

**OCONTO WATERFRONT OPTIONS:
A FOLLOW-UP SURVEY**

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SECOND RESIDENT SURVEY REPORT

SUMMARY

The Oconto waterfront project was initiated by University of Wisconsin-Extension, with support from the National Coastal Resources Research and Development Institute, when approached by Oconto residents for support in addressing the needs of their coastal community. The community was interested in determining how much interest there was in changes proposed for the waterfront area and what changes people might prefer. A secondary purpose was to begin action addressing these concerns. The major objectives of the project were to see if educational and consensus building efforts could help a coastal community move forward in determining future uses of its waterfront area.

The project sought to use adult education and community development principles to assist the community determine awareness and importance of the waterfront, explore support for specific options, and communicate technical information regarding waterfront issues and build a waterfront strategy. This was done through surveying a wide spectrum of people to get their opinions about the range of options being considered. The combination of information and education would enable the community to move forward on an action plan.

This survey report represents a second survey of Oconto residents to determine how opinions had changed since the project had formally begun. It also queries people about their preferred changes in the waterfront area. The responses are from 322 people who responded to both the first and second survey of residents.

During the project period most people surveyed (64 percent) did not change their opinion regarding the importance of the waterfront to the future of Oconto. But there was increased convergence of opinions between respondents and their friends and neighbors regarding the importance of the waterfront.

Affirmation of recent initiatives was conveyed by the strong support (90+ percent) for the recent improvements at Breakwater Park.

Support for dredging the river or building a marina was about one in three with uncertain and too expensive frequent responses.

The preferred waterfront options had a common element: they could be used by both visitors and residents. The individuals selecting waterfront options were willing to support their choices with higher local property taxes averaging about \$24 per year.

Perhaps the most critical question the second survey tried to answer was whether information changed the respondents' attitudes. The results are mixed. Respondents said they read the newsletters, but apparently information in the newsletters had little impact. Support for building eagle nests increased between the first and second survey, even though one of the newsletters noted that doing so was very unlikely to result in more eagles in the Oconto area. Those who seldom or never discussed newsletter topics was not greatly lower than those who frequently or occasionally discussed these items with friends. One could argue that there is little reason to believe that much change resulted.

Countering that impression, however, is the increased willingness to pay for improvements to the waterfront that benefit visitors and residents. It should be recalled that the second resident's survey was conducted just after Oconto's major employer announced its closing. One could argue that this timing should have drastically reduced the willingness of residents to have their money spent on discretionary expenditures. Yet the average amount that respondents indicated they would be willing to pay for improvements doubled. The general level of support for the waterfront, improvements, and the spending that inevitably accompanies development should be placed in the community's context of serious economic disruption.

Another question that this survey reviews is whether the newsletters were effective. The answer appears to be "no." As noted above, information in the newsletters did not appear to inform the responses to the survey questions. If

the newsletters were responsible for the respondents' willingness to double the amount they were willing to pay for waterfront improvements, their inability to inform residents on specific points of information would still constitute a bargain.

In switching from the planned educational forums to newsletters, the project responded to the preferences mentioned by the citizens in the first resident's survey. Newsletters are convenient. They demand nothing, they are readily accessible at any time. They are also easily ignored. Convenience, it seems, also has its price. A continuing debate in community development work may be whether it is better to affect hundreds of people to a slight extent or to have a much greater impact on a much smaller number. The newsletters, one could argue affected many people by creating support for the waterfront in particularly dark economic times, but it may prove difficult to argue for their efficacy in transmitting specific information.

The project used both broadly distributed newsletters that were effective in maintaining and increasing support for various waterfront options and strategies, and cultivated increased information for a core of interested citizens in the form of the advisory committee. This combination has been effective in that members of the advisory committee continue to organize projects identified in the visitors' and second residents' surveys that are feasible. Signage, wildlife observation points, shore fishing spots, are all being pursued. From the point of view of the advisory committee members, the project has just begun.

On a more positive note, the second survey clearly indicated which waterfront improvements had the greatest community support, and what the preferred strategy for waterfront development was. Attracting visitors is the top priority for the community strategy, followed closely by improvements that benefit local residents. The beauty of these two options is that they are often complementary. As the community increases its attractiveness to visitors, it also provides residents with those same desirable experiences. Also, specific projects to consider are provided in Table 13. The survey, in effect, provides a blueprint for future actions.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the purposes of the project was to collect information on the effect of the effort on the community. To accomplish this a second mail survey was conducted in January 1993 to respondents of the first resident survey. A survey was not randomly sent to Oconto area residents, since the intent was to determine if people's awareness, interest, or positions had changed.

Of the 433 mailed, 322 replied (8 were deceased) yielding an adjusted 75.8 percent response rate. A modified Dillman Total Survey Design method was generally used. A more detailed discussion of the survey methodology is contained in Appendix 1 of Silveira et al.

Surveys were used as a mechanism to solicit input from a wide spectrum of people regardless of their level of participation in waterfront activities. Thus, an additional survey objective was to garner more information on options respondents would support.

An Advisory Committee from the community provided substantial feedback on the pre-test of the survey instrument. They offered numerous improvements in wording to help clarify the questions. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A.

On the following pages, the responses to that survey are reported. The major sections include levels and changes in use and interest in the waterfront and Breakwater Park. Information is reported on the impact of the newsletters. Respondents are also asked to share what options they wished the community to pursue.

^{1/} Kevin Silveira, Ron Shaffer and Chris Behr, A Summary of Citizen Participation Methods for the Waterfront Development Project in Oconto, Wisconsin. Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension. Center for Community Economic Development Staff Paper 93.1, April 1993.

II. WATERFRONT USE AND INTEREST

The first section of the questionnaire posed questions about the level of use and interest in the Oconto waterfront area. TABLE 1 contains those responses. People were able to give more than one response, so the percentages will not sum to 100.

Although the percentages differ from the first resident survey, the ranking of frequency of visiting specific waterfront sites did not change between the first and second surveys. Breakwater Park followed by the Bayshore and the River between Holtwood Campground and the Park Street Bridge remain the top three sites visited.

The waterfront area visited most often also did not change between the first and second resident surveys. Breakwater Park and the Bayshore were the two top places visited (TABLE 2).

TABLE 1
OCONTO WATERFRONT SITES VISITED
(N = 322)

	Frequency	Percent
River from Suzie's Rapids to Holtwood Campground	94	29.2
Holtwood Campground to Park St. Bridge	179	55.6
Park St. Bridge downstream to Breakwater	120	37.3
Breakwater Park	232	72.0
Bayshore North & South of the Breakwater	188	58.4
Wetlands along the Bay	94	29.2
Have not visited the Oconto Waterfront	28	8.7

TABLE 2
WATERFRONT AREA VISITED MOST OFTEN
(N = 322)

	Frequency	Percent
River from Suzie's Rapids to Holtwood Campground	8	2.8
Holtwood Campground to Park St. Bridge	41	14.5
Park St Bridge downstream to Breakwater	21	7.4
Breakwater Park	127	45.0
Bayshore North & South of the Break Water	65	23.0
Wetlands along the Bay	7	2.5
Have not visited the Waterfront	13	4.6

To uncover the breadth of support and interest in the waterfront, both surveys asked about the respondent's opinion regarding the importance of the waterfront to the future of Oconto, and also their opinions about their friends and neighbors' assessment of the importance of the waterfront to the future of Oconto.

The opinions Oconto residents hold about the importance of the waterfront is dynamic. When people were asked how their interest in the waterfront had changed, 52.6 percent replied no change and 43.4 percent felt it had increased. The direct response to this question varied from a comparison of responses in the first and second survey.

Of the 265 people responding to this question on both surveys, 63.8 percent reported no change in their opinion regarding the importance of the waterfront, but over 49 percent still ranked it very important. About two thirds (14.3 percent) as many increased their ranking as reduced their ranking (21.9 percent).

The general pattern in both resident surveys was the same. The tendency was to estimate their neighbor's opinion of importance somewhat lower than their own. There was a minimal drop in the difference between the first and second survey ranking of "Very Important." The difference was 30 percent in the first survey and marginally smaller (28.5 percent) in the second survey (TABLE 3). At the "Important" ranking the difference declined from 17 percent to less than 10 percent. The narrowing of the perceived differences suggests increasing community agreement about the importance of the waterfront.

Over 55 percent of the respondents ranked their neighbor's view as identical to their own, while 42.3 percent ranked their neighbor's opinion as lower than their own. This level of agreement is slightly higher than in the first survey. The same respondents gave their neighbors the same rank 53.7 percent, a higher rank four percent and a lower rank 39 percent of the time in the first survey.

A comparison of the 234 respondents answering the ranking of their neighbors opinion in both surveys showed that 47 percent remained unchanged, 21.8 percent increased their ranking of their neighbors opinion, but 30.8 reduced their neighbors rating of the waterfront's importance.

TABLE 3
RANKING OF OWN AND NEIGHBOR'S OPINION OF IMPORTANCE OF
WATERFRONT TO OCONTO'S FUTURE

	Own		Neighbor	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very Important	169	59.5	81	31.0
Important	94	33.1	112	42.9
Neither Important or Unimportant	12	4.2	43	16.5
Not Too Important	3	1.1	18	6.9
Very Important	6	2.1	7	2.7
N =	284		261	

III. CHANGES AT BREAKWATER PARK

The first survey identified a high interest in Breakwater Park and interest in improvements in the Park. Several actions already being contemplated at the time of the first resident survey were completed before the second survey. The second survey, therefore, sought to determine citizens' awareness and approval of the park improvements.

The respondents gave strong approval to most of the Breakwater Park changes. Over 94 percent thought expanding and paving the parking lot had improved the park. Almost 94 percent thought the picnic shelter and bathrooms had improved the park. Almost six out of ten (57.7 percent) felt their enjoyment of the park had improved, 31.3 percent indicated no change, and only 2.3 percent felt their enjoyment had declined due to the changes. Several had no opinion.

Two questions were raised about possible large investments in the Breakwater Park area. The first related to dredging the river with an anticipated cost of \$1 million to the city, and the second was building a marina. TABLE 4 reports people's responses. Neither garnered more than a third of the respondents supporting the proposals. Uncertainty was the most frequent response.

While those who indicated that their most frequently visited waterfront site was between Park Street Bridge and the breakwater were more supportive of dredging, only 53 percent responded that they supported dredging. Frequent users of the river downstream from the Park Street Bridge supported the marina idea by 43 percent, while frequent users of Breakwater Park were less enthusiastic (34% supporting) about the marina.

TABLE 4
OPINIONS REGARDING MAJOR INVESTMENTS IN HARBOR
(N = 272)

	Dredging		Marina	
	#	%	#	%
Yes, because it will attract visitors	31	11.4	68	25.0
Yes, because it will reduce flood damage	44	16.2	na	na
Yes, because local residents can use it	na	na	24	8.8
No, because too expensive	84	30.9	63	23.2
No, because it changes the waterfront environment	13	4.8	43	15.8
I am uncertain	100	36.8	74	27.2

na = not asked.

A potential outcome of increasing use of the waterfront is a perceived decline in the quality of residents experience. One measure of this is a sense of congestion on the water at Breakwater Park. TABLE 5 indicates that while most have no opinion or no change, almost one in three felt congestion has increased.

TABLE 5

OPINIONS REGARDING CONGESTION ON THE WATER AT BREAKWATER PARK
(N = 266)

	Frequency	Percent
Has Increased	85	32.0
Hasn't Changed	32	13.5
Has Decreased	36	13.5
No Opinion	113	42.5

IV. RESPONSES TO NEWSLETTER & PRESS RELEASES

One of the major purposes of the project was to increase the amount of information and awareness in the community regarding the waterfront. While the original intentions were to use public meetings to increase awareness, the results of the first survey indicated that residents preferred written information rather than attending meetings.

A series of newsletters and press releases were used to share information with the respondents of the first survey and selected others in Oconto. More than seven out of ten (71.7 percent) remembered receiving the newsletter. The affirmative responses to remembering receiving specific newsletters varied. Eighty-one percent remember receiving the first newsletter, 73.3 percent remember receiving the second, 81.3 percent remembered receiving the third, and 78.1 percent remember receiving the fourth newsletter. The third and fourth newsletters discussed costs and economic impacts of waterfront changes.

Just over 44 percent indicated their overall awareness of waterfront options had increased during the study period (TABLE 6).

TABLE 6
CHANGES IN AWARENESS OF WATERFRONT OPTIONS
(N = 211)

	Frequency	Percent
Increased	93	44.1
Stayed the Same	117	55.5
Decreased	1	.5

The data (TABLE 7) indicates some effect on the level of discussion of issues raised in the newsletters. The number of people who discussed issues raised in the newsletters with friends on a frequent or occasional basis was 53.3 percent. Those who seldom or never discussed those issues accounted for 46.7 percent.

TABLE 7
 FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSING ISSUES RAISED IN
 NEWSLETTER WITH FRIENDS
 (N = 212)

	Frequency	Percent
Frequently	15	7.1
Occasionally	98	46.2
Seldom	59	27.8
Never	40	18.9

Four out of ten (41.3%) of the 179 people indicated they found all topics "equally interesting" in the first newsletter (TABLE 8). This is not surprising since there was a six month lag between mailing the first newsletter and mailing the questionnaire. However, 18.4 percent, the next highest response, found their neighbors rating of the importance of the waterfront "most interesting." This implies respondents interest in affirming their opinions.

For the second newsletter "all equally interesting" was again the most frequent response about newsletter topics (TABLE 9). "Changing water levels" was the most interesting topic for one third of those responding and ranked second.

The third newsletter also had topics that people found interesting (TABLE 10). It was the only newsletter where more than half (54.6%) of the respondents felt the topics were "all equally interesting." A distant second (14.9 %) and third (10.3%) were the topics "how visitors would change Oconto" and "spend money" respectively.

The topics in the fourth newsletter were also of general interest, since 44.4% indicated they found them "all equally interesting" (TABLE 11). "Multi-use (hike, bike, walk) trails" was the most interesting for 11.7% and "Breakwater expansion" was the most interesting for 10.5%.

The fact that people tended to pick the innocuous "All equally interesting" response could imply that the newsletters had little impact or that people simply did not differentiate that much between topics.

TABLE 8

MOST INTERESTING INFORMATION IN FIRST NEWSLETTER
(N = 179)

	Frequency	Percent
Others importance of the waterfront	33	18.4
Support for conservation options	21	11.7
Support for development options	24	13.4
Others environmental concerns	15	8.4
All equally interesting	74	41.3
Not interested in any	12	6.7

Nonresponse = 143

TABLE 9

MOST INTERESTING INFORMATION IN SECOND NEWSLETTER
(N = 161)

	Frequency	Percent
Zebra mussel	24	14.9
Purple Loosestrife	4	2.5
Changing water levels	54	33.5
All equally interesting	75	46.6
Not interested in any	4	2.5

Nonresponse = 161

TABLE 10

MOST INTERESTING INFORMATION IN THIRD NEWSLETTER
(N = 175)

	Frequency	Percent
Direct & indirect spending	16	9.1
How visitors spend money	18	10.3
How boaters spend money	8	4.6
How visitors would change Oconto	20	14.9
All equally interesting	95	54.3
Not interested in any	12	6.9

Nonresponse = 147

TABLE 11

MOST INTERESTING INFORMATION IN FOURTH NEWSLETTER
(N = 171)

	Frequency	Percent
Purchasing wetlands	14	8.2
Eagle nesting structures	4	2.3
Multi-use trails	20	11.7
Boardwalk in marsh	6	3.5
River markers	8	4.7
Breakwater expansion	18	10.5
Dredging river	16	9.4
All equally interesting	76	44.4
Not interested in any	9	5.3

Nonresponse = 151

One measure of the impact of the newsletters is how they might have changed people's opinions regarding the waterfront options being discussed. TABLE 12 displays those options and the change in support after reading the newsletter. For all seven options the proportion of respondents who were more supportive of an option exceeded those who were less supportive. The impact on people's support, however, probably is neutral since the "same" was the plurality for all but eagle nesting structures and river markers.

TABLE 12
CHANGE IN SUPPORT FOR SELECTED WATERFRONT OPTIONS
AFTER READING NEWSLETTER

	MORE		SAME		LESS		N
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Purchase wetlands from	33	22.3	83	56.1	31	21.6	148
Eagle nesting structures	64	43.5	54	36.7	29	19.7	147
Multi-use trails	64	38.5	57	38.5	27	18.2	148
Boardwalk in marsh	48	32.2	58	38.9	43	28.9	149
River navigation markers	63	42.9	59	40.1	25	17.0	147
Breakwater expansion	59	39.6	70	47.0	20	13.4	149
Dredging the river	40	27.6	71	49.0	34	23.4	145

Another measure of newsletter impact was effect on community discussion. When queried about the frequency of discussing waterfront environment and development options during 1992, 44.9 percent felt there was more discussion, 31.9 percent felt the discussion was about the same, and 21.9 percent didn't know. Just over one (1.3) percent felt it had declined.

V. CHOICES OF WATERFRONT OPTIONS

TABLE 13 presents two sets of information: 1) the tally of the top three preferences by the respondents, 2) the proportion of the respondents willing to make a non-zero contribution to pay for the option selected.

The top four options selected are interesting in the message they send. A multi-use trail can be enjoyed by both resident and visitor and reflects a newer tourism market. The shore fishing facilities also can be used by both resident and visitor and might reflect peoples wishes not to go through the hassle of getting a boat into/out of the water etc. to go fishing, or that many more people fish than own boats. The footbridge possibly reflects more of a visitor interest since Holtwood Campground is currently difficult to reach from the businesses along highway 41. That over one in five residents supported more informational signs for visitors shows an awareness of the problems of getting more visitors off the highway and to various sites in Oconto.

TABLE 13
TOP THREE PREFERRED WATERFRONT OPTIONS

	Total		Willingness to Pay Greater Than Zero	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Observation trail in marsh	39	12.1	29	9.0
Build multi-use trail biking, hiking, walking	108	33.5	81	25.2
Establish shore fishing facilities	105	32.6	77	23.9
Adopt & enforce safety laws along river	58	18.0	35	10.9
Signs for visitors to attractions	66	20.5	43	13.4
Picnic tables along river	52	16.1	32	9.9
Fish cleaning station Breakwater Park	37	11.5	24	7.5
Dredge river further upstream	50	15.5	42	13.0
Build eagle's nests in marsh	52	16.1	34	10.6
Purchase wetland for waterfowl habitat	42	13.0	29	9.0
Zoning to protect scenic waterfront property	52	16.1	35	10.9
Footbridge across river to Holtwood Park	97	30.1	61	18.9
Purchase land to expand Breakwater Park	36	11.2	35	10.9
Mark river channel	57	17.7	34	10.6
N =	322		322	

The respondents were asked to circle an amount they would be willing to pay in additional city taxes each year for the next ten years to support the option they selected. The average amount for 272 people responding was \$24.63. In the first survey people were given three options to spend money on and the averages ranged from \$10.37 to \$12.60. While not a majority of the total number of respondents, over half of those selecting the top three options were willing to spend money to implement them. Eight options had 60-69 percent willing to spend money, three options had 70-79 percent, and one each in the 80 and 90 percent level of support.

Of the 89 people willing to pay at least \$20, 29 percent ranked dredging among their top three options. But 43% and 38% of the same people ranked trails and shore fishing respectively in their top three.

TABLE 14 links respondents willingness to pay with their most preferred option. The number of respondents may vary from TABLE 13 which counted all respondents picking an option. Again, caution must be used in interpreting these data since so few responded to many of the questions. Some of the respondents are apparently willing to pay to see their preference implemented even though there is little general support for the idea. The top three average amounts willing to pay (TABLE 14) all ranked relatively low as simple top three preferences (TABLE 13). Purchase land to expand Breakwater Park had the highest average amount willing to pay, but ranked 14th out of 14 options in general interest. Dredging was the second highest amount willing to pay, but ranked 10th out of 14 in the general priorities. Purchase wetlands for waterfowl ranked third highest in average amount willing to pay, but only 12th out of 14 options in general support.

TABLE 14
TOP THREE PREFERRED WATERFRONT OPTIONS

	N	Average Amount
Observation trail in marsh	12	\$ 8.33
Build multi-use trail biking, hiking, walking	37	25.93
Establish shore fishing facilities	45	20.80
Adopt & enforce safety laws along river	20	5.50
Signs for visitors to attractions	10	27.00
Picnic tables along river	6	9.17
Fish cleaning station Breakwater Park	7	16.43
Dredge river further upstream	28	34.86
Build eagle's nests in marsh	10	11.50
Purchase wetland for waterfowl habitat	10	31.50
Zoning to protect scenic waterfront property	16	14.69
Footbridge across river to Holtwood Park	31	18.55
Purchase land to expand Breakwater Park	12	43.33
Mark river channel	18	12.78

TABLE 15 displays the top reason people selected their preferred option. If two reasons tied for top, both are reported. A general sense of peoples thinking is reflected in the reason for their selections. Attracting tourism was the primary reason for choosing seven options, enjoying it personally for choosing five options, improving the community for choosing four options, improving the environment for choosing three options, and creating economic activity was the reason for choosing one option.

TABLE 15
REASONS FOR SELECTING OPTION

Option	Top Reason for Selecting
Observation trail in marsh	Enjoy using it
Build multi-use trail: biking, hiking, walking	Enjoy using it
Establish shore fishing facilities	Enjoy using it, attract tourists
Adopt & enforce safety laws along river	Community is better place
Signs for visitors to attractions	Attract tourists
Picnic tables along river	Community is better, attract tourists
Fish cleaning station Breakwater Park	Community is better, attract tourists
Dredge river further upstream	Create economic benefits, enjoy using it
Build eagle's nests in marsh	Improves environment, attract tourists
Purchase wetland for waterfowl habitat	Improves environment
Zoning to protect scenic waterfront property	Improves environment
Footbridge across river to Holtwood Park	Enjoy using it
Purchase land to expand Breakwater Park	Attract tourists, improves community
Mark river channel	Attract tourists, improves community

People were asked to offer their first and second strategy goals for Oconto. Those are reported in TABLE 16. Again the preference for increasing tourism followed closely by increased improvement for residents is evident. The interest in main street commerce also shows an activity that will affect both visitors and residents.

TABLE 16
FIRST AND SECOND STRATEGY PROPOSALS
(N = 322)

	First Choice		Second Choice	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Increase environmental protection	38	11.8	38	11.8
Increase improvements for residents	71	22.0	78	24.2
Increase tourism	84	26.1	67	20.8
Increase Main Street commerce	54	16.8	48	14.9
No change desired	8	2.5	21	6.5
Reduce tourism	2	0.6	0	0.0
Reduce spending on city projects	33	10.2	30	9.3
Relax environmental regulations	5	1.6	12	3.7