

# Appendix B: Osseo Community Survey A Summary Report

May 19, 2008

Prepared by: Patricia L. Malone  
UW-Extension Trempealeau County

## **Introduction.**

As a part of Wisconsin's "Smart Growth" law, communities are required to involve citizens in the planning process. The City of Osseo is using a community-wide survey to solicit input on a number of factors related to the nine elements that must be included in the city's comprehensive plan. These elements include the following:

- ◆ Issues and opportunities
- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Transportation
- ◆ Utilities and community facilities
- ◆ Agricultural, natural, and cultural resources
- ◆ Economic development
- ◆ Intergovernmental cooperation
- ◆ Land-use
- ◆ Implementation

The city used a mail survey sent out to a random sample of 264 residents, renters and owners, drawn from the water utility list. The survey had a nearly 63% response rate (166/264). The participants were asked about issues relating to quality of life; strategies the city might consider using, and the services provided to residents. The respondents were also invited to share any comments they had with the city. Half of the respondents shared comments. All of the comments are compiled, unedited, in Appendix A of this report.

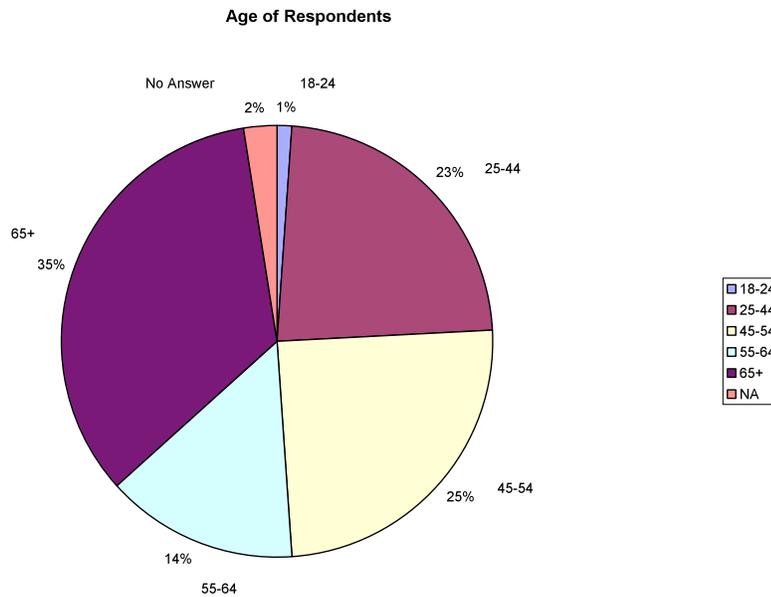
## **Demographics**

Survey participants were also asked a few demographic questions. Eighty-one percent of the respondents were homeowners (Graph 1). This is higher than the percentage of homeowners (63.8%) in the 2000 Census. Seven percent of the respondents described themselves as renters. This compares to the 36.2% of renters in the 2000 Census. The nature of the sample (people receiving water utility bills) may be affecting this result or the higher number of renters in the Census may reflect those living in group quarters (nursing homes, etc.) who would not be receiving water bills.

Graph 2 shows the age groups of the respondents. The survey had answers from all of the age categories. The largest percentage of respondents came from the 65 years and older category. The second largest category was respondents aged 45-54. Not surprisingly, the smallest age category was 18-24. This group of individuals is most likely still living at home or are "away" at college, tech school, etc. This is a typical pattern in small rural Wisconsin communities.

Survey participants were also asked if they were male or female (Graph 3). The gender of the respondents was 48.2% female and 45.2% male. Although these numbers are smaller than the Census percentages, they are in line with the general trend that females outnumber males. This question also had a significant number of participants (6.6%) who chose not to answer the question.

Graph 1. Home Ownership in the City of Osseo.



Graph 2. Age of Survey Respondents.

Graph 3. Gender of Survey Respondents.

## Results.

### *Questions 1 and 2. Quality of Life.*

A number of factors can influence an individual's decision to live in any given community. Residents were asked to rate the following factors on their importance to their decision-making process:

- ◆ Affordable housing
- ◆ Appearance of homes
- ◆ Natural beauty
- ◆ Near family and friends
- ◆ Close to employment
- ◆ Small town atmosphere
- ◆ Close to services and shopping

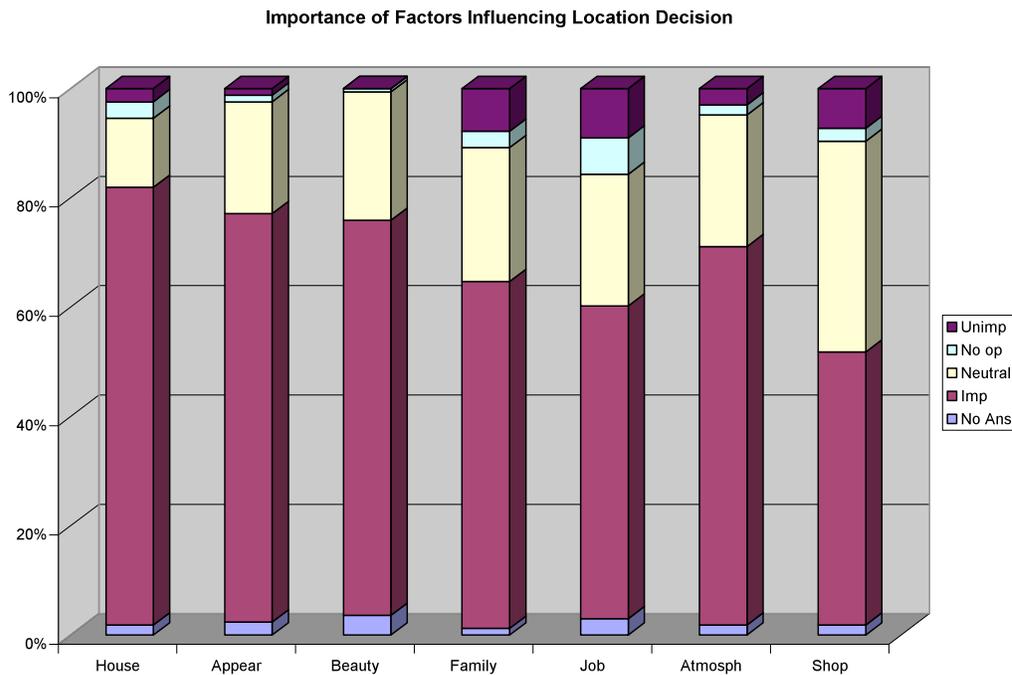
The rating results for each factor are provided in Appendix B. Affordable housing, appearance of homes, and natural beauty were consistently rated as important in an individual's decision to locate in Osseo.

The survey participants were also asked to rate the single most important reason for choosing to live in Osseo. When asked to identify the single most important factor, being near family and friends was the most important. Small town atmosphere and being close to employment were rated 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. This is consistent with other comprehensive planning surveys that have been conducted in the county. Graphs 4 and 5 show the summary results for these two questions.

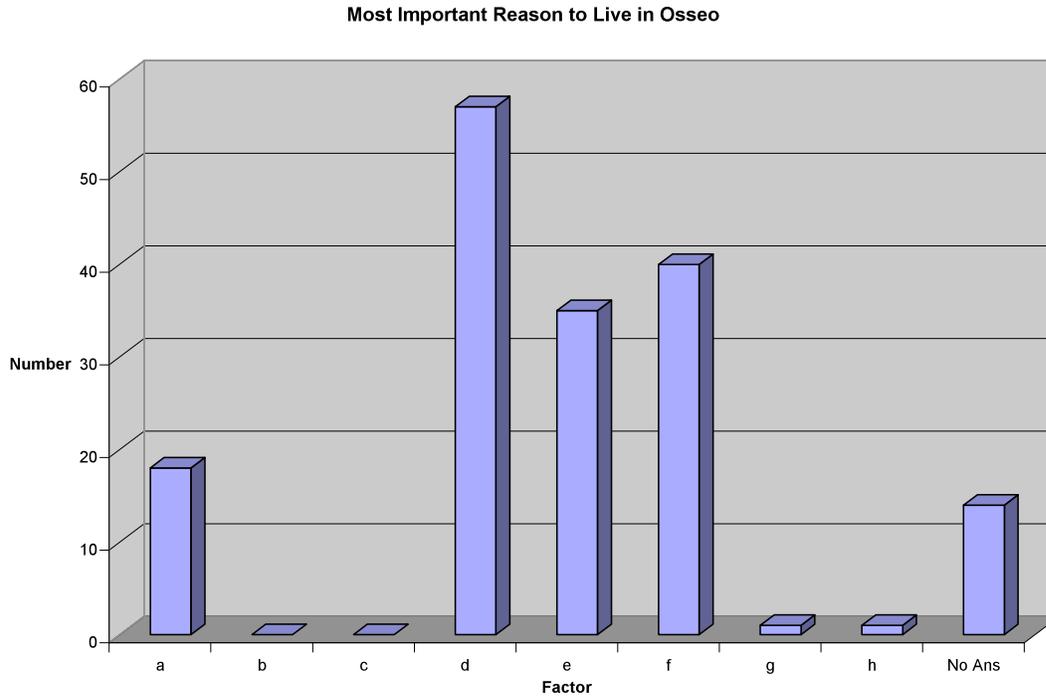
*Questions 3 and 4. Strategies.*

The respondents were also asked to rate how important each of five different strategies was for the city to consider. These strategies include:

- ◆ Increase coordination between local governments
- ◆ Promote economic development
- ◆ Conserve and protect natural resources
- ◆ Promote downtown revitalization
- ◆ Strengthen zoning ordinances



Graph 4. The ratings of factors that influenced respondents’ decision to locate in Osseo.

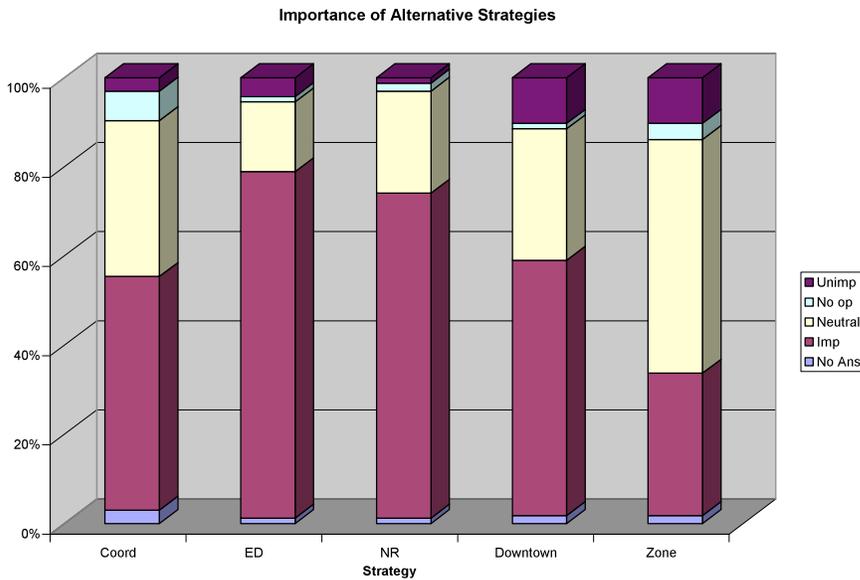


◆ Graph 5. The single most important factor influencing respondents’ decision to live in Osseo. Where a=Affordable housing; b=Appearance of homes; c=Natural beauty; d= Near family & friends; e=Close to employment; f=Small town atmosphere; g=Close to services & shopping; and h=other.

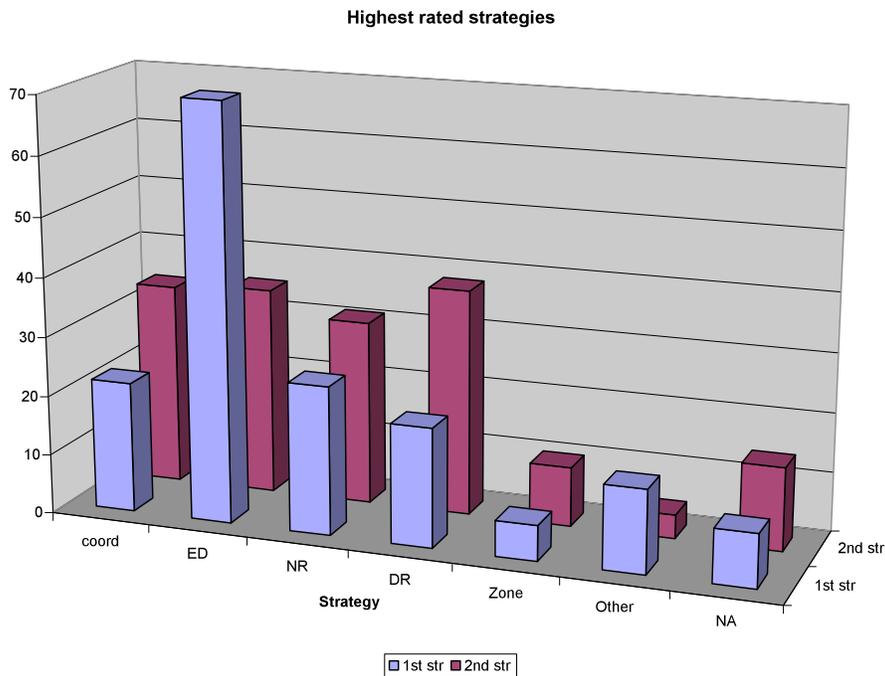
Just over 42% of respondents rated “Promote economic development” as the top strategy the city should pursue in the future. When asked to rate the second most important strategy, “Promote downtown revitalization” topped the list closely followed by economic development, increased coordination, and conserving and protecting natural resources. Graphs 6 and 7 illustrate these results.

“Promoting Economic Development” and “Conserving and Protecting Natural Resources” had the greatest percentage of people rating them as important strategies. “Strengthening Zoning Ordinances” was the only strategy receiving an important rating by less than half of the respondents. It also had the largest percentage of respondents rating it as a neutral strategy.

Respondents were also asked to rate their most important or second most important strategy the city should pursue as it implements its comprehensive plan. The most important strategies are consistent with ratings in Question 3. Economic Development



Graph 6. Importance of Alternative Strategies in Plan Development.



Graph 7. Number of Respondents rating planning strategies as most important or second most important.

*Questions 5 and 6. City Services.*

The city of Osseo provides a number of services to their residents. These range from emergency services such as ambulance, fire, and police to roads and streets to animal control. Question 5 listed the services provided in Osseo and respondents were asked to rate them from “very good”

to “very poor” or “not available.” This question was designed to get at the quality of the services provided. Emergency response services were the highest rated of all the services provided. Fire protection was the highest rated service with 71% of the respondents ranking it as “very good.” Ambulance service was the second highest rated service with 61% of the people rating it as “very good.” Police protection ranked third with 59% of the respondents rating it “very good.”

It is also important to pay attention to those services that are not highly rated. These present an opportunity for the city to pursue planning strategies that will improve the services. Roads and streets were the lowest rated service. Its quality was rated “poor” or “very poor” by 42% of the respondents. A review of the comments showed a number of people who felt strongly about the way streets and roads are maintained. To quote one respondent “Streets – the way they are patched is terrible.”

Animal control is also rated very low. Thirty-one percent of respondents rated the quality of animal control as “poor” or “very poor.” Most of the comments relating to animal control had to do with enforcement. “Please enforce dog barking laws.” “Animal control could be better...”

Sewer and water services were also rated low. Fifteen percent of respondents rated this service as “poor” or “very poor.” The comments do identify some specific concerns such as water pressure and iron. However, the single largest complaint had to do with the cost of city sewer and water.

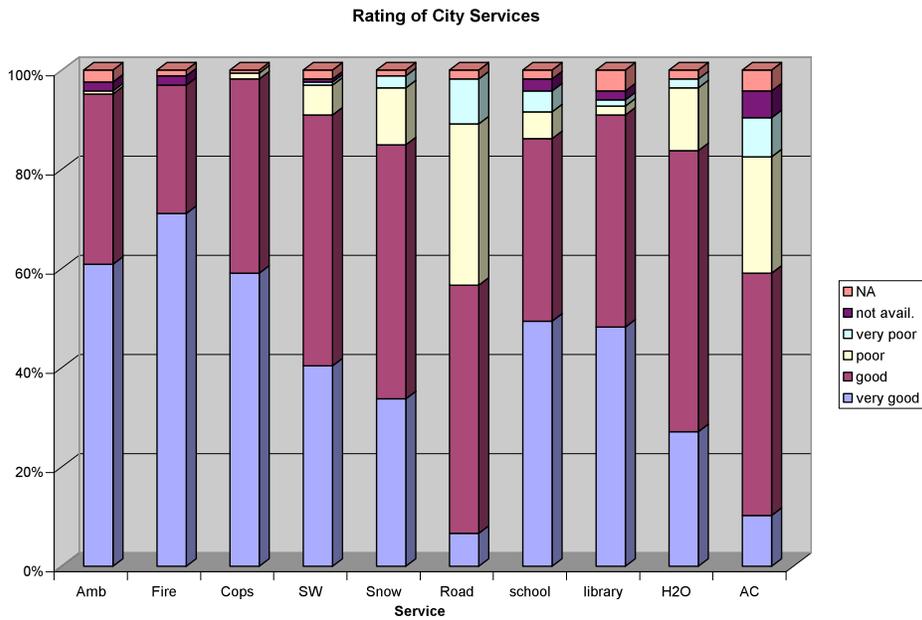
One interesting item related to public infrastructure showed up in the comment section of the survey. A number of people specifically mentioned city hall. The comments generally fell into one of two categories – renovate the historic building or tear the building down and start over.

Question 6 asked survey participants to actually identify the most important services that should be maintained by the city. It should come as no surprise that the emergency services ranked very high in importance. Fire protection was ranked the most important followed by police. The public school ranked third in importance. To quote one respondent, “The school is important because it is a visible item for people looking at the city.”

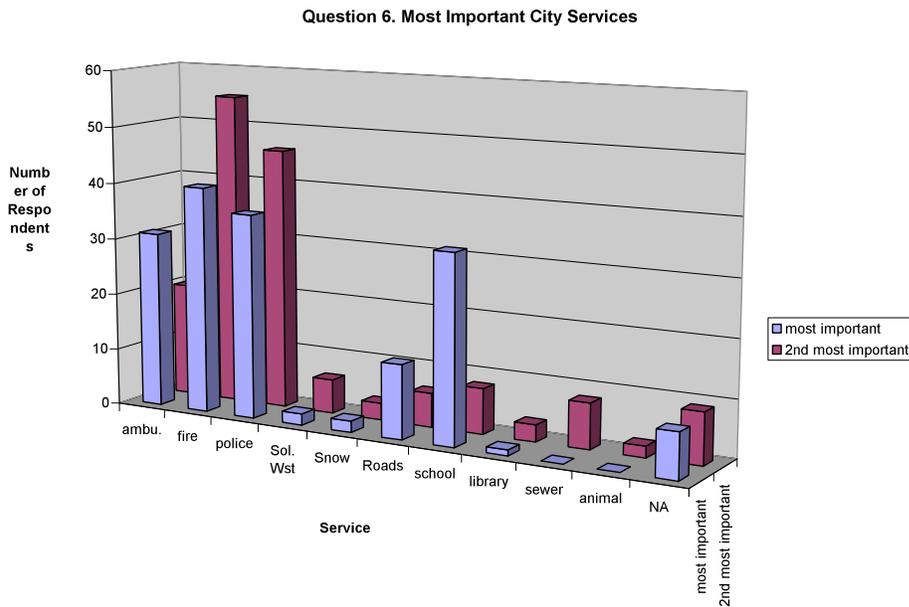
#### *Question 8. Additional Comments.*

Survey respondents were invited to share any additional comments or ideas with the city in Question 8. Half of the respondents wrote comments. The content varied quite widely from city clean up to school issues. However, the comments can be roughly divided into a number of categories. These include comments centered on property taxes, capital improvements of city infrastructure, suggestions for changes, and city services.

Just over a third of the people offering comments brought up property taxes. Most feel taxes are too high. A relatively small number of people tied improving efficiency and effectiveness with controlling taxes. Some examples include, “I don’t see the city taking advantage of government funding...” and “Money is wasted on poor quality of street repairs.” It is not unusual for residents to complain about property taxes. However, when you ask citizens what specific programs or services should be cut to reduce property taxes many residents find it difficult to prioritize.



Graph 8. Respondents' ratings of the quality of services provided in Osseo.



Graph 9. The most important and 2<sup>nd</sup> most important city services as rated by survey respondents.

Over a third of the survey participants who answered Question 8 raised concerns or ideas relating to capital improvements and city infrastructure. The quality of the roads and the cost of sewer and water were the focus of many negative comments. One surprise was the concern over city hall. A number of people talked about city hall and whether or not it should be restored or a new one built.

In terms of city services, the lack of animal control was a major concern especially in terms of uniform enforcement of the ordinances. Comments regarding the school were split between people seeing it as a plus for the community or a source of conflict. The overall positive view of emergency services seen in Question 5 can be summed up in the following comment, “As a senior citizen living alone, I value feeling safe and help is always nice.” There were some specific suggestions for the police department ranging from where vehicles should be purchased or serviced to suggestions for patrols.

Survey participants also generated a number of positive suggestions for improving the community. These ranged from preserving the small town atmosphere to collection days. People mentioned the importance of cleaning up and renovating the downtown area. They also mentioned the importance of recruiting additional businesses and maintaining the nursing home and senior housing.

## **Conclusions.**

This survey helps the city meet its requirement of citizen input in the planning process. One hundred sixty-six households, including homeowners and renters, were able to share their perspectives on a variety of planning issues. Additional tools can be used as the city moves forward with its planning process.

In terms of the housing element required by the local comprehensive plan, alternatives for senior housing could play a role in the city’s future. It is important to review census data and your own building permit records to develop a better picture of the city’s housing stock.

The ratings of city services and the written comments strongly suggest that the city develop a road and street maintenance and improvement plan. There is software and training available from the Transportation Information Center that could help the city maintain and improve the transportation infrastructure in a more cost effective and efficient manner. Using appropriate and well-timed maintenance can greatly increase the usable life of a road or street. Transportation planning also opens the door to improving intergovernmental coordination between the city, the Town of Sumner, the county, and the state.

There are many opportunities for the city as it develops its utilities and community facilities element. A capital improvement plan will help the city look forward and determine timetables for improving or replacing sewer and water, city buildings, recreational facilities, and emergency response equipment.

Looking at the economic development element, the survey provides insight into the community’s relative support for economic development and downtown revitalization. Your residents view the downtown as an important part of the community. They also see the results of your relatively diverse economic base and the importance of continuing to support businesses. However, keep in mind that your “small town atmosphere” is one of the top reasons people elected to live in Osseo.

To quote one respondent, “Stop trying to compete with the larger towns. I like the simple relaxed safe atmosphere we have.”

Finally, as you develop your plan and strategies to implement it remember that you have a number of alternatives. Zoning ordinances, uniformly and fairly enforced, can be an effective tool. Education and public awareness can also be used. A combination of strategies in partnership with your business community, school district, and others can make a positive difference in Osseo’s future.

## APPENDIX 1

### Planning Resources

As you continue to develop your plans, there are a number of resources that are available. I have listed a few of these below. In addition, I have included a copy of the county's most recent labor market study and the Department of Workforce Development's most recent county snapshot for your use.

**UW-Extension Center for Land Use Education:** They offer a number of publications and trainings directly related to land use and comprehensive planning.

<http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/>

**UW-Extension Local Government Center:** They offer a number of publications and training opportunities for local officials on a number of topics, but they also have a number of resources specific to comprehensive planning and growth management.

<http://lgc.uwex.edu/LandUse/index.html>

**U.S. Census:** The web address given below is for the Census Bureau's "American Factfinder" page. This tool will provide you census data on population, housing, employment, and other areas covered by the 2000 Census. It's relatively easy to use to get information specific to Osseo.

<http://factfinder.census.gov/>

**The Transportation Information Center:** They provide training and resources to local officials on a wide range of topics related to road and street maintenance and repair. They also provide training on PASER. PASER is an easy to use road rating and planning program. I have used it with a number of towns and one village in the county.

<http://tic.engr.wisc.edu/>

**Wisconsin Department of Administration:** The DOA offers a toolkit CD to assist communities with the planning process. Googling "Wisconsin.gov" will take you to the state's web page. From there you can access the DOA or you can call them at 608-267-3369 or Email: [comp.planning@wisconsin.gov](mailto:comp.planning@wisconsin.gov)

## City of Osseo Community Survey Comments

The comments that follow are the unedited comments provided by survey respondents. Each bullet point represents a single respondent. Half of the respondents provided comments.

- I think its time to clean up our city. It is looking kind of trashy. And most cannot afford to pay more taxes.
- Stop trying to compete with the larger towns. I like the simple relaxed safe atmosphere we have. The more we grow the more people that will come the higher the risk we attain.
- In question 5 they all are important. The city is more worried about there Tiff dist
- Local roads and streets are terrible also some sidewalks for the taxes we have to pay to live in this town.
- I pay over \$4000 in taxes for a simple 2 bedroom home and one extra city lot – absolutely crazy.
- With the economy the way it is and our tax basis we do not need to build a new city building.
- It is time to deal with the many problems with our school system. Let’s start with the very poor leadership and example of the school superintendent.  
Must decrease property taxes!
- Osseo police department needs to stay in Osseo when having to purchase or have work done on vehicles.
- In my opinion, taxes in the city are too high. It’s causing us to leave the city to a rural setting. We also have very noisy and annoying neighbors.
- Hold a “spring” clean up day where we can dispose of toxins, etc. for a really good price.
- Streets – the way they are patched is terrible. No attempt to make them look decent or smooth. Looks like elementary students do the work.
- Senior housing is very important.
- The higher taxes are forcing many people to move to different areas that pay less in taxes. Why is Osseo considered city of high taxes?
- Very important that taxes get lowered. **SUBSTANTIALLY LOWERED!!** It’s embarrassing!
- High taxes becoming a problem for most people.
- Taxes way to high for such a small town in a rural setting.
- 1) The Indian Logo is splitting the town apart – get rid of it and move on or heal. 2) The C.P.R. (Citizens who Promote Rage) is making living in this town a JOKE. I am hating this small town small thinking!
- We really need to spruce up the downtown area to bring in new local businesses. It doesn’t seem as though local businesses can make it without some help! Also, clean up sidewalks/park/lake, etc.!
- Rising taxes have us seriously considering moving out of the city and the school district.
- The city’s water and sewer bill is the highest of any other city around charges. Also the taxes for the city are terrible.
- As a senior citizen living alone, I value feeling safe and help is always nice.
- Please support the Osseo Fire Dept. April 20<sup>th</sup> for our chicken feed!!
- Question why our water and sewer is higher than surrounding towns?
- Save our current City Hall

- Taxes are way too high to get people to want to buy and live within the city. City water is also somewhat high.
- We've not used these services so we don't know enough to rate them. Don't spend our money on rebuilding the city hall. The single greatest thing that would force us out of Osseo is growing taxes. You must reduce taxes by cutting excessive spending.
- Please enforce dog barking laws. Stray dogs and cats. Enforce all sidewalk clearing. Some residents never, year after year, do not clear walks!! Sometimes, 4-5 dogs barking at once!! Police should walk a beat once in awhile – listen!!
- The school is important because it is a visible item for people looking at the city. I don't know who contracts the hospital, nursing home, assisted living, but I think it is unfortunate to cut it back. We have excellent doctors and staff. It would be nice if assisted living and nursing home could accommodate more people.
- Bigger variety in Summer Rec Programs for our youth.
- Taxes are pretty high.
- We would like a nice night club, where you can have family. Have a delicious drink. So we don't have to go 20-40 miles to enjoy this pastime.
- I don't want to see City hall demolished – make use of the present building. Where is the downtown revitalization if you tear it down – Structurally, it is a sound building. How do the Madison water bills end up way less than Osseo?
- Send city employees to street maintenance classes. Money is wasted on poor quality of street repairs.
- Recycling one night per week after 5pm. Get dogs to quit barking in town.
- This town is very stuck on themselves – unless you grew up here or own a business – you feel very unwelcome. I have lived here for 10 years and still don't call Osseo home.
- Osseo is a very nice and friendly place to live. I don't see the city taking advantage of government funding in forms of grants etc. The school system and building are a big plus. Osseo does have a fair amount of businesses that offer employment. We could always use more, for stable tax base. We need to look to the future.
- Need to reduce millrate for property taxes.
- Increase rate of street improvement. Maintain police protection and patrols. Entice new business/industry. Continue “paced” improvements to infrastructure. More animal control.
- License all cats and dogs. Within the city limits keep leashed and on their own property.
- Way too much for city water and sewer.
- More police presence at Stoddard Park and ballpark area, on busy summer evenings especially. It can get very crowded and could use some extra security for safety sake. Many people, cars and fast drivers.
- If an existing street has to be redone, why should the residents directly affected have to pay it directly out of their pockets? This should be the responsibility of the city.
- Build a new fire station and city hall.
- Something has to be done to help keep this down, so fixed income are able to keep their homes.
- The snow removal sometimes is not as good as it should be. Some of the city streets are not in very good shape.
- Police should patrol side streets better. All-terrain vehicles are driven up and down and making U-turns in the middle of the street. Roaring and revving them up. Kids don't

know how to ride bikes. Curb side service for disposal of branches in Spring and Fall would be helpful for those who don't have pickup trucks or trailers. When plowing snow side streets should not be blocked at intersections so cars have to drive over banks of snow.

- Water/sewer is overpriced and has poor quality – levels of iron in water leave an orange residue in sinks/showers, etc. (even with all new plumbing in house).
- Animal control could be better – city cats wander from neighborhood to neighborhood. Control spending and taxes.
- We enjoy living in Osseo. I wish there was more for the young people to do that are not involved in sports.
- Good that you are asking.
- Need for a restaurant for evening dining would be a plus.
- Poor city planning, poor follow through on ordinances, would like to see this improve. Term limits on Mayor and councilman. \*Wouldn't it save to have our police department contracted versus a city owned police department.
- Building projects – Build new structures – do not renovate old structures.
- Our utility providers including city water and sewer bills are very high! So are our taxes. Also, I have to go out of town to do most of my shopping due to prices. I think the prices are so high because of the items listed above.
- Please do not spend money on things we don't need like sidewalks, curb and gutter, etc. Also, City Hall needs a new building and not a relic to the past!
- Osseo is a great place to live and raise a family. A very youth oriented atmosphere. Our school system is great and open to students and public alike.
- Please start re-doing, instead of patching, city streets.
- Taxes are too high.
- We need to do something so our taxes don't keep going up. If property taxes keep going up, I will consider to sell and move elsewhere.
- Our Nursing Home – why is it not the same size it was meant to be?
- We have to attract business to lower taxes.
- Important to examine high tax rates and its effect on citizens moving into and out of community and what can be done. Costs of home and tax rate is ridiculous!
- We feel education is more important than building and also maintaining what we have is important instead of always building new and giving tax breaks to those who live there.
- We are proud of our city and enjoy living here. However there is always room for improvement and a good place to start would be come up with a strategy to lower high property taxes.
- Promoting and improving Osseo should not be funded by property tax breaks to businesses, which translates to higher taxes for residences.
- Need real estate tax reduction. High taxes are keeping buyers out of Osseo.
- Osseo is a nice place to live. I do feel our taxes and sewer rates are rather high when comparing to other cities as reported in Leader Telegram. Please put a drain in the road by the golf course/tennis court.
- Need a one day pickup of large appliances. Also need a new City Hall instead of putting new construction on a very old and worn out building. I understand some monies are already saved for this project.

- Stoddard Park – roads are horrible. Could you expand area to draw more people – skateboard park. The pool needs items for shade. Dislike going due to lack of shelter if you want to be out of sun. Hard on small families.
- Lower the water presser on East side of town.
- We need some new restaurants, not fast food or a nice night club. More industries.
- Property taxes are way too high in Osseo. Almost to the point of making people look elsewhere to live.
- Taxes too high for small town
- Taxes are too high
- Poor senior citizen service – grocery delivery, transportation
- Nice building. Needs major remodeling! If structurally sound!
- I moved here because I wanted to live in a nice small town.
- Sewer and water is too expensive. Appearance of Hwy 10 south side lots – no weed control, snow covered sidewalks. We have several ordinances that are not being enforced that cover appearance. Too many undesirable properties.
- Get the people in town to get along with each other.
- Taxes are very high. When you are on a fixed income and need to save \$225 or more for taxes it seems unfair! I do not feel we need a city hall. We have a beautiful auditorium at school and a Community Center down town, let's pay for these first.
- In quarter 5 they all are important. The city is more worried about there T.I.F. district (housing development) than the city itself.
- We have much to be proud of here in Osseo! Our streets need repair. We love our Gumby cop but he needs to help do follow-up on cases! Our school and library are wonderful. Superintendent is a bit questionable?? Our industrial companies have put us on the map!! Keep it going!!

To whom it may Concern:

Thank You for the opportunity to voice my opinion about the future plans for Osseo.

I have lived in Osseo for about 3 years, relocating from Minneapolis to be with my Husband. Whenever I tell people that I live in Osseo, WI, they always comment about what a beautiful area it is. While I do agree that the hills, trees, fields, and streams are a lovely part of living in a small Wisconsin town, there is much more that makes a town a 'nice place to live'.

Under Question 3, items b, c, and e, refer to promoting economic development and promoting downtown revitalization and strengthening zoning ordinances. Downtown Osseo seems to have been abandoned? There are a few restaurants, bars, and businesses but far too many vacant buildings and lots. The vacant buildings along Hwy 10 and Lake Martha are an eyesore, especially the Standard Oil Building.

A new store moved in named Cabin Chic, cute store, but they hung a temporary plastic sign on the building and it's been there for months. Do they have plans for a permanent sign? Is there an ordinance or a plan to develop downtown in a uniform manner? Possibly follow a Norwegian theme to attract visitors.

It seems that Osseo lets their tenants get away with not completing or taking care of their building. Have you see other towns with beautiful flower baskets hanging on the light posts and stores with welcoming curb appeal that make you want to stop and spend some time there?

A bar burnt down off of Hwy 10, it's still a pile of rubble with police tape around it. Isn't it important to clean up messes? Osseo Ace Hardware burnt down 2 years ago, and there are still dilapidated buildings on the lot.

The Osseo Inn right off the I-94 exit, obviously just invested money in new signs. When are the old signs coming down? Is it the Red Carpet Inn or the Osseo Inn? With the old tattered sign for the Red Carpet Inn, it's hard to tell. They have also had a temporary sign board at the bottom of their sign for years, letters are falling off and it's rusty. What does this say to people when they pull off the interstate into Osseo?

Thanks to McDonalds, Taco John's, Speedway, Ford and Chevy dealerships, Alliance Bank, United Bank, Kwik Trip, Osseo Title, Curves, and Opie's Pizza for taking the time to make their businesses bright, clean, and appealing.

Is it possible to capitalize on the beauty of Lake Martha? It's a lovely little lake, but where is it possible to enjoy the tranquility? How about the vacant lot across from the Norske Nook? Make that a nice area with grass and benches would entice people to come downtown and then take a break and enjoy the lake.

Should we form a beautification committee with Osseo residents that are familiar with Osseo's history and heritage and also new residents that see Osseo from somewhat of an outsiders perspective?

Again, thank you for taking the time to look into these issues.