

Strathcona County

2007 Perceptions of Strathcona County Residents on Regional Challenges



Research Results

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In November 2007, Strathcona County conducted a survey of its residents in order to obtain perceptions from Strathcona County residents about regional issues facing the County. The basis for this survey was to determine the extent of how residents throughout Strathcona County perceive any of the regional challenges that are being encountered by administrative officials. In this regard, the following aspects were measured in this study:

- How independent Strathcona County should remain from its regional partners;
- Views toward a new regional board;
- Views toward the use of municipal tax dollars; and
- Perceptions of discussions taking place among municipalities within the Edmonton Region.

Obtaining primary data from residents will provide information that will enable informed decisions that can be made about regional challenges facing Strathcona County. This report will provide a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results. A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation of the survey can be found in the next section of this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was a new instrument created by Corporate Planning and Intergovernmental Affairs under the direction of an internal committee struck to study the current regional issues. A copy of the questionnaire is located in Appendix A.

B. Sampling Design and Data Collection Procedure

The sample frame used in this study were residents of Strathcona County who were 18 years of age or older. The sample frame incorporated a statistical proportion estimate of 0.5, which assumes that there is a homogeneous mixture of attitudes and opinions about regional issues that could have an impact on Strathcona County residents. A 95% confidence interval was established for this study, which is standard for any public opinion study that utilizes a random sample of residents.

The sample frame consisted of 400 people living in urban¹ and rural parts of Strathcona County. The number of urban and rural residents was reflective of the proportionate distribution of residents living in Strathcona County. As such, 65% of the sample was drawn from the urban area, while 35% came from rural parts of Strathcona County. The sample frame provided overall results² accurate to within $\pm 4.9\%$, 19 times out of 20.

A telephone survey research design was used to collect the data for this study. Respondents were contacted by telephone between November 28^h and December 4th 2007. Strathcona County derived telephone numbers from the Select Phone Canadian Edition database and the 2007 Telus Directory and randomized them for this study.

¹ In this report, the urban component of Strathcona County is Sherwood Park.

² The $\pm 4.9\%$ is the *margin of error* associated with this study and refers to the potential percentage spread that exists within answers to particular questions. This means that an answer could be up to 4.9% higher or lower than what is reported.

Trained interviewers from Banister Research & Consulting Inc. made all telephone calls under supervised conditions. Each questionnaire took an average of 10 minutes to complete. The data was analyzed by Strathcona County Corporate Planning and Intergovernmental Affairs using SPSS for Windows.

III. RESULTS – STRATHCONA COUNTY FINDINGS

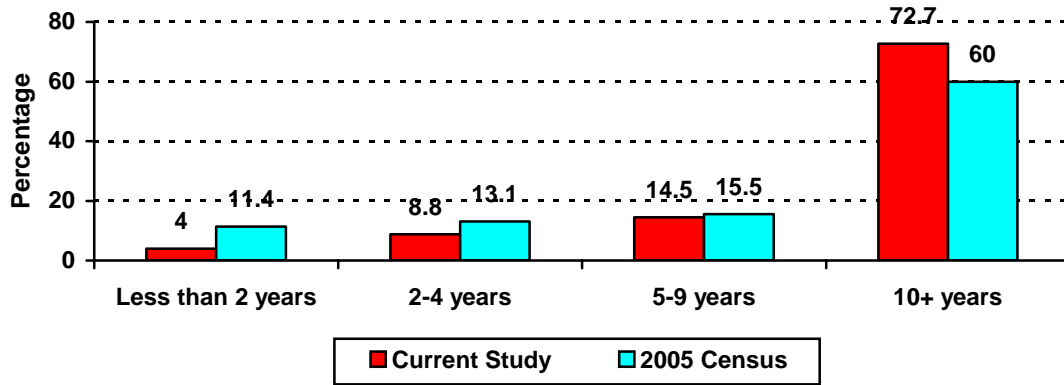
This section of the report presents a summary of the results associated with the perceptions and awareness of residents. Urban/rural comparisons, where significant, are also highlighted.

A. Demographic Overview

This section of the report presents an overview of the type of residents who were surveyed compared to the municipal profile (derived from the 2005 municipal census). As indicated in the previous section of this report, part of the sampling criteria was to survey the county by population density. In the sample, responses to the survey came from 50% of males and 50% of females. These trends reflected the patterns seen in the recent Strathcona County census.

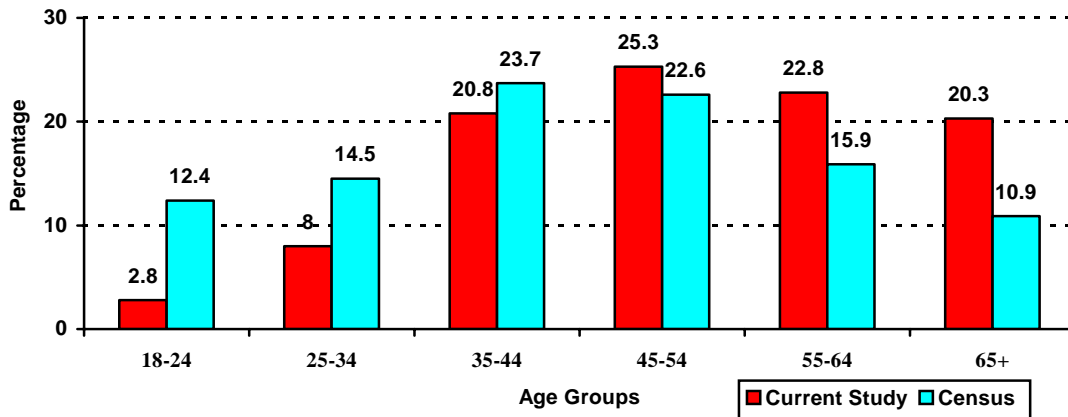
The majority of people who took part in the survey indicated that they were long term residents in the County. Figure 1 presents a breakdown of length of residence. It can be seen the majority of respondents have lived in the county for more than 10 years, much like the findings from the 2005 municipal census. The average number of years that respondents from this survey lived in Strathcona County was 20.62 years.

Figure 1
Length of Time Living in the County
(Current 2007 Study and 2005 Census Comparison)



A breakdown of the age of the respondents in this study compared to the municipal census is shown in Figure 2. There was a relatively good representation from all age groups, though in comparison to the 2005 census, the 18-24 and 25-34 year age groups were under-represented and the 55-64 and 65+ age groups were over-represented.

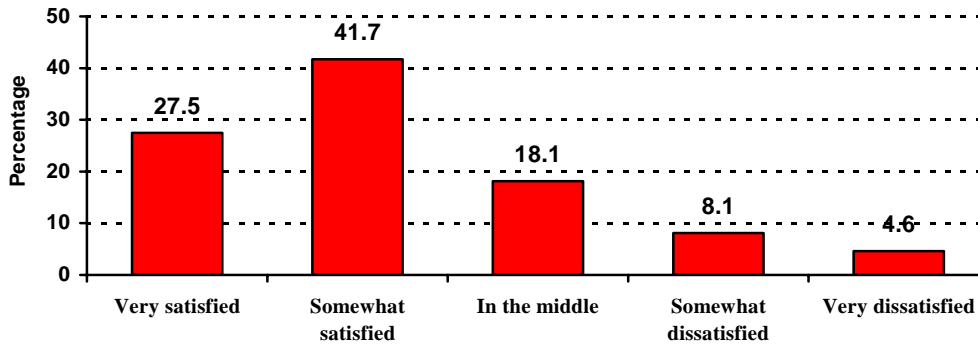
FIGURE 2
Age of Respondents
(Current 2007 Study and 2005 Census Comparison)



B. Perceptions of Local Government by County Residents

Overall, the majority of Strathcona County residents were generally satisfied with the municipal services provided by the municipality. It can be seen from Figure 3 that the satisfaction of County residents with local services far exceeded those who were dissatisfied.

FIGURE 3
Satisfaction Level of Residents with County Municipal Services



It was found that the majority of Strathcona County residents were strongly supportive of the County retaining its independence as a separate municipality. It was explained to respondents that “independence” meant that the County would keep its own distinct name and would continue to make the decisions about the quality of services that it provided for its residents. It can be seen from Figures 4 and 5 that support for the County retaining its independence as a separate municipality far exceeded those who opposed this, regardless of where the respondent lived in the County.

FIGURE 4
Support for Retention of Independence

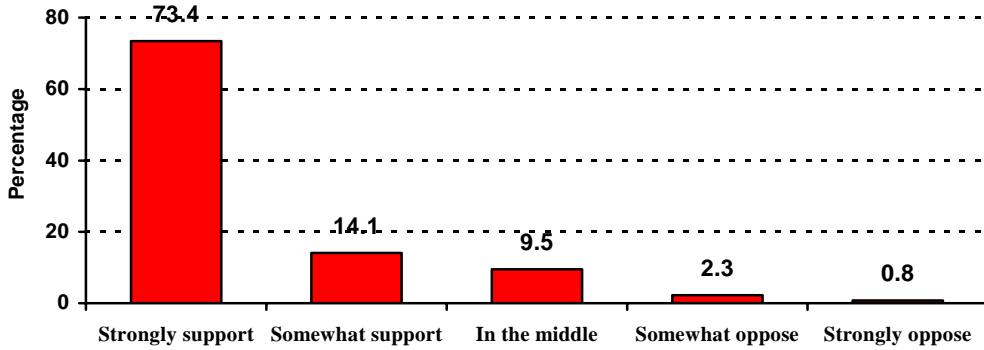


FIGURE 5
Support for Retention of Independence
(Urban & Rural Comparisons)

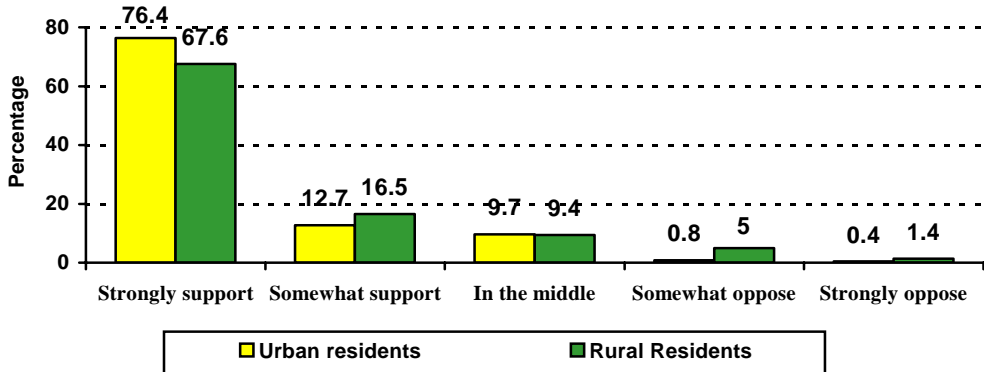
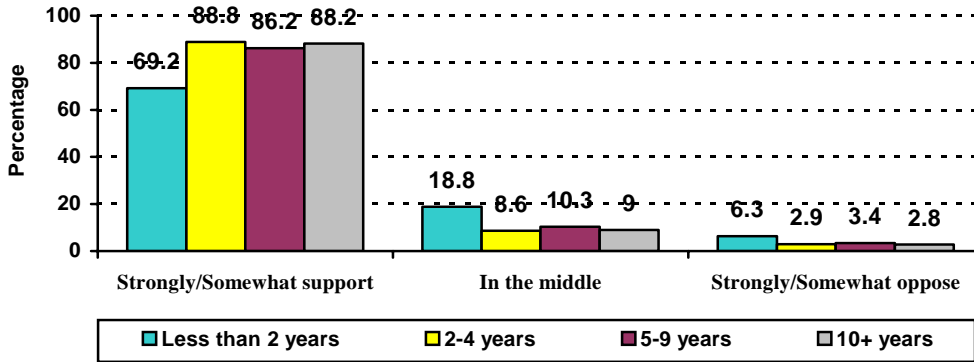


Figure 6 presents a breakdown of the attitudes of residents toward Strathcona County retaining its independence as a separate municipality on the basis of length of time people resided in the County. It can be seen that support for this increased as the length of time one resided increased.

FIGURE 6
Support for Retention of Independence
(Length of Residence Comparisons)



Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent that they supported Strathcona County continuing to deliver municipal services to its residents. It can be seen from Figures 7 and 8 that support for local services delivered by the County’s municipality far exceeded those who opposed this, regardless of where the respondent lived in the County.

FIGURE 7
Support for Continued Delivery of Municipal Services by Strathcona County

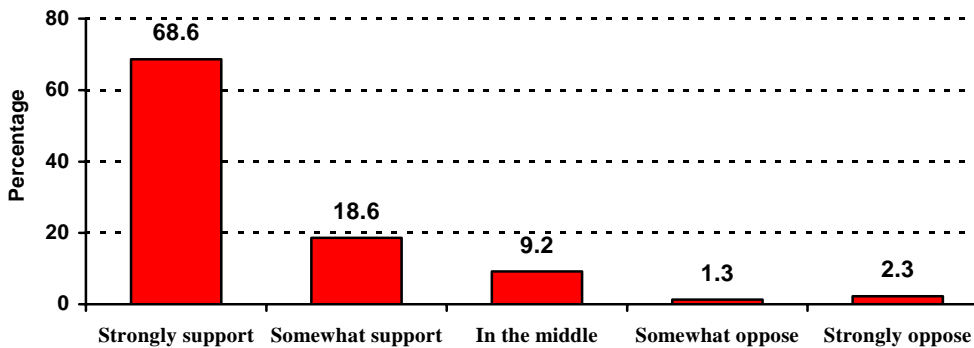
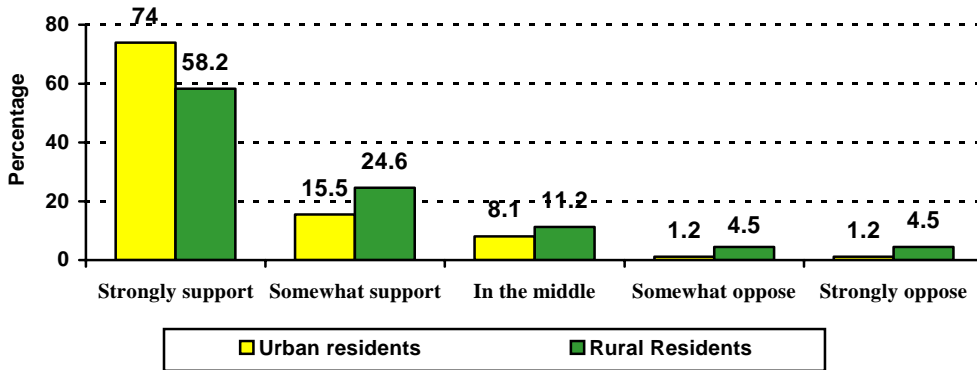
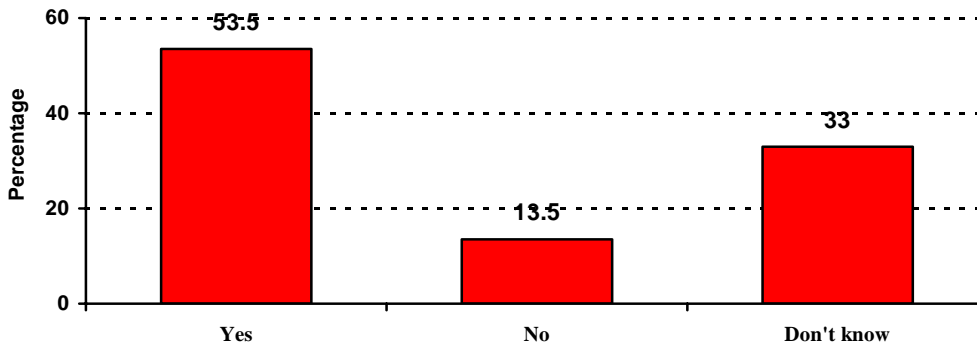


FIGURE 8
Support for Continued Delivery of Municipal Services by Strathcona County
(Urban & Rural Comparisons)



Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they were aware of the Strathcona County having agreements in place for working with other municipalities in the delivery of municipal services. It can be seen in Figure 9 that a slight majority believe this to be in place, while the remaining either felt this was not in place, or they just were not sure.

FIGURE 9
Does Strathcona County have Agreements with Other Municipalities
In the Delivery of One or More Municipal Services



C. Views toward a New Regional Government Board

Strathcona County residents were all given some initial information on the purpose and basic duties associated with the establishment of a new regional government board. Residents were told that this board would have representatives from all communities in the region (including Strathcona County) and that this board would have decision making power that would be binding. It can be seen in Figure 10 that the majority of County residents were opposed to the creation of a new regional board and that strong opposition was even higher among rural residents compared to urban ones (Figure 11).

FIGURE 10
Support for a New Regional Board from Strathcona County Residents

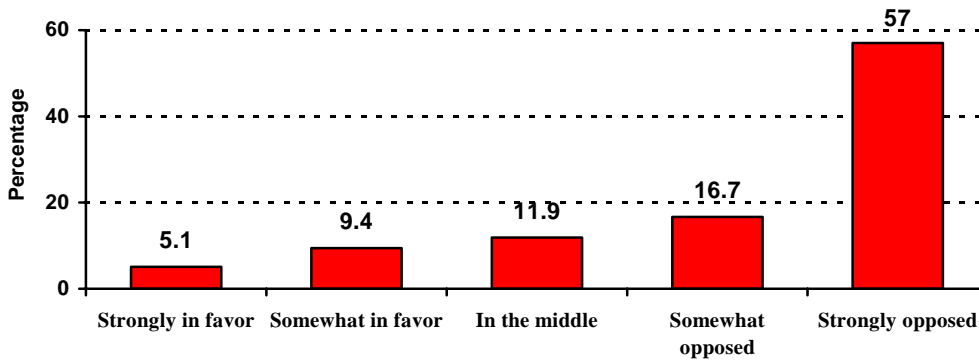
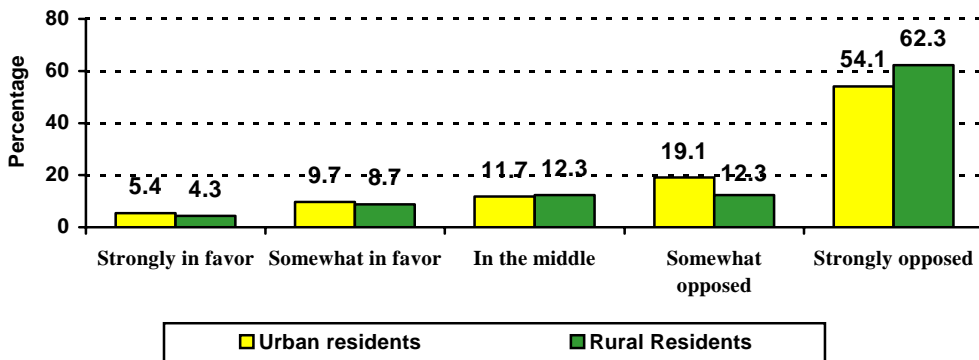


FIGURE 11
Support for a New Regional Board
(Urban & Rural Comparisons)

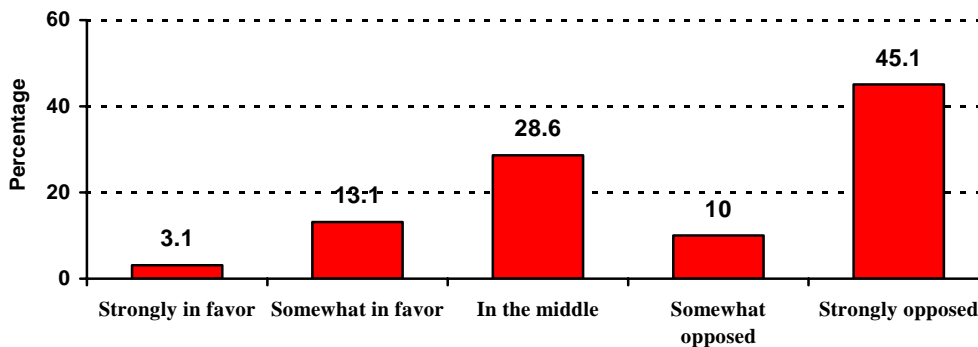


Residents were asked to indicate in their own words why they were in favor (or

against) the creation of a new regional board. There were a variety of reasons given for the stance taken by residents who were in favor of the creation of the board, with some ideas mentioned multiple times (including *having one strong authority to make decisions because there is always little fights going on between the counties*, or that *it is important for municipalities to work together*). Residents who were opposed to a new regional board also cited a variety of reasons, with the most frequent responses being that *the local governments should have complete control over its own affairs*.

Residents were then asked some additional questions pertaining to how a regional board might function. One of the queries directed to residents was to assess the extent that they would support the operations of this regional board being funded through municipal tax dollars. It can be seen in Figure 12 that the majority of County residents³ were opposed to the use of municipal tax dollars going toward the operations of a regional board.

FIGURE 12
Support for a New Regional Board being Funded through Municipal Tax Dollars



³ There were no differences seen for urban & rural residency for this question.

Another question directed to residents was to assess the extent that they would support a regional board taking over the decisions associated with some existing municipal services. Possible services mentioned to residents included local land use planning, transit, police and emergency services. It can be seen in Figure 13 that the majority of County residents were opposed to the intervention of a regional board in this regard. In Figure 14, it can be seen that slightly more rural residents were opposed to this notion than urban residents, though it was clear that the majority were opposed, regardless where they lived.

FIGURE 13
Support for a New Regional Board taking over Decisions
Pertaining to Particular Strathcona County Delivered Services

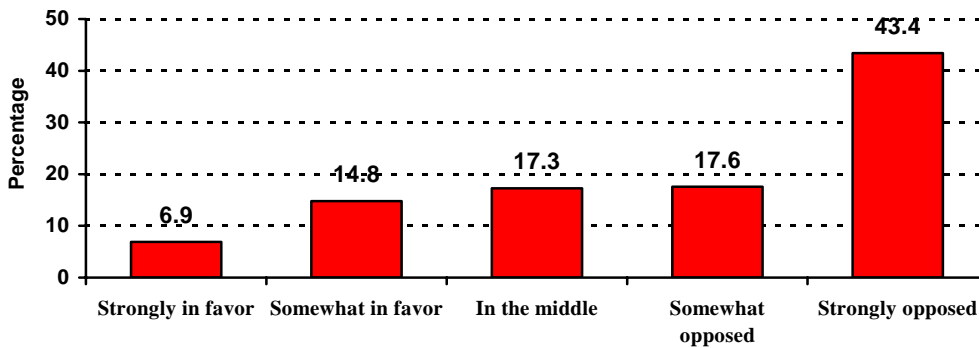
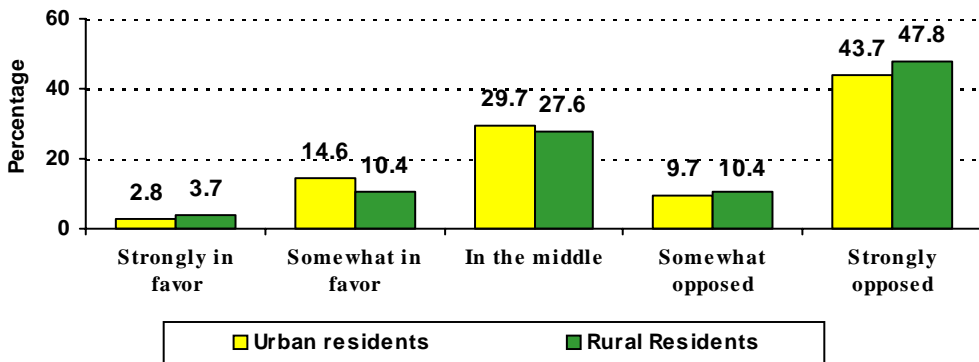


FIGURE 14
Support for a New Regional Board taking over Decisions
Pertaining to Particular Strathcona County Delivered Services
(Urban & Rural Comparisons)



Respondents were also told a regional board would have the authority to direct a municipal government such as Strathcona County on how it would deliver services to its residents, and asked the extent that they would support such a move. It can be seen in Figure 15 that the majority of County residents were opposed to this. It can be seen in Figure 16 that perceptions on this did not vary considerably between urban and rural residents.

FIGURE 15
Support for a New Regional Board having the Authority to Direct Municipalities on how to Deliver Services to the Residents

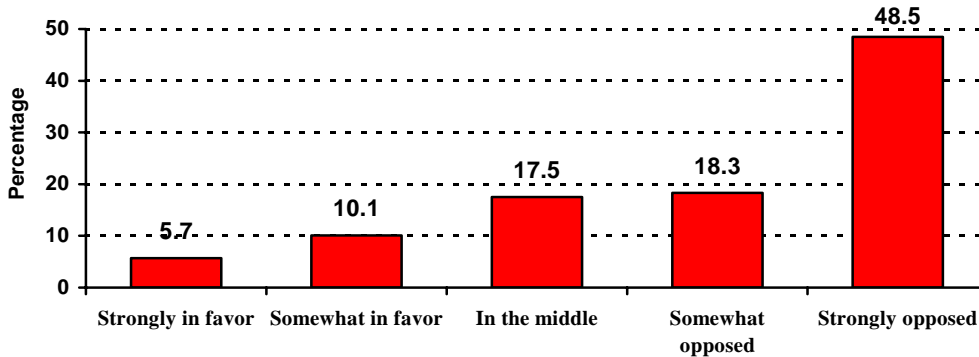
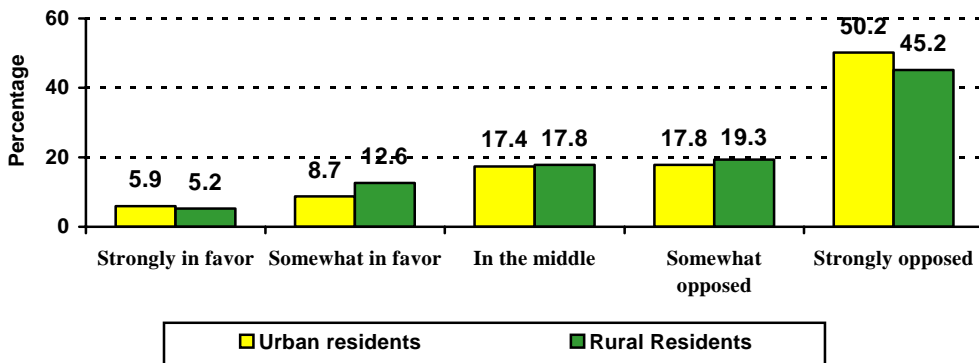


FIGURE 16
Support for a New Regional Board having the Authority to Direct Municipalities on how to Deliver Services to the Residents (Urban & Rural Comparisons)



With respect to funding, County residents were asked their views about revenue sharing. All respondents were given a common statement that defined revenue sharing and were also told that Strathcona County and Sturgeon County had been identified as sources for additional tax revenue that would be used by other municipalities. With respect to support for this notion, it can be seen in Figure 17 that the majority of County residents were opposed to this, and that perceptions were similar among urban and rural residents (Figure 18).

FIGURE 17
Support for Revenue Sharing
 (Providing local tax revenue to other municipalities to use as they see fit)

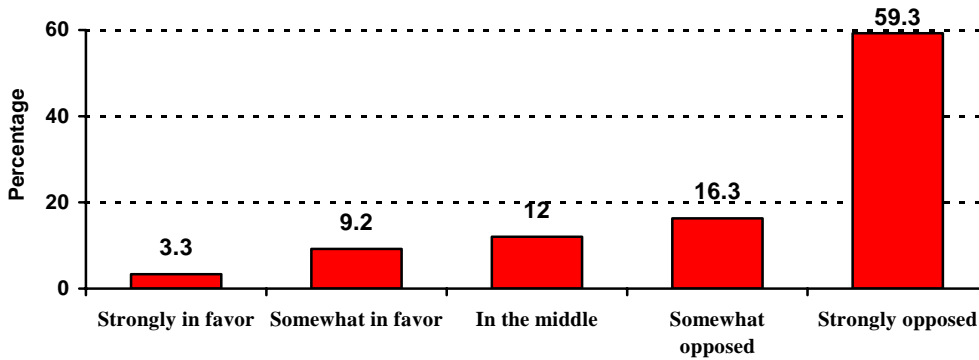
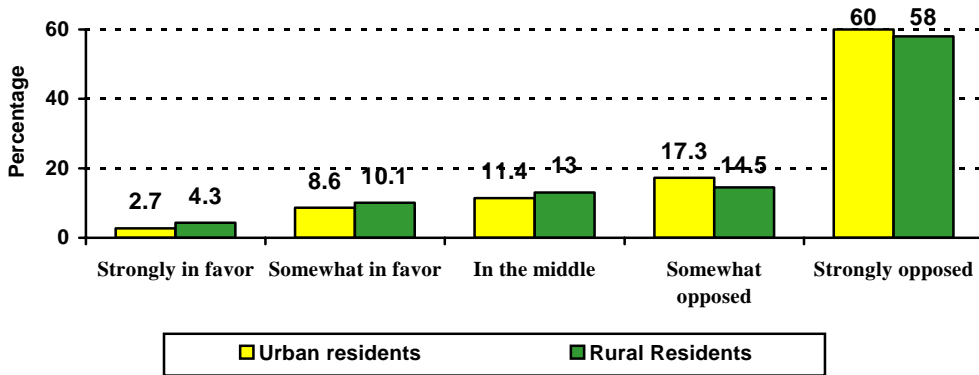


FIGURE 18
Support for Revenue Sharing
 (Providing local tax revenue to other municipalities to use as they see fit)
 (Urban & Rural Comparisons)



There was also another aspect of funding to consider, and that was with respect to how large projects that benefit the whole region should be paid for. County residents were asked to indicate if they would support local tax dollars being used to pay for costs

of regional projects that benefit residents in the region, including themselves. In this regard, it can be seen in Figures 19 and 20 that there was strong support for this use of tax revenue.

FIGURE 19
Support for Helping Pay for Regional Projects

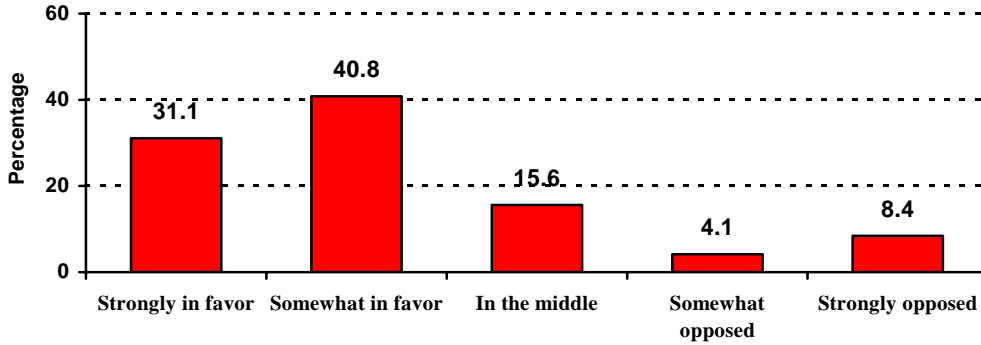
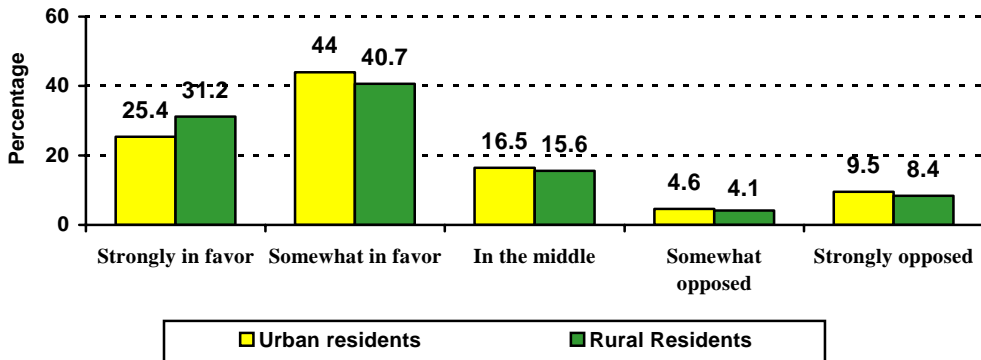


FIGURE 20
Support for Helping Pay for Regional Projects
(Urban & Rural Comparisons)



D. Perception of Regional Debates

Strathcona County residents were asked to indicate their level of awareness of the ongoing debates in the Edmonton region on things like provincial funding, industrial development and land use development. Overall, it can be seen in Figure 21 that almost all residents were at least somewhat aware of the regional debates. Perceptions of awareness were similar among urban and rural residents (Figure 22).

FIGURE 21
Awareness of Regional Debates

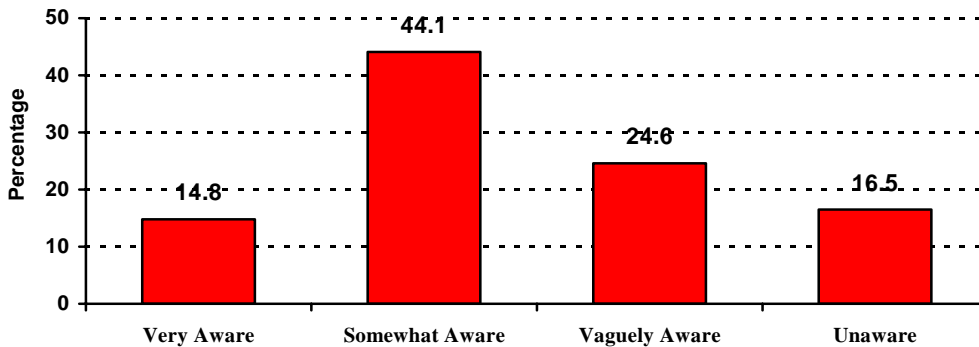
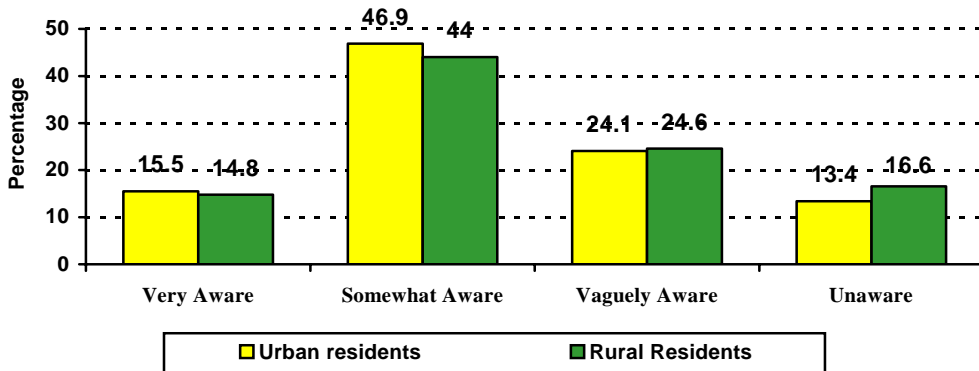
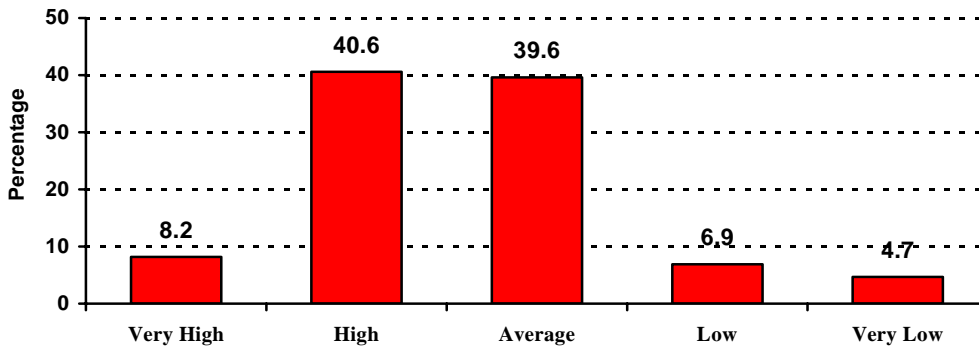


FIGURE 22
Awareness of Regional Debates
(Urban & Rural Comparisons)



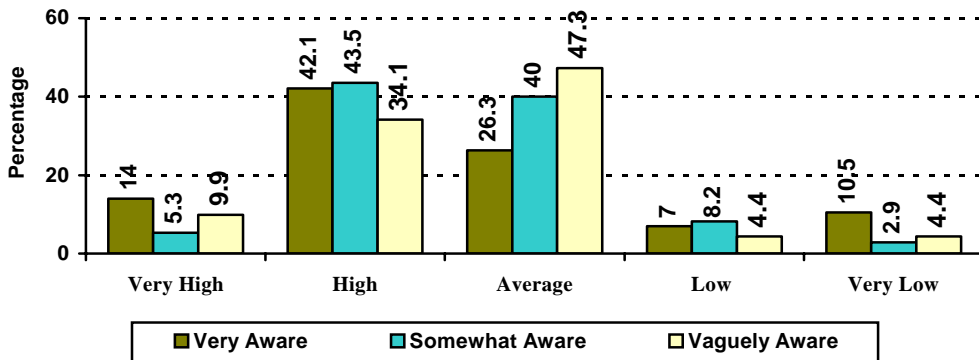
Strathcona County residents who were aware of these debates were then asked to indicate how well they thought the County had done in representing the interests of the residents in ongoing discussions. Overall, it can be seen in Figure 23 that almost half of residents gave the County a high rating (or better) in this regard. Only a small percentage gave the County a low grade.⁴

FIGURE 23
Rating of Strathcona County in Representing the Interests of Residents in the Regional Debates



A comparison of ratings for Strathcona County’s efforts on the basis of level of awareness of the residents is shown in Figure 24. It can be seen that those who were more aware of the debates gave the County a higher rating in terms of representing residents.

FIGURE 24
Rating of Strathcona County in Representing Residents in Regional Debates (By Level of Awareness of Resident)



⁴ There were no differences seen for urban & rural residency for this question.

APPENDIX A: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

2007 Alberta Community Regional Questionnaire

Hello. My name is _____ of *Banister Research*. We are doing a survey of adult residents for Strathcona County on the roles of local government. Can you spare me about **xx minutes** of your time right now to take part in this important survey?

(Use if Respondent says “No”)

**IF NO: When could I call you back to answer this survey?...Note time for follow-up
Is there someone else in your household who could answer this survey?)**

ONCE AN ADULT MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD IS ON THE LINE, CONTINUE.

Great, but before we begin I need to know:

Q1 Do you live:

1. In Sherwood Park, or
2. Elsewhere in Strathcona County?

If not 1 or 2 – Thank and terminate

I'd now like to ask you some questions about your local municipal government here in Strathcona County.

Q2 In general, to what extent are you satisfied with the services that are provided to residents by Strathcona County? Would you say that you are:

1. Very satisfied
2. Somewhat satisfied
3. Somewhat dissatisfied
4. Very dissatisfied, or
5. Somewhat in the middle

9. Don't know

Q3 To what extent do you support Strathcona County retaining its independence as a separate municipality? By this, I'm referring to the county keeping its own distinct name and making decisions about the quality of services for its residents. Do you:

1. Strongly support Strathcona County retaining its independence
2. Somewhat support this,
3. Somewhat oppose this,
4. Strongly oppose this, or
5. Somewhat in the middle

9. Don't know

Q4 To what extent do you support Strathcona County continuing to deliver municipal services to its residents? Do you:

1. Strongly support Strathcona County continuing to provide municipal services
 2. Somewhat support this,
 3. Somewhat oppose this,
 4. Strongly oppose this, or
 5. Somewhat in the middle
-
9. Don't know

Q5 To the best of your knowledge, does your government here in Strathcona County have agreements in place for working with other municipalities in the delivery of one or more municipal service?

1. Yes 2. No | 9. Don't know

There has been some talk of creating a new regional government board that would have representation from all of the communities in the Edmonton Region, including Strathcona County. It has been suggested this Board would have the ability to make binding decisions that would impact the services and taxes in Strathcona County, whether or not the County supported those decisions. In essence, it would be a new level of government with authority over Strathcona County.

Q6 To what extent would you support the creation of a new regional board with binding decision-making authority over Strathcona County? Would you be:

1. Strongly in favor of this
2. Somewhat in favor of this
3. Somewhat opposed to this
4. Strongly opposed to this, or

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 5. In the middle on this issue
<hr style="width: 20%; margin-left: 0;"/> 9. Don't know | <i>Skip to Q8</i> |
|---|-------------------|

Q7 Why do you feel this way? (*Note all answers below*)

- Q8 If a new regional board is established, to what extent would you support the board operations being funded through municipal tax dollars? Would you be:
1. Strongly in favor of this
 2. Somewhat in favor of this
 3. Somewhat opposed to this
 4. Strongly opposed to this, or
 5. In the middle on this issue
 9. Don't know
- Q9 Some of the services that a regional board might take over from Strathcona County could potentially be local land use planning, transit, police and emergency services. To what extent would you support a regional board taking over decisions on how services like this are provided to residents? Would you be:
1. Strongly in favor of this
 2. Somewhat in favor of this
 3. Somewhat opposed to this
 4. Strongly opposed to this, or
 5. In the middle on this issue
 9. Don't know
- Q10 It has been suggested that the regional board would have the authority to direct a municipal government such as Strathcona County on how it will deliver services to its residents. To what extent would you support this? Would you be:
1. Strongly in favor of this
 2. Somewhat in favor of this
 3. Somewhat opposed to this
 4. Strongly opposed to this, or
 5. In the middle on this issue
 9. Don't know

Q11 Some municipalities have suggested that they should have access to some of the tax revenues generated in other municipalities to be used as they see fit for their local services. This is called revenue sharing. At this point in time, Strathcona County and Sturgeon County have been specifically identified as sources for additional tax revenue that would be used by other municipalities. To what extent would you support this? Would you be:

1. Strongly in favor of this
 2. Somewhat in favor of this
 3. Somewhat opposed to this
 4. Strongly opposed to this, or
 5. In the middle on this issue
-
9. Don't know

Q12 There has been recent discussions about how large projects that benefit the whole region should be paid for. One example where all municipalities contributed to a regional project was the Anthony Henday roadway extension, which helped relieve traffic congestion in the area. To what extent do you support local tax dollars being used to help pay for costs of regional projects that benefit residents of Strathcona County? Are you:

1. Strongly in favor of this
 2. Somewhat in favor of this
 3. Somewhat opposed to this
 4. Strongly opposed to this, or
 5. In the middle on this issue
-
9. Don't know

I'd now like to ask you some questions about the Edmonton region, of which Strathcona County is one of the municipalities that makes up the region. To begin with:

Q13 To what extent are you aware of any ongoing debates between different municipalities in the Edmonton region on things like provincial funding, industrial development and land use development? Are you:

1. Very aware of these regional debates
2. Somewhat aware of these regional debates,
3. Vaguely aware of these regional debates, or

4. Unaware of these regional debates

Skip to Q16 on the next page

9. Don't know

Q14 How well do you think Strathcona County has done in representing the interests of its residents on the ongoing discussion of regional issues so far? Would you rate your level of satisfaction as:

- 1. Very high
- 2. High,
- 3. Average

4. Low, or	<i>Ask Q15 below</i>
5. Very low	

- 9. Don't know

Q15 **IF LOW OR VERY LOW, ASK:** Why do you feel that way?

Q16 On the basis of everything we've talked about today, are there any comments that you would like to make about present and proposed municipal government decision making? (*Note all answers below*)

In finishing up this survey, I'd like to get some basic information about your household so that we may better understand how your answers compare to others that we've talked to. This information will remain confidential. To begin with...

Q17 How many years have you lived in Strathcona County? _____

(Note: IF LESS THAN ONE YEAR, ENTER 0)

Q18 And as I read a list of age groups, please stop me when I mention the group that includes your age....

1. 18 to 24
 2. 25 to 34
 3. 35 to 44
 4. 45 to 54
 5. 55 to 64
 6. 65 years of age or older
-
- 9 Refused

Q19 **DO NOT READ. NOTE GENDER**

1. Male
2. Female

Could I please get your first name or initials in case my supervisor wants to verify that we completed this survey? _____

That's all the questions I have today. Thank you for your help in completing this survey, and have a very pleasant evening.

DO NOT READ: Phone #: _____