



## Focusing on South Madison County Quality of Life (2024)

Biannually since 2020, South Madison Community Foundation has intently listened to members of the communities it serves to discern topics of importance to the community and devise work to improve local quality of life. 2020's "Collected Wisdom" report of 35 existing community plans and studies, 2022's "Focusing on Madison County Quality of Life" report, and this "Focusing on South Madison County Quality of Life" report reveal certain observations relating to the people and places of South Madison County, including Lapel, Ingalls, Pendleton, Markleville, and unincorporated areas in between. This area constitutes 'our landscape,' South Madison County.

### 2024 Focus Groups

In late 2024, five resident focus groups were conducted. Participants ranged from 10 to 80 years old, and hailed from across our landscape. Participants were selected as representatives of target populations including those with long tenure in the community, those new to the community within the last five years, active participants in community life and those without known community associations. The same questions and format were used as in 2022. Each conversation took one hour.

### Understanding our landscape:

**Satisfaction:** On average, participants self-reported their satisfaction with quality of life in their community as **7.8** of 10. In 2022, South Madison's measure was 7.75 as compared to an overall ranking of 6.84 from Madison County (Anderson – 5.8, North Madison – 6.18).

**Assets:** Residents appreciate stable community anchors like good schools, magnet parks, and libraries. Robust community events and a stable and growing business community are enhanced by the proximity brought by the interstate and secondary transportation network. The transportation network also provides access to broader opportunities for recreation and employment not afforded locally. A sense of neighborliness is reinforced by teachers, community organizations, volunteers, and first responders.

**Challenges:** Residents note a strain on infrastructure capacity that affects water, internet, transportation, and public safety. The strain leads to concerns about system management and long range planning. While there is a desire for amenities like walking paths, park improvements, and community spaces, participants understand competing demands on public resources. Participants observe some areas lack any sidewalks, health services, grocery stores, or supportive housing. This lack deeply affects those with the least access to resources, including (automotive) transportation.

**Priorities:** Each participant was asked to identify two topics from the discussion as their "top two areas you'd like to see addressed." Participants chose from any area – whether asset or issue. Many themes recurred from 2022, but there was a marked increase in prioritization on issues of equity/access and demand on public resources. The following chart compares priorities from 2022 and 2024:

## Focus Group Priorities (2024)

AREAS OF INCREASING PRIORITY:	2022	2024
<b>EQUITY/ACCESS</b> lack of grocery, transportation, and housing options affect the disabled, aged, and economically challenged; need an expanded understanding of diversity and to better see "invisible" need.	17%	32%
<b>SMALL TOWN STRONG:</b> small town feel; cleanliness; neighborliness; quality schools, ability to make an impact. Expand on community assets.	16%	20%
<b>IMPROVE &amp; CONNECT:</b> Park utilization, Bike/Pedestrian connectivity and safety to get people to hubs where they like to gather.	14%	20%
<b>GROWTH TENSION:</b> Demand on public resources, inadequate infrastructure and capacity to serve growing communities.	5%	14%
<b>ACTIVE KIDS &amp; FAMILIES:</b> pools, trails, civic options; recreation & enrichment	14%	11%
<b>INVOLVEMENT:</b> Increased volunteerism and expanded options for youth service	14%	2%
<b>QUALITY OF PLACE:</b> retail center, parking, congestion, lack of offerings	12%	0%
<b>CIVIC RELATIONS:</b> Transparency, Clarity of Vision & Fear of Change, Improved two way communication	7%	0%
<i>*Each participant named two priority areas from the discussion, which were grouped thematically. There were 76 responses in 2022 and 44 responses in 2024.</i>		

**Strategies and Methods:** When asked to devise solutions to address community challenges, participants proposed a variety of tactics to help create capacity in existing organizations. As in 2022, participants favor capitalizing on our landscape's existing assets to address issues. These suggestions included:

- Identify underutilized resources and unmet needs
- Engage community partners to explore solutions
- Encourage partnerships between organizations
- Conduct an assessment to identify the most needed improvements
- Organize clubs to promote activity and social connections
- Investigate the availability of state and local funding sources
- Keep the community informed through consistent and effective channels

**Status/Next Steps:** Heeding guidance from focus group participants in 2022, South Madison Community Foundation screened our work through resident priorities and will continue to use their guidance to shape our work. Steps undertaken to date and continuing forward include:

- Revising the SMCF grant-making rubric to favor applications that address priority issues
- Launching a community calendar to showcase ample community activities
- Coordinating monthly municipal roundtables for government partners
- Convening partners to apply for State, Federal, and Foundation grants
- Participating in Equity Advancement Fund with United Way and Foundation partners
- Using priorities to frame creation of new SMCF Strategic Plan

To follow additional steps or get involved with the work of the Foundation, contact [tammy@southmadisonfoundation.org](mailto:tammy@southmadisonfoundation.org), subscribe to SMCF's newsletter, and follow us on social media.