# The Center for Community Studies

*At Jefferson Community College*

## *Fourth Annual*


# ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY

## Survey of the Community

### Summary of Findings

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
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# Section 2 - Summary of Findings

## Section 2.0 – The View from 30,000 Feet! (or, "if one only has 30 seconds to read this report")

### 1. Local Economic Points of Interest

In 2018, attitudes toward the local economy are mixed. Residents are still more likely to view the availability of good jobs negatively than positively (52% "Poor" vs. 14% "Excellent or Good") but the 52% "Poor" rating is the lowest obtained in the four years of the study and significantly lower than the 62% recorded in 2016. Conversely, negative views of shopping opportunities have increased significantly from those measured the previous three years. The 63% "Poor" rating is the highest to date and the most negatively perceived of all twenty indicators in the study. The 12% rate of "Excellent or Good" represents a significant drop from the 21% measured in 2015. For a second straight year, when asked to identify the largest issue facing the nation right now, 14% of St. Lawrence County residents believe it is the economy. Each year participants are asked whether they or their family's personal financial situation has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse in the past 12 months. Although the most common response for the fourth consecutive year is "stayed the same" (60%), nearly 30% of respondents indicated their personal financial situation has gotten better, a significant increase from 17% in 2017, while only 11% indicated that it has gotten worse, a drop from 19% in 2015. (Tables 20, 21, 41, 43)

### 2. Perception and Impact of Community Issues

Again in 2018, residents were asked to share both their perception of the severity and their personal impact of five potential community issues, three of which have been studied previously – poverty, alcohol abuse, heroin or other opiate abuse, and two that have not – prescription drug abuse and domestic violence. The percents of residents who perceive poverty (48%), alcohol abuse (46%), and heroin or other opiate abuse (65%) to be a "major" issue has declined after significant increases in 2017 from the initial measurements in 2016. Residents' perception of prescription drug abuse was the second highest rated "major" concern among the five issues at 58%. When asked if they had been personally impacted by the same five issues, poverty was the issue most commonly identified at 22%, followed by alcohol abuse (17%), heroin, or other opiate abuse (15%), and prescription drug abuse (14%). The rates for previously studied issues are all declines from 2017. Also of note, 18% (highest among any reported issue) of respondents identified "Drugs" when asked to identify the largest issue facing the nation, an increase from 13% in 2017 and 4% in 2016. (Tables 29-41)

### 3. Attitudes Toward Roadways in St. Lawrence County

For the third straight year county residents were asked to share their opinions concerning roadways in the county. The shift in opinion between 2016 and 2017 has remained in 2018. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated they believe the quality of the roads in the county to be "Poor," a 5% increase from 2017 and a significant increase of 15% when compared to 2016. The rate of "Fair" responses has dropped to 30% (was 39% in 2016) while the "Excellent or Good" rate of 26% is five percent lower than 2016. Residents were also asked two questions pertaining to County funding for roadways. The majority (61%) of residents believe the amount should be increased while only 2% believe it should be decreased, both consistent with results from previous years. More than two in five (44%) respondents indicate they would not support an increase to their property taxes to increase funding to the County's roadways while 20% would support an increase of more than $50, a significant increase from the 11% in 2017. (Tables 51-53)

### 4. Housing in St. Lawrence County

There are many more residents of St. Lawrence County who are satisfied with the quality of housing than dissatisfied (51% "Excellent or Good" and 14% "Poor") but the percentage who rate the quality of housing as either excellent or good has dropped significantly from the 60% reported in 2017. A similar trend can be seen in their attitudes toward availability of housing. In 2018, 44% rated housing availability as "Excellent or Good," a significant drop from 54% in 2015, while 20% rate housing availability as "Poor," a significant increase from 10% in 2015. (Tables 25, 49)

## Section 2.1 – Quality of Life in St. Lawrence County

(Tables 4, 7-28)

1. To gauge the current satisfaction with the quality of life in St. Lawrence County, participants were provided a list of 20 key community characteristics, or indicators. For each of these characteristics, the participants reported whether they feel that the characteristic in the county is "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," or "Poor." Table 4 summarizes the results with the percentage who indicated that each indicator is "Excellent or Good" as well as the percentage who report that it is "Poor." The list of indicators is sorted from highest to lowest according to the percentage who replied "Excellent or Good." (Tables 7-28)

Table 4 Summary of Quality of Life Indicators (Sorted by "Excellent or Good )

| | Excellent or Good | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Access to Higher Education | 74.5% | 6.0% |
| 2. Quality of the Environment | 71.4% | 7.0% |
| 3. Quality of K-12 Education | 69.2% | 5.7% |
| 4. Policing and Crime Control | 65.4% | 12.8% |
| 5. Public Outdoor Recreational Opportunities | 65.1% | 14.2% |
| 6. Overall Quality of Life in Area | 63.4% | 6.8% |
| 7. Healthcare Access | 50.1% | 19.9% |
| 8. Healthcare Quality | 49.9% | 19.4% |
| 9. Availability of Housing | 44.4% | 19.6% |
| 10. City, Town, or Village Government | 38.9% | 21.3% |
| 11. Availability of Behavioral Health Services | 36.5% | 20.3% |
| 12. Cultural/Entertainment Opportunities | 35.7% | 29.2% |
| 13. Availability of Care for the Elderly | 35.4% | 25.4% |
| 14. County Government | 32.8% | 22.7% |
| 15. Availability of Childcare | 31.4% | 17.1% |
| 16. Cost of Energy | 27.7% | 28.9% |
| 17. Real Estate Taxes | 19.3% | 38.3% |
| 18. Overall State of Local Economy | 16.1% | 41.9% |
| 19. Availability of Good Jobs | 14.0% | 51.9% |
| 20. Shopping Opportunities | 12.4% | 62.8% |

2. The majority of St. Lawrence County residents view the **overall quality of life in the area in a positive light**. More than three in five (63%) of the surveyed residents view the overall quality of life as either "Excellent or Good" while only 7% believe the overall quality of life is "Poor." This is the highest recorded value for "Excellent or Good" since 2015, though the results have not changed significantly over the four year period. (Tables 28)

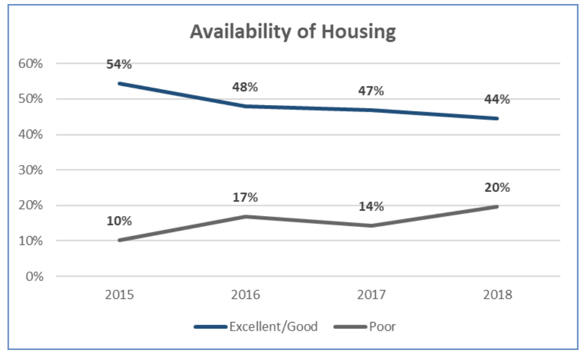
### Economic-Related Quality-of-Life Indicators:

(Availability of Housing, Availability of good jobs, Cost of energy, the Overall state of the local economy, Real estate taxes, Shopping Opportunities)

3. The economic related indicators continue to be more negatively perceived community characteristics than the not-so economic related indicators (consistent with previous years and the other counties surveyed). Five of the six economic related indicators were identified in the bottom quarter of all measured indicators. These five indicators are also in the top six most negatively perceived characteristics. (Tables 4,7)

4. **Overall State of the Local Economy**
For a third straight year, attitudes concerning the overall state of the local economy have not significantly changed. The most common response among participants is "Poor" (42%), closely followed by "Fair" (41%). The 16% response rate of "Excellent or Good" is the lowest measured since 2015, though not significantly lower. (Table 23)

5. **Availability of Housing**
The positive ratings of availability of housing have significantly declined since 2015 while the negative perceptions have increased over the same time period. The 44% "Excellent or Good" rating is the lowest rating recorded to date while the 20% "Poor" rating is the highest. Although a negative trend has been detected, availability of housing remains the highest rated economic indicator, the only indicator in the top half of all indicators when sorted by "Excellent or Good" rating. (Table 25)

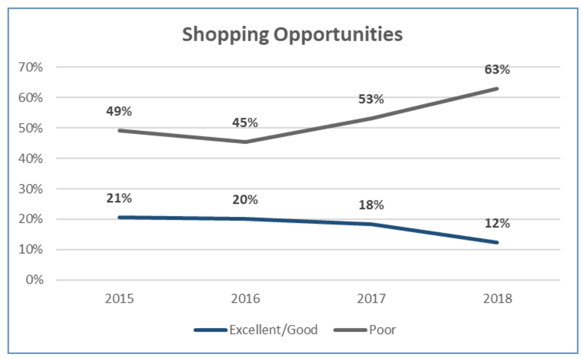



6. **Availability of Good Jobs**
Availability of good jobs continues to be one of the indicators more negatively perceived and less positively perceived by survey county residents. In 2018, 52% of the adults surveyed indicated a response of "Poor" while 14% perceived the availability of good jobs as either "Excellent or Good." The 52% "Poor" rating is the lowest reported in the four years of the study and statistically significantly lower than the 62% recorded in 2016. (Table 20)

7. **Cost of Energy**
For the first time since 2015 survey respondents rate the cost of energy more negatively (29% Poor) than positively (28% Excellent or Good). The most common response continues to be "Fair," at 42%. None of the three responses has changed significantly since 2015. (Table 10)

8. **Real Estate Taxes**
Opinions concerning real estate taxes have changed very little over the past year. "Excellent or Good" and "Poor" responses remain unchanged from 2017 (19% and 38% respectively) while "Fair" responses increased to 36% from 32% in 2017. (Table 18)

9. **Shopping Opportunities**
In 2018, shopping opportunities is the most negatively perceived indicator measured. Only one in eight (12%) respondents rate shopping opportunities as "Excellent or Good" while more than three in five (63%) rate them as "Poor." The "Poor" rating is significantly higher than that in 2015 (49%), 2016 (45%), and 2017 (53%) while the "Excellent or Good" rating is significantly lower than the 21% in 2015 and 20% in 2016. (Table 21)




## Not-so-Economic-Related Quality-of-Life Indicators:

10. **Quality of K-12 Education**
Quality of K-12 education was the third highest most positively perceived indicator in 2018. Nearly 70% of participants indicated that the quality of K-12 education is "Excellent or Good," consistent with the opinions in previous years. Additionally, "Fair" and "Poor" ratings have remained consistent over the time period. Residents in the lowest household income bracket are less likely to view K-12 education in a positive light. (Table 22)

11. **Access to Higher Education**
Access to higher education continues to be one of the most positively perceived indicators in the county. For the third time in four years, access to higher education was the most positively rated indicator by respondents. Three in four (75%) residents rated the characteristic as "Excellent or Good" while only 6% rate access to higher education as "Poor." These values have remained relatively constant since 2015. (Table 13)

12. **Healthcare Access and Healthcare Quality**
Opinions concerning healthcare access and healthcare quality are very similar. Half of the respondents reported healthcare access and healthcare quality as "Excellent or Good" with nearly 30% "Fair" ratings and 20% "Poor" ratings. The "Poor" ratings for both access and quality have risen each year since 2015, including a significant increase in healthcare quality (11% in 2015, 19% in 2018). The older segment of the population is more likely to rate both healthcare quality and access more positively than the younger age groups. (Tables 11-12)

13. **Availability of Care for the Elderly**
The year 2018 saw the highest "Poor" rating (25%) and lowest "Excellent or Good" rating (35%) of availability of care for the elderly since 2015. The 35% positive rating is a significant decline from the 45% recorded in 2015 while the 25% negative rating is a significant increase from the 17% from 2017. (Table 24)

14. **Availability of Behavioral Health Services**
Attitudes toward the availability of behavioral health services have changed very little since 2015. In 2018, 37% of respondents rate the indicator as "Excellent or Good," slightly higher than the 35% in 2017 and 33% in 2015. Twenty

percent of participants have rated it as “Poor” each year since 2015. The 31% of respondents who believe the availability of health services to be “Fair” is also consistent with results from previous years. (Table 27)

15. **Availability of Childcare**
After an increase in positive responses in 2017, attitudes surrounding the availability of childcare have returned to the levels seen in 2015 and 2016. In 2018 31% of residents rate the characteristic as “Excellent or Good” (down slightly from 34% in 2015 and 2016) while 17% rate availability of childcare as “Poor” (was also 17% in 2015 and 2016). For the first time in four years the most common response shifted from “Excellent or Good” to “Fair.” (Table 26)

16. **County Government**
Approximately one-third (33%) of participants feel the county government is “Excellent or Good” while nearly a quarter (23%) view the county government as “Poor.” For the fourth consecutive year the most common rating of county government is “Fair” at 38%. (Table 16)

17. **City, Town, and Village Government**
Positive attitudes toward city, town, and village government have remained stable since 2016 (2016-39%, 2017-38%, 2018-39%). The most common response continues to be “Excellent or Good” followed by “Fair” at 37%. Nearly one in five (21%) respondents indicated that they believe city, town, and village government to be poor. (Table 17)

18. **Policing and Crime Control**
Attitudes toward policing and crime control in 2018 are similar to those from 2017. The most common response is “Excellent or Good” (65% in both 2017 and 2018), followed by “Fair (22% in 2018, 24% in 2017), and “Poor” (13% in 2018, 10% in 2017). (Table 19)

19. **Cultural/Entertainment Opportunities**
Cultural and entertainment opportunities continue to be more positively viewed than negatively. The 36% of respondents indicating these opportunities to be “Excellent or Good” is the highest recorded over the four years of the study; however, the 29% “Poor” rating is also the highest recorded, but neither increase is statistically significant. The 31% “Fair” rating is approximately ten percent lower than those obtained in previous years. (Table 9)

20. **Public Outdoor Recreational Opportunities**
County residents’ opinions toward public outdoor recreational opportunities have been one of the more stable of all the quality of life indicators over the life of the study. “Excellent or Good” ratings have consistently been in the 60%’s (65% in 2018) while “Poor” ratings have been between 10% and 15% (14% in 2018). (Table 14)

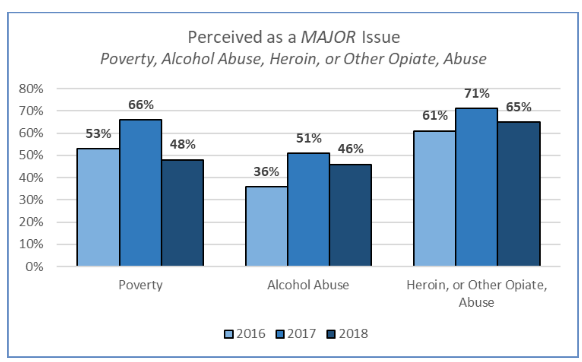
21. **Quality of the Environment**
Once again, the quality of the environment is one of the highest rated indicators in the study. Nearly seven in ten (71%) respondents rated the quality of the environment as “Excellent or Good” while only 7% rated it as “Poor.” Each of these rates is consistent with previous years; “Excellent or Good” rating have ranged between 67% and 73% while “Poor” ratings have ranged between 6% and 9%. (Table 15)

## Section 2.2 – Community Issues

(Tables 29-40)

A set of five potential community issues were presented to participants to solicit their perception of how severe each issue is for the community and whether or not they have been personally impacted by the issue. Specifically, participants were asked: (1) “How large of an issue do you believe __________ is in your community?” and (2) “Have you, or any immediate family, or close friends been impacted by __________ in the past twelve months?”

22. **Poverty**
Nearly one half of respondents (48%) indicated that poverty is a major issue in their community while another 38% believe it to be a moderate issue; only 12% identified poverty as a minor issue. The 48% identifying poverty as a major issue is a significant decrease from the 66% in 2017 returning to the more comparable rate of 53% from 2016. Nearly one out of every five (22%) St. Lawrence County residents report to being personally impacted by poverty, much lower than the reported 33% in 2016 and 38% in 2017. (Tables 29-30, 35-36)




23. **Alcohol Abuse**
Alcohol abuse was identified as a major issue by 46% of respondents, lower than the 51% recorded in 2017 but still significantly higher than the 36% observed in 2016. The percentages of residents who indicated alcohol abuse was either a moderate, minor, or not at all an issue have not differed significantly in the three years the issue has been studied. Females are more likely (51%) than males (40%) to perceive alcohol abuse as a major issue. One in six (17%)

respondents reported that they have been personally impacted by alcohol abuse in the last twelve months; this is a significant decrease from 28% in 2016 and 36% in 2017. (Tables 29, 31, 35, 37)

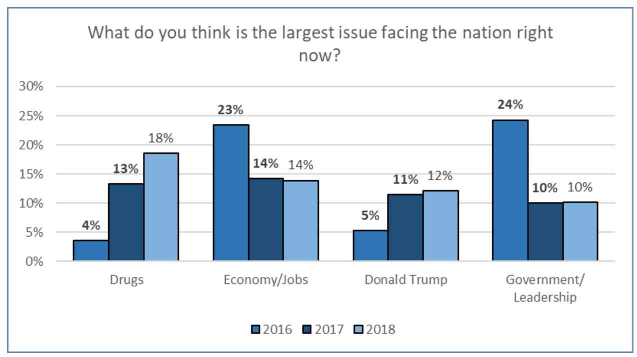
24. **Heroin, or Other Opiate, Abuse**
Of the five issues posed to respondents, heroin, or other opiate, abuse is the issue most identified as being a major concern . Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents believe this to be a major concern. This percentage is lower than the 71% from 2017 and higher than the 61% in 2016. Approximately 20% of respondents in 2018 indicated heroin, or other opiate, abuse to be a moderate issue. Fifteen percent of respondents shared that they had been personally impacted by heroin, or other opiate, abuse in 2018, significantly lower than the 26% in 2017 but similar to the 18% in 2016. (Tables 29, 32, 35, 38)

25. **Prescription Drug Abuse**
When asked to share their thoughts concerning prescription drug abuse, over half (58%) of county residents indicated they believe it to be a major issue. An additional 23% of residents believe prescription drug abuse to be a moderate issue. When asked if they had been personally affected by prescription drug abuse one in seven respondents indicated affirmatively. (Tables 29 33, 35, 39)

26. **Domestic Violence**
Domestic violence, including but not limited to sexual violence, is least likely to be identified as a major issue by St. Lawrence County residents. One quarter of respondents believe domestic violence to be a major issue while 44% believe it to be a moderate issue and 15% a minor issue. When asked if they had been personally impacted by domestic violence 7% shared that they had been impacted while 89% indicated they had not been. (Tables 29, 34, 35, 40)

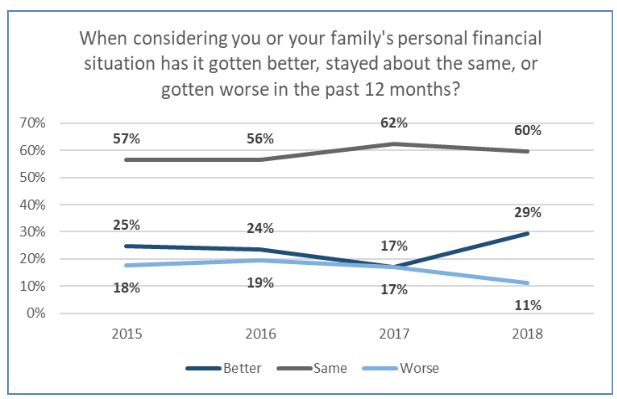
## Section 2.3 – Other Tracked Local Community Characteristics

(Table 41-47)




27. When asked to identify the most important issue facing the nation right now the four most common responses in 2018 are Drugs (18%), Economy and Jobs (14%), the President (12%), and Government and Leadership (10%). Economy and Jobs continues to be at the top of the list of concerns (second highest in 2016 and highest in 2017). The percentage of residents identifying Drugs as the most important issue has risen from 3% in 2016 to 18% in 2018. The percentage identifying the President (12% in 2018, 11% in 2017) and Government and Leadership (10% in both 2017 and 2018) as the largest issue in 2018 remained similar to results fom 2017. (Table 41)

28. St. Lawrence County residents were asked to evaluate how schools are preparing youth for the future by indicating their level of agreement with the statement, "St. Lawrence County schools are adequately preparing our youth for the technology and economy of the future." Attitudes in 2018 closely resemble those from 2015 with 52% in agreement and 29% not in agreement. The 52% is a significant drop from 69% in 2017 while the 29% is a significant increase from the 18% in 2017. (Table 42)




29. When asked to indicate if their family's personal financial situation had gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse in the past 12 months 60% indicated their situation is the same. Nearly three in ten (29%) indicated that their personal financial situation had gotten better while 11% indicated that it had gotten worse. The 29% recorded is significantly higher than the 17% from 2017 while the 11% is significantly lower than the 19% from 2016. (Table 43)

30. Participants were also asked to indicate whether their personal health had gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse in the last 12 months. Respondents are more likely to indicate that the personal health had gotten better (18%) than gotten worse (13%). Nearly seven in ten (69%) or respondents indicated their personal health has stayed the same in the last 12 months. (Table 44)

31. When asked their opinion about the availability of a multi-use trail for ATV's, snowmobiles, horseback riding and walking, approximately two-fifths (42%) of respondents believe such a trail to be very important to them personally. Nearly thirty percent believe a trail to be somewhat important (27%) or not at all important (30%). The not at all important percentage is a significant increase from 22% in 2017 but not as high as the 33% in 2016. (Table 45)

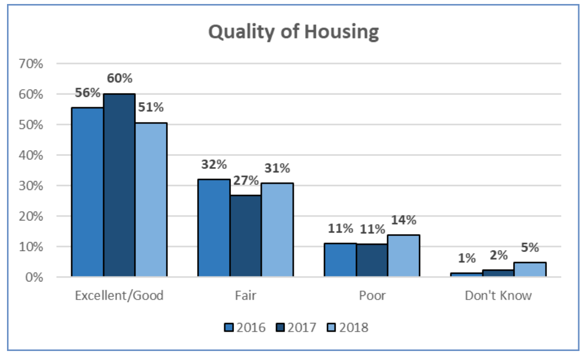
32. The employment status of county residents was recorded for each survey participant. Nearly a quarter (23%) identified themselves as retired, while nearly three in five (61%) are currently employed. These values are consistent with those from 2017, 26% retired and 56% employed. (Table 46)

33. As was the case in the three prior years, residents of St. Lawrence County are more likely to identify themselves as conservative (30%) than liberal (17%). Also consistent with previous studies, participants are most likely to identify as "middle of the road (39%). (Table 47)

# Section 2.4 – Housing in St. Lawrence County

(Tables 48-50)

34. Survey participants were asked whether they are currently rent or own their residence in St. Lawrence County. Nearly one fifth (18%) of respondents indicate that they rent their residence while 76% indicate that they are owners, six percent reported that they neither rent or own their residence in the county. The 18% is a decrease from 26% obtained in 2017 while the 76% is similar to the 74% from last year. (Table 48)



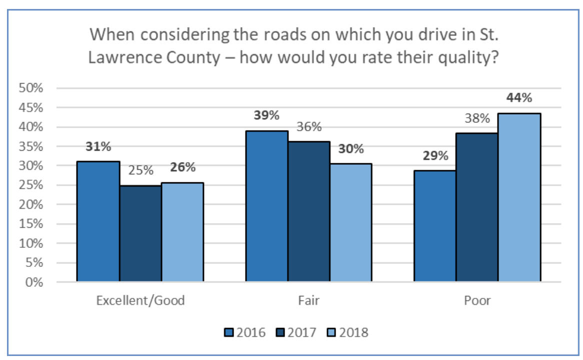

35. When asked to rate the quality of housing in their town, village, or city of residence nearly half (51%) of the respondents rate the quality as "Excellent or Good" while 14% rate the quality as "Poor." The 51% "Excellent or Good" rating is significantly lower than the 60% rating from 2017. (Table 49)

36. County residents were asked whether they had experienced housing discrimination when buying or renting a home within the county in the past twelve months. Approximately 22% of survey participants indicated that they had been involved in the process of buying or renting a residence in St. Lawrence County. Of those residents, approximately one in every six (16%) indicated that they had experienced what they perceived to be housing discrimination. Each respondent who indicated they had experienced discrimination was asked to identify the type of discrimination they experience. Nearly two-thirds of these participants believe they were discriminated based on pet ownership. (Table 50)

# Section 2.5 – Roadways in St. Lawrence County

(Tables 51-53)

37. For the third consecutive year survey participants were asked to rate the quality of the roads in St. Lawrence County. For the second consecutive year the percentage of respondents who rate the roads as "Poor" increased from the previous year. This value is 44% in 2018, up from 38% in 2017 and 29% in 2016. The "Fair" rating has dropped significantly to 30% in 2018 from 39% in 2016 while the "Excellent or Good" rating of 26% is one percent higher than 2017 but five percent lower than 2016. (Table 51)




38. Two questions were asked pertaining to funding for St. Lawrence County roadways. When asked whether they thought the amount of money the County spends on roads should be increased, decreased, or stay the same, three out of five (61%) of respondents indicated that funding should be increased, while 28% indicated funding should remain the same. The 28% who indicated the funding should remain the same is a significant drop from 36% in 2017 and a slight decrease from 31% in 2016. The 61% is an increase from 55% in 2017 but not quite as high as the 62% from 2016. Survey participants were also asked what dollar amount increase to property taxes they would support to increase funding to the County roads. Less than half (44%) of the respondents stated that they would not support any increase, while 20% would support an increase of up to $25 with another 16% willing to support an increase up to $50. Approximately 20% of county residents would support an increase of over $50, significantly higher than the 11% who supported an increase of more than $50 per year in 2017. (Tables 52-53)

## Section 2.6 – Living in St. Lawrence County

(Tables 54-57)

39. Each respondent was asked to share how long they have lived in St. Lawrence County. Nearly one in three (33%) respondents have lived in the county 25 years or less while nearly a quarter (26%) have lived in the county at least 50 years. (Table 54)

40. Nearly three quarters (74%) of participants are natives of St. Lawrence County. Of those who are not natives of the county the most common reason for their move the area is that either their family or parents lived in the county (60%). The two next most common reasons are that they took a job in the county (20%) and that they attended college in the county and stayed (16%). (Table 55)

41. Finally, participants were asked whether they planned to remain in St. Lawrence County throughout their retirement or move to another location. For those who did plan to move to another location they were asked to provide reasons for planning to move. Sixty percent of participants shared that they plan to remain in the county throughout their retirement; nearly a quarter (26%) plan to leave the county and 14% are unsure of their plans during retirement. The top reasons provided for leaving the county during retirement are the winter season (39%), cost of living (31%), and property taxes (20%). (Tables 56-57)

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