

**Report to the Residents of South Kenton County:  
Results of the Survey of Land Use Preferences  
April 2014**

**Introduction**

Kenton County is really two counties. The north is highly urbanized with 18 incorporated places and the south is essentially an agricultural area dotted with rural residential sites. As Table 1 indicates, between 1990 and 2000, the population of South Kenton County barely change (decline of 0.31%) and the proportion of all Kenton County residents living in the southern part of the county declined slightly from 6.1% to 5.7%. But between 2000 and 2010, growth in South Kenton County was 4.4% and the proportion of all Kenton County residents living in the southern part of the county stabilized at 5.7%. Similarly, the number of housing units in South Kenton County grew by 15.0% between 1990 and 2000, then grew by 9.4% between 2000 and 2010. Housing units in South Kenton County represented 5.1% of the total housing stock in Kenton County in 1990 and grew to 5.2% in both 2000 and 2010. Essentially, Kenton County has been experiencing per capita sprawl as the residential decisions of people increase the per capita consumption of land.

<b>Table 1 Kenton County and South Kenton County* Population and Housing: 1990 – 2010</b>			
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>
<b>Population</b>			
Total Population of Kenton	159,720	151,464	142,031
Population of South Kenton County census tracts	9,032	8,648	8,675*
637.01	3,172	2,761	7,154
637.02	4,354	4,424	
659	1,506	1,463	1,521
Population change for all of Kenton County	8,256 5.5%	9,433 6.6%	
Population change for South Kenton County	384 4.4%	-27 -0.31%	
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>
South Kenton County as a share of total Kenton County population	5.7%	5.7%	6.1%
<b>Housing Units</b>			
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>
Total number of housing units in Kenton County	68,975	63,571	56,086
Total number of housing units in South Kenton County census tracts	3,595	3,287	2,859
Change in number of housing units in Kenton County	5,404 8.5%	7,485 13.3%	
Change in number of housing units in South Kenton County	308 9.4%	428 15.0%	
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>
South Kenton County as a share of total Kenton County			

housing units	5.2%	5.2%	5.1%
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\*In 2000 and 2010, South Kenton County is comprised of census tract 637.01, 637.02 and 659. In 1990 it was comprised of only census tract 637. To permit comparison across time we have added census tract 659 into the data for 1990.

### **Status report on the 1996 Study: Charting a Path to the Future**

The tremendous growth of population and housing units in South Kenton County between 1990 and 2000 was the stimulus for an emerging concern about a vision for the future characteristics and identity of South Kenton County. Many people began to ask questions such as: If present trends continue, what will South Kenton County be like in 10 or 20 years? Will this still be the kind of place that we want to call home?

In 1996, an open public forum was held at which more than 100 residents of south Kenton County participated in a discussion on "Planning for the 21st Century." Citizens considered the following questions:

- What needs to be preserved in South Kenton County for future generations?
- What needs to be changed?
- Given your responses to these first questions, what kind of housing development do we want for future generations?

From these discussions emerged some consensus on residents' dreams for the future of South Kenton County.

- Preserve the green space and rural character of South Kenton County.
- Maintain farming and farm land as integral components of life in South Kenton County.
- Improve key aspects of the infrastructure, in particular, the quality of roads and access to water and sewers in South Kenton County.
- Create more opportunities for citizens to influence decisions related to planning for the future of South Kenton County.
- Change how development occurs in order to preserve the rural lifestyle and the rural landscape of South Kenton County.

In the fall of 1998, the Kenton County Fiscal Court appointed the South Kenton County Planning Task Force to develop a set of recommendations to guide government decisions on designing the South Kenton County to match residents' hopes and dreams. This Task Force eventually submitted a vision for the future of South Kenton County as well as implementation recommendations. The vision presented to the Kenton County Fiscal Court was as follows:

*The vision for the southern portion of Kenton County is one of residential growth centered around existing small communities where public services are currently available or planned for future upgrading, and where existing roads, with appropriate upgrades, can efficiently and safely move traffic. Residential development will be encouraged to occur in a way to minimize impacts on the rural landscape and the functioning of agricultural enterprises. Areas are identified where industrial and commercial development should occur to provide employment opportunities for*

*residents in this portion of the county. Finally, the vision includes maintaining a strong and viable agricultural economy in the southern portion of Kenton County.*

The 1998 report, "South Kenton County: Charting a Path to the Future" became a guide for the writing of the comprehensive plan. A status review of progress on these recommendations (Attachment A) indicates a substantial number have either been implemented or are in progress. The impact of these efforts is clear in the dramatically slower rate of population growth in South Kenton County. But, South Kenton County still posted a higher rate of housing growth than for Kenton County as a whole (see Table 1).

## **2014 South Kenton Survey Results**

In 2013, a South Kenton Citizens group was formed to assess how trends over the last 15 years might have modified residents' attitudes and preferences with respect to development patterns. The group decided that a survey would be the most effective way to offer residents of South Kenton County an opportunity to express their land use preferences and their desires for the future of their part of Kenton County. The citizens group hosted several community meetings and created a Facebook page open for suggestions. The group used comments from these to design the questions in this survey.

After developing the survey, it posted on the NKAPC website and letters with the survey (and the web site for the survey) were sent to all the households in South Kenton County. The letters as well as advertisements were used to inform residents of the importance of their participation for informing the planning process for South Kenton County.

1043 surveys were completed, representing 29.0% of all households in South Kenton County. While this is not a probability sample, the fact that 3 in ten households participated represents a significant indicator of residents' hopes and dreams for the future of South Kenton County. Moreover, 80% of the participants own property in South Kenton County.

What follows is a basic descriptive analysis of the results. A T-Test for differences in means was conducted to compare residents who have lived in South Kenton County for less than 10 years, with those who have lived here for more than 10 years. When appropriate, statistically significant differences in responses among these two residential groups will be noted. However, there are only four questions with significant differences and in each case, long-term residents are more likely to strongly agree with the statement than to agree or to agree rather than be unsure.

### *Geographic distribution of survey participants*

In order to assess the geographic distribution of survey participants, they were asked the name of the elementary school closest to their residence. For 46%, Piner is the nearest elementary school, and 20% live near Whites Tower, while 16% say they are close to Kenton Elementary. Eight in ten (80%) have lived in South Kenton County for more than 10 years, so these are residents who have a grounded sense of the pace and pattern of change in South Kenton County.

### *Reasons for moving to or staying in South Kenton County and use of land*

When asked why they moved to or remain in South Kenton County, 35.4% state it is to experience a rural lifestyle as indicated by the following comments: "This area is country and we want it to stay that way. We don't want or need any more suburbs," and "the rural lifestyle is most important." 30% say it is to be near family noting that they were "born and raised in

Kenton County," or, "my family has been here for generations." More simply, many say "my roots run deep."

13.6% say that either farming commercially or retaining a family farm are why they moved to or remain in South Kenton County. Another 7.8% stated that they wanted to be able to raise food for their family and other explanations represent 7.8% of the responses. Two explanations dominate the "other" category. One is the desire to get away from the "traffic," the "hustle and bustle" of the city and the suburbs while the other is to have land and a home "in a beautiful setting."

When asked about the current use of their land, 29% indicate that they are involved in subsistence farming for their family's own use while another 13% say that are engaged in commercial farming (cattle, horses, forestry, hay). Interestingly, another 29% state that their land is for preservation or conservation purposes, such as "I am working on a small (1 acre) certified area for birds." Another 28% offered other explanations for the current use of their land. The vast majority of these indicated that their land was simply a large residential lot, and the next largest group of these "other" responses explained that they were enjoying the country setting -- its peace and quiet and natural beauty.

In summary, a significant proportion of respondents value the rural lifestyle and the opportunities to produce food that is available to them in South Kenton County. To this is added the very strong ties to place for the significant number of participants who were born and raised in South Kenton County, sometimes in the same house or on the same property where they now live. Furthermore, South Kenton County offers "seclusion from the suburbs" and a place to raise a family with room for kids to play.

#### *Defining a rural landscape*

When asked what comes to mind when they think of a rural landscape, three quarters say "Wide areas of open grass land or pastures or unbroken wooded tracts," 70% say "small operating family farms (under 50 acres)" and 54% say "large operating farms (over 50 acres)." But less than one third say that they picture "large single home lots (5 acres or more)."

There is even stronger agreement among respondents on what does "Not at all" fit their picture of a rural landscape. This includes, 84% who say that "Large supermarkets or discount stores with large illuminated parking lots" are "not at all" in their picture of a rural landscape; 90% say that "Clustered housing developments with less than one acre lot sizes" does not fit; and 93% assert that neither "Large office/facility buildings (private or government)" nor "Factories or warehouses" fit what they define as a rural landscape.

In other words, there is an overwhelming consensus on what is and is not a rural landscape, and it reflects the sentiments expressed by residents in the late 1990s and what South Kenton County is like right now. For these respondents, a rural landscape, what they value most about South Kenton County, is its open pastures, wooded tracts and farms of different sizes.

#### *Attitudes on conditions and issues in South Kenton County*

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements that presented conditions and issues in South Kenton County. Responses are presented from the largest to the smallest percentage indicating that they "strongly agree" with each statement.<sup>1</sup>The highest proportion of respondents indicated that they "strongly" agreed with the statements that describe the desired rural landscape affirmed in earlier parts of the survey, as evidenced by the following:

- "It is important to keep agriculture a viable part of South Kenton economy." (SA = 68.7%) (A = 23.5%, **Total Agree = 92.2%**) On this question, newcomers to South Kenton County have a statistically significant higher mean score than those who have lived in the area for more than 10 years (Mean 1.55 v 1.38).
- "It is important to maintain the rural character of South Kenton County." (SA = 70.7%) (A = 19.3%, **Total Agree = 90.3%**)
- "I am satisfied with my access to commercial and retail stores where I live." (SA = 49.3%, A = 37.5%, **Total Agree = 86.8%**) On this question, newcomers to South Kenton County have a statistically significant higher mean score than those who have lived in the area for more than 10 years (Mean 1.93 v 1.67).
- "Subdivisions and other residential development should be directed away from land which is being used for preservation or conservation purposes." (SA = 52.2%) (A = 31.7%, **Total Agree = 83.9%**)
- "Subdivisions and other residential should be directed away from land which is being used for agriculture." (SA = 49.6%, A = 30.4%, **Total Agree = 80.0%**)
- "If residential and retail development occurs around these existing communities, it should maintain the small community character of these places." (SA = 41.8%, A = 38.0%, **Total Agree = 79.8%**)

If you add in those who "agreed" with these statements, support rises to between 79.8% and 92.2%. These responses reinforce the importance of the rural character of South Kenton County for these participants.

There are another set of statements that attracted a significant amount of support when both the strongly agree and the agree responses are combined. One of these statements reflects a concern for nearly 8 in 10 of the respondents that if there is "unrestricted residential growth" in South Kenton County, then property taxes will inevitably rise to meet the increased demand for public services. The other statements that gathered considerable agreement address whether certain needs exist in South Kenton County.

- "If there is unrestricted residential growth in South Kenton County, I am concerned that my property taxes will have to increase to pay for the cost of new services." (SA = 51.6%) (A = 26.9%, **Total Agree = 78.5%**) On this question, newcomers to South Kenton County have a statistically significant higher mean score than those who have lived in the area for more than 10 years (Mean 1.95 v 1.76).
- "Roads in South Kenton County need significant improvements (e.g., widening, straightening, side ditch maintenance)." (SA = 33.6%, A = 35.3%, **Total Agree = 68.9%**) On this question, newcomers to South Kenton County have a statistically significant higher mean score than those who have lived in the area for more than 10 years (Mean 2.43 v 2.11).
- "Internet access in South Kenton County is sufficient for my needs." (SA = 26.8%, A = 36.1%, **Total Agree = 62.9%**)
- "Existing regulations that permit a minimum lot size of one acre is appropriate zoning for South Kenton County." (SA = 30.5%, A = 32.2%, **Total Agree = 62.7%**)

On the other hand, when presented with a set of statements that describe development patterns the respondents see as unacceptable, they clearly express their disagreement. In these responses, participants are asserting that subdivisions should NOT be allowed in undeveloped areas, that South Kenton County does NOT need more employment centers and, that if given the opportunity to sell their farm for development, they would NOT take it.

- "Subdivisions should be allowed in undeveloped areas." (SD = 36.2%, D = 26.3%, **Total Disagree = 62.5%**)
- "South Kenton County needs to have more employment centers (e.g., clusters of large employers)." (SD = 28.5%, D = 32.1%, **Total Disagree = 60.6%**)
- "If the opportunity arose to sell my farm for development, I would take it." (SD = 42.9%, D = 16.0%, **Total Disagree = 58.9%**)

Finally, there are two statements which evoke mixed responses by the participants. These statements are related in that they refer to what should happen in and around the small communities of Piner, Morning View, Nicholson and Visalia and whether these communities should be the focus of residential and retail development or not.

- "If residential and retail development occurs around these existing communities, it should allow these communities to grow more." (SA = 9.5%, A = 33.7%, **Total Agree = 43.2%**; Unsure = 33.4%; SD = 13.1%, D = 13.3%, **Total Disagree = 26.4%**)
- "Residential and retail development in South Kenton County should only be permitted around the communities of Piner, Morning View, Nicholson and Visalia." (SA = 7.4%, A = 20.9%, **Total Agree = 28.3%**; Unsure = 33.3%; SD = 18.7%, D = 19.7, **Total Disagree = 28.4%**)

In summary, the responses to these attitude statements continue to reinforce the clearly stated and strong value attached to maintaining the rural and agricultural character of South Kenton County. The only uncertainty is whether residential and retail growth, if and when it occurs, should be clustered around the existing small communities.

#### *Other aspects of a vision for the future of South Kenton County*

Participants in the survey also had the opportunity to add their own thoughts to what they hope for the future of South Kenton County. The single largest set of comments related to a desire to "please" keep South Kenton County "just as it is" or "Keep it rural. When it's gone, it's gone." Others commented on the importance of maintaining the "country feel" as well as the importance of "Keep[ing] as much farm area from being developed as possible." One respondent summed up this view as follows: "I want Southern Kenton County to stay farm land and there to be no subdivisions."

The next two most frequently identified aspects of the vision are for upgrades on all aspects of the infrastructure, particularly access to public water and significant road improvements. Public water is a "number one concern" as described by one respondent, while others noted that access to or better cell phone, cable and high speed Internet service is needed, especially for those who have a home businesses. In terms of road improvements (e.g., widening, maintaining), respondents identified several roads that need particular attention in order to make them safer, but as one respondent said, "We need roads wide enough and safe enough for school busses."

Many also commented on the desire to see more parks and recreational opportunities. While a few described this as a YMCA, most wanted "a better park system with opportunities for children to play and participate in outdoor activities." Indeed, parks with trails, bike and running paths as well as a fishing lake are the key types of recreational choices participants would like to see in South Kenton County.

A number of participants expressed their desire for more retail choices in South Kenton County, typically these comments focused on major retailers (e.g., Lowes, Wal-Mart, Home Depot) but an even larger number wanted a greater selection of restaurants.

A nearly equally number of survey participants commented on the need for "Good planning, taking into consideration traffic flow, effects on our schools." For these participants, "A commonsense approach to development" that "Maintains the balance of residential and open land" is the way to insure the "area [does not turn] into a "mini" Florence. I don't want more crime, pollution or destruction of the environment."

## Summary

The results of the 2014 survey of South Kenton County households show that the pattern of development since the 1998 plan reflects the strong desires of residents to maintain the rural and agricultural character of this area. It is noteworthy that despite the passage of 16 years and a 4.4% increase in population as well as a 9.4% increase in housing units, "the rural lifestyle is [still] most important." Moreover, it does not matter how the issue of a desired landscape is presented, the level of consensus on the value of living in a rural area is remarkable.

South Kenton County is an area where most people have put down roots for years, if not generations. South Kenton County is more than a place, it is "home" and where many find they can "enjoy the land with family." South Kenton County's rural landscape becomes a part of the residents' "rural identity." This comment by one respondent represents the sentiment of the majority of participants: "We like our rural lifestyle as it is. That's why we stay."

While there is a desire for some changes, these tend to be focused on basic infrastructure improvements. Respondents want better roads, not necessarily new ones. Respondents want access to public water and reliable Internet and cell phone service, but few want large discount retail or office buildings in their part of the county. As one respondent said: "The main thing is to keep this area rural, yet also a close knit community. The rural area is what drew us here. It is already getting "busy" and feels as though we are losing the "country" feeling." While those who live in the "other" Kenton County might find such a sentiment difficult to comprehend, a significant majority of South Kenton County respondents would nod their head in agreement. For these respondents, there is only ONE South Kenton County, and it is a rural and agricultural landscape.

It is the responsibility of those who live in and love South Kenton County to work together and with local government to insure that their hopes and dreams for the future of this area can become a reality. Residents of South Kenton County should participate in the Southern Kenton County Community Events and Government Talk Facebook page for regular updates. We can create and sustain the kind of community that we desire when we work together for a better tomorrow.

<sup>1</sup> Two attitude statements are not included in this final report because comments on the surveys suggested that respondents may have misunderstood the intent of the statements. "If residential and retail development occurs around these existing communities, it should allow these communities to grow more" (SA = 9.5%, A = 33.7%, Total Agree = 43.2%; Unsure = 33.4%; SD = 13.1%, D = 13.3%, Total Disagree = 26.4%). "Residential and retail development in South Kenton County should only be permitted around the communities of Piner, Morning View, Nicholson and Visalia" (SA = 7.4%, A = 20.9%, Total Agree = 28.3%; Unsure = 33.3%; SD = 18.7%, D = 19.7, Total Disagree = 28.4%).