

2020 ND Statewide Planning Issues & Needs Survey Results

Executive Summary

Introduction

The ND Statewide Planning Issues & Needs Survey is a collaborative effort among the ND Planning Association, ND League of Cities, ND Association of Counties, and ND Association of Township Officers.

Survey Purpose: To investigate needs and issues of political subdivisions across the state, related to planning and zoning activities and to formulate a set of baseline data related to the level of resources each political subdivision has at its disposal to support planning activities.

Survey-Taker Audience: Zoning Administrators, Planners, Planning Directors, Planning & Zoning Commission/Board members and elected commissioners of all North Dakota's cities, counties and townships.

Method: A survey instrument was developed with input from each of the each of the state associations: ND Planning Association, League of Cities, Association of Counties, Association of Township Officers. The survey was made available from September 6, 2019 through January 24, 2020 via the Survey Monkey online platform.

Notifications to participate in the survey were sent via e-mail to staff and leadership of political subdivisions. Notices were publicized in e-newsletters and on the website of each of the state associations. The survey was also publicized in-person at the annual conferences of each of the associations in fall/winter of 2019.

Responses:

Total response rate for each political subdivision category is as follows:

Large City >15,000 population: **32** survey responses

All Other Cities < 15,000 population: **89** survey responses

Counties: **43** survey responses

Townships: **48** survey responses

Total: **212** survey responses

Responses to a key selection of survey questions are provided. Responses selected for inclusion in the executive summary are those responses that are most relevant to inform the state associations in their formation of a policy agenda.

At least one survey response was received from every state legislative district in North Dakota.

A copy of the 54-page report that includes full-length survey comments is available by request to natalie.pierce@mortonnd.org

Selected Survey Responses

- 1) What are the *most* significant, ongoing planning and zoning challenges your city/county/township faces?

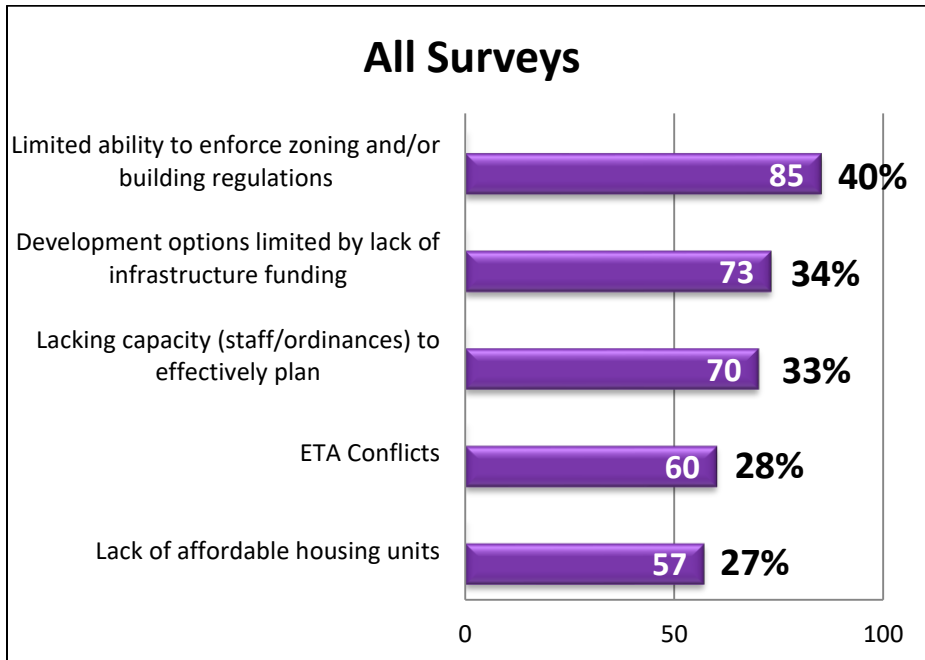


Figure 1

- 2) What are the three greatest needs of your city/county/township, related to carrying out planning and zoning activities?

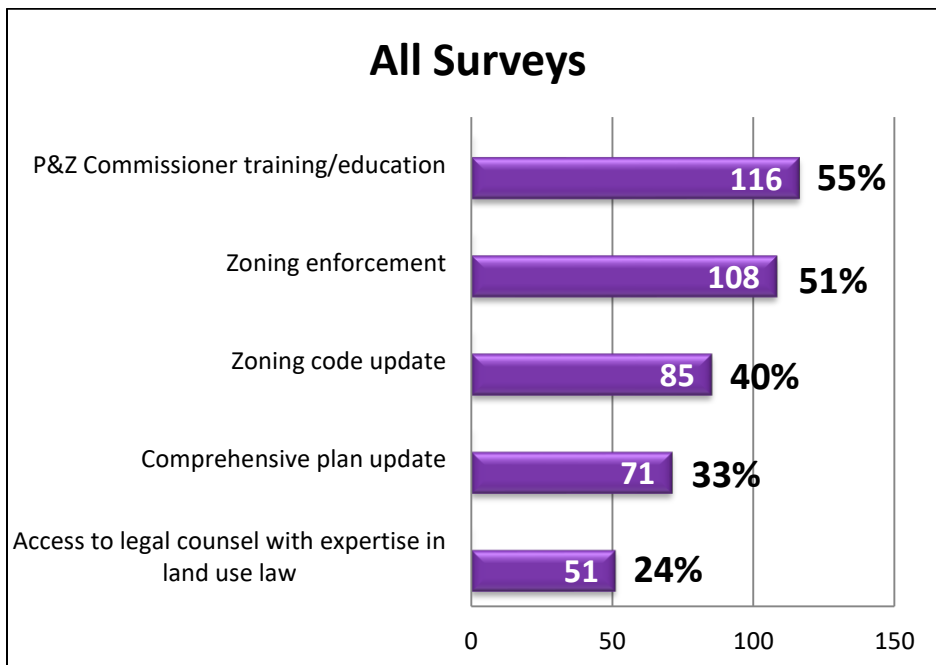


Figure 2

- 3) During the 2019 Legislative Session, House Bill 1297 sought to eliminate extraterritorial areas (ETAs) altogether (link to the bill text is here). The bill failed in the House. It is very likely that this bill will be introduced again in the 2021 legislative session. **Please choose the statement below that you most agree with.**

Displayed as percent of total surveys returned within category, for likewise comparison across political subdivision categories

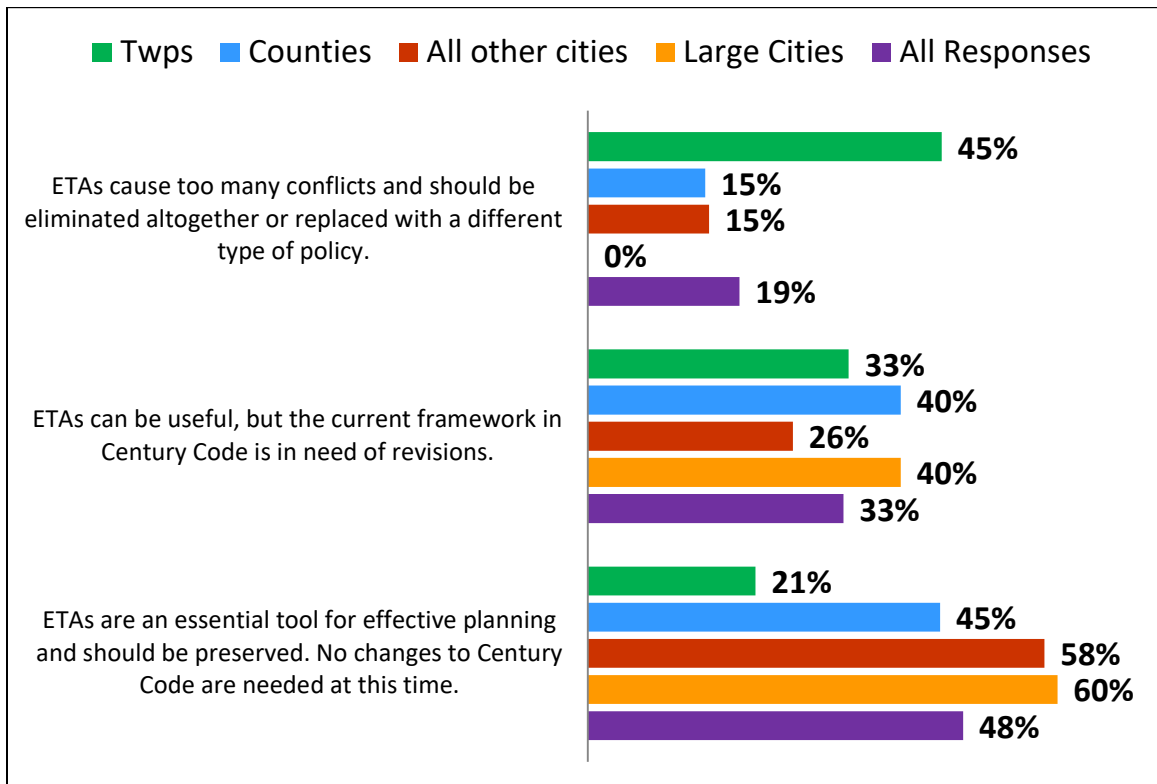


Figure 3

4) During the 2019 Legislative Session, House Bill 1165 sought to allow any and all non-conforming residential structures to have automatic standing to be reconstructed, even if damaged beyond 50% of market value. Passage of the bill would essentially allow non-conforming residential structures to persist indefinitely. The bill passed the House but failed in the Senate. This bill is certain to be introduced again in the 2021 legislative session. **How important is it to you that your state association (NDPA, ND League of Cities, NDACo, or NDTOA) fight against the passage of this bill?**

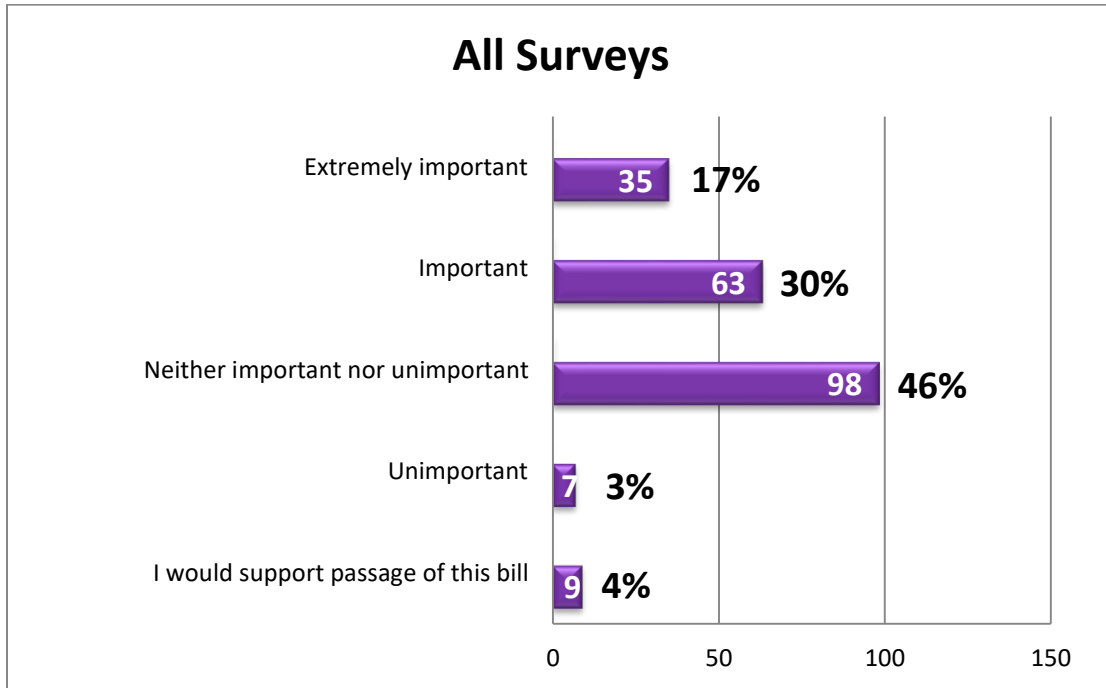


Figure 4

Political Subdivision Category Profiles

Large Cities:

Based on survey responses, the planning staff for large cities generally consists of a whole planning department. GIS software is available. Large cities consider their current zoning ordinance to be satisfactory or good. Long range plans or plan updates have been completed within at least the past 10 years. And they generally have no trouble filling vacant seats on the P&Z commission.

Counties:

Among counties within the survey sample, the most common (53% of county responses) planning staff resource was simply a zoning administrator, for whom planning oversight may be a secondary or ancillary function. Though 44% of county respondents stated they had either one full-time planner or a planning department. Most (79%) have access to GIS. Counties' comprehensive plans tend to be even younger than large cities with 56% of county respondents stating their comprehensive plan was adopted within the last 5 years. Roughly half of counties (44%) have a shortage of applicants to fill vacant P&Z commission seats and half (42%) generally have no trouble filling vacant seats.

All Other Cities:

Among half (46%) of small cities within the survey sample, planning staff consists of only a zoning administrator. 26% have no planning staff at all. Planning staff for the remainder of small cities is a mix ranging from occasional consultants to a full planning department. Roughly half of small cities (44%) have access to GIS. Among small cities 40% of respondents stated that their comprehensive plan was adopted more than 20 years ago or does not exist, to their knowledge. See **Figure 3** below for summary of characteristics of P&Z commissions.

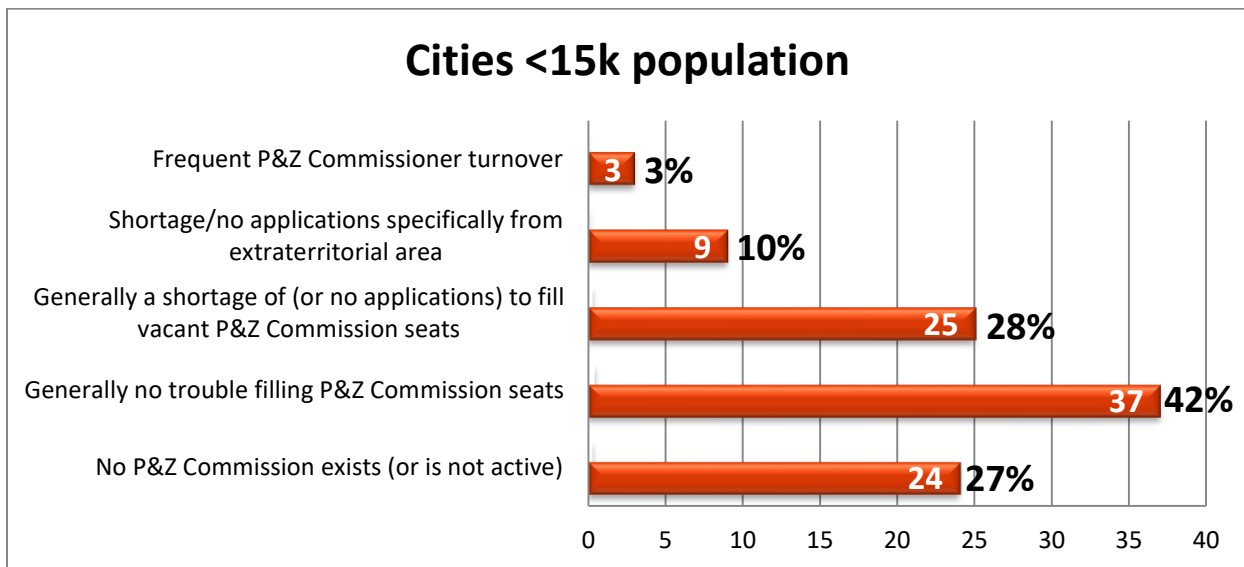


Figure 5

Townships:

Within the township category of survey responses, planning staff consists of a zoning administrator for 29% of respondents, while 43% of respondents are associated with a township where no one is assigned the responsibility of overseeing planning and zoning activities. Despite there being very little planning staff, 77% of respondents feel their zoning ordinance is "satisfactory" to "excellent." 63% of townships are operating without an active P&Z commission.