

THE EXURBAN CHANGE PROJECT REPORT NUMBER EX-2:

**RESIDENTS' VIEWS OF THEIR COMMUNITY AT THE
RURAL-URBAN INTERFACE:
RESULTS OF A COMMUNITY STUDY
OF NORTHWEST LICKING COUNTY, OHIO**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Outlined below is a summary of key findings from the 2000 – 2001 survey of Northwest Licking County residents.

- Longtime residents and new residents share many of the same reasons for choosing to live in NW Licking County, including its low crime rate, the general safety of the area and its lack of congestion.
- In terms of evaluating community services, little difference was found between new and longtime residents. More than half of the respondents felt the overall quality of services and facilities in their local area were either very good or good.
- Over half of all of the respondents shop for most of their daily needs within NW Licking County.
- Newcomers are not as embedded in social networks as longtime residents. Newcomers know less people by name where they live, have fewer relatives living in NW Licking County and have fewer friends living in the region.
- Almost half of the respondents attend church within NW Licking County and church membership is higher than any other type of belonging, such as recreational groups, service groups, and political organizations.
- Many new and longtime residents report they are not very active or not at all active in the community.
- Newcomers feel less at home in their community than longtime residents.
- Longtime residents do not describe the community as rural as newcomers.
- Newcomers do not describe the community as being as supportive as longtime residents.
- About two-thirds of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed the community is losing its rural character.
- More than three quarters of all respondents feel that residential development should be limited in the country to protect local farmland.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes results from a case study of an eight township and three village region located at the rural-urban interface in northwest Licking County, a part of the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area. This is one of a series of reports focusing on population, social and agricultural changes at Ohio's rural-urban interface.

Across the United States many rural areas adjacent to large urban areas experienced substantial population growth during the 1990s, and in Ohio this was also the case. Because thirty-nine of the state's 88 counties are part of a metropolitan area containing a central city of 50,000 or more residents, many of Ohio's nonmetropolitan counties are within reasonable commuting distance of one of these cities and consequently, many areas of Ohio are located at the rural-urban interface where population growth has been especially large.

STUDY BACKGROUND

This report describes some of the attitudes of new and longtime residents living in at the rural-urban interface in Ohio.

STUDY SITE

An eight township and three municipality contiguous study area in Northwest Licking county was selected for this study. This study area was selected because of its proximity to the City of Columbus and because parts of the study area had experienced substantial population growth during the 1990s. The study area was also chosen due to the existence of substantial and diverse agriculture in the area. Map 1 identifies the study area in relation to downtown Columbus and the rest of the Columbus metropolitan area.

Map 1. Geographic location of study site.



POPULATION TRENDS FOR STUDY AREA

The pattern of population change in the study area from 1990 to 2000 is consistent with trends across Ohio and the United States during the past ten years. Population in the study area in 1990 was 15,685 and grew to 17,365 residents in 2000 (Table 1). This is a 10.7 percent increase for the 10-year period. Population growth was greatest in the townships of the study area, with a 16.1 percent population increase in the eight-township area. The largest net growth occurred in Jersey, Liberty, and St. Albans townships, which are located nearest Columbus and Johnstown, the largest village in the area. Modest growth occurred in the townships further from Columbus.

Table 1. Population and Change, NW Licking County Townships and Villages

	Township Population		Δ1990-2000	
	1990	2000	Net Change	% Change
Township Name				
Bennington Township	971	1,265	294	30.2
Burlington Township	966	1,073	107	11.0
Hartford Township	779	878	99	12.7
Jersey Township	2,432	2,841	409	16.8
Liberty Township	1,470	1,797	327	22.2
McKean Township	1,357	1,516	159	11.7
Monroe Township	1,914	2,083	169	8.8
St. Albans Township	1,668	1,975	307	18.4
<i>All Townships in Study Area</i>	<i>11,557</i>	<i>13,428</i>	<i>1,871</i>	<i>16.1</i>
Village Name				
Hartford Village	418	412	-6	-1.4
Johnstown Village	3,242	3,440	198	6.1
Alexandria Village	468	85	-383*	-81.0
<i>All Villages in Study Area</i>	<i>4,128</i>	<i>3,937</i>	<i>-191</i>	<i>-4.6</i>
All NW Licking Co.	15,685	17,365	1,680	10.7

* The 2000 Census has initially reported that the Village of Alexandria lost 383 persons. The magnitude of the loss and its proximity to Columbus and associated suburbs is counterintuitive. There is the possibility that this is incorrect due to a boundary or reporting issue at the Census.

DATA COLLECTION

Several types of data were collected in the study area. Approximately 40 interviews with local residents, farmers, and leaders were conducted, with a majority of these informants living in St. Albans and Burlington townships. The focus of the key informant interviews was to learn about recent history and growth related changes.

Data was also collected through a survey of community residents. The survey measured resident attitudes about the community, agriculture, and recent development. The survey also requested information about resident social networks and level of participation in the community. The survey was sent to a random sample of one-third of the households in the area and requested that a randomly chosen adult in the household complete the survey.

The survey response rate was 52 percent, with 819 of 1574 households returning a completed questionnaire. This response rate is consistent with similar community survey response rates.

The results presented here may be affected by the possibility that nonrespondents differ from respondents in a systematic fashion.

RESPONDENT ATTRIBUTES

Responses to the survey by region of the study area are as follows:

- Jersey, St. Albans, and Alexandria (N=237)
- Johnstown (N=165)
- Monroe and Liberty (N=243)
- McKean, Hartford, Hartford Village, Bennington, and Burlington (N=174)

The average age of respondents is 52 (Table 2). Average household size is 2.7 persons. Seventy-five percent of the respondents are married. About 68 percent were employed either full or part-time and 22 percent were retired.

A total of 240 respondents (29.2 percent) can be categorized as newcomers as they reported living in the community less than 10 years.

Table 3. Survey Respondent Attributes

Attribute	Mean	Min	Max
Age (years)	52	19	93
Years lived in area	25	1	90
Household size (persons)	2.7	1	10
Married (%)	75		
Own home (%)	91		
Sex (% female)	52		
Employed (full/part-time)(%)	68		
Retired (%)	22		
Newcomers (%)	29		

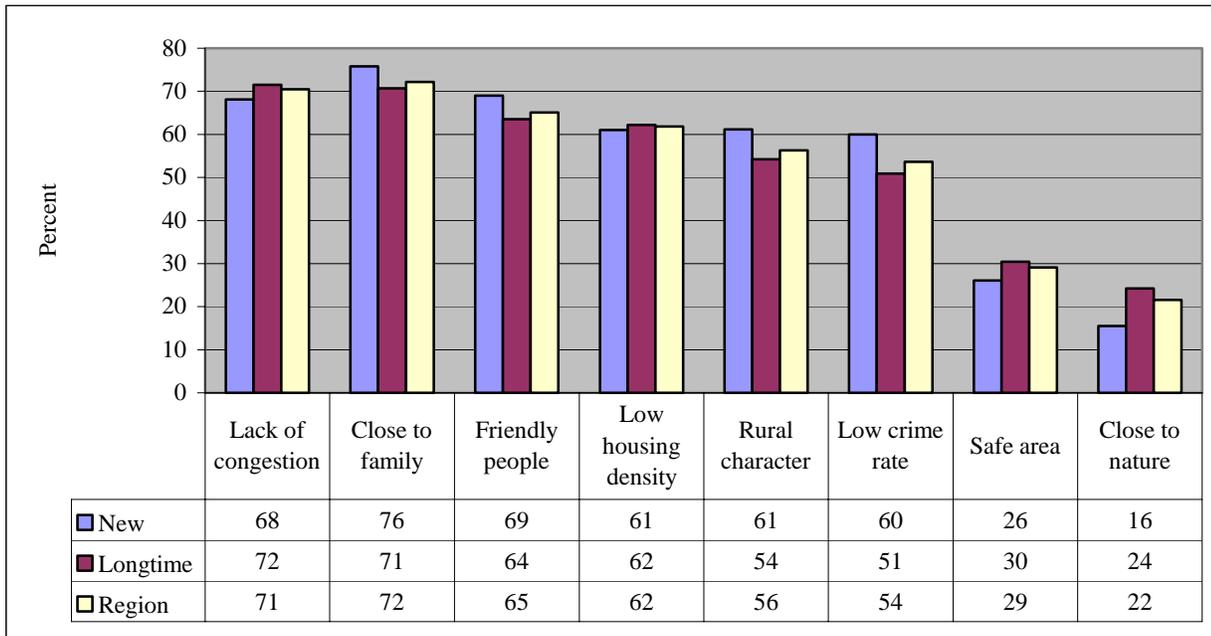
MOST IMPORTANT REASONS PEOPLE LIVE WHERE THEY LIVE

There are a variety of reasons why someone might choose to live in an area like NW Licking County. To understand some of the reasons, respondents were asked to identify the most important factors in their decision to live where

they currently live. Figure 1 identifies the percent of respondents identifying a factor as very important in their decision to live in the area. As a region, a large proportion of respondents identified lack of congestion, safety, rural character and low crime rate as very important in choosing to live in NW Licking County.

There are slight differences between newcomers and longtime residents in the factors identified as important to why they live in the area. The factor reported very important by the largest proportion of longtime residents, is lack of congestion, followed by close to family friendly people. The largest proportion of newcomers identify close to family as being the most important reason for choosing to live in NW Licking County followed by friendly people and lack of congestion.

Figure 1. Factors reported as very important for choosing to live in NW Licking County



**COMMUNITY SERVICES,
FACILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Areas experiencing rapid growth may experience some problems with delivery of local services or newcomers may find that certain local facilities or services are not of the same quality as those from which they moved. Little difference was found between new and longtime residents in evaluation of services, so the following analysis only reports on responses from the region as a whole.

Rating services

As a region, 56 percent of the respondents felt the overall quality of services and facilities in their local area were either very good or good. Forty one percent felt the overall quality of services and facilities in their local area were either fair or poor, while three percent did not know how they would rate the overall quality of services and facilities. Fire service, public schools, emergency medical services and housing were the highest rated local services (Table 3), while local senior citizen programs and recreation / entertainment opportunities were rated the lowest.

Acquisition of services

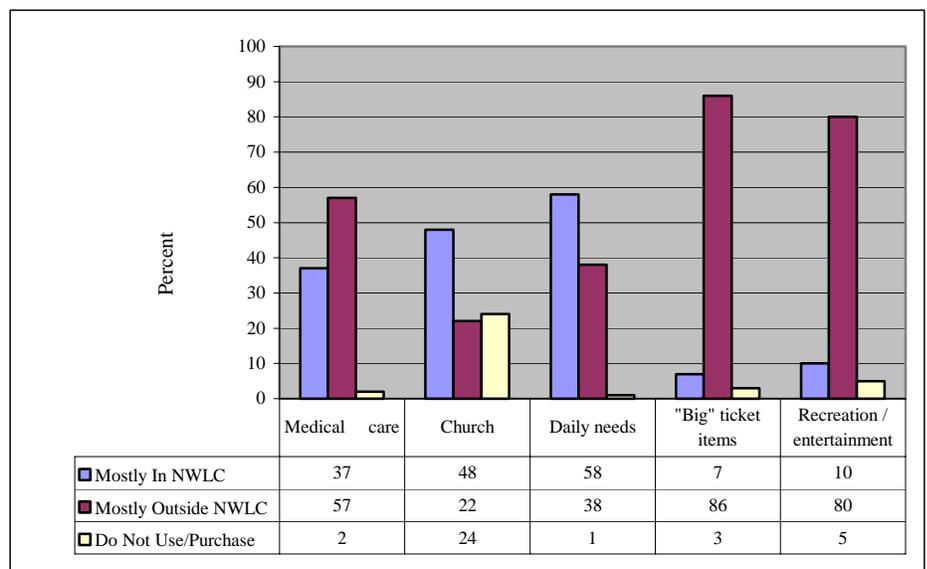
Probing residents further about services, facilities, and opportunities, respondents were asked where they went for several types of services or activities. Over half of the respondents reported shopping for their daily needs within NW Licking County (58 percent) (Figure 3). Almost half of the respondents report attending church within NW Licking County (48 percent). One

third (37 percent) of residents report seeking medical care within NW Licking County. Eighty percent of respondents report seeking recreation or entertainment opportunities outside the region and 86 percent report shopping for “big” ticket items outside NW Licking County. The very large proportion of residents seeking entertainment and big-ticket items outside the region is consistent with the low evaluation of recreation opportunities and shopping facilities reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Assessment of Services, Facilities and Opportunities

	% Very Good or Good
Fire service	75.3
Public schools	63.3
Housing	60.4
Emergency medical services	57.1
Library	43.3
Primary medical services	32.9
Jobs	23.8
Shopping facilities	22.2
Programs for youth	20.8
Child care services	16.4
Recreation / entertainment	15.9
Senior citizen programs	15.2

Figure 3. Acquisition of services by region



SOCIAL NETWORKS OF COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

In relatively fast growing areas like Northwest Licking County, there can be concern about integration of newcomers into the community. Family, friendship and acquaintance networks can provide some idea about newcomers' integration into the community. In NW Licking County, there are some variations between new and longtime residents' social networks (Figure 4). When asked about the proportion of close personal adult friends that live in NW Licking County, 31 percent of longtime residents indicated that half or more of their close personal adult friends live in the region, whereas for newcomers only 11 percent report half or more of their close personal friends living in NW Licking County. Longtime residents also have more relatives living in the region than newcomers and know more people in their village or township by name. These differences are not surprising, and one would expect over time that the local networks of newcomers will become more dense as they meet other area residents.

level of belonging (46%) and local recreational groups (card clubs, softball leagues, etc.) have the second highest level of belonging. Lower levels of involvement were reported for political organizations and volunteer emergency or fire service.

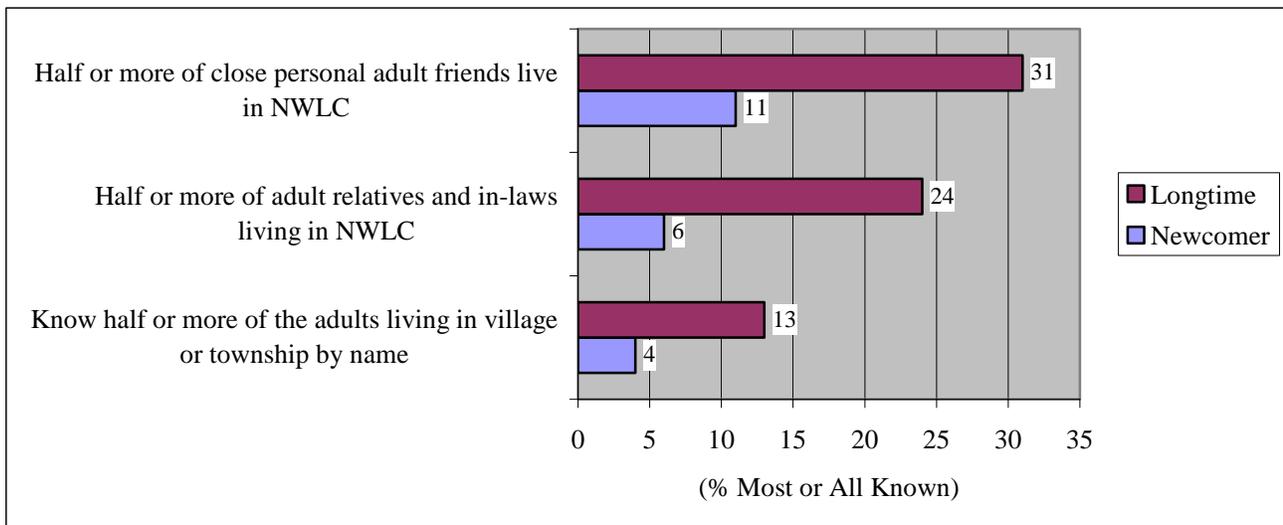
There were modest differences between newcomers and longtime residents in their level of participation in local political organizations (2 percent of newcomers versus 10 percent of longtime residents reported being involved). On the other hand, the differences in levels of participation of newcomers and longtime residents in local churches and schools were similar. Also given the fact that a relatively large proportion of residents report involvement in these institutions (46 percent of all area residents belong to a local church) suggests these might be important institutions for building social connectedness among local residents.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of belonging

Respondents were asked whether or not they belonged to a variety of organizations (Figure 5). Church membership in the region has the highest

Figure 4. New and longtime residents' social networks



Community Improvement Participation

Residents were also asked about their involvement in community improvement activities. Thirty-five percent of respondents reported having participated in a community improvement project in the past two years.

Respondents were also asked to describe their level of involvement in the community as very active, somewhat active, not very active and not at all active (Figure 6). Eleven percent of longtime residents indicated they were very active compared to only five percent of newcomers. In general, though, large proportions of newcomers and longtime residents reported being not very active or not at all active in the community (73 percent for newcomers and 57 percent for longtime residents).

Because newcomers potentially bring new resources and talents to the community, boosting the level of involvement of this group of

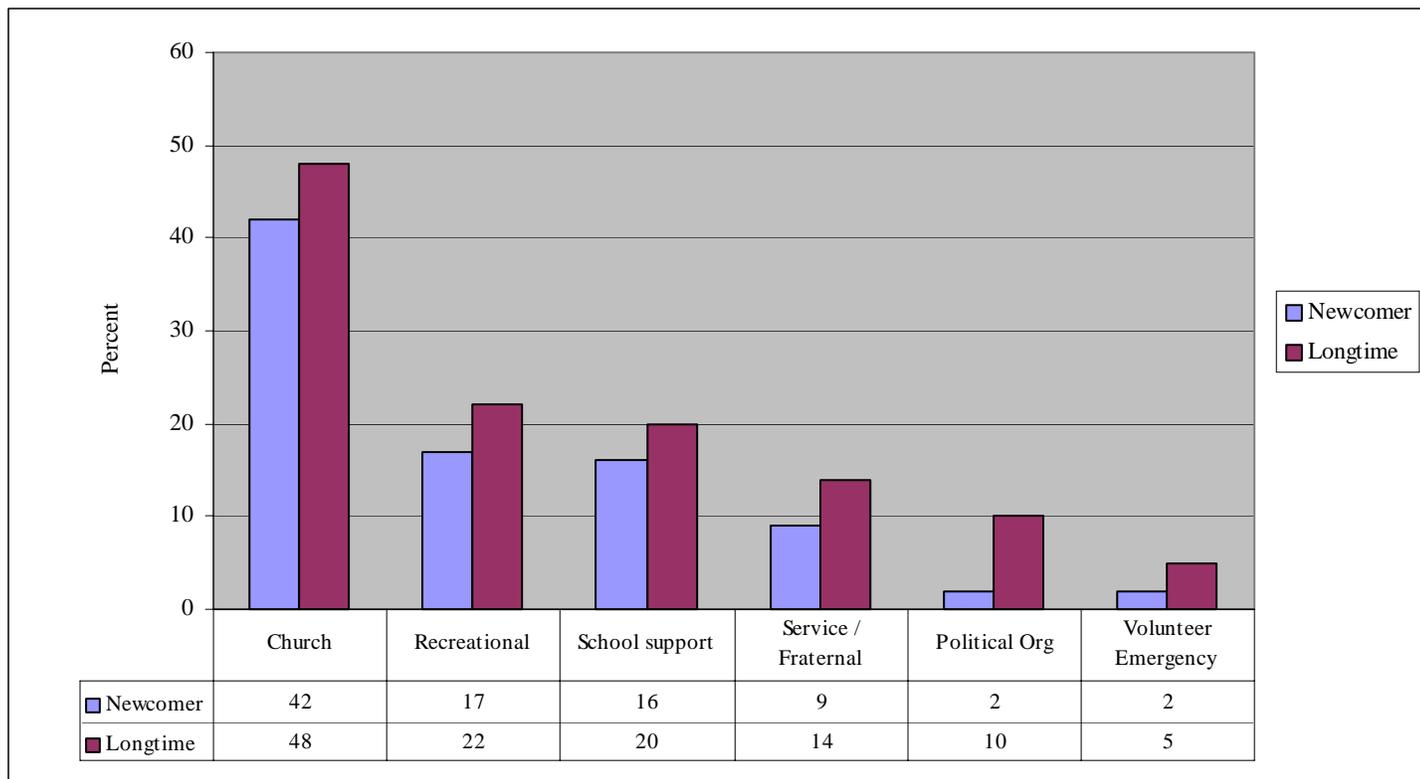
residents in community affairs may have positive benefits for the community.

DESCRIBING THE COMMUNITY

Several survey questions were included to measure how residents' would describe their community. Respondents were asked how friendly the community was, ranging from very friendly to very unfriendly. Newcomers and longtime residents in the region do not differ much in how they describe their community (Table 4).

Most newcomers and longtime residents similarly describe their community as trusting, friendly, and well-kept. A larger proportion of newcomers describe the community as very rural or rural compared to longtime residents. This may be because longtime residents have witnessed more growth and development in the community than newcomers. There is a slight

Figure 5. Level of belonging by residential status



difference between newcomers and longtime residents regarding views of community supportiveness. This finding may be related to newcomers not being as embedded in social networks as longtime residents.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

When asked whether or not they feel at home in their community, 66 percent of respondents report “yes, definitely” they feel at home in their community (Figure 7). Newcomers, though, feel less at home in their community than longtime residents. About 53 percent of newcomers report, “yes, definitely” to feeling at home in the community compared to 79 percent of longtime residents reporting “yes, definitely” they feel at home in the community.

VIEWS ON GROWTH

Several questions related to growth and development in the region were asked of residents. Respondents were asked if they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed or disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with a series of four statements.

About two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement, “This community is losing its rural character.” A larger proportion of longtime residents (66 percent) agreed with the statement than newcomers (53 percent). Respondents were also asked whether they believed population growth and development was negatively impacting local quality of life. Approximately, 40 percent of newcomers and longtime residents agreed with this statement. More than three-quarters of the respondents agreed with the statement (84 percent), “There should be limits on where residential development can occur in the country to protect local farmland.”

Figure 6. New and longtime residents self described level of involvement

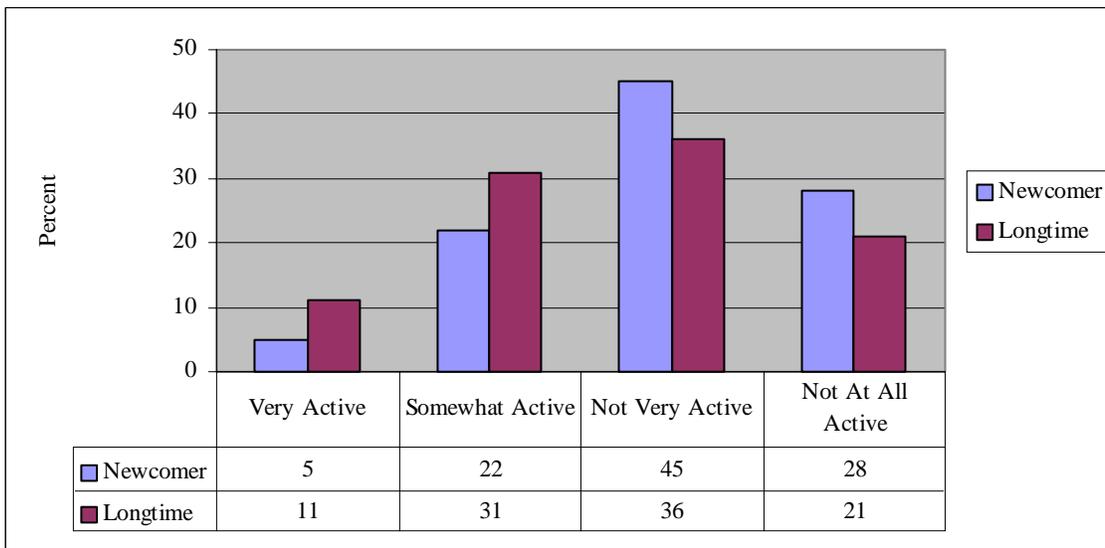


Table 4. Respondents' descriptions of their community by residential status (%)

	Newcomers	Longtime Residents
Very friendly / friendly	72.0	73.5
Very supportive / Supportive	55.2	61.4
Very rural / Rural	79.0	69.4
Very trusting / Trusting	60.4	63.0
Very well-kept / Well-kept	71.4	72.7

Figure 7. Feeling at home in the community by residential status.

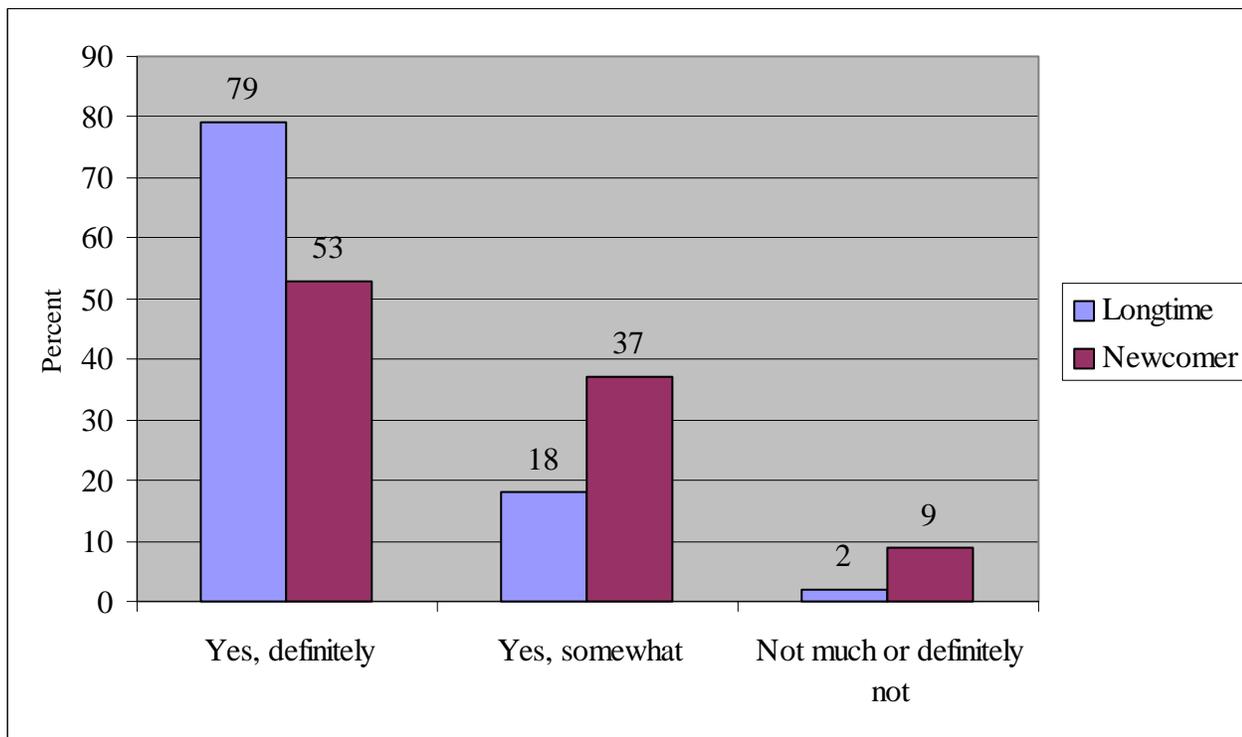


Table 4. New and longtime resident views of growth

	Newcomer	Longtime --percent--	Region
This community is losing its rural character.	53.5	66.0	62.8
Population growth and development in this community is negatively impacting local quality of life.	39.2	41.7	41.0
There should be limits on where residential development can occur in the country to	85.9	83.5	84.3

CONCLUSIONS

The influx of newcomers into rural areas adjacent to large urban areas can create both physical and social challenges for the local community. While most discussion of growth and development at the rural-urban interface focus on the physical or land-use impacts, there are less visible social impacts, concerning integration of newcomers and the development of a sense of community. Maintaining or developing the social dimensions of community in situations of rapid growth can be important for overall resident well-being. As the existence of social linkages among residents and patterns of getting involved in the community contribute to a capacity to solve local problems.

In Northwest Licking County, there is much common ground among newcomers and long-time residents. Most residents of NW Licking County report similar reasons for choosing to live in the region, such as friendly people, lack of congestion and being close to family, which could be a basis for community building or collective action to shape the future of the community.

Despite newcomers not being as socially embedded in the community, their involvement in churches, schools and other local organizations or activities suggest that over time these newcomers will become more socially integrated into the community.

In conclusion, this analysis indicates that the social features of community in Northwest Licking County are impacted by population growth. But because of many similar beliefs about why the community is attractive and evidence of some social participation of newcomers in local affairs, it is likely the community will be able to manage these social changes

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