

POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS
Mail AND Focus Groups (Categories)
Question 1 – March 2007

Respondents:

67 of 159 (42%) Mailed: County Board, Town: clerks, chairs, presidents, mayors, administrators, Civic Groups

7 Focus Groups: Luck, Amery, Osceola, Tourism Council, Town of Apple River, City of St. Croix Falls, County Employees
50 on-line/walk-in

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN? Back to the future. What are some significant changes and history of Polk County that have taken place in the last 150 years.

GOVERNMENT

- Schools have consolidated. (6)
- Mega growth of County government. (3)
- More and larger government & schools.
- Government changes – more paperwork, less people involvement.
- Tourism increase. Property value (lake homes) increase with out-of-state purchasers.
- From free world to dictatorship.
- Relocation of county jail from Osceola to Balsam Lake.
- County Seat debate – St. Croix Falls vs. Osceola.
- County seat.
- Property tax increase with more going to education.
- Fighting at county level.
- “Radical” political history.
- Taxes too high.
- Loss of local control.
- Improvements in schools & social services.
- Improved schools and education.
- Government was very small without all the taxes and social programs.
- Increase in demand for social services.
- Reliance of volunteer-based organizations to provide services.
- Autonomous small towns.

PRESERVATION, RECREATION

- Polk County Fair (1880).
- People more aware of need to protect water/air quality.
- Lake associations.
- Preservation of bluff land a big achievement. (Osceola)
- Preservation of St. Croix Riverway.
- Interstate Park.
- Improved parks and recreation areas.
- Recreation – Natural Resources.
- State parks introduced tourism.
- Tourism.
- Expansion of trails.
- Conservation of lands.
- Decreased water quality of lakes/streams. Closing township dumps. Increased interest in preservation of natural resources and environmentally sustainable lifestyles.
- Common practice of open dumps could still be improved.
- Fragmentation of wildlife habitat.
- More wildlife.
- More deer, more disease.
- (2 year resident) Moved here because of natural beauty and art presence.

TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATION

- Communication – from trips to town a few times a year for supplies to electricity, telephones, internet.
- Limited services (communication) in past.
- Changes in mail delivery.
- Internet.
- Electricity.
- Electricity to rural areas.
- Electricity changed rural landscapes.
- Hydropower plant at St Croix Falls.
- Advertising visual and sophisticated.
- Technology advancement and growth – use of technology has increased.
- Technology has taken over, some for better, some for worse.
- Changes in technology.
- World Globalization. Closer connection to large metro areas: Mpls/St Paul, Chicago, Eau Claire, etc.

TRANSPORTATION

- No more railroad. (4)
- Railroad/Bridge. (3)
- Transportation changes (roads & vehicles). (2)
- Transportation has increased mobility – people go outside the county for economic and cultural purposes. (2)
- Small towns thrived with railroads, logging, cheese factories, schoolhouse. Railroad gone, large schools, cars.
- Railroads and highways dominated development of land.
- Trains/railroad full.
- Trains connected communities.
- Loss of Public transportation.
- Railroad. Highways.
- Railroad, faster road traffic.
- From walking trails to airplanes.
- Horse & buggy to auto, roads – hard surface.
- Transportation – car, roads, bus.
- Trails became roads.
- Motorized transportation.
- More traffic.
- Increased traffic & commuters to cities.
- Road improvements.
- Transportation evolution – importance of highways.
- Transportation – people and products mobile.
- Commodity delivery.
- From shopping at rural grocery stores to village stores to cities or towns.
- Trip expansion (town to town; town to TC).
- Railroads provided far-away products and transportation. Good roads expanded. We've become a mobile society.

LOGGING, FARMING

- From small to large corp. farms. (2)
- Loss of small farms = death to small towns. (2)
- Loss of family (dairy) farm.(2)
- Logging, farm foreclosures, electricity, machinery replaced horsepower, farms doubled in size.
- From logging and farming to Government, schools, commuters.
- Forests, railroads, logging, farming.
- Virgin pines cut down, logging had huge impact on the area.
- From logging & small farms – all rural area.
- Entire area logged over so current forests valuable mostly for scenic beauty and firewood.
- Demise of forest product and farming industries.
- Timberlands mostly gone.
- Agriculture and support of it still vital.
- Rural (Ag) to Business Ag.
- Crop farming – wheat – originally then to dairy.
- Wheat – cattle – houses.
- Loss of farms.
- Loss of farms and open space per person.
- Small farms sold to large operators or developers.

VALUES

- Violent crimes and drug/alcohol have become significant problem. (2)
- Loss of generations with connections to pioneering principles and values of an agrarian culture. Aging of population.
- Strong family feeling, labor-saving devices in homes, women in workforce, earlier age for kids in school and daycare, sense of community became a place of employment, sporting activity, cultural interests, socializing outside the home.
- Neighbors knew and helped each other.
- Loss of being neighborly.
- People were self-sufficient, responsible, and took care of each other.
- Use to be more pride in communities. Activities were more centrally located in communities. Now people travel all over and use homes as bases only.
- Churches spaced 7 miles apart.
- Have become a county of commuters who have a different sense of ownership in the community. Local communities no longer the center of life; churches no longer a consistent source of community. People shop where it is more convenient and less expensive not because it is a neighborhood business.
- Independent, self-sufficient small communities. Families and neighbors worked together. Population has exploded. Crime is on the increase.
- Increase in crime, drugs, murder, theft. Increased cancer.
- Roadside garbage.
- Transient lifestyles.
- Changes in lifestyle.
- Loss of loyalty from local communities to regional(?) and beyond.
- Disparity between 'have' and 'have nots.'
- Expectations – instant gratification.

LAND USE/DEVELOPMENT

- Changes in land use.
- Cession of tribal lands.
- Was a farming community with land for hunting/trapping, timber harvesting. Now farms being lost to development.
- From timber & minerals to cheap land for growing & building. Roads, electricity, villages. Summer homes on the lakes.
- Farming and logging, cheese factories every 4 miles, electricity and tractors revolutionize farming – light industry begins, # of farms decreasing with size increasing, commuting to industrial jobs begins.
- From logging and agriculture to very diversified community.
- From wooded to farming to bedroom county.
- Electricity to rural areas to develop agriculture.
- Basic agriculture to more specialized ag (dairy to grain) & rapid urbanization.
- Decline of small ag-based communities. Loss of family farm due to residential developments and larger commodity based agriculture.
- From farming to residential/recreational county.
- Loss of agriculture and residential development of land.
- From dairy farming to developing. Farms are more crops and development.
- Less open space. More buildings and businesses.
- Farm decline, increase of “bedroom” people and recreation dollars.
- Farm loss, recreational residential development, commuters.
- Decrease in small dairy farms, increased traffic, trucks, commuters, rural/urban sprawl (more non-farm residents).
- From self-contained, small towns, farming – hunting & summer tourist area to easily accessed area by large urban areas i.e. Chicago & Twin Cities. Farming and open land has decreased.
- Development of lakes.
- Some areas remain unchanged, some have growth in population and development.
- (re: Osceola) Phenomenal growth from rural and farmland to developments and urban living. Bedroom community trying to hang on to historic business and downtown districts. We look healthy but it is a fine line.
- Increased ‘second home’ residences. Outside pressure for land development – commercial & residential.
- “Up on the hill” expansion on St Croix Falls/Hwy 8 corridor. Manufacturing/industry replacing farming.
- Witnessing progressive business development along Hwy 8.
- Urban sprawl (Twin Cities).
- Twin cities urban/suburban sprawl. Migration to urban/metro.
- The Cities growth in our direction is accelerating.
- Housing location and playground for Twin Cities residents.
- Tourist “mecca” weekend homes, development of lake property.
- Lake development – weekend, seasonal, year-round.
- Bedroom communities.
- Rural to urban transition.
- Urbanization.
- Development.
- Shopping and housing options – mega stores, townhouses, home developments, apartments.
- Growth – more commerce & housing.
- Unsustainable community development.
- Lack of planning.
- Pressures on infrastructure.
- Changes in infrastructure.
- All small business and farms are gone. Big business has taken over, except if it is a special business.
- Lumbering, railroads, and agriculture were the main industries. Vast improvements in infrastructure including roads, airports, sewage disposal and wells, communication systems, street lighting, snow plowing, waste management.
- Native American habitat and lifestyle destroyed by logging, damming rivers, and agriculture. Land surveyed and divided into 6 mile square townships. Villages and hamlets sprout up every 5 or 6 miles. Dairy farming dominates economy. Commercial retail, light manufacturing, logging, and tourism add to the economy. Lakes become ringed with “cabins” and “bedroom communities” are born for commuters to Twin Cities.

POPULATION

- Population increase. (12)
- Population growth with development. (3)
- In-migration – a lot seasonal residents. (2)
- Displacement of Native Americans. (2)
- From Native Americans and wild animals to immigration, timber harvesting, and farming.
- Indians driven off land and Europeans/Americans took the natural resources.
- Remember our predecessors – the St. Croix Band of Chippewa people.
- Homesteading.
- Settlers established communities and created building boom.
- From pioneer setting to densely settled area.
- From vacation in the woods to densely developed shore land.
- More people, more disease.
- Population loss from small communities to metro areas.
- European immigrant to new immigrant.

EMPLOYMENT

- Yo-yo factory demise. (2)
- Influx of large 'chain' stores. (2)
- Two-worker families became the norm due to low wages. Per capita income is low.
- Loss of creamery.
- Change of employment from agriculture to manufacturing & service.
- From focus on agriculture with supporting businesses to diverse economy of small businesses, agriculture, and tourism.
- From logging and ag to small industry. Largest employers became the county, hospitals and school districts.
- Decrease in agricultural jobs.
- Decrease in agricultural employment & product resulted in less employment opportunities in county.
- Move toward a tourism/service economy.
- Growing importance of tourism.
- From agrarian to industrial society.
- Sawmills to tourism-related industry.
- Farm-based economy to service and manufacturing-based.
- Growth of organic food industry (4 CSAs and 1 organic dairy).
- Influence of co-ops.
- Rise of cooperatives.
- Loss of family farms and small town local business – can't compete with big box stores.
- Loss of locally-owned businesses.
- Logging industry.
- Logging decline.
- Lumber industry to tourism/recreation/retail-based economy.
- Industry – mechanical.
- Industrialization.
- Industrialization, super stores.
- From small farm to commuter-based economy.
- From ag to residential, recreational, & industrial economy. Loss of small business.
- Economy shift from Ag to tourism/retail.
- From Ag to manufacturing.
- Farming (Ag) to Industry.
- Ag no longer dominant industry.
- Decrease in small family farms, industrial & agricultural jobs. Job market more toward service industry or high tech, leaving behind a large # of people who are not "college material."
- Flour mills, food processing, radio communications, electrical control systems. Plastics and plastic products. Computers & light industries.
- Cut of base employment with overseas trade & jobs.
- Shifts of coal to oil-based economy.

MISCELLANEOUS

- See Rosie Braatz's book.
- Take us back to the Fifties.
- The past is great but it is History! Leaders must focus on the future.
- Health insurance helped doctors/hospitals get paid.
- Medical facilities.
- Buildings better quality, energy efficient.
- "Architectural standard" for new buildings = pole barns.
- World wars impact on rural areas.

NO COMMENT = 31