

A Vision for Jersey County: Summary of Results

BACKGROUND

Public participation is an essential ingredient in the recipe for successful community planning. In a recent survey of planning commission members increasing public participation was identified as one of the five most important needs community planners must address to be successful. In the fall and winter of 2004 several meetings were held throughout Jersey County to give community leaders, business owners, and residents an opportunity to voice their opinions about the future of Jersey County. A twenty minute informational slide show was presented at each meeting and a survey, "A Vision for Jersey County", was distributed. In addition, the survey was published in the local paper and mailed to members of the Farm Bureau. The survey included the following questions:

1. How much growth and development do you feel is desirable in Jersey County?
2. What are the biggest problems facing Jersey County today?
3. What are three things you would like to change in about Jersey County?
4. What do you think Jersey County will be like in 5 years?
5. What would you like Jersey County to be like in 5 years?
6. What do you value most about Jersey County and the community you live in?

This effort was designed to start a dialogue about community values and begin to identify and prioritize major issues and concerns. This is a starting point not a prescription for action.

There were 234 surveys collected and included in this report. University of Illinois Extension entered the survey responses and completed the analysis of the data. This survey gathered qualitative responses to questions. Five of the questions were open-ended. Analysis of the responses to these questions is achieved by counting the number of times key ideas, words, and phrases are repeated. While some priorities will be presented it is important to keep in mind that this is not a quantitative process. The full text of responses are

attached with some minor editing that increased the accuracy of the analysis.

COMMUNITY VALUES

What do you value most about Jersey County and the community you live in?

Most of our choices in life are driven by our values. While we often don't think of the county we live in as a reflection of our values, it is. The people we elect to represent us in government, our volunteer activity, where we shop, how well we maintain our property, and a multitude of other decisions we make say something about us and where we live. People who are unhappy with where they live always have the option to vote with their feet. Population losses in over 50 Illinois counties attest to this.

There are six dominant values that were expressed by respondents to the survey.

1. **People, friendly, values, family, neighbors**
2. **Small town**
3. **Rural area, natural beauty, scenic**
4. **Safe, secure**
5. **Education, schools**
6. **Growing, business, opportunity**

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

What are the biggest problems facing Jersey County today?

This question addressed the here and now of Jersey County residents experience. Responses to this question reflect the current issues they are confronting day to day. Again there were a handful of dominant issues but a long list of secondary concerns as well.

Dominant problems identified in comments were:

1. **Uncontrolled growth, no plan for preserving quality of life**

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- a. Increasing traffic, congestion, quality of roads, rural road infrastructure
 - b. Conflict between farm and residential development
 - c. Loss of farmland
 - d. Preserving natural beauty and small town character
 - e. Growing too fast, losing
2. Increasing real estate taxes
3. Crime
- a. Drugs, meth
 - b. Delinquency, underage drinking
4. Economic development
- a. Lack of local employment opportunities, higher wage jobs
 - b. Need a greater variety of business
 - c. Poverty

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE

What are three things that you would like to change about Jersey County?

Responses to this question mirrored the concerns expressed in the previous question except there were fewer themes and many specific ideas were suggested. See the full text of comments attached to this document.

1. Lower taxes
2. Implement zoning, manage growth, land use policy
3. Attract more business, create employment opportunities
 - a. Industry, manufacturing
 - b. Tourism
 - c. Locally owned small business
 - d. Downtown improvement
 - e. Restaurants
4. Improve roads, control/reduce traffic
5. Increase/improve public safety, law enforcement, fire protection
6. Support and improve schools
7. More youth activities and recreation
8. Remove eyesores, improve the appearance

9. Nothing

THINKING AHEAD FIVE YEARS

What do you think Jersey County will be like in 5 years?

What would you like Jersey County to be like in 5 years?

When we asked about the short term future of Jersey County we did so in two ways. One question addressed the gut level sense of what will happen, the other asked what they would like to see transpire. The responses reflect the differences between experience and values. When you think about a probable future you often feel subject to forces that you cannot control. When you think about a preferred future you are visioning and planning.

The probable future:

1. The County will continue to grow, perhaps more rapidly, and will have growing pains.
2. Everything will be about the same, the County will be able to absorb the change as it has in the recent past.
3. Potential negative impacts like increasing traffic, crime, land use conflict, increasing taxes, and inadequate infrastructure are concerns.
4. Some expressed concern that it will become too much like some Metroeast places, less rural and more suburban.

The preferred future:

1. Preserve the rural small town character, much like it is today
2. More and better employment opportunities, steady business growth
3. Maintain or improve the quality
4. Safe
5. Preserve family value