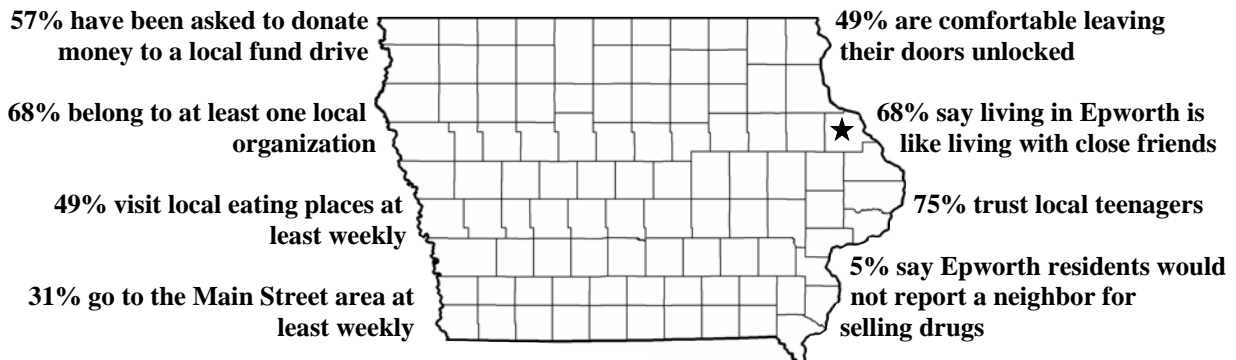


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN EPWORTH

In February 2004, the Rural Development Initiative Project at Iowa State University conducted a survey designed to look at changes in the social conditions in Iowa's rural towns. The survey was mailed to nearly 15,000 households in 99 towns, one of which was Epworth. Ten years ago, residents of these same 99 communities were asked to complete a similar survey. The households for both surveys were selected randomly from local telephone directories (150 households per community). In 1994, 119 Epworth residents responded to the survey, and 111 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Epworth residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN EPWORTH IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

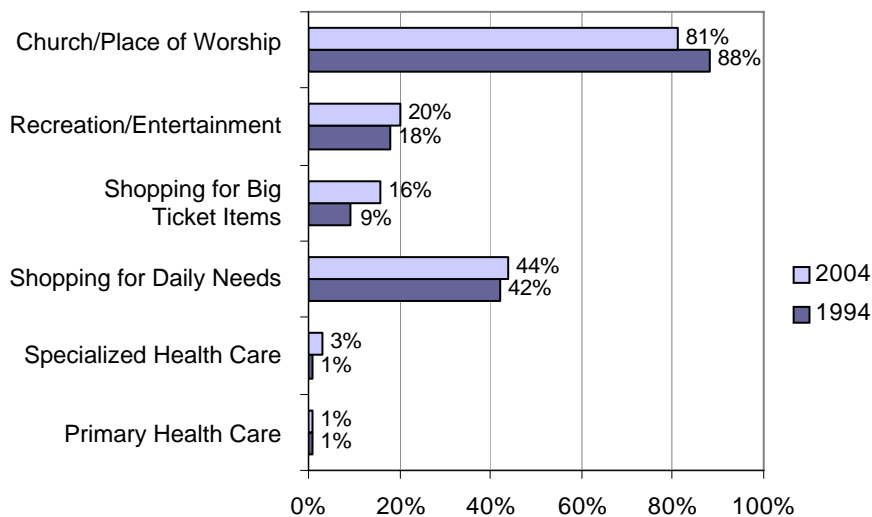


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. The results from the survey suggest that Epworth residents follow this pattern. Figure 1 shows that over 80 percent of the residents stay in town to attend church or their place of worship, but that they tend to leave for all of the other services. Slightly more than 40 percent shop for their daily needs in Epworth and about

20 percent stay in town for recreation/entertainment. Less than 20 percent shop for big ticket items in town and almost no residents receive their primary or specialized health care in the community. There were no significant changes in these patronage patterns over the last 10 years.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Epworth, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 11 percent should be considered a statistical "dead-heat." That is, they fall within the margin of error range, which occurs whenever samples are used to draw conclusions about a larger group. With the modest sample sizes used in this study, the differences must be relatively large before we can be confident that they are real. Throughout the report, differences that are equal to or exceed 11 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

## RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

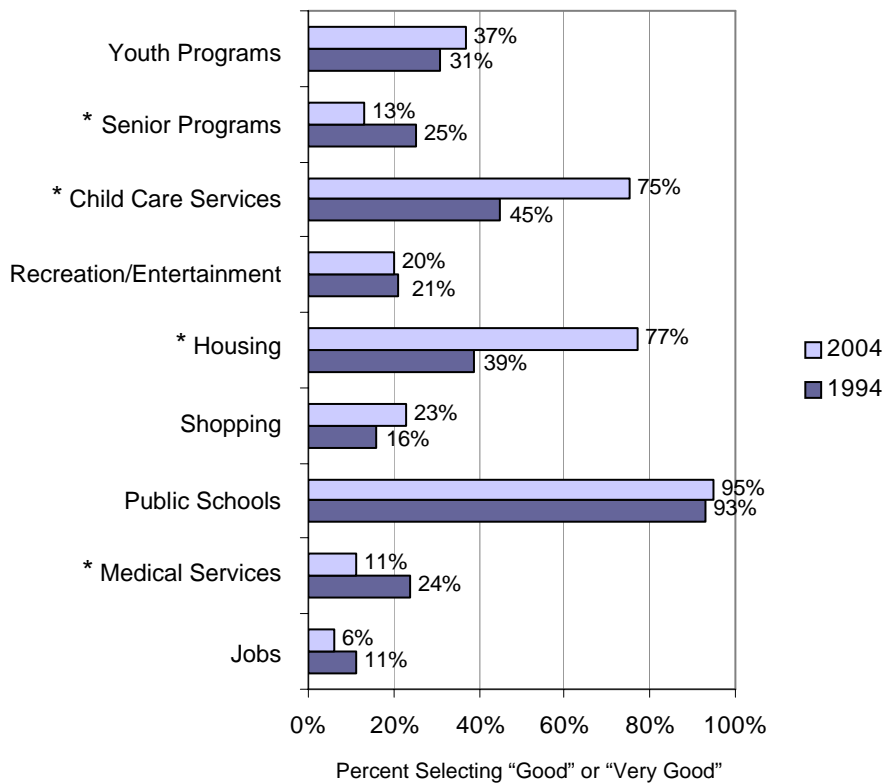


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

Nine local services were listed on the questionnaire along with instructions to rate each as “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” or “not available.” Figure 2 shows the percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. Over 90 percent of Epworth residents rated their schools positively in both years. The ratings for housing improved significantly, moving up from 39 percent in 1994 to 73 percent in 2004. Also, child care services received positive ratings from 30 percent more residents in 2004 compared to 1994. However, evaluations of senior programs and medical services declined significantly over the decade. The ratings for the other services were essentially the same in 2004 as they were in 1994.

## RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Residents were asked to provide ratings for seven services normally provided by local governments. Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents rating each service as “good” or “very good” for 2004 and 1994. Epworth citizens were generally pleased with the quality of their government services. All of the services received “good” and “very good” ratings from at least 65 percent, and over 95 percent of the residents rated emergency response and fire protection positively in 1994 and 2004. Residents’ perceptions of the quality of garbage collection services fell significantly from 1994 to 2004, but assessments of police protection increased significantly. There were no other significant changes in the ratings over the ten year period.

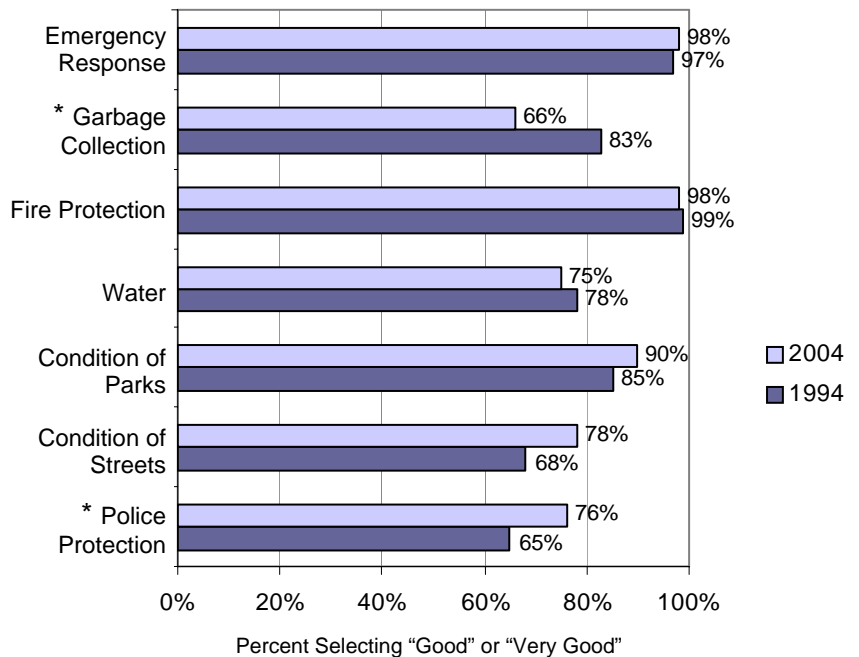
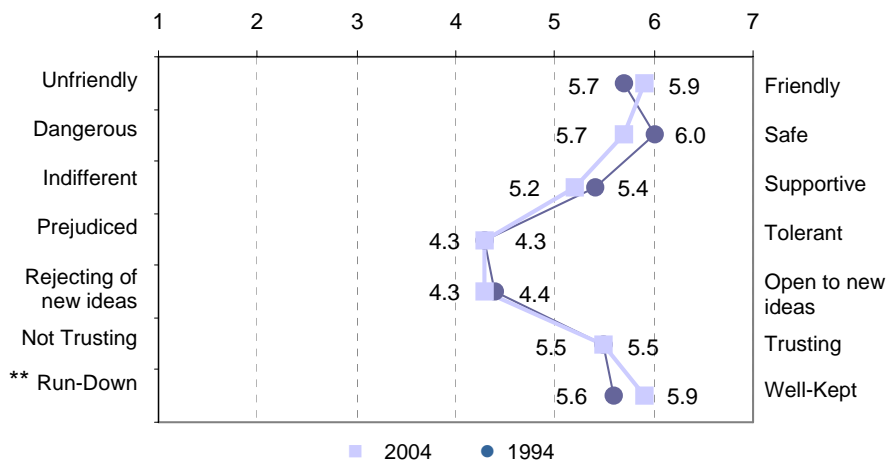


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## EPWORTH'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are regularly praised for having favorable social climates. A main goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's rural towns possess favorable social environments. Accordingly, a variety of questions were included on the survey asking residents to evaluate various social attributes of their communities.



**Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale**

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. Figure 4 shows how Epworth residents evaluated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In 1994 and again in 2004, residents assigned the highest ratings to the friendliness, safety, and appearance of Epworth. The lowest ratings in both years were for tolerance and openness to new ideas. Between 1994 and 2004, the rating for appearance increased significantly. The ratings for all other qualities did not change significantly over the decade.

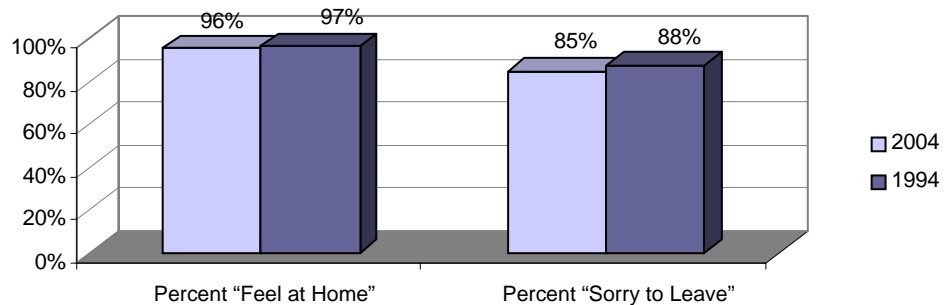
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only those items designated by double asterisks (\*\*) have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and can thus be considered to have changed since 1994.

### SOCIAL TIES

“Everybody knows everybody” is often cited as a feature of small towns. The extent to which people know and interact with each other influences commitment to the community and interest in its well-being. Therefore, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 61 percent of the residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Epworth, compared to 59 percent in 1994. Similarly, 51 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 43 percent in 1994. Thirty-one percent of the residents in 2004 and 30 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in town. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Epworth residents feel at home in their community? Figure 5 shows that almost all of the residents in both 1994 and 2004 felt at home in Epworth, and almost as many residents also said that they would be sorry to leave the community. These high levels of community attachment in Epworth have not changed significantly over the last ten years.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Epworth, 82 percent of the residents indicated that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In both 1994 and 2004, approximately 55 percent of the residents reported participating in a community improvement project during years prior to the surveys (see Figure 6). The percentage of residents who said they were “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities decreased significantly, from 56 percent in 1994 to 36 percent in 2004.

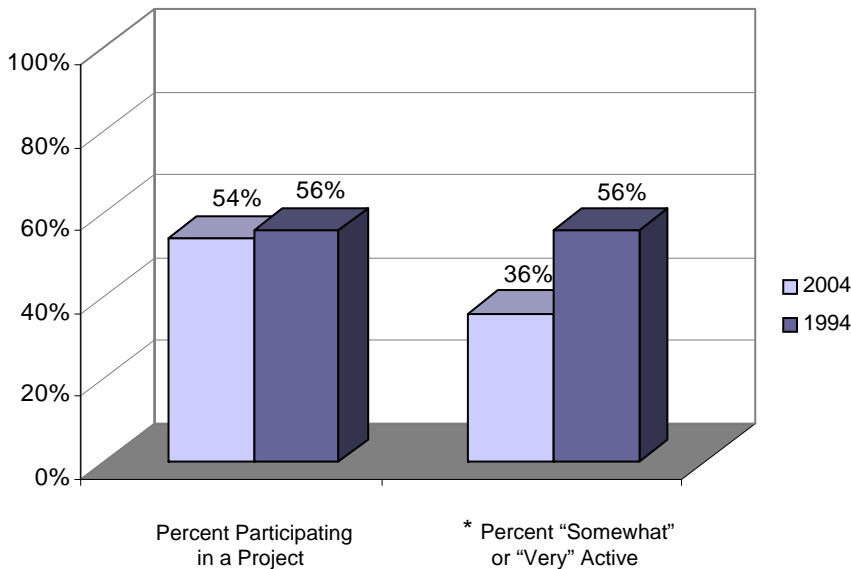


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When residents were asked to consider the factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top response in 2004 was that they lacked the time for involvement (65%). Other common responses were that they had no interest in participating (30%) and that they had not been asked to volunteer (28%).

## SUMMARY

A major goal of this project is to examine changes in the social conditions in rural Iowa over the past decade. As previously discussed, the differences between 2004 and 1994 shown in this report must be interpreted to account for the margin of error—that is, we cannot say with confidence that a change has occurred unless the difference is equal to or greater than 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Epworth over the past decade? Residents’ evaluations of the quality of police protection, housing, and child care services improved. However, senior programs, medical services, and garbage collection services received positive ratings from fewer residents in 2004. At the end of the decade, the majority of residents continue to approve of local government services.

The social environment in Epworth has changed somewhat over the decade. The ratings that residents gave their community on many qualities remained unchanged, but more residents felt that Epworth was well-kept in 2004 than in 1994. Levels of community attachment remained high over the ten year period. Significantly fewer residents, however, considered themselves to be active in the community in 2004 than in 1994. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that nobody had asked them to volunteer. This response suggests a way for increasing citizen engagement in community activities.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Epworth’s future. **We wish to thank the Epworth residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

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