

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A 13-question survey was conducted by the City of Louisville to determine public opinions on open space issues. 372 surveys were completed by telephone in January and February, 2003, using a random sample of households selected from the telephone book.

Sixty percent of survey respondents were female. 89% were between the ages of 25 and 54, and the sample was nearly evenly divided among residents who had lived in Louisville for 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, and over 20 years. The sample was somewhat over-representative of women and of those over age 65, and it was somewhat under-representative of those ages 18-24.

92% of respondents said that open space in and around Louisville was important, and 49% said that they used the City's open space at least once a week. Younger residents, males, and newer residents used open space more frequently than did other groups. Respondents indicated that use of open space was increasing.

89% of those who said that they used the City's open space rated their open space experience as "good" or "excellent." About half of those who used open space considered it either "very" or "somewhat" crowded. This group said that the crowding was created by people walking – alone or with dogs – as well as by bicycling and development. Walking for pleasure or exercise was by far the most common activity people reported taking part in, with 92% of those who used open space reporting that activity.

The survey requested residents' opinions on a variety of policy issues. Respondents' overall priorities for open space were split nearly evenly between wildlife habitat and recreation/exercise. Agricultural activities came in a distant third. People's priorities varied depending on their length of residence, gender, and age.

Respondents were asked whether nine issues were important to them. Overall, Louisville residents thought that it was most important that dog owners clean up dog droppings and that the environment be preserved. They thought it was least important to purchase historical sites related to agriculture and mining for preservation. Again, there were clear gender and length of residence differences on these policy issues.

Residents were also asked whether they favored or opposed three specific policies. There was no clear consensus on whether herbicides should be used as part of an integrated weed management program. Lethal control of prairie dogs was favored by somewhat more residents than opposed it. Nearly four times as many respondents opposed building more parking lots as favored the idea.

The last policy questions were designed to gauge public willingness to pay for conversion of pastures to native grasslands and for removal of prairie dogs from open space. Louisville residents were more receptive to spending public funds on restoring native grasslands than on removing prairie dogs.

When asked an open-ended question about whether they had any other information that they would like to provide to help the City plan for open space, 133 people provided answers. These comments were varied, but the most common response indicated that open space should be protected and/or enhanced. The next most common types of responses favored trail additions or improvements, and they favored open space more generally. Commentators split on their opinions of prairie dogs.

This information can be used by the City as it plans to meet the needs of its current and future residents for opportunities involving public open space.

INTRODUCTION

The City of Louisville is located in Boulder County in north central Colorado. According to the 2000 Census, the City had a population of 18,937, which represents 53% growth from 1990's figures. Like other fast-growing communities along Colorado's Front Range, Louisville has been concerned with maintaining its residents' quality of life. This has included maintenance of open space both in and around the City, including expenditure of \$8 million for land acquisition since 1993.

In November 2002, Louisville residents approved the continuation of the existing .375% sales and use tax for open space by a vote of 63.5%. This tax will continue for another ten years and, according to the City's *Community Update*, will "fund construction, development, and maintenance of open space and park improvements, as well as for the additional acquisition of land to be used for open space buffer zones, trails, wildlife habitats, wetlands preservation, and future parks."

With this mandate, the City turned to its residents for information on which of these projects should be prioritized. In December 2002, the City completed an agreement with the Technical Assistance Program for a community opinion survey on open space issues. This report provides the results of that survey, which was completed by students working for the Technical Assistance Program in January and February 2003.

The Technical Assistance Program is a partnership between Colorado State University Cooperative Extension and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The Loveland office, which conducted this study, works with local governments in 15 counties in northeastern and east central Colorado on a variety of community projects.

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Polly Boyd, Administrative Assistant, Land Management

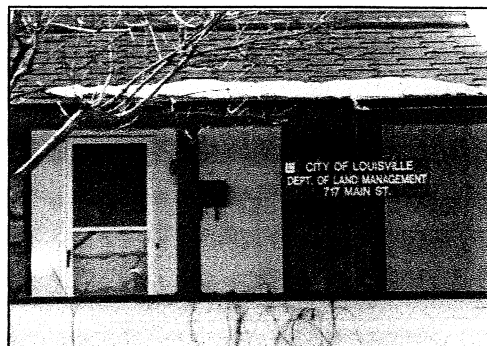
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SURVEY METHODOLOGY

A 13-question survey was designed by the CSU/DOLA Technical Assistance Program, with the assistance of City of Louisville staff and officials. The survey is attached as Appendix A.

The survey was administered by telephone to a random sample of Louisville residents drawn from the phone book. Calls were made from the City's Land Management offices by university students drawn primarily from Colorado State University. Training was provided by Liliias Jarding, Ph.D. All respondents were 18 years of age or older.



A total of 372 households completed the survey, from a total household population of 7,216. The survey results have a margin of error of +/- 5%. The results were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis.

SURVEY RESULTS

The Louisville Open Space Survey gathered information on four general topics: the characteristics of the responding households, general information on residents' experience with open space, information on the activities that residents took part in on open space, and opinions on a variety of policy issues. The results provided a great deal of information that can be used by the City in planning for the future of its open space programs.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Of those responding to the survey, 40% were male and 60% were female. Louisville's population is actually evenly split between men and women, so women were somewhat over-represented among those answering the survey. This should be taken into account when responses to questions vary by gender. Responding households included a total of 1,012 residents. The ages of those who answered the survey are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Ages of Respondents

Respondent's Age	Percent
18-24	1
25-40	29
41-65	60
Over 65	10

As Table 1 shows, most people responding to the survey were between the ages of 25 and 65, with the highest percentage being between 41 and 65. Compared to the total population of the City, the 18-24 age group was under-represented among survey respondents, while the over-65 age group was somewhat over-represented. Among the households surveyed, 45% included someone under the age of 18, and 13% included someone over the age of 65. Among City residents as a whole, about 29% of the population is under age 18, and 6% is over 65.

Respondents were also asked how long they had lived in Louisville. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Length of Time Lived in Louisville

Time Lived in Louisville	Percent
Less Than One Year	2
1-5 Years	25
6-10 Years	26
11-20 Years	29
Over 20 Years	19

As Table 2 shows, those who responded to the survey were fairly evenly divided by how long they had lived in the City, although the percentage of very new residents was low. This indicated that the survey results provided information from a residents with a variety of experience living in the City of Louisville.

RESIDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH OPEN SPACE

Residents were asked three types of questions about their experience with open space. One type of question asked about the importance of open space. The second asked about people's use of open space. Those who did use open space were then asked about the nature and quality of their experiences with City open space. The surveyors did not attempt to determine whether those answering the survey knew the difference between City-owned open space and County or other open space. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the results, as some respondents did not appear to make this differentiation.

IMPORTANCE OF OPEN SPACE

The first question on the survey asked people, overall, how important they considered open space in and around Louisville. The results are shown on Table 3.

Table 3: Importance of Open Space

Importance of Open Space	Percent
Very Important	69
Somewhat Important	23
Somewhat Unimportant	2
Not Important	2
Unsure/Neutral	3

The results in Table 3 indicate that 92% of Louisville residents consider open space in and around the City important, while only 4% consider it unimportant. This is a ringing endorsement of the City's focus on open space issues. As might be expected, open space was somewhat more important to those who used it once per week or more; 75% said it was "very Important," compared to 68% of lower-use residents. Open space was also more important to people under age 40, to newer residents, and to women. It should be noted that, throughout the results, long-term residence and greater age were often correlated, as would be expected.

It was clear that the survey touched an issue of importance to Louisville residents. The importance of open space was also evident in the responses to other questions.

USE OF OPEN SPACE

Louisville residents did not just say that open space was important. As Table 4 makes clear, residents use open space frequently.

Table 4: Frequency of Use of Louisville Open Space

Frequency of Use	Percent
Never	7
A Few Times a Year	20
A Few Times a Month	25
Once a Week	30
Daily	19

This indicated that open space is heavily used by many residents, with 49% of respondents saying that they used Louisville open space at least once a week. As this question only asked for the respondent's use level, other household members' use may be higher or lower. But this information was a clear indicator of a generally high level of open space use.

As might be expected, younger residents and newer residents used open space more frequently. Men said that they used Louisville open space slightly more than women. 33% of men said they were daily open space users, while 27% of women reported that level of use.



Respondents who said that they did use Louisville open space were then asked whether they had used open space more, less, or about the same amount in the past year. 56% said that their use had remained about the same, while 31% reported heavier use. Women reported a higher rate of increased use (33%) than men (27%).

Only 13% of respondents said that they had used open space less in the past year. This indicated that use increased overall. Those who reported lower use were also asked why their use had dropped. The 41 answers to this question are shown in Appendix 2. The most common reasons given were that people were busier or had less time

(9 responses or 22%), had work-related conflicts (6 or 15%), or were aging (5 or 12%). None of these more common answers reflects negatively on Louisville open space.

THE LOUISVILLE OPEN SPACE EXPERIENCE

Those who used Louisville open space were also asked how they rated the quality of their experience with that open space. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Quality of Experience with Louisville Open Space

Quality of Experience	Percent
Excellent	30
Good	59
Average	8
Fair	1
Poor	1

As Table 5 shows, Louisville open space also got high marks on this question. 89% of those who said that they used open space rated their experience as “excellent” or “good.” Only 2% rated it as “fair” or “poor.” When the ratings were compared among various groups, the heavier users of open space, men, and long-term residents were a bit less satisfied. For example, only 25% of men reported that their experience was “excellent,” while 34% of women reported that rating.

The other question that attempted to get residents’ opinions on the quality of their experiences asked whether respondents thought that Louisville open space was currently crowded. Their responses are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Perceived Crowding of Louisville Open Space

Perceived Crowding	Percent
Very Crowded	7
Somewhat Crowded	33
Not Very Crowded	36
Not Crowded At All	7

Respondents were very evenly split on this question, although those who used open space often did perceive it as more crowded than infrequent users. Interestingly, those who have lived in Louisville five years or less also considered it less crowded than did longer-term residents.

When those who thought that open space was “very crowded” or “somewhat crowded” were asked what types of activities they thought created crowding, 131 people answered. Many gave multiple answers. The most common response was that walking and hiking created crowding (39 responses or 30% of those answering). The second most common response was dog-walking (27 or 21%), followed closely by bicycles and building/development activities. Each of the latter two answers were provided by 26 people, or 20% of those answering this question. Other answers given by a number of people, in order of their importance, were joggers/runners, the presence of too many people, and dogs.

These answers indicate that the Louisville residents who consider open space crowded have a number of reasons for perceiving crowding. In light of later answers, it is worth noting that a total of 30% considered dogs and their owners an issue. Overall, Louisville residents value their open space and the quality of their experience on those lands. This should be kept in mind as activities and policy issues are considered.

ACTIVITIES ON OPEN SPACE

The third type of question asked those who said that they used Louisville open space to identify the activities that they took part in. People were asked about eight specific activities, and they were then asked to identify any other activities that they took part in on open space. Table 7 shows the results for the eight

specific activities, in order of importance.

Table 7: Activities That Respondents Take Part in on Louisville Open Space

Activity	Percent
Walking for Pleasure or Exercise	92
Bicycling	52
Dog-Walking	42
Wildlife Observation	40
Jogging	34
Rollerblading	11
Skateboarding	4
Horseback Riding	0

Table 7 shows that walking was, by far, the most common activity among those responding to the survey. Bicycling, dog-walking, observing wildlife, and jogging were also quite common, while no one reported riding horses on Louisville open space.

As might be expected, there were some notable differences among different types of people's participation in various activities. Among the differences that were significant, men were more likely to be involved in jogging, bicycling, and rollerblading than women. Younger residents were also more likely to be jogging, bicycling, and rollerblading than residents over age 65. Younger residents were more likely to be walking dogs and skateboarding. Long-term residents were more likely to be observing wildlife, while newer residents were more likely to be bicycling and walking dogs.

These variations can be used in establishing policies that are attuned to various types of residents. For example, if the City wants to encourage greater use of open space by long-term residents, the opportunities and facilities for wildlife observation can be expanded. Or if the City wishes to appeal to younger residents, then it can add facilities that encourage or facilitate the activities those residents favor. This information can be used either to enhance opportunities for certain groups or to provide a range of activities for all groups. This information can also be used to provide separate areas of open space that provide activities tailored to various types of residents – for example, a less active area, a more active area, an area that appeals to seniors, an area that appeals to youth, and so forth.

Eleven percent of respondents also indicated that they took part in activities that were not specifically listed. The most common of these was hiking (13 responses). It is not clear why some respondents differentiated "hiking" from "walking for pleasure or exercise," but this could be inquired into further, as it might be important for the City in planning for some users of open space. The second most common "other" activities, with four responses each, were playing with children and sitting/observing.

These results, combined with the fact that about half of respondents perceived some degree of crowding on existing Louisville open space, would indicate – at a minimum – the desirability of more walking trails. However, it's important for public officials to balance a number of uses on public lands. The last set of questions, which asked about people's policy preferences, provided more information on the balance preferred by Louisville residents.

POLICY ISSUES

The final type of questions asked Louisville residents their opinions on a variety of open space policy issues. These ranged from general policy preferences to specific opinions on matters that have received public attention.

POLICY PRIORITIES

The first of these questions attempted to get residents to prioritize three overall policy preferences for Louisville's open space. It asked residents to decide on one priority for what to do with a parcel of open space land – wildlife habitat, recreation/exercise, or agricultural activities. The results were interesting, as respondents were almost evenly split between using the land for wildlife habitat (42%) and using it for recreation/exercise (48%). While recreation and exercise received the highest rating, the difference between the two priorities was just outside the margin of error. Agricultural activities were favored by only 10% of those responding to the survey.



The differences among those who chose each of these priorities were instructive. Those over age 65 considered agricultural activities almost twice as important as did all respondents (18% rated it #1) and considered wildlife habitat less important (35% rated it #1). Long-term residents also favored agriculture more than newer residents. Women favored wildlife habitat slightly more than men, but men favored recreation and exercise notably more than women (57% vs. 43% rated it #1).

People who considered wildlife habitat their first priority were interesting in several ways. First, they considered the current open space more crowded than did people who chose either other priority. Second, they were the group that considered open space most important (those who chose agriculture as first priority considered open space least important). And third, they were less likely to take part in wildlife observation than were those who chose the other two priorities. This indicated that there was a segment of the population that not only valued wildlife, but that valued it for its own sake – not necessarily for its activity opportunities.

SPECIFIC POLICIES

After gathering information on respondents' general policy priorities, the survey went on to ask about a number of specific policies that have been proposed for Louisville open lands. Respondents were asked how important nine potential policies were, whether they favored three specific policies, and their preferences for public spending on two key open lands issues. Table 8 shows people's opinions on the importance of a number of open space issues.

Table 8: Importance of Open Space Issues to Respondents, in Percent of Responses

Issue	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Dog Owners Violating Ordinances by Letting Dogs Run Off Leash	46	34	20
Dog Owners Cleaning up Dog Droppings	80	18	2
Building More Trails	30	54	16
Providing a Place Where Dogs Can Legally Run Off Leash	40	34	26
Keeping Viable Agriculture	42	43	15
Environmental Preservation	70	27	3
Purchasing Native American Historical Sites for Preservation	3	42	19
Purchasing Mining Historical Sites for Preservation	22	50	28
Purchasing Agricultural Historical Sites for Preservation	21	50	29

Overall, Louisville residents thought it was most important that dog owners clean up dog droppings and that the environment be preserved. They thought it was least important to purchase agricultural and mining historical sites for preservation. When the preferences of heavier open space users were considered separately, this group was more concerned with dogs running off leash, clean-up of dog droppings, and preservation of all three types of historical sites than were those who used open space less often. Not surprisingly, those who considered recreation and exercise the highest priority also considered building trails more important than did other groups. All respondents who considered agriculture the highest priority also considered keeping viable agriculture on open space important.

When respondents were divided along demographic lines, clear differences were present between men and women and between newer and long-term residents. Differences that were significant for men and women

are shown in Table 9A, and those that were significant for new and long-term residents are shown in Table 9B. For these tables, the percentage of respondents who said an issue was “very important” was combined with the percentage who said it was “somewhat important” to create a total percent who said an issue was “important.”

Table 9A: Significant Differences in Issue Importance Between Men and Women

Issue	% of Women Saying “Important”	% of Men Saying “Important”
Dog Owners Violating Ordinances by Letting Dogs Run Off Leash	83	76
Providing a Place Where Dogs Can Legally Run Off Leash	77	69
Keeping Viable Agriculture	90	77
Purchasing Native American Historical Sites for Preservation	84	78
Purchasing Mining Historical Sites for Preservation	78	63
Purchasing Agricultural Historical Sites for Preservation	79	61

Table 9B: Significant Differences in Issue Importance Between Long-Term and Newer Residents

Issue	% of 20-Year-Plus Residents Saying “Important”	% of 5-Year or Less Residents Saying “Important”
Dog Owners Violating Ordinances by Letting Dogs Run Off Leash	81	75
Building More Trails	74	86
Providing a Place Where Dogs Can Legally Run Off Leash	53	78
Environmental Preservation	90	100
Purchasing Native American Historical Sites for Preservation	70	90
Purchasing Mining Historical Sites for Preservation	71	55

As Table 9A shows, women favored all types of historical preservation and viable agriculture more than men. Women also saw both dogs running off leash and providing a place where that could be done legally as more important issues. Table 9B shows that long-term residents considered historical preservation less important for Native American sites, but more important for mining sites. They also thought that providing an area for dogs to run off leash was considerably less important, while dogs who were already running off leash was more important. And long-term residents were less favorable toward building more trails and toward environmental preservation than newer residents.

The survey also asked for respondents' opinions on three specific open space issues. These were lethal control of prairie dogs, building more parking lots, and using herbicides as part of an integrated weed management program. Respondents were asked whether they "strongly favored," "mildly favored," "mildly opposed," or "strongly opposed" each of these policies. For purposes of simplicity, the strength of people's opinions were not included in Table 10, and "strong" and "mild" preferences were combined to create "favor" and "oppose" categories.

Table 10: Percent of Respondents Favoring or Opposing Possible Policies

Issue	Favor	Oppose
Lethal Control of Prairie Dogs	44	37
Building More Parking Lots	16	60
Use of Herbicides as Part of an Integrated Weed Mgt. Program	37	40

The public's opinion on building more parking lots was quite clear, with nearly four times as many people opposing this idea as favoring it. Unfortunately for City officials, the difference between those who favored and opposed use of herbicides was not statistically significant, so the survey results did not provide guidance on this issue. Lethal control of prairie dogs was favored by somewhat more residents than opposed the idea.

There were a number of differences among various groups on these issues. Those who used open space more often were also more strongly opposed to building parking lots and using herbicides than were less frequent users. All three options were more strongly opposed by those who considered wildlife habitat the first priority for open space. Newer residents showed a stronger environmental tendency than long-term residents by more strongly opposing both lethal control of prairie dogs and herbicide use. Residents under age 40 and women were also more strongly opposed to lethal control of prairie dogs. Those over age 65 and those who had lived in Louisville for over 20 years – two groups that often overlapped – were most in favor of building more parking lots.

Residents were also asked for their opinions on two specific issues through questions that were designed to determine their willingness to pay for policy changes. If the City decided to convert pastures to native grasslands or to remove prairie dogs from open space, these questions asked how much respondents thought the City should pay to accomplish these objectives.

Given a choice of paying nothing, \$500, \$1000, or \$5000 per acre to convert pastures to native grasslands, a third of residents (32%) were not willing to pay anything. Almost a third were willing to pay \$500 (27%) or \$1000 (32%), while only 8% were willing to pay \$5000 per acre.

Given a choice of paying nothing, \$50, \$100, or \$500 to remove a single prairie dog from open space, 42% said that they were not willing to pay anything. 39% were willing to pay \$50, 8% were willing to pay \$100, and slightly more (11%) were willing to pay \$500.

These results indicated that Louisville residents were more receptive to spending public funds on restoring grasslands than on removing prairie dogs. However, residents were not very receptive to spending large amounts of money for either activity. Long-term residents were decidedly less willing to spend money to restore grasslands than newer residents, but the opinions of the two groups were similar on prairie dog removal. Men's and women's opinions were similar on both of these issues.

The final policy question asked survey respondents for any additional information that they would like to provide to help the City plan for its open space. 133 respondents, or 36% provided additional information, which is shown in its entirety in Appendix 2. These comments were widely varied, but the most common response indicated that open lands should be protected and/or enhanced (22 responses or 17% of those providing additional information). The second most common types of comments included a request for trail additions or improvements, or comments favoring open space (13 or 10% each). These were followed closely by requests to control prairie dogs (12), which was followed in turn by those who wanted to keep the prairie dogs (9). Other comments that were made more than once, in order of importance, included comments favoring building an off-leash area for dogs (11); requests not to acquire more open space or spend tax money (8); comments that off-leash dogs were a problem (7); and comments indicating a need to take care of the existing open space (7).

These comments, which were open to any issue -- but often added information on the survey questions -- provided a useful indicator of the strength of people's opinions on certain issues. The comments also raised issues that were not directly raised by the survey and can be used to suggest topics that may be of importance in the future.

CONCLUSION

The Louisville Open Space Survey highlighted clear public agreements on some issues and clear differences on others. Variations based on respondents' time of residency in the City, gender, and use of open space were often quite noticeable and can be used to help make policy decisions.

The City of Louisville Open Space Survey provides a great deal of information that, it is hoped, the City will be able to use in planning and decision-making activities. Clear differences emerged among people with various priorities that can be used to tailor open lands to different audiences. The City can now make policy decisions about meeting the needs of various groups -- and City residents as a whole -- in a more informed fashion. Using this information, the City can move toward programs and facilities that will provide an improved quality of life for current and future Louisville residents.