

The Citizens of Allegheny County are Ready for Some Changes!

A Few Key Points and Some Observations

from

The *ALLEGHENY COUNTY 2001* Public Opinion Survey

by

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This in-depth public opinion telephone survey was conducted by the University Center for Social and Urban Research during late September and October of 1991. There were 812 randomly selected respondents; the duration of the average interview was 16 minutes. Based on comparisons with available 1990 U.S. Census data and other information it has been determined that this survey's respondents are quite representative of Allegheny County's adult residents.

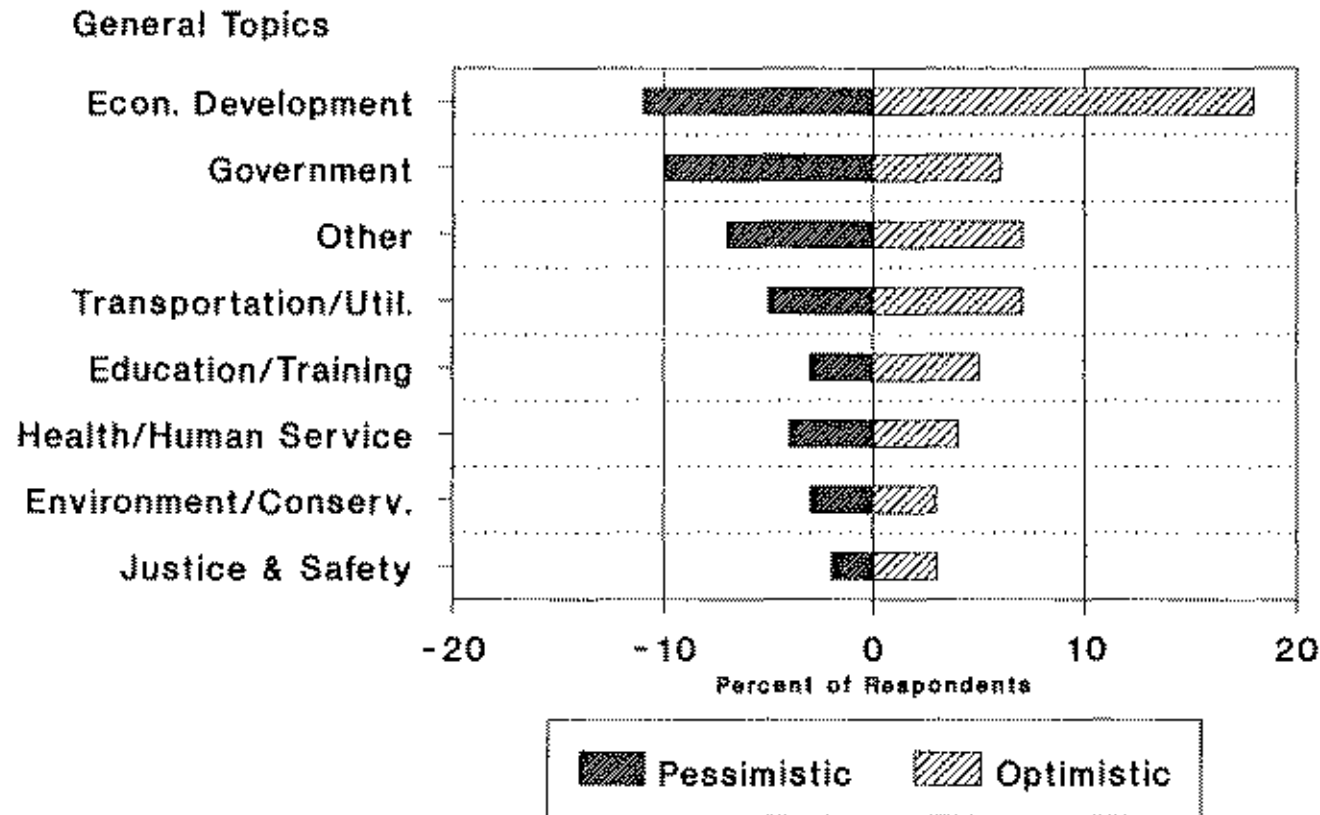
Consequently, this systematically conducted survey has a high level of reliability ($\pm 3.5\%$) and the responses have integrity -- that is, respondents have exhibited consistency in answering a set of relatively sophisticated

questions. Their thoughtfulness has provided a significant public service.

[The more I look at the data and the underlying explanations, the more confidence I have that we have good data that should be used to encourage key people in public, not-for-profit, and private institutions, particularly those who are participants in drafting AC2001's Action Plan, to take initiatives.]

What follows is a summary of the key findings, at this time; more findings will emerge later.

If you could pick ONE thing you'd like to see changed in this area by 2001, what would it be?

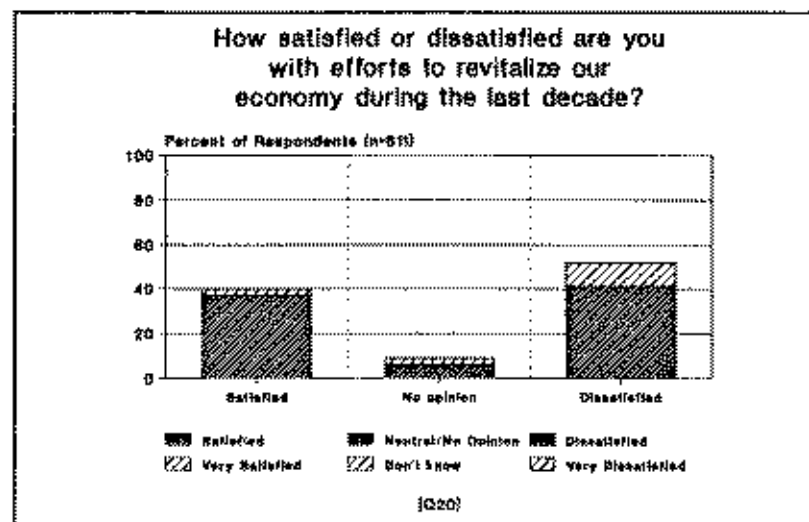


[Q5a]

Improving the region's economy is strongly supported, but..

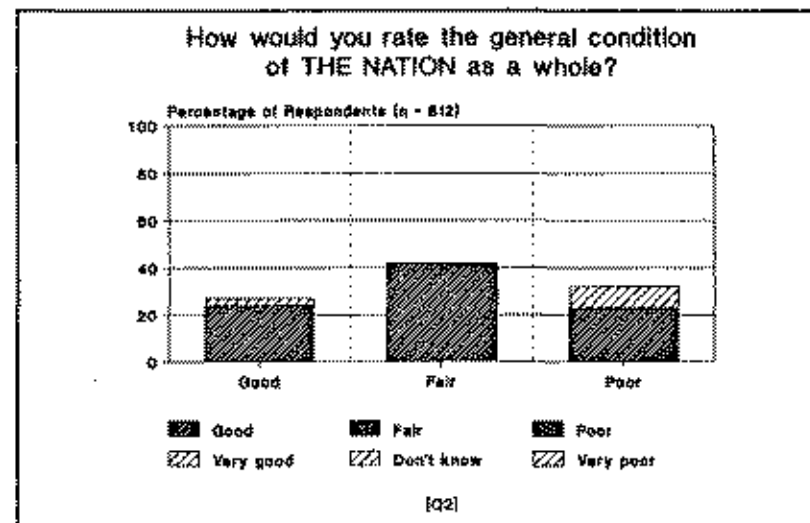
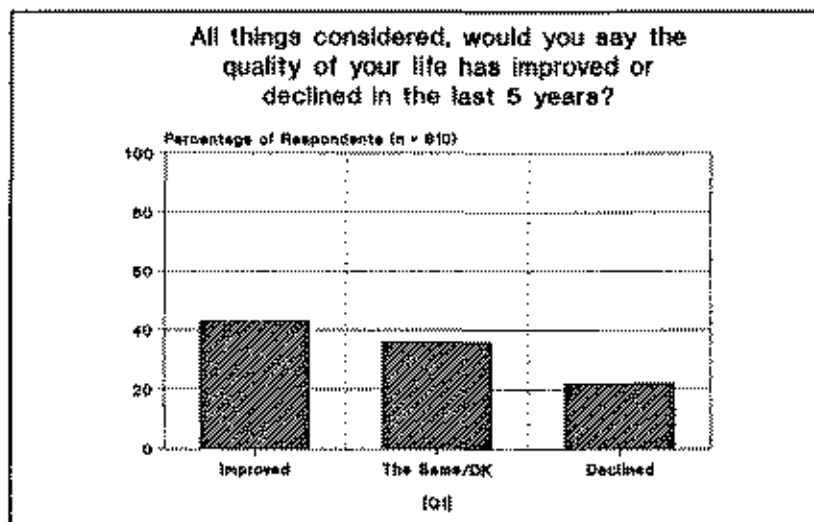
When respondents were invited to identify (in their own words) the ONE change they would like to see made by 2001 in this area, the most frequently mentioned changes concerned the economy -- particularly more and better jobs; it was mentioned by 30% of all respondents. Sixty percent of these respondents were optimistic that this change would happen. [Q5a]

However, when asked if they were satisfied or dissatisfied with efforts during the last decade to revitalize the area's economy, 51 % of all respondents reported being dissatisfied with these efforts ; [Q20]

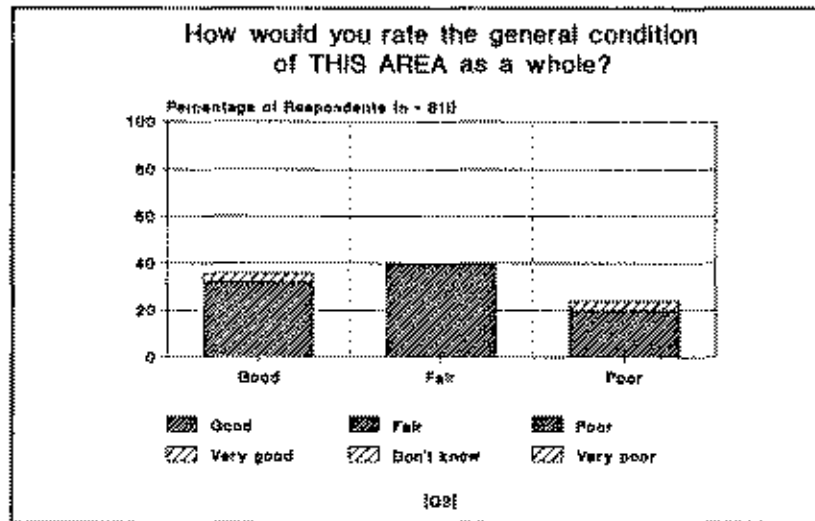


AND 65% of those respondents who had said that improving the region's economy was THE ONE change that they wanted to see happen were dissatisfied with efforts during the last decade!

We also asked respondents about their quality of life and their views about the "general conditions" of the nation and this area. Forty three percent told us that their quality of life has improved over the last 5 years. [Q1]



When asked to rate the general condition of the nation as a whole, more respondents answered "fair" (42%) than answered either "good" or "poor". [Q2] Note, however, that a relatively large proportion of respondents rated the nation's condition as "very poor."



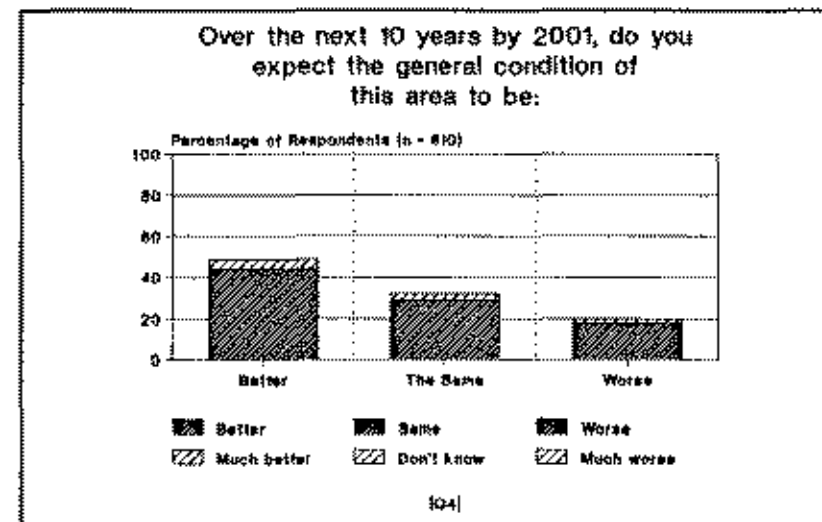
Asked about the condition of the area, respondents again said "fair" (40%) more than "good" or "poor". [Q3] Further analysis tells us that, in general, the optimists tend to be the younger, better educated, and higher income respondents.

Comparing individuals' responses to questions 2 and 3, we learn that while 56% of the respondents believe this area's "general condition" is about the same as the nation's, 29% say the area's condition is better than the nation's and 15% say it is not as good.

But there is a positive expectation: almost half of all respondents expect the area's general conditions to be better in the year 2001 than it is today. [Q4]

In many respects this set of responses is fundamental to understanding how Allegheny County residents are feeling about their community.

While people are generally optimistic supporters of their community and its future, they are not strongly supportive of the traditions, institutions, and leaders. As you are about to hear, they seem ready for some changes.



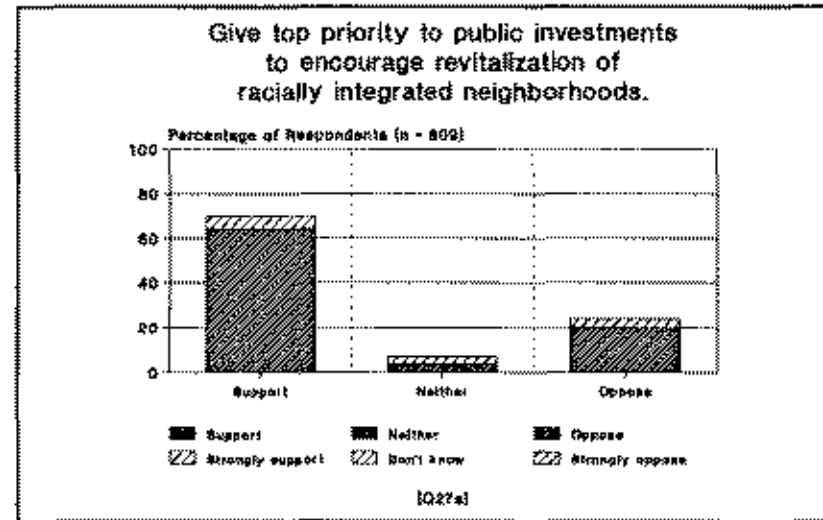
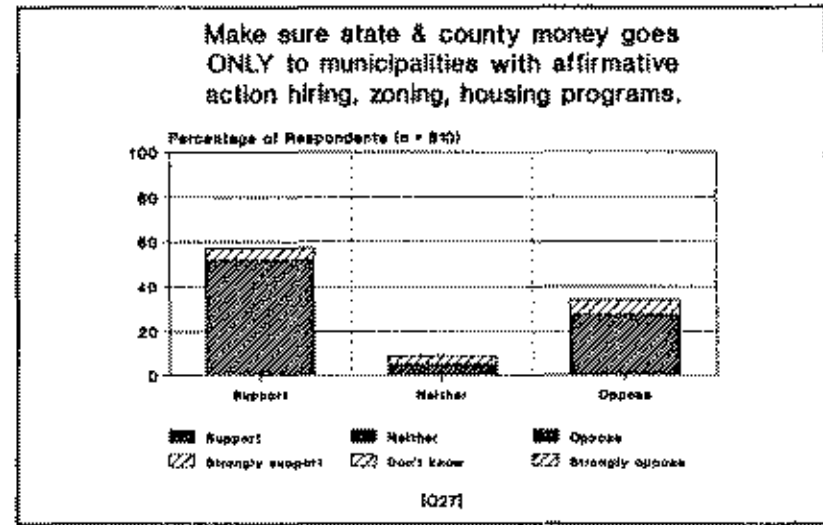
Racism is denied but actions are supported.

There is some evidence that white respondents are denying racial prejudice's influence on African Americans in Allegheny County. Exceptions, however, are apparent among respondents with higher levels of education and respondents who reported having familiarity with the AC2001 project's Our Future Our Choice or WQED's program, The Big Picture. Both of these efforts presented evidence of racial prejudices.

In spite of this "denial", there is considerable support for public actions that might help to ameliorate the outcomes of past prejudicial practices or injustices.

For example, 57% of all respondents supported the idea of "making sure that state and county money goes ONLY to municipalities with affirmative action hiring, zoning, and housing programs." [Q27]

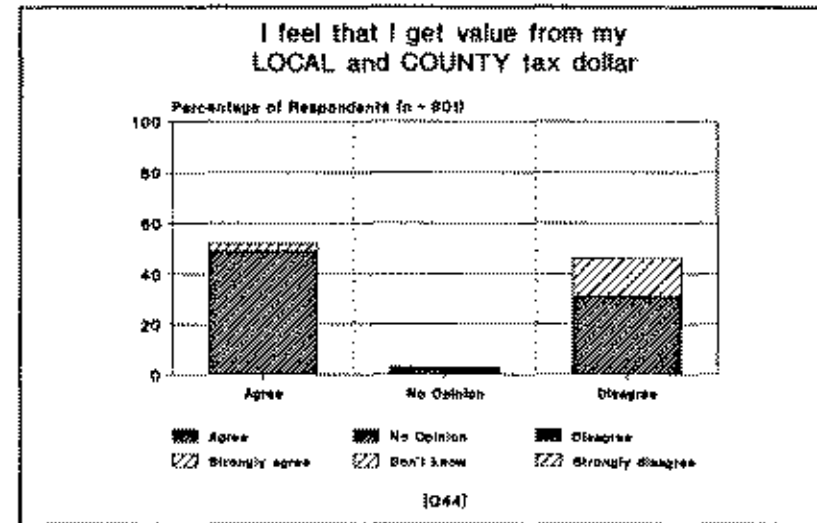
Almost 70% of all respondents supported "giving top priority to public investments that encourage the revitalization of neighborhoods which are racially integrated". [Q27a]



The strongest support for these actions comes from men and women who are under 40 years old, from people who are relatively well educated, and from non-whites.

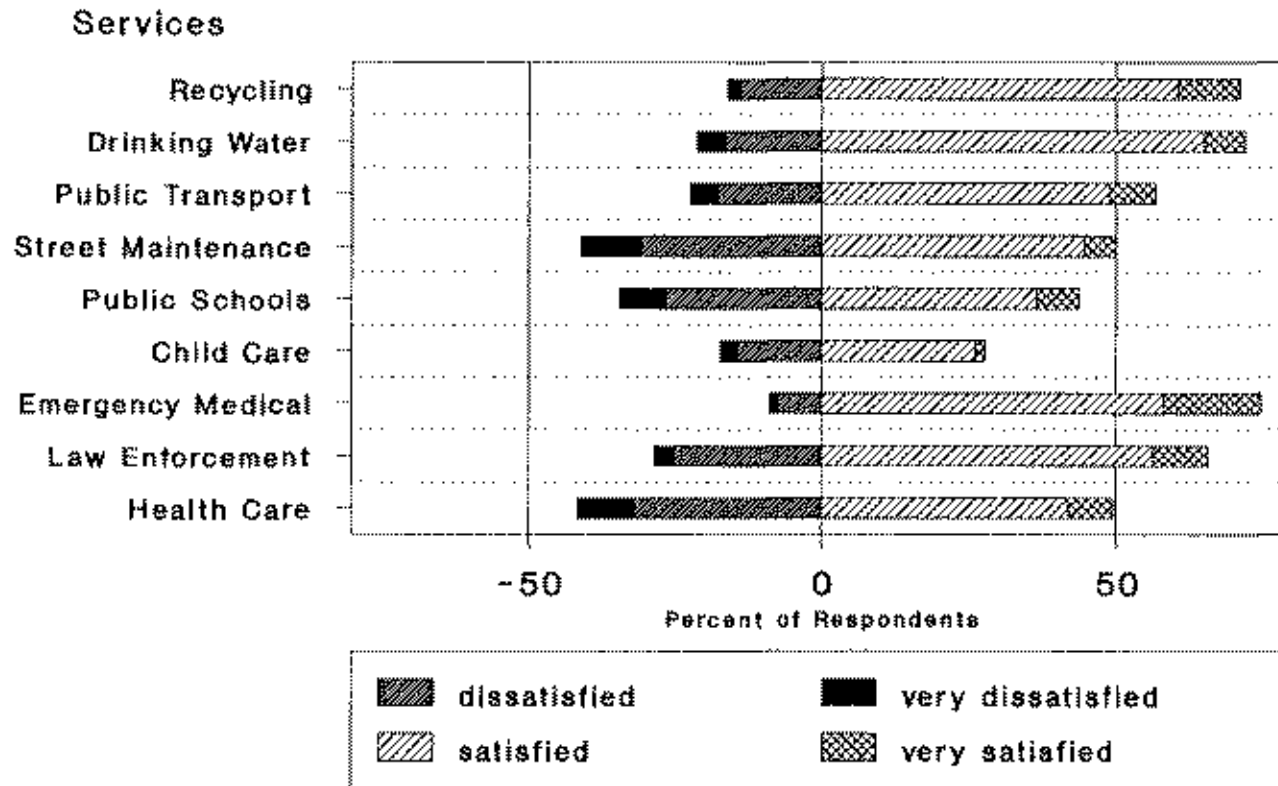
People are divided about getting "value for tax payments".

Allegheny County residents are equally divided with regard to getting value for their county and local government tax dollars; many of those who said they are not getting value for their tax dollars feel strongly about this matter. [Q44]

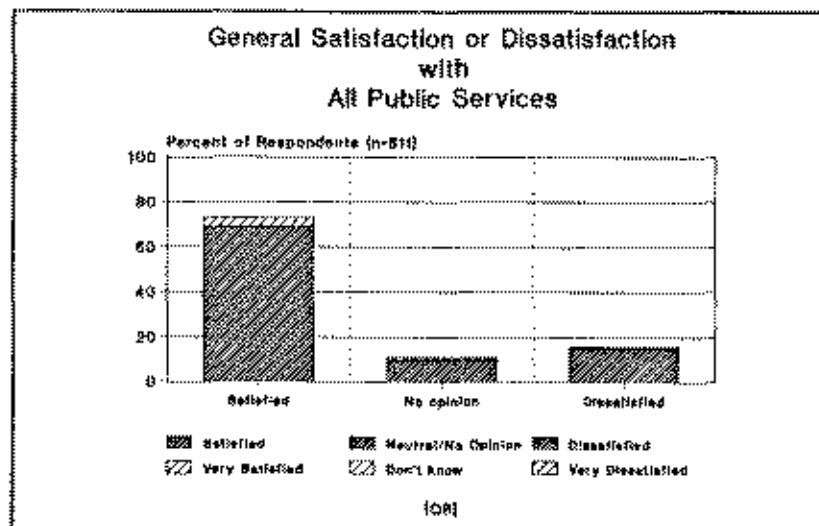


It is noteworthy that 68% of the respondents who reported being familiar with the AC2001 project expressed the view that they were getting value compared to 48% of the respondents who were not familiar with the AC2001 project. This may suggest that information about what is (or could be) done with locally raised revenues may be influencing resident's views of their local and county tax payments' value.

General Assessments of Services
 Percent of respondents who are
 dissatisfied or satisfied with services.



[Q07a1f]



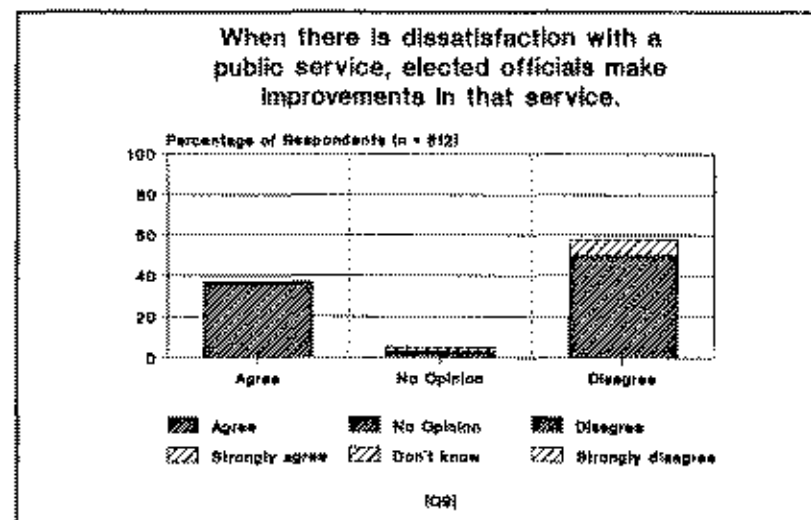
People express satisfaction with current public services.

Even though there is a mixed view of the value they receive for tax payments, 72% of the respondents claim to be satisfied with the delivery of public services in general. [Q8] The respondents' degree of satisfaction with particular services about which they were asked is also generally positive. [Q07all]

For example, 72% were satisfied with recycling and only 16% were dissatisfied. Many of those who were dissatisfied lived in smaller municipalities where recycling is not being done.

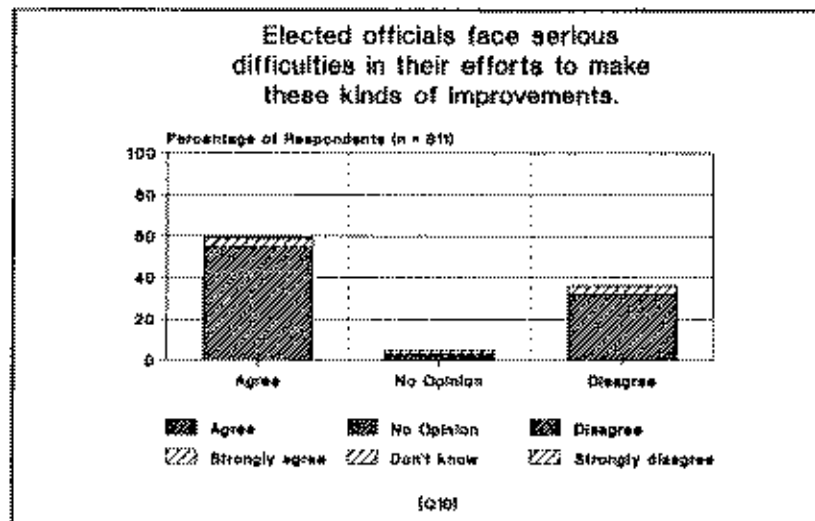
Elected officials and "the system" are not responsive.

When respondents were invited to disagree or agree with the notion that "when there is dissatisfaction with a public service, elected officials make improvements in that service." The majority of respondents (58%) disagreed with the statement (with 8% expressing strong disagreements). These respondents are saying that elected officials do NOT make improvements in public services when there is dissatisfaction. [Q9]



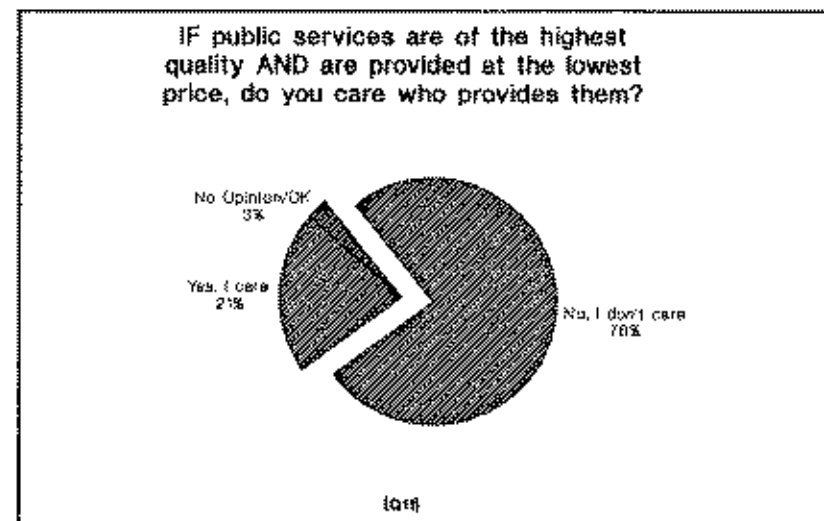
As a follow up question respondents were invited to consider another notion, namely that *"elected officials face serious difficulties in their efforts to make these kinds of improvements."*

Fifty five percent of the respondents agreed that officials face difficulties, with another 4% feeling strongly this way. Thirty two percent disagreed, with an additional 4% strongly disagreeing. [Q10]



When one considers the responses to both of these questions, it becomes evident that 90% of the respondents express some "complaint" about either elected officials, the system in which the officials operate, or both with regard to making improvements in public services about which people are dissatisfied. There is a view that changes, when warranted, are not being made. [Q09_10m]

Over three quarters of the respondents say they do not care who provides public services "as long as they are of the highest quality and are provided at the lowest price". [Q11]



Respondents' Views of Elected Officials

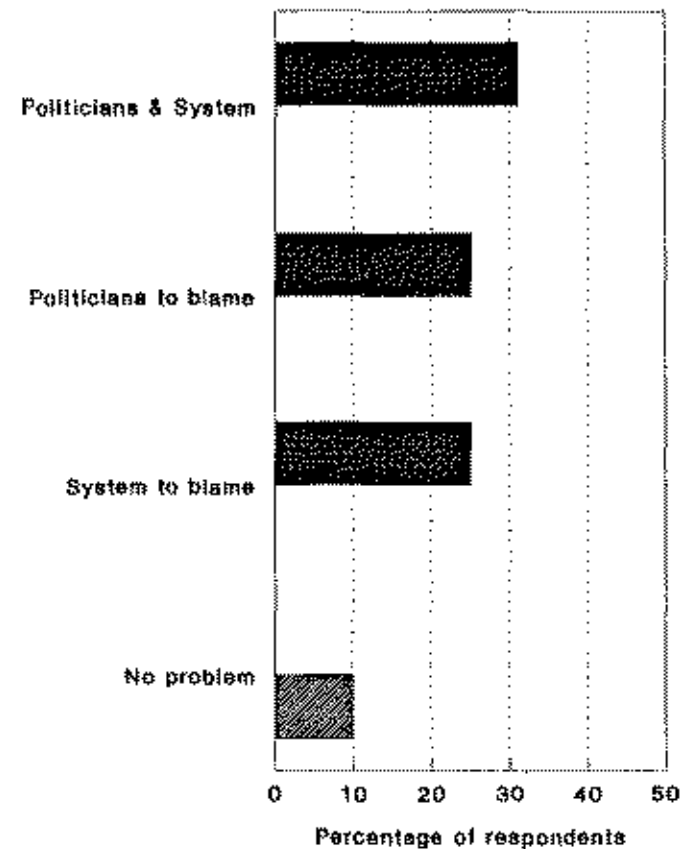
FOUR CHARACTERIZATIONS

POLITICIANS AND SYSTEM share blame for a lack of improvements in public services. Politicians **DO NOT** make the improvements, but they also **DO** face serious difficulties in their efforts to do so.

POLITICIANS ARE TO BLAME for not making improvements in public services. They **DO NOT** make improvements when there is dissatisfaction, and they **DO NOT** face difficulties in making improvements.

The **SYSTEM IS TO BLAME**. Politicians **DO** make improvements in public services, despite the fact that they **DO** face difficulties in their efforts.

There is **NO PROBLEM** in the improving of public services. Elected Officials **DO** make improvements, and they **DO NOT** face difficulties in doing so.



[Q09_10m]

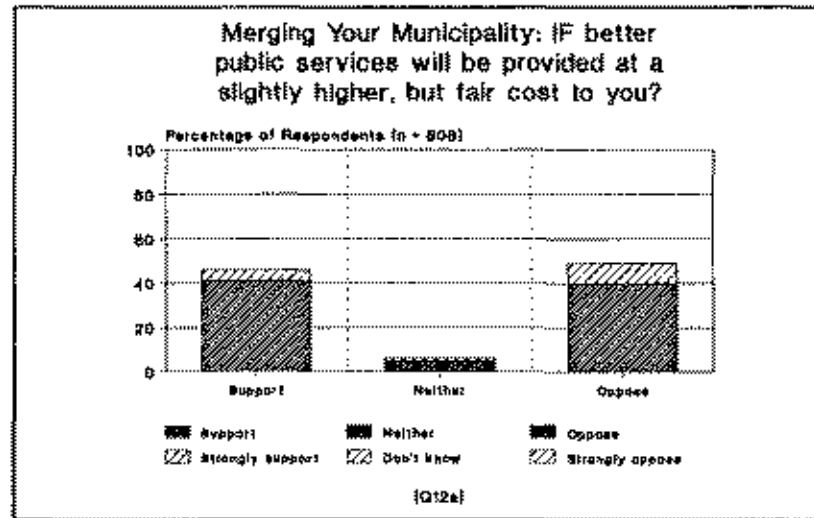
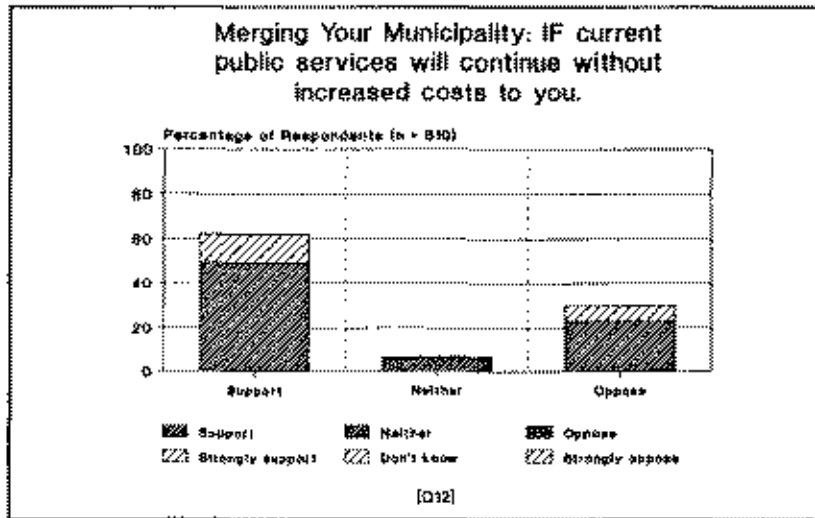
Municipal mergers have support.

Respondents were invited to indicate how strongly they would support or oppose the idea of merging their municipality and neighboring municipalities under two different assumptions: first, that *current public services would continue to be provided without increased costs to them* and, second, that *better public services would be provided at a slightly higher, but fair cost.*

Sixty two percent of the respondents said they would support the merger idea if there were no increased costs. Thirty percent stated opposition to this merger idea. [Q12]

Forty seven percent of respondents expressed support for the merger idea with improved services at a fair cost. Forty eight percent said they were opposed to this idea. [Q12a]

A clear majority of respondents support the concept of merging their municipality with a neighboring municipality. Only 30% of the county's residents oppose merging their municipality with a neighboring municipality. The supporters do, however, express some conditions; the most conspicuous of which is to maintain services and not to increase taxes or fees as part of the merger. [Q12_12am]



Respondents' Views of Municipal Merger

SUMMARY ON MERGING MUNICIPALITIES

43% supported merger, REGARDLESS OF DETAILS about level of service or cost.

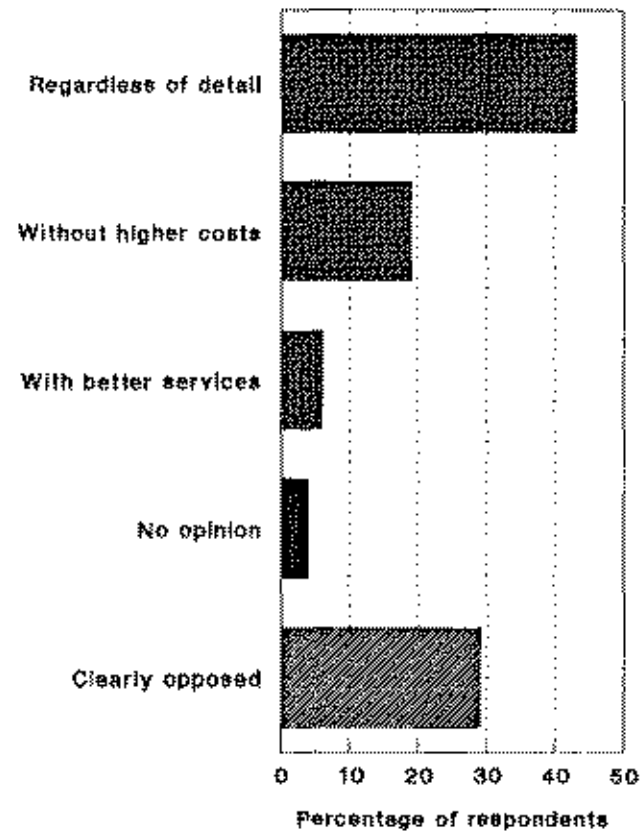
Almost 20% supported merger at the current service level WITHOUT HIGHER COSTS.

Six percent supported merger only WITH BETTER SERVICES provided at a slightly higher but fair cost.

Four percent expressed NO OPINION, or said they did not know.

The remaining 29% CLEARLY OPPOSED municipal merger under either circumstance.

SUPPORT FOR MERGER



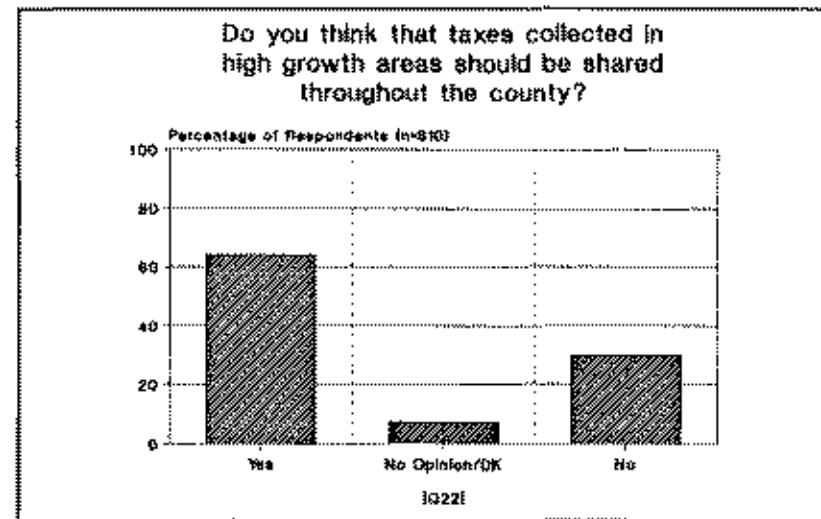
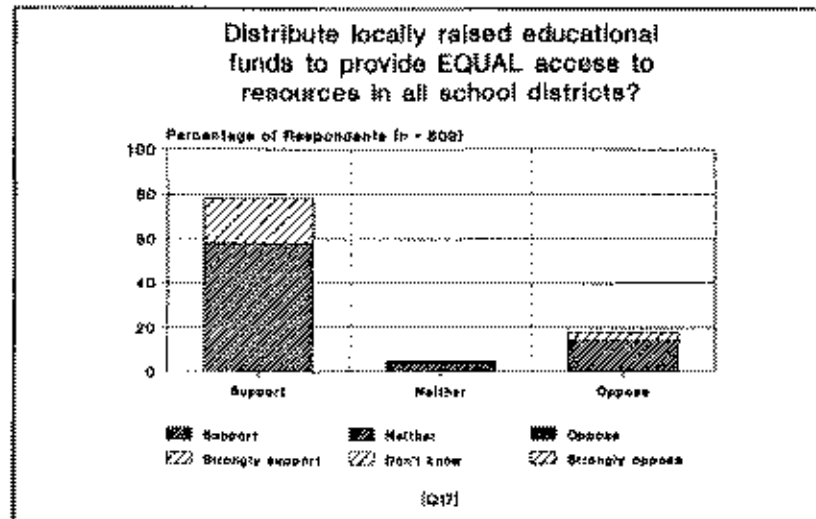
[Q12_12am]

Initiatives to share resources are supported.

Clear majorities of County residents support concepts of reallocating locally raised resources from "haves" to "have-nots".

For example, the idea of allocating education funds so that "kids from low income areas have EQUAL access to resources" was supported by 78% of the respondents. [Q17]

Almost two thirds of the respondents support the idea of sharing tax revenues that are collected in growth areas throughout the county. [Q22]

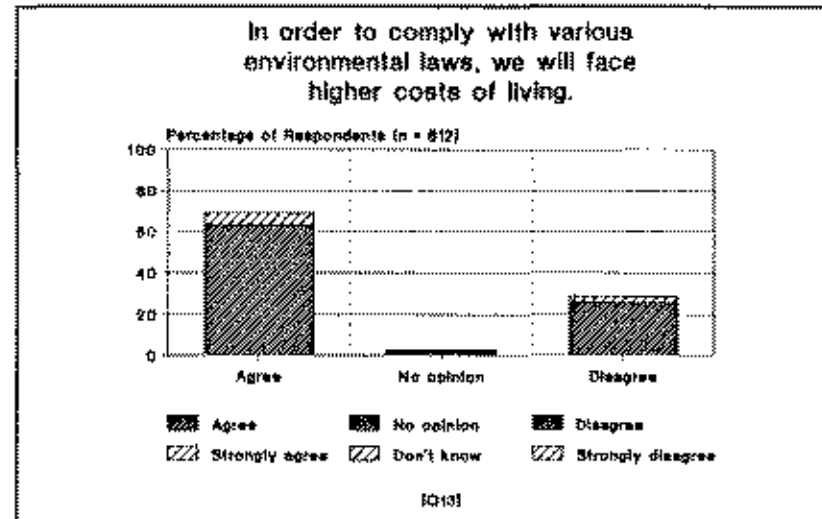
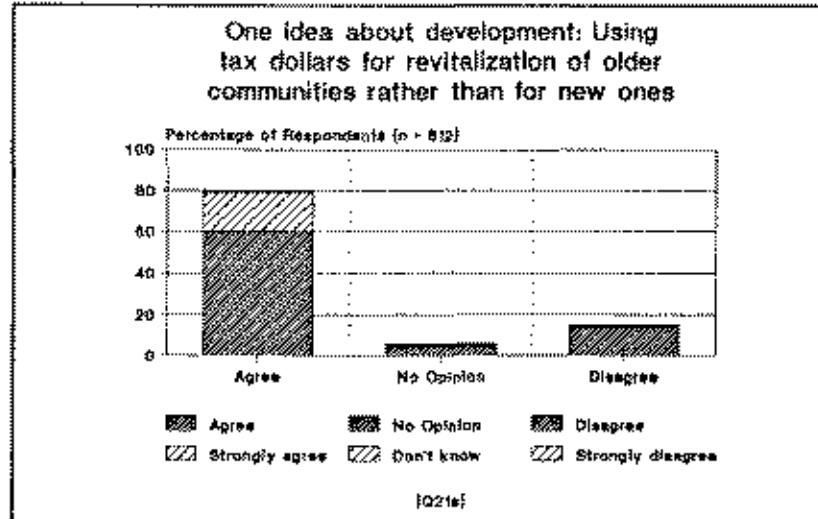


People also expressed willingness to incur added expenses and to do some things differently for the good of the community.

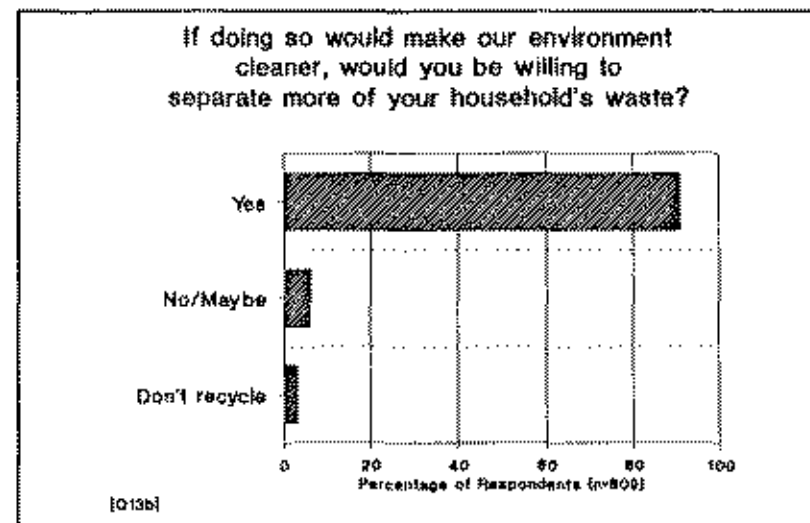
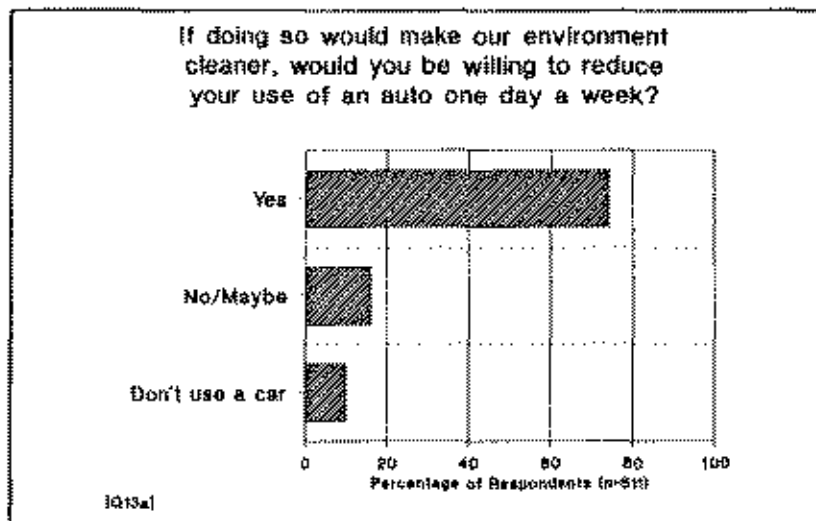
For example, respondents were asked about their support for environmental compliance: *"In order to comply with various laws for cleaner air, cleaner water, and the disposal of hazardous and toxic wastes, we will have to face higher costs of living."*

And 80% of the respondents support the idea of making investments in older communities as distinguished from new, growing communities. [Q21a]

Sixty eight percent of all respondents agree or strongly agreed with this premise; they perceive that compliance will require "higher costs of living". [Q13]



Another example is that seventy four percent of the respondents said they'd be willing to abandon the use of the automobile one day a week -- if it would improve the environment; [Q13a]

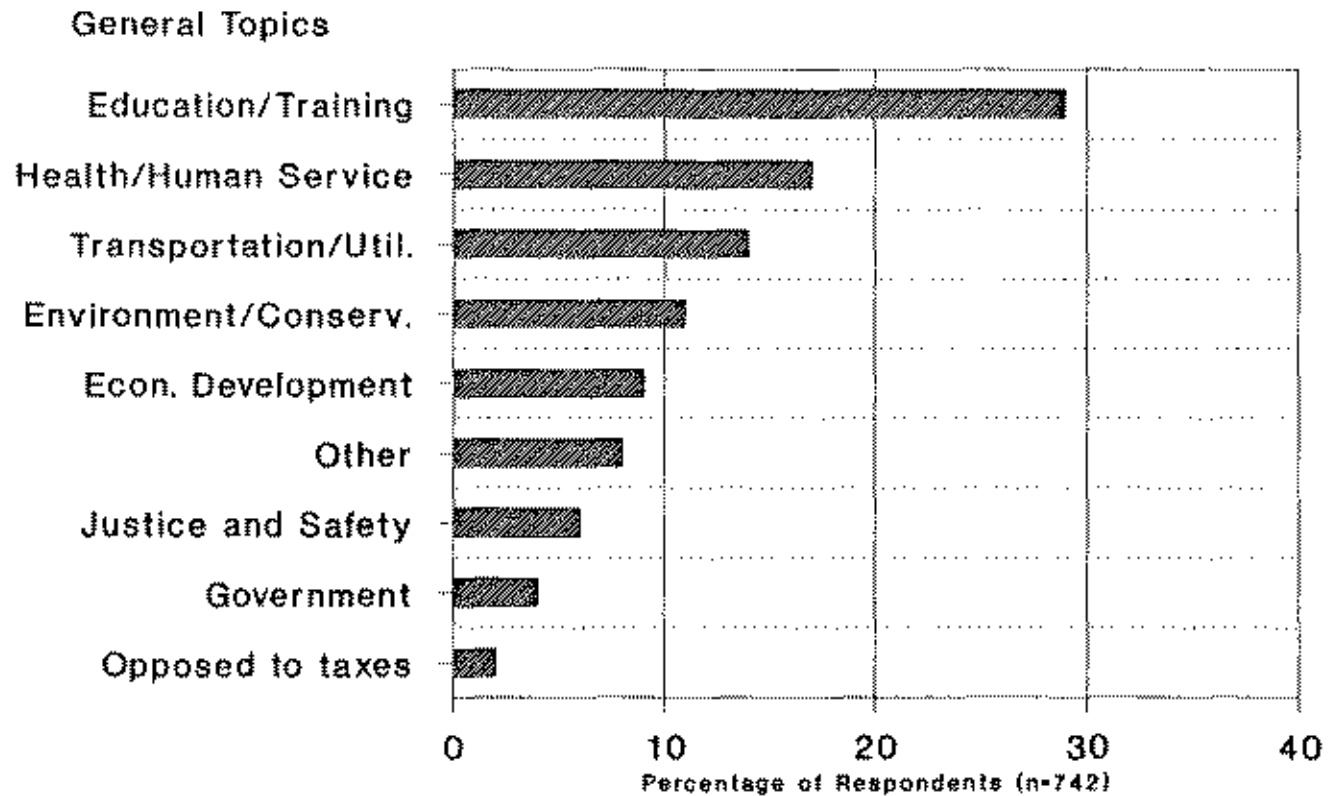


and 90% indicated their willingness to do more household trash separation and recycling. [Q13b]

People recognize that they will have to share their tax dollars and make commitments to improve this area.

Almost a third of the respondents indicated a willingness to support education and training programs -- if additional tax payments were essential; programs or projects concerned with health and human services, transportation, and environmental conservation or protection were also supported. [Q45]

On what sort of service, program, or project would you like any of your added taxes to be spent in the next ten years?

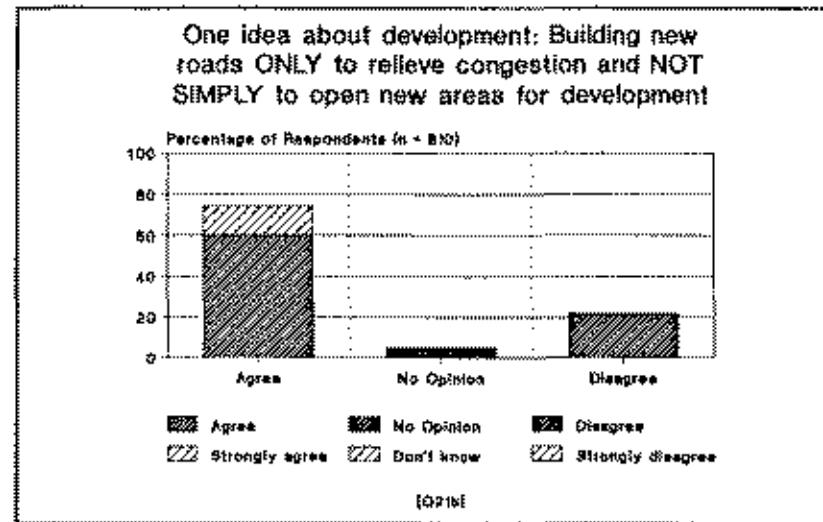


[Q45]

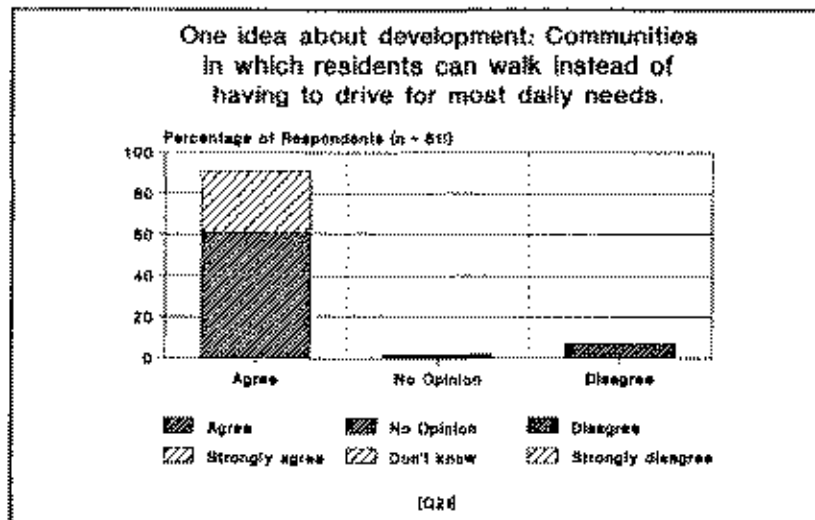
A surprising vision of an "ideal" community has been expressed.

People expressed some views about the nature of the area in which they'd like to live that suggested an "ideal" community like a small town or neighborhood.

Over 90% do not want to be dependant on the automobile for daily living; [Q21]

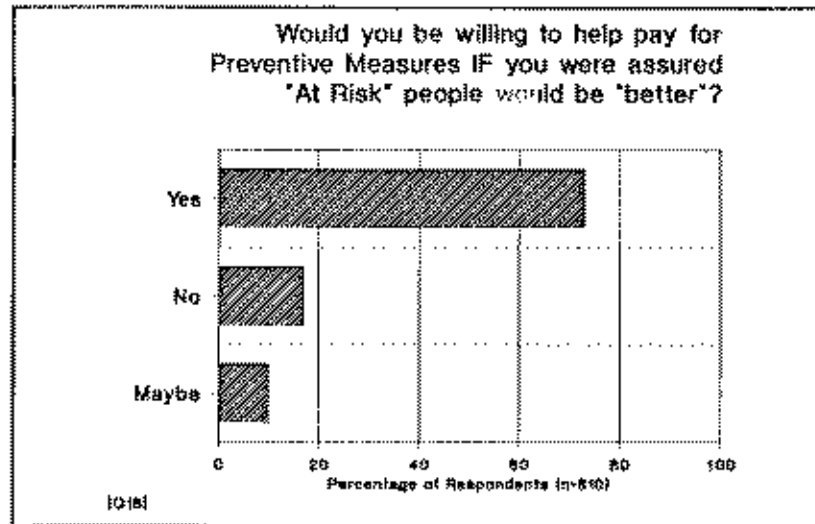


74% do not support building new roads to "open places for development"; they want traffic congestion to be reduced. [Q21b]



Investing is a strongly supported idea.

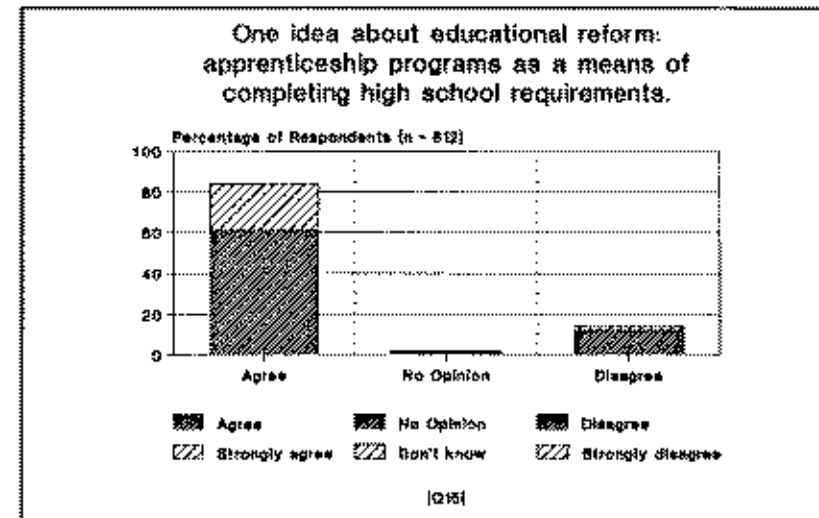
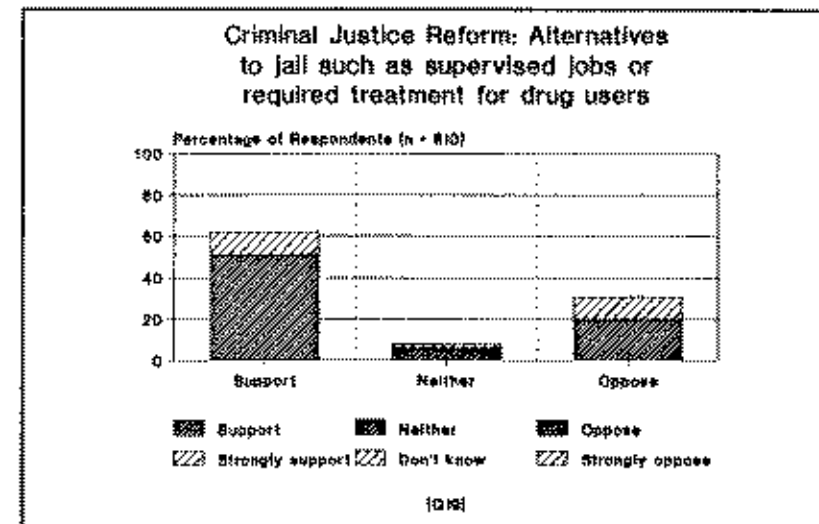
There was significant support from respondents for several ideas that will take time to show results; the notion of "pay now instead of paying later" was supported.



Helping to pay for preventive measures for "at risk" people was supported by 72% of the respondents. [Q18]

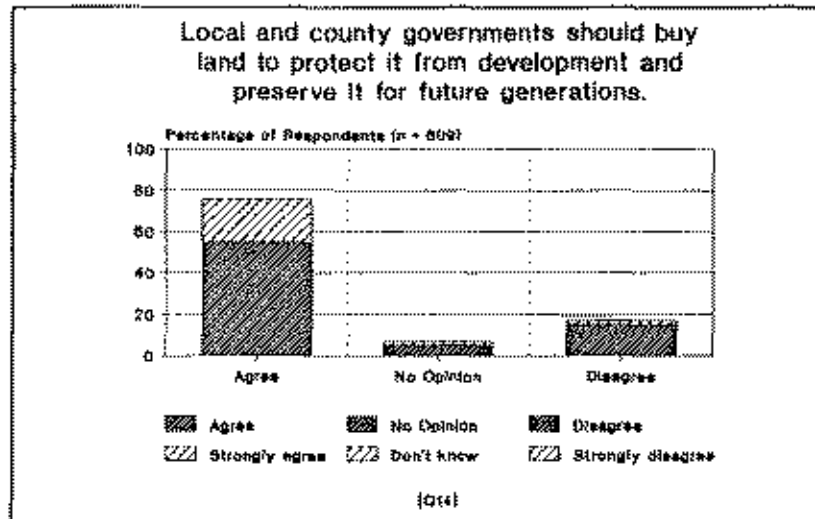
Having alternatives to jail such as supervised jobs or mandatory treatment for drug users was supported by 62% of the respondents. [Q19]

An alternative to traditional secondary education, apprenticeships, was supported by 84% of the respondents. [Q15]

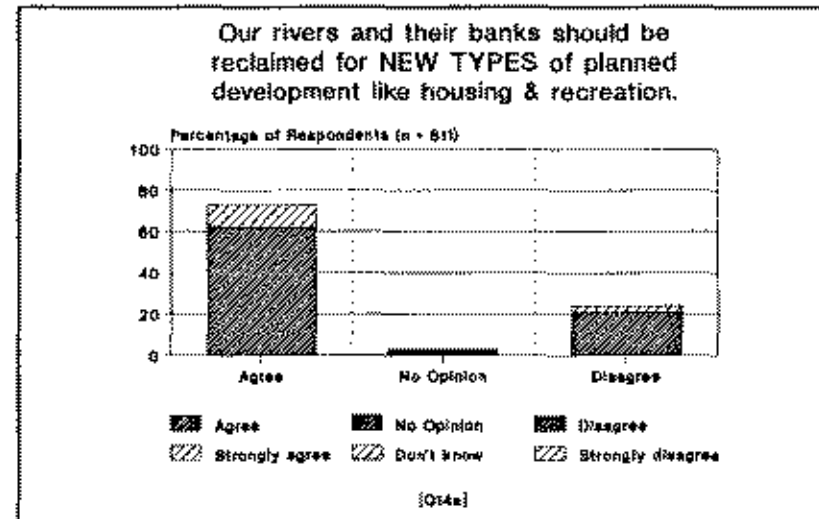


There was also significant support for local and county governments to make investments and to take more aggressive developmental actions.

Seventy six percent of all respondents agreed with the idea that "local and county governments should buy land to protect it from development and preserve it for future generations." [Q14]



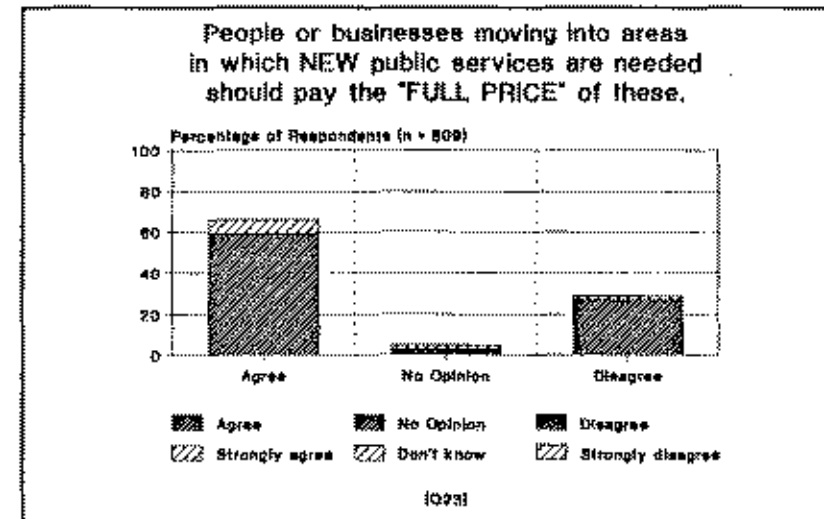
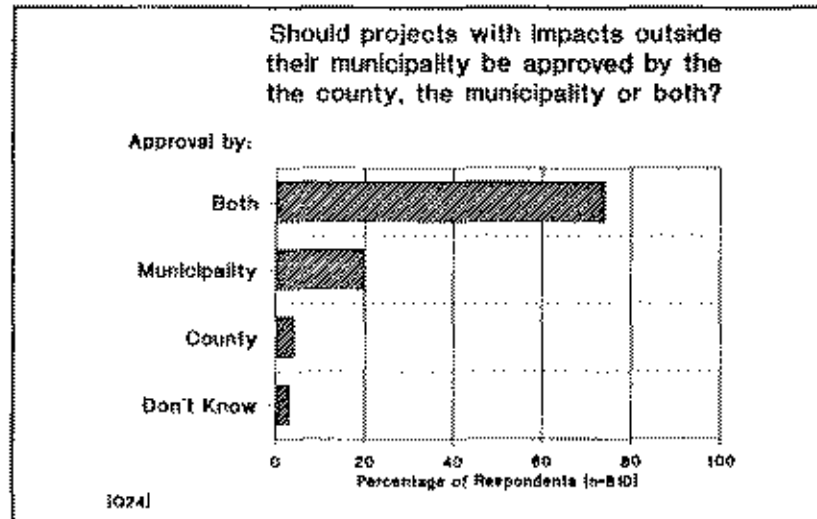
Seventy three percent of all respondents agreed with reclaiming our rivers and their banks " for NEW TYPES of planned development such as housing, recreation, transportation, etc..." [Q14a]



The idea of having residential and commercial development "pay its own way" was supported by two thirds of the respondents; this concept, which is associated with "impact fees", would increase the price of real estate development in locations on the urban fringe and possibly increase the opportunities for revitalization in already developed areas. [Q23]

Almost three quarters of the respondents support the idea of having projects with impacts outside of the municipality in which they are located approved by BOTH municipal and county governments. [Q24]

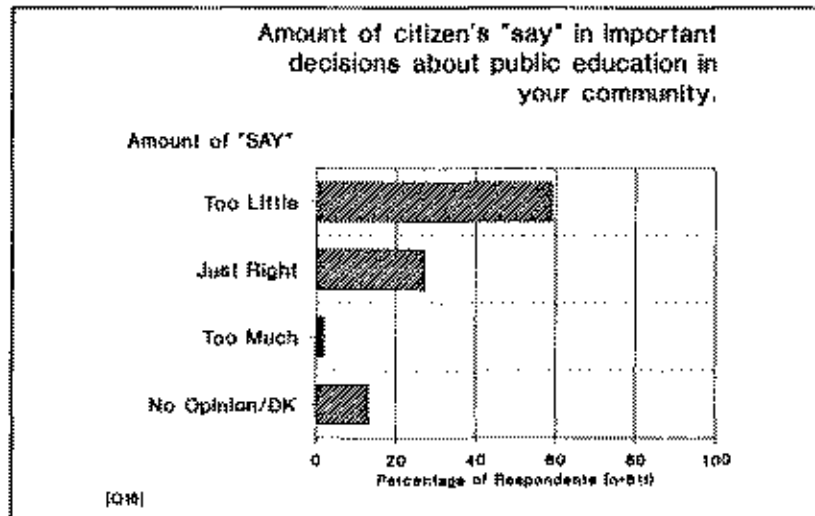
Taken together these supported actions, if implemented, could constrain development's suburban sprawl and create incentives for the re-investment in older communities that are in need of revitalization.



Having enough "say" in important community decisions is desired.

As noted earlier [Q45], significant proportions (30% of the respondents) support education and training programs as top spending priorities, if there were going to be additional taxes; however,

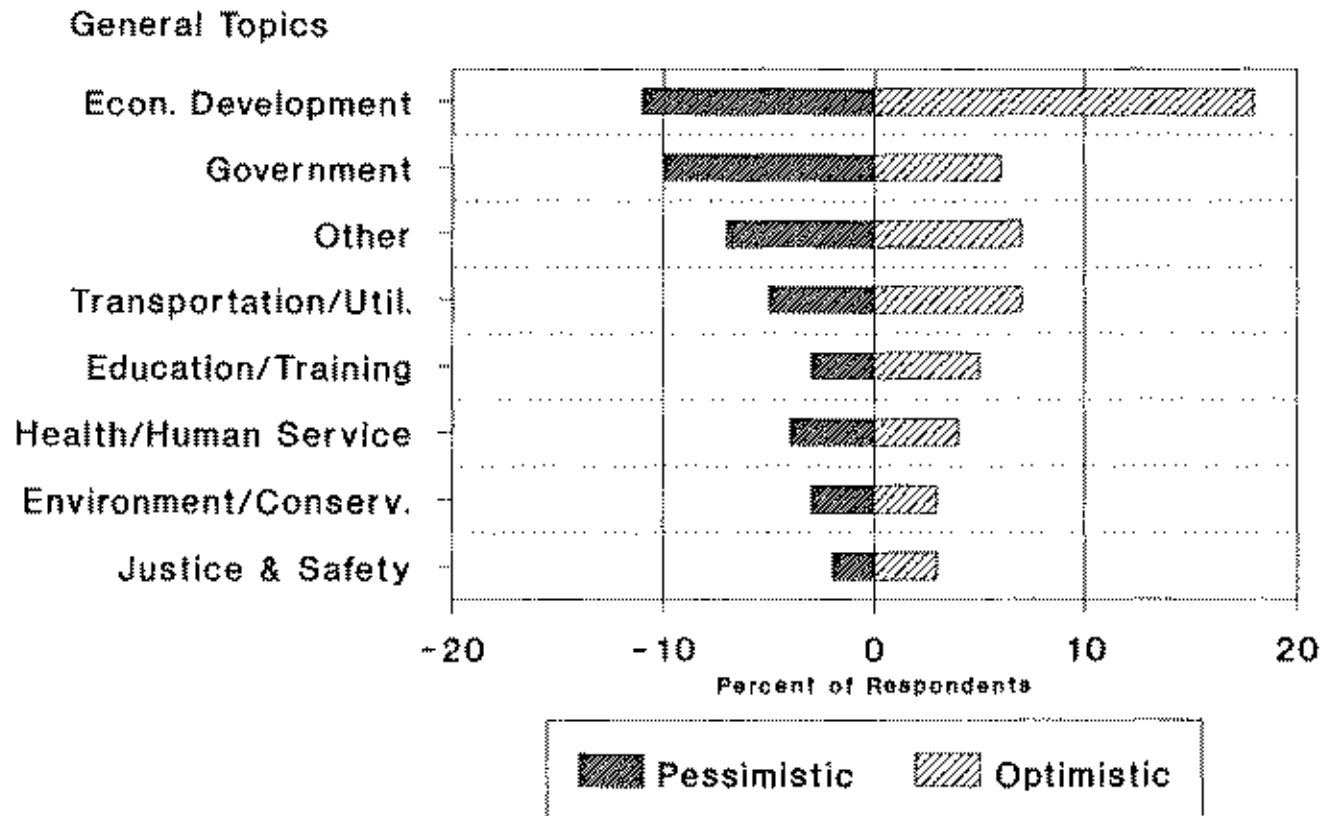
59% of all respondents feel that citizens have "too little say" in the important decisions that are made about public education in their communities. [Q16]



This suggests that people want more involvement in these important matters. Maybe increased citizen involvement is a condition for giving education and training such top priority support.

As noted earlier [Q5a], the second most frequently mentioned change that respondents said they would MOST like to see made by 2001 concerned government; 16% of all respondents mentioned something having to do with government change. About 57% of these people were pessimistic that the desired changes in government would be made by 2001.

If you could pick ONE thing you'd like to see changed in this area by 2001, what would it be?



[Q5a]

An Observation

It's been common wisdom for years that the people are ahead of their leaders or that successful leaders sense the direction of public opinion and position themselves near that "wave's crest". The notion of people leading leaders seems to be supported in this public opinion survey.

While it is tempting to steal the key line from the movie NETWORK ("I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!"), it would be an exaggeration to do so.

This County's residents **ARE DIVIDED** about the value they are getting for their tax dollar **BUT**, while they express satisfaction with current public services, they are not supportive of either their elected officials or the system within which these men and women work when it comes to making improvements. The people, with whom we spoke, support reforms of many kinds.

The people also seem to be supporting concepts that their leaders are hesitant (or, maybe, resistant) to propose:

using automobiles less,

reallocating public dollars from the wealthy to the less wealthy,

limiting urban sprawl,

**considering new methods of delivering public services,
being more accountable to citizens,
supporting long range human and environmental investments, and
considering municipal mergers.**

This public opinion survey should be considered as a point of departure for innovation. We know that, as some of the more controversial issues to which residents of Allegheny County have been invited to respond are included in AC2001's Action Plan and discussed in many public and private forums, elected, appointed, and publicly accountable officials and special interest groups will take positions that will often support traditions whose times may have passed. Their positions will influence public opinion.

If this same public opinion survey were conducted after these issues have been publicly debated, we should anticipate some changes in public opinion.

The citizens of Allegheny County are currently "Ready for Some Changes".

AC2001 PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

Sampling and Survey Methods

The Sample

This public opinion survey was conducted in 1991 between September 25th and October 22nd. Eight hundred twelve (812) telephone interviews were completed with a randomly selected adult resident of a randomly selected household in Allegheny County.

The set of telephone numbers that comprised the sample was generated from the University Center for Social and Urban Research's [UCSUR] Random Digit Telephone Sampling Frame. In this case, potential residential phone numbers within telephone exchanges included or partially included in Allegheny County were used.

Numbers were dialed up to a maximum of six times before final disposition of a given sample point was made. This technique ensures a reasonably equal chance for each household with a phone in Allegheny County to be included in this study.

A second-stage randomized selection of respondents among all adult household members (18 years of age or older) was accomplished using the industry standard "last birthday" method. This method attempts to minimize potential age and sex bias by randomizing the selection of an adult respondent within the household.

After contact was established, the average interview took sixteen minutes to complete. Many of the interviews took considerably longer since some people became very involved in telling us their ideas about Allegheny County's future.

Sample Disposition and Completion Rate

A sample of 3000 phone numbers was necessary to reach the proposed target of 800 completed interviews. The table on the following page summarizes the disposition of the sample.