APPENDIX

# A

# Parks Plan Engagement Summary

# Steering Committee Meetings

The Plans Steering Committee (PSC) plays a pivotal role in the development of the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) Plan, as well as the Comprehensive and Downtown Plans. The PSC works to ensure City staff and consultants are in close alignment with the community's needs and vision, as gathered during various opportunities for public input and feedback. The PSC not only provides guidance but also shapes the general vision for the plan, offering insights into effective community engagement strategies. By leveraging their expertise and taking into account public input, the PSC is integral to both the process and development of plan recommendations. Apart from the consultants and City staff who form the "primary" project team, the PSC members are the individuals most closely involved in the process.

The following members were appointed to the Plans Steering Committee (PSC):

- City of Harlingen Mayor Norma Sepulveda
- City Commission: Ford Kinsley (District 1) and Daniel Lopez (District 2)
- Planning and Zoning Commission: Luis Villarreal and Sergio Perez
- Parks and Recreation Board: Adele Clinton-Solis and Diana Esparza
- Downtown Advisory Board: Lars Keim and John Pearcy

The Steering Committee conducted three meetings at Harlingen City Hall during the process, which were open for public observation. Each session reviewed the progress of each plan, public input received and requested feedback on draft deliverables to lay the groundwork for future recommendations. The meetings centered on the following topics:

- Kickoff and Data Analysis
- Public Engagement Plan
- Community Feedback
- Vision and Goals
- Draft Deliverables
- Plan Implementation



PSC Meeting (November 19, 2024)

# Stakeholder Meeting

As part of the Harlingen Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) planning process, a focused stakeholder listening session was held on February 25th, 2025, to gather in-depth feedback from key user groups. Participants included representatives from youth and adult sports leagues, as well as park advocates who regularly engage with the City's parks and recreational facilities. The session provided an opportunity for these stakeholders to share firsthand experiences, challenges, and priorities related to the parks and recreation system.

## Key Priorities Identified:

- Expand the existing trail network to improve connectivity.
- Develop a new indoor recreation center for year-round programming.
- Improve security measures at select parks.
- Construct additional basketball courts.
- Add more restrooms to support longer visits and larger crowds.
- Expand recreational sports fields and increase parking capacity for tournaments.

## Key Concerns Raised:

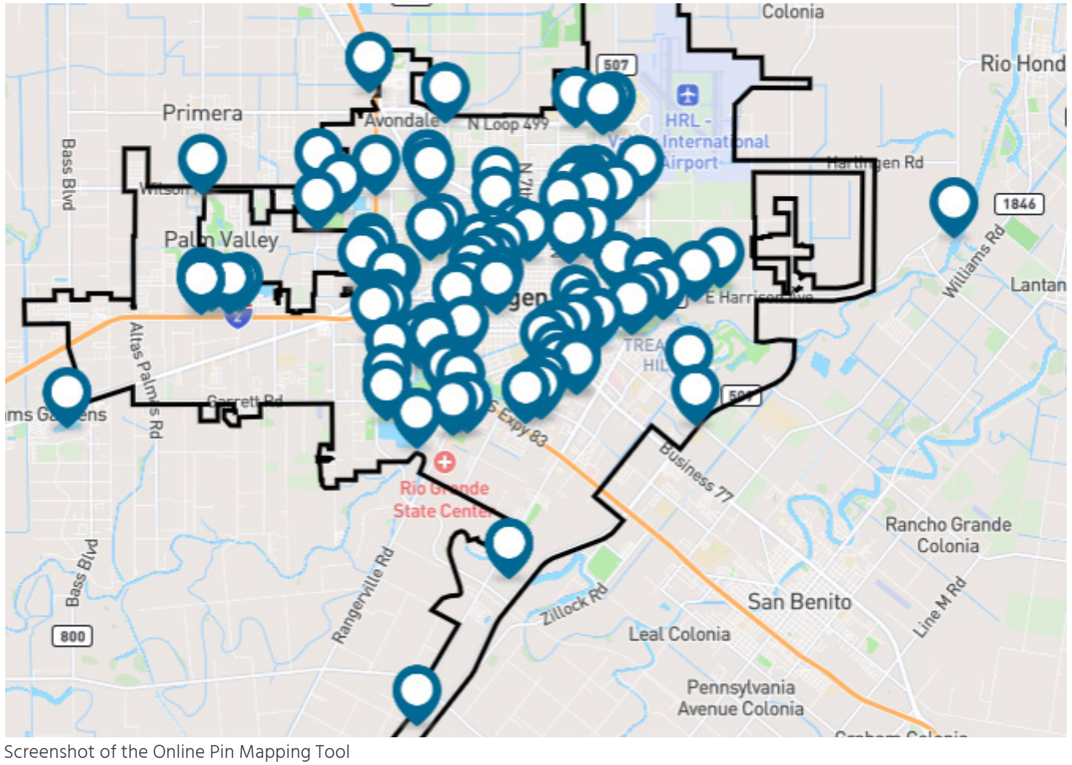
- Park beautification and maintenance need greater attention.
- Demand for league play exceeds current facility capacity.
- Inadequate lighting in parks and along trails.
- Limited after-hours access to HCISD facilities for community use.
- Insufficient parking for hosting large-scale sports events.
- Ongoing safety concerns in certain parks.

# Online Pin Map

The primary mechanism for greater virtual engagement for this plan was an online mapping activity where participants could leave georeferenced comments on a map of Harlingen. Website visitors could read and vote on others' comments to express agreement or disagreement. This feature helped the project team identify the comments that were most relevant and helpful for developing recommendations. Key themes that emerged from the online map comments included:

- There are general concerns about outdated playground equipment, restroom facilities, and other park infrastructure needing updates and repairs.
- There are requests for greater accessibility to parks and trails from surrounding neighborhoods, including the addition of crosswalks and improved pathways.
- There is a desire for greater shade or the number of trees along trails, the extension of bike paths, and improved lighting for greater park safety.
- Certain areas within Harlingen were highlighted for their ecological importance and potential economic benefits, such as birdwatching spots that attract tourists.

The online mapping activity opened after the project launched in October 2024 and was available for continuous participation throughout most of the project process.

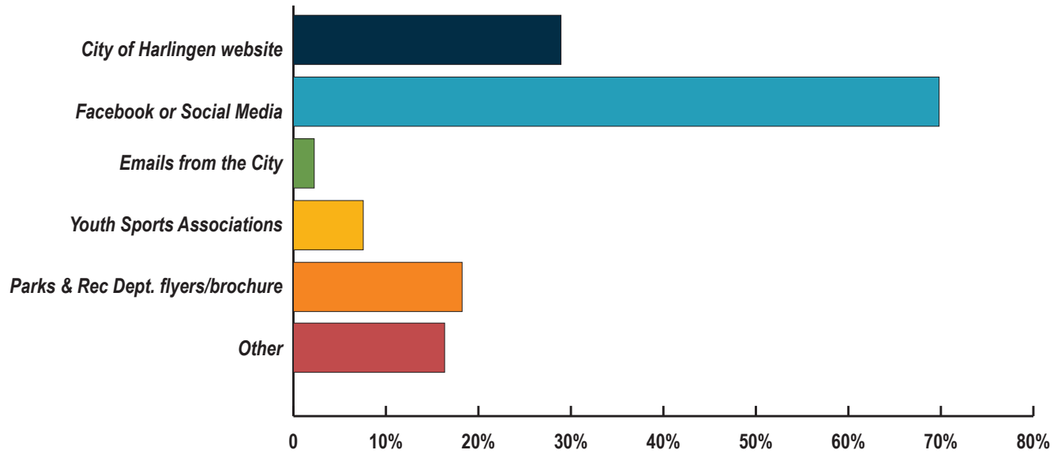


Screenshot of the Online Pin Mapping Tool

# Parks Plan Community Survey Responses

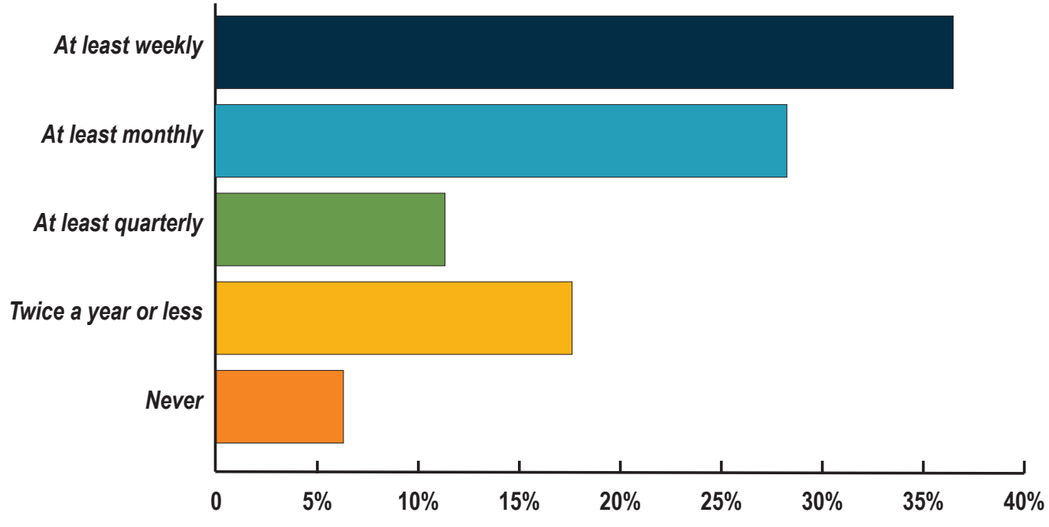
From October 30, 2024, to February 8, 2025, an online community survey was hosted on the Harlingen project website. Open to all, the survey featured translation tools to accommodate multiple languages and was accessible on both desktop and mobile devices. Outreach efforts to promote participation in the online survey included distributing flyers, promoting the survey on the local news and sharing information through the City's social media platforms. The survey received 159 responses while it was available to the public, and below is a summary of the public feedback received. This survey, as well as insights from public engagement events and the stakeholder group, provided the project team with essential baseline data and community priorities to guide the project's development.

## Question 1. How do you find out about parks, recreation facilities and recreation programs in Harlingen?




In our digital age, most Harlingen residents get information about the City's parks and recreation facilities or programs through social media (69.81%) or the City of Harlingen's website (28.93%). Some residents still receive this information through traditional means such as flyers sent out by the Parks and Rec Department (18.24%).

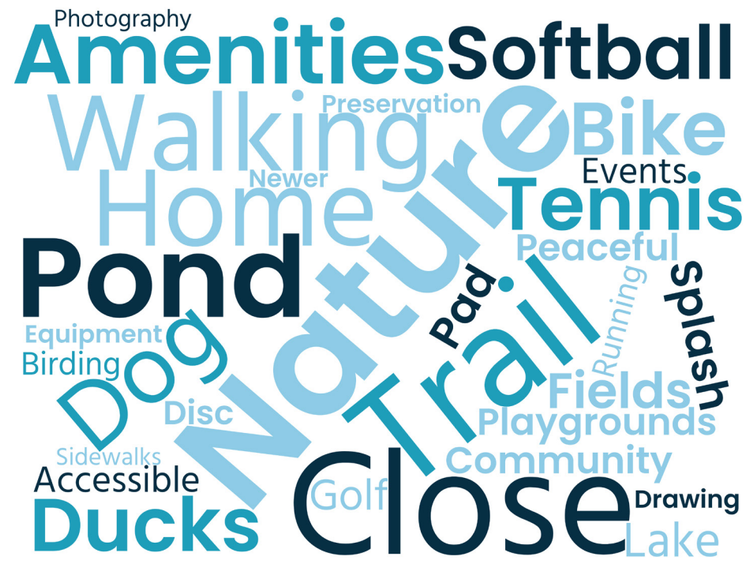
## Question 2. Within the past year, how often have you or someone from your household visited or used the park facilities in Harlingen?



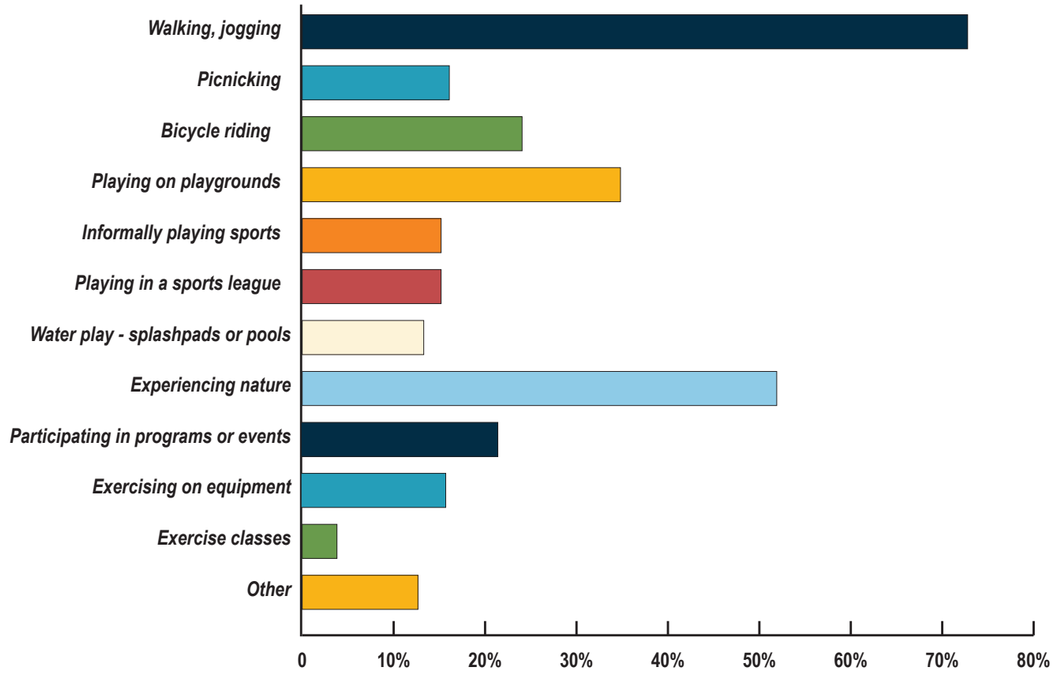

According to respondents, most households utilize Harlingen's park facilities weekly (36.49%), followed by those who go monthly (28.3%). Only 6.29% of respondents have never visited or used the park facilities in Harlingen.

## Question 3. What is your favorite park in Harlingen and why?



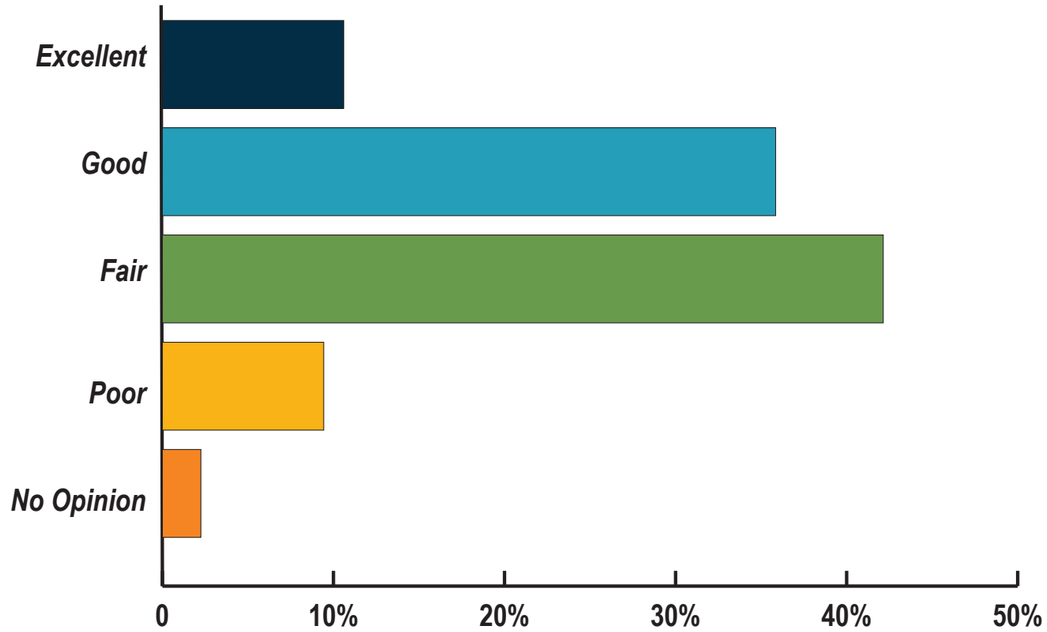



## Question 4. What activities do you typically engage in when visiting parks (e.g., walking, sports, picnicking)?




The primary activity respondents engage in when visiting Harlingen's parks is walking and jogging (72.78%). More than half of respondents like to experience nature during their visit (51.9%). Other popular activities include playing on the playgrounds (34.81%), biking (24.05%), and participating in programmed events (21.51%).

## Question 5. Overall, how would you rate the parks and recreational opportunities and open space in the City of Harlingen?

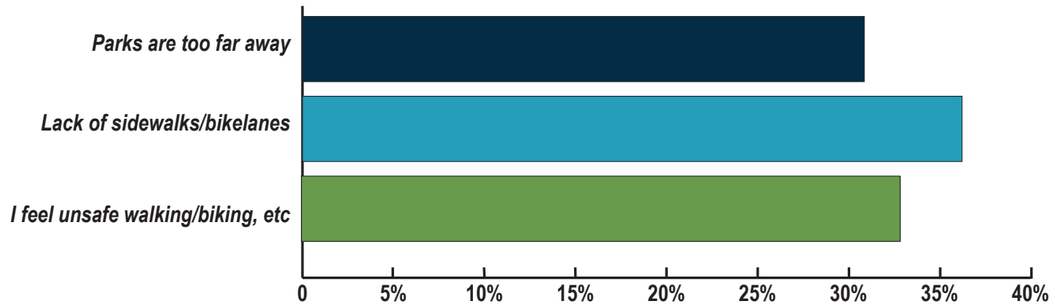



Most respondents rate Harlingen's current parks and recreational opportunities as fair (42.14%) or good (35.85%), indicating a need for improvement. Only 10.06% of respondents consider Harlingen's parks and recreation to be excellent, while slightly less than 10% rank it poorly.

## Question 6. If fair or poor, please explain.

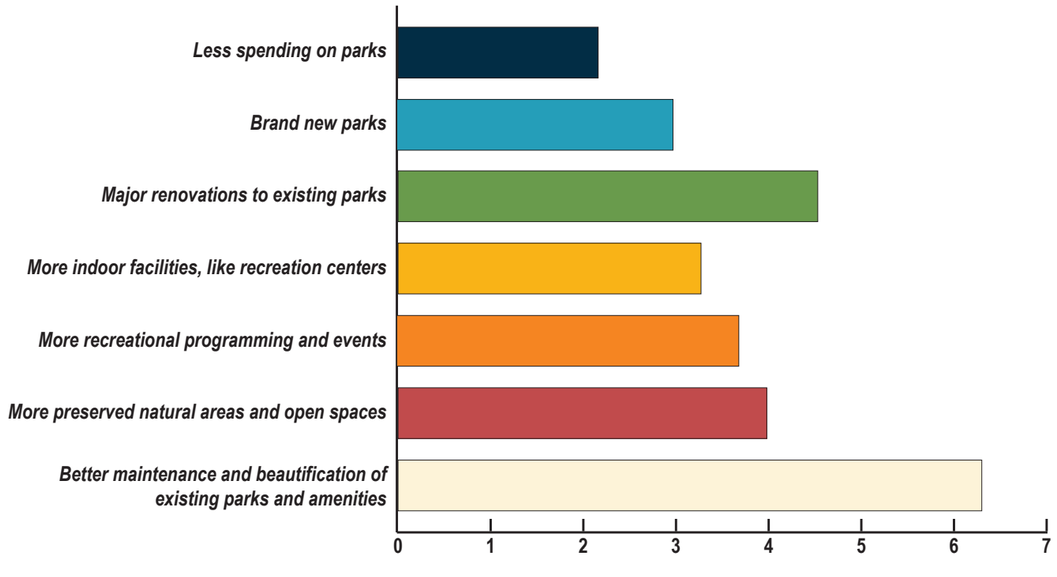



## Question 7. What keeps you from getting to parks by another means besides cars (walking, bicycling, skating, etc)?



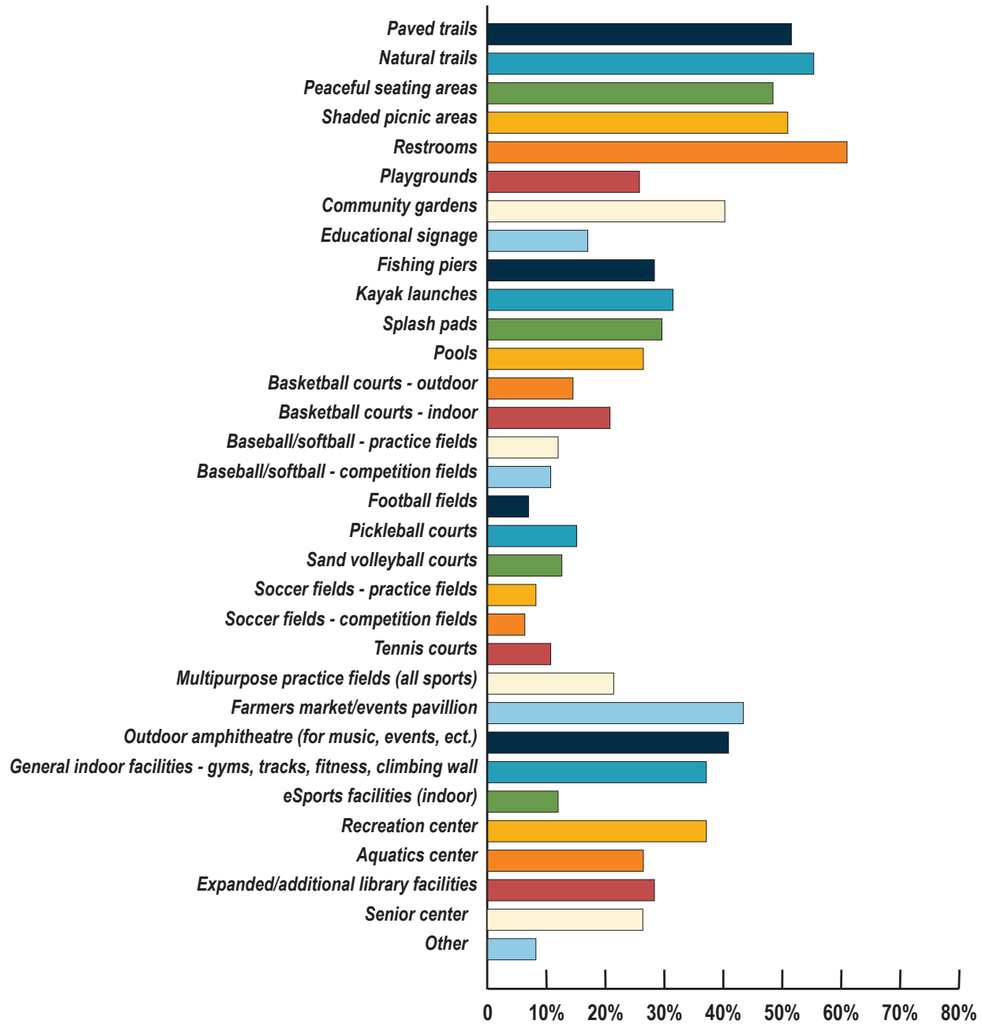

The most significant barrier preventing people from visiting parks without a car is a lack of sidewalks and bike lanes (36.24%). This could contribute to respondents feeling unsafe walking or biking to a park (32.89%). Additionally, many respondents live too far away from a park to conveniently get there without driving (30.87%).

## Question 8. Rank your priorities for parks in Harlingen.



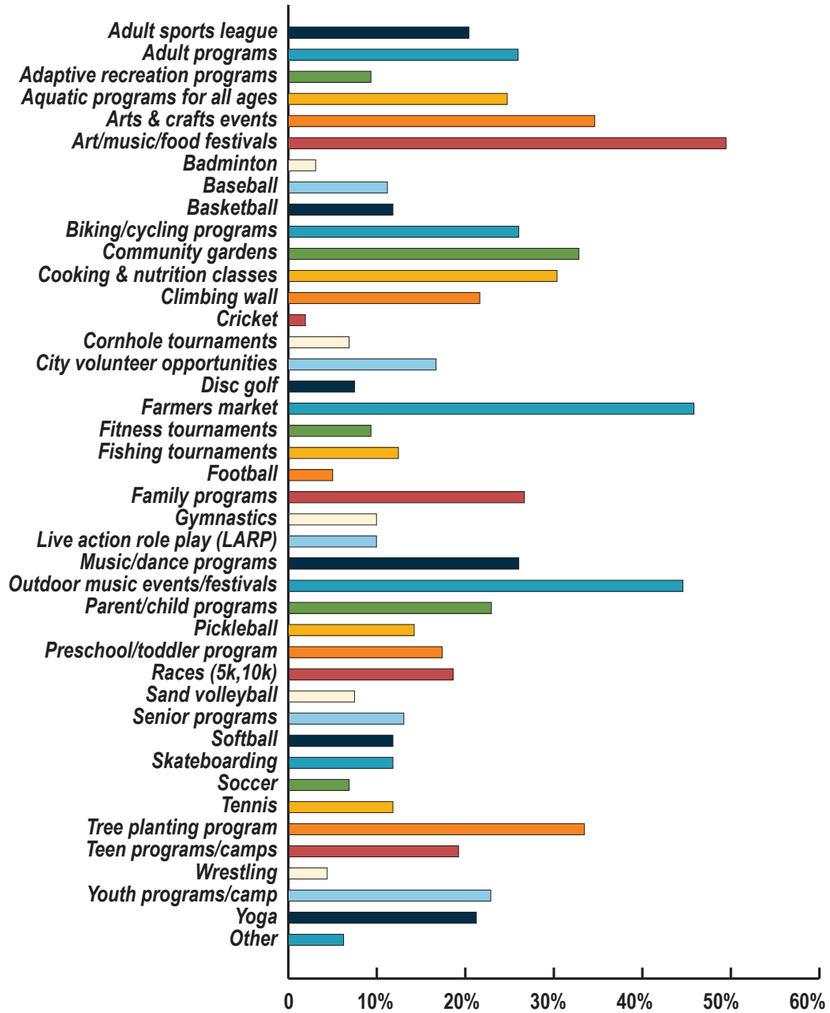

The main priority for Harlingen's parks is better maintenance and beautification of existing parks and amenities. This overlaps with the second priority — major renovations to existing parks. The third most significant priority is more preserved natural areas and open spaces, with other options ranking closely behind. Less spending on parks is the lowest priority among respondents.

## Question 9. Which of these parks and recreation FACILITES would your household members be most interested in having or having more of?



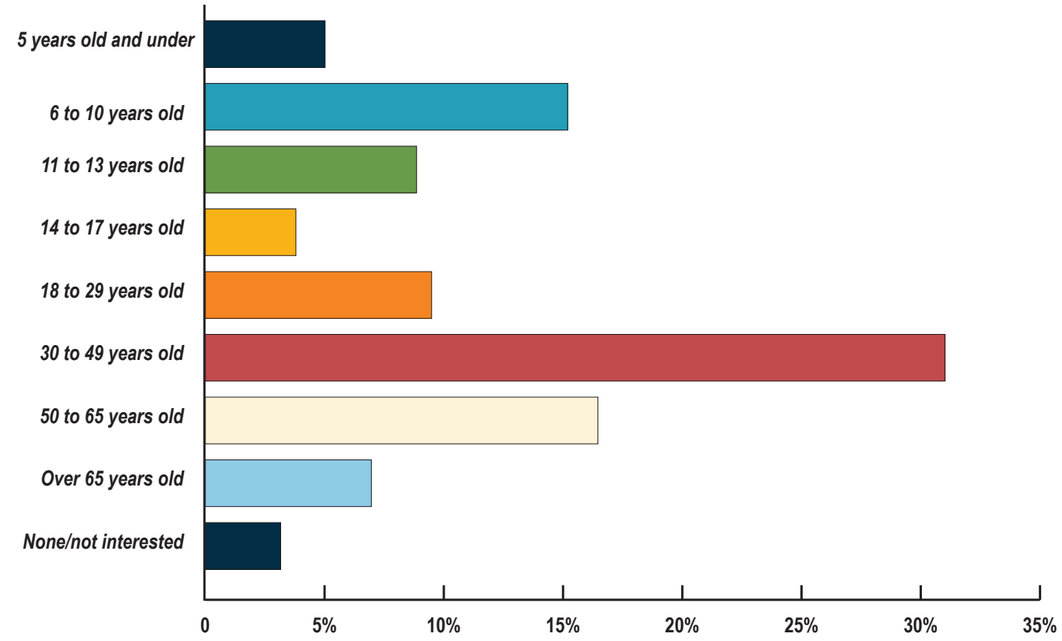

When asked what parks and recreation facilities members of their household would be interested in, respondents were given a list of more than 30 options to choose from. More than half of respondents want to see more trails — paved (51.57%) and natural (55.35%)— public restrooms (61.01%), and shaded picnic areas (50.94%). Soccer fields, tennis courts, e-sports, and other recreational facilities received the least interest.

## Question 10. In which of these parks and recreation PROGRAMS would your household members be most interested in participating?



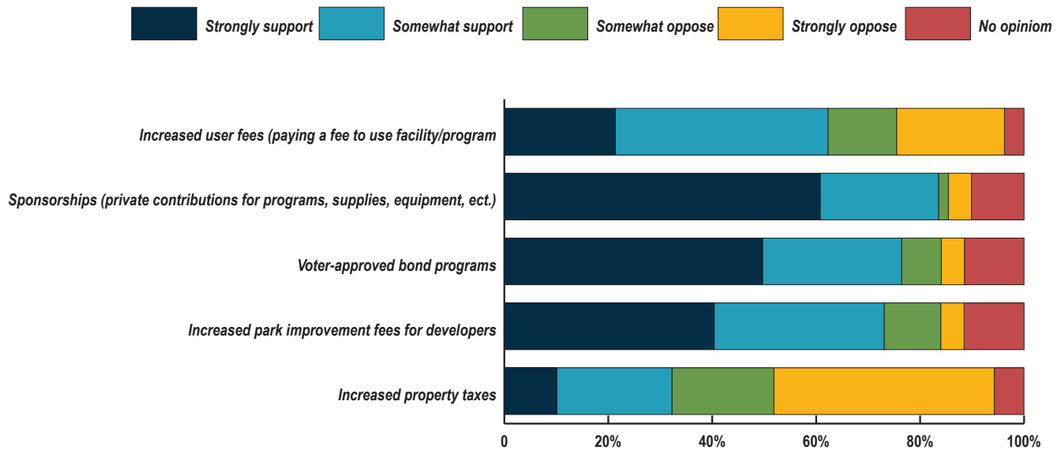

When asked what parks and recreation programs members of their household would be interested in, respondents were given a list of more than 40 recreational programs to choose from. Arts, music, and food festivals (50.63%) received the most interest, followed by a Farmer's Market (46.84%) and outdoor music events (45.57%). Traditional sports programs like football, soccer, and wrestling received the least amount of interest.

## Question 11. Which age groups in your household would be interested in participating in a City of Harlingen recreational program?



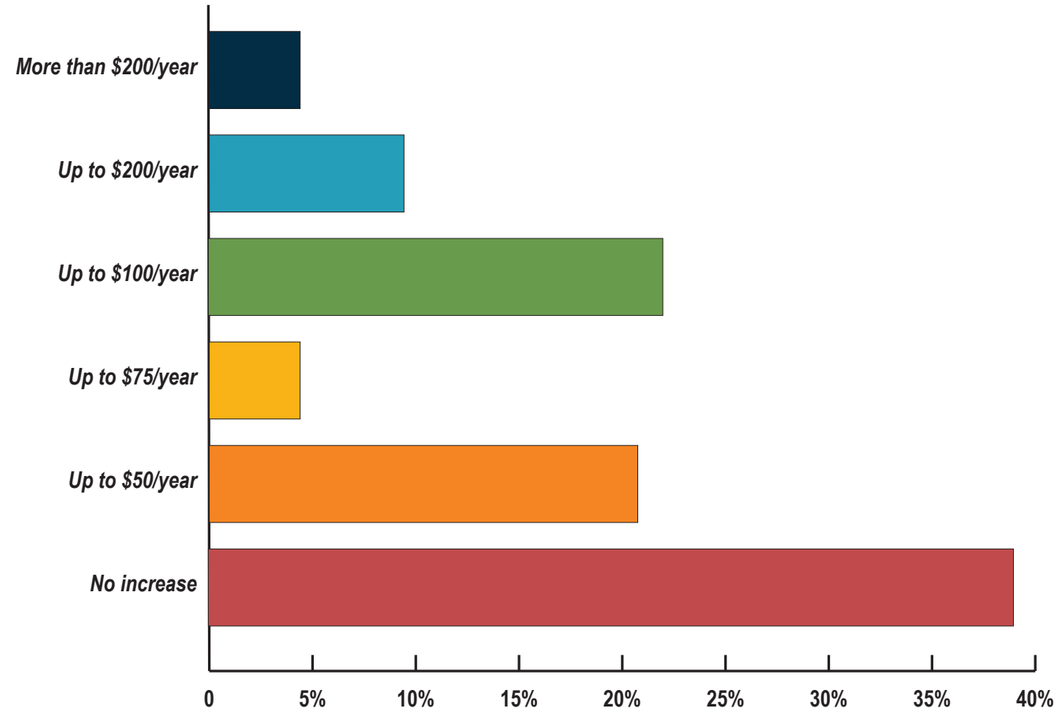

The age group most interested in recreational programs is adults between 30 and 49 (31.01%). There is also significant interest in programs for older adults between 50 and 65 (16.46%) and youth between the ages of 6 and 10 (15.19%).

## Question 12. In order to develop and maintain the park and recreation facilities/amenities you have suggested, how strongly would you support the following funding options?



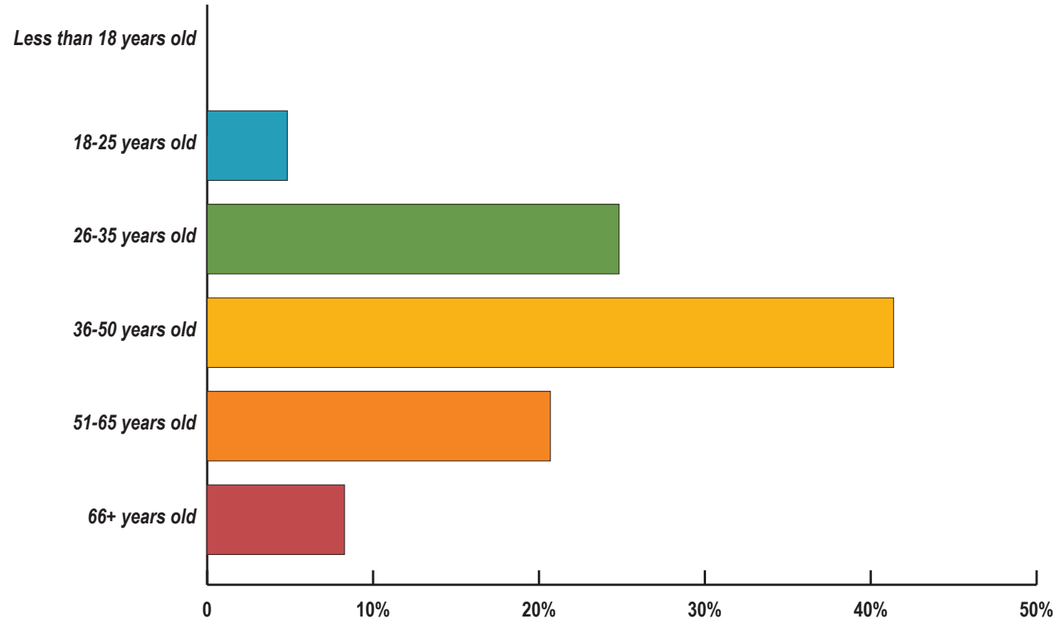

When asked about sources of funding for parks and recreation, respondents strongly supported private sponsorship. Voter-approved bonds and improvement fees for development also received substantial support, while increased property taxes were the least favorable funding source.

## Question 13. How much more per year in additional property taxes would you be willing to pay in order to fund the improvement priorities you have suggested in this survey?



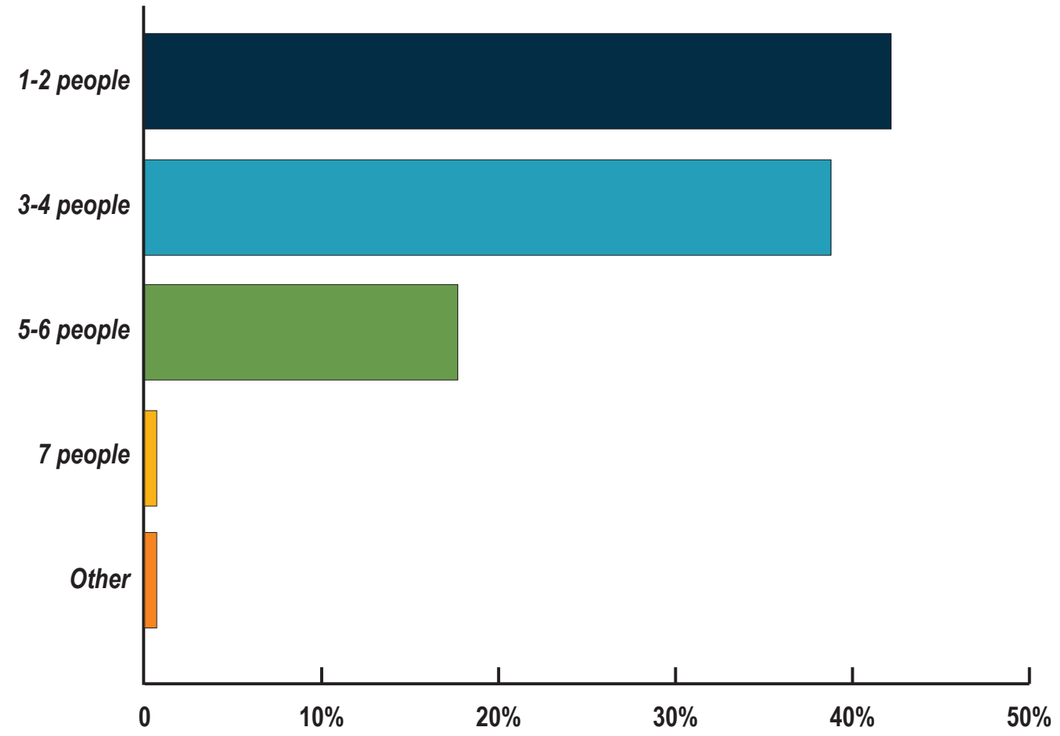

When asked how much more per year they would be willing to pay in property taxes to fund parks and recreation in Harlingen, many respondents stated they were unwilling to pay increased property taxes (38.99%). Those who are open to the idea are generally willing to pay between $50 and $100 more in taxes per year.

## Question 14. How old are you?



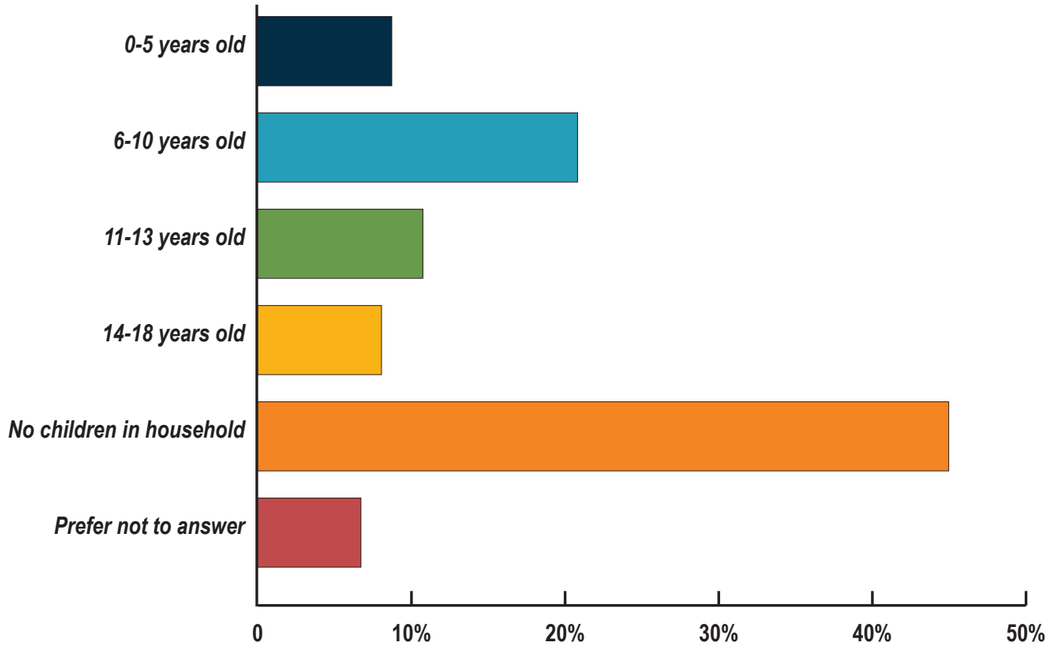

Most individuals who responded to the survey were between 36 and 50 years old (41.38%). This aligns with the preference for activities targeting this age range expressed in question 11. The second largest group of respondents were those aged 26 to 35 years old (24.83%), followed by those in the 51 to 65 age group (20.69%). No one under 18 years old participated in the survey.

## Question 15. How many people live in your household?



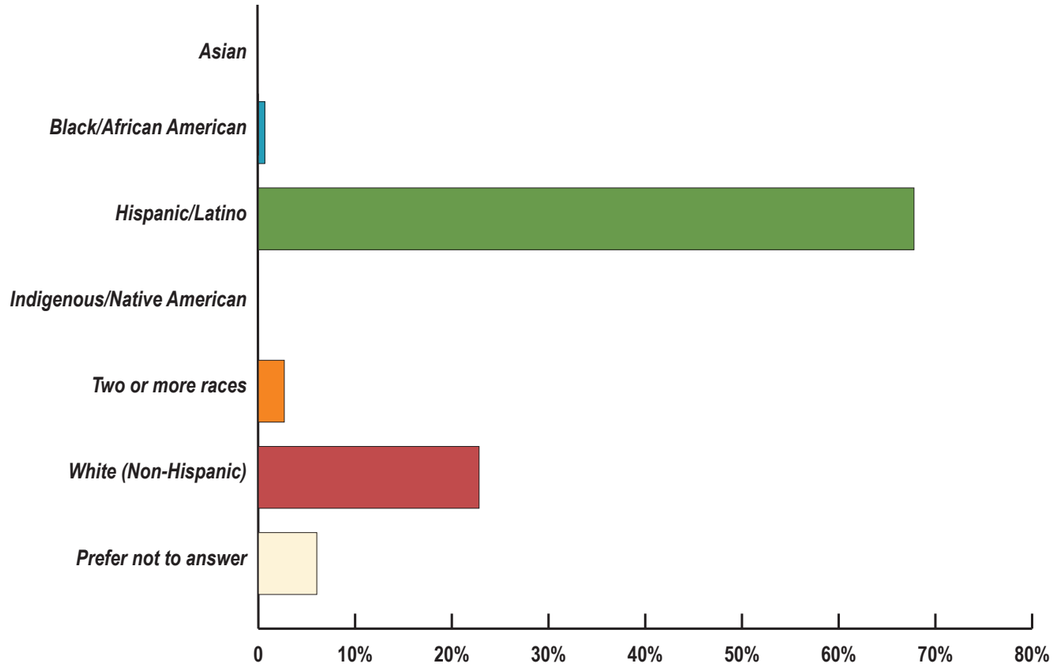

Most respondents live in a household with more than three people (57.82%); however, when the survey graph breaks down the individual household group with the most respondents, those in a household of two or fewer is the most prevalent (42.18%).

## Question 16. Which youth age groups are represented in your household?



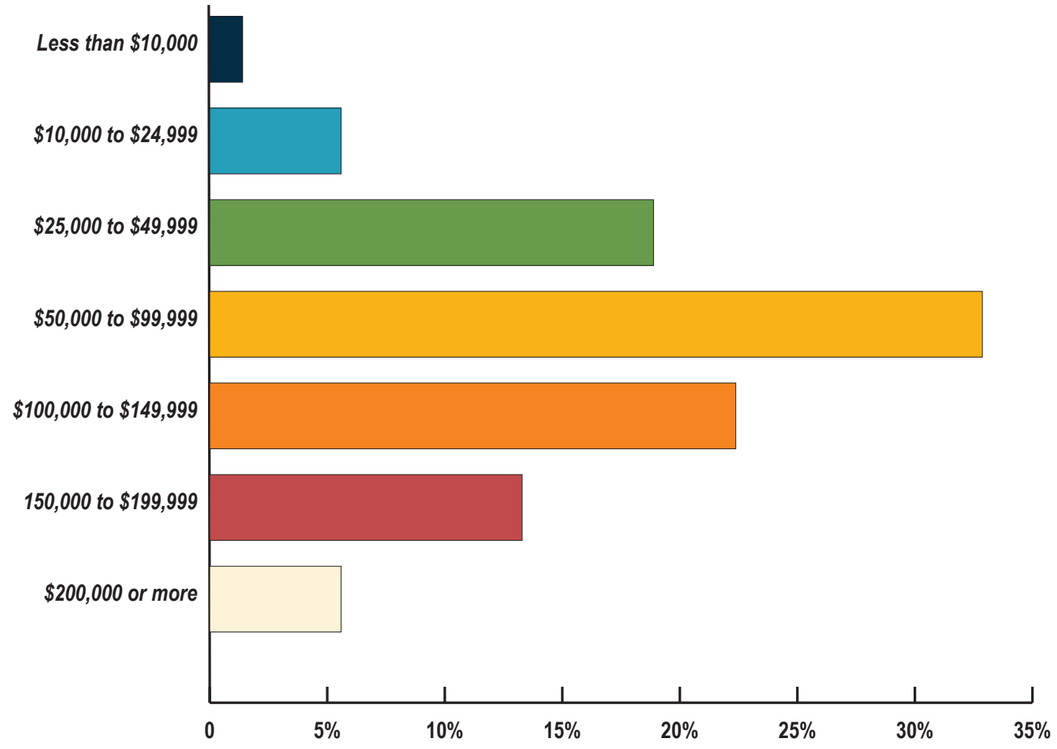

Nearly half of the survey's respondents do not have children in their household (44.97%). Those who do primarily have children between the ages of 6 and 10 (20.81%).

## Question 17. What best describes your race/ethnicity?




Most respondents identify as Hispanic or Latino (67.79%), followed by those who describe themselves as only White (22.82%). Those who identify as Black, Two or More Races, or prefer not to answer the question make up nearly 10% of all responses.

## Question 18. What is your household income in the last 12 months?




The largest group represented in the survey are those with an annual household income between $50,000 and $99,999 (32.87%). This is followed closely by respondents with an annual household income between $100,000 and $149,999 (22.38%) and those with an annual income between $25,000 and $49,999 (18.88%).

# Public Engagement #1

On November 18, 2024 at 6pm at the Harlingen Community Center the planning team held its first community engagement event. The meeting was hosted by the City of Harlingen and facilitated by Freese & Nichols, the City's consultant. 55 participants signed in on the meeting sign in sheets. Advertisements were made via the City's communication channels, social media, and the project website. Advertisements and all meeting materials were made available in both English and Spanish.

The purpose of this event was to educate the community on the upcoming process, how to get and stay involved and to gather initial feedback on their values, priorities and goals for the community, prior to the consultant team or City attempting to identify a set of goals and objectives. The evening began with a formal presentation by the consultant team, followed by an open house with interactive stations and one on one conversations with the participants. City staff were also in attendance and available to talk with residents.

The meeting agenda included:

- Overview of the Process
- Project Schedule
- Project Scope
- Next Steps
- Open House Activities (Interactive Stations)

The interactive stations topics included:

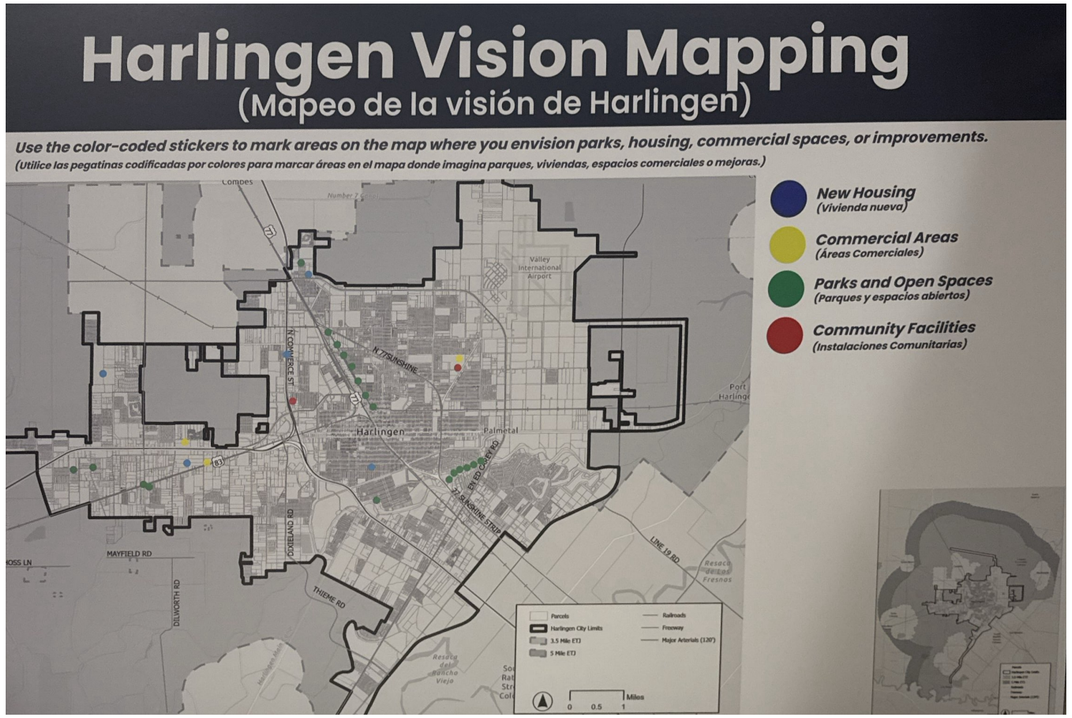
- Project and Website Information
- Community Insights, Aspirations and Goals
- Land Use and Development
- Transportation and Mobility
- Infrastructure and Public Facilities
- Shocks and Stressors




A screen capture of the meeting advertisement on the City's Facebook page.




Images from the public meetings in November 2024. Top row: welcome table with informational boards and participant sign in. Middle row: the presentation done by the consultant team. Bottom row: the interactive stations and one-on-one conversations.




Residents were asked to visualize what they want to see in Harlingen by using color coded stickers to mark where the City should develop parks and open space. Several spots were identified for parks and open space along Sam Houston St. and North Commerce St.

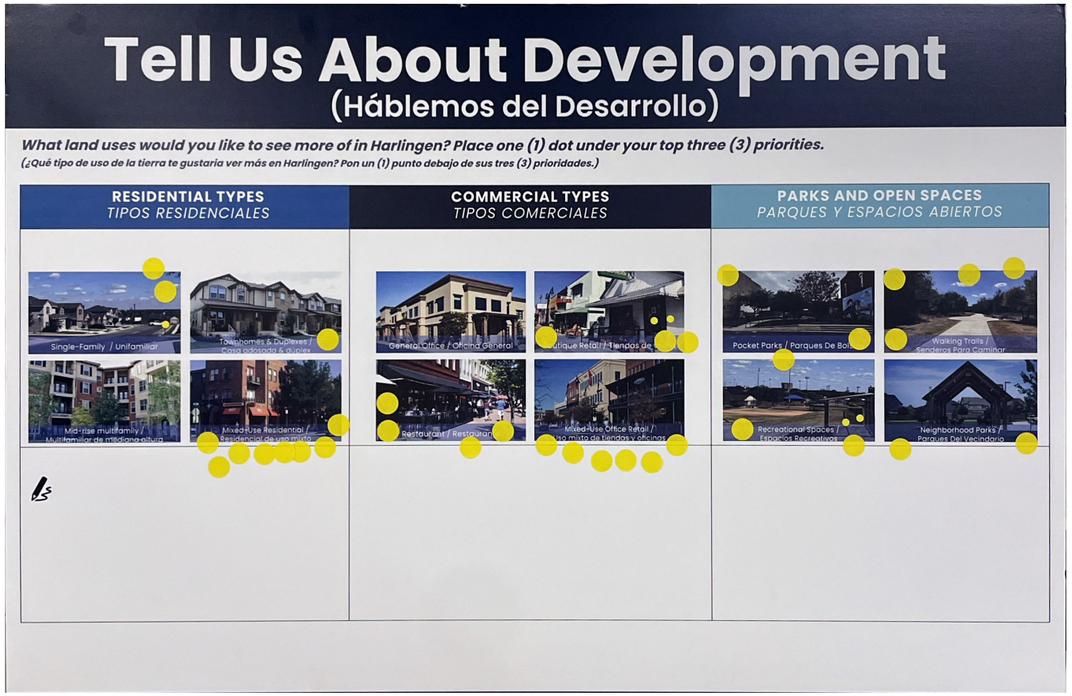
## Harlingen Vision Mapping

### Responses

Parks and Open Space

- Between Highway 77 and N 77 Sunshine
- Along Sam Houston St, north of Sunshine strip






Residents expressed a strong preference for greater incorporation of walking trails, followed by the construction of a greater number of recreational spaces within Harlingen's Parks System.

## Tell Us About Development

### Responses

Parks and Open Spaces

- Pocket Parks: 2
- Walking Trails: 4
- Recreational Spaces: 3
- Neighborhood Parks: 2

# Public Engagement #2

On February 24, 2025 at 6pm at the Harlingen Community Center the planning team held its second community engagement event. The meeting was hosted by the City of Harlingen and facilitate by Freese & Nichols, the City's consultant. 21 participants signed in on the meeting sign in sheets. Advertisements were made via the City's communication channels, social media, and the project website. Advertisements and all meeting materials were made available in both English and Spanish.

The purpose of this event was to present and discuss the baseline assessments, and gather feedback on additional Parks Plan topics that would help generate future recommendations. The evening began with a formal presentation by the consultant team, followed by an open house with interactive stations and one on one conversations with the participants. City staff were also in attendance and available to talk with residents.

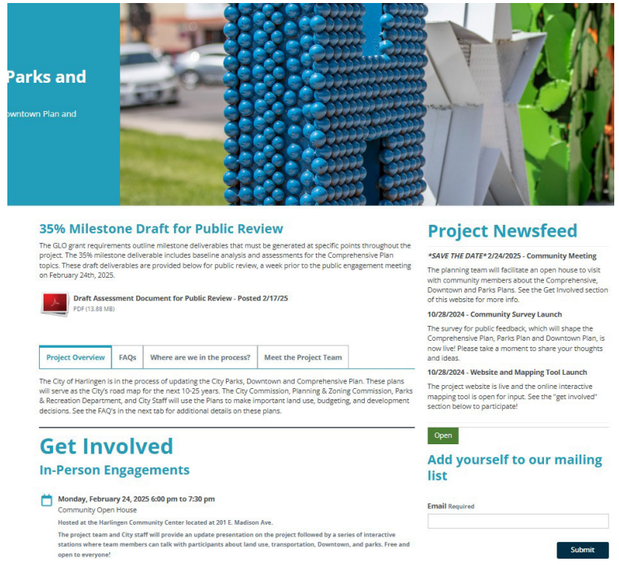
The meeting agenda included:

- Project and Process Overview
- Review of Community Feedback
- Key Takeaways from Assessments
- Next Steps
- Open House Activities (Interactive Stations)

The interactive stations topics included:

- Project and Website Information
- Overview of Public Feedback Received
- Draft Vision and Goals
- Resilience and Baseline Assessments (Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Infrastructure, and Economics)
- Land Use, Transportation, Downtown and Parks Feedback



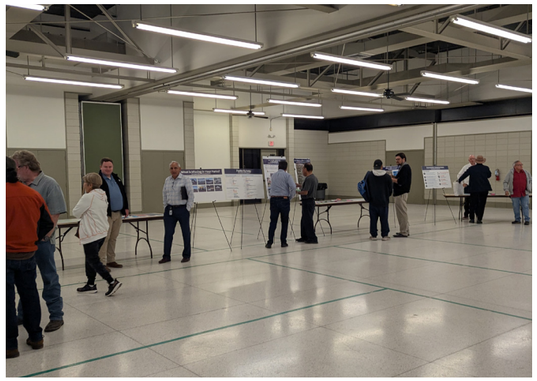




A screen capture of the meeting advertisement on the City's Facebook page and the meeting information on the project website. Additionally, this shows the 35% milestone document made publicly available on the project website a week prior to the meeting.



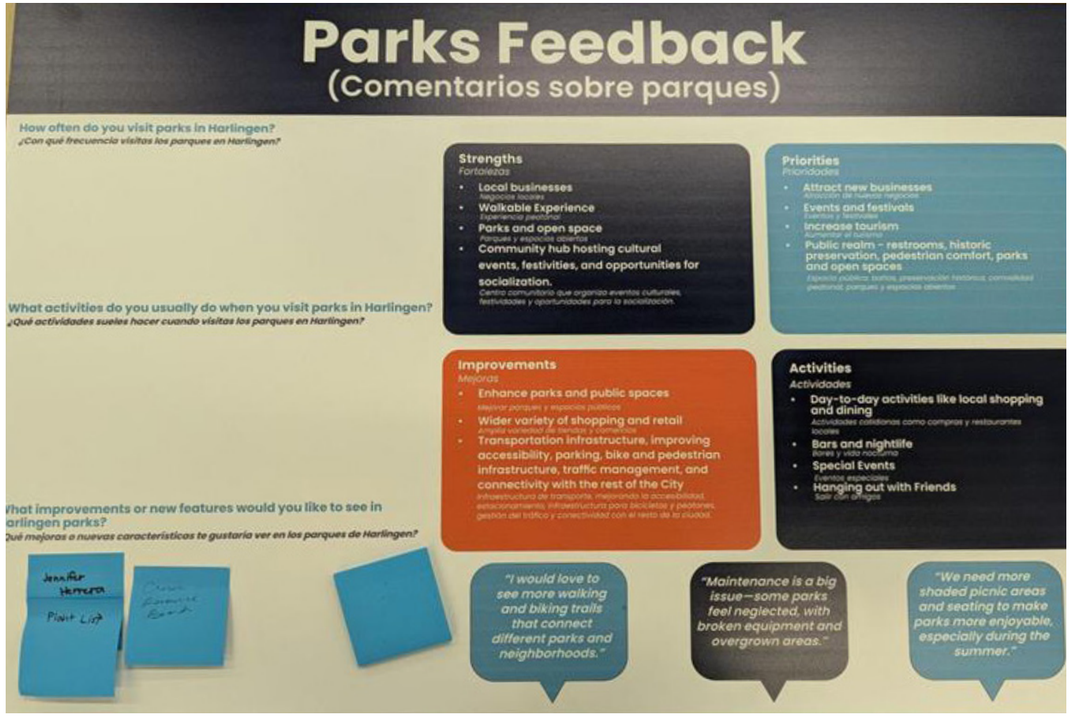







Images from the public meetings in February 2025. Top row: the presentation done by the consultant team. Middle and bottom rows: the interactive stations and one-on-one conversations.







## Parks Feedback

### Responses

How often do you visit parks in Harlingen?

- N/A

What activities do you usually do when you visit parks in Harlingen?

- N/A

What improvements or new features would you like to see in Harlingen Parks?

- Plant List - Jennifer Herrara
- Cannot read

Two responses were left on the "Park Experience" engagement board. Guiterrez Park was identified as needing improvement. Although there is not a park labeled on the map, a dot was placed close to Highway 83 on the Westside of Harlingen, indicating where the participants would love to see new amenities.




Bass Blvd to Alto Palmas Rd are used to access parks on the Westside of Harlingen, although one participant pointed out that the Westside is cut off on the map.




The top amenity needed in Harlingen's park system are trails for walking or bicycling. Other amenities like a sports courts, picnic pavilions, and restrooms are missing from some of the City's parks.

## What is Missing in Your Parks?

### Responses

| WHAT TYPES OF PARK AMENITIES ARE MOST NEEDED IN HARLINGEN? | # OF DOTS |
|---|---|
| Playgrounds | 0 |
| Picnic Pavilion | 1 |
| Sports Courts | 1 |
| Water Features | 0 |
| Community Gardens | 0 |
| Walking & Biking Trails | 3 |
| Athletic Field | 0 |
| Shade Equipment | 0 |
| Support Facilities (trash cans, benches, etc.) | 0 |
| Restrooms | 1 |

# Public Engagement #3

On June 3, 2025 at 6pm at the Casa de Amistad the planning team held its third community engagement event. The meeting was hosted by the City of Harlingen and facilitated by Freese & Nichols, the City's consultant. 14 participants signed in on the meeting sign in sheets. Advertisements were made via the City's communication channels, social media, and the project website. Advertisements and all meeting materials were made available in both English and Spanish.

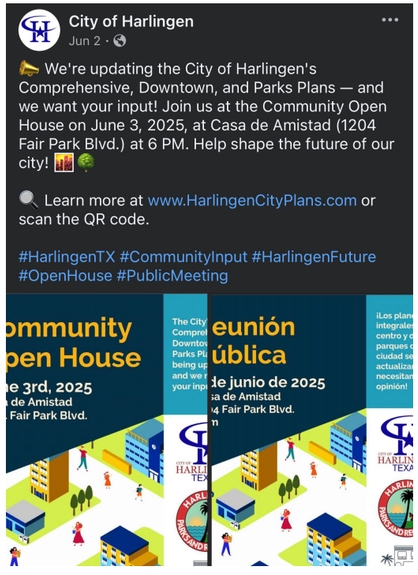
The purpose of this event was to garner additional feedback from local residents on the Harlingen Parks System in advance of recommendation development. The evening began with a formal presentation by the consultant team, followed by an open house with interactive stations and one on one conversations with the participants. City staff were also in attendance and available to talk with residents.

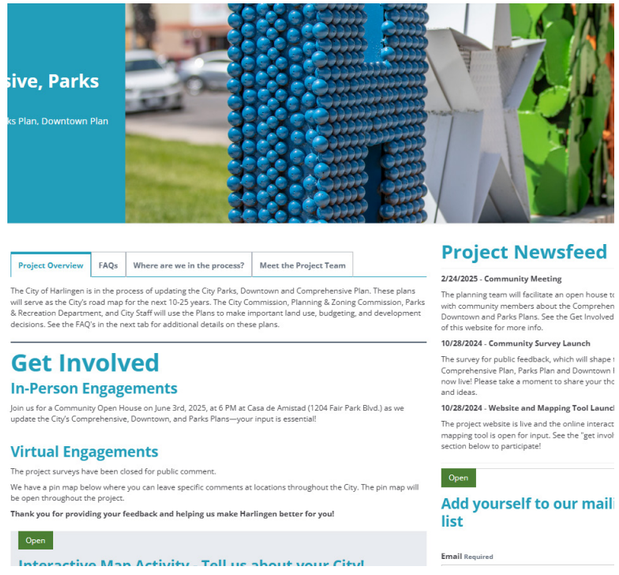
The meeting agenda included:

- Project and Process Overview
- Review of Community Feedback
- Key Takeaways from Assessments
- Next Steps
- Open House Activities (Interactive Stations)

The interactive stations topics included:

- Project and Website Information
- Draft Vision and Goals
- Plan Recommendations (Land Use, Housing, Infrastructure, and Economics)
- Transportation Feedback
- Downtown and Parks Plan Feedback




A screen capture of the meeting advertisement on the City's Facebook page and the meeting information on the project website.





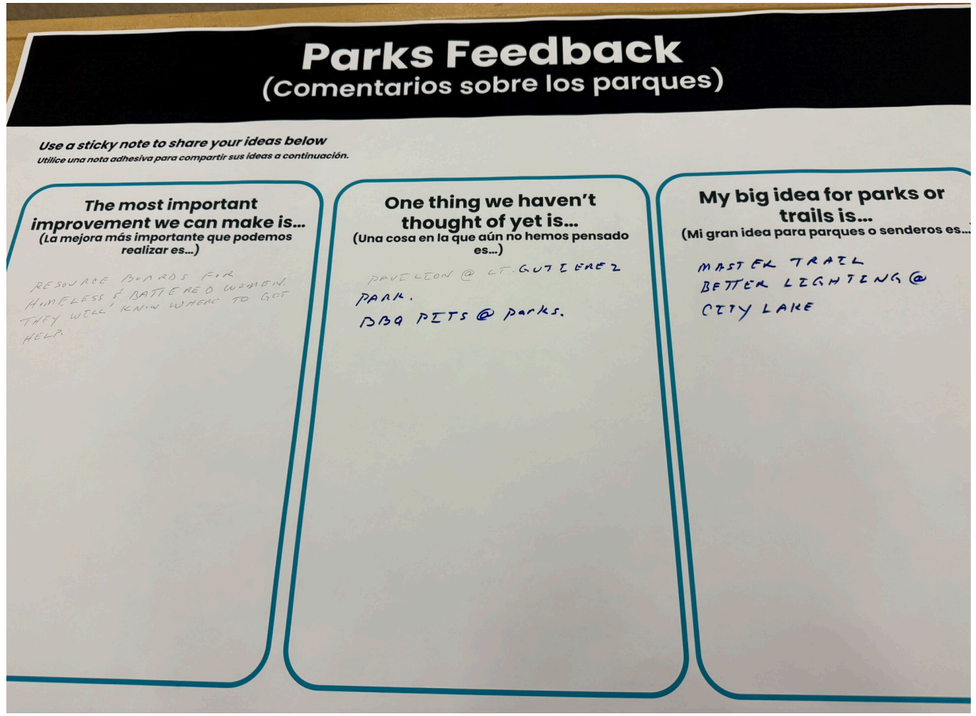








Images from the public meetings in June 2025. Top row: the presentation done by the consultant team. Middle and bottom rows: the interactive stations and one-on-one conversations.




Responses included the need for an improved pavilion at Gutierrez Park, more BBQ pits across all parks, the development of a Master Trail Plan, and the improvement of lighting at Lake Harlingen.

## Parks Feedback

### Responses

The most important improvement we can make is....

- Resource boards for homeless and battered women, they will know where to get help.

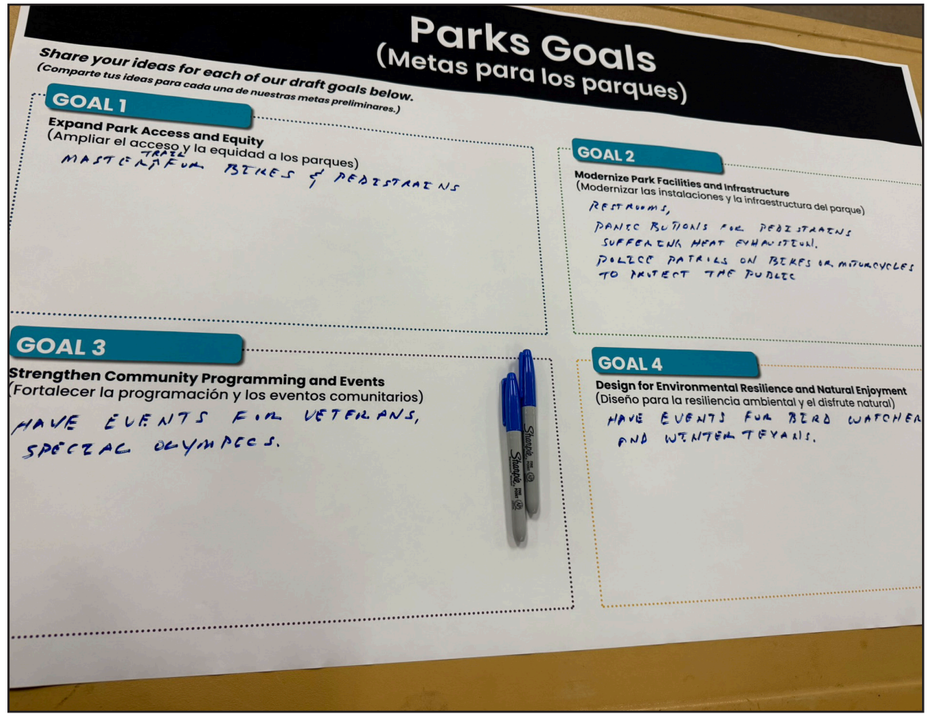
One thing we haven't thought of yet is....

- Pavilion at Gutierrez Park
- BBQ pits at parks

My big idea for parks or trails is....

- Master Trail Plan
- Better lighting at Lake Harlingen






Goals identified by event participants include the development of trails able to accommodate both bikes and pedestrians, the construction of additional restrooms and the deployment of bike-based police patrols within the City's Park systems.

## Parks Goals

### Responses

Goal 1

- Master Trail for bikes and pedestrians

Goal 2

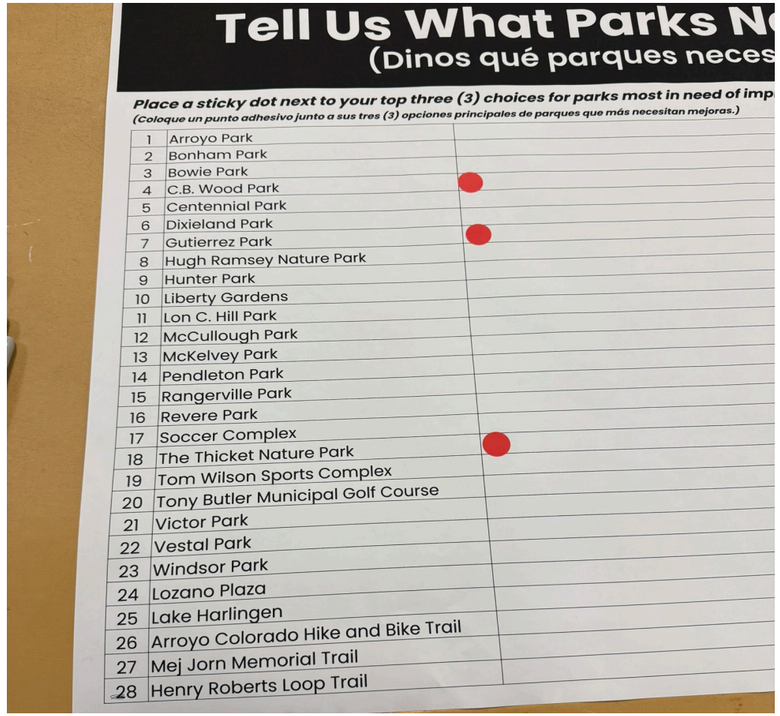
- Restrooms, panic buttons for pedestrians suffering heat exhaustion.
- Police patrols on bikes or motorcycles to protect the public.

Goal 3

- Have events for veterans and host Special Olympics.

Goal 4

- Have events for bird watchers and winter Texans.




Parks identifed as most need of improvement include: C.B. Wood Park, Gutierrez Park and the Thicket Nature Park.

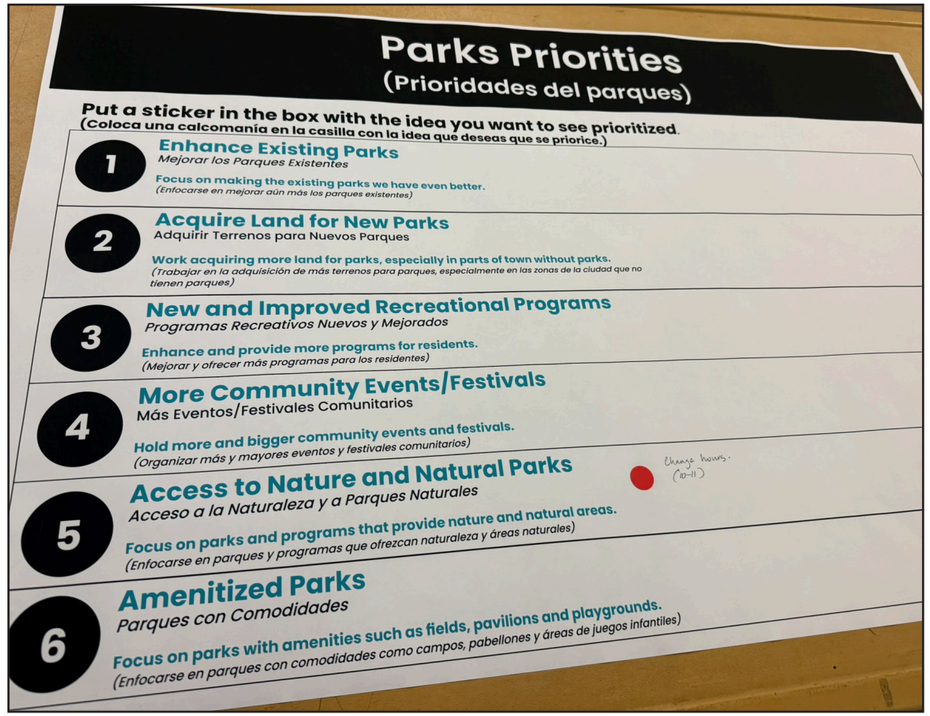
## Tell Us What Parks Need Attention

### Responses

C.B. Wood Park: 1 Dot

Gutierrez Park: 1 Dot

The Thicket Nature Park: 1 Dot




A response identifed a need to update the hours for access to nature parks in Harlingen to 10AM to 11PM.

## Parks Priorities

### Responses

Access to Nature and Natural Parks

- Change Hours (10AM to 11PM)