



ANN ARBOR Charter Township

Communication Survey Report

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Introduction

In October and November of 2024, Ann Arbor Charter Township conducted a community survey to evaluate its communication efforts and identify areas for improvement. The survey was distributed by postal mail with the October newsletter. Residents had the option to complete the survey with the provided paper copy in the newsletter or online with a provided URL. In total, 245 residents responded. Of those 245 respondents, 173 respondents completed and mailed back the paper copy to the Township and 72 respondents completed the survey online via Mailchimp.

Together, the survey responses provided valuable insights into communication preferences, frequency, and content priorities. Outlined below are key findings from the data. Some of the key findings are supplemented with qualitative examples of what respondents shared in their own words, which are illustrated in visuals entitled, “In Their Own Words.”

Key Findings

Initial questions on the survey were asked to understand the demographic makeup of the respondents, their internet access and usage, and how respondents currently receive information from the Township.¹ Key findings include:

Demographics

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I've been here 25 years and value updates about how things have evolved."

Years lived in Township: A significant majority (71%) of respondents have lived in the township for more than 10 years.

Age Distribution: The largest age group represented in the survey data is 65 and over (60%), followed by 55-64 (18%).

¹ For context, questions about internet usage and comfort levels were included to assess the viability of possible future digital communication initiatives and residents' access to and use of online resources.

Internet Accessibility and Usage

Internet Access and Reliability:

69% strongly agree they have adequate access, and 62% rate their connection as reliable.

Digital Communication Tools:

68% of respondents feel very comfortable using digital tools such as email and social media.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I'm comfortable navigating emails and social media but prefer not to rely on them exclusively."

Current communication channels

Residents were asked to rank the frequency of how they currently receive information from the Township (e.g. email, newsletter, in-person meetings, etc.). The findings below outline the most to least frequent ways they receive information:

Most Frequent Method: The mailed newsletter was rated as the most frequent way residents receive township information.

Other Frequently Used Methods: Postal mail and the township website were also highlighted as a frequent way to receive information from the Township.

Least Frequent Methods: In-person meetings and bulletin boards at township hall were reported as the least frequent.

Preferred Communication Frequency and Delivery

Residents were also asked to consider the frequency of Township communication they prefer, topics they are interested in learning about, and how they prefer to receive that information. Below are key findings from the data collected:

Frequency of communication

Most respondents (52%) prefer receiving updates monthly, followed by quarterly updates (37%). At the same time, while respondents prefer to receive most information on a quarterly or monthly basis, there was repeated mention of a desire to be informed with up-to-date information:

Delivery of communication

In terms of how participants receive information, 82% of respondents prefer to receive emailed newsletters, while 57% of respondents prefer receiving printed content. Figure 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of how respondents indicated their preference to receive information from the Township.

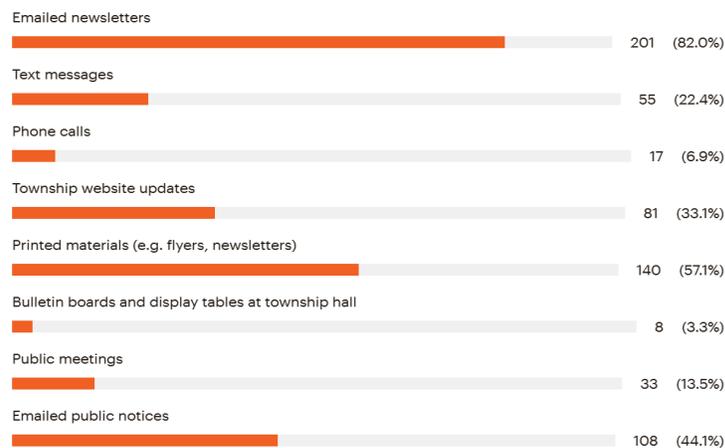
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Quarterly newsletters work well, but urgent updates should come as needed."

"Quarterly newsletter is great unless updates need to be sooner."

"Quarterly with exceptions for urgent matters e.g. public health/safety."

Figure 1: Breakdown of communication channel preferences



Top-rated topics of interest

Respondents are most interested in learning about the following:

- Township news, events, and updates (95%)
- Infrastructure and development updates (69%)
- Emergency alerts and public safety information (63%)
- Notifications about public meetings and hearings (62%)

Social Media Use

Residents were asked about their preference for receiving Township information via social media and their preferred platform. Notably, 53% of respondents either did not choose a specific platform or indicated in written comments that they do not use or prefer not to use social media. Of the participants who did indicate a preference for social media use, Facebook (34%) was the most preferred platform.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I only use Facebook occasionally. Emails are far more reliable for me."

"I don't use social media normally."

"I quit using social media. Too divisive."

"I don't use social media."

"Don't use social media"

"NONE"

Satisfaction Levels

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"While the newsletter is great, website updates are often delayed, which can be frustrating."

"We need a proactive approach to addressing our concerns."

Respondents were also asked about their level of satisfaction with current communication from the Township. 54% of respondents are somewhat or very satisfied with the current level of communication. For instance, and as indicated throughout this report, respondents overwhelmingly value the newsletter. However, 44% responded that they are neutral or dissatisfied, indicating room for improvement. For example, some respondents pointed to a need for more consistent, timely, and accessible information from the Township.

Recommendations

The survey results underscore the importance of maintaining and enhancing existing communication channels, particularly the newsletter and website, while addressing gaps in timely updates and digital engagement. By implementing these recommendations, the township can build stronger and more consistent communication with residents and foster an even greater sense of community. Outlined below are recommendations to consider to further develop the Township’s communication strategy.

1. Enhance Primary Communication Channels

Newsletter: Continue leveraging the township newsletter as a primary communication tool. Because respondents indicated a need for more transparency, consider including more detailed updates on key issues such as infrastructure, construction, and environmental matters. Further, while it is understood that certain information can only be made public at specific times, for instance, legal reasons, providing transparency about the Township’s process (e.g., a newsletter article explaining the timeline and process on decision-making for specific issues) would still align with the values of openness, effective communication, and informing the public.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Printed newsletters are a lifeline for many of us.”

“I thoroughly enjoy the newsletter and believe it enhances feelings of community.”

Printed materials and postal mail: Maintain the use of printed materials, as survey data indicates this is one of the most frequent ways residents receive information. It is notable that of the 245 surveys completed, 173 paper copies were returned by mail. Furthermore, the higher frequency of use is complemented by residents' appreciation for printed materials and especially the newsletter, as reflected in their qualitative responses.

2. Improve Digital Communication for Timely and Relevant Information

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"We get emails from one or 2 people in our neighborhood area but I do not know how or why they get communications."

"Do more communication. Email and texts are virtually free."

"Text or email of meetings, events, issues, etc."

Regular email communications: Survey data indicates that 82% of respondents prefer receiving emailed newsletters, while 44% favor emailed public notices. To complement printed communications, the Township could establish a regular email distribution for updates in addition to the current public notices that are distributed. This initiative may require collecting and maintaining an updated database of resident email addresses as well as an established schedule to send out emails in a timely fashion.

Website Enhancements: Revise the website to make it more user-friendly, navigable, and focused on providing clear, timely, relevant, and easily accessible information. Conduct a thorough evaluation, such as user testing, to streamline and reorganize the site while updating key content.

Urgent Alerts: Explore a system for disseminating emergency alerts and public safety notifications through email and text. Respondents repeatedly requested alerts for status of roads and weather alerts (e.g. CodeRED, everbridge, Nixle, etc.).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Improve website organization and ensure timely updates, particularly regarding meeting information and public notices."

"Documents about meetings should be available early enough for us to decide if we want to attend."

"Well Issue was hard to find on website...Should be important to everyone and made known front page of website."

"Sometimes the website is slow to be updated. I would like documents on the website in time for us to decide if we want to speak at a meeting."

"Website seems a bit chaotic; difficult to find what one is looking for."

"Turnaround time on meeting results seems inconsistent."

3. Increase Community Engagement

Consider hosting community workshops or events to raise awareness of township matters and activities. For example, respondents expressed interest in participating in educational programs, and some business owners or community leaders indicated a willingness to contribute to events such as farm activities, homeownership workshops, and yoga classes. Additionally, many respondents expressed a desire to learn more about current issues and events in the Township and receive regular updates.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I would like to know more about construction and green belt preservation."

"I would like a link to look at any current development plans both public and private plus have an early notification of any larger developments or projects."

"More on large scale property development like Toll Bros on Whitmore Lake Road"

"Efforts to protect open spaces"

"Local news-voting, local farms, Gelman plume update."

"Identify key issues like the fence and water quality and let us know what is happening "

"I would like to know when road-grading is going to occur."

"I am principally interested in environmental and development information. Would also like to know about legal actions by or against the township."

Conclusion

Responses from Township residents provide a solid foundation for developing a robust communication strategy. The data highlights mechanisms already in place that are effective and well-received by residents, while also revealing areas for improvement. A key insight is that residents want more information but in a balanced manner—neither overwhelming nor constant. This highlights the need for a strategic communication approach that prioritizes quality over quantity and follows a thoughtful schedule.

The survey results also indicate there is no need to start from scratch. Gradual improvements, such as establishing a regular schedule for distributing both print and digital materials, can enhance the Township’s communication efforts. Additionally, leveraging residents’ expertise and fostering collaboration can help create engaging community activities that bring people together.

Finally, respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their ideas and for the Township’s effort to continually improve. These results offer a strong foundation for future improvements, underscoring that progress is both possible and ongoing.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I appreciate this survey being done and hope the results are a better informed populous."

"Thank you for doing this."

"We appreciate the township efforts to keep us informed."

"Thank you for doing the survey. Do this annually."

"Thank you for asking our opinion."

"I applaud the township's effort to improve communication."

"Thanks for asking for input!"