

Introduction

Few people have deeper affection and appreciation for their natural and historical surroundings than do residents of the Copper Country. Public land-use meetings in 1994 revealed local concerns about change and its effect on community values. Area residents want to help shape the Copper Country's future.

A series of public programs in fall 1996, titled "Shaping Our Future: Growth Management and Land Stewardship," introduced area residents to tools and techniques they can use to guide their communities' development. To gain as much input as possible from residents who did not participate in the public meetings, a survey on community change, planning, development, open-space preservation, and property rights was mailed to all Houghton County residences in January 1997.

The intent of the survey was to provide every household in Houghton County with an opportunity to express opinions. Therefore, the results do not represent a random sample of Houghton County residents, only those who chose to respond to a survey by mail. People who feel most strongly for or against what they perceive to be the issue may be overrepresented in such self-selected surveys.

Two-thirds of survey respondents have resided in Houghton County for 10 years or more, 40 percent for more than 30 years. The age range of respondents was less than 1 percent under age 21, 24 percent ages 21-40, 39 percent ages 41-60, and 30 percent over age 60.

Survey methods

The Keweenaw Peninsula "Shaping Our Future" Partnership, formed in April 1996 as a result of a U.P. LEAD community leadership workshop conducted by Michigan State University Extension, designed the survey. Mini-grants from the Michigan Environmental Council's Land Stewardship Initiative supported the project along with other monetary and in-kind contributions. Members of the Partnership include the Groundwater Education in Michigan (GEM) Center for Environmental Outreach at Michigan Technological University, the League of Women Voters of the Copper Country, the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, the Keweenaw Land Trust, the Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission, and the Keweenaw Peninsula Chamber of Commerce. The Partnership sought input to and review of the survey from others in the community with an interest in economic development and stewardship of cultural and natural resources, including the Keweenaw Industrial Council, the Keweenaw National Historical Park, the Calumet Downtown Development Authority, local government officials, and participants in an October 1996 "Shaping Our Future" workshop. The survey went through several rounds of review and revision before it was finalized.

Local newspaper and radio stations publicized the survey. Surveys were bulk-mailed to 16,248 Houghton County residential addresses during January by Superior Mail Services for return by business reply mail. The 1,936 surveys returned represent a 12 percent response rate. However, the effective response rate is likely to be higher. For example, the 1990 census lists only 13,151 occupied households in Houghton County. The 3,097 discrepancy may reflect vacant residences. In addition, summer-only residents did not receive surveys because bulk mail is not forwarded. Some residents who watched for survey forms in the mail reported that they never arrived.

For each statement, respondents selected one of four choices: “agree strongly,” “agree somewhat,” “disagree somewhat,” and “disagree strongly.” During data entry, marks placed between categories, such as between “agree strongly” and “agree somewhat,” were assigned to the appropriate “somewhat” category. The survey also asked respondents to name the township, village, or city in which they reside, indicate how many years they have lived in Houghton County, identify their age range, and add any comments they wished.

Staff from the GEM Center compiled survey responses into a database. Five percent of the entries were rechecked against the surveys for accuracy. There were no errors.

Calculation of total points

For each survey statement, the actual number and percentage of respondents who agreed strongly or somewhat were tallied. The same measures were used for respondents who disagreed strongly or somewhat. A third measure, “total points,” was calculated, using weighting factors to interpret how strongly respondents felt about each statement. Total points gave double weight to responses of “agree strongly” and “disagree strongly” as compared to “agree somewhat” and “disagree somewhat.” The following equation was used:

$$\text{Total points} = 2 \times (\text{percent “agree strongly”}) + (\text{percent “agree somewhat”}) \\ - (\text{percent “disagree somewhat”}) - 2 \times (\text{percent “disagree strongly”}).$$

If all respondents *agree strongly* with a statement, the total points equal 200. If all respondents *disagree strongly* with a statement, the total points equal -200. If all respondents *agree somewhat*, the total points equal 100. If all respondents *disagree somewhat*, the total points equal -100. A value of 0 indicates a balance between agreement and disagreement. The statement with which residents *agree* most strongly received 169 total points, while the statement with which they *disagree* most strongly received -91 total points.

Dissemination of results

The Center released a countywide summary of results in June 1997, which was published, in part, by the Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*. Officials from each township, village, and city received copies of the countywide results plus a detailed breakdown of the responses from their jurisdictions in September.

Further analysis examined results by age of respondents, length of residence, and current residence within Houghton County. Summaries of these results appear elsewhere in this report. Comments made by survey respondents from each township, village, and city were compiled exactly as they were written. About three-quarters of the surveys included comments, some very brief, others with lengthy attachments. A summary of comments for the county as a whole, with a sampling of quotes, is included in Volume 2 of this report (Appendix A). The responses are not linked to individuals, even if the respondents chose not to remain anonymous. All of the results for each locality, including verbatim comments, were presented to local officials at their regular monthly meetings by members of the Keweenaw Peninsula “Shaping Our Future” Partnership in early 1998. Copies of the entire report are available at all Houghton County libraries and township, city, and village offices. The report will also appear on the GEM Center’s web site (under construction) via www.mtu.edu.