

THE MORRIS LEATHERMAN COMPANY

2020 City of Carver Residential Survey Findings and Implications

Residential Demographics:

Carver is a growing community composed of many affluent young families. The median longevity of adult residents is 9.4 years, indicative of more recently-arrived residents. Fifty-three percent lived in Carver for less than ten years; twenty-three percent resided there for 11-20 years; and, 25% lived there for over 20 years. The average age of respondents is 44.5 years old. Twenty-eight percent of the sample falls into the 18-34 age range, while 29% are in the over 55 age range.

The city is split between “empty nests,” containing no children, at 55%, and households with children at home, 45%. Thirteen percent are totally composed of senior citizens. Thirty percent of households report they are “financially stressed,” about 15% lower than the Metro Area norm. Seventy percent feel they are “financially comfortable.” Women and men are equally represented in the sample.

Quality of Life Issues:

Forty six percent of the residents rate their quality of life as “excellent,” while another 49% rate it as “good.” Only four percent rate their quality of life lower. The 46% “excellent” rating is more than double the Metro Area norm of 22% and places the community within the top decile of Metropolitan Area suburbs.

“Quiet and peaceful” is the most liked aspect of living in Carver, at 23%. “Small town feel” follows at 15%. “Schools” follow at 11%, while “safe” and “sense of community” are indicated by 10% each. In grouping resident’s opinions into typical “suburban” and “small town” responses, almost three-quarters of Carver residents point to a “small town” aspect. In assessing the most serious issue facing the community, 20% point to “too much growth,” while 9% each say “high taxes” and “lack of retail and dining.” “Boosters” - residents who feel there are no serious issues facing the community - are 23%, over twice as high as the suburban norm.

A comparatively solid 90% think things in Carver are generally headed in the right direction. Seven percent see the city as off on the wrong track. A very strong 92% rate the strength of community identity favorably; in fact, the 40% “excellent” rating is double the Metro Area norm. A majority of residents, 53%, see Carver as a “small town,” while only 16% think Carver is a “suburb.” Thirty-two percent see Carver as both a “small town” and a “suburb.”

Taxes and City Services:

The percentage of favorable ratings of city services ranges between 63% and 99%. The table below arrays each service with the percentage of respondents who rate it as either “excellent” or “good.”

City Service	Favorable Rating
Fire protection	99%
Police protection	98%
Park facilities	95%
Park maintenance	93%
Communications	85%
City street maintenance	85%
Utility billing	81%
Snowplowing of city streets	81%
Administration	80%
Building inspections	71%
City planning	71%
Stormwater run-off and drainage	63%

The mean favorable percentage for all city services is 83.2%, about two percent higher than the Metropolitan Area suburban norm. Clearly, stormwater runoff and drainage is the key city service which draws down the overall average; the City would be well-advised to review the issues residents have with this service.

A very high 92% think the quality of city services has been able to keep pace with growth in Carver; only 4% feel the opposite. Residents still post a large majority, 73%-14% in favor of an increase of city property taxes *if needed to maintain city services at their current level*. This majority is among the highest level found in Metropolitan Area suburban studies conducted during the past five years. Among opponents, twenty-seven percent believe services would not need to be cut at all to maintain them at current levels, that it can be achieved through the elimination of wasteful spending. However, 67% oppose an increase in city property taxes to *enhance current city services or offer additional city services*. Only 19% would support an increase in city property taxes for this purposes; they would prioritize “all city services equally” and “drinking water” for use of the additional funding.

The typical resident estimates approximately 25% of property taxes goes to city government. Forty-two percent believe the percentage is under twenty percent; while 21% think it is more than thirty percent. When asked about the city portion of their property taxes in Carver compared with nearby areas, 51% feel they are “high,” while 42% report they are “about average.” These ratings indicate a borderline “hostile” tax climate in the community. Even so, 83% think they receive an “excellent” or “good” value in the quality of the city services provided; only 13% rate the value lower.

By a 66% to 34% margin, residents rate city drinking water favorably, with only 12% rating it as “excellent.” This rating is about 15% lower than the Metro Area norm. Residents ranking drinking water as “only fair” or “poor” complain about “bad taste” and “rust color.”

Solid majorities endorse the City continuing to invest in long-term infrastructure projects and services. By an 88%-12% margin, residents support investing in maintaining and improving city streets. An 87%-12% majority favors improvements to the levee along the Minnesota River to meet FEMA certification. A 76%-20% majority is in favor of continued public transportation service with Southwest Transit.

Development Issues:

When asked about the types of development they would like to see in Carver, 11% each suggest “restaurants” and “retail and services.” However, 41% indicate there are no types of development they would like to see. In asking the reverse, types of development they would oppose in Carver, 9% report “low income housing” and 7% cite “any housing.” However, 58% state there are no types of development they would oppose. There are about 17% more pro-growth residents than anti-growth residents in the community. By a 70%-14% majority, residents support the City providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development.

When examining the number or quantity of various community characteristics, majorities of residents think Carver has “about the right amount” of 8 of 14 discussed. In the six cases where opinions are more skewed in the direction of thinking Carver has “too few” starter homes, affordable housing costing less than \$220,000, job producing businesses, service and retail establishments, entertainment establishments and restaurants. The 8 attributes posting higher levels of agreement about sufficient current numbers are: rental apartments, condominiums and townhomes, “move up” housing, executive high-end housing, one-level housing maintained by an association and parks and open spaces.

Parks and Recreation Issues:

Overall, 79% rate park and recreational facilities as “excellent” or “good,” while 19% rate them lower. The favorable rating is about 8% lower than Metro Area norm.

Fifty percent state members of their household participated in recreational programs run by the City of Chaska. A nearly unanimous 99% are satisfied with their experiences. In addition, 88% of the survey respondents think the current mix of recreational programming meets the needs of

their households. Among the 8% disagreeing with the statement, suggestions for improvements include: “youth sports” and “swimming.” Thirty-nine percent indicate they would be more likely to participate in recreational programs if they were offered in the City of Carver. However, increase in likelihood is indicated more often among current users, thus moving programs to Carver will not bring in as many new users.

Eighty-eight percent of the survey respondents think the current mix of park and recreational amenities meets the needs of their households. Among the 7% disagreeing with the statement, suggestions for improvements include: a “community center” “sports fields” and a “swimming pool.”

Public Transit Issues:

Sixty-eight percent leave Carver on a regular basis. Fifteen percent indicate they are “not employed or retired.” “Driving alone” is the normal commute for 82%; while 12% state they take the “bus.” A very high 90% rate their commute as “excellent” or “good.”

Thirty-three percent used public transportation during the past two years. Eighty-nine percent rate their experience positively; while twelve percent give negative ratings.

Non-public transportation users report two reasons for their decisions: “prefer to drive,” at 65% and “no need,” at 12%.

Seventy-nine percent are aware of the services provided by Southwest Transit. Twenty percent report they are not aware of these services.

City Government and Staff:

A comparative large 39% of Carver residents think they cannot have a say if they wanted to about the way things are run in the community. This level of non-empowerment is over the norm of 30%. Fifty-two percent report they know “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about the Mayor and City Council. The knowledge level of Carver residents is at the suburban norm of 43%.

Twenty-eight percent report “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Carver City staff. This contact level is almost 7% lower than the suburban norm. By an 75%-15% split, residents favorably rate the Staff’s job performance. The six-to-one ratio of favorable-to-unfavorable ratings is higher than the Metropolitan Area average.

During the past year, 36% visited or contacted City Hall either in person or on the telephone. Ninety-five percent of the respondents rate the courtesy of City Staff as either “excellent” or “good,” while four percent see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Ninety-four percent judge the waiting time for City staff to respond highly, while five percent disagree. Ninety-one percent rate the efficiency of the City Staff highly, with nine percent viewing it lower. And, 82% judge the ease of reaching a City staff member who could help you highly, while sixteen percent disagree.

These ratings are at the Metropolitan Area norm.

Communications Issues:

The principal and most preferred source of information about Carver City Government and its activities is the “city newsletter,” selected by 38% as their principal source of city information and 29% as their preferred source of information. The “City website” is a second communication channel principally used by 33% and preferred by 33%. “Social media” is relied upon by a very high 15% and preferred by 14%.

A solid 79% of residents regularly read the City newsletter. This readership is among the top quartile for Metropolitan Area suburbs. A very high 88% rate its format and content as “excellent” or “good;” thirteen percent are more critical.

Eighty-eight percent have access to the Internet. Among Internet-enabled residents, 74% accessed the City’s website. Overall, then, 65% of the households in the community visited the website. The typical resident reports visiting the City’s website “occasionally.” Among website visitors, 92% each evaluate the content and ease of navigating highly.

A very high fifty-five percent report using the City’s social media. Among social media users, 84% rate it favorably.

Summary and Conclusions:

Residents enjoy the “small town” aspects of the community: “quiet and peaceful,” “small town feel,” “sense of community,” and “safe.” But, they are also concerned about three major issues: too much growth, lack of retail and dining opportunities, and high taxes. The community is in the top quartile among rated suburbs in its overall quality of life. With the exception of stormwater run-off and drainage, residents are very satisfied with the operation of City Government, and regard city services as both solid and cost-efficient. A decisive majority favors the City providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development. In general, residents have high expectations; but the City appears to meet or exceed most residents’ needs. And, notably, residents exhibit one of the strongest levels of confidence in the direction of their community found within the suburbs.

One cautionary note: thirty-nine percent do not feel they can have a say about the way things are run in Carver, other than voting. This level of political alienation should be addressed in the near future.

The park and recreation system -- both facilities and programs -- is deemed both adequate in meeting household needs and are also well-regarded.

The tax climate in Carver is hostile. Fifty-one percent of the sample views their taxes as “high” in comparison with neighboring communities. Even so, 83% of the respondents rate the value of city services highly.

The key information sources about City Government and its activities revolve around the city newsletter and the City's website. The readership of "Carver Connections" is a very strong 79%.

Citizens are enthusiastic about their City. At a time when government at different levels polarizes people, Carver residents are overall extremely satisfied with their local government and its services. With a 23% "city booster" core, the City possesses a large reservoir of goodwill which has served it well over the challenging first half of 2020.

Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Carver. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between April 15th and May 1st, 2020. The average interview took eighteen minutes. All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a randomly generated sample of the residents of the City of Carver. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to their respective universe within +/-5.0 percent in 95 out of 100 cases.

Interviews were conducted by Morris Leatherman Company trained personnel from telephone banks in St. Paul, Minnesota. Approximately twenty percent of all interviews were independently validated for procedure and content by a Morris Leatherman Company supervisor. Completed interviews were edited and coded at the company's headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Statistical analysis and cross-tabulations were produced by the company's CfMC Mentor Analysis System and SPSS 26.0 FOR WINDOWS.