

Summary

“Wanted! Your Help in Shaping the Future of Houghton County.” That was the invitation to all Houghton County residents in January 1997 to participate in an opinion survey about land-use issues. Nearly 2,000 residents took the time to return the surveys, a response rate of 12 percent. The survey asked residents how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each of 26 statements on topics such as community change, planning, development, open-space preservation, property rights, and environmental stewardship. About three-quarters of the returned surveys included comments, ranging from a few words to lengthy attachments.

Overall, the number of surveys returned, the responses to statements, and the comments added show strong interest in long-range planning, land conservation, growth management, property rights, and jobs among Houghton County residents. The following statements have the highest level of support. At least 90 percent of respondents agree with them either strongly or somewhat; less than 10 percent disagree.

- Long-range planning is needed to manage growth and to protect our environment and natural resources such as drinking water.
- The natural environment, scenic beauty, and “getting away from it all” are important to our quality of life.
- Neighboring townships, cities, and counties should identify and work together toward shared goals.
- Public costs for new water, sewer, and other services should be considered when any development is proposed.
- The small-town feeling of the area is worth preserving.
- Environmental impacts should be considered when creating new jobs.
- Change brought by economic development should be balanced with actions to preserve community character.

The following two statements have nearly 90 percent agreement: “Lack of jobs, especially for young people, is a problem in our area” and “The design and appearance of new buildings and signs are important to the community.”

In contrast, the statement with the least support (25 percent agreement, 74 percent disagreement) is, “Developers should be allowed to develop with little or no restriction because it helps the local economy.” It is *the only survey statement with which more people disagree than agree.*

Respondents are more divided in their reactions to statements regarding benefits and costs of recent development, the relative importance of “private property rights” versus “public interest,” and the type and appearance of development projects.

The analysis shows that the responses to many survey statements differ by the respondents’ age, current residence, and length of residence within Houghton County. Those differences are presented in separate sections of this report.

Interestingly, about 40 percent of respondents under age 60 feel that they do not have a voice in shaping the future of their community, township, or city. This survey report is intended to promote discussion of land-use issues and help provide the voice that many residents feel they lack. Complete results, including comments as they appear on the survey forms and individual results for each of the 21 townships, cities, and villages in the county, have been presented to local elected officials.