

CHAPTER 7. CITIZEN INPUT, VISIONING ACTIVITY

CITIZEN INPUT - Community Opinion Survey Development and Results

Citizen input is valuable in evaluating trends and in forming goals and objectives for the community. To gather input, the Township disseminated a public opinion survey. The survey was meant to test public opinions regarding land use, planning, and zoning within the Township, thus informing the direction of policies related to the Master Plan. It consisted of a two-page, back-to-back, written survey instrument (tallied version, Appendix A) that accompanied the mailing of the winter tax bills. This survey requested information from all landowners in the Township rather than a sampling chosen at random. The format of the survey enabled respondents to provide multiple choice and rating scale responses to the items for consideration. It was felt in the development of the survey that a quick, simple pattern of response would maximize the response rate. Township taxpayers were asked to carefully consider the items contained in the surveys, then place them into an envelope, provide a stamp, and mail them to the Planning Commission Chairperson.

Of the 890 taxpayers who received the survey, 113 completed and returned the survey instrument, resulting in a response rate of 12.69%.

The results of the tallied survey follow.

Respondent Background Information

The survey asked for only one piece of background information. Most respondents have lived in the Township for 20 or more years. Interestingly, the second highest respondent group was non-resident landowners.

Question A-1 Approximately how long have you lived in Wells Township?					
2 yrs. or less	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	20+ yrs.	Not a Resident
5	5	15	18	46	24

Opinions, Preferences, and Perceptions

The survey form included land use questions that were intended to draw out the views of respondents. Following is a summary of the results.

Three questions asked for ratings of the Township's general character as follows:

Question A-2 On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you perceive Wells Township's general character?									
Undesirable					Desirable				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	1	0	7	13	15	16	31	15	12
Question A-3 Would you like to see the current general character of the Township continue in the future?									
Yes			No				Unsure		
79			7				23		

Question A-4 How important to you is the Township's general character in making the Township a desirable place for you to live in?		
Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
9	35	67

The results of the general character queries clearly support the notion that this is an important issue.

The survey form included a list of qualities that were also intended to draw out the views of respondents. Inadvertently, the rating categories were incorrectly titled as Extremely Important, Generally Important, Neither Important nor Unimportant, Generally Important, and Extremely Important. The Unimportant end of the spectrum was inadvertently mistyped. Validity for these ratings suffers because of this, although respondents corrected some surveys. In other cases, it appeared clear that most respondents began on the left side of the table with Extremely Important and assumed the progression. Few of the surveys returned offered a questionable response pattern, although they were not withdrawn from the total tallies. The results follow, and must be interpreted considering the drawback of the mislabeled headings.

Question A-6 How important do you feel the following are in making Wells Township a desirable place to live?							
List of Qualities	Extremely Important	Generally Important	Total of 1 st 2 columns, (assumed positive responses)	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Generally Important (as typed)	Extremely Important (as typed)	Total Respondents per item
Expansive open spaces	32	42	74	20	5	0	99
Tree lined roads	32	39	71	18	5	2	96
Farmland	47	43	90	8	4	1	103
Panoramic views from the roads	26	38	64	33	5	2	104
Presence of woodlands	52	44	96	8	4	2	110
Presence of wetlands	35	36	71	25	4	5	105
Comparatively low development densities	36	39	75	22	3	2	102
Limited commercial development	43	35	78	19	2	4	103
Limited industrial development	53	31	84	16	2	3	105
Residential development characterized by primarily residential dwellings	24	47	71	24	3	7	105
Reasonable taxes	79	26	105	3	0	0	108
Nearby employment opportunities	40	38	78	24	6	3	111
Police and fire protection services	54	40	94	10	5	1	110
Protected natural resources (such as streams, lakes, wetlands, woodlands)	65	30	95	9	3	1	108

Ranked according to number of positive responses are the following qualities:

- Reasonable taxes
- Presence of woodlands
- Protected natural resources
- Police and fire
- Farmland
- Limited industrial development
- Nearby employment opportunities/Limited commercial development
- Comparatively low development densities
- Expansive open spaces
- Presence of wetlands/Residential development characterized by primarily residential dwellings/Tree lined roads
- Panoramic views from the roads

It should be noted that even the lower ranked items were given a positive ranking by well over half of the respondents, indicating that all of the qualities were considered important by a majority of the respondents. It is clear that Township residents expect the services they receive to be delivered in the most cost-effective means possible, as indicated by the high importance given to “reasonable taxes.”

It may also be recognized that “nearby employment opportunities” appears just below “limited industrial opportunities” and with “limited commercial development”, indicating that jobs are important, and that residents prefer or expect those jobs to be located outside of the Township.

Concern regarding the preservation of farmland topped the following inquiries. Again, most respondents expressed concern regarding control of growth and development within the Township.

Questions	Yes	No	Unsure	Total Respondents per item
Question A-5 Do you generally support land use regulations intended to control the amount of growth and development in the Township?	74	16	20	110
Question B-1 Do you feel the Township should encourage the preservation of farmland?	89	10	5	104
Question B-2 Do you feel the Township should pursue ways to accommodate residential development that does not consume unnecessary amounts of farmland?	69	18	15	102
Question B-4 Do you feel the Township’s rural character and traffic safety will be undermined by an increasing number of homes fronting directly upon the existing county roads?	66	21	13	100
Question B-5 Do you generally support land use regulations aimed at preserving the quality of the Township’s water resources (such as its lakes and streams?)	84	5	12	101
Question C-1 Do you feel there are enough commercial facilities and services in the Village of Caro and other nearby communities to minimize the necessity for new commercial uses in Wells Township?	68	22	15	105

One question was directed to preferences regarding specific forms of residential development in the county.

Question B-3 Which of the following forms of residential development do you feel is more appealing and desirable for Wells Township?	
One acre lots lined up and down all along the county roads	A combination of different sized lots
10	77

The following questions were intended to draw out views regarding commercial and industrial development in the Township.

Question C-1 Do you feel there are enough commercial facilities and services in the Village of Caro and other nearby communities to minimize the necessity for new commercial uses in Wells Township?		
Yes	No	Unsure
68	22	15

Question C-2 Which of the following best describes how you feel about the number of commercial businesses in the Township today?		
Not enough	About right for the community	Too much
29	61	8

Question C-3 Which of the following do you prefer regarding the type of future commercial land uses in the Township?	
They be geared toward day-to-day needs of Township residents	They be geared toward consumer shopping needs of a more regional population including surrounding townships and beyond
76	17

The quality of several public service categories were presented in a table. Respondents were asked to rate each by making a check mark in only one box for each category.

Category	Much Worse	Worse	Same	Better	Much Better	Total # of respondents per item
Road Conditions	2	7	32	44	17	102
Privacy	8	24	65	4	1	102
Crime	11	18	63	6	0	98
Traffic Levels	13	32	50	3	0	98
Police Protection	4	12	70	11	1	98
Fire Protection	1	5	75	16	1	98
Public Education	8	10	56	18	2	94

Several surveys were returned with write-in comments placed by the respondents. It may be important to note that the comment “NO RAIL TRAILS” appeared on 5 returned surveys.

VISIONING ACTIVITY

The visioning activity was completed after the existing characteristics of the Township had been collected and studied, including physical characteristics, a socioeconomic profile of population, a study of current land use patterns and economic development, transportation patterns, available facilities, utilities, and services offered in the Township, and predictions and projections where appropriate. Citizen input gathered in the Community Opinion Survey had also been examined. Equipped with this information, the Planning Commission completed the visioning activity to help identify the issues that would lead to the formulation of community goals and objectives. The visioning activity consisted of individual reflections and informal group discussion on topics regarding current trends, considerations, opportunities, and threats.

Results of the visioning activity as they related to other citizen input obtained in the mailed survey are combined in the Implications section that follows.

IMPLICATIONS – RECURRENT PRIORITIES

Several recurrent themes or priorities were identified from the community opinion survey and visioning activity. The Master Plan supports these concepts and the Township will attempt to achieve them over time.

1. *Farmland and Open Space.* Productive farmland is important to maintaining the current way of life. The Master Plan should therefore provide the policies necessary to help support agricultural activity.
2. *Rural Character.* Rural character of Wells Township should be maintained, with room for improvement. The Township's location just outside Caro on one end and near Kingston on the other allows for it to retain its rural qualities of wide open spaces, farm fields, and natural features, while offering its residents the amenities of TIER I and TIER II Urban Service Areas just minutes away. Commercial, business and industrial development within the Township are generally deemed as less essential.
3. *Regulation of Residential Growth.* Attractive community design that protects natural resources and the country lifestyle is important. Future housing should take on a natural feel, woodlands should be left to line roads, and a variety of lot sizes and plans should be employed. Buffer zones between agricultural and residential uses help to prevent problems.
4. *Monitoring of Roads.* Traffic levels are a public service concern that will need on-going review, although road conditions are generally considered to be improved.
5. *Preservation of Natural Resources.* Presence of woodlands, wetlands, and water resources are important.