



Residential Questionnaire Results

Submitted to: Strathcona County and KPMG Consulting
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1. Background

Criterion Research Corp., in partnership with KPMG Consulting and Calder Bateman, and on behalf of Strathcona County, was commissioned to conduct a questionnaire with residents of the County as part of the Community Consultation 2002.

The primary objectives of the research included:

- Understanding the perceived quality of life among residents of the County;
- Gauging concerns in the community, particularly as it concerns growth in the County;
- Identifying how citizens feel the County needs to prioritize various issues; and
- Understanding community values with a view to guiding long term strategic planning.

2. Research Method

2.1. Data Collection

A 'pen and paper' questionnaire of 24,000 residents of Strathcona County was distributed in June 2002. The questionnaire was designed in close consultation with Strathcona County's Project Team and closely mirrored the telephone survey that preceded it. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

Questionnaires were delivered to all households in Strathcona County and also available on the Internet. A total of 3,881 questionnaires were completed for a response rate of 16% well above the projected 10% response rate to this type of well above the projected research.

A demographic profile of respondents is shown in Table 1 with comparisons to the sample achieved in the residential telephone survey. The questionnaire and the telephone survey were very similar from a demographic perspective. The only major point of difference is in the gender split. The random sample generated through the telephone survey had a 64%/36% female to male gender ratio compared to a 51%/41% (female/male) split in the questionnaire. In all other respects, the samples were practically identical.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

		Questionnaire*	Telephone Survey
<i>Sample size</i>		<i>(n=3881)</i>	<i>(n=1200)</i>
Gender			
	Male	41%	36%
	Female	51%	64%
Age			
	18-24 years	1%	1%
	25-34 years	12%	13%
	35-44 years	25%	26%
	45-54 years	24%	27%
	55-64 years	20%	18%
	65 years +	14%	12%
	Average age (years)	-	48.5
Length of Tenure in County			
	0-3 years	10%	14%
	4-6 years	9%	10%
	7-10 years	12%	12%
	11-20 years	22%	22%
	21-30 years	26%	26%
	31-40 years	12%	11%
	40+ years	5%	6%
	Mean (years)	19.4	18.1
	Median (years)	19.0	16.0
Adults in the Household			
	1 person	16%	14%
	2 people	60%	62%
	3 people	12%	16%
	4+ people	5%	6%
Children in Household Under 18			
	None	55%	55%
	One	13%	15%
	Two	20%	21%
	Three or more	7%	8%
Employment Status			
	Student	1%	1%
	Self-employed	11%	16%
	Employed Full-time	40%	44%
	Employed Part-time	9%	10%
	Homemaker	8%	10%
	Retired	20%	17%
	Unemployed	1%	1%
	Other	1%	1%
Work in County			
	Yes	(n=2409) 35%	(n=834) 39%
	No	59%	59%
Own/Operate a business in County			
	Yes	(n=2409) 15%	(n=834) 17%
	No	77%	81%
Operate a Farm			
	Yes	3%	-
	No	83%	-
Years Farming			
	Mean (years)	(n=131) 27 years	(n=43) 19.2 years
	Median (years)	23 years	13.0 years

	Questionnaire*	Telephone Survey
Sample size	(n=3881)	(n=1200)
Own or Rent Home		
Own	92%	94%
Rent	3%	6%
Hamlet Lived in or Closest to		
Antler Lake	1%	1%
Ardrossan	7%	13%
Collingwood Cove	<1%	<1%
Josephburg	1%	<1%
Half Moon Lake	1%	1%
Hastings Lake	1%	<1%
North Cooking Lake	1%	<1%
South Cooking Lake	3%	4%
Sherwood Park	77%	79% ¹
Other	3%	1%
Had Contact with County Employee in Past Year		
Yes	65%	-
No	30%	-
Visited County Website		
Yes	33%	-
No	63%	-

* Responses may not add to 100% due to non-response of individual questions and/or rounding error

¹ Note: 65% are urban respondents who live in Sherwood Park and the remaining 14% are rural and rural respondents who report the hamlet they live closest to is Sherwood Park.

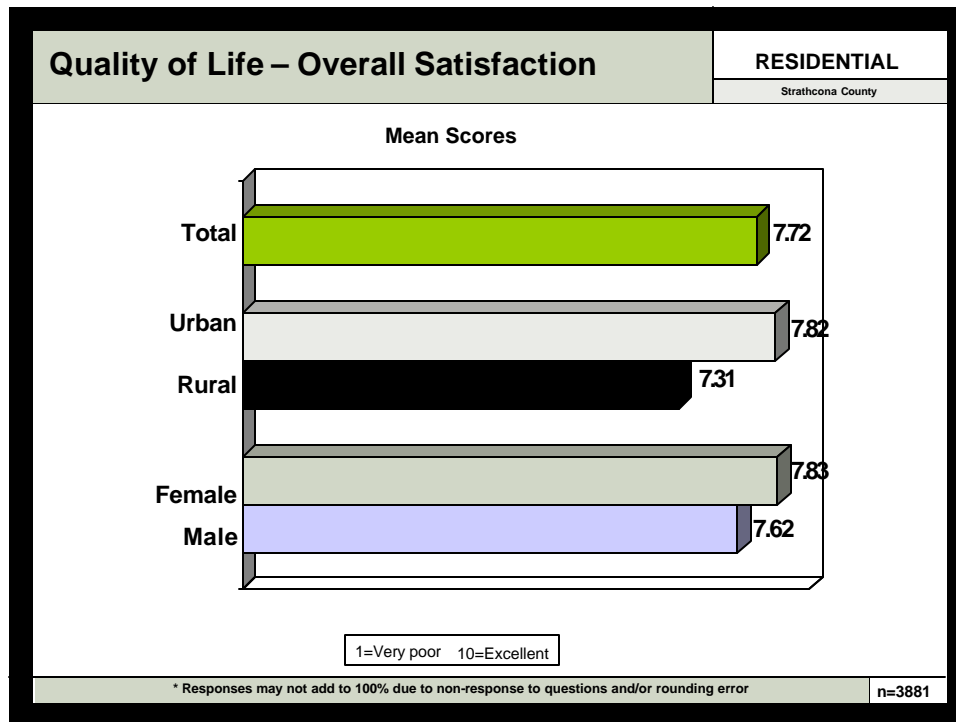
3. Analysis of Findings

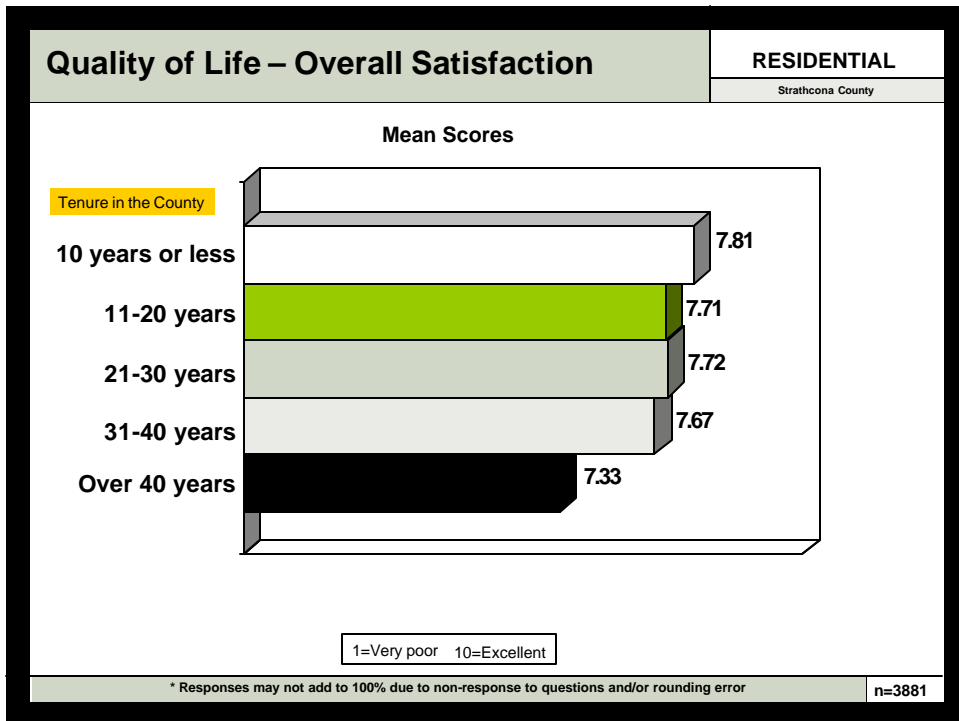
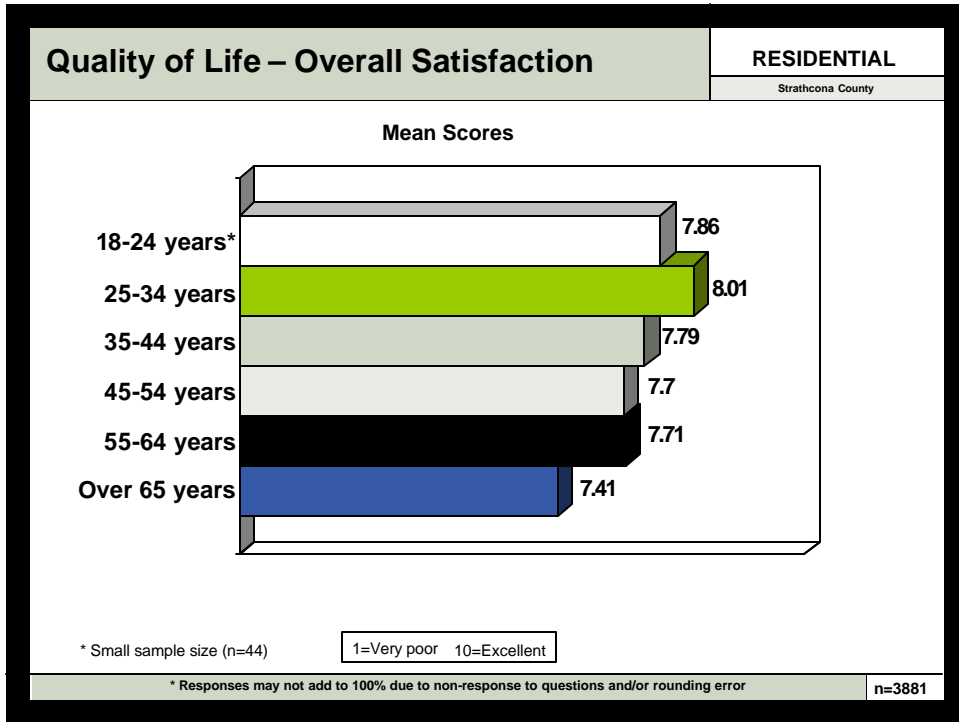
The following section details the key findings of the research.

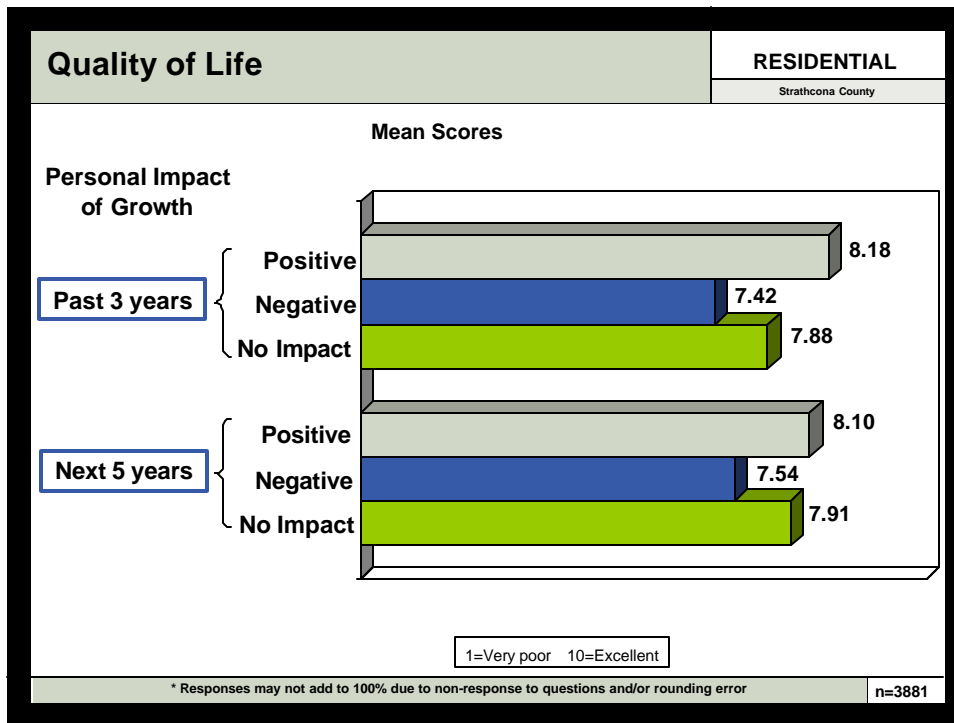
3.1. Quality of Life

In comparison to other places, how would you describe the quality of life in Strathcona County? (One to ten scale where 1= very poor and 10= excellent)

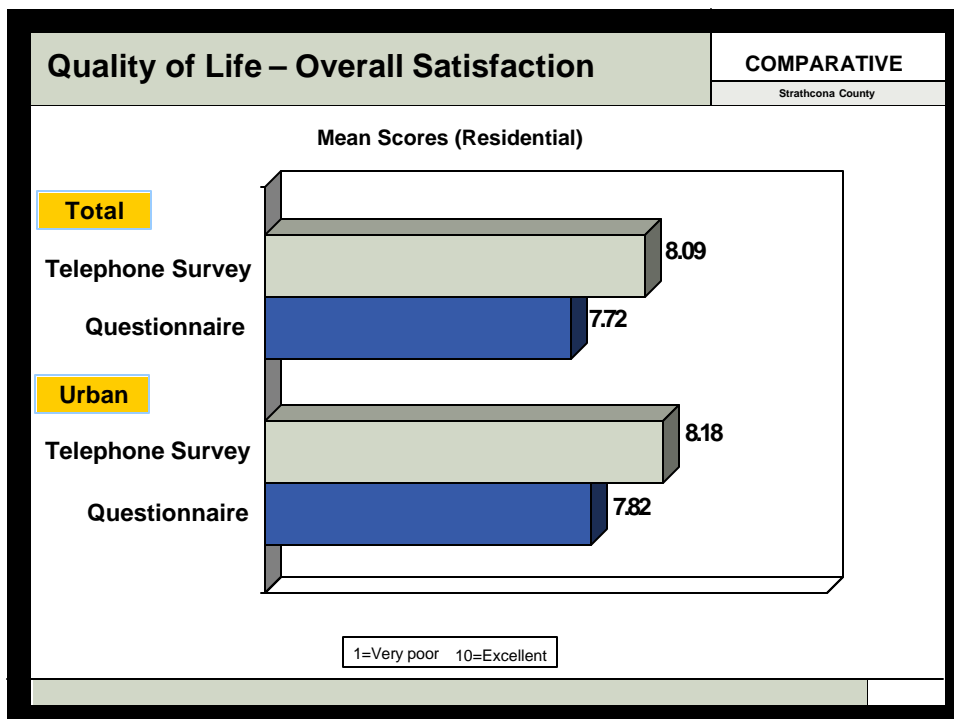
- Overall, residents rate their quality of life in the County a very high 7.72 out of 10 points. Quality of life ratings are higher in urban areas (Sherwood Park), than in rural/rural areas of the County, and for females than males.
- Age and quality of life ratings are inversely related, with those over 65 years of age showing the lowest ratings overall at an average of 7.41 out of 10.
- Newer residents (10 years or less=7.81) in the County rate their quality of life higher than do more established residents (over 40 years in the County=7.33).
- Respondents who feel growth has had and will continue to have a positive impact on them personally rate their quality of life higher than those indicating a negative impact do.

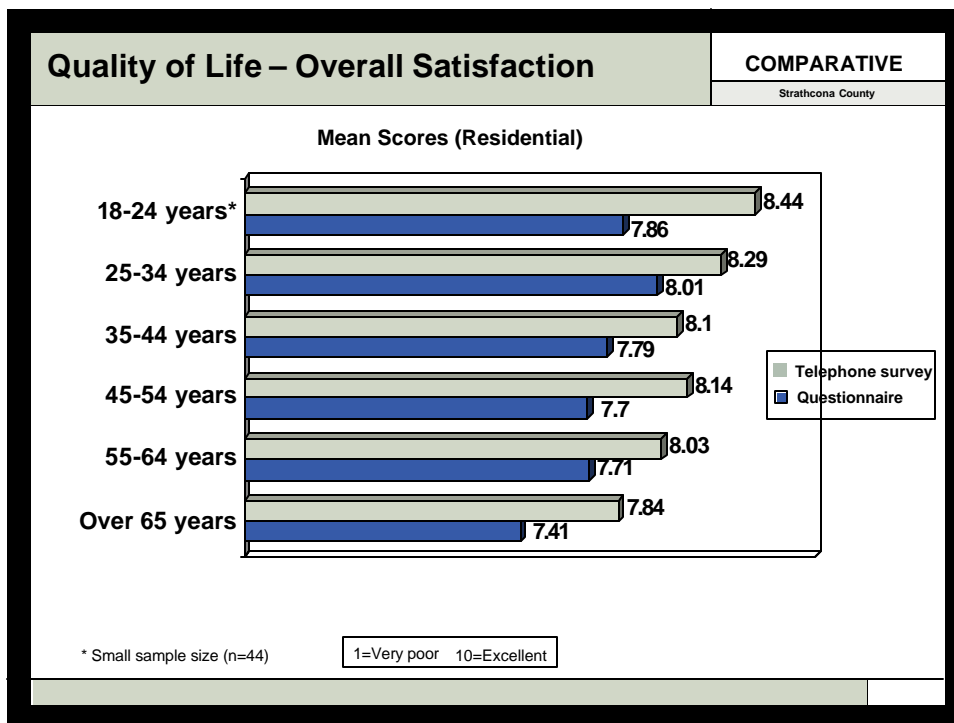
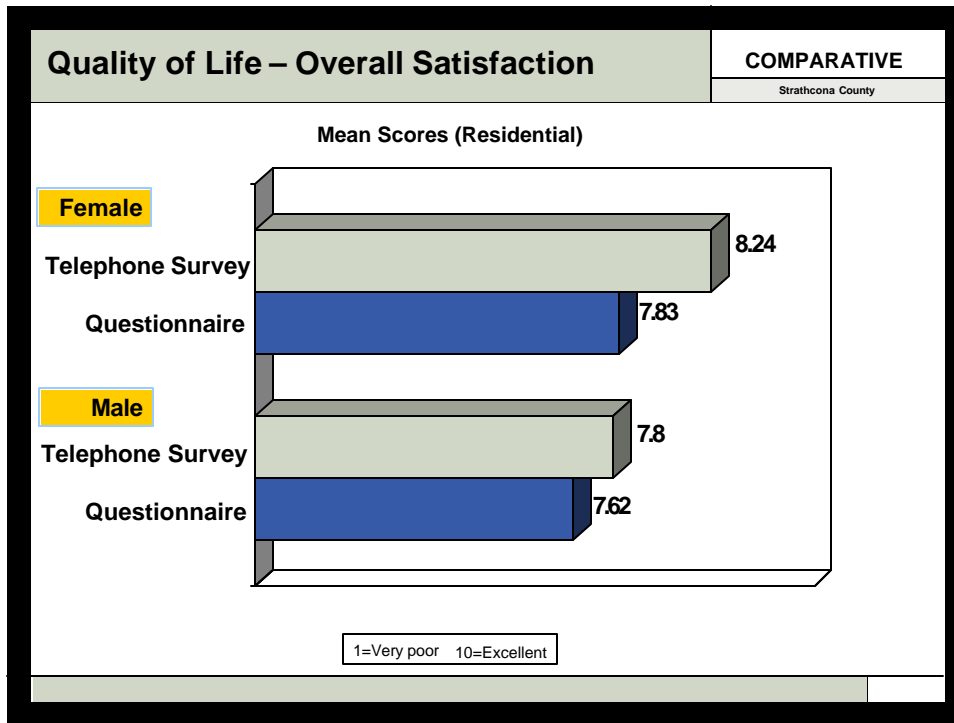






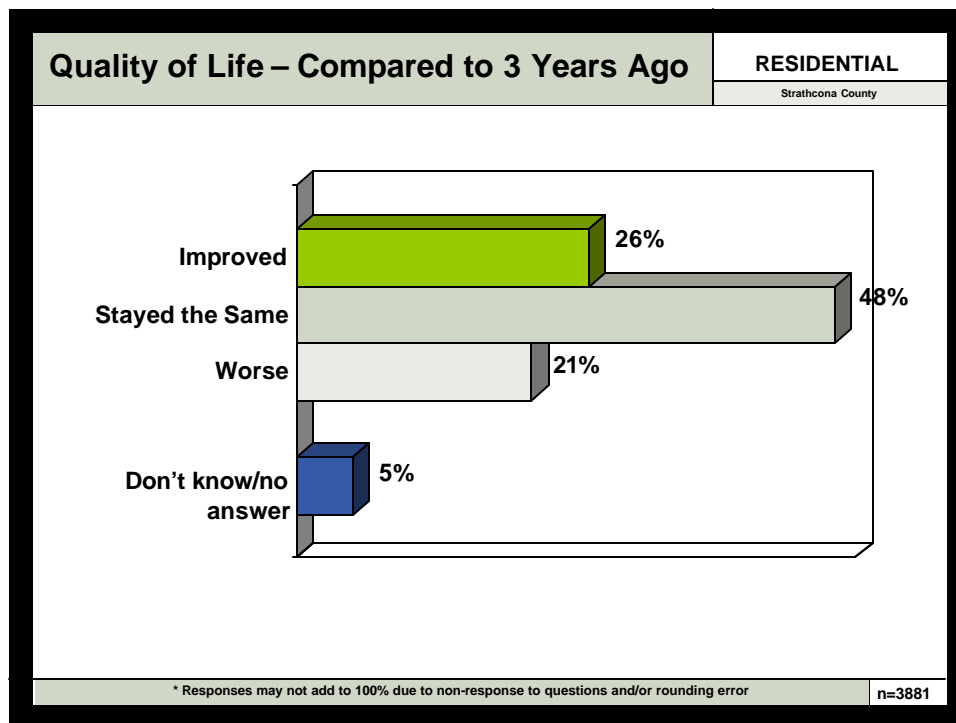
The overall quality of life scores achieved in the questionnaire was more moderate than for the telephone survey of a random sample of residents (7.72 compared to 8.09 for the telephone survey). When looking at the various demographic criteria, the directionality of results is identical even though the strength of the results is more subdued in the questionnaire.

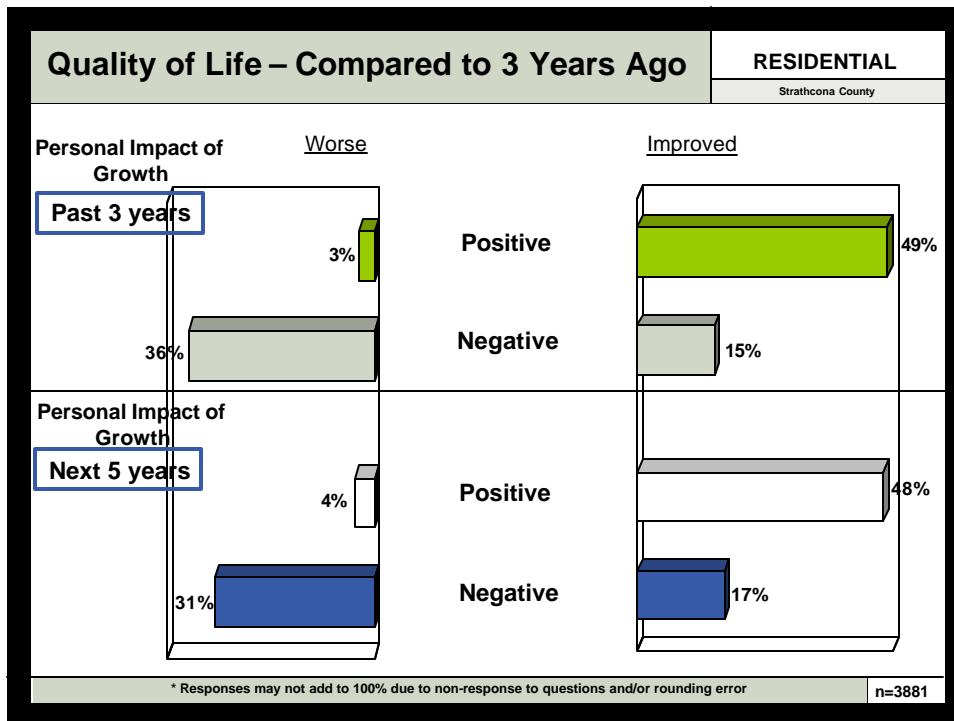
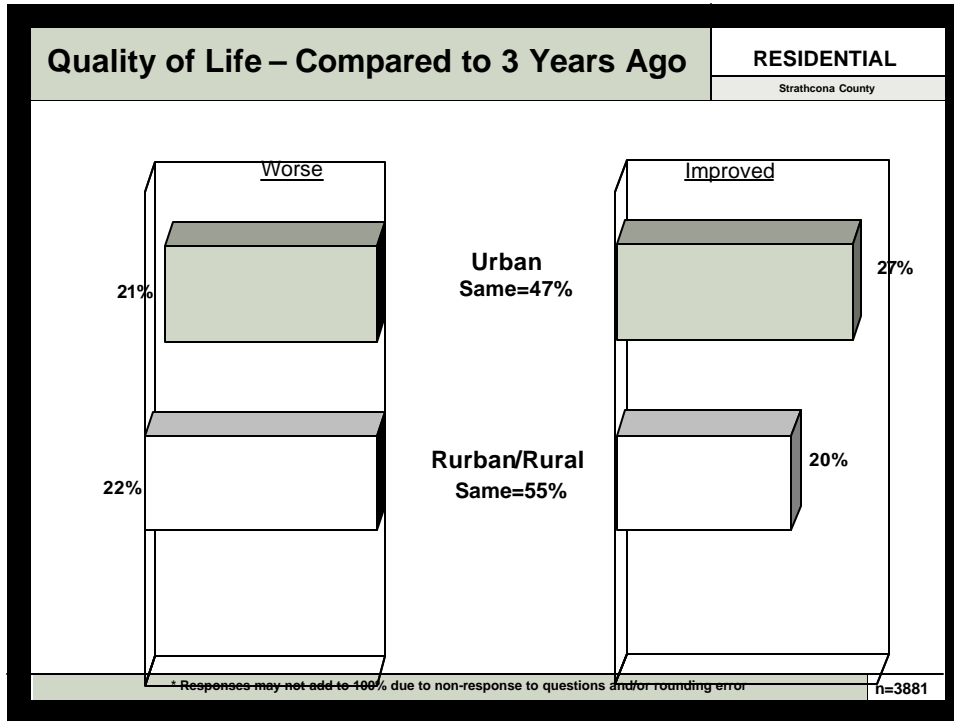


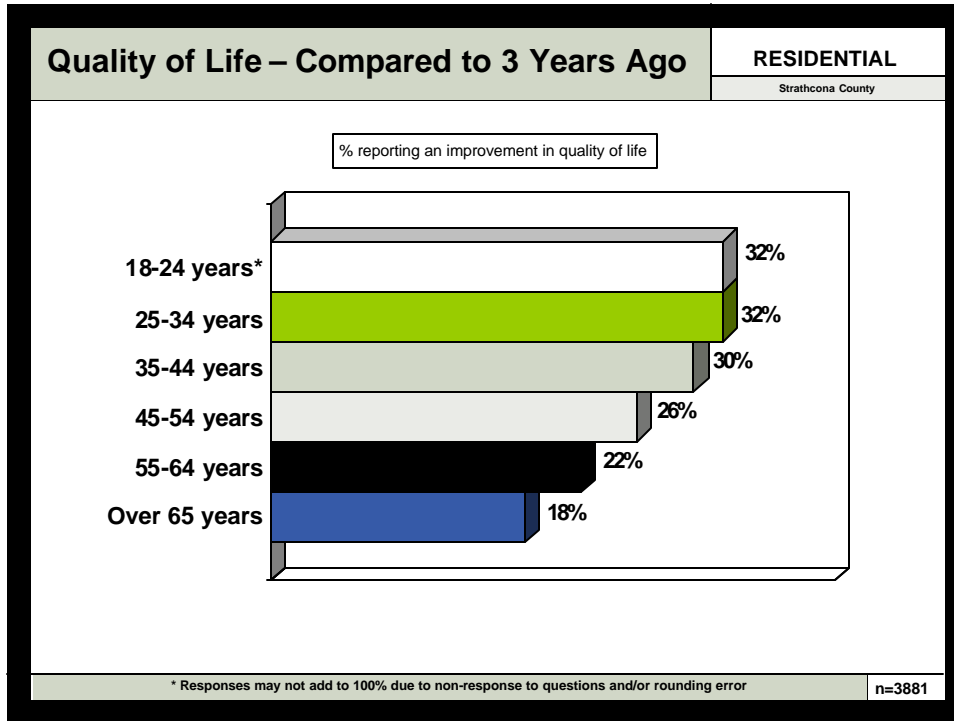


Compared to three years ago, do you think your quality of life in the County has improved, gotten worse or stayed about the same?

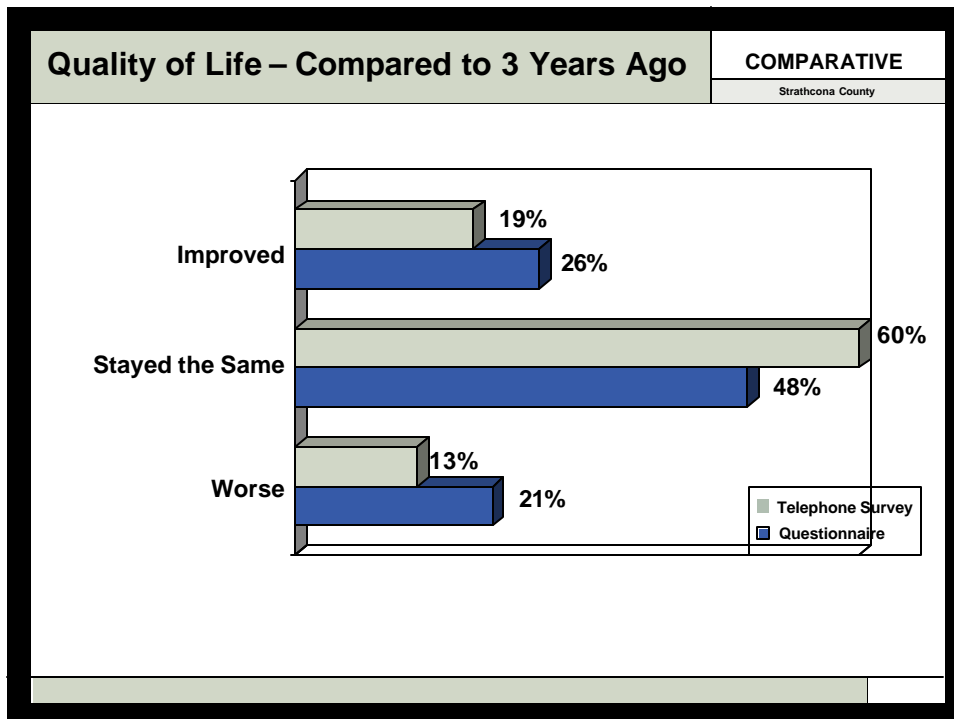
- Compared to three years ago, 48% of residents surveyed feel their quality of life has stayed the same. A further one-quarter (26%) feels their quality of life has improved while slightly fewer (21%) feel it has gotten worse.
- Urban residents are more likely than other areas to say their quality of life has improved (27% versus 20%), while rural/residents are more likely to report their quality of life to be the same as it was three years ago (55% versus 47% for urban residents).
- Respondents reporting a positive growth impact (past 3 years and next 5 years) are more inclined to report an improvement as opposed to a worsening in their quality of life. Conversely, those who are more pessimistic about the impact of growth (past and future) are more likely to report a worsening in their quality of life.
- Younger residents are more likely to report quality of life improvements over the past 3 years compared to older residents.
- Newer residents (people residing 20 years or less in the County) are most likely to report an improvement (29-30%) and least likely to report a worsening quality of life (15%) compared to longer standing residents (15% have seen an improvement in their quality of life compared to 24% who say their quality of life has worsened).







Comparing the questionnaire results with those from the telephone survey, directionally the results are the same with a majority reporting their quality of life to be the same now as it was three years ago. However, fewer residents in the questionnaire felt this way, while a larger proportion were more divided on whether their quality of life has improved (26% versus 19% in the telephone survey) or worsened (21% versus 13% in the telephone survey).



3.2. Community Concerns

What is the ONE most important thing the County can do to make it a better place in which to live? (unaided, open-ended question).

- Slowing, stopping or controlling growth were, by far, the most common suggestions for the one most important thing the County can do to make it a better place in which to live; accounting for 19% of the responses.

Some of the written comments received from respondents were very similar to those heard in the focus groups, including:

"Slow down the growth. One of the reasons we enjoy living here was the community spirit and quietness... I personally don't care if I have to go into Edmonton to buy a few things once and a while and then return home to my peaceful surroundings."

"Slow down pace of growth - too many people for the infrastructure."

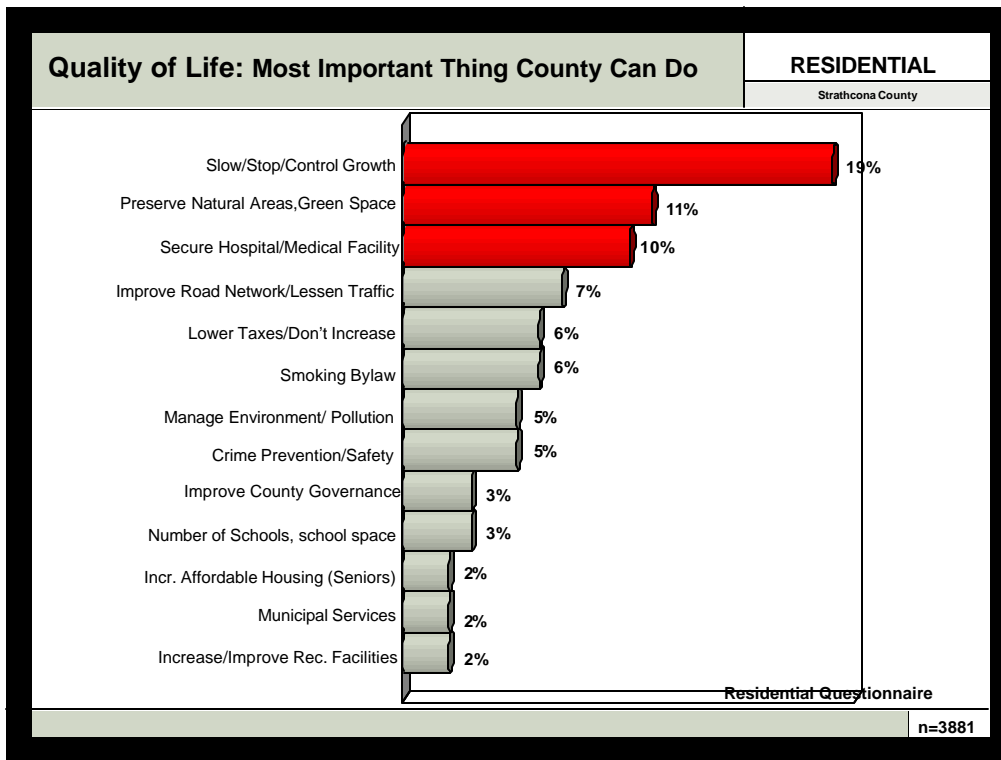
- The second ranked top-of-mind mention regarding the one most important thing the County can do to make it a better place in which to live was for preserving natural area and green spaces (11%). A commonly heard response from both questionnaire respondents and focus group participants was *"Leave the 'Park' in Sherwood Park."*
- Securing a hospital or emergency medical facility ranked third overall with 10% of respondents, followed by:
 - Improving the road network and/or alleviating traffic congestion (7%);
 - "Holding the line" on or decreasing current levels of taxation" (6%);
 - Various bylaw issues, including the "smoking bylaw," garnered 6% top-of-mind mentions for the most important thing the County can do to make it a better place in which to live.
- Managing the environment and crime prevention/safety were each mentioned top-of-mind by 5% of respondents, while 3% mentioned County governance and the number of schools. Of the latter two issues, respondents wrote:

"We are DESPARATELY in need of more schools."

"Planning! Planning! Planning! Sherwood Park is a jumble of strip malls, businesses, condo development. There is little thought given to planning."

"County must develop and articulate a "vision.""

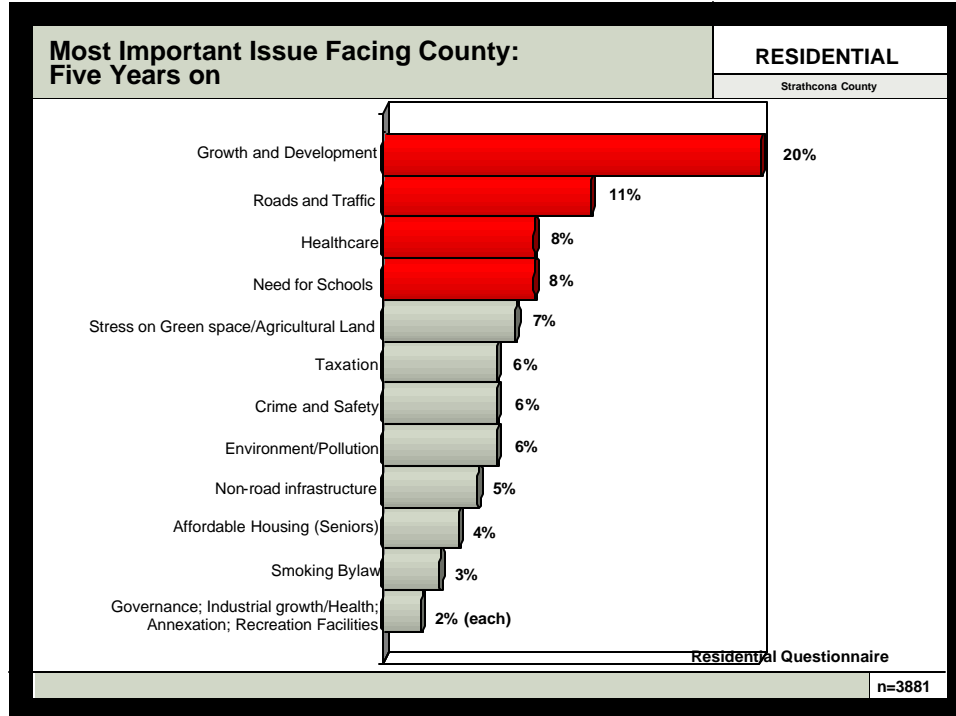
"Stay the course - the county has been well managed. It's a great place to live."



3.3. Issues Facing the County in the Next Five Years

Thinking about the next five years in the County, in your opinion, what do you consider to be the three most important issues facing Strathcona County in the next five years? (unaided, open-ended question).

- The most important issue overall facing the County 5 years on is managing growth and development (“We’re getting too big too fast”). This is the clear front-runner at 20%, garnering almost twice as many mentions as the second placed issue of roads and traffic (11%), - specifically, the issue of roads pertains to the quality and sufficiency of the roadways, and traffic congestion (“Control development within the capacity of the County to support that development with roads, sewers, schools, etc.”).
- Rounding out the top six most frequently suggested issues to deal with over the next five years are:
 - The need for a hospital or 24-hour medical facility (8%);
 - Addressing the lack of space in local schools (8%);
 - Maintaining or increasing current levels of trails, parks, green spaces, and agriculture land (7%). (“Stop cutting down our trees to build more houses – our ten year-old daughter answered this question and we agree with her 100%”). Respondents did not include agricultural land in their discussion of trees, parks and green spaces in the “most in important thing the county can do” question, but they clearly did here.
 - “Holding the line” on, or decreasing, current levels of taxation” (6%), crime and safety (6%) and protecting the environment/pollution (6%).

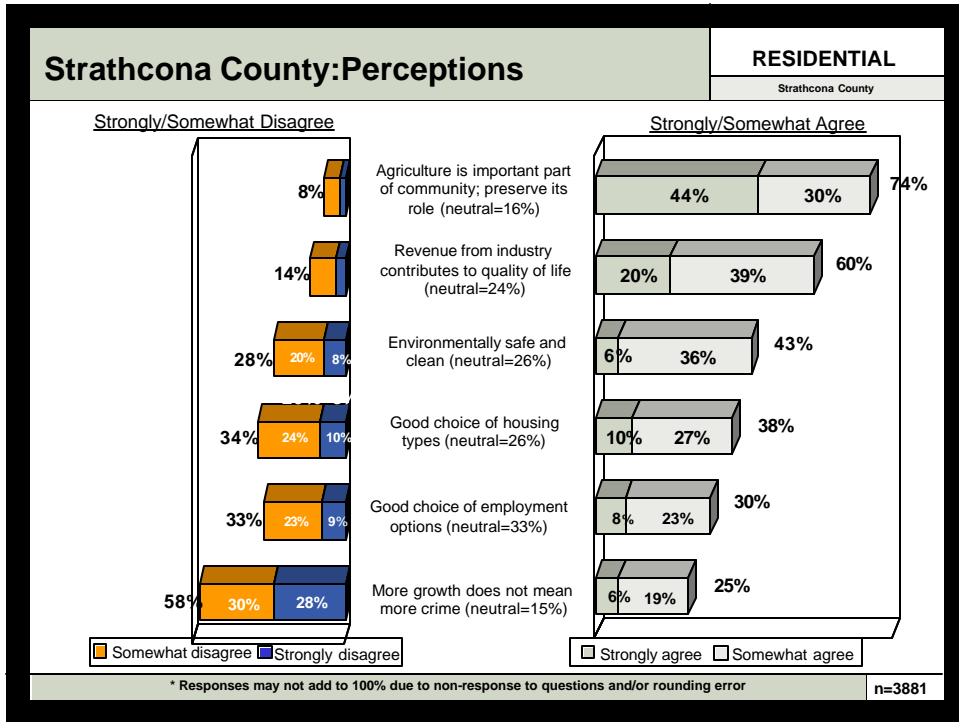


3.4. County Perceptions

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements about Strathcona County as it is today.

- A majority (74%) of survey respondents agrees – 44% “strongly” agreeing - agriculture is an important part of the community and the County should work hard to preserve its role in the future. Rurban/rural residents are more likely than urban residents to agree (85% versus 72%)
- Residents also agree (60%) revenue generated from industry contributes to a good quality of life for all people in the County although one-quarter of residents are neutral on this issue. Urban residents are more likely to agree with this statement than rurban/rural residents (63% versus 54%).
- Agreement is more moderate, especially among the rurban/rural constituency, for the environmental safety and cleanliness of the County with 43% agreeing, 28% disagreeing and 26% neutral with this statement.
- With regard to the issue of housing options in the County, 38% agree there is a good choice available while one-third (34%) disagrees. Home renters in the County offer the strongest disagreement with this statement at 66% (35% strongly disagreeing) compared to 33% for homeowners.
- Respondents are almost evenly divided on the range of employment options available to County residents although those who work outside of the County are more likely to disagree there is good employment options compared to those who work in Strathcona (42% vs 26%).
- On the relationship between growth and crime and social problems, one-quarter agrees that more growth does not mean more crime, while a majority (58%) disagrees.

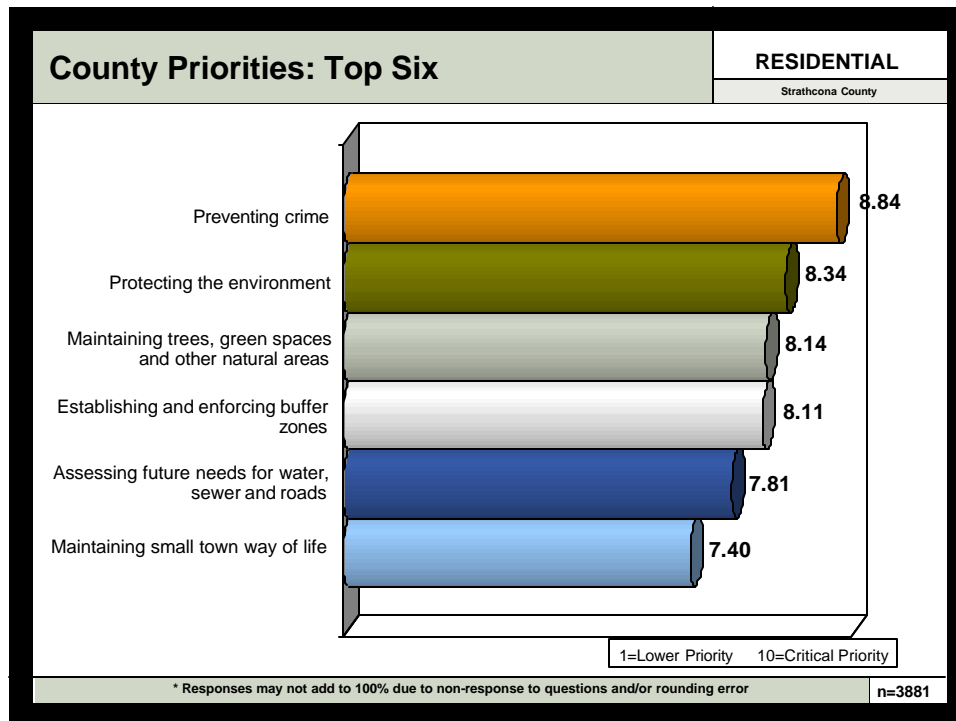
These results are directionally similar to those found in the telephone survey.



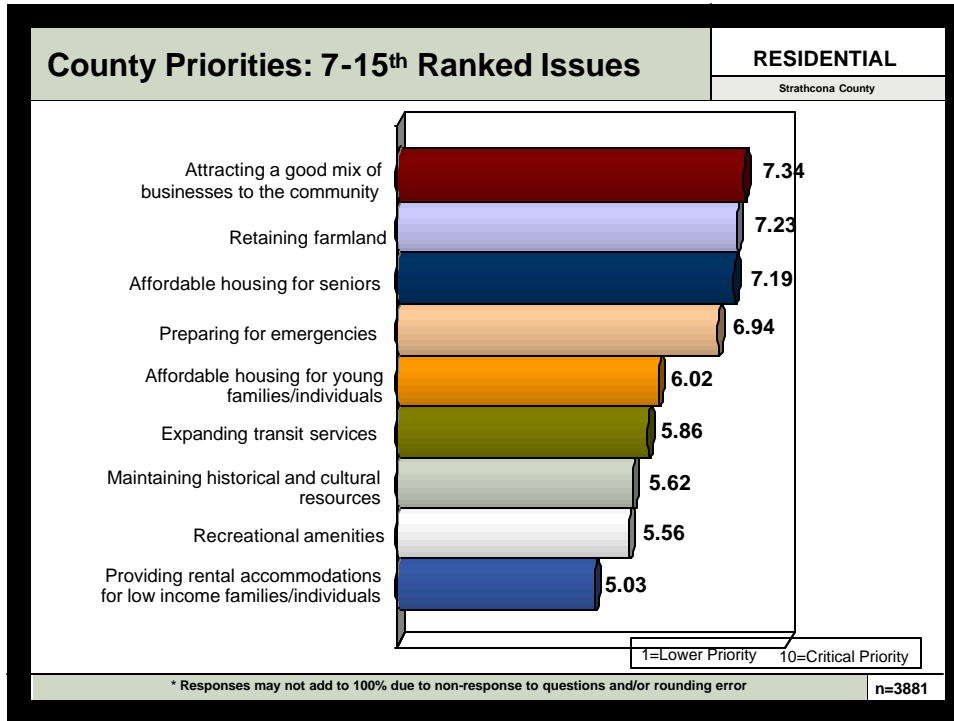
3.5. County Priorities

County officials have to set priorities and make difficult choices. We'd like to get an idea of what you think the County's overall priorities should be over the next couple of years. (Rating scale where 1=it is a lower priority and not in need of urgent attention and 10=it is a critical priority item and in need of urgent attention)

- Topping the list of County priorities presented to questionnaire respondents, and items that identify some of the underlying values in the community, are preventing crime (an average rating of 8.84 out of 10) and protecting the environment (8.34). Rounding out the top four are maintaining trees, green spaces and other natural areas (8.14) and the establishment and enforcement of buffer zones between industrial development and other land uses (8.11). The top three priorities here are identical to the top three identified in the telephone survey of residents while the latter item ranked 6th overall in the telephone survey.
- A second tier of priorities for citizens is appraisals of future infrastructure and service needs (water, sewer and roads) and maintenance of a small town way of life. While the first of these items ranked in the top six on the telephone survey, maintaining a small town flavour to the community just edged out the need for a good blend of businesses in the community to support the tax base. In all other respects, the priorities identified in the questionnaire are very consistent with those found in the telephone survey.



- Mid-pack priorities concern the retention of farmland, affordable housing for seniors, emergency preparedness, and affordable housing for young families and individuals.
- The lowest priority overall (mean rating of 5.03 out of 10) is the provision of rental accommodations for low-income individuals and families. Not surprisingly, renters rate this significantly higher than do those who own their home (7.63 versus 4.91, respectively). Retirees and those over 55 years of age also rate this a higher priority.



County Priority	COMPARATIVE			
	Questionnaire		Telephone Survey	
	Mean	Rank	Rank	Mean
Preventing crime	8.84	1	2	8.44
Protecting the environment	8.34	2	1	8.45
Maintaining trees, green spaces and other natural areas	8.14	3	3	8.33
Establishing and enforcing buffer zones	8.11	4	6	7.75
Assessing future needs for water, sewer and roads	7.81	5	5	7.96
Maintaining small town way of life	7.40	6	10	7.08
Attracting a good mix of businesses to the community	7.34	7	4	8.09
Retaining farmland	7.23	8	9	7.25
Affordable housing for seniors	7.19	9	8	7.49
Preparing for emergencies	6.94	10	7	7.52
Affordable housing for young families/individuals	6.02	11	11	6.71
Expanding transit services	5.86	12	14	6.14
Maintaining historical and cultural resources	5.62	13	12	6.26
Recreational amenities	5.56	14	13	6.15
Providing rental accommodations for low income families/individuals	5.03	15	15	5.72

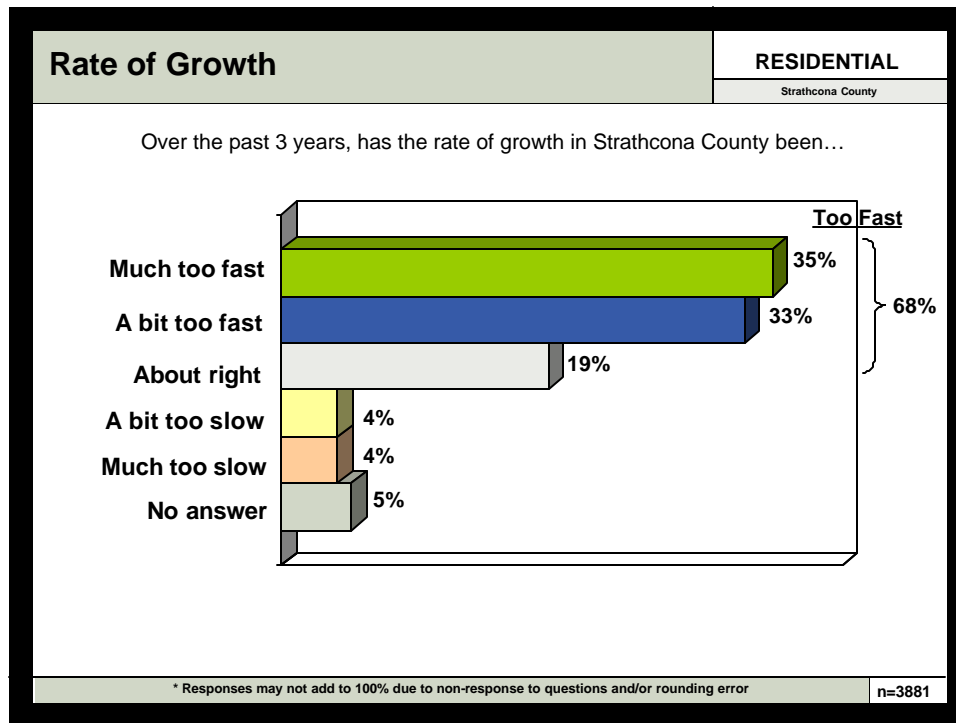
3.6. Growth Issues

Rate of Growth

In your opinion, over the past 3 years, has the rate of growth in Strathcona County been too fast, about right, or too slow?

- Two-thirds (68%) of residents surveyed feel growth in the County over the past three years has been too fast, and just under half of these (35%) feel growth has been “much too fast.” A minority (19%) feel the rate of growth over the last three years has been about right.
- Respondents most likely to feel growth has occurred too quickly are females and those who feel growth has had, and will continue to have, a negative impact on them personally.

These results are very consistent with the telephone survey where 67% overall feel growth has been too fast over the past three years.

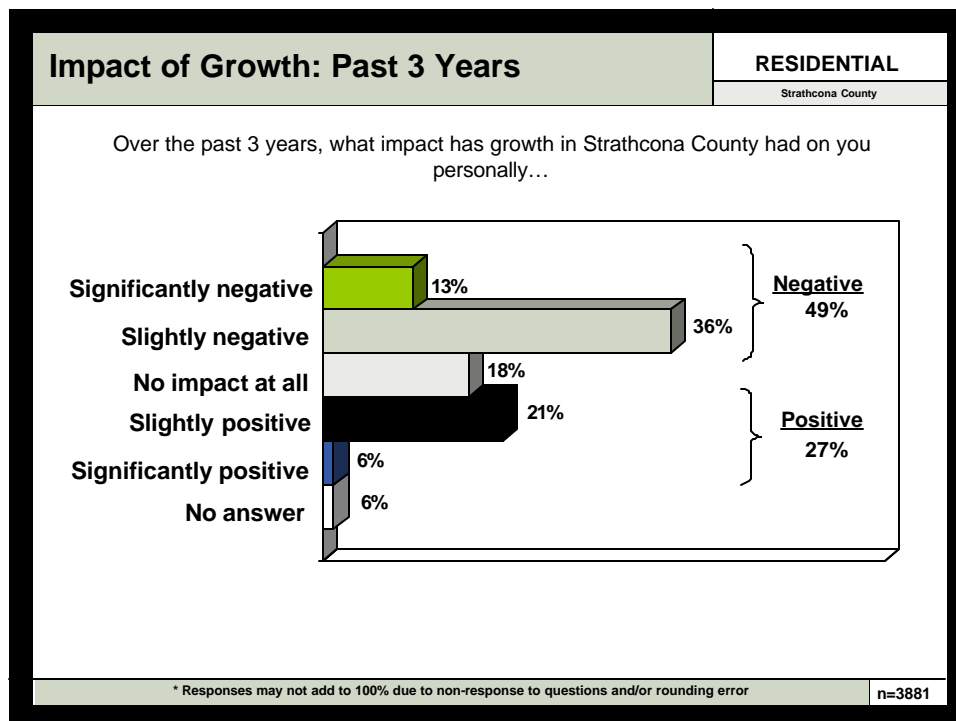


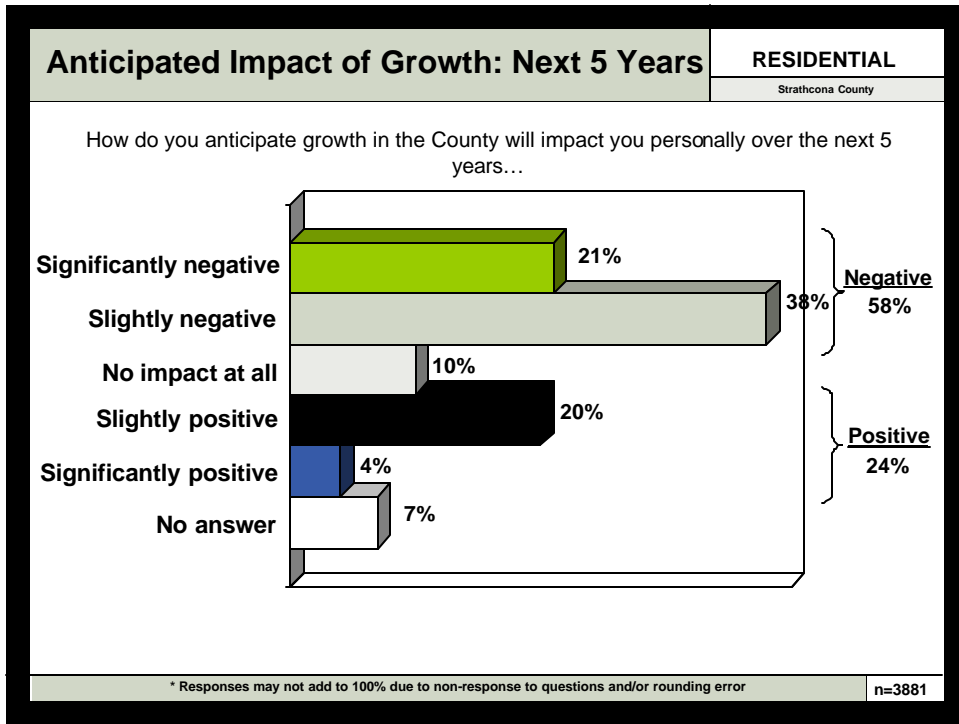
Personal Impact of Growth

Thinking back over the past three years, has growth in Strathcona County had a positive or negative impact on you personally? How do you anticipate growth in the County will impact you personally over the next 5 years?

- Residents surveyed note both positive and negative impacts of growth over the past 3 years although those reporting a negative impact of growth significantly outnumber those reporting a positive impact (49% versus 27%, respectively). Further, far more residents (58%) anticipate a negative personal impact of growth in the next 5 years than those who expect a positive impact (24%). It is important to note, however, that the potency of this impact is perceived to be “slight” rather than “significant.”
- Those who feel more negatively impacted by growth are urban residents, females, and those aged 35-54 years.
- Those most positively impacted by growth are younger respondents (25-34), males, newer residents, the self-employed or full-time workers, and homeowners although it is renters who are most optimistic than homeowners about the personal impact of future growth.

The telephone survey yielded much more evenly divided results for the personal impact of growth although the results of the survey and questionnaire are consistent in that, in the minds of residents, the negative impacts outweigh positives.

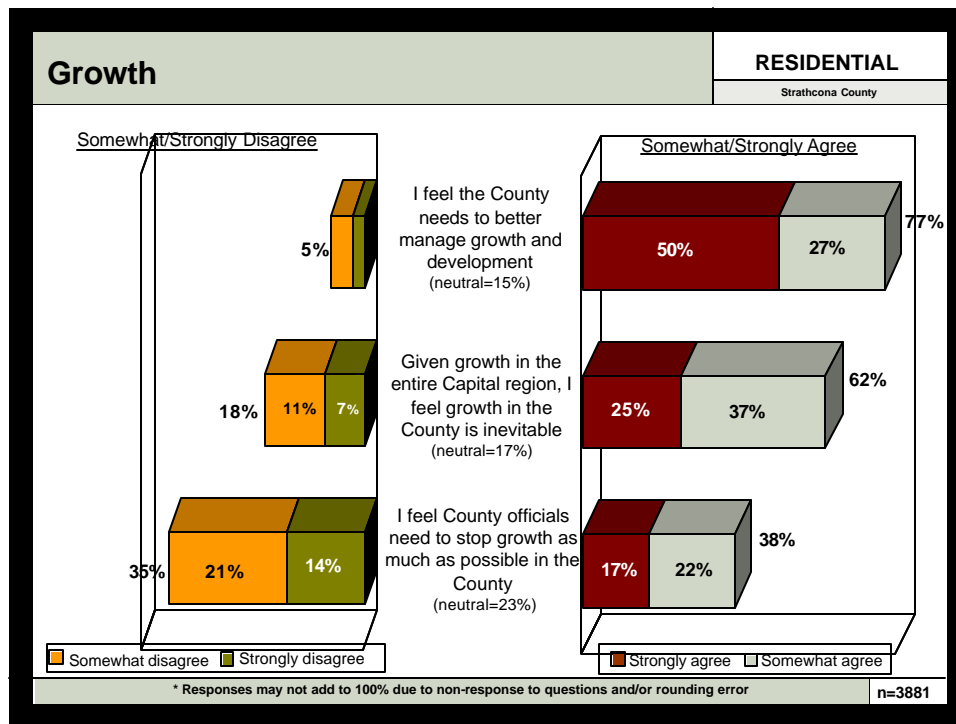




Still thinking about growth, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- A strong majority (77%) of respondents agree (50% strongly) that the County needs to better manage growth and development, and that growth is inevitable given the growth in the Capital region as a whole (62%).
- However, just over one-third (38%) agrees County officials need to stop growth as much as possible while slightly fewer (35%) disagree with this.

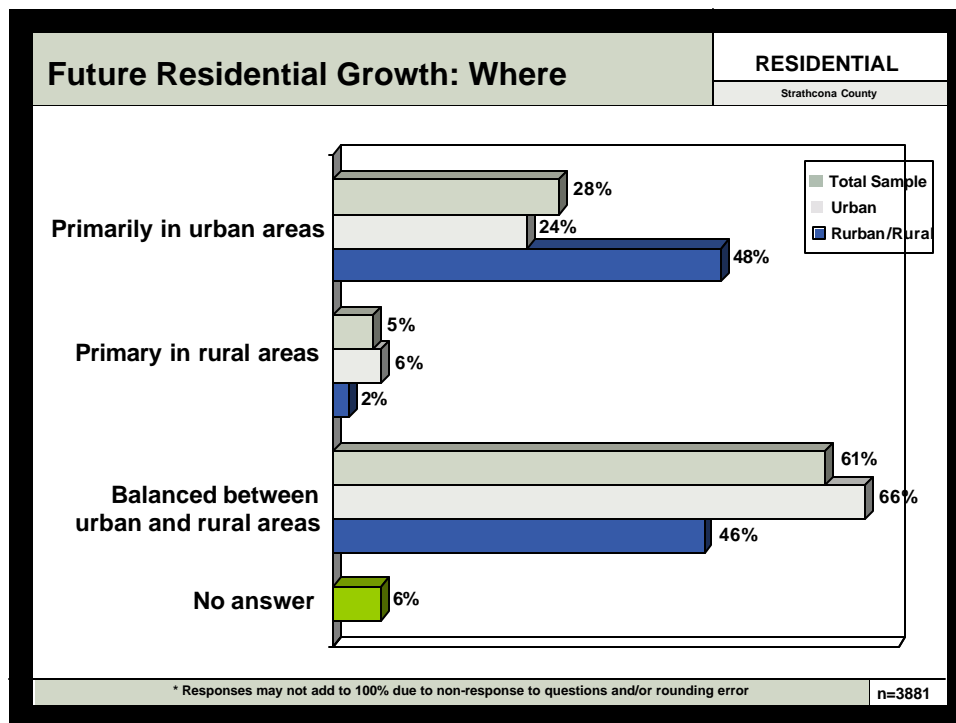
These results are similar to those found in the telephone survey, with one exception. In the telephone survey, 58% disagreed that “County officials need to stop growth as much as possible” compared to a smaller proportion (35%) found in this questionnaire.

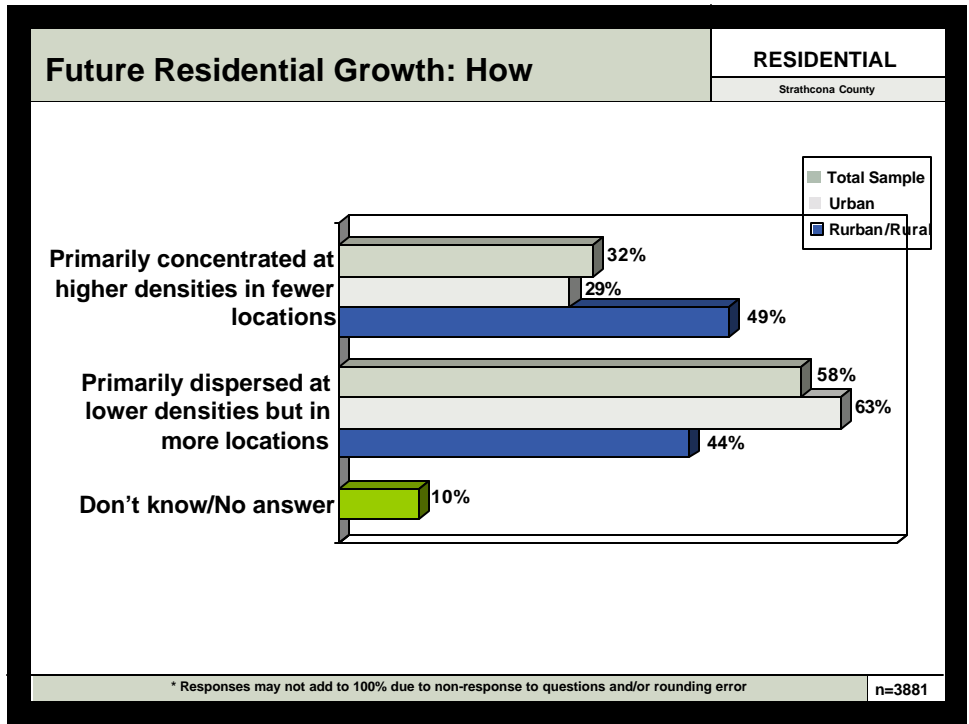


Future Residential Growth: Location and Form

Which of the following statements describes your preference for where any future residential growth occurs in the County?

- Residents surveyed are quite clear in their preferences for future residential growth: It should be balanced between urban and rural areas and be primarily dispersed at lower densities but in more locations. These results are directionally the same as telephone survey results with a random sample of residents.
- Rurban/rural residents are more likely than urban residents to feel growth should be primarily in urban area (48% versus 24%) and concentrated at higher densities in fewer locations (49% versus 29%).
- Urban residents are much more inclined to favour balanced growth in both urban and rural locations (66% versus 46%) and dispersed at lower densities but in more locations. A comment on the questionnaire that summarizes the position for some County residents, “Low density housing only! If we wanted to live in a big city we would have moved into Edmonton. We want a higher standard of living.”



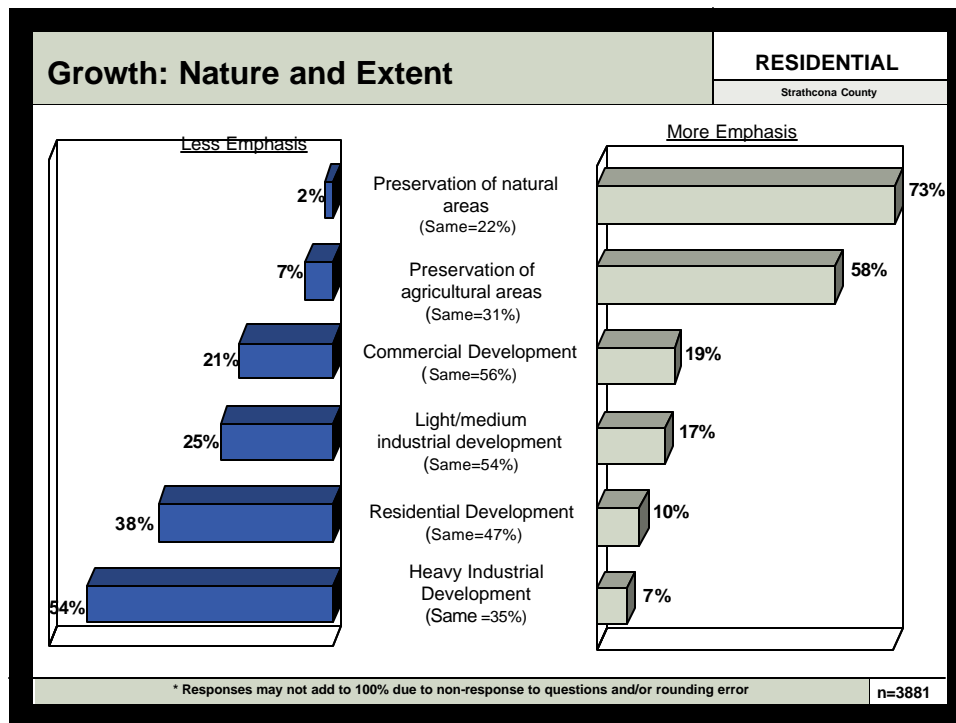


Nature of Future Growth

Thinking about the nature of any future growth over the next 10 years, do you think the County should place more, less or about the same emphasis as now on the following areas of development?

- A majority of respondents clearly identify the preservation of natural areas and agricultural areas as needing more emphasis in future growth plans. This is consistent with the desired County priorities of protecting the environment and maintaining trees, green spaces and other natural areas (previously reported).
- Residents call for the status quo on commercial, light/medium industrial and residential development with approximately half or more of respondents calling for about the same emphasis as now on these areas of development.
- In contrast, a majority of respondents indicate the desire in future growth plans to provide less emphasis on heavy industrial development, although slightly more than one-third (35%) prefer about the same emphasis as there is now.

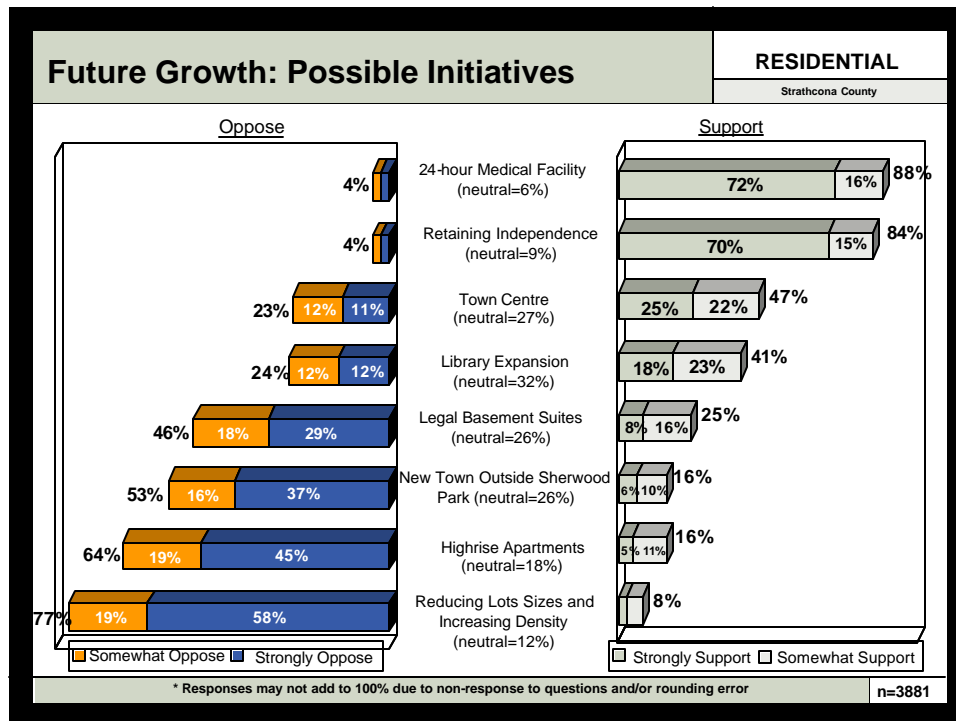
Again, these results are very consistent with the telephone survey findings.



Future Growth: Reaction to Possible Initiatives

Thinking about future growth in the County, do you support or oppose the following possibilities?

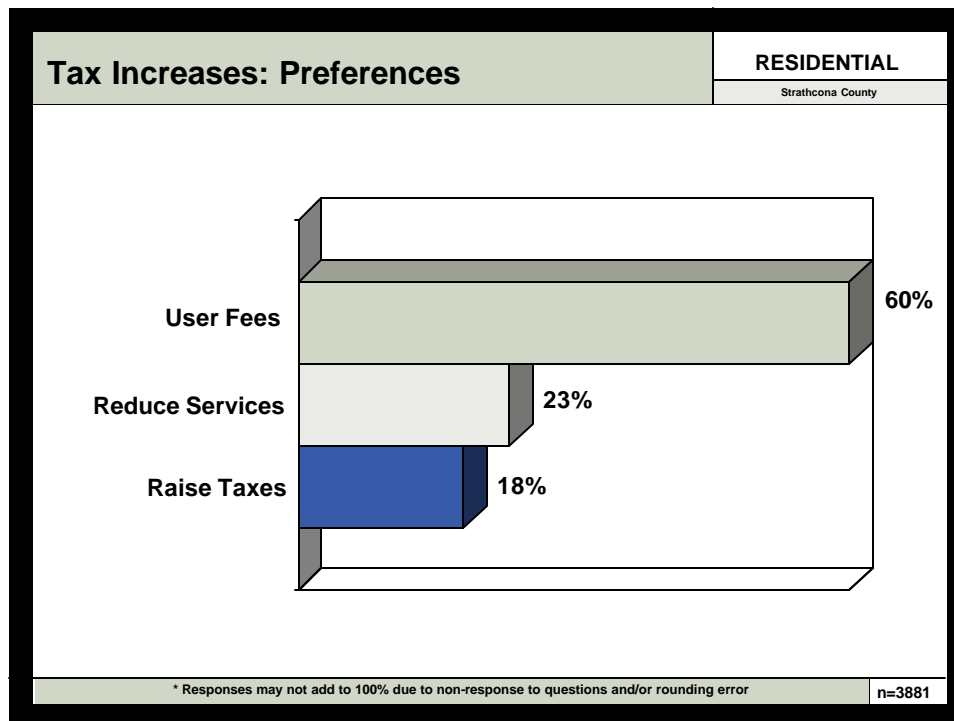
- A majority (88%) of respondents strongly supports the development of a 24-hour medical facility within Sherwood Park. Similarly, strong support is garnered for Strathcona County to retain its independence as a separate municipality (84%).
- There is also a groundswell of support for the development of a town centre in Sherwood Park that serves as a focus point for shopping and community activity (47%), and the relocation and expansion of the County Library (41%).
- On the issue of allowing legal basement suites in residential neighbourhoods, nearly half (46%) oppose this idea while one-quarter are neutral (26%) and a similar proportion (25%) are supportive of this initiative. Support is strongest in the rural/rural constituency, among younger residents, business owners and renters. Opposition comes mostly from Sherwood Park area families, males, older age groups, retirees, homeowners, and those who do not work or own a business in the County.
- Opposition also outweighs support for the development of a new town outside of Sherwood Park (53%, versus 16% support). Opposition is also very strong to the development of high-rise apartment buildings in the County with 64% opposing and 16% supporting this possibility.
- Survey respondents strongly oppose the reduction of lot sizes and the consequent increase in residential density (77% oppose versus 8% support). Opponents of this idea are mostly Sherwood Park families, homeowners and female respondents.



3.7. Taxes

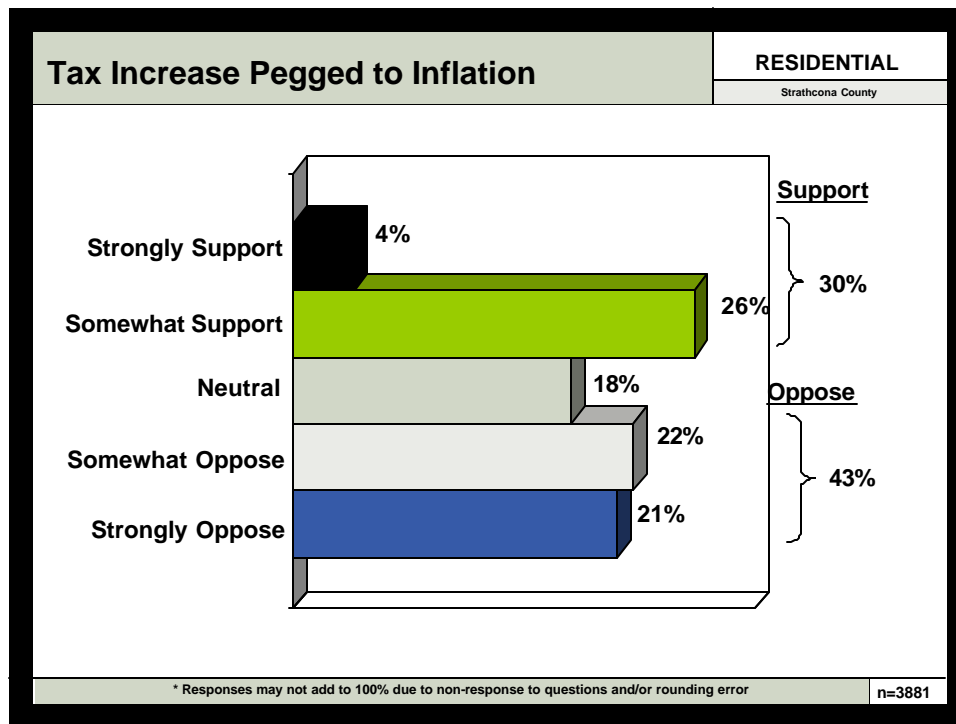
The cost of delivering municipal services today is higher than it was 10 year ago. To keep pace with cost increases, how should the County manage the increasing cost of services in the future? Given a choice, would you prefer to charge user fees for those who use the service, raise taxes or reduce services? (Paired comparisons).

- There is a clear preference by over a two-to-one margin for the County to pay for future services through user fees levied against those who use the service.
- In a departure from the telephone survey, respondents to the questionnaire ranked reducing services as their second preference overall, followed by raising taxes. The opposite was true in the telephone survey results.
- Rurban/Rural residents are more favourable than urban residents toward a reduction in services (28% versus 22%). In contrast, urban residents are more favourable than rurban/rural residents are to an increase in taxes (19% versus 12%).



Do you support or oppose a property tax increase that matches inflation?

- Unlike the telephone survey results where residents of the County were evenly divided on the issue of a property tax increase to keep pace with inflation (48% opposition and 48% support), respondents to the questionnaire were more inclined to oppose a tax increase pegged to inflation than support it (43% versus 30%).
- Opposition is strongest among homeowners, long-term County residents and those living in rural/rural areas. In the latter case, 54% of respondents living in a rural/rural area are opposed to a property tax increase matching inflation while only 42% of urban respondents are opposed to this.



3.8. County Governance

I'd like your opinion on how you feel the County governs. How would you rate the County on the following issues?

- Overall, the County rates a “fair” grade when it comes to a range of governance issues.
- The County rates highest overall in communicating with citizens (36% rate the County good or very good), providing value for one’s tax dollars (34% good/very good rating) and appropriate bylaw enforcement (31% good/very good).
- At the bottom of the list is planning for the future where over one-third (36%) of residents rate the County a poor or very poor and a similar proportion “fair.”

For the most part, these results are directionally consistent with the telephone survey results although respondents to the questionnaire were much more temperate in the ratings given to County governance.

