

Chapter 2. Citizen Input

The Bath Township Trustees and the Bath Comprehensive Planning Committee both recognized the importance of citizen participation in helping to formulate a Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is the first step in making the community vision a reality. To help define the community vision a detailed Citizen Survey was conducted at the outset of the process. As many of the concepts of the Comprehensive Plan are specifically based on that articulated vision, this Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan reviews the survey and the planning direction derived from the results. A complete survey summary was prepared by Dr. Marquette and is included in reference documents that comprise the complete record of the Comprehensive Plan process.

Township Wide Citizen Survey

In October of 1996, the Comprehensive Planning Committee had mailed a copy of the questionnaire to 3,203 households. A total of 1,265 questionnaires was returned in time for data entry. Of those, 1,250 were usable, resulting in an effective response rate of 39 percent.

Survey Summary

The Planning Survey consisted of six major areas of inquiry:

1. Housing Types and potential land uses.
2. Evaluation of community services.
3. Evaluation of Planning and Zoning processes.
4. Desirability of potential community services such as central water and sewer.
5. Demographics of the respondents.
6. Identification of the "Best" and "Worst" qualities of the Bath community.

At the end of the survey, space was left for open ended comments. The information contained in the comments section was extremely useful in interpreting the numerical responses.

The survey indicated several key areas of concern that are addressed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Housing Types and Land Uses

Housing:

The essay portion of the survey showed a clear desire and need on the part of older Bath residents for alternative housing options. These residents are clearly concerned about being forced to move from the area that they have been a part of for many years. These concerns reflected rising tax obligations on older, large property owners. Survey results indicated the need for the Plan to consider housing concepts providing alternatives to large lot single family homes.

In the Community Leader interviews, many expressed concern that unless the Comprehensive Plan provided for a variety of uses and densities, there would be continued impetus for annexations.

Specifically regarding residential development subdivision design, many younger residents saw the use of cluster concepts as a way to begin building "neighborhoods" and providing the framework for creating community amenities such as bike trails and greenways. It was often noted that subdivision design could encourage development of trails and parks which would reinforce the theme that Bath is a place of nature preservation and enjoyment. The development of internal trails and neighborhoods was also seen as a means of allowing reasonable

development while providing a secondary, safe means of transportation within the Township.

Non-Residential Land Uses

Retail Commercial

The presence of the Montrose retail conglomerate had a major effect on survey responses in two ways:

(1) The predominance of “Big Box” and national chains in the Montrose development has both obviated the market demand for additional like facilities within Bath and created a desire for site design review that would allow only compact, neighborhood scale retail development. It is clear in reading the surveys that while, for example, the entire Cleveland-Massillon Road corridor is identified as the best future location for neighborhood retail, residents want that to be allowed only in a clustered, nodal fashion that preserves the non-commercial strip streetscape. It was often suggested that retail development be controlled by limitations on footprint size and hours of operation.

In the Community Leader interviews, many were concerned about the possibility of additional strip development along the entire Cleveland-Massillon Road Corridor.

(2) The congestion of the Montrose area has caused many residents to suggest that Bath include small neighborhood retail facilities in their long term planning. The object is to be able to “run to the store” to get small items without having to face the Montrose congestion.

Office/Light Industrial

Office and light industrial development are important to communities such as Bath in that they reduce the tax burden for residents and provide a financial long

term planning component for both the local government and the school district. They also require less governmental support services in terms of police and other emergency services than commercial retail and can be a compatible use for residential areas.

There were few comments in the survey responses relating to office development other than to stress the importance of adequate site plan review for future development.

The numerical responses were virtually split on whether or not non-residential development was necessary for the future financial health of the Township and the school district. However, high property taxes were cited as one of the “worst” things about living in Bath by 12.3% of the survey respondents - the third highest response.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee considered all aspects of this issue in making the land use recommendations contained in the Plan.

Environmental Quality and Open Space Preservation

The reputation and desirability of Bath as a beautiful, natural area were reflected in the responses of this section as well as in the essay responses. There was strong support for environmental protection measures that could be implemented through zoning and site design review. The data also indicates that while there was strong support among newer families with young children for additional active recreation facilities, long term residents and older households are critical of public expenditure for additional active recreation. It was noted that the school district could acquire additional acreage and/or provide these additional facilities as new schools are built.

The use of open space, and neighborhood park development has been identified as a key component of building community

identity, i.e. places where people can interface with other residents. There was concern expressed in the surveys about the lack of community identity and community spirit and many residents suggested that recreation facilities and greenway trail systems could be included in the design of future development.

The issue of identity also was brought up in relation to the continued existence of an "equestrian" component for Bath and development of policies that would encourage this. Many respondents strongly urged that horse trails continue to be part of the Firestone development and that equestrian trails connected to the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area be pursued. The continued presence of horse facilities is seen as an element of preservation of the rural character.

The survey responses also indicated the importance of retaining the rural open space character along the thoroughfares and streets of Bath. The scenic views provided as one drives through Bath are a vital factor of the quality of the community. The land use and transportation sections of this Plan are designed to retain the rural residential streetscapes.

Control of Planning and Development Issues

The key issue of concern raised throughout the survey responses was that of the uncertainty of the future of Bath. Concern about continued annexations and problems with returning zoning control were consistently articulated in the survey responses. This fear of losing the ability to adequately plan for the future of the Bath area colors many of the responses. A good example of this is the responses to the question of whether or not central water and sewer was desirable. While responses varied by areas in the Township, some regions indicated a 50% not desirable rating for central water. At the same time, however, responses indicated that lack of public water was

one of the key issues cited in the question of what were the worst things about Bath. Further reading of the open-ended comment sections make it clear that provision of public water and sewer services are feared because residents equate the public facilities with overdevelopment and loss of the existing community character.

The policies and implementation strategies contained in this Plan are designed to alleviate the concerns about future overdevelopment, control of retail commercial land uses and inappropriate residential design. Legislation is currently being proposed at the State level to enable Townships to control a broad variety of site development issues. If this legislation is passed, Bath will have a wider variety of tools to use in zoning control and should immediately update its zoning resolution.

The Ohio Department of Transportation has drafted new Statewide Access Management Policies that recognize the relationship between the zoning and road capacity and safety. Bath Township should adopt these policies by reference in their development review procedures.