



Duluth Township Community Center Use Survey

August 2015

2015 Duluth Township Community Center Use Survey

Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to garner community resident input about projects that would support broader community use of the 40-acre Community Center/NSCS site and buildings. This information was timely for decisions on proposed improvement projects being considered by the Joint Use Committee and the Boards of the North Shore Community School, ABC, Inc., and Duluth Township.

Preliminary results of this survey were reported in the September *Newsletter* and this final report will be available, like earlier surveys, on the Township web site, www.duluthtownship.org. It was provided to our Town Supervisors and other Township and Joint Use Committee officials and is available in the Town Hall.

Background

The 2015 Community Center Use Survey involved sending a one-page questionnaire and cover letter as a separate mailing to all 788 Township households on July 31, 2015 with an August 17th deadline for responses. The cover letter reviewed the recent ownership change of the school property and listed facilities available in the school and on the grounds. Topics for the survey were identified from a discussion of proposals at the July 2015 Town Board meeting where ABC, Inc. representatives and Board members proposed that a survey of residents be conducted to guide further discussion. Topics included use of the NSCS facilities over the past year by household members, whether respondents favored expanding its use as a community center during non-school times, and questions about use of two aspects of the facility.

By the deadline, 112 responses were received (*about 14% of 788 households with an estimated 1941 residents*). This is one of the higher response rates for Township surveys (*second to 15% in 2012, and close to the 12% in the Trails survey which was sent out in the July 2015 Newsletter*). Only 2 respondents indicated that they live outside the Township. Every household had an opportunity to provide their response. Responses reported below should be considered to be of those who chose to provide their input to the Township about household use of Community Center/NSCS facilities, and not a random sample of Township households

It is important to recall the larger context of the survey. In 2013 the 40 acre school property was transferred to ABC, Inc. who obtained a mortgage and, in 2014-15 built a second addition to the school and removed the temporary portable classrooms. There was controversy in this process over legal matters. The “value” the Township received for the legal transfer was determined to be the continued use of the property as a community center during non-school times. This involved creating a Joint Use Agreement and a Committee to work out community uses of the school site. The Committee also reviewed proposals for improvements that might also benefit the broader community, where shared costs could be legally justified to be paid from a community center fund retained by the Township. For several years, the Township had been planning to update the Town Hall with room for community use, and that project was also underway in 2015 during the time this survey was in process. The questionnaire, then, addressed whether and how much the community might be interested in using various aspects of the NSCS building and grounds, and suggestions about improvements that would benefit community residents.

Note that the questionnaire is anonymous...no names were requested. Forms are kept a month or so in case double-checking is needed, and then are destroyed. Computer statistical data files are retained for future comparisons. Written comments are provided in Appendix 1. Where respondents might be identified from their comments, identifying references are eliminated. A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix 2. The back of the questionnaire form provided some room for added comments as well as the Town Hall return address. The questionnaire could be mailed or deposited in a locked “news box” at the Town Hall. 37% used the news box and 63% were mailed in.

Comments and suggestions about the *Community Center Use Survey* are most welcome and should be sent to the Town Hall.

Expanding Use of the Community Center.

A basic question was whether respondents favored **expanding the existing use of the school building and grounds as a community center during non-school times**. Overall, of the 108 responding to this question, 86% favored such expansion. Among those responding 30 were directly connected to the school (*e.g. teacher, student, staff, board/committee member, volunteer, etc.*) and 82 were not. Those who were directly connected with the school were more likely than other residents to favor such expanded use (*97% versus 82%*). Among those who used some of the facilities at the school during the past year, a higher proportion favored expanded community center use (*95%*) as compared to those who had not used any of the facilities (*77%*). Appendix 1, question 1, lists respondent comments (*3 out of 112 respondents made comments*).

A question asked whether the **facilities at the school site could be improved as a community center** to better serve the respondent's household. Among the 93 responding, 48% said yes and 52% said there was no need to improve facilities at the school site for its use as a community center. Those who had used one or more of the listed facilities were more likely to say that facilities could be improved than was the case for those who had not used any of the facilities (*65% vs. 31%*).

There were 43 comments on how the facilities might be improved and these are listed verbatim in Appendix 1 (*question 4*). Comments reflect user suggestions as well as items that might attract users.

Use of Community Center/School Facilities in the Past Year.

As a guide to likely use of various areas in the building or grounds, a question asked about approximate frequency of use of 11 facilities. Three were inside the building, 6 were outside and 2 referred to public functions or meetings at the school. Comments are shown in Appendix 1 (*question 4*). There were 43 comments from 112 respondents.

1. Inside Facilities: (on average, 78% of respondents said their household never used these inside facilities in the past year)

Of these facilities, the **gymnasium** was the most used. 26 of 105 households responding to the survey used the gym at some time in the past year (*76 of 105 had not*). Respondents directly connected with the school (*e.g. teacher, staff, student, board/committee member, volunteer, etc.*) were more likely to have used the gym during non-school hours (*18 of 28 responding*), than those not directly connected to the school (*6 of 77 responding*).

The **kitchen and cafeteria** areas were used in the past year by 13 of the 102 respondents. A higher proportion of those directly connected with the school (*9 of 27 responding*) used the kitchen and cafeteria than is the case among those not directly connected with the school (*4 of 75 responding*).

Respondents were asked about their use of **classrooms**, such as art, library and other rooms, in the past year. Seventeen (*of 101 responding*) indicated some level of usage of classrooms by someone in their household during non-school hours in the past year. Those directly connected with the school were more likely to use classrooms (*14 of 27*) as compared to respondents not directly connected to the school (*3 of 74*).

**Number of Household Using NSCS Indoor Facilities Last Year
During Non-School Hours**

<i>Use of NSCS building facilities during non-school hours by those in your household</i>	<i>At least weekly last year</i>	<i>1-2 times a month last yr</i>	<i>A few times last year</i>	<i>Once last year</i>	<i>Not used last year</i>	<i>Plan to use in the future</i>	<i>Total responding</i>
Gymnasium in the school	4	6	10	4	76	5	105
School kitchen and cafeteria	1	2	3	7	85	4	102
Classrooms in the school <i>(including art room, library, etc).</i>	1	4	8	4	80	4	101

2. Outside Facilities: (on average, 82% of respondents said their household never used these outside facilities in the past year)

Of the outdoor facilities noted, **school trails** were somewhat more likely to be used during the past year (*24 of 104 households were users*) than other outdoor facilities. Those directly connected with the school (*e.g. teacher, staff, student, board/committee member, volunteer, etc.*) were more likely to have used school trails (*14 of 27*) compared to those not directly connected with the school (*10 of 77*).

The **warming house and hockey or pleasure skating rinks** were used by 24 households (*of 102 responding to this question*). Again, households directly connected to the school were more likely to be users (*18 of 27*), than households not directly connected to the school (*6 of 75*).

The **picnic pavilion at the school site** had 11 users in the past year (*out of 103 households responding*). Nine of 27 households directly connected to the school had used the pavilion in the past year; only 2 of 76 households not directly connected to the school, used that facility.

Thirteen (*of 101 households*) used the **outside baseball field** during the past year. Among those directly connected with the school, 12 (*of 26 responding*) reported use during the past year. Only 1 (*of 75*) Township households not directly connected with the school, used this facility.

An **outside volleyball court** was included in the list in error because this isn't an existing court at the present time. However, one respondent said they used it, and 4 (*of 96 respondents*) might be interested in using such a facility if it were available.

An **outside basketball court** was used by 4 of 97 households and, along with trails, had the largest number (*8 of 97*) who plan to use it.

**Number of Household Using NSCS Outdoor Facilities Last Year
During Non-School Hours**

<i>Use of NSCS outside facilities during non-school hours by those in your household</i>	<i>At least weekly last year</i>	<i>1-2 times a month last yr</i>	<i>A few times last year</i>	<i>Once last year</i>	<i>Not used last year</i>	<i>Plan to use in the future</i>	<i>Total responding</i>
Nature trails in the adjoining area at the school site	1	3	9	11	73	7	104
Warming house and hockey or pleasure skating rinks	5	6	7	6	75	3	102
Picnic pavilion at the school	0	2	5	4	88	4	103
Outside baseball field	1	3	8	1	85	3	101
Outside volleyball court	0	0	0	1	91	4	96
Outside basketball court	0	0	2	2	85	8	97

3. Public Functions and Meetings.

Less than half of respondents (41 out of 103) attended a **public function at the school** in the past year but attending a public function at the school varied greatly by whether the respondent was directly connected with the school (21 out of 27), or not (20 out of 76). The frequency of attendance may reflect how frequently public events are offered and to whom they are advertised.

Findings are similar for having **attended meetings at the school** (26 of 97 responding attended a meeting at the school in the past year). Those directly connected to the school were more likely to have attended a meeting at the school (18 out of 25) compared to those not directly connected to the school. (8 out of 72).

**Number of Household Attending a Public Function or Meetings Last Year
During Non-School Hours**

<i>Use of NSCS outside facilities during non-school hours by those in your household</i>	<i>At least weekly last year</i>	<i>1-2 times a month last yr</i>	<i>A few times last year</i>	<i>Once last year</i>	<i>Not used last year</i>	<i>Plan to use in the future</i>	<i>Total responding</i>
Attended a public function at the school	2	4	18	17	57	5	103
Attended meetings at the school	1	6	9	10	68	3	97

Use of the Concrete Slab *(where previously the temporary classroom buildings were located).*

Respondents were asked: **Please provide your ideas for the slab that someone in your household would use.** Three options were provided and more than one could be checked. There was space for listing alternative uses. Twenty-seven of 70 who provided some response to this question, provided an added comment. These are listed verbatim in Appendix 1, question 5.

A fenced basketball court	36 checked <i>(of 70 answering question 5)</i>
A fenced tennis court	35 checked <i>(of 70 answering question 5)</i>
Other uses	18 checked <i>(of 70 answering question 5)</i>

There is equal interest (*36 or 35 households*) in basketball and tennis courts for the area, and some suggested both uses be accommodated.

Among those checking “**basketball**”, those who were directly connected to the school (*e.g. teacher, staff, student, board/committee member, volunteer, etc.*) were more likely to check basketball (*18 out of 28*), compared to those not directly connected to the school (*18 of 42 responding*). Those who used some of school or grounds facilities were more likely to check the basketball option (*23 out of 43*) than among those not using some of the facilities (*13 of 27 responding*).

Similarly, among those checking “**tennis**”, those with a direct connection to the school were more likely to check tennis (*15 of 28 responding*), compared to those not directly connected to the school (*20 out of 42*). If respondents used some school/grounds facilities, a higher proportion checked tennis (*24 out of 43*), than those who did not use school/grounds facilities (*11 out of 27*).

Comments were made by 27 out of 112 respondents. There were no general themes in the suggestions about other uses. Uses mentioned ranged widely include use as a bus staging area, added parking, a general play surface, a place to rent for tented events, shuffle board, a solar array, an industrial arts instruction area, a location for a public pizza oven, skateboard park, and a curling rink.

Indoor Potting Area.

A question was asked about possible use of one other specific area. Respondents were asked: **Would you use an indoor plant-potting area at the entry to the school greenhouse if it were available to the public during non-school hours?**

Among the 104 who responded to the question, 24 said yes, and 80 said no, they would not use the potting area. Those directly connected to the school (*e.g. teacher, staff, student, board/committee member, volunteer, etc.*) were more than twice as likely to say they would use the area, compared to those not directly connected to the school (*38% vs. 17%*).

Appendix 1, question 6 shows the 8 (*out of 112*) comments on this topic.

Appendix 1

Comments Provided by Respondents

<i>ID</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Written comment</i>
		Would you favor expanding the use of the school building or grounds as a community center during non-school times? (3 comments from 112 respondents)
001	1	Doesn't matter.
007	1	Only if use is offered for adults.
096	1	Only if local taxes are not increased. No if any additional levies or fees are necessary.
		Could the facilities at the school site be improved as a community to better serve your household? (43 comments from 112 respondents)
001	4	Nice idea to use the concrete slab for sports.
003	4	Storage and adult chairs in art room. Open in the daytime.
004	4	Clover valley farmers market, Township rummage sales.
006	4	Have an outside basketball court, workout equipment.
007	4	Outdoor basketball courts, outdoor tennis tables (tables made of waterproof materials)
008	4	Improve the nature trails.
009	4	More classes like community ed – music events – farmers market.
011	4	Don't use the facility.
014	4	To use the outside field and courts during community events and attend public functions and meetings at the school.
015	4	Fitness classes. Community ed classes.
023	4	Not sure how, but Town Board has hardly been supportive of the premier facility in the Township!
027	4	Community ed classes (i.e. yoga, cooking, gardening, etc.).
030	4	There used to be summer library hours. It would be nice to bring that back.
036	4	Trail maintenance updating.
037	4	Community kitchen to produce items for sale.
038	4	Craft classes, fitness and wellness classes.
045	4	Organized availability.
047	4	Upgrade gym locker room.
050	4	I firmly believe the \$100,000 the Township is holding should primarily benefit the <u>school</u> .
054	4	More community activities there instead of the French River Church and Town Hall...book club, crafts, exercise, cribbage.
055	4	Please return all money to the school where it rightfully belongs!
060	4	If the school kitchen is an "inspected" facility, I could use it for canning.
061	4	New to the township. No school aged children in the home.
064	4	Needs more area for parking!
066	4	Community education classes for adults and children, community education choice, adults: knitting, cooking, painting, crocheting classes, wood working, carving, canning, walking sticks, refurbishing, tons more.
071	4	Plans to improve the rinks, nature trail, and slab are welcome. Gym improvements might be too costly.
075	4	Maybe
076	4	Greater access to possible events.
078	4	Don't know what all is available now and when and how to access it.
080	4	Not sure. I think the school serves the community well now.
082	4	Tennis court.

085	4	Book club meetings, elder care, elder entertainment.
092	4	As listed below, add a tennis court.
093	4	Miss the community ed classes.
097	4	Possibly hockey rink. We constantly felt like outsiders as we weren't part of the main group who used it. They have special access. We asked to help clear rinks, flood, etc. Did not feel welcome.
099	4	Weight and/or exercise rooms.
100	4	Better information on what is available when and cost plus a more easy system for renting/reserving space. The facility is fine...the system to provide community access needs improvement.
102	4	I was unaware that the NSCS was available to Township residents for the uses listed in #3. Just better communication on how and when (days/times) we can use them would help. How about posting in each Newsletter?
104	4	Also, figure out a way that the hockey rink can be used for soccer, etc. when it is not winter time. Often too muddy to use currently during the school year.
108	4	How much does it cost to rent, etc.
109	4	Too late. You're already building an unneeded senior center.
110	4	Community education/adult education classes in the evenings
111	4	Basketball court as in #5 below.
		Please provide your ideas for the slab that someone in your household would use. (27 comments from 112 respondents)
004	5	Rent out to receptions (i.e. tent site).
007	5	More people could be having fun on a basketball court than if it were just for tennis (suggested 4 hoops). Could be setup as tennis court also and just have designated times for tennis use.
008	5	None
012	5	Have no use for this area.
014	5	We wouldn't use.
015	5	More logistical pickup/dropoff bus process.
020	5	Community garden
024	5	Wouldn't use.
026	5	Whatever.
042	5	Something kids can use to play on.
048	5	Parking space.
051	5	Either option would be wonderful.
054	5	Not fenced, for parking?
065	5	Despite my non-use, I heartily approve any expansion.
068	5	Put a basketball backboard on one end of the tennis court, end or side. However tennis players would always have priority over use of the court.
071	5	Multi-use for both basketball and tennis, shuttle board or other conceivable uses might be explored.
075	5	See idea on back about outdoor pizza oven. It could be a foundation for a large solar array as well. I have not seen the site after portables removed. It would seem to be a good location for another roofed pavilion for outdoor events like open houses and family reunions. It could also be enclosed as an arboretum sunspace for ¾ season use.
076	5	Industrial arts. Automotive, small engine or vocational instruction.

079	5	Not likely.
085	5	Skateboard park.
087	5	It depends upon the condition of the slab and the size. Hop scotch, chalk art after school activities. Non-fenced basketball or fence one side (to parking lot)!
096	5	No one would use it in my household.
100	5	Its great to be able to see the playground and back green space. Please NO FENCE. Could use temporary canopies for events, open space or pavilion for open-air events.
106	5	Utilize part of (the slab) for shuffleboard courts (2) with a nice surface overlay. Develop horseshoe courts adjacent to the slab also.
107	5	It's nice to come together there and for other activities.
109	5	Outdoor curling rink? Or enclose it? (no heat)
112	5	I would go with the majority.
		Would you use an indoor plant-potting area at the entry to the school greenhouse if it were available to the public during non-school hours? (8 comments from 112 respondents)
008	6	Too hard to transport personal potting supplies.
013	6	Possibly.
080	6	Probably not, unless part of a group or class held there.
085	6	Maybe. Can we use the greenhouse, book club, massage therapy?
091	6	Would be very impractical.
104	6	No, but I think this would be great for other community members!
106	6	Not practical. Too much work to haul plants and materials back and forth.
112	6	Maybe, probably not.
		Added Comments (14 comments from 112 respondents)
003	8	Look forward to using the new community room at the Town Hall.
007	8	I would like to see a section of the nature trail made more accessible to wheelchair or safer walking for those with unsteady gait. Maybe a loop could be of asphalt and the rest of the trails maintained in chips.
011	8	Can't believe you want feedback but can't provide postage.
021	8	Rather than have a "What can I get out of it" attitude, the Township should advertise glossy paper recycling, box top, etc. for our school. To paraphrase JFK, "Ask not what your school can do for you, but..."
029	8	We are elderly and unable to attend. Thank you.
033	8	It is important that a rural school have multiple uses that involve the community. I no longer have children at North Shore School, however I do support school being an active site. Activity creates security as well as a healthy community.
055	8	I find it unethical and immoral that \$100,000 of the school's money is being used for the town hall addition. That appropriation of money should have been brought before the township voting members. The rest of the money should be returned immediately to the school. It's obvious the township gets its value through the Joint Use Agreement!
058	8	Add to community ed classes, craft classes, etc. Use of gym for volleyball, etc.
062	8	Seems to be a lot of non-school time available. Can more time be added to school time? I don't know details, but it seems kids are offered a minimum number of educational hours. It's a school, use it to educate, teach.

072	8	Anything to expand the usage would be better. It seems that “the school” is unwilling to share space for non-school activities.
075	8	There are many fine attributes of the current campus that should be made available for off-hour use. The variety of outdoor fields and trails is already greatly enhanced due to funding and volunteer development. I think it would make sense to form an ad hoc steering committee of folks recruited from the Township to make an assessment of additional facilities to consider. The long-term maintenance costs and sustainability of the uses needs to be considered. Silver Bay has installed an outdoor wood-fired pizza oven on a slab near its school. This unit is used by the school and for community events. Just one example.
084	8	Teachers do not want people in their classrooms. The Town Hall is much easier to rent. I look forward to the new addition and update to the kitchen.
089	8	Auctions, flea markets, outdoor movie nights.
091	8	NSCS is a great facility for a school and after school activities for parents and children. However, it does not function well as a community center. Residents want a place where they can meet during the day. They want adult sized chairs and tables for meetings, crafts, education, music, etc. The new addition at the Town Hall will meet the community needs for dances, parties, socializing and all “community center” activities. Let the school provide education and use the grounds for some recreation. Stop pumping town funds into the school when the town can provide the service at the hall.

Appendix 2

2015 Community Center Use Questionnaire

DULUTH



TOWNSHIP

6092 HOMESTEAD ROAD ■ DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55804

Community Center Survey

July 27, 2015

To Duluth Township Residents,

This survey is being sent to all Duluth Township households. Its purpose is to find out how residents wish to use facilities at the North Shore Community School/Duluth Township Community Center on Ryan Road.

Background: As you probably know, the North Shore Community School (NSCS) property is now owned by ABC Inc., a non-profit company (*Phil Strom, George Sundstrom and Ed Bruckelmyer are its governing members*). ABC Inc leases the building and grounds to the NSCS charter school. Duluth Township was the former owner at a time when charter schools could not own their building. In 2001, ISD 381 transferred the property to the Township as a "community center" rather than close the school, with the understanding that it would be leased to NSCS, the newly formed charter school. The Township can not own a school but they could own a "community center" and lease it to the school. In 2013, the property was transferred to ABC Inc. (*the purchase agreement is on the Township web site: www.duluthtownship.org*). In transferring the building and its 40 acre property to ABC Inc., Duluth Township received legally required "value" through a negotiated joint community use agreement signed by ABC Inc, NSCS and the Town Board (*also on the Township web site*). Township residents, not just school-related residents, are able to use the facilities under certain conditions that do not interfere with school operations (*generally in non-school hours such as evenings, weekends and in the summer*). The use agreement created a "Joint Use Committee" made up of representatives of ABC Inc, NSCS, the Township and an at-large community member. This Committee discusses ideas for shared use of the facility and proposes various projects that have a broader community benefit. Several projects have recently been discussed.

The purpose of this survey is to get community resident input about projects that would support broader community use of the 40-acre NSCS site and buildings.

Facilities available at the site in addition to the original building, include the 4-room addition added by Duluth Township in 2010, a warming house with pleasure and hockey skating rinks, athletic fields, a nature trail, a picnic pavilion, etc. ABC Inc just finished a \$3.5 million dollar addition which includes a new greenhouse and additional permanent classrooms. The old temporary classrooms will be removed, leaving a 5,000 sq foot concrete slab also available for use. One purpose of this survey is to get community ideas about how the concrete slab could be used.

Please complete the survey form for your household by August 17th. Your responses help guide plans for community use of the facility and help identify projects that would be used by community residents, beyond the needs of the school itself.

Fold the one-page survey so the return address is visible. It could be mailed or put in the locked Newsletter mailbox on the Town Hall porch. The deadline is August 17th.

Thank you for your interest and response.

Duluth Town Board

*Space for additional comments and ideas about use of the school site at non-school times. Thank you.
(You could also enclose comments on a separate sheet.)*

**Mail your completed questionnaire to the Town Hall
or put it in the locked Newsletter News Box on the Town Hall porch railing.**

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*Stamp and Mail
Or
Put in the News-
letter
News Box
on the
Town Hall porch*

For: Duluth Town Hall
6092 Homestead Road
Duluth, MN 55804

-- fold --

**Thank you for providing your feedback!
Responses will be summarized in the September Township Newsletter
And the report will be available on the Township web site.**