

## **Alamo Parks and Recreation Survey Summary – January 2011 Report to Alamo Municipal Advisory Council**

### **Survey and Area Surveyed**

Seeking resident input to the Alamo MAC on future plans for Alamo Parks and Recreation both for facilities planning and for recreation programs, the county Public Works Department mailed 4,976 surveys to households and businesses included in the R-7, Zone A, County Service Area, which includes all of Alamo except for the Round Hill and Round Hill North neighborhoods. The response was greater than expected with 565 surveys returned, for an 11.5% response, considered outstanding for a 4 page survey with no postage supplied for the return envelope. According to Contra Costa LAFCO, there are 13,395 residents in the CSA.

### **Design Flaws in the Survey**

After tabulation began, it became immediately apparent that it was a mistake not to include some context in the cover letter that was sent with the survey. Commenter after commenter deplored government spending and requested no future spending on parks and recreation in the current economic and fiscal crisis. This mistake was compounded since the survey came from "Contra Costa County" and the county's economic woes have been featured prominently in recent newspaper articles. Context should have been included with the survey to emphasize that R-7A is funded independently of the county, that its tax revenue is part of the 1% tax allocation and therefore is not an extra tax burden to residents; and that a large balance exceeding \$3 million has built up that can only be spent on parks and recreation programs in Alamo. This survey flaw gave a strong negative bias to some questions. Those responding in the negative to many questions may have had a quite different response had they known there was adequate existing tax funding for future parks and recreation programs with no tax increases contemplated.

Although respondents were not asked their age, they were asked to state how long they had lived in Alamo, which can be a correlation to age. Because the largest group of respondents has lived in Alamo for more than 30 years, it can be assumed they represented seniors, and therefore in addition to a negative bias, the survey has a bias toward seniors and their interests. Traditionally, the heaviest users of parks and recreation facilities are young families with children, and an internet based survey rather than a mail in survey would have been a better way to reach these consumers of Alamo Parks services. Or, a clipboard survey of actual users of the parks could have been used.

Despite the negative anti-spending bias and the senior bias, however, there was strong support expressed for current R-7A events and facilities and for future

recreation programs. It can be extrapolated that this support would have been even stronger had the survey been correctly designed to include context and to elicit a stronger response from young families.

In addition, minor concerns about survey design are that those surveyed should have been asked, Do you use X Facility? and if the answer was no, they should have been directed to the next question and if the answer was yes, they should have been directed to rate the facility. Tabulators were forced to tabulate answers from respondents who rated a facility even though they stated they did not use the facility.

And finally, the survey was meant to be a resident survey. Instead, surveys were mailed to all taxpayers in the district, including downtown business parcels. An unknown number of persons who are not residents of Alamo filled out surveys; a few returned their blank survey, noting they were not residents. Future mail surveys should screen out business addresses downtown if resident and not taxpayer input is what is desired.

#### THANK YOU'S

I wish to express thanks to Alamo citizens Nancy Dommies, Claudia Waldron, Christy Campbell, Patt Larkin, Pat DeRensis and Grace Schmidt who volunteered many hours to tabulate the survey responses.

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Volunteer Coordinator  
Survey Tabulation