Municipal Outreach Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Municipal Outreach Program is part of DVRPC's Smart Growth project. From December 2012 through April 2013, DVRPC asked municipalities to participate in a survey to identify ways to improve municipal outreach efforts. This document summarizes the results of the survey and includes recommendations to guide future outreach efforts. For more information, contact DVRPC's Municipal Outreach program coordinator, Christina Arlt, at carlt@dvrpc.org or 215-238-2890.

SURVEY HISTORY

The 2012-2013 DVRPC Municipal Outreach survey included 18 questions. It was distributed via an html email with a link to Survey Monkey.[1] Paper copies of the survey were available upon request, though no municipality took advantage of this option. DVRPC last surveyed municipalities in 2008, and received 43 responses. Several of the questions in the 2012-2013 survey were copies of (or modeled on) questions from the 2008 survey (see Appendix A for a list of questions that were similar on both surveys).

SURVEY DESIGN

The survey was divided into several categories. Questions 1-3 dealt with planning staff and capacity; questions 4-6 dealt with smart growth challenges and progress; questions 7 and 8 dealt with sharing municipal services; questions 9-14 dealt with use of DVRPC resources and services; and questions 15-18 requested basic data, such as county, municipality name, and ZIP code. (See Appendix B for Response Rate by Question.)
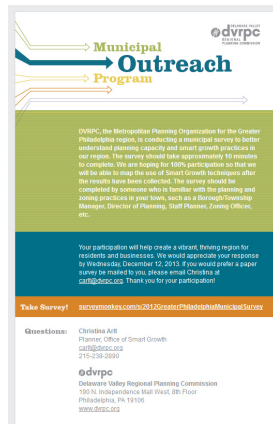

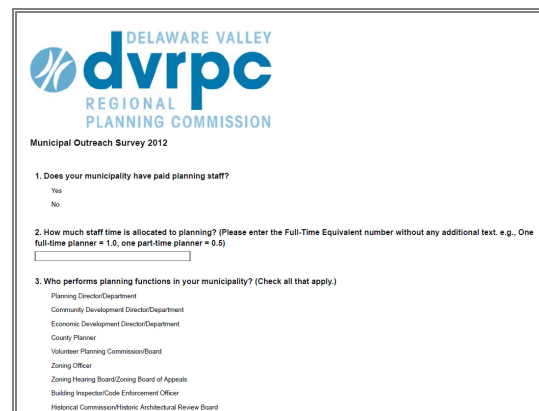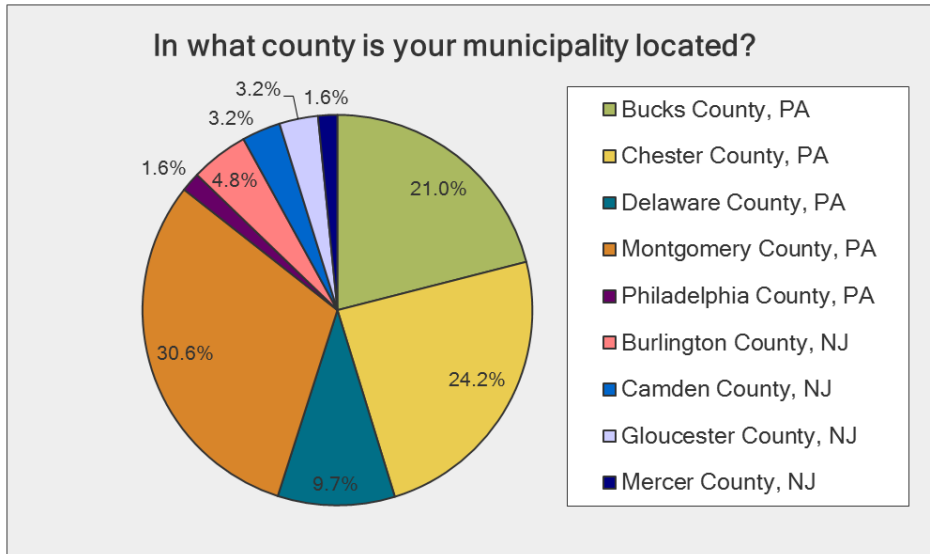Figure 1: A screen shot of the survey invitation

Figure 2: A screen shot of the survey

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[1] Survey Monkey is a leading provider of web-based survey solutions. While a "Basic" subscription is free, it only allows 10 questions and 100 responses per survey. As a result, DVRPC purchased a "Select" SurveyMonkey subscription for $17 per month, which allows unlimited questions and responses per survey.
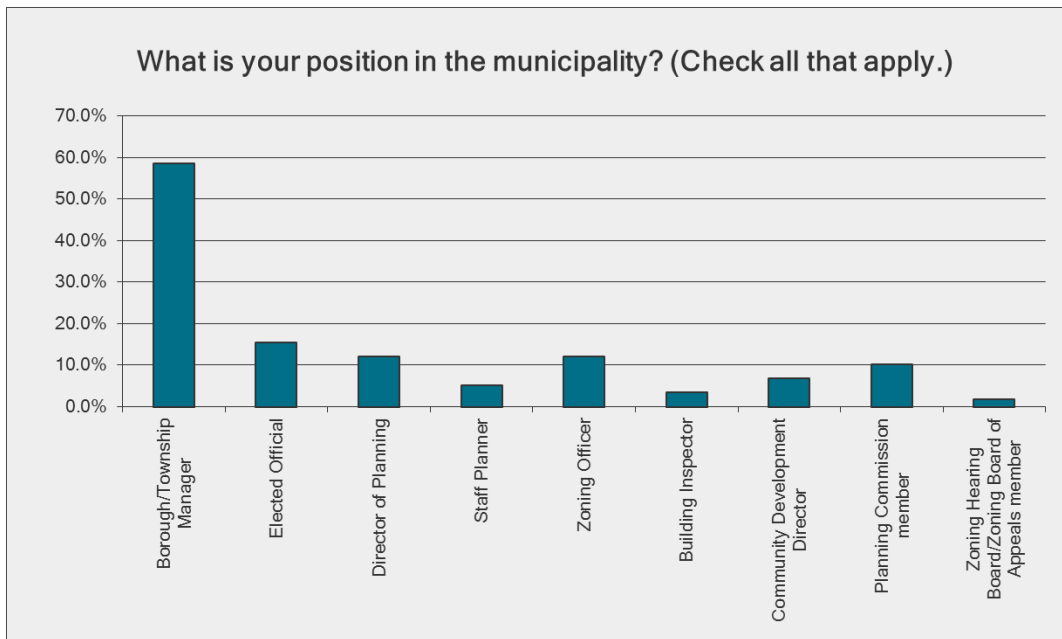
RESPONDENTS

Figure 3: In What County is Your Municipality Located?

DVRPC emailed the link for the survey to everyone on the "Municipalities" e-mail list in the Labels Database, which includes one email address (generally the Borough or Township Manager) for all 352 municipalities in the 9-county Greater Philadelphia region. Nearly 60% of the respondents were either the Borough or Township Manager.

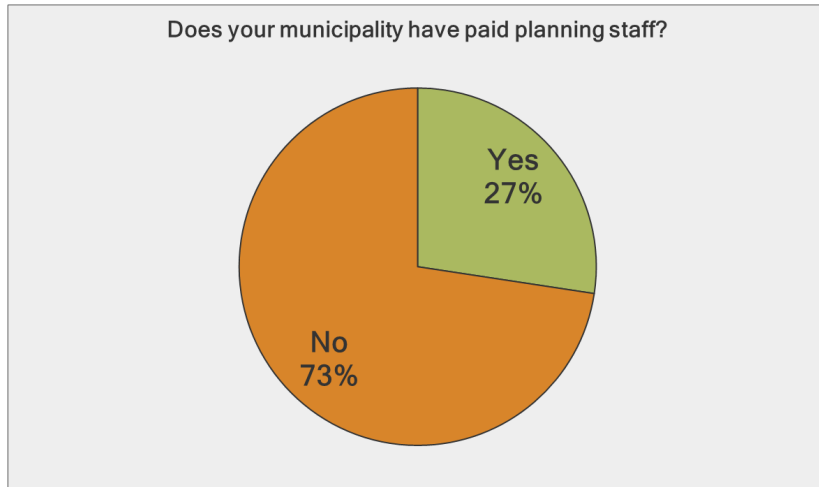*Figure 4: What is your position in the municipality?*

DVRPC received a total of 62 responses to the 2012-2013 Municipal Survey. Sixty-one respondents entered their answers online; one returned the survey via fax. The respondents represented 55 unique municipalities; six municipalities had one or more people submit responses. The overwhelming majority of responses were from Pennsylvania; only eight responses were from New Jersey. This survey did not use a random, representative sample. As a result, the responses may be influenced by voluntary response bias and non-response bias, and therefore should not be extrapolated to the region as a whole.
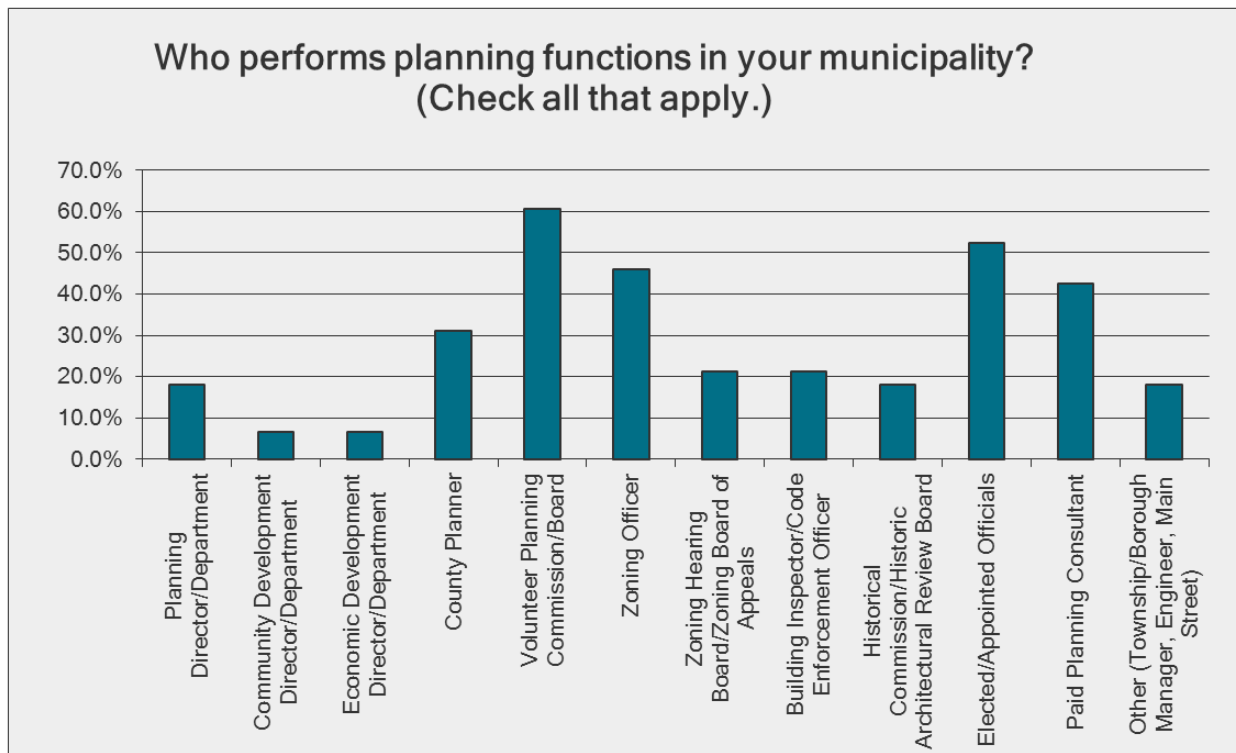
FINDINGS

The majority of respondents said their municipality did not have paid planning staff. Of the 44 respondents who answered the question "How much staff time is allocated to planning?," 20 responded <0.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE), nine responded 0.5 FTE, and 15 responded one or more FTE.

Figure 5: Does Your Municipality Have Paid Planning Staff?
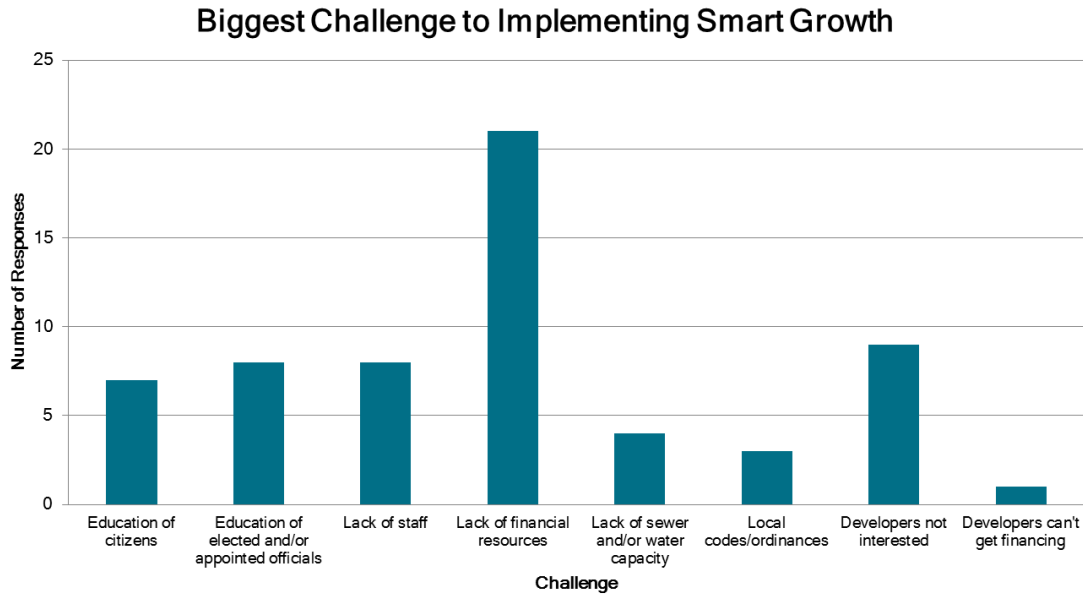

Most respondents indicated that planning functions in their municipalities were performed by volunteer planning board or commission members, followed by elected/appointed officials, zoning officers, and planning consultants. County planners are also involved in planning efforts at the local level.

Figure 6: Who Performs Planning Functions In Your Municipality?

By far, the biggest challenge the respondents identified for implementing smart growth was lack of financial resources. Other challenges included lack of developer interest, education of elected and/or appointed officials, lack of staff, and education of citizens.

Figure 7: Biggest Challenge to Implementing Smart Growth

Biggest Challenge to Implementing Smart Growth

Forty percent of the respondents felt their municipality had either made moderate progress towards implementing Smart Growth principles or that their planning was based completely on Smart Growth principles.

Figure 8: What Progress Has Your Municipality Made In Implementing Smart Growth Principles?

The respondents use a variety of tools to implement smart growth in their municipalities. Sidewalks, stormwater management, and street tree ordinances are the three most common tools from the list.

Figure 9: Use of Smart Growth Tools

Smart Growth Tool	Percentage of Respondents Using Tool
Stormwater Ordinance (emphasizing recharge and green infrastructure)	82.3%
Sidewalks required in most districts	69.4%
Street Tree Ordinance	54.8%
Shared Parking	46.8%
Official Map	45.2%
Impact Fee Ordinance	40.3%
Cluster Development Ordinance (minimum 50% open space)	37.1%
Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) Ordinance	29.0%
Conservation element in Master Plan	29.0%
Multi-Municipal Plan	25.8%
Form-based Code	24.2%
Unified Development Code (Combined Zoning and Subdivision/Land Development Code)	22.6%
Allows Accessory Dwelling Units	21.0%
Reserved Parking	19.4%
Retail Caps (limiting size of big box stores)	17.7%
Alternative Energy Ordinance	17.7%
Live/Work Zoning	16.1%
Right-To-Farm Provisions	12.9%
Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Ordinance	11.3%
Inclusionary Zoning	9.7%
Energy Efficient Design Standards	9.7%
Parking Maximums (NOT minimums)	8.1%
Universal Design Standards	4.8%
Brownfield Inventory	4.8%
Green Building Ordinance	4.8%
Policy Preference for Local Food Businesses (farmers markets, community gardens)	4.8%
Fee-in-Lieu Parking	3.2%
Green Fleet and Green Commute policies	3.2%
Don't Know/None of the Above	3.2%

Over half of the respondents indicated that their municipality shared services with another jurisdiction. Types of services which are shared include: water/sewer, public works, tax collection, code enforcement, police, recreation programs, trail maintenance, health insurance, animal control, fuel, road salt, street light/traffic light maintenance, and purchasing. Nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to consider sharing services. The services most respondents were interested in sharing related to public works. Other services listed included: planning, street lights, software, stormwater, tax collection, street sweeping, zoning and code enforcement, benefits and pension administration, police, and trash/recycling.
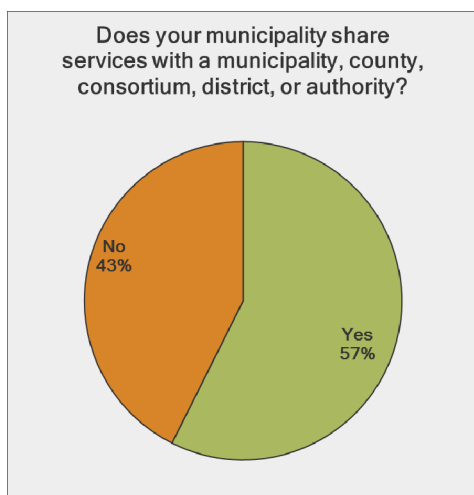
Figure 10: Existing Shared Services

Does your municipality share services with a municipality, county, consortium, district, or authority?

No 43%
Yes 57%

Figure 11: Desire for Shared Services

Would your municipality consider sharing services with other jurisdictions?

No 21%
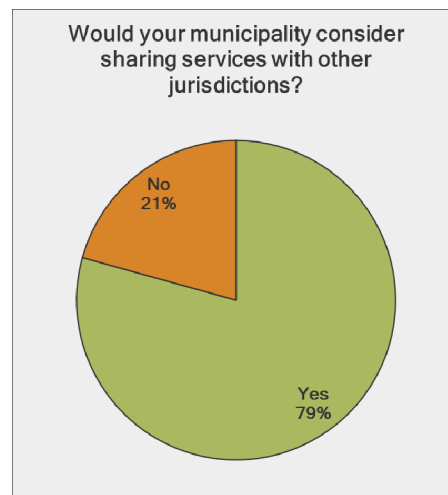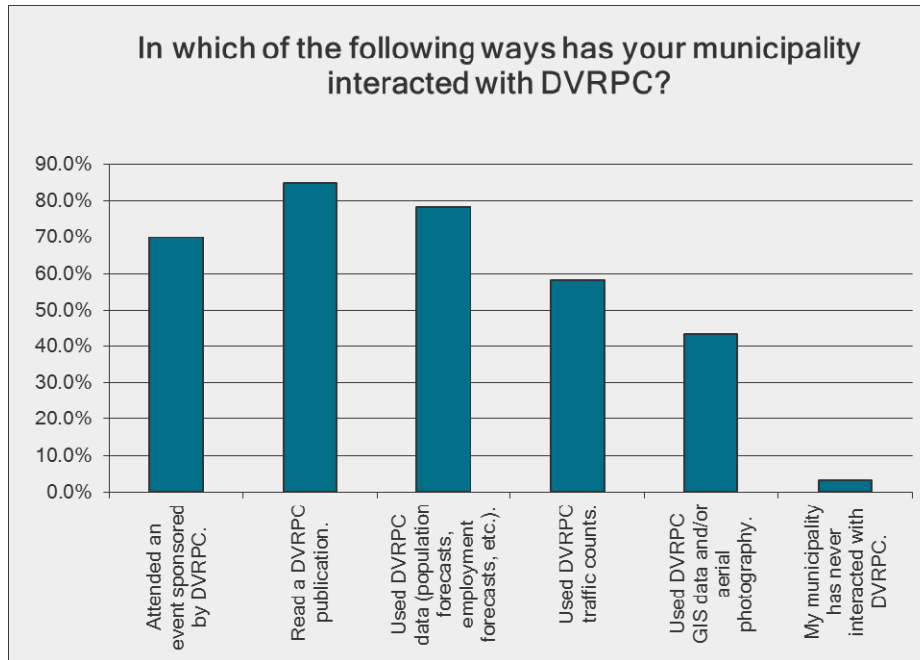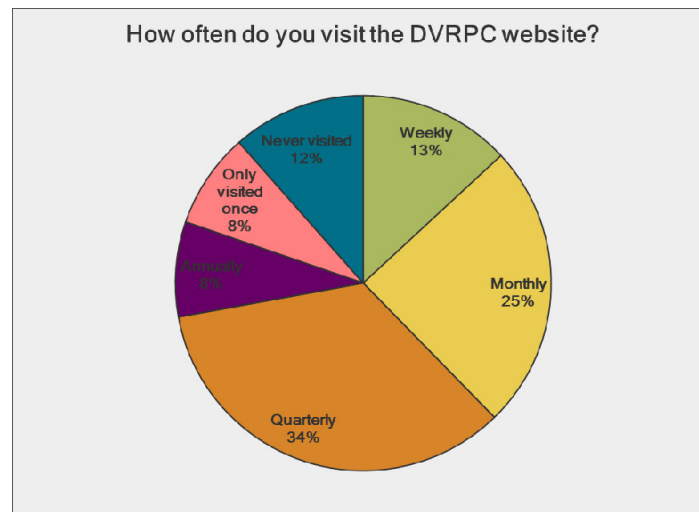Yes 79%

Municipalities can interact with DVRPC in a variety of ways. Respondents indicated that they read DVRPC publications, used data, attended events, used traffic counts, and—to a lesser extent—used GIS data. Respondents also mentioned DVRPC grants, studies, and the Classic Towns program in the write-in section of this question.

Figure 12: In Which Of The Following Ways Has Your Municipality Interacted With DVRPC?

In which of the following ways has your municipality interacted with DVRPC?

The majority of respondents visited the DVRPC website fairly infrequently. Only 25% of respondents visited on a monthly basis, and 13% visited on a weekly basis.

Figure 13: How Often Do You Visit The DVRPC Website?

How often do you visit the DVRPC website?

- Never visited 12%
- Weekly 13%
- Only visited once 8%
- Monthly 25%
- (daily) 8%
- Quarterly 34%

When presented with a list of sources for planning-related information, most respondents would choose to consult their county planning commission for assistance, followed by their municipal engineer and their municipal solicitor. DVRPC was the fourth most popular response. In addition to municipal staff (planner, zoning officer, engineer), other organizations that were listed in the write-in portion included: ICMA, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Office of New Jersey Heritage (DEP), Main Street, web-searches, traffic consultants, and the PA State Association of Township Commissions.[2]
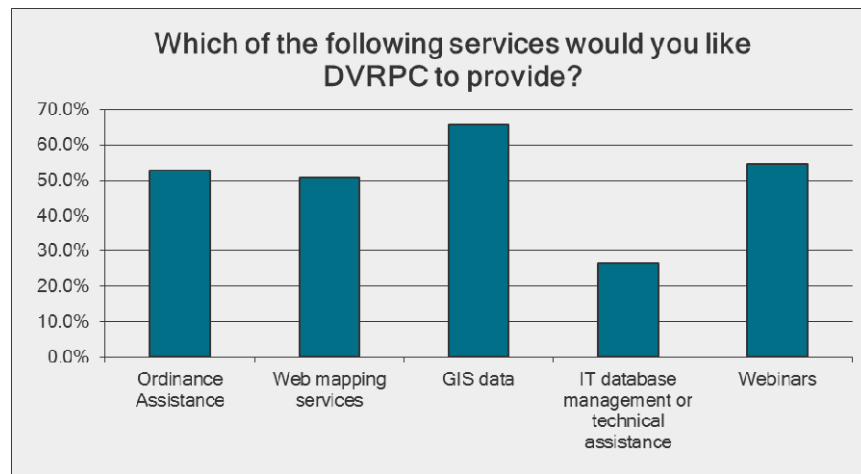
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[2] The PA State Association of Township Commissioners (PSATC) serves the 91 First Class Townships in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, while the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS) serves the 1,456 townships of the second class.

Figure 14: Top Sources for Planning-Related Information

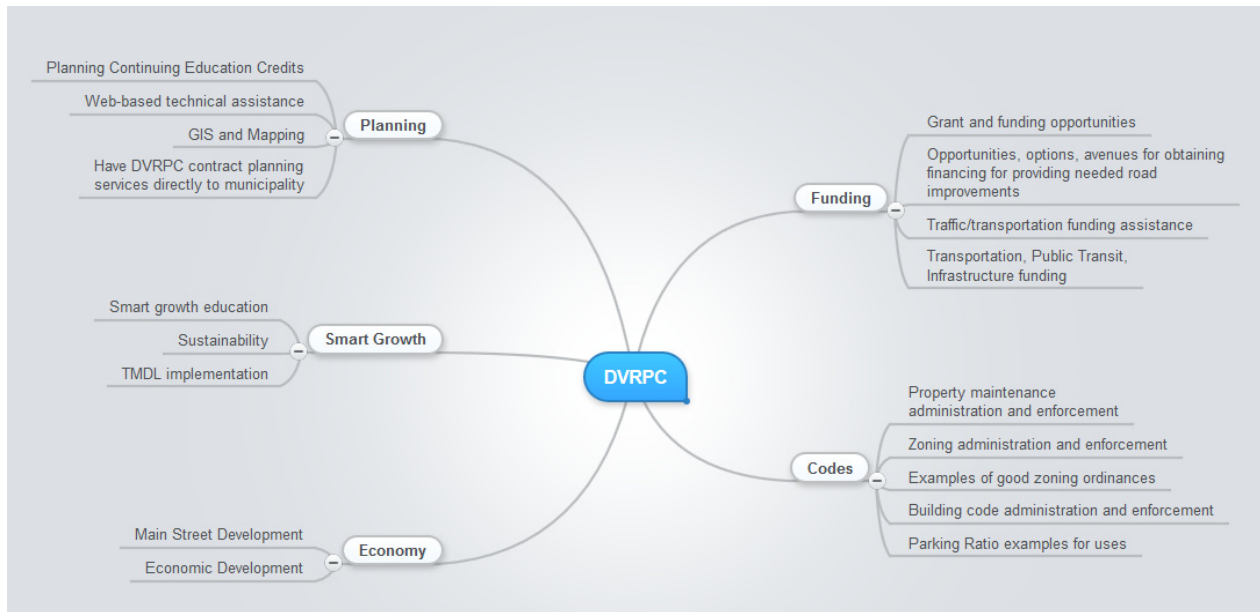| Source	Percent of Respondents
County Planning Commission	83.9%
Municipal Engineer	66.1%
Municipal Solicitor	54.8%
DVRPC	37.1%
PA Governor's Center for Local Government Services	25.8%
Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS)	22.6%
Municipal Consortium	21.0%
Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs (PSAB)	21.0%
American Planning Association (APA), planning.org	17.7%
Other (please specify)	16.1%

In terms of services the municipalities wanted from DVRPC, the respondents were most interested in obtaining GIS data, followed by webinars, ordinance assistance, and web mapping services. IT database management or technical assistance was lowest on the list.

Figure 15: Which Of The Following Services Would You Like DVRPC To Provide?

When asked what type of training, technical assistance, and information they would like DVRPC to offer, the respondents' responses fell into five overall categories: funding, planning, codes, smart growth, and economy.

Figure 16: Types Of Training Desired From DVRPC

DVRPC should continue to supply municipalities with technical assistance because the information DVRPC provides to municipalities often helps them make changes to their plans, ordinances, and transportation improvements or proposals. Forty percent of respondents have made changes to plans based on information from DVRPC.

Figure 17: Making Changes To Ordinances, Plans, and Policies As A Result Of DVRPC Information

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the recommendations from the 2008 survey have been addressed between 2008 and 2012-2013 (see Appendix C for a table indicating progress toward 2008 recommendations).

1. Because most respondents indicated that their municipality does not have paid planning staff and most planning-related work is done by volunteers, DVRPC should consider municipal outreach efforts that target volunteer planning commission members, elected officials, and zoning officers. Over 50% of respondents turned to their Municipal Engineer and Solicitor before turning to DVRPC for planning-related information. It would be worth creating webinars of interest to these groups so that they will be more likely to suggest smart growth policies to their communities. Webinars are a low-cost way to distribute education to a wider audience. DVRPC's Municipal Outreach Program held a successful webinar about Food Systems Planning in February 2013, which had 84 registrants and 53 participants. If the webinars are recorded and placed online, they can also be viewed by volunteer planning commission members who might not be able to view them during regular business hours. In addition to providing education about the topics listed in Figure 16, DVRPC should consider topics suggested on the evaluation forms of the American Planning Association Audio/Web Conferences series.

2. Parking Maximums and Fee-in-lieu Parking were two smart growth tools that received very low responses from respondents. Educating more municipalities about these two important smart growth tools could go a long way in reducing excess parking (and thus sprawl) in the Greater Philadelphia region. This would have ancillary benefits of reducing stormwater runoff, reducing urban heat island effect, and reducing development costs, all of which contribute to the fulfillment of DVRPC's Long Range Plan.

3. Green Building Ordinances, Energy Efficient Building Standards, and Green Fleet/Green Commute Policies are other smart growth tools that did not appear to be widespread; DVRPC has an Office of Energy and Climate Change and an Office of Marketing and Commuter Services that could each help with spreading these tools to more communities.

4. Respondents were eager to get ahold of GIS data and web-mapping services. It would helpful to put more DVRPC data files onto http://www.dvrpc.org/Mapping/data.htm and better market this resource.

5. DVRPC has multiple pages with model ordinances that are scattered throughout the DVRPC website. DVRPC should consider consolidating all the links to model ordinances onto one page and advertising this Model Ordinance resource to municipalities. Preliminary pages to include could include:

    http://www.dvrpc.org/Environment/NaturalResourceProtectionTools/ordinances.htm

    http://www.dvrpc.org/historicpreservation/Tools.htm

    http://www.dvrpc.org/energyclimate/aeowg.htm

6. While the Municipal Outreach Program tracks registration and attendance for the Municipal Outreach Webinar series, it could also periodically track other metrics, such as the number of people who download PDFs of the Municipal Implementation Tools from the online DVRPC Publications Database. Such benchmarking would be helpful to track the success of the Municipal Outreach Program in the future.

CONCLUSION

While the response rate to the DVRPC's Municipal Survey was not as high as the Office of Smart Growth had hoped, it still provided valuable feedback about progress toward smart growth in general and the success of the Municipal Outreach program in particular.

Question on 2008 Survey	Question on 2012-2013 Survey
29. Does your municipality have paid planning staff?	1. Does your municipality have paid planning staff?
30. If you answered "yes" to Question #29, how many staff members are dedicated to planning work and are they full-time or part-time staff?	2. How much staff time is allocated to planning? (Please enter the Full-Time Equivalent number without any additional text. e.g., One full-time planner = 1.0, one part-time planner = 0.5)
3. Have you ever visited the DVRPC website? 4. If you answered "yes" to Question 4, how often do you visit the website?	10. How often do you visit the DVRPC website?
8. Are there other services you would like to find online at the DVRPC website?	11. Which of the following services would you like DVRPC to provide?
26. Has information provided by DVRPC ever prompted you to make chances to your:	12. Has information provided by DVRPC ever prompted you to make changes to your:
39. Please list up to five (5) topic areas or issues related to planning in which you would like to see more training by DVRPC.	13. Please list topic areas or issues in which you would like to see more training, technical assistance, or information provided by DVRPC.
10. Please list other planning-related web resources you use regularly.	14. Where do you typically turn for planning-related information?
1. Please identify your county and municipality.	15. In what county is your municipality located?
1. Please identify your county and municipality.	16. What municipality are you from?

APPENDIX B: RESPONSE RATE BY QUESTION

Question Number	Question	# of Responses	Percentage of Respondents
1	Does your municipality have paid planning staff?	62	100.0%
2	How much staff time is allocated to planning? (Please enter the Full-Time Equivalent number without any additional text. e.g., One full-time planner = 1.0, one part-time planner = 0.5)	44	71.0%
3	Who performs planning functions in your municipality? (Check all that apply.)	61	98.4%
4	What are the top five challenges to implementing Smart Growth in your municipality?	61	98.4%
5	Does your municipality use the following tools? (Check all that apply.)	62	100.0%
6	What progress has your municipality made in implementing Smart Growth principles?	62	100.0%
7	Does your municipality share services with a municipality, county, consortium, district, or authority?	61	98.4%
8	Would your municipality consider sharing services with other jurisdictions?	58	93.5%
9	DVRPC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the 9-county, bi-state Greater Philadelphia region. In which of the following ways has your municipality interacted with DVRPC?	60	96.8%
10	How often do you visit the DVRPC website?	61	98.4%
11	Which of the following services would you like DVRPC to provide?	53	85.5%
12	Has information provided by DVRPC ever prompted you to make changes to your:	52	83.9%
13	Please list topic areas or issues in which you would like to see more training, technical assistance, or information provided by DVRPC.	18	29.0%
14	Where do you typically turn for planning-related information?	62	100.0%
15	In what county is your municipality located?	62	100.0%
16	What municipality are you from?	62	100.0%
17	In what ZIP code is your municipality located? (enter 5-digit ZIP code; for example, 00544 or 94305)	60	96.8%
18	What is your position in the municipality? (Check all that apply.)	58	93.5%

APPENDIX C: PROGRESS ON 2008 SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation from 2008 Survey	Status
Switch to an electronic email format for DVRPC newsletters	Completed
Improve email contact list management and access	Completed February 2010 with introduction of Emma system
Regularly process updates and corrections to contact lists	On-going
Prevent duplicate emails going to recipients	If emails are sent through the EMMA system, this is taken care of; if emails are sent through the labels database, this is not guaranteed
Ensure staff is aware of and trained in using email resources	Completed/on-going
Implement secure subscribe/unsubscribe features for emails	If emails are sent through the EMMA system, this is taken care of; if emails are sent through the labels database, this is not guaranteed
Create a DVRPC web page where users can manage email subscriptions	Completed; see https://app.e2ma.net/app2/audience/signup/1408631/1403728/?v=a
Continue and expand efforts to make DVRPC's website a clearinghouse for transmittal of electronic information. Make the DVRPC website the "go to" destination for planning information and resources for the region.	On-going
Ensure that many DVRPC publications are available online.	Completed; see http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/publicationsearch/
Educate municipalities and partner organizations about resources available on the DVRPC website.	On-going
Ensure that end-users can easily find content.	On-going
Use website to highlight GIS data, local planning news, and sample ordinances.	In progress; see http://www.dvrpc.org/Mapping/ for GIS; and http://www.dvrpc.org/Environment/NaturalResourceProtectionTools/ordinances.htm and http://www.dvrpc.org/historicpreservation/Tools.htm for sample ordinances