
CHAPTER 10. PARKS, RECREATION, AND CULTURE

SERVICE MISSION

Provide safe, creative, and attractive parks, recreational facilities, and programs, and open spaces that enrich the quality of life and serve the needs of the community.

There are nine goals listed for Parks, Recreation, and Culture:

1. Continue professional management of the parks while encouraging and making full use of volunteers.
2. Collaborate with the schools and other entities to provide opportunities for education, recreation, and support for youth during non-school hours.
3. Establish timely maintenance and repair of park facilities and existing infrastructure, including reforestation and maintenance of trees.
4. Preserve historically and architecturally significant parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces.
5. Collaborate and coordinate with public and private entities to provide the best and most efficient recreational programs.
6. Market the Parks and Recreation Program as an asset for economic development.
7. Work with surrounding municipalities

to ensure the costs and benefits of regional parks and cultural properties are shared by all metropolitan residents.

8. Develop a citywide trail system to connect recreational facilities, parks, schools, libraries, historical sites, cultural centers, and places of public interest.
9. Invest in quality of life efforts that provide residents a culturally rich community.



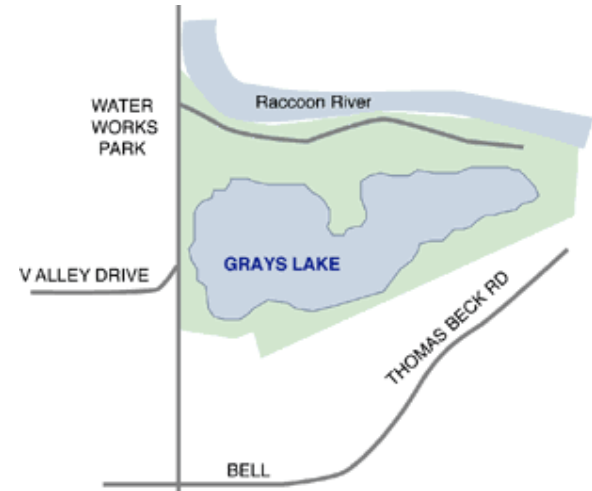
RESULTS

Parks, Recreation, and Culture covers a wide variety of activities and services, ranging from voluntary park maintenance to accessing art prints from one of Des Moines' Public Libraries. Because of this wide range, questions were developed to gather a sufficient amount of information relevant to the nine goals.

Respondents were asked if they or anyone in their households had visited or used parks or recreational facilities, their monthly usage, and their opinions about the adequacy of these facilities. Eighty-five percent of the responses indicated that they had used one or more of the facilities in the last year. Of these, neighborhood parks (82%), Gray's Lake (79%; see Figure 10-1), and biking, running, and walking trails (75%) were used by at least three-fourths of the respondents. Basketball/tennis courts (27%), golf facilities (37%), and ball fields (40%) were used by less than half of the respondents.

Overall, respondents who had visited or used Des Moines' parks or recreational facilities felt that they were adequate. As shown in Table 10-1, the less the facility is used, the greater the level of unsureness about the adequacy of the facility; for example, 39 percent of the respondents felt

Figure 10-1. Overview of Gray's Lake



that the ball fields were adequate, 13 percent did not feel they were adequate, and 47 percent were not sure, while only 40 percent of the respondents used them.

Table 10-1. Percent of Parks and Recreation Facilities Visited/Used in the Past Year and Ratings of Adequacy

	Visited/Used	Facility Rating		
		Adequate	Not Adequate	Not Sure
Neighborhood parks	82	72	12	15
Gray's Lake	79	87	3	9
Trails	75	72	12	15
Botanical Center	71	71	28	0
Picnic areas	69	68	12	20
Regional parks	62	62	9	29
Zoo	62	74	11	16
Playgrounds	61	64	11	24
Open spaces	57	52	12	36
Ball fields	40	39	13	47
Golf	37	55	3	42
Basketball/tennis	27	50	10	40

Most of the respondents used these facilities three times a month or less. One-fourth of the respondents used them more than four times a month (Table 10-2). It is important to note that the figures for facility use and the types of facilities used match the profile of the respondents fairly well. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that the prevalence of leisure-time physical activity declines with age and with increased income and education.¹

Table 10-2. Monthly Facility Use

	Percent
Less than once a month	39
1 - 3 times a month	35
4 - 10 times a month	15
Over 10 times a month	10

The profile of the respondents is that they are more representative of an older, less active population who may not necessarily actively and frequently visit or use the facilities identified in this survey. Therefore the results may not accurately reflect the use of the facilities by the “average” Des Moines citizen over 18 years of age. Further, comparing the level of the intensity with information about monthly usage strongly suggests that the most frequently used facilities are those of low or moderate intensity (i.e., activities that require only leisure walking, light hiking, and wading).

The survey results show that over one-third of the respondents were somewhat willing or willing to volunteer to help maintain and take care of each neighborhood park and other municipal grounds (Table 10-3). One-fourth of the respondents reported that they did not know if they were willing to volunteer. Several participants commenting on volunteerism stated that they felt too old and/or physically unable to volunteer.

Table 10-3. Percent Willing to Volunteer at Neighborhood Parks

	Percent
Willing to volunteer	5
Somewhat willing to volunteer	32
Unwilling to volunteer	39
Don't know	24



Questions about the Public Libraries addressed levels of satisfaction, usage, and methods of financing the public library system. The most recent Annual Report of the PLDM for 2000-2001 stated that 2000-2001 was a “banner year for circulation,” with over 1.6 million items checked out, a six percent increase from the previous year.²

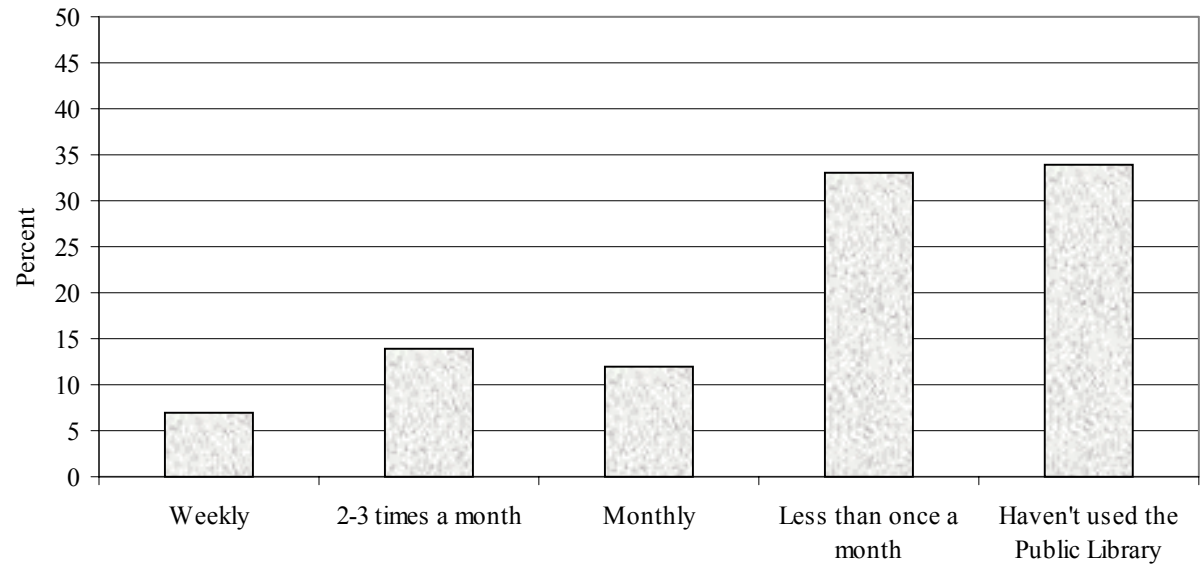
About one-third of the respondents reported that they had never used the public library (Figure 10-2). One-third had used a library less than once a month, and an additional third used it at least monthly.

Overall, participants were satisfied with the public library system: 56 percent were satisfied, and 20 percent were very satisfied (Table 10-4).

Table 10-4. Percent Satisfaction with Des Moines Public Libraries

Very satisfied	20
Satisfied	56
Dissatisfied	3
Very dissatisfied	1
Don't know	20

Figure 10-2. Frequency of Library Use



Respondents indicated that they most frequently used reference material, books for children, and books for adults. Figure 10-3 shows that 86 percent of the respondents checked out books for adults, 65 percent used reference materials, and over half (56%) checked out books for children at least once in the past year.

It is clear that not all materials and services offered at the public library are being used. Figure 10-4 shows that over 70 percent of the respondents had not used art prints, large print materials, games/toys/puzzles, interest access, children’s programs, and computers in the past year. Over half did not use interlibrary loan service or check

out music on CD or cassettes, audio books, magazines and newspapers, or video cassettes and DVDs.

The City, through its Capital Improvement Program (CIP), is currently working with the PLDM to finance the new Central Library in Gateway West (Figure 10-5), as well as helping to upgrade deteriorating older facilities and to increase and expand library services. The improvements and new construction is part of the PLDM’s 10-year project carrying a price tag of over 40 million dollars.

Figure 10-3. Frequency of Use of Selected Public Library Materials or Services

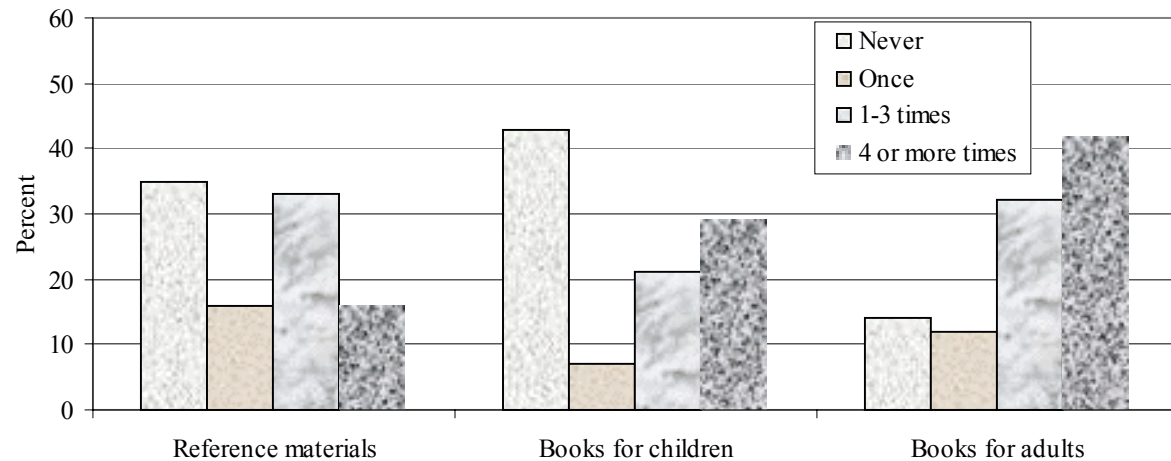


Figure 10-4. Library Materials and Services Not Used in the Past Year By More than 50 Percent of Respondents

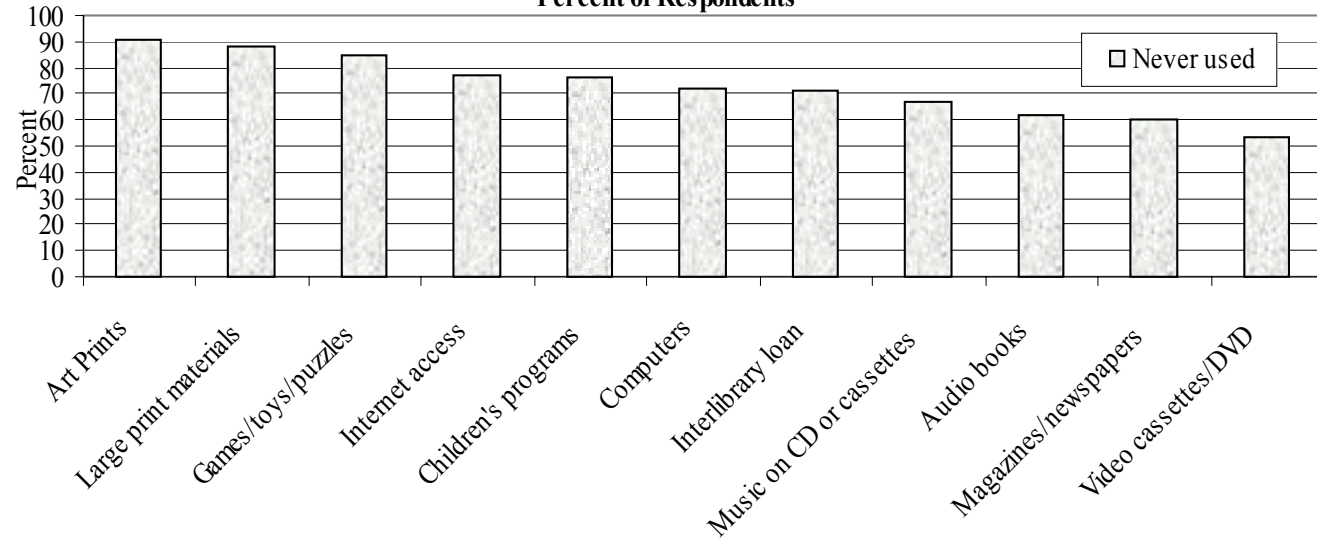


Figure 10-5. Architectural Model of the New Central Library in Gateway West



COMMENTS

Response to the plans on developing a new public library for Des Moines was split; 50 percent agreed it was a good idea, 19 percent did not think it was a good idea, and 31 percent did not know. Paying for an improved library system, which includes the construction of the new Central Library, were evenly divided between paying a tax (29%), a fee (33%), or neither (30%).

Des Moines' parks, recreation, and culture was the focus of 196 comments. The majority of the comments made by respondents noted their delight with Des Moines' bicycle and pedestrian trails. Along with their support of the trails were requests to complete connector trails, complete the trail system, and add more trails to the system. A number of positive comments were also received about the wonderful job the City has done with Gray's Lake; of note, all of the comments received about Gray's Lake were very positive. With regard to the parks, comments were directed to wanting the city to put more energy and resources into the maintenance and clean-up of existing parks. In some instances, specific parks were mentioned: MacRae, Ashby, and Greenwood. Mention also was made of the rose gardens and arboretums.

Comments about libraries were generally positive, with respondents noting their satisfaction with the staff as well as library facilities.

Other comments were made about a need for skateboard parks, more playgrounds for children, and recreational programs for children and adults. Several participants thought there should be greater emphasis placed on art and cultural events. A few remarked on the difficulty of using park facilities by the disabled, and others commented on the lack of cleanliness of park bathroom facilities. Others noted that more money should be set aside for park maintenance. Finally, only four comments were directed to volunteerism for park maintenance. Of those, only one person thought it was a good idea, two remarked that they were too old, and the fourth stated that the parks department should have enough money to do the maintenance themselves.

¹Schoenborn, C.A., Patricia M. Barnes (1998). *Leisure-time Physical Activity Among Adults: United States, 1997-1998*, Centers for Disease Control, Division of Health Iterative Statistics: Atlanta.

²Des Moines Public Library (2001). *Annual Report 2000-2001 of the Public Library of Des Moines*.