

## **Neighborhood Services Survey**

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The City of Redwood City hired Godbe Research and Analysis to conduct the second biennial Neighborhood Services Survey in June of 2001. Godbe conducted an 18-minute telephone survey with 630 randomly selected Redwood City residents, 100 of which were from the Redwood Shores neighborhood. Godbe also conducted one focus group of 14 neighbors from Redwood Shores. The results of this survey are in the attached executive summary. We will conduct a similar survey every two years and use the information to develop objectives for budget purposes as well as on-going continuous improvement plans.

The survey is a means to provide valuable feedback about satisfaction with City services and quality of life issues for the community. It is also an opportunity to receive direct feedback from Redwood City residents about how Redwood City is doing and how we can improve.

It is our intention to feature a department every other year to gather more detailed information on the individual department. The featured department in this survey was the Library Department. There was also an additional focus on determining the priorities of the residents in the Redwood Shores area.

The objectives of the survey were to: 1) expand direct citizen feedback on City services and quality of life indicators as objectively as possible; 2) do a more complete assessment of library needs and demographic information for all of Redwood City, and 3) determine the priorities among Redwood Shores area residents from a list of possible capital projects.

As you will see in this budget document, many departments have set objectives based on the results of the survey where appropriate. In most cases, the objectives are geared towards improving ratings or maintaining levels of services where there is a good or excellent rating.

## **Introduction**

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Godbe Research & Analysis is pleased to present the results of a public opinion research project conducted for the City of Redwood City. This report is organized into the following sections:

### *Executive Summary*

The *Executive Summary* includes a summary of the *Key Findings* from the survey and a *Findings & Conclusions* section, which details our recommended course of action based on the survey results.

### *Methodology*

The *Methodology* section explains the methodology used to conduct this type of survey research. This section also explains how to use the detailed crosstabulation tables in Appendix B.

### *Summary of Results*

In the body of the report, we present a question-by-question analysis of the survey. The discussion is organized into the following sections:

- Issues of Importance
- Satisfaction with City Services
- Library Use, Locations, and Services
- City Services
- Additional Demographic and Behavioral Measures

### *Appendices*

We have included the following three *Appendices*:

- *Appendix A*, which presents the questionnaires with topline results.
- *Appendix B*, which presents the complete cross tabulations for the survey.
- *Appendix C*, which presents the verbatim responses for the open ended questions in the survey.

## **Executive Summary**

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### **Key Findings**

Based on an analysis of the survey data, Godbe Research & Analysis (GRA) offers the following key findings:

#### *Issues of Importance*

The issues that were mentioned most often by respondents as the most important issue concerned ‘improving the quality of education’ (13%), ‘create affordable housing’ (13%), and ‘reducing traffic congestion’ (12%). Additional issues mentioned included ‘energy crisis’ (6%), ‘schools’ (5%), ‘none or nothing’ (5%), ‘reducing crime’ (4%), ‘improving public transportation’ (3%), and ‘gangs’ (3%).

#### *Satisfaction with City Services*

Respondents were asked to indicate whether, overall, they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the job the City of Redwood City is doing to provide programs and services, and to maintain public facilities. Because this question did not reference a specific program or facility and requested that respondents consider the City’s performance in general, the responses to the question can be viewed as an overall performance rating for the City.

The majority of respondents reported that they were either ‘very’ (30%) or ‘somewhat’ satisfied (51%) with the City’s efforts to provide programs and services, and to maintain public facilities. Approximately 7 percent of respondents were ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ and 5 percent were ‘very dissatisfied’.

With respect to specific City services tested, respondents were most satisfied with ‘fire protection/prevention services’, ‘library services’, ‘maintenance of park/recreation facilities’, and the ‘recycling program’. Alternatively, respondents were least satisfied with the ‘availability of affordable housing’ and the ‘reduction of traffic congestion’ in the City of Redwood City. Finally, it is important to note that nine of the fifteen services received a mean score of at least +1, indicating that respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with more than half of the tested services offered by the City of Redwood City.

#### *Library Use, Locations, and Services*

Approximately three-fourths of respondents (73%) reported that a member of her/his household has used a public library during the past year. Nearly 27 percent reported that he/she or a member of their household had not used a public library and less than 1 percent were not sure whether they have used the library or not.

The public library that the largest percent of library users indicated that their household uses most often was the Redwood City Main Library (77%) followed by Schaberg (13%), Fair Oaks (8%), and San Carlos (6%).

The two reasons respondents most frequently gave for choosing the libraries they used most often were 'location' (69%) and 'availability of materials' (15%). In addition, 4 percent stated that the library they chose was 'bigger/larger' than other libraries and 2 percent indicated that 'staff' was a deciding factor in choosing a library.

Next, Redwood City library users were asked what were their top two reasons for using the City of Redwood City public library. The reasons mentioned most often by Redwood City library users for using the Library were 'personal reading' (36%), 'research' (25%), 'children's use' (18%), school-related/homework' (14%), and 'reference materials' (10%).

Next, non-library users were asked to indicate the main reason why their household has not used the public library in the past year. The most frequent responses to this question were that a respondent had 'no need for a library' (21%) or 'don't have time' (19%). The other most frequently reported reasons for not using the public library were 'use the Internet instead' (9%), 'I buy books' (5%), 'don't know where they [libraries] are' (4%), and 'locations are inconvenient' (4%).

Next, all respondents were asked to rate the Redwood City public library services. 41 percent rated the City of Redwood City Public Library services as 'excellent' and 37 percent rated the Redwood City Public Library services as 'good'. Finally, 8 percent of respondents rated the Library services as 'fair' and less than 2 percent rated the Library services as 'poor'.

Redwood City library users were next asked to rate the availability of materials at the City of Redwood City Public Library. The vast majority of respondents rated the availability of materials as at least good ('excellent': 44% and 'good': 43%). Approximately 10 percent of respondents rated the availability of materials as 'fair', and 1 percent of respondents rated the availability of materials as 'poor'.

Respondents perceived the following library programs and services as most important: 'children's books', 'library staff', 'reference materials', 'convenient location', 'quiet reading/study areas', and 'current books'. Categories such as 'movies on video/DVDs', 'non-fiction films', 'adult programs', 'music and entertainment programs', and meeting rooms' were ranked least important overall. It is important to note, however, that all of the library services except for one was ranked as at least 'somewhat important'.

Respondents were asked where they prefer to get books or find information. The largest percent of respondents stated that they preferred to go to the 'Redwood City Public Library' (55%) compared to the percent of respondents who indicated that they preferred to use the 'Internet' (31%) or go to 'chain bookstores' (12%) to get a book or find information.

The primary reasons respondents preferred to get books and information from a 'chain bookstore' or the 'Internet', included 'convenience/easy access' (38%), 'Internet-better

resource' (15%), 'keep or buy the book' (9%), 'greater availability and selection' (7%), and 'did not have to leave their home' (6%).

Approximately 25 percent of respondents reported visiting the Redwood City library web site. Respondents who had Internet access and have visited the Redwood City library web site, indicated that they used it for the following reasons: 'conduct research' (22%), 'access online resources' (18%), 'access online catalog' (16%), 'renew library books' (11%), and 'information about libraries' (10%).

*City Services*

**Condition of streets and sidewalks:** 27 percent stated that the streets and roads were in 'good condition all over', 54 percent stated that the streets and roads were 'mostly good', and 18 percent stated that the streets and roads had 'many bad spots'.

29 percent stated that the sidewalks were in 'good condition all over', 49 percent stated that the sidewalks were 'mostly good', and 15 percent stated that the sidewalks had 'many bad spots'.

**Street sweeping:** Next respondents were asked if they would be willing to move their cars every two weeks to allow for street sweeping. Approximately 69 percent responded 'definitely yes', 14 percent responded 'probably yes', 3 percent responded 'probably no' and 5 percent responded 'definitely no'.

Those respondents that stated they would 'probably not' or 'definitely not' be willing to move their car every two weeks for street sweeping were asked why they were not willing to move their car. The responses included: 'too annoying/inconvenient' (23%), 'I have a driveway/carport/garage' (21%), 'no other places to park/not enough places' (15%), and 'streets are fine don't need cleaners' (8%). 5 percent gave responses of 'go around me', 'I won't do it', or 'not a concern'. Finally, 3 percent of respondents stated that they 'clean the gutter myself'.

Approximately 50 percent felt 'very safe' walking alone in their neighborhood. In addition, 33 percent felt 'reasonably safe', 13 percent felt some 'unsafe', and 3 percent felt 'very unsafe' walking alone in their neighborhood.

**Weeds, junk lots, graffiti abandoned automobiles, and dilapidated houses:** Next, respondents were asked if they felt things like weeds, junk lots, graffiti, abandoned automobiles, and dilapidated houses were a big problem in their neighborhood. 12 percent of respondents felt it was a 'big problem', 17 percent felt it was 'somewhat of a problem', 23 percent felt it was 'only a small problem, and 47 percent felt it was 'not a problem at all.'

**Traffic enforcement:** When asked about the enforcement of traffic laws, 24 percent of respondents stated that traffic law enforcement is 'excellent', 44 percent stated that traffic

law enforcement is 'good', 25 percent stated that traffic law enforcement is 'fair', and 4 percent stated that traffic law enforcement is 'poor'.

**Contact with Police Department:** Respondents were next asked if they had any contact with Redwood City's police department in past 12 months. 34 percent of respondents stated that they had contact with the Redwood City police department, 66 percent stated that they had not had any contact with Redwood City's police department.

Approximately 40 percent of respondents who have had contact with the Redwood City police department stated that the police were 'excellent' in the way they handled the contact and 29 percent stated that the police were 'good' in the way they handled the contact. 14 percent of respondents felt the police were only 'fair' and 15 percent felt the police handle the contact in a 'poor' manner.

**Contact with City employees:** Respondents were next asked if they had called, written or gone to see any City employee or Council member (other than police) about an issue or problem. 18 percent of respondents indicated that they had called, written, or gone to see a City employee or Council member in the past year.

56 percent of respondents who had contact with a city employee or council member in the past year rated the City employee or Council member as 'very helpful' and 21 percent rated them as 'somewhat helpful'. 10 percent of respondents felt the City employee or Council member was 'not very helpful' and 12 percent felt they were 'not helpful at all'.

Additionally, respondents were asked if the City employee or Council member was courteous. 63 percent of respondents rated the City employee or Council member as 'very courteous' and 27 percent rated them as 'fairly courteous'. Alternatively, 8 percent of respondents rated the city employee as 'fairly' (1%) or 'very' (7%) discourteous.

**Redwood Shores Facilities (only asked of Redwood Shores residents):**

Next, only Redwood Shores residents were asked what two types of facilities would they most like to have in Redwood Shores. According to the results, the largest percentage of Redwood Shores residents indicated that they would want a 'public library branch'. Other responses given by a large percentage of Redwood Shores residents included 'community swimming pool', 'teen center', 'community center', and 'child care facilities'.

Respondents with Internet access that indicated that they have visited the Redwood City web site were asked what they have used the City web site for. 16 percent stated that they used the web site for 'information about the community', 'current events' (13%), 'city services' (10%), and 'job opportunities' (8%). 37 percent stated that they visited the web site for reasons 'other' than what was pre coded in the survey.

***Parks and Recreation Services:*** Next, respondents were asked about Redwood City parks and recreation. 69 percent of respondents stated they or someone in their household had used a Redwood City park, recreation facility, or recreation program.

The next question addressed respondents' evaluation of recreation programs and services provided by Redwood City. 29 percent stated that the recreation opportunities, services and programs were 'excellent', 46 percent stated that the opportunities, services and programs were 'good', 15 percent stated that the opportunities, services and programs were 'fair', and 1 percent stated that the opportunities, services and programs were 'poor'. 9 percent of respondents stated that they either had 'no opinion' (3%) or 'didn't know' (6%).

Finally, 31 percent of the respondents felt that maintenance by Redwood City has been 'excellent', 44 percent felt that the maintenance by Redwood City has been 'good', 13 percent felt that the maintenance by Redwood City has been only 'fair', and 2 percent felt that the maintenance by Redwood City has been 'poor'.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on the research objectives for this study and the findings of the analyses, GRA is pleased to offer the following conclusions and recommendations:

### *City Satisfaction*

In general, Redwood City residents appeared to be quite satisfied with the City of Redwood City's overall efforts to provide programs and services, and maintain public facilities. A large majority of residents in the City were either 'very satisfied' (30%) or 'somewhat satisfied' (51%) with the City in general. Although this represents a high level of satisfaction, the City still has an opportunity to increase the satisfaction levels and to increase the percentage of 'very satisfied' residents compared with 'somewhat satisfied' residents. When compared with results from other similar survey projects that GRA has conducted for cities throughout California, the overall level of satisfaction is about average.

With respect to Redwood City residents' satisfaction with specific City services, residents were the most satisfied with fire protection/prevention, library services, and maintenance of park/recreation facilities provided by the City. Alternatively, residents expressed a lower level of satisfaction with the following services: availability of affordable housing, reduction of traffic congestion, and promotion of business district. It is important to note that housing and traffic were among the most frequently reported importance issues in Redwood City. Therefore, given the higher importance and lower satisfaction ratings of these issues, housing and traffic represent opportunities for improvement in the City of Redwood City.

Other issues that were considered among the most important issues in Redwood City included education and the energy crisis. Education, housing, and traffic were also considered among the top four most important issues in the 1999 survey conducted by Redwood City. Whereas crime was among the top four important issues in 1999, the energy crisis was the fourth most frequently reported important issue in the present survey (2001). These results are consistent with GRA's experience with other cities and counties. Specifically, crime and education are usually the most important issues. In addition, traffic and affordable housing are typically perceived as very important in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.

### *Library Services*

Approximately 73 percent of households had used the library within the past 12 months. This represents a 7 percent increase in use from the 1999 survey. Based on our experience, this represents a slightly above average level of household library use. In addition, library services received a high rating overall. Specifically, 78 percent of respondents rated the library services as at least good. Moreover, respondents from households that have used the library in the past 12 months rated the library services higher than did those respondents whose household has not used the library in the past six months. Library non-users were more likely to have no opinion or not know about library services. This suggests that non-users' reasons for not using the library are not based a negative opinion of the library ser-

vices. Instead, the most frequently reported reasons for not using the library were ‘no need’ and ‘no time’. These are the same reasons we have seen in other Cities for not using the library. Moreover, these reasons represent a challenge because it is difficult to try to convince someone that they do, in fact, have a need for the library.

Interestingly, respondents without school-aged children were more likely to report ‘no need’ and respondents with school-aged children were more likely to report ‘no time’ as the reason for not using the library in the past 12 months. It has been GRA’s experience that households with children are likely to use the library. Given these households tend to be library users and understanding the barrier to these respondents is simply no time, we recommend the library develop services and strategies to minimize the amount of perceived time necessary to visit the library and to inform residents of these services and strategies.

The availability of materials at the library also represents an important component of public library services. Approximately 87 percent of households that have used a Redwood City public library in the past 12 months rated the availability of materials as at least good. In addition, availability of materials was not mentioned as a reason for not using the library and it was not the most frequently mentioned reason for choosing a particular library. Although availability of materials does not seem to be a major issue in Redwood City right now, it is vital that the library continues to have the items and services that users feel are important. The services perceived as most important to respondents were children’s books, library staff, and reference materials. However, almost all the services tested were considered at least somewhat important.

Availability of materials is important because if the library does not have a particular item, then an individual may decide to go to a bookstore or use the Internet instead. Right now, bookstores and the Internet represent real competition for libraries. Therefore, respondents were asked whether they preferred to get books and information from the Redwood City Public Libraries, bookstores, or the Internet. The majority of respondents preferred the Redwood City Public Libraries to chain bookstores and the Internet. Respondents who preferred chain bookstores or the Internet were asked to provide a reason for their preference. The most frequently provided reason for preferring a chain bookstore was because one can keep the book and the availability/selection at chain bookstores. Alternatively, the most frequently reported reason for preferring the Internet was the convenience associated with the Internet. Understanding these reasons provides important insight that can aid in the development of services and strategies to meet these needs. Once these services and strategies are developed then they should be communicated to City residents. One possible strategy is to increase the awareness and the functionality of the Library’s website.

*City Services*

***Condition of streets and sidewalks:*** Although 81 percent of respondents perceived the condition of the streets as at least ‘mostly good/few bad spots’ in the current study, this represents a decrease from 1999. In 1999, 92 percent of respondents indicated that they felt

the condition of City streets was at least ‘mostly good/few bad spots’. Moreover, perception shifted from ‘good condition’ to other extreme of ‘many bad spots’. There was also a less positive perception of the condition of the sidewalks in 2001 compared with 1999. This change in perception was not as drastic as it was for the condition of streets. Specifically, the perception changed from ‘good condition’ to ‘mostly good/few bad spots’. Based on these results, the condition of streets and sidewalks represent an opportunity for improvement within Redwood City.

**Street sweeping:** There was a general willingness among respondents to move their cars to allow for City street sweeping. The primary reason for not wanting to move their car was because of the inconvenience.

**Weeds, junk lots, graffiti abandoned automobiles, and dilapidated houses:** The largest percentage of respondents indicated they felt the weeds, junk lots, graffiti abandoned automobiles, and dilapidated houses in Redwood City were not a problem at all. However, more than one-fourth of respondents felt that this was at least somewhat of a problem. Therefore, we recommend that Redwood City continues to make sure that this does not become more of a problem in Redwood City.

**Safety:** The majority of residents felt reasonably safe walking alone in their neighborhood. In addition, respondents, overall, were at least somewhat satisfied with the City’s provision of neighborhood patrols. However, it is important to keep in mind that reducing crime was mentioned by 4 percent of respondents as one of the most important issues.

**Traffic enforcement:** Overall, the largest percentage of respondents felt that traffic enforcement was good. The most frequently reported reasons for a fair or poor rating was that there was too much speeding and motorists running red lights. However, some respondents indicated that they were not happy with the traffic enforcement because they had recently received a ticket.

**Contact with Police Department:** Over one-third of respondents reported having some contact with the police department in the past 12 months. This represents an increase in contact from the 1999 survey results. In addition, a trend emerged between contact with the police department and satisfaction with the investigation of criminal activity. Specifically, a larger percentage of respondents who were very satisfied with the investigation of criminal activity had contact with the police compared to the percentage of individuals who were very dissatisfied with the investigation of criminal activity.

**Contact with City employees:** The majority of respondents who have had contact with a City employee felt that the City employee was helpful and courteous. However, a larger percentage of respondents indicated the City employee was courteous compared to the percentage of respondents who indicated that the City employee was helpful. Therefore, we rec-

ommend that the City ensure that City employees are able to help residents as well as being courteous to residents.

***Redwood Shores Facilities (only asked of Redwood Shores residents):***

The largest percentage of Redwood Shores residents indicated that they would most like to have a public library branch and community swimming pools in Redwood Shores.

***Parks and Recreation Services:*** The majority of households have used a park, recreation facility or recreation program in the past 12 months. Since 1999, park and recreation use has increased by 10 percent. In addition, the maintenance of these facilities and the overall recreation opportunities, services and programs in Redwood City were rated high among residents. Finally those who have used a park, recreation facility or recreation program in the last 12 months tended to provide higher ratings for maintenance and overall ratings of opportunities than did non-users.

By conducting tracking surveys regarding resident satisfaction, the City can assess residents' opinions regarding a variety of services and can identify a shift in the positive direction among the different City services. Throughout the Conclusions and Recommendations section, we have included comparisons between the results from the current project (2001) to the results from the 1999 survey conducted by Redwood City. In the following table, the results for the questions asked in both surveys are presented to facilitate a comparison between the two surveys. In this table, we have also provided a column that represents the differences between the two surveys. If the number in the 'change' column is positive, then there as been a *increase* since 1999. Conversely, a negative number in the 'change' column represents a *decrease* since 1999.

**Table 1. Tracking Survey Results**

Most important issue	1999	2001	% Change
traffic	14%	12%	-2%
education	18%	13%	-5%
crime	8%	4%	-4%
housing	10%	13%	3%
energy crisis		6%	6%
gangs		3%	3%
<b>Condition of streets</b>			
Good condition	39%	27%	-12%
Few bad spots	53%	54%	1%
Many bad spots	8%	18%	10%
<b>Condition of sidewalks</b>			
Good Condition	37%	29%	-8%
Few bad spots	41%	49%	8%
Many bad spots	15%	15%	0%
<b>Weed/junk/graffiti problem</b>			
Big/Somewhat problem	37%	29%	-8%
Small/Not a problem	62%	70%	8%
<b>Used parks/rec past 12 months</b>			
Yes	59%	69%	10%
No	41%	30%	-11%
<b>Rating park/rec</b>			
Excellent/Good	76%	75%	-1%
Fair/Poor	9%	16%	7%
<b>Used library in past 12 months</b>			
Yes	66%	73%	7%
No	34%	27%	-7%
<b>Availability of material</b>			
Excellent/Good	91%	87%	-4%
Fair/Poor	9%	11%	2%
<b>Library services overall</b>			
Excellent/Good	77%	78%	1%
Fair/Poor	4%	10%	6%
<b>Contact with police past 12 months</b>			
Yes	28%	34%	6%
No	72%	66%	-6%
<b>Rating police handling of contact</b>			
Excellent/Good	80%	69%	-11%
Fair/Poor	17%	29%	12%
<b>Past year contact with City employee</b>			
Yes	11%	18%	7%
no	88%	82%	-6%
<b>City employee/Council member-helpfulness</b>			
Very/Somewhat Helpful	79%	77%	-2%
Not Very/Not at all Helpful	22%	22%	0%
<b>City employee/Council member-courteous</b>			
Very/Fairly Courteous	87%	90%	3%
Fairly/Very Discourteous	9%	8%	-1%

*City-Resident Communication*

The survey also found that although the majority of Redwood City residents have access to the Internet (and most of those access from home), less than one-third of them had visited the City's web site. These findings suggest an opportunity for the City to increase its residents' use of its web site.

City web sites are often a neglected source of information for residents. GRA recommends that the City publish the URL of the web site in its local newspapers, inviting residents to visit. To the extent that the City may use local newspapers to increase local residents' use of its web site, the City may be able to strengthen its communication link with Redwood City residents.

An improved communication link not only serves to strengthen community involvement in local government, but it can also improve perceptions of the City and its efforts to provide services by making individuals aware of such efforts. It seems that often times residents' opinions are shaped largely by how they perceive that the City is approaching a particular problem. Sometimes knowing that their City is putting forth efforts increases their overall satisfaction with a particular service or issue. For instance, GRA recently worked with a City that received a considerably low score for the perceived safety of its parks and recreation facilities. Several months later, the City began to dig trenches and lay down wire to provide many of their parks and facilities with exterior lighting. Several weeks into the project, the City conducted another survey of its residents and asked a similar set of questions. The City Manager was concerned that because of the work in progress in the parks, accessibility was hindered and that would reflect negatively in the survey. However, to everyone's surprise, accessibility was rated highly, and even more surprisingly, so was safety. Even though the parks had no additional lighting and were not actually any 'safer' than before, simply knowing that the City was acting to improve safety seemed to influence the public's perception of it.

Such may also be the case for important local issues in Redwood City, such as affordable housing and traffic. Proactively informing residents of the City's efforts to manage traffic may be one of the first steps in addressing these issues and also improving the residents' perceptions of their City.