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Executive Summary 2014 City of Fridley

City Demographics:

Fridley is a demographically balanced first-ring suburban community. The median longevity of adult residents is 17.3 years. Twenty percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past five years, while 26% were there for over three decades. Only eleven percent report they will move in the next five years; in contrast, 78% have no plans to leave during the next ten years, with 52% sure to spend the “rest of their lives” in the city.

Twenty-four percent of Fridley households are completely composed of residents over 65 years old. Thirty-two percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. Sixty-seven percent own their current homes, while 33% rent. The median pre-tax yearly household income is \$56,500.00. But, 26% report household incomes above \$75,000.00 annually.

The average age of respondents is 50.3 years old. Thirty-five percent of the sample fall into the over 55 years age range, while 17% are less than 35 years old. Women outnumber men by four percent in the sample. The Ward of residence of each respondent was noted: Wards One contains 35% of the sample; Ward Two, 34%; and Ward Three contains 32% of the sample.

Quality of Life Issues:

Eighty-eight percent rate their quality of life as either “excellent” or “good.” In fact, 15% deem it “excellent.” Thirteen percent rate the quality of life lower. While the overall positive rating is in the top quartile of suburban communities, the “excellent” rating is comparatively weak.

At 25%, “convenient location” leads the list of attributes people liked most about living in the community. “Small town feel” is second, at 18%, followed by “close to family and friends,” at 17%, and “close to job,” at 16%. The most serious issues facing the city are “rising crime,” at 21%, and “aging infrastructure,” at seven percent. A “booster” group of 41% says there are “no” serious issues facing the community; the size of the booster group in Fridley is over six times higher than the norm for a Metropolitan Area suburb.

Fifty-seven percent of the sample offers no suggestions for anything currently missing from the community which could greatly improve the quality of life. Nine percent would like to see “more retail shopping opportunities,” while six percent each suggest “restaurants” or “better property maintenance.”

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Seventy-six percent of the sample report the general sense of community in the City of Fridley was “excellent” or “good,” a moderately high rating; twenty-four percent rate it lower. Sixty-eight percent call Fridley “home,” while 27% see it as “just a place to live and I’d be just as happy elsewhere.” Twenty-four percent report a closer connection to the City of Fridley “as a whole,” while 58% have a closer connection to their “neighborhood.” Twelve percent report a closer connection to the “School District,” and six percent have “no connections” at all. Eighty-five percent think all in all things in Fridley are generally headed in the right direction; but, nine percent think things are “off on the wrong track,” and six percent are “unsure.”

Community Characteristics:

In assessing the number or quantity of various community characteristics, majorities of residents think Fridley has “about the right amount” of 14 of the 18 discussed. These 13 attributes are: affordable housing, affordable rental units, condominiums, townhouses, starter homes for young families, “move up” housing, higher cost housing, nursing homes, parks and open space, trails and bikeways, service establishments, retail shopping opportunities, dining establishments, and day care opportunities.

Forty-nine percent report there are “about the right number” of assisted living for seniors options, while 32% believe there are “too few.” Forty-eight percent see “about the right number” of entertainment establishments, but 50% believe there are “too few.” Forty-six percent think there are “about the right number” of luxury rental units, while 29% believe there are “too few.” Thirty-seven percent see “about the right number” of one-level housing for seniors maintained by an association, while 38% think there are “too few.”

City Services:

In evaluating specific city services, the mean approval rating is 83.4%, within the top quartile of summary ratings in the Metropolitan Area. Over 90% rate fire protection, police protection, recycling, and park maintenance as either “excellent” or “good.” Between 80% and 90% favorably rate storm drainage and flood control and city-sponsored recreation programs. Between 70% and 80% favorably rate animal control, code enforcement, city street repair and maintenance, and snow plowing. Sixty-nine percent similarly rate street lighting.

Seventy percent rate the quality of drinking water in the City of Fridley as either “excellent” or “good;” eighteen percent are more critical in their evaluations. Similarly 43% are either “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about the safety of drinking water in the city; but, only 12% are “very concerned.”

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Property Taxes:

Fridley residents can be classified as fiscal moderates. Twenty-eight percent think their property taxes are “high” in comparison with neighboring suburban communities, while 50% see them as “about average. Seventy-six percent of the residents view city services as either an “excellent” or a “good” value for the property taxes paid; this endorsement level places Fridley within the top quartile of Metropolitan Area suburbs. The general property tax climate in Fridley can be best described as “fiscally benign.” The typical resident estimates the city’s share of the property tax to be 20.2%. Thirty-nine percent thought it was less than 20%, while another 36% thought the share was over 20%.

By a 45%-41% margin, residents narrowly oppose an increase in city property taxes increase if it were needed to maintain city services at their current level. But, by a 44%-42% margin, residents would narrowly support an increase in city property taxes if it were used to improve and enhance city services.

Neighborhoods and Businesses:

Eighty-seven percent rate the general appearance of their neighborhood as either “excellent” or “good;” fourteen percent are more critical in their evaluations. Similarly, 80% rate the general appearance of business and commercial areas in the city as either “excellent” or “good;” but 21% rate their general appearance lower.

Garbage Hauling:

By a 47%-35% margin, residents oppose changing from the current garbage hauling system, in which residents may choose from several different haulers, to a system where the City chooses one or more haulers for the whole community. Supporters of the current system base their decisions on “liking current hauler,” “lower cost,” and “want choice.” Supporters of city designation base their decision on “less truck traffic” and “less damage to roads”

Municipal Liquor Stores:

Ninety-four percent favor the City continuing to operate its municipal liquor stores. Among the four percent who oppose its continuation, only 31% -- effectively one percent of the citizenry -- still oppose the municipal liquor stores when informed that their closing would result in \$250,000 loss of revenue for the city. Fifty-nine percent of the sample visited the stores during the past twelve months, with 70% of these shoppers usually going to the store on University Avenue and the remainder patronizing the store on Highway 65. Ninety-six percent rated the courtesy and friendliness of the staff as either “excellent” or “good,” while 91% similarly rate

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the product selection and 84%, the price of products.

Public Safety:

A comparative high 85% feel safe walking alone at night in their neighborhood. In considering the entire city, 26% think there are areas where they do not feel safe, especially University Avenue and apartment complexes. Not feeling safe is generally caused by one of two factors: “not enough police patrols” or “not enough lights.” An overwhelming 99% do feel safe in their homes.

In rating the seriousness of public safety concerns in the City of Fridley, 25% feel “residential crime, such as burglary and theft” is the greatest issue. Twenty percent feel similarly about “youth crimes and vandalism.” And, 15% point to “drugs.”

Seventy-seven percent rate the amount of police patrolling in their neighborhood as “about the right amount,” while 77% also feel the same way amount the amount of traffic enforcement by the police in their neighborhood. In both cases, about 23% think the amounts are “not enough.”

Thirty-one percent rated traffic speeding in their neighborhood as either “very serious” or “somewhat serious.” Twenty-three percent similarly rated stop sign violations in their neighborhood.

Parks and Recreation:

Ninety-five percent rate the park and recreation facilities in Fridley as either “excellent” or “good.” Only three percent are more critical, while two percent are “unsure.” When considering the quality of life in the community, 75% rate park and recreational facilities as either “very important” or “somewhat important;” twenty-four percent rate them as “not too important” or “not at all important.” When considering the value of their homes, 89% rate the appearance of their neighborhood park as either “very important” or “somewhat important;” in fact, 41% see their neighborhood park’s appearance as “very important” to their home value.

The most popular park and recreational opportunities are “smaller neighborhood parks,” used by 70% of the city’s households, and “larger community parks,” used by 67%. Fifty-nine percent report their household uses the city’s “trails.” And, “community ballfields” draw 38%. Among users, positive ratings of each opportunity remain between a very high 95% and 98%.

A nearly unanimous 99% feel existing recreational facilities offered by the City of Fridley meet the needs of their households. Similarly, 99% view the current mix of City park and recreational programming meets the needs of their households. Eighty-one percent believes the City has enough community meeting spaces; only eight percent disagree.

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Fifty-five percent report they would oppose **any** tax increase to fund a park and recreational facilities bond referendum. But, 39% would be likely to vote in favor of a bond referendum which increased property taxes by \$3.00 per month.

Twenty-four percent report household members have participated in City park and recreation programs. Among participating households, 34% have enrolled in “youth sports.” Twenty-one percent participated in “summer programs.” Seventeen percent engaged in “baseball or softball,” and 11% each, in “swimming lessons” or “park programs.” One hundred percent are “satisfied” with the experience.

Sixty-four percent do not leave the city for park and recreation facilities or activities elsewhere. Sixteen percent go to “use lakes or for boating.” Six percent leave to play in “sports leagues” and four percent leave to “golf” elsewhere.

Community Center:

By a 55%-38% majority, residents support *in concept* the construction of a Community Center by the City of Fridley. Forty-nine percent of the sample indicate that a member of their household would be at least “somewhat likely” to use the facility if it were built; using standard market projection techniques, though, the expected user level would be 18% of the city’s households. The typical resident would be willing to increase their property taxes by \$2.00 per month to fund the construction of the Community Center; however, 45% of the sample would support no tax increase for this purpose.

City Government and Staff:

Forty-three percent think they know “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about the work of the Mayor and City Council. Respondents give the Mayor and Council a job approval rating of 85% and a disapproval rating of six percent. The almost fourteen-to-one approval-to-disapproval rating of the Mayor and City Council is among the top ratings in the Metropolitan Area suburbs.

Citizen empowerment is at a very high level. An average number of residents -- 34% -- feel they could not have a say about the way the City of Fridley runs things, if they want. Most communities score between 30% and 45% on this query. Overall, the ability to influence decision-makers is not a major issue.

Residents award the City Staff a job approval rating of 81% and a disapproval rating of only nine percent. Both the absolute level of approval and the nine-to-one ratio of approval-to-disapproval are within the top 10% of Metropolitan Area suburbs.

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Thirty percent of the sample contacted Fridley City Hall during the past twelve months. Most of the contacts involved the Police Department, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Building Inspection, and General Information. On three aspects of customer service, staff members are rated as either “excellent” or “good” by at least 88% of those who contacted City Hall: “waiting time for the receptionist to help you,” “courtesy of City staff,” and “ease of obtaining the service you needed.” In general, residents are very satisfied with their contacts with City Hall.

Communications Issues:

The City Newsletter is the most often indicated primary source of information about city government and its activities, at 49%. The local newspaper and the city website rank second and third, at 32% and seven percent, respectively. Five percent rely upon the “grapevine.” Preferred sources of information mirror the existing communications pattern; so, residents are satisfied with how they receive city information.

Eighty-one percent receive the “Community Report,” while 94% regularly read it. The newsletter’s effectiveness as an information channel is highly regarded: ninety-two percent rate the content favorably, while 92% also rate the format and appearance favorably.

The chart below summarizes the impact and reach of ten potential sources of information for news about the City of Fridley.

<i>Source of Information</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Reach</i>
The City publication, the “Community Report”	63%	82%
The “Sun Focus” newspaper	42%	71%
The City website	18%	40%
Friends and family	16%	73%
Community Channel 17	14%	33%
Direct mail updates	13%	51%
The “Anoka County Record” newspaper	11%	29%
The “Star Tribune”	8%	50%
City employees	4%	29%
Social media	1%	15%

“Impact” refers to the percentage of respondents who see the venue as a “major source of information.” “Reach” is the percentage of respondents who view the venue as either a “major source” or a “minor source of information.” The two main sources of information are the City Newsletter and the “Sun Focus” newspaper. Ranking third is the “grapevine.”

Sixty percent of the respondents subscribe to cable television. Forty percent of the subscribers at

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least “occasionally” watch City Council broadcasts. Similarly, 40% tune to the Bulletin Board at least “occasionally,” while 34% watch City programming at least as often.

Internet use is also assessed thoroughly in this study. Eighty-four percent of the households in the community have access to the Internet. Sixty percent subscribe to Comcast High Speed Internet, and 17% each use DSL or another wireless system. Among those on-line households, 53% accessed the city’s website. Ninety percent of website visitors rate its content highly and 93% report the website is easy to navigate.

With the exception of Facebook, social media usage among Fridley residents is limited. Thirteen percent listen to podcasts and 22% read blogs. Forty-two percent tweet and 37% visit YouTube. A much larger 66% access Facebook. As a result, the one social medium which could be used effectively by the City of Fridley to communicate with residents is Facebook; twenty-seven percent of city residents indicated their likelihood to communicate with the City this way.

Conclusions:

In general, Fridley citizens are very satisfied with their community, and high ratings on most aspects of city operations are commonplace. The key issues facing decision-makers in the future are addressing perceptions about “rising crime” and “aging infrastructure.” In addition, community development efforts should focus on attracting more retail, entertainment, and restaurant options.

Information levels about City Government activities are very high in comparison with neighboring communities. Positive ratings of both the Mayor and City Council and City Staff are among the top decile of Metropolitan Area communities. “Community Report,” the city’s quarterly newsletter, is exceptionally well regarded: it possesses a higher readership and effectiveness ratings than most peer communities.

More citizens now are enthusiastic about their City. With the “City Booster” percentage at 41%, or almost seven times the suburban norm, a large reservoir of goodwill has been established; this will serve decision-makers, in particular, very well as new issues are encountered and relatively tough decisions must be made.

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Fridley. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between December 4th and 17th, 2014. The average interview took 28 minutes. All

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respondents interviewed in this study were part of a randomly generated sample of adult residents of the City of Fridley. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to their respective universe within ± 5.0 percent in 95 out of 100 cases.