



2 Harrison Hall  
Miami University  
Oxford, Ohio 45056  
[www.cpmra.muohio.edu](http://www.cpmra.muohio.edu)

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# Village of Coldwater, Ohio

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## Community Satisfaction Survey – April 2002



*Prepared by the Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs*

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# Village of Coldwater Community Satisfaction Survey

April 2002

## Acknowledgements

This report represents the findings of 968 responses to the Village of Coldwater Community Satisfaction Survey. These data represent a snapshot of the views concerning a variety of issues in Coldwater at this time. A similar survey was conducted in Coldwater in 1996 and allows for some comparison of results between these two points in time. Village officials may find the data useful on two levels. First, general views about the delivery and quality of the services provided to residents may be valuable in long range planning efforts. Second, residents' views and ratings of specific conditions provide baseline data for continued benchmarking and ongoing evaluation. We are pleased to have worked with Village officials. Former Village Manager E. Thomas Ault provided valuable input into the development and administration of the survey project.

The following individuals comprised the project team:

### ***Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs:***

- Dr. Philip A. Russo, Jr., Director
- Andrew M. Dudas, Sr. Project Manager
- Lori B. Libby, Sr. Project Manager
- Mark H. Morris, Project Manager
- Carter Hewgley, Andrew Merrick, Ed Stazyk, and David Shock provided assistance with the production and data entry of this survey.

### ***Village of Coldwater:***

- E. Thomas Ault, Former Village Manager

The Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs at Miami University engages in applied research, technical assistance services, training and education, and data base development in the areas of public management and capacity building, local government economic development and planning, and public program evaluation and policy research. The Center's full-time professional staff hold advanced degrees in public administration, policy/program evaluation, and community planning. The Center's activities are funded by external grants and contracts from a number of funding sources including Ohio's Rural Universities Program and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.

Respectfully,

Philip A. Russo, Jr.  
Director, Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs  
Professor, Political Science, Miami University

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## Executive Summary

This section summarizes the results of the Village of Coldwater Community Satisfaction Survey conducted in February and March 2002 by the Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs at Miami University. The total response rate to the survey was 64.6%.

Note: The response rate is calculated using the total number of households (1,541) less vacant addresses (42) for a net total of 1,499 households.

Households Mailed	1,499
Households Responding	968
Response Rate	64.6%

- Six out of ten respondents (63.5%) have lived in the Village for more than 20 years.
- Nine out of ten respondents (89.4%) are home owners.
- Respondent gender was 45.0% male and 55.0% female.
- 73.4% of the respondents are married.
- 93.5% of the respondents are very satisfied (34.4%) or satisfied (59.1%) with living in the Village.
- Seven out of ten respondents (70.5%) think Coldwater has “stayed about the same” in the past five years.
- Nearly eight out of ten respondents (78.0%) indicate they are “happy here and will probably stay for the next five years.”
- 70.4% and 93.4% are very satisfied or satisfied with police and fire protection respectively.
- 95.2% and 92.1% are very satisfied or satisfied with Coldwater parks and recreational facilities respectively.
- Nearly four out of ten respondents (37.3%) believe that “pothole repair” has become worse over the past three years.

- 21.7% believe “street gutter and curb repair” have become worse over the past three years.
- Nine out of ten respondents (93.3%) rate the Village as very clean (38.9%) or clean (54.3%)
- “Unattended pets” was the most frequently cited (30.3%) public nuisance not adequately addressed by the Village.
- Nearly seven out of ten respondents (68.3%) think the Village should “pursue moderate growth” over the next five years.
- Light industrial development was most preferred by respondents (42.9%) while residential housing was least preferred (36.8%).

## Introduction

The staff at the Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs at Miami University conducted a mail survey for the Village of Coldwater in February and March 2002. Village officials were interested in assessing residents’ attitudes towards a variety of services provided by the Village. They were also interested in identifying preferences and interests of residents that could be used in long-term planning efforts for the Village.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information from *households* within the Village of Coldwater. The objectives of the survey were to better understand current satisfaction levels with Village services and to identify areas or issues that may require the attention of Village officials in the future. Through an objective analysis of survey responses, Village officials can evaluate these findings and establish priorities and strategies to better address the needs of the community. Because this is the second time the Center

has conducted a survey for the Village, this analysis includes comparisons between the results gathered in 1996<sup>1</sup> and the results of the current survey.

## Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was drafted by the staff at the Center for Public Management and Regional Affairs in consultation with Village of Coldwater officials. The survey used a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions to obtain responses from participants.

The first set of questions asked about life in the Village of Coldwater. Respondents were asked to indicate how long they have lived in Coldwater, their overall satisfaction with living in the Village, and how living in the Village had changed over the past five years. Respondents were then asked to list three positive and three negative aspects to living in Coldwater. Finally, respondents were asked about their intentions to remain in Coldwater or move away in the next five years.

The second set of questions gathered information on a variety of Village services offered to residents. Respondents were asked to indicate satisfaction levels with Village services including: police protection, fire protection, street & road maintenance, traffic signs, Coldwater parks, water and wastewater service, and zoning enforcement. Respondents were then asked to rate the change over the past three years of a variety of street, road, and sign conditions.

The third set of questions focused on public safety in the Village. Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with current levels of police protection and fire protection.

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<sup>1</sup> In July 1996, 1,446 households in Coldwater were surveyed with 963 usable responses returned for a

They were asked how many times they had seen on-duty police patrols in their neighborhood over the past month. Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with on-duty patrol, response time to requests, and general community outreach. Respondents were then given a list of areas in which police service could improve and asked to select all that applied. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate how safe they feel in their neighborhood.

A fourth set of questions asked respondents about other services provided by the Village. More specifically, these questions asked respondents about cleanliness in the Village and their feelings about public nuisances.

A fifth set of questions asked about the parks and recreation facilities provided by the Village. Respondents were first asked how many times they typically use municipal park facilities in a month. They were then asked to indicate which facilities they had used during the past year, their overall satisfaction with the recreational facilities available, and which activities they had participated in during the past year.

A sixth set of questions addressed growth and economic development in the Village. Respondents were asked to indicate both their interest in growth and economic development in the Village over the next five years and the types of development they preferred.

A seventh set of questions asked respondents about their attitudes and perceptions about Village government.

The final set of questions collected a number of demographic characteristics including: home ownership, family size and ages, gender, and marital status. Each section of the

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response rate of 66.6%.

survey provided respondents with an opportunity to write-in additional thoughts or comments if they desired.

## Survey Methodology

A survey questionnaire was mailed to all households in the Village of Coldwater. The household mailing list was based on the Village utility billing list. A total of 1,541 surveys were mailed to all households in February 2002. Each survey packet included a survey instrument and a return-addressed postage-paid envelope. The survey requested that one member of the household who is 18 years of age or older and a resident of the Village complete the survey. A reminder card was mailed to all households two weeks after the first survey instrument had been mailed. A second survey instrument was mailed 30 days after the first one. The second survey instrument packet was identical to the first one and provided households with a second opportunity to participate. A second reminder card was mailed two weeks after the second instrument had been mailed. A total of 968 usable responses were returned, for a response rate of 64.6%.

The standard margin of sampling error in this survey is plus or minus two percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases. This means that if a survey is conducted 100 times, in 95 cases the results will not vary by more than two percentage points from the results if all Village residents responded.

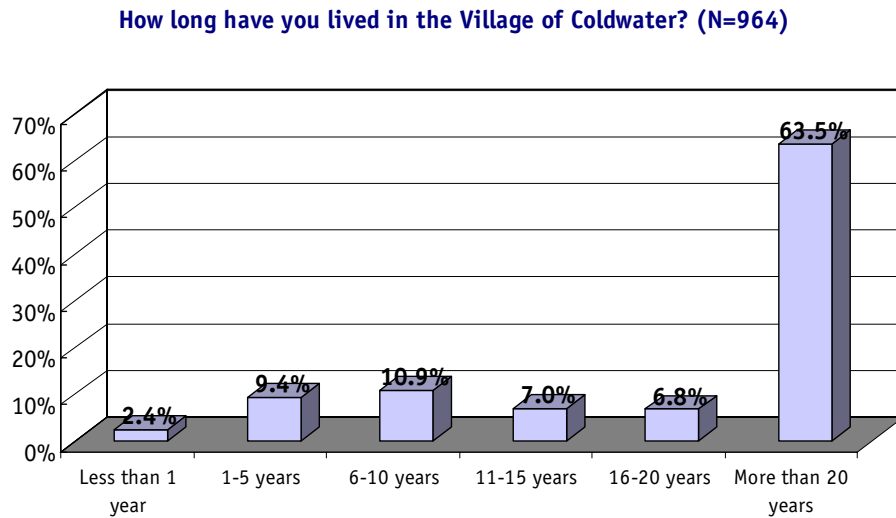
All surveys are subject to sources of error, such as bias in the wording of questions, timing, issue salience, etc. The instrument design, format, and timing were chosen to increase the response rate and to minimize bias. There is little reason to suspect that the data

collection procedures introduced any significant bias; the findings reported herein can be taken confidently as an accurate reflection of respondent opinion at the time.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of surveys returned were completed in full. However, some respondents chose not to answer parts or specific questions in the survey. Incomplete surveys were included in the database, thus some questions may have more responses than others. Due to rounding, some of the reported percentages may not equal 100%.

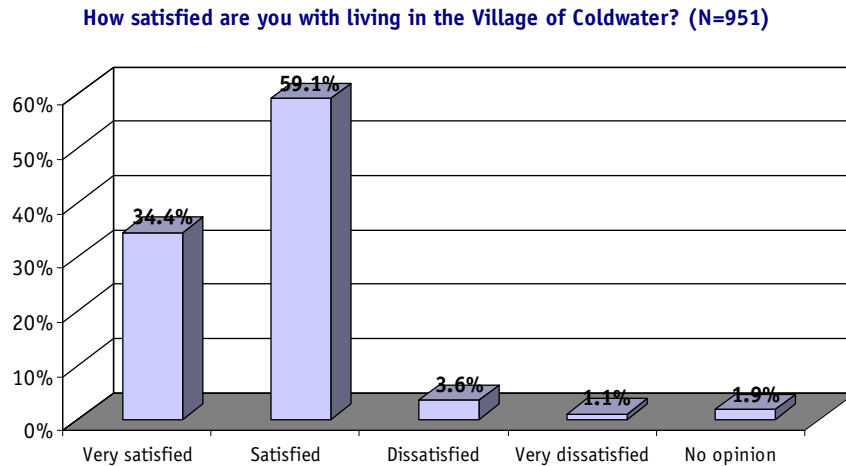
### Survey Results and Analysis

**VILLAGE LIFE:** The majority of respondents can be classified as long-time residents of the Village having lived there for six years or more. Six in ten reported having lived in the Village for more than 20 years.

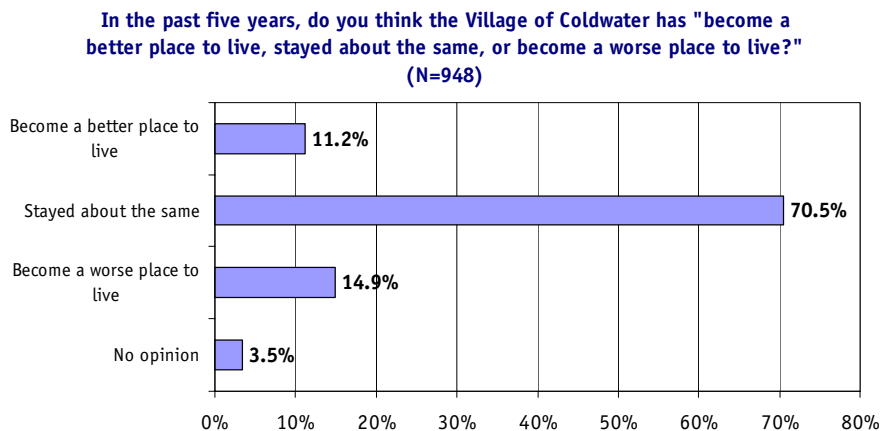


<sup>2</sup> The findings reported can be taken confidently as an accurate reflection of respondents' opinions at the time they completed the survey. However, these opinions may and do change over time. Therefore, they reflect a snapshot of respondents' views only at the time of the survey.

Length of residency among respondents is comparable to the results gathered in the 1996 survey. Similarly, 63.2% of the respondents had lived in the Village more than 20 years. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated their satisfaction with living in the Village as the following chart indicates.



When asked to consider how the Village has changed over the past five years, eight out of ten respondents indicated the Village had “become a better place to live” or had “stayed about the same.” Only 14.9% indicated the Village had “become a worse place to live.”



When comparing the 2002 results with the 1996 results, we do see a shift in attitudes. Most noticeably, respondents who felt Coldwater had “become a better place to live” declined

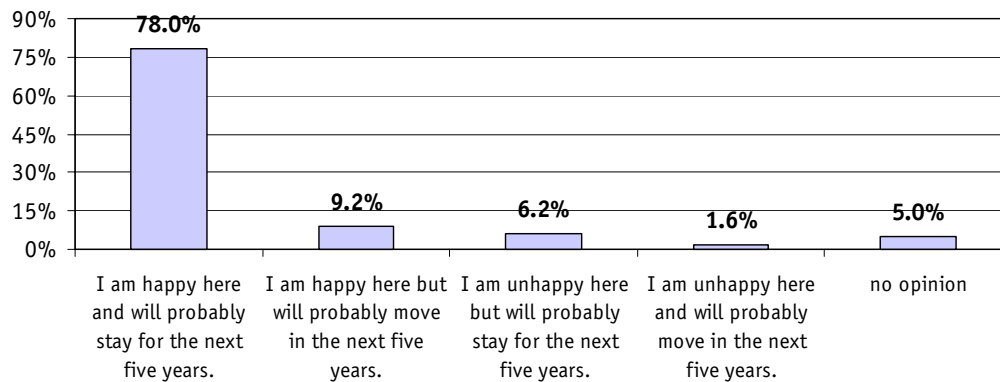
from 38.5% in 1996 to 11.2% in 2002. While the majority of respondents to the current survey moved into the “stayed about the same” category, the “become a worse place to live” category doubled from 7.0% in 1996 to 14.9% in 2002.

Respondents were asked to list three positive aspects and three negative aspects to living in Coldwater. Over 2,000 positive aspects and nearly 1,400 negative aspects were provided. Aggregating the individual responses into more general categories yielded the following conclusions. The vast majority of the positive aspects can be classified as quality of life issues. Respondents specifically cited the cleanliness of the community, their sense of personal safety and low crime rates, their satisfaction with municipal parks, and a general sense of community spirit in Coldwater.

The negative aspects also included quality of life issues such as the distance to work, to shopping, and to entertainment, the lack of diversity in the community, and the rate of crime. Other negative aspects included concerns with business closings, limited retail services available, and the lack of competition for existing retailers. Respondents also cited poor governmental decision making, issues with water and sewer service, and high taxes as negative aspects to living in the Village.

The final Village life question asked respondents to consider both their happiness in Coldwater and the likelihood that they would continue to live here for the next five years. Although conditions and circumstances can quickly change, this question provides some measure of the stability of the Coldwater population looking into the future. Nearly eight in ten respondents indicated they are happy and intend to stay in Coldwater.

**Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about living in the Village of Coldwater? (N=945)**



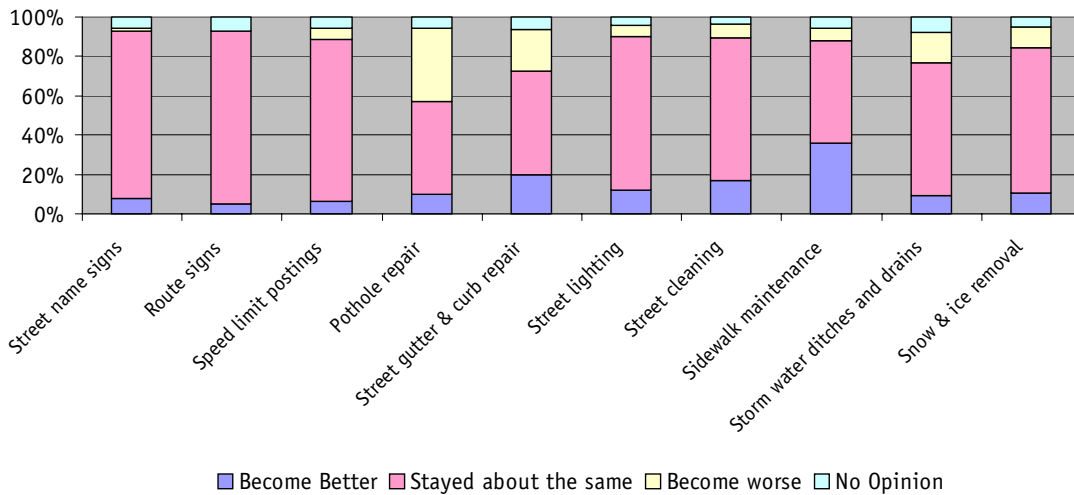
In sum, responses to the Village Life section of the survey indicate an overall satisfied community that finds many positive aspects to Village life, recognizes there are negative aspects that require attention, yet looks to remain in Coldwater for the foreseeable future. However, there does seem to be an attitudinal shift from 1996 to 2002 that may indicate some deterioration in satisfaction levels with the quality of life in Coldwater.

**VILLAGE SERVICES:** The Village of Coldwater provides a variety of services to residents. This section of the survey asked respondents to indicate their satisfaction levels with these services. The following table summarizes the responses. All of the Village services have overall satisfaction levels at or above 50%. Services with dissatisfaction rates greater than 20% are highlighted in pink.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Police protection	18.9%	50.2%	18.0%	8.2%	3.0%
Fire protection	45.1%	48.2%	6.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Street & road maintenance	10.9%	37.2%	24.0%	21.2%	6.7%
Traffic signs	16.7%	58.2%	20.0%	4.4%	0.8%
Coldwater parks	65.0%	30.3%	4.0%	4.0%	0.7%
Water & wastewater service	14.1%	42.6%	22.7%	15.4%	5.1%
Zoning enforcement	10.0%	40.1%	43.6%	5.0%	1.3%

To assess change over time, respondents were asked to indicate whether a variety of Village services had “become better, stayed about the same, or become worse” over the past three years. The pink bars in the chart below indicate services have remained the same over the past three years. Services that have the largest percentage of “become better” responses (blue bars) include street gutters and curb repair, street cleaning, and sidewalk maintenance. Note that sidewalk maintenance was the service with the highest dissatisfaction level in the 1996 survey. Pothole repair and street gutters and curb repair have the highest dissatisfaction levels (yellow bars) in 2002.

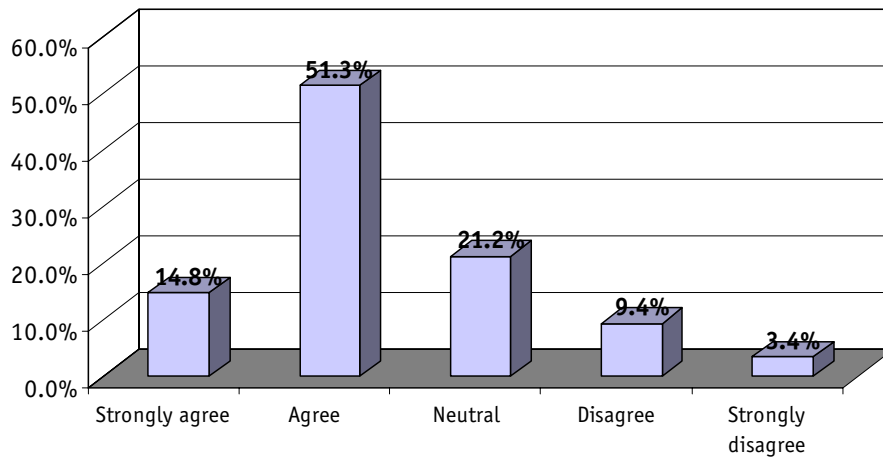
Over the past three years, have the following public works/street conditions listed below "become better, stayed about the same, or become worse?" (N=varies)



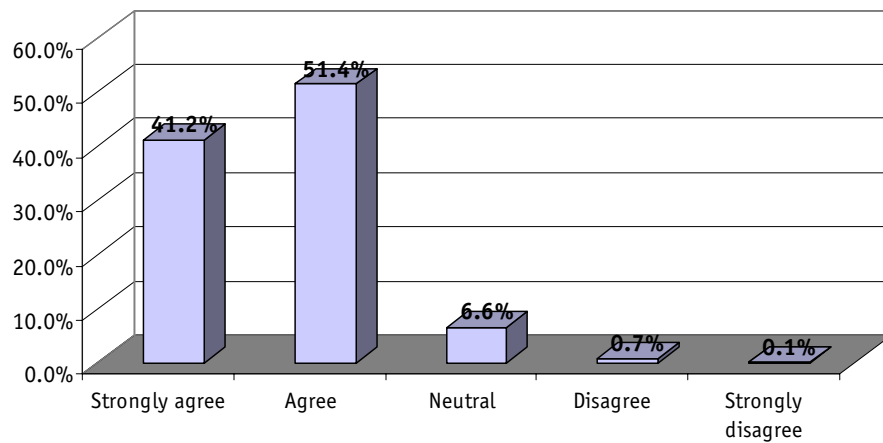
**PUBLIC SAFETY:** The Village provides police and fire protection for its residents. This section of the survey assesses public satisfaction with these two services. Respondents were first asked to indicate their satisfaction with the current level of police and fire protection. Both police and fire services received satisfaction levels that were notably higher than in 1996. Police protection satisfaction (very satisfied and satisfied) improved from 49.2% in 1996 to 66.1% in 2002. Fire protection satisfaction (very satisfied and

satisfied) improved from 71.5% in 1996 to 92.6% in 2002. Although we are unable to quantify specific effects, the increased attention given to public safety services and personnel since the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks may have had some effect on these results.

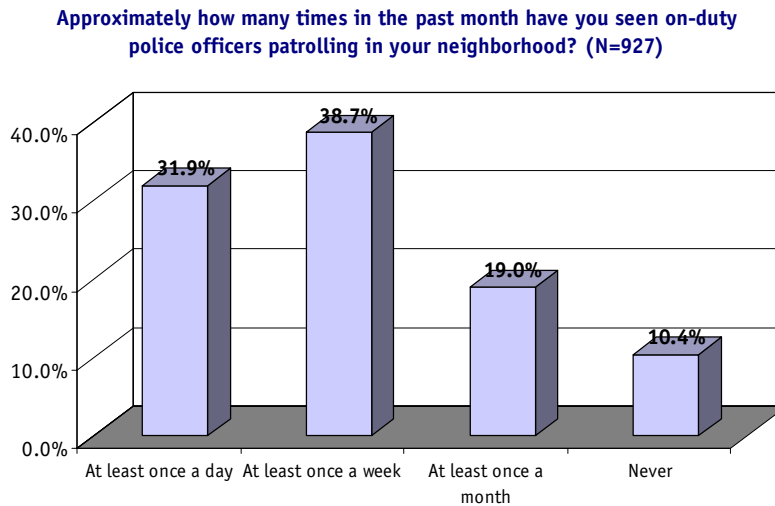
**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:  
"I am satisfied with the current level of police protection provided by the Village." (N=940)**



**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I am satisfied with the current level of fire protection provided by the Village." (N=945)**



Respondents were also asked several specific questions regarding police protection. The first asked about the frequency with which they saw on-duty police officers patrolling in their neighborhood. The 2002 responses were similar to the 1996 responses to this question.



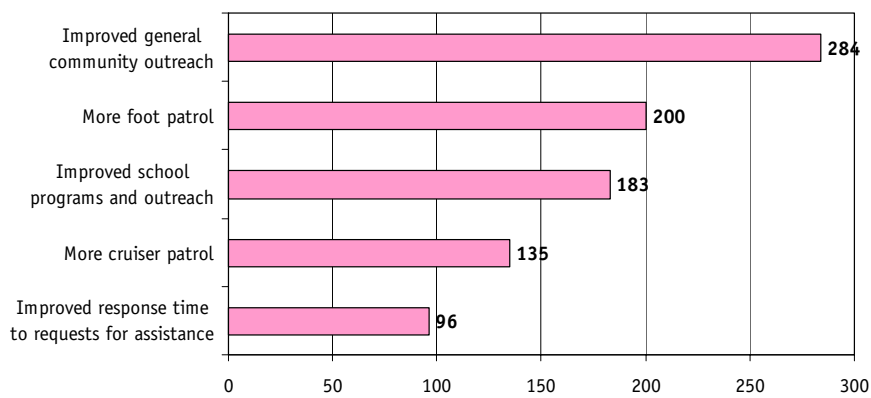
Similar to the Village services above, respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction levels with several specific police services. Overall, respondents indicated general satisfaction with these police services. None of the specific police services generated significant levels of dissatisfaction.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
On-duty patrol	13.5%	53.4%	22.3%	8.5%	2.3%
Response time to requests	11.6%	41.6%	40.6%	4.6%	1.6%
General community outreach	9.0%	37.3%	36.7%	12.4%	4.5%

In addition to assessing satisfaction levels, respondents were asked to identify areas in which police services could improve. Improved community outreach was the most commonly cited area for improvement. This issue was also noted in the “additional comments” where many respondents expressed their desire to see the police be “more

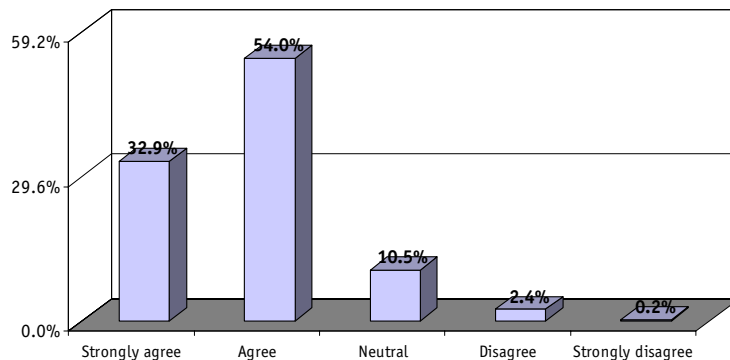
friendly," "more personable," and to be "more helpful with children." A number of respondents also indicated an interest in seeing the use of bike patrols in the Village and especially in the municipal park. The results of the 2002 survey are similar to the 1996 results, as improved community outreach and more foot patrol were again the top two areas noted for improvement.

Are there areas in which police service could improve? (N=varies)



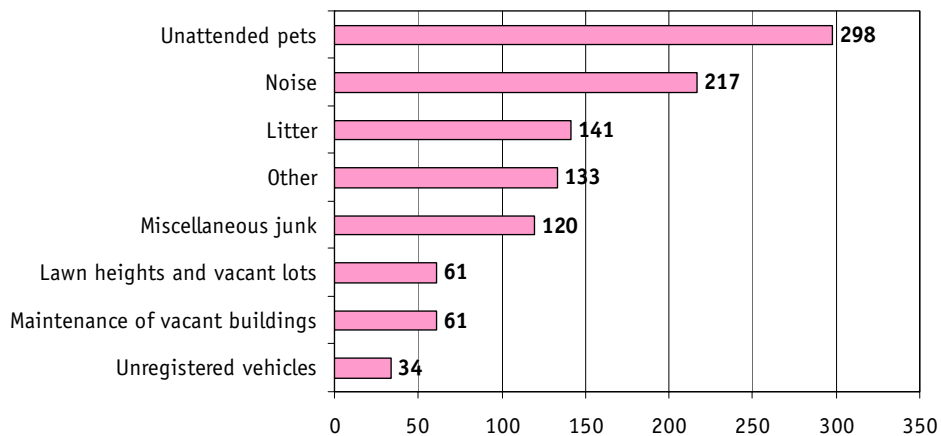
To generally assess the perceptions of public safety in Coldwater, respondents were asked to indicate their sense of personal safety in their neighborhood. Nearly nine out of ten respondents (86.8%) indicated they strongly agreed or agreed with feeling safe in their neighborhood.

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: "I feel safe in my neighborhood." (N=904)



**OTHER SERVICES:** Dealing with public nuisances presents numerous challenges to a community. One measure of overall satisfaction is the public perception of cleanliness in the Village. An overwhelming majority (93.3%) of the respondents rated Coldwater as being very clean or clean. Only 1.1% rated the Village as being very dirty or dirty. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of public nuisances the ones that they believe have not been adequately addressed by the Village.

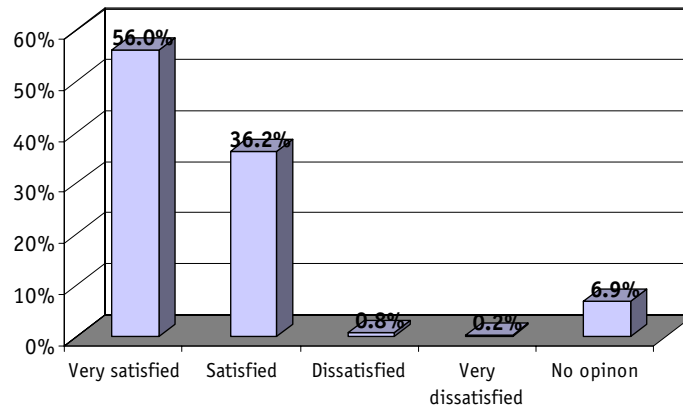
**Which of the following public nuisances, if any, do you believe the Village of Coldwater has not adequately addressed? (N=varies)**



When asked to rank the top three public nuisances requiring attention by the Village, respondents cited unattended pets, noise, and litter most frequently.

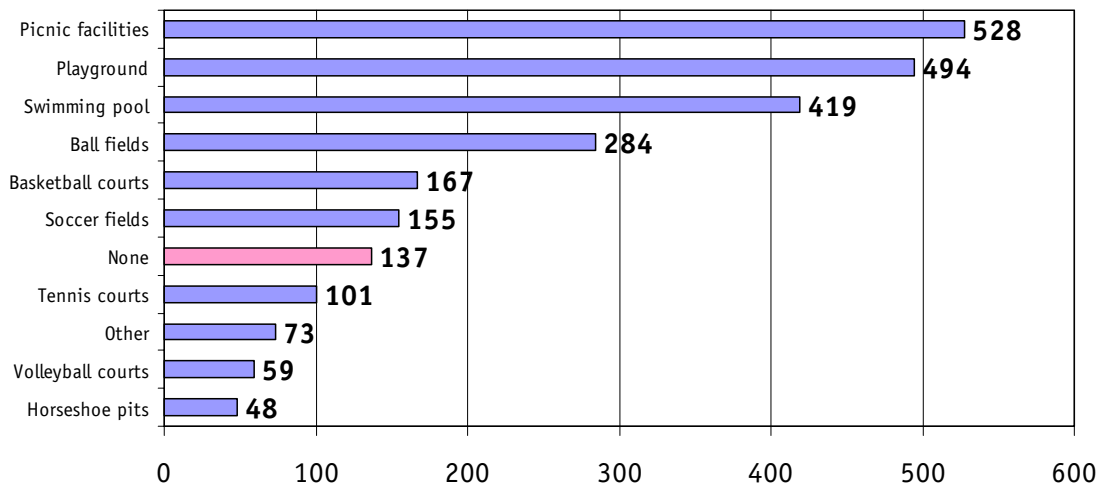
**PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES:** As was seen in the 1996 survey, respondents again indicate high levels of usage and satisfaction with the municipal parks. Overall satisfaction (very satisfied and satisfied) levels with the recreational facilities increased from 89.0% in 1996 to 92.1% in 2002. Usage of the facilities at the municipal parks also remained high with 40.5% of the respondents using them at least four times per month. Nearly two in ten (17.1%) indicated using the facilities more than 10 times per month.

**In general, how satisfied are you with the recreational facilities at the municipal parks? (N=904)**



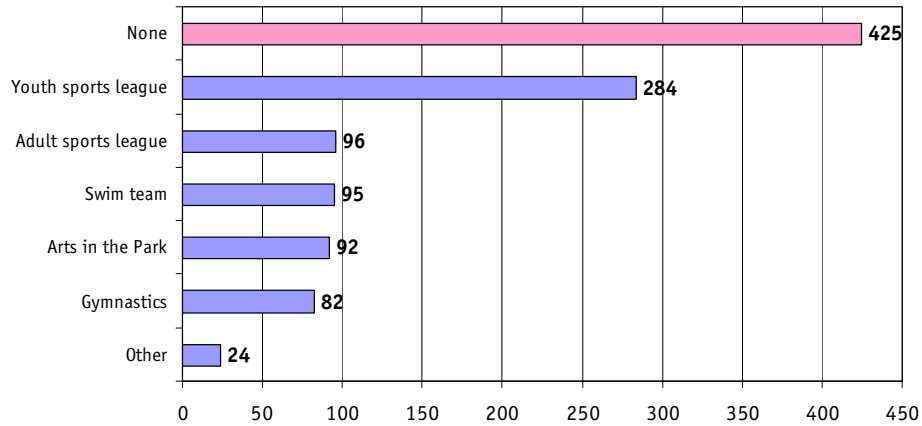
Identifying the specific facilities used for recreation, the picnic facilities, playground, and the swimming pool were again the most frequently used (same as in 1996).

**In the past year, other than participating in organized recreational activities, which of the following facilities have you or your family used at the municipal parks? (N=varies)**



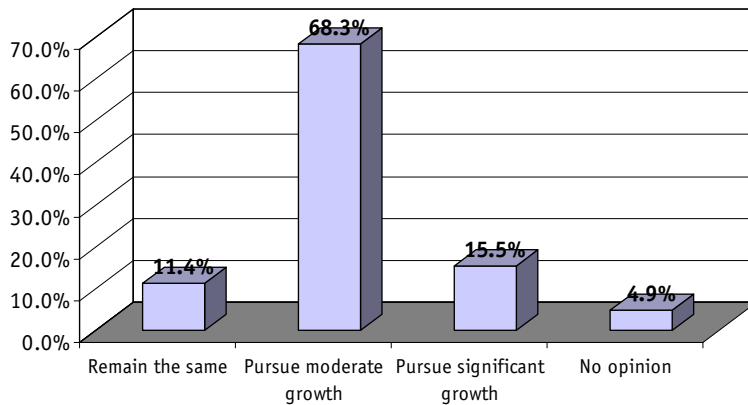
Respondents indicated that they or their family members participated in youth sports leagues, adult sports leagues, and the swim team most frequently.

**In the past year, have you or your family participated in any of the following organized recreational activities? (N=varies)**



**GROWTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Assessing public attitudes towards growth and development are important for longer-term planning. Over eight in ten respondents imagine the Village pursuing moderate (68.3%) or significant growth (15.5%) over the next five years.

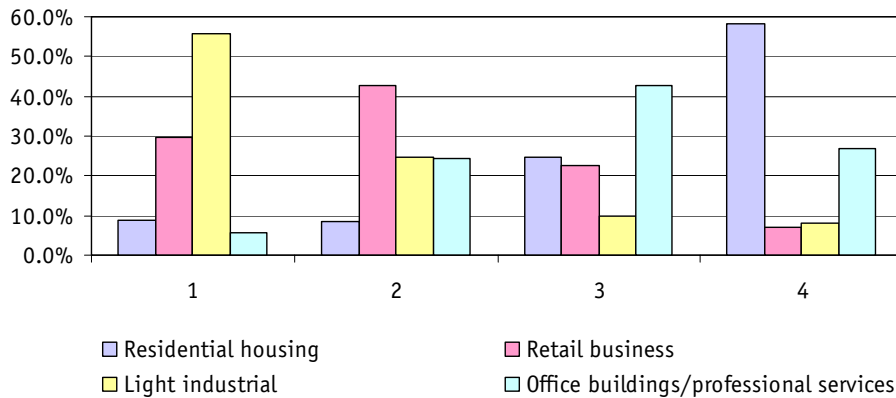
**When imagining Coldwater five years from now, do you think the Village should "remain the same," "pursue moderate growth," or "pursue significant growth?" (N=898)**



Economic growth can take many forms, so respondents were asked to rank their preferences for growth from a list of four specific types of growth. Based on responses, growth that creates employment opportunities is highly preferred. Light industrial was the most

preferred type of development; residential housing was the least preferred. These results are consistent with the results obtained in 1996 when creating “job opportunities” was also the preferred type of economic growth.

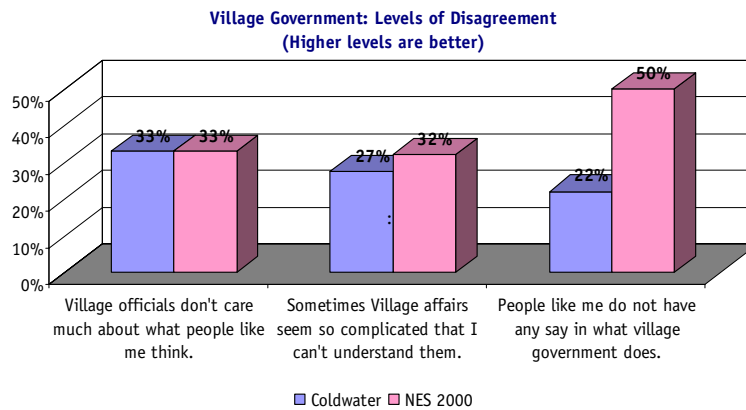
**If development were to occur in Coldwater over the next five years, what type of development would you prefer? Please rank from one to four with one being you most preferred and four as your least preferred. (N=varies)**



**VILLAGE GOVERNMENT:** The relationship between public officials and the residents of their community is an important one. This survey attempted to assess this relationship in a broad sense using a set of questions that have been used over time in other surveys in other communities. More specifically, these questions measure a respondent’s belief in their capacity to both understand and influence politics in their community. Because these questions have been used in other surveys, we can compare Coldwater’s results with the responses in other communities<sup>3</sup>. High levels of disagreement with this series of questions indicate respondents have positive feelings towards their ability to understand and influence the political process. Coldwater respondents indicate lower

<sup>3</sup> The National Election Studies, Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan. The NES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior (<http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/nesguide.htm>). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor], 1995-2000.

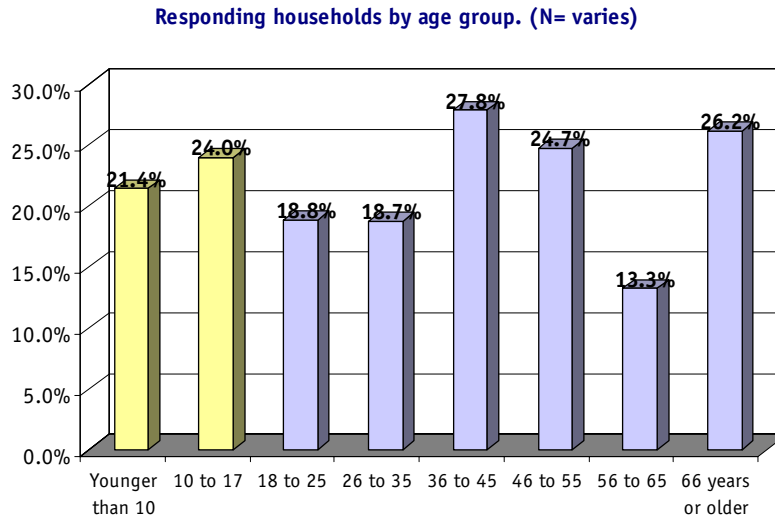
levels of disagreement than the levels found nationally. We do urge caution in the interpretation and use of these results as many factors can influence responses to questions of this nature. However, the results may suggest there is an opportunity for Village officials to increase both citizen awareness and involvement in the Coldwater governing process.



**DEMOGRAPHICS:** Because not every household that received a survey responded, we want to insure that those who did respond are a representative sample of the entire Village. Comparing the demographic data collected from the 2002 survey with the 2000 Census data, we can draw some general conclusions about the representativeness of the respondents in the aggregate. With a 45% to 55% distribution of male to female survey respondents, gender is consistent with the overall 49% to 51% distribution by gender in Coldwater.

Marital status is slightly over-represented with 73.4% of survey respondents indicating they are married versus 63.6% in the Village overall. However, respondents with families are very representative of the overall Village. Those who are married with children under the age of 18 accounted for 33.9% of the survey respondents versus 32.9% of the Village. Single parents with children under the age of 18 accounted for 2.8% of the survey

respondents while making up 4.2% of the total Village. The following chart indicates the percent of respondents with persons living in their household by age category.



Homeownership is somewhat over-represented in the survey with 89.4% of the responses versus an overall homeownership percentage of 79.8% in the Village. This is typical of community surveys of this type as homeowners often respond at higher levels than those who rent. We do not believe these over-representations invalidate the overall results of the survey. However, any interpretation of the survey results should keep in mind the types of respondents and the dispositions that may influence their responses.

### Additional Comments

At the end of the survey, respondents were provided with space to write any additional thoughts or comments. A total of 167 respondents provided a wide variety of comments given the opportunity. A sampling of their comments is provided below.

- *As of now, I intend to keep and maintain my home in Coldwater. I cannot think of a better place to live.*

- *Coldwater is a great place to live. However, there is a need for more industry, police, and fire. More officers would enhance the feeling of safety.*
- *Coldwater officials and employees lack the skills (technical, planning, and zoning) to organize further growth and economic development.*
- *Have been very disappointed with the sidewalk project.*
- *I'm not involved with the Village government due to the fact that I don't know when they meet or what they meet about. Need a newsletter on events and government happenings, park activities.*
- *I don't know what this survey cost, but it is another example of unnecessary expenditure at a time when we supposedly don't have enough money.*
- *I feel the police do not care to meet or get to know the people around town.*
- *I have lived in other communities and found Coldwater to be a community interested in safety of its occupants, neatness of the Village, and general improvement of the entire Village.*
- *I think this survey is a great idea. I hope the Village can fix up the bike path. I hope the Village can get a tax passed to help acquire the money to continue improvements.*
- *I would like to see more street lighting all the way down Main Street from end to end. Something needs to be done about traffic congestion before and after school on Vine and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.*
- *In the past, we could count on the Village for more services. It would be nice if they would pick up limbs more often. We would pay for this service.*
- *Need to improve our water.*
- *Need to pursue economic development.*
- *Thank you for seeking and addressing public concerns anonymously.*
- *The Village's number one priority right now has to be to attract businesses.*
- *We like the people here and also the businesses. The police department is very helpful. Great library.*
- *Will we hear the results of this survey?*

## Conclusion

As previously noted, surveys provide a snapshot of opinions at a particular point in time.

Because this is the second community-wide survey conducted in the Village, we have the added ability to compare attitudes and opinions over time. Both surveys had response rates near 65% indicating a high degree of public interest within the community. While satisfaction levels with the overall quality of life in the Village remain high, there was a noticeable decline in those who believe that Coldwater had become a better place to live over the past five years. Overall, satisfaction with Village services remains high with police and fire services seeing their satisfaction levels increase since 1996. The municipal park remains a very strong positive aspect for the community. The major area of concern remains economic growth and development within the Village. Respondents clearly see the connection between economic growth, an expanding tax base, and the ability of the Village to maintain and improve upon the services provided to residents.