
A Survey of Lancaster County-1998 Perceptions and Attitudes About the Quality of Life in Lancaster

*Prepared for
The Hourglass Foundation*

*by
Polk-Lepson Research Group*

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Research Methodology

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Both quantitative and qualitative research were performed by Polk-Lepson Research Group.

The quantitative data is based on a total of 453 telephone interviews. To ensure a sample representation of Lancaster County's population, a probability stratified proportional sample was employed, including gender, age, and geographical areas.

A random list of names was obtained by a database sampling company. The list included only residents 18 years of age and older. Based on each resident's address, they were assigned a designated area coding of either Lancaster City, suburb, borough or rural.

Using the predetermined sample size and population proportions for each of the four area classifications, quotas were established based upon gender, age, and geographic area classifications. Defined skip patterns were used to determine specific respondents.

A sample of this size yields an accuracy of ± 4.8 percent at a 95 percent level of confidence.

Trained Polk-Lepson Research Group interviewers conducted the telephone interviews. Surveys were performed on weekdays, weekday evenings and weekends to ensure the randomness of the sample. Where required, call back telephone calls were made.

Focus groups were used to collect the qualitative data. A focus group is a research technology in which a small group of participants engage in a discussion on the topic being investigated. This research methodology provides an opportunity to obtain in-depth information. For this study, four focus groups were conducted. Thomas D. Lepson, Ph.D., of Polk-Lepson Research Group moderated the group discussions which were held at Franklin & Marshall College and the Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce.

The four groups were made-up of the following:

1. business leaders
2. young leaders
3. elected officials
4. informed city residents

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Survey Findings

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What do you like best about Lancaster County?

- 55.5% Countryside/farmland/open spaces/rural atmosphere
- 25.9% Nice place to live/good place to raise a family
- 20.4% People/friendly people
- 16.6% Small-town environment
- 10.8% Proximity to large metro areas/accessibility
- 7.7% Quality of life

What to you like least about Lancaster County?

- 35.2% Traffic/poor road conditions/congestion
- 23.8% Over development/too much residential housing
- 16.0% Nothing/like everything
- 8.5% Too many malls/too many commercial stores
- 7.1% Violence/crime

What do you consider to be the biggest threats to the quality of life in Lancaster County?

- 50.5% Over development/urban sprawl/loss of farmland/unlimited growth
- 37.3% Crime/drugs/violence/guns/gangs
- 7.0% Environmental concerns/water supply/air quality/industrial pollution
- 6.6% Traffic

What solutions would you propose to address the problems of over development/urban sprawl/loss of farmland/unlimited growth in Lancaster County?

- 46.8% Limit new development
- 18.2% Don't know
- 16.3% More planning/zoning laws
- 3.4% Work with what you already have
- 3.4% More communities working together
- 3.0% Make farming more profitable

Who should be responsible for implementing solutions for over development/urban sprawl/loss of farmland/unlimited growth in Lancaster County?

- 43.0% Elected officials
- 33.0% Planning commission
- 12.5% Everyone
- 11.3% Don't know

Which elected officials should be responsible for implementing solutions for over development/urban sprawl/loss of farmland/unlimited growth?

- 32.9% Local development
- 31.6% County government
- 13.9% Mayor
- 12.7% State
- 8.9% City council
- 3.8% Governor
- 3.8% All government
- 3.8% Legislators
- 3.8% Development authorities

Leadership From Business

While all groups express that the business community possesses resources that could assist in dealing with problems associated with urban sprawl, they have reservations about having the business community exert direct leadership.

- Business leaders and city residents share a common belief that there is real potential to raise the quality of life in the city if appropriate creative solutions are implemented.
- Elected officials were less optimistic in the ability to enhance the quality of life for city residents.

Solutions

The perceived solutions to the problems associated with the city vary among population groups.

- The general population favors solutions that focus on curtailing crime and violence.
- Business leaders and future young leaders express a need to bring businesses back into the city and to create more of a draw for people, such as a convention center or more entertainment options.
- City residents express the key to the city's revitalization lies with drastically increasing services relating to job training.

An alternative to increasing zoning to control urban sprawl in the county is to stop the flow of city residents moving to the county by making the city a more attractive place to reside.

Elected Officials' Role

During the discussions, the topic of confidence in local elected officials to provide effective solutions to eliminate the problem of urban sprawl was introduced.

- Business leaders speak very highly of the leadership of local officials and their ability to get the job done. Many of the business leaders share the belief that the caliber of persons elected to office in Lancaster County and City has risen in recent years.
- Unfortunately, the discussions reveal that neither city residents nor young leaders share the confidence of business leaders in Lancaster County's local elected officials. The city residents were unanimous in suggesting local officials, unlike business leaders, do not perceive the revitalization of Lancaster City as critical to slowing urban sprawl. This group of informed city residents is also unanimous in suggesting that most local elected officials from communities throughout Lancaster County have limited knowledge of the unique needs and cultures of city residents. They have little understanding of the positive aspects of living among a diverse population. Some of the concerns of the city residents appear to be validated during the elected officials' discussion group in which some of the officials attributed the deterioration of the city to the low expectations of some of its residents. For some, although not all, of the elected officials, Lancaster City is a destination to avoid.

Responsibility for Solutions

People don't know who is responsible for controlling sprawl. They don't know what can be done. They feel helpless in solving this important problem.

Approximately one-half of respondents to the general population survey feel that elected officials are the logical choice for developing and implementing solutions for urban sprawl. For the discussion group participants, responsibility for addressing urban sprawl is dependent upon the solution offered.

- Business leaders who see the long-term solutions to urban sprawl being the revitalization of the city, suggest that only a strong elected leadership with vision and the ability to motivate the business community can do the job.
- Local elected officials are insistent upon taking responsibility for solving the problem of urban sprawl. They believe that these problems are best solved at the local level. While they acknowledge that support from county government and the business community would be welcome, they insist that control of solutions rests clearly with local officials.
- Informed city residents believe the solution to urban sprawl lies in strict zoning requirements. Therefore, the logical parties to solve the problems are elected officials.

Other communities have curtailed loss of farmland to overdevelopment by paying farmers to keep their land undeveloped. This, of course, is not a new concept in Lancaster County, where there are several initiatives to provide incentives for farmers to retain their land.

- The research reveals the extent to which this strategy is favored by the general population. Overall, 76.2 percent are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of a program of this nature. The degree of support is even higher among those 18 to 34.
- Participants in all four discussion groups, while displaying some caution about implementing the program, confirm their support for providing farmers with incentives.

Zoning/Tax Revenue

Zoning generally involves some form of growth management or restriction. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of limiting sprawl may be the inability of a community to generate tax revenue from new homes and businesses.

When the concept of other municipalities sharing their tax revenues with the communities designated as limited growth is mentioned, residents from the general population survey are evenly divided in the acceptance to this revenue-sharing concept. While approximately one-half favored revenue sharing, an equal number of residents either disagree with the concept or are undecided. When the concept was mentioned during the discussion groups, neither the business leaders nor elected officials supported this concept. The implementation of the program is seen as the problem.

Their point of reference is also the present, relating how urban sprawl is currently contributing to the decline in quality of life, not only in Lancaster County, but for Lancaster City as well.

Solutions to Urban Sprawl

The general population is quite vocal in desiring aggressive solutions to the perceived threat of urban sprawl and loss of farmland. The greatest percentage (35.8%) feel that urban sprawl can best be controlled with zoning restrictions and providing incentives to farmers not to sell their land. Restricting urban sprawl through moratoriums or stricter zoning is also echoed by future leaders' and informed city residents' discussion groups.

Not all population segments, however, embrace these strategies. According to the business leaders group, the loss of farmland can best be curtailed by revitalization of the city, thus redirecting future growth from Lancaster County's countryside toward the city. This group is quite adamant that the rebirth of the city would be a more long term, practical approach, especially in the absence of regional planning.

City residents, while seeing value in some zoning, also support the revitalization of the city. While both groups share the opinion that the city's well-being directly influences the county's well-being, they did vary on how best to revitalize the city.

Other Concepts Incentives

The research revealed mixed reaction and support for several concepts adopted by other communities to slow urban sprawl, such as incentives and revenue sharing.

- Business leaders' predominate concern is the absence of regional planning, rather than urban sprawl. They are concerned with the deterioration of the city and the negative impact it can have on the county. Additionally, they do not share the same sense of urgency in addressing urban sprawl as the general population.
- While acknowledging that population growth and overdevelopment can potentially result in urban sprawl and loss of farmland, many elected officials share a common view that despite various state restrictions, they are addressing the issue, and that any potential problems are controllable. Like business leaders, they do not share the same sense of urgency as the general population.
- Interestingly, a discussion group of young future leaders and a group of informed city residents are less optimistic that growth and development can be controlled in Lancaster County. According to these groups, the negative impact of population growth and overdevelopment on quality of life overshadows possible benefits of enhanced commerce. The young leaders view uncontrolled residential and commercial development and its accompanying road congestion the biggest threat to the quality of life in Lancaster County. These young people focus on the present, encouraging creative strategies to solve current problems.
- Among their concerns for maintaining Lancaster County's quality of life, city residents count rapid over-commercialization and uncontrolled urban sprawl. City residents feel the economic benefits derived from population growth and development appear academic, since they see little evidence to support that these benefits filter down into employment opportunities for those residing in the city.

- More than 76 percent of respondents are very or somewhat supportive of paying landowners to keep their land undeveloped in order to reduce urban sprawl as one possible solution.
- More than 44 percent of the respondents say they would be willing to pay higher taxes to live in a limited growth area.

Concern Not Shared by All

However, the degree to which urban sprawl threatens the lifestyle of Lancaster County is not necessarily shared by all population segments; neither is the sense of urgency in addressing the problem. Possibly as a result of perspectives being formed by life experiences, the discussions groups vary substantially in their perceptions about the threats to the quality of life for Lancaster County.

- Both business leaders and elected officials, while acknowledging some negative aspects associated with population growth and development, view growth as essential to growing the county's economy and development, and ensuring job opportunities. They perceive road congestion and other adverse conditions resulting from rapid population growth and development, while not desirable, as manageable when compared to other communities providing equal cultural and employment opportunities.

feel that urban sprawl is having a direct negative impact on their lives. This large population group shares a sense of urgency to find solutions that will eliminate the threats to their desired lifestyle. County and city residents repeatedly articulated an urgent need to address the problem of urban sprawl and loss of farmland.

Specifically:

- Over one-half of the respondents cite urban sprawl and overdevelopment as the biggest threat to the quality of life in Lancaster County.
- The majority of respondents (78.1%) say they consider urban sprawl a “serious problem” rather than a “minor problem” or “not a problem.”
- Almost 84 percent of the respondents agree that something should be done to stop or slow down urban sprawl.
- The majority of respondents (82.6%) feel that restrictions should be put in place to limit growth.
- What residents like least about Lancaster County is traffic (35.2%) and overdevelopment (23.6%).
- Rating crime, poverty, jobs, and urban sprawl according to how serious each is, more than 68 percent of the respondents rate urban sprawl as serious: more than 38 percent rate it as most serious.

Research Observations

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Quality of Life-County

From the general population research and the discussion groups, the following observations were drawn.

Consensus surfaced that residents of Lancaster County and City appreciate the quality of life in the county. The research reveals the extent to which residents favorably view the quality of life. Almost 80 percent of the residents responding to the general survey describe life in Lancaster County as enjoyable. They especially appreciate the ambiance and family atmosphere. Participants in the discussion groups enthusiastically echo this positive perception.

However, from the research, a major challenge emerges for Lancaster County's leadership to preserve this treasured lifestyle. While all population segments share a common belief that Lancaster County affords its residents an enjoyable quality of life, these same population segments vary greatly in their perception of whether this attractive quality of life can continue as the county's population grows at a rapid rate and residential and commercial development proceed at an aggressive pace.

Threats to County

A large portion of the population view uncontrolled growth and development as a real threat to those aspects they appreciate most about the area. For them, growth and development fosters urban sprawl, including the loss of farmland. Not only is urban sprawl considered an immediate problem, but more than 80 percent of those respondents to the general population survey

What is your age?

8.0% 18 - 25 years old
20.4% 26 - 34
19.2% 35 - 44
16.6% 45 - 54
12.6% 55 - 64
23.2% 65 and over

What is the highest level of education you completed?

13.1% Less than high school graduate
38.9% High school graduate
22.0% Some college or technical school
19.3% College graduate
6.7% Graduate school or professional degree

What is your gender?

54.7% Female
45.3% Male

Geographic area in the County where the respondents live.

45.5% Rural
25.8% Boroughs
19.5% Suburbs
9.5% City

What would make Lancaster City a more attractive place to live?

- 31.6% Keep it clean/make it better looking
- 18.9% Fix-up houses
- 18.7% Make it safer/more security/less crime and drugs
- 15.9% Don't know
- 9.9% Urban renewal
- 5.1% More shopping/restaurants
- 3.7% More jobs

How long have you lived in Lancaster County?

- 4.2% Less than 5 years
- 7.6% 5 - 9 years
- 8.7% 10 - 14 years
- 4.2% 15 - 24 years
- 75.2% 25 or more years

Have you ever lived in any area other than Lancaster County?

- 90.0% Yes
- 10.0% No

How important was quality of life in your decision to move here?

- 37.1% Very important
- 21.6% Not important
- 19.2% Job related
- 9.0% Family lives here
- 8.4% Quiet/nice atmosphere
- 4.8% From here originally
- 3.6% Had no choice

Who should be responsible for implementing solutions to the crime/drugs/violence/gun/gang problems in Lancaster City?

41.8% Elected officials
15.8% Police department
14.9% Parents
13.0% Everyone
7.4% Don't know
5.6% Planning commission
3.7% School board

Do you agree with the statement — "The future well-being of Lancaster City will have a major impact on the rest of Lancaster County."?

20.0% Strongly agree
46.3% Agree
16.9% Undecided
14.8% Disagree
2.0% Strongly disagree

Realizing that there are high concentrations of poverty in certain areas of Lancaster City, do you agree with the idea of making it easier for the City's low income households to live throughout the County?

4.5% Strongly agree
30.5% Agree
28.0% Undecided
27.1% Disagree
9.9% Strongly disagree

For what reasons do you go into Lancaster City?

- 32.6% Shop
- 22.6% Work
- 15.4% Entertainment/events
- 13.3% Farmers' market
- 12.2% Doctor
- 11.1% Visiting friends/family
- 8.2% Dinner out

How would you describe the quality of life in Lancaster City?

- 36.8% Not good
- 17.7% Average/same as anywhere else
- 16.4% Parts are good/parts are bad
- 13.2% Not safe
- 9.8% Don't know

What are the biggest threats to the quality of life in Lancaster City?

- 81.8% Crime/drugs/violence/guns/gangs
- 6.5% Economic problems/poverty

What solutions would you propose to address the threats to the quality of life in Lancaster County?

- 47.8% More police protection
- 38.5% Stiffer penalties/stricter enforcement
- 17.9% Higher educational standards/better education
- 8.7% Don't know

*Do you agree with having municipalities with growth areas .
sharing some of their new tax revenues with municipalities in
limited growth areas?*

10.2% Strongly agree
37.5% Agree
37.5% Undecided
11.3% Disagree
3.5% Strongly disagree

*Do you agree that county government should increase its
involvement in regulating and directing the development and
growth that occurs in Lancaster County?*

23.9% Strongly agree
49.9% Agree
14.4% Undecided
9.5% Disagree
2.2% Strongly disagree

Ten years from now, do you think Lancaster County will be . . .

48.8% Not as attractive a place to live
28.3% About the same
11.9% A more attractive place to live
10.8% Uncertain

Do you ever go into Lancaster City?

68.0% Yes
32.0% No

Where do you think the money should come from to finance a program to pay landowners to keep their land undeveloped?

- 41.8% Don't know
- 20.2% State government
- 17.3% Tax incentive to landowners
- 11.4% Federal government
- 6.9% Private foundations/contributions
- 6.0% Everyone

Realizing that limited growth will limit tax revenues realized from new homes and businesses, how would you feel about living in a municipality that was in a limited growth area?

- 35.8% I would be supportive
- 23.7% Don't know
- 6.2% Would not like it
- 6.2% Would not matter either way
- 3.9% Depends on how implemented

Would you be willing to pay higher taxes to live in a designated limited growth area?

- 44.3% Yes
- 29.0% No
- 26.7% Don't know/not sure

Which of these four issues do you feel are "most serious" in Lancaster County?

- 52.6% Crime
- 38.1% Urban sprawl
- 5.2% Poverty
- 4.3% Jobs

What other issues do you consider serious in Lancaster County?

- 21.7% Traffic/road quality
- 20.0% Don't know
- 10.0% Educational system
- 7.5% Environmental issues
- 4.2% Taxes
- 4.2% Bad family life

How supportive are you of paying landowners to keep their land undeveloped, as is done in some other communities?

- 38.0% Very supportive
- 38.2% Somewhat supportive
- 13.9% Not supportive
- 9.9% Don't know/not sure

Who should be responsible for stopping or slowing down urban sprawl?

42.1% Elected officials
17.3% Don't know
12.3% Planning commission
7.5% Everyone
7.2% Townships
4.7% Local industry
4.2% Builders
2.2% Landowners

Which statement describes how you feel about future growth in Lancaster County?

82.6% Restrictions should be put in place to limit growth
9.8% There should be no limits placed on growth
7.6% Restriction should be put in place which would allow no growth.

If you want to limit growth, why do you feel this way?

29.4% It's not country anymore
24.6% Growth can be controlled better
14.9% Growing too fast/getting crowded
14.0% Still need business to grow

If you want limited or no growth, what restrictions should be implemented?

35.0% Don't know
34.0% Still zoning/controlled growth restrictions
8.3% Stop farmers from selling to developers
5.3% Reuse existing buildings first

What effect does urban sprawl have on you and your household?

- 33.9% More traffic/road work
- 27.1% Loss of farmland/open land/country living
- 12.9% Doesn't really affect us
- 9.9% Overcrowding/over development/over population
- 6.1% Don't know
- 2.9% Pressures on schools/school overcrowding
- 2.5% Prices go up
- 2.5% More crime/increased violence
- 2.3% More taxes/higher school tax

Do you think anything should be done to stop or slow down urban sprawl?

- 83.8% Yes
- 16.2% No

What do you think should be done to stop or slow down urban sprawl?

- 35.9% Control growth with zoning restrictions
- 26.4% Don't know
- 15.2% Help farmers be profitable
- 4.6% Use old buildings, don't build new ones
- 4.3% Just stop it
- 4.1% Everyone needs to work together
- 2.7% Have county preservation committee

Due to development, Lancaster County has been losing farmland (urban sprawl). Do you think continued loss of farmland in Lancaster County is. . .

- 77.3% A serious problem
- 19.0% A minor problem
- 3.8% Not a problem

Why do you feel the continued loss of farmland in Lancaster County is a serious problem?

- 46.0% Losing farms/need farmland/need farmers
- 19.3% Getting too built-up/too overdeveloped
- 9.8% Losing Lancaster County heritage/identity
- 7.7% Less food locally grown/food more expensive
- 6.2% Wide open space is gone/rural areas diminishing
- 3.3% Amish won't have land/will move away

Who do you feel is responsible for the problem of urban sprawl in Lancaster County?

- 26.9% Builders
- 19.0% Don't know
- 13.1% Everyone
- 12.9% Elected officials
- 9.0% Local industry
- 7.5% Planning commissions

What solutions would you propose to address the problems of crime/drugs/violence/guns/gangs?

- 26.7% More police protection
- 21.3% Stiffer penalties/stricter enforcement
- 17.3% Don't know
- 16.7% Family guidance/good moral values
- 7.3% Higher educational standards/better education

Who should be responsible for implementing solutions for crime/drugs/violence/guns/gangs?

- 29.7% Elected officials
- 26.5% Parents
- 21.9% Police department
- 7.1% Everyone
- 7.1% Don't know

Which elected officials should be responsible for implementing solutions for crime/drugs/violence/guns/gangs?

- 30.8% Mayor
- 12.8% Local government
- 12.8% Courts
- 10.3% City council
- 7.7% State
- 7.7% Legislators
- 5.1% Governor
- 5.1% All government
- 5.1% Don't know

One proposed way to make the city a more desirable place to live is to break up areas of concentrated poverty by making it easier for low income families to live throughout the county.

Respondents to the general population survey express mixed feelings on whether this would really solve the problem.

- Discussion group participants share doubts that this strategy would be effective. City residents especially doubt the wisdom of this strategy.