
APPENDIX 3: PHONE SURVEY



Piatt County Market Research Telephone Study

**With emphasis on public perceptions as related to updating
the Piatt County Comprehensive Plan**

**Conducted for
Piatt County and Champaign County Regional
Planning Commission**

July 14 – 18, 2008

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Executive Summary

Piatt County residents give their highest praise to “fire protection” and “ambulance service” among seven county **services** tested. (Overall positive includes evaluations of “excellent” and “good,” overall negative includes “fair” and “poor.”)

Service	Overall Positive	Overall Negative
Fire protection (Question # 2)	82%	7%
Ambulance service (Q.1)	78	8
Garbage collection (Q.5)	76	19
Police protection (Q.3)	75	19
Drinking water (Q.7)	71	22
Maintenance of roads (Q.4)	46	54
Availability & location of recycling services (Q.6)	39	49

“Public libraries” top the list when survey participants evaluate six Piatt County **amenities**.

Amenity	Overall Positive	Overall Negative
Public libraries (Q.8)	82%	12%
The buildings for public schools (Q.13)	78	16
Overall healthcare services (Q.10)	77	15
Parks and recreation facilities (Q.12)	77	20
Care services for senior citizens (Q.9)	64	13
Public meeting facilities (Q.11)	57	25

But seven **community features** of Piatt County are rated less positively overall, with about half receiving generally negative evaluations

Community Feature	Overall Positive	Overall Negative
Availability of community events in general (Q.17)	65%	30%
Availability/maintenance of public sidewalks (Q.18)	58	36
Recreation facilities & programs for children (Q.15)	56	36
Access to the arts (Q.14)	45	45
Recreation facilities & programs for adults (Q.16)	33	54
Availability of facilities for bicycling (Q.19)	32	57
Availability of public mass transit options (Q.20)	28	58

Using a four-point satisfaction scale (ranging from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied),” survey participants show general satisfaction with eight **characteristics** of Piatt County life.

Characteristic	Overall Satisfied	Overall Dissatisfied
Rural living (Q.27)	92%	3%
Community spirit (Q.28)	91	7
Schools in Piatt County (Q.21)	88	5
Housing options (Q.24)	83	12
Recreational facilities in general (Q.22)	75	19
Shopping convenience in general (Q.25)	73	26
Cultural activities (Q.26)	59	33
Transportation options (Q.23)	50	38

Piatt County residents feel strongly about “protecting the natural environment” and “maintaining the agricultural character” of the county. But they also favor “new business & shopping opportunities” as well as development in general, although the “costs and benefits to taxpayers” should be made available to the public on proposed development projects. These responses come on 10 statements using a four-point “agree/disagree” scale.

Statement	Overall Agree	Overall Disagree
Piatt County should protect the natural environment (Q.41)	96%	2%
The agricultural character of Piatt County should be maintained (Q.38)	96	3
Proposals for development should include accurate and publicly available descriptions of costs and benefits to taxpayers (Q.34)	94	3
New business and shopping opportunities should be promoted (Q.39)	94	5
I support efforts to create new jobs in the area (Q.32)	93	6
Development should be coordinated with available infrastructure (Q.40)	90	8
Economic development is an important part of the future in Piatt county (Q.36)	89	9
I would recommend the county to a friend as a good location for business (Q.37)	78	18
I am concerned that nearly 60-percent of the Piatt County workforce works outside the county (Q.33)	70	26
Piatt County lacks the infrastructure needed to support new business (Q.35)	61	28

Three questions deal with respondents’ shopping habits:

- Just 30% respond “yes” when asked if they “do the majority of your shopping within Piatt County?” (Q.29)
- Of those who do most shopping *outside* Piatt County, 77% report they go to Champaign-Urbana and 26% to Decatur. (A few mention both.) (Q. 30)
- Just over half (51%) report they can get “most of... daily shopping needs within walking distance of... home or job.” (Q. 31)

Questions asking survey participants to name “one or two main [strengths/weaknesses] of Piatt County” (Q. 42-43) produce these responses (the table shows issues named by 4% or more):

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Schools	33%	Lack of stores, shopping	14%
Small town, rural atmosphere	26	Lack of development, industry	10
Location, near Champaign-Urbana	12	Lack of available jobs	10
Safe place to live	11	Lack of recreation, things to do	10
Community spirit/cooperation	10	Problems with roads, streets	7
Friendliness	9	Lack of communication	6
Agriculture	9	No mass transit, airport	6
Good healthcare	5	Taxes too high	5
Relatively low taxes	5	Location, too near Champ.-Urbana	4
The people	5	Government, political issues	4
Quiet, solitude	5	Lack of infrastructure	4
Just a good place to live	4		
Small population	4		
Don’t know	8%	Don’t know	19%

Grouping together responses on various questions by subject matter leads to some general observations:

- It appears respondents are least satisfied with various aspects of **transportation** in Piatt County. Negative evaluations (“fair” or “poor”) go to the maintenance of roads (54%), mass transit options (58%), and facilities for bicycling (57%), and just 50% are satisfied overall with the county’s transportation options.
- **Recreation** receives somewhat mixed results. While there are positive (“excellent” or “good”) evaluations overall for parks and recreation facilities (77%), the positive percentage is lower on recreation for children (56%), and ratings of recreation for adults are on the negative side (54% negative to 33% positive).
- Piatt County **schools** get good marks overall. One-third of survey participants name schools as the county’s main strength, and almost nine-in-ten (88%) say they’re satisfied with Piatt County schools.
- **Public safety** institutions are also highly rated, with both fire protection (82%) and police protection (75%) receiving far more positive evaluations than negative ones. And respondents citing Piatt County as a “safe place to live” outnumber those mentioning “crime” as a problem by better than 10 to 1.
- On **healthcare**, more than three-out-of-four evaluate both overall healthcare (77%) and ambulance service (78%) on the positive side. However, care services for seniors receive just 64% positive ratings.
- And while nearly three-in-five (59%) are satisfied overall with the availability of **cultural activities**, one-third are dissatisfied. And “access to the arts” receives equal numbers of negative (45%) and positive (45%) evaluations.

These results are based on 336 telephone interviews completed July 14-18, 2008 with members of randomly-selected Piatt County households. Respondents were screened to insure that they did live in Piatt County and were at least 18 years of age.

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Purpose

This survey was designed to gather input from Piatt County residents on issues facing the county and to assist the Piatt County Regional Planning Commission regarding the Piatt County Comprehensive Plan Update. The questionnaire was developed jointly by the Regional Planning Commission and Research Survey Service, Inc.

Methodology

Potential respondents for this survey were selected randomly from a universe of listed telephone numbers in Piatt County. Participants were screened to insure that they did live in Piatt County and that they were at least 18 years of age. For the most part, respondents within a household were selected randomly using the “last birthday” method.

An initial call, and up to three call-backs, were made in an efforts to contact as many households as possible from the initially drawn sample. This report is based on a total of 336 completed interviews.

The interviewing was carried out July 14-18, 2008 from the Research Survey Service calling center in Champaign. Most interviews were completed between the hours of 5 and 9 PM, although requests from individual respondents to be contacted at more convenient times for them were honored. Seven experienced interviewers worked on the project. At least one, and most often two, supervisors were on duty during the interviewing. For quality control purposes, at least 10% of each interviewer’s work was confirmed through follow-up calls.

There were no strict quotas designated for or applied to the interviewing for this project. However, supervisors at times used modified quota sampling procedures to insure that broad demographic segments of the Piatt County population were represented in the completed interviews, particularly with regard to gender and age.

The following tables compare demographic data on gender (Q. 51) and age (Q. 44) from the total completed sample to data from the 2000 U.S. Census:

<u>Gender</u>	Survey	Census	<u>Age</u>	Survey	Census
Female	57%	52%	18 – 24	2%	9%
Male	43	48	25 – 34	14	14
			35 – 44	23	23
			45 – 54	21	19
			55 – 64	16	14
			65+	24	21

Employment

Information on employment was sought from each survey participant – specifically, did they work outside the home, and if they did, in which county was their job located. (Q. 48) The tables on the next page summarize this information. (A small number of respondents listed more than one county in which they work.)

<u>Not Employed</u>	#	%	<u>Where employed</u>	#	%
Retired	83	25%	Piatt County	90	27%
Don't work outside home	26	8	Champaign County	81	24
Unemployed	5	1	Macon County	35	10
Disabled	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Douglas County	6	2
			DeWitt County	4	1
			Other	<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>
Totals	116	35%	Totals	230	68%

The 90 survey participants who said they work in Piatt County represent just under 40% of the 230 reporting a work location. This means that roughly 60% of Piatt County respondents who said they work do so outside their home county.

Location

Survey participants were asked if they lived in an incorporated area or an unincorporated one. Those who said "incorporated area" were asked to name the city, town, or village, and those saying "unincorporated" were asked for their township. Finally, for purposes of tabulation and analysis, the county was then divided into five geographic regions.

Incorporated/Unincorporated

	#	%
Incorporated	230	68%
Unincorporated	106	32

Incorporated/town

	#	%
Monticello	136	40%
Bement	26	8
Cerro Gordo	24	7
Mansfield	16	5
Atwood	11	3
Hammond	8	2
Deland	7	2
Cisco	2	1

Unincorporated/township

	#	%
Sangamon twp.	40	12%
Monticello twp.	20	6
W. Branch twp.	15	4
Cerro Gordo twp.	12	3
Goose Creek twp.	10	3
Blue Ridge twp.	4	1
Bement twp.	3	1
Unity twp.	2	1

County Divisions*

	#	%
Central	156	46%
Northwest	17	5
Northeast	60	18
Southwest	53	16
Southeast	50	15

* County divisions defined:

Central - Monticello Township, Monticello

Northwest - Goose Creek Township, Deland

Northeast - Blue Ridge Township, Mansfield (and unincorporated Harris)

Sangamon Township (unincorporated Lodge, Galesville, Centerville, White Heath)

Southwest - Cerro Gordo Township, Cerro Gordo (and unincorporated LaPlace, Lintner, Milmine)

Willow Branch Township, Cisco

Southeast - Bement Township, Bement

Unity Township, Hammond, part of Atwood (and unincorporated Pierson Station)

Other Demographic Data

Information was also collected from respondents on annual household income (Q. 50) and home ownership (Q. 49)

<u>Household Income</u>			<u>Home Ownership</u>		
	#	%		#	%
Under \$15,000	11	3%	Own	311	93%
\$15-\$30,000	21	9	Rent	24	7
\$30-\$45,000	41	12	Refused	1	<1
\$45-\$60,000	59	18			
\$60-\$75,000	47	14			
\$75-\$90,000	45	13			
\$90,000+	69	21			
Refused	28	8			
Don't know	4	1			
No Answer	1	<1			

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Introduction to Survey Results

For the most part in this report, survey results are reported in the same order as the questions were asked during the survey interviews.

The maximum margin of sampling error for the total sample of 336 completed interviews is plus or minus 5.5 percentage points. However, the error margin is larger for sub-groups, such as those used in demographic comparisons.

Statistical significance is calculated at the 95% confidence level, and some results are noted using words or phrases such as “significant” or “statistically significant.” (Statistical significance may not be noted in all situations, such as those in which a difference in percentages is obviously substantial).

Results noted as significant almost always reflect true differences in the opinions and responses of the populations studied, and not differences due to chance or the randomness of the sample selected. For example, in a discussion of community amenities on page 10, it’s noted that the top four amenities shown in the table “have statistically significant leads over the bottom two” in terms of the percentages of positive evaluations given to each.

This predicts that, 19 times out of 20 (95% of the time) on a survey with a sample of completed interviews this size (336), the percentage of positive evaluations on the amenities tested will not deviate more than the margin of error from results that would be obtained if the entire eligible population of Piatt County were interviewed. It also predicts that, in a survey of the entire county population, the top four amenities would receive more positive evaluations than the other two.

Some tables in the report do not show all possible answers. This is especially the case with regard to open-ended questions, where results may be shown only for the top response categories and not for all of the dozens of categories used. Examples in this report include tables showing responses to questions where participants named the major strengths and weaknesses of Piatt County. However, all responses on all questions are displayed with the survey questionnaire attached at the back of this report book and in the demographic cross-tabulation results provided separately.

It should also be noted that percentages shown on tables in the body of this report may sometimes differ from those on the results questionnaire and cross-tabs. This is because, in some cases, “not asked” or “don’t know” responses have been eliminated in the calculation of tables in the report in order to provide clearer and more meaningful information. An example is the table on page 19 showing the counties visited by survey participants who do the majority of their shopping outside Piatt County.

Throughout this report, some totals may not add to exactly 100% due to rounding or multiple responses.

Piatt County Services

Fire protection and ambulance services are the most-praised of seven Piatt County services tested in this survey. By contrast, road maintenance and recycling services are the most criticized.

This is how the series of questions was introduced:

“... I’m going to ask you to rate some specific features associated with living in Piatt County. The scale we’ll be using is ‘excellent,’ ‘good,’ ‘fair’ and ‘poor.’ How would you rate these community services....”

“The first is ambulance service in Piatt County?” (Q. 1)

“How about fire protection?” (Q. 2)

“Police protection?” (Q. 3)

“The maintenance of roads?” (Q. 4)

“Garbage collection?” (Q. 5)

“The availability and location of recycling services?” (Q. 6)

“Drinking water?” (Q. 7)

The table shows the services tested, listed in rank order based on the percentage of overall positive (“excellent” or “good”) evaluations.

The top five are bunched fairly closely on overall positive percentages, and the margins between all services in this group of five and the bottom two are statistically significant. Three of the five – “fire protection,” “ambulance service” and “police protection” – are also in a narrow range based on the percentage of “excellent” evaluations.

On the negative side, maintenance of roads has the most overall negative ratings, and it and recycling services are the only ones with more negative evaluations than positive.

Piatt County Services (% of total sample)

Service	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
1. Fire Protection	40%	42%	82%	6%	1%	7%	1%	10%
2. Ambulance service	41	36	78	7	1	8	1	13
3. Garbage collection	23	53	76	14	5	19	4	1
4. Police protection	37	38	75	16	3	19	1	5
5. Drinking water	30	40	71	13	9	22	7	-
6. Maintenance of roads	7	38	46	36	18	54	-	<1
7. Recycling services	11	28	39	16	33	49	5	7

Demographic comparisons – While there are no huge differences across demographic sub-groups regarding evaluations of these seven Piatt County services, there are some interesting patterns. These are seen not only in responses on the seven services noted above, but also with regard to the six Piatt County “amenities” and seven “features” summarized in subsequent sections of this report.

For one thing, residents of incorporated areas are consistently more likely to give positive (“excellent” or “good”) evaluations than are those in rural, unincorporated parts of the county. And the average difference across all 20 of the items surveyed is approximately 10-percentage points. In a similar manner, residents of the “central” region of the county (Monticello city and Monticello township) provide an average of 10-percentage points more in positive evaluations than do those living elsewhere.

Again across all 20 items (“services,” “amenities” and “features”), the average percentage of positive ratings increases with the age of the respondent. The average difference is about 15 percentage points between the positive evaluations given by those in the 25-34 age group (55% positive) and the ratings coming from seniors 65+ (72% positive). And there’s a roughly 10-point difference across the range of household incomes, although in the opposite direction. There, the average percentage of positive evaluations drops from just under 70% in households with less than \$15,000 in income to under 60% among households where incomes total \$60,000 or greater.

Looking specifically at the seven services, “fire protection” receives the most positive ratings across most sub-groups. However, seniors (age 65+) give it 75% positive evaluations, putting this item fourth behind “ambulance service” (90%), “garbage collection” (89%) and “police protection” (86% positive).

Survey participants with household incomes above \$90,000 are just 74% positive about “fire protection,” ranking it 3rd behind “police protection” (75%) and “drinking water” (81%). “Drinking water” also ranks highest among residents of the central division (Monticello city and township), where 91% give it positive evaluations, compared to 86% positive for “fire protection.” Just over half (53%) of residents outside Monticello city and township give positive evaluations to their “drinking water.”

Community Amenities

Public libraries and public school buildings receive the most positive ratings among six “amenities” of life in Piatt County tested in this survey.

The identical four-point rating scale was used here, with this introduction:

“Now we’ll look at some community amenities in Piatt County. On the same scale of ‘excellent,’ ‘good,’ ‘fair’ and ‘poor,’ how would you rate...”

“Public libraries?” (Q. 8)

“Care services for senior citizens?” (Q. 9)

“Overall healthcare services?” (Q. 10)

“Public meeting facilities?” (Q. 11)

“Parks and recreation facilities?” (Q. 12)

“The buildings for public schools?” (Q. 13)

Once again, rank order is based on the percentage of overall positive comments, and on that basis, the top four have statistically significant leads over the bottom two. However, it should be noted that both “care services for seniors” and “public meeting facilities” have substantially higher percentages of “don’t know” responses than any of the other four.

Looking at these results another way, the ratio of positive to negative evaluations is greatest – almost 7 to 1 – for public libraries. Other ratios are roughly 5 to 1 on “public school buildings,” “overall healthcare services,” and “care for seniors,” 4 to 1 for “parks and recreation facilities,” but just over 2 to 1 for “public meeting facilities.” It’s notable, though, that all of the amenities tested have far more overall positive evaluations than negative.

Piatt County Community Amenities

(% of total sample)

Service	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
1. Public Libraries	42%	40%	82%	7%	5%	12%	1%	5%
2. Public school buildings	35	43	78	13	3	16	1	5
3. Overall healthcare	32	45	77	12	3	15	1	6
- Parks, recreation	31	46	77	16	4	20	1	2
5. Care for seniors	27	37	64	9	4	13	1	22
6. Meeting facilities	12	45	57	20	6	25	1	17

Demographic comparisons – The overall average differences noted earlier across demographic categories are seen with these “amenities” too. The percentage of positive evaluations tends to increase with the age of the respondent, and to decline as household income grows. And average evaluations tend to be roughly 10 points higher from survey participants living in the central division (Monticello city and township) than elsewhere, and almost 10-points higher among respondents residing in incorporated areas compared to rural regions.

This last division is most pronounced on the evaluations of “public libraries.” Libraries get 89% positive ratings from those in incorporated areas, but just 68% from rural residents, and the difference is statistically significant.

Community Features

Responses are not nearly as positive on the final seven “community features” evaluated with the same four-point “excellent” to “poor” scoring plan.

These were the features:

“Access to the arts?” (Q. 14)

“Recreation facilities and programs for children?” (Q. 15)

“Recreation facilities and programs for adults?” (Q. 16)

“The availability of community events in general?” (Q. 17)

“The availability and maintenance of public sidewalks?” (Q. 18)

“The availability of facilities for bicycling?” (Q. 19)

“The availability of public mass transit options?” (Q. 20)

As the following table shows, none of the seven features achieves even 20% “excellent” ratings. By contrast, 10 of the 13 items tested in the first two sections (“services” and “amenities”) exceed the 20% mark on evaluations of “excellent.”

In addition, only three of the seven features here – “availability of community events,” “availability and maintenance of public sidewalks” and “recreation facilities and programs for children” – attain a majority of overall positive ratings. The bottom three have negative majorities. (Once again, the features are shown in rank order based on the percentage of overall positive evaluations.)

Piatt County Community Features (% of total sample)

Service	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
1. Community events	15%	51%	65%	23%	7%	30%	-	5%
2. Public sidewalks	9	49	58	23	13	36	4	2
3. Recreation for children	18	38	56	26	10	36	1	7
4. Access to the arts	11	34	45	29	15	45	<1	10
5. Recreation for adults	4	29	33	35	20	54	-	12
6. Facilities for bicycling	5	26	32	34	23	57	2	10
7. Mass transit	7	21	28	22	37	58	6	7

Demographic comparisons – The same age and income differences show up with these “features” too, with the oldest respondents, those with the lowest household incomes, Monticello township residents, and urban residents, all generally providing more positive evaluations than others.

“Community events” receive the highest percentages of positive ratings across all sub-groups except two. Those with household incomes of \$90,000+ give “public sidewalks” 70% positive to 62% positive for “community events.” And residents of the southeast division of Piatt County (Bement and Unity Townships) give public sidewalks 66% positive, “community events” 62%.

Services, Amenities and Features Compared

Although there is a certain “apples and oranges” nature to it, a comparison, in one table, of the evaluations of Piatt County “services,” “amenities,” and “features” is interesting. All three use the same four-point “excellent” to “poor” scale.

Here, they are ranked based on the percentage of overall positive ratings.

Piatt County Services, Amenities and Features Compared (% of total sample)

Service	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
1. Public Libraries	42%	40%	82%	7%	5%	12%	1%	5%
- Fire Protection	40	42	82	6	1	7	1	10
3. Ambulance service	41	36	78	7	1	8	1	13
- Public school buildings	35	43	78	13	3	16	1	5
5. Overall healthcare	32	45	77	12	3	15	1	6
- Parks, recreation	31	46	77	16	4	20	1	2
7. Garbage collection	23	53	76	14	5	19	4	1
8. Police protection	37	38	75	16	3	19	1	5
9. Drinking water	30	40	71	13	9	22	7	-
10. Community events	15	51	65	23	7	30	-	5
11. Care for seniors	27	37	64	9	4	13	1	22
12. Public sidewalks	9	49	58	23	13	36	4	2
13. Meeting facilities	12	45	57	20	6	25	1	17
14. Recreation for children	18	38	56	26	10	36	1	7
15. Maintenance of roads	7	38	46	36	18	54	-	<1
16. Access to the arts	11	34	45	29	15	45	<1	10
17. Recycling services	11	28	39	16	33	49	5	7
18. Recreation for adults	4	29	33	35	20	54	-	12
19. Facilities for bicycling	5	26	32	34	23	57	2	10
20. Mass transit	7	21	28	22	37	58	6	7
<i>Averages</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>61%</i>	<i>19%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>2%</i>	<i>7%</i>

Satisfaction with Piatt County Characteristics

Ratings are on a generally positive note when respondents are asked about their levels of satisfaction with eight specific Piatt County characteristics. Roughly three-in-five say they are “very satisfied” with “rural living,” “community spirit” and “Piatt county schools.” And majorities are at least “somewhat satisfied” with the other five.

The section was introduced with this:

“People often choose where to live based on their satisfaction with the amenities available. Next, I’d like you to tell me how satisfied you are with the following amenities in Piatt County. For each one, tell me if you’re ‘very satisfied,’ ‘somewhat satisfied,’ ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied...’

“How about the schools in Piatt County?” (Q. 21)

“Recreational facilities in general?” (Q. 22)

“Transportation options?” (Q. 23)

“Housing options?” (Q. 24)

“Shopping convenience in general?” (Q. 25)

“Cultural activities?” (Q. 26)

“Rural living?” (Q. 27)

“Community spirit?” (Q. 28)

The characteristics are ranked in the next table based on the percentage indicating overall satisfaction (“very satisfied” plus “somewhat satisfied”).

The top three – rural living, community spirit, and Piatt County schools – all receive judgments of “very satisfied” significantly more often than the other five.

Satisfaction with Piatt County Characteristics

(% of total sample)

Service	-----Satisfied-----			-----Dissatisfied-----			Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
	Very	Some-what	Overall Satisfied	Some-what	Very	Overall Dissatisfied		
1. Rural living	59%	33%	92%	2%	1%	3%	2%	3%
2. Community spirit	59	32	91	5	2	7	-	1
3. Piatt County schools	60	28	88	4	1	5	2	5
4. Housing options	40	43	83	9	3	12	<1	5
5. Recreational facilities	24	51	75	14	5	19	1	5
6. Shopping convenience	24	48	73	16	10	26	-	1
7. Cultural activities	15	44	59	23	10	33	2	6
8. Transportation options	13	37	50	18	20	38	4	8

Demographic comparisons – There are few differences in satisfaction levels across the demographic sub-groups. Looking at averages for all 8 characteristics, 82% of those residing in the central division (Monticello city and township) indicate overall satisfaction, compared to 71% of survey participants living in other parts of the county, but the difference is not statistically significant.

With regard to individual items, homeowners are more satisfied than renters with “housing options,” by a margin of 84% to 75%. And 86% of respondents under age 45 say they are satisfied with “shopping convenience” compared to just 61% of those 55 and older, and that difference is significant.

Economic Development and Piatt County's Future

Strong majorities of Piatt County residents want to protect the natural environment and maintain the agricultural character of the county, while also promoting new businesses and shopping opportunities. And while they generally support economic development, they believe both the costs and benefits of proposed development projects should be made clear to taxpayers.

These priorities are seen in responses to 10 questions dealing with economic development and the future of the county. Survey participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following statements on a four-point scale – “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “somewhat disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

“I support efforts to create new jobs in the area.” (Q. 32)

“I am concerned that nearly 60-percent of the Piatt County workforce works outside the county.” (Q. 33)

“Proposals for development should include accurate and publicly available descriptions of costs and benefits to county taxpayers.” (Q. 34)

“Piatt County lacks the infrastructure needed to support new business.” (Q. 35)

“Economic development is an important part of the future of Piatt County.” (Q. 36)

“I would recommend Piatt County to a friend as a good location for business.” (Q. 37)

“The agricultural character of Piatt County should be maintained now and into the future.” (Q. 38)

“New business and shopping opportunities should be promoted.” (Q. 39)

“Development should be coordinated with available infrastructure.” (Q. 40)

“Piatt County should protect the natural environment.” (Q. 41)

The table on the next page shows a comparison of the responses to these ten questions. The statements are in rank order, based on the percentage of respondents indicating overall agreement (“strongly agree” or “somewhat agree”).

Note that more than 7-in-10 *strongly* agree about maintaining the natural environment and the county’s agricultural character while at the same time promoting new business and shopping. Roughly the same percentages agree that development is an important part of the future but that both the benefits and costs of development should be explained to taxpayers.

Agree/Disagree re: Statements on Economic Development/Piatt County Future
(% of total sample)

Statement	-----Agree-----			-----Disagree-----			
	Strongly	Some- what	Overall Agree	Some- what	Strongly	Overall Disagree	Don't Know
1. Should protect natural environment	78%	17%	96%	2%	1%	2%	2%
- Maintain agricultural character	75	21	96	2	1	3	1
3. Make development cost/benefits public	77	17	94	3	1	3	2
- Promote new business, shopping	72	22	94	4	2	5	1
5. Support efforts to create new jobs	68	25	93	3	3	6	1
6. Development coordinated with infrastructure	65	25	90	7	<1	8	2
7. Development is important part of future	71	18	89	5	4	9	2
8. Would recommend Piatt Co. to a friend	40	38	78	10	8	18	4
9. Concerned that 60% work outside Piatt	46	24	70	19	7	26	4
10. Piatt lacks infrastructure for new business	30	31	61	20	9	28	11

Demographic comparisons – There are very few notable differences on any of these statements. Levels of overall agreement are at 90% and higher among *all* the major demographic sub-groups on the top two – “protect the natural environment” and “maintain the agricultural character of Piatt County.” And on the next five statements, which have overall agreement percentages from 89% to 94%, the levels of agreement are almost as uniformly high across the demographic spectrum.

The statement “I am concerned that 60% of the Piatt County workforce works outside the county” does produce some differences. Only about two-thirds (68%) of homeowners agree, while there is agreement from 92% of renters. Regarding the same statement, there is agreement from just over half (54%) of participants in the highest income group (\$90,000+), compared to roughly three-quarters (74%) of households under \$90,000. Both of these differences are significant.

And on the statement “Piatt County lacks the infrastructure for new business” there is agreement from just 53% of central division residents (Monticello city and township), compared to 67% in the rest of the county. However, this difference does not quite rise to the level of statistical significance.

Shopping

Seven-in-ten Piatt County residents do the majority of their shopping outside the county, and by a three-to-one margin they pick Champaign-Urbana over Decatur. However, about half indicate they can get most daily shopping needs met within walking distance of their home or job.

The initial question in the shopping series asked:

“Overall, do you do the majority of your shopping within Piatt County?” (Q. 29)

As the following table shows, just 30% say they can satisfy most shopping needs close to home.

Majority of Shopping Within Piatt County? (% of total sample)

Yes	30%
No	70

Demographic comparisons – Majorities of the oldest respondents, and those in the lower ranges of household income, are the only ones answering “yes,” they do the majority of their shopping within Piatt County. By age, 54% of the 65+ group stay in their home county, versus just 22% of younger respondents. And 51% of residents with household incomes under \$45,000 also report shopping at home, compared to 21% of survey participants with incomes of \$45,000 and up.

By geographic area, 40% of residents in the central division (Monticello city and township) say they stay in the county to shop; in contrast, the northeast division (Blue Ridge and Sangamon Townships) has 92% reporting they leave Piatt County to shop, just 8% stay at home. And 35% of women, versus 23% of men, say the majority of their shopping is in Piatt County.

* * * * *

Those answering “no” were then asked:

“If not, where do you do the majority of your shopping?” (Q. 30)

Champaign-Urbana is mentioned as a shopping destination by more than three-in-four, Decatur is selected by roughly one-in-four. (Some respondents name more than one place they shop.)

Where Do You Do Your Shopping? (% of those shopping outside Piatt County)

Champaign-Urbana	77%
Decatur	26
Mt. Zion	2
Mattoon	1
Tuscola	1
Other	2

Demographic comparisons – Substantial majorities of most demographic sub-groups show a preference for Champaign-Urbana over Decatur as the place they shop out-of-county. The only exception is based on geography: By 85% to 25%, residents of the southwest division (Cerro Gordo and Willow Branch Townships) favor Decatur over C-U (and some mention both).

* * * * *

Finally, Piatt County residents split almost equally on the other question of the series:

“Can you get most of your daily shopping needs within walking distance of your home or job?” (Q. 31)

Get Most Daily Shopping Needs Within Walking Distance
(% of total sample)

Yes	51%
No	49

Demographic comparisons – The most striking difference here is based on in-town versus rural residence. Of those living in incorporated areas (cities, towns, villages), 70% answer “yes.” But among residents of unincorporated regions, just 8% say “yes.”

And 59% of those with household incomes under \$75,000 say they can shop within walking distance of home or job, compared to 39% of residents with incomes of \$75,000+. All these differences are significant.

Majorities in two of the county’s five geographic divisions answer “yes” – southeast (68%) and central (60%). Three have majorities responding “no” – northwest (82%), northeast (75%) and southwest (53%).

Piatt County Strengths/Weaknesses

Near the end of the survey, two open-ended questions asked respondents to name “one or two main strengths [Q. 42]/weaknesses [Q. 43] of Piatt County.”

Just 8% say they “don’t know” about strengths, while 19% “don’t know” about weaknesses. That leaves 306 survey participants who offer a total of 615 comments on strengths, or an average of right at 2 comments per person. The 271 who provide weaknesses give a total of 459 comments, or about 1.7 per respondent. In total, 57% of the remarks are about Piatt County strengths, 43% about weaknesses.

Each comment on both questions has been assigned to one or more of roughly 50 categories.

The following table shows the comment categories – “strengths” and “weaknesses” – mentioned by 4% or more of all those surveyed. These categories represent about 70% of all comments received.

Piatt County Strengths/Weaknesses (% of total sample)

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Schools	33%	Lack of stores, shopping	14%
Small town, rural atmosphere	26	Lack of development, industry	10
Location, near Champaign-Urbana	12	Lack of recreation, things to do	10
Safe place to live	11	Lack of available jobs	10
Community spirit/cooperation	10	Problems with roads, streets	7
Friendliness	9	Lack of communication	6
Agriculture	9	No mass transit, airport	6
Good healthcare	5	Taxes too high	5
Relatively low taxes	5	Location, too near Champ.-Urbana	4
The people	5	Government, political issues	4
Quiet, solitude	5	Lack of infrastructure	4
Just a good place to live	4		
Small population	4		

Demographic comparisons – Schools are named as “strengths” most often by the youngest respondents and those in the middle and upper income categories. Schools are mentioned by 42% of respondents under age 45, by 33% in the 45-54 age category, and by 25% of those 55 and older. Among residents with incomes of \$45,000 and above, schools are named as strengths by 39%, while they’re mentioned by 23% of those whose incomes are below \$45,000.

Comments about schools outnumber those about the “small town/rural atmosphere” by 47% to 21% in the central geographic division and by 41% to 35% in the northwest. Remarks about the “small town/rural atmosphere” predominate over comments about schools in the northeast (35% to 27%), southwest (32% to 19%) and southeast (22% to 10%).

* * * * *

The next table pairs comment categories on the same or similar subjects. It takes categories meeting the 4% cut-off for either strengths or weaknesses and shows, in the other column, one or more categories covering identical or similar topics.

For example, 33% of respondents have made schools the most important strength. On the other hand, 3% contend the schools are a major weakness. Being close to the Champaign-Urbana metro area is viewed by 12% as a strength, but by 4% as a weakness, and so on.

Piatt County Strengths/Weaknesses – Paired
(% of total sample)

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Schools	33%	Schools	3%
Small town, rural atmosphere	26	Small population	2
Location, near Champaign-Urbana	12	Location, too near Champ.-Urbana	4
Safe place to live	11	Crime	1
Community spirit/cooperation	10	Lack of comm.. spirit/cooperation	1
Friendliness	9	Not friendly, cliquish	1
Agriculture	9	Land use, developments	2
Good healthcare	5	Lack of healthcare	3
Relatively low taxes	5	Taxes too high	5
The people	5	The people	<1
Quiet, solitude	5	Growth mentality	3
Just a good place to live	4		
Small population	4		
Stores, shopping	1	Lack of stores, shopping	14
Economic development, industry	1}	Lack of development, industry	10
It's good there's not a lot of industry	1}		
Good labor force	1	Lack of available jobs	10
Allerton Park	3}		
Recreation, things to do	2}	Lack of recreation, things to do	10
Other parks	2}	Lack of parks	1
Good roads, streets	1	Problems with roads, streets	7
Transportation, airport	1	No mass transit, airport	6
		Lack of communication	6
		Government, political issues	4
Good infrastructure	<1	Lack of infrastructure	4

Responses on Specific Issues

This section provides a different analysis – summarizing responses to questions dealing with similar issues. It looks again at statements and questions in the first three sections – services, amenities and features – which use the four-point “excellent” to “poor” scale, as well as the section using the four-point “satisfaction” scale to rate various Piatt County characteristics.

Also factored in are respondents’ suggestions for major county “strengths” and “weaknesses.”

Transportation

On a variety of questions, respondents are critical of transportation in Piatt County.

For example, satisfaction with Piatt County “transportation options” (Q. 23) is the lowest for any of eight characteristics tested. Just 50% of Piatt County residents are overall satisfied (“very” or “somewhat”), while 38% are not satisfied (“not very” and “not at all”). By comparison, overall satisfaction with the other seven characteristics ranges from a high of 92% (“rural living”) down to 59% (“cultural activities”).

And looking at the extremes of the four-point scale, just 13% say they’re “very satisfied” with Piatt County transportation options, while 20% are “very dissatisfied.”

Service	-----Satisfied-----			-----Dissatisfied-----			Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
	Very	Some-what	Overall Satisfied	Some-what	Very	Overall Dissatisfied		
(Q.23)Transport. options	13%	37%	50%	18%	20%	38%	4%	8%

Overall positive evaluations of “the availability of public mass transit options” (Q. 20) are the lowest of any of the 20 services, features, and amenities tested. Just 28% give positive ratings (“excellent” or “good”) while 58% are negative (“fair” or “poor”).

“Facilities for bicycling” (Q. 19) ranks barely ahead of “mass transit options,” with just 32% positive evaluations versus 57% negative.

And the “maintenance of roads” in Piatt County (Q. 4) also gets more negative (54%) than positive (46%) evaluations.

But respondents are positive (by a 58% to 36% margin) in their ratings of “the availability and maintenance of public sidewalks” (Q. 18).

	Overall			Overall			Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
	Excel.	Good	Positive	Fair	Poor	Negative		
(Q.20) Mass transit	7%	21%	28%	22%	37%	58%	6%	7%
(Q.19) Bicycling	5	26	32	34	23	57	2	10
(Q.4) Maintenance of roads	7	38	46	36	18	54	-	<1
(Q.18) Public sidewalks	9	49	58	23	13	36	4	2

Finally, in listing the “strengths” and “weaknesses” of Piatt County, 7% of residents say roads and streets are a weakness, just 1% consider them a strength.

Recreation

Recreation in Piatt County gets somewhat mixed reviews.

Three-fourths (75%) of survey participants are satisfied overall with “recreational facilities in general” (Q. 22). That ranks this item roughly in the middle of eight amenities tested

	-----Satisfied-----			-----Dissatisfied-----			Doesn't	Don't
	Very	Some- what	Overall Satisfied	Some- what	Very	Overall Dissatisfied	Apply	Know
(Q.22) Recreation facilities	24%	51%	75%	14%	5%	19%	1%	5%

And in another question (Q. 12), “parks and recreation facilities” also get positive (“excellent” or “good”) evaluations from better than three-fourths (77%) of respondents.

However, when Piatt County residents are asked to judge more specific “recreation facilities and programs for children” (Q. 15), the positive ratings drop to 56% (versus 36% negative). And the ratio is negative (54% to 33%) regarding “recreation facilities and programs for adults” (Q. 16)

	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
(Q.12) Parks, recreation	31%	46%	77%	16%	4%	20%	1%	2%
(Q.15) Rec. for children	18	38	56	26	10	36	1	7
(Q.16) Rec. for adults	4	29	33	35	20	54	-	12

And in the strengths/weaknesses section, while strengths include Allerton Park (mentioned by 3%), parks in general (2%) and recreation (2%), fully 10% cite a lack of recreation facilities and “things to do” as a weakness.

Schools

Piatt County schools get good marks overall from survey participants.

One-third (33%) of residents mention schools as Piatt County’s main strength, putting it atop that list by a good margin. Only 3% suggest schools are a major weakness, ranking them well down that list.

And 60% report they’re “very satisfied” with the county’s schools, rating schools ahead of seven other characteristics. (Q. 21) Another 28% say they’re “somewhat satisfied” with schools, bringing the overall satisfaction rate to a high 88%.

	-----Satisfied-----			-----Dissatisfied-----			Doesn't	Don't
	Very	Some- what	Overall Satisfied	Some- what	Very	Overall Dissatisfied	Apply	Know
(Q.21) Piatt County schools	60%	28%	88%	4%	1%	5%	2%	5%

A substantial 78% give “the buildings for public schools” overall positive evaluations (“excellent” or “good”). (Q. 13) Among county amenities, only public libraries rate higher (82% positive.) (Q. 8)

	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
(Q.13) School buildings	35%	43%	78%	13%	3%	16%	1%	5%
(Q. 8) Public Libraries	42	40	82	7	5	12	1	5

Public Safety

Public safety institutions also rank high in the esteem of Piatt County residents.

Fire protection (82% positive, Q. 2) and police protection (75%, Q. 3) receive far more positive (“excellent” or “good”) evaluations than negative ones (“fair” or “poor”).

	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
(Q.2) Fire Protection	40%	42%	82%	6%	1%	7%	1%	10%
(Q.4) Police protection	37	38	75	16	3	19	1	5

About one-in-nine residents (11%) lists “a safe place to live” as a major strength of Piatt County; just 1% put “crime” as a significant weakness.

Healthcare

More than two-in-five (41%) say ambulance service in the county (Q. 1) is “excellent” (a rating exceeded only by the 42% rating public libraries “excellent”). Ambulance service achieves an overall positive evaluation of 78% when 36% ratings of “good” are added in.

Overall healthcare in the county (Q. 10) has a positive rating of 77%, but when the subject is “care services for seniors” (Q. 9) the positive rating drops to 64%.

	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
(Q.1) Ambulance service	41%	36%	78%	7%	1%	8%	1%	13%
(Q.10) Overall healthcare	32	45	77	12	3	15	1	6
(Q.9). Care for seniors	27	37	64	9	4	13	1	22

On the questions of “strengths” and “weaknesses,” 5% contend healthcare constitutes a Piatt County strength; 2% say it’s a weakness.

Culture

Just two questions touch on culture and the arts.

Survey participants split evenly – with equal positive and negative evaluations – on rating “access to the arts” in Piatt County, as shown in the next table. (Q. 14) (The arts were further defined for respondents as “musical programs, plays, paintings and other artwork.”)

	Excel.	Good	Overall Positive	Fair	Poor	Overall Negative	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
(Q.14) Access to the arts	11%	34%	45%	29	15	45%	<1%	10%

But in another survey section, county residents express overall satisfaction (59%) with “cultural activities.” (Q. 26) However, only “transportation options” gets a lower satisfaction score out of eight characteristics tested.

	-----Satisfied-----			-----Dissatisfied-----			Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
	Very	Some- what	Overall Satisfied	Some- what	Very	Overall Dissatisfied		
(Q.26) Cultural activities	15%	44%	59%	23%	10%	33%	2%	6%