



What Do We Want Our Growing Community to Look Like?

*A Study of the Area South and East
of Lowell High School in Vergennes
Township*

Sponsored by Vergennes Township in
cooperation with the City of Lowell, Lowell
Township and MSU Extension.

*This study was made possible through a grant
from the Lowell Area Community Fund.*



Vergennes Township

Results of the Vergennes Township High School Area Study

This project was made possible by support from the Lowell Area Community Fund.

Project Team:

- Rod Cortright, Charlevoix / MSU Extension Director
- Jay Hoekstra, Grand Valley Metro Council Planner
- Jay Kilpatrick, Vergennes Township Planner, Williams and Works
- Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk
- Kendra Wills, Kent / MSU Extension Land Use Educator

The team appreciates the assistance of Marsha Wilcox, Vergennes Township Open Space Committee Member; Jean Hoffman, Vergennes Township Treasurer; Mark Nyp and George Hommowun of the Lowell Public Schools for help organizing and staffing the public meetings.

Goals of the Project:

- To educate residents about the facts concerning the property in the focus area.
- To inform residents why the area will eventually be developed for residential use.
- To develop creative thinking about development options.
- To get a sense of the type of development the community wants.

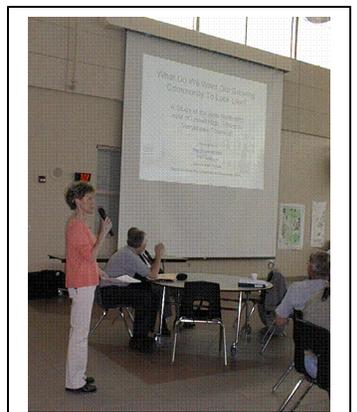
Process and Results:

Two public meetings were held on Wednesday, May 12, 2004 and Wednesday, May 19, 2004 both from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at the Lowell High School Freshman Center cafeteria. A brochure was developed and mailed to residents living within a one mile radius of the focus area. Invitations were also mailed to elected officials, staff and planning commissioners for the City of Lowell, Lowell Township and Vergennes Township. The team acknowledged that this area is highly traveled by residents from all three communities and that members of all three communities should be invited to participate. In an effort to invite the public to the meeting, an article on the meetings was printed in the May 5 edition of the Lowell Ledger, a general circulation paper for all three communities. It was also publicized at local government meetings and a Lowell Rotary meeting.

May 12, 2004 Meeting

77 people attended the May 12th meeting. Mostly all were residents of Vergennes Township. There were several officials attending from Lowell Township and the City of Lowell.

The purpose of this meeting was to convey facts and information about the focus area relevant to the development of the properties.



Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk

Mari Stone started the meeting by welcoming everyone and outlining the purpose of the project as well as the purpose of the meeting. She then gave an outline of why the focus area is prime for development. Her presentation was summed up by a quote from an area developer concerning the focus area, “You’ve got good schools, Meijers, two primary roads, water and sewer, a Master Plan for high density and a growing community. Basically, all the right ingredients for a large, higher density development.”

Jay Hoekstra, planner with Grand Valley Metro Council, then gave an overview of the projected demographic information for the Lowell area’s future population based on population projections, current zoning, land development patterns, and the results of the Blueprint regional planning process where the Metro Framework was created and adopted by GVMC in 2004. The Framework is based on regional consensus and includes allocation of future population growth (primarily in urbanized areas and largely in the form of walkable neighborhoods and town centers) as well as targeted areas for the preservation of agricultural and natural lands. For more information on the Framework visit www.gvmc.org.

The major trends he conveyed for the Lowell area were:

- Increasing amounts of one and two person households, which may translate into increasing demand for smaller square footage homes. See Figure 1.
- The most growth will occur in the 55 to 85+ age range. This may translate into a greater need for senior housing.
- Most of the increase will be in the lower 50% income levels (under \$46,715 annually in 2004 dollars) of one and two person households. This may be influenced by the Baby Boomer generation retiring and living on fixed incomes. This signifies the need for affordable housing and mixed income neighborhoods.
- The projected increase in population for the Grand Rapids metro area is 200,000 people by the year 2030.
- Based on the Blueprint regional planning process conducted by GVMC with representatives from local governments, the East Metro sub-region, which includes the City of Lowell, Lowell Township and Vergennes Township, has selected to accommodate 12% of the population increase or approximately 21,000 persons by 2030. This translates to approximately 3,500 new people living in Vergennes Township by 2030.

Mr. Hoekstra used illustrations to communicate how zoning relates to population increases. The higher the density of development, the greater the number of people can be accommodated in a smaller area. For example:

- Under strict agricultural or open space zoning, only one household or 2.5 persons would be allowed per square mile.

- Under 10 acre zoning, 160 persons can be housed per square mile.
- Under two acre zoning and under cluster zoning (50% open space), 660 persons can be accommodated per square mile.
- Under typical suburban subdivision development, 2500 people can be housed per square mile.
- Under the walkable Town Center zoning, found in the historical Heritage Hill neighborhood of Grand Rapids, 11,000 persons are housed in one square mile.

Vergennes Township has 3 acre zoning in the majority of the township due to the fact that most areas are not served by water and sewer. There are 36 square miles in a township (6 mile by 6 miles), therefore, approximating 3 acre zoning in all locations would allow for 532 persons per square mile multiplied by 36 miles equals 19,152 persons that would be able to live in Vergennes Township under current zoning. This is a conservative estimate.

The 2000 population of Vergennes Township is approximately 3,600. This population plus the 3,500 increase in population by 2030 equals 7,100. One could determine that the township was currently “over zoned” by planning and zoning for over 250% more people than are anticipated by 2030.

Jay Kilpatrick, planner for Vergennes Township was the next speaker. Mr. Kilpatrick explained what Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances are and what creative zoning tools Vergennes has in place such as PUD (Planned Urban Development zoning) and the new Open Space / Cluster Development zoning option. He explained that the Master Plan is like a blueprint – a plan for how the community wants to grow and build and that the Zoning Ordinance is like the tool box – different tools are used in different situations to construct the community according to the blueprint or Master Plan. It also provides some predictability for existing property owners to rely on.

The new Open Space Preservation Development (OSPD) zoning would allow for a density bonus of 25% over what would be allowed under regular zoning if 50% of the developable land is permanently preserved. This is consistent with state legislation that was adopted in 2002 requiring local governments to give developers the option of using Open Space Preservation Development if the community met specific population requirements. The Open Space Preservation Development Ordinance was adopted in the fall of 2002 by the Vergennes Township Board. To date, no development has used this option. The Vergennes Township Open Space Committee holds annual educational workshops for landowners to explain how the tool can be used.

He also discussed the natural resistance people have when development begins to change an area. He indicated that the area around the high school is facing growth pressure today.

Mr. Kilpatrick then presented the facts related to the development of the properties in the focus area. In summary, the facts are:

- Vergennes Township will add about 900 new homes by 2020.
- All properties in the focus area lie within the Water District. The township requires all developed properties within the Water District and adjacent to an existing water line to hook-up to the public water system.
- According to the Kent County Soil Survey, the soils for the property have slight to severe impairments for individual septic systems due to the presence of clay and gravel. Clay soils hold the effluent too long and gravel soils do not filter the effluent adequately. In addition, wetlands and creeks can be found on most of the properties, which increases the potential for ground and surface water pollution by septic tanks.
- When Lowell High School was constructed, sewer services from the City of Lowell were installed. The sewer pipes run through the focus area. Vergennes Township has contracted with Lowell Township for sewer use, however, Lowell Township had purchased its sewer capacity from the City of Lowell, which owns and operates the plant. It is not certain whether plant capacity exists to allow hook up to the sewer system for new residential development in the focus area. If it can be determined that sewer system capacity exists, Vergennes Township's Master Plan will allow medium to high density residential development in the focus area.
- Sewage treatment technology is constantly evolving. Many site based technologies cost less and offer better treatment if properly managed. The installation of a private system for development in the focus area is an option.

Rod Cortright, director of Charlevoix County MSU Extension then spoke on how current development patterns compare with those in the past and with what people want for their communities. Rod explained that the Euclidian zoning technique that most communities have adopted where each use (residential, commercial, industrial) is what has influenced what many term "urban sprawl." Rod feels that many communities have, "Moved from the art of building livable communities, to basically painting by numbers." He presented the statistic that today, for every 1% increase in population there is a 4.5 % increase in vehicle miles traveled. Based on his research and interaction with people, he believes the reason many people moved out to the rural areas is because the place where they used to live became unattractive from a design and functionality standpoint.

To entice people to return next week, the audience was given instructions for how to vote using the hand held remote voting tool. The audience was asked to rate two images on the following scale: 1 = very negative, 2 = negative, 3 = slightly negative, 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly positive, 6 = positive, 7 = very positive. Due to the fact that this was a test to show people how the voting systems worked and shows immediate results, the responses were not recorded.

Mari Stone then closed the meeting by encouraging people to drive by the focus area and record their thoughts on the evaluation form.

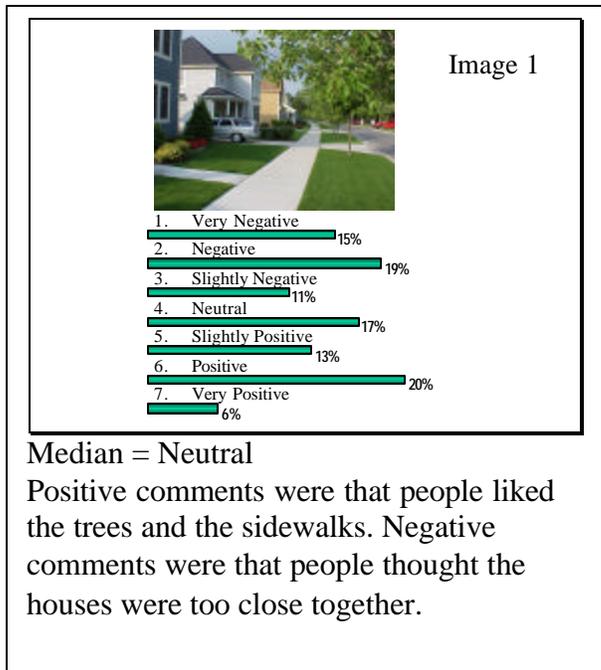
May 19, 2004 Meeting

On May 19, 52 participants returned after the first week. 14 new participants attended. The demographic made up of the group was approximately the same as May 12.

The focus of this meeting was to present information on some design options and some development options for the focus area and then using the hand held polling system, gather input from participants on which options they preferred.

Due to the fact that only 70 hand held voting remotes were available, Mari Stone set a procedure for distributing the remotes. However, we believe everyone who wanted to participate in the voting was able to do so whether they attended the first meeting or not.

Mari Stone started the meeting by welcoming everyone and reviewing what was discussed at the first meeting. Due to feedback that was received after the first meeting, Mari Stone and Jay Kilpatrick then distributed a handout that laid out the timeline for development applications. This provided the audience with a step-by-step process that a proposed development must take in Vergennes Township. See Attachment A to review this handout.

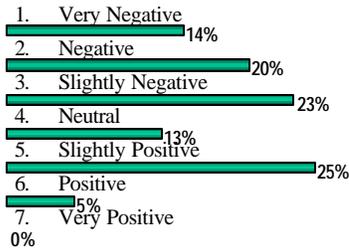


Rod Cortright was the next speaker. He began with a visual preference survey on different design options. Rod did not give the audience a context for their decisions because the purpose of this exercise is to get people to give their “gut” reaction on whether they like the design of the development in the photo or not. Participants voted, then the results were presented and people were asked what they liked and didn’t like about each image after the votes were calculated. The following slides are the results of this survey.

Note that the median indicates the point where 50% of the responses were below that point and where 50% were above that point.



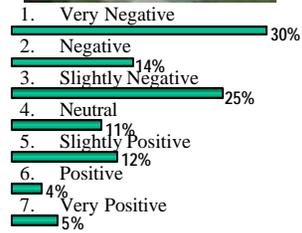
Image 2



Median = Slightly Negative
 Positive comments were that people liked the set back from the road and the trees in the back yard. Negative comments were that the garage dominated the front of the house and the driveway was not paved.



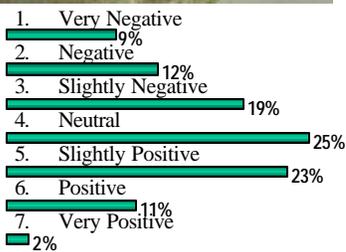
Image 3



Median = Slightly Negative
 Positive comments were that the façades were different, which made the building more interesting. Negative comments were that the houses were too close together resulting in a lack of privacy.



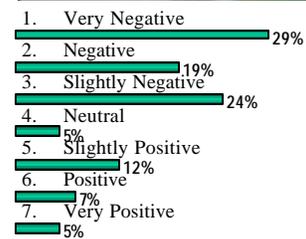
Image 4



Median = Neutral
 Positive comments were that the development looks more rural and the houses were more spaced out. Negative comments were that there were no sidewalks and few trees.



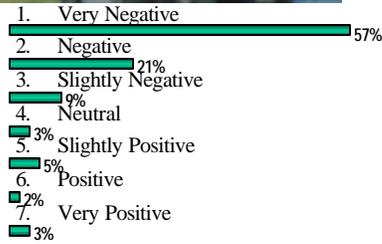
Image 5



Median = Slightly Negative
 Positive comments related to the sidewalk and the different building types. Negative comments were that the buildings were too close together.



Image 6

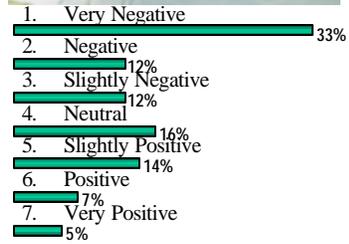


Median = Very Negative

No one was willing to give a positive comment about this development. Someone referred to this as their “worst nightmare.” People did not like all the idea of driving by and seeing all the roof tops. They also did not like the fact that all the trees were cut down.



Image 7

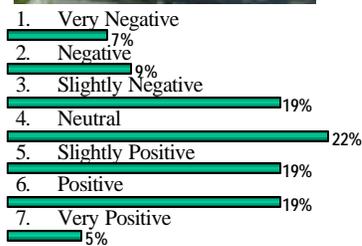


Median = Slightly Negative

Positive comments were that people thought this looked like a nice downtown and would be appropriate for the City of Lowell. Negative comments were that they didn’t want a downtown like this in Vergennes. Most people want Vergennes to remain rural.



Image 8

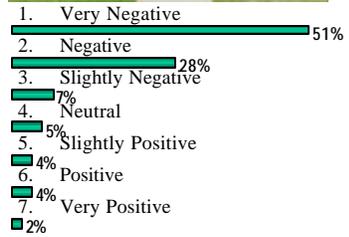


Median = Neutral

Positive comments were that the design of the building seems to fit the character – even the setback was acceptable to some. People liked the front porch and sidewalk. Negative comments were that the houses were too close together.



Image 9

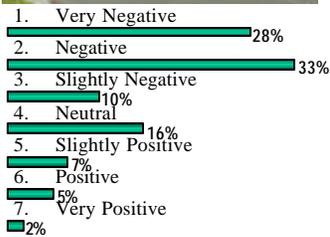


Median = Very Negative

Positive comments surrounded the existence of a sidewalk and street trees. Negative comments were made about the signage and too many driveways.



Image 10

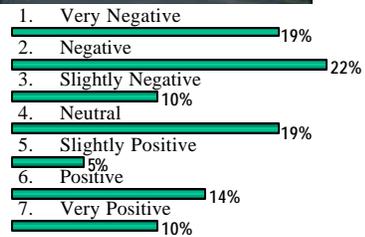


Median = Negative

Positive comments were made about the trees. Negative comments were that the building was “ugly” and looked too commercial. After the vote, Rod explained that this is a condo complex in Celebration Village near Orlando, Florida.



Image 11

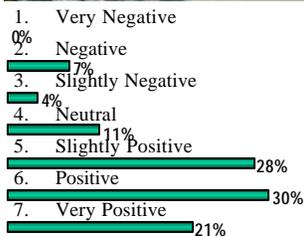


Median = Slightly Negative

Positive comments were that the character of the building was interesting. Negative comments were that the homes were too close together. After the vote Rod explained that this is a duplex.



Image 12

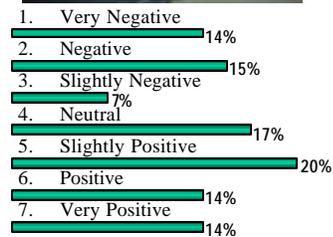


Median = Positive

Positive comments were that people liked the trees and the narrow street. Some commented that they recognized narrow streets and on-street parking as traffic calming tools. No one offered a negative comment.



Image 13

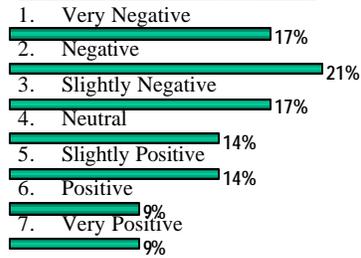


Median = Neutral

Positive comments were that the design of the house was interesting. Some liked the front porch and the side yard seemed appropriate for the community. Some also commented that they liked the front fence and, of course, the trees. Negative comments were that the homes were too close together.



Image 14

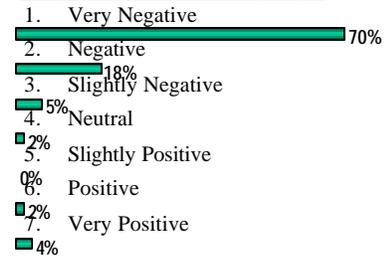


Median = Slightly Negative

Positive comments were surrounding the open space and the sidewalk. Negative comments surrounded the lack of private space.



Image 15

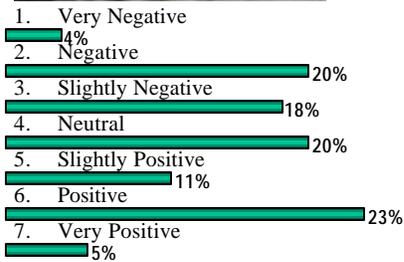


Median = Very Negative

No one was willing to offer up a positive comment about this image. Negative comments were that this was “ugly,” the houses were too close together and there were no trees. Someone said they didn’t like how the back of the house faced the road.



Image 16

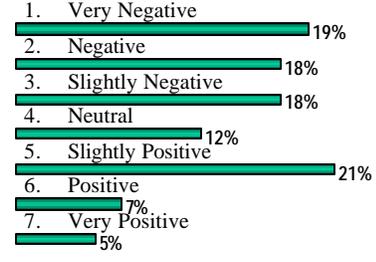


Median = Neutral

Positive comments were that this design of the house was interesting and the older trees were nice. Negative comments surrounded the short setback to the street. After the vote, Rod explained that this house has two living structures. The entrance to the “granny flat” can be found on the left side. Some communities use “granny flats” as a way to provide affordable and or senior housing.



Image 17



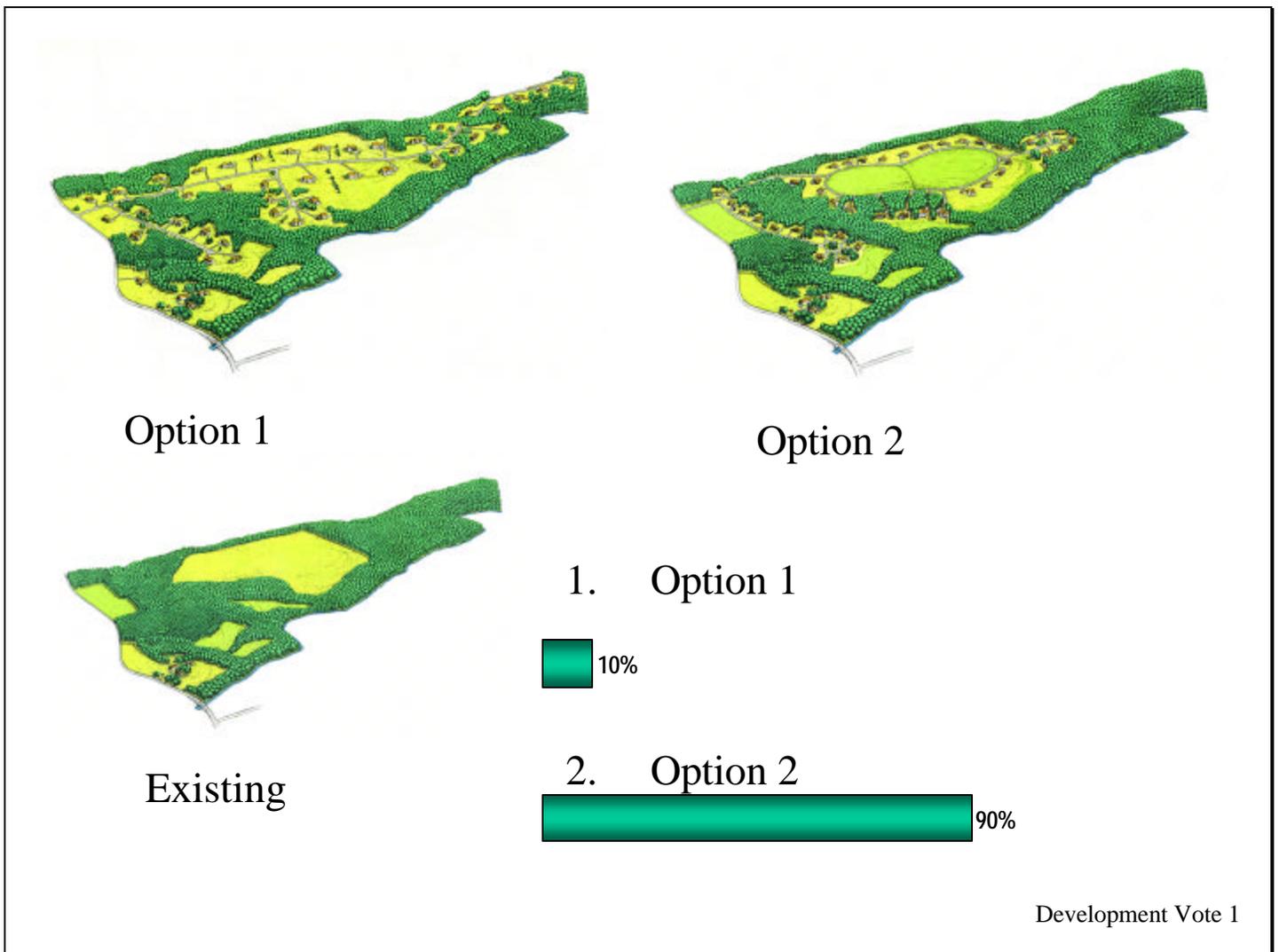
Median = Slightly Negative

Positive comments were made about the size of the front yard. Negative comments were made about the lack of sidewalks, lack of curbs and mature trees.

Rod then gave a review of the concepts he presented at the first meeting for the benefit for those who were not able to attend the first meeting. Due to the fact that Vergennes Township adopted this new tool and the desire of the community to remain rural, he went into greater detail on how some communities have structured their Zoning Ordinance to only allow open space/cluster development in some zoning districts. He explained that communities must be willing to give up setting a minimum lot size to control density.

To get a sense of how participants felt about open space development and other features that new residential development may bring to a community, the audience was again polled using the voting system.

The question was posed, “Which development pattern would you prefer, Option 1 or Option 2?” Note: both illustrations have the same number of houses (density neutral). The following are the results:





Option 1



Option 2



Existing

1. Option 1



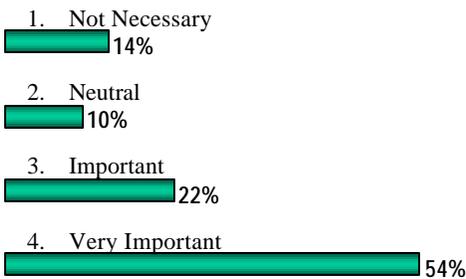
2. Option 2



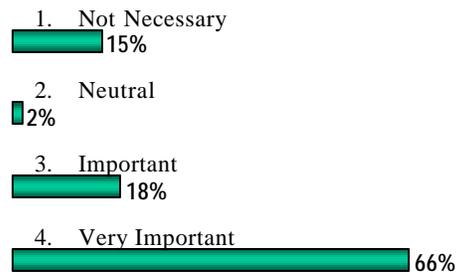
Development Vote 1

The audience was also asked to rate amenities that may come with new development. The following are the results:

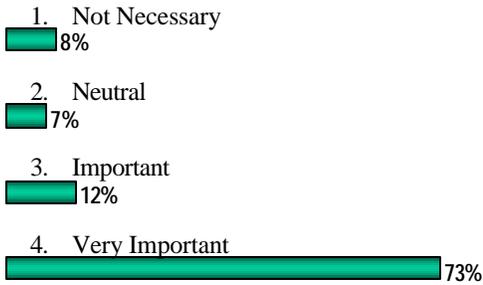
How important are walking paths and trail connections in a new development?



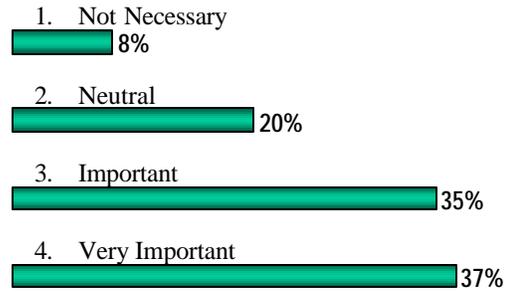
How important is public open space in a new development?



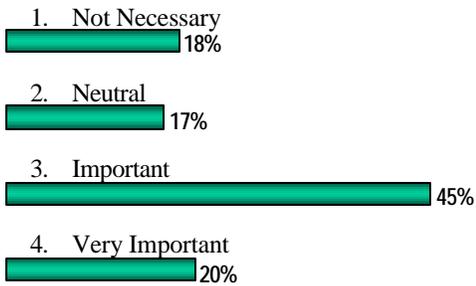
How important is the preservation of existing trees in a new development?



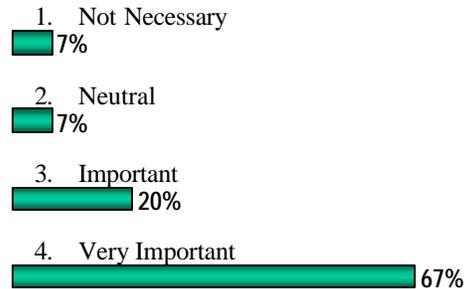
How important is a variety of housing choices and prices in a new development?



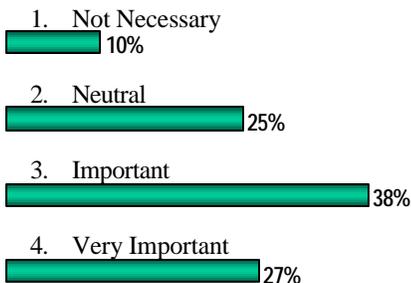
How important are ball/playing fields in a new development?



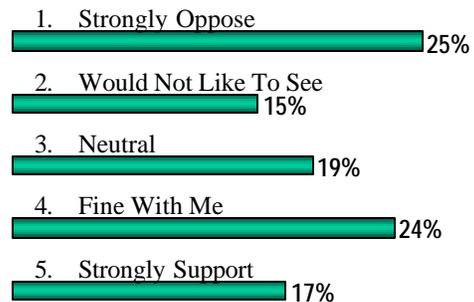
How important is slow traffic on residential streets in a new development?



How important is senior housing in a new development?



How would you feel about development on the north side of Vergennes Street?



After the polling, Jay Kilpatrick facilitated a roundtable discussion so participants could have a chance to express their views and ask questions. The following are a summary of the comments that were made:

- Concern was expressed about allowing more density to new developments
- There was a question about who enforces a conservation easement on the open space in open space developments. The response was, “it depends.” There are several options for the ownership and monitoring responsibilities of the open space. Some options are ownership of the open space by 1) homeowners association, 2) deeded to the local unit of government, 3) donated to a land conservancy, 4) developer keeps ownership. State law requires the open space to be preserved by a permanent deed restriction that runs with the property.
- There was a question about allowing commercial development in the township. Mr. Kilpatrick pointed to the Future Land Use Map and noted that a small amount of commercial is allowed and the PUD ordinance and districts would allow commercial mixed with residential.
- One participant had the audience vote by show of hands how many people supported the idea of allowing high density with little or no open space. Most people did not favor this. He also asked the audience how many people would favor the extension of water and sewer pipes at taxpayer expense to serve new development. Most people did not favor this option either.
- There was a question whether the theory about dense development alleviating development in rural areas had been tested. Mr. Kilpatrick responded that some pressure will be alleviated, and the best population projection models are only able to project a generation ahead.
- One participant commented that when she was driving around the township, she noticed that she could not see the new Murray Lake School from Lally Street because of the trees. She liked this. She commented that rural character to her was that most of the views from the roads were of trees and farm or open fields and the township should try and encourage the protection of trees. Another person noted that perhaps the township should look at adopting a tree preservation ordinance.
- Another resident asked the audience by show of hands how many people favored the idea of only allowing open space development in some places in the township and not allowing the regular “slice and dice” type of development. Most people favored this idea.
- An additional comment was made that residents need to be involved in the decision-making process concerning a development from the beginning. She referred back to the step-by-step process and noted that most residents start speaking up at the 11th hour when the process is almost complete. Mari Stone noted that planning commission

meetings and board meetings are posted on the web site (www.vergennestwp.org) , in the Lowell Ledger, at the township hall and in the newsletter. The Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance are also on the web site.

- One resident noted that he was not aware of the Cooper woodlot preserve until recently but appreciated it and the landowner's commitment to providing open space to township residents.
- The final comment thanked the project team for hosting the meeting and getting citizens involved.

Mari closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation and reminding everyone to turn in their evaluation.

Summary of Evaluation Data

Participants were asked to rate the following items according to their satisfaction using the scale of "1" being the lowest and "5" being the highest.

Program

- Length of program: Average = 4
- Amount of information: Average = 4
- Amount of audience participation: Average = 4

Presenters

- Subject knowledge: Average = 5
- Interaction with audience: Average = 4
- Presentation information was what I expected: Average = 4

Conclusions drawn from data:

- The most agreed upon answer was that the presenters were rated around a 4 on their interaction with the audience.
- The most varied answers came concerning the amount of information in the program.
- 95% of participants found presenter knowledge as the most useful part of the program.

Participants were also asked to write responses to the following:

- Something I thought about since the first session that I have a question about
- Something I would like to see as a part of a proposed development
- Something I would like to see as a part of a proposed development

Responses were as follows:

Something I was surprised to learn:

- That many communities are actively using these newer conservation methods

- Zoning may not be the best way to control density
- Expected growth in Kent County by 2030 is 211,000 people. Current zoning techniques/preferred approaches.
- Changing zoning for conservation development can be density neutral.
- Vergennes Township is expected to grow by approximately 3500 new residents in the next 20 years.
- Number of expected new homes.
- Our open space/conservation zoning
- Incentives for conservation – cluster development.
- The level of focus on land conservation already in action.
- Too much repetition of presentation material.
- Confirmation that there is so little emphasis on private property rights rather than central planning. Greater balance would be beneficial and more realistic.
- Just how crowded our township will/can be with current zoning. Last survey questions might better have pointed to “what kind of development” rather than “any or none.”
- Euclidean zoning.
- The projection of population.
- Conservation plans will work.
- Expected growth to our area of the state.
- That most residents will be 55-85 years of age in 2020. Resident’s opinions are important to the planning process.
- Options available to our township. Thank you for sharing with us! These designs could attract families to our community if we move forward with these unconventional options.

Something I thought about since the first session that I have a question about:

- More city/twp sewer availability? Expansion? When? How?
- Why would you want more density on the same property (even with open space)?
- No questions – I was extremely impressed with all the presenters. Rod was especially informative and knowledgeable. Thank you!
- Traffic needs.
- If we have more development that is near (up against) but not within the city limits of Lowell, what is the chance that the City will attempt to annex that portion? What is the process if they attempt this? Can it be stopped?
- Is it our duty or responsibility to offer such great housing needs. I know we have to do our share but how far do we have to go?
- Can you combine properties in developments?
- Sorry I missed the first session.
- If our township wants a rural look, why does the township choose to tax at the maximum rate on large parcels . . . forcing large landowners to split land and sell to developers?
- Lack of objectivity in the praise that was given to the planning board from Mr. Kilpatrick, if it is accurate that his employment is contingent in part upon his working with this board.
- Details of “private” sewage treatment plants.
- Development on the north side of Vergennes Road.

- If the land is rezoned to smaller parcels and set up for the Euclidean model, what's to stop the developers from just filling in the open space with a ton more houses?
- How do you go from "good idea" to reality?
- Thank you for explaining application process; very helpful.
- Very impressive program. Very informative.
- I didn't attend the first session, but my husband did.
- There are far better ways to spend the Lowell Community Fund Grant moneys than to waste them on these types of meetings!

Something I would like to see as a part of a proposed development:

- Activity areas for kids, playgrounds, clubhouse, pool, basketball, parks, etc.
- Community trails
- I would like to see the conservation design ordinance to be the only option for developers while giving them the incentives necessary for them to profit as well. A win/win situation could be met.
- Neighborhood/ tour plan. Open space, parks, recreation fields.
- Conservation development with neutral (same) density as general development.
- Conservation design as the only full lot development option – the only option allowing the development of the property to the same extent that the current zoning now allows. Aggressive traffic control and multiple ways in and out of all new developments – Lower Speed Limits.
- The developer must pay for not only the regular utilities (road/water/septic) but the additional burden on the township (police/fire needs, additional school/recreational needs, etc.).
- Sidewalks, trails, landscaping, lighted streets (lamp type).
- Nature trails/sidewalks.
- I just hope a lot of thought gets put into this. I love the area we're in and I hope to keep as much of the rural atmosphere as possible. I'm really concerned with the area behind me up to Pheasant Dr. I hope this area doesn't get packed full of tiny houses. I'm also concerned about runoff water gathering in my backyard. All property around that area runs downhill onto my property.
- Recreation field – play area.
- Strongly support the enhancement of land conservation and neighborhood development.
- I would like to see the township handle any application with less subjective, more equal application of the township goals, guidelines, rules, etc. I would also like to see township representatives abstain when it is appropriate – i.e., when there is a conflict. With regard to the openness of Vergennes Township meetings, I think they should be tape recorded! And, I think that the minutes should be all inclusive, NOT arbitrary inclusion depending on township officials. There is NO good reason not to tape the meetings unless a township official(s) has something to hide. If the meetings were taped and accurately reflected in minutes, it would be impossible to suspect/argue about the items left out of minutes. I would also appreciate it if those township officials running the meetings would not answer their phones during the meeting and concentrate on business at hand. At the very least, it would be more professional for the ringers to at least be switched to vibrate. If there exists an emergency situation, perhaps the person could step out. With

regard to whether these comments are responsible to the questions asked, I am of the opinion that for the township to make reasonable, informed decision regarding any proposed development, improvements need to be made to foundational operations on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. Your own speaker says there are over 5,000 people in Vergennes Township. Just over 1%, far less than 10%, participated in this meeting. Not fair or accurate to state that the results of this meeting reflect all the township preferences. There is a disproportionate number of people in attendance here who are under the mistaken impression that each homeowner is entitled to a herd of deer for their own yard. An 80 acre homeowner 5 1/2 miles from school did not get an invitation to this event. Came anyway. Not conducive to representative opinion.

- On-site waste water treatment plant.
- Cluster housing and 3-5 acres plats as well.
- Save as much natural space and trees as possible!!! But money talks. Whatever can be done to keep as much of a rural feel as possible – it's why we all moved here!
- I want conservation of open spaces and I want sidewalks.
- Coordination between adjacent properties.
- Creativity, creativity, creativity!
- Walking paths, park-like natural setting, nice country view from each house. Community center and/or pool. Sitter service, etc. Co-op gardening.
- Cluster with bonus – green space, PUD.
- Conservation design, etc. in master plan/zoning for certain/specific locations.
- Allow bermed/underground homes in appropriate setting/setback especially on 4+ acre parcels. Could consider section of homes that are highly efficient energy-saving homes. We could be a trend-setting community. I am in favor of conservation design approach.
- Less than 1% of Vergennes residents chose to come! The results of any vote means nothing. They should not be published. Ridiculous.

Other:

- I did not enjoy the 15 minutes of exact repeat of last week's presentation
- Thank you for your time and focus on the issue.
- Good PowerPoint, like build out maps
- Too much time was spent at 2nd session repeating what most of us heard last week.
- Meeting 1 was good, meeting 2 was too slow. Meeting 2 was too much duplication of meeting 1. Too much urban information; not enough information about applying conservation design to Vergennes Township.
- Jay – excellent speaker! Let's use him more.
- Redundancy from session 1 to session 2. Repeating information was a waste of time. One two hour meeting could have done it.
- Rod needs to be much more clear in his request for polling - too broad of range – not fair survey! Why did Rod repeat his program from last meeting? Why don't we review new techniques to propose? Waste time and money for 1st half of speech.

Background on the Project

For many reasons, this area near the High School and additional school district owned property has attracted a great deal of interest from the development community in the past several years. Vergennes Township believed it would be a valuable endeavor to bring all interested parties to the table while there is still time to make good decisions. It is important to note that the no official proposal for development on any of the properties in the focus area was submitted to the township at the time of the development of the project and the grant application to the Lowell Area Community Fund.

Report Distribution

This report will be posted on the Vergennes Township web site (www.vergennestwp.org), the MSU Extension United Growth for Kent County web site (www.msue.msu.edu/unitedgrowth) and will be given to those who request a copy. It will also be distributed to developers interested in the focus area properties. A copy will be submitted to the Lowell Ledger and the Lowell Area Community Fund. Contact Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk at (616) 897-5671 to request additional copies.

VERGENNES TOWNSHIP

AN OUTLINE OF THE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION PROCESS

I. Application Fee: General and Escrow Fee

These fees cover the administrative cost of processing the application and review by the Planning Commission. The escrow fee covers the cost of services provided by professional consultants retained by the Township to assist in analyzing the site plan.

II. Site Plan (most applications will require one)

A site development plan is required for most applications to be submitted to the Planning Commission for its approval prior to recommendation of final approval by the Township Board.

III. Meeting Dates

The Vergennes Township Planning Commission meets regularly on the first Monday of each month and also at special meetings called by the Planning Commission at 7:00 P.M. at the Vergennes Township offices at the corner of Bailey and Parnell.

IV. Processing Timeline for Various Applications:

Residential Site Plan Review (Planned Unit Development PUD, Site Condominium, Land Division with Private Road, Open Space Community): 2 to 4 months

Residential Special Exception Use Permit (Planned Unit Development, Open Space Community): 2 to 4 months

Master Plan Amendment: 3 to 6 months

Residential Rezoning: 2 to 3 months

Zoning Board of Appeals Process: 2 to 4 weeks

Applications must be submitted at least 7 calendar days before a Planning Commission meeting in order to be placed on the agenda.

V. Application Procedures

Whenever an Application is filed, the following steps are taken:

- (1) An application for a site plan is submitted to the Township along with the required fee(s). The application must be signed by the owner(s) of the property for which the application has been submitted.
- (2) Copies of the application and site plan are forwarded to the Planning Commission, Township Engineer and Planner. A report is generated and given to the Planning Commission.
- (3) The Planning Commission at its next regular meeting reviews the site plan and staff reports. The Commission reviews the plan in accordance with the standards contained in the Zoning Ordinance.
- (4) The public hearing is generally held by the Planning Commission. The applicant and others in attendance are provided an opportunity to speak on the application. Following the public hearing, the Commission may recommend approval, modification or denial of the site plan or approval subject to revisions being made to the Township Board, who issues final approval, modification or denial.
- (5) The applicant is notified of the final disposition of the application.
- (6) If a rezoning request is approved, the ordinance or summary of the ordinance is published in a local newspaper within 15 days of adoption. The rezoning request is effective seven days after publication.

VI. Public Hearing Requirements

- (1) Upon receipt of a rezoning, Planned Unit Development PUD, Site Condominium, Land Division with Private Road, Open Space Community, Zoning Board of Appeals or Special Exception Use application, a public hearing date is set.
- (2) Notice of this public hearing is then published in a newspaper of local circulation and notices are sent to occupants and property owners within 300 feet of the boundaries of the property to be reviewed in the following manner:
 - a. **Newspaper:** This notice, required by State of Michigan law, must be published at least once (rezoning requires two). There are specific publication timelines for each type of application.
 - b. **Mailing Notice:** A notice must be mailed as required by Michigan law to all property owners and occupants of all dwellings within 300 feet of the boundaries of the application property. This mailing list is taken from the most recent Township assessment roll.