

# Wayne County Comprehensive Plan Public Opinion Survey

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## Executive summary

### Summary of Results

The results of this survey reveal the public's strong support in five general areas.

- Preservation of the county's rural characteristics
- A desire for walkable communities
- Economic development as a priority
- Protection of the natural environment
- Consolidation of some local governments

#### *Preservation of the county's rural characteristics*

In question after question, Wayne County residents made it clear that the preservation of rural character remains a priority. Respondents ranked rural character as the number one amenity they like most about living in their community. It ranks second (after family ties) as the reason people live in the county. Almost 80 percent of respondents rated views of rural landscapes as important or very important and almost 70 percent felt the same about farm fields and pastures.

Also, respondents supported a variety of measures to preserve rural character. Over 80 percent would support or strongly

support the purchase of land to protect it from development and roughly the same number would support or strongly support programs to preserve wetlands. Almost 80 percent approved of tax incentives to keep farmers farming. Nearly three-quarters of people supported the purchase of open space for use as parks. A majority of people (62.5 percent) also favored purchase of development rights programs to protect farmland and open space.

### *A desire for walkable communities*

Walking is important to many residents of Wayne County, according to this survey. People ranked the ability to walk in their neighborhoods as the third most enjoyable aspect of their community (after rural character and clean air and water). Three-quarters of people voiced support or strong support for furthering the construction of walking and biking paths. In addition, 65 percent of respondents favored requirements that builders of multi-home developments be required to include sidewalks.

Support for downtown improvements could also be interpreted as support for walkable communities. As described in the economic development section below, many people surveyed want to strengthen downtowns.

Slightly less than 60 percent of respondents rated the walkability of their community as good or very good.

### *Economic development as a priority*

As expected, economic development emerged as one of the most important priorities of survey respondents. The top four problems residents reported with Wayne County are (in order) the lack of vital downtowns, high taxes, the general lack of economic vitality and the lack of jobs.

Strengthening downtowns seemed particularly important to respondents. The idea of a program to encourage businesses to

locate in downtowns scored exceptionally well with almost 90 percent of respondents supporting or strongly supporting it. In addition 78.8 percent of those surveyed favored upgrading streets, landscaping and other infrastructure in downtown areas.

Tax incentives to keep farmers farming and to help new or expanding businesses would be supported by almost eighty percent of respondents. The promotion of tourism, in general as well as specifically along the Canal and Lake Ontario, was supported by a majority of people and opposed by very few.

### *Protection of the natural environment*

A clean environment ranked as the second most important aspect of community life, according to the survey. This support held true for all respondents.

A policy to protect wetlands scored very high, receiving support of 81.5 percent of respondents. Wooded areas are also highly prized as county assets. Eighty percent of people rated them as important or very important and only 5.3 percent deemed them unimportant. Undeveloped land along streams also fared well with 61.2 percent rating this environmental amenity as important or very important.

### *Government Operations*

A surprising number of respondents would support the consolidation of some town and village governments with 59.1 percent voting in favor of consolidation and only 24.7 percent voting against the idea. Village residents seem to back consolidation stronger with 66.1 percent in favor.

In terms of participation, over 70 percent of people never attended a public meeting or hearing in the past year. Respondents overwhelmingly (74.1 percent) reported getting the bulk of their information about local government matters from the newspaper.

The second most important source of information is word of mouth at 12 percent.

### **Survey Method**

A total of 614 people returned the survey, which had been mailed to a random sample of 1500 Wayne County households with at least one registered voter listed at the address. The addresses included the line “or current resident” in order to facilitate the participation of any person in the household.

The survey was conducted in May-June 2004 by planning consultant George Homsy of Canandaigua under contract with Wayne County. The project was done in collaboration with and was supervised by the County Planning Department.

The Planning Department and the planning consultant publicized the survey via newspaper articles in the Finger Lakes Times, Daily Messenger and Courier Gazette. In addition, a subgroup of the sample households received follow-up post cards to encourage participation. These efforts pushed the response rate to 40.9 percent, making it a statistically reliable survey sample.