

TallahasseeVoices

Government Consolidation Survey May 2007

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***TallahasseeVoices is a pro bono Internet survey panel sponsored by Kerr & Downs Research and The Tallahassee Democrat. There were 780 responses to the survey sent out on March 2007. Panel results have been weighted to reflect the demographics of Leon County and results are representative of all local residents who have access to the Internet at home, work, or school. Go to our website at www.tallahasseevoices.com to join our panel and let your voice be heard.**

Property Tax Relief in the Guise of Consolidation?

As talk about cutting services and trimming programs emanates from City and County governments in light of continued discussions at the state level about property tax reform, one concept is absent from the local discourse – Consolidation.

For the past 30 years, this community has consistently told pollsters that it favors consolidation only to reject the concept at the ballot box. Have things changed?

During the 1980s and 1990s, telephone surveys conducted by Kerr & Downs Research consistently showed that 60% of local citizens supported the concept of consolidating city and county governments. Since 2004, three TallahasseeVoices surveys have shown consistent support for consolidation as 7 out of 10 residents say they support it. During the past three years, voter uncertainty over consolidation has been increasing as the percentage of voters who are not sure they support or oppose consolidation has nearly doubled from 2004 (13%) to 2007 (24%).

Most local residents agree (59%) that consolidation will save money, and just as many (61%) feel consolidating governments is a good idea not only to reduce costs but also to eliminate fights between the two local governments. Yet there are strong emotional arguments against consolidation and these arguments have carried the day in defeating consolidation when it has appeared on the ballot.

Resistance to consolidation centers on the following:

1. Necessity of choosing only one law enforcement agency
2. Turmoil created by change
3. Perception that Leon County residents' taxes will increase.

Yet all three of these issues have lost some steam when comparing TallahasseeVoices' surveys of the past three years to Kerr & Downs Research's survey in the 1980s and 1990s.

Property Tax Relief

There is plenty of sentiment locally that something needs to be done with property taxes. Two out of three local residents (64%) who have purchased property in the past three years claim that the current method for calculating property taxes discriminates against them. The 3% cap on property tax increases that was so popular a decade ago is now saddling recent purchasers with steep increases in property taxes compared to their neighbors who have not acquired a new home as home prices soared from 2002 to 2006. A very recent concern is whether properties that were assessed in the past two years are overvalued based on retrenchment in the housing sector.

Perhaps local governments have little to fear. Based on two decades of surveys, local residents have consistently been willing to fund new programs with tax increases. Even today more residents (40%) favor current levels of taxes and current service levels compared to lower government service levels and lower taxes (33% of residents favor this). Despite the fact that local government tax revenue has increased 61% over the past 10 years while local population has increased 24%, citizens are not up in arms about local taxation levels and government spending.

Consolidation -- Conclusions

- 7 out of 10 Leon County residents support consolidating County and City governments
- 6 out of 10 residents (59%) believe consolidation will save taxpayers money

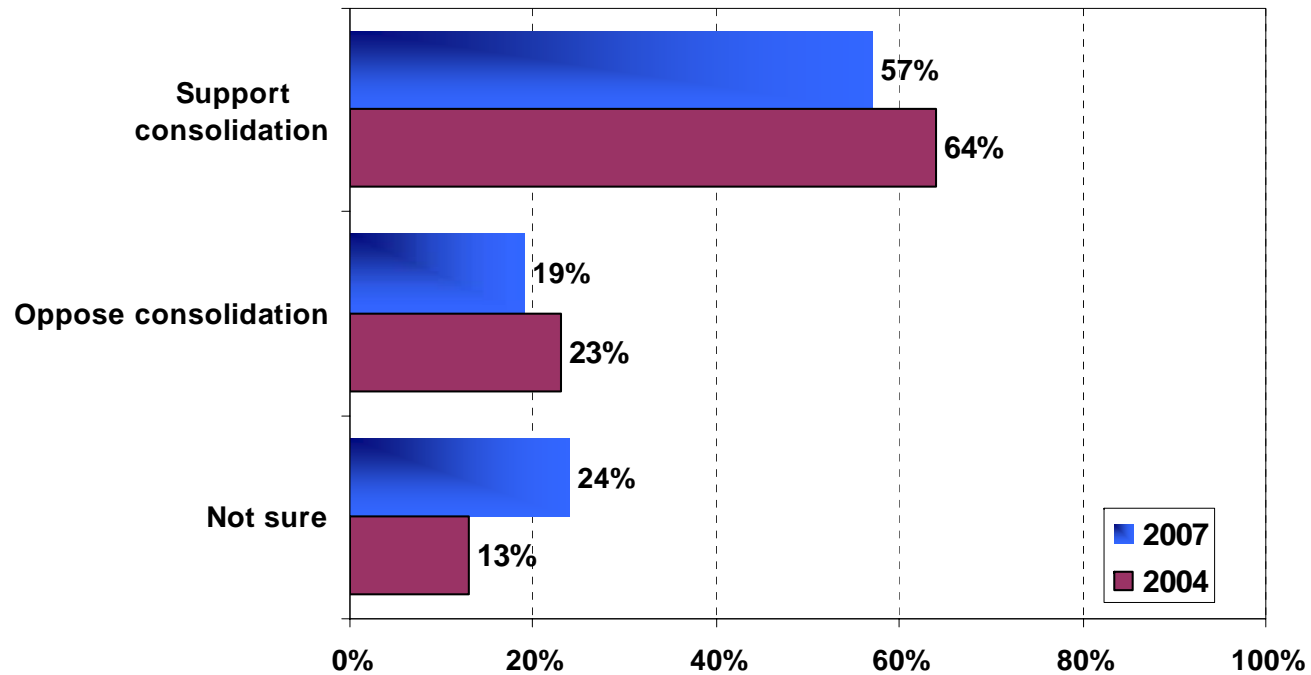
Consolidation -- Conclusions

- Biggest problems with consolidation
 - Must choose 1 law enforcement agency
 - Change creates turmoil
 - No checks and balances

Consolidation -- Conclusions

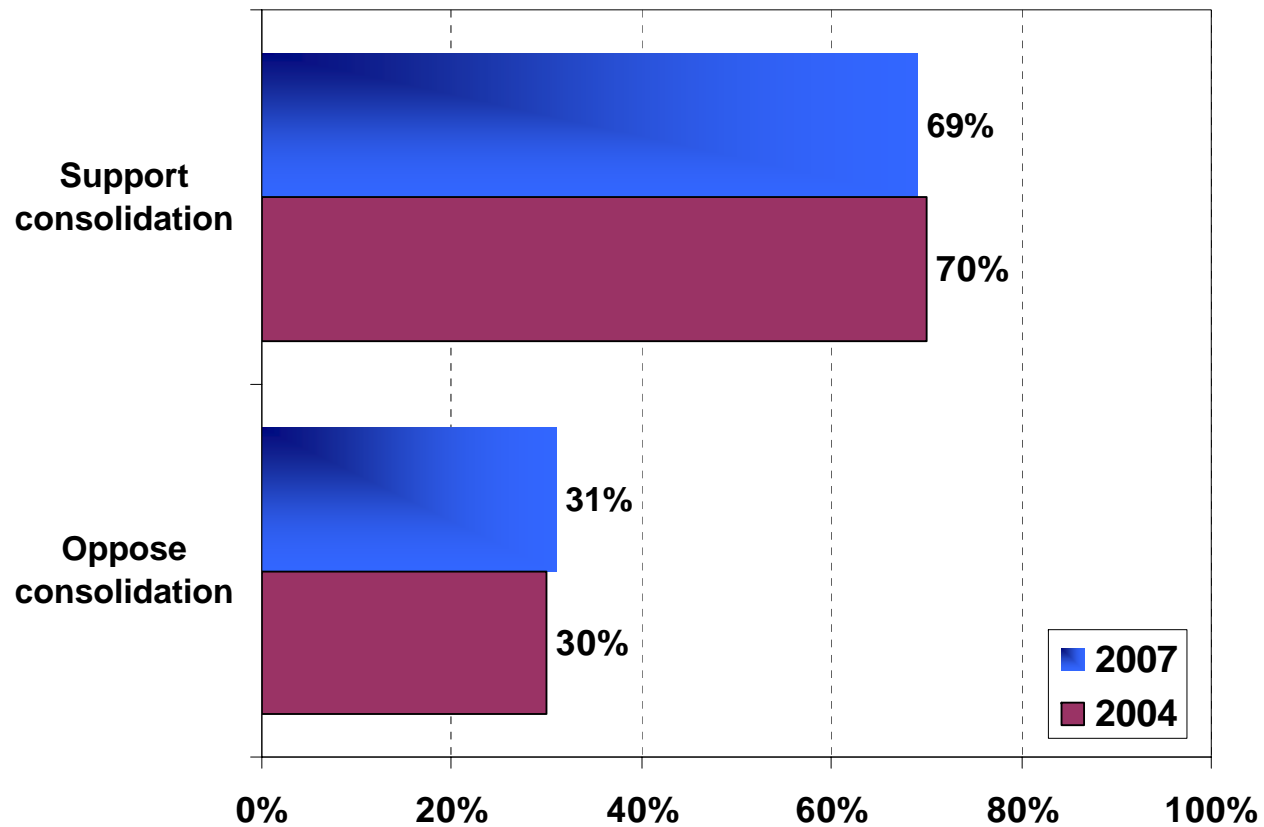
- Equal percentages of residents (37%) agree as to which commission would better serve the entire county
- A plurality (28%) of residents feel that the City Commission does the best job providing a vision for the community
- A plurality of residents (36%) believe the City Commission provides the best government services
- Residents recognize Gillum, Marks, Lightsey, Thaell, Proctor, and DePuy for their leadership efforts

Support or oppose consolidating the Leon County government and City of Tallahassee government into one*

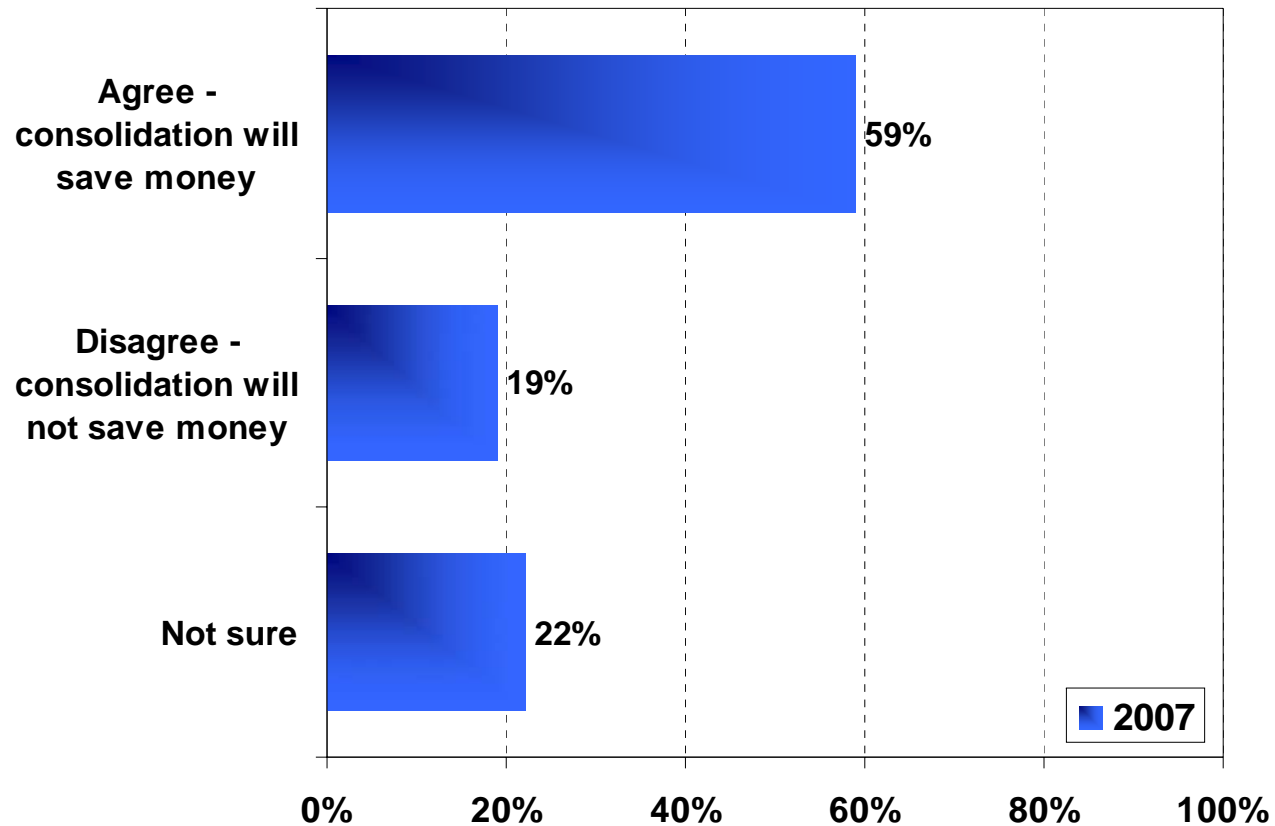


*Actual question read: If there were a vote today to support or oppose consolidating the Leon County government and the City of Tallahassee government into one countywide government, how would you vote?

If forced to choose, how would you vote on consolidation?

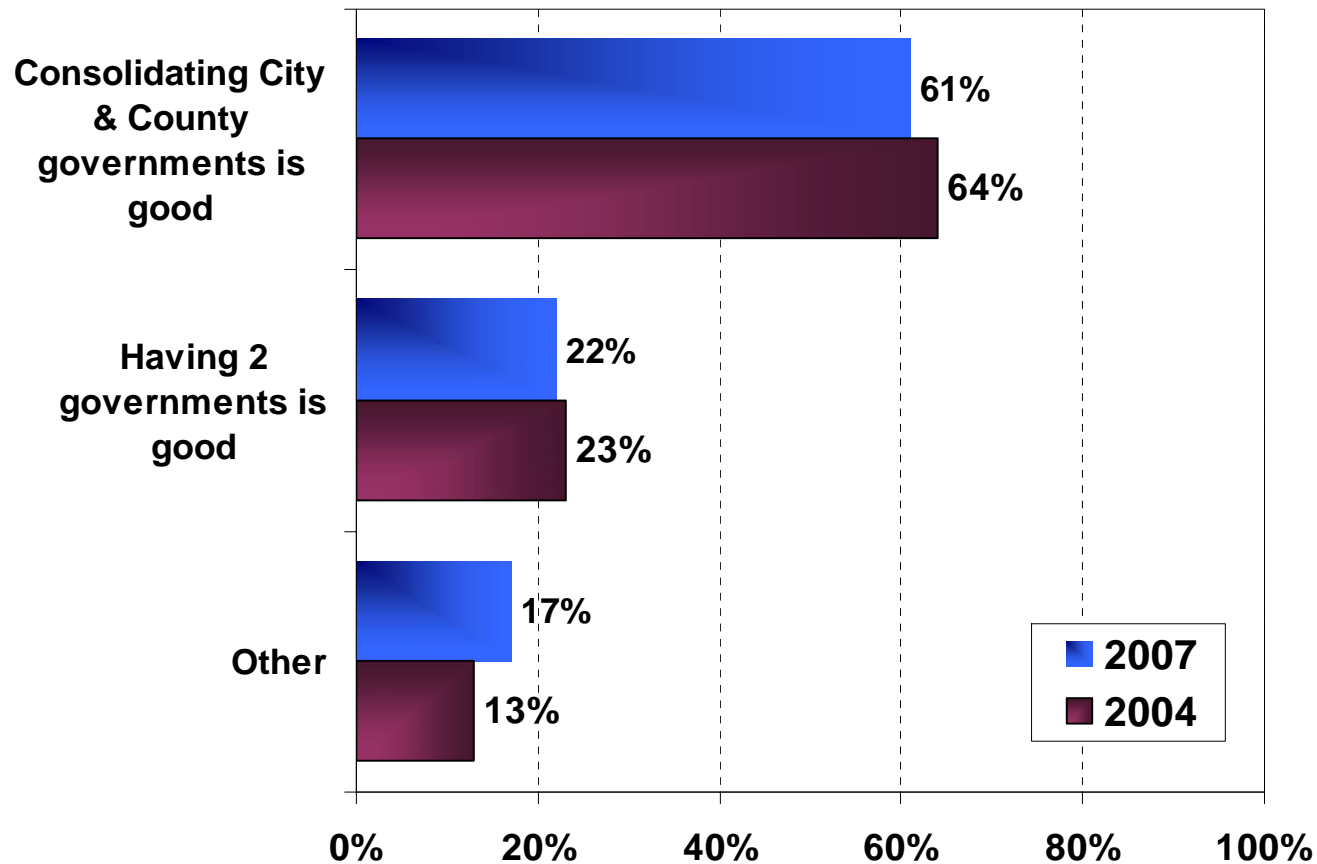


Agree or disagree that consolidation will save taxpayers money*



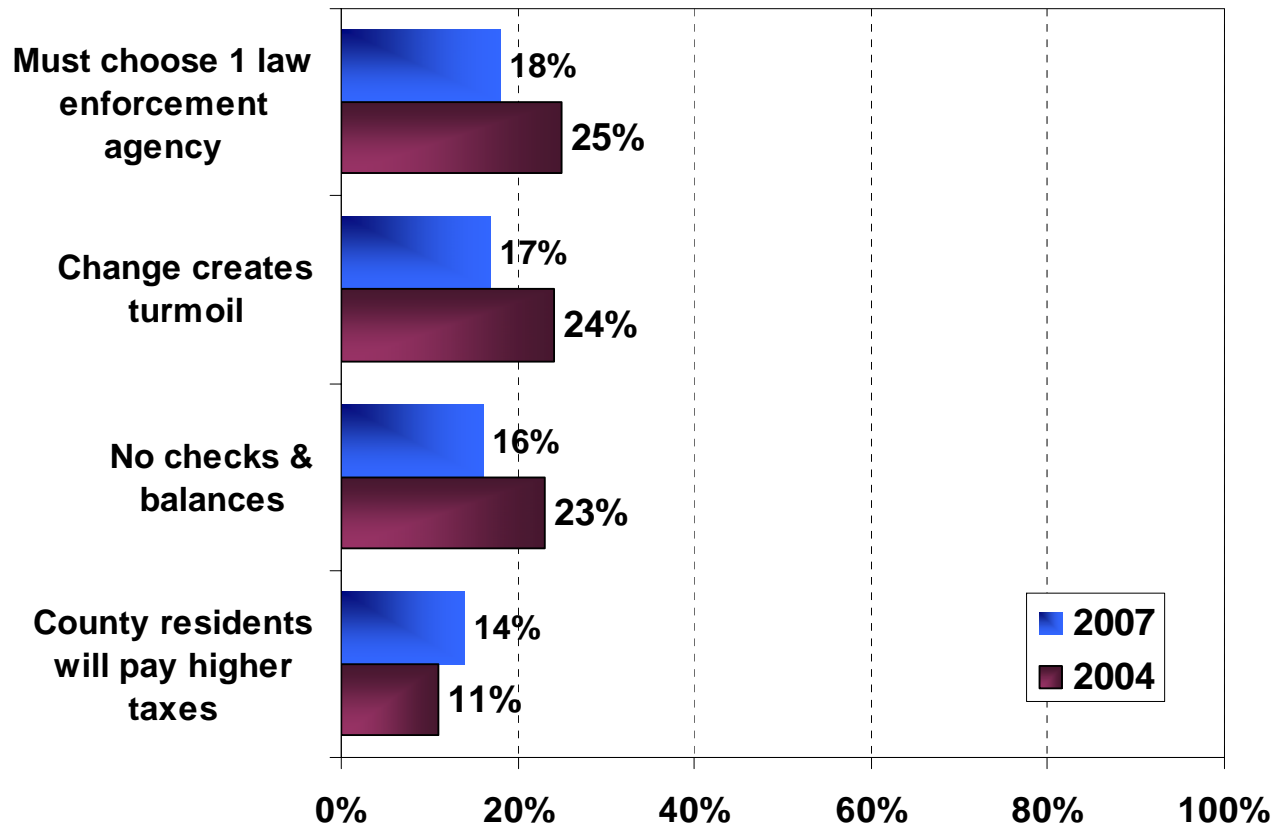
*Actual question read: Some people say that consolidating the 2 local governments will help save money, for example, local tax revenue has increased 61% in the last 10 years while population has increased only 24%. Do you agree or disagree that consolidating the 2 local governments will save taxpayers money?

Which position do you agree?*

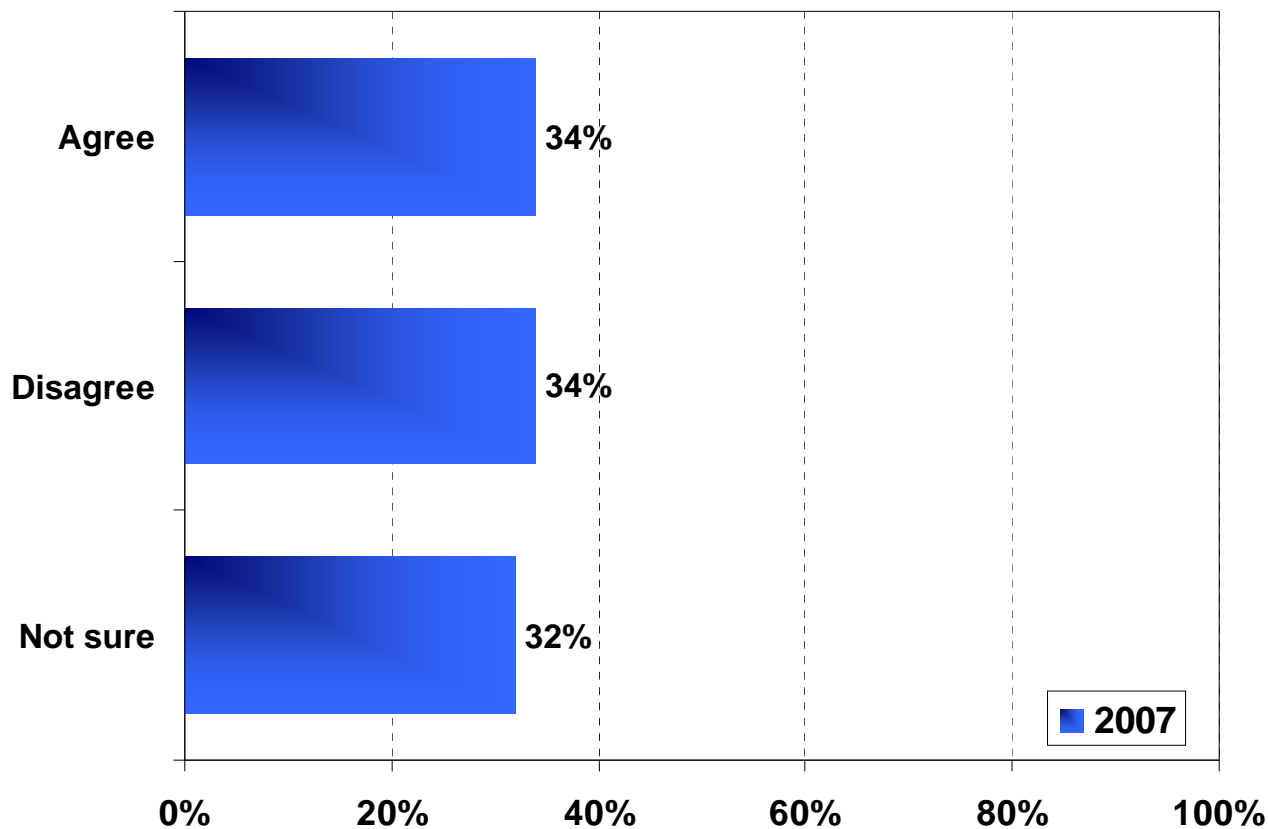


*Actual question read: Some people say having 2 local governments (City and County) is good because they provide checks and balances and because County residents don't want City services, law enforcement, etc. Other people say consolidating County and City governments into 1 government will reduce costs and eliminate fights between the 2 governments. Which position do you agree?

Biggest concerns with consolidation

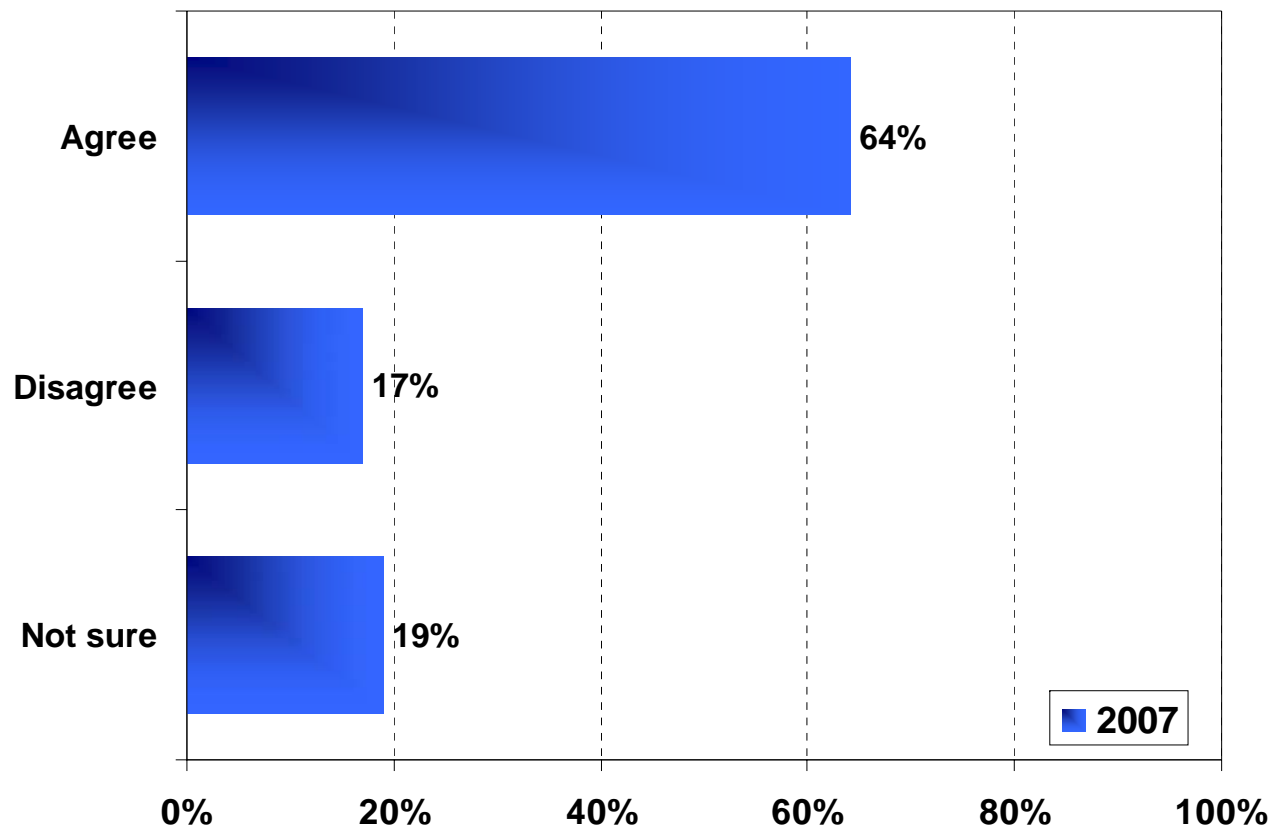


Leon County's property taxes discriminate against people who have acquired property in the past few years – all residents*



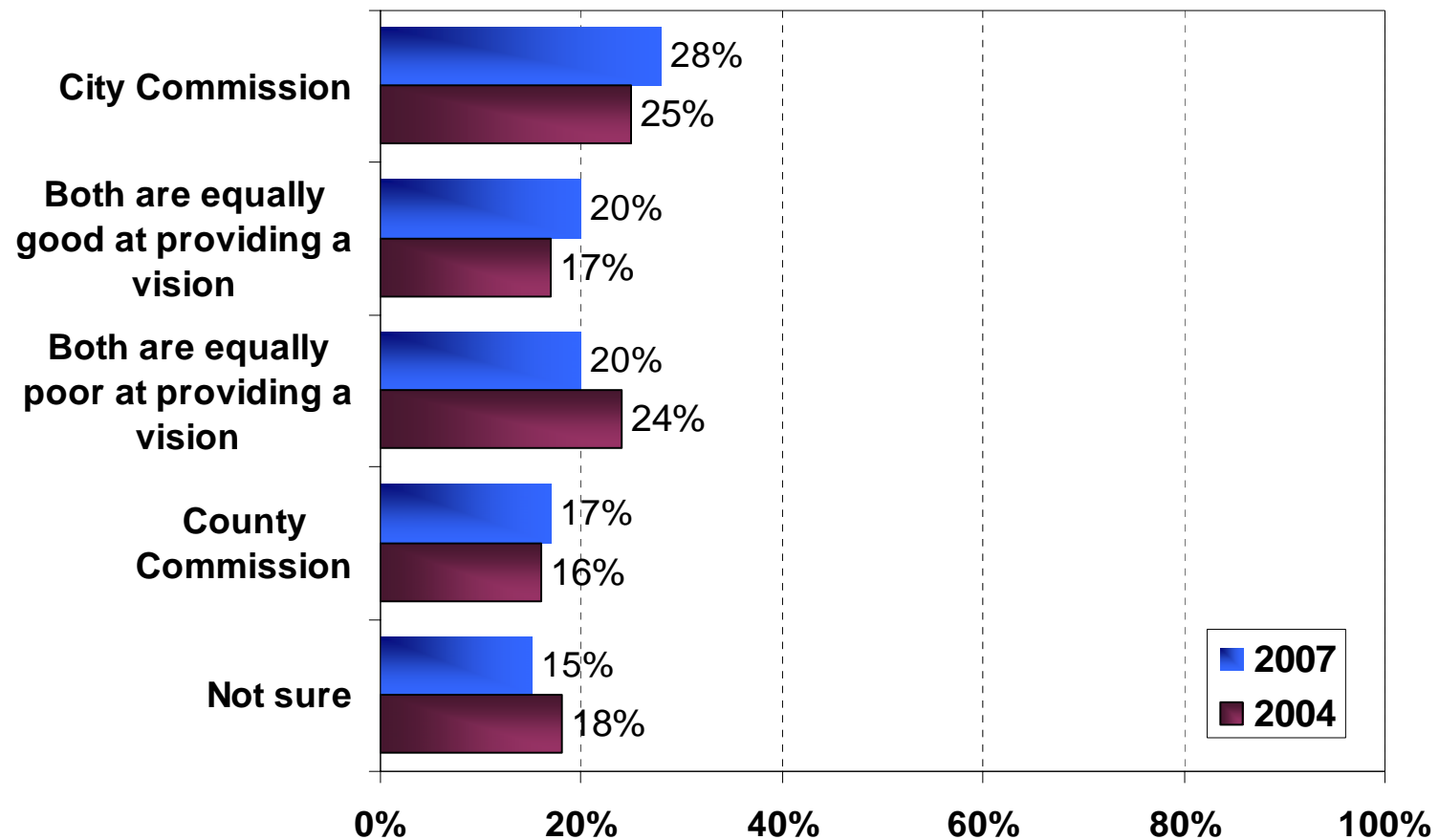
*Actual question read: Leon County's property taxes discriminate against people who have built or moved into new houses, offices, buildings, etc., in past few years since property values have increased significantly during that time.

Leon County's property taxes discriminate against people who have acquired property in the past few years – residents who have acquired property in past 3 years*

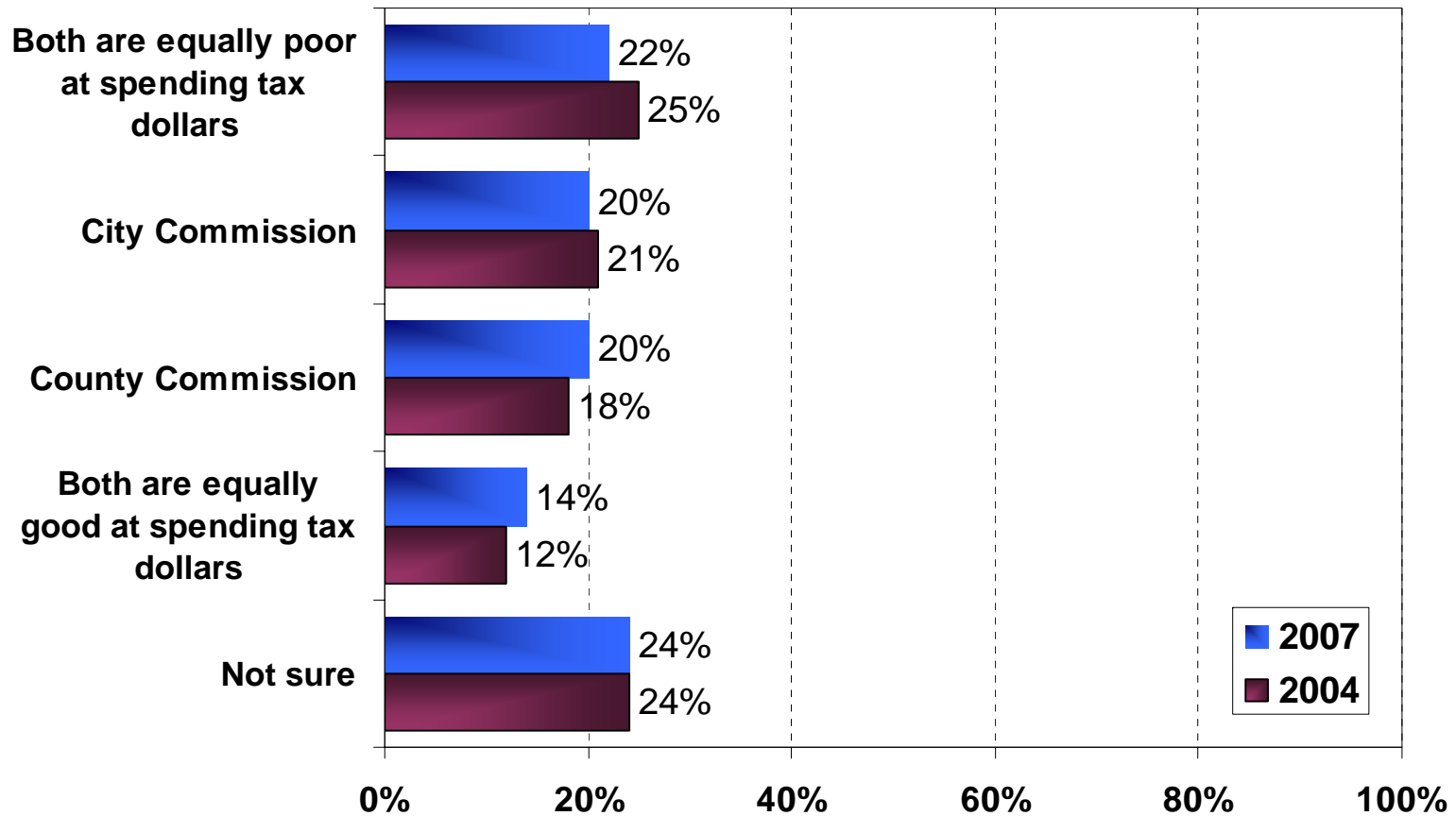


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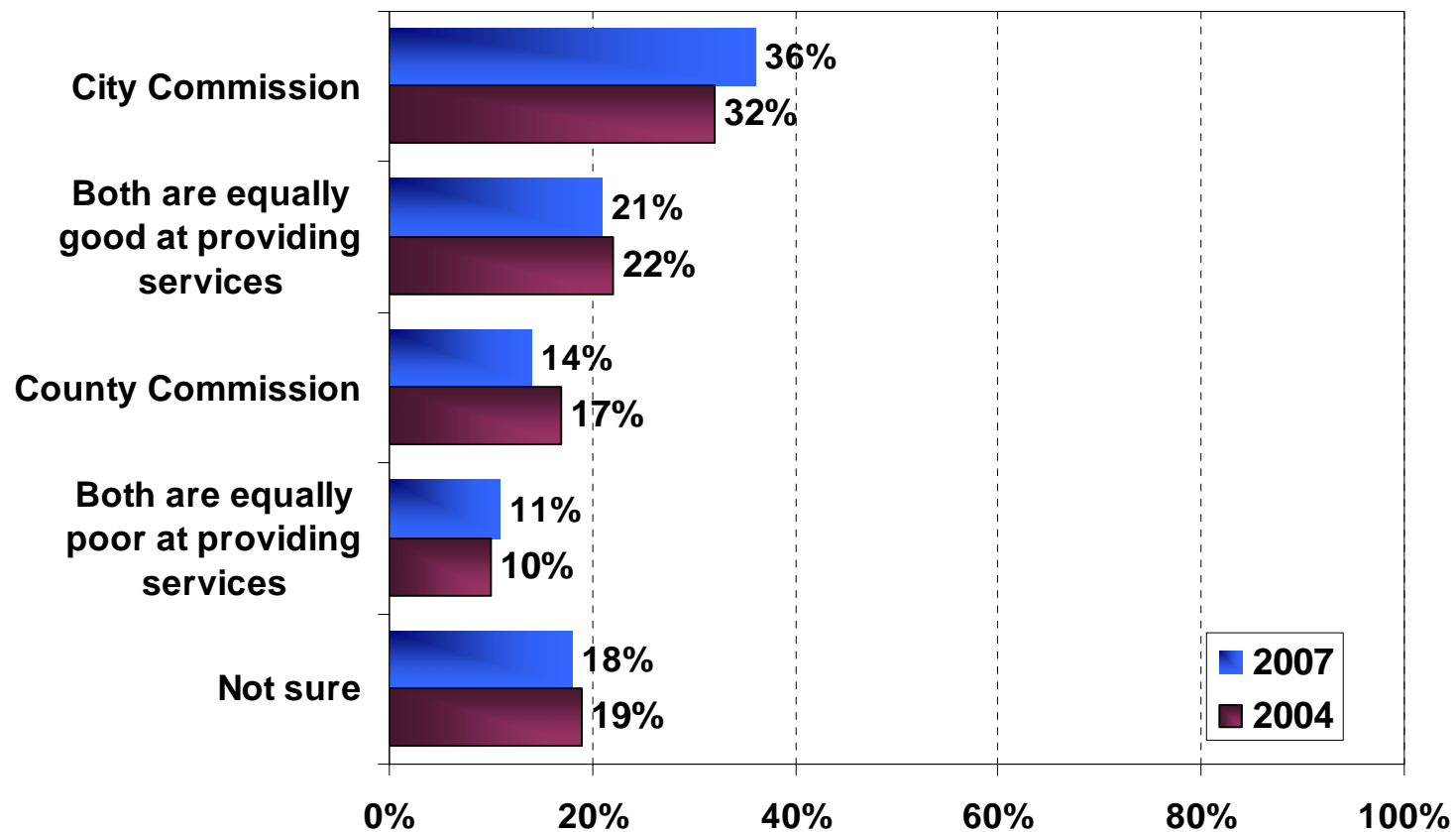
Commission that does the best job at providing a vision for the future for our community



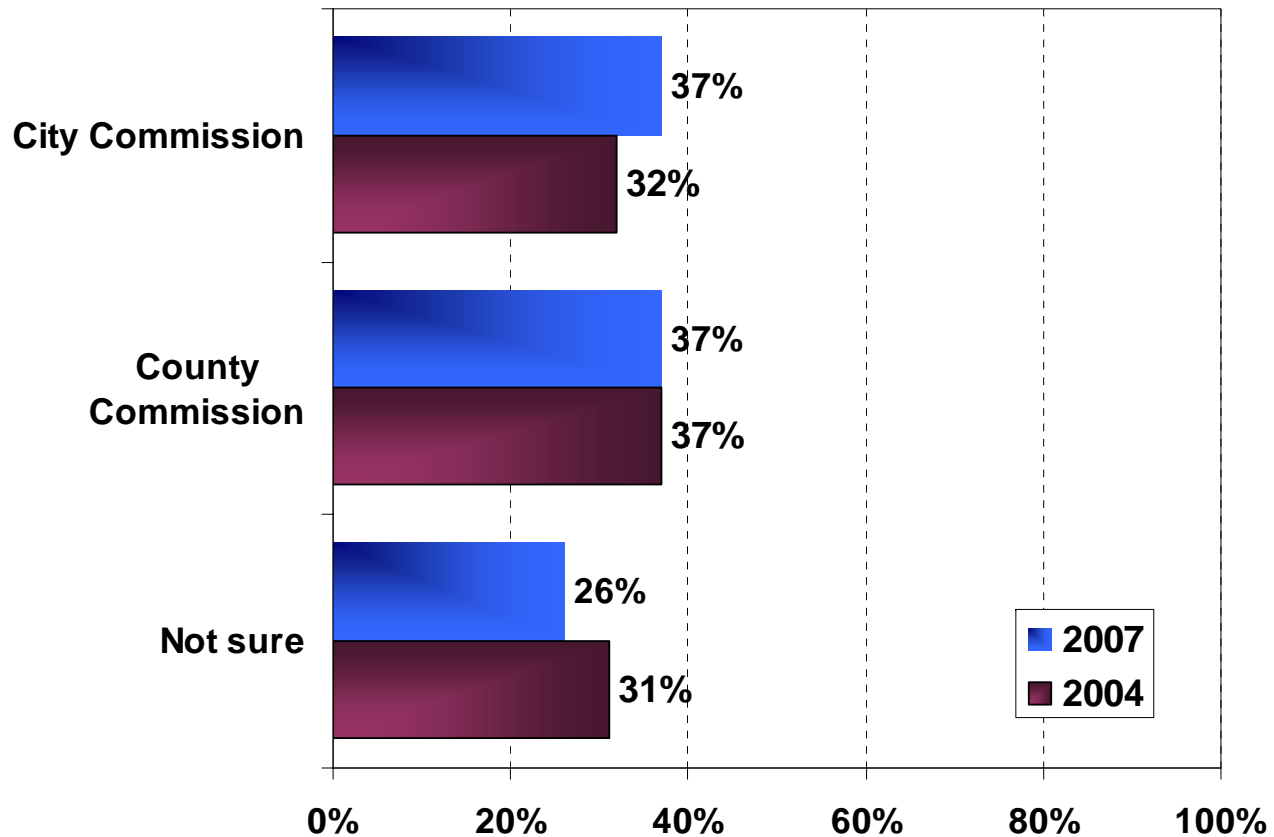
Commission that spends local tax dollars more efficiently



Commission that is better in providing government services to the community

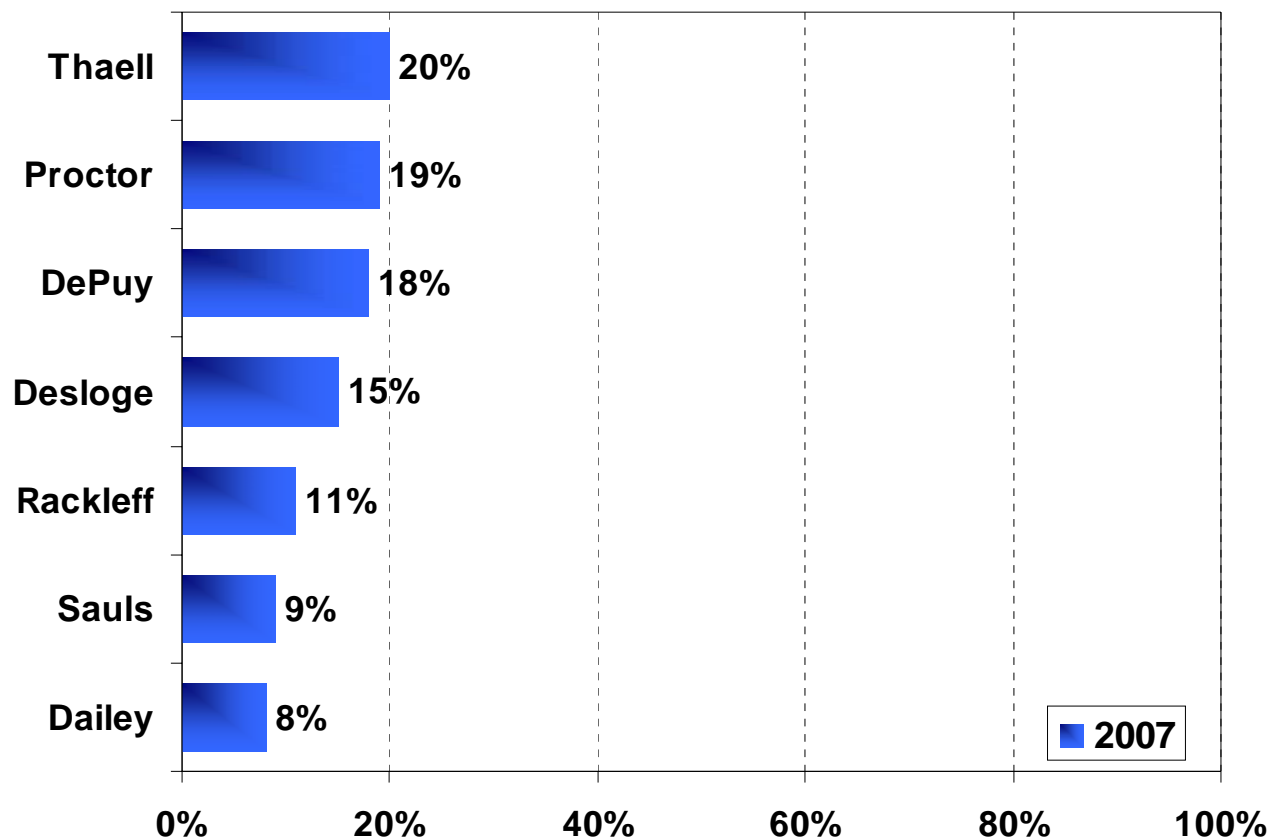


Commission that you would want to serve the entire county*



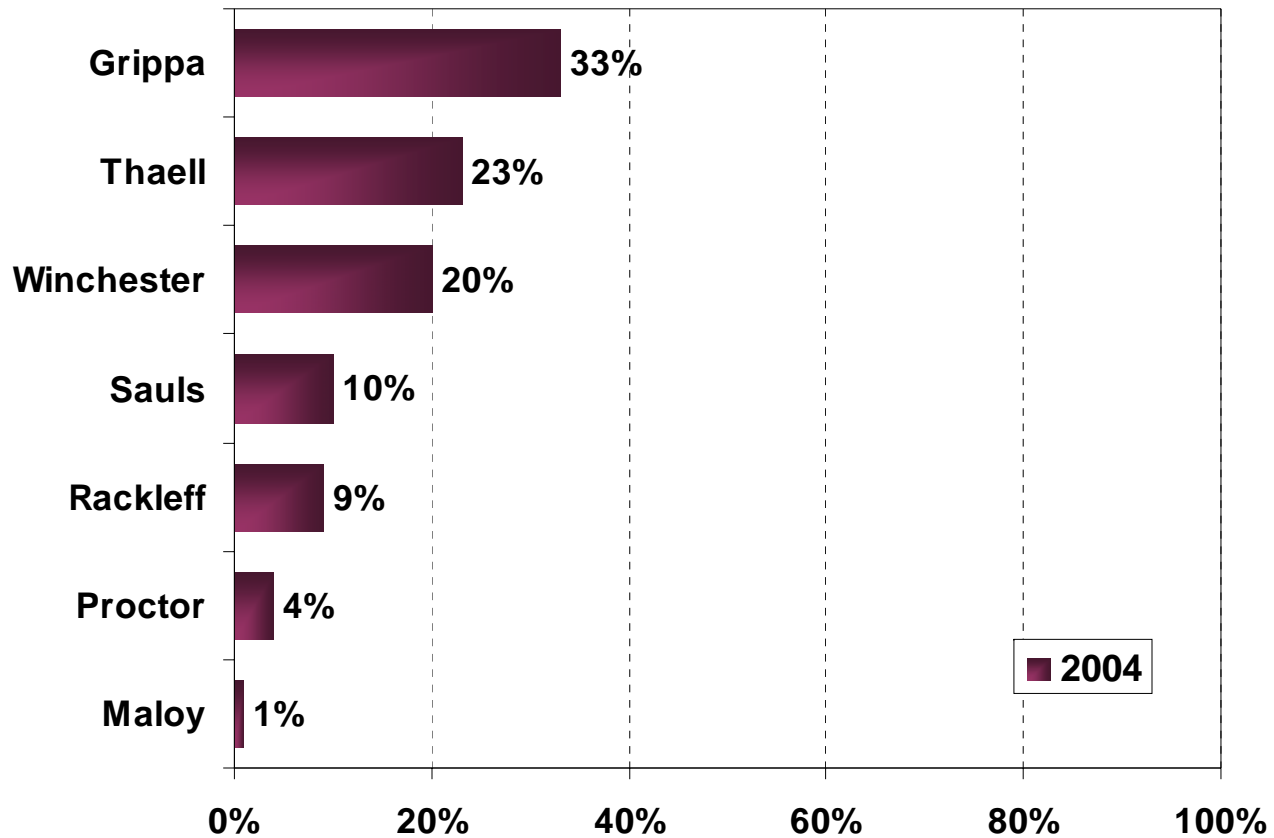
*Actual question read: If there could only be 1 commission for the entire county, which one would you want to serve all residents?

County Commissioners to commend for efforts in leading the community (2007)*



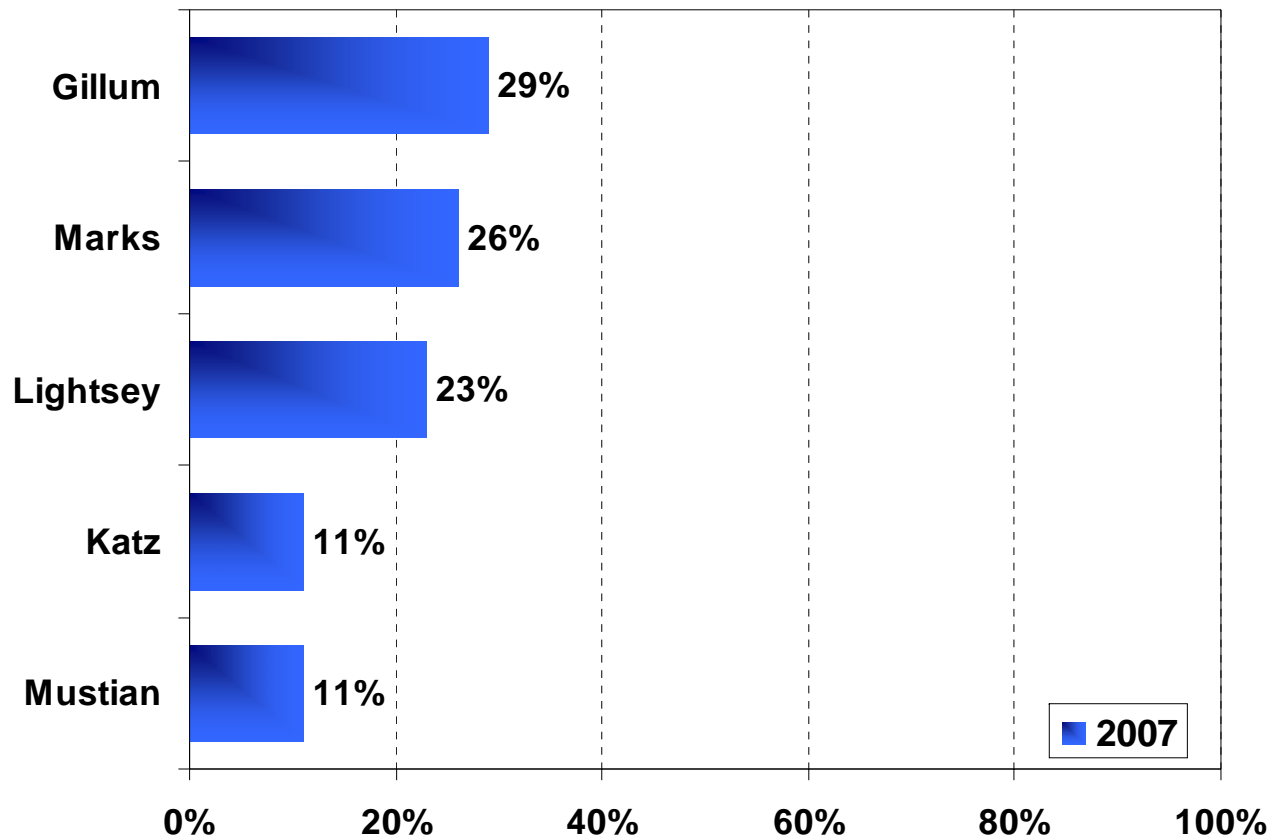
*Actual question read: Which County Commissioner would you like to commend for her or his efforts in leading the community?

County Commissioners to commend for efforts in leading the community (2004)*



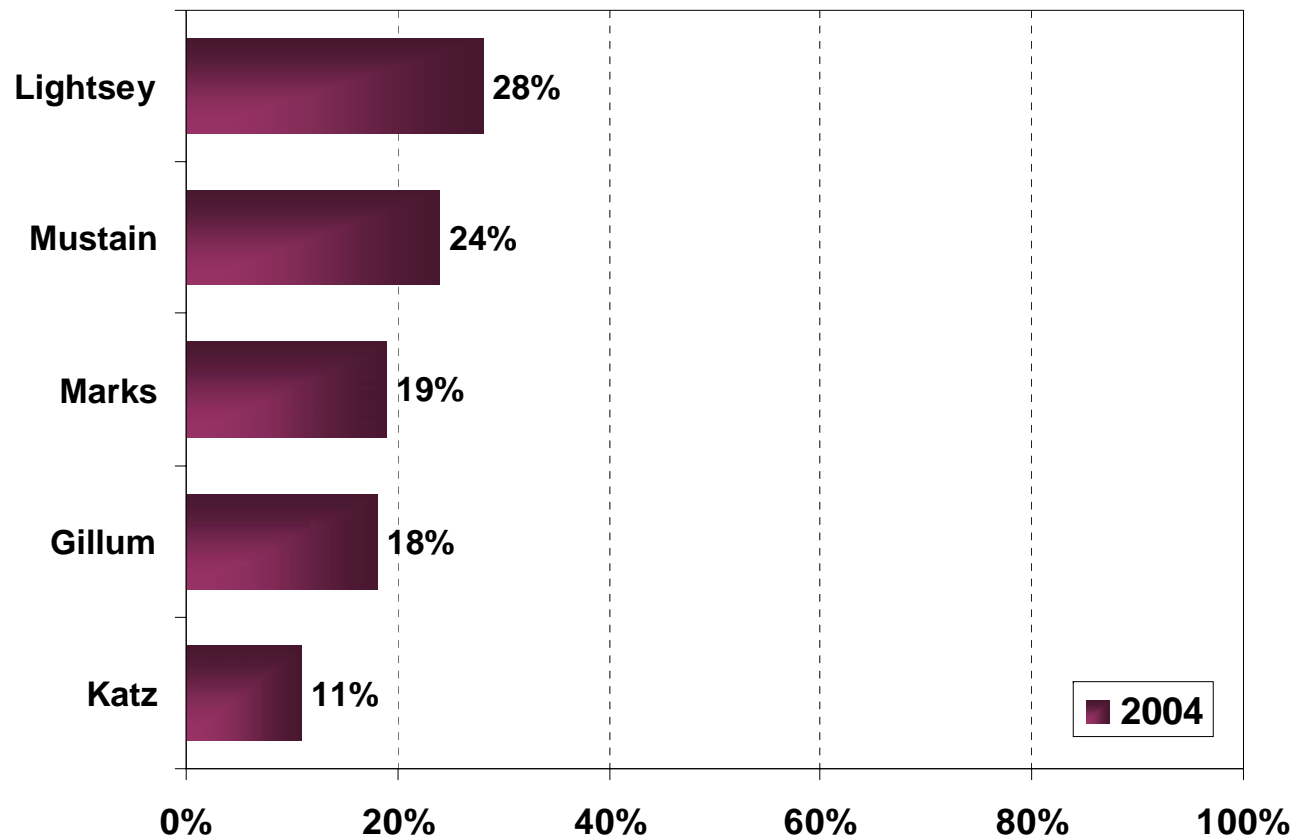
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City Commissioners to commend for efforts in leading the community (2007)*



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City Commissioners to commend for efforts in leading the community (2004)*



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