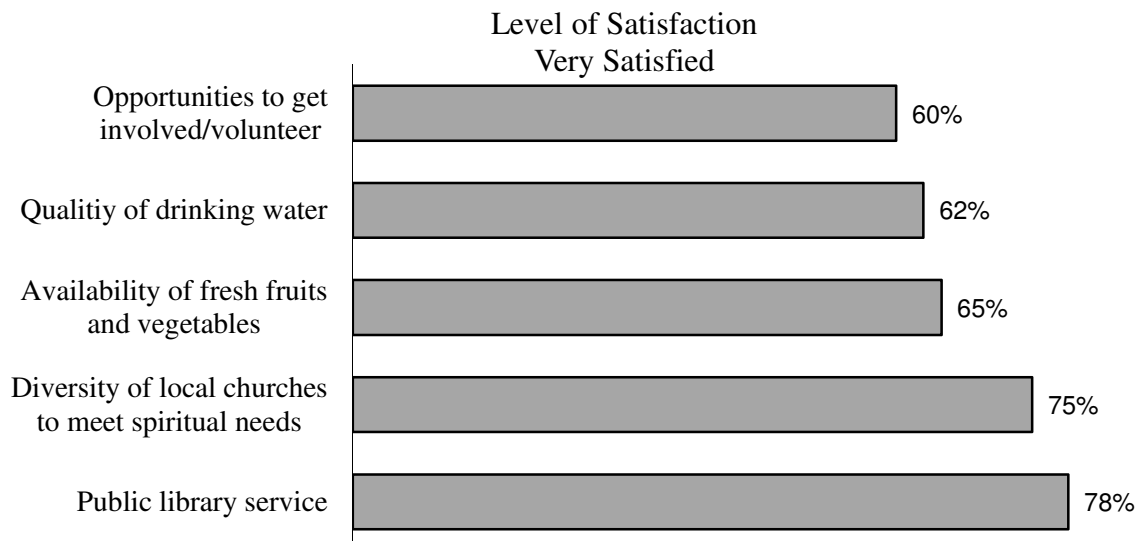


## Otsego County Quality of Life Assessment

### Survey Summary and Methodology

#### Survey Summary

1. The purpose of the survey was to obtain public opinion and perception on the quality of life in Otsego County. The survey is one of various ways to collect data for this project. The results will be widely shared in the hopes that individuals and organizations will use the information to take actions which will ensure Otsego County will be a desired place to live and work.
2. A 68-question opinion survey was mailed to 1167 citizens of Otsego County in November 2011 and received a nearly 50% return rate. This high rate of participation may be because residents are willing to share their opinions on quality of life. This is possibly due to a strong sense of community and desire to contribute to the common good on the part of those who are registered voters.
3. It is important to point out that 70% of the survey respondents are age 50 and over (survey sample was randomly drawn from individuals who voted in the 2008 election). This is a higher proportion than the 2010 census, where only 51% of those eligible to vote, were age 50 and over.
4. Unemployment rate (Q23) and Jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage (Q24) are of high concern with 78% and 80% of the respondents respectively.



5. Questions 57 and 58 were asked to get an idea of the types of industries that would be acceptable in creating jobs in Otsego County. 91% agree or strongly agree that tourism should play an important role and 77% thought likewise for the oil and gas industry. However, 35% strongly disagree with allowing casinos to operate in Otsego County (Q46). When asked if this

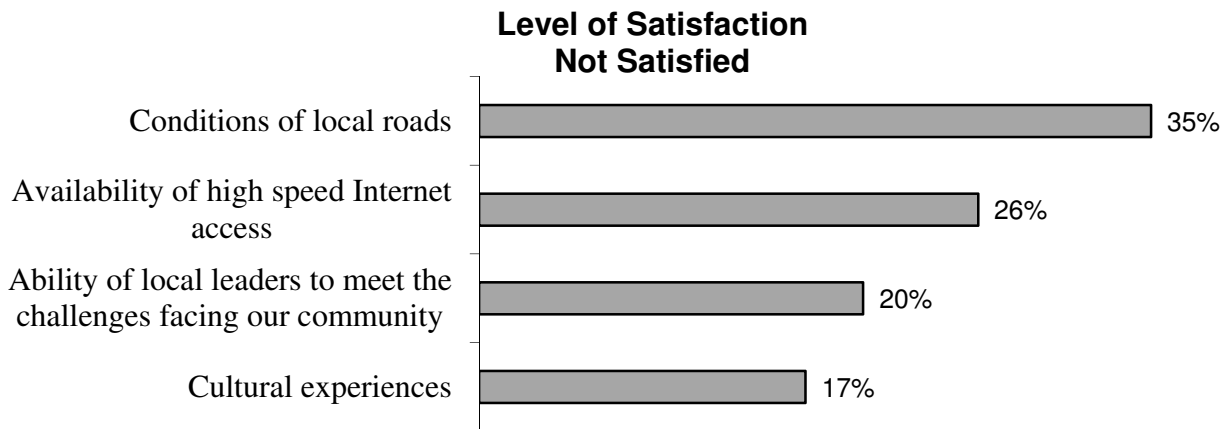
is a great place to open a business (Q43), 39% disagreed, 35% agreed, and the rest either didn't know or didn't answer the question. Perhaps the use of the word "great" affected the responses.

6. With all the news about home foreclosures, it was interesting to learn that 25% of the respondents have no concern about having enough money to pay their rent/mortgage. (Q22) This may reflect the high number of survey respondents age 50+ who are more likely to have their homes paid off and more financially secure than younger respondents.

7. When 90% of survey respondents agree on an item, you have to take notice. The price of gasoline compared to surrounding counties (Q39) is of high concern.

8. Questions 5 and 6 asked about water quality which has been at the top of the list of issues in our county for the past several years according to the County Master Plan, 2003 county government survey, and One County – One Vision planning document. Only 9% of respondents were not satisfied with the quality of drinking water and 8% for quality of water in lakes and streams. However, 47% are highly concerned about pollution in surface and groundwater. (Q35)

9. The abundant amount of public land throughout northern Michigan may have influenced 23% of the respondents who expressed no concern for access to nature and open space. (Q3)



10. Even though we talk about it but can't do anything about it, 88% of the respondents said they enjoy our four-season weather. (Q47)

11. When asked about paying \$25 a year for recycling (Q54), respondents were nearly equally divided between variations of agree and disagree.

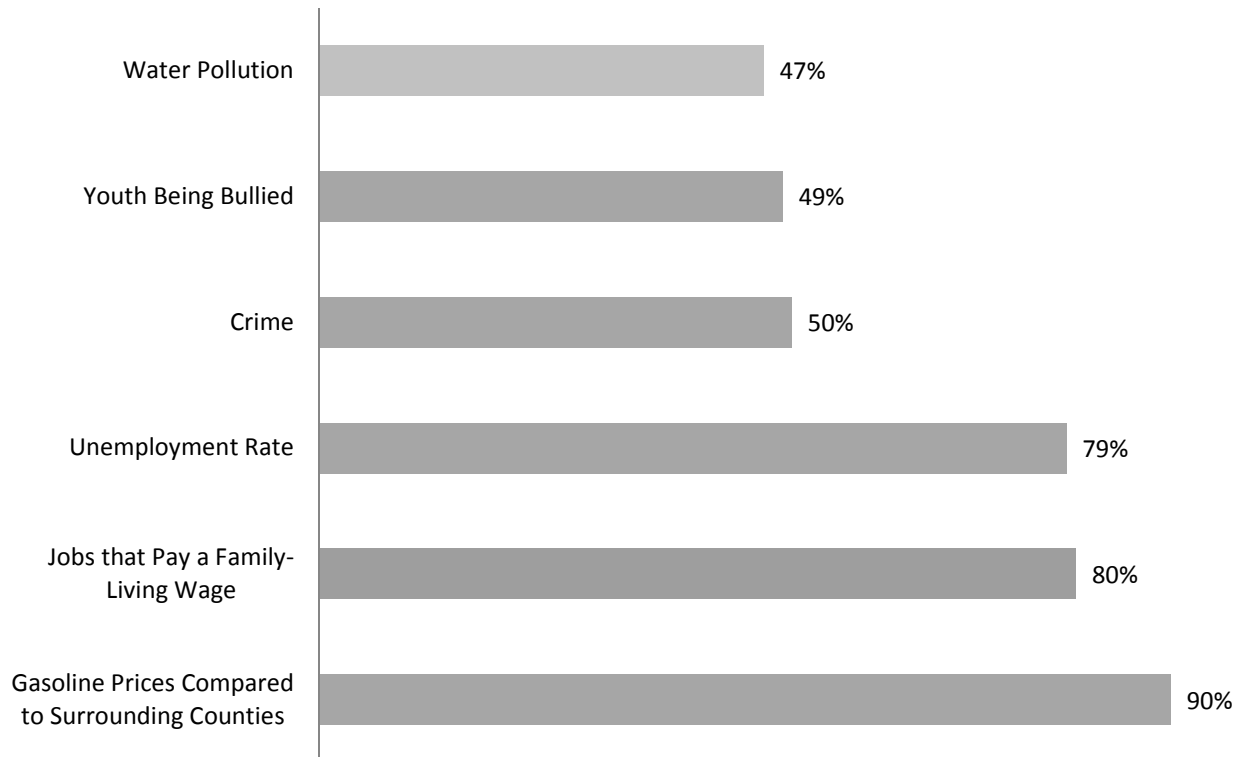
12. Overwhelming, people agree that this is a friendly place (Q48) 90% and this is a great place to raise a family (Q42) 93%. Otsego County is welcoming to "transplants" (Q41) according to 78% of the respondents.

13. Very high satisfaction rates were given to the Public Library (Q3) at 79% and the diversity of local churches to meet spiritual needs (Q10) at 75%.

14. 87% of the respondents agree that local festivals help generate community spirit (Q53) and 84% are somewhat or very satisfied with the opportunities to get involved and volunteer. (Q19)

15. 91% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that their neighborhood is safe (Q55). Yet, 79% have a medium or high concern about crime (Q36) which could include other geographic areas as well as a concern for potential criminal activity in the future.

### Level of Concern Top 6



#### Opportunities:

1. Already mentioned above but worth repeating are the high numbers of people concerned about the unemployment rate and jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. Looking at Q44, “I plan to spend my retirement years in Otsego County” received 64% agreement by respondents. This may provide an opportunity for jobs related to senior citizen services and encourage further consideration of pursuing Otsego County as a retirement destination as an economic development strategy as mentioned in the County Master Plan.

2. 35% of the respondents are not satisfied with the conditions of local roads (Q 16). This is also a statewide issue that reflects an overall lack of adequate funding for road maintenance.

3. 26% of the respondents are not satisfied with the availability of high-speed Internet access. (Q4) This issue received many written comments and is geographically specific because high-speed access is not available in some portions of the county. 83% of the respondents have Internet access at home (Q68) but apparently not all have high-speed.

4. This final observation may require reading between the lines. Questions related to youth (Q1, 11, 21, and 60) each received more than 30% Don't Know responses. This could reflect the high number of respondents age 50 and over. However, quality of life has a strong focus on our future generations. All residents of Otsego County – regardless of age or if they have children or not – need to be more knowledgeable about our youth. Similarly, 30% of the respondents checked the box Don't Know when asked about the level of satisfaction of services and programs for senior citizens.

#### Possible Uses of the Survey Results

1. Strategic planning and decision making by local units of government and nonprofit organizations.
2. Serve as a baseline for future comparisons – to measure change over time.
3. Compare Otsego County with other counties and established benchmarks.
4. Identify our county's strengths, competitive advantages, and opportunities for improvement so we can stay focused on making Otsego County a desirable place to live and work.
5. Information and justification for grant writers.

#### Methodology

1. A 68-question survey was designed by the Advisory Committee based on the county vision statement and 12 broad categories of attributes that contribute to our county's overall quality of life (arts & culture, community & civic engagement, economy, education & lifelong learning, faith-based & spiritual, government & politics, health & wellness, housing, infrastructure, natural resources & environment, recreation & leisure, and safety & security).
2. The draft questionnaire was pilot-tested for concise meaning of each question, appropriate choice of answers, clarity of instructions, easy to follow format, and length of time needed to complete the survey. This step helped increase accuracy and reduce measurement error.
3. We chose to use a mail survey rather than other options such as telephone or web based. Our next task was to obtain a mailing list of individuals that was inclusive as possible, wouldn't allow a name to be included more than once, and was free or nearly free of charge. Our best option was the list of registered voters who voted in the 2008 presidential election.

4. Crossroads Industries used this list to conduct a scientific random sample. Approximately 10% (1167) of those who voted in the 2008 presidential election were selected to take part in our survey. FYI the number of registered voters in 2008: 19,484 and the number of residents who voted in the 2008 presidential election: 12,647. Voting age population in 2010: 18,629.

5. We received 571 completed, useable surveys. This is a 49% return rate which is high for a mail survey to a broad-based population covering general topics.

6. Now for some technical jargon. Even though the return rate (49%) is wonderful, it's the random sample that is statistically important. For our county's population size, 378 surveys are needed to make estimates with a sampling error of  $\pm 5\%$  at a 95% confidence level. For example, 65% of the respondents are very satisfied with the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables (Q7). Therefore, with 571 returns, we can be quite confident that between 60% and 70% of the people who voted in 2008 are also very satisfied. If we think the rest of the adult population (non-voters) is like our sample, we can make similar estimates for Otsego County adults in general.

7. Funding was provided by County of Otsego, Otsego County Community Foundation, and the Otsego County Townships Officers Association.

### For More Information

[www.otsego.org/qol](http://www.otsego.org/qol)

### Advisory Committee Members

- Jim Akans, Otsego County Historical Society
- Laurie Andrews, Otsego Human Service Network
- Erma Backenstose, Otsego County Commissioner
- Paul Beachnau, Gaylord Area Chamber of Commerce
- Dana Bensinger, Otsego County Community Foundation
- Charlie Bono, Gaylord Area Council for the Arts (GACA)
- John Burt, County of Otsego
- Brad Butcher, Bradley J. Butcher & Associates
- Mindy Czinder, Michigan Department of Humans Services
- Maureen Derenzy, Otsego County Library
- Ed Doss, Waters Business Group
- Rudi Edel, Retired Court Administrator/Magistrate
- Candi Edwards, Old Spud Warehouse
- Larry Edwards, Otsego Wildlife Legacy Society (OWLS)
- Bob Felt, Michigan Department of Transportation
- Paul Gunderson, Gaylord Herald Times
- John Jenkins, Mayor of Gaylord
- Marilyn Kaczanowski, Friendship Shelter
- Luann Mabarak, M-TEC
- Lorraine Manary, Otsego County United Way
- Kristy Mortham, HeadWaters Land Conservancy
- Bill O'Neill, Michigan Department of Natural Resource
- Christie Perdue, Otsego Memorial Hospital
- Bethany Prykucki, Michigan State University Extension
- Donna Quandt, Habitat For Humanity
- Jeff Ratcliffe, Otsego County Economic Alliance
- Diane Rekowski, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG)
- Mary Sanders, Hayes Township Supervisor
- Randy Stults, Otsego County Planning Commission
- Jane Sundmacher, District Health Department
- Mike Tarbutton, Otsego County Parks and Recreation
- Sandy Tarbutton, District Health Department
- Dona Wishart, Otsego County Commission on Aging
- Cheryl Wojtas, Gaylord Community Schools
- Alice Yeoman, Northern Homes Community Development Corporation

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