

What do Brown Countians think about local issues and challenges? Would they like the opportunity to weigh in?

This year, the League of Women Votes of Brown County decided to use our table at the County Fair to engage passers-by with a new outreach initiative. We asked folks to fill out a very informal anonymous survey about Brown County issues. *This was not a scientific exercise*, and we did not conduct it to gather hard data – we just wanted to talk to people and see what they might have to say. Not everyone was interested, but 161 kind residents agreed to give us their input -- and we did ask that only county residents participate. While 161 random fair-goers do not provide a large enough sample for any statistically sound conclusions, the variety of people passing by our booth and filling out the survey was significant, and so we decided it was worth writing up some of the numbers, comments and concerns. Several of the questions are open-ended, with no particular answers suggested. Note that not everyone answered every question, and some respondents touched on more than one topic in their comments.

### **What kinds of jobs would you like to see come to Brown County?**

The clear winners on job sectors were light manufacturing/industry with 30 responses and tech/IT/engineering/STEM with 24. However, another 30 responses did not identify the sector, advocating instead for jobs with a middle-class salary/living wage and benefits that would attract families to live here. Low impact, green, environmentally friendly businesses jobs, services for youth and the elderly, and retail/restaurants were all in the 8-9 votes range, and there were 10 “negative” remarks mostly urging less reliance on tourism. Interesting comments:

“All different for a variety of people”

“More jobs with the opportunity to advance to a livable income with benefits. Jobs that are focused on people who haven’t had the opportunities to get a skill or college.”

“We need small factories and other types of industry.”

“Light small business and industry, like how Big Woods is offering so much in this area.”

### **Would you like to see the Courthouse renovated, renovated and expanded, moved to a new site or none of these?**

The plurality of respondents (57) supported renovating the old Courthouse, with another 26 voting for renovate and expand. There were 20 who think the court and its offices should be moved to a new site, and 28 who think none of these is appropriate. Interesting comments:

“Not moved. Renovated so it can be used. It is historical and should remain a part of county business.”

“Add a small court at or near the jail.”

“Any of the above. It has outgrown its space.”

“No, seems fine. Small county, not been an “issue” on size.”

### **Are you satisfied with our Brown County Public Schools?**

Our schools received a strong vote of confidence, with 75 respondents answering a flat yes (or some variant thereof) and another 10 yes with some caveat. There were only 19 flat no's, along with another 14 no's with reasons given. Some people commented without saying yes or no. The most frequently cited criticisms had to do with funding, the inadequacy of teacher pay vs administrative overhead, and the choices made on cuts (libraries, French classes, vocational training). Interesting comments:

"Yes, except disappointed that no French classes offered."

"They are doing the best they can under difficult funding. Not happy with dismantling of elementary libraries."

"No, our children are dying. We need more activities more options for our kids to be involved in."

"Absolutely, wonderful school system."

### **How would you prioritize our infrastructure needs among the following?**

<u>5</u> Countywide Sewer	<u>4</u> Water
<u>1</u> High speed internet	<u>3</u> Fire Protection
<u>2</u> Roads/Bridges	

Water and fire protection (which are linked in any event) were virtually tied. High speed internet and roads were a clear first and second, respectively. There were almost no comments on this question.

### **Do you have adequate access to health care in Brown County?**

103 respondents replied yes to this question, or gave a positive comment. 26 said no or gave a negative response. Over 20 said that they obtain their care outside the county, and it is unclear with the flat yes responses if they in fact get their care in Brown County or not. One respondent suggested we need an afterhours clinic, while another advocated for reopening a clinic for lower income citizens. Several noted that options locally are limited.

### **If Brown County needs more money to address any of these issues, what are you willing to accept?—**

<u>60</u> Increase in property taxes
<u>49</u> Increase in income taxes
<u>8</u> Increase in county debt
<u>61</u> None of these – or something else?

Comments focused on better management of current resources, cutting costs, seeking more grants, raising sales/alcohol/restaurant/tourist taxes, and innovative coalitions to fund initiatives.

### **What are your concerns?**

While only just over half of respondents provided concerns, those who did ranged over a wide array of topics. The number one concern is drugs and the damage they do to the county. The other two primary

concerns were focused around our youth (activities, job prospects, school) and around governance (financial management, cronyism, bickering and lack of cooperation, unqualified personnel). Other concerns mentioned more than once included logging and the environment, roads, planning and zoning/expansion/economic development. Interesting comments:

“The Opiate epidemic”

“The brain drain of the county.”

“Too much expansion and loss of local influence.”

“Housing that young families can afford.”

“I hope that we keep as much of our natural environment and ‘original-ness’ as possible. Not interested in being a Martinsville or Columbus.”

“No \$ to address needs. Many committees trying to go same direction – without direction.”

“Actually, not much – love the place!”

The 2017 County Fair is just a pleasant memory now, of good food and 4-H accomplishments, carnival rides and glad-handing politicians, and crowds of Brown Countians enjoying this shared event. The League of Women Voters of Brown County came away, as we always do, impressed by the booths and tables of all the citizens who care and are involved, and energized by seeing and talking with our Brown County neighbors. Thanks to all who participated in this informal poll!

*(Optional – will talk to Sara Clifford about the following 😊)*

*Would you like to express your opinion on these issues? If so, please send your responses to the bolded questions above to the Democrat (email address) no later than September 18. Alternatively, you can print off the form posted on our website ([www.lwvbrowncounty.org](http://www.lwvbrowncounty.org)) and mail it to PO Box 74, Nashville IN 47448.*