

**Ottawa County Citizen Survey
August 2021**

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 August 3rd through August 8th, 2021. Respondents were selected utilizing an interval method of randomly selecting records of published residential telephone numbers. In addition, a commercially available list of cell phones designated as in the possession of Ottawa County residents was obtained; Fifty percent of the sample, or 200 interviews, were completed via cell phone contact. The sample was stratified so that every area of the county was represented in the sample according to its contribution to a 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 even-year 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.

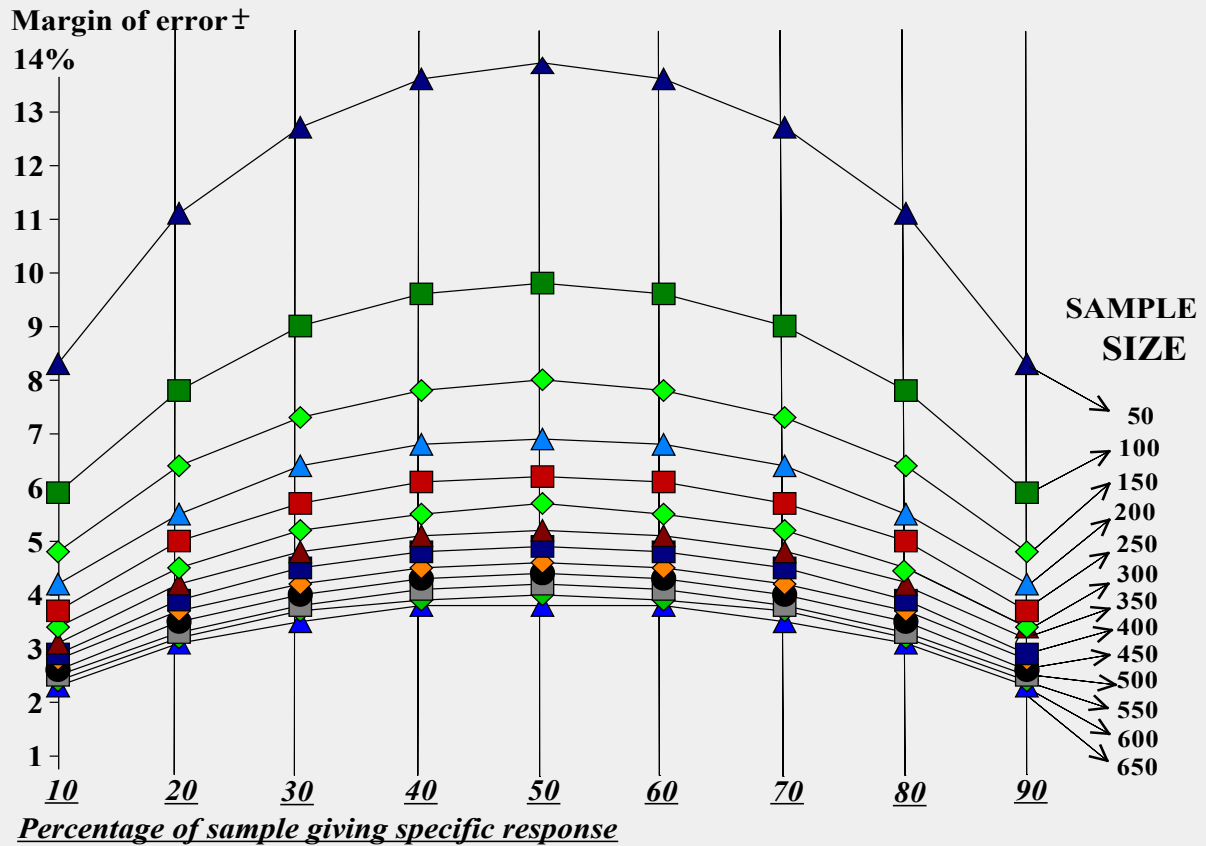
For example, 52 percent of all 400 respondents issued a “Total Positive” rating when assessing how well, . . . *Ottawa County does in managing county finances.*, (Q 19). As indicated in the chart that follows, this percentage would have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9 points. This means that with repeated sampling, it is very likely (95 times out of every 100), the percentage for the entire population would fall between 56.9 percent and 47.1 percent, hence 52 percent ± 4.9 points.

For analysis purposes, the county geography was broken down into five regions. Where variations in responses are found among or between regions, it is noted in the subgroup demographic breakout following each question. A chart illustrating the jurisdictional components of each of the regions can be found in the appendix.

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 2020 by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners to measure public opinion about county government operations in a “customer satisfaction” survey in what is the eighth in a series of biennial studies begun in 2006. While originally planned for execution in calendar year 2020, the disruptions caused by the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic prompted the postponement of interviewing until August of 2021. Nevertheless, the objects of the research remained much the same.

In addition to time series questions posed in each of the prior tests, there were questions unique to, and timely for, the period year in which the survey was conducted. For instance, surveys in prior years included questions concerning replacement of lost state revenue sharing dollars, farmland preservation issues, where responsibility for county roads should rest, and the efforts at promoting the county as a welcoming locale, among others. For this latest study, the county’s performance in addressing the pandemic, groundwater quality and capacity issues, and the availability of affordable housing were included for respondents to consider.

As noted, similar studies were conducted on behalf of the county in 2018, 2016, 2014, 2012, 2010, 2008, and in 2006, with most of the questions replicated in the 2021 survey. Throughout the following analysis, differences in outcomes between the 2021 survey results and prior studies – particularly the measurements in the more recent years – 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

A darkened outlook puts a pause on the upward trend in optimistic sentiment

Citizen anxiety over economic conditions was amply evident from the results of the surveys conducted in 2008 and 2010, and this angst served to color attitudes toward a wide spectrum of county government activities. In short, deep concern about respondents' personal financial well-being led to an unusually pessimistic view of all levels of government. Predictably, the dissatisfaction was expressed most acutely in relation to the national government, but the heightened negative outlook toward county and local governments was still palpable. The 2012 study yielded data that indicated the impact of the Great Recession of '07 was beginning to subside (or for many, just becoming the new "normal") with responses to questions about whether or not a named jurisdiction (i.e., state, county, township/city) was headed in the *Right direction* vs. being pretty seriously off on the *Wrong track*, suggesting much greater optimism – particularly in regard to county and local governments. Data from the 2018 survey clearly indicated that the less antagonistic sentiment toward governmental entities first seen in 2012, and repeated in 2014 and 2016, were not aberrations but rather, reflective of a more optimistic sentiment. However, this upward trend not only stops in the 2021 results on this question, but drops, sometimes significantly.

Undoubtedly due to the upheaval caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, voters hold back issuing a "right direction" response for the three levels of government tested and, in the case of the State, a 29 point drop from the "right direction" proportion recorded in 2018 is seen, leaving a plurality of responses in the "wrong track" category. Indeed, at just 35 percent "right direction" for the State, a more pessimistic assessment has not been seen since 2008 and 2010 when the state was issued a "right direction" assessment of only 20 percent and 12 percent for the respective years.

As has almost always been the case in this kind of tiered assessment of levels of successively smaller units of government, both Ottawa County and the respondents' local City/Township fare much better than the State on this measurement. Nevertheless, both the county and the local governments see significant declines from the 2018 proportions of "right direction" – dropping 18 points (from 78 percent to 60 percent) for the County and dropping five points (from 75 percent to 70 percent) for City/Township. While obviously not as acute a drop as seen with the State measurement, the 2021 proportions on this test for the County and City/Township are the lowest they've been since 2008/2010.

It is important to note, however, that the drop in “right direction” numbers for the County and City/Township are not – unlike with the State – made up in a complimentary increase in the “wrong track” proportions. Rather, the decrease in the “right track” proportions between 2018 and 2021 is made up in the proportion of respondents reporting *Undecided*; particularly so in the case of the City/Township measurement.

Another indicator of citizen discomfort can be found in the results of the question asking respondents to report whether they believe Ottawa County is *Better*, *Worse*, or *About the same*, as other West Michigan counties as place to live. First introduced in 2014, results to this question found an initial “better” proportion at 73 percent, climbing in each of the next two survey years to 77 percent in 2018. The 2021 measurement for the first time drops below 70 percent, standing at 67 percent “better”. As with the “right direction” question, however, the six-point drop from the 2018 measurement is not made up in the “worse” category, but in an increase in the “about the same” proportions.

First posed in 2018, another measurement of citizen attitude about the place where they live is found in a question asking respondents to rate on a scale of Zero-to-Ten, how likely they are to recommend Ottawa County as a place to live – with zero meaning not likely at all, and ten meaning very likely. Again, a holding back on enthusiasm about Ottawa County is detected based on a comparison of the 2018 and 2021 results. The mean score difference between 2018’s 8.601 and 2021’s 8.350 is not particularly profound in-and-of-itself, but it signals a reduction in the proportion of respondents issuing “9’s and 10’s” on the question and this is exactly the case. There is recorded an 8-point decrease in the 9 & 10 ratings (from 59 percent to 51 percent) but, as with the other general atmospheric questions earlier, the difference is not made up on the lower end of the scale but in the proportions issuing 6-to-8 on this scaled assessment.

-- Overall ratings of County Government/Local Government

Respondents were asked to issue a “Positive” or “Negative” rating for how well their local (city, township, village) government is doing in providing basic services, and this question is also asked about Ottawa County government. The results of these tests belie what otherwise might be the take-away from the results of the previous 2021 measurements of respondents’ sentiment about their view of local and county government. That is, where the aforementioned results showed a decline from the prior non-recession years, the overall positive/negative ratings in this test remain relatively static.

In the case of local (city/village/township) government for the 2021 survey, the total “positive” rating matched the 2018 results of 83 percent, eclipsed only by the 2006 survey’s highwater mark of 85 percent. Just as important, the Excellent portion of the overall “positive” rating remained at roughly one-quarter of the overall total (21 percent) and the overall “negative” rating also remained at the same low level of 15 percent (only one-fifth of which was of the more intense option of *Poor*) recorded in 2018.

Similarly, Ottawa County government also recorded a respectable 76 percent total “positive” rating for providing basic services to residents; a level on a par with survey years 2012 and 2014 and considerably higher than what was recorded in the recession years of 2008 and 2010. As might be surmised from the comparison of the County’s total “positive” ratings, the total “negative” results for 2021 were not remarkably different than other non-recession years, coming in at just 17 percent.

There are follow-up questions to these “Positive/Negative” rating queries asking respondents to cite the reason for issuance of their rating. For the local units of government, this follow-up is only asked among those issuing a “negative” rating but for the County government, a follow-up is asked among all respondents who were not “undecided”. For those issuing a “positive” rating for the County, a large plurality of 28 percent simply reported, *Good overall/No problems*, while 12 percent did not offer a specific answer. The next highest category, at nine percent, was *Responsive/Fast service*, with the balance of the responses scattering across 25 separate categories in the mid-to-low single digits.

As for the reasons for a “negative” rating, it is important to remember that there were only 59 total responses in the case of the Local government question and 69 responses for the rating of the County. With these small numbers, the percentages can easily be given greater weight than they actually deserve. Nevertheless, the top reason for a “negative” rating for Local government at 12 percent was, *Limited services offered/Receive no services*. For the County, *Communication* topped the rankings at 12 percent of reasons offered for a “negative” rating, although if three separate categories citing some version of a *Lack of services* are combined, the total is four-points higher at 16 percent.

--Provision of services and perception of tax level & managing finances

One bellwether question asks respondents which of two statements comes closer to their view: A statement saying that:

“ . . . it is important to maintain current county service levels even if it means having to pay higher taxes ”

Or a statement expressing the view that:

“ . . . it is important to keep taxes and fees as low as possible, even if it means reducing county services and programs ”

In 2008 and 2010, solid majorities of respondents opted for the “keep taxes low” statement as being closer to their view and even in the pre-recession year of 2006, only a plurality of respondents – 49 percent – opted for the “maintain services” statement. The 2012 survey was the first time a majority of respondents (51 percent) opted for the “maintain services” statement and this majority has moved upward ever since. In the 2021 survey, a strong 63 percent to 28 percent majority opted for the “maintain services” statement over the statement urging lower taxes and fees.

The which-statement-comes-closer-to-your-view result is in spite of the fact that the proportion of respondents reporting “too high”, in response to a question asking if they believe their property taxes and other fees they pay in return for the amount and quality of services they receive is *“too high, too low, or about right”*. In 2021, the total “too high” was 30 percent – the highest it has been since the recession survey of 2008, when it hit 39 percent. However, when respondents reporting “too high” are asked to characterize their sentiment as being *“much or just somewhat”*, the 2021 “much” portion of the total is just 8 percent – the same level it has been since the 2014 survey when the “too high” totals were lower (meaning a higher proportion of the previous years’ totals held the belief more intensely).

In another question directed at county revenue, respondents are asked to issue a “Positive/Negative” rating for the job, . . . *Ottawa County does in managing county finances*. At 52 percent “Positive” Ottawa County fares very well compared to the scores of other counties, townships, and school districts EPIC•MRA has tested in recent years. However, the 52 percent “positive” rating is the lowest it has been for Ottawa County going back five survey years and the 18 percent “Negative” is tied for the highest proportion over the same period. As with the preceding tax question, though, the intensity of the “negative” rating represented by the proportion reporting *Poor* (as opposed to *Just fair*) remains where it always has been – in the low single digits; again, meaning a lower proportion of the 2021 total held this belief more intensely.

This finding, coupled with previous tax level rating and competing statement option results, suggests a generalized anxiety about the state of affairs in general, without a readily

identifiable source at which to direct respondents' displeasure. Some corroboration of this premise can be found in the battery of questions asking respondents to assess which of four presented goals of the Commission's strategic plan should be a top priority.

--Communication becomes a catch-all reason for generalized unease

While the strategic goals statements going to the . . . *long-term, economic social, and environmental health of the County*, and, *to maintain and improve the strong financial position of the County*, have consistently traded-off between the one and two in the rankings of the four goals tested, the statement, *to maintain and enhance communication . . .* has seen a spike in "top priority" total proportion over what it has been in the prior four surveys. In 2018, the gap in "top priority" proportion was 16 points between the "long-term . . . health" statement and the "communication" statement; in this latest study, the gap narrows to nine points. Similarly, the gap in the "Total Important" score narrows from seven points in 2018, to two points in 2021.

The general topic of "communication" (especially the improvement thereof) crops up throughout the 2021 results. Albeit in small proportions, this area is always mentioned in follow-up open ended questions asking why the respondent issued a "negative" rating in a given question. In a battery of 13 questions which lay out various county programs and services, respondents were asked if they believe *more, too much, or enough*, is being done by the county in the subject area. *Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services* placed first on the "total more" should be done ranking among the statements as it has a few times in the past. However, at 46 percent "total more" the 2021 results are the highest proportion it has received since it was first posed in 2006.

The preceding result is in keeping with the results of a subsequent question asking respondents to assess how "aware" they believed themselves to be about activities. At 54 percent total "aware" and 41 percent total "unaware", only the recession-era 2008 proportions are lower and higher respectively, than the 2021 results. It is also consistent with the results of a question asking respondents if they or member of their household has contacted a county office in the past year. At 26 percent total "contacted" the 2021 respondents tied with the lowest proportion responding affirmatively to this question in the past five survey years. Perhaps not surprisingly, among those who reported contacting a county office, a clear plurality of 26 percent named the *Health Department* as the county office most recently contacted.

Respondents' search for a focused source of their unease can also be found elsewhere in the 2021 results. For instance, in a recited list of nine problems and issues – including roads and

keeping taxes low – *Protecting the public from crime and drugs*, took the second highest proportion of responses, at 20 percent; but in a later question, 99 percent of respondents reported feeling either *very* (74 percent) or *mostly* (25 percent) *safe* in their neighborhoods; a proportion identical to the prior four surveys. When asked what specific county service needs the most improvement, *roads*, at 25 percent, ranked the highest in the named services but this proportion is 16 points lower than in 2018 and ten points lower than the 35 percent who were “undecided”. None of the other 20-plus named services had a proportion above five percent.

In like fashion, when asked which one or two county programs should be cut if needed to balance the budget, 78 percent were either “undecided” or reported *Nothing*, and no named department or service rose above the five percent mark. Notably, and to the extent the COVID 19 pandemic is an underlying source of discontent among citizens, the Ottawa County Health Department scores quite high on the “Positive/Negative” rating test for its handling of the public health crisis. Nearly seven-in-ten – 69 percent – issue a total “positive” rating, with only 20 percent rating the Department’s efforts in the “negative”. Curiously, and notwithstanding opinions expressed elsewhere in the survey to the contrary, *Communication/Transparency /Keeping the public informed*, was the reason given by one-in-five respondents issuing a “positive” rating.

-- Affordable Housing & Groundwater Issues

From 2012 through 2018, *Affordable housing*, was mentioned as a top-of-mind important problem or issue in low-to-mid single digits. In the 2021 survey, it receives 11 percent of responses, more than any other problem or issue, including *Roads* and *High taxes*. More telling is the 21 percent of respondents who selected *Availability of affordable housing* as the one problem they are concerned about the most out of a list of nine other familiar issues; the top ranked issue, besting *Protecting the public from crime and drugs*, which garnered a second ranking 20 percent of responses.

The prominence of housing as an issue of concern can also be found in the “Why Negative” follow up open-ended questions, but a much clearer example is found in the hypothetical ballot proposal posed to respondents. In this question, respondents are asked if they would support an increase of 0.1 mill dedicated to increasing the availability of affordable housing. A total of 57 percent of respondents reported “yes” compared to the 37 percent reporting they would vote “no” on such a proposal. It is noted that support for this proposal is somewhat soft, in that fewer than a majority issued an unequivocal “yes” vote, but as the analysis

in the section below discusses, the proposal's prospects for passage are greatly enhanced if a housing initiative partakes of a public/private/charitable partnership.

Concerns about groundwater quality and scarcity are not as organic as those concerning housing in that this issue does not show up in the open ended top-of-mind responses. That this issue does not spontaneously appear is not surprising since in a direct question about how aware respondents are about the issue of declining groundwater supply, only 43 percent of respondents reported being either *very* (14 percent) or *somewhat* (29 percent) aware of the problem. This relative lack of awareness notwithstanding, in the 13-question *more, enough, too much* battery of questions, a statement concerning protecting groundwater ranked third for "total more" should be done and ranked second for "much more" should be done category.

-- Upshot of the 2021 findings

Like everyone else in the country, Ottawa County residents are tired of dealing with the inconvenience and worry surrounding COVID 19 and the omnipresent news and comment on the topic. It is posited – based on recent EPIC•MRA surveys conducted for other Michigan governmental entities exhibiting similar results – that the relentless prevalence of the worldwide pandemic is responsible for the less generous assessments respondents give for their County and Local governments in 2021 than they have in preceding post-recession surveys. Blame for the pandemic's effects on residents' everyday lives for the past 18 months cannot be pinned on an obvious culprit, so the resulting frustration manifests itself in a generalized less sanguine view of nearly everything.

Typically, when there is an identifiable source for unpopular issue or unpleasant circumstance, palpable dissatisfaction with that source will reveal itself in the data. With the exception of "right direction/wrong track" results for the State, such is not the case in the 2021 survey. To the contrary, the tests in many of specific areas of the survey reveal that resident respondents remain as satisfied with the County – if not more so – than they have been in the past. Especially demonstrative of this point is the receptivity shown toward an increase in millage rate for affordable housing and the interest in addressing the growing concern over groundwater quality and supply.

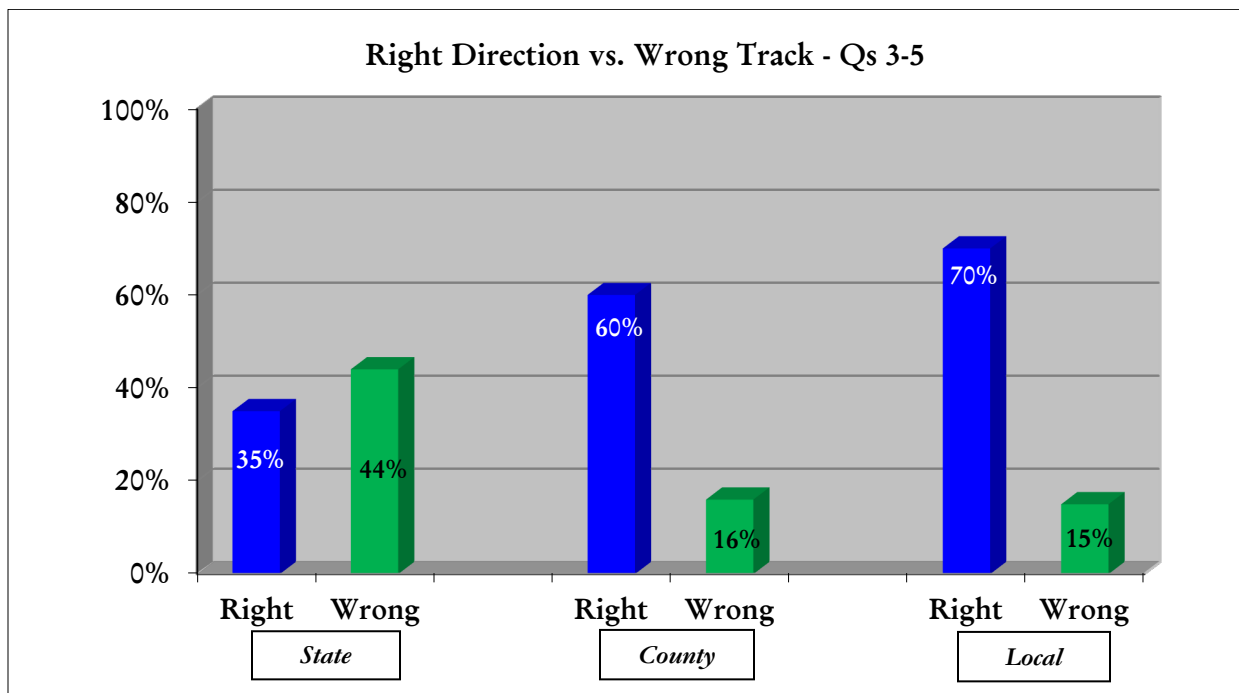
QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RESULTS

-- Right Direction or Wrong Track? – Q’s 3-5

A standard question on many public opinion studies designed to measure citizen satisfaction, the “right direction/wrong track” battery remained a fixture on the 2021 Ottawa County survey. The question reads:

“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?”

Respondents were asked to answer this question as it applies to Michigan, Ottawa County, and their local governments. The chart below illustrates the results for the 2021 survey:



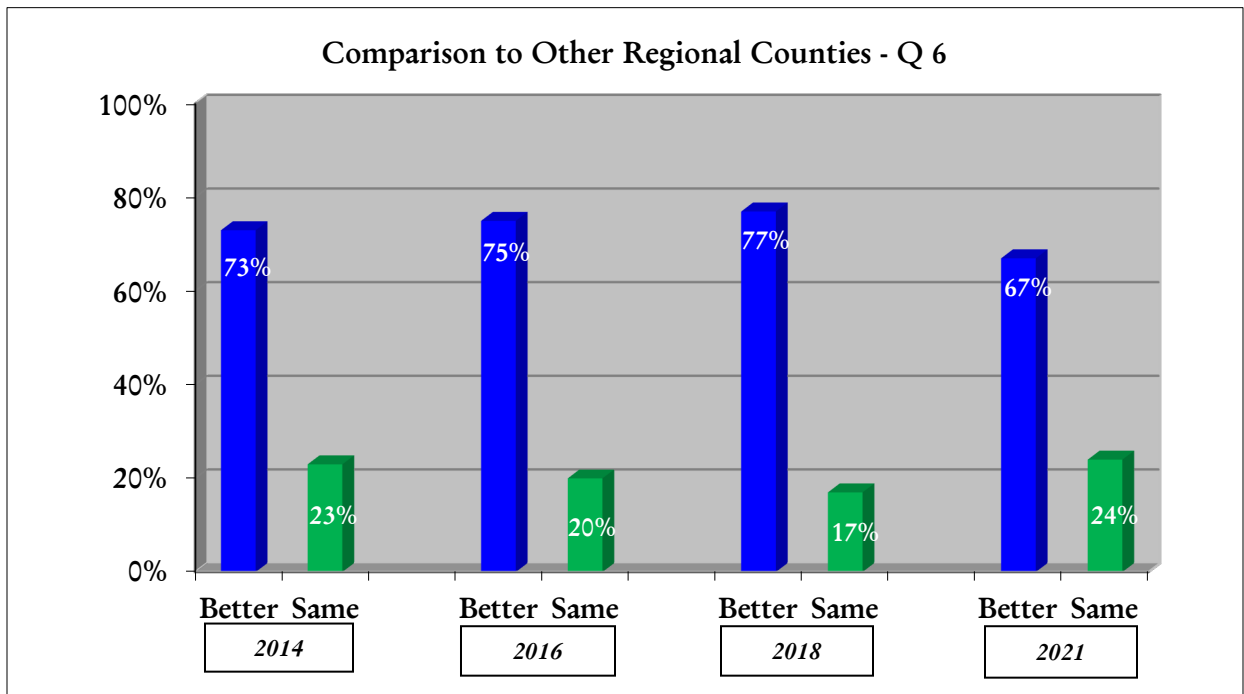
While each of the governmental units exhibit a decline in *Right Direction* numbers, this is the first time since the recession years of 2008 and 2010 the state has been “underwater” in the proportions (20 percent and twelve percent, respectively); declining 29 points from the 64 percent exhibited on the question when it was posed in April of 2018. Even though the 2018 *Right Direction* numbers for all three governmental units were unusually high, (the county dropped 18 points from 2018 and local units dropped five points), the “right direction” for the county and local units still show a notable decline from those recorded in the survey years 2012 through 2016.

Subgroups reporting “Wrong track” for the county in proportions greater than the norm of 16% included:

- 54% Local direction – Wrong track
- 35% County services – Negative
- 33% Financial management – Negative
- 32% Managing COVID – Negative
- 29% Taxes – Too high
- 28% Michigan direction – Wrong track
- Housing partnership – No
- 27% Vote in local elections – Half the time
- Local services – Negative
- 25% Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
- 21% Age 35-49
- Women 18-49
- 20% Ottawa compares – Same
- Housing proposal – No
- Preferred info source – Social media

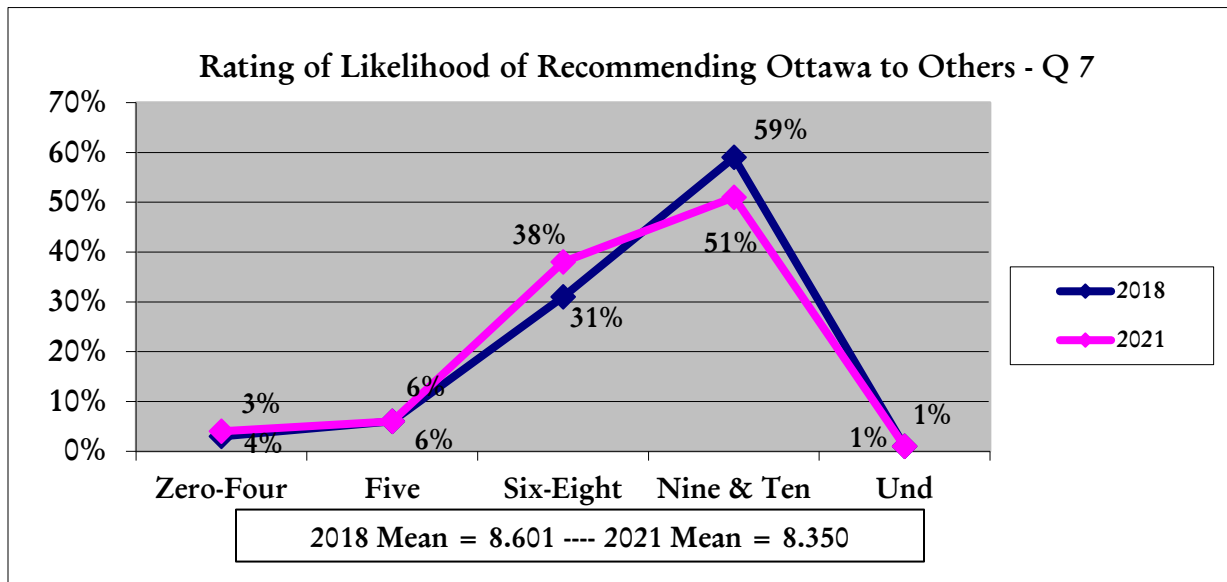
-- County Compared to Regional Neighbors – Q 6

Another measurement of how respondents view their status as Ottawa County residents is found in a question introduced in 2014 and repeated in subsequent surveys which asks them to report if they believe Ottawa County is, *Better, Worse or, About the same, as other western Michigan counties as a place to live.* The graph below illustrates that while more than two-out-of-three respondents reported, “better”, this proportion is significantly lower than it has been in prior years, especially the 2018 survey year and is the first time it drops below seventy percent.



-- Recommend Ottawa County as a Place to Live – Q 7

Respondents were asked how likely they would be to recommend Ottawa County to others as a good place to live. They were presented with a 0-to-10 scale with zero meaning, *Not at all likely*, and ten meaning, *Very likely*. This question was introduced in 2018 and, as was seen in the immediately preceding question, records a drop in respondents’ enthusiasm toward their home county. That is, there is a noticeable drop in “9-10” scores between 2018 and 2021, made up by an increase in the more middling “6-8” scores. This is reflected in the respective years’ Mean Scores and as illustrated in the graph below:



Subgroups reporting “0-5” for the county in proportions greater than the norm of the combined 9% included:

- 27% Local direction – Wrong track
- 25% County services – Negative
- 24% Financial management – Negative
- 23% Ottawa direction – Wrong track
- 22% Local services – Negative
- 21% Ottawa compares – Same
- 18% Preferred info source – Newspaper
- 16% Northwest Region
- Taxes – Too high
- Housing partnership – No
- Preferred info source – Radio
- Social media used – Don’t use
- 15% Vote in local elections – Half the time
- 14% Managing COVID – Undecided
- Housing proposal – No
- Website visitation – None
- 13% Michigan direction – Wrong track
- H.S. or less
- Men 18-49
- College men

-- County's Strategic Goals – Q's 8-11

The battery of questions about strategic goals was first posed in 2008 and has continued in each survey year thereafter. In it, respondents are informed that the Board of Commissioners has a strategic plan that includes four major goals, which are then recited in random order. After hearing each of them, respondents are asked to indicate if they believe the individual goal should be 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” (a combination of the “top priority” and “important but not a top priority” scores) by very high proportions. Also evident is the fact that maintenance of fiscal and economic health consistently tops the list, and it is also noted that improving county services and enhancing communications are almost exclusively the only goals that consistently register double digits for being “slightly” important – at least relative to the other two goals.

The foregoing notwithstanding, the strategic goal of, . . . *maintain[ing] and enhance[ing] communication with citizens, employees, and other stakeholders*, sees a notable rise in both the “Top priority” and “Total important” proportions from their levels seen in 2018 and most other prior survey years’ results. Other evidence for this can be found later in the interview where respondents issuing a “Negative” rating for the county’s provision of basic services are asked to name the reason for their sentiment. There, *Communication* received the highest proportion as a category among all responses.

Another interesting observation is that despite other ample evidence in the survey that the public is no longer pre-occupied with “the economy and jobs” as they once were, maintenance of the county’s economic health and strong financial position continue to be viewed by county residents as being of highest importance.

The table that follows shows the results for 2021 and the 2012 through 2018 results on these stated goals:

Ranked by 2021 “TOTAL IMPORTANT”*		Top Prior	TOT Impor	Slight Impor	Not Impor	DK/ Undec
__10.	To contribute to the long-term, economic, social, and environmental health of the County*	46%	87%	8%	3%	2%
	Ranking in 2018 - 2	47%	87%	9%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2016 - 1	51%	90%	8%	2%	1%
	Ranking in 2014 - 2	34%	88%	8%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2012 - 2	39%	86%	11%	2%	1%
__08.	To maintain and improve the strong financial position of the county	36%	86%	10%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2018 - 1	43%	88%	8%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2016 - 2	38%	90%	6%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2014 - 1	26%	89%	9%	1%	1%
	Ranking in 2012 - 1	45%	90%	7%	2%	1%
__09.	To maintain and enhance communication with citizens, employees, and other stakeholders	37%	85%	11%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2018 - 3	31%	80%	13%	5%	2%
	Ranking in 2016 - 3	36%	86%	10%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2014 - 4	23%	77%	19%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2012 - 3	31%	81%	16%	3%	---
__11.	To continually improve the county’s organization and services	35%	80%	13%	4%	3%
	Ranking in 2018 - 4	35%	79%	15%	4%	2%
	Ranking in 2016 - 4	37%	85%	11%	3%	1%
	Ranking in 2014 - 3	22%	80%	15%	3%	2%
	Ranking in 2012 - 4	33%	76%	18%	4%	2%
* Question 10 wording was changed in 2014 from: “To contribute to a healthy physical, economic, and community environment”						

-- Biggest Problem, “Top of Mind” & Prompted – Q’s 12 & 13

In the first of two related inquiries, an open-ended question invited respondents to provide a “top-of-mind” reaction to a question asking them to name

... the single, most important problem or issue facing the residents of your community that your local city, village, township, or county government must address.

As in past surveys, about eighteen separate categories were reported, but unlike the preceding three immediate past studies when *Roads* garnered the largest proportion of responses

(19 percent in each of the last three biennial studies) *Lack of affordable housing* was mentioned by the highest proportion in 2021, at eleven percent. *Roads* captured seven percent of the responses in this year’s survey, with *Mask mandates* (two percent) and other COVID-related responses combining for six percent.

Immediately following the open-ended “top issue” question, respondents were presented with a rotated list of nine problems and issues and asked to select which of them concerned them the most. Proving that the issue of affordable housing topping the list of open-ended responses was not an aberration, the statement, *Availability of affordable housing*, topped the ranking in this prompted set of nine issues of concern at twenty-one percent. This issue item was first introduced in the 2016 survey when it garnered six percent of responses (ranking 6th) and repeated in 2018 when 15 percent of respondents (ranking 3rd) selected it as their top issue of concern. The following chart illustrates the results of this question over the past three surveys:

<u>2016</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2021</u>	
6%	15%	21%	Availability of affordable housing (<i>new in 2016</i>)
14%	18%	20%	Protecting the public from crime and drugs
12%	9%	17%	Keeping local taxes and fees low
24%	26%	12%	Maintaining and improving area roads
15%	6%	10%	Providing economic development and jobs
8%	6%	9%	Protecting the environment in the area
4%	2%	4%	Providing quality basic city, township, or county services
3%	3%	4%	Controlling traffic congestion
11%	12%	N/A	Improving the quality of area schools
---	---	---	More than one [ASK: "But which problem concerns you most?" AND CODE BEST RESPONSE]
4%	3%	3%	Undecided/Refused

It is observed that despite the historically consistent near-unanimous proportions of respondents reporting they feel *Safe* (Q 21), the statement, *Protecting the public from crime and drugs* has also seen a steady increase in the proportions selecting it as a top concern. However, unlike the housing issue, “crime and drugs” has always ranked as a top 2nd or 3rd concern, dating back to at least the 2012 survey.

Subgroups reporting “Affordable Housing” in proportions greater than the norm of 21% included:

- 45% Renters
- 33% Southwest region
Women 18-49
- 31% Housing proposal – Yes
Social media used – Twitter
Website visitation – A lot/Some
- 30% College women
- 29% Michigan direction – Right direction
- 28% Vote in local elections – Most times
Preferred Info source – Social media
- 27% Northwest region
Social media used – Instagram
Age 18-49
\$75K - \$100K hh income
- 26% Housing partnership – Yes
- 25% County services – Negative
Services vs. Taxes – Keep services
Preferred Info source – Email
Social media used – Facebook
Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.
Children at home – Yes
\$100K - \$150K hh income

Subgroups reporting “Crime/Drugs” in proportions greater than the norm of 20% included:

- 31% Michigan direction – Wrong track
\$75K - \$100K hh income
- 29% Northeast region
- 28% Preferred Info source – TV
- 27% Housing partnership – No
Men 50+
- 26% Southeast region
Housing proposal – No
H.S. or less
No college women
- 25% Local direction – Wrong track
Financial management – Positive
Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
Managing COVID – Negative
Age 65+

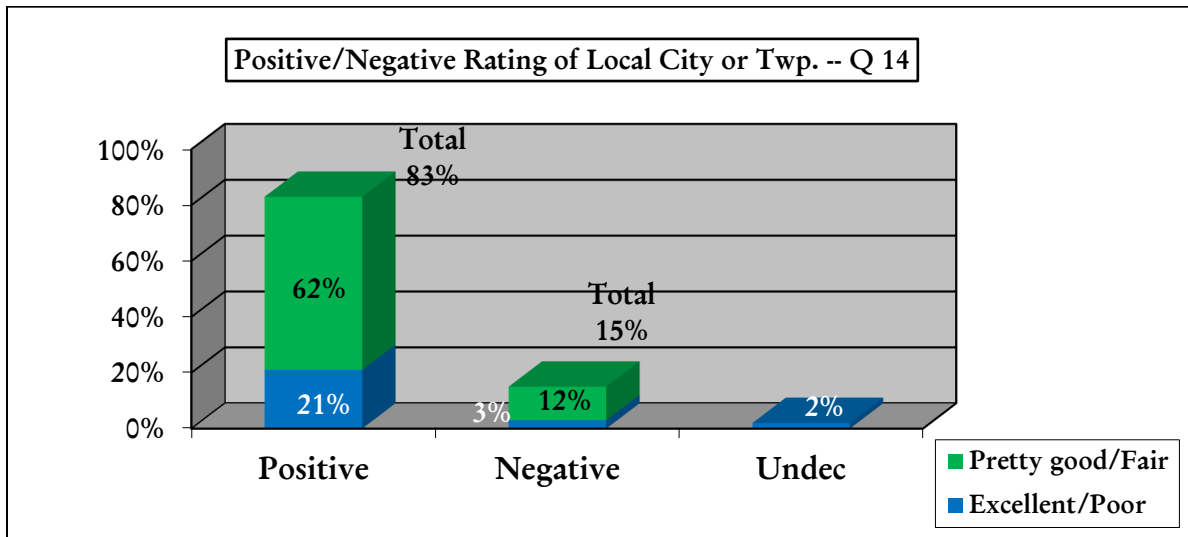
Subgroups reporting “Keep taxes low” in proportions greater than the norm of 17% included:

- 30% Central region
- 29% Managing COVID – Undecided
- 27% Vote in local elections – Half the time
Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
Preferred Info source – Radio
- 26% Taxes – Too high
Housing proposal – No
Housing partnership – No
- 24% Local services – Negative
Financial management – Negative
- 23% Southeast region
- 22% Michigan direction – Wrong track

21% *Managing COVID – Negative*
 Children at home – Yes
 Age 18-34
 \$50K - \$75K hh income
 No college women

-- Rating Local (City/Township/Village) Government - Q 14

2021 saw 83 percent of respondents issue a “Total Positive” rating for the job their local city, township or village was doing in providing basic services; the same figure recorded in the 2018 survey with nominal differences in the *Excellent* and *Pretty good* portions of the total. These two successive over-80-percent measurements contrast with a five-survey low of 72 percent recorded in 2016. Just as important, the “Negative” rating remained steady at its 2018 level of fifteen percent. These results contrast somewhat with the three-survey-year downward trend of the “Right direction” proportions seen at Q 5, although it is worth reiterating that this downward slide of “Right direction” numbers is not made up in “Wrong track” proportions but rather, in an increase in the number of “Undecided”.



Subgroups reporting “Negative” in proportions greater than the norm of 15% included:

45% *County services – Negative*
 39% *Local direction – Wrong track*
 28% *Financial management – Negative*
 26% *County direction – Wrong track*
 24% *Preferred info source – Newspaper*
 Preferred info source – Radio
 23% *\$25K - \$50K hh income*
 22% *No college men*
 21% *Vote in local elections – Half the time*
 Vote in local elections – Seldom/Never
 Most important issue – Taxes

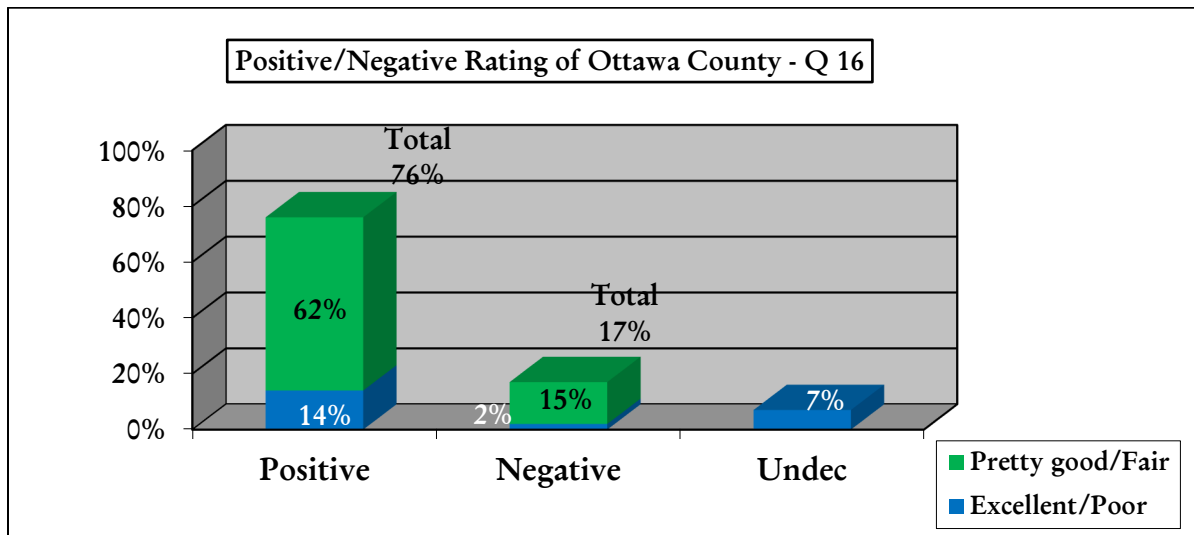
- 19% \$50K - \$75K hh income
- Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
- Managing COVID – Undecided
- County activities – Unaware
- Housing partnership – No
- Tenure in county – “Lifelong”

-- Reasons for the rating - Q 15

As a follow up to the Positive/Negative rating question, respondents who issued a *Negative* rating were asked to give their reason for doing so. In reviewing the proportional results, it is important to remember that at 15 percent “negative”, the responses for the reasons for that rating came from a total of just 59 individuals. For this group, the highest proportions landed in the categories of; *Limited/No Services* (12 percent); *Wasteful spending* (8 percent); and, *Roads* (7 percent), with the balance of the responses scattering across 22 other separate categories in proportions of five percent or less; 10 percent offered no reason. Interestingly, only one of the 59 individuals issuing a negative rating for their local unit of government’s *Handling of COVID*, as their reason.

-- Rate your County Government - Q 16

As for the county government’s provision of basic services, the 2021 results show 76 percent of respondents issuing a “Total Positive” rating; seven points lower than the positive rating issued for the local unit of government. This is a wider differential between the rating for the county and the local unit’s rating in measurements going back to 2012. In addition, the 76 percent total positive rating in 2021 is three points lower than that recorded in the immediately preceding 2018 with the difference (plus one point) made up in an increased “Total Negative” rating of seventeen percent.



Subgroups reporting a “Negative” rating for county government in proportions significantly greater than the norm of 17% included:

- 53% Local services – Negative
- 40% Financial management – Negative
- 39% County direction – Wrong track
- 36% Local direction – Wrong track
- 26% Vote in local elections – Seldom/Never
- Managing COVID – Undecided
- 25% Ottawa compares – Same
- Website visitation – Not at all
- 24% Northeast region
- Taxes – Too high
- 22% Southwest region
- Preferred info source – Newspaper
- H.S. or less
- 21% Vote in local elections – Half the time
- Managing COVID – Negative
- Housing partnership – No
- Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.
- Tenure in county – “Lifelong”

-- Reasons for the County Rating - Q’s 17 & 18

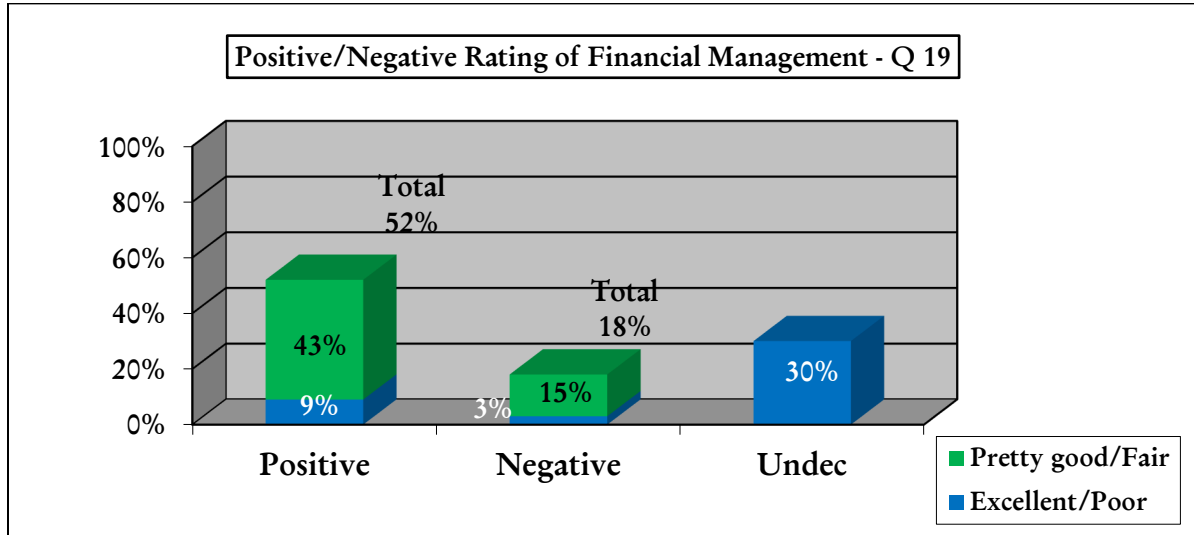
Again, as a follow up to the Positive/Negative rating of how well the county is doing in providing basic services, respondents were asked to give their reason for issuing the rating that they did. For the county test, this question was posed to respondents who issued either a positive or negative rating. The reader is also reminded again that at a 17 percent total “Negative” rating, the responses for the reasons for that rating came from a total of 69 individuals. The following illustrates the top several reasons why respondents offered the respective ratings:

Top Reasons for Positive Rating		Top Reasons for Negative Rating	
28%	No problems – Good overall	12%	Communication
9%	Timely Responses	9%	Wasteful spending
6%	Safe – Low Crime	7%	Little/No services
6%	Roads maintained	6%	Poor roads
		6%	Do Little/Nothing

-- Rate the County’s Handling of Finances - Q 19

In an effort to probe a little more specifically about perceptions concerning county government, respondents were also asked to offer a “Positive” or “Negative” rating for the job Ottawa County does in managing county finances. Over the course of the seven survey years, the “Positive” rating has ranged from a low of 53 percent (2008) to a high of 62 percent (2012) and the “Negative” rating has ranged from high of 20 percent (2010) to a low of 12 percent (2018). As can be seen from the graph below, the 2021 result sets a new seven-survey low of 52

percent “Positive” with the 18 percent “Negative” in a tie with the result recorded in 2014 and six points higher than the 2018 result.



Subgroups reporting “negative” in proportions greater than the norm of 18% included:

- 42% County services – Negative
- 39% County direction – Wrong track
- 34% Local direction – Wrong track
- Local services – Negative
- 33% Taxes – Too high
- 29% Housing partnership – No
- 27% Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
- Social media used – Twitter
- 26% Managing COVID – Negative
- Housing proposal – No
- 25% Top issue – Taxes
- \$50K - \$75K hh income
- 24% Website visitation – A lot/Some
- Tenure in county – “Lifelong”
- Age 18-34
- 23% Vote in local elections – Half the time
- Michigan direction – Wrong track
- Top issue – Roads
- Social media used – Don’t use
- \$750 - \$100K hh income
- No college men
- 22% Southeast region
- County direction – Undecided
- Men 18-49

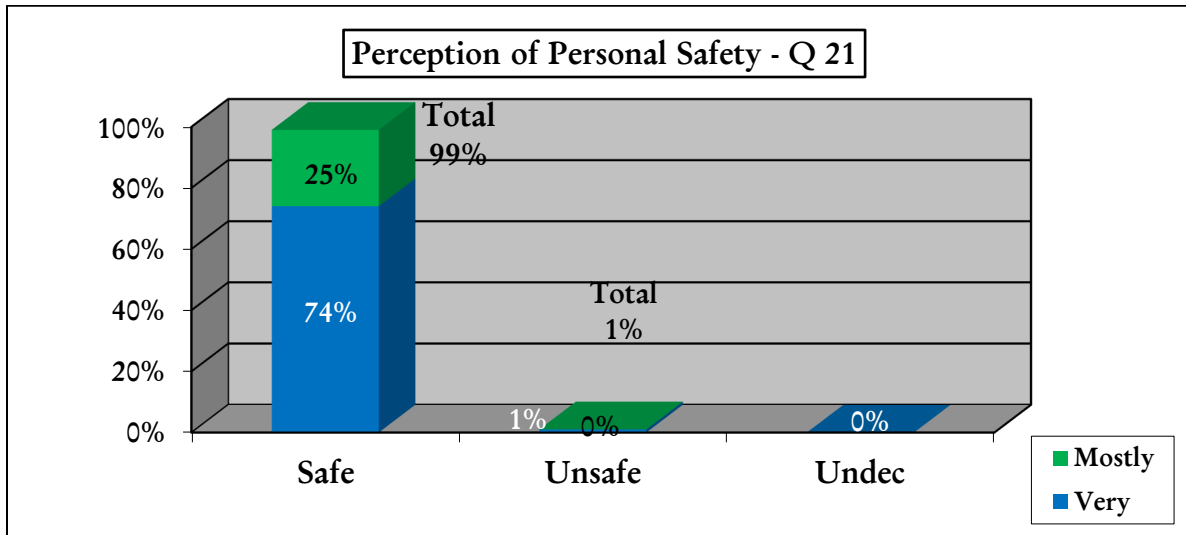
-- What County service is most in need of improvement - Q 20

Despite state action in recent years to address transportation infrastructure needs *Roads* – at 25 percent – remains the most-mentioned top-of-mind response when respondents are asked to name what specific county service needs the most improvement. However, “roads” in previous survey years garnered a much higher proportion of responses, being consistently at about one-third in the 2012 through 2016 surveys, with over four-in-ten offering the response in 2018.

None of the other 30-plus categories of responses broke four percent, with the exception of *Affordable housing*, which was mentioned by five percent as an open-ended response. The highest proportion of respondents – 35 percent – were “undecided” or otherwise did not offer an answer.

-- Perception of Personal Safety - Q 21

First introduced in the 2008 survey and repeated in each of the subsequent polls, respondents were asked, *How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?* Mirroring results from the prior four studies, virtually all 2021 respondents reported that they felt safe where they lived. This result is recorded despite – or perhaps because of – the 20 percent of respondents selecting *Protecting the public from crime and drugs* as their top issue earlier at Q 13. The chart below illustrates the results:



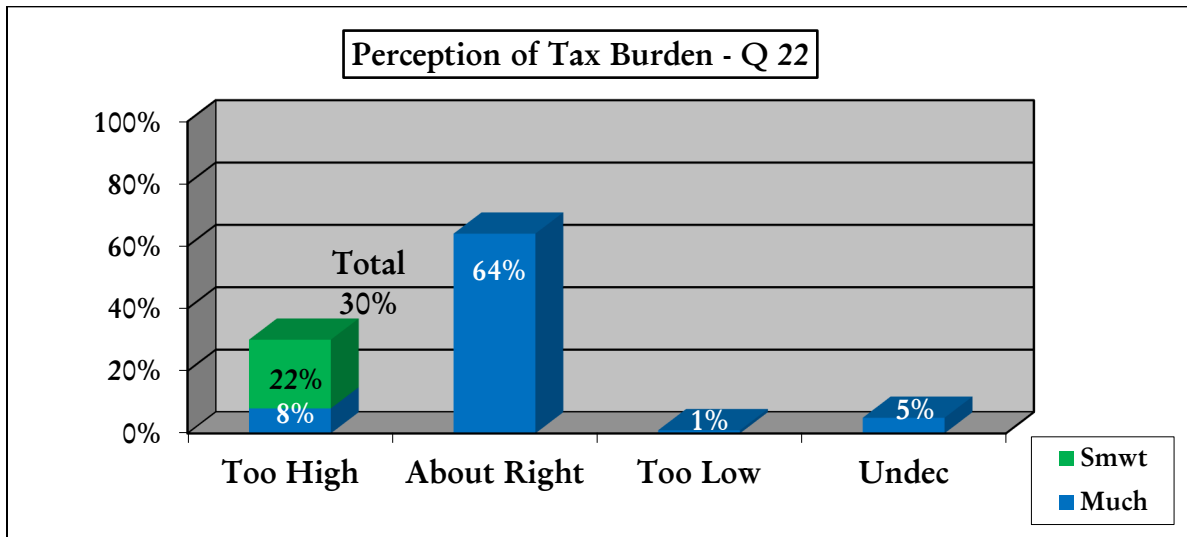
-- Perception of tax burden - Q 22

Respondents’ perception of value received in exchange for taxes paid is not only a key indicator about attitudes toward a governmental entity generally, but it is also a fairly good harbinger of the chances for passing a ballot proposal regarding changes to the tax assessment status quo. In a question included in nearly all surveys of this type conducted by EPIC ▪ MRA, 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.

In the second “Great Recession” year of 2008, the total “too high” proportion reached its peak in this time series of surveys, at 39 percent (nearly half of which was the more intense

Much too high expression), with the 2010 figure of 30 percent signaling residents were becoming less anxious about the state of the economy. The “too high” proportion hovered in the mid-to-upper-20-percent range in survey years 2012 through 2018; when respondents reported 23 percent, “too high”.

In this most recent 2021 study, the total “Too High” rises seven points to its 2010 level, although the more intense *Much* (too high) portion of the total remains below double digits; as it has since 2010.



The figures in this measurement are consistent with the generally lower proportions of “positive” ratings the county receives in other measurements for assessment of performance than it has received in recent previous studies. The increase in the 2021 survey’s, taxes “too high” number, however, is not necessarily indicative of a universal antithesis toward county government activities, as can be seen in the favorable responses issued other measurements (e.g., Q 24 - COVID response, and Q 45 - Housing millage).

Subgroups reporting “Too high” in proportions greater than the norm of 30% included:

- 56% County direction – Wrong track
- Financial management – Negative
- 52% Managing COVID – Negative
- 51% Local direction – Wrong track
- Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
- 49% Housing proposal – No
- 46% Michigan direction – Wrong track
- Top issue – Taxes
- 45% Housing partnership -- No
- 42% Vote in local elections – Half the time
- County services – Negative
- 41% County direction – Undecided
- 37% Local services – Negative

36%	<i>Website visitation – Not at all</i> <i>\$25K - \$50K hh income</i>
35%	<i>Southeast region</i> <i>Preferred Info source – Radio</i> <i>Social media used – Don't use</i> <i>Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.</i> <i>Tenure in county – “Lifelong”</i> <i>Women 50+</i>
34%	<i>Vote in local elections – Seldom/Never</i> <i>Age 50-64</i> <i>H.S. or less</i> <i>Over \$150K hh income</i>

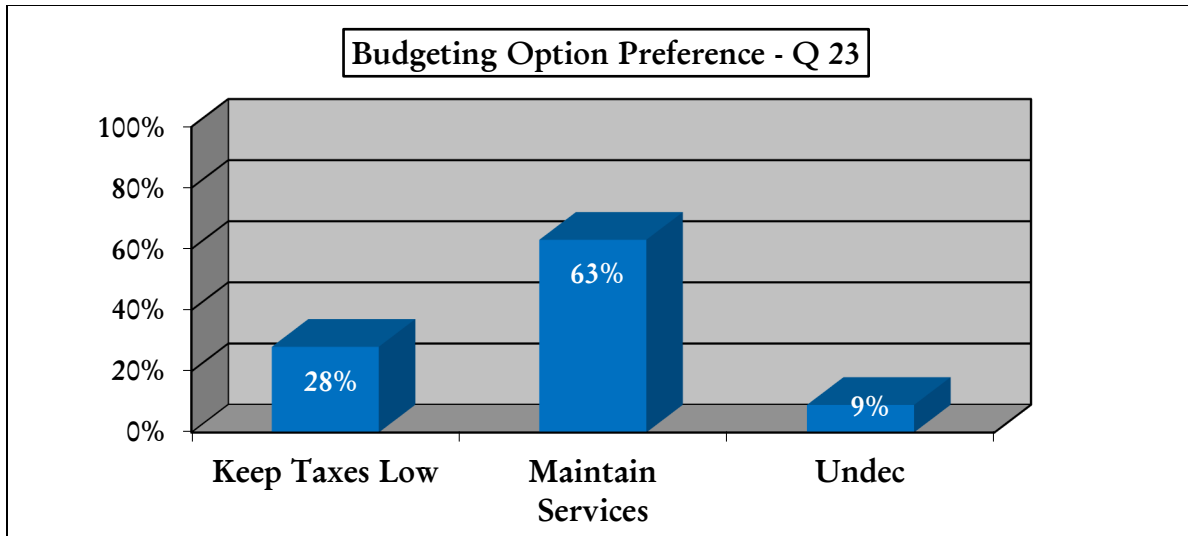
-- Taxes vs. Service Levels - Q 23

Another question designed to provide insight to elected officials and other policymakers asked respondents to select between the options of maintaining the current level of services even if that means a tax increase or, keep taxes low, even if that means a cut in services. This question has been posed in every survey since 2006 when a bare plurality of respondents opted of the “maintain services” statement. In 2008 and 2010 recession-year surveys, clear-to-strong majorities opted for the “keep taxes low” statement. The survey of 2012 was the first time a majority of respondents selected the “maintain services” option over the “keep taxes low” alternative, with a two point increase in this majority (to 53 percent) being recorded in 2014.

In the 2016, the majority response opting for the “maintain services” statement became unequivocal, with 61 percent of respondents selecting the maintenance of services option. The proportion rose to 62 percent in 2018 and for the 2021 survey stands at sixty-three percent. The language of the options available to respondents (the presentation of which were rotated throughout the sample to eliminate potential bias) read:

Which of the two following statements comes closer to your 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.”*



Subgroups selecting “Keep taxes low” in proportions greater than the norm of 28% included:

- 50% *Housing proposal – No*
- 48% *Taxes – Too high*
- Managing COVID – Negative*
- 46% *Housing partnership – No*
- 45% *County direction – Wrong track*
- 43% *Financial management – Negative*
- 42% *Michigan direction – Wrong track*
- Local direction – Wrong track*
- 38% *County direction – Undecided*
- Preferred Info source – Radio*
- 37% *Central region*
- Local services – Negative*
- 36% *Southeast region*
- 35% *Top issue – Crime*
- County activities – Unaware*
- Social media used – Don’t use*
- Tenure in county – 25+ yrs.*
- \$75K - \$100K hh income*
- No college men*
- 34% *H.S. or less*
- 33% *Website visitation – Not at all*
- Men*
- 32% *Top issue – Roads*

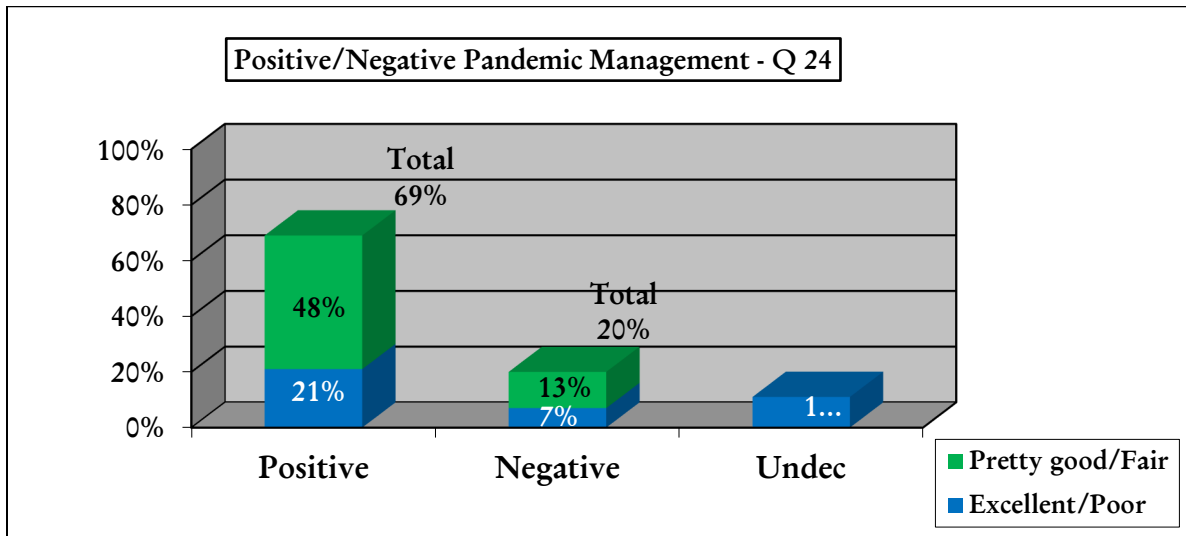
Subgroups selecting “Maintain services” in proportions greater than the norm of 63% included:

- 80% *Housing proposal – Yes*
- Social media used – Twitter*
- 78% *Michigan direction – Right direction*
- 77% *Tenure in county – 6-15 yrs.*
- 76% *Top issue – Housing*
- 75% *Northwest region*
- Taxes – About right*
- 74% *Preferred Info source – Social media*
- 73% *County direction – Right direction*
- Renters*
- Women 18-49*

- 72% *Housing partnership – Yes*
Preferred Info source – Email
Social media used – Instagram
- 71% *Managing COVID – Positive*
Website visitation – A lot
Website rating – Positive
- 70% *Financial management – Positive*
Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.
College women
- 69% *Social media used – Facebook*
- 68% *Local direction – Right direction*
Contacted County – Yes
County activities – Aware
Tenure in county – 1-5 yrs.
\$100K - \$150K hh income
- 67% *Preferred Info source – Website*
Preferred Info source – Newspaper
Website visitation – A little
Age 18-49
Women

-- County’s COVID Management Response – Q 24

In a question unique to the 2021 survey, respondents were asked to rate the job the County’s Public Health Department is doing (the question is consciously phrased in the present tense) managing the pandemic, using the now-familiar “Positive/Negative” format. As is illustrated in the graph below, nearly seven-of-ten issued a positive rating:



Subgroups reporting “Negative” in proportions greater than the norm of 20% included:

- 42% *County direction – Wrong track*
- 40% *Housing partnership -- No*
- 37% *Local direction – Wrong track*
- 35% *Taxes – Too high*
Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
- 34% *Michigan direction – Wrong track*
- 33% *Housing proposal –No*
- 31% *Women 18-49*

- 29% *Financial management – Negative*
Age 35-49
- 28% *County direction – Undecided*
Top issue – Roads
Tenure in county – 1-5 yrs.
Renters
- 27% *Top issue – Taxes*
Over \$150K hh income
- 26% *Vote in local elections – Most times*
Financial management – Undecided
Preferred Info source – Website
Preferred Info source – Social media
Age 18-49
- 25% *Central region*
Top issue – Crime
County services – Negative
Social media used – Instagram
Website visitation – A lot
Children at home – Yes
- 24% *County activities – Aware*
Groundwater issues – Aware
Preferred Info source – Radio

-- Reasons for the COVID 19 Management Rating - Q's 25 & 26

As with the follow up to the Positive/Negative rating of how well the county is doing in providing basic services, respondents were asked to give their reason for issuing the rating that they did on the Health Department’s management of the pandemic. With a total “Negative” rating of 20 percent, the proportions of responses for the reasons for that rating came from a total of 81 individuals. The following illustrates the top several reasons why respondents offered the respective ratings:

Top Reasons for Positive Rating N=277		Top Reasons for Negative Rating N=81	
26%	Vaccine & Testing Availability	47%	Overreach – Too many mandates/Too much enforcement.
20%	Communication – Transparency	9%	Poor communication
13%	Fewer cases than nearby counties	9%	Masks/Social distancing should still be required
7%	Followed CDC/State mandates	5%	It’s all politics

The low number issuing a Negative rating left very few subgroups of sufficient size for analysis. Sufficiently sized subgroups reporting “Overreach” in proportions greater than the norm of 47% included:

- 59% *Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes*
- 58% *Michigan direction – Wrong track*
Housing partnership – No
Social media used – Facebook
- 57% *Website visitation – Little*
- 54% *Housing proposal – No*
- 53% *County contact – No*
- 52% *Taxes – Too high*
- 51% *Groundwater issue – Aware*

-- Contact with a County Department - Q's 27-29

Another original question from 2006 asked respondents if they or anyone else in their household has contacted a county office or department. The first year this question was asked saw the highest proportion of responses at thirty-seven percent. In subsequent tests, the response rate had remained consistently at or around thirty-percent, with the exception of 2016 when it dropped to twenty-six percent. The 2021 measurement returns to the 26 percent low recorded in 2016, a somewhat surprising result given the public health circumstances of the last 18 months. The following chart illustrates the results over time:

2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2021	
28%	21%	20%	23%	26%	19%	19%	21%	Yes, respondent
7%	8%	3%	4%	2%	3%	6%	3%	Yes, someone else
2%	3%	7%	2%	3%	4%	6%	2%	Yes, more than one
37%	32%	30%	29%	31%	26%	31%	26%	TOTAL CONTACTED
61%	63%	69%	71%	68%	73%	71%	74%	No one contacted an office or department of Ottawa County
6%	5%	1%	---	1%	1%	1%	0%	Undecided/Refused

From 2008 through 2018, the department receiving the most reported contacts had been the Sheriff's Department if combined with other replies involving law enforcement or emergency responders. In 2016 and 2012, "Road Commission" as an entity unto itself, received the highest proportion of responses.

For 2021 – and perhaps unsurprisingly – "Health Department" supplanted the traditional most cited county departments, garnering 26 percent of responses from those households reporting contact with a county department (N=105) in the immediately preceding question. The "Sheriff's Department" still received a hefty 19 percent of responses, with balance of the 20 specifically named departments receiving response proportions only in the single digits – a pre-2021 status consistently occupied by the health department.

As has been traditionally the case, nearly all of these respondents reported they either called the named department on the phone (67 percent) or paid a personal visit (16 percent). While there had been no perceptible increase over time in the proportion of respondents reporting the use of web-based means of contacting a county office, 2021 saw a large increase to ten percent using email and significant rise to seven percent using the county website. These latter increases are likely associated with many respondents observing stay-at-home protocols.

-- Satisfaction with Job Performance - Q 30

While there was a reduction in the total number of respondents reporting contact with a county agency, the overall satisfaction with the experience from those who had contacted a county office remained quite high, with 88 percent reporting being satisfied (66 percent *Very* satisfied).

The low number issuing a Negative rating left very few subgroups of sufficient size for analysis.

-- More, Enough, or Too Much? - Q's 31-43

A battery of questions many policy-making bodies have found to be helpful recites a list of county services and activities, followed by the solicitation of respondents' opinion – after hearing of each individual service or activity – to give their opinion as to whether or not the county is currently doing, *enough*, *too much*, or, if *more* needs to be done. To measure the intensity of opinion that more needs to be done, respondents answering “more” are asked if they believe that *Much More* or just *Somewhat More*, is necessary to address their concern.

Continuing the shift from prior studies that was first detected in 2014, there is – for most of the categories tested – a lack of intensity of feeling among those respondents reporting the county ought to be doing “More” for a given area. There are notable exceptions to this general observation, and they tend to track respondents' perceptions of both the general state of the economy, and specifically, how secure they are feeling about their personal financial outlook.

For example, the effects of the great recession of 2007 began to manifest themselves in the 2008 survey, exerted their greatest influence in survey conducted in 2010, and continued with residual effects in 2012. Illustrative of this phenomenon are the results to the statement, *Providing effective economic development programs*; which not only ranked either 1 or 2 on the “Total More” ranking for those three survey years, but also recorded double digit *Much* more proportions as part of the total. In the current survey, this statement ranks 8th in the ranking out of the 13 statements tested, and the “much more” portion is in the low single digits.

By way of contrast the, *Providing mental health services* statement languished in the lower half of the overall “Total More” rankings in survey years 2006-2010. However, beginning in 2012, this statement rose to the top half of the overall rankings and since 2014, it has placed in either the 1st or 2nd slot in the “Total More” rankings. Moreover, this statement has held double digit “Much” more proportions since 2014 and, in the current study, holds the number one slot on the “much more” ranking scale.

Although not as dramatic as the movement of the mental health services area, but perhaps because of its correlation with it, similar upward movement on the scale for *Providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services* is also observed. In the 2012 and 2014 studies, substance abuse services had leveled off at a number six ranking from its former eleventh place spot in 2008. This ranking moved up to third place in 2016 and 2018 and would also be in the third slot for 2021 but for the introduction of the groundwater question. In like fashion, the “Much More” portion of the total has trended upward over the more recent survey years.

Remaining consistent throughout the survey years is the statement, *Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services*, which has never held lower than a number two ranking on the “total more” scale since 2008. This statement has also consistently received double digit “Much” more proportions for each of the eight surveys conducted for the county since 2006.

In 2018 a statement was introduced which asks respondents about, *Promoting Ottawa County as a welcoming place for diverse populations*. Three years ago, this statement ranked 5th on both the “Total More” and “Much More” rankings of the 12 statements tested. In this latest study, the statement again ranks 5th on both of the rankings, but in 2021 its placement is out of 13 statements.

The 2021 survey saw the introduction of a new statement, *Protecting the declining supply of groundwater that serves irrigation systems and drinking water wells to the county*. The pertinence the statement is reflected in the fact that it ranks 3rd on the “Total More” measure out of the 13 statements tested and ranks 2nd on the “Much More” ranking; besting the “greater communication” statement, and only slightly behind “mental health services” statement.

A demographic analysis of respondents’ opinions about the groundwater question is provided following this narrative. The significance of such an analysis lies in the results of a subsequent question which asks respondents to report how “Aware” they are of existing groundwater issues. It is hoped a comparison of the analysis to this “More, Enough, Too much” question with the analysis of the subsequent awareness question will prove useful to any education efforts about the groundwater issue the county may wish to pursue.

In reviewing this battery of questions, it is important not to focus so closely on the internal juxtaposition of “More” portion of the results that parts of the larger picture are lost. That is, it is important to note that of the thirteen statements tested, seven of them reveal majority *Enough* proportions, some of which exceed what can be characterized as very strong majorities.

Perhaps just as important from a policy-making perspective are the proportions of *Undecided* respondents. In some cases, (e.g., juvenile offender housing, substance abuse services, and groundwater) these proportions are quite high and come close to – and sometimes exceed – both the “More” and “Enough” categories. This can signal that even though the issue is important (it was included in the interview, after all), the public lacks enough information for policymakers to comfortably move aggressively without greater widespread understanding of the issue.

Following is a comprehensive time-line illustration of this battery of thirteen questions:

	2021 SORTED MOST TO LEAST “TOTAL MORE” NEEDED” Each item’s <i>Much More</i> ranking is shown in subscript	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>40.</u> #1 of 13	Keeping county residents informed about county programs and services	16% ₃	46%	47%	1%	6%
	Ranking in 2018 - 2 of 12	16%	37%	56%	1%	6%
	Ranking in 2016 – 2 of 11	11%	39%	56%	1%	4%
	Ranking in 2014 - 1 of 11	10%	40%	54%	1%	5%
	Ranking in 2012 - 2 of 14	14%	27%	55%	2%	3%
	Ranking in 2010 – 2 of 15	12%	41%	54%	1%	4%
	Ranking in 2008 – 1 of 15	15%	42%	49%	---	9%
	Ranking in 2006 - 4 of 15	16%	42%	52%	---	6%
<u>36.</u> #2 of 13	Providing mental health services	19% ₁	41%	34%	0%	25%
	Ranking in 2018 - 1 of 12	24%	43%	26%	2%	29%
	Ranking in 2016 – 1 of 11	22%	40%	38%	2%	20%
	Ranking in 2014 – 2 of 11	10%	23%	37%	3%	37%
	Ranking in 2012 – 5 of 14	7%	20%	50%	---	30%
	Ranking in 2010 – 8 of 15	7%	22%	50%	2%	26%
	Ranking in 2008 – 12 of 15	6%	21%	49%	2%	28%
	Ranking in 2006 – 8 of 15	7%	21%	41%	1%	37%
<u>43.</u> #3 of 13	NEW QUESTION FOR 2021: Protecting the declining supply of groundwater that serves irrigation systems and drinking water wells to the county.	17% ₂	35%	36%	1%	28%

	2021 SORTED MOST TO LEAST “TOTAL MORE” NEEDED” (cont.) Each item’s <i>Much</i> more ranking is shown in subscript	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>35.</u> #4 of 13	Providing substance abuse prevention and treatment services	12% ₄	29%	37%	2%	32%
	Ranking in 2018 - 3 of 12	14%	31%	27%	2%	40%
	Ranking in 2016 - 3 of 11	7%	24%	44%	1%	31%
	Ranking in 2014 - 6 of 11	4%	18%	37%	4%	41%
	Ranking in 2012 - 6 of 14	5%	19%	49%	2%	30%
	Ranking in 2010 - 9 of 15	5%	19%	46%	5%	30%
	Ranking in 2008 - 11 of 15	6%	22%	46%	4%	28%
	[Not posed in 2006]					
<u>42.</u> #5 of 13	Promoting Ottawa County as a welcoming place for diverse populations	11% ₆	28%	58%	4%	10%
	Ranking in 2018 - 5 of 12	10%	24%	64%	4%	8%
<u>39.</u> #6 of 13	Working with local governments to best plan commercial and residential development so excessive growth and sprawl can be avoided	12% ₄	27%	51%	3%	19%
	Ranking in 2018 - 4 of 12	12%	27%	51%	3%	19%
	Ranking in 2016 - 5 of 11	4%	20%	55%	2%	23%
	Ranking in 2014 - 5 of 11	4%	20%	55%	2%	23%
	Ranking in 2012 - 4 of 14	10%	26%	54%	3%	17%
	Ranking in 2010 - 5 of 15	5%	29%	49%	5%	17%
	Ranking in 2008 - 3 of 15	9%	32%	47%	3%	18%
	Ranking in 2006 - 3 of 15	18%	42%	39%	2%	16%
<u>37.</u> #7 of 13	Providing programs for juvenile offenders separate from adult prison programs	9% ₇	24%	34%	1%	41%
	Ranking in 2018 - 6 of 12	9%	22%	28%	2%	48%
	Ranking in 2016 - 5 of 11	6%	24%	39%	2%	35%
	Ranking in 2014 - 3 of 11	5%	21%	31%	1%	47%
	Ranking in 2012 - 8 of 14	5%	17%	47%	1%	35%
	Ranking in 2010 - 7 of 15	5%	23%	41%	1%	35%
	Ranking in 2008 - 10 of 15	6%	22%	45%	2%	31%
	Ranking in 2006 - 7 of 15	8%	22%	37%	1%	40%

	2021 SORTED MOST TO LEAST “TOTAL MORE” NEEDED” (cont.) Each item’s <i>Much</i> more ranking is shown in subscript	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>34.</u> #8 of 13	Providing effective economic development programs	6% ₈	19%	49%	3%	29%
	Ranking in 2018 – 7 of 12	4%	18%	52%	4%	26%
	Ranking in 2016 – 7 of 11	3%	17%	56%	4%	23%
	Ranking in 2014 – 4 of 11	3%	21%	48%	3%	28%
	Ranking in 2012 – 1 of 14	14%	41%	46%	2%	11%
	Ranking in 2010 – 1 of 15	19%	50%	35%	3%	12%
	Ranking in 2008 – 2 of 15	14%	42%	35%	2%	21%
	Ranking in 2006 – 2 of 15	18%	51%	31%	2%	16%
<u>31.</u> #9 of 13	Providing effective law enforcement services by the Sheriff’s Department	4% ₉	12%	84%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2018 – 8 of 12	4%	13%	82%	2%	3%
	Ranking in 2016 – 8 of 11	1%	10%	85%	3%	2%
	Ranking in 2014 – 8 of 11	1%	12%	82%	4%	2%
	Ranking in 2012 – 10 of 14	3%	13%	83%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2010 – 11 of 15	3%	14%	80%	3%	3%
	Ranking in 2008 - 6 of 15	8%	25%	66%	2%	7%
	Ranking in 2006 - 9 of 15	4%	18%	73%	3%	6%
<u>33.</u> #10 of 13	Providing public health services, such as immunizations and restaurant inspections	3% ₁₀	11%	76%	4%	9%
	Ranking in 2018 – 9 of 12	3%	12%	70%	2%	16%
	Ranking in 2016 – 6 of 11	4%	18%	69%	2%	11%
	Ranking in 2014 – 7 of 11	3%	13%	70%	3%	14%
	Ranking in 2012 – 9 of 14	4%	13%	74%	1%	12%
	Ranking in 2010 – 10 of 15	4%	16%	67%	6%	11%
	Ranking in 2008 - 14 of 15	6%	16%	65%	2%	17%
	Ranking in 2006 - 13 of 15	4%	15%	70%	1%	14%

	2021 SORTED MOST TO LEAST “TOTAL MORE” NEEDED” (cont.) Each item’s <i>Much</i> more ranking is shown in subscript	<u>Much More</u>	<u>TOTAL More</u>	<u>Enough</u>	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Undec/ DK</u>
<u>41.</u> #11 of 13	Maintaining <u>County</u> parks and recreational facilities	3% ₁₀	9%	86%	3%	2%
	Ranking in 2018 – 11 of 12	2%	7%	87%	3%	3%
	Ranking in 2016 – 10 of 11	1%	5%	91%	2%	2%
	Ranking in 2014 – 9 of 11	1%	8%	87%	4%	1%
	Ranking in 2012 – 14 of 14	1%	5%	90%	4%	1%
	Ranking in 2010 – 13 of 15	2%	11%	83%	5%	1%
	Ranking in 2008 – 13 of 15	4%	18%	72%	4%	6%
	Ranking in 2006 - 10 of 15	4%	18%	76%	2%	4%
<u>32.</u> #12 of 13	Safely operating the county jail, protecting the public, and avoiding prison overcrowding	3% ₁₀	7%	62%	1%	30%
	Ranking in 2018 – 12 of 12	3%	6%	59%	2%	33%
	Ranking in 2016 – 11 of 11	1%	5%	69%	2%	24%
	Ranking in 2014 – 10 of 11	1%	7%	63%	3%	27%
	Ranking in 2012 – 13 of 14	3%	7%	70%	1%	22%
	Ranking in 2010 – 15 of 15	1%	9%	67%	3%	21%
	Ranking in 2008 – 15 of 15	4%	16%	61%	2%	21%
	Ranking in 2006 - 14 of 15	4%	12%	65%	2%	12%
<u>37.</u> #13 of 13	Providing a quick emergency response to accidents	2% ₁₃	5%	86%	1%	8%
	Ranking in 2018 – 9 of 12	3%	7%	87%	---	6%
	Ranking in 2016 – 9 of 11	1%	7%	85%	1%	7%
	Ranking in 2014 – 11 of 11	---	5%	88%	---	7%
	Ranking in 2012 – 12 of 14	2%	9%	85%	1%	5%
	Ranking in 2010 – 14 of 15	2%	9%	85%	---	6%
	Ranking in 2008 – 9 of 15	7%	22%	64%	1%	13%
	Ranking in 2006 - 15 of 15	3%	11%	80%	---	9%

Subgroups reporting “Undecided” on the Groundwater statement in proportions greater than the norm of 28% included:

- 39% *Northeast region*
- 38% *\$75K - \$100K hh income*
- 37% *Top issue – Taxes*
- Groundwater issue – Unaware*
- 35% *Financial management – Undecided*
- 33% *Vote in local elections – Half the time*

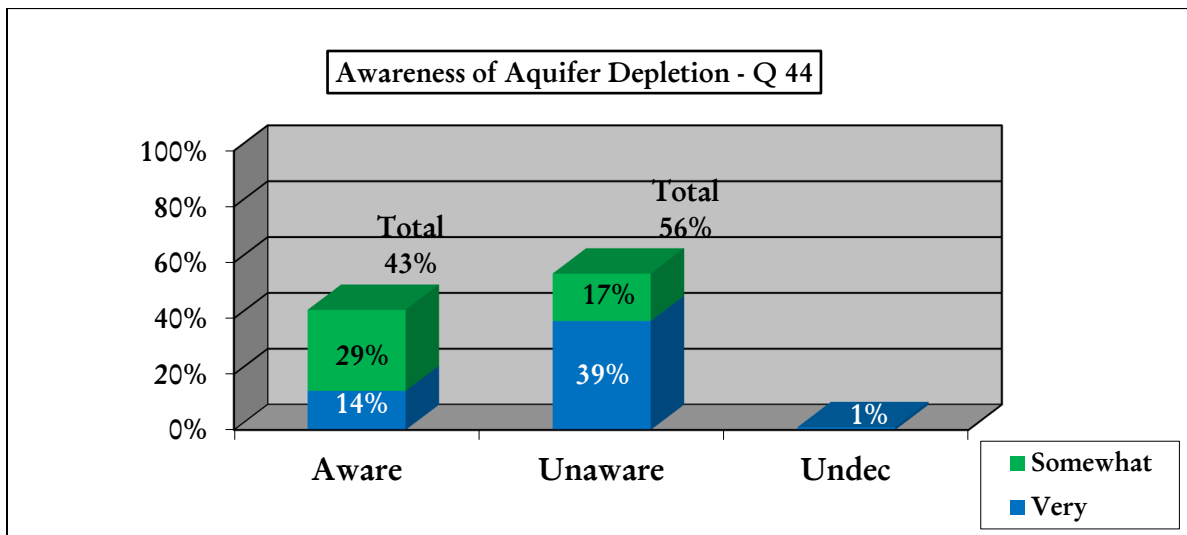
Local direction – Undecided
Managing COVID – Undecided
Post H.S.

Subgroups reporting “Enough” on the Groundwater statement in proportions greater than the norm of 36% included:

- 49% Top issue – Crime
- 48% Age 18-34
Over \$150K hh income
- 45% Top issue – Roads
- 44% Preferred info source – Social media
Tenure in county – 6-15 yrs.
- 43% Social media used – Twitter
Tenure in county – 1-5 yrs.
Renters
- 42% Michigan direction – Wrong track
Financial management – Positive
Managing COVID – Negative
Preferred info source – TV
- 41% Men
- 40% Southeast region
Groundwater Issue – Unaware
H.S. or less

-- Awareness of Groundwater Issues - Q 44

A description of several concerning issues involving groundwater was read to respondents. The information included mention of diminishing aquifer levels and the presence of salt in some wells. After hearing the description, respondents were asked how aware they were of these issues prior to hearing the description. A 56 percent majority indicated they were unaware of the problems, with seven-in-ten of that total reporting being very unaware of them. The graph below illustrates the distribution of responses:



Subgroups reporting “Unaware” in proportions greater than the norm of 56% included:
(Subgroups also appearing in the Q 43 “Enough” or “Undecided” are in **bold**)

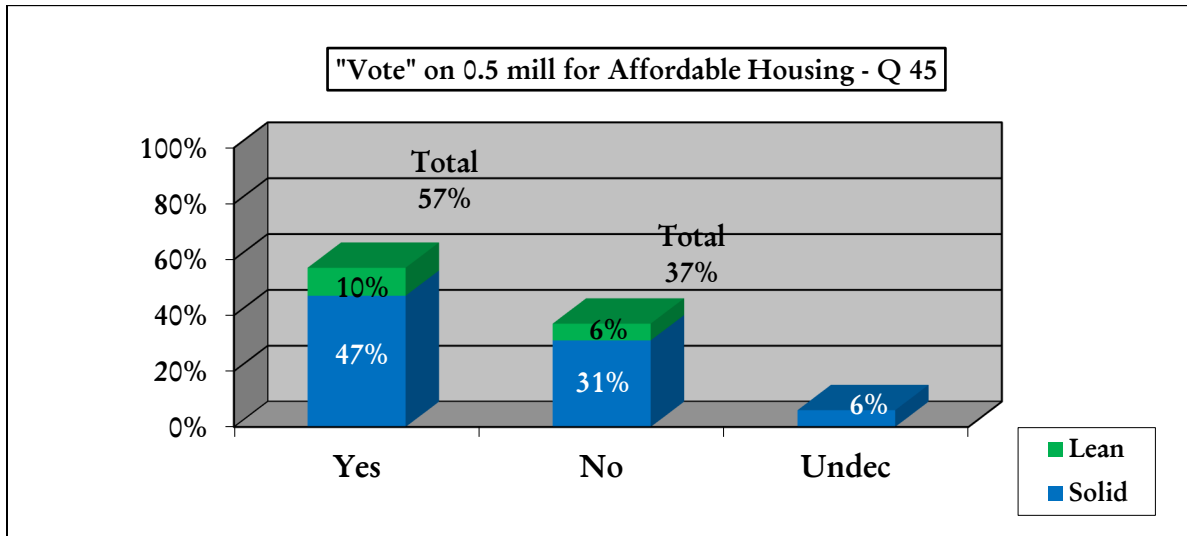
68%	Northeast region
67%	Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.
66%	Local services – Negative County activities – Unaware
65%	H.S. or less
64%	Managing COVID – Undecided
63%	Michigan direction – Right direction Tenure in county – 1-5 yrs.
62%	Vote in local elections – Most times Top issue – Jobs County services – Negative Housing proposal – Yes Preferred info source – TV Website visitation – Not at all
61%	Preferred info source – Newspaper Social media used – Twitter
60%	Southwest region Vote in local elections – Seldom/Never County direction – Right direction Top issue – Taxes County contact – No Housing partnership – Undecided Women 50+

-- Hypothetical Housing Millage - Q 45

Respondents were next presented with a “vote” on a hypothetical affordable housing ballot proposal. They were informed of discussions involving a request for a 0.1 mill property tax dedicated to increasing the availability of affordable housing as a means to support a growing economy and workforce in the area. Respondents were also informed that such an increase would result in an annual increase of \$5.00 per year on a home with an assessed value of \$100,000.00 and a taxable value of \$50,000.00. Following this information, respondents were asked how they would vote on such a proposal if were on the ballot today. For those initially reporting *Undecided*, the interviewer follows up by asking if they had to decide right now, would they “lean” toward one response or the other.

In the following graph, the results to this question are illustrated with immediate yes and no responses denominated as “Solid” votes, and these expressions elicited only after being pressed for an answer as “Lean” votes. When analyzing survey results involving voting sentiment on ballot questions, the convention is to look for a “Total Yes” of 60 percent or better with at least 50 points of the of that total comprised of “Solid” expressions to project likely approval of the measure. As can be seen in the graph below, the question of a modest millage

increase for the purpose of increasing the availability of affordable housing in the county comes close to – but does not quite reach – the respective “comfortable” totals:



Subgroups “voting” Yes in support of the Affordable Housing millage in proportions greater than the norm of 57% included:

- 87% Top issue – Housing
- 85% Renters
- 78% Michigan direction – Right direction
Housing partnership – Yes
Social media used – Twitter
- 73% Services vs. Taxes – Services
- 72% Preferred info source – Social media
- 68% Women 18-49
- 67% Southwest region
Northwest region
County direction – Right direction
Taxes – About right
- 66% \$25K-\$50K hh income
- 65% Managing COVID – Positive
Social media used – Instagram
Tenure in county – 15-25 yrs.
Age 35-49
- 64% Voted in one of last 2 general elections
Financial management – Positive
County contact – Yes
Preferred info source – Email
Women
- 63% Votes in local elections – Seldom/Never
Groundwater issue – Not aware
Website visitation – A lot/Some
Tenure in county – Lifetime
- 62% Top issue – Jobs
County activities – Aware
Social media used – Facebook
Age 18-49

61% \$100K-\$150K hh income
 Votes in local elections – Mostly
 Website – Positive
 Tenure in county – 6-15 yrs.
 H.S. or less
 College education

Subgroups “voting” No in opposition to the Affordable Housing millage in proportions greater than the norm of 37% included:

76% Housing partnership – No
 65% Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes
 60% Taxes – Too high
 59% Managing COVID – Negative
 58% Central region
 54% Top issue – Taxes
 53% Michigan direction – Wrong track
 County direction – Undecided
 Financial management – Negative
 51% Top issue – Roads
 No college men
 50% Northeast region
 Men 50+
 48% Vote in local elections – Half the time
 47% County direction – Wrong track
 Top issue – Crime
 Post H.S.
 46% Local direction – Wrong track
 45% Preferred info source – Newspaper
 Men
 44% Groundwater issue – Aware
 43% Ottawa compares – Same
 Preferred info source – Website
 Social media used – Don’t use
 Age 50-64
 Over \$150K hh income
 42% Southeast region
 Local services – Negative
 County activities – Unaware
 41% Tenure in county – 25+ yrs.

-- Influence of Public/Private Partnership on a Housing Ballot Question - Q 46

As a follow-up to the “vote” on a new dedicated housing millage, all respondents were asked if they would be more likely to support such a proposal . . . *if funding was a partnership of private businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government?* This twist on the proposal results in greater acceptance of the proposal, with 62 percent of all respondents saying it would make them more likely to support it. It is cautioned that reporting that a public/private partnership would make one *more likely* to support it does not necessarily translate into casting a yes vote at the polls. Nevertheless, for support of this initiative, wrapping in non-government entities enhances its appeal.

Subgroups reporting “Yes more likely to support in proportions greater than the 62% norm included: (Subgroups reporting “No” in the previous “vote” question now reporting “Yes” as being more likely to support are in **bold**)

- 80% Michigan direction – Right direction
- 79% Housing proposal – Yes
- 77% Top issue – Housing
- 76% Social media used – Twitter
- 73% County direction – Right direction
- Renters
- 72% Age 18-34
- 71% Northwest region
- Top issue – Jobs
- Services vs. Taxes – Services
- 70% Managing COVID – Positive
- Social media used – Instagram
- 68% Local direction – Right direction
- Taxes – About right
- Preferred info source – Social media
- Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.
- 67% Vote in local elections – Seldom/Never
- Social media used – Facebook
- Tenure in county – 6-15 yrs.
- College education
- 66% Southwest region
- Financial management – Positive
- Preferred info source – Website**
- Over \$150K hh income**
- Women

In addition to the subgroups highlighted in bold in the analysis above, the chart below lists the subgroups moving from a below-majority-“Yes” on the previous question, to 50 percent or higher, *Yes – [would be]* more likely to support the proposal if it were a public/private partnership:

Subgroup	Q 46 “Yes”	Q 47 “Yes	Movement
Top Issue – Taxes	37%	52%	+15
Northeast region	47%	61%	+14
Taxes – Too high	36%	50%	+14
Preferred info source -- Newspaper	49%	63%	+14
County direction – Undecided	40%	50%	+10
Groundwater issue – Aware	49%	57%	+8
Men	49%	57%	+8
Men 50+	44%	51%	+7
Vote in local elections – Half the time	48%	56%	+6
Top Issue – Crime	49%	54%	+5
Social media used – Don’t use	48%	51%	+3

-- Where to Cut if Needed? - Q 47

Following the ballot issue “vote”, respondents were given the opportunity to name up to two areas or programs to cut if the Commission were faced with such a decision in order to balance the budget. In keeping with the results of the prior five surveys, *Parks and Recreation* topped the list, but like every other survey after 2012, it was cited by fewer than ten percent of all responses offered in 2021 (5 percent), 2018 (5 percent) 2016 (7 percent) and 2014 (8 percent). The 2021 level of five percent is in stark contrast to citation of this county program in many prior surveys which saw it named by as high as 49 percent of respondents (2006). Indeed, this is the first survey where the *None/Nothing* response equaled the highest ranked named county service.

As noted, this five percent level is the highest of the 20-plus specific program/service areas respondents reported they would cut, if necessary. Indeed, the highest proportion – 73 percent – is found among *Undecided* respondents; a historically high figure and, when combined with *None/Nothing* responses, means just 82 of the 400 respondents could identify a program or service to be cut. Because of these factors, no specific program/service area received a consensus of opinion higher than five percent.

-- Awareness of County Activities in General - Q 48

In a question first posed in 2008 and repeated thereafter, respondents were asked to assess how aware they felt they were about county activities. With the 2008 results as a benchmark, the level of “Aware” jumps 12 points in the 2010 study and exhibits minor fluctuations through 2014. The 2016 results saw another spike in awareness of county activities but at 69 percent the 2016 results are the highwater mark for purported awareness of county activities. For 2021, we see a continuation of a decline in reported awareness that was seen in the 2018 study. The following chart illustrates the progression over time:

2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2021	
6%	9%	9%	8%	7%	9%	3%	Very aware
48%	57%	54%	53%	62%	53%	55%	Somewhat aware
54%	66%	63%	61%	69%	62%	58%	TOTAL AWARE
42%	34%	36%	38%	30%	37%	41%	TOTAL UNAWARE
24%	25%	24%	24%	21%	24%	27%	Somewhat unaware
18%	9%	12%	14%	9%	13%	14%	Very unaware
6%	---	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	Undecided/Refused

Subgroups reporting “Unaware” in proportions greater than the norm of 41% included:

62%	<i>Local direction – Undecided</i>
61%	<i>Vote in local election – Seldom/Never</i>
57%	<i>Financial management – Undecided</i>
56%	<i>Vote in local elections – Half the time</i>
54%	<i>County direction – Undecided</i>
53%	<i>Tenure in county – 1-5 yrs.</i>
52%	<i>Top issue – Jobs</i>
	<i>Website visitation – Not at all</i>
51%	<i>Local service – Negative</i>
50%	<i>Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes</i>
	<i>Managing COVID – Undecided</i>
49%	<i>Top issue – Taxes</i>
	<i>Tenure in county – 16-25 yrs.</i>
	<i>\$100K-\$150K hh income</i>
48%	<i>County services – Negative</i>
	<i>Groundwater issue – Unaware</i>
	<i>Age 18-34</i>
	<i>Over \$150K hh income</i>
47%	<i>Michigan direction – Undecided</i>
	<i>Housing proposal – No</i>
	<i>Children at home – Yes</i>
	<i>Age 18-49</i>
	<i>H.S. or less</i>
46%	<i>Preferred info source – Mail</i>
45%	<i>Taxes – Too high</i>

-- Information Sources – Q’s 49 & 50

In the eight surveys conducted beginning in 2006, a question has been posed to respondents asking them to identify from what sources they receive most of their information about county government. Beginning in 2016, the presentation of this line of inquiry was changed by introducing a question asking respondents to indicate whether they had received information about the county from any of eleven sources, with an opportunity to provide a source not recited.

The following chart shows the rank order of *Yes* responses in 2021, juxtaposed with the percentage point rise or fall from *Yes* responses recorded in the 2016 and 2018 studies:

2021 – Sources of Information Received from the Co.		<u>Yes</u>	+ - vs. 2018	+ - vs. 2016
Ranked Highest to Lowest <i>Yes</i>, Received				
_49B.	Mailed information	62%	-4	-1
_49C.	The Ottawa County Website: www.miOttawa.org	47%	+6	+12
_49H.	Television news	44%	-10	-20
_49G.	Radio news	38%	-11	-3
_49D.	Social networks (such as Facebook or Twitter)	35%	+12	+19
_49F.	Newspapers	32%	-18	-30
_49A.	Emailed information	31%	+14	+13
_49J.	Brochures found in County Offices	22%	-8	-9
_49E.	Text messages	19%	+14	+14
_49I.	Community Presentations	17%	-1	-6
_49K.	Board and Committee meetings	12%	-1	-2
_49L.	Somewhere else (<i>please specify</i>): _____			

Twenty-five individuals offered, “Somewhere Else”, with 18 of them (72 percent) reporting, *Word of Mouth*.

As in the past, mailings from the County tops the list of rankings and is not significantly less of a source of County-initiated information than in the prior two surveys. That being said, it is clear that Internet-based communications from the county have risen significantly in the past five years, mostly at the expense *Newspapers* and, to a lesser extent, *Television* and *Radio* newscasts and PSA’s. Also notable is the tremendous 19 point increase in *Social Networks* as a

category from which respondents report having received county-sponsored information. The following chart illustrates the ranking by percentage point increase for each information source item since the 2016 survey:

2021 – Sources of Information Received from the Co.		<u>Yes</u>	+ - vs. 2018	+ - vs. 2016
Ranked Highest to Lowest <i>Yes point increase from 2016</i>				
_49D.	Social networks (such as Facebook or Twitter)	35%	+12	+19
_49E.	Text messages	19%	+14	+14
_49A.	Emailed information	31%	+14	+13
_49C.	The Ottawa County Website: www.miOttawa.org	47%	+6	+12
_49F.	Newspapers	32%	-18	-30
_49H.	Television news	44%	-10	-20
_49J.	Brochures found in County Offices	22%	-8	-9
_49I.	Community Presentations	17%	-1	-6
_49G.	Radio news	38%	-11	-3
_49K.	Board and Committee meetings	12%	-1	-2
_49B.	Mailed information	62%	-4	-1
_49L.	Somewhere else (<i>please specify</i>): _____			

Twenty-five individuals offered, “Somewhere Else”, with 18 of them (72 percent) reporting, *Word of Mouth*.

In a further look at how citizens receive information about the county, a subsequent question asks respondents to report where they receive most of their information about county government. Through the 2014 study, the results fairly consistently found a large plurality of respondents relying on print media as a source of information on county government, with electronic media and government sources accounting for the next largest slice, and other miscellaneous sources along with social networks accounting for the balance of responses. In 2016, however, the results show far fewer mentions of newspapers with notable increases in government sponsored mailings and the county website. The comparative chart that follows demonstrates the point:

Reported Source of Most Information – 2021 High to Low Ranking w/ Point Difference from 2018						
2012	2014	2016	2018	2021	+/-	
9%	9%	12%	16%	16%	--	Mailed information-Newsletters
7%	5%	11%	15%	16%	+1	The Ottawa County Website: www.miOttawa.org
0%	2%	5%	8%	14%	+6	Social networks (such as Facebook or Twitter)
15%	16%	17%	12%	13%	+1	Television news
0%	1%	4%	4%	9%	+5	Emailed information
47%	45%	25%	21%	8%	-13	Newspapers
5%	2%	8%	6%	7%	+1	Radio news
0%	14%	8%	8%	7%	-1	Word of Mouth
0%	0%	4%	3%	2%	-1	Brochures found in County Offices

-- Preferences for receiving information - Q 51

Having just been asked the means by which they receive information concerning county government, the respondents are asked to name up to three sources through which they would prefer to receive such information. This question was first posed in 2010 and almost without exception, there has been a consistent and significant decline in a reported preference for newspapers with a concomitant increase in the proportions reported for *Email*, *Website* and, curiously, information via traditional *Mail*. Preference for social network sites had not seen an increase between the 2014 and 2016 studies, but the 2018 survey saw a rise of three points to 11 percent and in 2021, this proportion moves up just one point to twelve percent.

-- Use of social media sites – Facebook continues to dominate - Q 52

The 2010 survey saw the introduction of a question asking respondents how often they visit social media websites. The question has been altered over the course of the survey years, with the 2021 iteration asking respondents to name any social media platforms they use rather inquiry into the network used most often which was used in the 2012 through 2018 studies. The effect of this change is to dilute the proportions of responses for specific platforms, but this fact notwithstanding, *Facebook* remains far and away the most often mentioned social media platform; garnering a 47 percent plurality of responses. The only other platform reaching double digits was *Instagram* at 15 percent, with an even quarter of respondents reporting never using social media.

Subgroups reporting “None/Don’t Use” in proportions greater than the norm of 25% included:

- 52% Men 50+
- 50% Age 65+
- 43% Preferred info source – Newspaper

42%	<i>Top issue – Roads</i>
	<i>Preferred info source – Radio</i>
41%	<i>Website visitation – Not at all</i>
39%	<i>Age 50+</i>
38%	<i>No college men</i>
37%	<i>Tenure in county – 25+ yrs.</i>
35%	<i>Services vs. Taxes – Low taxes</i>
	<i>Housing partnership – No</i>
	<i>Children at home – No</i>
34%	<i>Vote in local elections – All the time</i>
33%	<i>Men</i>
32%	<i>Financial management – Negative</i>
	<i>Housing proposal – No</i>
	<i>H.S. or less</i>
31%	<i>Local direction – Undecided</i>
	<i>Taxes – Too high</i>
	<i>Preferred info source – Mail</i>
30%	<i>Northeast region</i>
	<i>Vote in local election – Seldom/Never</i>
	<i>Michigan direction – Wrong track</i>
	<i>\$25K-\$50K hh income</i>
	<i>Women 50+</i>
29%	<i>Voted in 1 of last 2 general elections</i>
	<i>Local direction – Wrong track</i>
	<i>Ottawa compares – Same</i>

-- Ottawa County website visitors and assessment of site quality - Q's 53-55

When told Ottawa County maintains a website and asked how often they log onto it, the percentage of those respondents responding *Not at all* had remained in the mid-to-high 50's from the question's first measurement in 2008 through the 2016 survey. In 2018, this proportion dropped to 46 percent and has dropped further to a new low of forty percent in 2021. Among the respondent's available remaining usage options of, *A lot*, *Some* and *Only a little*, the greatest increases are seen in "only a little", followed by "some", with the "a lot" variable remaining steady across time in the low to mid-single digits.

For those who reported having visited the county website (N=237), their assessment of its quality – on the *Positive/Negative* test – rose six points from its 2018 measurement to 83 percent. Among the 32-out-of-400 individuals issuing a "Negative" rating, half of them cited, *Hard to use/Confusing*, as their primary reason for their rating. Another eight respondents cited *Hard to find information/Need a search function*, as their reason. Three individuals did not offer a reason for their "Negative" rating with the remaining five respondents each providing a separate reason.

SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2021 survey marks the first time since beginning the series when the proportion of respondents identifying their race a *White* dropped below 90 percent; coming in at eighty seven percent. Very slight increases in the *Hispanic*, *Asian* and *Mixed Race* categories account for most of this result.

A 75 percent majority of survey respondents report calling Ottawa County their home for more than 15 years or, *All my life* (about the average over the course of the studies), with 24 percent reporting a residency tenure of 15 years or fewer. Despite their being a slightly higher proportion of respondents age-50 and older, 40 percent of 2012 respondents report having children at home; the highest proportion of the eight surveys conducted and not typical of most other areas in the state.

As in the past, respondents report a fairly high level of formal education, with 31 percent with some form of post-high school education short of a four year diploma, 30 percent attaining a bachelor's degree, and 15 percent with a post-graduate degree. Consistent with the formal education levels, 28 percent of respondents report a household income of \$100,000 or more. It is notable that the proportions reported for the \$100,000 or more has moved higher without interruption over time. Nearly nine-in-ten respondents (87 percent) report being homeowners, with the balance reporting either leasing, renting, or refusing to offer a response.

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-47percent in the 2021 study.

####

APPENDIX

Breakout of 2021 Survey Regions by Minor Civil Division			
Region	Jurisdiction	Samples	Totals
Southwest	Holland City	31	129
	Holland Twp.	44	
	Park Twp.	30	
	Zeeland City	8	
	Zeeland Twp.	16	
Southeast	Georgetown Twp.	78	103
	Hudsonville City	11	
	Jamestown Twp.	14	
Central	Allendale Twp.	23	57
	Blendon Twp.	11	
	Olive Twp.	6	
	Port Sheldon Twp.	8	
	Robinson Twp.	9	
Northwest	Ferrysburg City	5	73
	Grand Haven City	17	
	Grand Haven Twp.	27	
	Spring Lake Twp.	24	
Northeast	Chester Twp.	3	38
	Coopersville City	6	
	Crockery Twp.	7	
	Polkton Twp.	4	
	Tallmadge Twp.	13	
	Wright Twp.	5	

Ottawa County Citizen Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Presented by

EPIC ▪ MRA

November 2021



Ottawa County
Where You Belong.[®]

Methodology

- EPIC ■ MRA administered interviews with 400 registered voters residing in the Ottawa County, Michigan, August 3-8, 2021
- 50% of the interviews were completed with cell phone users
- ± 4.9 percent margin of error



Questionnaire Frame

Standard Inquiries

- Gauge “customer satisfaction” by asking:
 - Perceptions of how things are going
 - State
 - County
 - Local
 - What’s the biggest problem facing their county
 - Perceptions about specific county services and programs
 - Assess public opinion re: tax options
 - Probe attitudes re: relative tax burden
 - Investigate top-of-mind responses to general likes, dislikes, and preferences



Questionnaire Frame

Inquiries Unique to 2021

- Inquiry into groundwater issues
- Measurement of support for an affordable housing initiative
- Rating for Health Dept's. management of the pandemic



Overarching Conclusions

- Uncertainty and frustration caused by the COVID 19 pandemic have served to temper citizen enthusiasm about the performance of government at all levels. However, this does not translate into notably higher negative assessments of County and Local entities
- There is receptivity toward County government involvement in an affordable housing initiative
- Provision of governmental services continues to win out over a desire to keep taxes and fees low
- Purported inadequacy of “Communication” is a catch-all culprit for generalized discontent



Basis for Conclusions

- A reversal of the “Right Direction” (vs. “Wrong Track”) upward trend seen beginning in 2012
- The reversal is especially profound regarding State government, but also notable for the County and Local governmental bodies
- The proportion of “Better” (vs. “Worse”) responses describing Ottawa County compared to its West Michigan neighbors drops 10 points from 2018
- The difference is not made up with an increase in “Worse” but appears in the “About the same” category
- An 8-point drop in the proportion of “9s” and “10s”, on a 10-point scale, measuring the likelihood of recommending Ottawa Co. as a place to live
- The difference is not made up with an increase in “0-5” ratings, but in an increase in the “6-8” scores



Basis for Conclusions, cont.

- “Taxes Too High” rises to 30% -- highest level since 2008
- However, the more intense expression of “MUCH” too high portion of the measurement remains static
- “Negative” rating for County’s handling of finances rises but, as with “taxes” the intensity of sentiment is not strong
- “9” & “10” scores (on a 10-point scale) for likelihood of recommending Ottawa Co. as a place to live drops from 2018 but is made up in “6-8” scores, not the lower, “0-5” options



Basis for Conclusions, cont.

- “Positive” ratings for County and Local governments for delivery of basic services remains high
- County Health Dept. receives very high “Positive” rating for handling the pandemic
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) opt for “Maintain services” over “Keep taxes/fees low” competing statements
- Majority report being “Unaware” of groundwater concerns although it ranks 3rd of 13 among the “Total More” issues
- 0.1 mill for “Affordable Housing” receives a majority Total Yes “vote”
- Affordable housing ranks highest in “top-of-mind” and prompted issues



Summary

- As happened in the recession years of 2008 and 2010, residents' personal concerns are manifest in lower ratings for the performance of various levels of government tested
- Unlike those economically stressful times, however, the over 18-months of pandemic-induced concerns do not translate into antipathy toward governmental entities.
- Indeed, if anything, there is receptivity toward greater involvement in addressing their concerns



Detailed Results for Selected Questions

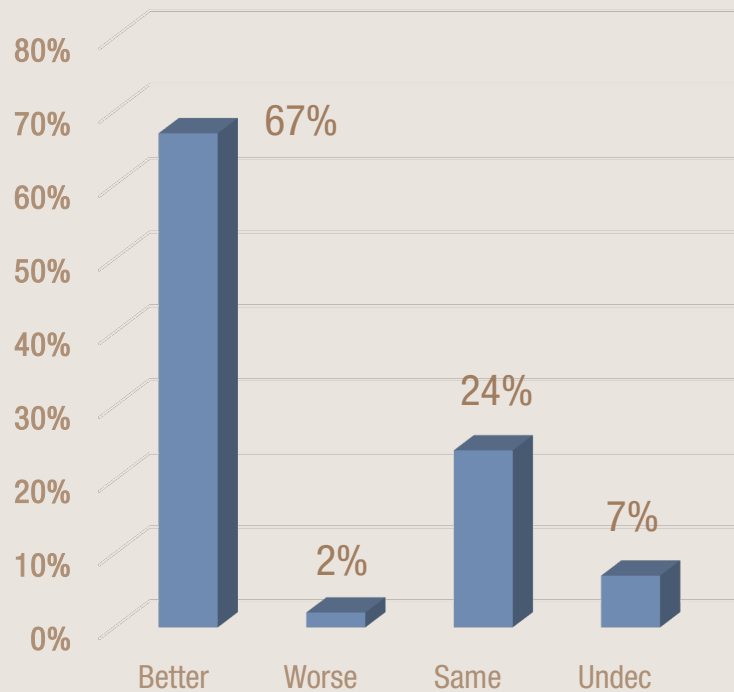
Overall, do you think that [jurisdiction] is headed in the right direction, or do you think that things are pretty seriously off on the wrong track?”

“RIGHT DIRECTION” COMPARISON	2021	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
STATE	35%	64%	51%	54%	51%	12%	20%
COUNTY	60%	78%	80%	73%	63%	52%	54%
LOCAL	70%	75%	79%	77%	70%	67%	68%



Ottawa County Compared to Regional Neighbors

Ottawa Compared to Neighbors - 2021



Prior Years

Total Better

2021	67%
2018	77%
2016	75%
2014	73%

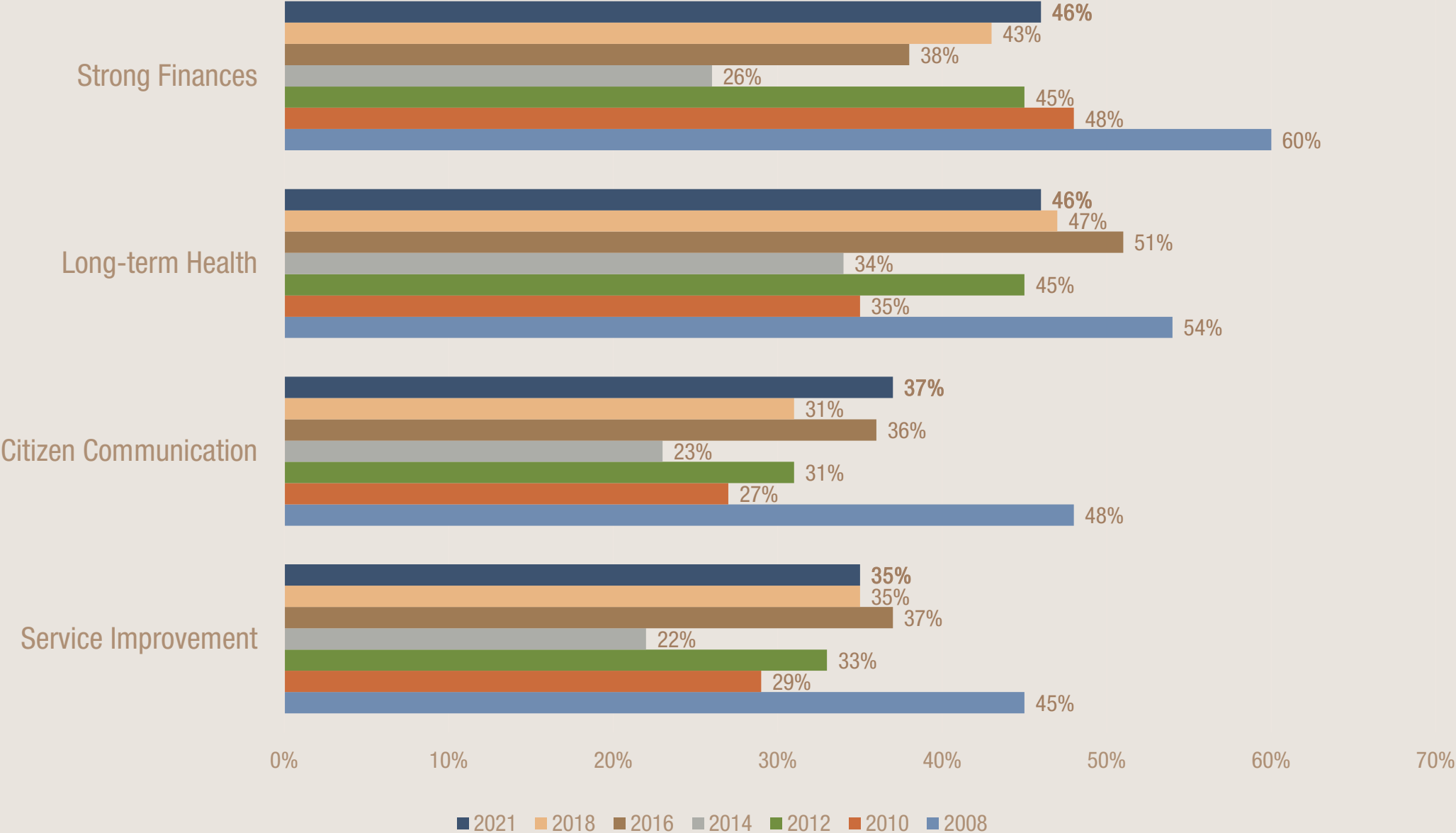


All Strategic Plan Goals Seen As Being At Least “Important”

<i>Ranked by “Total Important”</i>	Top Priority	Total Important
Contribute to the long term economic, social and environmental health of the county	46%	87% Unchanged from '18
Maintain/Improve County’s strong financial position	36% Down 7 pts.	86% Down 1 pt.
Maintain/enhance communication with citizens, employees and staff	37% Up 6pts.	85% Up 5 pts.
Continually improve the County’s organization and services	35% Unchanged	79% Up 1 pt.



All Strategic Plan Goals “Top Priority” Time Series

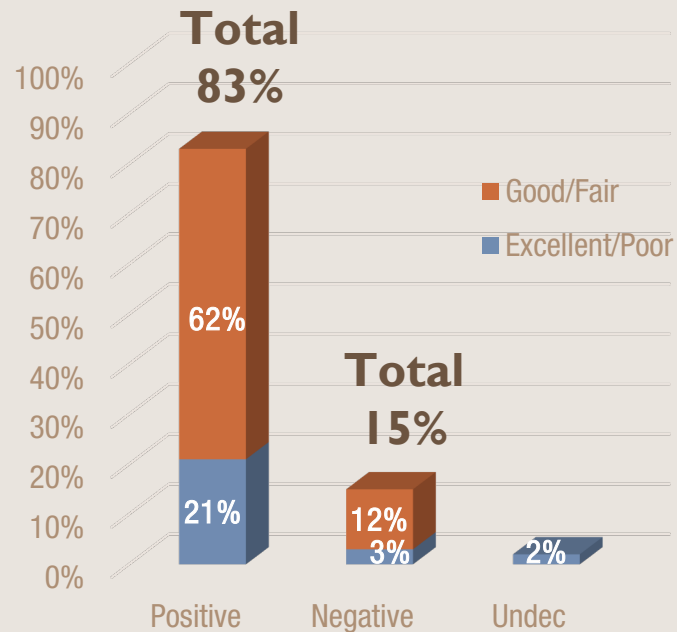


Biggest “Prompted” Problem

Ranked by 2021 Order (#) = other year rank	2021	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Providing affordable housing	21%	15% (3)	6% (7)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Protecting from crime & drugs	20%	18% (2)	14% (3)	16% (4)	13% (3)	6% (5)	14% (2)
Keeping taxes and fees low	17%	9% (5)	12% (4)	16% (3)	12% (4)	12% (3)	9% (3)
Maintain/Improve roads	12%	26% (1)	24% (1)	18% (2)	11% (5)	8% (4)	7% (4)
Providing econ development & jobs	10%	6% (6)	15% (2)	26% (1)	35% (1)	45% (1)	37% (1)
Protecting the environment*	9%	6% (7)	8% (6)	4% (6)	5% (6)	3% (7)*	6% (4)*
Providing basic services	4%	2% (9)	4% (8)	3% (7)	2% (8)	3% (7)	3% (9)
Controlling traffic	4%	3% (8)	3% (9)	3% (7)	2% (8)	1% (9)	3% (9)

Rate your Local (City/Township/Village) Government

2021 Pos/Neg



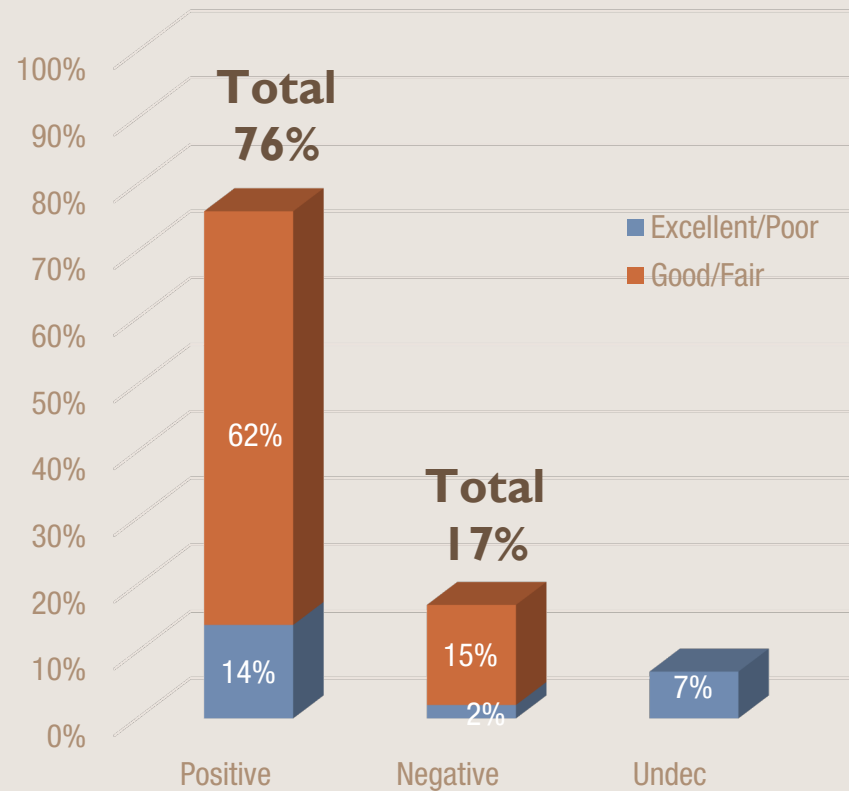
Prior Years' Pos vs. Neg

	Total Positive	Total Negative
2018	83%	15%
2016	72%	16%
2014	79%	16%
2012	78%	19%
2010	75%	23%
2008	75%	19%



Rate your County Government

2021 Pos/Neg



Prior Years' Pos vs. Neg

	Total Positive	Total Negative
2018	79%	13%
2016	71%	15%
2014	76%	15%
2012	76%	14%
2010	73%	19%
2008	70%	20%



Ottawa County does the best job at providing ...

(unprompted)

Ranked by 2018 Order (#) = other year rank	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006
<i>Parks and Recreation</i>	22%	17% (2)	13% (3)	15% (3)	12% (3)	13% (2)	8% (4)
<i>Snow removal plus "Roads"</i>	18%	19% (1)	18% (1)	25% (1)	29% (1)	17% (1)	26% (1)
<i>Sheriff plus "Police/Law Enforcement"</i>	13%	11% (3)	16% (2)	23% (2)	22% (2)	14% (2)	17% (2)



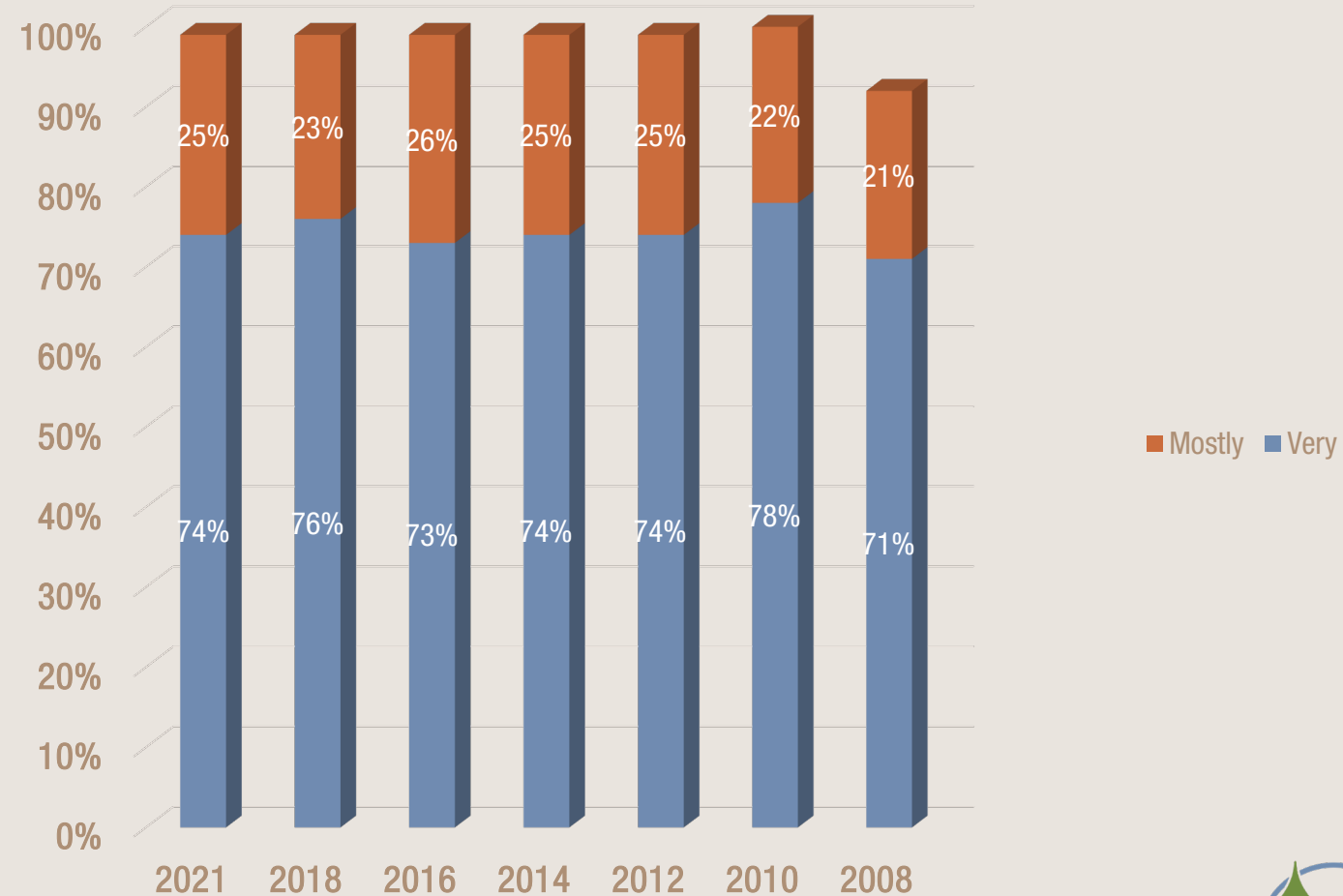
What county service needs the most improvement? (unprompted)

Ranked by 2021 Order (#) = other year rank	2021	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
<i>Roads plus "Snow Removal"</i>	25%	44% (1)	34% (1)	36% (1)	38% (1)	40% (1)	38% (1)
<i>Police/Law Enforcement</i>	4%	2% (4)	2% (4)	2% (2)	4% (3)	2% (3)	4% (3)
<i>Mental Health</i>	3%	4% (2)	3% (2)	1% (5)	1% (5)	---	---
<i>Nothing</i>	3%	3% (3)	3% (3)	2% (1)	10% (2)	4% (2)	8% (2)
<i>Undecided</i>	35%	28%	36%	39%	29%	39%	32%

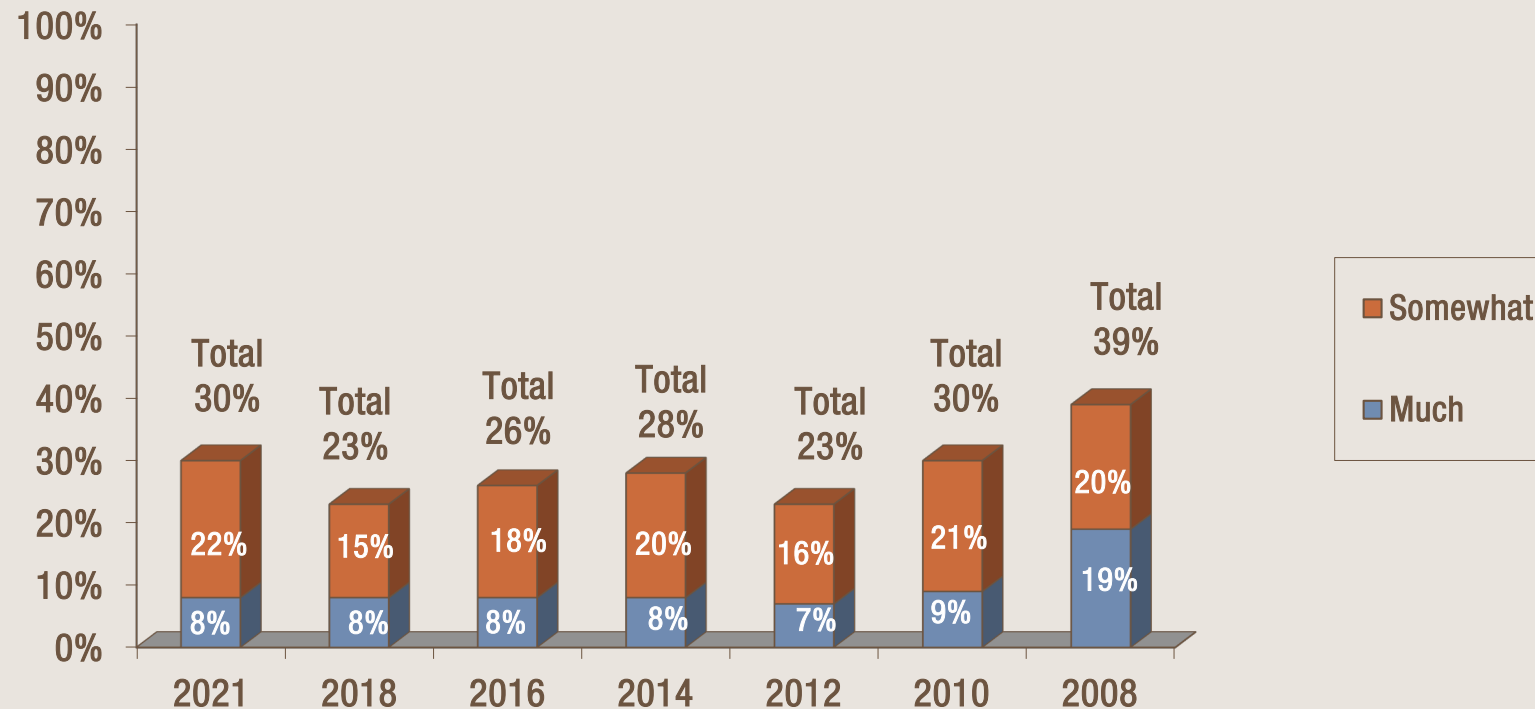


Perceived Personal Safety

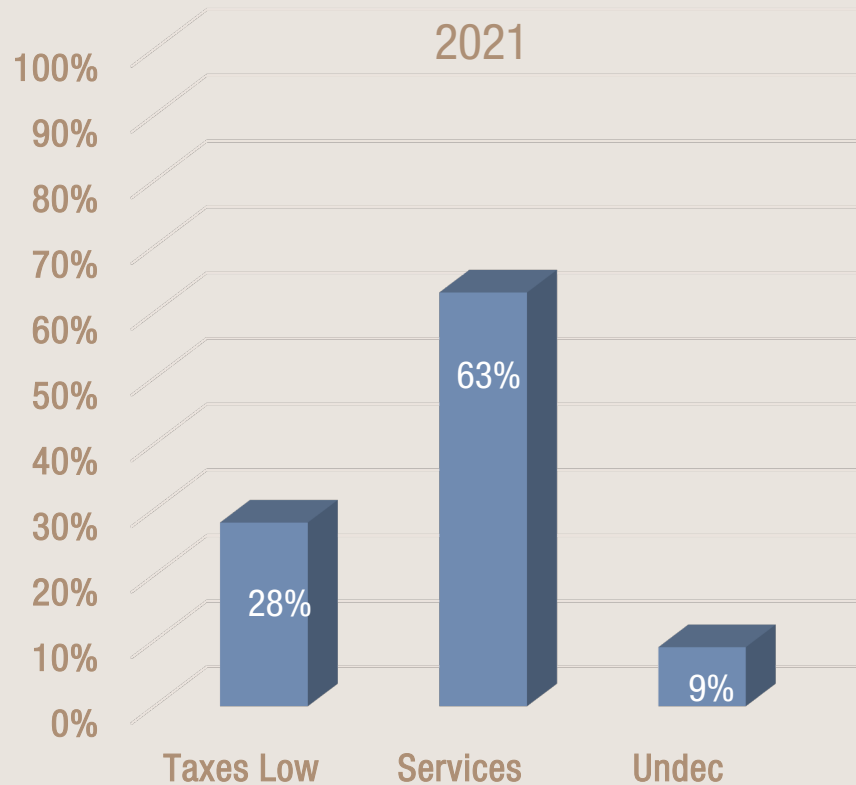
“How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?”



Perception of Tax Burden Total “Too High”



Taxes vs. Service Levels

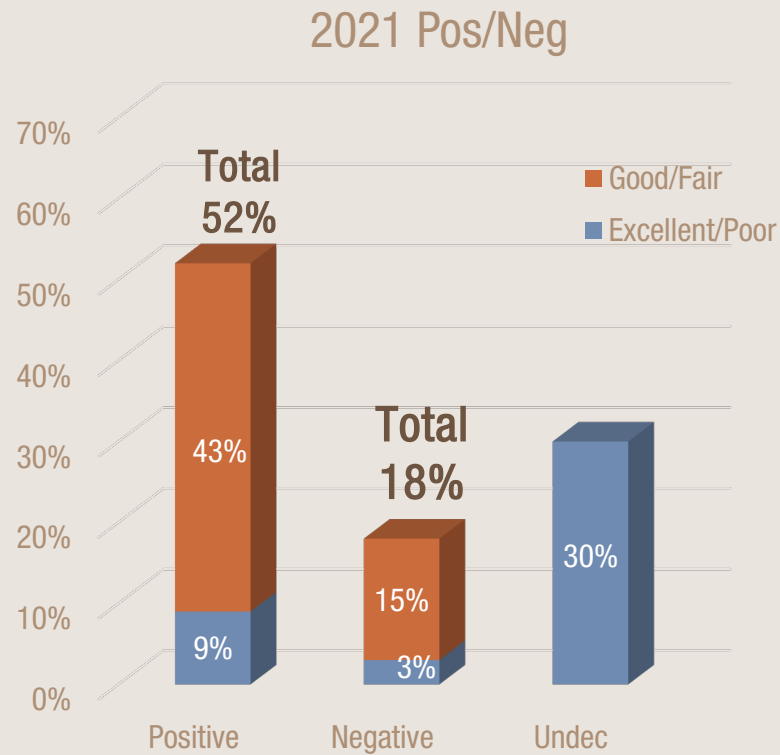


	Keep Taxes Low	Keep Services	Undec
2018	28%	62%	10%
2016	30%	61%	9%
2014	37%	53%	10%
2012	43%	51%	6%
2010	58%	38%	4%
2008	53%	37%	10%
2006	44%	49%	7%



Rate County Financial Management

Prior Years' Pos vs. Neg

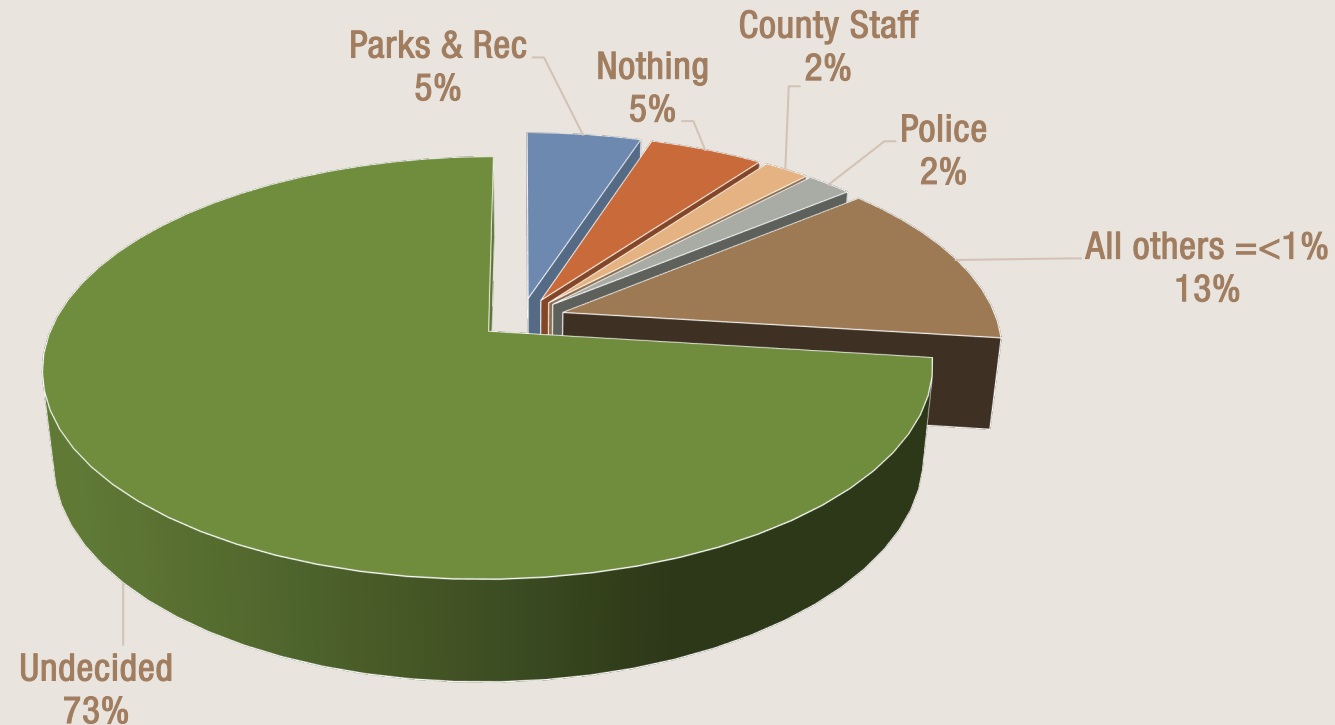


	Total Positive	Total Negative
2018	55%	12%
2016	58%	14%
2014	55%	18%
2012	62%	15%
2010	55%	20%
2008	53%	16%



Where to Cut if Needed?

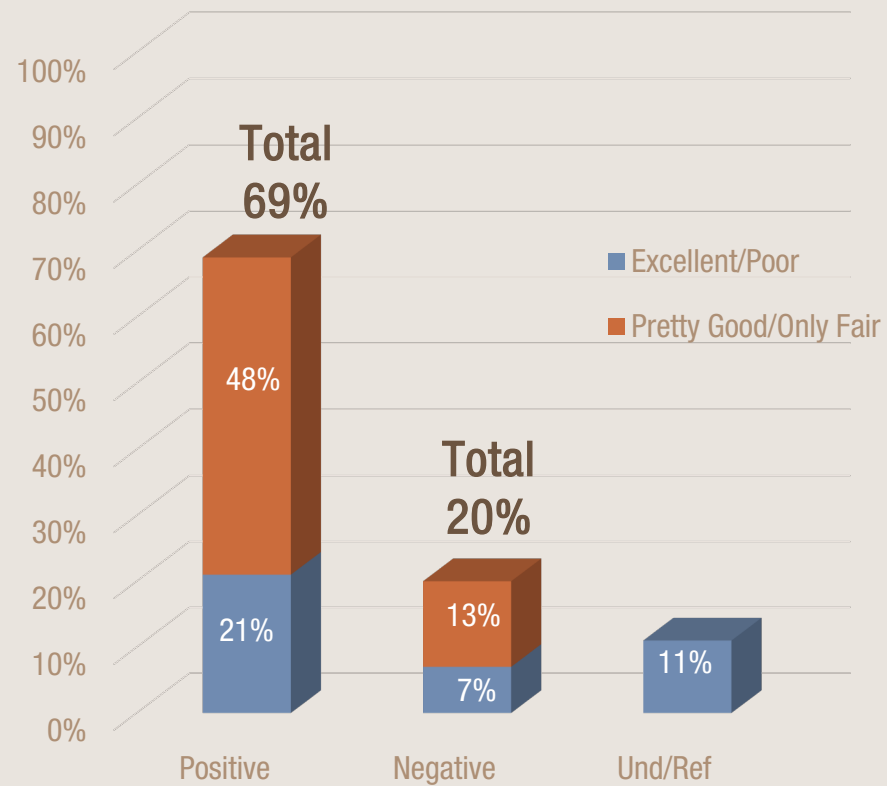
Parks & Recreation again tops the list but has shown a consistent decline in proportions – from a high of 32% in 2006 to this year’s low of 5% -- to where it is tied with “Nothing”.



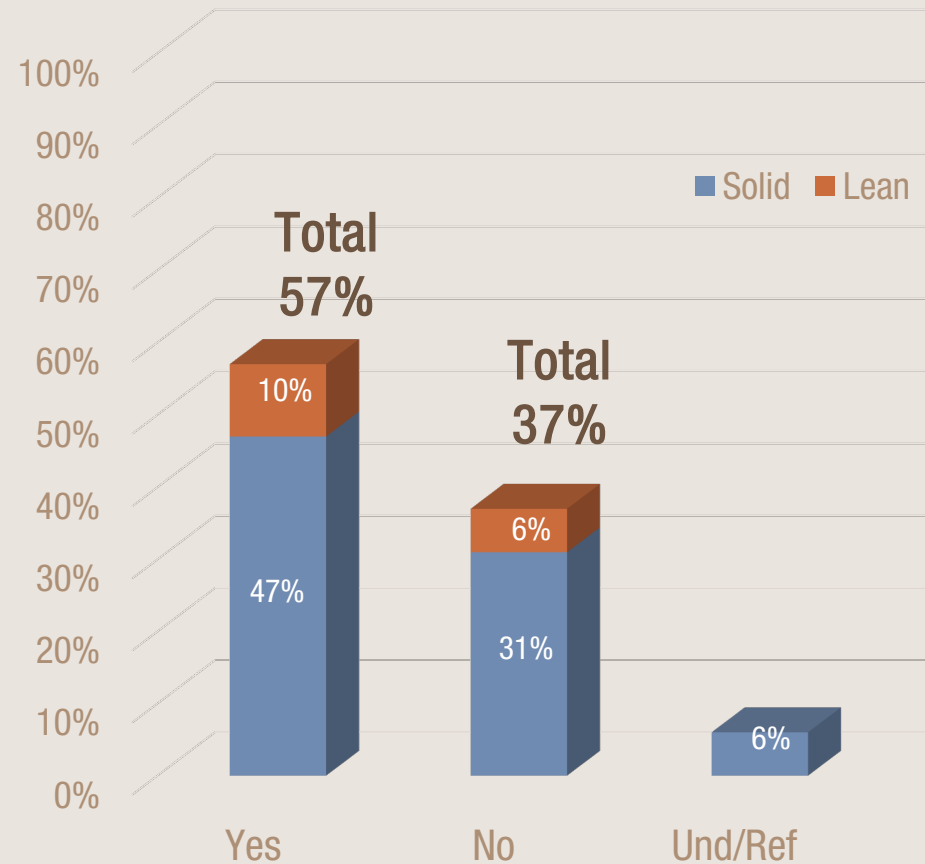
■ Parks & Rec ■ Nothing ■ County Staff ■ Police ■ All others =<1% ■ Undecided



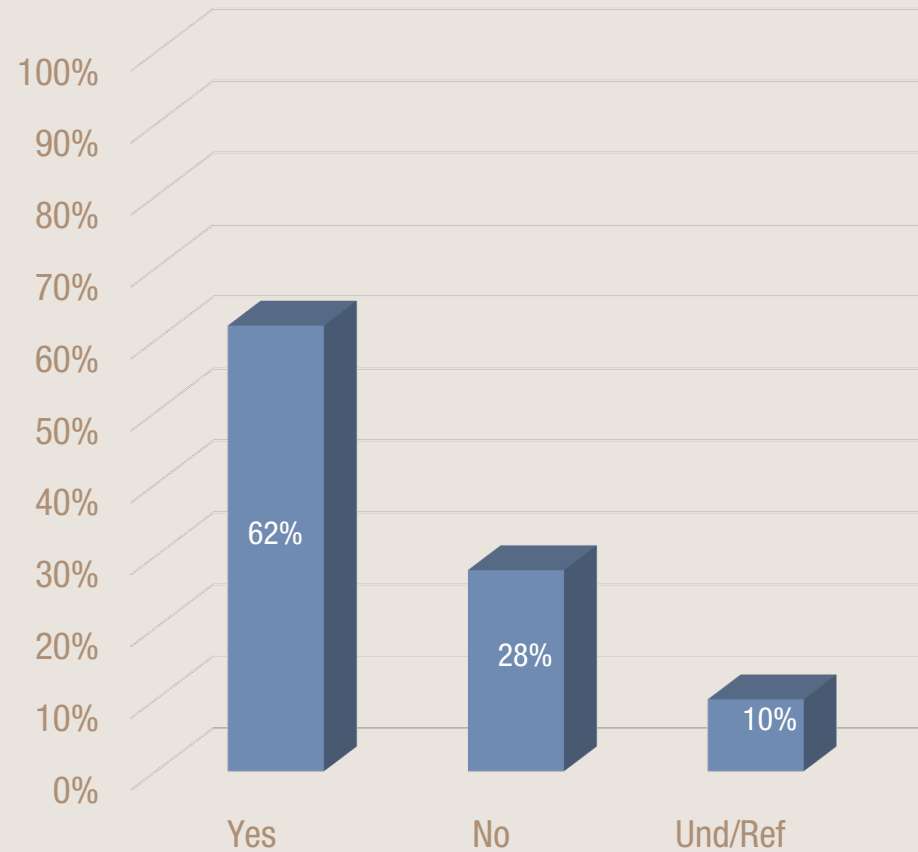
Rate Health Dept's COVID 19 Management



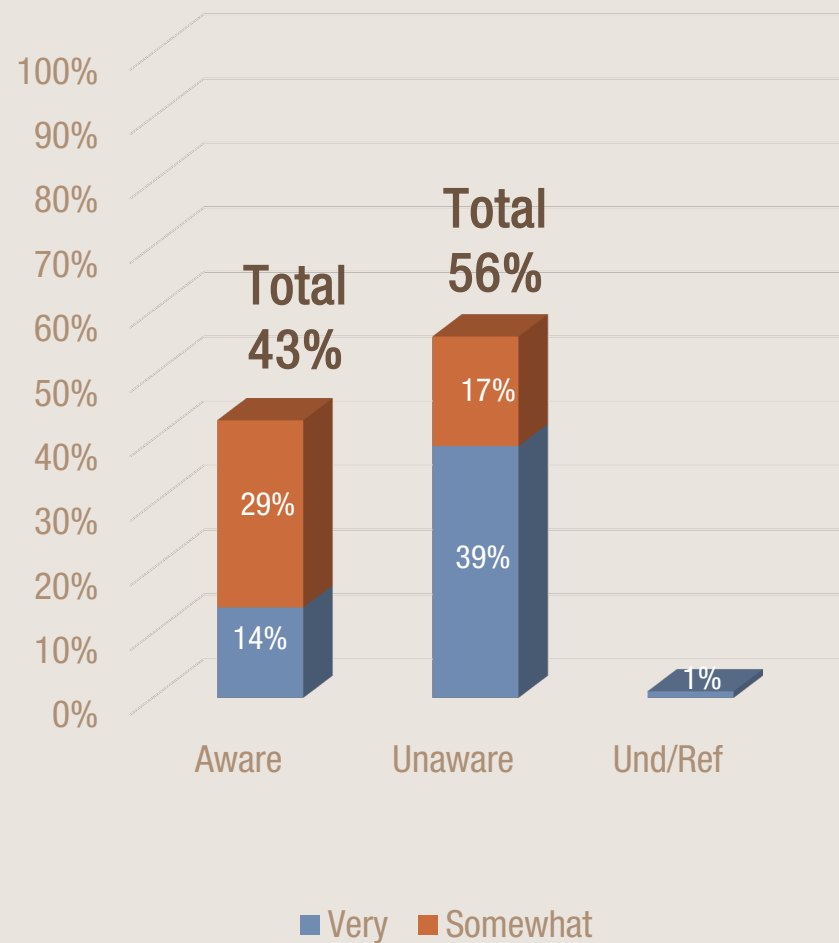
“Vote” on 0.1 Mill for Affordable Housing



Would you be more likely to support the millage if it were a partnership of business, non-profit and government?



Awareness of Groundwater Issues

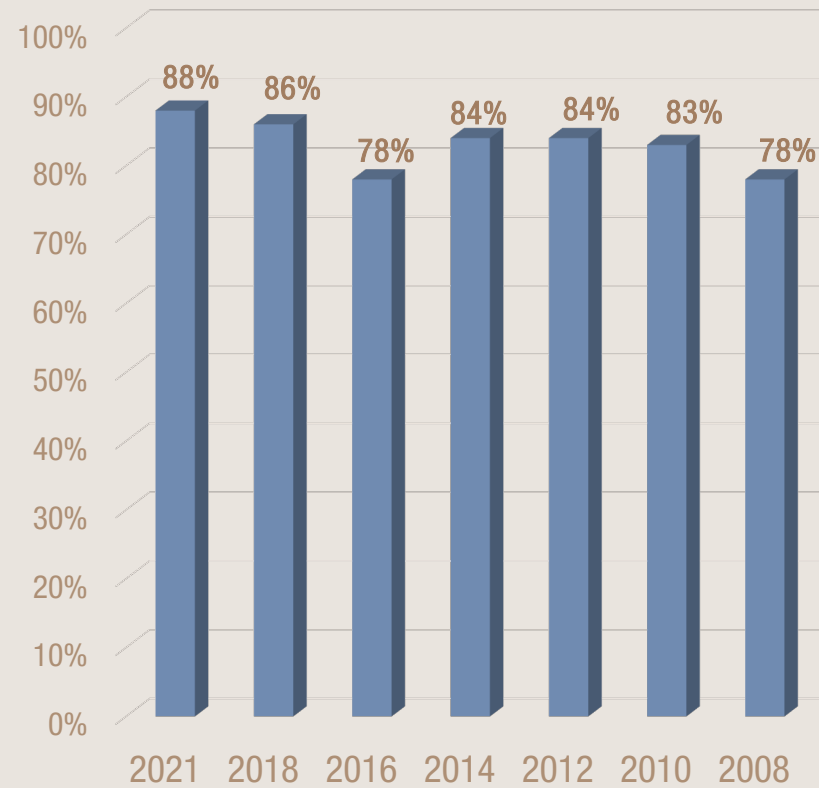


Contact With a County Department

	2021	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
“Yes” (respondent or hh member)	26%	31%	26%	31%	29%	30%	32%
“No”	74%	68%	73%	68%	71%	69%	63%
Undecided Don’t know	0%	1%	1%	1%	---	1%	5%



Satisfaction With County Response Timeline



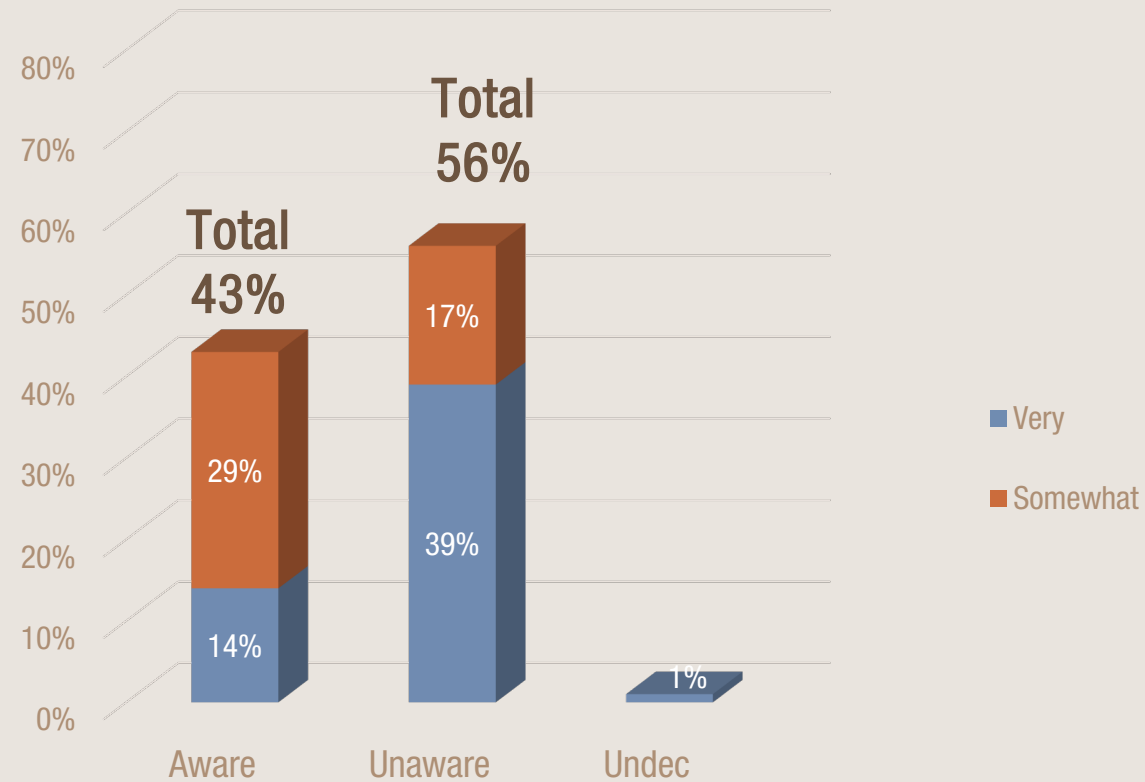
More, Enough, or Too Much? – Top 3

Is there Enough, Too Much, or Should More be Done ?	More	
<i>Ranked by 2021 Total “More” Order</i>	TOTAL	Much
Keeping county residents informed about programs & services.	46%	16%
<i>Ranking in 2018- 2</i>	37%	16%
<i>Ranking in 2016 - 2</i>	40%	22%
<i>Ranking in 2014 – 1</i>	23%	10%
<i>Ranking in 2012 – 2</i>	20%	7%
Providing mental health services.	41%	19%
<i>Ranking in 2018 - 1</i>	43%	24%
<i>Ranking in 2016 - 1</i>	40%	22%
<i>Ranking in 2014 - 2</i>	23%	10%
<i>Ranking in 2012 - 5</i>	20%	7%
<i>NEW BASELINE QUESTION INTRODUCED IN 2021</i>		
Protecting the declining supply of groundwater that serves irrigation systems and drinking water wells to the county.	35%	17%

More, Enough, or Too Much? — 4 thru 6 Ranking

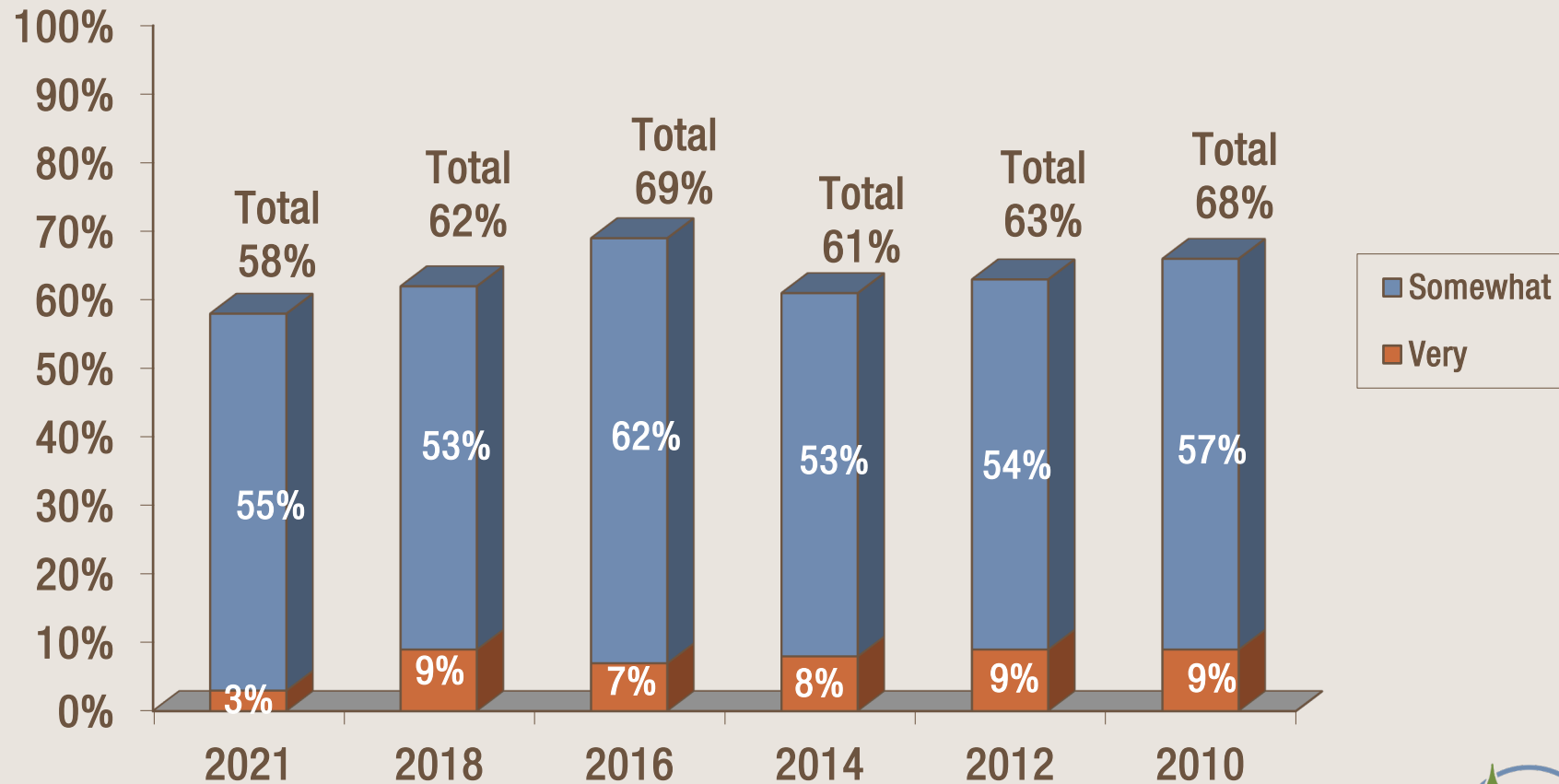
Is there Enough, Too Much, or Should More be Done ?	More	
<i>Ranked by 2021 Total "More" Order</i>	TOTAL	Much
Providing substance abuse prevention /treatment services.	29%	12%
<i>Ranking in 2018– 3</i>	31%	14%
<i>Ranking in 2016– 4</i>	24%	7%
<i>Ranking in 2014– 6</i>	18%	4%
<i>Ranking in 2012– 5</i>	19%	5%
<i>NEW BASELINE QUESTION INTRODUCED IN 2018</i>		
Promoting Ottawa County as a welcoming place for diverse populations.	28%	11%
<i>Ranking in 2018– 5</i>	24%	10%
Working with local governments to best plan commercial and residential development so excess growth and sprawl is avoided.	27%	12%
<i>Ranking in 2018– 4</i>	27%	12%
<i>Ranking in 2016 – 6</i>	17%	5%
<i>Ranking in 2014 – 5</i>	20%	4%
<i>Ranking in 2012 – 3</i>	26%	10%

Self-reported Awareness of All County Activities



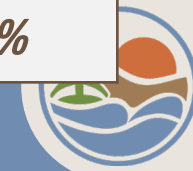
Self-reported Awareness of County Activities

Timeline



Have You Received Information About County Government From ...?

	YES	2018	2016
Mailed Info	62%	66%	63%
Ottawa Co. Website ↑	47%	41%	35%
TV News ↓	44%	54%	64%
Radio News ↓	38%	49%	41%
Social Networks ↑	35%	23%	16%
Newspaper ↓	32%	54%	62%
E-mailed Information ↑	31%	17%	18%
Brochures in Co. Offices	22%	30%	31%
Text Messages ↑	19%	5%	5%
Community Presentations	17%	18%	23%
Board & Committee Meetings	12%	13%	14%



Where Have You Received Most of Your Information?

	2021	2018	2016
Mailed Info	16%	16%	12%
Ottawa Co. Website ↑	16%	15%	11%
Social Networks ↑	14%	8%	5%
TV News	13%	12%	17%
E-mailed Information ↑	9%	4%	4%
Newspaper ↓	8%	21%	25%
Radio News	7%	6%	8%
Word-of-mouth	7%	8%	8%
Brochures/Text Messages	4%	3%	4%



From Where Would You Prefer to Received Most of Your Information?

	2021	2018	2016
Mailed Info	26%	28%	24%
Newspaper ↓	7%	14%	19%
E-mail	18%	15%	15%
TV News	10%	9%	11%
Social Networks	12%	11%	7%
Radio News	5%	4%	5%



Use of County Website

Total visitation up 5-points from 2018 and 13 points higher than 2016.

