Sandpoint Public Parking Satisfaction Survey

Response analysis

Introduction

Throughout the month of March the City collected responses to a survey aimed at gauging community satisfaction with the City's public parking facilities. Over 1,800 responses were collected, of which 53% came from City of Sandpoint residents and 47% from non-City residents (as self-reported by respondents).

The full results of the survey can be viewed here.

Around 4,000 narrative responses to three questions were collected. To help analyze, synthesize, and summarize those responses, a .csv file of all responses was exported and uploaded to ChatGPT pro, a large language model (LLM) Artificial Intelligence tool that excels in analysis of large quantities of data such as that collected through this survey.

In the sections below are the unedited results from when ChatGPT was provided several prompts to extract some meaning from the vast amounts of data collected through the survey, particularly the 4,000+ narrative comments.

Prompt 1: How do the primary modes of getting to Downtown Sandpoint differ between Sandpoint residents and non-Residents?

🚶‍♂️ **City of Sandpoint Residents**

Top 3 primary modes:

- **Drive and park on the street**: 483 → **56.5%**

- **Drive and park in a public lot**: 176 → **20.6%**

- **Walk**: 101 → **11.8%**

- Also notable: **Ride a bike**: 95 → **11.1%**

◈ *Takeaway:* City residents are **more likely to walk or bike** downtown than any other group, reflecting proximity and accessibility.

🚗 **Unincorporated Bonner County (e.g., Sagle, Selle Valley)**

Top 3 primary modes:

- **Drive and park on the street**: 339 → **59.6%**

- **Public parking lot**: 162 → **28.5%**

- **Private business parking**: 56 → **9.8%**

- Very few walk (8) or bike (4) → **0.7% - 1.4%**

◈ *Takeaway:* Non-City residents overwhelmingly rely on **driving**, especially to **on-street and public lots**.

Prompt 2: How did the preferred means of paying for parking lot maintenance and improvements differ between Sandpoint residents and non-Sandpoint residents?

Key Insights by Residence Group:

☑ **City of Sandpoint Residents**

- **Most supported**:
  - **User fees**: 295 → **35.7%**
  - **State/federal grants**: 292 → **35.4%**
- **Less favored**:
  - **City property taxes**: 216 → **26.2%**
  - **Privatization**: 23 → **2.8%**

◈ *Takeaway:* City residents lean slightly more toward **user-pays systems**, but there's also strong support for using grants. City property taxes are less favored.

⛰ **Non-Sandpoint Residents (Total = 729)**

- **State/federal grants**: 363 → **49.8%**

- **City property taxes**: 212 → **29.1%**

- **User fees**: 137 → **18.8%**

- **Privatization**: 17 → **2.3%**

◈ *Takeaway:* This group places **greater reliance on grants and city taxes**—even though they don't pay those taxes—suggesting limited support for **user fees**.

Prompt 3: How did City residents and non-City residents differ in their willingness to buy a parking pass?

🏡 City Residents

- **Yes**: 169 → **41%**

- **No**: 247 → **59%**

🌲 Non-City Residents

- **Yes**: 41→ **30%**

- **No**: 97 → **70%**

🔍 Key Takeaways:

- **City residents are more willing** to purchase a parking pass than non-residents.

- However, even among City residents, a **majority (59%) say no** — suggesting skepticism or a preference for free/time-limited parking remains strong.

Prompt 4: What themes emerged through responses to the question, "What questions do you have about parking in Sandpoint?"

🔁 Concern About Policy Decisions & Transparency

Many respondents questioned the City's decision-making around parking requirements and development.

"Why are developers being granted waivers to the amount of parking spaces they are required to provide?"
"Why is this coming up at the same time as the City Beach hotel development?"

💰 Questions About Paid Parking Implementation

People want clarity on how paid parking will work — particularly **who pays**, **where**, and **how it affects locals**.

"Why change parking in our small town at all?"
"Why not give all Bonner County residents a sticker for free parking?"

🗺️ Equity for Local vs. Tourist Use

There's a strong interest in ensuring that **locals (especially county residents)** aren't disadvantaged.

"If you offer free parking to locals only, please extend that to all county residents."
"Tourists should pay a little for City Beach parking."

🅿️ Infrastructure Ideas

Some respondents asked about **creative solutions** — including structured parking or expanded lots.

"Why can't Sandpoint get a grant to build a multi-level parking garage downtown?"

🚗 Seasonal and Use-Based Access

Respondents noted **seasonal congestion**, especially during the summer or when using **boat launches**.

"Availability during summer months when our city is overrun with tourists."
"Biggest concern is time limits on boat trailer parking at the launch."

Prompt 5: What themes emerged in response to the question, "What would you like the City to know as it works to improve the experiences of City residents and visitors using City parking facilities?"

🏠 Prioritize Locals Over Tourists

Many respondents want the City to **focus on the needs of residents**, not cater to tourists or development interests.

"Stop catering to tourists and focus on locals that have been here forever."
"Follow the wants of the public and not the big money."

🅿️ Strong Opposition to Paid Parking

There's widespread resistance to paying for parking — some would even prefer infrastructure stay unimproved.

"I would rather have potholes than have to pay to park."
"No one feels good about paying for parking."

💲 Prefer User Fees Over Property Taxes

Many expressed that **users (especially tourists)** should fund parking — not local taxpayers.

"It would not be fair for property owners to pay… let the people who use the parking pay for it."
"Make people pay for convenience, but do it with pay to park, not more tax."

🚶‍♀️ Encourage Alternatives to Driving

Several responses supported **biking, walking**, and **remote/free lots** over expanding central parking.

"Incentivize not driving. Sandpoint is a small area and can easily be walked or biked."
"Have free parking on the periphery."

🏢 Support Downtown Business Vitality

People are worried that paid parking could push shoppers away from downtown and harm local businesses.

"We need to encourage people to shop downtown, not push them further away."
"Paid parking is another excuse to shop online or in Ponderay."

🧑‍🏫 Appreciation for Public Engagement

Several thanked the City for including the public in the planning process.

"Thank you for asking our opinion on something that will impact us all!"

Prompt 6: What themes emerged in responses to the question, "What improvements, if any, would you like to see in Sandpoint's public parking facilities?"

🛠 Basic Maintenance & Upkeep

Many people called for **resurfacing lots**, fixing **potholes**, improving **lighting**, and **clear striping**.

"You should have kept up the city lot over the years by continuing funding in smaller amounts."

🌳 More Shade, Trees, and Stormwater Features

Respondents emphasized **shade and greenery**, citing climate, aesthetics, and comfort.

"Shade is of utmost importance. Parking lots have the potential to become massive heat sinks."

🚏 Better Signage & Wayfinding

Several respondents requested **clearer signs**, both for lot locations and time limits.

"Signage."
"More visible time limits, clearly posted."

🚐 Dedicated or Expanded Use Areas

Frequent requests included:

- **Separate parking for boat trailers vs. beachgoers**

- **Designated spaces for marina slip holders**

- **Angle parking to increase capacity**

"Windbag Marina slip owners need designated parking."
"Angle parking provides more parking spaces."

P Shuttle or Peripheral Parking Solutions

Some called for **remote lots with shuttles**, especially for busy destinations like City Beach.

"A parking lot with shuttle service to the beach would help congestion."

♀ Equity & Local Prioritization

Many felt parking should **serve locals first**, not just accommodate visitors or resorts.

"I don't believe locals should have to pay for parking improvements for high-end resorts and tourists."
"Time to prioritize locals over outsiders."

♟ Alternative Modes & Transit

A few suggested **promoting alternatives** like biking or SPOT transit to reduce parking demand.

"I would like to see the SPOT option promoted better."

Prompt 7: What were the general differences in tone and opinion towards City's efforts to manage downtown parking between City residents and non-City residents

🏠 City of Sandpoint Residents

Tone: Mixed — both critical and constructive
Themes:

- Frustration with **tax burden** and concerns about **fairness** if residents have to pay to park

- Some **support** for paid parking, as long as it's **reasonable and well-designed**

- Desire for **better planning**, such as **shuttle services** and longer time limits

- Specific concern about **out-of-state use** of local facilities

"We already pay property taxes. Money should be managed better."
"I support the implementation of paid parking in downtown Sandpoint."
"We need a plan in place to minimize the need to park at City Beach."

🌲 Non-City Residents

Tone: More defensive or aggrieved
Themes:

- Strong desire for **local (county) residents to be exempt** from paid parking

- Concern about **being labeled outsiders**

- Preference for **sales tax or tourist fees** over direct charges

- Perception that **parking is not a serious problem**

"Visitors can go to paid parking, locals (7B) should be free."
"You can start by not calling us in the unincorporated area outsiders for one..."
"We already pay enough in taxes… don't tax us more because of bad budgeting."

🔍 Summary:

- **City residents** are more willing to consider **paid parking** if implemented fairly and targeted at tourists.

- **Non-City residents** often feel **excluded or unfairly targeted** by parking proposals and express **stronger resistance** to change.

Summary:

Public feedback on the City's parking management efforts reveals a meaningful difference in tone between City of Sandpoint residents and those who live outside City limits. City residents expressed a mix of frustration and constructive suggestions,

often focusing on fairness, tax equity, and the need for thoughtful planning. While some opposed paid parking entirely, others supported it if implemented with reasonable rates, especially for tourists and non-residents. In contrast, non-City residents were more likely to express strong opposition to any paid parking, emphasizing their contributions through local commerce and requesting exemption based on 7B residency. Several respondents from outside the City also voiced frustration at feeling excluded or labeled as "outsiders." This divide underscores the importance of transparent communication and a parking strategy that carefully balances local access, fairness, and financial sustainability.