

LEADERS LISTEN

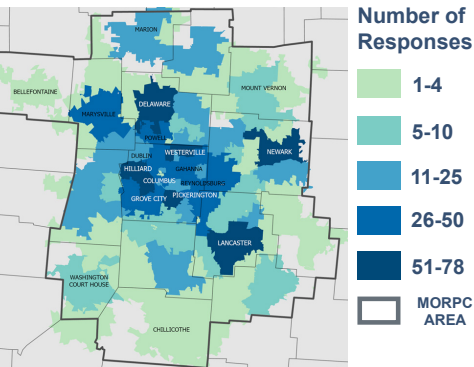
Sustainability Survey
Actionable Insights

Introduction

The Leaders Listen Series is a set of short surveys produced by MORPC that will periodically invite Central Ohio residents to share their input with regional planners and decision makers. *Leaders Listen: Sustainability* invited residents to make their voices heard on sustainability practices, environmental issues, and opportunities impacting the region. More than 2,000 survey respondents across our 15-county region shared their opinions on everything from air and water quality to their desire for commercial solar installations and other steps to mitigate climate change.

Developed in partnership with Measurement Resources Company and The Columbus Dispatch, the survey measured top-of-mind concerns for area residents.

Leaders Listen Central Ohio Sustainability Survey Respondents



Source: Leaders Listen: Sustainability Survey 2023

The Rural Perspective: A Summary

Local decision-makers should prioritize proactive environmental initiatives, including air, water, and recycling. It's crucial to promote sustainable practices such as increasing tree canopy, transitioning to wind and solar energy, preserving forests, and reducing chemicals in farming. Leaders need to engage with communities often to teach people how they can aid in improving the environment. The region must prepare for the costs of transitioning away from fossil fuels, while developing prudent vehicle emissions standards. Lastly, the region needs more effective cross-agency coordination and enforcement of environmental regulations.

*Summarized by AI; reviewed by MORPC and edited for length.

Sustainability Needs

As a region, we should strive to conserve green spaces and improve air and water quality as we grow larger. The best path forward requires us to listen closely to our communities. Through the Leaders Listen partnerships, we have measured the pulse of Central Ohio. When it comes to sustainability and environmental issues and priorities, we found strong agreement on items including: climate change worry, support for commercial solar power, and perceptions that leaders could do more to address the region's environmental needs.

Younger residents responded with much greater concern about current and future environmental conditions, especially air and water quality.

Actionable Insights

- Climate Change is somewhat to extremely worrisome for 2/3 of area residents
- Most (70%) feel that Central Ohio leaders are "not at all" to "moderately" addressing the region's environmental needs
- A noticeable portion feel that their drinking water and outdoor air are of poor or fair quality (25% and 30%, respectively)

Priority Environmental Investments

1. Conserve greenspaces and waterways
2. Improve water quality
3. Expand waste reduction and diversion
4. Improve air quality
5. Expand wind and solar electricity generation
6. Increase the number of electric vehicle charging stations

Strong Support for Commercial Solar

Of Central Ohio residents surveyed, 59% support large commercial solar projects in their communities. Most Americans under-estimate support for climate change mitigation policies. National support for placing wind and solar on public lands has reached 80%. In addition, 66% of Americans support going to 100% renewable energy by 2035.

Source: <https://nature.com/articles/s41467-022-32412-y/tables/1>



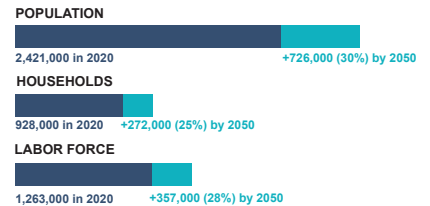
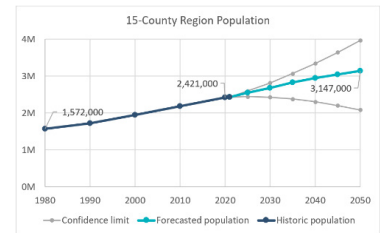
Growth Context

As we envision Central Ohio's future, we have many opportunities to better meet the wants and needs of residents. Collectively, we should focus on implementing a wide range of strategies and policies to conserve, protect, and sustain our natural amenities for future generations. We must ensure that growth and development are strategically managed in a way that allows for the preservation and improvement of our current standard of living.

Most importantly, as the region grows to nearly 3.15 million people by 2050, we must continue to pursue equitable outcomes, where everyone has access to a healthy environment in which to thrive.

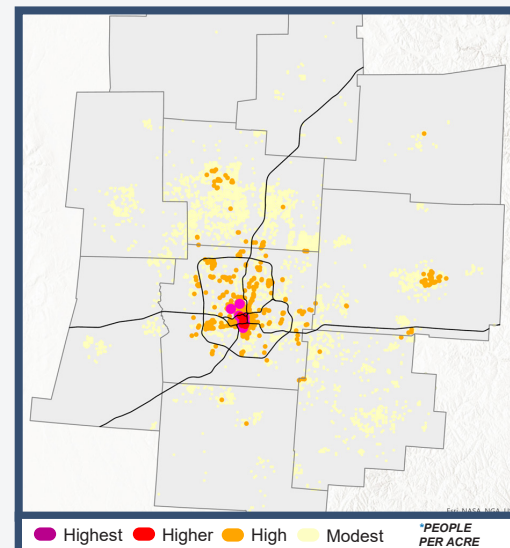
Continued Growth Context

The Central Ohio region is expected to grow by an additional 726,000 people, 272,000 households and 357,000 workers.



Source: MORPC 2050 Population Forecast 2023

Projected Population Growth 2021 - 2050



Impacts

How communities plan to meet current and future environmental and sustainability needs will have significant impacts, not only on the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink, but also on the health of natural environments for plant and animal life across our region.

Health and Wellbeing



A person's health and daily life are impacted by the air and water they consume. During central Ohio's 2022-2023 air monitoring season, a total of 11 Air Quality Alerts were issued for both PM2.5 (particulate matter) and ozone, with PM2.5 being the primary pollutant on 9 occasions. Overall, the majority of days were in the "Good" Air Quality Index (AQI) for both pollutants, but AQI levels were worse compared to the previous year. Nearly 7 in 10 (67%) respondents reported that they regularly pay attention to local air quality alerts, and 6 in 10 indicate that they both know where to find information about their local air quality and regularly limit their outdoor exposure when there are air quality alerts. However, less than a quarter of respondents agreed with the statement that "their neighborhood's air quality negatively impacts their health".

Environment and Sustainability



Across demographics and geographic areas, there is a collective call for more investment in greenspaces and water conservation activities which would enhance regional air and water quality. From our survey, over a quarter of all respondents rated their environmental air and water quality as "Poor" or "Fair" (27% and 32% respectively). To the extent that the survey responses are representative of the region as a whole, applying these rates suggests that over 650,000 residents believe that their air and/or water quality needs improvement. The EPA's "How's My Waterway" data shows that most waterways in Central Ohio do have one or more harmful contaminants that hinder uses.

Housing



Similar to the results for outdoor water, just under 4 in 10 respondents rated their drinking water and indoor air quality as "Very Good" or "Excellent" (38% and 40% respectively). Statewide, 95% of consumer drinking water meets EPA standards. Drinking water problems are often linked to the use of lead pipes. Indoor air quality issues often stem from mold growth which is most frequently caused by housing problems such as roof and basement moisture issues, inadequate ventilation, leaking pipes, or improperly sealed doors and windows.

Equity & Inclusion

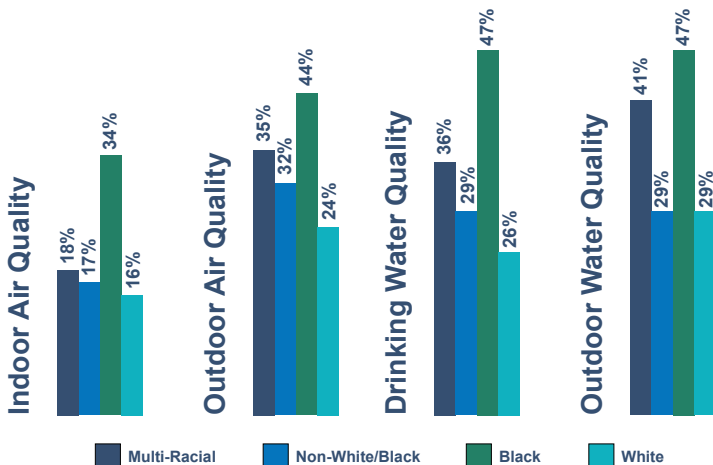


Black and younger respondents consistently express more negative perceptions of environmental conditions compared to their white or older counterparts. When rating air and water quality, Black respondents are 19% and 13% less likely, respectively, to indicate "Very Good" or "Excellent" ratings compared to White respondents. Additionally, White respondents are almost 10 percentage points less likely to perceive poor air quality in their neighborhoods when compared to Black respondents.

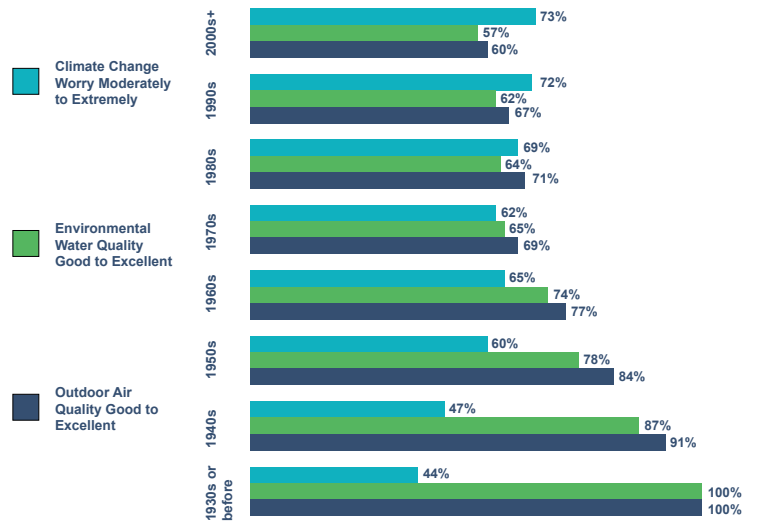
Diverse Perspectives

Across both geographic areas and political ideology, only a small portion of respondents indicated they are "very" or "extremely" satisfied with how local decision makers are addressing the Central Ohio Region's environmental quality needs. There was a high level of agreement across groups that the top investment priority for the region should be the "Conservation of Greenspaces and Waterways."

How would you rate the air and water quality in your neighborhood or residence? (Poor or Fair ratings)



Perceptions by Decade of Birth

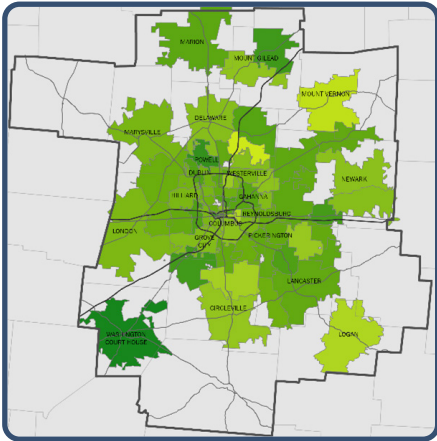


Source: Leaders Listen: Sustainability Survey 2023

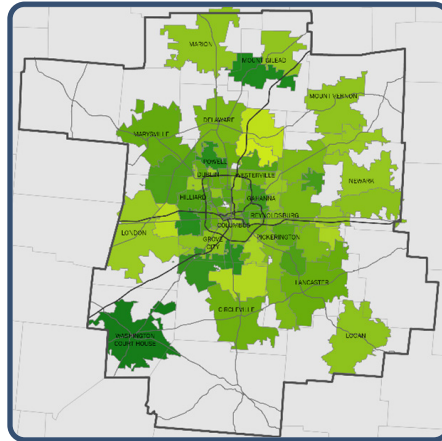
Deeper Dive

The region's perspectives on environmental air and water quality show that people want improvements to the environment generally. Often, individual ZIP Codes rate their air and water quality similarly, signaling that if the community believes one is an issue so is the other. Further, the region is worried about climate change, with all ZIP Codes reporting a minimum typical response of being "somewhat" worried. As Central Ohio prepares for the future affected by climate change, time and attention will need to be devoted to planning for both mitigating climate change and reducing detrimental impacts to the region.

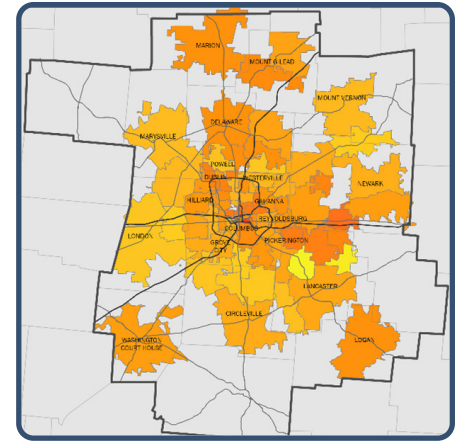
Average Outdoor Air Quality



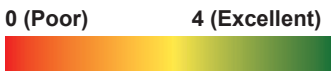
Average Drinking Water Quality



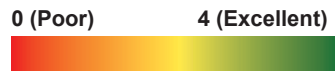
Average Climate Change Worry



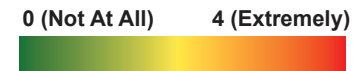
Mean outdoor Air Quality Ratings



Mean Drinking Water Quality

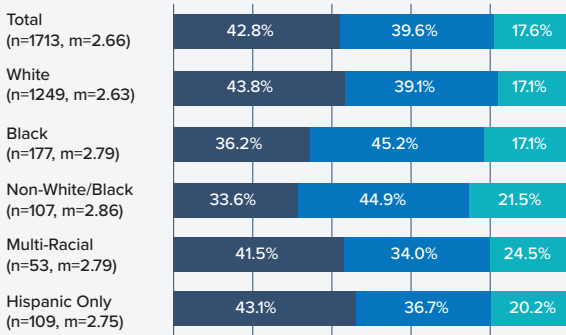


Mean Climate Change Worry Respondants



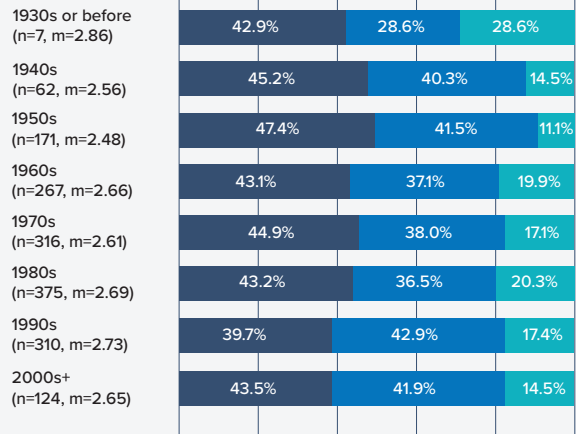
Source: Leaders Listen: Sustainability Survey 2023 (4B ZIP Code Count N < 5 Excluded)

Overall, how satisfied are you with how local decision makers are addressing the Central Ohio region's environmental quality needs? (By Race)



Not at all or Slightly Satisfied Moderately Satisfied Very or Extremely Satisfied

Local Decision Makers



Source: Leaders Listen: Sustainability Survey 2023 (4B ZIP Code Count N < 5 Excluded)

Actionable Insights

The *Leaders Listen: Sustainability* survey shows the desire for improving the environment and conserving our natural amenities. While the region experiences significant population growth and economic development, Central Ohioans want increased conservation of greenspaces and waterways. Prioritizing environmental and sustainability policies and practices will help ensure all residents have a safe and healthy environment in which to grow and thrive.

Find more data and planning resources at www.morpc.org/leaderslisten