

**The Opinions of Residents:**  
**A Survey to Aid in the Creation of**  
**The Berlin Master Plan**  
*Executive Summary*

Prepared for  
The City of Berlin  
by

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## Introduction to the Random Sample Community Survey Project

The City of Berlin, New Hampshire is a community in a uniquely beautiful setting that has undergone dramatic changes throughout its history. The city is valued for its strong sense of community, long and rich history, and as an essential economic resource in the region, and significant challenges lie ahead as the community continues to adapt to changing economic and environmental conditions to best meet the needs of its residents. Like many regions of New Hampshire the City of Berlin is experiencing social and economic changes, and as a result it is a pivotal time for ensuring the long-term health and vitality of the city by developing a Master Plan for the City of Berlin.

The human dimensions of issues relevant to the development of a master plan are extensive and complex, and a social scientific, random sample survey of residents of the City of Berlin, New Hampshire was conducted to inform the creation of the Berlin Master Plan. This executive summary report presents the results and conclusions from that research in a condensed format. Readers are encouraged to see the full report and appendix for further detail on the issues highlighted in this document.

Developing a master plan is a complex process involving many areas of professional expertise and research, and many important tasks require an understanding of the social dynamics of issues within a community. Identifying residents' desires for the future through visioning processes and understanding concerns about critical issues are just a few examples of the topics master plans need to be informed about to develop effective information and recommendations.

Through consultation with the steering committee, the project team, and a review of relevant social science research specific goals for the City of Berlin Master Plan survey project were defined, and uses for the information were determined. The social science research was conducted to examine the public's opinions about key issues and desires for the future, and the findings provide information for use in the development of the City of Berlin Master Plan and can also serve to inform the design and delivery of education and outreach programs related to planning efforts.

The following are the broad goals for the community survey segment of the Berlin Master Plan creation project as identified through extensive consultation with the steering committee and the master plan project team:

- Identify residents' and landowners' perceptions of the importance of specific objectives for planning for the future of the City of Berlin
- Determine residents' and landowners' satisfaction with municipal services in the City of Berlin
- Determine residents' and landowners' satisfaction with social services in the City of Berlin
- Identify residents' and landowners' desires for specific land uses in the City of Berlin
- Ascertain residents' and landowners' attitudes towards specific issues related to future development in the City of Berlin
- Determine the perceived importance of specific housing related issues for planning for the future of the City of Berlin

- Identify residents' and landowners' level of concern about specific issues in the City of Berlin
- Determine support for the dedication of city resources and tax dollars for specific purposes
- Discern residents' and landowners' perceived usefulness of various information sources to learn about the city and on-going activities
- Provide other useful information on specific issues relevant to the development of the master plan

### Research Methods

The self-administered questionnaire survey was administered to residents and property owners in the City of Berlin. Ultimately the randomly selected sample included 885 eligible recipients selected at random from city records of property owners and registered voter lists in the community. Survey administration was conducted using a modified form of the Total Design Method (Dillman, 2000) that uses customized greetings, carefully worded and clear appeals about the purpose of the survey, and a series of precisely timed follow up contacts with non-respondents to maximize survey participation rates. Of the 885 questionnaires sent, 433 were completed and returned for an overall response rate of 48.93%.

Analyses of the questionnaire data were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and the findings presented below are a summary of conclusions from the research. A great deal of time was spent conducting detailed analyses of the responses, including the examination of relationships between demographic variables and attitudinal and perceptual measures, and the results are presented in the final report and its appendix.

Readers are strongly encouraged to use the final report and appendix of survey results for a more complete picture of the survey process and its results.

### Conclusions— Key Findings and Conclusions from the Community Survey

As a whole there are many encouraging findings for future efforts to engage in community planning from the survey, and all conclusions below are based on the findings reported. Only very important findings and interpretations of their implications are succinctly presented here, and conclusions are organized by the research questions identified to guide this research. We encourage users of this report to use the document and information as a reference resource for data on a variety of topics.

#### Identify residents' and landowners' perceptions of the importance of specific objectives for planning for the future of the City of Berlin (Sections 1 and 2 of the questionnaire)

*In these sections of the questionnaire the importance of specific planning objectives were rated on a scale where 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important.*

- Responses indicate that of all planning objectives, maintaining low property taxes was the most important, with widespread agreement on this issue (mean = 4.72).

- Facilitating opportunities for the expansion of local businesses was the second most important objective (mean = 4.65).
  - There was strong support for planning objectives that would facilitate opportunities for technology based businesses (4.55), and for promoting Berlin as a destination for outdoor recreation (4.48).
- Protecting natural resources in Berlin is also a very important planning objective to respondents (4.54).
- Planning objectives given the lowest relative importance were creating more green space downtown (3.63), and facilitating industrial business development on the pulp mill site (3.36).
- Responses indicate that sentiments about industrial development on the mill site are polarized and quite strong, with 34.13% of respondents rating the objective as very important, and 15.87% rating it is not at all important. There are a large number of neutral opinions (24.04%), but outside of that respondents have strong sentiments. Given these results, outreach on this issue is essential, and transparency in the processes affecting the mill site and clarity in the reasoning behind the decisions made are important elements of successful outreach on this issue.
- There was also not strong support for facilitating non-industrial uses of the mill site (3.87), relative to other planning objectives.
- It should be noted that all planning objectives respondents were asked about received above neutral importance overall, so rankings should be viewed in a comparative manner.
- Given the importance of the issue in the community, it should be noted that creating opportunities for renewable energy generation (4.18), and promoting alternative energy technologies (4.37) were also considered relatively important planning objectives.
- Respondents with lower annual household income saw ensuring that forestry is a part of Berlin's economy as more important than those with higher annual household income.
- Individuals with lower annual household income placed increased importance on facilitating industrial development.
- Individuals with lower annual household income saw protection of natural resources as more important.
- With all questions of taxation (in all questionnaire items about taxes), politics correlated so that those who described themselves as more liberal showed less concern, or more willingness to pay more in taxes.

Overall, facilitating business development is the most desired planning objective, as long as a balance with conservation in is maintained. Based on responses to the survey as a whole, it appears many respondents feel that many of the issues the City of Berlin needs to address will be surmountable if economic development takes place.

Determine residents' and landowners' satisfaction with municipal services in the City of Berlin (Section 3 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' satisfaction with specific municipal services was rated on a scale where 1 = not at all satisfied and 5 = completely satisfied.*

- Respondents are most satisfied with fire protection and prevention (4.26), Ambulance services (4.10), the library (3.95), waste removal services (3.90) and law enforcement (3.88).
- In contrast, respondents are least satisfied with road maintenance (2.30), community planning (2.92), and community zoning (2.99). Responses indicate that sentiments about these issues rank satisfaction below neutral (3).
- Respondents were reported moderate levels of satisfaction with public transportation in Berlin (3.10), and there were not significant differences between car owners and those who do not own a car.
- Satisfaction with most municipal services goes down with level of education.
- Older respondents indicated higher levels of satisfaction with most municipal services.

There is widespread satisfaction with most municipal services, and the on-going planning processes may address some respondents concerns with the issues that were identified. It should be noted that later questions in the survey indicate respondents do support the use of city resources, including tax dollars, for road and bridge maintenance.

Determine residents' and landowners' satisfaction with social services in the City of Berlin (Section 4 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' satisfaction with specific social services was rated on a scale where 1 = not at all satisfied and 5 = completely satisfied.*

- There is high satisfaction the availability of services for seniors (3.65) and with medical services (3.48) relative to other social services.
- Satisfaction was lowest with social services for teens (2.48) and social services for pre-teen youth (2.53).
- Older respondents showed higher levels of satisfaction with all social services.

Overall, respondents are less satisfied with social services in the City of Berlin than they are with the municipal services. An additional non-random web-based survey was completed by 433 respondents, the vast majority of whom are teens. Their responses echo the results here, and their comments also strongly support the need for more youth-targeted social services. In essence, the most common sentiment was that teens need activities, and that a growth of activities may also address some other issues among the teen age population.

Identify residents' and landowners' desires for specific land uses in the City of Berlin (Section 5 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' desires for specific land uses in the future were rated on a scale where 1 = less of the land use than currently exists, 2 = about the same, and 3 = more of the specified land use in the future.*

- Responses indicate a desire for more local businesses (2.91) and commercial development (2.83). The level of support for these land uses is extremely high.
- There is less support, but still a relatively high level of support, for industrial development (2.56), again indicating the importance of economic growth in the City of Berlin to respondents.
- Walking paths (2.70) and outdoor recreation areas (2.69) are also highly desired land uses in the future, and it should be noted that responses from the web-based survey, which was primarily completed by teens, were even more strongly in support of more outdoor recreation areas.
- Responses were less supportive of increased residential multi-family housing in the future (1.66), and high density residential areas (1.69). The existence of these land uses in the existing community most likely account for the response patterns.

Ascertain residents' and landowners' attitudes towards specific issues related to future development in the City of Berlin (Section 6 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' level of agreement with statements about specific aspects of future development in Berlin identified by the steering committee were rated on a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.*

- Responses indicate strong support for future development requiring a buffer zone around environmentally sensitive areas (3.90), and the establishment of design guidelines for new construction in the downtown area (3.82).
- Overall there was disagreement with the assertion that future development should include land on Mount Forist (2.70).
- Responses were relatively neutral about the placement of future housing developments along route 110 (3.11), and the assertion that future industrial development should be concentrated along East Milan Road (3.43). It should be noted that overall responses still indicate above neutral agreement with these statements.
- Older respondents were more likely to respond with higher levels of agreement that development should include land on Mt. Forist.

Determine the perceived importance of specific housing related issues for planning for the future of the City of Berlin (Section 7 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire the importance of specific housing related issues for planning for the future of Berlin were rated on a scale where 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important.*

- Demolishing unused structures (4.88), addressing issues related to absentee landlords (4.76), and ensuring buildings meet LIFE safety standards (4.75) are all very important issues to address in planning, according to respondents. The City of Berlin is actively addressing many of these issues.
- There is also support for preventing development on steep slopes (3.73).
- In contrast, low importance is placed upon encouraging clustered housing developments (2.51) among respondents.

Provide other useful information on specific issues relevant to the development of the master plan (Section 8 of the questionnaire, among other items)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' level of agreement with statements about Berlin identified by the steering committee were rated on a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.*

- Respondents agree very strongly that high speed internet access is important to the future well-being of Berlin (4.18).
- The statement that it is essential for Berlin's success to work regionally through cooperative efforts to share the talents and resources of other communities in the region was also strongly agreed with by respondents (4.07).
- Give the importance of the issue, it should be noted that there is largely neutral opinions about whether the creation of a casino would be a positive development for the future of Berlin if the state legally allowed communities to do so (3.33). Within those responses 51.89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 20.52% were neutral, 10.14% disagreed, and 17.45% strongly disagreed, indicating that this is a controversial issues around which there is not widespread agreement. The response pattern also indicates very strong sentiments about the issue.

Identify residents' and landowners' level of concern about specific issues in the City of Berlin (Section 9 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' level of concern about specific issues in Berlin identified by the steering committee were rated on a scale where 1 = not at all concerned and 5 = very concerned.*

- Responses indicate that residents are concerned about all the issues covered in this section of the questionnaire, with all mean levels of concern about neutral (3).
- Concerns were highest about the property tax rate (4.81), the county tax rate (4.71), the costs of city services (4.72), the costs of schools (4.56), and the availability of post-high school educational opportunities (4.26). There is overlap across some of these issues, such as school costs and tax rates.

- There was relatively low concern about the availability of low income housing (3.41) and the loss of open space (3.52), which likely is a product of the current amount of these land uses in the City of Berlin.
- There was also relatively low concern about the process of getting a building permit (3.58).

Determine support for the dedication of city resources for specific purposes (Section 10 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' were asked to identify their opinions about the use of city resources to achieve specific goals, and responses were rated on a scale where 1 = strongly opposed and 5 = strongly in favor.*

- Overall levels of support were above neutral for all the activities listed, with little variance among them.
- Ensuring opportunities for recreational activities exist along the river through the city was most strongly supported (4.14), and preserving habitat for fish and wildlife was the second most supported use of resources (4.05).

Determine support for the dedication of tax dollars for specific purposes (Section 11 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' were asked to identify their opinions about the use of their tax dollars to purchase property or easements for specific goals, and responses were rated on a scale where 1 = strongly opposed and 5 = strongly in favor.*

- Levels of support were above neutral for all the purposes listed.
- Support was highest for the demolition of dilapidated structures (4.40), and for capital improvement projects to improve local roads and bridges (4.34).
- With most spending issues, whether social services, schools, or other issues addressed, political orientation correlated in a manner where liberals displayed increased willingness to see spending on schools, infrastructure, and services.

Discern residents' and landowners' perceived usefulness of various information sources to learn about the city and on-going activities (Section 12 of the questionnaire)

*In this section of the questionnaire respondents' were asked to identify their opinions how useful various information sources are when they are looking for information about Berlin, and responses were rated on a scale where 1 = not at all useful and 4 = very useful.*

- The sources of information identified as most useful by respondents include the local/regional newspaper (2.98), word of mouth (2.81), the City of Berlin internet site (2.59), and public meetings (2.48). Results indicate the City and others holding public meetings are doing a good job of reaching out to citizens, and have credibility when doing so.
- Government publications (1.94) and journals and magazines (1.92) were identified as the least useful sources.
- Older respondents indicated higher levels of usefulness for most information sources, internet was included among those. This correlation did not exist for word of mouth.

## Conclusions from written comments received

*Comments reflected several issues of importance to respondents. Most comments focused in six general subject areas.*

- Concern over a perceived influx of individuals receiving government assistance as a burden on the city.
- Generalized need for new businesses and the jobs they create.
- The need to repair and upgrade road systems.
- Both positive and negative comments about the possibility of a casino.
- Both positive and negative comments about the current location and potential effects of the boiler project.
- The need for a visual clean up of the town of Berlin.

## Conclusion

The data clearly indicate that residents are concerned about on-going changes in the City of Berlin, have strong desires for expanded economic opportunities, and are concerned about how changes may affect the community in which they live. There is a strong desire to ensure the beauty of the region and the economic vitality of the city into the future, and to work together as a community to achieve these goals, despite some strong and varying sentiments about specific issues. The master plan is an essential step in the process of the long-term planning for the well-being of residents of the City of Berlin, and residents and project partners are encouraged to use this resource to begin to develop an understanding of the human dimensions of many issues in the community. The data reported here was collected using social science research methods to design and conduct a scientific, random sample survey of residents and property owners, and the conclusions and recommendations above represent one step in the process of developing a document, and more importantly a spirit, that can help the City of Berlin and its residents protect the places and ways of life they cherish into the future.

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