



Chapter 5

Public Participation



Public Participation

Focus Groups, Stakeholder Meetings

On Wednesday, January 10th, 2018, the Planning Resources Team conducted a full day of Focus Group and Stakeholder meetings with Town of Munster staff, including key Town staff and all the Parks Departments. In addition, other Focus Groups included a general public open house, seniors, and Billy Casper Golf staff. Stakeholders included sports affiliates, schools, businesses, and service groups.

While each group had customized questions and the discussion was allowed to naturally evolve, each group was asked the following four questions at a minimum:

1. What are the most important issues facing the Town of Munster Parks and Recreation Department?
2. What is working well for the Town regarding the Parks and Recreation Department?
3. What is not working well for the Town regarding the Parks and Recreation Department?
4. What do you hope a master planning project for the Town of Munster Parks and Recreation Department addresses overall?

The results of these meetings are summarized in this section.

Sports

This group featured representatives from the following sport affiliate leagues:

- Munster Soccer Club
- Challengers Baseball/Softball
- Munster Babe Ruth
- Munster Lacrosse
- Munster Little League
- Munster Girls Softball

There is a desire for improved communication between the sports group and the Parks and Recreation

Department. Few people know who is responsible for maintenance, tournaments, and other areas relating to athletic programs. This has led to certain interests—such as concessions and special needs programming—generally underrepresented by the Park Board. One suggestion was for a liaison with the community to improve the relationship between the Parks and Rec Department and the public.

Other issues such as drainage, maintenance schedules, parking, hazards, ADA access, surfacing, and a deficiency of various amenities in different parks were also raised.

The executive director's leadership is welcomed among the Sports group, as is the existing programming, intergenerational appeal, and various current offerings from the Parks Department.

Park Board & Town Council

This group included representatives from the Town of Munster Park Board and Town Council.

Issues such as financial constraints, staffing, identifying priorities, and certain existing conditions at the parks were mentioned. It was also noted that improvement should be throughout the Department's parks, rather than just the largest-serving parks.

In identifying strengths, the executive director's presence was again mentioned along with the correct programs in place. Event diversity and staff productivity were also identified.

The Board/Council proposed goals reflecting the desire for improved communication with the community (see "Sports" above), establishing priorities for the future, equitable parks maintenance, branding/marketing for the public, integration of the river to the Town of Munster's north side, and ideas for new parks.

Certain challenges were noted relating to insufficient dog park facilities, vandalism, and planning with other departments in town for projects that relate to bikes.

Businesses

This group featured local business representing:

- Munster Chamber Admin Secretary
- People's Bank
- Level-Rite
- Level- Rite Concrete
- Largus Graphix Solutions
- Hasse Construction Co.

The general issues raised within the Businesses group related to generating revenue. There is a desire for more participation in events and programs to increase advertisements and sponsorships, to enhance visibility through more than simple brochures. Also, evaluations for new programs/promotions would benefit in organizing effective future attempts at generating revenue (knowing what works and what doesn't). Communication will be necessary, as well.

The strengths mentioned by the group related to the parks' conditions and opportunities to expand the existing bike path. Opportunities for better promotion of local businesses were the focus of this group, ultimately.

Open House

The Open House was at the end of the day in a large meeting room at Centennial Park. It was well attended by more than fifty residents, and did include a number of people who had been involved in previous Focus or Stakeholder meetings earlier in the day.

The issues raised with this group related to turf maintenance, bike accessibility, lighting, a lack of restrooms and shade trees, and more training for staff. In addition, a space for public gathering beyond what exists (such as developing a community center) were mentioned as well as the management/coordination of existing events like the Farmer's Market and Halloween events.

The strengths identified were the number and quality of parks, the structure of existing programming (such as

the reciprocal program with Dyer and Highland), and the responsiveness of the Department's maintenance staff.

Opportunities were listed, and the desire for a soccer complex was mentioned twice. Nearby soccer complexes locations in Valparaiso and Hammond were noted as examples. Also, the View Restaurant was seen as an underutilized space for which its marketing could be improved. "Festival concerts" was written down, similar to the expressed opportunity from the Businesses group.

Parks Staff

This group included the front line staff of the Parks and Recreation Department:

The front line staff had a long list of issues that ranged from internal functioning as an agency to the lack of owned facilities and program offerings.

The strengths of the team efforts, leadership, and proactive programming were highlighted as well. This group sees the Park Board as very influential and supportive.

Generally, pay, training and retention of part-time staff were the focus of this group. The hope for more input from staff was listed by this group.

Staff also identified concerns received from residents and facility users. Concerns ranging from the removal of the ice rink to safety issues within the park system (i.e. playground maintenance, behaviors at the dog park, or trip hazards). Internally, staff mentioned its complex relationship with the Historical Society, falling short on generating revenue at community parks, and signage restrictions (the Town's restrictive sign ordinance adversely impacting the ability for market and advertise the Department's facilities and programs).

Schools

This focus group consisted of representatives from:

- Eads Elementary School
- School Town of Munster

- Munster High School
- St. Paul Lutheran School
- St Thomas More School

Also in attendance were a few students representing Munster H.S. and the assistant superintendent.

In summary, the students identified a need for more activities. Various programs from sports to active academics were discussed. This could possibly be accomplished through more collaboration between the private schools and various social groups. Integrating technology in programming was also suggested, including more online engagement.

The hope that all stakeholders be included was this group's priority, along with utilizing all facilities. Improving the farmer's market, the bike paths, the number of activities bringing youth together, health-oriented programming, and fields for non-structured pickup use were all listed. Further, job training and opportunities for youth and people with disabilities was noted in the list of hopes.

Seniors

This group consisted of the active senior residents within the town and those seniors from the region who participate in the Department's senior programs.

This group saw many good existing features. They are interested in more events/concerts, parks use in open spaces, engaged youth, and possible overnight trips.

This group found weaknesses in pricing, the workout facility, and underutilization of other existing facilities such as "The View". Expanded amenities such as fences, benches, and lighting were also mentioned.

This group would also like to see upgrades to existing facilities, mentorship programs, educational training, connections to- and expansion of existing- bike paths, and an improvement of the farmer's market.

Town Administration

This focus group included the department heads from the Town's administration teams.

This group saw issues with the low number of people in maintenance. In addition, there will be an upcoming budget reduction. There is currently an uneven distribution of amenities throughout various regions. This group would like to see potentially more donation of land to the Parks Department.

The staff is working well, as this group sees it. They believe the existing programs and sponsorships are also going well, along with the collaboration between Departments.

Improvements in maintenance coordination, and increasing the amount of natural areas were mentioned. The quality of Centennial Park is desired throughout all parks' curb appeals. An additional recreation/community center was brought up.

Service Groups

This group featured individuals representing the following community service organizations:

- Munster Jr. Women's Club
- Munster Garden Club
- Munster Historical Society
- Munster Girl Scouts
- South Shore Arts
- Munster Lion's Club
- Munster Kiwanis Club
- Rotary Club of Munster
- Munster Chamber of Commerce
- Planting Possibilities

This group recognized the existing collaboration and opportunities for more of it between the Parks Department and the Historical Society. They saw a desire for more special needs programming. Like the rest of the groups, they desire more communication between the Parks Department and the public.

Billy Casper Golf

The most important issue among this group related to safety. For example, the concessions are solitary at the end of the day and there are no cameras. As Billy Casper Golf gets busier each year, vandalism on the course has occurred along the 4-ft fence. As it is now, the alarm system serves as a deterrent but is not linked to the police department or synced to alarm doors. Further, monitoring the golf course's range is limited, especially during the summer because of the leaves on trees.

On off season limited hours, there are technically no public bathrooms. However, sledders will use the clubhouse as a warming house and restroom. Optimizing safety during this time is a concern.

Golf is up lately because it is a more user friendly space with catering in-house. Per contract with management, concessions split profits with them. The equipment is owned by MPRD and all routine maintenance is done by BCG. They receive "tremendous" support from Parks Department.

The View restaurant could work better. It doesn't receive a lot of customers off the street, especially during the off-season. The perception is that the public doesn't know they have a restaurant. However, the restaurant does provide special events. Otherwise, it is open 9-3 from May to Sept.

The hopes for the master planning process are as follows:

1. Fix small issues outlined by groups
2. Effectively reach out to Munster residents and receive feedback
3. Make Munster residents aware of the facility
5. Ideas for implementing post-event feedback
6. Identifying pricing independent of MPRD
7. Recommend reliable WiFi at community parks

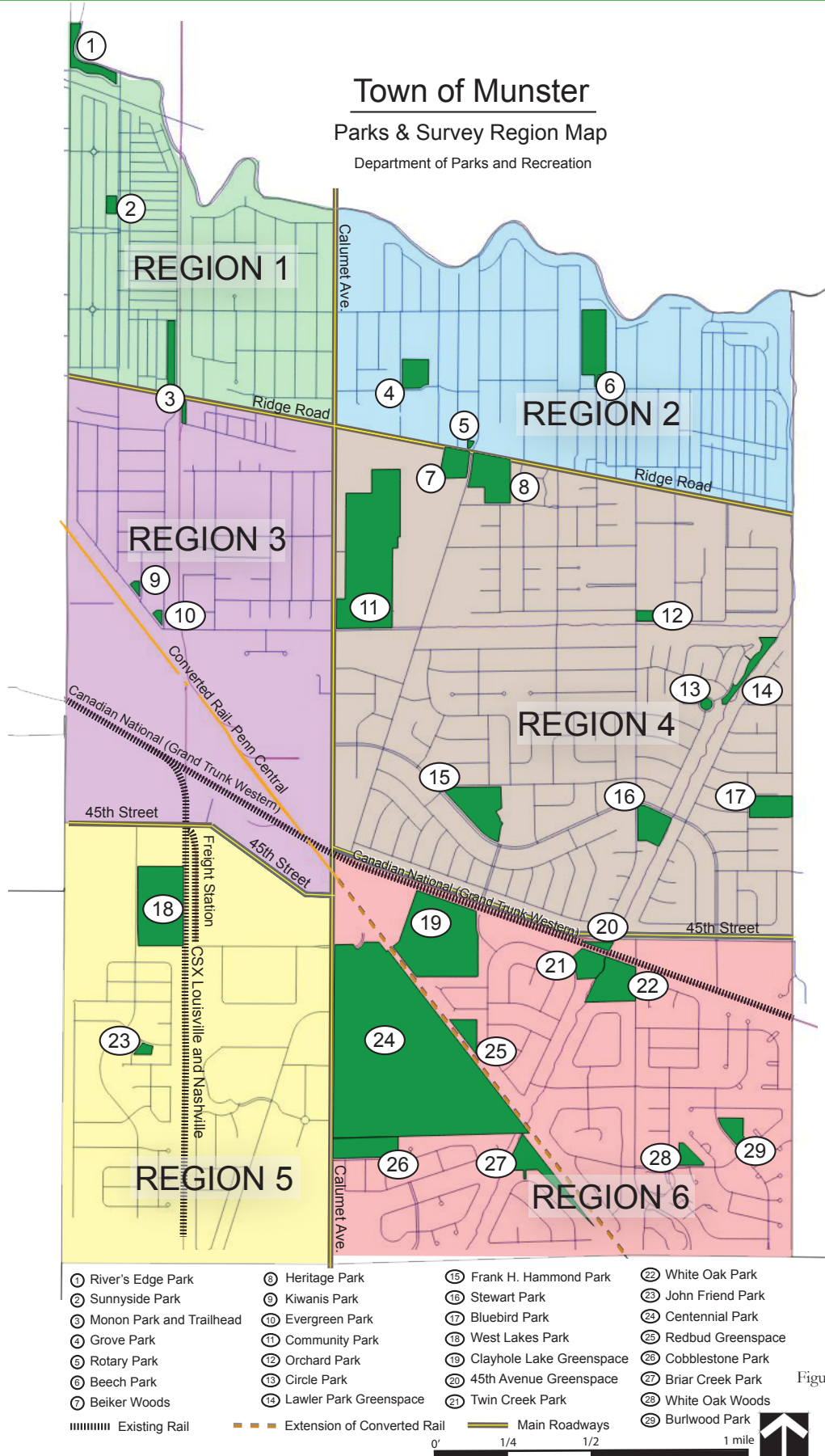


Figure 14: Map of Munster and its Survey Areas for Public Participation



MindMixer

Munster Parks and Recreation invited all members of the community to participate in MindMixer, an open and continuous on-line discussion forum over a period of three (3) months. The purpose of MindMixer was to provide an online, accessible place for residents to have an open dialogue through a series of open ended questions, idea sharing, and surveys.

Staff, community leaders, and residents generated ideas for the questions and discussion topics. Topics addressed on MindMixer were based in part on the feedback received during focus groups, stakeholder, and community leader meetings.

All residents were invited to participate in the MindMixer forum through social media, the Town of Munster website, and in community gatherings. The questions focused on frequency of use, interest in new programs, and participant's age/gender. The data collected from these questions was tabulated for analysis. These discussions provide additional insight into the public's recreation needs, and how Munster Parks and Recreation is currently meeting those needs. Forty-one people participated in MindMixer.

All participants in MindMixer were between the ages of 45 and 54. 66% of those respondents were female, and 34% were male.

Gender of Participants (n= 41)

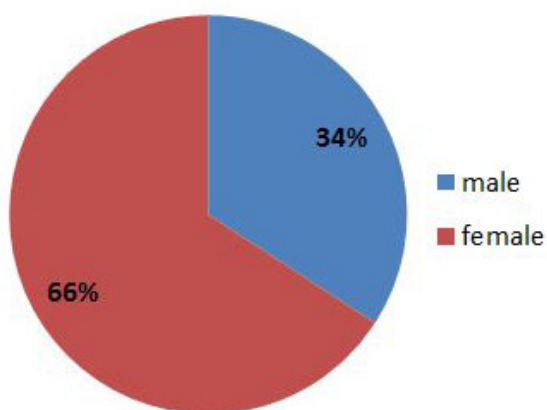


Figure 15: Gender of MindMixer Participants

Interest in the Park Department Investments

The majority of respondents believed that upgrading older playgrounds in the Town of Munster is a wise investment. Only one person who participated thought this was not a good use of resources.

Do you agree it is favorable to invest budget dollars into upgrading older Munster playgrounds? (n=14)

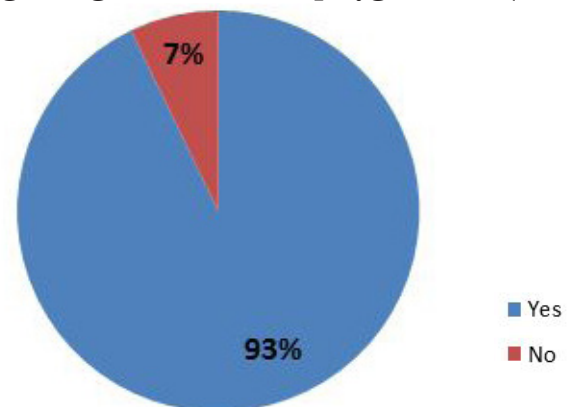


Figure 16: Favorability of Investing in Munster Playground

Current Program Utilization

Nearly a quarter of participants currently attend programs offered by the Munster Park and Recreation Department. Almost two-thirds of participants attend events 2-3 times a year. This means that the majority of people who participated in these questions are frequent users of the Munster Parks and Recreation services.

Do you attend special events organized by the Parks and Recreation Department? (n=11)

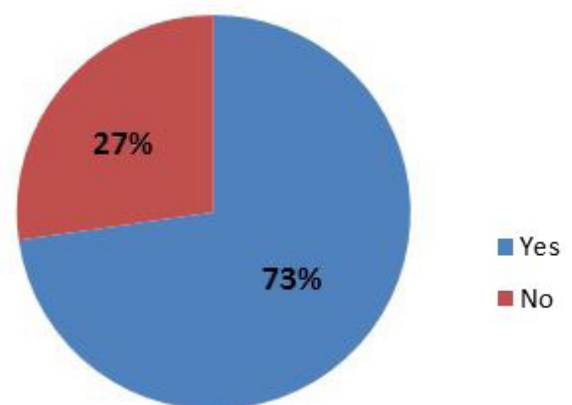


Figure 17: Attendance to Special Events

Of those who offered feedback on the question, one-third participated in programs offered by Munster Parks and Recreation ten times or more in the past year. Conversely, 13% stated that they have not participated at all, and no one attended just one program. This seems to indicate that the majority of people who take advantage of programs offered were frequent users.

How many special events have you attended in the past year? (n=11)

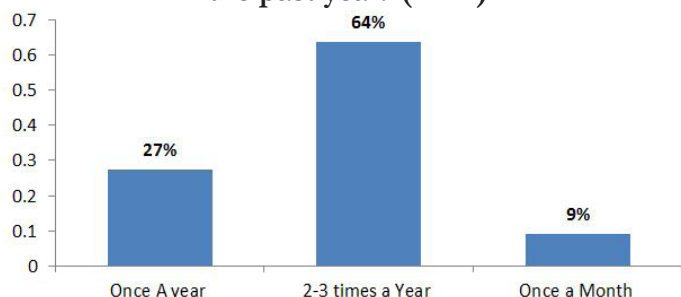


Figure 18: Frequency of Attendance to Special Events

How many programs offered by the Munster Parks and Recreation Department have you/members of your household participated in? (n=32)

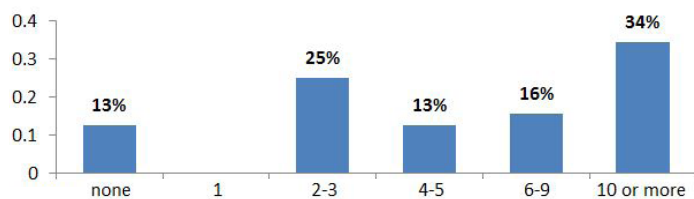


Figure 19: Number of Programs Participated in Household

Of those participants who offered information on their frequency of use of the bike trails, one half used them multiple times a week. This may indicate that the trails are heavily used, and may be useful for

How often do you use the local and/or regional bike path system (n=12)

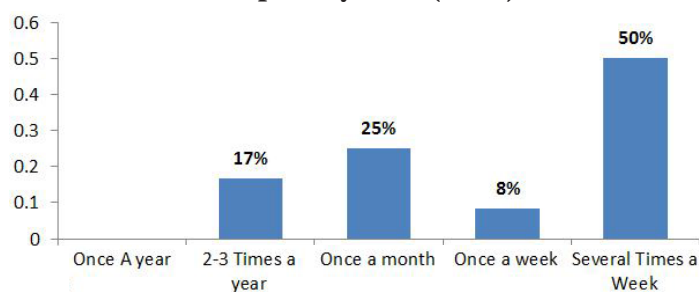


Figure 20: Bike Path Systems Use Frequency

daily commuting. However, most of the offerings are used only once a year, The Centennial Clubhouse and Community Pool are the only specialty facilities that are used by some participants at least once a week.

In the past 3 years, how often have you/members of your household visited the following facilities? (n=8)

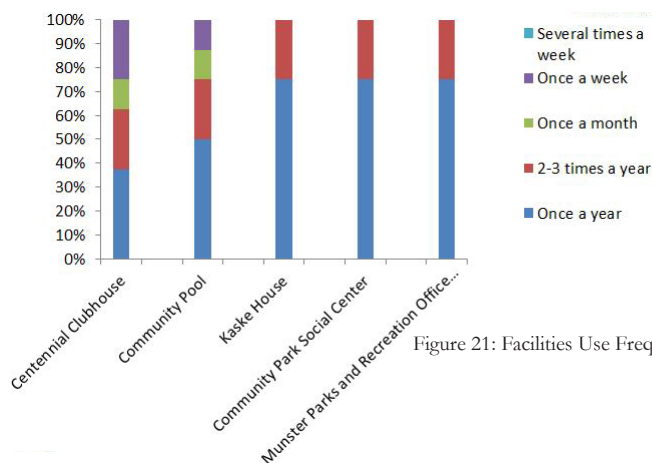


Figure 21: Facilities Use Frequency

When asked about their aquatic facility use, more than 70% of people who responded said that they used Munster pools, and almost 60% of people use public beaches. This is compared to the 7% of people who use the YMCA pool or a personal pool. It appears that in terms of water facilities, Munster parks and public beaches are well utilized.

What indoor or outdoor aquatic facilities did you or members of your household use regularly in the past 2 years? (n=28)

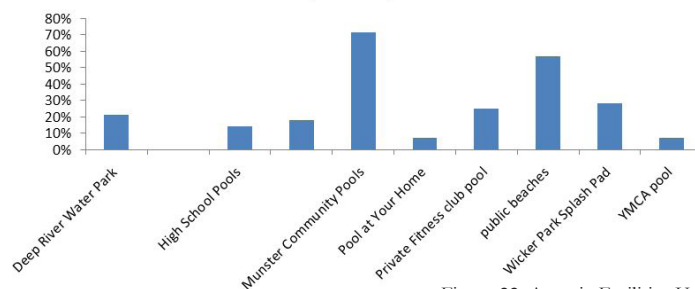


Figure 22: Aquatic Facilities Use

Everyone who provided feedback on program use participated in their organizations' programs, with a private fitness facility being the most popular. This could mean that people are interested in getting involved in a wide range of activities outside of the home.

In the past year, in which of these organizations' programs have you/members of your household participated in? (n=35)

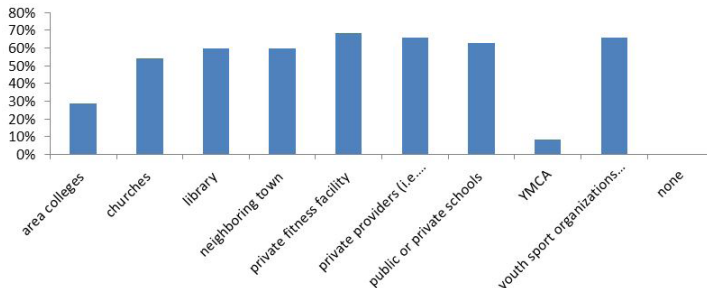


Figure 23: Organization Participation

When asked what kind of programs Munster Parks and Recreation could offer that would be of most interest, an indoor soccer field was the most popular idea. Additionally, there were requests for additional programming geared both towards adults as well as young children.

Please list types of programs that would interest you/members of your household if they were offered by the Munster Parks and Recreation Department? (n=19)

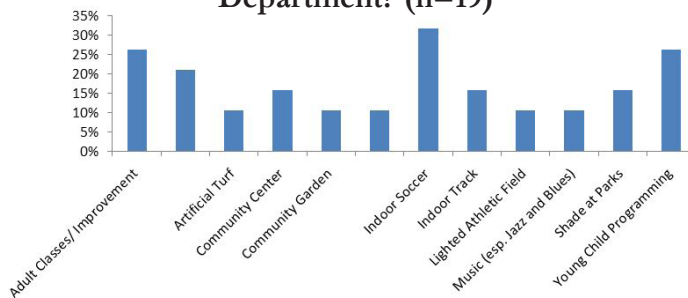


Figure 24: Programs of Interest