In surveys Mason City residents rank water sports (swimming, boating, and fishing) among their favorite recreational activities. The Mason River flowing through the city is rarely used for these pursuits, however, and the city park department devotes little of its budget to maintaining riverside recreational facilities. For years there have been complaints from residents about the quality of the river's water and the river's smell. In response, the state has recently announced plans to clean up Mason River. Use of the river for water sports is, therefore, sure to increase. The city government should for that reason devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.

Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on these assumptions and what the implications are for the argument if the assumptions prove unwarranted.

The argument reaches the conclusion that more money should be used to fund riverside recreation facilities along the shores of Mason River, and that the river should be cleaned to increase its use for water sports. This conclusion is based on the premise that residents have long complained about the river’s water quality and smell, and that citizens rank water sports among their favourite recreational activities. However, in reaching this conclusion, the author of the arguments makes three unstated assumptions that they fail to address properly.

First, the argument makes the assumption that, once the river is cleaned, people will use it for recreational activities like water sports. A related assumption is that the river itself is suited for such activities. Perhaps, it may be the case that the river is not deep enough for people to swim or boat in, or the river may not have any significant fish population that warrants fishing trips there. It may even be possible that people like activities like surfing, that are more ocean or sea-related water sports, that cannot be done in the Mason River. If any of these situations are true, then the argument fails. People would simply go to other locations with better-suited conditions for water sport, and the government’s investment would go to waste.

Second, the author assumes that the survey’s respondents were representative of the population of Mason City. It is possible that only a few out of every 10000 people enjoy water sports, but the sample space for the survey was disproportionately skewed towards people who like water sports. Other factors must also be taken into account when conducting surveys, such as demographic statistics, socio-economic condition, distances between the respondents’ homes and the river. If a survey that considers all these aspects reports a different reality of the river’s potential usage, it would dramatically reduce the argument’s validity. It may be possible that most of the people who like water sports cannot afford to do so, due to time, cost, or distance issues. Assuming that every citizen who said they prefer water sports in the survey is representative of the people who would travel to the river is not reasonable without substantiative evidence, or a comprehensive survey.

Third, the author fails to consider all the possible reasons behind the residents’ complaints about the conditions of the river. There is a wide range of possibilities here: What if the river’s water is used as a water source or a sewage disposal location for the city? In this case, the residents would be concerned about the river’s condition due to the community’s general health. What if, say, an industrial complex upstream released waste and contaminants directly into the river without proper treatment of the material? In this case, there is a bigger issue to address – simply cleaning the river may not be effective if the upstream contamination persists. Making an unstated assumption that such conditions do not exist could even prove harmful in the long run. No evidence provided by the author indicates that these situations are not possible (or existent), and that the measures taken would reasonably address them.

In conclusion, the argument, as it stands now, considerably fails by not addressing the unstated assumptions that it makes (due to the way it has been formulated). The author’s claims are built on a weak foundation that can only be strengthened if they consult more reliable or informative sources, that provide a more well-rounded view of the issues surrounding Mason River. Thus, not addressing all the assumptions made and going ahead with the plan to fund recreational activities without further inquiry would not be a well-reasoned decision.