

POLK COUNTY COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS
Mail (Complete) – Question 2
March 2007

117 Respondents.

WHERE ARE WE NOW? Current Assessment. What trends and issues do you see developing in our County and in our communities?

- No comment. 12
- I am pleased to see the county taking a long range look to the future. All of us need to determine what we want to have the county look like. The coming of added population & big box stores is on the way.
- More young people going to college and moving away from small towns and rural areas. Big Box stores forcing small business out of small towns. Family farms no longer being farmed.
- Scattered pockets of residential development. Taxes too high for middle class to afford. Wealthy absentee or recreational residents.
- In relation to the answer above, it is good to have growth, but we have to have good paying jobs to continue that. The current situation with our County's property taxes is not good. It seems that most property tax statements increase a little bit each year, almost to the point of driving people out of their homes. If we do not have good paying jobs, this problem will not go away. At the same time, just getting a better paying job doesn't fix the property tax situation. We need to find a way to stop the constant increases on property taxes, and find a different source of revenue for the County. Perhaps the sales tax should be increased instead of property taxes.
- Polk county continues to grow and change. More people are moving in than are moving out, lured by a rural lifestyle, good schools, and our abundance of lakes. They are coming mainly from neighboring counties in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Dairy farms are growing in size but the number of farms that can support a family is declining significantly. The largest employers in the county are the schools, county government, medical facilities, and small manufacturing businesses. Housing development is growing significantly in the southwestern part of the county. Big retail businesses recognize the growing market niche and are moving into the St. Croix Falls area. However, the St. Croix River has retained its beauty and is now a National Scenic Riverway.
- 2000 and on: leisure time expense – bigger part of cost of living. Material possessions – more elaborate and costly. Accustomed to having wants/desires fulfilled – use/enjoy now – pay later – credit debt. Income is lagging lifestyle. Absentee ownership: corporate farms, retail outlets, subsidiary manufacturing, internet jobs. Increased cost of utilizing natural resources, lumber, cement, coal, hydropower, oil. Increased use of natural resources – parks, lakes, land. Influx of older population – new residents. Income lagging lifestyles (cost of living). Social services viewed as responsibility of taxpayer. Taxes viewed as providing very small personal satisfaction. Capital investment for the future of the county is lacking.
- A continued loss of interest in local affairs. Our young people are leaving. Hopefully we can strive to retain this asset, to build a positive base of young people with a positive outlook for the future. We're on the verge of a large influx of people looking for a long term commitment to a place to live and grow.
- I view Polk County as a member of the 5th ring suburb's of the Twin Cities (Minnesota). High percentages of taxpayers (guess at least 30%) of Polk County taxpayers are not Polk County residents. They are viewed as seasonal (aka tourists). People live here for the housing cost and work where the wages are higher (commuters). Not everyone can work for the Government or schools. Largest employers of the county are Government and Schools. They also have the higher paying jobs with great benefits. Paved county Highways with under-funded maintenance. Growing number of resident and non-resident active retired seniors that want to enjoy the amenities found in urban and rural settings. Snowmobile and ATV trails, bike paths, walking paths, etc. A view from some that "They owe us" I never find out who they are talking about. Too many boards because we have always had them. Towns are where the population is on the rise; and they over governed by County Government.
- 2007 – About 20 large farms have 90% of cows in county. Major commuting jobs ending or in danger of ending. Very few of us are involved in food production or in manufacturing. Most of our jobs are service related or in the building trades. Globalization is taking jobs and resources.
- Farm land sold for development. Older population in need of services.
- We have lost a lot of agricultural jobs without adding very many other kinds of jobs. Polk County needs more jobs of all types.
- Polk County is giving way to suburban growth in the southwestern part of the county. Population along with building of homes and businesses escalate traffic on our highways for commuting persons, as well as tourist

traffic. Land and water resources are used more now than ever before. County health, law enforcement, court system, aging system are being stretched.

- We are growing at a fast rate and we aren't ready. Large developers are taking advantage of this.
- Small communities disappearing, most family farms are gone—split into small residential properties. Family members go their separate ways each day to earn money to purchase outside resources, which are now trucked in. We live in a wasteful, throw-away society. People are losing jobs to other countries and machines. People are less family and community oriented, everyone for themselves, no care or respect for other people or their possessions. At the "County Motel" prisoners are living better than our old and poor people. Climate control environment, recreation, nutritious meals and health care are given to jail birds, but are an unaffordable luxury for the common old and poor.
- There is growth issues in part of the county – there is economic problems in the other part. It is going to be very difficult to have an all-inclusive vision for the whole county.
- Less involvement in government at local level. Also see that the state is trying to mainstream local government, with the possibility of someday eliminating it?
- Growth without planning.
- Trends toward commercial and residential expansion; subdivision and development of rural areas. Issues concerning high property taxes, declining school enrollment, high cost of health care.
- Less farming, more manufacturing, more highway traffic, less community spirit.
- Losing family owned businesses and open land. Rural development on lands with separate wells & septic that are small parcels, aquifers drying up & septic failing. Main arteries going thru Polk County are being developed without looking at the whole county and what is happening to them.
- Lack of "Professional" managers at city, village, and county levels. High taxes and over assessments on waterfront properties.
- Growth from twin cities area. Zoning and land use issues along with developing community & growth. Transportation will be another issue.
- I am not against change. My farming operation that I am now passing on to the next generation has changed tremendously from my parents passing it on to me. Our county has followed the "bigger is better" theme probably too far. However, not just in agriculture, our school systems for instance have gotten to be big business. The administrators are acting like CEO's running a big corporation. The DOT and DNR are now making the laws instead of just abiding by them.
- Everything has to be big. The small operator has a hard time to make ends meet. We are getting to be a bedroom community.
- Keep "country" rural charm, regulate roadside advertisement signs, try and keep rural charm equals tourist \$.
- Public safety, need for more & better ambulance, police, fire, better roads. Increase need for parks. Growth issues, try to be fair to new residents and long time (older residents).
- We are becoming a suburb of the cities; many citizens need to commute to earn a decent living wage. The trend at the county level seems to be to want to cut taxes by cutting services. That may work for right now, but the true cost of cutting services now could very well end up costing more in the end. Communities do seem to work well together overall, the County has trouble finding solutions for the big picture. The county departments have been pretty top heavy, I applaud efforts to correct that.
- Consolidation of schools, more educational shared programs. Lack of discipline with parent with their children. Lack of respect for law enforcement. Our politicians need to follow up on issues and set good laws for all.
- Rural population is affecting the County south of Highway 8. As a result, planning is necessary to ensure that proper zoning land use is achieved. Roads are deteriorating faster than they can be maintained due to the increased cost of materials and labor. There appears to be less than adequate deputy's available for patrol. The County is trying to be an expert at everything instead of excelling at what they do best. There is more subdivisions and more traffic. More industry is coming into the County. Our population has increased.
- Keeping up maintenance of roads & resources due to increased population. Large amount of low income or no income population. Several businesses closed down.
- I feel the people of our county – communities should see our County Board not fight among themselves and grow up.
- More people moving in from city. More crime, meth labs. Land use differences. Trash in ditches. More trouble on town boards.
- Again – the rapid urbanization of our county. We're just too close to the Twin Cities and there are too many recreational opportunities for the city people to maintain our rural lifestyle.
- I see our county becoming a metropolitan area. I am concerned with new development in towns and their sanitation systems polluting our ground water.

- Polk County is beautiful. We have natural resources that draw people here. However, the quality of our lake water has diminished due to runoff of wastes and poor management of soils and brush. There is less respect for authority figures among our children and more leisure time and money. Our government, schools, banks, and hospitals have almost gone paperless with the mandated use of computers. Our municipalities are reporting by computer as well as running elections by computers. The roles of clerk and treasurer have become more complex requiring more employees to run the offices and more administrator positions created even in the smaller villages. The Golden Age Manor, a County run nursing home is doing a fine job and should not be the butt of divisiveness. I realize that it is difficult to make ends meet when costs rise and the state cuts back funding. I appreciate the struggle the County has to operate efficiently.
- Years 1980 – 2007. Dairy farms all but disappear and crop farming begins to dominate ag economy. Small farms are sub-divided into 1-20 acre parcels for housing development. Manufacturing plants and retail chain stores gobble up farm fields. Economy base is government employees, light manufacturing, commercial retail, and Mpls/St. Paul metro area – (some professional). I see the Mpls/St. Paul metro area continuing to exercise a big influence in Polk County's economy and social structure. As the metro area grows, it becomes closer to Polk County geographically, therefore providing a shorter commute to higher paying jobs.
- Expand out the ordinances to all land subdivision. We have growth, not so much pass through to the cities. Growth is good if it's good growth – well thought out and controlled – with green space, stylish buildings for this area.
- Business is getting bigger and are corp. instead of small privately owned. There will be bedroom towns and communities. If we do not change our small towns & villages may die, also cities like St Croix Falls & Amery will grow as business centers. Places like Range, Fox Creek Atlas, are gone.
- Consolidation of retail areas leading to demise of smaller family based business & smaller downtown and placing a greater burden on transportation infrastructure. Lack of planning to protect agricultural character of the county. Lack of planning based on resource base (Ex: long term sustainability of 1-acre lots served by well & septic).
- Growth pressures. Losing rural countryside. Losing community character.
- Housing infrastructure.
- I see some very serious issues related to community development and a potential lack of opportunities for municipalities to assist with small business startup or expansions. The levy limits and over reliance on property tax revenue is hindering our ability to promote growth.
- Changes will take place with the Twin Cities spreading out, this will produce more jobs and an increased population.
- Many county residents work and shop outside of their local communities (local businesses are suffering). Growth of county will continue as more people move out from the cities – will we have resources to support this growth?
- Growing rapidly – however Polk County is not prepared for growth. Polk County is not a business oriented county. New business generates tax \$. The County let Polaris get away.
- Increased property (land) development. Polk County is likely to become a large bedroom community for expansion of St. Croix County & St. Paul.
- Increased needs for increasingly aging population. Reduced enrollment in schools – increased pressure toward larger schools. Increased commute times. Job losses.
- Diminishing farm land, becoming too populated.
- #1 concern obviously is \$ (or lack thereof) for public programs.
- With our increased population I think we have done a good job with “smart growth.” Our schools, hospital, and services seem healthy. Dealing with the increased traffic and adjusting to it seems to be more of a problem.
- We have people moving in to our area. Some nice, some not. Main thing not enough work. We have such a beautiful area, people like to come. I am proud of this area.
- Urban sprawl, rapid growth, communities not prepared for the growth or having plans in place to control it.
- Growth in the southern cities of our county. More movement from small towns to metro. Need for future labor – how do we increase the skills of the workforce and corresponding wage rate.
- The current “haves” and “have nots” areas. It seems St. Croix Falls, Osceola, and Amery are “have” areas. How can we build the other communities up?
- It seems that the county board is overstaffed at the expense of efficiency and effectiveness. The board needs to operate in a fashion above reproach that will encourage both business and residential growth. As each small town loses it's downtown, the consumers are taking their money and spending habits to Minnesota. It is past time to bring those businesses into Polk County to keep the tax dollars and employment here. It is sad to see local businesses forced out to competition located in Minnesota. Each town must take a harder look at how to get people to shop locally. Every time a business is forced out, it means that the local shoppers are further hampered in where they shop. There are many groups trying to promote activities. Perhaps there could be more

coordination of events to give people reasons to come to an area for more than a few hours – more like a weekend or week.

- Significant residential growth (southern towns). Increased residential development/recreational activity (lakes). Increased traffic on US 8 and feeder roads. Larger farms.
- Good – Polk County has assets that make for a great tourism trade. Infrastructure for manufacturing is available. Bad – Allowing the “Big Boxes” into our area cheapens our community. Make them pay their way.
- Changes in culture with increasing immigrant workers.
- Increased drug use, sales and manufacturing. Negative gang influence coming into area. People over 50 retiring from full time employment and seeking part time jobs.
- Take out the word developing . . . currently we have no strategic plan and some cities and villages are networking to stop the County from moving forward. Some villages are progressive.
- Infrastructure not keeping pace with growth. Continued growth – urbanization, big box retailers.
- Growing quickly – demand for some social services outpaces resources. We need land use planning so we grow sensibly.
- The spreading out of population – a larger % of the people living outside barriers of cities, towns, and villages.
- Both my husband and I would like to see more development of renewable energy. He feels the taxes are too high here. Mass transportation should be developed also, so many people are traveling to the Twin Cities to work/play, just think of the carbon savings if there was a bus or van service, or a light rail train. There needs to be safe places for children and young people to play and hang out so they don't get involved with drugs, crime, or drinking. We need a comprehensive overhaul of the government structure, with more sharing between/combining of municipalities. I also see more violence here, domestic and other, more police protection and neighborhood watch-type programs should be implemented. We should tackle the root causes of these diseases and make sure there is funding and emotional support for victims. The recent father and son murder suicide is terribly upsetting. Also, this area is sorely lacking in quality jobs, this is the most glaring problem for me.
- What little undeveloped lakeshore is left is being developed while housing in cities and villages is being allowed to deteriorate. Farming has become unprofitable for all but the largest corporate operations. The Highway 8 strip appears to be developing without much, if any, planning; this growth threatens to turn the corner and head north up Highway 35. What manufacturing work is available is mostly unskilled and non-unionized. Schools are struggling with declining enrollments. Property taxes continue to rise as the state contributes less and less to local government and schools. Many are without health insurance.
- Music, theater, and art are blossoming in Polk County. There seems to be a conflict between wanting to move forward with the big box stores and with keeping the area quaint with antique stores, specialty shops, locally owned restaurants, natural food coops and art organizations. I favor the more unique approach over the big box stores.
- Enterprising people started health care centers, improved schools to broaden education and funded rest homes and homes for aging people. We can be glad for the people of vision who acquired or donated land for access to lakes and rivers, for parks, for land to be restarted, the forest and prairies. These centers for recreation are all the more valuable because they were given to use by the public. Everyone, children, families relaxing, and older people can enjoy learning about the fauna, birds, fowl, and amphibian in the marshes. People live here because they can work in the industries and live in the country. People work in the cities yet chose to live here in the country. People retire here to live in the country. There are pressures on county officials and employers to provide increasing services and security for our increasing population.
- Be fair in enforcing zoning. Minorities must obey the rules. No pigs & chickens & residential. No 15 family members taking hundreds of pan fish with no warden around. Warden is busy checking fishing license of property owners on upscale lakes.
- Urban sprawl.
- Overspending in some areas of County Government is causing large tax increase for residents of Polk County. This overspending needs to be addressed.
- I see an economic division developing (growing) in our communities between the higher educated “professionals” (who are in the minority) and the lesser educated either marginally employed or unemployed. The gap appears to be widening and has significant cultural implications for Polk County. These two economic classes often clash over politics, recreational issues, development, and land usage.
- Continuing loss of small, local business resulting in higher property taxes.
- Difficulty deciding what directions to take. Town & County boards don't want to upset certain people/groups. Time to take a stand & do what is right for our neighbors.
- Blocked by personal differences, fear of change, and a narrow vision of the possibilities and potential for this naturally rich and dynamic community. A reputation for dysfunction in county government. Growth in industrial/commercial development with a strong tendency towards fast, cheap, and easy contracts; competition

among communities TIF/industrial parks, etc. which creates “sell-out” mindset that is not only divisive but prostitutes our many natural resources, our assets. Increased property values, with resulting increase in real estate taxes, pressure older residents to make radical choices and changes in living conditions that they are ill-equipped to make. Main street businesses struggle to survive, many buildings are in bad repair due to lack of use, resources, etc. Lack of innovation in public education in response to: declining \$/resources; issues facing young adults; maximizing use of community facilities. Lack of mainstream entertainment/activity options for youth and teens. Migration of residents from metro areas looking for quieter, healthier, safer, earth based, natural living environments. County Board that is too large, limited in focus and ideas to respond quickly or effectively to the current and future growth issues which must be addressed. Great potential for positive growth and change, and opportunities manifesting from the co-creative efforts of enlightened, comprehensive planning and community design ideas.

- There seems to be a persistent focus on growth and development and change in the area with minimal emphasis on what we want to maintain and enhance. This survey is a good sign.
- Because of the urbanization of the southern portion of the county, the increase in recreational use and the demographic shifts in the population, the county is faced with issues that it has not had to address previously. These issues are listed below: An outmoded model for county administration to deal with complex issues. Conflicts among recreational resources for competing uses. Identification and preservation of unique natural resources. Urban sprawl and loss of open space. Increased poverty and human resource needs created by loss of farm-based economy and overseas export of manufacturing and service employment opportunities. Inadequate provision for an aging population. Aging housing base in established communities. Loss of retail in established communities as a result of large box stores. Increase of mega-agricultural operations with attendant impacts on neighborhoods and natural resources. Invasive land and water species threatening the viability of recreational waters and the land in Polk County. Over-emphasis on a highway-based transportation system. Increased impact of recreational housing and recreational use as a basis of the county economy.
- Lake property taxes are too high. Traffic on Highway 8 has increased.
- Polk County is quickly becoming a bedroom community for the greater Twin Cities area and it will continue to be an upgraded second home area.
- There is a lack of visionary thinking. Not looking at the long term (where do we want to be in 25-50 years). Our talented youth are leaving the county. Average age seems to be increasing. We are losing our agricultural base. Farms being sold for housing developments without proper zoning.
- An already large number of people are commuting daily to locations outside the county, particularly to the Twin Cities area. I base this on personal observation, recognizing automobiles, drivers, and their license plates while on my own daily commute prior to retirement. I believe the number of people who commute outside the county for their livelihood is steadily increasing. Improvements in roads, road maintenance, and automobiles contribute to this increase. My sense is that people are leaving the county after completion of high school and not returning. This trend of population is not being offset by influx of new residents and so the things that depend on population, such as economic and social development, are becoming stagnant. The disturbingly large number of “For Sale” signs that stand for more than a year may be an effect of this trend. These things affect the tax base. For whatever reasons, the property tax rates in Polk County are outrageously high and they discourage potential residents from moving to the county. Unfortunately, I cannot identify high level benefits commensurate with high level taxation. The number of older residents is increasing and the average age of residents is increasing. I am concerned that the combination of all of these current conditions operating together results in an unsustainable community and standard of living.
- Mega-stores – Wal-Mart, Menards – are moving in, small businesses dying off. Downtowns stagnating.
- The mega growth of County Government and its welfare programs. Tax sources unfairly transferred from agrarian to lakeshore properties. A large share of these dollars come from non-voting, non-resident, seasonal property owners.
- The county is growing, mainly (I think) due to immigration from the Twin City area. Those immigrants are largely, again my own perception, over 50, either retired or planning to retire within a few years. The second largest group seems to be families who are looking for an idyllic small town where they can find reasonably paying jobs and their kids will be safe.
- Unstable main street business atmosphere (or complete lack thereof in the case of Centuria). We are suffering from BRAIN DRAIN. Too few high school graduates go on to college and then return to Polk County.
- I see more and more of our open spaces being taken over by the growing population and businesses that come with more people.
- I have noticed that many more Minnesotans who are moving to Polk County, some are summer visitors (i.e. their families owned cabins) who have become full time residents. There also is more shopping variety – still little boutiques and locally owned stores, but also mega stores that are open 24 hours making pharmacy emergencies

and last minute trips to the grocery store easier. I am less dependent on shopping in the Twin Cities than before, even though I commute to Stillwater for work. Also the stores carry a greater variety of inventory, more “exotic” ingredients and foods, fresher fruits and vegetables, wider range of produce and ethnic items. Restaurants are still a challenge, but there are some new ones that offer a greater variety of dining options, i.e., to celebrate an anniversary, etc. Stillwater and Hudson still are within an easy commute for restaurants, but also Balsam Lake and other resort areas seem able to support more upscale dining. Coffee and tea shops offer a nice contrast to all the bars. Entertainment options have always been great as far as outdoor activities (skiing, snow tubing, swimming, tennis, hunting, fishing, and golf for example), but also, the local live theater (St. Croix, Amery, Osceola) has improved, as well as multiplex movie houses (my favorite though is still the little movie house in Amery). Another nice “entertainment” addition is the new St. Croix Falls area Vineyard. The other enhancement is that many of these venues have websites making it easier to look up their show times, hours of operation, etc., so access has improved. Although I still seek my healthcare in MN (most appointments are during the work week so that is easier to fit in during the day from my MN office), healthcare seems to be booming in Polk County . . . new assisted living options, hospitals, clinics, health and beauty spas for wellness care – the list goes on.

- Here is an issue for you. I work with the St. Croix Tribal Foster Care and the Round Lake Community is in Polk County and also there are Tribal Members in Balsam Lake. My department licenses to Tribal Foster Families and it is all to the federal standards, but still Polk County will NOT recognize our Tribal Foster Families. We are only helping out our native children by placing them with Tribal Foster Families. Polk County includes Native people in their grants they receive from the state but they will not pay for native children in foster care. What is up with that? Also we have to work with many different counties since the tribe is so spread out and Polk County is the only one that will not work WITH us and they never have. This has to change and fast the people in charge are only going to hurt themselves in the end because I will not let this go on any longer. We are not the only ones that have complaints against the Polk County DHS.
- As the population grows we need to abandon hodge-podge development, retain whatever wilderness is left and institute a new community planning system.
- What is severely needed in Polk County is more planning. From a Realtors perspective I need commercial property lots that are all ready to build on. We need to be able to supply land/building opportunities to developers—if we do not have ready buildable sites, developers will not be as attracted to our county.
- The “big guns” of development are here. We are dealing now with more than a farmer putting in a cul-de-sac in his back forty. These large developers can do curbs, and gutters, and infrastructure on a scale larger than we have seen up until now, including razing all trees and terrain differentials. They can push us around easily, if we let them. A large percentage of Polk County’s manufacturing is in plastic injection molding. These jobs will be in Asia within the next decade. What income source will replace these factory jobs? Working families make up a growing percentage of our food shelf use. They are doing everything right, but our low wages force them to seek free food. The St. Croix Falls food shelf served 110 families in December, 2006. In January, it served 124 families. St. Croix Falls at least has been able to make big box retailers like Wal-Mart and Menards modify their look so it isn’t as institutional or bland. Both companies mentioned have trees in their parking lots and roofline facades that look more tailored to our area. They look like that because the city made them make it look like that. The rest of Polk County needs to take the same approach. Development at the top of St. Croix Falls’ hill, however, is not pedestrian-friendly, despite the large housing developments behind the shopping areas of the north and south sides of Highway 8. There isn’t even a crosswalk at the traffic light. Several of our towns will have the problem St. Croix Falls has: how to connect the older parts of town with highway-fronting retail strip malls. Highways like 35 will have to be re-routed around towns like Osceola in order to avert traffic bottlenecks as more vehicles use our roads. Highway 8 will have to be rerouted in both Wisconsin and Minnesota to avoid small town bottlenecks and the traffic funnel at Taylors Falls. Our population is aging. Older people and new arrivals expect certain levels of public services and those must be paid for.
- My retirement check of \$1,000 and SS is not keeping up with the cost of living, etc., taxes, propane, gasoline, medical, and groceries. Keep Golden Age Manor.
- Farms are consolidating – land being split for development homes and small acreage home sites.
- More people moving into this area. More homes being built. Casinos have moved in, this is wrong – sin. It is greed. People spend their money at casinos and buy lottery tickets and then they can’t pay for fuel. Welfare should not pay their bills.
- Increasing urbanization and development with resultant loss of habitat for native flora and fauna, increased pollution of waterways and lakes. Loss of farmland and smaller agricultural enterprises which employ people rather than machines; loss of agricultural infrastructure and support for small-scale agriculture. Continued high cost of petroleum-based fuels, “peak oil”, proliferation of SUV’s. Global climate change. Increased drug abuse and negative, violent, material cultural values & norms. “Mean spiritedness” in public discourse, local and county government bodies and agencies. Economic “fear mongering,” – narrow minded scarcity thinking and short-term budget cutting, especially in areas of social services, with predictable long-term disastrous social AND economic

results (i.e. cost of incarceration and rehabilitation programs vs. cost of effective treatment of juvenile offenders, effective foster care support, adequate children and youth services and resources, etc.). Economic and social “Walmartization”; demise of local business and main streets.

- I am pleased to see that in comparison to several communities of same and larger size in Northern Minnesota, Osceola is far more progressive. The library is great offering the ability to get books from such a large source of libraries. I have heard only good things about the school and would hope that the teachers continue to be paid well so that it continues to attract and keep good teachers. Towns seem to always be looking for growth and focusing their energy on attracting outside people and businesses. I think it is wiser to focus the energy on sustainability. What already exists and is thriving, who are the people who already live within the community and what makes them stay and how can the whole community be made stronger. (Not just businesses seeking more buyers.)
- Polk County has extremely high levels of Lyme disease and erlichia, also known as anaplasmosis, or human anaplasmosis, or HGE. Wisconsin also has the other erlichia – HME and babesia, which causes babesiosis. The numbers of cases are rising every year.
- Because our highest value property (lake and wild land) has become the highest taxed, some of us living on family property are being taxed off. We have gone way too far with big government. Our father served on the county board for 23 years in the 60s and 70s and everyone fit in the old courthouse.
- Too much growth in government and too many individual rights are no longer esrstant(?). The rural area is being developed too fast. Taxes are too high and out of control.
- Obviously, it's a new century and there are new challenges facing everyone, at every level of government and in each of our own lives. Energy—what was once plentiful and cheap is becoming expensive and less easy to obtain. Plus, for every BTU of fossil fuel burned we come closer to extinguishing the human race. Polk County needs to initiate a thorough planning process RIGHT NOW for how it is going to handle its energy use in the future. Not because it is the right thing to do, but because it will end up saving the residents of Polk County a lot of money. The governmental units that get out front of the upcoming energy squeeze will be able to deliver services for considerably less money. We need, each of us, to learn how to live more sustainably and greener life-styles. We need to consume less energy per household, burn less fossil fuel and live healthier lives by using outdoor recreational opportunities that are local. Polk County can lead this process if they initiate local trails, particularly non-motorized trails. They need to be local trails so that people do not need to drive to Minnesota to exercise. Plus, by creating a viable end-point destination here in Polk County, we will actually be attracting tourists who spend money here. Tourism is HUGE, and motorized vehicle tourism will be more and more of a loser, both in terms of burning fossil fuels, creating demand for oil, and in keeping people without exercise. The number one thing this county needs is a place for people to ride bikes, walk, hike, and be out in Nature. That kind of quality of life is what makes people want to settle in an area and raise a family. Without parks and trails, Polk County will never be more than a flyway for the recreational crowd on their way to some other destination.
- We are a more mobile society ready and willing to travel for what we want and need. As a result we have accepted the demise of local businesses as part of progress. However, there is segment of our community that is “less mobile” (elderly, low income, etc.) that now have less options for basic needs of food, healthcare, clothing, etc. Small businesses and manufacturers have some difficulty recruiting employees as they cannot compete with wages offered at jobs in the metro area. Employees are willing to travel for better pay. Houses are springing up all over the place with a definite change in the landscape. We are losing our rural look. Homeowners who have been in an area for many years are being squeezed by new development thereby losing the appeal that drew them here in the first place.
- I see development as an issue – especially when it uses large amounts of our good agricultural land. One house every five acres can use up a lot of land. I think we need to look at proactively planning for housing development so that it serves the community and doesn't undermine it. Cluster housing developments with open space for kids to play and wildlife to survive sounds to me like one good option. Industrial and commercial development also needs to be well-planned so that we don't ruin our beautiful rural landscape with urban sprawl that doesn't let us see the stars, or walk to the neighbors, or let our children play outside safely. So I think we need to have a comprehensive plan for how to use the land in our area in a responsible way that protects our resources for the long term and doesn't exploit them for the short term.
- We are at a crossroads between keeping the identity and feel of Polk County and becoming another blurb on a map that looks like every other “suburban” area of the US. Rising costs associated with bigger schools demands. Higher levels of unemployment and people/families below the poverty lines due to higher paying blue collar jobs moving out of our county and being replaced with lower paying blue collar (big box companies, factories) jobs. I think we are at an economic crossroads where our community has the possibility of many possible futures: forcing lower income families out of the community because of rising costs; having the retired farmers/those without private pensions being unable to afford to live in Polk County due to rising property costs and taxes; a much wider split (nationwide) between the high income families (small percentage) and low income families (high

percentage); and trying to balance the needs and wants of all it's citizens, not simply those who are the most vocal or those with the resources to make sure their opinions are heard.

- Continued and increased problems related to alcohol and drug use.
- Most issues revolve around those who want no change, those who want any and all change (tasteful or not), those who want very strict control on development, and those who haven't thought about the future at all.
- Tourism and agriculture/forestry industries remain major contributors to the County's economy. However, the small dairy farms have been replaced by mega farms featuring dairy and poultry operations; grain cropping, primarily corn and soybean, has and continues to increase. The southwest one-third of the County is facing a rapid population growth, supplying the Greater Twin Cities area an abundance of ready labor. More and more people are living the suburban lifestyle. This increase is giving a rise to a sprawling suburban environment together with the accompanying growing crime rate and other aspects of non-rural life.