

technical
R E P E R E N C E
document

DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT
DRAFT
DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

Summary of Public Opinion Poll

Prepared by: Office of State Planning
150 West State Street CN 204
Trenton, NJ 08625

State
Development
AND
Redevelopment
Plan

SUMMARY **OF** PUBLIC OPINION **POLL**

Conducted December 5 - 14, 1986

Summary of Key Points of
the Public Opinion Poll

Technical Reference Document SDRP~87-2~S

January 30, 1987

CRAFT

State Planning Commission
Office of State Planning
Department of the Treasury
State of New Jersey
150 West State Street
CN 204
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
Telephone: (609) 292-7156

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS OF THE
PUBLIC OPINION POLL RESULTS

Summary

The New Jersey State Planning Omission authorized the Gallup Organization to conduct a public opinion poll to help them better understand the attitudes of New Jersey residents on issues related to growth and development in the State. The Commission posed a number of questions which they hoped to have answered through the Statewide survey. The questions fall into three broad categories: quality of life, governance, and future growth and development.

The Commission was concerned with how satisfied people are with the way development is occurring both in their own towns and in the State as a whole. They sought to ascertain the problem areas, or areas in need of improvement, in the way development is taking place.

Recognizing that certain community characteristics may be important to one's satisfaction with the quality of life, the Commission sought to answer such questions as: How long, and under what conditions, were people willing to travel to shopping, work, recreation, and cultural facilities? To what extent are people willing to trade off private yard space for ~~exiuvun~~ recreation areas or to support reinvestment in major cities to preserve the character of more rural areas of the State? How interested are people in preserving the environment and other amenities outside their community?

The Commission sought insight as to what the people of the State want to see in a State Development and Redevelopment Plan in order to support it. If people were not satisfied with the planning of growth in the State thus far, how could the State improve its efforts?

Finally, the Commission sought guidance as to where the people of the State thought future growth should occur.

As designed, the primary objectives of the public opinion poll, therefore, were:

To determine New Jerseyans¹ satisfaction with the way their communities are developing;

To identify those community characteristics that residents value most and those that they feel need to be improved;

To determine opinion on the way growth is being managed and public confidence in different levels of government to control growth;

To measure New Jerseyans¹ opinions of where growth should be concentrated and the importance of preserving natural and other resources;

To measure public opinion on revitalization of the State's urban areas - its feasibility and desirability.

The poll was conducted between December 5-14, 1986. Interviews were conducted by telephone, and a total sampling of 1501 adult New Jersey residents were polled.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Following is a summary of the results to the study:

New Jerseyans are generally satisfied with their communities and are optimistic about the future of their local area and the State;

The community characteristics that New Jerseyans value most are low crime rates, a clean environment, quality schools, and physical appearance;

New Jerseyans are most satisfied with their community's access to shopping, physical appearance, environment, and schools; those areas that the largest proportion feel need improvement are local taxes, traffic congestion, employment opportunities, the cost of housing, access to cultural and social activities and to recreational areas;

On balance, New Jersey residents believe development has made the State a better place to live, but this is a plurality opinion, not a majority opinion;

The overwhelming majority of residents think development will have a major impact on the State and their community, some good and some bad;

On the positive side, most residents expect increased development to bring increased employment opportunities, better access to shopping, to public transportation, and to cultural activities; the largest percentage see a negative impact of development in the areas of traffic congestion, increased local taxes, higher crime rate, and less clean environment;

When we compare attitudes on the impact of development with attitudes on the relative importance of community characteristics, we find that the characteristics residents

value most (low crime rate and clean environment) are the very «*TI*» issues en which most New Jerseyans fear development will have a negative impact. On the other hand, for those community characteristics that are less important (access to cultural activities, to recreational areas, to public transportation, employment opportunities), a plurality expect development to have a desirable impact;

The environment is an important concern for New Jerseyans: 91% say it is very or somewhat important to preserve the State's natural areas and 88% believe the State's natural resources are very or somewhat threatened by development;

New Jerseyans are most supportive of development in the more urbanized areas of the State and least supportive of development in rural areas, support concentration of development along the State's major highways, and are generally confident that the State's major urban areas can be revitalized;

A large proportion of residents (40%) support a regional approach to planning, compared with 52% who feel local communities should control growth; and when asked what level of government they feel can best manage growth, 35% choose local towns, 23% select the county, and 30% the State; and

On balance State residents believe current government control of development is not very strict, but that it should be very strict.

QUALITY OF LIFE

In determining quality of life attitudes, the poll asked questions regarding the importance of specific community characteristics, satisfaction of these characteristics in New Jersey towns, and the perceived impact of development on these community characteristics.

The two most important characteristics to New Jerseyans in evaluating the quality of life in their community are the crime rate and the environment, rated as very important by 72% to 67% respectively. Also important are the schools (61% rate very important) and the physical appearance of the community (58% rate very important), although among those with school-aged children quality of the schools ranks first.

Roughly half say local taxes, the cost of housing, and access to stores are very important, and almost as many place a similar level of importance on traffic or employment opportunities. By comparison, relatively few (fewer than one in three) say that access to public

transportation, access to recreational areas, and access to cultural and social activities are important community characteristics.

What the results to this question indicate is that New Jerseyans' primary concerns with regard to their local communities are the crime rate, the environment, the schools, and the physical appearance. And those community characteristics of least concern are access to public transportation, recreational areas, and cultural and social activities.

When asked to rate their community from excellent to poor on the same 12 characteristics, New Jersey residents give the most positive ratings to access to shopping (69%), the physical appearance of their town or city (69%), the environment (63%), the quality of the schools (59%), and the level of crime (51%). On the other hand, they give the most negative ratings to the high local taxes, traffic congestion, and employment opportunities.

There are two helpful ways of analyzing opinion on community characteristics: 1) the percent who say an issue is very important to them, and 2) the percent who say the issue is both important and who give their community a poor rating on the characteristic. In the first instance, we are measuring the potential for a community to mobilize around an issue, in the second, -we are measuring the existence of an issue.

Previously, we noted that the community characteristics most important to New Jerseyans are crime, environment, schools, and physical appearance. We next noted that most New Jerseyans give their community a positive rating on each of these characteristics. In sum, we would expect these to be non-issues as a result of community satisfaction.

If, on the other hand, we focus on those issues that are both important to New Jerseyans and for which residents give a negative rating to their community, we can identify the current community concerns. This analysis shows that among those issues studied, the key concerns today are traffic (ranked number 1), affordable housing (ranked second), and local taxes. In other words, traffic is the characteristic that the largest percentage say is both very important in their evaluation of their community, and is rated poorly in their community. Other less pressing concerns are access to recreational facilities and employment opportunities, the crime rate, access to public transportation and to cultural and social activities.

Issues of low immediate concern include the environment, quality of the schools, access to shopping, and the physical appearance of the community. While both physical appearance of the community and the environment are very important to a majority, the large majority also give their communities a high rating for each, hence these do not

represent current issues of concern.

In summary, the final column on the right side in the table below shows the percentage of New Jersey residents for whom each community characteristic is an issue of current concern; that is, it is important and rated poorly.

IMPORTANCE AND RATING OF COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Community Characteristic	% Who Say Characteristic Very Important	% Who Give Character. Positive. Rating	% Who Give Character. Neg. Rating	% Who Say Very Important AND Give Neg. Rating
	%	%	%	%
Traffic	45	36	31	39
Housing Costs	51	38	33	36
Taxes	53	34	31	32
Recreational areas	34	44	25	23
Employment	40	39	25	23
Crime	72	51	22	20
Transportation	35	50	26	19
Cultural/Social	31	43	25	1;
Environment	67	86	5	^
Schools	61	76	8	10
Shopping	47	69	12	9
Appearance	58	69	9	&

Table Percentages based on total sample of 1501 interviews.

The perceived impact of development on community characteristics is summarized in the following table.

Percent Who Believe Development Will Have An Impact en Each Characteristic

Percent Who Believe Development Will Have An Impact on Each Characteristic			
Housing	85%	Employment	71%
Traffic	14%	Schools	64%
Taxes	81%	Shopping	63%
Crime	76%	Transportation	38%
Environment	73%	Rec. Areas	53%
Appearance	72%	Cultural Activ	50%

A substantial majority of New Jerseyans believe growth and development will have a major impact on their communities. Of the 12 community characteristics studied, a majority believes development will have an important impact on each characteristic. This includes

substantial majorities who believe development will affect their communities' cost of housing (85%), traffic congestion (84%), tax rate (81%), crime rate (76%), environment (73%), physical appearance

Of particular importance are the community characteristics which people believe will be negatively impacted by development. The largest percentage see a negative impact of development in the area of traffic congestion; 78% are concerned that increased development will lead to increased traffic congestion. The next most frequently mentioned problems associated with development are the expectation of an increase in the local tax rate (mentioned by 63%) and an increase in the local crime rate (mentioned by 59%). A plurality of just under half (49%) fear increased development will result in a less clean environment.

Impact of Development and Importance of Community characteristics

When we consider New Jerseyans' opinions of the likely impact of development on their community in light of the importance of these characteristics to them, we can identify those issues most likely to play a role in the debate over development. For example, a majority of residents may feel development will have a negative impact on certain characteristics of their community, but if those characteristics are not important to them, they will be relatively unconcerned about this potential change. On the other hand, if they anticipate a negative impact on characteristics that are very important, we can anticipate increased public opposition to growth and development.

When analyzed in this way, the study provides evidence that a large number of New Jerseyans are going to be opposed to increased development in their community. The characteristics that most strongly determine residents' satisfaction with their community (crime, environment) are the very same issues on which most New Jerseyans fear development will have a negative impact. On the other hand, for those community characteristics that are less important (cultural activities, recreational areas, public transportation, employment opportunities), a plurality foresee that development will have a desired impact.

In sum, the four most likely arguments against development are that it will lead to an increase in traffic congestion, an increase in the local crime rate, a less clean environment, and increased local taxes. On the other hand, proponents of development are most likely to focus on increased employment opportunities, better schools, and improved access to shopping. These are the three areas about which the largest percentage feel that the characteristic is both important to the quality of life in their community and is likely to improve with development. While the balance of State residents believe development will be beneficial for access to public transportation, to recreational areas, and to cultural and social activities, these are not sufficiently important in residents' evaluations of their communities to become key issues in supporting development.

As previously discussed it is unclear what role housing prices and physical appearance of the community will play in discussions of development. A large majority (77%) believe the cost of housing will increase as a result of growth and development, and the cost of housing is also very important to a majority of residents. But increased housing prices, while desirable to many, will be a disadvantage to those hoping to purchase their first home and to those concerned about the affordable housing issue. Similarly, while physical appearance of a community is the fourth most important characteristic in community satisfaction, the public is equally divided on the impact of development in this area; 33% believe their community would become more attractive with development and 36% believe it would become less attractive.

Impact of Development

	<u>Important and Positive Impact (%)</u>	<u>Important and Negative Impact (%)</u>
Traffic	2	36
Crime	11	43
Environment- Overall Quality	15	34
Environment- Natural Areas	7	65
Taxes	7	36
Employment	25	4
Schools	25	13
Shopping	24	10
Transportation	17	3
Recreation	13	6
Cultural Activities	14	2
Housing Physical	18	2. r*
Appearance	20	20

Based on total sample of 1501 interviews

GOVERNANCE

When responding to questions regarding issues of governance, New Jerseyans are not clear on the level of government which controls development or the level of government best able to manage future growth in the State. An overwhelming majority of residents do agree that development controls should be stricter.

The survey found that a large percentage of New Jersey residents (40%) favor a regional approach to planning. While 52% of the respondents prefer to give primary control over development to local towns and cities, a substantial number of New Jerseyans appreciate the need for regional approaches to local issues.

When it comes to regulating growth and development, New Jerseyans were split on which level of government could do the best job of planning and managing future growth in the State. Almost as many selected the State (30%) and the county (23%) as selected their town or city (35%).

New Jersey residents are not in agreement in their assessment of the stringency of current government controls over development in the State, but there is consensus that there should be stringent control of development.

When asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how strict they believe current government control of development is, almost half (48%) gave a midpoint score of 3. Among those selecting a rating less than or higher than 3, slightly more said current controls are lax (30% gave a low rating of 1 or 2) than said they are strict (22% gave a high rating of 4 or 5).

On the other hand, when asked to rate on the same scale how strict they feel government control of development should be, almost half (47%) said "extremely strict" (a rating of 5), and 75% gave a "strict" rating of 4 or 5. Only 5% said they feel government control of development should be "Not Very Strict" (a rating of 1 or 2).

When the desired level of government control is compared with the current level of government control, the overall satisfaction with the level of government control is very low. Only 18% of New Jerseyans are satisfied with the current level of government control. Of the dissatisfied group, 6% would like less government control, while 68% want stricter government control over development.

RTIURE GROWJH - The Environment and Cities

In general, New Jerseyans are most supportive of development in the more urbanized areas of the State and least supportive of development in rural areas. When asked where they would like future development to be concentrated, the largest percentage mentioned cities, the second largest number selected suburban areas and the smallest number chose rural areas.

It should be noted that residents of urban areas are particularly supportive of concentrated development in the cities. Among those who live in an urban area, 55% would like to see development occur

mostly in the cities; among those Who live in rural areas, only 44% share this opinion.

^

Not only would a majority like to see development concentrated in urban areas, but an overwhelming majority are optimistic that the State's major cities can be revitalized, 87% say it is possible to revitalize the cities, and only 7% say it is not possible to revitalize urban centers. Virtually all of those who would like to see development concentrated in urban areas believe the cities can be revitalized - 93%.

Finally, a majority (54%) also believe that concentrating development along New Jersey's major highways is a good thing. This response may seem inconsistent with that given the preceding question regarding concentration of development in urban areas. We believe, however, that they are consistent and suggest that this is a positive acknowledgement of the abstract concept of corridor development as a concentrated development and an alternative to sprawl that is unrelated to transportation arteries.

Concern for the environment is another issue on which New Jerseyans are largely in agreement. In a number of ways, the survey results confirm that the environment is a key issue to New Jerseyans and that it contributes to people's opinions of development. As previously shown, on a list of 12 community characteristics, a clean environment ranks second in importance, after rate of crime, in evaluating satisfaction with one's community. It is more important than schools, taxes, the cost of housing, or traffic congestion.

A substantial majority (73%) also believe that development will have an impact on the environment, and among those in high growth areas 79% say growth will affect the local environment. Finally, the environment ranks fourth as the community characteristic that the largest number believe will be adversely affected by development. It is not surprising, then, to find that preservation of the State's natural areas is very important to a large majority (71%) of New Jersey residents, and that it is somewhat important to an additional 20%.

Consequently, it is important to take note of the importance of the fact that a majority (56%) believe the State's natural areas are threatened "a great deal" by increased growth and development, and that an additional 32% believe natural resources are threatened somewhat by development. In other words, we would expect the environment, both the State's natural areas and the local community environment, to be important issues in the debate over development.