

Appendix D

Otsego County Quality of Life Assessment Community Conversations Summary May 2 & 3, 2012

Community Conversations were held in Elmira, Gaylord, Johannesburg, Vanderbilt, and Waters to further gather input from the public on the Quality of Life in Otsego County. The 90 minute sessions were organized and facilitated by Steering Committee members Dana Bensinger and Lorraine Manary. Approximately 50 people participated and expressed their thoughts on the following topics:

1. What do you believe are the most important characteristics of a healthy, vibrant, desirable community?

- Enough jobs
 - Storefronts in downtown are empty, should be full
 - Small business meet more needs of the community, as opposed to the big box stores in Traverse City, Petoskey, and even in Gaylord
- Health benefits from employment
 - Access to healthcare in general
- Needs to be accessible for individuals that have trouble getting around—elderly, etc.—downtown area in particular
- Better bus system
- Intergenerational mingling
- Pride in community, volunteering
- Affordable housing
- Opportunities for families, individuals to engage in physical activities—trails, swimming pools, parks, etc.
- City should address delinquent youth, drugs, etc. when requested by citizens
 - Should feel safe and secure in homes
- Churches doing good in the community
- Service clubs—Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.
- Good public transportation
 - Ability to move large groups with public transportation
- Quality jobs—pay a living wage
- Public disaster shelter
- Education
- Walkable downtown
 - That you want to walk to—things to go to
- Safe, fun, beautiful
- Healthcare
 - Hospital
- Opportunities for recycling
- Strong tax base

- Friendly, welcoming people
- Recreational opportunities for all ages
- Cultural opportunities
- Affordable housing
- Safety, security
- Good traffic flow
- Safe pedestrian and bike lanes on/near roads
- Vital downtown—one that is functioning, people are visiting the area, the “core”, the “heartbeat”, full shop fronts, inviting
- Cooperation/coordination within the community (between cities/towns within the county)
- All areas of the community looking cared for—business loops, not just downtown
- Healthy planning
- Cooperation between business, city, county, residents, etc.
- Good collaboration between leaders
- Work, raise family, stability at job (5, 10, 30 years out)
- Choices—things to do, places to go—recreation, shopping, events
- Education—good & available
- Good services—garbage, recycling, snow removal, sidewalk repair, taxis
- Good town centers
- Smaller communities with even smaller neighborhoods
- Things for youth to get involved in the community
- Facilities in the smaller communities throughout the county (not just in Gaylord)
- Recycling
- Local and county governments working well together
- Healthcare for everyone
- Services for seniors
- Community involvement
- Strong education system
- Job opportunities
- Recreational activities—arts, culture, “stuff to do”
- Need an attractive place for young people to stay or return to—not many rental properties—specifically, a place where people want to work *and* live (not just work *or* live)
- Growing community—from a business, industrial standpoint
- Diversity
 - Generational differences in community, need to focus on all generations
 - Healthcare choices
 - Focus on all of the various QOL areas (arts, wellness, etc.)
 - Safety for all generations
- Livable, walkable—sense of community, get around easily without obstruction of “super slabs” (roads?)

- Varied industry; would result in a variety of incomes coming in; without, it's difficult to support restaurants, etc.
- Safety
- “community for a lifetime”—meets needs from a small baby to an older citizen—have a good QOL no matter what their age is
- Ability to generate a livable income
- Live lifestyles without excessive government interference
- Not tax to meet grand visions without plan to create meaning in community
- Schools—including lifelong learning
 - A lot of people choose to move in or out of a community based on schools
- Bring business in—controlled growth
 - Not want to end up like Cheboygan
- Housing-meeting housing needs as community changes
- Different government agencies working together; collaborative efforts without duplication

2. What makes you most proud of our county?

- Transplants feel accepted
- County works together, especially health & human services
- Gaylord serves as a hub for the local areas
- Size of county and resources
- The people that live here; sense of community pride, people care
- “We don't have that kind of thing in our town”—outsiders say; proud of what we have in general, especially for older people
- Natural beauty
- Family heritage, history, roots
- Safety
- Strong service organizations and non-profit boards; strong sense of volunteerism
- Access to nature; year round outdoor activities
- Community spirit
- Easy for new people to get involved in the community
- Lakes, woods, nature
- People are important, safety; contributions—can go anywhere and get what she needs—people are giving
- Gaylord is clean
- Strong community churches
- Location within the state; “hub of the north”
- Front door is unlocked every day of the year-safety
- Alpenfest
- Alpine theme
- Parks system-Aspen Park
- Good water

- Natural resources
- Community members
- History
- Good air
- ‘normal’ people, friendly, everyone know each other
- Governing bodies—prudent, responsible, effective
- Government works with residents—officials are *mostly* approachable
- Residents care for each other—fundraisers, general help, etc.
- Johannesburg
- Community involvement—new waves of volunteers coming in (not just older people), RSVP, The Volunteer Center
- Proud of self and what she can do; sharing it with other people
- Comparison with surrounding counties—Otsego county shines in comparison
 - Leadership in county
- Maintain a spirit found in a small community even though county has experienced growth
 - People care about community, willing to invest, develop new leaders
- Openness of community to all outsiders—welcoming, lack of “cliquishness”
- Easy to get involved in community; willing to listen to how people have done things elsewhere
- Hidden resources within community—funding will come forth; generosity
- Natural resources
 - Beautiful place to live, work play
- Spirit of volunteerism
- Many faith choices and ways to support through faith
- Everything is a community effort—all townships, cities, etc. working together
- OCCOA
- Facilities, resources for people in need
- Roads are better than Crawford County
- Effort to keep arts growing, vibrant, and alive
 - Theater
 - Orchestra
- Thunder Over Waters
- Many ways to have fun!
- Library services

3. What do you believe are the most pressing problems that must be addressed to improve the quality of life in Otsego County?

- Drugs in downtown area—general safety (youth fighting, noise, scaring people—are there gangs?)
 - Police department is not doing ‘much’ about it
- Sexual assault

- Child abuse, neglect
- Teenage pregnancy
- Working poor, poverty, homelessness—cycle of poverty needs to be broken
- Pride—independence
 - People need to show others that they care
- Leadership—need to develop future leaders
- Drugs
- Lack of vision—planning, attitudes, smart growth
- Downtown Gaylord layout—doesn't feel safe taking child
- No jobs for people without skills; public service projects that unemployed could be assigned to do
- Lack of opportunities in diverse areas, especially for young people getting out of high school—reasons to stay—activities, atmosphere
- Lack of vibrant downtown
- Diversity of opportunities
 - Jobs—low skill and high skill, but what about the middle?
- Maintaining the roads, infrastructure
- Employment—need more industry that comes with good jobs
- Work on non-profits—food pantry, homeless shelter—until times get better
- Boom and bust economy
- Lack of strong education; school funding
- Destruction of natural resources so that industry can come in
 - Should be using existing buildings that are empty
 - Need to balance quality jobs with natural resources
- Too many vacant buildings
- Disrespect for nature and environment
 - Taking nature for granted
- Lack of self-reliance
 - Too many regulations, government
 - Government is too involved in private property
 - Regulations get in the way of progress
- Behind on law enforcement pensions
 - Tax base isn't supporting tax obligations
- Not enough jobs
- Lack of traffic flow; some specific lights need to be changed to make traffic more safe
- Diversification of employment
 - Away from automotive, but still in manufacturing
- Manufacturing jobs are gone
- Walking and biking safety
- Health insurance
- Full recycling countywide
- Economy

- Recognize changes—move away from the status quo
- Services for the elderly—volunteers to service them
- Garbage transfer station in Johannesburg—communication, signs for hours
- Family sustaining jobs—quality jobs
- Overregulation
- Improved collaboration between governing bodies
- Maintain water quality—oil and gas drilling could contaminate water
- Need larger variety of activities that encompasses all age groups
- Need true community gatherings of the entire county—information gatherings, government meetings
- Community apathy
- Voter apathy
- Frustration—nothing comes from “all of these meetings”
- Equality of people
- Work ethic
- Drugs—heroin
 - Hippies and baby boomers “haven’t grown up”
 - Not just young people—learned lifestyles from family
- Welfare—generational, learned poverty
- Community engagement
- Education—Schools can’t do as much with academics because of lower budgets
- Peer pressure among youth
- Parents are very young, want to be “cool” parents; not having authority, they are not good role models for the youth
 - Not encouraging children to participate in sports, can’t afford to travel, etc. for sports
- Many minimum standard jobs—need to attract better jobs
- Educate young people about Social Security—they should appreciate what it can do for seniors
- High gas prices
- Road funding
- Activities for ages 18-29
- Services/activities centralized in one location (Gaylord)
- Public transportation could be easier to use
- Employment for young people
- Preparing for age wave
 - Housing and home modifications for older adults
- Healthcare services geared toward older adults
- Safety for older adults—walking, exercising, bus systems
- Drugs
- Lack of countywide access to high speed internet
- Concern that schools aren’t keeping up to date—different ways of learning

- Communicate what they are doing to the community, especially for community members that do not have children in school
- Declining school enrollment
- Main Street—M32—Gaylord—the decline of it
- Governmental budgeting—disconnect between availability of dollars to meet budgeting needs and community looking to the government to be the solution to everything
 - Need to look outside of government funding to do what we want to do
- Preserving and enhancing natural resources
 - Trash in the woods, makes area look bad, wonder about other things—are they selling drugs? Etc?
- Keep tourist areas/community in general looking nice
- Affordable housing/accessible housing—but not trailers
- Inequities in school funding
- Streets are not safe downtown—for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians

4. On a scale of 1(low) - 10 (high), how do you rate your Quality of Life?

The average for the participants was 8.4

5. What would excite you enough to become involved (or more involved) in improving the quality of life in our community?

- High class cultural events come in from outside of the community
- Leadership and abilities to lead
- Local history
- Movement around a great idea to inspire the local economy
- Nutrition education—health & wellness
- More people becoming engaged
 - Knowing that they have a say
 - They can be empowered to make a difference
- Opportunities that are available even if you can't see it; you can make your own opportunity
- Downtown Renaissance
- Something personal that you see some movement around
- Taking the next step to fix a complaint that you might have
- People present a solution to make a change
- Bike paths
- Fitness/health
- Collaborative projects, funding
- Getting people involved
 - Political

- Knowing that something is happening—receiving communication
- County Commissioners publicly acknowledging that change is necessary
- Being involved with something that you know will make a difference by you being involved with it—getting involved shouldn't be a waste of time
- Involved with something that has a positive impact/change on a person, community—should make a difference
- Volunteering
- Something where you have had a personal experience—personal interested
- Something you are passionate about-recycling, politics, etc.
- How you are approached to get involved
- Challenge
- New ideas; promotes things she's interested in; something where her knowledge would help out (has something to contribute); recognition, seeing results
- An eminent problem
- Involved-doesn't need anything extra
- Make a difference in the community
- A cause
 - Need awareness and need satisfaction
- Helping people of all ages to learn and enjoy music
 - i.e. personal passion
- protect a personal special interest
- critical need that would infringe friends and neighbors well-being
- General personal interest