

Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

The Consulting Team scheduled in-person stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings in March 2020. Due to COVID-19 related restrictions, the in-person visit was canceled and replaced with a virtual engagement strategy conducted in April and May 2020. The Consultant Team utilized WebEx, Zoom, a Crowdsourcing website, and phone conversations to solicit stakeholder feedback. Invited stakeholders included City staff, elected officials, Chamber of Commerce, Board of Education, Public Works, and special interest groups such as Little League, football and cheerleading, youth lacrosse, disc golf, mountain biking, soccer, collegiate athletics, and local sports businesses.

Based on feedback from these stakeholder interviews and focus groups, the following key themes regarding the Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth, and Community Services Department (“Department”) emerged. **It should be noted, however, this summary reflects responses provided by participants and comments do not necessarily constitute consultant recommendations.** The following key themes are not provided in any prioritized order.

Synthesis and Key Themes

There is a lot to like about the park system. Stakeholders indicate the park system offers a quality of life that helps attract new residents. Once here, the system offers a program portfolio filled with diverse programmatic opportunities. In fact, many stakeholders are surprised to know how many different programs and services the Department offers. Many stakeholders expressed the Department has an almost “renewed” focus on parks and programming in the recent years.

Staff leadership is an asset. Many respondents felt as though the Department is very attentive to community needs and exhibit a willingness to try new programming. Emphasizing this point is the Department’s ability to create touch points with the community and have a leadership that is approachable.

A unified direction is needed. Stakeholders expressed the need for the Department’s true identity to be established. Being the Department’s first Master Plan endeavor, stakeholders understand that this will be an outcome of the process. Additionally, since the Department is going through a merger, stakeholders stress the criticality of identifying a holistic vision for the future in light of merged services.

Park design and layout needs attention. ADA accessibility, walkability, and controlled access are all areas stakeholders brought forward. Bristol has great park sites but accessing them can be a challenge due to poor walkability and ADA issues. Controlled access refers to limiting the access point into a park space. Stakeholders mentioned there are areas in which park users can simply walk through other use areas which may disrupt the existing recreation use.

Indoor recreation space is needed. Given the fact that Bristol is a four-season City, stakeholders expressed a desire to see more indoor recreation space available for programming and rental purposes. Many sport groups indicated a need to secure indoor space for hosting clinics, workshops, and winter practices. Additionally, stakeholders desired to see more general indoor recreation programming offered by the Department.

There seems to be competition among recreation providers. Stakeholders identified the Boys and Girls Club as being a rather large competitor to the Department. Therefore, stakeholders expressed a desire to see the Department focus on core programs that are not duplicative in nature and are instead complimentary. Stakeholders desire to see an overall complimentary system within Bristol.

Page Park is a great asset that is need of a formal planning process. As part of the Master Plan process, Page Park is subject to a site design analysis. Knowing this, stakeholders provided input for what works

well and what areas need improvement. Stakeholders agree that the park is popular and boosts nice views and facilities; however, parking, walkability, traffic congestion, amenity layout, and ADA challenges are expressed as the top areas for park improvement. Stakeholders acknowledge that the Department can continue activating the park through programming and amenities, but increased park use needs to be supported by adequate parking and mobility throughout the entire park site.

Marketing practices currently used are good. Stakeholders acknowledge there is good connection to both the Department and the Mayor. The transparency provided by City leadership has helped facilitate communication between the City and residents. Areas mentioned for improvement include ensuring marketing materials are available in multiple languages and allowing individual facilities/divisions to have separate social media pages.

Special interest groups have a good working relationship with the Department. Many stakeholders expressed a positive viewpoint toward their interactions with the Department. They believe the Department has done a nice job opening communication channels with organizations. In fact, stakeholders admitted to understanding Departmental decisions even if they do not necessarily agree with the outcome. The notion of transparency and clear communication is evident.

Partnerships will be important for adding more niche opportunities. There are additional groups/leagues, boards, and associations the City can partner with to bring enhanced programming to the community. Organizations such as the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA), New England Mountain Bike Association, and National Disc Golf Board are just three entities that could help provide support for growing recreation opportunities.

Sustainable growth will be key. Stakeholders desire to see a unified approach to developing the Bristol park and recreation system. Sustainability means several things:

- Ensuring low cost programming is available while also being mindful of revenue generation
- Providing adequate park and facility maintenance
- Expanding facility access and playability through multi-use designs
- Maximizing underutilized places and spaces
- Creating a resilient park system and Department structure as a whole

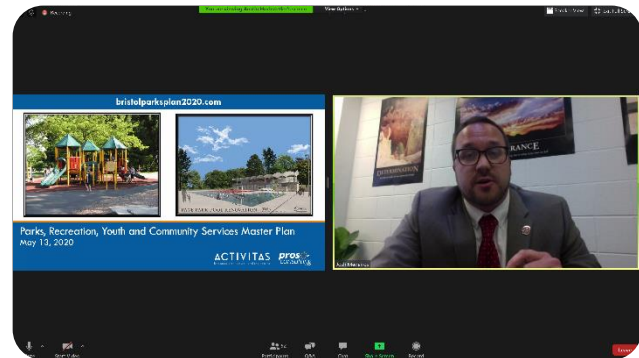
Continued investment in people along with the system's infrastructure. Understandably, stakeholders do not want to see the great staff in place today be gone tomorrow. Therefore, a focus on staff development through cross-training, succession planning, and recruitment processes is vital to the Department's ongoing success. Additionally, an emphasis should be made to embrace and articulate the entire portfolio of programs and services available to residents as a result of the Department's recent merger.

Field space allocation. Since there are many sports groups that utilize the Department's athletic fields, a deeper analysis is warranted to ensure there is equitable distribution and access. Stakeholders believe this analysis should consider natural turf versus synthetic turf discussions along with aligning maintenance standards and playability. Additionally, it was mentioned to consider developing a softball facility equivalent to the baseball facilities within the park system.

Emphasize community services throughout the entire Department. There is an opportunity for the Department to connect the dots in relation to addressing homelessness, reducing waste and litter, alleviating transportation needs, and instilling a connection to the nature and environment by promoting environmental stewardship. As the Department moves toward a unified vision, stakeholders agree that it will be imperative to leverage all aspects of the Department.

Public Forum

A community meeting was held the evening of Wednesday, May 13th via Zoom. This meeting format allowed for a larger turnout due to social distancing guidelines. The meeting was designed to encourage participant feedback by asking and answering questions in real time. Additionally, the Consultant Team presented an overview of the Master Plan process and preliminary information collected to date. There were approximately 75 people that attended the online meeting and provided input. The following sections detail the information gleaned from the public forum. Three modes of data collection were utilized:



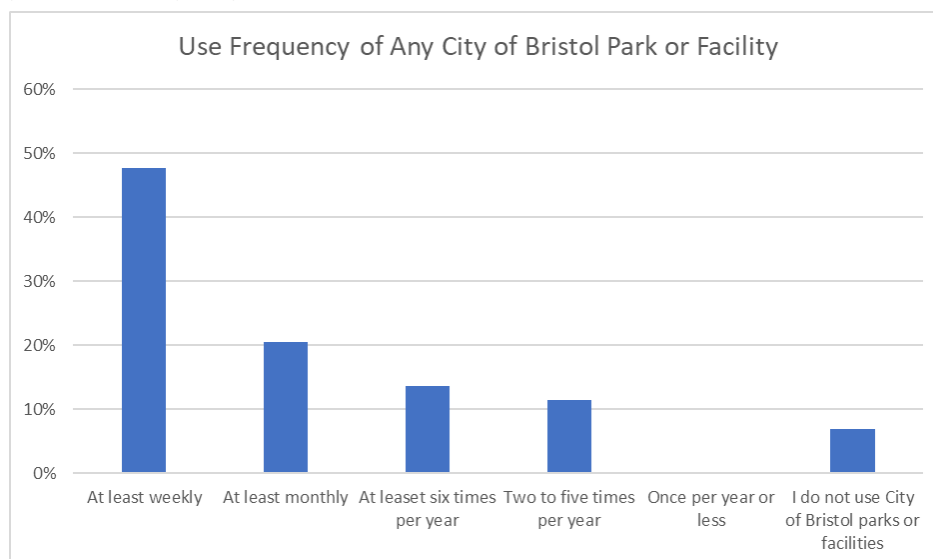
1. Interactive polling exercise during the presentation component
2. General inquiries received via the Q&A chat pod
3. Additional comments received via the Crowdsourcing website or direct email

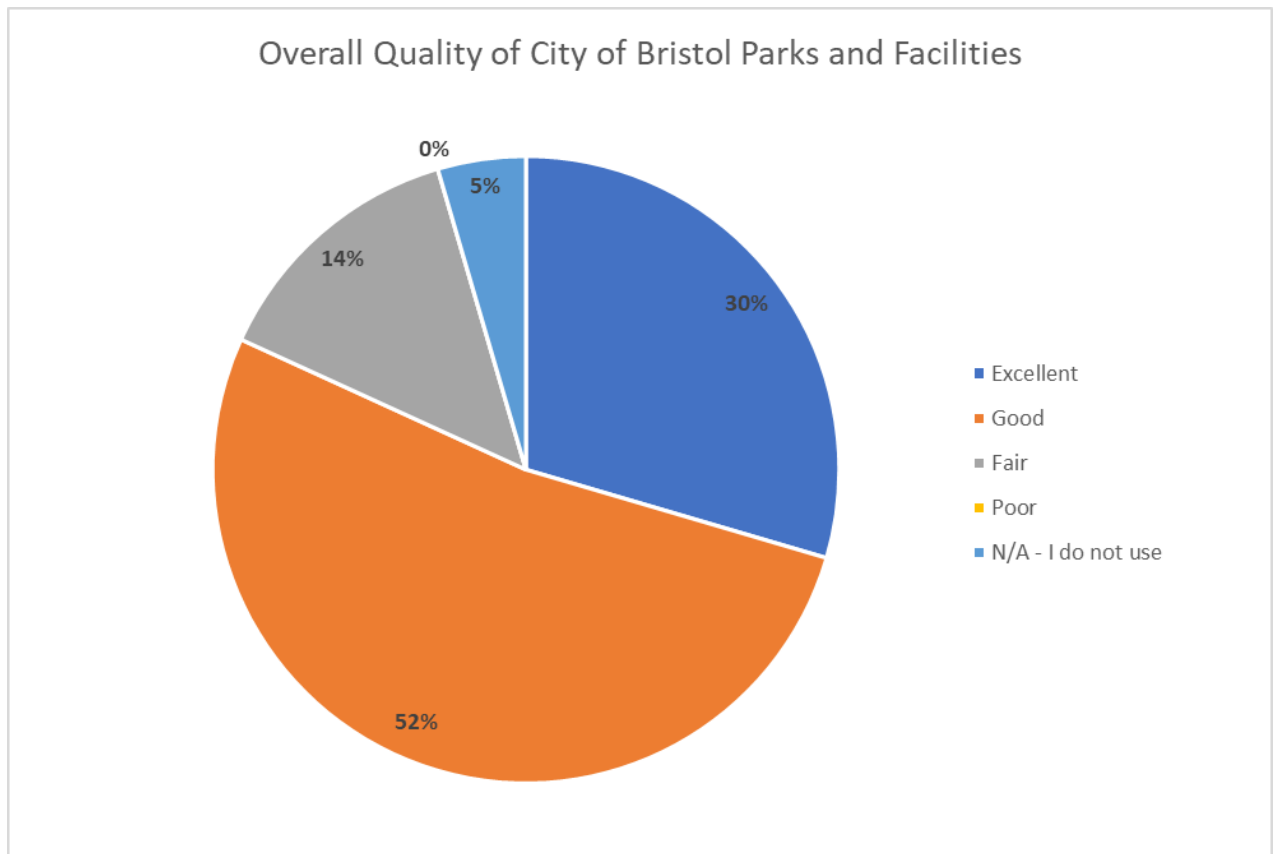
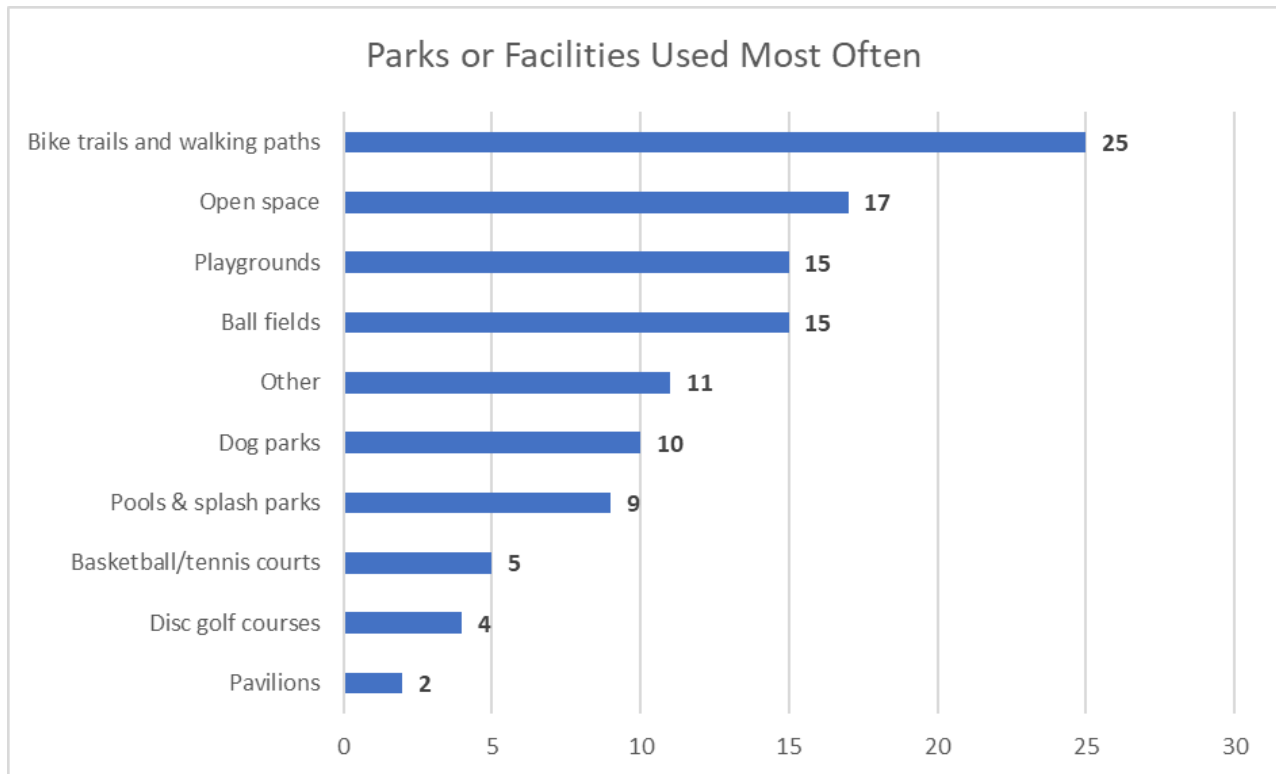
Interactive Polling

The Consultant Team created a series of polls to solicit feedback from meeting attendees. Although not statistically-valid or a true representation of community opinion, the polling exercise allowed the Consultant Team to understand a little bit more about who was attending the meeting while also allowing more quantitative data to be collected in preparation for developing the statistically-valid community survey. The following sections present the findings.

Parks and Facilities

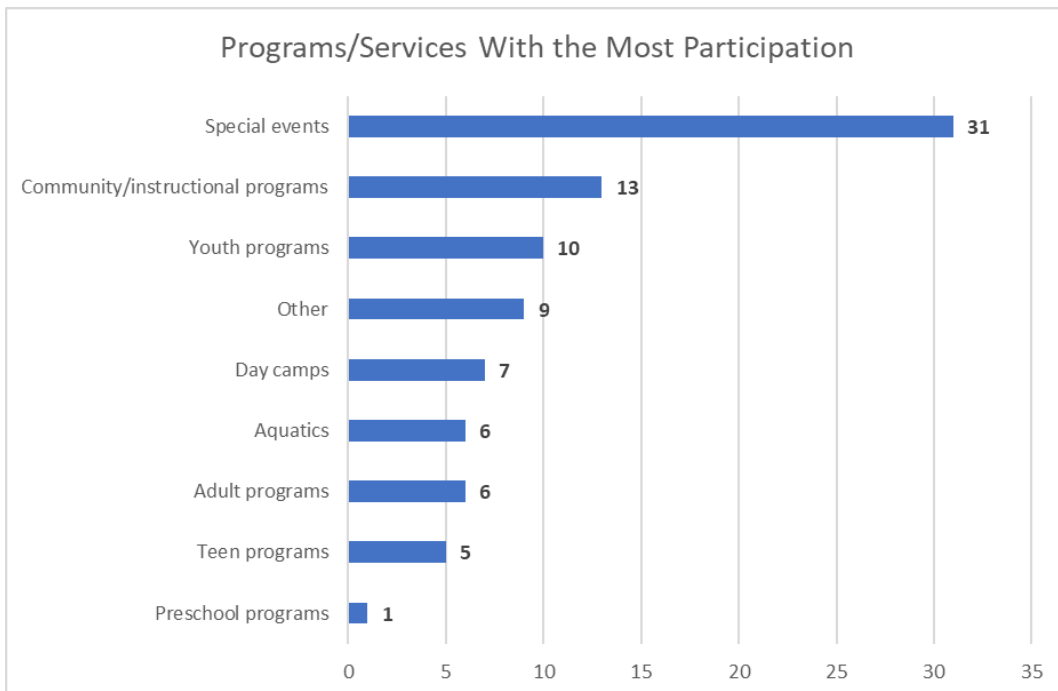
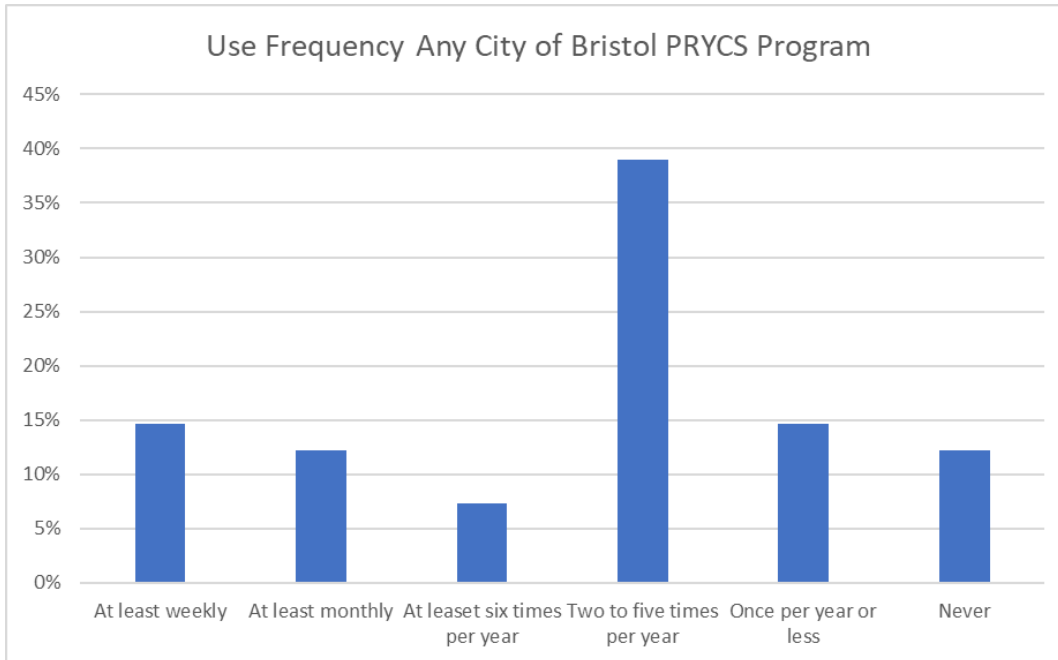
Respondents were asked to indicate how often they use any City of Bristol park or facility. Then, they were to indicate what they use most often and their viewpoint on how the overall quality is of those parks and facilities. The majority of the meeting attendees use Bristol parks or facilities at least weekly. The two most well-used facilities include bike trails & walking paths and general park open space. Approximately 82% of meeting attendees indicated the overall quality of Bristol parks and facilities as Good (52%) or Excellent (30%).

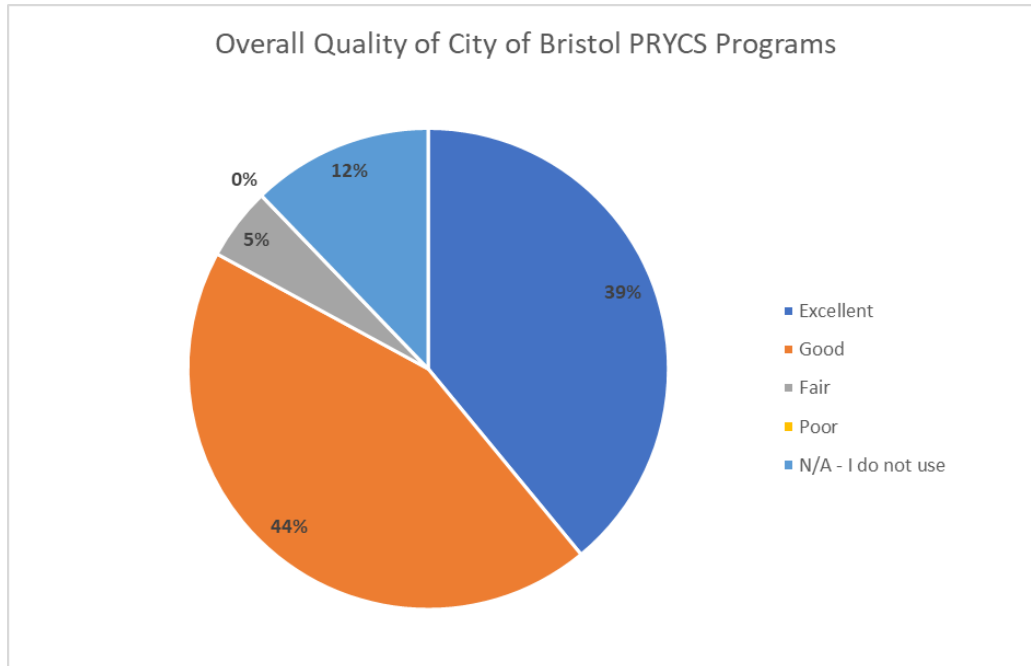




Programs and Services

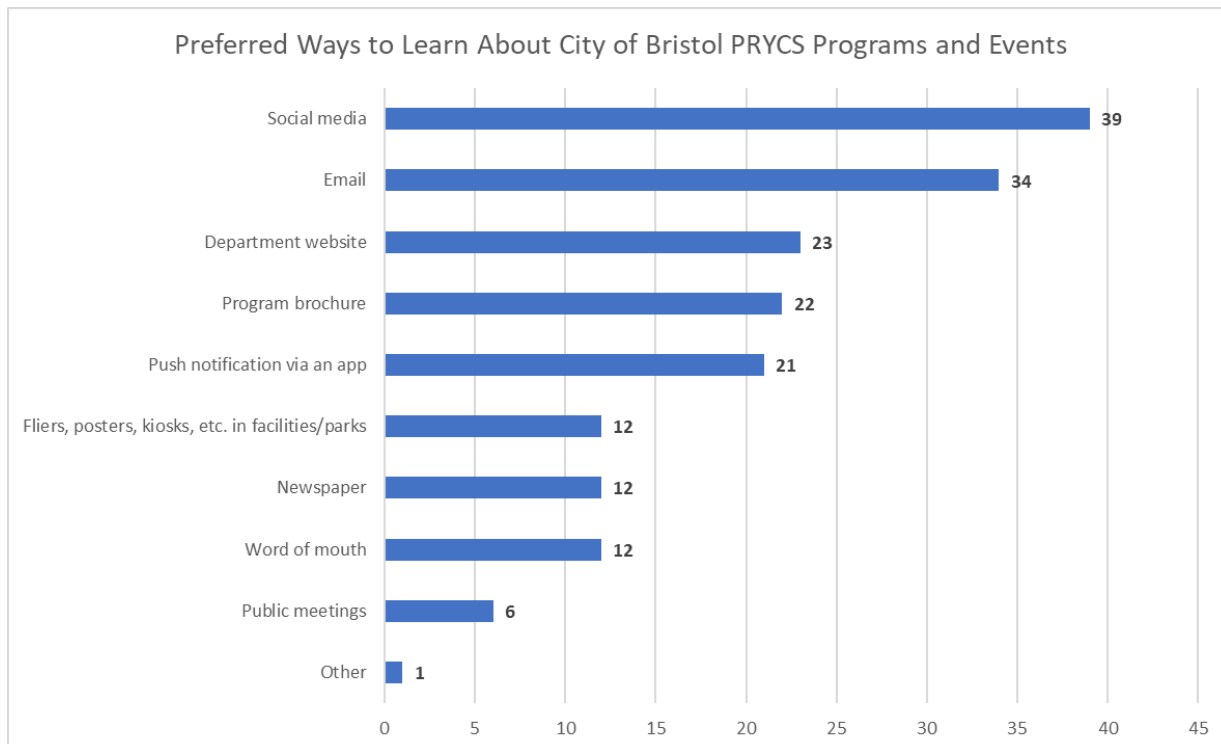
Respondents were asked to indicate how often they use any City of Bristol PRYCS program. Then, they were to indicate what they participate in most often and their viewpoint on how the overall quality is of those programs. The majority of the meeting attendees use Bristol programs one to five times per year. The most well-used program by far is special events. Approximately 83% of meeting attendees indicated the overall quality of Bristol PRYCS programming as Good (44%) or Excellent (39%).





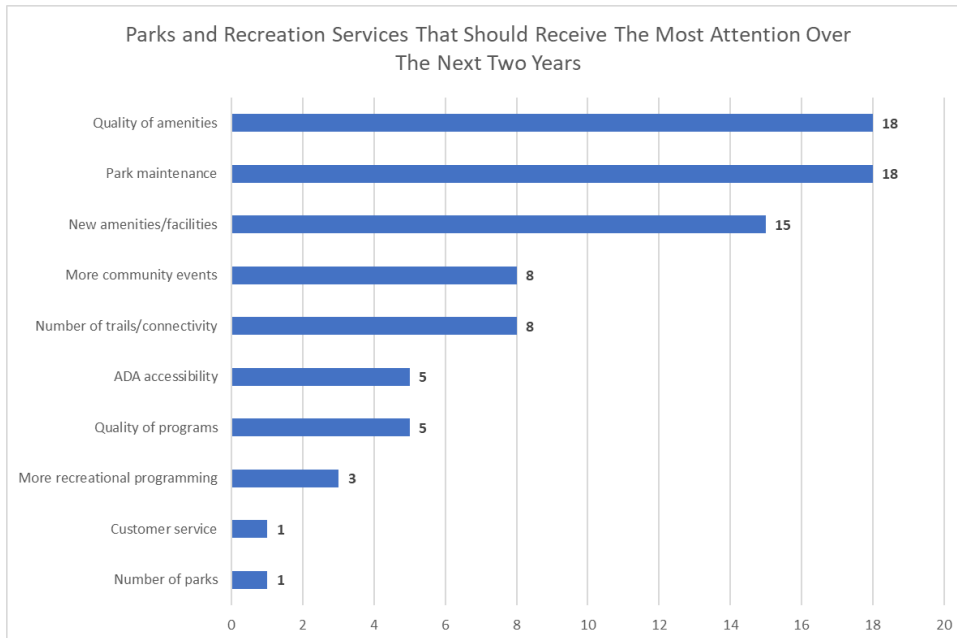
Marketing

Meeting attendees were asked to indicate what their preferred ways are to learn about City of Bristol PRYCS programs and events. The top two preferred methods indicated were social media and email.



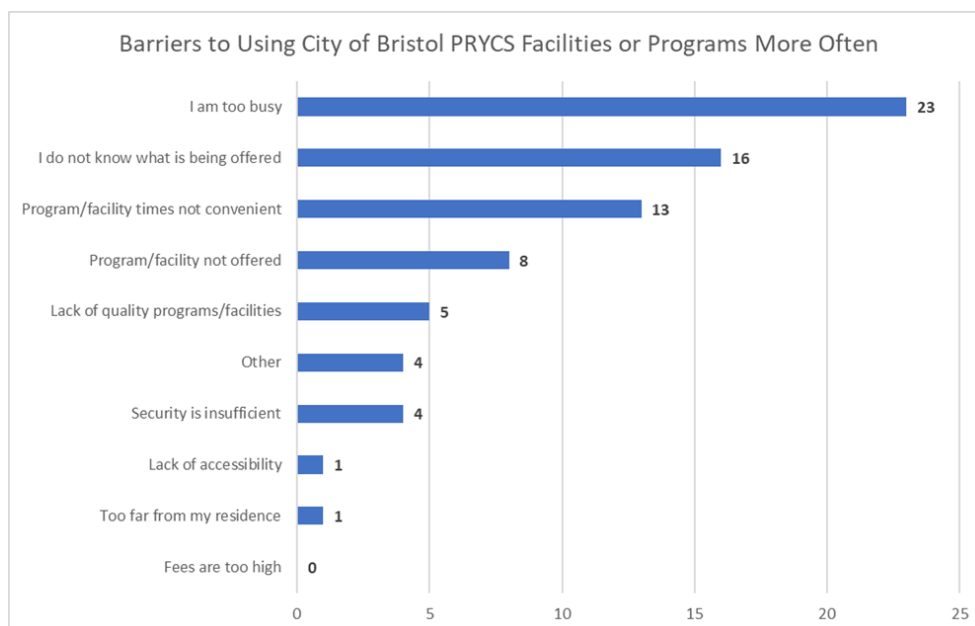
Service Prioritization

In an effort to have meeting attendees provide prioritized direction, they were asked to indicate what parks and recreation services should receive the most attention from the City of Bristol over the next two years. Three services in particular rose to the top: quality of amenities, park maintenance, and new amenities/facilities.



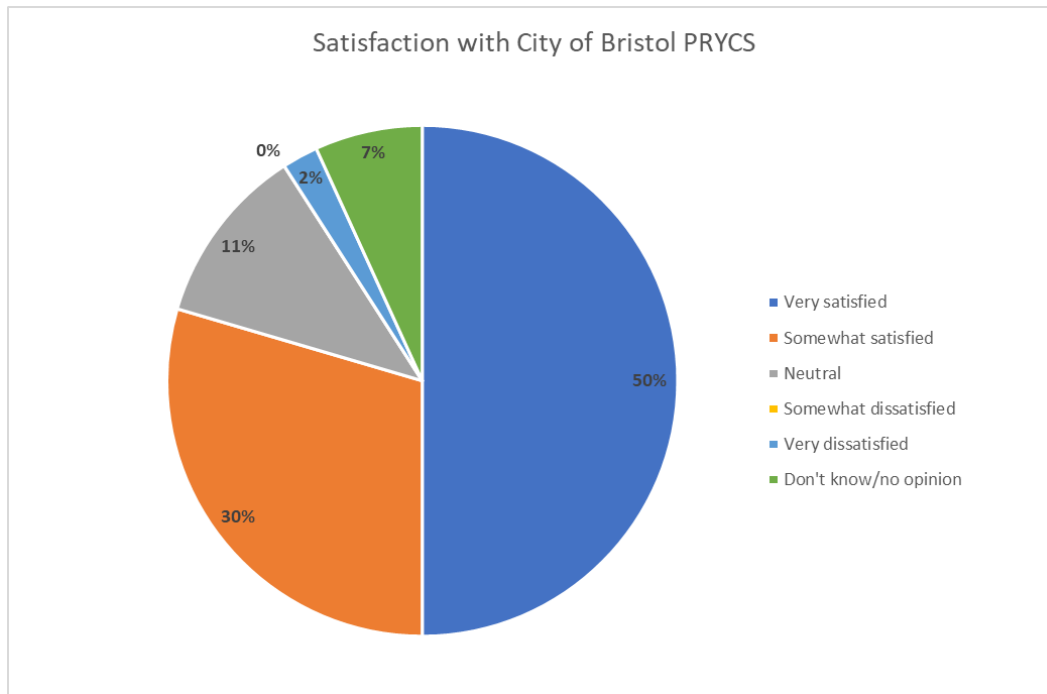
Barriers to Participation

To understand a little more about park, facility, and programming usage, meeting attendees were asked to indicate what prevents them from using Bristol PRYCS facilities or programs more often. The top three reported barriers included: I am too busy, I do not know what is being offered, and program/facility times not convenient.



Satisfaction

Lastly, meeting attendees were asked to consider all the things discussed during the previous polling questions. They were asked to rate their satisfaction with the overall value they receive from the City of Bristol PRYCS. Meeting attendees indicated a high level of satisfaction (80%) when combining Somewhat Satisfied (30%) and Very Satisfied (50%). Only 2% indicated being dissatisfied and the remaining 18% were either neutral in their opinion or did not offer an opinion.



Participant Q&A

To increase meeting interactivity, the Consultant Team organized a Chat Pod and Q&A function. This process allowed meeting attendees to directly converse with the Consultant Team and staff leadership. As a result, 18 questions and/or comments were received. The following questions and corresponding answers were provided:

I am curious about the process for selecting a location for the Little League Softball Complex. Are you able to share some insight as to what goes into that process (key dates, drivers, deterrents, etc.)?

The project team is currently developing a site analysis for the parks in the City. Part of this will be to understand what parks (if any) have opportunities to either modify existing fields or have space available to build new fields. Softball is a field many residents have said is lacking in the City.

Have you worked with other departments that include youth services in their parks department? Will that connection point have an impact on the end result of the plan?

The project team has! This connection point is what they will keep in mind as they develop the vision and the recommendations for this plan.

When is the last time a master plan was developed for the city's parks?

This is actually the first time the department has ever had a system wide master plan. We have had a number of site-specific master plans but not a community driven department plan.

As a senior citizen and an avid pickleball player (#1 growing sport in America is not the world!), I am interested in learning how this sport will be made available to all ages. As of now, there are no designated courts for pickleball. How will the city incorporate this into the master plan?

Based on the project team's observations with trends nationwide, Pickleball has certainly been one of the fastest growing sports in the last 5 years nationwide. They will certainly be making recommendations to the City incorporating this trends data, the community input you all share, and also benchmarks from other agencies that have developed Pickleball courts in their communities.

Can the BLVD be kept closed as it is now and developed into a park? It is being used in a wonderful way. It is serving a purpose that I feel the other parks don't offer.

This has been something our department has considered in the past but the idea posed potential issues with traffic in and out of the city. Based on the findings of the master plan this may be considered and discussed with the Police Traffic Division and Parks Board.

Has there been any discussion of summer programs?

At this time Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services will be offering Summer Camp starting June 29, 2020 under the protocols and procedures outlined by the Office of Early Childhood. All other programs are being reviewed in consultation with state guidelines for re-opening.

Has there been any discussion about continuing the teen program that was started in the fall?

Our popular Teen Night Social will return as soon as it is safe to do so. Our team is already planning future activities for when the program is safely able to return.

Is this basically a plan for the future or is there anything that will or can be accomplished right away? For example, we have a number of tennis courts in the city that are cracked and basically unusable. Can anything get done by the City of Bristol to fix these courts so we can use them to play Pickleball and not leave to use courts outside of the City?

The project team will be identifying the conditions of each park and will be providing recommendations for renovations along with order of magnitude costs to perform these renovations. Pickleball is growing across the entire country and we will be looking to see what facilities could support pickleball as well. Additionally, staff is waiting to address the cracks as well as other needs for just a little while more to get the full community input and analysis from this Master Plan. This will help determine all the needs holistically and determine what will be converted to Pickleball, basketball etc. and they will be in implementation mode as soon as July 2021.

Will you recommend developing the Roberts property?

Roberts is being looked at to understand the opportunities and constraints, but the project team is not providing design for that property at this time.

If we have specific ideas for the development of a particular park, what is the best way of communicating this to you?

The best way to communicate with the project team is to visit www.bristolparksplan2020.com and send us a comment!

Thoughts on making Memorial Boulevard Park road closure permanent?

This has been something our department has considered in the past but the idea posed potential issues with traffic in and out of the city. Based on the findings of the master plan this may be considered and discussed with the Police Traffic Division and Parks Board.

Will the handicap program happen?

We are hoping to be able to offer the Special Needs Social program this summer. Again, it hinges on guidance from the state as to whether or not it can be operated safely.

How many children do you feel you will be able to accommodate for each age group for summer camp?

As of 5/18/2020 we are following the OEC guidelines of 10 children per group with 2 staff members.

Will you be able to expand more 4-season uses and programs (referring to winter programs and such)?

We are always looking at expanding and modifying seasonal programs to meet the community's interest. If anyone has specific program ideas or would like to instruct a program, they can complete an instructor application at www.bristolrec.com.

When you say accommodate delayed programs, does that mean current permit dates would be extended?

As the state allows us to resume normal or modified levels of activity in the parks, we will be reaching out to all user groups to see how we can best extend the seasons and allow kids to play.

Will the master plan address adjacent park assets like neighborhoods, businesses etc. to augment park usage?

Absolutely! As part of the overall Master Plan process, a level of service (LOS) analysis will be conducted. This analysis will take into account existing City of Bristol parks and recreation inventories along with similar providers such as neighborhoods (HOAs) and other prominent providers of parks and recreation facilities and park land.

Will there be a waiver or accommodation for individuals with special needs who require one to one supervision during activities that may not be consistent with the strict requirements of social distancing?

We are expecting more guidance on this out of the OEC office in the coming days. Our department remains committed to serving all Bristol residents and ensuring the program is as equitable and inclusive as possible.

Is it possible to place signs throughout the parks that describe wildlife, flora, fauna and trees visible?

This is a great idea and we will explore doing this in the future. We have put up similar signs near our new rain garden at Page Park.

Crowdsourcing Website

A standalone project website was created to help facilitate consistent communication with City of Bristol residents. Residents (and non-residents) can navigate to www.bristolparksplan2020.com to send feedback and provide input directly to the Consultant Team. To date, community input received relates to:

- Addition of more exercise stations at Rockwell Park
- Addition of signage indicating the mileage a participant has walked/ran along the fitness circuit at Rockwell Park
- A desire to see more tennis courts resurfaced/redone to help promote Bristol as a tournament destination