



AMHERST, NY PARKS & RECREATION SURVEY RESULTS AUGUST 2017



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to gather public feedback on the Town of Amherst, NY parks and recreation facilities, services, and programs.

This survey research effort and subsequent analysis were designed to assist the Town of Amherst in updating their master plan regarding existing and potential future facilities and services.



METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted using three primary methods:

- 1) a mail-back survey,
- 2) an online, invitation-only web survey to further encourage response from those residents already within the defined invitation sample, and
- 3) an “open-link” online survey for members of the public who were not part of the invitation sample. The analysis herein primarily focuses on responses from the statistically-valid invitation sample.

The primary list source used for the mailing was a third party list purchased from Melissa Data Corp., a leading provider of data with emphasis on U.S., Canadian, and international address and phone verification as well as postal software. Use of the Melissa Data list also includes renters in the sample who are frequently missed in other list sources such as utility billing lists.



METHODOLOGY

A total of 3,500 surveys were mailed to a random sample of Town of Amherst residents in July 2017. After accounting for undeliverable addresses (63 total), 3,437 surveys were delivered and 560 completed responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 16.3 percent. The margin of error for the 560 statistically valid responses is approximately +/- 4.1 percentage points calculated for questions at 50% response¹. The open link survey received an additional 243 completed responses.

The analysis herein primarily focuses on responses from the statistically-valid invitation sample. However, invitation sample results are compared to those from the open link sample throughout the report. Furthermore, results were segmented and analyzed by presence of children in the household (invitation and open link samples combined to maximize sample size). Those results are presented in cases where meaningful differences were observed

¹For the total invitation sample size of 560, margin of error is +/- 4.1 percent calculated for questions at 50% response (if the response for a particular question is “50%”—the standard way to generalize margin of error is to state the larger margin, which occurs for responses at 50%). Note that the margin of error is different for every single question response on the survey depending on the resultant sample sizes, proportion of responses, and number of answer categories for each question. Comparison of differences in the data between various segments, therefore, should take into consideration these factors. As a general comment, it is sometimes more appropriate to focus attention on the general trends and patterns in the data rather than on the individual percentages.



WEIGHTING THE DATA

The underlying data were weighted by age to ensure appropriate representation of Amherst, NY residents across different demographic cohorts in the sample.



Using the U.S. Census Bureau 2015 American Community Survey five-year estimates, the age distribution within the invitation sample were adjusted to more closely match the 2015 demographic profile of the Town of Amherst.



Due to variable response rates by some segments of the population, the underlying results, while weighted to best match the overall demographics of residents, may not be completely representative of some sub-groups of the Town of Amherst population.



TOP 10 FINDINGS

1

Residents are **somewhat familiar** with Amherst's offerings, but a smaller percentage are very familiar. There may be potential to increase awareness of the Town's parks and facilities.

2

Programs and parks are **widely used by families with children at home**. Those who do not have children seem to **participate in programs and visit sites less**. There may be new opportunities to attract households that without children.

3

Community /neighborhood parks and trail connectivity are very important to residents. Additionally, many would like to see improvements, additions, and expansions on into the future in this area.

4

A large share of comments around recreation needs and opportunities focus on a need to **protect open space and continued expansion/linking of green space**. This finding is consistent with results in Erie County.

5

Improving communication strategies may lead to a higher degree of effectiveness. Residents stated a moderate to low effectiveness rate currently and identify the Town newsletter as the best method of communication.



TOP 10 FINDINGS

6

In general community needs are being met by the majority of the facilities. There are a few key areas to monitor as they have high importance, but low needs met. These include aquatic facilities and programs/events.

7

When allocating dollars to projects, residents signal two actions as most important: 1) making improvements/renovating existing amenities and 2) preserving open space.

8

Safety and security, well-maintained amenities, and pleasant settings are the primary drivers for why residents choose to visit parks. These three factors are vital reasons why residents pick their favorite areas to recreate.

9

Creating a foundation for parks is the most desirable funding option for residents. On the contrary, invitation residents are much less likely to support sales tax increases or dedicated property taxes which fund parks.

10

Community events and fitness/wellness programs are most popular among Amherst's residents. These programs also receive high priority rankings. Close behind are programs which involve nature and outdoor recreation.



COMPARING RESULTS TO ERIE COUNTY, NY

Trails and pathways continue to be of importance in at both the county and town level. In each study, trails and pathways rose to the top as the most important amenity in the region.

Preserving natural areas and access to open space is a top value throughout both studies. Protecting green space is a key concern for residents at the town and county level.

Awareness was rated moderately low by residents at the town and county level. Improving communications may increase awareness and use for park and recreation facilities across the region.

Lighting was a much more important area to focus on to increase usage at the town level. Lighting was indicated by only 38% of invitation respondents in the Erie County study vs. 60% in Amherst.



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

About half of the invitation sample is female (51%) and half male (49%). Forty-three percent of invitation respondents are under age 45. Just under half of invitation sample respondents (45%) live with children at home, and an additional 23% are empty nesters. Open link respondents are very similar, but had a higher share of respondents within the 55-64 age range and are more likely to be couples with children (44%).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Demographic Profile

		Invitation Sample	Open Link
Gender	Female	51%	55%
	Male	49%	45%
Age	Under 35	31%	16%
	35 - 44	12%	20%
	45 - 54	17%	17%
	55 - 64	16%	31%
	65 - 74	11%	14%
	75 or over	12%	1%
Household Status	Single, no children	15%	14%
	Single with children at home	4%	4%
	Single, children no longer at home	6%	5%
	Couple, no children	16%	13%
	Couple with children at home	41%	44%
	Couple, children no longer at home	17%	20%
English Primary Language	No	1%	
	Yes	99%	100%



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Invitation sample households are generally more affluent, with 51 percent earning over \$100,000. Open link households exhibit a very similar income distribution. One percent of invitation respondents are African-American; 1% identify themselves as being of Hispanic/Latino origin; 1% identify as Asian/Asian Indian/Pacific Islander.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Demographic Profile

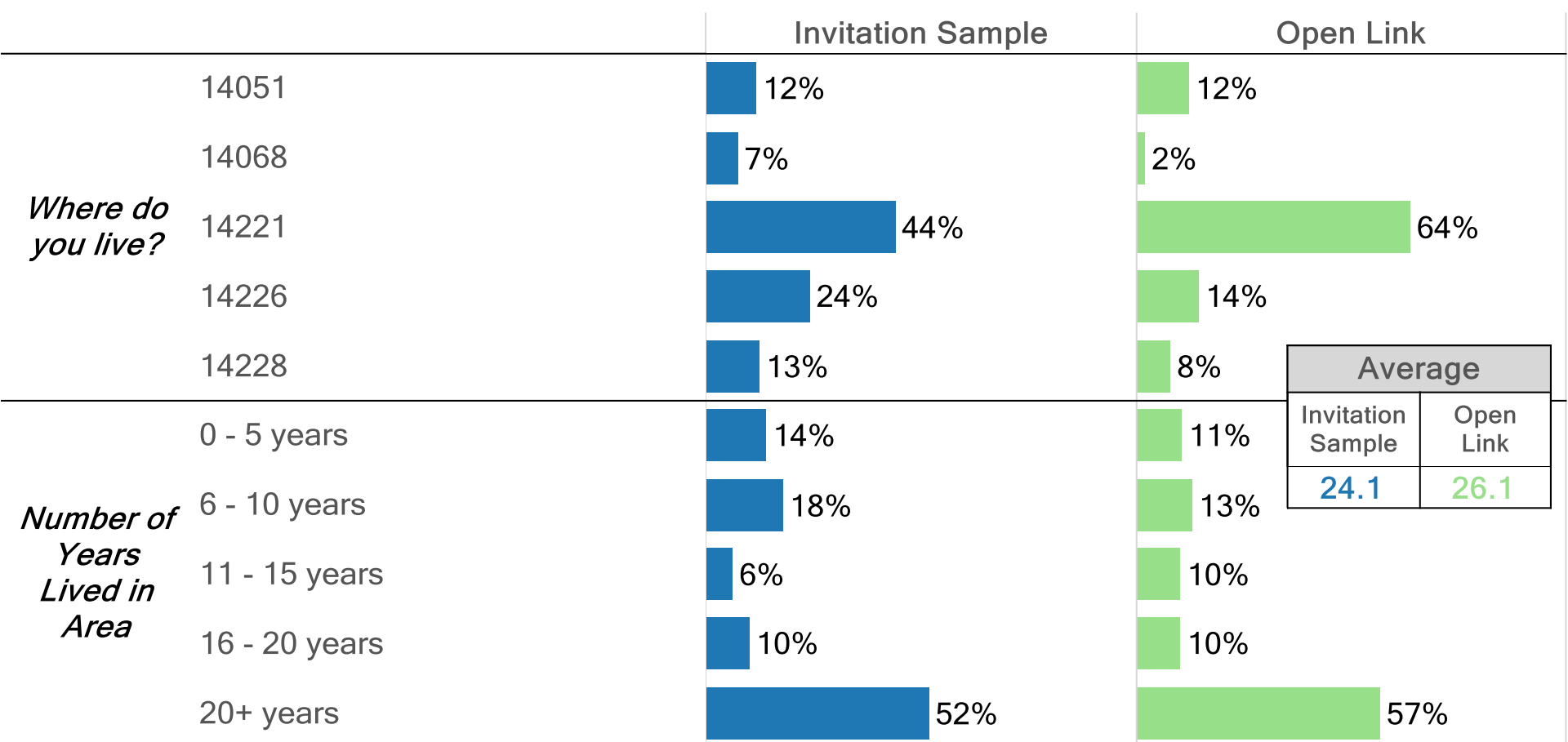
	Invitation Sample	Open Link
Annual Household Income	Under \$25,000	4%
	\$25,000 - \$49,999	9%
	\$50,000 - \$74,999	17%
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	19%
	\$100,000 - \$149,999	30%
	\$150,000 - \$199,999	14%
	\$200,000 - \$249,999	3%
	\$250,000 or more	4%
Race	White	95%
	Other	2%
	Black/African American	1%
	Asian/Asian Indian/Pacific Islander	1%
	Hispanic/Latino	1%
	Native American	0%



RESIDENTIAL PROFILE

Amherst's 14221 zip code is strongly represented among invitation respondents (44%), followed by 14226 (24%), 14228 (13%), 14051 (12%), and 14068 (7%). Representation of zip code 14221 residents was particularly strong in the open link sample (64%). Over half of invitation respondents have lived in the area for more than 20 years (24.1 average).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Residential Profile





RESIDENTIAL PROFILE

The majority of invitation respondents are registered voters (97%) who own their home (92%). Seven percent of invitation respondents are renters. Six percent of invitation respondents require ADA-Accessible facilities/services. Open link responses are very similar.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Residential Profile

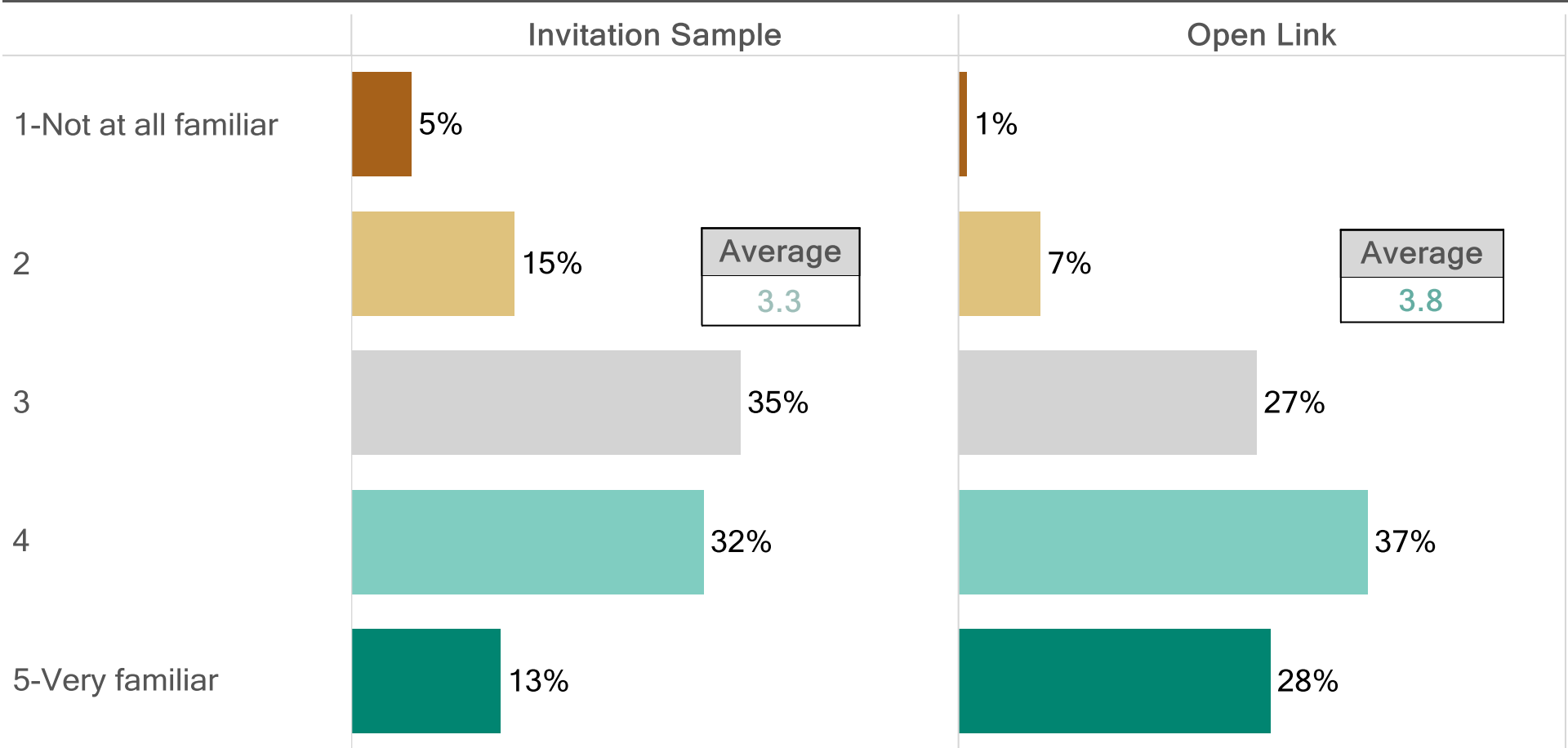
		Invitation Sample	Open Link
<i>Are you a registered voter?</i>	Yes	97%	97%
	No	3%	3%
<i>Do you Own or Rent Your Home?</i>	Own	92%	95%
	Rent	7%	2%
	Other	1%	2%
<i>Need for ADA-Accessible Facilities/Services</i>	Yes	6%	7%
	No	94%	93%



FAMILIARITY WITH PARKS & RECREATION

Respondents were asked how knowledgeable/familiar they and their household are with Amherst parks and recreation amenities. Invitation respondents were moderately familiar with 35 percent responding with '3' familiarity and 32 percent responding with '4' familiarity. Open link respondents were slightly more familiar overall.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Familiarity with Parks & Recreation Offerings

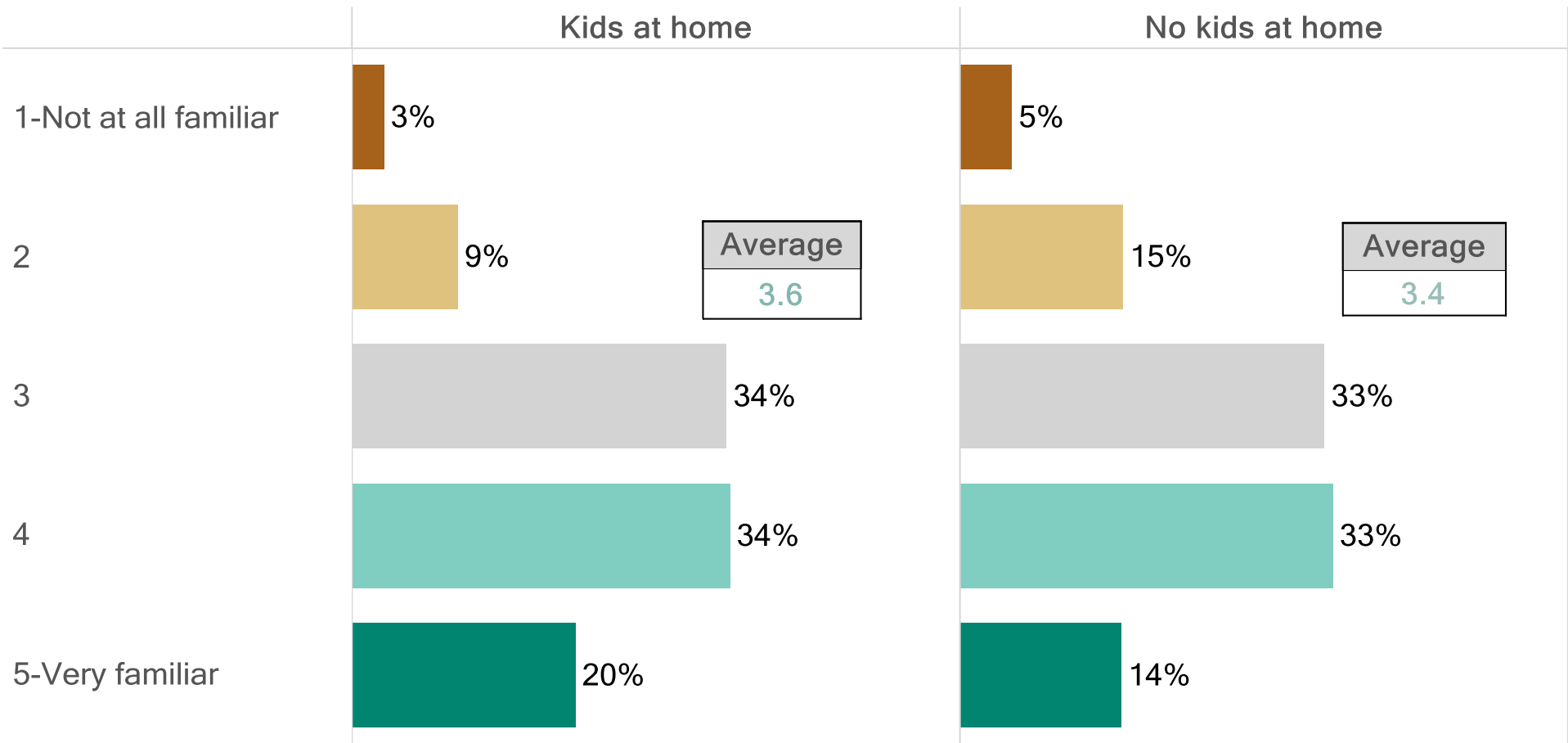




FAMILIARITY WITH PARKS & RECREATION

Comparing by the presence of children in the home between all respondents, respondents who have children were slightly more familiar (3.6 average) than those who do not (3.4 average). A larger share of respondents who had children were 'very familiar' (20%) compared to those without (14%).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Familiarity with Parks & Recreation Offerings

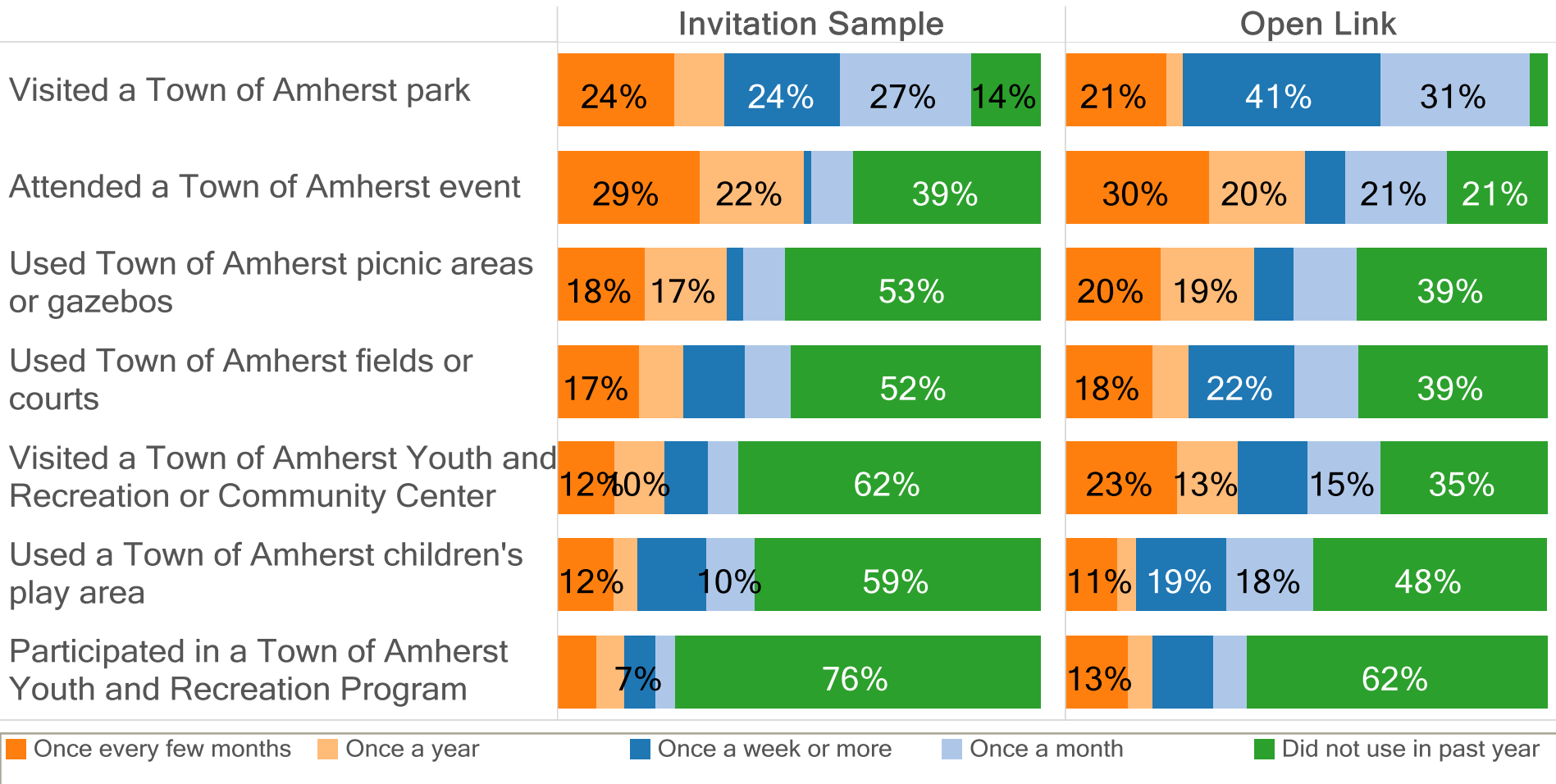




USAGE OF PARKS/FACILITIES IN PAST YEAR

The most frequently used amenity were Amherst's parks (24% used once at least once per week), followed by fields or courts (13%), and children's play areas (15%). The lowest ranking sites were Youth and Recreation programs (76% did not use), Youth and Recreation/Community Center (62%), and picnic areas or gazebos (53%).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Current Usage of Parks & Recreation Facilities

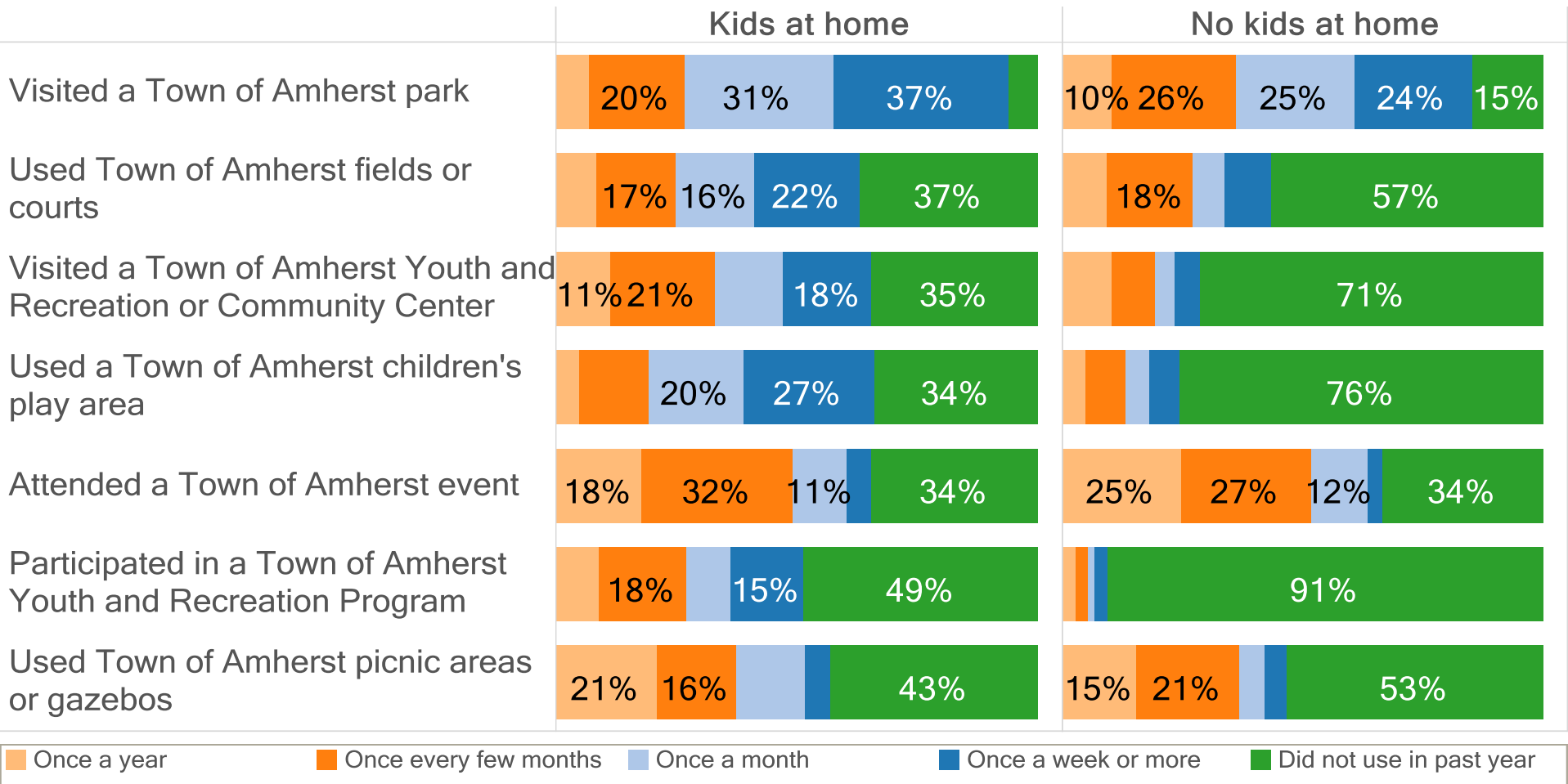




USAGE OF PARKS/FACILITIES IN PAST YEAR

When assessed by whether children are present in the home for all respondents, respondents with children at home used all recreation sites more than those without children, especially fields or courts (63% use vs. 43% use), and the youth and recreation programming (51% use vs. 9% use).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Current Usage of Parks & Recreation Facilities





COMMENTS ON WHY RESPONDENTS USE THEIR PARKS

Respondents were asked why they choose to visit their favorite park. Commonly mentioned themes and a brief summary of suggestions for each are illustrated below, along with a selection of verbatim invitation responses relevant to each theme. The full listing of responses is provided in the appendix.

Safety and Security

- Focus on safety/security
- Well lit and maintained
- Cleanliness

Safety, cleanliness, respects nature

Safety - lifeguards, trash collectors, etc.

Well lit and close to emergency services

Green space and Trails

- Open natural areas
- Expansive trail systems
- Peaceful and relaxing

Excellent walk path

Bike paths- untouched woodland /forest, wildlife

Natural setting, not crowded, away from noise, traffic. Great to 'get away'

Children Activities

- Multiple activities for children
- Ease of access
- Close to home

Close to home so I can take children after work

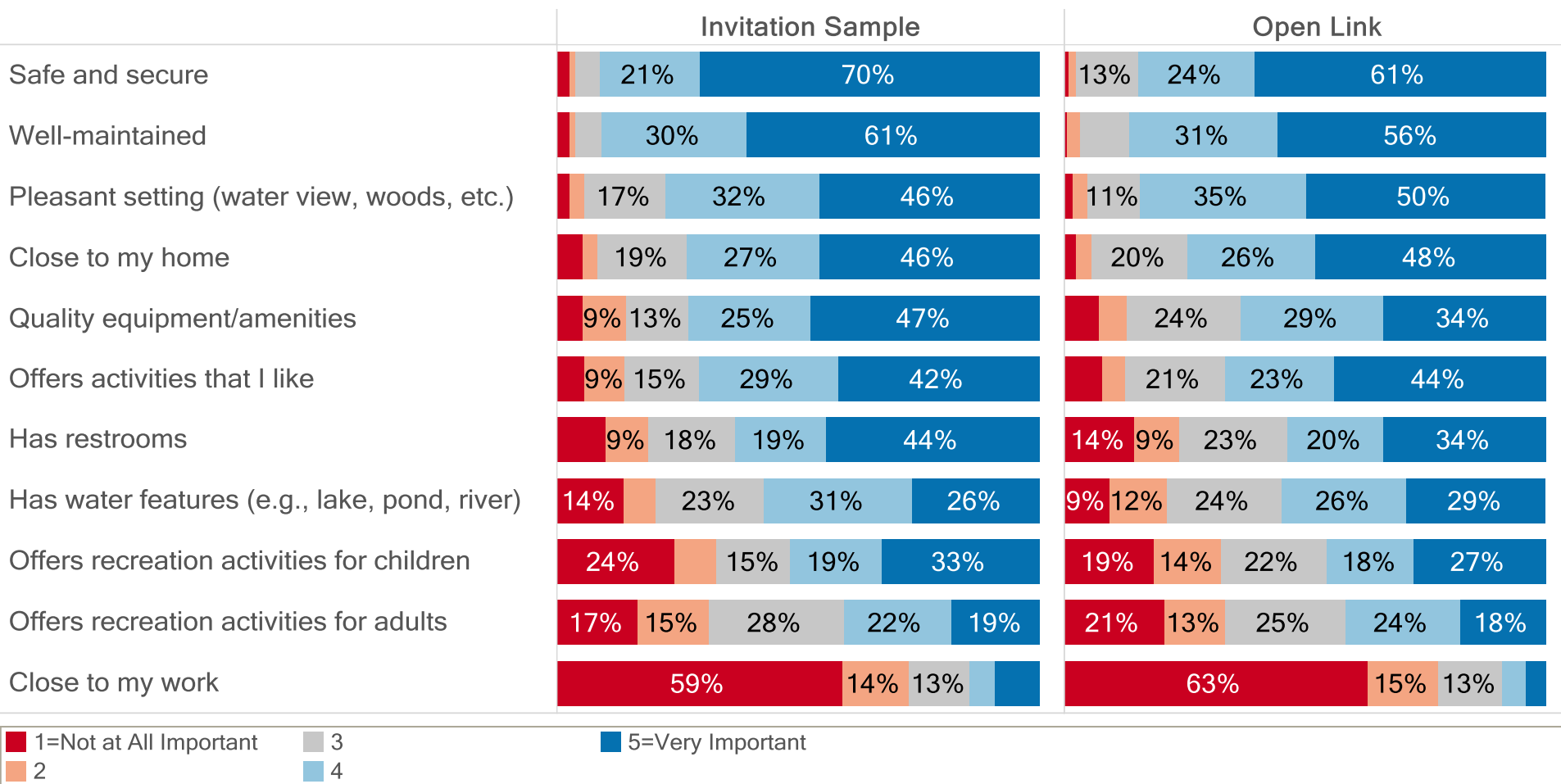
Playground equipment and kiddie pool all in one location is important. Sandbox should be upgraded.



FACTORS FOR CHOOSING FAVORITE PARK

Respondents were asked to state why they choose their favorite park. Invitation sample respondents indicate safety and security (70%), well-maintained (61%), and the pleasant setting (46%) as ‘very important’ factors. Closeness to work (73% rated ‘1’ or ‘2’) and recreation activities for children and adults (33% and 32% respectively) rank low in importance. Open link responses were very similar to invitation.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Factors for why you choose a favorite park

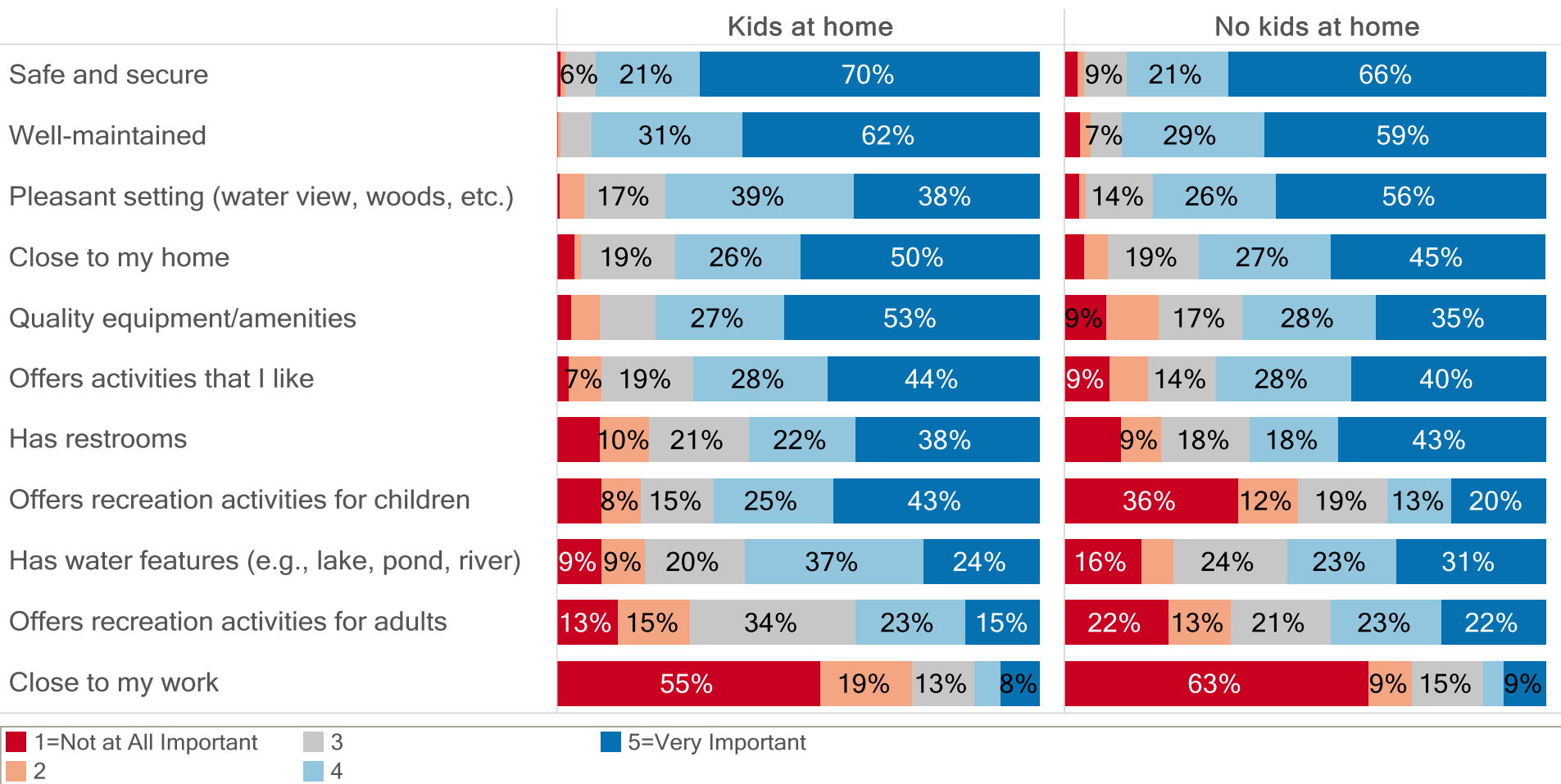




FACTORS FOR CHOOSING FAVORITE PARK

Families with children at home between both samples reported similar preferences as the overall invitation sample. Those without children at home had a much lower priority for places that offer children's activities. Overall, responses tend to mimic those found between invitation/open link.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Factors for why you choose a favorite park

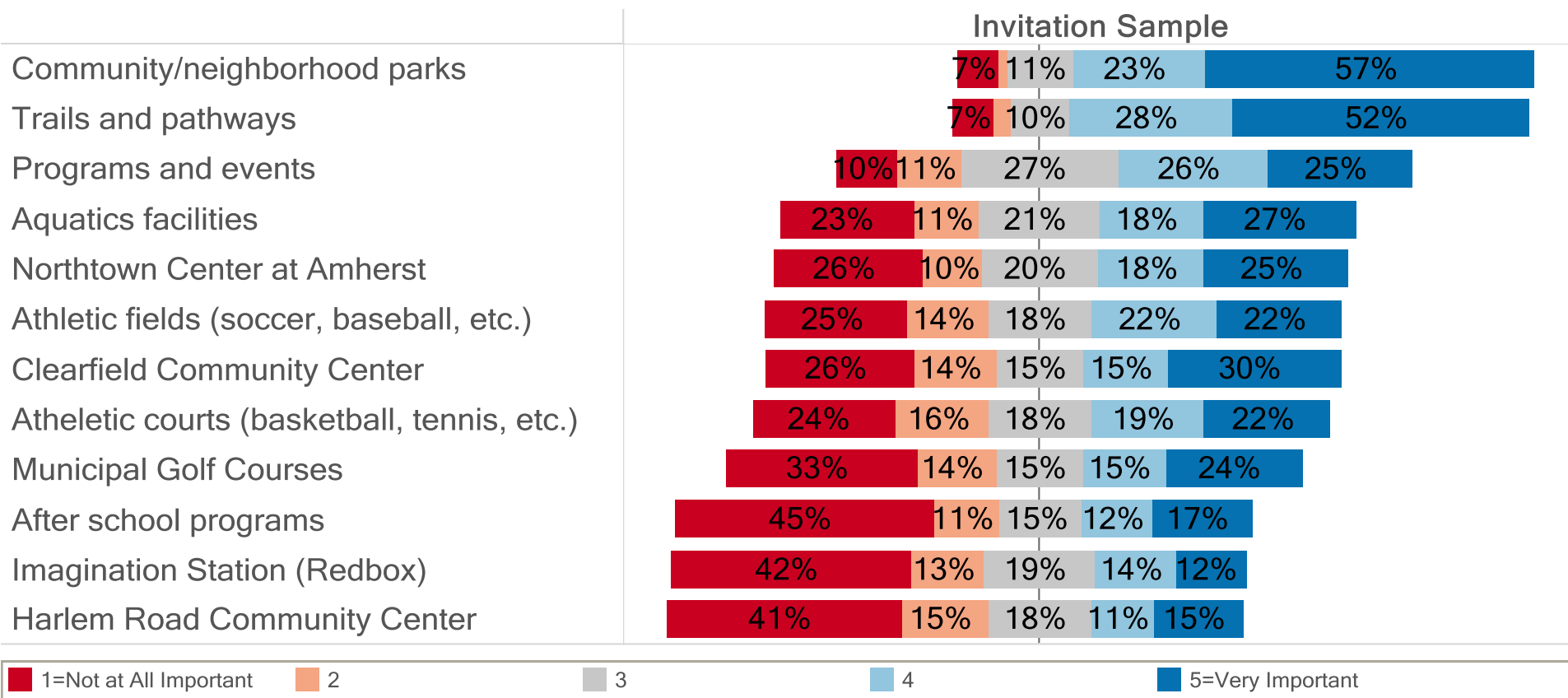




IMPORTANCE OF FACILITIES TO HOUSEHOLD

Invitation respondents noted community/neighborhood parks (80% rated '4' or '5'), trails and pathways (80% rated '4' or '5'), and programs and events (51% rated '4' or '5') as the most important facilities to their household. Less important are the Harlem Road Community Center (56 percent rated '1' or '2'), Imagination Station (55 percent rated '1' or '2'), and after school programs (56 percent rated '1' or '2').

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Importance of Facilities to Household *Sorted by Midpoint*

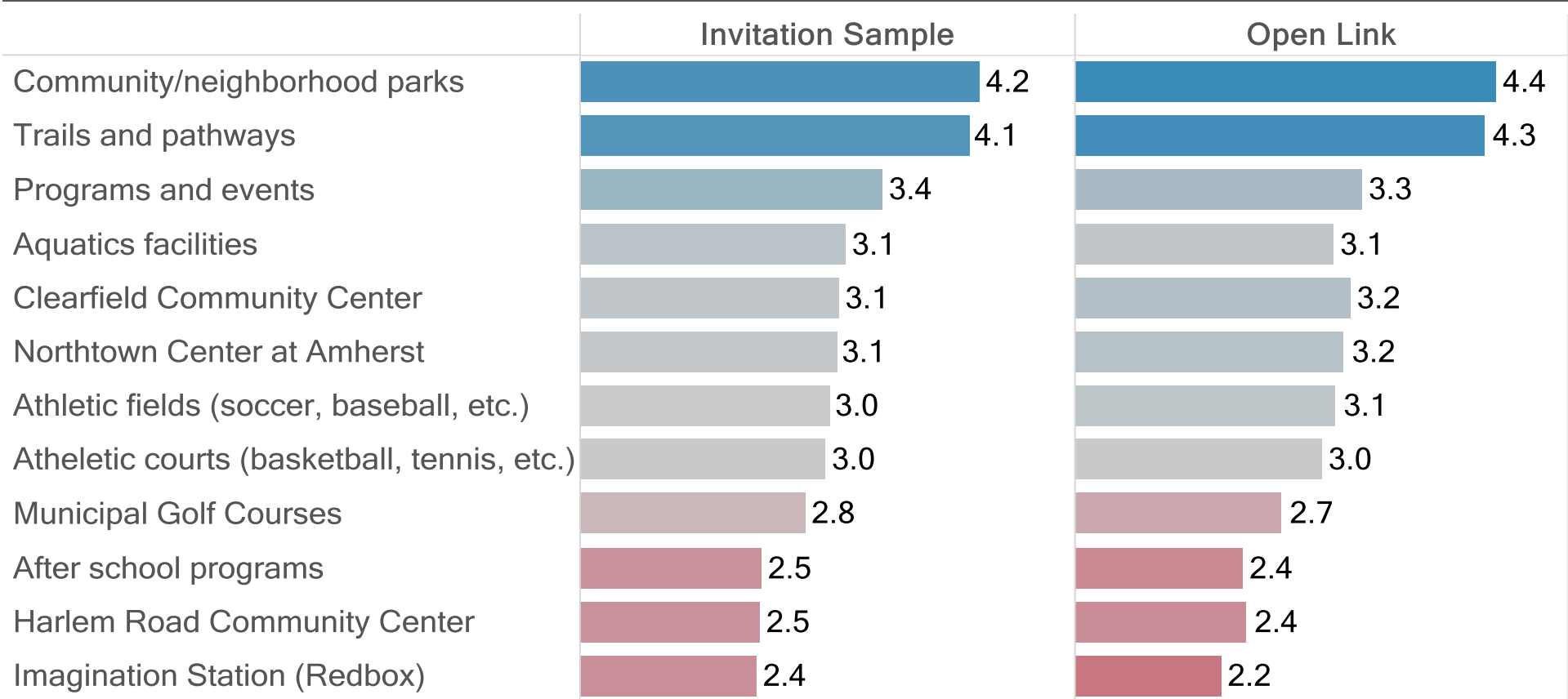




IMPORTANCE OF FACILITIES TO HOUSEHOLD

Community/neighborhood parks (4.2 average) and trails/pathways (4.1 average) rank highly among both open link and invitation respondents. Overall, response tended to be very similar across the two samples.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Importance of Facilities to Household *Average Rating (1=Not at All Important, 5=Very Important)*



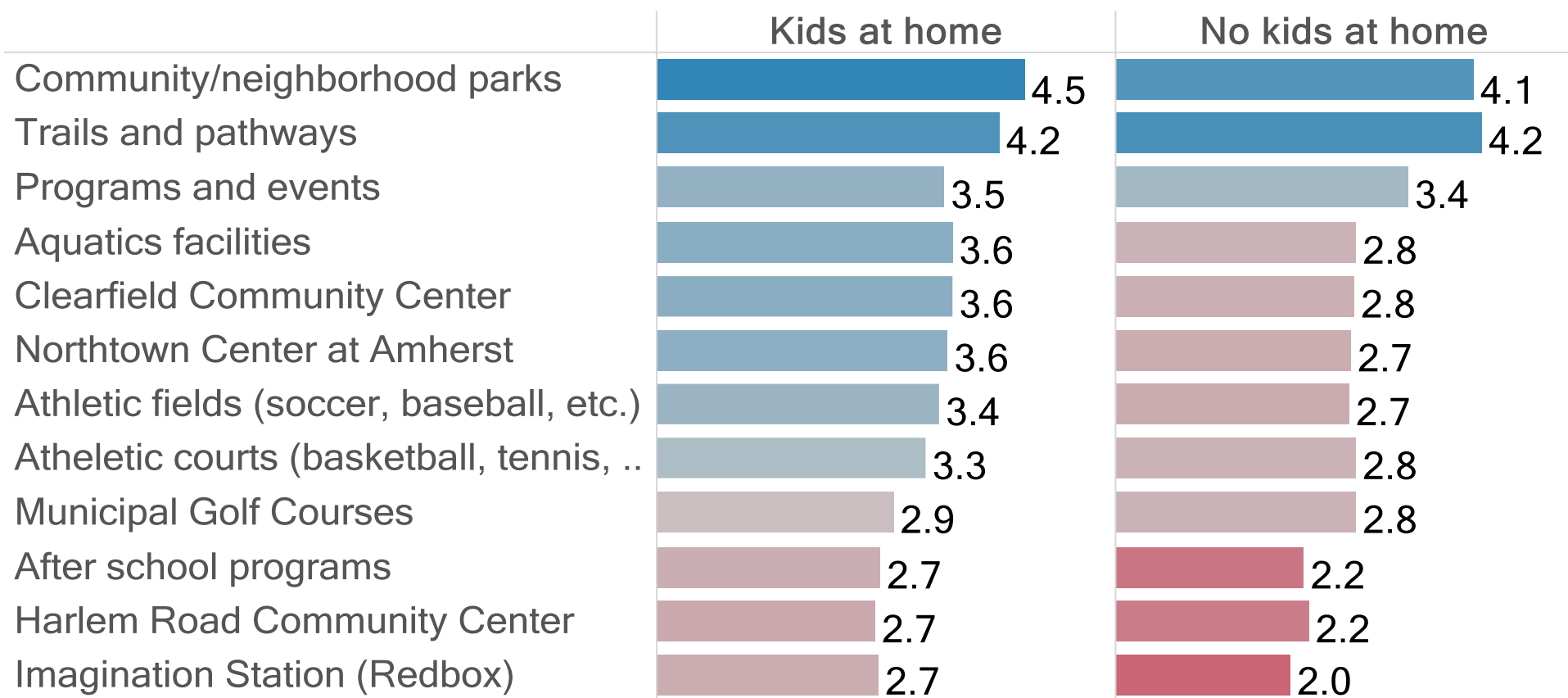


IMPORTANCE OF FACILITIES TO HOUSEHOLD

Community/neighborhood parks and trails/pathways rank highly in importance among both households with and without children. Households without children rank a number of facilities much lower in importance, particularly both community centers, athletic fields, Imagination Station, and aquatic facilities, than those with children.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Importance of Facilities to Household

Average Rating (1=Not at All Important, 5=Very Important)



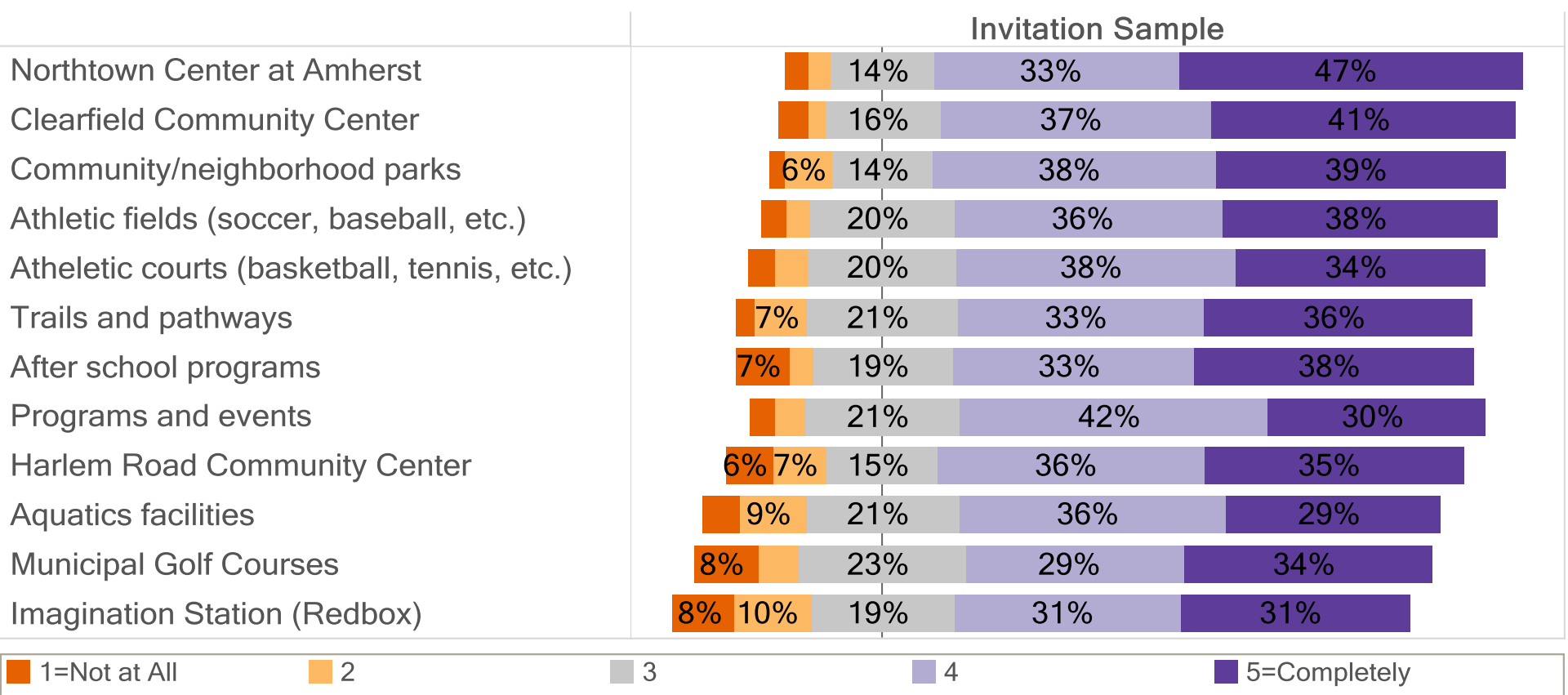


DEGREE FACILITIES ARE MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

The degree to which each facility meets the needs of Amherst tended to be relatively equal with only slight variations. The Northtown Center and Clearfield Community Center both rose to the top while the Imagination Station and municipal golf courses fell behind. That said, most facilities are meeting the needs of residents.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Degree to Which Facilities Meet Community Needs

Sorted by Midpoint

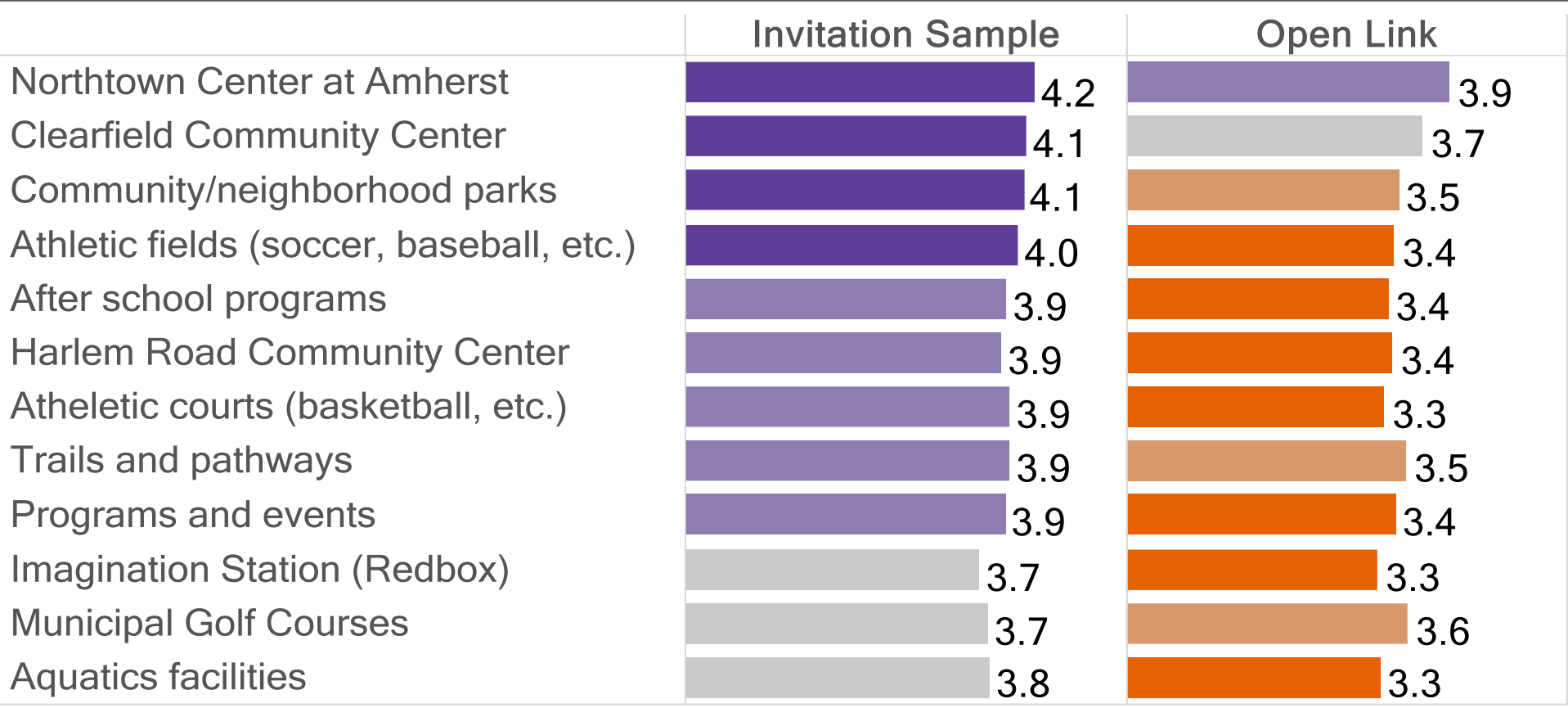




DEGREE FACILITIES MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

Little difference was noted in the invitation sample as to the degree each facility is meeting community needs. Only a 0.5 difference was found between the lowest rated and highest rated facility, indicating relatively strong perceptions of current facilities meeting community needs. Open link responses had similar views, but slightly lower opinion overall of each facilities' average rating of meeting community needs.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Degree to Which Facilities Meet Community Needs *Average Rating (1=Not at All, 5=Completely)*



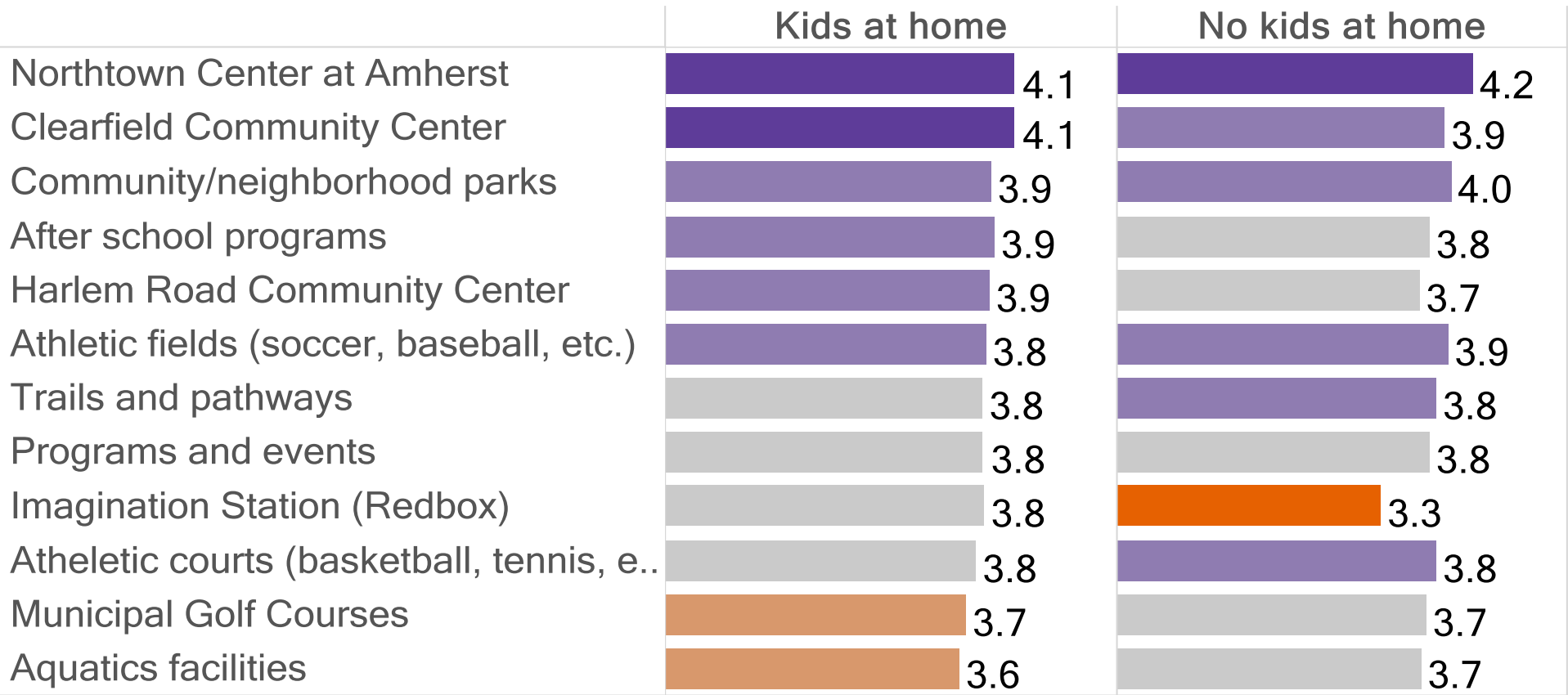


DEGREE FACILITIES MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

Overall small variations occur in the degree each facility is meeting the community needs between households with and without children. The main difference is that households without children rate the Imagination Station lower (3.3 average) in needs met than those with children at home (3.8 average).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Degree to Which Facilities Meet Community Needs

Average Rating (1=Not at All, 5=Completely)





IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE MATRIX

High Importance/ Low Needs Met

These are key areas for potential improvements. Improving these facilities would likely positively affect the degree to which community needs are met overall.

High Importance/ High Needs Met

These amenities are important to most respondents and should be maintained in the future, but are less of a priority for improvements as needs are currently being adequately met.

These “niche” facilities have a small but passionate following, so measuring participation when planning for future improvements may prove to be valuable.

Low Importance/ Low Needs Met

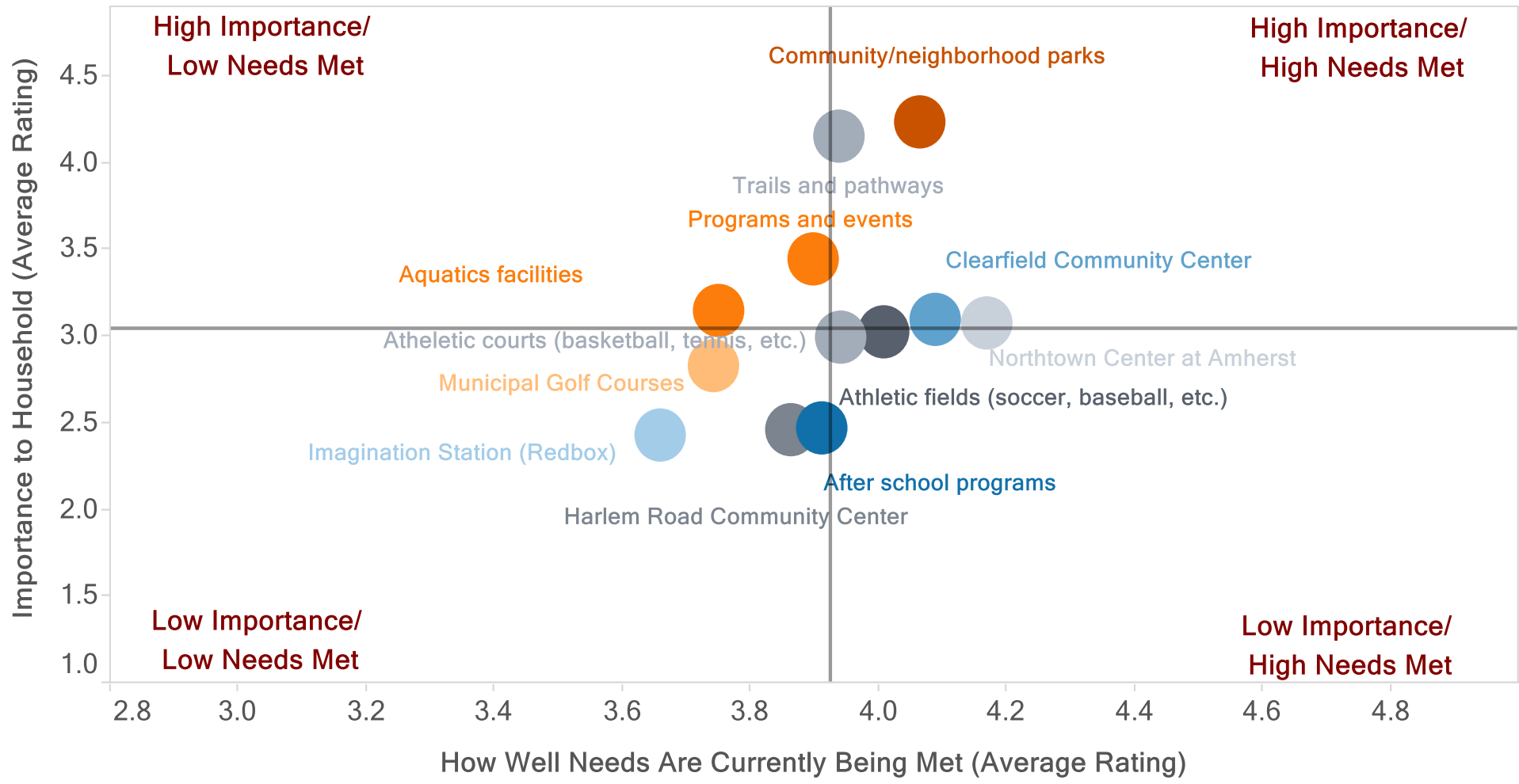
Current levels of support appear to be adequate. Future discussions evaluating whether the resources supporting these facilities outweigh the benefits may be constructive.

Low Importance/ High Needs Met



IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE MATRIX

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Level of Importance vs. Needs Met for Current Facilities

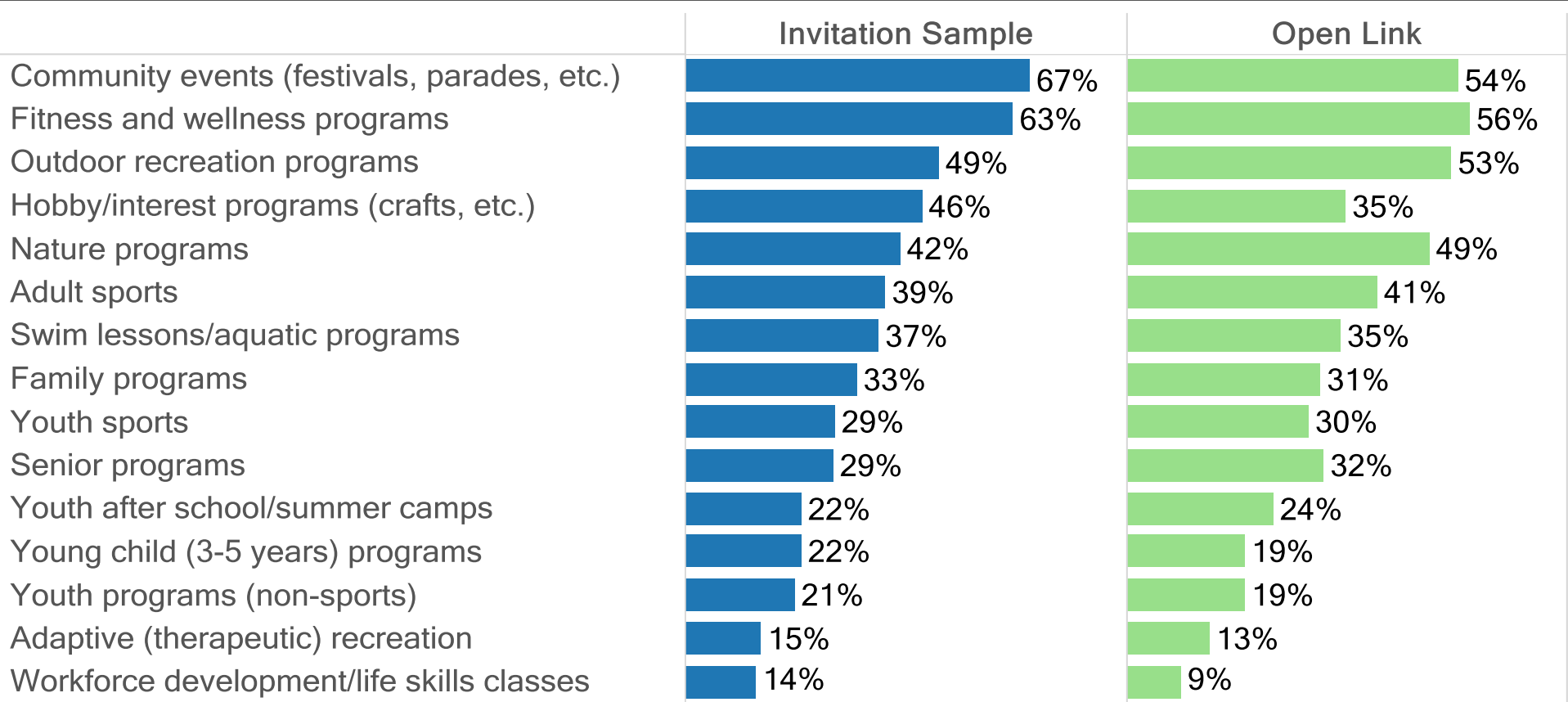




TOP NEEDS FOR PROGRAMMING

The top programs needs by invitation sample respondents are community events (67%) and fitness/wellness programs (63%). Outdoor recreation programs (49%) and hobby/interest programs (46%) follow behind. Program needs for the top two offerings (community events and fitness programs) are much higher in the invitation sample than open link. Workforce development classes and adaptive recreation programs are least needed in both groups.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Does your household have a need for the following programs?
Percent Responding "Yes"

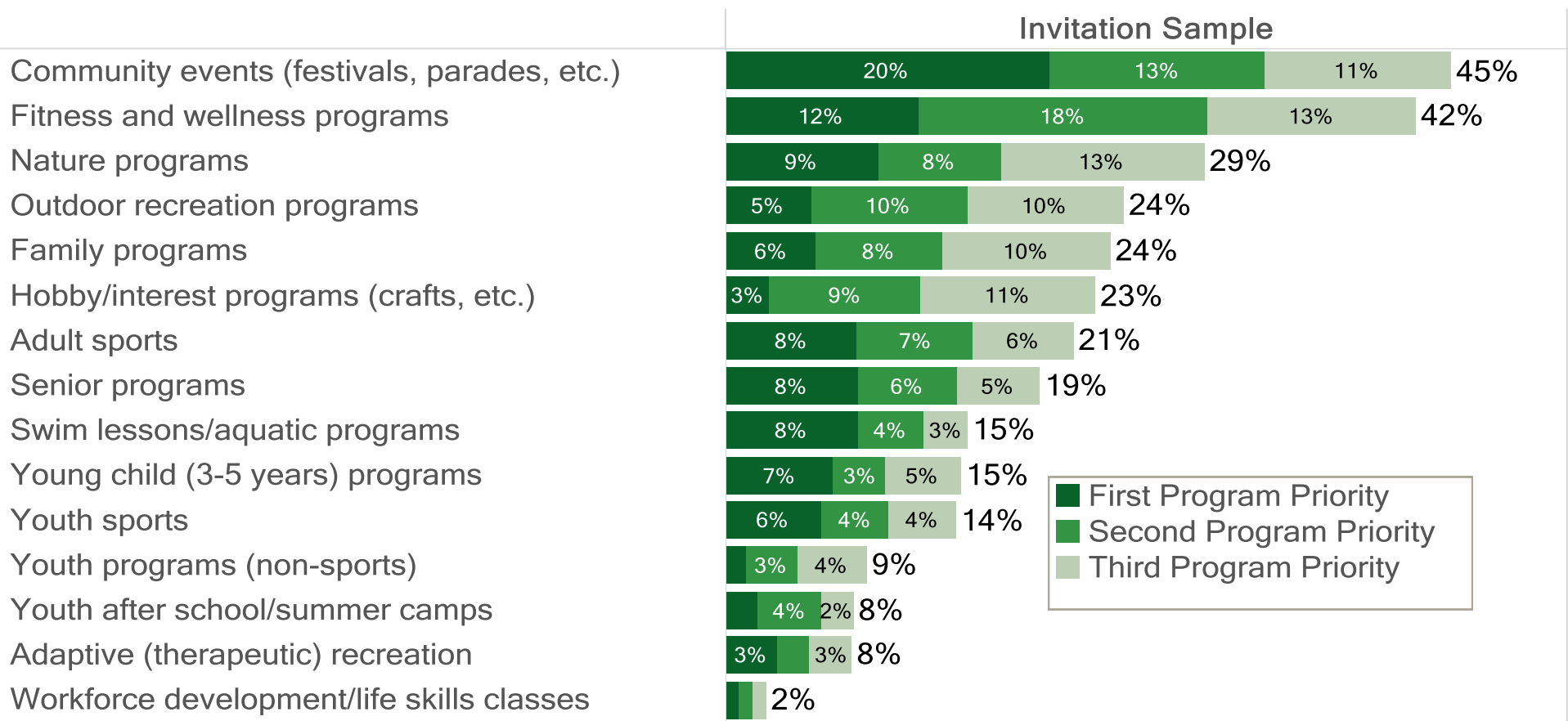




TOP THREE HIGHEST PRIORITY PROGRAMS

Respondents were asked to rank their top priorities for programming. Invitation respondents ranked both community events and fitness/wellness programs high for first program priorities. However, a number of moderately ranked programs were high in first priority rankings such as adult sports (8% first rank), senior programs (8% first rank), and swim lessons/aquatic programs (8% first rank). Such programs may not be high priority for everyone, but retain a passionate following.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Top Three Highest Priority Programs

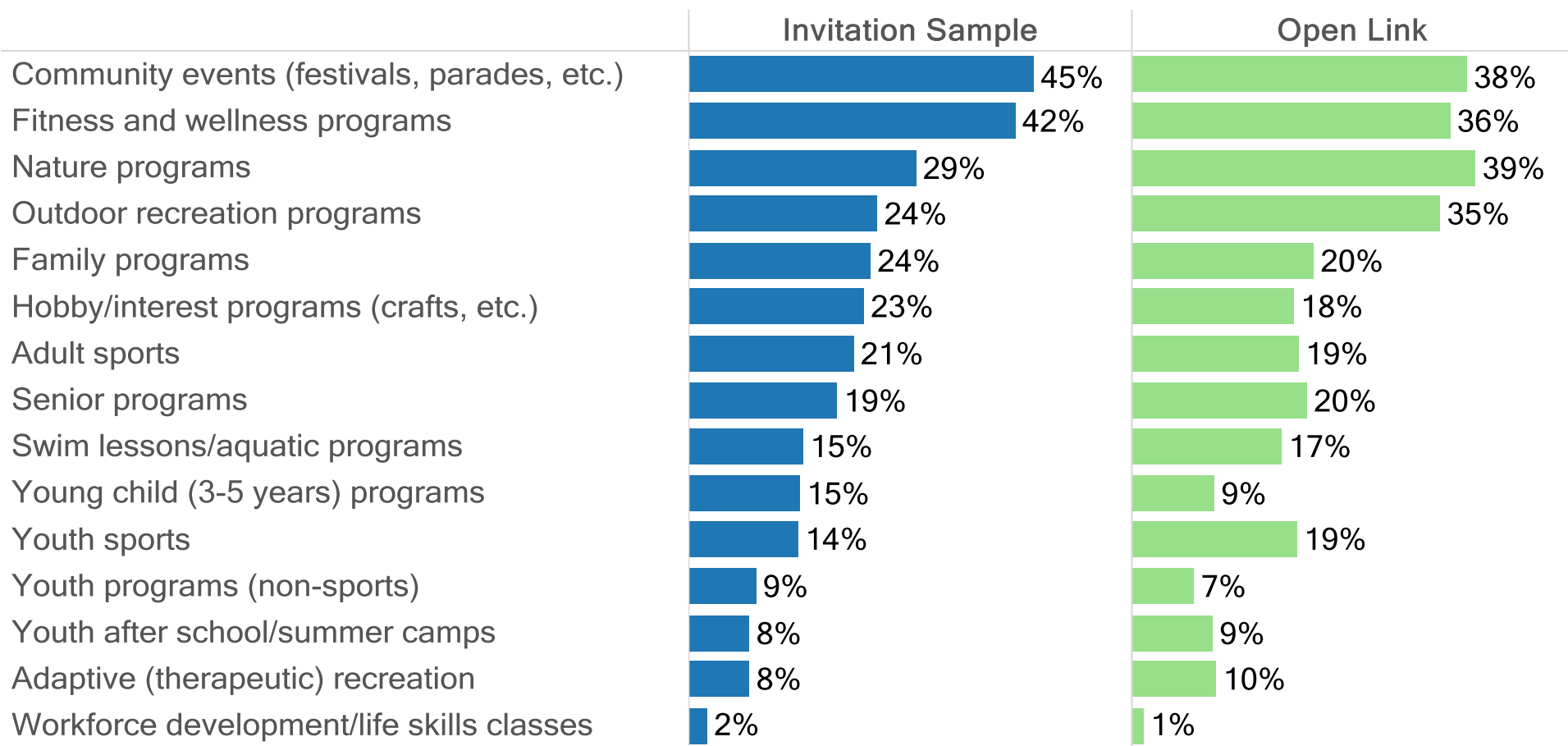




COMBINED PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Open link respondents tended to place more priority on nature programs (39%) than invitation sample respondents (29%) in addition to outdoor recreation programs (35% open link vs. 24% invitation). Open link users tend to be attracted to outdoor-oriented programming with less focus on youth programs.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Top Three Highest Priority Programs Combined

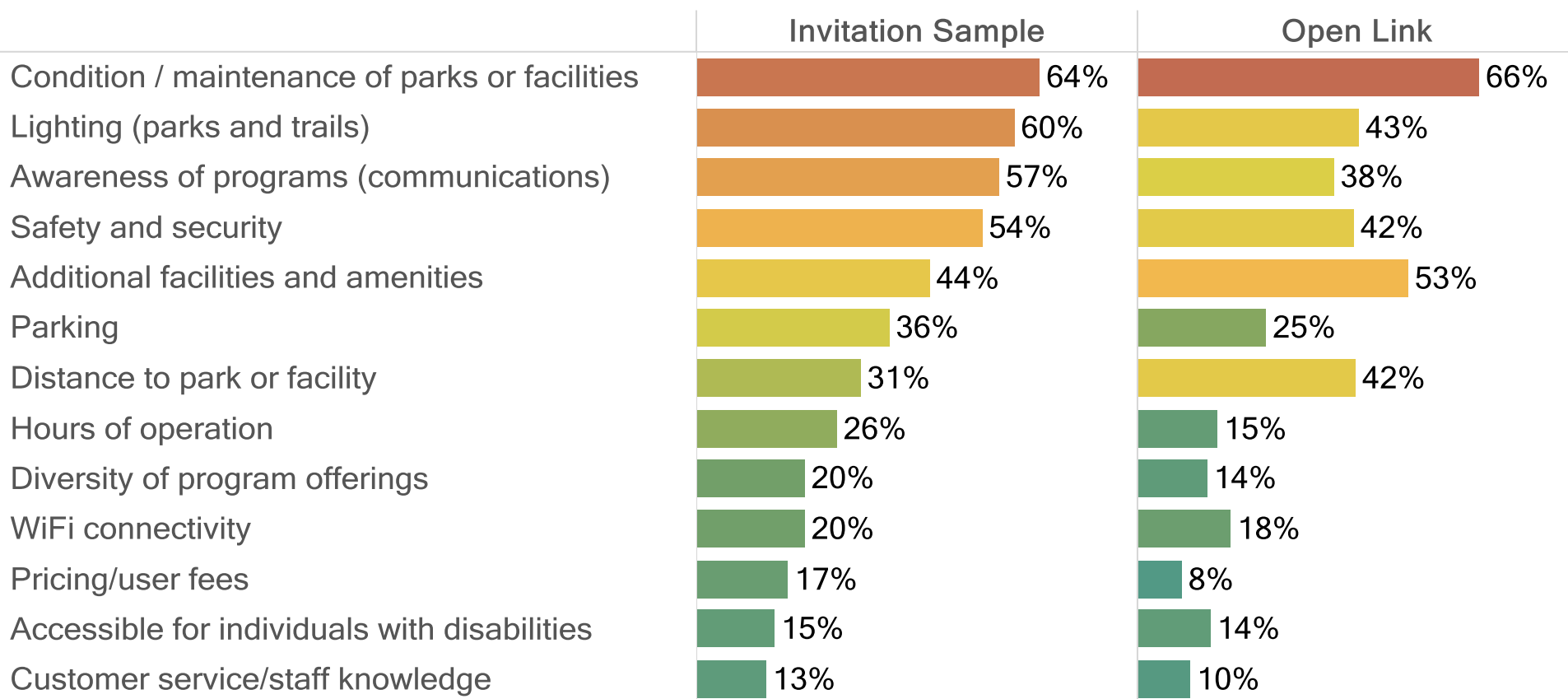




FACTORS THAT WOULD INCREASE USAGE

Condition/maintenance of facilities (64%), lighting (60%), awareness of programs (57%), and safety/security (54%) are the primary drivers for increased usage for invitation respondents. Open link respondents place more importance on additional facilities (53% vs. 44%) and on distance (42% vs. 31%) than invitation respondents, but less importance on lighting, awareness, and safety.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Most Important Areas that, If Addressed, Would Increase Usage of Facilities

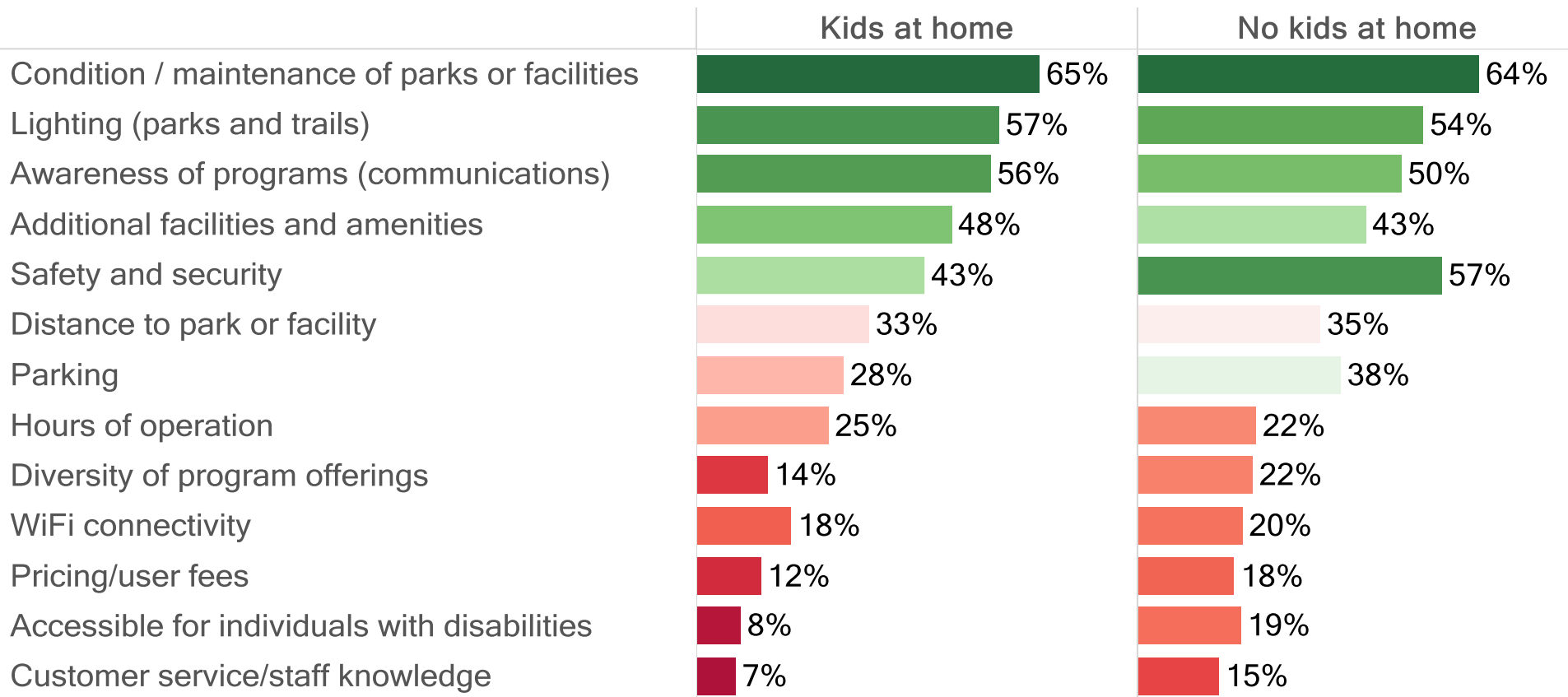




FACTORS THAT WOULD INCREASE USAGE

Areas to be addressed in order to increase usage differed in a few key areas for those with children at home vs. those without. Specifically, those who do not have kids place higher priority on parking (38% vs. 28%), safety and security (57% vs. 43%), and disability access (19% vs 8%). Those with children placed a slightly higher priority on additional facilities (48% vs. 43%).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Most Important Areas that, If Addressed, Would Increase Usage of Facilities

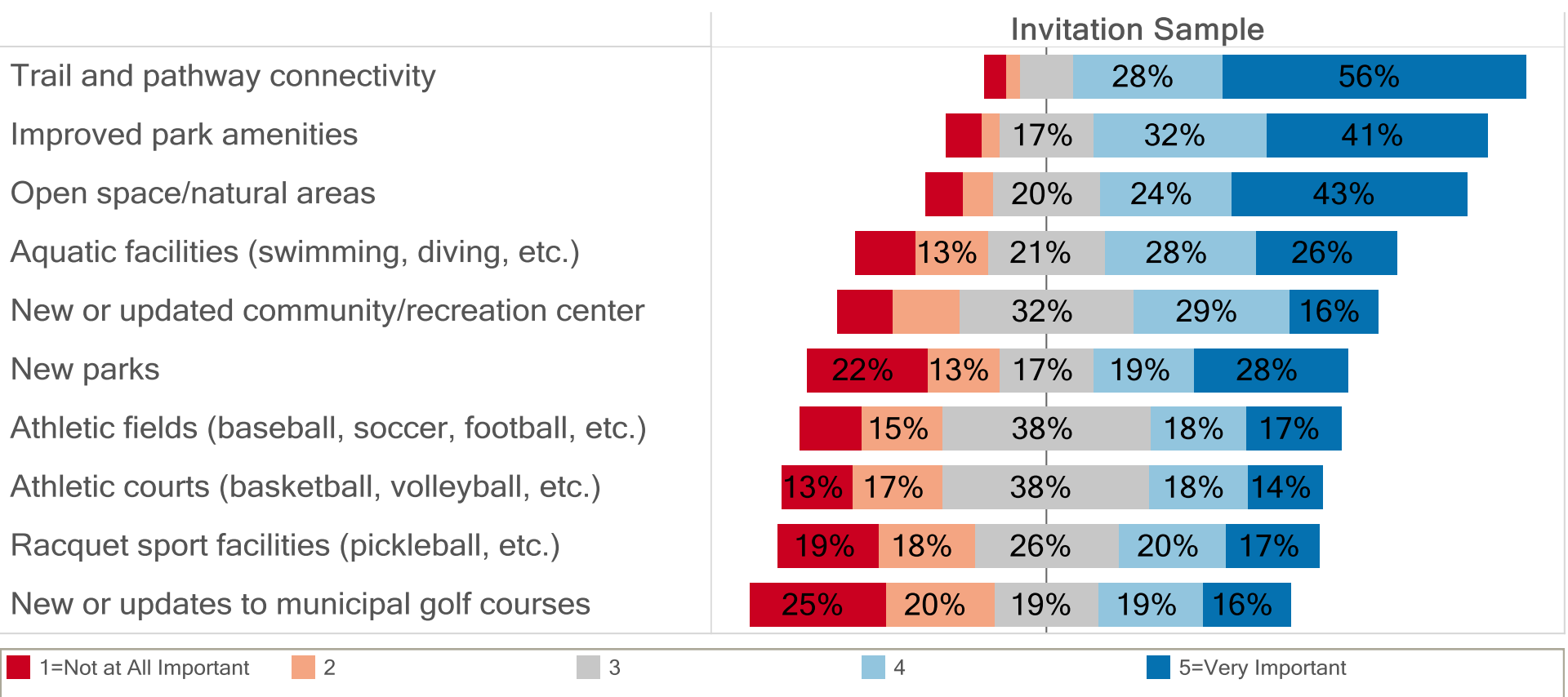




IMPORTANCE OF ADDING, EXPANDING AND IMPROVING

Invitation respondents noted trail and pathway connectivity (84% rated '4' or '5'), improved park amenities (73% rated '4' or '5'), and open space/natural areas (67% rated '4' or '5') as areas to focus for improvements, additions, and expansions. New/updated to municipal golf courses (45% rated '1' or '2') and racquet sport facilities (37% rated '1' or '2') ranked near the bottom of the list, but tend to have very passionate followings to be considered.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Importance of Adding, Expanding, or Improving Facilities *Sorted by Midpoint*

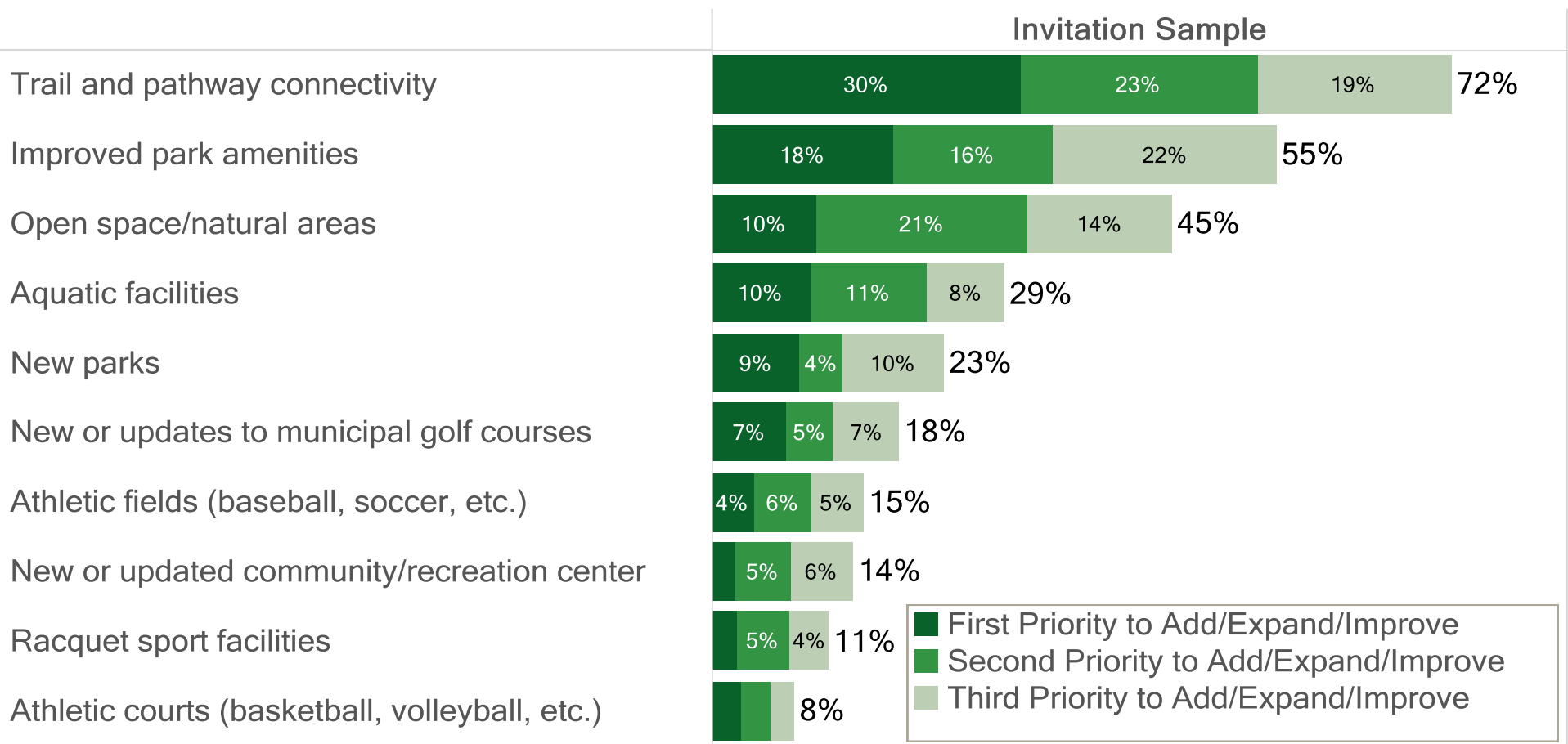




IMPORTANCE OF ADDING, EXPANDING AND IMPROVING

In ranking areas of importance, trails and pathways saw 30% of invitation respondents ranking as top priority. Improved park amenities (18% first ranking), open space/natural areas (10%), and aquatic facilities (10%) followed behind in first priority rankings. Nearly three-quarters of all invitation respondents consider trail and pathway connectivity to be a top-three priority for future improvement.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Top Three Highest Priorities to be Added, Expanded, or Improved

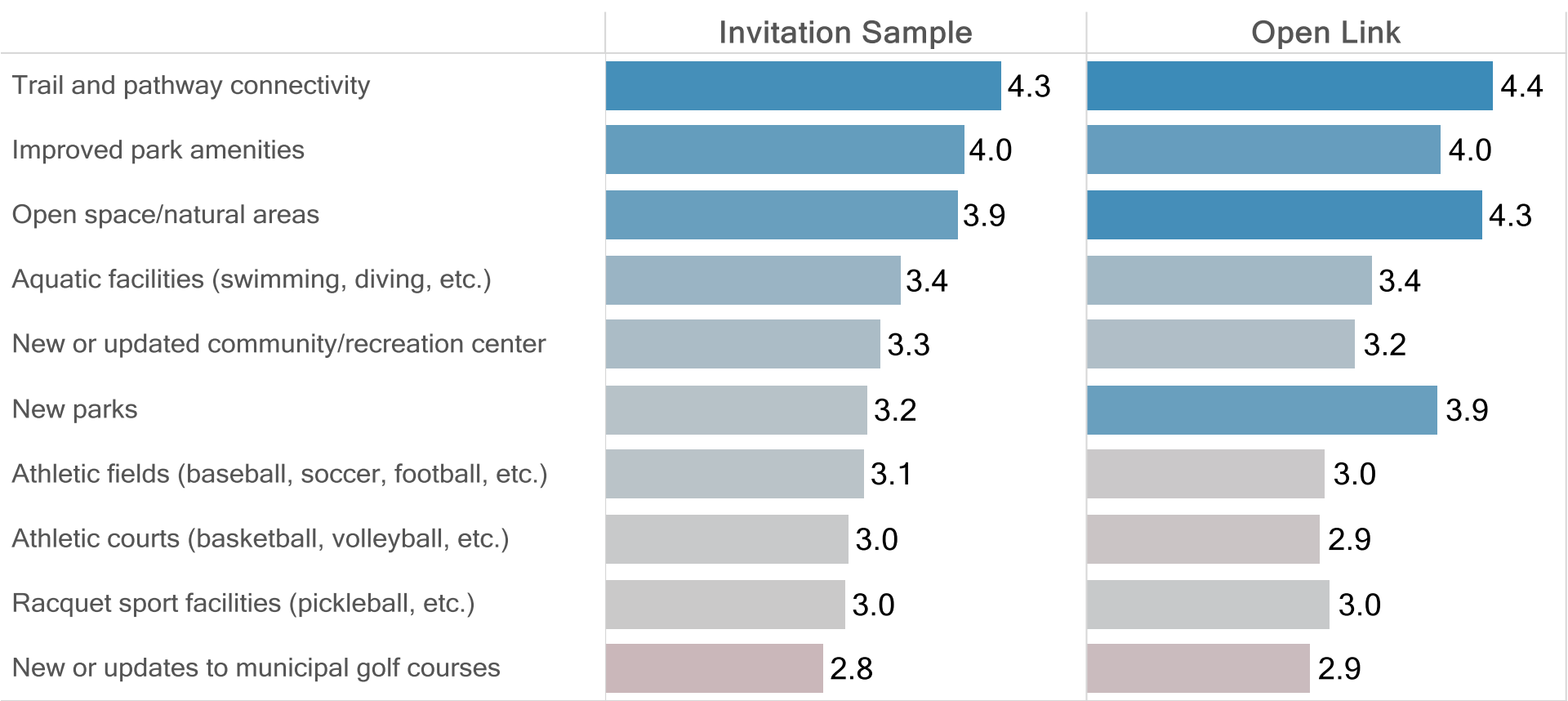




IMPORTANCE OF ADDING, EXPANDING AND IMPROVING

Compared to open link respondents, invitation respondents placed less importance on new parks (3.2 vs. 3.9 average) and on open space/natural areas (3.9 vs. 4.3). All other factors saw little difference between both groups. Other facilities mentioned in comments include pickleball courts, indoor pool, and creation of a park in Westwood.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Importance of Adding, Expanding, or Improving Facilities
Average Rating (1=Not at All Important, 5=Very Important)

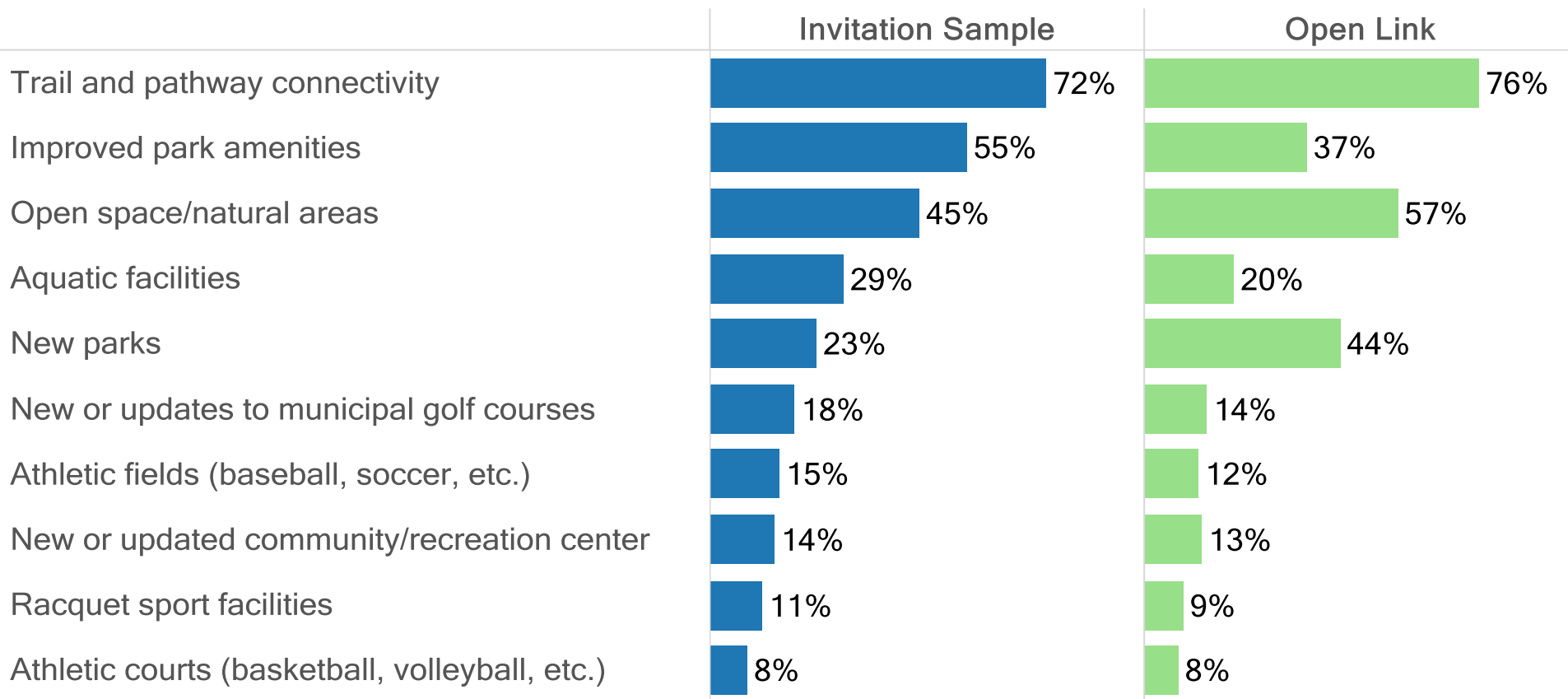




IMPORTANCE OF ADDING, EXPANDING AND IMPROVING

Invitation respondents placed higher priorities on improving park amenities than open link respondent (55% vs. 37%) with lower priority on new parks (23% vs. 44%). Both samples placed high importance on trail and pathway connectivity (72% and 76% respectively) and open space/natural areas (45% and 57% respectively).

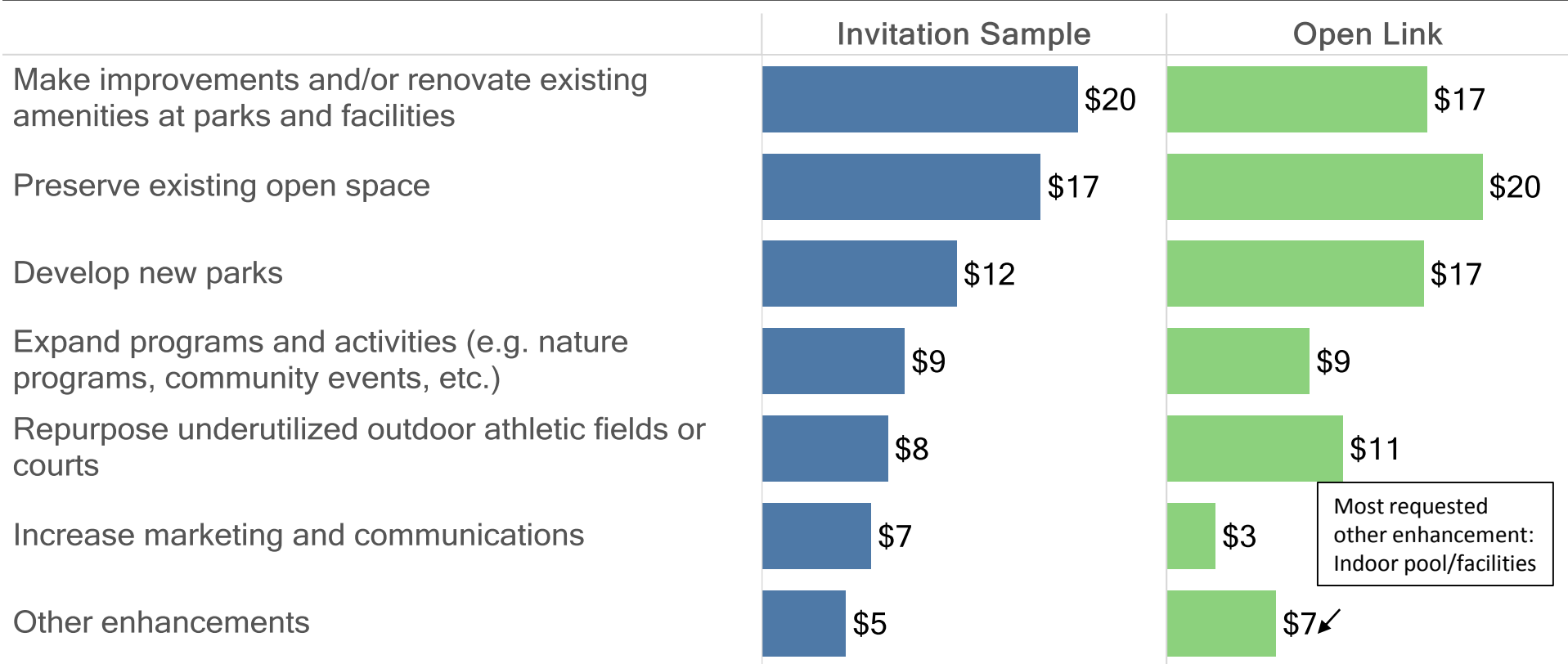
Amherst Parks & Recreation | Top Three Highest Priorities to be Added, Expanded, or Improved Combined



ALLOCATION OF \$100

Invitation respondents placed the highest allocation of dollars on making improvements or renovating existing amenities (\$20). Preserving open space ranked high (\$17) amongst invitation respondents as well. Less allocations were given to marketing (\$7) and repurposing underutilized fields/courts (\$8).

Amherst Parks & Recreation | If you had \$100 to spend on parks and recreation facilities, services and/or programs, how would you allocate that \$100 across the following categories?
Average Allocation Amount

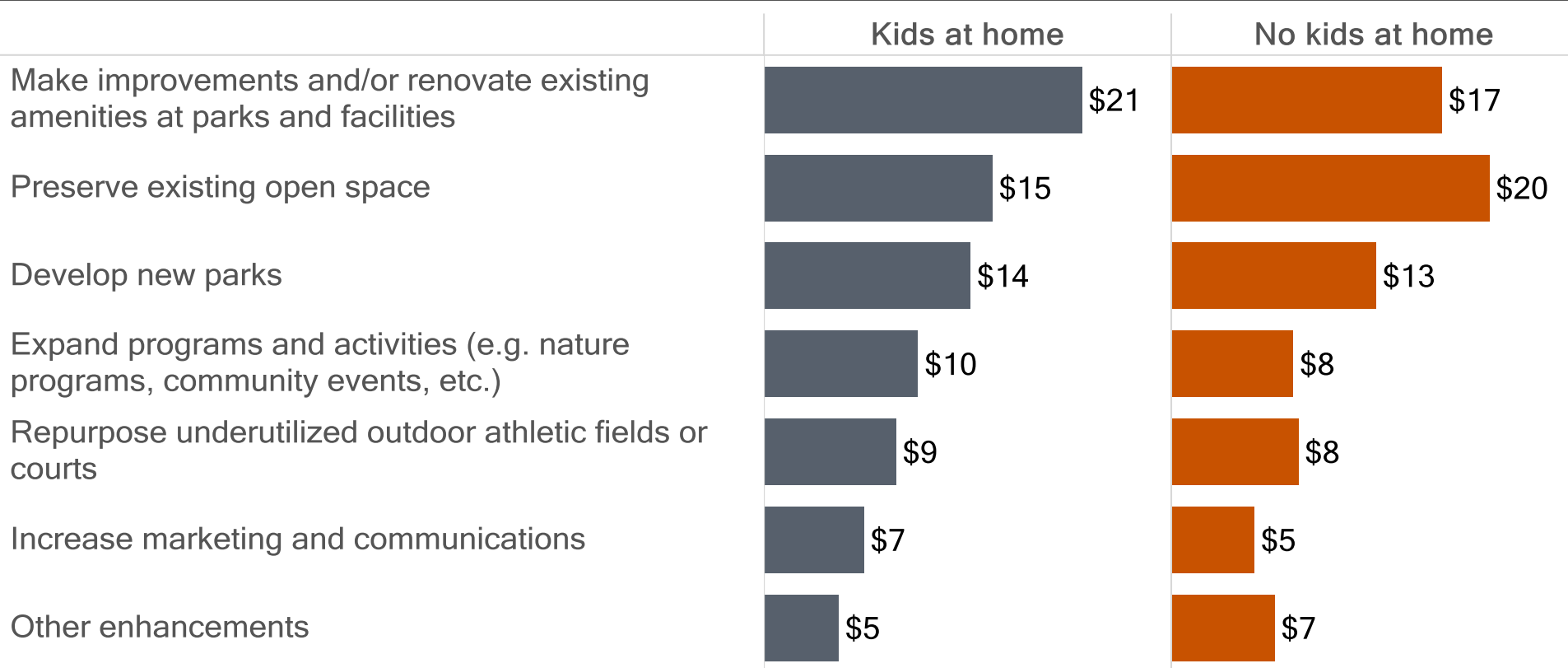




ALLOCATION OF \$100

The differences in allocation for households with children and those without exist in two categories: 1) making improvements and 2) renovating existing amenities (\$21 with kids vs. \$17 without kids) and preserving open space (\$15 with kids vs. \$20 without kids). Other allocations tended to be very similar between both groups.

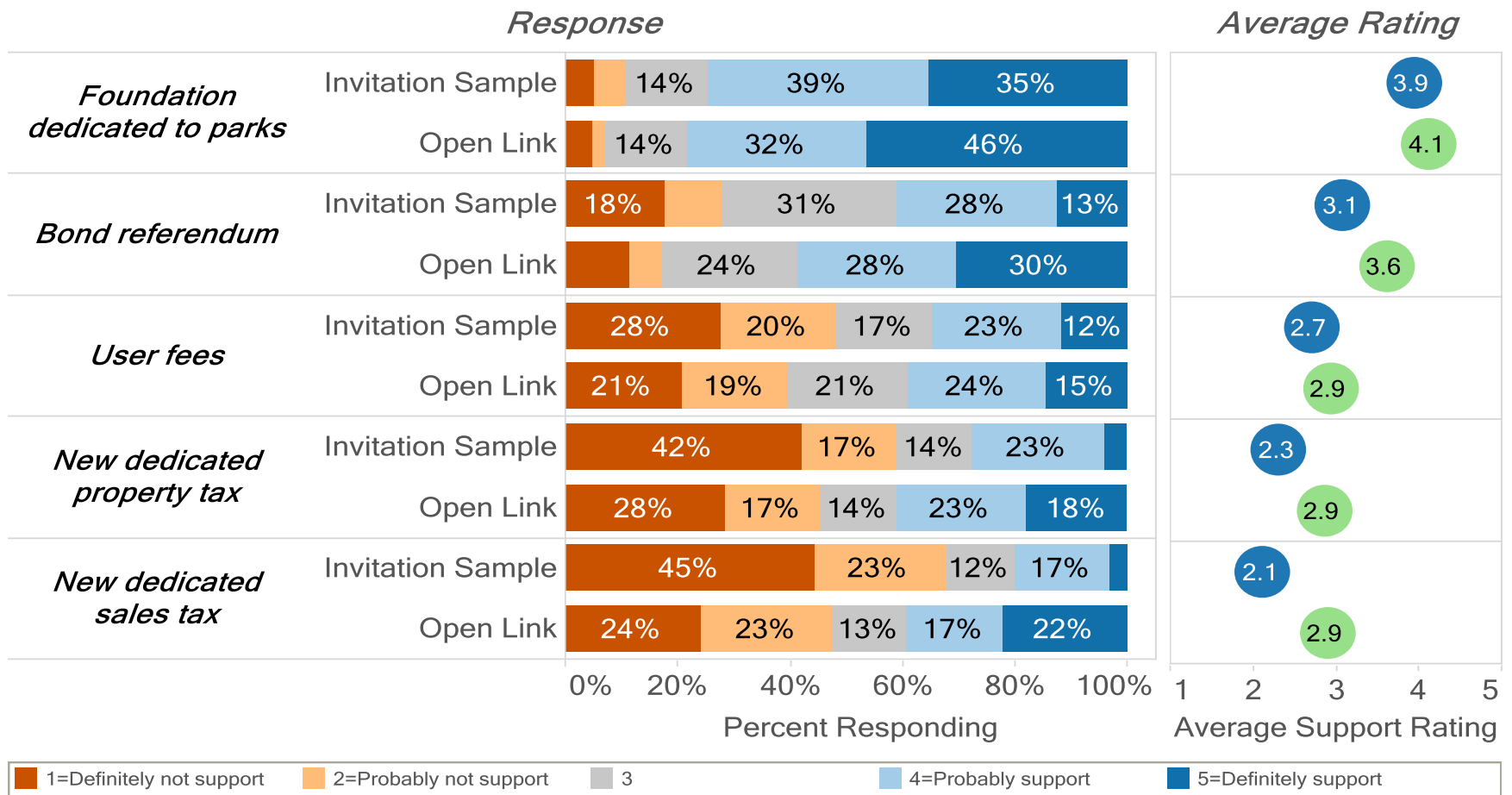
Amherst Parks & Recreation | If you had \$100 to spend on parks and recreation facilities, services and/or programs, how would you allocate that \$100 across the following categories?
Average Allocation Amount



\$ LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR FUNDING

When asked about increasing existing resources, invitation respondents were most supportive of a foundation dedicated to parks (74% rated '4' or '5') or a bond referendum (41% rated '4' or '5'), but were less likely to support new property taxes (59% rated '1' or '2') and an increase in sales tax (68% rated '1' or '2'). Open link respondents were more supportive of all the potential funding mechanisms.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Willingness to Support Parks & Recreation Funding Mechanisms

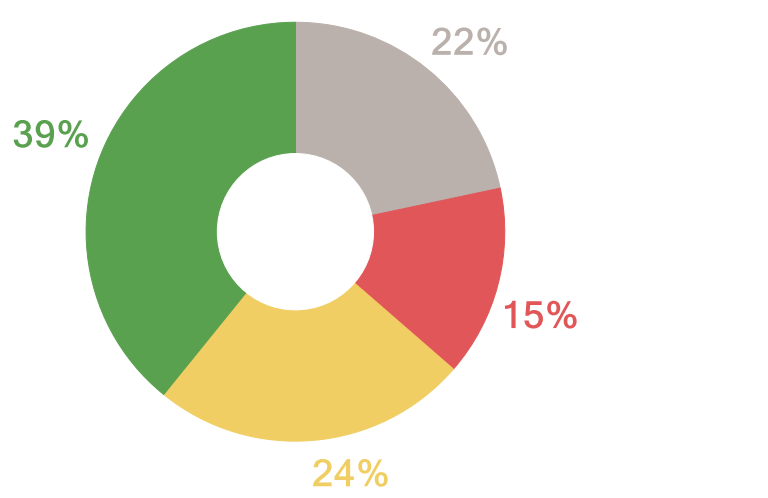


\$ IMPACT OF USER FEE INCREASES ON USAGE

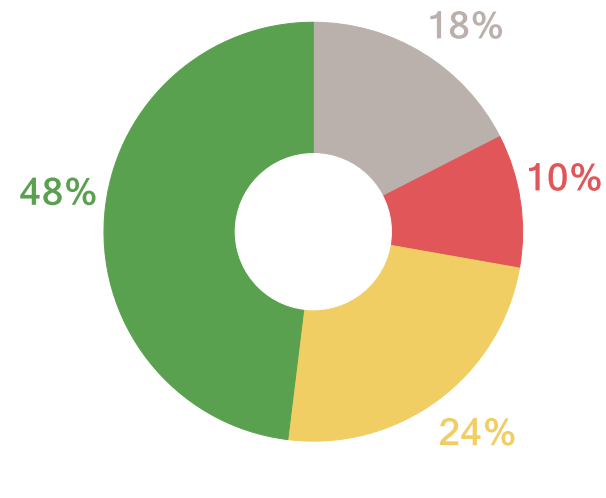
Thirty-nine percent of invitation respondents said moderate rental fee increases would not limit their ability to participate, while 24% said it would limit their participation somewhat and 15% said it would limit their participation significantly. Roughly a quarter (22%) didn't know. Open link respondents are less likely to be impacted by user fees overall.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Impact of Fee Increases on Parks & Recreation Participation

- Moderate fee increases would not limit my/our ability to participate at all
- Moderate fee increases would limit my/our participation somewhat or would have a minor impact
- Moderate fee increases would limit my/our participation significantly
- Dont know/uncertain



Invitation Sample



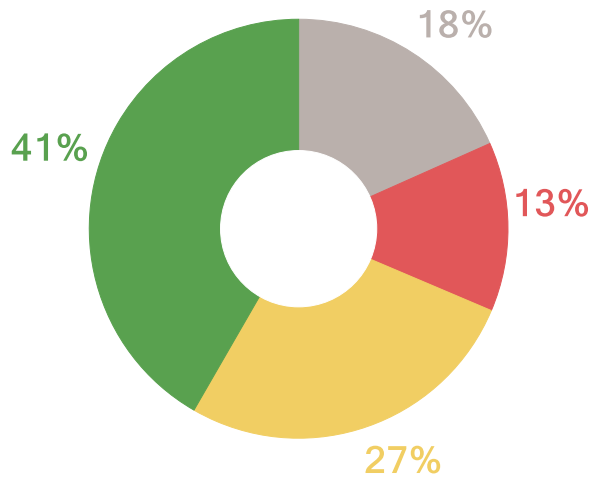
Open Link

\$ IMPACT OF USER FEE INCREASES ON USAGE

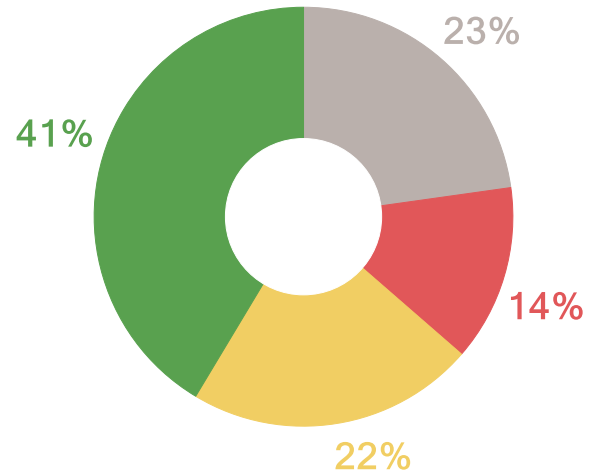
Households with children and those without had similar responses for whether user fees would impact their participation ability. Forty-one percent of households with children stated fee increases would not affect their participation, equal to households without children.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Impact of Fee Increases on Parks & Recreation Participation

- Moderate fee increases would not limit my/our ability to participate at all
- Moderate fee increases would limit my/our participation somewhat or would have a minor impact
- Moderate fee increases would limit my/our participation significantly
- Dont know/uncertain



Kids at home

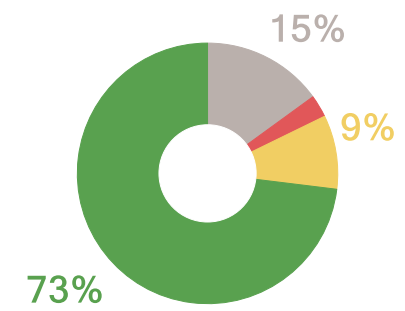
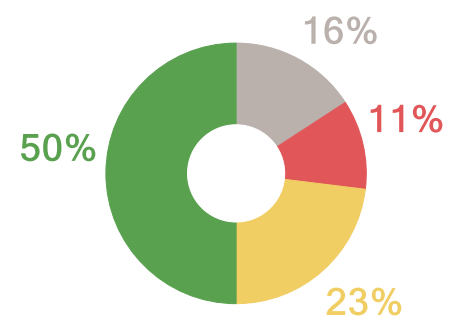
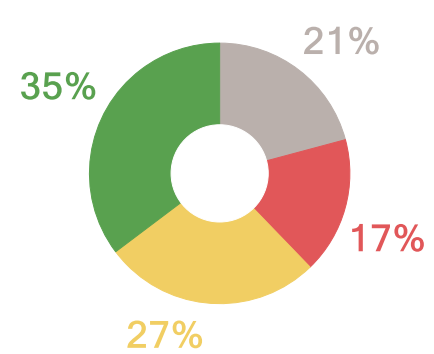
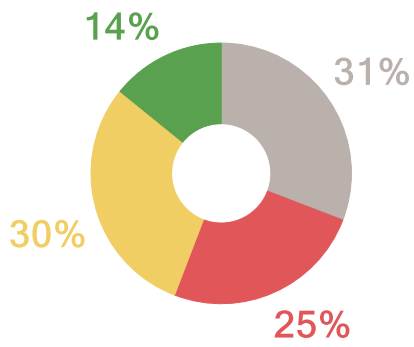
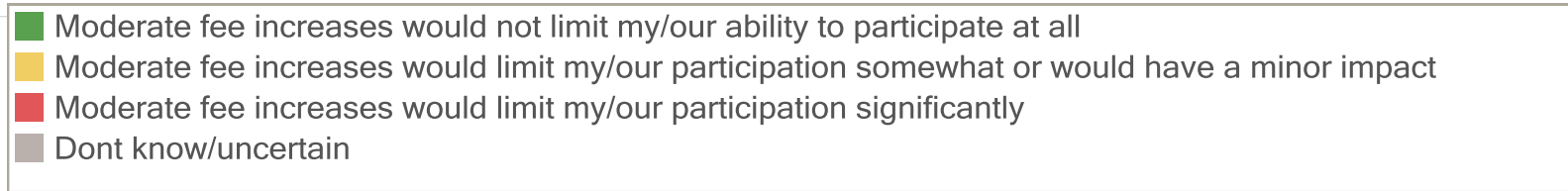


No kids at home

\$ IMPACT OF USER FEE INCREASES ON USAGE

Perhaps not surprising, as income increases the impact user fees has on participation drops. For all respondents in both samples who make under \$50k, 14% say user fees will not limit their ability to participate compared to 73% of respondents who make at least \$200k.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Impact of Fee Increases on Parks & Recreation Participation



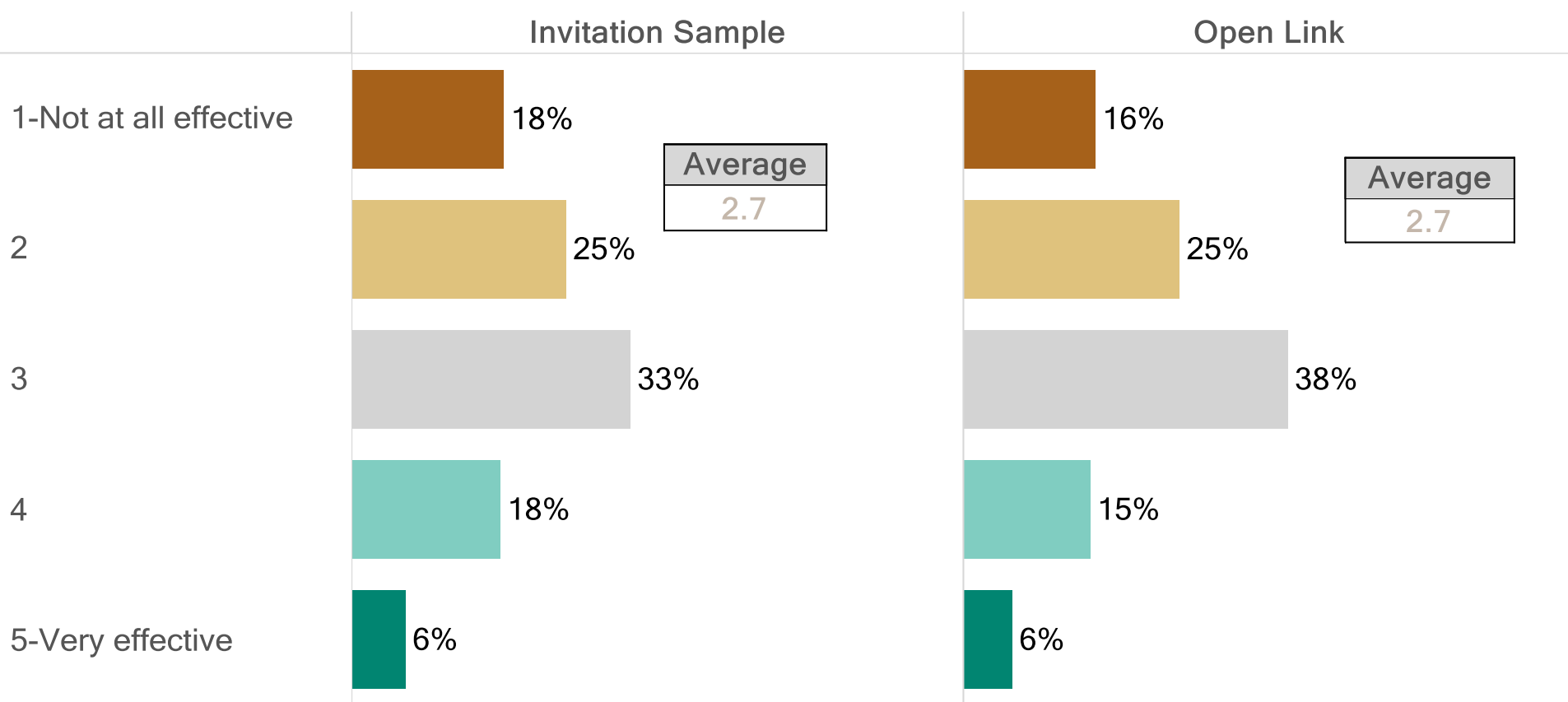
Under \$50,000 \$50k-\$99,999 \$100k-\$199,999 Over \$200k



EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

Communication effectiveness is an area that could be improved, as 43% of invitation respondents rated overall effectiveness a '1' or '2' on a 5-point scale. The average effectiveness rating among invitation respondents is 2.7. Only 24% rated current communication as effective.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | How effective are we at reaching you with information on parks and recreation facilities, services, and programs?

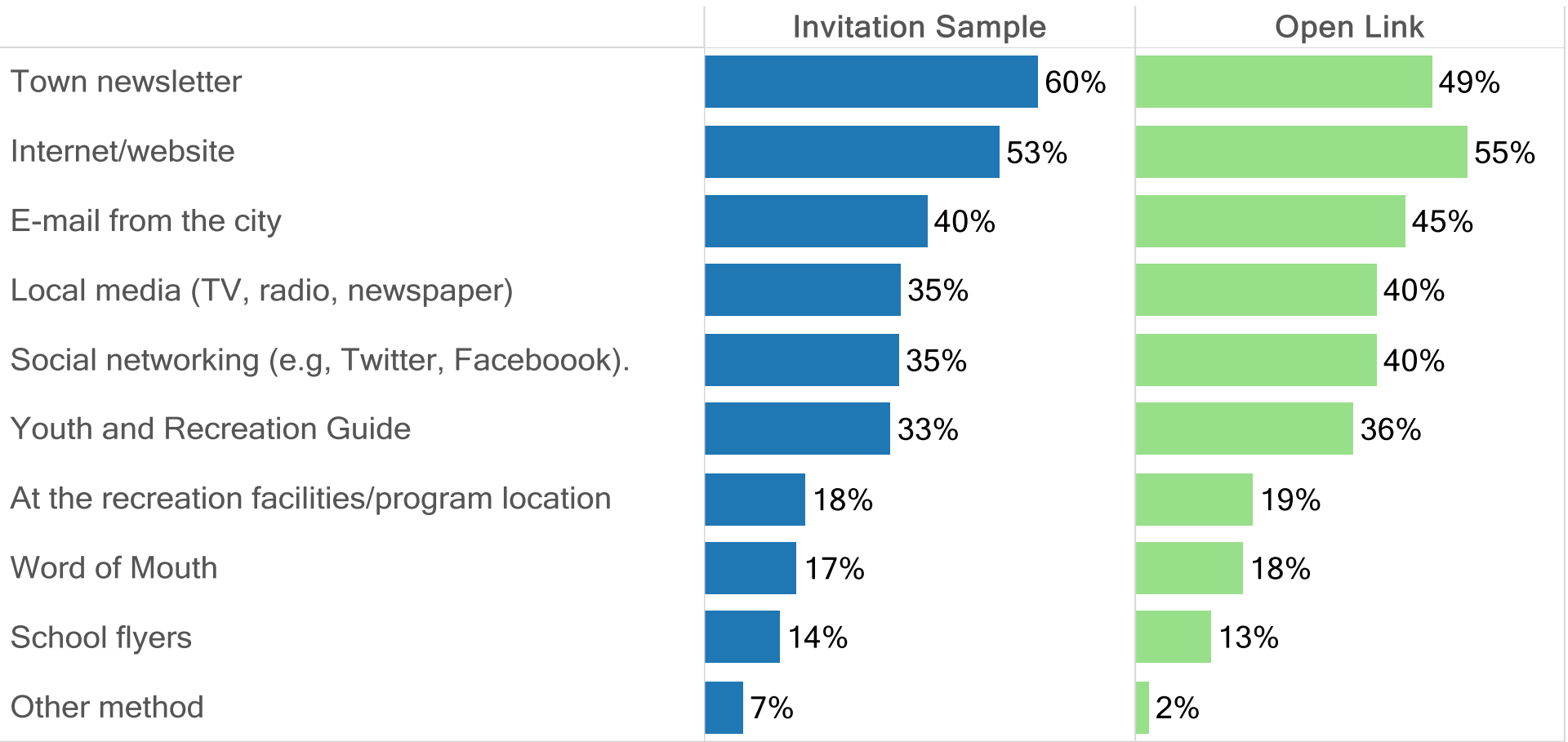




BEST WAY TO RECEIVE INFORMATION

Invitation respondents indicated the Town newsletter (60%), internet/website (53%), and e-mail from the city (40%) are the best ways to reach them with information. Open link respondents were less likely to select the Town newsletter as a good communication avenue and preferred internet/website.

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Best Way to Reach You With Parks & Recreation Information



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS

At the end of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments or suggestions for Amherst's Park and Recreation Department. Themes that came up frequently through the survey were again prominent in this comment field, including a desire for protecting the open space in Amherst, upgrades to existing parks/facilities, and increased trail and pathway connectivity. Many invitation respondents also took the opportunity to praise the efforts of the department. A selection of verbatim invitation responses is shown below. The full listing of responses is provided in the appendix.

Since the outdoor pools are only open 2 months of the year, we definitely need an indoor pool facility!

Amherst seems to have the privilege of having significant areas for further development without needing to expand into already reasonably inhabited areas. I would strongly support any and all efforts to keep the Westwood area green space. There is sufficient space elsewhere to build the types of facilities being proposed.

More information is needed about parks through media, PSA's , etc.

Open space is disappearing in Amherst. Preserving large, natural, passive space should be a priority before our town is built out and it's gone. Passive park space would be an asset to the health & well being to the entire town. Trailways connecting to other parks, bike paths would further enhance usage.

The programs for kids are very important. Although I no longer need them, they were beneficial to me as a single parent. They were affordable and taught life lessons in sports, teams, day care, and community.