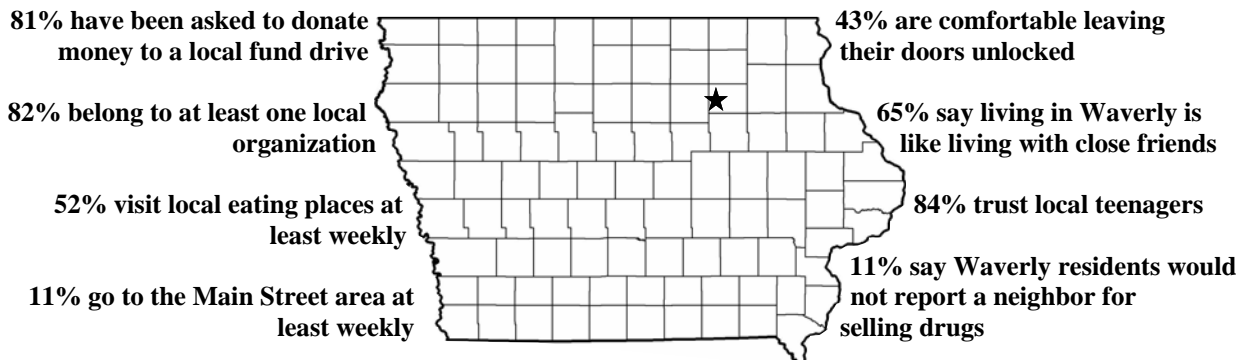


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN WAVERLY

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 Waverly. 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, 112 Waverly residents responded to the survey, and 106 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Waverly residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN WAVERLY IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

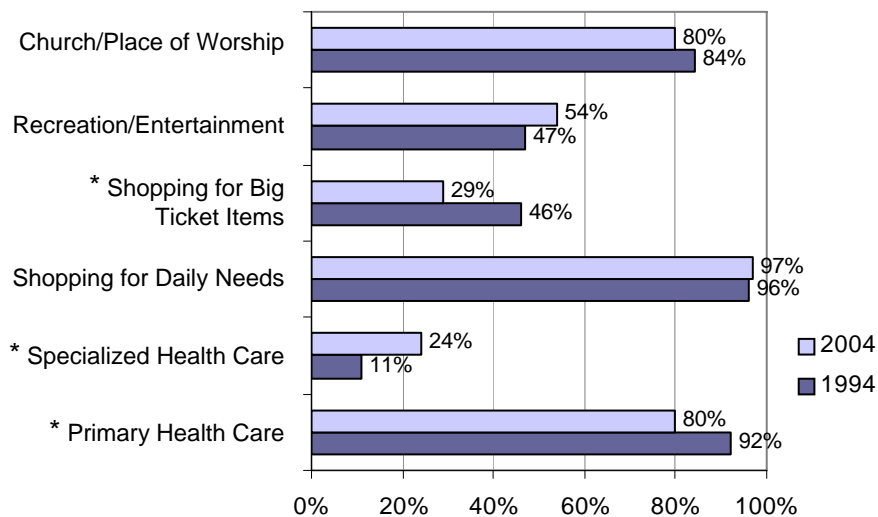


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Waverly residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Waverly. Nearly all residents reported shopping for their daily needs in town, but 29 percent stayed to shop for big ticket items in 2004, a significant decrease

from 46 percent in 1994. Similarly, while decreased significantly, a majority of residents in 2004 still indicated that they remain in Waverly to obtain primary health care. Only about one-quarter, a significant increase since 1994, stay for specialized health care services. Finally, a majority of residents reported attending church or place of worship in Waverly, while about half remained for recreation.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Waverly, 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

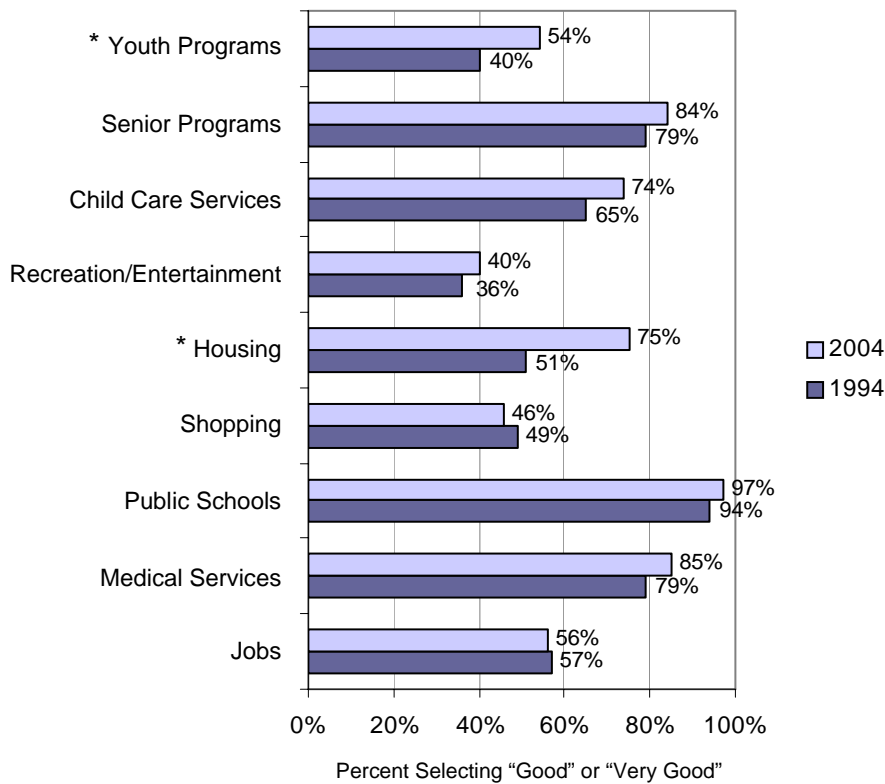


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Nearly all residents rated public schools favorably in both years, and a majority of residents did the same for medical services and senior programs in Waverly. Jobs and shopping received favorable ratings from about half of residents, and recreation/entertainment was rated positively by over one-third of residents. The percentage of residents assigning favorable ratings to housing increased significantly from 51 percent in 1994 to 75 percent in 2004. Youth programs also received a significantly greater percentage of positive ratings in 2004.

## RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Respondents 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. Overall, Waverly residents reported being satisfied with local government services. In both years, most residents rated emergency response and fire protection favorably, and a large majority also gave positive ratings to garbage collection, the condition of parks, and police protection services. Water received favorable ratings from just over three-fourths of residents in both 1994 and 2004, and the condition of streets were rated positively by over half. No significant changes were noted in the percentage of positive ratings given to these local services.

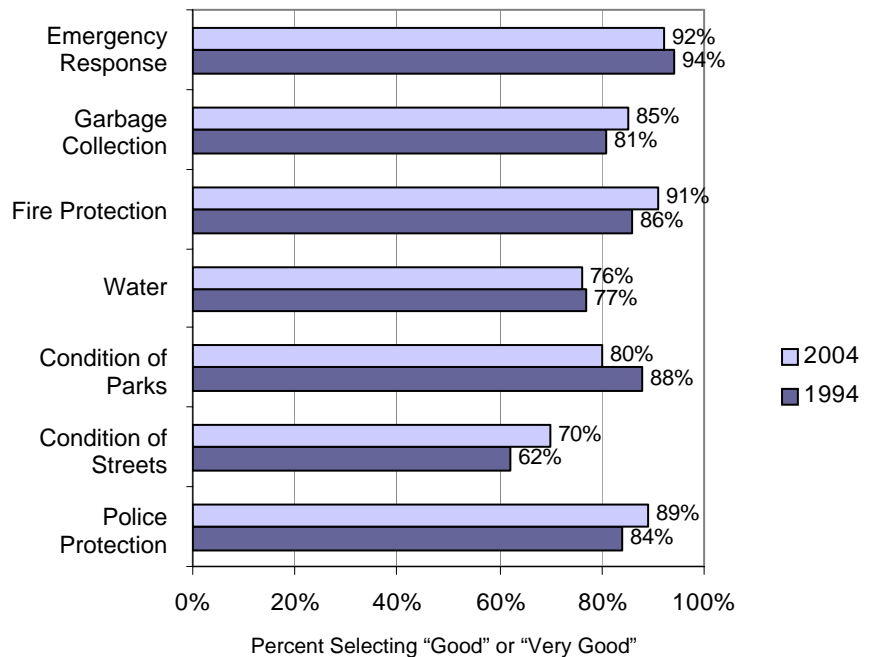
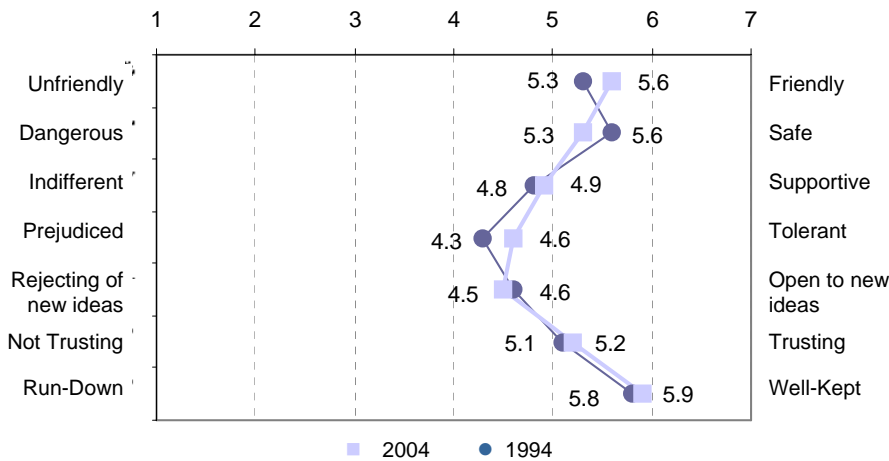


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## WAVERLY'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. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994 and again in 2004, residents assigned the highest ratings to the appearance of Waverly. In 1994, Waverly was also given high ratings for safety, and in 2004, residents gave high ratings to the friendliness of the town. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Waverly is tolerant and open to new ideas. There were no significant changes in any of these qualities over the past decade.

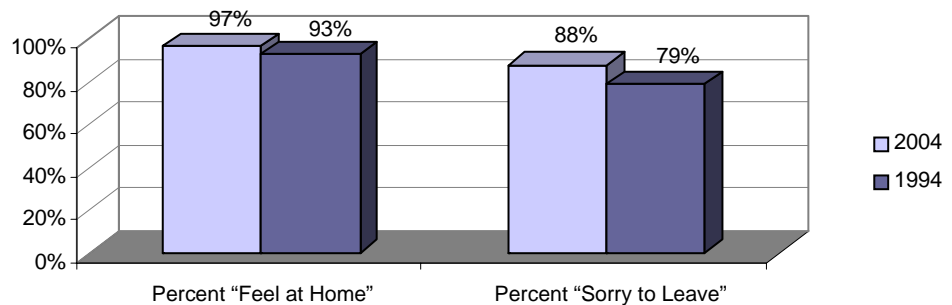
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 20 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Waverly, compared to 27 percent in 1994. In both years, 65 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town. As for relatives, 21 percent of residents in 2004 and 19 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Waverly. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Waverly residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, almost all residents in both years reported that they do feel at home in Waverly (see Figure 5). Furthermore, a majority indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from the community. These responses indicate that most Waverly residents feel attached to their community.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Waverly, 87 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, 54 percent of Waverly residents said they had participated in a community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, and 30 percent considered themselves to be “some-what” or “very” active in community activities or events (see Figure 6).

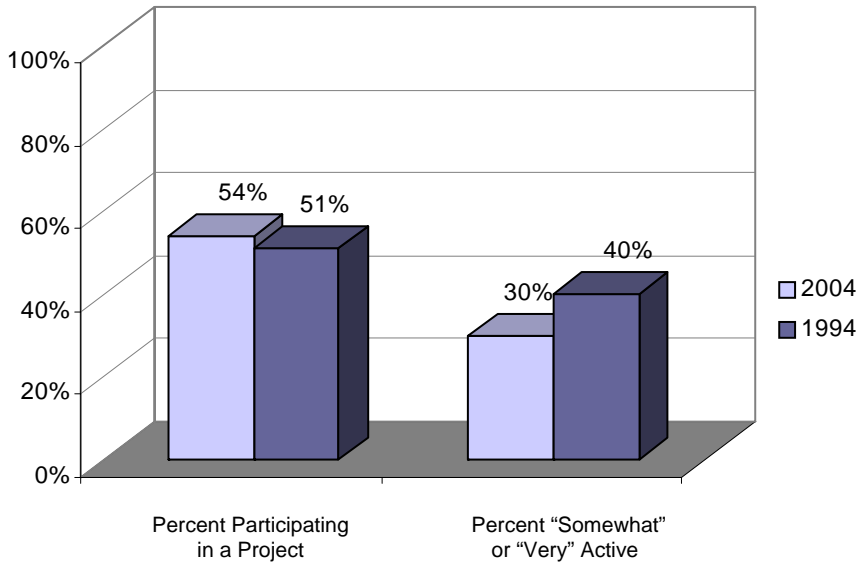


Figure 6: Community Involvement

This compares to 51 percent participating in a project in 1994, and 40 percent describing themselves as active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top three factors mentioned by Waverly residents were lack of time (67%), not being asked by others to volunteer (36%), and lack of interest in participating (26%).

## 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 Waverly over the past decade? Residents are obtaining specialized health care in Waverly more now than ten years ago, but are going outside of town more often for primary health care services and to shop for big ticket items. The evaluations of the quality of youth programs and housing in Waverly increased significantly. The evaluations of local government services remained high, and there were no significant changes in the ratings given to these services.

The social environment has changed very little. There were no significant changes in the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, or appearance of Waverly over the past ten years. Waverly residents remain attached to their community—that is, a majority feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. Participation rates have not changed since 1994, and a majority of residents say that the spirit of community participation is good or very good. It is interesting to note, however, that one of the top reasons people gave for not participating in community projects is that no one had asked them.

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

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