Results From Carbon Offsets Value Survey

City of Ann Arbor *** September 2026

Executive Summary

In September of 2026, the City of Ann Arbor released a survey to gather input on the values that the public would like to see in any carbon offsets the City may pursue. The survey consisted of three primary types of questions: a ranking of values, a series of "would you rather" questions, and questions regarding the role offsets could play in the City's sustainability work. The survey was open for nearly a month and received 657 unique responses. Of those responses, 627 were from residents of Ann Arbor. Only data from residents of Ann Arbor (627 responses) were analyzed and summarized below.

Due to the large response rate, the results are representative, meaning the results shed important insights into what values the public would like to see in carbon offsets. And the results overwhelmingly show that the public wants to see either offsets that "*reduce greenhouse gas emissions*" **or** offsets that are "*cost-effective*." The remaining values (enhances resilience, grounded in equity and justice, located locally, scalable and transferable, additionally, and rapidly deployable) scored similarly and lower than cost effective and additional.

The September survey also asked a series of questions that forced respondents to grapple with tradeoffs and tensions around carbon offsets. Results from these pairwise comparisons show very few clear mandates:

- 52% of respondents selected cost effective offsets over offsets that are additional to what is already being done
- 57% of respondents selected cost effective offsets over offsets grounded in equity
- 55% of respondents selected offsets that enhance resilience as being more important than cost effective offsets
- 52% of respondents selected local offsets over using cost effective offsets
- 60% of respondents selected offsets that are rapidly deployable over offsets that are scalable
- 73% of respondents selected local offsets over offsets grounded in equity and justice
- 51% of respondents selected rapidly deployable offsets over local carbon offsets
- 51% of respondents would prefer to use carbon offsets and keep the City's goal of carbon neutrality by 2030, compared to 49% who would rather change the goal and not use offsets

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- 55% of respondents would prefer the City invest in natural systems-based carbon offsets versus 46% that would prefer the City invest in renewable energy-based offsets.

Interestingly, many respondents ranked priorities differently across the two question types. For example, respondents may have ranked additionally as the top priority value, but then when faced with a pairwise question forcing them to choose either offsets that lead to additionality or cost-effective offsets, they chose cost-effective. This inconsistency may indicate that confusion remains about offsets. Regardless, the results point to a public that is seeking a "unicorn" solution, meaning a solution that does all things, at all times, for all people. Going forward, a major challenge for the City will be identifying carbon offsets that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cost effectively, likely with an emphasis on nature-based solutions that are both local and global.

More Detailed Survey Analysis

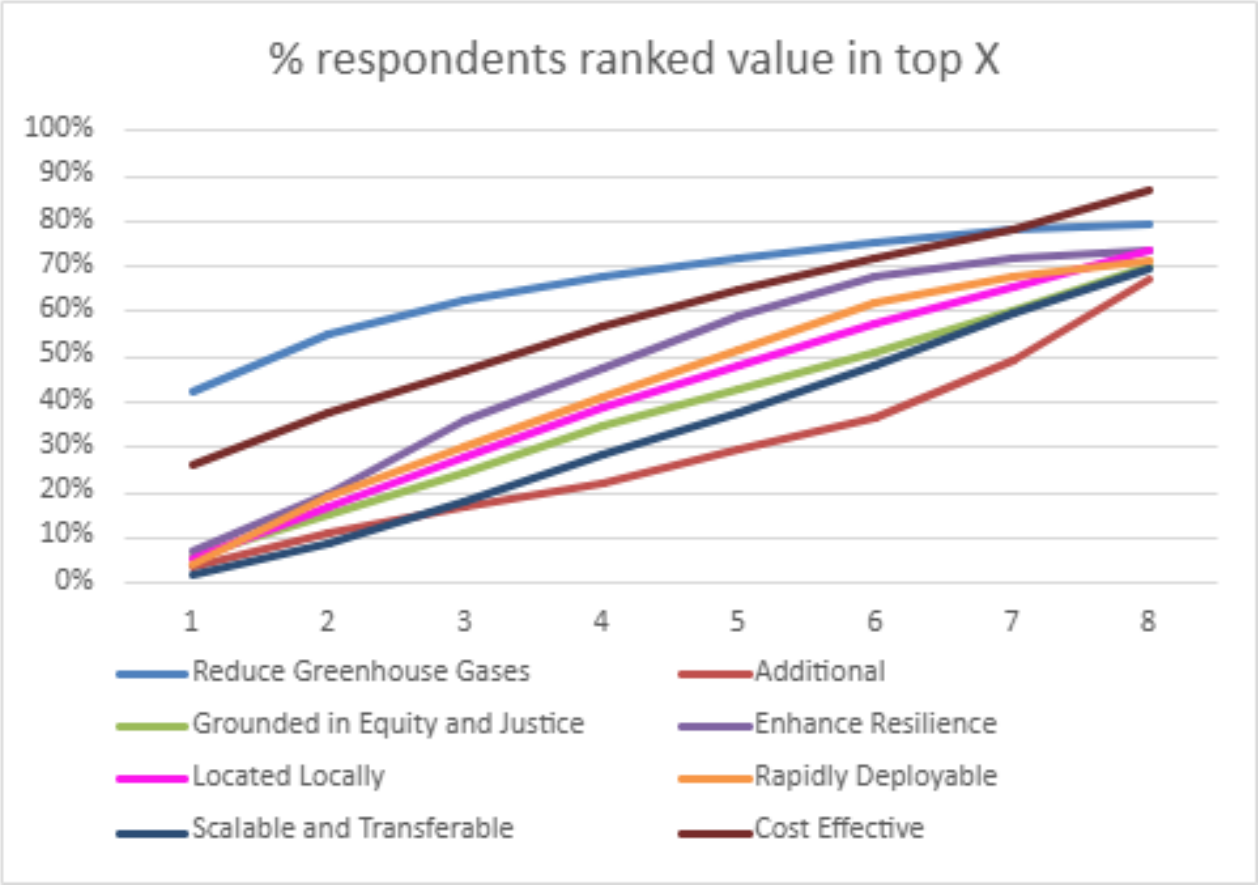
Respondents were asked to rank 8 concepts (which we labeled from A-H) in order of importance but were not required to rank all of the concepts. The drop-off in ranking was sudden, with most ranking at least 4 of the values. Of the 627 responses from Ann Arbor residents, 600 (96%) people ranked at least one concept, 546 (87%) ranked at least 2 concepts, 504 (80%) ranked at least 3 concepts, 468 (75%) ranked at least 4 concepts, but only 425 (68%) ranked 5 and 375 (60%) people ranked all of 1-8.

The most ranked concept was "Cost effective" which was ranked by 544 respondents, followed by "reduces greenhouse gases" which was ranked by 498 respondents. Additionality was the value/concept ranked the least (ranked by 420 of the respondents).

To understand the relative importance of Cost effectiveness (labeled "H") and Reduce Greenhouse gases (labeled "A") in rankings, we looked at how often these appeared together in respondent rankings. 81% of survey respondents had "A" or "H" appear in their top 2. Only 11% of respondents had both "A" and "H" appear in their top 2 ranked values. 90% of respondents ranked either "A" or "H" in their top 4 ranked values. 35% of respondents ranked both "A" and "H" in their top 4 ranked values.

The graph below shows how people ranked the 8 values/concepts. The graph highlights what percentage of respondents ranked the 8 concepts. The X-axis shows how the values/concepts were ranked (order 1-8). As an example, for "reduce greenhouse gases" (blue line) about ~40% of respondents ranked this as their number one priority and about 55% had ranked it within their top 2 priorities. In the end, 80% of people ranked it somewhere in their top 8 priorities.

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"Reduce Greenhouse Gases" and "Cost Effective" stand out as being the most ranked and the highest ranked values. The other values are more closely grouped, with some slight differentiation in the mid-priority (3-6) between Enhancing Resilience and Additionality, with Additionality being the least ranked of all values.

The survey also used pairwise comparisons to force respondents to choose between values that are often in tension with one another when it comes to offset projects. Responses to these pairwise comparisons showed very few clear mandates as well as conflicting responses (e.g., someone would say cost effective was more important than local, that local was more important than rapidly deployable projects, and that rapidly deployable was more important than cost effective). In general, the results point to respondents wanting "unicorn" projects, meaning projects that deliver everything very cheaply.

The specific responses to pairwise comparisons are provided below (and table 1):

- 52% of respondents selected cost effective ("H") offsets over offsets that are additional ("B") to what is already being done
- 57% of respondents selected cost effective ("H") offsets over offsets grounded in equity ("C")

- 55% of respondents selected offsets that enhance resilience ("D") over cost effective ("H") offsets
- 52% of respondents selected local ("E") offsets over using cost effective ("H") offsets
- 60% of respondents selected offsets that are rapidly deployable ("F") over offsets that are scalable ("G")
- 73% of respondents selected local ("E") offsets over offsets grounded in equity and justice ("C")
- 51% of respondents selected rapidly deployable ("F") offsets over local ("E") carbon offsets

TABLE 1: Pairwise Comparison Results

Would you rather...

...over ...	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
A								
B								52%
C					73%			57%
D								45%
E			27%			51%		48%
F					49%		40%	
G						60%		
H		48%	43%	55%	52%			

Survey respondents were also asked two preference questions related to using offsets and the type of offsets they would prefer. 51% of respondents (316 respondents) noted a preference for using carbon offsets and keeping the City's goal of carbon neutrality by 2030, compared to 49% who would rather change the goal and not use offsets (302 respondents). And 55% of respondents (331 respondents) would prefer the City invest in natural systems-based carbon offsets versus 46% that would prefer the City invest in renewable energy-based offsets (268 respondents).

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