users, 80% would still support an expansion in routes and destinations even if it meant more buses on residential streets, and 63% would still do so even if it mean more buses on their residential street.

“Envision Golden Valley:”

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents are aware of the “Envision Golden Valley” visioning program. Twenty percent report household members participated in the process.

Less than 60% are aware of any of the six goals adopted by the City Council as a result of this visioning process. In fact, only 39% are aware of two goals: “started a long-term park master plan process” and “conducted a Council Social Gathering to meet informally with residents.” Forty-five percent report awareness of “encouraged continued citizen involvement through “Connecting Golden Valley,” while 47% are aware of “sponsorship of Mighty Tidy Day to encourage community clean-up.” The high levels of awareness, 54% and 56%, respectively, are posted for: “adoption of stronger housing maintenance goals and enforcement” and “a study of zoning and development of the I-394 corridor.”

Sources of Information about City Government:

The City Newsletter is regarded as the principal source of information about Golden Valley City Government and its activities by 58%, up 15% since the 2001 study. The city newsletter has clearly increased both its public awareness and its impact. Local newspapers are regarded as the principal source of information about city government and activities by 23%. Six percent rely upon the “grapevine,” while five percent mention cable television.

Fifty-eight percent prefer to receive information about City Government and its activities through the city’s newsletter. Twenty percent prefer newspaper coverage. Five percent or less point to the “grapevine,” “city’s website,” “cable television,” “mailings,” and “e-mail.”

In assessing the reach of various communications channels, the “Golden Valley City News” newsletter registers a very high reach of 95%, an increase of five percent over the 2001 level. Ninety percent of those receiving the city newsletter report regularly reading it. Twenty-nine percent sometimes clip parts and keep them around for later reference, while 34% toss it after reading. Thirty-seven percent, though, double the percentage in 2001, report saving or tossing the issue depending upon its coverage. Ninety-four percent rate the content of the newsletter

highly, while 91% rate the format and appearance of the newsletter favorably.

Sixty-seven percent of the surveyed households currently receive cable television, the same level as in the 2001 study. Among cable television subscribers, an impressive 53% report watching Cable 12 News either “frequently” or “occasionally.” Among subscribers, a comparatively high 48% “frequently” or “occasionally” watch Golden Valley City Council Meeting live or taped telecasts during the past year. Forty-three percent report watching the Community Bulletin Board on Channel 16 during the past year. Thirty-three at least “occasionally” tune in to city programming, such as city updates and special meetings, and 32% similarly catch “Northwest Cities.”

Seventy-two percent report having access to the Internet from home or at work. In fact, 70% have access from their homes. Among those having access to the Internet, 46% connect through Comcast High-Speed Internet, 25% use DSL, and 16% have a dial-up modem at 56K speed. Forty-six percent report accessing the City’s website – translating to 32% of the households across the community. The typical website visitor rates it as either “excellent” or “good,” accesses the site less than once per month, is able to find what he/she is looking for, and tends to be concerned with information about park and recreational offerings, community events, general city information, and City Council Meeting minutes.

By an unconvincing 38%-22% margin, residents support Golden Valley offering high-speed wireless service. But, a very large 41% are unsure. The typical supporter of a City-operated system would be willing to pay \$20.00 for this high-speed Internet service.

Conclusions and Implications:

Once again, Golden Valley citizens remain very pleased with their community — city services, City Staff and City Council. In almost every case, very favorable ratings are either stable or improved from five years ago. Community identity and neighborliness remain at remarkably high levels for an inner-ring suburban community. Residents express great satisfaction with their current park and recreation system, and concerns about the sidewalk system have clearly abated. And, “boosterism,” already extraordinarily strong, dramatically increases to include over one-third of the sample. There are two pressing concerns; however; one is a Metropolitan Area-wide issue while the other is a particular first-ring suburban issue. While anxiety about property taxes has significantly increased since the 2001 study; this increase is in line with a pattern found throughout the suburbs during 2006. It does, however, provide a cautionary constraint on the ability of City Councils to substantially raise their levies for program funding. The second concern, crime, is consistent with increases during the past year in the inner-ring suburban

communities. In part, this increase reflects events in Minneapolis, but residents appear less comfortable with the generally safe nature of the community, particularly in areas bordering Minneapolis. But, beyond these two issues, residents are markedly contented with their quality of life.