

Chapter 1

A Trails Plan for Georgetown



“People walk for many reasons - for enjoyment, for relaxation, for challenge, for change, to revitalize, to think, to discover particularities usually blotted out by the modern world’s frenetic pace.”

Marlyn Doan, *Hiking Light*, 1982

Why Plan for Hike and Bike Trails in Georgetown

Georgetown has a wonderful trail system that parallels the San Gabriel River. In conversations with residents of the City, trails were mentioned time and time again as one of the principle things that they loved about Georgetown. No matter where one goes in Texas or across the United States, trails are popular, and are extensively used and enjoyed by the residents of those places. Trails offer benefits such as:

- They can be used by everyone, from the very young to the very active to the elderly looking for a quiet place to walk and appreciate being outside.
- Trails provide opportunities to engage in exercise in a fun setting, whether by simply walking or through more strenuous use such as running, cycling or rollerblading. They help us lead a healthier lifestyle.
- Trails provide alternative ways to get to key city destinations. They also provide ways to get to work and to retail areas.
- They support economic development by creating attractive greenbelts that can revitalize areas and enhance neighborhoods. Trails provide access to local businesses, and provide tourism opportunities. A great system of places to walk and ride makes Georgetown an even more attractive place to live and invest in.
- Trails help to preserve greenbelt areas and help beautify linear park corridors. Imagine how attractive green corridors such as the San Gabriel River, will be.
- Trails help us learn about the history and culture of Georgetown by preserving key historical features and areas, and by making these more accessible and easier to view.

Creating Greenways in Georgetown

A greenway is a long, narrow piece of land for recreational or pedestrian use. A greenway allows for urban commuting via bicycle or foot rather than traditional motorized transportation. Often times a greenway follows some natural linear corridor such as a riverfront, a stream valley or a ridgeline; or it can follow a man-made linear corridor such as a railroad right-of-way, a canal or a scenic road. Trails along many of the larger natural corridors in Georgetown should be considered as greenways.

Greenway opportunities in Georgetown include:

- All three branches of the San Gabriel River
- Smith Branch Creek corridor
- Pecan Branch Creek corridor
- Berry Creek corridor

Purpose of the Georgetown Trails Master Plan

This long range plan envisions a system of trails that connects all of Georgetown, allowing one to go from one end of the city to the other in a fun and healthy way. This plan will identify key trail corridors and guide the creation of a citywide network. A plan such as this will provide guidance on the preferred location for trail corridors and will help the city acquire greenbelt corridors for trail use. A Citywide hike and bike plan will also provide a framework through which the City of Georgetown and the private sector can work together to jointly create spectacular trail corridors. Finally, this plan will help Georgetown staff, elected officials and citizens make informed decisions as to how to fund trail development in a satisfactory manner.

The development of a citywide trail system clearly speaks to Georgetown's commitment to establishing a very high quality of life standard for its citizens. This commitment to quality tells everyone that Georgetown will always seek to be a premier place to live in and to do business.

This Trails Master Plan is flexible, it must continue to be useful even as Georgetown grows and changes. The plan will serve for many years, but should be periodically updated so as to reflect current conditions within the city, nearby cities and the greater Williamson County area as a whole.

"Imagine a network of trails connecting every community in American; carving a path through urban and rural areas; carrying us along our landscape; making it possible to walk or bike to work and school; helping us to understand and celebrate our history and culture. Trails will be very tangible gifts to our future. They will be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Together they represent a commitment and an investment in the kind of country we want to create in the next century."

Hillary Rodham Clinton, 1999



Principles of the Trails Master Plan

The system of trails and pedestrian connections recommended in this master plan creates an opportunity to enhance not only recreation opportunities but also to influence the appearance of much of Georgetown. This plan is both visionary and practical. The visionary component foresees a network of beautiful corridors that seamlessly allow a user to easily go from anywhere in Georgetown by walking or riding. The practical side envisions connections to all neighborhoods via readily accessible, wide, safe and attractive pathways.

The following principles were developed through the master planning process, and serve to guide the alignment and layout of both the trails proposed by this document, as well as additional pathways proposed in the future.

- **Create a citywide network of trails** – The ultimate goal is to create an interconnected network that allows travel across all of Georgetown. Unconnected sections should be united into an overall system of continuous trails. Trails can be used for both transportation and recreational use. The City should create facilities that can allow for commuting and short trips to retail and civic destinations.
- **Promote a feeling of security on all trails**– Trails should provide smooth walkable corridors that feel safe and are visible. The Georgetown Police Department’s Park Patrol Volunteer Program helps promote safety on Georgetown trails. With approximately 50 participants, volunteers patrol parks and trails equipped with a first aid kit, maps, and brochure of ordinances.
- **Access** – Access to the trail system must be maximized as much as is feasible. This may range from simple sidewalk connections to the trails, to complete “trailheads” with parking and comfort facilities such as shade shelters and restrooms. The City can encourage use of the trail system by creating easy access to the system.
- **Trails should enhance Georgetown** – trails should enhance the physical appearance of the city, whether through new pedestrian features, landscaping added to the trail corridors, or simply by revealing natural areas not previously visible to the general public.
- **Provide a variety of trail opportunity types** – Provide trails that are suitable for a variety of activities, including running, walking, cycling and in-line skating. Provide nature trail opportunities and equestrian facilities where feasible. Consider facilities for water trails along the San Gabriel River corridors.
- **Character of the city**– Trail segments should be designed so that they promote the physical and historical character of the City of Georgetown. They should relate to adjacent neighborhoods. Trail corridors provide unique opportunities to learn

about the history, culture, and accomplishments of Georgetown. Trails provide access to the natural habitat in the city, and should offer ample opportunities to learn about the environment. Include interpretive facilities where feasible to incorporate signs and features that provide opportunities for learning about Georgetown and its cultural and ecological heritage.

- **Connectivity** – Where possible, trails corridors and alignments should be designed so as to enhance linkages between parks, neighborhoods, schools, neighborhood services and key civic and community destinations. The citywide trails system is proposed to connect to other surrounding communities and other regional trail systems such as the Brushy Creek trail through the southern portion of Williamson County.
- **Create relationships with other city form givers**– The Citywide Trails System should encourage the creation of public and private partnerships that help build the entire system more quickly.



Safety



Learning



Identity



Access



Connectivity



Beauty of the city



Partnerships



Methodology Used to Develop the Trails Master Plan

The methodology used to develop this plan is graphically illustrated below.



Plan Implementation

The implementation of The Trails Master Plan will be lead by the City of Georgetown and its Parks and Recreation Department. Other key implementers will include:

- All area governmental entities, including the City of Georgetown, Williamson County, all area school districts, and other entities such as TxDOT, etc.;
- Other departments within the City of Georgetown, including Public Works, Transportation and Planning, should work with the Parks and Recreation Department to implement components of the plan;
- Property owners, developers, commercial entities and others in the business community of Georgetown;
- Community homeowner associations (HOA's) and other collective groups of neighborhoods;
- All citizens of Georgetown, no matter which part of the City they live in;
- Adjacent residents of Williamson County to help encourage connections to other adjacent systems

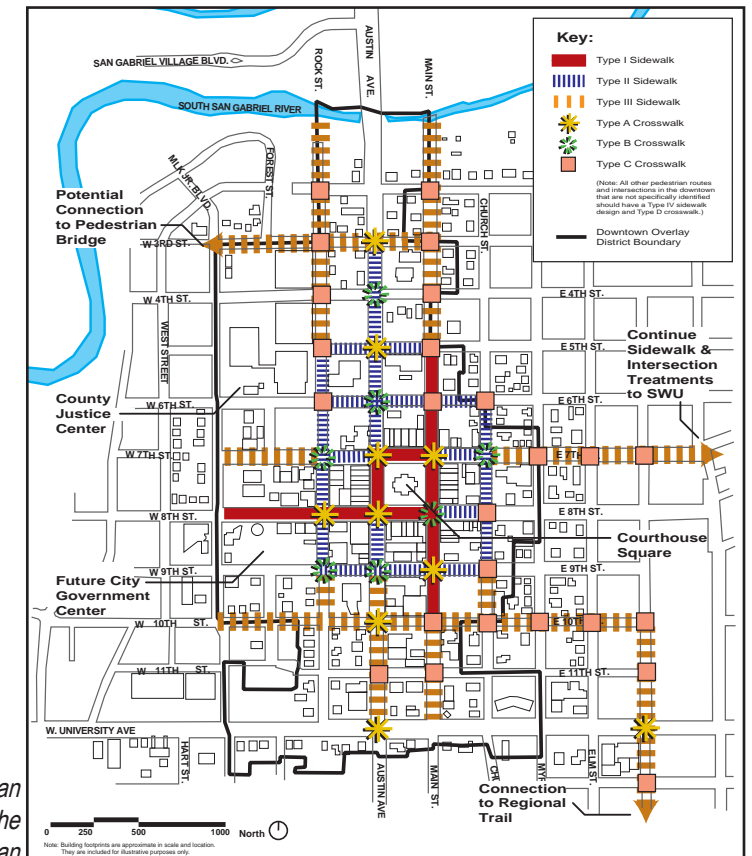
This Trails Master Plan follows the general guidelines for local park master plans established by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). This document will be filed with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and allows the city to better qualify for trail grant opportunities as they become available.

The timeframe for this plan is formulated to address the ten year timeframe from the beginning of 2008 through the year 2018. Periodic review is recommended to provide an opportunity for citizen feedback and to adjust for any major events or occurrences that may significantly alter the recommendations of the plan.

Other Trail Planning Efforts

Trail planning efforts have been noted in other Georgetown master plans such as the Downtown Master Plan. One focus of the Downtown Master Plan is to increase pedestrian traffic in downtown beyond just the courthouse square. The Downtown Master Plan recommends having enhanced sidewalks and crosswalks in downtown so that people feel safe and comfortable when walking. The Downtown Master Plan also has goals set to strengthen the connections between downtown and Southwestern University, downtown and the west bank of the San Gabriel River, and to provide trail connections to and from the downtown core.

The Downtown Master Plan also recommends enhancing the streetscapes along downtown streets so that people feel safe when walking. Encouraging on-street parking so that pedestrians are buffered from the vehicle traffic lanes is one way of enhancing the street and providing safety. The plan also recommends installing street trees where possible to create shade and add comfort for those walking around downtown.



Proposed pedestrian routes from the Downtown Master Plan



Recommended Target Level of Service for Trails

The Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan recommends that a target level of service of one to two miles of trail for every 5,000 residents in the city be established. This target goal reflects the high level of interest in trails and the commitment to quality of life that they represent.

The target level of service should be viewed as a performance goal and as a way to measure progress over the previous year. It should not be viewed as the absolute final goal of the city, since over time the city may actually exceed that target level of service.

With this target level of service, the following amounts of trails would be required as the population of Georgetown grows.

Current Miles of Trails: 6.4 miles of city-owned trails; 31.33 miles of all trails (including some primitive trail facilities that loop entirely around Lake Georgetown).

Estimated Current Population: 47,466

Current Level of Service (city-owned trails only): 1 mile per 7,417 residents.

Recommended Target Level of Service: 1 to 2 miles per 5,000 residents

- Current 2008 need for 47,466 population - 9.5 miles to 19.0 miles (deficit of 3.1 miles to 12.6 miles of trails)
- Year 2010 need for 53,412 population - 10.7 miles to 21.4 miles (deficit of 4.3 mile to 15.0 miles)
- Year 2020 need for 131,602 population - 26.3 miles to 52.6 miles (deficit of 19.9 miles to 46.2 miles of trails)

Other Comparable Levels of Service

For the current year 2008 (estimated population of 47,466)

- Goal of 1 mile per 3,000 residents 15.8 miles (deficit of 9.1 miles)
- Goal of 1 mile per 7,500 residents 6.3 miles (no deficit)
- Goal of 1 mile per 10,000 residents 4.7 miles (surplus of 1.7 miles)

Year 2010 (projected population of 53,412)

- Goal of 1 mile per 3,000 residents 17.8 miles (deficit of 11.4 miles)
- Goal of 1 mile per 7,500 residents 7.1 miles (deficit of 0.7 miles)
- Goal of 1 mile per 10,000 residents 5.3 miles (surplus of 1.1 miles)

Year 2020 (projected population of 131,602)

- Goal of 1 mile per 3,000 residents 43.9 miles (deficit of 37.5 miles)
- Goal of 1 mile per 7,500 residents 17.5 miles (deficit of 11.1 miles)
- Goal of 1 mile per 10,000 residents 13.2 miles (deficit of 6.8 miles)



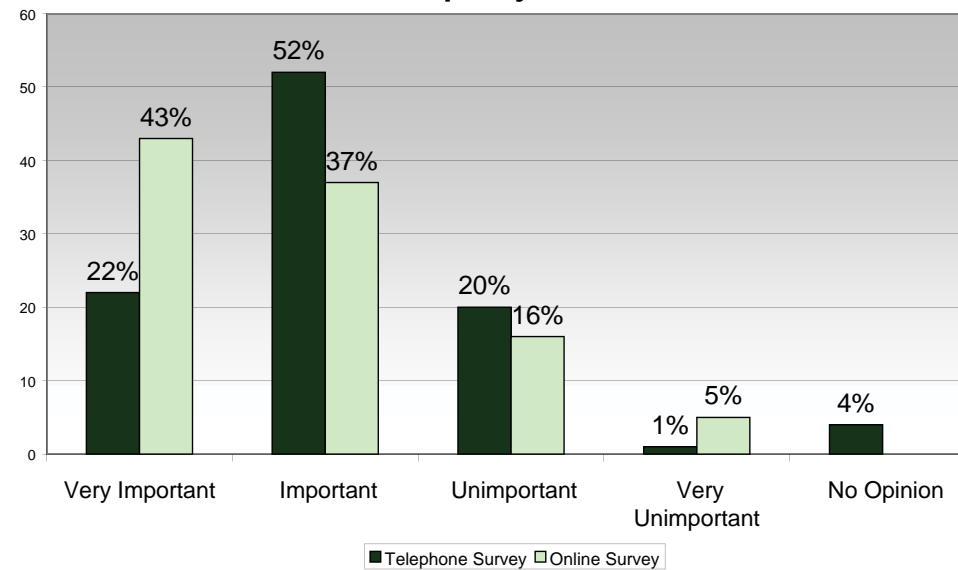
Public Input Regarding Trails

As part of the master planning process, a significant amount of public input was gathered from Georgetown citizens. In both the telephone survey and the online survey, residents were asked trail related questions. During the public community meeting, attendees were shown trail opportunities and asked for their feedback. Finally, the students who participated in the student survey were asked where trails ranked as a recreational activity they partake in while visiting a park, and how important trails are to them. In the following pages, a brief summary is given regarding the public input on trails that was received during the planning process.

Telephone and Online Survey Results Regarding Trails

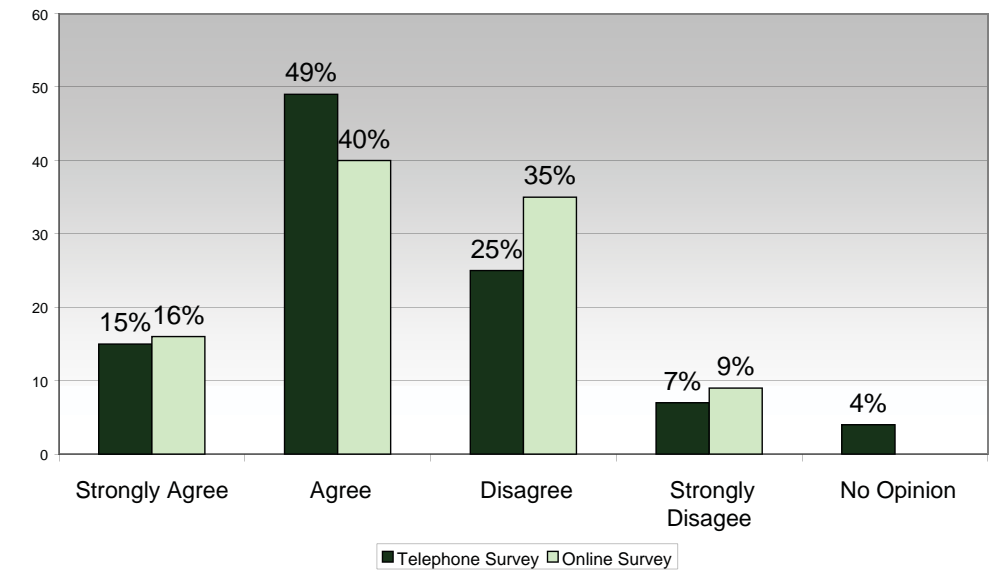
Both the telephone survey and the online survey had questions regarding trails. Residents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the trail statements. The following pages compare the Telephone Survey and the Online Survey results to questions regarding trails.

Develop Major Trails



Trail development is consistently shown through the public input process as one of the most important facilities for the city to provide. 74% of the respondents to the telephone survey and 80% of the respondents to the online survey felt this was either important or very important. Most impressively was that 43% of the citizens who took the online survey rated trails as very important, receiving the highest very important rating of all the categories.

Trails are Close to Where I Live

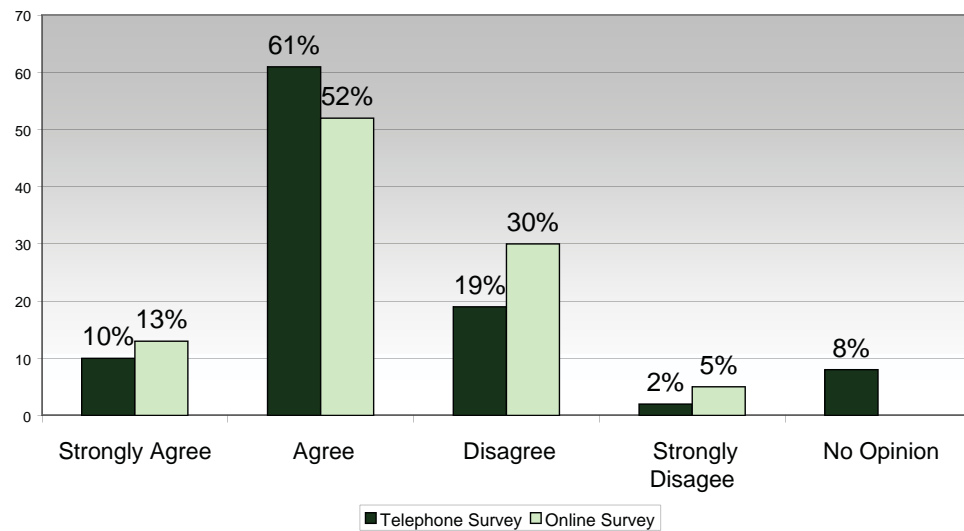


A total of 64% of telephone survey respondents and 56% of online survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement "Trails are close to where I live" while 32% of telephone survey respondents and 44% of online survey respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The city should strive to serve those citizens currently without trails.



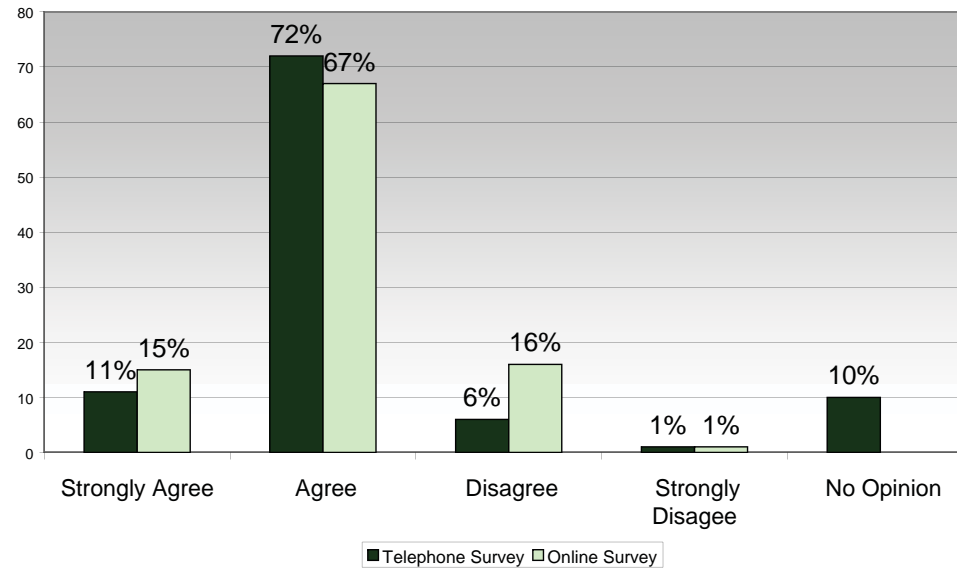


Trails are Wide Enough to Handle Multiple Activities



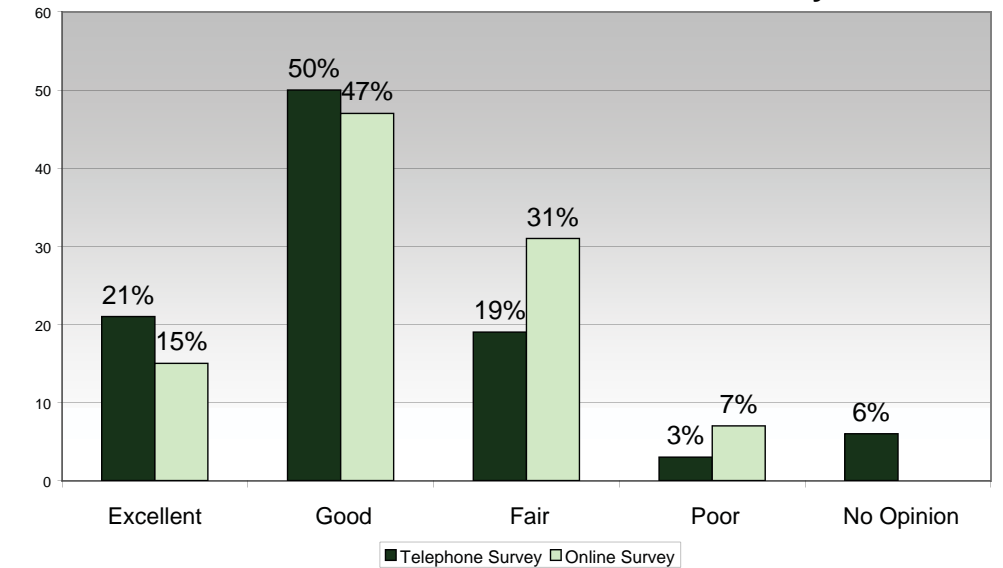
71 % and 65% of responses from telephone and online surveys, respectively, stated they thought that current trail systems are wide enough to handle multiple activities. The city can encourage trail use by multiple groups by widening trail systems to make them more accessible.

I Feel Safe When I'm on a Trail



Currently, 83% of those surveyed by telephone and 82% of those who completed the online survey feel safe while using the trails. The remaining 7% and 17% felt unsafe while using the trails. This indicates a need for more security measures to be taken to ensure the safety of trail users.

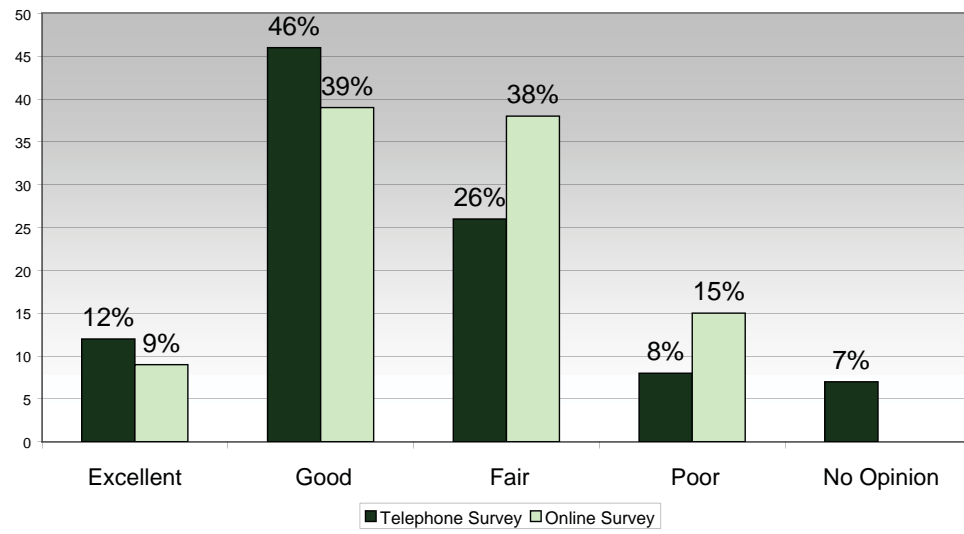
Amount of Hike and Bike Trails in the City



The item referring to the amount of hike and bike trails in Georgetown received one of the highest excellence ratings of all the choices, with 21% of the telephone survey respondents indicating this. 71% of the total telephone survey respondents felt that it was either excellent or good. While only 62% of the online survey respondents felt the amount of trails was either excellent or good. There are plans to increase the amount of trails which gives Georgetown the opportunity to increase this percentage.

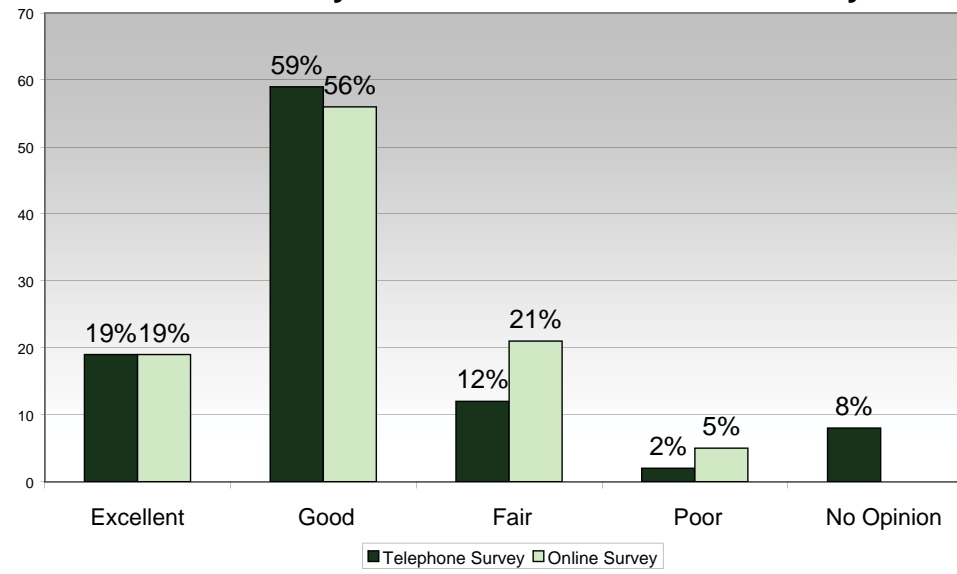


Having Hike and Bike Trails Conveniently Located for People in all Areas



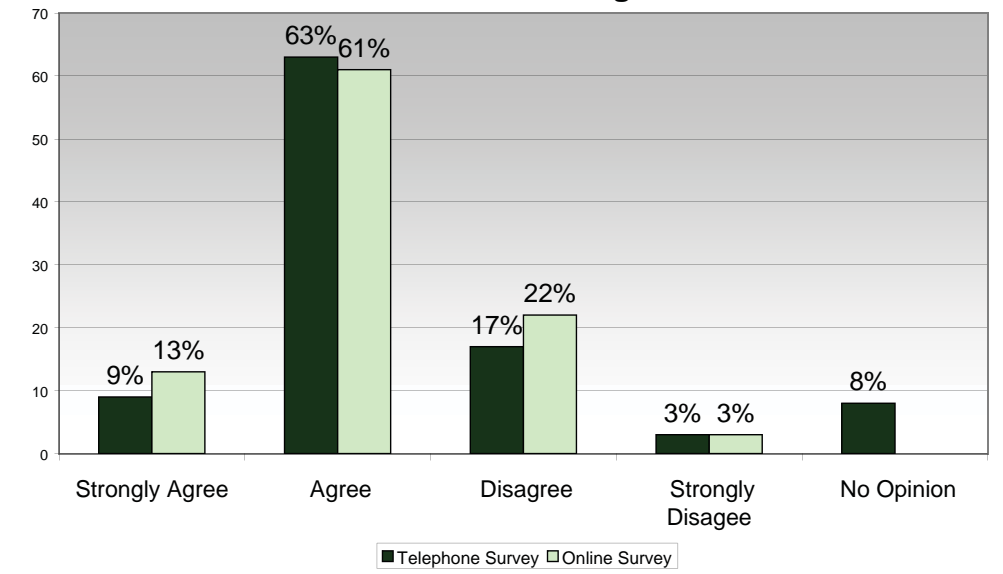
As was previously shown, the majority of people felt the amount of hike and bike trails in Georgetown was at least good. However, there is a decrease in percentage of people who feel the trails are conveniently located for people in all areas. Only 58% of the telephone survey responses and 48% of the online survey responses revealed either an excellent or good in terms of having hike and bike trails conveniently located.

Overall Quality of Hike and Bike Trails in the City



Over three-fourths of the population feels that the overall quality of hike and bike trails in the city are either excellent or good. 78% of the telephone survey respondents and 75% of the online survey respondents indicated this.

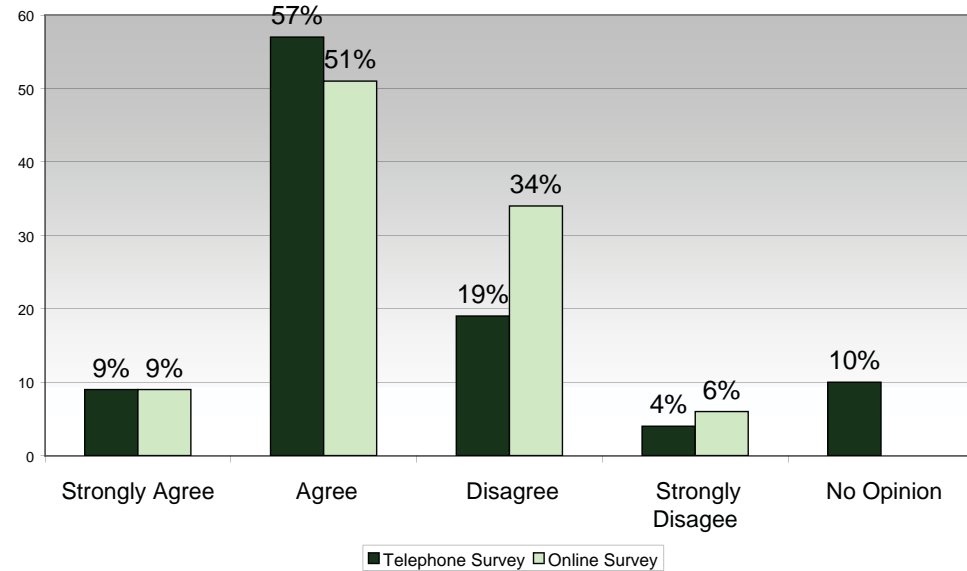
There is Convenient Parking and Access



Positive responses from 71% of telephone survey respondents and 74% of online respondents affirmed there is convenient parking and access in Georgetown's parks. 20% of telephone survey respondents and 25% of online respondents disagreed. These results indicate a need for more parking and better access within the Georgetown park system.

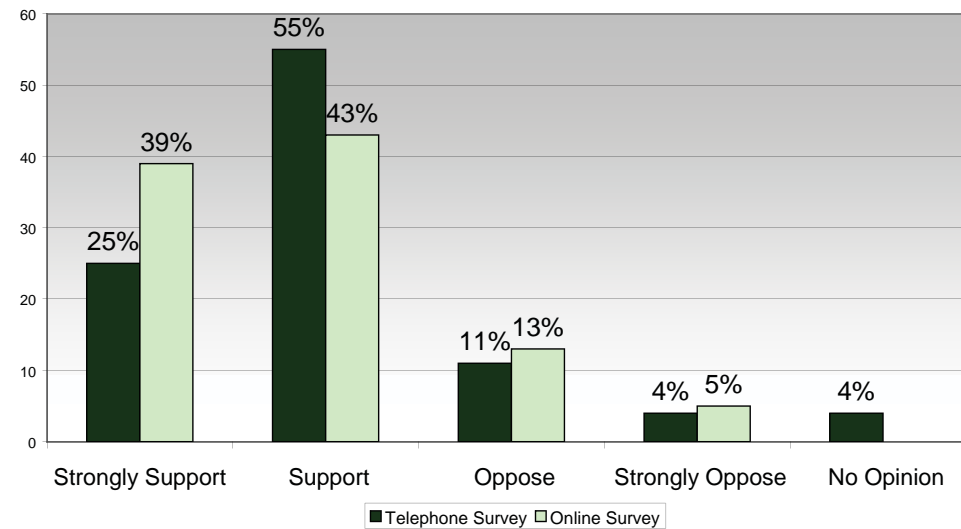


Trails Connect to Places I or My Family Want to Go



Currently, 66% of Georgetown residents surveyed by telephone and 60% of residents surveyed online agree that existing trails in parks connect to places they or their families want to go. 23% of Georgetown residents surveyed by telephone and 40% of online respondents disagree. The city of Georgetown should try to increase the amount of trails available to citizens and connect them to a larger number of destination.

Construction of Hike and Bike Trails Along South San Gabriel



A total of 80% of residents who participated in a telephone survey and 82% of those who completed an online survey said they supported the construction of hike and bike trails along South San Gabriel. A total of 15% of those surveyed by telephone and 18% of the online survey respondents opposed the trail system. The high number of supporters indicates that if built, the trails will be used by a majority of Georgetown citizens.

When asked what one facility they felt was lacking in their part of Georgetown, trails was also listed as the number one response.

This was an opened question on both surveys and residents were allowed to given any answer they wanted. 14% of those who participated in the telephone felt that multi-use trails was the one facility that was lacking in their area of the city. 17% of those who took the online survey also felt multi-use trails were lacking.

Similarly, when residents were asked on the telephone survey and the online survey what one recreational facility was the most important for the city to construct, the number one response on both surveys was trails. 26% of the citizens who participated in the telephone survey and 25% of those who took the online survey responded with jogging and biking trails being the most important facility.





Public Input Meeting and Responses Regarding Trails

During the public input meeting, attendees were given a questionnaire to fill out and give their feedback over what was presented. One question gave a list of different recreation facility types that could be added to the Georgetown Park and Recreation System. Attendees were asked to rank how important or unimportant they thought it is to provide each facility. Trails for walking and biking was the number one response and was ranked as the most important recreation facility for the city to provide.

During the public meeting, attendees were also asked to view illustrations regarding potential recommendations and priorities of the master plan. On the questionnaire they were then asked which three priorities they felt were the most important. Providing more trails was the second highest priority in terms of importance, preceded only by a festival venue in San Gabriel Park.

How important or unimportant is it for the city to provide each facility? The results are shown below in order of importance.

1. Trails for walking and biking
2. Preserved open space and natural habitat
3. Recreation centers
4. Large community parks
5. Senior citizen programs
6. Small neighborhood parks
7. Recreation programs and classes
8. Aquatic facilities
9. Water recreation at Lake Georgetown and on the San Gabriel River
10. Athletic facilities

The residents were shown illustrations reflecting all the different priorities of the master plan. They were then asked on the questionnaire which three they thought were the most important. Their responses are listed below in order of importance.

1. San Gabriel festival / farmers market venue
2. Trails
3. Downtown festival park
4. Acquire land / acquire land for a northwest park
5. Renovate / enhance San Gabriel Park
6. Preserve lands, creeks, rivers, and open space
7. Water sprayground parks
8. Enhance Lake Georgetown with rowing opportunities, access, improved trails



Student Survey Responses Regarding Trails

One question on the student survey gave the student a list of recreation activities and asked them which ones they normally do when visiting a park. 47% of students replied that they walk on trails when they visit a park. Their responses to the question are shown below.

When you visit a park, what do you normally do?

Play on a playground.....	63%
Meet with friends.....	59%
Walk on trails.....	47%
Participate in sports.....	47%
Go swimming.....	44%
Enjoy nature.....	37%
Family activity such as a picnic.....	36%
Play basketball or volleyball.....	36%
Skateboard.....	16%
Other.....	15%

Students were also given a list of recreation activities and asked how interested or uninterested they were in each activity. Jogging or biking on trails was ranked number six out of twenty three activities. 41% of students replied that they were either interested or very interested in jogging or biking on trails as shown in the graph below.

