

THE MORRIS LEATHERMAN COMPANY

Report of Findings 2017 City of Robbinsdale

Residential Demographics:

Twenty-seven percent of Robbinsdale residents report moving to the community within the past five years; thirty-seven percent lived there for more than twenty years. The median residential longevity is 11.4 years. Fifty-seven percent anticipate living in the community for at least the next ten years; in fact, 39% report they will stay for “the rest of their lives.” Only 15% think they will leave the community during the next five years, a smaller than normal transience among first-ring and second-ring communities. Sixty percent of the sample report owning their current residence, while 34% rent.

Seniors can be found in 24% of the community’s residences; in particular, 17% of the households are composed solely of senior citizens. The typical household contains two non-senior adults. School-aged children and pre-schoolers are found in 28% of the households. The average age of an adult resident is 48.5 years old. Forty percent of the population lies in the 45-64 year age range. Women outnumber men by two percent in the sample.

The Ward of each respondent is also noted. Twenty-seven percent live in Ward Four, while 25% each resident in Wards One or Four. Twenty-four percent live in Ward Three.

General Quality of Life Issues:

Robbinsdale citizens are content with their community. Seventy-six percent things are generally headed in the “right direction,” and 14% see things as “off on the wrong track.” Eleven percent are unsure. Eighty-five percent positively rate their quality of life; twenty-two percent rate it “excellent.” Fifteen percent, though, are more critical. This level of satisfaction is above the average for communities in the Metropolitan Area suburbs. When asked what they like most about the City, residents point to its “friendly people,” at 13%, as well as “location” and “small town ambience,” each at 11%. “Closeness to their jobs” is posted by eight percent, while seven percent each cite “strong neighborhoods,” “closeness to family and friends,” and “good schools.” One challenging issue facing the community is also identified: “rising crime,” at 30%. Twelve percent are “boosters” – at the Metropolitan Area suburban average – seeing no serious issues currently facing the City. Eighty-five percent rate their quality of life in the community as either “excellent” or “good,” while 13% see it as “only fair.”

A high 87% rate the strength of community identity and the sense of neighborliness among Robbinsdale residents either “excellent” or “good;” only 13% see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Fifty-four percent report their closest connection is the their “neighborhood,” 29% are closest to

the City of Robbinsdale as a whole, and nine percent feel closest to their “school district.” A nearly unanimous 96% feel accepted, valued and welcomed in the city. Only three percent disagree, with a majority citing “crime” as their primary reason.

Eighty-eight percent rate the general appearance of the City of Robbinsdale as “excellent” or “good,” while 12% rate the appearance as “only fair” or “poor.”

Community Characteristics:

Respondents were asked to evaluate the adequacy or sufficiency of 15 community characteristics.

In all but two cases, a majority thought the city already had “about the right amount or right number. They only exceptions are “affordable rental units,” at 46% sufficiency, and “luxury rental units,” at 41% sufficiency. The table is arrayed from highest to lowest by the percent thinking there is “too few or little.”

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Too Few</i>	<i>Too Many</i>
Entertainment opportunities	44%	3%
Retail shopping opportunities	39%	4%
Affordable rental units	34%	16%
Starter homes for young families	32%	8%
Dining establishments	31%	6%
Luxury rental units	29%	18%
Senior housing	28%	4%
“Move up” housing	26%	8%
Condominiums	23%	17%
Service establishments	22%	6%
Affordable housing, defined by the Metropolitan Council as a single-family home costing less than \$177,500.00	22%	11%
Townhouses	21%	21%
Parks and open spaces	19%	5%
Higher cost housing	19%	24%
Trails and bikeways	18%	5%

The major development deficit in the community are “entertainment opportunities” and “retail shopping opportunities.” “Affordable rental units,” “starter homes for young families” and “dining opportunities” form a second tier, with between 30% and 35% thinking there are currently “too few” of these opportunities.

By a 72%-27% margin, residents feel Downtown Robbinsdale provides adequate shopping options. Inadequacy is based upon the lack of four types of stores in the area: “clothing store,” at 24%; “grocery store,” at 21%; “Target/Walmart store,” at 15%; and, “department stores,” at 12%.

Robbinsdale Blue Line Station:

Fifty-two percent report they or household members are at least “somewhat likely” to use the Blue Line when it is operational. Using standard market projection techniques, 19% of city households are expected to use the Blue Line. Potential light rail transit users are split between four modes of transportation to the light rail station: “walking,” at 38%; “park and ride lot,” at 33%; “bicycle,” at 13%; and, “bus,” at eight percent.

When asked about services or amenities they would like to see offered at the station in Robbinsdale, 34% are either “unsure” or can think of “nothing.” Eight percent suggest either “fast food” or “vending machines.” Seven percent would prefer “restrooms” or a “coffee shop.” Six percent stress “security.”

City Taxes and Services:

When asked to estimate the percent of property taxes they pay going to the City of Robbinsdale, the median estimate is 24.0%. Thirty-one percent estimate the city’s share at 20% or less, and 22% place it higher than 30%. The property tax climate in the community is “borderline benign:” forty-four percent see it as “about average” and 43% rate it as comparatively “high.” Four percent actually see their city property taxes as comparatively “low.”

By a narrow 50%-41% margin, residents oppose an increase in their city property taxes if needed to maintain city services at their current level. But, a 63%-30% majority oppose an increase in their city property taxes if used to improve and enhance city services. Supporters of the latter increase favor improving or enhancing three services: “police services,” at 28%; “recreation programs,” at 16%; and, “road maintenance,” at 12%.

When considering the property taxes they pay and the quality of city services they receive, 78% rate the value as either “excellent” or “good,” while 16% rate the value negatively.

General city service ratings prove to be within the top quartile of Metropolitan Area suburban communities. The table below lists each of 11 city services, followed by its positive rating – “excellent” or “good” – and its negative rating – “only fair” or “poor.”

<i>City Service</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Dependability and quality of the city sanitary sewer service	88%	11%
Park maintenance	88%	11%
Fire protection	87%	3%
City-sponsored recreation programs	86%	9%
Recycling and brush pick-up	85%	11%
Dependability and quality of the city water supply	84%	16%

<i>City Service</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Snow plowing	84%	16%
Street lighting	84%	16%
Police protection	83%	17%
Storm drainage and flood control	80%	17%
City street repair and maintenance	68%	33%

Five city services register solid positive ratings, at or above 85%; the lowest rated service – city street repair and maintenance, at 68%, is still five percent higher than the statewide norm. The only outlier positive rating is “police protection,” at 83%, twelve percent lower than the suburban norm. The average positive rating of the 11 city services is a moderate 83.4%.

Curbside “Organics” Collection:

By a 50%-27% margin, with 23% unsure, residents support a curbside collection program of compostable waste for an additional fee; while 18% “strongly support” this service, 12% strongly oppose” it. Supporters base their position on three main consideration: “eco-friendly,” at 37%; “less in landfills,” at 10%; and, “less in garbage cans,” at six percent. Opposition stems from: “bad odor,” at seven percent; “opposition to more fees,” also at seven percent; “too much effort,” at five percent; and, “not needed,” at four percent.

Municipal Liquor Store:

Prior to this survey, 74% were aware the City operated the liquor store. Fifty-five percent, though, are aware the revenue from this store is used to support the City’s park and recreation programs. A massive 95% favor the City continuing to operate its municipal liquor store.

Public Safety:

Seventeen percent, at the average for inner-ring suburban communities, feel there are areas in Robbinsdale where they do not feel safe. Of this group, 12% point to “Broadway Avenue” or the “Minneapolis city border,” and 10% each point to “42nd Avenue” or report “everywhere at night.”

Recreational Opportunities:

Ninety-four percent rate the park and recreational facilities in Robbinsdale as either “excellent” or “good,” while only four percent rate them lower. Negative ratings stem from a perceived need for an “indoor pool” or “community center” in the City of Robbinsdale.

Seventy-seven percent of city households report using larger community parks; among users, 97% award them high ratings. Seventy-four percent say their household members use smaller neighborhood parks; among smaller park users, 97% rate them as “excellent” or “good.” Sixty-eight percent say household members used city trails during the past year; ninety-six percent of trail users rate them favorably. Forty-three percent of sampled households report using community ballfields during the past year; ninety-five percent of users rate them highly.

An above average 65% had household members attend a community event during the past few years. Ninety-eight percent of the attendees felt welcome, and 95% think these events provide enough opportunities for residents to connect with each other. If the City were to offer an Annual City Park Night Out in the autumn, 74% report their household members would be “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to attend; using standard market projection techniques, a solid 27% of the community’s households would be expected to participate.

Respondents were informed about on-going discussions in the community over the need for a community center providing gathering space for recreation, programs and meetings. By a very high 85%-11% majority, residents support **in concept** the construction of a Robbinsdale Community Center; a comparatively large 29% “strongly support” its construction. Seventy-six percent report their household members would be either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to use the facility; again, using standard market projection techniques, users of the new facility could be found in 26% of the city’s households.

More detail about the Community Center was provided: Since the City Hall is 47 years old and has been remodeled over the years, the City could consider including a new City Hall in a Community Center development. The construction of the Community Center and City Hall would require a property tax increase. If this development were considered a reasonable approach, the typical resident would support a \$5.91 per month, or \$70.92 per year property tax hike. But, 34% would support no increase for this purpose, while 20% would support a \$9.00 monthly property tax increase.

City Government and Staff:

Only 67% of the respondents feel they could have a say about the way the City of Robbinsdale runs things; twenty-six percent, at the suburban norm, feel unempowered, while seven percent are unsure. Fifty percent feel they know “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about the work of the Mayor and City Council. A high 84% approve of the job of the Mayor and City Council, while only seven percent disapprove. The almost 12-to-1 ratio of approval-to-disapproval is within the top decile of the Metropolitan Area.

Forty-five percent report having “quite a lot” or “some” contact with the Robbinsdale City Staff. Eighty-five percent rate staff job performance as either “excellent” or “good,” while nine percent see it as “only fair” or “poor.” The 9-to-1 favorable-to-unfavorable rating is well within the top

quartile of Metropolitan Area communities.

Thirty-seven percent contacted Robbinsdale City Hall during the past year. Thinking about their last contact with the City, 85% favorably rate the waiting time for the receptionist to help, 85% favorably rate the ease of obtaining the service needed, and 90% favorably rate the courtesy of city staff. These customer service ratings are each higher than the 80% favorable rating norm denoting “high quality” customer service in the public sector.

Communications:

Thirty percent report their primary source of information about Robbinsdale City Government and its activities is the local newspaper. Twenty-six percent rely upon the City’s website, while 14% opt for the City newsletter. These three sources are relied upon by a total of 70% of the city’s households. The preferred way to receive information about City Government and its activities is virtually identical to these sources, with the addition of the e-newsletter. Combining the use of the “Sun Post,” “City Newsletter,” “e-newsletter,” “social media,” and “City website,” eight-three percent of the community can be reached through their preferred source of information.

Next, residents were asked about their reliance on ten possible sources of information about Robbinsdale news, activities, events or City policies. The table below shows each information source followed by its “impact” – percent of respondents who label it a “major” source of information – and its “reach” – the percent of respondents who consider it to be at least a “minor” source of information. The sources are listed in descending order of their “impact:”

<i>Source of Information</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Reach</i>
The “Sun Post” newspaper	41%	70%
The City’s website	37%	60%
Co-workers/Neighbors	36%	87%
The Spring and Fall City-wide Newsletter	26%	68%
The City’s Facebook Page or Twitter	18%	36%
Government Access Cable Television Channels 12 and 16	17%	49%
Inserts in the City utility bills	15%	63%
City’s e-mailed newsletters	14%	39%
The “Star Tribune”	7%	23%
Webstreaming of City meetings	4%	21%

The four information sources shaded in blue have the greatest impact and reach across the community. The quartet are composed of two city-sponsored electronic or mailed channels, the local newspaper, and the community “grapevine.” One source, however, registers low reach and impact levels and also is lower than the suburban norm, webstreaming of City meetings.

Concluding Thoughts:

Robbinsdale citizens are pleased with their community services, with a mean positive rating of 83.4%, their Mayor and City Council, and City Staff. Just as important, the mean negative rating of city services was a low 14.5%. While the negative rating of storm drainage and flood control is higher than the suburban norm, the rating of city street repair and maintenance is not. The City may wish to examine the concerns about storm drainage and flood control more fully in the future.

In considering challenges facing Robbinsdale today, rising crime is singled out by a large 30% of the sample. Perceptions about crime are a key reason for lower ratings on a whole series of issues: job performance evaluations of City government, confidence about the direction of the city, police protection ratings, and safety across the city. Respondents concerned about rising crime are even less likely to participate in community events. By alleviating concerns about crime and demonstrating actions and policies aimed at its reduction, a general increase in city ratings can be anticipated.

A solid majority of City residents feel empowered in their ability to have a say about the way the City of Robbinsdale runs things, other than by voting; even so, with 26% feeling unempowered, the City may wish to consider an informative article in its newsletter about ways the public can impact the policy process. The approval rating-to-disapproval rating of the Mayor and City Council is a solid 12-to-1, with disapproval a low seven percent. Similarly, the City Staff job approval rating-to-disapproval rating is also a solid 9-to-1, with disapproval at a low nine percent. Customer service ratings of contacts with Robbinsdale City Hall are in the top tier of the Metropolitan Area.

Robbinsdale residents engender a duality found in only a couple of other inner-ring suburban communities. They prize both the amenities of closeness to a large city and the attributes and values of small town life. Residents appreciate the nearby jobs, shopping areas, affordability, and schools while valuing friendliness of neighbors, natural areas, sense of community and cohesiveness. But, this duality is challenged by cross-border problems: gangs, drugs, traffic, and growing residential diversity. Therefore, policy-makers will need to maintain this delicate balance for the foreseeable future.

The property tax climate is borderline hostile, but not as serious as in neighboring communities. Even so, almost 90% see “excellent” or “good” value in the taxes they pay for their city services. And, as a result, they might be likely to support a prudent tax increase to maintain those services, particularly police protection.

Support for a curbside collection program for compostable waste for an additional fee is tepid. Residents strongly support the City continuing to operate its municipal liquor store. Solid

support is also found for the construction of a Community Center in the city; however, the tax increase requested for its construction will determine the success of any referendum.

Attracting more entertainment, retail shopping and dining establishments are key development themes for many residents. These directions lead the list of currently missing opportunities that could improve the quality of life for residents. Senior housing and starter homes for young families are high on the list of housing development preferences.

The Park and Recreation facilities and programs in the city are both well-regarded and well-utilized. Smaller neighborhood parks and large community parks are particularly popular and users rate them highly. As mentioned earlier, a Community Center and City Hall development enjoys good support and could be passed at a high turnout election if the average property tax increase were approximately \$6.00 per month.

The City should reassess its communications system with residents. The semi-annual City Newsletter's distribution should be re-evaluated, since nearly one-third of residents do not think it is effective. Similarly, both the e-mailed newsletters and the City website should be reconsidered, since almost 40% see its effectiveness as limited. And, the webstreaming of City meetings should be viewed in terms of its very restricted cost-effectiveness.

In 2017, because of sound policies and high quality-cost effective city services, most residents of Robbinsdale are enthusiastic about their community. They feel accepted and valued, informed, empowered, and confident. But, certain mid-course corrections or changes, particularly in two areas – crime prevention and communications – may be necessary to continue, and even strengthen, the citizen-government linkage. This will become even more critical in the future as the City continues to confront issues of a more Metropolitan nature. Building upon the current high level of trust among the citizenry will allow decision-makers to make tough judgment calls based upon a solid foundation of popular consent.