



MEETING SYNOPSIS

September 30, 2021 | Daugherty Conference Room

The following is a summary of the tenth meeting of the Parks and Recreation subcommittee. The meeting attendance sheet and presentation are attached to this summary. The agenda can be found on the website under About > Meetings.

Welcome

Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) provided an overview of the agenda:

- Jane Daquin and Sarah Dunlap would speak on the parks survey findings first
- Dakota Whitten would speak on city staff's survey findings

Parks Statistical Survey

Jane Daquin, Ph.D. with the University of Alabama's Institute for Social Science Research (UA ISSR), presented their survey findings. She was joined by her colleague, Sarah Dunlap.

Project objectives were to identify:

- Who uses the parks facilities
- Who is not using the facilities and why
- Community perception of what needs to be changed or added

The survey was administered online and on paper. Also, it was available in English and Spanish. The survey pilot study occurred in October 2020. City employees were asked to answer park survey questions. The purpose of the pilot study was to make sure questions were clear, understandable and included all information of interest. Approximately 287 city employees participated. The pilot survey was adjusted to match the initial feedback from the pilot. Minor changes were made and then the survey was released to the public. The general community survey was available from January to March 2021. Over 2,600 residents participated, bringing the total survey participation to 2,913. The process was slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

UA ISSUR used a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze and produce statistics from close-ended questions. A software program called NVivo was used to develop a list of keywords to analyze answers to open-ended questions.

- Key survey findings:
 - Largest age group was >65 (43%)
 - Gender – majority female (58%)
 - Race – Mostly white (86%)



- Employment Status – 66% employed
- Household Income – 33% \$100,000-199,000
- Marital Status – 70% married
- Area of residence – 25% from north of the river
- Zip code of residence – 22% from 35406
- 65% were not affiliated with the University of Alabama
- Sokol Park and the Riverwalk were the most-used facilities (most often visited on a weekly basis)
- Most arrive at facilities by driving a vehicle
- Most common reasons to use a facility – sports; exercise; convenient location
- Most common reasons not to use a facility – too far; no enjoyable activities there
- 82% said their child uses the local park and rec facilities
- 64% said child participates in sports/activities – soccer and baseball most often
- Most have used facilities outside Tuscaloosa with features they would enjoy here
- Most suggested improvement to local facilities for: pets, children, and classes/educational programs
- Top response – most wanted paved walking and biking trails
- New program demands – top was special needs programs
- Most indicated they would be willing to travel to a facility from their homes
- Willingness to travel was for: better experience, change of scenery, and accessing specific amenities, programs and features
- Features that respondents were willing to pay for included water activities, specialized programs, and sports activities.

The subcommittee members discussed the presentation.

- Steven Rumsey asked a question to clear up the difference between the pilot and community survey. He also brought up the respondent interest in basketball in relation to the YMCA basketball court construction.
- Mayor Maddox asked for ISSR’s research considerations due to the underrepresentation of minorities. He asked if there was any part of the study that should be discounted as a result of this underrepresentation. Ms. Dunlap answered this question to say the answers were consistent across racial groups. She believes household income would be more of a consideration.
- The subcommittee discussed the underrepresentation of non-white racial groups.
- Mr. Moore noted that the survey was distributed and promoted to about 50 local organizations. Mayor Maddox expressed concern that there could be community distrust towards the survey. Dr. Daquin noted that the demographics were consistent with people who typically take surveys (predominately, older white females).



- Lesley Bruinton asked about the prevalence of basketball given that the largest demographic was older white women with a household income over 100,000 dollars.
- Dr. Daquin recommended focus groups to delve more into this matter. She suspected this is related to the prevalence of respondents who have children.
- Ms. Bruinton noted that older women would be unlikely to have adolescent children. Grandchildren made more sense, given the age. Dr. Daquin responded that grandchildren were often mentioned in the responses.
- Mayor Maddox commented that it is difficult to find space, particularly to play basketball. Karen Brooks (Advisory Council co-chair) mentioned the YMCA basketball courts.
- Amy Echols asked how COVID might have impacted the respondent answers. Dr. Daquin stated that the survey included a disclaimer that answers should be given without regard to COVID. Therefore, she believes there is little COVID bias.
- Ms. Echols asked about demand for waterparks and how that term is defined in this scenario. Dr. Daquin said that boat launches were the most common feature mentioned in relation to water usage.
- Mr. Moore asked Dr. Daquin and Ms. Dunlap to provide a summary of good next steps and recommend how the city could make improvement. Dr. Daquin said that the responses about this can be directly associated with a park. Ms. Dunlap mentioned that were issues with cleanliness and park safety. They recommended focusing on must-have top requests.

Mr. Moore turned the discussion over to Dakota Whitten, who discussed additional work being completed by city staff.

- The city is taking each question from the survey and coding each open-ended comment to the specific park to which it relates.
- Based on the responses, there was a large interest in expanding the Tuscaloosa Riverwalk. This desire is currently being addressed with plans for the western expansion of the Riverwalk and the Northern Riverwalk development.
- Sokol Park, one of the top two most-referenced parks, received a range of requests. A common request was for lights, particularly for the sports fields. This issue is currently being addressed by the city.
- There was great interest in adding more courts at the Tuscaloosa Tennis Center.

Mr. Moore opened up the discussion and asked the group if there were particular facilities or parks of interest. What were the group's priorities?



- Mr. Rumsey asked how Elevate is taking into account the northern migration of Tuscaloosa's population center. Mayor Maddox responded that there is an effort to expand sewer services to allow for more annexations in the north. In the Elevate plan, Sokol Park is expected to receive 9.5 million dollars. A suggestion was made to form a focus group for the Phelps Center to explore how it can better serve the community.
- Mr. Bruinton noted that Lake Tuscaloosa access is an issue. Jarrod Milligan (City of Tuscaloosa) said traffic counts show a significant increase in traffic to Lakes Nicol and Harris during the pandemic.
- Ms. Bruinton agreed that greenspace planning should be considered for the northern part of Tuscaloosa
- Mayor Maddox noted that Lakes Nicol and Harris are designated as parks by city code. This cannot change without a general referendum and majority vote of the City Council.
- Mr. Rumsey discussed general accessibility of Lake Tuscaloosa, the small islands within, and wanted to propose moving towards determining how this can be improved..
- Mayor Maddox responded that it is a balancing act between recreational use and preservation of our drinking water.
- Gary Minor said that for boat users, there is a lack of both gas and good access around the lakes
- Ms. Bruinton said there should be more information on access available to the public. For example, more signage to make access points more clear (specifically in reference to Lake Tuscaloosa). Mr. Moore agreed, and added that more information should be available on how to get to Lake Nicol and Lake Harris, as well.
- Mayor Maddox asked how to improve the Phelps Center. Within PARA, there are five city activity centers losing a total of one million dollars per year. He asked about the idea of making Phelps a water center, in consideration of its location on Lake Tuscaloosa. Mr. Moore agreed that it could be used for water resource education. Councilor Crow suggested that we need more boat docks on Lake Tuscaloosa and stated that these could even be used for field trips to get children interested in fishing. Something like this could be accomplished at the Phelps Center, and he would like to get a master plan completed for the center.
- Mr. Rumsey expressed that walking trails should be the number one priority. He recommended that the city advertise the Northern Riverwalk to the public so they can see the work being done at that site.
- Ms. Bruinton returned the conversation to focus groups with underrepresented demographics and wondered how residents in underrepresented groups view the river. She recommended drawing in vendors to make it more desirable as a destination.
- Shelly Jones stated that the focus should be on the programming and providing information to the underrepresented populations in the survey.



- Mayor Maddox noted that there should be a better partnership between PARA and the school system.
- Ms. Bruinton stated that girls' sports (in particular) have difficulty finding a location. There should be an effort to unify all Tuscaloosa afterschool programs. She proposed the development of a citywide competition. On the elementary and middle school level, the top two teams could play on the larger high school fields.
- Mayor Maddox expressed concern with how this may not equally benefit the underserved community
- Shelly Jones mentioned that sharing facilities between similar programs (in her experience, theater) has not always been successful.
- There was a general discussion on liability and responsibility for trying to better plan gym availability and use within the school system.
- There was also a discussion about eliminating facility access barriers between schools. Instead of school-specific sports, all schools could pool students together. This would increase the diversity of sports offered, as well as improve timing and program quality. Some subcommittee members noted that there would be transportation issues in accessing each facility if all students across the city are pooled into one group for sports/programming
- Mayor Maddox noted that for transportation of the students to afterschool programs, there could be a partnership between the Tuscaloosa Transit Authority and city school system for bus transport of the children. Tripp Powell stated that this would be a minimal investment compared with building or maintaining enough facilities to serve each neighborhood and its own programming.
- One idea was to give schools tax credits for hosting afterschool programs. Resource costs could be deducted.
- Ms. Jones stated that school leadership and board members would need to agree on how to open up their facilities and how to work together to maximize the facilities.
- Mayor Maddox stated that if the city is going to offset PARA activity center losses of one million dollars each year, we should determine how to spend that money in a way that brings the most good to the community.
- Tripp Powell noted that building new facilities costs millions of dollars, compared to paying a million dollars annually to maintain what we have.

Next Steps

The full parks survey report will be distributed to the subcommittee and posted on the Elevate website when it is completed.

**Subcommittee Meeting Attendance
September 30, 2021**

Name	In Attendance
Brinton, Lesley	YES
Corder, Blake	NO
Dedrick, Terrance	YES
Echols, Amy	YES
Gay Jr., David	NO
Jones, Shelley	YES
Minor, Gary	YES
Parker III, Tim	NO
Powell, Tripp	YES
Rumsey, Steven	YES
Staley, Don (Subject guest)	YES
Brooks, Karen (EAC co-chair)	YES
England, Chris (EAC co-chair)	NO
Wilson, Matthew (City Council District 1)	YES
Howard, Raevan (City Council District 2)	NO
Crow, Norman (City Council District 3)	YES
Busby, Lee (City Council District 4)	NO
Tyner, Kip (City Council District 5)	NO
Faile, John (City Council District 6)	NO
Lanier, Cassius (City Council District 7)	NO

Elevate Parks and Recreation Survey Results

Prepared by Jane Daquin and Sarah Dunlap, The University of
Alabama Institute for Social Science Research

Background

- Project objective
 - Identify:
 - (1) Who is using the parks and recreation facilities
 - (2) Who is not using the facilities and why
 - (3) The general communities' perception of what can be changed or added to improve the facilities
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Methodology

- Data were collected using a survey administered online through Qualtrics and on paper
 - English survey:
 - Online: 2,568 surveys
 - Paper: 54 surveys
 - Spanish survey:
 - Online: 4 surveys
 - Paper: 3 surveys
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Survey Participants

- Pilot Sample
 - City employees surveyed from October 1 to October 24, 2020
 - Purpose of the pilot study
 - To determine the feasibility of data collection
 - To ensure the survey questions (1) were clear and understandable and (2) captured all the information of interest
 - Participant responses and feedback were used to revise and/or add questions
 - Final sample size = 287 city employees
 - General Community Sample
 - Tuscaloosa residents surveyed from January 5 to March 17, 2021
 - Final sample size = 2,626 residents
 - **Overall sample size = 2,913 participants**
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Data Analysis: Quantitative Data

- Analyzed using SPSS
 - Statistical package that allows for the analysis of quantitative data
 - Descriptive statistics were produced for each closed-ended question
 - Frequency statistics for each response option were utilized to create graphic representations of participant feedback for each question
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Data Analysis: Qualitative Data

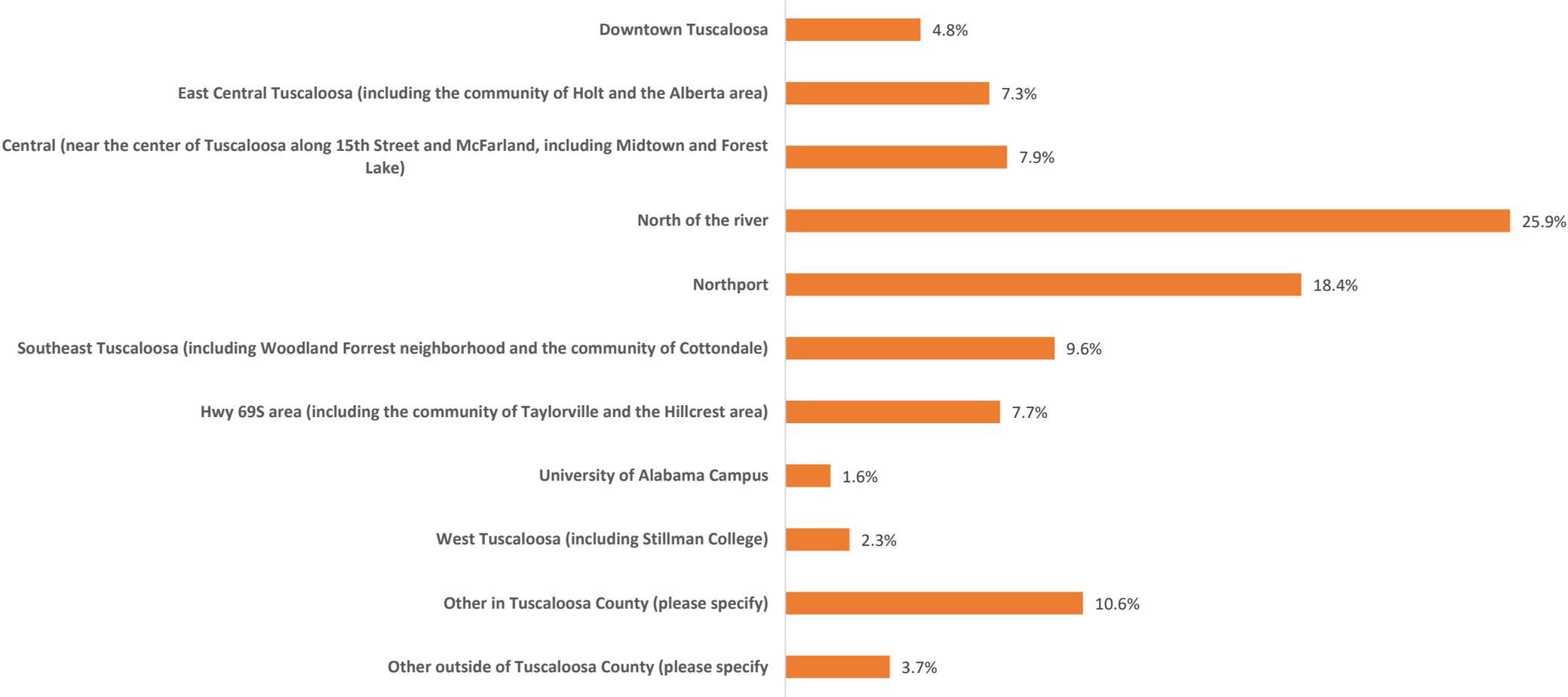
- Analyzed using NVivo qualitative coding software
 - Step 1: Deductive coding
 - Before coding, the research team developed a list of codes (or themes) for each question before analyzing the responses
 - Used initial list of codes to analyze the data
 - Step 2: Inductive Coding using pilot data
 - During the coding process and data audit additional themes were identified
 - Step 3: Code general community data
 - Data were analyzed and coded using the final list of codes generated
 - Final coded data
 - 67 codes (or themes)
 - 12,813 individually coded responses (many participants provided multiple answers for each question)
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Key Findings

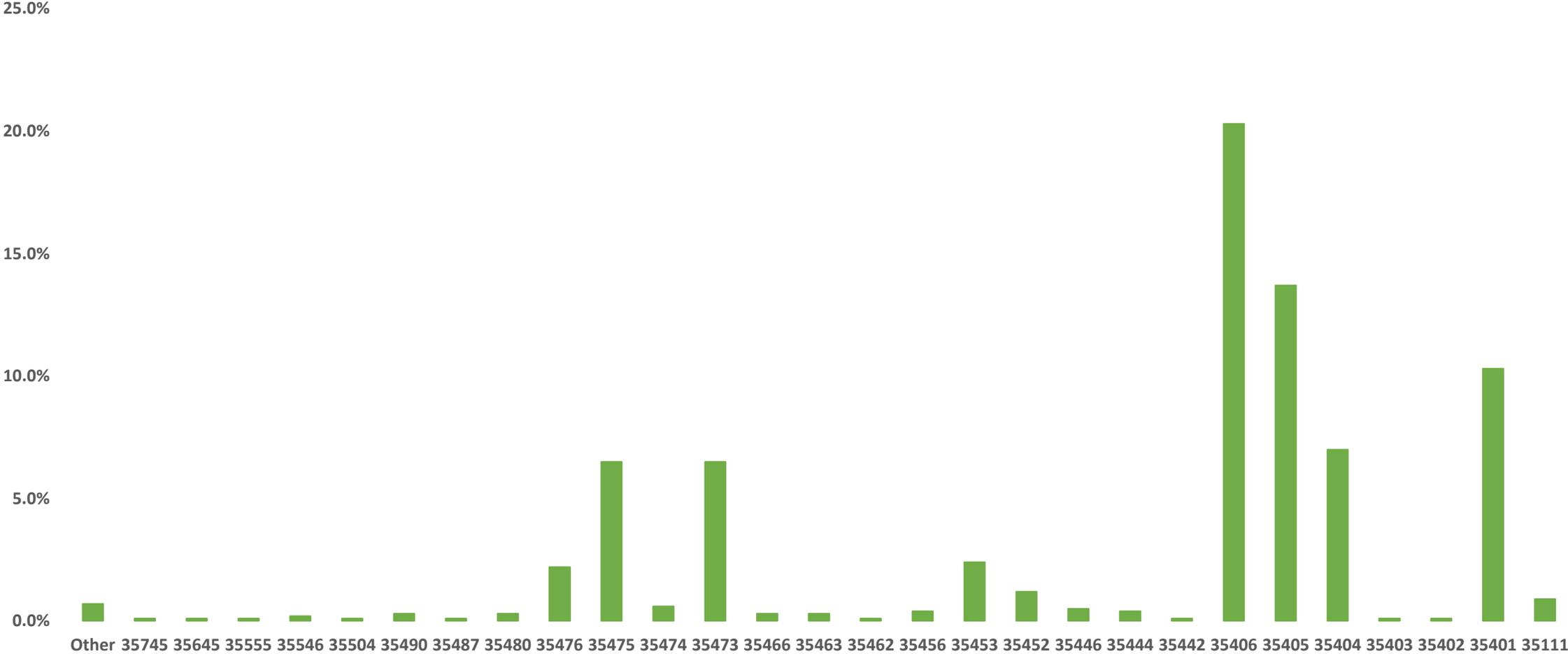
Participant Demographics

- **Age:** largest group was 65 and older (42.7% of the sample; median age = 61 years)
 - **Gender:** 57.6 female, 38.2 male
 - **Race/ethnicity:** 86.4% White, 9.7% Black, 3.6% Hispanic
 - **Employment status:** 65.8% employed full-time
 - **Educational attainment:** 34.3% Bachelor's degree, 26.0% Master's degree
 - **Household income:** 33.4% between \$100,000 and \$199,999
 - **Marital status:** Nearly 70% were married
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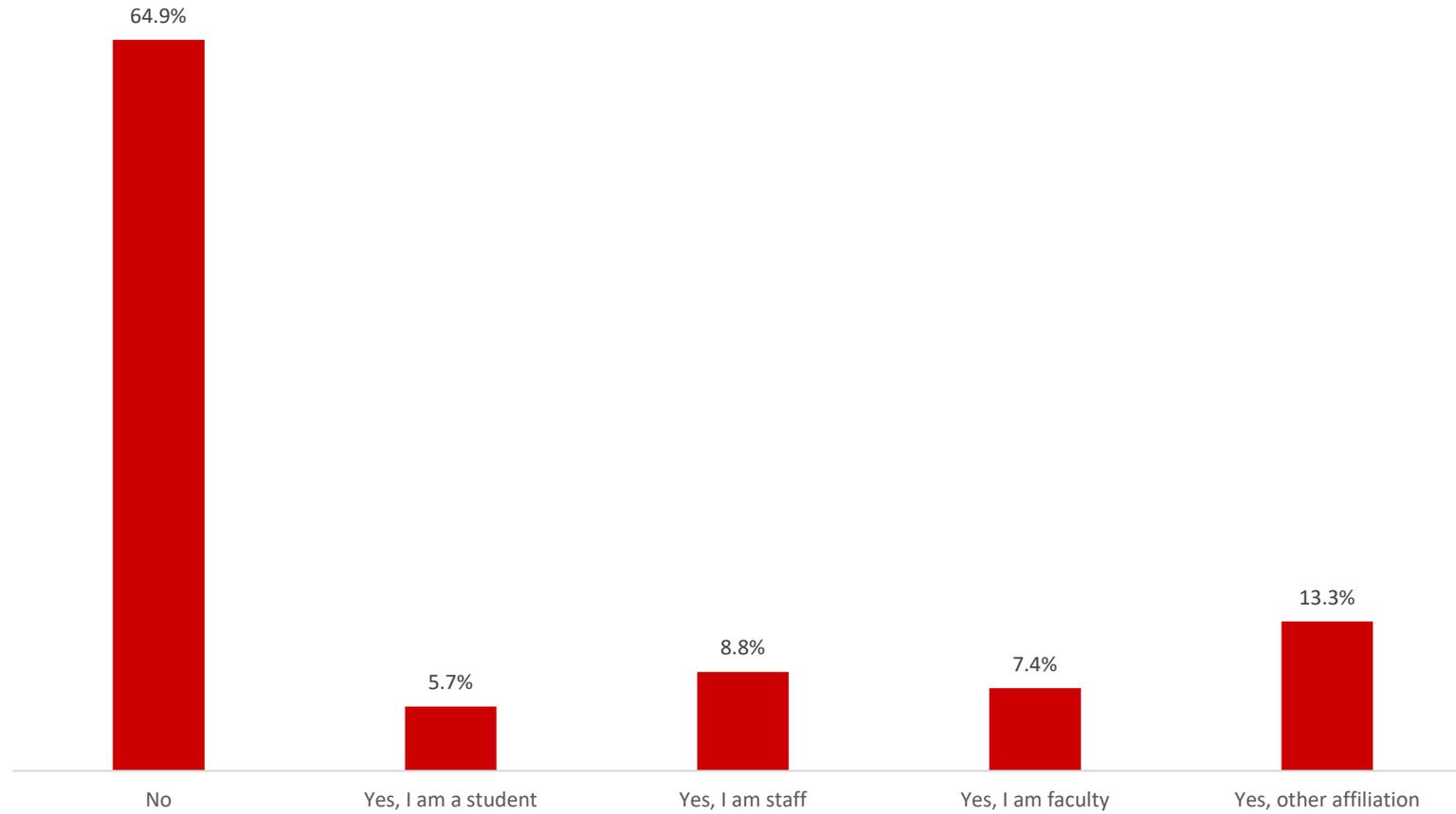
In what neighborhood or area of the county do you currently reside?



Please provide your 5-digit zip code



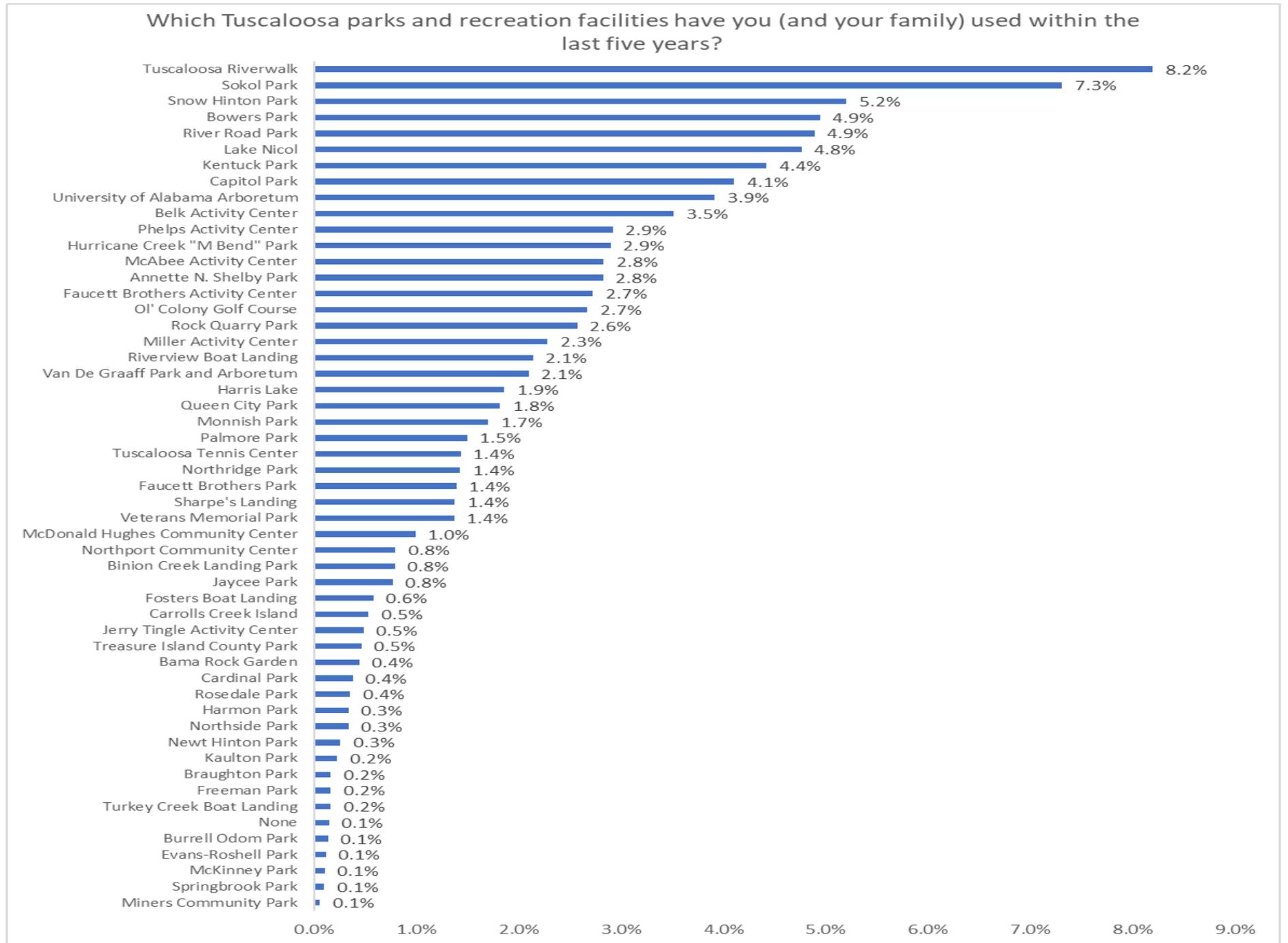
Are you affiliated with The University of Alabama?



Facility Usage

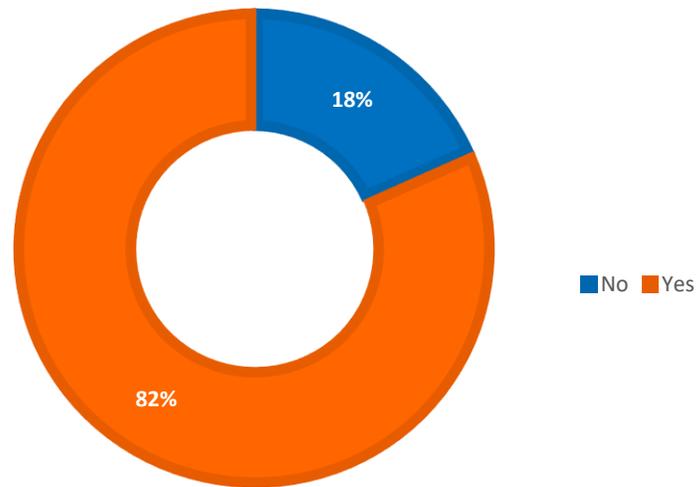
- Most frequently used facilities/parks
 - Sokol Park and Tuscaloosa Riverwalk
 - Most respondents indicated:
 - Using the facility they visit most often on a weekly basis
 - Visiting the parks by driving their own vehicle
 - The most common reasons identified for using a particular facility:
 - “for exercise, fitness, sports”
 - “convenient location”
 - The most common reasons why respondents do not use the facilities more often was:
 - “too far from my residence”
 - “there are no activities that I enjoy”
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- Facilities Used: All Locations

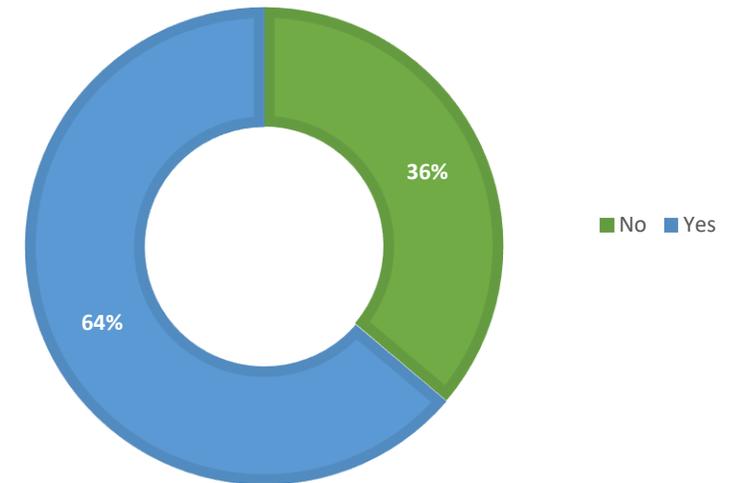


Children's Facility Usage & Participation

Does your child (or children) use any of Tuscaloosa's local park and recreation facilities?



Does your child (or children) participate in sports/activities?

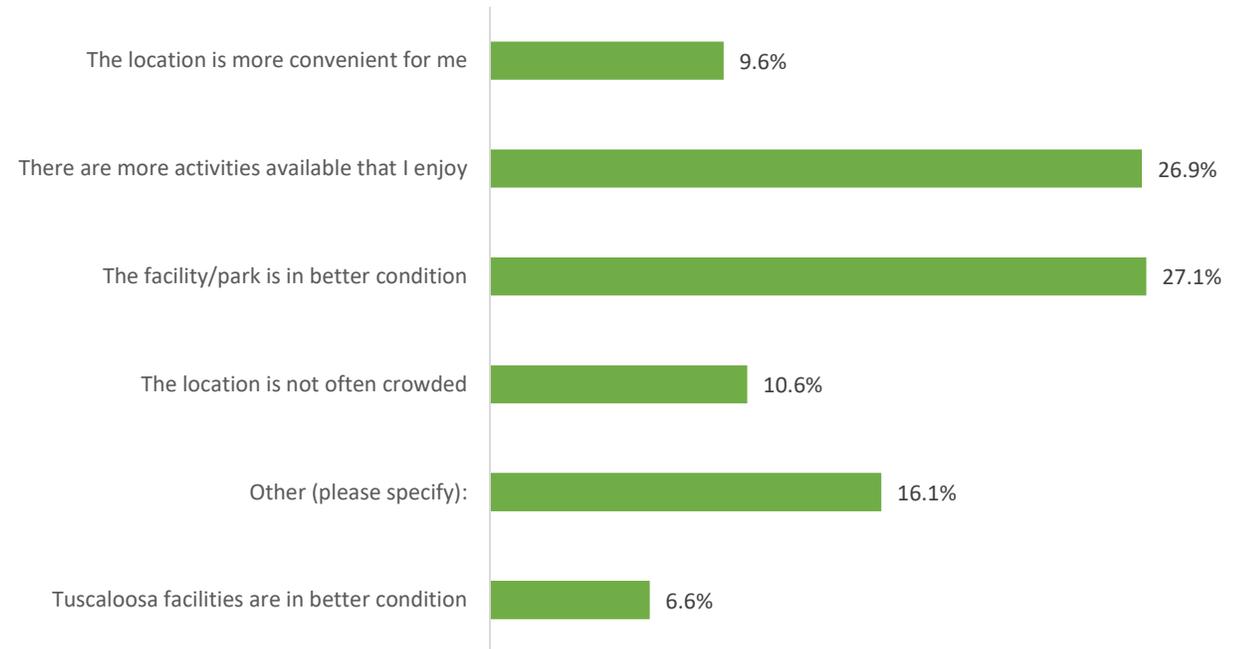


The largest category for children's participation in sports selected by respondents was *soccer*, followed by *baseball*

Facility Usage Outside of Tuscaloosa

- Most respondents indicated:
 - Having used a parks and recreation facility outside of Tuscaloosa
 - There were features of facilities outside of Tuscaloosa that they would like to see in Tuscaloosa

How does this facility/park compare to Tuscaloosa facilities?*



Facility Improvement

- The most common among suggestions for improvement to local facilities were:
 - “Features for pets”
 - “Features for children or teens”
 - “Classes or educational programs”
 - The number one response among those listed as desired new features was ***paved walking and biking trails with mile markers***
 - The top request for new programs desired were for those for ***people with special needs***
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Willingness to travel or pay for services

- Most respondents indicated that they would be willing to travel to other facilities if transportation was not an issue
 - The most common reasons given for willingness to travel were:
 - “Better experience”
 - “Change of scenery”
 - “Accessing specific amenities, programs or features”
 - Respondents were asked to indicate what additional recreational features they would be willing to pay for. The most common response were:
 - “Water activities”
 - “Other specialized programs (dance, vendors)”
 - “Sports activities”
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Thank you!