## A Community Dialogue on Parks and Public Spaces

The parks and public spaces of any community are there for people to enjoy and use. For this reason, it was essential that the public be part of the master planning process. In the future, an ongoing and systematic process of community participation should become second nature in decision making about parks and public spaces.

An extensive community dialogue on parks and public spaces took place in 2005–06 during the master planning process. The planning team employed a number of different methods to keep the public up to date on the progress of the plan and offered a variety of ways for citizens to make their opinions and priorities known. These activities included participation in citywide Miami 21 presentations, a project website, a public opinion survey, a customer-satisfaction survey, two public meetings in each of the 13 Neighborhood Empowerment Team (NET) Areas, and a citywide forum on parks and public spaces.

Each one of these activities provided a somewhat different perspective on the way that Miami residents use parks now and what they would like to see in the future. The public opinion survey provided a broad snapshot of attitudes about current and potential park and public space issues from a random sample of over 1,000 residents. It captured the preferences of the approximately one-third of households that say they do not visit or use city parks, as well as the sentiments of more regular park users. The survey's main disadvantage was an absence of open-ended questions, which limited the diversity of the answers it elicited. Its great strength, however, was its generation of a statistically significant and geographically representative overview of resident attitudes about parks.

In contrast, the public meetings attracted people with a stake in particular neighborhoods—as residents, park users, or property owners and business people. It also attracted activists with an interest in the park system as a whole. Meeting attendees were not as directly representative of the city as the survey respondents were and included some one-issue advocates, but participants were often very knowledgeable about the parks. The hands-on activities and more freewheeling discussions that took place in these meetings produced more detailed and nuanced comments than were possible from the surveys. Both kinds of community input were invaluable for crafting the master plan.

## THEMES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY AND THE PUBLIC MEETINGS

Certain themes emerged repeatedly in the survey and in the public meetings, as residents considered the park system today and what they would like it to be in the future.

#### MIAMI NEEDS MORE PARKS.

- The overwhelming majority of survey respondents (91%) believe that
  Miami needs more parks, and two-thirds agree that parks provide economic
  benefits to the city. Half of the respondents said that there are not enough
  parks within walking distance. In the survey, the highest need was expressed
  for small neighborhood parks, walking and biking trails, large community
  parks, large group picnic areas, and beach access areas.
- In the public meetings, participants emphasized a need for more park land to serve future residents of new development, and a need for new parks in underserved areas, especially Wynwood/Edgewater, Little Havana, Little Haiti, Model City, West Flagler, and Coral Way.

## MIAMI RESIDENTS WANT MORE ACCESS TO WATER—THE BAY, RIVERS, AND PUBLIC SWIMMING POOLS.

- Between 20% and 40% of survey respondents, when given a list of various park and recreation facilities, expressed a need for water-related activities, including fishing areas; canoe, kayak and small-boat water access; indoor pools for recreational swimming; outdoor pools and water parks; and beach-access parks. These percentages correspond to an estimated 30,000 to 60,000 households in Miami. In the survey, almost two-thirds of respondents judged year-round pools to be very or somewhat important.
- In the NET Areas with frontage on Biscayne Bay or on the Miami or Little
  rivers, there was considerable discussion about improving conditions at
  existing waterfront parks and about enhancing public access to the water.
  Ideas for enhanced access included creating beaches and providing new
  ways to get to the Picnic Islands.

#### MIAMI NEEDS MORE TREES AND SHADE.

Participants in public meetings and in interviews repeatedly mentioned
the need for more trees and more shade. Children's play structures without
shade are unusable on hot days for half the year. The availability of shade is
an essential ingredient in creating comfortable walking routes to parks.

### MIAMI NEEDS TO BECOME MORE PEDESTRIAN- AND BIKE-FRIENDLY.

- Over half of the survey respondents expressed a need for walking and biking trails (which translates to nearly 74,000 households), and half of them see their needs for trails currently being met 50% of the time or less. Survey respondents would allocate 15% of all park capital funds specifically to acquisition and development of new walking and biking trails.
- During the public meetings there was much discussion about the
  importance of dedicated pedestrian and bicycle trails and routes. Everyone
  supported the Riverwalk, Baywalk, and FEC Corridor Greenway concepts
  and expressed a strong desire to see them completed. Participants also
  wanted better pedestrian and bicycle connections from neighborhoods
  to parks and other public spaces—"better" here being defined as more
  numerous connections that are safe, comfortable, well-lit, and attractive for
  pedestrian and bicycle travel.

#### MIAMI MUST TAKE CARE OF THE PARKS IT ALREADY HAS.

- Survey respondents would allocate over one-third of capital funds to making improvements in existing parks and over one-third of program and operating funds to maintenance of existing facilities.
- Participants in the public meetings offered many suggestions for improved maintenance and ways to make existing underutilized parks more successful. They pointed out that in some neighborhoods, parks without staff saw less use due to security concerns.

## MIAMI'S PARKS MUST SERVE A VARIETY OF NEEDS FOR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES, BALANCING ACTIVE AND PASSIVE USES.

• Survey respondents expressed greatest need for small neighborhood parks, walking and biking trails, large community parks, large group picnic areas, and beach access areas. Even though the survey indicated preferences and needs for certain general categories of parks and activities, it is significant that at least 20% of respondents—corresponding to an estimated 27,600 households—expressed a need for 19 types of parks and facilities out of 24 offered in one of the survey questions. (Respondents could indicate multiple choices.) These facilities range from senior centers and fishing areas to indoor fitness centers, off-leash dog parks, and a nature center and trails.

• In the public meetings, the diversity of needs and preferences for parks and recreational activities was very clear. Low- and moderate-income parents were most interested in programs at staffed parks where they could feel confident that their children were safe and engaged in fun, interesting, and educational activities. Young families also wanted to be able to walk to play areas with their children. Many adults wanted more opportunities for improving fitness—through outdoor walking and biking trails, indoor fitness centers, or improved lighting and safety where they walk in existing parks. Other adults advocated for more passive green space and garden-like parks to balance dense residential development. In some neighborhoods there were strong constituencies for off-leash dog parks. Although the majority of households are not involved in organized sports, youth and adult sports leagues are very important to some neighborhoods and to some segments of the population. Current recreation programs were perceived as inadequately serving girls, middle school and high school youth, adults, and seniors.



The consultants designed and managed a website dedicated to the project, with links to the Miami 21 website. The site provided an overview of the project, schedules, and project documents and maps. It also allowed interested residents to contact the consultants and the city.

#### **MIAMI 21 PRESENTATIONS**

The consultants for the parks and public spaces plan participated in Miami 21 presentations that were designed to introduce the project and provide progress reports to the public. These presentations occurred in April 2005, July 2005, and March 2006.

#### **NET AREA WORKSHOPS AND OPEN HOUSES**

Both a public workshop and a public open house were held in each of the city's 13 NET Areas between August 2005 and February 2006. These meetings—held in the evening to encourage resident participation—generally took place in a recreation building or a park in the NET Area, although some took place at a NET office or other location. With the assistance of the City, the consultant team also met in advance with leaders of neighborhood associations or other local groups to discuss park issues. Outreach for the meetings included messages to e-mail lists, requests for neighborhood associations to inform their members, requests for park managers to inform park users, flyers distributed

to park managers, and schedules posted on the project website and the Miami 21 website. Participation in the meetings varied considerably, with some meetings well attended and others with fewer participants.

The workshop provided a hands-on discussion in which groups of participants worked with members of the consultant team to identify park and public space priorities for their NET Area. At the open houses, which followed a few weeks later, the consultant team presented a vision and priorities for the NET Area based on the workshop results and asked attendees to comment on them. The purpose of the open houses was to make sure that priorities and ideas that emerged from the workshops were understood, and to get feedback on additional ideas proposed by the consultants. The project website posted materials presented at each open house along with an aerial map and a land use map of that NET Area. Chapter 5 presents these NET Area visions in detail.

#### **CITYWIDE PARKS FORUM**

A daylong citywide forum on parks and public spaces took place on March 25, 2006. The purpose of this meeting was to report to the public on the NET Area visions and other work to that point on the plan, including the proposed planning framework, overall goals and principles, and strategies for reaching the goals. The participants also worked in small groups on three themes: recreation and culture, connections, and the ideal park. In their forum packages, participants received \$200 in "Greenspace Greenbacks"—replica money that they were asked to "spend" on a set of alternative budget areas in two categories, capital improvements and operations/programming. This exercise duplicated a question in the public opinion survey.

Speakers Sherry Kafka Wagner, Michael Singer, and Mary Eysenbach provided participants with national perspectives on park systems.

 Wagner's work focuses on how different people and communities perceive and use parks, emphasizing community needs and intentions as the basis for park design, interpretation, and programming. Among the projects she

Mayor Diaz and Miami residents participated in the citywide parks forum.







has been involved in are the San Antonio Riverwalk, several urban national parks, and Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco. Wagner spoke about the importance of understanding the diverse cultural identities of park users and ensuring that park design and programming are consistent with the way different groups use parks. As the shared spaces within a community, successful parks and public spaces reflect the diversity of the communities in which they are located.

- Singer, an environmental artist and designer who is an Eminent Scholar in
  the Arts and Humanities at Florida Atlantic University, has helped transform
  public art, architecture, landscape, and planning projects into models for urban
  and ecological renewal across the United States in Europe; his work includes
  the West Palm Beach Waterfront Commons. He showed examples of how
  the design of nuts-and-bolts public infrastructure—transfer stations, water
  treatment facilities, and wastewater treatment plants—can provide exciting,
  environmentally-sustainable public spaces that are beautiful and educational.
- Eysenbach, former executive director of the City Parks Forum of the American Planning Association, focused on the social benefits of parks, particularly their role in community building. Well-managed parks contribute to public health, reduce crime, educate, and support economic development. Parks are integral to community identity. The City Parks Forum identified key factors for success in using parks to build community, including citizen participation, partnerships, timing, design, programming, and a maintenance plan to make sure parks are clean and safe.

A general conversation among the speakers and meeting participants and the small group discussions generated a variety of ideas. Some of the day's ideas reflected themes developed in the NET Area meetings and expressed in the survey, and some represented new perspectives. Major ideas that emerged include:

- The city needs programming that involves access to the water, particularly the bay and river.
- Many parks need exercise programs for adults.
- Each area has specific needs; getting the right activities for the right parks in the right places is important.
- Parks need public art to reflect the city's identity. Revolving art exhibitions
  in parks can provide an opportunity for different cultures in different
  neighborhoods to get to know one another. For example, art by AfricanAmericans should not be thought of as just for the African-American
  neighborhoods.
- Every bridge over the Miami River should be made friendly to pedestrians.
- Walking will not become more popular in Miami until people can feel

safe; intersections are designed with signals and crosswalks that allow pedestrians to cross safely; and drivers are educated to respect pedestrians.

- Greenways, walking paths, and bike paths need to feel more secure, with more locations providing "eyes on the street."
- Corporate and institutional sponsorship helped revitalize New York's parks and can do the same for Miami.
- Areas of historic and cultural importance should be included in the master plan.
- Miami has too much concrete; green spaces should be planted to reinforce the city's tropical identity.
- Neighborhoods must be involved in deciding the location and design of new parks.

#### SURVEYS OF THE PUBLIC

The planning process included two surveys designed to solicit information from the public on current use patterns in the city's parks and recreation facilities, users' needs and their priorities for the system, and the level of user satisfaction with the system. The surveys were administered by Leisure Vision.

#### SURVEY 1: COMMUNITY ATTITUDE AND INTEREST SURVEY

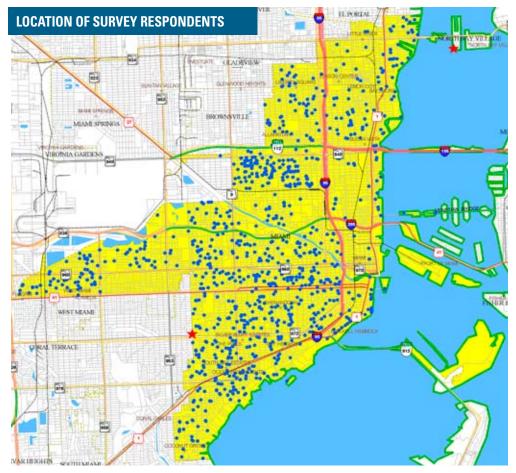
Miami residents value their park system. This survey showed that over the course of the previous year about one-third of city residents did not use any of the parks and an even larger group, 85%, had no household members who participated in city recreation programs. Of those who participated, however, satisfaction

was quite high—80% found the programs good or excellent. Residents generally think that parks and recreation are very important, bringing quality of life and economic benefits to the city that are worth paying for. Although unmet parks and recreation needs remain, the top two priorities are walking and biking trails and small neighborhood parks.

#### **Survey Methodology**

Survey I was conducted during March and April of 2006 to help establish priorities for the future development of parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services. The survey was administered by a combination of mail and phone in English, Spanish, and Kreyol. In March 2006, surveys were mailed to a random sample of 5,000 households in Miami. Approximately three days after the mailing, the survey team delivered an electronic voice message to each household encouraging completion of the survey. About two weeks after the surveys were sent, the survey team contacted the

RESIDENTS' USE OF PARKS AND FACILITIES AT LEAST ONCE IN 12 MONTHS	
	%
small parks	61
large parks	55
trails	44
Virginia Key Beach	27
youth athletic fields	22
outdoor pools	19
adult athletic fields	18
community centers	17
Parks and Public Spaces Master Plan Survey, 2006	



households again by phone, either to encourage completion of the survey or to administer the survey by phone.

The survey drew 1,140 responses, well beyond its goal of 1,000. The results of the random sample have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of +/-2.9%. Survey 1 was geographically representative and demographically representative by income, ethnicity, race, age, and gender.

The large sample size for the survey—more than 1,100 households from around the city responded—provided a broad and statistically reliable sampling of opinion. Each dot represents a respondent.

#### Small Neighborhood Parks, Walking/Biking Trails, and Large Parks

Asked to indicate which of 24 parks and recreation facility types they need, over 40% of respondent households chose small neighborhood parks, walking and biking trails, large community parks, large group picnic areas and shelters, and beach access parks—an estimated number of households ranging from 57,000 to 89,000. Between 20% and 40% of respondents (corresponding to 27,000 to 47,000 households) indicated a need for a wide variety of other kinds of park and recreation areas, demonstrating the diverse interests and needs of Miami's complex community.

#### **People Who Use Parks Think They Are Good**

The majority of people who use parks in Miami think they are good or excellent. Of the respondents asked to rate overall quality of the areas they have used in the last twelve months, 43% rated them as "good" and 9% found them "excellent." Another 19% said they were "fair" and only 9% said they were "poor." Another 21% said that they "didn't know"; this group probably comprised residents who do not use parks.

#### Park and Recreation Facilities Do Not Meet Needs

Using the same list of 24 types of facilities, respondent households that indicated a need for facilities were asked how well each type met their needs. No facility type drew more than 35% of responses indicating that it completely meets household needs. In the areas of indoor, water-based, and specialized facilities—indoor sports and fitness, senior centers, boating and fishing facilities, dog parks, and skateboard parks—even higher percentages said that existing facilities did not meet most of their needs.

#### The Most Important Park and Recreation Facilities Include Small Neighborhood Parks and Walking and Biking Trails

From the list of 24 types of facilities, respondents were asked to select the four most important to the members of their household. Small neighborhood parks ranked highest (36%) as one of the four most important types, and this category was also selected most frequently by respondents as their first choice. Respondents also frequently chose walking and biking trails (31%) and large community parks (22%) as among the four most important types of facilities.

#### Miami Needs Development of Both Small Neighborhood Parks and Large Community Parks

Fifty percent (50%) of respondents feel the City of Miami should place equal emphasis on the development of small neighborhood parks and large community parks. However, 24% of respondents would like the City to place more emphasis on small neighborhood parks, and 15% prefer to focus on large community parks. Only 9% of respondents indicated that no new neighborhood or community parks are needed.

NEED FOR PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES	, BY TYPI	E
	% YES	% NO
small neighborhood parks	64	36
walking and biking trails	55	45
large community parks	53	47
large group picnic areas and shelters	46	54
beach access parks	41	59
nature center and trails	34	66
outdoor swimming pools/ water parks	34	66
indoor fitness and exercise facilities	33	67
playground equipment	30	70
indoor running/ walking track	28	72
indoor pools for recreation	24	76
outdoor amphitheaters/ bandstand	24	76
outdoor tennis courts	24	76
canoe, kayak and small water boat access	23	77
fishing areas	22	78
off-leash dog parks	21	80
senior center	20	80
indoor exercise swim lap lanes	20	81
indoor basketball/ volleyball	20	81
youth baseball and softball fields	18	82
youth soccer fields	15	85
youth football/ lacrosse/ rugby	13	87
adult softball fields	12	88
skateboarding parks	11	89
Source: Parks and Public Spaces Master Plan Survey, 2006		

Source: Parks and Public Spaces Master Plan Survey, 2006
DUE TO ROUNDING, PERCENTAGES FOR SOME ANSWERS TOTAL MORE THAN 100%.

#### **Improving Swimming Pools and Aquatic Facilities Is Important**

Access to swimming and water is important for everyone in Miami's climate, and improving aquatic facilities is a focus for the Parks and Recreation Department. The survey included several questions about such facilities.

- From a list of nine potential improvements to outdoor aquatic facilities, respondents were asked to indicate which three they and members of their household would use most often. The largest proportion of respondents, 33%, chose a leisure pool with a gently sloped entry. A range of facilities won similar levels of support—between 23% and 27% of respondents. This group included water sprays with interactive play features; water slides; lap lanes for exercise, lessons and lap swimming; a shallow pool for infants or toddlers; a "lazy river" allowing for rafts or floats; and deck areas for sunbathing and lounging.
- Sixty-two percent (62%) of respondents felt that it is either very important (37%) or somewhat important (25%) for the City of Miami to operate swimming pools throughout the year. While 22% were "not sure" about this need, only 15% of respondents felt it is not important.

## Many Residents Support Increasing Fees for Recreation Facilities, Programs, and Services

Nearly half of respondents were either very supportive (21%) or somewhat supportive (26%) of increasing the fees for recreation facilities, programs, and services they use. A quarter was "not sure," while 26% of respondents did not want fees to be increased.

## Improved Parks and Recreation Services Are Important Compared to Other Priorities

A large proportion of respondents indicated that improvements in parks and recreation services are either very important (48%) or somewhat important (34%) compared to other priorities in Miami. Only 6% of respondents described improvements as not important; 9% were "not sure."

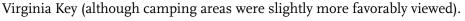
#### **Barriers to Park and Recreation Use Include Lack of Information**

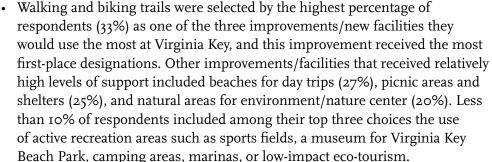
From a list of 18 options, respondents were asked to select reasons that they and members of their household do not use parks, recreation facilities, and programs of the City of Miami more often. The highest percentage of respondents (41%) were "too busy or not interested" in using municipal facilities and programs more often. The other most frequently mentioned reasons included ignorance of program offerings (22%), insufficient security (17%), distance (16%), and poor maintenance (16%).

#### More Walking and Biking Trails Are Needed on Virginia Key

Because preparation of a detailed plan for Virginia Key is under way, the survey included several questions about it. Key findings include:

- Thirty-one percent of respondent households had visited Virginia Key during the past two years.
- At least 35% of respondents were very supportive of four (out of nine) potential improvements or new facilities there: walking and biking trails (39%), picnic areas and shelters (36%), natural areas for environmental education/nature center (36%), and beaches for day trips (35%). The addition of "somewhat supportive" responses boosted support for each of these options above the 50% mark. Thirty percent or more were not supportive of marinas or low-impact ecotourism with cabins on







Beaches, picnic tables, and nature-based recreation were preferred for Virginia Key.

### SURVEY TWO: RECREATION PROGRAMS AND PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

A second survey was designed to focus more specifically on recreation programs. Originally intended as a customer-service survey of people using city recreation programs, problems with program enrollment records prevented targeted distribution to program users. Instead, surveys were mailed in August 2006 to a random sample of 3,000 households in the city. Approximately three days after the surveys were mailed, the survey team delivered an electronic voice message to each household encouraging completion of the survey. In addition, about two weeks after the surveys were mailed, the survey team began contacting households by phone, either to encourage completion of the mailed survey or to administer the survey by phone. The total of 614 surveys completed slightly surpassed the goal of obtaining 600 completed surveys. The results have a 95% level of confidence, with a precision of at least +/-4.0%.

#### **SUMMARY FINDINGS**

Responses to this survey show the diversity of recreation needs in Miami, but with a repeated emphasis on adult fitness activities. The most-needed park improvements were practical amenities like restrooms and drinking fountains. Other notable results include the fact that nearly half of the respondent households report using walking and biking trails. Highlights of the survey results are below:

#### Adult fitness programs are a focus of interest.

Respondents were asked to indicate which of 21 programs are needed by members of their households (including themselves).

> Five recreation programs surpassed a 25% level of responses, with respondent households expressing a need for adult fitness and wellness programs (38%), citywide special events (30%), nature programs (27%), water fitness programs (26%), and adult sports programs (25%). This corresponds to an estimated 35,000 households or more. However, an estimated 25,000–35,000 households also had a need for a range of other programs, including martial arts; youth art, dance and performing arts; youth summer camp; before- and after-school programs; youth learn-to-swim programs; boating and sailing; youth fitness and wellness; adult art, dance and performing arts; youth sports; and programs for seniors.

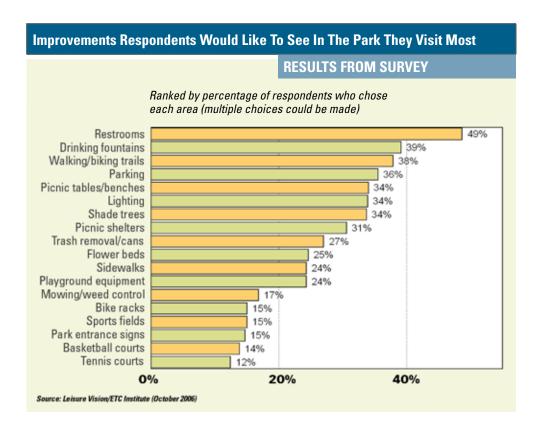
#### Many recreation needs are not being met.

Respondent households that have a need for programs were asked to indicate how well each item on a list of 21 recreation programs meets their needs.

- > Fewer than 55% of respondents indicated that any of the 21 programs completely meets the needs of their households. For example, between 20,000 and 30,000 households have needs for adult fitness and wellness programs, nature programs, citywide special events, and adult sports programs that are being met only 50% or less.
- > Respondents were asked to rank the four programs that are most important to them. Based on the sum of these four choices, the programs that are most important to respondent households are: adult fitness and wellness (22%), youth sports (14%), senior adult (12%), nature (11%) and citywide special events (11%). Among all 21 types of programs, adult fitness and wellness was most frequently chosen as the most important kind of program.

#### Most people visit a city park at least once a year.

As in the earlier survey, a majority of respondents reported visiting a city park over the previous year, with 43% reporting at least six visits in the year. Over a third (37%), however, had not visited a city park at all; an additional 2% did not answer.



#### Park restrooms and drinking fountains are high priorities.

From a list of 18 options, respondents were asked to indicate all of the improvements they would like to see made in the city park they visit most often.

> Improvements in amenities that make park visits more comfortable and pleasant topped this list: restrooms (49%), drinking fountains (39%), walking/biking trails (38%), and parking (36%). Close behind this cluster came another set of amenities in which respondents listed improved picnic tables and benches, lighting, shade trees, and picnic shelters.

#### Walking and biking trails are used often.

Respondents were asked to indicate how often their household currently uses walking and biking trails in the City of Miami.

> Nearly half of the respondent households (48%) used walking and biking trails, and a quarter (24%) used them at least once a week.

#### Few people use trails for transportation.

From a list of five options, respondents were asked to indicate the two reasons their household used walking and biking trails in the City of Miami.

> Respondents named exercise/fitness (45%) and enjoying the outdoors/ nature (32%) as their top reasons for using trails. Only 2% used the trails for transportation.

#### Athletic fields and youth programs elicited the highest levels of satisfaction.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with each of a list of 19 park and recreation services provided by the City.

- > The services that won the highest levels of satisfaction were quality of outdoor athletic fields (25%), number of baseball/softball fields (25%), number of city soccer fields (24%), quality of indoor athletic fields (23%) and city youth programs (23%).
- > Respondents were least satisfied with programs for seniors, the number of nature conservation areas, and the availability of information on city programs and facilities. ("Don't know" responses were excluded.)

#### Maintenance, more parks, and more walking/biking trails should be the focus.

- > From the list of 19 park and recreation services provided by the City, respondents were asked to select the three they felt should receive the most attention from the City over the next two years.
- > They most frequently chose parks maintenance (29%), number of parks (21%), and number of walking/biking trails (21%). Maintenance was selected by the highest percentage of respondents as their first choice.

#### **HOW SHOULD MIAMI DISTRIBUTE FUNDS FOR PARKS?**

In both the citywide forum and the first survey, participants were asked to allocate \$100 for capital improvements in parks and \$100 for operations and programming among a specified number of alternatives. Graphs displaying the results of these questions appear on pages 21 and 22.

#### **Capital Improvements**

The results of the allocation exercises for capital improvements show that the participants at the citywide forum were much more focused on acquisition of new parkland and walking and biking trails than were the survey respondent population. The citywide forum group would allocate 71% of capital funds to acquisition while the survey group would allocate 32%. Both groups wanted new parks, but the survey group wanted to invest more capital funds in existing facilities.

#### **Programs and Operations**

Compared to the survey group, participants in the citywide forum allocated more funds to maintenance and staff than to programming.

