

MADISON PUBLIC INPUT

MCMS & MCHS Students

February 11, 2016

Responses came from the following questions:

How many live in the City?

How often do you go into Madison & why?

What's the best thing about Madison?

What's not so great? What's missing?

What are Madison's biggest threats?

If it were a person, what would be Madison's reputation?

In 10 to 15 years from now, will you come back? Why/Why not?

What is that "one thing" about Madison that you would change?

Live in Madison/Why go to Madison: As a matter of perspective and background for answers below, the "City of Madison" was described by the students to encompass the area stretching from McDonald's to Heritage Park. Only a small handful of Middle School students live in the City limits of Madison, while nearly one-half of the High School students live in Madison. Several students commented that even though they do not live in the city, they go into town a lot for a variety of reasons including:

- Grocery – Ingles and Walmart
- Jewelry store, antiques, and bank
- Hang out with friends
- Amici's Pizza and Chop House
- Town Park and Events
- Post Office
- Hair Cut
- Job
- Sports/recreation

What is the best thing: When asked to offer what they believe to be the best thing about Madison, the High School students had more to say. Middle School students said the "old town look" and Amici's were the best things about Madison, with one student describing Amici's as "heaven". Other thoughts included:

- Know where everything is
- Madison Drugs
- Walkable
- Good tourist attraction
- Town Park and events
- Greenspace overall – no real urban spot with too much hard surface
- Small-town appeal
- Historical aspect
- Quiet but filled
- Downtown – walkability and historic houses
- Firefly event
- Not very industrial like Covington and Conyers
- Historic home tour – great but congested
- Everyone knows everyone
- Clean, nice downtown
- Trees
- Amici's / Food

What is not great or is missing: As expected, all students were more forthcoming with thoughts and ideas on what would make Madison an even greater place to live. Ideas shared on what Madison needs to improve or to add include the following:

- Concerts in the park – weekends; kid-friendly/desired music; battle-of-the-bands; "same old thing"/need more events (too stale)
- Need more continuity/consistency of events – like host one each month
- Park/Rec field needs to be updated
- Coffee house with Wi-Fi, couches and cheaper coffee / Wi-Fi café
- High School student hangout / place to do homework (community space)
- Green Trail / Nature walk – more connectivity, wayfinding signage

- Sidewalks – some need repair (tree roots); need to add more (at library/schools) and crosswalks
- Need bike lanes – Dixie Hwy and 278
- Need more jobs for teenagers
- Shopping – attractive to tourists but not drawing locals because close too early and too expensive
- Shopping – needs to be “everyday” and affordable; like Georgia Square Mall
- Hobby Lobby, Nike and other outlets, Technology store
- More Restaurants – Downtown restaurants are too crowded.
 - Middle School students said “more chain restaurants” and
 - High School students said more “In Between Restaurants” like Barbaritos and Food Trucks
- Entertainment/Cultural – ice skating, drive-in, Dave & Busters, paint ball, zoo, art museum, “Rush”/SkyZone (indoor recreational), movie theater (like “Ricky Dee’s”), bowling, lazer tag, etc.
- Left-turn problematic at Arbors
- More schools – bus rides too long
- Need to change mix-up of school ages on bus
- Trucks should use bypass
- Need light at turn by Hospital
- Traffic lights not synced
- Roads – pot holes; stormwater runoff; E. Jefferson Road; need more connected roads
- Parking – Downtown / need more
- Don’t expand city limits to Bostwick

Madison’s biggest threats: Surprisingly, the thoughts shared by the students were somewhat opposing. The Middle School students seemed to appreciate the “old town look” and “small-town feel” of Madison, while the High School students want more change and progress as illustrated by their suggestion that such protective policies as the historic district are too restrictive. Other threats perceived by the Middle School include:

- Traffic
- Drugs

- Too much “new”
- Don’t want to be Alpharetta, Atlanta, Greenville, Athens, Indianapolis, or San Francisco

Additionally, the High School students offered the following as threats to Madison:

- Potential for incompatible development
- Unwillingness to change/progress – specifically, the lack of adequate broadband/Wi-Fi
- Historic code – have to live in home to have a B&B

If it were a person, what would be

Madison’s reputation: This was an interesting question to pose, as it resulted in a wide range of answers.

- Middle School students offered:
 - Kind of popular by not
 - Between “normal and popular”
 - Old School
 - Classic
 - Small
 - Short-bearded dude who talks about the old days
 - Needs to touch up – paint, clean, pave roads, truck traffic
- High School students suggested:
 - Southern
 - Neat and tidy
 - Historic
 - Nostalgic
 - Conservative Grandma – can joke with but some off limits
 - Strand of pearls, not a choker
 - Fancy
 - Old-fashioned
 - Old
 - Middle-aged
 - Artistic
 - Land Barron / Old Money
 - Business/Entrepreneur
 - Southern charm with a splash of sass

In 10 to 15 years from now, will you come back to Madison: Answers provided were somewhat predictable given the age of the participants and the long list of “needs” offered earlier in the discussions. On the whole, most of the respondents have no plans to return to Madison, at least not until they are ready to raise a family. Being described as a family-friendly town and being a good place to raise a family were common theme among the students. Other ideas of what would attract Middle School students back to Madison included:

- Nature / tree cover
- Art
- Expansion of the city in terms of businesses/entrepreneurship and population diversity
- Family
- Major league baseball

Several High School students emphatically proclaimed they would not return to Madison, explaining that Madison is not a good city for the 20-something-year olds because there is limited affordable housing options and no night life. Several said they may consider moving back when they are ready to raise a family. Additionally, the students stressed that Madison is too small and that one cannot have a “private moment”. Other comments included:

- Not enough opportunity – jobs, housing, shopping
- Nothing to do / No social life
- Need more shops, live music, karaoke, bar/night life places
- More food options – small/local, eclectic places to eat and hang out
- People do not forget
- More affordable houses
- Community College

What is that “one thing” about Madison you would change: The Middle School students only offered a specific property in Madison, the old BI-LO shopping center. They suggested turning it into a “Dave & Busters” or similar type family entertainment place.

High school students expressed that Madison is too commercial and too “national-brand”. And, they do not want it to be. Some of the students also shared that they do not want Madison to become too big, but they would like to see more “young-people” stores and more variety of shops in Downtown.

In conclusion, the students were engaged in the focus group activity and offered great insight into what is important to the young people of Madison, Morgan County. About fifty (50) students between the Middle and High schools participated, and they offered a variety of ideas for how Madison could be strengthened to attract them back home after their next steps, whether college, military or job opportunities.