

# Amherst Parks and Recreation Master Plan Findings Summary

OCTOBER 10 & 11, 2017



# Agenda

- 1) Master Plan Process
- 2) Demographic Trends
- 3) Community Input
  - Focus Groups & Public Meetings
  - Survey
    - Respondent profile
    - Key findings
- 4) Inventory & Level of Service
- 5) Next Steps
- 6) Questions & Answers



# Master Plan Process

1) Strategic Kick-Off

2) Public Engagement

- Citizen and stakeholder focus groups and public meetings
- Statistically valid and online surveys

3) Inventory and Level of Service Analysis

- Existing assets, programs, staffing, budget, maintenance program, demographics, recreation trends

**4) Findings Presentation and Visioning Workshop**

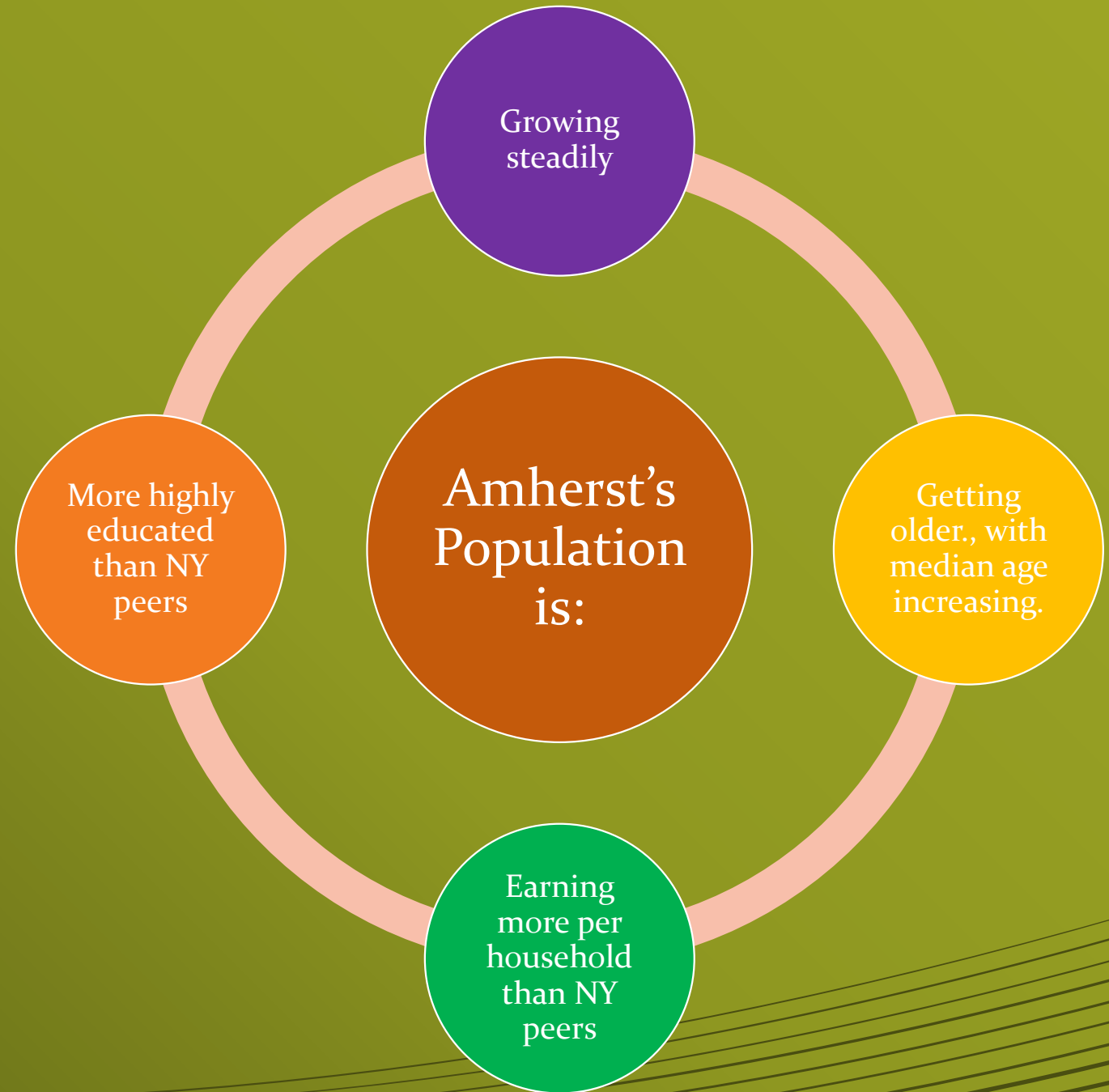
5) Draft Plan and Presentation

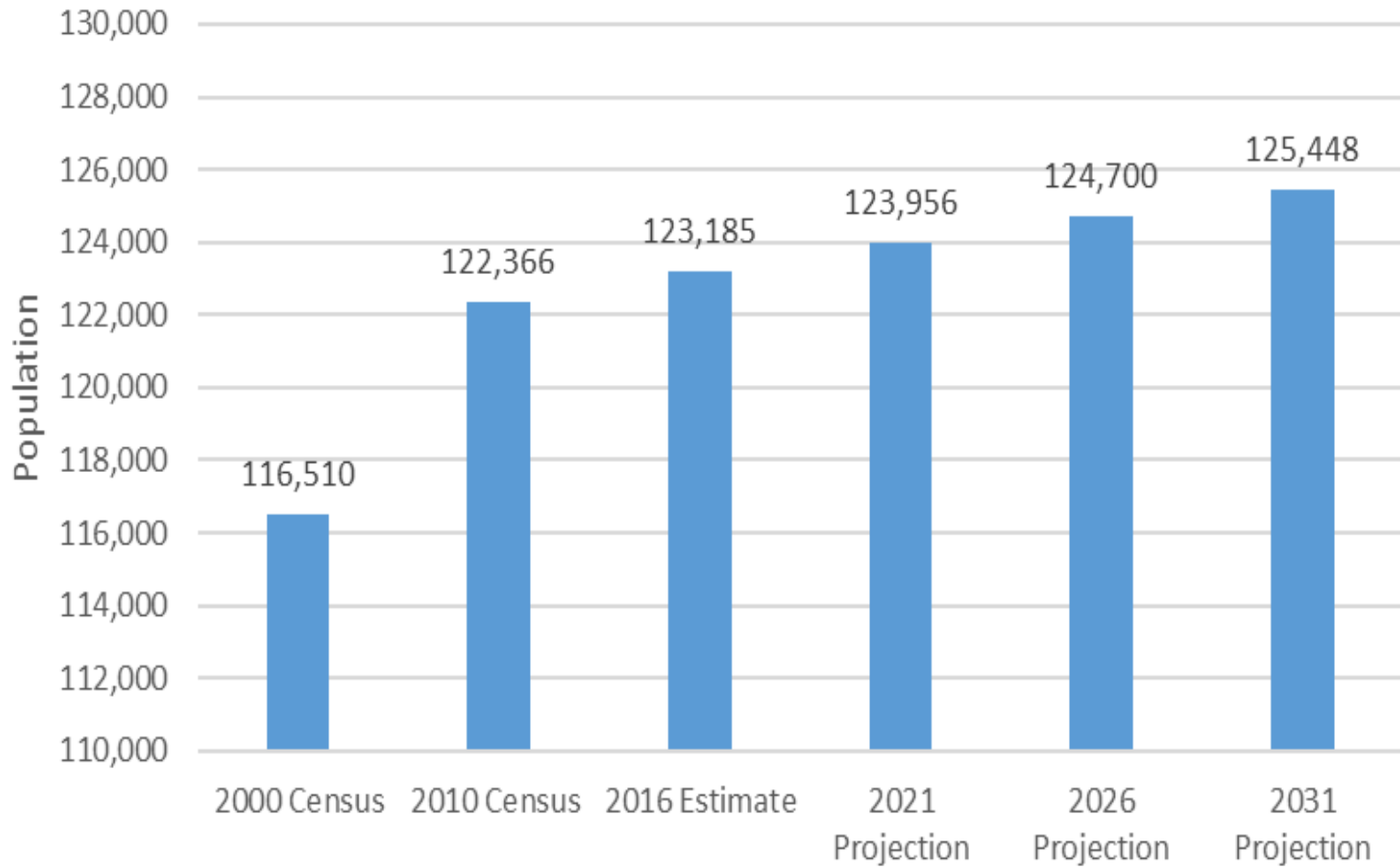
6) Final Plan and Presentation

# Demographic Trends

## *2016 Statistics*

- 123,185 residents
- 41.2 years old – median age
- 49,733 – households
- \$67,654 – median household income
- 80% Caucasian, 10% Asian



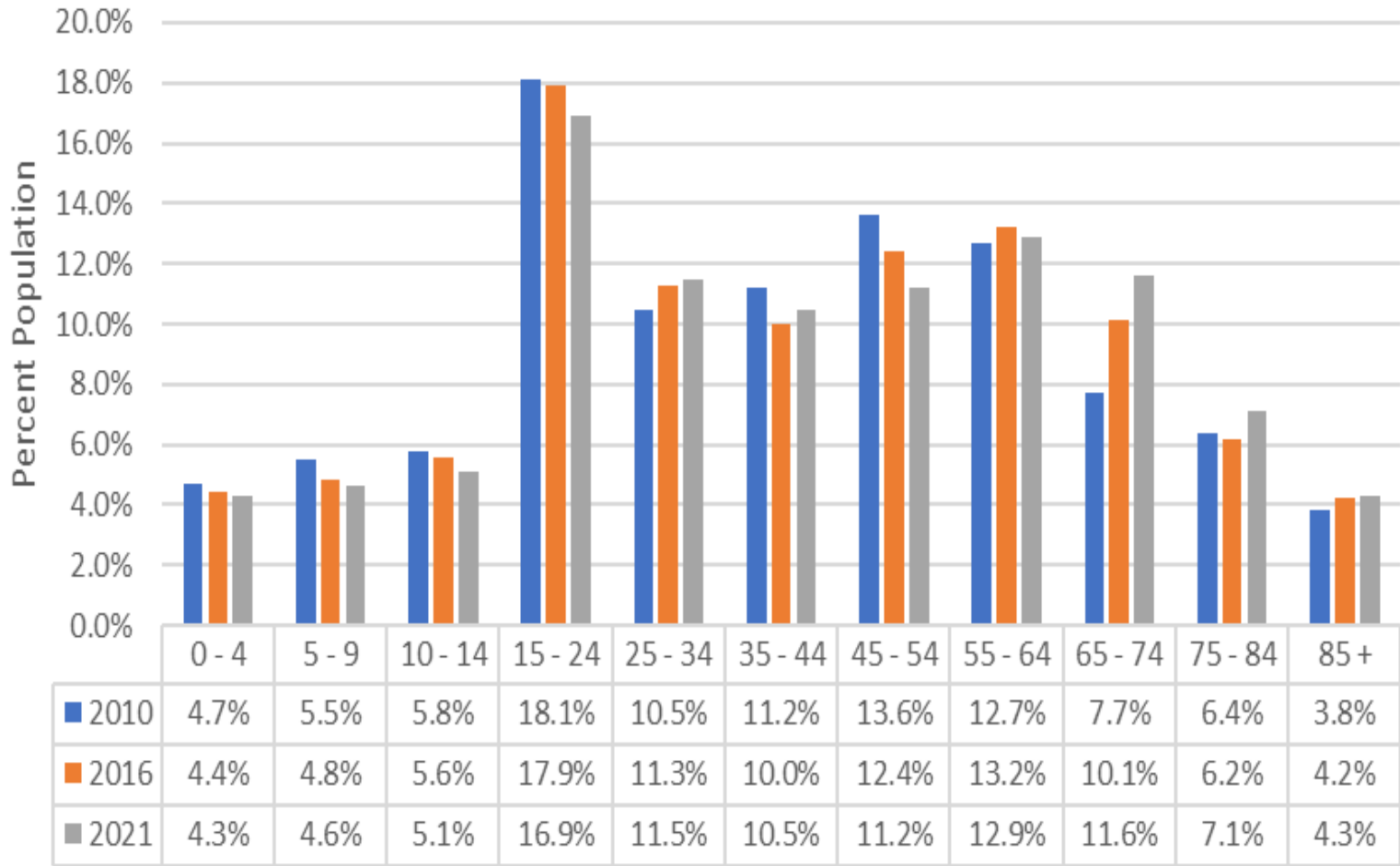


## *Population Growth*

- 2000-2010 growth spike
- 0.12% growth projected 2016-2021

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, and Esri Business Analyst

Getting older, with median age increasing.



## Age Distribution

- Age 15-24 is the largest single age cohort
- Population is getting older

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, and Esri Business Analyst

# Community Input Focus Groups & Public Meeting

10 Focus Groups & a Public Meeting (May 9 & 10)

Approximately 100 participants

Most were long time residents (20+ years)

Identified SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)  
of parks and recreation facilities and services

# Focus Group Key Findings – Strengths

High quality programs, especially for youth.

*Lots of praise for staff.*

Northtown Center at Amherst = “flagship” facility and major regional ice sports hub and sports field complex.

Trails/paths are well used and valued.

Participants appreciate existing assets.



# Focus Group Key Findings – Challenges

Level of basic maintenance is below expectations

Land acquisition/open space conservation is difficult

Many facilities are heavily programmed - little time for free/open use

Demand > capacity for fields, pickleball, aquatics, and indoor space.

Sites lacking infrastructure/comfort features (restrooms, seating, etc.)

Hard to find information (especially via town website)

# Focus Group Key Findings – Priorities

A guiding vision for town parks, recreation, and open space is needed

Improve delivery of up-to-date information to the public

Strengthen existing joint use agreements and partnerships; explore opportunities for new partnerships

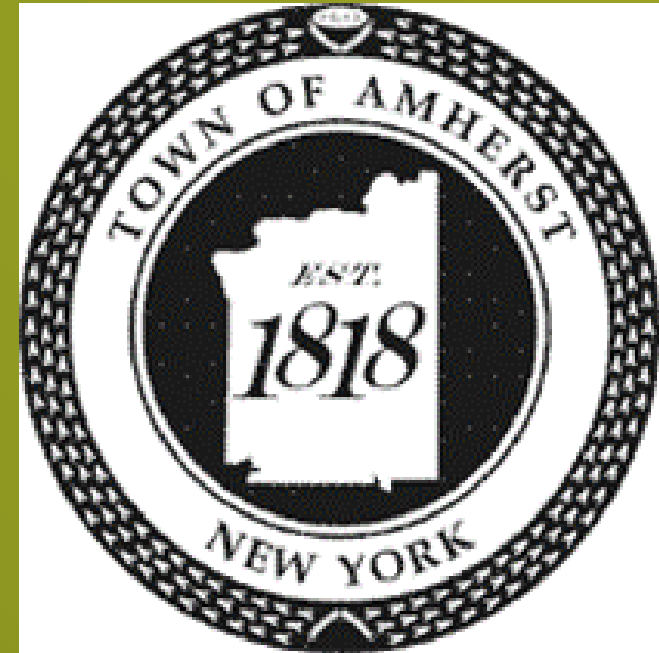
Enhance maintenance standards for parks and outdoor recreation areas

Create an interconnected system of pedestrian and bicycle trails

# Community Survey Overview

## Statistically Valid Survey

- 3,500 surveys mailed in July 2017
- 560 completed responses received (16.3% response rate)
- Margin of error +/-4.1% at 50% response
- Open Link Survey
- 243 responses



AMHERST, NY  
PARKS & RECREATION SURVEY RESULTS  
AUGUST 2017

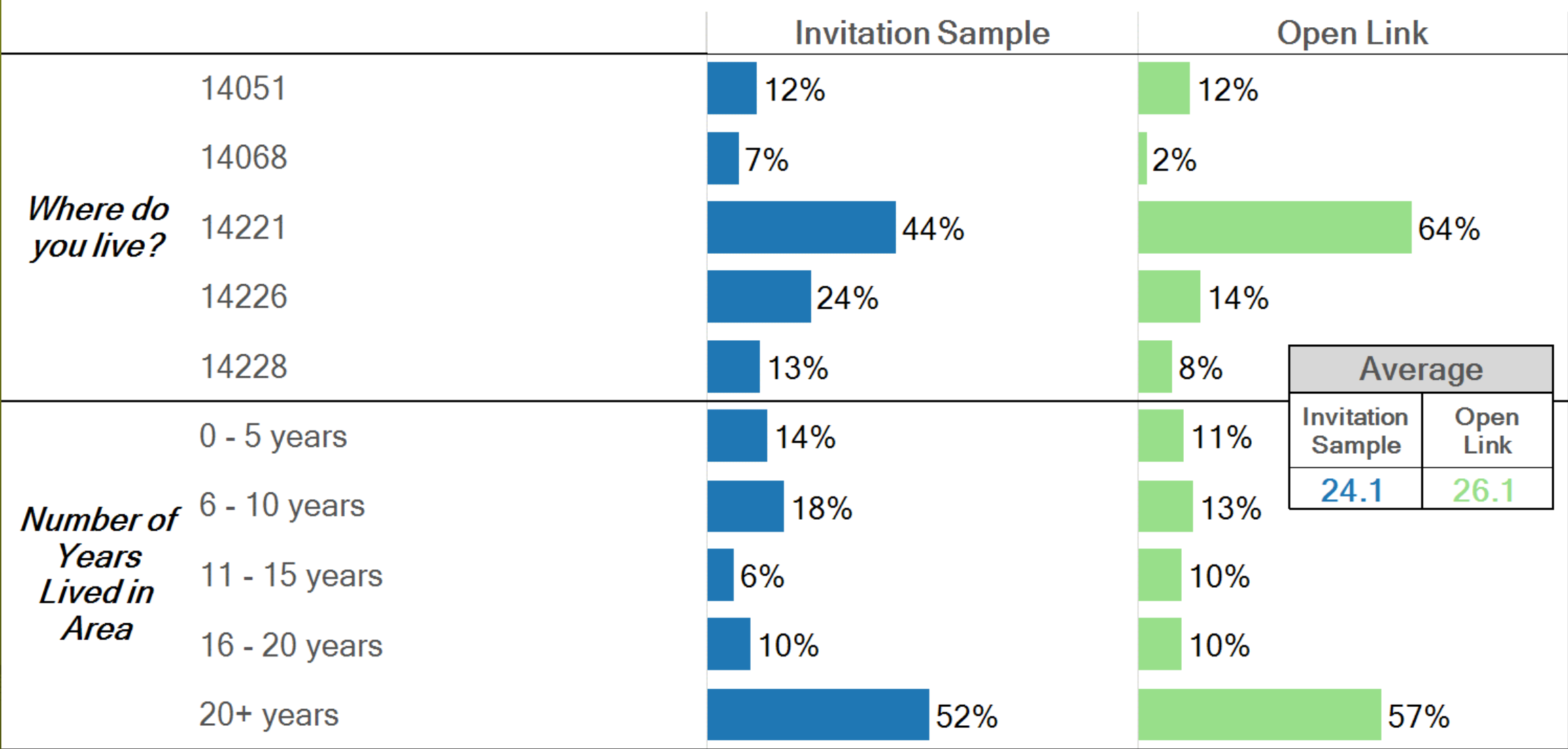
# Respondent Profile

## Amherst Parks & Recreation | Demographic Profile

		Invitation Sample	Open Link
<i>Gender</i>	Female	51%	55%
	Male	49%	45%
<i>Age</i>	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%
<i>Household Status</i>	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%
<i>English Primary Language</i>	No	1%	
	Yes	99%	100%

# Respondent Profile

## Amherst Parks & Recreation | Residential Profile



# Top Ten Survey 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 Ten Survey 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

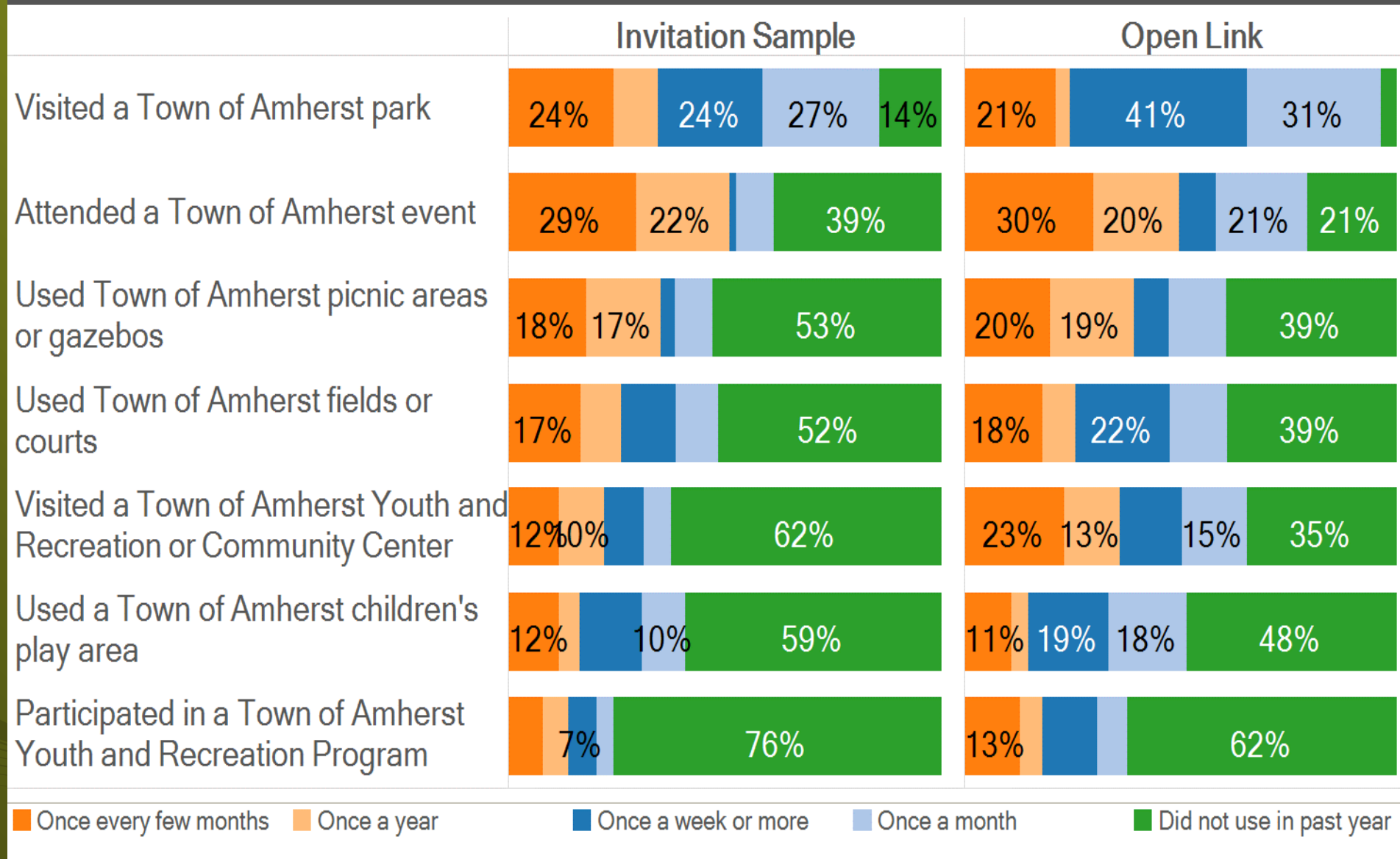
Creating a foundation for parks is the most desirable funding option for residents. On the contrary, invitation residents are much less likely to support sales tax increases or dedicated property taxes which fund parks.

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.

# Facility / Program Use

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



*Most frequently used:*

- Parks
- Fields/Courts
- Children's play areas

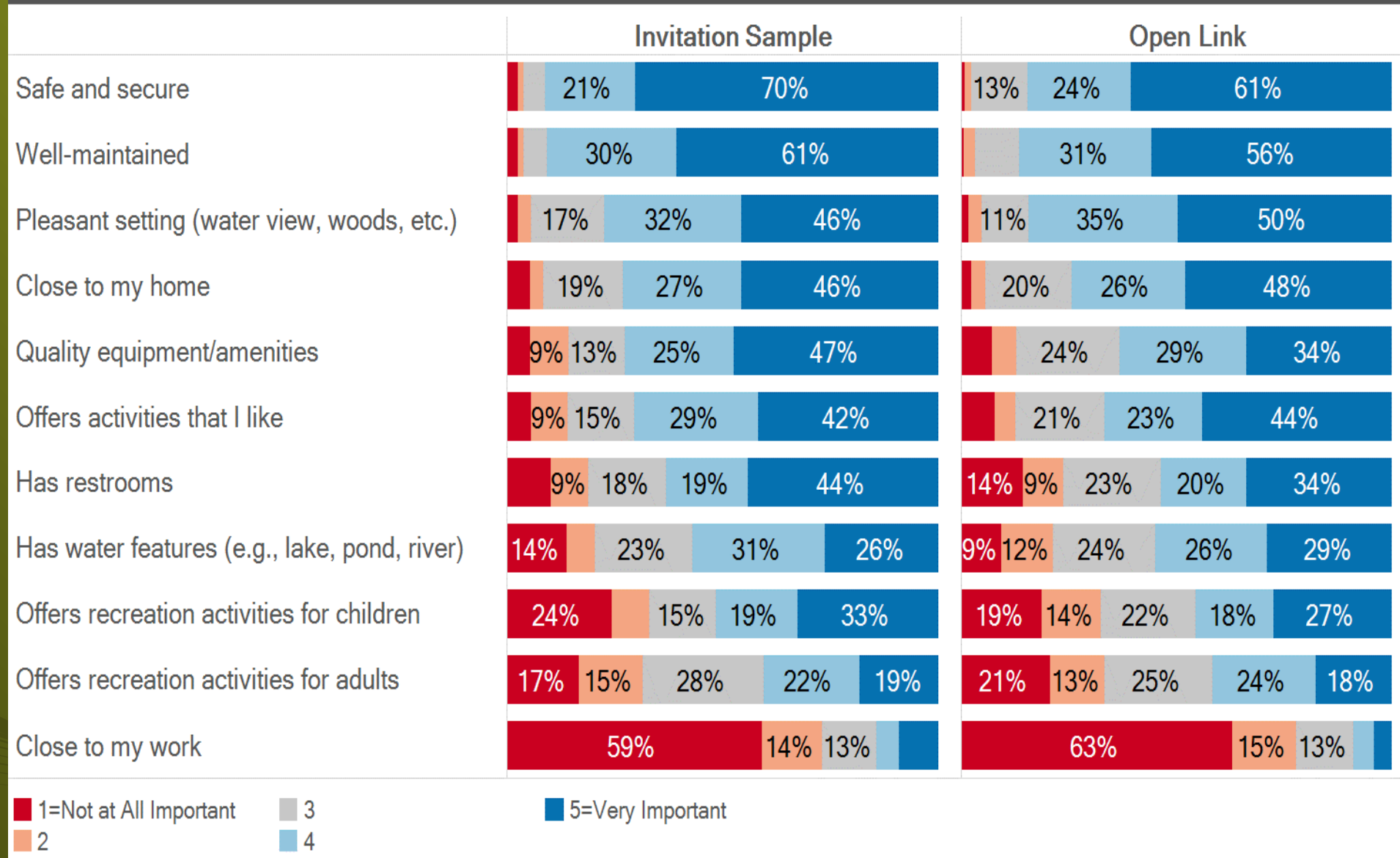
*Least frequently used:*

- Youth and Recreation Center and Community Centers
- Picnic areas and gazebos



# Favorite Park Characteristics

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



Important factors:

- Safe
- Well-maintained
- Green/open space
- Close to home

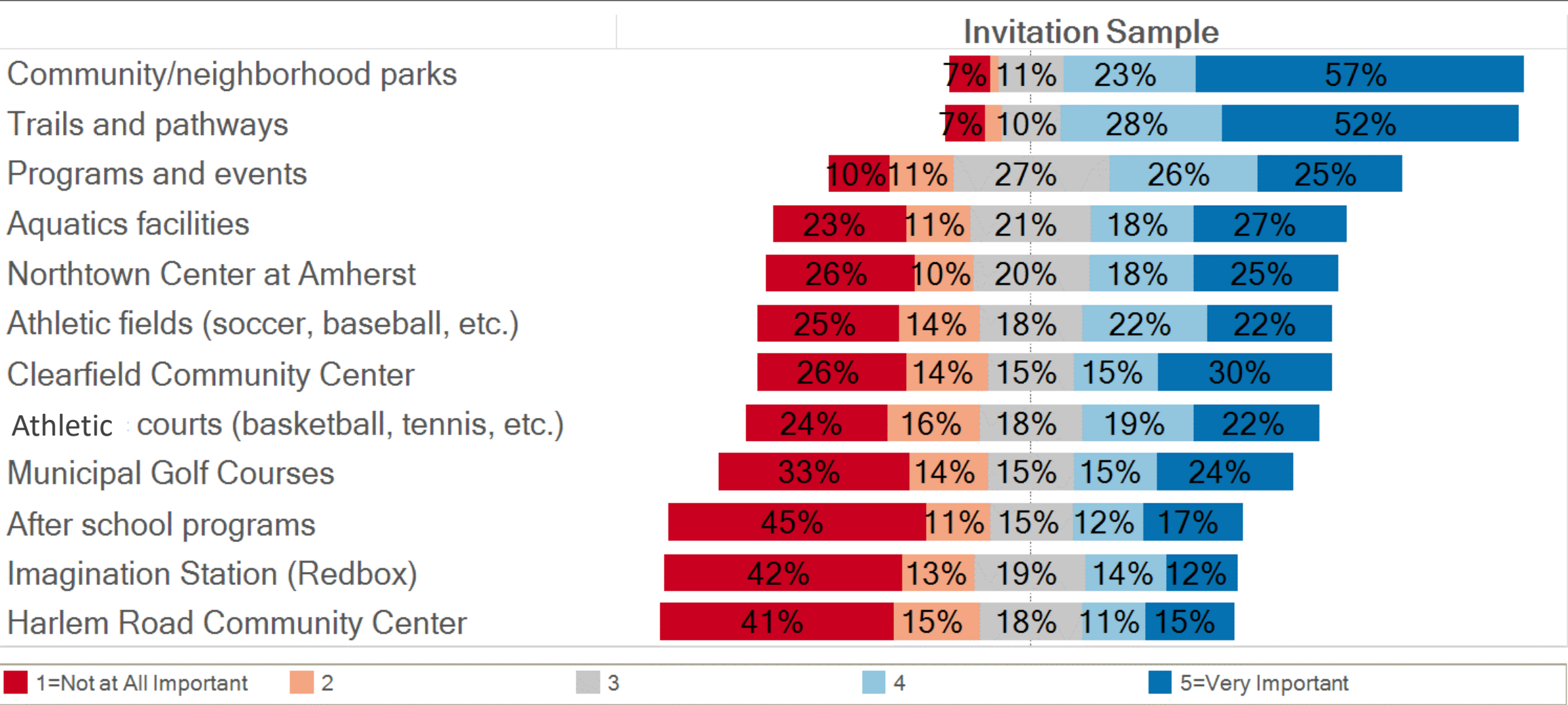
Least important:

- Proximity to work

# Importance of Facilities

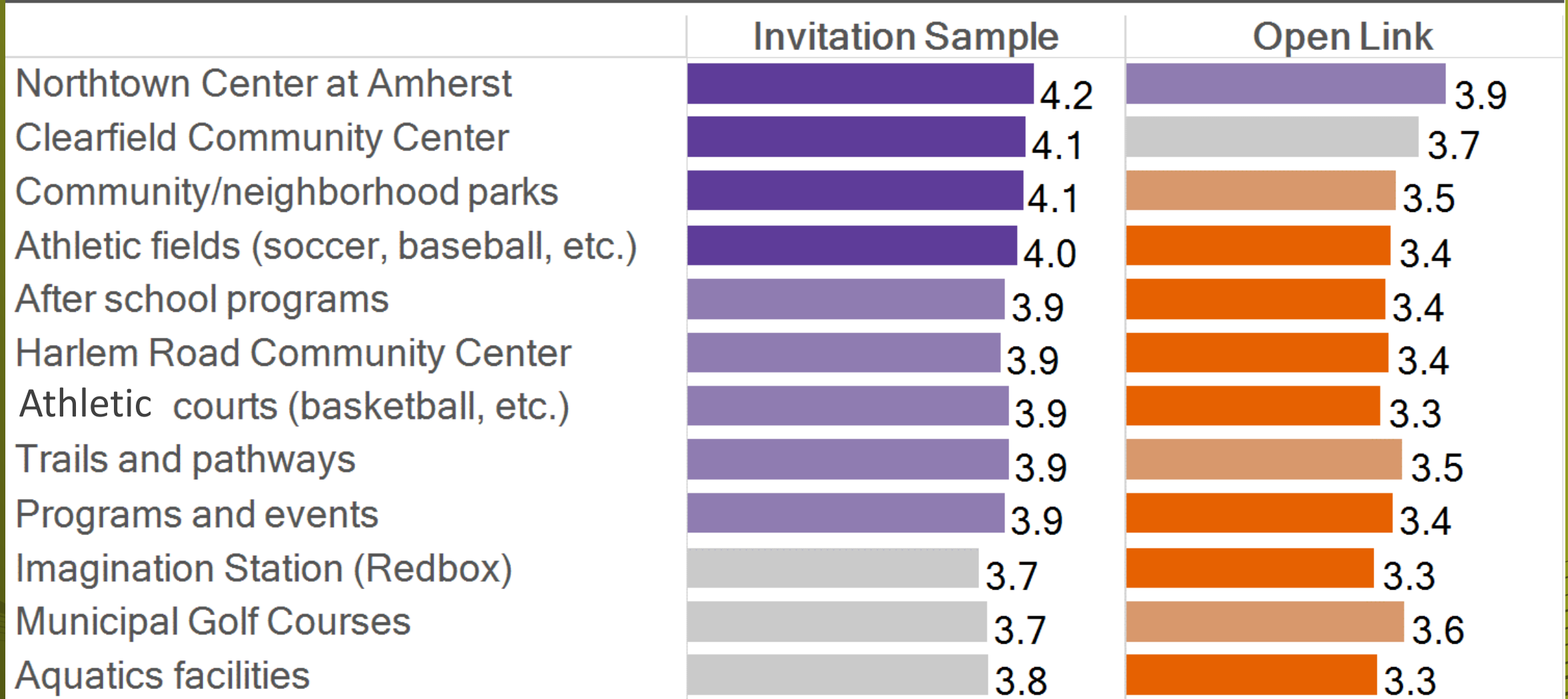
## Amherst Parks & Recreation | Importance of Facilities to Household

*Sorted by Midpoint*



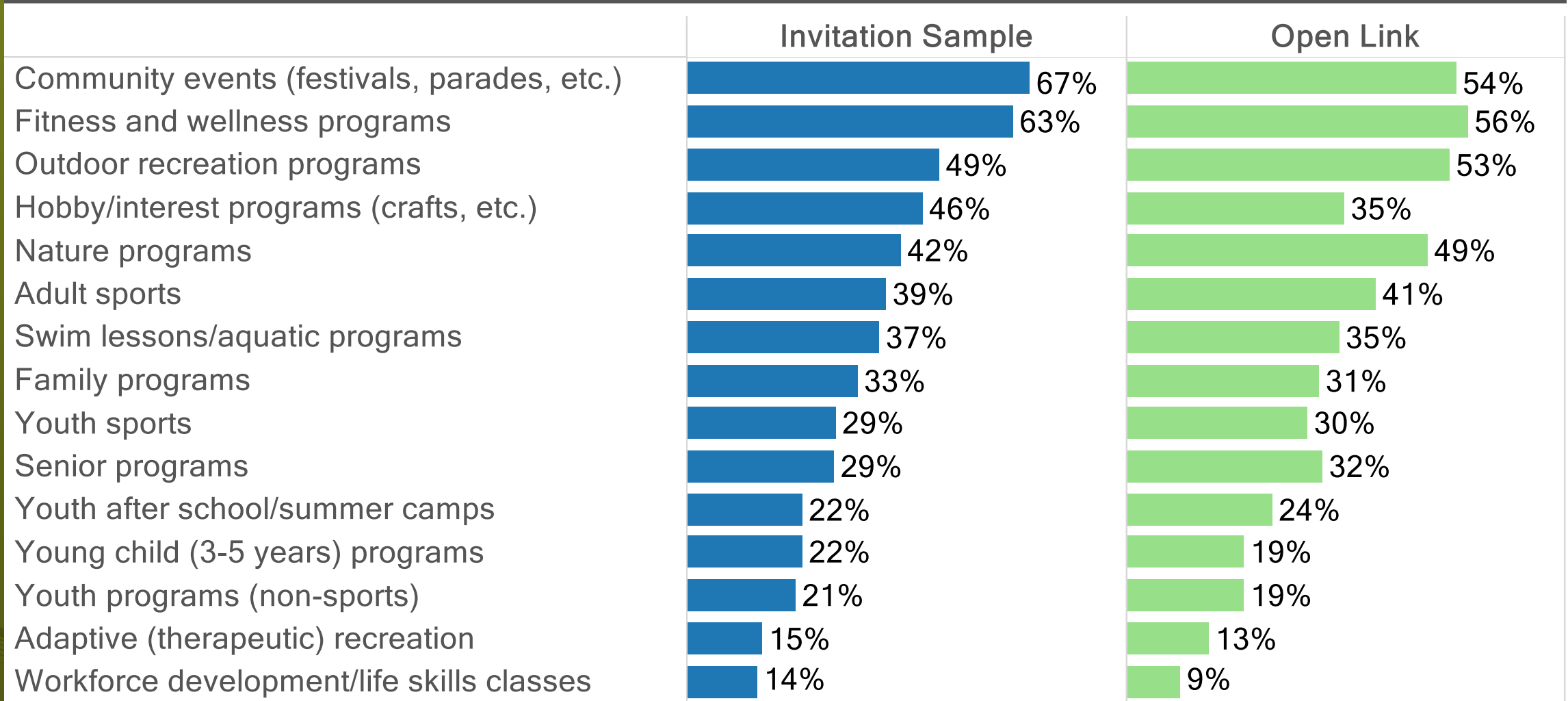
# Facilities meet needs

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



# Program needs identified

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



# 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.

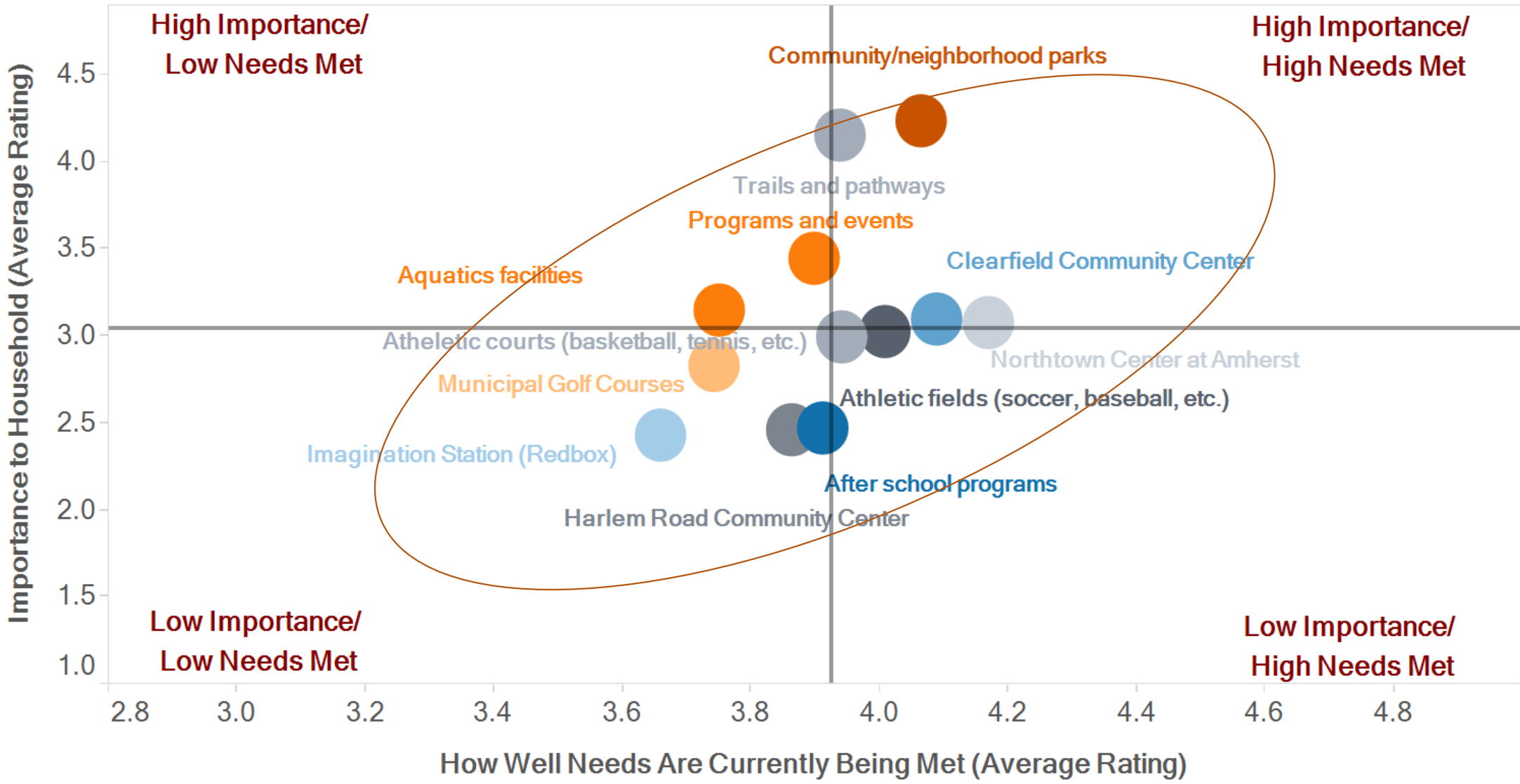
## **Low Importance/ Low Needs Met**

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**

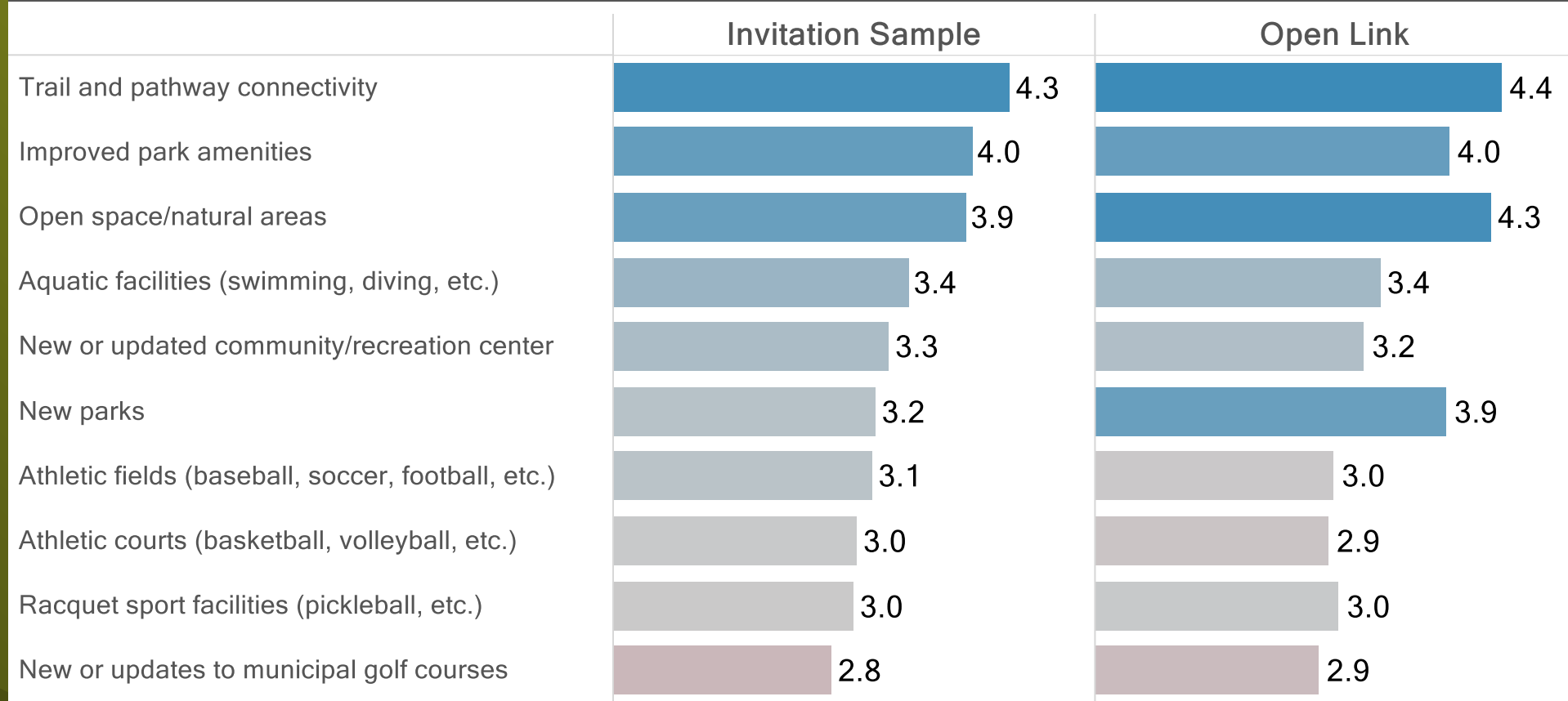
# Importance/Performance Matrix

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



# What facilities are most important to improve?

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

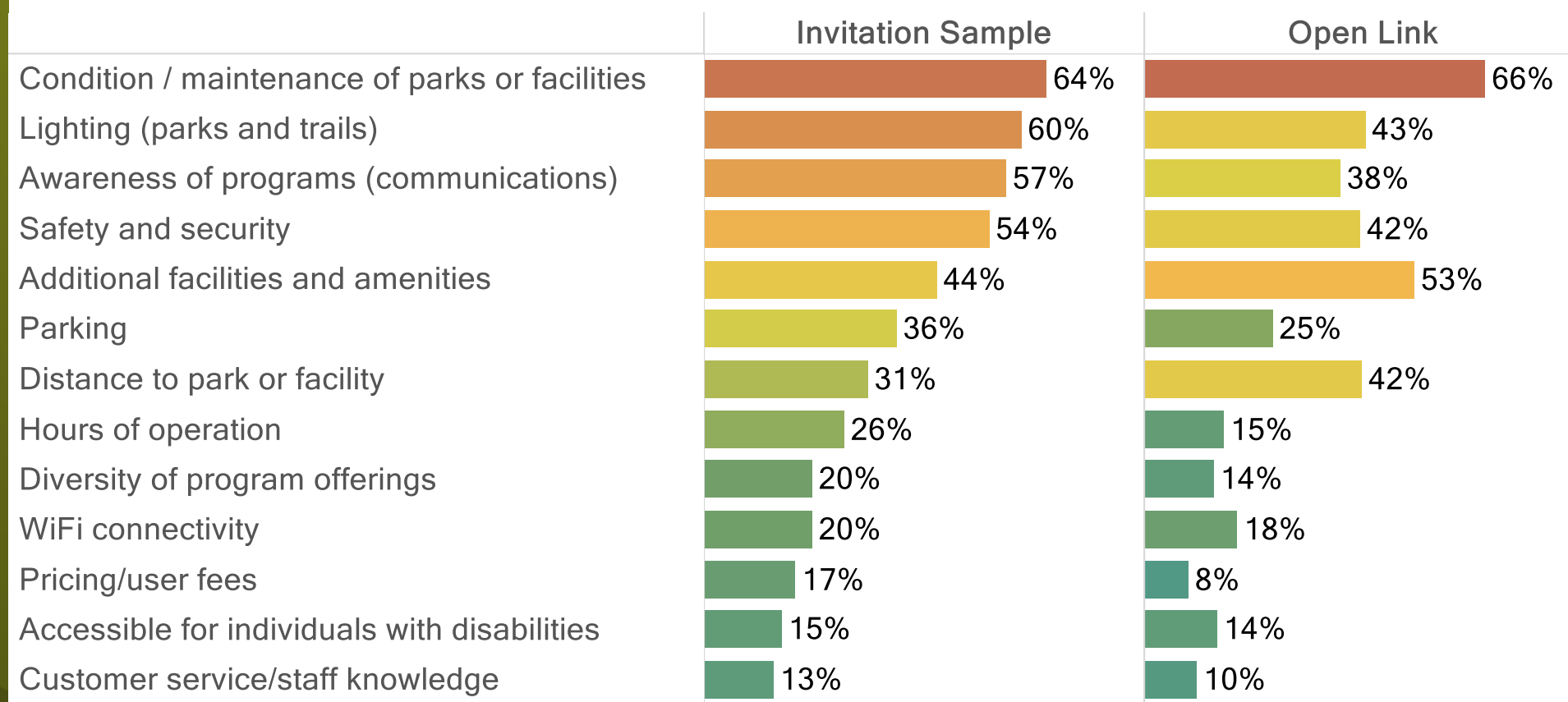


Other suggested improvements:

- Pickleball courts
- Creation of a new park
- Indoor aquatics facility

# Increasing use of parks and recreation facilities

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

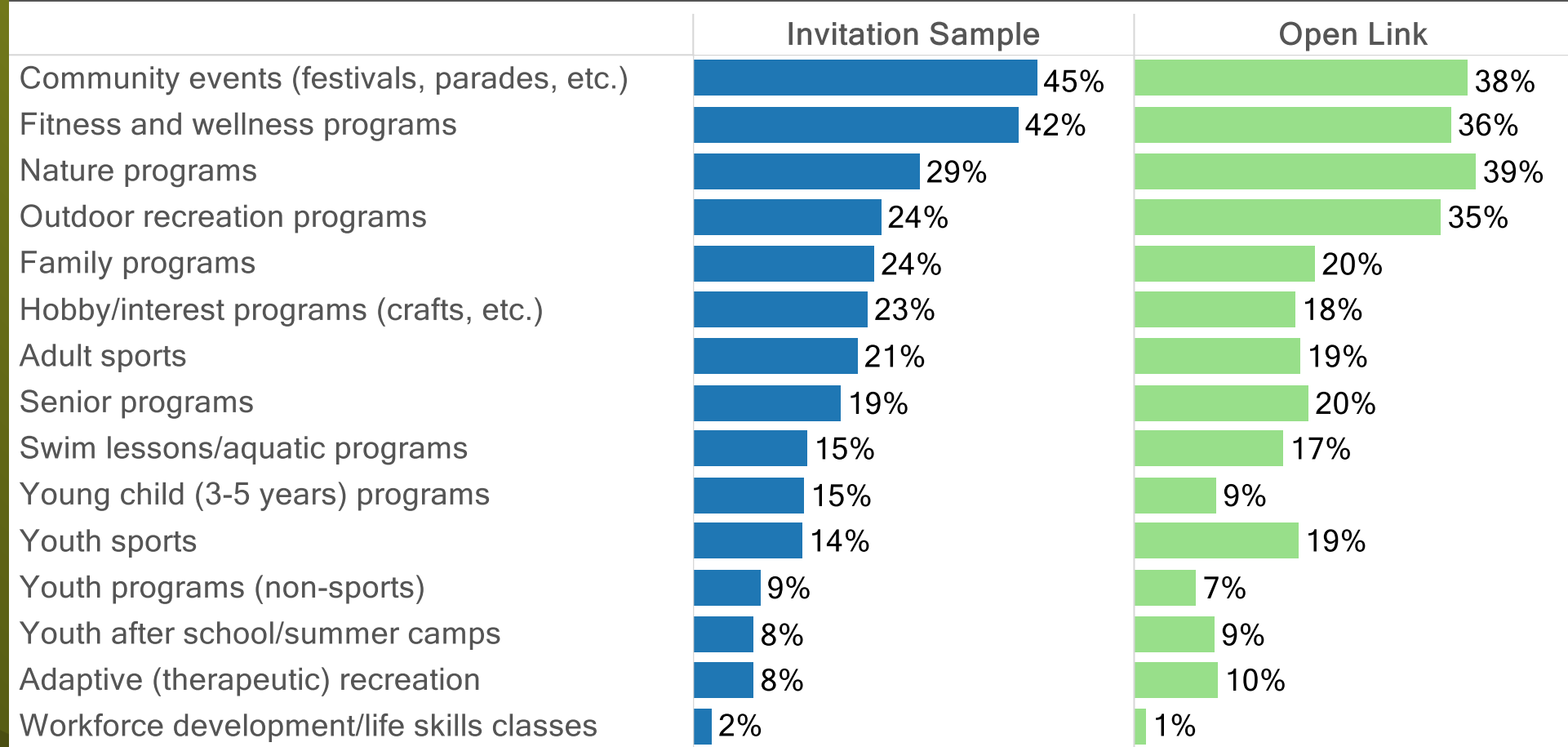


Enhancing basic infrastructure and amenities at existing park and recreation sites to improve the user experience is of high importance to respondents.



# What programs are most important to enhance?

Amherst Parks & Recreation | Top Three Highest Priority Programs Combined

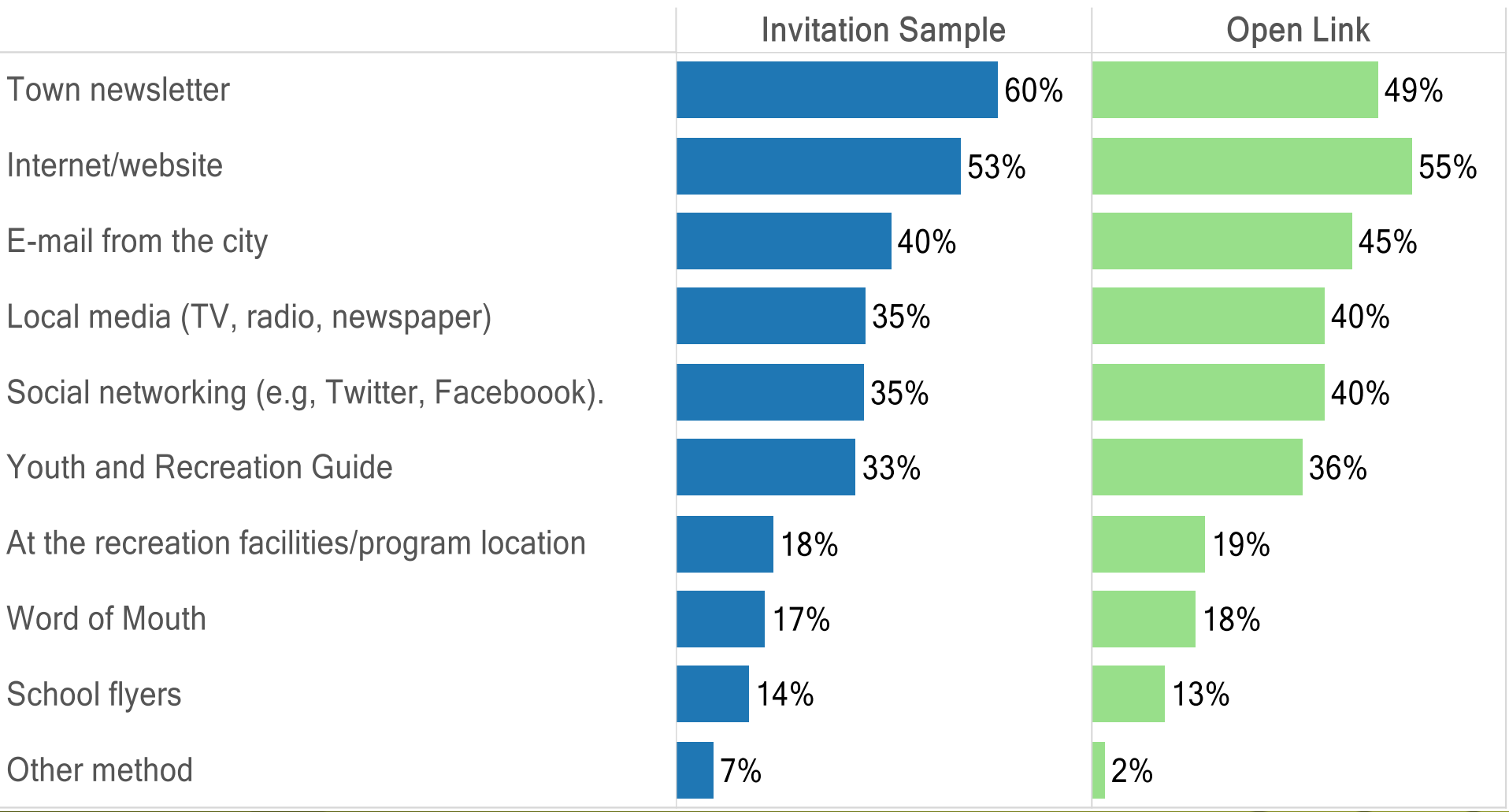


Top programs to enhance:

1. Community events
2. Fitness and wellness
3. Nature and outdoor recreation

# Best means to inform the public

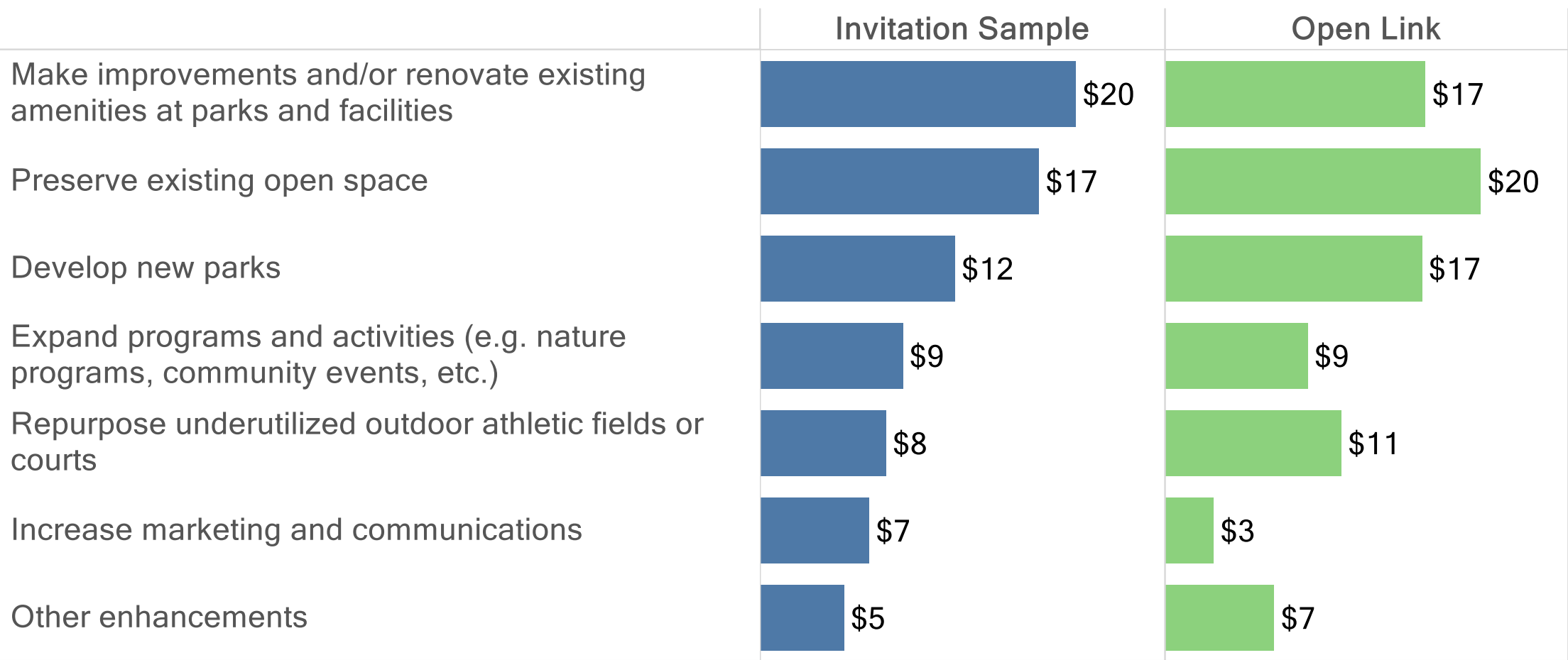
Amherst Parks & Recreation | Best Way to Reach You With Parks & Recreation Information



Most respondents want to receive information via the Town newsletter, Town website, or by email. Other media, including the Youth and Recreation Guide are important outreach tools.

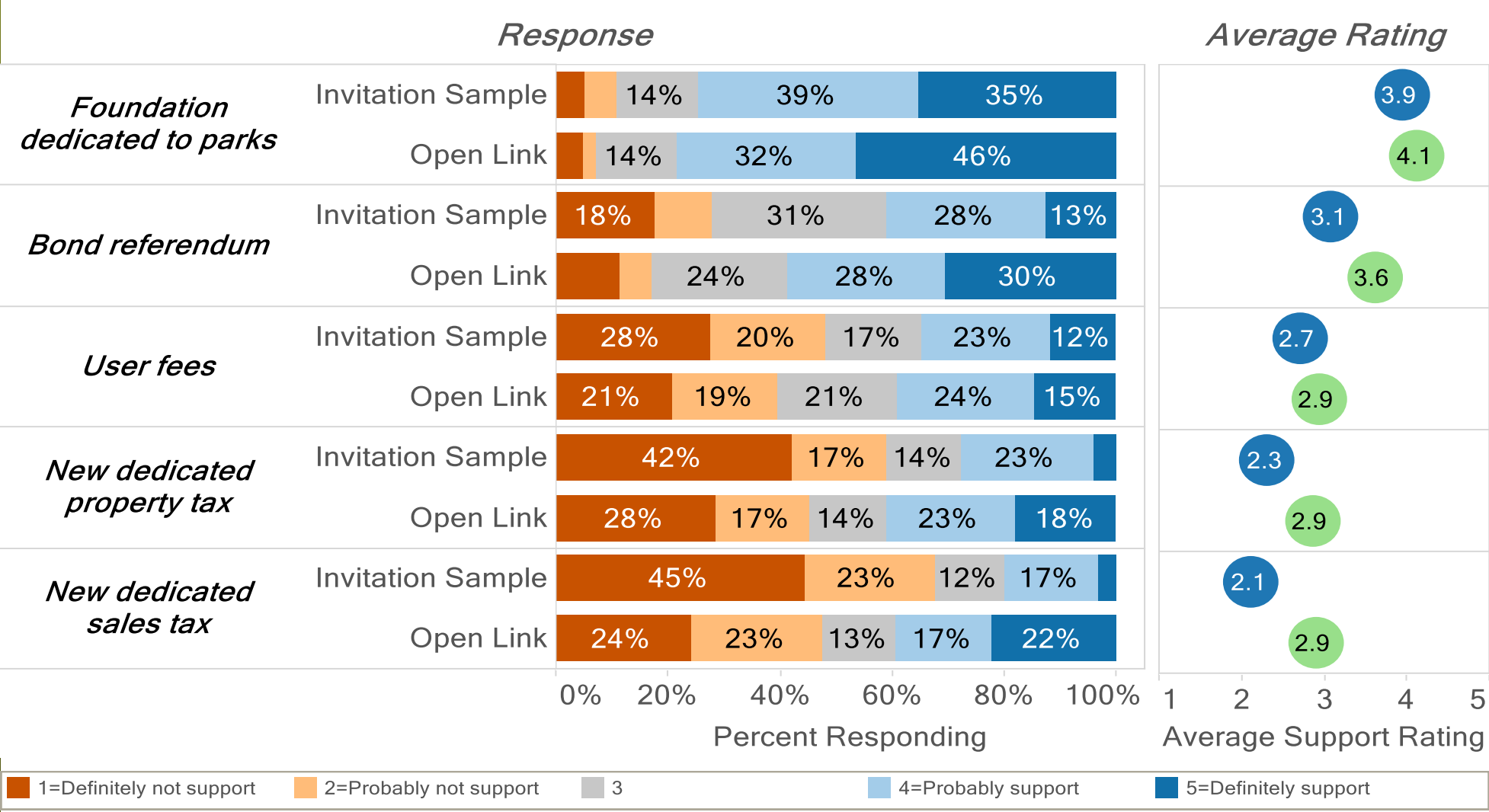
# Funding for improvements, the \$100 question

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*



# Support for funding mechanisms

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



Higher support for creating a dedicated foundation and/or bonding

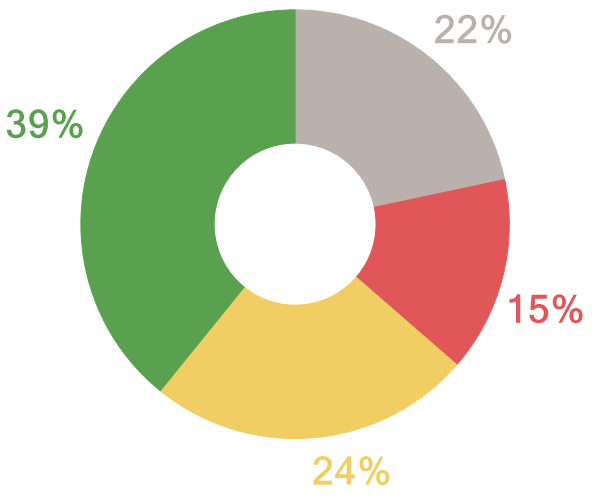
Vs.

New taxes

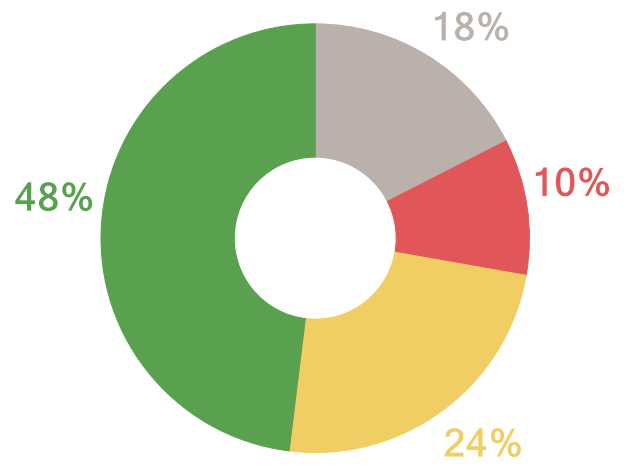
# Potential impact of user fee increases

## 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

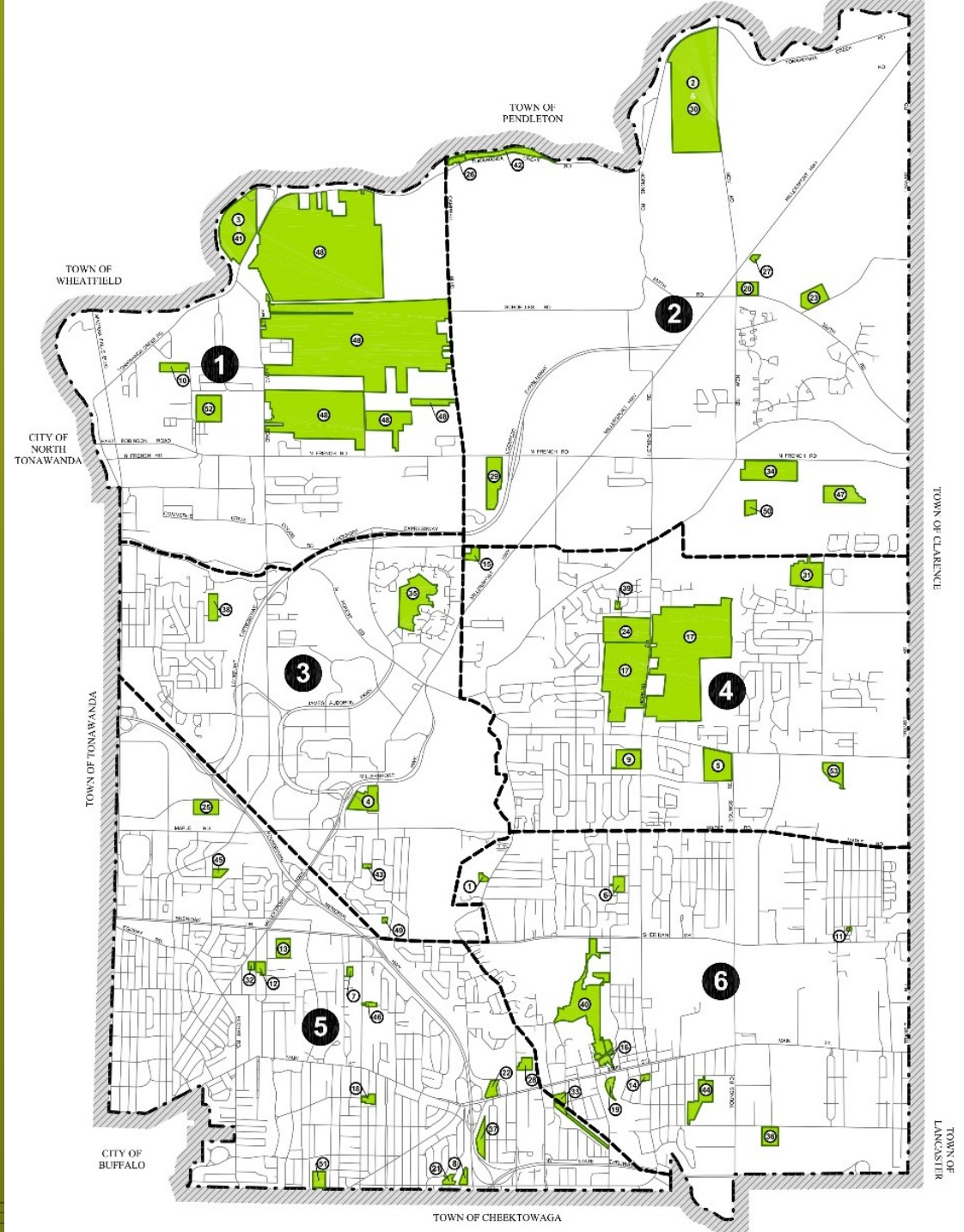


Open Link

Moderate fee increases would not limit, or only have a minor impact on respondents' ability to participate in Town recreation programs.

# Existing Parks

- Town Area: 53.6 sq. mi
- Total Parks in Town: 64
- Total Parks Surveyed: 43
- Total Park Acreage: approximately 1,230 acres



# Inventory & Analysis Process

- Inventory/analyze 43 of the 64 parks in Summer 2017
- Evaluated each park feature  
*Exceeds Expectation (3)      Meets Expectation (2)      Below Expectation (1)*
- Categorized park sites, analyzed areas, and distribution of assets

Town of Parks Recreation Facilities Inventory					
Facility Name	Amherst Veterans Canal Park		Inventory Date:	Jun.21	GIS point
Address	146 Brenon Road, Buffalo, NY 14228		Ownership (circle one):	Client	Area
					34.1 ac
					Other:
Ambiance Score		3	Rating Key: 3= Exceeds Expectation      2=Meets Expectations      1=Below Expectations		
Action Plan: Develop a second overlook/seating area on the east side of the boat launch.					
Action Plan: Resurface parking area with asphalt paving.					
Action Plans Completed?		Yes	Comments:		
Facility Component					
ID	Feature	Rating	Qty	Comments (inc. uses)	
AVCP-1	PRK (Parking Area)	2		Asphalt is in good condition, ample parking spaces, curb stops are in poor condition, no ADA striping	
ACVP-2	STRCT 1 (Overlook Areas)	2	2	Picnic area is well maintained, fencing is in good condition, right overlook does not have ADA access	
ACVP-3	STRCT 2 (Pavilion)	2	1	Structure is in good condition, paint is chipping off, structure has ADA access	
ACVP-4	SFURN 1 (Picnic Tables)	2	6+	Tables are in good condition, not all tables match, some do not have ADA access	
ACVP-5	SFURN 2 (Benches)	2	5+	Benches are in good condition, not all benches match, some do not have ADA access	

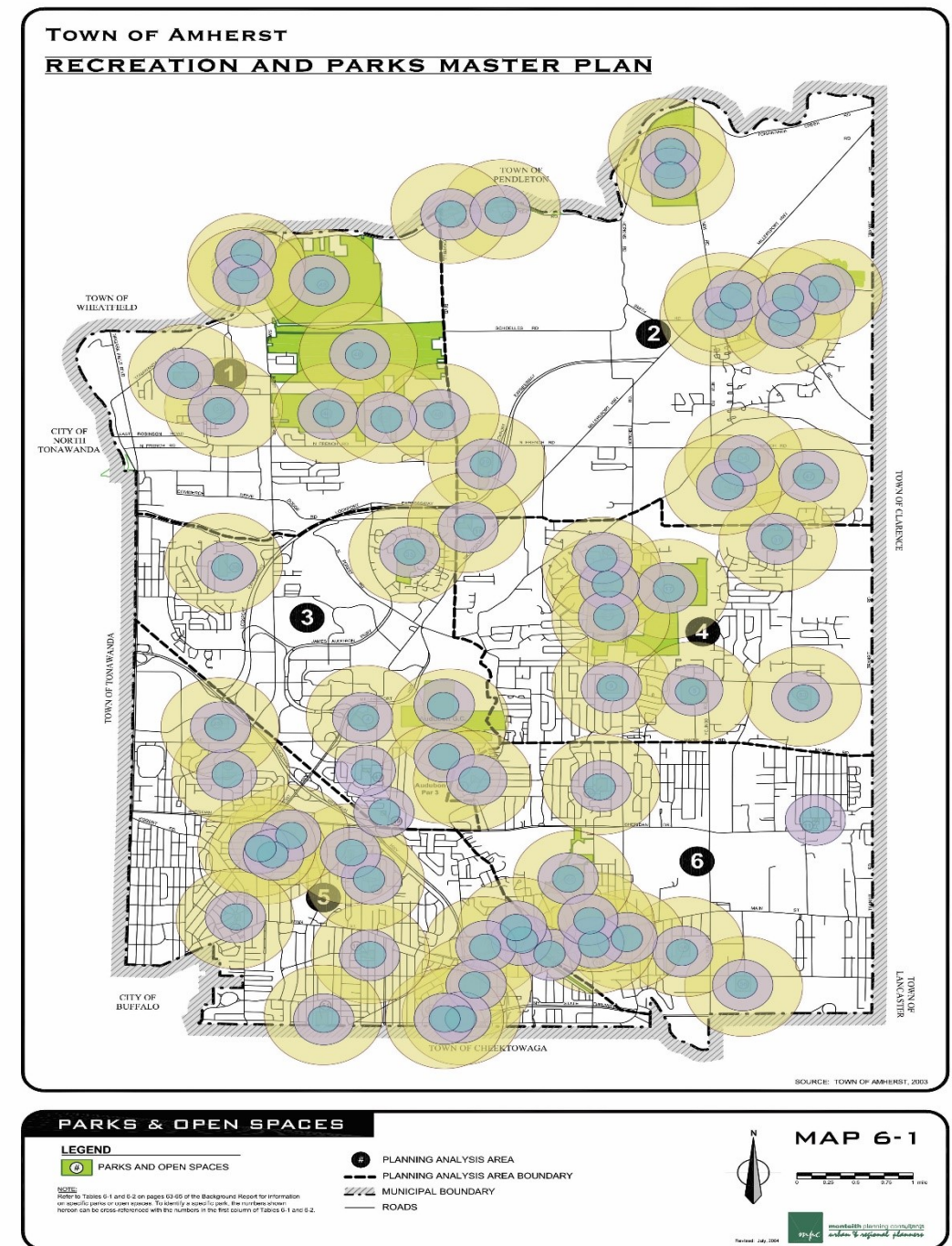
# Park System Composition

<b>ATHLETIC COMPLEXES (8 to 50 acres)</b>	<b>COMMUNITY PARKS (20 or more acres)</b>	<b>NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS (8 or less acres)</b>	<b>RECREATION CENTERS</b>	<b>NATURE AREAS/ CONSERVATION AREAS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amherst Recreation Complex</li> <li>• Central Amherst Baseball Complex</li> <li>• Garnet Park</li> <li>• Getzville Fire Department Park</li> <li>• Kingsgate Park</li> <li>• Lou Gehrig Amherst Park</li> <li>• North Amherst Recreation Area</li> <li>• North French Recreation Area</li> <li>• Sattler Field</li> <li>• Wehrle FAA Recreation Area</li> <li>• West Royal Parkway Recreation Area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bassett Park</li> <li>• Billy Wilson Park</li> <li>• Clearfield Community Center Park</li> <li>• Eggertsville Community Park</li> <li>• Glen Park</li> <li>• North Forest Park (Pool)</li> <li>• Paradise Park</li> <li>• Saratoga Park</li> <li>• Willow Ridge Park</li> <li>• Windsor Woods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Briarhurst Park</li> <li>• Campus Drive Recreation Area</li> <li>• Cindy Drive Recreation Area</li> <li>• Creekwood Park</li> <li>• Dana Heights Park</li> <li>• Dellwood Park</li> <li>• ECO Park</li> <li>• Fetto Park</li> <li>• Jurek Post</li> <li>• North Amherst Fire Company</li> <li>• Park Forest Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amherst Center for Senior Services</li> <li>• Clearfield Community Center (Pool)</li> <li>• Harlem Road Community Center</li> <li>• Northtown Center at Amherst</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amherst State Park</li> <li>• Amherst Veterans Canal Park</li> <li>• College Park</li> <li>• Dann Lake Park</li> <li>• East Amherst Conservation Area</li> <li>• Fisherman's Wharf</li> <li>• Great Baehre Conservation Area</li> <li>• Nature View Park</li> <li>• Oakwood Conservation Area</li> <li>• Walton Woods Recreation Area</li> </ul>



# Level of Service Analysis

- Most park areas are athletic complexes or community parks
- Parks are well distributed throughout Town
  - Larger Areas to the North
  - Neighborhood Parks in South
- Access to parks primarily by automobile; major pedestrian barriers
  - (ie. major road corridors, limited sidewalk/ trail connectivity)



# Park System – Strengths

- Excellent athletic facilities (soccer, baseball, and softball)
- Ample existing open space in parks
- Good distribution of parks throughout Town
- Community parks close to residential areas
- Variety of amenities throughout park system



# Park System - Weaknesses

- Aging/ dated facilities
- Accessibility (parking, playgrounds, facilities)
- Some facilities underutilized
- Limited security lighting within parks
- Difficult to find parks (wayfinding, signage)
- Lacking non-organized sport areas
- Connectivity with trails (neighborhoods to parks & parks to parks)
- Lacking arts and cultural events/ venues



# Park System - Opportunities

- Improvements/ access to underutilized facilities and open space within parks
- Improved access and interpretation within nature/ conservation areas (signage, education)
- Improved Aquatic Facilities
- Multi-use pathway expansion
- Specialty Park Areas (Dog Park, Skate Park, Fit Trails, Paddle Boats, Bocce)
- Expanded Tonawanda Creek park area
- Environmental Enhancements



# LOS Analysis - Recurring Themes

- Maintain & improve existing facilities
- Improvements/ access to underutilized facilities and open space within parks
- Expand multi-use pathway system
- Better utilize areas around the Tonawanda Creek and large nature areas
- Develop Specialty Park Areas (Dog Park, Skate Park, Fit Trails, Paddle Boats, Bocce)
- Acquire additional open space resources  
(as appropriate)
- Improved Aquatic Facilities (existing and new)

# Inventory Summary

- Most parks are maintained in good condition but some locations have aged significantly
- Several parks need site furnishings to be replaced/ repaired
- More can be done to better utilize areas around the Tonawanda Creek and large nature areas
- Non-turf areas deserve some attention to help with drainage and erosion
- ADA accessibility is limited in many parks (overall audit)

# LOS Analysis - Recurring Themes

- Maintain & improve existing facilities
- Improvements/ access to underutilized facilities and open space within parks
- Expand multi-use pathway system
- Develop Specialty Park Areas (Dog Park, Skate Park, Fit Trails, Paddle Boats, Bocce)
- Acquire additional open space resources
- Improved Aquatic Facilities (existing and new)

# Key Findings – composite of all research & analysis

- **Improvement of existing assets is needed**
  - Repair/replace aged infrastructure & amenities
  - Develop & implement measurable park grounds maintenance standards
  - Add comfort features (restrooms, lighting, shade, seating)
  - Develop specialized areas/amenities (dog park, skate park, fitness stations, bike repair station)
- **An expand & connected multi-use trail system is highly desired**
- **Acquisition of additional open space is important to residents**
- **Access to high quality aquatic facilities is desired (improve existing & create new opportunities)**



# Key Findings – composite of all research & analysis

- **Communication and Marketing efforts should be improved**
  - Currently not easy to find current info about parks, programs, etc.  
Wayfinding and interpretive signage lacking (on trails, in parks)
  - Website needs significant functional and content enhancement
- **Enhance special events and program offerings**
  - Seek to expand opportunities for participation in popular programs/camps
  - Create new community-wide special events at parks throughout Amherst

# Focus Areas for Enhancement

- **Leverage Existing Assets**

- *Enhance existing parks and recreation facilities*
  - *Repair/replace aged infrastructure and amenities*
  - *Create measurable park grounds and amenity maintenance standards*
  - *Add comfort features and new amenities*

- **Create New Recreation Opportunities**

- *Expand and connect multi-use trail opportunities*
- *Seek to acquire additional open space lands*
- *Bolster special events and program offerings*

- **Develop Stronger Relationships**

- *Enhance sharing of information with users and public*
  - *Develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy*
- *Strengthen existing partnerships/joint use agreements*
  - *Seek new partnerships*

# Next Steps

- Develop Recommendations and actions based on data collected
- Draft plan production & local review
- Final plan presentation



# Questions and Discussion



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