

Ottawa County Citizen Survey
April 2010

Presented by:

EPIC MRA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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METHODOLOGY

EPIC MRA administered interviews with 400 registered voters residing in Ottawa County, Michigan, from March 10 - 13, 2010. Respondents were selected utilizing an interval method of randomly selecting records of published residential telephone numbers. The sample was stratified so that every area of the county is represented in the sample according to its contribution to general election turnout. Interviews were terminated if the respondent indicated that he or she had not voted in at least one of the two most recent November general elections.

In interpreting survey results, all surveys are subject to error; that is, the results of the survey may differ from those that would have been obtained if the entire populations were interviewed. This “margin of error” quantifies the degree to which random sampling will differ from a survey of the entire population, taking into account, among other things, the disposition of individuals who do not complete the interview. Put another way, the opinions of those who are not randomly selected or who decline to be interviewed, are no more or less likely to be different – within the margin of error – than the opinions of those who complete an interview and are included in the sample. The size of sampling error depends on the total number of respondents to the particular question.

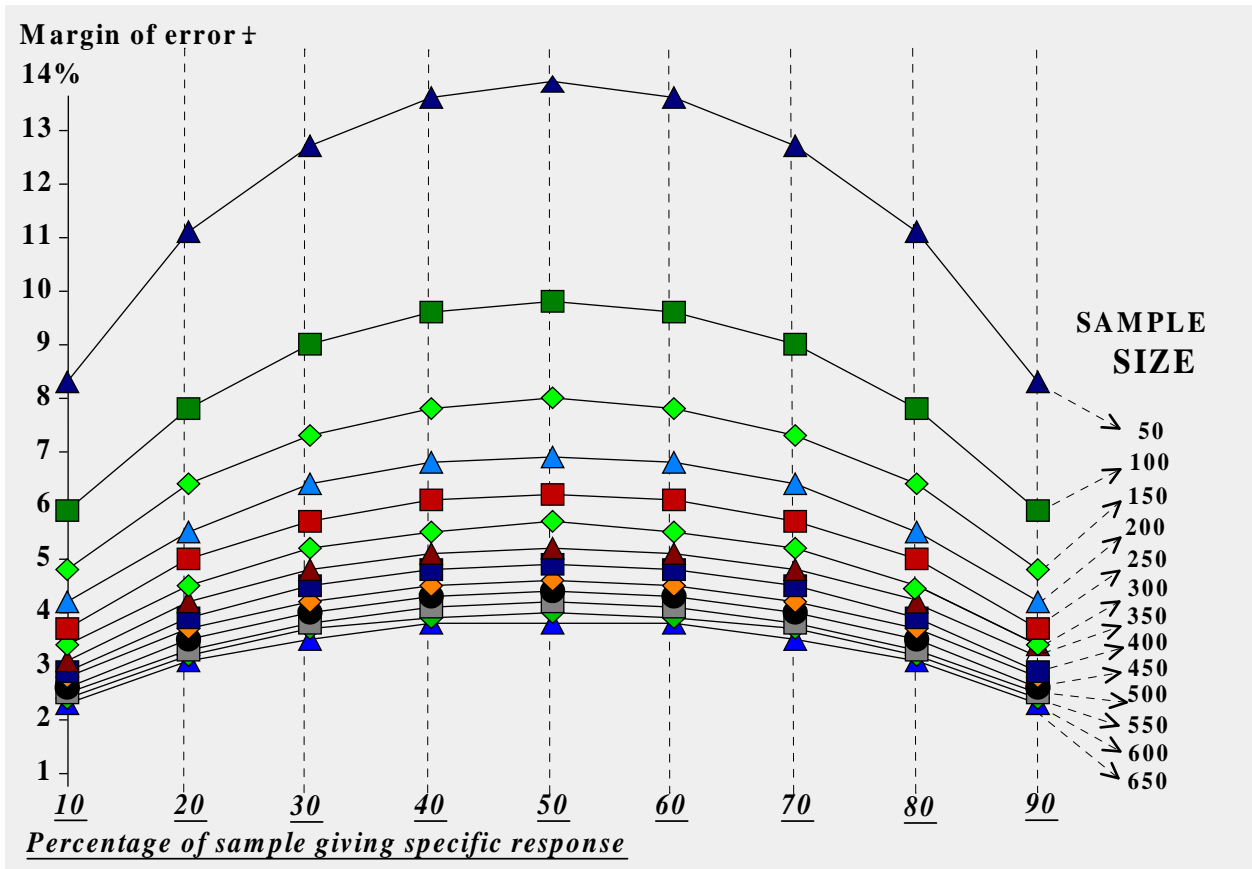
For example, 50 percent of all 400 respondents indicated they thought it was important “To maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees and other stakeholders” (Question # 07). As indicated in the chart below, this percentage would have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9 percent. This means that with repeated sampling, it is very likely (95 times out of every 100), the percentage for the entire population would fall between 45.1 percent and 54.9 percent, hence 50 percent \pm 4.9 percent. The table on the next page represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses based on sample size.

County geography was broken down into five regions. Region 1 included: Holland City and Township, Park Township, and Zeeland City and Township. Region 2 included: Georgetown Township, Hudsonville City, and Jamestown Township. Region 3 included: Ferrysburg City, Grand Haven City and Township, and Spring Lake Township. Region 4 included: Allendale Township, Blendon Township and Olive Township. And Region 5 included: Chester Township, Coopersville City, Crockery Township, Polkton Township, Tallmadge Township and Wright Township.

EPIC MRA SAMPLING ERROR BY PERCENTAGE (AT 95 IN 100 CONFIDENCE LEVEL)

Percentage of sample giving specific response

SAMPLE SIZE	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>90</u>
	% margin of error ±								
650	2.3	3.1	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.1	2.3
600	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4
550	2.5	3.3	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.8	3.3	2.5
500	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.0	3.5	2.6
450	2.8	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.2	3.7	2.8
400	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.5	3.9	2.9
350	3.1	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.2	5.1	4.8	4.2	3.1
300	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.2	4.5	3.4
250	3.7	5.0	5.7	6.1	6.2	6.1	5.7	5.0	3.7
200	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.5	4.2
150	4.8	6.4	7.3	7.8	8.0	7.8	7.3	6.4	4.8
100	5.9	7.8	9.0	9.6	9.8	9.6	9.0	7.8	5.9
50	8.3	11.1	12.7	13.6	13.9	13.6	12.7	11.1	8.3



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EPIC MRA was commissioned in 2010 by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners to measure public opinion about county government operations in a “customer satisfaction” survey. In addition, there was interest in measuring voter sentiment toward a possible ballot proposal to approve a 0.1 mill increase in property tax assessments to fund a “Purchase of Development Rights” program that would be designed to preserve existing farmland.

There was also an interest in testing voter support for the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners taking action to increase property taxes by one-half mill to make up for revenue sharing cuts imposed by State government, and also to test support for increasing taxes by 0.1 mill to fund the startup cost of implementing a less expensive defined contribution pension program instead of the current defined benefit plan.

Similar studies were conducted on behalf of the county in 2008 and in 2006, with most of the questions replicated in the 2010 survey. Throughout the following analysis, differences in outcomes between the 2010 and 2008 surveys are discussed, where appropriate.

-- Questionnaire Frame

An obvious starting point for gauging “customer satisfaction” is to inquire about attitudes toward county services in general and to determine if voters perceive, in a broad sense, whether or not things are going well in the county. In addition, measurements of what respondents believe is the biggest problem facing county government and questions about the perceptions of specific county agencies, departments, and programs are instructive. In order to accurately assess public opinion regarding possible tax options, it is necessary to probe attitudes regarding relative tax burden, and to investigate top-of-mind responses to general likes, dislikes, and preferences.

-- General Observations

Given the continued rate of high unemployment in Michigan, it is not surprising that uncertainty over the economy colors the responses to survey questions to a much greater extent in the current 2010 survey than was discovered in the 2008 or the 2006 surveys. This driving force behind voter opinion is manifest in several areas of the survey, beginning with the responses to an open-ended question about “Biggest Problem” and the responses in a question with prompted response options for biggest “Issue concern”.

In the survey of 2006, “Jobs” shared the largest portion of open-ended responses together with “Schools” – both at thirteen percent. This was followed closely by “Growth/Sprawl” at 12 percent, rounding out the very diverse top three response categories for a combined 38 percent of responses. In 2008, the top problem cited was “Unemployment”, cited by 27 percent, which is more than twice the percentage as the top problem of “Jobs” cited in 2006. In 2010, “Unemployment” was cited in an open ended response by 32 percent.

Likewise, when survey respondents were read a list of 10 issues and asked which one concerned them the most, “Providing economic development and jobs” was cited in 2010 by nearly half of all respondents, 45 percent, which is a significant increase from the 37 percent offering the same response in 2008, or the 32 percent expressing the same view in 2006.

In the current 2010 survey, “Education” and “Taxes” were the next highest areas of concern with 13 percent citing “Improving the quality of area schools” and 12 percent citing “Keeping local taxes and fees low”. In 2008, “Protecting the public from crime and drugs” was the second highest issue concern at 14 percent, followed by “Keeping local taxes and fees low” at 9 percent.

In 2006, issues surrounding growth dominated opinion following the top concern about the economy. The top secondary issue concern was “Controlling traffic congestion”, cited by 12 percent, with “Controlling unplanned development and sprawl” cited by 11 percent. Also in 2006, “Improving the quality of area schools” and “Keeping local taxes and fees low” were each cited by 10 percent as their top concern. In the current 2010 survey, “Controlling unplanned development and sprawl” was only cited by 5 percent, and “Controlling traffic congestion” was only mentioned by 1 percent.

The 2010 results clearly show a significant decline in the level of concern about taxes in Ottawa County. There was a nine point drop from 2008 (39 to 30 percent) in the overall percentage of respondents who said that “Taxes [are] too high” in return for what they received in county services. There was also a 10 point drop in the percentage of respondents who said that taxes were “Much too high” (19 to 9 percent). In 2006, only 27 percent overall said that taxes were too high, and only 6 percent said taxes were much too high.

Normally, a decline in the percentage saying that taxes are too high could mean that voters may be more receptive to tax increase proposals. However, voter response to other questions suggests that is not necessarily the case.

The lack of support among voters for higher taxes can be seen in the percentage of voters who chose one of two options that were offered for how the county could address a revenue shortfall. Respondents were presented with two statements – “Keeping taxes low even if it means a cut in services”, or “Maintaining services even if it means a tax increase”, and asked to select which of these two statements more closely reflects the way they feel. In the current 2010 survey, a 58 percent majority of Ottawa County voters said they would prefer a “Cut in services” rather than an “Increase in taxes”. This is the highest percentage opting for budget cuts of any of the three surveys conducted. In 2006, a narrow plurality of respondents (49 percent to 44 percent) opted for the “Cut in services” statement, and in 2008, a 53 percent majority selected the same option.

In the three biennial surveys taken to date, respondents were presented with the reality that state revenue sharing dollars coming back to the county were decreasing precipitously and they were also informed that a ½ mill increase would serve to replace the loss. In the 2006 and 2008 surveys the method for increasing property taxes was presented in two ways. The first would be through a popular vote at the ballot, and another, presented subsequent to the ballot method question, would be by the Board of Commissioners, unilaterally acting to increase the assessment against property via resolution. For the 2010 survey, the Board action method of increasing the millage for the purpose of replacing lost revenue sharing was kept but the ballot question avenue of increasing the millage for this purpose was not presented.

When the two methods of a prospective ballot proposal, and unilateral action by the Board of Commissioners to increase taxes without a public vote, were tested in the first two surveys, unilateral action by the Board was solidly opposed in 2006, while voters expressed a willingness to support a ballot proposal by a respectable majority. In 2008, voters were fairly evenly split on a ballot proposal, but still opposed to unilateral Board action, albeit by less of a majority than in 2006.

The 2010 survey, in which the ballot question option was not presented to respondents, there is far greater receptivity of the Board acting to raise taxes without a popular vote than in the previous years. Indeed, expressed opposition to such action just reaches the 50 percent mark. Whether or not this sentiment about relinquishing the decision about a tax increase to the Board is a function of an alternative ballot question option not being presented to respondents in the 2010 survey (voters tend to prefer having the opportunity to vote on tax issues over having

elected officials decide the question – especially if they are reminded of it in a telephone interview) is open to question. It is also possible that the result is a culmination of the trend over the last three surveys showing decreased vehemence against the Board acting unilaterally on the question, notwithstanding other data in the survey indicating voters expressing a preference for cuts in services over increases in taxes. The chart below illustrates the results from the past three surveys on this question:

Proposal to Replace Lost Revenue Sharing Dollars with a One-half mill Property Tax Increase			
	Increase Rate via Ballot Question		2010
	2006	2008	
Yes	55%	42%	
No	39%	38%	NOT ASKED
Undecided	6%	20%	
	Increase Rate via Board Resolution		
Support	26%	22%	42%
Oppose	66%	59%	50%
Undecided	8%	19%	8%

In a new question asked in the current 2010 survey, voters said that they would vote “No” on a ballot proposal which if approved, would establish a fund with a 0.1 mill tax increase to purchase the development rights of farmland and would cost the average homeowner \$5 per year in additional taxes. Respondents were informed that currently, private donations and grants are used to pay landowners to place deed restrictions on their property to preserve their use as farmland.

Notwithstanding the low cost of the proposed tax increase, a 50 percent bare majority, including 44 percent who would directly vote “No” and 6 percent who lean toward “No”, said they would vote to reject the proposal, 42 percent would vote “Yes”, and 8 percent were “Undecided”.

Survey respondents were also asked if they would favor or oppose a 0.1 mill property tax increase for up to 13 years to provide the short term start-up costs of \$8 million to convert the

current pension program for county employees from a defined benefit program to a defined contribution, 401K type of pension program, which could save the County a projected \$30 million over 30 years. Respondents were also informed that, as with other tax related proposals tested in the 2010 survey, the County Board of Commissioners could increase the tax rate without a public vote because Ottawa County does not currently levy the maximum amount allowed by law.

Voters favor the proposal by a 49 to 41 percent plurality, including 17 percent who very much favored the plan and 26 percent who very much opposed it. Another 8 percent were “Undecided” and 2 percent said it “Wouldn’t matter”. This is the only tax increase proposal that voters favored in the current 2010 survey.

On the whole, survey respondents say that Ottawa County is headed in the “Right direction”, but not by quite as high a percentage as expressed in the 2008 survey, and much less than in the 2006 survey. In 2010, a narrow majority of 52 to 30 percent said that Ottawa County was headed in the “Right direction”. This is down from the 2008 survey when a 54 to 36 percent majority offered the same opinion, and much lower than the 71 to 16 percent solid majority who offered the same opinion in 2006.

Two-thirds offered the same opinion about their city, township or village government. Specifically, a 67 percent majority said their city or township was headed in the right direction, with 22 percent saying they were, “Off on the wrong track”. These results are almost identical to the 2008 results when a 68 to 24 percent majority said their city, village or township was headed in the, “Right direction”. However, these results are much lower than the 76 percent majority who said their city, township or village government was headed in the right direction in 2006.

When current survey respondents were asked to offer a “Positive” or “Negative” rating for the job being done by their local, city, township or village in the delivery of basic services, the very high overall positive rating of 75 percent remained unchanged from the figures recorded in 2008, and indeed, the intensity of this sentiment was slightly higher in 2010. In 2006, an 85 to 14 percent majority offered a positive rating for the job their city, township or village did in providing basic services.

When making this same assessment in regard to the delivery of services by the county government, the overall positive ratings increased over the 2008 figure by three points to seventy-three percent, and getting a slightly better rating than in 2008 for the delivery of basic

services or handling county finances. Just as was the case for the local municipal governments, the overall 2010 positive rating for the county lagged behind those that which were issued in 2006, but at only 6 points lower, the county did not see as large a decline.

In 2008, the top reasons cited for offering a negative rating was “Unemployment”, cited by 11 percent, with “Wasteful spending” and, “No improvements being made” cited by 8 percent each. In 2010, the top reasons cited for offering a negative rating included “Roads are poor”, cited by 12 percent and, “High taxes”, cited by 8 percent. However, given the small numbers of respondents who issued a negative rating (19 percent of the total or, 76 individuals) not a great deal of stock should be placed in the specific categories of reasons for a negative rating.

When specifically asked to rate the job that Ottawa County does in managing county finances, a 55 to 20 percent majority offered a positive rating in the current 2010 survey, which is up by two points from the 2008 survey when a 53 to 16 percent majority offered the same rating. The rating is somewhat lower than the 60 to 15 percent margin offering a “Positive” rating in 2006, but nevertheless, a rating with which to be pleased.

When viewed in their totality, the three-survey data trend on the question of rating the delivery of basic municipal and county services has remained relatively static. It can be concluded therefore, that when respondents take the time to critically assess the job being done by their local governmental entities, they remain satisfied, despite increasing anxiety over economic conditions.

As in previous surveys, 2010 survey respondents were read a list of 15 activities and services in which county government involves itself, and asked for each one whether Ottawa County is doing “Too much”, in that area, if “Enough”, is being done or, if “More”, should be done. There was only one activity in 2010 where a majority of 50 percent or more said “More”, should be done. Exactly 50 percent said “More” should be done in, “Providing effective economic development” (19 percent said much more should be done). In 2008, a somewhat lower 42 percent said more should be done on “Economic development”, but in 2006, a 51 percent majority, about the same as in 2010, said “Economic development” needed more effort.

The second highest 2010 priority was, “Keeping county residents informed”, which was cited by 41 percent saying more should be done. This is unchanged from 2008 or 2006 when 42 percent in each year said more should be done.

In 2006, a 52 percent majority said more should be done to “Protect prime farmland and open space” from development. This activity declined as a priority in 2008 when 31 percent said more should be done and remained unchanged in 2010 when 32 percent said more effort was needed.

In 2010, an open-ended question asked what respondents “Like” the most about living in Ottawa County. The top response at 16 percent was “Close to Lake Michigan”, followed by “Rural – open space”, at 10 percent, with “Friendly people” and “Safe – low crime”, cited by 8 percent each, and “Great place to live” and “Small town feel” mentioned by 7 percent each.

In 2008, the responses were similar with “Proximity to Lake Michigan” cited by 19 percent, “Rural – open space,” cited by 10 percent, “Friendly people” cited by 9 percent, “Great place to live” cited by 7 percent, and “Quiet” mentioned by 6 percent. In 2006, the top response was “Green space” at 17 percent, “Close to Lake Michigan” at 15 percent and “Convenient location” mentioned by 14 percent.

The similarity of responses to this question over the course of three surveys bespeaks a deep-seated appreciation for the perceived semi-rural character of the county and its proximity to the shore. This appreciation notwithstanding, it is noted that, as discussed above, fewer respondents in the 2010 survey than in prior years cited a need for more county activity to “Protect farmland and open space”. Likewise, there is not a majority of support for even a very modest tax increase for the purchase of development rights.

In 2008 and again in 2010, survey respondents were asked about their personal safety. In 2010, a 78 percent majority said they felt, “Very safe” in their neighborhood, with another 22 percent saying they felt “Mostly safe”. In 2008, a 71 percent majority said, “Very safe” with 28 percent saying “Mostly safe”. This expressed sentiment is consistent with, “Police” being the top response to an open-ended question asking what service Ottawa County does the best job providing. It was cited by 18 percent in 2010, up 4 points from the 14 percent offering the same response in 2008. Other services cited in 2010 as the services that Ottawa County does the best job providing included, “Snow removal” (17 percent), and, “Parks and recreation” and “Road commission” (12 percent each).

While the “Road commission” was cited as a top service Ottawa County does the best job providing, a much higher percentage cited the “Road commission” as the service needing the most improvement (cited by 37 percent in 2010, up four points from the 33 percent offering the

same response in 2008). This conflicting result is, of course, a continuing source of frustration for Boards of Commissioners across the state but, absent a disproportionately large effort at public education on the subject, it is likely to remain the reality.

When asked which programs should be cut in the future to balance the county budget, 12 percent cited “Parks and recreation” programs in the 2010 survey, which is much lower than the percentage offering the same response in 2008 (28 percent). No other program was cited by double digits.

In another question first asked in 2010, respondents were asked whether they believe economic development efforts should be led by local jurisdictions for the primary benefit of local communities, or, if those efforts should take a more wide-ranging approach based on a regional basis. A solid 59 percent majority said economic development efforts should be based on a local focus in local communities, with 30 percent saying these efforts should be on a county or regional basis. This finding is consistent with other findings which tend to show a higher degree of confidence and appreciation for governmental units that are closer to “Home”.

In another question also only asked of 2010 respondents, over two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) said they were aware of the action by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners to ban the use of fertilizer containing phosphorus (43 percent very aware), with 31 percent saying they are unaware of the new law.

Between 2008 and 2010, there was a dramatic increase in the percentage of respondents who said they were aware of county activities. A 66 percent majority in 2010 said they were aware of Ottawa County activities (9 percent “Very aware”), with 34 percent saying they are “Unaware” of county activities. This represents a 12 point increase in awareness since 2008 when a 54 percent majority said they were aware of county activities, with 42 percent saying they are “Unaware” of county activities.

A bare 50 percent majority of 2010 survey respondents said they would be interested in attending citizen academy sessions to learn more about Ottawa County government, including 11 percent who said they were “Very” interested in attending such sessions. Forty-seven percent said they would not be interested, including 26 percent who said they would be “Very” uninterested in attending such sessions. In 2008, respondents were evenly split with 46 percent saying they were interested and 45 percent saying they were not interested in attending such sessions.

There was somewhat of a change in the stated source of information about the activities of Ottawa County government from 2008 to 2010. In 2010, “Television coverage” was cited as the top source by 15 percent, followed by the “Grand Rapids Press” at 14 percent, “Newsletters from the county” and the “Holland Sentinel” cited by 12 percent each. In 2008, the “Grand Rapids Press” was cited by 17 percent, followed by the “Holland Sentinel” at 13 percent, with “Television news coverage” cited by 12 percent.

In a new question in 2010, respondents were asked to name the two or three methods they would prefer to receive information about the county. “Newspapers” were mentioned as the top choice at 35 percent, followed by “Direct mail” and “The Internet” at 14 percent each, with “Television news reports” mentioned by 13 percent.

An 82 percent majority in 2010 reported logging on to the Internet at least once or twice a week (75 percent every day), which is unchanged from the 2008 response. There was a five point increase (70 to 75 percent) in the percentage who reported using the Internet every day.

While almost everyone logs on to the Internet, a 54 percent majority still reports not having visited the Ottawa County website. There was a five point increase in the percentage saying they do visit the site (40 to 45 percent). Among those who visit the site, nearly 8-in-10 respondents (77 percent) offered a positive rating for the quality of the website, which is unchanged from 2008. There was an increase however, in the percentage offering a negative rating for the quality of the site between 2008 and 2010 (11 to 20 percent).

In a new question asked of respondents in the 2010 survey, 30 percent said they use social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook or MySpace at least a few times a week, and among those who use such sites, more than 9-in-10 (92 percent) said they specifically use Facebook. If there is an interest in improving the “Quality of the website” figure above, then social network sites might be a means through which to address the issue.

Just under a third of respondents said that they or a member of their household had contacted a county office in the past year, which is only two points below the 32 percent of households reported in 2008, and six points lower than the 36 percent reporting contact with a county office in 2006; well within the study’s margin of error.

As in the past, a majority (53 percent) said they made a call and more than 8-in-10 report being either “Very” (60 percent) or at least “Somewhat” (23 percent) satisfied with the response to their contact. The top contact in 2010, cited by 17 percent, was the Sheriff’s Department,

followed by the Road Commission (11 percent), the Health Department and Human Services (8 percent each).

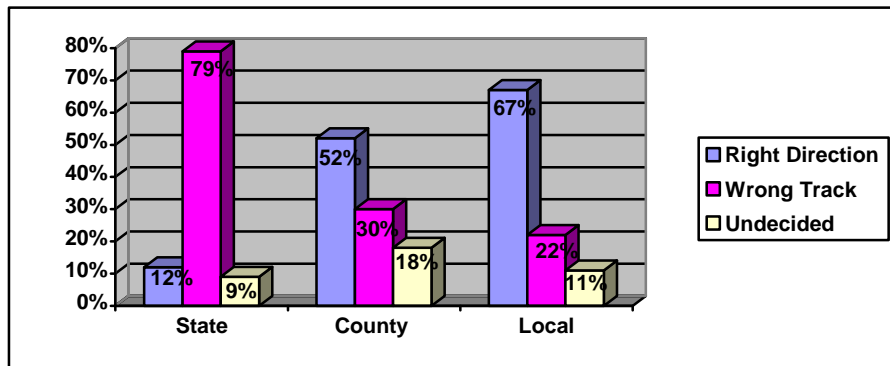
Finally, 2010 survey respondents were asked if they would use the Ottawa County website more often if they could access county services by way of the Internet instead of making a trip to the county office complex. A 72 percent majority said they would use the website more often (33 percent “A lot more” often) if they could access county services. However, nearly two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) said that they would NOT be willing to pay a minimal fee for the convenience of accessing county services by way of the Internet instead of driving to the county administrative complex.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RESULTS

-- Right Direction or Wrong Track?

In a question that is commonly used in national and statewide polls, this survey measured county residents' sentiment regarding their state, their county, and their local jurisdiction by asking: "Overall, do you think that [jurisdiction name] is headed in the right direction, or, do you think that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?" As for the state, Ottawa County residents' attitudes on this question mirror the statewide survey numbers in that an overwhelming majority, 79 percent believe things are "Off on the wrong track".

In keeping with similar surveys elsewhere in Michigan, this dismal attitude brightens considerably when respondents answer the same question about "Ottawa County" and moves even further into positive territory when asked about their local city or township. The chart below illustrates the results:



In 2008, a somewhat lower 70 percent said the State of Michigan was "Off on the wrong track". In 2008, a slightly higher 54 percent said the county was headed in the "Right direction", with 36 percent saying "Off on the wrong track". Also in 2008, a 67 percent majority said their local city or township was headed in the "Right direction". This shows that there was little change between 2008 and 2010, except in the view about the direction of the State.

When the same questions about the direction of the county and local city and township were posed in the 2006 survey, the Ottawa County "Right direction" numbers were considerably higher at 71 percent, and the local government figures numbers that were also much higher than in subsequent years, with 76 percent saying "Right direction" in that survey for their local government.

-- County's Strategic Goals

In a battery of questions that were first posed in 2008, respondents were informed that the Board of Commissioners had a strategic plan that included four major goals. These goals were recited to the respondents who were then asked to indicate if they believed the individual goal was a “Top priority”, “Important but not a top priority”, “Slightly important” or, “Not important at all”. As evidenced by the relative positioning of the several goals in the table below, each goal is viewed by county residents as being at least “Important”. Clearly, however, maintenance of the county’s strong financial position is viewed by county residents as the goal of highest importance. The ability of the Board to demonstrate that it continues to pursue this goal will be key in maintaining the generally high ratings it currently enjoys.

The table below shows the results for 2010 and 2008 on these stated goals.

Survey Year	County Goal	Top Priority	Important -- not Top Priority	TOTAL Top/Important
2010	Maintain and improve the strong financial position of the county.	48%	43%	91%
2008	<i>Maintain and improve the strong financial position of the county.</i>	60%	34%	94%
2010	Contribute to a healthy physical, economic and community environment.	35%	47%	82%
2008	<i>Contribute to a healthy physical, economic and community environment.</i>	54%	33%	87%
2010	Maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees and other stakeholders.	29%	50%	79%
2008	<i>Maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees and other stakeholders.</i>	45%	42%	87%
2010	Continually improve the county's organization and services.	27%	55%	82%
2008	<i>Continually improve the county's organization and services.</i>	48%	37%	85%

There was some slippage in the overall numbers from 2008 to 2010, ranging from eight points for “Maintaining communications” (87 to 79 percent); five points for “Contributing to a healthy physical, economic and community environment” (87 to 82 percent); three points for “Maintaining and improving the financial position of the county” (94 to 91 percent); and three points for “Continually improving the county’s organization and services” (85 to 82 percent).

The drop between 2008 and 2010 in the percentage saying they believe these goals should be a top priority was much more dramatic than the slippage in the overall percentages. It ranged from 21 points for “Continually improving the county’s organization and services” (48 to 27 percent); to 19 points for “Contributing to a healthy physical, economic and community environment” (54 to 35 percent); to 16 points for “Maintaining and enhancing communication” (45 to 29 percent); to 12 points for “Maintaining and improving the strong financial position of the county” (60 to 48 percent). What is suggested by the fact that the overall “Importance” figures changed very little between 2008 and 2010, while the “Top priority” portion of those overall numbers has dropped significantly, is a county constituency that recognizes the value of the stated goals but has far greater concerns about immediate economic prospects.

-- Biggest “Top of Mind” Problem

Respondents were next asked in an open-ended question to identify the single biggest problem facing the residents of their community that their local or county government must address. In 2010, “Unemployment” was the top problem, cited at 32 percent, which is up by five points from 2008 when 27 percent cited the same issue. “Roads” was next at 10 percent, up three points from the 2008 survey, and taxes was third at 8 percent, unchanged from 2008. In all, the relative positions of the top concerns have not changed, although in keeping with other findings, the intensity of feeling for the top few concerns has increased.

-- Biggest “Prompted” Problem

In a test similar to the top-of-mind “Biggest problem” question, respondents were read a list of ten “. . . problems and issues residents of Ottawa County say they are concerned about.” They were then asked to identify the single biggest issue that personally concerned them the most. The top issue concern, at 45 percent in 2010, was “Providing economic development and jobs.” Concern about the issue has increased by eight points since 2008, from 37 to 45 percent. This was the single most important issue identified, which is consistent with data coming from a series of statewide surveys.

Cited as the second concern, mentioned by 13 percent, was “Improving the quality of area schools”. This issue more than doubled as a concern since 2008 when just 6 percent cited it. Again, this is consistent with statewide data over time and illustrates the seemingly incongruous result throughout the survey that is manifest in the 2010 study much more than in the past.

The third top concern, cited by 12 percent, was “Keeping local taxes and fees low.” Taxes increased as a concern since 2008 by three percent (9 to 12 percent).

“Maintaining and improving area roads” was next at 8 percent (up a point since 2008).

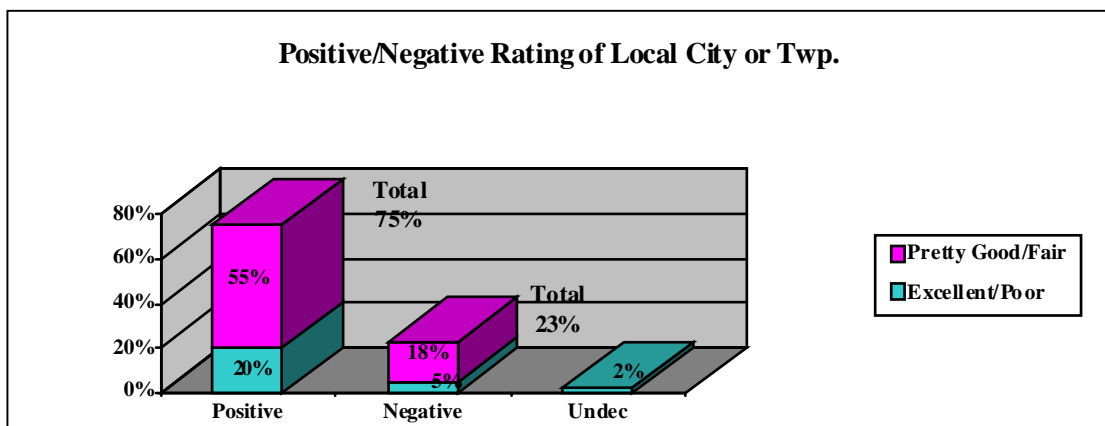
An issue that dropped as a concern from 2008 to 2010 is “Protecting the public from crime and drugs”. It was cited by 14 percent in 2008, but in 2010, it was only mentioned by 6 percent.

The table below illustrates the survey responses in both 2010 and 2008:

2010 Ranking		2008 Ranking
45%	Providing economic development and jobs	37% (1)
13%	Improving the quality of area schools	6% (5)
12%	Keeping local taxes and fees low	9% (3)
8%	Maintaining and improving area roads	7% (4)
6%	Protecting the public from crime and drugs	14% (2)
5%	Controlling unplanned development and sprawl	5% (7)
3%	Preserving prime farmland and open space	4% (8)
3%	Protecting the environment in the area	6% (6)
3%	Providing quality basic city, township or county services	3% (9)
1%	Controlling traffic congestion	3% (10)
---	More than one [ASK] "But which problem concerns you most?"	--
1%	Undecided	3%

-- Rate your Local (City/Township/Village) Government

In 2010, a 75 percent majority offered a “Positive” rating for the job being done by their local city or township government. This rating is unchanged from the results in 2008. However, there was a four point increase in the percentage offering an “Excellent” rating from 2008 to 2010 (16 to 20 percent). Also, the percentage offering an overall “Negative” rating increased by four points as well, going from 19 to 23 percent; demonstrating a solidifying of opinion on both ends of the spectrum.



Subgroups issuing a “Negative” rating in percentages significantly higher than the survey average of 23 percent included:

-- Reasons for the rating

As a follow up to the Positive/Negative rating question, respondents were asked to give their reason for issuing the rating that they did. The following table illustrates the reasons why respondents offered a positive rating, compared to the reasons stated in 2008:

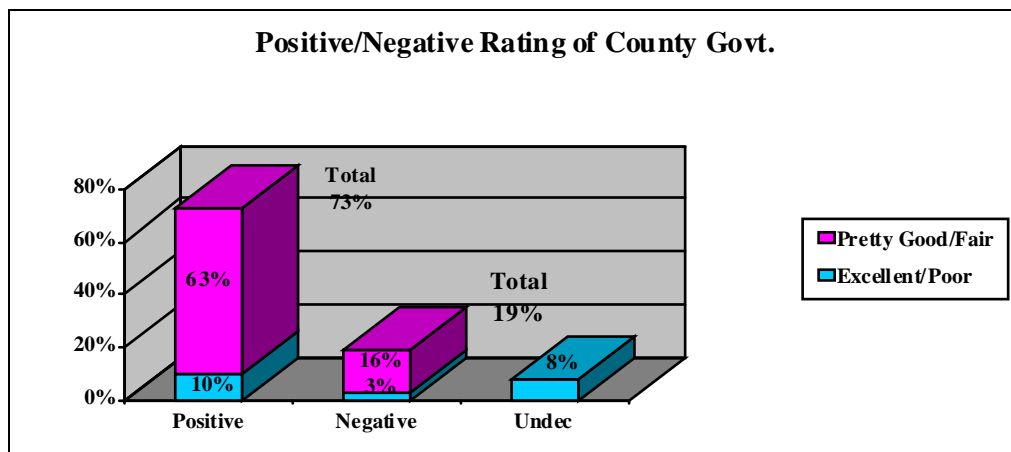
<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
13%	6%	Fiscally Responsible	3%	---	Snow Removal Timely
11%	16%	Good Job – Overall	2%	4%	Road Maintenance
9%	8%	Quality of Services	2%	---	Well Organized
8%	---	Citizens Best Interests in Mind	1%	4%	Economic Development
6%	14%	Have No Problems	1%	3%	Taxes are Reasonable
5%	7%	Communication	1%	1%	Control Growth - Sprawl
4%	7%	Police and Fire Dept.	1%	1%	Parks and Rec Programs
4%	2%	High Quality of Life	1%	---	Good Schools
4%	2%	They Try to Improve	1%	---	Good Water Quality
3%	4%	Active – Hard Working	1%	---	Honest – Trustworthy
3%	1%	Fast Response Time	---	2%	Beautiful City
3%	---	Infrastructure is Maintained	2%	1%	Other
3%	---	Our Needs are Met	8%	16%	Undecided/Refused

The following table illustrates the reasons why respondents offered a negative rating, compared to the reasons stated in 2008:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
13%	6%	Communication	1%	---	Drain Issues
11%	3%	Wasteful Spending	1%	---	Lack Cooperation
8%	8%	No Citizen Interests in Mind	1%	---	Lack of Senior Programs
8%	4%	Unemployment	1%	---	Public Assistance Programs
4%	12%	No Improvements Being Made	1%	---	No Public Transportation
4%	6%	Don't Do Anything - Lazy	1%	---	Poor Planning
4%	4%	Roads are Poor	1%	---	Services Hard to Get
3%	5%	High Taxes	1%	---	Snow Removal Slow
3%	---	Cut Needed Services	1%	---	They are Inconsistent
3%	---	The Economy	---	10%	Just Negative
2%	5%	All Politics	---	4%	Poor Schools
2%	---	Not Trustworthy	---	3%	Poor Planning
2%	---	Poor City Maintenance	---	3%	Underfunded
2%	---	Slow to Act	---	2%	Disagree with Them
2%	---	The Family Fair Ordeal	---	2%	Need More Services
2%	---	Zoning Issues	---	1%	Health Services
1%	3%	Need More Police	5%	---	Other
1%	2%	Focus on Bigger Cities	10%	17%	Undecided/Refused
1%	---	Disparity in Services Received			

-- Rate your County Government

In 2010, the survey showed a slight improvement in the rating of the job being done by Ottawa County providing basic services. A 73 percent majority offered a positive rating, including 10 percent offering an excellent rating, while 19 percent offered a negative rating, including only 3 percent who offered a poor rating. The “Positive” rating is up 3 points from the 70 percent offering in 2008, and down 1 point from the 20 percent offering a negative rating. Both 2010 and 2008 are down significantly from the 79 percent offering a positive rating in 2006. The chart graph below illustrates the results for 2010:



-- Reasons for the County Rating

The following table illustrates the reasons why respondents offered a positive rating for the job done by Ottawa County, compared to the reasons offered in 2008:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
15%	17%	Good Job – Overall	1%	2%	High Quality of Life
10%	6%	Police and Fire Dept.	1%	1%	Honest – Trustworthy
10%	5%	Quality of Services	1%	---	Care About Senior Citizens
8%	21%	Have No Problems	1%	---	Infrastructure is Maintained
7%	2%	Roads are Good	1%	---	Well Organized
6%	3%	Fiscally Responsible	---	1%	Active – Hard Working
5%	---	Snow Removal Timely	---	1%	Beautiful City
4%	2%	They Try to Improve	---	1%	Community Pride
3%	2%	Communication	---	1%	Health Care
3%	2%	Fast Response Time	---	1%	Taxes are Reasonable
3%	---	Citizens Best Interests in Mind	3%	1%	Other
2%	7%	Economic Development	14%	23%	Undecided/Refused
2%	1%	Parks and Rec Programs			

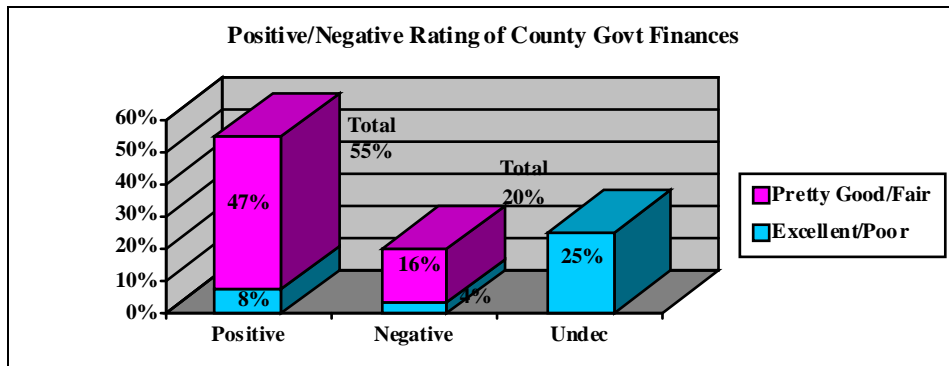
Among the 19 percent of respondents who issued a “Negative” job rating for the county, the following table illustrates the reasons offered in 2010 compared to 2008 – note that in both years, it is evident from the distribution of responses that there is no central focus of discontent.

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
12%	7%	Roads are Poor	1%	---	County DHS is Poor
8%	3%	High Taxes	1%	---	Lack Cooperation
7%	11%	Unemployment	1%	---	Never See the Sheriff Patrol
7%	4%	No Citizen Interests in Mind	1%	---	Not Trustworthy
7%	---	Snow Removal Slow	1%	---	Poor Public Relations
5%	8%	Wasteful Spending	1%	---	Uncontrolled Growth – Sprawl
5%	5%	Communication	1%	---	Wage Cuts for Co. Employees
5%	2%	Don't Do Anything - Lazy	---	7%	Just Negative
4%	8%	No Improvements Being Made	---	4%	Need More Services
4%	---	Cut Needed Services	---	3%	Bad Water System
3%	1%	All Politics	---	3%	Foreclosures
3%	1%	Lack of County Health Care	---	3%	Underfunded
3%	---	Focus on Bigger Cities	---	2%	Need More Police
3%	---	Public Assistance Programs	---	1%	Poor Planning
3%	---	Police are Rude	3%	---	Other
1%	2%	The Economy	10%	25%	Undecided/Refused

-- Rate the County’s Handling of Finances

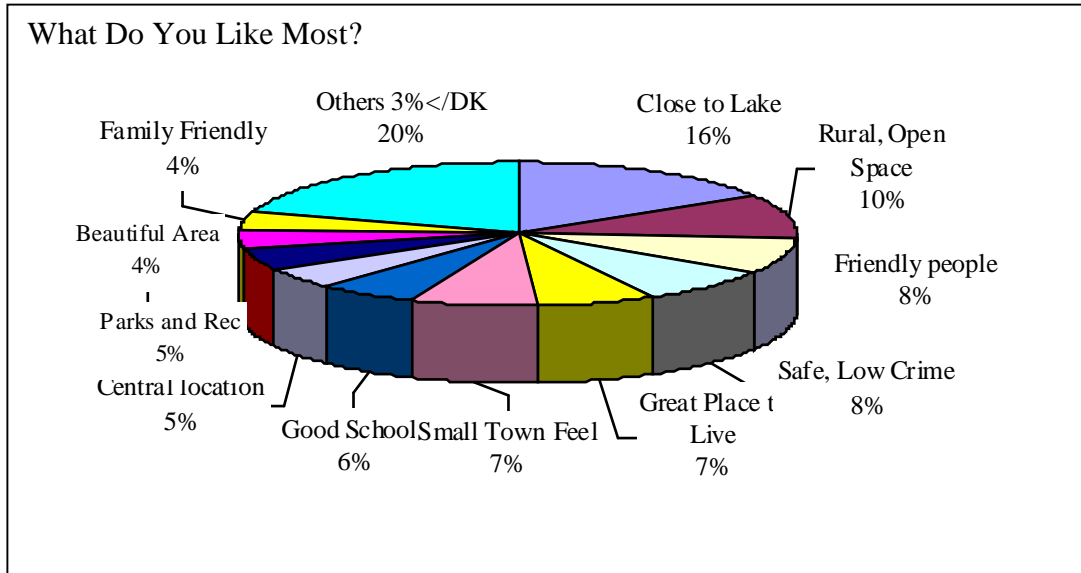
Respondents were asked to offer a “Positive” or “Negative” rating for the job Ottawa County does in managing county finances. In 2010, this rating improved slightly by two points from 2008, increasing from a 53 percent positive rating to 55 percent, but also increasing from 16 percent to 20 percent on the negative side.

In 2006, a significantly higher 60 percent offered a positive rating, meaning that the positive rating in 2008 slipped by 7 points, but then improved by 2 points in 2010 to the 55 to 20 percent positive rating, as illustrated in the following chart:



-- What is liked the most about living in Ottawa County

In an open-ended question in 2010, respondents were asked what they liked the most about living in Ottawa County. Unlike most other open-ended questions, “Undecided” only made two percent, which is much lower than the 8 percent registered in 2008. The pie chart below, illustrates the major categories of responses in 2010.

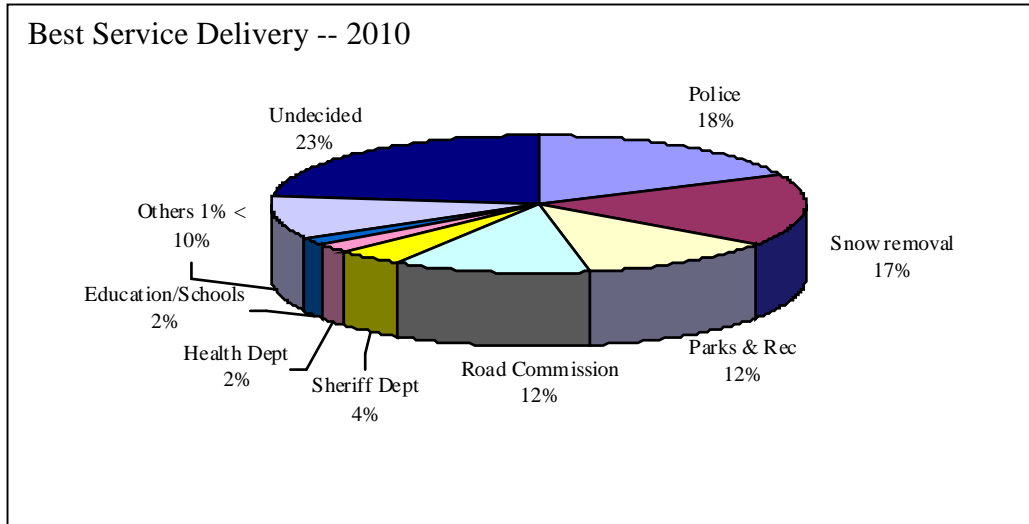


The 2008 survey had “Close to the Lake” as the top response at 19 percent, followed by “Rural – open space” at 10 percent, “Friendly people” at 9 percent, with “Great place to live” at 7 percent. These results are virtually unchanged from those of the most recent survey in 2008.

-- Ottawa County does the best job at providing . . . ?

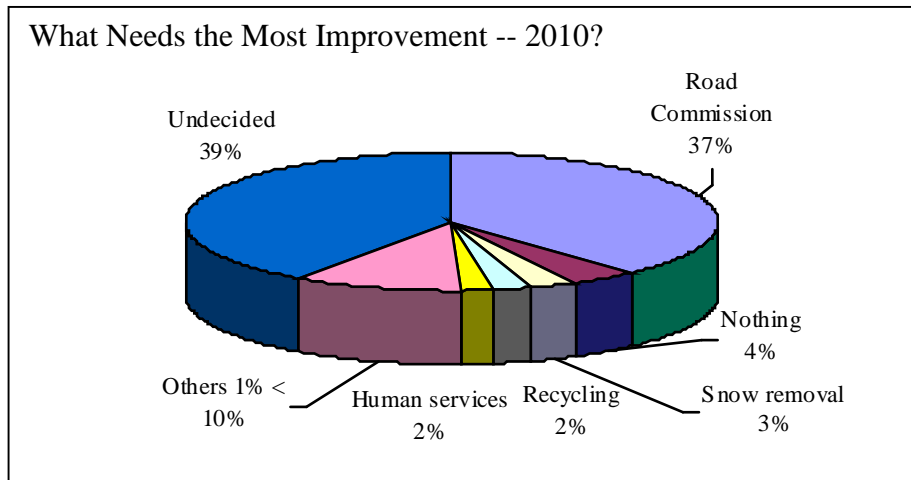
Respondents were next asked to name which specific county service they believed the county does the best job in delivering. Just under a quarter of all respondents were unable to name a specific service, which is down 7 points from the 30 percent undecided response in 2008, and 34 percent in 2006. Each survey shows fewer people who are unable to name a service that they feel the County does the best job providing.

“Police” at 18 percent (up 4 points since 2008), “Snow removal” at 17 percent (up 11 points), “Parks and recreation” at 12 percent (down 1 point), and “Road commission” were the top services that residents say Ottawa County does the best job providing. The chart on the next page shows the distribution of services with the percentages citing each service:



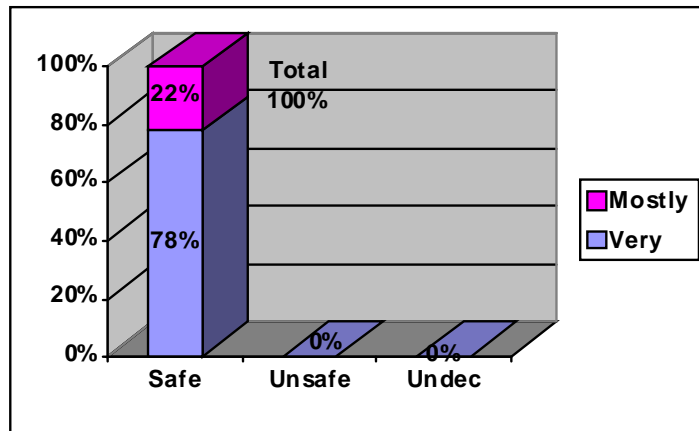
-- What County Service Needs the Most Improvement?

Four-in-ten respondents (39 percent) were unable to identify a single specific service area in need of improvement and said they were “Undecided,” which is up 7 points from 2008 (32 percent). The “Road commission” was cited as the county service most in need of improvement at 37 percent, which is up 4 points from the 33 percent offering the same response in 2008. Next was “Nothing” at 4 percent (down 4 points from 2008), followed by “Snow removal” at 3 percent, “Others” at 3 percent, and “Recycling” at 2 percent. There were 10 other services mentioned by 1 percent. The chart below illustrates the responses:



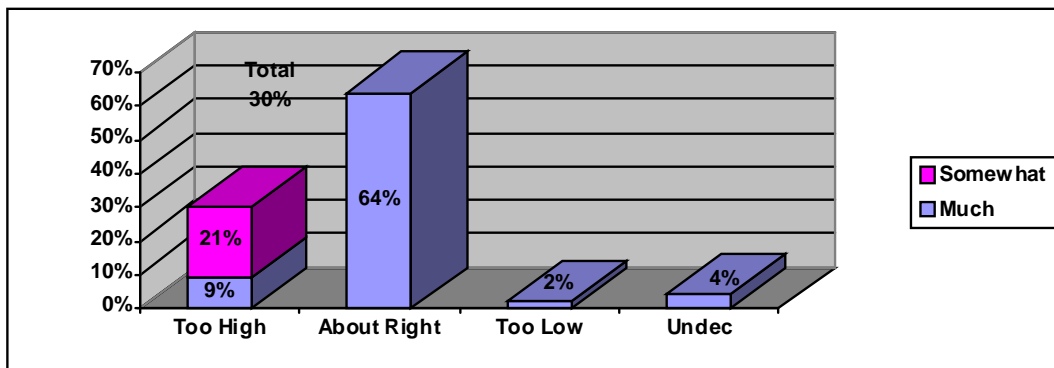
-- Perception of Personal Safety

In a new question for 2008 and repeated in 2010, respondents were asked, “How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?”. In the 2010 survey, 100 percent said they felt safe, including 78 percent who said they felt “Very safe,” unchanged from the 99 percent who said they felt safe in 2008, with a somewhat lower 71 percent saying they felt “Very safe”. This response in two years of surveys should be a source of great pride for those in law enforcement and for the Board. The chart below illustrates the 2010 results:



-- Perception of tax burden

A good harbinger for the chances of passing a ballot proposal to raise property taxes lies in a community’s perception of its current tax burden. Respondents were asked if county property taxes and other fees were “Too high, Too low, or About right”, given the amount and quality of county government services they receive in return. If respondents said “Too high”, a follow-up question asked them if the taxes are “Much” or “Somewhat” too high. The results were as follows:



The 2010 figures shown above are much closer to the results in the 2006 survey than those in 2008. A 64 percent majority said that taxes and fees are “About right,” compared to 67 percent in 2006 and a much lower 55 percent in 2008. Now, 30 percent of respondents said that taxes and fees were “Too high,” including only 9 percent who said “Much too high.” In 2008, 39 percent overall said that taxes and fees were “Too high,” including 19 percent who said taxes were “much too high.”

As an overall figure, a 30 percent “Too high” response is certainly not as problematic as the 39 percent response in 2008 to the same question. At the time of the 39 percent response, many governmental entities were showing higher than usual “Too high” reactions to this critical question about the perception of the level of tax burden. This persistent finding then correlated very strongly with the sentiments expressed about the economy as a top concern, and while the “Economy and jobs” is an even stronger concern now than in 2008, there is a noticeable decline in the level of concern about taxes and fees. This is likely attributable to the growing percentage of the electorate in Michigan and in many local communities reporting that they and/or their families have felt the impact of state and local budget cuts in the form of lost services and important programs. In response, voters statewide, as well as in many local communities, are indicating that they are more receptive to higher taxes and fees as a solution to budget deficits in general and also for specific uses even though responses to other questions in the current survey suggest somewhat mixed readings on the questions of higher taxes.

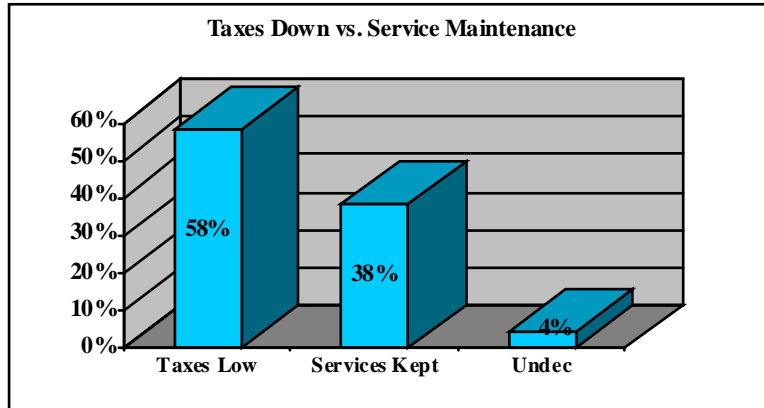
-- Taxes vs. Service Levels

Another indicator of the environment in which governments must discharge their obligations, is the answer to a hypothetical question pitting maintenance of current services against an increase in taxes. Respondents were presented with two statements which offered two possible approaches by county government in the face of the current budget situation, and were asked to select which of the two came closest to their view:

“Keep taxes and fees as low as possible – even if this means a cut in services; or,
Maintain existing services – even if this means a tax increase.”

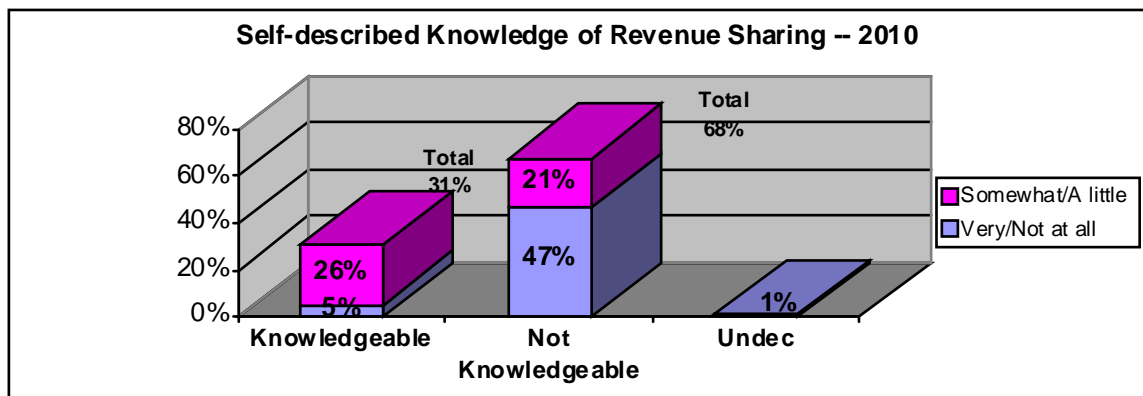
In 2010, a 58 percent solid majority said that they would opt to “Keep taxes and fees low,” with 38 percent saying they would rather “Maintain existing services” statement. This represents a 5 point increase from the 53 percent who preferred keeping taxes and fees low in 2008, and a 9 point increase in the percentage choosing the same option in 2006. Ottawa County survey

respondents have consistently increased in the percentage saying as a general rule that they would rather see Ottawa County take the approach of “Keeping taxes low” instead of “Maintaining existing services.” This is the preference of county voters, notwithstanding an indication in the previous question about tax burden which shows that a lower percentage of Ottawa County voters say that taxes are “Too high.”



-- Knowledge of Revenue Sharing – Contact with Legislator

In a new question for 2008, which was repeated in 2010, respondents were asked how knowledgeable they considered themselves to be about state revenue sharing and its impact on Ottawa County. The respondents were offered options of “Very”, “Somewhat”, “Only a little” or “Not at all” knowledgeable about revenue sharing. In the 2010 survey, 31 percent considered themselves at least somewhat knowledgeable, with only five percent saying they are “Very knowledgeable”. This represents an 8 point increase in the percentage of respondents between 2008 and 2010 who describe themselves as knowledgeable overall. The chart below clearly shows that more can be done to communicate with voters about cuts in revenue sharing and how those cuts have impacted Ottawa County government and its ability to maintain services.



To enable communication efforts to reach residents who say they are the least knowledgeable about revenue sharing, the following demographic groups indicated by the lowest percentages (below the county-wide results of 31 percent) that they considered themselves at least somewhat knowledgeable about revenue sharing:

- 27% *says taxes are too high;*
has children;
women age 50 and over;
college educated women;
young college educated;
- 26% *all women;*
votes in elections half the time;
incomes of \$25K to \$50K;
under age 50;
- 25% *Region 2;*
lived in Ottawa County 16 to 25 years;
men and women without college;
- 24% *younger and older voters without college;*
- 22% *taxes top concern;*
schools top concern;
women under age 50;
- 21% *high school or less education;*
under \$25K income;
- 9% *seldom/never votes in elections.*

Consistent with this lack of knowledge about revenue sharing, a follow-up question was asked of survey respondents - if they had contacted their state legislator about the topic. An 88 percent solid majority in 2010 respondents said no, which is unchanged from the 89 percent offering the same response in 2008.

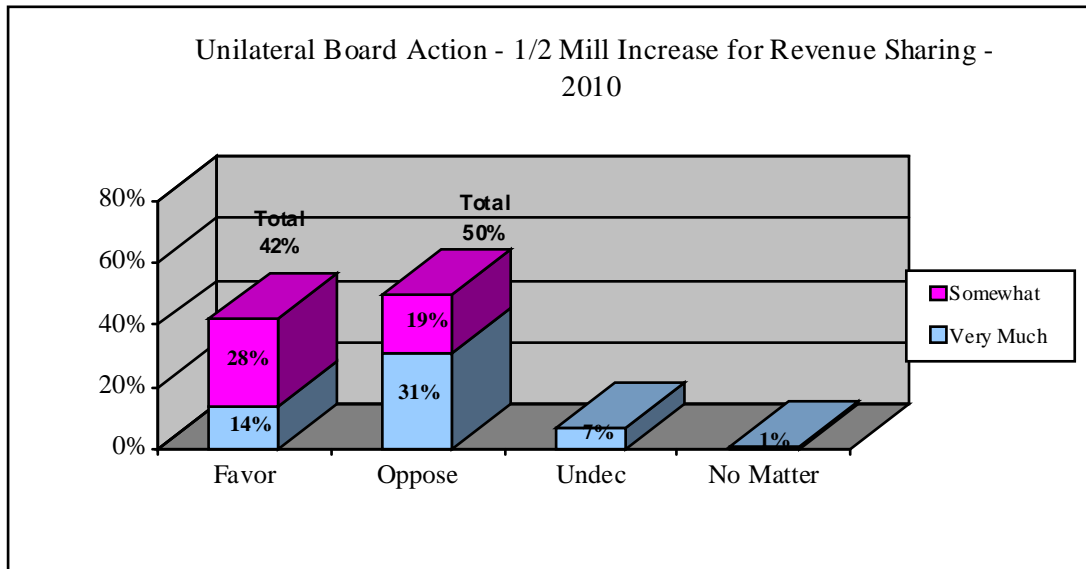
-- Board action to recoup revenue sharing funding lost from the state

In 2010, survey respondents were asked if they favor or oppose action to recoup lost revenue funds by increasing property taxes in Ottawa County. Respondents were asked:

“If the State of Michigan does NOT fully fund revenue sharing in 2011, the County will face a revenue cut of over \$4.7 million. Some people have suggested that local governments replace this lost state money through a local tax. In Ottawa County, replacing \$4.7 million in lost state revenue would require a ½ mill increase in the property tax assessment. For every \$100,000 in market value of a home and \$50,000 in taxable value, a one half mill property tax increase would cost homeowners in Ottawa County \$25 per year in additional property taxes. Because Ottawa County does not currently levy the maximum amount of property tax allowed under law, it is possible that the Board of Commissioners could act on their own and, at one of their regular meetings, pass a resolution to increase the property tax levy by ½ mill to make up for the lost state revenue sharing dollars. If the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners acted to increase property tax assessments by ½ mill to make up for lost revenue sharing money from the state, would you favor or oppose such action?”

The response was:

- 14% Very Much Favor
- 42% TOTAL FAVOR**
- 50% TOTAL OPPOSE**
- 31% Very Much Oppose
- 1% Wouldn't Matter (**volunteered**)
- 7% Undecided/Don't know/Refused



Key demographic groups indicating by the highest percentages (significantly above the county-wide 42 percent) that they **FAVOR** the proposal included:

- 71% *Maintain services;*
- 56% *concerned about roads;*
- 54% *incomes of \$75K to \$100K;*
concerned about schools;
- 53% *older college educated;*
- 52% *lived in Ottawa County Ottawa County 11 to 15 years;*
- 51% *headed in right direction;*
taxes about right;
lives in urban area;
college educated men;
- 50% *positive rating on county finances;*
other races;
men age 50 and over;
- 49% *age 50 to 55 (49%);*
- 48% *Very/Somewhat knowledgeable about revenue sharing;*
lived in Ottawa County 6 to 10 years;
college educated;
incomes of \$50K to \$75K;
- 47% *Region 1;*
lived in Ottawa County 16 to 25 years;
age 56 to 64;
incomes over \$100K;

Key demographic groups indicating by the highest percentages (significantly above the county-wide 50 percent) that they **OPPOSE** the proposal included:

- 69% *Taxes too high;*
wants to keep taxes low;
- 68% *negative rating;*
- 65% *age 36 to 40;*
- 62% *incomes under \$25K;*
younger without college;
- 60% *Region 4;*
- 59% *Region 5;*
undecided about direction of Ottawa County;
- 58% *men under age 50;*
- 57% *Ottawa County headed in wrong direction;*
negative job rating on county services;
high school or less education;
incomes of \$25K to \$50K;
under age 50;
men without college;
- 56% *those who feel mostly safe;*
age 41 to 49;
women under age 50.

In 2008, voters were first asked about a possible ballot proposal where voters would be able to vote on the question of a ½ mill increase to recoup revenue sharing funds. A 42 percent plurality said they would vote “No” on a ½ mill property tax increase, 38 percent said they would vote “Yes,” and 20 percent were “Undecided” of how they would vote. These results were much different than the results in 2006 when a 55 percent majority said they would vote “Yes,” 39 percent said they would vote “No,” and 6 percent were “Undecided”. Voters were much more receptive to a tax increase at the ballot in 2006 than in 2008, when voters became much more sensitive to their tax burden.

In 2006 and 2008, survey respondents were also informed that because the county does not currently levy the maximum amount of property taxes allowed by law, the Board could act unilaterally to increase assessments against property in order to make up for any shortfall in state aid. They were then asked if they would favor or oppose such Board action without putting the question to a popular vote.

In both those tests, solid majorities opposed unilateral Board action to raise taxes. In 2008, a 59 percent majority opposed Board action, including 46 percent who strongly opposed it, and in 2006, a 66 percent majority opposed Board action including 46 percent who strongly opposed such action.

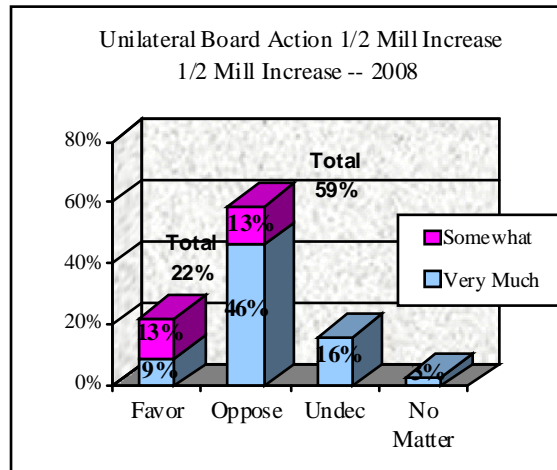
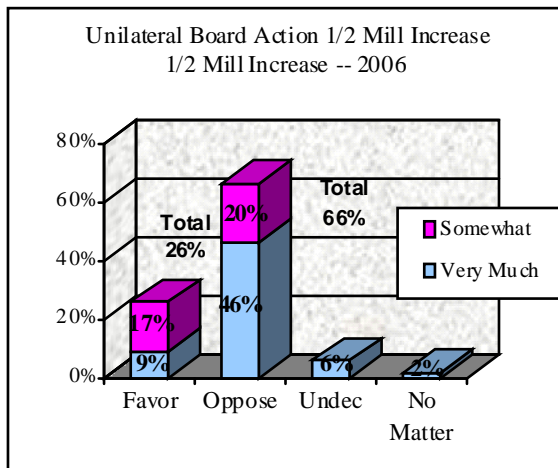
Why was there such a difference in opinion from 2006 and 2008 when solid majorities opposed Board action to raise taxes (when the question followed voter response to a question about a prospective ballot proposal), compared to a bare majority of 50 to 42 percent who opposed unilateral Board action when there was no previous question about voter approval of a ballot proposal? The sentiment at the time regarding taxes and the economy certainly influenced opinion on tax questions, but another influence could well have been the mere fact that voters were being asked their opinion about Board action after being asked about a ballot proposal. While it is always better to measure voter opinion about ballot proposals before testing public opinion about Board action, because it could bias and potentially inflate the results of a ballot proposal if the ballot proposal was asked second, it is logical to assume that the reverse can also be true.

EPIC MRA surveys for other clients have shown that voters generally prefer having the opportunity to vote on issues themselves, especially when it involves tax increases. Therefore, it is probably safe to assume that when voters are asked about actions taken by their elected

representatives when offered the option of making the decision themselves, they will show more opposition to action by their government just because they would prefer to make the decision themselves, at the polls.

When the question about Board action is asked in the absence of any questions about voter response to a ballot proposal, as was the case in the current 2010 survey, voter response can provide a more accurate measurement on the substance of the question tested. Hence, voters were much more receptive and supportive of Board action when tested by itself in 2010 than when coupled with ballot proposals in 2008 and in 2006.

In the future, it may make sense to separately test ballot proposed action compared to a Board decision when the action would be identical by using a split sample test. Half of the sample would be asked about a ballot proposal and the other half of the sample would be asked about support or opposition to unilateral Board action. The following charts illustrate the comparative voter sentiment on the question concerning Board action between 2006 and 2008.

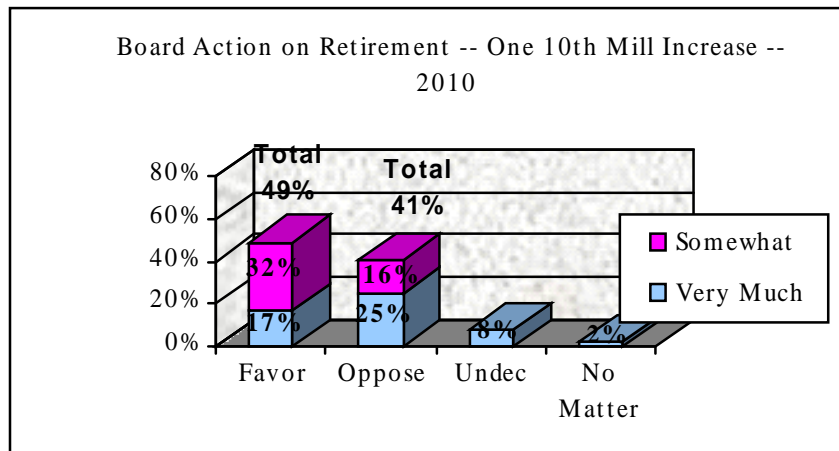


-- Defined Benefit to Defined Contribution Retirement Plan -- Plurality Supports

For the first time in an Ottawa County survey, 2010 survey respondents were asked the following question about a proposed action by the Board to change the county employee retirement system from a defined benefit program to a defined contribution system:

“Currently, county employees are in what is known as a defined benefit pension program. A recent analysis indicated that the County could save a projected \$30 million over the next 30 years if the pension program for all new hires was switched to a defined contribution, 401k –type of pension program. However, to put the money-saving defined contribution plan into effect for new hires, there would be short term start-up expenses of approximately \$8,000,000. In Ottawa County, raising \$8,000,000 would require a 0.1 mill increase in the property tax assessment for up to thirteen years. For every \$100,000 in market value of a home and \$50,000 in taxable value, a one-tenth of a mill property tax increase would cost homeowners in Ottawa County \$5 per year in additional property taxes. Because Ottawa County does not currently levy the maximum amount of property tax allowed under law, it is possible that the Board of Commissioners could act on their own and, at one of their regular meetings, pass a resolution to increase the property tax levy by one tenth of a mill to pay for the cost of switching to a different retirement system for new employees. If the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners acted to increase property taxes by one-tenth of one mill to realize a long-term savings by switching to a new pension program for new hires, would you favor or oppose such action?”

- 17% Very Much Favor
- 32% Somewhat Favor
- 49% TOTAL FAVOR**
- 41% TOTAL OPPOSE**
- 16% Somewhat Oppose
- 25% Very Much Oppose
- 2% Wouldn't Matter (volunteered)
- 8% Undecided/Don't know/Refused



While a 49 to 41 percent plurality overall favors the proposal, opposition is more intense than support, with 25 percent saying they strongly oppose the proposal with 17 percent strongly favoring it.

Key demographic groups indicating by the highest percentages (significantly above the county-wide 49 percent) that they **FAVOR** the proposal included:

- 62% *College educated women;*
- 61% *maintain county services;*
- 60% *women under age 50;*
- 56% *Ottawa County headed in right direction;*
college educated;
older college educated;
- 55% *taxes about right;*
age 50 to 55;
young college educated;
- 53% *lived in Ottawa County 16 to 25 years;*
age 41 to 49;
incomes of \$50K to \$75K.

Key demographic groups indicating by the highest percentages (significantly above the county-wide 41 percent) that they **OPPOSE** the proposal included:

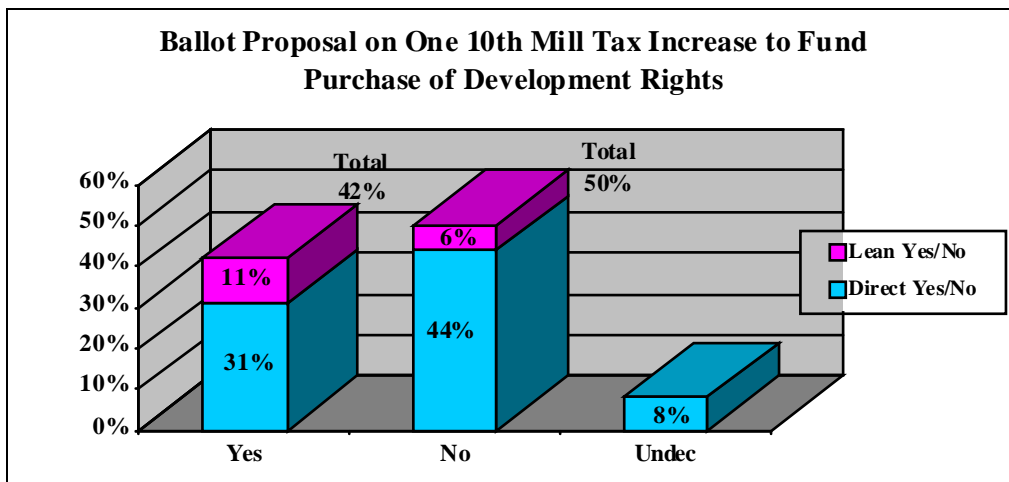
- 57% *Taxes too high;*
- 55% *Region 4;*
- 53% *men without college;*
- 52% *high school or less education;*
- 51% *Ottawa County headed in wrong direction;*
keep taxes low;
- 49% *negative job rating on county services;*
men under age 50;
older without college;
- 47% *all men;*
- 46% *younger without college.*

-- Funding Purchase of Development Rights Program with Tax Increase Opposed

Also for the first time, 2010 survey respondents were asked the following question about a proposed tax increase of one 10th of a mill to fund the Purchase of Development Rights Program. Survey respondents were asked the following question about a ballot proposal:

“The Ottawa County Board of Commissioners has adopted what is known as a “Purchase of Development Rights” program. This program is designed to preserve existing farmland by allowing the county to purchase the development rights to farmland, from the farm owner, so that the land can only be used for farming into the future. Currently, private donations and grants are used to pay landowners to place these deed restrictions on their property to preserve their use as farmland. Some people have suggested that a property tax of 0.1 mill be dedicated for this purpose in order to increase and stabilize the revenue source. For every \$100,000 in market value of a home and \$50,000 in taxable value, a one-tenth of a mill property tax increase would cost homeowners in Ottawa County \$5 per year in additional property taxes. If the County placed a proposal on a future election ballot to indefinitely increase property taxes by one-tenth of one mill to purchase the development rights of area farmland, would you vote Yes in favor of the proposal or No to oppose it?”

- 31% Yes
- 11% Lean toward Yes
- 42% TOTAL YES**
- 50% TOTAL NO**
- 44% No
- 6% Lean toward No
- 8% Undecided/Don't know/Refused



Voters would oppose a one 10th of a mill property tax increase proposal by a bare 50 percent majority, including 44 percent who would directly vote “No,” 6 percent who lean toward

voting “No,” with 42 percent voting “Yes,” including 31 percent who would directly vote “Yes” and 11 percent who lean toward voting “Yes,” leaving 8 percent “Undecided”.

Key demographic groups that would vote “yes” by the highest percentages (significantly above the county-wide results of 42 percent), included:

- 61% *concerned about schools;*
- 55% *lives in an urban area;*
- 54% *favors maintaining services;*
- 52% *income under \$25K;*
- 50% *concerned about roads;*
age 30 to 35;
age 36 to 40;
- 49% *college educated women;*
- 48% *feels mostly safe;*
lived in county 11 to 15 years;
- 47% *unsure about county services;*
positive rating on county services;
age 56 to 64;
women age 50 +;
- 46% *all women;*
taxes about right;
lived in county over 25 years or, “lifetime”.

Key demographic groups that would vote “no” by the highest percentages (significantly above the county-wide results of 50 percent), included:

- 78% *concerned about taxes;*
- 61% *taxes too high;*
- 59% *negative rating on county finances;*
men age 50 or older;
- 58% *lived in county 5 years or under;*
age 18 to 29;
age 41 to 49;
men without college;
younger without college;
- 57% *Region 5;*
keep taxes low;
lived in county 6 to 10 years;
- 56% *all men;*
concerned about the economy and jobs;
incomes of \$50K to \$75K;
- 55% *negative rating for county services;*
post high school education;
college educated men;
- 54% *votes in local elections half the time;*
Ottawa County headed in wrong direction;
lives in suburban area;
men under age 50.

-- Contact With a County Department

Three-in-ten respondents (30 percent – 32 percent in 2008) indicated that either they or someone else in their household had contacted a department or office in county government in the past year. Nearly seven-in-ten (69 percent - 63 percent in 2006) responded “No” to the question, and one percent were undecided. In the 2006 survey, 37 percent said that they or someone else in their household contacted a county department or office. Each year, fewer households report contacting the county.

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
20%	21%	Yes, respondent
3%	8%	Yes, someone else
7%	3%	Yes, more than one
30%	32%	TOTAL CONTACTED
69%	63%	No one contacted office/department of Ottawa County
1%	5%	Undecided/Don't know/Refused

Among those who responded “Yes,” that they or someone else in their household had contacted a county office, the top agencies contacted in 2010 and 2008 were:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
17%	8%	Sheriff Department	1%	1%	Natural Resources
11%	15%	Road Commission	1%	1%	Waste Management
8%	11%	Health Department	1%	---	Community Action
8%	---	Human Services	1%	---	Council on Aging
7%	7%	Clerk	1%	---	Probate Court
6%	5%	Treasurer	1%	---	Unemployment
5%	4%	Parks and Recreation	---	6%	City – Twp Office
5%	2%	Admin – Brd of Commissioners	---	4%	State Representative
3%	1%	District Court	---	3%	Senate
3%	1%	Register of Deeds	---	1%	City Manager
3%	---	Animal Control	---	1%	County Commissioner
3%	---	Drain Commissioner	---	1%	Emergency Services
2%	2%	Planning – Zoning	---	1%	Fire Department
2%	---	Assessor	---	1%	Governor
2%	---	Department of Agriculture	---	1%	Grants
2%	---	Friend of the Court	---	1%	Land Development
2%	---	Mental Health	---	1%	Land Management
1%	6%	Police	---	1%	Mayor
1%	1%	Building Department	3%	12%	Undecided/Refused

Almost all of these respondents either called the named department on the phone (53 percent), or paid a personal visit (37 percent). The remaining 10 percent either wrote a letter or

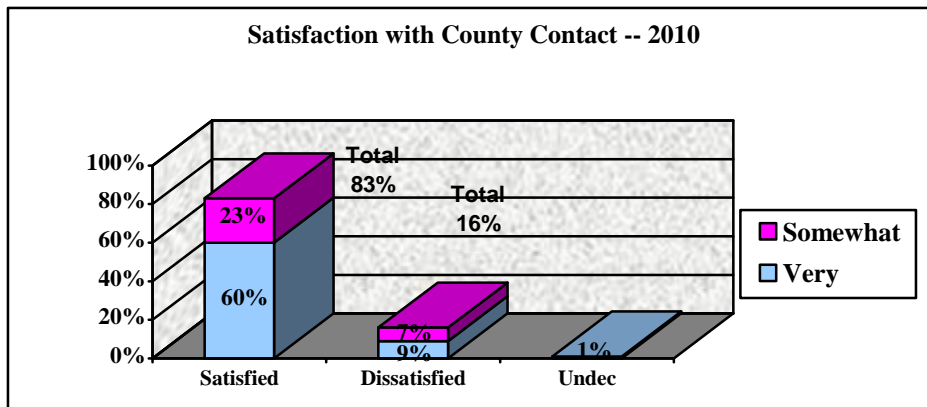
sent an e-mail. In the 2008 survey, 57 percent called, 27 percent personally visited a department or office, and 16 percent wrote or e-mailed an office.

-- Satisfaction With Job Performance

The overwhelming majority of the residents who said their household contacted a county office indicated that they were satisfied with the response they received. The total overall satisfaction numbers are higher in 2010 than in either the 2008 or 2006 surveys. An 83 percent majority said they were satisfied with the response (60 percent very satisfied), while 16 percent were dissatisfied (7 percent very dissatisfied), In 2006, an 80 percent majority said they were satisfied (55 percent very satisfied),

The table below, shows the specific 2010 and 2008 results, and the chart illustrates the 2010 findings.

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
60%	59%	Very satisfied
23%	19%	Somewhat satisfied
83%	79%	TOTAL SATISFIED
16%	19%	TOTAL DISSATISFIED
7%	11%	Somewhat dissatisfied
9%	8%	Very dissatisfied
1%	3%	Undecided/Don't know/Refused



-- More, Enough, or Too Much?

After the rating offered for the services provided when residents contacted the county, respondents were asked to give their opinion as to whether or not the county is currently doing – Enough, Too Much, or if More needed to be done – in fifteen separate service delivery areas. In an effort to measure the level to which there is a belief that more needs to be done, respondents

answering “More” were asked if they meant that “Much More” or “Somewhat More” was necessary to address their concern. As an indication of the effectiveness of the delivery of services, only one service, providing an effective economic development plan, got a response from a majority of survey participants saying that more needed to be done.

Response based on 2010 & 2008 surveys		<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Und/DK</u>	
33.	Providing effective county road patrol service by the Sheriff's Department	2010	3%	14%	80%	3%	3%
		2008	8%	25%	66%	2%	7%
34.	Safely operating the county jail, protecting the public, and avoiding prison overcrowding	2010	1%	9%	67%	3%	21%
		2008	4%	16%	61%	2%	21%
35.	Providing public health services, such as immunizations and restaurant inspections	2010	4%	16%	67%	6%	11%
		2008	6%	16%	65%	2%	17%
36.	Providing effective economic development programs to attract business and industry	2010	19%	50%	35%	3%	12%
		2008	14%	42%	35%	2%	21%
37.	Providing health care for uninsured and underinsured residents of the county	2010	14%	32%	35%	8%	25%
		2008	10%	26%	32%	3%	36%
38.	Providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services	2010	5%	19%	46%	5%	30%
		2008	6%	22%	46%	4%	28%
39.	Providing mental health services	2010	7%	22%	50%	2%	26%
		2008	6%	21%	49%	2%	28%
40.	Working with local communities to control crime and drugs	2010	4%	24%	64%	2%	10%
		2008	8%	24%	60%	2%	14%
41.	Providing programs for juvenile offenders separate from adult prison programs	2010	5%	23%	41%	1%	35%
		2008	6%	22%	45%	2%	31%
42.	Protecting prime farmland and open space from commercial and residential development	2010	7%	32%	49%	8%	11%
		2008	12%	31%	46%	4%	19%
43.	Providing an effective communications system for public safety officials so they can best protect the public	2010	3%	12%	73%	3%	12%
		2008	7%	23%	56%	2%	19%

Response based on 2010 & 2008 surveys		<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Und/ DK</u>	
44.	Providing a quick emergency response to accidents on county roads	2010	2%	9%	85%	---	6%
		2008	7%	22%	64%	1%	13%
45.	Working with local governments to offer the best plan for commercial and residential development so excessive growth and sprawl can be avoided	2010	5%	29%	49%	5%	17%
		2008	9%	32%	47%	3%	18%
46.	Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services	2010	12%	41%	54%	1%	4%
		2008	15%	42%	49%	---	9%
47.	Maintaining <u>County</u> parks and recreational facilities	2010	2%	11%	83%	5%	1%
		2008	4%	18%	72%	4%	6%

Responses ranked based on “Total More” in 2010	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Und/ DK</u>
Providing effective economic development programs to attract business and industry	19%	50%	35%	3%	12%
Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services	12%	41%	54%	1%	4%
Providing health care for uninsured and underinsured residents of the county	14%	32%	35%	8%	25%
Protecting prime farmland and open space from commercial and residential development	7%	32%	49%	8%	11%
Working with local governments to offer the best plan for commercial and residential development so excessive growth and sprawl can be avoided	5%	29%	49%	5%	17%
Working with local communities to control crime & drugs	4%	24%	64%	2%	10%
Providing programs for juvenile offenders separate from adult prison programs	5%	23%	41%	1%	35%
Providing mental health services	7%	22%	50%	2%	26%
Providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services	5%	19%	46%	5%	30%
Providing public health services, such as immunizations and restaurant inspections	4%	16%	67%	6%	11%
Providing effective county road patrol service by the Sheriff’s Department	3%	14%	80%	3%	3%
Providing an effective communications system for public safety officials so they can best protect the public	3%	12%	73%	3%	12%
Maintaining <u>County</u> parks and recreational facilities	2%	11%	83%	5%	1%
Safely operating the county jail, protecting the public, and avoiding prison overcrowding	1%	9%	67%	3%	21%
Providing a quick emergency response to accidents on county roads	2%	9%	85%	---	6%

The biggest changes between the 2008 and 2010 surveys saying more should be done on a service included:

- An 8 point increase (42 to 50 percent) in the percentage “providing effective economic development programs to attract business and industry.”
- A 6 point increase (26 to 32 percent) in “providing health care for uninsured and underinsured residents of the county.”
- A 13 point drop (22 to 9 percent) in “providing a quick emergency response to accidents on county roads.”
- An 11 point drop (23 to 12 percent) in “providing an effective communication system for public safety officials so they can best protect the public.”
- An 11 point drop (25 to 14 percent) in “providing effective county road patrol service by the Sheriff’s Department.”
- A 7 point drop (16 to 9 percent) in “safely operating the county jail, protecting the public, and avoiding prison overcrowding.”

In 2006, two of the categories – “Protecting prime farmland” and “Providing economic development programs” – both had more than 50 percent of respondents indicating that “More” should be done.

-- Where to Cut if Needed?

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to name, “. . . what one, two or three county programs or services do you think should be cut . . .” [if the Commission had to cut programs to balance the budget? The following table shows the results of both the 2010 and 2008 surveys:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
12%	28%	Parks and Recreation	1%	1%	Planning – Zoning
8%	31%	Nothing	1%	---	Animal Control
4%	---	Farmland Preservation	1%	---	Human Services
3%	4%	Road Commission	---	3%	New Construction
3%	1%	Admin – Brd of Commissioners	---	2%	Illegal Immigrant Programs
2%	7%	County Employees Wages - Benefits	---	2%	Landscaping
2%	3%	Police	---	2%	Personnel
2%	---	Health Department	---	2%	Welfare
2%	---	Sheriff Department	---	1%	After-school Programs
2%	---	Substance Abuse Prevention	---	1%	Federal Mandates
1%	2%	Mental Health	---	1%	Fire Department
1%	2%	Social Health Care	---	1%	Marketing Committee
1%	2%	Social Services	2%	2%	Other
1%	1%	Corrections	50%		Undecided/Refused
1%	1%	Economic Development			

-- Should economic development efforts have a local or regional focus?

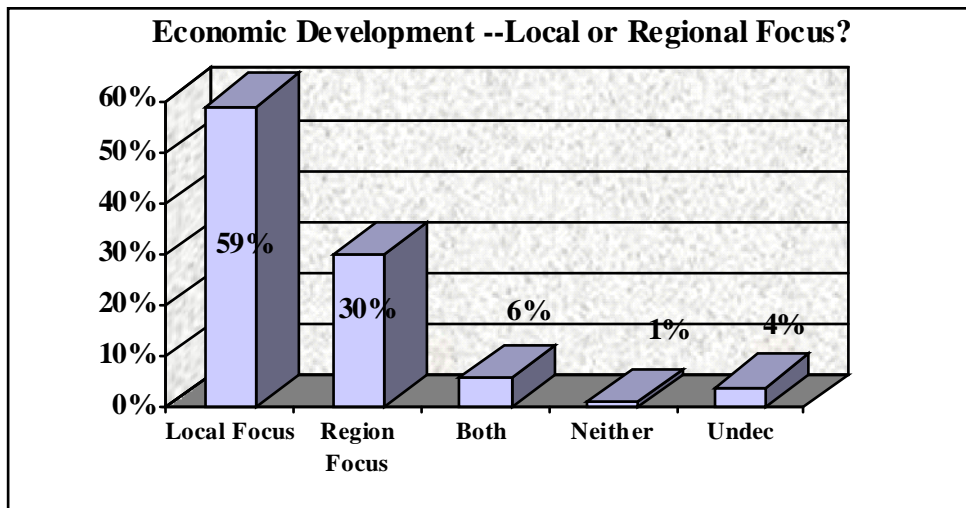
In a question asked for the first time in the 2010 survey, respondents were asked the following question:

“Historically in Ottawa County, various non-profit organizations with local government membership have taken the lead role in economic development efforts, working to spur economic activity within portions of the county. In some other areas of the state, it is the county government, and even coalitions of county governments, that are the primary source of economic development efforts, which aim at promoting economic activity on a county-wide, or even region-wide, basis. Which of the two types of economic development approaches I just described, do you prefer . . . The type of efforts that are ... **[ROTATE STATEMENTS]**

led by smaller local jurisdictions for the primary benefit of local communities;
 or,
 efforts that take a more wide-ranging approach and promote economic development on a regional basis?”

The responses were:

- 59% Local focus only
- 30% Regional approach
- 6% A little bit of both (*volunteered*)
- 1% Neither – shouldn’t be involved in economic development (*volunteered*)
- 4% Undecided/Don’t know/Refused



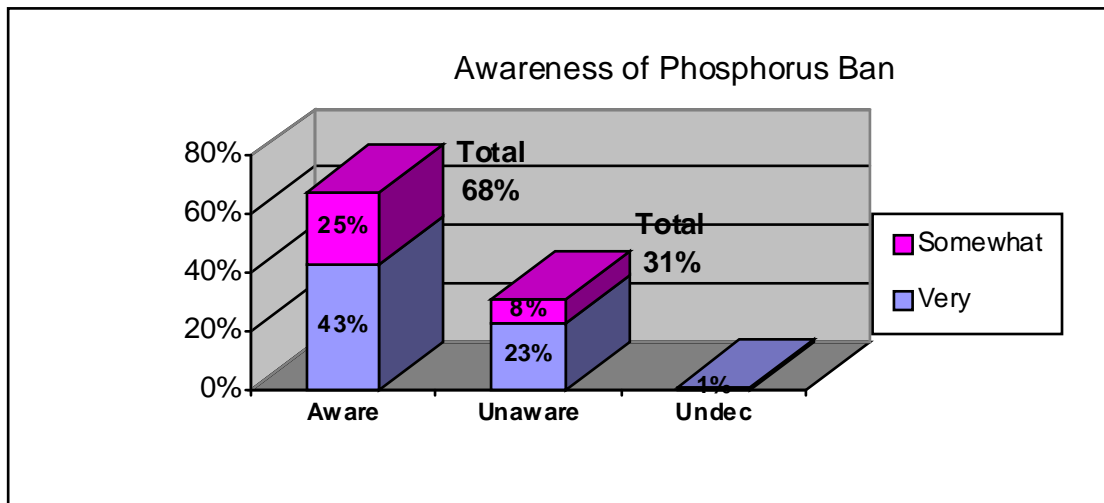
-- Awareness of Phosphorus Ban – More than Two-Thirds Aware

In a question that was asked for the first time in 2010, respondents were asked:

“A few years ago, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners voted to ban the use of fertilizer containing phosphorus. The ban, which went into effect on January 1st of 2008, prohibits the use of fertilizer containing phosphorus, as well as prohibiting the application of any type of fertilizer on frozen ground or on solid surfaces such as parking lots and roadways. Before I just described the ban on the use of fertilizer containing phosphorus, how aware would you say you were about this action by the Board of County Commissioners?”

The responses were:

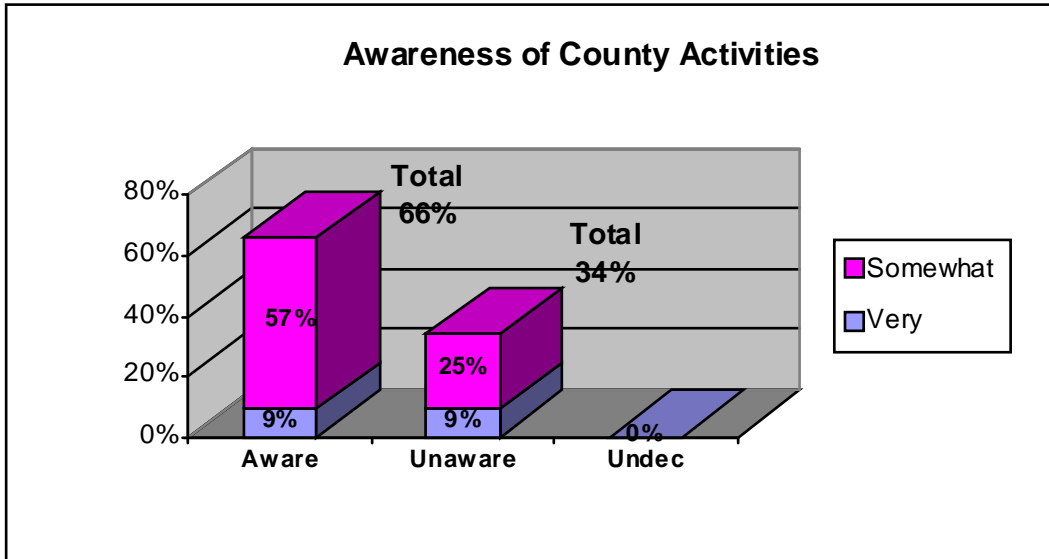
- 43% Very aware
- 25% Somewhat aware
- 68% TOTAL AWARE**
- 31% TOTAL UNAWARE**
- 8% Somewhat unaware
- 23% Very unaware
- 1% Undecided/Don't know/Refused



-- Awareness of County Activities in general

In a question asked first in 2008 and repeated in 2010, respondents were asked to assess how aware they felt they were about county activities. The responses in both years were:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
9%	6%	Very aware
57%	48%	Somewhat aware
66%	54%	TOTAL AWARE
34%	42%	TOTAL UNAWARE
25%	24%	Somewhat unaware
9%	18%	Very unaware
---	6%	Undecided/Don't know/Refused



-- Information Sources

In an effort to guide the county in the best means of communicating with its constituents, a question was posed to respondents asking them where they got most of their information concerning county government. The responses in 2010 and in 2008 were:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
15%	12%	Television coverage of the county
14%	17%	Grand Rapids Press
12%	11%	Newsletters from the county
12%	13%	The Holland Sentinel
11%	3%	Grand Valley Advance
10%	8%	Comments from friends/word of mouth
9%	7%	Grand Haven Tribune
5%	3%	Radio coverage of the county
4%	3%	The County Website – www.miOttawa.org
2%	1%	Muskegon Chronicle
1%	---	Commission meetings on cable
---	1%	Library
5%	---	Other/Undecided/Refused

Nearly half of all 2010 respondents, 48 percent, named a newspaper as their top source of information. This is down from the 68 percent citing newspapers in 2006, but 7 points more than the 41 percent citing newspapers in 2008. The 2010 survey is the first time that television coverage of the county ranked as the top source of information.

-- Preferences for receiving information

Respondents in 2010 were asked for the first time how that would prefer to receive information from Ottawa County.

“Which two or three of the following sources would you prefer to receive information from about Ottawa County government?”

The responses were:

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>
Newspapers	51%	21%	15%
Radio news and programs	5%	18%	9%
Television news reports	8%	15%	25%
Cable TV	4%	4%	1%
Billboards	---	3%	5%
The Internet	11%	17%	13%
Social Network sites such as Facebook	2%	1%	6%
Magazines	14%	---	2%
Direct mail	4%	14%	15%
Friends, family or relatives	---	7%	9%
Undecided/Don't know/Refused	1%	---	---

COMBINED 2010 RESULTS:

35%	Newspapers	6%	Friends, family or relatives
14%	Direct mail	3%	Cable TV
14%	The Internet	2%	Billboards
13%	Television news reports	2%	Social Network sites such as Facebook
10%	Radio news and programs	1%	Other/Undecided/Refused

-- More than 6-in-10 do not use social media sites

Respondents were asked how often they visit social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook or MySpace. A 61 percent majority said they never use social media sites, while 30 percent use them at least a few times a week.

18%	Every day
6%	Most days
6%	A few times a week
1%	Several times a month
8%	Seldom
61%	Or Never

-- Facebook the overwhelming social media favorite

Respondents who said they visit social media websites were asked: “Which social media site do you most often use?” “Facebook” was the overwhelming response of a 92 percent nearly unanimous majority.

92%	Facebook
2%	MySpace
4%	Twitter
1%	Craigslist
1%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- More than 8-in-10 connect to the Internet once a week or more

All respondents were asked how often they connect to the Internet. An 82 percent majority connects to the Internet at least once or twice a week, with 75 percent connecting every day, which is up 5 points since 2008 – as indicated in the following table:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
75%	70%	Every day
5%	9%	A few times a week
2%	3%	Once or twice a week
1%	1%	A few times a month
---	---	A few times a year
---	1%	Seldom
14%	11%	Never
2%	2%	Doesn’t have a computer (<i>volunteered</i>)
1%	3%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- More visit Ottawa County website than in 2008

Among respondents who said they connect to the Internet, they were asked how often they visit the Ottawa County website. Forty-five percent (up 5 points since 2008) said they visit the website (www.miottawa.org), with 17 (down 3 points) saying they visit the site “A lot” or “Some.” There was an increase in the percentage saying they visit the site “Only a little” – 28 percent in 2010 -- up from 19 percent in 2008, as indicated in the following table:

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
3%	3%	A lot
14%	18%	Some
28%	19%	Only a little
45%	40%	TOTAL VISIT
54%	57%	Not at all
1%	3%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- Nearly 8-in-10 offers a positive rating for County website

All respondents who said they visit the Ottawa County website were asked how they would rate the quality of the website by asking if they would give it a “positive rating of excellent or pretty good, or a negative rating of only fair or poor?” The positive rating was unchanged with 77 percent offering a positive rating (down 1 point since 2008), while the negative rating did increase from 11 to 20 percent, nearly double. There was also a drop in the percentage offering an excellent rating from 15 to 10 percent. The table below shows the two year results:

2010	2008	
10%	15%	Excellent
67%	63%	Pretty good
77%	78%	TOTAL POSITIVE
20%	11%	TOTAL NEGATIVE
15%	10%	Only fair
5%	1%	Poor
3%	11%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- More than 7-in-10 would visit website more if they could access services

Respondents were asked if they would use the Ottawa County website more often if they could access county services by way of the Internet instead of making a trip to the county office complex. A 72 percent majority said they would visit the site more often, including 33 percent who said they would visit the site a “Lot more often,” as indicated below:

33%	Yes – a lot more often
39%	Yes – only a little more often
72%	TOTAL MORE OFTEN
18%	No
8%	Depends (<i>volunteered</i>)
2%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- Less than 1-in-4 willing to pay a fee to access services via website

Respondents who said they would visit the website more often were asked if they would be willing to “pay a minimal fee for the convenience of accessing county services by way of the Internet, instead of driving to the county administrative complex?” Twenty-three percent said they would be willing to pay a minimal fee, while 65 percent said they would NOT be willing to do so, as indicated below.

23%	Yes
65%	No
11%	Depends (<i>volunteered</i>)
1%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- Half report interest in attending a citizens academy

All respondents were told that:

“Ottawa County is considering different ways to help inform citizens about its operations and activities. One way would be to hold a citizens academy, offering sessions that provide information about a specific area of county government, like property taxes and budgeting, the Sheriff’s Department, and the court system.”

They were then asked:

“How interested would you be in learning about Ottawa County’s government by attending these types of sessions?”

A bare 50 percent majority said they would be interested, which is up 4 points from the 2008 survey, although there was a 3 point drop in the percentage saying they would be “Very interested” in attending (14 to 11 percent).

<u>2010</u>	<u>2008</u>	
11%	14%	Very interested
39%	32%	Somewhat interested
50%	46%	TOTAL INTERESTED
47%	45%	TOTAL UNINTERESTED
21%	12%	Somewhat uninterested
26%	33%	Very uninterested
3%	9%	Undecided/Don’t know/Refused

-- SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS

A 74 percent majority of survey respondents said they have called Ottawa County their home for more than 15 years (up from 66 percent in 2008), with 59 percent claiming a county tenure of over 25 years. As is typical of most areas in the state, well over half (63 percent) report having no school age children in their home (up 5 points since 2008). A bare majority (50 percent) describes their community as “Suburban” (down 3 points), followed by “Rural” at 34 percent (up 6 points), and “Urban” at 14 percent (down 1 point).

The predominantly white cohort of respondents (94 percent), exhibit a fairly high level of formal education, with 31 percent attaining a bachelor’s degree, and 65 percent reporting some form of post-secondary education.

More than nine-in-ten respondents (93 percent) report being homeowners, with the balance reporting either leasing, renting or refusing to offer a response. Approximately half of the respondents (45 percent) report a household income of \$75,000 or less, with 33 percent reporting a household income of \$75,000 or higher. Twenty one percent of respondents did not respond to the question asking them to reveal their household income.

As in all of its surveys of this nature, EPIC MRA attempts to stratify the male/female ratio in a manner that reflects conventional voter turnout based on gender. This produced a female/male ratio of 53-to-47 percent.

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