



**2007 Community Needs Assessment:  
Final Report**

*prepared for the*

*Iowa West Foundation*

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# **2007 Community Needs Assessment: Final Report**

*Prepared for the  
Iowa West Foundation*

**Prepared by**

**Russell L. Smith, Ph.D.**

**Center for Organizational Research and Evaluation**

**College of Public Affairs and Community Service**

**University of Nebraska at Omaha**

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*Review these related publications on the  
2007 Community Needs Assessment:*

- Executive Summary
- Attachments

**Iowa West Foundation  
25 Main Place, Suite 550  
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51502**

**(712) 309-3003**

**[www.iowawest.com](http://www.iowawest.com)**

**Prepared by: Russell L. Smith, Ph.D.  
Center for Organizational Research and Evaluation  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Omaha, NE 68182**

**(402) 554-3188**

**[rsmith@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:rsmith@mail.unomaha.edu)**

**[www.unomaha.edu/core](http://www.unomaha.edu/core)**

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# Foreword

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This project was largely completed over a 10 month period spanning 2006 and 2007. The Iowa West Foundation (IWF) and its staff generously provided the resources and the charge to complete this needs assessment. I regularly met with the IWF staff to provide project updates, and several reports were given to the Board over the past months.

I would like to acknowledge the freedom the Iowa West Foundation provided to structure and complete the needs assessment in a way that I felt was appropriate. I particularly want to thank Reed Morgan, IWF Grant Program Director, for his insights, guidance and reality checks throughout the study period. I also want to thank J. Todd Graham, IWF Executive Director and CEO; Jerry Mathiasen, Associate Executive Director; and Jody Boyer, Fellow.

Community needs assessments by necessity involve contacts with many people. I particularly want to thank the 35 community leaders who generously provided access and time for interviews and several meetings. I also want to thank the many agencies and organizations that provided data and background information for the needs assessment. Finally, I want to thank my colleagues at UNO—Jerry Deichert and David Drozd—as well as research assistants Heather Bloom and Andrea Kathol.

Russell L. Smith

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# 1. Introduction

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This report summarizes the findings of a community needs assessment completed for the Iowa West Foundation (IWF). The foundation's Board and staff identified two goals for the project. They are to: (1) assess important, unmet needs in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County area and (2) identify measures that the Iowa West Foundation and the broader Council Bluffs/ Pottawattamie County community can use to gauge the community's progress in future years.

The needs assessment report reflects several different information sources and information gathering strategies. These include:

- **Interviews with community leaders.** The needs assessment process began with in-depth interviews with 35 leaders representing a wide spectrum of interests in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. Key issues and questions were derived from these interviews and used to inform and guide the analysis process.
- **Analysis of community trends.** Drawing on a comprehensive U.S. Bureau of the Census database spanning 1940 to 2000, trends for important dimensions of the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County community were examined.
- **Review and compilation of existing agency and organizational studies.** Over 20 different local organization's strategic plans, agency operational and

program plans, as well as annual reports were reviewed.

- **Community Attitude Surveys.** Telephone interviews were conducted with 600 residents of Council Bluffs and 307 residents of Pottawattamie County. A range of community issues was examined, with a goal of including new, credible input from the community.

Section 2 presents an overview of the interview process and the key issues gleaned from the community leader interviews. Sections 3-6 provide detailed information and discussion of community needs in the four special interest areas used by the Iowa West Foundation for its grant-making programs. The final section of the report (7) identifies several challenges that need to be addressed as the community moves ahead in the future.

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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Interviews with 35 community leaders provided the starting point for the needs assessment. The individuals represented a wide range of community leadership and service experiences. Attachment 1 provides a complete list of interviewees.

## **Selection of Interviewees**

The staff of the Iowa West Foundation assisted in compiling a draft list of potential interviewees. Using a modified “snowball” approach, the IWF staff worked with the project consultant to develop an initial list of potential interviewees. This list was gradually expanded and refined as important selection factors were considered. These selection factors included considerations such as: type of leadership experience; level of leadership experience; community resided in; gender; age; and community of residence. A final draft list of 53 resulted from this process. Due to project resource commitments, it was agreed that 30 to 40 interviews would be completed.

## **Interview Contact Process**

Potential interviewees were contacted by telephone. The consultant introduced himself and provided a quick overview of the IWF needs assessment project. The consultant informed each person that her/his name had been identified as a potential source of information on

the Council Bluffs and/or Pottawattamie County area. Potential interviewees were informed that the starting point for the needs assessment was a set of interviews with community leaders.

Some people on the community leader interview list indicated they either didn’t have time to participate or didn’t feel they had anything substantial to contribute. These individuals were thanked for their time and deleted from the interview schedule.

## **Interview Protocol**

Ultimately, interviews were completed with 35 community leaders. Thirty two of the interviews were conducted during the July-September, 2006 time period; three were conducted during October 2006. All but one of the interviews was conducted at the office or home of the community leader.

Each interview followed the same structure, although variations often took place, as determined by the interviewee and her/his interests. Figure 1 provides a copy of the interview guide used in the field. To reinforce the purpose and legitimacy of the interview, an overview letter signed by Foundation president, Todd Graham was provided to each interviewee. Figure 2 provides a copy of the letter.

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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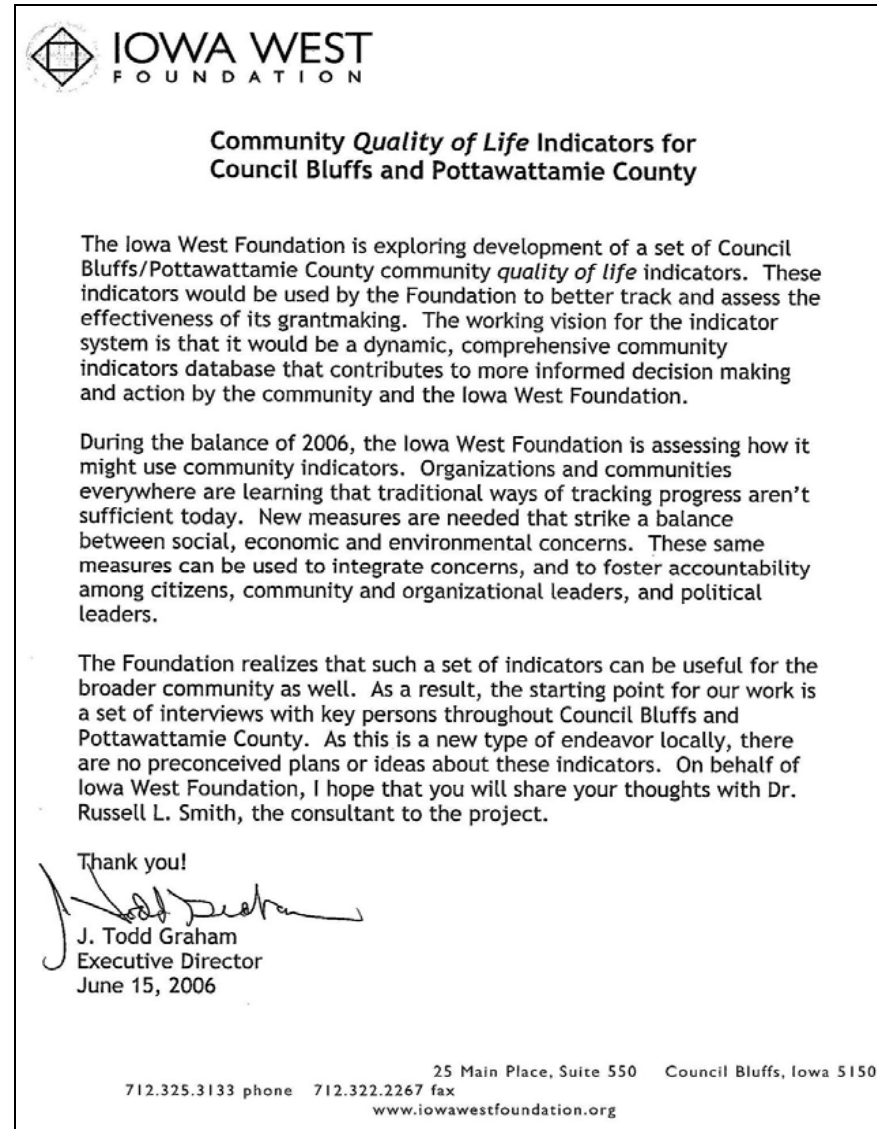
**Figure 1: Guide Used to Conduct Community Leader Interviews**

- IWF Community Indicators Needs Assessment Interview Guide
1. Introduce project and goals
    - Provide “overview” letter and review
      - Review approach (fig 1, etc.)
      - Semi-structured, with focus on factors that contribute to/reduce QOL in Council Bluffs & Pottawattamie County
  2. Talk just a bit about person and how long involved with Council Bluffs & Pottawattamie County area and in what capacities, etc.
  3. QOL discussion
    - Structure discussion around QOL and a few of the factors that—in the interviewee’s mind—most determine Council Bluffs & Pottawattamie County QOL
      - What are the issues/factors?
        - Positive/Facilitating factors?
        - Limiting/Barrier factors?
      - What are some sources of data you:
        - Have...?
        - Use...?
        - Would like to have?
  4. Does the person or organizations worked with track something that would be useful for the community as a whole? Share it?
  5. Willing to attend follow-up meeting(s)?
  6. Suggestions for community attitude survey?

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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Figure 2: Introductory Letter Provided to Community Leaders



# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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Next, a diagram was handed to the interviewee (see Figure 3). The interviewee was told that the diagram was being provided as an aid to organizing their thoughts about the factors that influence quality of life. The typical interview focused initially on sketching out the major factors the interviewee felt were most influential in contributing to the quality of life of Council Bluffs and/or Pottawattamie County. A discussion of both positive and negative factors was encouraged. The interview next focused on some of the information sources the interviewee most often relied on in keeping up with the community.

The session typically closed out with a review of what would be coming next in the needs assessment process. During this time, the interviewee was asked if he or she would be willing to meet in a group setting to review some of the issues identified. Suggestions for the community attitude survey were also requested.

Notes were developed during each interview. Summary notes were word processed following each interview. Copies of materials were sometimes provided during the course of the interview.

## **Interview Findings and Review Process**

### **1. Summary of Key Community Issue Statements.**

Review and analysis of the community leader interview

notes resulted in the development of 37 key community issue statements. The statements were compiled to reflect the major factors and concerns expressed by the interviewees. Each statement was framed as a question and provided to the interviewees at two different group meetings.

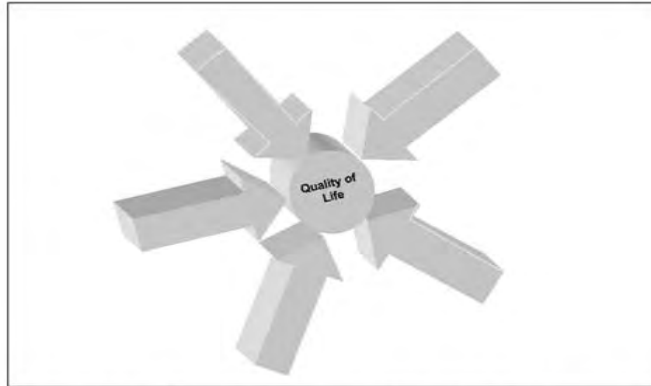
The 37 key community issues are provided in Tables 1 through 4. The issue statements and questions are grouped under the current Iowa West Foundation special interest area each is best aligned with. Several issue statements/questions overlapped with one another. This “redundancy” was deemed to be appropriate early on in the needs identification process, in order to ensure that different nuances of issues were included.

Sixteen of the 37 statements reflected community development and beautification concerns (see Table 1). Figure 4 provides a summary of these concerns. Within the Community Development and Beautification special interest area: six statements focused on *communication and building community* (40.0%) [Items: 2, 5, 8, 9, 13, 15]; four focused on *developing leadership and moving forward in the future* (20%) [Items: 4, 7, 9, 14]; three focused on *pride and community self-image* (20%) [Items: 1, 3, 6]; and three focused on making *physical improvements in the community* (20%) [Items: 10, 11, 12].

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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**Figure 3: Quality of Life Diagram Used with Community Leader Interviews**



**Figure 1: Influences on Council Bluffs-Pottawattamie County Quality of Life**

**FACTORS INFLUENCING COUNCIL BLUFFS-POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY QUALITY OF LIFE**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**WHAT SOURCES OF INFORMATION DO YOU USE FOR TRACKING THESE FACTORS?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

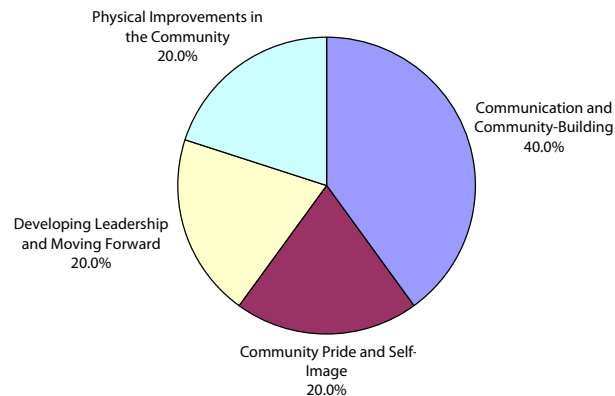
**Table 1: Community Development and Beautification Issue Statements**

1	What can be done/are we doing enough to increase the pride of young people as Council Bluffs residents?
2	How can we better communicate community achievements and needs to the people? The lack of local media "voice" and focus hurts the development of the community.
3	What is the community's current self-image? Is there still a "woe is me" attitude?
4	Are we doing enough to develop young leaders? How can we catalyze more of an "I'll do it" attitude?
5	Can we reduce the isolation of individuals and focus more on building a strong sense of community and connection?
6	Are the efforts to physically transform Council Bluffs leading to improved resident perceptions of the community, as well as increased pride in Council Bluffs?
7	How does the community ensure it has the ability to move beyond the current level and make the jump to the next level of development? Will there be a loss of leadership and memory of how bad it used to be? What is the community's expectation for the future? Is it higher than in the past? Boomer retirements will create much change.
8	Could we be doing a better job at demonstrating and showing what the area could be? How can we best show the community where to go next?
9	What can be done to encourage the development of more community-based organizations? How foster development of more grass-roots organizations that tackle local issues people care about?
10	Can Council Bluffs assist with building strong neighborhoods to provide local "voice" and alternative perspectives on how to develop/redevelop the areas where people live and work?
11	How can we further "soften" and make the community less "hard"?
12	Can access to downtown and the central areas of CB (from west and south) be improved? Is there room for community-wide planning and action to address the appearance of south and west arteries, rail corridors, viaduct areas, and vacant/dilapidated buildings? How do people feel about options for addressing these areas? Are we ready to move on from the past (rail and industry) and look to the future?
13	Do community design issues need to be examined? Will CB become a location for businesses that couldn't live with Omaha's new design and zoning standards? Should CB strive for the same level; a different level and direction?
14	Are we a welcoming community? Are we doing enough to reach out to the growing Latino community? What services are most needed?
15	How does Council Bluffs become more open-minded so that we can encourage more visionary and diverse activities and services to meet community needs?
16	What can be done to encourage and enable discussion between the different "communities" within Council Bluffs? What do people think about how the community is developing and where do people want to go? How split or unified are we?



# 2. Community Leader Interviews

**Fig. 4 Content of 16 Community Development and Beautification Issue Statements Developed from Community Leader Interviews**

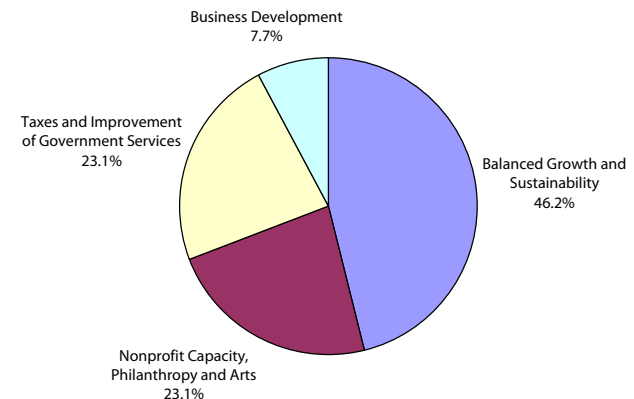


A total of 13 issue statements addressed economic development concerns. Table 2 provides the detailed statements, and Figure 5 shows the distribution of themes. Identifying themes within this special interest area was a bit more difficult than was the case for the Community Development and Beautification items. Still, several themes emerge:

- Balanced growth & Sustainability (6 items) [Items: 1, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13]
- Nonprofit Capacity, Philanthropy and Arts (3 items) [Items: 2, 7, 8]
- Taxes and Improvement of Government and Services (3 items) [Items: 3, 4, 5]
- Business Development (1 item) [Item: 9]

Three issue statements reflected concerns with education. Table 3 lists the detailed education special issue statements. These concerns focused on the overall priority and attention paid to youth education and development; the high school drop-out rate, especially in Council Bluffs; and college degree completion.

**Fig. 5 Content of 13 Economic Development Issue Statements Developed from Community Leader Interviews**



Human and Social Needs were the focus of five issue statements. Table 4 presents these statements. The Human and Social Needs concerns focused on: assessing the need to better address pressing issues such as mental

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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**Table 2: Economic Development Issue Statements**

1	Is Council Bluffs' growth to the east coming at the expense of the west? There appears to be on-going development of "two communities" <east and west>.
2	Can local human service agencies do more to be strategic in looking ahead? There seems to be a lack of objective data driving some decisions.
3	Can attitudes toward taxes be changed? The loss of business involvement via employees and CEOs may have affected attitudes toward government and taxes.
4	What additional opportunities exist for our local governments (city and county) to cooperate in serving tax payers and working for the good of the entire area?
5	Is the public transportation system serving the needs of the community?
6	How can Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County best promote sustainability issues? Are there specific sustainability issues that people want to see addressed (e.g., open-space/hills, public access to recreation land, water, trees, farmer's market/locally grown produce, recycling)?
7	How can we build a broader and more involved philanthropic community in Council Bluffs?
8	How important and critical is the focus on public arts—compared to some other needs? What are the benefits for the community?
9	Can the community do more to encourage development of space for "start-up" enterprises and nonprofits?
10	How much are people concerned about erosion control and storm water planning?
11	Are we a bedroom community, or what? Does the community want to see Council Bluffs become the residential community of choice in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area? Or, do we see Council Bluffs as a stand-alone, full-service community? Is the latter choice even realistic today?
12	Do community design issues need to be examined? Will CB become a location for businesses that couldn't live with Omaha's new design and zoning standards? Should CB strive for the same level; a different level and direction?
13	What is the role of smaller and rural communities in the growth of Council Bluffs, and vice versa? How can we encourage more collaboration and sustainable development in the smaller communities? Is there an "us" versus "them" divide between rural Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs?

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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health, substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, and public health; youth facilities, programs and services; and increasing volunteerism to meet human and social needs.

**2. Community Leader Review of Key Community Issue Statements.** Two meetings were held to provide the interviewees an opportunity to convene with one another to review and discuss the issue statements developed through the interview process. Invitations were sent via e-mail approximately 10 days in advance. An agenda and map were included with the e-mail invitation. A total of 23 of the 35 interviewees attended the meetings. Several leaders had prior commitments and were unable to attend.

## Meeting #1

The first meeting, attended by 15 interviewees, took place on October 19, 2006. The interviewees were primarily agency directors, executive directors, or business owners. A light breakfast was served, and attendees were provided an agenda, as well as a summary of the issue statements. Interviewees were asked to provide feedback and reaction to the statements. Questions posed to the group included:

- What is your reaction to the issue statements compiled from the interviews? Do the statements ring true to you?

- What is not included in the list of statements that should be included?
- What is included in the list of statements that should be eliminated?

Discussion followed for approximately 45 minutes. Overall, the group attending Meeting #1 felt the statements were too pessimistic and did not fully reflect the significant levels of improvement and progress made in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County communities during the previous 10-15 years. Furthermore, many in the group felt that a great deal of collaboration and partnering was taking place that would result in additional, significant improvement in the near future.

The first meeting concluded with agreement that the quality of life in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County communities is good, but that there is much work to be done. Furthermore, it was noted that much of the work remaining to be done is expensive work (from a funding/resource perspective).

Several additional recommendations and conclusions were offered during Meeting #1. These included the identification of several issues that need to be included in the list of issue statements. Each of these statements was

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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**Table 3: Education Issue Statements**

1	Can people and organizations in Council Bluffs come together to discuss and act on helping young people develop and prepare for the future? Is there a desire for more dialogue about our youth? Do we know how well we are doing as a community in this area?
2	Why does Council Bluffs/Pottawattamie County have such a small proportion of residents with a college degree? What is the role of access to higher education?
3	What can be done to better connect/excite all students with school? Are we losing too many of our young people as they move through the school system?

**Table 4: Human and Social Needs Issue Statements**

1	Are we doing enough as a community to address mental health and substance abuse?
2	Is there a need to engage more residents in helping one another out? How can we build volunteerism and support it?
3	Is the availability of quality, affordable child care adequate to meet the needs of the community?
4	Can Council Bluffs and the area do more to develop youth facilities, services, activities and challenges for young people of all types?
5	Are problems such as homelessness, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse being adequately addressed? To what extent are these issues connected to one another and/or provide a footing for other problems?

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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framed to pose a question about how the community might improve some facet of the quality of life:

- How can the community improve the condition of housing?
- How can the community increase the production of affordable housing?
- How can the community develop more jobs with wages and benefits that can support a family?

## **Meeting #2**

The second meeting was held the next day, October 20, 2006. The meeting was attended by eight leaders. Each had played several high profile roles in the community.

Once again, an agenda and summary of the key issue statements was provided to the leaders. Feedback and input were solicited using the same questions posed to the first meeting group.

The discussion was wide-ranging and animated. The feedback indicated that the list contained a good group of questions, overall. It was also noted that the list of key issue statements reflected a great deal of development in Council Bluffs since the development of the 1991 strategic plan. Most importantly, it was noted that there is a need to “fill in” and “finish off” certain areas.

Taking the next step was a key theme of this second leader meeting. Among the needs identified as deserving more attention and highlighting in the needs assessment process were the following:

- Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents are down-to-earth and hard-working. They quietly go about their life. What the community needs is a catalyst for further change and taking the next step.
- As a community, Council Bluffs needs to be reaching, not questioning and saying that we have already done enough
- There is a need to build a stronger expectation that the community deserves good things
- The next generation of community builders needs to be developed and nurtured.
  - Connected to this is a need to focus on building business owner and resident buy-in to participate in community and economic development work
  - The philanthropic community needs to be developed and enlarged to better support and contribute to important next steps

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

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- Economic development will continue to be critical, including several areas needing attention:
  - workforce development
  - job development
  - tax structure and its impacts on commercial development (especially space up to 1,500 sq. ft.) and multi-family housing
- Communication needs to be improved and developed. New, creative approaches to communication are needed to build stronger community.
- The rural-urban split between Council Bluffs and rural Pottawattamie County needs more attention. Sprawl must be monitored due its impact on the cost of services and agriculture.

These issues were used as a guide for determining which local reports, as well as numerous census and other databases, were examined in subsequent steps of the needs assessment process.

## **Final List of Community Issues**

A final list of community issues was developed. This list is presented in Table 5 and is the result of the interviews with the community leaders, the two feedback meetings, and e-mail/telephone conversations with several leaders who were unable to make the group meetings. As with the draft issue statements, the final community issues are grouped according to the four special interest areas of the Iowa West Foundation.

# 2. Community Leader Interviews

**Table 5: Revised Community Issues Identified Through Leader Interviews and Meetings**

	<b>Community Development and Beautification</b>
1	Increasing communication and building community
2	Develop leadership; help communities take the next steps; encourage and provide ways for business owners/managers and residents to get involved
3	Building pride and self-image
4	Continuing to make physical improvements to the community
5	Improve the condition of housing and increase the production of multi-family housing
6	Build and foster an expectation for continuing change and development in the community
	<b>Economic Development</b>
7	Encouraging balanced and sustainable growth, including paying attention to urban sprawl
8	Building the capacity of nonprofit organizations to better serve the community
9	Minimizing taxes, increasing governmental cooperation, and improving government services
10	Developing and encouraging small and new business start-up
11	Increase the number of jobs with wages and benefits; increase the quality of jobs
12	Build, expand and develop the size and diversity of the philanthropic sector
13	Encourage a tax structure that facilitates commercial and residential development, consistent with the needs of the community
	<b>Education</b>
14	Improving student connections to school, thus reducing the number who drop-out or who are not fully engaged in learning and developing
15	Increasing the proportion of residents with a college degree
16	Develop needed workforce skills and education levels
	<b>Human and Social Needs</b>
17	Better meeting pressing needs in areas such as mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, and public health.
18	Paying more attention to youth facilities, programs and services
19	Increasing volunteerism to meet human and social needs

# 3. Education Needs

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## Needs Assessment Strategy

This is the first of four sections of the report which present factual information documenting community needs. As explained in Section 1, the needs assessment is based on several different information sources and information gathering strategies. These include: community leader interviews; analysis of community trends using census, economic, education, and other sources of information; review of local organizations' plans and needs assessments; and two community attitude surveys of residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County.

The Iowa West Foundation emphasizes four special interest areas: Community Development and Beautification; Economic Development; Education; and Human and Social Needs. Within each of these four areas, the Foundation highlights several specific community needs for grant development and funding each year. The four broad areas and highlight issues used by the Foundation in 2006 are presented in Table 6.

This report reviews community needs in the following order, based on the researcher's assessment of their priority for the community: Education Needs; Economic Development Needs; Community Development and Beautification Needs; and Social and Human Needs. The

specific needs profiled in Sections 3-6, and the IWF special interest area each corresponds to, include:

- Education
  - Reducing the high school dropout rate; better connecting youth to school
  - Increasing the population with a college degree
  - Promoting adult education and life-long learning
- Economic Development
  - Encourage balanced, sustainable growth
  - Increase local wages and develop the job market to meet worker needs
- Community Development and Beautification
  - Support communication and build community
  - Build community pride and self-image
  - Making physical improvements to the community
  - Improve housing conditions and multi-family housing availability
- Human and Social Needs
  - Better meet pressing needs
  - Increase nonprofit organization capacity
  - Increase volunteerism and community involvement
  - Meet youth service and program needs



# 3. Education Needs

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**Table 6: 2006 Iowa West Foundation Special Interest Areas and Highlight Issues**

<p><b>1. Community Development and Beautification.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Encourage neighborhood revitalization and more livable neighborhoods</li><li>○ Improve quality of life and enhance image and/or appearance of the community</li><li>○ Improve public spaces, especially along: the Missouri River; Downtown Council Bluffs; the Mid-America Center; and major traffic arteries leading downtown</li><li>○ Corridor beautification, especially: West Broadway; East Kanesville Blvd; and the South Expressway</li></ul>
<p><b>2. Economic Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Retain and create family wage jobs that increase self-sufficiency for individuals and families</li><li>○ Build the capacity of the public and the nonprofit sectors to effectively plan and manage economic development projects.</li><li>○ Partner with local government and the nonprofit sector to support ongoing economic development projects at the Mid-America Center in order to create a major tourist and visitor destination for the region.</li><li>○ Fund the Pottawattamie County CITIES Fund (Community Improvements to Increase Economic Stability) for small community infrastructure needs</li></ul>
<p><b>3. Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ New and innovative programs that: promote life-long learning; academic performance; and workforce preparation</li><li>○ Early childhood education and quality daycare programs that meet: underserved age groups; and the needs of economically and educationally disadvantaged families</li></ul>
<p><b>4. Human and Social Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ New and innovative programs that: strengthen families; address the needs of underserved youth; provide services to seniors; and help citizens reach their potential</li><li>○ Focal areas include: Homeless and transitional housing; teenage pregnancy; prenatal care; chemical dependency, especially methamphetamine use; and collaborations to address needs</li></ul>

# 3. Education Needs

## Education Needs

One of the most important needs of the community is education. Young adults who have completed higher levels of education are more likely than those with lower levels to achieve economic success. Although many jobs have minimum educational requirements, completing more years of education also is known to protect against unemployment.

Higher levels of educational attainment also lead to higher wages and income, as well as jobs with opportunities for advancement. In the past few decades, earning differentials by education level have been increasing, especially among men. Adults with higher levels of education also report being in better health and having higher levels of socio-emotional well-being. They are also less likely to divorce.

Three different educational needs are identified in this section: high school drop-out rates that many feel are too high; too small a population with a college degree; and the need for additional emphasis on work skills, work training, and participation in life-long learning.

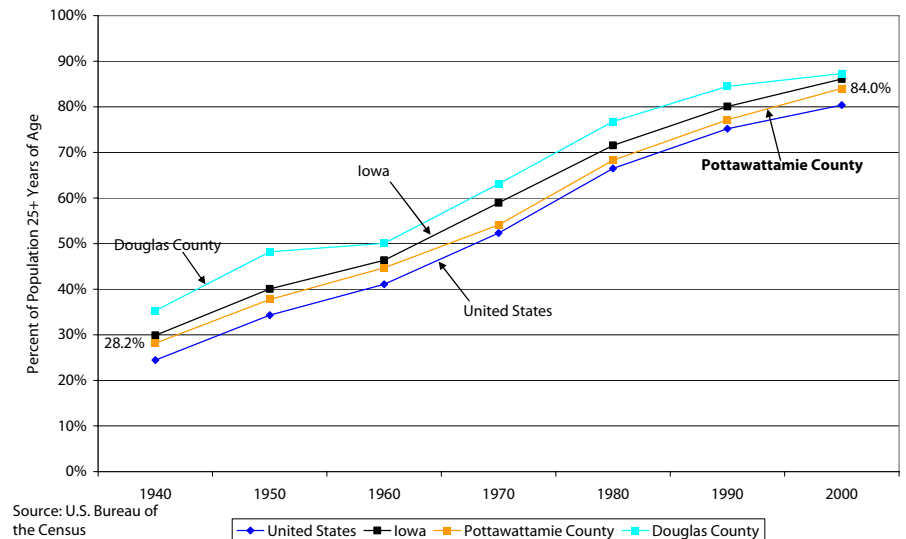
## Education Trends for Pottawattamie County

Figures 6 through 8 provide trend information for several indicators of educational achievement in Pottawattamie

County. Each of these trend lines are based on the population age 25 and older, and encompass the 1940-2000 time period. Comparison information is provided for the U.S., Iowa, and Douglas County, Nebraska.

The percentage of the population with a high school diploma is portrayed in Figure 6. As can be seen, the proportion for Pottawattamie County increased from 28.2 percent in 1940 to 84.0 percent in 2005. Pottawattamie County—like most of the nation's mid-section—has had a high school completion rate that exceeded the rate for the U.S. at every decennial census from 1940 to 2000. Note, however, that the proportion of the population with a high school diploma in Pottawattamie County has been lower than that for Iowa

Figure 6: Percentage of Population With High School Diploma



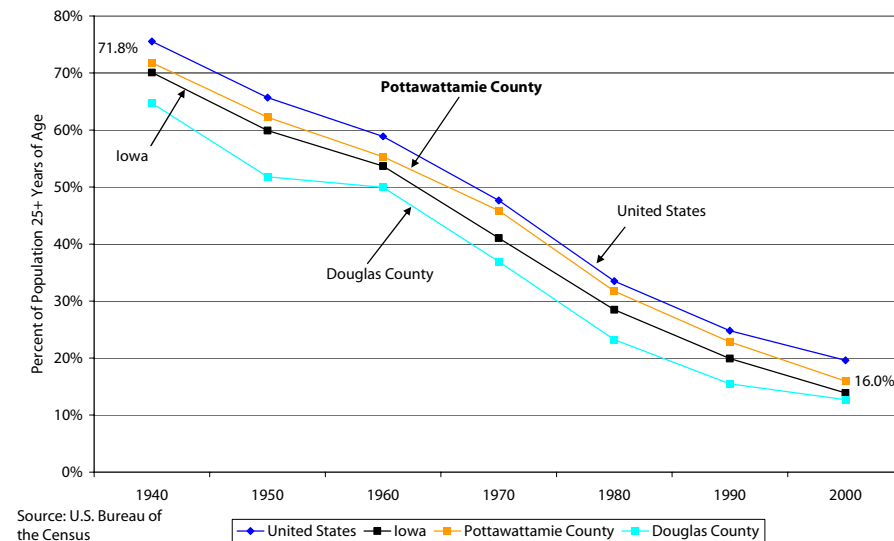
# 3. Education Needs

and Douglas County. Notably, Pottawattamie County has narrowed the gap with Douglas County since 1990. This is likely the result of significantly higher immigration growth in Douglas County.

Figure 7 presents information on the percentage of the population without a high school diploma. As can be seen, the proportion of the population without a high school diploma has declined steadily since 1940. In 1940, approximately 7 in 10 Pottawattamie County residents had not completed high school. By 2000, this proportion declined to less than 2 in 10 Pottawattamie County residents (16.0%). It is interesting to note that the slope

of the line leveled out slightly starting in 1980. This same trend occurred in the comparison units in 1980. Interestingly, Pottawattamie County is doing somewhat better than the comparison units, especially the U.S. and Douglas County. This is most likely the result of differences in population base, especially immigration patterns. While Pottawattamie County has a growing Hispanic/Latino population, this group is a very small proportion of the overall population. For example, the Hispanic population comprised approximately 5 percent of the Pottawattamie County population in 2000. In Douglas County, Hispanics constituted 15 percent of the population at the same point in time.

Figure 7: Percentage of Population Without High School Diploma

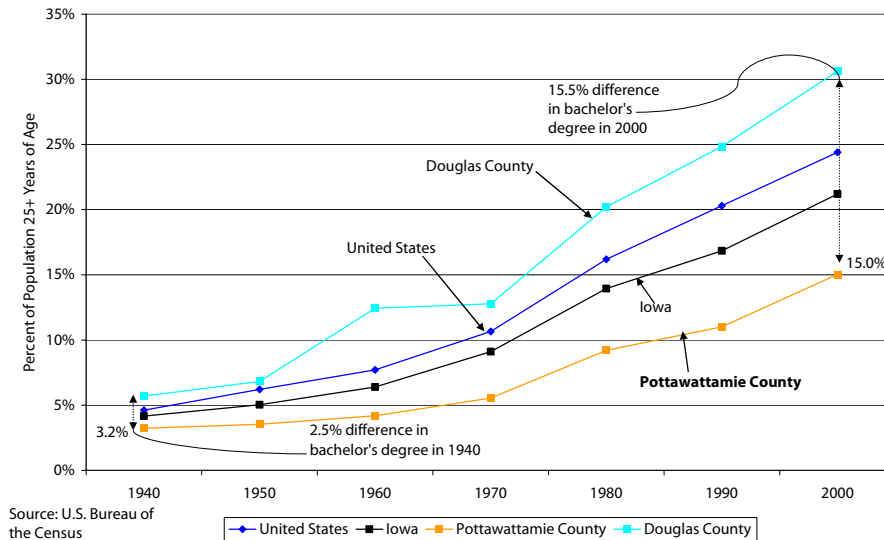


Another component of an area's educational can be found in the college graduation rate. Many of today's jobs, as well as those of the future, require a bachelor's degree or higher. Figure 8 presents trend information on the proportion of the population age 25 or older with a bachelor's degree or higher. As can be seen, 3.2 percent of Pottawattamie County residents had completed a bachelor's degree or higher in 1940, the first point in the 6 decade time series.

This proportion was very similar to that found for the comparison units (U.S., 4.6%; Iowa, 4.2%; and Douglas County, 5.7%). By 2000, the proportion of Pottawattamie County residents with a bachelor's degree or higher had

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Figure 8: Percent of Population With Bachelor's Degree or Higher



increased to 15.0 percent. While this increase was very substantial (369% increase), the gap between Pottawattamie County and Douglas County actually increased. During this same 60 year time period, Douglas County experienced a 436 percent increase in the percentage of population with a bachelor's degree or higher. By 2000, the gap in college graduation between Douglas and Pottawattamie County was an absolute 15.6 percent (30.6% and 15.0% bachelor's degree or higher, respectively). As note earlier, in 1940 the gap was an absolute 2.5 percent.

In summary, several things need to be highlighted about education trends for Pottawattamie County. First, the

proportion of the population with a high school diploma has consistently topped that of the U.S., but has been lower than that for Iowa and Douglas County. In recent years, Pottawattamie County has performed somewhat better than Douglas County. This is likely a function of differences in population immigration patterns. Second, the population not completing high school in Pottawattamie County has been consistently lower than that found for the U.S., but has been somewhat higher than Iowa and Douglas County. Third, the proportion of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher has been lower than the U.S., Iowa and Douglas County. Furthermore, Pottawattamie County is falling further behind in college completion.

## High School Drop-Out Rates

Interviews with leaders indicated general satisfaction with the local education system. At the same time, it was noted that the high school drop-out rate was too high. The information depicted in Figures 6 and 7 does indicate that Pottawattamie County lags Iowa and Douglas County in the proportion of population without a high school diploma. Furthermore, it is possible that the drop-out rate is higher than what might be reflected in Figure 7. For example, some percentage of drop-outs eventually obtains a high school diploma through alternative routes such as by obtaining a General Educational Development credential (GED). A further

# 3. Education Needs

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look at high school drop-out data for Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County is thus warranted.

Young people who drop out of high school are unlikely to have the minimum skills and credentials necessary to function in today's increasingly complex society and technological workplace. The completion of high school is required for accessing post-secondary education and is a minimum requirement for most jobs. High school dropouts are more likely than high school completers to be unemployed. Additionally, a high school diploma leads to higher income and occupational status. Interestingly, however, many youth who drop out of high school eventually earn a diploma or a GED. One study found that 63 percent of students who dropped out had earned a diploma or GED within eight years of the year they should have originally graduated.

Studies have found that young adults with low education and skill levels are more likely to live in poverty and to receive government assistance. High school dropouts are likely to stay on public assistance longer than those with at least a high school degree. Further, high school dropouts are more likely to become involved in crime.

## ***Recent Data on Pottawattamie County High School Drop-Out Rates***

There are several different measures used in reporting high school drop-out rates. The U.S. Department of

Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) regularly reports three types of dropout rates:

- Event rates reflect the percentage of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school. The Current Population Survey is used each year to estimate the event drop-out rate nationally. Using this estimate, approximately 5 percent of students drop out each year.
- Status rates reflect the percentage of the population in a given age range who have not finished high school or are not enrolled in school at one point in time. Status rates are higher than event rates since they reflect all students in a given age range who have dropped out of school over a number of year. Recent estimates place status drop-outs at 10 percent of persons aged 16-24.
- Cohort rates reflect the percentage of a single group of students who drop out over time. In 2000, 86.5 percent of all students aged 18-24 not enrolled in high school had completed school.

The Iowa Department of Education compiles high school graduation information from all Iowa school districts. Figure 9 summarizes the trend for high school graduation from 1998 to 2005, the most recent year

# 3. Education Needs

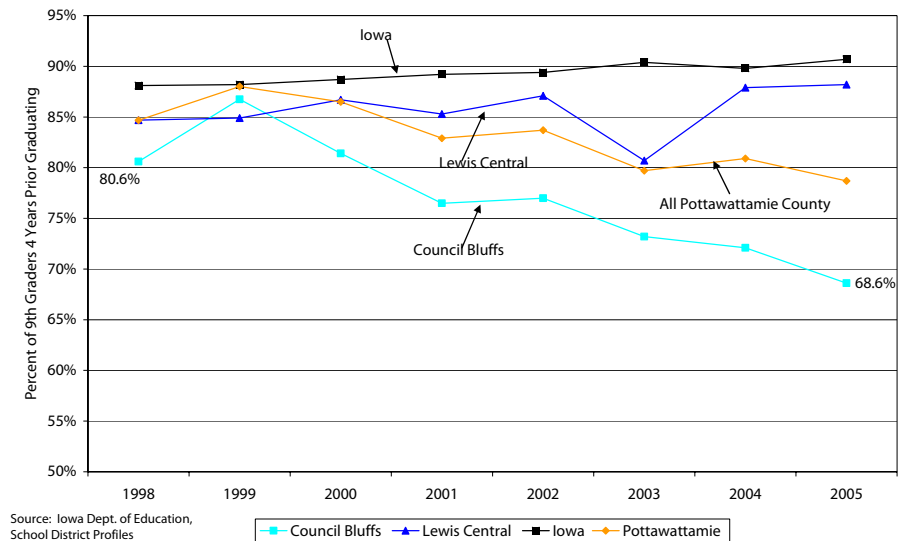
available. The drop-out information reported in Figure 9 is a cohort measure. The information is compiled by Iowa school districts using a methodology provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics, a part of the federal government.

The high school graduation rate is calculated by dividing the number of high school graduates in a given year by the estimated number of 9th graders four years previous. The estimated 9th grade enrollment is the sum of the number of high school graduates in that year and dropouts over the four series year period. More specifically: The total drop-outs include the number of dropouts in grade 9 in year 1, the number of dropouts in grade 11 in year 3, and the number of dropouts in grade 12 in year 4. Iowa high school graduation rate in year 4 equals the number of public high school regular diploma recipients in year 4 divided by the number of high school regular diploma recipients in year 4 plus the sum of dropouts in grades 9 through 12 from years 1 through 4 respectively.

Figure 9 reports an indirect, but widely reported measure of the drop-out rate. It must be kept in mind that if 68.6 percent of Council Bluffs 9<sup>th</sup> graders four years previous graduated in 2005, then 31.4 percent dropped out during the period. Figure 9 tells us several things. First, the high school graduation rate for Council Bluffs has been lower than that of Iowa and all Pottawattamie County school

districts in each of the years reported from 1998-2005. Furthermore, Council Bluffs high school graduation rates have lagged those of Lewis Central Schools in each year except 1999. Second, Figure 9 clearly shows that the recent trend in high school graduation for Council Bluffs has been declining since 1999. In 2005, Council Bluffs'

Figure 9: Recent High School Graduation Rates



graduation rate of 68.6 percent (of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders four years prior) was an absolute 22.1 percent lower than was found for all Iowa school districts, and was significantly lower than that of the Lewis Central School District and all Pottawattamie County Schools.

As was shown earlier, there are multiple measures of the high school drop-out rate. Clearly, the graduation rate is

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but one measure. At the same time, it must be remembered that is a key, straightforward measure. If unchanged in the future, the data reported in Figure 9 may point to a future in which the education level of Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs could reverse long-standing trends.

## **Public Attitudes about the Local High School Drop-Out Rate**

Several items in the community attitude survey focused on the high school drop-out issue. Attachment 3 reviews the methodology for the two surveys. Attachments 4 and 5 provide copies of the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County survey forms. Attachments 6 and 7 provide a complete set of response frequencies for each survey. One item asked Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents to indicate their agreement with the statement, “The entire Council Bluffs area community (Pottawattamie County area communities) needs to do a better job of reducing the number of high school drop-outs?” Table 7 summarizes responses for Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents. As can be seen, a significantly higher proportion of Council Bluffs residents say they “Strongly Agree” with the statement than is the case for Pottawattamie County residents. Notice that both sample groups agree with the statement. The Council Bluffs sample shows more intensity in their response.

**Table 7**  
**Agreement That More Work Needs to Be Done to Reduce the Number of High School Drop-outs**

	<b>Council Bluffs (N=555)</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County (N=279)</b>
Strongly agree	42.7%	26.9%
Agree	52.3%	62.4%
Disagree	4.9%	9.7%
Strongly disagree	0.2%	1.1%

A second statement asked respondents in both Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County: “How satisfied are you at the present time with – Programs to connect all youth to school, thus ensuring graduation from high school?” This item was included in the survey due to the likelihood that a high proportion of residents would say that reducing high school drop-out rate is important. This was in fact the case.

Table 8 summarizes responses for the two sample groups. As can be seen, the item on satisfaction with programs to connecting all youth to school in order to ensure graduation had a wider range of responses than with the other drop-out item. For Council Bluffs, respondents were split, with 50 percent satisfied (very or somewhat satisfied) and 50 percent dissatisfied (somewhat or dissatisfied). Pottawattamie County residents, however, were more likely to be satisfied than

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**Table 8**  
**Satisfaction with Efforts to Connect Youth to High School to Ensure Graduation**

	<b>Council Bluffs (N=424)</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County (N=243)</b>
Very satisfied	10.8%	16.5%
Somewhat satisfied	39.2%	49.8%
Somewhat dissatisfied	36.6%	23.0%
Very dissatisfied	13.4%	10.7%

dissatisfied with efforts to ensure high school graduation. These response patterns are consistent with objective data on graduation rates, and with the community leader interview data.

## Completion of College Degrees

Most Americans think that a college education has taken on the same importance that a high school diploma had in the past. A bachelor's degree is now viewed as a prerequisite for a good job and comfortable lifestyle. Over two-thirds of parents of high school students say that a college education is absolutely necessary for their child to complete. Furthermore, over two-thirds of adults who didn't go to college wish they had. In simplest terms, a bachelor's degree is now viewed as a basic ingredient for young people entering the labor force. For adults without a college degree, enrolling or returning to

college has become a familiar refrain as well. For all employed adults, occasional training and re-training have become a part of a process of life-long learning. The bottom line is that additional education translates into additional income.

Earlier, it was shown that the proportion of Pottawattamie County residents with a bachelor's degree or higher has for years lagged behind levels for the U.S., Iowa and Douglas County. Figure 10 summarizes college degree attainment for Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County residents. Comparison information is also provided for the U.S. As can be seen, 15.1 percent of Pottawattamie County and 13.9 percent of Council Bluffs residents age 25 and older had completed a bachelor's degree or higher in 2000, the last official Census date.

These rates were quite a bit lower than those reported for Iowa and the U.S., and significantly lower than the 30.6 percent reported for Douglas County in 2000. Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs have a level of college degree attainment that is 61.9 and 57.0 percent, respectively, of the U.S. level. Compared to Douglas County, the levels are but 49.3 and 45.4 percent of the level found for Douglas County in 2000. Estimates for 2005 produced by the American Community Survey show that the difference between Pottawattamie and Douglas County in college degree attainment has not been reduced. In fact, the gap has increased somewhat



# 3. Education Needs

since 2000, with current levels estimated at 17.3 percent in Pottawattamie County and 35.5 percent in Douglas County.

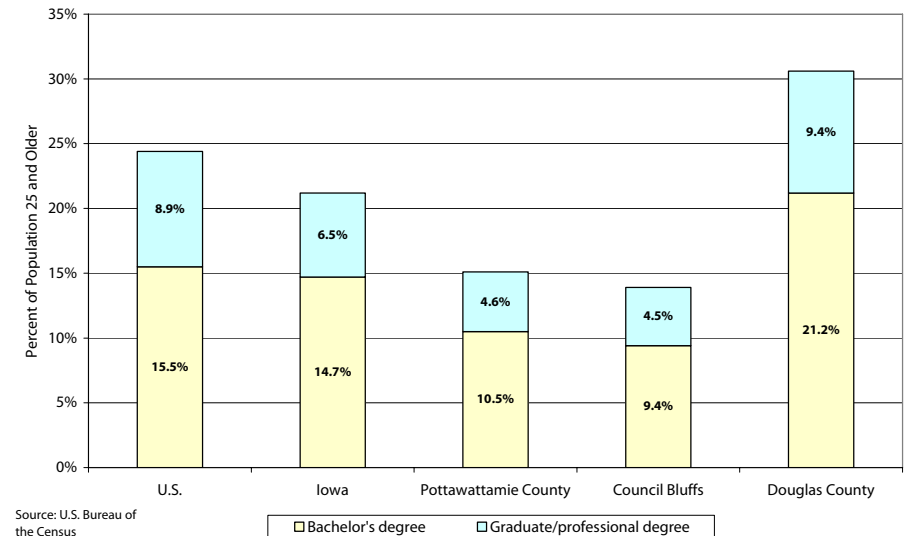
In Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs, the percentage of the population enrolled in college also lags the U.S., Iowa, and Douglas County (see Figure 11). The base for computing this information is different from the base used for the college degree attainment. For the enrollment figure, the number enrolled in college is divided by the number of persons age 3 and older who are enrolled in school. Generally, the percentage of residents enrolled in college mirrors the proportion who have bachelor's degrees or higher.

## ***Desire for a College Degree: Current Survey Information***

Several items in the community attitude survey were designed to explore resident desire for a college degree and some of the barriers to following through with college plans. Residents were asked if they had thought about getting a 4-year college/university degree or graduate degree. As can be seen in Table 9, almost 4 out of 10 (38.6 percent) respondents said "Yes" to this question. Among this group, approximately one-half had thought about pursuing an undergraduate degree and approximately one-half had thought about working toward a graduate degree.

The attitude survey also asked respondents who have thought about getting a 4-year (undergraduate) or graduate degree if one or more of four barriers had

Figure 10: College Degree Attainment - 2000



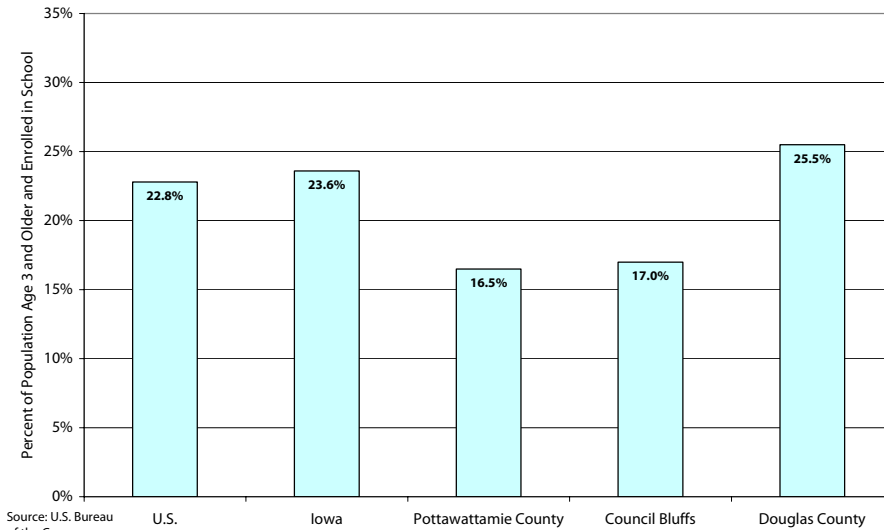
limited their ability to undertake or complete a college degree. Table 10 summarizes responses of adults desiring to work on a bachelor's degree. Table 11 summarizes this same information for those desiring to work toward a graduate degree.

As can be seen in Table 10, more people (40.0%) cited the lack of affordable access to a nearby 4-year university degree program in Iowa than any other factor. Next most likely to be cited as a barrier was the lack of courses

# 3. Education Needs

offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County) as part of a complete 4-year university degree program (28.0%).

Figure 11: Percentage Enrolled in College/Graduate School



Fully 1 in 5 respondents (21.1%) cited the lack of courses of any kind offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County) as a barrier to their attaining their undergraduate degree. The lack of affordable access to a nearby 4-year college or university degree program in Nebraska was least likely to be cited as a limiting factor (17.1%).

Table 11 provides information on barriers to attaining a graduate degree. Respondents were provided with a list of four factors and asked if each had limited their ability

to undertake or complete a graduate degree. Overall, the limiting factors cited by respondents desiring to work toward a graduate degree were listed in similar rank order. Thus, lack of affordable access to a nearby graduate degree program in Iowa was mentioned most frequently. This was followed by lack of graduate courses offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County) as part of a complete degree program, lack of graduate courses of any kind offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County), and access to a graduate degree program in Nebraska.

Interestingly, the proportions of respondents citing one or more of the limiting factors is higher for graduate than for undergraduate degrees.

Table 9  
Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County  
Residents' Planning for a College Degree

Have you thought about getting a 4-year college/university degree, or a graduate degree?		
	Number	Percent
Yes	310	38.6
No	493	61.4
Total	803	100.0
Would that be an undergraduate or graduate degree?		
	Number	Percent
Undergraduate	149	50.3
Graduate	147	49.7
Total	296	100.0

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**Table 10**  
**Barriers Cited by Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County**  
**Residents Desiring an Undergraduate Degree**

Lack of 4-year university course of any kind offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County)		
	Number	Percent
Yes	30	21.1
No	112	78.9
Total	142	100.0
Lack of courses offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County) as part of a complete 4-year university degree program		
	Number	Percent
Yes	40	28.0
No	103	72.0
Total	143	100.0
Lack of affordable access to a nearby 4-year university degree program in Iowa		
	Number	Percent
Yes	58	40.0
No	87	60.0
Total	145	100.0
Lack of affordable access to a nearby 4-year college or university degree program in Nebraska		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	24	17.1
No	116	82.9
Total	140	100.0

## Status of Adult Education and Life-Long Learning in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County

There is almost universal agreement today that adults will have multiple jobs, careers, or work experiences over their lifetime. There is also wide-spread agreement that working adults need to be ready to learn new job skills, train, and re-train. In other words, most working adults need to be engaged in “life-long learning.”

To gauge the participation of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents’ participation in life-long learning and adult education activities, several items were included in the community attitude survey completed for the needs assessment. An initial question asked respondents if they had taken classes, courses, programs, workshops, or training of any kind for any reason during the past year? Overall, 42.3 percent of all Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County survey respondents said they had taken one or more classes, programs, workshops, or training during 2006. Analysis of response differences between Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents indicated no significant differences. As a result, Figure 12 summarizes the proportions of combined survey respondents indicating they participated in selected adult education activities during 2006.

# 3. Education Needs

**Table 11**  
**Barriers Cited by Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County**  
**Residents Desiring a Graduate Degree**

Lack of graduate-level university courses of any kind offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County)		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	46	32.9
No	94	67.1
Total	140	100.0
Lack of graduate-level courses offered in Council Bluffs (Pottawattamie County) as part of a complete university graduate degree program		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	59	41.5
No	83	58.5
Total	142	100.0
Lack of affordable access to a nearby graduate university degree program in Iowa		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	67	46.5
No	77	53.5
Total	144	100.0
Lack of affordable access to a nearby graduate university degree program in Nebraska		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	27	19.0
No	115	81.0
Total	142	100.0

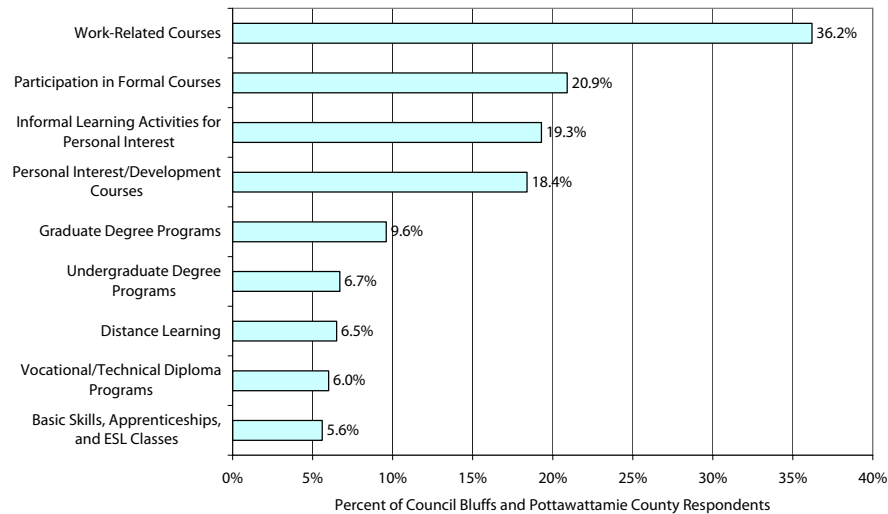
Among the approximately 4 in 10 respondents participating in adult education activities in 2006, more indicated they participated in work-related courses than any other category (36.2%). The next most frequently listed activities were: Participation in Formal Courses (20.9%); Informal Learning Activities for Personal Interest (19.3%); and Personal Interest/ Development Courses (18.4%).

The community attitude survey adult education items were adapted from indicators regularly used in a national survey of adult education (Condition of Education, 2005). When compared to the 2005 U.S. survey, Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents participated in adult education activities in 2006 at a level that is just slightly lower (44.4%) than that found nationally. In addition, several other differences are evident:

- Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents are more likely to report participating in:
  - Work-Related Courses (36.2% vs. 26.9% for U.S.)
  - Basic Skills, Apprenticeships, and ESL Classes (5.6% vs. 3.2% for U.S.)
- Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents are less likely to report participating in:
  - Personal Interest/Development Courses (18.4% vs. 21.4% for U.S.)

# 3. Education Needs

**Figure 12: Participation in Adult Education and Life-Long Learning Activities in 2006:  
Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County Residents**



Overall, the adult education and life-long learning items point to a very healthy level of activity in the community. To assess how broadly various segments of the community are engaged in life-long learning activities, differences in participation were analyzed. Several key variables were examined, including: education levels, work status, and income level. Several differences emerged; all show statistically significant differences across sub-groups. Differences include the following:

- Younger persons are more likely to have participated in one or more of the adult education activities in 2006 (19-49 years of age = 53.2%; 50 and older = 27.9%). Review of participation across

more detailed age categories shows there is a moderate, inverse relationship between participation in adult education activities and age.

- Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to have participated in one or more adult education activities in 2006. Respondents with a high school diploma participated at just one-half the rate of those with a college diploma (21.4% and 58.4%, respectively).
- Persons with higher incomes are more likely to have participated in one or more of the adult education activities in 2006. A respondent reporting that their total family income was \$25,000 or less participated at less than one-half the rate of those whose family income was \$75,000 or higher (24.5% and 57.3%, respectively).

Clearly, not all Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents have the same adult education desires and needs. At the same time, the statistically significant gaps in adult education participation rates across age, education and income groups points to the need to explore how to increase access to adult education opportunities to enhance work and personal quality of life.

# 3. Education Needs

## A Look Ahead: The Impact of Increased Education Levels on Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County

Clearly, several important education needs exist. Addressing these multiple issues requires extensive community dialogue, additional study, and the development of detailed, multi-faceted action strategies.

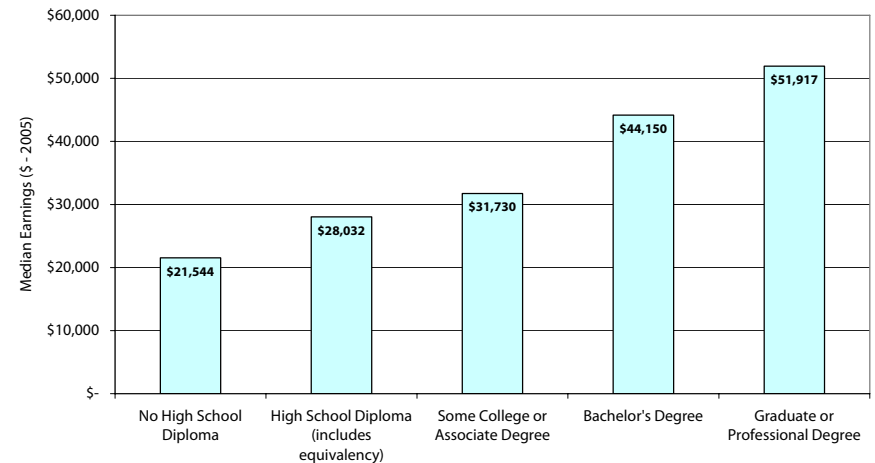
The community attitude survey indicates broad community concern about the high school dropout rate. There is also broad agreement that more needs to be done to connect students to schools, and to better meet the development needs of youth. Still, many will likely question whether the expense and effort required to address the high school dropout issue, as well as the college and adult education issues, will result in community-wide benefits.

While a definitive answer to this important question can only be provided in the future, it is possible to ask and answer a different type of question: What impact would a dramatic increase in education levels have on personal income and economic activity in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County?

Figure 13 helps answer this question by providing summary information on median earnings for individuals age 25 and older for 2005. As can be seen,

Pottawattamie County adults without a high school degree earned \$21,544. Adults with a high school degree earned 30.1 percent more (\$28,032) than adults without a high school diploma. Pottawattamie County residents with a bachelor's degree had median 2005 earnings that were \$16,118 greater than the level reported for high school graduates. Pottawattamie County adults with some college or an associate's degree had 2005 median earnings of \$31,730. This level is \$3,699 (13.1%) greater than that reported for high school graduates.

Figure 13: Median Earnings in Past 12 Months by Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Over: Pottawattamie County



Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005

Using this information, it is estimated that each 1,000 additional adult Pottawattamie County adults with a bachelor's degree would translate into approximately

# 3. Education Needs

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\$16.1 million in additional income for the county and its communities. If Pottawattamie County were to increase the proportion of its population with a bachelor's degree to match that of the U.S., there would likely be \$66.1 million in additional earnings for adult residents. If the county were to increase the proportion of its population with a bachelor's degree to match that of Douglas County, there would likely be approximately \$118.4 million in additional income. Matching the U.S. college completion rate would increase wage earnings in Pottawattamie County by approximately 6.4 percent.

A recent report of the Iowa Legislative Services Agency focused on the cost of high school dropouts to the State of Iowa. While Pottawattamie County fares well when compared to other jurisdictions' dropout rates, the Council Bluffs school performance is lagging. As documented earlier, there is widespread public concern about this.

Efforts to reduce the high school dropout rate in Council Bluffs can produce big dividends. For example, the Iowa dropout report notes that, nationwide, a dropout's lifetime earnings are approximately \$271,000 less than a high school graduate can expect to earn. Additionally, a number of social and economic costs can be avoided by reducing dropout rates. The unemployment rate for dropouts is twice that of high school graduates. As might be expected, dropouts are also more likely to

require welfare services. Finally, reducing the dropout rate can increase tax collections as a result of higher incomes. For example, the Iowa Legislative Services Agency estimates that a potential dropout who remained in school and graduated would pay an additional \$130 in income tax and another \$61 in sales tax.

Obviously, increasing education levels in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs can have a positive effect on reduced social costs; increased sense of self-control; increased purchasing and spending (e.g., purchasing more expensive housing), higher tax payments; increased home maintenance, and a variety of other positive effects. Efforts need to be increased to reduce the high school dropout rate, increase college degree completion, and to generally promote lifetime learning. The latter area will support a smarter, more agile workforce and community.

## **Summary of Education Needs**

The most important need identified by this community needs assessment is to increase education levels. One of the most striking features of the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County community is the low level of education, especially the proportion of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher. In addition, the high school drop-out rate has been increasing in Council

# 3. Education Needs

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Bluffs. Addressing these two issues is critical to the area's future development.

## **Reduce the High School Drop-Out Rate**

The Council Bluffs Community School District must reverse a declining high school graduation rate. Despite traditionally having a high school diploma rate that exceeds that of the nation, Pottawattamie County has trailed the performance of Iowa and Douglas County, the core county of the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA. In fact, Iowa Department of Education Data gathered from local school districts documents that Council Bluffs' high school graduation rate has been declining since 1999.

Even though many individuals who drop out of high school eventually earn a GED, the work and life experiences of these persons is known to differ from those graduating from high school. Based on data reported in the needs assessment, persons not completing high school earned one-half the amount of Pottawattamie County residents with a bachelor's degree in 2005.

Data drawn from the community attitude survey conducted for the needs assessment shows strong agreement by the public that more work needs to be done to reduce the number of high school drop-outs.

## **Increase the Proportion of the Population with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher**

The number of college degree holders needs to be increased. Addressing this need will lead to income gains and economic development. In 1940, the percentage of the Pottawattamie County population (3.2%) with a bachelor's degree was very close to the U.S., Iowa, and Douglas county levels. By 2000, Pottawattamie County had fallen far behind the comparison units. For example, in 2000, the percentage of bachelor's degree holders in Pottawattamie County was 15.0 percent. In Douglas County, the comparable level was 30.5 percent. Thus, a 2.5 percent difference between Douglas and Pottawattamie County in 1940 had grown to a 15.5 percent difference in 2000.

Despite having a community college within its borders, Pottawattamie County lags the U.S., Iowa, and Douglas County in the percentage of individuals enrolled in college/graduate school. Despite this fact, the community attitude survey discovered that almost 4 in 10 adult high school graduates (those who had not graduated from college) reported they had thought about getting a college or graduate degree. The top limiting factors mentioned by those desiring to complete a bachelor's degree were the lack of affordable access to a nearby 4-year university degree program in Iowa and



# 3. Education Needs

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the lack of 4-year university courses offered in Council Bluffs/Pottawattamie County.

## ***Promote Adult Education and Life-Long Learning.***

Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents are involved in a variety of adult education and life-long learning activities. Additional effort is needed to increase participation rates and to involve broader segments of the community. There is almost universal agreement today that adults will have multiple jobs, careers, or work experiences over their lifetime. There is also agreement that working adults need to learn new skills, train, and re-train.

Community attitude survey evidence shows that just fewer than 4 in 10 area residents participated in some type of adult education activity in 2006. This is just slightly lower than the national rate of 44.4 percent. According to the survey evidence, Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents are more likely to participate in work-related courses, and basic skills, apprenticeship and ESL classes.

Local residents are less likely than U.S. adults to participate in personal interest/development courses. Younger residents, those with higher education levels, and persons with higher incomes were more likely to say

they participated in one or more of the adult education and lifelong learning activities in 2006.

## **Addressing Education Needs**

Nine different alternatives for addressing education needs are offered. These include the following:

### ***Alternatives to Consider***

#### **Reduce the High School Drop-Out Rate**

- Encourage continued and sustainable funding for early childhood education initiatives, especially in Council Bluffs (also included in the section on Social and Human Needs). This is a long-term strategy that needs to be pursued at the same time the community is working to address those students currently in the school system. The IWF currently is funding major work in early childhood education. A comprehensive evaluation is a part of the initiative. Several national evaluations show that early childhood education can increase high school completion.
- Develop a broad, community-based task force charged to assess options for reducing the drop-out rate. Consideration should be given to a comprehensive effort tied to research-based evaluations. For example, Child Trends maintains several databases and guides to assist community-

# 3. Education Needs

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and schools-based efforts to reduce drop-out rates: *The Youth Outcomes Compendium* and *What Works: Programs for Teens*. Among the key factors to address are the following: academic achievement; involvement in extra-curricular activities; not using drugs during adolescence; not having early sex or becoming a parent during adolescence; social psychological well-being (self-esteem, perceived academic ability, school engagement); not repeating a grade or being over-age; not working more than 20 hours per week; not having a behavior problem or aggressive behavior; and high quality early child care program attendance.

- Consider asking Council Bluffs' high school drop-outs about their experience. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently completed a major study (*The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*) which asked high school drop-outs to share their experiences and attitudes. Too many studies don't incorporate the views of drop-outs in developing responses to the problem.
- Consider adopting the Learning to Finish™ Campaign sponsored by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. The Learning to Finish™ effort focuses on academic and social interventions for eighth graders based on the participating communities' studies of what skills students lack to be successful in high school. The Pew Partnership

for Civic Change is seeking communities to work with this new initiative. Ninth grade is the critical year of transition, and the key need is to identify students at-risk of dropping out of school and to ensure they have the skills, resources, and incentives to stay connected to school.

- Join the Iowa Department of Education in advocating that the legal drop-out age be increased from the current age of 16.
- Develop a long-term mentoring program, possibly coupled with a college (community or 4-year) scholarship program, for students at-risk of dropping out. As noted in the section on youth services and programs, the community attitude survey found low levels of satisfaction with mentoring programs.

## **Increase the Population with a Bachelor's Degree**

- The community attitude survey found that approximately one-half of all area adults with a high school degree have thought about attending college, but have not. A variety of strategies for increasing the proportion of adults attending college or graduate school exist. Strategies to consider include (*from least to most difficult*):
  - Support scholarships for adults desiring to complete a bachelor's degree. Scholarships

# 3. Education Needs

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would be available for use at a qualifying higher education institution in Iowa or Nebraska.

- Work to support development of reduced tuition rates for Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents at existing Omaha colleges and universities.
- Create a higher education center in Council Bluffs. The center could be co-located on the Iowa Western Community College (IWCC) campus and provide facilities and support staff for public and private universities offering degree work and courses in Council Bluffs. Infrastructure costs could be reduced through co-location with IWCC.
- Establish tuition reciprocity between Iowa and Nebraska, with particular emphasis on developing a “higher education common market” serving the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA.
- Create a new, upper-level (junior and senior) undergraduate university in Council Bluffs. The institution could be affiliated with an existing Iowa public university. Such an educational institution would work closely with students attending Iowa Western Community College.
- Establish a public undergraduate institution in Council Bluffs.

## **Promote Adult Education and Life-Long Learning**

- Support development of an inventory of education, nonprofit, and corporate providers of adult and life-long education services.
- Work to develop collaborative marketing strategies to encourage increased community participation in adult education activities for both personal and work-related growth and development.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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## Economic Development Needs

Several different needs were identified that align with the Iowa West Foundation's Economic Development special interest area. These needs are:

- Encourage balanced, sustainable growth
- Minimize taxes and encourage governmental collaboration in service delivery
- Encourage small and new business start-up
- Increasing the number of jobs with wages and benefits; increase the quality of jobs
- Build the philanthropic sector
- Encourage a tax structure facilitating development

This section presents detailed information on two needs that can be addressed by the Iowa West Foundation: encourage balanced, sustainable growth; and increase local wages and develop the job market.

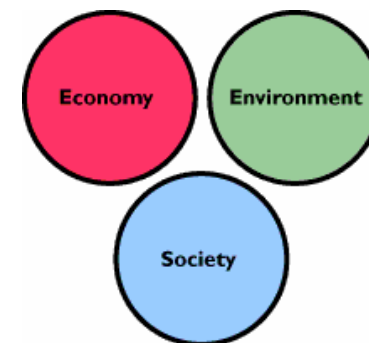
## Balanced, Sustainable Growth

The sustainability of both urban and rural development is increasing as a focus world-wide. A number of U.S. communities—both rural and urban—have identified sustainable development as a major challenge for their future development.

According to the nonprofit organization, Sustainable Measures, sustainability is related to the quality of life in a community. The major concern is with whether or not the economic, social and environmental systems that make up the community are providing a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all community residents, both present and future.

When society, the economy and environment are viewed as separate, unrelated parts of a community, the community's problems are also viewed as isolated issues. Figure 14 provides a graphic depiction of this view of the community. Guided by this orientation, Chambers of Commerce and economic development commissions try to create more jobs. Planning departments and developers try to create more subdivisions and housing. Social needs are addressed by health care services and

**Figure 14: Community as Three Separate and Unrelated Parts**



Source: Sustainable Measures;  
[www.sustainablemeasures.com](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com)

# 4. Economic Development Needs

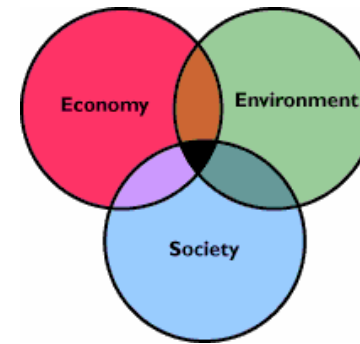
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housing authorities. Environmental agencies try to prevent and correct pollution problems. This piecemeal approach can mean that some solutions to a problem may make other problems worse. For example, adding more housing outside the development zone can result in infrastructure improvements that would not be required by in-fill housing.

Actions to improve conditions in a sustainable community take these very connections into account. Questions asked about issues in a “sustainable” community include references to these links. For example, the question, “Do the jobs available match the skills of the available work force?” looks at the link between economy and education. Understanding the three parts and their links is the key to understanding sustainability. Figure 15 presents an alternative way of depicting the interrelationships of these factors. Sustainability is about much more than just quality of life. It is about understanding the connections between and achieving balance among the social, economic, and environmental pieces of a community.

Figure 16 depicts an alternative way of looking at the facets of the community depicted earlier. Showing how the economy, society and environment overlap is advancement from the orientation depicted in Figure 14.

**Figure 15: Community as Three Linked Parts**

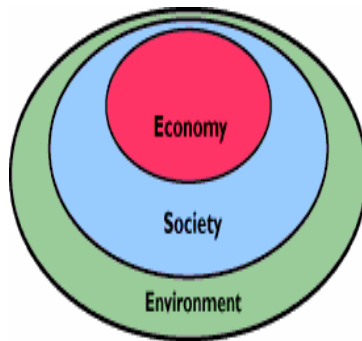


Source: Sustainable Measures;  
[www.sustainablemeasures.com](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com)

Figure 16 depicts a further refinement of how the parts of a community are interconnected. In this graphic, community is depicted as a series of circles within circles. Sustainability thus requires managing all households and organizations in ways that ensure that the economy and society continue to exist without destroying the natural environment on which we all depend. Sustainable communities acknowledge that there are limits to the natural, social and built systems which we depend. Key questions asked in a sustainable community include: “Are we using this resource faster than it can be renewed?” and “Are we enhancing the social and human capital upon which our community depends?”

# 4. Economic Development Needs

**Figure 16**  
**View of Community as Three Concentric Rings**



Source: Sustainable Measures;  
www.sustainablemeasures.com

- Council Bluffs needs more jobs that pay enough to support a family (93.3% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- Growth in any part of Council Bluffs benefits the entire Council Bluffs community (82.6% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- The location of residential growth in Council Bluffs is currently in the best locations for the community (77.2% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- Development and zoning policies used by the City of Council Bluffs lead to orderly growth (71.2% Agree/Strongly Agree)

Council Bluffs residents *agree less strongly* with the following issue statements:

- Currently, Council Bluffs is doing a good job of balancing its efforts to maintain older areas and provide support for growth (63.7% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- The fringe areas of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County are developing too rapidly and contributing to sprawl-related problems (62.9% Disagree/Strongly Disagree)
- Affordable housing is in short supply in Council Bluffs (57.7% Agree/Strongly Agree)

## **Community Attitudes toward Sustainability**

The community attitude survey was designed to probe several sustainability issues.

### **1. Council Bluffs Resident Attitudes**

Table 12 summarizes the responses of Council Bluffs residents to statements related to development, growth, and sustainability issues. Respondents were read a statement and asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement.

As can be seen, Council Bluffs *residents most strongly agree* that:

# 4. Economic Development Needs

**Table 12**  
**Sustainability Attitudes: Council Bluffs Residents**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Growth in any part of Council Bluffs benefits the entire community (N=586)	21.0%	61.6%	15.4%	2.0%
Development and zoning policies used by the City of Council Bluffs lead to orderly growth (N=507)	4.7%	66.5%	26.4%	2.4%
Fringe areas are developing too rapidly and contributing to sprawl-related problems (N=558)	6.3%	30.8%	55.7%	7.2%
Affordable housing is in short supply (N=546)	17.4%	40.3%	38.5%	3.8%
Council Bluffs needs more jobs that pay enough to support a family (N=579)	42.7%	50.6%	6.2%	0.5%
The location of residential growth is currently in the best locations for the community (N=557)	6.1%	71.1%	20.8%	2.0%
Currently Council Bluffs is doing a good job of balancing efforts to maintain older areas and provide support for growth (N=571)	7.4%	56.4%	31.5%	4.7%

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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Overall, it is clear that Council Bluffs residents feel that growth in any part of Council Bluffs benefits the entire community. There is also agreement that the community is balancing and leading physical development in appropriate ways.

It is also clear that residents feel that more needs to be done to develop jobs that pay enough to support a family and to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Finally, it is important to point out that a sizable minority of the community disagrees with current attention to the sustainability efforts explored through several of these statements. For example, 1 in 3 respondents said “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” with the statements on balancing efforts to maintain older areas and provide support for growth and 1 in 3 respondents said “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the statement that development is too rapid and is contributing to sprawl-related problems.

## **2. Pottawattamie County Resident Attitudes**

Table 13 summarizes the responses of Pottawattamie County residents to statements related to development, growth, and sustainability issues. As was the case for the Council Bluffs residents, county respondents were read a statement and asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Pottawattamie County *residents most strongly agree* with the following statements:

- Pottawattamie County’s communities have a good future as places to live (94.1% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- Pottawattamie County needs more jobs that pay enough to support a family (93.9% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- Currently, Pottawattamie County communities are doing a good job of balancing their efforts to support growth, while maintaining the quality of life (85.0% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- Growth in any part of Pottawattamie County benefits the entire county (76.7% Agree/Strongly Agree)

County residents *agree less strongly* with the following statements:

- The fringe areas of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County are developing too rapidly and contributing to sprawl-related problems (60.4% Disagree/ Strongly Disagree)
- Pottawattamie County government works wells to support the growth and development of the smaller communities (59.5% Agree/Strongly Agree)
- Pottawattamie County needs more open space for recreation (57.6% Agree/Strongly Agree)



# 4. Economic Development Needs

**Table 13**  
**Sustainability Attitudes: Pottawattamie County Residents**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Growth in any part of Pottawattamie County benefits the entire county (N=305)	16.1%	60.7%	20.7%	2.6%
The fringe areas of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County are developing too rapidly and contributing to sprawl-related problems (N=290)	6.2%	33.4%	55.2%	5.2%
Affordable housing is in short supply in Pottawattamie County (N=275)	10.2%	40.0%	46.9%	2.9%
Pottawattamie County needs more jobs that pay enough to support a family (N=293)	30.7%	63.1%	5.8%	0.3%
Pottawattamie County's communities have a good future as places to live (N=306)	18.3%	75.8%	5.2%	0.7%
Currently, Pottawattamie County communities are doing a good job of balancing their efforts to support growth, while maintaining the quality of life (N=292)	3.8%	81.2%	13.7%	1.4%
Pottawattamie County government works well to support the growth and development of the smaller communities (N=284)	3.8%	81.2%	13.7%	1.4%
Pottawattamie County needs more open space for recreation (N=288)	9.4%	48.3%	40.6%	1.7%

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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- Affordable housing is in short supply in Pottawattamie County (50.2% Agree/Strongly Agree)

The overall findings on sustainability issues for Pottawattamie County residents are similar to Council Bluffs. Residents feel that Pottawattamie County overall findings on sustainability issues for Pottawattamie County residents are similar to Council Bluffs. Residents feel that Pottawattamie County communities have a good future as places to live. They agree that growth and quality of life are being balanced.

Paralleling Council Bluffs residents, Pottawattamie County residents strongly feel that more needs to be done to develop jobs paying enough to support a family. A majority of county residents—albeit just a bare majority—also agree that affordable housing is in short supply.

## ***Sustainability Findings: A Summary***

Sustainability is an emerging concern. The survey findings explored in this section demonstrate that Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents desire more attention focused on jobs providing enough income to support a family and increasing the supply of affordable housing. There is agreement with the physical growth policies in Council Bluffs; agreement that maintaining older areas and support for growth is being

balanced; and a sense that growth in any part of the Council Bluffs or Pottawattamie can benefit all parts of the community.

Detailed analysis shows that residents with lower levels of income and education are less likely to agree with current sustainability policies. In addition, these residents are also more likely to feel that more needs to be done to increase jobs that pay family wages and to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Paying more attention to the income provided by jobs, increasing the supply of affordable housing; and increasing the awareness of residents on a variety of sustainability issues are priorities that can propel the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County community in coming years.

## **Incomes, the Pay of Jobs and Job Quality**

Two foundational economic development needs identified in the leader interviews are to increase the pay and benefits of jobs provided in the local economy, and to increase the quality of jobs. As noted in the section on balanced, sustainable growth, agreement of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents was highest on the need for more jobs that pay enough to support a family.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

This section provides detailed information on trends in wages and incomes from employment, as well as changes in the structure of the local economy. In addition, detailed information from the community attitude survey is used to provide real-time data on several special areas of employment need in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County.

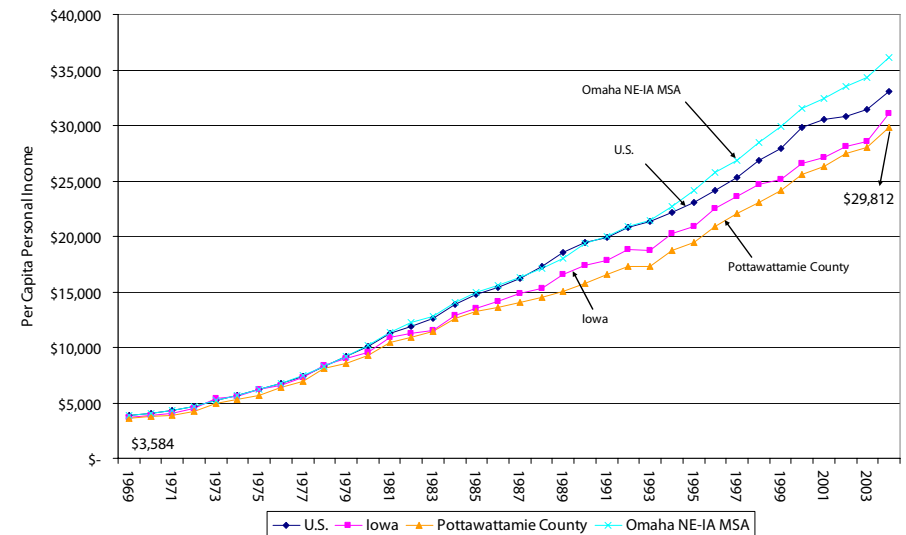
## ***Income and Earnings Trends for Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs***

### **1. Income Trends**

Figure 17 displays the trend for per capita personal income for the period 1969-2004. The figure shows that Pottawattamie County started the series with a per capita personal income of \$3,584 in 1969. This was just slightly less than the \$3,864 reported for the U.S. At the end of the time series, Pottawattamie County registered a per capita personal income of \$29,812. This compared to the U.S. level of \$33,050.

Pottawattamie County's per capita personal income was just slightly less than the \$3,851 reported for the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA in 1969. By 2004, Pottawattamie County had slipped quite a bit relative to the entire MSA, with a \$6,312 difference in per capita personal income.

Figure 17: Per Capita Personal Income: 1969-2004

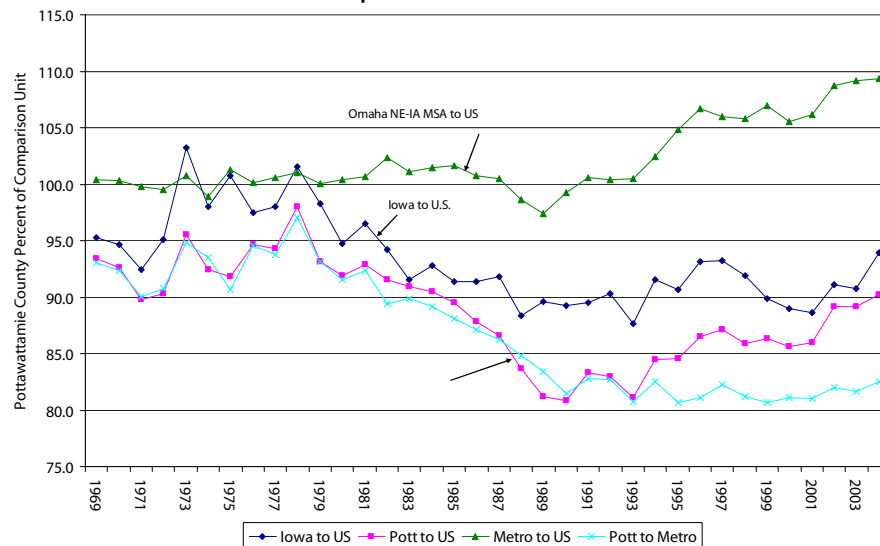


A somewhat different perspective of this is provided by Figure 18. In this figure, the per capita personal income level of Pottawattamie County is expressed as a percentage of the per capita personal income for several comparison units. As the figure shows, Pottawattamie County's per capita personal income was approximately 93.4 percent of the U.S. level. By 1978, the ratio had risen to 98.0 percent. After that point, Pottawattamie County's per capita personal income as a percentage of U.S. per capita personal income fell until reaching a low point of 80.8 percent in both 1990 and 1993. In 2004, Pottawattamie County registered 90.2 percent of the U.S. level, a point that is below the level recorded in 1969, the beginning of the series shown in Figure 18.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

In many respects, Pottawattamie County has tracked followed the overall trend of Iowa. One of the most telling stories, however, is the performance of the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA relative to the U.S. In all but 6 years out of the 35 year time series, per capita personal income in the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA has been over 100 percent of the U.S. level. Furthermore, since 1993, the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA ratio to the U.S. has grown from 100.4 percent to 109.3 percent.

Figure 18: Pottawattamie County Per Capita Personal Income as Percent of Comparison Units: 1969-2004



The per capita personal income data summarized in Figures 17 and 18 is based on all sources of information. One reason why Pottawattamie County has lagged the U.S. and the Omaha metropolitan area in income growth

may be the result of the education and employment base of the community. Education factors were reviewed earlier. Figure 20 provides information on average earnings per job for the period 1969-2004. This figure is illuminating. In 1969, Pottawattamie County's average earnings per job were \$6,215. This compared to \$7,123 for the U.S., \$6,462 for Iowa, and \$6,993 for the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA in the same year. In 1969, Pottawattamie County's average earnings per job were 87.3 percent of the U.S. level and 88.9 percent of the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA level. By 2004, the ratio had slipped to 74.4 percent of the U.S. level and 77.1 percent of the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA level. Figure 20 clearly illustrates that average earnings per job in Pottawattamie County have been lower than the comparison units since 1969. In addition, the gap has widened with time.

To further explore income trends, U.S. Bureau of the Census data were examined. Figure 20 reports median household income for the last four decennial census points (1970-2000). Pottawattamie County and Iowa have a high proportion of householders who work and this may increase income. For reporting purposes the income data provided in Figure 20 has been expressed in 1999 dollars, the income reporting year used for the 2000 Census. As can be seen, median household income in Pottawattamie County has traditionally been lower than the U.S., Iowa or Douglas County, the core county of the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

Figure 19: Average Earnings Per Job: 1969 - 2004

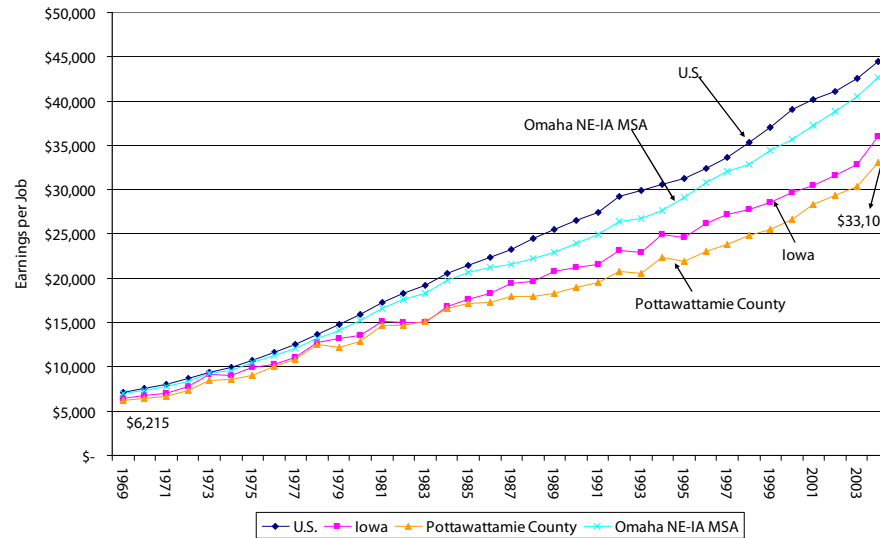
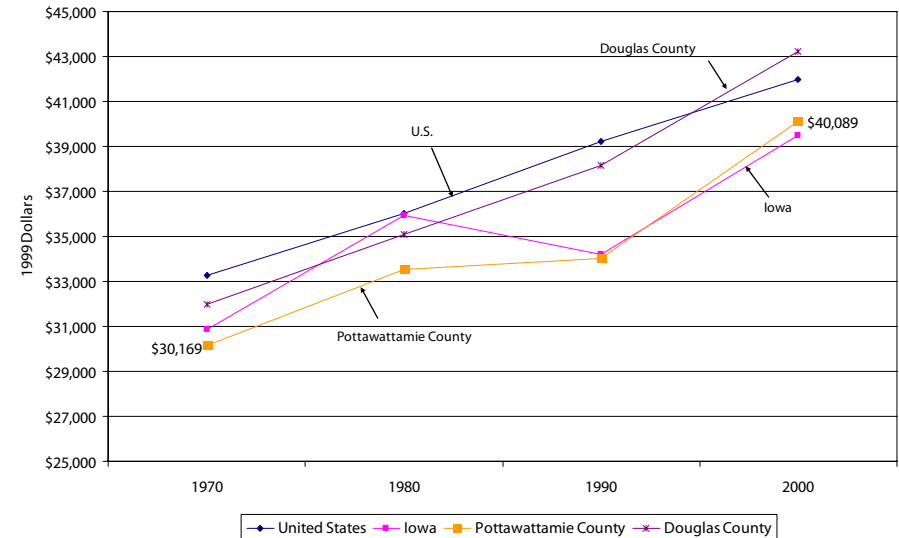


Figure 20: Median Household Income - 1970 to 2000 (1999 dollars)



In 1990, Pottawattamie County pulled just about even with median household income levels reported for Iowa. In 2000, Pottawattamie County's median household income exceeded the level for Iowa (\$39,469). Note, however, that the difference in median household income exceeded the level for Iowa (\$39,469). Note, however, that the difference in median household income between Douglas County and Pottawattamie County increased from \$1,805 to \$3,120 during the 1970-2000 time period.

## 2. Income Summary

The information reported in this section clearly shows that income levels in Pottawattamie County—regardless of the measure used—have consistently lagged behind those of the U.S., Iowa, and Douglas County (or the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA). The education issues—especially the low percentage of the population with a bachelor's or graduate degree is a major part of the explanation for the income trends reported in this section. These education differences are enduring, with median household incomes also lower than comparison units.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

The data reported in this section also shows a slight improvement in incomes during the 1990s and early 2000s. This improvement is both relative to past performance for Pottawattamie County, and with comparison units.

## **Employment and Occupational Trends**

### **1. Jobs and Employment**

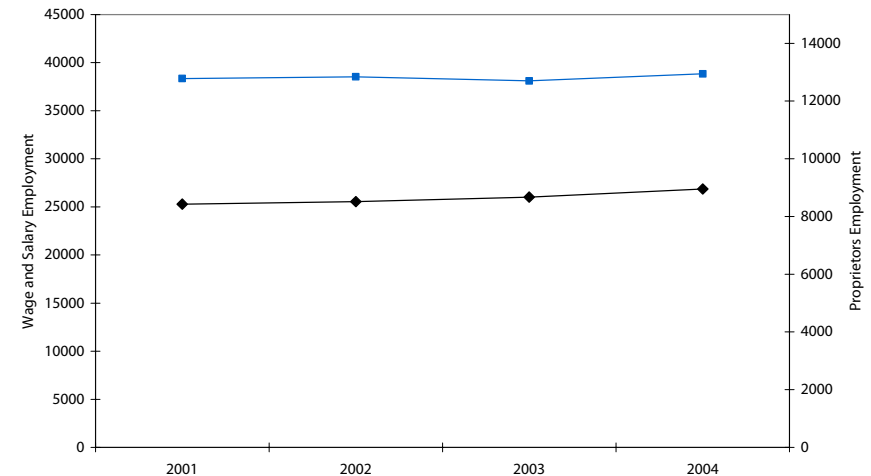
#### **Bureau of Economic Analysis Data**

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) produces annual estimates of income, as well as employment. Figure 21 summarizes the recent trend in employment for Pottawattamie County. Separate totals are provided for wage and salary, as well as proprietor employment. All sectors of the economy are included in the BEA data. In 2004, total employment in Pottawattamie County was reported by BEA to be 47,801. This total was comprised of 38,843 wage and salary employees and 8,958 proprietors. The 2004 total represented an approximately 2.2 percent increase from 2001, the start of the series presented in Figure 21. In 2001, BEA reported total employment to be 46,778 in Pottawattamie County.

#### **County Business Patterns Data**

A second source of reliable local employment data is the U.S. Bureau of the Census' annual report, *County Business*

Figure 21: Pottawattamie Employment, 2001-2004



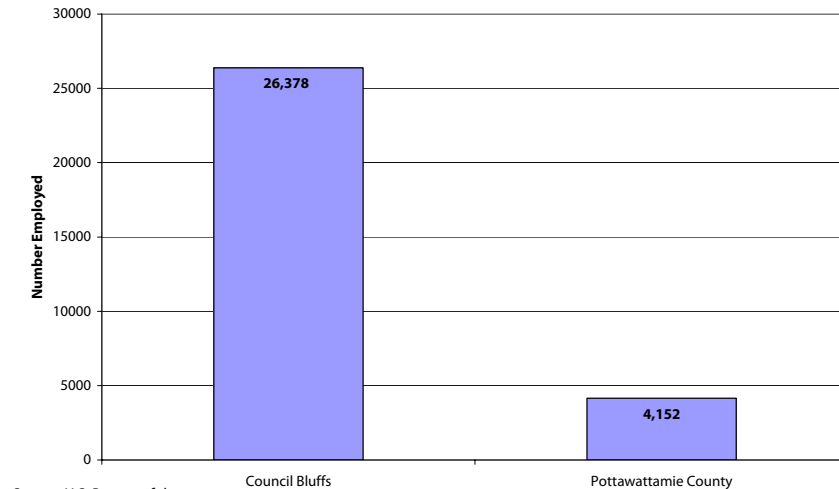
Source: Regional Economic Information System, Bureau of Economic Analysis

*Patterns* (CBP). This source can be used to determine how employment is allocated within a county area. A major difference between CBP and BEA data is that the former does not include government and railroad employment. Using the CBP data, Pottawattamie County is shown to have had a total of 30,530 jobs in 1,982 separate establishments in 2004. The total employment reported for Pottawattamie County in 2004 was up slightly from the 30,313 reported for 2003. Approximately 26,378 of the total jobs in Pottawattamie County in 2004 were located in the three Council Bluffs zip codes (51501, 51502, and 51503). Figure 22 displays the 2004 employment information, the most recent

# 4. Economic Development Needs

available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census' *County Business Patterns* data series.

Figure 22: Number Employed in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County, 2004



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *County Business Patterns*

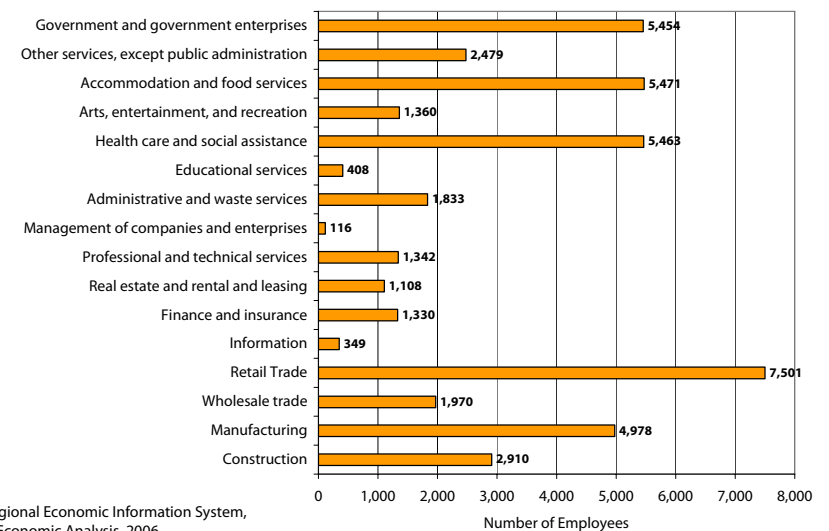
Looking at both the BEA and County Business Patterns data series, it is apparent that employment in Pottawattamie County has been growing slowly during the 2001-2004 time period. Within the county, most jobs are located in Council Bluffs.

## 2. Employment by Industry

The Bureau of Economic Analysis data also provide a current snapshot of the industry composition of the current jobs in Pottawattamie County. Figure 23 reports

the 2004 industry employment for the county. As can be seen, there are more jobs in Retail Trade (7,501) than in any other single sector of the Pottawattamie County economy. The second largest share of jobs is captured by the Accommodation and Food Services sector (5,471). Next in share of total employment are Health Care and Social Assistance (5,463); Government and Government Enterprises (5,454); and Manufacturing (4,978).

Figure 23: Pottawattamie County Employment by Industry, 2004



Source: Regional Economic Information System, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2006

Relatively few jobs are located in the Professional and Technical Services (1,342); Finance and Insurance (1,330); and Information (349) sectors.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

## 3. Journey to Work

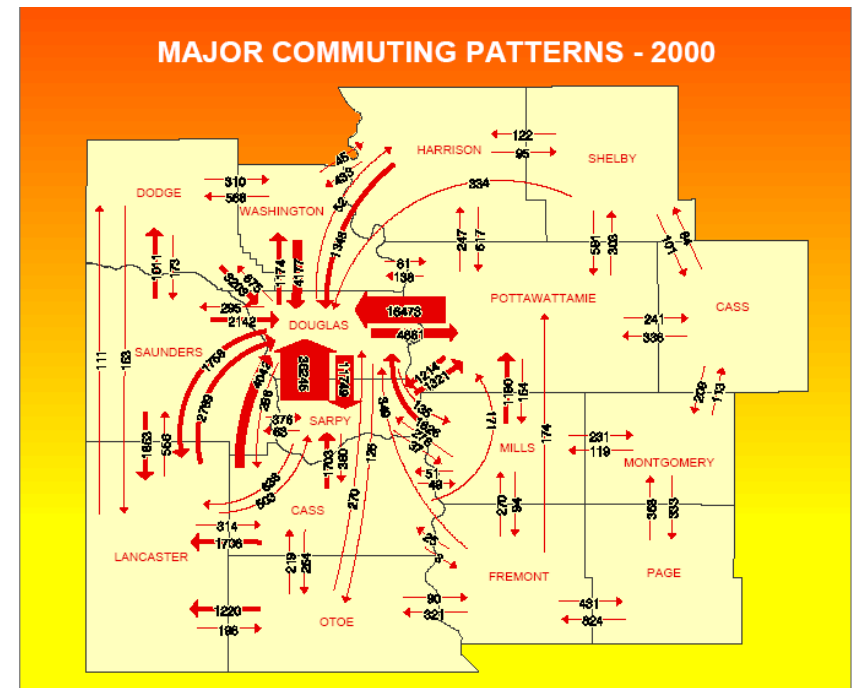
Using the BEA employment data, we can see there are approximately 47,801 jobs in Pottawattamie County in 2004. The most recent population estimates for Pottawattamie County—those from the 2005 American Community Survey—place the total number of Pottawattamie County residents in the labor force 43,900. Of this total:

- 23,305 (53.1%) worked in Pottawattamie County
- 1,028 (2.3%) worked in another county in Iowa
- 19,567 (44.6%) worked in another state

Comparable updated 2005 data are not available for the City of Council Bluffs. However, in 2000 Council Bluffs had a total of 28,441 residents who were working at the time of the decennial census. Of this number, 15,653 (55.0%) worked in Pottawattamie County; 343 (1.2%) worked in another county in Iowa; and 12,445 (43.8%) worked in another state. These proportions are very close to the updated 2005 data shown for Pottawattamie County. With total employment of approximately 47,801 in 2004, and with 53.1 percent of county residents working in Pottawattamie County, it is apparent that the county imports workers from elsewhere. The three major sources of labor are Douglas County and Sarpy County, Nebraska and Mills County, Iowa.

Figure 24 shows the flows of labor—classified as commuting patterns—for 2000, the last detailed census. In 2000, an estimated 16,473 Pottawattamie County residents were commuting to work each day in Douglas County. As noted above, the number commuting for work in Douglas County was estimated at 19,567 in 2005. It is clear that Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs residents are commuting in large numbers to work in Douglas County.

**Figure 24**  
**Commuting Patterns for Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA and Environs, 2000**





# 4. Economic Development Needs

## 4. Labor Force

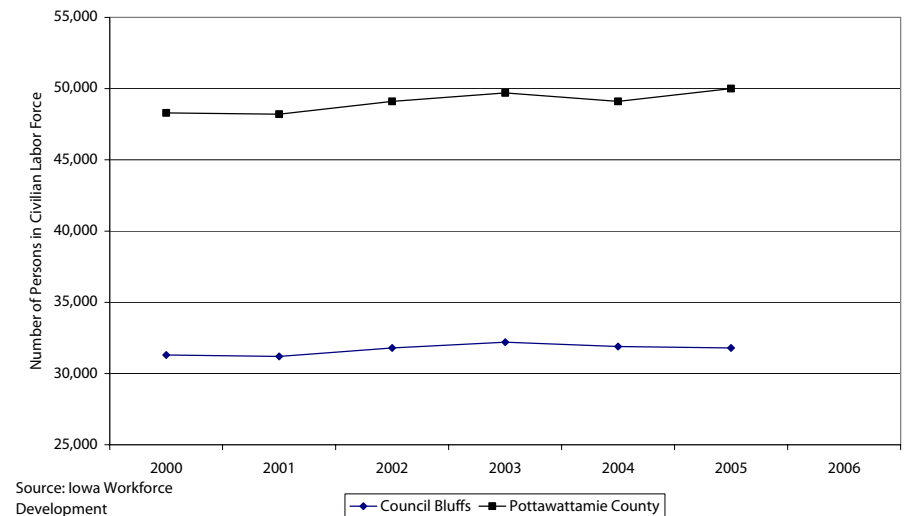
The size of the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County labor force has changed very little since 2000. Figure 25 shows changes in the number of persons in the labor force for the 2000-2005 time period. As can be seen, the Council Bluffs labor force has been trending down slightly since 2003, while the size of the Pottawattamie County labor force has been trending up slightly. Any significant growth in jobs in the area would come about only by convincing local residents to take local positions, through growth in the labor force participation rate, or by importing labor from other locations.

Figure 26 reports the recent trend in unemployment for Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. After trending up for several years, the unemployment rate for Council Bluffs declined from 6.0 percent in 2004 to 3.6 percent in 2005. This is largely a function of an increase in the number of jobs in the area, coupled with a slight decline in the size of the labor force. For Pottawattamie County as a whole, the unemployment rate appears to have stabilized after steadily increasing since 2000.

## 5. Occupation and Industry of the Employed

The occupations of Pottawattamie County residents are somewhat different from that of Douglas County, the core county of the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA. Council Bluffs and

Fig 25: Recent Civilian Labor Force Trends: Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County

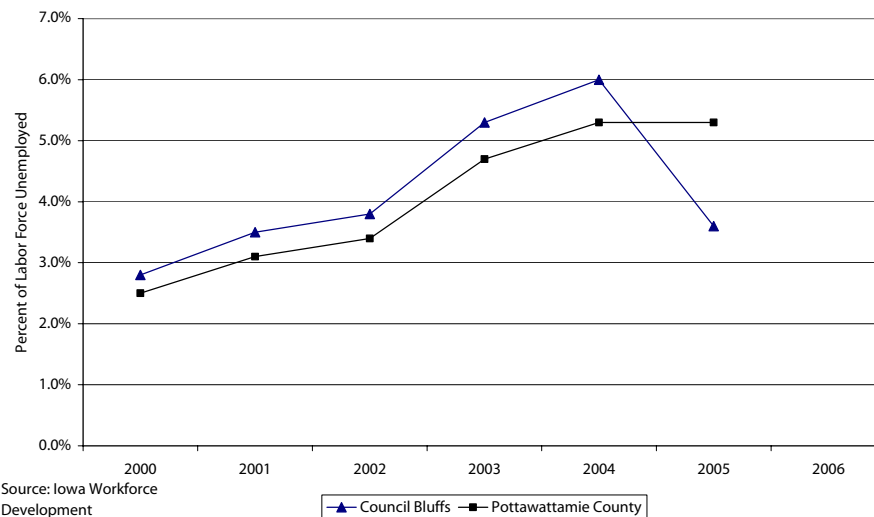


Pottawattamie County residents are less likely to be working in management, professional and related occupations; and more likely to be working in service occupations; construction, extraction and maintenance occupations; and production, transportation, and material moving occupations (see Fig. 27).

The differences in the occupational distribution for Pottawattamie County and Douglas County residents results in income differences. For example, wages and pay are highest for the management, professional, and related occupations, yet this is the area that is most under-represented in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County population.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

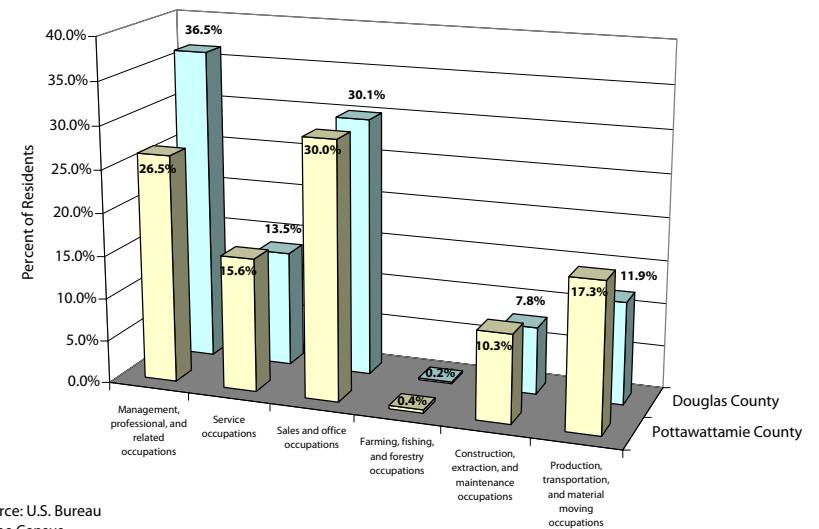
Figure 26: Recent Trend in Unemployment - Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County



The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that management occupations had a median hourly pay of \$35.90 for the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA in 2005. For several occupations, over-represented in Pottawattamie County, the 2005 median hourly pay in the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA was:

- \$8.46 for service and personal care workers
- \$16.37 for construction and extraction occupations
- \$12.32 for production occupations
- \$13.08 transportation and material moving occupations

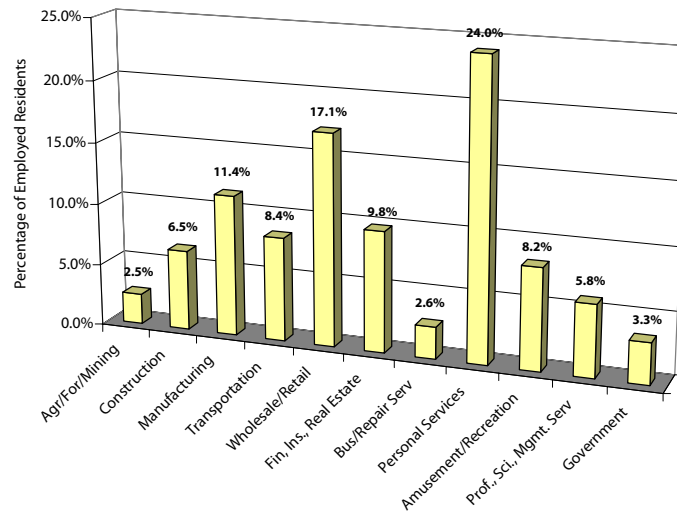
Figure 27: Distribution of Occupations for Residents: 2000



The industry of Pottawattamie County residents is summarized in Figure 28. The information—taken from the 2000 decennial census—shows that approximately 4 in 10 Pottawattamie County residents work in either the personal services or wholesale/retail sectors. Another 2 in 10 residents work in either manufacturing or transportation. Although data are not shown, residents of Pottawattamie County are much less likely than Douglas County residents (5.8% vs. 10.8%) to work in the professional, scientific, and management sector. Furthermore, Pottawattamie County residents are much more likely than Douglas County residents to work in the transportation and manufacturing sectors.

# 4. Economic Development Needs

Figure 28: Employment by Industry of Pottawattamie County Residents, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

## **Community Attitude Survey: Current Evidence on Employment, Earnings, and Job Quality in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County**

The community attitude survey included a series of items designed to gather information about current employment, hours of work, multiple job holding, and under-employment among residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. This section profiles the characteristics of the area's labor force. In addition, low income workers—the working poor—are profiled since they constitute a set of persons often overlooked in

today's labor market which emphasizes skilled job requiring higher levels of education.

### **1. Work Status, Hours Worked, Multiple Job Holding and Under-Employment**

The community attitude survey asked each respondent the following question: "Last week, were you primarily working at a job, farming (included with Pottawattamie County version), retired, going to school, keeping house, or what?" To identify all people who regularly worked, but were temporarily idled, a series of follow-up questions was also asked to identify all persons who were in the labor force.

Table 14 summarizes the work status of the community attitude survey respondents. Separate totals are provided for Council Bluffs respondents, as well as Pottawattamie County respondents. As can be seen in Table 14, there are few major labor force differences between the Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs respondents.

Overall, for both survey groups, approximately 7 in 10 respondents said they were primarily working during the week prior to the survey. An additional 4.5 percent of Pottawattamie County residents and 6.4 percent of Council Bluffs residents said they had a job but were not at work (e.g., due to vacation or temporary illness), were on temporary layoff, or for some other reason were

# 4. Economic Development Needs

**Table 14**  
**Work Status Summary for Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs Survey Respondents**

	<b>Pottawattamie County</b>	<b>Council Bluffs</b>
Working	72.9%	69.9%
Have job but not at work	4.2%	6.1%
Looking for work	0.0%	0.3%
On temporary layoff	0.3%	0.3%
Total in Labor Force	77.4%	76.6%
Average Hours Worked Past 12 Months		
20 or fewer hours per week	13.8%	13.0%
21-34 hours per week	7.5%	8.5%
35-45 hours per week	46.1%	48.0%
46 or more hours per week	32.7%	30.6%
Would like to work more hours each week?	4.4%	7.9%
Currently have more than 1 job?	14.6%	14.4%
Any of the jobs full-time?	80.6%	74.6%
Feel you are overqualified for your job?	11.4%	18.7%

unable to go to work. Finally, a few respondents said they were looking for work. Totaling these figures, approximately 77.4 percent of the Pottawattamie County residents were in the labor force during the week prior to the survey interview and 76.6 percent of Council Bluffs residents were in the labor force.

Table 14 also reports the proportion of persons working in each of four different categories of hours per week. Full-time work was classified as anything 35-45 hours per week. As can be seen in the table, the modal category (most frequent set) for hours worked was in the 35-45

hours per week (46.1% for Pottawattamie County and 48.0% for Council Bluffs). Using this definition of full-time employment, 78.8 percent of county residents and 78.6 percent of Council Bluffs residents stated they worked an average of 35 or more hours each week during the preceding 12 months.

Looking beyond these overall figures on hours worked in 2006, Table 14 shows that the reality for many people in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County labor force is that they will work significantly fewer than 35-45 hours each week. In fact, there are three sets of labor force work-hour experiences that can be identified in the sample (see Table 14). They are:

- **Part-Time Workers.** These individuals work an average of fewer than 35 hours each week. For both Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs, 1 in 5 workers fall into this category. A sizable sub-set of people work less than an average of 20 hours per week.
- **Full-Time Workers.** These individuals work an average of 35-45 hours each week. This category characterizes approximately one-half of those working in Pottawattamie County (46.1%) and Council Bluffs (48.0%).
- **Full-Time Plus Workers.** These individuals work an average of 46 hours or more each week. About 1 in

# 4. Economic Development Needs

3 workers in both Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs fall into this category.

Several other interesting findings deserve mention. First, as might be expected, as the average number of hours increase, workers are more likely to report they have more than one job. Table 15 summarizes information on this relationship. Among those working 46 or more hours each week, approximately 1 in 5 workers has more than one job. This is significantly higher than the average of 14.5 percent for all workers in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs. It is also interesting to note that a small proportion of persons working less than full-time (less than 35 hours per week) report holding more than one job (7.1% of those working 20 or fewer hours each week and 14.8% of those working 21-34 hours each week). Although data are not reported in a table, the norm for persons reporting they currently have more than one job is for one of the jobs to be full-time (76.6% reported one of the jobs was 35 or more hours per week).

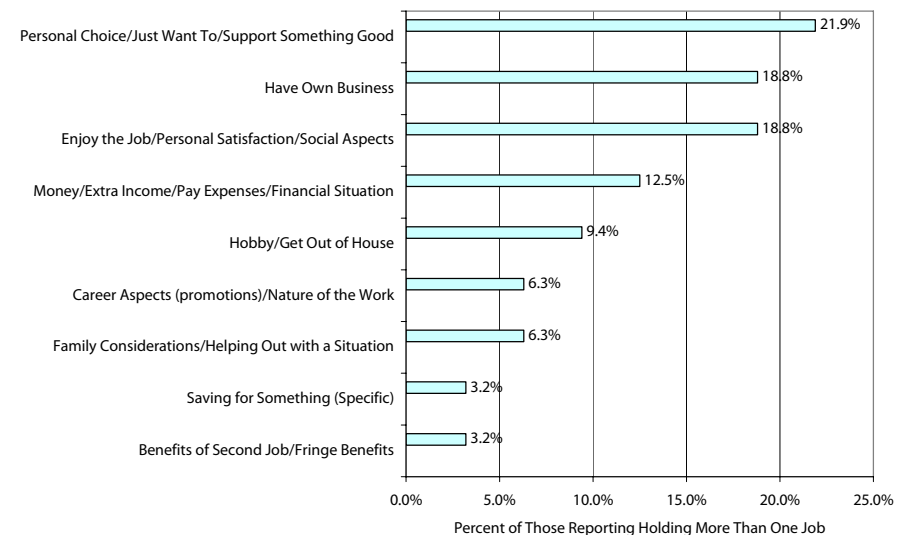
**Table 15**  
**Multiple Job-Holding and Weekly Hours Worked**

Currently Have More Than One Job?	Average Hours Worked Each Week			
	20 or less (N=99)	21-34 (N=61)	35-45 (N=354)	46+ (N=233)
Yes	7.1%	14.8%	12.1%	21.0%
No	92.9	85.2	87.9	79.0

Persons having more than one job were asked the reason for working more than one job at once. Verbatim responses were recorded by the interviewer. These responses were reviewed and coded into categories. Figure 29 presents a summary of the reasons reported by the 14.5 percent of working respondents who hold more than one job.

As can be seen, the top reasons were framed by respondents as personal choices (e.g., I have always done it; to keep myself out of trouble; my own business; or enjoy the job and personal satisfaction [e.g., want to help out; I enjoy both of them]). About 1 in 4 persons working more than one job indicated that money or financial

**Figure 29: Reasons for Having More Than One Job**



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issues were the reason (money, 12.5%; family considerations/help out situation, 6.3%); saving for something, 3.2%; and benefits of second job, 3.1%).

To explore whether respondents felt they were under-employed, each person working was asked, “Sometimes people have to settle for a job they are overqualified for because nothing better is available. Are you one of these persons?” Table 14 (see previous page) provides summary information for the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents. Although figures for all respondents combined are not provided in Table 14, 14.7 percent of all working survey respondents said “Yes” in response to this question. As can be seen in Table 14, there are significant differences in the proportions of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents saying they are overqualified for their current job. For Pottawattamie County respondents, 11.4 percent say they feel they had to settle for a job they are overqualified for. Among Council Bluffs respondents the comparable proportion is 18.7 percent.

Examination of differences in under-employment didn’t significantly vary across categories of hours worked, desire to work more hours each week, and multiple job-holding. However, differences were found across education level and age groups, especially among the Council Bluffs respondents. For example, workers without a college education were more likely than workers with a college education to say they were

overqualified for their job. Likewise, respondents (19-49) were more likely than those persons age 50 and over to say they were overqualified for their job. For these two groups (no college degree and age 19-49) approximately 1 in 5 Council Bluffs respondents indicated they felt they had to settle for a job because nothing better was available.

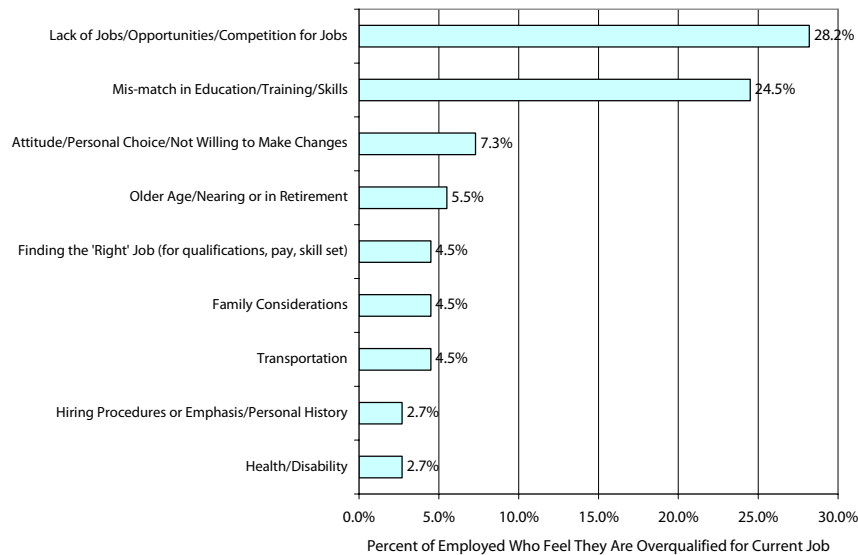
Persons who said they were working in a job they were overqualified for were asked, “What do you think is the biggest obstacle that keeps you from getting a better job or improving your business (e.g., if farmer)?” Verbatim responses were entered by the survey interviewer. Responses were examined and coded into categories. Figure 30 summarizes the percentages of all Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs mentioning the top categories. Percentages do not add to 100.0 percent since not all response categories are displayed. As shown in Figure 30, the majority of persons who felt they were under-employed provided one of two categories of reasons: lack of jobs/opportunities for jobs/competition for jobs (28.2%) or a mismatch in education/training/skills (24.5%).

## **2. Status of Low Income Working Persons in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County**

To provide information about the special needs and circumstances of low income working persons, all community attitude survey respondents who were

# 4. Economic Development Needs

**Figure 30: Biggest Obstacle to Getting a Better Job**



working and who indicated the total income of all adults living in their household was less than \$25,000 were identified. The total number of survey respondents in this group is 56 persons. This group of low income working persons comprises approximately 6.2 percent of the survey sample of 907 adults in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs. Within this group, 43, or 76.8 percent, lived in Council Bluffs.

A profile of the work status of the low income working persons compared to all working persons in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs is presented in Table 16. Low income working persons—like all working persons in the county—are most likely to be working full-

time (between 35-45 hours per week). In addition, low income working persons are more likely to work 20 hours or less per week, and less likely to work more than 46 hours a week. Individuals in this group are also less likely to desire to work more hours each week, and they are more likely than all workers to feel under-employed.

Table 17 contains summary information on several different demographic indicators for low income working persons and for all working persons in the county. Several interesting differences deserve highlighting. Low income working persons are more likely to:

- Have a high school diploma or less than a high school education
- Be 50 years or older

**Table 16  
Work Status Summary for Low Income Working Persons and All Working Persons in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs**

	Working Poor	All Persons Working
Average hours worked past 12 months		
20 or fewer hours per week	28.6%	9.2%
21-34 hours per week	8.9%	8.5%
35-45 hours per week	46.4%	51.1%
46 or more hours per week	16.1%	31.2%
Would like to work more hours each week?	19.6%	28.1%
Currently have more than 1 job?	16.1%	15.8%
Any of the jobs full-time?	7.1%	76.6%
Feel you are overqualified for your job?	28.6%	15.3%

# 4. Economic Development Needs

- Be single/never married; divorced/separated; or widowed
- Have a 1 person household

To complete the profile of the working poor in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs, several behavioral and attitudinal items gathered through the community attitude survey were examined. This information is summarized in Table 18.

As shown in the table, one impact of reduced income is a reduced level of home ownership. Low income working persons own homes at a rate about one-half (46.4%) of the rate for all working persons in the county (85.7%).

Low income working persons are also less likely to strongly agree that their home or apartment is in good condition, and they are less likely to strongly agree they are satisfied with the condition of their housing (see Table 18).

Income obviously can enable individuals to consider a range of locations for living quarters. Low income working persons may have fewer options due to their resource limits. This may impact their assessment of their community and neighborhood. Several survey items asked respondents to rate their community and neighborhood. As can be seen, smaller proportions of

**Table 17**

**Demographic Characteristics of Low Income Working Persons and All Working Persons in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs**

	<b>Working Poor</b>	<b>All Persons Working</b>
<b>Education Level</b>		
Less Than High School Education	14.8%	6.4%
High School Graduate	40.7%	23.1%
Some College/Two-Year Degree or Certificate	36.1%	38.9%
College Graduate +	8.3%	31.6%
<b>Age</b>		
19-49 years old	46.3%	70.1%
50 years and over	53.7%	29.9%
Median Age	52.5	42.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	45.4%	50.4%
Female	54.6%	49.6%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Hispanic or Latino	1.9%	3.1%
White	94.4%	94.9%
African American/ Black	0.9%	0.4%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.9%	0.3%
Native American	0.9%	0.4%
Other	0.9%	0.9%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Now married	26.8%	71.4%
Single, never married	42.9%	17.7%
Divorced/ Separated	23.2%	9.1%
Widowed	7.1%	2.3%
<b>Children Present</b>		
Have children in household	50.0%	50.9%
<b>Household Size</b>		
1 person	28.6%	11.0%
2 persons	25.0%	30.9%
3 persons	21.4%	21.0%
4+ persons	24.9%	37.1%



# 4. Economic Development Needs

**Table 18**

**Behavioral and Attitudinal Profile of Low Income Working Persons and All Working Persons in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs**

	<b>Working Poor</b>	<b>All Persons Working</b>
Own home	46.4%	85.7%
Home/apartment condition is good	35.7%	47.2%
Satisfied with condition of housing	30.2%	39.8%
Council Bluffs is excellent place to live	14.3%	19.9%
Neighborhood is excellent place to live	35.3%	41.4%
Neighborhood conditions improved	27.8%	35.4%
Registered to vote?	56.1%	89.9%
Vote in last election?	39.3%	78.1%
Never volunteered past 12 months	33.9%	22.0%
Most Important Problem		
Drugs	14.3%	11.6%
Crime/Violence	12.5%	8.0%
Schools/Education	5.4%	9.5%
Neighborhood Trust Scale (mean)	2.1	1.8
Parenting Scale (mean)	2.2	1.9

low income working persons said Council Bluffs is an excellent place to live (14.3% vs. 19.9% for all working persons). This was also the case at the neighborhood level, although it is interesting that people rate their neighborhood higher than Council Bluffs as a whole (see Table 18). Finally, low income working persons were also less likely to say that conditions had improved during the last few years (27.8% vs. 35.4% for all working persons).

Table 18 also provides information on differences in community participation, perception of community problems, and levels of trust in the community. Low income working persons are less likely to be registered to vote or to have voted in the fall 2006 general election. In addition, these individuals are more likely than all working persons to not have volunteered during the past 12 months.

In the area of community problems, low income working persons are more likely than all working persons to be concerned about drugs and crime/violence, and less likely to be concerned about schools/education.

Finally, Table 18 provides information on two scales measuring different dimensions of trust. One scale consisted of 5 questions focusing on trust in neighbors and people in the community. This is the Neighborhood Trust Scale. A second scale—the Parental Trust Scale—contained 5 items focusing on trust of parents and adults in the community. Both scales exceeded levels of Cronbach’s Alpha for reliability. As can be seen, low income working persons have lower levels of trust, as shown by their higher average scores on the two scales (1 = highest trust; 4 = lowest trust).

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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## **Summary of Economic Development Needs**

While education is the best long-term strategy for moving the community's job and occupation base in new directions, several economic development needs are readily identifiable. First, Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County must increase their efforts to increase the proportion of local jobs in higher paying occupations and skills. While there are limits to what can be done, there are definitely opportunities. The community is part of a large metropolitan complex, and should clearly market itself as a location for operations, with labor drawn from a broad area, not just from Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs. Another need is to work harder at marketing the community in new ways to residents who work elsewhere in the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA, but may be looking for a residential location that is convenient and offering amenities. This strategy may appeal to professional people working in the central business district and mid-town areas of Omaha.

In addition, there are several categories of workers who need assistance. Efforts in this area can pay significant dividends for the community and families. Some people in the community work fewer hours than they would like; some residents work more than 40 hours a week or hold more than one job because their pay is too low; and others feel they are overqualified for the job they have.

The proportion of local residents in each of these employment situations is higher than is found nationally. Attention needs to be focused on assisting individuals in these different situations with their work and income goals.

## ***Increase Efforts to Promote Sustainable Development***

The community wants more attention paid to creating jobs that pay wages adequate to support families. There is also strong agreement that the availability of affordable housing needs to be increased.

Sustainable economic development focuses on linkages between different aspects or parts of the community. Rather than a series of isolated parts or issues, the community is seen as interconnected. Through this lens, economic development would focus on development, not just growth. Thus, as jobs for lower education and lower skilled workers are added, affordable housing, transportation, and supportive services would be added. Or, as development takes place in fringe areas, attention would be paid to preserving, maintaining, and enhancing the oldest areas, or areas where populations are limited to as a result of income and other factors.

As shown in the information on sustainability attitudes, the residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County support growth and feel that current zoning and

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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development policies promote orderly growth. Although a majority thinks that sprawl-related problems and supporting growth and maintaining older areas are not an issue, almost 35.0 percent of Council Bluffs respondents desire a different approach to development in these two areas.

Residents want more attention devoted to: (1) developing jobs that pay enough to support a family and (2) increasing the supply of affordable housing. Thus, future economic development efforts need to pay increased attention to the pay of jobs and the supply of affordable housing. Residents with lower levels of education and income are less likely to agree with current sustainability policies. These same residents are also more likely to feel that more needs to be done to increase jobs that pay family wages and to increase the supply of affordable housing.

## ***Increase Local Wages and Develop the Job Market***

Area organizations and residents must work to increase the concentration of occupations paying higher wages; better align residents with work opportunities; and assist low income working persons. The heart of economic development is the generation of new jobs and income for an area. The information provided in this needs assessment shows that income growth in Pottawattamie County has lagged that of the U.S. and the Omaha-

Council Bluffs MSA. Recent casino gaming and other economic growth has clearly provided a much-needed “shot in the arm” for the community, but the stark reality is that Pottawattamie County’s per capita personal income is a smaller percentage of the U.S. level in 2004 than it was in 1969.

Average earnings per job in Pottawattamie County are also lower than the U.S. and Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA. Furthermore, the growth in average earning per job has lagged the U.S. and metropolitan area over time.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the number of jobs located in Pottawattamie County increased slightly from 2001 to 2004. Since 2003, the size of the labor force in Council Bluffs has been trending down slightly, while the size of the Pottawattamie County labor force has trended up slightly. As a result of the slight increase in jobs and slight decline in the area’s labor force, unemployment rates have declined by quite a bit.

The needs assessment research also found that the occupational profiles of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents differ from Douglas County. Both Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs residents are much less likely to be working in management, professional and related occupations. These residents are more likely to be working in service occupations;

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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construction, extraction and maintenance occupations; and production, transportation and material moving occupations. The occupations where the community is least represented are the highest paying occupations, while the occupations it is most represented in are among the lower paying occupations.

Information presented in the economic development section reinforces the education data (reviewed earlier). The lag in income and wages found for Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County are likely the result of the nature of local jobs and the occupational skills they require. While many local residents seek employment in Douglas County where there is a different occupational- and industry-mix, the fundamental truth is that the overall lower level of education and skill-sets of workers in the area is not enough to result in dramatically increased income growth. Clearly the area must find ways to increase education levels and reduce high school dropout rates, in addition to developing new jobs in higher paying occupations and industries.

Due to the inclusion of a special section focusing on labor force issues, the community attitude survey data provided a fairly detailed portrait of the working population in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. It was shown that a sizable proportion of the labor force is employed less than full-time. Approximately 1 in 5 workers falls into this category. This group provides a

pool of people potentially available for additional hours of work. Some of these individuals are working more than one job, but still working fewer than 35 hours per week. Even at the same rate of pay, if persons in this category worked more hours they would have increased earnings.

At the same time, a sizable proportion of the labor force is working more than full time. Approximately 1 in 3 persons are working 46 or more hours each week. Within this group, approximately 1 in 5 is working more than 45 hours each week because they hold more than one job. Overall, the proportion of persons working more than one job in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County is higher than has been found in surveys conducted in recent years in Omaha. Approximately 1 in 7 out of all workers in Pottawattamie County has more than one job. While personal choice is the top reason for their situation, the underlying factor is the need for additional income.

Approximately 1 in 7 workers feel they are overqualified for their job. In Council Bluffs the proportion is almost 1 in 5 workers (18.7%). Persons in this group tend to have lower levels of education and to be 50 or older.

The income, jobs, and employment analysis also included a profile of low income working persons. It was found that approximately 6.2 percent of the community attitude sample could be classified as low income and

# 4. Economic Development Needs

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working. These individuals were primarily working full-time, although a higher proportion than all workers said they only worked part-time. Low income working persons were also less likely to desire more hours and to hold multiple jobs than was found for all working persons in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs.

Low income working persons primarily live in Council Bluffs and have either a high school or less than high school level of education. In addition, they are more likely than all workers to be 50 or older and to be in a 1 person household. In terms of behavioral characteristics, low income working persons are less likely than all working persons to own their home; be satisfied with their housing conditions; and to see the community and their neighborhood as an excellent place to live. Finally, low income working persons are less likely to be engaged in the community and to trust people in their neighborhood or as parents watching out for children. Their world and life experiences are different from those who are working and earning more.

## **Addressing Economic Development Needs**

Nine different alternatives for addressing economic development needs are offered. These include the following:

### ***Alternatives to Consider***

#### **Promote Sustainable Development**

- Encourage efforts to communicate with the community about the importance of using education to increase the work and job skills of residents. Education for work—broadly construed—needs to become a “top of mind” issue in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. Elevating education levels will raise incomes. Higher incomes will result in a number of ripple effects, thus enhancing sustainability.
- Undertake a comprehensive study of multi-family housing needs in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County communities. The focus should include strategies for dramatically increasing multi-family housing (low- and moderate-income) above long-term levels currently provided by the market.

#### **Increase Local Wages and Develop the Local Job Market**

- Support increased efforts (e.g., through the Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce; Greater Council Bluffs Regional Economic Development Partnership) to retain, grow and attract new jobs that have high concentrations of: (1) professional, management and scientific occupations; and (2) business services. These efforts should be

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connected to regional recruitment and business development strategies and resources.

- Consider working collaboratively with regional allies such as the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the Western Iowa Development Association in regional marketing initiatives. Current information on several Council Bluffs business and economic development web sites provides very little information on the community's linkages to the larger metropolitan area.
- Build on Council Bluffs' proximity to a broad base of persons with professional, management, and scientific occupational skills throughout the Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA. The "metropolitan advantage" provides jobs for Council Bluffs residents in Douglas County. Likewise, Council Bluffs can work to develop and recruit new jobs providing employment for persons residing in Douglas County. Currently, far more workers travel from Pottawattamie County to Douglas County for work, than vice versa.
- Consider marketing Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County as a residential place of choice for professional, management and scientific employees. The availability of new residential housing, suburban and rural subdivisions, open space, natural settings, ease of access to

metropolitan offices and events, and low congestion are all marketing advantages.

- Encourage increased marketing and community connections for Iowa Workforce Development, or the establishment of an independent, community-based service to match people seeking part-time work with available full- and part-time jobs. Almost 1 in 12 adults in Council Bluffs would like to work more hours.
- Assist in developing a community of residents (and employers) who actively plan to develop their full talents. This might mean encouraging employers to identify job and work pathways to communicate more clearly with workers, as well as assisting local residents in developing their work and career goals. AEA 13's CareerVision initiative is an example of a program that could be extended and adapted to adults. Linkages with programs and resources at Iowa Western Community College can also be instrumental in addressing these needs. Companies, governmental units, nonprofit organizations, and education providers also need to be encouraging their employees, as well as the broader community, to be involved in life-long learning.
- Consider supporting a community-based initiative focusing on addressing the needs of low income working persons, a group that comprises

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approximately 18.7 percent of the Council Bluffs community. All have annual family incomes below \$25,000. Assistance needs to focus on: work skill development; life needs assessment; economic security assessment; education; and information and referral to needed supportive services.

# 5. CD and Beautification Needs

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## **Community Development and Beautification Needs**

The Community Development and Beautification goals of the Iowa West Foundation include: revitalization; improving quality of life; enhancing the image and physical appearance of the community; improving public spaces; and beautifying major community corridors and traffic arteries.

Six different needs fitting with the Community Development and Beautification special emphasis area were identified through the community leader interviews and meetings. This section of the needs assessment focuses on four specific needs: increasing communication and building community; building community pride and self-image; making physical improvements to the community; and improving housing conditions and the supply of multi-family housing.

## **Increasing Communication and Building Community**

The community leader interviews highlighted several inter-related communication and community-building issues. Questions and themes included the following:

- How can we better communicate community achievements and needs to the people? A working assumption of this question is that there is a lack of local media “voice,” and that this hurts the community, especially Council Bluffs.
- What can be done to encourage and enable discussion between the different “communities” within Council Bluffs? What do people think about how the community is developing and where do people want to go? How split or unified are we?
- Can we reduce the isolation of individuals and focus more on building a strong sense of community and connection?
- Are we a welcoming community? Are we doing enough to reach out to the growing Latino community? What services are most needed?

Community attitude survey items were developed to shed light on several of these questions and issues. Before looking at survey findings on these topics, several areas of background information are discussed to provide the overall setting or context for communication and community building. The background information and issue discussion in this section is most applicable to Council Bluffs.



# 5. CD and Beautification Needs

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## **Background Information**

### **1. Traditional Community Media**

Council Bluffs is the second largest city and Pottawattamie County is the third largest county in the Omaha NE-IA MSA. Council Bluffs has one radio station, KIWR (89.7 FM). The radio station is operated by Iowa Western Community College (IWCC) as a part of its electronic media studies programs. IWCC also operates a small TV station, CBT17. Marketed as “Your Hometown Information Station,” CBT17 is operated as a part of the IWCC electronic media studies-TV program. Programs include Bluffs Focus, a weekly local news magazine that is replayed multiple times each day. Sports Zone features local sports coverage and is aired three days each week.

Council Bluffs has one daily newspaper, *Daily Nonpareil*. The *Daily Nonpareil* is the dominant daily newspaper in Pottawattamie County. According to the *Daily Nonpareil* website, daily circulation was approximately 16,278 in late 2006. The *Daily Nonpareil* is the oldest daily community news source in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. Started in 1857, the newspaper reaches less than one-half of the area’s households.

Council Bluffs’ media outlets are limited in number. News coverage of the community tends to be overshadowed by Omaha and Nebraska news stories.

Many of the community leaders interviewed noted that the limited coverage of Council Bluffs stories by Nebraska media outlets tends to focus on negative news since that is what the electronic and print media feel attracts audiences.

Few other regular sources of community news and communication were identified through the needs assessment. The Council Bluffs library clearly plays an extremely important role in the community by sponsoring reading groups, book discussions, online book discussions, providing access to newspapers and magazines, and books for reading and self-improvement.

Table 19 reports the results of questions asked of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents. Council Bluffs residents were read the following statement, “Council Bluffs-based news media do a good job of supporting communication within the city.” Response options are shown in Table 19. As the table reports, 3.8 percent said “Strongly Agree” and 50.1 percent said “Agree.” A total of 46.2 percent either said “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.”

Pottawattamie County respondents were read the following statement, “Local news media do a good job of covering news and supporting communication within my area.” As can be seen in Table 19, Pottawattamie County residents had responses that paralleled those of Council

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Bluffs residents. Overall, 49.0 percent of Pottawattamie County respondents said “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” There is clearly room for improvement in the minds of area residents.

**Table 19**

**Assessments of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County News Media**

<b>Council Bluffs-based news media do a good job of supporting communication within the city (N=559)</b>	<b>Percent-- Council Bluffs Respondents</b>
Strongly agree	3.8
Agree	50.1
Disagree	36.9
Strongly disagree	9.3
<b>Local news media do a good job of covering news and supporting communication within my area (N=300)</b>	<b>Percent-- Pottawattamie County Respondents</b>
Strongly agree	2.7
Agree	48.3
Disagree	36.3
Strongly disagree	12.7

## **2. Governmental and School District Web Pages**

The main web pages of the City of Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County, and Council Bluffs Community Schools were reviewed. The City of Council Bluffs has a web site that provides information about city services,

and departments. The city web site has a contact directory, and most departments provide electronic copies of forms, reports, meeting dates and opportunities for citizen input. A copy of the municipal code is available online. A review of the City of Council Bluffs web site found that no online forms are available for submitting complaints or inquiries. No information was clearly posted on when, where and how citizens can view/listen to city council meetings via radio or TV. City council agendas and minutes are available electronically via the City’s web site.

Pottawattamie County maintains its own web site. Information and links to each major county government department/office are provided on the site. Supervisor meeting dates and times are posted on the web page, meeting minutes are provided electronically, and several supervisors have online forms for submitting inquiries.

No interactive online forms for submitting complaints could be found on the Pottawattamie County government site.

The Council Bluffs Community School District also maintains a web site. The main page provides a link containing information on how citizens can watch Board of Education meetings. A meeting can be watched while in progress, and past meetings can be viewed from an archive. The Board of Education has a page within the

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Community School District web site. A list of board members is provided, but no contact information or online forms are provided. Meeting agendas and minutes are accessible via the Board's page. Copies of plans such as the Master Facilities Plan; Equity Report (for the State of Iowa); annual reports; reports on school improvement efforts; and other initiatives. No strategic plan is available online. Separate pages are provided for school buildings and staff.

### **3. Other Community Vehicles for Communication**

The Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce operates a leadership development program, Leadership Council Bluffs. This program offers monthly leadership development sessions. In addition, the Chamber offers a youth program, Youth Leadership Council Bluffs. Both of these programs can play critical roles in developing leaders and citizens who have broad information about the community and its needs, as well as an attachment to the community.

A number of nonprofit and community-based agencies hold community meetings, issue forums, hearings, and work with community advisory committees. These efforts are also critical parts of any community's social fabric. Several notable examples include the work of Heartland Family Service; Children's Square; and the Council Bluffs Senior Center.

Overall, there are relatively few community-wide communication outlets serving Council Bluffs and the entire Pottawattamie County area. As noted in this section, there are a number of governmental, nonprofit and other local sources working to provide information and communication, albeit for sometimes specialized audiences and groups.

Obviously, the communication vehicles described thus far provide a base for sharing news and information essential to any community. However, much more is required to build community. The next section of the needs assessment examines social cohesion in the community.

### ***Survey Findings on Social Cohesion, Attachment to the Community, and Assessments of Local Communication***

#### **1. Social Cohesion**

Community media such as newspapers and TV and radio stations provide a part of the framework that helps sustain communication and a feeling of community at local levels. Yet, the ultimate decision of citizens to get involved and work to make the community a better place requires more than simply having information. Increasingly, people in all walks of life are recognizing the importance of "social capital." For years this was also called "social fabric." Social fabric, simply put, is the web of relationships among people in the community and the

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expectations of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity that develop from those relationships. Residents of neighborhoods have long called this neighborliness: helping one another keep the neighborhood safe through activities such as a Neighborhood Watch program; cleaning debris from a park; or helping paint an invalid neighbor's house.

The community attitude survey included two sets of items designed to measure different aspects of social cohesion. One measured residents' sense of belonging and cohesion with neighbors (Neighborhood/Community Belonging and Cohesion), and one measured active support of neighborhood children by adults (Neighborhood Adult/Parent Cohesion).

Table 20 shows the five questions included in the Neighborhood/Community Belonging and Cohesion Scale. The percentage of respondents giving each of the response options is summarized for both Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents. Analysis of response patterns indicates statistically significant differences between Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents on the Neighborhood/Community Belonging and Cohesion Scale. On every item, Pottawattamie County residents are more likely to strongly agree with the statement about their neighborhood/community. The one item where both respondent groups are close to one another in the

percent strongly agreeing is on the item dealing with people generally get along with one another. Of particular interest is that over 4 in 10 Council Bluffs residents either said they "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" with the statement, "This is a close knit neighborhood." Detailed analysis of this item shows that Council Bluff residents who are in the 19-49 age category were more likely to say "Strongly Disagree" with the statement. Residents with household income under \$50,000 were also less likely to say "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." Finally, residents in the 51501 zip code area—the heart of Council Bluffs—were more likely to say "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" to the statement, "This is a close knit neighborhood." For each of these groups, the response patterns are statistically significant.

Table 21 summarizes survey responses to the individual items in the second scale which measures active support of neighborhood children by adults (Neighborhood Adult/Parent Cohesion Scale). Statistically significant differences in response patterns were found between Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents. On several items, the percent differences between the two survey groups are quite large. For example, residents of Pottawattamie County are much more likely to say "Strongly Agree" to the statements, "There are adults in this neighborhood/community that children can look up to" and "Parents in this neighborhood/community generally know each other."

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Table 20

Neighborhood/ Community Belonging and Cohesion Scale Items

	Council Bluffs	Pottawattamie County	All Respondents
<b>People around here are willing to help neighbors</b>	<b>(N=587)</b>	<b>(N=306)</b>	<b>(N=893)</b>
Strongly agree	27.3%	42.5%	32.5%
Agree	57.6%	51.3%	55.4%
Disagree	11.8%	5.6%	9.6%
Strongly disagree	3.4%	0.7%	2.5%
<b>People in this neighborhood/ community share the same values</b>	<b>(N=535)</b>	<b>(N=299)</b>	<b>(N=834)</b>
Strongly agree	20.0%	25.8%	22.1%
Agree	56.8%	57.2%	57.0%
Disagree	17.9%	15.1%	16.9%
Strongly disagree	5.2%	2.0%	4.1%
<b>This is a close knit neighborhood/ community</b>	<b>(N=580)</b>	<b>(N=301)</b>	<b>(N=881)</b>
Strongly agree	17.4%	29.9%	21.7%
Agree	38.3%	50.5%	42.5%
Disagree	37.1%	18.9%	30.9%
Strongly disagree	7.2%	0.7%	5.0%
<b>People in this neighborhood/ community can be trusted</b>	<b>(N=577)</b>	<b>(N=301)</b>	<b>(N=878)</b>
Strongly agree	25.5%	32.6%	27.9%
Agree	56.8%	58.5%	57.4%
Disagree	12.3%	8.6%	11.0%
Strongly disagree	5.4%	0.3%	3.6%
<b>People in this neighborhood/ community generally get along with each other</b>	<b>(N=588)</b>	<b>(N=303)</b>	<b>(N=891)</b>
Strongly agree	28.1%	29.4%	28.5%
Agree	64.3%	66.3%	65.0%
Disagree	5.4%	3.6%	4.8%
Strongly disagree	2.2%	0.7%	1.7%

Table 21

Neighborhood Adult/Parent Cohesion Scale Items

	Council Bluffs	Pottawattamie County	All Respondents
<b>There are adults in this neighborhood/ community that children can look up to</b>	<b>(N=554)</b>	<b>(N=300)</b>	<b>(N=854)</b>
Strongly agree	26.7%	41.0%	31.7%
Agree	62.5%	57.7%	60.8%
Disagree	8.3%	1.3%	5.9%
Strongly disagree	2.5%	0.0%	1.6%
<b>You can count on adults in this neighborhood/ community to watch that children are safe</b>	<b>(N=557)</b>	<b>(N=296)</b>	<b>(N=853)</b>
Strongly agree	28.4%	34.1%	30.4%
Agree	49.6%	57.4%	52.3%
Disagree	16.9%	7.4%	13.6%
Strongly disagree	5.2%	1.0%	3.8%
<b>Parents in this neighborhood/ community know their children's friends</b>	<b>(N=580)</b>	<b>(N=301)</b>	<b>(N=881)</b>
Strongly agree	24.4%	33.7%	27.8%
Agree	57.9%	57.4%	57.7%
Disagree	14.7%	8.1%	12.3%
Strongly disagree	3.0%	0.7%	2.2%
<b>Adults in this neighborhood/ community know who the local children are</b>	<b>(N=547)</b>	<b>(N=288)</b>	<b>(N=835)</b>
Strongly agree	20.5%	31.6%	24.3%
Agree	51.6%	48.3%	50.4%
Disagree	24.1%	19.1%	22.4%
Strongly disagree	3.8%	1.0%	2.9%
<b>Parents in this neighborhood/ community generally know each other</b>	<b>(N=588)</b>	<b>(N=303)</b>	<b>(N=891)</b>
Strongly agree	19.2%	31.7%	23.6%
Agree	51.2%	56.7%	53.1%
Disagree	26.0%	11.0%	20.7%
Strongly disagree	3.6%	0.7%	2.6%

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To create the final cohesion scales, respondents were scored on each of the individual items. Reliability analysis showed that both scales exceeded minimum thresholds for reliability. Table 22 shows the mean scale scores for each of the survey groups and scales. Scale scores range from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the highest level of Neighborhood/Community Belonging and Cohesion (or Adult/Parent Cohesion) and 4 indicating the lowest cohesion. As shown in Table 22, Pottawattamie County residents show higher levels of cohesion on both scales, and Council Bluffs residents show lower levels of cohesion. For both scales, the differences in scores are statistically significant, and are not likely to have occurred by chance.

**Table 22**  
Mean Scores for Two Cohesion Scales

	Council Bluffs	Pottawattamie County
Neighborhood/Community Belonging and Cohesion Scale	2.0	1.8
Neighborhood Adult/Parent Cohesion Scale	2.0	1.7

## **2. Ratings of Community and Neighborhood**

Another measure of community belongingness is indicated by residents' rating of their community and neighborhood as a place to live. People who are more attached to their neighborhood/community will rate it

higher. The information in Table 23 shows that approximately 1 in 5 Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents say that Council Bluffs/Pottawattamie County is an excellent place to live.

**Table 23**  
Resident Ratings of Community and Neighborhood as a Place to Live

	Council Bluffs (N=600)	Pottawattamie County (N=307)	All Respondents (N=907)
<b>How rate Council Bluffs(Pottawattamie County) as place to live?</b>			
Excellent	20.7%	23.8%	21.7%
Good	60.5%	64.8%	62.0%
Fair	17.2%	10.7%	15.0%
Poor	1.7%	0.7%	1.3%
<b>How rate your neighborhood/area as place to live?</b>			
Excellent	40.0%	50.5%	43.6%
Good	42.8%	40.4%	42.0%
Fair	14.2%	8.1%	12.1%
Poor	3.0%	1.0%	2.3%

Typically, residents rate their own neighborhood or smaller residential area more positively than the larger city or county they live in. The immediate place of dwelling represents, for most people, an important choice. As Table 23 shows, this is indeed the case for both Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents.

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Among Pottawattamie County residents, a majority (50.5%) rate their community/area as an excellent place to live. Council Bluffs residents also rate their neighborhood/area higher than Council Bluffs overall, with 40.0 percent rating their area “Excellent.” The differences between Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents on the second item are statistically significant.

A final area of community focus was on resident assessments of how their area has changed during the past several years. If people feel connected to their community and neighborhood, this will be reflected not just in assessments of the community as a place to live, but in assessments of progress being made in addressing local problems.

Each respondent was asked, “During the past 2-3 years, would you say conditions in your neighborhood (community/area) have improved, remained the same, or declined?” Table 24 presents a summary of responses to this question. As can be seen, a much larger proportion of Pottawattamie County residents said, “Improved” (49.5% vs. 27.1% for Council Bluffs).

As a follow-up to the neighborhood improvement item, Council Bluffs respondents were asked if they would favor establishing a neighborhood association with the goal of working with residents to improve the area. As

shown in Table 24, there is clear support for both neighborhood- and resident-based organizations.

**Table 24**  
**Assessment of Changes in Neighborhood/Community Conditions and Support for Neighborhood Organizations**

	<b>Council Bluffs</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County</b>	<b>All Respondents</b>
<b>During last 2-3 years, how have conditions in neighborhood/community changed?</b>	<b>(N=582)</b>	<b>(N=301)</b>	<b>(N=883)</b>
Improved	27.1%	49.5%	34.8%
Remained the same	57.7%	40.2%	51.8%
Declined	11.3%	8.0%	10.2%
Lived in area <2 years	3.8%	2.3%	3.3%
<b>Favor establishing a neighborhood association to work with residents to improve area?</b>	<b>(N=403)</b>		<b>(N=403)</b>
Yes	72.4%	*	72.4%
No	27.6%	*	27.6%

\*Question not asked of Pottawattamie County residents

### **3. Reaching Out to Minority Communities**

The population of Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs has traditionally been Caucasian. In 2000, the population of Pottawattamie County was 98.0 percent White. Minority populations have never comprised more than a few percentages of the total population. During

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the past 10 years, the immigration of Latino populations throughout the U.S. has been felt, especially in Council Bluffs. The U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated the Latino/Hispanic population of Pottawattamie County at 3,740 in 2005. This is an increase of 29.3 percent from the 2000 population of 2,892. The staff of the Centro Latino estimates that the number of Latinos working in Council Bluffs is actually larger than the number living in the community. As a result, there are more Latinos eating, shopping, and moving around the community than live there.

Because the Latino population is very likely to continue to grow, it is important that the community create a welcoming environment. After all, Council Bluffs has traditionally had little diversity and the opportunity is available to start from a somewhat blank slate with the Latino immigrants.

The community attitude survey contained one question about efforts to be welcoming to Latinos. Respondents were read the statement, "The community of Council Bluffs/ Pottawattamie County is working hard to be inclusive of minority groups, especially Latinos." Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement. Although data are not shown, a majority of residents indicated they agreed with the statement (68.1% for Council Bluffs and 67.2% for Pottawattamie County). Approximately 1 in 4 disagreed.

## ***Summary of Findings on Communication and Community Building***

Several needs have been highlighted in this section. At a macro level, the institutions for informing Council Bluffs residents about important issues, trends, and concerns are in short supply. A near majority of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents feel their local media could do a better job of aiding community information and communication.

Social cohesion, measured with two different scales, is currently at the mid-point between high and low cohesion. Cohesion is lower in Council Bluffs, and lowest among younger residents; those with lower incomes; and those living in the 51501 zip code.

Overall, the residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County think their community is a good place to live. About 2 in 10 feel it is excellent and 1 in 10 think it is fair or poor. Most residents perceive that conditions are not changing in their neighborhood or immediate area of residence. This can reduce attachment to the area.

There is a need to foster new organizations to promote communication and information sharing. Existing nonprofits and new community-based organizations such as neighborhood associations need to be developed and nurtured. Furthermore, it is critical that



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low income and younger residents be engaged in ways that are meaningful to them. Neighborhood associations and other grass-roots organizations may offer opportunities for development. Increasing incomes, employment options will also provide renewal.

## **Community Pride and Self-Image**

A number of the community leader interviews touched on community pride and self-image. Almost always this was discussed in the context of Council Bluffs, rather than Pottawattamie County. Representative questions and concerns included the following:

- What can be done/are we doing enough to increase the pride of young people as Council Bluffs residents?
- What is the community's self-image? Is there still a "woe is me" attitude?

This section provides information about the current image Council Bluffs residents have of the community.

Table 25 shows the responses of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents to several different survey items dealing with image and community pride. Only around 1 in 10 Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents strongly agree with the statement, "Most Council Bluffs/ community residents are proud of the community." The preponderance of both groups of

respondents said either, "Agree" or "Strongly Agree," but relatively few were in strong agreement with the statement. Very close to 1 in 5 Council Bluffs residents said "Disagree" (16.5%) or "Strongly Disagree" (2.1%) with the pride statement. The responses of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents are significantly different from one another, with differences especially apparent on the Disagree/Strongly Disagree responses.

A second item focused on whether people felt residents had a strong sense of community. Responses were very close to the pattern found for the community pride item.

The next item summarized in Table 25 addresses perceived changes in the community during the past 15 years. As can be seen, Council Bluffs residents are more likely to Strongly Agree that the community is a better place to live than 15 years ago. For both groups, approximately 1 in 4 said either "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree."

The last item contained in Table 25 deals with leadership. This item had the lowest proportion of respondents say, "Strongly Agree." As a result, we can conclude that residents feel less strongly that the community's leadership is visionary and forward looking.

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**Table 25**  
Community Pride and Self-Image Among Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County Residents

<b>Most Council Bluffs/Community residents are proud of the community</b>	<b>Council Bluffs (N=575)</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County (N=303)</b>
Strongly agree	8.9%	12.2%
Agree	72.5%	76.2%
Disagree	16.5%	10.6%
Strongly disagree	2.1%	1.0%
<b>Council Bluffs residents/Residents of my area have a strong sense of community</b>	<b>(N=576)</b>	<b>(N=304)</b>
Strongly agree	10.2%	20.7%
Agree	67.2%	64.1%
Disagree	20.3%	14.5%
Strongly disagree	2.3%	0.7%
<b>Council Bluffs/My community is a better place to live than it was 15 years ago</b>	<b>(N=505)</b>	<b>(N=260)</b>
Strongly agree	16.4%	10.8%
Agree	58.0%	60.4%
Disagree	22.2%	25.8%
Strongly disagree	3.4%	3.1%
<b>Council Bluffs' leadership/Community leadership in my area is visionary and forward looking</b>	<b>(N=558)</b>	<b>(N=285)</b>
Strongly agree	7.2%	4.6%
Agree	65.2%	64.6%
Disagree	23.7%	28.1%
Strongly disagree	3.9%	2.8%

## **Summary of Findings on Community Pride and Self-Image**

To summarize the findings of this section, the overall perceptions of survey respondents—based on the proportion responding either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the survey items—is that residents are proud of the community and feel residents have a strong sense of community. At the same time, the intensity of the perception is not very strong. No more than 1 in 10 persons said “Strongly Agree.” Most troubling is that approximately 1 in 5 Council Bluffs residents disagree with the two statements measuring pride and community.

Residents feel that the community is a better place to live than it was 15 years ago, with Council Bluffs residents weighing in more strongly on this point. Finally, residents are not very likely to strongly agree that community leadership is visionary and forward looking. Each of these items represents an area to improve in future years.

## **Physical Improvements to the Community**

A great deal of energy and resources have been focused on improving the physical facilities, infrastructure and look of Council Bluffs during the past 10-15 years. Quite a few of the community leader interviews dealt with

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these physical changes. Some leaders were adamant that improving the physical look of Council Bluffs is absolutely critical, and that it must continue for the foreseeable future. Others were just as adamant that it is perhaps time to look at what has been done and to see what the community thinks about it. Still other leaders weren't sure if the right physical improvements had been undertaken; some tweaking of projects and approaches might be needed.

To explore these issues, several questions were developed for the community attitude survey. Table 26 reports information for two very basic questions: whether improving the physical appearance of Council Bluffs is critical to changing the image people have of it; and whether or not the physical developments of the past 10-15 years have significantly improved the look of the community. As can be seen, Council Bluffs residents firmly agree that physical change is critical to image change. The proportion saying "Strongly Agree" is among the highest found in the survey. Just 1 in 10 residents disagrees with this statement.

When asked about whether the physical development has significantly improved the look of the community, respondents agreed that it had, but the intensity was substantially lower. Just less than 1 in 5 said, "Strongly Agree." This was one-half the proportion giving a similar response for the first item.

**Table 26**  
**Attitudes Toward Physical Improvements in Council Bluffs**

<b>Improving the physical appearance of Council Bluffs is critical to changing the image people have of it</b>	<b>Council Bluffs (N=593)</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County</b>
Strongly agree	38.4%	
Agree	50.3%	
Disagree	9.9%	
Strongly disagree	1.3%	
<b>Council Bluffs' physical development over the past 10 to 15 years has significantly improved the look of the community</b>	<b>(N=558)</b>	<b>(N=291)</b>
Strongly agree	19.9%	19.2
Agree	66.7%	70.1
Disagree	12.0%	8.9
Strongly disagree	1.4%	1.7

The survey also asked Council Bluffs residents to respond to several statements about physical improvement project areas currently underway. Table 27 summarizes this information. Each of the three items— investment in the Western end of the community; revitalization of downtown Council Bluffs; and redevelopment of West Broadway—garnered agreement from a majority of the respondents. Agreement with the physical improvement statement about downtown was strongest (73.9% Agree or Strongly Agree), with redevelopment of West Broadway next (68.2% Agree or Strongly Agree). Just

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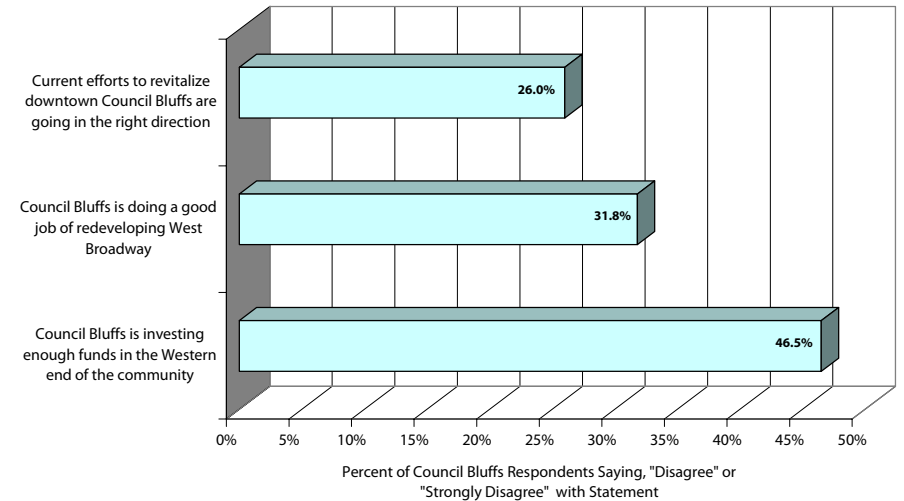
slightly over a majority of respondents (53.5%) said “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the item on investment in the Western end of Council Bluffs.

Figure 31 provides a summary for the proportion of residents saying “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to each of the three physical improvement priority statements.

**Table 27**  
**Assessment of Physical Improvements in Council Bluffs**

<b>Council Bluffs is investing enough funds in the Western end of the community</b>	<b>(N=525)</b>
Strongly agree	3.0%
Agree	50.5%
Disagree	40.8%
Strongly disagree	5.7%
<b>Current efforts to revitalize downtown Council Bluffs are going in the right direction</b>	<b>(N=564)</b>
Strongly agree	8.5%
Agree	65.4%
Disagree	23.0%
Strongly disagree	3.0%
<b>Council Bluffs is doing a good job of redeveloping West Broadway</b>	<b>(N=571)</b>
Strongly agree	8.8%
Agree	59.4%
Disagree	27.1%
Strongly disagree	4.7%

**Figure 31: Assessment of Physical Improvements in Council Bluffs**



## **Summary of Attitudes toward Physical Improvements to the Community**

Analysis of survey findings shows that Council Bluffs residents feel that changing the physical image of Council Bluffs is essential to changing people’s image of the community. Furthermore, the preponderance of all residents, including Pottawattamie County residents, perceives that the changes have significantly improved the look of the community over the past 10-15 years. Council Bluffs residents judge the improvements somewhat lower than Pottawattamie County residents.

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When asked to assess several areas where physical improvements are on-going, Council Bluffs residents were less positive than when assessing the entire community. Among the three improvement areas, respondents clearly feel that too little investment is being made in the Western end of Council Bluffs. There is also some concern about improvement of West Broadway.

## **Improving Housing Conditions and Increasing Multi-Family Housing Units**

Community development plans and programs of the City of Council Bluffs and the Community Housing Investment Corporation (CHIC) have stressed the importance of addressing housing needs in Council Bluffs for a number of years. Leader interviews and meetings also highlighted the importance of addressing housing conditions and availability, especially in Council Bluffs.

This section profiles selected information on housing needs in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. The focus is primarily on Council Bluffs. The Economic Development Needs section documented the importance that residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County place on increasing the supply of affordable housing.

## ***Background Information on Housing Conditions and Trends in Multi-Family Housing in Council Bluffs***

The strategic plan for the Community Housing Investment Corporation (CHIC) presents a compelling case for the need for increased efforts and funding to meet the housing rehabilitation and affordability needs of the community.

The following summary statements of need are drawn from CHIC's February 2006 strategic plan:

- Based on 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census data, almost 70% of the housing stock in Council Bluffs was built prior to 1960 and almost one-third of the housing stock was built prior to 1939.
- City-wide structural surveys undertaken by the City of Council Bluffs Department of Community Development found that approximately 25% of properties were considered in need of rehabilitation and 1% in need of demolition (Council Bluffs Blight Study, 1992).
- Based on U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development figures, 70.5 percent of households with incomes below 30 percent of the median family income report housing problems; 53.7 percent of households with incomes from 30-50 percent of median income reported housing problems; and 22.5 percent of households from

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50% to 80% of median report housing problems. This compares to 6.0% of households with incomes over 80% of the median reporting housing problems (2000 CHAS Data).

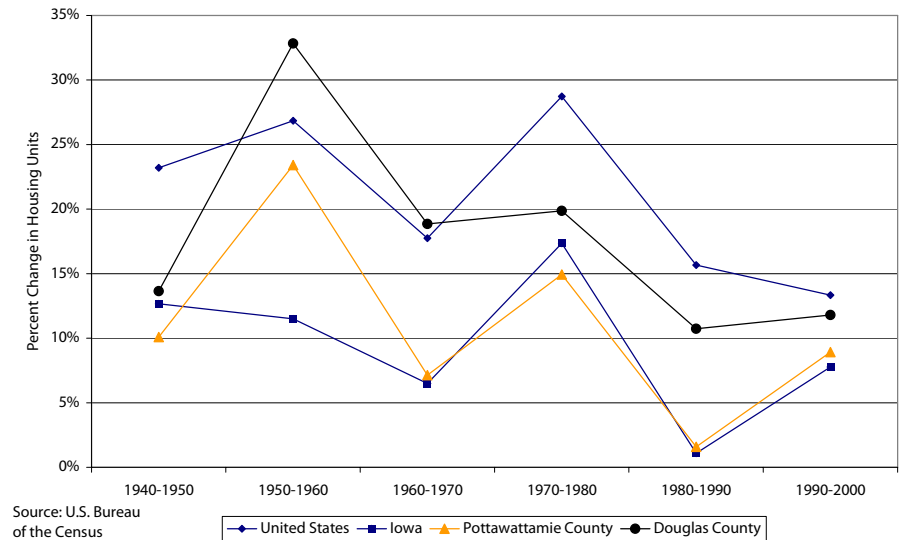
- Cost burdens are another housing issue in Council Bluffs. CHIC notes that of the 5,736 households below 30.0 percent of the median family income, 67.0 percent have cost burdens for housing (2000 CHAS Data). A cost burden is defined as costs exceeding 30.0 percent of household income for housing.

As CHIC notes in its strategic plan, these figures indicate a strong need for single-family rehabilitation, as well as affordable housing construction in Council Bluffs.

In addition to the CHIC strategic plan, several other items of information bear scrutiny. To provide a long-term view of housing unit change in Pottawattamie County, Figure 31 shows the percent change in housing units for 10 year periods since 1940. As shown in Figure 32, after the post-war boom, the decennial percent change in housing units has been in decline. Most important, Pottawattamie County's decennial change has lagged that of the U.S. and Douglas County at every time point. The 1980-1990 decade was very tough for Pottawattamie County. The 1990s, on the other hand, brought significant growth. Overall, it is sobering that the recent growth rate for housing units is lower than all but two

other decades in the 1940-2000 time series depicted in Figure 32.

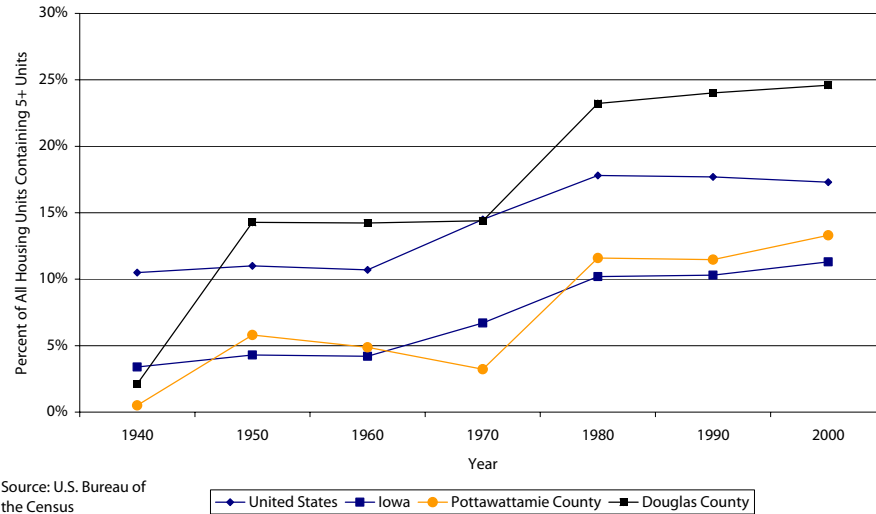
Figure 32: Change in Total Housing Units by Decade



A critical component of the affordable housing equation is the construction of multi-family housing. Figure 33 depicts the trend in the proportion of housing units containing 5 or more units from 1940-2000. Despite having income levels below that of Douglas County, Pottawattamie County has consistently had a lower proportion of housing as multi-family at every point measured in Figure 33. The recent up-tick is an extremely positive sign. Still, the proportion of housing consisting of 5 or more units in Council Bluffs stood at 13.3 percent of all housing units. This was quite a bit below the U.S.

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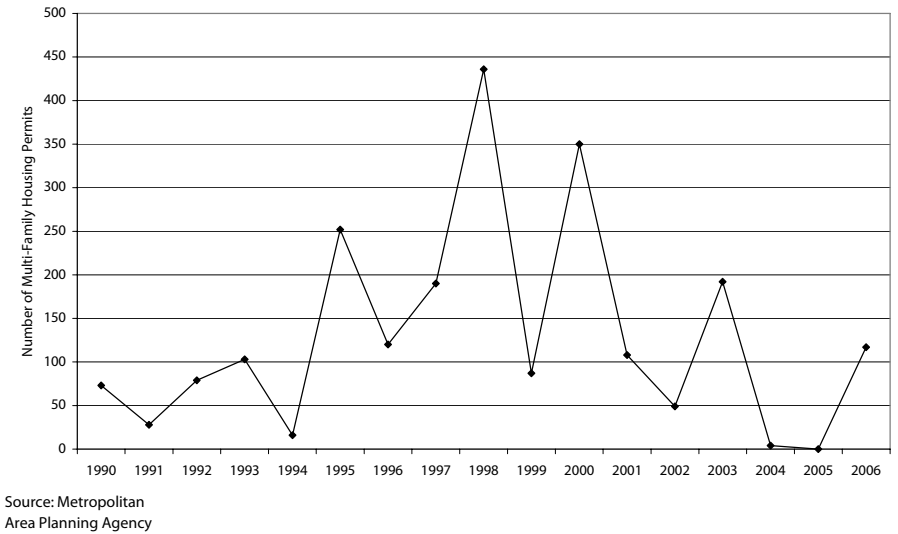
**Figure 33: Proportion of Housing Units Constructed as Multi-Family- 1940 to 2000**



level of 17.3 percent and significantly below the 24.6 percent reported for Douglas County in 2000.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) tracks building permits for single- and multi-family housing. Figure 34 reports the trend for Council Bluffs since 1990. The figure shows that multi-family housing permits increased significantly in 1995. Permits generally exceeded 100 multi-family units each year for the 1995-2003 period except for one year (1999) when the number dipped to 87. During 2004 and 2005 the number of multi-family units was near zero, with a rebound registered in 2006 (based on figures from the City of Council Bluffs).

**Figure 34: Multi-Family Housing Permits for Council Bluffs, 1990-2005**



Drawing on the data in Figure 34, during the past 17 years an average of approximately 130 multi-family housing units has been added each year in Council Bluffs. With a total of approximately 24,637 housing units in Council Bluffs in 2000, the annual addition of multi-family housing represents a replacement rate of approximately 0.5 percent. Bringing Council Bluffs up to the U.S. level (17.3% multi-family units) would require that an additional 100 multi-family units be built each year for the next 5-6 years, thus adding approximately 1,000 additional multi-family housing units.

Figure 35 summarizes the long-term trend in gross rents paid for housing in Council Bluffs. Expressed in 1999

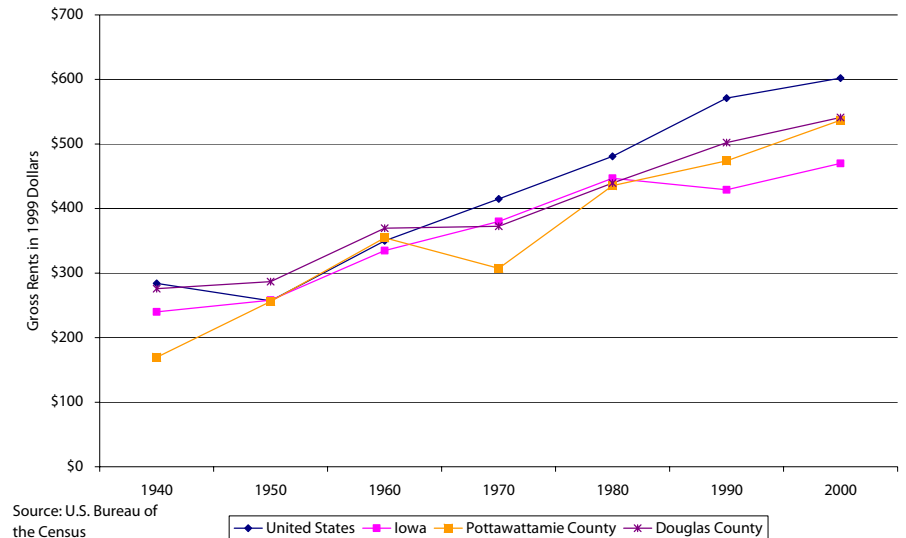
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dollars, gross rents have generally tracked those of Douglas County, reflecting the impact of the metropolitan housing market. It is clear from Figure 34 that Council Bluffs low and moderate income residents have likely been experiencing housing problems since incomes are lower. According to the 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census, gross rents consumed 35.0 percent or more of total household income for 29.1 percent of Council Bluffs residents. As noted earlier, these problems have been confirmed in CHIC's plan, as well as recent years' Consolidated Action Plans developed by the City of Council Bluffs Department of Community Development for use of Community Development Block Grant funds.

## **Survey Evidence on Housing Issues**

The community attitude survey asked residents several items about their current housing and housing environment. Table 28 provides information for both Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents. As shown in the table, respondents are relatively positive about the condition of housing in their neighborhood. Approximately 10.0 percent of Council Bluffs residents either Disagree or Strongly Disagree with the neighborhood housing condition statement. The differences between Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County are statistically significant.

Figure 35: Median Gross Rents - 1940 to 2000 (1999 dollars)



Similar, generally positive responses also characterize the two items on the respondent's home/apartment and their current satisfaction with their housing condition. Overall, these assessments are somewhat more positive than the data compiled by the City of Council Bluffs and CHIC.

Detailed analysis of differences in housing assessment across social and economic groups did find several significant departures from those presented in Table 28:

- Assessment of Neighborhood Housing Condition
  - Minority and lower income residents more likely to disagree that condition is good



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**Table 28**  
**Assessment of Housing in Council Bluffs and**  
**Pottawattamie County**

	<b>Council Bluffs</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County</b>	<b>All Respondents</b>
<b>The housing in my neighborhood is generally in good condition</b>	<b>(N=599)</b>	<b>(N=305)</b>	<b>(N=904)</b>
Strongly agree	31.6%	42.0%	35.1%
Agree	56.9%	54.1%	56.0%
Disagree	9.7%	3.6%	7.6%
Strongly disagree	1.8%	0.3%	1.3%
<b>My home/ apartment is in good condition</b>	<b>(N=600)</b>	<b>(N=307)</b>	<b>(N=907)</b>
Strongly agree	44.3%	49.8%	46.2%
Agree	51.2%	48.2%	50.2%
Disagree	3.8%	1.6%	3.1%
Strongly disagree	0.7%	0.3%	0.6%
<b>I am satisfied with my current housing condition</b>	<b>(N=597)</b>	<b>(N=307)</b>	<b>(N=904)</b>
Strongly agree	35.0%	45.9%	38.7%
Agree	55.8%	50.2%	53.9%
Disagree	6.4%	3.3%	5.3%
Strongly disagree	2.8%	0.7%	2.1%

- Assessment of Neighborhood Housing Condition
  - Minority and lower income residents more likely to disagree that condition is good
- Assessment of Own Home/Apartment
  - Lower income and lower education residents more likely to disagree

- Satisfaction with Current Housing Condition
  - Lower income and lower education residents are more likely to disagree that they are satisfied

## **Summary of Housing Condition and Multi-Family Housing Availability Issues**

Council Bluff's housing stock is aging and in need to rehabilitation. A majority of low income households report housing problems. Since 1940, Pottawattamie County has lagged the U.S. and Douglas County in the production of housing units. Despite an upturn in housing unit production in Pottawattamie County during the 1990s, the number of units was lower than all but one other time period since 1940. Within the multi-family housing sector (5+ units), Pottawattamie County has consistently had a lower proportion of housing as multi-family at every time period since 1940. On an annual basis, multi-family housing permits in Council Bluffs have shown significant variation, with the current level lower than occurred in the mid- to late-1990s.

Community survey evidence points to broad support for increasing the availability of affordable housing. Survey evidence also shows that lower income, minority, and Council Bluffs residents are less likely to Strongly Agree that their housing is in good condition; to Strongly Agree

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that they are satisfied with their current housing condition.

## **Summary of Community Development and Beautification Needs**

Considerable effort and resources have been focused on community development and beautification in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County during the past 10-15 years. Significant strides have been made in re-shaping and developing the physical community. This needs assessment has identified several areas of need which complement recent community development efforts.

### **Support Communication and Build Community**

Support is needed to foster increased communication and to build connections between people for a greater sense of community. At a macro level, the institutions for informing Council Bluffs residents about important issues, trends, and concerns are in short supply. A near majority of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents feel their local media could do a better job of aiding community information and communication.

Social cohesion, measured with two different validated scales, is currently at the mid-point between high and low cohesion. Cohesion is lower in Council Bluffs, and

lowest among younger residents; those with lower incomes; and those living in the 51501 zip code.

Overall, the residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County think their community is a good place to live. About 2 in 10 feel it is excellent and 1 in 10 think it is fair or poor. Most residents perceive that conditions are not changing in their neighborhood or immediate area of residence. This can reduce social attachment to the area.

There is a need to foster new organizations to promote communication and information sharing. Existing nonprofits and new community-based organizations such as neighborhood associations need to be developed and nurtured. Furthermore, it is critical that low income and younger residents be engaged in ways that are meaningful to them. Neighborhood associations and other grass-roots organizations may offer opportunities for development. Increasing incomes, employment options will also provide renewal.

### **Build Community Pride and Self-Image**

Community leaders identified community pride as a concern. However, results of the community attitude survey show that residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County are proud of their communities. Survey respondents—based on the proportion responding either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the

# 5. CD and Beautification Needs

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survey items—are proud of the community and feel residents have a strong sense of community. At the same time, the intensity of the perception is not very strong. No more than 1 in 10 persons said “Strongly Agree.” Most troubling is that approximately 1 in 5 Council Bluffs residents disagree with the two statements measuring pride and community.

Residents also feel that the community is a better place to live than it was 15 years ago, with Council Bluffs residents weighing in more strongly on this point. Finally, residents are not very likely to strongly agree that community leadership is visionary and forward looking. Each of these items represents an area to improve in future years.

## **Make Physical Improvements to the Community**

Continuing to promote physical change in the community is important. Council Bluffs residents feel that changing the physical image of the city is essential to changing people’s image of the community. The preponderance of all residents, including Pottawattamie County residents, perceives that efforts have significantly improved the look of the community over the past 10-15 years. Council Bluffs residents assess physical improvements lower than county residents.

When asked to assess several areas where physical improvements are on-going, Council Bluffs residents were less positive than when assessing the entire community. Among the three improvement areas, respondents clearly feel that too little investment is being made in the Western end of Council Bluffs. There is also some concern about improvement of West Broadway.

## **Improve Housing Conditions and Multi-Family Housing Availability**

Housing conditions are a leading predictor of neighborhood decline. Community data show that Council Bluff’s housing stock is aging and in need of rehabilitation. Furthermore, a majority of low income households report housing problems. The last effort to comprehensively assess the condition of housing in Council Bluffs was undertaken in 1992. It is time to update information on housing conditions and to develop an action plan to address condition changes.

In the area of housing production, Pottawattamie County has lagged the U.S. and Douglas County since 1940. Despite an upturn in housing unit production in Pottawattamie County during the 1990s, the number of units was lower than all but one other time period since 1940. Within the multi-family housing sector (5+ units), Pottawattamie County has consistently had a lower

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proportion of housing as multi-family at every decennial census period since 1940. On an annual basis, multi-family housing permits in Council Bluffs have shown significant variation, with recent years' production lower than in the mid- to late-1990s.

Community survey evidence points to very strong support among residents of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County for increasing the availability of affordable housing. Survey evidence also points to concerns among residents with the condition of their current housing. This is especially true for lower income, minority, and Council Bluffs residents. Each of these groups is less likely to Strongly Agree that their housing is in good condition, or that they are satisfied with their current housing condition.

## **Addressing Community Development Beautification Needs**

Twelve different alternatives for addressing community development and beautification needs are offered. These include the following:

### ***Alternatives to Consider***

#### **Support Communication and Build Community**

- Support development of grass-roots, community-based organizations to promote communication

and community-building. Examples of needed organizations include: youth leadership; young professionals; neighborhood associations; downtown association; and issue-based organizations (e.g., family self-sufficiency, community health, mental health, recycling)

- Explore development and formation of partnerships with local companies and organizations to support innovative communication strategies. Community web logs (blogs); community pages (e.g., Council Bluffs Facebook group); online forums; free, ubiquitous Wi-Fi; and other information-based strategies can draw in and appeal to young people seeking to connect with one another and their community.
- Work to support development of local organizations' efforts to connect with clients and their various communities through quality newsletters and web pages. Another strategy to consider is to develop a community Internet and web page development lab (partnership with schools and IWCC) to provide assistance to the community.
- Consider development of an on-going Community Forum initiative. The forum could utilize multiple community venues and sponsor dialogues and discussions on a variety of issues. A Community

# 5. CD and Beautification Needs

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Forum web page and discussion board could be tied to the physical forums.

- Explore development of a monthly or quarterly multi-organization newspaper or newsletter, combined with a web version, to be sent to every household. Sections could be purchased or set-aside for governmental, school, and nonprofit organizations to communicate with every household.

## **Build Community Pride and Self-image**

- Utilize communication and community building strategies identified in the previous section to continue informing residents about community projects and successes.
- Support an array of youth, adult and non-traditional leadership development strategies. This would include expanding the number of community-based organizations, as identified above.

## **Make Physical Improvements to the Community**

- Continue to identify and make needed physical improvements in the community. The City of Council Bluffs Capital Improvement Plan; the CITIES Initiative (rural communities in Pottawattamie County); and other planning documents provide important guidance on needs and opportunities.

- Identify physical improvements made in the western end of Council Bluffs; encourage the identification of gaps that residents prefer to be met; and identify strategies for making such improvements.
- Work to better inform and involve residents in planning and defining improvements to West Broadway.
- Consider developing a neighborhood grants program to assist in involving local residents in identifying and prioritizing needs in neighborhoods, and to stimulate development of new grass-roots associations and community-based organizations.

## **Improve Housing Conditions and Multi-Family Housing Availability**

- Undertake a comprehensive study of housing needs. Two areas are especially critical.
  - Housing conditions are a leading predictor of neighborhood and community decline. Maintaining the condition of housing is thus critical to community improvement. As a result, a housing condition assessment needs to be conducted, especially in Council Bluffs. Smaller communities in Pottawattamie County may also want to have portions of their area assessed, as well. The condition assessment should seek to

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update prior condition assessments. This is more than a code enforcement issue. It is an issue of low incomes and aging housing stock, coupled with limited resources, abilities, and knowledge to make needed exterior repairs. The results of the condition assessment should be used to define future public and private funding commitments for addressing housing conditions.

- A second area of focus should be on affordable housing, especially multi-family housing. In addition to identifying demand, the study must assess the role of Iowa's tax structure in the production of multi-family units. A key question to answer is whether Iowa's system of taxation for multi-family properties makes it difficult for multi-family projects to demonstrate positive cash-flow. If gross rents in Council Bluffs must be competitive with Omaha, does the tax system render their production in Council Bluffs marginal from a financial perspective?

# 6. Human and Social Needs

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## Human and Social Needs

Four Human and Social Needs issues are profiled in this section of the report:

- Meeting pressing needs in areas such as mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, and public health
- Increasing nonprofit organization capacity
- Expanding volunteerism and community involvement
- Meeting youth service and program needs

As shown in previous report sections, it is critical that education levels be increased in the community. This will, in the long run, lead to better jobs and increased incomes. It has also been shown that income levels are associated with the attitudes, perceptions and life experiences of area residents, especially persons with lower incomes. The most proven way to address these linkages is through education and through efforts to build nonprofit capacity, expand volunteerism and philanthropy, and youth-serving initiatives.

## Pressing Needs

Due to the lower income and education levels found in Council Bluffs, there are a number of pressing needs.

Mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence and community public health issues were identified by a majority of the community leaders interviewed early in the needs assessment process.

There are many outstanding initiatives to address each of these issues. Despite these initiatives, service providers are not able to meet all of the needs in the community. The age-old question remains to be answered: “How do we better meet the human and social needs in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County?” One strategy that is in its early stages in Council Bluffs is the use of formal partnerships and collaborations to meet pressing human and social needs. Collaborations promote common information and databases, common definitions of problems, specialization of labor, and cross-fertilization of ideas and options.

Some notable examples include the mental health taskforce that is currently at work in the community and the development of the Charles E. Lakin Human Services Campus. The mental health task force has brought together a number of organizations working to address mental health needs. Linked to this, of course, are substance abuse needs since many of these individuals have mental health needs. This kind of network development within a set of provider organizations can elevate the issue within the community, foster new approaches to providing services, and spur coordination.

# 6. Human and Social Needs

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The Lakin Human Services Campus will bring together the American Red Cross, Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army, Heartland Family Service and Micah House. The new campus is especially appealing as a strategy for meeting pressing needs since it brings together organizations that generally meet different existing community human and social needs. As a result, there is the potential to help individuals' multi-faceted needs.

Addressing the multiple needs of individuals and families is perhaps one of the greatest needs and best strategies for addressing pressing human and social issues. One of the best times to help an individual is when that person is meeting with a service provider. The numerous agencies located within the Omni Center have been providing some individuals with the convenience of being able to access multiple services at one location. Better yet, however, would be formal partnerships to serve multiple needs, coupled with common intake forms and databases. These goals have long been advocated as solutions; now is the time to make them happen in Council Bluffs.

## ***Community Support to Address Pressing Issues***

A number of survey items dealt with youth and volunteer issues. These are profiled later in this section. One question asked of both Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents focused on mental health needs.

Mental health needs were one of the concerns identified in the community leader interviews.

Pottawattamie County government has lead responsibility for mental health, as well as mental retardation and developmental disabilities services. These services are provided through the Community Services Department. The county has a Mental Health Services Management Plan, a Central Point of Coordination, a network of 56 provider organizations, and 7 access points. In the 2005-2006 Fiscal Year, Pottawattamie County budgeted \$7.6 million for such services. This amount is the third largest line item in Pottawattamie County's budget of \$58.0 million. Only Public Safety (\$15.2 million) and Roads and Transportation (\$9.8 million) exceed the amount spent on mental health, mental retardation and developmental disabilities.

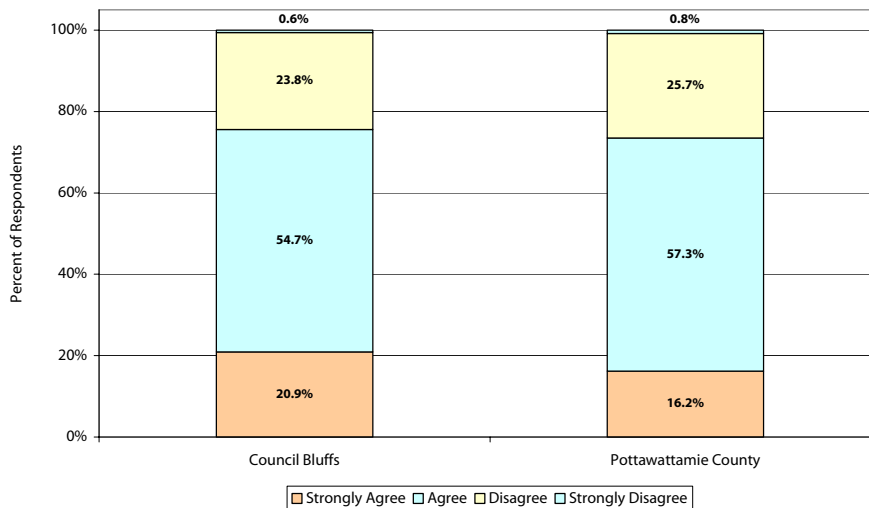
In 2006 the Council Bluffs Community Health Center had approximately 14,000 clinic visits involving almost 4,500 different patients. A significant portion of these patients had a mental health or substance abuse issue, in addition to a health-related need. In response to these and other indicators or need, a multi-organization task force is being developed to promote broad-based planning and response to mental health needs in the community.



# 6. Human and Social Needs

To provide information about public support for mental health efforts, community attitude survey respondents were read the following: “More needs to be done to address the mental health needs of Council Bluffs/Pottawattamie County residents.” Figure 36 summarizes the responses of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents to the mental health survey question. The preponderance of both respondent groups supports doing more to address the mental health needs of city and county residents.

Figure 36: Agreement that More Needs to be Done to Address Mental Health Needs



## Nonprofit Organization Capacity Needs

Most of the major nonprofit organizations serving the human and social needs of the Council Bluffs community were contacted during the needs assessment process. Furthermore, a number of their directors were interviewed as a part of the community leader interview and meeting process.

This section highlights several capacity issues identified through these contacts. The leader interview process identified nonprofit capacity building as one potential community need. Follow-up contacts to identify agency studies and reports relevant to the Iowa West Foundation needs assessment provided additional opportunities to learn more about some of the capacity needs of the area's nonprofit organizations. Assessing nonprofit capacity was not an initial objective of the study process. Instead, the need for nonprofit capacity building developed as a result of contacts with nonprofit agencies to gather needs-related documents and plans.

Sixty nonprofit organizations were initially identified to collect information that would assist with the needs assessment. The list of nonprofit organizations was developed with the assistance of existing lists available from the United Way of the Midlands, the Iowa West Foundation, the Council Bluffs community, as well as research conducted via the Internet. Internet search

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engines were utilized to obtain additional contacts. Local resources such as the Council Bluffs volunteer match provided by the Loess Hills Red Cross.

Of the 60 nonprofit organizations identified, 20 of the largest were contacted for several pieces of information. Items requested included: annual reports, strategic plans, needs assessments, grants, and any other available documents that the agency felt documented the needs of the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County area. Of the 20 organizations contacted, 15 organizations provided information; this is a 75 percent response rate. Table 29 summarizes the types of materials made available.

One in four agencies failed to provide source documents. Reasons listed by the agencies included factors such as: the organization did not have any of the documents requested; the organization was in the process of creating the documents; or the organization did not respond to the request for information.

As documents were received, they were reviewed and analyzed to identify needs of the organization and the clients served. Needs, goals, future plans, and any gaps in service were documented to identify trends throughout the document review. A list of the 60 nonprofits identified in the organizational reconnaissance phase is provided in Attachment 2. All documents were reviewed and summarized. Summaries

Table 29

Planning Documents Provided by Fifteen Nonprofit Organizations

Planning Documents/Reports Provided	Percent of Nonprofit Agencies (N=15)
Strategic Plan	33.3%
Action Plan	20.0%
Annual Report	46.7%
Grants	26.7%
Needs Assessment	6.7%
Agency/Service Fact Sheet	33.3%

and copies of the documents were archived in a single database containing artifacts of the materials provided by the 15 nonprofit organizations responding to the request for materials.

As a result of the document review, several capacity building issues were identified. One need identified is for assistance in developing strategic plans, identifying needs, and producing reliable and valid data for planning and decision making. The nonprofit organizations in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie have extremely dedicated and hard-working management and staff. Two priorities drive local agency actions. The first priority is to serve clients. The second priority is to stretch available resources as far as possible.

# 6. Human and Social Needs

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Few would take exception to these priorities. In fact, they are what makes the U.S. nonprofit sector the envy of the world. Beyond these, however, agencies must also make data gathering, analysis and evaluation, and report-writing top priorities. Funders expect nonprofit organizations to document their efforts and accomplishments. Furthermore, when documenting efforts, agencies are expected to be able to strategically frame how efforts and activities are related to needs, mission, goals and objectives. Likewise, when documenting accomplishments, funders expect agencies to be able to demonstrate how efforts are connected to outcomes, both short- and long-term. Work is thus needed to assist community nonprofit organizations with the following kinds of skills and tasks:

- Assessing organizational capacity at a broad level, including:
  - Planning
  - Leadership
  - Management capacity
  - Fund-raising
  - Communication
  - Information technology
  - Budgeting and financial management
- Developing logic models for key programs
- Building evaluation plans for key programs

- Identifying key program indicators and measures
- Building and refining data collection, database management, and report generation capacity

In addition to the general need outlined above, several additional, specific capacity-related needs were identified by nonprofit organizations in the reports and materials provided for the needs assessment. These include the following nonprofit capacity needs:

- Improved Human Resources: Personnel, leadership, pay and benefits, organizational culture, and communication practices and processes.
- Fund Development: Diversifying funding, increasing donor lists, and increasing grant applications were all identified as priorities.
- Public Relations & Marketing: Addressed the need to become more visible for fundraising purposes and to serve their clients more effectively.
- Volunteers: Need for more volunteers to assist with support and service provision, and volunteer management and training systems.

Overall, several important nonprofit capacity issues were identified through the needs assessment process. Contacts were made with local nonprofit organizations to ensure that locally-relevant data were examined for

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the needs assessment. The agency contacts and reports resulted in the identification of several critical agency needs. Building nonprofit capacity is critical for the future economic and social development of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. Helping the community's nonprofit organizations to better identify and respond to needs, and to better document and report on their efforts and accomplishments, will result in significant economic and social benefits for the community.

## Volunteerism and Community Involvement

### Level of Volunteerism

Many of the nonprofit organizations in Council Bluffs report they could use more volunteers. Several agencies have included increasing the number of volunteers and volunteer management as a part of their strategic plan. To determine the level of volunteerism in the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County, respondents were asked: "How many times in the last 12 months have you volunteered? By volunteering, I mean any unpaid work you've done to help people besides your family and friends or people you work with." Several response options were provided by the interviewer and these are show in Table 30. As seen in the table, approximately 3 out of 4 residents say they volunteered one of more times during the past 12 months. The table also shows

that Pottawattamie County residents are more likely to say they volunteered at all during the past 12 months.

Many people report volunteering once a month or more. Among Council Bluffs residents, the proportion volunteering at least once a month or more is 33.0 percent, and for Pottawattamie County the proportion is 39.0 percent.

The volunteer rates for Council Bluffs (73.3%) and Pottawattamie County (79.3%) are much higher than the rates reported by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). In their June 2006 report,

Table 30

Volunteerism in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County

	Council Bluffs	Pottawattamie County	All Respondents
How many times in the last 12 months have you volunteered?	(N=596)	(N=305)	(N=901)
Never did this	26.7%	20.7%	24.6%
Once	4.4%	5.9%	4.9%
A few times	15.1%	13.8%	14.7%
2 to 4 times	13.1%	12.8%	13.0%
5 to 9 times	7.9%	7.9%	7.9%
About once a month	9.9%	12.1%	10.7%
Twice a month	6.4%	8.5%	7.1%
About once a week	7.6%	5.9%	7.0%
More than once a week	9.1%	12.5%	10.2%

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*Volunteering in America: State Trends and Rankings*, the Corporation reported a volunteer rate of 39.2 percent for Iowa during the 2002-2005 time period. In the CNCS report, Iowa ranked fourth in volunteer rates, just behind Minnesota (3), Nebraska (2), and Utah (1). By any standard, the level of volunteerism in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County is extremely high.

Analysis of differences across sub-groups indicates statistically significant differences in volunteerism across race/ethnic groups, with African Americans showing very low levels of volunteerism, and Latinos being much more likely to report not volunteering. Residents with lower levels of education are also much more likely to say they have not volunteered in the past 12 months. Finally, persons whose total family income is less than \$50,000 each year are much more likely to say they have not volunteered.

The CNCS report, *Volunteering in America*, noted that the intensity of volunteering in Iowa was low during the 2002-2005 time period. Hours of volunteering was used as the measure of intensity. The median number of hours Iowans devoted to volunteering was 43. While the community attitude survey evidence is not directly comparable, Table 30 shows that approximately 1 in 3 persons volunteered 4 times or fewer for the entire year. Using an average of 4 hours per time yields a total of 16

hours; an average of 8 hours per time yields a total of 32 hours for the year.

Overall, the survey information on volunteerism points to a relatively deep pool of community commitment and involvement. The characteristics of Council Bluffs, especially, lead to substantial needs. How the available pool of volunteers gets matched up with the needs is something that bears working on.

## ***Personal Efficacy and Strategies for Involvement***

Survey participants were also asked several items designed to gauge residents' feeling of personal efficacy and preferred strategies for becoming involved in the community. This information is summarized in Table 31. The first item included in the table asked respondents how much impact they felt they could make on their community. As shown in the table, a majority of respondents said "Small Impact" or "No Impact at All." Among Council Bluffs respondents the proportion giving these responses was 60.4 percent; for Pottawattamie County the proportion was higher at 73.1 percent. These are very sobering figures. They clearly serve as a counter-balance to the community pride and cohesion data reviewed in the Community Development and Beautification section.

# 6. Human and Social Needs

**Table 31**

**Personal Efficacy and Involvement Actions**

	<b>Council Bluffs</b>	<b>Pottawattamie County</b>	<b>All Respondents</b>
<b>Overall, how much impact do you think you can have in making Council Bluffs/ Pottawattamie County a better place to live?</b>	<b>(N=600)</b>	<b>(N=307)</b>	<b>(N=907)</b>
Big impact	8.6%	5.6%	7.6%
Moderate impact	31.0%	21.3%	27.7%
Small impact	44.2%	42.9%	43.7%
No impact at all	16.2%	30.2%	21.0%
<b>What do you think is the most effective way you can have an impact?</b>	<b>(N=591)</b>	<b>(N=301)</b>	<b>(N=892)</b>
Get personally involved/volunteer	68.2%	60.9%	65.7%
Get other people involved	17.6%	19.0%	18.0%
Complain to authorities	6.0%	6.8%	6.3%
Give money	8.2%	13.3%	9.9%

A second question asked respondents, “What do you think is the most effective way you can have an impact?” Table 31 reports the responses for Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents. The most frequently selected option was “Get Personally Involved/Volunteer.” Almost 7 in 10 Council Bluffs respondents (68.2%) selected this choice and 6 in 10 Pottawattamie County respondents (60.9%) making the same choice. That a strong majority of respondents said they would use a

personal action strategy is important. At the same time, it stands somewhat in contrast to the relative feeling of powerlessness conveyed in responses to the first item contained in Table 31.

Detailed analysis of the linkages between these beliefs and actions shows several interesting things. First, residents who say they believe they can have an impact on the community are more likely to say they would get personally involved or volunteer to change things. The less one feels one can have an impact, the more likely one is to choose more indirect strategies such as complaining to officials, donating money.

## ***Interest in Keeping Up with Community News***

A final question asked respondents to indicate how frequently they keep up with the news about local government, the schools, or other government and community organizations? Commitment, involvement, and a feeling of personal efficacy all impact whether or not people keep up with community news and events.

Table 32 presents a summary of the results for this item. As can be seen, a near majority of Council Bluffs residents say they keep up with the news from any source about local issues and events. This is quite high. Just over 1 in 3 Pottawattamie County residents responded they

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**Table 32**  
**Keeping Up with the News**

	Council Bluffs	Pottawattamie County	Total
<b>How often do you keep up with the news from any source about the Council Bluffs City Council, the Mayor, the School Board, or other government and community organizations?</b>	<b>(N=599)</b>	<b>(N=306)</b>	<b>(N=905)</b>
Frequently	45.1%	36.3%	42.1%
Sometimes	29.2%	32.7%	30.4%
Seldom	17.0%	20.3%	18.1%
Never	8.7%	10.7%	9.4%

frequently keep up with the local news, and 1 in 3 reports they “Seldom” or “Never” keep up with the news.

In Council Bluffs, variations in keeping up with the news are related to education and age. Persons with lower levels of education or younger persons are less likely to say they frequently keep up with the news.

## Youth Program and Service Needs

Earlier, it was shown that the Community Attitude Survey pointed to broad concern about the high school drop-out rate in the community. Several additional survey items asked respondents to assess youth services and programs, at a general level. Four items focused on early childhood/children’s programs and services. These four

services included: early childhood education/pre-school; affordability of child care; availability of child care; and immunization programs for children.

Seven items focused on school-age youth programs and services. These programs and services included: organized school-based after school programs; organized sports programs; organized art, music, and dance programs; organized non-school based programs such as YMCA, Girls/Boys Clubs, Scouts, and Parks and Recreation; organized mentoring programs; organized career development programs; and programs to connect all youth to school, thus ensuring graduation from high school.

Table 33 reports the satisfaction levels found for these early childhood/child and youth services and programs. Mean satisfaction levels are reported. As explained in the note below the table, satisfaction responses ranged from Very Satisfied (response score=1) to Very Dissatisfied (response score=4). Thus, a mean satisfaction of 2.0 indicates an average assessment of Somewhat Satisfied.

As can be seen, satisfaction among all respondents to the community attitude survey was highest for one of the early childhood/child services, immunization programs (1.7), and one of the youth services, organized sports programs for school-aged youth (1.8). Satisfaction was lowest for organized mentoring programs for school-

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aged youth (2.5); affordability of child care (2.4); and programs to connect all youth to school, thus ensuring graduation from high school (2.4).

Table 33 also reports the mean satisfaction of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents for these same youth services and programs. Differences in means were examined for the two sample groups. Services and programs with statistically significant differences between the two samples are noted in the table. As can be seen, differences in satisfaction levels exist between the two samples for several services:

- early child education/pre-school
- affordability of child care
- organized school-based after school programs for school-aged youth
- organized art, music and dance programs for school-aged youth

For each of these items, Council Bluffs residents show lower levels of satisfaction (higher mean score).

Figure 37 summarizes the percentage of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County respondents who indicated they were either “Somewhat Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied” with the early childhood/child programs and services. As can be seen, dissatisfaction is highest for the affordability and availability of child care. Over 40.0

**Table 33**

**Mean Satisfaction Scores for Youth Services and Programs**

	All Survey Respondents	Council Bluffs Sample	Pottawattamie County Sample
Satisfaction with:**	Mean	Mean	Mean
Early childhood education/pre-school	2.0	2.0*	1.9*
Affordability of child care	2.4	2.4*	2.2*
Availability of child care	2.2	2.3	2.1
Organized school-based after school programs for school-aged youth	2.1	2.2*	2.0*
Organized sports programs for school-aged youth	1.8	1.9	1.7
Organized art, music, and dance programs for school-aged youth	2.2	2.3*	2.1*
Organized non-school based programs such as YMCA, Girls/Boys Clubs, Scouts, Parks and Recreation, etc. for school-aged youth	2.0	2.0	2.0
Organized mentoring programs for school-aged youth	2.5	2.5	2.4
Immunization programs for children	1.7	1.7	1.7
Organized career development programs for school-aged youth	2.2	2.3	2.2
Programs to connect all youth to school, thus ensuring graduation from high school	2.4	2.5*	2.3*

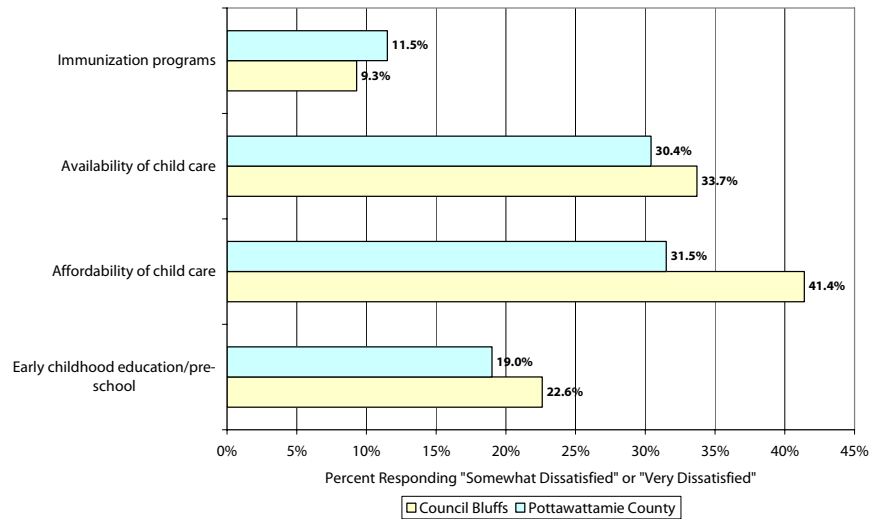
\*Statistically significant differences in mean satisfaction levels between the two survey sample groups (Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County).

\*\*Response choices included: Very Satisfied (1); Somewhat Satisfied (2); Somewhat Dissatisfied (3); and Very Dissatisfied (4).



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**Figure 37: Dissatisfaction with Early Child Programs and Services**

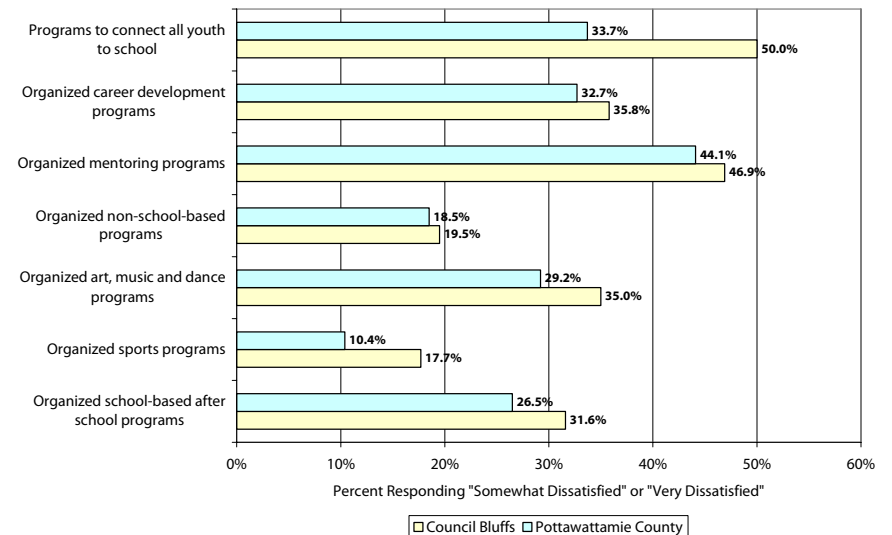


percent of Council Bluffs respondents are dissatisfied with the affordability of child care; among county residents, the level of dissatisfaction is 31.5 percent. Dissatisfaction is lowest for early childhood education and immunization services and programs.

Figure 38 provides dissatisfaction information for programs and services for school-aged youth. Among Council Bluffs respondents, dissatisfaction is highest for programs to connect all youth to school, thus ensuring graduation from high school (50.0%). Next, dissatisfaction is highest for organized mentoring programs (46.9%). Among Pottawattamie County respondents, dissatisfaction is highest for organized mentoring programs (44.1%).

To further explore the assessments of youth programs and services, the responses of survey participants with kid living at home were compared to survey respondents without children living at home. Although data are not shown, comparison of mean satisfaction levels identified several areas where the two groups significantly differed from one another. Statistically significant differences were found for: affordability of child care; availability of child care; organized art, music, and dance programs; and immunization programs for children.

**Figure 38: Dissatisfaction with School-Aged Youth Programs and Services**



For each of these areas, respondents with children present in the home were found to have higher levels of

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satisfaction with services, compared to respondents whose homes have no children present. These findings may indicate that residents with children living at home are more aware of the efforts and accomplishments of services being provided to children and youth. Residents without children/youth at home may be less aware, and assess programs and services using different criteria. This difference may indicate the need for information and communication efforts in these areas.

Additional analyses were conducted to identify potential differences in youth service and program satisfaction across income, age, and education levels. Data are not shown, but several significant differences were identified. They were:

- Income Levels
  - Lower income respondents (under \$50,000) had lower levels of satisfaction for affordability of child care; availability of child care; and school-based after school programs
- Age
  - Persons aged 19-49 less satisfied with: availability and affordability of child care
- Education
  - Respondents with a college education were less satisfied with: early childhood education; school-based afterschool programs; organized

non-school-based afterschool programs; and career development programs

## ***Summary of Youth Service and Program Needs***

At the risk of using an age-old phrase, it is true that “young people are the future of the community.” Because of this reality, every community must place a high priority on the development of its youth. Whether the issue is seen as an educational development strategy, an economic development, a sustainability strategy, or as a community-building strategy, the healthy development of young people is absolutely essential to the future well-being of every community.

Council Bluff’s leaders identified youth programs and services as an area to examine. Rather than duplicate the extensive work of the numerous educational, faith-based, and social and human-serving agencies, the needs assessment has focused on using community attitude survey data to shed some light on youth service and program needs.

Earlier in this needs assessment, the education and economic development sections emphasized that high school graduation, college completion and adult education are critical to future development and health of the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County communities. Clearly, these needs have strong ties to

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youth development. Addressing the youth needs highlighted in this section can pay dividends through increased education levels and quality of life in future years.

This section has highlighted several additional youth service and program needs. First, the efforts of the Iowa West Foundation and its partner organizations to enhance and bolster early childhood education are being recognized by the community. At the same time, there is still work to be done. Satisfaction levels for this area are in the mid-range for the services and programs reviewed.

Second, child care availability and affordability is a need within the community. Survey respondents with lower income levels and younger respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied with the child care items.

Third, it appears that several youth services and programs are in need of additional effort. This includes: organized mentoring programs and programs to connect all youth to school.

In general, Council Bluffs residents appear to be less satisfied with all of the early childhood/child and youth services and programs. This is consistent with the lower socioeconomic profile and conditions of Council Bluffs, relative to the balance of Pottawattamie County.

## **Summary of Social and Human Needs**

Due to the lower income and education levels found in Council Bluffs, a number of pressing social and human needs exist. The needs assessment has focused in-depth on basic issues such as education, economic development, and community development and beautification. At the same time—according to both leaders and service providers—issues such as mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, and community public health issues limit the ability of numerous community members to take advantage of existing and future educational, economic, and community development opportunities. As a result, the needs assessment focused on several selected areas of concern.

## **Meet Pressing Needs**

There are outstanding initiatives to address many of the pressing needs in the community. For example, the Phoenix House has an outstanding facility and committed leadership and staff. Mohm's Place and Micah House, each are committed to offering high quality programs, and have new facilities under development. Heartland Family Services and Children's Square offer vital services and are likewise committed to high quality programs.

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Despite these assets, each of the organizations is not able to meet all of the needs in the community. The question that remains to be answered is, “How do we better meet the human and social needs in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County?”

Addressing the multiple needs of individuals and families is perhaps one of the greatest needs and best strategies for addressing pressing human and social issues in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. One of the best times to help an individual is when that person is meeting with a service provider. The numerous agencies located within the Omni Center have been providing some individuals with the convenience of being able to access multiple services at one location. Better yet, however, would be formal partnerships to serve multiple needs, coupled with common intake forms and databases. These goals have long been advocated as solutions; now is the time to make them happen in Council Bluffs.

## **Increase Nonprofit Organization Capacity**

Nonprofit organizations in the community need targeted technical and management assistance. Several important nonprofit capacity issues were identified through the needs assessment process. Contacts were made with local nonprofit organizations to ensure that locally-relevant data were examined for the needs

assessment. Less than one-half of agencies responding to requests for information had printed strategic plans, action plans, needs assessments, or annual reports to provide for review.

The agency contacts and reports resulted in the identification of several critical agency needs. First, there is an overall need to increase the capacity of nonprofits in Pottawattamie County and Council Bluffs to assess and address their overall organizational capacity. This includes issues such as planning, management capacity, fund-raising, and communication. A second area of need is to increase the capacity of area nonprofits to document, and monitor their program outcomes, including the development of databases and measures. The overall level and quality of nonprofit program and evaluation information needs to be raised substantially.

Assisting the continued development of area nonprofits is important because a strong nonprofit sector contributes to economic development by resolving the social, health, and economic needs that keep people from contributing fully to the local community. Thus, by addressing needs of people, the nonprofit sector makes for a stronger community—a community in which all residents can both contribute to the economy and participate in its many benefits.

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## **Expand Volunteerism and Community Involvement**

The volunteer rates for Council Bluffs (73.3%) and Pottawattamie County (79.3%) are much higher than the rates reported by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). In their June 2006 report, *Volunteering in America: State Trends and Rankings*, the Corporation reported a volunteer rate of 39.2 percent for Iowa during the 2002-2005 time period. In the CNCS report, Iowa ranked fourth in volunteer rates, just behind Minnesota (3), Nebraska (2), and Utah (1). By any standard, the level of volunteerism in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County is extremely high.

The CNCS report, *Volunteering in America*, noted that the intensity of volunteering in Iowa was low during the 2002-2005 time period. Hours of volunteering was used as the measure of intensity. The median number of hours Iowans devoted to volunteering was 43. While the community attitude survey evidence is not directly comparable, analysis of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie residents shows that approximately 1 in 3 persons volunteered 4 times or fewer for the entire year. Using an average of 4 hours per time yields a total of 16 hours; an average of 8 hours per time yields a total of 32 hours for the year.

Overall, the survey information on volunteerism points to a relatively deep pool of community commitment and

involvement. The characteristics of Council Bluffs, especially, lead to substantial needs. How the available pool of volunteers gets matched up with the needs is something that bears working on.

The needs assessment looked at local residents' feeling of personal efficacy and preferred strategies for becoming involved in the community. Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County residents were asked how much impact they felt they could make on their community. A majority of respondents said "Small Impact" or "No Impact at All." Among Council Bluffs respondents the proportion giving these responses was 60.4 percent; for Pottawattamie County the proportion was higher at 73.1 percent. These are very sobering figures. They clearly serve as a counter-balance to the community pride and cohesion data reviewed in the Community Development and Beautification section.

The community attitude survey also asked residents, "What do you think is the most effective way you can have an impact?" The most frequently selected option was "Get Personally Involved/Volunteer." Almost 7 in 10 Council Bluffs respondents (68.2%) selected this choice and 6 in 10 Pottawattamie County respondents (60.9%) making the same choice. That a strong majority of respondents said they would use a personal action strategy is important.

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Detailed analysis of the linkages between these beliefs and actions pointed to several interesting relationships. First, residents who say they believe they can have an impact on the community are more likely to say they would get personally involved or volunteer to change things. The less one feels one can have an impact, the more likely one is to choose more indirect strategies such as complaining to officials, donating money.

Finally, the needs assessment examined how frequently local residents keep up with the news about local government, the schools, or other government and community organizations. Commitment, involvement, and a feeling of personal efficacy all impact whether or not people keep up with community news and events.

A near majority of Council Bluffs residents say they keep up with the news from any source about local issues and events. This is quite high. Just over 1 in 3 Pottawattamie County residents responded they frequently keep up with the local news, and 1 in 3 reported that they “Seldom” or “Never” keep up with the news.

In Council Bluffs, variations in keeping up with the news are related to education and age. Persons with lower levels of education or younger persons are less likely to say they frequently keep up with the news.

## **Meet Youth Services and Program Needs**

Several youth service and program needs were identified through analysis of the community attitude survey. Early childhood education is a continuing concern in the community. While it is important to note that the efforts of the Iowa West Foundation and its partner organizations to enhance and bolster early childhood education are being recognized by the community, the data point to the need for additional work. Satisfaction levels for this service/program area are in the mid-range for the services and programs reviewed.

Child care availability and affordability is a significant need within the community. Community members with kids in the household reported somewhat higher satisfaction levels with child care availability and affordability than those without kids at home. Survey respondents with lower income levels and younger respondents were most likely to be dissatisfied with the child care service/program items.

Several youth services and programs were also identified as needing additional effort: organized mentoring programs and programs to connect all youth to school.

Compared to Pottawattamie County residents, Council Bluffs residents appear to be less satisfied with all of the youth services and programs explored in the community

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attitude survey. This is consistent with the lower socioeconomic profile and conditions of Council Bluffs, relative to the balance of Pottawattamie County.

## **Addressing Social and Human Needs**

Fourteen different alternatives for addressing social and human needs are offered.

### ***Alternatives to Consider***

#### **Meet Pressing Needs**

- Continue and expand support for formal partnerships and collaborations among human and social service providers. Encourage partnerships to include shared databases, planning, and staff development. Encourage and facilitate co-location of services to meet the multiple needs of residents.
- Continue and expand support to address mental health needs within the Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County communities. Public support for this issue is broad and deep.

#### **Increase Nonprofit Organizational Capacity**

- Provide assistance to Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County nonprofits to develop better, more thorough needs assessment practices. This could include working with data compiled for

the 2007 Community Needs Assessment. Training on needs assessment methods, as well as follow-on technical assistance and access to the community attitude survey should be considered.

- Encourage professional development and technical assistance services designed to assist local nonprofits in assessing their organizational capacity. Developing logic models for key programs, as well as evaluation plans, are critical needs. Other areas needing assessment and attention include: leadership, management capacity, communication, information technology, board development, and budgeting/financial management.
- Consider develop a booklet and web site to disseminate and promote the use of Council Bluffs/ Pottawattamie County community and neighborhood indicators. This initiative would initially focus on the indicators utilized in the 2007 Community Needs Assessment.

#### **Expand Volunteerism and Community Involvement**

- Consider developing an independent, community-wide volunteer center. In addition to elevating the visibility and importance of volunteering to the community, the center could serve as a resource for recruiting, coordinating, training, and managing volunteers. Such a center could also

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increase external resources for building and supporting the depth of volunteerism in the community.

- Focus on building volunteer rates among minority, low income, and low education groups. Success in this area can be maximized in the short-run through connections to development of new grass-roots and community-based organizations.
- Seek to build resident feelings of personal efficacy through long-term, linked strategies. These include efforts to increase levels of education; develop better paying jobs; increasing the level of community information sharing and communication; and building community.

focusing on the needs of low income working families; single person parents; and the connections to education and economic development.

- Assess the current availability and quality of afterschool programs, both school-based and non-school-based. Identify providers, learn what parents and youth want, and work with the community to move programs closer to providing what is both needed and desired.
- Explore developing mentoring and career development programs (see earlier education alternatives)
- Establish programs to connect kids to school, especially to reduce the high school drop-out rate (see earlier education alternatives).

## **Meet Youth Services and Program Needs**

- Encourage continued and sustainable funding for early childhood education initiatives, especially in Council Bluffs (also included in the section on Education Needs).
- Seek continued and sustainable funding for early childhood education initiatives in the community, especially in Council Bluffs.
- Sponsor a comprehensive assessment of the need and demand for child care, considering availability, affordability, and quality of programs. Consider



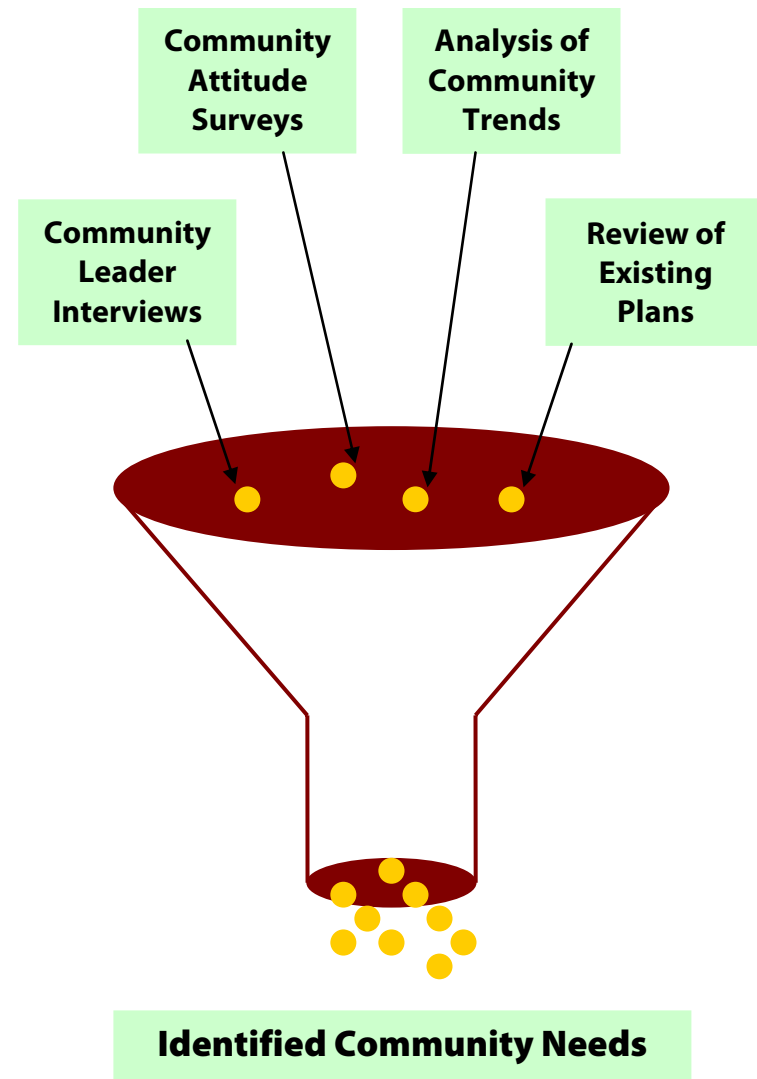
# 7. Next Steps

## A Quick Look Back

This report's primary objective has been to provide a detailed profile of community needs. This information can be used to guide and target future grant-making by the Iowa West Foundation (IWF). A secondary objective was to identify potential community indicators that both the Foundation and community can track in future years. Multiple indicators, drawn from existing sources of information or from the community attitude survey, have been provided throughout the report.

Multiple information sources and information-gathering strategies were used for the needs assessment. Figure 39 depicts the information-gathering and utilization process. Using multiple sources, 19 needs were identified (see Table 5). Indicators and background information for 13 of these needs was examined in detail in Section 3. The 13 selected needs were profiled and grouped for discussion purposes according to the four special interest areas used by the Iowa West Foundation: Education; Economic Development; Community Development and Beautification; and Human and Social Needs. Alternative recommendations for addressing needs were provided in the four major need areas. The alternatives were framed to provide several starting or "jumping off" points for IWF and community discussion.

Figure 39: Overview of Needs Assessment Components



# 7. Next Steps

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## **Prioritizing Community Needs**

The order in which the 13 needs were discussed has been driven by the importance of the various needs. Thus, education needs were discussed first because these needs are the most causally important need the community should address. The tendency in many communities today is to place economic development above all other needs. At one level, many people today would consider education to be integral to a comprehensive economic development strategy. In this sense, education and economic development needs are equal.

Yet, in some other senses, economic development is a “close second” to education. It is the conclusion of this needs assessment that education is a limiting factor in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. Despite having a high school graduation rate that exceeds that of the U.S., the area is increasingly lagging in the percentage of the population with a college degree or higher. This feature coupled with the increasing high school drop-out rate—more than any other factor—is setting the tone for the community today. Lower education levels spill over into all facets of the community, including the mix of jobs and occupations, pay levels, family incomes, and life experiences and attitudes. The contention of this needs assessment is that a major focus on education can, in the long run, spur

a new era of economic development in Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County.

## **Moving Ahead**

Addressing complex issues such as education, economic development, community development, and social and human needs is a daunting task. Moving ahead to develop meaningful plans and sustained action will require the Iowa West Foundation—and all of its community partners and institutions—to work together to address several challenges to success.

First, addressing the needs identified in this report will take long-term commitment by the community. As shown in the needs assessment data, many of the community’s characteristics and needs didn’t take their current configuration in just a few years. As a result, altering long-term trends will take multiple interventions over several decades. This sort of change is hard to sustain.

Second, the sheer magnitude and foundational nature of many of the needs identified in this report can make it hard for both leaders and citizens to envision how to move forward, much less mount a sustained effort. In such situations, sustained and broad community dialogue is generally required in order to achieve widespread community consensus about the needs and

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how best to move ahead. This is an important, yet often overlooked process in many communities.

Finally, it is important that the Iowa West Foundation see itself not just as a funding sponsor of good projects, but as a catalyst for action, broadly defined. From this vantage point, this needs assessment is more than a planning and discussion document for the Foundation, it is a document that may stimulate other community organizations to take action in the various spheres in which they work.