

West Des Moines
Community Education

REPORT ON THE COMMUNITY

August 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council has committed to undertaking a community needs assessment every five years. The needs assessment is carried out in order to identify community needs and strengths and mobilize resources to ensure that all community members have access to high-quality learning opportunities. For its 2010 community needs assessment, the West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council contracted with State Public Policy Group, a mission-driven policy consulting company based in Des Moines.

A community needs assessment is foundational to the mission and goals of the West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council and Department. The purpose of the Community Education Advisory Council is to help improve the community by engaging people to identify needs and inviting all service agencies and citizens to work together and share resources to meet those needs. West Des Moines Community Education was established in the mid 1970s and has created and/or funded numerous programs, services, and collaborations, including:

- » Before and after school programming
- » Summer classes and camps
- » Intramurals
- » Adult leisure classes
- » Safety Town for pre-kindergartners
- » Community service opportunities
- » Iowa Senior Olympics
- » Early childhood family education

In close collaboration with the West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council and Director, SPPG developed a plan for a qualitative research initiative with this goal in mind. Through ten focus groups with unique stakeholder groups, SPPG engaged a variety of West Des Moines Community School District residents and families on a wide range of topics from current accessibility of community programs and services to future needs and strategies to improve the community over the next five to ten years.

Ten focus groups were conducted from July 8 to July 29, 2010, at the West Des Moines Learning Resource Center, 3550 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, Iowa. Each Tuesday and Thursday night from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., two focus groups were conducted simultaneously in separate rooms at the Learning Resource Center. Figure 1 below provides the focus group schedule.

Figure 1: West Des Moines Community Education 2010 Focus Group Schedule

| ID # | Stakeholder Group | Date of Focus Group |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 4 | Young Adults, no Children (19-30 years of age) | July 8, 2010 |
| 8 | "Retirees" (60-69 years of age) | July 8, 2010 |
| 3 | High School Youth | July 20, 2010 |
| 6 | School-Age Families | July 20, 2010 |
| 2 | Latinos | July 22, 2010 |
| 9 | "Seniors" (71+ years of age) | July 22, 2010 |
| 5 | Preschool Families | July 27, 2010 |
| 7 | "Empty Nesters" (45-59 years of age) | July 27, 2010 |
| 10 | West Des Moines District Non-Residents | July 29, 2010 |
| 1 | Human Services Clients | July 29, 2010 |

Through the ten focus groups, 109 West Des Moines Community School District residents were engaged in discussions of community strengths and needs. Overall, the demographics of the focus group participants are strikingly similar to the demographics of the general population of the city of West Des Moines.

Several common themes have been identified based on thorough consideration of all participant responses.

1. Community identity is strongly rooted in people and the schools.
2. A sign of strength of the West Des Moines Schools community, growth, can put other identified community strengths such as good schools, low crime, nice parks, and strong neighborhood cohesiveness at risk.
3. There is agreement that current services to residents throughout the community are provided well, but there is a growing concern regarding services to middle-income families, individuals with disabilities, and aging residents.
4. Expanding opportunities for all residents to be civically engaged is important.
5. Transparency of decision-making and engaging community members in the decision-making process is important to residents in the high-growth community of West Des Moines.
6. Preferred methods for receiving information on community programs, services, or activities differ based on factors including involvement with the schools, primary language, culture, age, and interest.

This report provides detailed analysis of participant demographics and how those demographics compare to the general West Des Moines population, West Des Moines Schools community strengths, areas in need of improvement or expansion, and additional common themes found across all focus groups. This report is intended to provide the West Des Moines Community Advisory Council with information to identify community needs and mobilize community resources to fulfill those needs. This information is intended to be shared with other public officials and departments, community stakeholders, and nonprofit organizations to facilitate partnerships to improve the West Des Moines Schools community.

METHODOLOGY

Initial targets for stakeholder groups were identified by the West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council. The final stakeholder groups targeted for this effort were identified as the following West Des Moines School District residents:

- » Human services clients
- » Latino
- » High school youth
- » Young adults, preferably with no children
- » Families with preschool-age children
- » Families with school-age children
- » “Empty-nesters,” West Des Moines district residents with grown children living outside the home
- » “Retirees,” West Des Moines district residents retired and no longer working full-time
- » Seniors, elderly district residents
- » West Des Moines Community School District non-residents, individuals residing within West Des Moines Community School District boundaries but outside of the City of West Des Moines

Following identification of the target stakeholder groups, SPPG recommended the best method of recruitment to ensure a random, non-biased sampling of participants. All invitations, except for the human services clients and Latino groups, were sent out by postcard to randomly selected individuals via the method noted in Figure 2 below. For the human services clients and Latino focus groups, staff of West Des Moines Human Services and the West Des Moines Community School District family liaison disseminated invitations, respectively. This strategy was utilized for confidentiality and convenience purposes. As was evidenced in the focus groups, these groups greatly trust and have consistent contact with the source of the invitations.

For the remaining eight focus groups, the Iowa voter file, West Des Moines Community School District Infinite Campus, and West Des Moines Community Education customer database served as lists to draw randomly selected individuals to receive invitations to participate in the appropriate focus groups. For recruitment purposes, age ranges were identified for the groups young adults, empty-nesters, retirees, and seniors. These age ranges were used to randomly select individuals from the Iowa voter file after sorting for school district and city of residence. These individuals were then mailed a postcard invitation.

Figure 2: Recruitment Method by Focus Group ID and Stakeholder Group

| ID # | Stakeholder Group | Method of Recruitment |
|------|--|---|
| 1 | Human Services Clients | Invitation letter disseminated to clients by West Des Moines Human Services staff |
| 2 | Latinos | Invitation letter translated and disseminated to district Latino families by West Des Moines School District family liaison |
| 3 | High School Youth | Random selection through West Des Moines Infinite Campus |
| 4 | Young Adults, no Children (19-30 years of age) | Random selection through voter file by date of birth |
| 5 | Preschool Families | Random selection through West Des Moines Infinite Campus |
| 6 | School-Age Families | Random selection through West Des Moines Infinite Campus |
| 7 | "Empty Nesters" (45-59 years of age) | Random selection through voter file by date of birth and West Des Moines Community Education customer database |
| 8 | "Retirees" (60-69 years of age) | Random selection through voter file by date of birth and West Des Moines Community Education customer database |
| 9 | "Seniors" (71+ years of age) | Random selection through voter file by date of birth and West Des Moines Community Education customer database |
| 10 | West Des Moines District Non-Residents | Random selection through West Des Moines Infinite Campus and the voter file by city of residence |

SPPG tracked RSVPs for each focus group to ensure that a maximum of 15 individuals attended each focus group. A minimum of 200 invitations was disseminated for each focus group by the method indicated in Figure 2. RSVPs were checked one week prior to the date of the focus group. If RSVPs were low, SPPG utilized the invitation lists to call individuals for a second invitation to participate in the focus group. For all invitations, the respective identification number was used.

A 40 dollar stipend was offered for participation in the focus groups. The use of stipends has been found by SPPG to significantly increase participation in research initiatives. Especially for groups such as youth, young adults, and individuals living on restricted budgets, stipends are good incentive for participation in a focus group on a subject with little direct benefit for the invitees.

In close collaboration with the Community Education Advisory Council and Executive Director, SPPG developed a facilitation script to be used consistently across all stakeholder groups. A common script is used to more easily identify themes across all focus groups as well as significant differences among the groups. A copy of the script is appended to this report.

Two focus groups were conducted simultaneously each night with two SPPG staff at each focus group: one serving as facilitator and one as note-taker. While strong facilitation is important, note-taking is especially critical to the ultimate value of the information from the focus group discussions. The unattributed, verbatim responses from each focus group provide the foundation for the analysis of findings that is provided in this report.

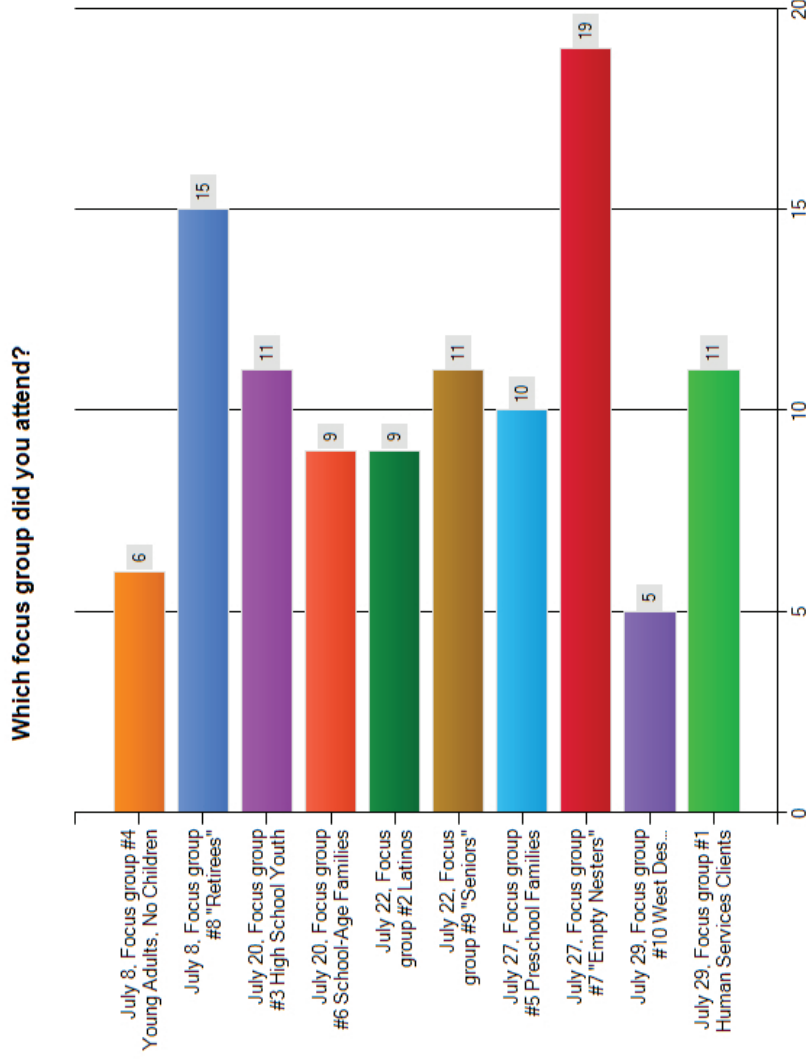
SPPG's experienced facilitators structure focus groups to gain the interest and engage the participants at the beginning of the session to encourage openness and throughout the session to elicit maximum participation. The SPPG facilitator asks "warm up" questions to put the participants at ease and encourage more reticent individuals to participate. The facilitator also works to ensure that participation is easy and

freely given, and that one or a few individuals do not control the conversation. Prior to the conclusion of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions ranging from income to city of residence. Each questionnaire was then collected by SPPG staff and compiled using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), an online research service. A copy of the demographic questionnaire is appended to this report.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Through the ten focus groups, West Des Moines Community School District residents were engaged in discussions of community strengths and needs. A total of 109 West Des Moines schools residents participated in the focus groups. However, only 106 participants completed the demographic questionnaire following the conclusion of the focus group. All participant demographics are based on 106 questionnaire respondents. Figure 3 below shows the number of participants of each focus group.

Figure 3: Number of Participants by Focus Group



A majority of focus group participants (69%) identified their zip code of residence as 50265 in West Des Moines, Iowa. Other zip codes most often identified by focus group participants include 50266 (West Des Moines, Iowa) and 50325 (Clive, Iowa).

Figure 4: Focus Group Participants' Zip Code of Residence

| Zip Code of Residence | Percent | Number |
|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| 50265 | 69.2% | 72 |
| 50266 | 14.4 | 15 |
| 50325 | 9.6 | 10 |
| 50324 | 1.9 | 2 |
| 50322 | 1.9 | 2 |
| 50235 | 0.9 | 1 |
| 50317 | 0.9 | 1 |
| 50312 | 0.9 | 1 |

Overall, the demographics of the focus group participants are strikingly similar to the demographics of the general population of the city of West Des Moines as estimated by the US Census. The few cases of significant dissimilarities exist due to the selective stakeholder groups engaged in the research, for instance the inclusion of a focus group exclusively for Latino district residents. The demographics of focus group participants as well as comparative statistics for the City of West Des Moines are provided in this section. All comparative statistics are from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) compiled by the US Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>).

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Just over 77 percent of focus group participants identified their race as white. This is slightly lower than identification of white race in the general West Des Moines population (89 percent). As is shown in Figures 5 and 6 below, the identification of Hispanic ethnicity is significantly greater among focus group participants (14 percent) than that of the general West Des Moines population (5 percent). This can be explained by the inclusion of a focus group targeted specifically to engage Latino residents of the West Des Moines Community School District.

Figure 5: Race and Ethnicity of Focus Group Participants

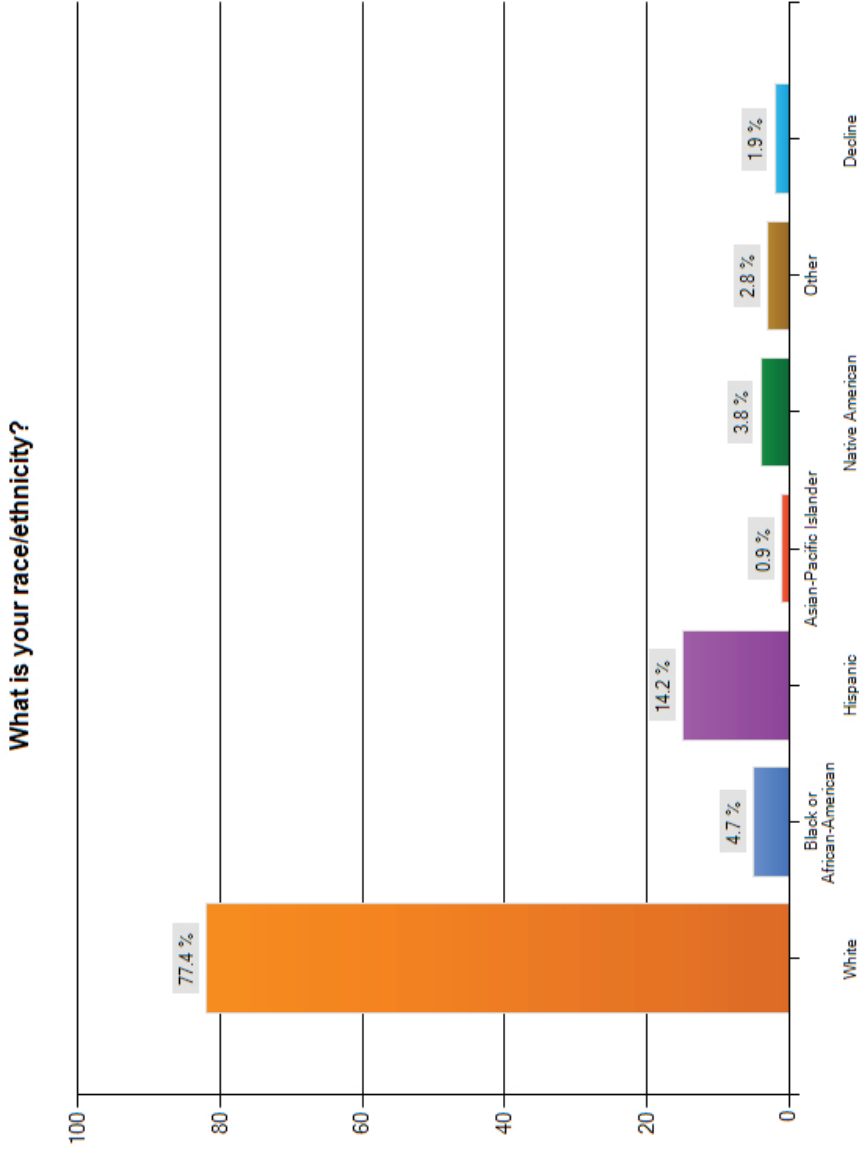


Figure 6: Comparison of Race and Ethnicity of Focus Group Participants and West Des Moines

| Race/Ethnicity | Focus Group Participants | West Des Moines |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| White | 77.4% | 89.9% |
| Black or African-American | 4.7 | 2.8 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 14.2 | 5.1 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 0.9 | 4.8 |
| Native American | 3.8 | 0.1 |
| Other | 2.8 | 1.4 |

GENDER AND AGE

Women were significantly overrepresented among focus group participants (Figure 7 and 8). Participants were slightly more representative of West Des Moines residents according to age (Figure 9), although still not a mirror of the general West Des Moines population. Residents age 65 and over, for example, make up only 10.3 percent of the general population of the city of West Des Moines, while in the focus groups this age group represented 20.8 percent of participants. This is explained, again, because of the specific focus groups targeted to stakeholder groups primarily determined by age, including high school youth, seniors, empty nesters, and retirees. For age, comparative statistics could not be provided for all age categories.

Figure 7: Gender of Focus Group Participants

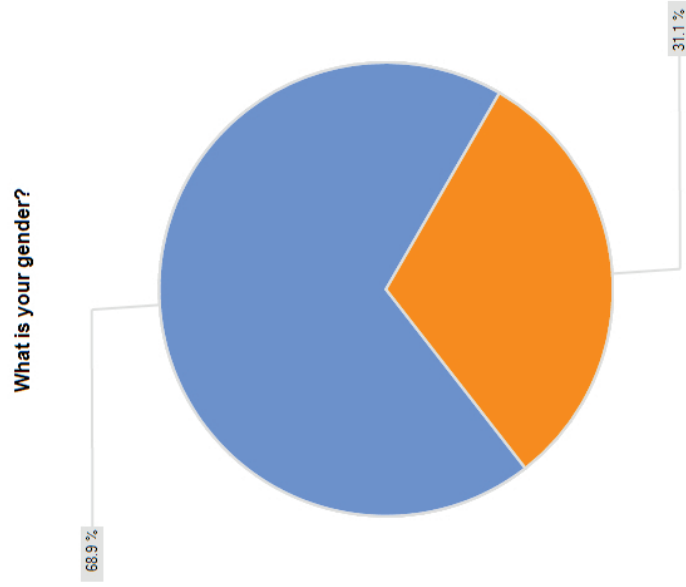


Figure 9: Age of Focus Group Participants

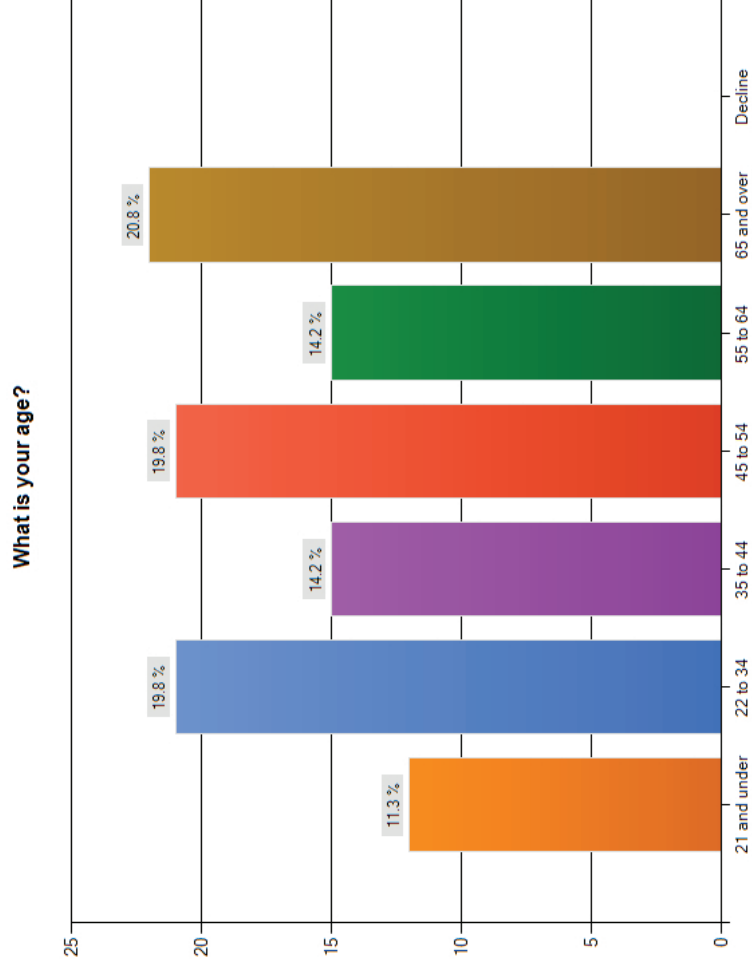


Figure 8: Comparison of Gender of Focus Group Participants and West Des Moines

| Gender | Focus Group Participants | West Des Moines |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Male | 31.1% | 49.2% |
| Female | 68.9 | 50.8 |

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household income was evenly distributed among the focus group participants. The least-represented income category among participants was households with an income of \$150,000 or more. However, the low representation of this category resembles that of the general population of West Des Moines (Figure 11). Overall, the household incomes identified by focus group participants did not significantly differ from those of the general population of West Des Moines.

Figure 10: Household Income of Focus Group Participants

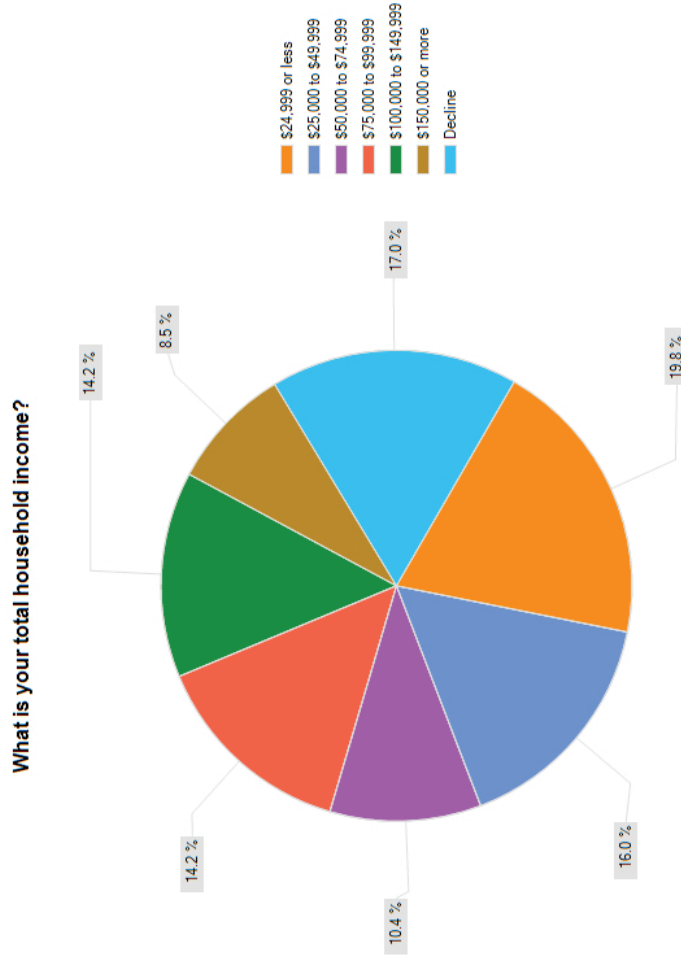


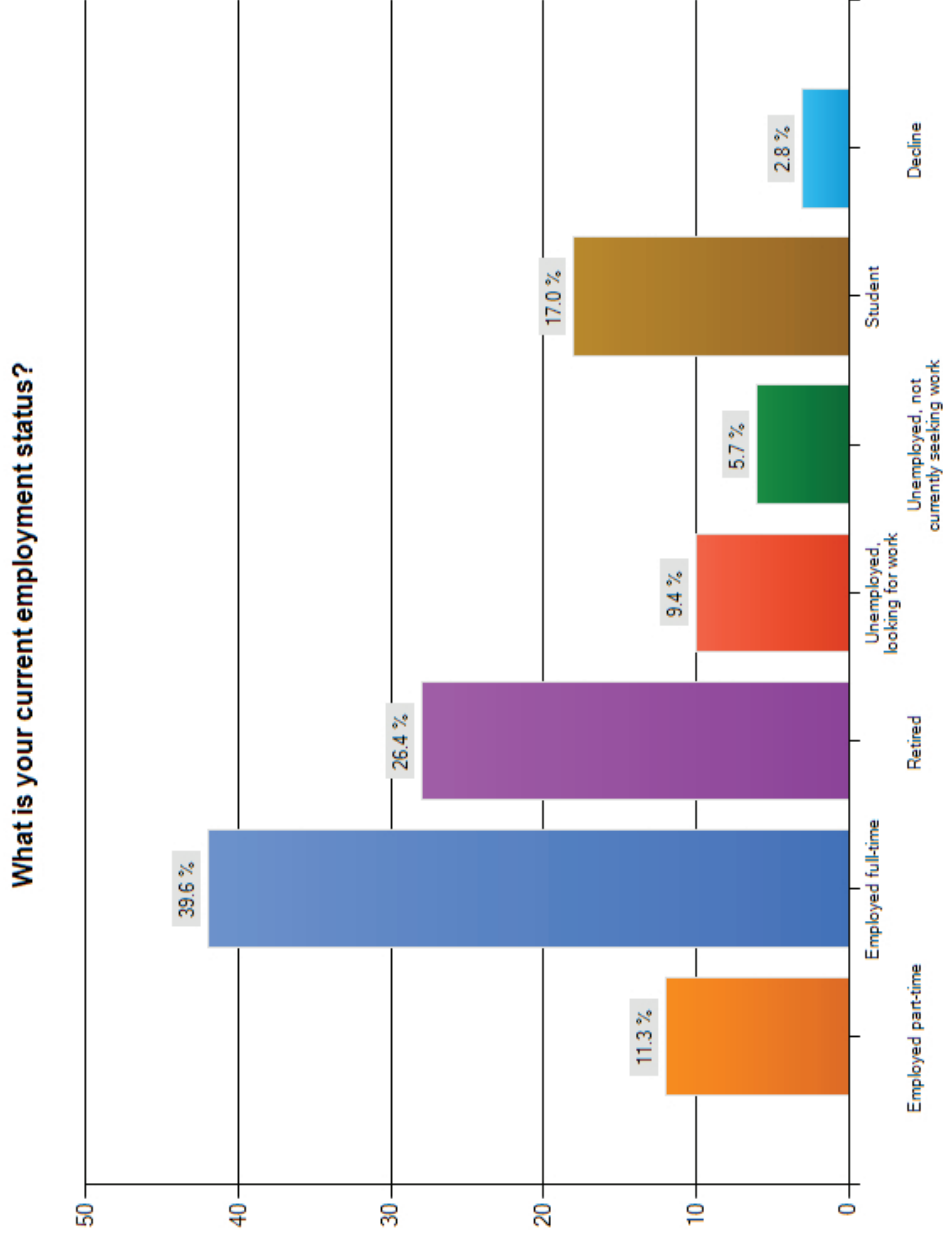
Figure 11: Comparison of Household Income of Focus Group Participants and West Des Moines

| Household Income | Focus Group Participants | West Des Moines |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| \$24,999 or less | 19.8% | 14.6% |
| \$25,000 to \$49,999 | 16.0 | 25.6 |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999 | 10.4 | 18.3 |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999 | 14.2 | 14.6 |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999 | 14.2 | 15.8 |
| \$150,000 or more | 8.5 | 11.1 |
| Decline | 17.0 | NA |

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

In comparison to the general population of West Des Moines, focus group participants identified an employment status in the labor force at a lesser incidence than the general population. According to the 2008 American Community Survey, over 76 percent of the population of West Des Moines is considered participating in the labor force. Only 50 percent of focus group participants identified themselves as employed full-time or part-time (Figure 12). The stakeholder groups targeted for the focus groups can explain this dissimilarity since full-time students, retirees, and the unemployed not seeking work are not considered a part of the labor force.

Figure 12: Employment Status of Focus Group Participants



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Nearly 30 percent of focus group participants had received their Bachelor's degree. This is comparable to the educational attainment of the general population of West Des Moines (33 percent). Among focus group participants, individuals with just some primary and secondary schooling are overrepresented due to the stakeholder groups targeted for the focus groups such as high school youth.

Figure 13: Educational Attainment of Focus Group Participants

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

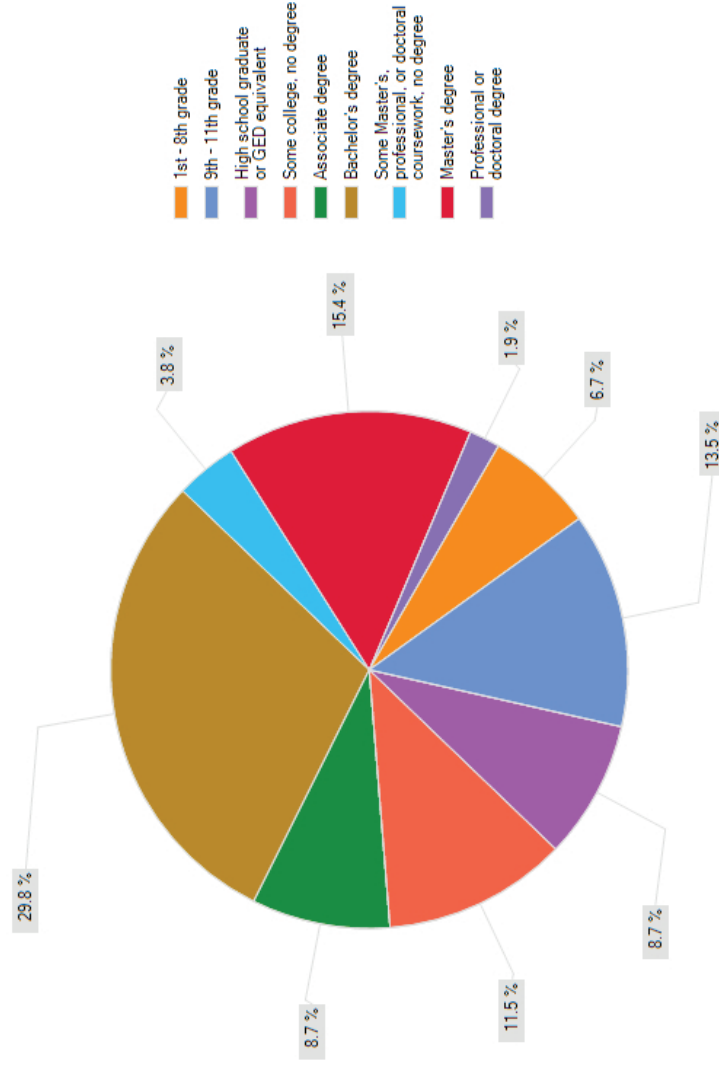


Figure 14: Comparison of Education Attainment of Focus Group Participants and West Des Moines

| Educational Attainment | Focus Group Participants | West Des Moines |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Less than ninth grade | 6.7% | 2.0% |
| Some high school, no diploma | 13.5 | 2.5 |
| High school graduate or GED equivalent | 8.7 | 18.8 |
| Some college, no degree | 11.5 | 19.2 |
| Associate's degree | 8.7 | 9.2 |
| Bachelor's degree | 29.8 | 33.3 |
| Master's or professional degree | 17.3 | 14.9 |

ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Additional demographic questions were added to the questionnaire to provide an enhanced picture of focus group participants. The additional questions asked were: if the participant's children currently attend or ever attended the West Des Moines schools; whether the participant currently owns or rents their residence; how long they have lived in the West Des Moines School District; and whether they work in a city that is different from the one in which they reside.

Figure 15 shows that the same percentage of participants have at least one child in a West Des Moines school (33 percent) as have no school-age children (33 percent). Figure 16 shows that a majority of focus group participants (61.8 percent) owns their place of residence. This is comparable to the ACS Estimate for West Des Moines (65.9 percent, Figure 17). Figure 18 shows that a majority of focus group participants (63.1 percent) has lived in the West Des Moines School District 10 years or longer. Finally, Figure 19 shows that of those focus group participants that work, more of them live and work in the same city (35.3 percent) than in different cities (23.5 percent).

Figure 15: Child(ren) of Focus Group Participants Enrollment in West Des Moines Schools

Do your children attend or have they attended West Des Moines schools?

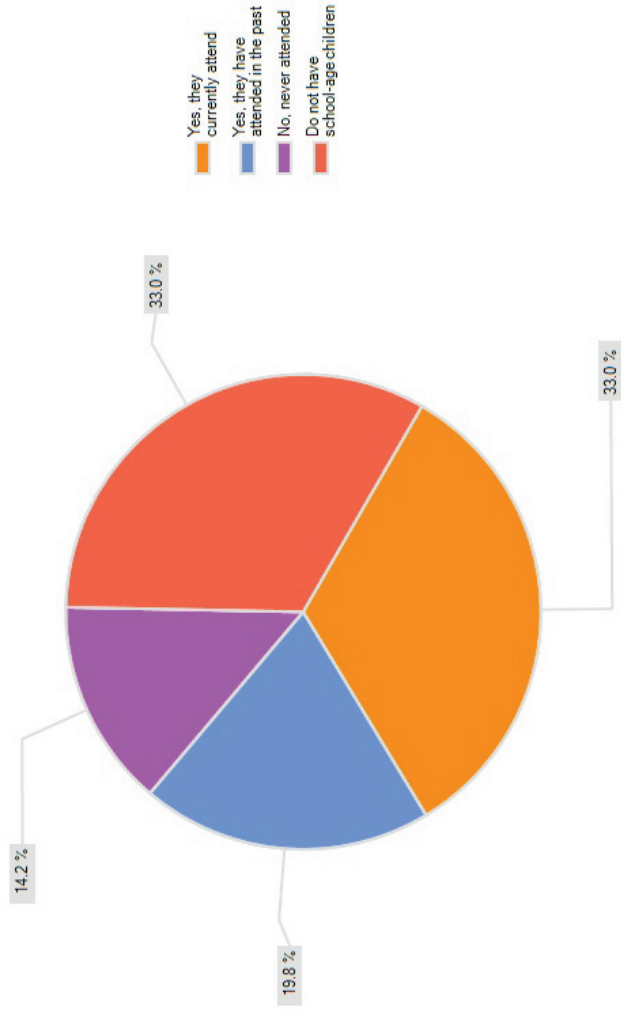


Figure 16: Home Ownership of Focus Group Participants

Do you currently rent or own?

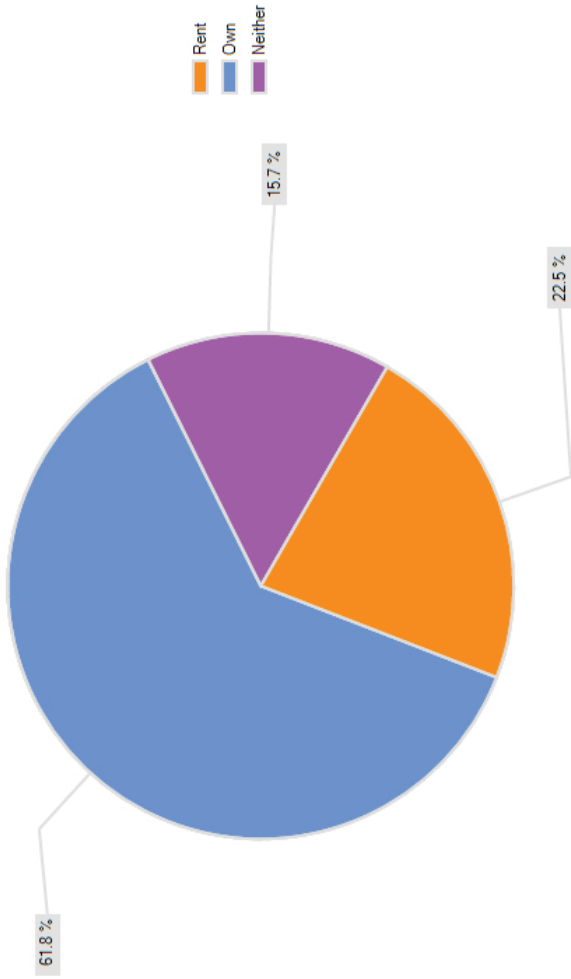


Figure 17: Comparison of Home Ownership of Focus Group Participants and West Des Moines

| Home Ownership | Focus Group Participants | West Des Moines |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Own | 61.8% | 65.9% |
| Rent | 22.5 | 34.1 |
| Neither | 15.7 | NA |

Figure 18: Length of District Residence of Focus Group Participants

How long have you lived in the West Des Moines School District?

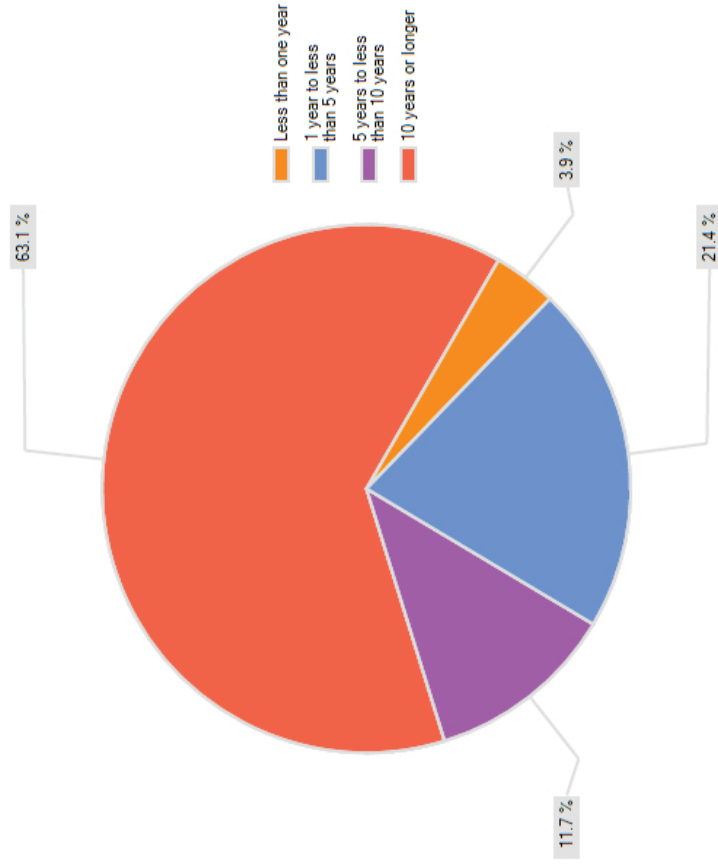
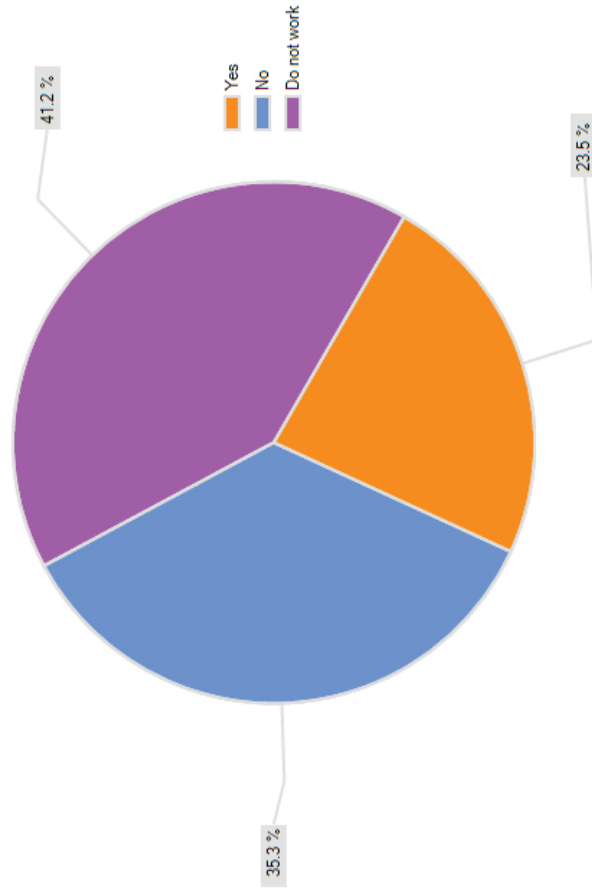


Figure 19: City of Residence and Employment of Focus Group Participants

Do you work in a city that is different from the one in which you reside?



SUMMARY OF INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Each focus group was unique as to the priorities and challenges that surfaced as each discussion progressed. This was to be expected given the selection of distinct stakeholder groups to engage in the community assessment. This section provides a summary of observations from the focus groups. Common priorities and issues across all stakeholder groups are listed followed by unique priorities and issues identified by the separate stakeholder groups engaged in the focus groups. This summary is intended to support West Des Moines Community Education and its communities in prioritizing community needs to most effectively allocate resources to better the lives of residents.

Common Issues and Priorities Across all Stakeholder Groups

- » Most participants of the focus groups thought that people outside the district view their community as “snobby,” “wealthy,” and exclusive.
- » Public transportation in West Des Moines is extremely limited. Many participants suggested that routes be expanded to better serve the community and promote a “greener” lifestyle.
- » Most participants cited the low crime rate in the community as a benefit of residing there.
- » The parks and trails were consistently cited as strengths of the community.
- » Valley Junction was recognized in all focus groups as an important neighborhood to the community.
- » Most participants view the growth in western West Des Moines, more specifically Jordan Creek and surrounding areas, as good for the community.
- » Volunteerism was identified by most participants as an important value in their community. However, many participants further noted that access to volunteer opportunities should be expanded or the opportunities should be better publicized.
- » In general, participants sought a desire for greater citizen input to ensure that long-term planning is community driven.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Human Services Clients

- » Participants placed tremendous value on the cleanliness and safety of West Des Moines.
- » Participants cited the value of West Des Moines Human Services programs and services. They noted a need for greater investment because of increased demand.
- » Participants expressed that investment in the western reaches of the city need to be balanced with investments in Valley Junction and other aging parts of the community.
- » Participants expressed the need for expanded bus service and more shelters at existing stops.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Latinos

- » Participants noted child care is a primary priority, but access is currently very limited. Participants explained that access to child care determines the ability of parents to expand their skills and education.
- » Participants suggested that Latino students don’t graduate from high school in some cases because they view their post-graduate educational options as very limited.
- » Education was viewed very highly by this group – not only the importance of education, but also in regards to the quality of education their children receive from West Des Moines schools.
- » Participants stated that immigration laws have a significant impact on their lives and well-being and are a priority for their families.

Unique Issues and Priorities: High School Youth

- » Not surprisingly, participants' lives revolve around the schools. Most of their information on activities and programs is received through the school or friends, and many of the current activities they participate in are school-related.
- » Participants noted that volunteerism was important to them.
- » Participants had a more skeptical view of the western growth in West Des Moines.
- » No participants thought they would live in West Des Moines as adults.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Young Adults

- » Recreation was a priority for the participants. They cited expansion of trails and parks as a need.
- » Most of the participants were currently living with their parents and had grown up in the West Des Moines district.
- » Participants felt that the community was growing younger and that it was a good community to be a young adult. Entertainment and recreation options were identified as important to attracting young adults to the community.
- » Participants stated that they would be interested in volunteering if they had more time outside of their job and new of available opportunities.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Preschool Families

- » Participants stated that it is highly competitive to get your child into West Des Moines enrichment programs; there seems to be an "in the know" group that shares information about programs.
- » Participants stated that they were very happy with the West Des Moines school district as a community in which to live and raise their families.
- » Most participants were mothers who did not work or worked only part-time outside the home.
- » The library and Safety Town received rave reviews.
- » Affordability of some programs for kids was identified by participants as a barrier to participation.
- » Participants stated that community growth and infrastructure should be well planned.

Unique Issues and Priorities: School-Age Families

- » Participants emphasized that affordability creates gaps in opportunities between students whose families can't afford programs and those who can.
- » A number of participants mentioned volunteerism and its importance, especially for students.
- » Participants thought that the community has most of the resources it needs, such as hospitals, grocery stores, parks, and shops, but lacks affordable housing.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Empty Nesters

- » A need noted by participants was the opportunity for youth in their early teens to have safe places to hang out after school.
- » The parks, schools, library, and trails system were all highlighted as strengths of the community.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Retirees

- » Participants noted the need for schools to communicate with community members in addition to parents.
- » Participants noted the need for attention to students falling in the middle of the academic achievement spectrum.
- » Participants noted that it was hard for kids not excelling in sports to receive encouragement for their achievements in the arts and music.

Unique Issues and Priorities: Seniors

- » Civic leader accountability was very important. Participants talked of their need to feel listened to and that local leaders were acting to their benefit.
- » Participants noted the need for more senior centers in West Des Moines and that the current center is crowded.

Unique Issues and Priorities: West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Community services were viewed very highly by this group.
- » Participants saw the western suburbs (Urbandale, West Des Moines, Clive, et. al.) as having similar values and culture.
- » Participants noted that redevelopment in the eastern areas of West Des Moines and Urbandale needed to be an area of focus. Empty commercial buildings were a concern.

THEMES AND ANALYSIS

Focus group participants were guided through a facilitated discussion on issues ranging from community identity, strengths, and areas in need of improvement or expansion to current access to and knowledge of programs and services and future projections and priorities for the community. Through the consistent use of a similar script for each focus group, SPPG is able to analyze verbatim participant responses to identify common themes across all groups as well as any unique issues of a particular group or among individuals.

Several common themes have been identified based on thorough consideration of all participant responses.

1. Community identity is strongly rooted in people and the schools.
2. A sign of strength of the West Des Moines Schools community, growth, can put other identified community strengths such as good schools, low crime, nice parks, and strong neighborhood cohesiveness at risk.
3. There is agreement that current services to residents throughout the community are provided well, but there is a growing concern regarding services to middle-income families, individuals with disabilities, and aging residents.
4. Expanding opportunities for all residents to be civically engaged is important.
5. Transparency of decision-making and engaging community members in the decision-making process is important to residents in the high-growth community of West Des Moines.
6. Preferred methods for receiving information on community programs, services, or activities differ based on factors including involvement with the schools, primary language, culture, age, and interest.

Each theme is explained in a few paragraphs followed by a detailed listing of verbatim responses that illustrate the theme. Following the detailed description of each of the six themes are considerations for future planning that are intended to serve as a starting point for utilization of the findings.

THEME 1: Community identity is strongly rooted in people and the schools.

A strong theme running throughout all focus groups was the association of community with people and schools. When participants responded to questions regarding outsiders' perceptions of the West Des Moines Schools community, many responses were very similar to the participants' own descriptions of their community: exceptional schools, discerning residents, family-centric priorities, and community pride. There are significant perceived misconceptions, however, that residents are quick to point out: primarily that the suburbs are ethnically and socio-economically homogenous and exclusive.

Many focus group participants cited the stigma associated with attending Valley High School. Both students and other residents noted the existence of this stigma, and identify the cause as primarily due to the school's athletic and academic domination. Much of the negative stereotyping of the West Des Moines Schools community highlights what residents see as community strengths – investments in schools and enrichment programs, caring neighbors, and community wealth represented by almost constant growth to the west and south.

Participant conversations prompted by a variety of questions throughout the focus groups emphasize the roots of the community identity: people and the schools. All identified community strengths hinge upon prioritizing people and schools first. The following themes reaffirm this first and primary theme.

The following are comments offered by participants illustrating this theme:

- » West Des Moines is like a family. Everyone gets along and knows each other. *[Human Services Client]*
- » The schools are great. *[Human Services Client]*
- » I like the fact that people here are more ready to help others than those in Des Moines. *[Human Services Client]*
- » We are friendly and connected. We are not snobs. We are down to earth. The community is nice. *[Human Services Client]*
- » I live in a community where I'm safe being a single mom with four kids...The schools have taken very good watch over my children. *[Latino]*
- » I came here seven years ago and went to Valley. My mother chose to live here for a better education for me. *[Latino]*
- » It is safe, and people watch out for you. Overall, it has a "small community in the city" feeling. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » Warm, friendly, and secure, with a great education system through all our public and private schools. *[Retiree]*
- » The city is made up of people who care about their community and who care about where they live. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*
- » People think that the West Des Moines schools are very interconnected with the city. *[Young Adult]*
- » I still see this town as a very good town with very good people, a close-bonded community. When it comes to a common goal, people get together and work together and that's what it takes for a good community. *[Senior]*
- » It can be spun negatively. People give me a hard time sometimes, but it goes both ways. They know the city is made up of people who care about their community and who care about where they live. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*

THEME 2: A sign of strength of the West Des Moines Schools community, growth, can put other identified community strengths such as good schools, low crime, nice parks, and strong neighborhood cohesiveness at risk.

It was clear throughout all focus group discussions that participants generally view West Des Moines' growth as good for the community and an indicator of attractiveness. This growth, however, does not come without drawbacks. Many participants were quick to note specific examples of how other areas of community strength such as the schools, low crime rates, nice green space, and neighborhood cohesiveness, could be put at risk without careful planning by community leaders. These strengths can be seen as competing forces: the push to expand and grow, and the desire to maintain and improve levels of service and amenities at the same time.

The community strengths most often cited by participants include:

- » Exceptional schools
- » Low crime rates
- » Watchful, attentive neighborhoods
- » Good value for cost of living
- » Safe, clean parks
- » Well maintained walking and biking trails
- » Well-utilized public library
- » Convenience

Many participants, however, recognize that growth puts these strengths at risk. With greater diversity of residents can bring conflict, school resources become strained with greater numbers of students, traffic increases with the number of people and amenities, and without careful, comprehensive planning neighborhoods could become more exclusive according to income. Participants of all ages and income identified schools as the highest priority. This is not surprising considering how closely the community is associated with its schools. As is illustrated in Theme 3, participants also note that people should be invested in, as well, with particular consideration for middle-income families (families earning slightly above the federal poverty level and, thus, ineligible for many income-based public services), residents with disabilities, and aging residents.

This theme stresses the importance of careful, comprehensive planning to ensure that the opposing forces of growth and the desire to maintain levels of service and amenities for residents are balanced as the community continues to grow. As is highlighted in following themes, part of this should be looking at current service gaps to middle-income families, residents with disabilities, and aging residents to ensure that the needs of all residents are met at a satisfactory level. In addition, this comprehensive planning must also be as transparent as is appropriate. As highlighted in Theme 5, transparency of decision-making and public engagement throughout the decision-making process are important to community members in the high-growth community of West Des Moines.

The following are comments offered by participants illustrating this theme:

- » We have higher income homes, professionals, big professional businesses. They [City of West Des Moines] don't really pursue industrial jobs. The community is financially better off than Des Moines. The people that are coming here are more professional and educated than other communities. *[Human Services Client]*
- » Clean. Everyone deserves to live in a nice environment. There are no bad areas. *[Human Services Client]*

- » A lot of small town people think, “Oooohhh, Big City” – disconnected. But, there is a small town attitude that connects people. *[Young Adult]*
- » The city keeps growing but the police department seems to have very little funding. The way the city is growing doesn’t match up with the amount of policing going on. *[Empty Nester]*
- » The city is clean, well kept. There are plenty of parks. Law enforcement is very good in West Des Moines. It is a safe place. *[Young Adult]*
- » The [library] children’s department has been phenomenal. Having some place to go everyday when you don’t know anyone is wonderful. They know you by name. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » The police open house is wonderful. We missed getting a bike helmet and the police told me to go to the public safety office. The paramedics let him play on the equipment. It’s that small town feel, again. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » I think an additional strength is that we are getting businesses here and attract new jobs here. I see a lot of communities that are stagnant. It seems that we are very progressive. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » There are a lot of family values here in West Des Moines. There are a number of gangs in the metro area and West Des Moines does not tolerate gangs. *[Empty Nester]*
- » It’s a safe community. Very seldom is our community in the news with a lot of crime. There is very little crime in West Des Moines compared to Des Moines. *[Senior]*
- » There is not the hassle that goes along with big cities. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*
- » I thought about this before I came. With the children’s program at the library we had the director come speak to us. Her budget has stayed the same while the number served has grown. The Friends of the Library should be expanded. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » We live near Crestview, and when my two kids were going through there, there was some solidarity in the neighborhood, but I feel the West Des Moines district has clobbered that neighborhood by changing it. We’ve seen the neighborhood deteriorating. The newer people don’t know us, and they don’t wave. Ours is very much a neighborhood in transition, and it’s not that old. It shouldn’t be decline. I attribute it a lot to how the school district has handled the school out there. *[Retiree]*
- » We have so many people speeding through our streets, and that’s disrespectful. If they knew the people on the street, they wouldn’t do that. I don’t think it’s been connected in some areas of West Des Moines. *[Retiree]*
- » We experienced the school capping problem. We assumed that our kids would be able to go to the neighborhood school. Now there are too many kids and they bus the kindergartners across town. That has frustrated people. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » The law enforcement officers used to come around more often and you knew who they were. Now you don’t know who they are. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » The locally-owned businesses are going away because of the chain stores coming to West Des Moines. We are losing our community character and becoming generic. *[Empty Nester]*
- » The population increase has resulted in more traffic and customer service suffers. Interstate traffic gets worse every year. *[Human Services Client]*
- » The demographic definitely changed. It’s a very different student population. *[Retiree]*
- » I would like to see West Des Moines keep up with the improvements that need to be made to the older part of the community before they grab more land and expand and expand. It’s really sad that we are on septic systems in my area because they are not concerned about running sewer lines. *[Senior]*
- » If they could improve the streets and have more parks and EMS services, that would be good. *[Senior]*

THEME 3: There is agreement that current services to residents throughout the community are provided well, but there is a growing concern regarding services to middle-income families, individuals with disabilities, and aging residents.

Overall, participants agreed that many services in the community were provided well, such as public safety, human services, community education, and city, park, and trail maintenance. Participants' comments suggest that they believe that most, if not all, basic needs for residents were currently being met. Additional services, particularly for middle-income families (families earning slightly above the federal poverty level and, thus, ineligible for many income-based public services), individuals with disabilities, and aging residents, were noted as needing improvement or expansion. These needs should be closely considered by community leaders to ensure that West Des Moines Schools communities remain inclusive and support the priorities voiced by community members.

The following are comments offered by participants illustrating this theme:

- » My concern is as a single mom. I have to leave my kids home alone sometimes to go to work. I have a very young child who is not school-age. I can't afford day care, but work too hard to qualify for assistance. I make too much to get the free day care. There needs to be something to do with our young kids. *[Latino]*
- » Some of the families that move away stated that it is because they felt their kids had a better chance of playing sports in Waukee. They felt you had to be a top-notch athlete to participate at Valley. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » We need activities that are affordable for the middle class. *[Young Adult]*
- » There are a lot of things in West Des Moines that are private, but we need some of them to be public. We go to the Country Club golf course once a year as part of a work event, and we know it's the only time we'll play golf there. It's out of reach for most of us. *[Young Adult]*
- » When my oldest went to preschool, we got a really good scholarship. This year, we couldn't find the same discount for my youngest. There needs to be a cheaper option – I'd be willing to pay, but not as much as they were requiring. This should be addressed. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » We are just outside the low-income range. There are some people who are just outside the range and their kids lose out on a lot of programs. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » The affordability of activities in the community. Youth soccer is expensive. It adds up after you get your child involved in sports, art center classes, and other activities. Sports camps and clinics are expensive too. There aren't a lot of organized things for families to do that are affordable. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » The busing system needs to be improved. My boys all go to the same school, and I have to pay \$200 per child. I don't understand why I have to pay that much. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » My daughter went to Western Hills. We were far from the bus route, and she had to walk because I couldn't afford the \$200. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » There isn't affordable housing. A lot of the places to live are upper scale or very expensive. There needs to be better housing around those jobs. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » Last year when my son was in first grade, he decided he wanted to do soccer. I got everything rounded up, and it ended up being \$400 to start – to get the equipment and register. I didn't even know if he liked it at that point. There are some people that can afford it, but I really have to budget. There are some scholarships, but if you're right outside the income guidelines, then there are some kids that slip through. It sorts kids into a group – the kids that can't do things. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » There should be an accessible system of transportation. The bus doesn't run at certain times and needs to address the aging population. *[Empty Nester]*
- » I work with people with neurological disorders that need a center where they can exercise, socialize, and receive education. *[Empty Nester]*

- » The public transportation system is not one of our greatest strengths. You can get downtown and Valley West, but you can't get over to Raccoon River Park. *[Retiree]*
- » I think the city governments of West Des Moines, Clive, and the whole area treat citizens pretty well. Overall, the west side of town does well in providing services. *[Retiree]*
- » I do home health as my profession. I think that West Des Moines does an okay job of helping the elderly, but I would like to see a program that would help the elderly commute to doctor appointments. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » Public transportation needs to be accessible and affordable. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » We need to improve community support for those who are aging or have disabilities. *[Empty Nester]*
- » One thing that Des Moines and other communities have that we don't is a senior center. Des Moines has several senior centers located all over – 17 total. *[Senior]*
- » My husband recently became disabled, and they don't have the services needed. *[Retiree]*
- » There is a gap for people that don't qualify for senior services because they are too young. Services for individuals with disabilities are also lacking. The city doesn't have comprehensive services for all ages. *[Human Services Client]*
- » There needs to be more community outreach for people with human services needs. *[Human Services Client]*
- » I have a daughter who has a difficult time hearing out of one ear. She is not totally deaf, but I feel that there hasn't been anything for my daughter. For all the resources available here, there should be something for her. *[Latino]*
- » Someone mentioned services for the handicapped. I think they're very nice. I lived here before I was in a wheelchair. The only problem I have is in the old part of Valley Junction, where I can't get into the stores. West Des Moines has a human services department that's very helpful. I used them for several years, and I've used their services to take myself to appointments. We've talked about moving back to Des Moines, and we've considered that as part of it. *[Retiree]*
- » They used to have an autism specialist in the AEA, but they eliminated that position and rolled it into a destructive behavior specialist. I'd like to see the autism specialist return. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*
- » As our population ages, people become isolated. We need to work aggressively to have volunteer and community centers so that we don't isolate those people. *[Empty Nester]*
- » My nephew and I live in Des Moines. We open enroll here. He will start a football camp here soon. The transportation brings him to Valley West Mall, but the bus won't take IDs from the West Des Moines schools. Any other district and university can get discounted fair, but not West Des Moines. *[Latino]*

THEME 4: Expanding opportunities for all residents to be civically engaged is important.

A surprising theme throughout the focus groups was the suggestion by all categories of participants – from high school youth, to parents, to empty nesters – that volunteer opportunities be expanded for community members. Some active volunteers, such as young adults, suggested that opportunities to volunteer be made more public through community publications and websites. For other participants, such as parents, suggestions concerning civic engagement included expansion of the schools' Silver Cord program and the creation of additional opportunities for students to be involved in the community.

Other participants suggested that community members be more involved in volunteering with community organizations as a solution to the issue of the gap in services to aging residents and individuals with disabilities. Not only did participants see civic engagement as good for the individual volunteering, but they also recognized it as a way for the community to help each other. This philosophy is not surprising considering the close tie between community identity and the people.

The following are comments offered by participants illustrating this theme:

- » Habitat for Humanity is what I'm interested in. I volunteer for Habitat for Humanity in Des Moines once a week. You never see them in West Des Moines. *[Young Adult]*
- » As far as volunteering is concerned, I don't hear as much about the opportunities as I did when I was in school here. I don't have the ways to find out about them now. *[Young Adult]*
- » I would volunteer, but there isn't a way to find what I can volunteer for. *[Young Adult]*
- » A community garden would be nice. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » And the food from the community garden could go to needy families. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » Getting more volunteer opportunities such as Silver Cord. They need to use it more. Silver Cord is a cord that graduates have that show that they have volunteered 200 hours. It is underutilized, and I hope they use it more. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » The elderly would love it if somebody would visit and talk with them. It would be a great idea to have kids stop by or volunteer for them. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » Silver Cord should tap into local businesses and try to have a career opportunity for kids who want to volunteer. If a business wants to provide a service to the community and needs workers, it could utilize the program. It could also expose kids to a type of career. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » I would like to have more volunteer opportunities for kids. Currently, it is hard for teens to get jobs over the summer. I try to push my daughters to start working on their resumes and to get involved in things that could benefit them in the long run. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » A volunteer component makes them more productive in society. It's a demographic that the City of West Des Moines should address. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » I graduated from college a year ago. I volunteered with the Gold Star Museum. If I had known about all of those opportunities I would have done it sooner and done more of it. *[Young Adult]*
- » I'd like to see more opportunities for the kids to do community service where they are actually able to think of others and be less focused on themselves. It's hard to think of ways that we can give back. We donate, but do they really make the connection? I feel like they need to make the connection better. A community service outlet would be good. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » [We need more] community advocates that step up and take initiative, even on a volunteer basis. *[Human Services Client]*
- » Volunteering is very helpful. More grades, such as middle school, should be able to participate in things like Silver Cord. *[High School Youth]*

- » I think we could increase the youth participation in the silver chord program that enables youth volunteering. We need our leaders to expand on these types of programs and design a place where we could find out how and where to volunteer. *[Empty Nester]*
- » I would get younger elementary kids more involved in a wide plethora of activities such as volunteering. They are the future of this community and need to start volunteering at a younger age. *[High School Youth]*

THEME 5: Transparency of decision-making and engaging community members in the decision-making process is important to residents in the high-growth community of West Des Moines.

The high-impact nature of growth in residential communities demands transparent decision-making and public engagement. Many participants noted specific situations where they felt their input was disregarded or ignored when confronted by the realities of community growth. For instance, one participant cited the example of a parking lot being put in near her home. When she attended a city council meeting to speak on the subject, she expressed the feeling that the decision was already made prior to citizen input.

While it may not be feasible to hear, in person, all resident input on development of certain locations and structures, a thoughtfully considered, comprehensive plan for community development where resident input is sought before plans are finalized would serve all stakeholders in a rapidly growing community. Such a plan must also proactively be shared with the community and referred to throughout the plan timeframe. This would give residents comfort in knowing that they have helped shape their community and their priorities were considered in the plans for physical development. If such planning is currently done, these plans should be shared more often and broadly.

Those participants living in communities outside of the city of West Des Moines that are not experiencing the same level of growth were far more satisfied with their elected officials and policy-makers. Participants in the West Des Moines District Non-Residents focus group (representing the communities of Clive, Windsor Heights and Urbandale) expressed much more positive views of decision-making in their communities than did those participants residing in West Des Moines.

The following are comments offered by participants illustrating this theme:

- » They're building a road right next to our house that doesn't go anywhere. All our neighbors banded together to speak with the DOT about it, but they went ahead with it. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » We live right on the edge of West Des Moines. The people building aren't talking to the residents and meeting our needs. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » Has anyone determined what the new needs of the community are now? As the community changes, the needs will change. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » When my kids were in elementary, we were surprised at the stand-offish-ness. We fought to get a light there for the kids on a busy road. Principals up through people in these offices had a very stand-offish attitude. I think they treated the school board badly. There was this sense of, "We're professionals. Leave us alone." *[Retiree]*
- » About 10 years ago there was a lot of publicity of smart communities where you park in the back and know your neighbors. Then they started to build Jordan Creek Parkway. The smart community idea went out the window. *[Senior]*
- » Having more input sessions [and] being able to meet with other community members [is good]. It would be nice to be able to participate and be part of the bigger picture here. *[Latino]*
- » As a Latino, West Des Moines seems like a community that cares. More community meetings like this would be nice. I would participate again. *[Latino]*
- » State officials should come into our neighborhoods to get an understanding of what is really happening. After 1993, officials really didn't spend much time in the community to see what needs to be done. Flood protection is a big issue in Valley Junction. If it floods again, many people will just move out of the area and it will all be thrown away. *[High School Youth]*
- » When I first moved into my house, there was a bunch of land nearby. It hadn't been decided what they were going to do with it. It became a park. The parking lot is right by my house. I felt that the board

members were open to the idea when I argued to move the parking lot, but the lady running the show was closed-minded. I just felt like I wasn't listened to. *[Preschool Parent]*

- » If you ever watch the city channel, it doesn't seem like this group is represented on the city council. It would be nice if the community could vote on issues instead of having the council making the decisions. We only have that one electoral vote, but the people who run don't relate to us. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » I would agree about them not relating with us. We called our council member about our street. He wasn't interested. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » I think they wait too long to include people in the decisions. Once they're talking about the money, they've made their decisions. They need to engage us much earlier. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » When I get notices for public meetings, it always seems too late. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » Continuously reach out to the community and find out their concerns and needs and actually follow through. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » They need to offer city council meetings or have opportunities where the city is able to get more citizens' point of views. I think these types of focus groups are more comfortable than going to a city council meeting. There is a lot less pressure in going to a focus group and not having to get on a microphone and have to talk in front of a lot of people. It would be nice also for the city to hear from a diverse group of people from all ages, genders, and races. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » I think our elected officials need to be seen more in the community. They could stop in at the community centers, schools, and other community events. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » Our leadership needs to be more involved within the whole community. A lot of students only know the name of their principal, but if they saw the person they wouldn't know who it was. This also goes with the city council members. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » I think they're on a pretty good course of action. They've got the right map to follow; it's just a matter of keeping on that path. I am not very active in politics, but if I'm not voting, I'm not going to complain. Elected officials have done a very good job minding the store, so to speak. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*
- » I haven't had any big disagreements with my elected officials. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*
- » I would focus on making the community more connected and bonded to each other. People of influence, police officers etc. need to be more involved and connected in the community. *[High School Youth]*

THEME 6: Preferred methods for receiving information on community programs, services, or activities differ based on factors including involvement with the schools, primary language, culture, age, and interest.

There was no unanimous agreement on the best method for providing information to residents regarding community programs, services, or activities. Participant preference for receiving such information was based on factors including involvement with the schools, primary language, culture, age, and interest. Participants directly involved in the schools, such as parents and high school youth, receive most of their information from the school. This was believed to be the best method for sharing information with them. For other groups with less connection to the schools, receiving information through the schools is not ideal. Young adults and adults with no children in the schools prefer to get their information via other sources including the newspaper (publications differ, however) and online.

Participants had specific suggestions for the best ways to reach out to them. A few of those specific suggestions were the following:

- » Families with preschool and school-age children – West Des Moines community program book, word-of-mouth, email, better utilization of public websites to coordinate information
- » Latino families – Sylvia, a liaison with West Des Moines Community Schools (the focus group’s interpreter), Spanish-speaker through telephone, Spanish radio
- » Young adults – Word-of-mouth, alternative publications like *Juice* and *Datebook* (both published by the *Register*), email, online
- » High school youth – These participants did not provide alternative suggestions for communicating with them outside of school, friends, and other organizations such as church.
- » Empty-nesters and retirees – Mail, email, the *Register*, online calendar of events,
- » Seniors – Expanding the school bulletins mailed to residents, West Des Moines community program book
- » West Des Moines non-residents – Non-residents did not provide alternative suggestions for communicating with them beyond the methods currently used including the school, the West Des Moines community program book, email, online, and the library.

Participants provided suggestions for improving communication regarding programs, services, and activities available to the community. These suggestions are provided below along with additional comments that illustrate this theme.

- » The community books that they send out are a huge strength. My mom lives on the east side and she has to search for programming. When people ask about swim lessons I just reference the mailed book thing. [*Preschool Parent*]
- » The book distributed by the city is good but needs to be more clear and expanded. [*Human Services Client*]
- » We need a more transparent way to find out about that programming. [*Preschool Parent*]
- » Some first time parents have a hard time finding out about programs. [*Preschool Parent*]
- » Now there are more people that can actually communicate with me in Spanish. Before, people wouldn’t reach out to me or other Spanish-speaking parents. That showed to us that they didn’t care. [*Latino*]
- » The problem is that schools are hard pressed for money. Communication is expensive, but they could do something over email to people without kids. [*Retiree*]
- » Not everyone uses a computer. [*Retiree*]
- » There needs to be more community outreach for people with human services needs. [*Human Services Client*]

- » When I go to Broadlawns, I wish there were more people there that could communicate with me in Spanish. I have to pull my oldest son out of school to interpret for me in order to talk to the doctor. *[Latino]*
- » One of the issues for me, as a parent, is that there are too many papers going home with my student. It is hard for me to identify the important papers, and the documents aren't translated. *[Latino]*
- » I called human services, and they didn't call me back. One person referred me to many different people, and I left a message and didn't get a call back. I'm not sure if we know what services are out there. If someone can answer your questions with the first call, that would be great. *[Retiree]*
- » Better designed web services [would be helpful]. *[Retiree]*
- » Yes, but West Des Moines sends out that little book regularly. *[Retiree]*
- » I do think the websites could be more user-friendly. *[Retiree]*
- » I think it is more knowledge that we need, like having a class on community services for West Des Moines Community Education. *[Retiree]*
- » As far as volunteering is concerned, I don't hear as much about the opportunities as I did when I was in school here. I don't have the ways to find out about them now. *[Young Adult]*
- » There needs to be a better community bulletin where people can post events on a website. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » They should advertise events that are going on and when and how to get started. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » The West Des Moines website is not that user friendly. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » It would be nice to have a page where citizens could add things. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » Last week there was a Jazz in July and I was able to go because I signed up for an email notification for upcoming events and knew about it. *[School-Age Parent]*
- » For me, the best person is Sylvia at the school. She knows me and she helps me. Sylvia picked up my daughter when I had to work. She helps me in those cases when no one else will. *[Latino]*
- » I listen to the Spanish radio station. And there are four to six Spanish newspapers. *[Latino]*
- » Everybody has to sign up their kids for programs. Maybe you could put the scholarship information on a pamphlet. *[Latino]*
- » [I hear about activities through] word of mouth. I trust my friends. *[Young Adult]*
- » [I hear about activities from] my friends, mostly, but Juice and DateBook. *[Young Adult]*
- » An expanded program book would be nice. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » Just being with other moms – the networking is so important. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » Visiting Nurse Services provides a lot of free information and pamphlets. They are a wealth of information. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » The community education book comes out twice a year. It's dog-eared and right by our phone. It's kept around. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » The city website is excellent. Sometimes I find things I've missed. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » There have been a lot of flyers in the school packet. At our school, you get a Monday folder that you have to sign. It's a good system. *[Preschool Parent]*
- » [I hear about things from the] Des Moines Register West Des Moines insert. *[Senior]*
- » The West Des Moines insert has everything we need to know. *[Senior]*
- » It's mostly the school that's funneled information out to us. Anymore, you just can hop on their website to find other links. We also find out about things through the library. I think the school does an excellent job. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*
- » My kids are out of school, so most of what I see is through the paper, Datebook, or television. *[West Des Moines District Non-Resident]*

- » It would be really cool to devote part of the city's website to posting all those activities. They have such a good website. It would be good to devote someone for posting. It could be a calendar, or ads, or other things. *[Young Adult]*
- » The education pamphlets that go to the home, we should consolidate and attach community activities to the school bulletins that are sent. They could include little announcements such as heat warnings. *[Senior]*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING

Many ideas for future programs, services, and organizational policies will come out of these findings. This section provides a few recommendations based on SPPG's experience with municipal governments, nonprofit organizations, and local education agencies, and is meant to be a starting point for the utilization of the findings from this community assessment.

1. Share the 2010 community report findings widely and regularly.

Many participants expressed support for additional public engagement activities like the focus groups undertaken by West Des Moines Community Education. Their desire to participate in such activities, as well as their desire to see the findings from the focus groups, reflects the importance of sharing information gathered from these activities with the public. This not only shows that policy makers are engaging the public on matters of community importance, but also that community leaders are operating transparently, opening up the process for making decisions that impact the community.

In sharing the report, it will be beneficial to make a commitment to those groups recognized as needing expanded services and programs. It is not necessarily a promise to do something specific at this time, but at least making a public commitment to pursue progress on the identified needs would go a long way to earn public support.

2. Utilize the findings to develop messages to potential residents and businesses that reflect the shared priorities and values of West Des Moines Schools community members.

Potential messages are scattered throughout this community report and should be fully integrated into pitches to potential residents and businesses. This report details the shared priorities and values of West Des Moines Schools community members that will certainly be attractive to families and businesses. For those groups for whom services need to be improved, seeing that the community is focusing on improving the quality of life for middle-income families, individuals with disabilities, and aging lowans is sure to attract people to the district.

3. Elicit additional feedback from stakeholders on specific programs and services participants suggested be changed, improved, expanded, or created.

Going back to stakeholders regarding specific suggestions will show the community that the findings are being taken seriously by leaders. Additional follow-up meetings with participants of the Silver Cord program, for instance, would help identify what programmatic elements are working, and what may be improved if the program were to expand. If any program is changed due to responses from the focus groups, explain those connections. Community members will appreciate that their input really does lead to policy change.

4. Continue the tradition of engaging West Des Moines Schools community members every five years for a comprehensive community assessment.

Focus groups are not just an opportunity to elicit input from the community. Focus groups and similar public events are also a chance for public entities to interface with their constituencies. Too often the dual purpose of focus groups is not fully realized and opportunities are missed. The commitment made by West Des Moines Community Education of undertaking such an assessment every five years is important to maintaining a foundation in its mission and successfully implementing its strategies. With this most recent assessment, community members were brought into the decision-making process for the school district and district communities, and will be more engaged because of that. In return, West Des Moines Community Education and its partners are more responsive and relevant to those they serve.

ABOUT SPPG

State Public Policy Group, Inc. is an independent, mission-driven consulting firm that works with clientele from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in providing a broad range of services including community outreach, organizational development, research and surveying, and issue advocacy. Founded on the belief that all stakeholders have an interest and value in being engaged in the policy-making process, SPPG prides itself on developing initiatives that engage diverse stakeholders, ultimately proving more successful than closed processes with little to no community engagement.

SPPG staff have extensive technical experience and bring project management, public engagement, and recognition of the importance of the process, not just outcome, as core elements of practice. For the past 26 years, SPPG has conducted projects in Iowa, the Midwest, nationally, in US territories, and in 20 countries abroad. Across Iowa over its 26 years, SPPG has conducted focus groups, training, or facilitated discussions in more than 300 communities.

For more information on SPPG, please visit www.sppg.com.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Script

Demographic Questionnaire

Focus Group Notes in Compilation Form

West Des Moines Community Education

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

I. WELCOME AND PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP

- » SPPG facilitator welcomes everyone and introduces self.
- » West Des Moines Community Education seeks input from residents within the West Des Moines Community School District regarding community strengths and needs. West Des Moines Community Education's mission is to meet the needs of the community by connecting people, ideas and resources. These focus groups are intended to help the school district serve its community better.
- » SPPG's role in this effort is to facilitate public discussion and deliver that information to the West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council in a usable way. West Des Moines Community Education is provided guidance by an advisory council of residents to inform programming, outreach, and other services.
- » Information from this and other focus groups will be summarized and incorporated into a report to the West Des Moines Community Education Advisory Council. The Advisory Council will decide how the information is then used.
- » Self-introductions of participants. Each introduces him/herself by name and where he/she resides.

II. STRUCTURE OF THE FOCUS GROUP

- » Use of a script is done for consistency across this and other focus groups. There is not a right or wrong response to the questions we ask. We're only interested in what you THINK about the issues we raise. The script is made up of a series of statements that we believe to be true, with some explanation about why we want to talk about them. Each statement is followed by a set of questions we want you to respond to.
- » Your honesty is important to us. You won't hurt our feelings by the comments you make. Our job is to find out what you think and use that information to help in planning.
- » Please BRIEFLY respond to the question with your first thoughts – and try not to react to what the person before you said.

III. RULES FOR THE SESSION

- » Everyone will participate.
- » Be ready to volunteer your comment.
- » Please be brief in your comments and get to the point right away.
- » Session will be limited to two hours, and I will do my best to ensure we move the discussion along to end on time.
- » Notes taken on laptop by SPPG staff.
- » Non-attributable comments. We are not interested in who said what, just what is said.
- » Any questions?

First Question: Take out pencil and paper and take a few moments to write down the first word that comes to mind when I say, "community."

Please share what you wrote down.

PREMISE 1

When we talk about “community,” for the purposes of this focus group, we mean the geographic region served by the West Des Moines Community School District. The District serves a number of communities, including West Des Moines, Urbandale, Clive, Windsor Heights, and Cumming. Each city in the district is unique, with its own character and identity. People choose to live in a community for a wide variety of reasons including housing options, entertainment, programs and services available, and commuting. Please answer a few questions about your community and your decisions behind living there.

1. Why do you live in your community?
2. How do you think people outside the community see it? Follow-up: Are schools a part of this community?
3. How would you like them to see your community?
4. Are there any additional community strengths that you would add?
5. What needs to be improved?

PREMISE 2

The population of West Des Moines-area communities has increased consistently between 15 to 20 percent every five years since 2000. This growth is a positive indicator of strong communities, but we all know that growth can also have drawbacks, as well. Please talk a bit about changes you have experienced in your community in the past few years.

1. What changes have you noticed in the community over the past five years?
2. How have these changes positively impacted your community?
3. What challenges have arisen from these changes?
4. Are there any needs in the community not currently being met?

PREMISE 3

Good recreational and educational opportunities are important characteristics of successful communities. Ensuring that basic needs of residents are being met are also important. Such opportunities and services are offered by a number of organizations, including the school district and the city, private organizations, faith-based organizations and area nonprofits. All West Des Moines school district communities have invested significant community resources to support a strong educational system for all community residents – programs offered through West Des Moines Community Schools extend beyond meeting the educational and social needs of the community’s children and youth to also serving the community’s adults. Examples of school activities include before and after school programs, continuing education classes, adult education classes, and sports. West Des Moines district communities have also invested in recreational opportunities through the cities. Examples of city activities include parks and recreation camps and programs, library story time, and adult sports. Strong communities also offer residents services to ensure everyone enjoys a good quality of life and are able to meet the basic needs necessary for their family. We want to talk a bit about the activities you participate in and services you receive and how you make those decisions.

1. Please take out your notepads and pens. Please list on the notepad which recreational and educational activities or programs you (and your family) participate in generally – not just city and schools activities. Please also list those services that you receive in your community. Please share what you wrote down.
2. What factors influence your participation in these activities? Follow-up regarding barriers to participation if not previously mentioned.
3. Are there any additional activities and services that you know of, but don’t participate in? What are those?
4. How do you find out about activities and services?
5. How would you prefer to find out about activities and services?
6. Are there any other programs and services that you don’t have access to but would like to?

PREMISE 4

It is important for communities to plan for the long-term to ensure a consistent or more improved quality of services for residents as well as to ensure that they remain attractive to potential residents and businesses. West Des Moines-area communities are not unique in their hope for long-term success, prosperity, and growth. These focus groups are an effort to do just this. Part of this process is to identify a longer-term goal for area communities, current community strengths, and how to attain the goals through maintaining those areas that are strong and improving those that aren't. Please answer the following questions related to this premise.

1. Take out the notepad and paper again. Please take a few moments to write down how you think your community will look in 5 to 10 years. Please share what you wrote.
2. How should it look ideally?
3. How can leaders and residents make this happen?
4. What or who should your community be attracting?
5. What are some priorities for your community in the next 5 to 10 years?

CONCLUSION AND ROUND ROBIN

If you were King or Queen of the World and had the power to make anything happen, what one thing would you do to improve your community?

Thank you very much for giving us your time and your insights. Please take this time to fill out our brief questionnaire before you leave. We have also brought public comment sheets that you can fill out if you wish to do so. Thank you for your time.

Focus Group Questionnaire

Thank you for your time today! Please take a few moments to complete this short questionnaire. Your answers will remain confidential.

1. Which focus group did you attend? (Check one)
 - July 8, Focus group #4
 - July 8, Focus group #8
 - July 20, Focus group #3
 - July 20, Focus group #6
 - July 22, Focus group #2
 - July 22, Focus group #9
 - July 27, Focus group #5
 - July 27, Focus group #7
 - July 29, Focus group #10
 - July 29, Focus group #1
2. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)
 - White
 - Black or African-American
 - Hispanic
 - Asian-Pacific Islander
 - Native American
 - Other
 - Decline
3. What is your gender? (Check one)
 - Male
 - Female
4. What is your age? (Check one)
 - 21 and under
 - 22 to 34
 - 35 to 44
 - 45 to 54
 - 55 to 64
 - 65 and over
 - Decline
5. What is your total household income? (Check one)
 - \$24,999 or less
 - \$25,000 to \$49,999
 - \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - \$100,000 to \$149,999
 - \$150,000 or more
 - Decline
6. Do your children attend or have they attended West Des Moines schools? (Check one)
 - Yes, they currently attend
 - Yes, they have attended in the past
 - No, never attended
 - Do not have school-age children
7. What is your current employment status? (Check all that apply)
 - Employed part-time
 - Employed full-time
 - Retired
 - Unemployed, looking for work
 - Unemployed, not currently seeking work
 - Student
 - Decline
8. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one)
 - 1st – 8th grade
 - 9th – 11th grade
 - High school graduate or GED equivalent
 - Some college, no degree
 - Associate degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Some Master's, professional, or doctoral coursework, no degree
 - Master's degree
 - Professional or doctoral degree
9. What is the zip code of your residence?

10. Do you currently rent or own? (Check one)
 - Rent
 - Own
 - Neither
11. How long have you lived in the West Des Moines School District? (Check one)
 - Less than one year
 - 1 year to less than 5 years
 - 5 years to less than 10 years
 - 10 years or longer
12. Do you work in a city that is different from the one in which you reside? (Check one)
 - Yes
 - No
 - Do not work

Focus Group Notes Compilation

West Des Moines Learning Resource Center

July 2010

Focus Group Schedule

| ID # | Stakeholder Group | Date of Focus Group |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 4 | Young Adults, no Children (19-30 years of age) | July 8, 2010 |
| 8 | "Retirees" (60-69 years of age) | July 8, 2010 |
| 3 | High School Youth | July 20, 2010 |
| 6 | School-Age Families | July 20, 2010 |
| 2 | Latinos | July 22, 2010 |
| 9 | "Seniors" (71+ years of age) | July 22, 2010 |
| 5 | Preschool Families | July 27, 2010 |
| 7 | "Empty Nesters" (45-59 years of age) | July 27, 2010 |
| 10 | West Des Moines District Non-Residents | July 29, 2010 |
| 1 | Human Services Clients | July 29, 2010 |

First Question

Take out pencil and paper and take a few moments to write down the first word that comes to mind when I say, "community."

Human Services Clients

- » People and individuals
- » People
- » Group of people
- » Families
- » People and families
- » Homes
- » People and businesses
- » Home
- » Reaching people together

Latinos

- » For me, a community consists of a large group of people who work together.
- » A community means a large group of people in a city or state.
- » I think that a community is a joint group of people coming together.
- » People.
- » Family.
- » The first thing that comes to mind is family.
- » A group of people surrounding us. People who surround us.
- » A large group of people working for a common cause.
- » The same as what everyone said, but also a community is something that helps people with support.

High School Youth

- » People I know and identify with.
- » Close knit neighbors that are friendly and helpful.
- » People around me that I know.
- » A developed area.
- » People living and running together in an area.
- » People who live, work, and use businesses in the same area.
- » People from the area you affiliate with.
- » People in the area you live with.
- » People you live and work with.

Young Adults

- » The idea of unity between a group of people who are in close proximity.
- » Surrounding people grouped together.
- » Friends and family in the area.
- » People in the neighborhood helping others.
- » A group of people working or living close together.
- » People and amenities of the general area.

Preschool Families

- » Education
- » Strength
- » People
- » Togetherness
- » Unity
- » Togetherness
- » Neighbors
- » People
- » Security – I know my neighbors; I can feel safe around them.
- » Family

School-Age Families

- » People
- » People
- » People
- » Family
- » Family
- » Friends
- » Togetherness
- » I also believe it is togetherness.
- » Neighborhood

Empty Nesters

- » Pride
- » Shared values and or concerns
- » Involvement
- » Working together
- » Government
- » Volunteering
- » Services
- » Friendships
- » Cohesive group

Retirees

- » Neighborhood - local two to three blocks.
- » Civic
- » Neighborhoods
- » Shared place
- » Comfort – I was thinking in terms of any community you're in, you should feel comfortable.
- » Supportive
- » Parks – There's a little park at the end of our neighborhood, and everyone is always there.
- » Belonging
- » Group of people living in close proximity
- » Family
- » Friendship
- » Small town because I grew up in a small town, and that's what I think of.

Seniors

- » Schools, shopping, events
- » Common interests
- » Feeling safe
- » Home
- » Caring for each other
- » Friends
- » Neighbors helping each other
- » Service
- » Neighbors
- » People with common interest
- » Village
- » Group of people from all walks of life that band together

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » People
- » People

- » Activities
- » Neighbors
- » City

Premise 1

When we talk about “community,” for the purposes of this focus group, we mean the geographic region served by the West Des Moines Community School District. The District serves a number of communities, including West Des Moines, Urbandale, Clive, Windsor Heights, and Cumming. Each city in the district is unique, with its own character and identity. People choose to live in a community for a wide variety of reasons including housing options, entertainment, programs and services available, and commuting. Please answer a few questions about your community and your decisions behind living there.

1. Why do you live in your community?

Human Services Clients

- » It is a lot better than being in Des Moines. There are more jobs in West Des Moines.
- » This is a different lifestyle. It is safer and cleaner.
- » When I first moved to the area, I lived in Johnston, Des Moines, and Clive. I prefer West Des Moines because of safety and cleanliness.
- » I agree with all of that.
- » It is safe for people of all ages.
- » West Des Moines is like a family. Everyone gets along and knows each other. I do a lot of volunteering and it is really nice.
- » People are really good at helping others.
- » The schools are great.
- » I like the fact that people here are more ready to help others than those in Des Moines. They are not trying to scam. West Des Moines Human Services is wonderful, open, and helpful. They are amazing.
- » West Des Moines Human Services is really underfunded considering the economy.
- » There was an article about the number of families seeking services.
- » People in West Des Moines are friendly and always say hello.
- » I know some police officers would rather work in Valley Junction because the community is behind them. Other parts of the community are not as supportive of the police. It also has to do with the activities that go on in town. The police need to focus more on drug issues.

Latinos

- » I just moved to Clive two months ago. I have been in West Des Moines and Des Moines. It’s quiet and safe. The schools are good. I lived here for ten years and just came back two months ago. The kids get more attention than they did in Des Moines.
- » For the schools. My opinion is that there is more organization here. Based on the feedback from my nephew, the teachers here care and like their jobs. He has many places to compare the schools to.
- » For me, it is the same about the schools and safety. I live in a community where I’m safe being a single mom with four kids. My kids can go out and be safe in the community, in the area. The schools have taken very good watch over my children. The school bus transportation has been wonderful. In California, it was very unorganized and there were gang fears.

- » I moved here from the east side of Des Moines. My daughter is seven and my son is nineteen months. I'm a single mom. I just moved to Western Hills in May and I feel that the attention given to the students is wonderful. My kids have never had that attention before. I feel safe and the teachers were actually waiting for her on the first day of school. They care so much about the kids coming out of the bus.
- » I came here seven years ago and went to Valley. My mother chose to live here for a better education for me. It took me a year to learn English. I was in ELL. I am the oldest and have three younger brothers. One of my brothers just graduated and another is in middle school. My youngest brother is nine. My mother is a single mom, and she has had a lot of support in the district. I don't know how she would have done it otherwise. My mother was living here first before I came. She decided to have me come here for the school.

High School Youth

- » We moved to an area we thought was safe and could provide a good education.
- » Schools, housing, safety, large size, and places to go.
- » School. Our home is near the woods and outdoor recreation.
- » Nice people, safe, great location.
- » My parents' jobs. We liked our home.
- » We had family in the area already.
- » Education. We have been here for many years.
- » My family has always lived here.
- » Family has been in the community for over 100 years.
- » Schools and a safe place to live.
- » Good housing and good education.

Young Adults

- » I think of communities and think of neighborhoods, families, and friends with each other. People want to help each other.
- » I have lived for twenty-plus years in West Des Moines and I don't think that I have ever seen anyone help anyone else out. It's too bourgeois. People have a lot of money and want more. There is a huge difference between West Des Moines and Des Moines.
- » The crime rate is pretty low. I agree with the neighborhood thing. Friendly neighbors are important.
- » Getting to know your neighbor is important, but in my neighborhood it isn't the case. We just don't know the neighbors. In my neighborhood, though, the adults get together once a month to visit.
- » It depends on where you live and what you want to do. In my neighborhood most people try to get to know their neighbors. There are a couple of really uppity neighbors I can't stand, though.
- » I get along with all my neighbors. When people walk by we say "hi" and they say "hi." We actually go to the farmers market with our neighbors. We take care of their dog when they go out of town. It depends on where you live.
- » I live there because of the cheap rent. I paid twice as much to live in Sun Prairie as I pay in Valley Junction with twice as much space. I like living here. There is always something for our age bracket to do. It's a young community here. I've lived other places.
- » I've lived here since the 1990s. My parents found the house we needed. I just graduated from Iowa State and will move from my parents' house in West Des Moines to my apartment in Des Moines.
- » There is an extreme difference between Valley Junction where the houses are about \$120,000 and my neck of the woods. I have a house that is \$450,000 and I live there because of my family.

- » I live in West Des Moines because it's where my parents lived for 18-plus years. I don't have to pay rent, and that's a good deal. If I was going to choose a place to move, it would be to some place like West Des Moines because of the schools and things to do.
- » My parents built our house. I just graduated and will go back to grad school in the fall. I'm living with my parents till then.
- » I live with my parents, and they built the house 20 years ago. I could see myself living here in West Des Moines.

Preschool Families

- » I grew up on the east side. The east side is a very unfavorable place to live. There are a lot of shady characters. The people here are a better class of people. I grew up in Norwoodville. I saw the large school thing and the small school thing. I guess it's a safety issue. The education wasn't very good there.
- » Schools. The education. It was a conscious decision to move here. We moved from Chicago to Milwaukee. I grew up in Iowa City. We knew we wanted to live within the West Des Moines School District.
- » We moved here from Cedar Rapids. When my husband found his job, we mapped it out. We knew we wanted to be by Jordan Creek because we knew there were things to do there. We also wanted to live by the Raccoon River for recreation.
- » I've lived everywhere except the east side, I suppose. Most of my time has been in West Des Moines. I like the people. Now that I have a son, the schools keep me here. The cost of living is good, too.
- » We just fell in to West Des Moines. As we discover more and more about West Des Moines, we feel really lucky. We didn't have children when we moved here. Now we know how great it is.
- » We keep discovering things, too. Each month we keep discovering new things to do and be a part of.
- » My original answer was family. This is where I grew up. I've lived other places. I know a lot of people from my graduating class have stayed here – I see them all over.
- » You get to know everybody here with all the programs available.
- » We didn't know we would be starting over with a child when we moved here. Honestly, I didn't want to live in West Des Moines. Schools were not an issue when we came. It was more about his job and being close to family.
- » We went to Michigan, then Chicago, then here. We like this place out of all the others. We like this place the most because of all the programs. There are lots of things to do.
- » I'm a guidance counselor at Valley High School. I love my job. I had a 7:00 a.m. meeting at the police station to talk about juvenile justice. My son is in Brighter Beginnings. I help prepare students for college, and seeing them go on to something greater is just so rewarding.
- » My reasons are a toss-up between family and job. My husband's job moved us from Ohio. We were supposed to be located in the middle of Des Moines. The realtor brought us out here, and everything fell into place. We didn't have a child then, so that wasn't a factor.

School-Age Families

- » Because my job is close to where I live.
- » Job
- » Affordability, and so that my son can attend West Des Moines Schools.
- » The environment - the neighborhoods are safe, and the people are very nice here.
- » We liked how close the homes were to the schools.
- » I live in the community so that my son, who is in special education, can get better education here.

- » The schools are great and because everything you need such as the mall, schools, and entertainment, is within in close proximity so you don't have to drive that far.
- » Because West Des Moines is a safe environment.
- » I moved here last year because my husband took a job in the community, and it is easier to commute for him. We wanted to be in a mature education system as well.

Empty Nesters

- » We have quality schools.
- » It is my home and I was born and raised here. You can trust what goes on around this community.
- » Because I live in a great neighborhood.
- » The conveniences of shopping and the quality schools.
- » This is my hometown, and I think we have an excellent school district, great quality of life, and a low crime rate.
- » I lived here in the past and moved away. We experienced another community and wanted to move back because of the planning the city does around here.

Retirees

- » Shared interest – If you have shared interest in something, it doesn't make a difference where you are, whether Norwalk or Clive.
- » I'm not sure I consider the suburbs as different places; they do seem to have shared interests.
- » Shared values bring together a community. People gather in a church because of shared values.
- » Safety – This is a place that you can be safe and comfortable to move about.
- » Cleanliness
- » Safety for children
- » Continuity, which means everybody is looking for the same things and has the same interests.
- » I like continuity but I also see it as having a sense of history of a place. We know where we've come from, but don't necessarily know where we're going.
- » I think of services provided to people who live in a community. I go to the library once a week and I think of shopping, schools, and the lake.
- » Expected affinity – expecting like people, like values, and the values can be something like keeping your lawn mowed.
- » I think some people choose a community because of diversity to experience a variety of viewpoints and so on. I don't know if that's an affinity that people look for.
- » That could be; it might be a matter of preference. It's what you think it might be and whether that fulfillment is there too.
- » I think people look at neighborhoods in terms of diversity and try to fit in within that.
- » We moved here back in 1985, and we were looking for a school district and safety. That was right after the kidnappings of Johnny Gosh. We're still in the same location. The schools had a large variety of possibilities, with language offerings and different sports.
- » I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and I got a job here. Before I moved out here, I met a few of my customers, and they told me Clive was the best place to live. It took me three days, but I finally figured out where Clive was. The numbering system here sucks, and I got lost. Finally I was having lunch, and a waitress told me how to get to Clive. I've been in Clive since 1972. I like the school district.
- » I've heard that over and over.

- » When I first came out here, Clive had about 1,500 people, and there was a lot of community activism. There was a group of about 50 people that seemed to be on everything – Jaycees, the fire department, and the chamber of commerce. That core really brought that city together. That’s what attracted me here, and I stayed. Now, I get a lot of people who live in Clive who say they live in West Des Moines.
- » I think a lot of people just come to Clive or West Des Moines, and it’s not an absolute thing about being intentional about living choices. There’s a socioeconomic factor when people align themselves with the intelligencia or whatever, and they want to surround themselves with others who are like them. It’s a class issue, and it’s not a politically correct thing to say. They want their kids to have that exposure to intelligent people.
- » Where we were living before was going downhill, and we were looking in Des Moines, but our realtor steered us toward West Des Moines. We looked at a lot, and there were 20 deer on it, which at the time, I thought was neat. I was very impressed with the cleanliness, and people seemed so nice.

Seniors

- » We were sucked in with annexation by default.
- » It was close to where my husband worked, had a good school system, and we were looking for a newer home.
- » We sold our house on 44th Street and decided we wanted a townhouse. We live in Florida the other six months out of the year.
- » We were looking for a good school district. My son couldn’t get the courses he wanted at North High School, so we chose the place because of the school district. It’s a beautiful spot.
- » I live in Indianola, but the real estate taxes were lower when I bought my house 20 years ago.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » The schools. I live in Clive.
- » Schools are important to me as well as the location and proximity to my kids’ activities.
- » I like it in terms of the location. I first moved here when I moved to the Des Moines area. I’ve moved around in Clive, but I like the city.
- » My parents have always lived in the community and I left and came back. I know the history of the area I live in. I know my neighbors.
- » It’s where we found the house we liked. The general neighborhood is nice and quiet.

2. How do you think people outside the community see it? Follow-up: Are schools a part of this community?

Human Services Clients

- » People come to West Des Moines to shop.
- » I think many people would live in West Des Moines if they could afford it. The standard of living is higher than other places.
- » The cost keeps some people out of the community.
- » Snobs
- » Rich
- » We have higher income homes, professionals, and big, professional businesses. They [the city of West Des Moines] don’t really pursue industrial jobs. The community is financially better off than Des Moines. The people that are coming here are more professional and educated than other communities.
- » As far as families go, they first look at schools when deciding where to live.

- » My kids are out of high school and are in graduate school. They wouldn't admit that they went to Valley because it was perceived as snobby. There is certainly a stigma and cliques in the schools.
- » The schools are starting to lose their clout. Some families are choosing smaller school districts. Some people move because they think there will be fewer drugs, more sports opportunities, and less bullying. Gifted kids get more attention in other school districts. Kids are bored in schools because they are not challenged.

Latinos

- » They criticize it. One of the first times you meet new people, they laugh at you for going to Valley. You get stereotyped as rich. I have friends from all over, and they all feel the same way.
- » I have some relatives that moved here from Chicago. They told me about the community. I wasn't sure if I would come here. When I got here, they said that I had made the best decision ever. I think the community is clean and people are healthy and care about themselves.
- » I don't know what other people think about the community. All my friends live here with me. I don't know anyone who lives outside the community so I don't know what they think about it.
- » I live in Des Moines. I work in West Des Moines. I am shocked that people think badly about the community. I think the folks that live here are very lucky. Some people don't have that choice. Working here, I see the differences in the nutrition of the schools because of my job. I have my kids in Des Moines schools. The nutrition that the children are being served is much better quality here in West Des Moines. The West Des Moines staff are more caring and nurture the kids in the buildings. There is a big difference.
- » We have a lot of resources in this community, but I wouldn't consider myself rich. I feel lucky to live here.

High School Youth

- » West Des Moines has a big city feel, but it is safer.
- » People from Des Moines think we have a lot of money.
- » People think West Des Moines is rich and snotty.
- » People on the coasts view West Des Moines as boring but a good place for raising a family.
- » We are viewed as a wealthier school district.
- » Wealthy

Young Adults

- » Snobby
- » Bourgeois
- » Unless they haven't spent time here, they think it's bourgeois. I travel around the state for work, and people assume West Des Moines is snobby. People are starting to change as they get to know the community better. Jordan Creek has helped people know West Des Moines better when they come to Des Moines and then find Jordan Creek Mall in West Des Moines.
- » If you went to Valley [High School], and tell people that, they say, "ohhhh." It's a stigma.
- » It's a matter of excess. You look in the parking lot at Valley and there are all these BMWs and Mercedes parked there. There is no 16-year old kid that can afford a BMW.
- » I think it's absolutely true. My first car was my parents' Grand Cherokee they handed down to me. I avoid saying where I went to high school if I can because of people's reactions.
- » People think that the West Des Moines schools are very interconnected with the city.
- » They spent \$9 million on a school stadium!

- » But the nice part about it – when I first heard about the cost of the stadium – is that it is used almost all the time. It does get used a lot.
- » It helps you understand the reason people look at you funny for coming from Valley. If they knew more about the people, maybe they wouldn't think that.

Preschool Families

- » We have no family here. They all live in small towns around here. They think it's big and unsafe.
- » Wealthy. Little surrounding communities think it's wealthy.
- » Growing up, West Des Moines Valley kids were perceived as snobby or uppity. The girls I knew needed new jeans when they got a rip in them. Now that I live out here, I know there are many different people.
- » We've received a lot of calls because we've lived all around the U.S. West Des Moines has been listed among the top places to live. My husband was promoted out here and people thought it was crazy to be promoted to West Des Moines from Atlanta.
- » The same. I always think how the east-siders have t-shirts. It's kind of the same here: people are proud to be from West Des Moines.
- » When I moved here, friends from college that didn't live here warned us that we would get sucked into the wealthy culture, that stereotype. I don't think that has happened at all.
- » Demographics are changing. We're seeing a lot more need in our community than we've seen in the past. I have prom dresses for girls in my office. We do a lot of things differently than we did even 10 years ago.

School-Age Families

- » People outside of West Des Moines think we are snobby or rich.
- » They think that we are privileged.
- » I live in the Valley Junction area, and they think differently in that area about those who live further west.
- » There is a lot of stereotyping involved. They think that every kid is spoiled and drives an expensive car, when they actually don't.
- » They think we dominate athletically.
- » I think they also see how our arts dominate as well.
- » I think that we acquired this stereotype at one time, and now it sticks. I don't think the West Des Moines community is like that now.
- » Some of my son's friends that go to a different school shared what they did on field trips. The things they had compared to what my son had were much different. His friends didn't have those things such as charter buses.
- » I will say visitors think that West Des Moines is a neat community. We have crossed the path of other people moving here because of it. Some of the families that move away stated that it is because they felt their kids had a better chance of playing sports in Waukee. They felt you had to be a top-notch athlete to participate at Valley.
- » People from the east side of Des Moines feel that we are privileged.
- » People think it is expensive to live in West Des Moines. It can be depending on where you live.

Empty Nesters

- » I think West Des Moines has a positive image, which can be seen in our school system, job market, and our quality of life.
- » They believe the citizens here care about each other.

- » Some are envious or jealous. They see that we have access to a larger tax base, which provides us with a lot more opportunities.
- » There are several misconceptions that West Des Moines is only wealthy and upper class. There are many problems in the Valley Junction area, which is not upper class.
- » I hear that people don't understand the amount of traffic that we have in West Des Moines.
- » It used to be a positive image from those outside of our community and now it has turned into envy, especially in our academics.
- » That we have too much money and that we are at an athletic advantage because we can afford to send our children to sports camps and clinics.
- » I believe they see that the community shares a vision. We have a lot of big events here in West Des Moines that prove that.

Retirees

- » It depends on which side of the community. Some people think everyone out here is snobbish.
- » I was on a panel for something, and a friend of mine said people in West Des Moines don't know their neighbors. That was her perception, that we all keep to ourselves and don't have a sense of community.
- » During that yuppie phase, there was a thing going around to change the name of Clive to "Clavais" because it sounded more sophisticated.
- » We were south-siders for years, and West Des Moines was closer to family and work. The attitude of south-siders and myself was that West Des Moines thought of themselves as a cut above Des Moines because of their strong athletic teams and strong everything else. When you compare different communities, West Des Moines and Valley and other schools, you tend to look at people as people with advantages in terms of money, teaching, and that can breed a bit of a negative attitude about people. We called them cake eaters.
- » We don't know our neighbors, a lot of them, except maybe next door. That's a situation where people are on the go, with kids, and no one takes the time to get to know the people around them.
- » I would beg to differ – I know everyone up and down the block, except the bachelors who just bought a house. I know my neighbors' kids and grandkids.
- » We have a block party every year, and there's a group of women who get together.
- » I'm saying that doesn't exist in a lot of parts of town. We moved here because of the services. My daughter lives in Des Moines and hardly knows anyone. It's just the neighborhood you move into.
- » When we moved here, the neighborhood was new, and the kids make adults gravitate toward each other. Then the neighborhood became more transient, and I've never seen some of my neighbors outside. It's hard to meet them if they're never outside. I know most of the people in the neighborhood because I've been there the longest. When I lived in the East, people would not take the time to cross the street to talk to you. As the neighborhoods change here, you just don't know as many people.
- » We moved out here in 1971 from the south side, and we didn't move because of the airport.
- » We didn't move because of the busing issue either.
- » I think our friends and relatives had this stigma that West Des Moines was an uppity place, but we invited them over and had pig roasts on the fourth of July. Everybody had children, and they're all gone now. We downsized into a townhouse about 10 years ago. We know quite a few of our neighbors, and we live in a large complex. There's a lot of turnover with young people like you. We know quite a few of our neighbors and belong to our homeowners association.
- » Well I didn't like it because we needed a house that was handicapped accessible and never found one. We come from a small town, and we didn't want to leave that to come to Des Moines.

Seniors

- » “Snob Lane.” When I was a kid, Waterbury was Snob Lane. We teased Des Moines all the time. We suggested they annex Clive and Urbandale into West Des Moines and Des Moines could become East Des Moines.
- » People who are in the lower economic spectrum see it as upper class and expensive.
- » People view it as safe.
- » I think Urbandale and West Des Moines are similar because their roads, schools, police force, and everything that makes a community is similar.
- » Most of the people from the south side consider us an affluent bunch.
- » Valley High School has gotten so large because so many voted down two high schools, so we have a huge high school and they do offer a lot. I have three grandchildren that graduated from there, but the business of the Valley High School has overshadowed other things people think about.
- » As you travel farther west, the cars and the houses get bigger. It’s almost like having two towns in one.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » I think they see it as a nice, quiet, safe community. It’s maybe not distinct from the cities around it; they’re all safe and feel comfortable.
- » The suburbs are all pretty similar, so it would differ from Des Moines proper and maybe the east side. I think people think pretty highly of West Des Moines, Urbandale, and Clive because they generally have nice houses, are quiet and safe, and have good schools.
- » I think people look at Windsor Heights as one of the older neighborhoods. There are not a lot of newer houses. We’re landlocked so we can’t expand or annex, so there’s always a lot of re-development going on to try to get a tax base. We’re not a sprawling suburb. I think generally we’re looked on positively. We’re right on the edge of West Des Moines and Des Moines. If I lived one street away, my kids would go to the Des Moines school district.
- » I think people view the western suburbs as well off people, not that there aren’t others elsewhere.
- » It’s definitely safer and has better schools.

3. How would you like them to see your community?

Human Services Clients

- » We are friendly and connected. We are not snobs. We are down to earth. The community is nice.
- » Many of my friends are from the south side of Des Moines. They think we all have money.
- » We are not all rich.
- » I don’t care how people see West Des Moines. I went to school with one of the other focus group participants.
- » West Des Moines used to be a bedroom community, and now it has a lot of jobs.
- » The city is taking the initiative to develop unique houses that don’t all look alike. We need to promote more housing options to draw people to the community. Some places off the interstate have what seems to be hundreds of houses that look exactly the same. In Valley Junction, there are no two houses alike.
- » West Des Moines people like to help each other.
- » We don’t have any problems here.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » As a place that others want to be.
- » Safe, with a good educational system.
- » Good education. Safe place.
- » Valley Junction is cool because of its history and neat shops. We also have a wonderful shopping center with Jordan Creek.
- » Safe, calm community with a lot of variety.
- » Welcoming. A good place to go.
- » Jordan Creek brings in a bunch of people who come to see the changes. Some changes are good, and some are not. Jordan Creek Mall is overdone. Valley Junction hasn't changed much at all. We all know each other.
- » We view Valley Junction as a respectable place.

Young Adults

- » I want it be less bourgeois. I said that last week to my friends, and I told them it's really not like that.
- » I think people will always think of it as the nicer part of the metro area. It shouldn't be looked down upon. If people from outside of Des Moines knew the city better, it would change their minds.
- » They just need to get to know the people. I think Waukee is starting to take on that [bourgeois] reputation.
- » I travel all over the state and tell people I am from West Des Moines. The stigma isn't as bad as people think. It is still popular when my friends come to town. They want to go to West Glen and have that lifestyle for a couple of days.

Preschool Families

- » Vibrant
- » Really family-friendly. It's all about families.
- » I grew up in a small town and there are definitely benefits to that size of community where people help neighbors. Comparatively, this is a big community, but it has a small town feel. People aren't afraid to help others here.
- » This is kind of like Columbus, Ohio. It has a small town feel. You have to be able to trust people, but then have the culture side, too.
- » I'd like others to see it as a secure area. We will watch out for one another. We protect our families.
- » I did not want to move here. Now I've been thrown into starting school. I'm not negative about Des Moines, but I can't get over the winters. I have a hard time answering this question.

School-Age Families

- » I would like them to see that it has a small town feeling. It is safe, and people watch out for you. Overall, it has a small community in the city feeling.
- » I would like to see more people be proud of our academics and schools. We have a lot of parks and many choices to do recreational activities.
- » That it is quiet, for the most part.
- » I would like them to see that our bills are the same as what they have and that not everybody has a lot of money in the community.
- » I would like to have people see that we are a very caring community.

Empty Nesters

- » I would like to have them see the community as being friendly and progressive. I would also like for them to understand that some people struggle here as well.
- » I would like for them to have the opportunity to see the West Des Moines 4th of July parade so that they could understand that the whole community was involved from Valley Junction to Valley High School areas.
- » The small town feeling and the sense of community. There are a lot of advantages because of the planning West Des Moines does. The city is open to growth and continuously attempts to attract more businesses. West Des Moines is that type of community because its community leaders have a shared vision.

Retirees

- » Friendly and welcoming
- » I personally don't care, the hell with people who think we're snobbish. We'll still have a little bit of free space out here.
- » I'd like to have people see it the way it is – warm, friendly, and secure, with a great education system through all our public and private schools. It's a fun community to live in. I get around all of the greater Des Moines area, and I can guarantee you, you feel a difference between East 14th Street and Mills Civic Parkway. You feel a difference in security and friendliness, and a different class of people, a little better educated, a little friendlier community.
- » A community that is supportive and welcoming of kids that are average rather than only above average. The perception is that if your kids are not scoring 30 on the ACT, they won't get attention, and I think that's a misperception. I think it's viewed as a competitive school district.
- » I think the education is there for the needier children.
- » On the high end for special education, but in the middle, I don't think it's there.
- » I've talked to people who were not happy with the West Des Moines district whose kids were ignored because they weren't high achieving.
- » Mine were ignored.
- » It's a different world where all of their kids go to camps all summer, and they'll learn how to do things in first grade that we didn't know until third or fourth grade. That's a concern for parents who are worried about their kids fitting into that.
- » I'm hearing about the acceptance of their peer group, too. If you're not an athlete, you need to find a niche somewhere else. Sometimes it's hard to do that amongst a ton of high achieving kids.
- » No, these are not unique to kids.
- » When kids go to junior high, it's reinforced from what elementary school they came from. I'd like people to be aware of the wide variety of socioeconomic representation and the number of languages spoken. We have an incredibly diverse culture that we're ignoring at our loss.
- » I volunteered in Des Moines and I worked with children on long division. One child had been in nine schools by fourth grade, and that school was good, but I was amazed at the diversity. I do not see the diversity near us that is there in the Des Moines district. I really wanted these kids to succeed, but they had to overcome so much.

Seniors

- » I would like them to think we're friendly. If you look at West Des Moines, there are a lot of people in apartments and subsidized housing.
- » As I walk through life, you can't tell by looking at the house or the car how much money they have. I would like people to see each other as individuals versus how much money they have as defining them.

- » Glen Oaks lost 85 members and then went bankrupt. If they want to call it bad, fine, if they want call it good, fine, I really don't care.
- » Life is so busy. Everybody just looks out for themselves. Everyone is busy taking care of themselves. That's why the senior centers are such a great community within themselves.
- » The library is a wonderful facility for people of any economic group. I think it is important to have facilities.
- » West Des Moines should have kept the old library and the new one.
- » I still see this town as a very good town with very good people - a close-bonded community. When it comes to a common goal, people get together and work together and that's what it takes for a good community.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » It can be spun negatively. People give me a hard time sometimes, but it goes both ways. They know the city is made up of people who care about their community and who care about where they live.
- » Generally the perceptions are pretty real, so I don't think anything needs to be changed in those perceptions.
- » The perception is right on, but every suburb has a mix. People like to play on perceptions, but I think generally, people view it how I want them to.
- » I think people have the right perception – it's safe and has a nice mix of people.
- » People like to see people take care of the neighborhoods where they live.
- » It's about pride.
- » It's caring about the neighborhood and the community in general.

4. Are there any additional community strengths that you would add?

Human Services Clients

- » Clean. Everyone deserves to live in a nice environment. There are no bad areas.
- » The parks, library, and common areas in the city are awesome. The sidewalks are great – they encourage people to walk, meet people, and get out of the house.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » We're not just plain. We are also very commercial. We have a lot of things that places like New York has. We are somewhat cosmopolitan.
- » It's very hot in the summer so we can go to the beach, but in the winter we go to Sleepy Hollow and can enjoy the seasons. There is variety.

Young Adults

- » A lot of small town people think, "Oooohhh, Big City" – disconnected. But, there is a small town attitude that connects people. I used to volunteer with the police department and there are lots of ways to bring people together.
- » I honestly am against the strengths of West Des Moines. I see it is immaculate, and that makes people against it because it is all the same. There are some good things, too. The city is clean and well kept. There are plenty of parks. Law enforcement is very good in West Des Moines. It is a safe place.

- » The growth I've seen since being here - the stadium, library, this building, Jordan Creek, City Hall - none of it was here when I came.
- » When we started school at Jordan Creek, Fuller Road was gravel.
- » I went to Jordan Creek the first year it opened.
- » I think it's a great community. The city has its hands in everything. They just built two new hospitals. The EMS, police, and fire are great. You can't get too much safer of a community. I know the stigma of Valley Junction, but I haven't seen anything there to make it less safe than other places.
- » This last weekend, the city sponsored something every day. If you wanted to do it, it was there, even when it was raining.
- » West Glen Farmers' Market is new just last year. I was standing at the bar at the new Wellman's. Sure, there were younger people there, but there were older people, too.
- » Safety, opportunities, and the way it's growing. The schools were good, but we were always going through construction of the new schools when we were coming through them.
- » I ran into a few of my professors from college in West Glen – they were from Decorah – so it's a place for them to come when they are in the area.

Preschool Families

- » The early education intervention program is incredible here.
- » The library has just been a godsend. As a first time mom, that is what got me out of the house.
- » The children's department at the library has been phenomenal. Having some place to go everyday when you don't know anyone is wonderful. They know you by name.
- » I like the libraries. I have been elsewhere. This community has the best. Each week there are activities for the kids. There were not many other programs elsewhere.
- » Safety Town is wonderful. Our granddaughter went to Safety Town and told me how she could save me. I thought that was wonderful.
- » Safety Town should be mandatory.
- » The community books that they send out are a huge strength. My mom lives on the east side, and she has to search for programming. When people ask about swim lessons, I just reference the mailed book thing.
- » The police open house is wonderful. We missed getting a bike helmet, and the police told me to go to the public safety office. The paramedics let my son play on the equipment. It's that small town feel, again. Luna Fest is nice, too.

School-Age Families

- » The special education classes and the attention my son has received. People get him going with certain tasks, and I think the school is great.
- » I think that a strength is the communities within the community. I hear over and over again that each street is like a community within itself. Kids are always out playing.
- » Family and community feeling. There are many kids on the block, and it is fun to see the interaction among the different age groups and genders.
- » West Des Moines is very diverse, and everybody melts well with each other. My kids have a wide variety of races in their classrooms, and I think the teachers make sure everything is integrated well.
- » The school system is a strength. My daughter is learning a lot.
- » The parks and trail system. West Des Moines is thoughtfully zoned out.
- » I think an additional strength is that we are getting businesses here and attracting new jobs. I see a lot of communities that are stagnant. It seems that we are very progressive.

Empty Nesters

- » The citizens are able to utilize the school facilities.
- » West Des Moines is safe, clean, progressive, and has quality schools.
- » We have an excellent library, learning resource center, and great schools.
- » There are a lot of family values here in West Des Moines. There are a number of gangs in the metro area, and West Des Moines does not tolerate gangs.
- » We have an educated population in this area compared to other communities. To me, it means that people work hard and have good values and pass those values and work ethics along to their children.
- » There is civic engagement from community leaders and businesses.

Retirees

- » We have great parks.
- » The parks help foster the community. There are seven streets that feed into the park. We have picnics every couple of years to introduce everyone to one another. Communities have been planned with these parks, and they are all hidden.
- » I've been watching all the people walking and riding their bikes outside this building tonight.
- » The trails
- » The trails are well maintained.
- » The library
- » It's a great library.
- » It's a wonderful library.
- » I like the collection at the library, the building, the services, the people who work there, the volunteers, and having a cup of coffee there.
- » The programs they have at the library are wonderful.
- » That is also true of the Clive Library.
- » It's very nice, and I was glad Clive got its own library.
- » It's a progressive community. If you look at our city council, they've directed us to give us the parks we have, from the city council to the school boards to all the committees who keep them going. There is some conservatism within those groups of people, and that didn't slow down their progressivism but kept it in check.
- » It's largely volunteer run.
- » Do you think that's our socioeconomic status out here?
- » Yes, people have the time to devote to volunteering. The family can be supported on one wage, and one parent can be a highly educated, highly motivated volunteer, which is ideal.
- » Developing Jordan Creek and West Glen is part of being progressive.
- » I think the work done for the Valley Junction Farmers' Market is great.
- » There's the Val Air Ballroom issue.

Seniors

- » The schools are really excellent. One of my grandsons is dyslexic, and he had wonderful help and now is going to the University of Iowa.
- » The expectations of and for the community are high.
- » The public services are good; the roads get plowed.

- » It's a safe community. Very seldom is our community in the news with a lot of crime. There is very little crime in West Des Moines compared to Des Moines.
- » The grocery stores. We have wonderful grocery stores compared to Illinois and Minnesota. They have one grocery store where you self-sack and then you have Target. The first thing that my family does when they visit is go to a grocery store.
- » We have very active Boy and Girl Scout groups and there are always activities going on for the kids.
- » Their recreation facilities are good and getting better, there are dog trails, and they are considering building parks further west.
- » There are a lot of opportunities for parents and children to do activities together.
- » We have what any major city in the U.S. has, whereas other Iowa cities don't. We have very creative people that want to make West Des Moines a people-friendly city. You can't beat that.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » The schools, parks, aquatic centers, offerings through the library for kids during spring break, and summer offerings through parks and rec are all good things. I use the Clive library.
- » I agree – they have a lot of great activities for my kids, and they're reasonable. I like the aquatic centers and recreational activities. Even at the Junction, there's always somewhere to go where the community is getting together.
- » They're always in competition for people moving in. I just moved to Clive from West Des Moines.
- » The community is large enough that you have all the stores and ice arenas, but it's not so big that you have the crime and inner city decay. I've lived in bigger cities – Cleveland and Birmingham, and it is nice being in a stable, prosperous, but not overly crowded city.
- » There is not the hassle that goes along with big cities. We went to Chicago a few weekends ago, and on Michigan Avenue, there's not a lot that we don't have here in terms of stores.
- » I would echo that – you don't know how many activities are out there until you start looking. In Windsor Heights, it feels very close-knit. We're not a huge suburb. For the size of our community, we get a lot done. They just re-did Colby Park, and they've got some nice recreational opportunities and trails. It needed it. It's a lot nicer now.

5. What needs to be improved?

Human Services Clients

- » Too much construction.
- » The Metro bus needs to expand bus service and bus stops. The bus doesn't even go to Valley West Mall and other parts of the city.
- » There need to be shelters for people waiting for the bus.
- » There is a stop on 4th and Elm. They make you stand there with no shelter while the bus makes the loop.
- » West Des Moines could start their own bus system. We are depending on West Des Moines Human Services, which is getting really full.
- » You should not have to call a week in advance for transportation.
- » The city is more concerned with the look of the city than services to residents.
- » I would like West Des Moines to be more eco-friendly. There is a green house in Valley Junction. I would like to see more sustainable features like LED lights, stoplight cameras for safety, and better cooperation between full-time and volunteer fire fighters. Volunteerism should be recognized and promoted. Something like a volunteer coordinator is needed.

- » Valley High School has volunteers that help seniors.
- » The book distributed by the city is good but needs to be more clear and expanded.
- » More meetings like this would be good.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » Jordan Creek needs to be improved. They need to do more advertisement to increase revenue. We also need more police officers since the area is growing so much.
- » We are very wasteful about the things we spend money on. The Jordan Creek Mall doesn't need to be so fancy. The money should go into the schools or other areas where we need it.
- » I would like more to do outside. We could use funds to freeze a lake to ice skate on or create more things to do outside.
- » A lot of places look bad. For example, the sand pits are disgusting. You can't go swimming. There is trash all over. It needs to be cleaned up.
- » Walnut Creek Campus needs some help. There have been a lot of financial problems at Walnut Creek. It was an abandoned church and can only hold 300 kids. We are just waiting to see what happens. It can take five years before things are replaced at Walnut Creek.

Young Adults

- » I really like to bike. There is a lack of mountain biking stuff available. There is plenty of land available to build an area for mountain biking. There are good trails for road biking. I could ride off the Luther campus and do some good biking.
- » That is one of the good things – the bike paths for road bikes.
- » I want a public golf course in West Des Moines.
- » There are a lot of things in West Des Moines that are private, but we need some of them to be public. We go to the Country Club golf course once a year as part of a work event, and we know it's the only time we'll play golf there. It's out of reach for most of us.
- » We need activities that are affordable for the middle class.
- » The Country Club area is odd – and bankrupt. It is in the way now. It sits in the middle of the city, even though it was all by itself when it was built.

Preschool Families

- » I thought about this before I came. With the children's program at the library, we had the director come speak to us. Her budget has stayed the same while the number served has grown. The Friends of the Library should be expanded.
- » There is a frenzy to sign up for library programs. I'm wondering if the budget is the reason. You have to register the morning it opens. By 9:20 a.m. that morning, my kids were on the waiting list. I've heard from other moms how much they love the programming, too.
- » We have the day marked on the calendar to sign up for the library programs.
- » We got signed up for one day, but then we couldn't attend. It was too bad.
- » Lots of people don't show up, and they don't cancel. They shouldn't be allowed to do the program next time.

- » I would like to see a young preschool-age sports program. When my son turned three and wanted to play soccer, I couldn't find a program for him. There just isn't any very young sports program where parents don't have to participate, as well.
- » There aren't those programs here.
- » I have another issue. When my oldest went to preschool, we got a really good scholarship. This year, we couldn't find the same discount for my youngest. There needs to be a cheaper option – I'd be willing to pay, but not as much as they were requiring. This should be addressed.
- » In Georgia, stay at home moms can contribute to the cost of the program by volunteering time.
- » We are just outside the low-income range. There are some people who are just outside the range, and their kids lose out on a lot of programs.
- » The state has set aside free four-year-old programming. I hope that the district takes advantage of this.
- » The district does have this program.
- » How do you find out about this? We need a more transparent way to find out about that programming.
- » Some first time parents have a hard time finding out about programs. I was lucky enough to know what to do with my eldest. The kids really have to be more prepared now before entering kindergarten.
- » With other moms I talk to, the whole kindergarten registration process is tough. This year, the schools are full and they must be bused, but people live in certain neighborhoods for the schools. One woman didn't know that she had to register early for the programming. They have three girls and she's worried about the kids all being in different schools. From what I understand, there are overcrowding issues.
- » The pond here at City Hall – they used to let kids on it when it was frozen over. Can they do this again?
- » A free yard waste receptacle would be nice.
- » In Milwaukee, we had a recycling center. You could take your yard waste there, and they would mulch it. Now you have to bundle it and tag it.
- » I'd like to see roundabouts that slow people down instead of stop signs and speed bumps.

School-Age Families

- » There are activities that some kids can't do. There need to be more activities for kids nine years old and younger.
- » There are not a lot of programs for teenagers here. It seems when they reach 12 years old, then there are no more programs.
- » Teen programs stop once you are out of junior high.
- » Our kids who come back home from college over summer and winter breaks don't have constructive things to do in the community.
- » The affordability of activities in the community. Youth soccer is expensive. It adds up after you get your child involved in sports, art center classes, and other activities. Sports camps and clinics are expensive, too. There aren't a lot of organized things for families to do that are affordable.
- » The Valley post prom party is expensive. It seems like every week there is something with a cost that comes up.
- » The amount they want for participating and the amount of games they play needs to be improved.
- » A lot of the kids that go to the sports camps and clinics are set up with the skills that would put those kids on a better team in school. It would be nice to have additional coaches in the schools and have the camps and clinics be more affordable so more kids can participate. My daughters want to be on a select travel team that cost more than \$900 apiece. There is no way I can afford it with a couple of kids.
- » I keep my kids in park and recreation programs, but all the kids who become good go to the camps and clinics that cost a lot.

- » The busing system needs to be improved. My boys all go to the same school, and I have to pay \$200 per child. I don't understand why I have to pay that much.
- » My daughter went to Western Hills. We were far from the bus route, and she had to walk because I couldn't afford the \$200.
- » I do home health as my profession. I think that West Des Moines does an okay job of helping the elderly, but I would like to see a program that would help the elderly commute to doctor appointments.
- » Most of the Metro Transportation Authority buses only go downtown, and there are no weekend or evening hours. It would be nice to have them run on the weekends and not have odd hours of operation.
- » I think it would be helpful to have an MTA route that goes around West Des Moines. Also, if there was some type of city bus, we could cut back on pollution.
- » Public transportation needs to be accessible and affordable.

Empty Nesters

- » I would like to see a more unified view of West Des Moines and Des Moines.
- » It would be nice to have fewer apartments being built.
- » We need a better balance of involvement between the sports and art programs.
- » The city keeps growing, but the police department seems to have very little funding. The way the city is growing doesn't match up with the amount of policing going on.
- » There needs to be more public transportation and less reliance on personal vehicles. There should be an alternative to get downtown by providing public transportation.
- » They need to create incentives for citizens to use public transportation.
- » We need to improve community support for those who are aging or have disabilities.
- » We need to improve our athletic image that we are spoiled and not good sports.

Retirees

- » I'd like to see more people caring about their yards. I'd like to see the beauty of the community maintained.
- » In some ways, the flood almost helped with that.
- » Around Valley, there are diverse groups moving into those neighborhoods, and they don't share that value.
- » There is a reality with the housing market that people are buying houses they can't afford.
- » We live near Crestview, and when my two kids were going through there, there was some solidarity in the neighborhood, but I feel the West Des Moines district has clobbered that neighborhood by changing it. We've seen the neighborhood deteriorating. The newer people don't know us, and they don't wave. Ours is very much a neighborhood in transition, and it's not that old. It shouldn't be decline. I attribute it a lot to how the school district has handled the school out there.
- » It would be interesting to know how many people have a good feeling about their neighborhood, if they want to be there, or if it's a weigh station. We have so many people speeding through our streets, and that's disrespectful. If they knew the people on the street, they wouldn't do that. I don't think it's been connected in some areas of West Des Moines.
- » The connection needs to be improved.
- » There is a certain transitory nature to this community. Several large companies bring people in who are on their way up, and people move on.

- » I think they don't have the interest. As long as things remain, they'll be there. They're going to keep their house up and do what's expected of them. I have a real issue with the police department. There is a stop sign in our neighborhood, and people drive through it. The police presence is sorely lacking on those streets.
- » When you're coming into West Des Moines on Grand and you get to 63rd Street, that area of the community needs a little refreshing. It probably involves Des Moines and DOT roads, but the buildings could use some fixing up.
- » I bring clients to town and take the freeway, but we used to come back on 63rd. I don't use that introduction to our community any more because of the comments I got. They would ask, "Where does West Des Moines start?"
- » Who should pay for that?
- » There's nothing changing over there. We also have a flood gate that has to come down there.
- » Fleur Drive was done with private funding.

Seniors

- » I think to cut our taxes down and improve our services for the whole community. We need to consolidate our fire and police department, like the communication gaps between communities. If we would consolidate this, service would be much more effective.
- » From a senior standpoint, the letters and the numbers on the street signs need to be bigger.
- » One thing that Des Moines and other communities have that we don't is a senior center. Des Moines has several senior centers located all over – 17 total.
- » Lots of Indian people go to the senior center, and our senior center is getting crowded.
- » I got hospitalized and disabled. I was shocked that when I had to cross a four lane street, I only had four seconds. You had to either go back or take a chance and run. So I would like more time at the crosswalks. You should have at least a minute to cross the street. Two teenagers couldn't even make it across one time that I saw.
- » To get across Mills Civic Parkway, I have to start right away.
- » Is the West Des Moines Community School District considering a three-year program or study abroad component?

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » As far as Windsor Heights, we're struggling with the fact that we can't expand or annex. They re-did some of the businesses on University, and now that development is sitting empty. It's a struggle to compete with Clive and Urbandale. When the HyVee came in, it wiped out a ton of businesses there. It's about balance between attracting new businesses and keeping the historical businesses there.
- » Nothing I can think of.
- » I'm having trouble thinking of anything.
- » It's taking forever for road work to get done, or roads are being torn up and redone.
- » One thing we struggled with was when we were looking for a new home, and we wanted to stay in West Des Moines because of the elementary school. We couldn't find a home there, so our youngest had to switch schools.

Premise 2

The population of West Des Moines-area communities has increased consistently between 15 to 20 percent every five years since 2000. This growth is a positive indicator of strong communities, but we all know that

growth can also have drawbacks, as well. Please talk a bit about changes you have experienced in your community in the past few years.

1. What changes have you noticed in the community over the past five years?

Human Services Clients

- » The sidewalks are getting fixed and the accessible ramps are nice.
- » It has gotten bigger.
- » Valley Junction started a program for Railroad Avenue years ago, which is now getting refocused.
- » The library is great.
- » Raccoon River Park is wonderful.
- » The water system is totally messed up. People who live at the end of the water line get a lot of rust. The system needs to be updated. We never knew when we would have clean water.
- » West Des Moines goes out so far now. Valley Junction is still West Des Moines, but it is not like it used to be.
- » The population increase has resulted in more traffic, and customer service suffers. Interstate traffic gets worse every year.
- » The mall came over the last five years.
- » More businesses have come to the city.
- » Microsoft is coming, which is really positive.

Latinos

- » The community has grown a lot. There are more people coming from other areas like California and Chicago. I've noticed the growth the most.
- » The programs in the school have changed with school supplies and tutoring. There is more communication from the schools. One-on-one help and support services in the school have grown.
- » I have lived here for nine years. I was in school in Des Moines. Now there are more people who can actually communicate with me in Spanish. Before, people wouldn't reach out to me or other Spanish-speaking parents. That showed to us that they didn't care.
- » I graduated from Valley and didn't have many choices after I graduated. I started to work then. When I graduated, there were only nine other Hispanics in my class. I have noticed since then that there are many more Hispanics graduating.

High School Youth

- » The Jordan Creek area. I didn't live here until I was 8. We now have a new pool, and many houses have been expanded in our community.
- » The Valley Junction Farmers' Market hasn't been as big as it used to be. There is also a battle over the sound ordinance for concerts at Val Air.
- » Classes are getting bigger. The schools are trying to keep up, and they are doing okay so far, but I think they need to plan ahead farther. Valley will need an additional expansion soon.
- » With a lot of people coming in, many people expect to get a job, but at the same time, there have been a number of layoffs.
- » The more we build things, the more people we can draw to the community.
- » Expansion. There have been some schools that have closed down. Some schools are just sitting there. Money is going into the school structures instead of school activities or transportation.

- » The school programs don't always grow at the same rate as other schools in the area.
- » There have been a lot of Bosnian immigrants into the community.
- » Valley High School is getting much bigger. It now takes 20 – 30 minutes to travel to the school.
- » It's nice that things are growing fast, but I don't know if we have the financial backing to grow at that rate.
- » There are a lot of new buildings and a lot of new restaurants.

Young Adults

- » It's gone from being a family place to a place for younger people, too. Toward West Glen, there are tons of apartments that have younger people living there.
- » We're a lot farther west. There are so many houses now; it's overbuilt, and that seems like a negative thing.
- » The houses and the new commercial building that have gone on in the west side of the city.
- » I like the commercial building because it's good for commerce. But I think it's a matter of not being unique, and it's all cookie cutter and cardboard construction. We need neighborhoods with their own identities. Glen Oaks is unique, but they are all million dollar houses. You can't tell where you are. I walked in the wrong house once when we first moved in. Building codes in this city also need attention.
- » All the houses are cookie cutter. I think it is cool that they designed all the townhouses different in West Glen, and that is what we need. A large community in Houston was built similarly to West Glen. I think West Des Moines has the potential to go that direction. Traffic has increased; streets need to be widened to handle more traffic.
- » Jordan Creek people have done their own design criteria. The developers are trying to make it their own style.
- » That is a good thing.
- » To an extent. It is a nice façade, but they are not well built. They are as minimalist as possible to hold down costs.

Preschool Families

- » The physical changes – they're building a road right next to our house that doesn't go anywhere. All our neighbors banded together to speak with the DOT about it, but they went ahead with it.
- » We live right on the edge of West Des Moines. The people building aren't talking to the residents and meeting our needs. Things are growing.
- » We experienced the school capping problem. We assumed that our kids would be able to go to the neighborhood school. Now there are too many kids and they bus the kindergartners across town. That has frustrated people.
- » These changes aren't good sometimes. We haven't experienced these things yet. The community is getting younger. A younger group of people are coming in, and may be first time homebuyers.
- » I've seen a lot of for sale signs on houses and buildings with lofts, as well as strip malls that are empty. They are advertising to get people in them – both residential and commercial.
- » Next to me is a business complex. Over four years, all the businesses have left. There were four or five places, and now they're gone.
- » Has anyone determined what the new needs of the community are now? As the community changes, the needs will change.
- » I haven't seen many changes over two years, but mostly new buildings.

- » I have seen a lot of the same things. The demographics are changing. Some people want to hold on to the fact that we win all the time, like with the new stadium. Some districts are saying that they are the new Valley, meaning that there are other strong communities. We need to talk with one another.

School-Age Families

- » The boundaries of the school district have changed.
- » I have worked in the Jordan Creek area. It used to be fields. Now it seems there is always a new street or house being built.
- » The traffic has increased because of the out-of-town travelers.
- » Opportunities fill up quickly such as signing up for swim lessons. You have to get things done as quickly as possible and sometimes months in advance.
- » The age of law enforcement officers is much younger than they used to be in West Des Moines. The law enforcement officers used to come around more often and you knew who they were. Now you don't know who they are.

Empty Nesters

- » The expansion of jobs.
- » A retail boom, but I'm not sure if it will be sustainable in the future.
- » The locally-owned businesses are going away because of the chain stores coming to West Des Moines. We are losing our community character and becoming generic.
- » I have noticed that the vision of the planning department is to make sure that we have the infrastructure we need to ensure a quality of life. I used to have a farm in the 1970s, and now a lot of the green space in West Des Moines has disappeared.
- » There has been a lot done to revitalize and rebuild the Valley Junction area. I wish there was more of that going on with the historic parts of West Des Moines.

Retirees

- » Too much traffic – the traffic flow sucks. We've had discussions of having to get out of the neighborhood with all the traffic in the morning, and they won't put in a light because of the proximity to the railroad. Since they put the mall in, it's gotten worse.
- » I'd like to see a third turn lane on a lot of streets. They've done a lot of road expansion. That's helped a lot. The ability to get on the freeway from 50th has helped a lot.
- » From being in the schools, we've seen more needy students.
- » The demographic definitely changed. It's a very different student population.
- » The services that are needed by students – tutors, meals.
- » There weren't any non English speaking students in the 1970s. In 1986, we had 3 percent of our students in special education. When I left in 2001, we had 15 percent in special education, and the number of programs we had to serve those kids seemed huge.
- » It's been dramatic. It seemed like every year, there were more and more kids in special education, and really, that was part of the reason behind the alternative school.
- » Aren't more people trying to streamline their kids in the classroom?
- » Students are needier in terms of money, and as a school district, we've done an amazing job.
- » Is special education starting in grade 1? Or are students moving in later?
- » Both. We were identifying any number of them coming in to junior high - kids coming in as special education kids who didn't know they needed it.

- » Is that correlated to socioeconomic status?
- » No – in the seven years I was at the alternative school, we had the full spectrum.
- » In 1969, we had a few Hispanics in Valley Junction, which has grown a lot. You'd call a parent, and you couldn't talk to them.
- » Housing – a lot of single family homes were being built when we moved here. Many condos, apartment buildings, and town homes are being built now, and baby boomers are moving back into town homes and down sizing.
- » When a developer goes in, the government requires them to be a planned unit developer, and so many have to be apartments, townhouses, and single family units. That's the reason you see all of that mix.
- » My husband recently became disabled, and they don't have the services needed. If they don't have a wheelchair at the store, I don't go there. I have to find out where they have a wheelchair. Our neighborhood changed recently because we had people leave for nursing homes. I see people my age frequently because of access to things. You need to know things like whether there are elevators. I have to leave a driver's license to get a wheelchair at Younkers. I think that's ridiculous. If you're doing community education, you have to plan for access.
- » The Americans with Disabilities Act says that has to be there.
- » Parking for the disabled.
- » Curb cuts are still not in all neighborhoods.
- » I don't think that Valley High School is as much of an anchor for the community as it used to be. We have a significant part of our community that has no connection to the school, whereas when we moved here, I remember going over to the school for events. We went over there that night they won second place at state, even though we had no connection with the school at all, and I'm not sure there's that same thing now.
- » I think she touches on something that is my observation. Relative to when we moved to the Des Moines area, and the people we knew out here, West Des Moines is aging, and it doesn't know how to deal with issues (i.e. disability services). People moved out here for retirement communities, and they don't want their taxes raised for schools they're not connected to. That's part of what's going on.
- » I think there should be more open houses or something where people could visit. They built a new police station and there was one open house. How many people know what this building is? I don't think people know. I just want to look at the place. How are our tax dollars spent? Then it's done and people ask you why you're there in the building.
- » Since my kids left school, there's definitely a lack of community information that's put out. Eighty five percent of what's happening in the community is generated through the schools. You're just left out, unless you catch something in the West Des Moines Register. There are a lot of resources that would be beneficial to 80 percent of the citizens that nobody ever knows about. Clive started putting out a newsletter, and it comes with the water bill.
- » The problem is that schools are hard pressed for money. Communication is expensive, but they could do something over email to people without kids. I love show choir, and I would love to go to a concert at the high school.
- » I never felt left out, and if I wanted to be involved in those things, I would be.
- » Not everyone uses a computer.
- » I would blame the school administration for some of this. When my kids were in elementary, we were surprised at the stand-offish-ness. We fought to get a light there for the kids on a busy road. Principals up through people in these offices had a very stand-offish attitude. I think they treated the school board badly. There was this sense of, "We're professionals. Leave us alone."
- » I sent a note to the principal at Western Hills about a suggestion I had, and I never got a note back. I made another one about getting a larger sign. I see that with public works, too.

Seniors

- » The growth. I would like to see West Des Moines keep up with the improvements that need to be made to the older part of the community before they grab more land and expand and expand. It's really sad that we are on septic systems in my area because they are not concerned about running sewer lines.
- » The churches are too big; it's not like small-town Iowa where you know everyone at church.
- » I wish we had a place to get a driver's license. It seems to me we should have a license place further west.
- » About ten years ago, there was a lot of publicity of smart communities where you park in the back and know your neighbors. Then they started to build Jordan Creek Parkway. The smart community idea went out the window.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » In Urbandale, they built the new library and new city center offices. They are both much bigger than the older facilities. I think it's an indicator of more people. All the expansion is out west. We're in the older section, but the new library is right there by our house, which is nice.
- » They did a lot of work on 86th Street and widened that. They improved the sidewalk and have lost some businesses because of that, but they definitely needed to widen that. Businesses would have had to make changes, and Taco John's, McDonald's and Wendy's didn't want to make the changes, so they moved.
- » There are a lot of new businesses and new development. Ninety percent of them have been positive, and there's that one strip on University that is empty.
- » We've seen the expansion out west in Dallas County and along 86th Street. You've seen a lot of the more positive businesses move out and places like check cashing places have filled in. My oldest goes to Stillwell, and you see a lot of those types of businesses that look pretty rough along Grand and the eastern parts of the city.
- » I agree. I've only lived there a couple of years, but most of the businesses are changing.
- » The median age is a little younger than I remember it in Windsor Heights.

2. How have these changes positively impacted your community?

Human Services Clients

- » Revenue
- » Microsoft is going to work with DMACC to train people.
- » West Des Moines Community Development does a fantastic job promoting the city.
- » The streets are better.
- » The safety is best in West Des Moines.
- » The levee system has helped with flood control, which is a real improvement.

Latinos

- » In the seven years I've lived here, I've noticed that the Hispanic community has grown. I now have much more support to find resources. There are more resources and people that utilize the resources through both the community and schools.
- » I've been here four years from California. Knowing that my daughter is receiving good education and learning quickly is a good change. She is able to learn very quickly here. In California, my daughter couldn't learn anything. The difference here is that my children are taught in English and being taught well. My experience being taught in Spanish and seeing materials in English was confusing.

High School Youth

- » There is a large variety of races. Diversity.
- » The more businesses we have, the more jobs we can create.
- » There are more places to go or meet at.
- » More money that can be used for community supports. Schools get funded, and more police officers get funded.
- » The more money we have, the more services the community can provide.

Young Adults

- » It's good for commerce, but I don't see small business going on strong. I think it's hard for the small businesses. Taxes may be low, but buildings are expensive in West Des Moines.
- » There is more stuff to do because of the changes, like Wellman's. That's positive.
- » Convenience is a big thing. Commercial development has expanded, making so much more available now. It used to be that going to Coral Ridge Mall was a big deal, and now we have something better.
- » The area is starting to bring more companies, like Microsoft, Wells Fargo, and the Event Center. It gets people to spend money in the community even if they are located in Des Moines.
- » There is a bit more small business development that is obvious, but the rent process in West Glen is astronomical. Small business growth is stunted because they don't know where to go to find the capital. In West Glen, about the only things that are the same are Caribou, Tonic, and Sticks. Everything else keeps flipping over.

Preschool Families

- » It's nice having people moving in from different places. They all have different experiences.
- » I love the recycling tubs. Those are great.
- » As the demographics changed, West Des Moines has positively changed. The culture that has been added because of the diversity has really been great for all of us. The more we know different people, the more we realize they are just like us.
- » I would echo that, especially in the classroom. My daughter learned so much Spanish last year just from classmates. It's part of the appeal of living here.

School-Age Families

- » It makes it a very convenient place to live. It is a big deal for students to leave West Des Moines because everything they need is already here.
- » We have an ample amount of resources here. With the new hospitals, now you don't even have to hit the freeway. The grocery stores, shopping mall, and hospitals are all here.
- » I love the fact that my teen drivers are not all over the interstate having to get somewhere. I feel safe because my teen can access everything around the West Des Moines area. You often hear about kids in rural areas that get in accidents.
- » They have a lot of places for teens to go to, and they try to keep the kids busy and in West Des Moines.

Empty Nesters

- » By making West Des Moines a destination.
- » The bike trails and amenities have been a huge improvement.
- » A lot more people come to shop in West Des Moines, which helps our local economy.
- » The increase in people has attracted businesses and created jobs.

- » There are people who live in West Des Moines that used to plan vacations to cities that had bigger name stores, but now West Des Moines has those stores, and they no longer have to make those trips.
- » West Des Moines is getting people from all around the state. The bike paths are great for the community because of the number of people who use them.
- » The mall has given us an idea that we as a community can do big things. It also delivers a safe walking place in the winter.
- » The growth here has enabled West Des Moines to host big events such as the Hy-Vee Triathlon.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » Parks and recreation activities for parents and children.
- » Good responses from public safety.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » I think the expansion west with Jordan Creek continues even with the economy. I think we will be seeing more tax money and people vacationing here, and that's certainly positive. We go to Jordan Creek and Valley West; we're pretty close to both. I think Jordan Creek is well done as the upscale look, and I think you can tell it's drawing people from around the state by just looking at the counties on license plates around the parking lot.
- » I worked part time out there for awhile, and people are coming from Vets Auditorium sporting events to go to Jordan Creek. There are stores out there that are the only ones in the state of Iowa. I go out there, but we try to stay around closer to our home.
- » You've got Scheels out there, too. Restaurants and businesses have grown out there.
- » It's drawing people to the area.
- » In Urbandale, they went through and anywhere there weren't sidewalks, they mandated they go in. They surveyed the sidewalks and made people repair them. I view that as a positive change. We didn't have a big problem in our neighborhood, but there were a few places where they didn't have sidewalks. I like that it's walk-able now.

3. What challenges have arisen from these changes?

Human Services Clients

- » Affordable housing is lacking.
- » I agree – we need more affordable housing.
- » Sun Prairie is a community in itself and could have its own services. West Des Moines services need to be able to keep up with groups and cooperate with groups to solve challenges.
- » Public transportation is an issue since the city has spread out so much. This will need to be addressed.

Latinos

- » For me, I don't see many challenges. All the improvements for me have been very positive. I have better options now. I haven't seen any of the challenges.
- » I agree.
- » I agree.
- » All the changes have been positive.

High School Youth

- » There is conflict when people come to the community to get a job while others who have been in the community are struggling to keep or get a job.
- » Jobs
- » Jobs are taken very quickly.
- » More buildings are going up, and they are taking up a lot of land. Jordan Creek is built on wetlands, which may not be the best spot to build.
- » People are leaving because of job loss, but people are also moving in to try and get those jobs.
- » It's tough to accommodate everyone that is coming in. How much space do we have to expand? What is the capacity of the schools?
- » Overcrowding
- » Overcrowding and jobs
- » Overcrowding. I feel like I don't have as close of a connection with people in the community, since I don't know people as well.
- » Growth is hard on the environment.

Young Adults

- » Infrastructure is my challenge. The fall of the Roman Empire came from not taking care of infrastructure. The infrastructure needs to match the growth. Look at how FDR put this into effect after World War II. Grand Avenue needs attention. EP True needs expansion. Parks need to be put in place.
- » I've heard they want to connect all the parks and trails so you never have to cross a street, but you still have to cross 63rd Street, which is not taking care of looping things together in the city. They should not put trails dead-ending in Waukee. They should link what we already have first.
- » I drive back here from Fleur to get errands run over my noon hour. The streets are crowded.
- » Planning for growth is difficult. The two high schools are a problem. It is also true in other areas, too. Now they say they might have to build another school even though they recently remodeled the high school and built a freshmen-only school.
- » The long-term planning of 15 years ago is what is killing them today. They are too worried about stamping bricks on EP True rather than safe driving on Ashworth. You sometimes jump the curb because it's so narrow. Just a couple feet would help in each direction.
- » The school thing is the most ridiculous. The school doesn't want to break up the football program because of the success of the program. I have two rings for football.
- » I've had smaller classes at Iowa State than I had at Valley.
- » Classes were huge. I saw people at graduation I'd never seen before.
- » We have great infrastructure, materials, and computers, but you just have so many people in one place.
- » We had great history teachers who were just a thesis short of a PhD. They didn't have to come here to teach, but they did.
- » It would be nice if Valley would become two schools.

Preschool Families

- » I'm hoping that the teachers have the resources they need to meet the needs of the diverse students – whether it be academic diversity or anything else. I really hope they have those resources - all the things they need to meet the needs of all the students. There is a move in the classroom to meet the individualized needs of students.
- » I had an incident with a garage sale. After one hour we had no one coming. It was a Saturday, and my signs had been taken down by the city. There should be a free two days for the signs. When you're

trying to make ends meet for your family, they should just let us have these days to put up the signs for a garage sale.

School-Age Families

- » I think that West Des Moines puts a lot of emphasis into these businesses. A lot of the infrastructure is put more into Dallas County. The further west you go in West Des Moines, the more money is put into it. They need to maintain infrastructure throughout all of West Des Moines. It also seems that the Waukee School District seems to get some of the West Des Moines money.
- » A lot of the money is going further west. A lot of people from Valley Junction area are getting left out. They tend to organize things for those who live farther west.

Empty Nesters

- » Class sizes have increased in our schools.
- » The teacher to student ratio has become an issue.
- » Kids don't have anywhere to go with their friends that doesn't serve alcohol.
- » Kids typically go to the Jordan Creek area to hang out.
- » The growth has deteriorated the sense of community because of the number of new people. I don't know as many people as I used to.
- » We used to be a hidden secret and now we are no longer one.
- » The growth has put pressure on the services that we provide such as our schools. The more people we have in our schools means that more people will be driving. This will affect the amount of safety services provided.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » All of our garages are in the front, so everybody drives right into their homes and doesn't engage with their neighbors.
- » I have a brother in Milwaukee, and he didn't have cookie cutter houses there.
- » Traffic has increased on Saturdays and around the holidays, but you will have that anywhere.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » They re-did the strip on University, and it's still sitting empty. When they added Wal-Mart and Sam's Club, you read the police blotter, and 80 percent of it has to do with that area. It gave the Windsor Heights police something to do other than catch us speeding over 25 miles per hour on University. It brings a different element and a lot of traffic to the area. You want those tax dollars, and that big field was begging to be developed. It just comes, the good with the bad.
- » Do you think the addition of the Wal-Mart out west has changed the element?
- » There's not really a Kmart or Wal-Mart there, and I think it has changed the element a little.
- » No, the Jordan Creek Wal-Mart is not open 24 hours a day.
- » The issue with 86th Street [businesses changing]. I think the development at Jordan Creek is cannibalizing growth at Southridge and Merle Hay malls. As west-siders, I don't know if we care.
- » I don't necessarily see challenges.
- » Those businesses keep changing on 86th, and I'd like to see something nicer move into those buildings out there.

- » I live close to Merle Hay Mall, and it's lost a lot of stores and the whole lower level there. It's shifted more out west. They eliminated the businesses next to HyVee on Hickman because they're going to build a whole new building and tear down the old one. The current one is already big, and the new one is going to have to be humongous. I'm kind of ambivalent. I used to go to two or three businesses that were in that strip – the Goodwill store, the UPS store, and the Urbandale Café.
- » Maybe they'll move into the strip malls and push the check cashing places out.

4. Are there any needs in the community not currently being met?

Human Services Clients

- » The Fairmeadows Creek has a bunch of trees that need to be cleaned up behind our apartment. The owners of the property say they are not responsible. It is a safety issue for kids.
- » Human Services are underfunded.
- » There is a gap for people who don't qualify for senior services because they are too young. Services for individuals with disabilities are also lacking. The city doesn't have comprehensive services for all ages.
- » In Seattle, they have a shut-in club for people who can't get out. They are offered games and other activities.
- » Suicide prevention. We had an incident where there was no help. Drug treatment as well.
- » Walnut School provides services to children with disabilities.
- » There needs to be more community outreach for people with human services needs.
- » The churches don't reach out to the community; they didn't after the 1993 floods.

Latinos

- » When I go to Broadlawns, I wish there were more people there that could communicate with me in Spanish. I have to pull my oldest son out of school to interpret for me in order to talk to the doctor.
- » I agree. I don't need translation, but I hear and see it at the hospital.
- » I have a daughter who has a difficult time hearing out of one ear. She is not totally deaf, but I feel that there hasn't been anything for my daughter. For all the resources available here, there should be something for her.
- » One of the issues for me, as a parent, is that there are too many papers going home with my student. It is hard for me to identify the important papers, and the documents aren't translated.
- » My nephew and I live in Des Moines. We open enroll here. He will start a football camp here soon. The transportation brings him to Valley West Mall, but the bus won't take IDs from the West Des Moines schools. Any other district and university can get discounted fare, but not West Des Moines.
- » My concern is as a single mom. I have to leave my kids home alone sometimes to go to work. I have a very young child who is not school-age. I can't afford day care, but I work too hard to qualify for assistance. I make too much to get the free day care. There needs to be something to do with our young kids. Day care services for the low-income are my biggest concern.
- » I want to go to school to learn computer skills or English, but I can't because I need day care, too.
- » My concern is the day care, too. There is so much I want to do. If I could go to school, I would do that, but my young children keep me from doing that.

High School Youth

- » There are not enough shelters for the homeless and children, especially shelters serving women. The YWCA was shut down and now we have to throw people wherever we can. Entertainment was viewed as a priority over taking care of people.

- » Overcrowding. There is increased criminal activity. We need more police to cover our larger areas. Gangs could come in as the community continues to grow.
- » I don't really know of any needs.
- » Overcrowding. Things can start to look trashy.
- » Our community is doing pretty well. As the community continues to grow, it becomes more liberal. Criminal activity could increase.
- » I'm happy.

Young Adults

- » We've still got the school thing with the large classes.
- » Some of the road stuff is not being looked at the way it should be. I don't understand why they didn't make Mills Civic six lanes all the way down because of the traffic that's on it. Even Railroad Avenue has a lot of traffic. You get people who are sitting next to each other going the same speed in the lanes and they just sit there and you can't get around them. Most of the time I drive the speed limit.
- » It's one of those things that doesn't get looked at enough. I sat in a meeting about Ashworth Road last winter, and they said they couldn't justify widening it because they didn't have enough accidents to show the need.
- » With city departments, the city manager and assistant city manager just left, and the plans the city has were put together for those people who just left. So everything will change or start over.
- » Infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure.
- » It's always making sure you nurture Valley Junction as much as you nurture West Glen. I think there are people who won't go to the Farmers' Market down there because it can be a hassle just to go there and find a place to park.
- » I can't think of any.

Preschool Families

- » Whole Foods
- » My husband commutes to Ames. When we had my son, we ended up staying here. It would be great if he had some type of transportation, either a bus, van, or train.
- » I used to see the rideshare between Ankeny and Ames all the time.
- » It would be nice to have a train running. The carpool thing can be challenging. A commuter line of some sort would be nice.
- » Biking – we have great trails, but there are still struggles between bikes and walkers. I always feel that we're dodging each other. It would be nice to have designated lanes on the roads.
- » Like on Ingersoll in Des Moines.
- » But I'm always afraid of hitting the bikers on Ingersoll.
- » Me too.
- » One thing I embrace is trying to live a healthier lifestyle. I know West Des Moines has embraced this as well. I'd like to see them do something more, maybe in the education of our families and children. I like to run errands on my bike, but I won't put my son on a trailer and try to dodge cars on the road.
- » A working farm in West Des Moines would be nice and so neat for the kids to see.
- » A community garden would be nice.
- » And the food from the community garden could go to needy families.
- » Food – I have some anxiety about my son eating school lunches. I would like to see the nutrition improved.

- » It would be so nice to get the food locally grown. I've heard about that in Iowa City.
- » More healthy food options in general would be nice – in grocery stores and at restaurants.
- » Another wading pool would be nice. We have one at Legion but no others. There are so many other parks that could have pools like that.
- » There was a park in Pinkerton, Ohio, that had AstroTurf. The kids could bounce off of everything. It was so nice. Parents could sit back and relax because their children were safe.
- » Some parks have really nice shaded areas. I would like that very much. The schools don't have any sun protection. That would be nice.

School-Age Families

- » It's hard to find resources within the community, especially for kids with intellectual disabilities. I found mine by calling the Department of Human Services office. I wanted to know how to get a remedial worker.
- » A lot of people are getting laid off, and a lot of the new jobs are moving farther west.
- » There isn't affordable housing. A lot of the places to live are upper scale or very expensive. There needs to be better housing around those jobs.
- » There needs to be more teen activities. A lot of people don't know that West Des Moines has an alternative high school. I think more people need to know about that.
- » All of these teacher cuts come from the electives and arts classes that are taught. We need more technical skills classes.
- » Walnut Creek is the only school in the district that has had no funding for improvements. They get little attention. It seems like they are increasing their attendance each year and shouldn't be neglected.
- » As a teacher, I know that college is not for everybody. Kids aren't offered certain career plans other than college. They need to give children more options for after high school. They also need to put more money into Walnut Creek.

Empty Nesters

- » We need more services and need to stop the cutting teachers in our schools.
- » Special education resources are not being met. Class sizes are getting larger and rooms are getting smaller than the traditional class. You create more problems when you keep packing these kids into these small classrooms. Cutting associates and increasing class sizes will have an impact in the future.
- » Some of the growth has increased our diversity, but it puts a burden on schools to accommodate for those who don't speak English.
- » I don't know about the Department of Human Services in Valley Junction, but I am sure they could use more resources.
- » Our ability to have water in West Des Moines. I don't want us to hook up with the Des Moines water system and pay those rates.

Retirees

- » I have very strong feelings that there is little or no programming during after school hours, the summer, and weekends for junior high and high school kids. I had an experience with a girl who told me she didn't see anyone over a three day weekend. Two hundred kids showed up at an after hours thing to deal with a death situation. If kids don't come from an active family, there are no places that they can go.
- » Someone mentioned services for the handicapped. I think they're very nice. I lived here before I was in a wheelchair. The only problem I have is in the old part of Valley Junction, where I can't get into the stores. West Des Moines has a human services department that's very helpful. I used them for several

years, and I've used their services to take myself to appointments. We've talked about moving back to Des Moines, and we've considered that as part of it.

- » I called human services, and they didn't call me back. One person referred me to many different people, and I left a message and didn't get a call back. I'm not sure if we know what services are out there. If someone can answer your questions with the first call, that would be great. I don't know how you do that.
- » That would be needed – better designed web services.
- » Yes, but West Des Moines sends out that little book regularly.
- » I do think the websites could be more user-friendly.
- » I have a friend who uses the bus service all the time.
- » I think it is more knowledge that we need, like having a class on community services for West Des Moines Community Education. Where do I turn?
- » Maybe there needs to be something more general for resources in West Des Moines.

Seniors

- » The senior center issue needs to be addressed as fast as possible. They need to have more underground wiring. Every time a storm comes, the lines go down. If we had more cables in the ground, we could save money in West Des Moines.
- » Is there a problem with finding low-income housing in West Des Moines?
- » They don't even build starter homes here in West Des Moines.
- » Roxanne Conlin is building low-income apartments. Her husband got the tax credit and he is building them as we speak.
- » How are we going to minimize environmental risks?
- » Is the bus system and public transportation good here?
- » When I was a kid, the rocket would come through each Iowa community. We need a metropolitan train system. We need to invest in public transit.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » We need to get Southwest Airlines – it's about price. Wherever they are, the airline prices drop dramatically. People go to Omaha or Kansas City because they can get cheaper flights. I used to travel a lot when I was working.
- » As an individual traveling, it makes sense to fly out of Des Moines, but if it's the family going, it starts to add up.
- » I thought Clive could have used a bigger library, but it didn't pass a few years ago.

Premise 3

Good recreational and educational opportunities are important characteristics of successful communities. Ensuring that basic needs of residents are being met is also important. Such opportunities and services are offered by a number of organizations, including the school district and the city, private organizations, faith-based organizations and area nonprofits. All West Des Moines school district communities have invested significant community resources to support a strong educational system for all community residents – programs offered through West Des Moines Community Schools extend beyond meeting the educational and social needs of the community's children and youth to also serving the community's adults. Examples of school activities include before and after school programs, continuing education classes, adult education classes, and sports. West Des Moines district communities have also invested in recreational opportunities

through the cities. Examples of city activities include parks and recreation camps and programs, library story time, and adult sports. Strong communities also offer residents services to ensure everyone enjoys a good quality of life and are able to meet the basic needs necessary for their family. We want to talk a bit about the activities you participate in and services you receive and how you make those decisions.

1. Please take out your notepads and pens. Please list on the notepad which recreational and educational activities or programs you (and your family) participate in generally – not just city and schools activities. Please also list those services that you receive in your community. Please share what you wrote down.

Human Services Clients

- » Church, taking care of kids, and visiting senior citizens. I help clean an apartment for an elderly lady.
- » I go to the community center. I am busy working.
- » I also like to bike on the trails.
- » Farmers' market.
- » I volunteer with hospice and the community center. I walk for fun.
- » The farmers' market is awesome.
- » The market is getting too many vendors. Some of the items are getting expensive.
- » They clean up really well now after the farmers' market.
- » I like the Human Services program and clothing closet. They also have really nice dinners. It is great if you need help.

Latinos

- » Summer lunches. The free lunches at the park. Rain or shine, I'm there.
- » Going to the park.
- » Lunch at the park.
- » I enjoy going to the parks in the afternoon. I feel safe there.
- » There's an international adult soccer league at Valley. The environment is very welcoming.
- » I go to the park, but I love to cook.
- » I go to the park during the lunch time, but I also go the Clive Park. My girls love to run around the park. I use the Clive pool.
- » In Des Moines, the programs and services aren't as good.

High School Youth

- » Silver Cord
- » Track and sports
- » Volunteer work and sports
- » Football, swimming, weight lifting, and Silver Cord.
- » Sports, special needs volunteering, and volunteering at the library.
- » Silver Cord, library, bike trails, church, and music programs at the school.
- » I help people around the Walnut Creek School area. We help people clean up their yards or whatever they need. My school needs more classes, sports, and room so we don't have to travel to Valley or Central Campus.
- » We help the neighborhood. I play football and basketball at the parks.

- » Varsity sports. I spend a lot of time outside on the trails.
- » Drama and Rock in Prevention.

Young Adults

- » Soccer. I volunteer for Habitat for Humanity in Des Moines. There is no Habitat for Humanity in West Des Moines.
- » Baseball, when I was in school. Close to Valley Junction, we would do some community work and field trips as middle and high school students.
- » In junior high and high school, I used the library and was in Boy Scouts.
- » I am working a lot, and work follows me home. Biking and visiting the mall and restaurants are the things I do. As a kid I did baseball. I volunteered with Planet 7 and Safety Town through the West Des Moines Police Department.
- » I also volunteered with Safety Town and did swim lessons and sports camps. I don't do as much now that I'm away at college. Parks, the library, bike trails, and Raccoon River are the kinds of things that appeal to me.
- » I work in the community so we're at all the events, such as little league. We bring a truck to the schools. I spend time at Raccoon River and go to the Farmers' Market every week. Then the night life, of course.

Preschool Families

- » Brighter Beginnings, book club, basketball for my husband, pool pass, ballet class, and we go to the Jordan Creek preschool.
- » Biking, the Arts Center, soccer, dance, gymnastics, the library, Science Center, and book club.
- » YMCA and church in addition to the other things people have mentioned.
- » We do all those things, too – lots of the same classes and play dates.
- » My kids love the Burnt Marshmallows camp. Swimming lessons and adult swim lessons. We go to Adventureland, the zoo, and the farmers' market. The Valley Junction Farmers' Market is fun. My kids are really artistic, so they like those kinds of classes.
- » We go to the Art Center. My son does gymnastics, music, and the Burnt Marshmallows camp.
- » We do a lot with our church - Bible church camp, Living History Farms camp, and preschool through the church. We also go to the tiny tots music class. My son has an IEP and gets a lot of support through that.
- » We bike and go to the pool. Raccoon River Park is really fun for us. We like to fish. A lot of the same things.
- » Everyone has said what we do – ditto. The same things.

School-Age Families

- » Big Brothers Big Sisters
- » My kids go to the YMCA, parks and recreation, and aquatic centers as well as the West Des Moines Public Library.
- » Holiday Park Aquatic Center, Valley Junction Farmers' Market, the West Des Moines Library, and the West Des Moines Learning Resource Center. We have also done orchestra.
- » We have been to Raccoon River Park and their dog park. We meet people down there from different areas of West Des Moines. We also use the library, swimming pools, bike trails, and sport clubs around the area.
- » We use the Nature Lodge at the Raccoon River Park.

- » We are active in the open gym nights and the Silver Cord program which involves volunteer programs.
- » We use the Little Ninjas program, vacation bible camps, free lunches at the Legion, free clinic, and the food pantry sometimes.
- » Polk County conservation classes
- » We use the YMCA and the lake around the Learning Resource Center.

Empty Nesters

- » Health and fitness kickboxing.
- » Fishing, park, football games, YMCA, horseback riding, and soccer.
- » Library programs, youth basketball leagues, and music at the creek.
- » Library, walking paths, adult education classes, farmers' market, art center, botanical center, Blank Park Zoo, Principal Park, and Drake Relays.
- » Adult education, Civic Center, and walking paths.
- » Disc golf courses in the area.
- » Raccoon River Park facilities, tennis courts, adult education classes, Des Moines Menace soccer.

Retirees

- » I recently retired, and I took a couple of adult education courses. That's how I found out where this building was. I thought it was a good deal and was relatively inexpensive. I golf, bowl, and walk a lot. I appreciate the trails and parks and stuff. It's always a nice group of people you meet at the parks. There are plenty of churches around. I like to go out and eat, and there are plenty of places to do that.
- » Tennis – my husband uses the city tennis courts, and I enjoy walking.
- » The walking trails are great.
- » Trails are a biggie.
- » They have wonderful pools.
- » Swimming lessons for our grandkids down at Holiday Park.
- » I like Blue Heron Lake, and there are trails, fishing, and a dog area. It's a beautiful lake to be so close to.
- » The dog park is wonderful. We have two Danes and they can't just lie in the back yard.
- » The library is a biggie.
- » The library is big for me too.
- » There's a rich offering of fitness clubs for the winter time.
- » We moved here in 1986, and there were two eating places. I think West Des Moines has done an awesome job in that. I think it's great.

Seniors

- » I travel, and I don't do a lot in West Des Moines.
- » There is an assumption that public services should include water parks and golf courses.
- » The schools aren't being used as much. They are closed down, and the community and private enterprise could be utilizing the schools when the kids aren't using them.
- » The problem is we need to address this immediately. During the war years, the schools had extra generators in case of natural disasters.
- » We use the great parks that are well supervised.
- » We also have great walking trails.
- » We have Jazz in July and the Farmers' Market.

- » I use the library and I belonged to a book group there. Also, our home association meets at the library, and we use the public room. They have a wonderful community room. We have a wonderful duplicate bridge club. I love to play duplicate bridge.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » My wife is in a softball league.
- » I have utilized some adult education craft classes, West Des Moines Fire Department CPR and first aid classes, the trail system, and the aquatic centers - I've only gone a couple times, but I like them.
- » I use the Urbandale library a lot because we can walk to it. We have a trail that starts a block from our house. We use the trails, and our kids use the Area Education Agency and have their teachers' associates. I'm in a barber shop group organized through the Barbershop Harmony Society. I'm involved with the Friends of the Library, was on the Commission of Persons with Disabilities, and have been involved with the Department for the Blind.
- » We utilize sports programs for my wife and I and the kids. Between t-ball and soccer, they're doing all those. You want the kids to try everything. You can do a league, and other times they offer a two-week trial sort of thing. Our kids do the camps offered through the school during the summer and breaks. There is always something they're offering the kids. We use the library right here in West Des Moines a lot for their reading programs and camps. Windsor Heights does not have a library. We do the Urbandale Public Library every once in awhile. Our kids have participated in the pre-kindergarten program at Clive Elementary and Tiger Cubs at Lions Park. Windsor Heights is good proximity-wise, and they have a lot of things to do. We don't have a school, but we utilize everything. The West Des Moines school system does a very good job communicating everything that's out there. We find out about things through leaflets through school, the library system, and through our networks of friends.
- » We go to the YMCA and have used library programs. My kids are in Kids West (an after school and summer program) through the school. We do Holiday Park swimming lessons and baseball, and other activities through parks and rec.
- » We do the same - Kids West, parks and rec activities, the YMCA, baseball, and library programs.

2. What factors influence your participation in these activities?

Human Services Clients

- » Survival
- » Accessibility
- » Trying to stay busy.
- » It is nice to know there is someplace to go if you need help (i.e. Human Services).
- » Age. I can't play baseball anymore.

Latinos

- » I like to take my kids out of the house away from the TV. If it's a nice day, my daughter needs to be outside.
- » My son is very young. As soon as he hears the word "outside," he grabs his shoes. He knows the time and what to do.
- » I would love to have day care so I can do something for myself.
- » Money. There are some scholarships, but that's not for everything.

High School Youth

- » Friends that are already participating.

- » I like the people who are involved in the same activities as me.
- » I love sports and running. That's what draws me to it.
- » I do whatever will help the community and the school.
- » Whatever will keep me out of trouble.
- » Whatever I love, depending on my time available.
- » I like the people involved in sports. At my church, there are always places to volunteer.
- » Time management. Convenience.
- » My family helps me make decisions. They give me options, but I have to make a choice between what my family decides are the best options.

Young Adults

- » Work schedules get in the way.
- » We have gotten older and some of our volunteering was when we were younger. We have different priorities now.
- » Opportunities may not be there with the Police Department now.
- » Habitat for Humanity is what I'm interested in. I volunteer for Habitat for Humanity in Des Moines once a week. You never see them in West Des Moines. I go to soccer because my little brother is there. I have to take any job I can find in this economy.
- » Recreation is what I enjoy most. As far as volunteering is concerned, I don't hear as much about the opportunities as I did when I was in school here. I don't have the ways to find out about them now.
- » Work schedule is what affects mine.
- » I would like mountain biking opportunities. I can't think of a single decent mountain bike track in West Des Moines. They are cheap and easy to make and can be made with different levels for different skills. Decorah has a city area where people could learn.
- » Road bike trails are what I would do if I had time. I would volunteer, but there isn't a way to find what I can volunteer for.
- » The amphitheater would be nice. They keep talking about it.
- » Blue Moon started Friday at the Fountain instead. That killed any public access music. You have to go into Blue Moon in order to participate in that – it's private at a bar.

Preschool Families

- » Cost
- » Cost
- » Time, too
- » Cost
- » Last year, when my son was in first grade, he decided he wanted to do soccer. I got everything rounded up, and it ended up being \$400 to start – to get the equipment and register. I didn't even know if he liked it at that point. There are some people that can afford it, but I really have to budget. There are some scholarships, but if you're right outside the income guidelines, then there are some kids that slip through the cracks. It sorts kids into a group – the kids that can't do things.
- » I'd agree with that. We're a one-income family. We have a one-activity limit.
- » There are so many things to choose from, but my son is four, and I'm making him choose.
- » I go back to time. Once you commit yourself to things, then you have to get there. I don't just look at cost. I look at if she's getting her social needs met. And then if parents always have to be there or participate, that's an issue.

- » I have my son do whatever he likes. Cost is a factor, too, but it's also about what he enjoys. His interest matters a lot.
- » Doing this as an older person and having a full-time job – we're very limited because sometimes I can't get her to things. She has plenty to do, though. She's in soccer and gymnastics. Time – between the schedule of so many things beginning at 9:00 a.m. and needing to be picked up at 3:00 p.m. is an issue. Things don't begin at times that make them easy. Even my church's bible school is at a bad time. It's a different way of life being a working mom and to feed them properly, too. I do a lot of cooking on Saturday morning just to ensure that they get good nutrition throughout the week.
- » I work part-time, and my husband works full-time. We think about whether we're spending enough time with our kids as a family unit. There are so many things to do as a single child, but I need to make sure that we're spending enough time together. Cost is a second factor and then vehicle travel, too. I spend so much time in my car.

School-Age Families

- » Cost
- » Affordability
- » Communication. There needs to be a better community bulletin where people can post events on a website.
- » Coming from a small town, you didn't have to do all of these waiting lists. Here we have to sign kids up for baseball in January. They should advertise events that are going on and when and how to get started.
- » The West Des Moines website is not that user friendly.
- » It would be nice to have a page where citizens could add things.
- » Last week there was a Jazz in July event, and I was able to go because I signed up for an email notification for upcoming events and knew about it.
- » We can't forget the other communities in our districts. We need to collaborate with Windsor Heights, Waukee, Cumming, Urbandale, and Clive, too.

Empty Nesters

- » Parking is a big influence because it is hard to park when there is a big event going on downtown Des Moines.
- » West Des Moines doesn't have the number of events that require large amounts of parking space.
- » Parking downtown Des Moines is free after a certain time and on the weekends. The concerts, art center, and science center are accessible from West Des Moines.
- » I am influenced by my choices of interest, affordability, and accessibility. I do end up doing most of our cultural activities downtown Des Moines and use the trail system in West Des Moines.
- » We choose on what is available and where it is located. I would rather go to Valley Junction for a concert than downtown Des Moines.
- » Participation is schedule based. There are job requirements that may not let us go to certain activities.

Retirees

- » Physical health
- » Orders from your doctor
- » Personal interest. One of my goals was never to turn the TV on during the day when I retired. I've forced myself to find something to do every day whether it's walking, having lunch with someone, bowling, or taking classes. Retirement's been a well kept secret.

- » And how fun it is to be retired in this community.
- » We all used to get together with our kids and their friends' parents. There's a new group of people who have moved in, and we still have the annual picnic, and it's refreshing to see young people messing up my grass.
- » I have two gardens, and I'm out there everyday. People stop and talk, and that's how you get people. I talked to the local park, and they offered to plow a plot for me. It'd look nice. You take opportunities that involve you; you have to make yourself get out. I love the Y.
- » The West Des Moines Community Center has a lot of interesting bus trips you can go on
- » And exercises.

Seniors

This question was not asked due to time.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Price, hours, and interest level.
- » I look for cost, hours offered, and that it's something I'm able to do. Evening availability is a big thing for me.
- » Whenever we've gone to look for something to do, we've been able to find something. If the kids are looking for something, we can find it.
- » Interest level and coordinating the schedule. Can we take so-and-so here? If the kids want to do it, we'll do what we can to facilitate that.
- » Pretty much the same.

3. What are barriers to participation in activities and services you are interested in?

Human Services Clients

- » Age slows me down.
- » Transportation is a big barrier.
- » I would like to see the police promote a bike ride for families on the trails - maybe a program specifically for youth to keep them off the streets - a mentoring or friendly cop program. Police participation is important.
- » No more dogs at the farmers' market.
- » The farmers' market should be moved somewhere bigger.

Latinos

- » I find out about the lunches through Human Services and the school. We take advantage of the summer activities.
- » Through Human Services. They give us a lot of information and connect us to resources, including free diapers.
- » Human Services also helped with shots and free medical care, as well as gas vouchers.
- » For me, the best person is Sylvia at the school. She knows me and she helps me. Sylvia picked up my daughter when I had to work. She helps me in those cases when no one else will.
- » We don't always know about the scholarships.

High School Youth

- » Cost really isn't a factor.
- » Most things are paid for by the community. Cost is minimized.

Young Adults

- » We have two bus routes in the entirety of West Des Moines.

Preschool Families

This question was not asked due to time.

School-Age Families

- » Interest in the activity
- » Child care

Empty Nesters

- » There should be an accessible system of transportation. The bus doesn't run at certain times and needs to address the aging population.
- » There should be more activities for youth such as a bicycle club, other than just sports.
- » Adult social activities that don't involve drinking.
- » A recycling facility would be nice.
- » I work with people with neurological disorders that need a center where they can exercise, socialize, and receive education.

Retirees

- » Weather
- » I'm sure for some it's cost.
- » It might be access. The public transportation system is not one of our greatest strengths. You can get downtown and to Valley West, but you can't get over to Raccoon River Park.
- » Do you think that would be utilized if we had it?
- » A bus would be a better use than five or six cars on the road.
- » I like the shuttles that go down to Valley Junction for the farmers' market because I don't have to hunt for parking.
- » I think the city governments of West Des Moines, Clive, and the whole area treat citizens pretty well. Overall, the west side of town does well in providing services.
- » Get the bike path on the east side of Walnut Creek to continue across the abandoned bridge on Center Street to West Des Moines, north of McDonald's. They fixed up other bridges for millions; let's fix it up so you don't have to go down to 63rd Street.
- » If you get to the Wal-Mart, there are lots of trails out of that area.

Seniors

- » Distances I need to drive and if it's in the evening.
- » Sometimes we go to the rec room and there is nothing going on.
- » I noticed there are two vans that will come pick you up for rides if you are handicapped.

This question was not asked.

4. Are there any additional activities and services that you know of, but don't participate in? What are those?

Human Services Clients

- » I would like to do more adult education programs, but the offerings are not very interesting. I would like a good computer class.

Latinos

- » Through Sylvia. Someone who can speak Spanish by telephone.
- » I listen to the Spanish radio station, and there are 4-6 Spanish newspapers.
- » Everybody has to sign up their kids for programs. Maybe you could put the scholarship information on a pamphlet.
- » Multiply Sylvia.

High School Youth

- » I don't like to travel to go to other schools for the classes I need. Central Campus has a great auto class, and I want that to be my career. We could do the classes at Walnut Creek if we had more space.
- » I'm looking for a real job, but it's hard to find a good job that will hire someone under 16.
- » If other sports were available, I would consider them.

Young Adults

This question was not asked due to time.

Preschool Families

- » As my kids age, there are going to be many things to do.
- » There are a lot of story times by businesses that I forget to go to.

School-Age Families

- » The community education classes that they offer cost too much, which deters me from going.
- » Community education teachers aren't getting paid that much at all, and these classes are expensive. Where is the money going?
- » Getting more volunteer opportunities such as Silver Cord. They need to use it more. Silver Cord is a cord that graduates have that show that they have volunteered 200 hours. It is underutilized, and I hope they use it more.
- » Kids really enjoy doing the Silver Cord program. I am impressed with the exposure that my kid has had to new experiences.
- » The elderly would love it if somebody would visit and talk with them. It would be a great idea to have kids stop by or volunteer for them.
- » Southwoods did a great job explaining the Silver Cord program and where and how to get involved.
- » Silver Cord should tap into local businesses and try to have a career opportunity for kids who want to volunteer. If a business wants to provide a service to the community and needs workers, it could utilize the program. It could also expose kids to a type of career.

- » I would like to have more volunteer opportunities for kids. Currently, it is hard for teens to get jobs over the summer. I try to push my daughters to start working on their resumes and to get involved in things that could benefit them in the long run.
- » A volunteer component makes them more productive in society. It's a demographic that the City of West Des Moines should address.

Empty Nesters

- » I wish hockey would be available.
- » A community center where young people could hang out and have dances. Sports go on a lot.
- » I don't participate in golfing, fishing, and camping because of interest, affordability, and accessibility.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » I don't play golf, but my husband plays on every course in Polk County.
- » The biggest problem right now is that every course that exists is hurting for membership. Should the public be paying for somebody's hobby? The public should decide that, but it's a reasonable question to ask.
- » We have a problem in the Midwest with obese people. I think the city and private enterprise should offer citizens more facilities to exercise and help our citizens stay in shape.
- » It's limited in adult education.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Anything we don't do is because of schedules.
- » There's something for everybody.

5. How do you find out about activities and services?

Human Services Clients

- » They are posted at Human Services.
- » City Council
- » City magazine

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » School, family, friends, the Internet, and the newspaper. My parents research options through the Internet or the school. If it's school-related, I'm definitely doing it.
- » Friends and schools.
- » Friends, schools, church, and my youth group.
- » School and friends.
- » School and friends.
- » I ask my teachers and they give us alternatives to figure things out on our own.
- » I get a lot of stuff mailed to me, such as summer programs and classes.

Young Adults

- » I graduated from college a year ago. I volunteered with the Gold Star Museum. If I had known about all of those opportunities, I would have done it sooner and done more of it.
- » Word of mouth. I trust my friends.
- » My friends, mostly, but Juice and Datebook.
- » I read every inch of the liberal rag the Des Moines Register. Mark Hansen and some of his opinions I can hardly stand any more.
- » I read it online and it's painful.

Preschool Families

- » Other moms. Word of mouth.
- » Sometimes it's hard to get into the moms' network. When we first started with our kids, we were floundering because you have to break through somehow. You have to get in somehow.
- » An expanded program book would be nice.
- » All things come back to Brighter Beginnings. Just being with other moms – the networking is so important.
- » Brighter Beginnings is so different from other programs in the community. It's an opportunity to interact with your child and then sit with the other moms. I was used to dropping my kids off and running errands.
- » What made me feel so much more a part of the community is knowing people through Brighter Beginnings.
- » Visiting Nurse Services provides a lot of free information and pamphlets. They are a wealth of information.
- » The community education book comes out twice a year. It's dog-eared and right by our phone. It's kept around.
- » The city website is excellent. Sometimes I find things I've missed.
- » There have been a lot of flyers in the school packet. At our school, you get a Monday folder that you have to sign. It's a good system.

School-Age Families

- » Mail
- » Pamphlets from school
- » Others in the community
- » West Des Moines Magazine

Empty Nesters

- » The City of West Des Moines website
- » By word of mouth
- » West Des Moines adult education newspaper
- » On the radio or on the television

Retirees

- » After the fact
- » The newspaper

- » The West Des Moines booklet
- » Newspaper, the West Des Moines booklet, and the computer. If you go to the Y, they have stacks of Cityview.
- » The library has stacks of things, too.

Seniors

- » We just picked up the magazine that has 100 things to do in Des Moines.
- » The internet
- » Des Moines Register West Des Moines insert.
- » The West Des Moines insert has everything we need to know.
- » People have access to get to the shopping centers. They can go walking any time of the year.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Through the schools and friends – it’s mostly the school that’s funneled information out to us. Anymore, you just can hop on their website to find other links. We also find out about things through the library. I think the school does an excellent job.
- » We find out through the school, and there is a group of parents of children who have Individual Education Plans, and they pass out information through them. There is a group that works through the AEA called the Parent Educational Connection, and once a month, we have a meeting to talk about problems and hand out sheets on resources.
- » My kids are out of school, so most of what I see is through the paper, Datebook, or television.
- » Radio sometimes has announcements, and we find out about other things through school or church. I get email updates from West Des Moines Parks and Rec.
- » West Des Moines Parks and Rec sends a quarterly catalog, and they refer you to the website, but it’s pretty helpful. We’ll see things in there and get ideas for the next season.

6. How would you prefer to find out about activities and services?

Human Services Clients

- » Newsletter
- » Mail
- » The Community TV Channel is good, but I forget about it.
- » A lot of people don’t have email or computers.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

No comments were provided.

Young Adults

- » It would be really cool to devote part of the city’s website to posting all those activities. They have such a good website. It would be good to devote someone for posting. It could be a calendar, or ads, or other things.
- » Email. They do put things where I can check for them online.

- » I think using the city site is a great idea. The volunteer listings would be good to have on there.
- » West Des Moines has a very nice website, but there are so many things you can do with a website.
- » I'd go with the website, and it's cheap.
- » The problem with it is that the city of West Des Moines is very particular on how they associate themselves with certain groups. The Fire Department has its own site, but the city doesn't even like to associate with the fire association.
- » There would need to be a policy on what is sanctioned and put on the site.

Preschool Families

- » It would be nice if you could go to a single website. I search a lot. I get on EventfulDesMoines.com. There are a lot of play dates that people don't know about.
- » I've had two kids and this is the first I've heard about Brighter Beginnings.
- » If Brighter Beginnings advertised, then she would be overwhelmed. I would give everything else up to participate in Brighter Beginnings.
- » I would like the website, but in this day in age, there should be a channel where moms give their feedback. You can find that information on businesses, but not on programs for children.
- » It would be nice if you could rate things.
- » The Visiting Nurse Services does an evaluation, but that is different from the rating.
- » I heard about Brighter Beginnings from a mom and then I told my friend. You find someone who is in a similar experience. If I hear about a bad experience, that seals the deal for me. Word of mouth is so important. When I was a new mom, it was so important to have a friend who was in the same situation I was in.
- » You can rate children's programming on DesMoinesMoms.com.

School-Age Families

- » I get on the West Des Moines website, but it needs to be user friendly. I hate all of the brochures for activities that they send home with the kids.
- » I use Facebook to learn about the organization on there such as battle of the bands, music coalition, etc. I learn about things that I otherwise wouldn't have known. It is a useful tool.
- » I prefer mailing. If my daughter has information from school, she never gives it to me because she doesn't want to participate in it.
- » I like email.
- » Put it on the West Des Moines website. It would be helpful if they could put local community events on it.
- » They only have one person to do the website. The website is very controlled. The intramurals site could be made to look more fun, but it seems like every page on the website is the same.
- » Many times on the website you have to dig for information. Other school districts, such as Johnston, have really good websites that are user friendly.
- » I would like the information to come to me in emails.

Empty Nesters

- » The Des Moines Register has gotten better to cater to the part of city you live in. West Des Moines used to have a great paper and it is too bad they don't have a printed publication still.
- » I get brochures in the mail for the upcoming activities.
- » Mailed information.

Retirees

- » Email – shoot everyone an email about activities. You could sign up on the website.
- » There should be something else for people who don't have email.
- » They have these regional papers that talk about school activities, and they have three pages that cover what happened last week, but they have nothing on future events for the schools.
- » The Register needs to know what will be happening.
- » If they had a calendar of events for the parks and schools, that'd be great. That would be inexpensive if it was designed right.
- » But people have to call that in. It's not the city's fault that people are not calling activities in.
- » If people knew they could go to a website, then people would know they can get people to events that way. I look at the calendar at the yoga studio.
- » You could get some of the older people in the community to see this as a resource. Computer literacy could be a class for community education. There could be a place for people to look.
- » It's not common knowledge.
- » We need better publicity about the services we have.
- » We need one central area to gather all this data.
- » There is certain core information, and I'm talking more about events. They print so much stuff. I want to find stuff on email. The kids' stuff is not going to interest a lot of senior citizens.

Seniors

- » As far as that little book is concerned, I suppose I am interested in metal working and any crafts where I use my hands. How would I find out about them? Well I guess a publication like the school system puts out for community education, where you could publish activities for various clubs.
- » I think that West Des Moines does a great job telling us about events.
- » I am curious how many people in the room use the Internet.
- » As adults, we should be responsible for finding out where we can do it. The community should not have to take care of us.
- » The education pamphlets that go to the home, we should consolidate and attach community activities to the school bulletins that are sent. They could include little announcements such as heat warnings.
- » I don't think the needs of all citizens are being met. I don't think that the lower economic classes can get to the library and their needs are not being met.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Once you know it's there, you're locked in.
- » I'm okay the way I find out about things now.
- » There's pretty good information out there.
- » I think it's good that it comes through the schools, and our kids get to be involved as well.
- » My son has come home saying he's seen a demonstration of something and wants to do more. The schools must have a connection with parks and rec.

7. How can these programs and services be strengthened if at all? Are there any other programs and services that you don't have access to but would like to?

Human Services Clients

- » Cost is an issue for me to participate in programs.

- » Swimming pools are costly.
- » You can get a tag from parks and recreation to get discounted fees.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

This question was not asked due to time.

Young Adults

This question was not asked due to time.

Preschool Families

- » I'd like to see the community support more military involvement. It doesn't seem prominent in West Des Moines. It would be nice to have a support group. It would be nice to be able to notify the police when my husband leaves.
- » I'd like to see more opportunities for the kids to do community service where they are actually able to think of others and be less focused on themselves. It's hard to think of ways that we can give back. We donate, but do they really make the connection? I feel like they need to make the connection better. A community service outlet would be good.

School-Age Families

This question was not asked due to time.

Empty Nesters

This question was not asked due to time.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » I would like to have a library that kids can walk to safely. I think that our old library could be a branch library. We do have the perception that West Des Moines has the money. I shudder to think that kids have to walk all the way out here to use the library. People who think that kids could walk down Railroad Avenue to the library are delusional. I don't understand why this isn't addressed.
- » Do your kids use the Kindle?
- » I don't think that takes the place of a community library.
- » There need to be more computer classes offered within our community. Sometimes information has nothing but a web address and a lot of seniors don't have access or don't use the internet.
- » Education about the internet and access to the technology.
- » I would just go to Drake because all the computers would be used up at the public library.
- » The courses that are offered in adult education are fine but they all seem to be about how to do stuff. I would like to see more things that deal with the arts or literature. I would like to see them expand to these things.
- » I would like to see them bring in some authors and expand the arts access in West Des Moines so we don't always have to go to Des Moines.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » They used to have an autism specialist in the AEA, but they eliminated that position and rolled it into a destructive behavior specialist. I'd like to see the autism specialist return.
- » I can't think of anything. There's a lot of stuff available.

Premise 4

It is important for communities to plan for the long-term to ensure a consistent or more improved quality of services for residents as well as to ensure that they remain attractive to potential residents and businesses. West Des Moines-area communities are not unique in their hope for long-term success, prosperity, and growth. These focus groups are an effort to do just this. Part of this process is to identify a longer-term goal for area communities, current community strengths, and how to attain the goals through maintaining those areas that are strong and improving those that aren't. Please answer the following questions related to this premise.

1. Take out the notepad and paper again. Please take a few moments to write down how you think your community will look in 5 to 10 years. Please share what you wrote.

Human Services Clients

- » It will look like Chicago.
- » It will be cleaner, more crowded, with higher taxes and higher rent.
- » Jobs and services will increase. It will blow up out here. There will be an effort to go more green.
- » There will be more updated housing. People will be moving farther out in the city. There will be more expensive housing. When something new is built, there is a cost associated with it. Multi-generational housing will decrease.
- » It will be bigger and richer. There will be new companies and higher property taxes.
- » It will change. More people will be struggling to get by. You need more money to make it these days.
- » In Florida, they charged an impact fee to help the community keep up with costs associated with growth. Here property taxes are raised on everyone.
- » Valley Junction was invested in after the 1993 floods, but you are already starting to see homes in disrepair. Fairmeadows neighborhood is also aging and homes are needing attention. Some of these areas will become blighted. I see more vacancy signs in businesses throughout the city. In the next 15 years, Valley will be split into two schools. Schools will need to keep up with building. Trade skills will need to be brought back into the schools, so kids have goals and offer opportunities. The Merle Hay area wants to keep pay day loans out, and they will come here eventually.

Latinos

- » I feel that there will be more opportunities for the Hispanic community.
- » More diversity. The minority population will grow.
- » Children are going to be better prepared and students will be stronger and better taught. They will graduate and have better opportunities.
- » More graduates and better futures for them.
- » I hope to see a better future for high school graduates in the community. Many students would like to go on to school but instead, go on to work.
- » The students have no funds or resources to go on after graduation. Some just don't graduate.
- » It's not just money. Sometimes it's immigration status. Immigration is a huge issue.

- » My brother is doing okay because he is in soccer, so he has a chance even if he does not have the best immigration status. He has a chance with a scholarship.
- » I always talk about transportation. Everyone has cars, but how did we do it in Mexico? How did we take public transportation all the time? Without a car here, you have to have a car. There are a lot of Latino women who don't know how to drive, even. Public transportation would give them a greater future.
- » I walk to the park with my kids. I live within walking distance of the school.
- » There does seem to be help with the bus at Human Services, and Visiting Nurse Services helps and comes and picks you up, as well.
- » Day care and public transportation are my biggest concerns. DMACC is too far away for me and my husband works, so I would like options. I need those things to have options.

High School Youth

- » I expect more growth at the same rate it has been growing. More families, businesses, schools, and communities will all continue to grow.
- » It's either going to get worse or better. It could go either way right now.
- » It's going to get bigger. A lot of farming communities are going to continue to disappear. Farming communities support our state economy, and they will be gone. It will be tough to support ourselves.
- » It's going to be very commercial and busy. I think there will be more apartments where families make their homes. There will be more entertainment options as well.
- » It will be more developed. The education system will be bigger and better.
- » It's going to be a lot bigger. A lot of schools are being remodeled. There will be multiple high schools at some point. Valley can't just continue to grow.
- » More buildings will go up. Farm land will be lost. People will be more cramped.
- » There will be more businesses. New communities will appear.
- » Buildings will be a lot bigger. Houses will be bigger. Entertainment will go up. There will be more immigrants.
- » It will be bigger obviously. Parts of the school that are nice now will start to go downhill. As we grow, thing will go downhill. I think the Waukee area will continue to grow. The new areas will get the attention while the other areas will go downhill.
- » The population will be bigger, but the population density will be much higher.

Young Adults

- » I think it will have expanded more west and farther south of Mills. As far as schools, I can see a little bit of growth. I think Waukee will grow more and have more families. They have more room to grow. West Des Moines residents will be about the same mix of younger and older people and families.
- » The growth will go west and south. Waukee and West Des Moines are in a race to see who will annex the land first. It will be interesting to see what happens when that northwest corner meets, like if they go with the live, work, and play approach like West Glen.
- » I would see this exactly the same in 10 years. We misallocate our funds to rebuild something that shouldn't have been done in the first place. It will still primarily be white and the same ages.
- » West Des Moines will grow west toward Waukee. We will have better gyms. Demographics will stay the same.
- » Bigger businesses and people will move west and negatively impact Des Moines.
- » I see it bigger and more lively. I see the West Glen style to continue. I see the demographics staying about the same. The amenities are very attractive.

Preschool Families

- » I think we'll be more diverse, larger, and that will lead to problems that happen in larger cities. Planned growth is really important. I lived in Oklahoma City when they didn't plan for water consumption with new growth. In the middle of summer, we had no water. I have seen first-hand how important planned growth is. Sometimes I wonder if West Des Moines is planning for this growth.
- » West Des Moines will be bigger, but I worry that there will be a big black hole where Valley Junction is. I worry that they focus so much on getting bigger that we don't maintain what we have.
- » More people and buildings. The schools will be even more crowded. The businesses will continue to turn over.
- » More schools. I thought that West Des Moines was kind of capped on size. I thought Waukee was growing, but that West Des Moines couldn't grow more.
- » They are annexing a lot of Cumming.
- » I don't doubt that West Des Moines is growing, but I go to planned growth. I worry that when kids graduate there won't be options for them, like jobs and affordable housing.
- » There will be more people. Business will flourish. Microsoft is coming.
- » I don't know. I will pass on this one.
- » Safety wise, more people means more crime and graffiti to me. I hope it stays safe here. And things may get run-down.
- » It's still a small city. It's little still.
- » I'm going to be an optimist and hope that we still have a lot of face-to-face activities. Our kids have so much technology available that I hope that they don't sink into that. The word materialistic jumped into my head. As long as we stay focused on the unity in community, then we'll be good.

School-Age Families

- » More developed with more houses and less green space.
- » I think we will see more empty businesses, apartments, and townhomes. A lot of these places will be vacant because they are priced too high.
- » I think economically we will be doing better. With all of the new business, we will be better off financially.
- » I think Valley West area businesses will start going away with the development of new businesses more west.
- » I think our schools are going to start struggling because of the funding. A lot of the services that citizens had and took for granted will go away or they will cost citizens.
- » The city seems to be landlocked because we could only build out so far until it runs into other communities.
- » I don't know if we will be as dominant in sports, but I sure hope so because it is a big part of the community.
- » They are cutting teachers, so I don't know what quality of education these kids are going to have.
- » I don't know what type of research the school district does for planning on the future needs of our youth such as kindergartner in ten years.
- » I see it becoming busier. I see a lot of business that are closing down in the eastern part of West Des Moines.
- » I think West Des Moines will still be a desirable community. I think it will still have safe neighborhoods.

Empty Nesters

- » That there will be fewer open spaces. I also see the western part of West Des Moines having more shade due to the tree growth.
- » I believe that there will be plans for getting more green spaces in Valley Junction.
- » I think West Des Moines will be much larger. I hope to see that they can revitalize older areas such as Valley Junction and get rid of the vacant buildings there. I also see the schools being overcrowded.
- » I see West Des Moines as economically stagnant. I don't see a lot of growth except in the aging population. We aren't having as many children as we used to and can see our student population declining.
- » I see West Des Moines as having a younger population. I see a lot of younger families moving in, which is nice.
- » There will be more traffic in West Des Moines. I see a fine arts building being built. I believe we will have empty strip malls and much more diversity.
- » I believe there will be more services for senior citizens to keep them active and healthy.
- » I think there will be more businesses coming to the mall and West Des Moines. I think there will be more money spent on improving our flood control especially near the Raccoon River area. I see that there will be more airlines coming to the airport.

Retirees

- » The population will immensely increase. Right now we don't have too much residential building going on, but as people get back to work, we'll have a lot of development west and south. All at once, houses are going to pop up. We're all going to say we live on the east side.
- » It won't develop until you see a Casey's in the middle of a corn field.
- » More growth will lead to more traffic. There will probably be a need for more services for senior citizens because it's an aging population.
- » It's going to a much more mature area with trees.
- » They need to focus on maintaining sewer and water systems, and they need to maintain that along with growth areas.
- » I would like to see some gentrification going on in the older areas for development to happen in a way that's not so lopsided.
- » Young people with young children are going to be a continual rollover. A lot of people buy homes who can't afford them. People might buy older homes that they can afford. I think our young people are pretty smart; they're energetic like we were.
- » Like we are.
- » Ten years from now, I think we'll see a second high school in West Des Moines, which will lead to fault lines in the community that will create less cohesiveness. That will take some interesting leadership.
- » You're going to have to redistrict.
- » They're not landlocked, and they can expand south and west.
- » We'll have more trails, and they'll widen Ashworth Road.
- » They'll have a web page with a community calendar on it.

Seniors

- » In five years, it will look like today because we are kind of landlocked.
- » The problem you have is that nothing is going to change. Economically, we don't know what is going to happen. The ability to raise money is very limited. I would guess you aren't going to see much change.

- » I think that we should focus on some of our older buildings in the community that could be renovated and thinking how they could be used.
- » We don't need any more office space or strip malls.
- » But if we don't have the strip malls, we won't have any jobs. We have people from all over the nation coming to West Des Moines to realize their dream. The bottom line is that we have to accept the kind of community we live in. We have several big companies coming in. They are going to bring in high-paying jobs.
- » Well, I think it's growing. We moved to this area and so many condominiums are being built. It's big, rapid growth. I think the growth will continue and many will continue to move here. From my country, Nepal, people come and then they have to work in Wal-Mart and other places. There will be more growth in the next five to ten years.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » I think it will look pretty much the same, other than stores will change. There will be the new HyVee and whatever will go in there. I live in an older neighborhood, so they're not going anywhere. The increases in population are out west, so that will continue to grow, but I think they're running into Waukee and Adel.
- » They've been pretty aggressive as far as redevelopment goes. There's not much left to do with what's left. They'll need to wait for some areas to age a little more. The challenge for Windsor Heights will always be to be aggressive about bringing in some extra tax dollars. Other than that little strip on University, they've pretty much done what they can for now.
- » It's hard to say. I include the whole area, but there's been so much development, and there has to be a breath to catch up. I can't imagine there's going to be much more development. I guess they can annex land south and west.
- » I think it may continue to grow some. They are planning to make the bike trails a little more interconnected. Some of the trails where I am don't connect. Some of the parks might grow and improve.
- » There are always ways to spruce it up to make it more attractive.

2. How should it look ideally?

Human Services Clients

- » Everyone should be required to recycle.
- » Everyone at church on Sunday morning.
- » Happy kids. No drugs. No family violence.
- » Place for community meetings and neighborhood meetings.
- » It is hard for people to meet others with the pace of life as it is.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » It should grow a little more so there are more things to do. We need more things to do over the summer. We need a nicer beach - it's the same place where people fish.
- » There isn't such a thing as a perfect community. Every place has flaws.
- » We need more money to create more entertainment opportunities.
- » A place where more people know each other.

- » I would like to see more funding for the arts and encouragement of diversity. Arts are overlooked. There seems to be an emphasis on sports at Valley.
- » More music programs and funding for the art centers.
- » Other cities like Johnston and Ankeny have carnivals and festivals. West Des Moines doesn't seem to have that.
- » We need more skate parks for BMX and boards. We also need West Des Moines fairgrounds to host our own events.
- » Communities tend to under value attractiveness and beauty. Things tend to get run down. Municipal parks, bike trails, and state parks are all great things we need to keep up.
- » The environment is often overlooked. We need upkeep of our parks and need to be much more environmentally friendly.
- » People from California were coming to Iowa to make movies. That was wonderful. We need to bring that industry back to Iowa. It was cool to see things being made in Iowa.

Young Adults

- » I like the way we have all the bunkers and dividers to make it look nice.
- » It would have more character. I don't like how it lacks being unique in different parts of the town.
- » I just think that the one thing I would like to see is that the city be better connected, whether it be the trails or the roads. Then big and small businesses will fare better. A smaller county I work with is taking advantage of the economy and the money available and is redoing all its roads.
- » They need to be careful how far west they go, as no one will come. They need to take care of what they have.
- » Still focus on what we have, not so much on the new areas.
- » The city has started to invest in keeping Valley Junction historical. The city offers help and making an attempt to spruce it up but keeping it historical. Out west they are growing so fast. I don't know the value of building so much out there.

Preschool Families

- » I'd like it to be the same – lots of programs and safe, good schools.
- » Greener
- » Healthier
- » I would like to see a change in the way garbage and recycling are paid for. You should pay for what you consume.
- » In Atlanta, you paid by how much you recycled. We actually paid less because we recycled.
- » Recycling needs to be encouraged.
- » Trash would be collected every other week, and recycling would be collected each week.

School-Age Families

- » Prosperous- you want the community to succeed.
- » I don't want people to forget about the old West Des Moines. We don't want the older businesses to be forgotten.
- » A lot of people are excited about the new things, but eventually they die down. People like the new things, but they still go to what they are used to and comfortable with.
- » The businesses that donate to support events are the local small town businesses, and the corporate franchises don't contribute as much.

- » Continue to support all big and small events such as the HyVee triathlon and Jazz in July.
- » It should continue to have a community feeling by having community rallies for sports and more community involvement.

Empty Nesters

- » West Des Moines should be planned and designed cohesively by leadership and citizens. We should look where we want to be in 15 to 20 years. I believe that there is stability in the leadership so that plans would be carried out.
- » More diversified by race and income levels. I believe there should be more growth in Valley Junction area.
- » Continue to be able to live, work, and play in the same area. I believe there should be a greener community in the future. I think that the trails should be connected to other trail systems in the metro and surrounding communities.
- » I think that there should be more collaboration between the suburbs. It makes more sense to have less redundancy of services in the area.
- » More schools to match our growth.

Retirees

- » West Des Moines needs to figure out how to control this forest fire of new restaurants being built. I don't know if zoning is the proper tool or not. It's getting to the point that restaurants are closing. There needs to be recycling going on with so much sprawl.
- » I think it will be well maintained and clean.
- » I would like to see a greater identification of pride in the community in terms of resources we have (i.e. library, trails, etc.) instead of just in kids who score a perfect 36 on the ACT.

Seniors

- » We need to have our power go underground. I am tired of running out of electricity. The street signs need to have bigger print.
- » I don't think we are going to see a lot of change. If they could improve the streets and have more parks and EMS services, that would be good.
- » In Valley Junction, we see more and more houses up for rent, and I can see our areas are going to deteriorate because of that because renters aren't the same as owners.
- » In Valley Junction, a lot of the stores are closing.
- » It would be a Greenwich Village-type area teeming with activity.
- » Valley Junction is trying so hard to come back, especially in the housing. They are taking more pride in their housing and properties.
- » Renters are going to make it worse for the owners.
- » I am a little disappointed. I thought that a city councilman would be at these meetings. We do have specific council members from this part of town.
- » I would like to see Grand Avenue improved. I would like to see them develop some zoning and better-developed signage. They should have consistent building distances from the street.
- » If you come in to Des Moines from Grand Avenue, they need to remove a lot of those old gas stations and the payday loan shops.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » I don't know that it's something that someone chooses to do. I think it will be influenced by the economy. I like where I live, and that's why we moved here. I don't know how they would invite diversity, but I think we're doing things like parks and rec.
- » I agree.
- » I do, too. I can't think of anything.
- » I had a friend who was mayor of Clive, and he didn't want to over-develop to the point of having to raise taxes to sustain services. One of the advantages to Urbandale is that we have fewer taxes for things like the Civic Center.
- » I agree.

3. How can leaders and residents make this happen?

Human Services Clients

- » Listen to residents.
- » Regular community forums.
- » More community advocates who step up and take initiative, even on a volunteer basis.
- » What is good for one person is not good for everyone. The community is diverse. People need a place to speak out.

Latinos

- » Having more input sessions. Being able to meet with other community members. It would be nice to be able to participate and be part of the bigger picture here.
- » As a Latino, West Des Moines seems like a community that cares. More community meetings like this would be nice. I would participate again.
- » I would also participate again.
- » I would have brought more people.
- » The radio is very important to the community. I feel that advertising on the Spanish radio would be a great way to communicate to the community.
- » The radio may be more effective than the newspaper. The first thing I read is my horoscope, and if it's bad I don't go any further.

High School Youth

- » Environmentally, we can do more recycling and dispose of our trash appropriately.
- » State officials should come into our neighborhoods to get an understanding of what is really happening. After 1993, officials really didn't spend much time in the community to see what needs to be done. Flood protection is a big issue in Valley Junction. If it floods again, many people will just move out of the area, and it will all be thrown away.
- » In other communities, business owners are fined if their building and facilities have been affected by graffiti. There are ways to make sure things are kept clean.
- » The river continues to go up and flood, but we aren't making sure that homeless individuals are cared for. Many homeless people live by the river and we need to make sure they are cared for.
- » Volunteering is very helpful. More grades, such as kids in middle school, should be able to participate in things like Silver Cord.

Young Adults

This question was not asked due to time.

Preschool Families

- » I think at the heart of anything is communication. That's where it all starts.
- » Communication, too.
- » I feel like the communication with the DOT about my street didn't go both ways.
- » I think we need to have a focus on what we have now.
- » When I first moved into my house, there was a bunch of land nearby. It hadn't been decided what they were going to do with it. It became a park. The parking lot is right by my house. I felt that the board members were open to the idea when I argued to move the parking lot, but the lady running the show was closed-minded. I just felt like I wasn't listened to.
- » People need to redefine what communication is. It's mostly about listening and then talking. It's not so much talking; it's mostly about hearing.
- » I think people need to know that they are being heard. I feel like our comments tonight will really be seen. Obviously someone really values our opinion tonight. I have met so many bright and proactive people – they just need to be listened to.
- » If you ever watch the city channel, it doesn't seem like this group is represented on the city council. It would be nice if the community could vote on issues instead of having the council making the decisions. We only have that one electoral vote, but the people who run don't relate to us.
- » I would agree about the not relating with us. We called our council member about our street. He wasn't interested.
- » I think they wait too long to include people in the decisions. Once they're talking about the money, they've made their decisions. They need to engage us much earlier.
- » If it's a budget issue, they should hand it over to one of us mothers. We'd manage the budget really well.
- » When I get notices for public meetings, it always seems too late.

School-Age Families

- » Don't forget where they came from. Don't forget the citizens that have been here for a long time.
- » Continuously reach out to the community and find out their concerns and needs and actually follow through.
- » They need to offer city council meetings or have opportunities where the city is able to get more citizens' point of views. I think these types of focus groups are more comfortable than going to a city council meeting. There is a lot less pressure in going to a focus group and not having to get on a microphone and have to talk in front of a lot of people. It would be nice also for the city to hear from a diverse group of people from all ages, genders, and races.
- » I think our elected officials need to be seen more in the community. They could stop in at the community centers, schools, and other community events.
- » Our leadership needs to be more involved within the whole community. A lot of students only know the name of their principal, but if they saw the person, they wouldn't know who it was. This also goes with the city council members.
- » I think it is important in any community to have everybody know who you are and not just another parent, student, teacher, or council member.

Empty Nesters

- » School administration should embrace diversity and foster the feeling of celebrating diversity.
- » I think we could increase the youth participation in the Silver Cord program that enables youth volunteering. We need our leaders to expand on these types of programs and design a place where we could find out how and where to volunteer.
- » Residents can make this happen by knowing where to share their information and where there are more open opportunities to express themselves such as these focus groups.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » Vote
- » Letters to the editor
- » Attending city council meetings
- » It should be the responsibility of residents to go door-to-door and sign petitions and then address the city council. Get some community organizing done. The bottom line is that we need action.
- » When we have really negative things, people really get out and organized. If we could find a way to do positive things instead of reactionary things, that would be great.
- » If we could get the business owners of these abandoned properties to do something to clean them up, that would be great. They look bad for West Des Moines.
- » There are council meetings, and city representatives could meet at neighborhood associations to provide input to the officials.
- » I think that the Valley Junction effort to renovate should expand to commercial buildings versus just residential. We should look at other cities that are reworking these plans. We need to widen the lanes and move the power lines and rehab it with federal money.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » I think they're on a pretty good course of action. They've got the right map to follow; it's just a matter of keeping on that path. I am not very active in politics, but if I'm not voting, I'm not going to complain. Elected officials have done a very good job minding the store, so to speak.
- » I haven't had any big disagreements with my elected officials.
- » I feel the same way.

4. What or who should your community be attracting?

Human Services Clients

- » Businesses
- » Businesses that have something to give back to the community rather than just get tax breaks and incentives.
- » Locally owned business people. More small businesses and family-owned.
- » There are not many doctors in the Valley Junction area.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » Instead of one group, we should be attracting all groups. If we are all going to be a community, then we need to be attracting all types. We shouldn't focus on just one group to recruit. We need to be recruiting everyone and just let groups come naturally.
- » Everyone outside of Iowa thinks our state is one big farm. Younger people need to be attracted to Iowa.
- » If they opened more outdoor recreational opportunities, we would get more people coming to the area.
- » We should open ourselves up to more venues and conventions. Even things like tattoo conventions target the coastal areas because the public is more open.
- » We need more venues for music and should be more lenient for the types of groups we can attract.

Young Adults

- » Young residents will stay around. They are sucking off their parents' teat right now. I don't care about the demographics. There isn't a black man within 15 houses – or 15 blocks – from my house.
- » It would be nice to have more diversity, culture, and ethnicity, but I don't know how to go about it.
- » We need to keep Wells Fargo and anything that has anything to do with banking or insurance in our city.
- » I agree with the race thing and diversity. We had more people with Hispanic culture in my graduating class. I'm not saying they should go out and recruit them, but it was good to have them in class.
- » This is the least diverse place I've ever lived. I think diversity is a good. Outside of Valley Junction, there isn't much in West Des Moines. If you could attract small business diversity, that would be good. In Sioux Falls, there was an area with different shops and cultural celebrations. It's fun. It's something West Des Moines doesn't have.
- » We need to attract more business, especially in the technology sector. One of the downtown businesses is getting ready to outsource some of their technology to India and it seems they shouldn't have to do that.
- » Definitely the small business thing and diversity. Our graduating class was mostly white kids. I think there is an opportunity for niche things that would sell. Some say that it can always be bought online, but I'd jump at the opportunity to shop here.
- » As much as I want big companies like Wells Fargo, we need small business that our country was built on. Tax incentives should be available to small business; now they are only there for the big companies.
- » There needs to be some way to keep Wells Fargo here after their incentives run out.

Preschool Families

- » Anyone who wants to contribute to the community.
- » Quality not quantity. We need people who are going to further the community. I think that if it's not helping the community, then it shouldn't be brought in.
- » Something that protects the people of neighborhoods. My friend had an experience where her neighborhood was going to be rezoned for business. When it came to the council meeting, it seemed as though things had already been decided.
- » The greater good of many, not the few.
- » I think anyone who wants to come should be welcome. It's hard to put certain parameters on it. You want everyone to contribute, but you know that not everyone will. You have to be optimistic.
- » I think encouraging people to participate and engage is so important. A lot of people think that they can sit back and have other people do things. A lot of our families finding out that their kids can enroll in the district are just ecstatic. We have a parent that wants to help with our internship program. It is wonderful that people want to help out. If we have a strong school, then we'll be good.

School-Age Families

- » We need progressive people, and we need diversity.
- » Anybody that is an asset and not a liability to the community.
- » Family friendly people.

Empty Nesters

- » New businesses that we don't ordinarily have. It is a ripple effect that attracts other types of businesses.
- » Attract high tech companies. I have a son who attended Iowa State University and graduated with a degree in aerospace technology and he is unemployed. I wish he didn't have to leave the state to find a job.
- » I think our city government needs to put more pressure on the Iowa Department of Economic Development. The Iowa Department of Economic Development should attract more businesses by providing incentives. There are many disincentives regarding taxes that don't bring in new businesses to Iowa.
- » The community should be attracting diverse businesses and industries. Technology companies would be great to bring here.
- » I would like to see better collaboration between local and state governments. We should bring in technology companies. We could do public and private partnerships to bring people here.
- » Bring innovative industries that keep young people in the state.
- » Besides the state universities, the state does not have a strong research center here.
- » Large research opportunities at local universities such as Drake.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » Commercial zoning is pretty open. We should get rid of those loan places.
- » We should appeal to people with upper incomes. We should attract companies with good paying jobs that hire people already living in our community.
- » We should strive to build a more diverse community. Our kids aren't getting a real world education. I have been in Cleveland where there is a more diverse population of students.
- » This is a hard question.
- » I would like to see the people and businesses that come here not get tax credits.
- » If you have a flower pot, good soil, and sun, plants will grow. The key to attracting people is to have fertile soil. If the taxes are too high, people won't come here – it's the tax base.
- » The West Des Moines School District needs to look at their budget. There are a lot of positions that could have been cut. Our school board insisted that the superintendent have a raise even when he tried to turn it down.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

This question was not asked.

5. What are some priorities for your community in the next 5 to 10 years?

Human Services Clients

- » Addressing people's needs.
- » Space to put all the new development.

- » West Des Moines has done a great job of attracting business, but the future needs to be community driven.

Latinos

This question was not asked due to time.

High School Youth

- » Focus on crime.
- » We need to watch how many people come. If a lot of gang affiliations come here, we could end up being the next LA. There are many challenges that come with people of different backgrounds.
- » We are already becoming a more upscale and larger city. We are trying to make Des Moines something big. We should continue on the path we are on.

Young Adults

This question was not asked due to time.

Preschool Families

- » Taking good care of our schools. They are the foundation. These are our young people. They are our future. The educators need to be taken care of.
- » I would like more of a relationship between the school and the church and a better relationship between organizations and institutions.
- » Helping new mothers. It really helped us to have mentoring relationships.

School-Age Families

- » Affordability.
- » Quality education in schools.
- » Anything that benefits my kids.
- » We are taking cuts on our future. These are the ones who will be taking care of us. We want kids to do well, but we are cutting back on their education.
- » Everyone preaches that you need to go to college, but the costs keep on increasing. We need to find other paths that they can go into.
- » If we have mediocre dedication to our kids, then we won't progress.
- » We need to continue to change and diversify our education. It is no longer reading, math, and science. There is a lot more education that involves technology. Children are learning differently now.
- » We need to teach more social skills to our youth.

Empty Nesters

- » Maintain the services and have adequate protection from our police and fire departments.
- » As our population ages, people become isolated. We need to work aggressively to have volunteer and community centers so that we don't isolate those people.
- » It is important for those businesses that have closed their shops to remain attractive and clean. People also need to clean up their homes.
- » There is a priority for attracting new businesses that helps us increase the taxable income and provide jobs.
- » I would like to see West Des Moines have an additional high school. It would be nice to see more kids involved in sports and other activities.

- » We have to maintain our quality school systems because school is a safety net for those who would otherwise fall through the cracks. We need to maintain our infrastructure and services and also manage our development.

Retirees

This question was not asked due to time.

Seniors

- » We need to attract energy efficient and alternative energy companies. We have companies that produce solar panel roof shingles. Why don't we have more canning companies here if we are the largest agricultural center? There is a guy that invented a machine that turns manure into gas for energy.
- » I would like to see the sprawl slow down. I would like to see some of the money they are spending to acquire more property be diverted to spend on education.
- » They should take a look back and see what you have done and what you have left in the dust.
- » I would like to see us be more diverse. We are a lily white community. It is very seldom that one sees racial diversity.
- » Isn't that just an economic reality?
- » It has to be a natural thing. We can't recruit them. They will come when they want to come.
- » It's economic when people go out and buy four-dollar beers. I went and counted how many people who just bought six four-dollar beers at the farmers' market the other day.
- » It's got to be economic. Are these people at the welfare office at the end of the month? A lot of people have to pinch their pennies. How many children do they have?

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Keeping the level of the schools up.
- » I agree – keep up the quality of the schools.
- » Definitely – the schools.
- » They've done a lot of good sprucing up on 86th, with the new Urbandale library, and it's just a matter of maintaining everything to not let neighborhoods get run-down.
- » Keeping neighborhoods safe.
- » The culture within the communities to maintain the schools should be kept up.
- » They're fixing up a lot of the grade schools. They're still important to me, even though my kids are out of school because they attract people to the community.

Conclusion and Round Robin

If you were King or Queen of the World and had the power to make anything happen, what one thing would you do to improve your community?

Human Services Clients

- » More community centers and human service programs.
- » More affordable housing and jobs.
- » Incentives to volunteer.
- » All kids would have the opportunity to go to college. Better life for seniors.
- » More capacity at Human Services. Immigrants are using all of the resources.

- » More funding for handicapped and elderly services.
- » No one should be complaining about immigrants unless they are Native Americans. I want training centers for careers and expanding human services.
- » End taxes.
- » I would promote a program for family values and parenting skills. The family unit is lost and people are more selfish.
- » More space for children's activities. More indoor play areas for children.
- » More growth and development.

Latinos

- » For me, the opportunity for my children to have more time in Head Start would be nice. A four-hour day would be better. I would get more time, as well as my daughter.
- » The unity of the people is important. No one should discriminate by the color of your skin or the shape of your eyes.
- » I would like to have a moms' group to receive and give support to other single parents and to provide and facilitate more services to the moms.
- » Discrimination with all the laws that are being passed right now. We need a better future. That is why we're here. We're trying to respect living here and respect the laws. Those laws split communities. People are scared here for the laws being passed elsewhere.
- » I agree. When a parent comes from Mexico with their children, they don't have a choice to come here. My kids still don't have a choice. You don't know from one moment to the next what the future brings.
- » Latino parents come here for a better living for their children. They don't have the means to continue their own education. They work very hard. Once the kids hit graduation, they see no future. The biggest problem is the documentation. When they are juniors, they lose the hunger. They finally realize that the future is blank. If I would change something for the community, the students would benefit from their parents' hard work. Then the parents would really achieve what they came here to do. Also, kids after school make the wrong friends because the parents work. West Des Moines doesn't have the social problem yet, but the community is growing so it will need to implement preventative programs – after school programs.
- » I would like to see programs to prevent kids from getting into drugs and trouble and less violence. I'd like to see more support for those that don't have the ability to do it on their own.
- » I am going to ask for a lot. I would like to see an initiative for immigration so that I could see my daughter who's in Mexico.
- » Help for all the homeless people. We need more jobs. We're in a crisis and we need those jobs.
- » There are so many things for me. I don't know of one. I'd like to see more youth programs and to put more effort and influence toward that, so we can prevent all the violence and the problems that come with crime.
- » Working takes parents away from children, but I knew my mother loved me. She may not have been there for all the events, but we ate together, and she made sure I knew she loved me.
- » I was married at one time. The importance of being a part of my children's lives is a priority now. Now that my boys are older, they need me more. I went through a divorce and we need to come together.

High School Youth

- » I would create programs where people can be diverse – something where everyone can have some common bond regardless of their background. We should actually fix a problem instead of talk about it and label it.
- » I would focus on making the community more connected and bonded to each other. People of influence, police officers, etc. need to be more involved and connected in the community.

- » I would feed all of the starving people in the world. For some, just eating is their biggest challenge.
- » I would get younger elementary kids more involved in a wide plethora of activities such as volunteering. They are the future of this community and need to start volunteering at a younger age.
- » All over the world we need to focus on health and the environment. Helping the environment would address a number of other problems such as health, cleanliness, etc.
- » There are so many people that live off the government. We need to encourage people who live off the government to actually do something for themselves.
- » We need to make sure everyone has a chance to make money, have a career, and live a dream life. It doesn't come to everyone so easy.
- » I would make more jobs – jobs that would be valuable to the community.
- » I wouldn't take it upon myself. I would turn to the community to determine what needs to be done.
- » I would put more funding into schools, the environment, and bettering what we already have instead of continuing to grow.

Young Adults

- » Infrastructure - I'd build roads, and everyone gets a free margarita.
- » I'd expand out in terms of buildings, but I'd bring in diversity.
- » Infrastructure. I was watching something on the History Channel and learned how antiquated the U.S. infrastructure is.
- » I would have to agree with the infrastructure. I would say people who live here tend to want to be outdoors, so that should be included. Keep all infrastructure in good shape.
- » Keep working on planning, and plan for the problems that come with implementing the plan.
- » I'd like to have one event in the center of town that would attract everyone in the community.

Preschool Families

This question was not asked due to time.

School-Age Families

- » Have more connection within the community. Make people feel like they are part of the community. If there is a need by someone who is elderly, then there should be a group that could help them out. There could be another group in the community that could help somebody find a job. Churches, so far, are the only places that help connect people with their needs.
- » I would make us less top heavy in our education system, because the things that are getting cut are making deep impacts on our children's future.
- » I wouldn't have school cutbacks, and I would find ways to meet transportation needs.
- » I would see our kids have learning become more of their responsibility, which could help them understand the importance of education.
- » Improve the transportation of West Des Moines for kids and the elderly. It could even help businesses out with more people able to be in their area.
- » Jobs for teens and young adults.
- » Community networking, jobs, and education.
- » Better education in the community and smaller class sizes for our youth.

Empty Nesters

- » Have a resource for people to access to find volunteer and community opportunities.
- » Employment is important and we should do anything to keep a good level of businesses in our community.
- » Find ways to bring together our youth and the aging population, which would foster a greater sense of community. Provide mentoring between these age groups. Bringing these two groups together in a meaningful way would be great.
- » Public transportation is important and will become a larger need in the future.
- » I think that in order to have business growth, transportation for seniors must be improved. Community public transportation is important.
- » I would look to the reversal or stoppage of the strip malls and development areas and be smarter about building in the future.
- » More opportunities for participation for the average person in our schools who are not the best.
- » I'd like to see a continued emphasis with our schools and being promoted as providing quality education. There needs to be more business and school collaboration in order to provide students the opportunities for career exploration.
- » Support our educators and make sure parents are included in the discussions regarding their children's future. Children are our future and we need to support the system, teachers, and decision makers. We should also market our schools as having a stellar reputation.
- » We need to continue to attract young families into our communities. In order to continue to attract young families into our communities, we must keep our facilities, programs, and education system attractive.
- » I would redesign the talented and gifted programs and push our children to understand the concept of hard work.
- » I would make more of the houses being built disabled ready.
- » I would like to see the cities work together better. There could be more community cooperation.
- » I want to instill in the population what was instilled in me when I grew up - supporting your community by voting in local and state elections.
- » We need to prepare our students and work with business leaders so that there is a pool of potential qualified employees. We also need to maintain a robust educational system.
- » I would create more business opportunities so that we can get away from the brain drain problem here in Iowa. Our educated youth are moving out of state in order to find jobs.
- » I think we need to challenge our children to compete on the global level. We also need to attract businesses, so we can keep our educated youth in Iowa.
- » I would make sure there was an opportunity for our youth to be involved in activities.
- » I would double the resources for education, human services, and community projects.

Retirees

- » We need to get honest about the West Des Moines water system and the quality of the water they're selling us. Thirty years ago, they weren't being honest about the level of softening they were doing. I'm concerned about the use of the wells in the Railroad Avenue area, which the EPA has checked.
- » I would put in a lot of trails even if it means widening the sidewalk going out on Ashworth.
- » I would address the issue of new people in neighborhoods and things not being as compatible through better communication between old and young and diverse communities. Hopefully, this results in joint community pride.
- » I would have annual festivities that highlight resources and people in the community.

- » Yoga for seniors.
- » I like the ideas of trails and festivals. Make it easier to use bikes from our houses rather than hauling them somewhere to ride. We could have festivals around the arts, music, or cars.
- » I would address the problem with West Des Moines water.
- » I would like to see the east side of West Des Moines updated.
- » Valley Junction should be updated, too. There should be more activities for school age children, not just sports.
- » We need more public transportation in our community that could link to Des Moines and provide more extensive service within our own area. Unified government has a lot to do with that.
- » Find a way to fund the school systems where everyone doesn't have to pay for books and supplies. Take it back to when we were in school and everything was provided for you.
- » We're east siders, so I'd like to see more communication between the east and west sides.
- » I agree with everything that's been said.
- » Restructure the funding that supports schools, and avoid funding them through property tax. It pits elders versus the young because people on a fixed income do not want their taxes raised.
- » West Des Moines has a disappointing senior center compared to Des Moines. There's just the dinky one in Valley Junction, and Des Moines has all these nice buildings.

Seniors

- » My emphasis is always on libraries and not just books for kids but for the whole family. I think we have been short changed. I would see that we have a library for everybody.
- » I would focus on some of these public entrances to the city such as Grand Avenue. It's not a good impression.
- » Increase access to lower-income housing.
- » I would bring the small tech industries and green jobs to West Des Moines.
- » I would fire all the public official bastards that have made a promise and not kept it.
- » We should expand free medical clinics. We need to have more of these scattered throughout the community.
- » Make it easier for people to relocate.
- » I would revise the way we elect city council members, so we could oust them if they weren't responsive to the ward. I would also make a way that if the city government wasn't responsive, we could fire them.
- » I agree with the comment about public officials, and I would take a look at this military complex that we have created so we can keep this operation going. I would like to understand clearly what I could do to about the international conflicts.
- » I would like to see stronger enforcement of city regulations. I like to see peoples' behaviors kept in check.
- » Worldwide, religion causes more wars than anything else in the world because people can't respect each other. If we could just respect each other and make sure that no one would go to bed hungry in West Des Moines, we would be in a good place.
- » You know how we have Raccoon River Park? In that movie Showboat, they had a lake or a river and a steamboat would come straight into town. We could do this and we could have a horse and buggy trail and a bike trail.
- » I would have uniform dress codes and free breakfast for all kids.

West Des Moines Non-Residents

- » Resources are always a challenge with schools but they always have a responsibility to manage resources responsibly. Investment in schools is important, and I think we're doing that, whether or not people agree with how it's being done. The schools are being improved.
- » I agree with the schools being important and in beautifying the neighborhoods. Little things like the barriers on 86th Street can add a lot.
- » They put in a wall and a sign.
- » It separates the traffic from the residential area.
- » It announces Clive, and along 86th, they put in a fence and some medians.
- » I would have nice homes for everyone, with well kept-up yards, so everyone would have beautiful homes to live in.
- » I can't think of anything. The autism services would be nice. The waiting list for some services is five years, so I would make sure people have those services.
- » Give people the resources to do whatever they wanted to do so you could have the good schools, homes, and services. I would give people the resources they needed to do that, whether it would be time, money, drive, etc.

