

PUBLIC INPUT

Public Participation



Public Input was a key component to the development of the Comprehensive Recreation, Park, and Open Space Plan. Four venues were used to collect input in Jackson Township. A Study Committee was used throughout the process to represent the community in meetings with the Consultant, two public meetings were held, a recreation questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of Jackson Township residents, and fifteen key person interviews were conducted. This chapter describes the public participation process and results for each.

Summary of Input

Below is a summary of key issues identified by each of the venues of public input used throughout this Plan. Full listings from each venue can be found following the summary.

STUDY COMMITTEE

In terms of community recreation issues, the Study Committee identified the following:

- A Community Building is needed. It may include a youth center, permanent Boy and Girl Scout areas, a community room, and space for recreation programs.
- Snowmobile connections need to be made from the Chickaree Ridge Runners Clubhouse at Mitchell Park to access local stores, gas stations, and restaurants via local roads.
- The Township should assure maintenance of existing facilities and programs.
- Camping locations and facilities for weekend events held in the Township are needed.
- Local groups should meet together occasionally to discuss issues and ways to work together.
- Permanent restrooms are needed at all parks.
- A large pavilion should be constructed at Mitchell Park.
- A fitness center is needed.
- Soccer fields are needed.
- There are plenty of opportunities to build new trails throughout the Township.

PUBLIC MEETING

The Public Meeting identified the following needs for parks and recreation.

- A community center is needed for use by all residents and to house local groups such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.
- The Township should consider acquisition and/or development of other properties available in the Township, i.e. Lorraine Park, the reclaimed rock dump, Chickaree Mountain property.
- There is a need for motorized recreational vehicle trails. Also the need to provide legal connections to food and fuel sources for riders.

- Consideration should be given to development of Lorraine Park.
- Additional picnic pavilions are needed.
- Restrooms are needed in the parks.
- There are a lot of possibilities for development of a trail system:
 - o The waterline right-of-way
 - o Former Southern Cambria Streetcar Line
 - o Connections to Ghost Town Trail
- A place is needed for outdoor winter sports.
- There is a need to diversify sports fields to provide for sports other than baseball and softball.
- The community needs an indoor or outdoor swimming pool.
- Local campgrounds are needed.

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

Based on the fifteen (15) Key Person Interviews conducted by Pashek Associates the following observations were made.

- Mitchell Park and the Township's ballfields are the cornerstone of the Township's parks system.
- The parks lack public restroom facilities.
- There are insufficient picnic pavilions.
- There is a need for a community center.
- There is a need for a regional swimming pool.
- There is a need for walking trails and motorized recreational vehicle trails.
- There is a deficiency in recreation programming for youth who don't play baseball and for adults who are not seniors.
- Strong support was indicated for cooperation with other municipalities.
- The Township should not plan more facilities than it can build and maintain.

CITIZEN QUESTIONNAIRE

The following observations are made regarding the responses to the questionnaire. The rate of return indicates a good interest in the Township's parks and recreation.

- 41% of the respondents indicated that members of their household participate in organized sports.
- Youth and young adults were identified as the age groups that most needed additional recreation activities.
- Top activities requested – exercise and fitness programs; swimming; music and concerts; nature activities; bus trips; youth and adult sports; summer day camps.
- The most used facilities in the Township were identified as 1) playgrounds at Leidy Lane and Mitchell Parks, 2) Jackson Elementary School Playground, 3) Mitchell baseball fields, and 4) the Senior Center.
- Top facilities requested – indoor swimming pool; permanent restrooms at parks; exercise/fitness facility; hiking and biking trails; community center.
- 86% of the respondents said parks are important to them and 73% said they are satisfied with the current maintenance of local parks.
- When asked which projects should receive priority funding, development of existing parks ranked first, followed closely by trails.

VISION COMPONENTS

Utilizing the results from each of the public input venues, as well as those from the first Study Committee Meeting, the Committee identified components that seemed to be expressed across more than one venue. These components will assist in development of a vision for parks and recreation in Jackson Township. The components identified are:

- Community Center
- Restrooms at parks
- Age gap in programming and facilities for non senior adults
- A system to administer and operate programs and maintenance; probably a paid staff person
- Outdoor winter sports
- Picnic pavilions
- Hiking and biking trails
- Year-round recreational programming
- Swimming pool
- Outdoor activities
- Exercise/fitness facility

Details of the Public Input

The details of each public input venue provide a more in-depth understanding of the overall response from the community.

STUDY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

From the beginning of the planning process to the final recommendations, the fourteen-member study committee met seven (7) times to represent the community in the planning process. The Study Committee played an important role in the development of a successful Comprehensive Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Plan.

The Committee began by identifying twenty-seven issues they believed to be important to the recreational pursuits of the Township. The Committee prioritized these issues through a numeric ranking. The following table lists all of the issues in order of their priority ranking.

Rank	Issue	Total Points
1	Develop a youth center – a place for kids to go	35
2	Create snowmobile connections from the club house to Rager Mountain	21
3	Boy Scouts need a place of their own for meeting and storage of equipment	18
4	Consider and plan for all populations and their ages. Consider population growth	17
5	Take care of what currently exists	15
6	Need camping locations and facilities for weekend events held in the Township	13
7	Gather a complete inventory of resources to know what is available to meet the needs	9

8	Create legal snowmobile access on Township roads to allow access to stores, gas stations, and restaurants	8
9	Local groups should meet occasionally to discuss issues and ways to work together	8
10	Construct a large pavilion in Mitchell Park near the basketball court	6
11	The Township needs a couple soccer fields	6
12	A fitness center is needed	5
13	Construct permanent restrooms at all parks	5
14	Create a trail along the new water line. Consider other utility right-of-ways as well	5
15	One field at Mitchell Park needs to be lighted	5
16	The elementary school needs trails, a grassy play area, and soft surface play areas	4
17	Use Lorraine Park for camping. Consider best uses of the Park	4
18	The shooting clubs should be involved in this planning process	3
19	Develop ways to deter vandalism	2
20	Longer trails are needed for running and other activities. 10 miles plus.	2
21	Mitchell Field drainage needs improved	2
22	Parking needs to be adequate at all facilities and events	2
23	Consider acquisition of property behind Leidy Park	0
24	Consider the legal and liability aspects of implementation of this Plan	0
25	Develop legal, legitimate places to skate and bike	0
26	Lorraine Park ballfield needs improved. It is located in the north part of the Township	0
27	Watch for bullies at parks and programs	0

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two public meetings were held during the Study process. The first was held on October 19, 2005 to gather information from the general public regarding recreation, parks, and open space in the area. Twenty-three persons attended the meeting.

The Nominal Group Technique was used to gather input. The technique worked as follows.

- Every person in attendance was asked to write down their comments on a card. Each person was asked to share one of his or her issues at a time while each was recorded on a board in the front of the room. After everyone had the chance to share one issue, each person was asked again and again until every person had the opportunity to express all of their issues and have them recorded. The group identified 39 issues.
- Similar issues were then combined on the chart under a single number for a final total of 30 issues.

- Finally, each person was given five stickers that were numbered 1 through 5. They were asked to prioritize the issues listed by placing the sticker with the number 5 on their highest priority, 4 on the next highest, etc.
- After the prioritizing was completed, the points for each issue were totaled giving every issue a numeric ranking. The ranking of the issues, with their respective point values, is included below.

Rank	Issue	Total Points
1	The community needs a community/recreation center for all residents and groups to use (Boy and Girl Scouts, etc.)	34
2	Provide legal motorized vehicle trails	26
3	Consider acquisition and development of the old, reclaimed rock dump for recreational purposes or other Township uses	24
4	Campgrounds are needed	21
5	Develop Lorraine Park into a usable park. Utilities are already available there.	20
6	Provide areas with pavilions with restrooms, electric, etc., to rent	15
7	Diversify ballfields to allow other sports such as football and soccer	14
8	Support freshwater streams for trout	14
9	The community needs an indoor or outdoor swimming pool	13
10	Expand recreational programming to become year-round	11
11	Consider the waterline right-of-way for trail use. It is the former Southern Cambria Streetcar Line. Possible trail connection to Ghost Town Trail, Staple Bend Tunnel, and more. And other regional trails.	11
12	Develop a shooting range	10
13	Need places for outdoor, winter sports	10
14	Protection of property owners' rights adjacent to park properties should be a priority	9
15	The 4,000 acre Chickaree Mountain property needs to be back in the Township's hands to use for recreational purposes	8
16	There needs to be recreation for young people	7
17	Enlarge one of the baseball fields in Mitchell Park to accommodate AAA baseball	7
18	Provide legal road access to food and fuel stores for snowmobiles and ATVs	5
19	Permanent restrooms are needed in all parks	5
20	Expand parking at all parks	4
21	Develop a backpacking trail	3
22	Need bowling alleys	2
23	Bring all recreation providers together twice a year to discuss plans, needs, and programs	2
24	Need lighting at one baseball field at Mitchell Park	1
25	Consider smaller areas of population concentrations/neighborhoods for some recreational development	1
26	Need an indoor archery range	0
27	Need a skating facility – inline, roller, ice	0

28	Need a court area in one of the parks – basketball, tennis, volleyball, badminton	0
29	Should be cooperating with surrounding municipalities to prevent duplication of facilities and services	0
30	Consider development of natural areas with trails and interpretative features	0

The second public meeting was held on June 22, 2006. Pashek Associates presented the Vision and Goals of the Plan and reviewed the major issues, findings, and recommendations.

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

Pashek Associates conducted fifteen interviews with leaders of local sports organizations, municipal staff, teachers, pastors, local business owners, parents, homeowners, and staff from the Senior Center. Each person interviewed was asked a series of questions about the existing state of parks and recreation in the area and the facilities that need to be built or improved to meet the community's current and future needs. They were also questioned about whether they favor a regional approach to parks and recreation planning and how such cooperation should occur.

Fifteen respondents said they live in the Township and eight stated they work there as well.

When asked what comes to mind when they think about parks and recreation in the area, the most common response was Mitchell Park and ballfields (12). Other places mentioned were the Senior Center (4), playgrounds (4), and the walking trail at Veteran's Park (2).

When questioned about strengths, respondents most frequently named Mitchell Park and ballfields (7). They noted the excellent quality of the facilities as well as its potential for expansion. Other strengths cited by more than one respondent include Leidy Lane Park (2), the Senior Center (2), all Township parks (2), and organized children's sports (3). One respondent spoke about the popularity of the local snowmobile club which draws families and provides recreation for local youth. At a recent ATV race sponsored by the club, over 600 people attended.

The weakness raised most frequently (7) was that the Township does not have enough variety in children's sports. There is nothing but baseball. Other responses included a lack of public restroom facilities at local parks (3) and insufficient picnic facilities (2). Three (3) respondents felt there are no particular weaknesses.

In terms of facilities, many respondents (7) indicated that the region's greatest need is a community recreation center where people can recreate indoors, particularly during the long winter months. Several respondents (6) suggested that the region needs a swimming pool. Others called for picnic shelters and pavilions (4), more recreational trails (4), public restrooms at local parks, particularly Mitchell fields (3), a skateboard park for teens (3), and motorized vehicle trails (2). One person noted that the Bethlehem Steel property which used to allow access for recreation would be an excellent place for new walking or motorized vehicle trails. There was no clear consensus on the types of programming the Township needs. Responses that were given more than once were: additional youth sports leagues like soccer and basketball (2); summer programs (2); after school programs other than sports (2), and; adult programs (2). Only two (2) respondents felt the region did not have additional parks and recreation needs. They stated that all types of recreation are available within or nearby Jackson Township.

When asked what segment of the population in Jackson Township is least served by recreational programs and facilities, respondents most frequently said non-Senior adults (6). They noted that while there are activities for children and Senior citizens, there is a conspicuous gap for everyone falling in between. Some noted that this includes a lack of facilities for families, like picnic pavilions or ATV trails. However, others (3) felt that teens/young adults have very few recreational options once they outgrow Little League baseball. Others noted that kids who don't play baseball are not well served.

Two thirds of the respondents (10) voiced support for cooperation with neighboring Townships in providing for parks and recreation. Many felt that working with others makes sense and can only benefit all municipalities involved. Some suggested sharing ideas and programming, while others said sharing grants and maintenance responsibilities would be appropriate. A few respondents said the best partners would be East Taylor and Nanty Glo. Two (2) respondents were uncertain about cooperation and three (3) indicated that they did not favor it. One noted that the Township is growing and that shared facilities could become overcrowded and stressed. Another recalled that the Township previously “lost out” when it cooperated in developing a regional community center and the center was built in a neighboring municipality. The third felt that with too many involved, it is hard to get things accomplished.

Other issues that respondents raised for consideration were:

- The Township should not plan for more facilities than it can afford to build and maintain.
- Don't duplicate facilities that exist in neighboring municipalities.
- The Township should tap into the volunteer resources at local churches.
- Patrol parks at night to prevent vandalism.
- There is a need to keep young people from leaving the Township.
- Private property issues will be an obstacle when planning for new trails in the Township.

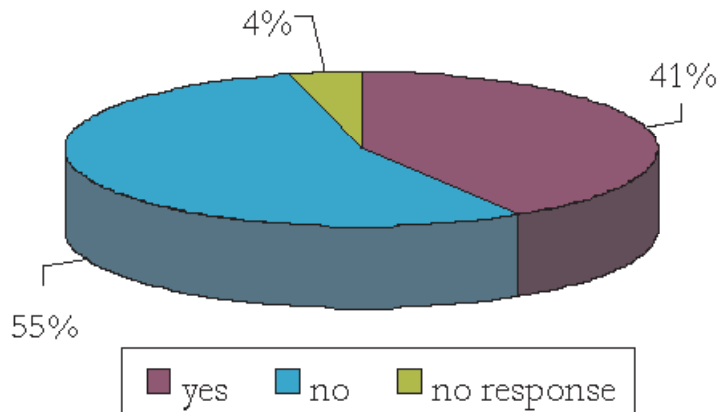
CITIZEN QUESTIONNAIRE

In September 2005, eight hundred forty questionnaires were sent via first class mail to a random selection of Jackson Township households. Sixty-five questionnaires were returned as undeliverable. The net result was that 775 questionnaires were delivered to residences. That totals 40% of the households in the Township. One hundred fifty nine were completed and returned for an excellent response rate of 21%.

The following charts, graphs, tallies, and analyses show the results of each question.

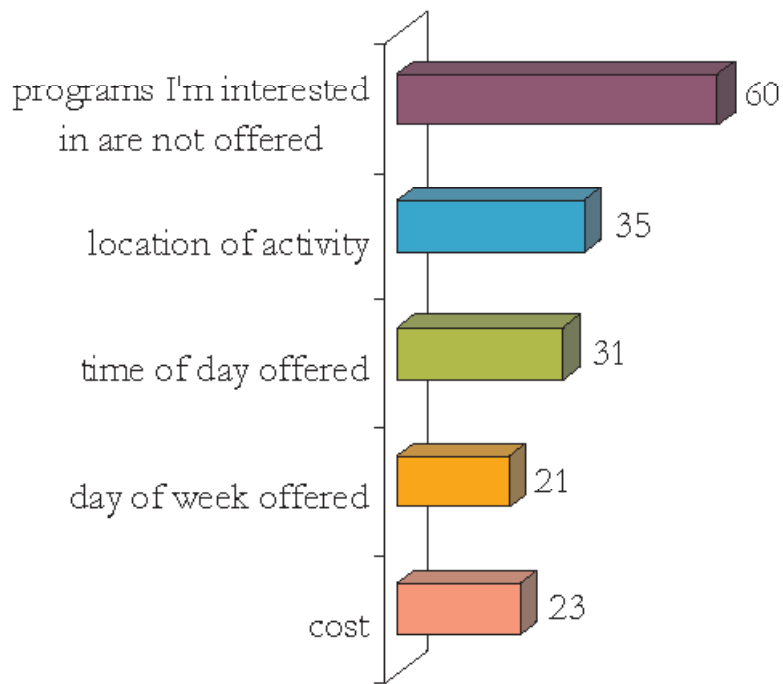
Question 1

41% of the respondents indicated that members of their household participate in organized sports.



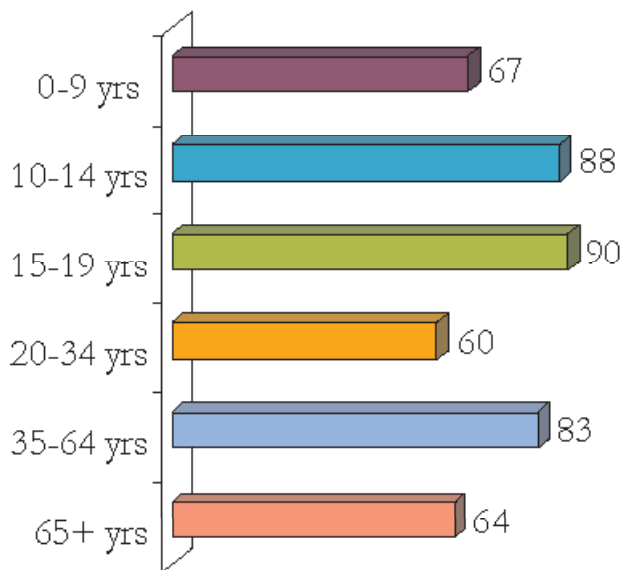
Question 2

There is no significant response to why persons do not take advantage of recreational activities. The highest response was that people are not aware of what programming is available. A better system of publicity is recommended to improve in this area.



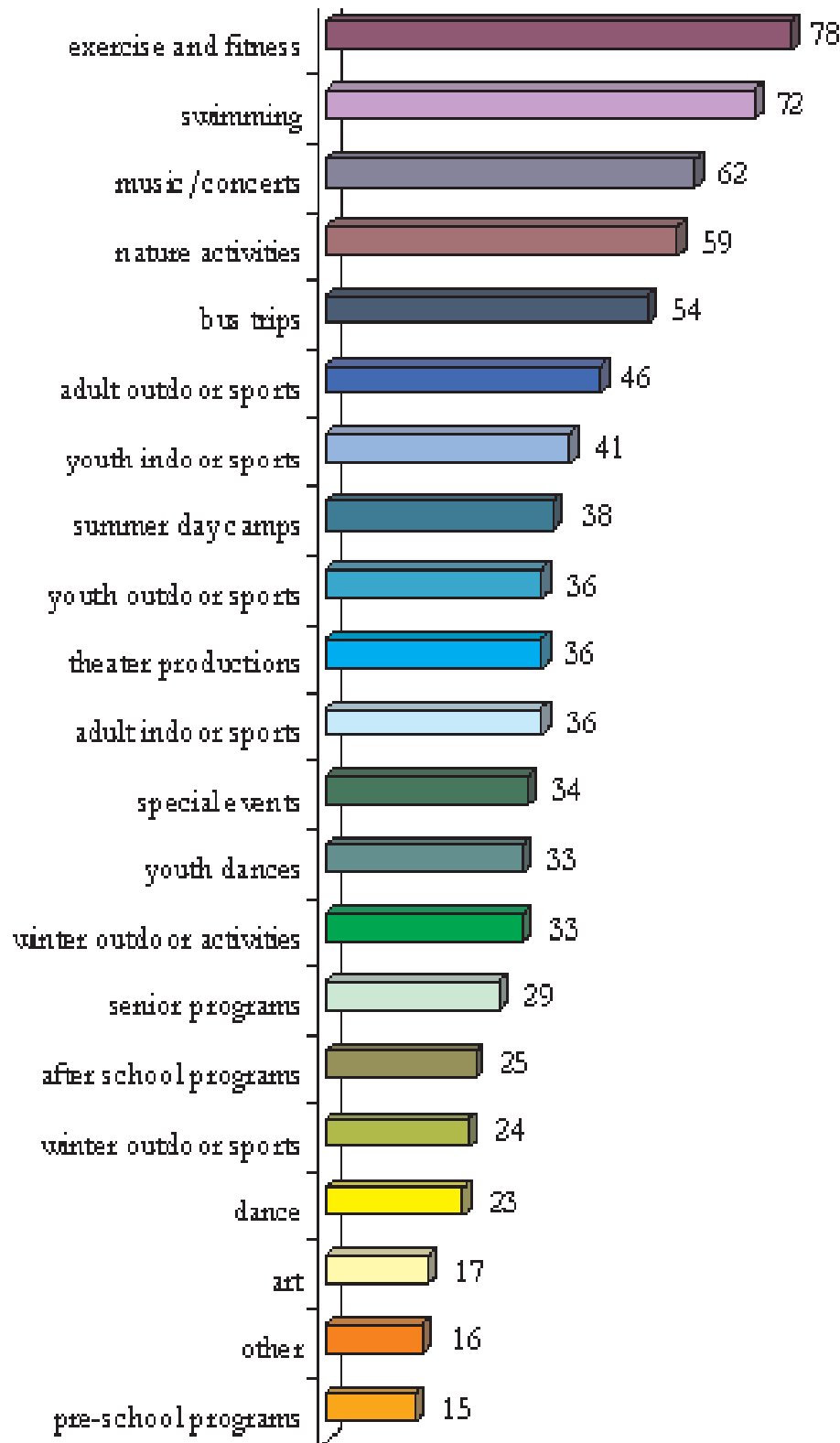
Question 3

Recreational activities appear to be needed for all age groups with the highest responses being for those ages 10 to 19 and ages 35 to 64.



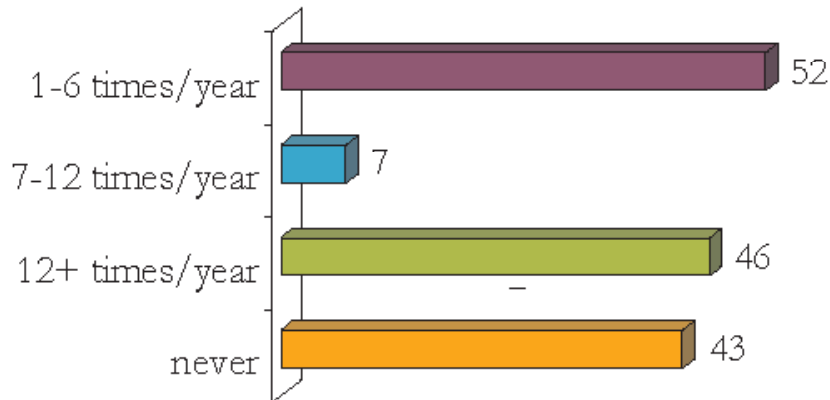
Question 4

The top activities requested were exercise and fitness programs, swimming, music and concerts, nature activities, bus trips, youth and adult sports, and summer day camps.



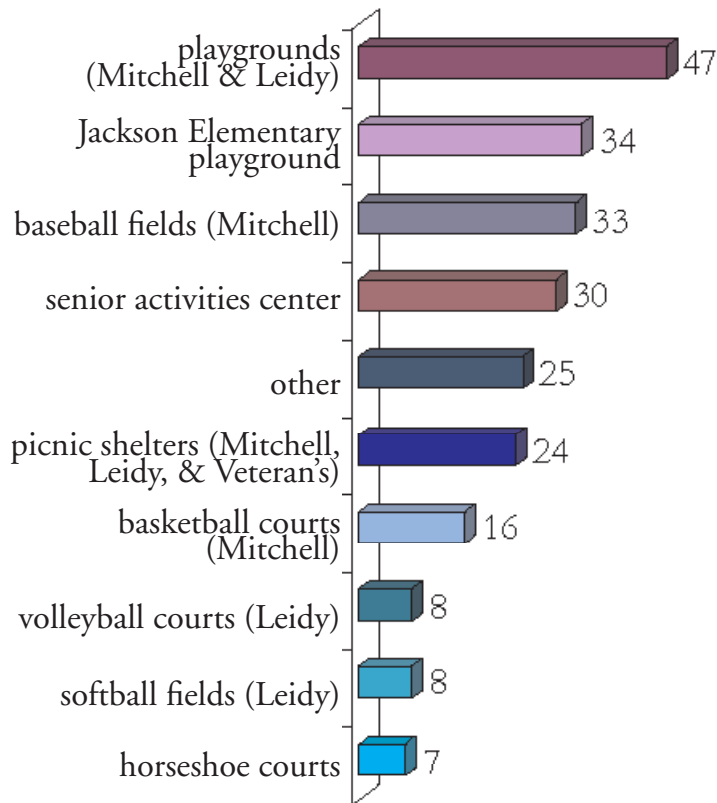
Question 5

The largest majority of resident use local recreation facilities 1 to 6 times per year. The second highest response was 12 or more times per year.



Question 6

The most used facilities in the Township were identified as 1) playgrounds at Leidy Lane and Mitchell Parks, 2) Jackson Elementary School Playground, 3) Mitchell baseball fields, and 4) the Senior Center.

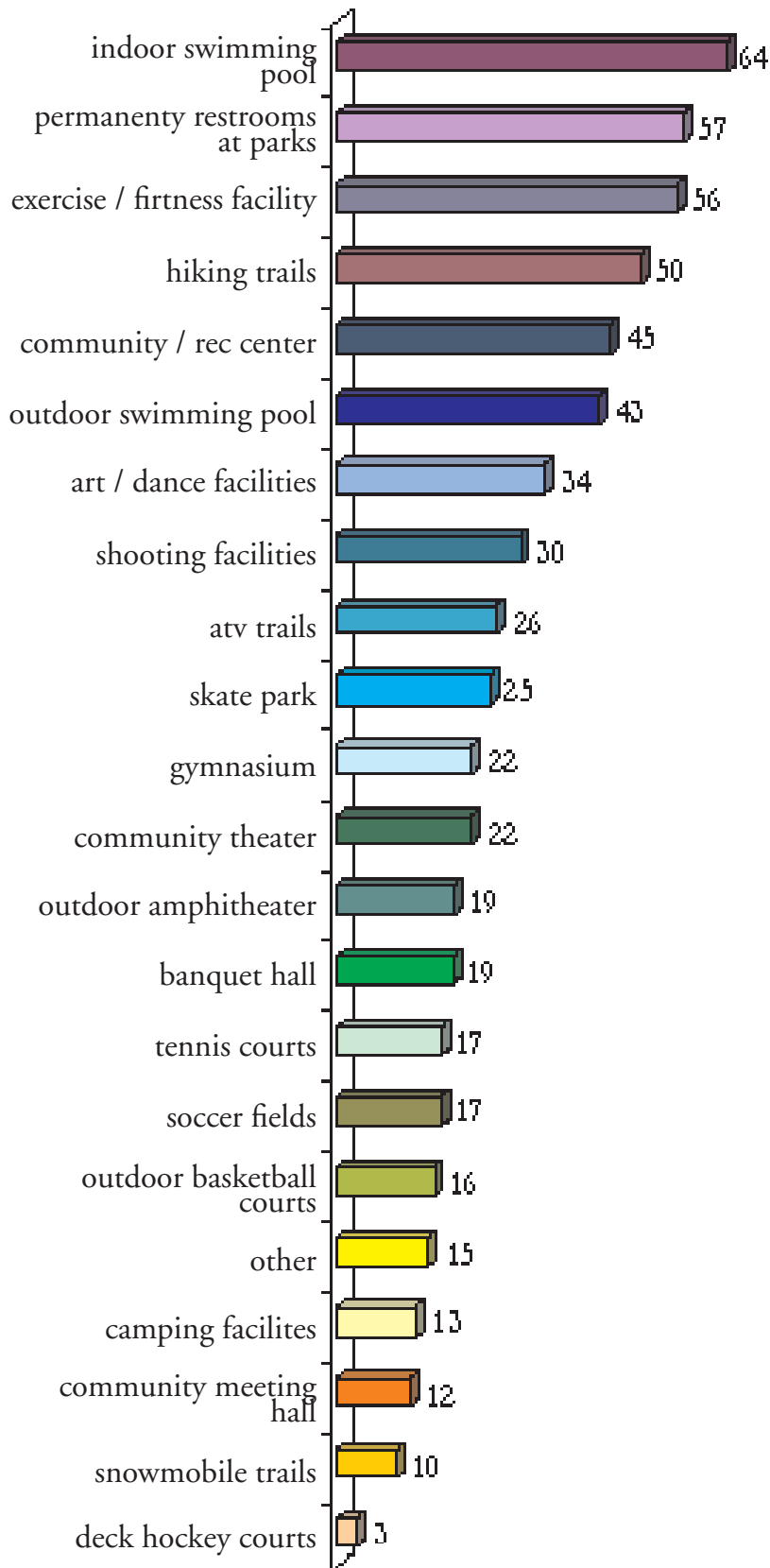


Question 7

The most used recreation facilities outside of Jackson Township were Ebensburg Young Peoples Community Center, Roweena Lake, Northern Cambria Ice Rink, Windber recreation facilities, Nanty Glo Park and swimming pool, Ghost Town Trail, and a variety of State Parks. Many also listed biking and hiking trails.

Question 8

The top facilities requested were an indoor swimming pool, permanent restrooms at parks, an exercise/fitness facility, hiking and biking trails, and a community center.



Question 9

Are parks and recreation important to you?

86% - YES 12% - NO 2% - no response

Question 10

Are cultural opportunities (art, theater, music) important to you?

70% - YES 27% - NO 3% - no response

Question 11

Are you satisfied with the overall parks and recreation opportunities available to you?

43% - YES 45% - NO 12% - no response

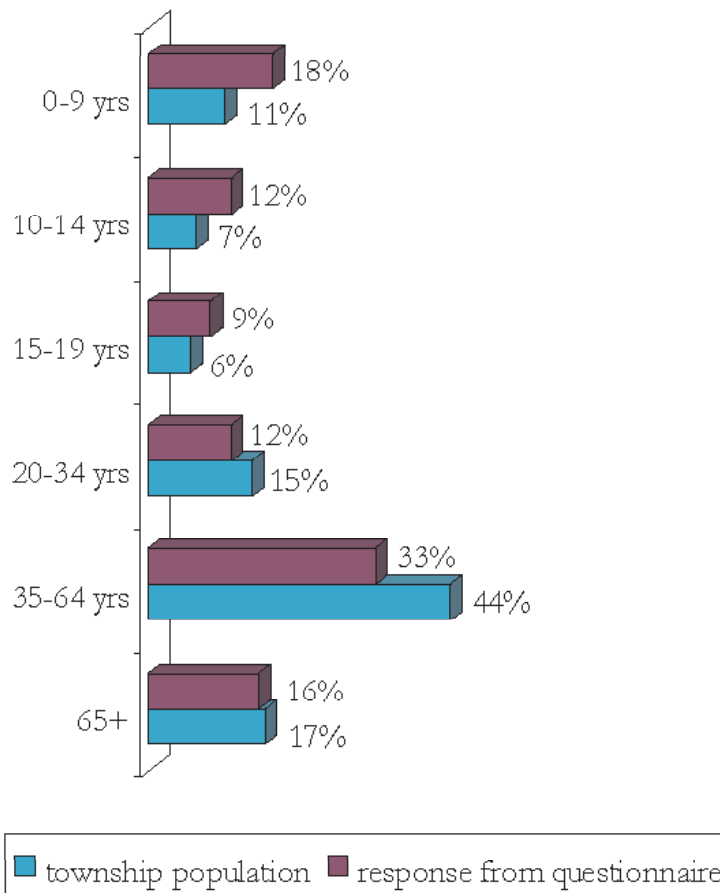
Question 12

Are you satisfied with the current maintenance of recreation facilities?

73% - YES 16% - NO 11% - no response

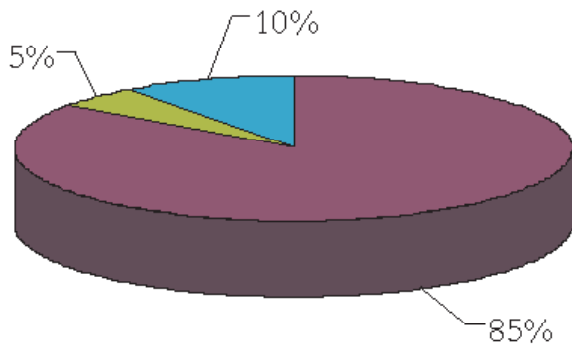
Question 13

Please indicate the number of people in your household in each age group.



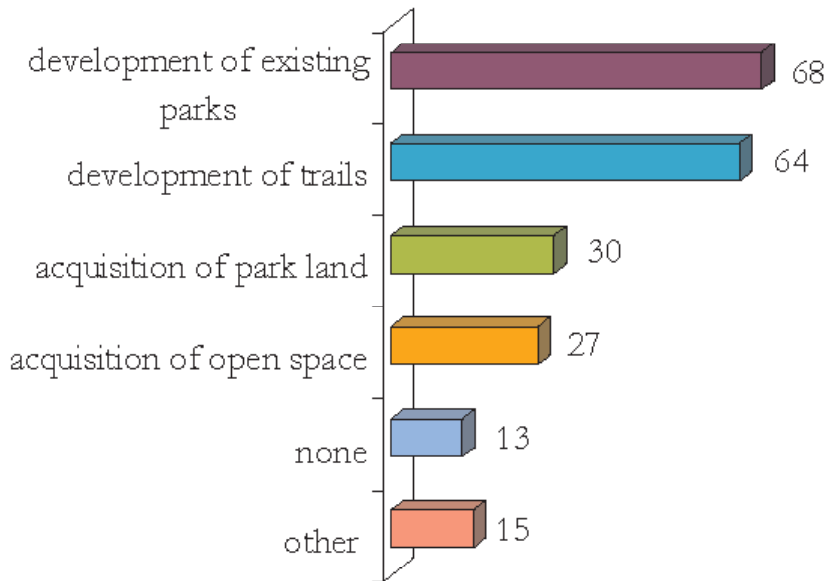
Question 14

How long have you lived in Jackson Township?



Question 15

Respondents indicated that development of existing parks and trails should receive priorities for funding.



Question 16

More than half of the respondents thought that funding for parks and recreation in Jackson Township should increase.

