

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2008 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey is the fifth in an annual series that began in 2004. Engaging the public in local government performance measurement “is critically important if we are to have government actions aligned with the public’s needs.”¹ Citizens are the ultimate stakeholders and consumers of government services. As taxpayers, they support local government efforts; as voters, they select government leaders.²

THE 2008 SURVEY

The 2008 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey reflects the opinions of 800 randomly selected adult respondents 18 years of age and older. The respondents were contacted via telephone from April 8-28, 2008 by Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc. The margin of error for the 800 person-survey is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence level. The average time for an interview was 8 minutes—up from 7 minutes in 2007. A pre-test of the survey instrument was conducted on April 8 to assure that citizens understood the questions posed to them.

Focus of the 2008 Survey

The 2008 survey is a combination of new and repeat questions.

The **new questions** ask citizens to identify:

- ◆ The quality of life (covering a wide range of facilities, services, and amenities) in each citizen’s own neighborhood.
- ◆ The areas in the county budget they believe should be cut back first during tough economic times.

Repeat questions, critical to trend analysis, focus on citizen opinions about:

- ◆ The quality of county services today v. five years ago.
- ◆ The most important issue facing Polk County today.
- ◆ The frequency of their contacting of a county office/official.
- ◆ How they contact county offices/officials (in person, by phone, e-mail, letter, etc.).
- ◆ County employee responsiveness to their request.

¹ Barbara J. Cohn Berman, “Involving the Public in Measuring and Reporting Local Government Performance,” *National Civic Review* (Spring 2008): 3.

² *Ibid.*; also see other articles in the Spring 2008 special issue of the *National Civic Review* dedicated to “engaging the public in local government performance measurement and reporting” and the April 2008 issue of *Government Finance Review*, with a special focus on performance and “knowledge” management.

- ◆ The importance of funding specific county services—property and non-property tax-supported.

Survey Design, Project Management, and Analysis

The 2008 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey was designed and analyzed by Dr. Susan A. MacManus, Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Government & International Affairs at the University of South Florida. Andrew F. Quecan, a USF undergraduate honors program student, assisted with the survey analysis and prepared the tables and graphics for the Final Report to the Board of County Commissioners. Corttney Penberthy, an Florida State University undergraduate student, assisted with the report formatting.

The Florida Institute of Government (IOG) at USF administered the survey project. Polk County contracted with IOG to select a principal investigator (Dr. MacManus) and a telephone marketing firm (Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc.).

Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc. (SSA) was engaged to draw the sample, pre-test the survey instrument,³ conduct the phone interviews, transfer the data to the principal investigator, analyze the representativeness of the sample, and run the crossbreaks by geographical location, length of residency, age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, income, homeowner status, and child under 18 living at home status. (The crossbreaks appear in Volume II of the Report.)

The Respondent Profile: 2008

The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the 800 survey interviewees are shown in detail in Table I-1. Over 70% of those surveyed have lived in Polk County for more than 10 years. Most (86%) own their own homes. The majority (78%) lives in the Northeast and Northwest regions of the County. A plurality (44%) is 50-65 years of age; 27% is under age 50; 16% between 65 and 75, and 12% is 75 or older. Females make up 52% of the sample; whites (80%), African Americans (12%), Hispanics (8%), and other races/ethnicities (1%). Over half (54%) has at least some college, and has household income under \$50,000 (54%). Almost one-fifth (16%) has a child under 18 living in their home.

Sample Representativeness

In general, the sample is representative within the margin of error for gender, race/ethnicity (whites, African Americans, Hispanics, others), and age (18-64 year-olds, persons 65 and older). It is also representative within the margin of error for residents living in the northeast and southwest portions of the county, but over-representative of those living in the southeast and under-representative of those residing in the northwest parts of the County. The sample also over-represents homeowners and

³ The pre-test was conducted on April 8, 2008, with a total of 40 interviews. No changes in the survey instrument were deemed necessary.

under-represents renters. However, the sample's overall representativeness eliminated the need to weight the data.

QUALITY OF COUNTY SERVICES IN POLK COUNTY: TREND OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Asking citizens to assess the overall progress of local government service delivery increases "the likelihood that the quality of government service provision will be more responsive to their needs."⁴

Half of the Polk County residents surveyed agree that the quality of services today is about the same as it was five years ago. However, *over twice as many feel services have gotten better rather than worsened* (25% v. 10% respectively). Another 9% say they have not lived here for five years, reflecting the County's growth, while 6% do not have an opinion.

The overall rating of county service quality pattern generally remains the same after subtracting out the opinions of those who have not lived in Polk County for at least five years. Nearly half sees service quality as stable, while the proportion judging service quality to have improved is a lot higher than that seeing service deterioration.

Over the five-year period the CitizenS Opinion Survey has been conducted (2004-2008), the overall rating of county service quality pattern has generally remained the same. Nearly half sees service quality as stable, while the proportion judging service quality to have improved is consistently—and considerably— higher than that seeing service deterioration.

Opinions about trends in county service quality vary significantly by length of residency and race/ethnicity.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING POLK COUNTY TODAY

Asking residents to identify problems serves as *an early warning system*. It allows local officials to address concerns before they get out of hand. Examining trends in problem identification can also serve as *an important feedback mechanism*—evidence

⁴ Marc Holzer and Younhee Kim, "Educating Public Officials and Managers: A University Experience," *National Civic Review*, Spring 2008, p. 21.

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of whether government reactions to problems identified in earlier surveys have been effective.

While Population Growth/New Development remains the most cited issue (15%), two other problems are cited almost as often in the 2008 survey: Crime/Law Enforcement (12%), and Economy/Jobs (12%). These are followed by Public Schools/Education (8%) and Taxes (7%).

The biggest changes since the 2007 survey have been: (1) a *rise* in the percent identifying the Economy/Jobs (from 4% to 12%) and Crime/Law Enforcement (from 6% to 12%); and (2) a *drop* in the proportion citing Population Growth/New Development (24% to 15%) and Taxes (12% to 7%). There have been smaller shifts in the percentage of respondents citing Health Care (up—3% to 5%) and Traffic (down—7% to 3%).

The greatest shifts throughout the *five-year period* the Citizens Opinion Surveys have been conducted are: (1) an upswing in the proportion citing Economy/Jobs (1% to 12%), Crime/Law Enforcement (6% to 12%), and Taxes (3% to 7%); and (2) a decline in the percent identifying Population Growth/New Development (28% to 15%), Public Schools/Education (20% to 8%), and Traffic (12% to 3%) as key issues.

Newly-emerging issues that just have surfaced in 2008 (mentioned by a few respondents) are housing affordability, the proposed CSX project—rail through Lakeland; budget cuts, hunger and poverty, and utility costs.

Issue identification varies most consistently by age, gender, and household income, followed by homeownership and education.

RESPONSIVENESS OF COUNTY TO CITIZENS REQUESTS

Citizens generally understand that “much of what local government must do is difficult and complex.”⁵ While they do not expect perfection, they do want to be treated with respect and courtesy by government elected officials and employees. They also want responsive and reasonably timely reactions to their questions and requests, and want to know how they can obtain accurate information about a government’s programs and activities.

One-fourth (26%) of all those surveyed report having contacted a Polk County office or official over the past year. Persons most likely to contact the county are 30-49 year olds (32%), homeowners (28%), persons with some college (34%), college

⁵ Barbara J. Cohn Berman, “Involving the Public in Measuring and Reporting Local Government Performance,” *National Civic Review* (Spring 2008): 4.

graduates (31%), with incomes in the \$50,000-\$74,999 (36%) and \$75,000+ (35%) brackets, and with a minor child living at home (40%).

The two primary ways citizens contact county officials are by phone (84%) and in person (31%). The least common ways are via e-mail (9%) or letter (4%). Contacting by phone has increased significantly since last year (70% to 84%) while in-person contacting has declined (71% to 31%). The other means of contacting have remained fairly stable.

Polk County residents continue to rate their interactions with county officials and office quite highly:

Were you treated with respect? 92% said "Yes."

Were you given correct information? 83% said "Yes."

Were you helped in a timely fashion? 76% said "Yes."

The "treated with respect" (the 90%*s*) and "given correct information" (the 80%*s*) ratings have changed very little over the three-year period the questions have been asked. There has been greater fluctuation in the "helped in a timely fashion" measure which fell from 82% in 2007 to 76% in 2008.

QUALITY OF LIFE WITHIN A CITIZEN'S OWN NEIGHBORHOOD

This is the first year in the survey's five-year history that respondents have been asked to rate the quality of a wide range of social, economic, and physical conditions in their own neighborhood as "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," or "Poor." Some were unable to give a rating for a specific amenity—most likely one that irrelevant to or was not utilized by them.

The neighborhood amenity rankings ("Excellent" + "Good") are:

	<u>All Responses</u>		<u>Don't Knows</u>	
	(%)	Rank	(%)	Rank
Responsiveness to emergencies	79	1	85	1
Air quality	76	2	76	2
Shopping choices	75	3	75	3
Safety & security of elderly	66	4	69	4
Water quality	62	5	64	6
Roads	59	6	59	11
Health care	58	7	60	10
Recreational opportunities	54	8	64	8

Environmental protection	53	9	59	11
Safety & security of children*	51	10	67	5
County government employees*	49	11	62	9
Schools*	40	12	64	8
Housing affordability	38	13	42	14
Public Transportation*	32	14	46	13
Employment opportunities*	24	15	31	15

*Overall ratings for five of these amenities are a bit misleading due to the high percentage of respondents who could not assess them. The percentage who gave “Don’t Know” responses to these amenities was: Schools (37%), Public Transportation (31%), Employment Opportunities (29%), Safety & Security of Children (23%), and County Government Employees (22%).

When the rating for each amenity is recalculated excluding the Don’t Know/No Response answers, the ratings generally improve and the rank orderings shift somewhat. Just three neighborhood amenities are still rated as Excellent or Good by less than a majority of the knowledgeable respondents—Public Transportation (46%), Housing Affordability (42%), and Employment Opportunities (31%).

Ratings differ most by age, race/ethnicity, income, and education.

BUDGETING AND FINANCE: SPENDING & CUTBACK PRIORITIES

Prioritization is essential in tough economic times when resources are limited. The 2008 survey, like its predecessors, asked Polk County residents to identify services they regard as “absolutely” critical. This year’s survey also asked residents to choose which service areas should be cut back first in the event of revenue shortfalls. In general, with some exceptions,⁶ a smaller percentage of citizens rated services as “absolutely critical” than did so in 2007—a reflection of the economy. When times get tough, citizens expect government to tighten its belt just as they must do.

Among the county’s property tax-based services, a majority of Polk County residents rates public safety (EMS, Law Enforcement) and Children and Family Services as “absolutely critical.” Services seen by more than one-fifth as “absolutely critical” are (in descending order): Elderly Services (49%), Jail Operations (40%), Mosquito Control (36%), Growth Management (30%), Drainage (25%), and Code Enforcement (23%). Services viewed as “absolutely critical” by fewer than one-fifth of the population are:

⁶The five county services seeing an *upswing* in “absolutely critical” ratings were Children & Family Services (+3%), Jail Operations (+5%), Recycling (+2%), Economic Development (+1%), and Public Transportation (+1%).

Animal Control (15%), Library Services (13%), and Parks and Recreation (11%). The relatively low ranking of leisure services (Parks and Recreation, Library Services) is a pattern that has been frequently observed in similar surveys conducted by local governments throughout the U.S.

A comparison of changes in the “absolutely critical” ratings for property tax-backed services *over the past five years* shows consistently high rankings for EMS, Law Enforcement, Elderly Services, and Children and Family Services. Jail Operations, Mosquito Control, Growth Management, Drainage, and Animal Control ratings have fluctuated the most, reflective of changes in social, economic, and physical conditions—some weather-related, others driven by demographic shifts, economic fluctuations, and county resolution of problems.

County services supported by non-property taxes (fees, excise taxes, and other local taxes) are, on average, not rated as critically as property tax funded services. Only one such service category (Fire Services) is seen by the vast majority (65%) of the residents as “absolutely critical.” A majority do not rank Garbage Collection (49%), Water/Sewer/Reuse Water (41%), Economic Development/Job Creation & Retention (39%), Road Maintenance & Improvements (34%), Public Transportation (24%), or Recycling (24%) as vitally critical services.

Over *the five year period* (2004 to 2008), “absolutely critical” ratings for non-property tax-based services have been most consistent for Garbage Collection, Economic Development, Public Transportation, and Recycling. They have fluctuated the most for Water/Sewer/Reuse, Road Maintenance, and Fire Services—again reflective of changing physical and environmental conditions and county intervention.

Citizen recommendations for the *two service areas to be cut back first* in the event of revenue shortfalls are (in descending order): Land Use/Growth Management (44%), Recreation (32%) and Economic Development (31%), followed by Natural Resources (9%), Human Services/Basic Needs (5%) and Safety (3%). In summary, citizens see cutbacks in Safety and Human Services as the last resort.

Responses to the critical service ratings vary most consistently by income, age, and gender.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2007 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey is the fourth in an annual series that began in 2004. The annual survey gives citizens a chance to grade the efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness of county operations. It provides county officials with valuable citizen assessments and enables constituents to play a key role in establishing the government's priorities.

THE 2007 SURVEY

The 2007 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey reflects the opinions of 800 randomly selected adult respondents 18 years of age and older. The respondents were contacted via telephone from April 12-24, 2007 by Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc. The margin of error for the 800 person-survey is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence level. The average time for an interview was 7 minutes—the same as in 2006. A pre-test of the survey instrument was conducted on April 12 to assure that citizens understood the questions posed to them.

New Questions

The 2007 survey is a combination of new and repeat questions. The new questions asked citizens to identify:

- ◆ Their top priority for the county's growth management plans.
- ◆ How they contact county offices/officials (in person, by phone, e-mail, letter, etc.).
- ◆ How quickly they were able to get to the right person at the county for assistance.
- ◆ How critical future water supply is as a property tax-supported service.
- ◆ Whether property insurance (home, business) is the biggest problem facing the county.

Repeat Questions

Repeat questions, critical to trend analysis, focused on citizen opinions about:

- ◆ The quality of county services today v. five years ago.
- ◆ County services that have improved the most over the past year.

- ◆ County services that have worsened the most over the past year.
- ◆ The most important issue facing Polk County today.
- ◆ The frequency of their use of Polk County TV (PCTV) and the Polk County web site (www.polk-county.net).
- ◆ The frequency and nature of their contacting of a county office/official.
- ◆ County employee responsiveness to their request and their overall satisfaction with the county's responsiveness.
- ◆ The importance of funding specific county services—property and non-property tax-supported.

Survey Design, Project Management, and Analysis

The 2007 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey was designed and analyzed by Dr. Susan A. MacManus, Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Government & International Affairs at the University of South Florida. Kristine Zooberg, a USF honors program graduate, and Andrew F. Quecan, a USF undergraduate honors program student, assisted with the survey analysis and prepared the tables and graphics for the Final Report to the Board of County Commissioners.

The Florida Institute of Government (IOG) at USF administered the survey project. Polk County contracted with IOG to select a principal investigator (Dr. MacManus) and a telephone marketing firm (Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc.).

Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc. (SSA) was engaged to draw the sample, pre-test the survey instrument,¹ conduct the phone interviews, transfer the data to the principal investigator, analyze the representativeness of the sample, and run the crossbreaks by geographical location, length of residency, age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, income, homeowner status, and child under 18 living at home status. (The crossbreaks appear in Volume II of the Report.)

An Overview of the 2007 Survey Respondents

Over two-thirds (69%) of those surveyed have lived in Polk County for more than 10 years. Most (85%) own their own homes. The majority (80%) live in the Northeast and Northwest regions of the County. A plurality (39%) are 50-65 years of age; 35% are under age 50; 26% are 65 or older. Females make up 52% of the sample; whites (81%), African Americans (11%), Hispanics (8%). Over half (52%) have at least some

¹ The pre-test was conducted on April 12, 2007, with a total 23 interviews. No changes in the survey instrument were deemed necessary.

college, and have household incomes under \$50,000 (59%). Almost one-fifth (18%) have a child under 18 living in their home.

Sample Representativeness

In general, the sample is representative within the margin of error for gender, race/ethnicity (whites, African Americans, Hispanics), and age (18-64 year olds, persons 65 and older). It is also representative within margin of error for geographical location of the respondents, with the exception of residents living in the Southeast section who are slightly over-represented. The sample also over-represents homeowners and under-represents renters. The sample's overall representativeness eliminated the need to weight the data.

QUALITY OF COUNTY SERVICES IN POLK COUNTY

A plurality (45%) of Polk County residents rates the quality of county services offered today as about the same as it was five years ago.

Twice as many see services as having improved than worsened (24% v. 14% respectively). The pattern has changed little over the four years the survey has been conducted. The major difference is in the percent of respondents who have not lived in Polk County more than five years; it increased from 9% to 14% between 2006 and 2007, reflecting the county's growth.

After subtracting out the opinions of those who have not lived in Polk County for at least five years, the results show that 54% judge service quality as stable (compared with 46% the previous year). The percent judging county service quality as better did not change (29% in both 2006 and 2007), but the proportion seeing services as having worsened declined (19% to 17%).

Among those who have observed changes in the delivery of specific services over the past year, a higher percentage identify a service that has worsened (35%) than one that has improved (29%). The same service is seen by some as having improved, but by others as having worsened.

Improved Services: 2007

The six most often mentioned improved services are: law enforcement (33%); roads (17%), parks and recreation (8%), education/school (7%), garbage collection (4%) and public officials/leadership (4%).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary

The Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey is the third in an annual series that began in 2004. The use of such citizen-based surveys is on the rise nationally as local governments seek input for decision-making from a broader base of their residents.

THE 2006 SURVEY

The 2006 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey tapped the opinions of 801 randomly selected adult respondents 18 years of age and older. The respondents were contacted via telephone from May 9-25, 2006 by Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc. The margin of error for the 801 person-survey is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence level. The average time for an interview was 7 minutes. There were a larger number of open-ended questions (five) in this year's survey. Such formats are appropriate when the purpose of the question is largely probative in nature.

New Questions

The 2006 survey is a combination of new and repeat questions. The new questions were designed to probe more deeply into:

- Citizen opinions about how to improve the county's web site.
- Citizen contacting of county officials and offices—how often and for what purposes.
- County employee responsiveness to citizen contacts.
- Service delivery improvements and shortcomings over the past few years.

Repeat Questions

The repeat questions, designed to track trends, asked citizens about the overall quality of life in Polk County, the major issues facing the County today, the essentiality of various programs and services, and the importance of infrastructure expansion to meet growth demands.

Survey Design, Project Management, and Analysis

The 2006 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey was designed and analyzed by Dr. Susan A. MacManus, Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Government & International Affairs at the University of South Florida. Thomas A. Watson, a USF honors program graduate, assisted with the survey analysis and prepared the tables and graphics for the Final Report to the Board of County Commissioners.

The Florida Institute of Government (IOG) at USF administered the survey project. Polk County contracted with IOG to select a principal investigator (Dr. MacManus) and a telephone marketing firm (Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc.).

Susan Schuler & Associates, Inc. (SSA) was engaged to draw the sample, pre-test the survey instrument, conduct the phone interviews, transfer the data to the principal investigator, analyze the representativeness of the sample, and run the crossbreaks by geographical location, length of residency, age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, income, homeowner status, and child under 18 living at home status.

The 2006 Respondent Profile

Nearly three-fourths of those surveyed have lived in Polk County for more than 10 years. Most (91%) own their own homes. The majority (80%) live in the Northeast and Northwest regions of the County. A plurality (43%) are 50-65 years of age. Females make up 52% of the sample; whites (79%), African Americans (11%), Hispanics (8%). Over half (52%) have at least some college, and have household incomes under \$50,000 (57%). One-fifth has a child under 18 living in their home.

Sample Representativeness

In general, the sample is representative within the margin of error for gender, race/ethnicity, and age. It is also representative within margin of error for geographical location of the respondents, with the exception of residents living in the Southeast section who are slightly over-represented. The sample also over-represents homeowners and under-represents renters.

QUALITY OF COUNTY SERVICES IN POLK COUNTY

A plurality of Polk County residents judge the quality of services in general to have remained the same *over the past five years*. But among those who see changes, a higher percentage say services have improved than say they have deteriorated. Older, more long-time residents are the most likely to say things have gotten better.

However, when asked to identify changes in specific services *over the past year*, the pattern is somewhat different. Some 26% name an improved service while 33% point to a service that has deteriorated.

Among the 26% who observed changes for the better in specific service areas, the five most commonly-cited are road maintenance and improvements (25%), law enforcement (22%), schools (8%), all services (7%), and fire services (6%).

Among the 33% of the respondents who point to a specific deteriorating service, the largest portion mention growth management (13%), public officials and leadership (12%), law enforcement (9%), schools (7%), road maintenance and improvements (7%), and taxes (7%).

When citizen evaluations of changes in specific service delivery are laid out side-by-side, the improved-deteriorated percentages are almost identical. Only two side-by-side analyses yield more positive-than-negative assessments (road maintenance, improvements and law enforcement). Two others yield more negative-than-positive ratings (public officials & leadership and growth management).

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING POLK COUNTY TODAY

Population growth (28%) and public schools/education (11%) are the two most often cited issues survey respondents see facing Polk County in 2006, paralleling the results of surveys throughout Florida. The other major issues cited (in descending order) are: crime/law enforcement (5%), taxes, (5%), traffic (5%), water/sewer/reuse (4%), health care (4%), drugs/substance abuse (3%), and road quality (3%). Some 17% of the respondents either do not see any serious problem (5%) or are unable to offer an answer (12%). The other 16% mention a wide array of issues.

Over the past three years, the most marked increase has been in the percentage of the county's respondents identifying population growth as a critical issue. The sharpest declines have been in the proportion citing public schools and traffic. There has also been a marginal increase in the citation of taxes and a slight decrease in mentions of law-enforcement-related issues. *But for the most part, there has been a fairly high level of consistency in the "most important issue" question response patterns.*

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC:

CABLE PGTV & WWW.POLK-COUNTY.NET

The 2006 Polk County Citizens Opinion Survey was designed to give government officials a clearer picture of county residents' media habits, specifically their awareness and use of Polk County government's cable television station (PGTV) and web site (www.polk-county.net). In general, citizen use of government-related media is higher among younger, better-educated, and middle-to-upper income households.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the adults surveyed have access to cable television. Of those, 53% have tuned in to PGTV via their television sets or the Internet. However, fewer than one in five (16%) of all those surveyed are aware that PGTV—the County's television station—can be watched on the Internet.

Forty-six percent of the survey respondents have access to the Internet. Over one-fourth (27%) have logged on to www.polk-county.net. The three most popular features of the county's web site are its information and content (30%), ease of use (12%), and information about property valuation (8%).

When asked to identify needed improvements in the county's web site, the vast majority either had no recommendation or like it just fine as it is. But among those with an

idea, the most common suggestions are to make it easier to maneuver (9%) and to provide even more information (8%).

RESPONSIVENESS OF COUNTY TO CITIZEN REQUESTS

Over one in five respondents (22%) contacted a county office or official over the past year. Those most likely to have contacted the county are 30-49 year olds, college graduates, and persons from the more affluent households.

Citizen contacts covered a *wide range* of subjects. Law enforcement was the single most-cited subject area (13%), followed by help for the elderly and disabled (7%), development and zoning (7%), and property taxes and real estate (6%). Other subjects on citizens' minds when they contacted county personnel ranged from water, drainage, garbage and trash services to legal forms, child support, and volunteerism, among others.

The vast majority of citizen contactors say they were treated with respect (94%), given correct information (81%), and helped in a timely fashion (76%) by county personnel. Those with young children at home were the most likely to say they were given correct information, whites and Hispanics were the most likely to say they were helped in a timely fashion.

Overall satisfaction levels are highest among those who contacted the county seeking information (93%), to report something (71%), to ask for help (64%), or to voice a concern (59%). Overall dissatisfaction levels are highest (58%) among citizens acknowledging they contacted the county for multiple reasons.

BUDGETING AND FINANCE: SPENDING PRIORITIES

Polk County residents are solidly in favor of the county building and improving critical infrastructure needs related to high growth. Almost 90% say it is "very important" to put in roads, water and sewer lines in a timely fashion—an even higher proportion than in 2005 (62%).

A majority of Polk County residents identify seven *property tax-based services* as "absolutely critical" (in descending order): Emergency Medical Services (72%), Growth Management (66%), Law Enforcement (65%), Children & Family Services (60%), Elderly Services (59%), Drainage (53%), and Mosquito Control (53%). Priority rankings of property tax-based services vary most consistently by income, education, and race/ethnicity.

The most dramatic jumps in the "absolutely critical" ratings *over the past three years* have been in Drainage, (+17%), Animal Control (+16%), and Mosquito Control (+10%) while the sharpest declines have been in Jail Operations, -20%, Law Enforcement, -11%, and Emergency Medical Services, -7%.

Of the *nonproperty tax-based services*, a majority rates as absolutely essential: Fire Services (70%), Road Maintenance & Improvements (66%), Water, Sewer, & Reuse (61%), Garbage Collection (57%), and Economic Development, Job Creation & Retention (51%).

The proportion of top ratings has increased *over the past three years* for each of these nonproperty tax-based services (including public transportation) except fire services and recycling. The sharpest increases over the past three years have been for Road Maintenance & Improvements (+19%), Garbage Collection (+7%), and Water, Sewer, & Reuse (+5%). The greatest decline in top-priority ranking has been for fire services (-10%). Priority rankings of nonproperty-tax based services differ most consistently by household income.

