

“SURVEY SAYS...”

Critiquing the Draft of the Le Sueur County Comprehensive Land Use Plan

*NOTE: The implementation of a Comprehensive Land use Plan must follow the guidelines set forth in MN. Stat. § 394.232, Subd. 2, which states that “**Notice must be given at the beginning of the community-based comprehensive planning process to ... local citizens to actively participate in the development of the plan.**”*

Notice of the Land Use Plan was published on the County Website and published in the Le Sueur County News, to document the legal requirements of notification to the public. The use of a community survey, Open Forums, Open House event, and pop-up events, were arranged to fulfill the requirement of soliciting community engagement.

Recognizing that all protocols were followed in the process of drafting the Land Use plan, this critique of the process is to point out that our inquiries indicate that the vast majority of the citizens in Le Sueur County are still unaware of this very expensive undertaking which they are footing the bill for and which will direct the use of their private property, will increase their taxes, and will restrict many of their rights and freedoms. It also needs to be recognized that county officials seem to have purposely chosen to limit the broadcasting of this effort and its importance to the community. Engagement at public forums used the Delphi Technique, which was firmly implemented with strict adherence, to limit unsolicited concerns, conversations and questions, thus always guiding the discussion to produce the preplanned conclusions being sought.

Therefore the purpose of this paper is to question claims made throughout the draft of the plan that suggest broad public support from the citizens of Le Sueur County with determinations made in the draft of the plan with statements such as: “...22% of residents would choose...”; “...57% of survey respondents...”; “...survey respondents were most interested in...”; “...residents ranked economic development as the top issue...”; “...efforts prioritized by survey respondents...”; “...top priorities were:...”; “was important for nearly 69%...”; “...survey respondents reported as most needed...”; “Top economic development efforts prioritized by...”;

Needless to say, the conclusions stated in the draft of the Land Use Plan are bogus at best, and factually deceptive. It would serve the public well if the Commissioners would take the time to reach out to a broader base of citizens if indeed this Comprehensive Plan is to be taken seriously as a benefit for all, rather than a sacking of community property for the prosperity and wealth of the County to fund societal change.

The total number of people counted for each participatory community event:

[Documentation is found on page 16 of the Land Use draft.]

Survey participants:	273
Pop-up interactions:	150
Forum attendees:	65
Online comments:	74
Focus group attendees:	59
Feedback-Land Use & Draft Plan:	15
Community Open House:	35

671 total counts of interaction and/or comments.

Interactions for all events combined resulted in participation by slightly over 2% (.02278) of the total population of 29,459, in Le Sueur County.

Our purpose of focusing on the numbers of participants is to question bona fide preferential public opinion with the plans. We acknowledge here that other people were aware of events but were either not able to, or chose not to attend.

Claims of community support diluted by 'outsiders.'

The survey and events were open to participation from persons living outside of Le Sueur County. This was justified as valid in order to acquire the opinion of potential tourists looking for places to visit and persons that may consider moving into the county.

People that engaged in numerous events were counted multiple times.

It is also critical to factor in that the total count represents some of the same people numerous times, as they participated in many opportunities to weigh in on the Plan.

Is it possible that Taxpayer support for the Plan is less than 1%?

This is a fair and important question to ask and it deserves an unadulterated answer. To summarize and put into perspective the "claimed community support," we need to acknowledge that to simply attend an event *does not document agreement with, or support of, the ideas being presented.* Combine that consideration with the fact that *many persons attended multiple events and were counted more than once.* Then factor in *people from outside the county participating,* and ***taxpayer support for proposed plans may be very thin.***

It will be the taxpayer that will be charged to pay for all of the irrational remedies to imagined problems and projected needs that may never come to fruition, along with all the extravagant tourist attractions in the plan. These plans are all suspect as being put into place as the foundation for changing the social fabric of our communities.

Support for the various plans and projects are declared throughout the draft as top priorities and community supported, yet we are never told the **number** of people supporting these options, as we will see in the following statements:

Page 16. "Of the topics included in this plan, survey respondents' top priorities were: Jobs and Economic Development, Natural Resources, and Housing"

These answers were not spontaneous, they were derived from the following limited and guided survey question:

Rank the following issues, 1 being the top priority and 5 being lowest priority:

- Housing
- Jobs and economic development
- Natural Resources
- Community facilities, including parks
- Transportation, including trails

Note that parks and trails are not on people's priority list of desires to raise taxes for, yet they are a prevalent topic in the Land Use Plan.

Page 18. "When asked to rank housing, economic development, natural resources, community facilities, and transportation, residents ranked economic development as the top issue in Le Sueur county."

These limited choices were from the same question as the previous statement on page 16.

Page 19. “If more jobs were available, 22 percent of residents would choose to work in Le Sueur County instead of commute, according to the public survey.”

It needs to be noted that this is 22% of the mere 273 people that took the survey.

Assuming they were all residents of Le Sueur County, this is only 60 out of 29,459 citizens.

We also find the claim that 22% of households in the county have a person with a disability (page 9). We find this to be very perplexing. Could it be that the same 60 people that answered the survey question on jobs, marked survey question #26 __YES? [“Do you identify as someone with a disability?”] If that is not where the 22% claim of disabled citizens came from, we ask where that % is derived from?

Page 21. “Local/regional ownership of businesses was important for nearly 69% of survey respondents.”

69% of respondents is a mere 188 people. Were all of them county residents?

We can understand and agree that local business ownership should be chosen as important. We also believe the word “regional” is in there to familiarize people with thinking under the terms of “regional governance” and to promote businesses outside of the community as being “local”. Perhaps a dumb-down version of “Think globally – Act locally?”

Page 21. “Food establishments, retail businesses, and childcare providers were the top three businesses that survey respondents reported as most needed in the county.”

This survey question listed 8 choices. These 3 were chosen over: Arts/entertainment/cultural facilities; Educational choices; Healthcare providers; Industrial businesses; and Offices.

A broader number of opinions may agree!

Page 22. “Top economic development efforts prioritized by survey respondents include:

- small business and entrepreneurship development
- business recruitment and retention
- broadband internet development
- community revitalization”

Survey respondents were supposed to choose 3 of 8 choices listed, yet we ended up with 4.

Could it be that a high priority choice was not chosen, so we added a 4th answer? What

were the total number of votes for each choice? The other choices were: Financial education for economic development; Housing development; Marketing of the county for tourism; Workforce recruitment and retention.

Page 32. “Over the next 25 years, survey respondents were most interested in seeing:

- Single family home development
- Incentives and resources to maintain existing housing
- Senior housing independent living facilities”

This is very interesting! There were 8 choices. Look at the 5 below that were not picked!

- Twin-home/Townhouse/4-Plex Development
- Owner-occupied Condos development (8-24 units)
- Rental apartment development (8-24 units)
- Incentives and standards to control population growth through increased population density.
Read that last one again! Control growth by increasing densities? Our guess is that nobody chose to “control population growth” because the question is illogical.
- Standards to allow for smaller rural lots within County limits

Page 49. “57% of the survey respondents rated the overall conditions of the county’s transportation infrastructure as good or excellent”

It should be noted that besides roads, this includes sidewalks, bike paths, and trails. A lot of emphasis is being put on the last three in the Land Use Plan and will be a major driver causing increased taxes.

Page 51. “Survey respondents felt safer driving in Le Sueur County than walking or biking”

This question isn’t leading toward advocacy of increased use of surveillance cameras is it?

Page 60. “74% of survey respondents thought more should be done to protect the water quality of lakes and streams”

*Water quality of lakes is directly affected by the number of residential lake properties with manicured lawns and activities along the shore land. Page #67 of the Land Use draft, states **“A significant number of Le Sueur County’s lakes, rivers, and streams are considered impaired or impacted by one or more environmental stressors...”** - yet the county aspires to encourage many more residential lake lots to increase the tax base.*

Page 70. “75% of survey respondents agreed that quality farmland should be protected”

This sounds great and responsible, yet we need to be very cautious about this language. This is handily laying the groundwork for what may be highly restrictive regulations on farmland, especially with the potential encouragement of land owners to enter into ‘conservation easements’ which restrict usage in perpetuity and may devalue the land by as much as 40%. Additionally, regulations of the endangered species act and environmental protection concerns take precedence over the use of the land which could drastically limit the use for agricultural purposes. When they say ‘protected’ we need to ask ‘from who’, and/or ‘from what’.

Page 75. “In the survey and focus groups, community members said they want more trails that provide access to parks and lakes.”

First of all, we need to clarify once again, that the survey was open to anyone that wanted to participate. This was questioned and affirmed with the explanation that tourists and persons that live outside of the county would have an interest in visiting if there were amenities to attract them. If the question had been limited to taxpayers of the county with the clear understanding that construction of more trails equals increases in taxes, would there be much interest in providing more trails? A question on the survey asked “What amenities or accessibility accommodations are missing from Le Sueur County’s trails, sidewalks, and public parks, if any?” Could it be that any answer provided was an indication of support?

Page 98. “Community members said their top priorities for land use were:

- Preserve agricultural land: Cluster development and concentrate it near cities to protect farmland
- Rural character: Retain Le Sueur county’s small-town feel”

Our comment to the 1st priority concerning preservation of agricultural land, is to re-read the comments for Page 70 above. Our comment to the 2nd priority, is an overwhelming AGREED! Keep our communities small, quiet, and safe, without an influx of population growth, crime and stack n’ pack housing. We do not need the activity (chaos) of large cities.