

The **MORRIS** LEATHERMAN Company

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS *2018 City of Elko New Market*

City Demographics:

Elko New Market remains a growing exurban community. Since the 2015 study, the median longevity of adult residents decreased by less than two years to 11.0 years. This is over five years lower than the metro area average, but in line with other exurban areas. Twenty-three percent of the sample report moving to the city during the past five years, while 28% was there for over two decades. Fifty-six percent have school-aged or pre-school children in their households.

The median age of respondents is 43.0 years old. Nineteen percent of the sample is over 55 years old, while 24% are less than 35 years old. Women outnumber men by two percent in the sample.

Quality of Life Issues:

Ninety-eight percent rate their quality of life as either “excellent” or “good;” in fact, 46% see it as “excellent.” Only two percent rate the quality of life lower. The key differentiating factor for quality of life is the “excellent” rating given by residents. A high 46% deem it “excellent,” placing the city well within the top decile of Greater Metropolitan Area suburban and exurban communities. Among exurban communities, Elko New Market’s “excellent rating” is at the top of the range.

“Housing,” at 16%, followed by “quiet and peaceful” and “small town feel,” each at 14%, tops the list of factors most important in moving to Elko New Market. “Housing” is particularly important to 5-30 year residents and 18-44 year olds; “quiet and peaceful” is a key factor for over 30 year residents and 18-24 year olds. Ten percent point to “closeness to family,” especially less than five year residents, and nine percent cite “rural and open space,” very important to over 30 year residents and 18-24 year olds. Together, these top five factors are mentioned by 63% of the sample.

At 26%, “small town feel” leads the list of attributes people like most about living in the community. “Quiet and peaceful” and “rural and open spaces” follow at 18% and 12% respectively; the latter is especially liked by less than two year residents, empty-nesters, and over 55 year olds. “Friendly people” and “nice place to raise children” rank next at 11% and ten percent each. Together these top five factors are posted by 77% of the sample.

The most serious issues facing the city are “lack of businesses,” at 30%, mentioned most often by households containing children. Fourteen percent point to the “need for a grocery store,” especially 5-30 year residents, while ten percent each cite “high taxes,” particularly over 20 year residents and over 45 year olds, or “too much growth.” These four issues are posted by 64% of the sample. A “booster” group of six percent, just below the Greater Metropolitan Area norm, says there are “no” serious issues facing the community. “Boosters” have declined by 17% during the past three years.

When property taxes are weighed against the quality of city services, 78% rate the value as “excellent” or “good,” a six percent increase in three years. Twenty-two percent, down six percent, rate the quality as “only fair” or “poor.” More negative ratings are posted by over 55 year olds and men. The over three-to-one favorable-to-unfavorable ratio reveals a community satisfied with the cost of currently-offered city services. This rating continues to rank within the top decile of Greater Metropolitan Area suburban and exurban communities; among exurban communities, it places Elko New Market at the top over the past five years.

City Services:

In evaluating specific city services, the mean approval rating is 87.5%, placing the city in the top quartile of Metropolitan Area suburban and exurban communities. The mean approval rating decreased by 4.5% in the past three years. As an indicator of more dissatisfaction with city services this year, “excellent” ratings decreased by an average of 9.6% since 2015.

Even so, in looking at each individual city service, two services stand out as “best practices” in the metro area: “city street repair and maintenance” and “snow plowing.” Four services are in the top decile in comparison to other Metropolitan Area communities: “police protection,” “fire protection,” and “park maintenance.

City Service	Favorable	Unfavorable	Decrease in “Excellent” Rating
Police Protection	98%	2%	5%
Fire Protection	91%	3%	4%
Park maintenance	91%	7%	13%
Snow Plowing	86%	14%	11%

City Service	Favorable	Unfavorable	Decrease in “Excellent” Rating
City-sponsored recreation programs	84%	8%	13%
City Street Repair and Maintenance	82%	17%	10%
Code Enforcement	78%	15%	11%
Mean	87.1%	9.4%	9.6%

Those rating a city services as “only fair” or “poor” were asked for a reason. Forty percent of residents fall into this category. “Poor street repair” is criticized by 25%. “Poor snow plowing” and “lack of code enforcement” are each cited by 22%.

Seventy-five percent feel the City of Elko New Market does not need to add any further city services. Among the twenty-five percent indicating the city should add services, fifteen percent would like to see a “community center.”

Public Safety Issues:

A solid 85% rate the amount of police patrolling in their neighborhood as “about the right amount.” Only 12% think the amount is “not enough.” Eighty percent rate the amount of traffic enforcement by the police in their neighborhood as “about the right amount.” Eighteen percent, though, think it is “not enough.” These combined ratings of police patrolling are among the top quartile of communities across the Greater Metropolitan Area.

Forty-one percent, an 11% increase in three years, think the problem of traffic speeding in their neighborhood is either “very serious” or “somewhat serious.” Fifty-nine percent see it as “not serious.” Thirty-nine percent, a 17% increase in three years, view the problem of stop sign violations in their neighborhood as either “very serious” or “somewhat serious.” Sixty percent think it is “not too serious” or “not at all serious.” Both levels of concern are slightly higher than other suburban and exurban communities; they arise from the evaluations of over 30 year residents and over 55 year olds.

Twenty-six percent think the greatest public safety concern in Elko New Market is “traffic speeding,” while 17% see it as “youth crimes and vandalism.” It is important to note from the previous question on the seriousness of traffic speeding; only 13% rate the problem as “very serious.” Although traffic speeding leads the list of public safety concerns, it is a “soft” concern. Thirty-seven percent think “none” of the enumerated public safety concerns are a problem in the city; double the Greater Metropolitan Area average.

Transportation Issues:

Fifty-five percent commute outside of the city to school or work on a daily basis. Within this group, 78% use Highway 35 for the majority of their commutes, while 11% similarly use Highway 13. Fifteen percent regularly ride public transit, an almost three-fold increase in three years. Frequent users tend to be under 10 year residents, households containing children, 18-34 year olds, and women. The typical rider uses public transit five or more days per week. Among non-public transit users, 65% have never ridden this form of transportation.

Next, respondents were asked how likely they would be to use four different potential public transit services. In the table below, the potential service is followed by the percent of residents who would be at least “somewhat likely” to use it and the market projection of service users.

Potential Service	Likely to Use	Projected Use
Service to events in Downtown Minneapolis or Downtown Saint Paul for events like concerts or sporting events at Target Center, Target Field or the Xcel Energy Center	63%	24%
Service to the Minnesota State Fair, Valley Fair, Canterbury Park or the Renaissance Center	60%	22%
Regular weekly commuter service from Elko New Market to Downtown Minneapolis	34%	12%
Service to area Community and Technical Colleges, such as Normandale, Inver Hills, or Dakota County Technical College	25%	9%

As in the 2015 study, the most popular service is to events in either Downtown Minneapolis or Saint Paul. Close behind is seasonal service to periodic amusements. More limited interest is found in the daily commuter service to Downtown Minneapolis and service to area educational institutions.

Eighty-one percent report familiarity with the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority, or MVTA. Since 2015, familiarity has almost doubled.

Parks and Recreation:

The household use of existing facilities in the park system was examined in some detail. Eighty-seven percent report members using the trails and sidewalks. Seventy-four percent visit larger community parks and 68% visit smaller neighborhood parks. Fifty-eight percent, an 18% increase since the last study, use the community ballfields, while 52%, a 13% increase, indicate using the Wagner Park Shelter. Thirty-two percent, a 13% increase in three years, use the

Wagner Park skatepark, and 32% visit city ice rinks. When comparing Elko New Market to communities with similar demographics, use of park facilities is among the top quartile of cities.

Users were asked to rate each specific facility. A comparatively high average of 90% of facility users offering ratings post positive ratings; in only two cases, Wagner Park Skatepark and city ice rinks, did negative judgments exceed 10%. These park facility ratings continue to place the city within the top ten percent of cities across the Greater Metropolitan Area and among the top three exurban communities.

Park Facility	Change in Usership	Favorable	Unfavorable
Larger Community Parks	+10%	74%	2%
Smaller Neighborhood Parks	+2%	68%	8%
Trails and Sidewalks	+10%	87%	7%
Community Ballfields	+22%	56%	6%
Wagner Park Skatepark	+16%	29%	6%
Ice Rinks	+7%	32%	6%
Wagner Park Shelter	+17%	52%	3%

Ninety-one percent of the residents feel that existing recreational facilities offered by the City meet the needs of their household. Only seven percent disagree, principally citing the lack of baseball fields.

Ninety-two percent similarly feel that existing recreational programs offered by the City meets the needs of their households. Six percent disagree, citing particularly the lack of basketball programs. This level of satisfaction with recreational programs is right at the norm for the Greater Metropolitan Area.

Forty-four percent, consistent with the 2015 level, report household members participated in a City park and recreation program. The most popular are baseball/softball programs, accounting for almost one-third of the participants, and swimming, accounting for 14% of the participants. Among participants, a unanimous 99% are satisfied with the experience. Combining the use and rating of recreation programs, Elko New Market places among the top five communities across the Greater Metropolitan Area.

Ninety-six percent believe existing community events offered by the City meet the needs of their households. When comparing Elko New Market to communities with similar demographics, this level of satisfaction with community events is 17% higher than the average. A very large 86% think the City has the “right amount” of community events; only 11% believe it is “too few.” Eighty-one percent of community households participate in community events. Among participants, 21% attended “the Parade,” 16% attended “Fire & Rescue Days,” and 15% participated in “block parties” or “the Easter Egg Hunt.” One hundred percent are satisfied with

their experiences there. Combining the use and rating of community events, Elko New Market is at the top of communities across the Greater Metropolitan Area.

City Government and Staff:

Overall, residents continue to be extremely satisfied with their contacts with City Hall. Forty-five percent of the sample contacted Elko New Market City Hall during the past twelve months. Seventy-one percent called or visited one of four departments: Billing, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, or General Information. On two aspects of customer service, staff members are rated as either “excellent” or “good” by at least 91% of those who contacted City Hall: “response time from City Staff to assist you” and “courtesy of city staff.” There are no statistically significant differences between departments when looking at aspects of customer service. The standard threshold indicating quality customer service in the public sector is an 80% positive rating. The average 94% favorable ratings on customer service places Elko New Market in the top decile among Greater Metropolitan Area communities.

Sources of City Information:

Forty percent cite the “City Newsletter” as their principal source of information about Elko New Market City Government and its activities. Twenty-nine percent point to the “City Website.” Eight percent cite “social media,” while six percent each rely upon “e-mailed newsletters” or “word of mouth.” “Local newspapers” are the principal source of information for four percent. The City Newsletter audience is heavily skewed toward over 20 year residents, empty-nesters, over 45 year olds, and men. The “City Website” has especially high use percentages by 2-10 year residents, households containing children, 18-44 year olds, and women. These two sources of information appeal to different “generations.” Except with respect to one source of information, most respondents already rely upon their most preferred source; the only exception is “e-mailed newsletters,” preferred by 22% and currently relied upon only six percent.

Eighty-five percent report a household member regularly read the city’s newsletter. Among regular readers, 94% rate the quality of the newsletter either “excellent” or “good,” while seven percent rate it as “only fair” or “poor.”

If the printed version of the city’s newsletter were discontinued, 86% of Elko New Market households would be able to access the electronic version on a computer or mobile device. Sixty-seven percent are also at least “somewhat likely” to read an electronic version of the city newsletter; but, using standard market projection techniques, 26% would be expected to actually read this version.

Sixty-seven percent, an increase of 22%, of the households in the community accessed the City's website. Among users, 88% favorably rate the content of the website, while 85% rate the ease of navigating the website favorably.

A social media presence by the City of Elko New Market would supplement its current communications reach. At this point, Facebook users are 84% of the households in the city, while 62% use YouTube, and 42% access Twitter. Almost 90% of the users of Facebook, and about 70% of YouTube or Twitter users report they are likely to use that social media to obtain information about the community.

Conclusions:

In comparison with the opinion survey conducted in 2015, Elko New Market residents are growing more worried about a cluster of issues correlated with growth and development. Concerns about business development, development amenities, rate of growth, and tax levels emerged as city challenges. Even so, residents rate the quality of life in Elko New Market and rate city government and services relatively high.

The key issue facing decision-makers in the future remain balancing growth and development with natural ambience and the efficient provision of city services – in essence, balancing the wishes of residents against their concerns as taxpayers, City government and staff currently strikes an excellent balance when compared with other exurban communities. Strong positive city service ratings are posted across the board, though a slippage in intensity – from “excellent” to “good” ratings – is common, and more criticism can be found in the perceived lack of code enforcement and slow plowing response to snow storms. Public safety concerns remain focused on traffic speeding and stop sign violations in residential neighborhoods, as well as youth crimes and vandalism.

Development preferences are focusing on “Type II” growth, shifting from the rate of change and provision of basic services to desired types of general development. Residents see a need for additional amenities – more local business offerings, especially a grocery store.

Two opinion “blocs” are present in this survey. Demographically, the profile of the first group is over 20 year residents, empty-nesters, over 45 year olds, and men. They are concerned about “high taxes,” “preserving the rural ambience of the city by maintaining open spaces,” and “efficient city government spending.” The second group is composed of less than 20 year residents, households containing children, 18-44 year olds, and women. They are concerned about “safety,” “quality of schools,” “preserving the rural ambience of the city by maintaining open spaces,” and “lack of businesses in the community.” The first block primarily uses the City Newsletter to keep abreast of City government and its activities; the second bloc relies upon the

City Website.

Overall, the City of Elko New Market continues to do an exceptional job in communicating with residents about city government and policies. But, shifting away from the printed newsletter could disenfranchise one of the major opinion blocs in the community. Given their communication preferences, residents want to receive information directly from the City with no secondary filters.

As in the 2015 study, Elko New Market is still “working well.” Residents are very happy with their community. They endorse the direction the City is taking and are confident about the future of the community. The major challenge will be preserving the small town ambience of the community and simultaneously attracting more suburban-like amenities to the city.