

**Elk Rapids Community Attitude Survey:
Summary of Open-Ended Responses**

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Introduction

The following is an analysis of the open ended questions in the Elk Rapids' community survey.¹ The number of responses to the survey was quite good--about 33 percent of the residents who actually received surveys answered them. (Some of the questionnaires were returned by the post office for various reasons.) Responses were tallied for village residents (152 responses), township residents (120 responses), and all residents combined (252 responses). Where notable differences were found between the village and township, both are discussed. Otherwise, only the combined totals for all survey participants are discussed.

The following pages examine the responses to each of the six open ended questions. The written responses to each question were categorized by type. Although answers in each category are similar, they are certainly not all the same. Therefore, a list of categories and a description of the responses within each group is provided for each question. A complete list of all responses will be provided at a later date.

QUESTION 6. WHAT RESIDENTS LIKE ABOUT LIVING IN ELK RAPIDS TOWNSHIP

Survey participants were asked to indicate the three aspects of Elk Rapids Township that they liked the most. The lakes, parks, and recreation available in the area was the number one answer. Nearly twenty percent of the responses referred to outdoor recreation, and village and township residents mentioned it equally.

Natural beauty was the most popular aspect of Elk Rapids Township after recreation, with 15 percent of all respondents listing it. More township residents than village residents pointed to natural beauty as a benefit of the area.

Perhaps not surprisingly, township residents valued the rural character of the area more than village residents. Conversely, village residents cited the small town atmosphere more often than township residents.

¹Open-ended questions are those in which survey participants write in their own answers rather than selecting one from a list.

Question 6. Please list the three things you value most about living in Elk Rapids Township. (Percentage of all three responses that fall under each category.)

Response	Township	Village	Total
1. Natural Beauty	20%	12%	15%
2. Rural Character	16	7	11
3. Small Town Atmosphere	11	15	13
4. Lakes, Parks & Recreation	19	19	19
5. Low Crime Rate	5	9	7
6. Friendliness of the People	13	10	11
7. Schools and/or Churches	5	10	8
8. Closeness to Traverse City	4	4	4
9. Other	7	14	11

1. Natural Beauty. Includes the scenery, open spaces, scenic overlooks, orchards, and other aspects of natural beauty.
2. Rural Character. Many people specifically mentioned "rural character". Low population and peace and quiet were also commonly mentioned.
3. Small Town Atmosphere. Many people specifically mentioned the "small town atmosphere". Also included in this category of responses are access to shops by bicycle or by foot, closeness to neighbors, and the peacefulness of the community.
4. Lakes, Parks, and Recreation. Many people mentioned lake access, the variety of lakes, harbors, bays, and parks.
5. Low Crime Rate. Many people said that they enjoyed feeling safe in Elk Rapids Township.
6. Friendliness of the people. Self-explanatory.
7. Schools and Churches. Most answers pertained to the quality of the schools and people's feelings towards their own churches.
8. Closeness to Traverse City. Residents said that they enjoyed being close to the amenities of Traverse City or "a big city" without having to live there.

9. Other. The responses varied widely. Some mentioned the overall quality of life without giving specifics, and others mentioned personal reasons, such as they were born and raised in Elk Rapids Township.

QUESTION 7. WHAT RESIDENTS DISLIKE ABOUT ELK RAPIDS TOWNSHIP

Survey participants were asked to list the three aspects of living in Elk Rapids Township that they liked the least. There were some interesting differences in the responses of township and village residents.

The quality and/or quantity of shopping, medical services, and restaurants was the number one dislike overall. Township residents were much less satisfied than village residents with this aspect of the area, and one-fourth mentioned it as a dislike. Village residents were more likely to list dislikes related to the local government than were township residents. This was the second-least favorite aspect of the area for residents overall.

It is interesting to note that taxes, a popular dislike in most communities, was not at the top of the list. Rather, it tied for fifth place with natural resource deterioration and pollution.

Question 7. Please list the three things you like least about living in Elk Rapids Township. (Percentage of all three responses that fall under each category.)

Response	Township	Village	Total
1. Taxes	11%	8%	9%
2. Local Government	11	17	14
3. Lights Downtown	2	2	2
4. Appearance of the Twp.	3	4	4
5. Natural Resources/Development	7	10	9
6. Jobs/Economy	7	11	10
7. Public Services/Infrastructure	11	14	13
8. Shopping/Medical/Restaurants	25	14	18
9. Other	23	20	21

1. Taxes. Especially property taxes.
2. Local Government. Responses in this category varied. The relationship between the village and the township was mentioned most often. Also, many responses indicated that residents feel their concerns are subordinate to the needs of tourists and developers. Other comments related to specific governmental decisions that they did not like or to

specific government bodies (for example, the school board).

3. Lights Downtown. These responses relate to the brightness of the street lights downtown.
4. Appearance. Many of the responses related to the appearance of Ames street and vacant or "rundown" buildings in the Township.
5. Deterioration of Natural Resources, Development and Tourism. There was also a lot variety in these responses. Some people indicated that there was too much development and change. Others specified that they did not like tourist attraction or the tourist season in general. Some responses in this category related to very specific aspects of growth, such as dislike of metal boat warehouses near the entrance to the village.
6. Jobs and the Economy. People mentioned that they wanted more, better paying jobs. Some mentioned specifics, such as secretarial work or light industry.
7. Public Services/Quality of Infrastructure. The quality of roads and sidewalks were common complaints. Many residents also mentioned the availability of sewers, cost of water, and lack of transportation to Traverse City. A few said that they disliked the lack of police protection.
8. Shopping, Restaurants, and Medical Services. Responses in this category often related to the price or quality of the goods and services available in Elk Rapids Township.
9. Other. There were many responses that did not fall in the above categories. Many were very specific complaints, such as the weather or the cost of housing. Some said that they had no complaints or that the township is "fine as is".

QUESTION 8. WHAT AREA ATTRACTIONS RESIDENTS WOULD SHOW A VISITOR

Survey participants were asked to list three places they would show a visitor. The harbor and marina in Elk Rapids were the number one answer for both township and village residents, with one-fourth saying they would take a visitor there. The scenery and area parks were the two next popular attractions. A slightly higher percentage of township residents than village residents mentioned the downtown area--about one-fifth of all survey participants said they would take a visitor downtown.

Question 8. If you took a visitor around your community, what places would you be certain to include?

Response	Twp.	Village	Total
1. Scenery	23%	20%	22%
2. Harbor/Marina	27	24	25
3. Downtown	18	15	16
4. Parks	15	22	19
5. Library/Museum	8	9	8
6. Residential Areas	1	1	1
7. Other	8	10	9

1. Scenery/Natural Beauty. Some responses related to the overall beauty of the area and others mentioned specific attraction, such as scenic overlooks.
2. Harbor and Marina. These responses pertained primarily to the harbor and marina in downtown Elk Rapids.
3. Downtown. Most of the responses referred to the downtown area in general, although some referred to specific sights or shops.
4. Parks. A variety of parks were mentioned in these responses, including nature conservancies.
5. Library, Museum, and Other Buildings. Schools, churches, and the Township Hall were also mentioned by many people.
6. Residential Areas. Historical homes and wealthier homes in the Township and in Traverse City were mentioned the most.
7. Other. Area resorts, Glen Arbor, and the Cherry Festival were among the variety of answers that did not fit into the above categories.

QUESTION 9. GOODS AND SERVICES THAT RESIDENTS WOULD LIKE IN ELK RAPIDS

Survey participants were asked to list three items and services that they would like to be available in the area. The answers varied widely, and nearly one-fourth are grouped into the "other" category. Township and village residents gave similar answers to this question, and there

are no notable differences between them.

The largest category of responses were in the "other" category. These answers varied widely, from a car wash to specialty items. Next to the numerous answers in the "other" grouping, clothes and shoes were what most residents wished were more readily available in the area. Over one-fifth of responses pertained to the type, quality, or price of clothing and shoes that residents would like to shop for in Elk Rapids. Restaurants, variety stores, and groceries also ranked high.

Question 9. Which items/services that you usually buy from other areas do you most wish were available in the area?

Response	Township	Village	Total
1. Restaurants	11%	10%	11%
2. Medical/Dental Care	8	9	8
3. Variety/Dime Store	11	12	12
4. Groceries	12	10	11
5. Clothes and Shoes	20	22	21
6. Activities	3	4	3
7. Hardware and Home Supplies	5	4	4
8. Books and Crafts	6	7	6
9. Other	25	7	23

1. Restaurants. Most people had a particular type of restaurant in mind. Five-star restaurants, fast food, and restaurants with more variety were mentioned most often.
2. Medical and Dental Care. Many people said that they wished there were more doctors to choose from in the township. A few mentioned that they would like urgent care in the community.
3. Variety Store, Dime Store, General Store. Many people specifically mentioned that they miss the dime store. Many also specified that they would like a Meijer, K-Mart, Walmart, or similar store in the community.
4. Groceries. Residents commonly responded that they would like more affordable groceries, more selection, or better produce. A few people said that they wished there was a health food grocery store.
5. Clothes and Shoes. Many people indicated that they would like lower prices and more

variety in general. However, some residents specifically mentioned women's clothing, clothes for the elderly, or more fashionable clothing.

6. Activities. A wide variety of answers were placed in this category. Many specified that they wanted a particular type of facility, such as a skating rink, bowling alley, or swimming pool. Other answers were more general, such as senior or youth activities.
7. Hardware, Lumber, Home Appliances. Many people specified that they wanted a hardware store that was open on Saturday, had longer hours, and offered more variety. Others wanted either small or large home appliances available in the community.
8. Books, Crafts, Sewing Supplies, and Hobbies. Self explanatory.
9. Other. A variety of items and services were listed that could not be categorized elsewhere. Some examples are a fast-photo shop, half-off card shop, and cheaper gasoline. A number of people said that they were happy driving to Traverse City and did not want any more shops.

QUESTION 11. THINGS RESIDENTS WOULD MOST LIKE TO CHANGE IN ELK RAPIDS

Residents were asked what they would change if they could change one thing about their community. There was tremendous variety in their responses, and nearly 30 percent had to be placed in the catchall "other" category. Responses in this grouping varied from dissatisfaction with the weather to the cost of housing. The responses are similar to the responses given in question 7, which asked what residents disliked about living in the area.

When asked to specify one single aspect of the community that they wished were different, survey most often participants listed local government. As with question 7, villagers were less content with the local government than township residents. Many of their responses about local government pertained to the relationship between the township and village governments, either wishing for better cooperation or that they would consolidate into one entity.

The second most common aspect of the community that residents would change pertain to public services and the condition of roads and sidewalks, with 14 percent of all respondents listing it. Township residents were unhappy with public services economy more often than village residents.

Question 11. If you could change one thing about your community, what would it be?

Response	Township	Village	Total
1. Taxes	6%	6%	6%
2. Local Government	20	29	25
3. Development/Tourism	10	9	10
4. Public Attitudes/Participation	4	3	4
5. Jobs/Economy	6	10	8
6. Public Services/Infrastructure	19	10	14
7. Shopping/Restaurants/Medical	7	2	4
8. Other	28	30	30

1. Taxes. Many of these responses pertained to property taxes.
2. Local Government. Responses in this category varied. The relationship between the village and the township were mentioned many times. Also, many responses indicated that residents feel their concerns are subordinate to the needs of tourists and developers. Other comments related to specific decisions made by the local government that they did not like.
3. Development and Tourism. Some people indicated that there was too much development and change. Others specified that they did not like tourist attraction or the tourist season in general. Many people expressed concern about water quality and lake pollution as well. Some responses in this category related to very specific aspects of growth.
4. Public Attitudes and Citizen Participation. Some survey participants said that they did not like the negative attitudes of some area residents toward development. Other residents said that there was not enough citizen participation in community activities. A few said that they feel like outsiders after moving to the community or that people were "small minded".
5. Jobs and the Economy. People mentioned that they wanted more, better paying jobs. Some said that they wished the area had a "year-round" economy.
6. Public Services/Quality of Infrastructure. The quality of roads and sidewalks were common complaints. Many residents also mentioned the availability of sewers and lack of transportation to Traverse City.
7. Shopping, Restaurants, and Medical Services. Responses in this category often related

to the price or quality of the goods and services available in E.R. Township.

8. Other. There were many responses that did not fall in the above categories. Many were very specific complaints, such as the weather or the cost of housing. Some said that they had no complaints or did not want the township to change.

QUESTION 14. WHAT CHANGES DO RESIDENTS EXPECT.

Survey participants were asked what aspect of their community was most likely to change and whether they thought this change was for the better. They were also asked why this would or would not be a good/bad change and what should be done about it. Very few respondents explained why they thought changes would be good or bad. Also, with the exception of planning for change most people did not make suggestions for lessening the impact. Therefore, these parts of question 14 are not included in this analysis.

Nearly all answers pertained to natural resource deterioration or the expectation of growth and development of the area. Several of the responses indicate that although residents have accepted that fact that some growth is inevitable, it is the pace of growth that worries them—they fear that things are growing and changing too fast.

Nearly half (47.2 percent) stated that they expect deterioration of natural resources and pollution. A much higher percentage of township residents than village residents thought that natural resources would deteriorate, 59 percent compared to 34 percent.

The remaining answers were grouped by respondents' feelings about the desirability of growth. Almost one fifth stated that growth would be a change for the worse. Village residents more often thought change was a negative than township residents, 25 percent compared to 13 percent. Fifteen percent of residents stated that growth was either acceptable or a change for the better if it was planned growth.

Question 14. What part of the environment in which you live is most likely to change? Is this change for the better?

Response	Township	Village	Total
1. Natural Resource Deterioration	59	34	47
2. Growth, Change for Worse	13	25	19
3. Growth, Good if Planned	13	18	15
4. Growth, Neither Good or Bad	7	2	4
5. Growth, Change for Better	1	9	5
6. Other	7	13	10

1. Natural Resources. Water contamination was the most common response to this question. Loss of farmland and scenic beauty were also common answers. Almost without fail, residents thought these changes would be negative.
2. Growth, A Change for the Worse. These people see the community growing and changing and are not happy about it.
3. Growth, Acceptable if Planned. Responses in this category indicate that the community will grow and change, and that this is either acceptable or desirable if development is well-planned.
4. Growth. These people predicted growth, but did not indicate if it was a positive or negative change or simply were not sure if it was good or not.
5. Growth, A Change for the Better. Responses in this category indicate that the community will grow and change, and that it will be a change for the better.

Conclusion

Survey participants expect things to change over the next few years. Some welcome it, some fear it, and some do not mind as long as change proceeds in an orderly, planned manner. The natural beauty of the area is one of the aspects that residents hold most dear and is also what most expect to change in the next few years. This concern for natural beauty and the environment is strong--survey responses indicate that it outweighs economic and social concerns in the minds of residents. Township dwellers indicated more concern than village residents for the environment throughout the survey.

Despite concerns about growth and change, there are things that area residents would like to change. Many indicated that they would like more stores, restaurants, and medical facilities located in their area. Some said that they would like more activities, such as a skating rink and senior citizen activities. Many also specified that they enjoy recreational activities in the area, some of which are a result of development efforts. From these responses, it appears that residents might benefit from some types of development activities.

Another theme that appeared throughout the questionnaire is dissatisfaction with the attitudes and actions of the local government. Many respondents stated that they felt too much effort was spent to attract tourism while residents' needs were being overlooked. Numerous responses dealt with the relationship between the township and the government. Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the local school board (although many were pleased with the schools, in general).

Although survey participants had their fears and dissatisfactions, many expressed great fondness for the area. Some stated that Elk Rapids Township is one of the most beautiful areas in the state or that they would not live anywhere else.