



Executive Summary

City of West Des Moines 2024 DirectionFinder Survey - Executive Summary



Purpose

The City of West Des Moines conducted its eleventh DirectionFinder® survey during the summer of 2024 to assess citizen satisfaction with the delivery of major city services and to help determine priorities for the community as part of the City's ongoing planning process. The first survey was conducted in 2002.

Methodology

The survey was administered by mail and online to a random sample of households in the City. The goal was to obtain a total of at least 400 completed surveys. This goal was far exceeded, with a total of 501 surveys having been completed. The overall results for 501 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 4.4%.

This report contains:

- a summary of major findings
- charts depicting the overall results of the survey along with comparisons to the results from 2022 and 2002
- benchmarking data that show how the survey results for West Des Moines compare to other cities
- Importance-Satisfaction analysis that shows priorities for investment
- tabular data that show the overall results for each question on the survey
- a copy of the survey instrument

The percentage of “don't know” responses has been excluded from many of the graphs shown in this report to facilitate valid comparisons of the results from the City with the results from other communities where ETC Institute has conducted a citizen survey. Since the number of “don't know” responses often reflects the utilization and awareness of City services, the percentage of “don't know” responses has been provided in the tabular data section of this report. When the “don't know” responses have been excluded, the text of this report will indicate that the responses have been excluded with the phrase “*who had an opinion.*”

Major Findings

- **Perceptions of the City.** Most (95%) of the residents surveyed, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with their overall quality of life in West Des Moines; 94% were satisfied with their overall feeling of safety, and 91% were satisfied with the overall image of the City.

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- **Overall Satisfaction with City services.** Ninety-four percent (94%) of the residents surveyed, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied (ratings of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) with the quality of police, fire, and emergency medical services; 93% were satisfied with the maintenance of City buildings and facilities, and 93% were satisfied with city's parks, recreation, programs and facilities. Residents were least satisfied with the overall enforcement of code violations (65%).
- **City Services That Residents Think Are Most Important to Emphasize Over the Next Two Years.** The major City services that residents thought were most important for City leaders to emphasize over the next two years were: (1) overall quality of the City streets system, (2) overall traffic flow management in the City, and (3) quality of City water services.
- **Public Safety.** Ninety-five percent (95%) of residents, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the quality of local fire protection; 92% were satisfied with the quality of emergency medical services, and 92% were satisfied with how quickly fire fighters respond to emergencies. Residents were least satisfied with the enforcement of traffic laws (75%).
- **Public Safety Services That Residents Think Are Most Important to Emphasize Over the Next Two Years.** The public safety services that residents thought were most important for City leaders to emphasize over the next two years were: (1) overall quality of local police protection and 2) officers' attitudes and behavior towards citizens.
- **City Water Services.** Ninety-three percent (93%) of residents, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the reliability of water service to their home, and 85% were satisfied with the variety of payment options available. Residents were least satisfied with the quality of water delivered to their home (59%).
- **Parks and Recreation.** Ninety percent (90%) of the residents surveyed, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the number of City parks; 90% were satisfied with the Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge, 86% were satisfied with walking and biking trails in the City, 86% were satisfied with the number and quality of greenway areas, and 84% were satisfied with the Raccoon River Park Boathouse. Residents were least satisfied with the City's senior citizen recreation programs (63%).
- **Parks and Recreation Services That Residents Think Are Most Important to Emphasize Over the Next Two Years.** The parks and recreation services that residents thought were most important for City leaders to emphasize over the next two years were: (1) walking and biking trails in the City, (2) access to desired destinations via the bike and trail system, and (3) the number and quality of greenway areas.

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- **Code Enforcement.** Seventy-six percent (76%) of residents, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the enforcement of fire safety codes and regulations; 71% were satisfied with the enforcement of building codes related to commercial construction, and 70% were satisfied with the enforcement of building codes related to residential construction. Residents were least satisfied with enforcing the removal of junk cars and other nuisances (51%).
- **City Maintenance.** Ninety-three percent (93%) of the residents surveyed, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with maintenance of City buildings; 91% were satisfied with the City's weekly curbside trash collection, and 90% were satisfied with the maintenance of City parks. Residents were least satisfied with the maintenance of City streets (74%).
- **City Maintenance Services That Residents Think Are Most Important to Emphasize Over the Next Two Years.** The City maintenance services that residents thought were most important for City leaders to emphasize over the next two years were: (1) maintenance of City streets and (2) snow removal on City streets.
- **City Communications.** Eighty-six percent (86%) of the residents surveyed, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the quality of the City's WDM Magazine, and 78% were satisfied with the availability of information on City programs and services. Residents were least satisfied with the level of public involvement in local decisions (46%).

Other Findings

- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the residents surveyed, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the rate of growth in West Des Moines; 76% were satisfied with the quality of business growth, and 73% were satisfied with the quality of residential growth.
- Ninety-three percent (93%) of residents, *who had an opinion*, were satisfied with the Public Library, and 66% indicated they had visited the West Des Moines Library in the last six months.
- When residents were asked which sources they have used during the past year to get information about the City, 88% indicated they used WDM Magazine; 77% used the City website, and 35% used the City Facebook page (multiple responses could be given to this question).
- Residents were asked which improvements were needed most in their neighborhood. The top three responses were: (1) more enforcement of traffic laws, (2) more enforcement of property maintenance codes, and 3) street maintenance.

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- Forty-five percent (45%) of the residents surveyed indicated it is “very easy” or “easy” to travel by bicycle in the City of West Des Moines. Fifty percent (50%) of residents think it is “very important” or “important” for the City to make it easier to travel by bicycle within the City.
- Fifty-five percent (55%) of the residents surveyed indicated they are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the value they receive for the portion of their property taxes that fund the City’s operating budget and the services they receive; 13% are “neutral,” 6% are “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied,” and 26% do not have an opinion.

Trends

The significant increases and decreases among all of the items that were assessed in 2022 and 2024 are listed below; changes of 5% or more were considered significant.

Significant Increases:

- Online services offered on the City’s website (+10%)
- Enforcing the maintenance of business property (+7%)
- Availability of information on City programs/services (+5%)
- Quality of the City’s website (+5%)
- Traffic circulation in parking lots (+5%)
- Traffic circulation between developments (+5%)
- Ease of registering for programs (+5%)
- West Des Moines Service Desk (+5%)
- Enforcing the maintenance of residential property (+5%)
- City aquatic centers (+5%)

Significant Decreases:

- Valley Junction Activity Center (-5%)
- Water Works efforts to keep residents informed (-6%)

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How West Des Moines Compares to Other Communities Regionally

West Des Moines is setting the standard for the delivery of City services. The City **rated significantly higher than the Plains regional average (5% or more above) in all 43 areas that were assessed.** The Plains Region includes the states of North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. A table comparing West Des Moines to the Plains Region is shown below.

Service	West Des Moines	Plains Region	Difference	Category
Customer service from City employees	87%	42%	45%	Major Categories of City Services
Overall value received for City tax dollars/fees	76%	33%	43%	Perceptions of the City
Maintenance of City buildings	93%	51%	42%	City Maintenance
Quality of parks/recreation/programs/facilities	93%	52%	41%	Major Categories of City Services
Effectiveness of City communication with public	78%	37%	41%	Major Categories of City Services
Overall image of the City	91%	50%	41%	Perceptions of the City
Quality of City's sanitary sewer system	86%	45%	41%	Major Categories of City Services
Weekly curbside recycling collection	88%	49%	39%	City Maintenance
Yard waste collection	85%	46%	39%	City Maintenance
Overall quality of City services	90%	52%	38%	Perceptions of the City
Overall cleanliness of City streets	89%	51%	38%	City Maintenance
Availability of info on City programs/services	78%	40%	38%	City Communications
Overall quality of City streets system	72%	35%	37%	Major Categories of City Services
Maintenance of sidewalks in public areas	77%	40%	37%	City Maintenance
Quality of City's stormwater management system	83%	46%	37%	Major Categories of City Services
Overall quality of local police protection	92%	57%	35%	Public Safety
How well City is planning for growth	72%	37%	35%	Perceptions of the City
Quality of fire prevention education	76%	43%	33%	Public Safety
Maintenance of City streets	74%	41%	33%	City Maintenance
Quality of City's website	64%	33%	31%	City Communications
How quickly police respond to emergencies	87%	56%	31%	Public Safety
Quality of City water services	74%	44%	30%	Major Categories of City Services
Weekly curbside trash collection	91%	62%	29%	City Maintenance
Maintenance of traffic signals and street signs	86%	57%	29%	City Maintenance
Overall feeling of safety in the City	94%	65%	29%	Perceptions of the City
Mowing/trimming along City streets/public areas	84%	55%	29%	City Maintenance
Enforcing sign regulations	70%	42%	28%	Code Enforcement
How quickly emergency medical services respond	92%	66%	26%	Public Safety
Quality of emergency medical services	92%	67%	25%	Public Safety
How quickly fire fighters respond to emergencies	92%	67%	25%	Public Safety
Enforcing the maintenance of business property	67%	43%	24%	Code Enforcement
Overall enforcement of code violations	65%	42%	23%	Major Categories of City Services
Adequacy of City street lighting	80%	58%	22%	City Maintenance
Quality of police/fire/emergency medical services	94%	72%	22%	Major Categories of City Services
Enforcing the maintenance of residential property	61%	40%	21%	Code Enforcement
Enforcing animal control	63%	43%	20%	Code Enforcement
Overall quality of local fire protection	95%	76%	19%	Public Safety
Enforcement of local traffic laws	75%	57%	18%	Public Safety
Overall traffic flow management in City	67%	50%	17%	Major Categories of City Services
Snow removal on City streets	79%	62%	17%	City Maintenance
Level of public involvement in local decisions	46%	34%	12%	City Communications
Enforcing removal of junk cars/other nuisances	51%	44%	7%	Code Enforcement
Maintenance of City parks	90%	84%	6%	City Maintenance

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How West Des Moines Compares to Other Communities Nationally

The City of West Des Moines rated significantly higher than the National average (5% or more above) in all 43 areas that were assessed. The comparisons between the City of West Des Moines and the National average are listed below.

Service	West Des Moines	U.S.	Difference	Category
Customer service from City employees	87%	39%	48%	Major Categories of City Services
Quality of parks/recreation/programs/facilities	93%	49%	44%	Major Categories of City Services
Overall value received for City tax dollars/fees	76%	33%	43%	Perceptions of the City
Effectiveness of City communication with public	78%	37%	41%	Major Categories of City Services
Overall quality of City services	90%	49%	41%	Perceptions of the City
Overall quality of local police protection	92%	53%	39%	Public Safety
Overall image of the City	91%	53%	38%	Perceptions of the City
Maintenance of City buildings	93%	56%	37%	City Maintenance
Overall cleanliness of City streets	89%	53%	36%	City Maintenance
Quality of City's sanitary sewer system	86%	53%	33%	Major Categories of City Services
Quality of City's stormwater management system	83%	50%	33%	Major Categories of City Services
How well City is planning for growth	72%	39%	33%	Perceptions of the City
Availability of info on City programs/services	78%	46%	32%	City Communications
Weekly curbside recycling collection	88%	56%	32%	City Maintenance
Overall quality of City streets system	72%	41%	31%	Major Categories of City Services
How quickly police respond to emergencies	87%	56%	31%	Public Safety
Yard waste collection	85%	54%	31%	City Maintenance
Maintenance of sidewalks in public areas	77%	47%	30%	City Maintenance
Quality of police/fire/emergency medical services	94%	65%	29%	Major Categories of City Services
Mowing/trimming along City streets/public areas	84%	55%	29%	City Maintenance
Overall feeling of safety in the City	94%	66%	28%	Perceptions of the City
Quality of fire prevention education	76%	49%	27%	Public Safety
Overall enforcement of code violations	65%	40%	25%	Major Categories of City Services
Enforcement of local traffic laws	75%	50%	25%	Public Safety
Enforcing sign regulations	70%	45%	25%	Code Enforcement
Maintenance of City streets	74%	50%	24%	City Maintenance
How quickly emergency medical services respond	92%	69%	23%	Public Safety
Weekly curbside trash collection	91%	68%	23%	City Maintenance
Maintenance of traffic signals and street signs	86%	63%	23%	City Maintenance
Overall traffic flow management in City	67%	45%	22%	Major Categories of City Services
Quality of City's website	64%	42%	22%	City Communications
Quality of City water services	74%	52%	22%	Major Categories of City Services
Quality of emergency medical services	92%	71%	21%	Public Safety
Adequacy of City street lighting	80%	59%	21%	City Maintenance
Snow removal on City streets	79%	58%	21%	City Maintenance
Enforcing the maintenance of business property	67%	46%	21%	Code Enforcement
How quickly fire fighters respond to emergencies	92%	72%	20%	Public Safety
Overall quality of local fire protection	95%	76%	19%	Public Safety
Enforcing the maintenance of residential property	61%	44%	17%	Code Enforcement
Enforcing animal control	63%	49%	14%	Code Enforcement
Level of public involvement in local decisions	46%	34%	12%	City Communications
Maintenance of City parks	90%	82%	8%	City Maintenance
Enforcing removal of junk cars/other nuisances	51%	45%	6%	Code Enforcement

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Investment Priorities

Recommended Priorities for the Next Two Years. In order to help the City identify investment priorities for the next two years, ETC Institute conducted an Importance-Satisfaction (I-S) analysis. This analysis examined the importance that residents placed on each City service and the level of satisfaction with each service.

By identifying services of high importance and low satisfaction, the analysis identified which services will have the most impact on overall satisfaction with City services over the next two years. If the City wants to improve its overall satisfaction rating, the City should prioritize investments in services with the highest Importance-Satisfaction (I-S) ratings. Details regarding the methodology for the analysis are provided in this report.

Based on the results of the Importance-Satisfaction (I-S) Analysis, ETC Institute recommends the following:

Overall Priorities for the City by Major Category. The first level of analysis reviewed the importance of and satisfaction with major categories of City services. This analysis was conducted to help set the overall priorities for the City. Based on the results of this analysis, the major services that are recommended as the top priorities for investment over the next two years in order to raise the City's overall satisfaction rating are listed below:

- Overall traffic flow management in the City (I-S Rating = 0.1452)
- Overall quality of City streets system (I-S Rating = 0.1366)
- Overall enforcement of code violations (I-S Rating = 0.1197)

Priorities Within Departments/Specific Areas: The second level of analysis reviewed the importance of and satisfaction of services within departments and specific service areas. This analysis was conducted to help departmental managers set priorities for their department. Based on the results of this analysis, the services that are recommended as the top priorities within each area over the next two years are listed below:

- **Public Safety:** none of the public safety services were selected as a “high priority” for improvement
- **Parks and Recreation:** none of the parks and recreation services were selected as a “high priority” for improvement
- **City Maintenance:** none of the City maintenance services were selected as a “high priority” for improvement