



# Regional Report

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## Cooperating in a Conflicted Region *Blurred Vision for Southeastern Wisconsin*

What kind of a region do **you** want to live in? What does **your** ideal community look like? What's **your** vision for southeastern Wisconsin? What are **you** willing to do to make that vision happen?

These questions were the basis for in-depth interviews with 600 citizens of the seven counties in southeastern Wisconsin. What emerged is a collective vision that focuses on unity, commonality and consensus in a region usually portrayed as deeply divided. It describes what most citizens want for themselves and their families – whether they live in Milwaukee or Pewaukee, Oconomowoc Lake or Lake Geneva, Kewaskum or Kenosha. It also says what people *don't* want. For the most part, they don't want to be like Boston, Paris, Las Vegas, Toronto – or any other region.

### Key findings

- Southeastern Wisconsin has a **weak regional identity**. Yet residents have great pride in the area and would recommend it to newcomers.
- **Quality of life** is seen as the region's strongest asset. The state of the economy and quality of government are considered less strong.
- There is no consensus on the "ideal" region. Asked to name their ideal city, citizens cited 270 places, **mostly small cities** across the US.
- Among 33 community attributes, the most highly ranked are "**safe**," "**good place to raise children**," "**clean**," and "**healthy environment**."
- Among 30 individual priorities, the highest ranked are **quality of life**, **schools and universities**, **personal security**, and **healthy environment**.
- Of 27 regional priorities, the highest ranked are **skilled workforce**, **natural resource preservation**, **attracting entrepreneurs**, and **environment**.
- There is a high level of **trust in local governments**, but also strong interest in **regional collaboration**.
- Citizens want governments to pursue **regional solutions**, and most favor **regional authorities** (not new taxes) for transportation, water, and the arts.

# One Region

## Elements of a Collective Vision for Southeastern Wisconsin

From our survey findings, these powerful themes emerged:

**CONSENSUS.** Despite our differences, we have a lot in common. The region and its media spend considerable energy on differences of opinion about business development, education reform, and tax policy. Those debates obscure the fact that citizens from all demographic groups across the region want the same things for their families and their communities.

**COOPERATION.** Citizens demand collaboration, not revolution. Generally, people trust and respect local government and, therefore, don't want radical change. But they are disappointed by government's outcomes and are especially eager to see local government cooperate to make this a better – and less contentious – region for its residents.

**REGIONALISM.** Residents are keenly aware that many public issues are regional in nature and must be solved regionally. Examples are support for the arts and culture, transportation, and water resource management. Citizens want regional entities to oversee the solutions to these larger regional problems, but they don't want all-encompassing regional government or taxing authorities.

**REALITY.** To the outside world, we need to market what the region IS -- not what it's not. Citizens of southeastern Wisconsin generally do not want their community to be like Paris, the Silicon Valley, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Chicago, or any other place. For the most part, people like the region the way it is – although they want to tweak it somewhat.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION.** Regional competition may be healthy, but it's time to end the urban-rural/city-suburban/red-blue conflict. Citizens do not identify strongly with the region; they live locally, at the neighborhood and village levels. But citizens recognize that their futures are tied to the region, and therefore they want both their municipality and the region to thrive. People understand we're in the same boat.

**COMMUNITY.** Although politics and controversy capture much attention, citizens are focused more on safety, children, and the natural environment.

Overall, residents of southeastern Wisconsin want to live in a family-focused region. They want local governments to work with other local governments to solve important regional problems. Citizens' values are conservative in a classic sense, favoring change at a measured pace. They want to live in a safe place that provides a good quality of life. Most of all, they value children and the natural environment. Citizens consider regional cooperation extremely important – and recognize regional thinking as a critical component in southeastern Wisconsin's competitiveness in the global marketplace. But a strong economy must co-exist with a healthy, safe environment and child-friendly communities. In short, this survey points to a vision for southeastern Wisconsin.

**That vision looks like a prosperous, integrated, and cooperative collection of community-centered, environmentally healthy, and family-friendly neighborhoods and villages.**

# One Future

## Overview

Southeastern Wisconsin has 254 governments, but it is one region with one future. And it is a region in search of a vision. There has been a history of successful cooperation among some municipalities and counties that serves as a model of collaboration on issues, such as consolidated services, shared taxes, school transfers, and regional planning. However, economic development in southeastern Wisconsin has been characterized for several decades by isolated, fragmented decisions that can be counterproductive to the region's economic interests and quality of life.

Public policy within the region tends to be made in compartments, as if decisions about zoning, transportation, education, public safety, housing policy, and job training were independent of one another. Some policymakers believe an integrated, holistic approach to policy, backed by strong leadership, might ultimately strengthen the region's economic competitiveness.

For our region to compete in the global economy -- for us to think and act regionally and strategically -- policymakers need a clear understanding not only of our differences but also of what our citizens have in common. If the region has a competitive future, its disparate parts may want to work together to incorporate land use, housing, education, economic development, transportation, tax policy and other policy issues that typically are decided independent of one another. But first, the region needs a shared vision of priorities.

To identify elements of a regional vision that resonate among citizens across the ideological spectrum, we listened to citizens: average people who work, raise families and pay taxes in rural, suburban and urban neighborhoods -- people of all ages, cultural backgrounds and walks of life. Talking with citizens enabled us to establish common themes in their desires for the region. Understanding what they said may lead to a vision of regional priorities and actions that are likely to gain public acceptance.

For this project, we conducted a survey of 600 adults in southeastern Wisconsin (Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington and Waukesha counties). Participants were selected at random and interviewed by telephone in July and August 2005. For a survey of this size, the sampling margin of

error is four percentage points. The error margin is larger for subgroups (**Table 1**). Percentages do not always add to 100% because respondents who expressed no opinion are excluded from the tables.

**TABLE 1: Survey demographics**

Survey Participants	600
Kenosha	7%
Milwaukee	47%
Ozaukee	3%
Racine	10%
Walworth	5%
Washington	9%
Waukesha	18%
Male	45%
Female	55%
Homeowner	75%
Renter	25%
Liberal	19%
Moderate	37%
Conservative	41%
Republican	32%
Democrat	30%
Independent	32%
No College	30%
Some College	32%
College Graduate	21%
Graduate Degree	14%
Age 18-29	12%
30s	18%
40s	22%
50s	24%
60s	11%
70 or older	13%
<\$25,000 hh income	15%
\$25,000-\$35,000	12%
\$35,000-\$45,000	12%
\$45,000-\$55,000	12%
\$55,000-\$65,000	9%
\$65,000-\$75,000	9%
\$75,000-\$85,000	6%
\$85,000-\$100,000	6%
More than \$100,000	9%

# One Region

## Regional Identity

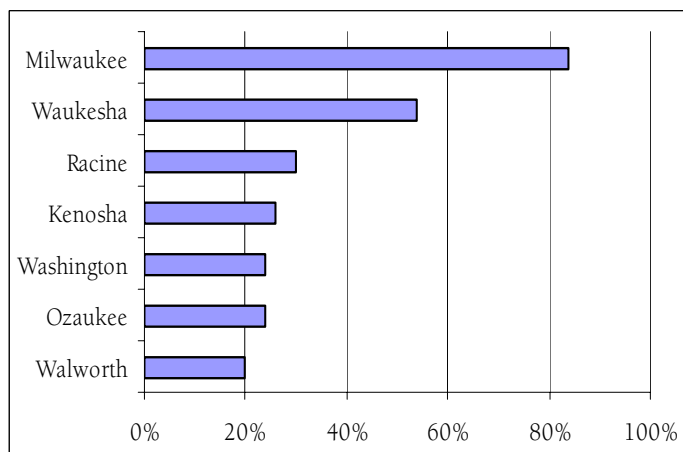
Southeastern Wisconsin citizens generally do not think of themselves in a regional context. This conclusion comes from responses to two questions.

For the first, those surveyed were asked whether each of the seven counties would be included if they were speaking to someone from Boston or Los Angeles about **southeastern Wisconsin**. A clear majority considered only Milwaukee County to be part of the region (**Chart 1**), and about half also included Waukesha County. Most respondents did not include Racine, Kenosha, Ozaukee, Washington, or Walworth counties. Interestingly, most of those surveyed who live in Washington and Ozaukee counties regard their own counties as part of the region, but do not include Racine or Kenosha county; similarly, most Racine and Kenosha residents said they were part of the region, but they excluded Washington or Ozaukee counties.

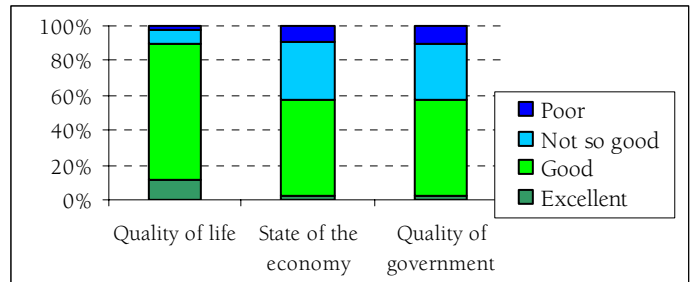
For the second hypothetical instance, citizens were asked to imagine they were traveling in Florida and asked by a stranger where they were from. In response, most people did not identify themselves with the Milwaukee area or in any other regional context. On the contrary, the majority (61%) volunteered the response: "Wisconsin." Just 26% said, "Milwaukee." Even Milwaukee County residents were just as likely to identify themselves as Wisconsinites as Milwaukeeans.

As it stands, southeastern Wisconsin has a weak collective identity.

**CHART 1: Percent of SE Wisconsin citizens who perceive each county to be part of the region**



**CHART 2: Perceptions about SE Wisconsin**

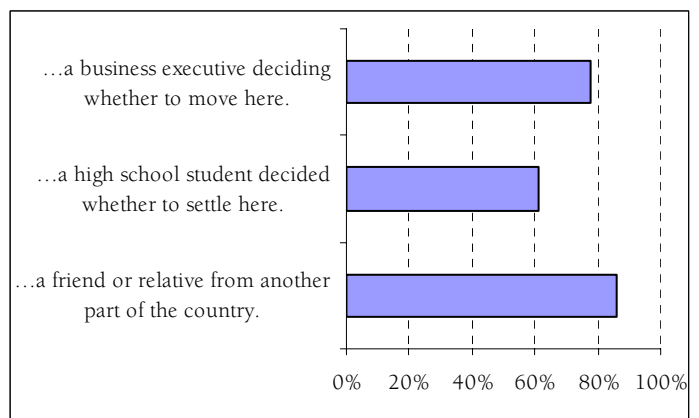


## Regional Strengths and Weaknesses

The region's quality of life is perceived as a powerful asset - greater than its economy or government. The vast majority (88%) of southeastern Wisconsin's residents perceive that their region has a good quality of life. However, a much smaller majority feels the same way about the state of the economy or the quality of government, with about 40% rating them poor or not so good. Also, citizens are nearly evenly divided on whether the region is moving ahead, staying the same, or falling behind. And more people (31%) believe that race relations in our region are getting worse than believe they are improving (16%).

At the same time, the survey found considerable pride in the region. This finding emerged from responses to three questions aimed at determining whether citizens would recommend their region as a good place to a friend, relative, student, or business executive. In response, the vast majority said they would recommend the area to a friend, relative, or business executive. A smaller majority said they would recommend that a high school student should stay rather than move elsewhere after completing school.

**CHART 3: Percent recommending SE Wisconsin to...**



# One Future

## Milwaukee's Place in the Region

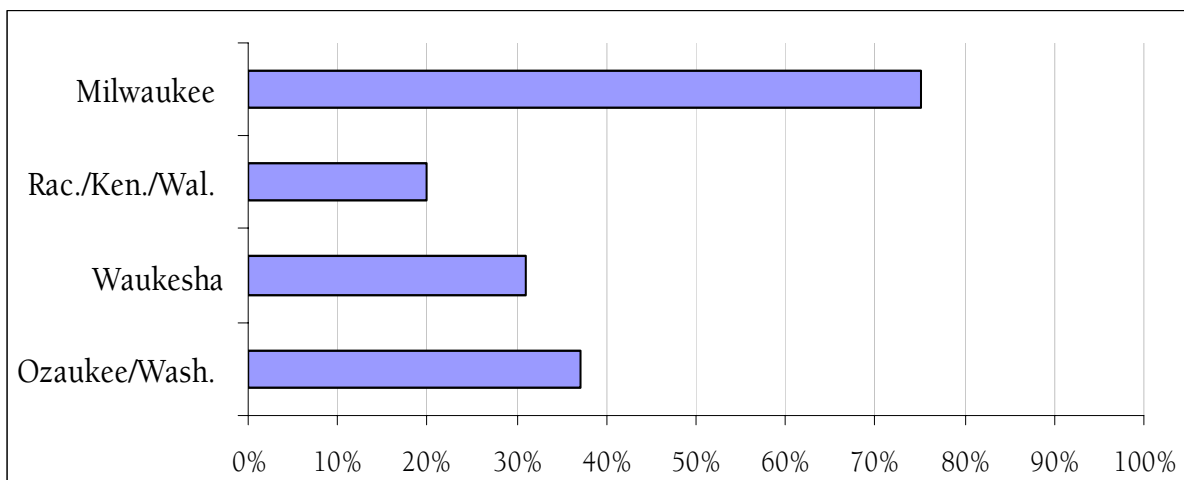
The survey found that Milwaukee has an image problem that presents a significant challenge to regional collaboration. This finding emerged from a series of questions in which survey respondents were divided into three groups. For one group, the term “Milwaukee” was used in questions; for the second group, the term “Milwaukee metropolitan area” was used, and for the third group, the term “southeastern Wisconsin” was used. For example, one third of those surveyed were asked: “If a friend or relative from another part of the country were considering moving to Milwaukee, would you recommend Milwaukee as a good place to live, play and work?” For others surveyed, the question was worded this way: “If a friend or relative from another part of the country were considering moving to southeastern Wisconsin, would you recommend southeastern Wisconsin as a good place to live, play, and work?”

A narrow majority (59%) said they would recommend Milwaukee, whereas 75% said they would recommend the “Milwaukee metropolitan area,” and 86% said they would recommend southeastern Wisconsin. Similarly, a minority (45%) would recommend Milwaukee as a good place for a student to settle, whereas 61% would recommend southeastern Wisconsin and

57% would recommend the metropolitan area. Use of the word “Milwaukee” had somewhat less of an impact when respondents were asked whether business executives should move to the area.

The challenge of incorporating Milwaukee into regional thinking also is evident in responses to questions about support for the region’s cultural amenities in Milwaukee County. Overall, citizens of the seven-county region are evenly divided on whether the entire region should contribute taxes to facilities in Milwaukee, such as the zoo, Mitchell Park Domes, and Milwaukee Public Museum. However, as might be expected, there is a stark difference of opinion depending on where citizens live. Three of every four Milwaukee County residents believe other counties should contribute, whereas just one of four citizens outside the county agrees.

**CHART 4:** Percent who agree their county should contribute taxes to facilities in Milwaukee, such as the zoo, Mitchell Park Domes, and Milwaukee Public Museum



# One Region

## Ideal Region

One way to decide what our region should become is to ask citizens what would be ideal. We asked the following question: “When you think of your ideal city in which to live, work, and play, what city comes to mind?” After respondents gave their answers, they were asked a simple follow-up question: “Why?”

No cities or regions emerged as consensus choices. On the contrary, citizens mentioned about 270 different places.

Most of the places people named as their “ideal” are not major urban areas like Milwaukee, Chicago, or San Francisco. On the contrary, they tend to be small cities off the beaten track, and in any state in the US.

Citizens of our region were equally divided on whether the “ideal” city is situated inside or outside Wisconsin. About one-third of all respondents chose a place within southeastern Wisconsin as their “ideal” city. In many cases, of course, it was the place where they live.

Of the total surveyed, 13% named Milwaukee, but many other cities and villages in the region also were mentioned, including Racine, Waukesha, Elkhorn, Greenfield, Delavan, Union Grove, and many others. About one-sixth of those surveyed selected a Wisconsin place outside the region as their ideal. Among the answers were Madison, Platteville, Eau Claire, Peshigo, Hurley, and Park Falls.

Half of the respondents named a place outside Wisconsin as the ideal, but there were virtually no mentions of cultural centers like Paris, Rome, New York, or London. In fact, just five respondents named a foreign city – two cities in Australia and one each in the Bahamas, Israel, and Canada. The “ideal” cities tended to be small and rarely near large urban centers. Some examples of cities cited by southeastern Wisconsinites as “ideal:”

- Lead, SD
- Coeur D’Alene and Pocatello, ID
- Canon City and Montrose, CO
- Wilmette and Peoria, IL
- Helena and Missoula, MT
- Manhattan, KY
- Tyler, TX

- Juneau and Anchorage, AK
- Knoxville and Memphis, TN
- Bettendorf, IA
- Rochester, NY
- Jerome, AZ
- Springfield, MO
- Marietta, GA
- Anacortes, WA
- Coalville, UT

The final finding emerged from analysis of the reasons citizens cited for regarding a place as ideal. We sorted the various reasons given into four categories:

- **Environmental** – mentions of the natural assets of a region such as lakes, mountains, or climate. These tend to be attributes that are out of our control.
- **Social** – mentions of the people, friendliness, cultural amenities, sense of community, and other aspects of a place’s social atmosphere.
- **Economic** – mentions that relate to finances, such as taxes, availability of jobs, or the business climate.
- **Institutional** – mentions of services provided by government, such as schools, public transportation, freeways, parks, and others.

The analysis revealed that the most frequently mentioned reasons for choosing a place as ideal fall into the **social** category. In short, most citizens of southeastern Wisconsin want to live in a place, first and foremost, where they feel a sense of community. The implications of this finding are important because a region has more control over the culture of its communities than it does over its climate. Moreover, attributes like “friendliness” and “sense of community” are theoretically less costly than large scale government programs or major capital spending on freeway or rail systems.

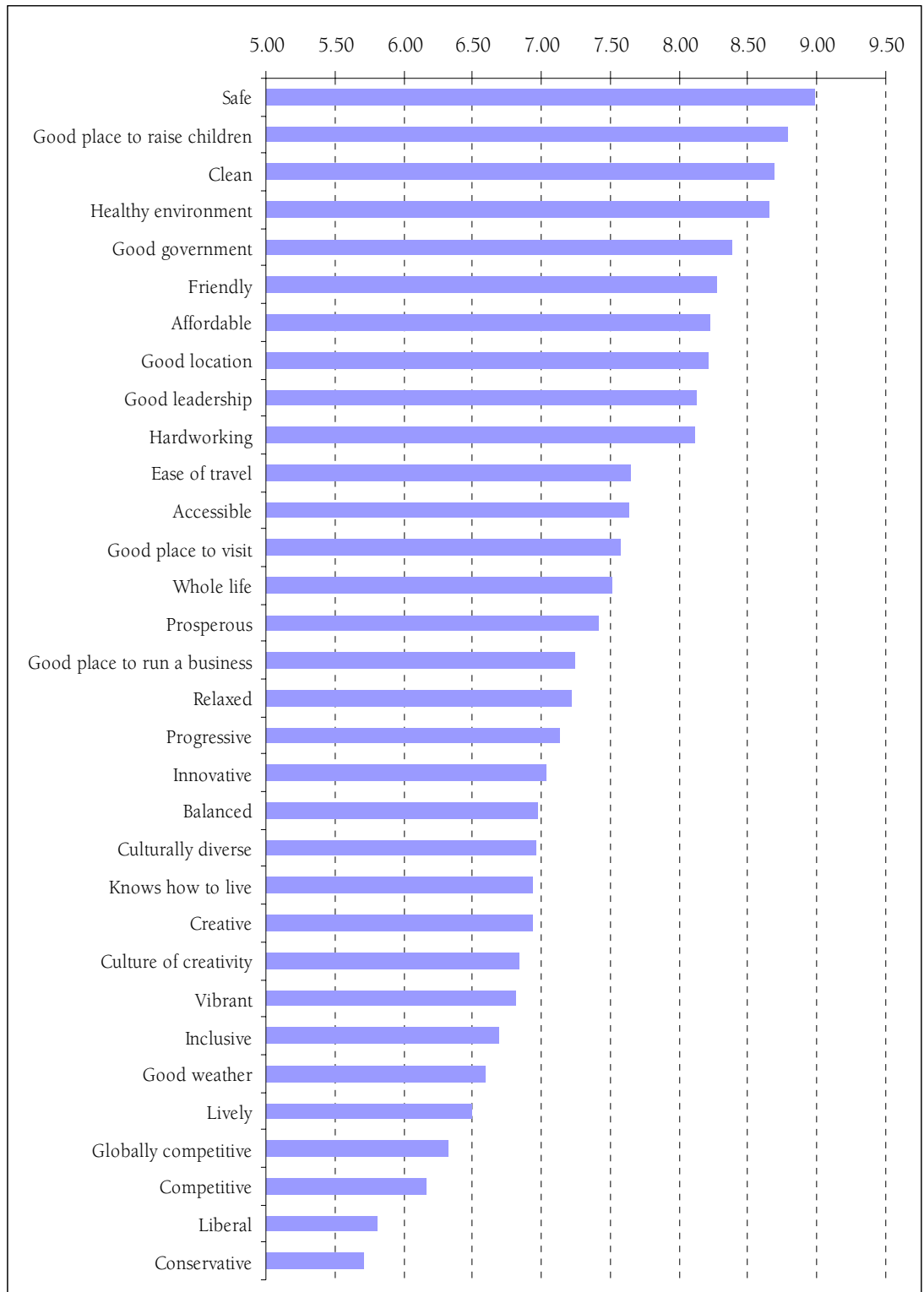
# One Future

## Regional Attributes

What kind of qualities or attributes does southeastern Wisconsin embrace? To find out, we asked survey respondents to rate 33 community attributes on a scale of 1-10. Respondents were divided into three panels and each panel was asked to rank 10 potential priorities.

As **Chart 5** shows, the attributes that resonate most clearly across the region are safety, environmental health, and being a good place to raise children. Community attributes that do not rank nearly as important overall are the weather, balance, creativity, competitiveness, or liveliness.

**CHART 5: Community attributes ranked** - Importance based on a scale from 1 (not important) to 10 (most important)



# One Region

## Regional Priorities

Understanding the priorities of residents is an important part of identifying a vision for the region. Therefore, those surveyed were asked the importance of 30 community priorities, using a scale of 1-10. Respondents were divided into three panels and each panel was asked to rank 10 potential priorities.

As **Table 2** shows, the priorities that rose to the top in the rankings are, in order, having a good quality of life, having good schools, and living in a healthy natural environment. Community priorities that resonated far less are having winning sports teams, living in an exciting city, having fewer cars on the road, and building personal wealth.

**TABLE 2: Importance of citizens' priorities on 1-10 scale - 1 (not important) to 10 (most important)**

Having a good quality of life	9.27
Having good schools and universities	9.24
Your own personal security	9.21
Living in a healthy environment	9.17
Having efficient government	9.01
Having friendly neighbors	8.86
Fair and reasonable taxes	8.75
Having your opinions taken into consideration	8.70
Excellent air and water quality	8.70
Preserving farms and green spaces	8.56
Having affordable housing for working families	8.55
Having parental choice in education	8.54
Having balanced development in your community	7.98
Helping preserve our historic treasures	7.95
Embracing racial diversity	7.84
Living in a prosperous region	7.65
Living in a beautiful neighborhood	7.57
Living in a region that has ambitious goals	7.42
Living in a region that keeps up with the times	7.41
Volunteering for community improvement activities	7.17
Having a public park near your home	7.17
Controlling urban sprawl	7.14
Building personal wealth	6.96
Living in a culturally diverse neighborhood	6.95
Living in a region that is globally competitive	6.89
Living in an exciting city	6.66
Your right to bear arms	6.44
Having fewer cars on the road	6.21
Having a regional form of government	5.92
Having winning sports teams	5.55

# One Future

## Regional Consensus

If our region wants to create a shared vision that would resonate through its seven counties -- among young and old; rich and poor; rural and urban; Republican and Democrat; male and female -- this survey may provide some guidance. Three potential elements of a regional vision stand out from the survey:

- **Child-friendliness**
- **Safety**
- **Environmental health**

These terms define what southeastern Wisconsin residents want their region to be. This is not to say citizens don't want the region to be prosperous, efficient, affordable, business-friendly, inclusive, innovative, and/or authentic. But none of those terms or the concepts that underlie them rise to the same level of importance in the minds of citizens. Children, education, safety, and the natural environment are at the core of the region's aspirations.

These findings come from several questions on the survey. Among them:

Asked to rate the importance of 33 community attributes, citizens of all parts of the region selected as their top four: "safe," "good place to raise children," "clean," and "healthy environment."

Asked to rate the importance of 27 priorities for the region (**Table 3**), citizens in all parts of the region selected as their top four: "make sure we have an educated and skilled work force," "preserve our natural resources," "attract young, skilled entrepreneurs to our region," and "improve environmental quality."

**TABLE 3: Importance of regional priorities on 1- 10 scale - 1 (not important) to 10 (most important)**

Make sure we have an educated and skilled work force	9.13
Preserve our natural resources	8.85
Attract young, skilled entrepreneurs to the region	8.26
Improve environmental quality in southeastern Wisconsin	8.08
Have more open government	7.87
Attract cutting edge technology businesses	7.86
Have racially diverse schools throughout our region	7.77
Have equal funding for public schools in all communities	7.75
Build better roads and highways	7.65
Strengthen Milwaukee as a city	7.58
Have more regional cooperation	7.38
Have a variety of transportation systems	7.32
Have a small town atmosphere	7.27
Have racial and ethnic diversity in every community	7.23
Have a regional organization to promote our region	7.19
Improve the arts, culture, sports and entertainment	7.15
Put new housing near jobs	7.07
Improve the racial diversity in our communities	7.04
Control growth	7.01
Have public transportation in your city or town	6.98
Be a major technology research center	6.94
Be viewed globally as a world-class region	6.93
Build new housing for working families	6.92
Build new housing for working families in your city or town	6.75
Make plans on a regional basis	6.58
Have big-city amenities	6.34
Present one face to the world	5.55

# One Region

## Economic Development

The economy is important to southeastern Wisconsin residents, although by some measures it does not rise to the same level of importance as quality of life.

For example:

- Asked to name the biggest problem facing the region, about one-third of respondents named taxes or the economy, neither of which was regarded as important as public safety.
- On the list of 33 community attributes (Chart 5), “prosperous” ranked 15th and “good place to run a business” ranked 16th.
- On a list of 27 regional priorities (Table 3), “attract cutting edge technology businesses” ranked 6th, “become a major technology research center” ranked 21st, and “be viewed globally as a world class region” ranked 22nd.

Asked to rate 30 personal priorities (Table 2), citizens ranked “living in a prosperous region” 16th; “living in a region that is globally competitive” 25th.

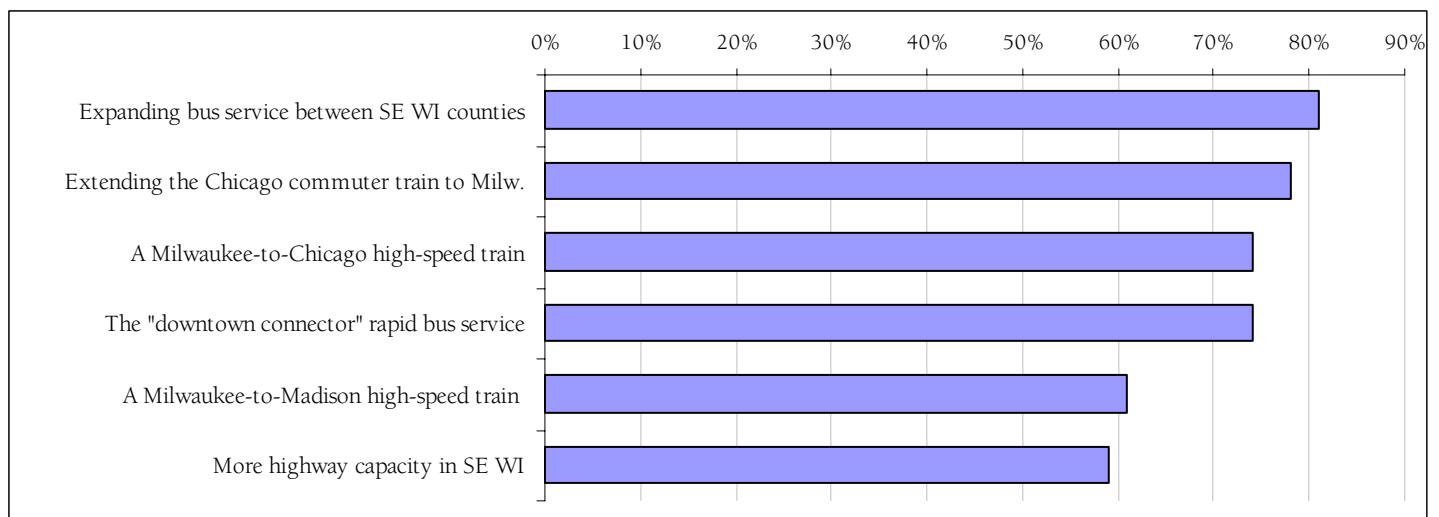
At the same time, regional priorities that underlie a healthy and growing economy rank very high in the minds of ordinary citizens. As Table 3 shows, the top ranking of 27 priorities was “make sure we have an

educated and skilled work force,” while “attract young, skilled entrepreneurs to the region” ranked 3rd.

The survey also revealed tension between environmental and economic concerns. Citizens are divided on whether economic growth harms the environment (53% say it doesn't), and whether we worry too much about the environment and not enough about jobs and the economy (52% say we don't). On the other hand, the majority (64%) agrees we need jobs more than we need stricter environmental enforcement.

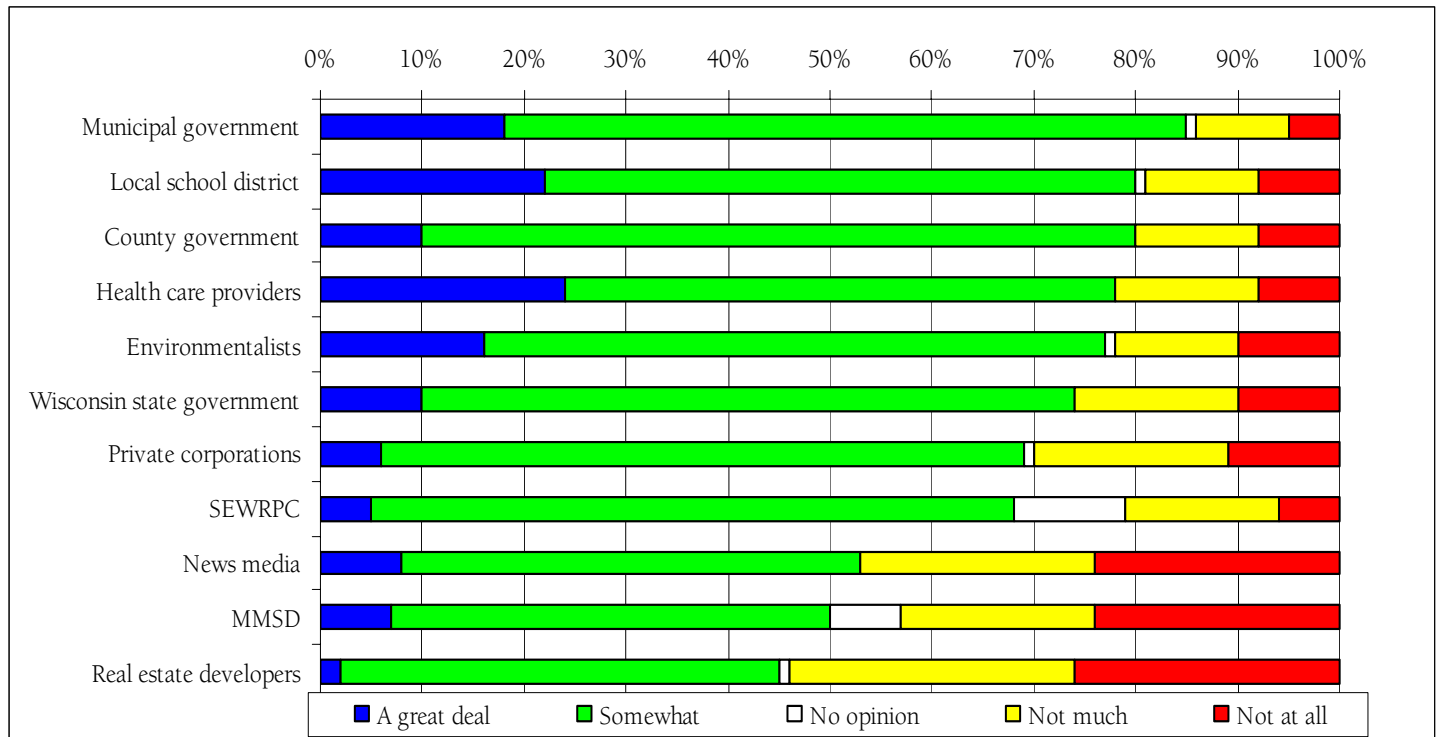
Responses to several questions about transportation also revealed a concern about the infrastructure needed for a strong economy. The survey found a majority of residents favor expanded freeways, bus service, and commuter trains. Most of those surveyed (60%) said they would favor a penny increase in the gas tax -- but the majority (53%) would oppose a 1% increase in sales taxes -- to pay for transportation improvements.

**CHART 6: Percent favoring transportation improvements**



# One Future

**CHART 7: Degree of trust in institutions** - Percent indicating how much they trust each of the following



## Role of Government

The closer a government’s seat of power is to a citizen’s home, the more that citizen trusts it to do the right thing. Thus, the most trusted level of government is municipal, with 85% of survey respondents saying they trust their city, village, or town government at least somewhat. Next was county government, which enjoys the trust of 80%, followed by the state (74%).

After respondents were asked to name the biggest problem facing the region, they were asked how it should be addressed, including non-governmental means. The choices were: individuals and families, the private sector, local government, regional government, state government, or federal government. The vast majority (78%) chose government over private individuals or the private sector; 30% chose local government, and 30% chose state government.

Even though citizens want government to solve problems, the survey found dissatisfaction with the way governments are doing so currently. Asked whether local and county governments need to be restructured, 83% said they do and 16% said they do not. Those

favoring restructuring of government broke down this way: 32% said government needs major restructuring and 51% said government needs minor restructuring. On the other hand, the vast majority opposes abolishing county or municipal government, or the creation of regional government.

**TABLE 4: Views about regional governance**

	Favor	Oppose
Regional Transportation Authority	75%	22%
RTA with taxing ability	43%	54%
Regional authority to support arts and culture	68%	29%
Arts authority with taxing ability	37%	59%
Regional government	32%	62%
Regional watershed district	72%	24%
Restructuring of local government	83%	16%

# One Region

## Regional Cooperation

Collaboration among local governments for the good of the region as a whole is a major theme of the survey results. Nearly nine of every 10 citizens surveyed said regional cooperation is a good idea; 86% said regional cooperation is important to their future quality of life.

Survey respondents were given a list of public issues -- affordable housing, transportation, air quality, water resource management, public safety, education, economic development, and land use planning. For each, citizens were asked whether decisions about the issue should be made individually, by municipal governments, or by local governments working together to pursue regional solutions. In every case, the majority favored the regional approach. More than 90% want regional solutions for air and water issues; more than 80% want municipalities to work together on transportation and economic development; and more than 70% want regional action on public safety and education.

Also, even though most citizens (83%) favor restructuring local government, most (62%) do not favor replacing municipal or county governments with a new regional form of government. However, a large majority favors separate regional authorities in order to:

- **Oversee transportation needs**
- **Support the arts and culture and**
- **Oversee the management of water resources.**

In each case, however, citizens do not favor giving these regional authorities the power to levy new taxes (Table 4).

The survey also found other apparent contradictions in public sentiment about regionalism. For example, although 67% favor creating a regional agency to implement regional development guidelines, about half of citizens say they are skeptical about regional approaches because they fear municipalities would give up too much control. Also, while 87% agree increased coordination among municipalities could improve decision-making, solve problems, lower costs, and improve efficiency, most people (55%) worry that could lead to unneeded bureaucracy and loss of local control.

**TABLE 5: Citizens' views about regional cooperation. Should decisions about ... be made individually by city, town and village governments or should local governments work together to pursue regional solutions?**

	Local	Regional
Affordable housing	32%	68%
Transportation	18%	82%
Air quality	7%	93%
Protecting our water supplies	9%	91%
Public safety	23%	76%
Education	26%	73%
Economic development and job creation	16%	83%
Land use planning and zoning	40%	59%

### Cooperating in a Conflicted Region Blurred Vision for Southeastern Wisconsin

A complete version of this report, including three appendices, is available on our web site.

Appendix A: **Sampling of "ideal" cities**

Appendix B: **Survey questionnaire**

Appendix C: **Survey responses**

*The Public Policy Forum is facilitating regional cooperation in southeastern Wisconsin based on research and analysis. The Forum encourages the region to think and act in ways that promote its long-term economic and social health.*

*We continue to enlist partners to support this effort.*

*Acting regionally on issues that are regional in nature is in our economic and social long-term interest. For more information about the Public Policy Forum and its work, please visit our web site:*

**[www.publicpolicyforum.org](http://www.publicpolicyforum.org)**