

RESOLUTION R-____ -12

**ADOPTION OF AN UPDATED
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE COUNTY**

WHEREAS, the Strategic Plan is a roadmap for organizational development. It answers questions of what our County does (services), who we do it for (customers) and how we excel at what we do (accomplishments); and

WHEREAS, the Strategic Plan clarifies our mission, vision and strategies; and

WHEREAS, the Strategic Plan has a short term horizon (3-5 years) it is in need of periodic updating and revision; and

WHEREAS, the planning process for this plan update began with a review of the accomplishments resulting from the Strategic Plan adopted in 2005 and we learned that there were many accomplishments that directly resulted from that plan including reorganization of the County's governance structure, the adoption of a West Side Master Plan to guide the future development of UWMC and Marathon Park, the creation of a regional organization to provide services to the elderly and disabled (ADRC-CW), and creation of an annual process to determine program priorities; and

WHEREAS, the planning process that supports this Strategic Plan update has been inclusive including County Board small group discussions, community focus groups and a community survey; and

WHEREAS, the Standing Committees have taken a leadership role in developing specific action items which will move forward each of the six core strategies.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Marathon County Board of Supervisors does hereby adopt the attached updated Strategic Plan for the County.

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that consistent with our County Board rules the Vice-Chair of the County Board will provide oversight and leadership for the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Dated this _____ day of November, 2012.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Fiscal Note: Adoption of the Strategic Plan update is and of itself will not result in any expenditure of County funds. The action items all have fiscal implications which will be considered and reported during the term of the Strategic Plan.

MARATHON COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

I. Marathon County Mission Statement

Marathon County Mission Statement: Marathon County Government serves people by leading, coordinating, and providing county, regional and statewide initiatives. It directly or in cooperation with other public and private partners provides services, shares resources and creates opportunities that make Marathon County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit and do business.

II. Marathon County Vision Statement

Marathon County Government leads by providing high quality infrastructure and integrated services and by developing trusting, collaborative relationships among diverse partners. It is proactive in enhancing health and safety, protecting the environment, and providing cultural, recreational, and economic opportunities which make Marathon County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business.

III. Introduction to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is "the process of bringing anticipations of the future to bear on the need to make decisions in the present". It is a thoughtful process anticipating future opportunities and challenges and identifying those broad based strategies which must be undertaken in the present to assure a viable future for the organization.

Strategic planning affords the elected County Board, as representatives of the public, the opportunity to identify the most important work of County Government in a future timeframe. The County Board then can establish outcome expectations for Administration and allocate resources resulting in the organizations focusing fiscal and human resources on accomplishing that work.

The strategic planning process aligns the publics' priorities for County government, with outcome expectations, board policies and resource allocation decisions developed by the County Board, and focuses the work of Administration and the entire County workforce.

IV. History of Strategic Planning in Marathon County

County government is an extension of state government and as such is permitted / required by state statute to implement specific programs and services. In addition counties are permitted to initiate selected services which exceed those prescribed by state statute. Counties have the ability to prioritize programs and services funded by local resources based upon County needs/wants.

Marathon County completed its first strategic planning process in 2005, with the assistance of an outside consultant. The planning process was primarily a County Board focused discussion of the future with the assistance of a community strategic planning taskforce composed of County Board members and citizen members selected to represent specific interest groups within the community. The outcome was a 5-year strategic plan which identified (5) broad based core strategies as the most important work of county government for the time period 2006- 2011. The plan also identified specific projects for each core strategy which were identified as high priority for administrative attention.

Using the identified core strategies and the specific projects list, annually Administration developed action plans to accomplish this work. The County Board charged with monitoring the organizations progress on the core strategies periodically received updates from administration regarding progress. In September of 2011, as part of beginning the 2012 strategic planning process, the 2012 Strategic Planning Taskforce in cooperation with Administration provided a final "Report of Accomplishment" for the 2005 Strategic Plan.

V. 2012 Strategic Planning Process/Methodology

The 2012 strategic planning process is led by a planning taskforce composed of County Board members. The taskforce determined it would complete the process without the assistance of an external consultant. The process is composed of three distinct activities which are designed to identify "the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next five years 2012-2017".

-Activity One

County Board Focus Group Discussions

As part of its October 2011 County Board meeting, the Board using a focus group format answered the question, "*What are the most important opportunities and challenges which Marathon County Government will encounter in the next 5 years*"? The discussion output of these focus groups was summarized and used as the basis for the County Board's October 2011, focus group discussions in which County Board members were asked to answer the question, "*What is the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next 5 years*?" The discussion output of the October focus groups was summarized and tabulated resulting in the development of a prioritized listing of the most important work of County government per the County Board. The results was distributed to and discussed with the County Board at its December 2011 meeting. The Executive Summary of these focus groups is available as Appendix A to this document.

-Activity Two

Community Focus Groups

Through discussion, the Strategic Planning Task Force identified seven (7) unique community constituencies which it determined to be representative of

Marathon County's general public's interest in the work of county Government. These seven groups were

1. Agriculture/Agribusiness,
2. Wausau Area Chamber of Commerce,
3. Non-profit Agencies,
4. Public Officials
5. Religious Leaders
6. Service Groups, and
7. Community Professionals.

Due to the broad based membership in the Chamber organization, two focus groups were conducted with this constituency for a total of eight focus groups. Ten to twelve individuals who were identified from each of these constituency groups and were invited to participate in the focus group discussion targeted to answer the question *"What is the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next five years?"* Each of these groups was conducted by an external professional facilitator who volunteered his time and expertise to assist the taskforce with this activity. Each group process was approximately two hours in length. An Executive Summary of these community focus groups was provided by the facilitator and is available as Appendix B to this document.

-Activity Three

Community Surveys

With the assistance of the University of Wisconsin River Falls, the Strategic Planning Task Force developed and administered a community survey designed to answer the question *"What does the general public believe to be the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next 5 years?"* A random sample of Marathon County households was selected to receive the survey through the postal service. Surveys were mailed to 1083 households with a response rate of 466 or 43%. The survey consisted of 38 multiple choice questions for which respondents were asked to provide their perspective. The UW River Falls tabulated the responses to the survey and provided an executive summary which is available as Appendix C to this document.

In addition to the Strategic Planning taskforce survey, the findings of the "Life Survey" which was conducted by the communities Life Steering committee were reviewed and incorporated into the content of the proposed strategic plan for the county.

The information gathered through these distinct qualitative and quantitative survey activities has been combined to form the basis for developing the Core Strategies which are presented in this document as the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next five (5) years.

VI. Planning Assumptions

As part of a planning process, there are assumptions which an organization can make about its future and the environment in which it will exist. Following are the planning assumptions which the Planning Task Force used as it developed the Core Strategies.

1. For the duration of this plan and perhaps beyond, Marathon County Government will experience limited and or declining resources as a result of a locally challenged economy, reduced state and federal funding.
2. The Marathon County economy will not recover to its earlier (2006) status during the duration of this plan.
3. Marathon County property values will decline slightly in the early stages of this planning cycle and will stabilize in the later years.
4. Demand for basic services by the community will continue to grow during the first half of this planning cycle and will stabilize for the remainder of the plan cycle.
5. Expectations for Marathon County Government to take an active role in economic development activities will grow.
6. There will be an increased need to measure and monitor County program and service outcomes and establish outcome expectations in order to appropriately allocate resources for programs based upon their successfully delivering outcomes. .
7. Due to declining resources, other governmental entities may be amenable to cooperative/collaborative activities which can demonstrate they will save resources.
8. State wide initiatives will incentivize regional collaboration by counties and other collaborative working arrangements with governmental entities to deliver services.
9. Alternative approaches to incarceration have alleviated the current need to construct additional jail facilities. Changes in state law and an inability to continue to substitute alternative approaches for incarceration may result in the increased need for jail beds toward the end of this planning cycle.
10. The use and cost of technology will increase as a percentage of the County's capital budget.
11. Marathon County will continue to borrow on a very conservative basis to fund capital projects. The County will not use one time funding sources or borrow for operational cost. The County will borrow primarily on a short-term basis (10 years) for capital projects.
12. Private/private partnerships will present an opportunity for County government to foster economic development and private sector job creation.

Marathon County 2012- 2017 Strategic Plan

Core Strategies

Introduction

The Core Strategies of a strategic plan are not specific activities, but rather are those broad based strategic initiatives which the organization must pursue to assure its greatest success in meeting the expectations of the organizations owners. In the case of Marathon County the owners are the residents of Marathon County. Often an organization will include a core strategy which stresses the need to govern and administer the organization consistent with greater efficiency, cost containment, and in the case of government entities, lower taxes. This plan does not include a fiscal containment core strategy. Rather the planning assumptions presented, as part of this plan and the fiscal reality of the County Board environment in this time of austerity, dictates that both County Board and its Administration must approach all work of the County with a commitment to the required fiscal constraints. Fiscal viability for the County will be an outcome of the Core Strategies identified in this plan. Rather than being identified as being one of the broad based Core Strategies fiscal constraint is the water in which County Government now swims. It is the way County Government must do business.

The following Core Strategies have been deduced from the planning discussions of the County Board, Community Focus Groups and the Community Survey. They are not presented in priority order, but rather as a group of strategies. Certainly there is interface and overlap between these strategies as all address the work of Marathon County Government. However like shingles on a roof, the overlap is positive in that it binds each strategy with the other and assures an integrated plan.

Core Strategy I. Provide Leadership for Greater Cooperation and Collaboration Among State, Regional and Local Public and Private Entities.

Rationale – Current fiscal constraints on all levels of government sets a stage for Marathon County to provide leadership for greater cooperation and anticipated increased efficiency of government operations. Marathon County is viewed as a governmental organization that is large enough to initiate collaboration among other governmental entities while still being sensitive to local issues and appreciating the needs of local municipalities. Current State initiatives point to an interest on the part of the State to increase its work with counties to form regional initiative at all levels of government. Marathon County as a large county in North Central Wisconsin has historically been a leader in successfully generating regional collaborative programs and services.

Core Strategy II. Foster and When Appropriate Provide Services Which Facilitate Economic Development and Create Private Sector Jobs Which Provide a Living Wage.

Rationale – While counties do not have a direct statutory dictate to initiate economic and job development services, Wisconsin Statutes do permit counties to

initiate, coordinate and fund economic development activities. Having the ability to collaborate with other community based organizations, and to allocate resources necessary to facilitate economic development outcomes, Marathon County can be a leader in the work to generate economic development and job creation in Central Wisconsin.

Core Strategy III. Provide Leadership and Services Which Focus on Improving Land Use and Resource Planning to Assure the Orderly Development of Retail and Manufacturing Business, Agriculture/Agribusiness and Residential Growth While Retaining the Rural Character of Marathon County.

Rationale – Marathon County is positioned for development in the future. Marathon County is the largest and has been historically regarded as a rural agriculture and agribusiness related Industry County in North Central Wisconsin. In more recent years Marathon County has become a greater center of non- agriculture business and industry, large corporate agriculture production facilities, and residential development. The improvement of Highways 39 and 29 into interstate quality highways, coupled with a sound regional airport, quality workforce, and regional quality life style available due to the excellent natural resources of the area, have positioned Marathon County for future development. While the current economy has curtailed some of the enthusiasm for development, now is the time to plan for the future before specific and personally motivated development issues arise. Planning and implementing land use and natural resource plans on a 20 - 30 year horizon have proven to be the most effective means of avoiding short-term use decisions which over time result in poor land and resource management

Core Strategy IV. Develop and Implement Innovative Approaches which Improve the Adult and Juvenile Justice System, as a Means to Creating Marathon County as the Safest County in Wisconsin.

Rationale – Public safety has proven to be an outcome expectation of high interest by the residents of the County. Economic development studies have indicated that good public safety is a critical attractor when a community is working on economic development. While Marathon County has a history of good public safety, the current models to address these issues has proven to be very costly and less effective than desired. Modifications in state law, existing public attitude and cultural acceptance of the use of soft drugs such as alcohol has the potential to drive excessive costs to retain our current levels of public safety. Retention of a safe community requires that Marathon County develop innovative ways to address these problems. Additionally the current model of providing services and service availability for individuals with mental health issues is unacceptable from a public safety and quality of life standard. To avoid increasing costs, provide for greater public safety and perhaps most importantly to improve the quality of life and productivity of the individuals suffering these afflictions and those who live with and around them, Marathon County must pursue innovative solutions.

Core Strategy V. Increase County Government Accountability by Establishing Measurable Performance Expectations for County Programs and Services and Monitor Performance Consistent with Predetermined Outcome Expectations.

Rationale – To effectively Govern and Administer an organization, the organization must have clear outcome objectives and must measure and monitor the success of its programs and services. Without this information an organization has little ability to provide evidence of its effectiveness in meeting owner/community expectations and to allocate resources consistent with the success of programs and services. The process begins with Governance establishing broad based outcome expectations. Using these broad based outcome expectations, Administration is challenged to develop monitoring systems which provide Governance with outcome information. Governance uses outcome information to establish board policies and allocate resources. Administration uses the outcome data to improve implementation and operation of programs.

Core Strategy # VI. Expand Communication With Marathon County Residents and Provide Educational Opportunities Which Improve the Publics' Understanding of the Services Provided and the Issues Confronting Marathon County Government.

Rationale - The results of the 2012 community survey and the continued absence of public involvement in county government are evidence that the residents of Marathon County do not understand the role of county government. In order for Marathon County government to successfully lead the allocation of limited resources, the delivery of prioritized services and the creation of a desired future state, it must improve residents understanding of the role of county government. Marathon County Must inform and educate residents regarding the issues which confront county government and the opportunities and limitations of county government.

Specific Activities/ Tactics to be Undertake During the 2012-2017 for Each Core Strategy. These Activities to be Developed by the County's Standing Committees Upon the Adoption of the Strategic Plan by the County Board.

Core Strategy I Leadership for Collaboration Among Public and Private Entities.

1. Provide leadership for the elimination of duplicative public services by municipalities and within county government such as emergency response systems, property assessments, highways and roads, solid waste management, etc.
2. Analyze the need and if determined feasible and appropriate develop and implement a county wide transportation system for selected populations.
3. Develop templates including criteria to be used in establishing multi-jurisdictional public/ private initiatives.

Core Strategy II – Foster Economic Development

1. Clarify and delineate Marathon County's role in economic development and communicate the same to all appropriate audiences.
2. Assure the continued protection of production agriculture land by fostering the development of Agriculture Enterprise Areas.
3. Provide leadership and take actions which support the development of county wide access to high speed Internet
4. Develop infrastructure policies that reflect the needs of agriculture and industry within design and fiscal limitations.
5. Provide leadership for the use of technological innovations to assist enterprises in the management and reuse of waste materials.

Core Strategy III – Land and Resource Use Planning

1. Develop comprehensive planning and zoning ordinances that provide towns with so much value that in the future 100% request participation in county planning and zoning.
2. Improve water quality and residential, commercial and industrial waste management resulting in 100% of all households, businesses and industry sites meeting water quality standards.
3. Inventory our water resources, determine where we have adequate supplies and encourage development in those areas.
 - A. Develop an educational program on the quantity and quality of water supplies for local and state policy makers.
 - B. If changes in regulations are needed to protect the water supply, attempt to influence legislation.
 - C. Provide public education on the water supply in Marathon County and implications for our future.

Core Strategy IV – Establish Innovative Approaches to Maintain a Safe Community

1. Evaluate the need and effectiveness and assess the feasibility and if appropriate develop alternative justice systems such as a veteran's court, drug court, etc.
2. Develop mental health and drug dependency services commensurate with the needs identified by the Offender Assessment program.

3. Reduce alcohol abuse through community education, intervention and legislation.

Core Strategy V – Increased County Government Accountability

1. Continue the development and refinement of the County's service/program outcome monitoring and ranking system.
2. Implement a county health impact assessment Indicator to be included as a criteria on every County ordinance policy/resolution proposal.
3. Develop and implement a governance education program for County Board members.

Core Strategy VI – Public Communications/Education

1. Develop a system which allows the county government to communicate with every Marathon County household and business.
2. Develop and implement a communications system with all elected officials that results in a timely notification of elected officials regarding county actions and activities.

APPENDIX A

Executive Summary of the County Board “Most Important Work of Marathon County Government in the Next Five Years”

INTRODUCTION

The Marathon County Board conducted a Focus Group discussion in October of 2011 answering the question: “What are the greatest opportunities/challenges which face Marathon County in the next five years?”

Using the topics identified in these Focus Groups and including any other items of work which members agreed were to be added, the County Board again conducted Focus Groups in November of 2011 to answer the question: “What is the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next five years?”

RESULTS

Using a weighting approach based upon how many of the groups identified an item in it’s list of the top five items, and how that group ranked the item among it’s top five, an importance ranking score was developed for 12 items which were identified as the most important work of Marathon County Government in the next five years.

These ranking scores fall into three categories high, medium and low.

- 2 high ranking items were identified by the Focus Groups. This included being on the list of 4 of the 5 groups, and were ranked as either number 1, 2 or 3 on their importance list.
- 3 medium ranked items were identified by 3 of the 5 groups as being important and were ranked as either a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 on the list of importance.
- 7 lower priority items were identified by inclusion of 1 or 2 groups as being important and were ranked as a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 by the group on the list of importance.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

High Priority Work Topics:

- Cooperating/consolidating services with other public (municipality and county) government and private partners to deliver current and new services
- Managing the adult and juvenile criminal justice system to contain costs, and improve outcomes while creating an incredibly safe community.

Medium Priority Work Topics:

- Maintenance of quality infrastructure including transportation, buildings, etc. to foster continued economic development.
- Development of a new relationship between county employees, administration and the governing body focused upon retention and recruitment of a quality workforce and maximization of the use of employee capabilities.
- Maintenance of a strong agriculture community.

Lower Priority Work Topics:

- Development of county program outcome measures required to provide the information necessary to determine County program effectiveness and efficiency and priorities
- Initiation and coordination of economic development activities focused on job creation and retention including support of entrepreneurial initiatives
- Retention and promotion of services (parks, public land, recreational activities) which retain a high “quality of life” standard.
- Community health issues including drug and alcohol abuse, weight management and healthy life styles
- Development, integration and maximization of the use of technology to coordinate and deliver county services.
- Communicating with and educating the general public regarding the role and responsibilities of county government and inclusion of non-elected individuals in county government.
- Provision of basic services to indigent populations in the face of an increasing population of elderly.

NEXT STEPS

The results of the County Board Focus Groups will be integrated with the findings of the community Focus Groups, and the community survey and used to develop 3 – 5 broad areas of the most important work of Marathon County Government “Core Strategies” for the next five years. These Core Strategies will serve as the focus of Marathon County Government work and will be used to establish goals and monitor the County Board’s and Administrations progress in accomplishing the most important work of Marathon County Government.



2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARATHON COUNTY

STRATEGIC PLANNING

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

Prepared by Jim Van Eyck, Facilitator

January 3, 2012



What is the most important work Marathon County government should undertake over the next five years?

In developing a plan, what are the county's strengths on which we can capitalize? What weaknesses must we overcome? What opportunities do we foresee for the county? What are the threats that must be neutralized?

These issues were put to focus groups of county residents in the fall of 2011 as a preliminary tool in the county's strategic planning process. The results of these sessions are reported here.

Focus Groups (methodology and general observations)

The Strategic Planning Task Force conducted focus groups with eight citizens' groups during the fall of 2011. Represented in the sessions were Chamber members and business people, young professionals, United Way agencies, agribusiness and rural interests, service club members, religious leaders, and public officials. Focus groups provide snapshots of public opinion rather than a complete picture. Nevertheless, they are a valuable planning tool since they provide insights into what various sectors of the citizenry view as the priorities for their county government. The focus group results reported here will be used with other forms of input into the strategic planning process, including similar future focus discussions of County Board members and a public opinion survey.

During two-hour sessions each group was asked to identify Marathon County's

- strengths** and
- weaknesses** as well as potential
- threats** and

- **opportunities.**

The groups ranked strengths and weaknesses to provide a consensus opinion of their relative importance. These discussions were preliminary to the key question:

“What is the most important work Marathon County Government should undertake over the next five years?”

Not surprisingly, each group tended to provide a viewpoint from a unique perspective based on the composition of its members. Nevertheless, we do see several common themes in the observations of the groups so that several issues appear to loom large in the minds of county residents. Each group provided a ranking of answers to the question so that we can report a consensus opinion.

Marathon County’s strengths and weaknesses

The observations on the **strengths and weaknesses** of the county are valuable in creating a backdrop for planning:

The primary **strengths** of the county, as identified by the groups, provide these common themes:

- **Quality of life** is very good here. This was a strong belief and overriding theme brought forward by all of the groups. It represents an umbrella for all of our strengths.

For example: relatively low cost of living, highway and airport transportation, good schools at all levels, and excellent health care were commonly identified. Natural resources, parks, winter and summer recreation opportunities, the performing and visual arts, and museums as well as local events and festivals all contribute, according to the participants.

As a result, there is a **family-friendly atmosphere** in Marathon County, according to the groups.

- **Schools, at all levels and of all “types,”** while contributing to the quality of life, were repeatedly mentioned as a specific strength.

All levels of schools were cited, including elementary, secondary, community college, private colleges, UW system. Urban and rural were equally praised as were public and private.

- **The local health care system**, too, while it was identified as contributing to our quality of life here, was also a consensus choice as a major strength in and of itself.

Oft-mentioned were the availability of medical services, diversity of medical facilities and medical specialties, quality of care, and centers of excellence

- **Abundant natural resources** also contribute to quality of life and are a major Marathon County strength, according to the groups.

Specifically mentioned: Rib Mountain, our forests, Lake Wausau and other lakes, and the local rivers, along with our parks and other public green space.

- **Diverse recreational opportunities** – summer and winter – which provide opportunity for a strong tourism industry are another strength identified by the groups, albeit related to natural resources and quality of life.

Specifically boating, fishing, bike riding, hiking, golf, organized sports, cross country and downhill skiing, snowmobiling, hunting.

- The focus groups identified a **progressive, collaborative culture** here that includes public and private sectors working together for the good of the community.

Specifically, volunteers, individual financial contributors, foundations, businesses, government entities and nonprofit agencies

- **Our Industry is diverse, and this is yet another strength**

Including manufacturing, retail, processing/call centers, health care, agriculture, professionals, tourism and recreation, hospitality, transportation.

- In particular, **our agriculture infrastructure** is a recognized strength

Including agricultural markets, growers, suppliers and services ...

And diverse sizes of agricultural operations from small family farms to large commercial dairies, and diverse types including dairy, ginseng, and crops

- We have a **strong downtown in Wausau**, which is the core of our county benefiting urban and rural areas alike.

- **Entrepreneurship is a tradition** here, and it has been a core element of our local economy as well as a major source of leadership, volunteerism and charitable giving.

- **A well developed human services infrastructure** (public and private agencies) was also identified as a major strength.

It includes services and agencies – public and private -- such as churches, social services, United Way and other non-profit agencies, Start Right, Head Start, 4-year kindergarten.

- Other common themes in the discussions on strengths included public safety – law enforcement, fire protection and the justice system, a diverse and skilled workforce, clean government with strong leadership, our centralized location, the generosity of the community including both charitable giving and public support for worthwhile programs and projects.

We are not without our weaknesses, according to the group discussions. For virtually every strength, focus group participants identified a corresponding weakness. And the discussion of weaknesses gave rise to the expectations the groups had for government leadership and involvement through a five-year plan.

The principal **weaknesses identified** were:

- There is a **need to communicate and promote the natural resources and recreational opportunities** available in the county because many residents as well as potential visitors from outside the county are not aware of what the county has to offer. There is a **special need to communicate these opportunities to young adults** within and outside the county who do not recognize them and who do not find the county to be a particularly desirable place to locate.
- There is a **“brain drain,” with young college graduates seeking opportunities elsewhere.** There is a lack of good jobs and, moreover, a lack of non-bar, after- hours entertainment and recreational opportunities for young people. At the very least, the available entertainment and recreation must be better promoted among this group to create greater awareness of opportunities.
- **Unemployment is high.** It is, in part, a result of a decline in local business ownership and a corresponding decline in local business decision-making, concern for the community, leadership, volunteerism, and charitable giving. There is a threat of even greater unemployment and resulting problems. And there is a resulting need for renewed economic development efforts.
- **A growing percentage of the county residents are poor** and need better access to health and human services, and to employment opportunities. The elderly make up a special needs group. Alcohol and other drug abuse, domestic abuse, broken families, crime and jail overcrowding, need for legal services, and other social problems are increasing as a result. An increasing number are seeking basic needs help (housing, food, clothing and medical care). Services to deal with these issues are stretched beyond their limits. These issues threaten our overall quality of life.
- **Municipalities in the county do not work together well** and, in fact, too often compete in their economic development efforts. Our municipalities protect parochial interests rather than working cooperatively for the good of the community as a whole. More cooperation, shared services and even consolidation are necessary to provide services efficiently and economically, streamline responses, solve problems, eliminate duplication and reduce taxes.
- Despite good schools at all levels, **the county lacks a college offering four-year degrees and graduate studies. Further, we need to ensure that our schools are preparing the workforce for the jobs that will emerge in the new economy.**
- **Taxes, particularly property taxes, are too high and unsustainable.**
- There is a **provincialism** about us that limits our ability to find solutions to our problems and that encourages outsiders to view our community as backward and non-progressive. We are often **tied to traditions and slow to adopt new technology.** It’s time to shed the image of the *cheesehead* and to present a more positive and progressive image of ourselves to outsiders.

Threats and Opportunities

The potential threats faced by the county as well as the opportunities are presented in the detail notes from the focus groups appended to this report.

The role for county government

“We are all county residents living in smaller communities.”

Based on the perceived strengths and weaknesses as well as the threats and opportunities, the focus groups desire to see their county government step into a greater leadership position among other local units of government -- a role of visionary, of coordinator and facilitator, of catalyst for change. Every one of the eight groups identified this greater and more visible leadership role for Marathon County Government as a desirable objective in its strategic planning.

What is the most important work Marathon County Government should undertake over the next five years? The *primary* suggestions from our eight focus groups highlighted

economic development and job creation,

creating a strong brand for the county,

addressing social problems,

encouraging collaboration and shared services, even consolidation among local governmental units to create efficiencies and lower property taxes.

- Lead local municipalities in more cooperative and collaborative economic development efforts and job creation.

Specifically, recognize the importance of agriculture to the county and promote the development of new agricultural businesses as well as other businesses that are more recession proof. Focus on attracting and retaining businesses that are and will be “locally owned.”

Provide support through McDEVCO, a county revolving loan fund, business incubator, SCORE, grant writing, favorable regulations, etc.

Ensure that essential business services remain in place, such as transportation, ice-free roads, etc. Actively foster high speed internet and cell coverage throughout the county.

Metro mass transportation should be a county issue rather than a municipal issue because it cuts across municipal boundaries and requires a broad based solution.

Work through the educational institutions to prepare the workforce for targeted businesses and a changing job market which is more technology driven

- Specifically, to solve increasing social problems such as alcoholism, access to health care and poverty, facilitate solutions involving collaborative efforts and partnerships among government, public and private agencies, churches, and businesses. Be a facilitator as well as a funder. Invest in prevention as well as treatment.

- Also, specifically, facilitate land use planning and county zoning in order to provide for orderly business and residential growth, to protect our natural resources, and to preserve our “rural character” and quality of life.

- Reduce taxes: take a leadership role to encourage shared services and consolidation among municipalities to eliminate redundancies and to tighten budgets while retaining essential services. Promote “lean thinking.” Find sustainable alternatives to increasing property taxes.

- Create and communicate a strong brand for the county that takes advantage of our many strengths. Promote existing recreational opportunities to people within and outside of the county; facilitate organizations (bicycle clubs, hiking clubs, snowmobile clubs, etc.) that promote these opportunities. Develop new opportunities (bike trails, hiking trails, etc.). Target young adults. Use the brand to attract and retain business.

Improve county-wide internet access to promote agribusiness and other rural businesses and to improve rural communication for families.

Clearly, and not surprisingly, the focus group members want the county to work on reducing taxes, particularly property taxes. Perhaps more revealing is the high priority they place on taking a leadership role in cooperative economic development efforts (job creation); seeking *cooperative* solutions to social issues such as poverty, alcoholism, and access to health care; protecting and promoting the county’s assets such as natural resources and recreational opportunities; creating a strong, recognizable brand for the county-wide community; and, in general, taking a more visible leadership role acting as *facilitator* among public and private entities to take better advantage of our strengths and to overcome our weaknesses.

Following are more detailed notes from each of the individual focus group sessions:

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
19	3,3,3,2,2,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader/Catalyst for change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use planning • Consolidation • Workforce Development
16	1,2,2,3,1,1,1,1,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development of new AG businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDEVCO • County Revolving Loan Fund
10	3,1,1,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping Recognize importance of AG and Promote AG business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate public about agriculture
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education/Promotion of good practices to preserve water resources
8	3,1,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate education at all levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster partnerships for grant-writing & business tart ups (need a pot of money)
4	2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Ag use value assessment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide for good transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control/Reduce Ag-specific regulations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy overlap non-Ag and Ag related (e.g. road use)
8	3,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate land use planning and promote County zoning

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County-wide loss of valuation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imposing regulations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural-environmental • Employment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry stagnation or moving due to lack of qualified workers (Where will we get our workers?)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrinking AG business community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of local transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buses • Impact on students & others
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack entrepreneurial spirit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to modernize
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational shift of values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work ethic • Location of residence
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased energy costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric • Gas, etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average age of AG producers increasing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Affordable</u> health care
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of public services on AG producers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes • Education • Regulations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of run-off to preserve water
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced resources for education
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economy

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuation of recession
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tax threats<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elimination of AG use tax
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban sprawl<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conversion of land to non-AG use• Conflict urban and rural
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Global competition

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidating municipalities to reduce tax burden or redirect taxes toward unmet needs/priorities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban communities • Schools
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational opportunities with new NTC AG school
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with and educate local officials on land use planning
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New businesses through bio-energy/green energy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural internet
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold Ag-focused meetings/groups
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring back younger, educated individuals
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help businesses compete globally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of airport
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People available for retraining because of economy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support entrepreneurs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost loans • Mentors, etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in sustainable renewable energy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better promote ourselves in and out of area
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate AG nuisance lawsuits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer communication on AG needs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition farms to next generation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships to develop new AG businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AG community • State • Education, etc.

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
20	2,2,3,2,3,3 1,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ag infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markets • Suppliers • Services, etc.
5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 • UW Marathon County • NTC
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation
7	1,2,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AG • Industry • Recreation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large CEO. size with AG Dollars <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brought in to County and State
17	3,3,1,2,2,3, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse AG base <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dairy • Ginseng • Crops • Ag Enterprise sizes & types
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good metro area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural • Arts • Ice arena
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foresight to brand & market our community
2	1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-farm income brings benefits, e.g. health care
4	2,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong support & leadership within AG community

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPA, e.g. • NTC • Government
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location to other cities, Merrill, e.g. – workforce resource
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong credit score <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People managing personal resources
3	1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care system
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many small family farms surviving
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparatively low forage production costs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Fire • EMS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community support for projects
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water supply
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Granite quarries

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of rail services • No direct flights to many locations
16	3,1,2,3,3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not good land use planning County-wide
2	1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology Access in rural County e.g. Internet
7	3,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tied to tradition; slow to adopt new technology
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges due to our large size
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain drain
5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber does not consider AG an important business
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Board also needs to be more aware of its importance
5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside knowledge of Marathon County and what we do; what we offer
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of AG focus in lower grades in schools
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short growing season • Cost of housing
4	3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of natural resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned development • Protection of Land
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hilly terrain – small parcels makes some farming difficult
11	2,1,2,3,1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of smaller farms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less interest in AG
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less labor (lack of <u>qualified</u> AG workers)
4	3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxes & Regulatory Climate
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ag businesses don't speak with one voice politically
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique products leave without our identity

3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education – lack of opportunities for advanced degrees • Lack 4-year university
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban sprawl drives land prices up
3	1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependency on commodity price fluctuations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parts of County (West) running short of water
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to get started in AG

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrink County Board/Redistrict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot lead by committee • For more action; better decision making
2	1 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication by Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's challenges • It's accomplishments (Board is too big for people to follow understand) Note: Promote website
3	1 - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively foster high speed internet; cell coverage throughout the County (assist providers)
5	3 - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment Programs and Housing; More Time & money on people with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Substance Abuse • Other health Issues Work through Churches Agencies (Salvation Army, etc.)
3	2 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcome Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone specifically responsible on monitoring • What's being done elsewhere to I.D. opportunities?
9	2 - 3 - 3 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of recreational opportunities while growing diversity of jobs and industries
4	2 - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Board pull together as one community of Marathon County
5	3 - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest for future (monetary & time/attention) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Promotion • Create new business opportunities
10	1 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower barriers to new businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various municipalities compete with one another • Role model in collaboration

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on what we don't have rather than what we do have
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal to collaborate
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal to compete •
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Suicide Rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including aging population
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home foreclosures
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to be realistic and honest about what we <u>can</u> do in larger environment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to progress with action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're too concerned with our own opinions/positions • Over-analysis • Feel too right to listen to other positions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red tape to starting business
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs → Poverty → Crime Cycle
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working out of sense of fear or scarcity rather than opportunities

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a growth plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care for current citizens • Attract younger population with sustainable jobs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small enough to act quickly if we want to
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be creative; visionary
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take risks to make things happen
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forget city names --- think broadly
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new niche industries to use educations/talents of young workers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell what we have - - - promote our assets
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take advantage of our events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitewater
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborations

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration to meet needs of underprivileged
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including the 400 Block
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning revitalization of downtown and people who do it
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banks/Credit Unions locally based • Legal community
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benevolence
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large land mass
4	2 - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Wildlife • Etc.
6	2 - 2 - 1 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum • Theater Well supported
5	3 – 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong, diverse downtown
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong transportation & Infrastructure Including airports – especially CWA
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work force & work ethic
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality of life
12	3 - 3 - 3 - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational opportunities/Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer • Winter
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central location Important for commerce

1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong medical
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent schools
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community that cares for those who cannot care for selves (NCHC)

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
11	2 8 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities don't work well together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting regulations • Duplication
6	3 - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative Isolation away from other population centers
2	1 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack promotion winter outdoor sports
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not progressive or not viewed as such
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of 4-year college <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student community
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain drain – lack high paying jobs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack fiber and other technologies to support work from remote locations
2	1 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack diversity in industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High tech needed • Find new ways to use existing resources • Research
5	3 - 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack mental health care Lack financial resources for the underprivileged
4	3 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of Leadership (too much grey hair) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Board too large • Under 40 need to participate
15	3 - 3 - 3 3 - 2 - 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for young adults • Jobs • Things to do (quality of life outside of work) (Reversed from earlier generation) • It's here; were not selling it – Market it • Bike Lanes (Skinner has made investment and promoted it)

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
20	1,2,3,3,2, 3,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation & Consolidation among municipalities
13	1,2,3,1,2, 1,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create attractive business enforcement • Explore government cost vs. privatization • Keep the road ice free
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline (no sacred cows)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce social dependency through support of innovation & technology
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business shrinks while government grows <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Force efficiencies • Standards of performance • Not to point where ineffective • Help private sector grow
11	3,3,3,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate “Brand”
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus 1st on businesses already here
3	1,1,1	Active revitalization New/(younger) leadership Openness in government
4	3,1	Collaborate with others
5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Business • Agencies
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less special interest • Greater good
9	2,2,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same services; tighten budgets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Economic Development

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to involve young professionals in leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Other
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow response time to needed change
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popularity as a measure • Need <u>performance</u> basis
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of skilled workforce
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of cooperation with fighting for resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to anticipate & deal with diversity issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining education system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmentation • Funding • Political
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining investments in community (opportunity fund)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy & small business taxes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing poverty (working poor)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pull back • Selfishness vs. cooperation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued loss of state funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandates
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging Population – Resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to unify throughout metro area
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complacency – Failure to recognize weaknesses
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political partisanship

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing more business to poor economy – building industry in particular
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to investment, innovation & cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be creative for economy to grow
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing (THIS COULD BE OUR MOMENT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to recognize & act – seize the moment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation & Entrepreneurship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin within specific industries • Need to encourage

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmark against other regions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on strengths we have identified
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium – County/City/McDEVCO to attract businesses & people
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared resources/coordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit • Others
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase airport services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Centergy – <u>Think Regionally</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation Hub (railroad) • Logistics • Paper sciences • Research & Development • Economic tools e.g. lean fund!! • Consolidation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population & retirements create job opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time for retirees • Full-time • Volunteerism • Entrepreneurship
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals for accountability
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go nationally to attract investors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using our advantages & our quality of life
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not using talents/businesses locally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Buy locally!!
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our population/talents need to be inclusive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reverse snowbird migration
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services that attract young & old are similar!

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter & Summer activities – no where else in the State can compete <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ski hill, etc. • Lakes, etc. • Kayak course
14	3,2,3,1,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living • Transportation safe • Good schools
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong & diverse non-profits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition of strong citizen support
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong entrepreneurial tradition
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great health care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional medical center
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving tax/business environment in State
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Chamber involved at State level
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong public safety & law enforcement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Fire • State Patrol • County • Lab
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public/Private partnership leads to accomplishments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various Living Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • Condo • Etc.
1 2	1 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward Thinking Area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 Block, etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Successful
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital available

1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDEVCO • Business Development Center
12	3,2,1,1,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Secondary Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UWMC • NTC
2 5	1,1 2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse cultural activities • Theater unique to rural area • Museum
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good government services
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of Regional cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Care Center • Airport
17	2,1,2,3,3 3,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity among communities • Borders/communication
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value systems & work ethic of workers • Loyal & stable work force
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership of government leaders
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy of Economic Development efforts
9	3,1,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity/Blend of industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy, industry, farm, tourism
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion plan for business & infrastructure in place
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive geography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crossroads
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low commuter times – including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airport • Transportation • Highways

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various Living Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • Condo • Etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change to frequent – we look at problem solving in too short a time frame
13	2,3,1,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcoholism
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Business being replaced by Big-Box
11	3,2,2,1 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parochialism
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of next generation leaders
5	3,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment (difficult to get people off of “benefits”) • Remove barriers • Need more than minimum wage jobs • Mismatch of skills & jobs
6	2,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of fragmented government • Duplication of services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to adapt to change diversity
6	2,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrinking services for elderly
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax burden
2	1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Relations issue – what Marathon County is/is not (weather)
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrinking agriculture • Small farm base
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation for elderly
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction business over-represented
17	3,1,2,3,2, 3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to attract & keep young college grads • Recreation • Career growth

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing a weakness
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband internet connectivity
9	3,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty
5 3	1,2,2 2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of key businesses leading to diminished local support • Weaker sense of community • Lack of activities for youth • Expense of alcoholism/treatment - expenditure misdirected • Politically sensitive

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
9	2,2,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve affordable health care for everyone
14	3,3,2,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus more on economic development, especially locally owned businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers market, e.g.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuade outside businesses to look at County population & resources as a whole
8	2,1,1,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve County-wide internet access
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate politically at State & National levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to work collaboratively is best a local level
7	3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene business & education to prepare our workforce for new job market (technical)
8	1,3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County review treatment options for alcohol abuse among youth & plug holes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage schools?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support environmental strategies to reduce access to drugs & alcohol
11	1,1,3,1,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn more about these problems and invest in solutions & prevention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and help those with problems
13	1,3,3,2,1,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate integration of solutions from public & private entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate shared electronic data base • Establish local service centers to work on multiple needs • Work collaboratively with public & private organizations for unified approach
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in alternate transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biking • Walking/hiking
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More focus on tourism

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic violence due to stress of poverty
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterans returning with problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness • Mental health • Jobless
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of services for 50+ who are unexpectedly out of work
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrusions of Federal & State politics in our communities hamper local solutions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce rate
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs increase as needs go unmet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uninsured; under-insured • Health Care hyper-inflation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing cost of energy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol use
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline in good paying jobs as well as entry level
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small businesses not surviving
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of houses decreasing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property taxes declining
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less financial resources for programs & services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government and business withdrawing from providing solutions as problems get too big <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not doable putting the blinders on – turning a deaf ear
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explosion of payday loan organizations

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing existing resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate public/private resources • Money for infrastructure • Solutions not efficient for clients now
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Way ability to gain collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene community forums that include all sectors • Schools • Agencies • Businesses • Government
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UWMC Center for Civic Engagement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-traditional approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage business creatively • Get Smart Wausau Coalition, e.g.

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways • Airport
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward thinking leadership
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value the environment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming & friendly Midwestern values
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ahead of the curve in creating brand
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIFE report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward thinking • Innovative
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History/Heritage/Historical Society
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance to families where there's been domestic abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter • Hmong Association
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning to be more diverse
4	3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy remains relatively strong
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population good size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities without problems of larger area
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central business area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to improving health of community
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to support innovation
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned from mistakes e.g. Hmong 1st arrivals
3	2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong United Way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulls resources together through 2-1-1 makes referrals
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural resources – makes us a destination

1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large foundations for public & private purposes
6	2,2,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Care
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location, geographic
24	3,2,3,2,3,3 3,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well developed human services infrastructure – public & private
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low crime rate
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich diversity in business and industry
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural opportunities – diversity
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountain • River • Lake • Trails
12	1,2,2,3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations work well together • Starting to reach out to whole County
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financially • Volunteerism • Local employers support
8	1,1,2,2,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary through college

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some areas of inner city blighted
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income access to legal services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities don't yet work well together
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haven't found a way to share our strengths or to distribute our generosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People don't dig-in on the issues • We need special events to gain participation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No 4 year old kindergarten
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement gap <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minorities • Poor
8	1,3,2,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing numbers seeking basic needs help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources insufficient
8	3,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not everyone has access to our strengths
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector withdrawing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a <u>system</u> of resources even without current economic crisis
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to health care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including treatment for alcohol, drugs, mental health
7	2,2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drinking culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-house treatment options lacking
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow to react to issues; don't mobilize quickly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication poor among communities & institutions • Distance an issue
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside image of small town; rural doesn't help attract young people
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing for the poor including foreclosures
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack adequate internet access, cell coverage
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of 4 –year college with affordable access

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access difficult in metro and some rural areas – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance; transportation • Cutting back on public transportation
9	1,1,3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor don't have adequate access to health care or dental care
11	2,3,3,1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty rate for children accelerating faster than State as a whole
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack capacity in mental health & family counseling
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain drain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth leaving for opportunities elsewhere
20	1,3,3,1,3,3 3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing local ownership of businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose leadership • Good paying jobs • Decision making

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
10	3,3,1,1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branding our strengths to State & beyond • Economic Development
23	3,3,3,3,3,3,1,1,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating County-wide economic development efforts • Focus on more recession-proof businesses
9	3,2,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage schools/education system to prep the workforce for targeted businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration to attract new jobs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Education • Business
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage County residents in dialog on issues and solutions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Services expand initiatives to lessen impact of poverty
7	3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use <u>inputs</u> to plan for future and meet greatest needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rethink involvements and methods
7	3,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax incentives to attract new businesses & job creation
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realign to support education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance • Collaboration
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively engage with State and Federal Legislators to deal with budget issues
7	2,2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage efficiencies thru shared services and cooperation in local government
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for places to control costs and re=allocate
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation issues – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transportation • Biking • Pedestrian • Facilitate & fund

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate what government is already doing for residents
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lobby for grants, etc. to support <u>collaborative</u> efforts and get through short term economic issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate priority-setting among communities

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to engage diverse groups to meet workforce needs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domino effect from loss of jobs/incomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of tax base • More business closings • Homes vacated
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing poverty
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing crime
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban decay
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased willingness to support government & public services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased service needs/budget strains
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer Federal grants
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow focus on city infrastructure without regard to rural needs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Commerce rather than buying locally
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average age of Agriculture sector increasing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural physician shortage
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminals being retained in the community (parked here)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing & Pervasive negativity toward government
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of civility in solving problems

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		•

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School referendums • Investments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less susceptible to recession • Exports increasing
23	3,3,3,3,2,3,2,1,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • City • Access to community college & UW systems
6	1,2,1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational opportunities - outdoor & year-round
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A leader in County government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most Counties look up to it.
13	3,1,1,2,2,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse skills
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic location
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity also
10	1,2,1,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life
8	3,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong alliance between, government, education & business to support economic development
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public green space
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to Arts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual • Performing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real estate lesser decline than elsewhere
5	3,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation hub (highways)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philanthropy – strong foundations support

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available land for development
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation examples – world class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ski Hill • Whitewater • Golf • Curling • X-Country
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library system
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversified economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing • Agriculture • Health service • Finance/Insurance
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban & rural amenities and availability
7	2,2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community involvement • Civic Engagement (e.g. voter turnout) • Responsiveness of elected officials • Sound law enforcement • 400 Block
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful, unique landscape
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith structure
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine dining – unique shopping
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good senior-care
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel safe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively low crime rate
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building well maintained
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to wellness ops. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YMCA • Parks • Etc.
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invites public activism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People able to get involved where/when they want

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
22	2,3,3,2,3,3,3,3,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing of businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closely tied to the economy • Need good-paying jobs • High unemployment
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need greater public transportation opportunities
4	2,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We haven't sold ourselves* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-kept secret • Need to "Brand" Marathon County
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of venues for young adults, esp. evening activities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmet health care needs of poor, especially dental
7	1,2,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain Drain – lack opportunities for college grads to return (Look first for a place they want to live)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Board operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size • Meeting times exclusive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long response time for law enforcement in outreaches of County
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *Perception of geography & climate – specially winter
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *More to do than boating perception/communication issue
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated mental health services, especially children
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High property taxes
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggling to maintain tax base <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property values declining • Assessments being questioned
19	2,3,3,2,3,1,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy not as diverse as should be regarding economy e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology • Food Processing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't have identity attractive to young people
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopping hasn't kept pace with families

3	1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inefficiencies & duplication in government with many entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parochialism
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large geographic size
2	1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing aging population
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to do more to attract entrepreneurs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal drugs easily transported in
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in invasive plants that threaten recreation
12	2,1,2,2,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty rate increasing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult mental health issues • Alcohol & other drug abuse • Crime Rate

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate sense of community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote cooperation & involvement Promote Events Be Proactive
5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop county-wide government partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidate services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger County-wide internet opportunities
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be visionary regarding new types of employment & training required
10	3,3,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the County attractive to businesses & people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roads Support for “trailing” spouses Jobs Parks Services Etc.
4	3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to approach problem solving & opportunities through <u>Regional</u> cooperation
9	2,2,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition metro-ride from city to county <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need <u>metro</u> transportation
4	2,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attract young professionals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health & fitness emphasis Walking & Biking trails Family activities Become a more desirable location for families
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a grant system for churches & non-profits to do what they do well
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find solutions to addiction & incarceration Preventive services & treatment Alcohol & drug treatment center – Regional

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure there isn't prejudicial behavior on Probation & Parole Board
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attract new (futuristic) businesses
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wisest use of tax dollars

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing taxes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price tag for services • Prioritizing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing division among people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is the middle? Compromise? • There needs to be <u>shared</u> sacrifice in the community • Territorial understanding must diminish <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Self interest vs. community
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting demographics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the poor declining <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care • Financial • Education (Head Start)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on Federal/State support
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in crime rate and seriousness of crime
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More unemployment/businesses closing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More pressure on families • More pressure on government and non-profit resources (competition for limited resources) • Loss of skilled young people • Not creative about future employment opportunities • What are the possibilities for employment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to be something we're not – emulating other communities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats to environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean water & air
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing alcohol & drug problem
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to be forward-thinking and proactive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in Gap between rich and poor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in poverty

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Airline industry realignment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Church attendance and participation<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declining morals and ethics

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalize on strengths to attract businesses and young professionals
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical College <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand medical possibilities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World exposure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitewater • Etc. • We are already world class in a number of ways.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address now our greatest weaknesses before they get out of hand
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups can work together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable of creating new models of partnership • Business • Government • Schools • Churches • Volunteerism vs. taxation • Local solutions to local problems
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcome competition among communities – shared services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Police & Fire • Etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a new vision of what we can be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get everybody on the same page • Create enthusiasm
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solve the transportation issue cooperatively rather than relying on taxes alone
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared vision, effort rather than shared “sacrifice” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive/Growth rather than Negative/Less • Train/Recognize potential leaders (Leadership Wausau)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our educational system
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize location
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the things we do well

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
12	2,1,3,3,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Base • Variety of services
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central • Proximity to other attractive areas
17	3,3,2,2,1,2,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education – all levels
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • Urban • Suburban
5	2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources to help young families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start Right • 4-year kindergarten • Head Start
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of Philanthropy
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business community support of worthy causes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations • Etc.
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment
6	3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Religious Community
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong downtown
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing but small town feel
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong work ethic
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong “metroplex” communities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks County-wide
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral conservative behavior especially young people

3	1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community events • Ski Hill • Whitewater • 9-mile
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 Block
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts – County-wide
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-political atmosphere <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No hidden agendas • Responsive government • Good core group of leaders that work well together • Political • Business • Etc.
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Fire
5	2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of optimism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical college • Curling facility
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to anticipate and make it happen
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Diversity
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Airports • Roads
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News media do a good job

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
16	3,2,3,3,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues for jail inmates (training & employment) • Employment opportunities beyond service sector • Empty buildings • Needs of young families especially
3	1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunger & nutrition
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation between schools & churches waning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wednesday nights • Weekends
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough resources for non-profit programs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching/coaching has gotten difficult because of “broken families”
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of high taxes especially in City
7	3,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing separation of the wealthy and poor
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to do it all – provide services (quality) to everyone without the resources
10	3,1,2,2,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drug and alcohol issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation
6	3,1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transportation
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not sure what size we want to be – bigger?
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack education in life skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting • Finance • Etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Them vs. us mentality – Rural/Urban
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space available in County jail for classes
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care availability for un-under employed & families
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of psychiatrists
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No indoor “Community Center”

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
19	2,3,3,3,2,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the lead to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster thinking/change to stimulate government consolidation/shared services
8	2,2,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage economic development, independent business retention, to create jobs
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a medical facility for County employees with staff medical rather than using “outside” services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Balanced</u> approach to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 year educational center • Crime prevention • Other
8	3,2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting up to speed with internet and cell technology and using it to deliver services • e.g. wellness education • deliver and accept payments – statements (tax bills)
9	3,3,1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change mindset that we are <u>County residents, living in smaller communities; take the lead in change</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>County-wide</u> transportation system
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire Federal/State grant-writer
3	1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support & promote higher education opportunities to attract people, jobs & businesses

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime & drug growth
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard of living becomes lower
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of good disaster preparedness – e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-1-1 availability • Ability to test plan
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small farms disappearing – small towns impacted
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-regulation /Government intervention (mandates)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrinking tax base due to economy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eroding moral values
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of 4 year campus threatens economic development
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union labor & resulting costs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entitlement mentality
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrorist protections
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Services, jail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming overburdened • Breaking cycle of abuse
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment groundwater contamination

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote business growth thru tax incentives
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government synergies, cooperation, mergers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further utilize technologies to increase efficiencies and create jobs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-year college
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Services & crime prevention improvements
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging green technologies.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mining, especially gold mining on public lands
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County take lead in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared services (e.g. dispatch, SWAT team & dive team [IT opportunity]) • Economic Development
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand institutions that can re-train workers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development along Wisconsin River
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for Spanish speaking citizens with increasing Hispanic population

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
5	1,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality • Quantity
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership, Government
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations • Etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logging
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard workers • Willing
17	3,3,3,3,1,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of life, culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks • Roads • Schools • Recreation • Arts • Events • Etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of industry and agriculture
3	2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of public safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law enforcement • Fire • Justice system
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River • Mountain • Parks
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size & location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest land mass • Central
16	1,2,3,3,2,1 1,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airport, regional – central location
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse cultures
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branding
8	2,1,2,1,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Parochial • NTC • UWMC

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cuts to Human Services & Transportation where they are most needed.
3	2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost to serve a large County geographically
15	3,3,1,1,1,3 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Services <u>need</u>
5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to change
5	2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location & size when trying to attract professionals
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack 4-year College
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol Abuse
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of opportunities for ages 18 - 25
14	3,3,2,1,2,2, 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack jobs & career opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing jobs, net.
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bussing & mass rail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passenger • Cargo
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cellular & internet coverage
5	3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small town (1 over) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary structure (+/-)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run-off • Transportation issue

FOCUS GROUPS

Most Important Work of Marathon County Government

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Most Important Work of Marathon County Government</u>
14	2,2,3,2,1 2,2	• Get municipalities to work together specially from economic development standpoint
6	3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand • Opportunities – families and young professionals • Resources
7	3,1,3	• Create more sustainable tax structure than property tax
4	1,3	• Performance based budgeting based on public’s needs and wants
2	2	• Communicate what County government does and how to get involved.
9	3,3,2,1	• Lean thinking regarding budgets drive costs lower
		• Housing incentives; nightlife; recruiting assistance; communication – one main website on opportunities
		• Reinvigorate Wausau Young Professionals Group
1	1	• Look beyond 5 years
4	1,1,2	• Work with other counties to reduce health care costs
		• Pioneer fee for deliveries with public employees
		• Hire the right people to run the County
4	1,1,2	• More guidance with business start-ups – beyond score – incubator
4	2,2	• Streamlined regulation across municipalities
3	3	• Continued attention on getting kids school-ready
4	3,1	• Maintain our safe, tourist friendly atmosphere
5	3,2	• Plan for environmental sustainability e.g. Dairy College

THREATS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Threats</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourcing of manufacturing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs leaving • Failing housing • Shrinking population
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing illegal drug activity
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't understand sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change needed to become efficient & survive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current economic condition (first downturn could have been worse)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing local ownership & decision-making
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk pricing
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More low income people dependant on resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing our identity & culture in pursuit of growth
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime increasing with economic conditions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of technology here
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government debt
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging infrastructure
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funds to support demands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Social Services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People leaving for work elsewhere
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small businesses suffering - big retailers taking over
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack health & dietary education
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other regions competing for our businesses (Fox Valley)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining concept of community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not functioning together to compete with limited resources

OPPORTUNITIES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Opportunities</u>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterfront
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local produce – utilization
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater coordination for greater access to social services
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy, etc.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDEVCO to create a business park website
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abundant and affordable water – potable
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get broader based business thinking into government (cost reduction)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand County within State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not aware of new branding • Differing opinions on its effectiveness
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives for Entrepreneurs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More grant dollars • Focus on employment • Space available

STRENGTHS:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Strengths</u>
11	3,3,3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family atmosphere
16	3,3,1,3,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary in particular • High school • College
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation infrastructure
3	2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups (McDEVCO) focused on growing business & industry
5	2,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist attractions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ski hill • Natural resources (river)
6	3,1,1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Beauty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake • Mountain • Mosinee Hill • County Parks
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low crime rate
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fertile Soil
5	1,1,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of medical resources
6	2,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing diversity of industry
4	1,1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardworking, accountable workforce
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community resources & programs for families
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopping
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving community/culture of philanthropy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term residency
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalization of downtown (envy or Eau Claire & Appleton)
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wausau-grown businesses doing business internationally

1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Central location
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youthful demographic

WEAKNESSES:

<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Individual Points</u>	<u>Topic: Weaknesses</u>
5	1,2,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language & social barriers with minorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro vs. rural • Income • Race/social
3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in workforce
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather strain on programs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People ashamed of accessing resources
6	3,2,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of 4-year college
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack diversity among government officials
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children on free & reduced lunch programs
8	1,3,3,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of after-hours options (non-bar) especially in the winter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication about what's available
9	1,2,3,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large business affected by economy – High unemployment
13	3,3,2,3,1,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to municipalities working together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic development efforts compete • Separate services
10	3,2,2,3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax Rate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially property tax • Unsustainable structure
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities for mental health & homeless
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look of buildings & environment not cohesive – first impression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown improving • Weston an exception
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack education for 18-21 year olds on voting
9	2,2,3,1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College grads – lack of identification and what we have here
2	1,1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities don't work together on image

5	3,2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack awareness
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack central resource for information
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people leaving for opportunities in larger metro area
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No accountability for visitors council
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't promote our history and arts opportunities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication and therefore accessibility to free activities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude among natives that there isn't much to do here; negative on community
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack transportation for outlying areas
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No facilities for children's birthdays, etc.
2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need support for start-up businesses



Marathon County Resident Survey Report, 2012

**James Janke
Shelly Hadley
David Trechter**

**Survey Research Center Report 2012/7
April 2012**

Staff and students working for the Survey Research Center at UW-River Falls were instrumental in the completion of this study. We gratefully acknowledge Denise Parks, Jacki Roden, Erin Ingli, and Caleb Riedeman for their hard work and dedication. The SRC would also like to thank Dianne Wessel of the Marathon County Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department and the members of the Strategic Plan Task Force for their assistance. In addition, we thank Marathon County Finance Director Kristi Kordus for providing the budget information for the cover letter.

Strategic Plan Task Force:

Gary Wyman (Chair)
John Robinson (Vice-chair)
Joanne Leonard
Bill Miller
Craig McEwen
Ken Day
Roger Zimmerman

Finally, we would like to thank the Marathon County residents, who took the time to complete their questionnaires

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Executive Summary

This survey is part of Marathon County's strategic planning process and was developed to gather opinions from Marathon County residents about the current importance of various County functions and future spending levels for those functions.

In February 2012, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,149 Marathon County residences. The surveys were followed up with reminder postcards and a second mailing to non-respondents. The overall response rate was 43 percent (466 completed questionnaires). The results provided in this report are expected to be accurate to within plus or minus 4.5 percent with 95 percent confidence. Statistical tests do not indicate that “non-response bias” is a problem in this sample. However, the demographic profile of the sample contains substantially fewer women than expected and there is a pattern of gender-based differences of opinion about Marathon County spending. The SRC reweighted the survey results to reflect response patterns if the sample contained the same proportion of men and women as were counted in the 2010 Census. Gender weighting did not substantially alter the overall pattern of the results and resulted in a shift of one or two percentage points in the tabulation. The sample contained more respondents over age 45, had higher levels of post-secondary education, and contained fewer renters than the County average. There is broad agreement across demographic groups on these issues and most differences are a matter of degree. The SRC notes differences of opinion among different demographic groups throughout the report.

The survey presented a list of 38 Marathon County programs and functions and asked respondents' opinions about the current importance and future spending levels for each item.

Importance Ratings. Four of five programs related to economic development ranked in the top ten most important items. Expanding employment opportunities and recruiting more manufacturing businesses ranked first and second overall. Recruiting more industrial businesses ranked fifth, and business incentives ranked eighth. This may be a reaction to the deep recession that has gripped the U.S. economy since 2008.

Also near the top of the ten most important programs and services were timely response to emergencies (third most important) and safe houses for domestic abuse victims (fourth most important). Respondents also rated certain basic government services highly. The County's highway/road network ranked sixth, and law enforcement (Sheriff) ranked ninth.

Rounding out the top ten most important services were K-12 education of children with disabilities (seventh place). Two programs for elderly and handicapped residents were in a virtual tie for tenth place, addressing existing housing issues for elderly and handicapped residents and ensuring adequate public transportation for elderly and handicapped residents.

Routes for bicycles/pedestrians and recreation facilities were among the group of programs and functions that received comparatively low ratings on the importance scale. Other items that rated relatively low include access to air transportation services, criminal rehabilitation services, programs that promote healthy lifestyles, and addiction therapy/support.

Future Spending Ratings. Overall, respondents generally favored retaining current spending levels for most programs and services included in the survey. However, there were a small

number of programs and services for which a majority of respondents said they would favor an increase in spending. Consistent with their high importance ratings for economic development programs, majorities of respondents favored increased spending for programs to expand employment opportunities in the County (65%) and to recruit more manufacturing businesses (63%). Half of respondents favored a spending increase to recruit more industrial businesses and nearly half (47%) favored increased spending on incentives for economic development. These four economic development programs were the top ranked items on the spending scale.

Respondents said they preferred no change in the funding of some of the program and functions that were rated among the most important. These include timely response to emergencies, safe houses for domestic abuse victims, the County road/highway network, K-12 education for children with disabilities, and law enforcement.

While there were no programs for which a majority of respondents favored reductions in spending levels, the same items that ranked lowest in priority also had the lowest rankings with respect to future spending levels. Bicycle/pedestrian routes in urban and rural areas ranked 37th and 38th. Access to air transportation ranked 35th and criminal rehabilitation ranked 34th.

Survey Purpose

This survey is part of Marathon County’s strategic planning process and was developed to gather opinions from Marathon County residents about the current importance of various County functions and future spending levels for those functions.

Survey Methods

In February 2012, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,149 Marathon County residents. Sixty-six surveys were returned as non-deliverable, resulting in a net of 1,083 delivered surveys.

The overall response rate from the public was 43 percent (466 completed questionnaires). Based on the estimated number of adults in the population of the County (101,194)¹, the results provided in this report are expected to be accurate to within plus or minus 4.5 percent with 95 percent confidence.

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who don’t return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. **Based upon a standard statistical analysis that is described in Appendix A, the Survey Research Center (SRC) concludes that there is little evidence that non-response bias is a concern for this sample.**

Appendix B contains written responses to the “other, specify” category.

Appendix C contains a copy of the survey questionnaire with a complete quantitative summary of responses by question. As described below, the SRC adjusted the raw percentages due to the disproportionate number of responses from men (65%). The percentages in Appendix C are based on the raw data that are not adjusted for gender.

¹ 2010 US Census

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the 466 respondents from the public who returned surveys. Where comparable data were available from the 2010 US Census of Population and Housing and the 2010 US Census American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year data set, they were included to indicate the degree to which the sample represents the underlying adult population in the County.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents							
Gender	Count	Male	Female				
Sample	449	65%	35%				
Census (Age 18+)	101,194	50%	50%				
Age 18+	Count	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65+
Sample	461	1%	8%	15%	22%	25%	29%
Census	101,194	10%	16%	18%	21%	17%	19%
Employment Status	Count	Full time	Part time	Self - Empl.	Unempl.	Retired	Other
Sample	453	47%	5%	9%	4%	32%	2%
ACS (Age 16+)	105,423	66%			5.7%	28% ²	
Place of Residence	Count	Own	Rent	Other			
Sample	455	89%	10%	1%			
ACS	51,851	74%	26%				
Household Income	Count	<\$15,000	\$15,000 – 24,999	\$25,000 – 49,999	\$50,000 – 74,999	\$75,000 – 99,999	\$100,000 or More
Sample	440	17%	15%	16%	25%	14%	14%
ACS	51,851	10%	12%	29%	21%	13%	15%
Length of Residency	Count	<1 yr	1 – 4	5 - 9	10 - 24	25+	
Sample ³	462	1%	3%	7%	16%	73%	
Highest Level of Education	Count	Less than High Sch.	High Sch. Dipl.	Some College/ Tech.	Tech. College Grad.	Bachelor Degree	Graduate/ Profess. Degree
Sample	457	6%	28%	18%	16%	20%	11%
ACS. (age 25+)	90,298	10%	39%	18%	13%	15%	6%

² Includes “not in workforce”

³ Census data does not contain a length of residence category.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (continued)				
Residence ZIP code	Community Name	Frequency	Percent of Survey Responses	Percent of Marathon County Population
54401	Wausau	106	24%	23%
54403	Wausau	79	18%	18%
54455	Mosinee	69	15%	13%
54476	Schofield & Weston	56	12%	14%
54484	Stratford	21	5%	4%
54448	Marathon	18	4%	3%
54411	Athens	15	3%	4%
54426	Edgar	13	3%	3%
54440	Hatley	12	3%	2%
54474	Rothschild	12	3%	3%
54405	Abbotsford	7	2%	2%
54479	Spencer	7	2%	2%
54449	Marshfield	6	1%	2%
54471	Ringle	6	1%	1%
54452	Merrill	5	1%	2%
54414	Birnamwood	4	<1%	<1%
54421	Colby	4	<1%	<1%
54473	Rosholt	4	<1%	<1%
54499	Wittenberg	2	<1%	<1%
54402	Wausau PO Boxes	1	<1%	<1%
54408	Aniwa	1	<1%	<1%
54425	Dorchester	1	<1%	<1%
54488	Unity	1	<1%	<1%
Count		450		

In most categories, the overall pattern of the sample’s demographic characteristics matches the 2010 Census numbers and the estimates from the American Community Survey quite well.

However, there were a disproportionate percentage of males among the respondents. While men comprise 50.2 percent of the County population, 65 percent of the returned surveys were completed by men. The SRC compared the opinions of men and women and found that there were statistically significant gender-based differences on 76 percent of the variables in the questionnaire. As a result the SRC chose to weight the survey results as if the sample contained the same proportion of men (49.8%) and women (50.2%) as were counted in the 2010 Census. The percentages shown in the charts and tables in the text of this report reflect the values after gender weighting. As noted above, the percentages in Appendix C were not modified with the gender weightings. Gender weighting did not substantially alter the overall pattern of the results and resulted in a shift of one or two percentage points in the tabulation. As we summarize the various elements of the survey, we will point out those few instances where the differences between the opinions of men and women differ to a substantial degree.

In other categories there were relatively small differences between the sample and the Census/ACS data. There are fewer people under 45 years of age in this sample (24%) than the 2010 Census indicates should have been included (44%) and fewer renters (10%) than reported in the 2010 Census (26%). Our experience is that younger residents and renters in most jurisdictions are less likely to participate in surveys. The sample contained a higher proportion of respondents who have completed a post-secondary education program (47%) than was reported in the American Community Survey estimate (34%). The income distribution of the sample closely aligns with the percentage of Marathon County households with at least \$50,000 annual income, but contains more households with less than \$25,000 annual income and fewer households with \$25,000 to \$49,999 annual income. The employment pattern of respondents aligns closely with the ACS estimates. The geographic distribution of the sample matches the actual population distribution of Marathon County particularly well.

Most differences in the responses between demographic groups are relatively small and are a matter of degree. As such, they do not change the overall pattern of the results. As we analyze the data, we will identify when the differences between demographic groups are noteworthy.

Overview

The survey presented a list of 38 Marathon County programs and functions divided into topical categories: health, education, vulnerable populations, public safety, transportation, economic development, and community development for planned growth and recreation. Respondents were first asked to rate the current importance of each listed program or function using a scale of very important, somewhat important, not important, or don't know. Respondents were next asked to indicate their preferences with respect to the level of Marathon County spending by the year 2017 for each of the listed items: Response choices were: increase, not change, shrink, or don't know.

In order to aid in the analysis and interpretation of the data, the Survey Research Center assigned a numeric value to each of the response choices as shown in Table 2. Responses in the "don't know" category were excluded from the analysis.

Current Importance		Spending in 2017	
Response Choice	Value	Response Choice	Value
Very important	2	Increase	2
Somewhat important	1	Not change	1
Not important	0	Shrink	0
Don't know	Not included	Don't know	Not included

In the analysis to follow, we will compare programs by the paired values of current importance and preferred future spending levels. We will be particularly interested in paired values that are substantially larger than (1,1) indicating programs that are seen as very important and for which citizens would prefer spending levels to increase, and those significantly smaller than (1,1), indicating less important programs that residents would be willing to see spending levels fall.

Using the numeric coding described above, Table 3 and Chart 1 present the gender-weighted means for each of the 38 pairs of questions on the survey. Table 3 indicates the rank order of the gender-weighted means in descending order on the “importance” scale. Corresponding mean values on the spending scale are adjacent to the importance values.

With respect to importance, three topics stood out at the top with mean values above 1.6 – more employment opportunities, recruitment of more manufacturing businesses, and timely response to emergencies. Ranking fourth were programs to ensure that victims of domestic abuse have access to safe houses, followed closely by recruitment of industrial businesses in fifth place.

Table 3. Rank Order Weighted Means – Gender Balanced				
Item	Import. Mean	Import. Rank	Spend Mean	Spend Rank
Expand employment opportunities (Q29)	1.67	1	1.61	1
Recruit more manufacturing (Q30)	1.64	2	1.57	2
Timely response to emergencies (Q23)	1.61	3	1.35	5
Safe houses for victims of domestic abuse (Q13)	1.42	4	1.25	8
Recruit more industrial (e.g., gravel mining, power generation) (Q31)	1.42	5	1.38	3
County highway/road network (Q25)	1.40	6	1.27	7
K-12 Education for children with disabilities (Q6)	1.40	7	1.19	12
Incentives for business start-ups and entrepreneurs (Q33)	1.39	8	1.35	4
Law enforcement (Sheriff’s Office) (Q18)	1.35	9	1.13	17
Address existing housing issues for elderly and handicapped (Q17)	1.33	10	1.25	9
Public transportation for elderly and handicapped (Q11)	1.33	11	1.29	6
Natural disaster recovery (Q24)	1.30	12	1.14	16
Change business permitting process to attract more business (Q34)	1.30	13	1.19	13
Housing issues prevention (e.g., displacement of elderly) (Q16)	1.29	14	1.20	10
Address juvenile criminal behavior (Q21)	1.28	15	1.18	15
Increase intergovernmental collaboration (Q35)	1.27	16	1.18	14
North Central Technical College (Q7)	1.25	17	1.05	24
Limit spread of communicable diseases (Q5)	1.24	18	1.06	23
Domestic abuse prevention (Q12)	1.24	19	1.08	20
Provide information on health threats (Q3)	1.24	20	1.09	19
Mental health services (Q2)	1.21	21	1.12	18
Public libraries (Q9)	1.19	22	1.07	22
Recruit more retail/service (Q32)	1.19	23	1.19	11
Preserve forest land (Q37)	1.18	24	1.07	21
University of Wisconsin (Extension & UW-Marathon County) (Q8)	1.17	25	1.01	27
Programs to ensure adequate nutrition for residents (Q10)	1.14	26	1.05	25
Emergency prevention (fire codes, hazard. waste collection) (Q22)	1.11	27	0.95	31
Preserve agricultural land (Q36)	1.10	28	1.00	28
Inform residents how to get information with health concerns (Q4)	1.09	29	0.99	30
County jail (Q19)	1.05	30	0.89	34
Addiction prevention (Q14)	1.04	31	0.93	32
Public recreation facilities (Q38)	1.03	32	1.04	26
Addiction therapy/support (Q15)	1.02	33	0.93	33
Promote healthy lifestyles (e.g., nutrition education) (Q1)	1.02	34	0.99	29
Criminal rehabilitation (Q20)	0.92	35	0.86	35
Air transportation access (Q28)	0.80	36	0.83	36
Build/maintain bike/pedestrian routes – urban areas (Q26)	0.77	37	0.76	37
Build/maintain bike/pedestrian routes – rural areas (Q27)	0.66	38	0.69	38

The remaining priority programs in the top ten include the County's highway/road network, K-12 education of children with disabilities, incentives for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs, law enforcement (Sherriff's Office), and addressing existing housing issues for the elderly and handicapped. The SRC notes that economic development programs occupy four of the top eight ranks on the importance scale. The poor economic performance of the U.S. economy since 2008 may explain the dominance of County economic development programs.

At the other end of the importance scale, County residents said bike/pedestrian routes in either urban or rural areas had the lowest importance values among the items included in the questionnaire, with mean ratings well below 1.00. Other items with mean importance ratings below 1.00 include access to air transportation and criminal rehabilitation programs.

Table 3 also presents the mean values and rank of the future spending for each program and function (rightmost columns). A comparison of the values in the importance column and the values in the spending column indicates, probably not surprisingly, that functions and services that have high importance ratings also tend to rate higher on the spending preference scale.

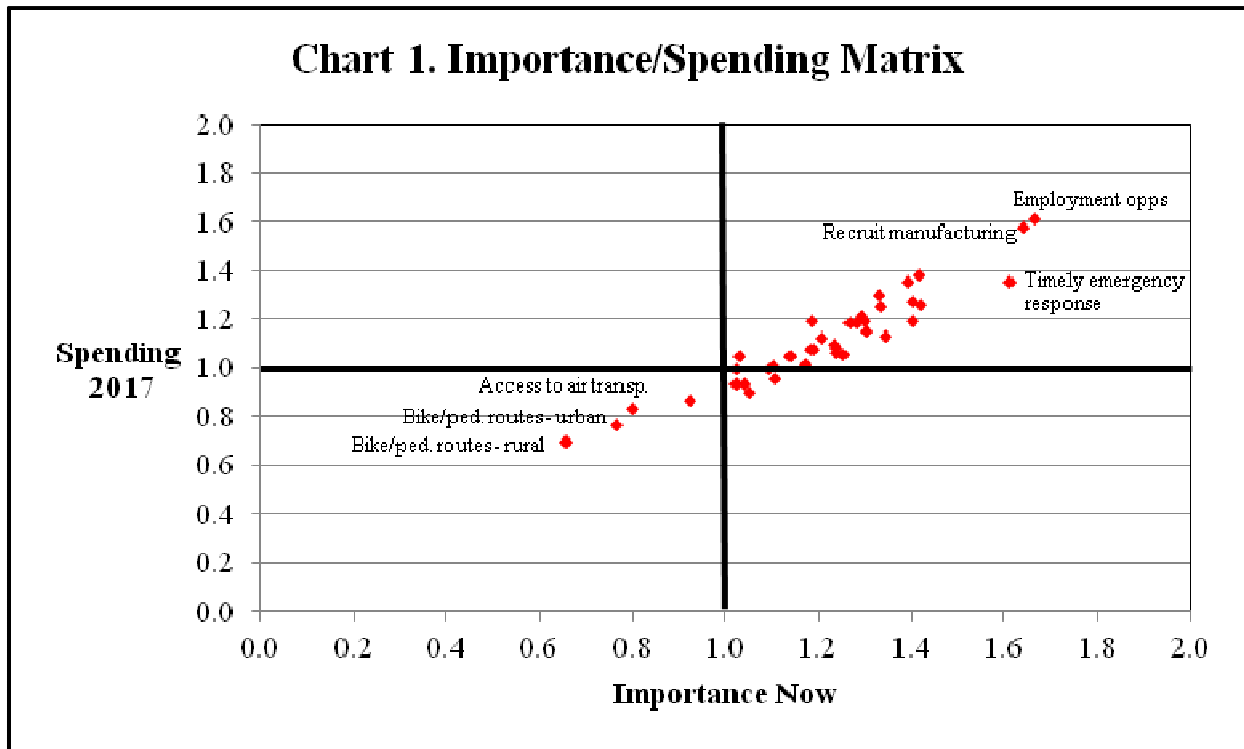
Economic development programs and functions ranked high on the spending scale, as they did on the importance scale. Programs to increase employment opportunities, to recruit more manufacturing businesses, to recruit more industrial businesses, and to offer incentives to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs had the highest ratings on the spending scale.

Timely responses to emergencies ranked fifth. Access to public transportation for the elderly and handicapped was ranked sixth on the spending scale, having been ranked 11th on the importance scale. The County highway/road network ranked seventh, followed by access to safe houses for domestic abuse victims.

Housing programs to prevent issues and to address existing problems for the elderly and handicapped ranked ninth and tenth in the spending ratings.

As was true on the current importance scale County residents said bike/pedestrian routes in either urban or rural areas were the lowest on the future spending scale, with mean ratings well below 1.00. Likewise, access to air transportation and criminal rehabilitation programs scored low on the spending scale.

Chart 1 is a graphical representation of the mean values for importance and for spending contained in Table 3. The pattern in Chart 1 shows the overall tendency for importance ratings and spending ratings to be positively associated as described above. Items of particular interest are those that are closest to the upper right corner (very important, increased spending) and those that are closest to the lower left corner (not important, shrink spending). These programs and functions are those that are near the top of Table 3 and near the bottom of Table 3. There are no outliers, as would be the case if a large percentage of respondents had rated a particular program very highly on the importance scale while favoring a reduction in the spending for that program.



The pattern on Chart 1 also indicates that there are many programs and functions grouped in the middle. Mean values for these programs and functions are slightly above 1.0 (somewhat important) on the importance scale and slightly above 1.0 (no change) on the spending scale. Table 3 and Chart 1 also show that mean values for spending tend to be slightly smaller than the corresponding values for importance.

On a percentage basis, the largest percentages of responses on the importance scale were in the somewhat important category for 26 of the 38 programs and functions. With respect to future spending, the largest percentages of the respondents said they want to see no change in 32 of the 38 functions and services included in the survey.

Although there is an overall preference to retain current levels of spending for most programs, there is a slight tendency among those respondents who favor a change in spending to prefer increases in future spending rather than spending cuts. In 17 of the 38 programs (45%), a greater percentage of respondents favoring a change said they supported an increase in spending rather than a decrease. In contrast, among 7 of the 38 programs (18%), a greater percentage of respondents favoring a change said they supported a decrease in spending rather than an increase. In the remaining 14 programs (37%), the percentage of respondents favoring a change in spending were about equally split between supporting increases and supporting decreases.

Overall, the majority of respondents said major Marathon County functions such as law enforcement, the County jail, the highway/road network, and nutrition programs were important or very important and also said they favor retaining current spending levels for these major programs and functions.

Those programs and functions that rated highest in importance and are most favored for increased spending (economic development) tend to be in budget categories that are relatively small portions of the overall County total. Similarly, those programs that have relatively low in both importance and future spending rankings (bicycle/pedestrian trails and airport transportation) comprise relatively small portions of current expenditures in the County's budget.

Details will be described in the remainder of the report.

Health

The first set of questions asked about five health programs. Currently these programs are a relatively small part of the County’s budget, comprising about 5 percent of the County’s expenditures.

The results are shown in Table 4. With respect to importance, the largest portion of respondents, ranging from 46 percent to 58 percent, chose the somewhat important category. In addition, between 23 percent and 39 percent of respondents said these health programs are very important. Relatively few respondents, ranging between 10 percent and 20 percent rated these health programs as not important. Using the ranking scale described in Table 2, programs that help limit the spread of communicable disease was ranked as the most important, followed by providing information on health threats, mental health services, information on how to get help with health-related concerns, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

With respect to future spending, majorities of respondents preferred the status quo. Between 50 percent and 63 percent said there should be no change in the budget for these health programs. Between 21 percent and 26 percent of respondents preferred spending increases. Smaller percentages of respondents, ranging from 14 percent to 25 percent, said that future spending on these health programs should shrink.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
1. Programs that promote healthy lifestyles (e.g. nutrition education)	20%	57%	23%	25%	50%	25%
2. Programs that ensure access to mental health services	10%	58%	31%	14%	60%	26%
3. Programs that provide information on health threats (e.g. food safety)	15%	46%	39%	16%	59%	25%
4. Programs that inform residents how to get help with health concerns	20%	51%	29%	22%	58%	21%
5. Programs to limit the spread of communicable disease	13%	49%	37%	16%	63%	21%

Education

The education category is a relatively small portion of the overall budget, comprising 8 percent of the County’s expenditures. As shown in Table 5, about half of respondents said each program or function is somewhat important, while an additional 34 percent to 46 percent chose the very important response. Responses in the not important category were relatively few, ranging from 5 percent to 17 percent. Respondents gave the highest overall importance ranking to K-12 education of children with disabilities (ranked 7th among all 38 items listed in the survey – Table 3), followed by North Central Technical College, public libraries, and the University of Wisconsin (County Extension and UW- Marathon County campus).

With respect to future spending, majorities of respondents, ranging from 56 percent to 61 percent, indicated that funding levels should remain unchanged. Among respondents who said there should be a change in future funding for these programs, a larger portion were likely to prefer an increase than a decrease.

Demographic Comparisons. More women and those with at least a Bachelor’s Degree said that public libraries were very important.

Table 5. Education – Marathon County Public Opinions						
	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
6. K-12 education of children with disabilities	5%	49%	46%	10%	60%	29%
7. North Central Technical College	14%	46%	40%	18%	59%	23%
8. University of Wisconsin (Marathon County campus and Extension)	17%	49%	34%	21%	56%	23%
9. Public libraries in Marathon County	16%	49%	35%	16%	61%	23%

Vulnerable Populations

Table 6 presents the results of the questions about programs for vulnerable populations. These programs are a significant portion of the County budget, comprising 23 percent of the County’s expenditures and ranking first among the budget categories included in this survey.

With one exception, the largest percentages of respondents chose the somewhat important category, ranging from 45 percent to 53 percent. The single exception was for programs to ensure access to safe houses for domestic abuse victims. Forty-eight percent of respondents said this program is very important, and 45 percent said it is somewhat important. Access to a safe house ranked first within this group of questions, and scored very high overall, ranking 4th among all 38 items on the survey. Programs to address existing housing issues for the elderly and disabled ranked second in importance among this group of questions, followed by transportation programs for the elderly and disabled, programs to prevent housing issues, domestic abuse prevention, nutrition programs, addiction prevention, and addiction therapy/support. Programs related to addiction rated particularly low compared to the other programs in this group and were ranked relatively low in importance among all 38 items in Table 3, ranking 31st and 33rd.

With respect to future spending, half or more of respondents, ranging from 48 percent to 62 percent, prefer funding levels to remain unchanged for all programs in this group. Four in ten respondents said they favor an increase in spending on public transportation for elderly and handicapped residents. Relatively few respondents said they prefer that funding be reduced for vulnerable population programs. More respondents said funding for addiction programs should be reduced than those who said funding should be increased.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
10. Programs to ensure County residents have adequate nutrition	16%	53%	30%	18%	59%	23%
11. Programs to ensure elderly and disabled County residents have adequate public transportation	10%	48%	43%	11%	48%	41%
12. Programs to <u>prevent</u> domestic abuse	15%	47%	39%	18%	56%	26%
13. Programs to ensure victims of domestic abuse have access to safe houses	6%	45%	48%	6%	62%	32%
14. Programs to <u>prevent</u> addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling)	25%	45%	29%	27%	53%	20%
15. Programs to address existing addiction issues (support programs, therapeutic services)	23%	52%	25%	24%	58%	18%
16. Programs to <u>prevent</u> housing issues (e.g. elderly being displaced)	11%	48%	41%	11%	58%	31%
17. Programs to address existing housing issues for the elderly and disabled	7%	52%	41%	7%	61%	32%

Demographic Comparisons. A greater proportion of renters said nutrition education programs, and programs to prevent housing issues are very important. Renters were also more likely to favor increased spending for nutrition education programs, domestic abuse programs, and programs to prevent housing issues.

Women were more likely to say that programs to ensure that elderly and disabled residents have adequate public transportation are very important. The percentage of respondents who favor increased spending for public transportation for elderly and disabled residents increases with the age of the respondent.

Respondents from households with annual incomes under \$50,000 gave higher importance ratings to programs to prevent housing issues and were also more likely to favor increased spending on such programs.

Public Safety

The fourth group of questions was on the topic of public safety, which comprises 13 percent of the County's expenditures and ranks third among the categories included in this survey.

The ratings of the seven items in this group are shown in Table 7, which indicates that the residents of Marathon County place the most importance on the timeliness of emergency response. Nearly two of three respondents said emergency response was very important, and among all 38 questions on the survey, it was ranked in third place. Law enforcement (Sheriff) ranked second, with 45 percent of respondents saying it is very important and 43 percent saying it is somewhat important. Among all 38 items on the survey, law enforcement ranked 9th. Programs for recovery from natural disasters ranked third, followed by addressing juvenile criminal behavior, emergency prevention through regulations such as fire codes, the County jail, and programs for the rehabilitation of criminals. There was substantial diversity of opinion among the responses in this group of questions. As noted, emergency response and law enforcement ranked high among all 38 items. On the other hand, rehabilitation of criminals was near the bottom of the overall rankings.

Majorities of respondents favored keeping future spending for all items in this group at the current levels. However, large minorities (39%) said spending should be increased for emergency response programs and disaster recovery programs. About a third of respondents favored increased spending for programs aimed at youth criminal behavior. In contrast, about a third of respondents said spending on criminal rehabilitation programs should be decreased.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
18. Law enforcement programs (e.g. sheriff's office)	11%	43%	46%	12%	64%	24%
19. County jail	20%	55%	25%	21%	69%	10%
20. Programs to rehabilitate criminals	27%	53%	20%	31%	51%	17%
21. Programs that address juvenile (youth) criminal behavior	9%	53%	38%	13%	57%	30%
22. Programs to prevent emergencies (e.g. fire codes, flood plain zoning, hazardous material disposal)	17%	55%	28%	20%	66%	15%
23. Programs to ensure timely response to emergencies	4%	30%	65%	5%	56%	39%
24. Programs for recovery/clean-up after natural disasters (e.g. floods, tornados)	9%	51%	40%	5%	56%	39%

Transportation

Transportation programs are a significant portion of the County’s budget, ranking second among the categories included in this survey and comprising 19 percent of County expenditures.

As shown in Table 8, Marathon County residents placed substantially greater importance on highways/roads than on bicycle/pedestrian routes and air transportation. Ninety-five percent of respondents said the County highway/road network is somewhat important (50%) or very important (45%), which ranked 6th among all items on the survey. Access to air transportation was rated as somewhat important by 43 percent of respondents and very important by 18 percent and ranked 36th overall.

The building and maintenance of urban and rural bicycle routes received comparatively low importance ratings and ranked at the bottom of the 38 programs and functions on the survey. While 56 percent of respondents said urban bike/pedestrian routes were somewhat important (35%) or very important (20%), a large minority (43%) said urban routes were not important. Bicycle/pedestrian routes in rural areas fared more poorly, with half of respondents saying they are not important. This was the only item on the entire survey for which at least half of respondents said was not important.

Majorities of respondents said future funding levels for the county highway/road network and access to air transportation should remain the same.

Consistent with the low importance ratings for urban and rural bike/pedestrian routes, respondents were more willing to shrink the budget for these two items than for any other item included in the questionnaire. Forty-two percent favored shrinking the budget for urban bike/pedestrian routes, and 46 percent favored reducing the budget for rural routes.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

Table 8. Transportation – Marathon County Public Opinions						
	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
25. County highway/road network	5%	50%	45%	7%	59%	34%
26. Building/Maintaining pedestrian & bike routes in <u>urban</u> areas (e.g. Wausau, Mosinee, Marshfield)	43%	36%	20%	42%	39%	19%
27. Building/Maintaining pedestrian & bike routes in <u>rural</u> areas (e.g. towns & villages)	50%	35%	16%	46%	38%	16%
28. Access to air transportation in County	38%	43%	18%	28%	61%	11%

Economic Development

Expenditures for economic development programs are a relatively small portion of the County’s budget, comprising 1 percent of the overall total.

Table 9 indicates the economic development section of the survey received the highest overall importance ratings among the topics included in the questionnaire. Reflecting the troublesome economic conditions at the time of the survey, a large majority (71%) of respondents said expanding employment opportunities is very important. Respondents more strongly favored recruiting manufacturing businesses (69% very important) compared to industrial businesses (54% very important) or retail/service (40% very important). Half of respondents said providing incentives to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs and changing the permitting process to attract more businesses are very important.

With respect to funding, respondents said they are willing to open their pocketbooks for economic development programs to a degree not found elsewhere among the 38 items included in the questionnaire. While majorities of respondents tended to favor no change in future spending for most items listed in the survey, majorities favored increased spending for expanding employment opportunities (65%) and recruitment of manufacturing businesses (63%). Half of respondents favored increased spending for industrial business recruiting, and nearly half (47%) supported increased spending for business development incentives.

Demographic Comparisons. There were no substantial differences among the demographic groups.

Table 9. Economic Development – Marathon County Public Opinions						
	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
29. Expanding employment opportunities in the County	4%	24%	71%	5%	30%	65%
30. Recruiting more manufacturing businesses to the County (e.g. paper manufacturing, pre-fabricated homes, etc.)	5%	26%	69%	5%	32%	63%
31. Recruiting more industrial businesses to the County (e.g. gravel mining, power generation)	13%	33%	54%	12%	38%	50%
32. Recruiting more retail/service businesses to the County (e.g. department stores, insurance companies, medical services, etc.)	21%	39%	40%	15%	50%	34%
33. Programs to provide incentives for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs (e.g. tax breaks, providing infrastructure like sewer and water, etc.)	12%	37%	51%	12%	41%	47%
34. Changing permitting process (e.g. zoning, environmental requirements) to attract more businesses to the County	19%	32%	49%	16%	49%	35%

Community Development for Planned Growth and Recreation

Expenditures in this category are a relatively small component of the County’s budget, comprising 1 percent of overall expenditures.

As shown in Table 10, intergovernmental collaboration programs had the highest overall importance rating in this group of programs and functions, receiving 41 percent in the very important category and 45 percent in the somewhat important category. Preservation of forest land ranked second, and had a greater percentage of responses in the very important category (42%) than in the somewhat important category (35%). Ratings for farmland preservation programs and public recreation facilities were somewhat lower.

In a pattern that has been consistent throughout most of the survey, the largest percentage of respondents, ranging from 48 percent to 57 percent, said they favored no change in the future spending levels among the four programs in this section.

Demographic Comparisons. Respondents who have completed a post-secondary education program were more likely to give higher importance ratings to intergovernmental collaboration programs and to favor increased spending for intergovernmental collaboration.

Respondents age 45 and older were more likely to favor reduced spending on public recreation facilities.

	Importance			Future Spending		
	Not Imp.	Some-what	Very Imp.	Shrink	No change	Increase
35. Programs to increase collaboration between County, Towns, Villages and Cities	14%	45%	41%	14%	53%	33%
36. Programs to limit conversion of ag. land to urban uses	25%	40%	35%	25%	49%	26%
37. Programs to limit conversion of forest land to urban uses	23%	35%	42%	22%	48%	29%
38. Programs for public recreation facilities (boat ramps, parks, trails)	22%	52%	26%	19%	57%	24%

Conclusions

The results of this survey indicate that economic development forms a cluster of strategically important programs and functions, both in terms of importance and future spending. These include programs to expand employment opportunities and the recruitment of manufacturing and industrial businesses. Incentives to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs ranked high in importance, but respondents were less willing to increase spending. These particular strategic directions among County residents are no doubt a reflection of the current economic conditions as the national, state, and local economies struggle to emerge from a deep economic recession.

These economic development programs are the only items for which substantial percentages of respondents wanted to increase spending. The largest portion of respondents prefers to retain spending at current levels for other programs and functions, even those that were rated comparatively high on the importance scale. Examples include timely response to emergencies, safe houses for domestic abuse victims, the County road/highway network, K-12 education for children with disabilities, and law enforcement.

At the same time, County residents identified relatively few programs and functions that they believe are not important and could be considered for reductions in spending over the next five years. The largest portion of respondents, between 43 percent and 50 percent, said routes for bicycle trails were not important and that spending on them should shrink. There were no programs that were rated as not important by a majority of respondents. Similarly, there were no programs for which a majority of respondents wanted to shrink the budget.

There are a substantial proportion of programs and functions that are viewed as at least somewhat important by County residents. At the same time, the largest portions of respondents prefer that spending on most programs remain unchanged in the next five years, and among those respondents who prefer a change, there is a slight tendency toward favoring increased spending. This poses a dilemma for Marathon County decision-makers as they consider strategic options in a difficult fiscal environment. The rankings in Table 3 provide a measure of public sentiment among the County's programs and functions, even if such sentiment is not clearly definitive in many cases.

Appendix A – Non-Response Bias Tests

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who don’t return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. For example, suppose most non-respondents gave low ratings to programs to prevent addiction, whereas most of those who returned their questionnaires gave high ratings to addiction prevention activities. In this case, non-response bias would exist, and the raw results would overrate public opinion about the importance of addiction prevention programs in Marathon County.

The standard way to test for non-response bias is to compare the responses of those who return the first mailing of a questionnaire to those who return the second mailing. Those who return the second questionnaire are, in effect, a sample of non-respondents (to the first mailing), and we assume that they are representative of that group. In this survey, 353 people responded to the first mailing, and 113 responded to the second mailing.

We found only nine variables with statistically significant differences between the mean responses of these two groups of respondents out of 76 tested. Table A1 indicates that even when statistical differences exist, the magnitude of this difference is very small and the interpretation of the results is not affected. **The Survey Research Center (SRC) concludes that there is no evidence that non-response bias is a concern for this sample.**

Table A1 – Statistically Significant Differences Between Responses of First and Second Mailings (raw data, includes “don’t know” responses)			
Variable	Statistical Significance	Mean First Mailing	Mean Second Mailing
2b.Mental health services	.002	2.11	2.40
3b.Information on health threats	.039	2.03	2.01
15a. Addiction therapy/support	.034	2.12	2.31
20b. Criminal rehabilitation	.035	2.33	2.52
21b. Address juvenile criminal behavior	.040	1.96	2.15
28a. Air transportation access	.036	2.36	2.27
36b. Preserve agricultural land	.008	2.23	2.51
37a. Limit conversion of forest land	.032	1.97	2.19
37b. Limit conversion of forest land	.038	2.17	2.39

Appendix B – Written responses, “Other” category

41. Employment Status: Other (10 Responses)

- Disabled (x5)
- Disabled Veteran
- Husband employed home maker
- SSDI
- Student
- Volunteer

42. Place of Residence: Other (3 Responses)

- Live with elderly parents
- Live with family
- Live with Mother