

## **Imagine McHenry County Survey Results: Executive Summary**

*Imagine McHenry County* has a mission to establish, promote and maintain an ongoing grass roots process of planning for quality growth for McHenry County that will provide for the preservation of the natural resources of the county, the enhancement of economic vitality and the quality of life for existing and future generations.

*Imagine McHenry County* includes representatives from a diversity of interests, including government, business, health care, environmental, historic preservation, agriculture.

In March 2006, *Imagine McHenry County* conducted a countywide survey of residents, to help understand their attitudes about quality of life in McHenry County today and in the future. Nearly 3,000 people responded with their thoughts and feelings about the county's state today and their hopes and fears for the future. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, *Imagine McHenry County* held a public forum that was attended by nearly 100 county residents from all walks of life to imagine together a future for McHenry County.

### **Results from the Survey and Public Forum**

#### **KEY FINDING: Balance and Sustainability**

Respondents expressed a concern with balancing growth and development with preservation of existing resources for the sake of long-term stable prosperity.

The results were organized into several categories, but should be read together to understand the diversity and complexity of the responses.

#### **COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT**

McHenry County residents clearly value the historic town centers. Significant responses in this area were related to the maintenance of a unique identity for each community. In particular, the notion of historically appropriate development in existing centers, maintaining architectural integrity, and respecting the unique characteristics of the communities of McHenry County surfaced often in responses.

#### **EDUCATION**

Many respondents felt that their children are not receiving the best quality of education, with 68% expressing a concern about the availability of quality schools. Related to this point was an expression from respondents that property taxes should be relieved of the burden of school support by allowing other forms of taxing to contribute to school funds, including appropriate support from the state level.

The responses related to this topic convey the complexity of funding high quality education without unduly burdening the residential tax base.

#### **HOUSING**

Results in this area indicate that there is a need to provide a broad range of employment opportunities in reasonable proximity to residential areas offering a variety of housing options.

21% of survey respondents felt overburdened by the cost of their housing. Half of dual – income households would prefer to work less, but fear being under an economic burden. Half of single-income households were concerned that a second household member will have to work in order to maintain their current standard of living. 50% of respondents in the survey indicated that, after paying for housing, they have just enough to pay their bills and provide for family entertainment, but not enough to save for the future.

### **JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

There is a clear preference for a strong local economy centered in appropriate locations. The bulk of survey respondents thought that local government should be doing more to ensure the availability of good jobs in McHenry County. Responses indicate a desire for more employment opportunities, even if this means more intensive development like compact employment centers that allow higher density commercial development than generally found in the area. At the same time there is an expressed preference for local jobs when feasible, based more on entrepreneurial opportunities and less on an influx of national chains.

### **OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT**

Respondents are interested in preserving and maintaining McHenry County’s rural character which includes its natural environment and agricultural heritage. This topic had the highest number of write-in comments at the workshop and survey respondents ranked “Clean Water” and “Clean Air” 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, respectively, out of a list of 16 categories of existing features that they value in McHenry County. In addition, preserving agriculture and a rural atmosphere is particularly important to survey respondents who are at least 35 years of age.

### **PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE**

Respondents expressed frustration that different governmental agencies are often not communicating with one another or, at times, are in opposition to one another, especially when it comes to environmental issues that require a broad geographic set of solutions. 75% of respondents wanted officials to do more to ensure the availability of good jobs in McHenry County. 72% wanted government to do more to encourage public participation. 71% wanted government to do more to Ensure the Availability of Good Jobs in McHenry County, and 69% wanted government to do more to preserve the existing character of the County.

### **PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

The main concern in this topic related to potential water shortage and maintaining water quality: citizens wish to manage water withdrawal and quality by protecting ground water recharge areas. The other issue that people mentioned was the improvement of transportation infrastructure: expanded roadways, new roads, bridges, bypasses, etc.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

On the whole, McHenry County residents appear concerned with the relationship of transportation to development and the environment, not just with the creation of new or improved transportation options. McHenry County residents appear to have a growing awareness of the interrelatedness of the transportation system with other land use patterns.

## **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Preserving a sense of community and a “small town feel” is particularly important to the people of McHenry County. At the same time, there is a desire expressed by many residents for the amenities provided by a more urban environment. All demographic groups ranked a community type with a moderate level of development and a variety of housing choices with jobs and businesses that serve residents’ needs as most desirable. Preserving a small town feel and rural atmosphere were ranked as the top two challenges for future McHenry County leaders.

For a full report of the survey and workshop results, prepared by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), visit [www.imaginemchenrycounty.org](http://www.imaginemchenrycounty.org)

The *Imagine McHenry County* board of Directors anticipates working with CMAP and other community groups to develop recommended action steps based on these results.