

# THE MORRIS LEATHERMAN COMPANY

## 2024 City of Dayton Residential Survey Findings and Implications

### **Residential Demographics:**

Dayton is a growing community composed of many young families with children. The median longevity of adult residents is 12.9 years, indicative of more recently-arrived residents. Forty-four percent have lived in Dayton for less than ten years; twenty-seven percent have resided there for 11-20 years; twenty-nine percent have lived there for over 20 years. The average age of respondents is 44.2 years old. Thirty-two percent of the sample falls into the 18-34 age range, while 30% are in the over 55 age range.

The city is split between “empty nests,” containing no children, at 60%, and households with children at home, 40%. Seventeen percent are totally composed of senior citizens. Fifty-nine percent of the households contain two adults. Thirty-five percent of households report they are “financially stressed,” about 12% lower than the Metropolitan Area suburban norm. Sixty-five percent feel they are “financially comfortable.” Women outnumber men in the sample by four percent.

Forty-six percent reside in Precinct Three, 30% live in Precinct Two, and 25% reside in Precinct One.

### **Quality of Life Issues:**

Forty-two percent of residents rate their quality of life as “excellent,” while another 52% rate it as “good.” Only four percent rate their quality of life lower. The 42% “excellent” rating is almost quadruple the Greater Metropolitan Area norm of 11% and places the community within the top decile of Greater Metropolitan Area suburbs and exurbs.

“Safety” leads the list of what residents like most about living in Dayton, at 14%. “Quiet and peaceful” follows at 12%. “Friendly people” follows at eleven percent, and “rural/open spaces” and “parks and trails” are cited by nine percent each. “Small town feel” and “small community” are indicated by seven percent each. “Close to family and/or friends” rounds out the list of statistically significant responses, at five percent. In grouping resident’s opinions into typical “suburban” or “small town” responses, almost two-thirds of Dayton residents point to a “small town” aspect.

In assessing the most serious issue facing the community, 20% point to “too much residential growth” and nine percent cite “high taxes.” “Speeding/reckless driving” follows at seven percent, while “rising crime” at six percent completes the list of statistically significant issues. Four percent cite “street maintenance,” three percent each mention “economy/inflation,” “drinking water,” “flooding,” and “city services keeping pace with growth.” Two percent each

mention the “lack of shopping/services,” “lack of jobs,” and “drugs.” “Boosters” – residents who feel there are no serious issues facing the community – are 27%, almost five times higher than the Greater Metropolitan Area suburban norm.

A comparatively solid 89% think things in Dayton are generally headed in the right direction. Only six percent see the city as off on the wrong track, significantly based on perceived “too much growth.” A majority of residents, 57%, see Dayton as a “small town,” while 27% think Dayton is a “suburb.” Sixteen percent see Dayton as both a “small town” and a “suburb.”

### **Taxes and City Services:**

The percentage of favorable ratings of city services ranges between 62% and 96%. The table below arrays each service with the percentage of respondents who rate it as either “excellent” or “good.”

<b>City Service</b>	<b>Favorable Rating</b>
Police protection	96%
Fire protection	95%
Park maintenance	89%
Utility billing	86%
Park facilities	85%
Communications	85%
Snowplowing of city streets	83%
City street maintenance	80%
Administration	79%
Storm water run-off and drainage	78%
Building inspections	76%
City planning	74%
City drinking water	62%

The mean favorable percentage for all city services is 82.2%, about two percent higher than the Greater Metropolitan Area suburban norm. Three city services, highlighted in red, draw down the overall average; the City should review in more depth the micro-issues residents have with these services.

When asked about the city portion of their property taxes in Dayton compared with nearby areas, 57% feel they are “high,” while 38% report they are “about average.” These ratings indicate a “hostile” tax climate in the community. Even so, 84% think they receive an “excellent” or “good” value in the quality of the city services provided; only 14% rate the value lower.

When asked about their level of concern about response times for city police and fire, 62% indicate no concern about police response times and 52% state no concern about fire response times. Less than 10% cite response times as a major concern for either department. Thirty-four

percent are not willing to pay any additional property taxes to reduce police response time. The typical resident is willing to see a property tax increase of about \$5.00 a month to reduce police response. Thirty-seven percent are not willing to pay any additional property taxes for the construction of a third fire station. The typical resident is willing to see a property tax increase of about \$6.00 a month for this construction project.

A high 85% think the quality of city services has been able to keep pace with growth in Dayton; thirteen percent feel the opposite, focusing on “city drinking water” and “parks and recreation.”

Fifty-eight percent of residents regard speeding on residential streets in Dayton to be either “very serious” or “somewhat serious,” while 42% disagree. By a 71%-23% majority, interviewees support reducing the speed limit to 25 MPH on residential streets in the city; in fact, 63% support the use of city funding to enforce the 25 MPH speed limit on residential streets.

### **Development Issues:**

When asked about the types of development they would like to see in Dayton, eleven percent suggest “retail/service businesses” and five percent seek “restaurants.” However, 59% indicate there are no types of development they would like to see. In asking the reverse, 69% state there are no types of development they would oppose. There are about 10% more pro-growth residents than anti-growth residents in the community. By a 76%-17% majority, residents support the City providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development.

When examining the number or quantity of various community characteristics, majorities of residents think Dayton has “about the right amount” of the 15 discussed. Even so, eight cases show opinions more heavily skewed in the direction of thinking Dayton has “too few”: “job-producing businesses,” “assisted living,” “service and retail establishments,” “one-level housing maintained by an association,” “restaurants,” “entertainment establishments,” “affordable housing,” and “starter homes.” Only one characteristic shows opinions more heavily skewed in the direction of thinking Dayton has “too many”: “executive high-end housing.”

### **Trash Collection:**

City residents are evenly split on the type of trash collection system: forty-four percent prefer the current open collection system and 44% opt for a new City-managed system. Supporters of the current system base their decision on “want to choose,” at 23%, “like current hauler,” at 10%, “lower cost,” also at 10%, and “better service,” at six percent. Supporters of a City-managed system cite “less trucks,” at 27%, “lower cost,” at nine percent, and “better service,” at six percent.

By a 64%-29% majority, citizens think an open system would be better on the cost for trash collection. By a 56%-36% majority, residents think an open system would be better for customer service. By a 60%-28% majority, respondents view a city-managed system would be better on

pollution from trucks. By a 56%-33% majority, citizens think a city-managed system would be better on wear and tear on city streets. Finally, by a 50%-33% plurality, respondents think a city-managed system would be better for pedestrian safety.

### **Parks and Recreation Issues:**

Overall, 91% rate park and recreation amenities as “excellent” or “good,” while only nine percent rate them lower. The favorable rating is about 11% higher than Greater Metropolitan Area norm. Ninety percent think the current mix of park and recreation amenities in the city adequately meets the needs of their household; only eight percent disagree. Statistically significant suggestions for improvements in recreational amenities include: “trails,” “dog park,” and “pool/splash pad.”

Eighty-three percent of respondents view park and recreational facilities as at least “somewhat important” to their current overall quality of life in Dayton; thirty-one percent think they are “very important.” Eighty-eight percent think the quality and appearance of city park and recreational facilities is at least “somewhat important” to the value of their home; in fact, 42% see them as “very important.”

Fifty-seven percent report household members have visited Elsie Stephens Park on the Mississippi River; among visitors, 97% rate the park as either “excellent” or “good.” Thirty-nine percent report household members have visited the Elm Creek Park Reserve; among visitors, 55% report Dayton’s proximity as at least a “minor” factor in their decision to move to Dayton.

Residents were asked if they would support or oppose a property tax increase for each of 12 improvements to the parks and trails system. The table below shows each proposed improvement and the percent of residents supporting and opposing a tax increase for that purpose.

<b>Proposed Improvement</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Oppose</b>
A Veteran’s Memorial	87%	13%
Picnic shelters	82%	18%
Additional pedestrian and bicycling trails	81%	20%
Docks and fishing pier	81%	18%
Construction of a large community park with athletic fields and playgrounds	79%	18%
An off-leash dog park	73%	27%
Construction of a splash pad	71%	28%
A bandshell for concerts	66%	33%
Additional snowmobiling trails	62%	37%
Additional horseback riding trails	61%	37%
Construction of an indoor and outdoor sports complex, including an indoor fieldhouse or dome and grass and artificial turf athletic fields	60%	36%
Pickleball courts	60%	38%

Five funding purposes, overlined in green, should be considered as top priorities for inclusion in any referendum package. Four purposes, overlined in red, should be considered low priorities, since they will build greater opposition to the complete referendum as more are added to the package.

Next, respondents were asked by how much they would be willing to see their property taxes increased to fund these projects. A very low 17% reported they would not support any increase, much lower than the normal level of 35% in this kind of a tax election. The typical Dayton resident would support a property tax increase of \$7.17 per month or \$86.04 per year. In fact, thirteen percent would support at least \$15.00 per month.

Sixty-nine percent report household members have attended Dayton Heritage Days; among attendees, 95% rate their experience as either “excellent” or “good.” No statistically significant changes or improvements were suggested by residents.

Forty-six percent report household members have attended Holly Dayton; among visitors, 96% rate their experience as either “excellent” or “good.” Again, no statistically significant changes or improvements were suggested by citizens.

### **City Government and Staff:**

Twenty-five percent of Dayton residents think they cannot have a say, if they wanted to, about the way things are run in the community. This level of non-empowerment is under the norm of 30%. Seventy percent report they know “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about the Mayor and City Council. This knowledge level is well above the suburban norm of 45%.

Fifty-seven percent report “quite a lot” or “some” first-hand contact with the Dayton city staff. This contact level is almost double the Greater Metropolitan Area suburban norm. By a 91%-8% split, residents favorably rate the job performance of city staff. The over 11-to-1 ratio of favorable-to-unfavorable ratings is much higher than the Metropolitan Area average.

During the past year, 43% have visited or contacted City Hall either in-person or on the telephone. Ninety-one percent of the respondents rate the courtesy of city staff as either “excellent” or “good,” while eight percent see it as “only fair” or “poor.” Eighty-six percent judge the wait time for city staff to respond highly, while thirteen percent disagree. Ninety-one percent rate the efficiency of the city staff highly, with nine percent viewing it lower. Ninety percent judge the ease of reaching a city staff member who could help (them) highly, while only nine percent disagree. These ratings are consistently above the 80% threshold signifying high quality customer service in public or government organizations.

### **Communications Issues:**

The principal and most preferred source of information about Dayton City Government and its

activities is the “City newsletter,” selected by 33% each. The “city website” is a second communication channel principally used by 30% and also preferred by 25%. “Facebook” is relied upon by 17% and “word of mouth” is relied upon by seven percent. “City social media” is preferred by 17%, “City e-newsletter,” by nine percent, and “mailings,” by six percent.

Seventy-six percent of residents read the City newsletter. This readership is within the top decile of Greater Metropolitan Area suburbs. A very high 93% rate its format and content as “excellent” or “good”; seven percent are more critical.

Ninety-five percent have access to the Internet. Among Internet-enabled residents, 71% have accessed the city website. Overall, 67% of the households in the community have visited the website. The typical resident reports visiting the city website “occasionally.” Among website visitors, 96% evaluate the content highly and 92% similarly rate the ease of navigating the website highly.

Forty-three percent of Internet-enabled residents report using the City of Dayton Government Facebook or Instagram to receive information from the City. Among users of the two sources, 92% rate them favorably.

### **Summary and Conclusions:**

Residents enjoy the “small town” aspects of the community: “quiet and peaceful,” “small town feel,” “rural/open spaces,” “small community,” and “safe.” But they are also concerned about four major issues: “high taxes,” “too much residential growth,” “speeding/reckless driving,” and “rising crime.” The community is in the top decile among rated Greater Metropolitan Area suburbs in its overall quality of life. With the exceptions of “city drinking water” and “city planning,” residents are very satisfied with the operation of City Government, and regard city services as both solid and cost-efficient. A decisive majority favors the City providing financial incentives to attract specific types of development. In general, residents have high expectations; but the City meets or exceeds most residents’ needs. Notably, residents exhibit one of the strongest levels of confidence in the direction of their community found within the Greater Metropolitan Area suburbs.

Even though residential alienation is common in high growth suburbs and exurbs it is not the case here: only twenty-five percent, five percent less than the overall norm, do not feel they can have a say about the way things are run in Dayton, other than voting. Very few growing communities have managed to mitigate residential alienation as well as the City of Dayton.

Knowledge of the work of the Mayor and City Council is very high; similarly first-hand contact with city staff is much higher than the norm. The job performance of Dayton city staff is almost unanimously positively rated. Almost twice as many residents as the norm have visited or contacted Dayton City Hall. The staff ratings on customer service dimensions are well-above the level indicating “high quality” in the public sector.

The park and recreation amenities - both facilities and programs - are deemed both adequate in meeting household needs and are also exceptionally well-regarded as part of the quality of life and an asset for home values. The only statistically significant additional amenities suggested by the sample are “trails,” “dog park,” and “pool/splash pad.” Residents are receptive to a bond referendum for a large array of amenities and would be amenable to a property tax increase of over \$80.00 per year.

Dayton citizens are evenly divided on changing from the current open collection system to a city-managed collection system, 44% favoring each system. On a rating of each system, residents prefer the open system for “cost for trash collection” and “customer service.” They prefer the city-managed system for “pollution from trucks,” “pedestrian safety,” and “wear and tear on city streets.” Given no consensus on this issue, the issue is not ripe for determination at this time.

The tax climate in Dayton is “hostile.” Fifty-seven percent of the sample view their taxes as “high” in comparison with neighboring communities. Even so, 84% of the respondents rate the value of city services highly.

The key information sources about City Government and its activities revolve around the city website and the city newsletter. The readership of the “Dayton Communicator” is exceptionally high.

Citizens are enthusiastic about their city. At a time when governments at different levels polarize people, Dayton residents are extremely satisfied with their local government and its services. With a 27% “city booster” core, the City possesses a large reservoir of goodwill which will serve it well meeting challenges in the near future.

#### **Methodology:**

This study contains the results of a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected residents of the City of Dayton. Survey responses were assembled by professional interviewers across the community between August 1st and 21st, 2024. The average interview took fourteen minutes. All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a randomly generated sample of the residents of the City of Dayton. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to their respective universe within  $\pm 5.0\%$  in 95 out of 100 cases.