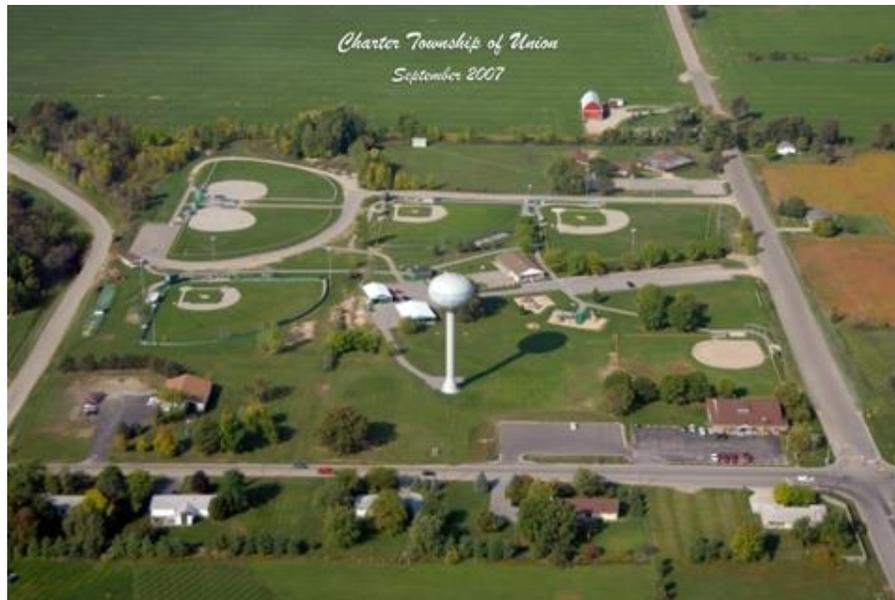


# Union Township Residents' Views of Community Issues

Report of 2016 Survey Findings  
June 27, 2016



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## **BACKGROUND**

In Fall, 2015, the Charter Township of Union contracted with the Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies (CARRS) of Central Michigan University (CMU) to complete a survey of Township residents. The purpose of the study was to explore residents' views about Township services and their preferences for the future. Findings would be useful to the Township's officials and staff in their efforts to meet residents' needs and to revise the Township's Master Plan. A similar project was undertaken by CARRS in 2009.

The Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies was created through a Michigan Research Excellence Fund grant in 1995 to address issues of concern in central and northern Michigan. The function of CARRS is to utilize the resources and academic expertise of Central Michigan University to assist governmental units such as Union Township, social agencies, and non-profit organizations in addressing social, economic, and community development issues.

## **THE QUESTIONNAIRES AND THE SAMPLES**

Two survey instruments were developed for this project by CARRS in consultation with the Union Township Board of Trustees, the Planning Commission, and Township staff. Many of the questions are replications of ones used in the CARRS survey undertaken in 2009, although they were reformatted because the 2009 survey was administered over the telephone. The first survey was developed for non-student residents of Union Township. The survey was formatted as a six-page print booklet, designed to be posted to residents through U.S. mail. An identical web survey was also created for those (few) individuals who preferred to complete the survey on line.

A second shorter survey was created for students living within apartment complexes in Union Township. The questions are a subset of those mailed to non-student residents. This second survey was only available as a web survey. Copies of the two surveys are found in Appendix B.

Two distinct samples were used in this survey project. First, Union Township provided a list of property owners in the Township. This list of names and addresses was produced from the file used for taxation purposes. Excluded from the file for the survey sample were addresses outside of Michigan and the addresses of business firms, because it was highly unlikely that these addresses were associated with individuals actually living in the Township. An additional list of addresses was created from a file containing those properties that have been approved for rentals through the rental inspection process. Hence, this second list, while lacking names of residents, allowed for a mailing to residents of single family homes that are currently being rented. For ease of nomenclature, this sample will be called the “residents sample.”

Second, given the growth in apartments in the Township in the last several years and the reasonable assumption that large numbers of those apartments are rented by CMU students, a sample of all students with the zip code 48858 was obtained from CMU. This list was then culled by CARRS’s staff and Union Township staff to include only those addresses within the Township. In addition, CARRS was provided with a listing of apartment complexes in Union Township. The manager/owner of each of these complexes that primarily serves students was contacted by CARRS. Each was asked to inform their residents about the survey and to provide the link to access it on line. While the people with whom we communicated were agreeable, we have no way of knowing how many actually did contact their residents through email, phone

texting, or newsletters. We will refer to this second sample as the “student sample” in the discussion below.<sup>1</sup>

## **ADMINISTRATION OF SURVEYS**

The Total Design Method was used for administering the print survey to the residents sample. On April 1, 2016, a cover letter, the six-page questionnaire booklet, and a postage-paid return envelope was mailed to 1,715 property owners. Five days later, 256 packets were mailed to the addresses of the single family rental units (although they were addressed simply to “Union Township Resident” because specific names were not available). Approximately one week later a post card was mailed to all of these addresses. The postcard thanked those respondents who had already taken the time to return a completed survey. It also served as a reminder to those who had not. Then, two weeks after the postcard mailing or approximately three weeks after the initial survey mailing on April 29 and May 2, a second cover letter and second questionnaire booklet was mailed to all residents from whom we had not yet received a completed questionnaire or a notification from the post office that the address we were using was not valid.

No attempt was made to contact a random adult within the household to complete the questionnaire. The assumption was that any adult household member—18 years and over—could adequately report on the behavior and opinion of household members.

The period for accepting surveys from residents closed on Thursday, June 8, 2016, having given residents one month after receiving the second mailing to return completed questionnaires. In the end, completed print surveys were returned from 705 respondents. An additional 13

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<sup>1</sup> Students living in Union Township are, of course, Township residents. We are using the terminology “residents sample” and “student sample” simply to maintain a clear distinction between the samples.

respondents completed the identical survey for residents on line.<sup>2</sup> One hundred and one survey packets were returned to CARRS because of bad addresses; 71 of these were from the list of property owners, while 30 were from the addresses approved for rental. This yields a very fine response rate for the residents sample of 38.4 percent [1,971 addresses - 101 bad addresses = final sample of 1,870 good addresses.  $(718 \text{ completed questionnaires}/1,870) * 100 = 38.4\%$ ]. The response rate from the list of property owners was 40.0 percent, while from the list of addresses of rentals it was 20.8 percent. CARRS gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance of all of the residents who spent time completing questionnaires.

Readers should remember that all random samples have associated with them a margin of error. Given the non-student households of Union Township, a sample of 718 yields a margin of error of about 3.7 percentage points, at the 95 percent confidence level. That is, a reader can be 95 percent confident that the households of Union Township fall within plus or minus 3.7 percentage points of the sample statistics presented in this report from the residents sample. If one applies the Finite Population Correction factor, which is appropriate here, the margin of error falls to slightly less than three percent (plus or minus 2.9 percent). The statistical analysis used in some portions of this report will be based on the more traditional calculation of the margin of error, which assumes a large population size.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, small differences between subgroups in the sample or between the results from one question and another should be discounted.

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<sup>2</sup> The respondents who completed the survey on line are younger than those who completed the print survey (47 years versus 57 years). They also have a higher income: 44% of print survey respondents have household incomes of \$75,000 or more while 69% of web survey respondents are in this high income category. While there are some differences in responses between the two groups of residents, most key findings are similar.

<sup>3</sup> This assumes that our sample of residents in non-student households is drawn from a large population of residents in non-student households (that would share similar characteristics across years). In point of fact, we contacted a high percentage of all non-student resident households in Union Township currently, which is why we also report the Finite Population Correction factor ( $FPC = \text{square root} [(1,876 - 718) / (1,876 - 1)] = .786$ ) here.

An email invitation to complete the web survey for students was mailed on April 6, 2016 to 754 names and email addresses that were in the student sample. A reminder email was sent to them at the very end of the Spring semester on May 13, 2016. The email provided the web address for the survey accessed simply by clicking a link in the email message itself. Students were told that they could share the link with other students living in Union Township.

While CMU asks students to update their U.S. mail contact information each semester, some students choose not to do so. This is especially the case because CMU now uses its own email system (students' "cmich" accounts) for all official communication. We have every reason to believe that the number of CMU students living in Union Township greatly exceeds the number that we directly contacted.

By June 1, 2016, when data were downloaded, only 31 respondents fully completed the student web survey, while another 12 completed the first part of the questionnaire. Since we are unsure about the number of other students contacted by the apartment complex managers/owners, we cannot calculate the response rate. It is, however, so low that no scientifically sound conclusions can be based on the student sample. We summarize these data in Appendix A so that the student voice is recognized and represented in some way and heartily thank the students who did take the time to complete the survey.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESIDENTS SAMPLE**

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their background. They were assured that their confidentiality would be maintained and that this information would be used—as here—for summary purposes only. The information from the sample of residents is summarized in Table A, using percentage distributions.

**Table A: Demographic Characteristics of the Residents Sample:  
Percentage Distributions**

	<b>1-5 years</b>	<b>6-10 years</b>	<b>11-20 years</b>	<b>21-30 years</b>	<b>31-50 years</b>	<b>51 or more years</b>
Years in Township	20.9	13.4	25.4	14.1	16.8	9.4
Years in county	10.3	8.6	16.7	14.3	25.5	24.5

	<b>High density apartment or condo complex</b>	<b>Subdivision/ urban</b>	<b>Rural/ agricultural</b>	<b>Other</b>
Location of residence	5.2	53.7	38.0	3.1

<b>Number of ...</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>One</b>	<b>Two</b>	<b>Three</b>	<b>Four</b>	<b>Five or more</b>
Adults living in household—18 to 64 years	29.0	16.5	44.8	7.7	1.0	1.0
Number of seniors—65 years and older	61.0	20.0	18.7	0.1	0.0	0.1
Number of children—12 years and younger	77.6	8.9	9.8	2.6	1.2	0.0
Number of teenagers—13 to 17 years	87.8	9.3	2.8	0.1	0.0	0.0

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>				
Gender	48.4	51.6				
	<b>18-30 years</b>	<b>31-40 years</b>	<b>41-50 years</b>	<b>51-60 years</b>	<b>61-70 years</b>	<b>±71 years</b>
Age in years	5.3	15.1	15.2	21.3	22.9	20.2
	<b>Less than \$25,000</b>	<b>25,000 up to 50,000</b>	<b>50,000 up to 75,000</b>	<b>75,000 up to 100,000</b>	<b>\$100,000 or More</b>	<b>Refusal/ Don't Know</b>
Household Income	8.5	20.5	21.3	16.3	24.4	9.1

- About one third of respondents report that they have lived in the Township for 10 years or less, while about 10 percent of respondents in the residents sample have been Township residents for 51 years or more. The average tenure in the Township is 22.1 years, while the average period of time lived in the county is necessarily longer at 33.5 years. More than one half of respondents report that they live in an area defined as “subdivision” or “urban,” with another 38 percent in an area characterized as “rural” or “agricultural.”
- One or two adults between the ages of 18 and 74 years live in about 60 percent of households in the Township. Thirty-nine percent of households contain one or more senior citizens, while 22 percent of households have children 12 years of age or younger and 12 percent of households have teenagers 13 to 17 years of age.
- Among those who responded, slightly less than one third of respondents report a household income of \$50,000 or less, while more than one quarter indicate that their household income is \$100,000 or more. Note that about one respondent in ten does not want to provide information on household income. Given the sample design, we would expect to find relatively few respondents who are 30 years of age or younger, and that is the case; about 20 percent of respondents are more than 70 years of age. The gender split is about 50-50 which is appropriate.

## **FINDINGS**

The substantive findings from the residents sample are organized into seven main sections.

- We begin by discussing respondents’ views about the quality of services they receive in Union Township.
- We then discuss respondents’ use of parks in Union Township, the City of Mount Pleasant, and Isabella County, as well as their views about park enhancement.
- We then move on to a discussion of respondents’ opinions about priority initiatives from the Township General Fund and their views about special projects from assessments.

- The next section focuses on views about development and land use in the Township.
- We then summarize information on the amount of information respondents have about Township issues and on their ways of receiving information about local issues.
- The final section of the report focused on the total sample summarizes respondents' general views about change and the quality of life in the Township. This section also includes a summary of respondents' open-ended comments about the future of the Township.
- We conclude the report by highlighting key differences between important subgroups of the sample. We compare respondents who differ in terms of years living in the Township, location of residence, and household income.

### **Quality of Services**

The questionnaire began by asking respondents “to rate the quality of various services that Union Township provides.” They were asked to “think of the grading system that the schools use—where A is excellent, B is good, C is adequate, D is fair, and E is poor.” Table 1 provides the percentage distributions for the residents sample. For this table, two panels of results are reported—the first includes only those respondents who had an opinion on the issue. That is, individuals who responded with “not applicable” or “do not use” when asked their opinion about a service are *excluded*. For this panel, mean scores are also provided, with the understanding that low scores are more positive than high scores because “excellent” is coded 1 and “poor” is coded 5. The numbers of respondents with an opinion is also provided in parentheses. The second panel *includes* those respondents who reported “not applicable” or that they “do not use” the service, as well as the ones who responded with a grade of “A” through “E.” Hence, mean scores are not available. Table 1 and all tables that follow are arranged with

the “positive” findings in descending order, so that the service with the highest mean score appears on top for the first panel and the service with the highest percentage of “A” ratings is first in the second panel.

**Table 1: Ratings of Union Township Services—Residents Sample:  
Means and Percentage Distributions**

**Respondents with an Opinion Only (“Not Applicable” and “Do not use” Excluded)**

	<b>Mean Grade</b>	<b>A Excellent (Code=1)</b>	<b>B Good (Code=2)</b>	<b>C Adequate (Code=3)</b>	<b>D Fair (Code=4)</b>	<b>E Poor (Code=5)</b>
Grade fire services of Mt. Pleasant to Union Township (N=485)	1.74	48.0	34.0	14.6	2.5	0.8
Grade Michigan State Police services provided to Township (N=527)	1.91	39.1	38.0	17.3	4.2	1.5
Grade Isabella County Sheriff services provided to Township (N=564)	1.97	36.0	40.2	16.8	4.8	2.1
Grade curbside recycling (N=585)	2.11	35.2	36.4	15.6	8.0	4.8
Grade customer services from Township staff at Township Hall or over the phone (N=618)	2.33	25.9	38.2	19.3	9.9	6.8
Grade Union Township’s water and sewer services (N=500)	2.40	22.0	39.6	21.8	9.6	7.0
Grade overall government services provided by Township (N=633)	2.55	9.8	42.3	34.9	8.7	4.3
Grade zoning and building permit application process (N=388)	2.84	11.3	30.2	34.3	11.3	12.9
Grade responsiveness of Board of Trustees members to your concerns (N=381)	2.90	10.5	26.5	36.5	15.5	11.0
Grade the rental inspection process (N=171)	2.93	11.7	23.4	37.4	15.2	12.3

**Respondents Including Those with “NA” or “Do not use” Response**

	<b>A Excel- lent</b>	<b>B Good</b>	<b>C Ade- quate</b>	<b>D Fair</b>	<b>E Poor</b>	<b>NA/ Do not use</b>
Grade fire services of Mt. Pleasant to Union Township (N=687)	33.9	24.0	10.3	1.7	0.6	29.4
Grade Michigan State Police services provided to Township (N=698)	29.5	28.7	13.0	3.2	1.1	24.5
Grade curbside recycling (N=705)	29.2	30.2	12.9	6.7	4.0	17.0
Grade Isabella County Sheriff services provided to Township (N=700)	29.0	32.4	13.6	3.9	1.7	19.4
Grade customer services from Township staff at Township Hall or over the phone (N=708)	22.6	33.3	16.8	8.6	5.9	12.7
Grade Union Township’s water and sewer services (N=700)	15.7	28.3	15.6	6.9	5.0	28.6
Grade overall government services provided by Township (N=703)	8.8	38.1	31.4	7.8	3.8	10.0
Grade zoning and building permit application process (N=699)	6.3	16.7	19.0	6.3	7.2	44.5
Grade responsiveness of Board of Trustees members to your concerns (N=670)	6.0	15.1	20.7	8.8	6.3	43.1
Grade the rental inspection process (N=695)	2.9	5.8	9.2	3.7	3.0	75.4

- The percentages of “A” or excellent ratings for respondents with opinions about the service vary considerably from a high of 48 percent for fire services of Mount Pleasant provided to Union Township to a low of 10 percent for overall government services provided by the Township.
- At least 70 percent of residents with opinions give grades of “A” or “B” to the fire services provided to the Township by Mount Pleasant, to the Michigan State Police, to

the Isabella County Sheriff and to curbside recycling. Grades of “D” or “E” are given to these four services by at most 13 percent of residents.

- Between 52 and 64 percent of residents with opinions provide excellent or good ratings to customer services from Township staff at the Township Hall or over the phone, to Union Township’s water and sewer services, and to overall government services provided by the Township. Ratings of only fair or poor for these services are provided by more than one in eight respondents.
- About one quarter or more respondents give one of the two lowest grades to four services—the zoning and building permit application process, the rental inspection process, and the responsiveness of Board of Trustees members “to your concerns.” Fewer than one half of respondents give these services excellent or good ratings, with the modal (most common) response being adequate.
- The percentages of “NA” or “do not use” responses vary considerably depending on the service in question, but tend to be high. While the vast majority of respondents have an opinion about overall government services, only 171 (24%) respondents have an opinion about the rental inspection process.

### **Use of and Views about Parks**

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the parks in Union Township and surrounding areas. They were reminded that the Township parks are McDonald Park at Lincoln and Pickard behind the Township Hall and Jameson Park off of Pickard near Isabella. Table 2 presents responses for the residents sample, summarized as percentages.

**Table 2: Views about the Parks—Residents Sample:  
Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Not at all 1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Completely 5</b>
Local parks meet recreational needs of household members <sup>4</sup>	16.1	6.8	22.1	30.6	24.4

<sup>4</sup> Based on residents who answered the question (N=651).

<b>Frequency of Park Use in the Past Year</b>			
	<b>Never</b>	<b>1 to 5 Times</b>	<b>6 or More</b>
McDonald Park	51.7	30.8	17.5
Jameson Park	69.2	27.1	3.7
Hannah's Dog Park	89.4	7.2	3.4
City Parks	21.3	34.4	44.3
County Parks	44.8	35.5	19.7

	<b>Park Closest to Your Home</b>
McDonald Park	50.9
Jameson Park	24.0
Other Parks in Isabella County	14.0
Hannah's Dog Park	11.0
City Parks	0.1

	<b>Suggestion Favored Most for Enhancing Township Parks</b>	<b>Suggestion Favored Second Most for Enhancing Township Parks</b>
Pathways linking residence to parks	19.8	10.8
Play area with splashing water (splash park)	11.9	7.7
Adult size playground/fitness equipment	11.8	11.1
Handicap accessible playground equipment	8.2	9.4
Ice skating	7.0	9.0
Basketball courts	5.6	6.1
Soccer field	2.6	3.9
Horseshoe pits	1.6	3.7
More than one suggestion selected	31.4	38.2

- Residents were asked “how well do the existing Union Township parks meet the recreational needs of your household members.” They were asked to respond “using a 5-point scale where 1 is ‘not at all’ and 5 is ‘completely.’” More than 50 percent of residents respond that the parks completely or “almost” completely (code “4” or “5”)

meet their needs, while almost one quarter indicate that their household members' needs are met "not at all" or almost not at all (code "2").

- Slightly more than one half of respondents never use McDonald Park, and almost 70 percent never use Jameson Park. About one half of the sample indicate that the park nearest to their residence is McDonald Park, with about one quarter saying that Jameson Park is the park nearest to their home. Almost 90 percent of respondents never use Hannah's Dog Park.
- By contrast, parks in the City of Mount Pleasant are used with some frequency, with more than 40 percent of respondents indicating that they use these parks six or more times a year. The use of other parks in Isabella County is comparable to the use of McDonald Park, with 45 percent indicate no use of these parks and almost one in five reporting County park use more than five times in a year.
- At least one third of respondents indicated support for a number of ways of enhancing Township parks, rather than check their *one* most preferred and *one* second most preferred enhancement option. It is, consequently, difficult to interpret results. However, the two most preferred enhancements seem to be adult size playground/fitness equipment and pathways linking residences to parks. Respondents with children 12 years of age and younger in the household are more likely to give a preferred rating to a splash park: 21 percent of respondents with children rate the play area with splashing water as their most preferred enhancement (compared to only nine percent of those without children in the household).

### **Priorities and Special Projects**

A number of questions in the interview schedule focused on the priorities of people living in the Township. Interviewers began this section of the interview by noting that: "Union Township relies on the General Fund from taxes to pay for a variety of services. Because resources from the General Fund are limited, the Township wants to know about the priorities of residents. Please indicate whether you think each initiative should be a high, medium, or low priority for use of General Fund dollars." Table 3 provides percentage distributions summarizing the residents' views.

**Table 3: Priorities from the General Fund—Residents Sample:  
Percentage Distributions**

	<b>High Priority</b>	<b>Medium Priority</b>	<b>Low Priority</b>
Improving roads in the Township	73.2	24.0	2.8
Program to reduce mosquitoes	35.7	33.1	31.2
More sidewalks in the Township	33.0	30.0	37.1
Dedicated police officer for the Township	26.8	32.6	40.6
More bike paths in the Township	26.1	34.3	39.7
Zoning ordinance enforcement	26.0	43.2	30.8
Enhancement of Township parks	14.1	53.6	32.3

- Fortunately, respondents were able to make distinctions between initiatives and did not view all proposals as “high priority.” In fact, the range of “high priority” responses ranges from 14 to 73 percent.
- One initiative clearly stands out as a high priority. Almost three quarters of respondents indicate that improving roads in the Township is a high priority, and fewer than three percent of respondents indicate that road improvement is a low priority.
- Meanwhile, five initiatives are given “high priority” ratings and are given “low priority” ratings by about 30 percent of respondents. Residents are clearly split about the priority that should be given to a program to reduce mosquitoes, more sidewalks in the Township, a dedicated police officer for the Township, more bike paths in the Township, and zoning ordinance enforcement.
- While a majority of respondents give the enhancement of Township parks a “medium priority” rating, few—less than 15 percent—give park enhancement a “high priority” vote.

Another section of the questionnaire also focused on respondents’ support or opposition to proposals that would require funding, but these proposals would secure monies through special assessments rather than the General Fund. To make the issue of funding source clear to respondents, this set of questions was introduced as follows: “At times the Township approves special assessments in order to implement specific projects residents want. Please indicate whether you definitely support, probably support, probably oppose, or definitely oppose each of

following which would be funded through special assessments.” A “don’t know” response was also provided. Table 4 provides the percentages summarizing the responses of residents to these questions.

**Table 4: Support for Proposals from Special Assessments—Residents Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Definitely Support</b>	<b>Probably Support</b>	<b>Probably Oppose</b>	<b>Definitely Oppose</b>	<b>Don’t Know</b>
Enhancement of water treatment facility to provide softened water to residents	30.6	27.1	14.1	14.8	13.3
Additional sidewalks and pathways	29.2	35.8	16.6	12.4	6.1
Improved lighting on sidewalks and pathways	26.9	42.9	14.8	8.9	6.6
Development of a county-wide community swimming pool	23.4	26.5	20.9	21.6	7.6
Snowplowing of sidewalks and pathways	21.0	39.8	18.7	12.2	8.3
Recycling for apartments	20.7	35.2	11.8	13.5	18.8

- At least 50 percent of respondents express some level of support for each of the initiatives under analysis here. Almost 70 percent of the residents sample either definitely or probably supports improved lighting on sidewalks and pathways.
- By contrast, the percentage of oppose responses never falls below 24 percent. In fact more than 40 percent of respondents are probably or definitely opposed to a county-wide community swimming pool.
- More than 10 percent of respondents have no opinion about enhancement of the water treatment facility or recycling for apartments.

Another set of questions asked respondents to indicate how much effort should be directed to a variety of activities in the Township. Respondents could indicate their view that “much more effort,” “more effort,” “less effort,” or “much less effort” should be expended or

they could indicate that things were “okay as is.” Table 5 provides the responses of residents to these questions, summarized with percentage distributions.

**Table 5: Amount of Effort to Direct to Township Activities—Residents Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Much more effort</b>	<b>More effort</b>	<b>Okay as is</b>	<b>Less effort</b>	<b>Much less effort</b>
Reducing blight of residential properties from poor maintenance and upkeep	23.6	44.9	28.8	1.7	1.0
Reducing blight of business properties from poor maintenance and upkeep	22.6	41.2	33.5	1.7	1.0
Cooperating with local government units such as the City of Mount Pleasant and Isabella County	19.3	31.3	47.4	1.0	1.0
Reducing noise and controlling parties	16.5	28.4	50.8	3.0	1.3
Limit advertising signs and enhancing the appearance of buildings and roads	13.6	31.5	48.5	2.8	3.5
Establishing appropriate buffers between business and residential areas	13.0	32.4	50.8	2.0	1.9
Maintaining appropriate balance between the needs of business owners and the needs of residents	11.9	29.9	55.3	2.0	0.9
Controlling weeds and tall grass	11.4	34.3	49.9	3.6	0.9
Controlling light pollution—that is, light from one property affecting others	8.6	20.1	60.1	6.8	4.4

- More than 60 percent of respondents indicate that they would like “much more effort” or “more effort” directed to reducing blight both of residential properties and of business properties.
- For all other activities, respondents are split between the modal (or most common) response category of “okay as is” and wanting additional effort expended.

- More than 10 percent of respondents indicate that less effort should be directed to only one activity—controlling light pollution.

### **Development and Land Use**

Respondents were also asked about their views about “development and land use in Union Township.” They were directed to indicate their opinion by checking one of the following responses: “definitely support,” “probably support,” “probably oppose,” or “definitely oppose.” A “don’t know” option was also provided. Table 6 provides the percentage distributions summarizing responses to this question set.

**Table 6: Levels of Support for Development and Land Use—Residents Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Definitely Support</b>	<b>Probably support</b>	<b>Probably oppose</b>	<b>Definitely oppose</b>	<b>Don’t know</b>
Protecting the residential quality of existing neighborhoods	65.7	29.0	2.1	0.7	2.4
Protecting existing farmland	50.0	34.1	6.0	1.1	8.8
Developing more single family housing	24.4	53.9	9.0	4.6	8.0
Growth in commercial development—that is, offices and stores	17.2	49.9	18.6	7.4	6.9
Growth in industrial development	13.8	38.8	26.3	11.4	9.6
Developing more multi-family housing	5.2	18.7	36.5	30.6	8.9

- There is overwhelming support for two uses of land—that is, protecting existing farmland and protecting the residential quality of existing neighborhoods. At least one half of respondents express definite support, with another one third indicating probable support.
- At least two thirds of respondents also express some level of support for developing more single family housing and for the growth in commercial development. However, the percentage of residents expressing definite support is less than 25 percent.

- Respondents are split in their views about the growth in industrial development with about one half expressing some level of support and the other half expressing opposition or no opinion.
- Respondents are opposed to developing more multi-family housing, with a full two thirds expressing some level of opposition (and 30 percent indicating definite opposition).

**Amount of Information about Issues and Ways of Receiving Information**

The section of the questionnaire focused on knowledge about Township issues and ways of receiving information about local issues began by asking respondents how much knowledge they have in six areas. It was acknowledged at the outset that “Township residents differ in terms of how much information they have on specific activities and programs in the Township.” Three response options were provided—“good deal of knowledge,” “some knowledge,” and “little knowledge.” Table 7 uses percentages to summarize responses.

**Table 7: Amount of Information about Township Activities and Programs—Residents Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Good deal of knowledge</b>	<b>Some knowledge</b>	<b>Little knowledge</b>
Township website	19.0	43.3	37.7
Ability to access Township public meetings on line or on demand	13.2	39.3	47.6
Zoning ordinances in the Township	11.2	42.4	46.4
Actions of Township Board	9.2	34.4	56.4
Actions of Planning Commission	7.3	30.1	62.6
The Township Master Plan for land use	6.7	20.9	72.3

- Relatively few respondents—fewer than 20 percent—express a “good deal of knowledge” about any of the activities and programs presented to them.
- More than one half of respondents indicate “little knowledge” about the actions of the Township Board, the actions of the Planning Commission, and the Township Master Plan for land use. Almost one half report this low level of knowledge about zoning ordinances in the Township and the ability to access Township public meetings on line or on demand.

- Knowledge is highest about the Township web site, but even here 38 percent of respondents indicate “little knowledge”

Union Township was interested in how respondents currently receive information about the Township and how they might like to receive such information in the future. The survey asked: “How often do you use each of the following methods for gaining information about local issues.” The available response options were “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely,” and “never.” This question set was followed by: “How likely would you be to read or use each of the following ways of learning about local issues if they were developed IN THE FUTURE.” Here respondents could indicate “very likely,” “somewhat likely,” “not too likely,” or “don’t know.” Tables 8a and Table 8b summarize responses for the residents samples. Percentages in Table 8a focus on current information gathering, while those in Table 8b center on the likelihood of using the information source in the future.

**Table 8a: Sources of Information about Local Issues—Residents Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
Newspaper	41.5	27.1	17.7	13.6
Radio	24.1	35.1	24.3	16.5
Word of mouth from others	20.1	51.9	19.2	8.8
Township web site	6.6	28.5	31.8	33.2
Communication with Township officials	4.3	27.0	37.2	31.6
Public access to Township meetings on line or on demand	3.8	20.6	31.4	44.2
Communication with staff	3.4	30.4	38.5	27.7
Attending Township meetings	2.1	11.9	31.1	54.9

- Newspapers remain the most popular way that residents receive information on local issues, with more than 40 percent of respondents reporting using this information source “often” and more than two thirds indicating that they “often” or “sometimes” receive local news this way.
- At least 60 percent of respondents “often” or “sometimes” use the radio or word of mouth to secure local information although the percentages of the sample using these ways of securing information often is less than 25 percent.
- Large number of residents—65 percent or more—“rarely” or “never” receive local information from the Township web site, through public access to Township meetings on line or on demand, or from communication either with Township officials or staff.
- Very few residents—less than five percent—receive information by attending Township meetings, and more than 85 percent “rarely” or “never” use these official meetings as a source of information about local issues.

**Table 8b: Amount of Information about Township Activities and Programs—Residents  
Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Very likely</b>	<b>Somewhat likely</b>	<b>Not too likely</b>	<b>Don’t know</b>
Township newsletter provided through U.S. mail	51.8	29.3	16.5	2.4
Township newsletter provided through email	33.7	31.0	30.3	5.0
Information provided through social media	19.8	32.9	41.8	5.5
Town Hall meetings	5.2	23.1	63.1	8.6
Coffee hours with Township officials and staff	3.3	14.1	73.0	9.6

- More than one half of respondents indicate that they would be “very likely” to read or use a Township newsletter provided through U.S. mail if such a document were created in the future. A newsletter provided through email is less popular with respondents, although one third report that they would be “very likely” to read or use it. About 30 percent of respondents indicate that they are “somewhat likely” to read/use a Township newsletter.
- Respondents are split almost 50-50 between those who report being very or somewhat likely to access Township information provided through social media and those who

indicate that they are “not too likely” to use or “don’t know” whether they would use social media in the future.

- Very few respondents report being “very likely” to use Town Hall meetings or Coffee Hours with Township officials and staff as a way of gathering information in the future, and more than 60 percent indicate that they are “not too likely” to use these proposed sources of information about local issues.

### **Quality of Life and Open-ended Comments**

Respondents were also asked two questions designed to gauge their general views about change and the quality of life in the Township and county. Table 9 provides a summary of the responses from the residents sample, using percentages.

**Table 9: General Views about Growth and the Quality of Life—Residents Sample: Percentage Distributions**

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
Quality of life living in Union Township	24.3	61.6	11.6	1.7	0.9
Growth that has taken place in Union Township over the past 10 years	8.3	47.6	25.4	5.5	13.2

- The vast majority of residents describe “the quality of life living in Union Township” as “excellent” or “good.”
- Very few respondents—only eight percent—describe the growth that has taken place in the Township over the past 10 years as “excellent,” although almost one half indicate that it has been “good.”

Respondents were asked two open-ended questions at the end of the survey. They are: “What do you believe is the MOST IMPORTANT issue to address for affecting the future of Union Township?” “Is there anything you would like to add about issues in the Township?” CARRS staff coded these qualitative responses into a series of discrete categories (along with “other”). Any one response may be coded into more than one category, and some respondents

chose not to answer these questions. Verbatim comments, organized by category are found in Appendix C. Table 10 provides the code categories, the number of respondents in each category, and the percentage distributions based on the total sample size of 718.

**Table 10: Open-Ended Responses about Issues to Address—Residents Sample: Code Categories, Frequency and Percentage Distributions**

Code Category	Most important issue to address for affecting the future of Union Township		Anything else to add about issues in the Township	
	Number	Percentage (based on N=718)	Number	Percentage (based on N=718)
Land Use and Zoning	101	14%	28	4%
Roads and Traffic	94	13%	29	4%
Township Operations	69	10%	59	8%
Water and Sewer	65	9%	21	3%
Sidewalks, Pathways, Bikes	64	9%	14	2%
Ethical Issues in Government	39	5%	25	3%
Taxes and Assessments	37	5%	15	2%
Police and Safety	23	3%	5	1%
Blight	15	2%	19	3%
Lighting	14	2%	3	0%
Recycling and Garbage	11	2%	29	4%
No Comment	10	1%	31	4%
Positive Comments	3	0%	22	3%
Other	43	6%	31	4%

Three types of responses were most common. More than 100 respondents indicated that issues related to Land Use and Zoning were the most important issue to address for affecting the future of Union Township or added a comment along these lines when asked about “anything else.” Some of these comments focused on respondents’ desire to maintain the rural quality of

the Township. Others were explicit in mentioning the type of land use they either supported or opposed. Still others mentioned issues related to zoning itself. Comments included in this category are:

*Quit trying to make Union Township a city.*

*They need to stop the building of high density student housing of low quality.*

*Quit building subdivisions next to homes. We use to be in a rural-agricultural area. Now a subdivision (small city) has been built in our backyard. We lost everything. All our nature – view, and peace and quiet.*

*Very careful consideration before approving any more large apartment complexes. Little thought seems to have been given to the negative impact that the vast numbers of these units have had on our daily living.*

*Proper zoning of business vs. residential structures*

*Managing growth in terms of zoning, development, infrastructure, and quality of life*

*Code enforcement building and zoning*

Almost as many respondents focused on Roads and Traffic. Respondents expressed a variety of concerns about the roads. Included in this category are also concerns about traffic (and speed) on roads. Examples of comments included in this category are:

*Need better roads*

*Road repair*

*Roads plowed*

*Speed control in residential areas*

More than 100 respondents also expressed concern either about what we are calling Township Operation in Table 10 or Ethical Issues in Government. While single comments are sometimes found in both categories, the distinction is this: Township Operations comments focused on issues related to communication between residents and the Township, the need for

cooperation between the Township and other units of government, or the need for better management, generally, while the category Ethics in Government was used for comments suggesting that some residents in the Township are treated differently from others or for comments that used words suggesting negative behavior on the part of the Township that was not simply inefficient or ineffective. Examples of comments in the Township Operations category are these:

*The township seems to run smoothly, but there is too little communications about what is going on.*

*Improved communication at how taxes are put to use.*

*We need better communication and cooperation with city as there is too much us vs them.*

*Keep working together with other government bodies.*

*The township needs to be smart about how tax money is spent.*

*Sometimes seems like they are going in too many directions. Need a plan and finish projects first. Okay to look ahead. Use money smart.*

*Some of the times I have stopped at the Hall the staff seemed like it was a bother to have to wait on me.*

*The board of trustees needs to put good policy ahead of politics*

The comments found in the Ethics in Government category include these:

*Very unprofessional good old boy system – gone bad.*

*Abuse of authority by township board!*

*Corruption and untrained staff and township officials.*

*Zoning rules and their complete enforcement for everyone equally.*

Sixty five respondents focused on the access, quality, and price of Township Water and Sewer when answering the first open-ended comment about the most important issue affecting the Township's future. Here are examples of comments found in this code category:

*Availability of clean water, reliable sewage systems*

*I cannot drink Union Township water. Can't stand the taste.*

*Considering moving to the city because the water in Union is terrible!*

*Sewer/water is very expensive.*

A comparable number of residents made comments about Sidewalks, Pathways, and Bike Paths when answering one of the two open-ended questions. While the vast majority of these comments were supportive of more of these efforts, a couple of respondents were opposed to bike paths.

*The owners of all buildings and have built over the last 25 years should be accountable for sidewalks.*

*Bike paths and sidewalks would improve the safety of children as well as adult residents who wish to bike to shopping areas and parks.*

*Better sidewalks and more sidewalks.*

*Need sidewalks. My children and I bike ride, my neighbors jog - no sidewalks. Hello: we need sidewalks.*

More than 50 comments, provided in response to either of the two open-ended questions, focus on Taxes and Assessments. Examples of these responses are:

*Keep taxes down. Many people avoid Union Township because taxes are too high.*

*Find a way to use tax money more efficiently. Also stop raising taxes. The township is going to force our family to move because taxes are getting too expensive.*

*Lower taxes-lower taxes enhances growth.*

### **Subgroup Comparisons**

Table A—focusing on the demographic characteristics of the sample—shows clearly that diversity exists within the Township. Fifty-six percent of respondents have lived in the Township for 15 years or more, while 44 percent for a shorter period of time. More than one

half (54%) live in areas they would characterize as urban/subdivision while 38 percent live in rural/agricultural parts of the Township. And, 32 percent (of those who provided information on household income) have incomes less than \$50,000 while 68 percent have incomes of \$50,000 or more. Before concluding the report, it is useful to explore any differences in viewpoints and experiences that may exist between these subgroups of the Union Township population. Discussed below are differences between groups of 10 percentage points or more. They also meet the standard test of statistical significance ( $p \leq .05$ ).

### **Length of Time in the Township**

Respondents who have lived in the Township for 15 years or more are older on average than those who have been Township residents for less than 15 years (62.3 vs 49.4 years old). Longer-term residents are much more likely to have no children 12 years of age and younger living at home compared to shorter-term residents ((90.9% vs. 59.8%). Respondents who have lived in the Township for a shorter period of time are more likely to have household incomes of \$100,000 or more (32.8 vs. 22.6%).

Respondents who have lived in the Township for fewer than 15 years were more likely than those with longer tenure to give high priority to more sidewalks (44.9 vs. 24.5%) and more bike paths (33.1 vs. 21.3%). They were also more likely to indicate definite support for enhancement of the water treatment facility (40.8 vs. 22.5%), additional sidewalks and pathways (43.1 vs. 18.7%), improved lighting on sidewalks and pathways (33.1 vs. 22.2%), and sidewalk/pathways snow plowing (27.8 vs. 15.3%). Members of the sample who had lived in the Township for 15 years or more were more likely than those with fewer years in the Township to give park enhancement a low priority (38.1 vs. 24.5%), but to give zoning ordinance enforcement a high priority (32.0 vs. 17.3%). They were also more likely to report that much

more effort should be directed to reducing residential blight (28.1 vs. 18.1%). Smaller percentages of those with longer tenure in the Township were satisfied with the current amount of attention given to maintaining the appropriate balance between the needs of business owners and the needs of residents (50.3 vs. 61.2% reported “okay as is”) and to controlling light pollution (55.8 vs 66.7% said “okay as is”).

It is not surprising that respondents who had lived in the Township longer were less likely to report little knowledge about zoning ordinances (56.9 vs. 38.8%), the Master Plan for land use (79.2 vs. 66.4%), the actions of Township Board (63.8 vs. 50.1%) and the actions of the Planning Commission (69.0 v s. 57.0%).

Long-term residents of the Township were more likely to read the newspaper often to secure local news (48.1 vs. 34.2%), but were more likely to say that they would be “not too likely” to use a Township newsletter distributed through email (36.2 vs. 22.2%), to use social media (48.3 vs. 33.4%), or to use Town Hall meetings (53.3 vs 75.7%) to learn about local issues in the future.

### **Type of Residential Location**

On average respondents in urban/subdivision areas have lived in the Township for 19 years compared to those in rural/agricultural areas who have been in the Township for 27 years. The latter group is slightly older at 57.7 years compared to 54.4 years for those in urban/subdivision areas. The urban/subdivision residents are more likely than the rural/agricultural residents to be in the higher household income group of \$100,000 or more (32.2 vs. 21.4%).

Respondents living in urban/subdivision areas were more likely than those in rural/agricultural areas of the Township to give the responsiveness of the Board of Trustees to

residents' concerns an excellent or good rating (44.5 vs. 26.2%) and to give such a positive rating to overall government services (56.8 vs. 44.4%). They also were more likely to give a high priority rating to more sidewalks (42.3 vs. 19.4%), more bike paths (32.4 vs. 18.6%) and to express definite support for water treatment facility enhancement (39.9 vs. 15.5%), a community-wide swimming pool (26.6 vs. 15.4%), additional sidewalks (36.1 vs. 18.1%), improved lighting on sidewalks and pathways (31.7 vs. 19.8%), and protecting the residential quality of existing neighborhood (70.1 vs. 57.4%). Those members of the sample living in rural/agricultural areas were more likely to give definite support to protecting existing farmland (57.6 vs. 43.6%). The rural/agricultural residents were more likely to indicate that they would be not too likely to read a Township newsletter delivered through email (35.6 vs. 25.7%).

### **Income**

Respondents with household incomes of \$50,000 or more have lived in the Township for 18.4 years on average compared to the 28.3 years of Township residence for those with lower household incomes. These respondents from higher income households are also younger (53.5 years of age vs. 61.9 years for lower income respondents), and they are more likely to have children 12 years and under living in the household (27.3% vs. 14.9%).

Respondents with household incomes of \$50,000 or more were more likely than those with lower household incomes to give high priority ratings to more sidewalks (37.9 vs. 27.2%) and more bike paths (32.3 vs. 17.5%) and to give definite support to additional sidewalks and pathways (33.9 vs. 23.7%). Higher income household respondents were more likely to definitely oppose growth in industrial development (14.7 vs. 5.0%) and developing more multifamily housing (33.3 vs. 23.6%). Lower household income respondents were more likely to give high priority ratings to a dedicated police officer for the Township (33.7 vs. 23.6%) and a program to

reduce mosquitoes (42.0 vs. 32.7%). Respondents from households with income less than \$50,000 were less likely to say “okay as is” when asked about reducing noise and controlling parties (43.1 vs. 53.8%) and controlling weeds and grass (41.3 vs. 54.1%).

Lower income household respondents more likely than higher income household respondents to report little knowledge about public access to meetings on line or on demand (56.1 vs. 43.9%) and the Township website (54.5 vs. 28.3%). When asked about ways of communicating to Township residents in the future, respondents with household incomes of \$50,000 or more were more likely than others to say that is very likely that they would read a Township newsletter delivered through email (39.6 vs. 22.8%), but they were more likely to say that attending Town Hall meetings or coffee hours is not too likely (67.0 vs. 56.9% and 77.0 vs. 66.7%, respectively). Respondents with higher household incomes were more likely than others to rate the quality of life living in Union Township as excellent (27.8 vs. 17.6%).

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This report summarizes the responses of 718 Union Township residents, who responded to a survey questionnaire in April and May, 2016. Key findings are found below.

- At least 70 percent of residents with opinions give grades of “A” or “B” to the fire services provided to the Township by Mount Pleasant, to the Michigan State Police, to the Isabella County Sheriff and to curbside recycling. About one quarter or more respondents with opinions give one of the two lowest grades to four services—the zoning and building permit application process, the rental inspection process, and the responsiveness of Board of Trustees members “to your concerns.” Reasonably high numbers of respondent indicate that they have no opinion on various services provided by the Township—that is, they answered “not applicable” or “do not use.”
- More than 50 percent of residents respond that the parks completely or “almost” completely (code “4” or “5”) meet their needs, more than 30 percent indicate that their household members’ needs are met “not at all” or almost not at all (code “2”). Slightly more than one half of respondents never use McDonald Park, and almost 70 percent

never use Jameson Park. Almost 90 percent of respondents never use Hannah's Dog Park.

- One initiative clearly stands out as a high priority for spending from the General Fund. Almost three quarters of respondents indicate that improving roads in the Township is a high priority. Few respondents—less than 15 percent—give park enhancement a “high priority” vote. Opinion about other projects from the General Fund varies considerably.
- At least one half of respondents express some level of support for each of the projects that would be funded through special assessments. Almost 70 percent of the residents sample either definitely or probably supports improved lighting on sidewalks and pathways. However, the percentages of responses who oppose these proposals never fall below 24 percent. More than 40 percent of respondents are probably or definitely opposed to a county-wide community swimming pool.
- More than 60 percent of respondents indicate that they would like “much more effort” or “more effort” directed to reducing blight both of residential properties and of business properties. For all other activities, the most common response category is “okay as is.”
- At least one half of respondents express definite support, with another one third indicating probable support for protecting existing farmland and protecting the residential quality of existing neighborhoods. Two thirds of respondents are opposed to developing more multi-family housing.
- The amount of information about Township activities is low, with more than one half of the residents sample reporting little knowledge about zoning ordinances in the Township and the ability to access Township public meetings on line or on demand.
- More than two thirds of respondents indicate that they “often” or “sometimes” receive local news through the newspaper. Large number of residents—65 percent or more—“rarely” or “never” receive local information from the Township web site, through public access to Township meetings on line or on demand, or from communication either with Township officials or staff. Even fewer receive information by attending Township meetings.
- More than one half of respondents indicate that they would be “very likely” to read or use a Township newsletter provided through U.S. mail if such a document were created in the future, and one third report that they would be “very likely” to read or use it if it came through email.

- More than 85 percent of respondents report that the quality of life living in Union Township” is “excellent” or “good.” Thirty percent, however, indicate that the growth that has taken place in the Township over the past 10 years is fair or poor.
- Respondents were asked two open-ended questions about issues in the Township. More than 100 discussed land use and zoning issues, roads and traffic, and Township operations (including issues of ethics in government).