

Chapter 3

Identification of Issues - Public Participation

For a Joint Comprehensive Plan to be a useful tool for guiding future development and policy in an area, it must represent a consensus among the region's stakeholders. The residents, business owners, community service providers, and municipal officials must each have a part in forming the policies of the Joint Plan.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) requires public input at the *end* of the process, in the form of public meetings and public hearings. Restricting public involvement to merely what is required is not likely to produce a successful plan, as the public - quite rightly - will have little sense of participation in the process or ownership of the final document: they are being asked to approve a plan in which they had no voice. Early and frequent public participation is essential to the development of a practical, community-based Comprehensive Plan, regardless of the number of municipalities that are involved.

The public participation component of the Shippensburg Area Joint Comprehensive Plan far surpasses the requirements of the MPC. Public input was sought early in the planning process, well before any policies or future land uses were determined. Chapter 1 described the public outreach efforts that were included in the planning process for this Joint Plan. This chapter will include a detailed analysis of the results of that outreach, including a detailed summary of the questionnaire results.

The questionnaire was not the only public outreach effort undertaken. Community phone and face-to-face interviews were completed, a public outreach meeting was held, and a SWOT Analysis was performed. A SWOT Analysis is a visioning tool which is useful in identifying a community's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. A SWOT Analysis can help a community explore a host of issues such as farmland preservation, downtown revitalization, or intergovernmental cooperation. The SWOT Analysis was performed on the Joint Planning Committee using individual surveys and group discussion.

Detailed results from this analysis as well as the phone interviews and public outreach session can be found in Appendix A.

SHIPPENSBURG SURVEYS - ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CONCLUSIONS

SHIPPENSBURG BOROUGH

240 surveys mailed out: 190 to homeowners and 50 to renters

76 surveys returned (65 homeowners, 11 renters), for an **overall response rate of 31.6%**. Note that 80% of the survey mailing went to homeowners, while 85% of those received were from homeowners. The homeowners were therefore somewhat more responsive than the renters, but the mix of responses is still generally consistent with what was originally sent.

Almost half (33) of the respondents were long-time residents; MORE than half (57) have lived in the Borough for more than ten years.

The **age distribution** of the respondents differs significantly from the distribution documented by the 2000 census:

- The lowest response (3) was from the 18-24 age group. This represents only 3.9% of the responses, although 28.5% of the residents are in this age group - a figure that is

presumably affected by the presence of University students, although no Shippensburg dormitories lie within the Borough limits.

- The highest response (19) was from the 45-54 age group. Although they are only 9.9% of the total population, they provided exactly 25.0% of the responses. Analyses typically assume that this age group consists of individuals at or near their peak earning years - and who probably contribute the greatest proportion of the residential tax revenue.
- The next highest rate of response (18) was from the 65 and over group: retirees and senior citizens. While they make up 15.6% of the total population, they submitted 23.7% of all the responses.

About a third (27) of the respondents indicated that they owned between a quarter- and a half-acre of property in the Borough; only 8 (10.5%) reported owning more than one acre. This is consistent with expectations for a relatively dense area such as a Borough.

Place-of-work observations:

- 36 (47.7%) of the respondents work in the Borough or the Township (includes those who indicated "at home" as their place of work).
- 22 (28.9%) of the respondents were retired - which is probably a disproportionate representation based upon the total Borough population, but it is consistent with the reported ages of the respondents.
- Only 5 (6.6%) of the respondents worked outside of Cumberland or Franklin Counties.

Almost all of the respondents (73, or 96.1%) said that they liked Shippensburg's "small town community/atmosphere," thereby making this the aspect of the community the most consistently appreciated. "Emergency services/safety" was the second-most popular with 71 (93.4%) "like" responses; this was the only item with NO "dislike" responses. Despite some complaints about the effects of the University upon the town, Borough residents generally recognize "proximity to Shippensburg University" as an asset to the town: 59 (77.6%) of the respondents indicated that they "like" this aspect of the town, and only 6 (7.9%) indicated "dislike."

It is apparent that there is a generally high level of satisfaction with life in the Borough: total "like" responses far outnumber the "dislike" and "no opinion" responses. The aspect with the most "dislike" responses was "shopping opportunities," with 38 (50.0%), followed closely by "taxes" with 37 (48.7%), and "job opportunities" with 36 (47.4%). The "shopping" response is consistent with later responses regarding the need for more diverse development in the downtown area and written comments noting the desire for shopping alternatives to the strip malls as well as more upscale restaurants. The response about "job opportunities" is somewhat unexpected given the number of respondents who work in the immediate area; however, it could be referring to a lack of higher paying jobs in the area.

A response of "no opinion" suggests that the respondent doesn't have enough direct experience with the issue to form an opinion. The strongest "no opinion" response (30, or 39.5%) was for "availability of public transportation," indicating that a large number of people simply don't have need for this service, or that it doesn't occur to them to use it. This suggests that any effort to expand public transit services may be difficult or - at best - should only be done after detailed study has demonstrated a desire for it.

More than half of the respondents indicated agreement with ALL eight of the statements provided in item six of the survey. The two statements with the most "agree" responses were the importance of rehabilitating underutilized/deteriorated properties (69, or 90.8%, agree) and the importance of enforcing existing ordinances and codes (63, or 82.9%, agree). Noted that these statements are closely related to each other and are mutually compatible. These two were followed closely (62, or 81.6%) by the importance of programs to encourage owner-occupied housing.

The weakest support (41 [53.9%] "agree" and 24 [31.6%] "disagree" - the highest "disagree" figure) was in response to the statement that downtown traffic was a serious issue requiring resolution in the near future.

Respondents were asked to select and rank what they believed to be the four most important planning issues from a list of sixteen items. Given the format of responses, we note that the TOTAL number of "votes" - regardless of ranking - indicates which issues are of greatest concern to the residents. The rankings are a gauge of the strength of the opinions.

Observations:

- By FAR **"economic vitality and stability of the downtown" is the issue of greatest concern among those listed**, receiving the highest number (57) of total responses, the highest number (27) of #1 responses, AND the highest number (10) of #2 responses.
- Two issues were tied for second place, with a total of 34 responses each - note that this is significantly fewer responses than received by the top concern. The issue of "economic development" had more (15) #1 responses, so it should be seen as being of greater concern than "growth management," which had 12 #1 responses. We note that these are quite similar to the first issue: clearly, **there is a strong desire for well-managed growth that will assure the ongoing vitality of the downtown area**.
- The issue of "pedestrian circulation and safety" had the fewest responses with 14, but 8 of these were #1 responses: for the individuals who care about this, it is a critical concern.
- The issues of "improving recreational facilities" and "stormwater management" had the fewest #1 responses with 4 each, but recreational facilities received 23 total responses to only 16 for stormwater.

Water-related issues seem to be of particular environmental concern to residents: "water quality/supply" and "waterways" were the top two responses (57 and 53, respectively) for the environmental question.

Not surprisingly, there was **little support for increasing taxes** for ANY of the purposes listed in the ninth question. There were only **two issues that received a "yes" from at least half** of the respondents: **"emergency management services"** with 45 (59.2%) and **"transportation/street improvements"** with 38 (50.0%). It is important to compare this with the responses to question 5, where residents indicated a very high rate of satisfaction with emergency services - there were NO "dislike" responses to that question on the issue of these services. From this we can gather that, although residents are pleased with the quality of this service, they are also concerned that it REMAIN a high-quality service and are generally willing to pay to assure that it does so. The willingness to support transportation and street improvements is more surprising in that there was only lukewarm response to this same issue in question 5 (only 38 [50.0%] gave a "like" response), and the issue of traffic congestion in question 6 had the fewest "agree" and the most "disagree" responses. "Road improvements" received modest support in question 7, with 29 total responses, making it fifth out of the sixteen issues. The level of response to this question then may be recognition of the importance of the transportation network (and the traditional prominence of road issues in municipal concerns) rather than any particular area of dissatisfaction or enthusiasm. "Creation of a Parking Authority" and "public transportation" registered the strongest resistance with 61 (80.3%) and 55 (72.4%) "no" responses, respectively. Another unexpected response is the lack of support for "revitalization of downtown area" (31 [40.8%] "yes" and 38 [50.0%] "no" responses) given the level of concern on this issue expressed elsewhere in the survey.

Borough residents generally support the addition of commercial activity to the Borough, particularly if it occurs in currently vacant or underutilized buildings in the downtown area. Having more restaurants (especially nicer ones) was a popular response along with having a movie theatre and clothing stores: more than half of the respondents indicated a need for these kinds of businesses.

There was a remarkable three-way tie regarding the need for additional industrial activity, with 25 responses each for "yes," "no," and "no opinion." If new industry should be developed, the clear location of choice was within the Shippensburg Industrial Park (56 total responses and 49 #1 responses); the Hoffman Mills area was a rather distant second choice. Lurgan Avenue was clearly rejected with only 6 total responses and NO #1 responses: the only area listed that didn't get a single #1 vote. The most popular new business types to be accommodated were "retail and wholesale trade," "high technology research firms," and "services and offices."

SHIPPENSBURG TOWNSHIP

86 surveys mailed out: 68 to homeowners and 18 to renters

34 completed surveys were returned (all from homeowners), for an **overall response rate of 39.5%**. The results of the survey should be analyzed in light of the fact that no renters (and presumably no college students) responded.

More than half (18, or 52.9%) of the respondents had been residents for more than twenty years.

Analysis of the **age distribution** of the respondents is complicated by the fact that the census figures include college students.¹ Fortunately, the census also notes the number of residents housed in college dormitories, so **it is possible to "back out" dormitory residents from the total population figure**. Doing so results in a total adjusted population for the Township of 2,261 (down from 4,505, according to the 2000 census). Note that this figure still includes college students residing in off-campus housing in the Township. Even based upon this adjusted population, the demographics of the survey respondents varies significantly from the distribution documented by the 2000 census:

- Over a third (12, or 35.3%) of the respondents were 65 years old or older: a group that comprises only 13.5% of the total adjusted population of 2,261.
- There were NO respondents in the 18-24 age group - which still comprises 37.3% of the adjusted population - and only one in the 25-34 group. **All but one of the responses were from a group that represents only 36.4% of the total adjusted population.**

About a third (11) of the respondents indicated that they owned between a quarter- and a half-acre of property; another 9 owned between 3,000 and 10,000 square feet. None owned more than five acres.

Place-of-work observations:

- 10 (29.4%) of the respondents worked in the Township (includes those who indicated "at home" as their place of work); NONE of the respondents worked in the Borough.
- **12 (35.3%) of the respondents were retired**, which is undoubtedly a disproportionate representation of the total Township population, but it is consistent with the reported ages of the respondents.
- Only 2 (5.9%) of the respondents worked outside of Cumberland or Franklin Counties

Respondents were asked for their opinion ("like," "dislike," or "no opinion") on eighteen different aspects of the Township. There was a **three-way tie for the most "like" responses**: "schools," "open space/scenery," and "rural atmosphere/farmland" each received 29 (85.3%) "like" responses. **"Schools" comes out on top**, however, as it received NO "dislike" responses, while the other two - which are very similar to each other - each received one.

¹ Census figures are based upon place of residence on April 1 of the census year, so most college students are recorded as residents of their college community. This is true nationwide, not just in Shippensburg.

"Emergency services" and "sewage facilities" also got high marks, with 26 (76.5%) and 25 (73.5%) "like" responses, respectively. It is worth noting that "University located within the Township" received 19 (55.9%) "like" responses and 5 (14.7%) "dislike" responses.

No aspect was disliked by more than half of the respondents. The **strongest "dislike" response was for "taxes,"** with 13 (38.2%) such responses. Close behind were "job opportunities" and "existing sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and bikeways" with 12 (35.3%) each. It is interesting to note that "job opportunities" also received the greatest number (13, or 38.2%) of "no opinion" responses, likely due to the high proportion of retirees who responded. Furthermore, the "existing sidewalks..." aspect received the same number of "like" and "dislike" responses, 12 of each, with 7 "no opinion" answers.

There was strong to favorable agreement with most of the nine statements presented in question 6 for the respondents' consideration. The **strongest support was for enforcement of existing ordinances** with 30 (88.2%) "agree" responses, followed closely by farmland preservation (29, or 85.3%, "agree"). The need to improve traffic circulation in the region and the need to encourage owner-occupied housing were tied with 28 (82.4%) "agree" responses each.

The strongest opposition was to the provision of additional park and recreation facilities, with 20 (58.8%) "disagree" responses. The closely related statement about improving *existing* park and recreation facilities was also somewhat unpopular with only 15 (44.1%) "agree" and 9 (26.5%) "disagree" responses. These were the only two statements where fewer than half of the respondents checked "agree."

Respondents were asked to select and rank what they believed to be the **four most important planning issues** from a list of seventeen items. Given the format of responses, we note that the TOTAL number of "votes" - regardless of ranking - indicates which issues are of greatest concern to the residents. The rankings are a gauge of the strength of the opinions.

Observations:

- There is **no clear, single issue favored by the respondents.** The issue of "growth management" received the greatest number of total "votes" (19), but had fewer #1 responses (7) than both "farmland/open space preservation" (10) and "police/crime watch response times" (8). The police issue received the second-highest number of total votes (18), and the farmland preservation issues third (17). The concern over police response times is a bit surprising, as respondents indicated a fairly high level of satisfaction with the current performance of the emergency service providers, which would include police. This could be due to a disproportionate response to the fire and emergency services.
- Clearly, the **respondents attached the lowest priority to economic development,** which received only four votes overall and NO #1 rankings: the only issue to do so.
- The issue of historic preservation is interesting, as it received the second-fewest (6) number of total votes, but three of these were #1 rankings. It appears that there are few respondents who are concerned about preservation, but those who are tend to be passionate.

Insofar as environmental protection issues are concerned (respondents were allowed to select up to three, no rank indication), farmland preservation (21, or 61.8%) and water supply (17, or 50.0%) were the top responses by a significant margin.

The response to the question of willingness to accept a rise in taxes to pay for various services was quite similar to the responses from the Borough: there was **little support for increasing taxes** for ANY of the purposes listed. The only **issue that received a "yes" from at least half** of the respondents was **"emergency management services"** with 21 (61.8%), which is the same top answer from the Borough surveys. Also in common with the Borough is the observation that, in question 5, residents indicated a fairly high rate of satisfaction with emergency services (26 "like" responses, or 76.5%). From this we come to a conclusion similar

to that for the Borough: residents are generally pleased with the quality of this service, but they are also concerned that the level of quality be maintained and are willing to pay to assure that it does so. The most strongly rejected beneficiary of new taxes was for "additions/improvements to recreational facilities and programs," which got 24 (70.6%) "no" responses and only five (14.7%) "yes" responses; the fewest of any issue. This is consistent with responses elsewhere in the survey. We suspect that a contributor to the reluctance to accept new taxes is influenced by the high proportion of retired respondents, many of whom are on fixed incomes.

Respondents rejected the need for more commercial development by a 2-to-1 margin - although "not sure" scored just as high as "yes." If such development should occur, Walnut Bottom Road was by far the most preferred location. Respondents rejected the concept of additional industrial development even more strongly, noting that, if any were to be developed, it should be "within an industrial park" (13 #1 responses) or "Exit 29 (I-81 Interchange Area)" (11 #1 responses). Most preferred industry types were "services and offices" (17) followed by "agriculture," "high technology research firms," and "retail and wholesale trade," with twelve responses each. Respondents were allowed to select up to three industry types from a list of eight. Based upon this methodology, we note that numbers would be higher if any particular industry were strongly favored.

Over half (19, or 55.9%) of the respondents felt that the rate of increase in residential development in the Township was "acceptable;" only 7 (20.6%) responded "too high." No one responded "too low." If proposed, 24 (70.6%) of the respondents preferred it to be "in new single-family developments," followed closely by "by infilling" with 22 (64.7%) "yes" responses. Least-favored forms were "in mobile home parks" with 25 (73.5%) "no" votes and "conversion" of single family homes into multi-unit buildings with 23 (67.6%) "no" responses. Interestingly, although neither student housing developments nor condominium/townhouse development were favored (21 "no" responses, or 61.8%) they received exactly equal scores: apparently there is little objection to student residents per se - or the respondents assumed that most condo/townhouse developments would be largely populated by students, which is probably a reasonable expectation.

Regarding the question of the design of new residential development, "conservation development" received the strongest support with 15 #1 responses.

ADDRESSING SURVEY FINDINGS IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Part III of this Joint Comprehensive Plan will include five (5) distinct plan elements. The responses from the residents could affect these elements in the following ways.

Land Use: Respondents from both the Borough and the Township state that they like the current character of their communities. While "character" is a somewhat inchoate quality touching on a range of aspects, there is a strong visual element. Preservation of community character may be largely (although not entirely) addressed by the land use and housing elements of the plan. These elements should therefore provide for growth that represents a natural evolution of the existing spatial forms rather than a dramatic departure from those forms.

Economic Development: The Borough respondents were quite clear that the stability and vitality of the downtown area is a HUGE concern for them. This is not uncommon for smaller towns. We note that this concern complements those expressed by Township respondents regarding the loss of rural areas to business-

oriented development - and an almost complete lack of interest in ED. This suggests a coordinated ED strategy whereby smaller-scale uses could be directed to the downtown area and larger-scale enterprises are directed toward the existing industrial park and areas appropriate for large-scale commercial uses.

Transportation:

Generally, transportation concerns were not particularly pressing for either Borough or Township residents. We noted that many of the respondents were retired (i.e., don't need to travel to work every day) or had short commutes. In order to determine if this was characteristic of the community - or if the people with short or no commutes were the only ones who had time to respond to the survey - we reviewed the travel-time-to-work information from the 2000 census. For the Borough, thirty percent of workers² travel less than ten minutes to work; over half (54.2%) of workers have commutes of less than twenty minutes. In the Township, *over two-thirds* (67.5%) of working persons have commutes of less than twenty minutes. Clearly, the short-commute *is* characteristic of the total population.

Respondents did not feel a strong need for any improvement to or expansion of the mass transit network.

Parking did not rate as a critical concern - although this may become an issue if economic development and downtown revitalization efforts are successful.

Borough residents noted the need for street improvements to reduce congestion and facilitate easier movement through town, and Township residents noted the need to improve traffic circulation in the region.

Facilities & Services:

All respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with emergency services (i.e., police and fire protection), but *also* indicated concern that the quality level be sustained, and crime watch and police response times be improved. This was the only area where more than half of the respondents from both communities indicated that they would be willing to pay more taxes.

Of all direct municipal services, code enforcement was the most critical concern.

There was little support - and some opposition - to the development of new recreational areas. This is likely a reaction to the recent expenditures for the recently developed Township park as well as the demographics of the respondents.

² All travel-time-to-work information from the U.S. Census *excludes* individuals who work at home.

Resource Conservation &
Historic Preservation:

Both Borough and Township respondents indicated concern regarding water supply quality.

Township respondents indicated strong interest in farmland/open space preservation.

Historic preservation does not enjoy broad support in either the Borough or the Township, but among those who *do* indicate some concern, it ranks highly. This suggests that a standing committee for historic preservation concerns may do well.