



County of Ottawa Memorandum

Summary of Ottawa County's Citizen Budget Meetings

Ottawa County held five citizen budget meetings in May with a total attendance of 13 citizens. Six citizens came to the Holland meeting, four to the Georgetown Township meeting, and three to the Coopersville meeting. No citizens were present at the Saturday meeting at the Fillmore Complex or at the Spring Lake Library. Despite the low attendance, many comments were positive.

Each meeting started with a presentation by June Hagan, Fiscal Services Director; Connie VanderSchaaf, Budget and Audit Manager; and Al Vanderberg, County Administrator, discussing the County's budget, services, and future economic outlook. After the presentation, participants were divided into small groups to answer four discussion questions:

1. How would you describe "quality of life"?
2. What services are most critical in supporting that quality of life?
3. What county services could be provided at differently, at a reduced level, or not at all, in order to reduce costs?
4. What suggestions do you have for the Board of Commissioners and county staff to solve future budget challenges?

There were three small groups total, two from Holland and one from Georgetown Township, and each was facilitated by an executive staff member. The responses are compiled and attached.

Following the discussions, participants were asked to prioritize eight broad service areas using red, yellow, and green dots. After looking at the data collectively, it was clear that many were uncomfortable using the red dots to indicate their lowest priority. In total only 88 percent of the dots distributed were used. From those that were used, Public Safety and the Justice System were the two areas receiving the most green dots/highest priority rankings. Technology and Health Education were the lowest ranked areas, receiving only yellow and red dots. The overall ranking results are attached.

Although turnout was low, the comments received on the County's efforts were positive. The citizen budget meetings will be held again in 2010 with slight modifications from lessons learned in the first year. Please check miottawa.org for information about next year's budget meetings or to download a copy of the 2009 Budget In Brief.

2009 Citizen Budget Meetings
Small Group Discussion Question Responses

1. How would you describe a high quality of life?

- Recreation (2)—water, natural resources, activities, weather
- Health (3)
- Jobs/local economy
- Safety (3)
- Infrastructure—roads, water/sewer (2)
- Education (2)
- Human Services safety net (2)
- Elder care
- Access to government processes
- Disaster preparation

2. What services are most critical in supporting that quality of life?

- Human Services (2)
 - Too complex of a system to access or get what you need (simpler system)
 - Larger group of people that need help that have not had problems before
- Parks and Recreation (2)
 - Saving and valuing our natural resources (perception issue)
- Youth
 - Not the opportunities they used to have (be aware of this population)
- Safety (2)
- Elder care
- Health
- Business attraction services
- Tourism (2)
- Social Services
- Cultural Events

3. What County services could be provided differently, at a reduced level, or not at all to reduce costs?

- Collaboration to reduce duplication—“less turf”; county should facilitate
- Human Services/Jail
 - Getting info/broad view of needs in the community
 - Child Support/Jail is a vicious cycle
 - Driver responsibility fees
 - Be careful not to compound issues in the system
- Mobile health services
- Conduct Board meetings via video and at different times
- Healthcare and Personnel Costs
- Reduce staffing if savings achieved through miottawa.org

4. What advices would you give to the Board of Commissioners and staff to solve budget challenges?

- Locals make point to state and educate/mobilize citizens
- Fight legislatively-- tell the state if you don't pay for it, we won't do it
- Reduction in marine patrol, stimulus funding
- Higher trust in Commission now than before
- Change system that penalize those who do well and punishes those trying to do well (child support/courts)
- Attract business (2) (bring a professional sports team to the area)
- Attract people (2) (tourism)
- Intergovernmental cooperation
- Sell land
- Sell ads on the website
- Reduce vehicle usage, public safety and non-public safety; do not reduce Sheriff's services
- Eliminate lobbyist contract
- Schedule services at certain locations on limited days at limited times and vary times
- Institute productivity measures
- Evaluate individual employee performance

Ranking Results from Citizen Budget Meetings

RED= Lowest Priority

Yellow= Medium Priority

Green= Highest Priority

	RED	YELLOW	GREEN	TOTAL
Agriculture/Environment	5	4	3	12
Clinical Services	5	4	4	13
Health Education	5	5	0	10
Justice System	0	2	6	8
Planning & Development	3	8	0	11
Preventative Services/ Public Assistance	5	4	4	13
Public Safety	0	5	9	14
Technology	6	4	0	10
	=29	=36	=26	=91

Total Number of Participants: 13
 Total Number of Dots Given: 104
 Green Dots Not Used: 0
 Yellow Dots Not Used: 3
 Red Dots Not Used: 10
 Total % Dots Used: 88%