

Ottawa County Citizen Survey
August 2014

Presented by:

EPIC ■ MRA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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METHODOLOGY

EPIC ▪ MRA administered interviews with 400 registered voters residing in Ottawa County, Michigan, from July 22 - 26, 2014. Respondents were selected utilizing an interval method of randomly selecting records of published residential telephone numbers. In addition, a commercially available list of cell phones designated as in the possession of Ottawa County residents was obtained; Twenty percent of the sample, or 80 interviews, were completed via cell phone contact. The sample was stratified so that every area of the county is represented in the sample according to its contribution to a general election turnout. Interviews were terminated if the respondent indicated that he or she had not voted in at least one of the two most recent November general elections.

In interpreting survey results, all surveys are subject to error; that is, the results of the survey may differ from those that would have been obtained if the entire populations were interviewed. This “margin of error” quantifies the degree to which random sampling will differ from a survey of the entire population, taking into account, among other things, the disposition of individuals who do not complete the interview. Put another way, the opinions of those who are not randomly selected or who decline to be interviewed, are no more or less likely to be different – within the margin of error – than the opinions of those who complete an interview and are included in the sample. The size of sampling error depends on the total number of respondents to the particular question.

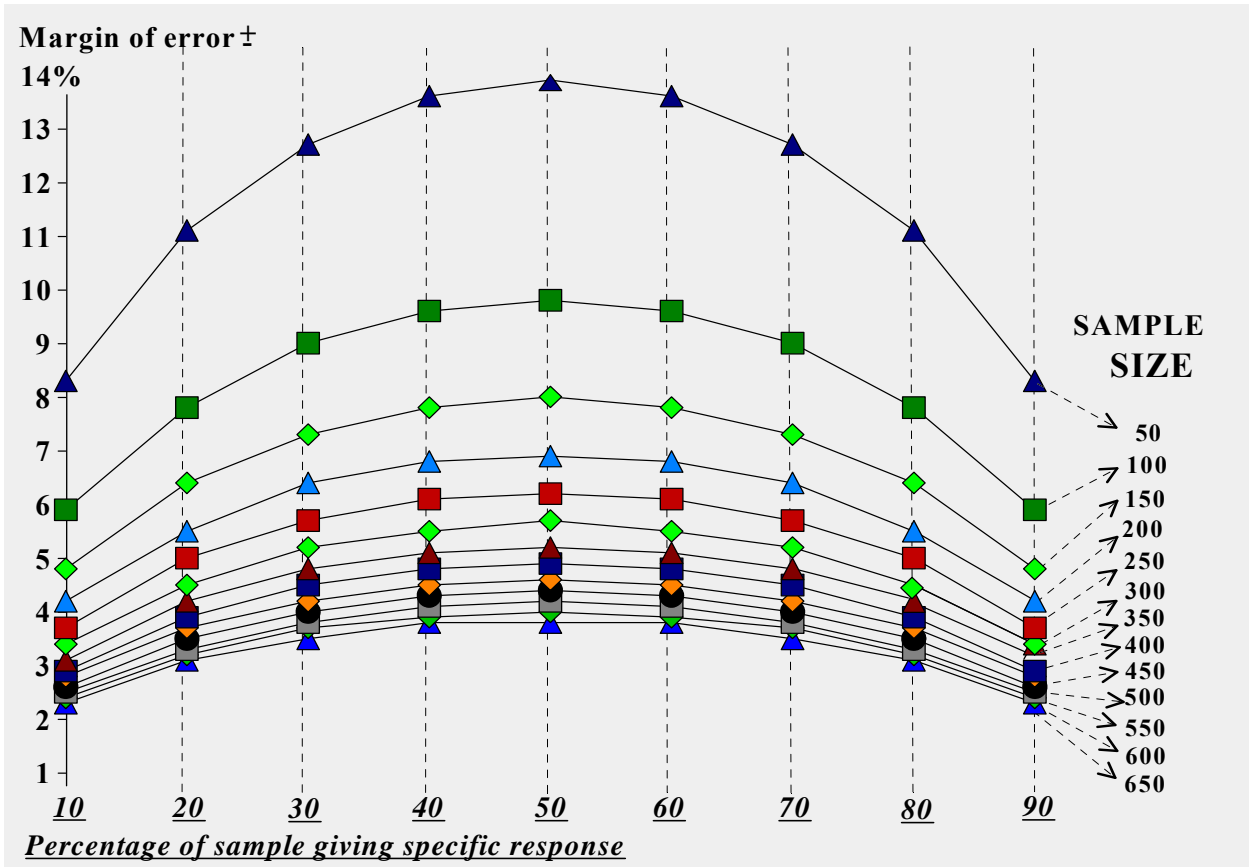
For example, 53 percent of all 400 respondents selected the statement: *“In light of the current budget situation in Ottawa County, it is important to maintain existing county services and programs, even if it means having to pay higher taxes.”*, over a competing argument urging maintaining existing tax levels even if that meant a reduction in services (Question 25). As indicated in the chart below, this percentage would have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9 percent. This means that with repeated sampling, it is very likely (95 times out of every 100), the percentage for the entire population would fall between 48.1 percent and 57.9 percent, hence 50 percent \pm 4.9 percent.

For analysis purposes, the county geography was broken down into five regions. Where variations in responses are found among or between regions, it is noted in the textual report. A chart illustrating the jurisdictional components of each of the regions can be found in the appendix.

EPIC ▪ MRA SAMPLING ERROR BY PERCENTAGE (AT 95 IN 100 CONFIDENCE LEVEL)

Percentage of sample giving specific response

SAMPLE SIZE:	<u>% margin of error ±</u>								
	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>90</u>
650	2.3	3.1	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.1	2.3
600	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4
550	2.5	3.3	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.8	3.3	2.5
500	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.0	3.5	2.6
450	2.8	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.2	3.7	2.8
400	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.5	3.9	2.9
350	3.1	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.2	5.1	4.8	4.2	3.1
300	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.2	4.5	3.4
250	3.7	5.0	5.7	6.1	6.2	6.1	5.7	5.0	3.7
200	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.5	4.2
150	4.8	6.4	7.3	7.8	8.0	7.8	7.3	6.4	4.8
100	5.9	7.8	9.0	9.6	9.8	9.6	9.0	7.8	5.9
50	8.3	11.1	12.7	13.6	13.9	13.6	12.7	11.1	8.3



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EPIC ▪ MRA was commissioned in 2014 by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners to measure public opinion about county government operations in a “customer satisfaction” survey in what is the fifth in a series of biennial studies begun in 2006. In addition to time series questions posed in each of the prior tests, there were questions unique to and timely for, the calendar year in which the survey was conducted. For instance, surveys in prior years included questions concerning replacement of lost state revenue sharing dollars, farmland preservation issues and where responsibility for county roads should rest, among others. In the 2014 study, questions asking respondents how they would vote on a scheduled ½ mill property tax assessment increase for the purpose of improving local roads; the possibility of a renewal of an existing 1/3 mill levy dedicated to the county parks; and, the possibility of a 0.3 mill increase to fund community mental health services for the developmentally disabled.

As noted, similar studies were conducted on behalf of the county in 2012, 2010, 2008, and in 2006, with most of the questions replicated in the 2014 survey. Throughout the following analysis, differences in outcomes between the 2014 results and prior studies – particularly the most recently preceding 2012 survey – are discussed where appropriate.

-- Questionnaire Frame

An obvious starting point for gauging “customer satisfaction” is to inquire about attitudes toward county services in general and to determine if voters perceive, in a broad sense, whether or not things are going well in the county. In addition, measurements of what respondents believe is the biggest problem facing county government and questions about the perceptions of specific county agencies, departments, and programs are instructive. In order to accurately assess public opinion regarding possible tax options, it is necessary to probe attitudes regarding relative tax burden, and to investigate top-of-mind responses to general likes, dislikes, and preferences.

-- General Observations

A rebound in optimistic outlook first observed in 2012, continues in 2014

Concern about jobs and the economy supplanted by “Roads”

The deep economic recession beginning over six years ago heavily influenced the data obtained in the 2008 and 2010 surveys. Unusually high proportions of respondents expressed deep dissatisfaction with state government in particular, and this disdain carried over even to the

normally well-insulated bailiwicks of local township and city entities, with the county caught in between. Consistent with this outlook, high proportions of citizens did not see where they were receiving fair value for their tax dollar and hypothetical ballot questions requesting increases in assessments were met with a much-greater-than-normal skepticism. In pertinent open-ended follow-up questions asking “Why?” the amorphous term, “Wasteful spending” was quite often the answer offered by a plurality of respondents as the reason for issuing a negative rating or for “voting” no on a hypothetical ballot issue.

In the 2012 study, a rebound to pre-recession attitudinal levels was reported, and for the most part, the 2014 data establishes this observation as a trend toward a more optimistic outlook – or at least one not nearly as jaundiced as witnessed in the recession years. To be sure, many of the indicators from the current survey suggesting residents’ more optimistic outlook are not yet at the levels recorded in 2006, but they are trending in that direction and in some cases, 2014 even sees the highest favorable results recorded in the last eight years of testing.

As noted, the rationale behind the observation that citizens are adopting a more optimistic outlook is manifest in several areas of the survey, beginning with the responses to an open-ended question asking respondents to identify the “most important problem or issue” confronting local and county government. Some expression involving the economy (e.g. “jobs”, “unemployment”, etc.) have uniformly headed the list in each of the prior three surveys conducted and the 2012 study is no exception. However, what is notable about the 2012 survey is that 21 percent of respondents gave top-of-mind answers involving the economy and jobs compared to the 27 percent who identified this issue in 2008 and the 32 percent who did so in 2010. While still not close to the 13 percent figure posted in 2006, the 2012 data represents a drop of over one-third in the number of respondents spontaneously identifying the “economy” as the most important issue facing their county and local government.

A similar follow-up question offers respondents a roster of eight major problem and issue areas of concern to Ottawa County residents and asks the respondent to name which of them they are personally concerned about the most. Again, the area involving the economy – specifically “Providing economic development and jobs” – tops the 2012 list as it has in the past but a 10

percentage point drop is seen from the 2010 test, falling from 45 percent of all respondents selecting this item, to 35 percent; a figure far closer to the 2006 result of thirty-two percent.

Questions and responses that fall under the general rubric of “the economy” run throughout the survey and are detailed in the later section offering a question-by-question illustration of outcomes. Three of these questions, however, are important to highlight in this initial section in order to substantiate the observation that county residents harbor less anxiety about both public and personal fiscal matters than in the recent past.

Slight increase from 2012 in sensitivity to existing tax burden

A standard question used by EPIC ▪ MRA for any survey of constituents of a governmental entity seeks to measure respondents’ attitude toward the taxes they pay in return for the services that are delivered. This question asks respondents to report whether they believe their taxes are “Too high”, “Too low” or, “About right”, in return for what they receive in the way of county services. For those responding “Too high”, a follow up question is posed, asking if that would be, “Much” or, “Somewhat”, too high. A level in the high 20 percent-to-low-30 percent range is the typical result in other recent surveys conducted in other jurisdictions for the overall “Too high” response rate, with fewer than half that total being of the “Much” too high variety.

In 2012, the survey revealed a total “Too high” level of 23 percent (7 percent “Much” too high)– the lowest overall total of the four surveys EPIC ▪ MRA had conducted in Ottawa County since 2006 – well below the 2010, 2008 and 2006 levels, which were 30 percent, 39 percent and 27 percent respectively. In 2014, this measurement moved up 5 points from its 2012 level to what is more commonly found in other jurisdictions. It is worth of note, however, that the intensity of this sentiment – as measured by the “Much” too high portion – moved up only one point to eight percent.

Higher importance placed on government services

Another key question asks respondents which of two statements comes closer to their view: A statement saying that:

“ . . . it is important to maintain current county service levels even if it means higher taxes”;

Or, a statement expressing the view that:

“ . . . taxes and fees should be kept as low as possible, even if it means a reduction in services”.

In 2008 and 2010, solid majorities of respondents opted for the “keep taxes low” statement as being closer to their view and even in the pre-recession year of 2006, only a plurality of respondents – 49 percent – opted for the “maintain services” statement. The 2012 survey was the first time a majority of respondents (51 percent) opted for the “maintain services” statement. The 2014 survey sees this outlook bolstered slightly, with 53 percent of all respondents opting for the “maintain services” statement versus the 37 percent who were drawn to the “keep taxes low” sentiment. It is also noteworthy that the proportion of respondents opting for the latter statement dropped by six points from its 2012 level, with the difference rounding out the 10 percent who were undecided on the question.

Willingness to increase tax levy for roads

The last key indicator question involves a hypothetical ballot proposal which would ask voters to approve a 0.5 mill increase in assessment, with the revenue being dedicated to fund improvement of non-primary roads in cities, villages and townships. Respondents were asked if the election were held today, would they vote yes in favor of the proposal or, no to oppose it. The initial outcome (a tally of those immediately responding either “yes” or “no”) was 47 percent “yes” to 36 percent “no”. After “leaners” are factored in (a “leaner” is one who is initially undecided but when pressed by the interviewer to indicate in which direction they would “lean” if the vote were held today, offers a yes or no response), a majority (albeit slight) of 51 percent is recorded as in the “yes” column to a total of 38 percent “no”.

While the results from the 2012 survey on the millage issue are not necessarily at a level to instill great confidence in projecting a particular outcome in actual election, they do mark the first time since the 2006 survey (which posed a question involving replacement of lost state revenue sharing dollars) a millage increase question met with a majority approval. The 2008 survey posed nearly the identical road improvement millage question as in 2012, and the total “vote” results (i.e. including “leaners”) were 33 percent “yes” to 47 percent “no”. The 2010 survey tested a 0.1 mill increase to convert the county retirement system from a defined benefit to a defined contribution program, as well as testing a 0.1 mill increase to be dedicated to fund a purchase of development rights program; both were rejected by the respondents in 2010 by

margins of 51 percent oppose versus 49 percent favor in the case of the pension system question and, 50 percent no to 42 percent yes, in the case of the purchase of development rights question.

Taken together, the results from the foregoing questions, which either directly or tangentially touched upon on respondents' personal financial interests, clearly indicate a rebound to the sunnier outlook recorded in 2006 and away from the relative pessimism exhibited in the two subsequent surveys conducted during the deepest portions of the recession years of 2008 and 2010. The results to the questions pertaining to economic interests are not the end of the story, however. There are other measurements tracked over time which also serve to corroborate the observation that Ottawa County residents are more content with their county government today than they have been in the not-too-distant past.

Greater benefit of the doubt given to governmental entities

“Right direction/Wrong track”

The responses to individual questions asking if the state, county, and the respondents' local unit (i.e. city, township, and village) are heading in the “right direction” or pretty much off on the “wrong track” are also instructive. The traditional order of highest-to-lowest “right direction” responses is: local unit, followed by the county, with state government having the lowest “right direction” percentages. This rank ordering continues with the 2012 results but with all of the specific governmental entities tested enjoying significantly higher “right direction” percentages over 2010 survey levels – a finding particularly striking in the case of state government and, to a somewhat lesser but still impressive degree, for Ottawa County government.

“Positive/Negative” ratings

Similar tests asking respondents to issue either a “Positive” or “Negative” rating (which are further subdivided into Excellent/Pretty good vs. Only fair/Poor, respectively) for both their local governmental unit and for the county as a whole reflect an increase in the “Positive” portion from their 2008 and 2010 levels. In addition, the intensity of the “Positive” rating – as measured by the percentage denominating their answer as being “Excellent” increased in 2012 and conversely, the proportion of the “Negative” rating denominated as “Poor”, decreased from the measurements taken in the prior two surveys.

This “Positive/Negative” rating test was also applied to the specific issue of how well respondents believed Ottawa County was doing in managing its finances. The 2012 results reveal the highest “Positive” rating of the four surveys conducted to date, with 62 percent of

respondents offering a positive rating (12% “Excellent”), up nine points from the 2008 low mark of 53 percent and outpacing the 2006 level by two percentage points.

Seemingly conflicting results concerning “Roads”

Why “Positive/Negative” for [County/Local]

Following the positive/negative rating questions about overall performance for both the local unit of government and the county as a whole, an open-ended question is asked as to why the respondent offered the rating that they did. In the case of the local unit (i.e. city, twp., village) “Roads” appear as the fifth most cited reason among those offering a negative rating for their local unit and the sixth most often cited reason for why the respondent issued a positive rating for the local unit. Similarly, “Roads” together with “Road Commission” and “Snow removal”, hold first place – by a wide margin – as the most mentioned reason for offering either the positive or the negative rating. Clearly, what constitutes good service in this area varies widely in the minds of the respective “Positive” and “Negative” camps, although the reader is reminded that fewer than one-in-five respondents offered a negative rating for their local unit and only 14 percent did so in regard to the county. Still, other data suggests the issue of roads as being something to which county residents pay some attention.

The “best service”, “needs improvement” and “what to cut” results

In two follow up open-ended questions, respondents are asked to identify a specific service the county does the best job at providing, as well as a question asking them to cite the county service in most need of improvement. In both instances “Road Commission” together with “Snow removal” topped the list by fairly wide margins. A little later in the survey, respondents are asked to name which service to cut in the event a future budget shortfall required such action. In this instance, “Road Commission” was cited by only four percent of respondents, trailing the more frequently cited responses of, “Parks & Recreation” (17%), “Staff salary & benefits” (9%), and, “Nothing” (6%). Taken together, the results suggest a citizenry appreciative of the county’s efforts at maintaining its road system, while still recognizing the need for improvement. This observation is corroborated by the results to more pointed questions on the issue.

Sentiment toward more funding for roads under the status quo

As noted earlier, the 2012 survey marked the first time a majority of respondents indicated approval for an increase in assessment for a dedicated purpose. In this instance, a total of 53 percent reported they would “vote” yes on a .05 mill increase for the purpose of improving

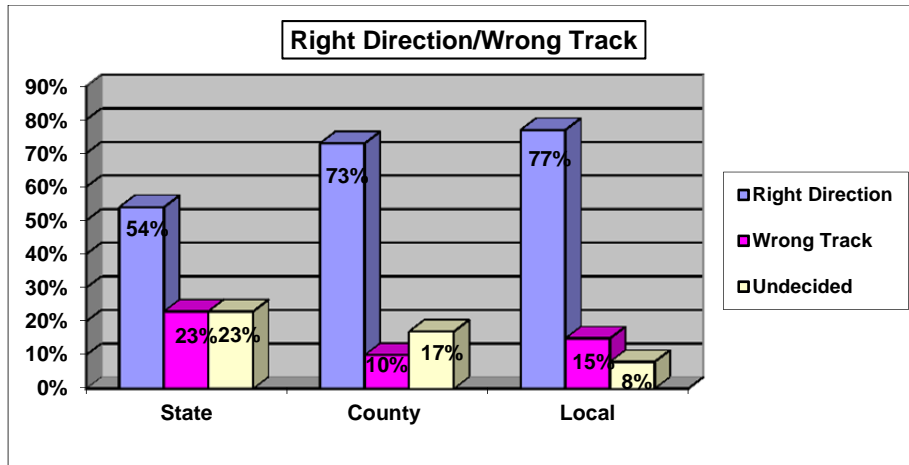
county roads. Prior to posing this question, however, respondents were asked if they would support action by the county commission to dissolve the road commission and directly assume its functions. In an initial asking of support or opposition to the notion, respondents were given background information about the current manner of appointing road commission members and apprised of legislation which would allow the commission to dissolve the commission in favor of taking on direct responsibility for servicing county roads. Respondents were then asked if they would approve or disapprove of such action on the part of the county commission.

In this initial asking of the question, a solid 53 percent to 38 percent majority of respondents voiced their opposition to such a proposal, with well over half the opponents (37%) indicating their opposition “strongly”. A follow-up re-vote question on the issue was asked after respondents were presented with arguments both for and against the idea. The presentation of arguments only served to solidify opposition to the dissolution of the road commission, with 55 percent of respondents voicing opposition.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RESULTS

-- Right Direction or Wrong Track? – (Q’s 03-05.)

As part of a series of questions designed to measure the overall “atmospherics” in which county government activities operate, respondents are asked about their perception of the direction in which several governmental entities are headed by asking: “Overall, do you think that *[jurisdiction name]* is headed in the right direction, or, do you think that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?” The chart below illustrates the results for the 2014 survey:



In the 2010 survey, the state posted a dismal 12 percent “right direction” rating, but saw a dramatic turnaround in 2012 to 51 percent. As can be seen, the 2014 results show a continuation of improvement for the state by three points for 2014. While not as quite as dramatic as the movement in the state numbers between 2010 and 2014, the level of “right direction” responses for the county and the local unit also improved, from the 2010 levels by 21 points for the county and 10 points for the local unit.

Subgroups reporting “wrong track” for the county in proportions greater than the norm of 10% included:

- 41% Local “wrong track”
- 25% State “wrong track”
- Negative rating-local services
- 20% Negative rating-county services
- 18% Negative rating-county finances
- Taxes “Too high”
- 16% No on road millage
- No on park millage
- 15% Votes in All elections

-- County Compared to Regional Neighbors – (Q 06.)

Another measurement of how respondents view their status as Ottawa County residents is found in a question new for the 2014 test which asks them to report if they believe Ottawa County is “Better”, “Worse” or, “About the same” as other western Michigan counties. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) reported their belief that Ottawa County was better than neighboring counties as a place to, “live, work and raise a family”. Twenty-three percent viewed the County as “About the same” with three percent undecided. Only one percent reported a belief that Ottawa County was, “Worse”.

-- County’s Strategic Goals – (Q’s 07-10.)

The battery of questions about strategic goals was first posed in 2008 and in each survey year thereafter. Respondents are informed that the Board of Commissioners had a strategic plan that included four major goals, which are then recited in random order. After hearing each of them, respondents are asked to indicate if they believe the individual goal was a “Top priority”, “Important but not a top priority”, “Slightly important” or, “Not important at all”.

The table below shows the results for 2014, 2012, 2010 and 2008 on these stated goals:

Ranked by 2014 “TOTAL IMPORTANT”*		Top Prior	TOT Impor	Slight Impor	Not Impor	DK/ Undec
__07.	To maintain and improve the strong financial position of the county	26%	89%	9%	1%	1%
	Ranking in 2012 - 1	45%	90%	7%	2%	1%
	Ranking in 2010 - 1	48%	91%	6%	1%	2%
	Ranking in 2008 - 1	60%	94%	3%	1%	2%
__09.	To contribute to the long-term, economic, social and environmental health of the County*	34%	88%	8%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2012 - 2	39%	86%	11%	2%	1%
	Ranking in 2010 - 2	35%	82%	13%	2%	3%
	Ranking in 2008 - 2	54%	87%	8%	2%	3%
__10.	To continually improve the county’s organization and services	22%	80%	15%	3%	2%
	Ranking in 2012 - 4	33%	76%	18%	4%	2%
	Ranking in 2010 - 3	29%	79%	16%	4%	1%
	Ranking in 2008 - 4	45%	87%	10%	1%	2%
__08.	To maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees, and other stakeholders	23%	77%	19%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2012 - 3	31%	81%	16%	3%	---
	Ranking in 2010 - 4	27%	82%	14%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2008 - 3	48%	85%	10%	3%	2%
* Question 9 wording was changed in 2014 from: “To contribute to a healthy physical, economic, and community environment”						

As evidenced by the relative positioning of the several goals in the table below, each goal is viewed by county residents as being at least “Important” by very high proportions. Also evident is the fact that maintenance of fiscal and economic health consistently tops the list and it is also noted that improving county services and enhancing communications are the only goals that consistently register double digits for being “slightly” important – at least relative to the

other two goals. Another interesting observation that is perhaps indicative of the public’s lack of personal preoccupation with “the economy and jobs” as a top concern, is the lower levels of “Top Priority” issued in 2014 across all the recited strategic goals – sometimes dramatically lower (e.g. Q.7 2008 thru 2014) – compared to prior years. Nevertheless, maintenance of the county’s strong financial position continues to be viewed by county residents as the goal of highest importance.

-- Biggest Problem, “Top of Mind” & Prompted – (Qs 11 & 12.)

Among the many indicators in the 2014 survey pointing to the fact that transportation infrastructure rivals the economy and jobs as the issue of greatest importance in the minds of the public, perhaps the best evidence lies in the data emerging from the “biggest problem” questions. In the first of these, respondents are asked to name, “. . . the single most important problem or issue facing the residents of your community that . . . [local] government must address?” Nearly one-in-five (19 percent) cited “Poor roads” as the single most important issue that first came to mind, with “Unemployment/No jobs” as the second most mentioned spontaneous response at eleven percent. Compare these findings with those of previous years when “Unemployment/ Jobs” topped the list of issues that were most urgent in 2008 at 27 percent, 2010 at 32 percent, 2012 at 21 percent and even the pre-recession year of 2006 at 13 percent and it is clear that concerns about personal economic insecurity while still important, no longer totally dominate the public discourse.

Subgroups reporting “Poor roads” in proportions greater than the norm of 19% included:

- 28% *H.S. less education*
- 27% *\$50K-\$75K hh income*
- 26% *DCMH vote, “Undecided”*
- 25% *“About the same” as other counties*
Age 65+
- 24% *“Keeping services” more important*
No college Men

Subgroups reporting “Unemployment” in proportions greater than the norm of 11% included:

- 18% *Road millage, No*
- 16% *\$25K-\$50K hh income*
- 15% *Recently contacted county*
Park renewal, No

A similar test followed the top-of-mind question wherein a list of eight issues – identified as areas many residents of Ottawa County say they are concerned about – were recited to respondents and they are then asked to select which one problem they are most concerned about.

The results from this question see “Providing economic development and jobs” as the issue area selected by the greatest proportion of respondents at 26 percent – a result consistent with the rankings emerging from the battery of prompted questions on strategic goals presented earlier in the interview. However, even at 26 percent, the proportion of 2014 respondents selecting this issue area is well-below that of previous years and the proportion citing “Maintaining and improving area roads spikes significantly – especially compared to pre-2012 levels. The year-by-year comparison of responses shown below demonstrates the changes in relative rankings over time:

					ISSUE OF GREATEST PERSONAL CONCERN
2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	
32%	37%	45%	35%	26%	Providing economic development and jobs
5%	7%	8%	11%	18%	Maintaining and improving area roads
10%	9%	12%	12%	16%	Keeping local taxes and fees low
5%	14%	6%	13%	16%	Protecting the public from crime and drugs
10%	6%	13%	16%	13%	Improving the quality of area schools
3%	6%	3%	5%	4%	Protecting the environment in the area
12%	3%	1%	2%	3%	Controlling traffic congestion
1%	3%	3%	4%	3%	Providing quality basic city, township or county services
---	3%	---	---	---	More than one [ASK: "But which problem concerns you most?" AND CODE BEST RESPONSE]
3%	3%	1%	2%	1%	Undecided/Refused
11%	5%	5%	---	---	<i>Controlling unplanned development and sprawl</i>
8%	4%	3%	---	---	<i>Preserving prime farmland and open space</i>

Subgroups reporting “Economy/Jobs” in proportions greater than the norm of 26% included:

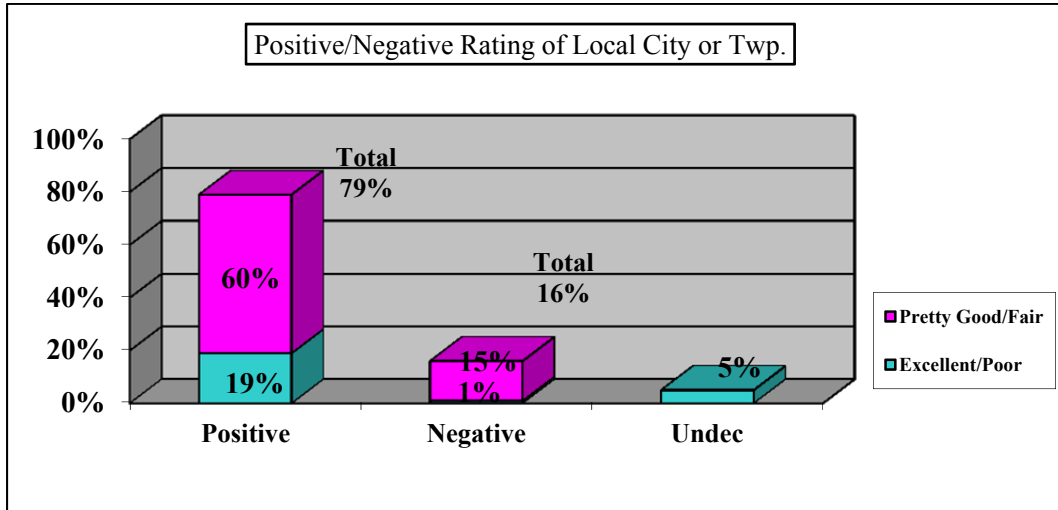
- 40% *Under \$25K hh income*
- 39% *Non-homeowners*
- 34% *Keep Services/Low Taxes, Undecided*
- 33% *Votes in “Most” elections*
- 32% *Men 18-49*
- College men*
- 31% *Region 1*
- Region 4*
- Do not access county website*

Subgroups reporting “Roads” in proportions greater than the norm of 18% included:

- 37% *1-10 year residents*
- 34% *\$50K-\$75K hh income*
- 29% *DCMH vote, No*
- 28% *Region 5*
- 25% *Votes in “All” elections*
- No college women*
- 23% *Road millage, Yes*
- Post H.S.*
- Women 18-49*

-- Rate your Local (City/Township/Village) Government - (Q 13.)

At 85 percent, 2006 saw county residents issue the highest “Positive” rating for the job their local government did in providing services. This rating dropped to 75 percent in 2008 and 2010, and inched up to 78 percent in 2012. 2014 sees a continuation of the upward trend, but only very slightly, reaching 79 percent, although the more intense “Poor” portion of the Negative rating dropped to an all-time low of only one percent.



Subgroups reporting “negative” in proportions greater than the norm of 16% included:

- 49% Local govt. wrong track
- 47% Negative rating, County
- 43% Ottawa Co. wrong track
- 39% Negative rating, County finances
- 33% Michigan wrong track
- 29% Taxes “Too high”
- 28% Schools, top prompted concern
- 27% Region 4
- 25% No college men
- 24% Region 2
- Post H.S.
- 23% Park renewal, No
- 22% Ottawa Co “about the same”
- Keep taxes low
- Age 50-64
- 21% Vote “Half the time”
- Road millage, Undecided
- Non homeowners

-- Reasons for the rating - (Q's 14, 15.)

As a follow up to the Positive/Negative rating question, respondents were asked to give their reason for issuing the rating that they did. It is important to remember, however, that at 16 percent total “Negative” rating, the responses for the reasons for that rating came from a total of 65 individuals. The following illustrates the top several reasons why respondents offered the respective ratings:

Reasons for “Positive” rating for local government delivery of services

- 15% - No complaints
- 11% - Good job in general
- 8% - Fast response
- 6% - Well-kept/Clean

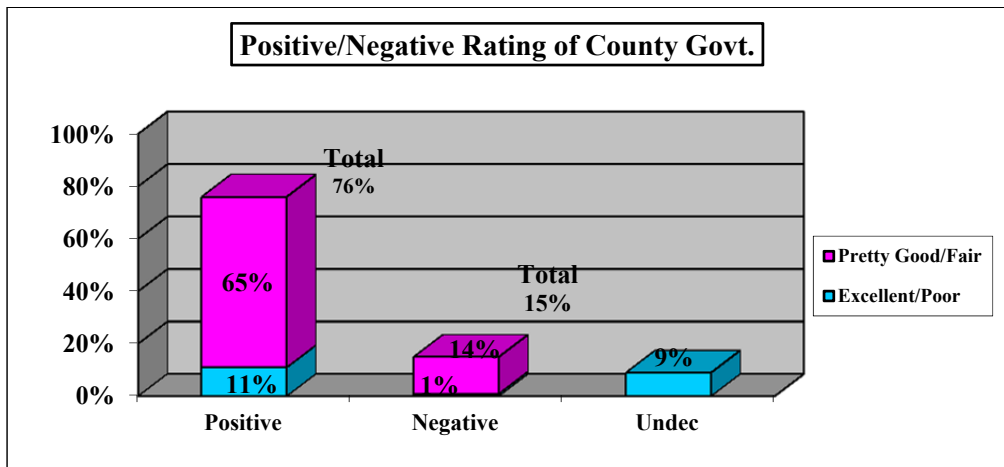
Reasons for “Negative” rating for local government delivery of services

- 20% - Wasteful spending
- 12% - Poor administration
- 10% - Poor communication

It is worth noting that the top reasons in the respective categories have changed their relative rankings over time but, for the most part, the top several reasons themselves tend to be the same.

-- Rate your County Government - (Q 16.)

Where respondents’ rating of their local unit of government in the 2014 survey showed a very minor increase in “Positive” rating over the 2012 numbers along with a concomitant decrease in the “Negative” rating, the 2014 rating for County government exhibited nearly identical results to the 2012 study. The graph below illustrates the results for 2012:



Subgroups reporting “negative” in proportions greater than the norm of 15% included:

45%	<i>County finances, Negative</i>
44%	<i>Local rating, Negative</i>
31%	<i>County wrong track</i>
29%	<i>Region 4</i>
28%	<i>Michigan wrong track</i>
	<i>Local govt. wrong track</i>
25%	<i>Ottawa “About the same”</i>
	<i>Taxes “Too high”</i>
	<i>Park renewal, No</i>
23%	<i>H.S. or less</i>
22%	<i>Vote in “all” elections</i>
	<i>Schools biggest prompted concern</i>
	<i>DCMH millage, No</i>
	<i>Non-homeowners</i>
21%	<i>Keep taxes low</i>
	<i>Road millage, No</i>
20%	<i>Crime biggest prompted concern</i>
	<i>Little access to county website</i>
	<i>No college men</i>

-- Reasons for the County Rating - (Q’s 16, 17.)

Again, as a follow up to the Positive/Negative rating of how well the county is doing in providing basic services, respondents were asked to give their reason for issuing the rating that they did. The reader is also reminded again that at 15 percent total “Negative” rating, the responses for the reasons for that rating came from a total of 61 individuals. The following illustrates the top several reasons why respondents offered the respective ratings:

Reasons for “Positive” rating for county government delivery of services

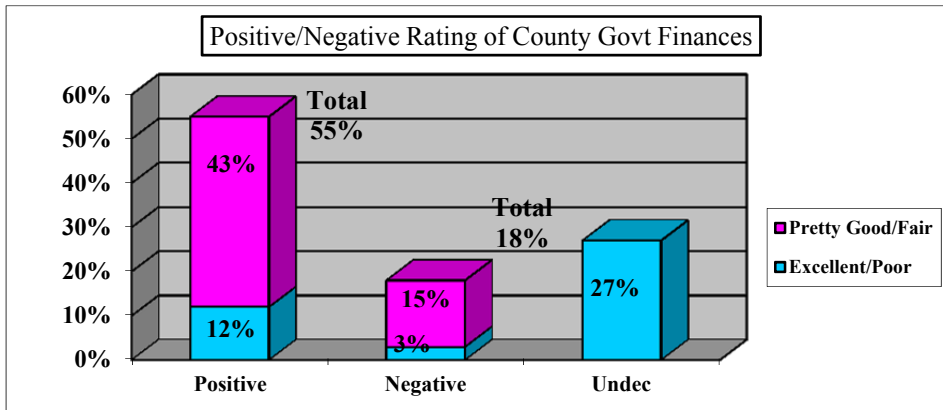
- 13% - *No complaints*
- 12% - *Good job overall*
- 6% - *Winter/Snow services*

2012 Reasons for “Negative” rating for county government delivery of services

- 21% - *Poor roads*
- 14% - *Wasteful spending*
- 12% - *Don’t care about residents*
- 8% - *Could improve in general*

-- Rate the County’s Handling of Finances - (Q 18.)

Respondents were also asked to offer a “Positive” or “Negative” rating for the job Ottawa County does in managing county finances. Over the course of the five survey years, the “Positive” rating has ranged from a low of 53 percent (2008) to a high of 62 percent (2012) and the “Negative” rating has ranged from 20 percent (2010) to 15 percent (2006 & 2012). As can be seen from the graph below, the 2014 results fall squarely in the middle of both rating ranges:

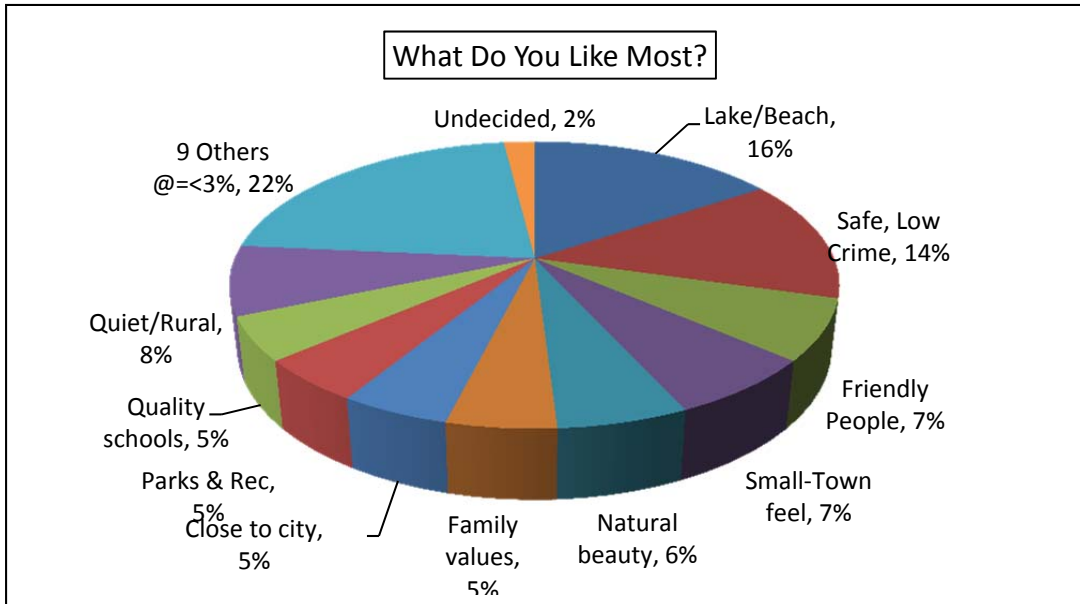


Subgroups reporting “negative” in proportions greater than the norm of 15% included:

- 52% County services, Negative
- 47% Region 4
- 42% Local services, Negative
- 36% Road millage, Undecided
- 32% Local direction, wrong track
- 29% No college, Men
- 28% Michigan wrong track
- County direction, Undecided
- Park renewal, No
- 27% Schools top prompted issue
- Taxes “Too high”
- 26% H.S. or less
- 25% \$25K-\$75K hh income
- 24% Ottawa Co., About the same
- Keep taxes low
- 23% Vote “Seldom/Never” in local elections
- Lived in Ottawa, “Lifetime”

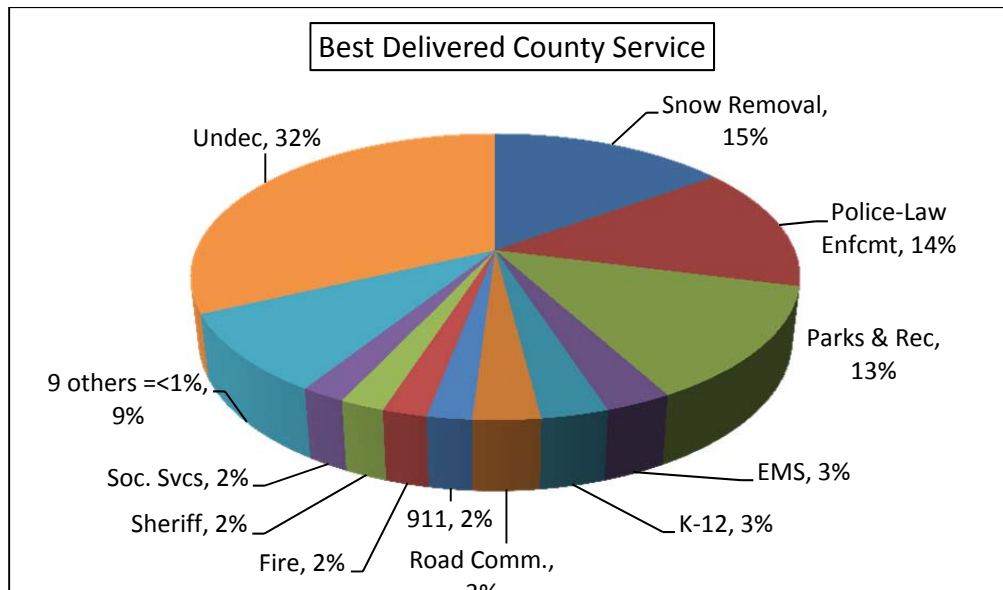
-- What is liked the most about living in Ottawa County - (Q 20.)

Since 2006, the predominant answer to this open-ended question has centered on the county’s proximity to Lake Michigan and its natural beauty. Coming in close behind are comments about personal security (e.g. “safe”, “friendly”) and other quality of life attributes. Also striking over the years is the consistently small percentage filling the “Undecided” slot. The following pie-chart illustrates the distribution of responses for 2014.



-- Ottawa County does the best job at providing . . . ? - (Q 21.)

Law enforcement, Snow removal, Parks and Recreation have traditionally occupied the top spots for the services named by respondents as being the best delivered by the County and the 2014 survey continues that tradition. Those three services account for over two-in-five of the responses, and if some of the other sixteen individual categories that are related to the three first named are included into broader categories, (e.g. EMS, 911, Road Commission) then well over a majority of responses would fall into just a few categories. It is noted, however, that the precise functions and responsibilities of county government are not especially well circumscribed in the minds of some respondents, so there is usually some credit taken (and blame, for that matter) that is not necessarily properly directed. Be that as it may, the chart on the following page shows the major categories mentioned for this question.



-- What County Service Needs the Most Improvement? - (Q 22.)

With all the recent media attention about transportation infrastructure generally, and the condition of the state's roads in particular, it is not surprising that the 2014 survey finds "Road Commission" as the top mention county service in need of improvement. However, "Roads" and "Road Commission" have topped the list in all five of the county-wide surveys dating back to 2006, with the highest percentage (37 percent) citing Road Commission in the 2010 survey. Only in 2006 did this category not account for at least one-third of the responses but even then, the proportion topped the list at twenty-six percent.

Perhaps just as noteworthy is the very high proportion of respondents who are "Undecided" about which of the myriad of county services is in most need of improvement. Indeed, the undecided category has consistently surpassed or closely approximated the proportion naming roads in all five surveys. In 2014, 33 percent cited "Road Commission" but 39 percent were "Undecided"; with 21 separate other categories filling the balance at proportions of three percent or less.

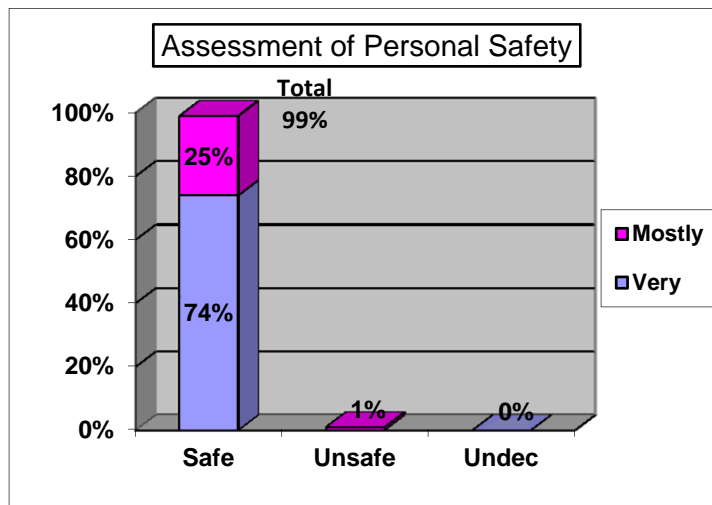
Subgroups reporting "Road Commission" in proportions greater than the norm of 33% included:

- 49% Region 5
- Ottawa Co. direction, wrong track
- 48% DCMH millage, No
- 45% County finances, Negative
- 43% Local direction, Undecided
- 41% Roads biggest prompted concern
- 40% Region 2
- Region 4
- Schools biggest prompted concern
- Taxes "Too high"

39% Taxes biggest prompted concern
 38% Over \$100K hh income

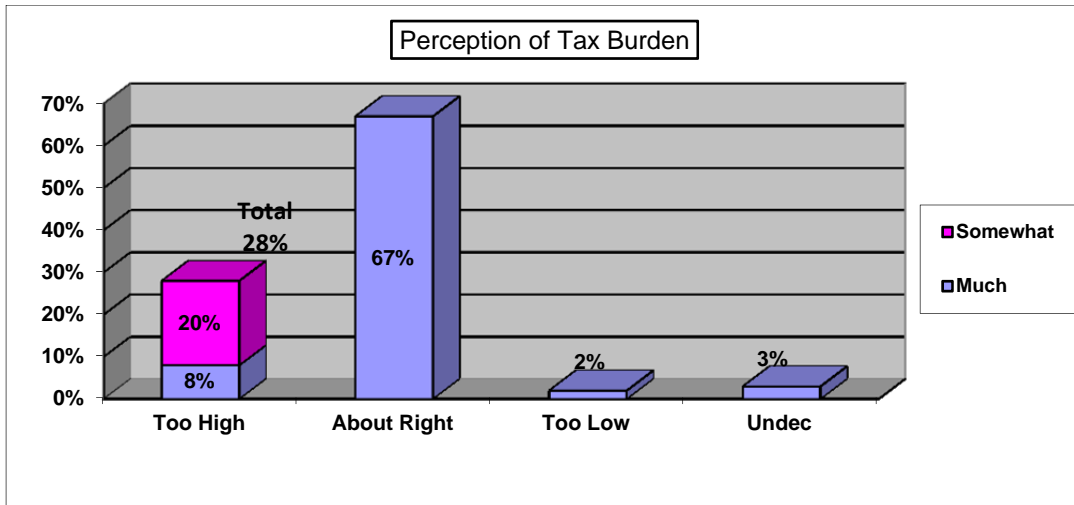
-- Perception of Personal Safety - (Q 22.)

In a new question for 2008, repeated in 2010, 2012 and continued in 2014, respondents were asked, “How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?” Mirroring results from the prior three studies, virtually all respondents reported that they felt safe where they lived. It is noted that a top-of-mind response of, “safe”, “safety” and “friendly people” are all mentioned specifically in response to Q 20 which asks respondents to identify what it is they most like about living in Ottawa County. The chart below illustrates the 2014 results:



-- Perception of tax burden - (Q 24.)

A good indicator of a population’s attitude toward a governmental entity lies in whether or not they believe they are receiving value in the form of services in exchange for what is paid in property taxes. This measurement also happens to be a fairly good harbinger of the chances for passing a ballot proposal to raise property taxes. In a question included in nearly all surveys of this type conducted by EPIC ▪ MRA, respondents were asked if county property taxes and other fees were “Too high, Too low, or About right”, given the amount and quality of county government services they receive in return. If respondents said “Too high”, a follow-up question asked them if the taxes are “Much” or “Somewhat” too high. The results were as follows:



The “Too high” figure for 2012 was the lowest recorded in any of the five surveys, at twenty-four percent. As can be seen, the 2014 level is four points higher, returning to a more “normal” level seen in other jurisdictions in which EPIC ▪ MRA has recently conducted citizen surveys and closer to the Ottawa County survey results measured in 2006 and 2010 (2008 was the high water mark at 39 percent). Much like a blood pressure reading, it is important to note both the “Much” and “Somewhat” measurements that make up the total “Too high” category. At eight percent “Much” too high, the 2014 data does not signal an inordinate electorate-wide sensitivity to issues involving county revenues.

Subgroups reporting “Too high” in proportions greater than the norm of 28% included:

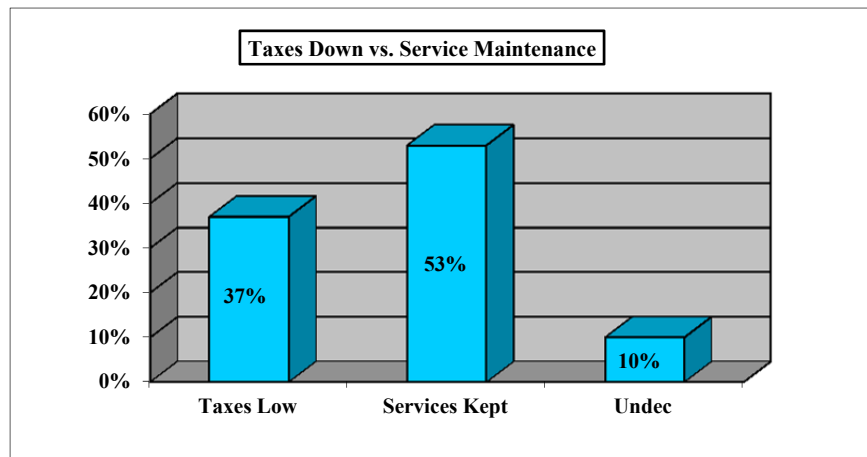
- 60% Local direction, wrong track
- 55% Park renewal, No
- 53% Taxes biggest prompted concern
- 52% County direction, wrong track
- 51% Road millage, No
- DCMH millage, No
- 50% Local services, Negative
- 47% State direction, wrong track
- Keep taxes low
- 46% County services, Negative
- 42% County direction, Undecided
- 39% Seldom use Internet
- 37% Lifetime residents
- H.S. or less
- \$75K-\$100K hh income
- Men 50+
- 36% Age 50-64
- 35% Region 5
- 34% Vote in All local elections
- Won't use web for county business
- 33% Region 4
- Roads biggest prompted concern
- Age 50+
- Don't use social media

-- Taxes vs. Service Levels - (Q 25.)

Another question designed to provide insight to elected officials and other policymakers asks respondents to select between the options of maintaining the current level of services even if that means a tax increase or, keep taxes low, even if that means a cut in services. This question has been posed in every survey since 2006 when a bare plurality of respondents opted of the “maintain services” statement. In 2008 and 2010, clear-to-strong majorities opted for the, “keep taxes low” statement. The survey of 2012 saw the first time a majority of respondents (albeit 51 percent) selecting the “maintain services” option over the 43 percent selecting the “keep taxes low” option.

The 2014 data reveals a continuation of the trend first seen in 2012, with a higher 53 percent majority selecting the “maintain services” statement, and a lower than concomitant proportion – 37 percent – selecting the “keep taxes low” sentiment. That is, keep services went up 2 points from 2012, while the, low taxes statement saw a 6 point drop. The language of the options available to respondents as a reaction they would prefer county government to take in the event of a budget shortfall is:

- “Keep taxes and fees as low as possible – even if this means a cut in services”; or,
- “Maintain existing services – even if this means a tax increase.”



Subgroups selecting “Keep taxes low” in proportions greater than the norm of 37% included:

- 62% *Park renewal, No*
- 61% *Taxes “Too high”*
- 59% *Road millage, No*
DCMH millage, No
- 58% *Taxes biggest prompted concern*
- 54% *Local direction, wrong track*
No college men
- 51% *County finances, Negative*
- 50% *Local services, Negative*
- 49% *County services, Negative*

- 47% County direction, wrong track
Seldom use Internet
Men
- 45% Region 2
Region 4
H.S. or less
- 43% Under \$25K hh income
- 42% Vote in All local elections
Lifetime resident
\$25K-\$50K hh income

Subgroups selecting “Maintain services” in proportions greater than the norm of 53% included:

- 69% Schools biggest prompted concern
- 67% Road millage, Yes
- 65% Vote half the time in local elections
\$75K-\$100K hh income
- 64% College women
- 63% Taxes “About right”
- 62% Park renewal, Yes
- 61% Region 3
Region 5
DCMH millage, Yes
Age 18-34
Women Age 18-49
- 59% 11-25 yr. residents
College
- 58% Local direction, right
Children at home
Women

-- Contact With a County Department - (Q’s 26-28.)

Another original question from 2006 asks respondents if they or anyone else in their household has contacted a county office or department, “. . . in the past year”. The first year this question was asked saw the highest proportion of responses at thirty-seven percent. In subsequent tests, including the lasted in 2014, the response rate has remained consistently at or around thirty-percent. The following chart illustrates the results over time:

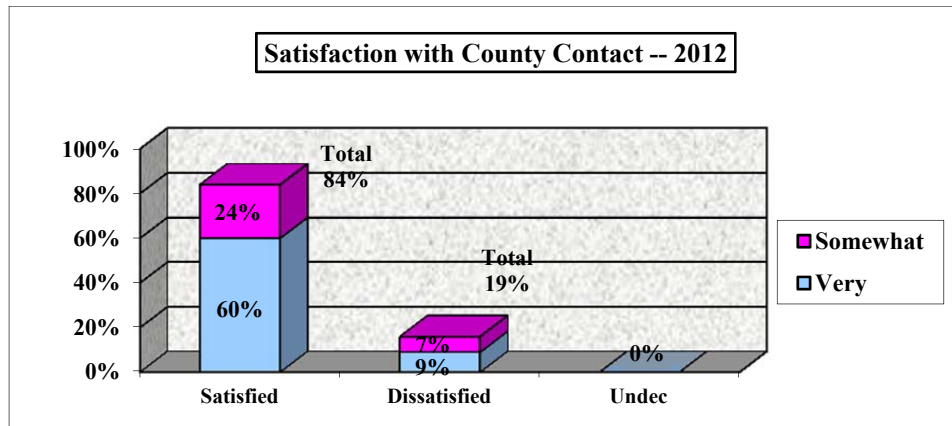
2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	
28%	21%	20%	23%	26%	Yes, respondent
7%	8%	3%	4%	2%	Yes, someone else
2%	3%	7%	2%	3%	Yes, more than one
37%	32%	30%	29%	31%	TOTAL CONTACTED
61%	63%	69%	71%	68%	No one contacted an office or department of Ottawa County ----- GO TO Q.30 INTRO
6%	5%	1%	---	1%	Undecided/Refused ----- GO TO Q.30 INTRO

Typical of the results from 2008 through the current survey year, the department receiving the most reported contacts has been the Sheriff’s Department or other reply involving law enforcement. Similarly, the Clerk’s office and Health Department (9 percent each in 2014) along with the Road Commission, (six percent in 2014) have perennially been among the most cited departments to receive reported citizen contact. For the 2014 study, There were 24 other specifically mention agencies and departments cited by four percent or fewer of respondents.

Nearly all of these respondents reported they either called the named department on the phone (62 percent), or paid a personal visit (32 percent). The remaining six percent either wrote a letter or sent an e-mail. With insignificant minor variances for the several means of communication available, the 2014 results comport with the respective proportions reported in earlier surveys.

-- Satisfaction with Job Performance - (Q 29.)

Again echoing the results from prior years, the residents who said their household contacted a county office indicated that they were satisfied with the response they received. The total overall satisfaction numbers were higher in 2010 than in either the 2008 or 2006 surveys, and that trend holds true in the 2014 survey, with an 84 percent majority reporting satisfaction with the response (60 percent “Very” satisfied), while 19 percent were dissatisfied. The chart below illustrates the 2014 findings.



-- More, Enough, or Too Much? - (Q's 30-40.)

A battery of questions many policy-making bodies have found to be helpful recites a list of county services and activities. Respondents are asked after hearing of each individual service or activity to give their opinion as to whether or not the county is currently doing – “Enough”, “Too Much”, or if “More” needs to be done; In 2014, eleven specific areas were tested. To measure the intensity of opinion that more needs to be done, respondents answering “More” are asked if they believe that “Much More” or “Somewhat More” is necessary to address their concern.

In a dramatic shift from prior surveys, there is a very significant drop in intensity of feeling among those respondents reporting the county ought to be doing “Much More” for many of the eleven recited service or activity areas where a respondent reported more should be done. This is particularly true in the case of “Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services” and notably, “Providing effective economic development programs”.

Indeed, “Providing effective economic development programs” relinquished its usual 1st or 2nd “Total More” ranking to the “Keeping county residents informed . . .” statement, dropping to a tie for third along with “Providing programs for juvenile offenders separate from adult prison programs”. This shifting of rank represents at least a 20 point drop – and as high as a 30 point drop – in “Total More” score from the levels recorded for that statement in the four previous surveys. While this may be an aberration in the data for this particular survey, a review of pertinent question results preceding this battery of questions lends credence to the *bona fides* of the recorded 2014 opinion for “More”, “Enough”, “Too much”.

First of all, the general drop in intensity level is replicated earlier in the survey at Qs 7-10, which tested the Commission’s strategic goals. There a similar dramatic drop in 2014 in the proportion of respondents indicating any of the stated goals was a “Top Priority” is observed. Another corroborating set of questions is found in the series asking about “Right Direction” vs. “Wrong Track” (Qs 3-5). For each of the entities tested – state, county and local – the “Right Direction” proportions have moved up significantly since tests in previous surveys, but the most dramatic movement is seen for Ottawa County government, as a service delivery entity, in particular.

As for the drop in “More” ranking of, “Providing effective economic development programs”, there are several indicators strongly suggesting that personal financial security concerns are not as front-and-center for respondents as they have been in prior surveys. For

instance, Q 11 asks respondents to identify the single most important problem facing residents of the county. For the first time in five surveys since 2006, “Unemployment/Jobs” HAS NOT received the highest proportion of top-of-mind responses to this open-ended question. Indeed, at eleven percent, the 2014 proportion of responses is the lowest recorded since 2006. Similarly, Q.12 immediately follows up with a prompted list of nine issues facing county residents and asks respondents to select which of them is of most concern to them personally. While “Providing economic development and jobs” received the highest proportion of responses, at 26 percent, that proportion is the lowest recorded over the five surveys asking this same question for the past eight years.

Taken together, the diminished intensity of sentiment, general acknowledgement of heading in the right direction and lack of prominence of responses concerning personal economic security, more than account for the shifting of rank found in the 2014 “More” “Enough”, “Too Much” battery. Presented below is a comparison of the findings over the five surveys conducted to date:

	2014 SORTED MOST TO LEAST TOTAL “MORE NEEDED”	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>39.</u> #1	Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services	10%	40%	54%	1%	5%
	Ranking in 2012 – 1 (tie)	14%	41%	55%	1%	3%
	Ranking in 2010 - 2	12%	41%	54%	1%	4%
	Ranking in 2008 - 1	15%	42%	49%	---	9%
	Ranking in 2006 - 4	16%	42%	52%	---	6%
<u>35.</u> #2	Providing mental health services	10%	23%	37%	3%	37%
	Ranking in 2012 - 5	7%	20%	50%	---	30%
	Ranking in 2010 - 8	7%	22%	50%	2%	26%
	Ranking in 2008 - 12	6%	21%	49%	2%	28%
	Ranking in 2006 - 8	7%	21%	41%	1%	37%
<u>36.</u> #3	Providing programs for juvenile offenders separate from adult prison programs	5%	21%	31%	1%	47%
	Ranking in 2012 - 8	5%	17%	47%	1%	35%
	Ranking in 2010 - 7	5%	23%	41%	1%	35%
	Ranking in 2008 - 10	6%	22%	45%	2%	31%
	Ranking in 2006 - 7	8%	22%	37%	1%	40%

	2014 SORTED MOST TO LEAST TOTAL “MORE NEEDED” (cont.)	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>33.</u> <u>#4</u>	Providing effective economic development programs	3%	21%	48%	3%	28%
	Ranking in 2012 – 1(tie)	14%	41%	46%	2%	11%
	Ranking in 2010 - 1	19%	50%	35%	3%	12%
	Ranking in 2008 - 2	14%	42%	35%	2%	21%
	Ranking in 2006 - 2	18%	51%	31%	2%	16%
<u>38.</u> <u>#5</u>	Working with local governments to best plan commercial and residential development so excessive growth and sprawl can be avoided	4%	20%	55%	2%	23%
	Ranking in 2012 - 4	10%	26%	54%	3%	17%
	Ranking in 2010 - 5	5%	29%	49%	5%	17%
	Ranking in 2008 - 3	9%	32%	47%	3%	18%
	Ranking in 2006 - 3	18%	42%	39%	2%	16%
<u>34.</u> <u>#6</u>	Providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services	4%	18%	37%	4%	41%
	Ranking in 2012 - 6	5%	19%	49%	2%	30%
	Ranking in 2010 - 9	5%	19%	46%	5%	30%
	Ranking in 2008 - 11	6%	22%	46%	4%	28%
	[Not posed in 2006]					
<u>32.</u> <u>#7</u>	Providing public health services, such as immunizations and restaurant inspections	3%	13%	70%	3%	14%
	Ranking in 2012 - 9	4%	13%	74%	1%	12%
	Ranking in 2010 - 10	4%	16%	67%	6%	11%
	Ranking in 2008 - 14	6%	16%	65%	2%	17%
	Ranking in 2006 - 13	4%	15%	70%	1%	14%
<u>30.</u> <u>#8</u>	Providing effective law enforcement services by the Sheriff’s Department	1%	12%	82%	4%	2%
	Ranking in 2012 - 10	3%	13%	83%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2010 - 11	3%	14%	80%	3%	3%
	Ranking in 2008 - 6	8%	25%	66%	2%	7%
	Ranking in 2006 - 9	4%	18%	73%	3%	6%

	2014 SORTED MOST TO LEAST TOTAL "MORE NEEDED" (cont.)	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>40.</u> <u>#9</u>	Maintaining <u>County</u> parks and recreational facilities	1%	8%	87%	4%	1%
	Ranking in 2012 - 14	1%	5%	90%	4%	1%
	Ranking in 2010 - 13	2%	11%	83%	5%	1%
	Ranking in 2008 - 13	4%	18%	72%	4%	6%
	Ranking in 2006 - 10	4%	18%	76%	2%	4%
<u>31.</u> <u>#10</u>	Safely operating the county jail, protecting the public, and avoiding prison overcrowding	1%	7%	63%	3%	27%
	Ranking in 2012 - 13	3%	7%	70%	1%	22%
	Ranking in 2010 - 15	1%	9%	67%	3%	21%
	Ranking in 2008 - 15	4%	16%	61%	2%	21%
	Ranking in 2006 - 14	4%	12%	65%	2%	12%
<u>37.</u> <u>#11</u>	Providing a quick emergency response to accidents	---	5%	88%	---	7%
	Ranking in 2012 - 12	2%	9%	85%	1%	5%
	Ranking in 2010 - 14	2%	9%	85%	---	6%
	Ranking in 2008 - 9	7%	22%	64%	1%	13%
	Ranking in 2006 - 15	3%	11%	80%	---	9%

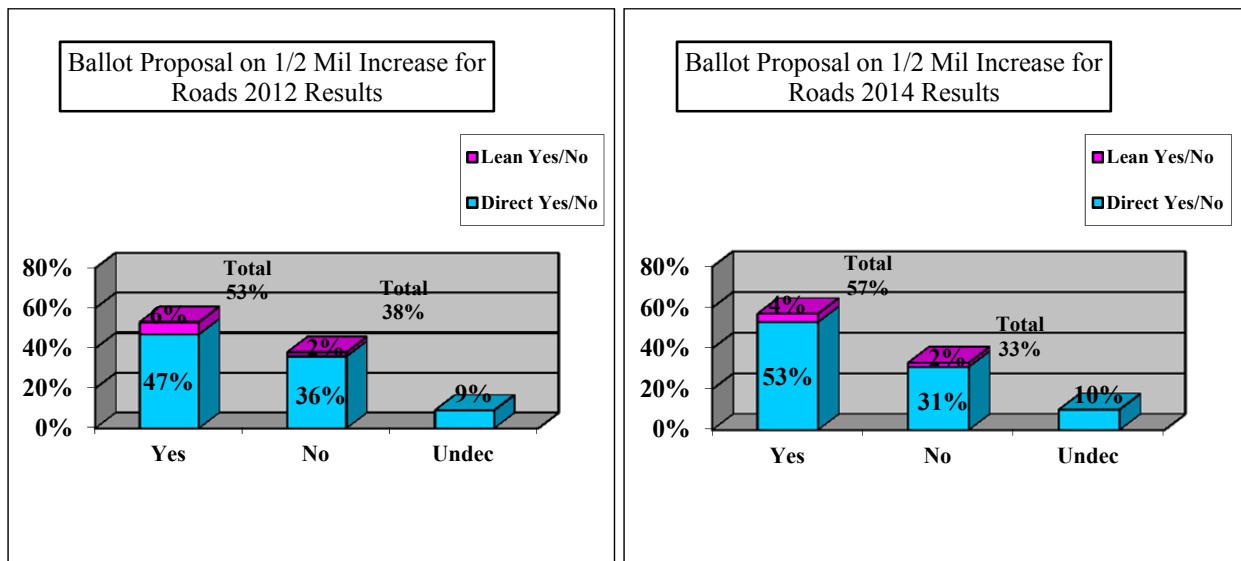
-- Support/Opposition to ½ mill increase dedicated to roads - (Q 41.)

Respondents were next informed that the Board of Commissioners has placed a proposal on the November 2014 ballot which will ask voters to decide on a ½ mill increase for the specific purpose of improving roads in cities, townships and the Village of Spring Lake. They were informed that such a levy would increase taxes on a home valued at \$100,000 with a taxable value of \$50,000 by \$25 per year. They were then asked if that question were in front of them on a ballot “today”, would they vote yes to support the millage or no to oppose it.

In the 2012 survey, a similar – ½-mill-increase-dedicated-to-roads – question was posed to respondents but the issue was framed in the hypothetical. In other words, no actual ballot question had been approved for placement on the ballot at the time the survey was conducted, but respondents were asked how they would vote if such a question were placed on a future ballot. That test yielded a total yes “vote” of 53 percent, and a total no “vote” of 38 percent, with nine percent undecided. It is important to note, however, that the 53 percent yes “vote” was only reached by adding the six percent who “leaned” yes to the 47 percent who are denominated as “solid” yes. That is, in 2012, a 47 percent plurality of respondents immediately indicated that

they would vote yes, with an additional six percent voicing support after initially responding that they were undecided but were persuaded to offer in which direction they would “lean” if they had to vote on the question “today”. The resulting 53 percent yes vote (albeit with “leaners”) from 2012 was the first time in four survey tests conducted up to that time that a hypothetical property tax increase had met with majority support.

For 2014, the overall yes “vote” totaled 57 percent, consisting of a majority of 53 percent “solid” yes together with four percent of “leaners”. All of the increase in the 2014 yes total is the result of the 2014 no “vote” response dropping by five points from its 38 percent total in 2012. The charts below illustrate the responses to the nearly-identical ballot question “vote” taken in the respective survey years:



Subgroups “voting” Yes in support of the road millage in proportions greater than the norm of 57% included:

- 90% Would pay a Co. web-use fee
- 72% Roads top prompted concern
Keep services
- 69% Taxes, “About right”
- 67% Vote in “Half” of local elections
Schools top prompted concern
- 66% Park renewal, Yes
Would use the Co. Web vs. travel
Women age 18-49
- 65% Region 3
Over \$100K hh income
- 64% Region 5
DCMH millage, Yes
Age 35-49
College women
- 63% Post H.S.

62% *Ottawa Co., Positive*
County finances, Positive

Subgroups “voting” No in opposition to the road millage in proportions greater than the norm of 33% included:

64% *Park renewal, No*
 62% *DCMH millage, No*
 59% *Taxes, “Too high”*
 56% *Local govt. direction, wrong track*
 55% *Taxes top prompted concern*
 53% *Ottawa Co. direction, wrong track*
Keep taxes low
 47% *No college men*
 46% *Men age 18-49*
 45% *County rating, Negative*
 42% *Ottawa better than others*
 41% *Age 50-64*
H.S. or less
 40% *Recently contacted the Co.*
Men
 39% *Region 2*
Michigan, wrong track
Vote in “All” local elections
County finances, Negative
Would Not use web vs. travel
 38% *Region 4*
Local rating, Negative
Visit Co. website, “A lot”
 37% *Children at home*

-- Reasons for “Vote” - (Q’s 42, 43.)

As a follow-up to the “vote” on the road millage, respondents were asked why they responded as they did. For supporters of the proposal the unsurprising response, “Roads need repair” (90 percent) consumed nearly all the responses.

For those “voting” no, “Make cuts elsewhere” (43 percent) garnered the clear plurality of stated reasons for opposition, with “All goes to Spring Lake” (20 percent); “Wasteful government spending” (12 percent) and the related reason of, “Not needed” (11 percent) consuming the balance of the cited reasons.

-- Support/Opposition to Other Ballot Questions:

Two other possible millage question proposals were presented to respondents with the question framed as: “If Ottawa County places [this] proposal on a future election ballot . . .”, after which the respondent is asked if the election were held “today”, would you vote yes to support or no to oppose it. The potential proposals were for a renewal of an existing millage for parks and, a new levy to fill the gap in dwindling state revenue to the Department of Community

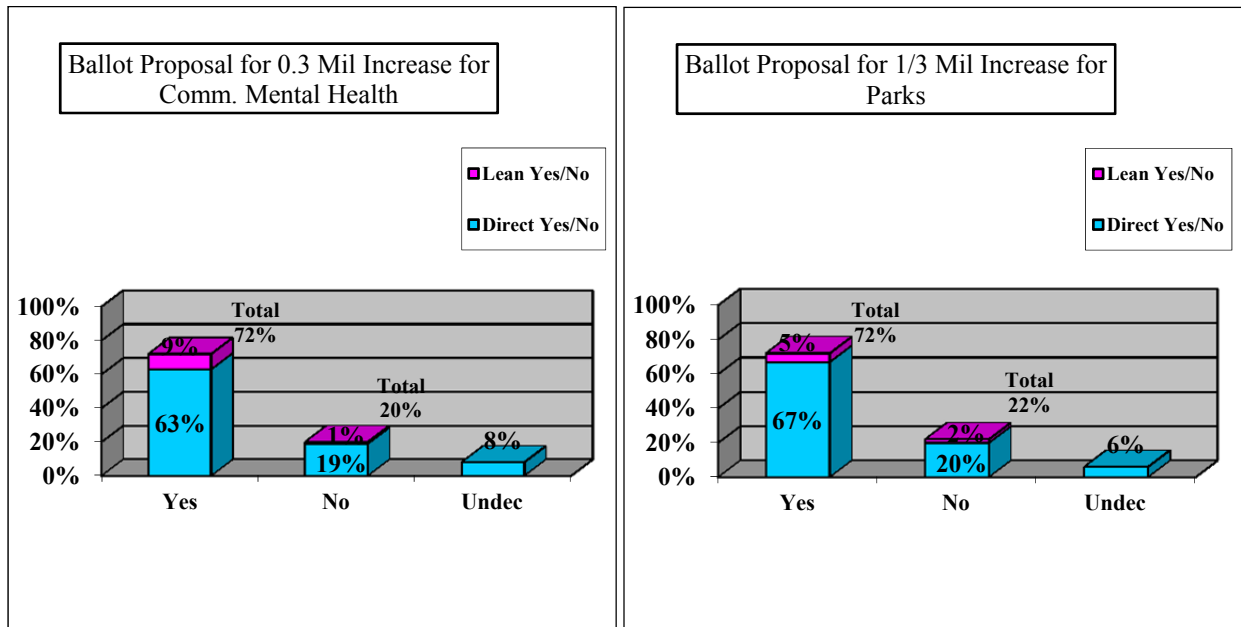
Health for work skill services aimed at the developmentally disabled. The order of presentation for these two proposals was rotated to minimize the risk of biasing the results due to respondents consistently hearing about one of these two proposals before hearing about the other. The results from these questions are almost identical, with nearly three-quarters of all respondents reporting they would “vote” yes.

1/3 mill Land Acquisition/Parks Maintenance Renewal - (Q 44/45.)

Respondents were informed that in 2006, voters approved a ten-year 1/3 mill tax levy for the purpose of funding the acquisition, development and maintenance of county parks and open spaces. The statement went on to note the tax cost for an owner of a home valued at \$100,000 and inquired whether they would vote yes or no if the county asked on a future election ballot for authority to levy this tax for an additional ten years.

0.3 mill New Levy to Replace State Revenue for the Developmentally Disabled - (Q 46/47.)

The other portion of the rotated pair of millage questions asked respondents if they would support or oppose a 0.3 mill new tax levy dedicated to the Department of Community Mental Health to provide work skill training to developmentally disabled citizens. The introduction to the question noted that the Department currently provides these services but they have been jeopardized because of budgeting priorities enacted by the Governor and State Legislature. This recitation also noted the tax implications for an owner of a home valued at \$100,000.



Subgroups “voting” No” in opposition to the DCMH proposal in proportions greater than the norm of 20% included: **NOTE: N=81**

- 44% Park renewal, No
- 38% Taxes top prompted concern
Road millage, No
- 37% Taxes, “Too high”
- 33% Roads top prompted concern
Keep taxes low
1-10 year residents
- 30% Region 2
No college men
- 29% Local, wrong track
County rating, Negative
- 27% Vote in All local elections
Ottawa, About the same
\$50K-\$75K hh income
Men 50+
- 26% Lifetime residents
Men
- 25% Age 50-64
- 24% Michigan, wrong track
County finances, Negative
H.S. or less
\$25K-\$50K hh income

Subgroups “voting” No” in opposition to the Parks renewal proposal in proportions greater than the norm of 22% included: **NOTE: N=87**

- 47% DCMH millage, No
- 43% Taxes, top prompted concern
- 42% Taxes, “Too high”
Road millage, No
- 37% Ottawa Co., wrong track
Local govt., wrong track
Keep taxes low
- 36% County rating, Negative
No college men
- 35% County finances, Negative
- 33% Men age 18-49
- 29% Vote in All local elections
Men
- 28% \$25K-\$50K hh income
- 27% Lifetime residents
- 26% Region 2
Michigan, wrong track

-- Where to Cut if Needed? - (Q 48.)

Following the ballot issue series of questions, respondents are given the opportunity to name up to three areas or programs to cut if the Commission were faced with such a decision in order to balance the budget. In keeping with the results of the prior four surveys, “Parks and Recreation” topped the list but it was cited at only eight percent of all responses offered. This

eight percent level is a large proportional reduction citing this county program since prior surveys saw “Parks and Recreation” named by high as 49 percent (2006) and the lowest rate was in 2012 at twelve percent. As noted, this eight percent level is the highest of the 20 specific program/service areas respondents reported they would cut, if necessary, so obviously, no area received a consensus of opinion in double digits. Indeed, the highest percent – 63 percent – is found among “Undecided” respondents; also a historically high figure.

It is noteworthy that a couple of other areas traditionally cited by fairly proportions of respondents (e.g. “Administration”, “Salaries”) did not become the focus of attention either. That the usual targets do not emerge as places to cut and instead are replaced by “Undecided” lends further credence to the overall observation that personal economic security is no longer on the front burner for a majority of Ottawa County voters.

-- Awareness of County Activities in general - (Q 49.)

In a question asked first in 2008 and repeated in 2010 and 2012, respondents were asked to assess how aware they felt they were about county activities. The historic levels of “Aware”/ “Unaware” are more-or-less maintained in the latest survey results. The following chart illustrates the trends:

2008	2010	2012	2014	
6%	9%	9%	8%	Very aware
48%	57%	54%	53%	Somewhat aware
54%	66%	63%	61%	TOTAL AWARE
42%	34%	36%	38%	TOTAL UNAWARE
24%	25%	24%	24%	Somewhat unaware
18%	9%	12%	14%	Very unaware
6%	---	1%	1%	Undecided/Refused

Subgroups reporting “Unaware” in proportions greater than the norm of 38% included:

67% Undecided about Ottawa Co. rating

-- Information Sources - (Q 50.)

In all five surveys since 2006, a question has been posed to respondents asking them where they got most of their information about county government. The 2014 results do not vary significantly from the prior tests in that print media, by far, is the most relied upon source of information for county residents. Electronic media in the form of television and radio received the next highest proportion of responses, with various other means making up the balance. The following chart illustrates the distribution of responses for 2014:

47%	Print Media Total	
	12%	<i>Grand Rapids Press</i>
	12%	<i>The Holland Sentinel</i>
	11%	<i>The Advance</i>
	8%	<i>Grand Haven Tribune</i>
	2%	<i>MLive</i>
	2%	<i>Muskegon Chronicle</i>
18%	Electronic Media Total	
	16%	<i>Television coverage of the county</i>
	2%	<i>Radio coverage of the county</i>
15%	Government Sources	
	9%	<i>Newsletters from the county</i>
	5%	<i>The County Website – www.miOttawa.org</i>
	1%	<i>City of Holland.org</i>
19%	Misc. Sources	
	14%	<i>Comments from friends/word of mouth</i>
	5%	<i>Social media, Internet, Library, Email</i>
1%	Other/Undecided/Refused	

-- Preferences for receiving information - (Q 51.)

Having just been asked the means by which they receive information concerning county government, the respondents are asked to name up to three sources through which they would prefer to receive such information. This question was first posed in 2010 and, almost without exception, the relative rank order of preferred sources has not changed. However, the increase in, “Social network sites such as Facebook” and concomitant decrease in a preference for “Radio news and programs” is noted, as well as the steep decline in “Newspapers”.

The responses for three survey years are illustrated in the following chart, which closely parallel the order and frequency of responses in the prior question which asked, “Where do you (actually) receive most of your information about county government?”

2010	2012	2014	
35%	30%	25%	Newspapers
14%	14%	19%	Direct mail
14%	14%	16%	The Internet
13%	15%	13%	Television news reports
2%	3%	7%	Social Network sites such as Facebook
6%	7%	6%	Friends, family or relatives (word of mouth)
10%	11%	5%	Radio news and programs
3%	3%	4%	Cable TV
2%	2%	2%	Billboards
---	1%	1%	Magazines
---	---	1%	Email
1%	---	1%	Other/Undecided/Refused

(note: totals may not equal 100% due to rounding)

-- Use of social media sites – Facebook continues to dominate - (Q’s 52, 53.)

Another first in 2010 was a question asking respondents how often they visit social media websites, “. . . such as Twitter, Facebook or MySpace”. It is instructive for appreciating the pace at which social media changes that 2010’s “MySpace” was dropped as an example and/or response category in 2014 as being obsolete. In any event, it is clear that whatever other trade names come and go, Facebook remains the overwhelmingly dominant brand and that use of social media sites is clearly on the rise.

Four years ago a strong 69 percent majority said they either “seldom” or “never” use social media sites, while 24 percent reported using them at least “Most days”. The 2014 results show a marked increase in the quite frequent (especially daily) use of social media sites, and a concomitant drop in the percentage of respondents reporting that they “Never” use the communication mode.

Among those who use social media websites, the 2014 data reveals that Facebook remains – by far – the most dominant brand for the medium, with 95 percent of social network users identifying the brand as the site they most use.

FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE			
2010	2012	2014	
18%	29%	35%	Every day
6%	6%	5%	Most days
6%	11%	7%	A few times a week
1%	4%	3%	Several times a month
8%	4%	7%	Seldom
61%	46%	43%	Or Never -----GO TO Q.54
---	---	---	Undecided/Refused-- GO TO Q.54

-- Interest in attending a citizens academy – (Q 54.)

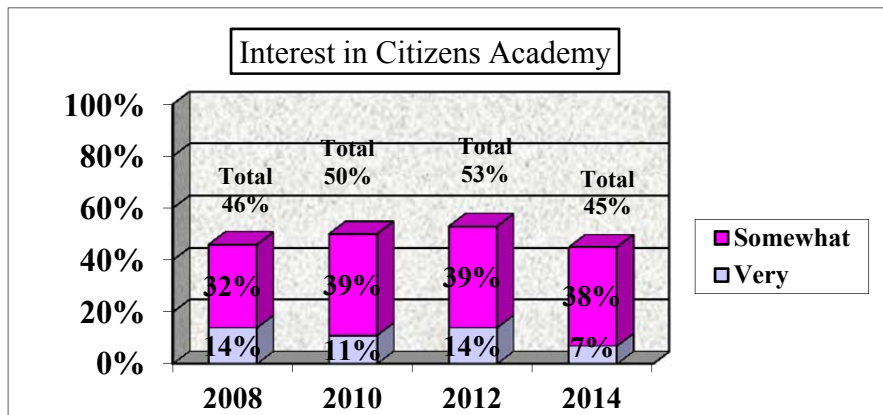
Beginning with the 2008 study, respondents were told that:

“Ottawa County is considering different ways to help inform citizens about its operations and activities. One way would be to hold a citizens academy, offering sessions that provide information about a specific area of county government, like property taxes and budgeting, the Sheriff’s Department, and the court system.”

They were then asked:

“How interested would you be in learning about Ottawa County’s government by attending these types of sessions?”

From 2008 through 2012, interest had steadily from a bare plurality of 46 percent to 45 percent “Interested” vs. “Uninterested”, to the 2012 results showing a stronger 53 percent level of interest. The 2014 results show an eight point decrease in overall interest overall, with the “Very Interested” portion of the total dropping by half. The graph below illustrates the movement in overall interest in the academy over time, as well as in the intensity of such interest.



Subgroups Reporting interest in the Citizens Academy in proportions greater than the norm of 45% included:

- 62% Ottawa, wrong track
Local govt., wrong track
- 61% Visit Co. website "A lot"
Would pay a web fee
- 55% Vote in All local elections
- 52% Michigan, wrong track
1-10 yr. residents
- 51% Contacted Co.
Men 18-49

-- Frequency of Internet connection - (Q 55.)

As with the results concerning social media use, the 2014 data reflect an increase in the incidence of Internet use over the data found in 2012. Indeed, since 2006, the frequency with which respondents report "logging on" has steady increased. The latest results show a combined "Every day", "A few times a week" proportion of 88 percent, which is over ten points higher than that recorded eight years ago. The chart below illustrates the trend of increase in occasional as well as daily use since the data was first collected in the 2006 study.

FREQUENCY OF INTERNET ACCESS					
<u>2006</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2014</u>	
67%	70%	75%	81%	84%	Every day
9%	9%	5%	5%	4%	A few times a week
4%	3%	2%	3%	1%	Once or twice a week
1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	A few times a month
---	---	---	---	---	A few times a year
1%	1%	---	1%	1%	Seldom
14%	11%	14%	5%	7%	Never
4%	2%	2%	3%	2%	Doesn't have a computer (<i>volunteered</i>)
---	3%	1%	---	---	Undecided/Refused

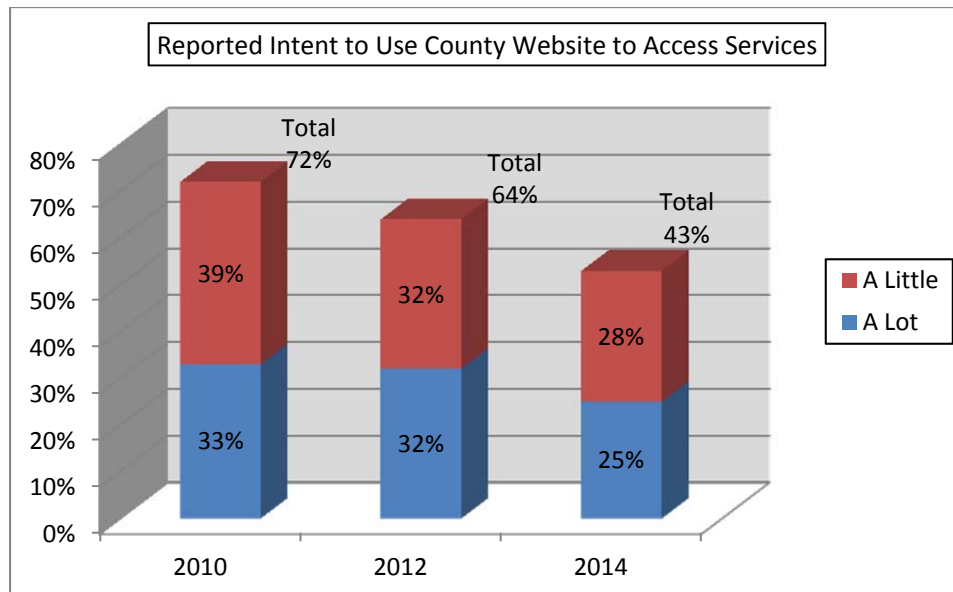
-- Ottawa County website visitors and assessment of site quality - (Q's 56, 57.)

Respondents who reported they connect to the Internet at all (N=363) were asked how often they visit the Ottawa County website. The percentage of those responding "Not at all" has remained relatively steady from 2008 through the current test, with between 57 percent and 59 percent offering this answer. Among the usage options of, "A lot", "Some" and "Only a little", there is exhibited a slight increase in the "Some" category (from 2012's 10 percent to 2014's 14 percent) with concomitant reductions in percentages for the remaining use categories.

For those who reported having visited the county website (N=165), their assessment of its quality dropped from its 2012 record high of 83 percent to 75 percent – a level more consistent with pre-2012 surveys.

-- Interest in accessing county services via the web - (Q 58)

Respondents were asked if they would use the Ottawa County website more often if they could access county services by way of the Internet instead of making a trip to the county office complex. This question was first asked in 2010 and in that test only 18 percent of respondents offered an outright rejection of the notion. The 2012 survey saw a significant increase in the number rejecting the option of accessing county services via the county website – up to 31 percent, but the percentage reporting they would use the web site “a lot more often” if they could access county service remained virtually even with the 2010 figure, coming in at thirty-two percent. Perhaps reflective of increased media attention concerning identity theft through major retail outlets and the resulting caution instilled in people about on-line transactions, the 2014 results show a precipitous decline in the number of respondents indicating any willingness to conduct county business via the Internet of over 20 points.



-- Willingness to pay a fee for Internet access to county services – (Q 60.)

Well more than half of the 2014 respondents who reported they might be willing to transact county business via the Internet (N=213) would be unwilling to pay a fee for such a service. At 57 percent in 2014, this majority is similar to that reported in 2012 who would be unwilling to pay a fee (55 percent), but still well below the 65 percent of 2008 respondents who expressed disinterest in such a fee.

SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS

An 80 percent majority of survey respondents said they have called Ottawa County their home for more than 15 years – or “All my life” (up from 75 percent in 2012 and 66 percent in 2008), with 20 percent reporting a residency tenure of 15 years or fewer. As is typical of most areas in the state, nearly two-thirds of respondents (62 percent) report having no school age children in their home.

The predominantly white cohort of respondents (94 percent), exhibit a fairly high level of formal education, with 34 percent attaining a bachelor’s degree, and 70 percent reporting some form of post-secondary education. The proportions are somewhat lower than reported in 2012, but well within the margin of error and in keeping with the same proportions reported in pre-2012 studies.

More than nine-in-ten respondents (92 percent) report being homeowners, with the balance reporting either leasing, renting or refusing to offer a response. Nearly half of all respondents (48 percent) report a household income of less than \$75,000 with 28 percent reporting a household income in the \$75,000 to \$150,000 range, and six percent reporting a household income in excess of \$150,000. While still within the margin of error for a survey of this sample size, the 2014 household income results continue the observed trend since 2006 of a widening income disparity gap among resident.

As in all of its surveys of this nature, EPIC ▪ MRA attempts to stratify the male/female ratio in a manner that reflects conventional voter turnout based on gender. This produced a female/male ratio of 54-to-46 percent.

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APPENDIX

REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	REGION 5
Holland City	Georgetown Twp.	Ferrysburg City	Allendale Twp.	Chester Twp.
Holland Twp.	Hudsonville City	Grand Haven City	Blendon Twp.	Coopersville City
Park Twp.	Jamestown Twp.	Grand Haven Twp.	Olive Twp.	Crockery Twp.
Zeeland City		Spring Lake Twp.		Polkton Twp.
Zeeland Twp.				Tallmadge Twp.
				Wright Twp.