



# The Conservation Council of Ontario

Conservation Trends Report  
September, 2011



*Prepared for the Conservation Council of Ontario by*



# Introduction

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This report is the first of a series that will track public attitudes and commitment toward conservation. It draws upon opinion polling conducted for the Conservation Council of Ontario by Oracle Poll Research in 2006 and 2011.

The Conservation Council of Ontario is a sixty year-old association of conservation leaders in Ontario. Our membership includes organizations, individuals, and (more recently) municipalities and companies that share in our vision of Ontario as a conserver society.

The Conservation Council has undertaken this project as part of our strategy to support a voluntary transition to a conserver society in Ontario. The complete strategy can be found on our website, [www.weconserve.ca/strategy](http://www.weconserve.ca/strategy). This report is in support of the section, "Evaluating Our Progress".

Through "We Conserve," the Conservation Council and its members seek to be a catalyst for the voluntary transition to a conserver society. In particular, we have identified four strategic actions:

1. promote conservation
2. promote distributed leadership on conservation
3. promote effective networking (provincially and locally)
4. promote innovation.

This research is designed to help us plan conservation programs: social marketing, support programs, and government policy. In particular, we are looking for:

1. Do public understand the importance of conservation?
2. Have people made a personal commitment to conserve?
3. What do people want from their governments?

This being an election year, we also asked two questions as indicators of public attitudes toward the role of government and taxation.

## Defining Conservation

To conserve is to use less. The real challenge is to live better by using less. This is why we define conservation as "the art of living lightly."

Those who get it, really get it. From farmer's markets and community gardens, to biking to work or school, there is a strong social movement across Ontario towards living a healthier and lighter lifestyle. Conservation offers us the chance not just to survive the next crisis, but to redefine what we mean by "the good life."

We are all conservers, although how we choose to conserve is as individual as each and every one of us. Our motives to conserve can be short-term self interest or long-term values. We can conserve to save money, or we can conserve to save the planet.

As a society, conservation improves our ability to weather economic or environmental crises and it can also improve public health and our sense of community. Any way you look at it, conservation is good.

Our research shows not only does the public get it, but they are increasingly making a conserver lifestyle a priority. This is the most positive trend of all.

In the face of economic turmoil and the pressure to cut taxes and downsize government, there is an alternative future emerging. Our challenge is help it along, to make conservation easy, affordable, and desirable.



**Chris Winter**  
**Executive Director**  
**The Conservation Council of Ontario**

## 2011 Key Findings

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### In a nutshell...

- **There is a strong culture of conservation in Ontario.**
- **People choose to conserve in their own lives.**
- **People understand how conservation addresses provincial priorities of the economy, the cost of living, the environment, healthy communities, and public health.**
- **People expect government leadership and support.**



These conclusions have a dramatic impact on how environmental issues need to be addressed by our governments.

The research shows there is a strong movement towards a conserver economy and a personal desire to live better by living lightly. This movement is running directly counter to conventional theories of economic stability through exponential growth.

In essence, the green movement has created a second economy that centres around the provision of local, green products and services. Tougher to measure than big business investments, a resilient local economy provides an excellent buffer to international pressures, increased job satisfaction, and stronger communities.

For many different reasons, people have made conservation a personal priority, whether to reduce the cost of living, live a healthier lifestyle, or contribute to solving global issues of climate change and resource depletion.

Because conservation is both a strong cultural value and a personal lifestyle choice, a conservation ethic needs to be infused throughout all social and economic development policy. The environment is no longer something out there to be protected; it is part of who we are.

For environmentalists, businesses and governments alike, the message is clear:

- living well shouldn't cost the planet,
- saving the planet shouldn't be a sacrifice.



**Sooner or later, by choice or by crisis,  
we will live in a conserver society.  
We prefer sooner, and by choice**

## Deep Trends

**Voters are concerned about our future**, including the cost of living (72%), public health and health care (71%), the economy (57%), the environment (50%), public education (50%) and crime and public safety (41%).

**Most people see conservation (defined as “living better by using less”) as important in addressing those concerns**, including ensuring a healthy environment (86%), ensuring a healthy economy (78%), promoting public health and reducing health care costs (69%), lowering the cost of living (67%), and promoting safe communities and reducing crime (56%).

**Almost everyone in Ontario practices conservation**, with 65% saying they conserve daily, and 26% saying they conserve most of the time.

- 79% feel Ontarians need to do a better job of conserving electricity
- 47% would ride bikes if there were safe bike routes
- 68% want to live in a complete, walkable community

**There is clear public support for strong government leadership** in legislation and programs to support a healthier and sustainable future for Ontario, with only 12% believing government should be smaller. This support is strong across supporters of all political parties.

**Almost six in ten or 59% are of the opinion that taxes should be maintained** and a further 19% that they should be increased, while only 14% believe that they should be reduced.

## Hot Issues

**Gravel Pits:** The question on top-of-mind response to the term “conservation” always yields interesting results, because it gives us an indication of any emerging issues. Minerals and gravel pits suddenly appeared on the list of responses this year, perhaps a reflection of the current tension over a proposed 937 hectare quarry in Melancthon Township.

**Renewable Energy:** We did not ask specific questions on renewable power, given that the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association had recently contracted with Oraclepoll Research in July of this year to conduct a poll on wind and solar power. The results showed that over 7 of 10 Ontarians support green energy initiatives ([http://www.ontario-sea.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=3170&SiteNodeID=272&BL\\_ExpandID=](http://www.ontario-sea.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=3170&SiteNodeID=272&BL_ExpandID=)).

**Government Leadership:** Our polling discovered that Ontarians want good government, not less government. Break these numbers down by voter intent and region and we find some interesting results:

1. Only 20% of Progressive Conservative supporters want smaller government. 30% favour tax cuts, however 55% percent of PC supporters would like to see taxes maintained at current levels to keep existing services.
2. In the City of Toronto, where the Mayor is proposing radical and deep cuts to city services, the regional results were astounding. We found absolutely no support (0%) for either a reduction in services or tax cuts.

# Survey Report

Prepared for the:



*By:*



August 2011

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Available in the full report:

**R E S U L T S   B Y   Q U E S T I O N**

**C R O S S T A B U L A T I O N S**

# M e t h o d o l o g y   a n d L o g i s t i c s

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## **Overview**

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- The following represents the results of a public opinion survey of 1,000 voting age Ontario residents conducted in the Oraclepoll Research Limited Ontario omnibus survey for August 2011.
- The results presented in this report are the findings from those questions subscribed to by the Conservation Council of Ontario (CCO).

## **Study Sample**

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- A total of 1,000 respondents, 18 years of age and older from across Ontario were interviewed. The margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 3.1\%$ , 19/20 times.

## **Survey Method**

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- The survey was conducted using computer-assisted techniques of telephone interviewing (CATI) and random number selection. Interviews were conducted in the respondents preferred language of choice.
- A total of 30% of all interviews were monitored and the management of Oraclepoll Research Limited supervised 100%.

## **Logistics**

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- Interviews were conducted between the days of August 12<sup>th</sup> and August 19<sup>th</sup> 2011.
- Initial calls were made from 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. with call-backs of no-answers and busy numbers made on a (staggered) daily rotating basis up to 5 times (from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.) until contact was made. In addition, telephone interview appointments were attempted with those respondents unable to complete the survey at the time of contact.

# E x e c u t i v e   S u m m a r y

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## **OMNIBUS RESULTS**

The following are the results of questions included by Oraclepoll Research Limited and provided to the CCO as part of being a subscriber to the omnibus survey.

- Respondents were first asked what they felt was the **most important issue facing the province of Ontario** at this time. A total of 22% named the economy, closely followed by 20% that said health care and 19% job creation. The budget was cited by 7%, the environment by 6% and rising utility prices by 3%. A total of 10% did not know or had no opinion.
- When then asked about their **vote intent**, 42% of decided voters back the PC's, 38% the Liberals, while the NDP trail with 13% support and the Green's with 7%. A total of 14% were undecided.
- Voters are split on the issue of **change in Ontario politics**. Slightly fewer than half or 49% of respondents said that it is time for a change of governments in Ontario, while 30% claimed that the Liberals should be re-elected and 22% did not know.
- When asked **why they would favor change**, 21% named taxation, 13% health care, 11% job creation, 7% honesty, 5% rising prices, 5% the environment, 5% education, and 5% the budget deficit. 21% had no response or were unsure.

**CONCERN**

Respondents were read a series of statements that they were asked to agree or disagree with.

<p><b><i>“Please rate your level of concern with each of the following using a scale from one not at all concerned to five very concerned?”</i></b></p>	<p><b>Total Concerned (Concerned &amp; Very Concerned)</b></p>
<p>The cost of living including, food, energy and housing</p>	<p>72%</p>
<p>The quality of public health and health care in Ontario</p>	<p>71%</p>
<p>The state of Ontario’s economy</p>	<p>57%</p>
<p>The state of Ontario’s environment</p>	<p>50%</p>
<p>The quality of public education in Ontario</p>	<p>50%</p>
<p>Crime and public safety</p>	<p>42%</p>

Concern among voters was highest for the cost of living and the quality of public health and health care in the province.

## **CONSERVATION**

Respondents were first asked in an open ended question what **first came to mind when they thought of the term conservation**. The majority of responses identified conservation issues (energy, biodiversity, pollution, farmland), and only a small percentage gave a top-of-mind response reflecting a conserver lifestyle and individual action.

Mining and aggregates is a significant top-of-mind concern for 2011, with 15% mentioning minerals and gravel as conservation issues.

<b><i>When thinking about conservation what first comes to mind?</i></b> <b><i>TOP FIVE RESPONSES</i></b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
1. Conserve energy and electricity	22%	18%
2. Conserving other resources (minerals and gravel)	-	15%
3. Protecting nature and biodiversity	21%	29%
4. Preventing pollution and waste	24%	10%
5. Saving farmland and promoting compact development	5%	7%
6. Living lightly / personal benefit	4%	8%
7. Don't know	13%	11%

The following preamble was read to those interviewed and they were then asked to rate the **importance of conservation in helping to achieve a series of goals.**

*“I will now read you a **definition of conservation.** Conservation is how we can balance our needs and desires as individuals and as a society with a respect for nature and the need to protect our future supplies of natural resources. Conservation is how we can live well while using less.”*

<p><i>“In your opinion, <b><u>how important a role can conservation play in helping to achieve the following goals for Ontario?</u></b> Please use a scale from one not at all important top five very important.”</i></p>	<p><b>Total Important (Important &amp; Very Important)</b></p>
<p>Ensuring a healthy environment</p>	<p>86%</p>
<p>Ensuring a healthy economy</p>	<p>78%</p>
<p>Promoting public health and reducing health care costs in Ontario</p>	<p>69%</p>
<p>Lowering the cost of living including food, energy &amp; housing</p>	<p>67%</p>
<p>Promoting safe communities and reducing crime</p>	<p>56%</p>

Conservation is seen as being most important with respect to ensuring a healthy environment and a health economy. A strong majority also see it as important in promoting public health and lowering the cost of living, but lowest in promoting safe communities.

## **TRACKING**

The **following questions were first asked in a 2006 Ontario wide survey conducted by Oraclepoll Research Limited for the CCO** and were once again asked in the current survey.

When asked **how often that they make a conscious effort to conserve**, 65% said that they do it on a daily basis (69% in 2006), 26% conserve most of the time (22% in 2006) and 10% conserve from time to time (8% in 2006). In 2006 1% claimed that they never conserve compared to none in the current survey.

Respondents were then asked to **rate their level of agreement with each of the following statements related to conservation.**

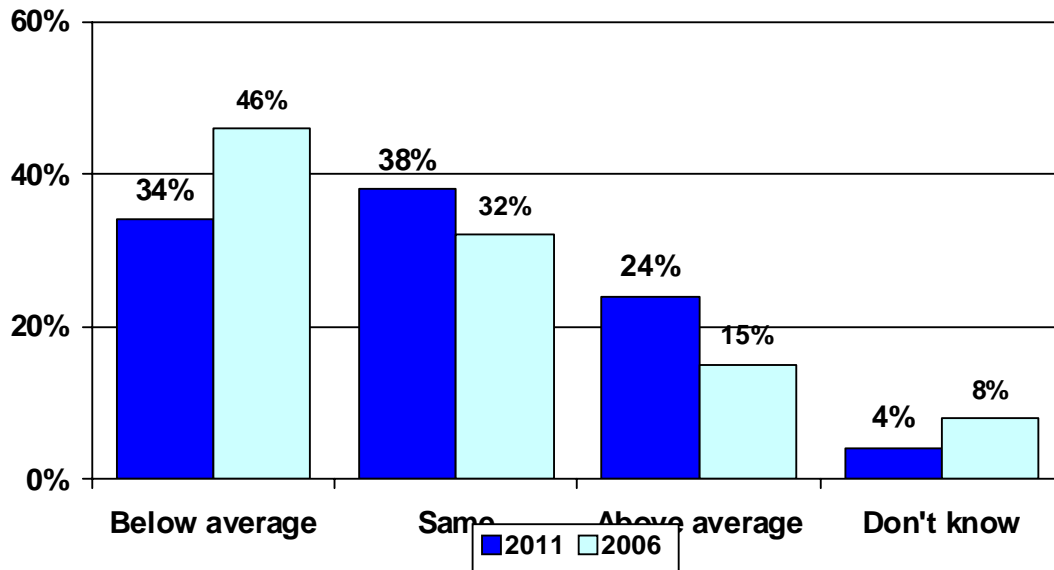
<b><i>“Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements using a scale from one strongly disagree to five strongly agree?”</i></b>	<b>2006 Total Agree</b>	<b>2011 Total Agree</b>
Conservation is important to me	93%	87%
Overall, I feel that Ontarians need to do a better job of conserving energy	84%	79%
I am better at conserving than others	54%	54%

There is very strong buy in with respect to energy conservation being important, although the numbers are slightly lower compared to 2006. A significant 79% also agreed that Ontarians need to do a better job at conserving (6% lower than 2006) and a similar 54% over both survey periods agreed that they are better at conserving than others.

## ELECTRICITY

A series of questions were asked about home electricity usage.

**“Overall, would you say that your home energy usage is above average, below average or about the same as other Ontarians?”**



Only 24% claimed that their home energy usage is above average, while most feel it is either the same (38%) or below average (34%). Overall, the number of people who see themselves as being above-average consumers has increased over the past five years.

Most Ontario homes also have **compact fluorescent or LED bulbs** as only 10% claimed that they had none.

2006	2011
<input type="checkbox"/> 24% have none	<input type="checkbox"/> 10% have none
<input type="checkbox"/> 8% have 1 or 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% have 1 or 2
<input type="checkbox"/> 20% have 2 – 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 14% have 2 – 5
<input type="checkbox"/> 27% 5 – 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 19% 5 – 10
<input type="checkbox"/> 21% 10 or more	<input type="checkbox"/> 54% 10 or more
<input type="checkbox"/> 2% did not know	<input type="checkbox"/> 2% did not know

In general, people appear to be adopting energy-efficient lighting.

When asked about **how often they use a clothesline to air dry laundry**, 49% said never, 26% occasionally and 26% almost all or all of the time. The total number of people who use a clothesline (52%) is a slight increase over the 48% of respondents in 2006 who said they air dry clothes.

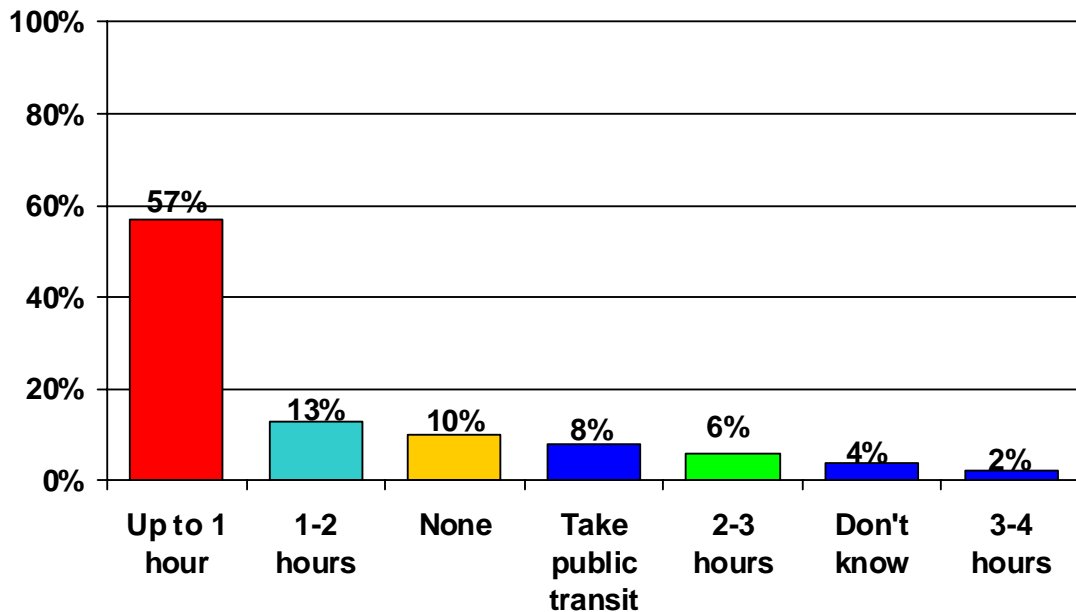
All respondents were also asked about **what source they find most trustworthy when it comes to electricity conservation**.

- 42% said the media
- 14% claimed their local utility
- 8% government agencies
- 6% the internet or websites
- 6% experts
- 5% municipal councillors
- 18% did not know and 2% said that there was no source

## TRANSPORTATION

A series of questions were asked about personal transportation.

**“In a typical day, how much time do you spend commuting in a personal vehicle?”**



Most or 57% commute in a personal vehicle for up to one hour, 13% 1-2 hours, 6% 2-3 hours and 2% 3-4 hours in a typical day. 10% do not commute, 8% take public transit and 4% did not know. In 2006, the numbers were similar, with 56% saying they spent up to one hour commuting in a personal vehicle.

When asked how **much they commute in an average day compared to five years ago**, more than half or 54% said less, 37% about the same and only 10% more. In 2006, in response to the same question, only 33% said less, 40% said about the same, and 24% said more.

The results indicate a subtle shift away from commuting long distances by personal vehicle.

Respondents were asked **how important each of the following are as reasons to encourage Ontarians to drive less or adopt alternatives to driving.**

“

<p><i>“How important are each of the following reasons that would <b><u>encourage Ontarians like you to drive less or adopt alternatives that will help conserve gas.</u></b> Please use a scale from one not important to five very important.”</i></p>	<p><b>Total Important (Important &amp; Very Important)</b></p>
Helping to reduce smog and asthma	78%
Having government incentives for driving alternatives	73%
Saving gas money	72%
Contributing to a greener & more efficient economy	70%
Having convenient alternatives	68%
Helping to reduce the effects of climate change	67%

A high level of importance was placed on all areas, with the strongest level being related to helping to reduce smog and asthma.

## **FOOD**

Food was a new area of enquiry for us, with a single question asked where respondents were asked to rank in **priority each of the following motivators that would encourage the purchase of locally grown food.**

Please rank in order of priority each of the following <b><i>motivators that would encourage Ontarians like you to buy locally grown food.</i></b> <i>(Food produced within 100 kilometers of your home)</i>	<b>Rank</b>
1. Lowering energy use & greenhouse gas emissions from imported foods	4.8
2. Food that tastes better	4.5
3. Support for healthy farming practices	4.3
4. Protecting Ontario's best farmland from development	3.8
5. Lower prices for local food	3.4
6. Food that is healthier	3.4
7. Support for local farmers	3.2

With 1 being the lowest priority, and 7 being the highest priority, the results showed strong support for each of the stated reasons, with none of the answers being ranked below a 3.

Environmental reasons had a somewhat stronger persuasion, holding three of the top four positions. Ranked highest was lowering energy use / greenhouse gas emissions, followed by better tasting food and support for healthy farming practices.

## COMMUNITY

Respondents were asked to rate each of the following as aspects about living in a community.

**“How important are each of the following aspects about living in a community to you. Please use a scale from one not at all important to five very important.”**

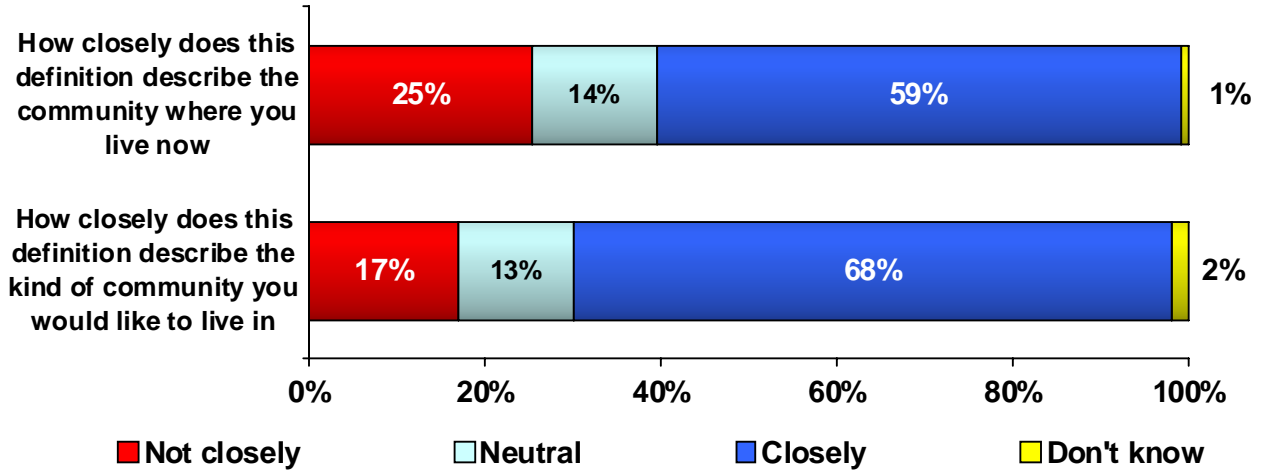
<p><i>“How important are each of the following <b>aspects about living in a community to you.</b> Please use a scale from one not important to five very important.”</i></p>	<p><b>Total Important (Important &amp; Very Important) 2006</b></p>	<p><b>Total Important (Important &amp; Very Important) 2011</b></p>
<p>Having public green spaces such as parks for recreation in my neighbourhood</p>	<p>89%</p>	<p>86%</p>
<p>Being able to walk to local stores</p>	<p>64%</p>	<p>76%</p>
<p>Living close enough to work or school that I can get there by walking, transit or cycling</p>	<p>59%</p>	<p>70%</p>
<p>Having friends and neighbours within easy walking distance</p>	<p>58%</p>	<p>65%</p>

The high level of importance was placed on having green spaces, followed by being able to walk to local establishments.

There is a measurable increase in the desire to live in a walkable community.

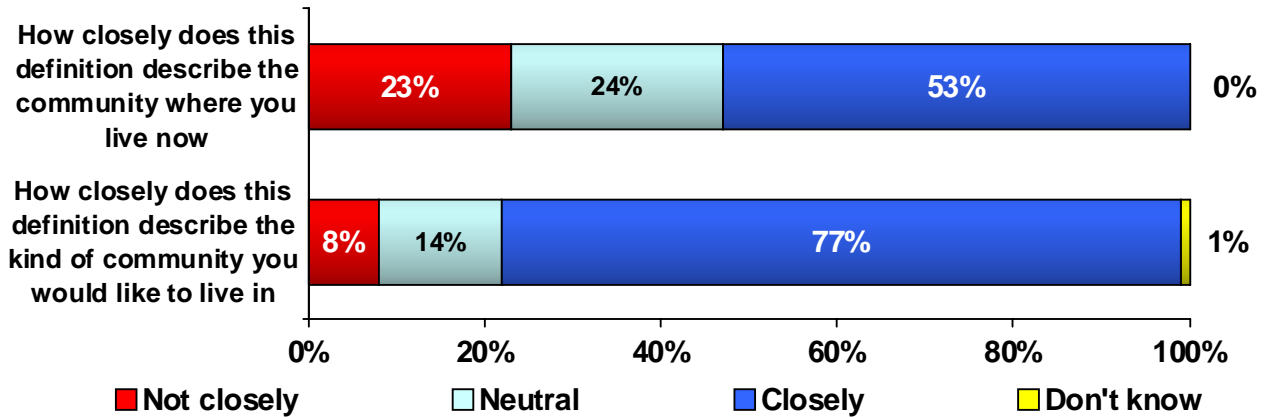
All respondents were read the following preamble and were asked two follow up questions.

***“A complete community is defined as a neighbourhood-based community that has most everything you need within easy walking distance. It usually has a central area with shops, local businesses, playgrounds and community services, small parks and other green spaces, and lots of cycling and walking paths, all surrounded by a mix of smaller homes located fairly close together.”***



While almost six in ten (59%) claimed that the definition provided resembles their current community, a higher 69% said it resembles the community that they would like to live in.

In 2006, the gap between satisfaction with where you live now and the desire for a more complete community was even greater:



Respondents were then asked to **rate their level of agreement with each of the following statements.**

<b><i>“Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements using a scale from one strongly disagree to five strongly agree?”</i></b>	<b>Total Agree (Agree &amp; Strongly Agree) 2006</b>	<b>Total Agree (Agree &amp; Strongly Agree) 2011</b>
I would drive less if there were other convenient, safe transportation options, like public transit or cycling	55%	55%
I would ride my bike to work, school or shopping if there were safe bicycle routes and bicycle paths in my community	47%	47%
I prefer to live in a bigger house with a large yard, even if that means that more farmland and natural areas has to be used up to support this lifestyle	11%	11%

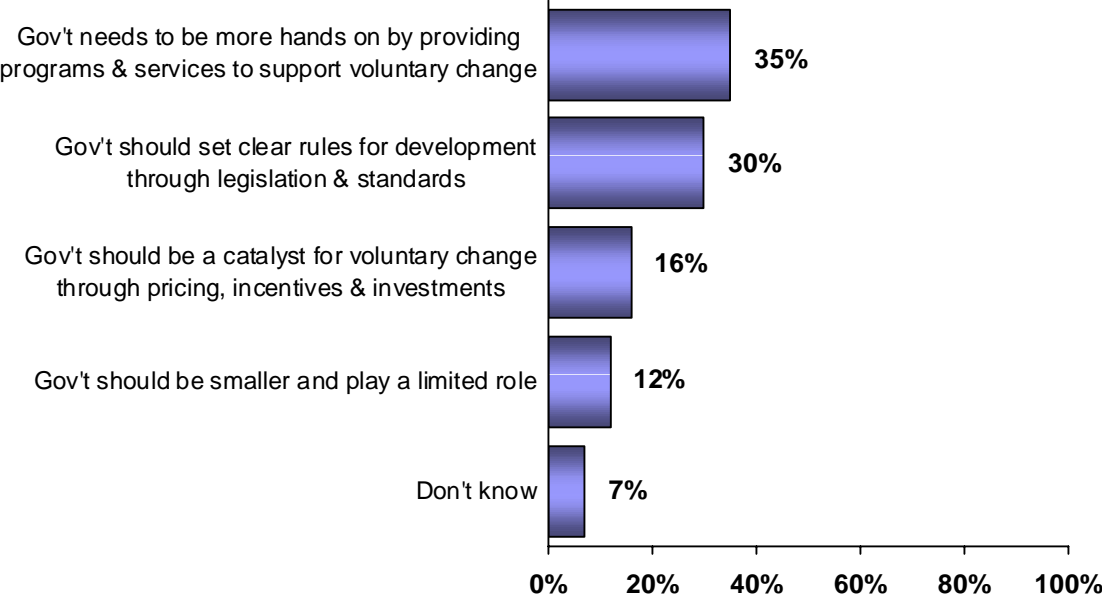
Roughly half of respondents would drive less and ride a bike if there were options available and only 11% would live in a bigger house at the expense of farmland or natural areas.

*These numbers remain virtually unchanged since 2006 and indicate a consistent and significant personal desire for convenient and safe transportation options including safe cycling.*

**GOVERNMENT**

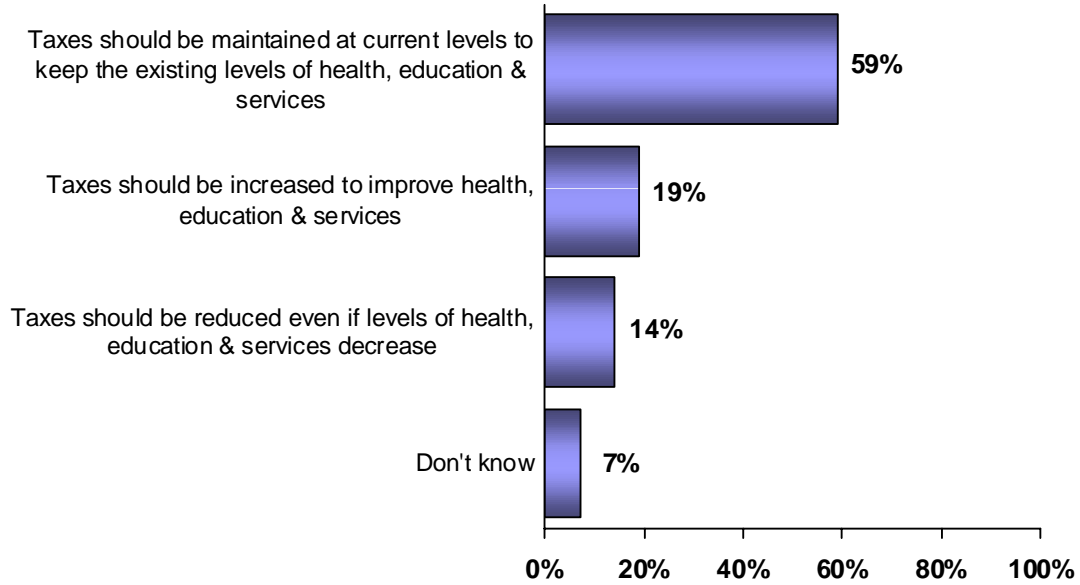
Respondents were asked which statements best reflected their view on the role of government with respect to Ontario’s future and on taxation in the province.

***“Which of the following statements most closely reflects your view of the role that the government of Ontario should have with respect to creating a strong future for Ontario?”***



The majority of Ontarians favour some role for government in creating a strong future for Ontario. A total of 35% want a strong hands-on role and 30% one where government sets clear rules.

***“Which of the following statements most closely reflects your view on taxation in Ontario?”***



Almost six in ten or 59% are of the opinion that taxes should be maintained and a further 19% that they should be increased, while only 14% believe that they should be reduced.