Summary of 2001-2002 Twin Cities Area Survey
Regional Rating and Problems, Transportation Concerns and Growth and Development Issues

Background

In all but two years since 1982, the Metropolitan Council has asked residents of the seven-county metropolitan area to rate the region's quality of life and to identify the major problems it faces. The Council also regularly asks specific questions to determine how the public perceives its programs and activities. This activity is part of the Council's broad-based efforts to monitor conditions in the region. . The general attitudinal measures provided in this survey serve as a regional barometer in giving early warning signs of problems. They are especially useful for monitoring progress toward achieving long-range goals

The latest survey focused on growth-related issues. Questions were asked about people's receptiveness to the kinds of development patterns supported by the Council's Smart Growth Twin Cities initiative. The Smart Growth goals of the Council are ultimately concerned with something very general – the well-being of the region's citizens. From general measures more detailed questions can be devised to look more closely at areas of concern. These attitudinal indicators can help focus objective measures on identified problems.

The survey is a random phone survey of about 800 households conducted by the University of Minnesota Center for Survey Research. Interviewing began in late 2001 and was finished in early March 2002. The numbers below are rounded and thus may not add exactly to 100%. Given a + or – 3.5% range for statistical reliability (the commonly used standard) rounding is appropriate. In the past these surveys were begun in the fall and completed either before or shortly after year's end. In recent years they have started later and most of the interviewing has been done in January and February. For that reason subsequent surveys are going to be referred to for the year the survey was completed. Surveys done in the past few years will show both starting and finishing date so that the time series does not appear to be missing a year.

Regional rating and major problem identification

QA1 – "How would you rate the Twin Cities as a place to live as compared to other metropolitan areas in the nation – do you feel the Twin Cities area is a much better place, a slightly better place, a slightly worse place, or a much worse place in which to live?"

The overall regional rating (how people thought we compared to other metro areas as a place to live) rebounded from last year's modest drop. This year's rating is pretty similar to the average over the past 20 years. (See attached graph).

QA2 – "In your opinion, what do you think is the SINGLE most important problem facing people in the Twin Cities metropolitan area today." (Open ended, all responses recorded verbatim and then coded to categories afterwards for time series analysis).

These responses are grouped using a general four-category summary and one with about a dozen more specific categories. The four general categories are: development (including transportation, other (including education, the environment and health). Because of the economic downturn that just preceded this survey, the concerns about the economy jumped sharply—from 16% to 23%.

Since only one choice is allowed when identifying the number one problem, if responses go up in one area, they have to go down somewhere else. Even so, the development issues only dropped a point and were still by far the most important set of concerns with 42% naming one of them. Their rise has been remarkable in the last five years, having generally been the area of least concern until 1996. Social issues (including crime) dropped nearly 5 percentage points to 21% and other issues were down from 16% to 14%. (See attached graph).

Looking at the problems in more detail, transportation, which rose to number one for the first time last year, dropped from 23% to 19%. Housing, which has been a rapidly rising concern in recent years is one of the few problems, besides the economy that rose. It climbed from 16% to 19% (slightly above transportation) as the region's top problem, but they are so close that it would be best to view them as equal. Social issues were the third most cited set of problems. They only slipped slightly from 17% to 16%. Economic concerns jumped from just 6% last year to 14% in the recent survey, ranking fourth. But that percent is far below the 26% recorded in 1992 after that mild recession. Economic concerns were also ranked as the top problem in 1987 and 1986, before crime concerns skyrocketed. Education also had a sharp increase, from 6% to 10%, the highest percentage it has ever had. Crime continued its precipitous slide from 12% last year to just 9%, an all time low—remarkable considering it was cited by 61% as the top problem in 1993.

Urban sprawl and other "population" problems are a subset of social issues and are also included as one of the development problems. They dropped from 4.4% saying it was the number one problem two years ago to 3.6% last year and remained about the same this year. As one of the top two or three problems it was cited by 10% last year and 9% this year.

Apart from the findings themselves it is important to recognize that perceptions change. One could argue that changing perceptions aren't just due to changing conditions, but also on the ability of any problem to engage people's or the media's attention for more than a limited period of time. If public concern is important to policy action, it is vital to strike while the iron is hot. Transportation and housing are hot.

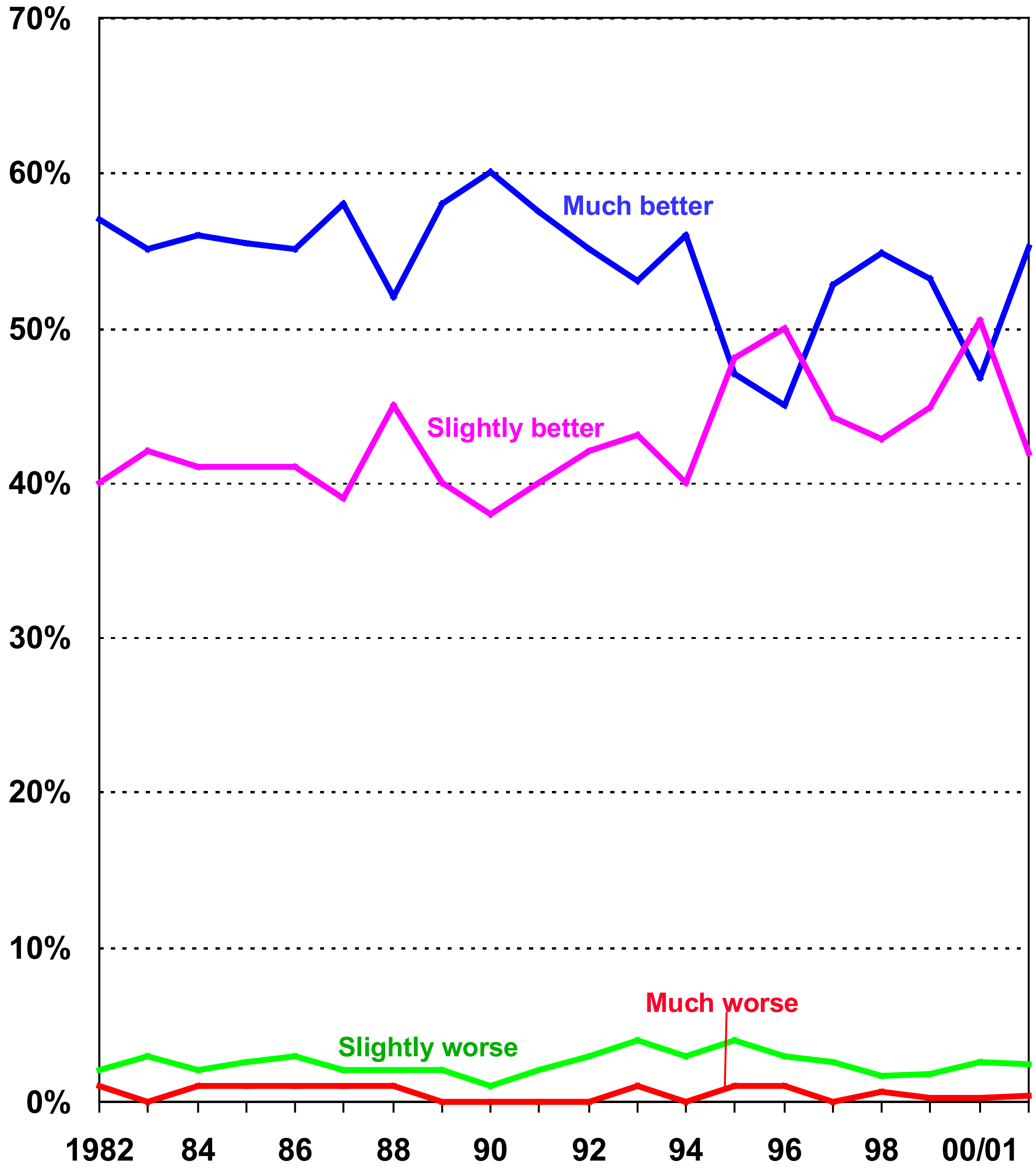
Transportation

QB1 – "In the past year, do you think traffic congestion in the Twin Cities Metro area has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased?"

	2002	2000-01	1999	1998
Increased	74%	76%	81%	79%
Stayed the same	22%	22%	16%	16%
Decreased	2%	1%	2%	2%
Don't know, refused to answer	2%	3%	2%	4%

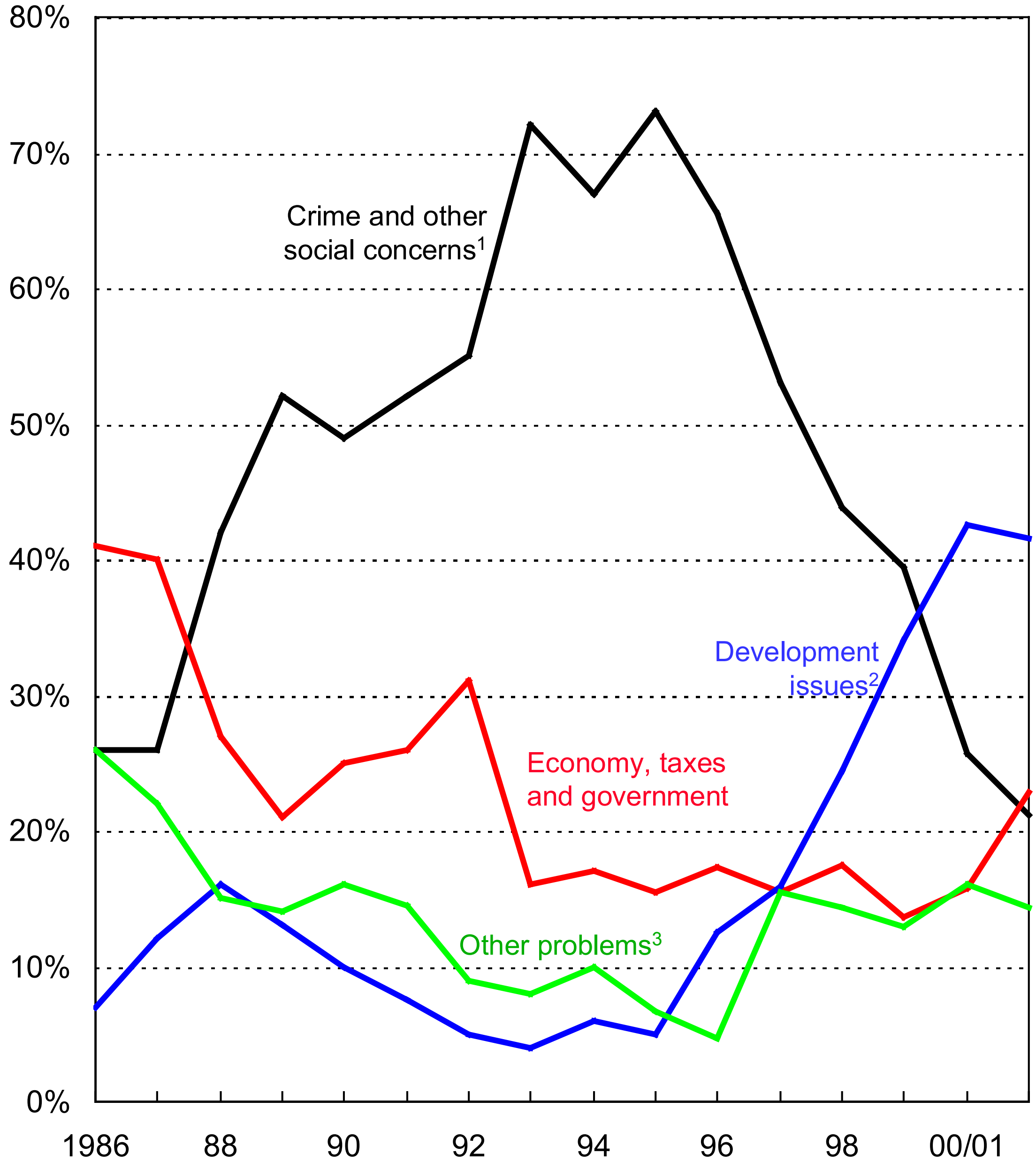
While 74% is still a high percentage believing congestion has gotten worse, it has been slipping since 1999 when it peaked at 81%. But the slippage is from increases in those saying "staying the same" not from those saying congestion had "decreased". While it doesn't appear concern about congestion is going to go away soon, it may continue to slowly fade as people come to accept it and the media address new problems to interest their readers or viewers.

"How would you rate the Twin Cities as a place to live compared to other metropolitan areas in the nation--do you feel the Twin Cities Area is:"



Survey was not conducted in 1985 or 1991.

“In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing people in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area today?”



Notes: Categories above are groupings of responses to open-ended questions. Survey was not conducted in 1991.

[1]Includes homelessness, poverty, drugs and family problems.
[2]Transportation, housing, urban sprawl and population concerns.
[3]Includes environment, education and health.

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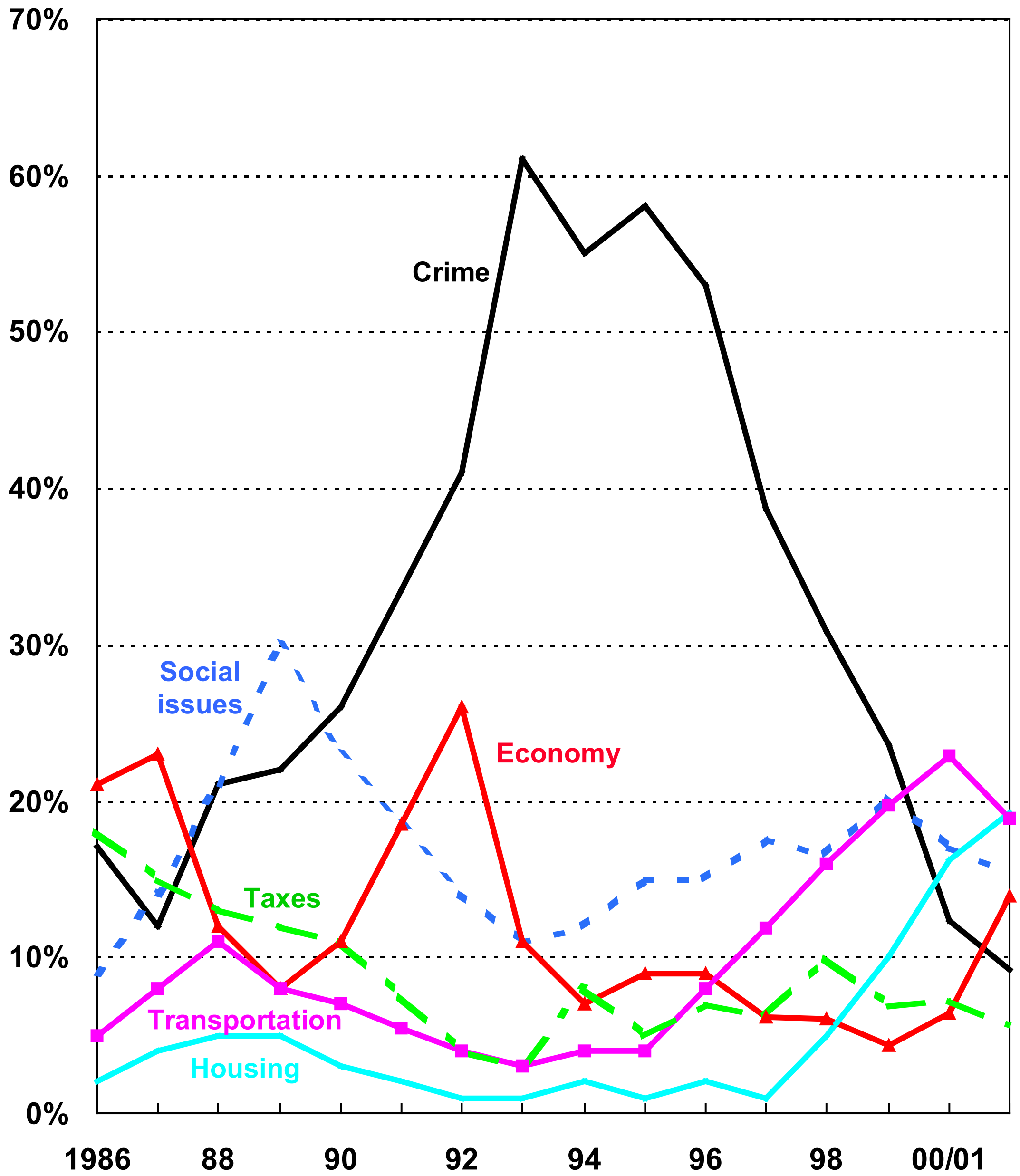

Notes: Categories above are groupings of responses to open-ended questions. Survey was not conducted in 1991.

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QB3 – "Do you agree or disagree that light rail, exclusive busways, and commuter rail lines are necessary in order to meet the metro area's long range transportation needs….would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?"

	2002	2000-01
Strongly agree	40%	39%
Somewhat agree	36%	38%
Somewhat disagree	11%	10%
Strongly disagree	10%	11%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	3%	3%

Very strong support for LRT, commuter rail and busways; about the same as in last year's survey.

Smart Growth and Development

A number of questions related to different aspects of smart growth were asked. The questions were the result of staff review and refinement of past questions on these topics. While we believe we have improved the questions to better meet Council needs, it does mean we have to be careful in comparing the results to similar questions asked in the past. The summary that begins below compares results to previous questions asked in the recent past, noting differences in wording. The chart on the next page shows the results of each question for the 2002 data.

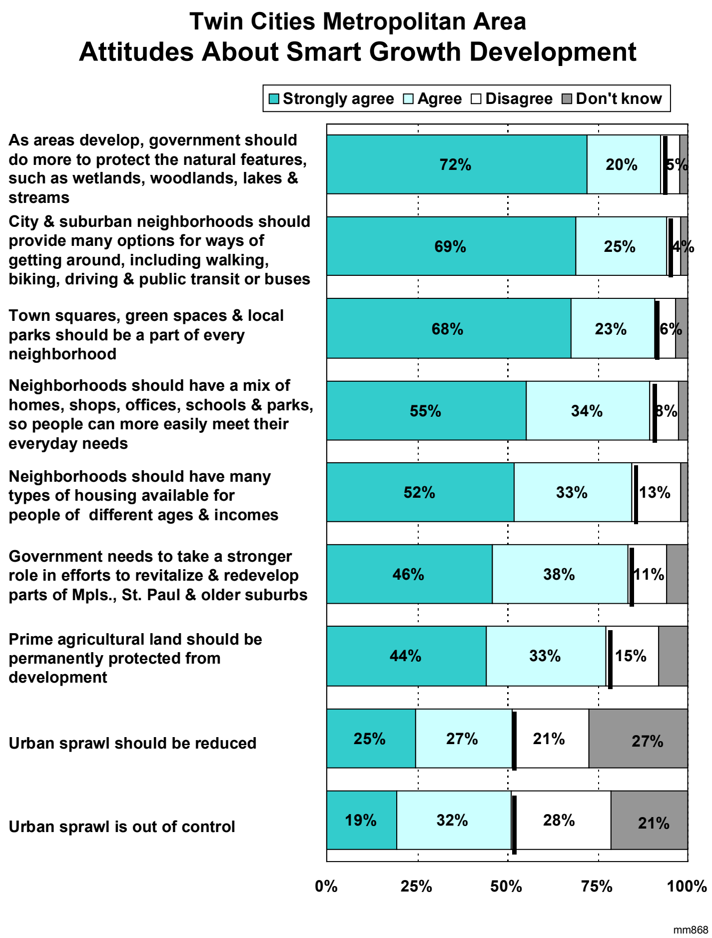
QB4 – "Now I'll read you statements about possible ways to accommodate future growth in the Twin Cities metro area. For each statement, I'd like to know if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, …etc."

Nine statements were read with the interviewer starting with a randomly chosen place on the list.

QB4a – "Government needs to take a stronger role in efforts to revitalize and redevelop parts of Minneapolis, St. Paul and older suburbs."

	2002	2000-01, same introduction, but two questions, one for central cities and one for older suburbs were asked, each of half the respondents.	
		"Older suburban neighborhood should be redeveloped?"	"Parts of Minneapolis and St. Paul should be revitalized and redeveloped?"
Strongly agree	46%	52%	55%
Somewhat agree	38%	33%	33%
Somewhat disagree	6%	6%	4%
Strongly disagree	5%	5%	2%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	6%	3%	6%

Very strong support—46% strongly agree and 38% somewhat agree—despite the addition of "government" in the question in this year's survey. Not surprisingly the "softer" question from last year got even stronger support, with little difference between older suburbs or central cities (that is the reason they were combined in the recent survey).


Twin Cities Metropolitan Area
Attitudes About Smart Growth Development
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Don't know
As areas develop, government should do more to protect the natural features, such as wetlands, woodlands, lakes & streams
72%
20%
5%
City & suburban neighborhoods should provide many options for ways of getting around, including walking, biking, driving & public transit or buses
69%
25%
4%
Town squares, green spaces & local parks should be a part of every neighborhood
68%
23%
6%
Neighborhoods should have a mix of homes, shops, offices, schools & parks, so people can more easily meet their everyday needs
55%
34%
8%
Neighborhoods should have many types of housing available for people of different ages & incomes
52%
33%
13%
Government needs to take a stronger role in efforts to revitalize & redevelop parts of Mpls., St. Paul & older suburbs
46%
38%
11%
Prime agricultural land should be permanently protected from development
44%
33%
15%
Urban sprawl should be reduced
25%
27%
21%
27%
Urban sprawl is out of control
19%
32%
28%
21%
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%
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QE4b. – "As areas develop, government should do more to protect the natural features, such as wetlands, woodlands, lakes, and streams."

	2002	2000-01 The same question but without government referred to.	1999 In general, do you strongly support, somewhat strongly support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose paying more in taxes that would be dedicated to preserving agricultural land. (no intro)
Strongly agree	72%	79%	20%
Somewhat agree	20%	17%	47%
Somewhat disagree	3%	1%	14%
Strongly disagree	2%	1%	15%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	1%	1%	3%

Protecting natural features had the highest support for any measure related to accommodating growth. The specter of government involvement, which was added to this year's question didn't make much of a dent in the support for environmental protection. It may also indicate that even without saying government, most people understand that protecting resources implies a government role. While they want it protected and most want government to do it, they aren't as enthusiastic when it comes to paying for it with more taxes, as the 1999 survey showed. However, still two-thirds were supportive, just not as strongly so.

QE4c. – "Neighborhoods should have many types of housing available for people of different ages and incomes."

	2002	1999 Housing should be available for a mix of ages and incomes.
Strongly agree	52%	53%
Somewhat agree	33%	36%
Somewhat disagree	10%	7%
Strongly disagree	3%	3%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	2%	2%

Basically the same question as asked two years ago but neighborhood location was added to the current question. There was strong support and very little change from two years ago, even when question became more geographically specific—implying possible location of such housing in their neighborhood. That may have countered any increase in support we might have expected given the rise of housing to the number one problem in the region.

QE4d – "City and suburban neighborhoods should provide many options for ways of getting around, including walking, biking, driving, and public transit or buses."

	2002	2001 "Neighborhoods should be designed for walking and public transit or buses".	2000 Same question as 2000-01 but introduced with "thinking about all the neighborhoods in your community? (not accommodating growth)
Strongly agree	69%	53%	42%
Somewhat agree	25%	34%	42%
Somewhat disagree	2%	6%	11%
Strongly disagree	1%	5%	3%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	2%	4%	2%

While there are some wording changes in the questions in each of the three surveys they are fundamentally the same and so it is reasonable to say that people are showing increased support for providing transportation choices. In fact, in the most recent survey almost every body, 94%, supported this idea: 69% strongly agreed and 25% somewhat agreed.

QE4e – "Neighborhoods should have a mix of homes, shops, offices, schools and parks, so people can more easily meet their everyday needs."

	2002	2000-01 Same question as 2002 without the "meet everyday needs" part	1999 Same question as 2000-01 but introduced with "thinking about all the neighborhoods in your community? (not accommodating growth)
Strongly agree	55%	43%	34%
Somewhat agree	34%	38%	44%
Somewhat disagree	6%	9%	13%
Strongly disagree	2%	5%	7%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	3%	4%	2%

This year's question added a positive purpose to mixed use, which may account for some of the increased support. There was also increased support from 1999 to 2000-01. The 1999 survey had the same question as the next year's survey, but with a different introduction to the question. Whenever language changes in a question one can not determine how much any change in response that occurred was because of language change or because people's attitudes actually changed. But the degree of support is overwhelming; almost everybody, 90%, supported mixed use development for all three years and the level of support has increased in recent years.

QE4f – "Prime agricultural land should be permanently protected from development."

	2002	2000-01 Agricultural land should be preserved. (with same intro as 2002)	1999 In general, do you strongly support, somewhat strongly support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose paying more <u>in taxes</u> that would be dedicated to preserving agricultural land. (no intro)
Strongly agree	44%	62%	17%
Somewhat agree	33%	26%	44%
Somewhat disagree	9%	5%	14%
Strongly disagree	5%	2%	21%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	8%	4%	3%

Although nearly 3/4ths were supportive of preserving or protecting farmland, support wasn't as strong for what may seem like minor wording changes—evidently they weren't. Support is not nearly as strong when raising taxes was suggested (1999 survey) but still over 60% wanted to preserve farmland.

Another agency also asked about preserving prime farmland and found that 39% would be willing to have their "property" taxes raised, while 52% would not and 8% had no opinion. Of the 233 willing to have their property taxes raised, 41% were willing to have it increased $50 or less a year, while 32% would agree to up to $100, 13% up to $200 and 12% over $500. In 1999 the Council asked a similar question but referred only to taxes not property taxes; only 35% opposed it while 61% were supportive.

QE4g – "Town squares, green spaces, and local parks should be a part of every neighborhood."

	2002
Strongly agree	68%
Somewhat agree	23%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	1%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	2%

This was a very popular idea, which should be of no surprise given people's desires to preserve open space and natural areas.

QE4h1 – "Urban sprawl is out of control."

	2002
Strongly agree	19%
Somewhat agree	32%
Somewhat disagree	19%
Strongly disagree	9%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	21%

QE4h2 – "Urban sprawl should be reduced."

	2002	2000-01
Strongly agree	25%	27%
Somewhat agree	27%	35%
Somewhat disagree	14%	17%
Strongly disagree	8%	7%
No opinion, don't know, refused to answer	27%	15%

The sample was split in half to see how different ways of asking about sprawl would affect the outcome. While the majority felt urban sprawl should be reduced fewer thought it was "out of control", although the results were pretty close. This suggests that most of those concerned with sprawl are very concerned. The comparison to last year's survey asked only about reducing it. Interestingly, concerns diminished some, but mostly because more people had no opinion. This may reflect some fading of interest in a lesser regional concern or it may be that the term has lost popularity rather than the issue. In any case, half those surveyed wanted it reduced and only a quarter didn't.

QG8 – "Have you ever heard of the term smart growth?"

	2002	2000/2001
Yes	34%	35%
No	66%	65%

QG8a – "(IF YES) In general do you have a favorable impression or an unfavorable impression of "smart growth", or do you not have an opinion about it?"

	2002	2000/2001
Favorable	42%	43%
Unfavorable	10%	15%
No opinion	47%	42%

Only about a third of those surveyed had heard the term smart growth and that was virtually the same as the previous year. Of those, nearly half had no opinion while nearly as many had a favorable opinion. Only 10% had a negative opinion, a modest improvement over last year.

The key message about either smart growth or sprawl from this survey is that the terms aren't as important to people as the concepts. People embrace the positive elements of smart growth without necessarily using the term or being terribly concerned about urban sprawl (as a term).

Economic Outlook

QA4 – Generally speaking would you say that your standard of living, that is the things that you can buy and do, is getting worse, staying about the same, or getting better compared to on year ago?

QA5 – Looking one year into the future, do you feel you financial prospects will get better, remain unchanged, or get worse?

	Past year	Next year
Getting better	27%	45%
Staying the same/remain unchanged	51%	38%
Getting worse	22%	16%
Don't know	0%	2%

Even though the survey was conducted primarily in January and February (not that long after 9/11 and as fears of a recession were being raised), these responses are still fairly positive. The outlook for the future was particularly bright. This suggest that people will still be willing to support government initiatives they believe in. And the smart growth principles asked about in this survey were certainly well supported.