

2020 Park Road and Parking Lot Closures Survey Findings Overview

Should Park Road and Parking Lot Closures be Extended?

Statement on Findings

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many park roads and parking lots were closed in 2020 to encourage social distancing and safety. A survey was launched to gather public input on whether these closures were enjoyed or not, and if they should remain for a longer period.

Numerous survey responses, plus input and recommendations from individuals and groups such as the Denver Bicycle Lobby and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), have helped us determine what works for now, and what needs to be adjusted for the future. Overall, most people love the park road closures and want to extend the closures for both the short term and long term. However, valid and important concerns were also raised that we are currently evaluating. These concerns centered on the following topics:

- Accessibility – for people with disabilities and older adults with mobility needs, general access to Denver’s regional parks for those who do not live nearby, and the implication that the closures send a message of exclusion
- Parking Lots – a desire for some parking lots to remain open, to address the need for access
- Other park uses -- a need for flexibility during COVID-19 was appreciated but access needs for future events and other park activities was also noted
- Barricades – there were many issues with the temporary barricades used in 2020, and improvements are needed for easier bike access and prevention of movement

Recognizing that the demographics of age and race/ethnicity from respondents of this survey do not match the overall demographics of Denver, we are focusing on the concerns noted, especially those around accessibility and sentiments of feeling unwelcome in our parks when roads and parking lots are closed. In addition, we are analyzing any differences between respondents who stated they live in zip codes *not* surrounding the key parks in question, to understand more. As a department, the pandemic experience has also re-emphasized the importance of adaptability to be able to ensure that our system can be resilient and responsive in the face of changing conditions, be it a public health crisis, emergency, special event, or other emerging circumstance.

Currently DPR is working to:

- Maintain the park road closures for the winter season
- Adjust operations where noted in maps (see PRAB Presentation) come spring season (mid-April), while maintaining flexibility to adapt as necessary
- Planning and design work for swing gate/bollard fabrication and installation
- Coordinate with our colleagues at DOTI to see where parking regulations or other streetscape adjustments can be made to provide additional park accessibility
- Maintain flexibility and adapt as new issues or impacts arise

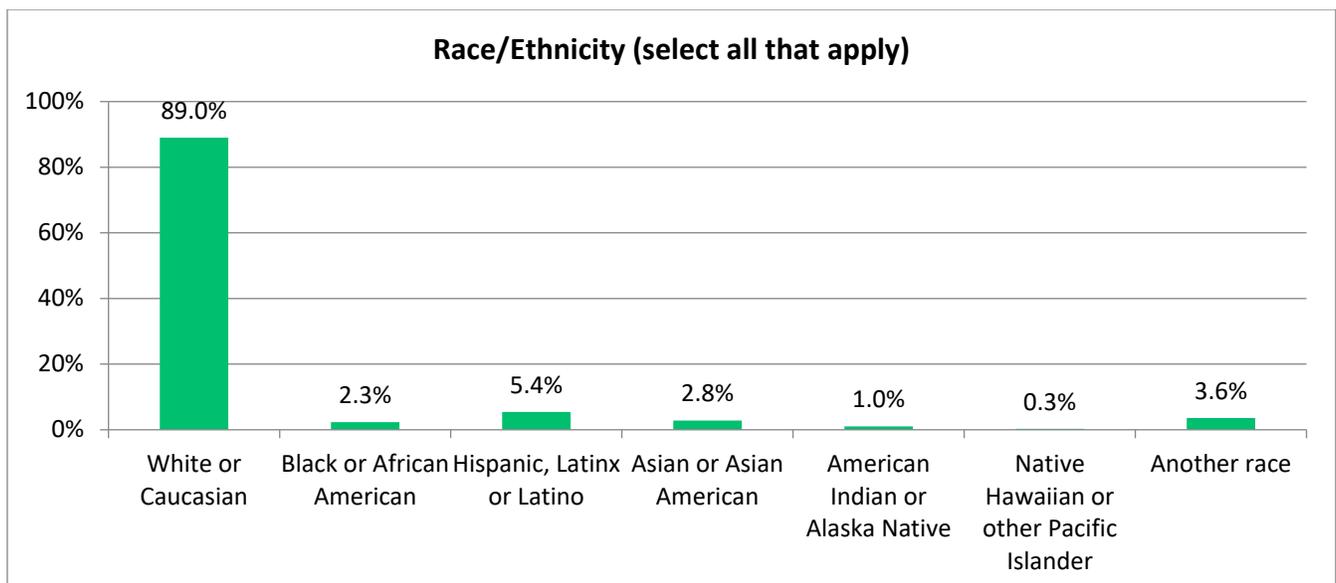
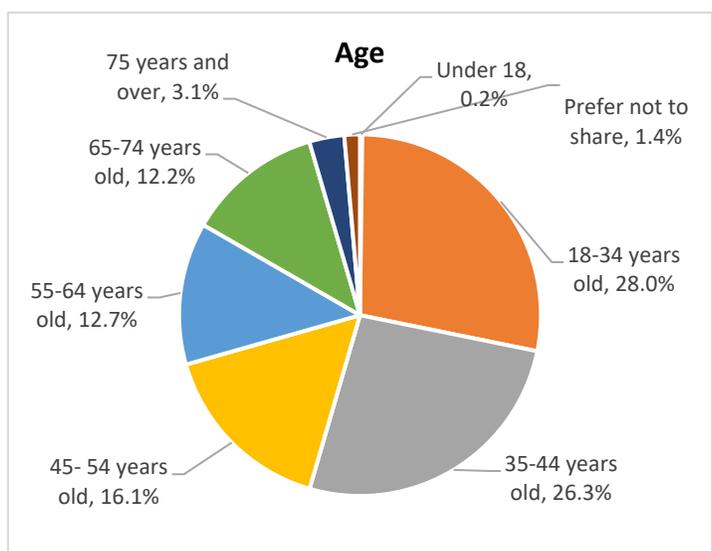
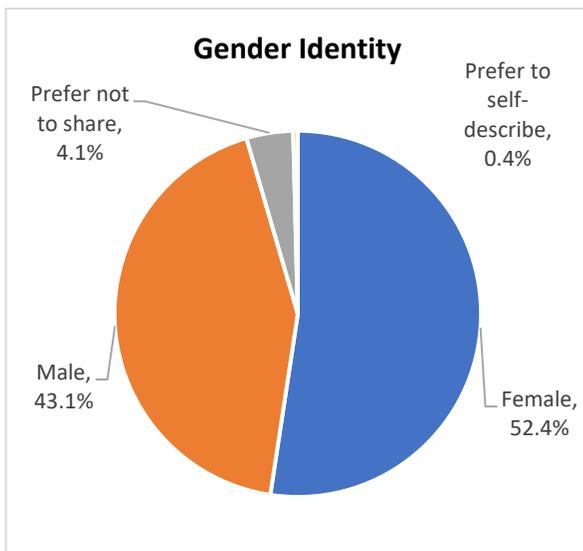
Survey Summary

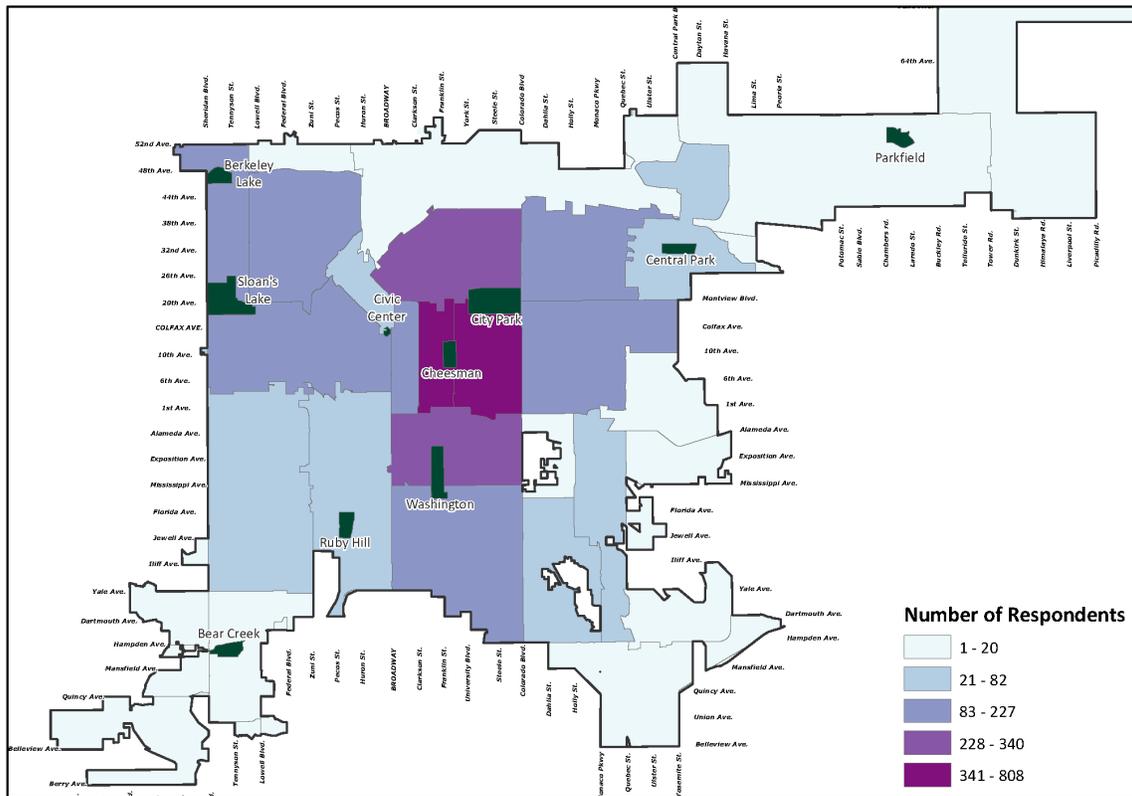
Survey Details

- Survey open from September 28, 2020 - November 30, 2020
 - Survey deadline was extended 1 month due to public request
- Marketing: Facebook Paid Ads, Twitter, Nextdoor, and Facebook Posts, “yard signs” posted in key parks, Media, RNO emails, and City Council Newsletters and social media posts.
- Additional input (not reflected in data below): emails to DPR, report of potential long-term solutions from the Denver Bicycle Lobby, and comments made at the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board in meetings late 2020
- Total survey responses: 4,240

Respondents

The majority of survey respondents were under the age of 45, who identify as Female, White or Caucasian. Recognizing that the demographics do not fully reflect Denver’s diversity, additional consideration was given to the challenges, concerns, and issues that were brought up in the comments of this survey.





Road Closure Survey Response
By Zip Code

Overall Reactions to Park Road and Parking Lot Closures

Overall, survey respondents were very much in favor of the temporary closures remaining closed for a longer-term, and the majority have used these closed roads for outdoor activities. Respondents, however, added thoughtful comments about ways to improve the closures, concerns about the closures, and potential impacts of the closures if continued.

In order to emphasize the views of those not immediately surrounding the parks, and to potentially better understand the voices less heard in the survey, a few additional comparisons were examined, specifically finding:

- The desire for park roads to stay closed decreases as age groups of respondents get older. For example, while 89.96% of people ages 18 to 34 think park roads/lots should remain closed for a longer term, 75.4% of 55 to 64 age group do, and 68.03% of those 75 and older do.
- The amount of people who identify as Black or African American and *do not* want roads/lots to remain closed is significantly higher compared to all other race/ethnicities. The amount of people who identify as White or Caucasian and *do* want roads/lots to remain closed is significantly higher than all other race/ethnicities besides Asian/Asian American.
- More people that live in zip codes surrounding the parks in question on this survey believe the closures *should* remain closed for a longer term compared to those who do not live in zip codes surrounding the parks. When looking at the zip codes near the parks, 83% are in favor of keeping the closures in place, while in the zip codes not surrounding the parks, 64% are in favor of keeping the closures in place.

The following points summarize comments made in favor of the closures overall, in favor of closures with adjustments/changes, and not in favor of the closures:

In favor of closures

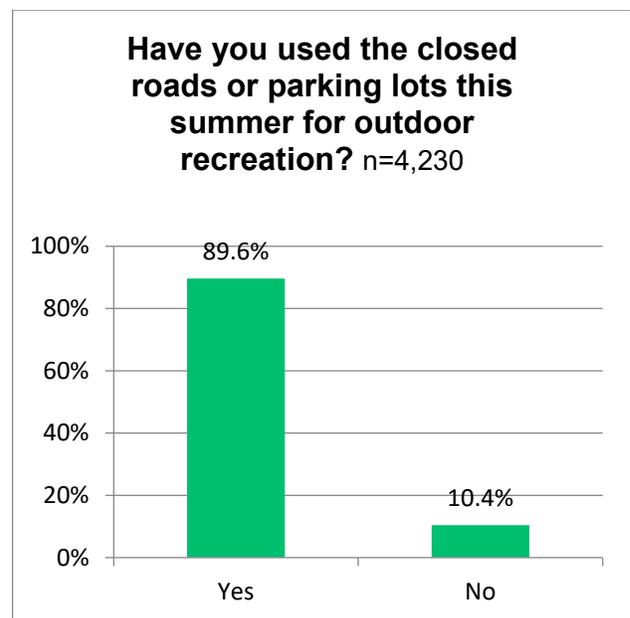
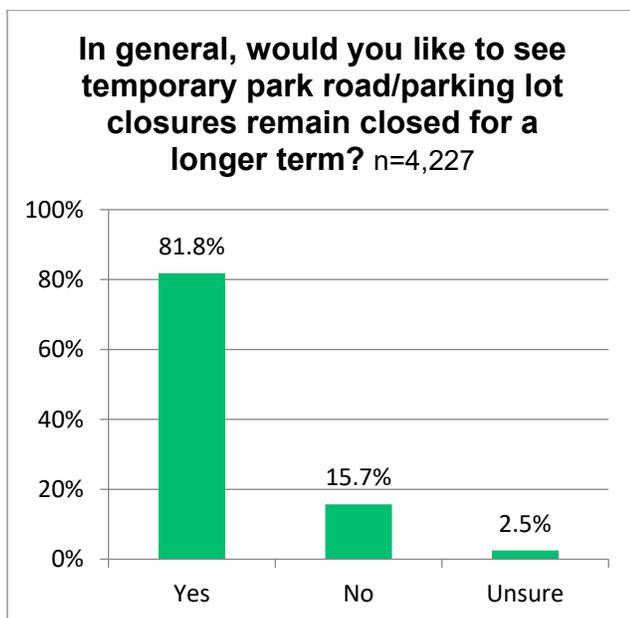
- Love the closures during the pandemic for distancing
- Love the closure *and* keep it permanent, close more roads, and/or redesign of roads into pathways
- Benefits to people: happiness, safety, peace, quiet, more room for activities, social distancing, parks are for people, good for neighborhood, a greener city

In favor of closures with adjustments

- Closure are good, but needs more enforcement, clearer signage, stronger barriers and more communication to neighbors
- Keep roads closed but open parking lots (ADA reasoning, accessibility overall for older adults, activities, people with disabilities, sense of exclusion)
- Close roads only occasionally: seasonal closures or weekend closures
- COVID-19 closures worked for social distancing, but go back to normal after
- Concern of equity for long-term
- Exceptions of closures for schools or businesses with park access (Steele Elementary, Zoo, VOC)

Against closures

- Accessibility concerns (people with disabilities, older adults)
- Impact on neighborhood parking too large (crowds a different area, danger in crossing busy streets)
- Access to outdoor activities inhibited (boating, tennis, gatherings, future events)
- Feels exclusionary, “elitist”, or discriminatory
- Confusion on what is open/closed leads to increased safety issues (partial closures, moving barriers, etc.)
- Feels not useful at a time when we need to be outside more (COVID-19)



Reactions to Specific Park Road and Parking Lot Closures

Cheesman Park

Approximately 1,600 people provided comments on Cheesman Park. Overall, respondents are enjoying the closures, with 83% wanting them to remain for the long-term. Benefits specific to Cheesman Park include the increased feeling of safety without cars, and a sense that more people were using the park and still able to distance. Quotes below reflect some of the positive comments heard about Cheesman Park road/parking lot closures:



“Please close the roads in Cheesman, permanently if possible! The drivers getting a two-block shortcut is not worth endangering pedestrians and making bikers/riders feels unsafe...”

“I support most anything that allows people to a place to go that's not indoors and/or doesn't allow distancing. I think the park closure is an important piece of Safer at Home. I appreciate the city working to develop creative options.”

“Living in Capitol Hill, I know how hard it can be to drive in the neighborhood. But, the benefits of having a safe place to ride and walk with a whole family far outweigh the small price of having to drive around the park.”

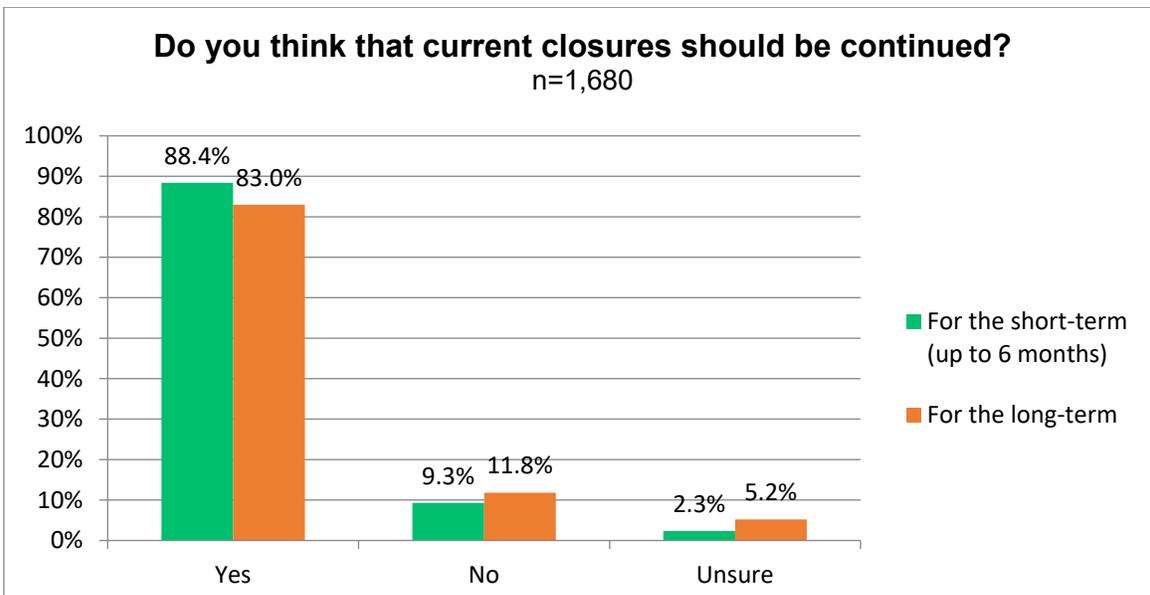
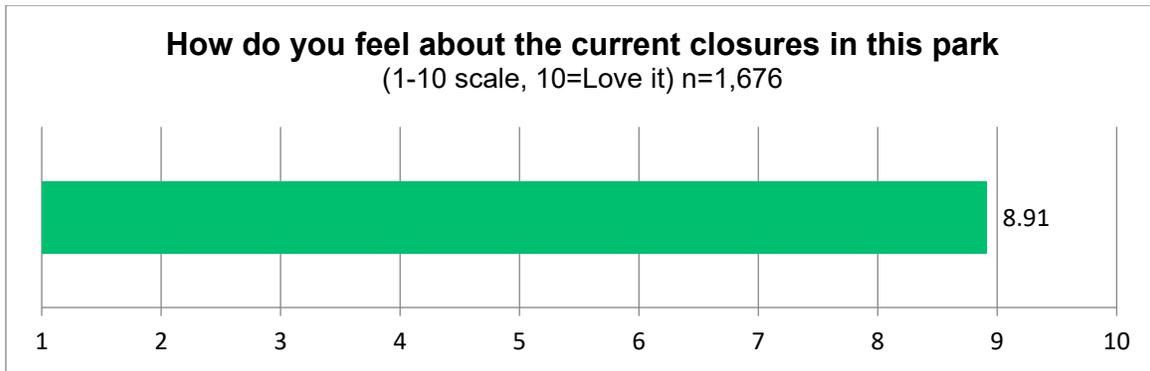
Concerns, however, focused on park accessibility for people with disabilities and older adults, a general need for access to activities (celebrations), increased parking in the neighborhood, car entry to neighboring apartment complexes, and sentiments of exclusion or elitism. Quotes below reflect concerns heard about these closures:

“I live by Cheeseman Park and have seen drivers (other than park managers) of cars and motorcycles physically move temporary barriers to get through blocked roads. This should to be monitored more closely and those drivers fined.”

“Cheesman is my favorite park in Denver but it is not walking distance from my home. The lack of ability to drive there and park my car means I don't have access.”

“There are plenty of trails in and around Cheesman Park. Having the streets within closed makes parking too difficult for residents of the neighborhood.”

When asked what influenced their response above, the top three positive influences (positive towards the closures) were increase in walkability, increase in feeling of safety, and less traffic/cars in the park. The top negative influences (negative towards the closures) were the loss of parking within the park, the loss of parking in the neighborhood, and decreased accessibility to the park. Other comments included less noise and idling in cars, more happiness and activity, as well as potential discrimination for people with disabilities and those not living next to the park.



City Park

Approximately 1,500 people provided comments on City Park. Overall, respondents are enjoying the closures, with 78% wanting them to remain for the long term. Benefits specific to City Park were specifically the feeling of safety, peace and quiet, decrease in trash, and usage by families and kids. Quotes below reflect some of the positive comments on City Park closures:



“These closures have been so wonderful and have helped me get through life in this pandemic. I feel so much safer in city park without cars. There is less sketchy activity going on with cars parked throughout the park and the park is a much more enjoyable place without them. Please keep City Park car free forever!”

“City Park feels much more like a park when it is free of cars. Also, noticing significantly less litter / trash without cars accessing park.”

"I have now walked all the trails that used to allow cars--it is great not having to worry about speeding cars (see comment above about 99% of cars speed), and I've noticed more of the trees and wildlife. This has been mentally beneficial during the pandemic."

Concerns about the closures focused on access to the park from busy roads (17th and Colorado Blvd), access to the Denver Zoo Staff parking, accessibility for people with disabilities and the older adults, a need for parking near Tennis Court, and future events. Concerns were also expressed that the barriers at Esplanade are difficult for bicycle entry, a lack of enforcement, as well as feelings of exclusion.

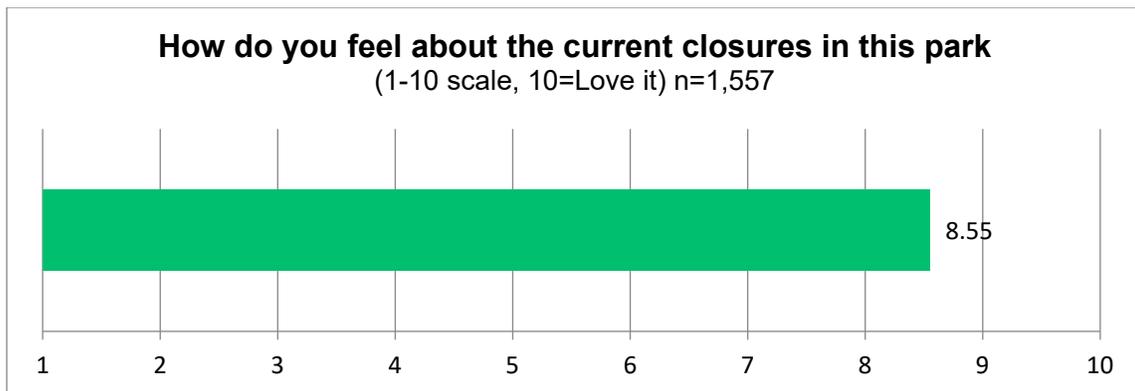
"At the entrance by the Thatcher fountain, across from the Esplanade, please provide bikes a good way to get into the park while the street barriers are closed, rather than having to bike around the barriers onto the dirt."

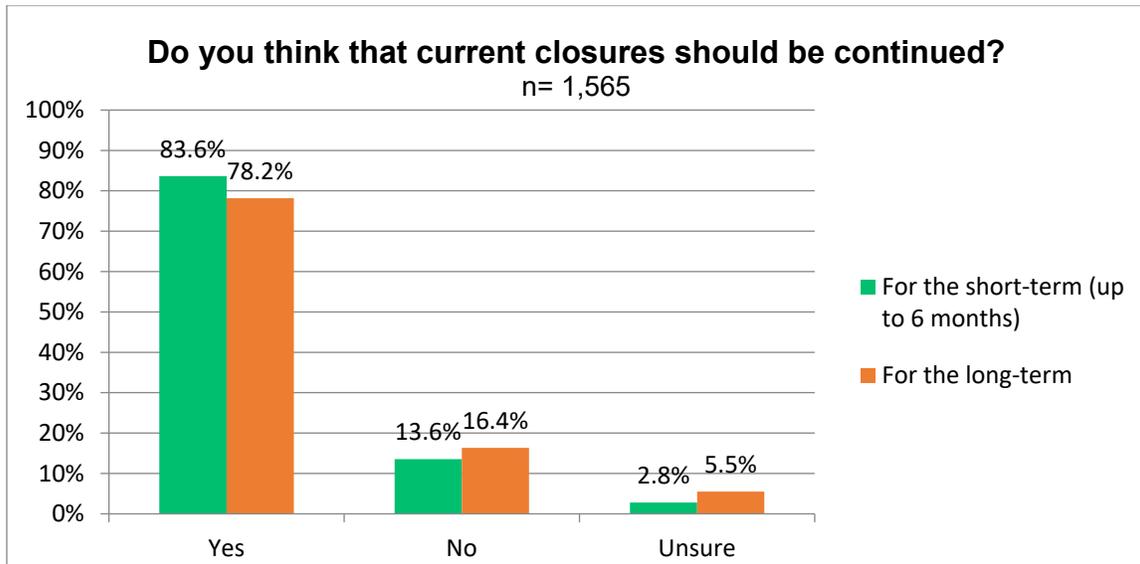
"In City Park, the closure of roads and parking areas eliminates access to many events, facilities tennis courts, pavilion, and lakes to a large local and regional population. It also pushes parking for events into adjacent neighborhoods. Partial or intermittent closure is fine, but not permanent closures!!"

"I think only some internal roads should stay closed permanently but general internal parking lots should open once COVID is 100% over."

"Tried to take my 85-year-old to City Park to walk on paths and picnic. It was disappointing to be limited to area accessible from museum parking lot."

When asked what influenced their response above, the top three positive influences were increase in walkability, increase in feeling of safety, and less traffic and cars in the park. The top negative influences were the loss of parking in the park, loss of parking in the neighborhood, and decreased accessibility to the park. The negative influences had higher percentages with City Park than Cheesman Park, though were still in the minority. Other sentiments expressed were related to tennis court access needed, parking needed due to the size of the park and accessibility issues, in addition to less noise and trash.





Ruby Hill Park

Approximately 315 people provided comments on Ruby Hill Park. While most respondents are enjoying the closures, with 68% wanting them to remain for the long term, the percentage is lower than seen in other parks on this survey. Positive comments unique to Ruby Hill Park focus on the increased safety, decrease in speeding of cars, and decrease in large gatherings during the pandemic. Quotes below reflect some positive comments on the closures:



"I live near Ruby Hill and it is wonderful to be able to use the entire park and not worry about vehicles. There are numerous road crossings on the single-track path and its much nicer to not have the roads becoming parking lots and overcrowded. Other parks throughout the city have benefited immensely, also, with even more road surface available to bikers and walkers...Bikes on the road safely improves the interactions between walkers so much, as well. Thanks!"

"Cars race thru the top road of Ruby Hill like the quarter mile at Bandimere Speedway at all hours of the day and all hours of the night. When the Ruby Hill park roads and parking lots were closed it felt so peaceful and safe."

"We live far away so we have to drive to ruby hill. If we want to go to the playground it's a bit of a hike, but for the bike park we feel it's ok."

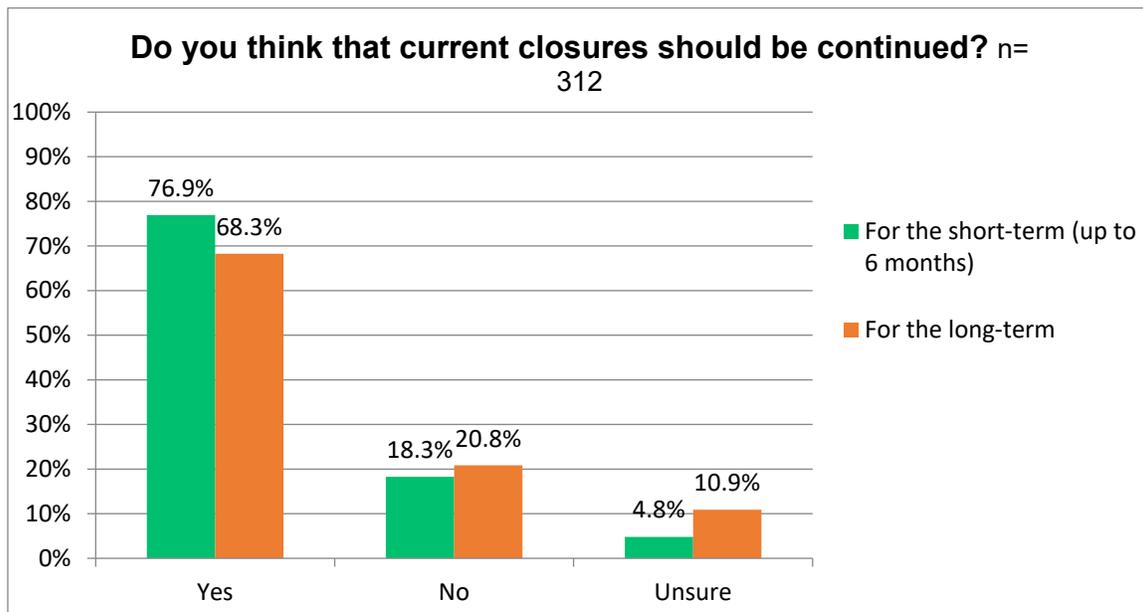
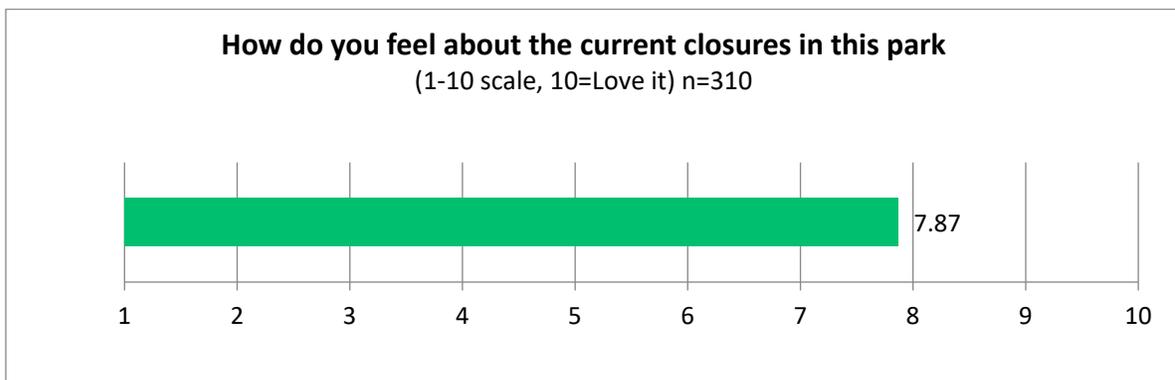
Concerns focused on accessibility for people with disabilities and older adults, as well as a feeling of unfair exclusion from the park. The size of this park was mentioned as a need for parking lots to open, as well as questions on parking when Levitt Pavilion was open again. Quotes below reflect some of the concerns about Ruby Hill closures:

“This park is too big so it’s hard to access amenities in the middle.”

“There has been less reckless late-night driving through Ruby Hill. However, many people during the day are ignoring the road closures and driving around the barricades on the grass.”

“All roads and parking lots should be open in this park to give people wider options for distancing. The one lot at the top that is easily accessed is often crowded and full of [litter]. Parks should be wide open to allow park goers to spread out as much as possible.”

When asked what influenced their responses above, the top three positive influences were increase in feeling of safety, increase in walkability, and less traffic and cars in the park. The top negative influences were decreased accessibility to the park, the loss of parking in the park, and decrease in connectivity. Other comments mentioned safety for cyclists and kids, decrease in noise, increase in peace, a feeling of gentrification, increasing illegal camping, and a sense that this was a counterproductive push to *not* be outside during COVID-19.



Sloan's Lake Park

Approximately 920 people provided comments on Sloan's Lake Park. Overall, respondents are enjoying the closures, with 76% wanting them to remain for the long term. Benefits specific to Sloan's Lake include increased safety, less gatherings during COVID-19, a useful bike route for cyclists, and greater ability to socially distance. Quotes below reflect some of the positive responses about closures:



"This is the park closest to me. I've been so much more since the closures, this one is walkable for me, so I love it. The closures are great. If anything, you should add more!"

"I went to Sloan's Lake before the closures happened and the park was jammed with people, way too many especially with COVID. I have not gone back because of the overcrowding in the park. I was then glad to see that roads on two sides of the park were closed..."

"The roads along the northern boundary of Sloan's Lake should be for pedestrians and cyclists only - much safer and there are other means to get to destinations without having to drive through the park."

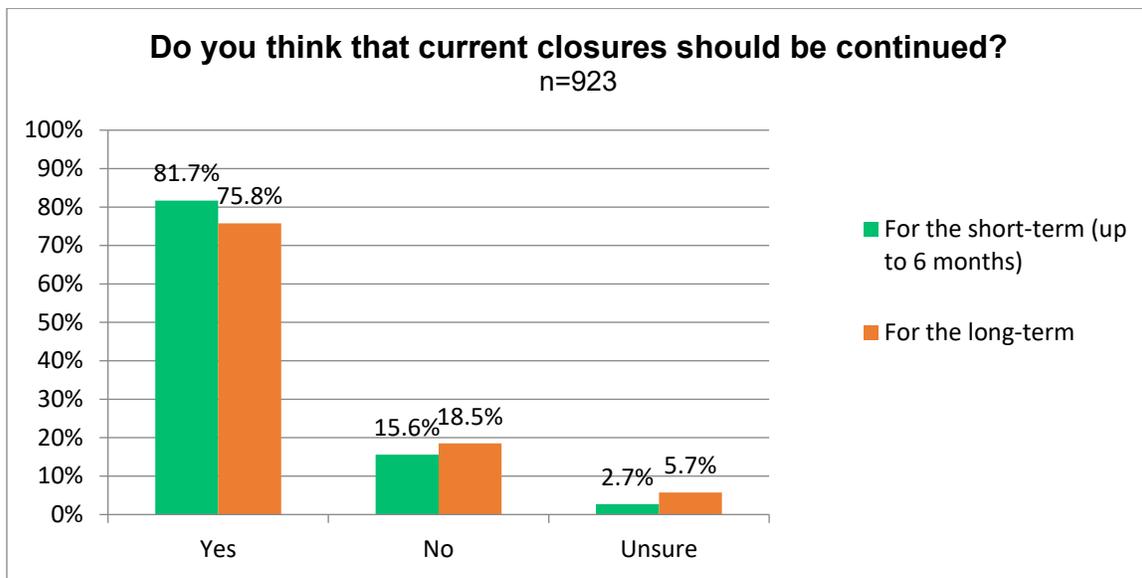
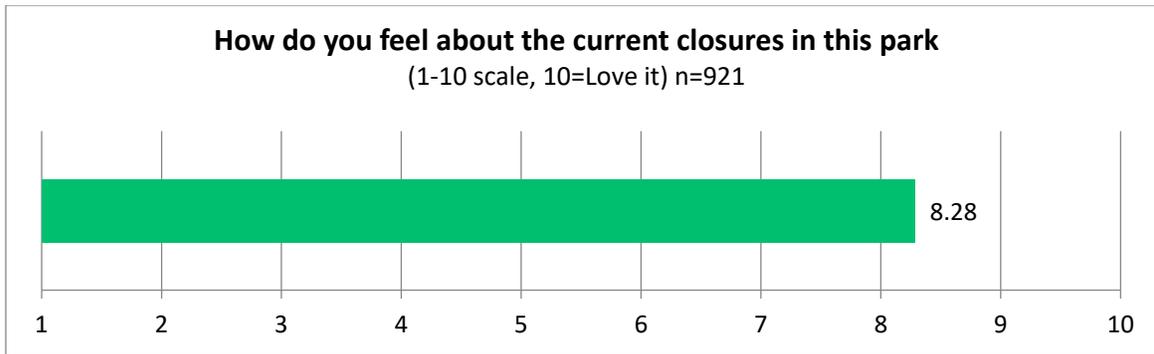
Concerns about the closures focused on access to the park for non-neighbors and the feeling of exclusion. The closed access to boating on the lake, accessibility for people with disabilities and older-adults, increased parking in the neighborhoods, and barricades being moved or ignored were also mentioned.

"I think the other parking lot close to the playground on the south side should also open. It's dangerous with kids trying to get across 17th to that area."

"As a woman who suffers from chronic pain, I depend on being able to go sit in my car and catch the sunset on the east side of Sloan's lake...I've been on this neighborhood for over 50 years and so many things have changed and not necessarily for "our" good!!!"

"I think the boat house closures and the closures near the playground areas make the park inaccessible to mothers with children. It also makes the parks inaccessible for family gatherings. The closure of the streets on the East side of the park are less problematic."

When asked what influenced their responses above, the top three positive influences were (1) increase in walkability, (2) increase in feeling of safety, and (3) less traffic and cars in the park. The top negative influences were (1) loss of parking in the park, (2) decreased accessibility to the park, and (3) loss of parking in the neighborhood. Other comments included less noise, increased happiness and overall park aesthetics, safety for cycling, frustration with the boat access closed, confusion on where to park and drive, and constant movement of the barriers.



Washington Park

Approximately 1,480 people provided comments on Washington Park. Overall, respondents are enjoying the closures, with 75% wanting them to remain for the long term. Benefits specific to Washington Park included the feeling that as the park is so heavily used, that going car-free makes sense, and that there is more space to distance with the closures in place. Quotes below reflect some of the positive reactions to Washington Park closures:



“Wash Park is a radically different place - more open, friendlier, and with notably higher use - when people are not using it to park and/or drive through to avoid traffic. People never obeyed the speed limits anyway.”

“LOVE the closed road!! Makes it so much safer for the kids to ride their bikes and scooters there. And being able to spend all day every day in the park has been about the only thing that has kept us sane in all this. Really would LOVE to see the road in Wash Park stay closed.”

Concerns focused on access to Steele Elementary, the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado offices and the recreation center once it opens. Parking was often mentioned, both the need for parking for non-neighbors, the difficulty of parking in the neighborhood, and safety for those crossing streets to get to the park. Accessibility for people with disabilities and older-adults, and dislike of the barricades visually were mentioned, as well as the idea that it is too busy regardless of social-distancing and being car-free or not.

“I think on balance it’s better to have the parking lots open return than the danger of parking on Downing to cross into park, and less neighborhood hassle on the east side if parking in the park was open.”

“This is one of the nicest parks in the city, in one of the most affluent neighborhoods. These closures significantly benefit the affluent neighbors and disadvantage those of us who can't afford to live in walking distance from nice parks. We already lack good parks in several areas of Denver. Don't prevent us from traveling to where the nice parks are from time to time!”

“We want the lots at Wash Park to stay open. It allows a diversity of people to better access the park- older people who may not qualify for handicapped stickers but can't walk a mile to the park in order to enjoy the park. Taking away the lots will just make Franklin St even worse.”

When asked what influenced their responses above, the top three positive influences were increase in walkability, increase in feeling of safety, and less traffic and cars in the park. The top negative influences were the loss of parking in the park, decreased accessibility to the park, and loss of parking in the neighborhood. Other comments included happiness and health, space away from traffic, less noise, in addition to feelings of gentrification, not welcoming, and angering neighbors.

