



Marathon County Resident Survey Report, 2012

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Finally, we would like to thank the Marathon County residents, who took the time to complete their questionnaires

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Executive Summary

This survey is part of Marathon County's strategic planning process and was developed to gather opinions from Marathon County residents about the current importance of various County functions and future spending levels for those functions.

In February 2012, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,149 Marathon County residences. The surveys were followed up with reminder postcards and a second mailing to non-respondents. The overall response rate was 43 percent (466 completed questionnaires). The results provided in this report are expected to be accurate to within plus or minus 4.5 percent with 95 percent confidence. Statistical tests do not indicate that “non-response bias” is a problem in this sample. However, the demographic profile of the sample contains substantially fewer women than expected and there is a pattern of gender-based differences of opinion about Marathon County spending. The SRC reweighted the survey results to reflect response patterns if the sample contained the same proportion of men and women as were counted in the 2010 Census. Gender weighting did not substantially alter the overall pattern of the results and resulted in a shift of one or two percentage points in the tabulation. The sample contained more respondents over age 45, had higher levels of post-secondary education, and contained fewer renters than the County average. There is broad agreement across demographic groups on these issues and most differences are a matter of degree. The SRC notes differences of opinion among different demographic groups throughout the report.

The survey presented a list of 38 Marathon County programs and functions and asked respondents' opinions about the current importance and future spending levels for each item.

Importance Ratings. Four of five programs related to economic development ranked in the top ten most important items. Expanding employment opportunities and recruiting more manufacturing businesses ranked first and second overall. Recruiting more industrial businesses ranked fifth, and business incentives ranked eighth. This may be a reaction to the deep recession that has gripped the U.S. economy since 2008.

Also near the top of the ten most important programs and services were timely response to emergencies (third most important) and safe houses for domestic abuse victims (fourth most important). Respondents also rated certain basic government services highly. The County's highway/road network ranked sixth, and law enforcement (Sheriff) ranked ninth.

Rounding out the top ten most important services were K-12 education of children with disabilities (seventh place). Two programs for elderly and handicapped residents were in a virtual tie for tenth place, addressing existing housing issues for elderly and handicapped residents and ensuring adequate public transportation for elderly and handicapped residents.

Routes for bicycles/pedestrians and recreation facilities were among the group of programs and functions that received comparatively low ratings on the importance scale. Other items that rated relatively low include access to air transportation services, criminal rehabilitation services, programs that promote healthy lifestyles, and addiction therapy/support.

Future Spending Ratings. Overall, respondents generally favored retaining current spending levels for most programs and services included in the survey. However, there were a small

number of programs and services for which a majority of respondents said they would favor an increase in spending. Consistent with their high importance ratings for economic development programs, majorities of respondents favored increased spending for programs to expand employment opportunities in the County (65%) and to recruit more manufacturing businesses (63%). Half of respondents favored a spending increase to recruit more industrial businesses and nearly half (47%) favored increased spending on incentives for economic development. These four economic development programs were the top ranked items on the spending scale.

Respondents said they preferred no change in the funding of some of the program and functions that were rated among the most important. These include timely response to emergencies, safe houses for domestic abuse victims, the County road/highway network, K-12 education for children with disabilities, and law enforcement.

While there were no programs for which a majority of respondents favored reductions in spending levels, the same items that ranked lowest in priority also had the lowest rankings with respect to future spending levels. Bicycle/pedestrian routes in urban and rural areas ranked 37th and 38th. Access to air transportation ranked 35th and criminal rehabilitation ranked 34th.

Survey Purpose

This survey is part of Marathon County’s strategic planning process and was developed to gather opinions from Marathon County residents about the current importance of various County functions and future spending levels for those functions.

Survey Methods

In February 2012, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,149 Marathon County residents. Sixty-six surveys were returned as non-deliverable, resulting in a net of 1,083 delivered surveys.

The overall response rate from the public was 43 percent (466 completed questionnaires). Based on the estimated number of adults in the population of the County (101,194)¹, the results provided in this report are expected to be accurate to within plus or minus 4.5 percent with 95 percent confidence.

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who don’t return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. **Based upon a standard statistical analysis that is described in Appendix A, the Survey Research Center (SRC) concludes that there is little evidence that non-response bias is a concern for this sample.**

Appendix B contains written responses to the “other, specify” category.

Appendix C contains a copy of the survey questionnaire with a complete quantitative summary of responses by question. As described below, the SRC adjusted the raw percentages due to the disproportionate number of responses from men (65%). The percentages in Appendix C are based on the raw data that are not adjusted for gender.

¹ 2010 US Census

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the 466 respondents from the public who returned surveys. Where comparable data were available from the 2010 US Census of Population and Housing and the 2010 US Census American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year data set, they were included to indicate the degree to which the sample represents the underlying adult population in the County.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents							
Gender	Count	Male	Female				
Sample	449	65%	35%				
Census (Age 18+)	101,194	50%	50%				
Age 18+	Count	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65+
Sample	461	1%	8%	15%	22%	25%	29%
Census	101,194	10%	16%	18%	21%	17%	19%
Employment Status	Count	Full time	Part time	Self - Empl.	Unempl.	Retired	Other
Sample	453	47%	5%	9%	4%	32%	2%
ACS (Age 16+)	105,423	66%			5.7%	28% ²	
Place of Residence	Count	Own	Rent	Other			
Sample	455	89%	10%	1%			
ACS	51,851	74%	26%				
Household Income	Count	<\$15,000	\$15,000 – 24,999	\$25,000 – 49,999	\$50,000 – 74,999	\$75,000 – 99,999	\$100,000 or More
Sample	440	17%	15%	16%	25%	14%	14%
ACS	51,851	10%	12%	29%	21%	13%	15%
Length of Residency	Count	<1 yr	1 – 4	5 - 9	10 - 24	25+	
Sample ³	462	1%	3%	7%	16%	73%	
Highest Level of Education	Count	Less than High Sch.	High Sch. Dipl.	Some College/ Tech.	Tech. College Grad.	Bachelor Degree	Graduate/ Profess. Degree
Sample	457	6%	28%	18%	16%	20%	11%
ACS. (age 25+)	90,298	10%	39%	18%	13%	15%	6%

² Includes “not in workforce”

³ Census data does not contain a length of residence category.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (continued)				
Residence ZIP code	Community Name	Frequency	Percent of Survey Responses	Percent of Marathon County Population
54401	Wausau	106	24%	23%
54403	Wausau	79	18%	18%
54455	Mosinee	69	15%	13%
54476	Schofield & Weston	56	12%	14%
54484	Stratford	21	5%	4%
54448	Marathon	18	4%	3%
54411	Athens	15	3%	4%
54426	Edgar	13	3%	3%
54440	Hatley	12	3%	2%
54474	Rothschild	12	3%	3%
54405	Abbotsford	7	2%	2%
54479	Spencer	7	2%	2%
54449	Marshfield	6	1%	2%
54471	Ringle	6	1%	1%
54452	Merrill	5	1%	2%
54414	Birnamwood	4	<1%	<1%
54421	Colby	4	<1%	<1%
54473	Rosholt	4	<1%	<1%
54499	Wittenberg	2	<1%	<1%
54402	Wausau PO Boxes	1	<1%	<1%
54408	Aniwa	1	<1%	<1%
54425	Dorchester	1	<1%	<1%
54488	Unity	1	<1%	<1%
Count		450		

In most categories, the overall pattern of the sample’s demographic characteristics matches the 2010 Census numbers and the estimates from the American Community Survey quite well.

However, there were a disproportionate percentage of males among the respondents. While men comprise 50.2 percent of the County population, 65 percent of the returned surveys were completed by men. The SRC compared the opinions of men and women and found that there were statistically significant gender-based differences on 76 percent of the variables in the questionnaire. As a result the SRC chose to weight the survey results as if the sample contained the same proportion of men (49.8%) and women (50.2%) as were counted in the 2010 Census. The percentages shown in the charts and tables in the text of this report reflect the values after gender weighting. As noted above, the percentages in Appendix C were not modified with the gender weightings. Gender weighting did not substantially alter the overall pattern of the results and resulted in a shift of one or two percentage points in the tabulation. As we summarize the various elements of the survey, we will point out those few instances where the differences between the opinions of men and women differ to a substantial degree.

In other categories there were relatively small differences between the sample and the Census/ACS data. There are fewer people under 45 years of age in this sample (24%) than the 2010 Census indicates should have been included (44%) and fewer renters (10%) than reported in the 2010 Census (26%). Our experience is that younger residents and renters in most jurisdictions are less likely to participate in surveys. The sample contained a higher proportion of respondents who have completed a post-secondary education program (47%) than was reported in the American Community Survey estimate (34%). The income distribution of the sample closely aligns with the percentage of Marathon County households with at least \$50,000 annual income, but contains more households with less than \$25,000 annual income and fewer households with \$25,000 to \$49,999 annual income. The employment pattern of respondents aligns closely with the ACS estimates. The geographic distribution of the sample matches the actual population distribution of Marathon County particularly well.

Most differences in the responses between demographic groups are relatively small and are a matter of degree. As such, they do not change the overall pattern of the results. As we analyze the data, we will identify when the differences between demographic groups are noteworthy.

Overview

The survey presented a list of 38 Marathon County programs and functions divided into topical categories: health, education, vulnerable populations, public safety, transportation, economic development, and community development for planned growth and recreation. Respondents were first asked to rate the current importance of each listed program or function using a scale of very important, somewhat important, not important, or don't know. Respondents were next asked to indicate their preferences with respect to the level of Marathon County spending by the year 2017 for each of the listed items: Response choices were: increase, not change, shrink, or don't know.

In order to aid in the analysis and interpretation of the data, the Survey Research Center assigned a numeric value to each of the response choices as shown in Table 2. Responses in the "don't know" category were excluded from the analysis.

Current Importance		Spending in 2017	
Response Choice	Value	Response Choice	Value
Very important	2	Increase	2
Somewhat important	1	Not change	1
Not important	0	Shrink	0
Don't know	Not included	Don't know	Not included

In the analysis to follow, we will compare programs by the paired values of current importance and preferred future spending levels. We will be particularly interested in paired values that are substantially larger than (1,1) indicating programs that are seen as very important and for which citizens would prefer spending levels to increase, and those significantly smaller than (1,1), indicating less important programs that residents would be willing to see spending levels fall.

Using the numeric coding described above, Table 3 and Chart 1 present the gender-weighted means for each of the 38 pairs of questions on the survey. Table 3 indicates the rank order of the gender-weighted means in descending order on the “importance” scale. Corresponding mean values on the spending scale are adjacent to the importance values.

With respect to importance, three topics stood out at the top with mean values above 1.6 – more employment opportunities, recruitment of more manufacturing businesses, and timely response to emergencies. Ranking fourth were programs to ensure that victims of domestic abuse have access to safe houses, followed closely by recruitment of industrial businesses in fifth place.

Table 3. Rank Order Weighted Means – Gender Balanced				
Item	Import. Mean	Import. Rank	Spend Mean	Spend Rank
Expand employment opportunities (Q29)	1.67	1	1.61	1
Recruit more manufacturing (Q30)	1.64	2	1.57	2
Timely response to emergencies (Q23)	1.61	3	1.35	5
Safe houses for victims of domestic abuse (Q13)	1.42	4	1.25	8
Recruit more industrial (e.g., gravel mining, power generation) (Q31)	1.42	5	1.38	3
County highway/road network (Q25)	1.40	6	1.27	7
K-12 Education for children with disabilities (Q6)	1.40	7	1.19	12
Incentives for business start-ups and entrepreneurs (Q33)	1.39	8	1.35	4
Law enforcement (Sheriff’s Office) (Q18)	1.35	9	1.13	17
Address existing housing issues for elderly and handicapped (Q17)	1.33	10	1.25	9
Public transportation for elderly and handicapped (Q11)	1.33	11	1.29	6
Natural disaster recovery (Q24)	1.30	12	1.14	16
Change business permitting process to attract more business (Q34)	1.30	13	1.19	13
Housing issues prevention (e.g., displacement of elderly) (Q16)	1.29	14	1.20	10
Address juvenile criminal behavior (Q21)	1.28	15	1.18	15
Increase intergovernmental collaboration (Q35)	1.27	16	1.18	14
North Central Technical College (Q7)	1.25	17	1.05	24
Limit spread of communicable diseases (Q5)	1.24	18	1.06	23
Domestic abuse prevention (Q12)	1.24	19	1.08	20
Provide information on health threats (Q3)	1.24	20	1.09	19
Mental health services (Q2)	1.21	21	1.12	18
Public libraries (Q9)	1.19	22	1.07	22
Recruit more retail/service (Q32)	1.19	23	1.19	11
Preserve forest land (Q37)	1.18	24	1.07	21
University of Wisconsin (Extension & UW-Marathon County) (Q8)	1.17	25	1.01	27
Programs to ensure adequate nutrition for residents (Q10)	1.14	26	1.05	25
Emergency prevention (fire codes, hazard. waste collection) (Q22)	1.11	27	0.95	31
Preserve agricultural land (Q36)	1.10	28	1.00	28
Inform residents how to get information with health concerns (Q4)	1.09	29	0.99	30
County jail (Q19)	1.05	30	0.89	34
Addiction prevention (Q14)	1.04	31	0.93	32
Public recreation facilities (Q38)	1.03	32	1.04	26
Addiction therapy/support (Q15)	1.02	33	0.93	33
Promote healthy lifestyles (e.g., nutrition education) (Q1)	1.02	34	0.99	29
Criminal rehabilitation (Q20)	0.92	35	0.86	35
Air transportation access (Q28)	0.80	36	0.83	36
Build/maintain bike/pedestrian routes – urban areas (Q26)	0.77	37	0.76	37
Build/maintain bike/pedestrian routes – rural areas (Q27)	0.66	38	0.69	38

The remaining priority programs in the top ten include the County's highway/road network, K-12 education of children with disabilities, incentives for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs, law enforcement (Sherriff's Office), and addressing existing housing issues for the elderly and handicapped. The SRC notes that economic development programs occupy four of the top eight ranks on the importance scale. The poor economic performance of the U.S. economy since 2008 may explain the dominance of County economic development programs.

At the other end of the importance scale, County residents said bike/pedestrian routes in either urban or rural areas had the lowest importance values among the items included in the questionnaire, with mean ratings well below 1.00. Other items with mean importance ratings below 1.00 include access to air transportation and criminal rehabilitation programs.

Table 3 also presents the mean values and rank of the future spending for each program and function (rightmost columns). A comparison of the values in the importance column and the values in the spending column indicates, probably not surprisingly, that functions and services that have high importance ratings also tend to rate higher on the spending preference scale.

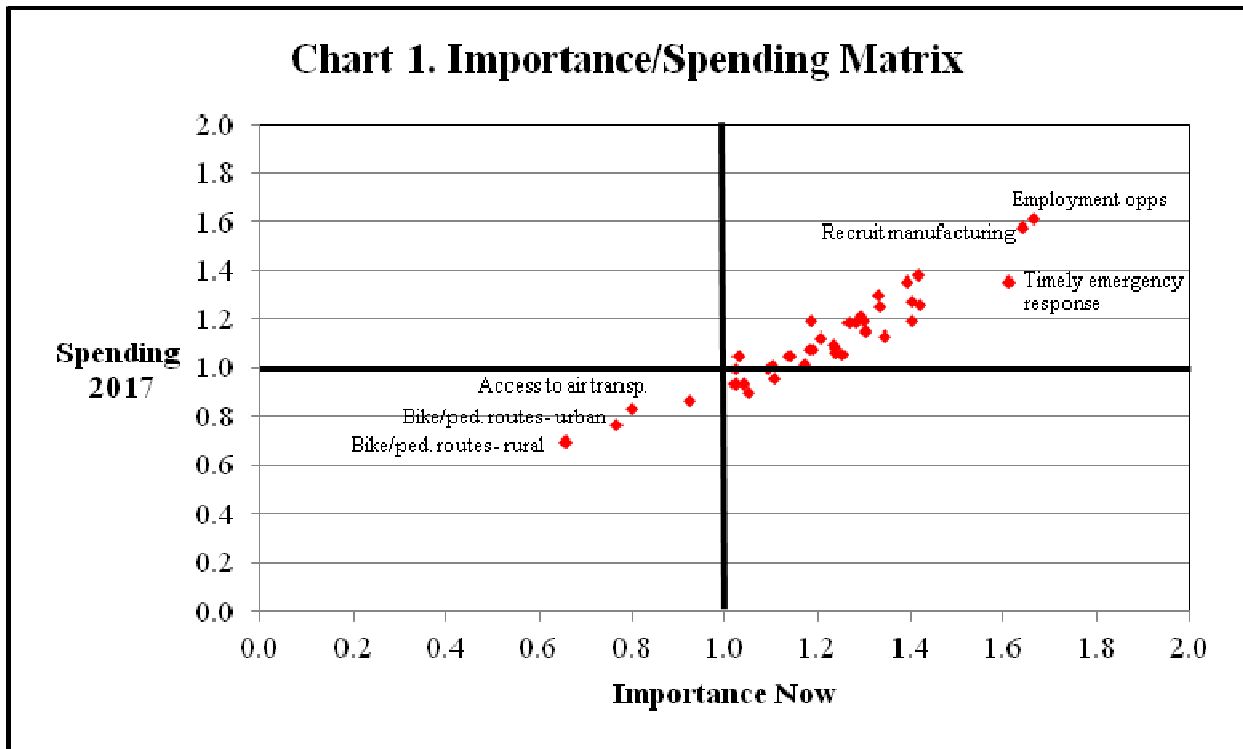
Economic development programs and functions ranked high on the spending scale, as they did on the importance scale. Programs to increase employment opportunities, to recruit more manufacturing businesses, to recruit more industrial businesses, and to offer incentives to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs had the highest ratings on the spending scale.

Timely responses to emergencies ranked fifth. Access to public transportation for the elderly and handicapped was ranked sixth on the spending scale, having been ranked 11th on the importance scale. The County highway/road network ranked seventh, followed by access to safe houses for domestic abuse victims.

Housing programs to prevent issues and to address existing problems for the elderly and handicapped ranked ninth and tenth in the spending ratings.

As was true on the current importance scale County residents said bike/pedestrian routes in either urban or rural areas were the lowest on the future spending scale, with mean ratings well below 1.00. Likewise, access to air transportation and criminal rehabilitation programs scored low on the spending scale.

Chart 1 is a graphical representation of the mean values for importance and for spending contained in Table 3. The pattern in Chart 1 shows the overall tendency for importance ratings and spending ratings to be positively associated as described above. Items of particular interest are those that are closest to the upper right corner (very important, increased spending) and those that are closest to the lower left corner (not important, shrink spending). These programs and functions are those that are near the top of Table 3 and near the bottom of Table 3. There are no outliers, as would be the case if a large percentage of respondents had rated a particular program very highly on the importance scale while favoring a reduction in the spending for that program.



The pattern on Chart 1 also indicates that there are many programs and functions grouped in the middle. Mean values for these programs and functions are slightly above 1.0 (somewhat important) on the importance scale and slightly above 1.0 (no change) on the spending scale. Table 3 and Chart 1 also show that mean values for spending tend to be slightly smaller than the corresponding values for importance.

On a percentage basis, the largest percentages of responses on the importance scale were in the somewhat important category for 26 of the 38 programs and functions. With respect to future spending, the largest percentages of the respondents said they want to see no change in 32 of the 38 functions and services included in the survey.

Although there is an overall preference to retain current levels of spending for most programs, there is a slight tendency among those respondents who favor a change in spending to prefer increases in future spending rather than spending cuts. In 17 of the 38 programs (45%), a greater percentage of respondents favoring a change said they supported an increase in spending rather than a decrease. In contrast, among 7 of the 38 programs (18%), a greater percentage of respondents favoring a change said they supported a decrease in spending rather than an increase. In the remaining 14 programs (37%), the percentage of respondents favoring a change in spending were about equally split between supporting increases and supporting decreases.

Overall, the majority of respondents said major Marathon County functions such as law enforcement, the County jail, the highway/road network, and nutrition programs were important or very important and also said they favor retaining current spending levels for these major programs and functions.

Those programs and functions that rated highest in importance and are most favored for increased spending (economic development) tend to be in budget categories that are relatively small portions of the overall County total. Similarly, those programs that have relatively low in both importance and future spending rankings (bicycle/pedestrian trails and airport transportation) comprise relatively small portions of current expenditures in the County's budget.

Details will be described in the remainder of the report.

Health

The first set of questions asked about five health programs. Currently these programs are a relatively small part of the County’s budget, comprising about 5 percent of the County’s expenditures.

The results are shown in Table 4. With respect to importance, the largest portion of respondents, ranging from 46 percent to 58 percent, chose the somewhat important category. In addition, between 23 percent and 39 percent of respondents said these health programs are very important. Relatively few respondents, ranging between 10 percent and 20 percent rated these health programs as not important. Using the ranking scale described in Table 2, programs that help limit the spread of communicable disease was ranked as the most important, followed by providing information on health threats, mental health services, information on how to get help with health-related concerns, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

With respect to future spending, majorities of respondents preferred the status quo. Between 50 percent and 63 percent said there should be no change in the budget for these health programs. Between 21 percent and 26 percent of respondents preferred spending increases. Smaller percentages of respondents, ranging from 14 percent to 25 percent, said that future spending on these health programs should shrink.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
1. Programs that promote healthy lifestyles (e.g. nutrition education)	20%	57%	23%	25%	50%	25%
2. Programs that ensure access to mental health services	10%	58%	31%	14%	60%	26%
3. Programs that provide information on health threats (e.g. food safety)	15%	46%	39%	16%	59%	25%
4. Programs that inform residents how to get help with health concerns	20%	51%	29%	22%	58%	21%
5. Programs to limit the spread of communicable disease	13%	49%	37%	16%	63%	21%

Education

The education category is a relatively small portion of the overall budget, comprising 8 percent of the County’s expenditures. As shown in Table 5, about half of respondents said each program or function is somewhat important, while an additional 34 percent to 46 percent chose the very important response. Responses in the not important category were relatively few, ranging from 5 percent to 17 percent. Respondents gave the highest overall importance ranking to K-12 education of children with disabilities (ranked 7th among all 38 items listed in the survey – Table 3), followed by North Central Technical College, public libraries, and the University of Wisconsin (County Extension and UW- Marathon County campus).

With respect to future spending, majorities of respondents, ranging from 56 percent to 61 percent, indicated that funding levels should remain unchanged. Among respondents who said there should be a change in future funding for these programs, a larger portion were likely to prefer an increase than a decrease.

Demographic Comparisons. More women and those with at least a Bachelor’s Degree said that public libraries were very important.

Table 5. Education – Marathon County Public Opinions						
	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
6. K-12 education of children with disabilities	5%	49%	46%	10%	60%	29%
7. North Central Technical College	14%	46%	40%	18%	59%	23%
8. University of Wisconsin (Marathon County campus and Extension)	17%	49%	34%	21%	56%	23%
9. Public libraries in Marathon County	16%	49%	35%	16%	61%	23%

Vulnerable Populations

Table 6 presents the results of the questions about programs for vulnerable populations. These programs are a significant portion of the County budget, comprising 23 percent of the County’s expenditures and ranking first among the budget categories included in this survey.

With one exception, the largest percentages of respondents chose the somewhat important category, ranging from 45 percent to 53 percent. The single exception was for programs to ensure access to safe houses for domestic abuse victims. Forty-eight percent of respondents said this program is very important, and 45 percent said it is somewhat important. Access to a safe house ranked first within this group of questions, and scored very high overall, ranking 4th among all 38 items on the survey. Programs to address existing housing issues for the elderly and disabled ranked second in importance among this group of questions, followed by transportation programs for the elderly and disabled, programs to prevent housing issues, domestic abuse prevention, nutrition programs, addiction prevention, and addiction therapy/support. Programs related to addiction rated particularly low compared to the other programs in this group and were ranked relatively low in importance among all 38 items in Table 3, ranking 31st and 33rd.

With respect to future spending, half or more of respondents, ranging from 48 percent to 62 percent, prefer funding levels to remain unchanged for all programs in this group. Four in ten respondents said they favor an increase in spending on public transportation for elderly and handicapped residents. Relatively few respondents said they prefer that funding be reduced for vulnerable population programs. More respondents said funding for addiction programs should be reduced than those who said funding should be increased.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
10. Programs to ensure County residents have adequate nutrition	16%	53%	30%	18%	59%	23%
11. Programs to ensure elderly and disabled County residents have adequate public transportation	10%	48%	43%	11%	48%	41%
12. Programs to <u>prevent</u> domestic abuse	15%	47%	39%	18%	56%	26%
13. Programs to ensure victims of domestic abuse have access to safe houses	6%	45%	48%	6%	62%	32%
14. Programs to <u>prevent</u> addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling)	25%	45%	29%	27%	53%	20%
15. Programs to address existing addiction issues (support programs, therapeutic services)	23%	52%	25%	24%	58%	18%
16. Programs to <u>prevent</u> housing issues (e.g. elderly being displaced)	11%	48%	41%	11%	58%	31%
17. Programs to address existing housing issues for the elderly and disabled	7%	52%	41%	7%	61%	32%

Demographic Comparisons. A greater proportion of renters said nutrition education programs, and programs to prevent housing issues are very important. Renters were also more likely to favor increased spending for nutrition education programs, domestic abuse programs, and programs to prevent housing issues.

Women were more likely to say that programs to ensure that elderly and disabled residents have adequate public transportation are very important. The percentage of respondents who favor increased spending for public transportation for elderly and disabled residents increases with the age of the respondent.

Respondents from households with annual incomes under \$50,000 gave higher importance ratings to programs to prevent housing issues and were also more likely to favor increased spending on such programs.

Public Safety

The fourth group of questions was on the topic of public safety, which comprises 13 percent of the County's expenditures and ranks third among the categories included in this survey.

The ratings of the seven items in this group are shown in Table 7, which indicates that the residents of Marathon County place the most importance on the timeliness of emergency response. Nearly two of three respondents said emergency response was very important, and among all 38 questions on the survey, it was ranked in third place. Law enforcement (Sheriff) ranked second, with 45 percent of respondents saying it is very important and 43 percent saying it is somewhat important. Among all 38 items on the survey, law enforcement ranked 9th. Programs for recovery from natural disasters ranked third, followed by addressing juvenile criminal behavior, emergency prevention through regulations such as fire codes, the County jail, and programs for the rehabilitation of criminals. There was substantial diversity of opinion among the responses in this group of questions. As noted, emergency response and law enforcement ranked high among all 38 items. On the other hand, rehabilitation of criminals was near the bottom of the overall rankings.

Majorities of respondents favored keeping future spending for all items in this group at the current levels. However, large minorities (39%) said spending should be increased for emergency response programs and disaster recovery programs. About a third of respondents favored increased spending for programs aimed at youth criminal behavior. In contrast, about a third of respondents said spending on criminal rehabilitation programs should be decreased.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
18. Law enforcement programs (e.g. sheriff's office)	11%	43%	46%	12%	64%	24%
19. County jail	20%	55%	25%	21%	69%	10%
20. Programs to rehabilitate criminals	27%	53%	20%	31%	51%	17%
21. Programs that address juvenile (youth) criminal behavior	9%	53%	38%	13%	57%	30%
22. Programs to prevent emergencies (e.g. fire codes, flood plain zoning, hazardous material disposal)	17%	55%	28%	20%	66%	15%
23. Programs to ensure timely response to emergencies	4%	30%	65%	5%	56%	39%
24. Programs for recovery/clean-up after natural disasters (e.g. floods, tornados)	9%	51%	40%	5%	56%	39%

Transportation

Transportation programs are a significant portion of the County’s budget, ranking second among the categories included in this survey and comprising 19 percent of County expenditures.

As shown in Table 8, Marathon County residents placed substantially greater importance on highways/roads than on bicycle/pedestrian routes and air transportation. Ninety-five percent of respondents said the County highway/road network is somewhat important (50%) or very important (45%), which ranked 6th among all items on the survey. Access to air transportation was rated as somewhat important by 43 percent of respondents and very important by 18 percent and ranked 36th overall.

The building and maintenance of urban and rural bicycle routes received comparatively low importance ratings and ranked at the bottom of the 38 programs and functions on the survey. While 56 percent of respondents said urban bike/pedestrian routes were somewhat important (35%) or very important (20%), a large minority (43%) said urban routes were not important. Bicycle/pedestrian routes in rural areas fared more poorly, with half of respondents saying they are not important. This was the only item on the entire survey for which at least half of respondents said was not important.

Majorities of respondents said future funding levels for the county highway/road network and access to air transportation should remain the same.

Consistent with the low importance ratings for urban and rural bike/pedestrian routes, respondents were more willing to shrink the budget for these two items than for any other item included in the questionnaire. Forty-two percent favored shrinking the budget for urban bike/pedestrian routes, and 46 percent favored reducing the budget for rural routes.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

Table 8. Transportation – Marathon County Public Opinions						
	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
25. County highway/road network	5%	50%	45%	7%	59%	34%
26. Building/Maintaining pedestrian & bike routes in <u>urban</u> areas (e.g. Wausau, Mosinee, Marshfield)	43%	36%	20%	42%	39%	19%
27. Building/Maintaining pedestrian & bike routes in <u>rural</u> areas (e.g. towns & villages)	50%	35%	16%	46%	38%	16%
28. Access to air transportation in County	38%	43%	18%	28%	61%	11%

Economic Development

Expenditures for economic development programs are a relatively small portion of the County’s budget, comprising 1 percent of the overall total.

Table 9 indicates the economic development section of the survey received the highest overall importance ratings among the topics included in the questionnaire. Reflecting the troublesome economic conditions at the time of the survey, a large majority (71%) of respondents said expanding employment opportunities is very important. Respondents more strongly favored recruiting manufacturing businesses (69% very important) compared to industrial businesses (54% very important) or retail/service (40% very important). Half of respondents said providing incentives to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs and changing the permitting process to attract more businesses are very important.

With respect to funding, respondents said they are willing to open their pocketbooks for economic development programs to a degree not found elsewhere among the 38 items included in the questionnaire. While majorities of respondents tended to favor no change in future spending for most items listed in the survey, majorities favored increased spending for expanding employment opportunities (65%) and recruitment of manufacturing businesses (63%). Half of respondents favored increased spending for industrial business recruiting, and nearly half (47%) supported increased spending for business development incentives.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

Table 9. Economic Development – Marathon County Public Opinions						
	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
29. Expanding employment opportunities in the County	4%	24%	71%	5%	30%	65%
30. Recruiting more manufacturing businesses to the County (e.g. paper manufacturing, pre-fabricated homes, etc.)	5%	26%	69%	5%	32%	63%
31. Recruiting more industrial businesses to the County (e.g. gravel mining, power generation)	13%	33%	54%	12%	38%	50%
32. Recruiting more retail/service businesses to the County (e.g. department stores, insurance companies, medical services, etc.)	21%	39%	40%	15%	50%	34%
33. Programs to provide incentives for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs (e.g. tax breaks, providing infrastructure like sewer and water, etc.)	12%	37%	51%	12%	41%	47%
34. Changing permitting process (e.g. zoning, environmental requirements) to attract more businesses to the County	19%	32%	49%	16%	49%	35%

Community Development for Planned Growth and Recreation

Expenditures in this category are a relatively small component of the County’s budget, comprising 1 percent of overall expenditures.

As shown in Table 10, intergovernmental collaboration programs had the highest overall importance rating in this group of programs and functions, receiving 41 percent in the very important category and 45 percent in the somewhat important category. Preservation of forest land ranked second, and had a greater percentage of responses in the very important category (42%) than in the somewhat important category (35%). Ratings for farmland preservation programs and public recreation facilities were somewhat lower.

In a pattern that has been consistent throughout most of the survey, the largest percentage of respondents, ranging from 48 percent to 57 percent, said they favored no change in the future spending levels among the four programs in this section.

Demographic Comparisons. Respondents who have completed a post-secondary education program were more likely to give higher importance ratings to intergovernmental collaboration programs and to favor increased spending for intergovernmental collaboration.

Respondents age 45 and older were more likely to favor reduced spending on public recreation facilities.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
35. Programs to increase collaboration between County, Towns, Villages and Cities	14%	45%	41%	14%	53%	33%
36. Programs to limit conversion of ag. land to urban uses	25%	40%	35%	25%	49%	26%
37. Programs to limit conversion of forest land to urban uses	23%	35%	42%	22%	48%	29%
38. Programs for public recreation facilities (boat ramps, parks, trails)	22%	52%	26%	19%	57%	24%

Conclusions

The results of this survey indicate that economic development forms a cluster of strategically important programs and functions, both in terms of importance and future spending. These include programs to expand employment opportunities and the recruitment of manufacturing and industrial businesses. Incentives to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs ranked high in importance, but respondents were less willing to increase spending. These particular strategic directions among County residents are no doubt a reflection of the current economic conditions as the national, state, and local economies struggle to emerge from a deep economic recession.

These economic development programs are the only items for which substantial percentages of respondents wanted to increase spending. The largest portion of respondents prefers to retain spending at current levels for other programs and functions, even those that were rated comparatively high on the importance scale. Examples include timely response to emergencies, safe houses for domestic abuse victims, the County road/highway network, K-12 education for children with disabilities, and law enforcement.

At the same time, County residents identified relatively few programs and functions that they believe are not important and could be considered for reductions in spending over the next five years. The largest portion of respondents, between 43 percent and 50 percent, said routes for bicycle trails were not important and that spending on them should shrink. There were no programs that were rated as not important by a majority of respondents. Similarly, there were no programs for which a majority of respondents wanted to shrink the budget.

There are a substantial proportion of programs and functions that are viewed as at least somewhat important by County residents. At the same time, the largest portions of respondents prefer that spending on most programs remain unchanged in the next five years, and among those respondents who prefer a change, there is a slight tendency toward favoring increased spending. This poses a dilemma for Marathon County decision-makers as they consider strategic options in a difficult fiscal environment. The rankings in Table 3 provide a measure of public sentiment among the County's programs and functions, even if such sentiment is not clearly definitive in many cases.

Appendix A – Non-Response Bias Tests

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who don’t return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. For example, suppose most non-respondents gave low ratings to programs to prevent addiction, whereas most of those who returned their questionnaires gave high ratings to addiction prevention activities. In this case, non-response bias would exist, and the raw results would overrate public opinion about the importance of addiction prevention programs in Marathon County.

The standard way to test for non-response bias is to compare the responses of those who return the first mailing of a questionnaire to those who return the second mailing. Those who return the second questionnaire are, in effect, a sample of non-respondents (to the first mailing), and we assume that they are representative of that group. In this survey, 353 people responded to the first mailing, and 113 responded to the second mailing.

We found only nine variables with statistically significant differences between the mean responses of these two groups of respondents out of 76 tested. Table A1 indicates that even when statistical differences exist, the magnitude of this difference is very small and the interpretation of the results is not affected. **The Survey Research Center (SRC) concludes that there is no evidence that non-response bias is a concern for this sample.**

Table A1 – Statistically Significant Differences Between Responses of First and Second Mailings (raw data, includes “don’t know” responses)			
Variable	Statistical Significance	Mean First Mailing	Mean Second Mailing
2b.Mental health services	.002	2.11	2.40
3b.Information on health threats	.039	2.03	2.01
15a. Addiction therapy/support	.034	2.12	2.31
20b. Criminal rehabilitation	.035	2.33	2.52
21b. Address juvenile criminal behavior	.040	1.96	2.15
28a. Air transportation access	.036	2.36	2.27
36b. Preserve agricultural land	.008	2.23	2.51
37a. Limit conversion of forest land	.032	1.97	2.19
37b. Limit conversion of forest land	.038	2.17	2.39

Appendix B – Written responses, “Other” category

41. Employment Status: Other (10 Responses)

- Disabled (x5)
- Disabled Veteran
- Husband employed home maker
- SSDI
- Student
- Volunteer

42. Place of Residence: Other (3 Responses)

- Live with elderly parents
- Live with family
- Live with Mother