

Land Use Planning in Ohio Townships: Survey Results Highlights

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Introduction

The Ohio Township Association, the Ohio State University, and Ohio State University Extension joined together in Fall 2003 to collect information concerning Ohio township zoning. The goals included compiling a database of the 1,309 Townships in Ohio, identifying which Ohio townships have zoning, and which do not have zoning. While a majority of townships have provided this information, the collection continues until a complete database of township zoning exists. Another goal of the study, and focus of this article, was to learn more about land use planning and zoning in those townships that have adopted zoning resolutions. This article summarizes survey information concerning township land use management that was collected since January 2004.

The information collected through this survey is critical to understanding the resulting land use trends and patterns that contribute to Ohio's landscapes. This important information about Ohio township land use and zoning will become part of a database that can help set priorities for educational programs, identify issues of importance for the Ohio Township Association and legislative sessions.

Zoning Survey

Survey Sample and Respondents

In January 2004, 250 surveys were sent to townships that have adopted zoning. The 250 township sample was randomly selected from the database of zoned townships within the five geographic districts of Ohio (Central, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast). The zoning survey responses represented an overwhelming 69 percent return rate from the 250 sampled townships¹. In most cases the surveys were filled out by the township clerk, township trustee, or township zoning inspector.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the township survey responses originated from across the state; Central area townships contributed 14 percent of the responses, Northwest townships contributed 36 percent, Northeast contributed 30 percent, Southwest contributed 14 percent and Southeast contributed to 6 percent of the survey responses. The number of survey responses therefore varied geographically. Distinction can also be made between townships included in metropolitan statistical area boundaries and those included within non-metropolitan or more rural boundaries. Only slightly more survey responses came from metropolitan area townships (54 percent) than non-metropolitan area townships (46 percent).

¹ The subsequent data analysis is based on 170 surveys as three of the returned surveys did not provide requested information.

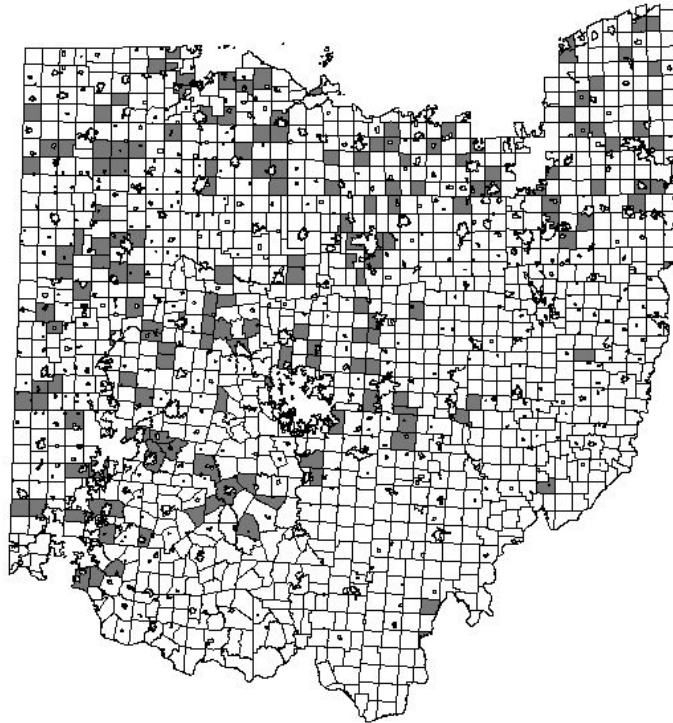


Figure 1. The Ohio townships that participated in the zoning survey.

Land Use Challenges

Multiple survey questions gathered information about township land use or zoning challenges (Table 1). This information is especially important as it identifies areas of potential focus for future discussion or attention. Most frequently, townships identified zoning resolution enforcement as their greatest challenge in administering zoning, this may be in part because a majority of the townships sampled (59 percent) have a part-time instead of full-time zoning inspector responsible for reviewing zoning applications and handling requests for information about zoning from property owners.

Table 1. Issues that townships selected as their greatest challenges in administering zoning. Issues are ranked based on the frequency that they were selected; “1” represents the most frequently selected challenge.

Rank	Zoning Challenges
1	Zoning Resolution Enforcement
2	Lack of Understanding by Property Owners
3	Unhappy Property Owners
4	Quantity of Variance Requests
5	Paperwork
6	Requests to Revise the Code
7	Lack of Assistance from the County or Regional Planning Commission

The second and third highest ranked item among the challenges in administering zoning involves property owners. Information from the survey suggests that more education is needed for property owners regarding zoning. Further inquiry may determine if townships feel that property owners need more information about zoning purposes, zoning procedures, or some other aspect of zoning. Other challenges include issues related to the amount of work resulting from zoning adoption, which may again be related to administrative capacity.

In order to obtain information about land use or zoning issues generally, townships selected a single category that identified the greatest land use issue in their community. Figure 2 shows that overall, the highest percentage of townships ranked sprawl as the greatest land use or zoning issue that townships currently confront. Given the rates of urbanization in Ohio, it is not surprising that issues characteristic of sprawl such as uncoordinated growth and land consumption that are of key concern to townships. Economic development is also a category of concern that 20 percent of townships ranked as their greatest concern.

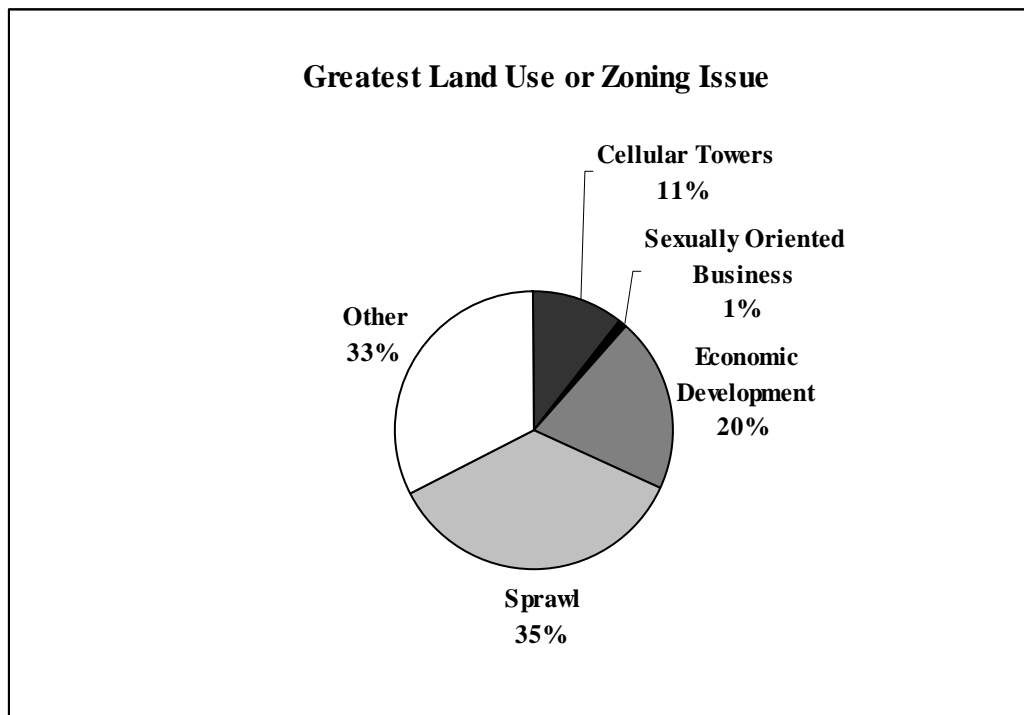


Figure 2. Greatest land use or zoning issue confronting the township.

A large percentage of townships ranked the “Other” category as their greatest land use or zoning issue. Consideration of the “Other” issue in the context of metropolitan and non-metropolitan townships identifies interesting differences. While overall metropolitan and non-metropolitan townships identified the same ranking of land use and zoning priorities as shown in Figure 2, the issues they listed for the “Other” category differed in many cases. For example, non-metropolitan townships listed dairy farms and factory farms generally as their greatest land use issue. They also indicated that annexation issues

played a significant role in land use and zoning in their townships. Comparatively, metropolitan townships listed outside storage of junk vehicles as a key issue. Additional issues included finding ways to deal with growth and developing a comprehensive plan that can both support township attitudes and future growth.

Zoning Resolution Adoption

An important factor in understanding township land use management includes determining the motivations behind adopting zoning resolutions. Information was therefore collected pertaining to when and why zoning was adopted within townships. The average year in which zoning was adopted in the sampled townships was 1970. The distribution of adoption years shows that 29 percent of townships adopted their resolutions before 1960; 44 percent adopted resolutions between 1960 and 1970; and 27 percent of townships adopted resolutions since 1980. It is interesting to note that the survey respondents included early adopters as well as somewhat recent zoning adopter townships. As expected, townships located in metropolitan areas adopted their zoning resolutions earlier than those in non-metropolitan areas; on average, metropolitan townships adopted resolutions in 1966, while non-metropolitan townships adopted their resolutions a decade later in 1976.

Townships were asked to select multiple factors that motivated their decision to adopt zoning. Detailed in Figure 3, among given choices, a township's decision to adopt a zoning resolution is motivated most frequently by encouragement from local citizens (37 percent). Many felt that growth pressures (29 percent) and locally unwanted land uses (25 percent) also contributed to the township's decision to adopt a zoning resolution. The survey results suggest that County encouragement plays a much smaller role in decision-making than does citizen encouragement. Finally, only 14 percent of townships indicated that economic development opportunities motivated the township to adopt zoning. Other reasons noted within the survey include zoning to address problems with manufactured housing, to keep the township agriculturally friendly, and to conserve and protect property values.

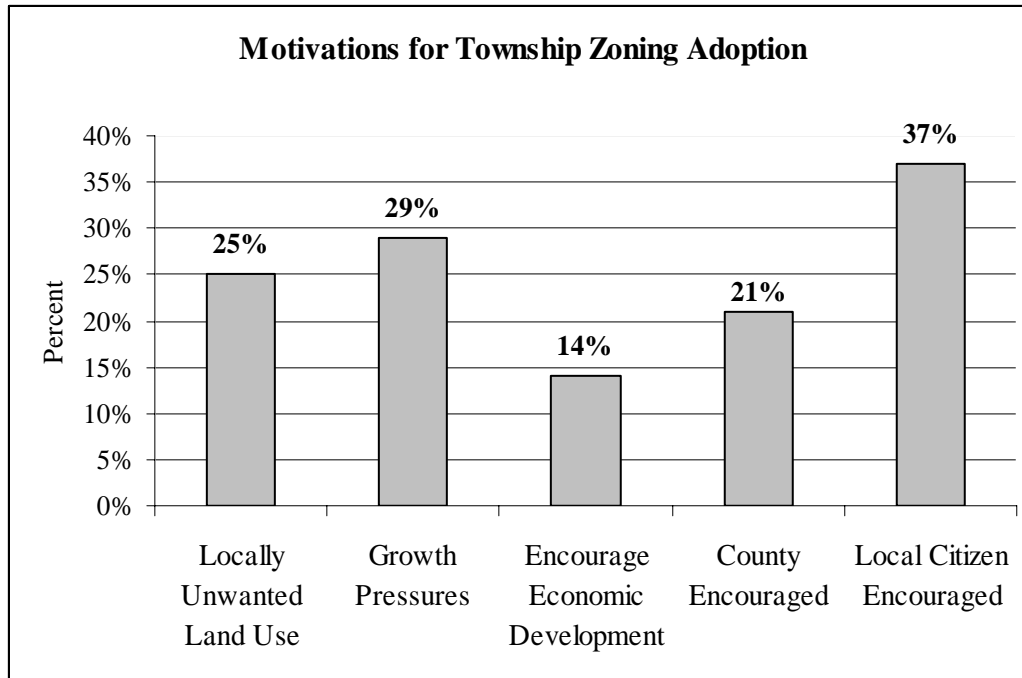


Figure 3. Percent of township respondents who felt that these factors lead to the decision to adopt a zoning resolution. Total percentages exceed 100 percent as townships were allowed to select multiple answers for this question.

Land Use Toolbox

Several survey questions focused on different land use tools within the township. Some of the tools highlighted here include a comprehensive plan, zoning map, agricultural zoning, planned unit development, local improvement districts, conservation zoning, and transfer of development rights. Information regarding the use of such land use tools can add insight to the level of sophistication of land use management and zoning in Ohio. Knowledge about the types of land use tools employed by different townships can serve as a starting point for further information exchange among townships. Sharing information among townships concerning the successes or the problems resulting from different land use tools can help other townships make more efficient and successful land use decisions.

The comprehensive land use plan is notably one of the most common and useful land use tools. A comprehensive plan is used as a policy guide to facilitate community development. The plan is developed by examining existing conditions and needs, considering opportunities and alternatives, and adopting goals and objectives that will further the orderly development of the community. Only 41 townships indicated the last time their comprehensive land use plan was revised. Based on these respondents, the average year for plan revisions was 2001; however, 17 of these townships have revised their plans within the last year. As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of townships with their own comprehensive plan (37 percent) is almost equal to the percentage that uses their county's comprehensive plan (33 percent). When responses are distinguished,

approximately 50 percent of metropolitan townships have their own comprehensive plan and 27 percent use the county's plan. Comparatively, only 20 percent of non-metropolitan townships have their own plan and 41 percent use the county's comprehensive land use plan in place of their own.

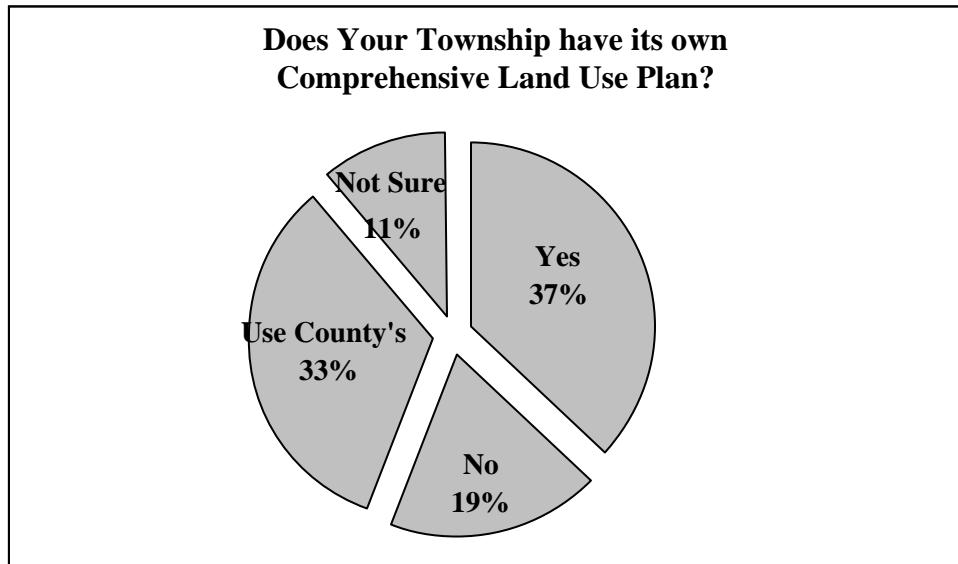


Figure 4. Survey responses indicating if the township has a comprehensive land use plan, if they are not sure if they have a comprehensive plan, or if they use the County's comprehensive plan in place of their own.

Information was also requested about township application of other land use tools such as agricultural zoning, planned unit development, local improvement districting, conservation zoning and transfer of development rights. Of these tools, the greatest numbers of respondent townships indicate that they utilize planned unit development as a land use tool. Planned unit developments are a form of development that usually includes a mix of housing units and nonresidential uses, incorporating flexibility into the zoning resolution. A considerable number of townships also adopted forms of agricultural preservation (44 townships) and conservation zoning (36 townships).

Metropolitan townships used planned unit developments most frequently, followed by conservation zoning and agricultural preservation tools. Non-metropolitan townships, being more rural in character, utilize agricultural preservation tools most frequently, followed by planned unit development and conservation zoning.

Next Steps

Currently researchers are analyzing zoning resolutions from townships across the state. Information gathered from the resolutions will help further identify which land use tools are being employed by townships. Moreover, resolutions analysis will help determine how land use tools are being used throughout Ohio's townships.

More information concerning the township zoning survey can be made available to townships in order to help officials compare their issues and concerns with other townships in the region or with townships of similar size around that state. Please contact Heidi Fought in the Ohio Township Association office at 614-863-0045 or by emailing fought@ohiotownships.org should you be interested in further information.

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