



## **KENT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

### **Kent County Department of Public Works Survey Overview August 19, 2021**

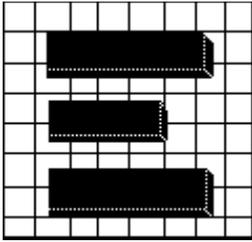
Kent County Department of Public Works commissioned a survey of Kent County residents to measure public opinion on changes to how residential solid waste is handled and disposed of. The research firm EPIC-MRA administered the countywide phone survey of 600 adult residents from July 19, 2021 through July 27, 2021, with a sampling error of plus or minus 4.0 points; equal participation from northern, central and southern areas of the county; and representative of the county demographics.

The primary purpose of the survey was to test support for a change in residential waste disposal in Kent County. The proposed change was presented as increasing the cost of monthly trash service by \$5 in order to implement mixed waste processing and reduce waste going to a landfill.

Over 2/3 of all survey participants (67 percent) showed initial support for the proposed change. As respondents received additional information about the proposed change, support increased to 77 percent. By the end of the survey, after respondents heard statements supporting or opposing the proposed change, overall support for the proposed change rose to a final 81 percent. Support grew further when respondents opposed to the change were presented with a lower monthly increase for trash removal.

The most compelling reason respondents said they supported the proposed change was that the mixed waste processing plant would be privately funded, boost the local economy by creating new jobs and repurpose a significant amount of household waste. Preserving Kent County's natural beauty and not leaving a landfill legacy for future generations were the second and third most compelling reasons to support the change. Of those that opposed the proposed change, roughly 50 percent cited the main reason for not supporting it was the increase in costs for the homeowner.

The result of the survey shows a high level of public receptivity to a change that would increase costs for the homeowner if it reduced the amount of household waste going to a landfill.



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# **Kent County DPW Community Perception Survey**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY And DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS**

**August 2021**

- Educational
- Political
- Industrial
- Consumer
  
- Market
- Research
- Analysis

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## METHODOLOGY

**EPIC ▪ MRA** administered interviews with 600 adult residents in Kent County, Michigan from July 19, 2021, through July 27, 2021. The object of the research was to measure public opinion about certain policy options concerning household-generated solid waste disposal, including recycling availability and retaining the status quo for landfill use.

The sample was stratified to proportionately represent the population distribution in the County and incorporated 50 percent cell-phone users. Respondents were included in the sample if they affirmed their residence in the county and expressed either sole or joint decision-making capacity concerning household financial matters.

In addition, a split sample format was employed for the supporting/opposing statements section of the interview, whereby half the entire stratified sample heard statements supporting one of the waste disposal policy options, followed by statements in opposition to that proposal. The other half of the entire stratified sample had this supporting/opposing order of presentation reversed.

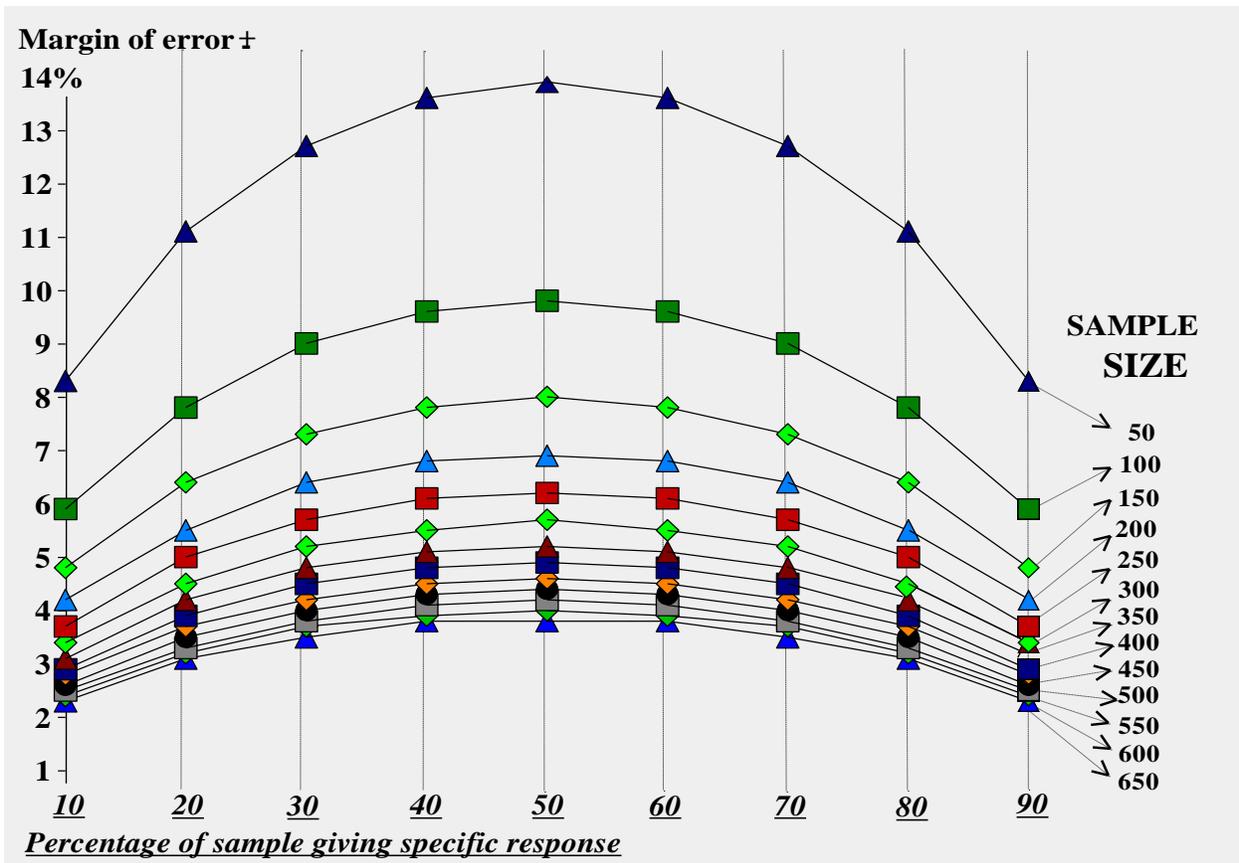
In interpreting survey results, all surveys are subject to error; that is, the results of the survey may differ from those that would have been obtained if the entire populations were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends on the total number of respondents answering any question. The table on the following page represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses based on sample size.

For example, 52 percent of all 600 respondents reported “*About right*” when asked if their local taxes were, “Too high”, “Too low”, or “About right” in return for the quality of services provided by their local city or township. (Question 2). As indicated in the chart below, this percentage would have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.0 points. That means that with repeated sampling of the qualified population, it is very likely (95 times out of every 100), that the percentage for the entire population would fall between 56.0 percent and 48.0 points, hence 52 percent  $\pm 4.0$  points. The total frequencies for the advocacy statements section of the interview also carry a margin of error of  $\pm 4.0$  points, but the single, bi-furcated split sample responses were issued by 300 respondents and thus carry a margin of error of  $\pm 5.7$  points.

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SAMPLING ERROR BY PERCENTAGE (AT 95 IN 100 CONFIDENCE LEVEL)

SAMPLE SIZE	<i>Percentage of sample giving specific response</i>								
	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>90</u>
<b>650</b>	2.3	3.1	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.1	2.3
<b>600</b>	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4
<b>550</b>	2.5	3.3	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.8	3.3	2.5
<b>500</b>	2.6	3.5	4	4.3	4.4	4.3	4	3.5	2.6
<b>450</b>	2.8	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.2	3.7	2.8
<b>400</b>	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.5	3.9	2.9
<b>350</b>	3.1	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.2	5.1	4.8	4.2	3.1
<b>300</b>	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.2	4.5	3.4
<b>250</b>	3.7	5	5.7	6.1	6.2	6.1	5.7	5	3.7
<b>200</b>	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.5	4.2
<b>150</b>	4.8	6.4	7.3	7.8	8	7.8	7.3	6.4	4.8
<b>100</b>	5.9	7.8	9	9.6	9.8	9.6	9	7.8	5.9
<b>50</b>	8.3	11.1	12.7	13.6	13.9	13.6	12.7	11.1	8.3



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

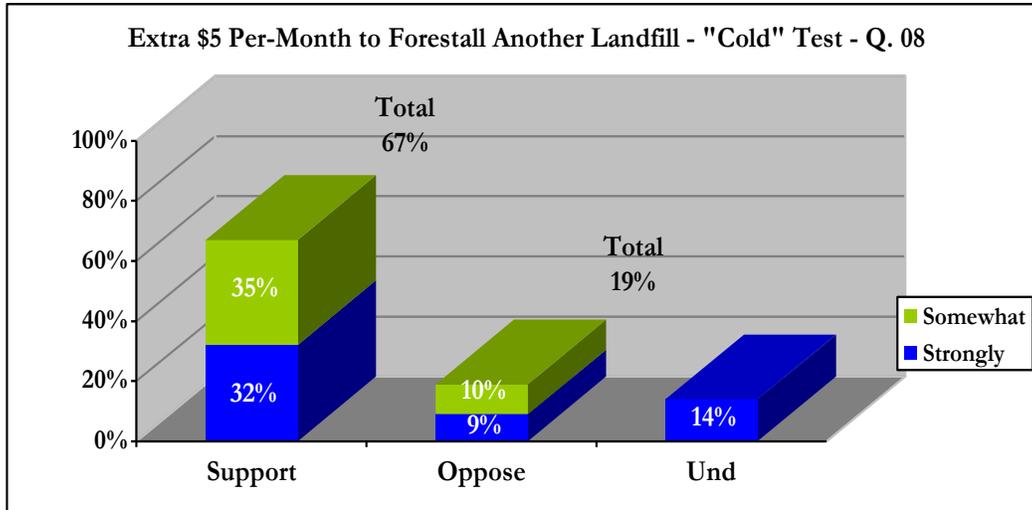
There is very strong public support for a policy designed to reduce the current amount of trash being sent to regional landfills. This very strong support measured in the first test of the proposal increases substantially when respondents are given more information about the policy change and increases further after competing arguments are presented to them.

Out of 35 key demographic subsets examined, only one – those age 65 and older– did not support a change in trash disposal policy by a majority (49%) in the first test of the proposal near the outset of the interview (referred to in this analysis as the “Cold” test), and after receiving more detailed information about the proposal, were also moved toward supporting the proposal (at 67% support). Indeed, 30 of the 35 demographic subsets examined expressed support for the change by proportions of 60 percent or more<sup>1</sup>.

The first “Cold” test offered limited information about the rationale behind the consideration of a waste-disposal policy change, but it did inform respondents that the change would result in an average increase in a household’s trash hauling charge by \$5 per-month. After hearing a brief description of the policy change proposal, all 600 respondents were asked if they supported or opposed the change. If a position was expressed, a follow-up question asked the respondent if they held their view *Strongly* or *Just Somewhat*. As the graph below illustrates, over two-thirds of respondents expressed support in this first measurement, with nearly half of that total support sentiment being held “strongly”:

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix for a chart of the 35 demographic subsets examined for their proportion of initial support and the movement of support over the succession of measurements taken over the course of the interview.



This strong expression of support in the “cold” test is despite the relatively high sensitivity respondents expressed about their local tax load. That is, 42 percent of all respondents reported their local taxes are *Too High* in return for the quality of their local public services. If this proposal required a tax increase to fund the trash disposal policy change, this level of sensitivity would be a significant warning flag for the prospects of approval by voters at a future ballot. In the instant case, even though respondents are informed that implementation of the policy change would result in an average monthly trash pick-up charge increase of five dollars, the sensitivity to local tax burden does not appear to influence opinion on the proposal.

Indeed, in complementary questions asking respondents to assess their perceptions of whether their non-recycling monthly trash removal service fee (Q.3) and specifically, the monthly fee paid for yard waste removal and recycling (Q.6), the *Too High* proportions are much lower than the 42 percent issued for local taxes; coming in at 22 percent “too high” for trash removal and just 16 percent “too high” for yard waste and recycling. It is worth noting that overall, 72 percent of all respondents report having curbside recycling service, but the regional subsets are quite lopsided. Residents of the Central Region report having such service at 94 percent and South Region residents by a 70 percent proportion. By contrast, just 48 percent of North Region residents report having curbside recycling service.

If the “too high” proportions reported for trash and recycling costs were part of survey testing a proposal that included a tax increase, they would be a non-factor in assessing a ballot question’s chances for approval, given the disparate reported access to curbside recycling and the fact that 87 percent of those who do have access report the cost of it as, “About right”. To further bolster the point, and notwithstanding expressed sensitivity to local tax burden, four-out-of-five – 80 percent – of all 600 respondents issued a *Positive* rating (*Excellent* 23%, *Pretty Good* 57%) for the job being done by their local unit of government in providing services.

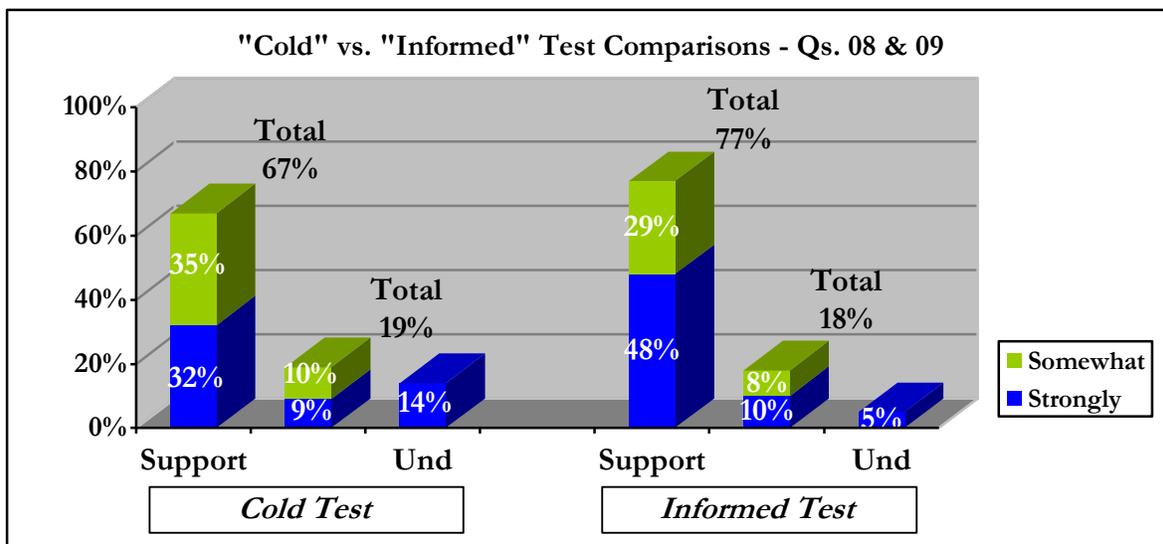
Another indicator that the strong support found in the first “cold” test is not anomalous can be found in the question asking respondents to select which of a list of five presented waste management options Kent County should pursue as a top priority. Four of the five presented options involved either expansion of existing recycling measures or involving private businesses to engage in more rigorous trash sorting/recycling procedures before sending waste to the landfill. Each of the four options received roughly equal response proportions of between 18 and 20 percent. Fifteen percent selected investment in chemical treatment facilities to protect groundwater, with just seven percent undecided on the question.

As for subset differences in the selection of a waste management priority, Central Region residents opted for “expanded recycling” at a proportion of 29 percent compared to the overall 20 percent selection rate. “Waste-to-Energy” found the most favor among those Age 50 and older, also at a proportion of 29 percent compared to the 20 percent overall average. Non-white respondents expressed a 26 percent support for the “Mixed Waste Processing” priority, more than the 19 percent average.

After inquiring about the value of local taxes, monthly waste removal/recycling costs, preferred policy options concerning trash removal, and the first “cold” measurement, respondents were given a more detailed account of the waste management policy change currently under discussion. Unlike the limited information provided in the preceding “cold” test, this “Informed” test provided respondents with detailed information about the amount of waste generated in the county annually, the relatively short life expectancy of the South Kent landfill, the proposal’s requirement that local trash haulers deliver trash to a facility for refined sorting or

energy generation instead of a landfill, and that the added cost of this policy would average five dollars per month to household trash pick-up costs, and also apply to all residents of the county. Following the more detailed description of the proposal, respondents were once again asked if they *Supported* or *Opposed* the policy.

As can be seen in the graph below, providing more information about the proposal resulted in a ten-point increase in “Total Support” for the policy change, taking nearly all the increase from the “undecided” column of the “cold” test. Importantly, the *Strongly Support* portion of the total “informed test” rises an impressive sixteen points.



Subsets exhibiting the greatest movement toward support between the two tests include:

Subset	Cold Test Support %	Informed Test Support %	+Pts.
Age 65+	49%	65%	+16
Central Region <sup>2</sup>	63%	77%	+14
Recycling Access - No	58%	72%	+14
2-Person Households	61%	75%	+14
Trash cost – Too High	54%	66%	+12
Recycling cost – Too High	60%	72%	+12
1-Person Households	52%	63%	+11
North Region	67%	78%	+11
Children at home – No	63%	73%	+10
Urban residents	66%	76%	+10

<sup>2</sup> Minor civil divisions comprising the three regional subsets can be found in the Appendix.

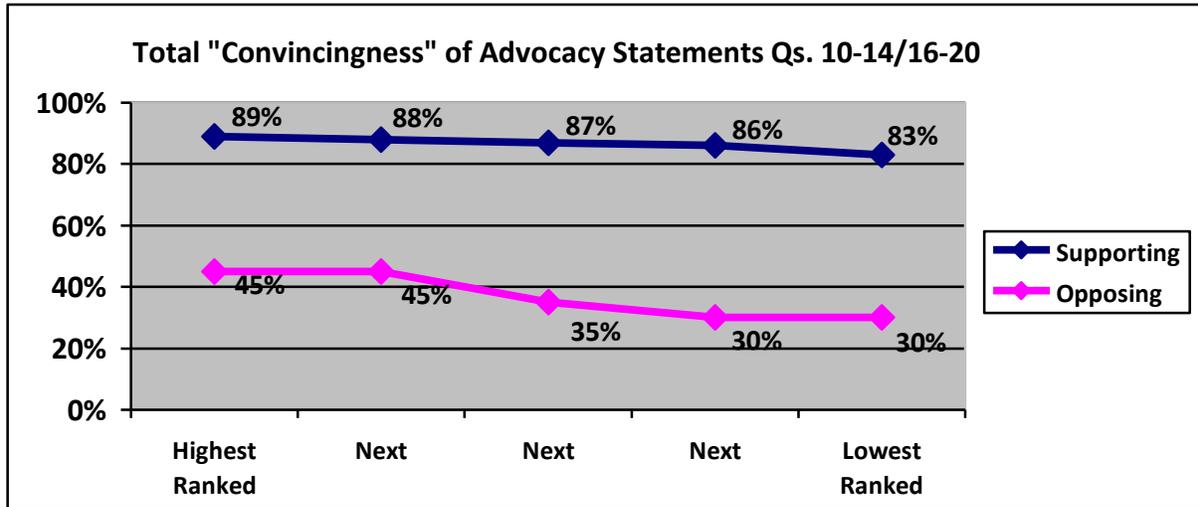
Following the “informed” test, respondents were presented with separate batteries of advocacy statements; one set urging support of the proposal and the other set urging opposition. After each statement, respondents were asked to indicate whether they found the statement to be a *Very Convincing*, *Somewhat Convincing*, or *Not a Convincing Reason at All*, to oppose/support the proposal. For analysis purposes, responses of “very” and “somewhat” convincing are added together to create a “Total Convincing” proportion. To eliminate possible bias, the entire sampling of 600 respondents was split for this series of questions, with 300 respondents hearing the supporting statements first followed by statements in opposition. The other half of the entire sample had this order of statement presentation reversed.

Each of the five supporting statements received a “Total Convincing” proportion of over 80 percent – ranging from 83 percent to 89 percent. It is also important to note that well over half of all five of the total convincing scores for all supporting statements are of the more intensely held sentiment of *Very Convincing*.

The most compelling supporting statement – at 89 percent total convincing (64% “very”) – noted that a mixed-waste processing plant would be privately funded, boost the local economy by creating new jobs, and repurpose a significant amount of household waste. As might be expected, this advocacy statement was the most compelling to the overwhelming majority of the 35 major demographic subsets, including Central Region residents, those Age 65 and older, those who gave a “Positive” rating for local services, and those who believe their local taxes are, “about right.”

For Northern Region residents, the desire to not leave a “Landfill Legacy” was the most salient supporting statement. This was also the case for those who reported having access to recycling services, the age 18-34 cohort, those who believe their recycling costs are “too high”, renters, and Non-White respondents, among others. Among the subsets finding the preservation of “Natural Beauty” most compelling were Urban residents, those offering a “Negative” rating for the quality of local services, and three-person households.

In stark contrast, none of the five opposing statements breached the 45 percent “Total Convincing” mark. Moreover, in no case did the “very” convincing portion of the opposing statements come close to comprising half of the total. The graph below illustrates the efficacy of the competing advocacy statements tested:



Although none of the opposing statements reached a “Total Convincing” rating from a majority of all respondents, a majority of some demographic subsets did select at least one of the statements by a majority margin. For the statement that “Recycling Services Already Exist”, those who believe their trash hauling costs are “too high” and, those age 65 and older found the statement compelling by margins of 51 percent and 53 percent respectively.

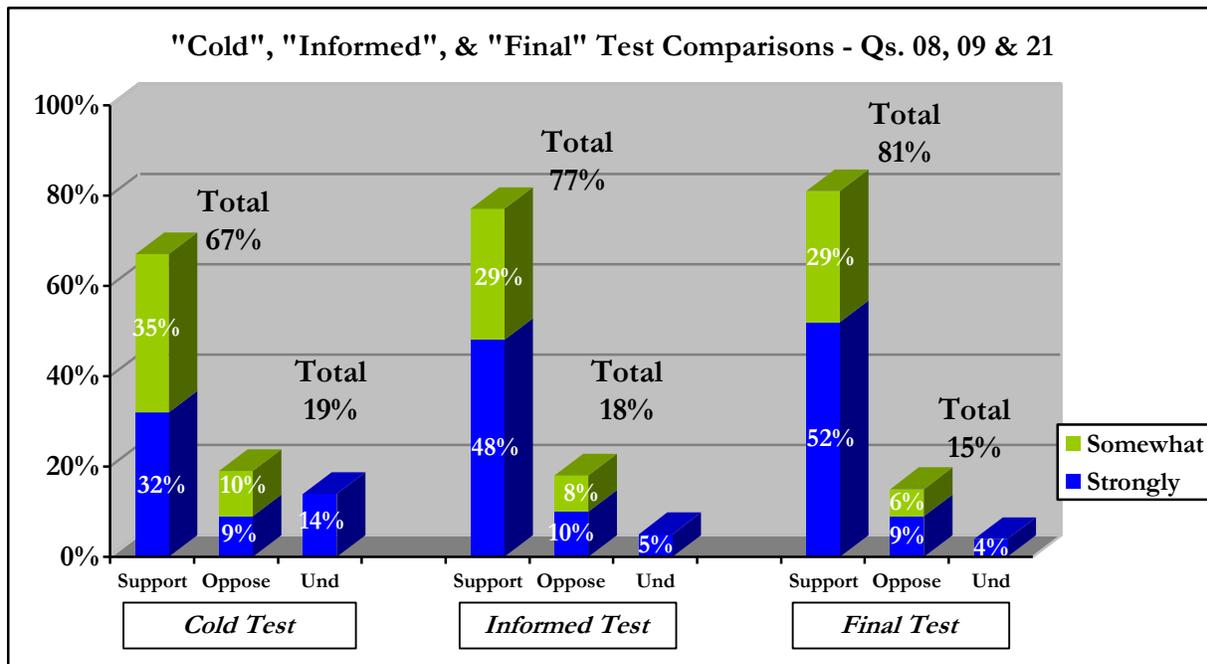
For the statement purporting the policy is “Too Expensive”, North Region residents and those who find their recycling costs to be “too high”, issued a total convincingness proportion of 53 percent, each. No other statement found a majority convincingness among any of the subsets and none of the subsets found any of the opposing statements convincing in a proportion higher than forty-five percent,

A third measurement of support for the proposal was taken after respondents heard the first battery of advocacy statements – either supporting or opposing. The results of this test can reveal whether hearing one or the other of the sets of statements impacts attitudes toward the proposal. When the “Split Sample A” (supporting arguments first), “Split Sample B” (opposing

arguments first) are combined in this “Mid-Test”, an increase of one point to 78 percent Total Support from the “Informed Test” is recorded. However, it is clear that hearing only supporting statements serves to enhance support (SSA Total Support is 83%) just as hearing only opposing statements serves to diminish support (SSB Total Support is 74%),

The disparate results from the order of advocacy statement presentation also manifest themselves in the fourth and “Final Test” of the proposal. In this measurement, after hearing both sets of statements, all 600 respondents are asked if they support or oppose a proposal to reduce the amount of trash put in landfills with the knowledge that such a plan would cost the average household an additional five dollars per month in waste disposal charges.

In this “Final Test” Total Support rises to 81 percent but this is by combining the Split Sample A total (hearing supporting statements first) of 84 percent with the Split Sample B total (hearing opposing statements first) of 78 percent. The six-point disparity between the split samples is just outside the ±5.7 pt. margin of error for each of the split samples’ 300 respondents and thus, must be viewed as being statistically relevant.



Subsets exhibiting the greatest movement toward support between the “Cold” and “Final” tests include: (Subsets in **bold** also appeared in the “toward support” table following the “Cold” and “Info” tests)

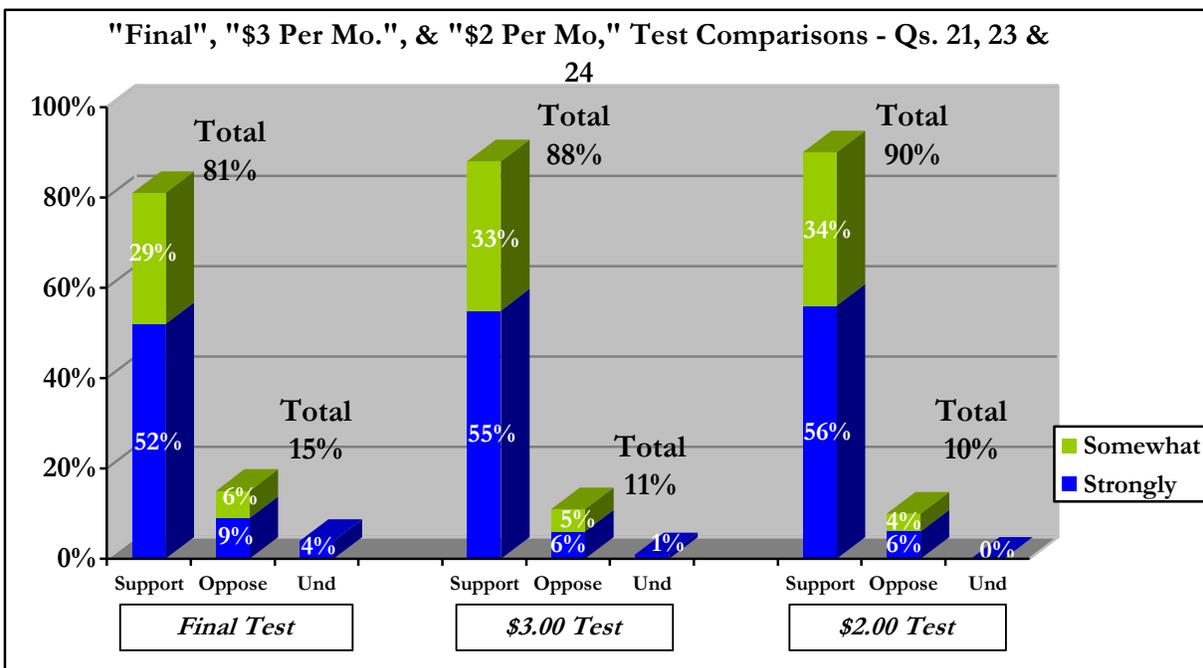
<i>Subset</i>	<i>Cold Test Support %</i>	<i>Final Test Support %</i>	<i>+Pts.</i>
<i>Age 65+</i>	<b>49%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>+22</b>
<b><i>Central Region</i></b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>+20</b>
<b><i>1-Person Households</i></b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>+20</b>
<b><i>Urban residents</i></b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>+18</b>
<b><i>Recycling cost – Too High</i></b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>+18</b>
<b><i>Recycling Access - No</i></b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>+17</b>
<i>Women</i>	66%	82%	+16
<b><i>Children at home – No</i></b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>+15</b>
<b><i>2-Person Households</i></b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>+15</b>
<i>North region</i>	67%	80%	+13
<i>Suburban residents</i>	70%	83%	+13
<i>White residents</i>	69%	82%	+13
<i>Own their home</i>	67%	80%	+13
<i>Age 50-64</i>	60%	73%	+13

An open-ended question was posed to the 18 percent of the sample who reported “Oppose” in the final test of the proposal -- a proportion representing 90 individual respondents – asking the main reason for the opposition. A clear plurality of 48 percent of these respondents cited the *Increased cost of it*, as the reason for their opposition. In a distant second in the ranking of reasons, 13 percent cited *Government interference/Overreach* as their main rationale for being opposed. There were over ten other categories of reasons offered that made up the balance of the reasons given, none of which exceeded six percent of those qualified to respond. Five percent were undecided or otherwise did not provide a reason for their opposition.

It is observed that even though the 48 percent plurality of opposing respondents cited “increased costs”, that even among those who reported their trash removal, and recycling fees were “too high”, a majority supported the proposal in the first “cold test”, with the size of the majority increasing with each successive measurement of the issue. Similarly, the opponents’ advocacy statement asserting the proposal is an example of “government overreach” was the least resonant of the five opposition advocacy statements tested, leaving only 13 percent (12 individuals) to cite this as the reason for their opposition.

This is not to say that a reduction in the estimated per-month household waste disposal costs does not increase support for this mixed-waste processing proposal – it does. A follow-up question asked all 600 respondents about their sentiment toward the proposal if a reduction to \$3 dollars per-month instead of \$5 dollars per-month were the standard, total support rises seven points to 88 percent. Support rises further to 90 percent when a subsequent question puts the estimated per-household cost at two dollars per-month.

The chart that follows shows the composite of measurements beginning with the “Final” test, through the hypothetical two-dollars-per-month test:

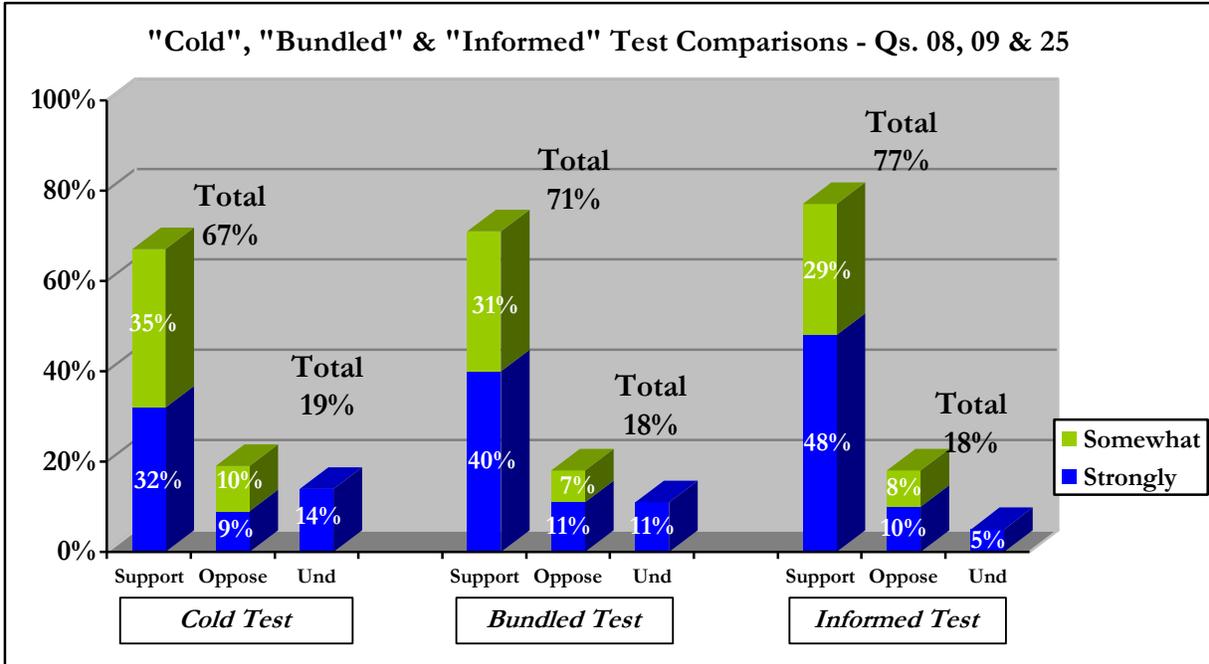


Clearly, reducing the per-month cost of the proposal increases support among the sampling. However, it must be remembered that the three-dollar and two-dollar hypotheticals come near the end of the interview and on the heels of a quite exhaustive test of the proposal described as costing an additional five dollars per-month. This sort of movement toward support is typical in interviews where succeeding tests of an issue recite lower costs.

The question for policymakers becomes whether the mixed-waste processing proposal comprehensively tested in the interview can be effectively delivered at a cost lower than an average per-household increase of five dollars per-month. Taken together, the results of this survey clearly indicate a high level of public receptivity to a change in policy aimed at reducing the level of household trash finding its way into the county landfill. Bolstering this observation is the fact that the estimated increase in per-household trash removal cost was clearly articulated to respondents in each test of the proposal. However, the survey also demonstrates the need for a repetitive public education campaign using the information found in the “Info” test and the advocacy statements producing the results in the “Final” test – where a majority of the overall support was the more intense and reliable, *Strong* variety.

In the last substantive question of the survey, respondents were asked if they supported or opposed a separate policy under discussion which would, “. . . *require all trash removal and waste hauling companies to offer both trash and recycling services to all residents as one bundled service with one rate to all residents, in order to increase the availability, and use, of recycling county-wide*”. No cost was assigned to the implementation of the bundled service policy.

As demonstrated by the comparison graph that follows, this “bundled service”, as presented, received 71 percent “Total Support”; a level higher than the “Cold” test of the main question, but lower than the “Info” test total.



Subsets exhibiting Support in a proportion significantly higher than the 71% average include:

<i>Subset</i>	<i>Bundled Test Overall - 71%</i>
<i>Renters</i>	88%
<i>Larger households</i>	85%
<i>Age 18-49</i>	80%
<i>Non-White respondents</i>	78%

####

APPENDIX

<b>\$5 Monthly Increase Waste Proposal “Total Support”  (“Strong” Support)</b>		“Cold” Q.8	“Info” Q.9	Pt. +/-	“Mid” Q.15	Pt. +/-	“Final” Q.21	Pt. +/-	Pt. +/- “Cold” to “Final”
		67% (32%)	77% (48%)	+10 (+16)	78% (49%)	+1 (+1)	81% (52%)	+3 (+3)	+14 (+20)
Region	North	67%	78%	+11	78%	---	80%	+2	+13
	Central	63%	77%	+14	78%	+1	83%	+5	+20
	South	71%	76%	+5	79%	+3	80%	+1	+9
Local Servs.	Positive	69%	79%	+10	80%	+1	83%	+3	+14
	Negative	60%	67%	+7	70%	+3	72%	+2	+12
Recycle Access	Yes	69%	78%	+9	79%	+1	82%	+3	+13
	No	58%	72%	+14	74%	+2	75%	+1	+17
Taxes	Too High	59%	68%	+9	70%	+2	73%	+3	+14
	About Right	74%	85%	+11	85%	---	87%	+2	+13
Trash Cost	Too High	54%	66%	+12	64%	-2	68%	+4	+14
	About Right	73%	81%	+8	83%	+2	86%	+3	+13
Recycle Type	Curb	72%	81%	+9	82%	+1	85%	+3	+13
	Center	65%	74%	+9	70%	-4	74%	+4	+9
Recycle Cost	Too High	60%	72%	+12	78%	+6	78%	---	+18
	About Right	77%	82%	+5	83%	+1	86%	+3	+9
HH Size	One	52%	63%	+11	67%	+4	72%	+5	+20
	Two	61%	75%	+14	73%	-2	76%	+3	+15
	Three	80%	82%	+2	88%	+6	87%	-1	+7
	Four	77%	84%	+7	83%	-1	84%	+1	+7
	Five or More	80%	87%	+7	89%	+2	92%	+3	+12
Children	Yes	77%	85%	+8	86%	+1	87%	+1	+10
	No	63%	73%	+10	74%	+1	78%	+4	+15
Age	18-34	81%	91%	+10	91%	---	92%	+1	+11
	35-49	78%	82%	+4	85%	+3	86%	+1	+8
	50-64	60%	69%	+9	70%	+1	73%	+3	+13
	65+	49%	65%	+16	67%	+2	71%	+4	+22
Location	Rural	66%	74%	+8	74%	---	75%	+1	+9
	Urban	66%	76%	+10	82%	-6	84%	+2	+18
	Suburban	70%	80%	+10	80%	---	83%	+3	+13
Home	Own	67%	76%	+9	78%	+2	80%	+2	+13
	Rent	71%	84%	+13	84%	---	86%	+2	+15
Race	White	69%	80%	+11	80%	---	82%	+2	+13
	Nonwhite	70%	76%	+6	79%	+3	81%	+2	+11
Gender	Male	69%	77%	+9	77%	---	79%	+2	+10
	Female	66%	78%	+12	80%	+2	82%	+2	+16

Geographic Stratified Sample Breakout								
GROUP	JURIS	JURIS NAME	SAMPLES	QUOTAS	SSA-M	SSA-F	SSB-M	SSB-F
1	00240	ADA TOWNSHIP	14	130	31	34	31	34
	01160	ALGOMA TOWNSHIP	11					
	01840	ALPINE TOWNSHIP	13					
	13080	CANNON TOWNSHIP	14					
	14200	CEDAR SPRINGS CITY	3					
	18500	COURTLAND TOWNSHIP	9					
	34020	GRAND RAPIDS TWP	18					
	34560	GRATTAN TOWNSHIP	4					
	56920	NELSON TOWNSHIP	5					
	59580	OAKFIELD TOWNSHIP	6					
	69080	ROCKFORD CITY	6					
	74460	SOLON TOWNSHIP	6					
	75440	SPARTA TOWNSHIP	8					
	75560	SPENCER TOWNSHIP	4					
	81140	TYRONE TOWNSHIP	4					
81920	VERGENNES TOWNSHIP	5						
2	64660	PLAINFIELD TOWNSHIP	33	33	7	9	8	9
3	82960	WALKER CITY	23	23	6	6	5	6
	<b>TOTALS - NORTH REGION</b>		<b>186</b>					
4	34001	GRAND RAPIDS - WARD 1	56	56	13	15	13	15
5	34002	GRAND RAPIDS - WARD 2	62	62	15	16	15	16
6	34003	GRAND RAPIDS - WARD 3	60	60	14	16	14	16
7	23980	EAST GRAND RAPIDS CITY	11	11	2	3	3	3
	<b>TOTALS - CENTRAL REGION</b>		<b>178</b>					
8	09780	BOWNE TOWNSHIP	3	62	15	16	15	16
	12500	CALEDONIA TOWNSHIP	15					
	13660	CASCADE TOWNSHIP	19					
	34160	GRANDVILLE CITY	15					
	49540	LOWELL CITY	4					
	49560	LOWELL TOWNSHIP	6					
9	12240	BYRON TOWNSHIP	24	24	5	7	5	7
10	31240	GAINES TOWNSHIP	25	25	6	7	5	7
11	42820	KENTWOOD CITY	48	48	11	13	11	13
12	88940	WYOMING CITY	66	66	16	17	16	17
	<b>TOTALS - SOUTH REGION</b>		<b>225</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>159</b>