

1996 Vermonter Poll

Economic Growth and Development

General Findings

Vermonters' attitudes toward growth and development have become more positive in the past year, according to results of the 1996 Vermonter Poll. Most notably:

- 58% of Vermonters believe that in the next several years their communities should encourage further growth and development, up from 53% last year.
- 54% of Vermonters believe that additional Wal-Marts and other large-scale retail stores should be discouraged in Vermont, down from 62% last year. Still, only 37% of Vermonters favor additional large-scale retailers, up only slightly from last year's 35%.

These shifts in attitude suggest a return to patterns observed before 1995, a year in which many large-scale development issues were hotly debated in the media.

Opinions on the quality of local planning were split. 47% of respondents said their communities were doing a good or excellent job of planning for the future, while 49% said their communities were doing a fair or poor job.

Strength of Opinion

Similar to last year's findings, high percentages of Vermonters responding to the general question on encouraging or discouraging growth and development and to the more specific question on encouraging or discouraging Wal-Marts and other large retailers show strong opinions on both sides of the issues. The share of Vermonters who would like to see their communities "strongly limit" further growth and development (28%) was more than double the proportion of Vermonters in the "limit" category (9%). This held true for supporters of future growth and development as well. 39% of Vermonters answered that further growth and development should be "strongly encouraged," while 19% said further growth and development should be "encouraged." On the large retailers issue, 45% of Vermonters surveyed said that Wal-Marts and other large-scale retailers should be "strongly discouraged" in Vermont, compared to only 9% who answered "discouraged." 21% of respondents said large retailers should be "strongly encouraged," while 9% said "encouraged."

Table 1. Limit or Encourage Further Growth and Development

Do you think that in the next several years your community should limit or encourage further growth and development? Do you feel strongly about that?	1994	1995	1996
	Percent		
Strongly Limit	19.7	29.0	27.9
Limit	13.1	14.2	8.5
Neutral	7.8	4.1	5.3
Encourage	20.7	16.9	19.4
Strongly Encourage	38.7	35.8	38.8

Source: 1994, 1995, and 1996 Vermonter Polls, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont.

Table 2. Discourage or Encourage Wal-Marts and Other Large Retail Stores in Vermont

Should additional Wal-Marts and other large-scale retail stores be discouraged or encouraged in Vermont? Do you feel strongly about that?	1994	1995	1996
	Percent		
Strongly Limit	31.6	47.6	45.1
Limit	13.3	14.1	9.0
Neutral	11.6	3.0	9.1
Encourage	17.3	12.6	15.5
Strongly Encourage	26.2	22.7	21.4

Source: 1994, 1995, and 1996 Vermonter Polls, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont.

Table 3. Primary Government Responsibility for Large-Scale Retail Development

Who should have primary responsibility for encouraging or discouraging large-scale retail development in Vermont? State or local government?	1994	1995	1996
	Percent		
State	18.0	15.6	24.8
Local	49.7	61.7	54.7
Both	27.7	17.5	17.9
Nobody	2.7	3.6	1.4
Don't Know	1.9	1.7	1.3

Source: 1994, 1995, and 1996 Vermonter Polls, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont.

Table 4. Opinions on Community Planning, Statewide and Regional

How well do you think your community is doing right now in planning for the future: excellent, good, fair or poor?	1995	1996
	Percent	
Strongly Limit	6.8	9.8
Limit	39.7	37.2
Neutral	37.9	35.4
Encourage	12.9	13.2
Strongly Encourage	2.3	4.5
Source: 1995 and 1996 Vermonter Polls, Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont		