Township Trustees in Ohio

Use and Knowledge of Land Use Planning Tools:
Zoning, Subdivision Regulations, and Comprehensive Planning

By
David Civittolo
John Conglose
Greg Davis
Nancy Kukay

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For more information, contact:
John Conglose
330-263-3831
Introduction

Land use change in Ohio takes place predominantly at the township level. As such, Ohio’s township trustees are faced with decisions related to land use on a regular basis. What do trustees know about zoning, subdivision regulations, and comprehensive planning? Are trustees participating in continuing education related to these land use planning tools? Are these land use tools being employed at the township level in Ohio?

The overall objective for this project was to better understand the above issues to help in targeting programmatic resources. Specific objectives were to:

- identify gaps in knowledge and preferences for land use-related training and training providers,
- determine the extent to which trustees were familiar with Extension’s land use programs.

Demographic information was collected in order to describe respondent characteristics. An understanding of respondent characteristics permits an analysis of differences in land use knowledge, use of tools, participation in land use-related training, and familiarity with Extension Land Use programs by gender, age, race, length of tenure, educational attainment, and political views.

While the desire to better understand programmatic needs drove the project, the measurement of trustees’ perceptions of development pressure in relation to location was explored. Respondents were sorted by geographic region (see maps above) as well as by Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) or Non-Metropolitan Statistical Area (non-MSA) status.

Methodology and Sample

Data were collected in Fall 2005 by mail survey of 500 randomly selected Ohio township trustees. Dillman’s Tailored Design Method was utilized involving 4 contacts. A total of 309 useable questionnaires were returned resulting in a response rate of 62%.

Five Ohio Regions

Respondents were predominantly white males, over age 50, who reported themselves as politically conservative. Most had obtained a high school diploma. Selected respondent characteristics are illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metro %</th>
<th>Non-metro %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond HS</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MSA/non-MSA (MSA in charcoal)

If rural zoning was employed, to what extent was the zoning ordinance based upon a comprehensive land use plan? Of those township trustees (57%) who indicated their township had zoning regulations, 59% indicated their township’s zoning regulations were based upon a current comprehensive land use plan.

What regions of Ohio use these tools most? Townships in the central region led all others in recently updated comprehensive plans (84%), use of subdivision regulations at the county level (90%), and use of zoning (80%).

Townships in southeastern Ohio appeared to use these tools the least. Only 6% of trustees from Ohio’s southeastern townships indicated that their township had a comprehensive plan in place. Of those townships, almost half (44%) indicated their comprehensive plans were more than 10 years old. Slightly more than 6 in 10 (62%) trustees in southeastern Ohio indicated that the county in which their township was located had subdivision regulations in place. And, only 13% of trustees in southeastern Ohio indicated that their township had zoning in place.

Tools Usage

Township use of comprehensive planning lags behind zoning and county subdivision regulation usage. Only 33% of trustees indicated their township had a comprehensive plan in place. Nearly 6 in 10 (57%) respondents indicated their township had zoning in place. Statewide, 71% of trustees indicated the county in which their township was located had subdivision regulations in place.

Of the one-third of township trustees who indicated they had a comprehensive plan, 82% indicated they referred to the document when making land use decisions.
they were located had subdivision regulations in place compared to 63% of respondents from townships in counties in non-metro areas. And, more than 45% of metro area respondents indicated a comprehensive plan was in place in their township as compared to 23% of their non-metro area counterparts.

Tools Knowledge
While it appears use of tools is associated to location, there also appears to be an association between location and trustees’ understanding of land use tools.
- Respondents in metro areas, central, southwestern and northeastern regions of the state indicated higher levels of understanding than respondents from non-metro areas, and southeastern and northwestern regions.
- Respondents from the central Ohio region indicated the highest level of understanding.
- Zoning appeared to be the best understood tool.

Training Participation
Trustees’ level of participation in land use training appeared to be associated with their perception of development pressure.
- When intense or moderate development pressure was perceived, respondents were more likely to have attended training in past two years.
- Training participation was highest in metro areas, and the southwestern region.
- Training participation in the southeastern region was half the rate of other regions.
- Statewide, 22% of respondents participated in training in the past two years.

Preferred Providers
Perhaps due to organizational familiarity, roughly 60% of respondents indicated they preferred to learn about these land use tools from the Ohio Township Association. Other training providers in order of preference:
- regional planning commission (40%)
- OSU Extension (25%)
- OSU Extension as a source for learning was preferred by respondents from the northeastern region of Ohio more than any other region
- Interestingly, in the past two years only 12% of respondents statewide, attended training by OTA & RPC, and 5% by OSUE.

Familiarity with OSU
Statewide, 20% of respondents were familiar with OSU Extension’s Land Use Programs.
- Metro area respondents were more familiar than non-metro area respondents.
- Central region respondents were most familiar with OSU Extension’s Land Use Programs and were more likely to have requested additional information.

Role of Development Pressure
Not surprisingly, respondents from the central Ohio region and metro area respondents felt the highest perceived development pressure. This may help to explain the higher perceived knowledge levels of respondents from these areas. Higher perceived development pressure also may be associated with the higher levels of reported usage of zoning, subdivision regulations, and comprehensive planning by these respondents. A statistically significant association was found between perceived development pressure and land use tools usage.

Summary
This project summary provides a brief overview of how zoning, subdivision regulations and comprehensive planning are being used in Ohio; the extent to which township trustees feel knowledgeable of these land use tools; trustee participation in training related to land use; and preferred training providers.

Results indicate that there are differences in how these tools are used and how well they are understood. Zoning was the best understood tool and most directly employed by trustees (subdivision regulations were cited as being more widely used but they are coordinated at the county level).

An opportunity exists for trustee learning as well as for Extension Land Use programming. Less than one fourth of respondents participated in training in the past two years and only 20% were familiar with Extension Land Use programming. However, 61% indicated they would like more information.