

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2012 City of Crystal

### *City Demographics:*

Crystal continues to evolve into a generally mature second-ring suburban community. The median longevity of adult residents is 20.0 years, up 1.6 years since the 2007 study. Twelve percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past five years, while 30% were there for over three decades. Crystal primarily drew residents from two areas: Minneapolis, at 34%, and neighboring Hennepin County suburbs, at 31%. Moreover, 80% of the sample either have no plans to ever move or intend to stay for at least the next decade.

The average household in Crystal contains 2.4 residents. Thirty-two percent are completely composed of residents over the age of 55 years old. Thirty-four percent of the households contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. Seventy-five percent own their current homes, with the median current property value at \$194,000.00. The typical resident spends about 20.8% of their pre-tax monthly household income on either rent or mortgage payments.

The average age of respondents is 49.3 years old, a 5.4 year increase from the 2007 level. Thirty-eight percent of the sample fall into the over 55 years age range, while 17% are less than 35 years old. Twenty-seven percent graduated high school or had less education, while another 40% report graduating or undertaking post-graduate course work.

Women outnumber men by four percent in the sample. The Ward of residence of each respondent was noted: Wards One and Two each contain 26% of the sample; Ward Three, 25%; and Ward Four contains 24% of the sample.

### *Quality of Life Issues:*

Ninety-one percent rate their quality of life as either “excellent” or “good.” In fact, 26% deem it “excellent,” a seven percent increase from the 2007 findings. Nine percent rate the quality of life lower.

At 26%, “location” leads the list of attributes people liked most about living in the community. “Strong neighborhoods/good housing stock” is second, at 18%, followed by “small town feel,” at

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13%. “Friendly people” rounds out the list, at 10%. The most serious issues facing the city are “high taxes,” at 21%, and “rising crime,” 15%. A “booster” group of 25%, almost twice as high as the 2007 level, says there are “no” serious issues facing the community; the size of the booster group in Crystal is over four times higher than the norm for a Metropolitan Area suburb.

Eighty-three percent of the sample report the general sense of community in the City of Crystal was “excellent” or “good,” maintaining the very high rating from the 2007 study. This percentage is well above the norm for Metropolitan Area suburban communities.

***Property Taxes:***

Crystal residents are more fiscally conservative in this study than they were in the 2007 survey. Forty-four percent think their property taxes are “high” in comparison with neighboring suburban communities, while 43% see them as “about average.” Residents would oppose, by a 53%-31% majority, a tax increase to maintain city services at their present levels. Eighty-one percent of the residents view city services as either an “excellent” or a “good” value for the property taxes paid; this value level reflects a 16% increase since the 2007 study.

***City Services:***

In evaluating specific city services, the mean approval rating is 82.6%, a comparatively high rating, and a 4.5% increase from the 2007 mean. Over 90% rate “fire services” and “police services” highly. Between 80% and 90% favorably rate “quality of drinking water,” “snow and ice removal on city streets,” “condition and maintenance of parks, recreation facilities and trails,” “animal control programs,” and “city recreational programs and services for children, adults and seniors.” Remaining services receive positive ratings between 70% and 79%: “maintenance and repair of city streets,” “response to code violations, such as housing maintenance, motor vehicle parking, and long grass,” “building inspection and obtaining permits,” and “elimination of blighted properties.” If only citizens providing a rating are considered, the mean positive rating for city services is a very high 88.4%.

In 2007, the typical Crystal resident would support a property tax increase of \$4.60 per year for the preservation and improvement of water quality and storm water management in the city; but, 45% would support no tax increase for this purpose. This year, a 53% majority would support **no** utility bill increase for this purpose.

In rating the importance of city services, two were considered “essential” by over 75% of the residents: “fire service,” at 83%, and “police service,” at 79%. Between 50% and 55% view three services as “essential:” “quality of drinking water,” at 54%; “snow and ice removal on city

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streets,” at 53%; and, “maintenance and repair of city streets,” at 52%. Twenty-one percent rate “animal control programs” as “essential,” and 20% feel similarly about “elimination of blighted properties.” Less than 20% call four services “essential:” “response to code violations, such as housing maintenance, motor vehicle parking, and long grass,” at 17%; “building inspection and obtaining permits,” at 16%; and, both “condition and maintenance of parks, recreation facilities and trails” and “city recreational programs and services for children, adults and seniors” at 15%.

Majorities of over 85% would “maintain funding at current levels” of each of the 11 city services discussed so far. In no case did more than 10% of the residents support “cutting funding from current levels” or “service elimination.” Similarly, three services registered modest support for a “funding increase:” “police services,” at 14%; “fire services,” at 11%; and “maintenance and repair of city streets,” at 11%.

***Neighborhoods and Housing:***

Ninety-one percent rate the general appearance of their neighborhood as either “excellent” or “good;” but, 10% are more critical in their evaluations. Seventy-eight percent report the general appearance of their neighborhood stayed “about the same” during the past two years. Twelve percent report an “improvement,” while nine percent see a “decline.” “Rundown houses,” “messy yards,” “junk in yards,” and “home foreclosures” are the primary causes of low ratings. Eighty-two percent feel at least “somewhat connected” to other people living in their neighborhood; but, 19% report feeling “disconnected” from their neighbors.

Seventy-three percent, up 16% in five years, feel the housing maintenance codes requiring the annual inspection and licensing of rental property are at least “somewhat effective” in maintaining the condition of this type of housing. Similarly, 60% feel the mandated point-of-sale inspection of owner-occupied housing a “positive” difference on the condition of that housing in the city. By a solid 86%-4% margin, residents favor expanding by offering incentives for residential property improvements. And, by a solid 90%-2% margin, residents favor the city purchasing deteriorating and blighted properties for redevelopment. Overall, 73% think the City of Crystal is doing “enough” in providing residents and business owners opportunities to maintain and improve the appearance of their properties.

***City Government and Staff:***

Forty-nine percent think they know “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about the work of the Mayor and City Council, an 11% increase in five years. Respondents give the Mayor and Council a job approval rating of 82%, a 23% increase in five years, and a disapproval rating of 10%. The increase of 23% in the approval rating since 2007 is particularly impressive. The eight-to-one

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approval-to-disapproval rating of the Mayor and City Council is among the top ratings in the Metropolitan Area suburbs. Positive ratings are based upon generalized feelings about their “good job” and the perception of “no problems.” Criticism of the Mayor and City Council is also based upon two factors: “not listening” and “issue differences.”

Citizen empowerment is at a moderately high level. An average number of residents — 31% — feel they could not have a say about the way the City of Crystal runs things, if they want. Most communities score between 25% and 40% on this query. But, that number reflects a decrease of seven percent since the 2007 study. Overall, though, the ability to influence decision-makers is not a major issue.

Residents award the City Staff a job approval rating of 82% and a disapproval rating of 11%, reflecting an increase of an uniquely high 28% in favorable evaluations. Both the absolute level of approval and the nearly eight-to-one ratio of approval-to-disapproval are well above the Metropolitan Area suburban norm. The 45% of the residents reporting first-hand contact with the staff is almost one-third higher when compared with other suburban areas. The approval ratings of staff are primarily based on actual positive experiences with them; the more negative ratings are associated with a perceived “lack of listening.”

Twenty-seven percent of the sample contacted a City of Crystal facility during the past twelve months. Most of the contacts involved the Police Department, Building and Housing Inspection, Public Works and Engineering, and the Information Desk. The contacts generally revolve around a request for general information, reporting something, or registering a complaint. On six aspects of customer service, staff members are rated as either “excellent” or “good” by at least 92% of those who contacted City Hall: “courtesy of the Information Desk receptionist,” “efficiency of the Information Desk receptionist,” “waiting time for service,” “ease of reaching a department staff member who could help them,” “efficiency of the department staff,” and “courtesy of the department staff.” In general, residents are extremely satisfied with their contacts with City facilities.

***Garbage Hauling:***

By a 52%-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 “like choice.” Supporters of city designation base their decision on “less truck traffic” and “less damage to roads”

***Public Safety:***

Thirty-four percent of the respondents were involved in or observed a situation in which the Crystal Police Department was present; contact for 32% of this group occurred at a public or awards ceremony. Among those having contact, 32% report it was for “emergency services;” 24%, for “public service information;” and 21% say it was for a “traffic violation.” Ten percent report the contact was at a public ceremonial event. Among these observers and/or participants, 92% think the way the Police handled the situation was either “excellent” or “good,” while 92% report the Police responded promptly. Ninety-one percent feel the Police Department personnel were courteous and acted in a professional manner.

Usage of various prevention services provided by the Crystal Police Department is still relatively low. Awareness of the programs, however, is consistently high. Thirty-four percent are members of Neighborhood Watch, seven percent less than the 2007 level. Nine percent underwent a home safety survey. DARE was used by 17% of the households, generally by those households containing school-aged children. And, 17% also used traffic enforcement services.

In rating the seriousness of public safety concerns in the City of Crystal, 45% feel domestic abuse is either a “very serious problem” or “somewhat serious problem.” Fifty-one percent rate violent street crime, such as robbery and assault, as at least a “somewhat serious problem,” reflecting a ten percent increase in five years. Seventy-one percent similarly rate alcohol and drug abuse; this represents a 13% increase during the past five years. Twenty-eight percent rate child neglect and abuse as either a “very serious problem” or “somewhat serious problem,” while 21% feel the same about senior neglect and abuse.

Sixty-nine percent feel safe walking alone at night in their neighborhood. In considering the entire city, city parks are targeted by eight percent as areas where residents would feel unsafe walking alone at night.

Thirteen percent of the sample report being involved in or observing a situation where the West Metro Fire/Rescue District was present; within this group, 39% state this involved fire services, while 52% report it involved rescue or medical services. Thirty-one percent report the situation took place at a public ceremonial event or awards ceremony. Ninety-nine percent give the West Metro Fire/Rescue District high grades for the way the situation was handled, and 92% feel they responded promptly. Ninety-six percent also report the District personnel were courteous and acted in a professional manner. Ninety-one percent have a working carbon monoxide detector in their homes, up six percent from the 2007 level..

***Parks and Recreation:***

Residents rely principally upon the City Newsletter/Recreation Program brochure and the “Sun Post” newspaper for their information about park and recreation facilities and programs in the City of Crystal. Fifty-nine percent rely upon the former, while 23% use the latter. Only five percent report they have no source of information about these types of topics. Sixty-six percent report visiting a Crystal park or recreation facility, weather permitting, at least “several times each year.” In fact, 35% do so “once a week or more.” The most popular destinations are Bassett Creek Park, Becker Park, Lions Park, their neighborhood park, and the Community Center.

The most important current park and recreational facility is “walking trails and pathways,” chosen by 41%. Next, in order, is “nature areas,” at 32%. Twenty-five percent cite the “Crystal Community Center,” and 22% say “playground equipment.” Nineteen percent prefer the “community garden,” and 15% favor “picnic areas.”

Thirty-eight percent consider “community events” to be the most important recreational opportunity for their household. Twenty-five percent point to “youth sports or programs,” and 20%, to “teen sports or programs.” Eighteen percent view “senior programs” the same way, while 17% each say “programs or open swimming at the swimming pool” or “outdoor concerts.”

Ninety-five percent of the residents are satisfied with the current mix of recreational opportunities. Twenty-five percent participate in city-sponsored recreational programs during the past year. Ninety-eight percent place a high value on these offerings, while only two percent rate them lower. Satisfaction is unanimous. The 72% of the community who did not participate point to already “busy lifestyles,” “lack of interest,” and “advanced age or deteriorating health” as their major reasons. In general, then, both programming and facilities are well-regarded.

Thirty-four percent of the sample report regularly leaving the City of Crystal to pursue recreational activities. This level of “recreational leakage” is at the Metropolitan Area suburban norm. Residents are most apt to leave the community in search of “lakes for boating” and “trails.”

***Communications Issues:***

The City Newsletter/Recreation Brochure is the most often indicated primary source of information about community events in Crystal, at 47%. The “Sun Post” newspaper follows at 35%. The “Sun Post” and the City Newsletter are even closer as the primary sources of information about City government and its activities, at 40% and 32%, respectively. City mailings are also mentioned as a source of this type of information, by 17%. Eighty-eight

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percent receive the “Crystal City Newsletter,” while 81% regularly read it. Both the newsletter’s content and clarity, as well as its format and readability, are nearly unanimously praised. Similarly, almost all readers view the publication as effective in keeping them informed about activities in the community.

Sixty percent of the respondents subscribe to cable television. Thirty-four percent of the subscribers at least “occasionally” watch City Council telecasts on Channel 16; this audience size is nine percent higher than it was in 2007.

Internet use is also assessed thoroughly in this study. Seventy-seven percent of the households in the community have access to the Internet, a 16% increase during the past five years. Among those on-line households, 56% report accessing the city’s website, usually browsing, looking for general information, or looking for park and recreation information. Ninety-seven percent of those searching for information were able to find it, and 95% report the website is easy to navigate. Seventy-seven percent are aware they can register for recreation classes or apply for a building permit on the City’s website; thirty percent have actually done so. Twenty-eight percent of the residents of the community would like to see more “general information” on the website; ten percent want “more parks and recreation information,” and nine percent, “more community events information.” Only seven percent have watched a City Council meeting on the City’s website.

With the exception of Facebook, social media usage among Crystal residents is limited. Ten percent listen to podcasts, fourteen percent read blogs, and 18% tweet. A much larger 47% access Facebook. Similarly, the one social medium which could be used effectively by the City of Crystal to communicate with residents is Facebook; thirty-three percent of city residents indicated their likelihood to communicate with the City this way.

***Conclusions:***

In general, Crystal citizens are very satisfied with their community, and improved evaluations are evident in this study when compared with the 2007 study. The key issues facing decision-makers in the future are addressing perceptions about “high taxes” and “rising crime.” Secondly, residential property maintenance, particularly focusing on the City continuing to purchase deteriorating and blighted properties for redevelopment.

The long term issue found in the 1997 and 2007 studies has significantly changed: the chasm of disconnection between residents and the City. Information levels about City Government activities and positive perceptions of the Mayor and City Council have increased markedly during the ten year interim between the 1997 and 2007 studies. Accompanying this turnaround is the increased reliance on and favorable ratings of the City Newsletter/Recreation Brochure.

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Any efforts the City makes in continuing and upgrading communications with residents will serve the community well. More citizens now are content and continue to view their City, its government, and its services in a very positive light. With the “City Booster” percentage at 25%, or four 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 difficult decision must be made.

***Methodology:***

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Crystal. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between May 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The average interview took 31 minutes. All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a randomly generated sample of adult residents of the City of Crystal. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to their respective universe within  $\pm 4.0$  percent in 95 out of 100 cases.