

Citizen Survey Results

Fall 2005



A collaborative effort of

- The Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region
- Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Fox Cities Economic Development Partnership
- United Way Fox Cities

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Introduction and Purpose

In 2000-2001, the L.I.F.E. (Local Indicators For Excellence) study painted a broad picture of the quality of life in a 3-county area surrounding the Fox Cities. The study, which compiled results from citizen and leader surveys, panels of experts, and an analysis of secondary data, had broad impact and sparked numerous community efforts to address needs. In 2005-2006 sponsors repeat the work to understand trends and identify current conditions of the community, now calling it “Leading Indicators for Excellence (2006 L.I.F.E. Study).

This report presents results of the Citizen Survey. The primary research objective of the L.I.F.E. Fox Cities Citizen Survey is to gauge how citizens perceive the quality of life in the Fox Cities today and to compare how their perceptions have changed since the 2000 survey. The specific objectives are to compare average citizen perceptions of:

- the overall quality of life in the Fox Cities;
- their participation in activities in the Fox Cities;
- their areas of concern for themselves or their families;
- attitudes about the direction being taken by the Fox Cities

The L.I.F.E. Study examines nine aspects of quality of life: Education, Self-sufficiency (basic needs), Economy, Home (Children and Families), Environment, Leisure, Health, Community, and Safety.

Survey Methods and Sample

In replicating the previous approach, we conducted a mail survey of 2000 randomly selected persons residing in households in the Fox Cities. The survey incorporated items from 2000 along with a number of new items allowing for analysis of emerging issues and trends. It addressed each L.I.F.E. category along with participation in the community and concerns. The survey instrument appears in Appendix A.

Three hundred fifty residents responded to the survey yielding a return rate of 18% and a margin of error of + / - 5%. Percentages reported in the results must be considered using this range. When comparing characteristics of the respondents to the general population, the survey results are reflective of gender, geographic distribution, and racial characteristics. The results under-represent employed, less-educated, and households with children. This was true in 2000 as well. Table 1 shows the characteristics of those who participated in the survey.

For this reason we examined the possibility of weighting the sample to correct for the sampling bias. Considering the desire to compare findings to 2000 and the fact that response patterns did not change substantially after weighting, we elected to use the un-weighted survey results.

Characteristics of Survey Participants

	2000	2005	Regional population
Response rate	19%	18%	n/a
County of residence	6% Calumet 72% Outagamie 20% Winnebago	12% Calumet 47% Outagamie 31% Winnebago	Examined Fox Cities portion of the counties
Gender	42% Female 58% Male	52% Female 42% Male	51% Female 49% Male
Employment	24% No 71% Yes	38% No 54% Yes	29% No 71% Yes
Race	97% White	93% White	93% White
Children at home	63% No 37% Yes	69% No 26% Yes	34% No 66% Yes
Education	96% HS or higher	93% HS or higher	90% HS or higher

Results

Overall Opinions about the region

A higher number of persons indicated that the Fox Cities is an “Excellent” place to live in 2005: 40% versus 22% in 2000. Most respondents thought that the Fox Cities is a good or excellent place to live: on a scale of 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excels), the average rating was 4.24. While 58% like the direction in which the region is heading, over one-third are not sure.

Figure 1

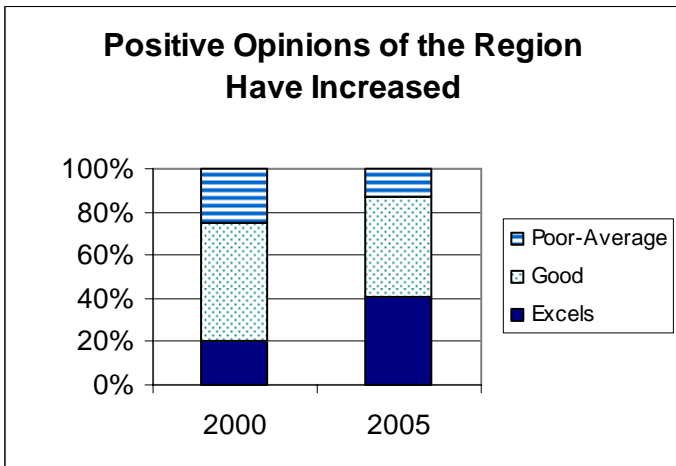


Figure 2

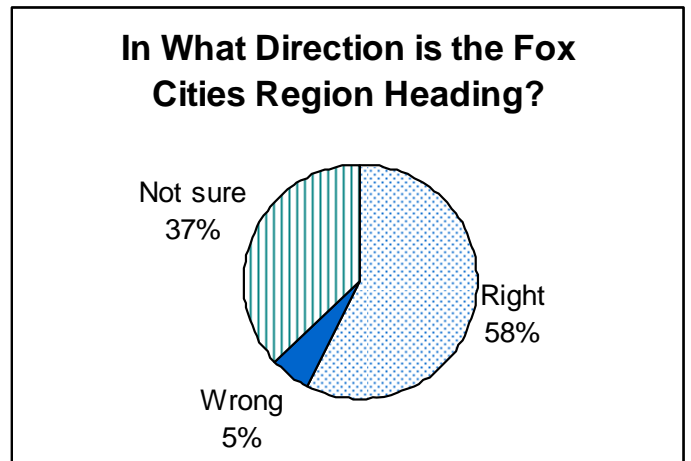
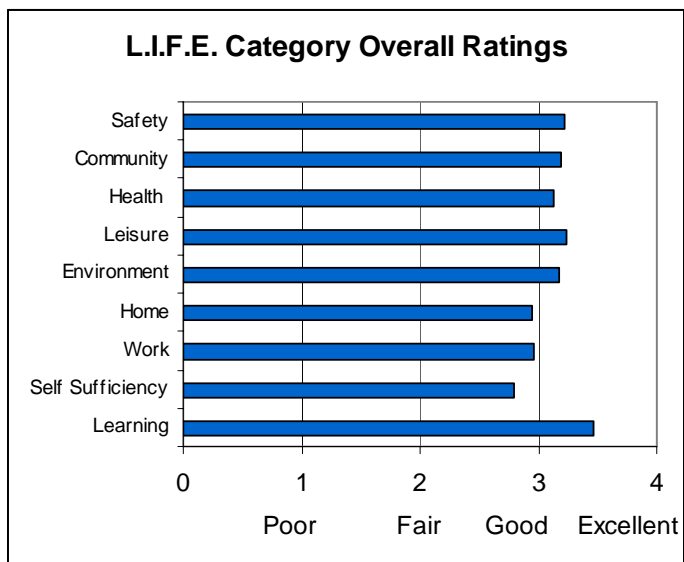


Figure 3



Comparing the nine categories of L.I.F.E. in the region, citizens were most satisfied with the education system (Learning) and least satisfied with meeting the overall self-sufficiency needs of poor residents. Not surprisingly all categories were rated “good.”

Figure 4

Residents perceived the region as an “Excellent” place for children and families and “Good” for retirees, singles, and people with disabilities. As a place for people of color, respondents perceived that the Fox Cities is between “Fair” and “Good.” In fact, 33% answered “Fair” or lower to this question (note that 98% of persons responding were Caucasian).

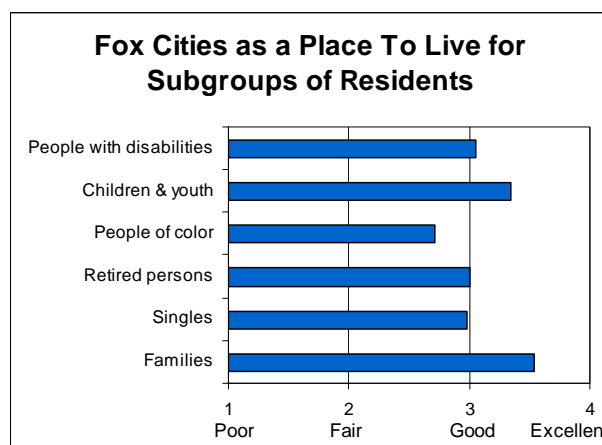
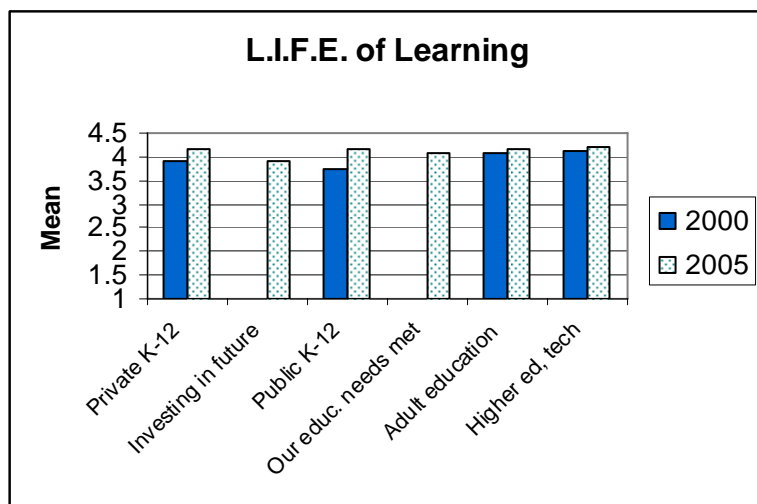


Figure 5

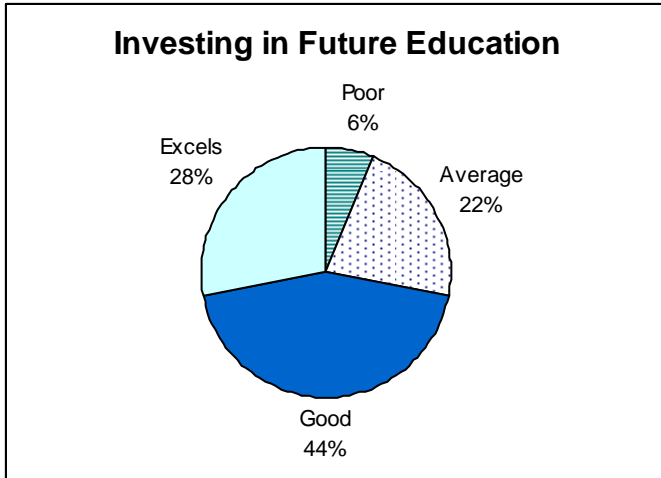


L.I.F.E. of Learning

Compared to 2000, the positive perceptions of Fox Cities’ education opportunities, including public, private, higher, and adult education remained high.

Three in four respondents reported that “the Fox Cities is a place that meets the education needs of my family.”

Figure 6



Seventy two percent believed that the region invests well in the future education system (“Good/Excellent”). This item revealed the greatest concern related to education, as 28% responded “Average” or “Poor.”

L.I.F.E. at Work

Figure 7 shows that in 2000, 54% of respondents said the region was good or excellent at meeting the employment needs of all citizens. In 2005 the number had dropped to 41%.

A number of new items were included in the 2005 survey. Over half believed that the Fox Cities provided good jobs *for their own families*, although 9% rated the region as poor in that regard.

Figure 7

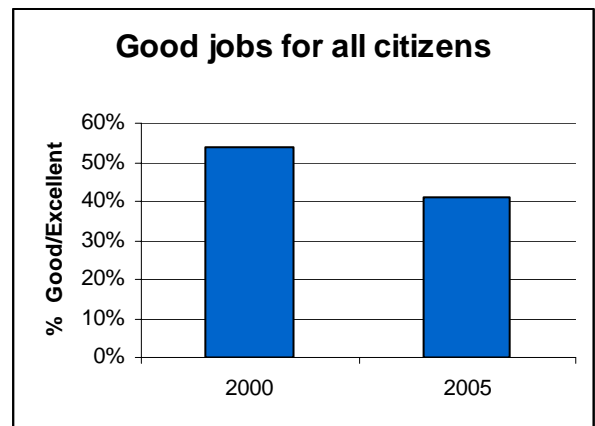


Figure 8

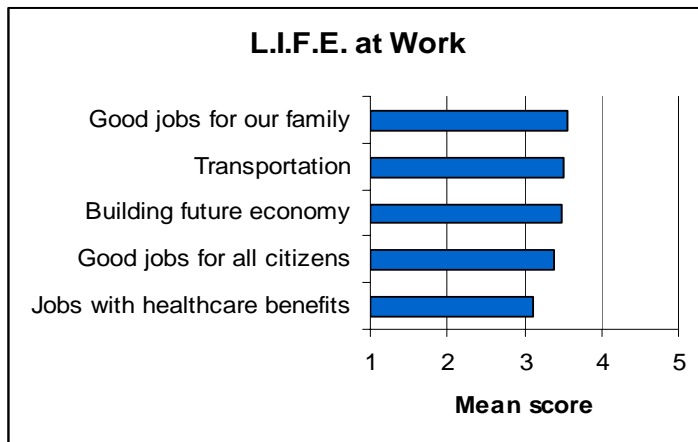


Figure 8 shows that jobs with health care benefits received the lowest rating of any item within the L.I.F.E. at Work category. Only 30% gave the region good/excellent ratings on providing jobs with health care benefits with 24% indicating that this aspect of L.I.F.E. is “Poor.”

A Healthy L.I.F.E.

Health care ratings remain in the generally in the “Good” range and were comparable to 2000. Slight improvements shown are within the margin of error.

However, 34% of respondents replied “Average” or “Poor” in rating access to health care for all persons (not asked in 2000). Forty-five percent replied “Average” or “Poor” in addressing problems of substance abuse (a slight improvement since 2000).

Figure 9

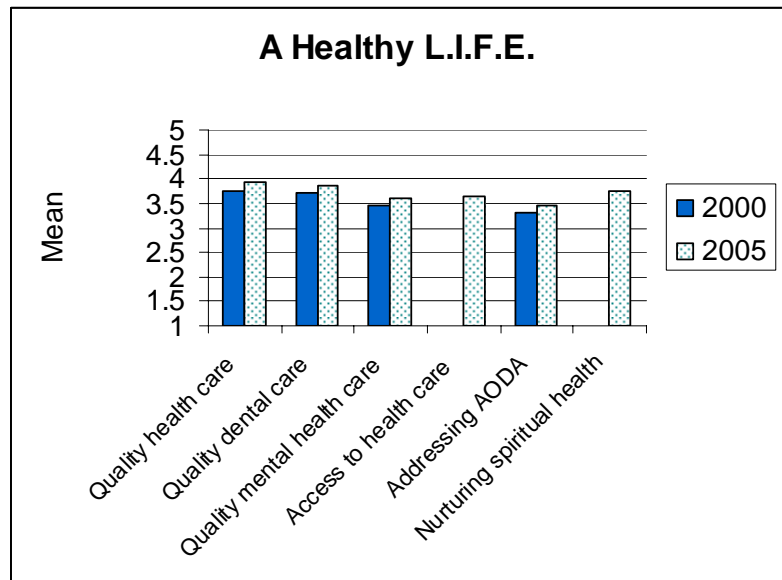
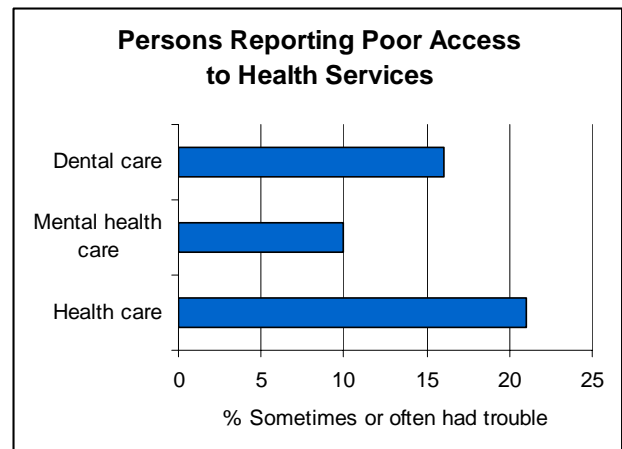


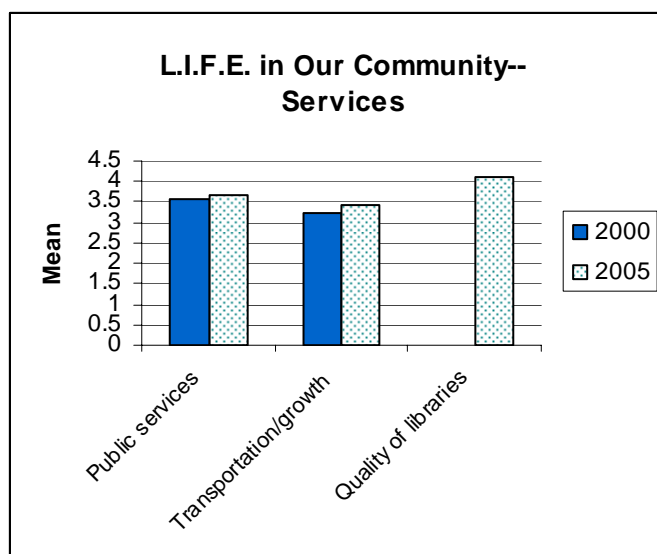
Figure 10

For this survey, we split apart the question asking about access to different types of health services (in 2000 we asked a combined question). More than one in five persons surveyed (21%) had difficulty obtaining medical services at least some of the time (6% of which stated “all” or “most” of the time).



L.I.F.E. in the Community

Figure 11



Quality of libraries received an average score of 4.1 out of the highest possible score of 5. Mean ratings fell in the same range as in the 2000 survey. People are more satisfied that transportation needs are being addressed to keep up with growth: 43% rated transportation improvements as “Good” or “Excellent” compared to 34% who did so in 2000.

While a large number of respondents reported that their own families were treated with respect, people were less sure that the Fox Cities is a place where people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds get along well (mean= 3.3) or where persons respect each other regardless of their differences (mean = 3.25).

L.I.F.E. at Leisure

Figure 3

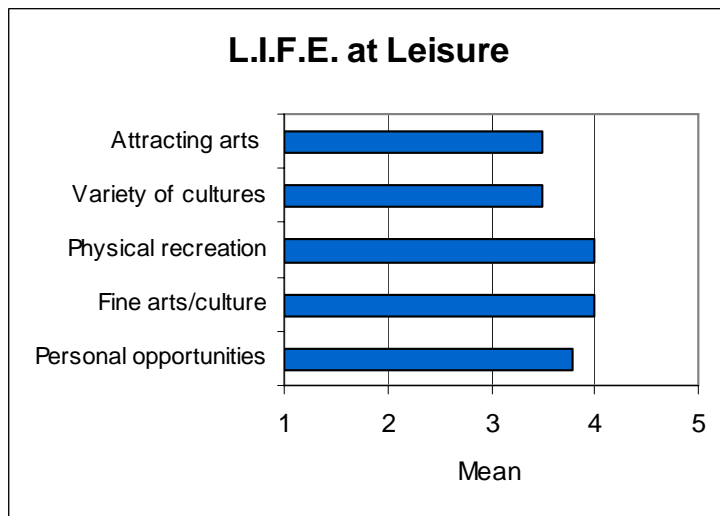


Figure 4

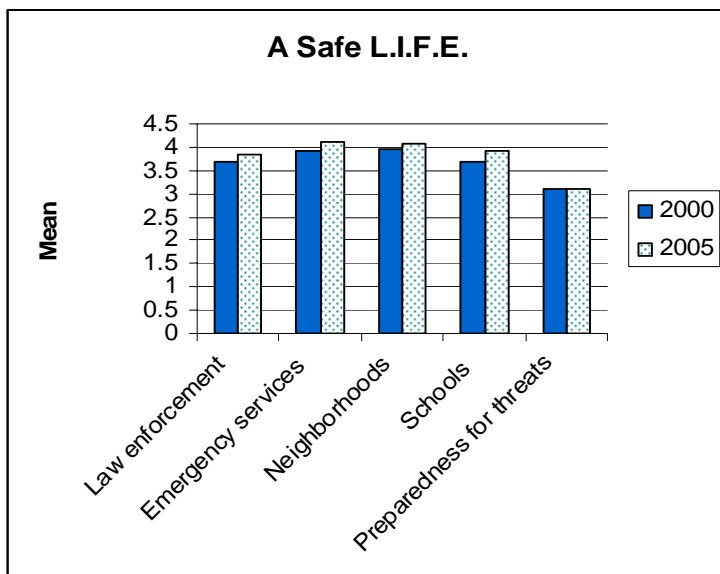
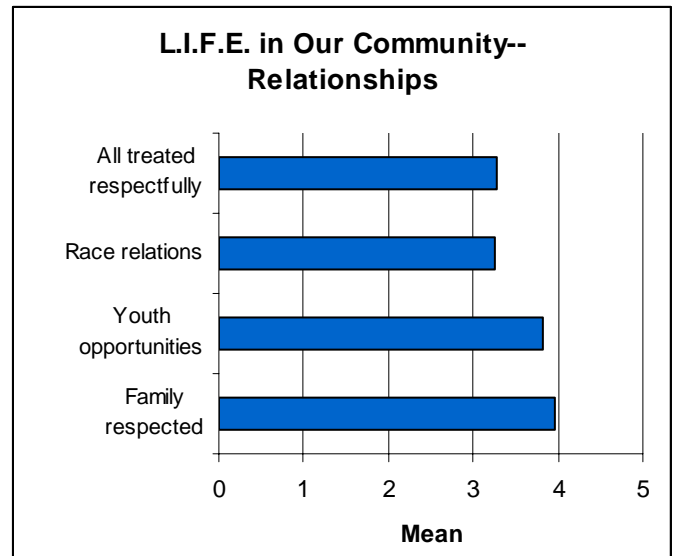


Figure 2



Recreational and arts/cultural opportunities were rated highly on the survey (mean=4.0), and respondents were positive about meeting their own personal interests for leisure time activities (mean 3.8).

Less than half of respondents believed that the Fox Cities is a place that is good at attracting talented persons in the arts or at providing leisure opportunities that reflect a variety of cultures.

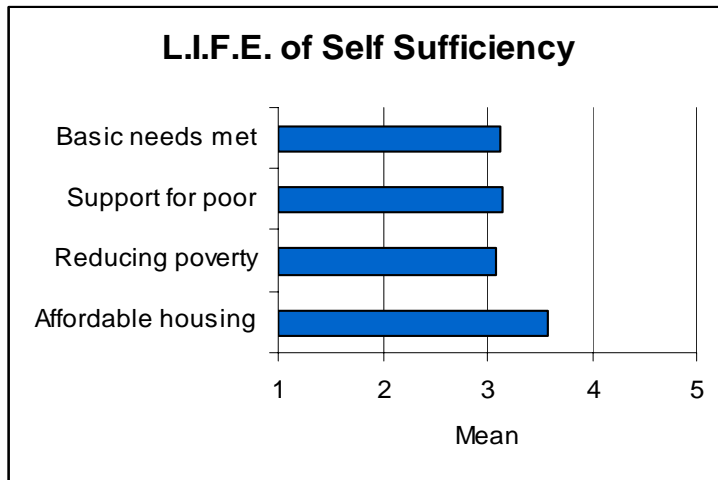
A Safe L.I.F.E.

As in 2000, the survey showed strongly favorable reactions to law enforcement, emergency services and the safety of schools and neighborhoods.

These high ratings do not occur on the issue of preparedness for a major safety threat (natural disaster or terrorism), with a mean of only 3.1. Interestingly, almost 1/3 answered “no opinion” to this question indicating they did not know whether or not their region is well prepared for these threats. Only 24% answered “Good” or “Excellent” when rating preparedness.

L.I.F.E. of Self Sufficiency

Figure 5



Only 5% of survey respondents indicated that the Fox Cities region “Excels” in efforts to reduce poverty.

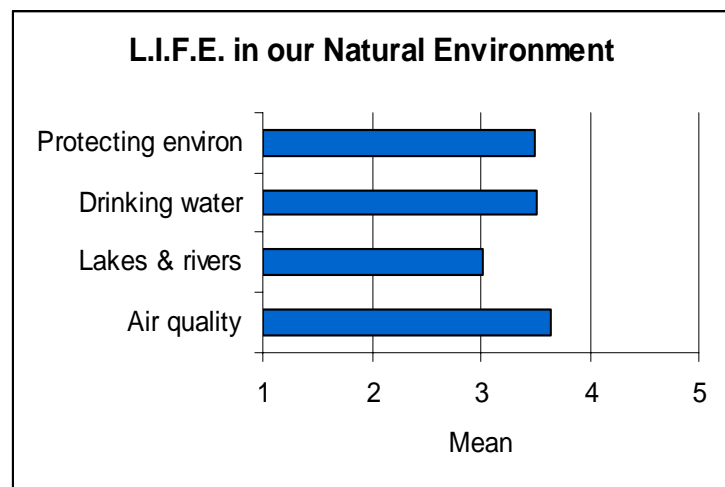
The category of self-sufficiency saw some of the lowest ratings on the survey. As shown in Figure 15, citizens believed that the Fox Cities region is only “Average” as a place for affordable housing and issues related to poverty.

When asked about “availability of “affordable, quality housing for your family,” the mean rose to 3.6 with 45% of survey respondents indicating “Average” or lower.

Figure 6

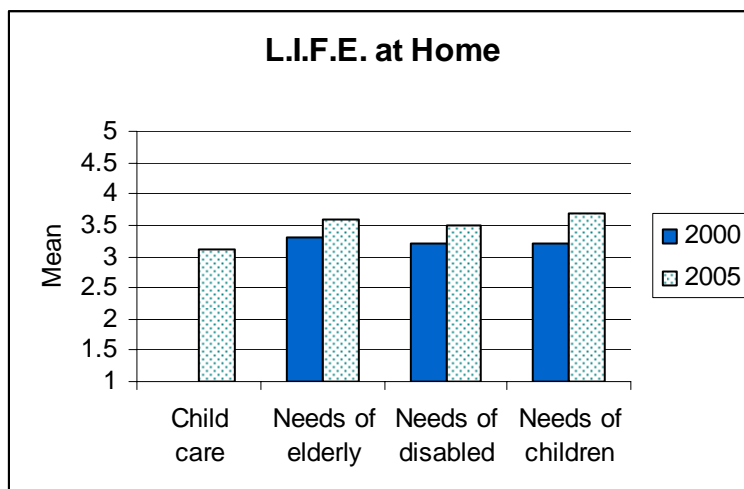
L.I.F.E. in our Natural Environment

As shown in Figure 16, ratings of the natural environment remained in the “Good” range. Ratings of air quality rose slightly (mean of 3.6 in 2005 versus 3.4 in 2000) while water quality remained nearly identical.



L.I.F.E. at Home

Figure 7



Respondents with children in the home reported that the Fox Cities region is “Average” when it comes to being able to obtain “quality child care at an affordable cost.”

Ratings for how well the region meets the needs of persons with disabilities, seniors, and children showed slight improvement since 2000 but still fell in the Good/Average range.

L.I.F.E. Experiences

For those who worked, average commute time rose from 14 minutes to 16 minutes one-way.

Figure 8

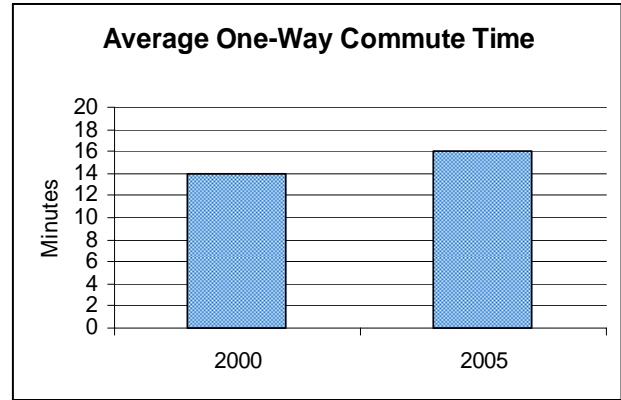
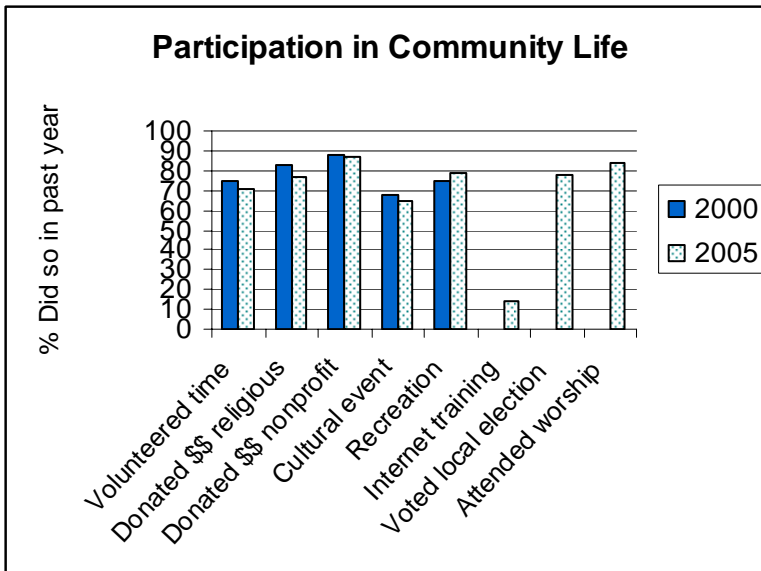


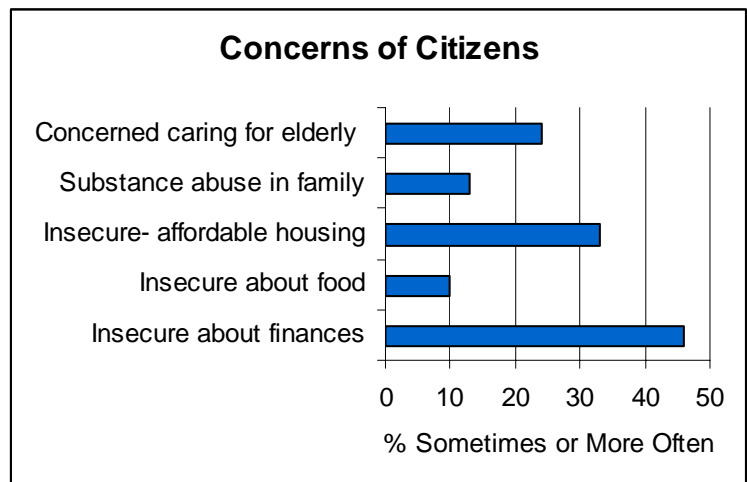
Figure 9



Participation in community life remained similar to rates observed in 2000. About 8 in 10 persons surveyed reported having voted in a recent local election and having attended a religious or worship service in the past year.

Figure 20

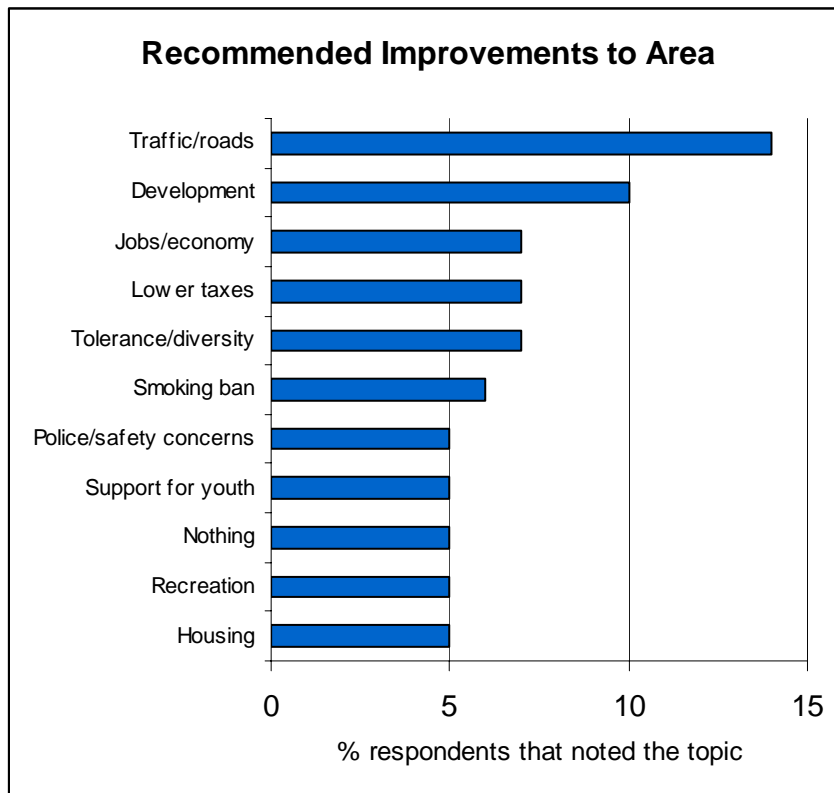
Two items stood out when examining citizen concerns: housing and financial security. About half reported worrying about family finances sometimes or more often. In the previous survey, 6% of citizens worried about becoming homeless. The 2005 survey asked instead about whether the person worried about “being able to afford adequate housing to meet my family’s needs.” One-third of the survey participants worried “Sometimes” or more often about adequate affordable housing.



“If you could change one thing...”

Citizens were asked “If you could change one thing about the Fox Cities Region, what would you change?” Figure 21 shows the results, with the percentage of all respondents reported (n=350). By far, traffic and congestion topped the list of things to change (n=27), followed by comments related to controlling the rate or nature of development to the region (including consolidation of metro-area services). Next in order were jobs, the need to lower taxes, and suggestions related to improving tolerance (not only racial/ethnic, but for those with different views). The smoking ban generated comments from citizens on both sides of the issue.

Figure 10



“Anticipate traffic issues before allowing major development.”

“Jobs where there is security and honesty with decent pay.”

“Assistance for families that mostly can maintain their current bills but occasionally have difficulties.”

Comparative Findings

Finally, we examined the highest and lowest scores across all nine L.I.F.E. categories, with the results shown in Figure 22. Emergency services, Recreation, Libraries, Healthcare Services, and Education (all items) scored highest on the 2005 L.I.F.E. Survey.

Conversely, the following individual items scored lowest in the minds of citizens: Water in lakes and rivers, Efforts to reduce poverty, Emergency preparedness, Availability of affordable child care, and Availability of jobs with health care benefits.

In conclusion, the Citizen Survey yielded a number of issues to examine further. Results must be interpreted with caution due to the fact that respondents tended to be more educated and involved in the community than the average citizen, and fewer had children in the home.

Figure 11

