

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2003 Rolling Meadows Residential Study

Methodology:

Decision Resources, Ltd., contacted by telephone 300 randomly selected residents of the City of Rolling Meadows. Professional interviewers obtained survey responses across the community between November 11th and 25th, 2002. The average interview took 23 minutes. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to their respective universe within ± 5.5 percent in 95 out of 100 cases.

Residential Demographics:

Twenty percent of Rolling Meadows residents reported moving to the community within the past five years, while twenty-five percent had lived there for more than thirty years. The median residential longevity proved to be 15.4 years. Eighteen percent thought they would leave the community during the next ten years, a very low transience rate; a majority of those anticipating departure cited “job transfers,” “retiring and moving South,” and “moving closer to family” as their key reasons. Less than twenty percent of citizens intending to leave mentioned reasons within the purview of city policy — “high property taxes” and “seeking different type of housing.”

Senior households composed twenty percent of the community’s residences. School aged children could be found in thirty-four percent of the households, while pre-schoolers resided in only four percent. The average age of an adult resident was estimated at 51.0 years old. In fact forty-eight percent of the adult population was in the 35-54 year age range, while forty percent were over 55 years old.

Eighty-one percent of the sample reported owning their current residence. Sixty-six percent lived in detached single family homes, while fourteen percent resided in condominiums, eleven percent in townhouses, and ten percent in apartments.

White Collar jobholders – Professional-Technical and Owner-Manager categories – headed thirty-five percent of the households in the community. Twenty percent of household heads were Clerical-Sales persons and fifteen percent were Blue Collar workers. Retirees led twenty-six percent of the city’s households. The yearly median household income proved to be \$74,075.00; in fact, seventeen percent posted households incomes over \$100,000.00 annually.

The typical adult resident had post-secondary educational experience, albeit short of college graduation. Thirty percent reported high school graduation or less education. Twenty-eight percent attended Vocational-Technical schools, community colleges, or colleges for less than four years. Forty-three percent had graduated from college or had undertaken post-graduate training. Women outnumbered men by four percent

The principal reasons for residents moving to Rolling Meadows were “affordable housing” and “closeness to job location,” mentioned by forty-five percent of the sample. “Attractive housing and nice neighborhoods” as well as “closeness to family” were each reported by twelve percent. “Small town ambience” and “good schools” rounded out the principal draws of the community, at seventeen percent. An additional eight percent stated they had always lived in Rolling Meadows.

General Perceptions of the City:

Rolling Meadows residents were very contented with their community. Ninety-four percent rated their quality of life positively; forty-five percent judged it to be “excellent.” This quality of life rating placed Rolling Meadows within the top fifteen percent of suburbs in major Metropolitan Areas. When asked what they liked most about the community, large numbers of residents pointed to “convenience to retail and service opportunities,” “solid community,” “small town ambience,” and “quality housing and neighborhoods.” Smaller percentages cited “convenient location,” “high quality city services,” “good schools,” “closeness to job location” and “quiet and peacefulness.”

Only one issue was regarded as serious by a moderate number of residents: eighteen percent pointed to “high taxes.” A smaller group of residents pointed to “poor tax base,” cited by eight percent, and “need for Downtown retail opportunities,” at seven percent. Eight percent were “boosters” who saw no serious issues facing Rolling Meadows. No issue facing the community engaged a large numbers of residents.

Eighty-eight percent rated the sense of community in the City of Rolling Meadows as either “excellent” or “good.” Only eleven percent rated it lower. Similarly, an impressive eighty-six percent thought things in Rolling Meadows were generally headed in the right direction, while a minuscule four percent disagreed.

In thinking about their neighborhood, a solid ninety-four percent rated the general appearance was either “excellent” or “good.” Eighty-seven percent similarly rated the condition of street and road surfaces in their neighborhood. And, eighty percent felt connected with other people living in their neighborhood, while twenty percent did not feel that way. Not unexpectedly, the “disconnected” were more likely to be moving during the next decade and less likely to live in single-family homes.

Rolling Meadows residents were asked to evaluate the community on a number of dimensions — development, population characteristics, and city amenities. Almost two-thirds of the sample, 64.3%, on average felt the City had about the “right amount” of each aspect. This level of across-the-board satisfaction was unusually high in comparison with other suburbs. Four aspects of the community were judged as “too little” or “too few” by relatively large numbers of respondents. Fifty-nine percent thought Rolling Meadows had too few entertainment establishments. Forty-six percent felt the same way about retail shopping opportunities, while forty percent saw the number of dining establishments the same way. Thirty-six percent also

thought the number of job opportunities within the community was too small. In general, a small percentage of residents thought the community had “too many” or “too much” of any of the attributes mentioned.

City Services and Amenities:

City service ratings proved among the highest in suburbs contained within major Metropolitan Areas. Over ninety percent of those familiar with the service positively rated fire protection, snow plowing of city streets, police protection, park maintenance, recreation programs, and snow plowing of city sidewalks. Between eighty and ninety percent favorably rated senior services, city street repair and maintenance, health and housing regulation, animal control, and communications with residents. Finally, seventy-six percent of residents familiar with those services positively rated planning, zoning and permits as well as storm drainage. Overall, the mean positive rating of Rolling Meadows city services was a very high 87.8%.

In comparison with the services in the city of their previous residents, eighty-three percent of the residents who had lived elsewhere rated Rolling Meadows city services as either “excellent” or “good.” Only eleven percent rated services as either “only fair” or “poor.” Similarly, eighty-two percent rated the value of city services as “excellent” or “good,” while eleven percent rated them lower. There was very little consensus either on city services to expand or offer new, or on city services to reduce or terminate.

An unusually high forty-five percent reported they had “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Rolling Meadows City Staff. Sixty-nine percent rated the job performance of the City Staff highly, while eleven percent were more negative in their evaluations. Among residents having contact, a very high eighty-seven percent rated the Staff highly.

The usage of current park system components varied somewhat. While seventy-one percent reported household members had used larger community parks during the past year, sixty-five percent had visited smaller neighborhood parks, and fifty-seven percent used bike paths and trails. Usage dropped to forty-eight percent of the households for special facilities such as the swimming pool, gymnasium, and ice rinks, while forty-three percent had visited community ball fields.

Facility users consistently rated them highly. The highest positive evaluations were given to smaller neighborhood parks, with ninety-eight percent of the visitors rating them as “excellent” or “good.” The lowest positive evaluations were awarded special facilities, such as the swimming pool, gymnasium, and ice rink, at ninety-three percent. The range of positive evaluations was very small. In fact, the mean positive evaluation of recreational facilities was a very high 95.2%.

Eighty-seven percent thought existing recreational facilities offered in the community met the needs of their household; only five percent disagreed. The small number of dissenters urged the City to construct and operate an indoor swimming pool and more ball fields.

Development Preferences and Priorities:

In prioritizing the types of development they would like to see attracted to or discouraged in Rolling Meadows, residents generally counseled keeping and maintaining each type at its current level. The average percentage of respondents wanting to maintain the status quo on each type of development was 62%. Four types of specific developments registered majorities or near-majorities in favor of the City attracting more: entertainment establishments, at sixty percent; development providing job opportunities, at fifty-two percent; retail shopping opportunities, at fifty percent; and, dining establishments, at forty-nine percent.

A decisive eighty percent favored attracting more shops and stores specifically to Downtown Rolling Meadows; in fact, thirty percent strongly favored this approach. But, by a 52%-40% margin, residents felt the current design of Downtown sufficiently addressed the needs of pedestrians and saw no need for more focus on pedestrian access and ease of movement. When asked about the location of their shopping for groceries, eighty-four percent indicated Rolling Meadows, itself. Eight percent went to food stores in Arlington Heights, while four percent patronized stores in Palatine.

Forty-nine percent of the respondents reported regularly leaving Rolling Meadows to go to work. The typical commute was about twenty-two minutes, with thirty-one percent posting times of 15 minutes or less and seven percent, times of forty-five minutes or more. Ten percent of the residents reported they regularly used public transportation, with the majority using the Commuter METRA Trains. If the CTA Light Rail or Blue Line were extended to better serve Rolling Meadows, nine percent were “very likely” to use it, while another twenty percent were “somewhat likely” to do so. Among commuters not using public transportation, twenty-five percent were likely to use an extended Blue Line, while a majority of current METRA users would switch to the Blue Line. So, an augmented Blue Line would have two consequences: first, an overall increase in the use of public transportation by enticing current non-users; and second, decreasing the use of METRA Train through shifts to the Blue Line service.

Communications Issues:

Residents proved to be extremely informed about City government and services. Seventy-nine percent felt informed about the City enterprise, while eighty-one percent expressed satisfaction with their current information levels. The City Newsletter, read frequently or occasionally by eighty-four percent, proved to be the most popular source of information. The “Herald Daily” was the next most relied upon source of information, read at least occasionally by seventy-four percent of the respondents. Local cable television channels were watched for City information by forty-seven percent, while the City website was accessed by thirteen percent. Print media, then, proved to be the key source of information for most residents.

Conclusions:

Demographically, Rolling Meadows would be considered an example of a “Gold Collar” suburban community. Residents are relatively affluent, predominantly White Collar, and stable. They express pride in key community values: sense of connection, strong neighborhoods, safe streets, exemplary park system, and cost-effective city services. They have high expectations; but the City meets or exceeds most residents’ needs. In fact, residents exhibit a very high level of confidence in the direction of their community in comparison with other Greater Metropolitan Area suburbs.

City services are delivered effectively and efficiently, and the City enterprise is both customer-friendly and competent. In particular, the park and recreation system is widely used and well regarded. High user rates and very positive evaluations are the norm. The City exemplifies affordable excellence in both meeting public needs and taking steps to insure a continuing high quality of life.

In looking at past development decisions and future needs, residents not only see a need for more offerings in four areas, but endorse city policies to attract them. Entertainment establishments rank first on this list. Developments providing job opportunities within the city are in second place, while retail shopping opportunities and dining establishments tie for third. Other development possibilities, such as different types of housing, are clearly subordinate to these four areas. In general, community self-sufficiency appears to be the theme tying together these development preferences.

Residents for the most part are satisfied with their quality of life in Rolling Meadows. And, City government and staff have established a broad reservoir of goodwill among the populace. As city demographics change and new issues develop, this strong foundation will serve the community well in the future.