

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2012 City of Plymouth

City Demographics:

The typical adult resident lived in the City of Plymouth for 10.4 years. Twenty-seven percent lived there for five years or less, while 25% lived there for over 20 years.

Twenty percent of the households in the city contain senior citizens. Single seniors are about 10% more numerous than senior couples. In fact, 13% of the households are composed exclusively of seniors. Thirty-five percent of the households in Plymouth contain school-aged children or pre-schoolers. Women outnumber men by two percent in the sample. Seventy-two percent own their current residents, while 28% are renters. Eighteen percent live in apartments, and another 18% reside in townhouses or condominiums. Sixty-three percent live in a detached single family home. Thirty percent reside in Ward One, while 23% each live in Ward Two or Ward Three. Twenty-five percent reside in Ward Four.

The median adult age of Plymouth residents is 47.3 years old. Nineteen percent of the sample is under 35 years old; fourteen percent are 65 years old or older. A 63% majority are college graduates. Eighteen percent have high school or less education, while 28% report post-secondary experience, short of college graduation. Thirty-one percent say their household is “fiscally stressed” – either their “monthly expenses are exceeding their income” or “their monthly income meets their expenses, but leaves little or nothing for savings.” Women outnumber men by two percent in this sample.

Quality of Life Issues:

Three aspects of the City of Plymouth are mentioned most frequently as liked most by residents: “convenient location,” at 28%; “good housing and strong neighborhoods,” at 19%; and, “good schools,” at 12%. Nine percent each also mention “safe” and “friendly people.” There is no one single dominant aspect of the community, though, cited by at least 30% of the respondents; but, “convenient location” approaches this threshold.

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The two most serious issues facing the community are “growth,” cited by 18%, and “high taxes,” at 14%. Seven percent point to “traffic congestion.” However, a very solid 22%, nearly quadruple the Metropolitan Area norm, report there are no serious issues currently facing the community.

Ninety-seven percent rate the quality of life in Plymouth as either “excellent” or “good;” in fact, a solid 75% see it as “excellent.” Only one percent is more critical. Suggested actions to improve the quality of life include: “more police patrolling,” at 15%; “lower taxes,” at 11%; and, “limit growth,” or “improve city services,” each at eight percent. Twenty-three percent think the quality of life improved during the past five year, 66% feel it “remained about the same,” and seven percent think the quality of life “declined.”

City Services:

The average favorable grade given by residents familiar with a specific city service is 89.6%. The positive ratings range from a high of 98% to a low of 70%. In comparison with other suburban communities, these ratings place the City of Plymouth within the top decile.

City Service	Positive Rating
Fire protection	98%
City-sponsored community events	98%
Park maintenance	97%
Condition of trails	96%
Police protection	95%
Recreation programs	94%
Storm water drainage	93%
Recycling service	93%
Snow removal on city trails	90%
Building inspection	88%
Street lighting	81%

City Service	Positive Rating
Snowplowing of city streets	81%
Nuisance and code enforcement	80%
Pavement repair and patching on city streets	70%

One outlier exists in that only 70% rate the condition of city streets as either “excellent” or “good,” while 30% rate it lower. The 30% negative rating is about 15% lower than the suburban norm.

Next, residents were asked to prioritize each city service – from “essential” to “not very important.” The table below indicates the percentage of respondents calling a service “essential.” This ranges between a high of 83% to a low of 20%.

City Service	Essential Rating
Fire protection	83%
Police protection	81%
Pavement repair and patching on city streets	65%
Snowplowing of city streets	63%
Recycling service	50%
Street lighting	43%
Storm water drainage	42%
Building inspection	33%
City-sponsored community events	31%
Nuisance and code enforcement	29%
Recreation programs	29%
Park maintenance	28%
Condition of trails	21%
Snow removal on city trails	20%

Significant majorities consider “core” city services to be “essential:” fire protection, at 83%; police protection, at 81%; pavement repair and patching on city streets, at 65%; and, snowplowing of city streets, at 63%. City trails, parks and recreation programs, not unexpectedly, rate lower.

Finally, residents were asked for their perspective on each service if tough choice needed to be made in these economic times. In each case, a significant majority of at least three-quarters of the respondents wanted to “keep funding at current levels.” And, the maximum level of residents wanting to eliminate any service is one percent. The table below lists the percentage of residents who would increase a particular service’s funding level and the percentage who would cut funding of that service.

<i>City Service</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>Cut</i>
Pavement repair and patching on city streets	26%	0%
Snowplowing of city streets	16%	0%
Police protection	14%	0%
Fire protection	10%	0%
Street lighting	10%	3%
Nuisance and code enforcement	6%	7%
Recycling service	3%	3%
Storm water drainage	3%	8%
Snow removal on city trails	3%	10%
Condition of trails	2%	6%
Recreation programs	2%	10%
City-sponsored community events	2%	6%
Park maintenance	1%	6%
Building inspection	1%	10%

Five city services show unusually high sentiment for funding increases in a tough economy: pavement repair and patching on city streets, at 26%; snowplowing of city streets, at 16%; police

protection, at 14%; and, fire protection and street lighting, both at 10%. Three city services also show moderate support for funding cuts: snow removal on city trails, recreation programs, and building inspection, each at 10%.

Only five percent of the respondents noticed any differences in city services offered in the community. This very small level of concern is particularly impressive in view of the city's tax levy remaining the same and eliminating 28 city staff positions during the past three years. Among the small sub-sample noticing differences, 33% point to "slower road work" and 22% cite "fewer recreation programs."

A seventy-five percent majority endorse the City's efforts to transitioning more and more city services to on-line availability. Only eight percent are critical, and 16%, neutral about the changes. Critics cite three major concerns: "not everyone likes to use a computer," at 36%; "not everyone has a computer," at 36%; and, "loss of human interaction," at 19%.

City Taxes:

A solid 80% rate the value of city services for the property tax they pay as either "excellent" or "good." Only 11% see the value as either "only fair" or "poor." The over 7-to-1 ratio of favorable-to-unfavorable ratings is at the top of Metropolitan Area suburbs.

Forty-two percent see their total property taxes as comparatively "about average," while 40% think they are either "very high" or "somewhat high." Only three percent think they are "very low" or "somewhat low." An unusually large 15% have no opinion.

City Government:

A comparative high 72% think they can have a say about the way the City of Plymouth runs things; in tandem, a very low 24% think they could not have a say. In comparison with the suburban norm of 34%, alienation from Plymouth City Government is not a serious issue in Plymouth.

A high 64% feel they know either "a great deal" or "a fair amount" about the work of the Mayor and City Council. Eighty-two percent either "strongly approve" or "approve" of the job performance of the Mayor and City Council; only nine percent are more critical. Three reasons account for these high ratings: "overall good job," at 42%; "no problems in the community," at 22%; and, "caring and try hard," at 13%.

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Fifty-eight percent of the residents report first-hand contact with the Plymouth City Staff. Residents award the job performance of the City Staff a comparatively very high 84% approval rating; a low nine percent are more critical in their evaluations.

Forty-eight percent report contacting the City of Plymouth during the past year. Fifty-six percent of the contacts are by telephone, 27% in-person, nine percent, on the City website, and eight percent via e-mail.

Public Safety:

Eighty-seven percent feel “safe” walking alone in their neighborhood at night. Twelve percent disagree and report feeling unsafe there. This feeling of safeness, though, is among the highest in the Metropolitan Area suburbs.

Forty-eight percent see youth crime and vandalism as one of the two most serious safety concerns in the community. Thirty-eight percent regard business crimes, such as shoplifting and check fraud, similarly. Thirty-three percent feel the same way about traffic speeding, and 27% think drugs is a key concern in the city. No one public safety concern is dominant among residents.

Environmental Issues:

The greatest environmental concern in Plymouth is “water quality of lakes, streams and wetlands,” chosen by 36%. Fifteen percent picked “solid waste and recycling.” Nine percent think “wildlife management,” seven percent opt for “aquatic invasive species,” six percent, “invasive plants, like buckthorn,” and five percent pick “noise pollution.” Twelve percent think “none of these issues” is an environmental concern.

Seventy-eight percent are “satisfied” with the change to single sort recycling with every other week collection. In fact, 37% are “very satisfied.” Eleven percent report they are “dissatisfied.”

Commuting Dynamics:

Eighty-seven percent are aware of the city-operated Metrolink bus service.

Park and Recreation System:

Residents rate the park and recreational facilities moderately high. Seventy-eight percent award them a positive rating, while only eight percent are more critical. Positive responses are based upon “well-maintained and clean,” at 52%, “variety of activities,” at 11%, and “nice parks,” at seven percent. Negative responses center on “need to update playground equipment,” at five percent, and “some facilities need to be maintained better,” also at five percent.

Use of the various components of the Plymouth Park System varies. Seventy-three percent use the city’s trails at least “occasionally,” and seventy percent do so at “neighborhood and community parks.” Forty percent either “frequently” or “occasionally” use the Plymouth Creek Center and Fieldhouse. Thirty-three percent use the large playfields at least “occasionally,” while 28% similarly use the Plymouth Ice Center.

Ninety-seven percent of residents having opinions give positive ratings to both neighborhood and community parks and city trails. Ninety-one percent also post positive ratings of the Plymouth Ice Center and the Plymouth Creek Center and Fieldhouse. And, 87% of residents with opinions give positive grades to the large playfields.

Thirty-four percent report members of their households participated in city-sponsored recreational programs. All participants rate the programs favorably. A very high 96% think the current mix of recreational or sports facilities in Plymouth meets the needs of household members.

There is no majority consensus about potential park and recreation project priorities. Forty-four percent would make the improvement and updating of neighborhood parks the highest priority or second priority. Between 27% and 29% would similarly prioritize three projects: replacing and updating existing trails, acquiring open spaces, and adding or upgrading existing park buildings. Twenty-three percent give highest priority or second priority to the construction of additional trails. At the bottom of the list, 16% prioritize the construction of additional athletic fields.

Communications Issues:

The city newsletter is the major source of information about city government and its activities for most residents, at 48%. The local newspaper ranks next, at 23% as primary source. The source of information ranking third is the “City website,” mentioned by 19%. Print media remains dominant in this community.

The city newsletter is also the information source with the greatest reach across the community. Ninety-one percent receive and read the “Plymouth News.” Among those receiving the newsletter, 86% rate the newsletter favorably and three percent rate it negatively. In focusing on supplements in many issues, 96% read the “Environmental Extra.” – ninety-one percent rate that supplementary highly. Ninety-four percent read the “Financial Extra” – eighty-five percent rate it highly. And, 96% read the “Public Safety Extra” – ninety percent rate it as either “excellent” or “good.”

Ninety percent of the households report they have access to the Internet at home or at work. In fact, 70% of the households in the community have accessed the city website. Among city website visitors, 92% favorably evaluate the content of the City’s website and 88% favorably rate the ease of navigating the site and finding the information they sought. Sixty-two percent are aware the City streams city meetings on the website; twenty-three percent report watching a city meeting on the website.

There is moderate interest in using social media sources to obtain information about the City of Plymouth. Thirty-seven percent of the residents are likely to communicate with the City through Facebook. Thirty-two percent are likely to do so through YouTube. Sixteen percent are likely to use Twitter for this purpose. Fourteen percent would access blogs for City information.

The City of Plymouth receives a sterling rating for its overall performance in communicating key issues to residents. Eighty-six percent rate city efforts as either “excellent” or “good,” while 11% rate them as “only fair” or “poor.” The favorable communications rating easily places the community within the top three suburbs.

Conclusions:

1. Overall, residents remain positive about their quality of life in 2012, with “excellent” ratings reaching a very high level of 75%. This rating places Plymouth within the top three Metropolitan Area suburbs.
2. “Growth” and “high taxes” are the two most serious issues facing the community today. But, the levels of concern about each of these issues is lower than suburban norms. More impressive, however, is the 22% who see “no serious issues” facing the community. This percentage of “boosters” is one of the highest in the Metropolitan Area and is also almost four times higher than the suburban norm.

3. There is no one aspect of the city a majority of residents like most about living in Plymouth. One theme is “location” – closeness to family, jobs, churches, and shopping. A second theme is “community” – good schools and strong neighborhoods.

4. The property tax climate in Plymouth is comparatively benign. A moderate 40% view their taxes as “high” while 42% see them as “about average.” But, 80% think the value they receive in the quality of city services is at least “good” when compared to the property taxes they pay.

5. On average, a solid 90% rate the quality of each city services as either “excellent” or “good.” Core city services, with the exception of street maintenance, receive positive ratings above 90% from residents able to rate the service. In the case of pavement repair and patching on city streets, positive ratings outnumber negative ratings by a lower margin: 70% to 31%. In comparison with other suburban communities, the ratings are higher than the norm of 55% negative to 45% positive.

6. Residents are generally proud of the park and recreation system. They feel that both facilities and programs adequately meet the needs of their households. Components of the Plymouth Park System receive outstanding positive ratings. All participants in city-sponsored recreational programs rate them highly. If further park and recreation projects are funded, 44% would prioritize the improvement and updating neighborhood parks.

7. Communications efforts prove to be extremely effective in keeping a well-informed community. “Plymouth News” is the key source of information about city government and its activities. In addition, local newspapers and the City website effectively supplement the newsletter. In addition, the City may wish to augment its presence on Facebook and YouTube to increase the residential audience, particularly with younger residents.

As a maturing community, Plymouth residents remain very pleased with their community — city services and City Government. Community cohesiveness remains a key value. And, the percentage of residents judging their quality of life to be “excellent” is significantly high. But, two areas of moderate concern for future action are youth crimes and vandalism, as well as surface water quality. Also, updating and improving neighborhood parks should be systematized. One key result is the development of a sizeable “booster corp” – at 22%, about four times the suburban norm. This group forms a reservoir of goodwill that will serve the City well as it approaches future challenges and decisions.

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Methodology:

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Plymouth. Survey responses were gathered by professional interviewers across the community between August 28th and September 20th, 2012. The average interview took twenty-eight minutes. 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 trained personnel from telephone banks in St. Paul, Minnesota.