



THE CITY OF  
**CALGARY**

**imagineParks**

**Executive Summary  
Public Opinion Research Report  
August 2012**

**Leger**  
MARKETING

# CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

Parks play an integral role in our local communities and help shape the neighbourhoods in which we live. As the population of Calgary has grown, so has the need to plan for future generations of Calgary parks users.

Proactively, The City of Calgary is developing a visionary 30-year plan for a sustainable, efficient and effective open space system. This imagineParks Plan will serve as the foundation for future planning policy and development.

As one tool among many, to assist in the development of the imagineParks long-term Plan, The City of Calgary commissioned a multi-phased public opinion research study to understand the public's vision of Calgary's parks in future and identify priorities for Calgary's open spaces over the next 30 years.

This research will form only one component of input into the final imagineParks Plan, supplementing other research and engagement strategies being undertaken by Calgary Parks.

# RESEARCH OVERVIEW: Multi-Phased Research Process

## RESULTS

will be used as one of the many inputs to assist with the ultimate imagineParks Plan.

**A TELEPHONE SURVEY**  
was conducted among a random stratified sample of 506 Calgarians aged 18+.

**AN ONLINE SURVEY PORTAL**  
was available to ALL who wanted to respond to the same telephone survey questions.

**FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH**  
laid the foundation for the subsequent survey research.

# RESEARCH METHODS:

## Qualitative Focus Groups

A series of four focus groups were conducted for this phase of research.

Group Type	Date/Time	# of Participants
Parks frequent adult users	May 14 <sup>th</sup> : 5:30-7:30pm	10
Parks frequent adult users	May 14 <sup>th</sup> : 7:30-9:30pm	9
Parks less frequent adult users	May 13 <sup>th</sup> : 6:30-8:30pm	9
Youth aged 15 to 17 years	May 13 <sup>th</sup> : 4:30-6:30pm	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4 GROUPS</b>	<b>36</b>

**Frequent users** = use parks at least once/week.

**Less frequent users** = use parks less than once/week

**Parks** = pathways, natural areas, wetlands, cemeteries, sports fields, off-leash areas, community gardens, playgrounds and local, community and regional parks.



# SURVEY RESEARCH METHODS:

## Telephone Survey

**WHO?**



- 506 randomly selected Calgarians aged 18 years and older
  - Stratified by City quadrant, age and gender

**HOW?**



- Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
- Benchmark data, no tracking available



**WHEN?**



- Formal pre-test: June 11, 2012
- Interviews conducted: June 13-26, 2012

**VALIDITY?**



- Overall margin of error = +/-4.4%

# SURVEY RESEARCH METHODS:

## Online Survey Portal

### WHO?



- 742 respondents aged 18 years and older who voluntarily opted to complete the survey
- A parental consent form was available should youth have desired to participate in the online survey; however, no youth participated

### HOW?



- Survey link from The City's website to Legerweb.com platform: Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI)



### WHEN?



- Online survey link open from June 13 to July 10, 2012

### VALIDITY?



- **SELF-SELECT ONLINE RESEARCH CAVEAT:** The findings are qualitative in nature. As a result of the method by which the sample was obtained, the results should be regarded as directional and cannot be projected to the larger population. Online survey results are not included in this executive summary for this reason.





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## **Focus Group Highlights**

# MOTIVATION FOR PARKS USAGE

Participants explain that they use parks for five key purposes:

## Recreation

*"I play soccer a lot."  
"I use parks for biking and running."*

## Relaxation

*"I enjoy the scenery."  
"Parks help relieve daily stresses."*

## Education

*"I like to learn about the natural areas."  
"I use them for bird watching."*

## Social Interaction

*"We like to have BBQs with family and friends."  
"I meet my friends in the park for coffee."*

## Transportation

*"It's safer on the paths than on the roads."  
"I bike to get to work and get around."*



# DESCRIPTIONS OF CALGARY'S PARKS TODAY

Unprompted descriptions of Calgary's parks are predominantly positive. Most participants greatly appreciate what parks bring to their quality of life.

Positive Comments	Neutral Comments	Negative Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Convenient, easy to access</li><li>➤ Clean, kept-up</li><li>➤ Variety of activities</li><li>➤ Many of them, plenty, vast</li><li>➤ Green, grass, trees</li><li>➤ Relaxing</li><li>➤ Fun, well-developed</li><li>➤ Family environment</li><li>➤ Easy to navigate, connected</li><li>➤ Nature has been preserved</li><li>➤ Outstanding, awesome</li><li>➤ Safe</li><li>➤ Impressive</li><li>➤ Best pathways</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Inconsistent maintenance</li><li>➤ Some are busy, some are not</li><li>➤ Some are green, others are not</li><li>➤ Assorted use is offered, but could always use more</li><li>➤ Some don't have enough knowledge about parks</li><li>➤ Need more trees</li><li>➤ Need better parking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Not safe</li><li>➤ Not updated</li><li>➤ Problems with signage</li><li>➤ Dangerous pathways</li><li>➤ Maintenance issues</li><li>➤ Hard to get to bigger parks</li><li>➤ Getting hurt</li><li>➤ Boring</li><li>➤ Empty</li></ul>

# HOW PARKS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME

Participants' perceptions regarding how parks have changed over time focus on four key areas:



## **Society has changed:**

More safety-oriented; less citizen stewardship; families are busier with other activities.

## **The types of parks available have changed:**

More pathways; more off-leash parks; more water parks and community gardens.

## **Materials used in parks has changed:**

Paved pathways; gravel replaced by rubber turf; safety of playground equipment.

## **For some, the purpose of using parks has changed:**

Using pathways to commute; more festivals; less use as meeting places.

# PREFERENCES FOR PARKS: 10 YEARS FROM NOW

Focus group participants' preferences for parks in Calgary 10 years from now are concentrated on three major themes:

*"I'd like to see pathways cross highways and major routes and take you through the entire city."*

An increased interconnectivity of parks throughout The City

*"A park should offer more than one activity. It should have a lot to do. People have multiple kids at multiple ages."*

An increase in multi-functional destination parks

*"I'd like to see more off-leash areas." vs. "I'd like to see greener sports fields." vs. "I want more BBQ areas, fire pits and rest areas."*

Specific features and amenities

# THE FUTURE OF PARKS: 20 YEARS FROM NOW

In all focus group workshops, participants present their perspective on:

Societal projections 20 years  
from now



Denser population, increased  
desire for convenience, less  
driving, more biking and transit,  
greater dependence on technology

Expectations for the types of  
parks 20 years from now



More rooftop spaces, more biking  
opportunities, more international-  
style sports fields, more all-season  
parks, bigger parks

Anticipated features and  
amenities in parks 20 years  
from now



Solar powered lighting, integration  
of nature and technology, more  
maps, emergency stations, covered  
areas, healthy food options

# PROJECTING THE VISION FOR PARKS IN FUTURE

Adult focus group participants offer birth announcement messages for parks in Calgary as a projective exercise to identify what they hope parks will bring to the community over time. This exercise brings information related to participants':



# FUTURE CONCERNS FOR PARKS

Focus group participants commonly hypothesize that there will be **less**:

- Parks space in general
- Options available for all ages
- Maintenance
- Money for parks in general
- Focus on the upkeep of parks versus adding new parks
- Green space in general
- Communication regarding what is happening with parks
- Natural areas and wildlife
- Focus on parks regulations/legislation

Focus group participants also feel that there will be **more**:

- Garbage
- Privatization of cleaning parks
- Commercialization of parks sponsorship
- City expansion impacting natural areas such as the Weaselhead
- Wildlife such as coyotes or raccoons
- Tree disease and infections
- User fees/additional taxes for parks
- Money spent on parks which people will not frequently use
- Focus on safe equipment vs. “fun” equipment, making playgrounds more “boring”



# KEY PARKS CONCEPTS AND TRADE-OFFS

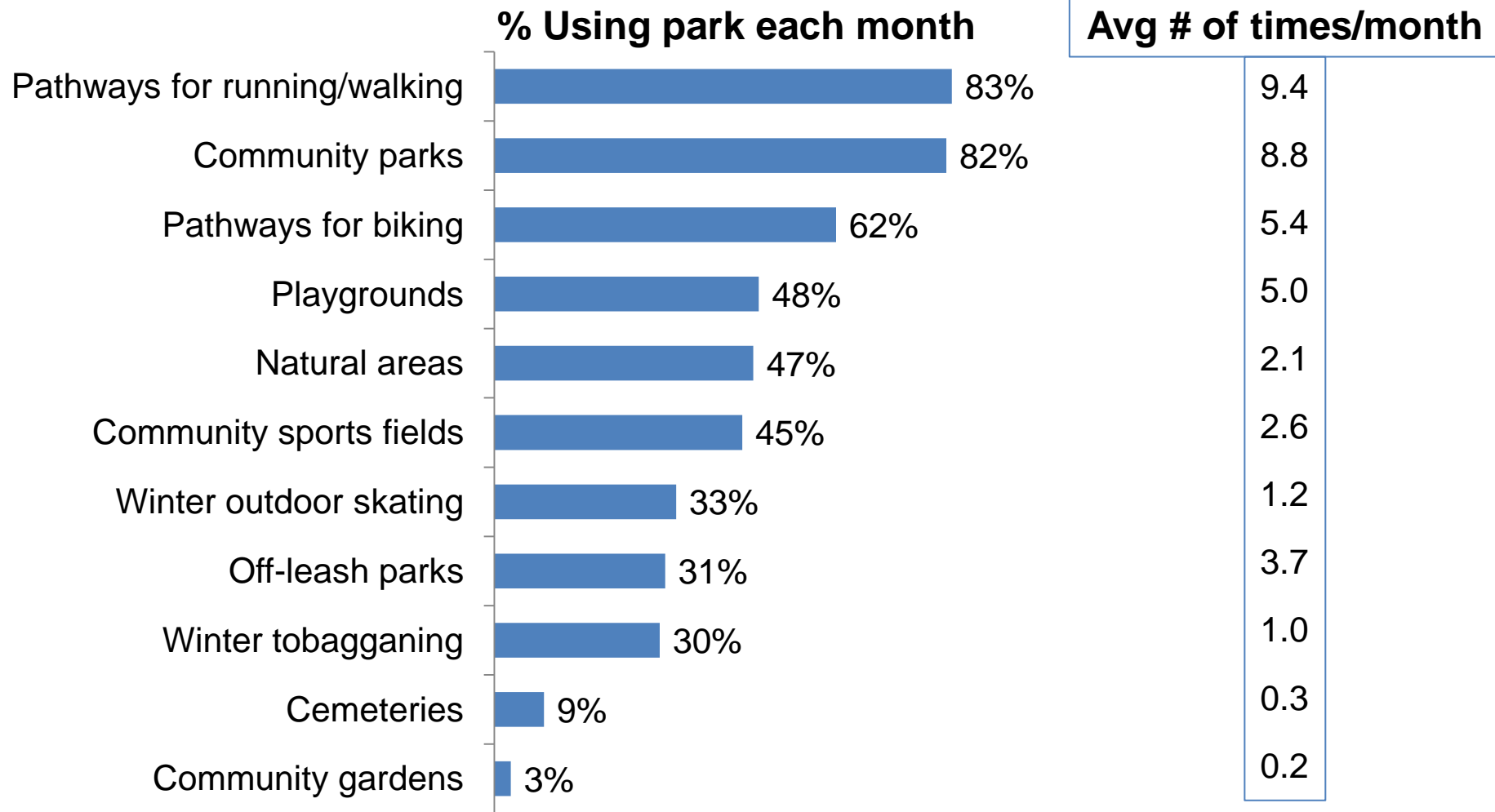




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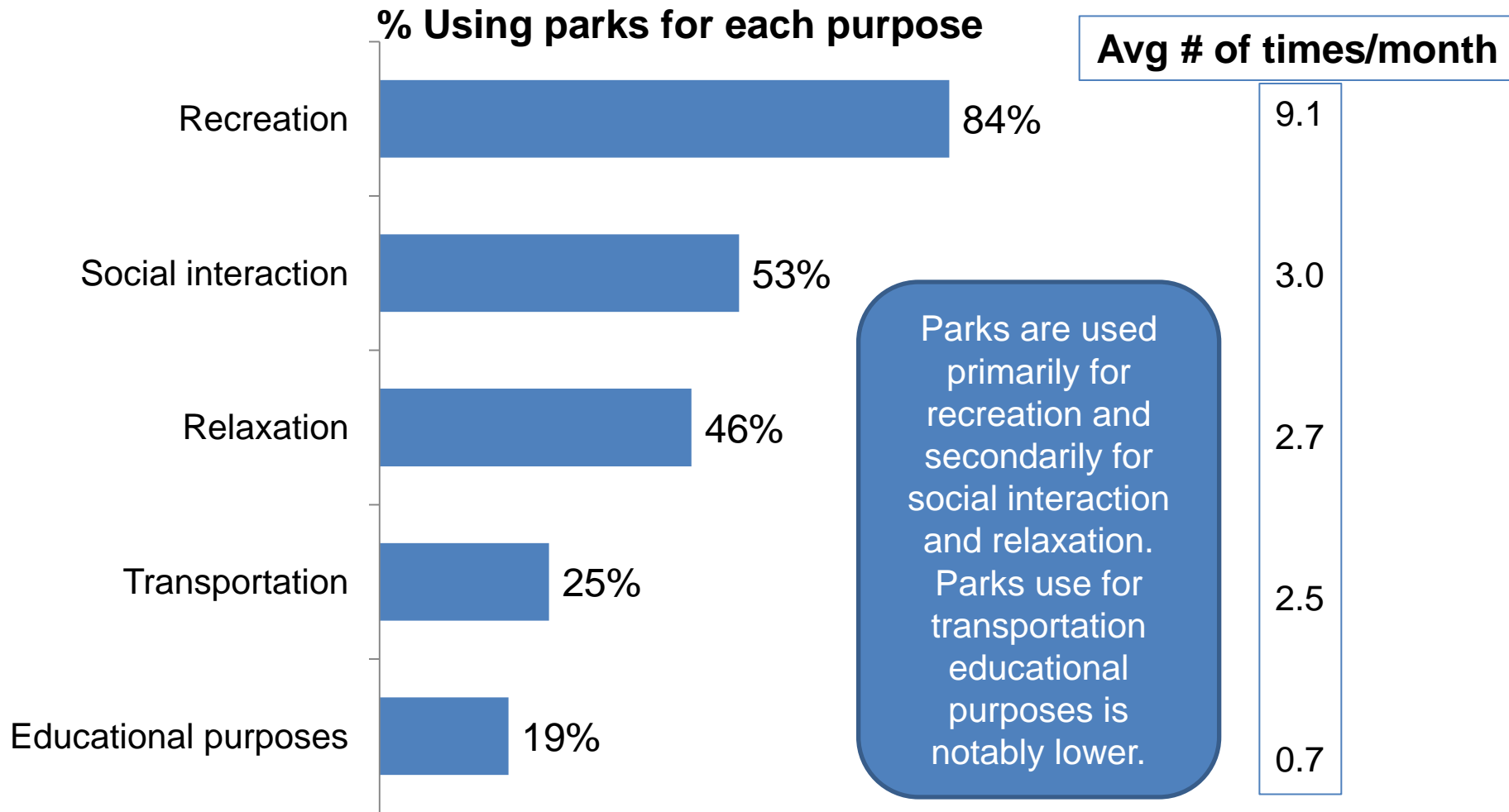
## **Telephone Survey Highlights**

# FREQUENCY OF USING VARIOUS TYPES OF PARKS



All Respondents n= 506

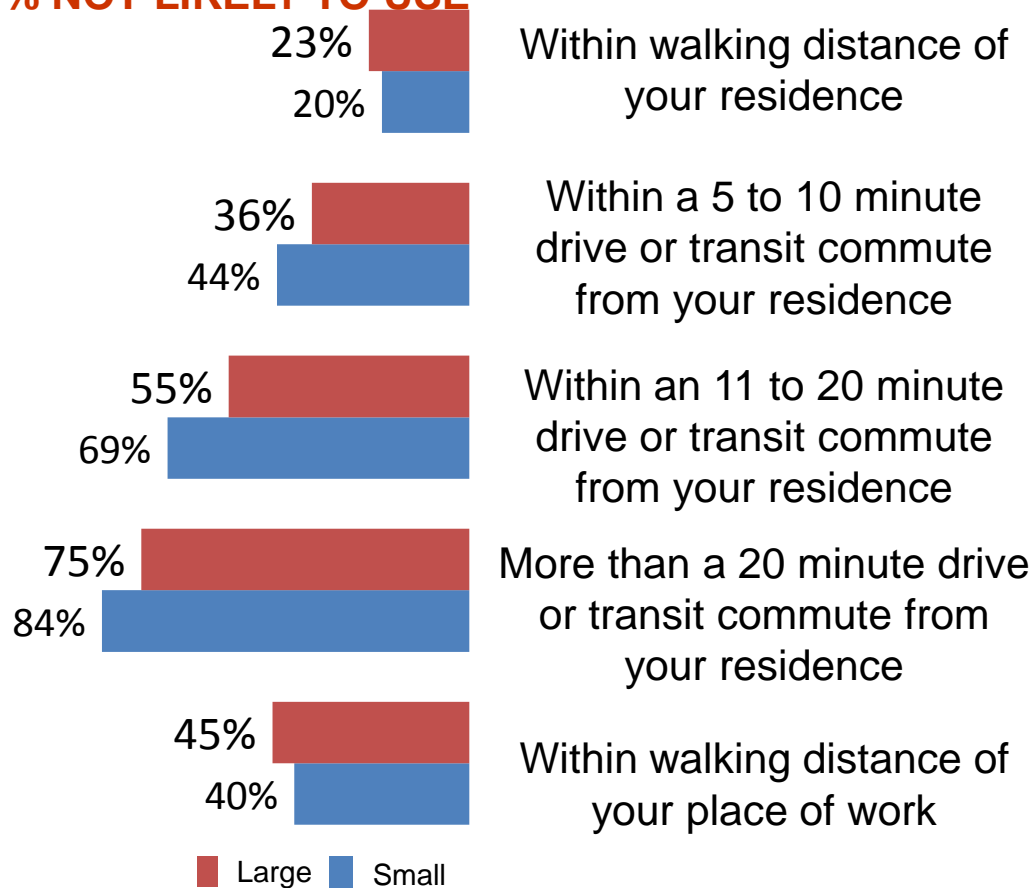
# MOTIVATION FOR USING PARKS



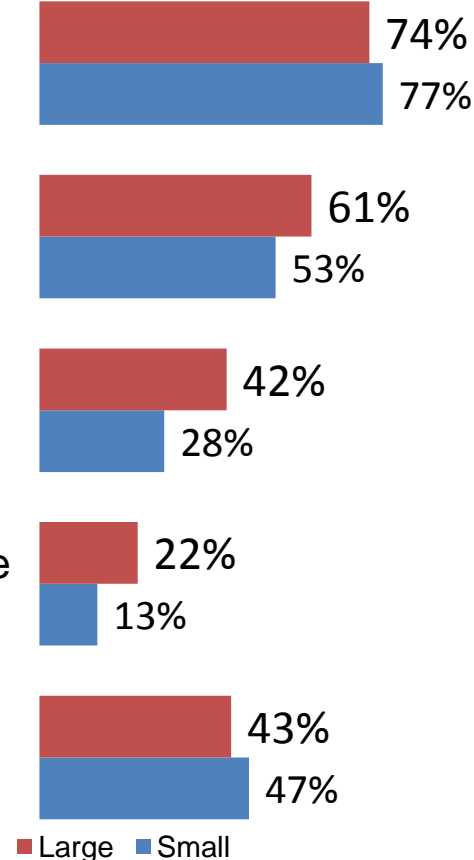
All Respondents n= 506

# PROJECTED USE OF SMALLER COMMUNITY-BASED PARKS VS. LARGER PARKS

## % NOT LIKELY TO USE

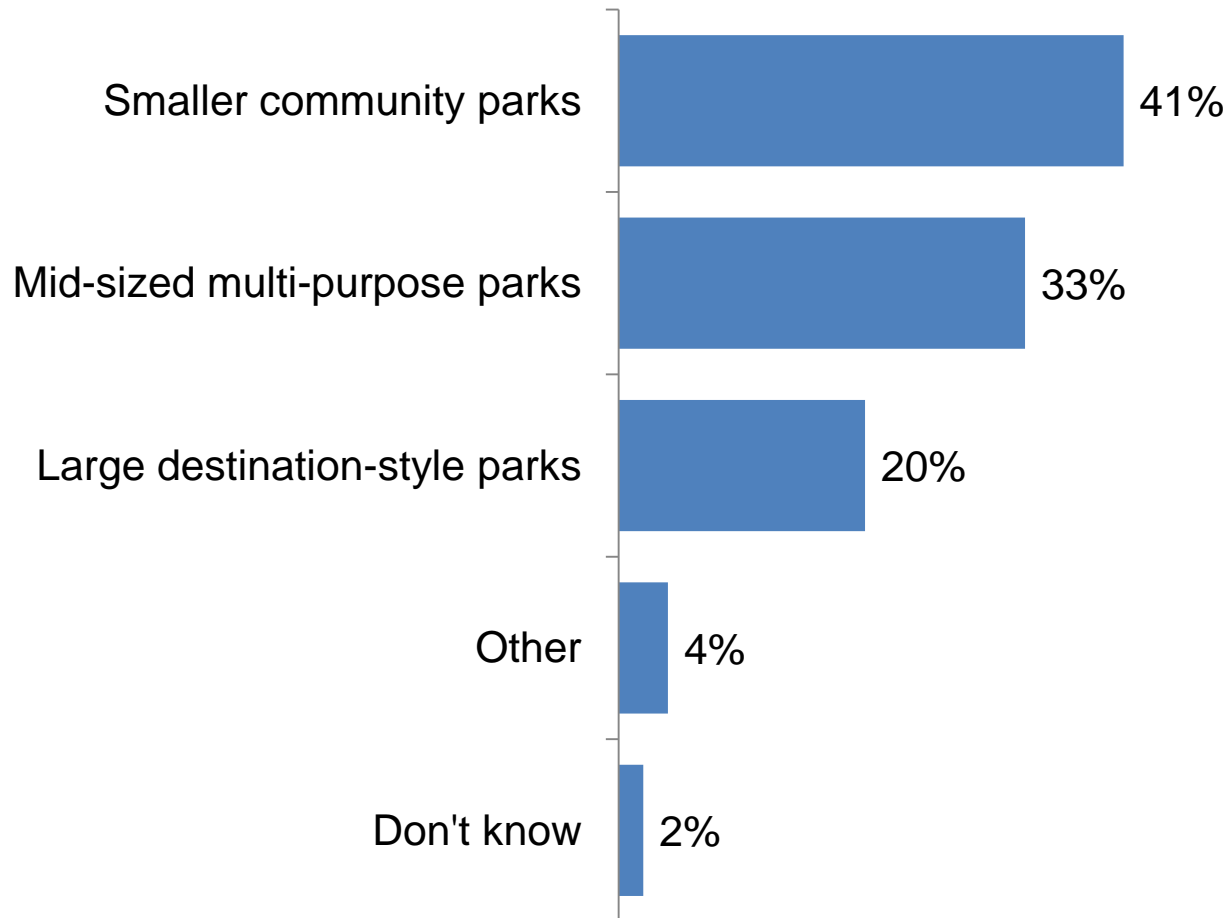


## % LIKELY TO USE



All Respondents n= 506

# SIZE OF PARKS: FUTURE NEEDS



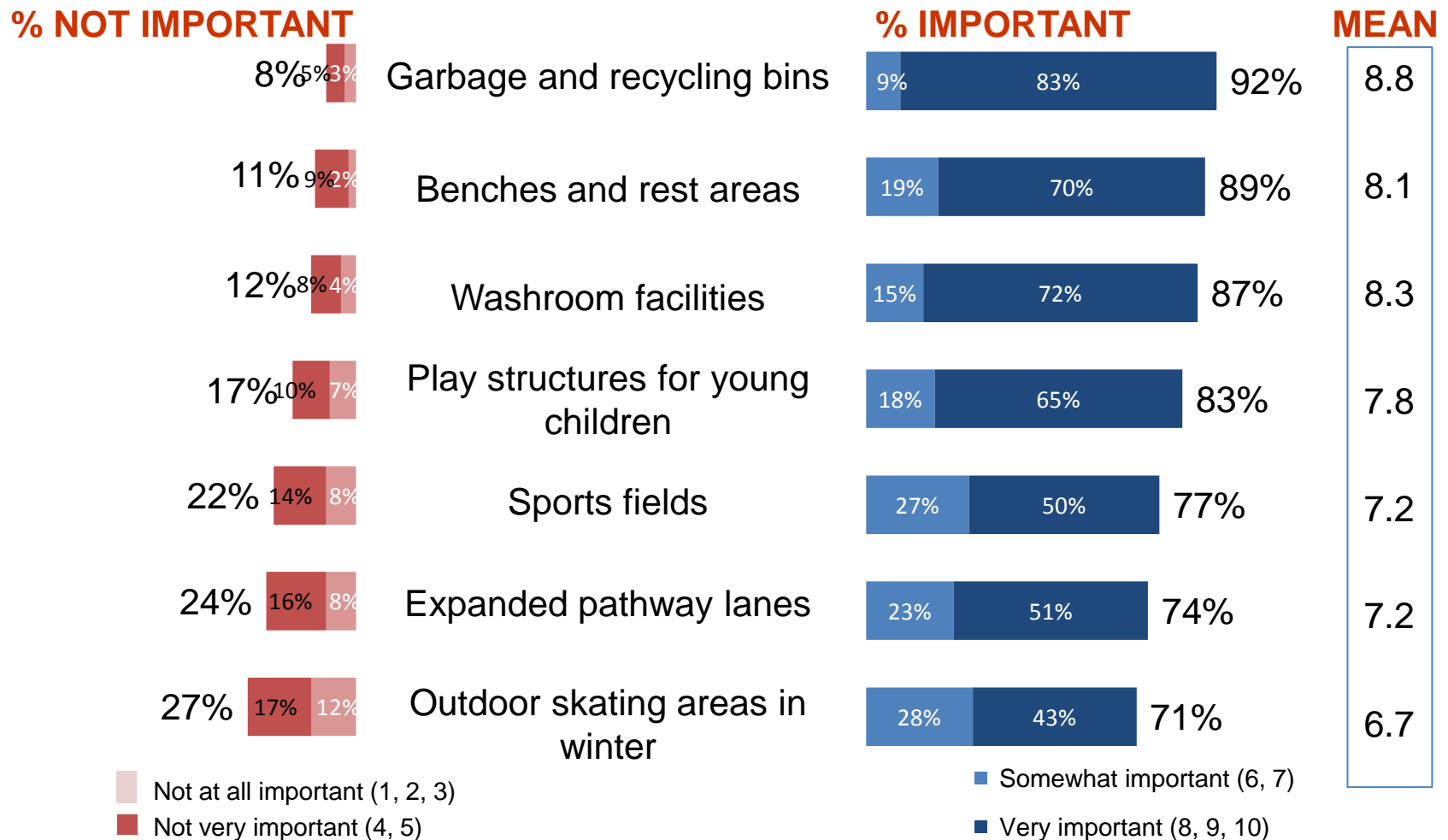
In future, Calgarians believe that Calgary will need a variety of types of parks. The greatest expressed need is for smaller community parks, followed by mid-sized multi-purpose parks and then by larger destination-style parks.

All Respondents n= 506



# FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS FEATURES

## TOP-TIER



All Respondents n= 506

# FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS FEATURES

## MID-TIER

### % NOT IMPORTANT

33% 19% 14%

Play structures for youth and/or adults

34% 22% 12%

Water features such as swimming or wading pools or spray parks

35% 20% 15%

Covered gazebo-style areas that provide shelter from sun/rain

36% 20% 16%

Flower beds

37% 22% 15%

Planned river access

37% 21% 16%

BBQ areas with fire pits and picnic tables

44% 20% 24%

Off-leash areas

49% 23% 26%

Community gardens

Not at all important (1, 2, 3)

Not very important (4, 5)

### % IMPORTANT

25% 41% 66%

26% 39% 65%

26% 39% 65%

24% 39% 63%

24% 39% 63%

24% 38% 62%

17% 38% 55%

20% 31% 51%

Somewhat important (6, 7)

Very important (8, 9, 10)

### MEAN

6.6

6.6

6.5

6.4

6.4

6.4

6.0

5.7

All Respondents n= 506

# FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS FEATURES

## LOWER-TIER

### % NOT IMPORTANT

57%

27%

30%

Bike rentals

### % IMPORTANT

20%

23%

43%

### MEAN

5.2

57%

26%

31%

Skateboarding parks

23%

20%

43%

5.0

58%

31%

27%

Canoe or kayak rentals

22%

20%

42%

5.1

58%

25%

33%

BMX biking trails

22%

20%

42%

4.9

60%

26%

34%

Art features, such as  
sculptures or murals

19%

20%

39%

5.0

61%

16%

45%

Free Wi-Fi

12%

26%

38%

4.6

65%

28%

37%

Boat launch areas

18%

17%

35%

4.7

Not at all important (1, 2, 3)

Not very important (4, 5)

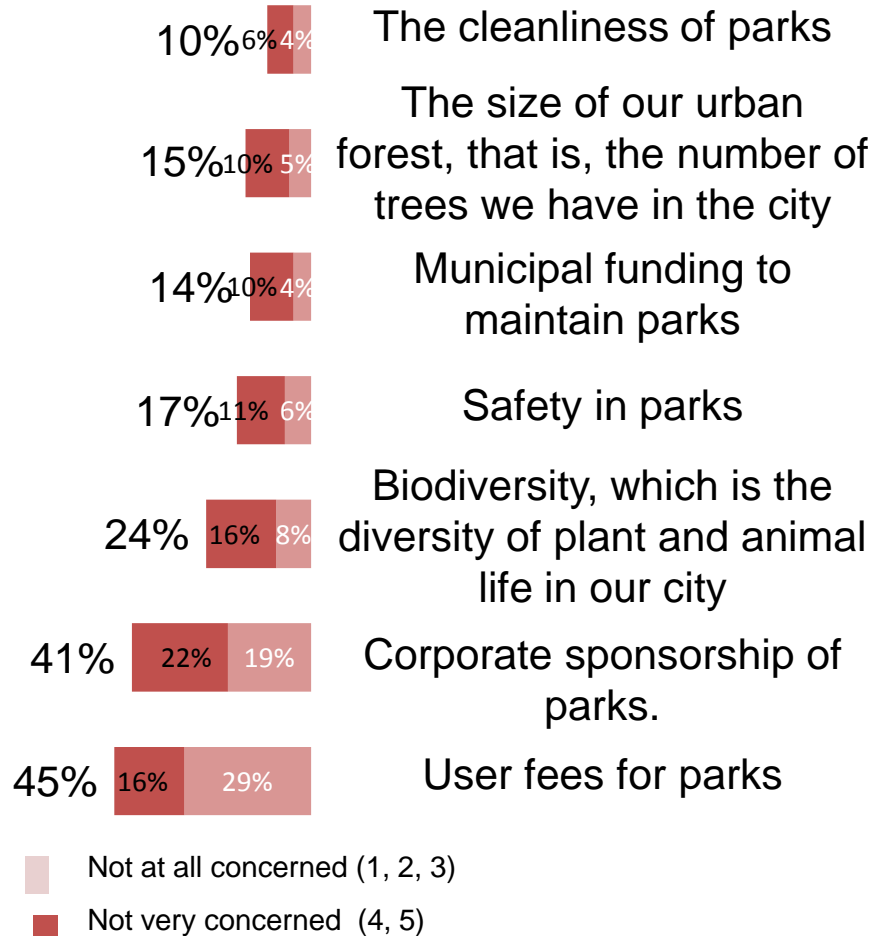
Somewhat important (6, 7)

Very important (8, 9, 10)

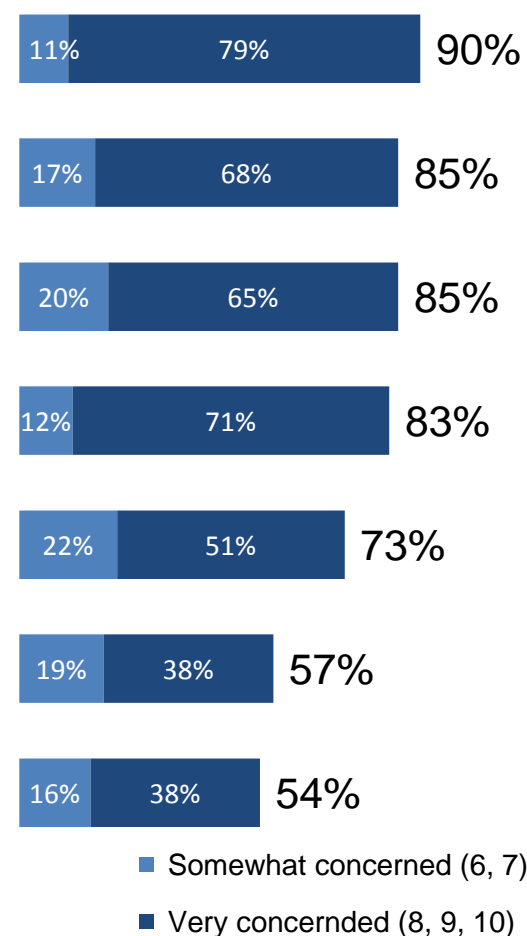
All Respondents n= 506

# FUTURE CONCERNS FOR PARKS

## % NOT CONCERNED



## % CONCERNED



## MEAN

8.5

8.0

7.9

8.1

7.3

6.3

5.9

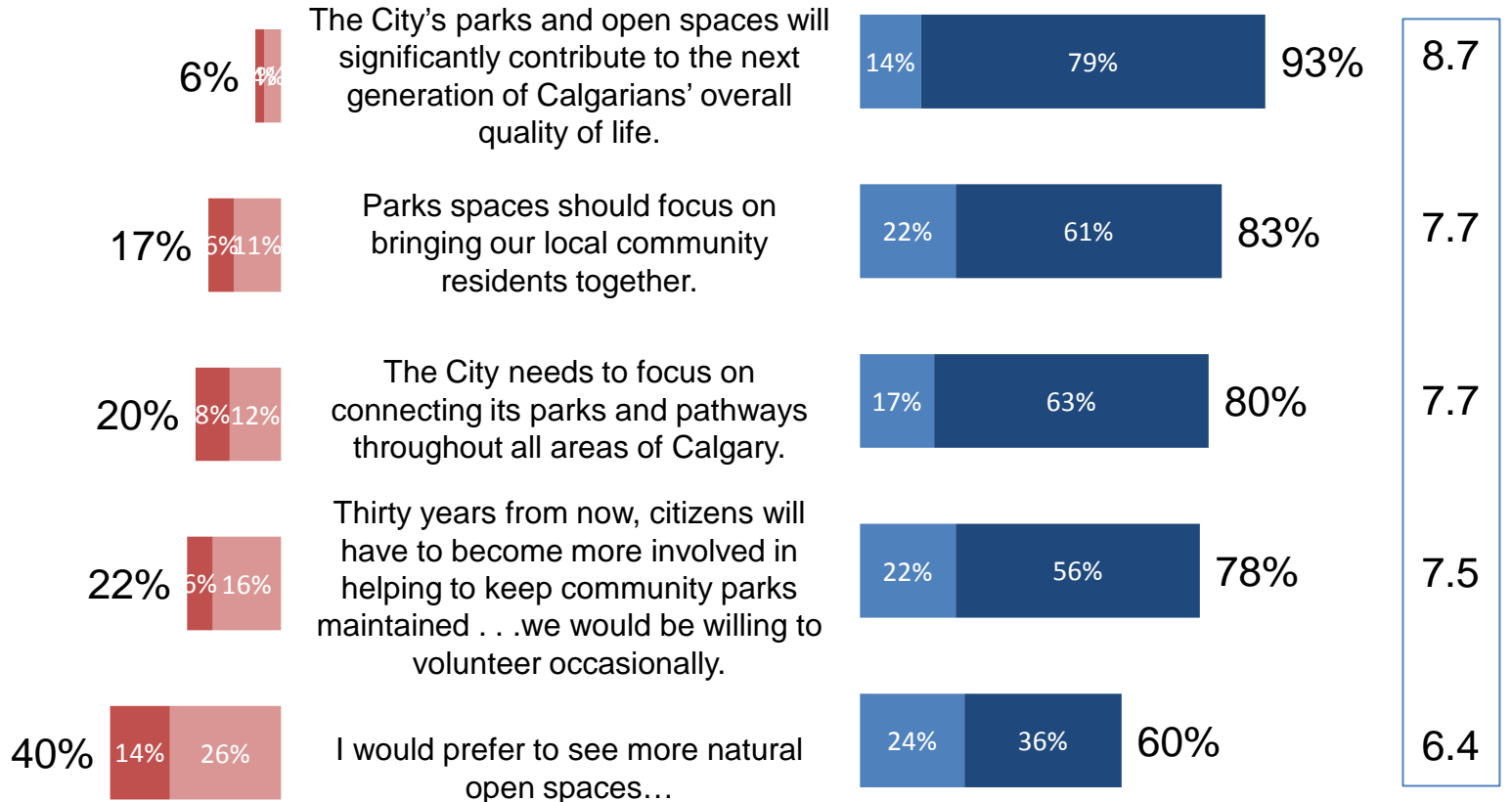
All Respondents n= 506

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS FUTURE PARKS CONCEPTS

## % DISAGREE

## % AGREE

## MEAN



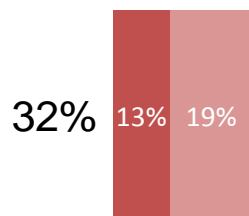
Strongly disagree (1, 2, 3)    Somewhat disagree (4, 5)

Somewhat agree (6, 7)    Strongly agree (8, 9, 10)

All Respondents n= 506

# LIKELIHOOD TO LIVE IN CALGARY IF NOT FOR CURRENT JOB

## % NOT LIKELY



How likely would you be to live in Calgary if it were not for your job or a family member's job here in the city?

## % LIKELY



## MEAN

6.7

Not at all likely (1, 2, 3)

Not very likely (4, 5)

Somewhat likely (6, 7)

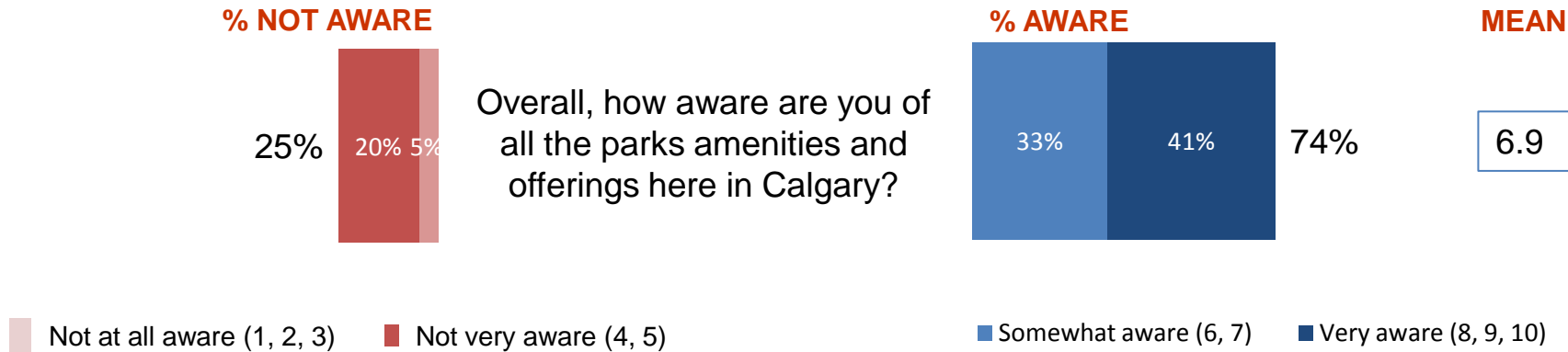
Very likely (8, 9, 10)

Two-thirds of Calgarians show loyalty to the City of Calgary in expressing that they would be likely to remain living in the City regardless of their current job or a family member's current job. Nonetheless, one-third of survey respondents indicates that they would not be likely to reside in Calgary if it were not for their current employment situation. This sentiment is common across all socio-demographic subgroups of Calgarians surveyed.

All Respondents n= 506



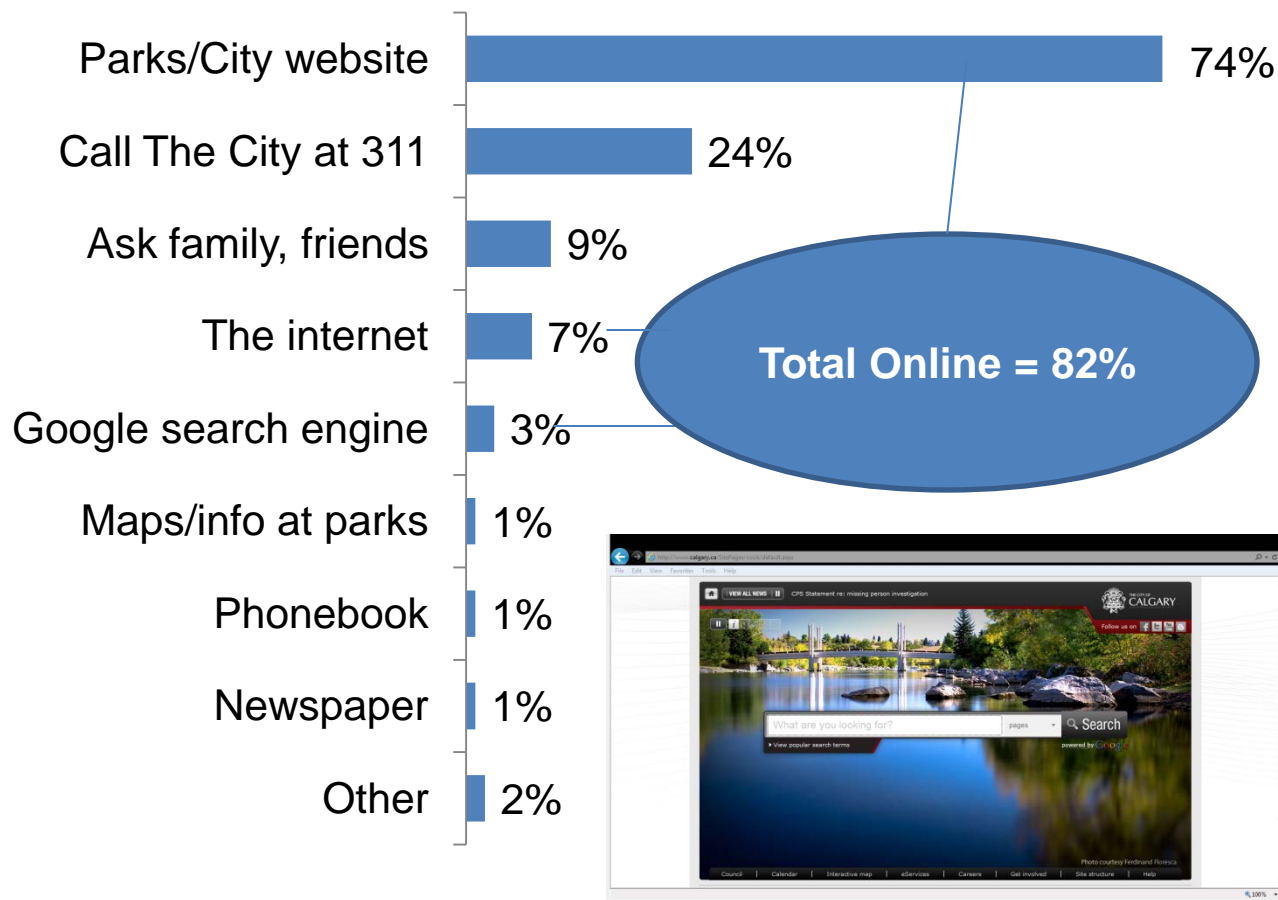
# AWARENESS OF PARKS AMENITIES IN CALGARY



A minority of citizens feel fully informed about the extent of parks amenities in Calgary. Overall, approximately three-quarters of Calgarians feel at least somewhat informed about parks offerings. On the other hand, one-quarter of survey respondents report that they are not aware of what is available in Calgary's parks.

All Respondents n= 506

# SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT PARKS

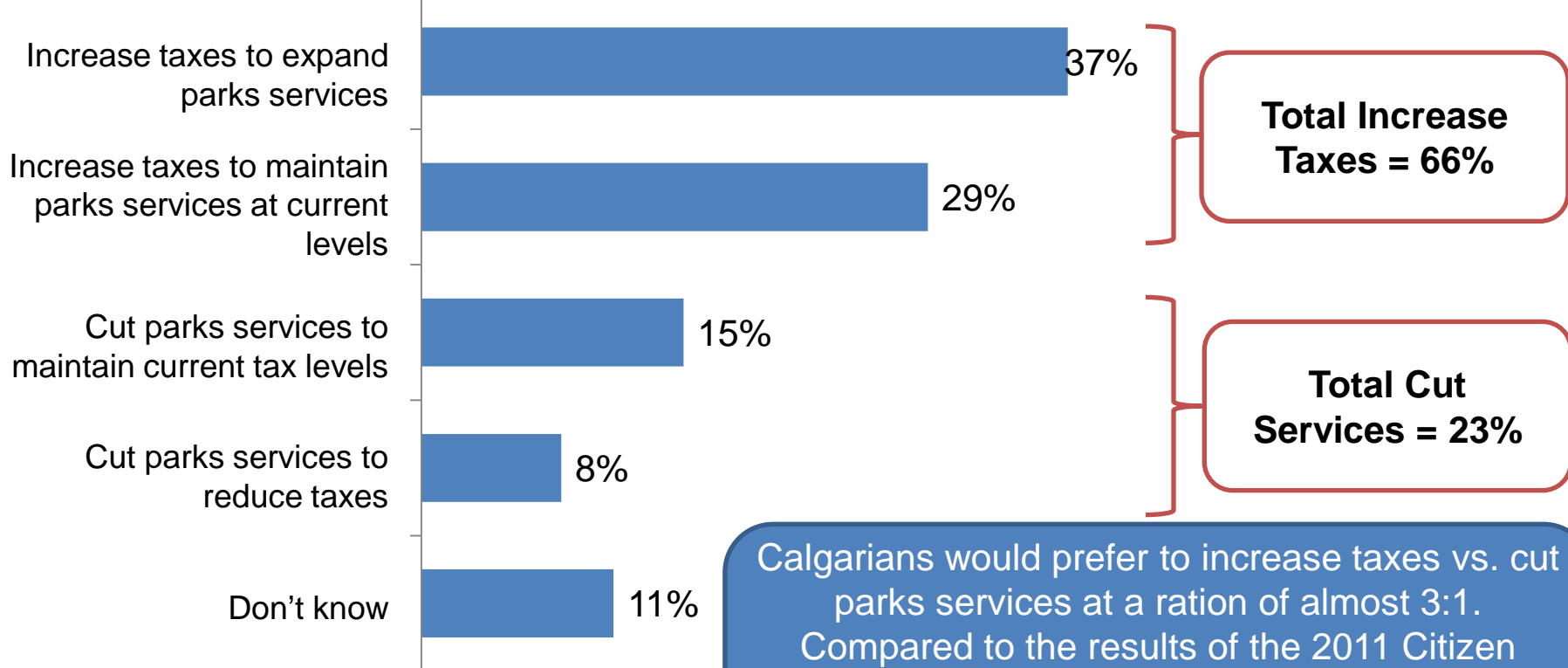


All Respondents n= 506

The online environment plays the most significant role as a key source of awareness of parks in Calgary among more than eight-in-ten survey respondents. Using The City's 311 telephone line ranks as a distant second resource among almost one-quarter of Calgarians.

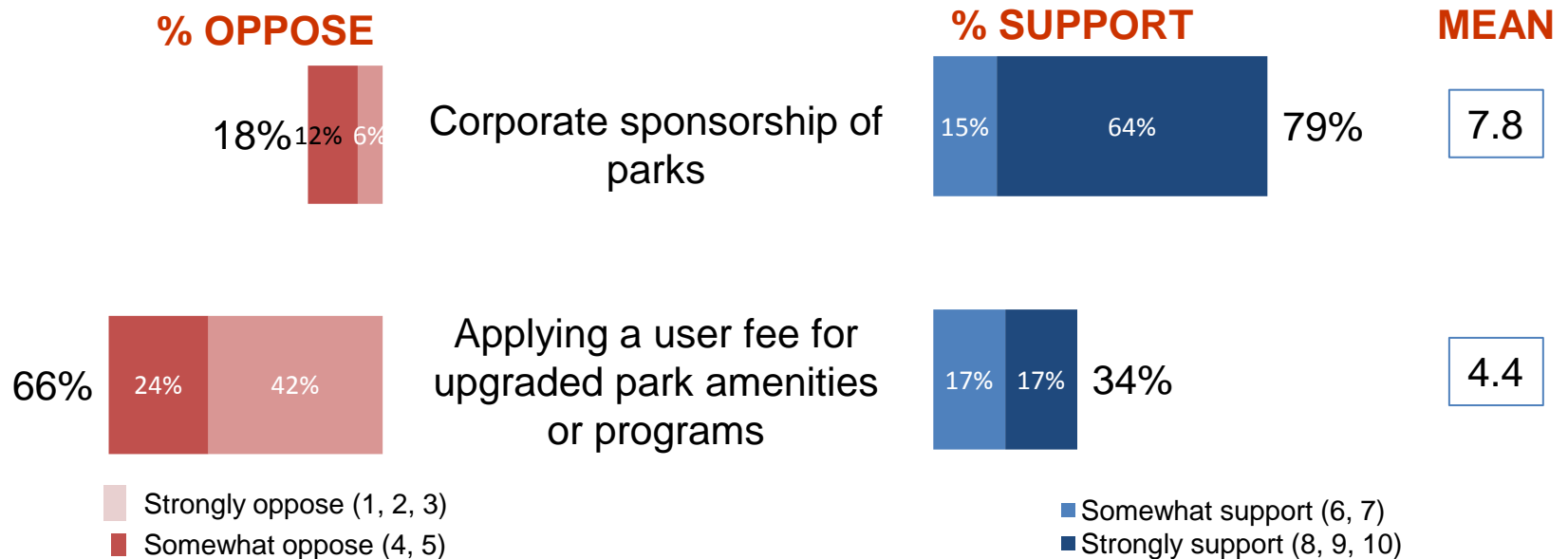
# FUNDING TRADE-OFFS: TAXATION VS. SERVICE LEVELS

*Municipal property taxes are the primary way to pay for parks services and maintenance provided by The City of Calgary. Due to the increased cost of maintaining current parks service levels and infrastructure, The City must balance taxation and service delivery levels for parks. To deal with this situation, which one of the following four options would you most like The City to pursue?*



Calgarians would prefer to increase taxes vs. cut parks services at a ratio of almost 3:1. Compared to the results of the 2011 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, Calgarians are more likely to support increasing taxes specifically for parks (66%) than for general City services (61%).

# SUPPORT LEVELS FOR USER FEES AND CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS



Fully eight-in-ten Calgarians is supportive of seeking corporate sponsorships as a funding option for parks, including almost two-thirds who strongly support this approach. Conversely, two-thirds of respondents oppose applying user fees to upgraded park amenities or programs.

All Respondents n= 506

# imaginePARKS TELEPHONE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Open-Ended Responses

### Suggested Changes

- Suggested changes for parks in future are diverse in scope. Maintenance and security are paramount, followed by creating more parks and ensuring better access to parks. A desire for 'more' trees, off-leash areas, natural areas and washrooms follow as identified preferred changes, among others.

### City Considerations

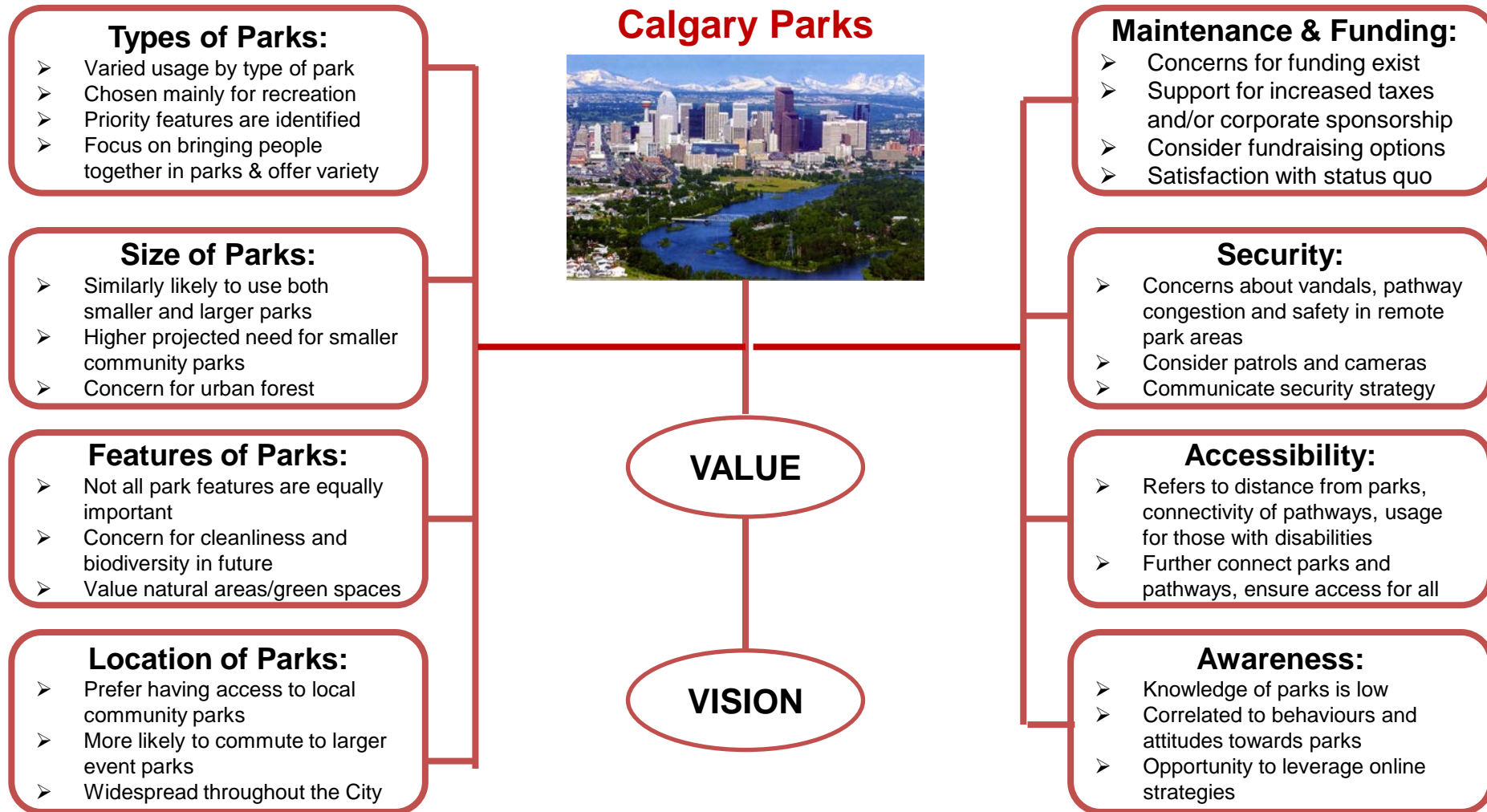
- Similar to suggested changes for parks in future, increasing the amount of parks, improving maintenance/security and the ease of accessing parks also emerge as key priorities for The City of Calgary to consider for parks and open spaces 30 years from now.



### Value of Parks

- The existence of green spaces, both in the form of natural areas and community parks, is the most valued aspect of Calgary's parks. While some Calgarians also value the maintenance and ease of access to parks in the City, others believe this could be improved. Finally, the variety of types of parks in Calgary is also a valued aspect of parks, including the pathways and playgrounds throughout the City.

# imaginePARKS PARKS SURVEY: SUMMARY





# imaginePARKS PARKS: WEB VS. TELEPHONE SURVEY DIFFERENCES

## **Natural Areas and Biodiversity:**

- Online respondents have a definite stronger use of, desire for and concern for natural areas and biodiversity in Calgary's parks vs. telephone respondents

## **Overall Use of Parks Spaces:**

- Online respondents are heavier users of almost all types of park spaces
- Given that online respondents are less likely to have children, they use playgrounds and sports fields less than do telephone respondents
- Online respondents are also using parks spaces at a higher frequency

## **Important Features for Parks:**

- Apart from natural areas being more important to online respondents, the desired features for parks in future is fairly similar

## **Are the Survey Samples Different?**

- Yes, by age, gender, quadrant, children in household, behaviours and attitudes
- However, similar values for parks are held regardless of the survey method used



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**Implications for  
Discussion**

## An exercise in evolution or revolution?

- Calgarians want to maintain current parks amenities and offerings and many are even willing to pay more taxes to preserve the status quo
- At the same time, they seek 'more' parks, enhanced features and a variety of options to suit the vast array of citizens residing in Calgary
- Finding a balance between the existing state of affairs vs. preferences for the future will be challenging
- Respondents also value what parks in Calgary presently contribute to their quality of life, with some recommending that nothing really needs to change

*"I like everything the way it is."*

*"I would not change anything."*

*"Keep them the way it is."*

- Therefore, is the future of parks simply a continuation or evolution of the current vision OR does it need to be completely revisited?

## Calgarians do not necessarily delineate between parks and recreation.

- Recreation is the primary motivator for parks use
- When thinking of parks, mindsets automatically connect with recreation equipment and facilities
- Are parks and recreation truly distinct entities or do they share synergies that can be further leveraged?

## Opportunities for increased community involvement exists.

- Respondents recognize the future need for individuals to volunteer to maintain parks AND express intentions to willingly participate in such efforts
- Funding for increased maintenance, expansion and improvements is limited
- How can we become the leader in developing parks community involvement?

*"I would maintain them. I do not want to see any more green spaces disappear."*

# CITY OF CALGARY PARKS



# imagineParks

Executive Summary Report  
August 2012

## Detached Appendices:

Recruitment Screening Questionnaire

Moderator's Guide and Handouts

DVD Recordings

Telephone Survey Questionnaire

Detailed Statistical Tables and Verbatim Files

