Heartland 2050: Omaha-Council Bluffs Values and Priorities Quantitative Study

Prepared for Fregonese Associates

January 28, 2014
About three in four see their quality of life in the Omaha-Council Bluffs Region as positive and increasing. While slightly less, the majority say the region is on the right track.

**Quality of Life in the Future**
- 78% Increasing
- 23% Decreasing

**Direction of Their Own Community**
- 60% Right direction
- 22% Wrong track
- 19% Not sure

**Quality of Life in the Region: Positives vs. Negatives**
- 71% Positive
- 29% Negative

18-34 yr olds most likely to believe quality will increase.

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Q320. Thinking about the quality of life that will be here for you or your friends’ children and grandchildren, do you see their quality of life in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region increasing or decreasing in the future?

Q330. On another subject, do you feel things in your own community today are going in the right direction or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?

Q335. Thinking of all the positive and negative aspects about the quality of life here in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region, what percentage of things would you classify as positive? What percentage is negative?
Reducing crime is the most important issue to the region with two thirds giving it high priority. Jobs, young adult retention, education and taxes also rise to the top.

**Top 2 Box Importance** (Rated 9/10 on 10 pt. scale)

1. Reducing crime and making neighborhoods safer (66%)
2. Increasing the number and quality of jobs (59%)
3. Retaining well-educated, well-trained, young adults (57%)
4. Improving education (56%)
5. Lower property taxes (54%)
6. Lower state, local and sales taxes (53%)
7. Increasing access to quality health care (47%)
8. Addressing the aging infrastructure (i.e. improve roads, bridges… (44%)
9. Increasing economic development through business expansion (42%)
10. Improving affordability of housing and living (41%)
11. Improving social equity and justice (33%)
12. Reducing traffic congestion and improving transportation options (31%)
13. Increasing the enjoyment and access to culture and the arts (28%)
14. Increasing the opportunity for residents to be involved… (27%)
15. Increasing civic involvement and engagement (25%)

**Greater Importance To:**
- Jobs: those with high school education or less (71%)
- Education: those residing in Iowa (73%)
- Property taxes/State, local & sales taxes: those 55+ (63%)

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Violent crime per 100,000 people in the Omaha MSA is 407.1, below the MSA average of 409.4.

Property crime per 100,000 people in the Omaha MSA is 3,368.8, above the MSA average of 2,949.8.

Iowa ranks 24th among the states in terms of state/local tax burden. Nebraska ranks 21st.
Values-Based Strategic Hinge

There is a “strategic hinge” which exists, linking the attributes and benefits of life in the Omaha–Council Bluffs Region to the people.

Identifying the rational and emotional drivers of this hinge is the purpose of “values” research.
Omaha-Council Bluffs Values: High Taxes (22%) & Crime (18%)

Values
- Self esteem
- Accomplishment
- Done a good job
- Children better quality of life
- Feel safe
- Quality of life
- Peace of mind
- Happiness

Emotions
- Done a good job
- Feel safe
- Quality of life
- Happiness
- Satisfaction
- In control
- Freedom
- Mood effect
- Enjoyment

Benefits
- Earn Money / Money goes further
- More choices / opps
- Save time
- Roads safe
- Better / Improved community
- Neighbor help
- Sense of community
- Family love
- Small town feel
- Family friendly / Strong values

Attributes
- Education system
- Jobs / Employment
- Income Equality
- Cost of living
- Education system
- Variety to do
- Traffic
- Infrastructure
- The people / Small town feel
- Infrastructure
- Traffic
- Education system
Executive Summary
Omaha-Council Bluffs Resident Values

Nearly a quarter (22%) of respondents identified the high level of taxes, including property and state/local/sale, as the most or second most area of concern for residents.

High Level of Taxes

Taxes: Property taxes and the lack of bang for the buck for what we pay. Decreases disposable income and reduces saving opportunities while increasing thoughts of where is my money going. Purchasing a larger house or upgrades to the house because it will increase the assessment. I am limited in what I would like to do to better my situation.
Executive Summary

Omaha-Council Bluffs Resident Values

Nearly one-in-five (18%) identified crime as a major factor impacting quality of life in Omaha-Council Bluffs. Gang activity is also a big concern and viewed as a heavy contributor to crime levels.

Too Much Crime

Crime, there is so much of it in North Omaha, no value of life. As a single mother, I do whatever to make sure my son doesn't fall prey to senseless mess. My kids can't go to certain parts of North Omaha at night even if it's a family member home. Can't fully enjoy family. It's just plain senseless.
Omaha-Council Bluffs Values: Low Cost of Living (9%)

**VALUES**
- Self esteem
- Accomplishment
- Done a good job
- Health lifestyle
- Children better quality of life
- Enjoy outdoors/rec
- Children learn more
- Weather
- Jobs / Employment
- Cost of living

**ATTRIBUTES**
- Education system
- Income Equality
- Taxes
- Variety to do
- Traffic
- Infrastructure

**BENEFITS**
- Earn Money/ Money goes further
- Stay in community
- Provide for others
- Do more/other things
- More choices/ opps
- Saves time
- Roads safe
- Neighbors help
- Family safe
- The people/ Small town feel
- Infrastructure

**EMOTIONS**
- Happiness
- Peace of mind
- Security
- Freedom
- In control
- Feel safe
- Better/Improved community
- Feel safe
- Family love
- Sense of community

**Low Cost of Living & Jobs**
Executive Summary
OMaha-Council Bluffs Resident Values

Key values to protect and promote are derived from the low cost of living and affordability that residents currently enjoy.

Low Cost of Living

We are able to afford a very nice lifestyle with a standard rate of pay. It allows us to eat out more, go to more entertainment, and worry less about the financial impacts of leisure expenses. This gives me a sense of security.
Region residents prefer growth strategies focused on centralizing jobs and shopping close to residence, encouraging a range of housing options and infusing existing cities and towns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement with Growth Strategies</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locating new jobs and shopping close to where people live</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage a range of housing options that meet the needs and budgets of residents*</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locating new growth in the existing cities and towns</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invest in new roadways and road improvements</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investing in areas of poverty to reduce crime</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making it convenient to walk or bike to neighborhood stores, businesses, and schools</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinvesting in the Region's Main Streets and Downtowns</td>
<td>68%</td>
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<td>Providing more public transportation options</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<td>Locate new growth along major transportation corridors (i.e. I-80/I-29, Dodge Street, etc.)</td>
<td>61%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Iowa residents more strongly agree with strategy encouraging range of housing options (94%)

BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (N=400)
Q760 How much do you agree or disagree with the following growth strategies for the Omaha-Council Bluffs region? Please note that these strategies are not mutually exclusive.
Making improvements to existing elements, such as infrastructure and communities, is important for future growth in the region.

**Top 2 Box Importance** *(Rated 9/10 on 10 pt. scale)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving base infrastructure - like roads, bridges, utilities, broadband, etc.</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making more affordable housing region wide</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalizing older neighborhoods, communities and underutilized properties</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flood protection</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing service and routes of the existing public transit system</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating express bus service for key corridors</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating more walkable downtowns and main streets</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making downtown Omaha more accessible</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating more bike paths for the community and region</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding water/sewer and other infrastructure for outlying communities</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing an entrepreneurial center to support new businesses</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial park development</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning more shopping and retail centers in the city</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three times as many residents prefer infill of existing areas over new growth in outlying communities.

**Smith** believes that the region should begin focusing new growth and development in the urban center, existing towns, and in parts of the city that need to be revitalized or redeveloped.

18-34 year olds most likely to agree with Smith and infill strategy (74%)

Neither: 11%

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**Jones** believes that the region should begin focusing new growth and development across the region into new areas and communities where there hasn’t been much development before.

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BASE: ALL QUALIFIED RESPONDENTS (N=400)

Q565. Below are the opinions of two hypothetical residents. Please indicate which opinion comes closest to your own. Is your opinion more like Mr. Smith or more like Mr. Jones?
Nearly all believe having a plan for regional growth in the region is important. More than half feel the Omaha-Council Bluffs region has preformed ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ in this area.

Importance of Having a Vision or a Long Range Plan for Growth in the Region – Top 2 Box (Extremely/Very Important)
Scenario A

In Scenario A, we will continue to grow and decline much the same as we have in the recent past. Areas of the urban core will continue to lose population, as westward expansion continues in Douglas and Sarpy counties.

Scenario B

In Scenario B, the highest growth occurs in central Omaha and Council Bluffs, and over 40% of new growth takes place in existing urban and suburban areas, making efficient use of road and water infrastructure.

Scenario C

In Scenario C, population and employment growth are focused in the core, revitalizing North, South and Midtown Omaha and Council Bluffs. Sarpy County and western Douglas County see some moderate growth. The region makes significant transit investment to serve the bustling central city.

Scenario D

In Scenario D, new jobs are located near urban, suburban and rural communities to reduce long commutes and revitalize existing neighborhoods and towns. Infill and redevelopment help to build walkable communities and main streets across the region.
Though scenarios B, C, and D are all rated highly, when forced to choose only one, Scenario D is most preferred for the region.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Scenarios</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In Scenario A,</strong> we will continue to grow and decline much the same as we have in the recent past. <strong>Areas of the urban core will continue to lose population,</strong> as westward expansion continues in Douglas and Sarpy counties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Scenario Is the Best Option (Completely/Somewhat)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario that Is Best Option for Region</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In Scenario B,</strong> the highest growth occurs in central Omaha and Council Bluffs, and over 40% of new growth takes place in existing urban and suburban areas, making efficient use of road and water infrastructure.</td>
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<td>Scenario that Is Best Option for Region</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In Scenario C,</strong> population and employment growth are focused in the core, revitalizing North, South and Midtown Omaha and Council Bluffs. Sarpy County and western Douglas County see some moderate growth. The region makes significant transit investment to serve the bustling central city.</td>
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<td><strong>In Scenario D,</strong> new jobs are located near urban, suburban and rural communities to reduce long commutes and revitalize existing neighborhoods and towns. Infill and redevelopment help to build walkable communities and main streets across the region.</td>
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While most agree that investing in regional transportation is important, a majority believe funds allocated for public transportation should be kept the same or increased only somewhat.

"Investing in regional transportation is an important priority for our region."

**Support or Oppose Allocation of Local Tax Dollars Toward Public Transportation Services**

- Strongly/ Somewhat Support: 71%
- Strongly/ Somewhat Oppose: 29%

**Level of Spending that Should Be Allocated for Public Transportation Services**

- Significantly decrease the level of spending: 4%
- Somewhat decrease the level of spending: 8%
- Keep the level of spending the same: 40%
- Somewhat increase the level of spending: 39%
- Significantly increase the level of spending: 9%

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**Q920.** To what extent do you agree with the statement: Investing in regional transportation is an important priority for our region?

**Q930.** Thinking about just one part of the transportation picture… Do you support or oppose the allocation of your local tax dollars toward the expansion and improvement of public transportation services in your community?

**Q935.** Thinking about your own local public transportation, what level of spending do you believe should be allocated for the improvement of public transportation services and access for the local system where you live?