

Visual Preference Survey: Summary of Results

General overview

Based on 324 surveys from Leelanau, Kalkaska, and Benzie Counties, the following generalizations and patterns have been found.

Rural Housing

Respondents generally preferred images 3 and 4 of the five rural housing visuals. These were images with the fewest total number of homes, the largest open lots, and the most amenities (a field and a lake, respectively). Image 1 was least popular, presumably due to the fact that there were so many homes tightly clustered together. Respondents thus preferred rural housing that is truly in a rural landscape and featuring fewer homes.

Neighborhoods

Respondents preferred heavily wooded and rural-type neighborhoods. Density was accepted, as in Image 8, when done with well-designed homes that provide both yards and setbacks. Respondents also preferred newer homes. Image 7 was by far least popular, indicating that perhaps residents do not want any type of commercial activity adjacent to residential areas. However, since the image featured an older, less attractive building, the low ratings could be based purely on structural aesthetics.

Auto-style commercial

This was the least popular category among respondents. Image 16, featuring a Home Depot, received the overall lowest score of any visual, indicating a clear distaste for big-box retail and large surface parking lots. Image 15 was quite popular, as it demonstrated a roadside cottage-like structure in the forest. Clearly, respondents were most concerned with maintaining a rural character and preserving a quaint atmosphere.

Town and village

Images 23 and 24 were the least popular in this category. Image 23 featured a 4-story mixed use building and 24 featured new vinyl-sided colonial row houses. The results indicate uneasiness among respondents with density and structural height. Many respondents viewed the mixed-use structure as completely out of place with their local environments (since these respondents were all from rural outlying counties). Attached housing seems to also be frowned upon by respondents. Their preference for Image 25 indicates an appreciation of pathways, landscaping, and tree canopies in the village.

Employment

Image 30 was popular in this section. The consensus is that businesses should occupy attractive, one-story buildings that mix well with residential styles. They prefer business structures that look like public buildings such as libraries, schools, and fire houses.

Open Space

These were all very popular images and the category as a whole was by far the most popular. Respondents preferred images that showed no buildings and as little activity as possible. Wide, open spaces untouched by human intervention were the strong favorites, such as Image 32.

Public Space

Ironically, respondents preferred those public spaces that had very little “public” occupying them. The fewer the people and the lower the level of activity, the higher the rating received. Respondents enjoyed parks more than plazas and town squares.