
Pagosa Springs Parks and Recreation Mailback Survey

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PAGOSA SPRINGS PARKS AND RECREATION MAILBACK SURVEY

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Town of Pagosa Springs commissioned a survey to be conducted of residents and second homeowners in Archuleta County regarding their parks and recreation needs. A “mailback” survey approach was used, with 2,200 surveys mailed out in February, 2006. The primary source of names was derived from a random sampling of property owners within the Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation district. In addition to the PAWS database, a random sampling of properties outside the water district using the County tax assessors’ database supplemented the PAWS list.

Of 2,200 surveys mailed, a total of 459 were returned resulting in a response rate of 21 percent. This is a quite strong response rate as typical responses for mailback surveys range from 10 to 20 percent. Note that second homeowners were also included in the sampling, and that individuals were not allowed to fill out a survey unless they had been randomly selected. The margin of error for this sample size is +/- 4.5 percent¹.

The content of this report consists of a narrative section which discusses the overall findings; the survey instrument; comments in response to open-ended questions; and data tables. Key segments of the population were identified as being important in terms of their behavior and preferences, and have been segmented through cross-tabulation where appropriate. These population segments include: voters within the Town of Pagosa Springs; marital status/children in household; location of residence; second homeownership; and whether the person is an avid user of parks/recreation programs.

¹ For a total sample size of 459, the margin of error is +/- 4.5 percent calculated for questions at 50% response.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

General Improvements

- A key finding that emerged from the research was residents' strong enthusiasm for the community's parks, trails, and open space. Residents are active users of these downtown assets and would like to see expansion in all three areas. When asked to prioritize potential improvements in the areas of parks and recreation, "open space acquisition and preservation" was the top priority (84 percent). Also very important to residents was expansion of walking and bike trails -- within Town as well as linking the east and west ends of Pagosa Springs. Other improvements that were important were a new recreation center, improved "gateways" to Town, and an outdoor amphitheater for performing arts.
- The strength of the community's desire for "open space acquisition" is an interesting finding given the fact that Pagosa Springs is surrounded by public lands. Aside from the issue of ease of access and convenience to users, the data and comments suggest that residents would like to see more *integration* of public open spaces interspersed throughout the community—through neighborhood parks, bike paths and trails, and so on. Other research has shown that residents are quite concerned about urban sprawl, and that perhaps this strong advocacy for open space is another way of voicing support for mitigating sprawl through dedicated open space preservation, buffers, and wildlife corridors. In other words, this strong level of support may partially derive from a sense of urgency on the part of the community to ensure that there be a plan for open space preservation in light of the rapid pace of development in the community.

San Juan River

- Regarding the San Juan River, respondents are focused on improving public access to the river. Again, similar to the issue with open space, this is perhaps an indication of the public's concern about preserving access to the river as development pressures increase along the river. Also important to residents is shore habitat improvement, parking access to the river, improved river trail system, and tubing areas. Somewhat less important are fishing habitat improvement, ADA/handicap accessibility to the river and parks, better boat and raft access, and kayaking features.

Reservoir Hill

- Reservoir Hill is clearly a unique and important asset to the downtown experience in Pagosa Springs. However, one-quarter of respondents have never visited Reservoir Hill, with singles and families being the primary users. Nearly three-quarters of respondents would like to see improved on-site amenities to Reservoir Hill such as restrooms, water fountains, more picnic tables, and so on. Additional improvements receiving significant support include an expanded hiking trail system, more information on what is available on the Hill, and improved parking. It should be noted that the latter two improvements are not particularly capital intensive and would not require a significant monetary investment in order to increase the year-round usage of Reservoir Hill (assuming that the parking issue is more about raising awareness on where lots are located as opposed to increasing the capacity – rarely are the lots at the base of Reservoir Hill full).
- Interestingly, 58 percent of respondents wanted to see a dedicated area for snow sports activities, with one person commenting that they "*wish there was a small ski lift on*

Reservoir Hill that only ran for small kids learning to ski. It's a long, expensive day if you take your kids to Wolf Creek if they are only learning how to ski. It should only be for beginners as the hill can't support many skiers at one time".

- Less important are improved directional/interpretive signage, more activities on the Hill in general, and more points of access from Town. And finally, least important are "improved performing arts venues on Reservoir Hill," a nature center/environmental educational facility, vehicular access to the top of the Hill, and an expanded equestrian trail system.

Recreational Needs of the Community

- Families are the primary users and supporters of expanded recreational programs and facilities. Many feel that the recreational needs of children, particularly middle and high schoolers, are underserved. Even older respondents recognized the need for more activities for youth – with one respondent saying: *"Better activities for the children of our community need to be available where the children can participate in a safe environment where children of all ages become involved and are role models for each other and growth potential becomes an asset to the child. Anything to help keep them involved and off the streets loitering."*
- A similar survey was fielded last year among junior high and high schoolers: over two-thirds of students felt that activities and recreational facilities for youth are "inadequate." Among students, development of a multi-purpose recreation center was by far the most important improvement that the Town could make to improve the youth experience in Pagosa Springs – 79 percent of youth indicated that the addition of a recreation center would be "important" to them. Parks were also important to youth, with 65 percent supporting "large parks dedicated to organized sports" and 53 percent for a "skateboarding/in-line skate park."

Parks and Recreation Programs

- Approximately one-fifth of respondents participated in parks and recreation programs over the past two years, suggesting some opportunity for expanded penetration into the youth segment of the population. Based on the ratings, improving the scheduling/organization and quality of instruction of these programs may improve participation rates. In addition, over half (59 percent) of respondents indicated that they would like to see "more youth programs and activities."

Recreation Center

- While improving and perhaps expanding youth programs might address some of the perceived lack of activities for children, a new recreation center was consistently mentioned among adults and youth themselves as being an important amenity that would directly serve the needs of children and families in the community. The most important features of a new recreation center were a weight room, indoor pool, multi-purpose space for meetings, and an area for teen activities and programs.
- The broad level of support for teen activities and programs – including even support from those *without* children – is an interesting and somewhat surprising finding. There was not this same degree of consensus regarding programs for children in other age categories, suggesting that the population as a whole considers healthy and active programs for teens to be a pressing community-wide issue. As one respondent put it:

All residents of Archuleta county and the town of Pagosa benefit [from these programs] even if they never personally use them. It empowers our youth to become accountable and responsible by directing energy to positive activities that build character and a sense of community. This is a win-win opportunity.

- Financing for a new recreation center should come from user fees, a sales tax increase, and impact fees. A number of respondents also mentioned grants and fundraising as important sources of revenues that should be explored. Receiving little support was the option of increasing property taxes through the formation of a special recreation district. Detractors from this approach felt that it was unfair to tax those who would not be the primary users of the facility. Others felt that there were higher priorities for public dollars, such as roads, health facilities, schools, and expanded infrastructure.

In summary, most respondents recognized the need to address the issue of providing adequate recreational programs and facilities in the community, especially for children. As one person put it: *“Although we, as seniors, have not participated in youth or adult sports activities, we have enjoyed watching your family members play.”* As Pagosa Springs continues to attract retirees and second homeowners, it becomes increasingly important to balance the needs and demands of the diverse population segments that make up the community. Reflective of these diverse needs was the desire for a wide array of recreational amenities, such as open space, trails and bike paths, parks, a recreation center, and so on.

Developing a long-term strategic plan that prioritizes and phases these improvements with an eye toward the anticipated change in demographics of residents and visitors is strongly recommended as a priority for the Town. Formation of an advisory board to guide this strategic planning process that includes residents, Town and County staff, representatives of the tourism and recreation industries, etc. would provide the diverse perspectives that are necessary for a thorough and comprehensive public input process. It is important that key stakeholders be identified and their needs further explored through small meeting/focus group formats. This will serve to refine the priorities that emerged from this quantitative survey approach as well as begin the public outreach element that should be part of the plan.