

Environmental Finance Center Inlet Community Survey

Final Report

June 2005

The Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (EFC) mailed a community survey to 382 selected property owners in the Town of Inlet in April 2005. The survey consisted of several background questions regarding the property (how long owned, seasonal or permanent resident, types of services, etc.) and the respondents' opinions on a number of public service and community development issues. Names and addresses were provided by the Town; respondents were asked to indicate a neighborhood the property is located in, also identified by the Town.

Survey response was over 47% (180 returned from 382 mailed). Mail survey response rates typically range from 20% - 50%. The response for this survey is quite good, considering no follow up notices were sent. The vast majority (84%) of responses came from seasonal residents, although without knowledge of the breakdown of the 382 property owners, there is no way of knowing whether this is significant. The majority of respondents (60%) have owned property in the community over 20 years, which indicates a long term interest in Inlet. Other interesting facts related to property include the reported age of septic systems (50% are 20 years or older) and wells (41% over 20 years). The average "life span" for septic systems and wells tends to be around 20-25 years, depending on maintenance and use.

The public seems generally pleased with public services provided by the Town. Most services received ratings of "Good" from over 60%, including street maintenance, police and fire service and public area maintenance. Commercial and other services did not rate as highly. For example, 15% rated health services as "Good", restaurants were rated as "Fair" by 46% and 45% felt that the general appearance of businesses is only "Fair". Respondents were asked to list the "biggest strengths" of Inlet. Their comments included:

- *Magnificent natural beauty and easy access to it. [the most common comment]*
- *Strong community involvement by permanent residents as well as by the seasonal people.*
- *Community leaders are reliably consistent in their dedication and effort to carry out their duties.*
- *Quiet, not overly commercialized.*

Residents were also asked how that quality of life in Inlet could be improved:

- *Keep government agencies off our backs.*

- *Town Board is self-centered around personal agendas, i.e. personal businesses. Needs to address broader scope to seasonal residents and their needs.*
- *Protecting the water quality of the 4th Lake by installing proper treatment system for the town and enforcing strict inspections/testing on septic systems around the lake.*
- *More good restaurants*

Regarding development in Inlet, 61% answered yes when asked if they felt the community would benefit from economic development. However, there is not a strong feeling that the Town is taking the correct approach or pursuing opportunities—47% feel that planning and development is either “Fair” or “Poor”. Without follow up questions, it can’t be stated whether these people think there is too much development, too little, the wrong type, etc. The survey asked what respondents felt was the biggest obstacle to economic development. Comments included:

- *Seasonal occupancy- sometimes there is a great deal of money in town other times there is not. [by far the most common comment was the seasonal nature of the economy.]*
- *No infrastructure (water sewer). [mentioned by 8 of the 107 that provided comments]*
- *Unplanned growth that destroys the character of the town.*
- *Town politics- they’re all related or involved in business together and are closed minded to outside involvement, unless it furthers their personal careers.*

The Town and The Clean Water Committee are interested in the public’s attitudes about water and wastewater service. Residents seem generally satisfied with drinking water quality and supply (rated “Good” by 42% and 46%, respectively). Over 50% stated that construction of a water or wastewater system and water quality were all “Somewhat Important” or “Very Important” and over 85% felt the same about groundwater and lake quality protection. There does not seem to be a large variation in these responses between either the six neighborhoods or between permanent/seasonal residents. The exception is Area 4; respondents from this neighborhood tended to not be in favor of a water/wastewater system or economic development.

Residents were asked to provide comment on any other issues not specifically addressed in the survey:

- *Adequate source of potable water and the treatment of septic wastes has been an ongoing problem in the village of Inlet for years.*
- *We would not be in favor of any development that destroys or jeopardizes the natural wildlife and beauty of the area.*
- *The town is being run by idiots who are only interested in their own interests and those of their friends.*

- *Leave Inlet the way it is.*

If the Town is interested in pursuing a municipal wastewater or water system, there are several issues to emphasize, based on the survey results.

- It is apparent that residents are concerned about maintaining water quality, both drinking water and the lakes. There have been identified problems with septic systems draining into lakes and some well contamination. An education/outreach effort can inform the public about the impact of failing septic systems on the environment and health. This is especially relevant given the large number of older systems in the community.
- Residents are interested in economic development. Over 60% felt that it was “Very Important” or “Somewhat Important” to attract new business and to expand local business and tourism. This is difficult to do without adequate infrastructure and can be explained to the public through outreach and education.
- Maintaining the Adirondack environment is very important to residents. Tourism and economic development is dependent on a safe and healthy environment. The impact of failing septic systems on the lakes and tourism can be brought to the public’s attention. The DEC and DOH can provide specific information.

Attached are the complete results of the survey, broken out by neighborhood and including the results of some questions broken out by permanent/seasonal respondents. Also attached are all comments provided by respondents.