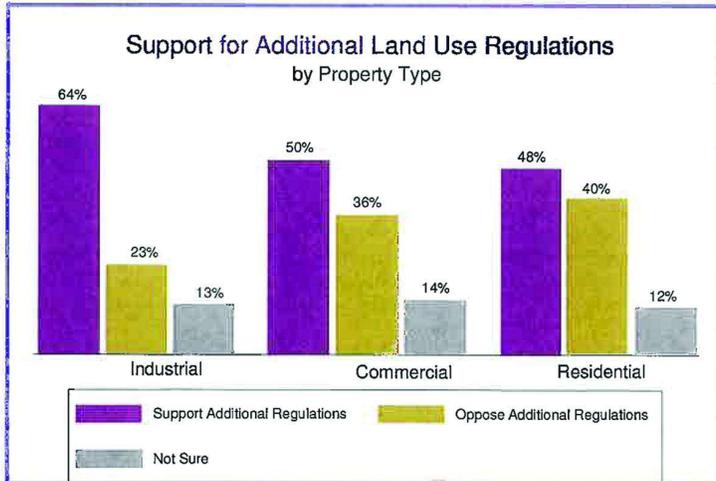


Survey shows broad support for community planning

By Vicki Hyatt | Apr 06, 2016



A telephone survey conducted the weekend of March 20 indicates about two-thirds of Haywood County residents believe it is time for a common land-use and development plan. Just under two-thirds believe there should be additional regulations on industrial land use.

There is slightly less support for regulations on commercial development where 50 percent would support additional regulations and 36 percent would oppose them. The margin tightens to a 48 for and 40 percent

against margin when it comes to residential development.

(See complete survey results at www.themountaineer.com.)

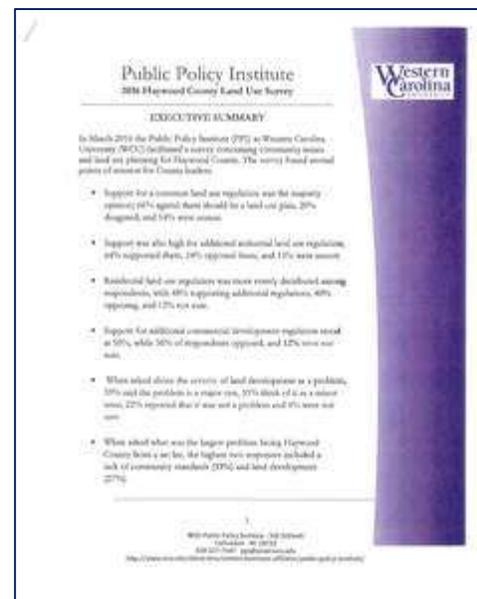
The survey was commissioned by the Haywood County Board of Commissioners in light of well-attended, recent public hearings where residents were objecting to certain activities in their neighborhood.

Commission Chairman Mark Swanger referenced comments on a proposed recycling center considered in the Beaverdam Industrial Park, as well as the community outcry against an indoor shooting in the Francis Farm area of the county.

“A lot of people were asking questions about why we didn’t have land-use planning,” Swanger said.

That prompted the board to begin a dialogue with leaders at the Public Policy Institute at Western Carolina University about conducting a community issues and land-use planning survey.

In all, 817 people responded to the survey, said Todd Collins, institute director. Given Haywood’s population of just under 60,000, the response is statistically valid with a margin of error of 3.5 percent, he said.



A list of 7,500 names were pulled from the registered voter base to select a cross-section of individuals to be polled. Those responding mirrored the ethnicity, age and gender of the broader population, Collins said.

Of those responding, 90 percent were landowners, and 67 percent lived outside town limits where there are fewer planning regulations in existence.

At the Monday county commission meeting, County Manager Ira Dove played an audio of the telephone survey that was posed to residents. Those who participated were asked to choose one of up to four choices in the multiple choice, 14-question issue portion of the survey.

Most questions asked respondents whether the topic mentioned was a major problem, minor problem, not a problem at all, or whether they were not sure. Others were simply a choice of agreeing or disagreeing with a statement, with a third option of being uncertain.

One question asked respondents to identify the largest issue in the county if the choices were 1) traffic outside town limits; 2) a lack of recreational facilities and ball fields; 3) land development; a lack of community standards related to property use, or 5) not sure.

Of those choices, 33 percent said lack of community standards for property use; 27 percent said land development and 19 percent identified the lack of recreational facilities. The other two categories were 10 and 11 percent.

“This is a great step a lot of counties should take to get a sense of what their community wants,” Collins said.

Change in attitude?

The survey, commissioners indicated, appears to show the public attitude toward planning has shifted from the reaction 20 years ago where the same group of opponents attended each of the three community meetings held on the issue and disrupted the discussion by ringing cowbells. The actions intimidated those who may have been interested in sharing an opposing view, said Swanger.

That experience, along with recent public comments, convinced the commissioners it was time to use an unbiased tool to gauge where the county was on the issue before pursuing it.

“You think you know how the community feels,” said Commissioner Bill Upton, “but this shows the perception is not necessarily what you think.”

Swanger said the next step is to turn the survey results over to the county planning board, where members can assess the information and make a recommendation on what steps to take next.

He later said whatever steps are taken would likely be the start of a lengthy community dialogue that will take months, or even a year or two, to build a consensus.