


Perception vs. Reality

OVERVIEW OF FORMER RESIDENT SURVEY





Primary goal: To increase the number of people living and working in Ottumwa. And, as a community, to provide a high quality of life to residents

Realistically, what is the experience of those that move here?

Why the Survey?

Let's go straight to the source!

Survey Process:

- ▶ Partner with Area 15
- ▶ Requested assistance from major employers
- ▶ Created comprehensive survey with elements such as housing, education, quality of life, friendliness of community, etc.
- ▶ Analyze responses and identify common “themes” for improvement

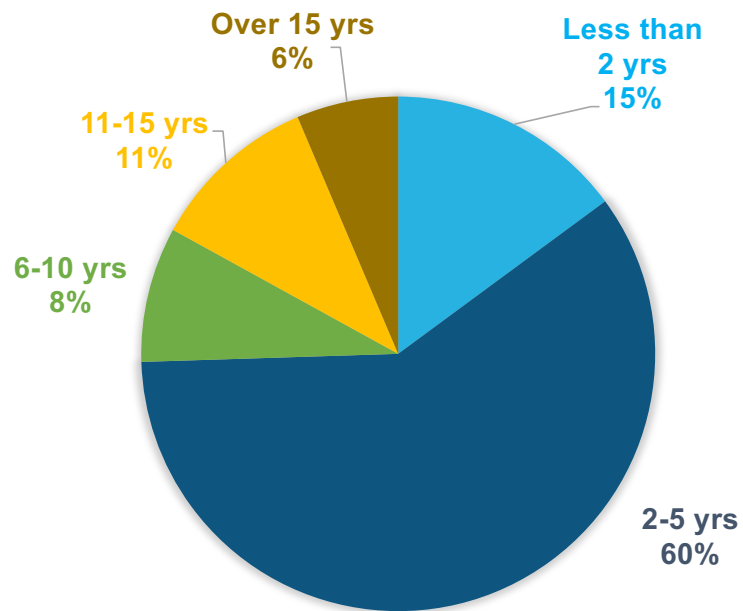


Participants Targeted

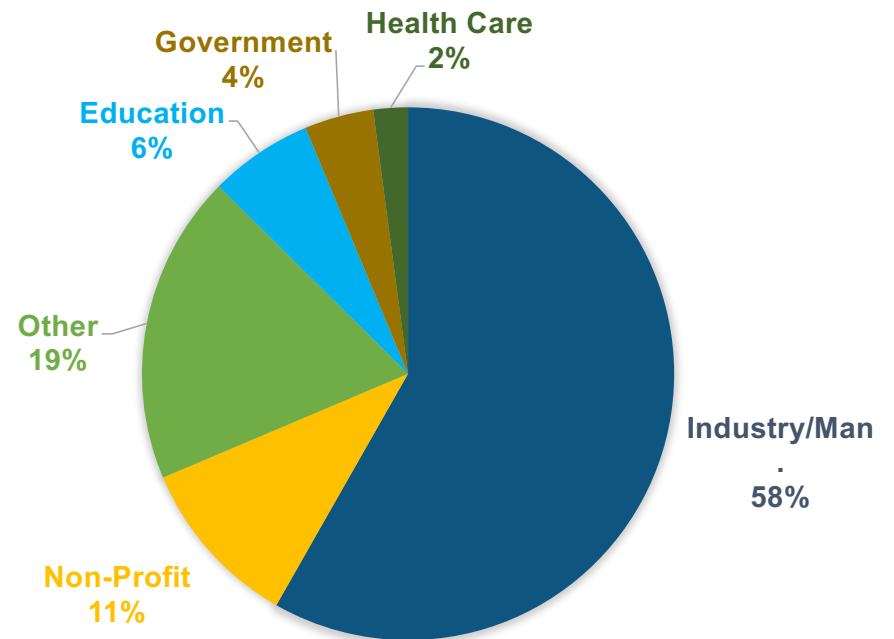
- Individuals who had previously moved to Ottumwa but have since moved to another community – “former residents”
- “Former Residents” were targeted to provide insight regarding their experiences while living in Ottumwa. This cohort group was especially insightful because of their ability to compare us to other communities they have lived in.
- Ultimate goal was to identify what the community is doing well and provide recommendations in areas that the community needs to improve.

49 Past Residents completed the survey.

About the Respondents

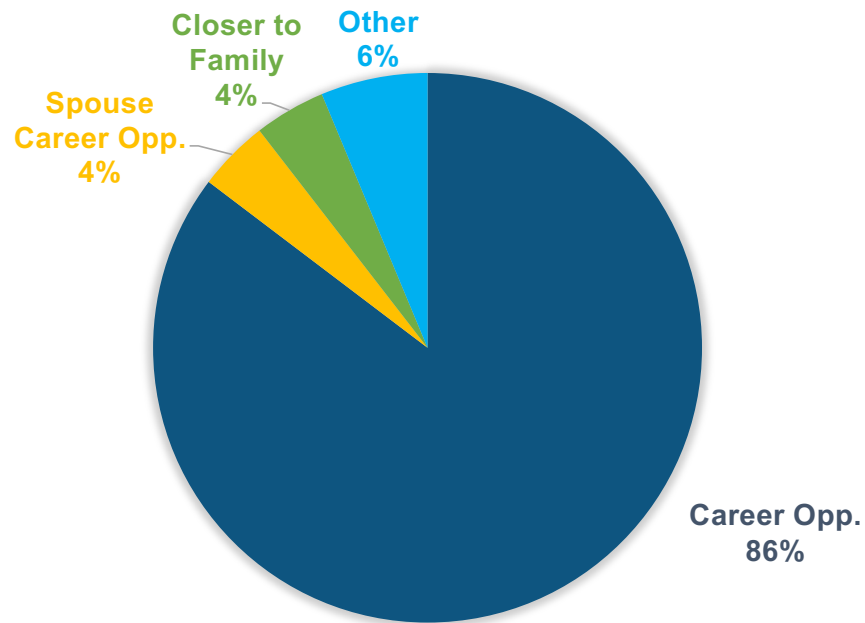


LENGTH IN OTTUMWA

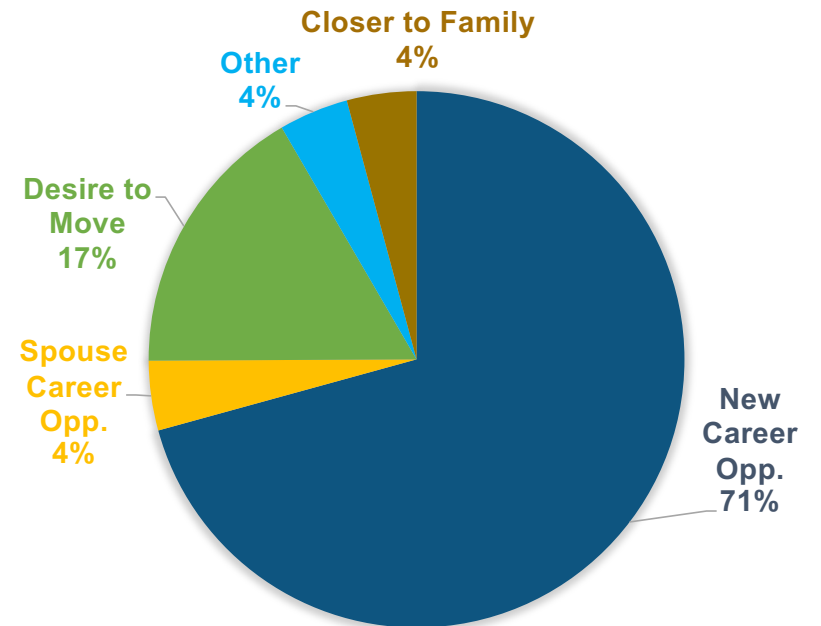


EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

Coming & Going



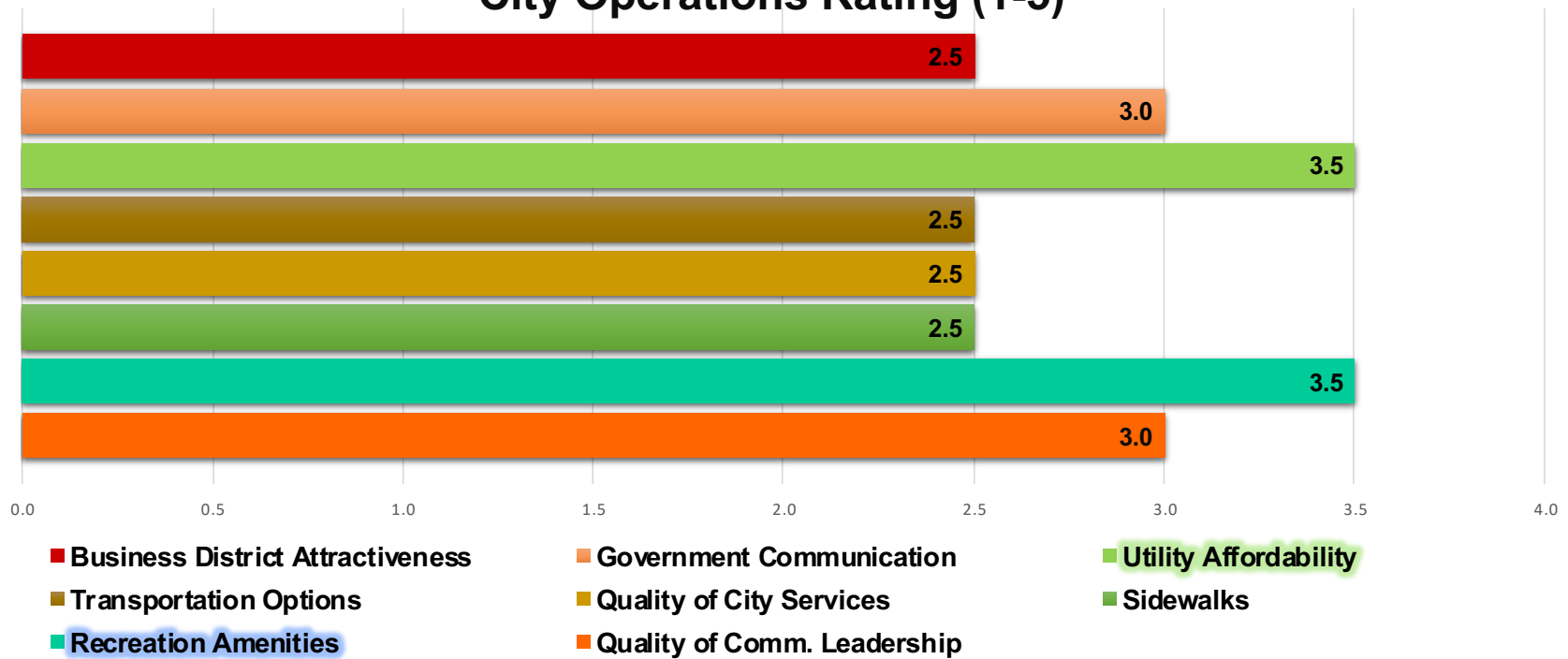
REASON FOR OTTUMWA MOVE



REASON FOR LEAVING OTTUMWA

City Ratings

City Operations Rating (1-5)



1. High Property Taxes

Numerous respondents made a comparison to other communities they have lived in, among them was a pervasive feeling that they were paying more in return for much less

▶ Sample Comments:

- ▶ “The property taxes in Ottumwa are ridiculous.”
- ▶ “It frustrated me that I paid some of the highest taxes in the city and my street was not in the best of shape.”
- ▶ “Taxes were too high for the services received.”
- ▶ “I have lived in 6 different locations in 3 different states, Ottumwa by far had the highest real estate taxes than any other location. I don’t mind paying more as long as I can see my money being used in the community, but it wasn’t visible.”
- ▶ “The tax rate is extremely high in Ottumwa. Prior to moving to Ottumwa, I was paying \$5K in the Quad Cities for the same square footage 2 story home that cost me over \$8K per year by the time I left Ottumwa.”
- ▶ “I pay as much in taxes in Madison, WI, on a more expensive house as I did in Ottumwa and get more for it.”

2. Lack of Quality Housing

Housing was mentioned numerous times, citing quantity, quality and cost

- ▶ “Many homes within our budget were not clean and were in need of significant repairs. Home finding process took 6 months.”
- ▶ “There were few houses on the market at the price point we were interested in. It was immediately apparent that the community needed new housing developments.”
- ▶ “I couldn’t find affordable housing when looking for an apartment/house to rent. I found a very rundown place that was priced way too high with a landlord that did not want to keep the place up.”
- ▶ “Housing! Where is it and why can’t there be a focus on this as a community.”
- ▶ “Suitable housing options are very poor.”
- ▶ “There are far too many terrible rental houses and a shortage of decent low-to-mid housing options.”

3. Negative Attitude

(Community Positivity - )

Many comments indicated that, again, we are our own worst enemy

- “The social media about Ottumwa can be really negative about the place. It doesn’t benefit anyone to speak ill of themselves, and Ottumwa is doing lots of good things!”
- There is a pervasive negative tone – victim mentality – that makes it challenging to stay upbeat.”
- “There is an overall negative attitude in the community.”
- “The sense of entitlement in the area was awful.”
- “Ottumwa has challenges...But, it’s biggest challenge may be the negativity that many have in the community about the future of Ottumwa.”

4. Culture of Apathy

- ▶ “I always felt that mediocre was not only acceptable in Ottumwa, but almost encouraged. There are so many people that have a poverty mindset and encourage others to have the same view.”
- ▶ “I believe Ottumwa has great people. I believe the current residents don’t want to see change.”
- ▶ “I was brought up that even if you didn’t have much, you worked hard to take care of what you did have; I didn’t see this demonstrated in the culture. In fact, I felt the opposite was there, that many people felt that they were entitled to more because they existed. Culture of apathy.”
- ▶ “The biggest issues I experienced were there were far more takers than givers in the community.”
- ▶ “The feel I got from residents of the city was that the best days of Ottumwa was behind it.”

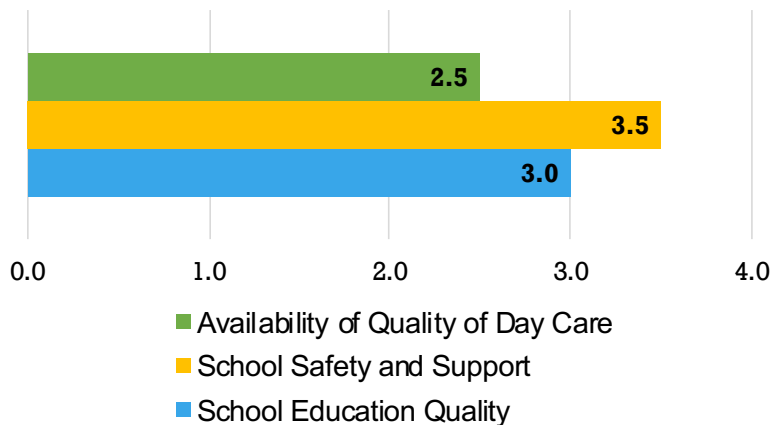
5. Lack of Pride

This apathetic attitude is seen to carry into property and physical infrastructure

- “I feel Ottumwa could improve their roads and overall appearance of residential areas, some areas are pretty rough looking, and people don’t keep up their homes/yards well.”
- “it was shocking to me that people seemed to have no pride in what they had and didn’t care what their house/yard looked like.”
- “It was apparent from a tour around the city that folks don’t take pride in their property like the community we moved from.”
- I don’t feel that the community had pride in itself. Some residents seemed to be in a never-ending loop of despair.”
- “It is apparent that folks don’t take pride in their property like the community we moved from. Residents generally (not all) have a “well it’s always been this way so I guess it’s good enough attitude.”

6. Education

Education & Childcare (Rating 1-5)



Experience with school district was varied. Obvious credibility leaned to what is “heard”

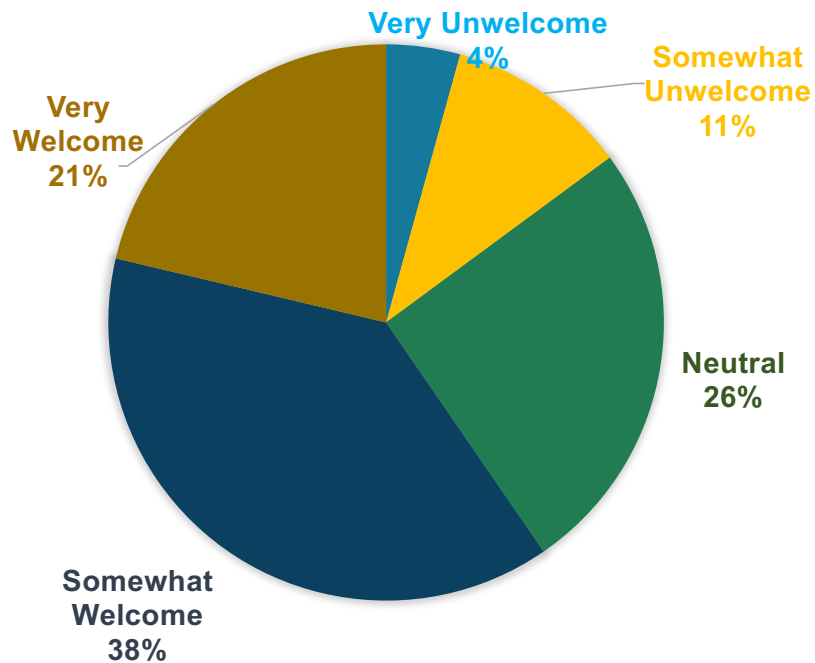
- ▶ “Not impressed with the schools. Ottumwa schools don't have a good reputation for a quality education.”
- ▶ “I didn't have any kids in schools, but what I heard from others at work was there is a pretty large drop out and pregnancy rate at the high school.”
- ▶ “The Seton preschool was fantastic, but we have heard that the middle schools and the high schools are to be avoided.”



Other Challenges Cited

- ❖ Need for more retail, shopping and dining options (not chains)
- ❖ Need for more entertainment and nightlife opportunities
- ❖ Need for better health services (doctor retention)
- ❖ Need for more kids activities

How Welcome Did You Feel?



“Ottumwa has some of the friendliest people in Iowa...meaning friendliest in the US!”

“My feeling was that if you weren’t from Ottumwa it was very difficult to get involved.”

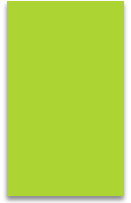
“With regards to the friends I made, it was welcoming. Overall for the community, it was hard to not get weird looks no matter where I went.”

“I liked my time overall in Ottumwa because of the friends I made, but without those friends I could see it going a different route.”



Positives Cited

- Downtown Improvements
 - “The downtown revitalization is a key improvement for Ottumwa.”
 - “The downtown is looking so much better than when we moved there. Look forward to visiting in the future to see more improvements.”
- Trails
 - “I think the bike trails and network in Ottumwa is far superior to other communities.”
- Size of Community
 - “Ottumwa is a great size...small enough to know each other and large enough to have an amenity like Bridge View Center.”
- Nonprofit and spiritual communities were widely respected
- Diverse community was seen as a good thing



The overall sentiment of the feedback was that former residents feel as though we have much more potential than we acknowledge and that we just need to get out of our own way.



Thoughts?

Feel free to share them...

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