

**Ottawa County Citizen Survey
October 2008**

Presented by:
EPIC MRA

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS**

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METHODOLOGY

EPIC MRA administered interviews with 400 registered voters residing in the Ottawa County, Michigan, August 18 - 22, 2008. Respondents for the interviews were selected utilizing an interval method of randomly selecting records of published residential telephone numbers. The sample was stratified so that every area of the county is represented in the sample according to its contribution to 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, and takes 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 affirmatively 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 the sampling error depends on the total number of respondents in the particular question.

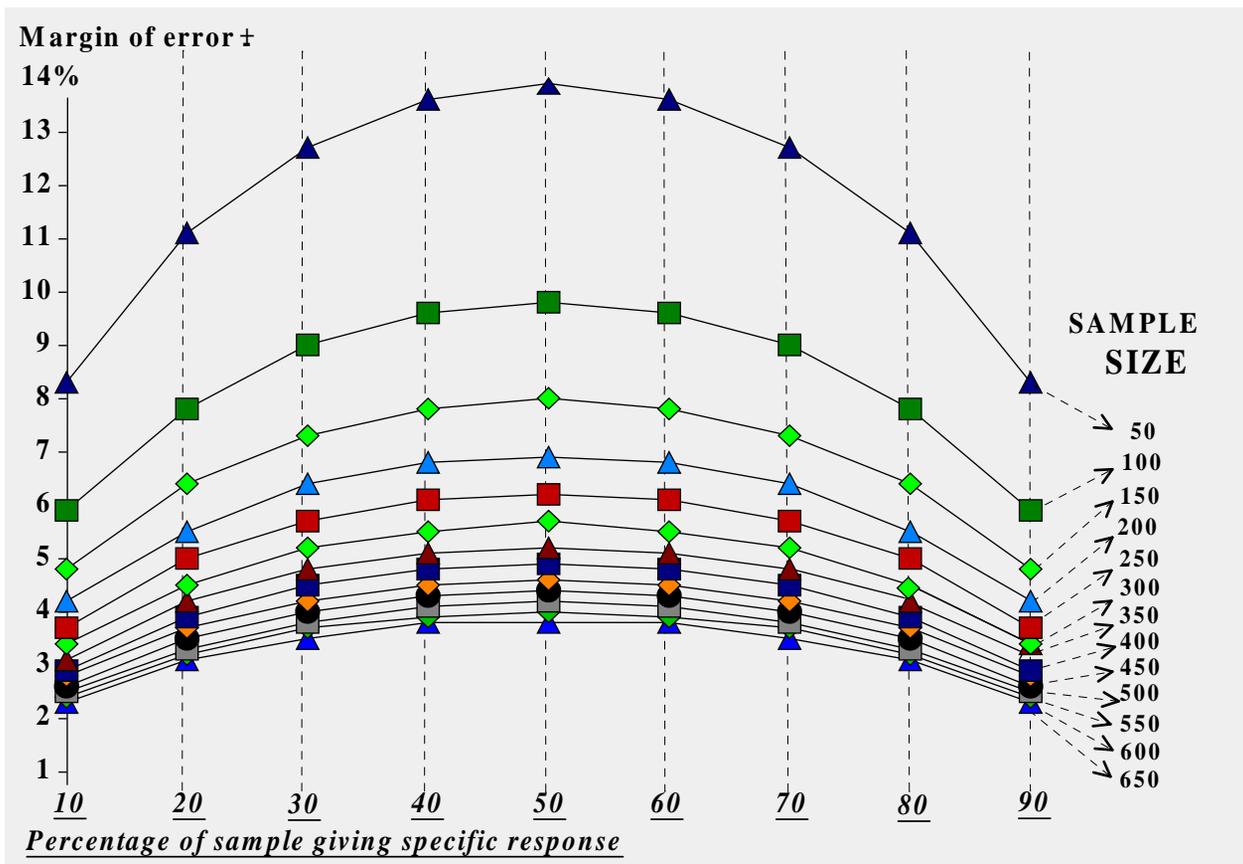
For example, 53 percent of all 400 respondents indicated that they were “Not very knowledgeable at all” about state revenue sharing and its impact on Ottawa County, (Question # 29). As indicated in the chart below, this percentage would have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9 percent. This means that 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 53 percent ± 4.9 percent.

The table below represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses based on sample size.

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

Percentage of sample giving specific response

SAMPLE SIZE	<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>
	% margin of error ±								
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 by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners to measure public opinion about county government operations in a style akin to a “customer satisfaction” survey. In addition, there was interest in measuring residents’ sentiment toward a possible ballot proposal to approve an increase in assessment against property for the purpose of maintenance and improvement on county secondary roads. There was also a desire to obtain guidance from the citizens on spending priorities for the Parks and Recreation Department.

A very similar study was conducted on behalf of the county in 2006 with most of the questions replicated in 2008. Throughout the following analysis, differences in outcomes between the two surveys 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 they 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 their county government and questions going to perceptions about 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

Given recent events, it is perhaps not surprising that uncertainty over the economy colors the responses to a much greater extent in the current survey than was discovered in the 2006 test. This angst is manifest in several areas of the survey, beginning with the responses to an open-ended question about “*Biggest Problem*” and the responses in a question with prompted response options for biggest “*Issue concern*”.

In the survey of two years ago, “Jobs” shared the largest portion of open-ended responses together with “Schools” – both at thirteen percent. This was followed closely by “Sprawl”, at 12 percent, rounding out the top three – very diverse – response categories for a combined 38 percent of responses. At 27 percent, over twice as many 2008 respondents named the top problem as “*Unemployment*”, as named the top problem of “Jobs” in 2006. When combined

with the kindred concerns of “*Economy*” (9%) and “*Taxes*” (8%), close to half of all 2008 respondents (46%) cited something connected with personal financial health.

Similarly, the 2008 results show a large twelve-point increase – a jump of over 30 percent – in the number of respondents who believe their “*Taxes [are] too high*” in return for what is received in county services. Not only is the overall figure significantly higher than in 2006, but that portion expressing intensity of that belief (i.e. “Much too high”) spikes from under a third of the total in 2006 to just under half (i.e. 19 of 39 percent) in 2008.

This overarching concern also manifests itself in the level by which respondents selected one of two options the county could take in the face of a revenue shortfall. Respondents are presented with two statements – “*keeping taxes low even if it means a cut in services*”, or “*maintaining services even if it means a tax increase*”, and asked to select which of two more closely reflects the way they feel. The 2006 survey saw bare plurality of respondents (49% to 44%) opting for the “*cut services*” statement but for 2008, a solid 53 percent majority selected this option.

There is also a marked reversal of fortunes for a hypothetical ballot question involving a ½ mill increase to replace lost revenue sharing disbursements from the state. In 2006 there was a slight majority (in hypothetical ballot question terms) of 55 percent Yes, to 39 percent No. In 2008, a 42 percent plurality of respondents issue a “No” response to this hypothetical revenue replacement measure, compared to 38 percent expressing a sentiment to say “Yes”; a decline in support of seventeen points. In one similarity between the two surveys, however, is the continued adamant opposition to the county board acting unilaterally to increase the millage rate.

As might be expected, the fate of a proposal to increase assessments for the purpose of improving non-primary roads is bleak. When asked if they would approve such a measure, only a third of respondents indicated that they would vote Yes.

On the whole, Ottawa County residents are content with the level of service they receive from their county government, although the expression of this sentiment has become a little more

tepid. For instance, the numbers from 2006 to 2008 are down for questions such as whether or not Ottawa County is headed in the “*Right direction*”, as opposed to being on the “*Wrong track*”; and to a lesser extent, when this question is posed in the context of the respondents’ city or township. The same trend holds true in the case of respondents issuing a “*Positive*” or “*Negative*” rating for the job being done in the delivery of basic services, whether in the context of the county or the city or township, as well as issuing a rating for how well the county handles its finances. Nevertheless, the 2006 “*Positive*” numbers were quite high and the decline witnessed in the 2008 survey is not so extreme as to raise alarm. It should also be noted that among those issuing a negative rating for the county, “*Unemployment*” topped the list of reasons given for issuing the rating, giving further credence to the notion that lackluster economic conditions are coloring all perceptions.

In 2006, when respondents were read a list of fifteen different activities and services in which county government involves itself, two categories – providing economic development and checking the pace of land development – recorded majorities calling for “*More*” to be done. In 2008, no single category had a majority calling for “*More*” to be done and, “*Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services*” replaced checking land development in the category selected by the highest number of respondents, at forty-two percent, along with the county’s economic development efforts.

In 2006, an open-ended question asked what respondents “*Like*” the most about living in Ottawa County and better than half offered one of four distinct responses going to the amount of “*Green space*”, “*Quality of life*” and “*Proximity to Lake Michigan*”. The majority of the remaining categories in this response set could arguably be placed in one of the three named responses, or one very close to it in meaning. The appreciation for the rural quality, peaceful setting and general physical location are again top reasons cited in 2008, but as with the Positive and Negative ratings, the enthusiasm for these qualities is more muted.

2008 saw a new question going to personal safety. Respondents were asked whether or not they felt safe in their neighborhood. Virtually everyone reported feeling at least “*Somewhat safe*”, with 71 percent reporting feeling “*Very safe*”. This expressed sentiment is consistent

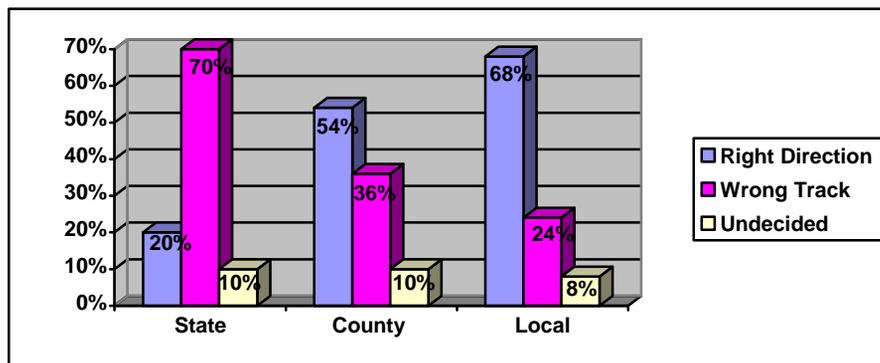
with “*Police*” being the top response to an open-ended question asking what Ottawa County does the best job doing. Nevertheless, “*Providing effective county road patrol service . . .*” ranked sixth out of fifteen in things the county needs to do “*More*” of, being cited by a quarter of respondents.

Over a third of respondents or a member of their household has contacted a county office in the past year; nearly identical with the number reported in 2006. As in the past, most make a call and nearly eight-in-ten report being either “*Very*” or at least “*Somewhat*” satisfied. Top information sources remain predominantly newspaper-based, with “*Local newspaper*”, “*Grand Rapids Press*” or, “*The Holland Sentinel*”, being named most often. While over 80 percent report logging onto the Internet at least “*Once or twice*” a week, well over half of these have never visited the Ottawa County site. Among those who have, the site receives high “*Positive*” ratings.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RESULTS

-- Right Direction or Wrong Track?

In a question that is commonly used in national and statewide polls, this survey measured county residents' sentiment regarding their state, their county, and their local jurisdiction 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?" As for the state, Ottawa County residents' attitudes on this question replicate the statewide survey numbers in that an overwhelming majority (70%) believes things are on the wrong track. In keeping with similar surveys elsewhere in Michigan, this dismal attitude brightens considerably when respondents report about "Ottawa County" and moves even further into positive territory when asked about their local city or township. The chart below illustrates the results:



As can be seen, there is little indecision on the question and as the respondents are asked to consider things closer to home, there is a marked increase in positive attitude. Reflective of the general degeneration of the economic condition in the country and especially the state, it is noted that when this same question was posed in the 2006 survey, the Ottawa County "Right direction" numbers were considerably higher at 71 percent, and the "Wrong track" figure stood at sixteen percent. This degeneration in optimism is not contained at the county level, however. The local government figures showed a similar decline from the 2006 figures, which showed the percentage of "Right direction" at 76 percent, and the "Wrong track" at eighteen percent.

-- County's Strategic Goals

In a new question for 2008, respondents were informed that Board of Commissioners had a strategic plan that included four major goals. These goals were recited to the respondents who were then asked to indicate if they believed the individual goal was a "Top priority", "Important but not a top priority", "Slightly important" or, "Not important at all". As is evidenced by the relative positioning of the several goals in the table below, each of the goals are viewed by county residents as being at least, "Important". Clearly, however, maintenance of the county's strong financial position is of paramount importance.

	Top Priority	Important	TOTAL "Top/Impt"
Maintain and improve the strong financial position of the county.	60%	34%	94%
Contribute to a healthy physical, economic and community environment	54%	33%	87%
Maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees and other stakeholders.	45%	42%	87%
Continually improve the county's organization and services.	48%	37%	85%

Obviously, the main goals set out by the Board for the county's strategic plan meet with concurrence of the residents, especially as those goals relate to fiscal responsibility.

-- Biggest "Top of Mind" Problem

Respondents were next asked to identify the single biggest problem facing the residents of their community that their local or county government must address. Unlike "Undecided", which at 20 percent topped the list of identified problems in 2006, "Unemployment", at 27 percent, was the single most identified concern among residents in this open-ended question. A related concern, "Economy" was cited by nine percent and in keeping with the perceived anxiety over the economy, "Taxes", was mentioned by eight percent.

-- Biggest “Prompted” Problem

In a test similar to the top-of-mind “biggest problem” question, respondents were read a list of ten “. . . *problems and issues residents of Ottawa County say they are concerned about.*” They were then asked to identify the single issue that personally concerned them the most. In results consistent with the “top-of-mind” responses and reflective of the top concern cited in 2006 “*Providing economic development and jobs*” was by far the single most identified issue of concern, with 37 percent of respondents selecting this issue.

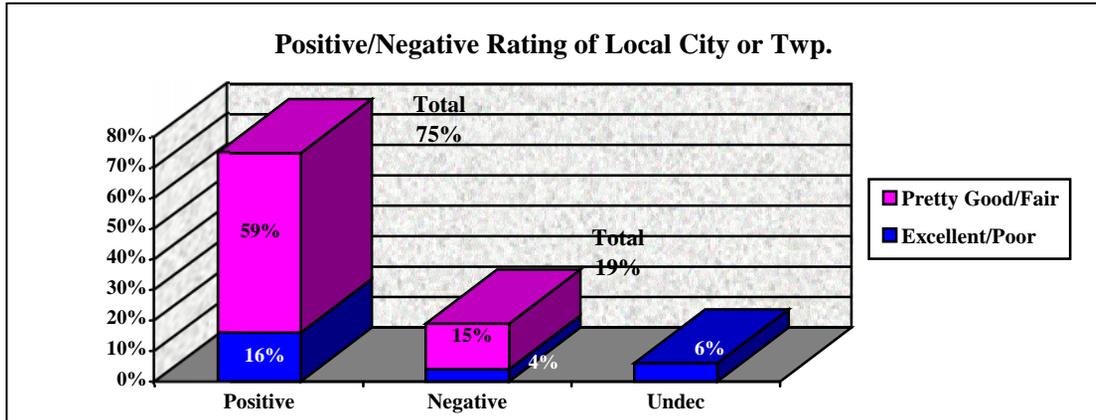
Trailing in the remaining spots by at least twenty-three points were, “*Protecting the public from crime and drugs*” at 14 percent and “*Keeping local taxes and fees low*”, at nine percent. The latter two replaced the 2006 second and third spot holders, “*Controlling traffic congestion*” (12%), and “*Controlling unplanned development and sprawl*” (11%). The table below illustrates the distribution:

2008 Ranking		2006 Ranking
37%	Providing economic development and jobs	32% (1)
14%	Protecting the public from crime and drugs	5% (7)
9%	Keeping local taxes and fees low	10% (4)
7%	Maintaining and improving area roads	5% (7)
6%	Improving the quality of area schools	10% (4)
6%	Protecting the environment in the area	3% (9)
5%	Controlling unplanned development and sprawl	11% (3)
4%	Preserving prime farmland and open space	8% (6)
3%	Providing quality basic city, township or county services	1% (10)
3%	Controlling traffic congestion	12% (2)
3%	More than one [ASK] "But which problem concerns you most?"	--
3%	Undecided	3%

-- Rate your Local (City/Township/Village) Government

As in 2006, and in keeping with the “Right direction” and “Wrong track” results, respondents gave an overall “Positive” rating to the job being done by their local government by an overwhelming 75 percent rate, although this ten points lower than when tested two years ago. This “lost” ten percent were evenly divided between a Negative rating and Undecided, with each

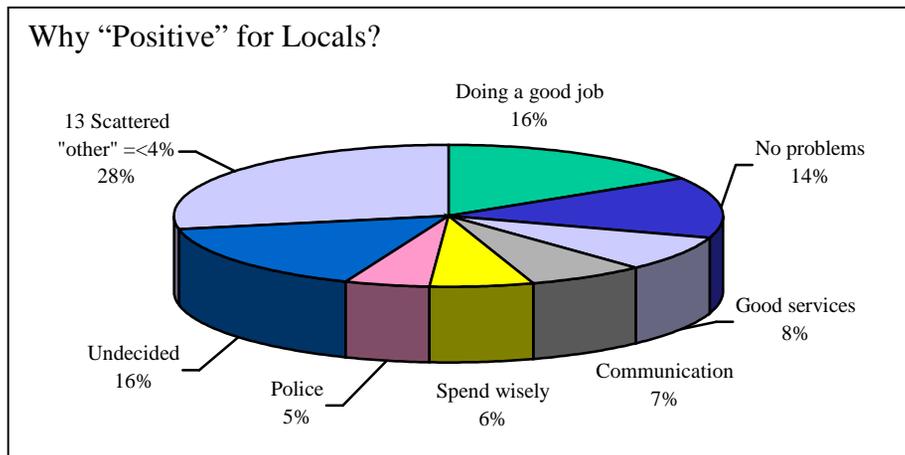
of these categories rising by five percentage points from the prior test. It is worth noting, however, that the intensity of belief – either Positive or Negative – as reflected in the “excellent” and “poor” portions of the respective ratings remained relatively unchanged from 2006; which is to say that these sentiments are not held with particular strength.



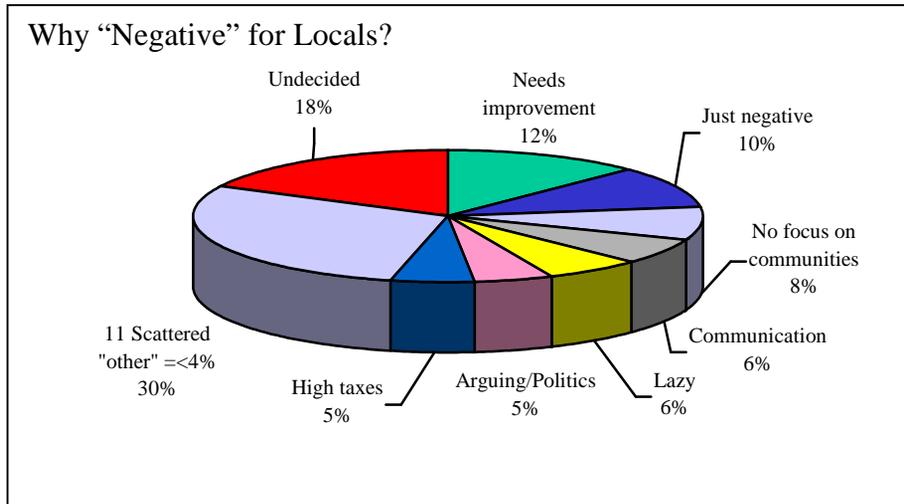
Subgroups issuing a “Negative” rating in proportions higher than the norm included:

-- Reasons for the rating

As a follow up to the Positive/Negative rating question, respondents were asked to give their reason for issuing the rating that they did. The following pie chart illustrates the portion of the positive rating responses attributable to specific reasons:

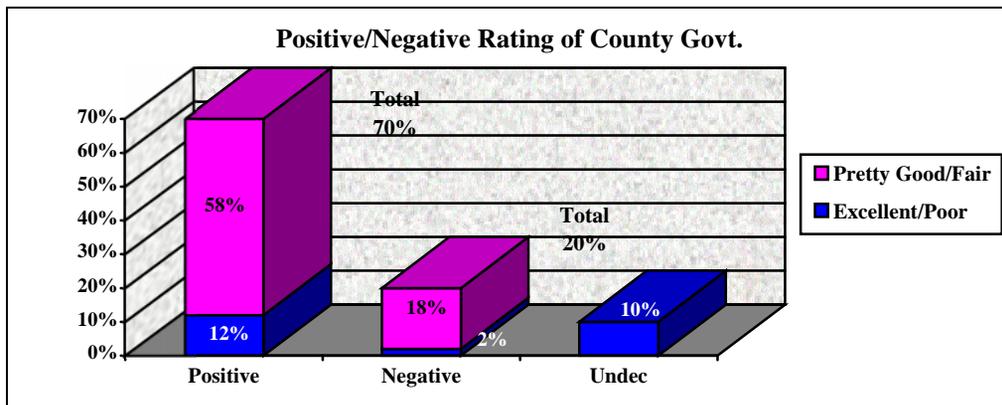


As for the 19 percent issuing a negative rating, a breakout of the seventy-seven responses are not particularly long on specificity for the bulk of the comments, and are distributed as follows:



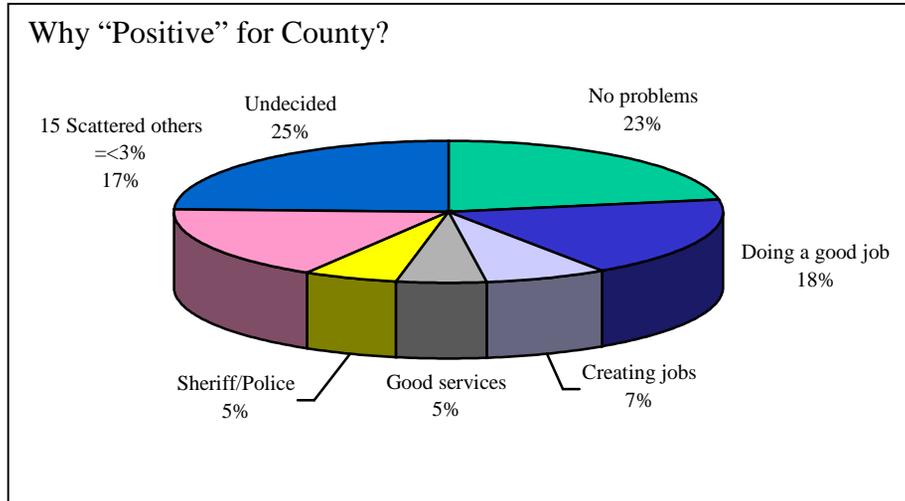
-- Rate your County Government

Just as the ratings declined slightly from the 2006 data for the local government job rating, so too, did the job rating for county government. The 2008 survey saw a slight nine point decline in the "Positive" rating, with the "Negative" rating picking up six of these "lost" points and the balance going to the "Undecided" category. Significantly, however, and in another similarity with the rating of the local government, the intensity of feeling as represented by the "excellent" and "poor" portions of the respective totals remained virtually unchanged. Indeed, the excellent portion of the positive rating moved up a point from 2006, although well within the margin of error. The graph below illustrates the results:

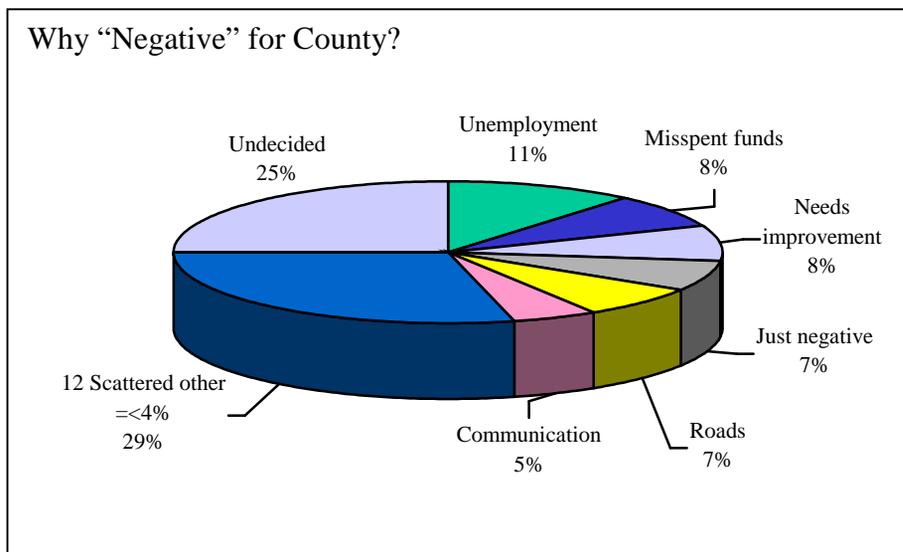


-- Reasons for the County Rating

The following pie chart illustrates the portion of the positive rating responses attributable to the specific reasons asked for in the follow-up question:



Among the 20 percent of respondents who issued a "Negative" job rating for the county, the reasons are as relatively undefined and/or outside the purview of government action, as those offered for a negative rating for local government. Arguably, the top five reasons cited are problems that either outside of the Board's ability to act, or are so vague as to not give any direction for improvement. The following graph illustrates the distribution of responses:



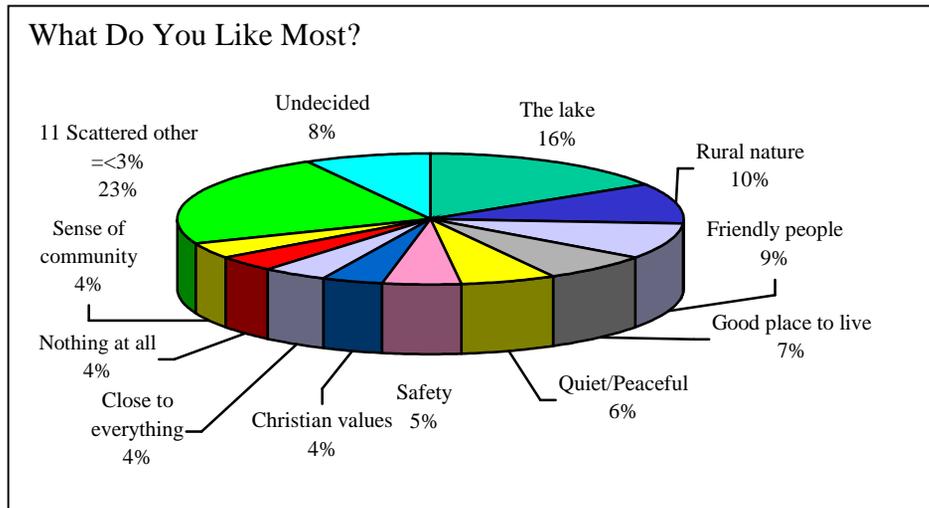
-- Rate the County's Handling of Finances

Respondents were asked to issue a "Positive" or "Negative" rating for the job Ottawa County does in managing county finances. This type of question is often asked in surveys commissioned by governmental entities and the responses lend insight into constituents' broader perceptions of the regard in which they hold their public officials. The question has particular significance in 2008, given the other indicators throughout the survey of an increased anxiety about economic conditions generally.

Consistent with the trend seen between the 2006 ratings for local and county government, and those for 2008, the "Positive" ratings for this question declined from their former levels by seven percentage points. Where the 2006 survey saw 60 percent issue a "positive" rating on the handling of finances, 53 percent reported this rating for 2008. Also, consistent with the comparisons among and between the various ratings requested of respondents in the 2006 survey, the "Positive" rating in 2008 is roughly 20 points lower than the highest of the others tested. As in the past, it is important to note that the lower "Positive" rating does not translate into a concomitantly higher "Negative" rating, since in this test, it remains at a very low 16 percent, with the difference being made up in the 31 percent who are "Undecided" on the question.

-- What is liked the most about living in Ottawa County

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked what they liked the most about living in Ottawa County. Unlike most other open-ended questions, “Undecided” did not even make double digits, with only eight percent of respondents not being able to come up with something specific in answer to this question. The pie chart below, illustrates the major categories of responses.

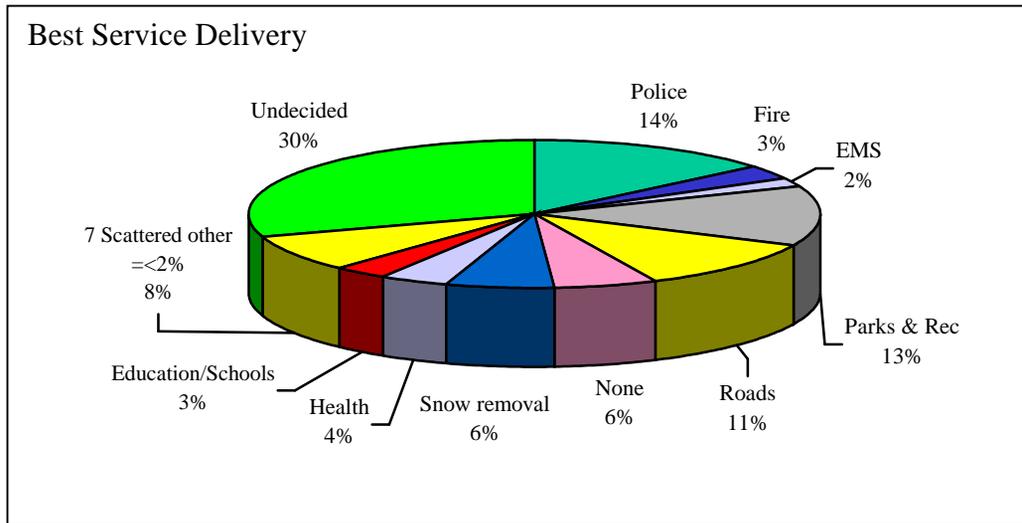


While the 2006 survey saw “The Lake” as one of the top categories cited by respondents as being what they like the most about living in the county, “Green space” (at 17%) led the list at that time. This was consistent with the high percentages citing “Growth/Sprawl” and “Controlling growth” as the top problems in the open and closed ended questions. In 2008, with the economy and jobs being foremost on respondents’ minds, a mention of green space, in the form of “Rural nature” and Quiet/Peaceful”, take a secondary position to “The Lake”.

-- Ottawa County does the best job at providing . . . ?

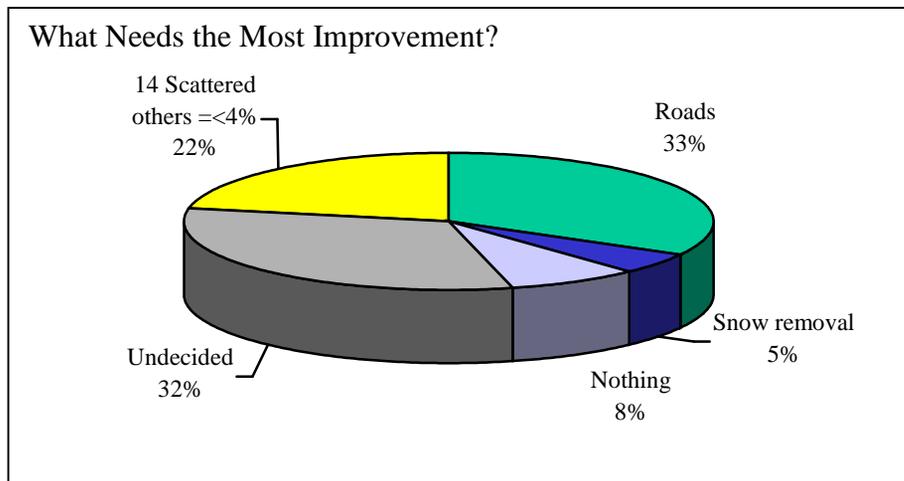
Respondents were next asked to name which specific county service they believed the county does the best job in delivering. Just under one third (30%) were unable to cite a specific service and said they were “undecided”, as compared to the 34 percent who were undecided in 2006. In a result similar to the prior survey, “Police”, “Fire” and “EMS” combined for 19 percent of the responses, with “Roads” and “Snow removal” at 11 percent and six percent respectively. In a switch from 2006, “Parks & recreation” claimed the second spot – moving up

two places – with 13 percent citing this service as being the one Ottawa County is best at delivering. The chart below illustrates the distribution:



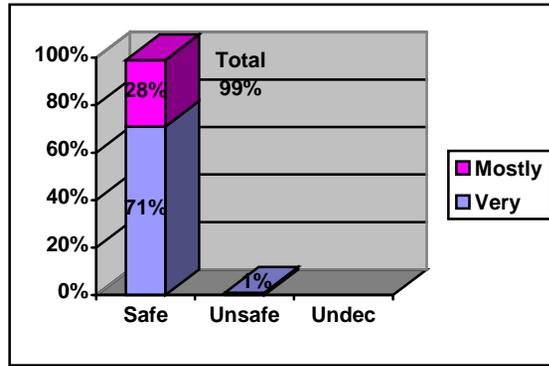
-- What County Service Needs the Most Improvement?

Four-in-ten respondents were either unable to identify a single specific service area in need of improvement and said they were “Undecided” (32%) about what needed the most improvement, or they responded “Nothing” (8%) needed improvement – a result very similar to those in 2006. Less encouraging from the Board of Commissioners’ perspective -- since they have so little direct control over the delivery of the service – is the fact that “Roads” were mentioned by 33 percent of respondents, an increase of seven points over the 2006 numbers, when 26 percent of respondents cited “Roads”. Fourteen other specific services were mentioned, but none reached a level of greater than four percent.



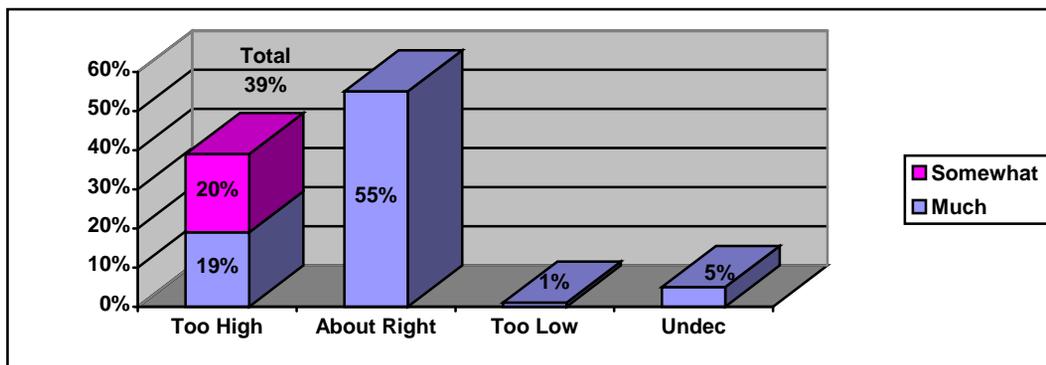
-- Perception of Personal Safety

In a new question for 2008, respondents were asked, “How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?”. It should be heartening for those in law enforcement and for the Board to know that 99 percent of respondents feel either “Very” or “Mostly” safe. The chart below brings the point home:



-- Perception of tax burden

A good harbinger for the chances of passing a ballot proposal to raise property taxes lies in a community’s perception of its current tax burden. Respondents were asked if county property taxes and other fees were, “Too high, Too low, or About right”, given the number 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.



These results are a significant change from the data collected from this question in 2006. Then, 67 percent of respondents reported that they believed their taxes were “About right”, as opposed to the 55 percent who reported the same sentiment in 2008. Not only has the entire 12-

point differential shifted in 2008 to the “Too High” category, but all of it – plus one – has moved into the “Much too high” category. As an overall figure, the total of 39 percent “Too high” would in the past have been a signal of constituent discontent over spending priorities. However, several other tests throughout the survey (e.g. Positive/Negative ratings, Why negative, What needs improving?, etc.) auger against attributing any such attitude here. Rather, in surveys EPIC

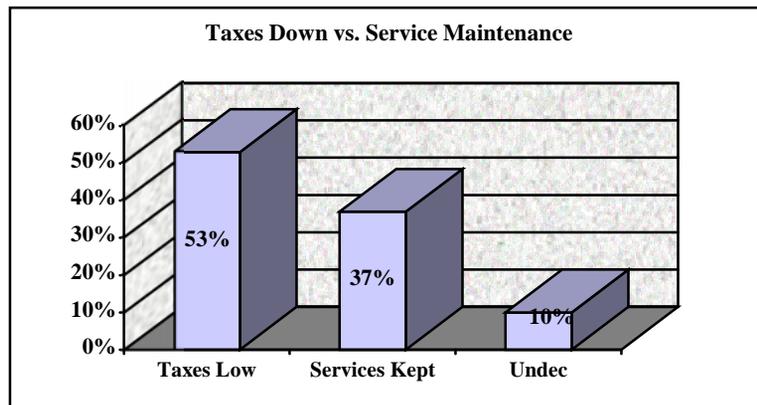
MRA has conducted for governmental entities over the last 18 months, there has been a noticeable increase in the average of taxes, “Too high”, responses, along with the intensity of that sentiment as represented by responses of “Much too high”. This gradual and persistent increase in this indicator correlates strongly with the sentiments expressed about the economy in general and in particular, an increase in the proportion of those citing “economy and jobs” as a top concern both nationally, within Michigan and in the current survey.

-- Taxes vs. Service Levels

Another indicator of the environment in which governments must discharge their obligations is in the answer to a hypothetical question pitting maintenance of current services against an increase in taxes. Respondents were presented with two statements that offered possible reactions of the county government in the face of the current budget situation, and were asked to select which of the two came closest to their view:

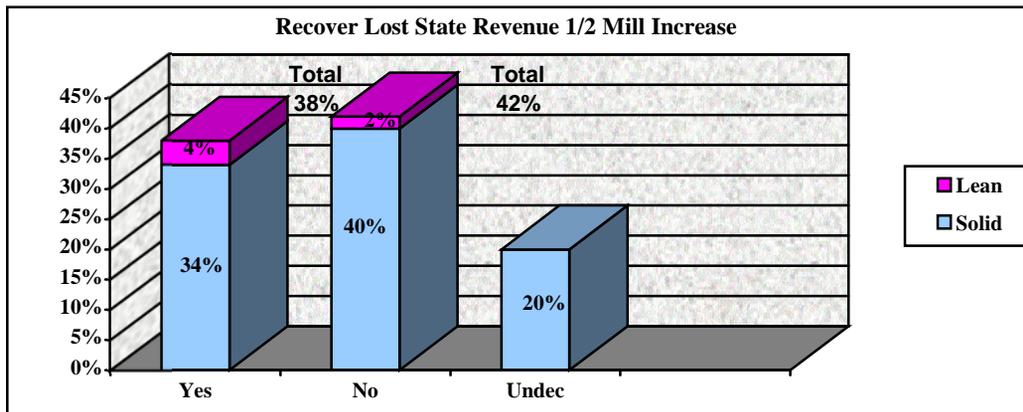
“Keep taxes and fees as low as possible – even if this means a cut in services; or, Maintain existing services – even if this means a tax increase.”

In a shift from 2006, when a bare plurality of 49 percent to 44 percent opted for the statement that would, “Keep taxes and fees low”, a majority of 53 percent to 37 percent chose this statement over the maintenance of services option.



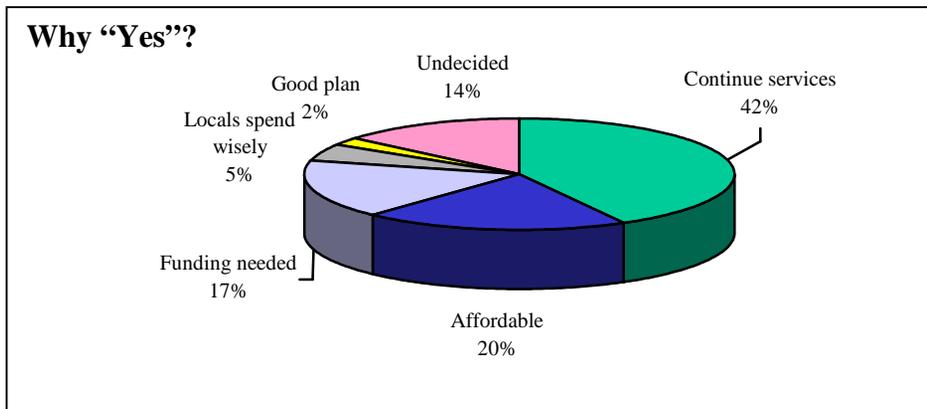
-- “Vote” on Recouping Lost Revenue Sharing

As a follow-up to the previous question about the voters’ preferred reaction to a hypothetical budget shortfall, respondents were informed that if the state does not fully fund revenue sharing, the County would lose \$4.7 million per year. Respondents were told that a ½ mill assessment increase costing the average property owner an additional \$25 per year would be necessary to make up for the loss. This description was followed with a question asking, “. . . if the election were held today . . .” would the respondent vote “Yes”, in favor of a new assessment increase of ½ mill to replace lost state revenue, or “No”, to oppose it. In 2006, a majority of respondents (albeit slight in terms of “solid” yes) reported that they would support such a proposal. However, the 2008 survey shows a complete reversal in sentiment with a plurality of respondents now expressing opposition to the hypothetical ballot proposal to increase assessments by ½ mill. The exact results are illustrated in the chart below:



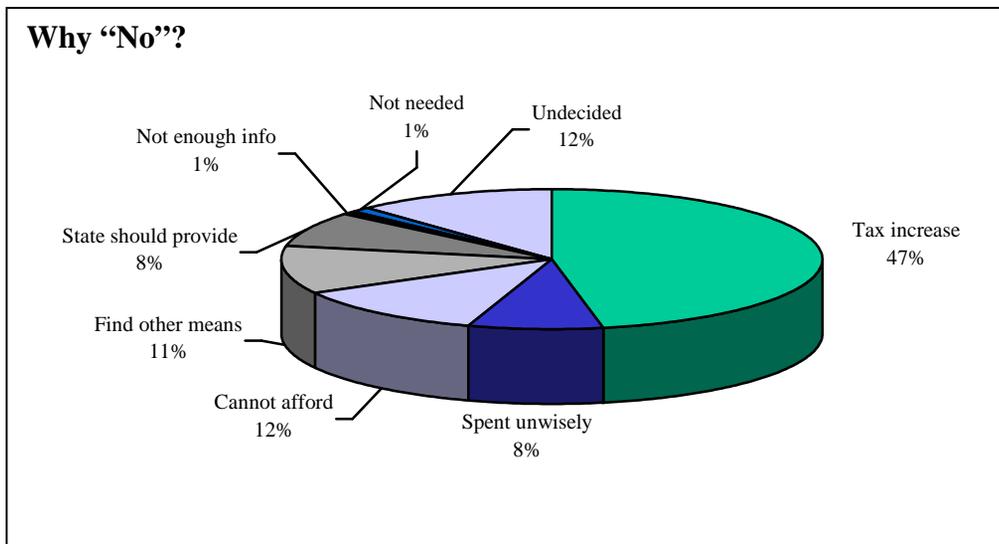
The “Lean” category refers to those respondents who were initially undecided, but were encouraged by the interviewer to try and decide one way or the other.

This “Vote” was followed by a request for the respondents to indicate the reason they “voted” the way they did. The charts below illustrate the major categories for their rationales.



As can be seen, most of the “Yes” voters, as in the 2006 results, report wanting to maintain current levels of service as their reason for supporting the “Proposed” increase in property taxes, with most of the others implicitly wanting their maintenance

As in 2006, opposition to the proposal is clearly rooted in the very fact of an increase in assessments, as evidenced by the combined 55 percent voicing the related responses of “Tax increase,” and “Spent unwisely”.

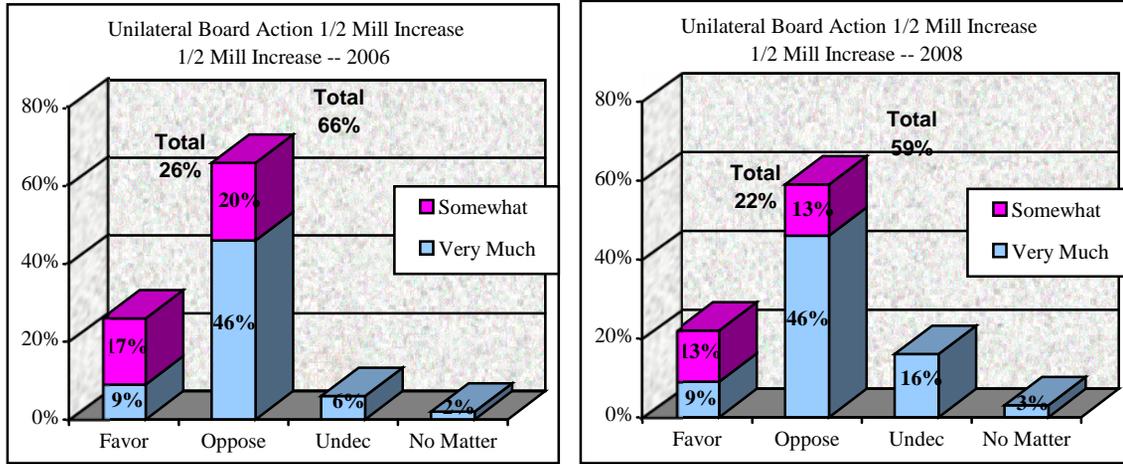


-- Unilateral Board Action

Following the “vote” on the ½ mill to recoup revenue lost from the state, respondents were informed that because the county does not currently levy the maximum amount allowed under the law, the Board could act unilaterally to increase assessments against property in order to make up for any shortfall in state aid. They were then asked if they would favor or oppose such Board action without putting the question to a popular vote. If a respondent indicated favor or opposition, a follow up inquired as to the level of intensity of that sentiment by asking if that would be “*Very much*” or “*Just somewhat*”? In 2006, a strong two-thirds majority voiced their opposition to such a notion with more than two-thirds of that total expressing that they opposed it, “*Very Much*”.

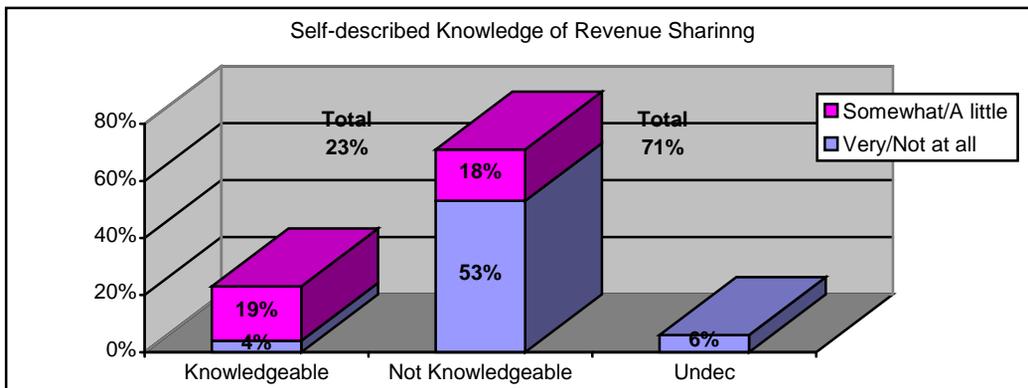
The 2008 shows similar results with a strong 59 percent majority voicing opposition and an even larger portion of this group than in 2006 voicing “*Very much*” opposition. This opposition is slightly lower than in the earlier survey, as is the percentage of those saying they

would “Favor” such action, with the differences being made up in the “Undecided” portion. The charts below, illustrate the comparative voter sentiment on the question between the survey years:



-- Cognizance of Revenue Sharing – Contact with Legislator

In a new question for 2008, respondents were asked how knowledgeable they believed themselves to be about state revenue sharing and its impact on Ottawa County. The respondents were offered options of “Very”, “Somewhat”, “Only a little” or “Not at all” knowledgeable. Even with the information supplied to them in the immediately preceding question, only 23 percent of them considered themselves to be at least somewhat knowledgeable, only four percent of these total saying, “Very”. The chart below clearly demonstrates the lack of knowledge respondents admit to when it comes to the topic of revenue sharing and the impact reductions in this revenue has on Ottawa County’s budget. This finding is a potentially fertile area in which communications from the county can serve to emphasize how cuts in revenue sharing affect the county’s ability to deliver the high level of services its citizens so clearly appreciate.



Consistent with this lack of knowledge about revenue sharing, a follow-up question asking respondents if they had contacted their state legislator about the topic, revealed that nearly nine-out-of-ten (89%), admitted that they had not.

-- Contact With a County Department

Over four-in-ten respondents (42% -- 37% in 2006) indicated that either they or someone else in their household had contacted a department or office in county government in the past year. Nearly two-thirds (63% -- 61% in 2006) responded “No” to the question, and five percent were undecided.

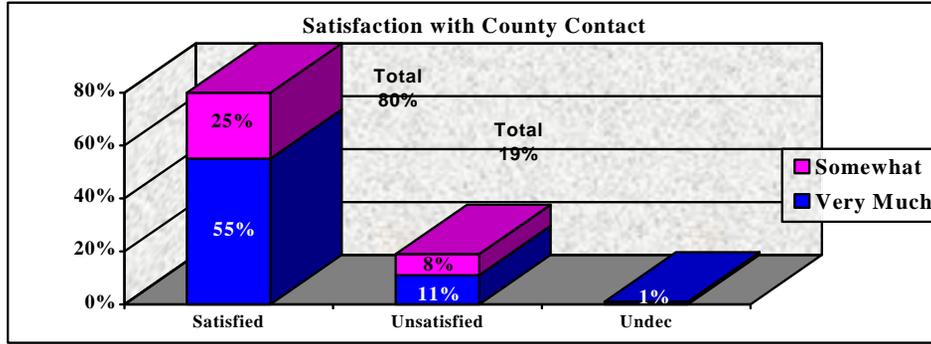
Among those who responded, “Yes”, that they or someone in their household had contacted a county office, the top agencies were:

2008 Ranking		2006 Ranking
15%	Road commission	13% (3)
11%	Health Department	13% (3)
8%	Sheriff/Police	12% (4)
7%	Clerk’s office	17% (1)
6%	City/Twp. Office	----
5%	Treasurer	5% (5)
4%	Parks & Recreation	8% (5)

Almost all of these respondents either called the named department on the phone (57%), or paid a personal visit (27%). The remaining 16 percent either wrote a letter or sent an e-mail.

-- Satisfaction With Performance

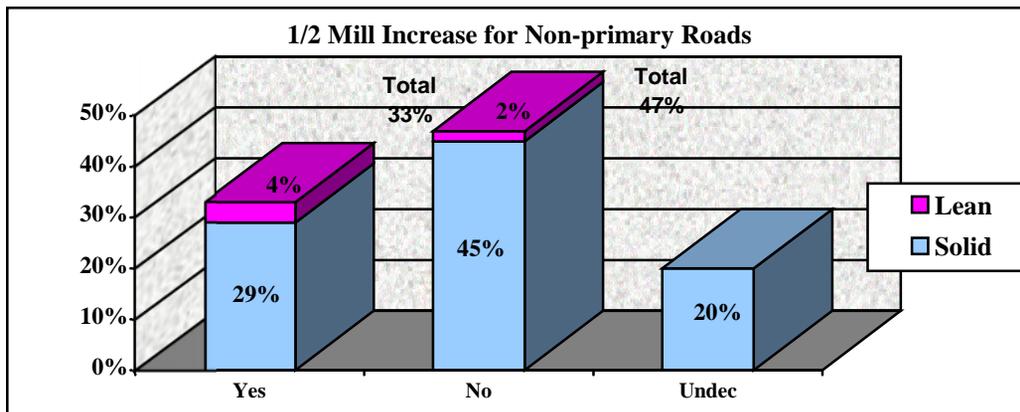
The overwhelming majority of the citizens who said their household contacted a county office indicated that they were satisfied with the response they received. While the total overall satisfaction numbers are just slightly below the 2006 figures (80%), the “Very” satisfied portion is four points high than in the previous test. Overall total dissatisfaction remains unchanged and the “Very” portion of that measurement is down three points. The chart below, illustrates the 2008 feelings on the subject.



-- “Vote” on Road Commission Millage

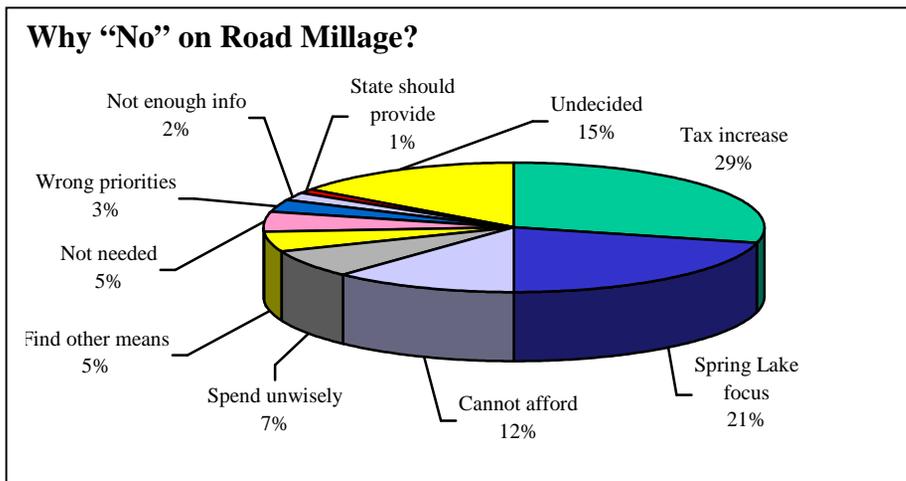
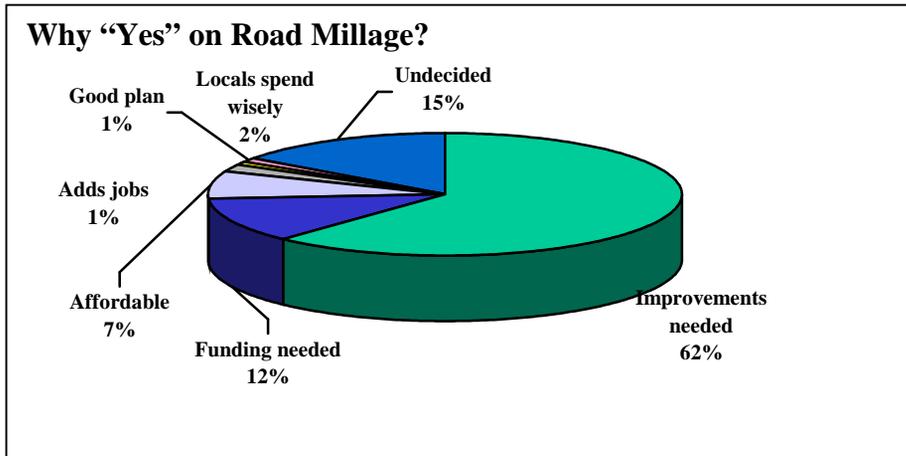
In the 2006 survey, respondents reported overwhelming support (70% “Yes”) for a ten-year renewal of the set-to-expire 1/3 mill dedicated parks millage. Another millage proposal was posed in the 2008 survey, this one calling for a ½ mill increase for the improvement of local roads Ottawa County. They were informed that on a property with a taxable value of \$50,000, the increase would cost a homeowner about \$25 per year in additional tax.

The expressed support of this millage increase is markedly different than was exhibited two years ago for the parks millage renewal, with only 33 percent of respondents indicating that they would “vote” yes on such a proposal. While opposition did not reach a majority, the 47 percent indicating a no vote demonstrates a strong plurality that do not support the idea. The chart below, demonstrates the relative proportions on the question:



The “Lean” category refers to those respondents who were initially undecided, but were encouraged by the interviewer to try and decide one way or the other.

-- Reasons for Your "Vote"



-- More, Enough, or Too Much?

After the “vote” on the millage for roads and the follow-up for the reasons for their “vote”, respondents were asked to give their opinion as to whether or not the county was currently doing – *Enough, Too Much*, or if *More* needed to be done – in fifteen separate service delivery areas. In an effort to measure the level to which there is a belief that more needs to be done, respondents answering “More” were asked if that meant “*Much More*” or “*Somewhat More*” was necessary to address their concern. As a testament to the proficiency of the delivery of services, only two of the fifteen categories tallied a total of Much/Somewhat More identified by the survey’s respondents.

The following shows the rankings of the services based on a descending total of “More”:

In the following areas, is Ottawa County doing Enough, Too Much, or Should More be Done?	More Should be Done			Enough	Too Much	Undec
	<i>Much</i>	<i>Smwht</i>	Total			
Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services	15%	27%	42%	49%	--	9%
Providing effective economic development programs to attract business and industry	14%	28%	42%	32%	6%	36%
Working with local governments to best plan commercial and residential development so excessive growth and sprawl can be avoided	9%	23%	32%	47%	3%	18%
Protecting prime farmland and open space from commercial and residential development	12%	19%	31%	46%	4%	19%
Providing health care for uninsured and underinsured residents of the county	10%	16%	26%	32%	6%	36%
Providing effective county road patrol service by the Sheriff’s Department	8%	17%	25%	66%	2%	7%
Working with local communities to control crime and drugs	8%	16%	24%	60%	2%	14%
Providing an effective communications system for public safety officials so they can best protect the public	7%	16%	23%	56%	2%	19%
Providing a quick emergency response to accidents on county roads	7%	15%	22%	64%	1%	13%
Providing programs for juvenile offenders separate from adult prison programs	6%	16%	22%	45%	2%	31%
Providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services	6%	16%	22%	46%	4%	28%
Providing mental health services	6%	15%	21%	49%	2%	28%
Maintaining <u>County</u> parks and recreational facilities	4%	14%	18%	72%	4%	6%
Providing public health services, such as immunizations and restaurant inspections	6%	10%	16%	65%	2%	17%
Safely operating the county jail, protecting the public, and avoiding prison overcrowding	4%	12%	16%	61%	2%	21%

There are a couple of changes in the rankings between 2006 and 2008, most notably in the intensity of feeling that more ought to be done in an area. In 2006, two of the categories – “*Protecting prime farmland*” and “*Providing economic development programs*” – both had more than 50 percent of respondents indicating that “More” should be done. In addition, the “Much more” percentage for these top two categories had 29 percent and 18 percent of respondents respectively indicating that “Much more” should be done. As is shown in the table above, the highest “More” percentage is 42 percent, and the “Much more” portion of those percentages never get over the 20 percent mark.

In addition, the ordering of categories is significantly different, with “*Keeping county residents informed*” topping the list (formerly in the number four ranking), replacing “*Protecting prime farmland*” in this top spot, which fell to a fourth place slot in 2008. Also moving up in the rankings in 2008 were, “*Providing effective county road patrol*”, “*Providing effective emergency communications*” and “*Providing a quick emergency response*”.

-- Parks & Recreation Spending Priorities

In a new question for 2008, respondents were asked to indicate which of two spending option should take precedence for the Parks & Recreation Department. Unfortunately, the results of this inquiry do not provide a great deal of guidance for policy makers, since just a plurality of respondents opted for one of the alternatives, with a fair number indicating that they are “Undecided” on the question. The alternative statements presented were: “. . .*which of the following two statements best describes what you think should be the top financial priority for [P&R Dept.]?*”

Save as much money as possible to fund the future cost of operations and maintenance for the parks and recreation system;

OR

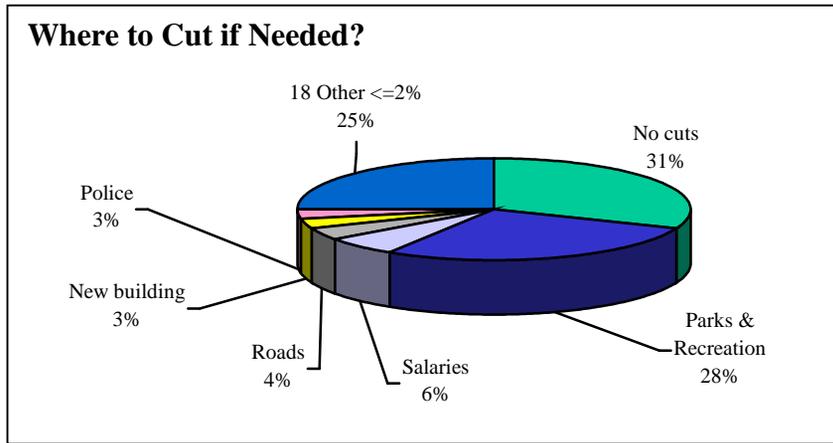
Only buy land for future park development and to improve existing parks and recreational facilities.

46%	Only buy land for future development
39%	Save as much money as possible
15%	Undecided

-- Where to Cut if Needed?

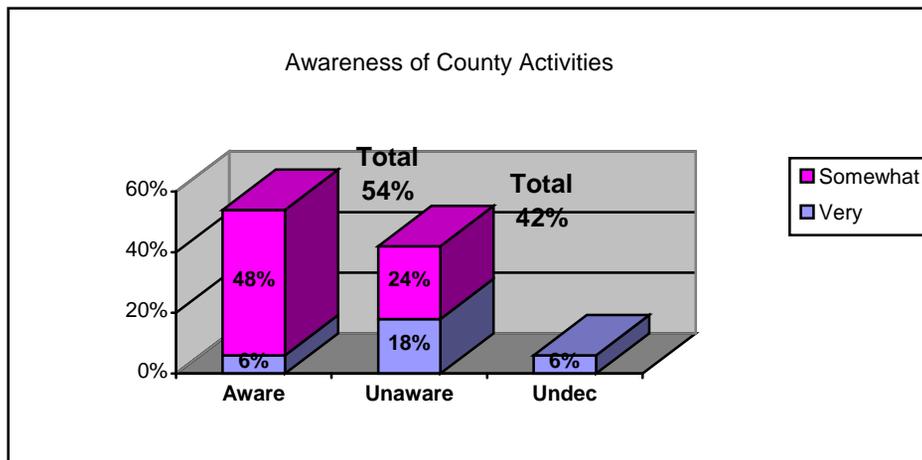
In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to name, “. . . *what one, two or three county programs or services do you think should be cut . . .*” [if the Commission had to cut programs to balance the budget?

In a repeat of the 2006 results, “*Parks and Recreation*” was by far the most named program or service to be cut in the composite of the, up-to-three, that were named, although in a departure from the 2006 results, the highest percentage response was, “*No cuts*”, at thirty-one percent. The pie chart below illustrates the respondents’ preferences:



-- Awareness of County Activities

In another new question for 2008, respondents were asked to assess how aware they believed themselves to be about the county’s activities. While a 54 percent majority reported that they believed themselves to be aware, only six percent described themselves as being “Very aware.



-- Information Sources

In an effort to guide the county in the best means of communicating with its constituents, a question was posed to respondents asking them where they got most of their information concerning county government. Three newspapers dominated the responses, combining for 52 percent of the responses. These were:

Local newspaper	21%
Grand Rapids Press	17%
Holland Sentinel	13%
Grand Haven Tribune	7%
The Advance	3%

Interestingly, Television coverage (12%), County newsletters (11%) and “Word of Mouth” (8%) ranked higher than the Grand Haven Tribune and the Advance (although a portion of these responses are likely wrapped up in “Local newspaper”) as sources of information.

While the County Commission makes an effort to communicate via cable television, nearly seven-in-ten respondents (68%) report, “Never” having watched any of the broadcasts. Another 15 percent report watching it, “Seldom”, with the remaining 17 percent scattered in the single digits amidst, “Every two weeks” (2%), “Once a month” (7%), “Several times a year” (3%), “Once or twice a year” (3%) and “Undecided (2%).

-- Selected Demographics

The vast majority of respondents (66%) report calling Ottawa County their home for at least 15 years, with 47 percent of them claiming a county tenure of over 25 years. As is typical of many areas in the state, well over half (58%) report having no school age children in their home. A slight majority (53%) describes their community as “Suburban”, followed by “Rural” at 28 percent, and “Urban” at thirteen percent.

The predominantly white cohort of respondents (90%), exhibit a fairly high level of formal education, with 32 percent having attained at least a bachelor’s degree, and 68 percent reporting some form of post-secondary education. Seventy percent of the respondents report logging on to the Internet daily, however, a strong 57 percent majority report never having logged onto the county website.

Nearly nine-in-ten respondents (87%) report being homeowners, with the balance reporting either leasing, renting or refusing to offer a response. Approximately half of the respondents (47%) report a household income of \$75,000 or less, with 26 percent reporting a household income of \$75,000 or higher. Twenty seven percent of respondents did not respond to the question asking them to reveal their household income.

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. The attempt was again successful for this survey, with a female/male ratio of 55-to-45 percent.

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