



2022 Recreation Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

The Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department conducted a Recreation Needs Assessment in the spring of 2022.

The purpose of the Needs Assessment was to assess how the community currently uses recreational facilities and programs, levels of satisfaction and knowledge of existing services, and to help inform future planning efforts and budget priorities.

Methodology

Survey

A comprehensive 30-question community survey was conducted over 3 months. The survey focused on recreational facilities, aquatic facilities, and recreation programs and events. The survey was promoted on a variety of platforms, including social media, email lists, newsletters, and flyers. Our goal was 800 survey respondents. We exceeded that goal with 1,236 respondents. The survey results have a margin of error of +/-2.72% with 95% confidence.

Engage Bellingham

Nearly 3,500 visitors viewed the Engage Bellingham page during the data collection period, and 36 contributors made over 70 suggestions regarding recreational services.

Community Meetings

Three community meetings were held to gather additional feedback from recreational service providers, educators and the general public.

Key Findings

Recreation Facilities

Indoor community recreation centers, covered, well lit outdoor areas, more aquatic space, more ice, and more pickleball courts were common themes in survey responses and meeting forums. Nature play areas, outdoor classrooms and adventure play (ziplines, climbing, slackline etc.) also ranked high in future facility desires.

67% of respondents reported they travel outside of Bellingham to use recreational facilities.

Lack of time is the primary reason people don't use local recreational facilities more frequently, with facility conditions closely following.

Aquatic Facilities

Lap lanes, family/leisure pools and hot tubs/therapy pools ranked higher on aquatic needs compared to competitive swimming and diving.

Recreation Programs

Physical and mental well-being, stress reduction and connection with nature are the primary reasons people stated for participation in our recreational programs. Lack of time is cited as the number one reason for not participating more frequently.

Over 80% of respondents are not aware of our scholarship program, which annually grants qualifying families \$200 per person, per household. The \$200 can be applied to nearly all recreation division programs and events, as well as community garden plot rentals. The department has also received grants funds to support a supplemental scholarship program which allowed kids to go to camp for free in 2022.

64% of respondents reported having an excellent or very good experience participating in programs, and 30% rated their experiences as satisfactory.

Respondents would like to see more youth sports opportunities. This response was further articulated in the community meeting forums. Lack of cohesiveness, hard to obtain information, and lack of equity and opportunities to participate are critical issues in need of further examination and action.

Willingness to Pay

Respondents are willing to pay for recreational facilities and services. In addition to stating facilities and services are worthy of tax dollar investment, 97% of respondents are willing to pay directly out of pocket to have accessibility to recreational facilities and programs.

Next Action Items

- Share detailed findings at community meeting. September 22, 2022
- Share findings with City Council-September 26, 2022
- Create Youth Sport Task Force-2023-2024
- Increase promotion of scholarship program
- Utilize data to inform Cost Recovery model and Civic Athletic Complex feasibility study (both currently underway)