



“The FOUR Questions”

A tool for defining a vision and future direction for the Koochiching County area

A Summary of Themes and Comments



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Michael Wellcome

Voyage Forward Steward

INTRODUCTION

Background In the spring of 2013, Koochiching County's largest employer, Boise, announced they would be laying off approximately 265 people at the International Falls paper mill. This announcement set a series of events in motion that resulted in the creation of an Economic Response Team (ERT).

The ERT, led by County Commissioners Wade Pavleck and Rob Ecklund and International Falls Mayor Bob Anderson and City Councilor Pete Kalar, called on community members to participate in three teams to develop a comprehensive response to the pending layoffs. The broad mission of the response was to leverage all available resources to help individuals and businesses impacted by the decision and to formulate a long-term vision and strategy for economic viability.

The result was the creation of the Business Development and Retention Team, Worker Retention and Assistance Team, and the Long Term Vision and Strategy team. It was a three pronged approach intended to support business, workers, and develop a long term sustainable economic development strategy for Koochiching County.

The Business Development and Retention Team focused on identifying immediate actions and strategies to support existing businesses, looked at opportunities to build on workforce skills available, and investigated new development opportunities.

The Worker Retention and Assistance Team pooled together federal, state, and county resources to support those affected by the layoffs. The programs developed include career counseling, training and unemployment benefits support, and tracking of the dislocated workers, their skills, interests and career plans. Other local companies were also affected and assistance was provided to support the additional dislocated workers in need.

The Long Term Vision and Strategy Team (LTVST) had an immediate need to identify the economic development assets and liabilities available to create a viable economic development strategy. The research required to identify what we, as a county, have to offer, and what barriers we must overcome to develop a diversified economic strategy to succeed in the long term led to the hiring of the consultant firm of Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF). The release of the economic adjustment strategy is anticipated sometime in June or early July. This report will be comprehensive and include the hard data necessary to identify business opportunities and economic development initiatives suitable for our region.

A long term need identified by the LTVST was to engage the community in a process that would provide a roadmap, vision, or *destiny* with clear goals and objectives of what our region will look like in the future. The LTVST wanted the citizens to define *who and what we wanted to be in 5, 10, or 15 years from now*.

In September, the LTVST launched an *Economic Response – Call to Action* event at Backus Community Center. Over 165 people from throughout Koochiching County heard presentations from Dr. M. James Benson, President Emeritus of Bemidji State University

who shared information on a community engagement process called “Bemidji Leads”, and from Mike Lundstrom, President of the Hermantown Area Chamber and one of the leaders of the “Advance Hermantown” effort.

The overwhelming support to the Call to Action resulted in the formation of the Public Engagement Team which took on the responsibility of engaging the community and defining Koochiching County’s “destiny”, and the Buzz Team, which was responsible for spreading the word.

Purpose

This summary document provides a broad overview of the process used to identify what our community values most, what we don’t want to lose, and what we would like to see changed.

It provides the foundation to clearly define our future.

It contains a description of the FOUR Questions process, a brief summary of the comments submitted by our citizens, and discusses the community engagement process moving forward.

The “Combined Themes” portion of the summary is provided to allow the reader an opportunity to view a cross reference of the themes identified in each of questions, two, three, and four.

Our goal is to be as transparent as possible. Therefore, all of the raw data, themes by question, and combined themes are available for viewing on the Voyage Forward website at www.voyageforward.org. Nothing has been edited in the raw data. It was downloaded directly from the survey instrument as the comments were provided, typos and all.

The “FOUR Questions”

Following the process of the “Bemidji Leads” and “Advance Hermantown” community engagement initiatives, Public Engagement Team members, or Stewards, identified community wide organizations, both public and private, to present the idea of a community engagement process. With support from the Buzz Team, in January and February the Stewards began a public conversation to garner support and peak interest in identifying what we value as a region.

The FOUR Questions created and asked by the Stewards were:

What do you like most about living in _____ (city)?

What do you like most about living in the Koochiching County area?

What don’t you want to lose as the Koochiching County area changes over time?

If you were in charge, what would you do to improve the Koochiching County area?

The FOUR Questions were intended to ask community members what they value, what they don’t want to lose, and what they would change if given the opportunity. Our mission was to engage the community by listening objectively and carefully to all community members so we had a better understanding of what is important, what is working, and what may need to be changed. It was essential the Stewards did not coach nor comment on the respondents’ answers.

Armed with this information, we can develop a shared vision reflecting these values and priorities, and define major strategies to make our region a better place to live and raise a family. To make our region a Community of Choice.

This was a critical step to understand -- in very broad terms -- what the citizens *thought and felt* about our County. For about six weeks the Stewards combed the County asking citizens and organizations the four questions, entering their responses into a database so they could be analyzed and categorized to identify major *themes*.

The response was overwhelming! The Stewards received feedback from well over 800 individuals and groups who provided *thousands of responses*. People were engaged, passionate, and open about what they like, what they value, and what they would like to see changed.

**Summary of
the FOUR
Questions**

This is a very brief summary of the FOUR Questions. You are encouraged to review the appendices in this summary and visit the Voyage Forward website at www.voyageforward.org for a more detailed list of responses and themes.

We are very passionate of our way of life. We enjoy the outdoors, nature, and all it offers. We respect the environment yet want the freedom and flexibility to thoroughly enjoy its splendor.

The services offered by our business community, education institutions, and healthcare providers are critical to our success. We want to see them grow and remain prosperous.

Our culture and heritage are intertwined in the way we think and act. We do not want to lose our identity yet understand there is room for change. We live in a global society and should embrace change and be open to new comers.

We respect what our largest employer offers yet feel the need to diversify. Supporting existing small businesses and creating an environment which supports new business opportunities that offer a livable wage are key to our success. As a region we have been losing our youth because of a lack of opportunity.

That needs to change.

While we live in one of the most pristine areas of the state there is room for improvement. First impressions are difficult to change. What visitors see when they visit our cities says a lot about *all of us*. We need to make the best first impression we can. It starts with changing how we are seen by people that come to our region. Voyageurs National Park has over 230,000 people visit each year. Over 250,000 people enter Canada at our border crossing.

That is a lot of first impressions.

We need to do a better job working together for the common good. We are at our best when we forge relationships with a common goal of making this the best possible place to raise a family. All too often this is not the case. A common perception is personal agendas derail opportunities. We need to make a concerted effort to look to the future

and create the best community in the state.

In conclusion, we have a lot to offer and like all communities, can do a better job at promoting our region and working together to solve problems. To the person, we enjoy our region, heritage, culture and have a strong desire to grow and diversify our economy to improve services and keep our youth here.

What's Next?

The intent of the Voyage Forward effort is to seek citizen input, identify common issues we are passionate about, create common goals (Destiny Drivers) we can agree on, and keep us moving in the right direction. While the FOUR Questions provide very broad themes, we need to delve deeper and narrow our focus.

To that end, the Public Engagement Team is in the final stages of developing a region wide survey which will provide a focused direction on our Journey to Success.

The survey instrument will be available on the web and in paper form for those that do not have access to a computer or the Internet.

The results of the survey will enable us, as a region, to develop specific goals or "Destiny Drivers" with action plans to make our community the best possible place to live, work, and raise a family.

The Destiny Drivers provide regional, city, and community leadership with the information they need to implement action plans based on community input. Destiny Drivers will provide a roadmap for future decisions and implement the changes we as a community want to see.

How can I help?

Voyage Forward is all about community engagement. It's about getting involved and defining who we want to be in the future. We are ordinary people -- Stewards of the community from all walks of life who care deeply about our community. We are passionate, energetic, and embrace change for the betterment of our community.

YOU can help by joining our effort. Subscribe for updates on the Voyage Forward website at www.voyageforward.org and contact one of our Stewards. We are all listed on the website.

Help us make our region the best in the state.

QUESTION ONE

QUESTION ONE

What do you like most about living in _____ city?

** The first question asked by Voyage Forward Stewards was city specific. Below are the major categories and themes from cities within Koochiching County. The categories were analyzed and themes created by city residents. A complete list of comments is available on the Voyage Forward website at www.voyage.forward.org

BIRCHDALE

CATEGORY: **THEME:**

Activities	There are opportunities to be involved and activities for all ages.
Community	This is a place where everyone feels as though they are part of a larger community and they can rely upon one another.
Education	The Indus school and the opportunity to access RRCC is valued.
Employment	Opportunities in logging and farming are important to the area.
Family	This is a place with strong family ties and a good place to grow families.
Heritage	Our area is rich in history and culture.
Leadership	We appreciate those who step forward to represent the community.
Location	We like our remote location yet value our proximity to larger cities and Canada.
Low Cost Living	Our area is affordable.
Nature	We appreciate the beauty of the area.
Outdoors	The great outdoors provides us with tremendous opportunities to recreate and relax.
Safety	This is a safe community.
Small Town	Our small town is a peaceful place that provides a great sense of community.

INTERNATIONAL FALLS

CATEGORY:	THEME:
Activities	International Falls residents value the availability and variety of activities and public events. (10 responses)
Border	We value our image as a border community, the opportunities it offers, and our relationship with our sister city, Fort Frances. (17 responses)
Business	We value those businesses that provide friendly, quality service. (14 responses)
City Services	We value the quality services provided by the city. (16 responses)
Climate	We enjoy the changing seasons. We enjoy our good summer weather, our snow-filled winters, and our notoriety in national weather coverage. (10 responses)
Community	
Culture	There is a plethora of cultural and arts programs available through Backus and beyond. (20 responses)
Education	Our educational systems provide a variety of quality opportunities from pre-school through College. (39 responses)
Family	Close relations with family and friends help make this a community of choice. (36 responses)
Heritage	Our history and tradition is an important anchor and draw to the community. (47 responses)
Jobs	Living wage jobs are appreciated by those who have them. (22 responses)
Low Cost of Living	18 responses
Location	Great things about our location include the lake, river, international border, and access to the outdoors. (32 responses)
Nature	72 responses
No themes were provided for the below categories:	
Outdoors	
Pride	
Recreation	
Safety	
Small Town	
Tourism	

LITTLEFORK

CATEGORY:	THEME:
Business/Services	People like the friendly, customer service oriented small businesses and access to all basic services. (15 responses)
Community	Littlefork is a friendly, supportive, close-knit small community. (64 responses)
Employment/Family	Littlefork is a great place to live, work and raise a family. (27 responses)
Outdoor Recreation/Natural Resources	Littlefork is a beautiful town with many outdoor opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of nature and natural surroundings. (16 responses)
Safe	Littlefork is a safe community. (32 responses)
School	Littlefork has great pride in their school which is known for its excellence in education. (43 responses)
Small Town	Littlefork is a friendly, close-knit, small town with a charming atmosphere and supportive, helpful community members.

NORTHOME

CATEGORY:	THEME:
Business	People in the Northome area enjoy living here for the good stores with friendly service.
Community	People in the Northome area enjoy living here for the strong sense of community.
Education	People in the Northome area enjoy living here for the good small school.
Employment	People in the Northome area live here for their employment.
Family	People in the Northome area have a strong sense of family.
Infrastructure	People in the Northome area have access to infrastructure.
Nature	People in the Northome area enjoy the numerous opportunities that nature has to offer.
Outdoor Activity	People in the Northome area enjoy the variety of outdoor activities that the area has to offer.
Proximity	People in the Northome area like the proximity of school, work and shopping.
Rural Area	People in the Northome area enjoy the peaceful small town atmosphere.
Safety	People in the Northome area enjoy living in a safe community.
Youth	People in the Northome area believe it's a good community to raise children.

RANIER

CATEGORY:

THEME:

Amenities	Ranier offers adequate convenient and pleasing amenities including family activities and access to necessities. (7 responses)
Cost of Living	Relative low cost of living. (2 responses)
Economic	Local resources including Rainy Lake offer economic and recreational opportunities. (8 responses)
Heritage	Ancestral roots give a strong sense of belonging. (2 responses)
Lake Access	Access to and use of Rainy Lake is a premier and widely valued asset. (6 responses)
Location	Proximity to town and close access to year round outdoor activities. (2 responses)
Sense of Community	Strong sense of community driven by friendly people. (6 responses)
Small Town	Ranier residents value living in a small town community that is safe, comfortable, quiet, and friendly. (17 responses)

QUESTION TWO

QUESTION TWO

What do you like most about living in the Koochiching County area?

BUSINESS

Koochiching County has a resource based economy supporting a wide variety of businesses.

- Koochiching County has a resource based economy supporting a wide variety of businesses.
- Gift shops are a plus
- No big box stores
- Family owned businesses
- Resorts
- Health services
- It gives my family good business “logging company”
- Logging industry and how it preserves our forests while employing many people
- Mix of professional and blue collar jobs
- Local small town businesses
- Airport

COMMUNITY

Respondents have a strong sense of community, family and friends.

- Small town ambience
- Nice place to raise kids
- it is easy to have friends and ties to all of the surrounding communities
- Caring people
- The community is like a family. "Everyone's there for everybody."
- The family feel here
- Coming together during a crisis
- More connected because we are together more.
- Close knit community
- Living in a small community without big city traffic

- Tight community bond.
- Welcoming, friendly, helpful, personable community
- I enjoy living in this area because it is a small community
- Sandbagging effort this past summer was a great testament to community comradery.
- Laid back community
- I liked seeing people I knew at the grocery store and feeling like there was a community surrounding me.
- Friendly supportive people
- The folks are always friendly and have smiles
- Good community events
- Neighbors helping neighbors (fire, flooding)
- Familiar faces
- Quality place to raise family
- Close to family and friends
- Family ties
- Family & friends are all close.
- Engagement currently with people in other communities in the county through Voyage Forward - sense that "we're all in this together".
- Community groups/theater
- Sense of community.
- Feel like part of a community and not just a face without a name
- Like the smaller community feel and slower pace
- The community is pretty centered around its overall success.
- Caring and involved community
- Small enough that some local business owners take time to say hello.

ECONOMY

Respondents feel Koochiching County has a low cost of living.

- Income levels are fairly reasonable for many compared to cost of living
- Taxes are reasonable
- Homes are affordable
- Cheap food/housing
- Affordable housing and good overall cost of living.
- Inexpensive cost of living
- Life is pretty easy up here
- Low cost of living
- Affordable housing
- Wages are good
- The cost of living such as housing and taxes is less here than what I was paying in the Twin Cities
- Very low cost of living - low housing costs, low property taxes
- Reasonable land prices

EDUCATION

Respondents feel there is a strong educational system with varied learning options.

- Good education
- Great schools throughout county
- School option between St. Thomas, FHS, LBF, Indus
- Having the college here opens many different ethnic backgrounds to the community
- L-BF school district
- School systems
- Super great school
- Education in our area is superb
- Educational opportunities
- Great college
- Education is made a priority in the area
- Charter school focusing on the Arts with 100 students enrolled
- Where my children attend school in Littlefork

HEALTH CARE

Respondents have access to health care services.

- Close to medical care not too much traffic
- Health services
- Quality of mental health care available to residents
- Senior services
- Services such as health

INFRASTRUCTURE

Respondents feel that residents have access to public services and infrastructure.

- Good roads which is important to our economy; they make a difference for out-of-towners to come to town easily
- Public services and road services are pretty good considering where we live
- Roads fairly good
- Public library
- Birchdale fire department
- Great drinking water
- Bus service
- Law enforcement
- Roads are not too busy
- Good services - police, fire, ambulance
- Easy to get to goods and services
- County services are very good
- Rural Koochiching County is sparsely populated with an abundance of unpopulated areas, plenty of wildlife, lots of scenic areas, vast watery areas, adequate roads for access, and room for all of us to get out and enjoy it all at any time of the year.

NATURE

Access to nature and outdoor activities are extremely important to residents of Koochiching County.

- Ability to enjoy nature, hunting, fishing.
- Drive any direction and you'll see woods, deer, nature, every town in Koochiching has beautiful surroundings.
- Abundant outdoor recreation opportunities

- What I like most about the area is access to outdoor recreation.
- Enjoy outdoor activities such as fishing boating and snowshoeing
- We like the rural setting in Kooch. Co. where a family can enjoy woodsy outdoor activities summer & winter, like 4-wheeling, hiking, swimming, snow mobiling, skiing and ice skating.
- It's a place for people to enjoy nature in their own way
- Abundance of public lands for recreation
- I also like the access we have to Canada and all the recreation opportunities they have to offer.
- Recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, skating, boating, etc. are all accessible within a fairly short distance
- Rainy Lake and Rainy River
- Lakes are a treasure; great natural beauty; peaceful
- The closeness of the lakes and rivers so I can fish.
- The outdoors, lakes, rivers, resorts
- Ash River
- Bigfork River
- Love our life on the river and lakes.
- Natural beauty of the lakes, rivers and wilderness
- The beauty of the area, being so close to nature. Boating, trails, the Park is beautiful.
- I am an avid hunter, fishermen and outdoorsman and Koochiching County has everything that is important to me.
- The outdoors, lakes, rivers, resorts
- The outdoors and everything it has to offer
- Outdoor activities for all seasons
- The wilderness and outdoors
- The beautiful outdoor opportunities close enough to visit in a day
- I like the outdoors of hunting, fishing, & 4-wheeling at an easy convenience.
- Great hunting and recreation areas
- Recreational opportunities including golf course, lake, horse camping and horse trails in Big Falls
- Recreation on Rainy Lake

- Good natural recreational resources.
- Voyageurs National Park (3)
- Rainy Lake
- Rainy Lake, Rainy River, closeness to Canada, closeness to our family cabin on Lake Despair.
- Access to Rainy and Kab lakes.
- We travel to the metro area a lot, and really truly appreciate the natural beauty that encompasses our county, as well as the beautiful lakes and rivers.
- I like the wilderness aspects of it. The different habitat types and forest communities. The rivers and streams and lakes and beaver ponds and all the lower Lake Agassis natural environment.

PRIDE

Respondents appreciate having a variety of experiences including going to Canada within a short commute.

- Like summer in our town and the tourism.
- We have hundreds of thousands of acres of public land to recreate on with the park service, state, county, and PCA lands all within the area.
- Lots of volunteerism
- Strong heritage/rich history
- I can see Canada from my back yard
- Backus: it is still going, they try hard, and it is a nice experience to attend events there
- our county is beautiful
- Diverse things to do
- Awesome baseball team
- Backus Community Center
- District Fair - Littlefork
- IFalls recognized everywhere you go.
- Local celebrations
- I also like the access we have to Canada and all the recreation opportunities they have to offer.
- We find a way to do things without outside involvement
- Friendly, Rainy Lake, Chamber good at promoting, Citizens for Backus awesome
- Living on an international border

- Proximity to Canada
- People are independent
- Boot hockey
- Integration between us and Fort Frances.
- Volleyball
- Mudding
- Park's ice road
- Wheeler riding
- I LOVE the small town football games and hockey games; so much more fun when you know everyone

RURAL AREA

Residents like living in a small town rural area.

- We like the rural setting in Kooch. Co. where a family can enjoy woodsy outdoor activities summer & winter, like 4-wheeling, hiking, swimming, snowmobiling, skiing and ice skating.
- It is far enough away from the congestion of large cities, but close enough to smaller cities that have the amenities I want.
- Not too big and not too small.
- Rural feel
- Community atmosphere is better because of remoteness.
- The lake, woods and remoteness.
- The small town atmosphere
- I am grateful for the "small-town" atmosphere and friendliness of the people. It's great to be away from the hustle and bustle of the big cities.
- Like the smaller community feel and slower pace
- It is far enough away from the congestion of large cities, but close enough to smaller cities that have the amenities I want
- Rural Koochiching County is sparsely populated with an abundance of unpopulated areas, plenty of wildlife, lots of scenic areas, vast watery areas, adequate roads for access, and room for all of us to get out and enjoy it all at any time of the year.
- Koochiching Co. as a whole is an amazing place to live. We have a really great group

of people who live in the area. I truly believe the people in the area are the best part of this small area.

- Stronger people ties because we live in a remote area
- Not so remote that you can't still travel to Bemidji, Duluth, Winnipeg
- Convenience of small town - no traffic or commute time
- I like the small town feel and close knit community
- Koochiching County, however vast it is in size, presents a small-town vibe and culture.
- Small town advantages--less congestion, laid back lifestyle.

SAFETY

Residents feel Koochiching County is a safe place.

- It's a safe place to live.
- Safe and caring communities.
- I feel safe here.
- Low crime rate.
- Safe place to raise children.
- everyone looks out for each other
- Low crime rate, high trust
- no poisonous animals, insects, reptiles
- Safer than big cities
- Well protected
- Can walk around safely
- A feeling of safety from the rest of the world
- The world is a scary place these days and feeling safe and secure every day and every night is a blessing.
- Not a lot of crime in the area.
- Safe for kids
- Feel safe
- Feel safe except for animals like wolves

QUESTION THREE

QUESTION THREE

What don't you want to lose as Koochiching County changes?

ACCESS/RIGHTS

The county communities do not want to lose public access to lands and waters.

- I don't want to lose what access we have left to Canada.
- Lose or harm access to local waters and woods including VNP.
- Don't want to lose accessibility to trails (snowmobile) and other outdoor activities (bike, ski)
- I have a shack on a Boise lease that has been in my family for nearly 60 years and 4 generations, I don't want to lose that.
- Can't lose the privilege to use land leasing
- Public access to hunting land and public recreation
- The ability to enjoy county & state lands available to us, outdoors lifestyle.
- Rainy Lake and Rainy River as recreational areas
- Access to lakes, rivers, and woods
- The freedom to access the rivers and lake
- Convenient public access to Rainy Lake and Rainy River
- I do not want to lose the access to the park service, state, county, and PCA lands.
- Open access to wilderness trails through private lands.
- Access to lakes & outdoors for hunting & fishing.
- Access to public land
- Access to beautiful lakes and forests
- Access to limitless recreational opportunities within VNP
- Access to water and shacks
- County Land access to Lakes, Rivers and Trails
- The vast amount of public recreational land for use. Would not want to see it become privatized by a big company.

- There is a disturbing trend in other areas of large land holdings that were once public access being sold to private and posted. I see that starting to happen here, I think it needs attention.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Our communities do not want to lose our caring, close-knit small town atmosphere. We want to maintain our volunteerism, camaraderie, and grassroots community efforts for those in need.

- Sense of caring unity
- Backus - arts, culture, entertainment opportunities
- I don't want to lose the attitude of the people coming together in need.
- Friendliness of people
- Backus acts like a magnet drawing people together - people coming from outside-attracting new people
- Backus as a whole - arts, all ages, open to all, businesses there
- Safety and security, close knit community feel
- Tight-Knittedness
- Small town atmosphere
- Small town community pride
- I don't ever want to lose the small town feel. My family has lived here for 60 years and I want them to remain a part of this community. I just hope over the years it proceeds to grow.
- Promote arts and culture and recreation for our youth
- Small town camaraderie and neighbor helping neighbor, community and school spirit.
- Community cares- people still come to school events even if they don't have kids there

- Don't want the friendliness and neighborhood attitude of everyone to become like the people in the cities
- Backus - entertainment options we already have
- I don't want to lose the tight-knit community feeling.
- Small town vibe
- The small town feel of all the communities
- I don't want to lose the small town feel and the good International Falls water.

BUSINESS

Koochiching County wants to maintain and grow local businesses. Small businesses are an important aspect of our local flavor.

- I want to encourage local business and industry to continue to invest in the prosperity of our local economy
- Locally owned & operated businesses
- The small industries we have
- Keeping businesses large and small
- Small, locally-owned businesses. Large companies are great, but small businesses bring personal attention. Any forward action should do 2 things: be progressive with the big picture, without losing any of the already established aspects
- Small family-owned stores
- Businesses and individuals to continue to invest in the local economy
- Houseboat businesses
- I do not want to lose our paper mill, any of our present business community or residents.
- Keeping businesses large and small
- Logging business
- Do not want to lose the Mall
- Jobs and businesses
- Do not want to lose any more businesses
- It is important to keep business alive here
- Our small businesses
- Small owner-operated businesses
- Small Businesses brings towns together

- Stability of community small family owned businesses Wagner construction, Corrin's Plumbing, Kantor Electric Lots of churches
- Small business Preserved and Protected
- Allowing businesses that we have now to close is simply not acceptable. Need to find ways to keep them going & growing.
- Keep our local businesses
- Established businesses currently providing employment opportunities
- I want to encourage local business and industry to continue to invest in the prosperity of our local economy.
- The store in Birchdale which is the only single retail establishment within a 30 to 40 mile radius

ECONOMY

We support all economic development efforts to diversify our economy. Responsible leadership needs to maintain a tax structure that will not force people out of their homes. We don't want to lose any more jobs or career opportunities; keeping the young people in our community is important.

- I don't want property taxes to become prohibitive for individuals on fixed incomes
- Without good jobs we would be forced to move
- The skilled, trained, professional workforce; don't want them to leave for jobs elsewhere, need to give them a reason to stay here.
- I also hope to never lose the opportunity for young people to return to their own home town in Kooch Co. if they choose to do so.
- We need to keep jobs here so we don't lose enrollment for the schools
- Don't want to lose the paper mill and the good family-wage jobs it provides.
- Jobs or work opportunities able to support a city population of at least 6,000 people
- Our jobs at Boise and ISD #362
- continue economic development efforts to diversify our economy
- Do not raise taxes.

- Boise - it's the key to everything, the key to our tax base
- Low property taxes
- I don't want to lose sight of economic development efforts to diversify our economy.
- I want to encourage local business and industry to continue to invest in the prosperity of our local economy.
- Job opportunities for all ages - a reason for young people to stay.
- Some of the good people who have to move away because there is not enough jobs.
- Well-paying jobs.
- Jobs that already exist here
- Living wage jobs
- Jobs to draw and keep people here
- Jobs and the ability to live here
- Quality high-paying jobs with benefits
- We need enough living-wage jobs to support the services and businesses in the community
- Property due to tax increases
- Don't allow over development, especially on our lakeshores, even if it means less tax revenue
- The ability to keep owning our cabin despite island tax rates

EDUCATION

Communities value their own independent school districts as a valuable resource both to individuals and to the area as a whole.

- L-BF School
- Would not want to lose FHS by combining with schools in the region
- Do not want to combine school district with Int'l. Falls
- Independent schools
- Stay one school district
- Northome School
- Smaller schools
- Indus School
- School quality

- Wouldn't want to lose our schools (Bronco pride) or any of the existing stores and restaurants (yes, even KMart!).
- Support of schools
- What we have in the schools-"don't lose any more."
 - Our teachers and schools
- Do not want our school district 362 to merge with 361
- Do not combine schools
- Littlefork & Int'l. Falls combining schools & sports. (no)
- Littlefork School
- Education and school opportunities
- Indus school fills a need for a certain type of student, has a smaller group setting
- School sports
- The High School
- Schooling opportunities for our young people
- School activities
- Don't combine schools
- Community support for educational systems K-12 and higher ed

ENVIRONMENT

We do not want to lose the pristine beauty and serenity of the natural environment. The continued good management of wildlife and fish will protect our future.

- Environmental quality, "the beauty not despoiled"
- Beauty and tranquility of the lake and surrounding environment.
- Wildlife and beauty of the area.
- Pristine wilderness and natural beauty
- Zoning to protect wilderness areas
- Manage game fish appropriately
- Quiet at night
- Don't want to lose peace and quiet
- Fresh clear quiet lakes and woods
- Quiet and safe environment
- Nature & trees
- Fresh air
- Rainy Lake
- Cleanliness of our environment

- Good air and water quality
- Healthy lakes
- The beauty of the natural resources and critters of the river, lake and forest
- Protection for our natural resources.
- The natural beauty.
- Natural resources and beauty
- Support for the logging culture, and paper & related industries; the quality of the air; beauty of the forests and waters (and wilderness areas);
- Quiet beautiful places to visit
- Forests
- Beautiful environment and Natural surroundings
- Clean water
- Wetlands
- Trees
- Pristine wilderness and natural beauty

GOVERNMENT

We don't want to lose our rights to use public land and waters. We do not want any additional restrictions or regulations on our freedom.

- I don't want more restrictions (Park restrictions) on houseboats, motor boats. You need to ask the Park what their 100 year plan is. They have one. You need to see it.
- Public access to hunting land and public recreation
- Local rights & representation.
- Private property rights
- Rights and privileges to Rainy Lake
- Trapping rights
- My rights to enjoy the things that I love
- Don't want more Park restrictions on houseboats or motor boats
- Do not want to be stifled by government regulations
- Amphitheater and public access at VNP headquarters
- Public use of Rainy Lake
- Convenient public access to Rainy Lake and Rainy River
- There is a disturbing trend in other areas of large land holdings, that were once public

access being sold to private and posted. I see that starting to happen here, I think it needs attention.

- Do not want more restrictions on trail riding, etc.
- Do not want to be stifled by government regulations.
- The vast amount of public recreational land for use. Would not want to see it become privatized by a big company.
- The rights we have
- Rights to hunt and fish
- Hunting and land rights.
- Loss of rights would take away from our heritage
- Too many environmental restrictions (freedom)
- Resources taken over by the government
- SFIA (state forest initiative ___) gives public access to forestland for snowmobile trail access
- Access to outdoors and public lands
- Public hiking trails
- Freedom on the Lake
- Freedom to use trails for recreation
- The freedom to enjoy hunting & fishing.
- Freedom of access
- The freedom to access the rivers and lake

HEALTH CARE

Koochiching County does not want to lose its health care services and facilities.

- Healthcare system and hospital
- High quality emergency & obstetrics services available at all times.
- Access to health care.
- Health services
- health care and health care facilities
- Nursing homes
- Doctors and dentists
- Medical services
- Hospital
- Local medical care
- The clinic
- Health care for all ages and medical conditions.
- Littlefork Medical Center

- Accessible healthcare
- community healthcare
- L-BF school system, and Littlefork nursing home. Sometimes too focused on what not to lose instead of what to gain looking forward - RRCC on rebound, adding programs & growing, Boise, UHC, TruStar, grocery stores.
- Good medical care
- Human Resources Center
- Assisted living

INDUSTRY

The communities do not want to lose Boise and the associated satellite industries. The family-sustaining, well-paying jobs are important to the County.

- Don't want to lose Boise
- I don't want to lose the paper mill because it will affect this town greatly and affect my family and many close to me.
- Support for the logging culture, and paper & related industries; the quality of the air; beauty of the forests and waters (and wilderness areas).
- Our jobs at Boise and ISD #362
- Living wage jobs gotta stay here
- We need enough living-wage jobs to support the services and businesses in the community
- Factories
- Mill – must be filled with people
- Boise - it's the key to everything, the key to our tax base
- Paper industry
- I do not want to lose our paper mill, any of our present business community or residents.
- Don't want to lose the paper mill and the good family-wage jobs it provides.
- Quality high-paying jobs with benefits
- Boise Paper
- Level of work opportunities that we currently have
- The mill

INFRASTRUCTURE

Our transportation connections such as the airport and highways are important. The public and historic buildings along with infrastructure services such as water, sewer, internet, cellular, and electric are all valued.

- Airport that connects to a hub.
- Basic infrastructure such as airport
- Amphitheater
- Good electric, telephone and internet service
- Don't want to lose any more of our historical buildings and preserve them for future use
- History of city
- The city's historic buildings
- Airport. It is the only link to the outside world. We have no bus or rail service to transport out of INL, so airline service is a must.
- Airline services
- Roads – don't want highways
- International Airport
- Public library
- Water and sewer
- High speed internet.
- Historic downtown area
- Historic buildings
- Need to keep our historic buildings because they represent who we are
- Hwy system
- Our airport
- Band Shell

NATURE

The slow-paced, close to nature lifestyle that we enjoy in this county is important to us.

- I would not want to lose our slower-paced lifestyle.
- Being connected to nature
- Five-minute drive from town to the wood
- Ability to get out and drive
- Ability to hunt and fish
- Ability to use lakes and rivers
- Ability to use the lake and land
- Ability to immerse yourself in a natural environment
- Nature & trees

- Like the slower paced lifestyle
- Beauty and tranquility of the lake and surrounding environment.
- Simpler lifestyle
- The beauty
- The calm

OUTDOORS

We do not want to lose hunting and fishing as well as other opportunities for outdoor recreation.

- The ability to enjoy county & state lands available to us, outdoors lifestyle.
- Access to lakes & outdoors for hunting & fishing.
- Hunting and fishing
- Outdoor activities such as fishing and hunting
- Right to snowmobile, hunt, fish
- The freedom to enjoy hunting & fishing.
- Places to fish.
- Fishing areas - don't want them too congested
- Snowmobile trails
- 4-wheeler & snowmobile trails
- Ability to be outside with 4-wheelers, snowmobiles, etc.
- Trapping rights
- Recreation opportunities on lakes and trails
- Access to outdoors and public lands
- Rights to hunt and fish
- Hunting areas
- Hunting and land rights.
- Ability to hunt and fish
- Public access to hunting land and public recreation
- I love fishing
- Bike and snowmobile trails
- Don't want to lose accessibility to trails (snowmobile) and other outdoor activities (bike, ski)
- Free cross country skiing

POPULATION

A strong growth pattern to increase our population and offer opportunities for our young people to remain in or return to our communities.

- Can't lose more population and jobs
- More opportunities will be lost with a shrinking population
- Jobs to draw and keep people here
- Our youth, young people
- People - no decline in population
- I also hope to never lose the opportunity for young people to return to their own home town in Kooch Co. if they choose to do so.
- Young people leaving our area to find jobs
- Jobs or work opportunities able to support a city population of at least 6,000 people
- People - no decline in population
- Employment opportunities for young and old
- I would hate to see the town population fall any more than it has.
- The younger adult population
- Our young people
- Job opportunities for all ages - a reason for young people to stay.
- Ability for people and families to earn a living in Koochiching County
- I don't want to lose any more people from the area,
- More opportunities will be lost with a shrinking population
- Need to grow population not get smaller
- Employment and education opportunities for all residents of the community

PRIDE

We take pride in our unique historic order location and our national notoriety as the Icebox of the Nation.

- Known as the Icebox of the Nation contributes to our mystique
- Don't want to lose sight of our history
- Keep the spirit of the "Ice Box"
- Grand Mound as a cultural asset
- Historic downtown area
- History of city

- History of county
- The old buildings
- The oldness of and vintage feel of the down town area
- The outdoor-tourist feel
- Historic downtown area
- Need to keep our historic buildings because they represent who we are
- A sense that we are unique because we are on the border
- I like that we take pride in our forestry
- Historic sites.

RECREATION

The County wants to maintain and grow programs and recreational activities for youth and adults.

- Freedom to use trails for recreation
- Access to limitless recreational opportunities within VNP
- What little we have available for kids - minimal services, rec programs and opportunities - "movies all R-rated."
- Community events
- Summer events
- Concerts
- Entertainment
- High school pool
- Bowling alley
- County Fair
- PALS Program
- Smokey Bear Park
- Promote arts and culture and recreation for our youth
- The programs and activities the town holds
- Enthusiasm of organizers of community events
- The family events that are still here.
- Recreation opportunities on lakes and trails
- Concerts in the park
- Ice Box Days
- Outdoor rinks
- Backus - arts, culture, entertainment opportunities
- Parks available for playing sports like basketball, tennis, hockey , and disc golf

RURAL AREA

We want to preserve the quiet, peaceful small town feel of our communities.

- Quiet at night
- Don't want to lose peace and quiet
- Small town atmosphere/community pride
- I don't ever want to lose the small town feel. My family has lived here for 60 years and I want them to remain a part of this community. I just hope over the years it proceeds to grow.
- Ability to immerse yourself in a natural environment
- Seclusion
- Don't lose rural "culture"
- Frontier spirit
- Small town mentality
- The ability we have here to drop in on friends and knock on doors instead of making appointments
- Knowing my neighbors
- I don't want to lose the serenity
- The smallness and friendliness of area.
- Quiet beautiful places to visit
- Peaceful settings and towns
- Small town camaraderie and neighbor helping neighbor, community and school spirit
- The ability to truly get away from human contact
- Small Town neighborhood feeling
- Friendliness of people
- Resiliency
- Friendliness and cooperation of a rural area
- Small town feel
- That it's a good place to raise your kids.
- Tight knit community
- Lack of congestion
- The small town feel of all the communities
- I would not want to lose our slower-paced lifestyle.
- Worry free way of life

SAFETY

We appreciate our law enforcement entities. We feel that we live in a low crime area that is safe and secure and is a good environment for raising children.

- Quiet and safe environment
- Safe schools
- Do not worry about criminal activities
- Caring law enforcement officers
- Relative safety
- Sense of safety and security
- Positive policing
- The ability to leave doors unlocked
- No gangs
- Non violence
- Law enforcement system
- The feeling of safety and security, especially the safety of children.
- Safe community
- Low crime rate
- Safe environment to raise kids
- Safety
- Safety and security, close knit community feel
- Safety of the area
- Safety of living here and being able to know everyone as well as I do now.

SERVICES/SOCIAL ISSUES

We don't want to lose the feel of human services available for those in need. The volunteer services such as fire fighters, first responders, and the humane society are valued.

- Human Resources Center
- Police & fire emergency services
- Our core values and standards
- Senior services
- Services for abused women
- Volunteer fire department
- First responders
- Humane society
- Maintain at least the existing level of social services
- Spirit of cohesiveness
- Assistance programs
- Cultural connections

- Churches
- At least the existing level of social services; the abundance of volunteers; feeling of safety-small town feel.

TOURISM

We value the bass tournament, VNP, State, and County parks as important contributors to tourism.

- Voyageur's National Park -Tourism has the potential to be a larger economy driver in our community if properly marketed.
- Tourism
- Bass Fishing Tourney
- It is critical that tourist have quality lodging options which currently NONE exists.
- Wouldn't want to lose Franze Jevne or the state and county park sites (Big Fork, Birchdale, etc.)
- Not lose tourism - "If we're not welcoming, they'll move on."
- Bass Tournament
- Invest more in parks and recreation and trail systems to attract tourists
- Voyageur's National Park
- Smokey Bear Park
- Community gardens and parks
- The park in Big Falls
- Museum

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

School and community activities and events, especially for children are an important part of our lifestyle

- School sports
- Parks available for playing sports like basketball, tennis, hockey, and disc golf
- Cheerleading program
- Outdoor activities
- Girl's hockey
- Youth sports
- Opportunities here that will keep our youth here
- Activities for kids
- Fun community events

- Concerts
- High School pool
- Community theatre - Borealis Bards
- Promote arts and culture and recreation for our youth
- The family events that are still here

QUESTION FOUR

QUESTION FOUR

If you were in charge, what would you do to improve the Koochiching County area?

AESTHETICS

People felt a need for improved aesthetics and general appearance throughout the county. Cleanup of blight, beautification of Hwy 53, and by adding plantings, benches, signage etc. Overall, a more welcoming, pleasant appearance.

- Update the water tower and put our school colors on it
- Plant lady slippers along the entire length of Highway 11 west between I. Falls and Baudette to replace all of the plants that were wiped out with the road construction project
- Beautify the downtown with a unique look, put something in the open spots
- Flower garden
- Change the look of our corridor entries
- Make Hwy 53 approach to I Falls and Main Street into I Falls much more attractive to visitors with better resorts and businesses
- Playground
- Plant more trees
- Clean up blight, especially along the major corridors
- Add boardwalk
- Add parks/benches, flowers, banners, lights, etc. through the community to make it more inviting.
- We need to spiff up our storefronts
- Energize the community to make parks, businesses, and homes more appealing to the eye
- Make garbage clean up mandatory
- No more metal buildings along major highway entrances
- Take down old buildings and replace with new businesses

- Improve the looks of the town while preserving historic neighborhoods and buildings
- Give the town a face lift, paint, get garbage off roads
- Enforce landscaping rules
- Make Smokey Bear Park more interesting with water fountains, statues, etc.
- Have city clean-up crews
- Improve design in existing communities
- Improve the downtown area of International Falls
- Add a grand entrance to Rainy River Community College with digital signage like BSU has
- Bury power lines
- Enforce or tighten up building codes so business owners would at least repaint or repair what they have
- Put more money into our infrastructure so we look beautiful to companies deciding if they should move here or not
- Beautify the river like Fort Frances did
- Better entrance to Ranier, and updated park and playground equipment
- When logging - leave a buffer zone of trees along the highway
- Eliminate semi-trailer parking lot along route to lake and Canada

ARTS & CULTURE

People really value Backus, and arts in general, and would like to see more attention and funding provided to area arts and culture. Such as music, theater, artists' colony, sculpture and area-focused museums.

- More public art and cultural opportunities
- Promote arts and music

- Add sculpture
- Advertise the museum more
- Artist colony
- Culture and fine arts
- Celebrate beauty and significance of Rainy River, art, music and culture
- Enhance Backus Community Center
- Get more foundation grants for Backus Community Center
- Highlight talent in the area
- Improve use of historic sites and museum
- Increase funding and participation in arts and education
- More live theater, plays, dinner theater
- Preservation of historic buildings
- We need a bigger music community
- Feature artists, musicians, etc. in our town! Create a sculpture contest or something like that and have the winners displayed around town.
- Connect artists in area to exhibit art
- Involve community members and children with art
- Children's theatre
- Arts and Craft center
- Art structures
- Music stage
- Subsidize cultural/historical arts events
- Marketing person for locally made crafts
- Have musical festivals, film festivals at Backus - it's the best auditorium in Northern MN!

BORDER ISSUES

Streamline border crossing process and ease regulations. Advocate for the inclusion and cooperation of cross border activities. Pursue a new port of entry.

- I would make Canada loosen up their non-resident fishing, hunting, camping, and driving a vehicle on their gravel roads regulations. By doing that right there you would bring possibly hundreds of thousands more people through Koochiching County helping the economy and still keeping the small town.

- Easier border crossing for athletic teams
- Provide an express lane for local residents to cross the border
- I would open the border once a month or so to let people go across for free and easy
- Local lane at International Bridge
- Make a community between Canada and International Falls so we could work together because people are what makes a community good
- Need new Customs and Immigration port of entry
- Never forget to include Fort Frances and the surrounding area
- Work with the MNR, Ontario, on Rainy Lake regs
- Encourage cross-border events
- Encourage more tourism from Canada
- Add a passenger train from Canada to International Falls
- Rerouting the bridge line

BUSINESS

Overall we would really like to see diversification and more innovative businesses for the county. Some suggestions included brewery, outfitters, water bottling, and Internet cafes for outlying areas, aquaponics, cold weather businesses, data entry centers, and spa. A need was also expressed for improved customer service and general business and employee training

- Negotiate or incentives for businesses to come here
- Small businesses offer the most potential for growth and a program for nurturing small business startups might bear fruit and a mentoring program combined with carefully administered startup grants might result in one or two businesses that grow to be significant employers.
- Encourage green industries to start up or relocate here.
- Encourage small diverse businesses
- Expand cold weather testing
- Better radio stations

- Bring in ice fishing business
- Encourage out-of-the-box thinking for new business, business expansion and tourism
- Help promote the local businesses more
- More cold weather business opportunities such as training for police or firemen
- There are trucks leaving with loads of Boise Paper, they need to be full of something else when returning, or put it on the train to return
- Improve customer service in businesses
- Aesthetic multi-use development on riverfront
- Try to attract an emerging young company and give them our full backing and help to succeed
- Improve customer service so that everyone who works in local business becomes an ambassador for the community
- Local business owners need direction and consulting on how to properly run a business
- There is currently a HUGE lack of customer service skills in this area.
- Rent empty downtown window space to other businesses to promote their business that's not in the downtown. • I would work hard to try and bring new large innovative businesses into the community - we need a means to bring our youth back to the area.
- Invite more business whether they are union or not
- Would like to see the area as medium sized with more business opportunity
- Encourage young entrepreneurs and new business
- Hopefully attract several smaller businesses rather than one large employer.
- I would like to see 3-4 different businesses develop roots here. I would like to see that many so that we have several options and can weather changes to the economy.
- Improve shopping, restaurants, theaters to attract professionals to the area
- Look for more business opportunities other than tourism
- More amenities for locals and tourists
- Outfitter that rents outdoor gear like kayaks, canoes, bikes, jet skis, boats, tubes, snowmobiles, four-wheelers with marked trails
- Seek out companies that can have headquarters anywhere, like United Healthcare
- We need to be innovative in our thinking and pursuing businesses that would be a good fit for our area - Can we use our colder weather to attract certain businesses other than Cold Weather Testing, for example businesses that pay high cooling costs (computer operations, etc.)?
- Add technical business to the area with living-wage jobs
- Improve communications. We have a newspaper that publishes twice weekly and one radio station that does very little to inform the community of what is going on. Unfortunately, neither one is well respected within the community.

ECONOMY

Diversify economic base by being open to innovative business ideas as well as supporting existing local businesses. Desire for competitive pricing for goods and services. Technology related business opportunities should be encouraged. Incentives need to be provided to attract and retain businesses and young people.

- Lower gas prices
- Bring in industry, jobs, people and families
- Try to diversify the economy
- Change and diversify the economy from a one industry town to a more diversified one
- Change the unwillingness of people to be open to new ideas for economic development
- Diversify business base
- Healthy downtown
- Strive for economic development
- Support what we have
- Try to fix lower incomes
- Try to improve the economy

- Buy locally in our county to support our businesses
- Foster loyalty and spending locally such as a loyalty card or program for buying locally
- More self-sufficiency in the county other than the mill
- Remove the anti-change attitude which chills new businesses
- The economic development team need to change and re-strategize
- Keep the dollars generated here spent here
- Try new ideas to grow
- The paper mill is gradually closing. We need something that will provide jobs, something that will be successful over time.
- Add more businesses to fit community needs (the "shop locally" statement should mean shopping locally can be done affordably)
- Bring wealth to the community
- Diversify our community's economic base
- Diversify the economy creating less dependency upon Boise
- Economy and growth. Why are we one third the size we used to be?
- Everybody and organization should think in terms of promoting economic development and healthy community
- Falls has a lack of diversity to its economic base and opportunities for employment
- Lower electric & propane prices
- More competitive choices so they are lower priced utilities
- Support and work for reasonable costs in energy (electricity) because it runs everything

EDUCATION

Increase programs at RRCC, especially Vo-Tech, such as law enforcement, cosmetology, and welding and explore the possibility of four year programs. Improve facilities and explore addition of daycare. Encourage better collaboration between school districts and RRCC. Expand and improve educational/extra-curricular opportunities for k-12 learning particularly in ISD 361. Improve and update

facilities especially Bronco Arena. Increase expectations and standards for graduates.

- Start a scholarship program for individuals to retrain regardless of age, the criteria being from Koochiching and want to continue living here
- Start a Vo-tech here because our kids in this county are going to Wadena to train as lineman for Northstar Electric and MP&L
- Stop in-fighting amongst city and county, high school and college
- Need to capitalize on RRCC and bring unique programs that attract people from all over the United States (drone technology, etc.?). If we attracted football players from Florida, they will come for unique opportunities.
- Continue to advocate for RRCC as an economic engine
- Demolish all school systems and start over
- Fix the broken school district 361.
- Have a middle school or junior high
- Improve Bronco Arena
- Lack of diversity in school hinders youth who move outside the area
- More technical programs at RRCC like cosmetology, carpentry, heating & cooling, diesel mechanics, law enforcement/criminal justice, welding
- Pass a school referendum to build a new school that would house preschool through 12th grade
- We need to begin building a diversified skill set of workers now
- Improve school district. Looking at recent data other rural districts e.g. Ely was ranked in the top 20, they are no closer to a metro area and they are able to attract quality teachers. It will be impossible for business owners to grow and expand their businesses if they are unable to recruit young families.
 - Too many kids are coming out of school with no idea of what they want to do, except stay in this area, but they have no concept of what kinds of jobs will keep them here and what education they need to pursue to stay in this county. We need to feed that information to them and start at an early age

then continue to offer ongoing guidance/mentoring and shadowing of jobs in our area.

- Expand RRCC's job prep programs and retraining options other than nursing; options for older generations to go back to school
- Improve schools: figure out a healthy relationship between high school and RRCC to benefit all; offer languages, music, arts, etc.; use volunteer talent for creative classroom enrichment; strengthen academic core!
- Work with RRCC to provide education to new businesses' new employees
- Assign every City Council member a student to be at their side to instill community service work
- Capitalize on opportunities to build strong, productive alliances (FHS & RRCC)
- Make the College what it can become and what the State starves it from becoming. The College is an essential part of growth to making this county what we can be.
- I would set the bar much higher at the educational level. My son left high school in 11th grade to obtain his AA degree at the community college. He stated, "high school is for the kids who need to be baby sat. The teachers don't teach well anyhow." Again, with the lack of professional careers opportunity the bar is set very low for most children.

EMPLOYMENT

Overwhelming need for more good living wage jobs with benefits, especially for young and families. Diversification of jobs, skill levels and union/non-union jobs. Suggestions included casino and prisons. There is also a need for job skills training.

- Better paying jobs
- More employment opportunities
- Union and nonunion jobs
- Build a federal prison due to remoteness of area and access to good paying jobs
- More professional job opportunities for the younger people
- Bring in more business
- Provide infrastructure jobs
- Train employees, wait staff, clerks, etc so tourists are wowed with their service and appearance
- Need jobs that offer benefits
- Bring in additional retail that would provide jobs and a variety of shopping opportunities
- Start an initiative to encourage businesses to train their employees on customer service
- Enable people to get jobs and off welfare
- Better 'store' signage esp. downtown
- More manufacturing jobs.
- Stronger business possibilities where all people have an opportunity to be trained and hold good jobs
- Sustainable long-term jobs
- Allow bigger business to come in to be able to have more job opportunities
- Attract better paying jobs because I have to work two jobs and average 72 hours a week working to make what a Boise job pays and I have a college education
- Be open to non-union jobs with benefits
- Build a base of good paying jobs
- Continue to work on job creation
- Create more good paying jobs to bring young families back.
- Create more jobs for area by bringing in a Casino or prison
- Encourage Boise to once again offer apprentice programs
- Get rid of the all or nothing approach regarding unions
- Have living wages for entry level positions
- Not much here to keep young people in the town
- Attractions that will draw people up
- Bring in more people from area such as alumni
- Build and promote an educated workforce
- I know they are trying to get more jobs around here-but that is the negative part of living here-our kids and grandkids have to move away!

- Ensure people who want to live here can survive here.
- It's always jobs in rural areas and Koochiching County is no different. More middle class jobs would bring more variety of amenities.
- Losing too many people as businesses are closing.
- More opportunities for volunteer and interning jobs
- We need to create another 500 jobs here over the next ten years to maintain the amenities that are here now
- With the need for office paper declining - the Mill has a longevity of only 10 to 20 years
- Focus on long-term solutions to employment of Kooch County residents/Short-term projects are OK to help the current stressed economy but a longer view needs to be embraced
- Higher base pay for all workers
- Work to bring lasting jobs to rural areas and towns
- Business owners need the basic tools (school and healthcare) to be able to attract knowledge workers.
- Provide a future here so you can stay here and not always be poor.
- Diversify our economy with living wage jobs
- Larger community event center to hold concerts
- Get a NBA/NHL team
- More radio stations
- Wedding Hall
- Amusement park
- Beach parties
- More community activities
- Redevelop river and lakefronts for public use, including festivals
- Black River Casino on Native American property south of Loman
- More entertainment in general, that keeps travelers in northern Minnesota vs. going to Canada.
- Alternate forms of entertainment to drugs and alcohol
- Attractions
- Curling Rink with Bar
- Conference/event center
- Festivals
- Larger conference center with a resort on the water
- More activities like the Bass Fishing Tournament and Crazy Days
- Musical events and concerts
- More stuff for families to do
- Need more than a beer stand at the Bass Fishing Tournament
- Rodeo
- Better summer fair
- Street dances
- Water Amusement Park
- We need more things for people to do so they'll come for big hockey tournaments (there isn't enough for the families or parents to do when their teams aren't on the ice
- Winter activities at Smokey Bear Park
- Arcade
- Bring more entertainment to the area
- Build a play park with slides and towers and parachute games
- Build a three-day concert event like they have in Walker and Detroit Lakes
- Draw more people to the lake events
- More community activities

ENTERTAINMENT

A need for increased entertainment options for all ages, including youth, families, young adults and seniors. Specific requests included: casino, amusement park, splashpark, waterpark, music and theater, nightclub.

- Live theater
- Larger 4th of July celebration with vendors & activities throughout the town
- Casino
- Concerts
- Conferences
- Entertainment centers not only the outside one
- Increase entertainment opportunities

- Have more things to do for family and kids besides fishing and hunting
- More movie theatres and variety
- More quality entertainment opportunities
- Small town functions and gatherings
- Special events
- Truck shows
- Extended hours at the movie theater
- More radio stations with variety of music
- Festival in summer and other seasons, especially winter--"promote what we have."
- More entertainment, community center with swimming and rec center, YMCA
- Cheaper place to have parties like reunions
- More activities in the Park
- More bands at the Band shell
- Picnic
- Cultural food fair.
- Drive-in theater

- Sustainable (environmentally) economic ventures
- Use the river to our advantage - it's pretty!
- Green energy
- Keep our lake clean and pure
- Accelerate invasive species protection of lakes and waterways
- More wetland flexibility
- Renewable resources
- Clean up Littlefork River.
- Discourage city people from depleting our natural resources
- Get rid of "wetlands" legislation
- Provide and do a better job of recycling garbage
- Promote and support for alternative energy usage
- Continue to preserve the natural habitat of both the superior forest and border waters

ENVIRONMENT

Definite concern about eliminating the mill smell. Wetlands are an issue, with varied views. Strong desire to preserve and protect the natural resources we have and utilize them in a sustainable manner.

- I would make the town of I. Falls smell better.
- Find ways to use more of our natural resources.
- Add more solar panels
- Change the cold weather
- Air fresheners or deodorizers
- Trees
- Sustainable planning and development - "balance of people, profit, and planet;" need more respect for air and water quality here
- Power town by renewable energy
- Improve recycling and add composting
- Encourage "greener" living
- More education for everyone to live environmentally friendly
- Put strict parameters on lake shore development by limiting size, and having buffer zones on lake shore development, and prohibit shoreline alteration

GOVERNMENT

Citizens expect governmental entities and officials at all levels to cooperate, be transparent and work together for the benefit of our county. A broad dissatisfaction was specifically expressed with International Falls city council and mayor. Citizens expressed their awareness and dissatisfaction with the continuing conflict and dysfunction. Zoning and regulations are an issue. Government at all levels needs to support and encourage collaborations between existing economic development organizations.

- Good communication within decision making groups
- Improve area's image (lack of synergy among public officials, climate, etc.)
- Less disharmony within government.
- Work very hard at bringing county and city government together.
- Ask the Blandin Leadership Alum to come forward and publicly share what they learned at council meetings and at a county board meeting
- Blandin Community Leadership groups all need to go to meetings in full force

- Improve the social services programs (i.e. communications between organizations and the general public so that they are seen as a helpful resource rather than a "danger zone."
- Inspire and encourage more young people to run for local elected positions
- Mandate a culture of respect and inclusion among elected officials and those who work with and for them
- Put "community" above self-interests when making development decisions.
- Sign contracts for KEDA to respect, value and work together with EDA (City) as strongly as the city EDA is collaborating with KEDA.
- Sign contracts for Mayor and City Council members to leave personal witch hunts behind and work together
- Sign contracts for the city leadership and county leadership to work together
- The perception (or reality) that the City and the County are always 'at odds' about something
- Unite and recruit effective leaders
- More women in local government
- City-wide and county-wide cooperation is difficult, perhaps because there is no consensus on either method or goal in this area
- Civic leaders need to develop a unified vision of what economic diversity should look like for our area
- Make political process more transparent
- Increase zoning enforcement
- Support all of our economic development organizations
- Create long term planning and development guidelines that all agree on.
- Demand transparency of economic development people including regular reports to tax payers with concrete goals for bringing in new businesses and creating jobs
- Eliminate negativity between officials, medical facilities, school and college
- Eliminate the "turf wars", speed up actions focused on development.

- Get rid of political posturing and competition between groups.
- I would give the county lots of money to enforce its zoning and ordinance.
- Have a city council that works as a team and is inclusive of all members
- Broaden views of city council, county board, school board.
- Elect people who listen to their constituents
- The constant negativity and arguing among County Commissioners and International Falls City Council. It makes us look like we are backwoods and prevents us from making this community a better place
- Along with attitude the messaging has to change from our leaders.

HEALTH CARE

Improvement is needed in facilities and availability of services such as orthodontics, dialysis, dermatology, mental health, obstetrics, radiation and cardiology. Nursing home/dementia care is needed throughout the county, with specific concerns expressed about the closing of Northome's facility. Cooperation is needed among all healthcare institutions.

- More doctors
- Improve medical facilities
- Have solid good friendly medical services
- Settle the dispute between the Clinic and the Hospital
- Inpatient mental health capability
- Provide more crisis beds in town
- Teen services for chemical dependency, including Alanon for teens who have parents with addiction.
- Enhance local healthcare especially at public health level
- Make our healthcare system more than a stop-gap
- Build a new hospital between the nursing home and clinic
- Continue to improve hospital.
- Increase mental health services
- More facilities like the Good Samaritan Center

- Strengthen healthcare with tools, equipment and staff
- Update the hospital, being so far from any higher care puts people at risk during long transfers
- Easier border relations for people to cross over to Fort Frances to use their dialysis equipment
- Provide a better birthing center & experience.
- Healthcare has the potential to create new jobs, but organizations will still be unable to attract new, young, educated families unless there are improvements in the schools.
- Improve mental health services, especially for youth; not enough choice.
- Dialysis
- Add better health-care facilities with specialized services - dialysis, dermatology, pediatrics, radiation, OB-GYN.
- Cardiology
- Dermatology
- Have high quality emergency & obstetric services available at all times.
- Orthopedics
- With an aging population, I believe that a memory care unit or "behavioral center" would be an asset to Kooch. Co., so that families do not have to experience their loved one being sent to a facility 150 miles away for long-term care. This would be an asset, not only as fulfilling a need, but as an investment with jobs, etc. We have an area which campaigns to "shop local", but we also need a campaign to "Live Local."
- Modernize elderly healthcare
- Having access to high quality medical care is a major concern or potential community members.
- I would see that the Good Samaritan nursing home was under new management, as it is being grossly mismanaged and cannot retain its employees.
- Northome needs their nursing home back! What a disservice to our elderly population!
- Better cancer treatments locally so don't have to drive an hour & half away.

- Upgrade hospital, better coordination of services, more transparency in planning, ONE CAMPUS with services in proximity to each other

HOUSING

Countywide there is a need for more quality and affordable housing choices for all. Convert AB into housing. Add waterfront and golf course options such as condos.

- Senior housing
- Apartments/rentals
- Summer resident condos on golf course and water areas
- Improve affordable housing
- Additional reasonable rental units
- Address housing and consider the need to redevelop the inner-core of the city of International Falls
- Bring in the MLS
- Clean up surrounding downtown areas - bulldoze 3rd and 4th Street and build duplexes - get rid of slums areas
- Create more housing for professionals, temporary and long-term.
- Develop a housing facility in the Alexander Baker AB Building
- Modern, high-end rentals
- Need better housing choices and availability
- Renovate AB into a moderate income living spaces
- Upgrade and modernize housing
- Waterfront condos
- Get rid of the slumlords, some of the apartments and rentals are just disgusting and can't possibly meet any safety and fire code
- More decent middle class housing affordable for families; upgrade rental options to keep families here.
- Homeless and transitional housing
- Work on getting housing in Northome.

IDENTITY

Some feel our area is not viewed as very welcoming to outsiders. We need to learn to embrace both union and non-union employers. We need to promote, capitalize upon and be proud of what we have and can offer. We need to embrace the future and be open-minded to change. We need to better support our communities within our county.

- The first item that needs to be decided is what type of community do we want to be. If not known for being a resort community, then what?
- Follow through with the Voyage Forward initiative - develop a realistic vision for the future of our area focused on economic and community development.
- If I were in charge, I would instill pride in the people who live here
- People are not inviting
- This community is the least welcoming place I've lived
- Many people not born and raised here don't feel welcome, that needs to be addressed
- Promote Smokey the Bear. Put memorabilia of Smokey in the museum, celebrate his birthday, use him to draw people downtown
- Eliminate conflict between medical providers, county and city, union and non-union and provide a "more open culture for job opportunities whether union or not."
- End company town mentality.
- Fix the fear of change; get rid of "this is the way we do it; this is the way we've always done it."
- Take advantage of what the area has to offer
- Develop a Voyageur theme
- Preserve what is uniquely ours in the built environment, history and natural areas.
- Promote that which embodies the spirit of this special place.
- Develop entire county, not just Int'l. Falls
- Maintain what we have
- I would encourage this current tight knit community to open its doors to change and newcomers.

INCENTIVES

- Give every student who graduates from a school in Koochiching county 10 acres of county land in order to give them roots and ties to the area and a reason to stay here or come back here
- Offer a tax break for small businesses
- Assist small business
- Provide a student loan repayment plan that would encourage employers to hire and recruit well trained people while helping the new employee repay their student loans.
- Encourage and incentivize small businesses
- Attract businesses by using incentives
- Make it an encouraging place for people to come to attract new employers
- Provide an incentive for businesses to expand
- When I bought my car locally I got chamber bucks, it was great
- Be sure we are ready to welcome new business to the area and move promptly, sites are ready for new business, offer incentives.
- Create a multi-million dollar Angel Investment Fund for job creation
- Expect, promote, and reward strong work ethic
- Have something to offer those who want to relocate here
- Help Boise stay viable and grow
- I would offer incentives to attract and keep businesses open downtown.
- Recruit businesses to expand
- Fill up empty store fronts downtown either with businesses offers, deals or create an ad to put in the window
- Give grants to local small businesses to freshen up their look with paint, new signs, things to look nice especially on the Main Street.
- I would offer monetary assistance and/or rewards for small business retention. Those who have offered goods and services over extended periods of time should be allowed financial assistance of some sort at various intervals.

- Energy credits
- Add manufacturing & industrial businesses, we need to offer incentives for them to locate in our area.
- Make a bigger effort to get larger businesses & attractions to the area.
- Supply start-up costs or services for new businesses
- Give money to improve resorts to add swimming pools and upgrade units
- Encourage the development of businesses that don't depend on location for success
- Encourage large and small businesses by giving deals like land for \$1.00
- Infuse funding and energy into arts and creative small businesses.
- Make it easier, provide support for starting small businesses with the strong entrepreneurial spirit here

INDUSTRY

Explore all potential industries to diversify and increase our area's job base. We need to work at changing the perception among both residents and industries that the area will only support unionized industry. Industries suggested include plasma gasification, skidoo, greenhouses, Polaris, fisheries and water bottling. FTZ or Tax-free zone needs to be ready for development. Establish a fair and transparent process for new business opportunities that avoids local protectionism.

- I would bring more industry (not too much) to keep the town thriving but not lose the small town feel.
- 80 acre gold mine in Birchdale
- Build a plasma gasification facility
- Build greenhouses to grow produce to sell locally and ship out
- Build a toilet paper factory
- Stop hauling trash to another county
- Bring in a business that makes things the area needs like canoes
- Bring in at least one additional major manufacturer
- Get companies to expand up here
- Get skidoo to build tundras again as there is enormous demand for them as they are small and great for use in Canada, the northern US, and Alaska for fishing hunting and trapping
- Have a fact finding process for why big employers such as Marvin, Polaris and others did not set up here
- Minimize hurdles for new small industry
- Ongoing public awareness of why new businesses are not encouraged
- Open up fishery to raise fish and sell them
- Prevent Boise from keeping other employers from coming to town
- Start a water bottling company using glass instead of plastic so the water doesn't take on the plastic taste
- Tap into the rails coming back and forth across the border - is there a way to develop something in the free trade zone?
- Try to attract emerging young companies
- What happened to the Pharma gasification plant
- Bring a boat and water sport manufacturing or testing to area
- Build bush planes
- Start businesses that would create jobs and utilize the wood products and resources we have here
- Tourism is a dead horse but not manufacture for sports
- Tourism is not the best hook to hang our hat on - because we're so isolated
- Use the tax free zone to become a mining industry distribution center for Fort France and Emo
- Utilize wood resources (i.e. wood pelletizing production)
- We need to attract another major employer so that what happened to Fort Frances doesn't happen to I Falls
- We need to quit chasing away opportunities such as RECAP that have huge potential to put us on the map for green and innovative technology, while creating good paying jobs. Before listening to people complain and say "not in my backyard", make sure they really

understand what they are complaining about rather than making assumptions based on rumors. If we continue to chase away opportunities we will have nothing left but a gaining poverty stricken population, with more dollar stores and consignment shops than we already have.

- One idea would be a repackaging business where things in bulk are repackaged to display packaging for store shelves.
- Make our area a pilot project for environmentally friendly industry
- Utilize forest industry renewable resources
- Look at the projects that we have started and try to finish them by getting rid of the hurdles that are preventing us from moving forward, such as peat processing in Big Falls & gasification plant in Northome.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Fix, improve and maintain roads, highways, sidewalks throughout county. Highway 53 should become 4 lanes. Sewer should be extended. A boardwalk should be created along the riverfront. Develop a transportation system county-wide and to surrounding areas. High speed Internet and cell phone service need to be improved and expanded throughout the county.

- Fix the roads
- Make sure that all county roads were tarred, not just the ones on the lake but all county roads
- Improve sidewalks
- Improve lighting
- Consider using an architect to plan the two highways into town and Main St.
- Keep the roads clean both on back roads and on the highway
- Extend four lane highway to International Falls
- Fix up our streets, like 6th Street and the surrounding neighborhoods
- Underground, heated tunnels
- Utilize thermo heat like Lake LaCroix
- Add highway rest stops
- Boise for power for city generator water

- City roads need to be in much better condition.
- Fix the potholes and streets that are in poor condition
- Get sewer service all the way up the lake and along the river where it hasn't been done yet.
- Get the new airport terminal project done
- Get utilities into the Donahue property and market it to developers
- Keep roads in good condition and improve other modes of transportation
- More sewer and water
- Repave main highways
- Fiber optics going farther
- Redundancy regarding fiber optics
- Equal road services - private contractor in south not doing a good job.
- Improve cell phone coverage
- Bring city water and sewer all the way out Sha Sha so all the resorts can upgrade which makes it more attractive to locals and tourists
- Clean up the areas not taken care of by owners
- Increase broadband spectrum to attract big businesses
- Sewer will be going to Sha Sha's but we need to get water to the East end also! It's crazy we can't provide the basic necessities for survival to our citizens!
- Better roads and jobs
- Relocate the Boise Railway station
- Improve highway infrastructure
- Improve streets and intersection management
- Add a boardwalk area like Ft. Frances
- Better road maintenance
- Improve 53 from Cook North, if not 4 lane then add passing lanes
- Natural gas line extensions
- Roads plowed more

POPULATION

We need to stop the decline in population. We need to initiate growth by attracting the younger generation with jobs and opportunities, as well as making the area a desirable place to live. The senior population needs to be kept by providing additional services.

- Stop the exodus
- The community cannot afford to get any smaller or its ability to buy goods and services will diminish
- At present, we are an elderly community (mean age is high) - we need to continue to grow services that are affordable (housing, therapy, home health care, support groups) and support our aging population.
- Develop the area as a retirement area
- Stop brain drain
- Find chore, handyman services for elderly and disabled
- We need to recruit and retain young people
- If we don't create more programs and services and more senior housing options to keep our seniors active and healthy in our community they will have to move to find those services and their children who may be their caregivers will move with them
- Bring more full-time residents to the area
- Rethink our future based on population changes.
- Our aging population should be looked at and consider as economic development, they are a stable and secure source of income in our area
- Make older generation more comfortable
- Get younger people ages 18-40 more involved in community growth, leadership and activities.
- Market the area as a retirement area that's served by an airport so you can leave in the winter
- More retirement communities like Good Sam
- Find someone who left to come back
- Provide transportation for elderly in southern part of county - not income based, but need based

- Attract younger people
- Make it economically feasible for people to continue living there.
- We need a good mix of young and older people
- Need more for young people

RECREATION

Both variety and choices indoor and outdoor throughout the county. Most desired included trails, campgrounds, rock wall, water access, YMCA/recreation center, community pool. We need to better promote, support and expand opportunities already in place e.g. expand offerings (concessions) at City Beach.

- Invest more in parks and recreation and trail systems to attract tourists.
- Improved sports and recreation facilities. The sports facilities (esp. the skating facilities) are outdated. They do not allow the city
- There is a need for a public pool - the high school pool does not serve as a community pool. I would suggest contacting the YMCA which assists with funding and grants in rural communities e.g. Ely and Grand Rapids.
- Horse trails
- Snow terrain park
- Add more camping for RVs, campers and tents on the lake and river
- More walking and hiking trails around town
- Add on to Kerry Park Arena
- Add ski resort
- Advertise the disc golf at RRCC
- Affordable ways to access nature
- Allow more freedom for utility vehicles (ATVs, snowmobiles)
- Add a splash pad at the old "3rd Street playground" location where the community garden is. This would be great for parents and young children.
- Baseball field and hockey rink for the college
- Batting cages
- Begin a bike borrowing program where people can take bikes and return them.
- Better beach access other than city beach

- Build a recreation center including indoor pool, water slides, gym space, etc.
- Build more hiking and walking trails.
- Build RV park
- Build YMCA
- Camping available on the mainland on the lake so that a boat is not required
- Campsites are poorly maintained and ill-spaced
- Campsites for people visiting VNP
- Make City Beach a more fun & active location with paddle boat & kayak rentals, concession stand, water slide, beach volleyball.
- Ice fishing is getting popular again, just look at what Brainerd is doing with it
- Improve access to the park and other recreational areas for folks with mobility issues.
- Improve area parks to make them more appealing to young families
- Improve biking
- Improve parks
- Improve services and product selection as it relates to water recreation
- Increase camping areas
- Increase recreational and leisure opportunities, such as creating a sports complex with ice rink, pool, tennis, racquetball, soccer field, climbing wall, obstacle course that is usable in winter and summer.
- Keep tennis and basketball courts at Smokey Bear and Kerry Parks
- Make a mud run area
- Make the lake more accessible
- Mini golf
- More and better ATV trails
- More bike paths and hiking trails
- More campgrounds
- More camping sites without having to own a boat
- More campsites and houseboat sites
- More mapped biking
- More outdoor programs to educate on survival and canoeing
- More places to get out and see nature

- More public camping sites that can be driven to
- Walleye tournament
- Water park
- We need more centrally located things to do for people who don't have a boat or cabin.

RESTAURANTS

There is a desire for more and varied dining opportunities, many franchise restaurants were named.

- I would bring one larger name restaurant to town, (Applebee's, Buffalo Wild Wings, etc), I care about the local family owned restaurants so allowing one in town would please the locals and visitors as well as keep the family owned in business.
- Old Country Buffet
- Red Lobster
- Cherry Berry
- Starbucks
- Bring in soul food
- Coffee bar
- Open ICE International Chocolate Emporium in the Jim's Cafe building
- Refurbish the ICO building to sell food and beverages and have a water-filling station
- Restore the Alexander Baker Building to house a variety of things including roof-top cafe
- Ice cream parlor
- Wine bar downtown
- Restaurants with wholesome, healthy food; more organic choices in supermarkets
- Chipotle
- A larger variety of restaurants such as Jimmy Johns or Arby's would benefit the community
- Pizza Hut
- Add restaurants with more sophisticated menus
- Cafe Rio
- Have a floating restaurant on Rainy Lake that's open summer and winter
- Mexican Food
- Qdoba

- Distinct eating opportunities
- Good restaurants serving good food and providing good service
- Great restaurant and pub at Woody's in Ranier, maximize the view and the deck, offer shuttle boat rides, resort packages
- Need a really good sports bar
- Chinese Buffet
- Open A&W in Littlefork again.
- Caribou Coffee
- Texas Roadhouse
- Coldstone Creamery
- Add coffee shop
- Small cafe or restaurant
- Lunch wagons
- Taco Bell / Taco John's
- Olive Garden

RETAIL

There is a strong desire for better local shopping opportunities. This includes national retailers such as Target, Kohl's, Sam's Club, Walmart and Cabela's. There was also mention of a wide variety of specialty shops/mom and pop stores. People do not want any more dollar stores.

- Add a mall
- Target
- Walmart
- Aldi's
- Bath and Body shop
- Become a regional shopping destination
- Best Buy
- Better quality department store
- Big outdoor store
- Bookstore
- Bass Pro Shop
- Gander Mountain
- Dick's Sporting Goods
- Plato's Closet
- Cabela's
- Clothing stores so we don't have to travel 3 hours
- Create more of a shopping district
- Cub Foods
- Discourage thrift and dollar stores
- We don't need three dollar stores

- Dump Kmart and bring in Target
- Expand Mall
- Kohl's
- Get rid of K-Mart
- Hobby Lobby
- I love what Grand Rapids did with their old high school - they turned it into shops
- Improve diversity of shopping available (improves the image of the community)
- More local businesses downtown - stores (not office space i.e. lawyers, dentist, but fun, cool places to buy things)
- More unique shops
- More variety stores
- New boutiques
- No consignment or dollar stores
- Outdoor stores to buy canoes and other outdoor activity items
- Promote 2nd largest Menards
- Put in good shopping mall
- Sam's Club
- Starbucks
- Start a downtown development authority and try to get something different in our downtown areas. Since we don't have a mall any longer, we need people to go downtown. People want different home-good items, check out 218 Gift Store in Bemidji
- Toys r us
- Lower grocery prices
- Make Birchdale a destination by building a stronger retail business
- Add more shops in Ranier
- Mall with teen clothes

SAFETY

Better snow removal on streets and sidewalks. Stricter enforcement of drug and alcohol issues in public areas. Better outdoor lighting throughout the county.

- Keep streets and sidewalks shoveled
- Clear ditches
- Do something to stop current vandalism and help young people

- Crack down on city parks and get the druggies out
- Guardrail on roadways
- Better snow removal
- Have safety measures in place
- More “caution” road signs
- Need yellow signs that identify the edge of road corners, better infrastructure
- Stoplights, because it’s hard crossing streets
- Lighted Backus, churches, crosswalks, stores
- Lower snowbanks on corners
- Street lights back on main street
- Put up more stop signs in Int'l. Falls
- Improve law enforcement division, by getting stricter on drug and alcohol problems in county.
- More controlled intersections

SERVICES/SOCIAL ISSUES

A need was expressed for more social programs that would help with childcare including after hour care, drug/alcohol abuse and welfare. The communities need to involve more members, promote open-mindedness and inclusiveness.

- After hour day care
- People to understand and not be judgmental if a person is on assistance
- Want the small town attitude so we don't lose what's important in life and end up in a rush for this and that
- Get rid of negative attitudes
- More open mindedness about bringing new jobs and businesses in
- Change the attitude of animosity and distrust toward non-native residents
- Change the impetus for our core values
- Open communication so that locals would be more receptive to other perspectives
- Reduce the fear of change
- Reduce the widely accepted level of mediocrity
- Unity comes from what we work for, not against
- Be more inclusive
- Businesses, churches, and schools work together for the common good

- Change mentalities that we are so far away from everywhere else, that no one wants to live here, that it is so cold and miserable
- Get rid of complaining
- Get rid of mentality that international falls belongs only to those who were born and raised here
- Give the community a sense of the possibilities
- Local people should participate in the great opportunities we have around here
- Look toward being more welcoming
- More help for parents
- We need to brag about this town
- Acceptance of diversity within the community
- Be more intentional about inviting newcomers to the table and listen to what they have to say about our issues and opportunities
- Build a culture of quality and improvement.
- Change our thinking from "being at the end of the road" to the "beginning of the road."
- Help control drugs and drinking
- Improve customer service at all local businesses through actual "customer service" training that all employees take part in. Wear "welcome" name tags. Make sure all employees go through the "friendliness" course and practice that.
- International Falls needs to get out of its own way
- People who live here must give up their tunnel vision
- Promote youth travel out of the area for education and jobs.
- Quit looking backwards and build for the future
- We are good at coming together in a crisis. Would find a way to keep that togetherness going so it would become a way of life. It wouldn't change policy just change our hearts and redirect our spirit.
- More support for the elderly
- Do a full scale attack on culture
- Instill ambition.
- Need more motivation to change

- We need to get rid of unions. The union mentality scares businesses from coming to town.
- Deal with the large influx of homeless people in the 20 - 30 age range
- Ensure access to food, transportation and health care for the underclass
- Ambassadors for anyone moving to our area
- A community, especially a small one, wanting to attract visitors needs to bend over backwards to be welcoming
- The hardest part about moving to the Falls was people had a closed attitude to a newcomer
- This is the first place I came to where the first criteria to be included was you needed to be attached to a Falls High School class or from here
- As Herb Brooks said "It's not the name on the back of the jersey, it's the name on the front of the jersey"

TOURISM

Better and increased promotion of VNP and the other great resources already available, summer and winter. Lodging with amenities is needed and waterside RV/camping. There is a desire for high-end lodging as well as a hotel with a waterpark/pool. Expand water access, provide family vacation opportunities. Re-open Grand Mound.

- I would market the area more as a gateway to the only National Park in Minnesota and also as a border town (once the regulations were loosened).
- A comprehensive plan for adding and improving campsites providing for consistent maintenance and marketing could increase tourism in the county
- Tourism is a fundamental pillar of Koochiching County
- Add paddlewheel riverboat cruises along Rainy River
- Make Koochiching a destination to see Native history
- Post great photos of area on public and media sites
- A bridge port at the airport
- Make this area a destination rather than a through-point to Canada
- New full sized motel
- Change concept of the national park
- Increase access into VNP
- Reopen the Grand Mound and operate it as a full interpretive center with guided tours on the history of the Laurel Indians, plus offer classes for local schools to bring students to the center for a day
- Find an investor to buy a riverboat and offer tours on the Rainy River between Int'l Falls and Baudette. There are areas of history all along the river: Grand Mound center, Loman where the West Fork River joins the Black River and dumps into the Rainy River, Nelson Landing in Birchdale, Frontier Landing, all areas of early settlers. We have a beautiful resource in this river that divides two countries
- Better hospitality
- Billboards at all entrances to International Falls showing where International Falls is on Rainy Lake.
- More year round resorts
- Hotel by river near park headquarters
- Improve marketing of region to increase tourism
- Improve tourism, but not so much we're fighting for fishing spots
- Need another hotel in town that has a pool so we can attract more organized activities like tournaments for various sports
- Need large and scenic RV park at the Rainy Lake Visitors Center, on Rainy Lake, that could be owned by the Park Service and operated by a business
- Promote tourism
- Jump on the new MN "North" campaign and promote us as "Way up North!"
- Something to promote us as the Ice Box of the Nation. There should be a Facebook or Instagram account where updates can be given on the cold and photos/stories of the

area can be shared. Use hashtags to promote different events, etc. And I would bring back some sort of thermometer!

- Sell the outdoors and what is unique to our area.
- Create an attraction that would be unique and alluring to tourists
- Enable us to keep more of the tourist trade on this side of the border
- Souvenir shops for tourists
- It seems that when people from the Falls talk about Ely they always say, "Oh, but they have a casino." Nobody from the metro area visits Ely for the casino. They go there go get away and be in nature. They visit (and buy!) cabins, talk about the great outfitter shops, and apparently like the food. The Falls could totally be that!
- Better signage for visitors to area

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Provide teen centers, under 21 club, Boys & Girls clubs, additional programs for teens and kids.

Provide more opportunities for youth and young people to participate in the community, give youth a voice.

- Kids Center for all ages
- Reasonable and nice rental places for youth
- Big Brother
- Inside kid zone
- More recreation for kids youth 12-18
- Playgrounds
- Somewhere to hang out for teens.
- Youth activities, expand and promote MANKA, ski
- Large wooden playground
- Better playgrounds
- Kid hangouts to keep them out if trouble
- More activities for younger people - like concerts
- Bring in a Boys & Girls Club or YMCA
- Engage our youth
- Get more sports and if your school doesn't have your sport, allow kids to play for another school that does for a fee

- Improve activities offered to younger people - a club, group, or farm related activity
- More after school and summer activities for kids
- We need more for kids to do - McDonald's is not big enough
- Provide more substance free activities for teens after school and weekends
- Recreation for kids Indoors and outdoors
- Opportunity for youth activities with the elderly to experience new things or things that people used to do
- I would highly recommend offering more programs for our youth. Artistic and Cultural Education. Museums.
- Recruit leaders for the future. Start a leadership program to identify and recruit new leaders. Something like the Jaycees but actively recruit young people to be leaders
- Provide youth center with free arts and education services
- Provide more funds for social programs, especially youth--provide something like the Bemidji Boys and Girls Club. Make all school programs free for all kids--restore music, theater and other programs that build self-esteem.
- To keep people here - have things for kids of all ages to do/put in a kids zone for long winter days

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS TWO, THREE AND FOUR COMBINED THEMES IN PRIORITY ORDER

Category	Q-2 Theme What do you like most about living in the Koochiching County area?	Q-3 Theme What don't you want to lose as Koochiching County changes over time?	Q-4 Theme If you were in charge, what would you do to improve the Koochiching County area?	Total Comments	Q-4 Total Comments
Recreation		The County wants to maintain and grow programs and recreational activities for youth and adults. (41)	Both variety and choices indoor and outdoor throughout the county. Most desired included trails, campgrounds, rock wall, water access, YMCA/recreation center, community pool. We need to better promote, support and expand opportunities already in place e.g. expand offerings (concessions) at City Beach. (236)	277	236
Employment			Overwhelming need for more good living wage jobs with benefits, especially for young and families. Diversification of jobs, skill levels and union/non-union jobs. Suggestions included casino and prisons. There is also a need for job skills training. (195)	195	195
Retail			There is a strong desire for better local shopping opportunities. This includes national retailers such as Target, Kohl's, Sam's Club, Walmart and Cabela's. There was also mention of a wide variety of specialty shops/mom and pop stores. People do not want any more dollar stores (192)	192	192

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Government			Citizens expect governmental entities and officials at all levels to cooperate, be transparent and work together for the benefit of our county. A broad dissatisfaction was specifically expressed with International Falls city council and mayor. Citizens expressed their awareness and dissatisfaction with the continuing conflict and dysfunction. Zoning and regulations are an issue. Government at all levels need to support and encourage collaborations between existing economic development organizations (186)	186	186
Business	Koochiching County has a resource based economy supporting a wide variety of businesses. (24)	Koochiching County wants to maintain and grow local businesses. Small businesses are an important aspect of our local flavor. (150)	Overall we would really like to see diversification and more innovative businesses for the county. Some suggestions included brewery, outfitters, water bottling, and Internet cafes for outlying areas, aquaponics, cold weather businesses, data entry centers, and spa. A need was also expressed for improved customer service and general business and employee training (148)	322	148
Services/Social Issues (Q4)		We don't want to lose the level of human services available for those in need. The volunteer services	A need was expressed for more social programs that would help with childcare including after hour care, drug/alcohol abuse and welfare. The communities need to involve more members, promote open-	168	146

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		such as fire fighters, first responders, and the humane society are valued. (22)	mindfulness and inclusiveness. (146)		
Education	Respondents feel there is a strong educational systems with varied learning options. (23)	Communities value their own independent school districts as a valuable resource both to individuals and to the area as a whole. (139)	<p>Increase programs at RRCC, especially Vo-Tech, such as law enforcement, cosmetology, and welding and explore the possibility of four year programs. Improve facilities and explore addition of daycare. Encourage better collaboration between school districts and RRCC.</p> <p>Expand and improve educational/extra-curricular opportunities for k-12 learning particularly in ISD 361. Improve and update facilities especially Bronco Arena. Increase expectations and standards for graduates (124) (Two major themes in this category)</p>	286	124
Infrastructure	Respondents feel that residents have access to public services and infrastructure. (22)	Our transportation connections such as the airport and highways are important. The public and historic buildings along with infrastructure services such as water, sewer,	<p>Fix, improve and maintain roads, highways, sidewalks throughout county. Highway 53 should become 4 lanes. Sewer should be extended. A boardwalk should be created along the riverfront. (80)</p> <p>Develop a transportation system county-wide and to surrounding areas. (15)</p>	186	120

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		internet, cellular, and electric are all valued. (44)	High speed Internet and cell phone service need to be improved and expanded throughout the county. (25) (original category: Technology)		
Tourism		We value the bass tournament, VNP, State, and County parks as important contributors to tourism. (46)	Better and increased promotion of VNP and the other great resources already available, summer and winter. Lodging with amenities is needed and waterside RV/camping. There is a desire for high-end lodging as well as a hotel with a waterpark/pool. Expand water access, provide family vacation opportunities. Re- open Grand Mound. (120)	166	120
Entertainment			A need for increased entertainment options for all ages, including youth, families, young adults and seniors. Specific requests included: casino, amusement park, splashpark, waterpark, music and theater, nightclub (104)	104	104
Economy	Respondents feel Koochiching County has a low cost of living. (23) (original category: Cost of Living)	We support all economic development efforts to diversify our economy. Responsible leadership needs to maintain a tax structure that will not force people out of	Diversify economic base by being open to innovative business ideas as well as supporting existing local businesses. Desire for competitive pricing for goods and services (36) Technology related business opportunities should be encouraged (25) (original category: Technology)	222	98

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		<p>their homes. (16)</p> <p>We don't want to lose any more jobs or career opportunities; keeping the young people in our community is important. (85)</p>	<p>Incentives need to be provided to attract and retain businesses and young people. (37) (original category: Incentives)</p>		
Restaurants			<p>There is a desire for more and varied dining opportunities, many franchise restaurants were named (91)</p>	91	91
Industry		<p>The communities do not want to lose Boise and the associated satellite industries. The Family-sustaining, well-paying jobs are important to the county (49) (original category: Boise)</p>	<p>Explore all potential industries to diversify and increase our area's job base. We need to work at changing the perception among both residents and industries that the area will only support unionized industry. Industries suggested include plasma gasification, skidoo, greenhouses, Polaris, fisheries and water bottling. FTZ or Tax-free zone needs to be ready for development. Establish a fair and transparent process for new business opportunities that avoids local protectionism (87)</p>	136	87
Aesthetics			<p>People felt a need for improved aesthetics and general appearance throughout the county. Cleanup of blight, beautification of Hwy 53, and by adding</p>	80	80

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			plantings, benches, signage etc. Overall, a more welcoming, pleasant appearance. (80)		
Health Care	Respondents have access to health care services (5) (original category: Medical Services)	Koochiching county does not want to lose its health care services and facilities. (56)	Improvement is needed in facilities and availability of services such as orthodontics, dialysis, dermatology, mental health, obstetrics, radiation and cardiology. Nursing home/dementia care is needed throughout the county, with specific concerns expressed about the closing of Northome's facility. Cooperation is needed among all healthcare institutions (80)	141	80
Youth Activities		School and community activities and events, especially for children are an important part of our lifestyle (16) (original category: Activities)	Provide teen centers, under 21 club, Boys & Girls clubs, additional programs for teens and kids. Provide more opportunities for youth and young people to participate in the community, give youth a voice (66)	82	66
Environment		We do not want to lose the pristine beauty and serenity of the natural environment. The continued good management of wildlife and fish will protect our future.	Definite concern about eliminating the mill smell. Wetlands are an issue, with varied views. Strong desire to preserve and protect the natural resources we have and utilize them in a sustainable manner. (38)	91	38

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		(19) Preserve a healthy environment of good water quality and clean air. (34) (original category: Pollution)			
Safety	Residents feel Koochiching County is a safe place. (62)	We appreciate our law enforcement entities. We feel that we live in a low crime area that is safe and secure and is a good environment for raising children. (44)	Better snow removal on streets and sidewalks. Stricter enforcement of drug and alcohol issues in public areas. Better outdoor lighting throughout the county (35)	141	35
Identity			Some feel our area is not viewed as very welcoming to outsiders. We need to learn to embrace both union and non-union employers. We need to promote, capitalize upon and be proud of what we have and can offer. We need to embrace the future and be open-minded to change. We need to better support our communities within our county (31)	31	31
Arts and Culture		We do not want to lose the Backus Community Center and RRCC and their	People really value Backus and arts in general and would like to see more attention and funding provided to area arts and culture.	79	30

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		support of arts and cultural activities. (49)	Such as music, theater, artists' colony, sculpture and area-focused museums (30)		
Population		A strong growth pattern to increase our population and offer opportunities for our young people to remain in or return to our communities. (23)	We need to stop the decline in population. We need to initiate growth by attracting the younger generation with jobs and opportunities, as well as making the area a desirable place to live. The senior population need to be kept by providing additional services (30)	53	30
Housing			Countywide there is a need for more quality and affordable housing choices for all. Convert AB into housing. Add waterfront and golf course options such as condos (24)	24	24
Border Issues			Streamline border crossing process and ease regulations. Advocate for the inclusion and cooperation of cross border activities. Pursue a new port of entry. (13)	13	13
Access/Rights		Northhome doesn't want to lose the local representation and rights including convenient access to public land and water, and existing private property rights (Combine theme?) The county		89	0

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		<p>communities do not want to lose public access to lands and waters. (43)</p> <p>We don't want to lose our rights to use public land and waters. We do not want any additional restrictions or regulations on our freedom. (46)</p>			
Community	Respondents have a strong sense of community, family and friends. (214)	Our communities do not want to lose our caring, close-knit small town atmosphere. We want to maintain our volunteerism, camaraderie, and grassroots community efforts for those in need. (101)		315	0
Nature	Access to nature and outdoor activities are extremely important to residents of Koochiching County	The natural beauty of the area with its pristine and unspoiled up-north feel is an important aspect of		926	0

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	(768)	our lifestyle. (142) The slow-paced, close to nature lifestyle that we enjoy in this county is important to us. (16) (original category: Lifestyle)			
Outdoors		We do not want to lose hunting and fishing as well as other opportunities for outdoor recreation. (60)		60	0
Pride/Proximity	Respondents appreciate having a variety of experiences including going to Canada within a short commute (35) (original category: Proximity)	We take pride in our unique historic order location and our national notoriety as the Icebox of the Nation. (18)		53	0
Rural Area	Residents like living in a small town rural area (232)	We want to preserve the quiet, peaceful small town feel of our communities. (87)		319	0