

Bigfork, Montana

Steering Committee

2005

Community Planning Survey

Methodology
&
Results

Executive Summary

Thirteen years ago the citizens of Bigfork created a community/neighborhood master plan for the purpose of providing a vision for the future and a plan for thoughtful and orderly growth. The process has helped preserve the unique quality of our area.

In early 2005, the Bigfork Steering Committee reformed as it became clear the passage of time had rendered the Bigfork planning document out of date. Steering Committee membership was open to all, and those who attended three consecutive Steering Committee meetings were granted voting rights on all matters before the committee. The new requirement of Montana code that all county Master Plans be updated by October 1, 2006, added to the importance of revising the Bigfork plan with the best information obtainable. As a result, plans were formulated to conduct a comprehensive community planning survey and undertake a number of community information and consensus building events designed to gather the information needed, and to subsequently provide it as input to the Flathead County Planning Board and the Flathead County Commissioners as they revised the Flathead County Master Plan. The information would be made available to Lake County Commissioners as well. The survey was mailed to area voters, residents and landowners in March 31, 2005. It was returned, and the results tabulated by August 2005. The remainder of this document describes:

- Process used to develop, distribute, score and assess the survey
- Results

Survey results merit special attention. As will be seen in the data (below), Bigfork area residents resolutely favor preservation of the charm and character of the local environment and view community planning/zoning by an elected local body as an essential step in that process. Respondents were unequivocally supportive of maintaining Bigfork as a safe and secure community with a rural, small-town environment. Capitalizing on the natural beauty of the area was also rated very highly.

It is important to note that the survey results can not be characterized as anti-growth. Rather, respondents seemed to understand that growth is inevitable, and this growth would need to serve the needs of a diverse group of citizens. The imperative was to plan for it and do so in a manner that protects for all of us those well-documented characteristics that make Bigfork the wonderful place to live that it is. Thus, based on the survey, planned and responsible growth consistent with Bigfork's character is the unequivocal message of Bigfork area citizens.

2005 Bigfork Survey Methodology

Survey Questions

- Both 1992 and 1993 short and long surveys served as starting point for 2005 survey
- Additional questions derived from
 - Similar community efforts in Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma & Colorado (Web search)
 - Several Subcommittee meetings (June 2004 thru Feb 2005)
 - Open and inclusive membership (public urged to participate)
 - Consensus
 - Bigfork Land Use Advisory Committee (BLUAC) input
 - Review/input by community planning professional (Janet Cornish)
 - Review by sample group: Time and Content

Survey Area

- Flathead County school districts 38 and 4 (Bigfork schools) and Lake County school districts 38J and 73. Lake County school districts were included as these property owners pay taxes to the Bigfork schools and their children attend these schools.

- Premise was one survey per household regardless of the number of properties owned, or number of registered voters.

Mailing List

- Property tax rolls and voter registration lists for the above school districts contained over 30,000 names, property and mailing addresses.
- Property tax lists were edited to delete names of multiple properties owned by an individual, business or homeowner's association.
- Voter registration lists were edited to a single name at each property address (e.g., husband's name retained, wife and voting age children's names were deleted).
- The phone book was utilized to aid in identification when multiple family names were encountered.
- The edited names and addresses from property tax rolls and voter registration lists were printed on mailing labels.
- The property tax roll names and addresses were cross checked with the voter registration list names and addresses and the duplicates were removed from the voter registration mailing labels. This procedure was adopted as the voter registration list was 3 years old and the property tax rolls were determined to be more accurate.
- The final number of mailing labels resulted in 6,226 surveys being sent.

Survey Tabulation

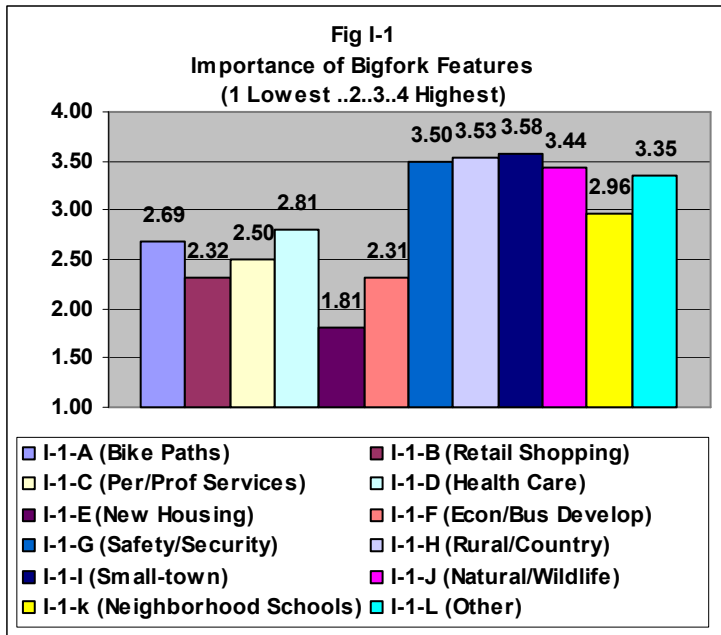
- Returned completed and undeliverable surveys were held in a secure area at the Bigfork Post Office.
- Undeliverable surveys (491) were researched and new surveys were sent (33) when current addresses were found in the phone book or by calling the individual.
- Completed surveys were picked up and returned to the post office by two members of the survey committee.
- Completed surveys were stamped with sequential numbers for identification during the tally process. The tally sheets were also numbered sequentially for tracking and audit purposes.
- Each survey was initialed by the person(s) recording the responses on the tally sheets. The tally sheet was also signed by the person(s) entering the responses on the tally sheet. This process provided an audit trail.
- At the end of each work session, all surveys and tally sheets were returned to the post office for safe keeping.
- Upon completion of each tally sheet, the results were entered into an Excel program and e-mailed to both Don Loranger and Sue Hanson to insure data integrity. Each tally sheet was signed by the person (s) entering the data and/or who typed the survey comments.
- Survey comments will be compiled and placed in the Bigfork library for public review along with maps of the current Bigfork Land Use area.
- Completed tally sheets, surveys, undeliverable surveys and copies of computer data were boxed and stored at the Flathead County Records storage facility.
- 60+ volunteers were involved in the tally process.

The Results

Section I: General

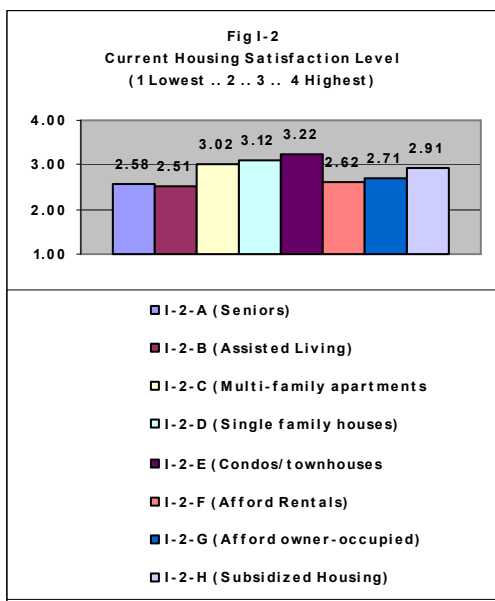
Section I consisted of 15 questions which addressed a wide spectrum of community facility and structure issues related to ambiance, functional requirements, and governmental structures as they pertain to zoning and planning.

In question I-1, survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of a variety of community characteristics on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest). As shown below (Figure I-1), Small Town Environment, Rural/County



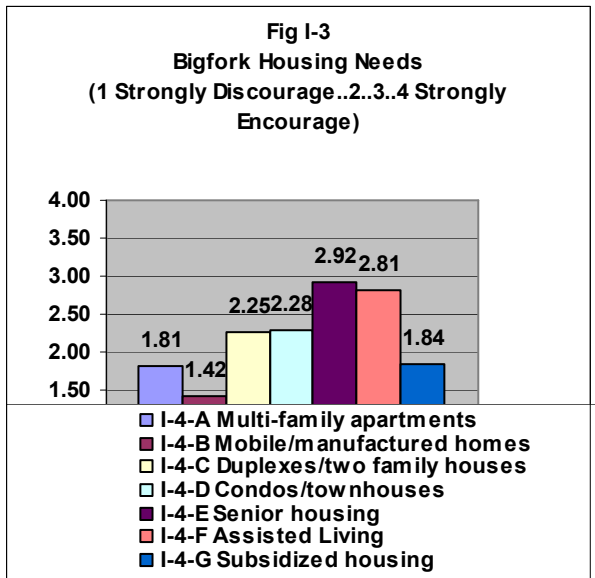
Environment, Safety/Security, and Natural/ Wildlife Environment were all strongly supported in the 3.5 range. New housing, Economic Development and Retail Shopping received the lowest scores. Consistent with these results, when asked to choose the two most important features from the list, 76.6 percent of respondents cited Small Town Environment, Rural/ County Environment, Natural Environment/Wildlife Habitat, and Safety/Security as the most important features of greater Bigfork. Personal/Professional Services (1.1%), New Housing (2.1%) and Retail Shopping (2.2%) received the lowest scores in this area.

Question I-2 listed the full spectrum of housing types and asked respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with the availability of each type. All housing types received at least a midrange score of 2.5 or higher (Fig I-2) with Assisted Living Facilities (2.51), Senior Housing (2.58), Affordable Rentals (2.62), and Affordable Owner

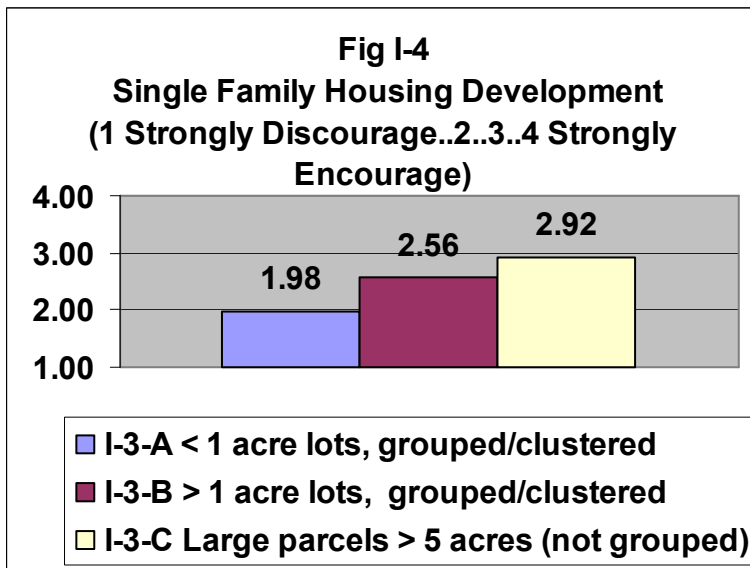


Occupied (2.71) posting the lowest scores of the eight categories, and thereby indicating a modest level of support for additional housing in those areas.

The perceived need, or lack thereof, for additional housing is fortified by the results of question I-4 (as shown in Fig I-3) below. The need for Senior Housing and Assisted Living Facilities received the highest and relatively strong support while the need for Mobile/Manufactured Homes, Multi-family Apartments and Subsidized housing received little support. The raw scores of 2.25 and 2.28 for Duplex/two family houses, and Condos/townhouses, respectively, do indicate modest support in these areas.



An assessment of Single Family Housing needs (or lack thereof) is found in Figure I-4. Only un-clustered developments of 5 acres or greater received positive support (2.92 on a scale of 1 to 4). Clustered Homes on more than 1 acre received more support (2.56) than did Clustered Homes on less than one acre (1.98)—the latter representing a modest level of discouragement when compared to the other two categories. In a related question on the 1993 survey (Land Use Questions #16), eighty percent (80%) of the participants rejected the notion of reducing parcel sizes in their area.

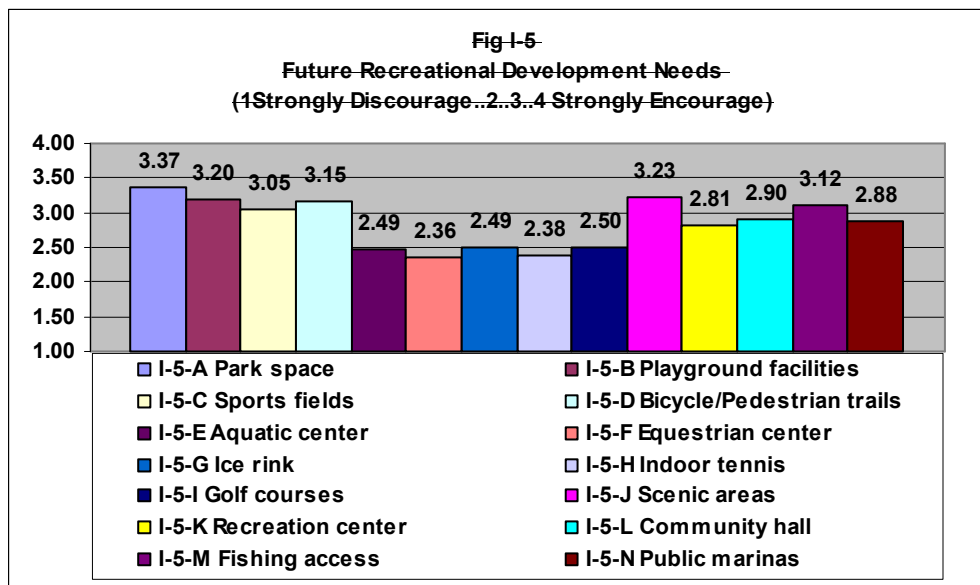


While the data presented in Figures I-2, I-3 and I-4 do reflect the views of survey participants, caution must be

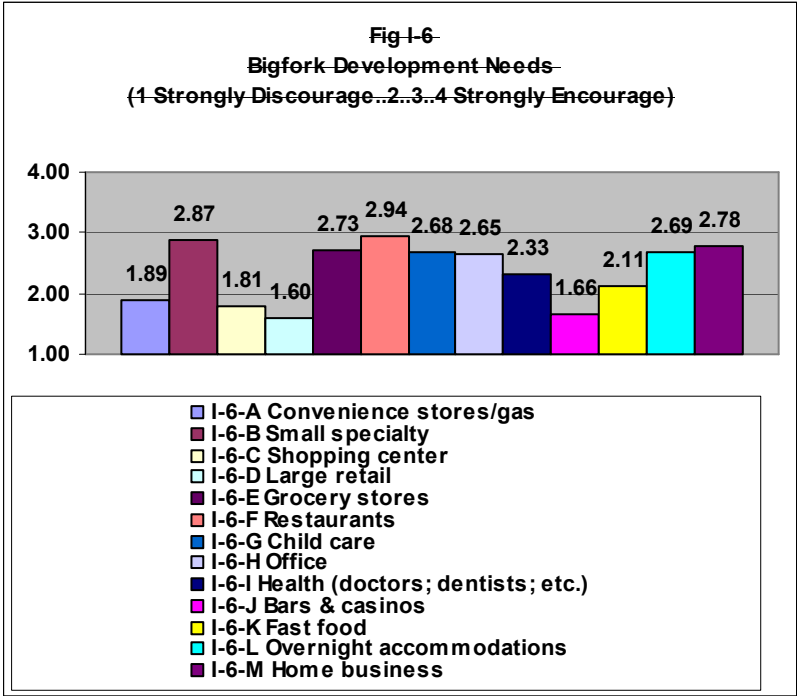
used before using these data as the sole guideposts for identifying Bigfork housing needs. As will be discussed later in this analysis, the age (64% over age 55) and economic status (97% land owners) of survey participants may well reflect a bias in this area. Moreover, for those survey participants already housed in an appropriate manner (and most are based on age and ownership status), it is reasonable to expect they will demonstrate only limited support for housing outside of their anticipated needs. Written comments on housing needs covered a wide-spectrum of opinion ranging from “let the market decide,” to a many centered on preserving the “character” of Bigfork.

The results of questions I-5 & I-6 have been included below as Figures I-5 & I-6 respectively. However, when the actual survey was printed, the final printed copy resulted in some misalignment between the available choices and corresponding blanks. As a result, it was difficult to accurately score these two survey questions. However, as this difficulty was highlighted to those compiling the survey results, tabulators were able to give this area extra attention. The Steering Committee has concluded that the results are generally accurate and certainly reflect the basic trends established by survey participants. This conclusion is fortified by the fact that the responses to these two questions do not appear to be counterintuitive. Nonetheless, the titles of these two slides are in strike through font as a means to highlight this difficulty.

In Figure I-5, those areas associated with scenic beauty, sports fields and broadly based recreational activities (fishing, etc) received the strongest support while more narrowly defined areas (Aquatic and Equestrian Centers, Ice Rink, etc.) received only neutral support.



Similarly, in addressing Bigfork Development Needs, Figure I-6 depicts encouragement for Small Specialty Shops, Restaurants, Home Businesses, Grocery Stores, and Child Care Facilities. Caution should be used before giving too much credence to the strength of support (2.78) for Home Businesses. This category was the last choice on the list and the aforementioned misalignment problem could have resulted in some unintended votes in this area.



In terms of support for various “conservation areas,” survey results (Fig I-7) are consistent with trends already highlighted that indicate a general preference for maintaining the pastoral setting of Bigfork and its surrounding area. However, as with all areas in the survey, it is important to remember that respondents did not have cost information when selecting their preferences. Thus, while certain areas received very strong support, the costs of actually pursuing some of these improvements would doubtlessly diminish public ardor. Conversely, as Bigfork is an unincorporated entity, many such improvements are pursued by civic and religious organizations, The Bigfork Development Corporation, and private benefactors. Comments in this section are generally consistent with the data presented.

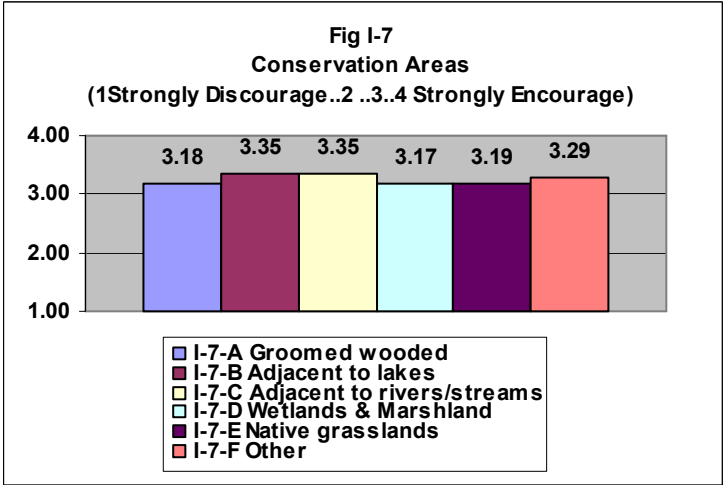
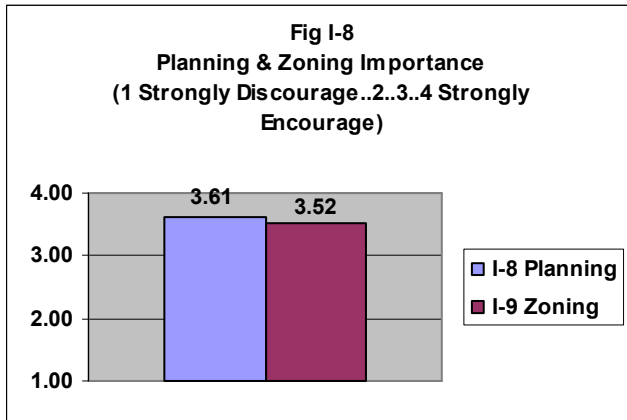
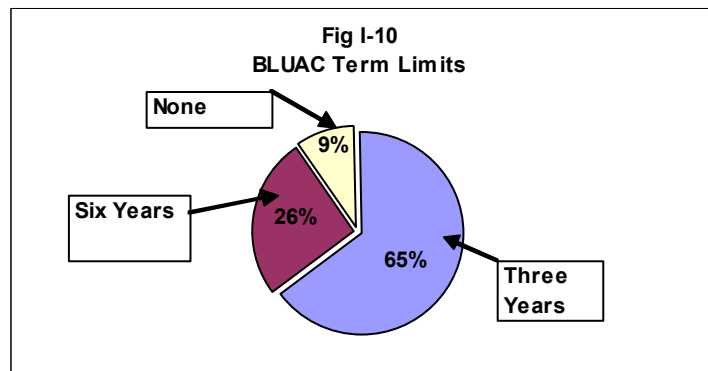
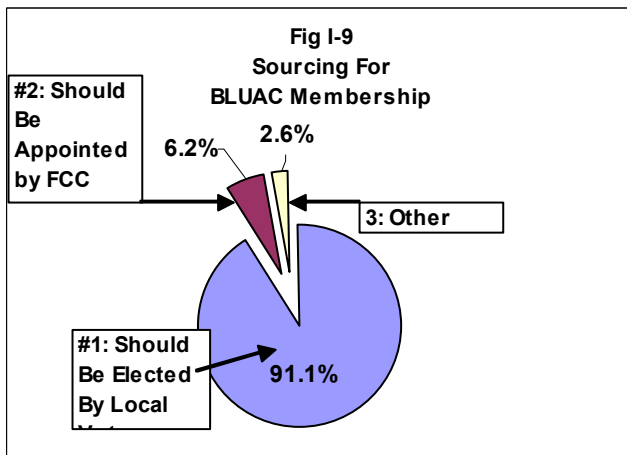


Figure I-8 (below) represents the results of questions I-8 and I-9. As is clear from the graph, respondents expressed very positive support for the notion that planning and zoning are essential steps in ensuring a positive future for Bigfork. It is noteworthy that the response (3.61) to question I-8 (planning) received the highest score of all questions asked in the survey.

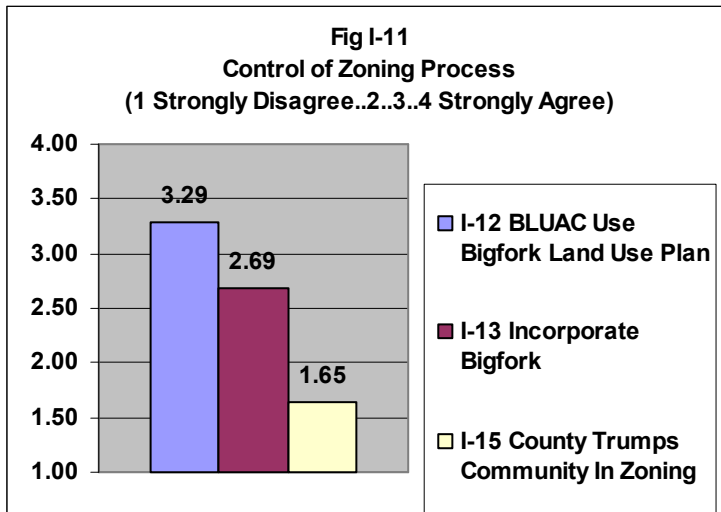


Figures I-9 and I-10 represent respondents' views on defined aspects of the existing zoning and planning process. Consistent with the historical precedent of the Boston Tea Party and the more recent 1993 Bigfork Master Plan, respondents expressed overwhelming support (91.1%) for having members of the Bigfork Land Use Advisory Committee (BLUAC) elected to office instead of the current method of appointment by the Flathead County Commissioners. This figure is up considerably from the 1993 survey result (General #5) of seventy-one percent (71%) favoring elected BLUAC members. Additionally, 65% of respondents felt that BLUAC members should have three-year terms with 26% supporting six-year term limits.



Some may argue that this is a Flathead County issue and the inputs of Lake County residents should be discounted. Interestingly enough, an analysis of the data reveals this issue as transparent to governmental boundaries. When confining the results to Flathead County residents only, the results were very similar: 90.6% Elected; 6.8% appointed; 65% three-year term limit; 25% six-year term limit.

Questions I-12, I-13 and I-15, as depicted in Fig I-11, continue with the planning theme. Respondents registered strong support (3.29) for requiring the BLUAC to use the Bigfork Master Plan as the guiding document when making planning and zoning determinations. Support for incorporation of Bigfork as a means to more thoroughly control the planning and zoning process was modestly positive (2.69), but the median score in this area was a more positive 3.0. There is very little support (1.65) for the idea that county zoning determinations should take precedent over the planning and zoning preferences of the local community. Here too we find consistent views between overall survey participants and those who may be regarded as closer to this particular issue. Of those respondents who lived in areas A or B (generally inclusive of potential incorporation boundaries), survey results were marginally different on the need to use the Bigfork Master Plan (3.35) as a guiding document and support for incorporation of Bigfork (2.7). On the question of whether or not county zoning should trump community zoning, residents of areas A and/or B recorded 1.64--a statistically insignificant difference from the 1.65 expressed by the survey respondents at large. Taken separately, these



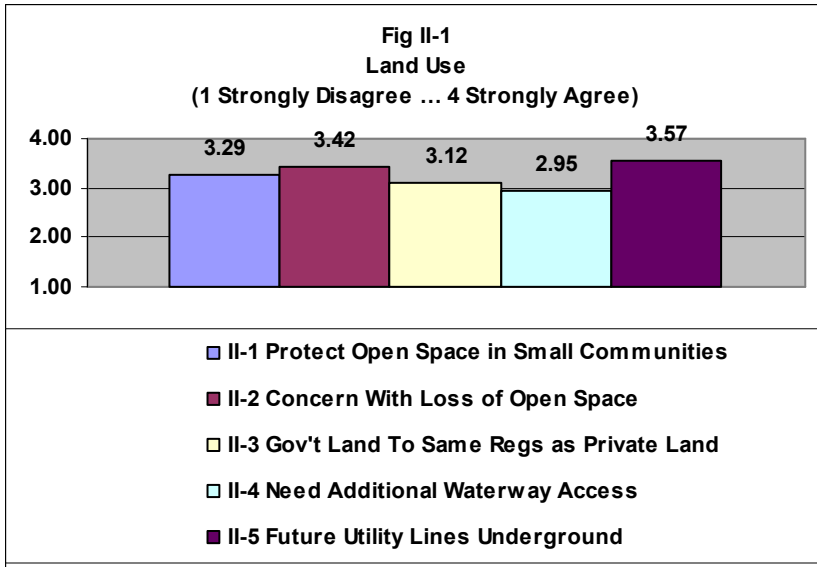
responses demonstrate very strong support for community based planning and zoning similar to the 1993 result for a related question (General #10) in which seventy-seven percent (77%) of those surveyed favored area zoning. Though the question dealing with incorporation of Bigfork posted only a modestly positive response, it is compelling to note that under the Constitution for the State of Montana, community as opposed to county based planning and zoning can only be achieved through the political mechanism of an incorporated community, or through cooperation with county commissioners who are responsive to the community. On the other hand, similar to the earlier developmental questions, respondents were asked to give their views without

any access to cost information. What, if any, the additional tax burden would be for incorporation, and whether or not area citizens would be willing to pay it, will need to await further exploration.

Question I-14 asked what the incorporation boundaries of Bigfork should be. Three-hundred seventy-nine (#379) respondents provided comments with forty-three (#43) (11%) providing negative comments on the wisdom of incorporating, or at least asking for cost information before deciding. The actual suggested boundaries covered the wide range of options, to include prefix 837, postal code 59911, Bigfork Village—and most every combination in between imaginable.

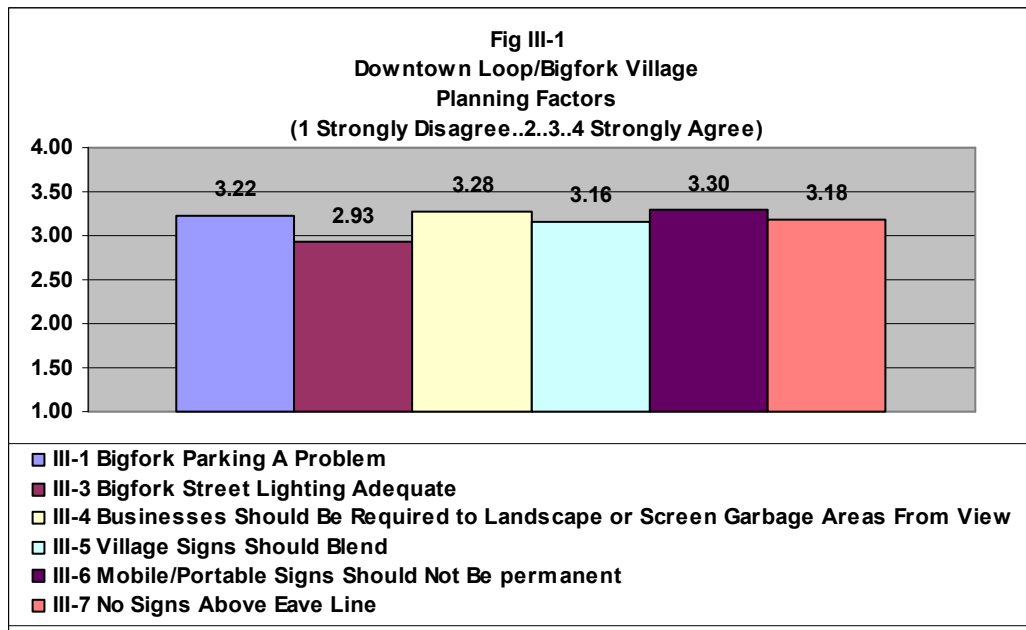
Section II: Land Use Questions

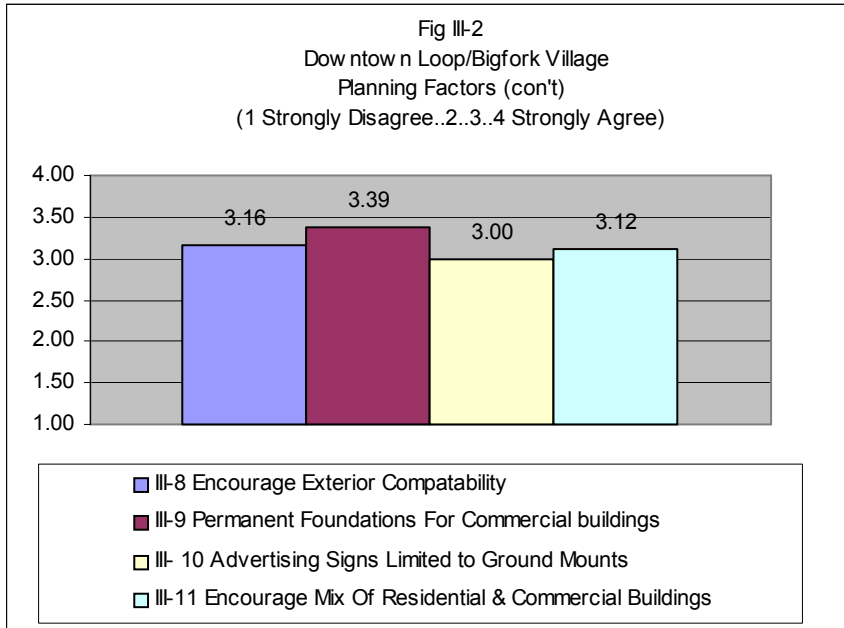
Responses to land use questions (Fig II-1), ranging from a high of 3.57 to a low of 2.95, reveal generally strong support for all categories included in the question. Placement of future utility lines underground received the highest rating (3.57) while need for additional waterway access posted 2.95—the lowest of the five areas, but nonetheless a score of considerable strength. The above score on a perceived requirement for underground utilities is consistent with the 1993 survey results (Land Use Questions #28) as eighty-five percent (85%) of those surveyed favored underground utilities.



Section III: Downtown Loop Bigfork Village

Figures III-1 and III-2 depict the scores associated with ten separate planning factors as they would apply to Bigfork Village. Again, the responses were not cost constrained.





All of the areas scored at the “agree” level with the exception of the adequacy of Bigfork street lighting, which at 2.92 scored just under “agree.” Taken as a whole, these responses reflect a strong desire to keep and/or improve the current village atmosphere of Bigfork.

Anticipating the relatively high concern about parking in the Bigfork Village (3.22), Question III-2 asked for written suggestions on how to solve this problem. The response rate was a stout forty-eight percent (48%), or seven hundred forty-three (743) specific comments. Representative comments are included below.

- Above ground parking garage
- Underground parking garage
- Shuttle from school lot to downtown during summer months
- Limited employee parking
- Electric Ave (one-way) with two-side diagonal parking
- Make downtown pedestrian area

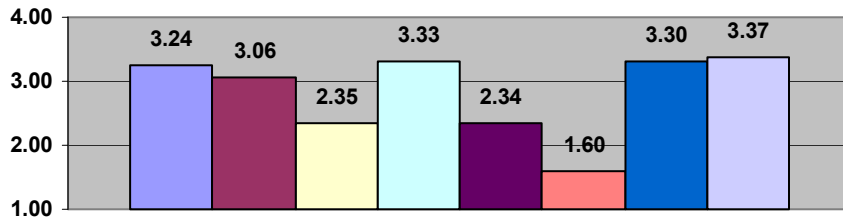
The 1993, sixty-seven percent (67%) of survey participants favored a requirement for additional village parking before approving additional commercial facilities.

Section IV: Outside the Loop

These questions explored various issues pertaining to area aesthetics as well as location-defined development questions. The specific results are easily gained from Fig IV-1 and Fig IV-2.

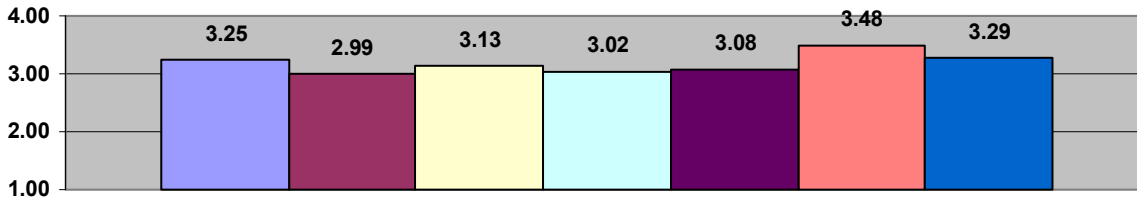
Generally, respondents showed less than positive support for additional commercial development in the specific areas cited in this section: Holt Drive between Flathead Bank and Eagle Bend; Hwy 35 from Burger Town south to boundary between Flathead and Lake County line; Hwy 83 corridor between Rocky Mountain Roadhouse to boundary between Flathead and Lake Counties. A determination of just where additional commercial development would be encouraged is not addressed in the survey. Without exception, aesthetic issues (e.g., mobile/portable signs, screened garbage collection facilities, signage requirements, etc.) all received very positive support.

Fig IV-1
Community Planning Factors
(Outside Loop)
(1 Strongly Disagree...2...3..4 Strongly Agree)



- IV-1 Preclude "Strip Malls"
- IV-2 No Additional Holt Drive Development Between Flathead Bank and Eagle Bend
- IV-3 Allow Hwy 35 Commercial Development From Burgertown to Lake County Line
- IV-4 No Mobile Signs as Permanent Displays
- IV-5 Allow Hwy 83 Commercial Development between RM Roadhouse and Lake County Line
- IV-6 No Requirement For New Commercial Buildings To Have Underground Utilities
- IV-7 Require Landscaped Buffer Zone For New Commercial Buildings Adjacent To Highway
- IV-8 Require Commercial Garbage Facilities to Be Contained/Screened From View

Fig IV-2
Community Planning Factors (Outside Loop) (con't)
(1 Strongly Disagree...2...3..4 Strongly Agree)



- IV-9 Require County to Screen Garbage Sites From Sight
- IV-10 New commercial construction should include sidewalks.
- IV-11 Signs should be constructed of natural materials with natural colors throughout the village.
- IV-12 New advertising signs should be limited to ground mounts (no pole mounts).
- IV-13 Advertising signs should not be constructed above the eave line of commercial buildings.
- IV-14 Billboards should not be allowed in the Bigfork Zoning District.
- IV-15 Highway advertising signs should be limited to 14 feet in height.

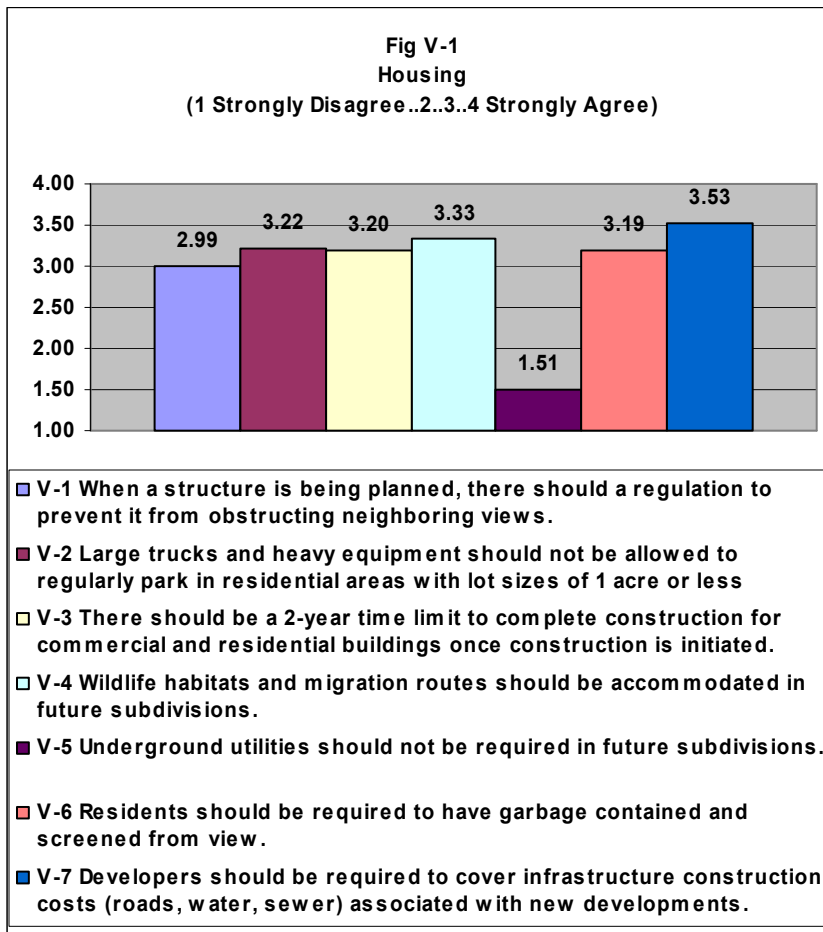
The responses in Section IV lead to the conclusion that when confronting growth issues, survey participants feel that maintaining the pastoral atmosphere of Bigfork and the surrounding area are imperatives of significant importance. However, the results do not really indicate an indictment of growth and economic development. Rather, the blend of responses points to support for growth as long as it does not unduly impinge on the overriding greater good of maintaining the essential character of the area.

Section V: Housing

Consistent with questions in other sections that touched on these same issues, respondents give solid support to maintaining the pleasant atmosphere enjoyed by area residents. Pertaining to new construction, the following concepts all received strong support (Fig V-1):

- A requirement for completion within two-years (3.20)
- Not limiting neighboring views (2.99)
- Prohibiting large trucks/heavy equipment from being routinely parked in residential areas of 1 acre or less
- Protecting wildlife habitats (3.33)
- Using contained/screened garbage collection sites (3.19)

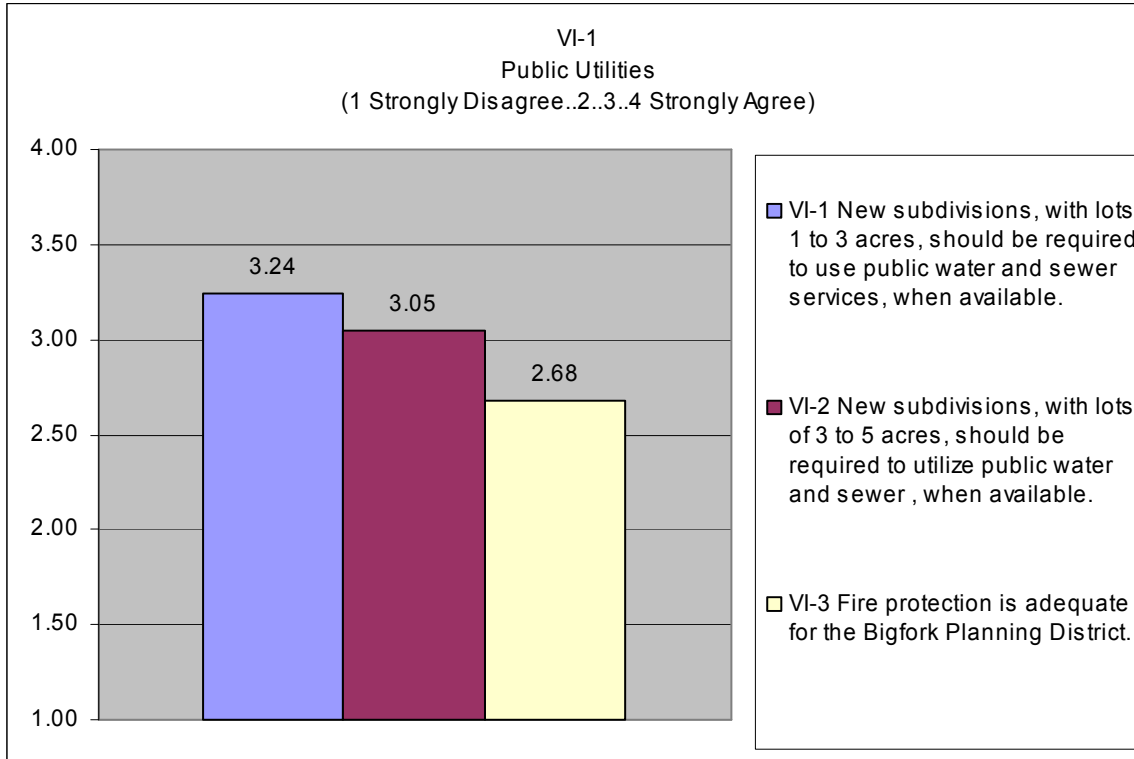
Mandatory provision of underground utilities was also heavily favored though the question was posed in an inverted fashion such that the low score of 1.51 reflects positive support for the concept. A requirement for developers to defray the full cost of their infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer) received the strongest support (3.53) in this section.



Section VI: Public Utilities

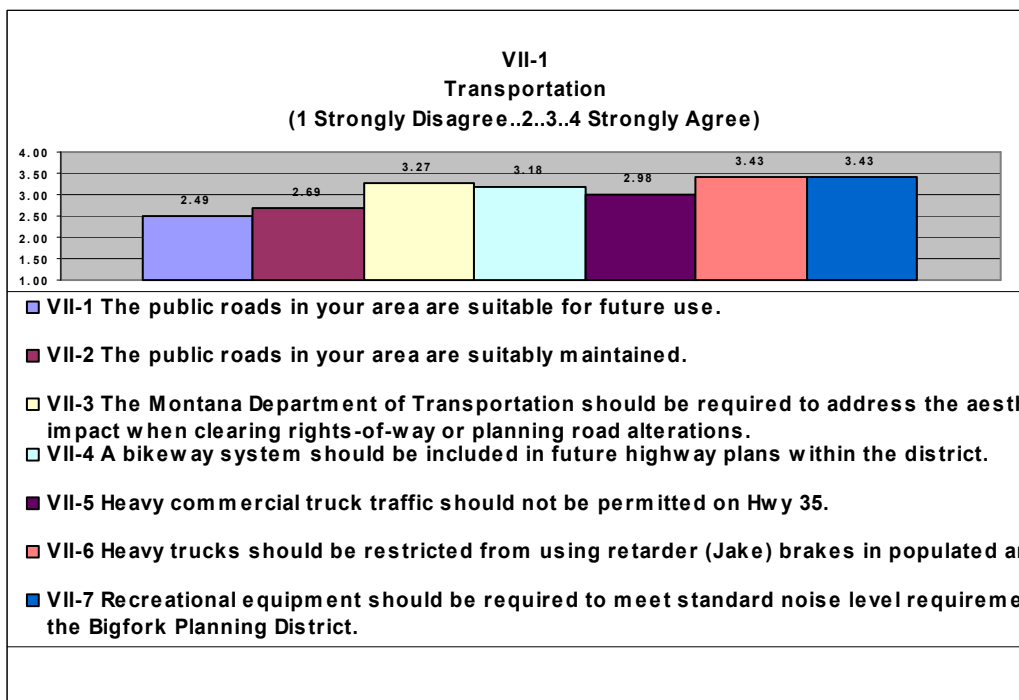
No doubt sensitive to a variety of environment issues currently before the public, respondents generally supported the concept of new subdivisions being required to use public utilities (Figure VI-1). Though the survey only listed two selections in this area (subdivisions with lots of 1 to 3 acres, and subdivisions with lots of 3 to 5 acres), the data show a preference for a requirement to use available public utilities when lot sizes decrease (density increases). The adequacy of area fire protection received slightly more than neutral

support. Though the question did not delve into specifics, survey comments support the notion that this is a question of capacity and not competence.



Section VII: Transportation

Here too we find consistent support for protecting the serenity of Bigfork and the surrounding area. Per Fig VII-1, consideration of aesthetics when planning roadways (3.27), incorporating a bikeway system in future highway plans (3.18),



highway plans (3.18), restricting commercial trucks from use of Hwy 35 (2.98), prohibiting use of “retarder” (Jake) brakes in populated areas (3.43), and requiring recreational vehicles to stay within standard noise thresholds (3.43) all received positive support. The current road system (2.49) and provision for its maintenance was assessed (2.69) as adequate.

Despite the fact that respondents generally felt public roadways were generally suitable for future use (2.49 at Figure VII-1), and suitable maintained (2.69 at Figure VII-1), several comments were made in these areas.

Roads frequently cited as unsuitable are:

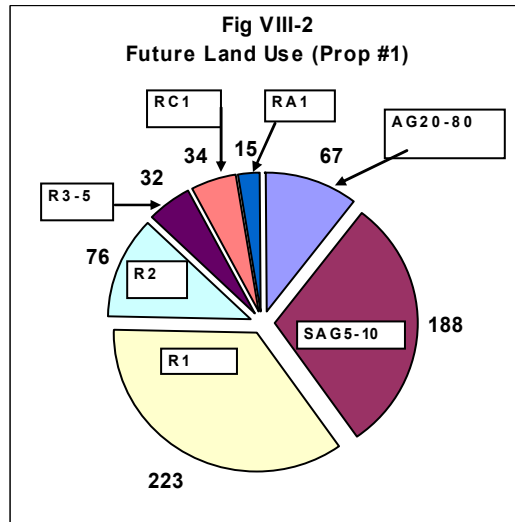
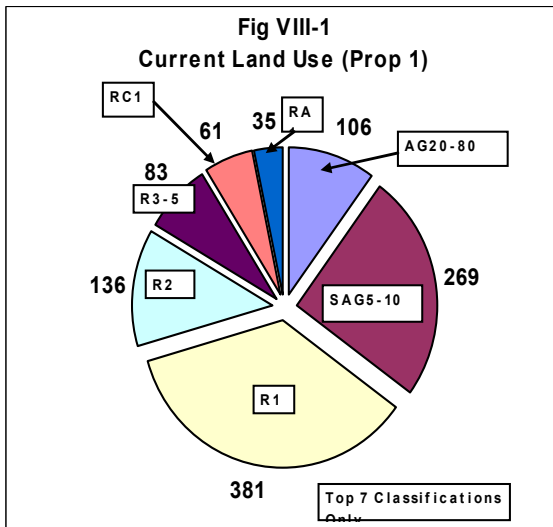
- Holt Drive
- Bigfork Stage Road
- Hwy 35
- Chapman Hill Road
- La Brant Road
- Ferndale Drive
- Yenne Point Road
- Hanging Rock Road
- Echo Lake Road

Not surprisingly, there is some similarity to the list of roads assessed as maintained most poorly:

- Hwy 35 (cited most frequently)
- Hwy 209

Table 1 Land Use Classifications		
Code	Description	Size
AG-20 to AG-80	Large Agricultural Tracts	20 acres and up
SAG-5 to SAG- 10	Suburban Agricultural	5 acres through 19 acres
R-1	Suburban Residential,	1 acre minimum (43.5K)
R-2	Suburban Residential	20K sq ft
R-3 to R-5	Urban Residential	10K sq ft to 5.4 K
RC-1	Residential Cluster: Master Plan community, Gross Density of One Unit Per Acre	
RA-1	Residential Apartment: Multi-Family & Non-Residential Use	
B-1	Neighborhood business	
B-2 through B7, BR-2 and BR-4	Business: general, community, resort, tourist, rural area commercial	
CCC and CVR	Commercial: rural area, small scale intersections, rural area intersection of two state highways: village	
I-1 & I-2	Industrial: Light and Heavy	
P	Public: schools, public buildings, parks, open space	

- Chapman Hill Road

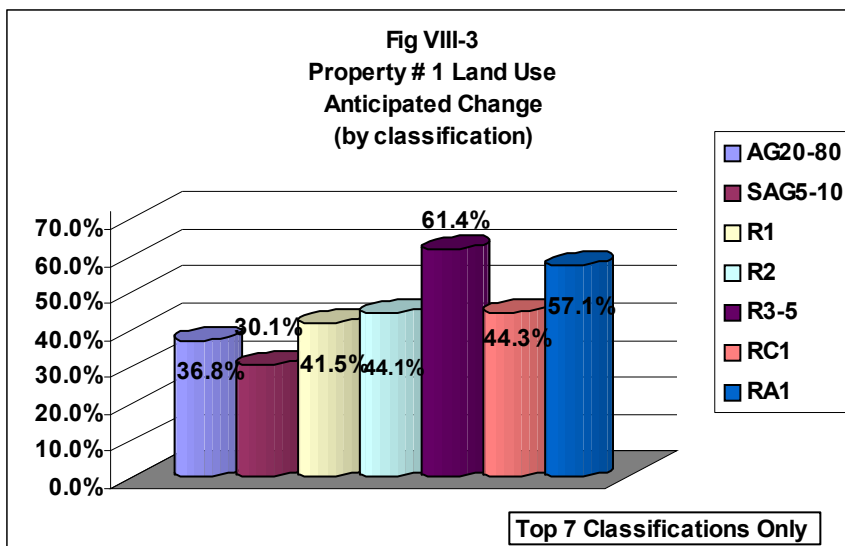


- Holt Drive
- Bigfork Village

Section VIII: Present and Future Land Use

Figure VIII-1 depicts the zoning classifications (see also Table 1 above) for the primary property of survey participants. For the same property, Figure VIII-2 depicts their zoning expectations for future use of the property. From a proportional perspective, note that the relative sizes of the pie slices remain consistent between current and future use, which could give the impression property owners anticipate little change in the use of their property over time. However, a closer examination of the numbers of participants that marked each future use area (outside edge or each pie slice) reveals considerably fewer property owners were in the future area compared to the same classification for current use.

Figure VIII-3 dramatically demonstrates this change. For example, of those owners whose primary property is currently zoned AG 20-80, there are 36.8% fewer owners who believe their property will have that same zoning classification in the future, and 61.4% fewer owners of property zoned R3-5 who believe it will remain so in the future. Similar trends are readily apparent in Figure VIII-3. These figures are



considerably higher than those recorded in the 1993 survey when only twenty-four percent (24%) of respondents anticipated a future change in the use of their land. In sum, these current data demonstrate the potential for considerable turmoil in terms of the land use expectations of land owners. Taken together with the strong support of community zoning and planning already cited in Figures I-8 through I-11, this forecast of property use turmoil places an even greater urgency on the need for Bigfork's future to be guided by a community planning approach that is thoughtful, well-measured and fair.

(Note: More turmoil than actually warranted may be indicated by these data as some respondents could have merely failed to fill in the "future use" blank, thereby registering a forecast change for their property from its current use. This could partially explain the high turmoil forecast in the RC1, RA1 and R3-5 areas when it is difficult to imagine to what the owners think they may be changing.)

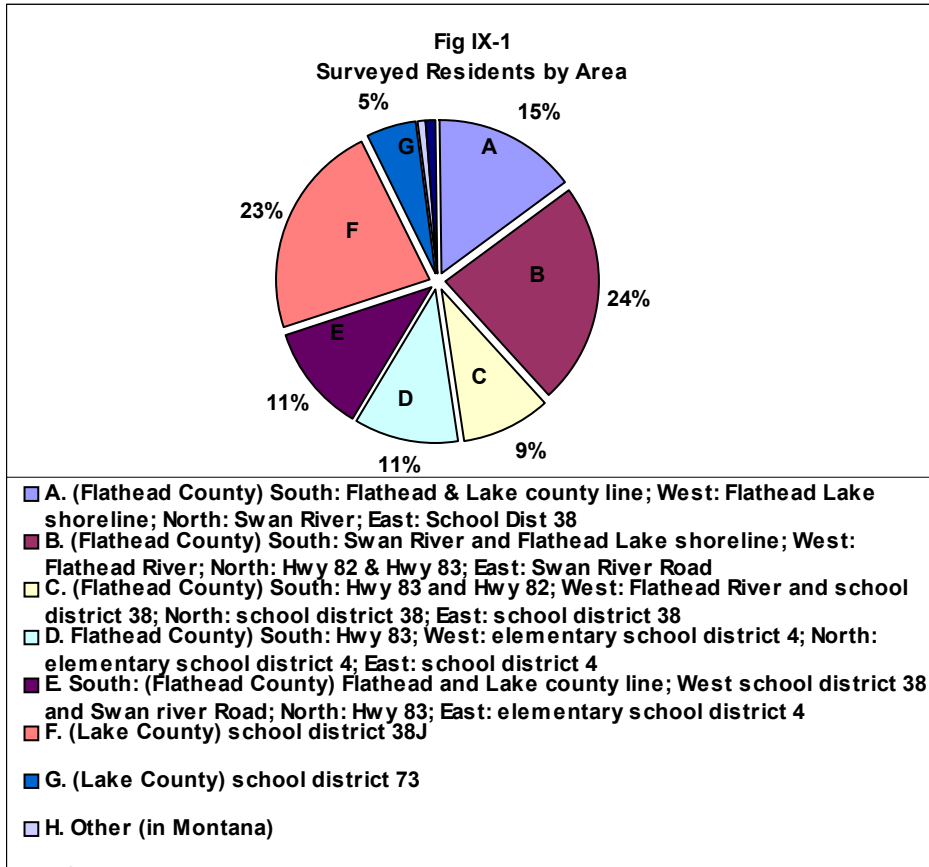
Section IX: Vital Statistics

The demographics of survey participants provide a crucially important backdrop in terms of understanding the survey's message and applicability to area problems, issues and their resolution. At appropriate points identified throughout this analysis, partial survey data have been provided which permit determination of how a particular group or subset of survey participants feels about a particular issue. For example, the method of appointment of Bigfork Land Use Advisory members is logically more important to Flathead County residents than to residents of Lake County. Thus, when this subject was addressed earlier in this analysis, both data sets were presented.

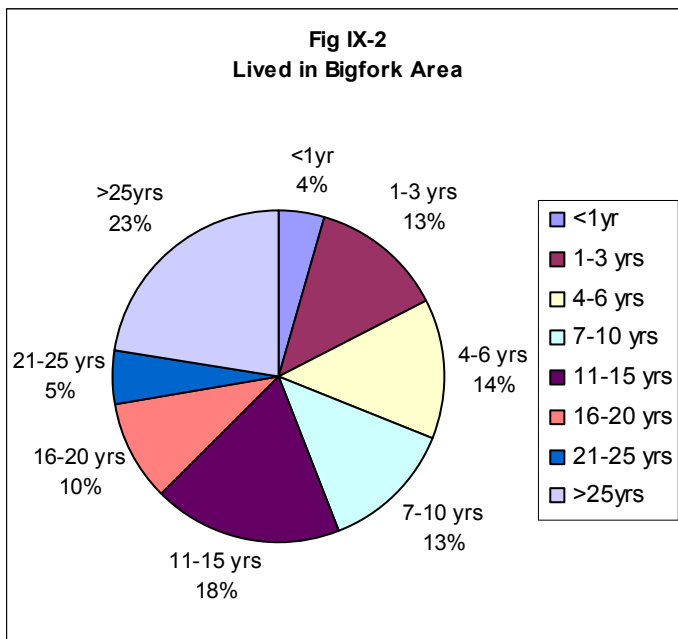
Other demographic issues are important as well. A past Bigfork area survey (1993) only recorded the views of property owners despite the fact that in Montana (and other states as well) voters, be they property owners or not, have full sway over planning and zoning issues. This survey was sent to area land owners and registered voters though when this resulted in duplication, an individual received only one survey. Similarly, when different people in the same household qualified for being part of the survey population, only one survey was sent to that household—survey administrative costs being the driving element in the decision to truncate distribution in this manner.

Thus, the results are not necessarily a perfect mirror of what the people of the Bigfork area think on all issues addressed in the survey, but then again, even an unconstrained democratic process fails in this regard. Nonetheless, when viewed together, these data do offer decision-makers an important community window as they attempt to deal with the many complex issues that we currently face and are doubtless in our future.

As depicted in Figure IX-1, twenty-eight percent (28%) of completed surveys were from Lake County residents—the majority of these being from School District 38J with seventy percent (70%) being from Flathead County. As Lake County residents only received twenty-five percent (25%) of the surveys mailed out to eligible households, this means that Lake County residents responded at a slightly higher rate (28%) than did those from Flathead County (25%). Areas A& B, generally consisting of core Bigfork, were represented by thirty-nine percent (39%) of the surveys collected. Data is not available on how this compares to the number of surveys sent to those in Areas A or B.



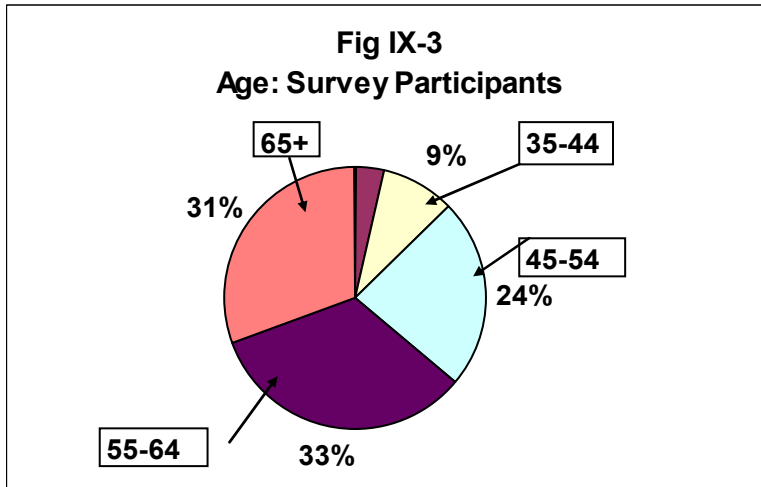
Per Fig IX-2, twenty-three percent (23%) of respondents have lived in the area for 25-years or more—no doubt inclusive of several who have been “born and raised” here.



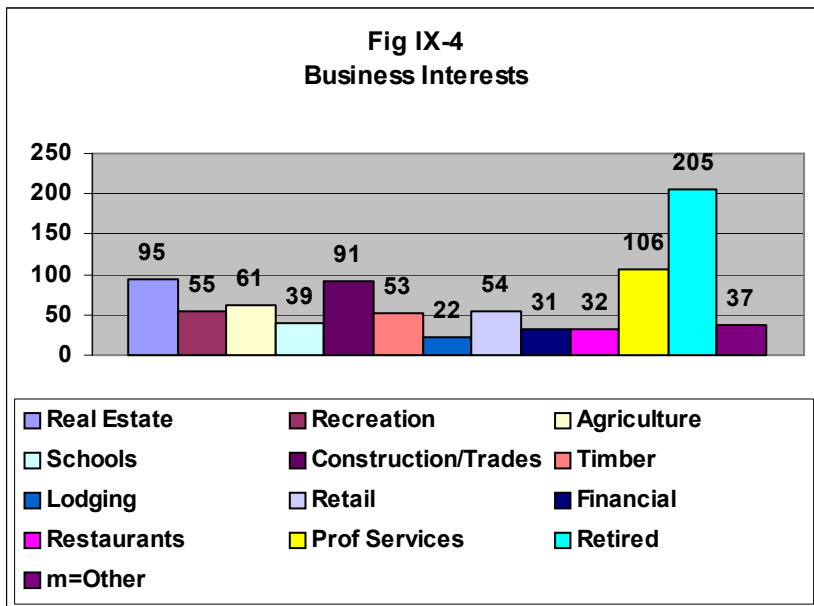
Nonetheless, the dramatic growth the area has experienced in recent years is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that fully thirty-three percent decimal 2 (33.2%) of those surveyed have lived in the Bigfork area six-years or less. When this slice is increased to fifteen-years or less, the percentage figure jumps to sixty six decimal eight percent (66.8%). (Note: Chart numbers are rounded off and thus do not precisely match

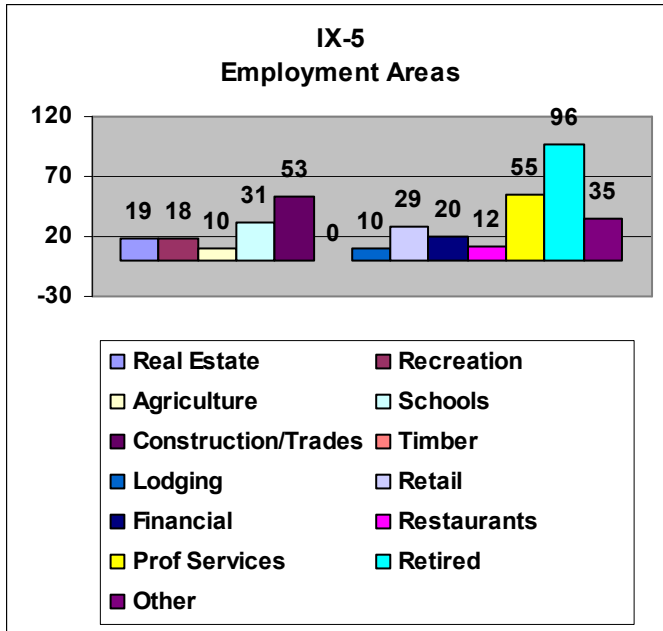
number totals cited above.)

Age, being a fundamental prism through which one’s views are formed and filtered, offers some essential background information to the survey results. As a group, survey respondents were comparatively senior as shown in Figure IX-3. Thirty-one percent (31%) of respondents were 65-years old or more, and sixty-four percent (64%) were over age fifty-five.



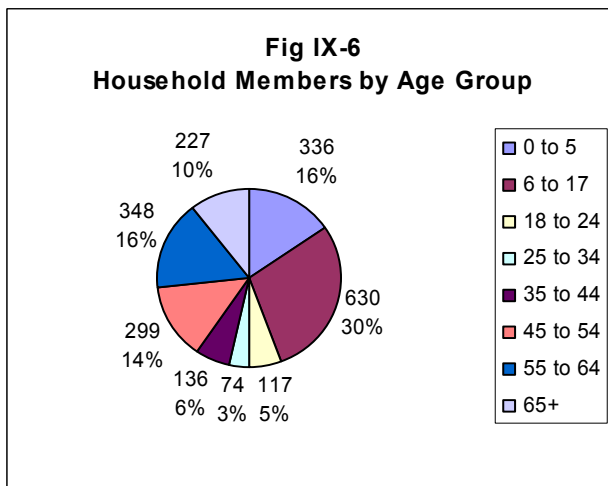
These age data are more fully understandable when compared to the Business Interests and Employment Area information depicted on Figures IX-4 and IX-5, respectively. By almost a factor of two, “Retired” is the largest category in both charts. Professional Services, Real Estate, and Construction/Trades were the next most populated categories under Business Interests (Figure IX-4). Similarly, Professional Services and Construction/Trades (Figure IX-5) were the next most populated Employment Areas.





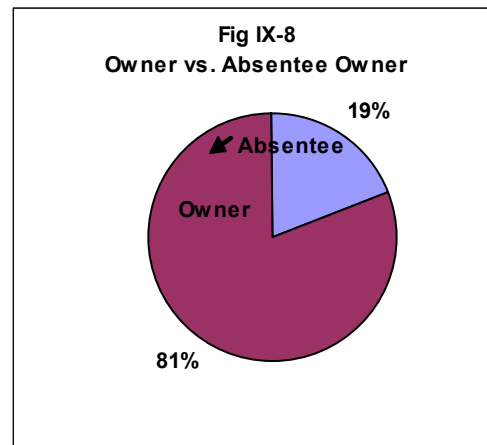
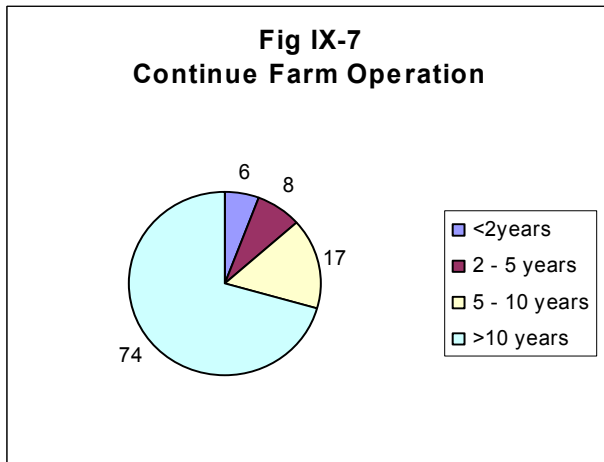
However, the age component is more complex than the data depicted in these two charts. Per Figure IX-6, of the 2,167 area household members of survey participants, forty-six percent (46%) were age 17 or under.

Moreover, when interpolating these data on the basis of the number of persons in each specific year group, the 0 to 5 Age Group has on average 67 individuals in each age year while the 25 to 34 Age Group and the 35 to 44 Age Group only average 7 and 14 persons, respectively, in each age year. Thus, while the Bigfork area has a large and growing number of retired individuals, it also has youthful population advancing through life's stages. Note that the age year regression is far from linear. Rather, it is heavy at both ends suggesting that while area residents have determined Bigfork is a great place to raise a family or retire, it is also possible to fortify the popular conclusion that necessity forces a number of our youth to seek their financial security elsewhere.



Taken together, the data demonstrate that area longevity and seniority, coupled with business/employment interests, are reflective of a dynamic community that diverse groups have found attractive. These trends, coupled with the well-documented and fast approaching baby-boomer retirement bubble, make the community planning processes that serve as a backdrop for this survey absolutely essential elements of Bigfork's future. Just as important, we must continue to recognize that we are a diverse community and the ability to meet the needs of the full spectrum of our community must remain an essential planning element of our future.

Of the 1,560 survey respondents, only 131 (less than 1%) indicated they were active farmers. Of these, only one hundred-five (105) responded to the question about how long they would continue farming (Figure IX-7). Of these, seventy four (74) (representing 6,290.5 acres) felt they would be farming for ten years or more, while fourteen (14) (representing 347 acres) felt they would be out of farming in the next 5 years. Interestingly, respondents to this question collectively own 7,185 acres of the 18,473.9 acres owned by all survey respondents.



As depicted in Figure IX-8, nineteen percent (19%) of survey respondents were absentee landowners—and presumably not locally registered voters. This compares to approximately forty percent (40%) of the respondents being absentee landowners in the 1993 survey. Interestingly enough, when survey results are exclusively confined to the absentee landowner group, there is not one survey question for which there is a statistically significant variance in the overall response when compared to the results of the entire survey population.

Additionally, of the entire survey population, only forty-three respondents (3%) listed themselves as renters as opposed to owners of their Bigfork residence.

General Survey Comments:

Three hundred forty-five (345) respondents (22%) offered general comments in the space provided at the end of the survey. As one could expect, these comments covered a wide range of subjects and opinions.

Consistent with the numerical scores reported earlier in this document, the planning and zoning theme occupied center stage with overwhelming support being expressed for the need for both planning and zoning. Nonetheless, a representative number of comments with the opposite view have been included (below).

- “If we continue to rezone our land for developers, subdivision (sic), commercial use & industry, our area, with its unique beauty, our way of life will be completely lost.
- “I do not want to live in New California!!”
- “We shouldn’t lose the reasons we live here.”
- “The ongoing construction is destroying Bigfork.”
- “Appears to be some conflict of interest with so many members of the BLUAC being composed of mostly builders and realtors.”
- “The Flathead Valley is an awesome place to live. Progress is only natural, however, there should be limitations set on future development, so not to diminish its natural beauty.”
- “This is a waste of money; the planning boards will put through whatever they want.”
- “Planning is essential for the Bigfork area so that we will maintain open spaces, natural wildlife and a country atmosphere. Uncontrolled growth will ruin the beauty of our area.”
- “Planning is essential! Members of planning boards should not have a conflict of interest—no realtors, developers, builders, engineers, etc. Full time residents only.”

- “I think it is sad to see downtown Bigfork turning into predominately real estate offices and bars. Bigfork is losing its “quaint” village atmosphere of specialty shops and art galleries—that which attracted us here.”
- “We need more low cost housing (apartments) for young people to be able to afford to stay and live here.”
- “I support economic growth of the Bigfork area, however, the rate of such growth should be monitored to avoid regrettable outcomes, enhance beauty, livability, safety, tourism, etc.”
- “Development is natural. Uncontrolled development is probably disastrous....
- “Planning of this nature is vital to being able to cultivate a truly unique neighborhood....”
- “A failure to plan is a plan for failure.”
- “Bigfork is not just for the wealthy. Housing needs to be affordable. Land should not be zoned to preclude affordable multi-family housing.”
- “I strongly favor land use planning.”
- “This township has nothing for evening entertainment for teenagers like a movie or dance house.”
- “Please bring zoning and sensible planning to the area.”
- “Growth is inevitable but it must be done in a manner that will retain the charm of Bigfork.”
- “This survey is biased. Who wrote this survey? The Sierra Club? Greenpeace? Communists? Californians?”

Though zoning and community planning predominated, a number of other subjects were discussed as well.

- “If you incorporate I’ll have to die so my family can have insurance to pay the city taxes on top of the state.”
- “This whole survey is self-serving. The town should incorporate so the public can VOTE instead of being run by bankers, business people and real estate agents!!!”
- “Thanks for doing this.”
- “Very good survey.”
- “This survey is not very well done. It attempts to confuse by asking one a question one way and the next question opposite.” *(SC Note: We did this on the advice of a professional as an essential step in developing an unbiased survey. It also cuts down on napping while taking the survey.)*

Signed (August 26, 2005)

Bigfork Steering Committee Executive Board

Doug Averill	Chairman
Denise Lang	Vice Chairman
Shelley Gonzales	Treasurer
Sue Hanson	Secretary
Katie Brown	Member-at-Large
Elna Darrow	Member-at-Large

Written/produced by

Shelley Gonzales	Methodology
Don Loranger	Analysis
Carol Venable	Edit