

Park Rapids Area Report Card

A report by
Progress Park Rapids

May, 2005

Background

Progress Park Rapids began some six months ago, committed to positioning the Park Rapids community to succeed in the future. As part of Progress Park Rapids, a group of community leaders, now called stewards, came forward to guide the broader Park Rapids area in defining its desired future, and deciding how to best get there together.

As part of their commitment, the stewards created a charter. The charter states:

“The Progress Park Rapids stewards group is a diverse group of over 20 community members committed to the long-term well being of the greater Park Rapids community. We exist to create the environment for the greater Park Rapids community to succeed. We will accomplish this by:

- Engaging the greater Park Rapids community to collectively define its desired future;
- Identifying strategies and action steps that ensure progress toward being a successful community; and
- Being the long-term place for ideas to land and be nurtured that lead the greater Park Rapids community forward.

We are committed to acting as stewards of the greater community not only within the stewards group, but in the organizations and projects we serve as well. This means we represent the greater good over our own personal interest or agenda. We will work together, and challenge the Park Rapids community to do the same.”

Survey Methodology:

Before the Park Rapids area can move forward, however, we need to fully understand our community’s current standing in a variety of quality of life areas. With that in mind, over the past three months Progress Park Rapids developed and administered a community perception survey. The purpose of the survey was to begin to identify and assess the assets of the Park Rapids area, based on the perceptions of those who live in the area.

The survey was administered using a variety of means. Residents could go to a number of local sites to complete the survey. Progress Park Rapids stewards handed out the survey throughout the area. The Park Rapids Enterprise published the survey for their readers to respond to. Finally, the survey was available online at the web site of the Park Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce.

All total, 670 community members completed the survey. This report summarizes the results of those surveys.

Themes Emerging from the Community Perception Survey

As you read the results of the survey, a number of themes will emerge. The key themes being addressed by Progress Park Rapids are the following:

- ***People have something to say.***

With nearly 700 completed surveys, it is clear people wanted to be heard. The question now is this: are they willing to get engaged in making Park Rapids a great place to live, work and raise a family?

- ***Good enough for Park Rapids.***

Consistently throughout the survey, people expressed general satisfaction but gave the community an average grade. Is it time to increase the expectations of our community? Is it time for us to deserve to have a great quality of life in Park Rapids?

- ***We feel our community slipping away from us.***

On nearly every indicator, respondents felt the area has done a poorer job than five years ago. There clearly is a concern that, as we grow, we will lose what makes Park Rapids special. But people like the growth and the regional center amenities. Do we want to maintain our small town charm, or do we want to be a regional center? Or is there a better way?

- ***The things that are keys to building successful communities are trouble spots for us.***

We know that working together and having one common destiny for our community are key elements to community success. Yet, we also know we struggle in these areas. What is it going to take to get the Park Rapids community to work together?

Report Card

Indicator: _____ ***Grade:***

Education	C+
Addressing Growth-Related Issues	C-
Public Safety	C+
Place to Raise a Family	B-
Economy	C
Health Care	B
Natural Environment	B-
Arts and Culture	C
Recreation	C+
Sense of Community	C
<i>Overall Quality of Life</i>	C+

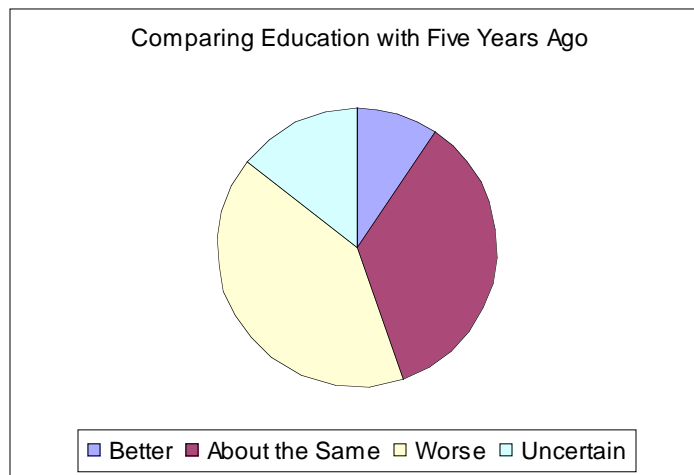
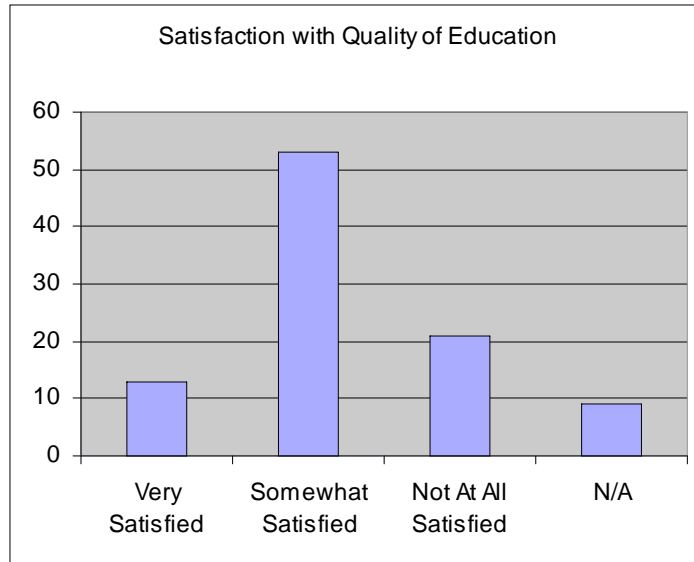
Education is a critical element of a community’s quality of life. In fact, six in ten respondents listed education as one of the three top factors in their personal quality of life.

How is Park Rapids doing in education? The survey results are mixed.

When asked how satisfied they are with the quality of education in Park Rapids, two thirds of respondents are very or somewhat satisfied. Just over twenty percent of the respondents are “not at all satisfied” with education in the Park Rapids area.

Despite the relative satisfaction, very few respondents felt education in the area is getting better. Nearly forty percent believe the quality of education in the area is worse than just five years ago, and another 34 percent said it is about the same as five years ago. Only nine percent believe the quality of education has improved.

Overall, the community gave Park Rapids a grade of C+. One in four respondents gave education a C, while another 31 percent gave it a B. Of concern are the 18 percent who gave education either a D or an F.

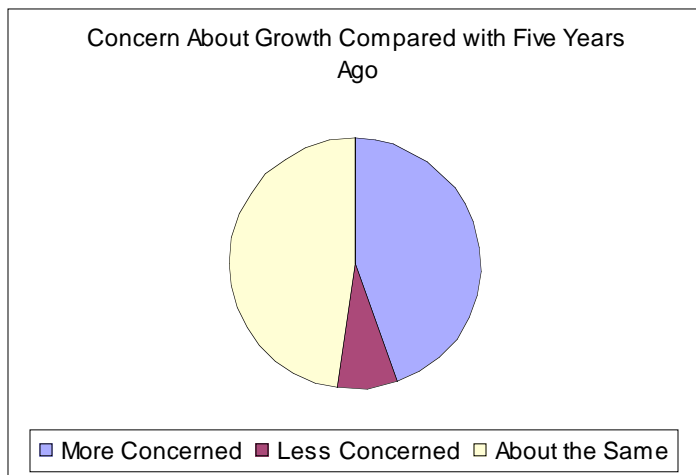
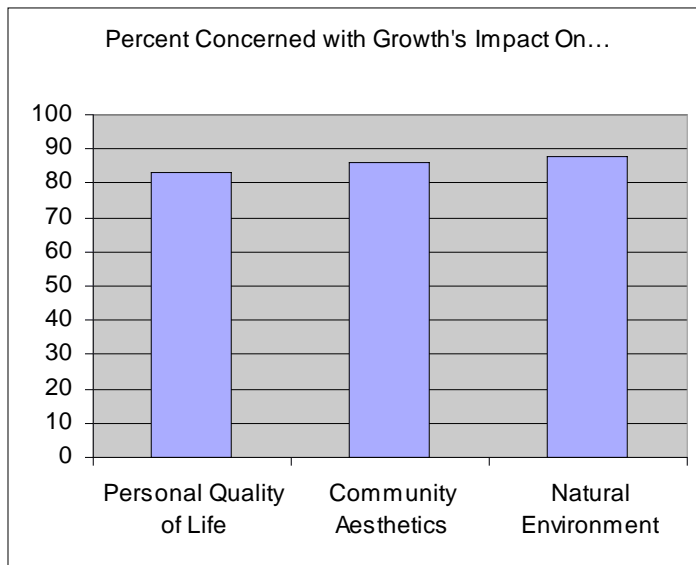
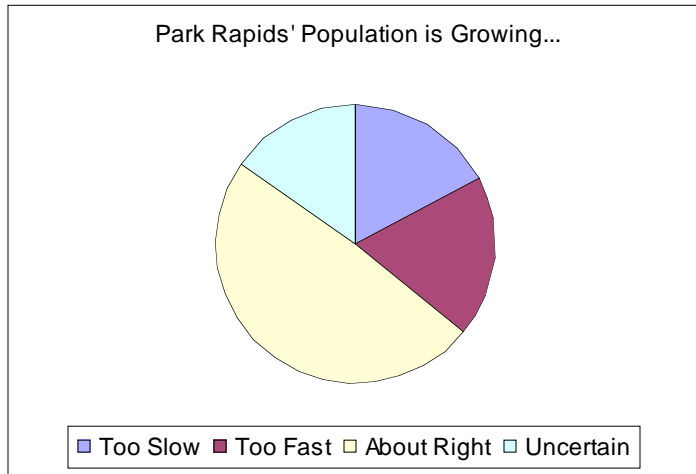


The Park Rapids area has grown rapidly over the past two decades. This growth has led to a series of discussions about growth management in the area.

Survey respondents were asked if the area’s population was growing too fast, too slow or about right. Almost an equal number of respondents felt the community has grown too fast as too slow. Some 17 percent said the area is growing too slow, while 18 percent felt it is growing too fast. Nearly one half of respondents felt the population growth in the area has been about right.

To say respondents are concerned about the growth’s impact on the community, however, would be an understatement. Over 80 percent of respondents are either very or somewhat concerned about the growth’s impact on their personal quality of life, 86 percent are concerned about its impact on the community’s aesthetics, and 88 percent are concerned about the growth’s impact on the area’s natural environment.

As with education, respondents are becoming increasingly concerned. Only seven percent are less concerned about the growth today than five years ago. In contrast, some 43



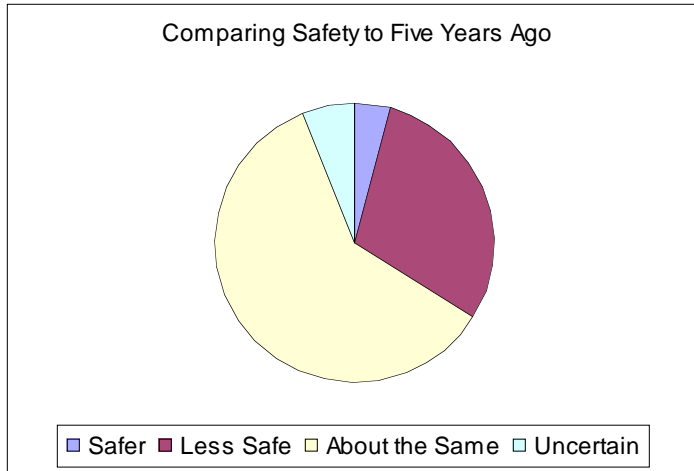
percent of respondents are more concerned.

Overall, the area was given a grade of C- for dealing with growth-related issues. Only one percent, or eight respondents out of nearly 700, gave the area an A. Over one third of respondents gave the community a C or a D, and nine percent gave it an F.

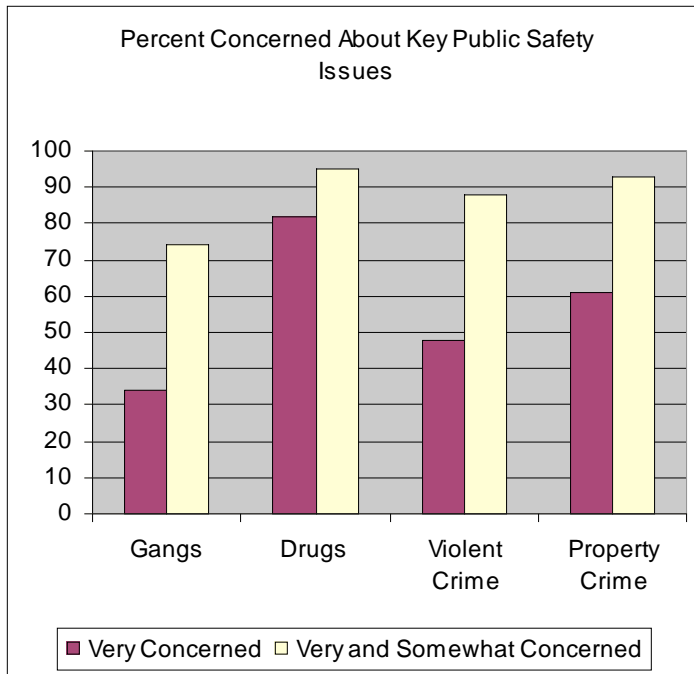
Generally, the respondents feel safe in the Park Rapids area. Ninety percent stated they felt very or somewhat safe walking alone in their neighborhood at night. Only seven percent feel “not at all safe”.

With that percent of respondents feeling relatively safe, the average overall grade given to public safety is a surprise. Why the average grade?

First, once again people are more concerned then in the past. Only four percent of respondents feel safer than five years ago, while nearly thirty percent feel less safe. Just over 58 percent feel the safety of the area is “about the same” as five years ago.



Drugs are clearly a major concern of the Park Rapids community. Over 80 percent of respondents are “very concerned” about drugs in the community. Over 95 percent are very or somewhat concerned. The recent meth issues facing the area clearly have had an influence on people’s feelings.



In addition to drugs, respondents were concerned about gangs in the area, property crime and violent crime.

Overall, as stated earlier, the respondents gave the area a C+ for its public safety. Nearly half gave the community a B, while another third gave a grade of C. One in ten respondents gave a grade of D.

Is the Park Rapids area as a great place to raise a family? Respondents believe it is. Over two thirds strongly agreed or agreed that Park Rapids is a great place to raise a family. In the end, only seven percent disagreed.

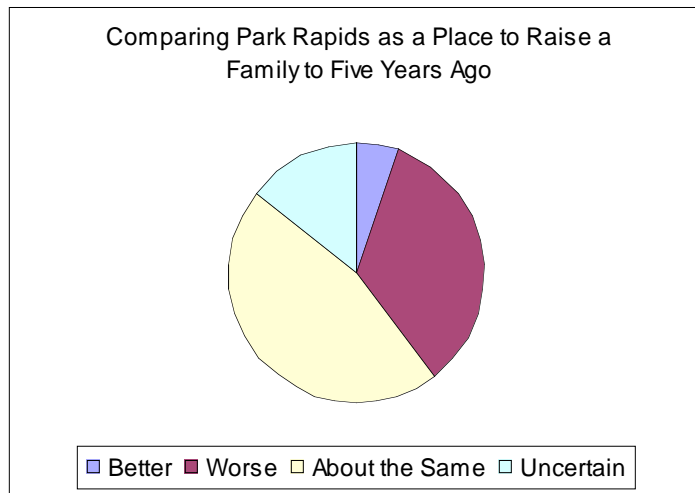
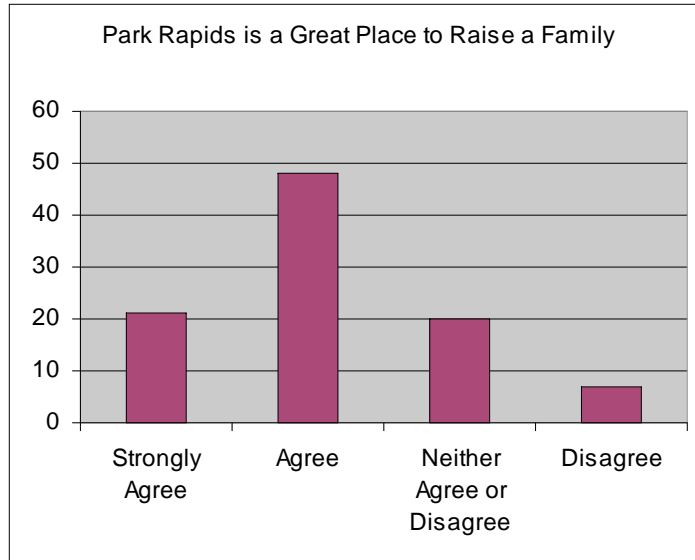
Once again, however, there is concern about the future. Only five percent feel the area is a better place today to raise a family than five years ago. On the other hand, one third of respondents feel it is a worse place to raise a family than just five years ago.

Respondents gave the area an overall grade of B-. The highest percentage (42%) gave the area a B grade, while another third gave it a C. Twelve percent gave either a D or an F.

The survey also asked several related questions. One was focused on whether Park Rapids is a “youth-friendly” community, while the other focused on housing.

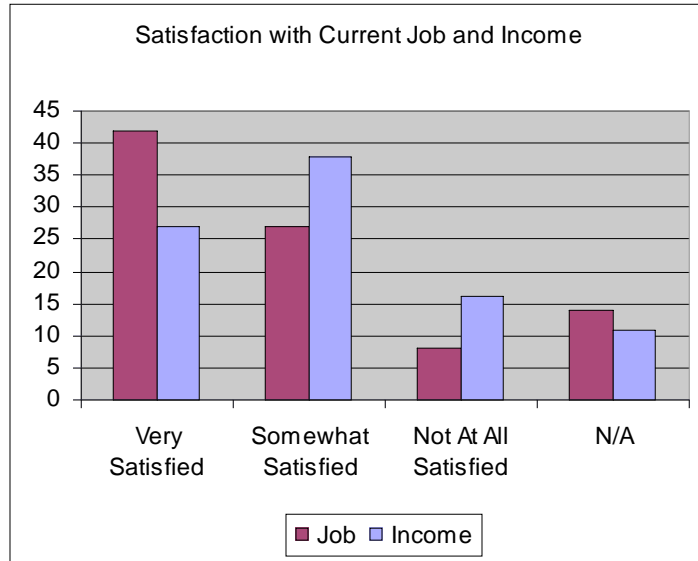
Respondents were mixed as to whether the community is youth-friendly. Some 27 percent strongly agreed or agreed, while 38 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Finally, respondents were asked whether the Park Rapids area had an adequate supply of quality, affordable housing. Just shy of thirty percent agreed or strongly agreed the area does have an adequate supply, while an equal number disagreed or strongly disagreed.

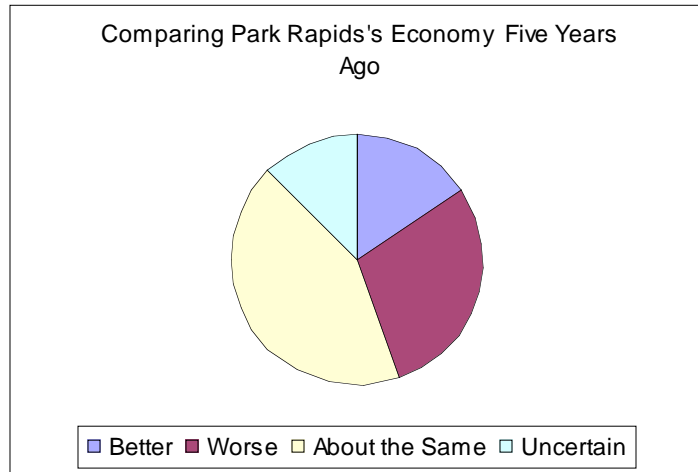


As with virtually all rural Minnesota communities, the economy and economic development are consistently mentioned as critical issues facing the Park Rapids area. The survey sought to measure the economic health of the community by looking at perceptions about jobs, job creation and incomes in the area.

The respondents seemed relatively satisfied with their current jobs and incomes. Over two thirds are very or somewhat satisfied with their current jobs, and 65 percent are very or somewhat satisfied with their current income. Just eight and sixteen percent of respondents are “not at all satisfied” with their jobs and incomes, respectively.



When looking at the community as a whole, though, respondents were less encouraged by the economy. Over one third of respondents are “not at all satisfied” with the general job opportunities in the area.



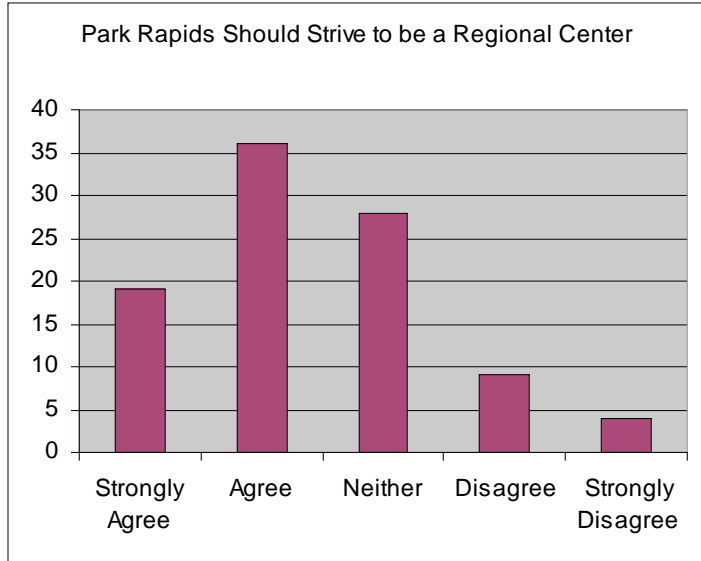
In addition, twice as many respondents think the economy is worse than five years ago than those who think it is better. Nearly thirty percent of respondents think the economy is worse than five years ago.

Overall, it is clear that respondents are concerned about the general economy of the area, both today and in the future. This is despite being relatively satisfied with their own economic situation.

A final economic question was asked specifically to address a long-standing question facing the area. Respondents were asked if they agreed that Park Rapids should strive to be a regional center. Over 45 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed, and only

twelve percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Even though respondents are concerned about the growth's impact on their quality of life, they also seem to desire the amenities associated with being a regional center.

Overall, the Park Rapids economy received a grade of C. Nearly half of respondents gave the economy a C. Only one percent gave it an A, and only three percent gave it an F.

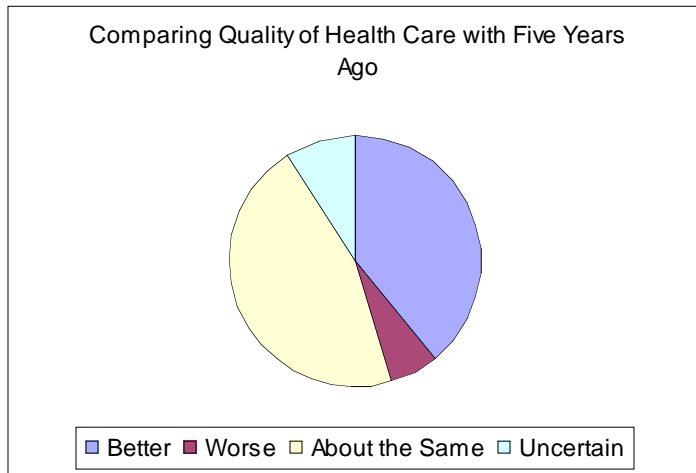
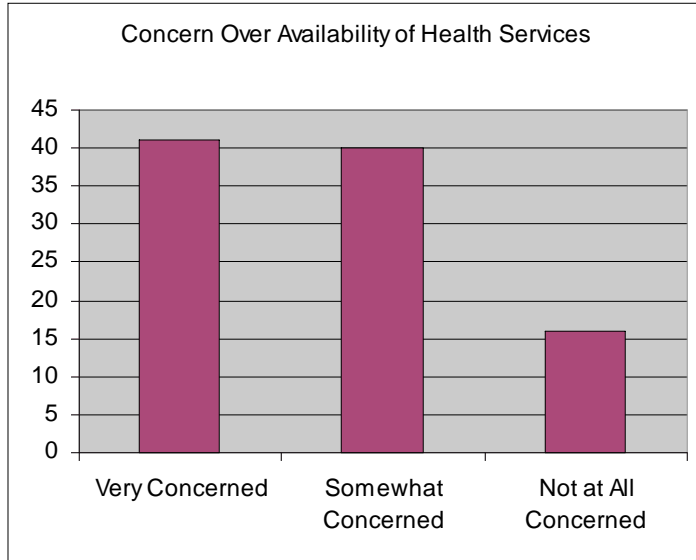


Health and health care are increasingly becoming critical quality of life elements in small communities. This is clearly true in the Park Rapids area, as well.

Overall, health care in Park Rapids received the highest grade of any quality of life area with a grade of a B. Nearly two thirds of respondents gave health care either an A or a B, and only seven percent gave health care a D or a F.

There is concern among respondents regarding the availability of health services in the Park Rapids area. Eighty-one percent are either very or somewhat concerned about the availability of health services in the community. It is uncertain whether that concern is the result of fear about the cost of health services, or is based more on the difficulty in providing health services in small communities. It is likely a combination of both factors.

Health care is one of the few cases where respondents feel things have gotten better than five years ago. Some 38 percent believe that the Park Rapids area has better health services now than five years ago, while only six percent feel the quality of care has declined.

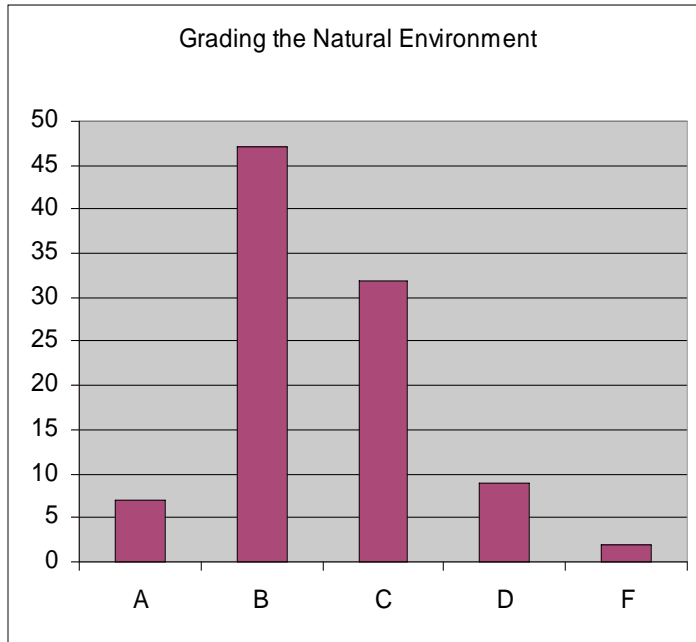
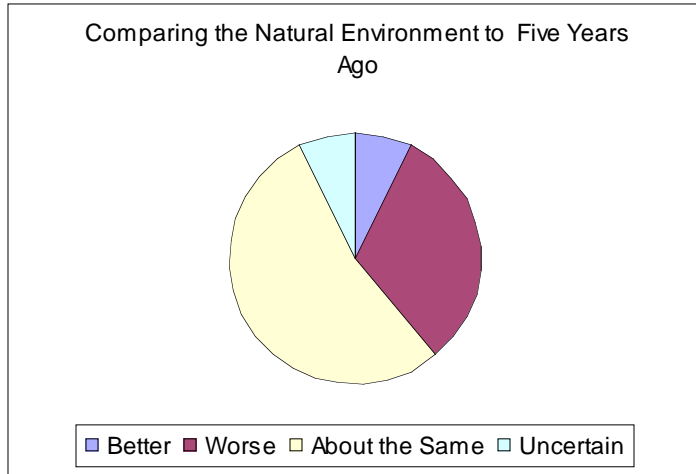


Park Rapids is known for its natural environment. As part of the lakes and pines corridor in Minnesota, it is a sought-after destination for tourists and outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

The survey respondents gave the area's natural resources a B-. The grade is once again a reflection of the concern for the quality of the natural environment as the area grows in the coming years.

When comparing the quality of the natural environment today with five years ago, only seven percent of respondents felt it has gotten better. At the same time, nearly a third believes it has gotten worse in the past five years. Just over half of respondents feel there has been virtually no change in quality over the past five years.

Nearly eighty percent of respondents gave the quality of the natural environment in the area either a grade of B or C. In fact, 47 percent gave it a B and over seven percent gave it an A.

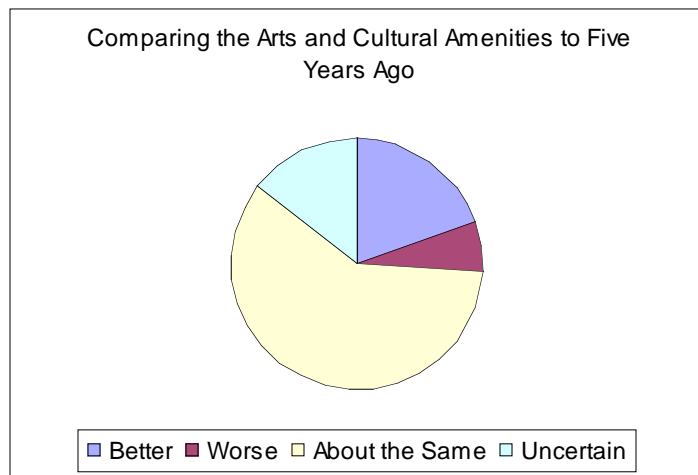
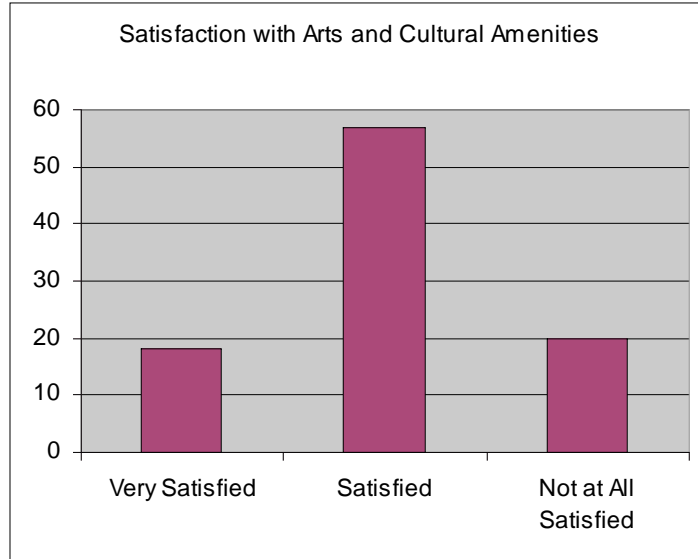


Arts and cultural amenities, ranging from music to theatre, have long been seen as important community assets. When asked to assess the Park Rapids area arts and cultural amenities, respondents provided a relatively positive assessment.

Respondents were asked their satisfaction with the area’s arts and cultural amenities. Overall, three fourths of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied. At the same time, a significant number (20 percent) were “not at all satisfied”.

In comparing to five years ago, however, three times as many respondents feel they have gotten better rather than gotten worse. Nearly nineteen percent of respondents feel the arts and cultural assets have improved. Over 56 percent feel it has remained relatively unchanged.

The respondents gave the area’s arts and cultural amenities an overall grade of C. While 43 percent gave it a C, a large percent (29 percent) gave it a B.

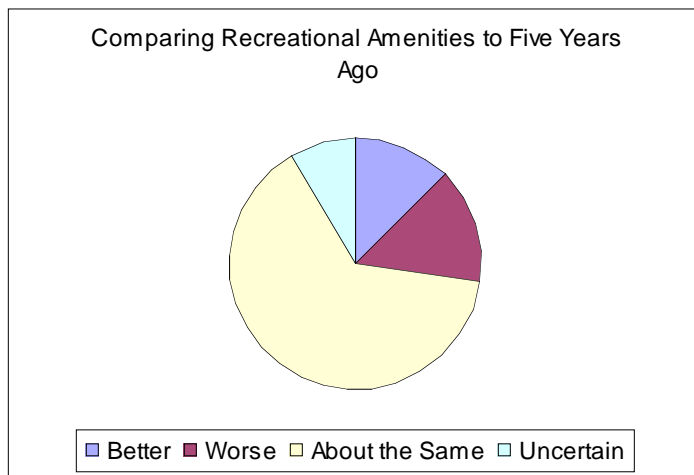


Along with the area’s natural environment, the Park Rapids area is known for its outdoor recreational opportunities. How would area residents assess the quality of the recreational amenities?

Generally, respondents are satisfied with the recreational amenities of the area. Over 28 percent are very satisfied, and 82 percent are either very or somewhat satisfied.

When comparing to five years ago, the respondents impressions were mixed. A majority (62 percent) feel the recreational amenities have remained the same. An almost equal number believe the area has gotten better as those who think it has gotten worse.

Finally, the respondents gave the area’s recreational amenities an overall grade of C+. The largest number (42%) gave it a B, while another 31 percent gave it a C.

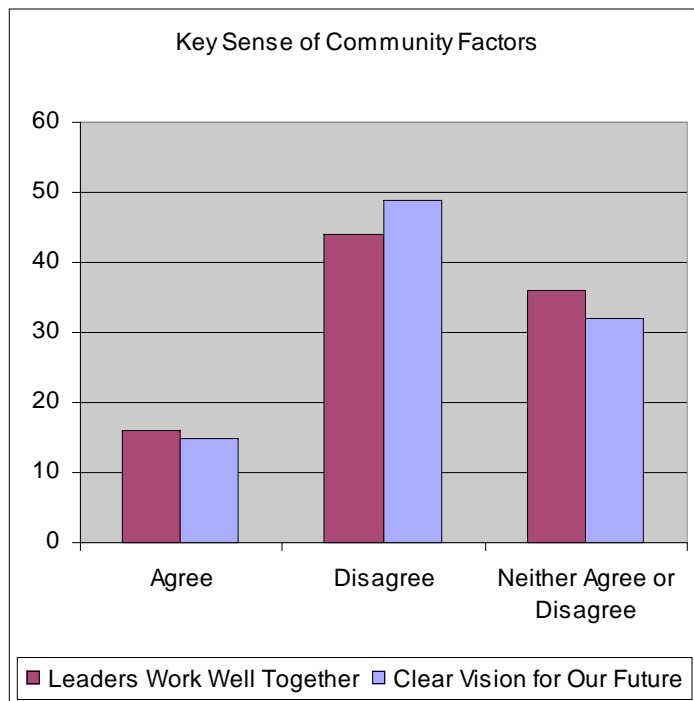
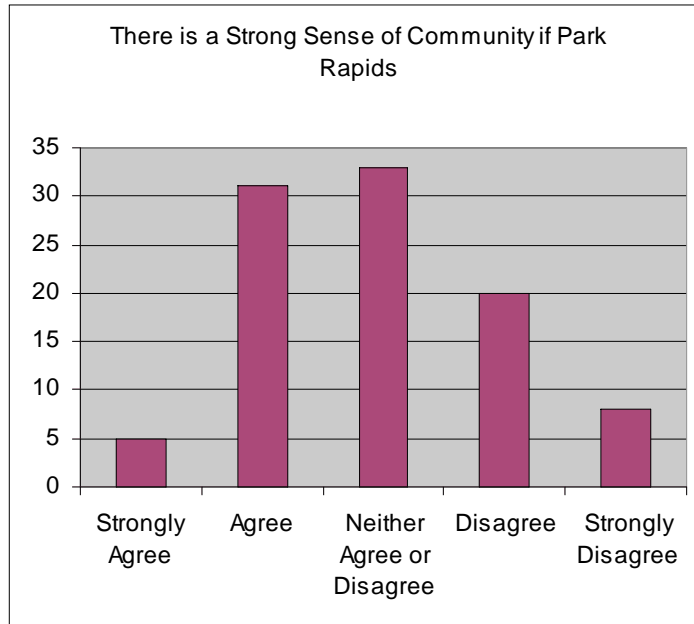


There is a key factor in a community’s quality of life that is difficult to fully define. Often people describe it as a family atmosphere or small town charm. For the purposes of this report, we are describing it as a sense of community.

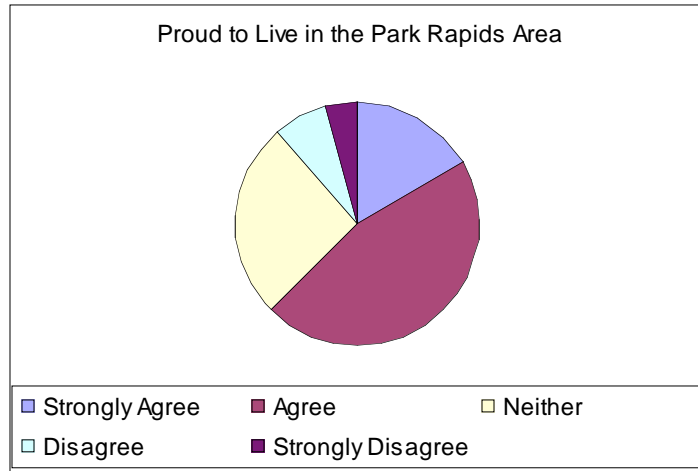
When asked if Park Rapids had a strong sense of community, 35 percent agreed. At the same time, however, 28 percent disagreed.

When asked to grade the overall sense of community in the Park Rapids area, respondents gave it a C. Nearly an identical number of respondents gave the area a D as did a B, while over 45 percent gave it a C.

How is the Park Rapids area doing on some key areas that make up a strong community, such as working together, community pride and a sense of community? Not very well. Overall, only fifteen percent of respondents believe the area has a clear vision for its future, and sixteen percent feel Park Rapids area leaders work well together.

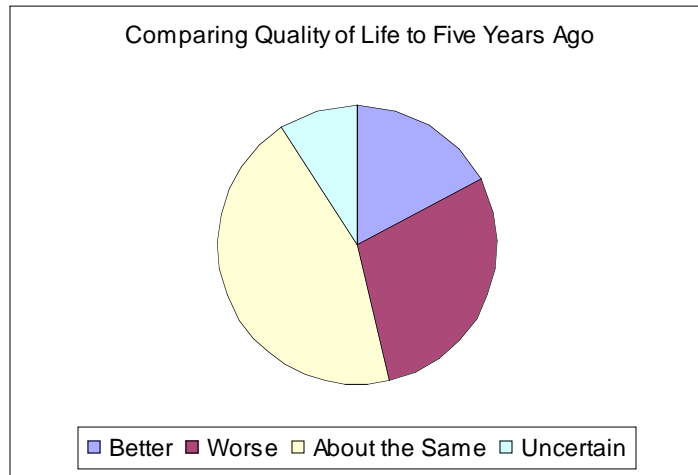


On the other hand, people are proud of the Park Rapids area, and feel good about living in the community. Nearly sixty percent expressed their pride in living in the area, while only eleven percent did not feel that sense of pride.



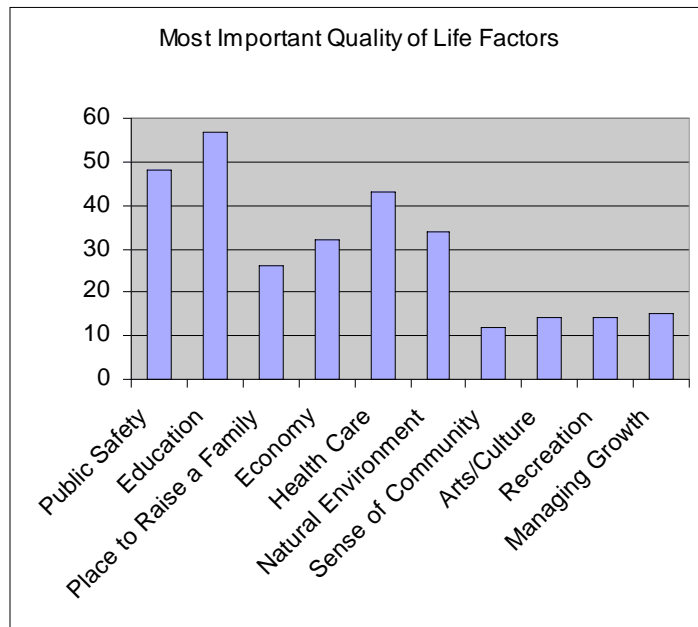
Overall, respondents were asked to assess the quality of life in the Park Rapids area. The greatest number of respondents (42 percent) gave the area a grade of C, and another 39 percent gave it a B.

When comparing the quality of life to five years ago, nearly thirty percent believe the area’s quality of life has worsened. Only seventeen percent feel it has improved.



As one indicator of quality of life, respondents were asked if they would leave the area if they could. Less than thirty percent said they would. That highlights the sense of pride and commitment to community that comes out throughout the survey.

Finally, respondents were asked which of the nine quality of life indicators identified in this report are most important to them. Specifically, respondents were allowed to choose their top three indicators.



Overall, education received the most votes, with over 57 percent choosing it in their top three. Education was followed closely by public safety (48 percent), health care (43 percent), natural environment (34 percent) and economy (32 percent).

Survey Demographics

