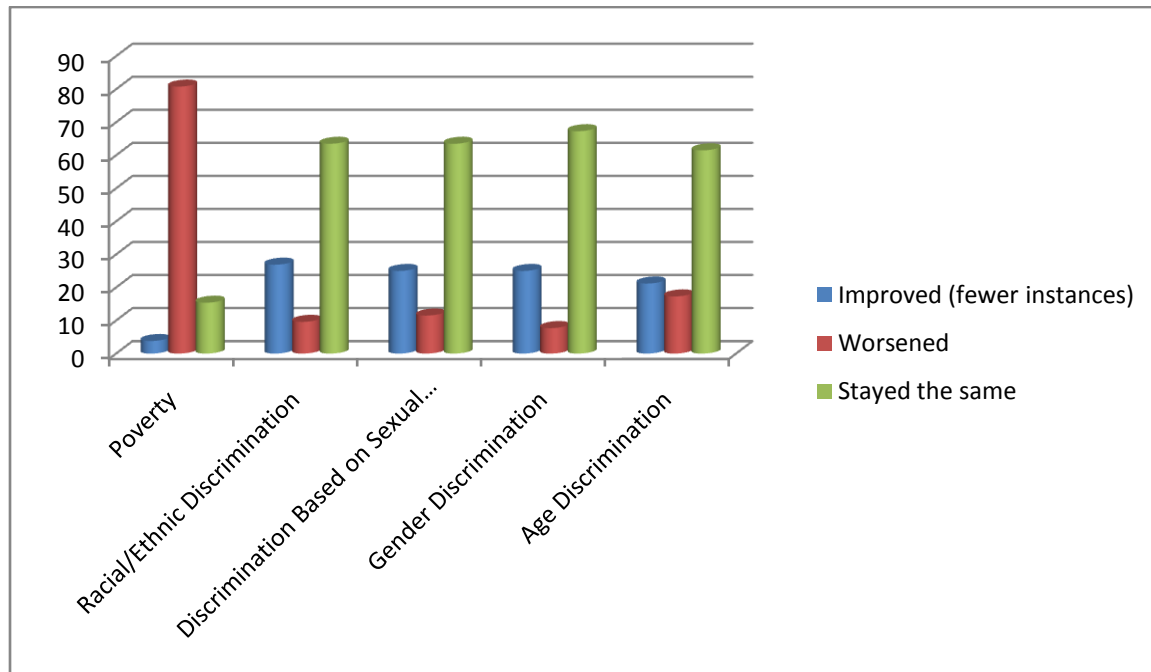


## Fort Dodge Human Rights Commission Community Assessment Survey Results

These data are the result of a survey sent to over one hundred individuals and organizations in Fort Dodge. This is not a scientific survey; it was not designed for or distributed to a representative sample of the local population. This survey was created simply to indicate which issues appear prevalent in Fort Dodge, and perhaps to promote further discussion. If you have comments, questions or concerns regarding this survey, please email [jfeld@fortdodgeiowa.org](mailto:jfeld@fortdodgeiowa.org). Thank you to all who participated.

12/14/2009, based upon 52 responses.

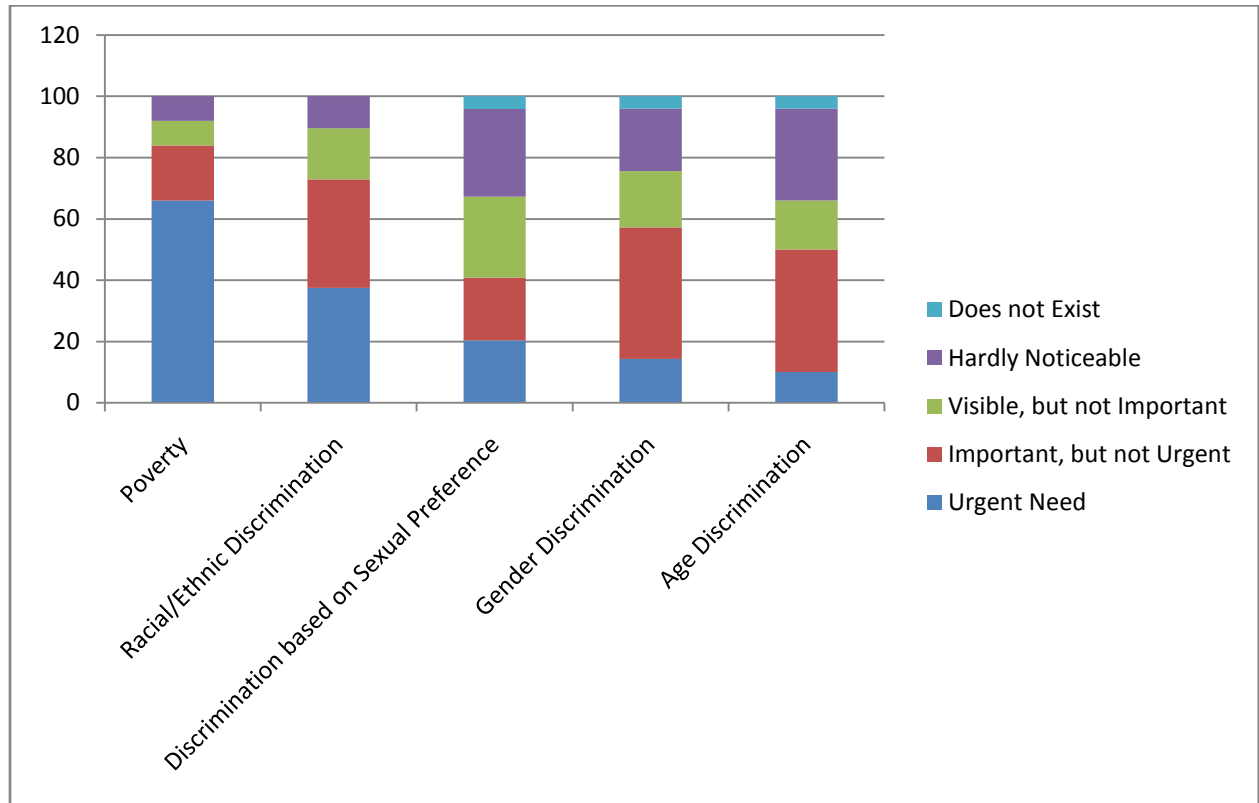
- 1. In the past five years (or however long you have been in Fort Dodge), rate whether you feel these social problems have gotten better (fewer instances, gotten worse, or stayed about the same.**



The statistics for the four discrimination issues are relatively similar, with the majority of respondents answering that the levels have stayed the same. The most glaring feature of these data is that over 80% of all respondents felt that poverty has gotten worse.

I followed up by asking what time frame their responses to the first question referenced. I received answers ranging between six months and 80 years, with the median response being near 12 years. More than one reply mentioned that the most drastic change has occurred in the past year.

## 2. How much attention should be given to these issues, based on the current state of affairs in Fort Dodge?



Again, with over 80% responding that it is urgent or very important to address, poverty appears to be the issue deserving of most attention. Racial/ethnic discrimination is next, with just over 70% responding that this issue is urgent or very important. Discrimination based on sexual preference received the widest range of votes, with almost 20% seeing an urgent need, but 30% responded that this issue is hardly noticeable.

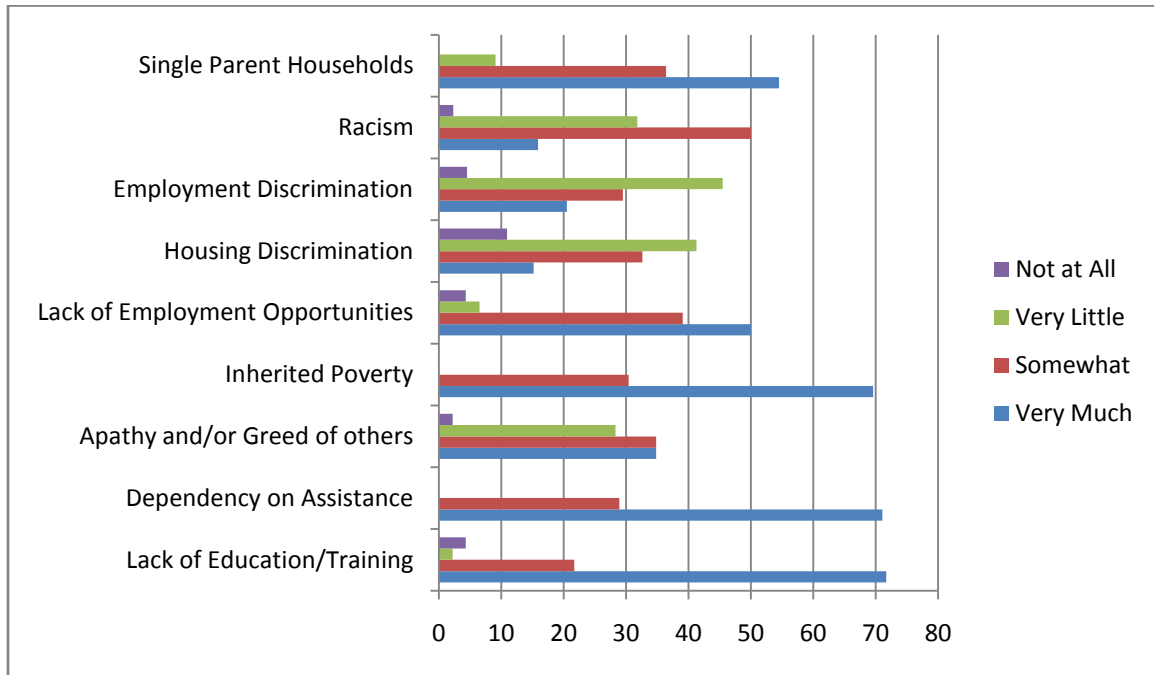
Written comments to this question included these:

*...Racial discrimination gets confused with misconduct by some of the African American race. I sense that law abiding African Americans fare much better than those not.*

*...Fort Dodge retailers do not hire racial/ethnic and I feel the school system does not promote job training skills in this category.*

*...I do not believe that we have businesses or housing that are visibly discriminatory*

**3. There are many possible contributing factors to poverty. To what degree does each listed factor contribute to poverty in Fort Dodge?**



Three specific poverty-contributing factors stand out: Inherited poverty (generational poverty) and dependency on assistance were both over 70% as ‘very much’ a factor, with the remaining twenty-something percent as ‘somewhat’ of a factor. Lack of Education was also seen as a major factor contributing to poverty. Somewhat surprisingly, racism, employment discrimination and housing discrimination received the lowest percentage of votes.

Other comments included:

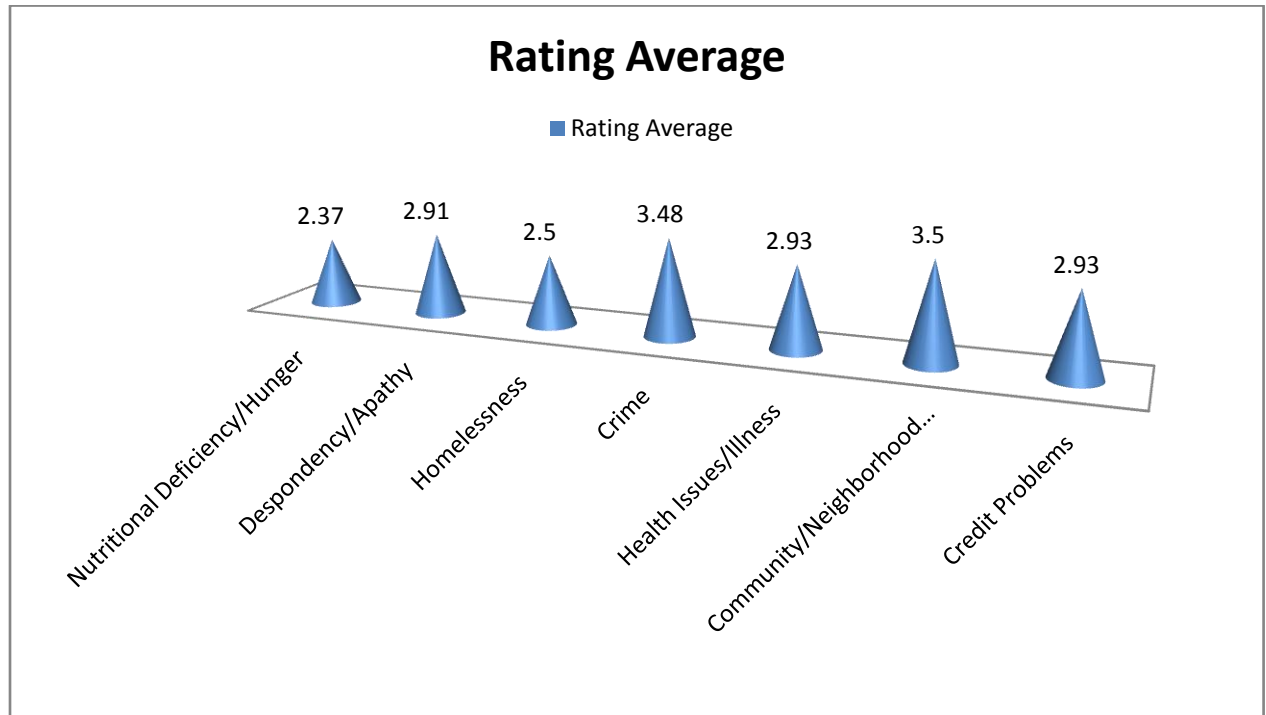
*...Skilled and semiskilled job shortage is a major factor for the less educated or trained.*

*...Dependency. Greed.*

*...You have to want better—some people (not just in Fort Dodge) are okay just getting by, and don’t have the desire to better themselves*

*...Substance abuse and mental illness*

4. How noticeable are the following effects of poverty in Fort Dodge? (a '1' rating = Unnoticed, 2=Barely Visible, 3=Evident, 4=Obvious and Problematic)



Crime and Community/Neighborhood Degradation, which often go hand-in-hand, were seen as 'obvious and problematic' by roughly 60% of the respondents. Note that the lowest overall rating averages, 2.37 and 2.5 for Hunger and Homelessness, respectively, are still somewhere between 'barely visible' and 'evident.'

I followed up with the question, 'What are other visible effects of poverty in Fort Dodge?' and received the following responses:

*...the recession has made a difference*

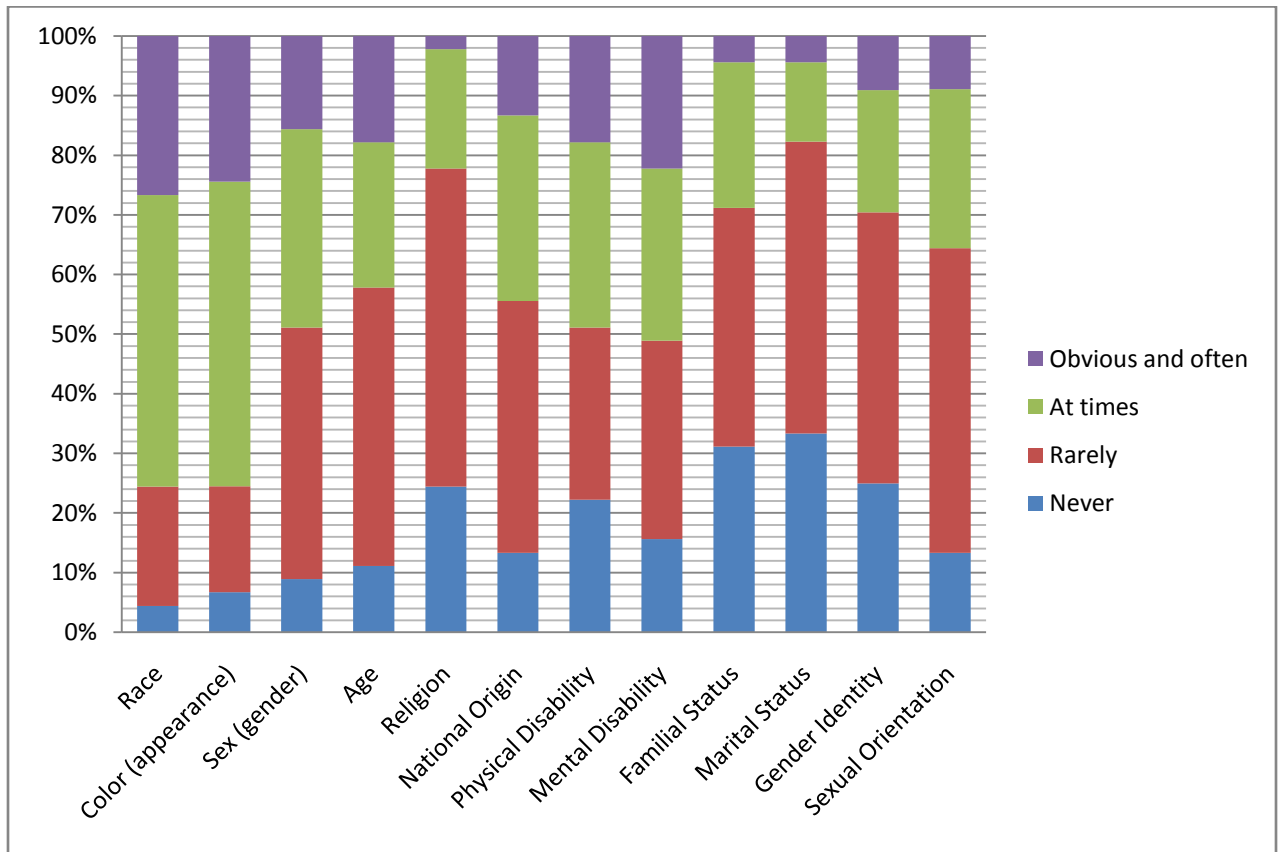
*...Fringe rental properties with unkempt exteriors and grounds.*

*...Most of the people I see in Fort Dodge who think they are in poverty and deserve our handouts still have a cell phone, cable TV, smoke cigarettes, buy junk food, beer, etc...I don't believe anyone in Fort Dodge is really living in poverty. I think there is too much subsidized housing in Fort Dodge that draws this type of individual to our community. I feel they believe it easier to rely on the system to help instead of working every day. They do not understand the moral value in doing a full day's work and getting paid for that performance. ...Chemical dependency; drug use/manufacture/sale*

*...Creating additional issues in the school system as school officials try to tackle the problems leading to gaps in student achievement.*

*...Illness associated with lack of education*

**5. Discrimination in housing, employment, credit, public accommodation or education is illegal in Iowa. Based on your observation (through direct experience, news, others' stories, etc.) how prevalent is discrimination against the following protected bases?**



Three quarters of respondents see racial/color-based discrimination 'often' or 'at times.' Almost as many respondents see discrimination based on mental disability as 'obvious and often' as racial discrimination.

Other comments on this matter:

*...Fort Dodge native vs. relocated here*

*...Discrimination based on perceived citizenship status (which ties in with National Origin/Ethnicity), have witnessed derogatory comments and discrimination because person was called an 'illegal alien' (whether true or not.) Also in regard to their employment. Examples: have heard comments about persons of Hispanic origin and their 'transient nature...' disdain for seasonal field workers, roofers, etc. Also in regard to their households and cohabitating in extended family arrangements and a hesitation to rent to or make housing available to these families*

*...hard to document*

## 6. With what urgency should each of these be addressed regarding poverty and discrimination?

1. With what urgency should each of these be addressed regarding poverty and discrimination?				
Poverty				
	This is obvious.	This could help.	Little help.	Pointless.
Childhood Education	57.8% (26)	37.8% (17)	4.4% (2)	0.0% (0)
Adult Education	50.0% (22)	45.5% (20)	2.3% (1)	2.3% (1)
Neighborhood/Community Outreach	34.1% (15)	50.0% (22)	15.9% (7)	0.0% (0)
Law Enforcement	36.4% (16)	43.2% (19)	18.2% (8)	2.3% (1)
Additional Legislation	18.2% (8)	31.8% (14)	29.5% (13)	20.5% (9)
Charitable Donations	25.6% (11)	48.8% (21)	23.3% (10)	2.3% (1)
Discrimination				
	This is obvious.	This could help.	Little help.	Pointless.
Childhood Education	46.5% (20)	39.5% (17)	11.6% (5)	2.3% (1)
Adult Education	37.2% (16)	48.8% (21)	11.6% (5)	2.3% (1)
Neighborhood/Community Outreach	31.7% (13)	56.1% (23)	12.2% (5)	0.0% (0)
Law Enforcement	29.3% (12)	46.3% (19)	22.0% (9)	2.4% (1)
Additional Legislation	14.6% (6)	36.6% (15)	31.7% (13)	17.1% (7)
Charitable Donations	23.1% (9)	20.5% (8)	46.2% (18)	10.3% (4)

The shaded areas indicate the highest concentration for this category and response. Childhood education was selected as an 'obvious' issue to be addressed concerning both poverty and discrimination. Almost half of all respondents view additional legislation as 'little help' or 'pointless' when dealing with poverty or discrimination.

Which is the most urgent issue to be addressed?

*...of the above choices I would choose neighborhood and community outreach. Stronger, vibrant, healthy neighborhoods will go a long in improving poverty and discrimination*

*...housing and jobs*

*...law enforcement*

*...childhood education*

*...getting people off welfare*

*...reduce subsidized housing*

*...neighborhood/community outreach, also more industry and jobs*

*...crime is a real problem that our city has chosen to downplay*

*...coordinating services for those in need*

*...poverty*

*...neighborhoods*

*...education—providing funds does not change behavior*

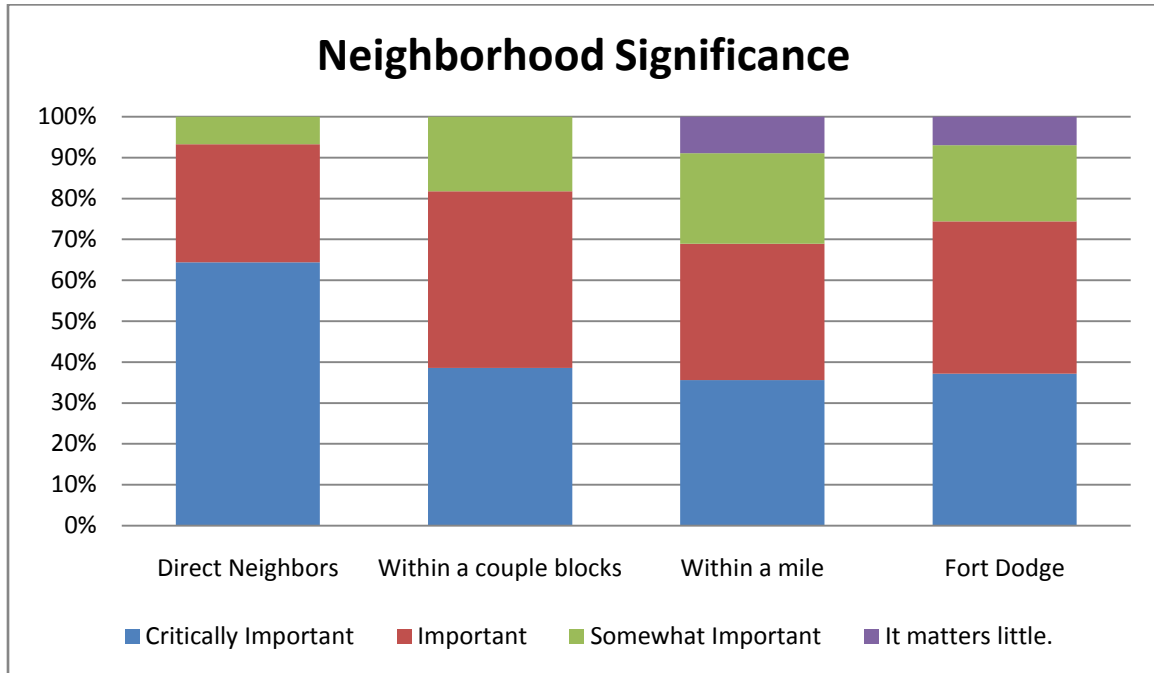
*...outreach*

*...teen pregnancy, teen alcohol abuse, importance of education*

*...until individuals are taught how to get out of the poverty cycle and stay out of it, services thrown to them beyond stop gap measures is like money down the drain*

*...neighborhood/community outreach*

**7. What is community? Does it matter, or are we simply individual households living among each other? How important is it for Fort Dodge residents to feel welcomed and proud of their respective neighborhoods and community, considering safety, poverty and discrimination?**



Predictably, the overall importance of neighbors declines as the proximity decreases. Over 90% of respondents feel that all parts of community are at least ‘somewhat important.’

*Other thoughts:*

*...end the cycle of poverty and as long as government agencies exist to take care of people too lazy to work or they victimize them and tell them they are victims and protect them nothing will change*

*...I believe we need to help our community succeed. But the people living in our community have to want to succeed themselves. I think our system continues to enable people to remain in non productive situations by allowing them to be ‘handicapped’ to it. I enjoy all different types of people and appreciate their opinions and the difference between us. However, I don’t appreciate the martyrs and the people who use discrimination as a tool for them to get what they want without earning it*

*...A sense of community—working together is very important*

*...it is critically important for all members of the community to feel included and respected. There are subcultures, driven by both race and/or poverty, existing or ‘co-existing’ within the Fort Dodge ‘community’ that are hugely overlooked. People know they exist but other than the negative feelings or apathy by the general populous, they do not care to address them. In working with families who*



*fall into these groups, I notice a common sense of acceptance of this, occasionally anger or resentment, but generally a helplessness about their situation. In the current economic environment where funding for public assistance and programs is being slashed, I worry for these families. However, it is not only financial bolstering they need. Identifying their need to feel useful, respected and empowered is paramount to helping them cope with their current situations.*

*...more could and should be done to foster the development of neighborhood associations*

*...as city government addresses the shortcomings in Fort Dodge, I would appreciate having elected representatives who follow the direction of their constituents instead of voting for what they personally prefer.*