

Master Plan Survey Analysis

Long Hill Township Master Plan Survey Results

The survey focused on three questions:

Part II. Which current characteristics of Long Hill Township will be important in making this a desirable place to live in the future?

Over 80% of respondents rated each of the following characteristics of Long Hill Township as “Important” or “Very Important.” (“*Very Important*” responses in parentheses).

2. Access to NJ Transit rail service — 85% (52%)
3. Access to I 78 and I 287 — 93% (63%)
4. Community spirit and volunteerism — 89% (45%)
5. Good schools — 91% (73%)
6. Green “look and feel”/ open space — 93% (71%)
8. Semirural historical heritage — 81% (47%)
9. Residential neighborhoods — 93% (57%)
10. Safe place to live 98% (89%)
11. Tree-lined roads — 89% (56%)
12. Town services — 91%(61%)

Part III. Which current issues affecting Long Hill Township should the Master Plan address?

The same high degree of consensus characterized these responses as well. 80% of respondents who answered these questions either agreed or strongly agreed on the need for the Master Plan to address the following issues. (The average of 12% of respondents who checked “No Opinion” is not included):

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| 13. Encourage development of the Valley Road commercial corridor into an economically-successful, shopper-friendly “downtown” | 81% |
| 14. Ensure that new commercial development is environmentally responsible | 94% |
| 15. Ensure that new commercial development is architecturally consistent with Long Hill Township’s predominantly residential character | 89% |
| 16. Improve the visual appeal/architectural quality of existing commercial areas | 93% |
| 17. Provide more commercial ratables to offset local government costs | 83% |
| 19. Provide more passive recreation (walking/biking trails) within the township | 88% |
| 21. Re-develop aged industrial sites (such as TIFA and Thermoplastics) into attractive, productive uses | 95% |
| 22. Mitigate the potential damage from serious flooding | 89% |

IV. Which emerging issues potentially affecting Long Hill Township do you believe are important for the Master Plan Committee to consider?

Here, the number of respondents who had no opinion, 20%, was greater than in the other two questions. Of those who did answer the questions positively or negatively, over 75% said the following issues were important for the Master Plan to consider:

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| 23. The impact of future changes in Long Hill Township’s residential demographics (average age of homeowners) | 80% |
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24. The impact of future changes in Long Hill Township’s school population	91%
27. Making Long Hill Township attractive to new home-buyers seeking to use our NJT Rail stations	85%
28. Making Long Hill Township attractive to new home-buyers seeking walkable mixed use (residential and commercial) neighborhoods	79%
29. Increasing wastewater capacity to enable future growth	76%
30. Providing additional tax ratables to offset the cost of government	84%
31. Providing a wider range of shopping/dining choices for local residents	77%

Understanding the Results

With a general survey like this that doesn’t go into detailed choices or priorities for each question, it’s not useful to treat any one question as a definitive statement about an issue. The more helpful process is asking “What important issues emerge from all the survey questions?”

For example, in Part IV, less than 46% of total respondents believed it was important for the Master Plan to consider “Providing additional age-appropriate, less expensive housing for existing or new residents over 50 years old.” (30% said it was not important, and 24% had no opinion.)

But in the demographics section, of the 154 respondents who said they were retired or planned to retire in 5 years, 73% said they would prefer to spend retirement near family and friends in Long Hill Township. That result suggests it is still worth considering the availability of affordable, age-appropriate housing in Long Hill Township for seniors who might wish to retire in place rather than leave the township.

Similarly, in Part IV, only 32% of respondents thought it was important to consider providing additional life-style-appropriate, less expensive housing for existing or new residents under 30 years old who are just entering the housing market. 43% said it was “not important, and 27% had no opinion.

But 62% said it was important to consider the impact of future changes in Long Hill Township’s residential demographics — average age of homeowners. (15% said it was not important and 24% had no opinion.) 78% said it was important to consider the impact of future changes in Long Hill Township’s school population.(8% said it was unimportant and 13% had no opinion.) When you consider that Long Hill Township’s population is steadily aging and that the number of school-age children has been continuous decreasing, then it seems to make sense to consider the availability and attractiveness of Long Hill Township to the next generation of young parents or potential parents entering the housing market for the first time.

Finally, 72 % of respondents said it was important to consider making Long Hill Township attractive to new home-buyers seeking to use our NJT Rail stations. (13% said it was not important and 15% had no opinion.) 66% said it was important to consider making Long Hill Township attractive to new home-buyers seeking walkable mixed use (residential and commercial) neighborhoods. “17% said “not important” and 17% had no opinion.

These results dovetail with those above to suggest that the Master Plan needs to seriously consider how we make ourselves desirable to young Millennials who prefer walkable mixed use neighborhoods and access to mass transit instead of dependence on an automobile to meet many of the needs of daily living and employment.

Survey Validity

A survey’s validity in predicting the attitudes of a large population from the results of a small sample depends on a number of factors. The first is simply sample size: is the number of respondents in the sample large enough to provide, based on the mathematics of probability, a statistically significant representation of the whole? For example, to be 95% confident that a sample represents the whole with a ±5% margin of error, you would need a

total of 368 responses for Long Hill Township's overall population of 8,700. The number of responses to this survey, 424, exceeds that threshold comfortably.

A second test is how representative the sample is of the entire population. In the Long Hill Township Master Plan Survey, the percentage of respondents from Millington, Stirling and Gillette were within a few percentage points of the actual population percentages for these communities. There were significantly fewer responses from Meyersville residents. It's worth noting, however, that the survey questions centered on Millington, Stirling, and the Valley Road commercial area, not Meyersville. The Master Plan Element for Meyersville was adopted in 2009, and there is no intention at this point to reexamine that plan.

A third test is the correlation of the ages of respondents with that of the population as a whole. Here the survey responses were skewed towards residents ages 31-49 (47%) and 50-69 (43%). Residents under 30 years old (4%) and over 70 (6%) were significantly underrepresented. Without surveying or interviewing those people who looked at the survey but decided not to complete it, or those who didn't know about it in the first place, it's impossible to know why there were so few respondents from either extreme of the age distribution.

It's worth noting that unlike the last Master Plan surveys in 1993-94, which were publicized by a mailing to every household, the primary way residents could know about this survey was by reading the *Echoes Sentinel* or logging on to the township website. Whether the preference of people under 30 to get news from their smartphones rather than newspapers played a role in the low response is a legitimate, but ultimately unanswerable question. Similarly, because this was an on-line survey, we have no way of knowing what role and seniors' lack of comfort with technology may have played in the number of responses from this age segment. The fourth test is sample bias. As we've all seen, the political telephone surveys we are currently inundated with that attempt to predict presidential voting preferences are often inaccurate, or even dead wrong. These surveys are conducted from pre-selected lists of respondents based on their historical voting preferences, for example, "registered Democrats who voted in the last presidential election." In the case of the Long Hill Township survey, the sample was 100% voluntary with no pre-selected bias. This survey also differs from phone surveys in that instead of responding to a few forced choice questions in a short time frame, respondents had time to think through questions. One measure of the time and effort respondents put into the survey is the incredibly high number of voluntary comments — over 580 — respondents added in the write-in boxes.

Finally, the strongest argument for the survey's validity in representing the values of a large consensus of Long Hill Township's residents is based on the strength of the majority opinions on individual questions. For example, on the question "Should the Master Plan seek to re-develop aged industrial sites like Thermoplastics and TIFA into productive uses," 33% of respondents agreed and 55% strongly agreed. (5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed and 8% had no opinion.)

For those numbers to change to 50/50% split in favor or opposed, a statistically highly improbable 370 new respondents would have needed to disagree or strongly disagree with this statement against just 20 new respondents who agreed.