

## Racine County Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey

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As part of the Racine County multi-jurisdictional comprehensive planning process, in the spring of 2007, a countywide public opinion survey was conducted in order to obtain widespread community input about land use and planning issues. As is typical of mail-in surveys, respondents were generally older—about 30% of survey respondents were age 65 or older; Census 2000 indicates that 12% of the County’s population is in this age range. In the case of the comprehensive plan survey, this may have been compounded by the fact that the survey sample was drawn from the County’s registered voter lists, which often contain a larger number of older adults than of younger ones. Use of the registered voter lists may also explain why the City of Racine was under-represented in the survey results: while the 2000 Census indicates that approximately 42% of the County’s population resided in the City of Racine (about 80,500 persons), only 59% of that number were registered to vote, and Racine City respondents comprised about 25% of the overall survey sample.

To explore how these factors may have impacted the overall survey results, the survey responses were cross-tabulated by age and compared with the overall County responses to see where there were differences in opinion. Similarly, the City of Racine’s results were compiled separately, and then compared with the overall County responses. This report looks only at the substantial differences (+/- 10 percentage points) between the sub-group and the overall response; it does not consider the responses that were in agreement.

### Age Group

A total of 576 respondents (out of 590) indicated their age in the demographic portion of the survey. Due to the small number of respondents within the 18-24 age group (N=14), the groups 18-24 and 25-34 were combined (N=52) for the purpose of this memo. The other age groups included: 35 to 44 (N=95); 45 to 54 (N=113); 55 to 64 (N=152); and 65 or older (N=164).

As was true of the overall survey sample, the western portion of the County was over-represented in each age group. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 77% of the County population lives in communities east of the I-94. 68% of respondents under the age of 35 lived in the eastern part of the County, as did 63% of respondents aged 35-44, 63% of respondents aged 45-54, 66% of respondents aged 55-64, and 70% of respondents aged 65 or older. It should also be noted that female respondents were considerably over-represented in the under-35 age group, comprising 73% of the group. The other age groups were more equally divided, with an almost even gender representation in the groups 45-54, 55-64, and 65 or older.

*As stated above, the following considers only the age group responses that differed significantly (+/- 10%) from the overall responses.*

The age groups that showed the most variances with the overall sample were the youngest (under 35 years of age) and the oldest (65 years or older). The group consisting of persons between the ages of 55 and 64 showed no significant differences from the overall sample.

Survey respondents under the age of 35 were more inclined to rank job-related and family-related issues highly. About 89% of respondents indicated that employment opportunities were important to their decision to live in Racine County (compared with an overall percentage of 77), including about 65% who reported that job opportunities were very important (46% of all respondents). In addition, 87% stated that proximity to work was important (compared with 66%). This age group also placed more importance on housing choices (88% rated them as very important or somewhat important, compared with 74% of all respondents), and higher importance on a quality public school system (80% said quality of public schools was “very important,” compared with 64% of all respondents).

None of the respondents under the age of 35 indicated that there should be no growth in Racine County (10% of total respondents selected this option), although 53% preferred to see growth slow down (45% overall). This age group showed far more interest in mixed use development (63%, compared with 44% of all responses), and a greater percentage placed high priority on redeveloping older urban and downtown areas (62%, compared with 42%), and on ensuring that new residential development includes green space (63%, compared with 50%).

The environment and outdoor activities seem to be a prevalent interest of respondents under the age of 35. About 75% indicated that lake access/quality was either very important or somewhat important to their decision to live in Racine County. Over three-quarters of respondents (76.5%) agreed that more biking and walking paths were needed (compared with 60% of all respondents), including nearly 50% who strongly agreed that Racine County needed more paths. Although they did not rate recreational opportunities very differently from the entire survey sample, in terms of economic development, approximately 86% of respondents favored bringing in more jobs in the Arts & Entertainment industry (+22%, compared with an overall percentage of 64%) and 78% favored more jobs in Sports and Recreation (+10%). They were more inclined to favor the development of alternate energy sources, such as wind power (98% indicated they either favored or strongly favored wind power development, compared with 85% overall) and solar power (94%, compared with 84% of all respondents). They were much less in favor of expanding infrastructure for the built environment, such as natural gas services (35% favored this idea, compared with 53% overall) and sewer/water services (43%, compared with 58%).

Respondents under the age of 35 were less likely to rate community services favorably. In particular, their responses of “excellent” or “good” were substantially lower than the overall response ratings in regards to: ambulance service (-12%), park and recreation facilities (-12%), police protection (-16%), public school system (-14%), sanitary sewer service (-11%), stormwater management (-10%), and especially snow removal (-31%). It should be noted that nearly 10% of respondents in this age group indicated that they had no opinion of ambulance services, and 18% had no opinion of sanitary sewer service.

A stronger opposition future residential development characterized survey respondents in the age groups of 35-44 and 45-54. About 17% of respondents aged 35 to 44 and 19% of those aged between 45 and 54 stated that they wanted to see no growth in their communities (+7% and +9%, respectively, compared with the overall percentage of 10). Approximately 37% of respondents aged 35-44 preferred to see no residential development; this is similar to the 45-54 age group’s percentage of 36%. Overall, about 22% of respondents selected this option. Specifically, both age groups showed more opposition to duplexes (about 50% disagreed or strongly disagreed that more of such units were needed, compared with 37% overall), and single-family, renter-occupied housing (about 56% disagreed or strongly disagreed that more was needed, compared with 45% overall). About 64% of persons in the 35-44 age group thought that more housing for elderly residents was needed, and while this is solid majority, it is substantially lower than the overall agreement percentage (81%). These attitudes towards residential development might be shaped by the respondents’ current place of residence—94% of those aged 35-44 live in single-family homes, and 90% of those aged 45-54 live in single-family homes. (This compares with 79% of respondents under the age of 35, and 70% of respondents aged 65 or older.)

In relation to decelerating the rate of new development, respondents in the 35 to 44 were somewhat more likely to favor redeveloping older urban areas and downtowns (52% said this should be a high priority for their community, compared with 42% overall) and were less inclined to rate their community’s planning and zoning highly (20% indicated that it was excellent or good, compared with 30% of all respondents).

Respondents between the ages of 45 and 54 seemed to be more supportive of agricultural and natural resource preservation, with 66% indicating that protecting farmland is very important (compared with 56% overall). They were also somewhat more inclined to favor measures to protect these resources, including the creation of a purchase of development rights program (61% strongly favored or favored this idea, +10% compared with the overall percentage of 51%), using local tax dollars (50% in favor, +10%), using state and federal grants (82% in favor, +10%), and using private donations (89% in favor, +11%). In keeping with an interest in natural resources, respondents in this age group were more favorable towards developing additional pedestrian and bicycle trails in the County (70% agreed that more were needed, compared with 60% of all respondents). They were also more likely to say that communities should place low priority on ensuring that adequate land is put aside for commercial and industrial uses (36%, compared with 26% of all respondents).

Interestingly, like the under 35-year olds, respondents between the ages of 45 and 54 placed higher importance on employment opportunities (87.5% said that these were very important or somewhat important, +12% compared with overall responses), and proximity to work (77% said this was either a very important or somewhat important factor, +11%). The responses of people aged 35 through 44 did not vary significantly from the entire sample; this correlates with zero count of unemployment, and about 33% of respondents commuting more than 20 miles each way for work (about 24% of overall respondents travel that far).

Given the high percentage of retired respondents (35% of the overall survey sample), it is unsurprising that those aged 65 or older were much less likely to rate job-related factors as important (employment opportunities, -13% compared to the overall percentage, and proximity to work, -23%). They placed higher importance on access to medical care (73% said it was very important, compared with 59% overall) and government services (37% rated these as very important, +10%). In keeping with these issues, the group indicated more interest in expanding the health care sector: 91% favored or strongly favored developing this industry for the County's economic future, compared with 80% of all respondents.

Older respondents were less likely to oppose new housing projects (only 12% said they would prefer no more residential development, compared with 22% of overall respondents), and naturally, they showed the most enthusiasm for more housing designed for seniors (50% strongly agreed that more was needed in the County, compared with 36% of all respondents). They were also more inclined to look favorably on their community's planning and zoning; about 41% rated it as excellent or good, compared with 30% of all responses.

### **City of Racine and County of Racine**

In total, 143 respondents indicated that they live in the City of Racine; this was about 25% of the total survey sample. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 41.7% of the County's population resides in the City of Racine. Persons under the age of 35 made up 15% of the City of Racine's sample, which is higher than the County's percentage (9%), while 22% of the City sample was in the age group of 35 to 44 (compared to 16% of the County's sample). Therefore, the City had a lower percentage of persons between 45 and 54 (13%, compared to 20% of the County), and slightly lower percentages of people aged 55 through 64 and 65 and older.

*The following primarily considers the responses that differ significantly (+/- 10%) from the overall responses.*

Residents in the City of Racine responded to the survey the way that one might expect of people living in a city setting, with respondents reporting higher expectations of urban services and opportunities and somewhat less concern with rural character issues. A greater number of City of Racine respondents felt that the quality of life has declined in the County over the last five to ten years—72% indicated this feeling, compared with the countywide percentage of 59. Approximately 63% of City respondents said that employment opportunities were very important, compared with 46% of all survey respondents. They were also more likely to want to

work in or near their neighborhood, with 71% saying proximity to work was either very important or somewhat important to them, including 34% who said it was very important (this compares with 22% of all respondents). Given the higher importance placed on jobs, the City of Racine was understandably more favorable to economic development in almost all industries, especially Industrial and Manufacturing (81% of City respondents were in favor of further developing these jobs, compared with 70% of the County) and Warehousing and Distribution (53% were in favor, compared with 43% of the County).

City of Racine residents also showed more support for recreation-driven industries, such as Recreational and Sports (78% of City respondents favored expanding this industry, compared with 68% of all respondents), Tourism (72% of the City, 62% of the County), and to a slightly lesser degree Arts and Entertainment (72% of the City, 64% of the County). This correlates with 88% of City of Racine respondents ranking recreational opportunities as very important or somewhat important, (compared with 76% of all respondents), and 78% ranking lake access and quality as important (+14%, compared with the County percentage).

Just over 84% of City of Racine respondents rated housing choices as very important or somewhat important, compared with a countywide percentage of 74. They were also more interested in affordable housing, with 79% stating that more affordable housing units were needed (compared with 68% of the County), and more single-family owner-occupied homes were needed (84% of the City, compared with 70% of the County). Mixed used development was considerably more attractive to the City of Racine, with 61% of respondents saying it should be encouraged, compared to 44% of all respondents. They also were concerned that new housing developments should have green space or easy access to parks: 60% said it should be a high priority (+10%).

About 22% of City respondents occasionally use the public transit system (about double the overall County percentage), and they were more likely to agree that the local bus services meet the needs of residents (39%, compared with 21% countywide). They were also far more enthusiastic about the potential commuter rail service from Kenosha to Racine and Milwaukee, with 78% in favor of the extension, including 48% who strongly favored it (compared, respectively, to 65% and 34% overall).

Government services ranked as very important or somewhat important to 89% of City respondents (this compares to 73% of all respondents). Overall, the level of satisfaction with community services was similar. One exception was the public school system, which was rated poor by 42% of the City respondents, compared to a countywide “poor” percentage of 26. Water supply, on the other hand, was apparently much better in the City, with 88% rating it as excellent or good, compared with 72% of the County.

Even though the City of Racine respondents were less interested in their community working to preserve small town character (35% said this should be a high priority, compared with 43% of the County), it should be noted that their interest in protecting agricultural and natural resources, and their support for the various preservation tools, were very similar to the overall survey sample.

Differences in opinion could be found in every element of the Racine County countywide public opinion survey which emphasizes the broad array of planning issues that the comprehensive plan must address, from expanding economic development and transportation services to protecting agricultural and natural resources, from redeveloping older neighborhoods and providing a range of housing choices to preserving small town character. One aspect that did not vary was concern about how Racine County moves forward, and a belief that community members should be involved—all sub-groups agreed with the overall response: over 93% said that citizen participation was important when developing and implementing community improvement efforts.