The Northern Venango County Community Survey

Love the arts program in Oil City; one of the reasons we moved here.

Need a more positive attitude from younger generation to stay in their hometown.

CORNPLANTER TOWNSHIP, CITY OF OIL CITY, AND THE BOROUGH OF ROUSEVILLE

I wouldn't want to live anywhere else!

2009

Oil City is a lovely community where people work together.

We need more emphasis on housing control.

I like the hiking and biking trails in the area.

You can survey all you want, but if you don't get rid of drugs and blighted housing, and attract new industry, you're wasting time and money!

We love Oil City and the surrounding communities, and believe in the people!

I like living in a small town—less traffic, friendlier people, and feel safer.

I would like the people to take better care of their homes, storefronts, and neighborhoods.

Drugs are infesting Oil City big time!

For the most part, we feel it's a perfect area for retirement.

We need to focus on youth in the area!

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Cornplanter Township, City of Oil City, and Rouseville Borough

2009

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Prologue

Why a survey? In an age where there is cable (or dish), television, soccer, dance lessons, and two-worker households, people often do not have the time nor the inclination to attend public meetings. This is especially true if the sessions are on future policies and plans and not on some controversial topic. Hence, to get public input, a survey.

How was it done? First, each municipality was asked to provide a list of households. Lists from Cornplanter Township and Rouseville Borough had names with the address, while those from Oil City had "Resident" with the address. Names tend to increase response rates. From the survey universe, approximately 1,500 households were selected. They were chosen using a random-number generator that the Commonwealth has accepted.

Letters were sent first class, using stamps, not a postage meter. This option tends to increase response rates. Letters were sent in March 2009. The response goal was 361 to 384 surveys. Using various formulas, this achieves a situation where we can be 95% sure the results are no more than a 5 error, compared to a survey of the entire 6,000-household universe.

As is the case with any survey, there were returns. The returns were from all the communities, though most were from Oil City. In all, 100 returns were received. Some were from bad addresses, but the majority of these were from Oil City, because of vacant structures.

Even with this problem, the response was 463, about one third of all "good" surveys. And, more than sufficient to achieve, the confidence interval and level quoted above. There is one final note. Though every effort is made to achieve a true cross section of the three communities using a sampling universe, this is not always achieved. In doing similar surveys for other clients, our firm observes that homeowners respond more than renters do, and older residents usually reply more than younger ones. There are two other observations. First, in western Pennsylvania, jobs and the economy have always been the number-one concern in surveys taken by this firm. Second, the most popular public services are the fire departments. Yet, given the statistical approach and the response rate, readers can view the results with confidence.

Why not survey everyone? Money. The cost of a survey of all residents would have been well in excess of $20,000.

The Results

For convenience of the reader, results of this survey are given at the end of this narrative. Certain questions asked for fill-ins or comments. They are summarized in this report, and each community will receive copies of these written entries. In all, these comments fill over 70 pages. Survey results were tabulated using Access, the database software from Microsoft. As this was a survey for a three-community plan, the combined results are given in this report. *Please Note: **Not every respondent answered every question**, so the results' total is usually less than 463.* Results for the individual communities will take time to extract, and copies will be forwarded to the individual municipalities.

The response rate was 34% and 70-plus pages of comments. People in the three communities of the Northern Venango County Region care—they care very much.

The results of the survey are slightly skewed. Both Cornplanter and Rouseville responses are slightly higher than their population, while Oil City is slightly under-represented. Why? Vacancies in the Oil City housing stock resulted in the majority of bad surveys.

As stated earlier, there were 463 respondents—115 from Cornplanter, 323 from Oil City, and 25 from Rouseville. Most are long-term residents, averaging 32 years in the area.

In western Pennsylvania, at most public meetings on the economy, the common complaint is: "My children had to leave home to get a job." It seems at least partially true here. Of those with adult children, nearly half (45%) have left the area and, on average, live at some distance of over 600 miles.

Quality of Life

Some seven questions were asked in this category. To an overwhelming degree, respondents believe this is a beautiful, affordable, great place to raise kids, with good community spirit. The question "Freedom from Crime" was answered by 399 households. Fifty-four percent agreed the area is crime free and forty-six percent disagreed.

There was agreement on one topic. Ninety-four percent believe it is a poor job market.

Community Services and Facilities

Community services and facilities encompassed five general headings that included both public and private aspects. Here, the response options were Very Good, Adequate, or Poor.

Emergency Services

In emergency services, police received a 35% very good rating and a 52% adequate ranking, for an over 87% positive rating. The Fire Department (a perennial favorite in such surveys) had a 70% very good and an overall 99% rate. Ambulance and emergency scored 65% very good rate and 98% when adequate was included.

Community Services

Under this topic, five activities were presented. The Oil City Library received the highest number of "Very Good" responses—72% of all respondent votes. Next was health care, at 30 percent. That heading also saw some 81 "Poor" votes. Only "Public Transportation" and "Recycling Facilities" received more than 100 "Poor" votes. A generic "Access to Public Services" had 64. Except for the Library, other services did not fare as well in the section.

Sewer and Water

Sewer and water is somewhat harder to judge, as public water and sewer are not universal. Nonetheless, 70% of those on a public sewer service rated it as very good, while 61% believe the public water is very good. On-lot systems did not do as well. Water was nearly 50-50 between very good and adequate, with 18% as poor. On-lot sewage was marginally better, with a slight edge to adequate and only a 9% poor rating.

Parks and Recreation

The heading had five entries. Questions relative to quality, recreational opportunities, and outdoor recreation were ranked by most respondents as adequate. Generally, for traditional outdoor recreation, the "Very Good" responses were numerous, with the "Poor" responses the minority. However, in terms of Indoor Recreation and Recreation for Youth, the greatest number was in the "Poor" class. Though not a majority, just over 40% of the respondents used that classification for these two questions.

Buildings and Land Use

The real purpose of this question is to measure what type of new development local citizens believe is needed. There were 11 separate categories, from Single-Family Housing to Woodland. Residents identified "needs" as Industry, Small Retail Stores, and Large Retail Stores, in order. They appear satisfied with the current supply of housing. According to the survey, there are "Enough" farmlands and woodlands.

Local Government Priorities

Here, there are thirteen options, from Local Roads to Green Infrastructure. The top priorities were:

- Local Roads
- Fire Services
- Ambulance and Police (a virtual tie)
- Economic Development

Those with lower rankings were:

- Green Infrastructure
- Green Development
- Protection of Historic Sites

Housing

The responses to this section of the survey are very interesting, especially when compared to land use. Though there appears to be "Enough" land devoted to housing, there seems to be deficiencies in particular types. Interestingly, the public sees a lack of market-rate condominiums for seniors, and in the general market. This corresponds with other communities in western Pennsylvania. Low-maintenance housing options become more popular, as populations age. And, the market usually delays in meeting these needs. Manufactured home parks is ranked poorly— typical of all surveys this firm has conducted in western Pennsylvania. This section also saw a number of "no" responses. Likely, persons not interested in the local housing market did not answer many of these questions.

Transportation

The first seven questions dealt with routine matters. Local road crews should be congratulated, as winter road maintenance scored quite well. Bike and hike facilities also scored high. Those garnering "poor" ratings were: quality of roads, streets, and sidewalks, and parking.

The next series of questions asked about the most dangerous road. Plummer was chosen, scoring more than twice than any named road; the next road was Route 8. This question allowed respondents to write in other roads. The most frequent of these entries were West First, Grandview, and Route 227.

Three options were listed for which road needs repaired. Once again, Plummer Street was number 1, but by a narrow margin over Colbert Avenue and Central. The written "Other" responses filled three pages. Most of the streets mentioned were in Oil City.

For dangerous intersections, East First and Wilson were ranked the worst, by far. There were some 88 "Other" entries. Most of these were Oil City intersections, primarily along busy roads. In Cornplanter Township, Route 227 and Grandview were named, especially the Moody Run and Grandview intersection. Generally, accident frequency and traffic volumes go hand in hand.

Economy

The next questions concerned economic matters. In terms of employment, the 162 retirees were the greatest number of entries. They comprised just over one third of all responses. Those actively employed showed a wide mix of jobs. Though medical/health had the most, the type of employment varied greatly, with a rather even, wide variety of answers. No one single employment base is evident. Only some 5% listed themselves as unemployed.

For those who worked, most, about 66%, worked within 10 miles of home. Some 128 traveled 11 or more miles to work.

The answers to the quality of jobs were universally negative. All three questions received a "Poor" rating, ranging from 405 to 379. It is hardly surprising that "More Jobs" received 439 "Yes" votes. Though jobs and the economy are perennial top concerns. The results in this survey topped any results seen by this firm in recent years.

When asked what types of job opportunities or businesses were needed, the top three, in order, were:

- Light Industry (303)
- Hardware Store (245)
- General Retail and General Industry (tied at 232)

Shopping patterns: "Why shop in another community" elicited a variety of responses. But, the top very logical three were:

- Prices
- Quality
- Convenience

The "Other" fill-in brought 74 responses. Most centered on selection and availability.

The next three series of questions were all "fill-ins." They were: Why do you like living here, two things to change, and "other" comments.

The responses are worth reading. In all, there are over 50 pages of these responses. In general, they can be summarized as follows:

- What do people like about the area?

    - Family connections
    - Quiet, small-town, friendly atmosphere
    - Comparatively safe
    - Scenic qualities—outdoors
    - Sense of history

- What they would change?

    - Need more jobs – first in both sections
    - Improve roads
    - Get rid of dilapidated homes—improve appearance
    - Drug use and crime
    - The police garnered many comments, but they varied from isolated criticism to requests for more patrols.

Summary

Most of the results from the Citizen Survey were predicable, but helps to set some Plan priorities. Jobs, housing, and roads are of primary concern. Yet, certainly *all* were certainly not negative. First, a goodly number of people returned the surveys—a positive sign that the citizens care. Second, the number of written comments reinforced that observation. Finally, people *really* like living in the study area and appreciate the beauty and ambience of the area. Not all communities can boast of such attitudes! As one respondent observed:

The community *"has a soul (historical depth, etc.) and people who care."*

The Northern Venango County Community Survey Results

Community Survey Results (July 2009)
Northern Venango County Comprehensive Plan

Cornplanter, Oil City and Rouseville are developing a multi-municipal comprehensive plan. You have been randomly selected to complete this anonymous survey to help focus the plan. The survey, which takes about 10 minutes, will help us understand how citizens feel about important issues. Please complete only one survey per household. There are no right or wrong answers and *all responses are confidential.* Please return your completed survey in the envelope supplied, drop it off at your municipal office, or fax it to 724.450.0433. Thank you.

You and Your Household

Where do you live?   Cornplanter – 115 (25%) Oil City – 323 (70%) Rouseville – 25 (5%)
How long (years) 32 Years (Average)

Are you originally from outside the area?   Yes – 152   No – 271   No Response – 40
   If yes, what is the biggest difference between the study area and your hometown? _____

Do you have any adult children?   Yes – 323 No – 138   No Response – 2
If yes, do any still live in one of the three communities?   Yes – 154 No – 144   No Response – 22
   If no, how close are they (in mileage) from your home? 635 (Average) miles

Quality of Life in Your Community

My community . . .	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Is a good place to raise children	336	76	44
Provides quality education	315	73	66
Is affordable	361	68	28
Provides freedom from crime	215	184	54
Has adequate jobs and businesses	27	408	22
Has outstanding scenic character	356	64	34
Is neighborly; has good community spirit	301	100	54

Community Services and Facilities
Please rate the following community services and facilities.

Emergency Services	Very Good	Adequate	Poor
Police	161	238	59
Fire and Rescue	316	133	3
Ambulance and Emergency	292	147	9
Community Services	**Very Good**	**Adequate**	**Poor**
Public transportation	75	260	109
Quality and accessibility of public library	328	115	12
Availability of healthcare	163	211	81
Recycling facilities	106	225	114
Access to public services	116	271	64
Sewer and Water (as applicable)	**Very Good**	**Adequate**	**Poor**
Public water (n/a – 437)	308	113	17
On-lot water (well) (n/a – 36)	17	14	7
Public sewer (n/a – 381)	234	131	14
On-lot sewer (n/a -- 70)	31	35	6

Parks and Recreation	Very Good	Adequate	Poor
Quality of parks	165	236	55
Recreation opportunities	148	205	102
Outdoor recreation	186	190	81
Indoor recreation	51	201	202
Recreation for Youth	57	187	200

What do you think about the use of buildings and land in your community?	Enough	Not Enough	No Opinion
Single family housing	298	96	54
Multi-family housing	252	112	82
Offices and business services	177	209	60
Small retail stores	74	355	26
Restaurants	180	246	25
Large stores and shopping areas	126	309	17
Industry	26	299	31
Commercial business parks	80	272	92
Parks and recreation areas	257	158	34
Farmland	262	95	94
Woodland	330	64	56

Local Government Priorities

Local government resources are limited. How would you prioritize our time and financial resources?

Government should focus on . . .	Highest Importance	Minor	Lowest Importance
Local roads	375	62	12
Snow removal	303	132	11
Building code enforcement	209	189	54
Public safety (police)	334	100	15
Fire services	358	82	7
Ambulance	336	104	9
Recreation	143	266	36
Economic development	337	53	16
Public Sewer	230	187	29
Public Water	251	169	27
Protecting historic sites	146	219	82
"Green Development"	166	187	91
Green infrastructure (e.g., LED street lights, expanded recycling program)	170	183	95

Housing

Do you own or rent your home?	Own – 388	Rent – 63	No Response – 63

Your opinion of housing quality and availability?	**Very Good**	**Adequate**	**Poor**
Market rate housing for seniors (senior only)	35	163	108
Rental only	29	182	104
Purchase only	44	185	79
Condominium (joint ownership of commons)	12	109	174
Market-rate housing for the general population	42	165	63
Rental only	40	211	115
Purchase only	63	228	69
Condominium (joint ownership of commons)	12	135	194
Public housing	50	207	91
Affordable housing to purchase	98	219	79
Affordable housing to rent	60	205	134
Manufactured home parks	11	176	193

Transportation

What is your opinion of . . .	**Very Good**	**Adequate**	**Poor**
Winter road maintenance	153	216	88
Signage	110	281	38
Parking	55	232	162
Bike and pedestrian facilities	153	219	69
Traffic signal timing	101	270	75
Quality of roads, streets, and sidewalks	28	143	283
Rail crossing safety	68	286	93

What is the most dangerous road in the region?

Colbert Avenue – 66   East Second Street – 36   Plummer Street – 166   Other – 46
Route 227 – 18   Grandview Avenue – 68   Route 8 – 68

What is the road most in need of repair?

Central Avenue – 106   Colbert Avenue – 108   Plummer Street – 119   Other – 75

What is the most dangerous intersection in the region?

E. First & Wilson – 163 E. Second & Central – 68   W. Seventh & Innis – 40   Other – 86
Route 227 and Moody Road – 27

Economy

What is your primary occupation?

Agriculture – 2	Education – 21	Military – 0	Management – 27
Finance – 5	Medical/health – 38	Retired – 162	Manufacturing – 29
Government – 21	Clerical – 20	Student – 2	Construction – 11
Retail sales – 23	Utilities/communication -- 3	Personal Services – 22	Unemployed – 24
Mixed Occupations – 29			

How far do you commute?

Within my community or two miles of my home – 85   Within 11–25 miles of my home – 75

Within 2–10 miles of my home – 161   More than 25 miles from my home – 53

Quality of Jobs	Very Good	Adequate	Poor
Availability of living-wage jobs	1	60	379
Availability of jobs in general	2	66	372
Economic opportunity	3	33	405

Do you think there is a need for more jobs in your community?   Yes – 439   No – 6 No opinion – 7

If yes, which job opportunities and businesses are most needed (check all that apply)?

General retail – 232   Clerical – 84   Appliance repair – 134

Specialty retail – 143   Light industry – 303   Restaurant – 156

Finance/banks – 18   Pharmacy – 24   Video rental – 17

General Industry – 232   Hardware store – 245   Movie theater – 89

Car sales – 20   Bar/tavern/club – 16   Other (please specify) – 65

Auto repair – 36   Laundry service – 40   _____

Medical health – 97   Barber/beauty shop – 31   _____

If you shop in another community for items that are also available in your community, why do you do so?	Highest Importance	Minor	Lowest Importance
Prices	305	74	25
Convenience of shopping	239	118	31
Quality of merchandise	255	115	16
Store hours	172	170	38
Merchant friendliness	140	186	53
Advertising	91	190	99
Frequency of sale items	211	131	48
Product services	189	131	92
Store policies on returns	130	157	94
Other – 74			

Please list two reasons why you like living in your community

1.   (See Narrative)

2.

Please list two things you would like to change about your community

1.   (See Narrative)

2.

Other comments (feel free to attach additional sheets of paper)

(See Narrative)