Baseline Survey on Attitudes and Perceptions About Open Space & Agricultural Preservation

A 400-Sample County-wide survey of adult registered voters conducted September 7 through 10, 2010
Margin of error ±4.9%

“Cold” Question Section

• Slightly fewer than half of the questions in the survey – posed at the outset of the interview – were devoted to measuring “cold” responses to questions going to open-space, county agriculture and governmental activity in land use.
### Relative Importance Placed on Local Government Policy Aims

[Read and rotate Q.1 to Q.8]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Top</th>
<th>Prior</th>
<th>Not Top</th>
<th>TOT Imp</th>
<th>Slight Imp</th>
<th>Not Imp</th>
<th>Imp</th>
<th>DK/ Und</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the public from crime and drugs</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Protecting the air, land and waterways from pollution</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing economic development programs and incentives to attract business and industry</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining and improving area roads</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving farmland and open space for local food production</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Offering programs to recycle household items such as cans, plastics, cardboard and newspapers</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling traffic congestion</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling where population growth occurs by regulating commercial and residential development</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Assessment of 20-Year Growth Rate

**Q. 10**

- **Total** 17%
- **Too Much** 10%
- **About Right** 9%
- **Too Little** 26%
- **Undec** 54%

**Projection:** Increase a limited amount.
• Most residents see agriculture as an “Important” but not, “Major” component of the economy.

• Most believe acreage has declined “Only little” (4%) or, “Somewhat” (47%), over 20 years. Over one-third (36%), report an opinion that it has declined, “A lot”.

Impressions of Agriculture in the County
Qs. 17-18

Locally Produced Food
Qs. 14-16
Relative Agreement With Statements About the Topic

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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preserving open space is important to the future quality of life in Kent County.</td>
<td>61% 89% 9% 4% 2%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The loss of farmland has a negative impact on our local economy.</td>
<td>50% 76% 19% 7% 5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial and residential development in areas without strong local planning results in higher costs for government services.</td>
<td>38% 71% 20% 9% 9%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the population continues to grow without more planning and control over growth and development, it will have an overall negative impact on the economy in Kent County.</td>
<td>43% 69% 21% 11% 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My local unit of government currently makes adequate plans for growth and development.</td>
<td>22% 60% 28% 13% 12%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market factors – not government regulation -- is the most important thing that should determine if land is developed or not.</td>
<td>30% 54% 40% 23% 6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“Informed” Question Section

- The next section of the interview offered:
  - objective data concerning Kent County’s place in agricultural production;
  - an explanation of the existing Kent County PDR program; and,
  - questions probing respondents’ reactions to questions similar to those posed in the “Cold” section of the survey.
Attitudes Toward Loss of Farmland Acreage

Q. 25

Awareness Translates Into “Concern” Over Loss of Acreage

Qs. 26 & 27

- Once apprised of the 39,000 acre loss of farmland, as well as Kent County’s ranking for farm commodity production, 59% of respondents expressed that they were either “Extremely” (22%) or, “Very” (37%), “Concerned”.

  - Reasons for concern found a plurality citing loss of locally grown consumables and preserving the environment.
  - To a lesser extent, economic impact and increased government service needs were expressed.
Generic PDR Description Receives Bare Majority Support

Q. 28

Support for PDR Programs Increases Significantly When Described in the Context of Open Space and Farmland

Qs. 29-32

- Open Space PDR Program “Favor” moves up to 77%
  - 50% “Strongly”
  - 27% “Smwt”
- Farmland PDR Program “Favor” moves up to 70%
  - 47% “Strongly”
  - 23% “Smwt”

- Opposition to the specific programs centers on the role of government vis-a-vis free market dynamics.
“Awareness & Knowledge”
Question Section

• The next section of the interview:
  – Measured awareness of the Kent County program operating since 2002;
  – Tested respondents’ knowledge concerning several aspects of PDR programs; and,
  – Gauged the level of importance placed on the existence of PDR programs and a dedicated source of funding for them.

Two-thirds “Favor” the Kent Co. PDR Program After Hearing About It.

Qs. 33 & 34

• Upon hearing a brief description of the existing Kent County PDR program, just over one-third of respondents (36%) indicated that they had heard of the program.
# Lack of Clear Consensus About PDR Program Specifics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rotate Qs. 35-42</th>
<th>Very Accurate</th>
<th>TOTAL Accurate</th>
<th>TOTAL Inaccurate</th>
<th>Very Inaccurate</th>
<th>DK Undec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has long term benefit to the community</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It improves land values</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It provides jobs and helps the economy</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces water, sewer &amp; other svc. costs.</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded mostly by local tax dollars</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other areas of MI have benefitted.</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded mostly by local foundations</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It only benefits the farmer</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Relative Importance of Farmland PDR Programs & Sure Funding Source

**Qs. 43 & 44**

**Importance of Farmland PDR**

- **Essential**: 39%
- **Very Impot**: 33%
- **Somewhat Impot**: 19%
- **Not**: 9%
- **Unsure**: 1%

**Total Essential/Very Impot 71%**

**Importance of Dedicated Funding**

- **Essential**: 27%
- **Very Impot**: 34%
- **Somewhat Impot**: 29%
- **Not**: 7%
- **Unsure**: 3%

**Total Essential/Very Impot 81%**
Relative Importance of Open Space PDR Programs & Sure Funding Source
Qs. 45 & 46

Importance of Open Space PDR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Level</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Very Impt</th>
<th>Smt Impt</th>
<th>Total Essential/Very Impt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importance of Dedicated Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Level</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Very Impt</th>
<th>Smt Impt</th>
<th>Total Essential/Very Impt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</table>

Summary of Findings

“Initial” Respondent Impressions

- Preserving farmland and open space for local food production ranks high on a list of several government public policy goals. (81% Important 49% “Top”)
- Generic description of PDR programs as one means for governments to control growth is met with slight majority favor (51%)
- Most residents see agriculture as an “Important” but not, “Major” component of the economy (51%).
- Most believe acreage has declined “Only little” (4%) or, “Somewhat” (47%), over 20 years.

“After Information” Impressions

- 2/3 Approve of Kent Co. PDR program after brief description (66% Favor 37% “Strongly”)
- PDR programs described as specifically aimed at preserving open space and farmland meet with strong “Favor” (77% for Open Space, 70% for Farmland)
- In a final asking, having a PDR program to preserve farmland is seen as “Very Important” by 71% of respondents (38% “Essential”). For Open space, the figures are 63% “Very Important”, (24% “Essential”)