

# Executive Summary

Williamstown Township's Community Survey provides insight into the feelings of neighborhood residents about their community and the services available to them. This report summarizes significant insights from the survey.

Three open-ended questions addressed the residents' likes, dislikes and concerns. The following items show what the residents *like* most about the Township:

- **Rural Character:** Of the 98 responses in this category, every response contained the word "rural" except for one. The responses included phrases like: rural atmosphere, rural character, rural community, rural environment, rural setting, and others.
- **Small Town Atmosphere:** Residents enjoy what is described, as a small town that is rural and quiet with a country atmosphere. They like the natural areas, parks and wooded natural habitats.
- **Safe and Friendly:** The people, its friendliness and safeness were cited as a "nice place to live." The Township was described as friendly with a sense of community and a safe place to live.
- **Proximity to Developed Areas:** Many residents like the location of Williamstown Township and its proximity to metropolitan areas, yet it still has a rural character. They cited its proximity to MSU, Okemos, Lansing, East Lansing and Howell.
- **Open Space:** Open space responses addressed not only undeveloped land, but also low-density population, no stores and lots of farms. Land size responses were related to not being over-developed with too many subdivisions and having reasonable sized splits of land. Combined with the residents like of rural character (38%) and a small town atmosphere (17%), a total of 67% of the respondents liked open space.

At the same time, the findings also suggest some areas of *dislike and concern*:

- **Increased Housing, Development and Density:** 82% responded that density and development and increased housing and development are a dislike of the Township. Of specific concern was over-development, out of control growth similar to Meridian Township and too many new developments. Specific dislikes were loss of rural areas to development, continuing sprawl, and the current trend toward suburb type development accompanied by up-scaling socioeconomic effects.
- **Loss of Rural Character:** As the residents express their like of the Township's rural, small town, open space atmosphere, they also express as a concern that we are losing our rural, small town atmosphere, and open spaces.
- **Commercial and Industrial Development:** Residents expressed a concern for allowing businesses to settle anywhere, particularly in rural areas. They don't want to see sprawl of scattered commerce along Grand River.
- **Code Enforcement and Township Blights:** Blight concerns cited were for houses and areas around the Township as "eyesore" properties. Other miscellaneous code enforcement dislikes were empty buildings, noise and fire restrictions.
- **Lack of bike, Walking and Other Connections to Downtown Williamston:** Cited as a dislike were not enough natural areas such as woods and wetlands which corresponds with the resident's like of a township with rural character.

# Summary of Household Survey Findings

1. Maintain the rural character of Williamstown Township *(pg. 2)*.
2. Maintain the current Williamstown Township Master Plan and its Vision Statement *(pg. 2)*.
3. Preserve wooded areas, roadside trees, wetlands, farmlands, and unique wildlife or bird habitats *(pg. 3)*.
4. Continue to allow open space developments *(pg. 4)*.
5. Direct commercial development toward the downtown area of the City of Williamston *(pg. 4)*.
6. Little support for a millage request to support community services *(pg. 4)*.
7. Mixed feelings about traffic and the overall road system of Williamstown Township *(pg. 5)*.
8. Williamstown Township residents responded favorably to the role of Township Government and also had some concern *(pg. 5)*.
9. Many residents are concerned and have questions regarding taxes *(pg. 6)*.
10. Maintain private water and septic systems *(pg. 6)*.
11. Many Williamstown Township residents are long-term residents *(pg. 7)*.
12. No more subdivisions *(pg. 7)*.

# **Williamstown Township Community Survey**

## **Summary Report**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report summarizes the major findings of a survey conducted among Williamstown Township residents in February 2005. The survey measured the attitudes of residents about the quality of life in their neighborhood and gauged their perceptions of various township/county services, activities and land use.

### **BACKGROUND**

Williamstown Township Master Plan was adopted in 1992 and revised in 2000 after a Township wide survey. The Master Plan is a document used by the Township Board and Planning Commission to guide their decisions regarding future development within the Township. The Plan contains analyses and recommendations regarding population, housing, economic development, community and recreation resources, transportation, and the future land use pattern.

It is recommended that Master Plans be reviewed every 5 to 10 years so governments are up-to-date with the residents concerns and desires. Since the last survey was conducted in 1998, a new survey was conducted.

### **FORMAT**

Part I of this report summarizes findings of the household survey, and Part II is a technical report of the findings. The survey gives resident perceptions of the Township. Future planning efforts will be based on this information. Results of this survey will also be forwarded to appropriate organizations and agencies for their response.

# Part I

## Household Survey

### Survey Objectives

The Williamstown Township Master Plan revised in 2000 sets forth the goal of maintaining the “rural atmosphere” of the Township. This concept has been an important force in guiding the Township Board and Planning Commission in various decisions related to the development of land zoning within the Township. As pressure for development increases the need to refine the concept of “rural atmosphere” is apparent. It is also important to know if protecting undeveloped land remains a priority for residents and if so, how far they are willing to go to acquire and protect it. Therefore, the central purpose of the survey was to give residents an opportunity to speak directly to this issue. Specifically, the survey:

- A. Gave opportunity for residents to respond to four open-ended questions regarding their general opinion about the Township; their likes; their dislikes, their greatest development concerns; and how they would like the Township to look in twenty years. In this section there was also a list of potential problems faced by many communities for residents to rate their thoughts on those issues.
- B. Asked residents to respond to questions regarding community services.
- C. Asked for resident opinions concerning residential, commercial and industrial development.
- D. Gave an optional opportunity for residents to answer questions about their household to be used for demographic analysis, provide any additional information, and volunteer to serve on Township committees.

### How the Survey was Conducted

The survey was designed by McKenna and Associates on behalf of the Williamstown Township Planning Commission and Board Members.

- **Participants**  
The survey was sent to 1,880 households and yielded an approximate 17% rate of return. It was distributed on a geographical basis based on location and zoning.
- **Quality Control**  
The survey process included a number coding process to assure quality control of the responses.
- **Survey Data**  
Data tabulation and analysis were done with a standard statistical software program. The summary report presents the survey’s major findings in the following pages and the Technical Report in Section II.

# FINDINGS

## 1. Maintain the Rural Character of Williamstown Township.

Rural as defined by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is open land of or relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture.

- Of the 255 responses to an open-ended question regarding what do you **Like** most about the Township 65% of the responses used the word "rural" and/or its definition (open [land, spaces, environment, etc.]; country and/or agriculture [farm, farmland, fields]) as part of their answer.
- When residents were asked how important farmlands were, 96% responded that preserving farmland was a priority. Those priorities were as follows: 59% responded with High Priority; 18% responded with Moderate Priority and 14% responded with Low Priority.
- However it should be noted, that there was no priority to change from the current agricultural uses of the Township to alternative agricultural uses. 89% said that encouraging alternative agricultural uses (e.g., nursery farms, orchards, etc.) is not a priority.

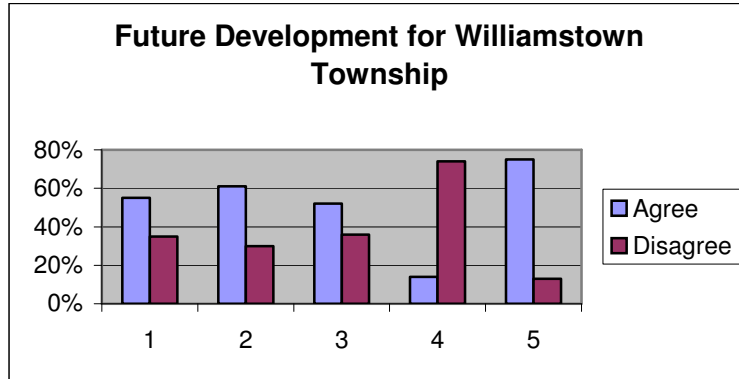
## 2. Maintain the Current Williamstown Township Master Plan and Its Vision Statement.

In 2000, the Planning Commission communicated through the Master Plan and the following statement it's vision for growth and development of the Township for the next ten years:

- Williamstown Township strives to preserve the rural qualities that are central to its image and identity, provide conditions for a variety of agricultural uses, and provide an appealing residential environment.
- The Township endeavors to retain its wealth of natural features, prime farmlands, and open spaces, while allowing limited well-planned, low-density residential and commercial development.
- The Township seeks to direct most residential and commercial development to the Grand River Avenue corridor and around the City of Williamstown, where more urban services are available.
- Williamstown Township strives to plan for and provide parks and other services, consistent with the needs generated by population growth.

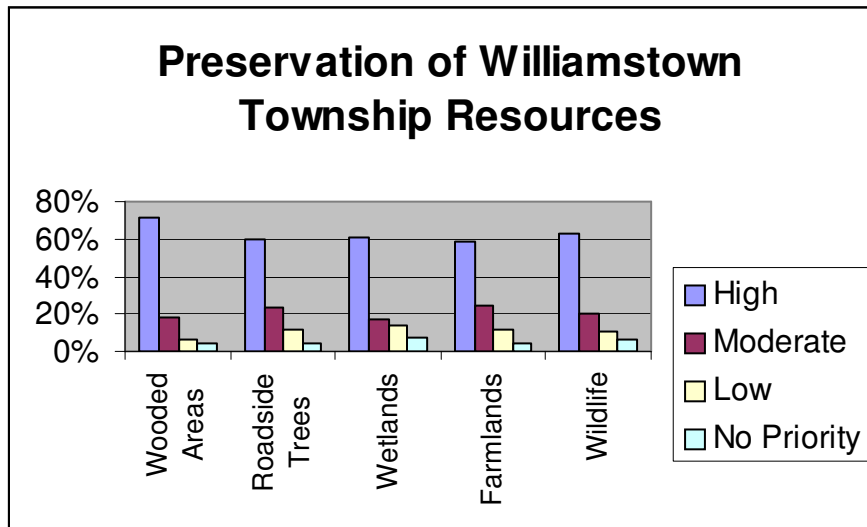
The 2005 survey asked specific question regarding future Planning and Development as it pertains to residential, commercial, and industrial development. Residents were asked if they agree or disagree. The majority agreed with all the statements except for statement four which asked if they would like to see more subdivisions developed. The statements were:

1. Intensive development should generally be confined to south of Sherwood Road.
2. Additional commercial development should be located near Grand River & Zimmer.
3. Discourage scattered commercial development along Grand River.
4. Develop more subdivisions.
5. New industrial development should be confined to the southeast part of Township.



**3. Preserve Wooded Areas, Roadside Trees, Wetlands, Farmlands, and Unique Wildlife or Bird Habitats.**

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated a desire to preserve wooded areas, roadside trees, wetlands, farmlands, and unique wildlife or bird habitats as a priority. 96% responded that preservation of wooded areas is a priority; 96% responded that preservation of roadside trees is a priority. 92% responded that preservation of wetlands is a priority; 96% responded that preservation of farmlands is a priority; and 94% responded that preservation of unique wildlife and bird habitats is a priority. The level of priority is reflected as:



It should also be noted that when asked if the Township should selectively purchase lands for the purpose of preserving valuable natural and historic resources, 50% agreed.

#### 4. Continue to Allow Open Space Developments.

Williamstown Township currently encourages the use of their cluster concept (Open Space Preservation Option) for development of large parcels. This concept allows the developers to concentrate houses onto the most buildable portions of the property so the remainder of the property can be preserved as open area, woodlands, and other natural features of the property. When asked if the Township should continue this concept provided it does not result in an increase in the total number of houses that can be developed on a parcel, 71% said yes.

67% of respondents indicated that lost of open space was a problem. While 9% responded that their greatest concern in regards to development of the Township was loss of open space.

When asked what do you like most about Williamstown Township 7% indicated open spaces.

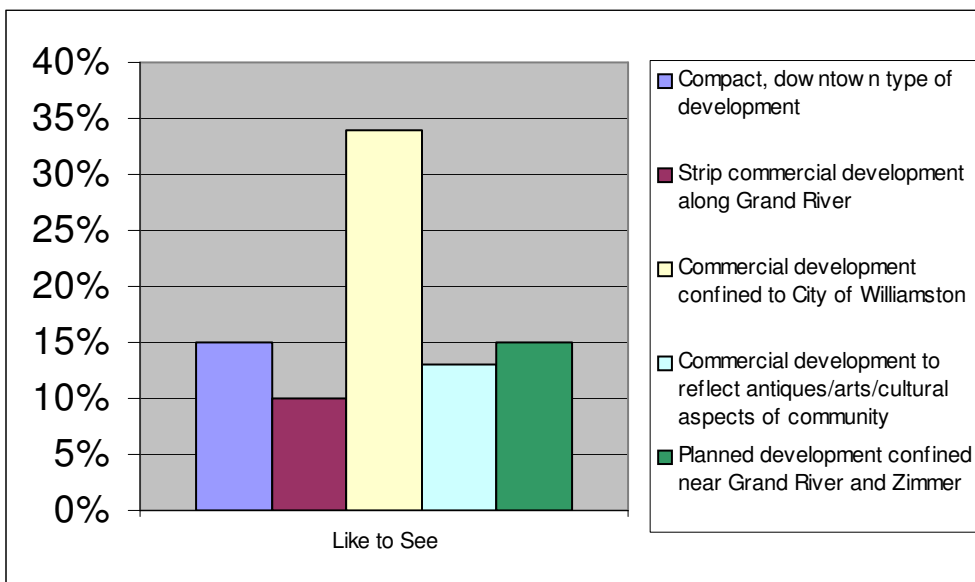
#### 5. Direct Commercial Development Toward the Downtown Area of the City of Williamston.

When asked if commercial development should be located near Grand River and Zimmer, 61% of the residents agreed.

In fact, 52% agreed that scattered commercial development should be discouraged along Grand River thus eliminating the strip type development.

However, it should be noted that 67% felt that the Grand River Corridor should reflect the rural character of the Township.

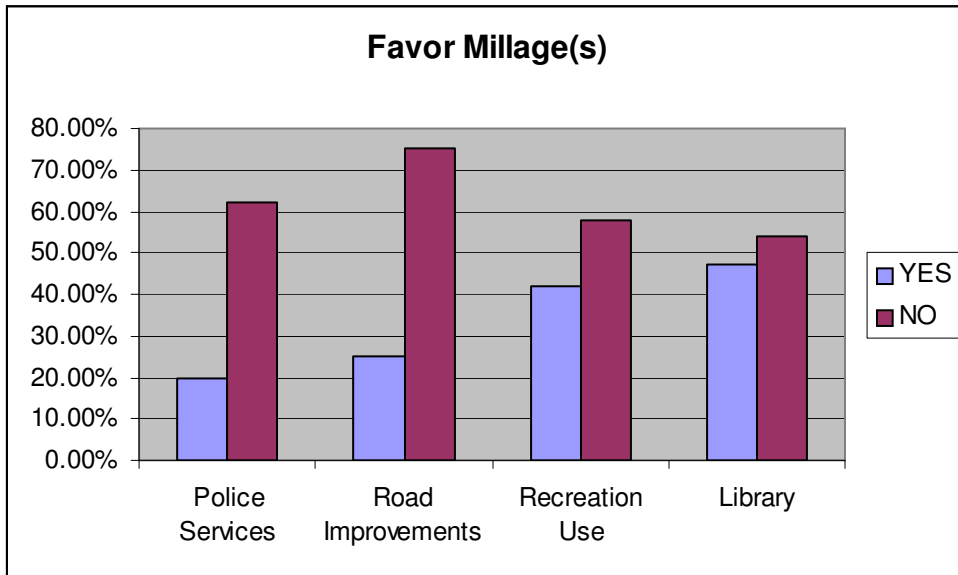
The residents were asked what type of commercial development they would like to see in Williamstown Township they responded:



#### 6. Little Support for a Millage Request to Support Community Services.

On average most residents believe that services such as police services, road maintenance, park development, and a new library are **needed**. However based on no specific proposals, they are not willing to support, at this time, a millage for such services.

- 41% of the residents believe that patrolling of residential areas should be **increased**. However, patrolling commercial and industrial areas (41%), crime investigation (38%), traffic control (53%) and community relations (44%) should **stay the same**.
- Most residents indicated that road maintenance (64%) and traffic congestion (53%) are a problem.
- 54% indicated that land should be acquired for park development.
- Although 63% of residents indicated that they use other libraries, 70% indicated that the current library is inadequate and should be relocated.



## 7. Mixed Feelings about Traffic and the Overall Road System of Williamstown Township.

Williamstown Township residents had mixed feelings in regards to the overall road system. The distinguishing factor seemed to be the condition of the roads versus traffic control and/or congestion.

When asked to rate road maintenance as a service, 52% rated it as fair and only 27% rated it as good. 20% rated road maintenance as poor.

In regards to traffic congestion, 53% of the residents responded that there is a problem. Yet when asked to rate traffic control as a public service, 53% indicated it should stay the same.

All three open-ended questions cited traffic as a response. 2% said they like the traffic in Williamstown Township. Their statements included quiet roads, no traffic, and low and/or light traffic. 16% said they dislike the traffic in Williamstown Township. Their comments centered on concerns for the Grand River/Zimmer Road intersection, speed limits, and other road maintenance issues. 8% said they have concerns for traffic in regards to development within the Township. A majority of their concerns were focused on increased traffic, congestion, control and flow of traffic.

## 8. Williamstown Township Residents Responded Favorably to the Role of Township Government and also had Some Concern.

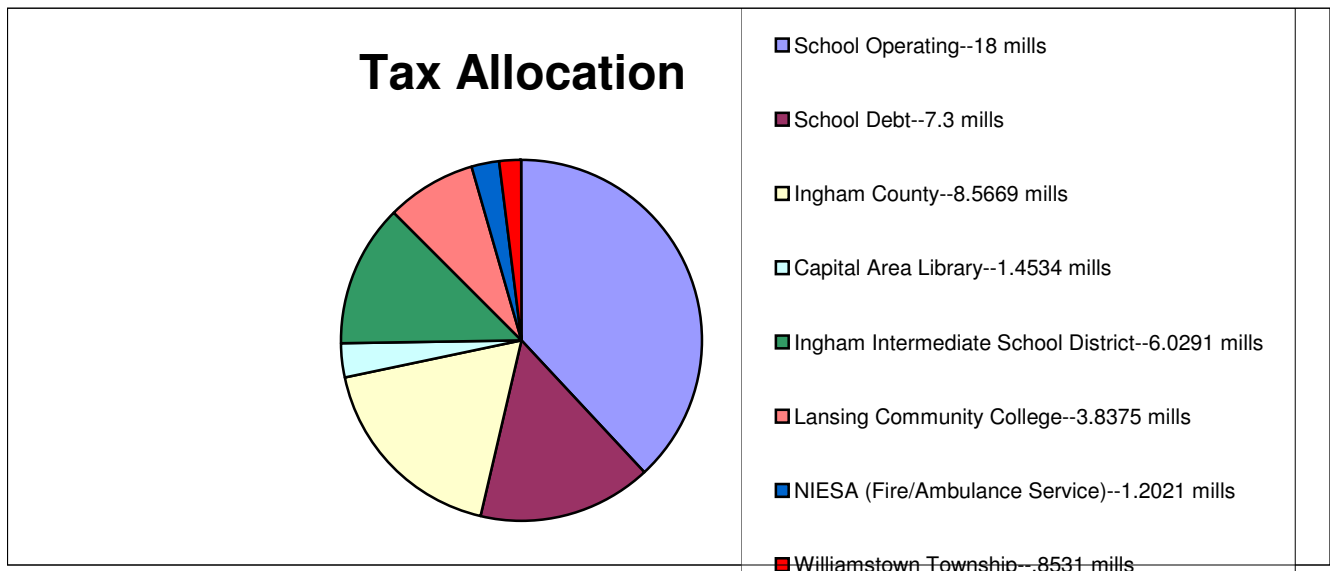
An overwhelming response of 88% of the residents said that they were satisfied with the Township office hours of operation.

When asked through an open-ended question what residents like most about the Township, they responded the Township Government. Their comments included leadership and vision and other Township Board comments such as their ability to not stray from the rules.

However, it should also be noted that when asked through an open-ended question what residents disliked most about the Township, they responded the Township Government. These comments focused on keeping the residents better informed and/or giving better response to their requests. Other concerns were in regards to development within the Township. These comments focused on rezoning that may allow high-density housing and the regulation of how land is developed.

**9. Many Residents are Concerned and have Questions Regarding Taxes.**

When responding to the three open-ended questions, residents commented on taxes. If the response was a concern, they did not specify which tax was of concern. The choice of taxes that may have been referred to if the resident lives in Ingham County, Williamston School District are:



6% who responded that they like the low tax base of Williamstown Township. All of their comments cited low taxes and/or no millage or city tax.

10% of the residents responded that they dislike their taxes and/or assessments. Their comments were that taxes are too high, and that assessments & taxes are rising.

**10. Maintain Private Water and Septic Systems.**

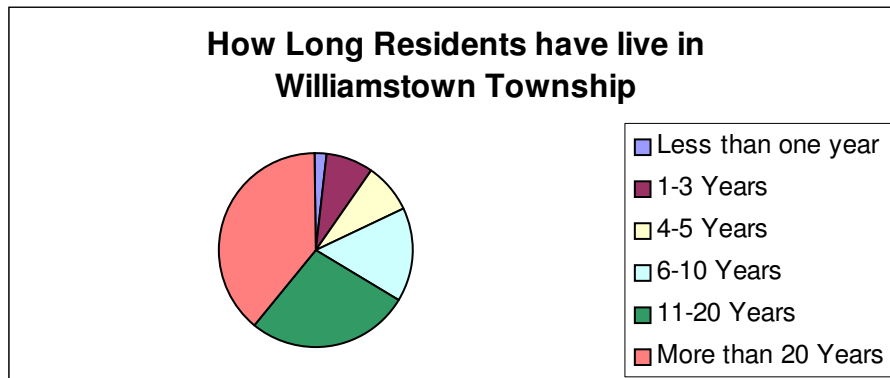
The increase in population and development of vacant lands often creates a need for public water and sanitary sewer services. However, the availability of public water and sanitary sewer service tends to result in increased density. The residents were asked to assess their needs and/or desires for these services.

When asked if the Township should develop a public water system or pursue extension of the Williamston water system, 4% indicated that the Township should develop its own and 7% said pursue Williamston water system. However, an overwhelming amount (77%) of the residents responded that neither option should be pursued.

The same question was asked about a public sanitary sewer and 5% responded that the Township should develop its own and 5% said pursue Williamston sanitary system. Again, an overwhelming amount (74%) of the residents responded that neither option should be pursued.

## 11. Many Williamstown Township residents are long-term residents.

It is important when conducting a survey of this type to assess who is answering the survey. It was found that 4 out of every 5 respondents (80%) have lived here five or more years. In fact, many of the respondents have lived here twenty or more years.



## 12. No More Subdivisions.

Throughout the survey, the residents were asked in various forms their opinions, desires and concerns regarding development with the Township. When specifically asked if they would like to see more subdivisions developed in the Township, 74% disagreed.

In fact, when asked what do they dislike most about Williamstown Township, a majority of the responses commented on their dislike for the increased housing and development. 53% of those responses to concerns regarding development were focused on density and the overall development of the Township.

When asked through an open-ended question how the residents would like to see the Township in twenty years, 41% said they would like to see it stay the same as it is now. 24% want it to maintain its rural character, and 7% responded that any development must be planned. 6% responded that open-space is important and 4% said that natural and recreational aspects of the Township would also be important over the next 20 years.

# Interpretation of Results and Future Direction

As a first step, the findings of this survey are being shared with the residents. Hopefully, this information will lead to a dialogue with residents and Township officials that sustain interest and involvement in the Township's planning activities. Our understanding of the residents desires are presented below in the form of our initial proposed responses.

**Open Space** – A majority of residents like the open space and dislike the loss of any of it. Residents are concerned that the Township Government would allow the loss of the open space. The current Master Plan provides many options to maintain open space. Similarly, proposed revisions to the Master Plan (required every five years) will provide further opportunities to maintain open space and to retain the rural atmosphere of the Township. The Township Board for the past five years has adhered to the Master Plan as a guide when making development decisions and will continue to follow the revised Master Plan.

**Density/Development**—Future development must be compatible with surrounding townships and the City of Williamston. We envision a land pattern with the highest density located around the City of Williamston where public services and utilities are available. The pattern would then decrease density in a ringed fashion to the lowest at our borders to the north where public services are not available and the surrounding townships lowest densities would provide compatibility with ours. It was clear through the survey the residents did not want the Township to back off on controlling development and maintaining the Township's rural character.

**Township Government**—Township government will continue to provide a transparency in actions and keep residents informed of what is happening in their township. We will continue our presence. Furthermore, we plan to expand and improve our website ([williamstowntowntwsp@cablespeed.com](mailto:williamstowntowntwsp@cablespeed.com)). We will also continue keeping residents informed through the newsletter. Also, we will continue to encourage residents to attend Township Board and Planning Commission meetings to make their opinions known and heard. Too often we only receive the input of a few special interests, rather than the input of residents that simply want the best for their community.

**Traffic and our roads were of concern to many residents--** The Township receives minimal funding of \$30,000 per year through Ingham County Road Commission to help maintain our road systems. A compact development pattern where major roads exist will help the Township maintain its roads with the heaviest traffic on these roads. Each spring the Township must determine what maintenance will be done on the roads. The Township has a Road Task Force Committee that reviews the existing road conditions every year and makes recommendations to the Township Board for repairs or upgrades. Please contact the Township with any thoughts you may have and they will be forwarded to the committee.

**Services--** Because we are a general law township most of our services are provided from other sources. Road maintenance comes from the Ingham County Road Commission. Surface water drainage is maintained and regulated through the Ingham County Drain Commission. Police service is through the Ingham County Sheriff's Office in Mason. The Township Board tries to maintain an ongoing relationship with all of these agencies to keep open communication with them. The Township millage rate at this time is .8531 and will be rolled back each year unless a voter-approved millage is enacted. This low rate limits the services the Township alone can offer.

**Nature/Bike Paths** – Nature and Bike paths were a desire from many residents. The Township will work with the Parks and Recreation committee to explore avenues to expand on this. The committee meets the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 pm at the Township Hall. Please feel free to attend with your thoughts and comments.

**Environmental** – The Township has adopted a Wetlands Ordinance to promote education and protection of all wetlands in the Township. We have a wetlands consultant that works for the Township on any wetlands issues that may arise. The Township is dedicated to the continuing protection of our natural resources.

**Code Enforcement** – Enforcing the Township ordinances is the responsibility of the Township Board. We strive to enforce the ordinance as fairly and uniformly as possible. The Board relies on their legal counsel for advice and the Township Constable to enforce Township ordinances.

**Taxes and Assessment-** Taxes are a concern for residents and hopefully the chart in the text will explain where tax dollars are allocated. The Township gets the smallest share of the pie. Taxes are based on taxable value not the assessed value. The assessed value of properties in the Township continues to rise. Property values are maintained and sales have resulted in benefits to the sellers. This also makes the Township a place where some people may buy for investment in the future. The Township Board must rely on the Master Plan to guide them in development with increasing property values.

**Conclusion**—The Township has reviewed all of the results and will proceed with updating the Master Plan to reflect the feelings of the residents. The Township will once again use the Master Plan as a guide to development of the Township for the next five years.