

DRAFT
Working Paper #2

**ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC INPUT AT
PONTIAC VISIONING TOWN MEETINGS
IN SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2007**

By Mark A. Wyckoff, FAICP
Director, Planning & Zoning Center at MSU
Senior Associate Director, MSU Land Policy Institute

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www.pzcenter.msu.edu
517-432-2222



LAND POLICY
INSTITUTE
<http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu>
517-432-8800

Michigan State University
1405 S. Harrison Road
East Lansing, MI 48823-5245

INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes the information presented in **Working Paper #1 – Pontiac Public Input at Four Visioning Town Meetings** held between September 25th and October 11th. About 125 persons participated in these Town Meetings. Citizens had the opportunity to present their opinions on things, people, places, events, activities and land uses in the city about which they are proud and/or sorry; as well as to offer their ideas for the future of Pontiac twenty years from now. All observations were recorded along with votes by participants on their proudest prouds and sorriest sorries, as well as on their most preferred visions of the future as they want it to be in Pontiac in twenty years. All observations were coded into fifty categories for further analysis.

This report examines the frequency of citizen input in the fifty categories. First the analysis looks at the big picture by examining those categories which received the most attention. Then it examines separately the top ten prouds, sorries and images of the future. The discussion attempts to bring out many of the nuances of these ideas, although it is impossible to reflect the complete richness of each idea as it was actually expressed in the small groups of 5-8 persons.

Significance of the Public Input

The public brainstorming input from these Town Meetings is structured anecdotal information. That means it is NOT statistically significant public input as could come from a well-prepared citizen opinion survey using proper scientific method and an adequate return rate. So if it is not statistically significant, what significance does it have?

It's significance is considerable, because it reflects the key issues and concerns of citizens of Pontiac who care enough about the future of the city to take an entire evening to share their thoughts. It is open ended input, meaning that citizens did not choose their preference from a set of options. It comes from the mind, heart and mouths of those that participated. It was prompted only by broad questions to name prouds, sorries and images of the future as residents would like them to be.

It would be easy (though not cheap) to test the “representativeness” of the public input received at the Town Meetings with a structured survey. While the results would be different in terms of frequency of response, the key issues are likely to be very similar. This is the opinion of the author for two reasons. First, when the public input from the Town Meetings is compared with the input of members of the Planning Advisory Committee (which was chosen to be representative of broad stakeholders in the community) at their first meeting the issues are very similar—giving further credibility to the input. The second reason it is believed to be a reasonably good reflection of broader public opinion, is that the author has conducted dozens of Futuring Town Meetings in large and small communities across Michigan, and when the same issues come up consistently from small group to small group, and Town Meeting to Town Meeting, subsequent events demonstrated they are very likely to reflect issues of concern to a great many citizens, not merely those that participated. Of course, there is no other

information currently available that is more representative of current public opinion than this input from the Town Meetings.

The Town Meeting locations were carefully distributed throughout the city to make it convenient for people to participate. While no formal census of participants was taken, observation by the author of the race and age of participants when all sessions are considered together, reveals that the black and white populations, teens through elderly, male and female, and quite likely a wide range of incomes were represented. Clearly underrepresented were the Hispanic and Asian populations in the city, as well as business owners. Again, this is not a statistically significant observation.

The following analysis is most useful to the Planning Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, the city planning consultants (McKenna & Associates) and the City Council as they develop the new Pontiac Master Plan. The input is directly relevant to creating a common vision of the future along with the goals and objectives necessary to achieve that vision.

ANALYSIS

All of the public input at the Town Meetings was recorded and documented in the first Working Paper. Each discrete idea offered at the Town Meetings was placed in a category with a three letter code (also in Working Paper #1). While many of the comments could be classified into more than one category, an effort was made to place each comment into the category that was most dominant relevant to the point being made. Even if others would classify some of the comments into different categories than the author, it would take wholesale reclassification to substantially change the frequencies that follow because in most cases, the top 5-10 ideas in each column were so much greater than the balance of the input. Table 1 on the next page lists the fifty categories that public input at the four Town Meetings was classified into and presents a count of the frequency of input that falls into each category. The categories are listed in the first column, the code for that category is in the second column and the number of times that code appeared for each category in the “prouds,” “sorries,” and “images of the future” follow in the third through fifth columns. The sixth column is the total of columns 3-5. The three remaining columns reflect the percentage of responses in that category from all 1236 ideas that were recorded.

Table 1 – Summary of All Town Meeting Input by Category

Category	Code	Prouds	Sorrie	Image	Total	Prouds %	Sorries %	Images
ARCHITECTURE	ARC	4	0	1	5	1.3%	0.0%	0.2%
ART & CULTURAL FACILITIES	ART	3	2	14	19	1.0%	0.6%	2.4%
BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN PATHS	BIC	1	0	16	17	0.3%	0.0%	2.8%
BUSINESS	BUS	22	23	42	87	7.3%	6.5%	7.3%
CODE ENFOCEMENT	CDE	0	7	0	7	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%
CHURCHES	CHR	3	2	3	8	1.0%	0.6%	0.5%
CITIZENS	CIT	6	2	0	8	2.0%	0.6%	0.0%
COMMUNITY	COM	38	23	35	96	12.6%	6.5%	6.0%
COUNTY	COU	3	3	11	17	1.0%	0.8%	1.9%
DIVERSITY	DIV	8	0	7	15	2.6%	0.0%	1.2%
DOWNTOWN	DTN	15	19	37	71	5.0%	5.4%	6.4%
ENTERTAINMENT	ENT	1	2	5	8	0.3%	0.6%	0.9%
FEDERAL FACILITY	FED	3	0	0	3	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%
FESTIVALS	FES	12	2	4	18	4.0%	0.6%	0.7%
FINANCIAL	FIN	2	7	4	13	0.7%	2.0%	0.7%
FIRE	FIR	5	0	0	5	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
GOVERNANCE	GOV	4	20	21	45	1.3%	5.6%	3.6%
GROCERY STORE	GRO	0	1	6	7	0.0%	0.3%	1.0%
HERITAGE	HER	4	0	2	6	1.3%	0.0%	0.3%
HISTORIC STRUCTURES/DIST	HIS	7	2	7	16	2.3%	0.6%	1.2%
HOMELESS	HOM	2	12	9	23	0.7%	3.4%	1.6%
HOSPITALS	HOP	5	3	11	19	1.7%	0.8%	1.9%
HOUSING	HOS	17	11	20	48	5.6%	3.1%	3.5%
IMAGE	IMG	3	9	20	32	1.0%	2.5%	3.5%
JOBS	JOB	6	7	11	24	2.0%	2.0%	1.9%
LAKES	LAK	6	3	4	13	2.0%	0.8%	0.7%
LEADERSHIP	LDR	1	12	9	22	0.3%	3.4%	1.6%
LIBRARY	LIB	4	5	6	15	1.3%	1.4%	1.0%
LAND	LND	2	16	17	35	0.7%	4.5%	2.9%
LANGUAGE BARRIER	LNG	0	1	1	2	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%
LOCATION (esp. Central)	LOC	15	0	0	15	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%
NEIGHBORHOOD	NEI	15	7	7	29	5.0%	2.0%	1.2%
NEWSPAPERS, RADIO, TV	NWS	1	3	0	4	0.3%	0.8%	0.0%
PHOENIX	PHX	5	7	3	15	1.7%	2.0%	0.5%
POLICE	POL	2	25	28	55	0.7%	7.0%	4.8%
PARKS & RECREATION	PRK	13	10	16	39	4.3%	2.8%	2.8%
QUALITY OF LIFE	QOL	1	2	36	39	0.3%	0.6%	6.2%
RESTAURANTS	RST	3	4	3	10	1.0%	1.1%	0.5%
CLINTON RIVER	RVR	1	7	12	20	0.3%	2.0%	2.1%
SCHOOLS	SCH	14	23	54	91	4.6%	6.5%	9.3%
CITY SERVICES	SER	6	9	15	30	2.0%	2.5%	2.6%
SILVERDOME	SIL	8	13	12	33	2.6%	3.7%	2.1%
SENIORS	SNR	2	1	8	11	0.7%	0.3%	1.4%
SPORT	SPT	10	0	7	17	3.3%	0.0%	1.2%
STREET MANAGEMENT	STR	9	25	11	45	3.0%	7.0%	1.9%
TAXES	TAX	0	8	8	16	0.0%	2.3%	1.4%
TRANSPORTATION	TRN	1	3	25	29	0.3%	0.8%	4.3%
TRASH/JUNK	TRS	4	3	5	12	1.3%	0.8%	0.9%
WATER	WTR	1	0	0	1	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
YOUTH	YTH	4	11	6	21	1.3%	3.1%	1.0%
TOTAL		302	355	579	1236	100%	100%	100%

There are a number of obvious observations that can be drawn from Table 1. First, about 24% of the public ideas were “prouds”, 29% were “sorries” and 47% were images of the future. This is consistent with observation where most groups had more trouble identifying “prouds” than “sorries.” To a degree this reflects the current state of mind of people in Pontiac who, while long from having given up hope, are concerned because there seems to be more things wrong in Pontiac at the present than seem right. This is a common sentiment among people in large urban communities facing a host of problems. In contrast there are many more images of the future because people are very hopeful about the future of Pontiac, and creative in their desire for the future to not only be better than the present, but in several key places, for Pontiac to go from near last to first (as is the desire with the quality of education at public schools).

Second, there are a few categories with many more responses than others. These are easiest to observe and discuss via a series of smaller summary tables. Insight into the gist of many of the comments in the various categories is also offered when discussing these other categories.

Table 2 focuses on the “total” column of Table 1 and lists the top ten categories in rank order based on the total number of ideas offered in that category by summing all ideas in the “prouds,” “sorries,” and “images of the future” brainstorming.

Table 2 – Top Ten Categories of Concern

Rank	Category	Frequency (number of times mentioned)	% of Total Responses (1236)
1	Community	96	7.8%
2	Schools	91	7.4%
3	Business	87	7.0%
4	Downtown	71	5.7%
5	Police	55	4.4%
6	Housing	48	3.9%
7	Governance	45	3.6%
8	Street Management	45	3.6%
9	Parks & Recreation	39	3.2%
10	Quality of Life	39	3.2%

While these ten categories are only 20% of the total number of categories, they represent nearly half (49.8%) of all the ideas generated. The first three (community, schools and business) represent about 1/5 of all the ideas. The first and last of the categories above (community and quality of life) have a wide range of ideas included within the category. For example, within community are a host of positive ideas related to community and homeowner pride, support for a wide range of community service organizations (NGOs); as well as negative feelings related to loss of sense of community, closing of community centers, and poor parenting, among others. Images of the future largely relate to building on the pride that remains, restoring the sense of

community, stimulating more community involvement and reestablishing community centers. Quality of life ideas are even more expansive in range, but were rarely mentioned in either the “prouds” or “sorries” sessions; instead they were offered almost exclusively as images of the future. Examples include: a more livable, environmentally conscious city that is attractive to people of all ages and races, with low poverty and unemployment.

Schools is the category with the most highly consistent “sorries” mention, also had the largest number of images of the future. These ideas are very heavily tilted to a desire for a complete turnaround of the quality of education offered. Business is another category with a wide range of elements. On the prouds side, it is largely kudos to specific businesses, and on the sorries side it is largely lament over the decline of retail business (especially downtown), the lack of chain grocery stores in town, and the lack of family oriented restaurants.

When similar or related categories are combined, the importance of comments in these top ten categories is even stronger. Consider adding the “citizens” and “neighborhoods” categories to “community;” the “entertainment,” “art and cultural facilities,” “festivals,” and “library,” categories to “downtown;” the “grocery store” and “restaurants” categories to “business;” and the “homeless” to the “housing” category and the top ten ranking of these categories becomes much more significant.

Table 3 lists the top ten prouds from Table 1. While six of these categories are the same as on Table 2, “location,” “neighborhoods,” “festivals,” and “sport” are new. Location is the most unique in that it is the only category with all ideas from the prouds session. Fifteen times the central location of Pontiac in Oakland County was mentioned as a proud. It is also one of, if not the greatest untapped assets the city has (see Working Paper #3). Many of the specific observations about “neighborhoods” could as easily have been categorized under “community”. The “sport” category is unique in that some of the comments related to the rich sports heritage in Pontiac (high school, Lions, Pistons, World Cup Soccer, Grand Prix, etc.) and could just as well have been classified under “heritage,” the rest related to sports facilities other than the Silverdome (such as Wisner Stadium, new soccer area on South Blvd., etc.). While the Silverdome missed the top ten list for most mentioned, it was frequently mentioned on both prouds and sorries lists when it was mentioned, and a few citizens had ideas about how it, or the site, should be redeveloped (casino, convention center, waterpark, new semi-pro sports venue, mixed use development, educational facility, etc.).

Table 3 – Top Ten Categories of Prouds

Rank	Category	Frequency (number of times mentioned)
1	Community	38
2	Business	22
3	Housing	17
4	Downtown	15
5	Location	15
6	Neighborhood	15
7	Schools	14
8	Parks & Recreation	13
9	Festivals	12
10	Sport	10

Table 4 lists the top ten sorries from Table 1. Police is listed for the first time here and it is the top listed sorry. Most often that was related to the perception of poor response times, and a substantial cut in the number of police officers in recent years. In contrast, the fire department was only rated favorably (but also only five times). Street management also appears for the first time tied with police for the top spot. Pot holes, snow removal, a large number of cars left on the street, inadequate lighting and street signs are all a part of citizen concern in this area, as is redesigning widetrack drive (the downtown loop road), so that is more green, more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, and includes better links to adjoining neighborhoods. Loss of business in general and retail downtown were major sorries. Loss of pride, sense of community and declining schools as mentioned earlier were important.

Governance and leadership also appear on the list for the first time. If these categories were added together and the related categories of “finance” and “taxes” were added to them, then governance would be by far the top sorries category (with 45 responses). Concerns in this area were often expressed in a deeply heartfelt way and were generally directed to the quality of leadership and decisions coming from recent past and present elected leaders on a wide variety of subjects (see comment related to images of the future below as well).

The “land” category refers to blighted homes and buildings, vacant land, contaminated land, neglected property, urban renewal, brownfield sites, and related issues. This category is clearly also an opportunity given an equal number of ideas for improving land in Pontiac as reflected in Table 5.

Table 4 – Top Eleven Categories of Sorries

Rank	Category	Frequency (number of times mentioned)
1	Police	25
2	Street Management	25
3	Business	23
4	Community	23
5	Schools	23
6	Governance	20
7	Downtown	19
8	Land	16
9	Silverdome	13
10	Homeless	10
11	Leadership	10

Table 5 lists the top ten categories of future images as citizens at the Town Meetings want Pontiac to be. While citizens want schools to be much better (in fact the best in the state), their ideas are much richer. They include a desire for the schools to be closely linked to major employers like GM and the hospitals, with entrepreneurial programs and a focus on technology and trades. In the business category they want more businesses in general and retail and industrial employers in particular. They want more entrepreneurs to come to the city. They want some specific businesses like Starbucks and a major chain grocery store, and more technical jobs to attract young professionals. They want the commercial activity downtown, tied to arts and culture, they want the Strand Theater rehabilitation completed. They want a vibrant downtown that doesn't just exist to meet entertainment needs in the evening, but also meets the retail, restaurant and entertainment needs of families in the day. They want a vibrant but family oriented downtown that is safe for everyone.

The ubiquitous “quality of life” category adds other livability dimensions including walkability (and bikability from the bicycle category), mixed uses, green buildings, the Clinton River restored to free flowing surface condition, wireless service everywhere and a much smaller gap between the “haves” and “have nots”. They want the quality of police service much improved (as well as many other public services – see SER category). For the first time broader transportation issues surface with a focus on quality bus service that covers more area and more predictable and shorter service times. They want fixed rail service from Pontiac to Detroit with not more than 2-3 stops on the way.

They want significantly improved governance with serious consideration given to a shift to a city manager form of government. They want city government and the school district to coordinate much better and work together to achieve common goals.

They want more and better quality housing choices from lofts to senior citizen housing. They want more low income housing and more upscale housing. They want to limit the

creation of more rental units and to see the preservation of more historic homes. They want a more stable and well-maintained housing stock.

While last in the top ten, it is significant that they want to improve the image of the City of Pontiac by beautifying and greening the streetscapes, to reducing graffiti and junk, to improving the image to outsiders. Citizens of Pontiac want a much better future, and while discouraged about some of the existing conditions, remain optimistic, and many are willing to help to build a better future for Pontiac.

Table 5 – Top Ten Categories with Images of the Future

Rank	Category	Frequency (number of times mentioned)
1	Schools	54
2	Business	42
3	Downtown	37
4	Quality of Life	36
5	Community	35
6	Police	28
7	Transportation	25
8	Governance	21
9	Housing	20
10	Image	20

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

The input from the public at the four Town Meetings is most useful in helping to guide the scope and content of the vision statement and goals and objectives in the new Pontiac Master plan.

Vision Statement

The vision statement is a verbal description of the city in 20 years that weaves images of the future into a complete picture of the city as citizens want it to be. It is usually written in the present tense as if the year were now 2027. A brief well written vision of the future can be a powerful tool in helping achieve consensus on a common course of action and motivating people to act to achieve the vision.

The following elements appear to be major themes that should appear in the vision statement based on input from the four Town Meetings:

- ♣ Community has regained a sense of pride in itself, confidence in its future that is evidenced by citywide, neighborhood, NGO and personal actions of citizens, elected and appointed officials, and city staff.
- ♣ The city has leveraged its central location asset to not only attract new jobs and opportunities, but to also give rebirth to retail in its downtown in a way that

continues to build on its nighttime entertainment options, but also daytime family shopping and entertainment needs.

- ♣ The city has redirected redevelopment to achieve a revitalized downtown and neighborhoods by careful mixing of land uses and expanding housing choices so as to attract 20-34 year olds and families with children.
- ♣ To attract families with children, the Pontiac School District has reinvented itself in unique and exciting ways that result in quality education that links schools to diverse neighborhoods, and students to opportunities with a variety of local businesses and major employers.
- ♣ The city has redesigned the loop around downtown with more trees, better connections to neighborhoods and links with a stronger pedestrian orientation throughout the city.
- ♣ The city is the northwestern hub for fixed rail service to Detroit and high quality transit service within the city and with adjacent jurisdictions.
- ♣ The city is governed by leaders who are fiscally prudent, understand citizen needs and priorities, and are neither afraid to take action, nor stand up and be counted when tough decisions have to be made.
- ♣ Police protection and public safety has improved through strategic actions that acknowledge the fiscal challenges facing the city while better meeting crime prevention expectations.
- ♣ Quality of life has significantly improved across the board with very few individuals in poverty, few divided families, more options for (especially) youth and seniors, many more job and housing choices.
- ♣ The image of the city has vastly improved because of all the actions above and the city is now a place that continues to grow in terms of housing units and population because it is an aesthetically pleasing, green, environmentally conscious and culturally diverse place to live with a wide range of neighborhoods, job opportunities and businesses.

Goals & Objectives

The general elements of a future vision for 2027 is typically expanded upon by specific goals and objectives that provide targets for future actions that should be taken consistent with the Master Plan and to help implement the Plan. These goals and objectives need to focus on both short and long term actions to be taken to implement the Plan, consistent with the vision. The 1992 Plan that the new Master Plan is replacing, has many goals and objectives that should be first reviewed for continued relevance, and where necessary rejuvenated, replaced or supplemented based on the public input from the Town Meetings.

Next Steps

The Planning Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission should review Working Papers #1 and #2 and quickly provide input to the City Planner and to the City's Planning Consultants, McKenna & Associates, as to the elements to include in the proposed vision statement and proposed goals and objectives to go in the Master Plan. If there are items from the public input at the Town Meetings that they are uncomfortable with, disagree with, or if they believe there are important issues that have

been ignored then they need to quickly inform the consultants so that these issues can be properly addressed in the new Plan.

Working Paper #3 will be an asset based economic assessment with identification of strategies to help the City and the City Planning Consultants when refining specific future land use and policy recommendations in the Master Plan. A draft of this document will be completed by mid-November.