

The Morris Leatherman Company

Executive Summary 2016 City of Golden Valley

City Demographics:

Golden Valley continues to maintain 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 15.7 years. Thirty-five percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past ten years, while 38% have lived there for over two decades. In looking toward the future, the typical resident expects to remain in the community for at least another ten years if not for the rest of their life, while nine percent envision leaving within the next five years.

Thirty-nine percent of the households have individuals at least 55 years old; in fact, 31% of the households are composed entirely of over 55 year olds. Twenty-seven 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 a 12% group would like to see the City offer “card leagues.”

Twenty-seven percent of the households possess school-aged children and/or pre-schoolers. Seventy-six percent own their current residences, whereas 24% rent.

The average age of respondents is 49.7 years old. Twenty percent of the sample fall into the 18-34 year age range, with 21% 65 years old or older.

Residents are classified according to the precinct in which they live. Twenty-seven percent reside in Precincts 1 or 2; twenty-three percent in Precincts 3 or 4; twenty-five percent in Precincts 5 or 6; and, 26% in Precincts 7 and 8. Women outnumber men by four percent in the sample.

Quality of Life Issues:

A solid 98% again rate the quality of life as either “excellent” or “good;” forty-eight percent rating it as “excellent.” A very small two percent post “only fair” ratings. Positive ratings, then, held fairly constant during the ten-year period.

In thinking about “high quality” aspects of Golden Valley, 34% point to “housing/neighborhoods,” while 17% cite its “people.” “City government and services” or “schools” are critical to 13%, and “natural areas and open spaces” is key to 10%.

The Morris Leatherman Company
August 2016

In discussing “low quality” aspects of the city, eight percent are unable to respond to the query. Thirty-nine percent are “enthusiasts” — residents who see no “low quality” aspects of the community; this enthusiasm level, while still much higher than the suburban norm, dropped 15% in three years. “Streets” tops the list at 15%, followed by “low income housing,” at 14%.

In considering serious issues facing the city, 14% point to “high taxes,” consistent with the 2013 study. “Growing diversity” follows at eight percent. “Rising crime” and “too much growth” are each posted by seven percent. Twenty-seven percent see no serious issues facing the community, down five percent in three years. This “booster” level is four times higher than the Metropolitan Area suburban norm. Eighty-eight percent feel the city is moving in the “right direction,” and nine percent think it is going “off on the wrong track.” Once again, residents endorse the direction of the city and its recent policies.

City Government and Staff:

Seventy-one percent, an 11% decrease since 2013, feel they could have an impact on the way things are run in Golden Valley; twenty-three percent think they could not. Overall, this level of empowerment remains above the suburban area norm.

Fifty-nine percent report having a “great deal” or “fair amount” of knowledge about the work of the Mayor and City Council. Eighty-five percent either “strongly approve” or “approve” of their job, while 11% register disapproval. Positive ratings are based upon the perception of a “good job,” “lack of city problems,” and “listens to residents;” critics point to an “unwillingness to listen” and “disagreement with City Council spending decisions.”

Fifty-two percent report having contact with the Golden Valley City Staff; this level of contact is six percent higher than the 2013 study. Eighty-seven percent rate the staff as “excellent” or “good,” while only eight percent rate them critically, relatively unchanged from the 2013 level. Positive evaluations are based on the perception of a “good job,” “helpfulness,” “good listeners,” and “lack of problems in the community;” negative judgments are based upon perceptions of “poor spending.”

By a 67%-18% majority, residents favor changing from the current odd-numbered year city elections to even-numbered years. There were no “strong opponents” of this change.

Community Characteristics:

When considering a list of 15 characteristics of a community, majorities think the City of Golden Valley has “about the right number or amount” of fourteen. “Affordable rental units” is the only

one where “about right” dropped to 49%. Five characteristics are viewed by 25% or more respondents as “too few or little” in the city. These five characteristics include: “affordable housing, defined as a single family home costing less than \$160,250,” at 31%; “starter homes for young families,” at 30%; “entertainment establishments, such as movie theaters and night clubs,” at 28%; “assisted living for seniors,” at 26%; and, “one level housing for seniors maintained by an association,” at 25%. Three other characteristics are viewed by over 20% as “too much or two many:” “luxury high amenity rental units,” at 21%; “affordable rental units,” at 20%; and, “executive high-end housing,” at 20%.

City Services:

On the issues of property taxes and city services, residents are trending toward a more supportive approach to maintain highly-rated services. They split — 60%-35% — in support of an increase in their property taxes if it were needed to maintain city services at their current levels; in 2006, residents split against a property tax increase by a 43% to 36% margin, and in 2013, residents favored a property tax increase by a 53%-39% majority. Even so, 62% rate the city portion of their property taxes as either “very high” or “somewhat high” in comparison with nearby suburbs; thirty-three percent see them as “about average.” Ninety-two percent, an increase of eight percent in three years, think they receive either an “excellent” or a “good” value for the property taxes they pay.

City services evaluations are very positive. Police protection, fire protection, recycling service, storm drainage and flood control, park maintenance, city recreation facilities, city-sponsored recreation programs, animal control, communications, street lighting, quality of city drinking water, dependability of city drinking water, quality of sanitary sewer service, dependability of sanitary sewer service, and snow plowing receive approval ratings of ninety percent or higher. Only Neighborhood Watch programs and city street repair and maintenance post positive ratings under 90% – for Neighborhood Watch programs, its positive rating is 82%; and, for street repair and maintenance, the positive rating is 84%, which is still almost 40% higher than the Metropolitan Area suburban norm. Critics of the Neighborhood Watch programs focus on the “need for more programs,” while critics of city street repair and maintenance point to “poor street repair.” Overall, though, the consistency and magnitude of the positive ratings of Golden Valley city services remains at the top of the Metropolitan Area.

Forty-nine percent would prioritize funding directed toward “maintaining and improving infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewers.” Eighteen percent would prioritize “creating community connections, such as neighborhood associations and community events,” while 15% urge “improving public safety.”

Sixty-two percent are “concerned” about the aging infrastructure in the City of Golden Valley;

of those concerned, most express a moderate level of anxiety. By an 88%-13% majority, residents support using property taxes or fees to repair or replace city roads. By an 80%-20% majority, they feel the same way about repair or replacement of city water and sewer pipes. By a 77%-23% majority, residents would support a project focused on sidewalks and trails. And, by a 68%-33% verdict, they support repairing or replacing city buildings and facilities.

Economic Development:

Ninety-three percent, a 12% increase in three years, rate general economic development in the community as either “excellent” or “good.” Only six percent are more critical in their evaluations. Ninety percent favorably rate the city’s efforts to attract new businesses, an eight percent increase since the 2013 study; only six percent post negative ratings.

Three types of development are sought by moderate-sized groups in the community: “big-box retail,” at 13%; “restaurants,” at 12%; and, “assisted living facilities,” at 11%. Fifteen percent also state there are “no types” of development they would particularly like to see in the city. Only one type of development is strongly opposed by moderate-sized groups in the city: “apartments,” at 15%. Twenty-six percent report there are “no types” of development they would strongly oppose.

Ninety-seven percent rate the general condition and appearance of industrial and commercial properties as either “excellent” or “good;” only four percent rate them as “only fair” or “poor.” The positive rating jumped 25% in ten years.

By a solid 66%-21% majority, residents support the recent changes to limit the subdividing of current residential lots.

Environmental Issues:

Moderate percentages of respondents point to five environmental issues as “most important” to be addressed in the City of Golden Valley: “air pollution,” at 15%; “litter,” at 14%; “lawn chemical run-off,” at 10%; “water quality in lakes and ponds,” at nine percent; and, “quality of drinking water,” at seven percent. But, 18% think there are no important environmental issues currently needing to be addressed. Eighty-six percent rate the water quality of lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands in the community as either “excellent” or “good;” thirteen percent rate it lower. Fifty-four percent report they are at least “somewhat concerned” about invasive species in the city; only ten percent, though, are “very concerned.”

Respondents were informed some communities in the Metro Area have approved ordinances

encouraging the reduction of plastic bag use either by charging fees in stores or a complete plastic bag ban. By a solid 64%-30% majority, residents support the City of Golden Valley doing something similar; intense support proves twice as high as intense opposition to policies like this.

Transportation Issues:

Fifty-two percent leave Golden Valley on a regular or daily basis. Twenty-seven percent do not leave the community on a regular basis, while 22% are currently unemployed or retired. Among the group leaving on a regular or daily basis, 87% report they normally drive alone while commuting to work while 11% van or car pool. Ninety-three percent rate the ease of getting from place to place within the City of Golden Valley favorably; eight percent are more critical.

Twenty-eight percent have used public transportation during the past two years, a ten percent increase in three years; ninety-four percent rate their experience favorably, while six percent hold the opposite view. Public transportation non-users indicate one overwhelming reason for their choice: seventy-nine percent just “prefer to drive.” When told about the Metro Blue Line Light Rail Line plans connecting Downtown Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park, with a stop near Theodore Wirth Park, 23% report they or household members are at least “somewhat likely” to use this option when opened in 2021. Projected use by Golden Valley residents is only seven percent of city households. They are almost equally likely to get to the Light Rail Station by walking, biking, being dropped off, or using a park and ride lot. If bus rapid transit were available along Highway 55, 30% of Golden Valley households are either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to use this service; standard market projection techniques estimate nine percent of the households in the city would be actual riders.

Respondents were reminded two years ago the City passed a winter parking ordinance, restricting parking on city streets from midnight to 6 AM from November 1st through March 31st. By a 64%-32% majority, residents favor changing the ordinance to restrict parking from 2 AM to 6 AM during Winter months.

Public Safety Issues:

Thirty-two percent, almost a three-fold increase in three years, report there are members of their households who would consider becoming a firefighter in the city; perceived barriers for the lack of potential participation are “age or health issues,” at 39%, and “no interest,” at 45%.

Seventy-nine percent think the current response time of around eight minutes to a fire call of the Golden Valley Fire Department is “acceptable;” of the 17% not finding the average response

time acceptable, 72% would support a property tax increase to reduce that time.

The three most-often offered one-word perceptions of the Golden Valley Police Department are “excellent,” “good” and “helpful.” Eighty-four percent report awareness of the Police Department’s community programs, such as Night to Unite, Police in the Parks, the Citizen’s Academy, GVPD University, and open houses. Forty percent of the sample had contact with the Department through its community programs during the past year, and 97% rate the experience favorably. Twenty-six percent report other contacts with the Police Department in the past two years. Among these contacts, 42% were for traffic violations, 36% were for emergency services, and 18% were for the investigation of a crime. Eighty-nine percent rate the way the Police Department handled these situations as either “excellent” or “good;” eleven percent were more critical. Ninety percent say the time it took the Police Department to respond was “prompt.” And, 89% say the Police Department personnel were courteous and acted in a professional manner. The best ways for residents to receive information and updates from the Police Department include: “mailings,” at 33%; “e-mail,” at 23%; and the “City Newsletter,” at 19%.

Ninety-four percent think there is “about the right amount” of police patrolling in their residential neighborhood. Only five percent see it as “not enough.” There are two public safety problems which residents feel concerned about: “juvenile crime,” at 20%; and, “traffic safety,” at 14%. But, at the same time, 21% do not see any public safety problems as critical in the community.

Waste Disposal Issues:

Fifty-five percent, down ten percent in three years, participated in the City Brush Pick-Up, Leaf Drop, or Mighty Tidy Day programs; all participants rate these services highly. Seventy-seven percent label these programs as at least “somewhat important” to their households; in fact, 29% say they are “very important.”

Forty-two percent report currently using the curbside pick-up of yard waste and small brush service; another 22% are “very interested” in using this service in the future. Twenty-six percent are currently using the curbside pick-up of composting organics service; this time another 26% are “very interested” in using the service in the future. Twenty percent avail themselves of the yard waste drop-off site; twenty-eight percent are “very interested” in future use. Thirteen percent currently use the dirt and mulch pick-up service; another 26%, though, are “very interested” in future use.

Reversing the 54%-39% majority of respondents opposed to organized garbage collection three years ago, residents currently support the change by a 51%-38% majority. Supporters cite three reasons for their position: “less truck traffic,” “cheaper,” and “less road maintenance.”

Opponents base their decision on “liking their current hauler,” “cheaper,” or “want to choose.” In assessing organized versus open garbage collection systems, pluralities or majorities think an open garbage collection does a better job in “cost for garbage collection” and “customer service,” while pluralities or majorities consider an organized collection does a better job in “cost for street maintenance and upkeep” or “pollution from trucks.”

Parks and Recreation:

Usage of the various components of the park system vary markedly. During the past year, 72% used the city’s trails. Sixty-seven percent of the households used community parks and/or neighborhood parks, down eight percent in three years, and an identical 67% used open spaces and natural areas. Thirty-nine percent report attending summer concerts and special events, while 32% visited the Brookview Golf Course and Lawnbowling. Twenty-nine percent used the community athletic fields, 28% used on-street bike routes and shoulders, and 27% used the Brookview Park Picnic Shelters. Twenty-three percent visited the Brookview Community Center and 21% visited the David Community Center at Meadowbrook School. Only 14% used outdoor ice rinks, while 13% used City tennis courts. Ninety-five percent of the users of city sidewalks, trails, bike routes and shoulders report walking or running there, 36% recreational bike there, 20% fitness train, and 18% commute there.

Ninety-five percent rate the city’s trails and sidewalks system favorably; only five percent are more critical in their evaluations. The very small group of negative respondents focus on the “lack of enough sidewalks.” If sidewalks in their neighborhood were connected, 20% are “much more likely” to walk or bicycle to where they needed to go and 51% are “somewhat more likely” to do so.

Residents provide super-majorities in favor of using city funds for three parks and recreation purposes. By a 72%-27% majority, residents support the use of city funding for city gardens. By a 69%-30%, residents similarly endorse the use of city funds for off-street trails. And, by a 67%-30% split, residents would approve city funds to be used for an off-leash dog area.

Two more projects are favored by majorities. By a 55%-38% split, residents assent to the use of city funds for a central community pedestrian plaza replacing Winnetka Avenue near the Creek and Library. And, by a 54%-46% margin, they support city funding for bicycle boulevards on neighborhood streets where pedestrians, bikes and motor vehicles share the road.

Two projects, however, are opposed by majorities. By a 54%-45% split, residents oppose the use of city funds for on-street bicycle lanes. And, by a 58%-41% majority, they oppose city funds used for tennis courts.

In discussing the future of city tennis courts, respondents were told most were built in the 1970's and 1980's, can no longer be maintained for safe use, and would require complete reconstruction. They were also informed the City maintains and operate significantly more tennis courts than most neighboring communities. Thirty-six percent support “reconstruct(ing) courts only needed for community tennis programs,” while 32% opt for “reduc(ing) the number of tennis courts and reconstruct(ing) them.” Sixteen percent suggest “do not replace any of the tennis courts,” while eight percent urge “fund(ing) the replacement of all current tessen court facilities.”

Thirty-four percent of the sample, five percent higher than the 2013 study and 14% higher than the 2006 study, report household members participated in City park and recreation programs. The most popular programs are “softball/baseball,” “summer programs,” “arts/crafts/hobby,” and “fitness.” Satisfaction with the offerings remains virtually unanimous. Ninety-nine percent view the current mix of City park and recreation programming as meeting the needs of their households.

Fifty-four percent say household members currently leave the city for park and recreational facilities and activities elsewhere; this level is 20% higher than the 2013 level. The most popular reason is for “lakes/boating,” at 28%, followed by “parks,” at seven percent, and “walking trails” or “golf courses,” at six percent each. This level of recreational “leakage” to other communities is about ten percent higher than the suburban norm.

Communications Issues:

The City Newsletter is regarded as the principal source of information about Golden Valley City Government and its activities by 56%. The City website and local newspapers follow, at 12% and 13%, respectively. Forty-eight percent prefer to receive information about City Government and its activities through the city’s newsletter. Thirteen percent prefer the City website, and 12% point to local newspapers.

In assessing the reach of various communications channels, the “Golden Valley City News” newsletter registers a high reach of 82%, but eight percent lower than the 2013 level. Only 84%, down 11% in three years, of those receiving the city newsletter report regularly reading it. Ninety-five percent rate the content of the newsletter highly, while 94% rate the format and appearance of the newsletter favorably. Regular reads suggest the need for both “more detail” and “more budget information.”

Seventy-six percent receive and read the “New Hope/Golden Valley Sun Post” newspaper. Forty-two percent read the city legal notices printed there. But, if they could choose, 47% would prefer to receive city legal notices in the newsletter, 20% in the newspaper, and 18% through e-mail.

Forty-nine percent, down 12% since the 2013 study, of the surveyed households currently receive cable television. Among cable television subscribers, 31% “frequently” or “occasionally” watch Golden Valley City Council Meeting live or taped telecasts during the past year; this level of viewership is down 14% in three years. Thirty-three percent, also down 14%, report watching the Community Bulletin Board during the past year. Thirty-four percent at least “occasionally” tune in to city programming, such as the State of the City, Mayor Minutes and city videos.

Seventy-four percent report having access to the Internet from home or at work. In fact, 72% have access from their homes. Sixty-three percent of home or work Internet users report accessing the City’s website – translating to 47% of the households across the community. The typical website visitor rates it as either “excellent” or “good” and is able to find what he/she is looking for.

While 65% of Internet-equipped residents, up 10% in three years, are aware the City is webstreaming city meetings and programs on the city’s web site, 25%, also a 10% increase, actually viewed a city meeting or program there. Similarly, while 65%, up 11% since the 2013 study, are aware the city provides e-mail updates to residents who subscribe to the “GV Direct Connect” service, only 19% have subscribed to that service.

Both Facebook and YouTube already have large user pools, at 78% and 53%, respectively. In both cases, moderately large pools of current users would be likely to use them for obtaining information about the community. Twitter is a secondary social medium for this purpose.

Conclusions:

1. Once again, Golden Valley citizens remain very pleased with their community — city services, City Staff and City Council. The dramatic increase in city service ratings, noted in the 2013 study, has been reinforced in this study. There are no major declines in service ratings, indicating the 2013 changes were not a fluke but a significant and sustainable change. Community identity and neighborliness still remain at remarkably high levels for an inner-ring suburban community. In fact, 39% think there is nothing “low quality” in the community. “Boosterism,” while registering a slight retreat from three years ago, is over one-quarter of the sample and three times higher than the suburban norm. Residential views of City government continue to rank among the top four or five cities in the Metropolitan Area. Confidence in the future, which was very shaky in the 2006 study, is maintaining high levels of stability.
2. The property tax climate has become more hostile during the past three years. In fact, at 14%, it leads the list of “most serious” issues facing the community. But, residents are not reflexively anti-tax. They almost unanimously see “excellent” or “good” value in the taxes they

pay for high quality city services, and they would support a property tax to maintain city services at current levels. Respondents also support the use of property taxes or fees to repair or replace aging infrastructure, such as city roads, water and sewer pipes, sidewalks and trails, and city buildings and facilities. And, in considering parks and recreational facilities, residents also overwhelmingly support city funding of community gardens, an off-leash dog area, and off-street trails.

3. The City needs to reassess its communications system with residents. The “Golden Valley News” dropped by 17% in three years. The reach of cable television also declined by 12% during the same time period; among cable television subscribers, viewing of programs on the Government Channel dropped by an average of 10%. Use of the City website dropped by a small four percent since the 2013 study; part of the loss in cable viewing of City Council meetings may be attributed to an increase in web-streaming those telecasts. To augment the reach of the current communications system, the City may wish to more broadly advertise its presence on Facebook and YouTube.

4. Significant majorities favor the City taking further action on several fronts. These include:

- Reducing the average fire call response time, even if a property tax increase were required.
- Continuing dialogues with residents in preparation for a change to an organized system of garbage collection.
- Either charging fees in stores for the use of plastic bags or banning their use outright.
- Reducing the number of city-maintained and city-operated tennis courts and reconstructing only those chosen for continued operation.
- Changing to even-numbered years for city elections.

In 2016, because of sound policies and well-defined plans for the future, many residents of the City of Golden Valley continue to be enthusiastic about their community. They feel informed, empowered, and confident. But, certain mid-course corrections or changes, particularly in communications, may be needed to continue, and even strengthen, that linkage. This will become even more critical in the future as the City confronts issues of a more Metropolitan nature. Sustaining the current high level of trust among the citizenry will allow decision-makers to make tough judgment calls based upon a solid foundation of popular consent.

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a sample of 400 randomly selected adult residents residing in the City of Golden Valley. Professional interviewers conducted the survey by telephone between July 26th and August 9th, 2016. The typical respondent took twenty-eight minutes to complete the questionnaire. The results of the study are projectable to all adult Golden Valley residents within $\pm 5.0\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.