



**Citizens 4 A Strong Fairmont**

*"An enlightened citizenry is indispensable  
for the proper functioning of a republic."*

Thomas Jefferson

# Survey Results Analysis

## Local Option Sales Tax Recreation Amenities Survey

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*A structured review of SurveyMonkey responses  
regarding recreational amenities in Fairmont.*

Prepared by:  
**Citizens 4 A Strong Fairmont**

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

Citizens 4 A Strong Fairmont (C4ASF) conducted a community survey using the SurveyMonkey platform to better understand citizen perspectives regarding the potential use of revenue generated by Fairmont’s Local Option Sales Tax (LOST). The survey gathered input regarding priorities for improving existing recreational amenities and developing new recreational facilities.

This report presents a structured analysis of those responses. Its purpose is to organize the survey data in a clear and consistent way so that patterns of interest can be identified. C4ASF does not recommend specific projects or policy decisions. All decisions regarding the use of LOST revenue remain the responsibility of the City Council and City Administration.

An important point of reference for interpreting these results is the City of Fairmont Parks and Recreation Survey conducted in 2021. When the findings from that survey are compared with the results of the 2026 C4ASF survey, several areas of alignment become apparent. The consistency between the two surveys suggests that many of the recreational priorities expressed by residents have remained relatively stable over time.<sup>1</sup>

### Areas of Consistent Community Agreement

A comparison of the 2021 City Parks and Recreation Survey and the 2026 C4ASF survey reveals several common themes regarding recreational priorities in the community.

Across both surveys, residents consistently expressed interest in the following areas:

- Trail infrastructure and outdoor recreation;  
Walking, biking, and hiking trails appear among the most frequently supported recreational investments in both surveys.<sup>2</sup>
- Lake-related recreation and shoreline access;  
Amenities supporting lake activities—including beaches, fishing and boating access, and shoreline recreation—appear prominently in both surveys.<sup>3</sup>
- Maintenance of existing parks and recreational amenities;  
Residents consistently express strong support for maintaining and improving the parks and recreational assets the community already has.<sup>4</sup>
- Expanded indoor recreation opportunities;

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<sup>1</sup> City of Fairmont, Parks and Recreation Survey, May 10, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Both surveys reference interest in facilities such as indoor aquatic space, fieldhouse-style recreation facilities, and expanded indoor activity areas.<sup>5</sup>

- Facilities supporting organized recreation and community events; Community gathering spaces, youth recreation facilities, and multi-use recreation areas appear in both surveys as desired additions.<sup>6</sup>

## Overall Interpretation

When the results of the two surveys are viewed together, a consistent pattern emerges regarding how many residents view the future development of Fairmont's recreational system.

Residents appear to place the strongest emphasis on:

- Outdoor recreation connected to Fairmont's lakes and trail systems
- Maintaining and improving existing recreational assets
- Expanding opportunities for organized recreation and community activities
- Developing additional indoor recreation capacity where feasible

It is important to note that survey responses represent community preferences rather than final project decisions. Decisions regarding recreational investments must also consider factors such as capital cost, land availability, long-term operating expenses, and the statutory limitations governing the use of Local Option Sales Tax revenue.

The survey results presented in this report therefore represent one source of community input that may assist City leaders as they evaluate future recreational planning and investment decisions.

## Key Takeaways

Three broad conclusions emerge when the 2021 and 2026 surveys are viewed together:

- Outdoor recreation infrastructure remains the community's highest priority. Trails, lake access, and related outdoor amenities consistently appear among the most supported recreational investments.
- Residents value maintaining existing parks while also expanding opportunities. Maintenance of current recreational assets ranks among the highest priorities in both surveys.
- Interest in expanded indoor recreation has remained steady over time. Facilities such as year-round aquatic space, fieldhouse-type recreation centers, and expanded youth recreation capacity appear in both surveys as desired additions.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Survey Results Comparison Table: Questions 8, 9, and 10.

Question 8 Selections (verbatim)	Total Counts Q8	Question 9 Selections (verbatim)	Total Counts Q9	Question 11 Mentions	Total Counts Q11	Total
<b>TIER 5 (251 - 313) — Highest frequency of requests (selections + mentions)</b>						
Hiking, walking and biking trails	165	Hiking, walking, or biking trail segments	128	Trails (walking, biking, hiking, trail connections, mountain bikin trails	15	308
Lake water activity amenities	142	Beaches	121	Lake improvement, water quality, lake recreation	13	276
<b>TIER 4 (189 - 251) - 2nd highest frequency of requests (selections + mentions)</b>						
Fishing and boating docks or ramps	138	Boating and fishing docks or ramps	90			228
Restrooms in parks	146	Restrooms within parks	80			226
Pickleball courts	106	Pickleball courts	82	Pickleball courts	8	196
<b>TIER 3 (126 - 188) - 3rd highest frequency of requests (selections + mentions)</b>						
		Aquatic center (enclose for year-round use)	156	Indoor Aquatic Center, Indoor Pool	12	168
		Ice hockey arena	101	Ice Arena, Hockey Facilities	48	149
Playground equipment	98	Playgrounds	42	Playground equipment, play ares	6	146
Park shelter houses	98	Shelter houses	33			131
Lighting within parks	79	Lighting in parks	52			131
		Multi-use Fieldhouse (capacity of at least 400 people)	96	Community Center, Fieldhouse	34	130
Band shell	101	Band shell	26	Band shell	2	129
<b>TIER 2 (63 - 125) - 4th highest frequency of requests (selections + mentions)</b>						
		Open-air pavilion	93	Open-air pavilion	2	95
Basketball courts	58	Basketball courts	32	Basketball courts	4	94
Miniature golf	56	Miniature golf	37	Miniature golf	1	94
		Splash pads	79	Splash pads	4	83
Baseball and softball diamonds	57	Baseball and softball fields	22			79
		Camping facilities	78			78
Water fountains in parks	73					73
Dog park	46	Dog park	24	Dog park	1	71
Picnic tables in parks	67					67
<b>TIER 1 (1 - 62) - lowest frequency of requests (selections + mentions)</b>						
Barbecue grills in parks	36	Barbecue grills and areas in parks	23			59
Sand volleyball courts	39	Sand volleyball courts	16	Sand volleyball courts	3	58
		Space for non-athletic activities (games, hobby, and recreation space)	58			58
		Gardening, community garden spaces	57			57

## Survey Results Comparison Table: Questions 8, 9, and 10.

Question 8 Selections (verbatim)	Total Counts Q8	Question 9 Selections (verbatim)	Total Counts Q9	Question 11 Mentions	Total Counts Q11	Total
<b>TIER 1 - Continued (1 - 62) - lowest frequency of requests (selections + mentions)</b>						
Tennis courts	38	Tennis courts	15	Tennis courts	3	56
Skateboard park	39	Skateboard park (new or additional)	12			51
		Roller skate arena	46	Roller skating rink	1	47
Cedar Creek disk golf course	46					46
Soccer fields	36	Soccer fields	10			46
				Fairmont Opera House, opera house, performing arts center	43	43
		Archery range	40	Archery range	1	41
		Par-3 golf course	33	Par-3 golf course	1	34
		Ziplining	32			32
		Snowshoe, cross country skiing trails	27			27
		Rock climbing walls	27			27
Volleyball courts	25					25
		Obstacle course	18			18
		Bocce ball court	14			14
		Horseshoe courts	7			7
				Youth indoor recreation, family entertainment facilities	7	7
				Return tax money / eliminate tax	7	7
				Streets / infrastructure improvements	6	6
				Business development / economic growth	5	5
				Survey criticism	4	4
		Cricket field	3			3
				Parks maintenance, improvement of existing parks	3	3
				Gpvernment leadership criticism	3	3
				Red Rock Center	1	1
				Theater / theater space	1	1
		RC flying field	1			1

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# Introduction

## Survey Data Sources

SurveyMonkey was used to collect and organize all responses. SurveyMonkey then generated the official Results Report summarizing the data collected from participants. Copies of the SurveyMonkey Results Report have already been provided to the City and are available on the C4ASF website [www.c4asf.com](http://www.c4asf.com).

## Survey Availability and Access

The public was made aware of the survey through several community channels. C4ASF promoted it in the PhotoPress newspaper, it was tagged on local social media platforms such as Facebook, and on the C4ASF website. A-frame tent cards were placed on tables or next to cash registers at certain local restaurants, and notices were posted on entry doors at businesses throughout the community. Respondents were able to access the survey by scanning a QR code or by visiting the C4ASF website and clicking a link that directed them to the SurveyMonkey survey.

## Survey Timing and Participation

The survey was open to the public from January 19 at 6:00 a.m. through February 17 at 12:00 midnight.

A total of 344 individuals began the survey. SurveyMonkey's reporting system included 302 completed responses in the official Results Report. The difference reflects responses that were incomplete or otherwise excluded by SurveyMonkey's automated reporting criteria.

## Survey Integrity

The survey could only be filled out by an IP address one time, preventing multiple result sets from a single phone or computer. It was configured in the SurveyMonkey platform so that C4ASF did not have access to the raw response data and therefore could not edit, revise, or remove entries. C4ASF did not have the ability to alter, exclude, or modify any individual responses. All tabulations and reported totals were generated directly by SurveyMonkey.

## How to Interpret the Results

The survey reflects the views of those who chose to participate. Because participation was voluntary and not based on a random sample, the results should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the entire population of Fairmont or Martin County. In contrast, the 302 completed responses provide meaningful insight into the perspectives of participating residents and households and may assist the City Council in guiding its discussion and decision-making regarding the use of LOST revenue.

## **Role of This Analysis**

This Results Analysis Report is a follow-up to that SurveyMonkey report. Its purpose is to examine the survey data more closely and to explain what the results may suggest about citizen interest in how revenue from the 2016 Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) should be distributed. C4ASF is not recommending policy decisions. This purpose of this analysis is to clarify the survey results. All final decisions regarding the distribution and use of LOST revenue rest with the City Council and City Administration.

## **Overview of Survey Questions**

There were eleven questions asked in the survey to help better understand citizen preferences regarding the use of LOST revenue.

The first question was a gateway question (“Ready to begin survey?” Yes or No). No data was collected from that question beyond allowing respondents to begin the survey.

Questions 2, 3, and 4 were geographic questions. They were designed to allow preferences to be reviewed based on where respondents lived — within Fairmont, within Martin County, or outside of Martin County.

Questions 5 and 6 asked about age range and household composition. These questions made it possible to review preferences by age group and household makeup.

Question 7 was designed to measure the level of importance respondents placed on certain types of actions related to Fairmont’s recreational assets. This included maintenance, improvements to existing amenities, and the addition of new amenities.

Question 8 asked respondents to identify specific existing amenities owned and operated by the City that they would like to see improved, upgraded, or better maintained. Participants were provided a list of twenty-three amenities, owned and operated by the City, from which they could choose up to twelve. This was a frequency-based question—SurveyMonkey kept a running total of the number of times participants selected an amenity. Respondents selected amenities but did not rank them by importance.

Question 9 asked respondents to identify amenities they would like to see added to Fairmont’s current list of recreational assets. This included adding new amenities or expanding existing ones. Like Question 8, this was also a frequency-based question.

Question 10 asked whether the City should consider adding youth sports facilities and related programming as part of future parks and recreation investments, provided that they do not duplicate or compete with existing privately owned and operated recreational, fitness, or health centers. A “Yes” response indicated that the respondent believed the City should not offer such amenities if they compete with privately owned facilities. A “No” response indicated that the respondent was not concerned whether the City created recreational amenities and assets that competed with privately owned and operated facilities.

Question 11 provided respondents with an opportunity to write in additional comments or ideas regarding the use of LOST revenue.

## **Report Structure**

Because the survey questions were structured in different ways, this report is organized to clearly explain how the data from each question was reviewed, and, where necessary, organized into a common structure so that meaningful comparisons could be made, and patterns and priorities could be clearly understood. What follows is a detailed discussion of the survey results and what they suggest.



## Section 1 — Question 7: Importance

### Purpose of Question 7

Question 7 is important because it sets the “importance framework” for the rest of the survey. It asks respondents to rate how important different types of actions are, such as:

- Maintaining amenities that the City already has in place
- Improving existing amenities
- Adding new amenities and programs

Question 7 shows what respondents believe are priorities. In later sections of this report, the Question 7 results are used as the reference point for cross-question comparisons. This helps determine whether the amenities receiving the highest selection support in Questions 8, 9, and 11 also align with the categories respondents rated most important in Question 7.

### Structure of Question 7

Question 7 asked citizens to rank nine categories according to the degree (level) of importance that they placed on each category. These categories included:

1. Improvements to and expansion of walking, biking, and hiking trails
2. Improvements to lakes and shoreline access (including docks / boat ramps)
3. Improvements to or expansion of aquatic facilities
4. Improvements to or expansion of parks and playgrounds
5. Maintenance of existing parks and playgrounds
6. New recreational facilities and amenities (courts, fields, and similar features)
7. Public gathering and event spaces (pavilions, fieldhouse, band shell, amphitheaters, etc.)
8. Recreation opportunities designed for seniors
9. Youth sports facilities and related programming

### Tier Ranking by Level of Importance

Respondents were asked to rank each category using five levels (tiers) of importance. Each level of importance was assigned a value as shown below:

- 5 – Very Important
- 4 – Important
- 3 – Moderately Important
- 2 – Slightly Important
- 1 – Not Important

SurveyMonkey tracked data by frequency of responses to each of the nine categories according to the five levels of importance selected. It then calculated the percent value for each level of importance based on the number of responses.

### Example Calculation

Example: "Improvements to or expansion of parks and playgrounds." A total of 302 respondents answered this question. The number of responses for each level of importance was as follows:

- Very Important – 43
- Important – 78
- Moderately Important – 77
- Slightly Important – 66
- Not Important – 38

These added up to a total of 302 responses. The percentages were determined by dividing the number of responses for each level of importance by the total number of responses. Thus:

- Very Important – 43:  $43/302 = 14.24\%$
- Important – 78:  $78/302 = 25.83\%$
- Moderately Important – 77:  $77/302 = 25.50\%$
- Slightly Important – 66:  $66/302 = 21.85\%$
- Not Important – 38:  $38/302 = 12.58\%$

SurveyMonkey then calculated a composite (mean) importance value for that category by multiplying the number of responses at each level by the value assigned to that level. It then added those numbers together and divided the total by the total number of responses for that category. Continuing with our example, below is how the mean was calculated:

- Very Important (5):  $43 \times 5 = 215$
- Important (4):  $78 \times 4 = 312$
- Moderately Important (3):  $77 \times 3 = 231$
- Slightly Important (2):  $66 \times 2 = 132$
- Not Important (1):  $38 \times 1 = 38$
- Total:  $215 + 312 + 231 + 132 + 38 = 928$
- $928 \div 302 = 3.07$  (Mean Importance Value)

A higher mean value indicates that more respondents selected the higher levels of importance. In other words, the closer the mean is to 5, the stronger the overall importance placed on that category. This process was repeated for each category. These

mean values provide a snapshot of how important respondents rated each category and can be used to assist with ranking selections in Q8 and Q9.

Question 7 therefore provides the conceptual weighting framework that helps interpret the frequency results from later questions. The results are shown in the table on the next page. They show how participants ranked each category. These are listed from the highest ranking to the low ranking of importance.

Comparing Improvements to Additions for both their mean importance ratings and composite totals across all categories combined yielded the following results. This indicates that respondents had a slightly stronger affinity for additions as a whole vs improvements to existing amenities as a whole.

Improvements - All categories	3.245 Mean	554
Additions - All categories	3.303 Mean	581

### **Understanding What the Mean Value Does, and Does Not, Show**

The mean value alone does not fully describe where the strongest weighting occurred within the responses. The mean combines all five levels into a single number, but it does not show how strongly responses were concentrated in the top two levels (Very Important and Important).

For example, let us look at the category, “Maintenance of existing parks and playgrounds.” It had the highest mean value of 3.99. When we examine the number of responses by level of importance, we see that this category was more heavily weighted in the “Very Important” (116) and “Important” (101) categories.

Now compare those values to our previous category, “Improvements to or expansion of parks and playgrounds,” whose mean value was 3.07. The number of responses for Very Important (43) and Important (78) were far fewer than for Maintenance of existing parks and playgrounds: 217 versus 121. This helps us better understand why the mean value was higher for Maintenance compared to Improvements to parks and playgrounds.

By looking at both the mean value and the distribution of responses across the five levels, we gain a clearer understanding of how strongly respondents felt about each category.

We will come back to Question 7 later in our analysis because it will be used to calculate a priority value for all categories and amenities. Let us now move on to Question 8.

Question 7 - Category According to Importance	Action Category	Mean Value	Very important / Important Composite Total
Maintenance of existing parks & playgrounds	—	3.99	217
Improvements - Lakes & shoreline access	Improvements	3.64	180
Youth sports facilities and programming	Additions	3.54	167
Improvements/Expansion - Walking, biking, and hiking trails	Improvements	3.37	149
New recreational facilities & amenities	Additions	3.30	148
Public gathering and event spaces	Additions	3.21	134
Recreation opportunities for seniors	Additions	3.16	132
Improvements/Expansion - Parks & playgrounds	Improvements	3.07	121
Improvements/Expansion - Aquatic facilities	Improvements	2.90	104

## Section 2 — Consolidated Amenity Totals (Q8 + Q9 + Q11)

### Purpose

This section presents the compiled results for individual recreational amenities referenced in Questions 8, 9, and 11 of the survey. These compiled results are shown in the table at the beginning of this document immediately after the Executive Summary. The purpose of this consolidation is to provide a clear view of how frequently specific amenities were referenced across both the structured survey questions and the open-ended responses.

### Source of Question 8 and Question 9 Response Totals

The response counts for the amenities listed in Questions 8 and 9 were taken directly from the SurveyMonkey summary reports. These reports record the number of respondents who selected each listed amenity as part of their survey response. Because of SurveyMonkey's structure, no manual adjustments or recalculations could be made to these totals. The values used in this analysis reflect the exact counts provided in the SurveyMonkey reporting output.

### Coding of Question 11 Open-Ended Responses

Question 11 allowed respondents to provide open-ended comments regarding recreational amenities or facilities they believed should be improved, expanded, or considered in the future. Each response was reviewed and coded to identify references to specific amenities or recreational facilities.

When respondents used different phrases to describe the same type of amenity, those references were grouped into a single category. For example, references to hockey arenas, ice rinks, additional sheets of ice, curling facilities, or figure skating facilities were grouped together under an Ice Hockey / Ice Arena category. Similar groupings were applied to other amenities where respondents used different terminology to describe the same general facility.

To prevent inflation of the results, each response was counted only once for a given amenity category, even if the same term or related terms appeared multiple times within the same comment.

### Scope of Amenities Included in the Structured Survey Questions

Questions 8 and 9 were designed to focus specifically on recreational amenities owned or managed by the City. Certain facilities within the community are privately owned and operated. Under the Minnesota state laws governing the use of local option sales tax revenue, public tax funds generally cannot be used to finance privately owned recreational facilities.

For this reason, privately owned amenities were not included as selectable options, however, if respondents referenced such amenities within their open-ended comments

in Question 11, those references were recorded and categorized for informational purposes.

### **Compiled Amenity Totals**

After the Question 11 responses were coded, the totals for each amenity category were combined with the corresponding totals from Questions 8 and 9. The resulting compiled totals provide a unified view of how frequently each amenity was referenced across all three survey questions.

### **Tier Structure Used in the Analysis**

To assist in interpreting the compiled totals, the amenities have been organized into five frequency tiers based on the total number of responses recorded across Questions 8, 9, and 11. The tiers represent ranges of response frequency and allow amenities to be viewed within a structured hierarchy reflecting the relative level of interest expressed by survey respondents. Tier 5 represents the highest frequency of responses, while Tier 1 represents the lowest. Organizing the results in this way makes it easier to see how individual amenities compare with one another across the full range of survey responses.

### **Determination of Tier Ranges**

The tier ranges were determined by first identifying the overall range of compiled response totals across all listed amenities. The difference between the highest and lowest totals was then divided into five equal numerical intervals, corresponding to the five tiers used in the analysis. Each amenity was subsequently placed within the tier whose range included its compiled response total. This method allows the tiers to reflect the distribution of the survey results themselves rather than relying on subjective judgments about which amenities should be considered higher or lower priorities.

The compiled totals for each amenity category, along with the corresponding frequency tiers, are presented in the table on the next two pages.

## Section 3 — Observations

### Purpose

The tier structure presented in Section 2 provides a framework for understanding how frequently different recreational amenities were referenced across the survey responses. This section examines the patterns that emerge within those tiers and highlights several observations about how respondents appear to prioritize different types of recreational investments.

Because the tiers reflect relative response frequency rather than project feasibility or cost, the placement of amenities within a particular tier should be understood as a comparison of how often respondents referenced those amenities within the survey, not as a recommendation regarding which projects should be pursued first. Refer to the Survey Results Comparison Table: Questions 8, 9, and 10 as you read through the following observations.

### Observations

#### Tier 5: Highest Frequency

The highest tier of responses is dominated by improvements related to outdoor recreational infrastructure that supports broad community use. In particular, walking, biking, and hiking trails and lake-related recreational amenities appear at the very top of the compiled response totals.

These types of amenities support a wide range of recreational activities and are accessible to residents across many age groups. Trails provide opportunities for walking, biking, and other forms of outdoor recreation, while lake-related recreational amenities support activities such as boating, fishing, and general shoreline recreation.

Because these facilities are used by both residents and visitors throughout much of the year, improvements in these areas may be perceived as benefiting a large portion of the community.

The concentration of these amenities in the highest tier suggests that respondents place significant value on outdoor recreation connected to Fairmont's lakes and surrounding natural environment. Trails and lake-related recreational amenities often function together within the community's recreational landscape, providing access to shoreline areas, scenic routes, and opportunities for both active and passive outdoor activities.

The prominence of these amenities within the highest frequency tier therefore reflects the importance respondents appear to place on preserving and expanding the outdoor recreation features that are closely tied to the community's identity as a lake-centered environment.

#### **Tier 4: High Frequency**

The second-highest tier of responses continues to emphasize foundational outdoor recreation infrastructure. Amenities appearing within this tier include features such as fishing and boating docks or boat ramps, park restroom facilities, and pickleball courts.

Docks and boat access facilities are closely tied to the lake-related recreational amenities described in the highest tier, and their presence within this tier reinforces the importance respondents place on access to lake activities.

It should be noted that fishing and boating docks or boat ramps could reasonably be considered part of the broader category of lake-related recreational amenities. If these features were combined with the lake-related recreational amenities, the total number of references associated with lake-based recreation would increase substantially.

Under such an alternative grouping, lake-related recreational amenities would account for more than 500 combined mentions and would stand alone in the highest frequency tier. Trails and park restroom facilities would then shift to the next tier, while the remaining amenities would adjust downward accordingly.

For the purposes of this analysis, however, the amenities were kept separate because they were presented as distinct options within the survey questions. Maintaining that separation preserves the structure of the original survey design and avoids combining categories that respondents encountered as separate selections.

Park restroom facilities also appear in Tier 4 and serve as essential support amenities that improve the usability and accessibility of parks and public gathering spaces.

Pickleball courts represent one of the most frequently mentioned organized recreational activities in the compiled responses. The placement of pickleball within this tier suggests that this activity has developed a strong and growing level of interest among respondents.

Together, the amenities appearing in this tier highlight the importance respondents place on both lake access infrastructure and recreational facilities that support active community participation.

#### **Tier 3: Moderate Frequency**

Amenities appearing within Tier 3 generally represent larger recreational facilities or community gathering spaces that support organized activities and events. Examples include the enclosure of the aquatic center for year-round use, the development of an ice hockey arena or additional sheets of ice, a community center, improvements to playground equipment, park shelter houses, lighting improvements within parks, the development of a multi-use fieldhouse, and performance spaces such as a band shell.

These amenities often function as destination facilities for organized recreation, youth sports, tournaments, and community events. Many of these projects also represent larger capital investments compared with the infrastructure improvements that appear in the higher tiers.

Their placement within the middle tier suggests that respondents show meaningful interest in these larger facilities, though they appear somewhat less frequently in the compiled responses than the foundational outdoor infrastructure improvements that occupy the highest tiers.

### **Tier 2: Lower Frequency**

Amenities appearing within Tier 2 represent recreational facilities that support specific activities or serve particular user groups. Examples within this tier include open-air pavilions, basketball courts, miniature golf, splash pads, baseball and softball diamonds, camping facilities, park water fountains, dog parks, and picnic tables.

Many of these amenities support individual recreational activities or smaller groups of users. While these features clearly hold value within the community, their placement within this tier suggests that they were referenced less frequently across the survey responses than the broader infrastructure improvements or larger recreational facilities described in the higher tiers.

In many cases, amenities within this tier may represent enhancements that complement existing recreational infrastructure rather than core facilities that serve the entire community.

### **Tier 1: Lowest Frequency**

The final tier includes amenities that were referenced least frequently across the survey responses. These amenities often represent highly specialized or niche recreational activities. Examples include sand volleyball courts, tennis courts, skateboard parks, roller skating facilities, archery ranges, par-3 golf courses, and ziplining.

The relatively low frequency of responses for these amenities does not necessarily indicate that they lack community interest. Instead, it suggests that they may represent more specialized recreational interests that appeal to smaller segments of the population.

Their appearance within the responses nevertheless illustrates the diversity of recreational interests within the community and highlights the wide range of activities that residents may consider when thinking about future recreational opportunities.

### **Overall Pattern**

When the results from all five tiers are viewed together, several broader patterns become apparent regarding the types of recreational amenities respondents referenced most frequently. Taken together, the tier structure suggests a general hierarchy of recreational priorities among survey respondents. Improvements to foundational outdoor recreation infrastructure appear most frequently in the compiled responses, particularly those associated with trails and lake-related activities. These are followed by additional infrastructure supporting lake access and park usability, as well as certain organized recreational activities.

Larger recreational facilities and community gathering spaces appear within the middle tier of responses, indicating meaningful but somewhat more moderate levels of interest. More specialized or single-activity recreational amenities tend to appear within the lower tiers of the compiled totals.

These observations are descriptive rather than prescriptive. The tier structure simply reflects the relative frequency with which amenities were referenced across the survey responses. Decisions regarding the development, expansion, or improvement of recreational amenities ultimately involve additional considerations such as cost, feasibility, long-term maintenance, and alignment with broader community planning objectives.

## Section 4 – Question 10: Youth Sports Facilities and Competition Consideration

### Purpose

Question 10 addressed a policy-level consideration that applies broadly across all categories of youth sports facilities and related programming. The question asked respondents whether the City should consider adding youth sports facilities or programming provided that such facilities do not duplicate or compete with privately owned and operated recreational, fitness, or health centers.

This question therefore applies to any youth sports or recreation amenity the City might consider developing, including facilities such as ice arenas, fieldhouses, indoor recreation centers, athletic courts and fields, training or conditioning areas, and related youth programming spaces.

Because youth sports facilities ranked first among addition-related importance categories in Question 7, and because several youth-oriented amenities ranked prominently within the compiled amenity totals presented earlier in this report, Question 10 provides important context for interpreting that support.

### Question 10 Results

A total of 295 respondents answered Question 10.

- **Yes: 211 responses (71.5%)**
- **No: 84 responses (28.5%)**

A “Yes” response indicates that the respondent believes the City should consider whether publicly funded youth sports facilities or programming would duplicate or directly compete with privately owned recreational facilities.

A “No” response indicates that the respondent is not concerned about potential overlap between public and private offerings and supports City development of youth sports facilities regardless of competitive impact.

#### Clarification: Activities and Programming vs. Physical Structures

Question 10 does not primarily concern the physical structure of a building. Rather, it addresses the activities and programming that may be offered within such facilities.

For example, if a privately owned facility already provides services such as weight training, cardio equipment, walking tracks, tennis courts, virtual golf, or similar programming, and the City constructs a publicly funded facility offering identical services without evaluating existing capacity, some respondents may view that situation as unnecessary duplication.

Because City facilities are supported by public tax revenue, including Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) funds, a publicly funded facility offering identical services could

potentially create a situation in which privately owned businesses indirectly contribute tax revenue to a publicly operated facility that competes with their services.

## **Interpretation of the Results**

The results of Question 10 do not suggest that respondents expect a complete separation between public and private recreational offerings. Rather, the 71.5% “Yes” responses indicate that a clear majority expect the City to demonstrate thoughtful consideration when expanding youth sports and recreation programming.

In practical terms, this suggests that many respondents believe the City should:

- Evaluate existing private recreational capacity within the community,
- Consider whether unmet demand exists for particular activities or facilities,
- Explore potential partnerships or expansion opportunities where feasible, and
- Proceed carefully when developing publicly funded amenities that may overlap with private offerings.

For example, if a privately owned facility currently operates two indoor tennis courts but community demand significantly exceeds available court time, respondents may reasonably expect the City to first evaluate whether expansion by the private provider is feasible. If such expansion is not possible, the City may then determine that additional publicly provided facilities are appropriate to meet demonstrated demand.

This interpretation reflects a preference for coordination and careful evaluation, rather than automatic duplication or strict prohibition.

The 28.5% of respondents who selected “No” represent a meaningful minority who appear to prioritize expanded public recreation access even if some overlap with private facilities occurs.

## **Relationship to Earlier Survey Results**

Earlier sections of this analysis demonstrated substantial support for expanded youth sports and indoor recreation opportunities. Amenities associated with youth sports and organized recreation appeared frequently within the compiled amenity totals presented earlier in this report.

Examples include:

- **Aquatic Center Enclosure — 168 combined mentions**
- **Ice Hockey Arena — 149 combined mentions**
- **Multi-Use Fieldhouse — 130 combined mentions**

All three of these amenities fall within Tier 3 of the compiled frequency tiers, indicating a moderate but clearly established level of interest among respondents.

Question 10 adds important context to those findings. While support for youth recreation expansion appears strong, many respondents also expect public investments in these facilities to be structured carefully in relation to existing private providers.

### **What Question 10 Does Not Measure**

Question 10 does not determine which specific facilities should or should not be developed. In particular, it does not:

- Rank specific youth sports facilities,
- Measure the strength of support for individual projects,
- Determine feasibility or funding,
- Require complete separation between public and private recreation offerings.

Rather, the question provides insight into how respondents believe decisions regarding youth sports expansion should be approached.

### **Role of Question 10 in the Overall Analysis**

Youth sports and indoor recreation capacity emerged as significant themes across multiple survey questions. Question 10 helps clarify how many respondents believe such expansion should be evaluated,

Taken together, the results suggest that many respondents support expanding youth recreation opportunities, while also expecting those decisions to be made with careful consideration of existing private recreational providers.

This clarification strengthens the overall interpretation of the survey results by illustrating not only which amenities respondents support, but also how they believe decisions about those amenities should be approached.

Taken together, the results of Question 10 provide an additional layer of context for interpreting the broader survey results. While respondents expressed meaningful support for expanded youth sports and recreation opportunities, many also indicated that such expansion should be approached thoughtfully and in coordination with existing private providers. This perspective helps frame how future recreational investments may be evaluated alongside the compiled amenity priorities presented earlier in this report. The concluding section that follows summarizes the key findings from the survey and highlights the overall patterns that emerge from the analysis.



## Section 5 — Concluding Comments and Findings

The observations presented in Section 3 highlight several consistent patterns that emerge when the compiled amenity totals are viewed within the five-tier framework. The results of this survey provide a structured view of how respondents prioritized various recreational amenities and facilities within the community. By combining the structured selections from Questions 8 and 9 with the coded open-ended responses from Question 11, the analysis presents a comprehensive picture of how frequently specific amenities were referenced across the survey.

One of the most consistent patterns revealed in the compiled totals is the strong level of support for improvements to existing outdoor recreational infrastructure. Amenities such as trails, lake water access, fishing and boating docks, and restroom facilities appear among the highest frequency tiers in the compiled results. These types of amenities support a wide range of recreational activities and are used by residents and visitors throughout the year. Improvements in these areas also tend to enhance the usability and accessibility of parks, lakes, and other public recreational assets that already play a central role in the community.

The importance ratings from Question 7 also reinforce this pattern. Maintenance of existing parks and playgrounds received the highest overall importance rating among all categories, indicating that respondents place significant value not only on expanding recreational opportunities but also on maintaining and preserving the assets the community already has.

A second major group of amenities consists of larger community recreation facilities. Examples include an aquatic center designed for year-round use, an ice hockey arena or additional sheets of ice, playground improvements, a multi-use fieldhouse, and cultural or performance spaces such as a band shell. These facilities often function as destination locations for organized activities, community events, and regional tournaments. While these amenities appear somewhat lower in the overall frequency totals than foundational outdoor infrastructure improvements, they nevertheless represent a substantial level of interest among respondents.

The compiled results also show that a variety of organized sports facilities and activity-specific amenities appear within the middle tiers of the frequency distribution. Courts for sports such as pickleball, basketball, sand volleyball, and tennis fall within this category. These amenities support organized recreation and may serve particular age groups or user communities. Their placement within the middle tiers suggests that they are valued by respondents but may not carry the same level of broad community priority as the most frequently referenced amenities.

Amenities appearing within the lower tiers generally represent more specialized recreational facilities. These include amenities such as miniature golf, dog parks, skateboard parks, archery ranges, roller skating facilities, and similar single-activity

features. The lower frequency of responses for these amenities does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest; rather, it suggests that these facilities may be viewed as secondary or complementary recreational opportunities relative to the amenities appearing in the higher tiers.

Overall, the survey results suggest a general hierarchy of recreational priorities among respondents. Foundational outdoor recreation infrastructure appears most frequently in the compiled responses, followed by interest in major community recreation facilities and organized sports amenities. More specialized or niche recreational facilities appear less frequently in the survey responses.

The purpose of this analysis is therefore not to recommend specific projects, but rather to present a clear and transparent summary of how survey respondents referenced various recreational amenities. The tier structure and compiled totals provide a framework that allows community leaders, policymakers, and residents to view these results within a consistent and data-driven context.

It is important to note that the tier structure presented in this analysis reflects the relative frequency of survey responses, not the cost, feasibility, or timing of potential projects. Decisions regarding the development, expansion, or improvement of recreational amenities ultimately involve additional considerations such as financial resources, long-term operating costs, land availability, and alignment with broader community planning objectives.

Within that broader decision-making process, the survey results summarized in this report provide a structured view of the recreational amenities that survey participants referenced most frequently, offering one source of information that community leaders may consider as future recreation planning discussions take place.

## Frequently Asked Questions About This Analysis

### **How were the response numbers for Questions 8 and 9 obtained?**

The response totals for Questions 8 and 9 were taken directly from the SurveyMonkey summary reports generated for those questions. These reports record the number of respondents who selected each listed amenity. The values used in this analysis reflect the exact totals provided by SurveyMonkey, and no manual adjustments were made to those counts.

### **How were the open-ended responses from Question 11 analyzed?**

Each open-ended response from Question 11 was reviewed to identify references to specific recreational amenities or facilities. When respondents used different terms to describe the same type of amenity, those references were grouped into a single category. For example, references to hockey arenas, ice rinks, additional sheets of ice, curling facilities, or figure skating facilities were grouped together under an Ice Hockey / Ice Arena category.

To avoid artificially inflating results, each response was counted only once per amenity category, even if similar terms appeared multiple times within the same comment.

### **Why were the results from Questions 8, 9, and 11 combined?**

Questions 8 and 9 asked respondents to select specific amenities from predefined lists, while Question 11 allowed respondents to provide additional suggestions through open-ended comments. Combining the results from these questions provides a more complete picture of how frequently each amenity was referenced across the survey.

This consolidated approach ensures that both structured selections and narrative responses are reflected in the overall analysis.

### **Why were the amenities organized into frequency tiers?**

The tier structure was used to help interpret the compiled response totals. By grouping amenities into ranges of response frequency, it becomes easier to see how different amenities compare with one another across the full set of survey responses.

The tiers represent relative levels of response frequency rather than recommendations for specific projects.

### **How were the tier ranges determined?**

The tier ranges were determined by identifying the overall range between the highest and lowest compiled response totals and dividing that range into five equal intervals. Each amenity was then placed into the tier whose range included its compiled total. This method ensures that the tiers reflect the distribution of the survey data itself rather than subjective judgments.

## **Why were some amenities not listed in the structured survey questions?**

Questions 8 and 9 focused on amenities owned or managed by the City. Certain recreational facilities within the community are privately owned and operated. Under Minnesota law governing the use of Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) funds, public tax revenues generally cannot be used to finance privately owned recreational facilities. For this reason, privately owned amenities were not included as selectable options in the structured survey questions.

However, if respondents referenced such amenities within their open-ended comments in Question 11, those references were recorded for informational purposes.

## **Do the survey results determine which projects the City should build?**

No. The survey results indicate how frequently respondents referenced different recreational amenities. The tier structure reflects relative levels of response frequency, not project feasibility or priority for construction.

Decisions regarding the development or expansion of recreational amenities involve additional considerations such as cost, land availability, long-term operating expenses, and alignment with broader community planning objectives.

## **Does this analysis represent recommendations for specific projects?**

No. The purpose of this analysis is to summarize and interpret the survey responses in a clear and transparent way. The report does not recommend specific projects. Instead, it provides a structured view of how respondents referenced different recreational amenities, which may help inform future community discussions and planning efforts.

## **Could a respondent increase the influence of a particular amenity by mentioning it multiple times in their comment?**

No. During the coding of the open-ended responses in Question 11, each response was counted only once for any given amenity category. If a respondent mentioned the same amenity multiple times within a single comment, it was recorded as a single reference for that category. The survey was configured to limit submissions to one survey response per device/IP session within SurveyMonkey. This setting helps reduce the likelihood that a single respondent could submit multiple surveys from the same phone or computer. Together, these safeguards help ensure that the results reflect the number of respondents referencing an amenity rather than the number of times a particular term appears in the comments.

## **Do the survey results represent the views of the entire community?**

The survey results reflect the responses of the individuals who chose to participate in the survey. While the survey provides valuable insight into community perspectives, it does not represent a statistically controlled sample of the entire population. Instead, it should be viewed as one source of input among several that may inform future discussions and planning decisions regarding recreational amenities.

## **APPENDICES**



## **Guide to Report Appendices**

The appendices included in this report provide supporting information explaining how the survey results were analyzed and how those results may be interpreted within practical and legal decision-making frameworks. While the main body of the report focuses on the survey findings, the appendices provide additional context regarding survey methodology, demographic comparisons, project considerations, and statutory requirements governing the use of Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) revenue.

Together, these appendices provide transparency regarding the analytical process used in this report and help City Council members, City Administration, and community members better understand both the opportunities and limitations associated with potential uses of LOST funds.

### **Appendix A—Survey Representation and Statistical Limitations**

This appendix explains the limitations associated with voluntary public surveys and clarifies how the results should be interpreted. Because participation was voluntary and not based on a randomized sampling method, the results reflect the views of those who chose to participate rather than a statistically representative sample of the entire community.

### **Appendix B—Comparison of Survey Respondent Demographics to Community Demographics**

This appendix compares the demographic profile of survey respondents with available demographic data for the City of Fairmont and Martin County, providing context for how closely the respondents reflect the broader community population.

### **Appendix C—Statutory Authority and Limitations for Use of the Local Option Sales Tax**

This appendix summarizes the statutory authority granted by the Minnesota Legislature for the City of Fairmont's Local Option Sales Tax and explains the legal limitations governing how those funds may be used. It also discusses constitutional requirements related to the use of public funds and provides guidance for evaluating whether proposed projects may qualify for LOST funding.

### **Appendix D—Illustrative Project Comparison: Cost, Complexity, and Implementation Considerations**

This appendix provides an illustrative comparison of several recreational projects referenced in the survey results. The comparison considers factors such as estimated capital costs, project complexity, land requirements, and implementation considerations. These examples demonstrate how factors beyond survey preference—such as cost, feasibility, and statutory eligibility—may influence project prioritization.



# Appendix A

## Survey Representation and Statistical Limitations

The SurveyMonkey survey used in this study was voluntary and open to anyone who chose to participate. Respondents were not selected through a random sampling process, and participation depended entirely on individual choice. Because of this:

- Not every resident had a known or equal chance of being selected.
- The total number of individuals who saw the survey but chose not to respond is unknown.
- A statistical margin of error cannot be calculated.
- The results may reflect the views of individuals who were more motivated or more engaged in the topic.

For these reasons, the survey results should be described as reflecting the views of respondents rather than a statistically representative sample of all individuals or households in Fairmont and Martin County.

This does not mean the results lack value. Voluntary surveys are commonly used by communities to gather public input and identify patterns of interest or concern among residents. However, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive of survey participants rather than as statistically precise measurements of the entire population.

### **What Would Be Required for a Statistically Representative Survey**

To treat a survey as statistically representative of Fairmont and Martin County, several methodological standards would need to be met.

#### **1. Random Sampling**

Participants would need to be selected through a true random sampling process from a defined population list (such as registered voters, census-based residential lists, or another verified population frame). Every eligible resident would need to have a known and equal chance of being selected.

#### **2. Defined Sample Size**

A scientifically determined sample size would be required to ensure statistical reliability. Larger populations require larger samples to achieve a reasonable margin of error.

#### **3. Controlled Distribution and Follow-Up**

Selected participants would need to be contacted directly, and follow-up reminders would typically be used to improve response rates and reduce non-response bias.

#### **4. Known Response Rate**

The total number of surveys distributed and returned would need to be tracked so that response rates can be calculated.

#### **5. Margin of Error Calculation**

With random selection and a known sample size, a statistical margin of error (for example,  $\pm 4\%$  at a 95% confidence level) could be calculated and reported.

#### **6. Demographic Weighting (If Needed)**

If certain demographic groups respond at lower rates, statistical weighting may be applied to adjust results so that they reflect known census distributions for age, gender, geography, or household composition.

If these methodological steps were followed, the survey results could be described as statistically representative of the population within a stated margin of error. Without these elements, the results remain descriptive of survey respondents only.

# Appendix B

## Comparison of Survey Respondent Demographics to Community Demographics

This appendix provides a comparison between the demographic characteristics of survey respondents and publicly available demographic data for the City of Fairmont. The purpose of this comparison is to provide context regarding who participated in the survey.

Survey responses are compared with demographic information from the 2020 U.S. Census and American Community Survey estimates for Fairmont, Minnesota, which report population characteristics based on a total community population of approximately 10,487 residents.<sup>1</sup>

Because the age ranges used in the survey differ somewhat from those used in Census reporting categories, the comparisons presented below should be interpreted as approximate rather than exact. In addition, the survey was voluntary and open to any individual who chose to participate. As explained in Appendix A, the survey results should therefore be interpreted as descriptive of respondents rather than statistically representative of the entire population.

The comparisons presented below are intended to provide general context regarding who participated in the survey and how the respondent population compares with the broader community.

### Age Distribution Comparison

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their age range. A total of 302 respondents provided age information in the survey. The table below compares the distribution of survey respondents across age groups with the approximate age distribution of the Fairmont population based on Census data.

Age Category	Survey Respondents	Fairmont Population (2020 Census)
Under 18	1.0%	21.4%
18–29	5.3%	6.9% (18–24)
30–44	28.8%	21.1% (25–44)
45–59	22.5%	28.4% (45–64)
60–74	32.8%	22.2% (65+)
75+	9.6%	Included in 65+

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2020): Population Characteristics, Fairmont, Minnesota.

## Observations

The comparison indicates that survey participation was concentrated among middle-aged and older adults. Respondents between the ages of 30 and 74 account for approximately 84% of all survey participants.

Residents under the age of 18 represent a very small portion of survey respondents. This pattern is common in voluntary public surveys. Individuals under age 18 are generally not the primary decision-makers regarding household participation in civic surveys, and surveys related to municipal planning are typically distributed through communication channels that reach adult residents more directly. As a result, participation rates in community planning surveys tend to increase with age, particularly among residents who are homeowners, parents, or otherwise engaged in local civic matters.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the age distribution suggests that the survey responses primarily reflect the perspectives of adult residents who are most directly involved in community decision-making and local recreational activities.

## Household Composition Comparison

Survey respondents were also asked to identify the age groups represented within their households. Respondents could select more than one category, meaning the percentages represent the proportion of responding households reporting the presence of individuals within each age group.

Survey responses indicate the following household composition among respondents:

<b>Household Age Group Present</b>	<b>Survey Respondents</b>
Children under 13	30.14%
Teens (13–18)	20.20%
Adults (19–64)	52.65%
Seniors (65+)	36.42%

The categories for children under 13 and teenagers (13–18) represent distinct age ranges. Together, these responses indicate that a substantial portion of responding households reported children or teenagers living in the home.

For comparison, data from the 2020 U.S. Census indicate that approximately 24.8% of households in Fairmont include children under the age of 18, while 75.2% of households do not.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Don A. Dillman, Jolene D. Smyth, and Leah Melani Christian. *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. 4th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2020): Household Characteristics*, Fairmont, Minnesota.

## **Observations**

The survey results suggest that households with children may have participated in the survey at somewhat higher rates than their share of the overall population. This pattern is commonly observed in community recreation surveys, where families with children often have a greater level of interest in recreational amenities, youth sports programming, and community facilities.

Households with children are often among the primary users of many recreational amenities considered in this survey, including playgrounds, aquatic facilities, youth sports fields, and ice sports facilities. As a result, it is not unusual for recreation-related surveys to receive higher participation from families with children.

These differences do not invalidate the survey findings. Rather, they provide helpful context for understanding who participated in the survey and how the responses may reflect the interests of different segments of the community.

## **Interpretation of Demographic Comparisons**

Taken together, the demographic comparisons presented in this appendix indicate that the survey responses were primarily provided by adult residents, with particularly strong participation among middle-aged households and households that include children.

Such patterns are typical in voluntary surveys related to community recreation planning. Adults who are active users of community facilities, parents of children participating in recreational programs, and long-term residents often have the greatest level of engagement with local recreation infrastructure and therefore are more likely to participate in surveys addressing these topics.

These demographic comparisons should therefore be viewed as contextual information that helps interpret the survey responses, rather than as evidence that the survey results represent the entire population with statistical precision.

## **Relationship to the Survey Findings**

The demographic characteristics of survey respondents provide useful context for interpreting the survey results presented in this report. Participation was strongest among adult residents and households that include children, groups that are often among the primary users of community recreational amenities such as parks, athletic fields, aquatic facilities, and youth sports programming. As a result, the survey responses may reflect a particularly strong level of engagement from residents who regularly interact with these types of recreational facilities and programs.



# Appendix C

## Statutory Authority — Use of Local Option Sales Tax

### A Reference Guide for City Council, Administration, and the Public

#### Legal Context Statement

The information provided in this appendix is intended to summarize the statutory and constitutional framework governing the use of Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) revenues by the City of Fairmont. It is provided for informational and explanatory purposes to assist City Council members, City Administration, and members of the public in understanding the legal context within which LOST funding decisions must be made.

This appendix does not constitute a formal legal opinion. Final determinations regarding the legal eligibility of specific projects for LOST funding should be made in consultation with the City Attorney or other qualified legal counsel.

The statutory citations and constitutional references included in this appendix are provided to help clarify the legislative authority under which the Fairmont Local Option Sales Tax was authorized and the legal principles that govern the use of public funds in Minnesota.

#### Purpose of This Appendix

This appendix summarizes the statutory and constitutional framework governing the use of the City of Fairmont's Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) revenue. Its purpose is to clarify the legal authority under which the tax was created and the limitations that apply to how the resulting funds may be used.

The recreational survey discussed in this report provides insight into citizen preferences regarding potential recreational improvements and additions within the community. However, survey responses alone do not determine which projects may legally be funded. The use of LOST revenue must comply with the statutory authority granted by the Minnesota Legislature and with constitutional requirements governing the use of public funds.

Because the LOST program represents a voter-approved tax intended for specific purposes, understanding these legal requirements is essential for evaluating potential projects and maintaining transparency in the decision-making process.

## **Legislative Authorization for the Fairmont Local Option Sales Tax**

The City of Fairmont's Local Option Sales Tax was authorized by the Minnesota Legislature through Laws of Minnesota 2017, First Special Session, Article 4, Section 19. [1]

This legislation allows the City of Fairmont to impose a 0.5 percent local sales and use tax, subject to approval by voters. Fairmont voters approved the tax in a referendum held on November 8, 2016.

The statute specifies that revenues generated by the tax must be used:

“to finance the capital and administrative costs of constructing and funding recreational amenities, trails, and a community center.”[1]

The law also establishes a maximum revenue limit. The total amount that may be raised through the tax is \$15,000,000, plus costs associated with issuing and servicing bonds used to finance eligible projects.[1]

The tax must terminate once this revenue threshold has been reached or after twenty-five years, whichever occurs first.[1]

## **Relationship to Minnesota Statutes Governing Local Sales Taxes**

Although Fairmont's LOST authority was granted through special legislation, the statute specifies that the tax is otherwise governed by Minnesota Statutes §297A.99, which establishes the general framework for local sales taxes in Minnesota.[2]

Under this statute:

- Cities must obtain legislative authorization before imposing a local sales tax.
- The proposed use of the tax must be identified as part of the authorization request.
- The tax must typically be approved by local voters through referendum.

In Fairmont's case, the Legislature authorized categories of projects rather than a fixed list of specific facilities. The three categories authorized in the statute are:

- Recreational amenities
- Trails
- A community center

This structure provides the City Council with some discretion in determining which projects within those categories will be funded. However, that discretion remains subject to the statutory language and to broader constitutional requirements governing public expenditures.

## **Capital Project Requirement**

The statute specifies that LOST revenues must be used for the capital and administrative costs of constructing and funding the authorized facilities.[1]

### **Eligible uses of LOST funds therefore typically include:**

- Construction of new recreational facilities
- Major capital improvements or expansions
- Infrastructure associated with those facilities
- Administrative and financing costs associated with project development

Routine operating expenses, maintenance activities unrelated to capital improvements, or other municipal expenditures are generally not eligible uses of LOST revenue under this authorization.

## **Bonding Authority and Financial Limitations**

The legislative authorization also permits the City of Fairmont to issue bonds to finance eligible projects.[1]

The total principal amount of bonds issued for LOST projects may not exceed \$15,000,000, plus costs associated with issuing those bonds.[1]

This bonding authority allows the City to construct projects earlier by borrowing against future LOST revenue. However, the total borrowing tied to the program remains subject to the same overall financial limit established in the statute.

## **Constitutional Requirements Governing Public Funds**

In addition to statutory requirements, the use of LOST revenue must comply with constitutional principles governing the use of public funds.

Under Article X, Section 1 of the Minnesota Constitution, taxes may be levied only for public purposes.[3]

Public expenditures must therefore provide a benefit to the community as a whole rather than primarily benefiting private individuals or organizations.

In addition, Article XI, Section 2 of the Minnesota Constitution restricts the ability of governmental entities to provide financial assistance or credit to private parties unless authorized by law.[4]

Together, these provisions establish the legal principle commonly referred to as the public purpose doctrine, which requires that public expenditures serve legitimate governmental objectives and provide a demonstrable public benefit.

## **Implications for Privately Owned Facilities**

Because LOST revenue represents public tax funds, projects financed with these funds must satisfy both statutory authorization and the constitutional public purpose requirement.

In many cases this means that facilities constructed or improved with LOST funds are publicly owned or under public control.

If a project involves a privately owned facility, additional legal review may be necessary to determine whether public funding is permissible under Minnesota law.

For example, the Fairmont Opera House was referenced in a number of open-ended survey responses. However, the Opera House is not owned by the City and therefore was not included among the structured amenity options presented in Questions 8 and 9 of the survey.

If the City were to consider using LOST revenue for renovations to a privately owned facility, several issues would require evaluation, including:

- whether the project qualifies as a public capital improvement
- whether the project satisfies the constitutional public purpose requirement
- whether the project falls within the statutory categories authorized by the Legislature
- whether additional legislative authorization or a different project structure would be required

These questions would typically require review by municipal legal counsel.

## **Compliance Checklist for Evaluating Proposed LOST Projects**

When evaluating potential projects for LOST funding, City officials may find it helpful to apply a structured review process.

A proposed project should generally be evaluated against the following questions:

1. Does the project fall within one of the categories authorized by the Legislature (recreational amenities, trails, or a community center)?
2. Is the project a capital construction or major improvement project rather than an operating expense?
3. Will the facility be publicly owned or under public control?
4. Does the project serve a clear public purpose that benefits the community as a whole?
5. Is the project financially feasible within the remaining LOST revenue limit?
6. Does the project align with community priorities expressed through public input and planning processes?

Applying a consistent review process helps ensure that funding decisions remain consistent with both statutory requirements and community expectations.

## **Illustrative Examples of Potentially Eligible and Non-Eligible Projects**

Projects that clearly fall within the statutory authorization may include:

- construction or expansion of public trail systems
- improvements to publicly owned parks or recreational facilities
- development of recreational courts, playgrounds, or similar amenities
- construction of a community recreation center or fieldhouse

Other proposals may require additional legal review, including projects involving partnerships with nonprofit or private organizations.

Projects that primarily benefit privately owned facilities or fall outside the authorized project categories may not qualify for LOST funding without additional legislative authorization or a different project structure.

These examples are illustrative and not definitive determinations, but they demonstrate how statutory requirements may affect project eligibility.

## **Administrative Caution in Areas of Statutory Interpretation**

In some situations, the statutory language governing the use of Local Option Sales Tax revenues may leave room for interpretation regarding whether a particular project clearly falls within the authorized categories. When such questions arise, it is generally advisable for municipal decision-makers to exercise careful restraint until the legal eligibility of the project has been clearly established.

Areas of statutory ambiguity can sometimes become the source of legal challenges, particularly when public tax revenues are involved. For this reason, many municipalities adopt the practice of seeking clear legal guidance before proceeding with projects that may fall near the boundary of the statutory authorization.

This does not mean that the City should avoid considering innovative or complex projects that could benefit the community. Rather, it reflects the importance of obtaining clear and unambiguous guidance from municipal legal counsel regarding whether a proposed use of LOST funds complies with both the statutory authorization granted by the Minnesota Legislature and the constitutional requirements governing the use of public funds.

By approaching questions of statutory interpretation with careful legal review, the City can ensure that decisions regarding the use of LOST revenue remain legally sound, transparent, and consistent with the intent of the legislation approved by voters and enacted by the Legislature.

## **Relationship to Survey Results and Community Input**

The recreational survey discussed in this report provides useful insight into how respondents would like to see recreational amenities develop within the community. However, survey responses identify community preferences rather than legal eligibility. When interpreting these results, City officials must consider both the level of public support for a project and whether the proposed use of Local Option Sales Tax revenue clearly complies with the statutory authorization and constitutional requirements governing public expenditures.

When a proposed project falls within a legally clear category—such as publicly owned recreational facilities, trail systems, or community recreation infrastructure—the survey results may provide helpful guidance regarding community priorities. When a proposal falls near the boundary of statutory authority or involves privately owned facilities or services, additional legal review may be necessary before public funds could be used.

Recognizing this distinction helps ensure that community input remains an important part of the decision-making process while also ensuring that the City's actions remain consistent with the legal framework governing the Local Option Sales Tax.

## **Public Understanding, Legal Constraints, and Community Trust**

Public surveys and community input processes are valuable tools for understanding how residents would like to see their community develop. The recreational survey discussed in this report represents one form of that public input.

However, citizen preferences expressed through surveys do not override the statutory authority granted by the Minnesota Legislature. The City Council and City Administration must operate within the legal framework established by state law when determining how LOST funds may be used.

In some cases, citizens may express strong support for projects that fall outside the statutory authorization or that involve privately owned facilities. When this occurs, the limitation is not necessarily a matter of local policy choice but rather a matter of legal authority.

City officials have a responsibility to ensure that public tax revenues are used in ways that comply with state statutes and constitutional requirements. If public funds were used for projects outside the statutory authorization, the City could be exposed to legal challenges or violations of state law.

Providing clear information about these legal requirements helps ensure that public discussions remain constructive and informed. When residents understand the statutory framework governing LOST funds, it becomes easier to evaluate potential projects realistically and to maintain confidence that City officials are acting responsibly within the authority granted to them.

Transparency regarding these legal constraints is therefore an important element in maintaining long-term community trust in the stewardship of voter-approved tax revenue.

### **What This Means for Citizens Evaluating Proposed Projects**

The recreational survey discussed in this report reflects citizen preferences regarding potential recreational improvements and additions within the community. These preferences provide valuable insight into how residents would like to see Fairmont's recreational assets evolve in the future.

However, it is important to recognize that the survey results represent public input, not legal authorization.

Even when a project receives strong support from survey participants, the City must still determine whether that project:

- falls within the statutory categories authorized by the Minnesota Legislature
- qualifies as a capital project under the LOST legislation
- meets constitutional public purpose requirements
- complies with any additional statutory or legal restrictions governing the use of public funds

In practical terms, this means that some projects mentioned in the survey may not be eligible for funding through the Local Option Sales Tax, even if they are viewed favorably by respondents.

For example, open-ended survey responses included several references to the Fairmont Opera House and other cultural facilities. While these comments demonstrate that some residents view these venues as important community assets, the use of LOST revenue for improvements to privately owned facilities may raise legal and statutory considerations that must be carefully evaluated before public funds could be used.

In these situations, the limitation does not necessarily reflect a lack of community support for the project or a policy decision by the City Council. Rather, it reflects the legal framework within which local governments must operate.

Understanding this distinction is important when interpreting survey results. Public surveys help identify community priorities, but the final determination of which projects may be funded must remain consistent with the authority granted by state law.

By clearly communicating these legal constraints, the City can help ensure that public discussions remain focused on projects that are both community-supported and legally feasible. This transparency helps strengthen public confidence that LOST funds are being administered responsibly and in accordance with the authority approved by voters and granted by the Minnesota Legislature.

## Summary

The City of Fairmont's Local Option Sales Tax was authorized by the Minnesota Legislature to fund capital projects related to recreational amenities, trails, and a community center.

The statute establishes several key parameters:

- the tax rate is limited to one-half of one percent
- total revenue is capped at \$15 million, plus bond-related costs
- funds must be used for capital projects within the authorized categories
- expenditures must satisfy constitutional public purpose requirements

Within these parameters, the City Council retains discretion to determine which specific projects will be funded. However, all funding decisions must remain consistent with the statutory authority granted by the Legislature and the broader legal framework governing public expenditures.

Understanding these requirements provides an essential foundation for evaluating potential recreational investments and ensuring that the use of LOST funds remains consistent with Minnesota law and with the expectations of the community.

## Footnotes

- (1) Laws of Minnesota 2017, First Special Session, Article 4, Section 19 – City of Fairmont; Local Tax Authorized.
- (2) Minnesota Statutes §297A.99 – Local Sales Taxes.
- (3) Minnesota Constitution, Article X, Section 1 – Public Purpose Requirement.
- (4) Minnesota Constitution, Article XI, Section 2 – Restrictions on Public Credit.

# Appendix D

## Illustrative Project Comparison: Cost, Complexity, and Implementation Considerations

### Purpose of This Appendix

The tier rankings presented earlier in this report reflect how frequently survey respondents referenced specific recreational amenities across Questions 8, 9, and 11. Higher tiers indicate that an amenity was referenced more often by survey participants, while lower tiers indicate that it was referenced less frequently.

However, frequency of survey responses alone does not determine which projects can or should be pursued first.

Decisions regarding recreational investments must also consider several practical factors, including:

- Capital cost to construct or develop the project
- Long-term operating and maintenance costs
- Land availability and site requirements
- Project complexity and engineering considerations
- Time required for planning, design, and construction
- Coordination with existing community organizations or facilities

These factors can significantly influence how projects are prioritized, even when public interest levels differ.

This appendix provides a simplified comparison of several illustrative projects referenced within the survey results. The projects were selected from multiple survey tiers in order to demonstrate how real-world decision criteria may interact with public interest levels.

The purpose of this comparison is not to recommend specific projects, but rather to illustrate how practical considerations may affect implementation decisions.

It should also be noted that the total Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) revenue currently available for recreational investments is approximately \$12.6 million. As a result, many potential projects may compete for limited funding and must be evaluated within that broader financial context.

### Illustrative Project Considerations

(Listed from Highest Estimated Cost to Lowest Estimated Cost)

**Ice Arena Expansion – Second Sheet of Ice—Cost estimate: \$18M – \$25M**

*Survey Tier Reference: Tier 3 — 149 combined responses*

*Capital Cost*—Construction of a second sheet of ice typically requires a large enclosed structure, spectator seating, locker rooms, mechanical systems, and associated infrastructure.

*Operating Cost*—Ice arenas have significant ongoing operating costs due to refrigeration systems, utilities, and staffing.

*Land / Space Requirements*—Approximately 4–6 acres depending on parking, circulation, and supporting facilities.

*Project Complexity*—High. Ice arena construction requires specialized refrigeration, slab construction, and climate control systems.

*Implementation Considerations*—The refrigeration system at the existing arena was recently upgraded and is reportedly capable of supporting two sheets of ice. If a second sheet were pursued, the City would need to explore whether an agreement could be reached with the Martin County Fair Board, which currently owns the site where the existing arena is located.

### **Multi-Use Fieldhouse / Community Recreation Center—Cost estimate: \$15M – \$25M**

*Survey Tier Reference: Tier 3*—130 combined responses

*Capital Cost*—Large indoor fieldhouses typically require long-span structural systems, indoor turf or courts, spectator seating, locker rooms, and event space.

*Operating Cost*—Moderate to high depending on programming levels, staffing, and building size.

*Land / Space Requirements*—Approximately 6–10 acres, including parking and potential outdoor practice areas.

*Project Complexity*—High due to building size, mechanical systems, and programming flexibility.

*Implementation Considerations*—If the City partnered with the Fairmont Area Community Center Foundation (FACC), the City might potentially purchase or acquire land currently owned by the foundation for development of such a facility.

### **Aquatic Center Enclosure (Year-Round Use)—Cost estimate: \$12M – \$18M**

*Survey Tier Reference: Tier 3*—168 combined responses

*Capital Cost*—Enclosing an existing outdoor aquatic facility would require a large-span building structure approximately 300 ft × 200 ft × 40 ft high, along with substantial modifications to the existing pool mechanical systems.

*Operating Cost*—High. Indoor aquatic facilities require significant heating, humidity control, and water treatment systems.

*Land / Space Requirements*—Sufficient land exists at the current aquatic center location to accommodate an enclosure.

*Project Complexity*—High due to the need for specialized humidity control, mechanical upgrades, and retractable or operable wall systems to allow airflow during summer months.

*Implementation Considerations*—The enclosure concept would convert the seasonal aquatic facility into a year-round recreational asset, significantly expanding its operating capacity.

### **Opera House Renovation or Restoration (Cost estimate: \$4M – \$6M)**

*Survey Tier Reference: Tier 1*—43 combined comment mentions

*Capital Cost*—Costs depend heavily on structural upgrades, historic preservation requirements, and modernization of stage, seating, and building systems.

*Operating Cost*—Moderate depending on programming, staffing, and event scheduling.

*Land / Space Requirements*—No additional land required.

*Project Complexity*—Moderate to high depending on structural and preservation requirements.

*Implementation Considerations*—The Opera House is not a City-owned facility and therefore did not appear in the structured survey questions. However, it was referenced frequently in open-ended responses. The use of public tax dollars to fund the remodelling of the Opera House would have to be carefully considered, because it would open the door to demands for the use of public tax dollars to fund other privately owned and operated amenities and services.

### **Park Lighting Improvements (Cost estimate: \$300K – \$1.2M)**

*Survey Tier Reference: Tier 3*—131 combined responses

*Capital Cost*—Lighting improvements may include installation of LED fixtures along trails, parking areas, sports fields, or gathering areas.

*Operating Cost: Low*—Modern LED lighting systems are relatively energy efficient.

*Land / Space Requirements*—Minimal.

*Project Complexity*—Low to moderate depending on electrical infrastructure requirements.

*Implementation Considerations*—Final costs would depend on how many lighting installations are added and their location throughout the park system.

### **Fishing and Boating Docks or Ramps (Cost estimate: \$200K – \$1M)**

*Survey Tier Reference: Tier 4*—228 combined responses

*Capital Cost*—Costs vary based on dock length, materials, shoreline improvements, and ADA accessibility.

*Operating Cost*—Low

*Land / Space Requirements*—Minimal if installed at existing lake access points.

*Project Complexity*—Moderate due to shoreline stabilization, permitting, and water-level considerations.

*Implementation Considerations*—Dock and boat ramp improvements directly support lake recreation, which ranked among the highest frequency categories in the survey results.

### **Pickleball Courts (4–6 Courts) (Cost estimate: \$250K – \$700K)**

*Survey Tier Reference:* Tier 4—196 combined responses

*Capital Cost*—Costs include court surfacing, fencing, lighting, and spectator seating areas.

*Operating Cost*—Low.

*Land / Space Requirements*—Grouped complex (4–6 courts): 1–1.5 acres. Distributed courts in several parks: 0.2–0.3 acres per court

*Project Complexity*—Low to moderate.

*Implementation Considerations*—Pickleball was one of the most frequently referenced organized recreational activities in the compiled survey results.

### **Archery Range (Cost estimate: \$75K – \$300K)**

*Survey Tier Reference:* Tier 1—41 combined responses

*Capital Cost*—Costs vary depending on target systems, safety berms, fencing, and site preparation.

*Operating Cost*—Very low.

*Land / Space Requirements*—Approximately 2–4 acres depending on range configuration and safety buffers.

*Project Complexity*—Low.

*Implementation Considerations*—Archery ranges are relatively low-cost recreational amenities but require adequate space and safety design considerations.

## **Additional Planning Considerations**

The illustrative comparisons presented in this appendix demonstrate how factors beyond the frequency of survey responses can influence the evaluation and prioritization of potential projects. While the survey results identify areas of interest among respondents, practical considerations—such as capital cost, implementation complexity, available land, and statutory eligibility—also play an important role in determining which projects may be feasible within the available funding.

For example, when viewed within the approximate \$12.6 million in remaining Local Option Sales Tax revenue, several large-scale projects illustrated in this appendix—such as adding a second sheet of ice to the Ice Hockey Arena, constructing a Multi-Use Fieldhouse / Community Recreation Center, or enclosing the existing Aquatic Center for year-round use—could individually consume a substantial portion of the available funds. Because of their capital cost, these projects may require additional financing mechanisms, phased implementation, or longer-term planning beyond the remaining LOST revenue capacity.

By contrast, several other illustrative projects—including Opera House renovation, park lighting improvements, fishing and boating docks or ramps, pickleball courts, and an archery range—would likely fall well within the available LOST funding constraint,

even if several were pursued in combination. As a result, projects of this scale may be more readily achievable within the existing revenue framework.

These examples are not intended to recommend specific projects. Rather, they illustrate how financial capacity and implementation considerations can affect project feasibility and may influence how community priorities identified through the survey are ultimately evaluated and sequenced.

### **Additional Illustration of Cost and Funding Capacity**

Another factor that may influence project sequencing is the relationship between project cost and the total amount of funding available. Even when a project appears in Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the survey results, meaning it received fewer total selections or mentions from respondents, the capital cost associated with that project may be relatively modest. In such cases, multiple lower-cost projects could potentially be implemented within the same overall funding constraint. By contrast, projects that appear in Tiers 3, 4, or 5 may reflect strong interest among survey respondents but may also involve significantly higher capital costs that could consume a large share of the available LOST revenue.

This illustrates an important planning consideration: the relative ranking of amenities in the survey results identifies areas of interest among respondents, but it does not account for the financial scale of individual projects. As a result, decision-makers may evaluate both the level of public interest and the cost-to-benefit relationship of proposed projects when determining how to allocate the approximately \$12.6 million in remaining LOST revenue.

### **How This Appendix Should Be Interpreted**

The comparison above demonstrates that projects referenced within the same survey tiers can vary dramatically in cost, complexity, and land requirements.

For example:

- Trails and lake amenities received the highest response frequency in the survey results.
- Large indoor facilities such as fieldhouses or aquatic center enclosures received meaningful support but involve significantly larger capital investments.
- Smaller recreational amenities such as courts, docks, or specialty recreation areas may be implemented at substantially lower cost.

As a result, survey frequency alone cannot determine which projects should be pursued first. Community leaders must evaluate survey interest alongside practical considerations such as financial capacity, implementation timelines, and long-term operating costs.

The purpose of this appendix is therefore to illustrate how survey results may be integrated with real-world planning considerations when evaluating potential recreational investments.

Viewed together with the tier rankings presented earlier in this report, these project comparisons help illustrate how community interest, financial feasibility, and implementation considerations may all play a role in shaping future recreational planning decisions.

### **Concluding Note on Project Evaluation**

The comparisons presented in this appendix are intended to illustrate how practical considerations—such as capital cost, implementation complexity, land availability, and statutory eligibility—may influence the evaluation and sequencing of potential projects. The tier rankings presented earlier in this report reflect the relative frequency of survey responses and therefore help identify areas of interest among survey participants. However, the tier rankings do not account for financial scale, project feasibility, or legal constraints. For this reason, community interest identified through the survey results is only one of several factors that City officials may consider when evaluating potential projects within the approximately \$12.6 million in remaining Local Option Sales Tax revenue.