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City of Wahpeton Releases Results from Rec Center Survey

The Wahpeton Rec Center Committee that is working on the feasibility of a new recreational center in town has released the results from the recently completed community survey gauging the public's interest and feedback on the topic. The study was conducted over a two-week span in March and is one tool being used as a starting point of a comprehensive community engagement plan to gather feedback from the residents of Wahpeton, Breckenridge, and the surrounding area. "We're definitely pleased with the number of people that took the time to complete the survey," said committee member Amanda Fisher. "We will use the results to dive deeper into the details and foster important conversations throughout the region."

The committee was formed as a grassroots effort to try to bring an exciting amenity to residents of the region, improving quality of life for residents and tourism opportunities for visitors. Committee members include Zach Hatting, Tami Sirek, Amanda Fisher, Stacia Henningsen, Kelly McNary, Tyler Gripentrog, Brad Pauly, Ryan Smith, and Korey Skovholt.

The survey was launched to reach as many people as possible, and to gather feedback in the areas of programming, funding, and general support. The committee wants to ensure that a new facility in town will compliment other facilities, as well as compliment, not compete with, local businesses. The survey results will be used to further conversations and explore partnerships and collaborations with groups throughout the region. "We are excited to work with people across the region to explore the possibility of building something that will make our community stronger," said committee member Stacia Henningsen. "The survey showed us that there is genuine interest in a facility like this, so we will continue to work to find out what is most important to all of our citizens and businesses in the area."

Over the last two weeks in March, over 1,500 people took the survey. Of the respondents, nearly 1,000 of them live in Wahpeton, with another 200+ living in Breckenridge. Another 259 respondents live outside of Wahpeton but in Richland County. The age demographics of the survey respondents had a wide variety, as did the number of people per household.

Some key findings from the survey are as follows:

- 72.5% said they strongly support building a new rec center in Wahpeton, while another 17.82% said they agree.
- Only 3.37% said they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with building a new rec center.
- 63.53% of respondents said they believe a sales tax should be used as a funding source, compared to 29.6% believing property tax should be used. 85.55% believe that private donations should be a component when funding a new rec center.
- Survey respondents were asked the highest level of sales tax they would support, should sales tax be used as a funding source. 41.12% of respondents said that 1% is the highest they would

support, while another 34.69% said 0.5%. An additional 11.78% said that 1.5% is the highest they would support.

- The survey asked people to choose their top 5 amenities that they would like to see in a new rec center, out of a list of 19 possibilities. This was done to see which amenities were most important to people, knowing that a new rec center could not have all of them. In order from the most popular, the top ten items were:
 - Indoor play park for toddlers through teens, including Ninja course
 - Aquatics Center
 - Elevated Walking Path
 - Basketball/volleyball courts
 - MAC gym for pickleball, tennis, badminton, floor hockey
 - Outdoor splash pad
 - Indoor turf for soccer, golf, baseball, and softball use
 - Space for active older adults
 - Gathering space for the public
 - Golf simulator

The committee will now look closely at the construction costs and operational costs of each listed item and use all of this information to look comprehensively at which items will make the most sense for the community moving forward.

The people of Wahpeton and Breckenridge can soon expect another community survey that will be more detailed and look more closely at some programming elements and amenities. Additionally, there will be public forums and focus groups scheduled to gather as much information and feedback as possible. “We know that we still have a lot of work to do,” said committee member Zach Hatting. “The committee understands all of the layers that can make a facility such as this impactful and successful, and we’re committed to making sure that all citizens, businesses, and groups have a chance to participate in the process and provide us important feedback.”