

# The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy >> University of Michigan

Michigan Local Energy  
Survey October 2020

## Energy Issues and Policies in Michigan Local Governments

By Natalie Fitzpatrick, Debra Horner, and Sarah Mills

This report presents the opinions of Michigan's local government leaders regarding a variety of energy issues and policies in their jurisdictions, including the relevance of particular energy policies for their communities, whether the jurisdiction has staff or external consultants devoted to energy issues, energy audits in government facilities, barriers to local energy policymaking, and more. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders conducted in the Fall 2019 Michigan Local Energy Survey (MiLES), a special wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey.

>> The Michigan Local Energy Survey (MiLES) is a census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan. The survey was funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). More information about MiLES, including a copy of the questionnaire, is available online at: <http://closup.umich.edu/miles>. Respondents for the Fall 2019 MiLES include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,350 jurisdictions across the state.

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## Key Findings

- Local leaders were asked about the relevance of five different sustainability-related issues in their jurisdiction. A majority of local officials say regulating placement of energy infrastructure on private property (57%) and improving energy efficiency for local businesses or residents (53%) are either somewhat or very relevant issues in their jurisdiction. Almost half say siting energy infrastructure on public property (45%) and reducing jurisdiction government's use of fossil fuels (44%) are somewhat or very relevant. However, just 23% say planning for Electric Vehicles (EVs) is somewhat or very relevant.
- Statewide, 70% of Michigan jurisdictions report having at least considered developing plans or policies regarding energy issues, though fewer (59%) report having actually developed local policies, and fewer still (55%) say they have *implemented* such policies.
- Regarding staffing for energy policy, just 19% say their jurisdiction has someone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues, including employees, elected leaders, or external organizations/consultants.
- A majority (52%) say they rarely or never engage with their residents on energy issues.
- Few (15%) report collecting data about energy use in either public or private buildings, either on a voluntary or mandatory basis.
- Approximately four in ten Michigan local governments statewide have had energy audits conducted for at least one type of government facility, most commonly the jurisdiction hall or county administration building.
  - » Among jurisdictions that have not had audits conducted on any government facilities, more than half say such audits are just not a priority for the jurisdiction, while about one in five say they do not have sufficient funding to conduct an audit.
- Finally, among the approximately 30% of Michigan local governments that have not at least considered energy issues, officials cite a number of barriers to considering energy issues. About two-thirds say that lack of expertise to develop policies, costs associated with developing energy policies, and having more important priorities are barriers to addressing energy issues locally.

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## Relevance of energy issues in local jurisdictions

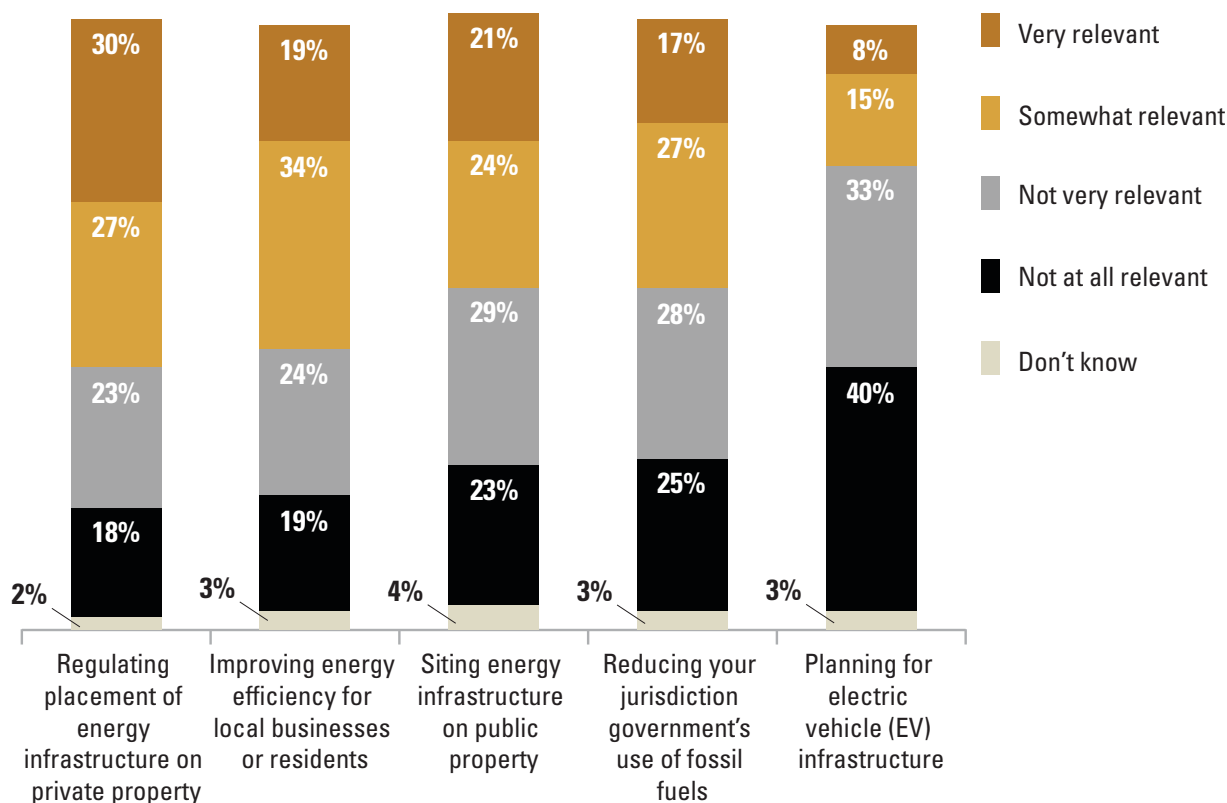
In Fall 2019, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) sponsored the Michigan Local Energy Survey (MiLES) a special wave of CLOSUP's ongoing Michigan Public Policy Survey to better understand local officials' perceptions of the costs, benefits, and likelihood of developing energy policies and engaging in sustainability activities. The MiLES survey first asked local officials about five specific energy issues and their relevance to the local jurisdiction's government. In response to these questions, a majority of Michigan local officials say regulating placement of energy infrastructure on private property (57%) and improving energy efficiency for local businesses or residents (53%) are somewhat or very relevant to their jurisdiction's government (see *Figure 1*). Additionally, 45% of officials say siting energy infrastructure on public property is somewhat or very relevant, while 44% say the same for reducing their jurisdiction government's use of fossil fuels.

Meanwhile, 40% of local officials statewide say planning for electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure is not at all relevant, significantly higher than for any of the other energy topics. Only 23% of jurisdictions say it is somewhat or very relevant.

When looking across all five energy issues, only 10% of local officials statewide say *none* of these issues are relevant at all to their jurisdiction. In other words, an overwhelming majority says at least one of the five issues is at least minimally relevant in their jurisdiction

**Figure 1**

Local officials' assessments of the relevance of various energy issues to their jurisdiction's government





As shown in *Table 1*, looking by population size, the smallest jurisdictions (those with fewer than 1,500 residents) are the least likely to say each of these energy issues is either somewhat or very relevant to their jurisdiction's government. However, even among these small jurisdictions, almost half (47%) say improving energy efficiency is somewhat or very relevant, and 44% say regulating the placement of energy infrastructure on private property is somewhat or very relevant. And among these smallest jurisdictions, only 16% say none of these issues are at all relevant.

Meanwhile, large majorities of officials from the state's largest jurisdictions (those with more than 30,000 residents) say each of the five energy policy areas are relevant to their local governments, including 62% in regard to EV infrastructure (compared to just 23% of all jurisdictions statewide).

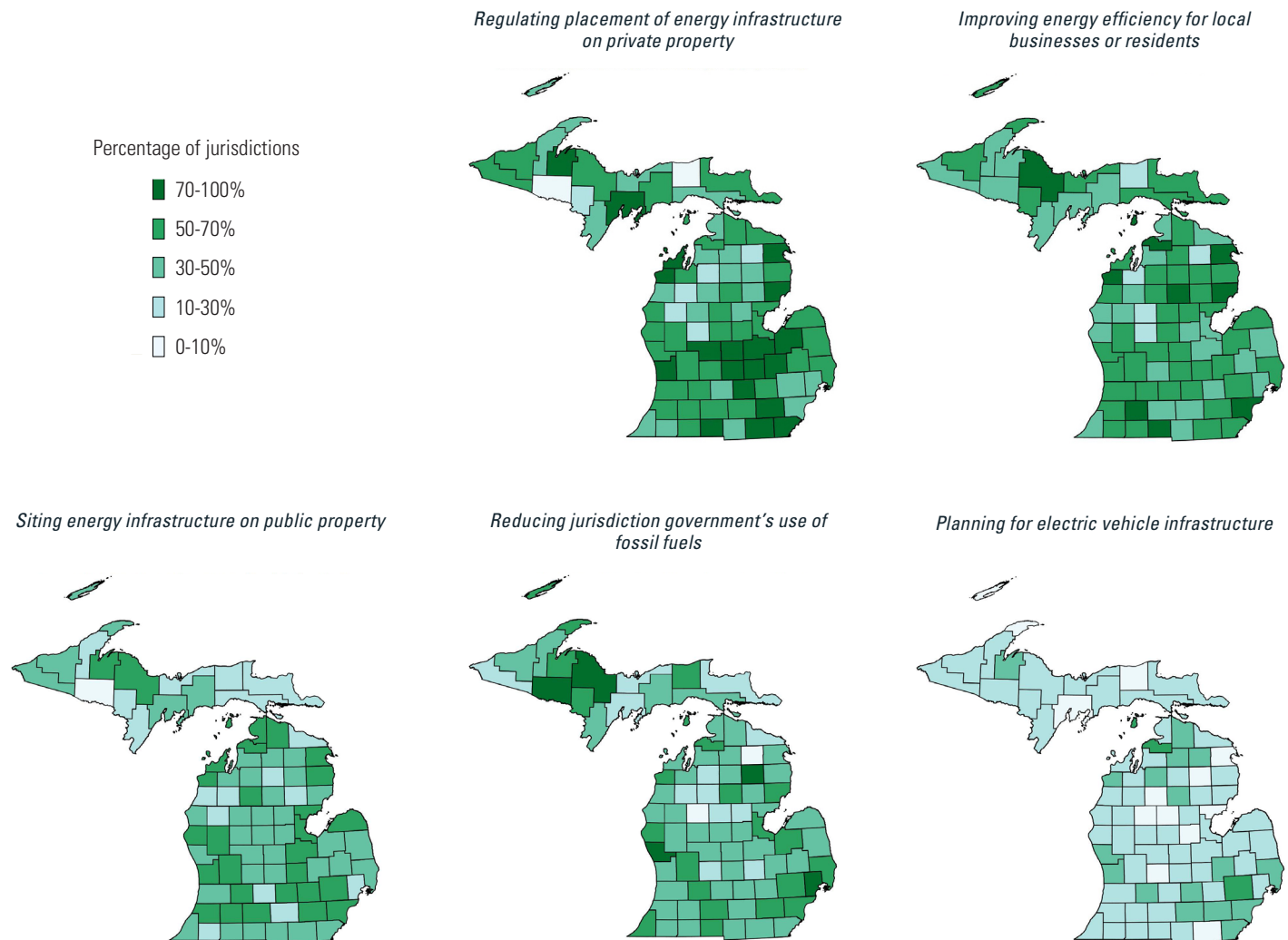
**Table 1**

Percent of jurisdictions saying particular energy issues are somewhat or very relevant, by jurisdiction size

	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Regulating placement of energy infrastructure on private property	57%	44%	64%	65%	65%	68%
Improving energy efficiency	53%	47%	55%	53%	56%	72%
Siting energy infrastructure on public property	45%	34%	47%	58%	56%	63%
Reducing jurisdiction government's use of fossil fuels	44%	33%	45%	55%	61%	69%
EV infrastructure	23%	13%	24%	31%	36%	62%

The maps in *Figure 2* display local officials' assessments of the relevance of each of the five energy issues, aggregated at the county level. The lighter shades indicate where relevance of an issue among cities, villages, and townships within a county is relatively low, while the darker shades indicate greater relevance among the county's jurisdictions. As noted earlier, local leaders say regulating placement of energy infrastructure on private property is the most relevant of the five policy areas, and this is particularly true across many Central Michigan counties, as well as in Baraga and Delta counties in the Upper Peninsula, Leelenau County in the northwest Lower Peninsula, and Alpena and Iosco counties in the northeast Lower Peninsula. At the other end of the spectrum, only in Oakland and Charlevoix counties do a majority of jurisdictions see EV infrastructure as relevant to their local governments.

**Figure 2**  
Percent of jurisdictions saying particular energy issues are somewhat or very relevant, by county

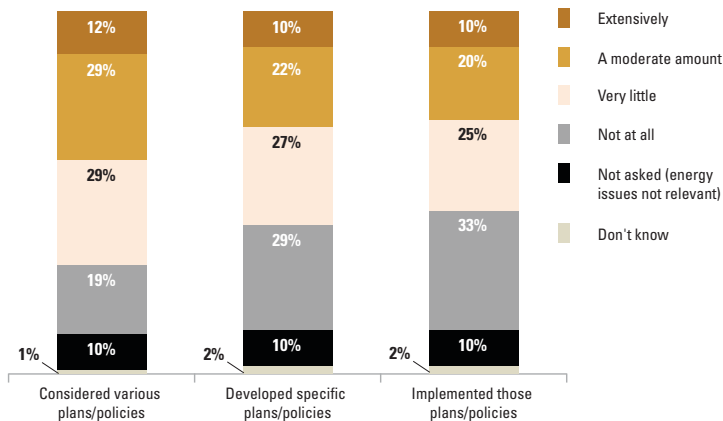




## Local government action on energy policies: consideration, development, enactment

**Figure 3**

Percent of jurisdictions that report considering, developing, and/or implementing any plans and/or policies regarding energy issues



In jurisdictions where energy issues are seen as relevant, the MiLES survey next asked whether the local government has considered or currently is considering, developing, or implementing any policy action. Overall, 70% of Michigan jurisdictions report having at least *considered* various plans or policies regarding any energy issues at all (including but not limited to the five specific issues listed above), including 41% who have considered them a moderate amount (29%) or extensively (12%). Meanwhile, another 19% say energy issues are at least slightly relevant to their jurisdiction but their jurisdiction has not considered any plans or policies regarding energy issues.

Beyond simple consideration of plans or policies by the jurisdiction, though, the likelihood of action starts to drop off. As shown in *Figure 3*, when it comes to actually *developing* policy, fewer jurisdictions statewide report having developed policies (59% at least very little). And fewer still have *implemented* those policies (55% at least very little).

By population size, Michigan's smallest jurisdictions are the least likely to have considered (57%), developed (45%), or implemented (40%) plans and/or policies regarding energy issues (see *Table 2*). By comparison, once a community's population size exceeds 1,500 residents, their local governments are significantly more likely to have considered, developed, or even implemented energy-related policies at least minimally.

**Table 2**

Percent of jurisdictions that report considering, developing, and/or implementing any plans and/or policies regarding energy issues at least very little, by jurisdiction size

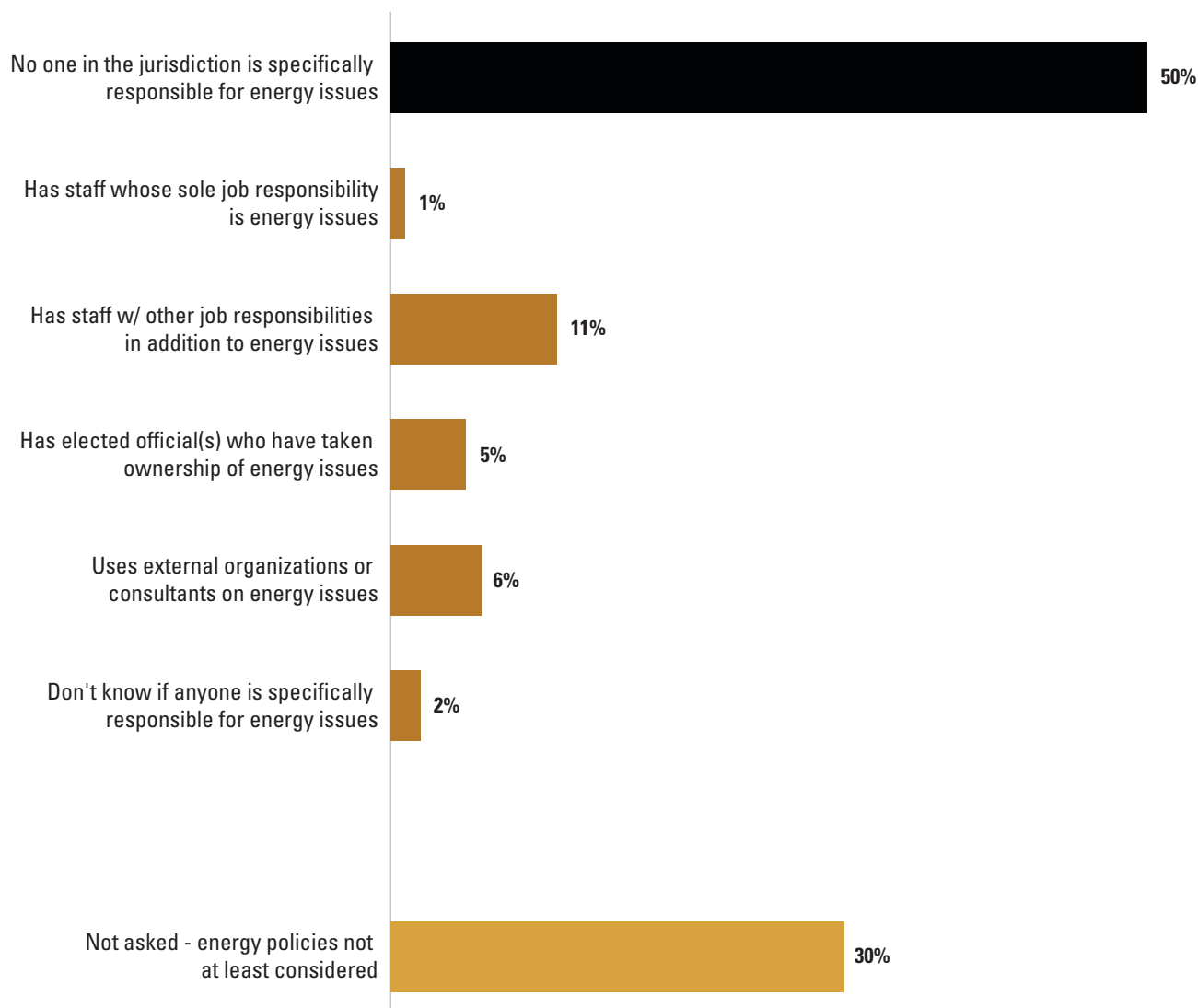
	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Considered at all	70%	57%	73%	85%	87%	90%
Developed at all	59%	45%	63%	72%	78%	83%
Implemented at all	55%	40%	57%	69%	80%	82%

## Staff (and other actors) responsible for energy issues

Statewide, a large majority (80%) of Michigan local governments do not have anyone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues. As shown in *Figure 4*, this includes jurisdictions where energy issues have not been considered, developed, and/or implemented (30%), as well as jurisdictions which have at least considered energy policies, but report that no one in the jurisdiction is specifically responsible for these issues (50%).

Among the remaining 19% of Michigan local governments who do have someone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues, local officials report using a mix of staff, elected leaders, or external organizations/consultants. Specifically, 11% of Michigan jurisdictions report having staff who have other job responsibilities but are responsible for addressing energy as well, and a small handful (1%) say they have staff whose sole job responsibility is energy issues. Meanwhile, 5% say they have elected officials who have taken ownership of energy issues, and 6% of jurisdictions statewide use external organizations or consultants on energy issues.

**Figure 4**  
Percent of jurisdictions with someone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues



Note: percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents were able to check all that apply



Among the state's smallest jurisdictions, just 10% have someone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues, compared to 53% of the largest jurisdictions (see *Table 3*). However, as detailed in an earlier MiLES report from CLOSUP, local officials from 28% of jurisdictions statewide express interest in future collaboration with other local governments on shared staffing for energy issues (e.g., jointly employing a sustainability manager/coordinator), including 24% of the smallest jurisdictions and 48% of Michigan's largest jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3**

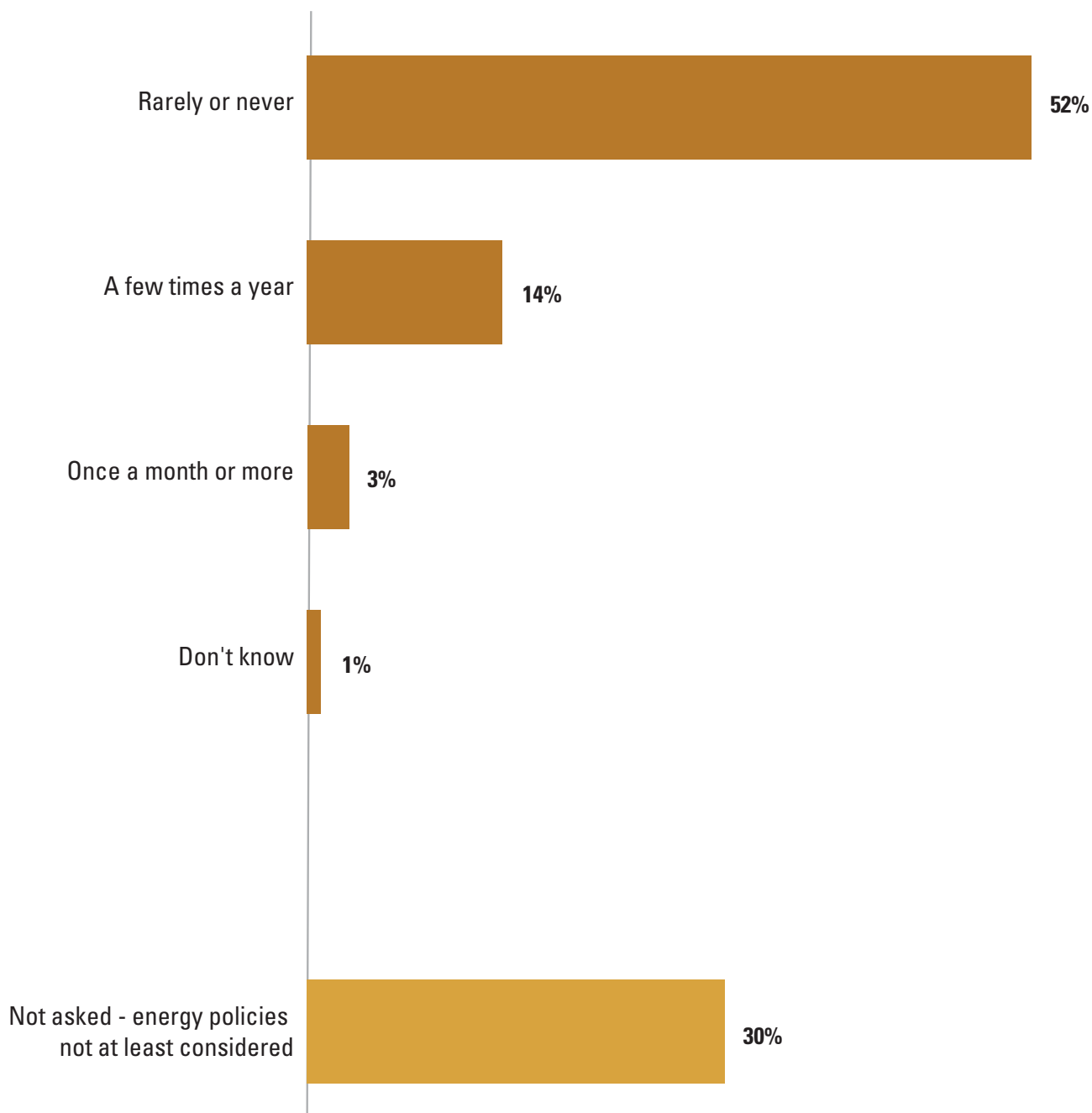
Percent of jurisdictions with someone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues, by jurisdiction size

	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Yes – any	19%	10%	17%	24%	37%	53%
No – none	51%	46%	56%	62%	52%	40%
Not asked – energy policies not at least considered	30%	44%	27%	14%	11%	8%

## Engagement with residents on energy issues

When it comes to engaging with residents on energy issues (i.e., through public events, mailers, email newsletters, on social media, etc.), most Michigan jurisdictions say they engage with residents only rarely or do not engage at all. Statewide, just 17% of local officials say their jurisdiction engages with residents on energy issues at least a few times a year, including just 3% who say they engage once a month or more (see *Figure 5*).

**Figure 5**  
Percent of jurisdictions that engage with residents on energy issues







Looking by population size, larger jurisdictions are more likely to engage with residents frequently. However, even among the largest jurisdictions, only 12% engage with residents once a month or more, while another 29% say they engage a few times a year (see *Table 4*).

**Table 4**

Percent of jurisdictions that engage with residents on energy issues, by jurisdiction size

	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Rarely or never	52%	47%	54%	65%	62%	47%
A few times a year	14%	8%	15%	17%	21%	29%
Once a month or more	3%	1%	3%	2%	5%	12%
Don't know	1%	0%	2%	2%	2%	5%
Not asked – energy policies not at least considered	30%	44%	27%	14%	11%	8%

## Voices Across Michigan

### Quotes from local leaders about ways their jurisdiction interacts with their residents on energy

“At township meetings. Effective for the limited few who are there.”

“Depends on topic (some more than others), but includes press releases, community meetings, news media, face to face interactions, infographics and social media sharing.”

“... we have been doing more work with the creation of an environmental council and social media communications and are currently planning a big community effort for earth day in 2020.”

“Invite them to public meetings for discussions, invite them to public presentations, classes on saving energy at local libraries and we will be starting a newsletter soon!”

“We had an entire successful Department for Weatherization and Energy reduction that worked directly with community members, but the funding was eliminated.”

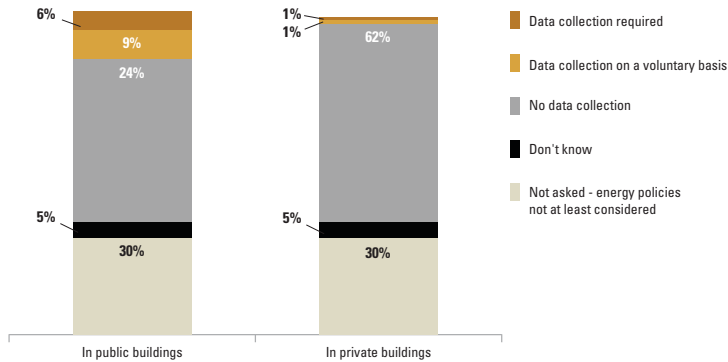
“Village has sponsored onsite engagement meetings between residents and vendors who provide energy efficiency programs to small business and residential properties.”



## Collecting data about energy use in public and private buildings

**Figure 6**

Percent of jurisdictions that currently collect data about energy use in public and private buildings



Local officials from 15% of jurisdictions statewide say their government collects data about energy use in public buildings, either as a requirement (6%) or on a voluntary basis (9%), while just 2% collect it in private buildings (see *Figure 6*).

Larger jurisdictions are more likely to collect data, particularly about public buildings. Among jurisdictions with 10,001-30,000 residents 29% collect data on a required (11%) or voluntary (18%) basis, and among jurisdictions with more than 30,000 residents 50% collect data on a required (25%) or voluntary (25%) basis (see *Table 5*). However, even in larger communities, few local jurisdictions collect data about private buildings, either on a required or voluntary basis (see *Table 6*).

**Table 5**

Percent of jurisdictions that currently collect data about energy use in public buildings, by jurisdiction size

	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Data collection required	6%	1%	5%	10%	11%	25%
Data collection on a voluntary basis	9%	4%	7%	13%	18%	25%
No data collection	51%	47%	57%	56%	51%	32%
Don't know	3%	4%	7%	9%	10%	5%
Not asked – energy policies not at least considered	30%	44%	27%	14%	11%	8%

**Table 6**

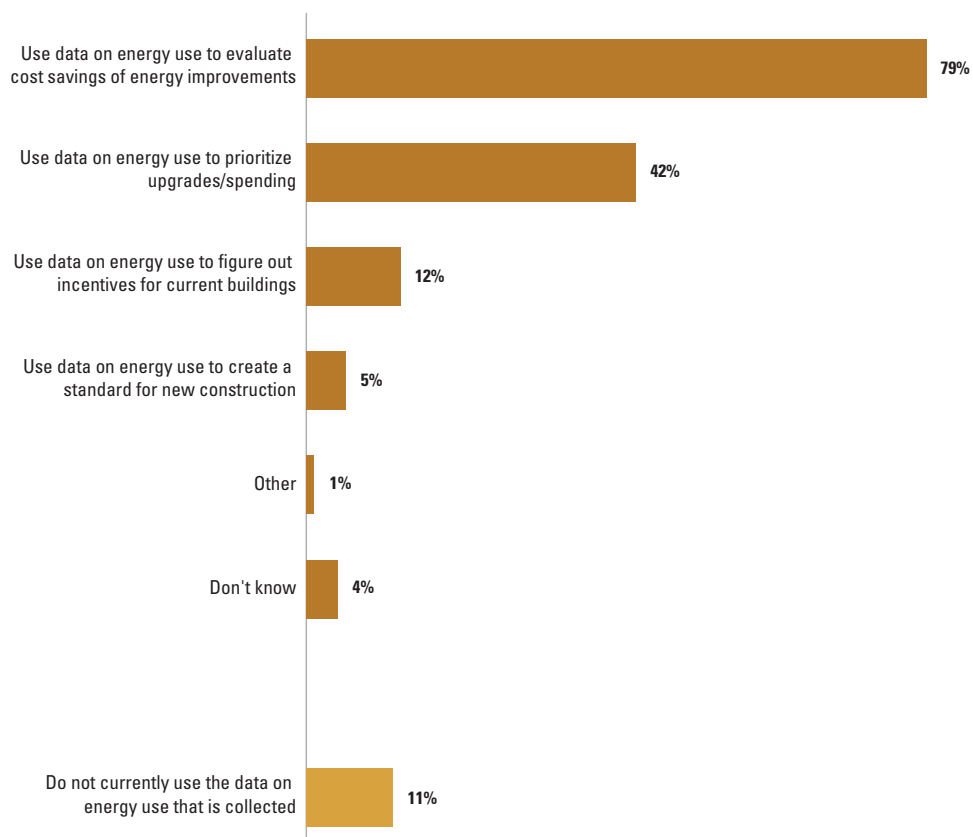
Percent of jurisdictions that currently collect data about energy use in private buildings, by jurisdiction size

	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Data collection required	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Data collection on a voluntary basis	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	6%
No data collection	62%	52%	65%	77%	78%	71%
Don't know	5%	3%	4%	7%	9%	13%
Not asked – energy policies not at least considered	30%	44%	27%	14%	11%	8%

Among jurisdictions that do collect data on energy use in community buildings—public or private—79% say they use it to evaluate cost savings of energy improvements, and 42% say they use it to prioritize upgrades and spending (see *Figure 7*). Fewer use it for figuring out incentives for current buildings (12%) or creating a standard for new construction (5%), while 11% say they do not currently use the data on energy use that are collected.

**Figure 7**

Ways local jurisdictions use data about energy use in public and private buildings, among jurisdictions that collect such data



Note: percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents were able to check all that apply

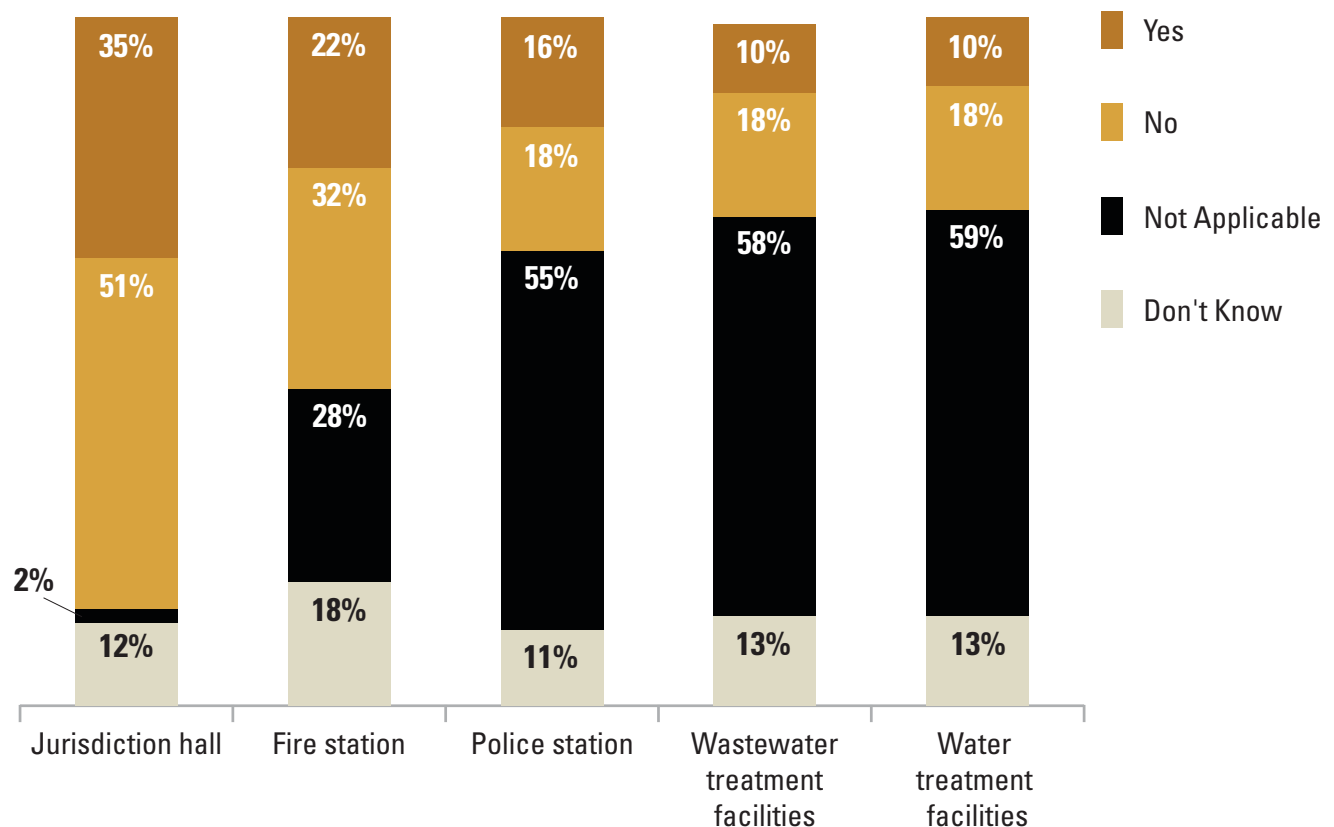


## Energy audits on community facilities

On an earlier survey, the Spring 2019 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) asked local officials about their jurisdiction's actions to reduce costs or environmental impacts of energy use and found that most jurisdictions have taken some type of action. In particular, 50% of Michigan local governments statewide said they had adopted policies or plans to improve energy efficiency in their government facilities.<sup>2</sup> The Fall 2019 MiLES survey followed up on this MPPS question and asked all jurisdictions statewide—regardless of whether or not they have considered energy plans or policies—if any energy audits (i.e., measuring energy use and efficiency) have been conducted in various government facilities. Overall, 39% of jurisdictions report having at least one facility where audits have been conducted. Larger jurisdictions are more likely to have at least one facility where audits have been conducted (including more than 75% among jurisdictions with more than 10,000 residents).

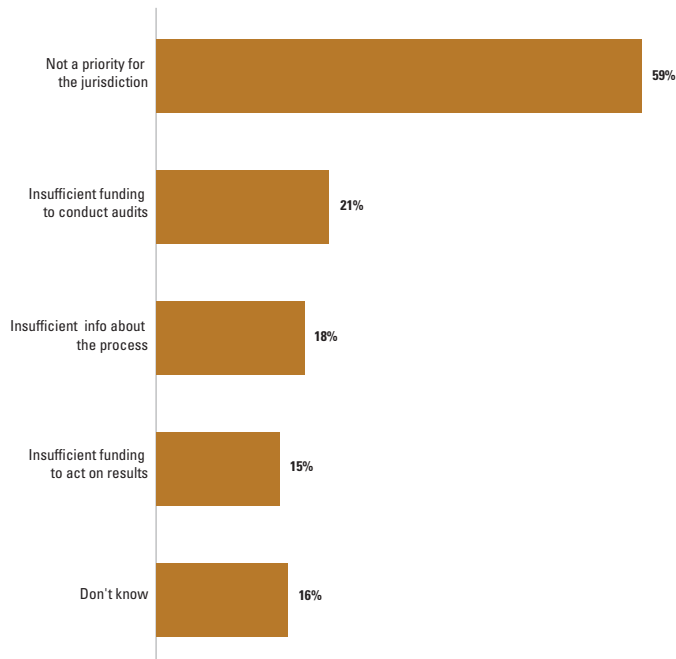
The most common location for audits is in jurisdiction halls/county administration buildings, with 35% of Michigan local governments statewide reporting that they have had energy audits conducted in those facilities (see *Figure 8*). Fewer say energy audits have been conducted for fire stations (22%), police stations (16%), water treatment facilities (10%) and wastewater treatment facilities (10%), largely because so many jurisdictions do not have some of these types of facilities. However, among those jurisdictions that do have police stations or wastewater treatment facilities, for example, nearly as many report having conducted energy audits on them as not having conducted audits.

**Figure 8**  
Percent of jurisdictions with energy audits in public buildings



**Figure 9**

Reasons energy audits have not been conducted on local public facilities, among jurisdictions that have had no energy audits for any public facilities



Note: percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents were able to check all that apply

Among jurisdictions that have not had any energy audits in any public facilities, 59% say that such audits are simply not a priority for the jurisdiction, while 21% say they do not have sufficient funding to conduct audits (see *Figure 9*).

Among smaller jurisdictions, local officials are more likely to say audits are not a priority for the jurisdiction (including 62% of jurisdictions with fewer than 1,500 residents), while officials from large jurisdictions are more likely to cite insufficient funding to conduct the audits (including 41% of jurisdictions with more than 30,000 residents) or insufficient funding to act on the results (43%).



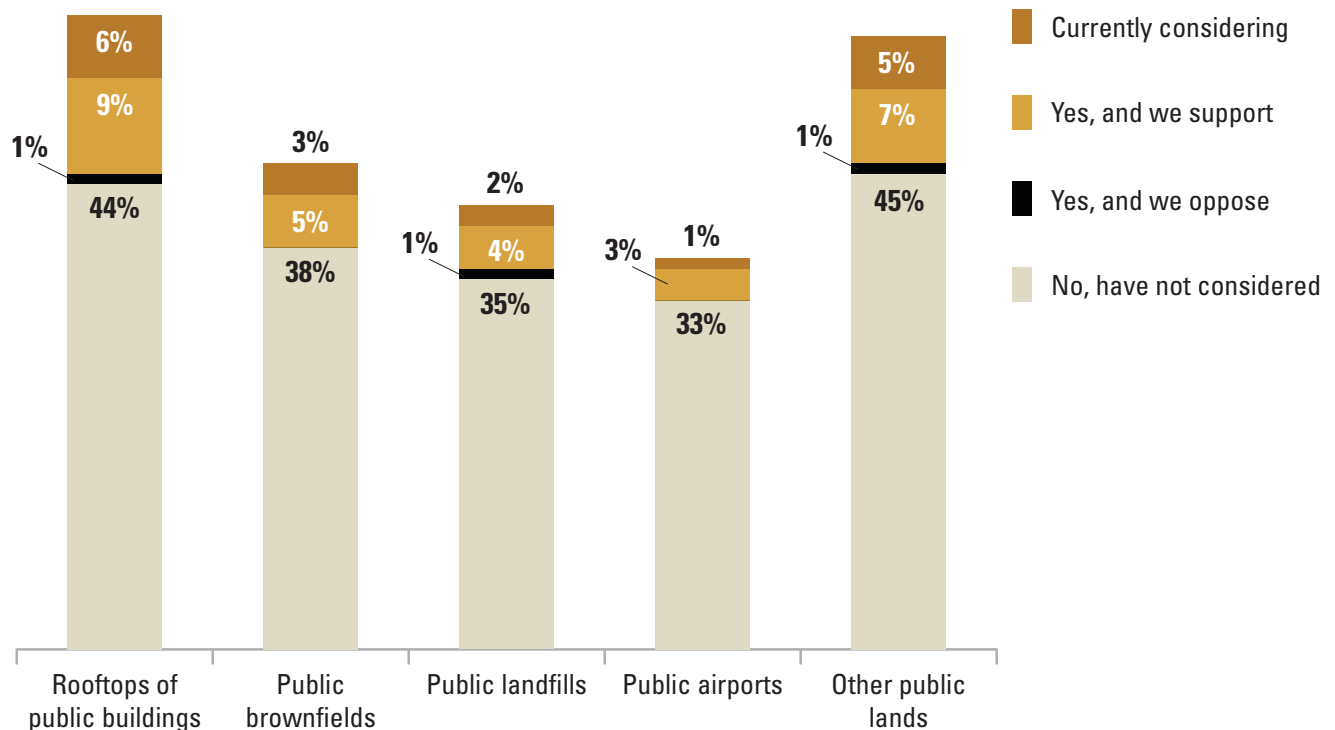
## Solar panels on public buildings

On the Spring 2019 MPPS, 13% of Michigan jurisdictions said they had developed or purchased renewable energy sources.<sup>3</sup> One way local governments develop their own renewables is by placing solar panels on public lands or buildings in their community. However, this approach in Michigan is currently fairly limited. Only 22% of local governments in Michigan say they have at least considered placing solar panels on any types of public lands, including 13% who say they support placing solar panels on at least one type of public land.

As in other areas of energy policy, the largest jurisdictions are the most likely to have considered placing solar panels on public lands, with 53% of the largest jurisdictions reporting at least considering the issue in one or more types of public lands, including 33% who support implementation. Among smaller jurisdictions this is less common, and in the smallest jurisdictions, just 12% say they have considered the issue, including 6% who support placing solar panels on at least one type of public land.

When asked about the prospect of siting solar panels on various types of public land in their communities, the most commonly considered location is on the rooftops of public buildings (see *Figure 10*). Yet even there, only 16% of jurisdictions statewide have considered the action at all, including just 9% who support this action. Statewide, 8% are considering or have considered solar panels on public brownfields, 7% on landfills, 4% on airport lands, and 13% on other public lands.

**Figure 10**  
Support for or opposition to placing solar panels in various locations on public lands



Note: percentages for "don't know" and "not applicable" responses and the percentage of jurisdictions not asked this question are not shown

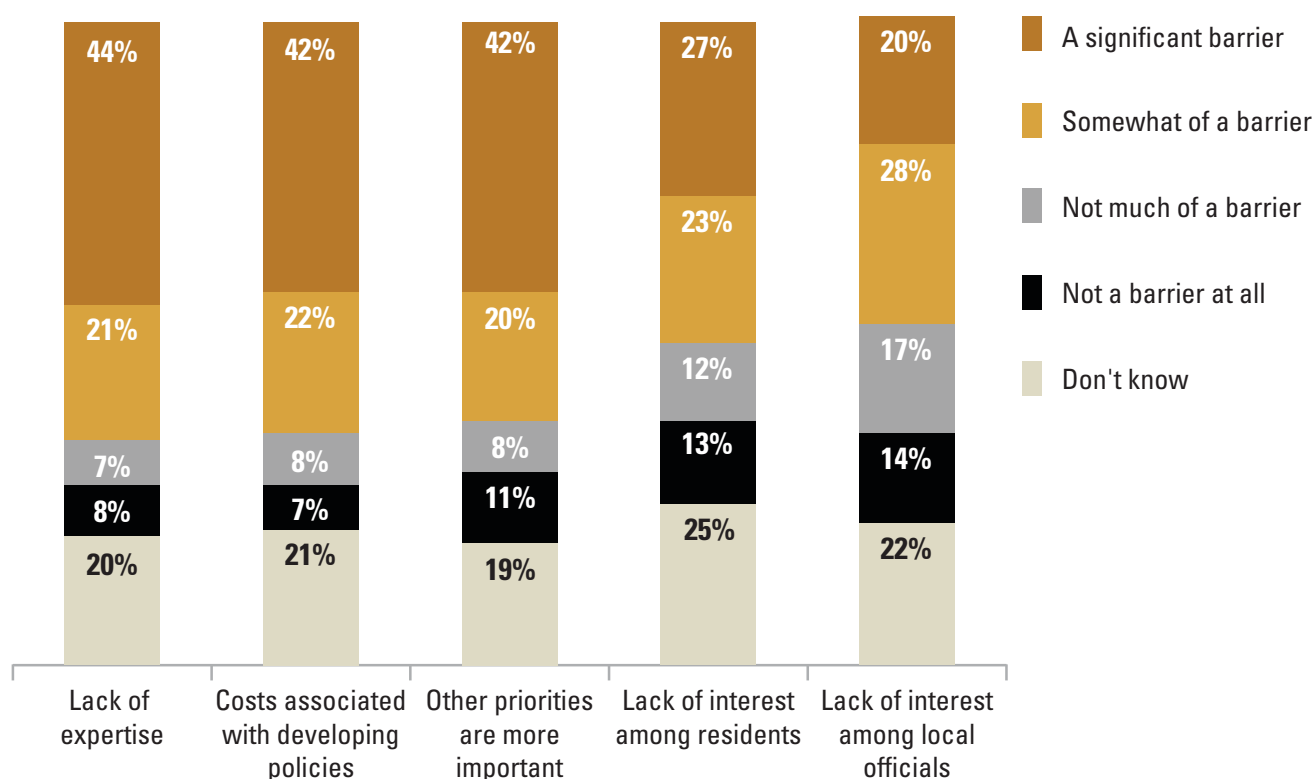
## Barriers to developing energy policies

Turning now to those jurisdictions that are not addressing energy issues locally, 30% of Michigan local governments report not considering, developing, or implementing specific energy policies. This includes the 10% of jurisdictions that say none of the survey's energy issues are even minimally relevant to their jurisdiction, and the 20% that say at least one of the energy issues is relevant but their jurisdiction hasn't considered any specific energy plans or policies.

As shown in *Figure 11*, among these jurisdictions that have not at least considered specific energy policies (regardless of whether any energy issues are relevant), the most commonly reported barriers to addressing energy issues are a lack of expertise to develop policies (44% say this is a significant barrier while another 21% say it is somewhat of a barrier), the perceived costs associated with developing policies (42% say it is a significant barrier, 22% say it is somewhat of a barrier), and having other priorities that are more important (42% say this is a significant barrier, 20% say it is somewhat of a barrier). Other barriers include a lack of interest among residents (50%), and a lack of interest among local officials (48%).

**Figure 11**

Percent of jurisdictions reporting barriers to addressing energy issues locally, among jurisdictions statewide that have not at least considered energy issues



While costs and lack of expertise are the most commonly cited barriers, 70% of those jurisdictions not currently engaging in energy policies say that there is another barrier other than costs or lack of expertise. To that end, 34% of jurisdictions who haven't at least considered energy policies say additional resources wouldn't make a difference in future consideration or adoption of local energy policies.<sup>4</sup>





Local leaders from the smallest jurisdictions are slightly more likely than others to cite lack of interest among residents, while larger jurisdictions are somewhat more likely to cite lack of interest among local officials (see *Table 7*). Among the mid-sized jurisdictions with 10,000-30,000 residents and who aren't engaged in energy policies locally, 83% say other priorities are more important.

**Table 7**

Percent of jurisdictions reporting somewhat or significant barriers to addressing energy issues locally, among jurisdictions statewide that have not at least considered energy issues, by jurisdiction size

	Statewide Total	Population <1,500	Population 1,500-5,000	Population 5,001-10,000	Population 10,001-30,000	Population >30,000
Lack of expertise	65%	66%	65%	66%	77%	50%
Costs	64%	65%	61%	66%	76%	46%
Other priorities more important	62%	61%	60%	57%	83%	69%
Lack of interest among residents	50%	55%	46%	47%	40%	38%
Lack of interest among local officials	48%	47%	49%	52%	50%	57%

### Conclusion

Many local governments across Michigan are taking steps on a variety of energy issues. Statewide, 90% of local leaders from jurisdictions large and small say that key areas of energy policy are relevant to their jurisdictions. Furthermore, 70% report having at least considered plans or policies to address energy issues, and over half of Michigan local governments (54%) have implemented at least some plans or policies regarding energy issues.

Despite this widespread attention to energy issues at the local level, fewer than 20% of jurisdictions report they have someone specifically responsible for addressing energy issues, be it staff, elected leaders, or external organizations/consultants. And when it comes to bringing residents into energy policymaking, 52% say they rarely or never engage with their residents on energy issues.

Approximately 39% of jurisdictions statewide have had energy audits conducted for at least one type of government facility. However, relatively small percentages of Michigan local governments report collecting data about energy use in either their public buildings (15%) or in private buildings across the community (2%).

Finally, when Michigan local leaders say their jurisdictions have not at least considered energy issues, they point to a number of barriers, including lack of expertise to develop policies, costs associated with developing energy policies, and having more important priorities.

### Notes

1. Fitzpatrick, N., Horner, D. & Mills, S. (2020). Intergovernmental collaboration on sustainability and energy issues among Michigan local governments. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from: <http://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/84/intergovernmental-collaboration-on-sustainability-and-energy-issues-among-michigan-local-governments>
2. Fitzpatrick, N., Mills S., Ivacko T., & Horner D. (2019). Energy policies and environmental leadership among Michigan's local governments. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from: <http://closup.umich.edu/energy-policies-and-environmental-leadership-among-michigan-s-local-governments>
3. Fitzpatrick, Mills, Ivacko, & Horner. (2019).
4. Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy. (2020). The Michigan Local Energy Survey (MiLES) Fall 2019 Data Tables. Retrieved from: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2019-data/q27.php>



## Survey Background and Methodology

The Fall 2019 Michigan Local Energy Survey (MiLES) was a supplementary wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey, conducted from October 7 - December 2, 2019. Surveys were sent via internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village managers, presidents, and clerks; township supervisors, managers, and clerks) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in Michigan. A total of 1,350 jurisdictions returned valid surveys (58 counties, 208 cities, 179 villages, and 905 townships), resulting in a 72.7% response rate. Note that because the unit of analysis in the survey is the jurisdiction, the findings reflect the percentage of local officials that feel a certain way. That is, the response of the County Board Chair in a very populous county is treated on even footing with the response of the Village President of a small village. As a result MiLES has more representation from these small, often rural areas than would a survey that is representative of population of the state overall.

The margin of error for the MiLES as a whole is +/- 1.39%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level or below, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. Verbatim responses have been redacted to protect confidentiality and may have been edited for clarity.

*The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS or the MiLES programs.*

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The **Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP)**, housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

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