

## **Appendix C: Citizen Survey Results**

Memo To: North Brookfield Master Plan Committee  
From: Stephen Wallace, CMRPC  
Date: April 11, 2006  
Subject: Citizen Survey Results

### **The Details:**

- Nineteen questions covering such topics as land use, zoning, housing, economic development, open space, recreation, and municipal services.
- Sent to every household in North Brookfield (1,842 households)
- There were 642 responses received for a total response rate of 34.8%.

**Question #1:** What do you like about living in North Brookfield? The top three responses were:

- Small town character (508 votes)
- Low crime rate (445 votes)
- Open spaces (399 votes)

None of the other choices came close, although family ties did garner 209 votes. The results for Question #1 indicate a clear preference for a quiet, rural, crime-free community where open space is valued.

**Question #2:** What do you find undesirable about living in North Brookfield? The top two responses were:

- Lack of retail shopping opportunities (288 votes)
- Lack of employment opportunities (174 votes)

There were five choices that received a significant amount of votes:

- The school system (124 votes)
- The downtown (121 votes)
- High tax rate (118 votes)
- Lack of recreation opportunities (112 votes)
- Excessive development (111 votes)

As North Brookfield is neither a regional employment center nor a regional shopping destination, it is no surprise that residents lament the lack of shopping and employment opportunities. Furthermore, it has been my experience that issues like high tax rates and excessive development always receive high negatives on citizen surveys.

What is alarming is that the local school system and the downtown received such negative responses. That the lack of recreation opportunities would be cited as a discontent in a rural town with an extensive amount of open space is also disconcerting. We need to give some thought to how we can turn these three negatives into positives.

**Question #3:** There was no Question #3.

**Question #4:** Please check the types of businesses you feel the Town of North Brookfield needs and where you feel the businesses should be located.

- Restaurants received the highest number of votes with 568. In terms of preferred locations, the Main Street/Downtown area received the most votes with 218, followed by Route 67 with 105 votes.
- Professional services received the second highest number of votes with 563. In terms of preferred locations, the Main Street/Downtown area received the most votes with 204.
- Hardware/Home Improvement stores received the third highest number of votes with 476. In terms of preferred locations, the Main Street/Downtown area received the most votes with 274 (or 58% of the total votes).
- Small-scale retail stores received the fourth highest number of votes with 396. In terms of preferred locations, the Main Street/Downtown area received the most votes with 211 (or 53% of the total votes).
- Services received the fifth highest number of votes with 392. In terms of preferred locations, the Main Street/Downtown area received the most votes with 217 (or 55% of the total votes).
- Home-based businesses received the sixth highest number of votes with 384. In terms of preferred locations, the preferences were split fairly evenly among the five options.

Businesses that didn't receive a lot of support:

- Large-scale retail stores (177 votes)
- Clothing stores (186 votes)
- Fast food establishments (229 votes)
- Home-based agricultural businesses (279 votes)

Question #4 gives us an indication of what people would like to see in North Brookfield's downtown: restaurants, professional offices, small-scale retail stores, and services like tailors and dry-cleaners. Although home-based agricultural businesses only garnered 279 votes, I'm betting this option would garner more support if we can demonstrate that such businesses would help preserve open space and keep alive the Town's agricultural heritage. This question gives us a lot of material to work with when we get to the Economic Development chapter.

**Question #5:** Please check the types of industries you feel the Town of North Brookfield needs and where you feel the industries should be located.

- Light manufacturing received the highest number of votes with 490. In terms of preferred locations, East Brookfield Road/Gilbert Street received the most votes with 156, followed by Route 67 with 109, and Route 67/148-North with 97.
- Research and development received the second highest number of votes with 371. In terms of preferred locations, East Brookfield Road/Gilbert Street received the most votes with 105, followed by Route 67 with 83, and Route 67/148-North with 80.

Industries that received a modest level of support:

- Medical research (306 votes)
- Office parks (301 votes)
- Bio-technology (289 votes)

Industries that didn't receive a lot of support:

- Freight shipping (172 votes)
- Heavy manufacturing (176 votes)
- Defense industries (179 votes)
- Warehouse and storage (222 votes)

While most respondents answered Question #5, a significant portion did not. In terms of industries that could be integrated into North Brookfield's rural character with a minimum of damage to the environment, the survey respondent's top five choices could achieve these goals if planned for properly.

**Question #6:** Do you believe North Brookfield has enough land zoned for business purposes?

The results were fairly evenly split here, with 289 "yes" votes and 271 "no" votes. We may need to make the case that North Brookfield's business tax base has been slipping over the past twenty years and that residential property owners have had to pick up the slack. Are the citizens comfortable with this trend?

**Question #7:** Do you believe North Brookfield has enough land zoned for industrial purposes?

There were 205 "no" votes for this question and 350 "yes" votes, or 63% of the total responses. My comments under Question #6 apply here as well.

**Question #8:** What do you see as the major benefits of encouraging business/industrial development?

The top three responses were:

- More tax revenues to help ease residential tax burden (390 votes)
- More in-town jobs (384 votes)
- More tax revenues to help improve Town services

**Question #9:** What do you see as the major disadvantages of encouraging economic development?

The top three responses were:

- More truck traffic (318 votes)
- More auto traffic (315 votes)
- Loss of open space (288)

The responses to Questions #4 through #9 indicate that while citizens want more services, shopping and in-town jobs, they are not willing to sacrifice the Town's rural character. Further, citizens are not in favor of zoning more land for industry and are split in regards to zoning more land for businesses. Does this mean that citizens believe there is expansion potential in the Town's current commercial/industrial zoning districts or that the land in such districts could be better used? When we come to the Economic Development chapter, we will assess the development capacity of each commercial/industrial zoning district: how much vacant developable land is in each district, how much of the district is being used, how much of the district could be reused, etc.

**Question #10:** Would you support the rezoning of land currently zoned as residential for the following purposes?

The top four responses were:

- Office and professional uses (273 votes)
- Retail use (233 votes)
- Would not support any rezoning (193 votes)
- Light industry (189 votes)

That the "no support" option would receive such a high number of votes indicates that rezoning for economic development would be a tough sell in North Brookfield. This leads us to the following question: how to make better use of the current commercial/industrial zoning districts? We will be in a better position to answer this question once we've analyzed the expansion potential if these districts.

**Question #11:** What types of housing do you think North Brookfield needs more of?

None of the options listed received very much support, and that in its self is very telling. In fact, many respondents wrote in comments such as "no more housing" and the like under the "other" heading. Of the preferences listed, the top four responses were:

- Single-family housing (196 votes)
- Elderly housing (136 votes)
- In-law apartments in existing residences (122 votes)
- Open space residential design (118 votes)

**Question #12:** Do you favor zoning changes that would allow for new construction/conversion of existing buildings, in order to provide housing for low/moderate-income households?

The vote was fairly evenly split here with 281 "no" votes (or 52% of the respondents), versus 260 "yes" votes (or 48%).

**Question #13:** What do you think of North Brookfield's 66,000 square foot minimum lot size?

Just about two thirds (66%) of the respondents think the minimum lot size is "just right". Based on this response, I'm not sure if up-zoning (going to larger lot sizes) should be part of our gameplan. We will know much more by the time we get to the Land Use & Zoning chapter.

**Question #14:** Would you support any of the following measures to control residential growth?

All of the options received a decent level of support; however, the top two responses were:

- Limit the number of building permits issued per year (336 votes)
- Specify how fast each subdivision can be built (233 votes)

Regarding these two choices, last year's Hadley decision made it quite clear that municipalities cannot have growth control in place as a standing measure. Growth control in the forms of a cap on building permits or phasing of subdivisions can only be used for a limited time (meaning a sunset provision), and can only be in place while the municipality addresses an identified community need, such as: building a new school, upgrading a wastewater treatment plant, finding a new water source, or in the case of North Brookfield, completing a master planning process. North Brookfield's current growth control bylaw is legal because it is in place for a limited amount of time while the Town completes the Master Plan. The other growth management techniques listed under this question do not legally qualify as growth control measures, and thus are not subject to the restrictions set forth in the Hadley decision.

**Question #15:** In an effort to preserve North Brookfield's rural character, would you be in favor of any of the following initiatives?

The top two responses were:

- Protect open space (414 votes)
- Protect farming with an agricultural commission (380 votes)

**Question #16:** What types of recreation opportunities would you like to see more of in North Brookfield?

The top three responses were:

- Bike trails (258 votes)
- Theater (198 votes)
- Hiking (195 votes)

Both hiking and bike trails are recreational activities that would be in keeping with North Brookfield's rural character. Hopefully, we'll be able to identify some appropriate locations once we get to the Open Space & Recreation Plan.

**Question #17:** Rate the services.

North Brookfield's municipal services ranked by level of satisfaction:

- Fire Department – rated excellent or good by: 97%
- Emergency – rated excellent or good by: 92%
- Police Department – rated excellent or good by: 89%
- Library – rated excellent or good by: 86%
- Transfer Station – rated excellent or good by: 83%
- Council on Aging – rated excellent or good by: 81%
- Sewer Department – rated excellent or good by: 81%

- Water Department – rated excellent or good by: 79%
- Health Department – rated excellent or good by: 76%
- Conservation – rated excellent or good by: 72%
- Elected Officials – rated excellent or good by: 72%
- Planning Board – rated excellent or good by: 71%
- Building/Inspection – rated excellent or good by: 70%
- School System – rated excellent or good by: 62%
- Recreation – rated excellent or good by: 45%
- Highway Department – rated excellent or good by: 45%

With a few exceptions, the responses here are very typical of what I’ve seen from other citizen surveys: fire/police/emergency always rate very high (usually above 90% good/excellent), and planning/building/conservation (boards that occasionally have to say “no”) usually score between 65% and 75% good/excellent.

What is surprising is that the School Department scored so low. Most local school systems usually have an excellent/good rating of 80% or better. There wasn’t a lot of support for providing the Department with more money either: only 86 respondents voted to give them more money (five other departments received more support for additional funding). In fact, 55 respondents voted to give the Department less tax dollars (the highest “less” response of any of the departments).

Citizens are clearly unhappy with the Highway Department. This may be due to the Department’s chronic staffing shortages, the ability of its aging equipment to do the job, or it may be an evaluation of the Department’s job performance.

The low level of satisfaction with recreation requires a deeper investigation. Are people unhappy with the quantity of existing recreation facilities/programs, or the quality of them? I should be able to get at the quality question once I visit all of the Town’s recreation facilities as part of the Open Space & Recreation Plan. I’d also like to talk with the Recreation Commission and see what they have for attendance numbers, waiting lists, quality evaluations (if they exist), etc.

**Question #18:** Are you satisfied with the access to Town services and departments?

While the vote was seemingly one-sided with 391 “yes” votes (or 71% of the respondents), versus 158 “no” votes (or 29%), the tally is somewhat troubling. In the surveys I’ve seen that have asked this question, the overall rate of satisfaction with community services has been above 80% favorable. That North Brookfield’s town government “only” a 71% overall favorability rating should be cause for concern.

**Question #19:** Would you be in favor of expanding the municipal sewer & water systems for the following uses?

- Residential development (269 votes)
- Commercial development (206 votes)
- Industrial development (155 votes)

**Question #20:** Does North Brookfield need public transportation?

While the majority said “no” (359 votes or 65.6%), a significant portion of the population said “yes” (188 votes or 34.4%).