

Snapshot of Recreation in Dover, the Capital of the First State



Introduction

The goal of the City of Dover Parks and Recreation Department is to provide the Dover community with a broad, varied and interesting selection of recreational programs and activities. The department offers both active and passive recreation programs designed to meet the needs of all residents, regardless of age, sex, socio-economic status, race, or disabilities. City parks, many of which are equipped with play areas and structures, walking paths and attractive landscaping, can be found in key locations throughout Dover. They provide a safe and clean space for recreational activities within walking distance to the city's neighborhoods.

Our Residents' Needs and Opinions

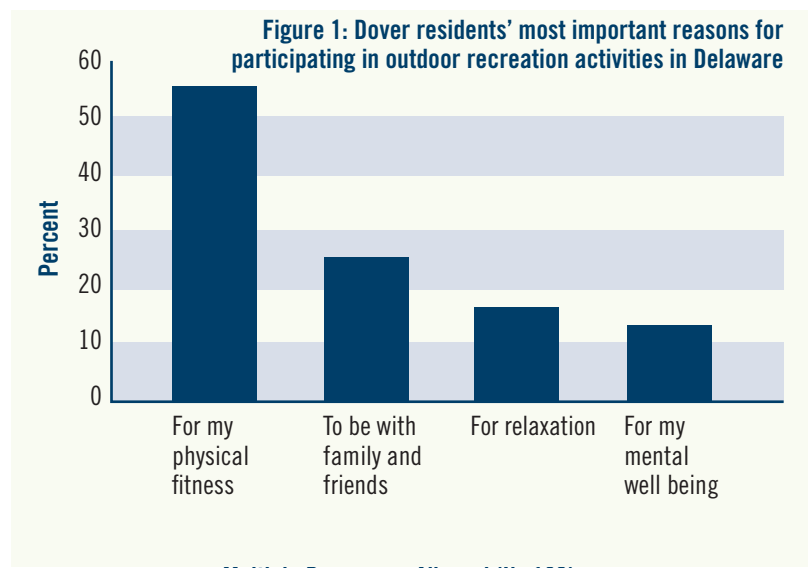
The 2008 Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends Survey (ORPTS)¹ provides valuable information on the recreation needs and preferences of Dover residents.

Recreation Preferences

The majority of Dover residents (89%) responding to the survey indicate that outdoor recreation is "very" or "somewhat" important to them personally. The activities they participate in most frequently are: walking or jogging (49%), fishing (16%), biking (13%), passive recreation in the outdoors (13%) and swimming at the beach (13%). Figure 1 illustrates the most commonly cited reasons for participating in outdoor recreation activities.

When survey respondents were asked about their main reasons for choosing to visit a particular outdoor recreation area, they identified living nearby (51%), the existence of facilities for activities of interest (36%), the existence of facilities for children (14%) and aesthetics (13%).

Table 1 shows the facilities cited most often by those responding to the survey question about additional facilities for community parks.



Multiple Responses Allowed (N=186)

Table 1: Facilities Dover residents would like to see added to parks

| Facility (Multiple Responses Allowed, N=69) | Percent |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|
| Outdoor public swimming pools | 20 |
| Biking paths | 14 |
| Off-leash dog areas | 14 |
| More, cleaner, better bathrooms | 13 |
| Concessions/vendors with healthier foods | 13 |
| Playgrounds for children ages 6-12 | 12 |
| Playgrounds for children ages 2-5 | 10 |
| Indoor recreational facilities | 10 |
| Hiking/walking trails | 6 |
| Public tennis courts | 6 |
| Skate/bike park | 6 |

Funding Priorities

Since the majority of respondents consider outdoor recreation important to them personally, it's not surprising that large percentages identify recreational programming as an important priority for state and local funding. Table 2 summarizes the programs identified as important priorities.

Additionally, 94% of respondents indicated that funding for public parks should be an important priority for state and local policy makers in Delaware. Similarly, 87% thought acquiring more land for parks and open space should be an important priority for state policy makers.

Parks and Recreation Can Help Address Challenges Facing Our Residents

Parks and recreation programs provide a means for children and their families to be physically active and live a healthy lifestyle. This is critical given the childhood obesity epidemic nationally and in Delaware. Data from 2008 reveal that 39.7% of children ages two to 17 in Delaware are overweight or obese.² Parks and recreation programs provide children an outlet for engaging in positive activities.

Initiatives

The City of Dover's 5 year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes plans for several park improvements that will benefit its citizens and park users. Skate spots are proposed for popular park areas and a skate park is in the works for Schutte Park. To provide a water based activity for young people, the city is planning a splash pad project for one of its major parks. Expansion of the multi-use pathway is planned for Schutte Park, along with the development of additional athletic field space on adjacent land donated from a local developer. Additionally, the Silver Lake Revitalization project will continue with tree, flower, and shrub plantings with the focus on water quality improvement. These actions are intended to provide improved outdoor recreation and nature education opportunities for our citizens and park users.

References

1. The Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends Survey (ORTPS), a statewide telephone survey, informs development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The Parks Resource Office, Division of Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control manage the SCORP. For more information on the SCORP, visit <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/parks/Information/Pages/scorp.aspx>.
2. Nemours Health and Prevention Services. 2008 Delaware Survey of Children's Health.

Access to Recreation Opportunities

More than two-thirds (69%) of survey respondents agree with the statement: "There are parks and/or outdoor recreation areas in or near my neighborhood that are easy to get to." Proximity is important because many Dover residents (63%) responding to the survey said that more recreation opportunities close to home are likely to encourage them to participate more actively in outdoor recreation activities. Other important factors are more information about facilities and opportunities (57%); more opportunity to participate in organized activities (48%); and better security within facilities (46%).

Park Maintenance

Nearly three-fourths (74%) of Dover residents responding to the survey rate the overall upkeep of parks and outdoor recreation areas in their community as "excellent" or "good."

Table 2: Percent of Dover residents who say that specific programs should be a "very" or "somewhat" important priority for state and local funding

| Program (N=194) | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Outdoor recreation programs for persons with disabilities | 91 |
| Outdoor recreation programs for teens | 89 |
| Nature education programs | 89 |
| Programs for children ages 4-12 | 88 |
| Historic education programs | 85 |
| Outdoor recreation programs for senior citizens | 84 |
| Cultural and arts programs | 82 |
| Organized leagues for team sports | 76 |