



WALWORTH COUNTY MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FACT SHEET NO. 3

November 2007

INTRODUCTION

As part of the County comprehensive planning process, a countywide public opinion survey was conducted in the summer of 2007 to identify perspectives on a range of issues related to the future of Walworth County. Included in the survey were questions about the overall character of the County and quality of life, population growth, preferred land uses, housing types and lot sizes, the relative importance of preserving farmland and environmentally sensitive lands, and the role of government in shaping future County directions, among other items. The survey was designed to provide County and local officials and interested parties with insight into attitudes and preferences of County residents and landowners, so that those factors may be taken into account in the preparation of the County comprehensive plan.

The survey was designed as a sample survey, conducted on a mail-out/mail-back basis. The survey questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 15 percent of all resident households and non-resident owners of residential property. About 19 percent of the sampled parties completed and returned the survey.

The survey methodology and findings are fully documented in a report entitled "Walworth County Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey" which can be accessed on the comprehensive planning website (see website address below). The following is a generalized summary of the key findings of the survey.

SUMMARY OF KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- Respondents are generally very satisfied with the quality of life in Walworth County. Among reasons for choosing to live in Walworth County, frequently cited factors include friendly communities, good place to raise a family, low crime rate, natural environment, pace of life, recreational opportunities, rural atmosphere, and suitable residence found.
 - Most respondents would prefer to have the County slow down with respect to its population growth, saying that development should be allowed but not encouraged, resulting in a preferred agricultural/residential future.
 - Strong support exists for the preservation and continued active use of farmland in Walworth County. That support prevails, though in somewhat lower percentages, even when farmland preservation is cast against private property owner decisions.
 - The continuation of family farming is as important to survey respondents as farmland, per se. Rural residential uses, however, are seen as compatible with the vision for agriculture.
 - Regarding prime farmland, support for the current minimum buildable lot size of 35 acres for A-1 zoned land substantially outweighs the support for a smaller lot size. Regarding A-2 zoned land, the same is true for maintaining the current minimum buildable lot size of 20 acres. Preferences vary considerably on the matter of lot size for rural land not considered to be prime farmland.
 - Considerably more respondents indicate that residential growth should take place in urban areas than in rural areas of Walworth County. Among growth supporters, nearly half would like to see rural residential growth. A majority of respondents indicate that the County should remain neutral regarding residential housing as it plans for future development.
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- There is greater support for all types of housing in urban areas than in rural areas. In both urban and rural areas, single-family housing is convincingly favored over all other types. However, there is considerably more support for duplexes, multi-family housing, and condominiums in urban areas.
 - Respondents do not seem to favor encouragement of commercial and industrial development, as almost twice as many respondents indicate that, while they believe commercial and industrial development should be allowed, they are opposed to having that development encouraged. Support exists for concentrating businesses, and for zoned commercial and industrial areas.
 - A neutral policy regarding retail development and tourism facilities is supported by a majority, while lesser percentages would either encourage or discourage such growth. Among commercial and industrial development supporters, a majority would encourage or allow both services and agricultural related businesses.
 - A neutral policy regarding industrial development is supported by a majority of respondents. Among survey respondents in general, and commercial and industrial development growth supporters in particular, light industry is greatly favored over heavy industry.
 - Natural resource features are very highly valued and their protection is strongly supported. Almost all respondents say that the natural environment positively influences their decision to live, locate, or invest in Walworth County. Three-fifths think the best use of land along rural stream corridors is to leave it in its natural state. Most say the County should actively pursue the protection of woodlands, wetlands, open spaces, park land, groundwater recharge areas, and endangered species habitat.
 - A substantial number of respondents feel Walworth County government should encourage environmental preservation compared to those who feel the County should remain neutral or discourage it. Regulation of land uses that would adversely impact groundwater is also strongly supported, as is protection of historic sites.
 - There is widespread agreement that local units of government have a responsibility to protect property owners and the community by regulating land use and that zoning regulations are beneficial. Support for zoning is lower, but still over twice as strong as opposition, when the matter is cast in terms of zoning vs. private landowner preferences. Stricter requirements and enforcement of existing ordinances—or maintaining them as is—all substantially outweigh a low level of support for relaxed requirements and enforcement.
 - Opinions regarding the impacts of growth in the County are mixed. Many respondents feel that growth has positively impacted the County in a number of ways (access to health care, availability of shopping, library system, sense of community) and negatively impacted the County in other ways (traffic volumes, cost of living, housing costs). When asked specifically and directly about the effect of population growth on the quality of life in Walworth County, more responded negatively than positively. However, when asked a related question in a broader context about the local impact of past growth on the overall quality of life, more responded positively than negatively.
 - Resident households and non-resident property owners exhibited basically the same responses to trends but to different degrees—as well as some differences—on various issues. However, the survey responses of these two groups were often in accord. Beyond the findings summarized above, Walworth County characteristics of low crime rate, friendly communities, suitable residences, good place to raise a family, and pace of life were very strongly and somewhat universally supported.

For additional details regarding the public opinion survey findings and other information on the comprehensive planning program, www.sewrpc.org/smartgrowth/walworthcounty/
