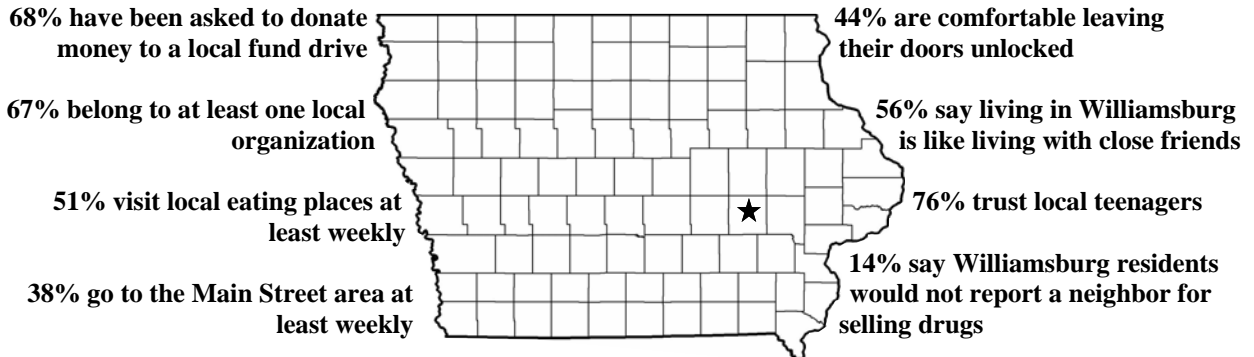


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN WILLIAMSBURG

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 Williamsburg. 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, 113 Williamsburg residents responded to the survey, and 102 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Williamsburg residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN WILLIAMSBURG IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

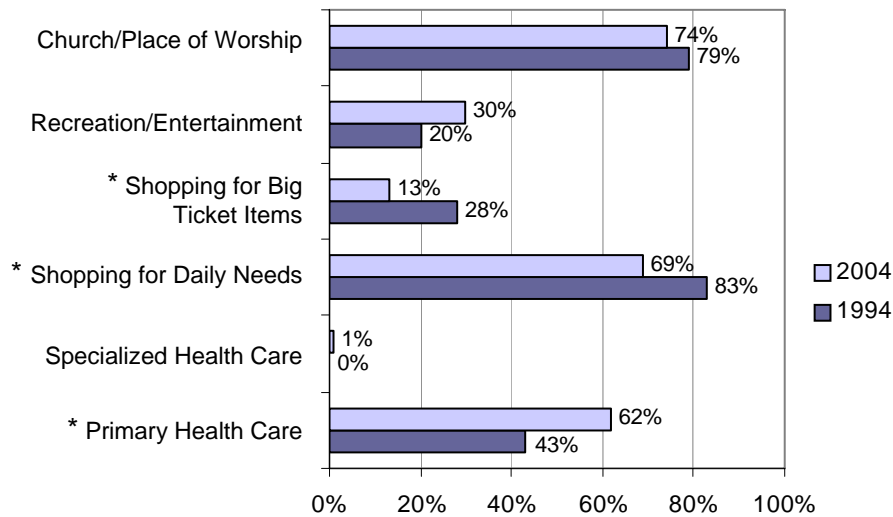


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Williamsburg residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Williamsburg. Even though almost 70 percent reported shopping for daily needs in town in 2004, this was a drop from 83 percent in 1994. A similar decline occurred for shopping for big ticket items in town. Almost no one utilized local specialized health care services and few patronized local recreation services. However, almost two thirds reported utilizing local primary health care, an increase from 43 percent in 1994. In both periods, about three-fourths of residents reported attending a local church or place of worship.

cent in 1994. A similar decline occurred for shopping for big ticket items in town. Almost no one utilized local specialized health care services and few patronized local recreation services. However, almost two thirds reported utilizing local primary health care, an increase from 43 percent in 1994. In both periods, about three-fourths of residents reported attending a local church or place of worship.

A Note on Interpretation: For Williamsburg, 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

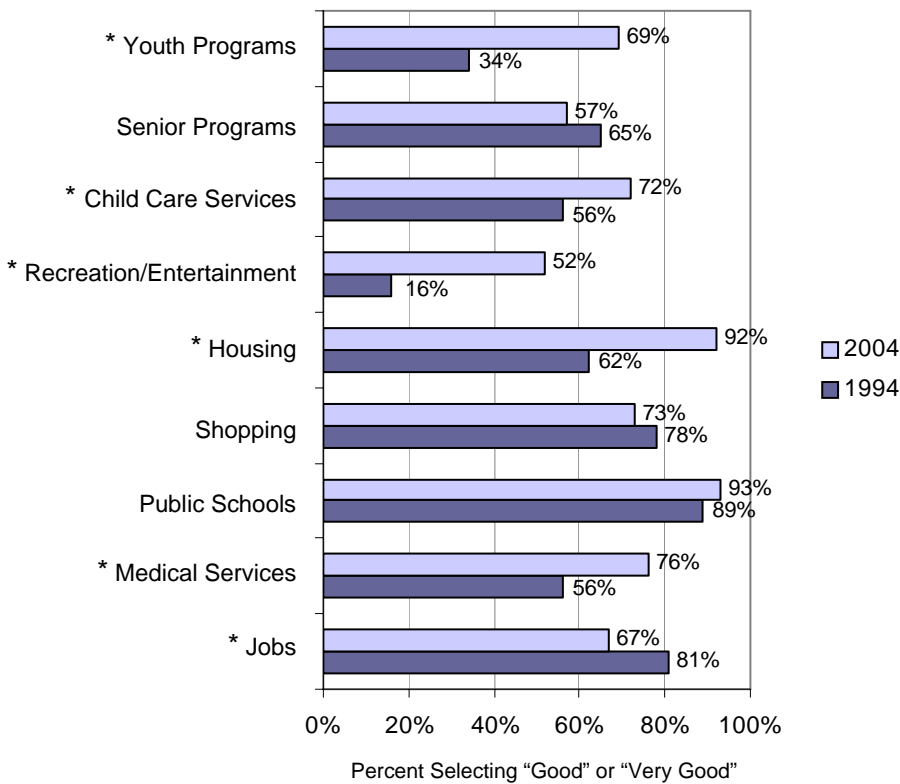


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. In both periods, about nine out of ten residents rated public schools favorably, three-fourths gave positive ratings to shopping, and slightly more than half evaluated senior programs positively. The percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to jobs in Williamsburg decreased significantly from 1994 to 2004. However, youth programs, child care services, recreation/entertainment, housing, and medical services received significantly more favorable ratings in 2004 compared to 1994.

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, Williamsburg residents reported being satisfied with their government services. Nearly all residents rated fire protection and emergency response services favorably, and a majority gave positive ratings to garbage collection and police protection. While a majority of residents also rated the condition of parks and water positively, the percentage of positive ratings decreased for these services in 2004. Compared to 1994, residents gave significantly more positive ratings to the condition of streets in the town.

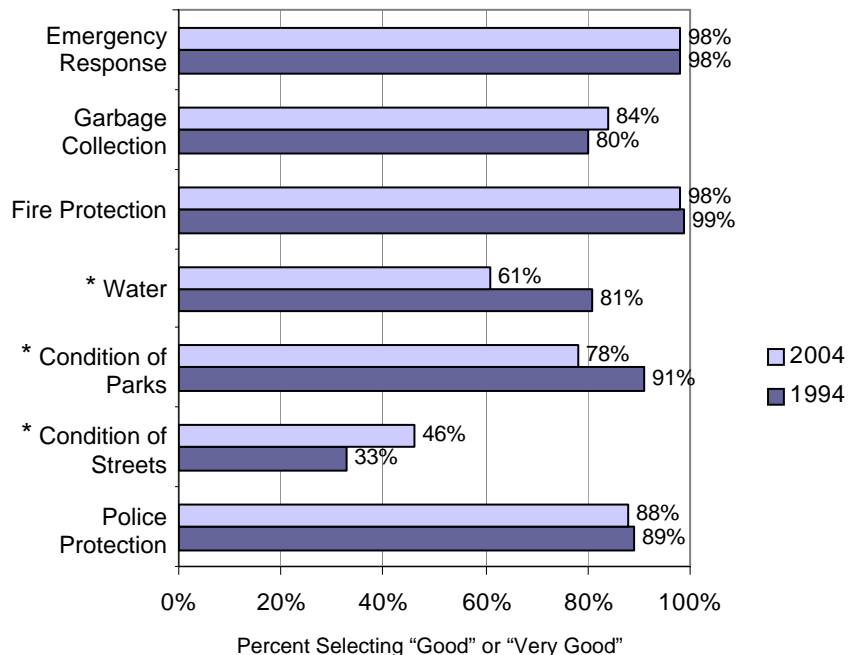


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

WILLIAMSBURG'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.

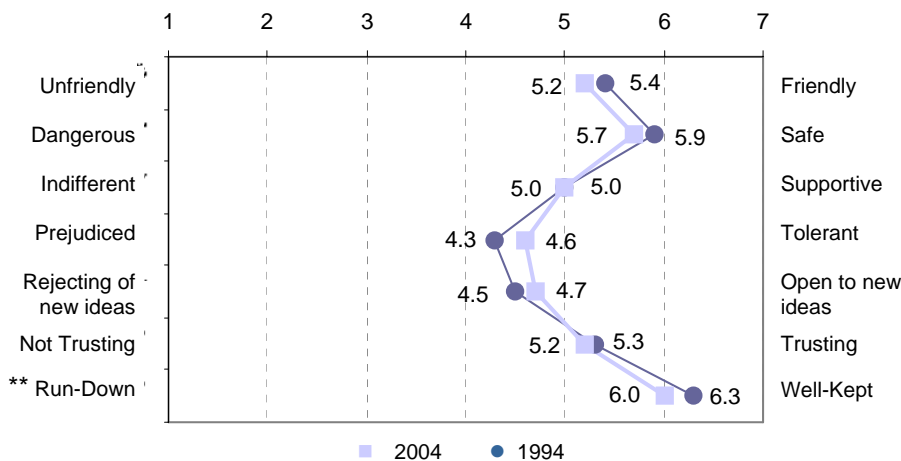


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 and safety of Williamsburg. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which the town is tolerant and open to new ideas. One significant change over the past decade is that residents viewed Williamsburg as less well-kept in 2004 compared to 1994. No other significant changes were noted in resident ratings of these qualities.

** 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, 33 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Williamsburg, compared to 42 percent in 1994. Similarly, 51 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Williamsburg, compared to 58 percent in 1994. Twenty-one percent of residents in 2004 and 29 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Williamsburg. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Williamsburg 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 Williamsburg (see Figure 5). Furthermore, a large majority indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from the town. These responses indicate that most residents feel attached to their community.

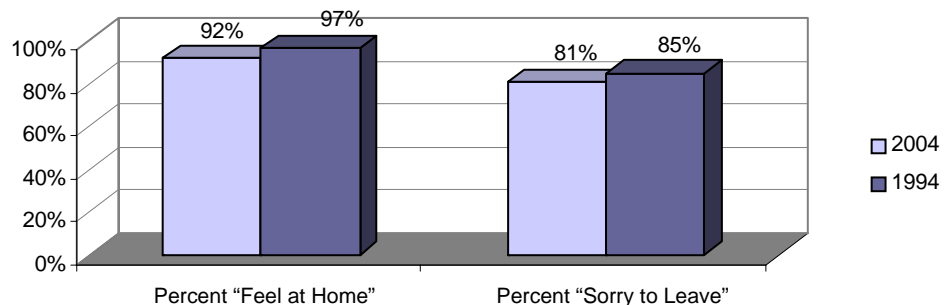


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Williamsburg, 92 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Also, 59 percent in 2004 reported participating in a community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, a significant increase from 42 percent participating in 1994 (see Figure 6). In both years, 32 percent of residents described themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events.

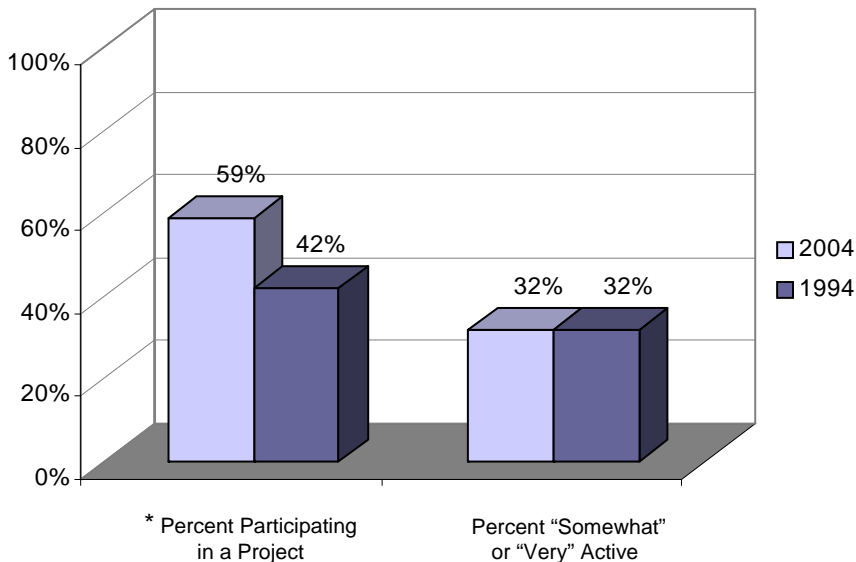


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When asked to consider a variety of factors that served to limit their involvement in the community, the top three factors mentioned by Williamsburg residents were lack of time (68%), not being asked by others to volunteer (48%), and not knowing how to become involved (31%).

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 Williamsburg over the past decade? More residents reported receiving primary health care in town, but fewer residents are shopping in Williamsburg compared to ten years ago. The evaluations of the quality of jobs decreased, while positive ratings for youth programs, child care services, recreation and entertainment, housing, and medical services increased. The evaluations of the quality of local government services have remained high. Although ratings for water services and the condition of the parks in Williamsburg declined, ratings increased for the condition of the streets.

The social environment has changed very little. Residents still describe Williamsburg as a safe and well-kept place, but view it as less well-kept than ten years ago. Williamsburg residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave. A majority of residents reported that the spirit of community participation is strong and the percent of residents participating in a community project increased significantly since 1994. It is interesting that two of the top reasons given for not participating were not knowing how to become involved and not being asked.

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

RDI

Prepared by: Laura Forster, Kerry Agnitsch, Terry Besser, Jean Friestad, Tom Rice, Vern Ryan, and Nick Recker, Department of Sociology, Iowa State University. For further information, contact Kerry Agnitsch, 515-294-4095, kagnitsc@iastate.edu or Terry Besser, 515-294-6508, tbesser@iastate.edu.

RDI-222 — This report was prepared through the **Rural Development Initiative** Project, Iowa State University and funded by the National Research Initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 2003-35401-13828.