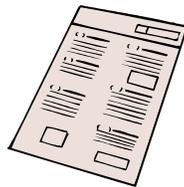


CHAPTER 7

SURVEY AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

A detailed analysis of park, open space, trails and other recreation facility needs is found in appendices A, B, and C of the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter contains the summaries of those surveys.

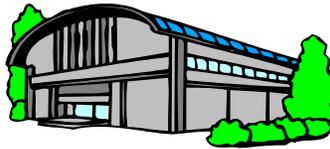
Identifying recreation needs is a difficult task because every region is different and community values vary according to many internal factors. In essence, identifying recreation needs is the process of comparing the supply of existing facilities and programs against the demand for facilities and programs demonstrated by local residents. In Skagit County it is somewhat more complicated because the region also attracts significant users who live beyond the County boundary. Some of the sources of information used to quantify community desires and establish program and/or facility priorities were: household surveys, a series of community workshop meetings, contacts with user groups and meetings with major suppliers of recreation services such as cities, Forest Service, etc.



SUMMARY OF THE 1998 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SURVEY

1. In general, respondents were quite conservative with interests in the more passive types of activities. A concern for services that increase government cost prevailed throughout the survey.
2. A higher than average number of senior-aged responses was noted. Part of this can be attributed to an older than average population profile in the County.
3. When asked to list the three most needed facilities or activities in Skagit County, the top five responses were (in order): swimming pool, sports fields, teen/youth activities, campgrounds, bike trails.
4. The County facility currently receiving the most use is Padilla Bay Trail followed by Skagit Valley Playfields and Howard Miller Steelhead Park.
5. A slight majority favored the construction of a multi-use recreation center. However, another 17.5% had no opinion.

6. The predominant reason residents do not ride a bicycle more often is the lack of safe bicycle routes/trails.
7. Residents would favor a major parks and recreation development program if the amount was limited to about \$15 per household annually.
8. When asked what role the County should take in providing park and recreation services, nearly half of the respondents felt the program should continue at the same level.
9. Activities with the highest latent demand (activities residents would like to do most if facilities were available) are attending cultural events, horseback riding, RV camping, saltwater fishing, arts and crafts, and indoor swimming.



SUMMARY OF THE 1998 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WORKSHOP MEETINGS

A series of workshop meetings were held to give the general public an opportunity to respond to recreation issues and express park and facility needs. The meetings were held in a format wherein participants were divided into small groups and asked to collectively answer four open-ended questions. At the end of the workshop, this information was shared with the remaining groups. In addition, each participant was given five "dots" and asked to select his/her favorite project from a given list.

Workshops were held at Fidalgo School (Anacortes), LaVenture School (Mount Vernon), and the Sedro Woolley Community Center. Over 70 persons participated in the three workshops, with each workshop attracting between 20 and 25 participants. The results of this community participation process are described below.

1. In general, participants felt trails, an indoor recreation center, camping sites, sports fields, and ball courts and were the most needed recreation facilities in Skagit County.
2. Overall, participants favored multi-use trails. There was support for both recreation and transportation-related users of trails and non-motorized travel corridors.
3. When asked to prioritize a list of potential projects, trail corridors were near the top for all three workshop sessions. They were clearly the top choice among Anacortes and Sedro Woolley participants, whereas Mount Vernon participants were closely divided between a sports field complex, trails, and multi-use parks. Second place choices in Anacortes were multi-use parks and open space areas. Sedro Woolley participants were divided between

multi-use parks, a sports field complex, and an indoor recreation center for their second choice project.

2001 NORTHERN STATE RECREATION AREA SURVEY SUMMARY

This survey was mailed to every one of the approximate 40,000 households in Skagit County. The total number of households responding to this survey was 4381, with the largest age response group being between the ages of 36-55.

Top 10 Activities at NSRA that would be used:

1. Hiking Trails	2687	61.3%
2. Open Space/Picnic Area	2334	53.3%
3. Water Park/Swimming Pool	1922	43.9%
4. Bicycle Trails	1882	43.0%
5. Wetlands/Wildlife Viewing Platform	1881	42.9%
6. Camping	1611	36.85
7. Demonstration Farms/Gardens	1286	29.4%
8. Environmental Education Center	1081	24.7%
9. RV Park	813	18.6%
10. Conference Facilities/Meeting Rooms	807	18.4%

NSRA DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Respondents were asked to prioritize a list of development projects for this 726 acre property. Of the respondents familiar with the plans for Northern State Recreation Area, trails received twice the amount of votes (28%) as any other element. Ball fields and playgrounds received 14% apiece and campgrounds received 12%.

SUMMARY OF THE 2003 HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESULTS

In the Spring of 2003, Skagit County Parks and Recreation (SCPR) contracted with Applied Research Northwest (ARN) to conduct a scientific study. The purpose of the study was to obtain the input of Skagit County residents. The overall goal of the study was to provide SCPR with estimates of residents' preferences for parks and recreation facilities development and priorities for future planning. The study consisted of the administration of a community survey to a random sample of Skagit County residents and included questions regarding recent activities, desired expansion of existing facilities (including athletic fields, campgrounds, trails, etc.) and the addition of new public indoor facilities including classrooms, a multi-purpose gym, and an indoor pool. Development of the Northern State Recreation Area (NSRA) was also included in the study. Refer to the appendices for the total results of this study.

MARGINS OF ERROR

The findings in the Survey have an estimated error margin of plus or minus six percent (6%) with a 95% level of confidence. That is, we can be 95% sure the survey results reflect a view accurate within 6 percentage points.

RESIDENT CHARACTERISTICS

First questions in the survey focused on developing a profile of the respondents. Skagit County resident characteristics from the sample were as follows:

- 40% were male, 60% female (census shows 49% male and 51% female).
- The great majority of respondents (76%) were between the ages of 35 and 75 (census shows 47%).
- 62% reported that there are no children 18 or younger living in their homes.
- 72% reported living in Skagit County more than 10 years
- Geographic distribution analysis confirmed proportionate representation of each area of Skagit County in the survey. The complete survey project is available in the appendices.

There are measurable differences between the survey and county census figures in regards to resident characteristics. These differences can be due to many factors including:

- Females are more apt to be home during day hours than males.
- County residents over 35 and without kids are more likely to be at home during the spring than young families with kids.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Park Usage:

Nearly all (92%) of the respondents reported their household had used a park facility in the past 12 months. More SCPR respondents reported household members spending time at a public seashore, lake, or river (water access, 78%) in the past twelve months than any other of the listed facilities. Trails (67%) were a close second. Spending time at a park playground was ranked third with just over half (55%) reporting spending time at a park playground.

Table 7.1
Parks Used in the Past 12 Months*

Park Activity	% of Use
Water Access	78%
Trails	67%
Park playground	55%
Campground or RV	47%
Other parks	43%
Outdoor Athletic Facility	40%
Boat launch	34%
Indoor public pool	27%
Indoor Athletic Facility	18%

* N=299. N is an average. Sum of percentages greater than 100 are due to use of multiple facilities.

The survey shows a strong relationship between households with children and park usage. Households with children were significantly more likely than others to use water access (88%), trails (80%), playgrounds (76%), outdoor athletic facilities (61%), RV/campgrounds (58%), indoor pools (40%), and indoor athletic facilities (31%).

In general, households with the fewest years of living in Skagit County, younger-aged households and households with children were more likely to report using parks in the past 12 months. As expected, younger aged households are more likely to have lived in Skagit County a fewer number of years and are more likely to have children living in the household. Because younger people are generally more active, more likely to move or to have just “settled down” and to have children living in the home these findings suggest a strong demographic relationship with park use.

PARK NEEDS AND PROJECTED USE

1. Respondents reported indoor facilities - an aquatic center, a multi-use gymnasium and multi-purpose rooms - are the top three additional facilities most needed in Skagit County. A vast majority (85%) stated they would “definitely” or “probably” use an indoor recreation facility if it was to include both a gymnasium and multi-purpose rooms.
2. When comparing compared need to projected use, trails and indoor facilities (aquatic, recreation and multi-purpose rooms) would be used the most, with 66% of the respondents saying they would definitely or probably use more trails, and 64% saying they would definitely or probably use an indoor aquatic facility. More than half of respondents (53%) say they would definitely or probably use multipurpose rooms, and the same percentage said they would use additional campgrounds and RV parks. Survey respondents (64%) also said

the County is in need of a multi-purpose gym. With an indoor recreation center, a multi-purpose gymnasium, and a multi –purpose meeting room, support was very high.

3. Of those respondents who reported their household "probably" or "definitely" would use additional trails, 80% said their household would use additional hiking trails and 53% said their household would use bicycle trails.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

■ Recreation Center

When asked to rank the importance of providing a Public Indoor Recreation Center, 83% of community survey respondents ranked such a facility somewhere between somewhat important and extremely important (Figure 7.1). The remaining 17% said it would be "a little" or "not at all" important. With a margin of error for this survey of about 6%, this suggests that as many as 89% of the respondents might use such a facility.

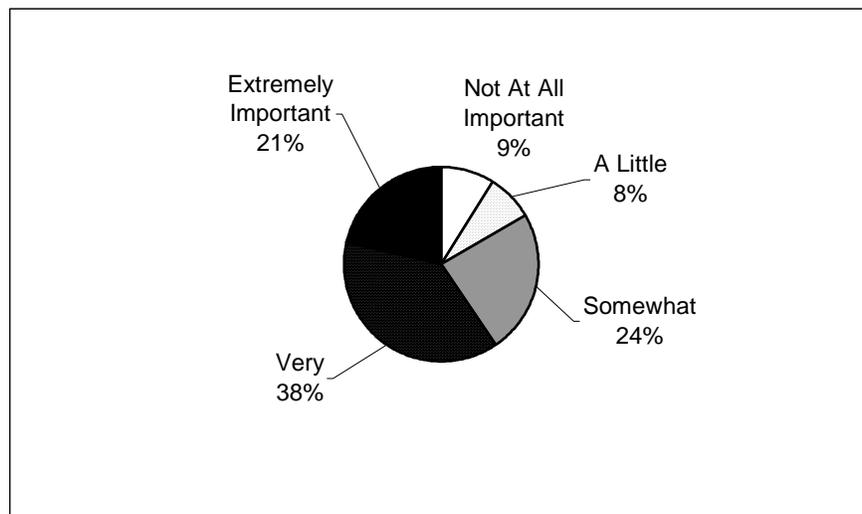


Figure 7.1: Importance of Public Recreation Center*

*N=290.

■ Land Acquisition for Future Park Use

On the question of acquiring land for future park use, 79% of the respondents said that it is somewhat, extremely or very important (Figure 3.2). With a margin of error of 6%, this suggests that as many as 85% of county residents believe land acquisition to be important to county residents.

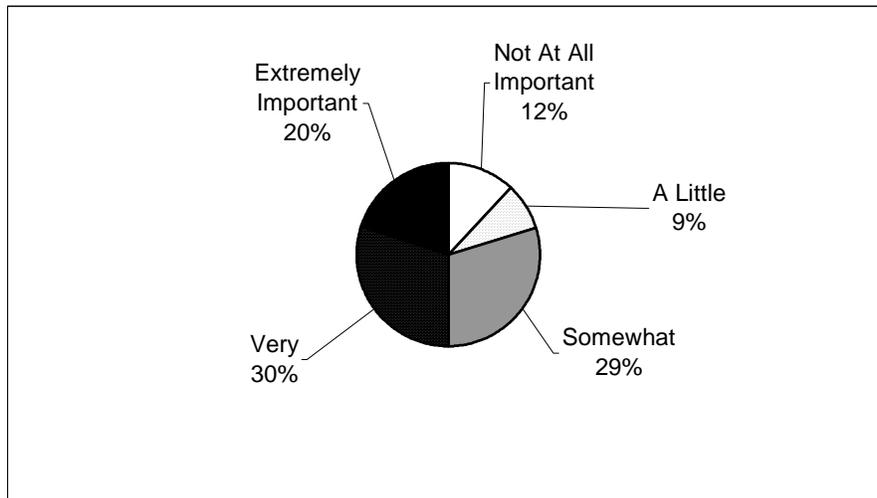


Figure 7.2: Importance of Land Acquisition*

*N=294.

2003 PUBLIC MEETINGS/PUBLIC COMMENT

Three public meetings were held in the County during the Plan Update process: May 13, 2003 at Howard Miller Steelhead Park (District 3) in Rockport, May 14, 2003 at Anacortes (District 1), and May 15, 2003 at Mount Vernon (District 2). These meetings were multi-purpose: to inform people of what the existing system consists of at this time, to provide an overview of the activities of the past 6 years, (including improvements, program changes and general expenses, trades, acquisitions and master plans), and to hear issues, concerns and feedback on the services provided.

A number of those attending were there to promote a specific concern or recommend a specific interest be met. For example, off-leash dog advocates attended the district 1 (In Anacortes) meeting to promote their interest in seeing a park devoted to accommodate their needs. Meeting participants in Anacortes also revealed interest in seeing priority placed on acquiring lands which would create a wildlife corridor connecting Deception Pass State Park and the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. Attendees with concerns regarding the cascade trail brought their issues to the forefront at the district 3 meeting.

From all attendees, the County staff was commended for their past efforts at designing recreation programs that are interesting to a wide range of interests, running an excellent adult and youth sports program and creatively making needed improvements to parks with little funds.

USING SURVEY RESULTS FOR DETERMINING NEED

These three aforementioned surveys are used in extracting a survey ranking for ultimate determination of need/priorities dictated in chapters 11 and 12 of this comprehensive plan update. Survey results, use patterns, level of service standards, and other factors are ranked and averaged to derive at the needs/priorities of County residents. Complete survey results are available in the appendices.