

Everly Community Survey 2021



The purpose of this survey is to understand how residents of Everly perceive quality of life in their community and how it has changed over time. A second goal is to identify the most pressing concerns facing the community. To that end, the City of Everly partnered with Iowa State University (ISU) to conduct the survey as part of an undergraduate research methods class project (*Sociology 302: Research Methods in the Social Sciences*). Costs of the survey were paid by ISU. The appendix presents the data collection methods, as well as detailed tables by age groups.

Everly's population stood at 575 people in 2020, 4.6% lower than a decade ago in 2010. The population is majority white non-Hispanic (98.3%).¹ The median age of residents is 36.4 years, with 24.2% being under 18 years old and 18.4% being over age 65.² Most people in town are well educated, with 89.6% having a high school diploma and 11.7% possessing a 4-year college degree. Everly has 284 housing units, of which 8.5% are vacant, mostly due to rentals. In terms of economics, 71.7% of residents are in the labor force, of which 3.3% are unemployed. The remaining 28.3% of the population is either retired, disabled, or in school. The typical Everly resident commutes 21.1 minutes to work. Most residents are employed as sales and office workers (27.4%), in manufacturing or transportation occupations (19.7%), or in agriculture, construction, or maintenance jobs (19.4%). The median household income in Everly is \$48,333 per year, and 14.3% of residents live in poverty.²

Government Services in Everly

Residents were asked to rate the quality of government services and facilities available in Everly (see Fig.1). Over 90 percent of residents rated the quality of the Ketelsen community center, fire and emergency medical services, and city parks as good or very good. Above average ratings were given to the public library, city government offices, and public utilities (about 70%). Areas of concern include average ratings for police protection (61%), below average ratings for city streets (42%), and very poor ratings regarding the quality of public schools (28%). Younger residents under 40 years of age had more negative ratings than those over 65 years of age. Overall, most city services were rated lower today than they were in 2014. The largest drops in quality ratings were for K-12 schools (-55 percentage point drop), followed by city streets (-22 points). This means that seven years ago the quality of local schools and streets was rated much better than it is today.

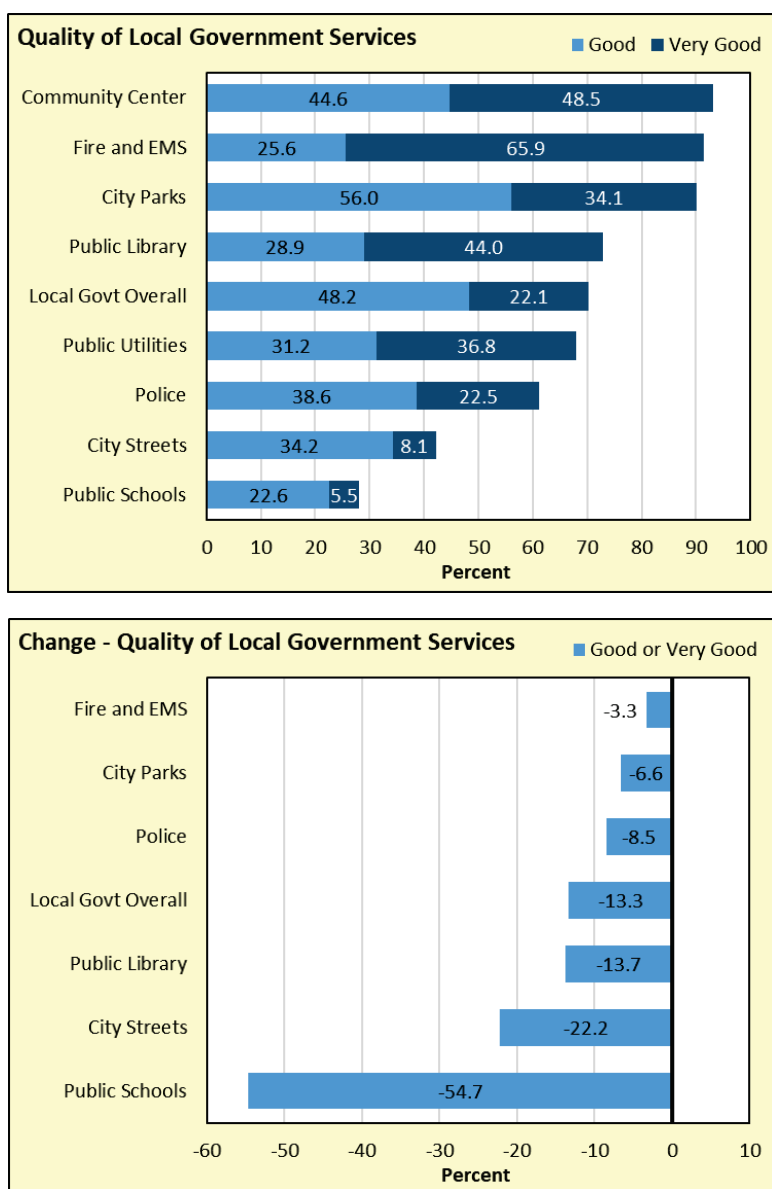


Figure 1. Quality of local government services in 2021 and change from 2014.

Nearly 60% of residents thought the city has been doing a good job at keeping them informed about local issues. Just under 31% said the city is doing a fair job, and only 6% rated the city's efforts as poor. Residents indicated they would most frequently use local radio (50%), Facebook (45%), and city flyers and mailings (44%) as a means to learn about local news and events (see Fig.2). Younger residents under 40 heavily favor Facebook over the newspaper, while seniors still rely on their local newspaper. Few would visit the city's website, and none would use Twitter as a communications platform. In their comments, people also said posting flyers in the post office was a good way to communicate with residents, as well as displaying events on the electric marquee on the main highway.

Job city does in keeping people informed				
	Percent	Age 18-39	Age 40-64	Age 65 plus
Poor		0.0	9.5	3.1
Fair		28.8	37.1	27.1
Good or very good		71.2	53.5	63.5
				Total
				59.0

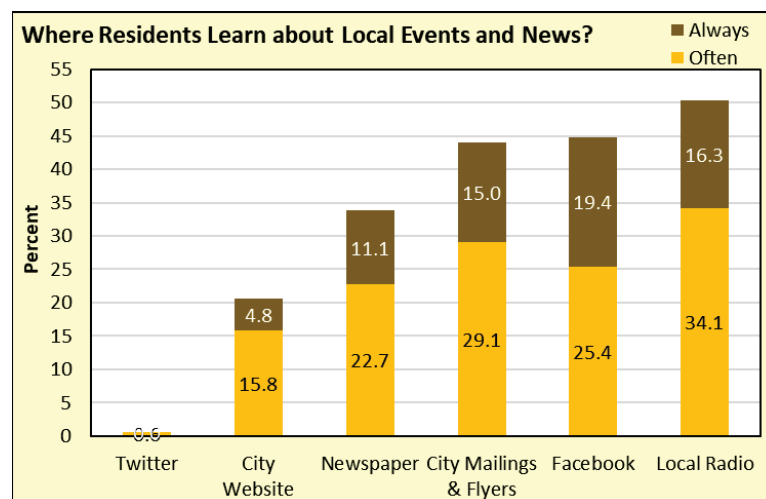


Figure 2. Where residents learn about local news and events

Quality of Amenities and Shopping in Everly

While most Everly residents were satisfied with government services, the same cannot be said for other aspects of the community (see Fig.3). In terms of amenities, about half thought their broadband internet service was good. The quality of local housing was rated lower, with only 36% rating homes as good to very good. However, nearly half of younger residents said housing quality was good. The major concerns in Everly have to do with dependent care and entertainment services. For children services, only 15% rated youth programs as good and only 7% rated childcare services favorably. In fact, between one-third and one-half of residents did not know how to rate these services, indicating they probably do not exist in Everly. The quality of local shopping and entertainment venues was rated very low at 12%, as was the quality of local job opportunities in Everly at 11%. Services for senior citizens posted the lowest ratings, with only 6% saying it was good

and 39% not knowing how to rate senior care, again indicating the absence of these services in Everly. Compared to 2014 ratings, dependent care services are much worse today than they were almost a decade ago. Favorable ratings of childcare fell by -67 percentage points, as did senior services (-50 point drop) and youth programs (-35 point drop). However, ratings for shopping, entertainment, and local jobs did not change much since 2014, indicating these are long-term challenges for Everly.

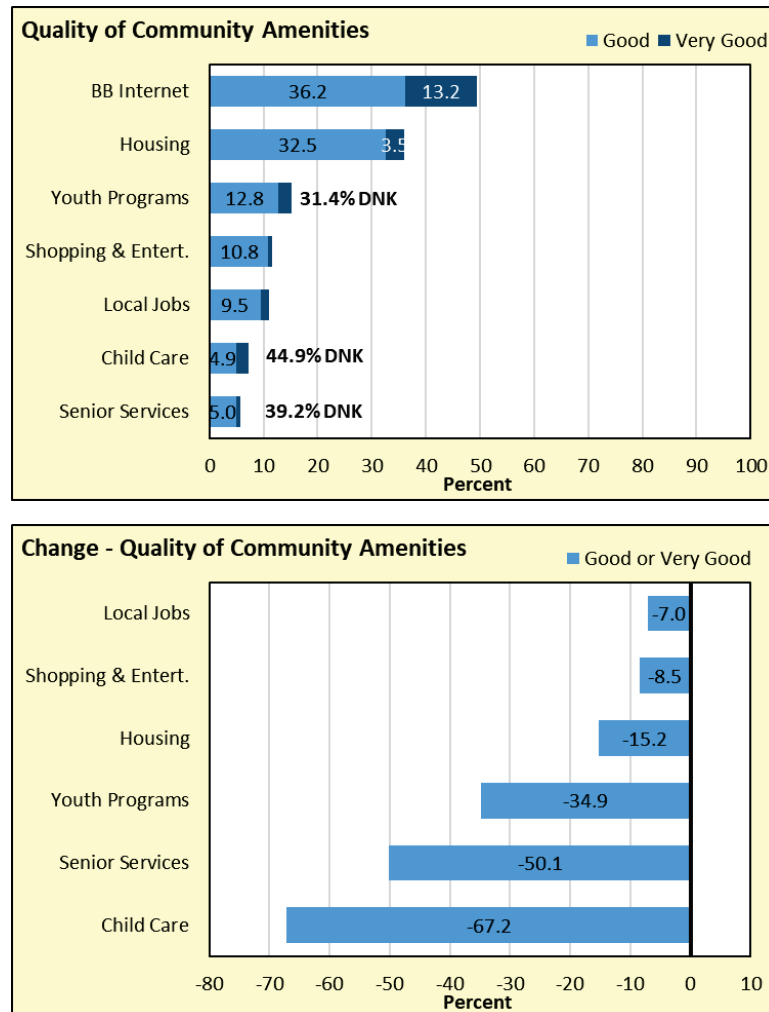


Figure 3. Quality of community services and conditions in 2021 and change from 2014

Knowing that residents rate the quality of local shopping and entertainment low, the next question is where do people in Everly travel to obtain these services. We asked people whether they stay mostly in Everly or travel to another community for retail and entertainment (see fig.4). Only 7% of residents stay in Everly to dine or drink at local restaurants and bars; and only 5% stay in town for entertainment and recreation. By contrast, the majority of Everly residents travel to Spencer. For example, 62% do most of their shopping in Spencer, 44% frequent restaurants and bars there, and 43% travel to Spencer for entertainment and recreation. Between 11% and 20% of residents travel to both Spencer and Okoboji for these services. Few travel to Hartley. On a positive note, most Everly residents attend church in town (39%).

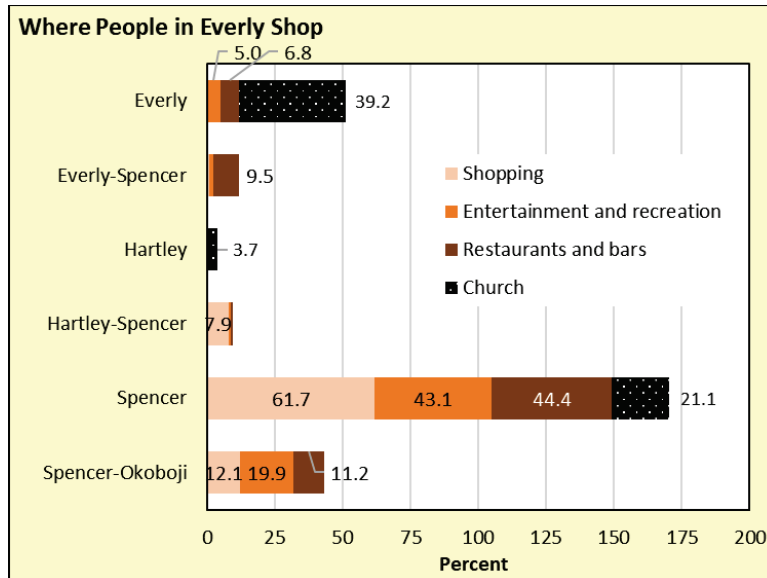


Figure 4. Locations where residents frequently go for shopping and entertainment

We also asked residents a hypothetical: If they could bring two new businesses to Everly, what would they be? The counts are presented in figure 5. The majority of residents said Everly needed a grocery store and/or a meat locker (mentioned 32 times). Having a restaurant also topped the list, being mentioned by 22 residents. Other important businesses on the list was an auto service store (including a car wash), more retail stores, having a hardware store or lumberyard, and more dependent care and health services like daycares, fitness centers, and clinics.

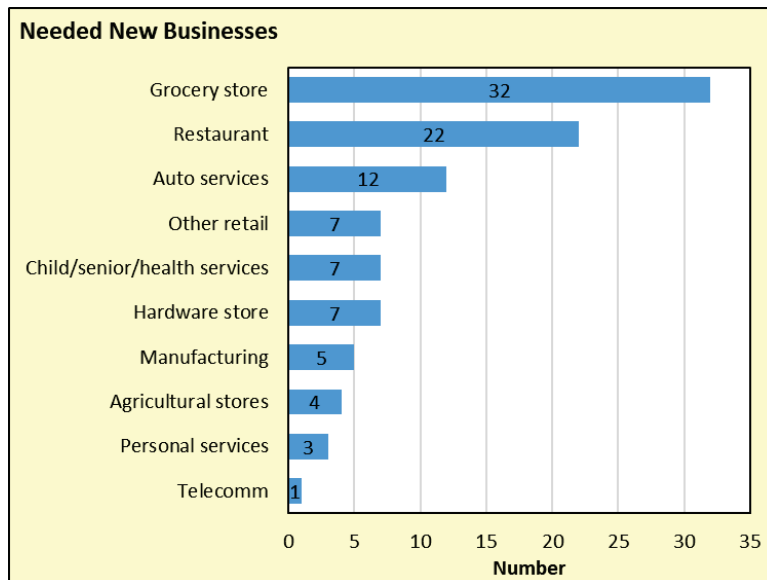


Figure 5. Types of new businesses needed in Everly

Community Perceptions of Everly

We next asked residents what they thought about everyday life in Everly (see Fig.6). The majority of residents, about 75%, expected Everly to stay about the same over the next two years. About 22% thought the community will become worse off, and only a handful expected circumstances to get better. Younger residents tended to be more optimistic. Over 90% of residents agreed that Everly is a safe place to live. Over 60% thought the community was trusting of each other and friendly. About half of residents said Everly is a supportive and tolerant community. However, only 40% see the community as accepting of new ideas; and only 33% thought the town was well kept-up. Looking at changes from 2014, Everly has become more safe, more trusting, and more accepting of new ideas in 2021. Less positive is that residents feel that the community is less friendly and supportive of each other today than it was back in 2014. The starkest drop has been in town up-keep. In 2014, nearly 55% said Everly was kept-up, but this fell by -22% percentage points by 2021, indicating people think the community is becoming run-down. Young people view Everly as less tolerant, less accepting of new ideas, and less kept-up than older residents.

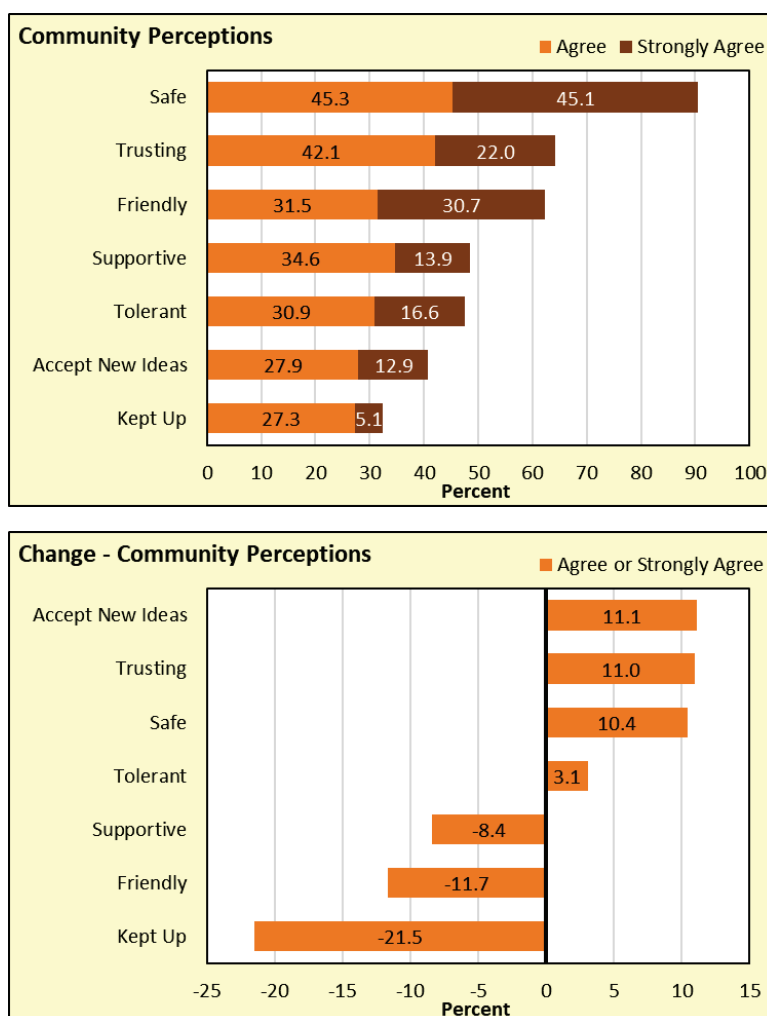


Figure 6. Community perceptions in 2021 and change from 2014

Most residents in Everly feel a strong attachment to the community (see Fig.7). Nearly 90% say they feel at home in Everly, and over 70% say they would be sorry to leave the community if they ever had to move. These two indicators of attachment have increased since 2014, indicating people are more attached to Everly now than almost ten years ago. In addition, over 55% of people say that local organizations work to benefit everyone in Everly. However, Everly is struggling with a loss of confidence, cooperation, and involvement. Only 38% say Everly has more going for it than other towns of a similar size; and only 38% agree that the whole town gets behind projects when something needs to get done in Everly. Young people, in particular, note the lack of cooperation and confidence in the community. These indicators of confidence and cooperation fell by about -10 percentage points since 2014. Lastly, only about 30% of residents feel they are highly involved in local decision making, which may limit participation and volunteering in community projects.

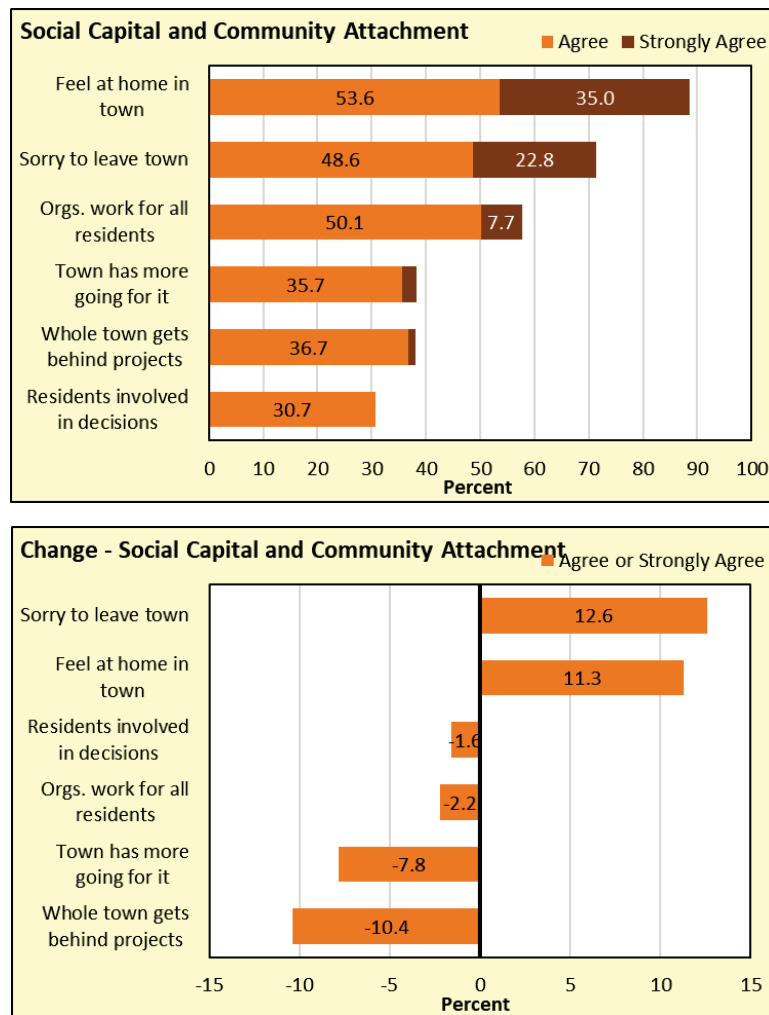


Figure 7. Social capital and community attachment in 2021 and change from 2014

Civic Engagement and Volunteering in Everly

Civic engagement means participation in local projects and membership in local organizations, which helps with volunteering and fund-raising to support community improvements. Membership in outside organizations can help bring in new ideas, more funding, and technical expertise from outside the community. Organizations can include civic service clubs, fraternal groups, church-related groups, and other community organizations. Residents in Everly are not very engaged in the community, with 55% saying they have never participated in a local project during the last two years. Further, 57% say they do not belong to any local organization in Everly, and 67% say they are not members of any outside groups (see Fig.8). Rates of non-participation and non-group membership are higher now than in 2014. Non-participation rose by 5 percentage points, non-membership in local groups rose by 7 points, and non-membership in outside groups rose by 19 points – all indicating declining rates of civic engagement in Everly. On a positive note, Everly appears to have a small yet dedicated group of volunteers who have participated five or more times.

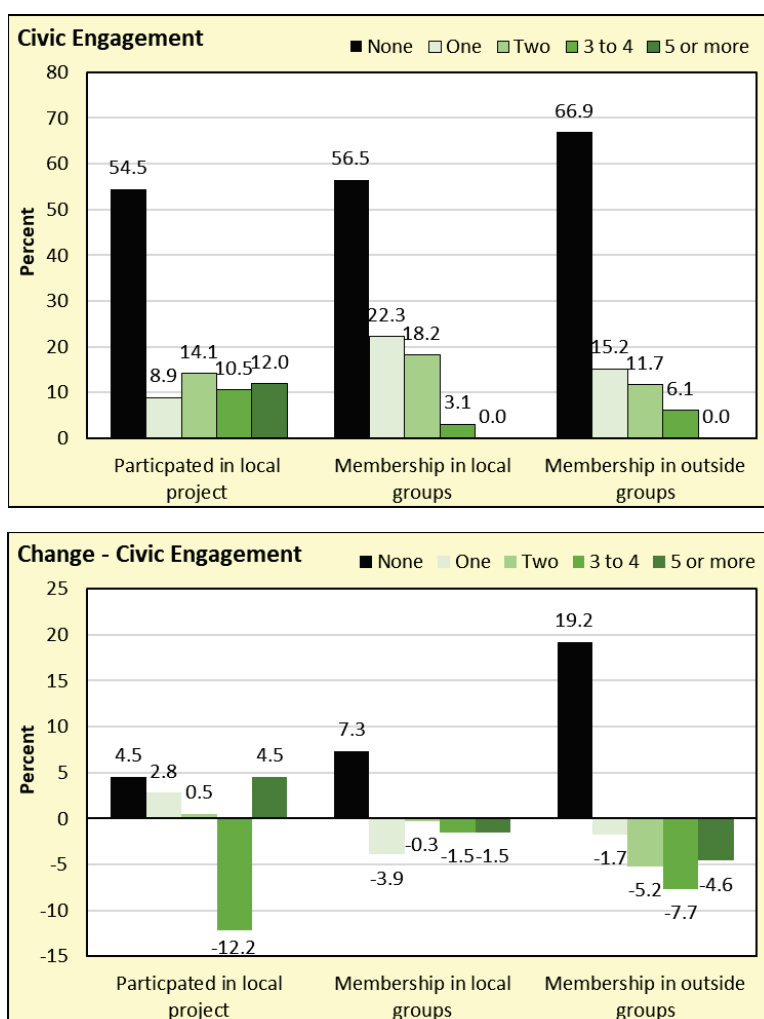


Figure 8. Local participation and organizational memberships in 2021 and change from 2014

So why are people in Everly reluctant to get involved? The top reason cited by 61% of residents is that no one asked them to volunteer, up from only 26% saying this back in 2014 (a gain of 35 percentage points). Around 43% said they did not know how to get involved, double the percentage saying this in 2014. Just over 40% said they simply did not have the time to participate in projects, which has grown as a reason over the past decade. Few residents in Everly said they had no interest in volunteering (only 29%), and few said they lacked the skills to contribute (only 25%). Young residents under 40 years of age showed a strong interest in volunteering, but did not seem to know how to get involved. In short, people in Everly are not getting involved because they say no one asked them and they do not know how to participate (see Fig.9).

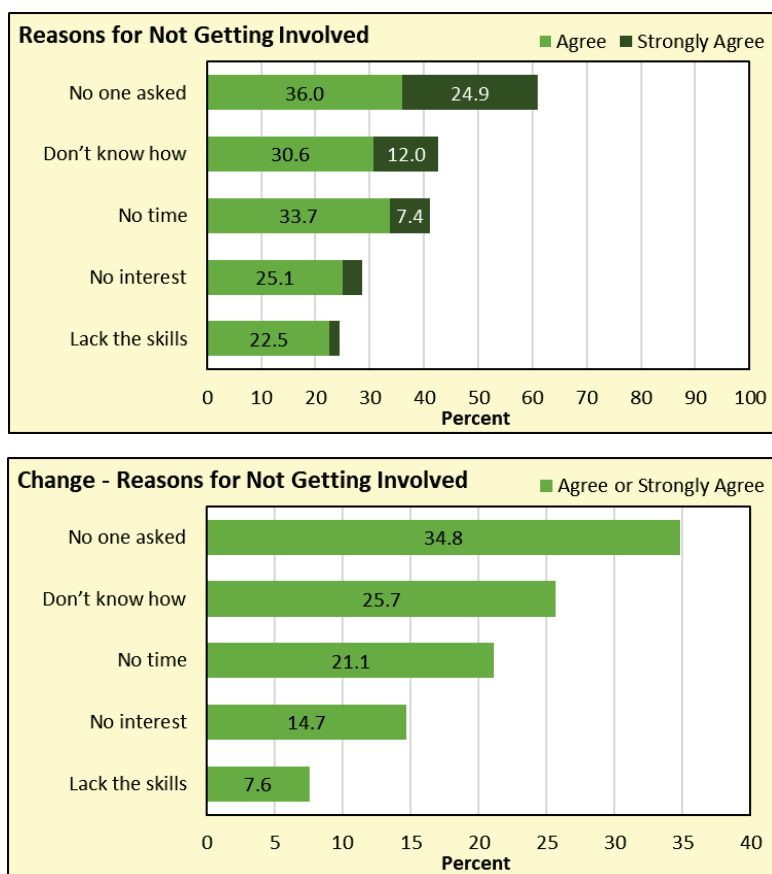


Figure 9. Reasons why people do not volunteer in 2021 and change from 2014

In Their Own Words: What Residents Think About Everly

Lastly, we asked residents what are some of the things they liked best about living in Everly. Below is a selection of representative comments.

“I like the small town feel/atmosphere.” “I feel very safe.” “People are friendly.” “Quiet place to live.” “Town's close for jobs and shopping and eating.” “They leave you alone if you want to be or you can be involved in everything.” “I loved Everly growing up so I thought

it would be perfect for our growing family.” “Small town community is very nice. People help and look out for each other.” “City Hall on top of things.” “Clean parks”

Conversely, we asked residents about some of the things they dislike about living in Everly. Again, below is a selection of representative comments.

“No housing for rent or sale to get younger families into the community” “Streets that need to be cut down (for height, years of blacktop buildup). Water runs to sidewalks and homes.” “I dislike that we do not have curb/gutter. It doesn't look good, rain water doesn't flow well, it's messy.” “They need to advertise the different groups and get new people involved. Besides the library there really are no family activities.” “To better help the community we need more activities to get people out and meeting each other, especially since the school closed. There are some very devoted citizens and we could do more if someone spearheaded the effort.” “Run down conditions of home and lots; Not many people get involved in city projects.” “Need to clean up the town so it doesn't look like a junkyard.” “Selective city code enforcement.” “I dislike having to go to other communities for everything.” “Seems like we may be losing our sense of community with the closing of the school.”

Summary

This community survey has identified some opportunities and challenges facing Everly in the coming years. In terms of government services, residents clearly had concerns about the quality of K-12 schools since the closing of the middle and high school in Everly. The condition of city streets, including curbs and gutters, is a major complaint among residents. On the other hand, the Ketelsen Community Center, the Everly fire and rescue department, and city parks are valued assets in the community. Over 60% of residents think the city does a good job of keeping residents informed about local news and events; and the most preferred way to communicate is through local radio, Facebook, and mailings and flyers (especially at the post office).

In terms of other community services, the priority needs in Everly are to improve childcare, services for senior citizens, and programs for children and teenage youth. Ratings of quality were very low, and had worsened sizably since 2014. For example, favorable rating of childcare dropped by -67 percentage points, senior services by -34 points, and youth programs by -35 points. The results suggest that many of these important services have become unavailable in the community. Like many smaller towns, Everly rates low in terms of quality of local jobs, local shopping, and local entertainment. Between 40-60% of residents travel to Spencer for shopping, dining out, or entertainment. Only 5-7% regularly shop or go out-to-eat in Everly. When asked what new businesses they would like to see come into Everly, a grocery store and a restaurant were at the top of the list, followed by an auto services store.

Everly is a great place to live because two-thirds of residents say the community is safe, people trust each other, and everyone is friendly. Residents are strongly attached to Everly, with over 70% saying they feel at home and would be sorry to leave the community. Over 55% say that local clubs and organizations work to benefit everyone in the community, not just certain groups. However, the community has become more run-down; and people are less willing to work together and are less

confident about the future. Only 33% thought the town is well kept-up today, compared to 54% in 2014. Only 38% thought the town gets behind local projects today, down from 49% in 2019. Only 38% feel that Everly has more going for than other similar towns, down from 46% a decade ago.

There are troubling trends in terms of volunteerism in Everly. Only 31% of residents feel they are involved in local decisions, 55% have never participated in a local project, 57% do not belong to a local organization, and 67% do not belong to any group outside the community. Rates of participation have fallen since 2014. Most residents say the reasons they do not get involved is that no one asked them (61%) and they do not know how to volunteer (43%). Some do not have the time, but most said they have an interest in getting involved. In summary, Everly is a community that has some strengths, but one that also faces challenges similar to other smaller towns in Iowa. Closure of the public middle and high schools has been a major issue in the community. Everly will need to create a culture of cooperation and confidence to overcome these challenges.

References

¹ PL94-71, Decennial Census 2020, U.S. Census Bureau

² American Community Survey 2015-2019, U.S. Census Bureau

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Methods

Undergraduate students in ISU's *Sociology 302: Research Methods in the Social Sciences* conducted the survey for their class project. In cooperation with the City of Everly, students helped draft questions and formatted the questionnaire. Students also drew the samples, assembled the mailings, and entered the data. Using the U.S. Postal Service Delivery Sequence File, n=224 housing units in Everly were randomly sampled and mailings sent to addresses in April 2021. The first mailing contained a cover letter explaining the project, the questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope. Two weeks later a postcard was sent either thanking residents who responded to the survey, or reminding others to complete the questionnaire and mail it back to us. Residents were encouraged to complete the survey on-line, as a web version was available. There were n=42 housing unit addresses that came back as vacant. In total, n=83 residents responded to the survey, for a response rate of 45.6% (RR2). The sample was designed to have a margin of error of plus or minus 3% at a 95% confidence level. This means if the survey were repeated using the same questions and the same methodology, 19 times out of 20 the findings would not vary by more than plus or minus 3 percentage points. The actual margin of error with responses is plus or minus 7.3%. Finally, data are adjusted by sex and age to reflect the general population of Everly based on 2015-2019 ACS Census data.

Appendix – Results by Age Cohorts

Where will Everly be in the next two years?				
<i>Percent</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>	<i>Total</i>
Worse off	6.7	30.4	22.6	21.8
Stay the same	79.8	69.6	71.3	74.6
Better off	13.5	0.0	0.0	3.7

Quality of local government services				
<i>Percent good or very good</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>	
Public Library	71.2	65.7	86.9	
Community Center	93.3	92.2	94.0	
City Streets	37.5	43.1	45.5	
City Parks	86.5	86.7	100.0	
Public Utilities	64.4	66.3	72.6	
Fire and EMS	93.3	88.4	94.8	
Police	51.0	64.0	68.2	
Public Schools	22.1	28.1	33.3	
Local Govt Overall	55.8	77.0	70.8	

Quality of community amenities				
<i>Percent good or very good</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>	
Local Jobs	15.4	10.4	8.5	
Shopping & Entert.	6.7	17.6	5.8	
Housing	51.0	31.0	32.9	
Child Care	0.0	6.7	17.5	
Youth Programs	22.1	10.1	18.8	
Senior Services	0.0	10.5	3.2	
BB Internet	42.3	46.0	64.3	

Where residents learn about local news & events				
	<i>Percent often or always</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>
Newspaper		22.1	24.1	61.1
City Website		13.5	23.4	19.9
City Mailings & Flyers		42.3	39.9	48.9
Local Radio		57.7	42.1	59.0
Facebook		55.8	43.1	40.2
Twitter		0.0	0.0	2.8

Community perceptions				
	<i>Percent agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>
Friendly		57.7	60.7	66.0
Safe		93.3	92.2	82.5
Supportive		51.0	44.1	54.5
Tolerant		28.8	53.0	57.7
Accept New Ideas		37.5	34.8	55.3
Trusting		71.2	61.8	62.3
Kept Up		22.1	31.6	44.0

Social capital and community attachment				
	<i>Percent agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>
Town has more going for it		13.5	51.0	46.0
Orgs. work for all residents		42.3	61.6	69.0
Whole town gets behind projects		21.6	42.6	40.4
Residents involved in decisions		14.4	34.4	44.5
Feel at home in town		92.8	84.4	91.5
Sorry to leave town		64.4	70.1	79.4

Civic engagement and reasons why people do not volunteer				
	<i>Percent yes or agree</i>	<i>Age 18-39</i>	<i>Age 40-64</i>	<i>Age 65 plus</i>
<u>Participated in a local project</u>				
Did not volunteer		71.2	48.7	43.4
Volunteered once		0.0	12.8	11.3
Volunteer 2 or more time		28.8	38.4	42.2
<u>Reasons for not volunteering</u>				
No time		28.8	48.2	39.7
Lack the skills		26.9	17.2	35.2
Don't know how		55.8	37.3	36.8
No interest		6.7	37.3	41.0
No one asked		62.5	59.3	63.9

About Rural Sociology at Iowa State University

Rural Sociology at Iowa State University has a long history, being one of the first programs in the nation. The research and extension programs were established in 1913 and 1922, respectively, in the College of Agriculture. The Bachelor of Science degree in rural sociology was established in 1919, the Master of Science in 1920, and the Ph.D. in 1940. At present, there are four rural sociology faculty members who engage in teaching, research, and extension activities in the sociology of agriculture, rural communities, and population studies. Long-term research and extension projects in rural sociology include the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll since 1982; and Iowa Small Towns Poll since 1994.