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TOWN OF WINCHESTER

# Summary of the Master Plan Community Survey

OCTOBER 2018

**PREPARED FOR:**

Master Plan Steering Committee  
Town of Winchester  
71 Mt. Vernon Street  
Winchester, MA 01890

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# Master Plan Community Survey Process

The Winchester Master Plan Community Survey was distributed in the first half of 2018 by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) using a variety of outreach methods, including social media and posts on the Town of Winchester’s website. Local papers published information about the survey, and flyers were distributed widely throughout town. It was noted that over half of the responses came as a direct result of an email sent out by the Superintendent to all parents and students.

## Survey Challenges and Limitations

### DATA COLLECTION

There were some challenges in analyzing the data received from SurveyMonkey due to the original design of the survey. Some demographic questions—age, for example—were not consistent with U.S. Census age brackets. This made it difficult to analyze whether or not the MAPC survey group was representative of Winchester’s overall demographics. Other questions requiring scaled response (Likert scale) did not use consistent language across all Likert-style questions for their response categories. Data analysis also became a time-intensive process due to how data was presented in the spreadsheet. In particular, it required merging cells to streamline information.

Drop-off rates were another significant issue—318 participants did not answer any questions other than language. Of the 1,142 participants reported by SurveyMonkey, only 825 are complete survey responses. Twenty-one of these 318 incomplete responses indicated that they were Chinese speakers. The remaining 297 responses were English speakers. It’s unclear whether all survey questions were offered in both English and non-English languages.

### SURVEY REPRESENTATION

Few survey questions addressed participant demographics or characteristics—making it difficult to fully analyze how representative the survey truly is. Preliminary analysis, shown below, indicates that the following groups are underrepresented: youth, households without children, and non-English speakers.

- According to Census data, 31 percent of Winchester residents are 19 years of age or under.<sup>1</sup> Only 2 percent of survey participants fall into the 18 or younger age group.
- According to Census data, 18 percent of Winchester residents speak a language other than English in the home.<sup>2</sup> Only 3.5 percent of survey respondents identified as one of the two non-English options – Spanish or Mandarin.
- Due to outreach by Winchester’s Superintendent, there is a high percentage of participants with children in this survey.

Older residents may also be underrepresented in the survey. According to the Census, about 17 percent of Winchester residents are estimated to be age 65 or older.<sup>3</sup> While the brackets in the survey differ from the census (62-74 years of age and 75+ years of age), these two groups total 11 percent of total respondents—a bit under the Census estimate.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2012-2016, Table B01001.

<sup>2</sup> Source: ACS 2012-2016, Table S1601.

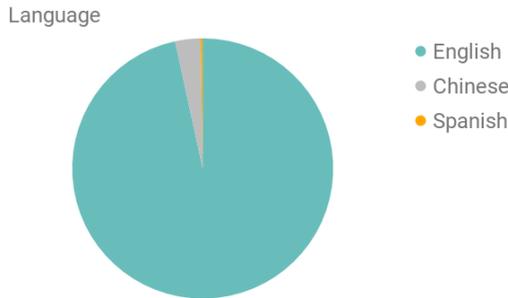
<sup>3</sup> Source: ACS 2012-2016, Table B01001.

# About the Survey Participants

Of the 1,142 participants reported by SurveyMonkey, only 825 completed the majority of the survey. These 825 responses are analyzed in the rest of this document. Below is a breakdown of participants' characteristics. More detailed demographic information can be found in the Appendix.

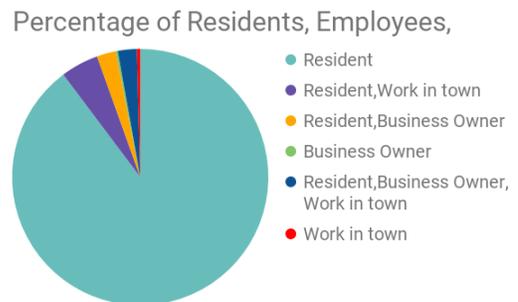
## LANGUAGE

The majority of responses (797) identified as English speakers. Twenty-six identified as Mandarin speakers and two as Spanish speakers.



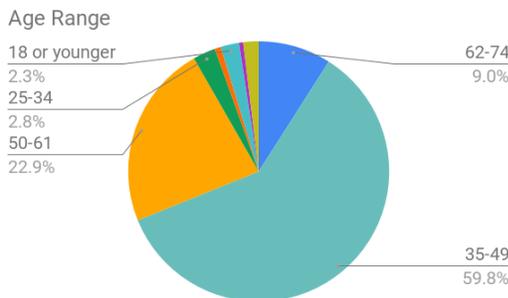
## RESIDENTS, BUSINESS OWNERS, AND EMPLOYEES

Ninety-nine percent of survey respondents reported being residents with 5 percent noting that they were business owners. Seven percent reported that they worked in town.



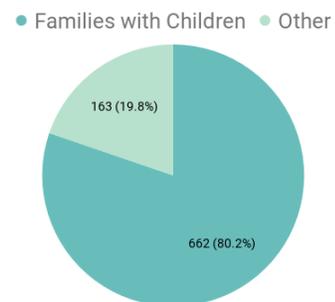
## AGE RANGE

The majority of responses (almost 60 percent) fell in the 35-49 age group. It should be noted that 35 percent of participants were over the age of 50 and only 2.3 percent under the age of 18.



## AGE OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

The majority of survey participants (662) have children 18 or below.



## OTHER PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

- The location of participant homes is spread across precincts.
- Over half of survey participants (52 percent) have lived in Winchester for over 10 years. A quarter (26 percent) have lived in town for less than 5 years.

# Key Findings by Topic

## 1. Cultural Resources and Assets

*Neighborhood Character* was the strongest theme to emerge from the results of this survey. Responses throughout the survey addressed this topic, including sections where participants could write their own responses. Although *Neighborhood Character* was rated very highly across all participants, participants over the age of 50 rated all of the options of *Cultural Resources and Assets* as more important compared to younger participant responses.

**Almost all survey participants (99 percent) identified “neighborhood character” as a priority—78 percent noted it is “Very Important” and 17 percent that it is “Somewhat Important.”**

*Neighborhood Character* also appeared throughout the comments. Participants specifically identified ongoing issues with scale in new development and the desire for housing to be built in character with existing housing stock. Several sample responses are below.

*“The small-town charming feel of Winchester is critical to maintain so any development needs to be within scale.”*

*“Keeping the historic character, and walkability (with safe streets) to town center is important.”*

*“I hate seeing all the new ugly developer-built homes that look too large for the lots.”*

Walkability was another aspect of *Neighborhood Character* mentioned frequently in the participant comments. Many respondents feel that walkable neighborhoods with greenery and accessibility to the Town Center are a crucial part of what makes Winchester special. The safety aspect of walkable neighborhoods will be discussed in other sections later on.

**“The historical architecture, great schools, wide streets, houses on good-sized lots, and attractions like Wright-Locke farm and the Fells differentiate Winchester and are what attracted us to this town. If it becomes overly commercial with houses squished together on small lots, or overwhelmed with gigantic houses, Winchester will lose its distinctiveness and a lot of its appeal.”**

*-Survey Participant*

## MOST USED ASSETS

The top three most-used cultural assets identified were the *Library*, *Town Common* and *the Fells*. The least-used assets included the *Jenks Center* (16 percent), *Wildwood Cemetery* (17 percent), and the *Sanborn House (Historical Society)* (21 percent).

ASSET	PERCENT
Library	92
Town Common	87
The Fells	81

The following are other cultural assets not listed in the survey question that were identified through the comment section:

- Winchester’s farmer’s market
- Winchester cooperative theater
- Ballet Arts Center
- Studio on the Common - art camps, classes & birthday parties
- Karen Bernard School of Dance
- Various Playgrounds and Athletic Fields
- Winchester Multicultural Network
- Aberjona River Walk
- Mystic Lakes
- Winchester Station
- Davidson Park
- Bellino Park
- Various Churches and Synagogues

## 2. Town Areas and Assets

The top-five town assets identified as “very important” were the *School System, Open Space, Walkability, the Town Center, and Recreation Facilities*.

### TOP TOWN-ASSETS RATED AS “VERY IMPORTANT”

ASSET	PERCENT
School system	90
Open space for passive recreation	74
Walkability	74
Town Center	69
Recreation facilities	66

For non-family households, the top responses were *Open Space, Walkability, and the Town Center*. Despite a small number of responses, Mandarin and Spanish survey participants selected the *School System, Walkability, the Town Center, and Housing Options* as the top four very important assets, followed closely by *Open Space*. Older survey participants indicated the *Transfer Station, the MBTA, and the Senior Center* as higher priorities compared to younger respondents.

As many survey participants received the survey from the Superintendent, responses are likely to be parents or closely affiliated with the public schools in some way. This can account in part for the high ranking of the school system. Many comments specifically addressed the school system, particularly the need for more technology resources and the need for improvements to specific schools (with Muraco being mentioned the most).

*“Muraco should not be last in line for renovations. It is in desperate need.”*

The transfer station was mentioned quite frequently in the comments with frustration at having to pay for a permit, and a desire for trash pickup service like neighboring towns may have.

*“Let’s move into the modern era and get curbside trash pickup. Should be cheaper than [a] transfer station and town can use [the] transfer station property for business to increase tax revenue or build 40B housing.”*

Many comments did not include specifically address *Open Space*. Instead, *Walkability*, particularly walkability to the schools, or to Town Center, was highlighted several times.

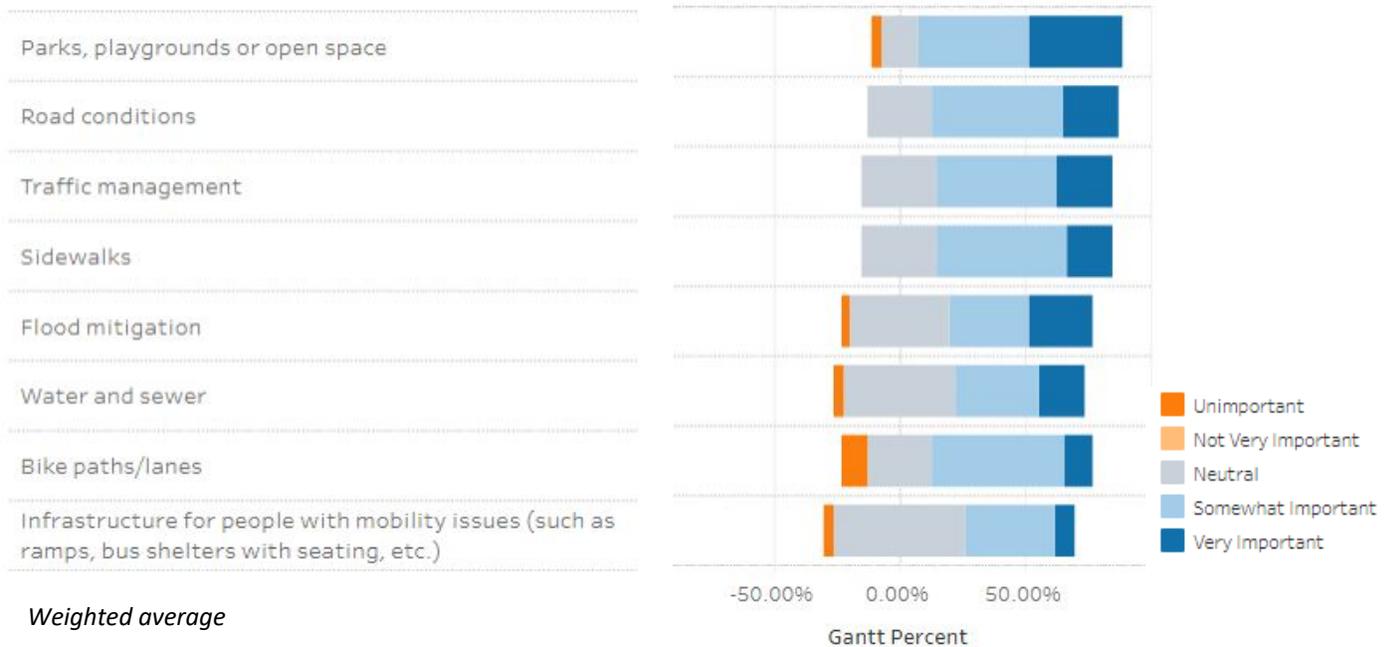
One participant mentioned the Winchester’s waterways—a topic not listed in the survey question:

*“More should be done to make the beautiful waterways in town visible. In too many places a view of the water is obstructed by concrete/stone walls and/or parked cars, building, etc.”*

### 3. Infrastructure

The weighted average for the *Infrastructure* section is shown below. *Traffic Management* was identified by many participants as “Most Important.” These results are also complimentary to the comments received which highlighted traffic as an issue in a general sense, as well as some specific areas that are problematic.

#### ADDITIONAL AND IMPROVEMENTS TO WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE MOST NEEDED?



Bike paths were identified as a top concern by the 25-34 age group. Parks and playgrounds were identified as important by all age groups over 34.

Safety was another major concern. Participants identified a need for sidewalk and bike path maintenance—especially on routes to school.

*“We don't feel comfortable letting our children bike to the middle school because of the lack of bike paths.”*

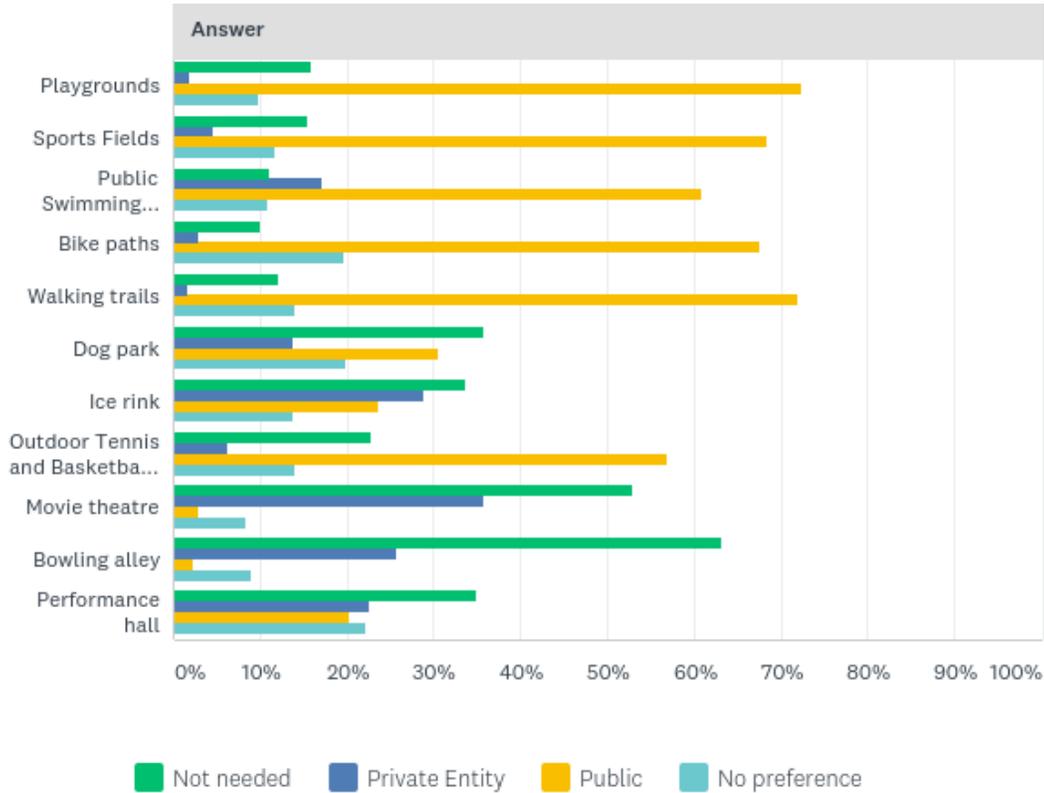
*“There should be walking/biking tunnels/bridges under/over south border road to allow adults and children to cross the road without fear of life.”*

Many participants commented that existing infrastructure and recreation areas need to be maintained before investing in new infrastructure. One participant requested that more housing and recreation areas be accessible for disabled children and adults.

## 4. Recreation

The graph above shows the participants preference for which recreational facilities should be developed and if they should be developed by a public entity, or private entity. They also had the option to select if the asset is not needed, and if they have “no preference” for who develops them. Overwhelmingly, participants felt like a public entity should pay for the recreational assets.

### WHAT FACILITIES DO WE NEED MORE OF? WHO SHOULD DEVELOP THEM?



More than 60 percent of respondents feel that the following five facilities, in ranked order, are needed and that a public entity should pay for them:

1. Playgrounds
2. Walking Paths
3. Sports Fields
4. Bike Paths
5. Swimming Pool

The comments also support this view with many participants expressing a desire for a public pool and ice-skating rink.

*“We need more variety programs or more options at school and rec center. I hope my children can get more options in my town Winchester not in other town (Lexington or Arlington)”*

*“...the town badly needs a pool and an ice rink. It's embarrassing that a town this affluent doesn't have those facilities.”*

*“We should prioritize a pool.”*

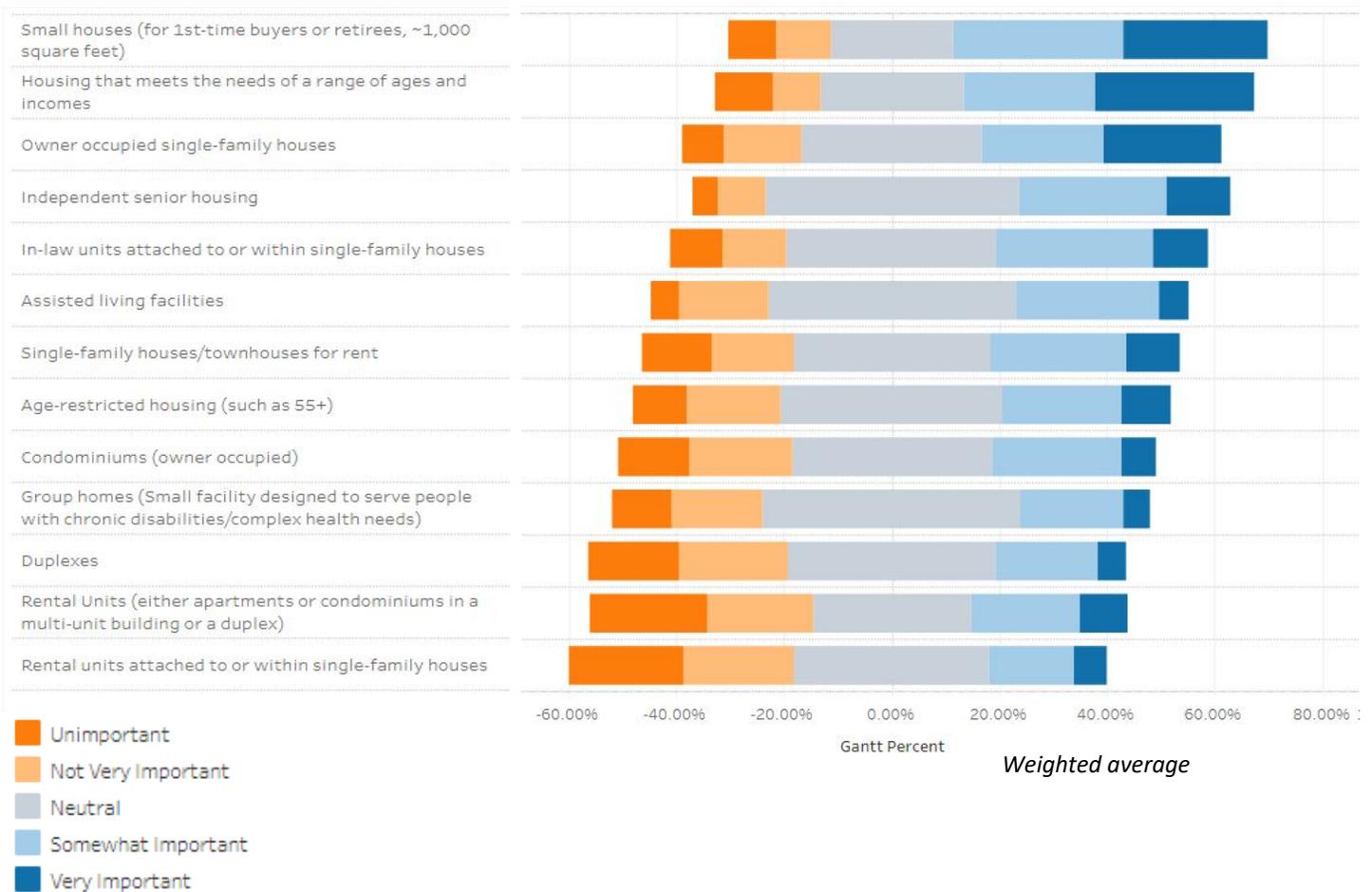
# 5. Housing

## A MIX OF HOUSING TYPES

Participants of all ages responded that they desired a mix of housing types that meet the needs of a range of ages and incomes. The most selected option for all age groups was *small houses for first-time home buyers and retirees*. The full weighted responses are shown in the chart below.

For many participants, owner-occupied single-family houses were ranked high. For participants age fifty and older, the importance of single-family homes decreases and the importance of other options increases. The next two most desirable options after *small houses* were *independent senior housing* and *in-law units*.

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DOES WINCHESTER NEED MORE OF?



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Many participants commented that a lack of affordable housing is a key issue in Winchester, and one that affects them personally.

*“My biggest frustration is that we cannot buy a single-family home in this town because of the prices and my husband and I work hard and make \$350,000 a year.”*

*“Did not see affordable housing as an option/issue. I think this is one of the most important issues facing our town.”*

*“Give incentives for people who work in Winchester to live in Winchester. For example, young teachers, healthcare professionals and other public professions who do not get paid well should have tax incentives to live in town.”*

## A HOUSING DILEMMA

As mentioned above, a mix of housing types was a top response by participants of all age groups. However, there was a clear contradiction between answers to the question and general comments. In question responses, *housing that meets the needs of a range of ages and incomes* was rated highly. Yet, *rental units, duplexes and group homes*—housing types that may provide that mix—were rated low.

The comments section further illuminated a commonly-held perception of large apartment buildings by many participants. Many feel that these large buildings are too large in scale for the neighborhoods and affect the character negatively.

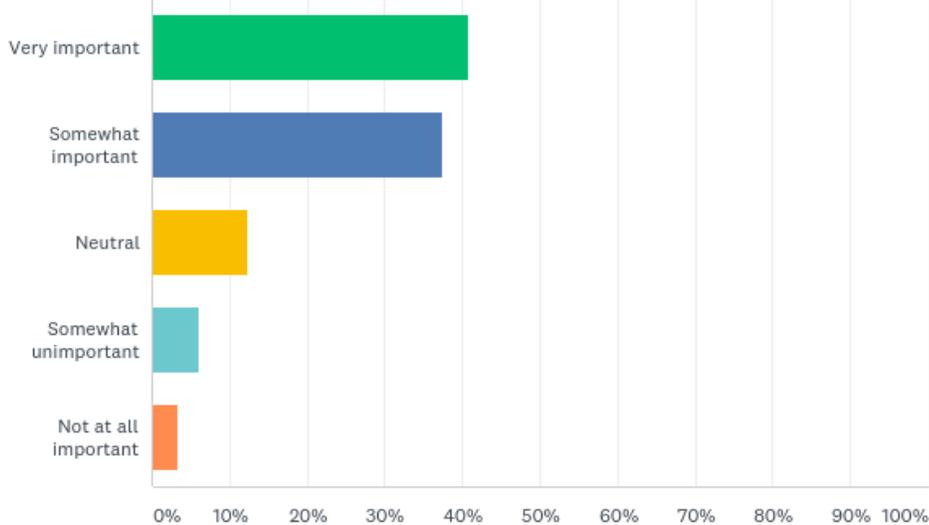
*“One area of town should NOT be used to solve Winchester’s affordable housing shortage. This needs to be shared across all towns and neighborhoods.”*

*“Please stop allowing so many large housing complexes to be built- it's destroying the character of the town.”*

## 6. Aging in the Community

Seventy-eight percent of respondents feel that it is important to them to continue living in Winchester as they age. With this high percentage, it is clear that survey participants want the town to be a place that is welcoming to all ages and abilities, and that they intend to stay as long as they are able to.

### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO YOU TO CONTINUE LIVING IN WINCHESTER AS YOU AGE?



### PRIORITIES OF SENIOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Below are some key priorities that survey respondents age 62 and older indicated were important to them in this survey.

- Open Space for Passive Recreation
- Neighborhood Character
- Town Center (as an Asset)
- Historic Structures
- Preserving the historic quality of Town Center
- Cultural Organizations
- Walkability

# 7. Transportation

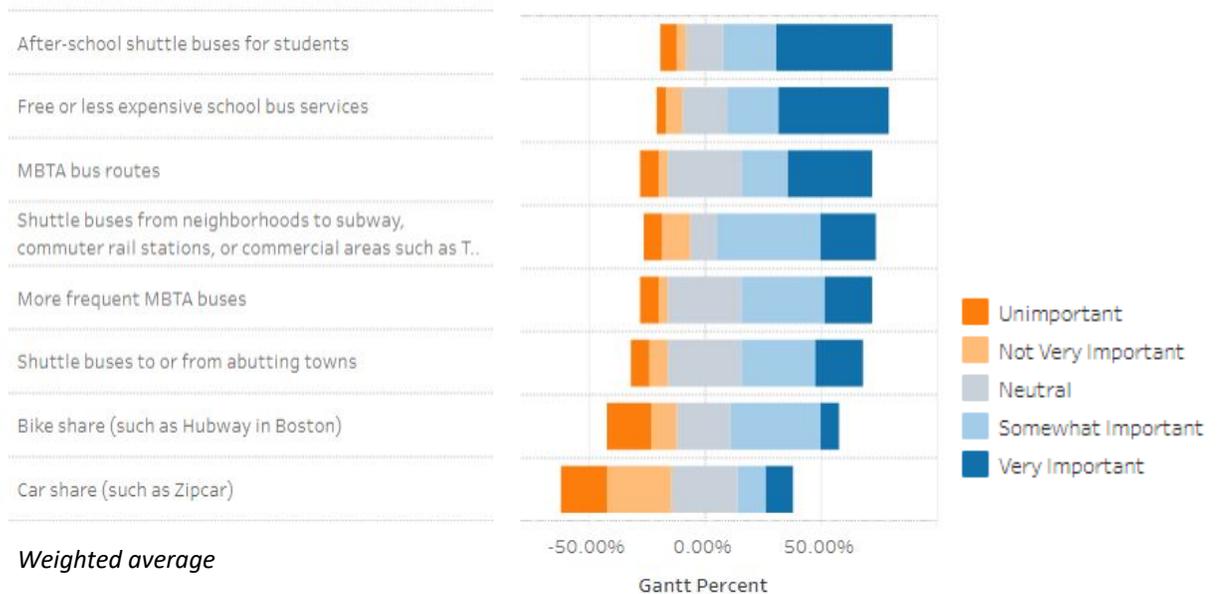
## KEY ISSUES

*Sidewalk Conditions/Maintenance* and *Road Conditions* were rated the two most important issues by all participant groups. The third and fourth most important transportation issue varied based on participant demographics. Those with children felt that traffic calming was a priority while those over the age of 50 felt parking was an important issue.

Participants split in what transportation options were needed in Winchester. The top-three options selected by participants as “Greatly Needed” included:

- Free or less expensive school bus service
- After-school shuttle bus for students
- Shuttle buses from neighborhoods to subway, commuter rail station, or commercial areas such as Town Center

## WHICH TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS DOES WINCHESTER NEED MORE OF?



While not indicated as a top response, several comments mentioned it would be helpful to have better transportation connections to neighboring towns or commercial centers.

## SAFE, ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION AND SPEED LIMIT

Many participants provided specific feedback on improving safety—particularly around alternative transportation options. The main focus areas are listed below:

- 1) **Reducing speed:** There were several participants who theorized that traffic is a problem because neighboring towns have lower speed limits and traffic applications, such as Waze, route drivers through Winchester. Many expressed a desire for the town to lower the speed limit—to address this issue of Winchester being used as a shortcut to other destinations.

*“We need to go to a 25-mph speed limit, install speed bumps and have a town wide initiative that focus on safety and respect.”*

- 2) **Making roads safe for pedestrians and cyclists:** Many survey participants mentioned safety regarding pedestrian and biking activity. There was also a special focus in the comments on safe routes to schools where children and high schoolers can safely walk or bike with or without parent supervision.

### **THE TRAFFIC AND PARKING PARADOX**

It should be noted that the survey had mixed responses around both traffic and parking. Survey participants identified traffic as a major issue—but also expressed a desire for slower speeds, speed barriers, and other traffic calming devices to slow cars through Winchester. These would increase safety but aggravate traffic.

A similar contradiction appeared around parking concerns. Participants noted that parking was a barrier to accessing downtown—and promoted increased parking fees and implementing parking limits as a strategy for changing behavior from single occupancy vehicles to other modes of transportation. This paradox around parking and traffic is not specific to Winchester but is a common tension seen in communities around the U.S.

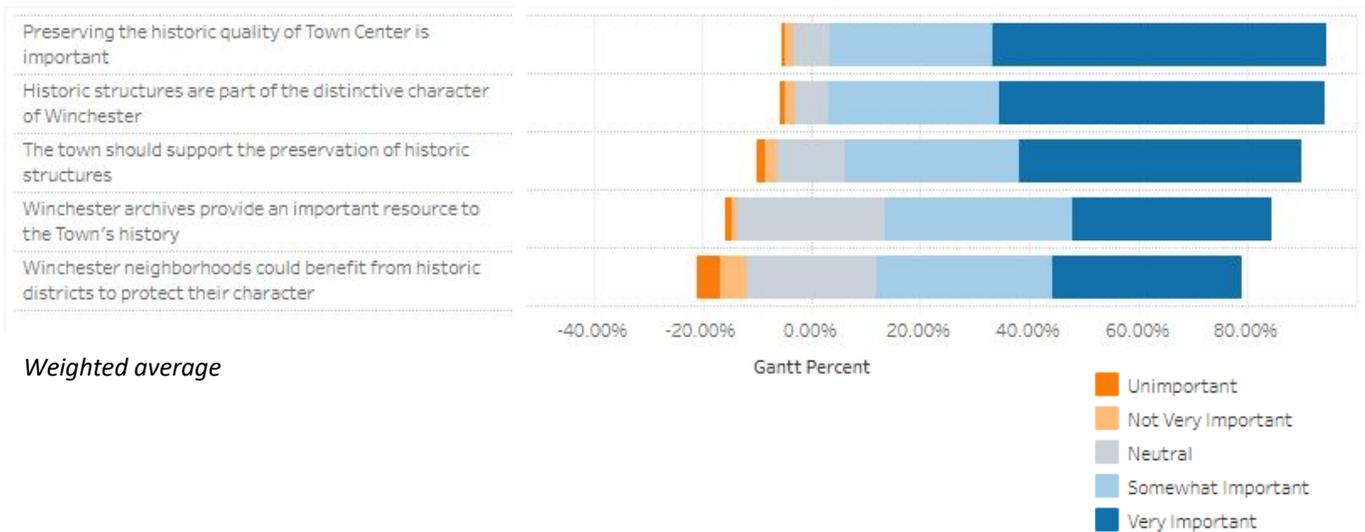
## 8. Historic Resources

As seen in the high importance of *Neighborhood Character* in the *Cultural Resources and Assets* section, the town’s historic quality—particularly the Town Center and the residential neighborhoods—are highly valued among survey participants. The majority (60 percent) of participants view historic structures as a defining aspect of Winchester’s character. Participants (62 percent) identified the Town Center’s historic quality, in particular, as a priority to preserve.

*“I would like to see the town more dedicated to preserving old houses and preventing tear-downs.”*

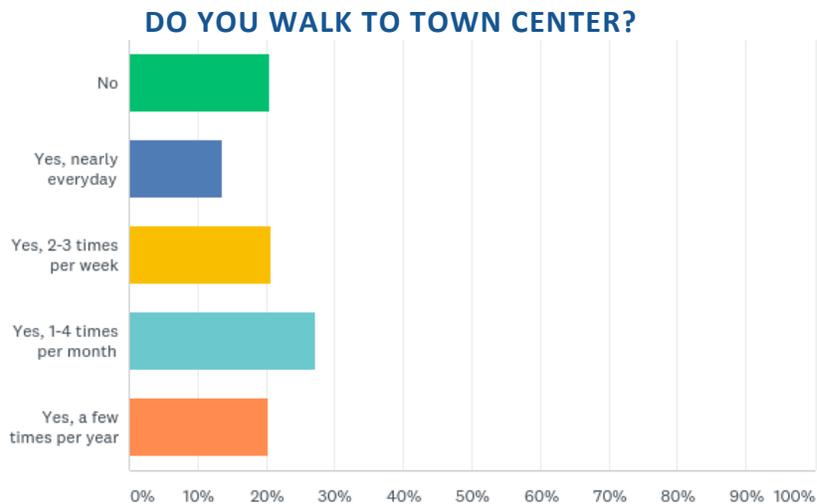
Younger respondents age 24 and under felt neutral about preserving historic resources, while all other age groups rated it as important. The full responses are shown in the chart below.

### HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS [ON WINCHESTER’S HISTORIC RESOURCES]?



## 9. Town Center

As illustrated in the chart below, one-fifth of survey participants reported not walking to Town Center. However, another fifth reported making the trip 2-3 times a week, with another 27 percent reported that they walk to Town Center 1-4 times a month.



### WALKABILITY TO TOWN CENTER BY PRECINCT

As one would suspect, the analysis showed that those who live in the closest proximity to Town Center reported walking more often than those furthest away. The survey participants who live in Precinct 3, where Town Center is located, responded that they walk to Town Center often, as well as those in adjacent Precincts 2, 7, and 4. Those who live in Precincts further away from Town Center (1, 8, 5, and 6) responded the least favorably to walking to Town Center with Precinct 6 having the lowest numbers.

### MOTIVATION TO TOWN CENTER

The top-five reasons participants reported visiting in Town Center included visiting the *Library*, visiting the *Post Office*, going to *Coffee Shops/Cafes*, attending *Cultural Events*, and *Dining*. The least popular reasons for visiting the Town Center included catching the *MBTA Bus* (3 percent), *Work* (6 percent), and visiting *the Jenks Center* (9 percent).

### TOP 5 REASONS PARTICIPANTS VISIT TOWN CENTER

	PERCENT
Library	84
Post Office	82
Coffee Shops/Cafés	81
Cultural events	80
Dining	78

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING TOWN CENTER

Many survey respondents expressed the importance of attracting residents to the Town Center and recommended solutions. The top recommendation was to increase the diversity of dining options, retail, and other storefronts. Several participants criticized the current options as targeting a wealthier, older demographic, and suggested that a better mix of businesses and services to serve all ages and incomes would be welcome.

*“There are too many businesses that cater to rich women. Boutique shops. Nail salons. Real estate places. Need to cater to a younger, more contemporary demographic.”*

*“It would be great if we could impact the diversity of storefronts.”*

*“Winchester really needs to focus on attracting citizens to its center.”*

A couple of survey participants suggested having either a cultural center in the Town Center, or a space for non-profits and community partners to have shared offices and collaborate.

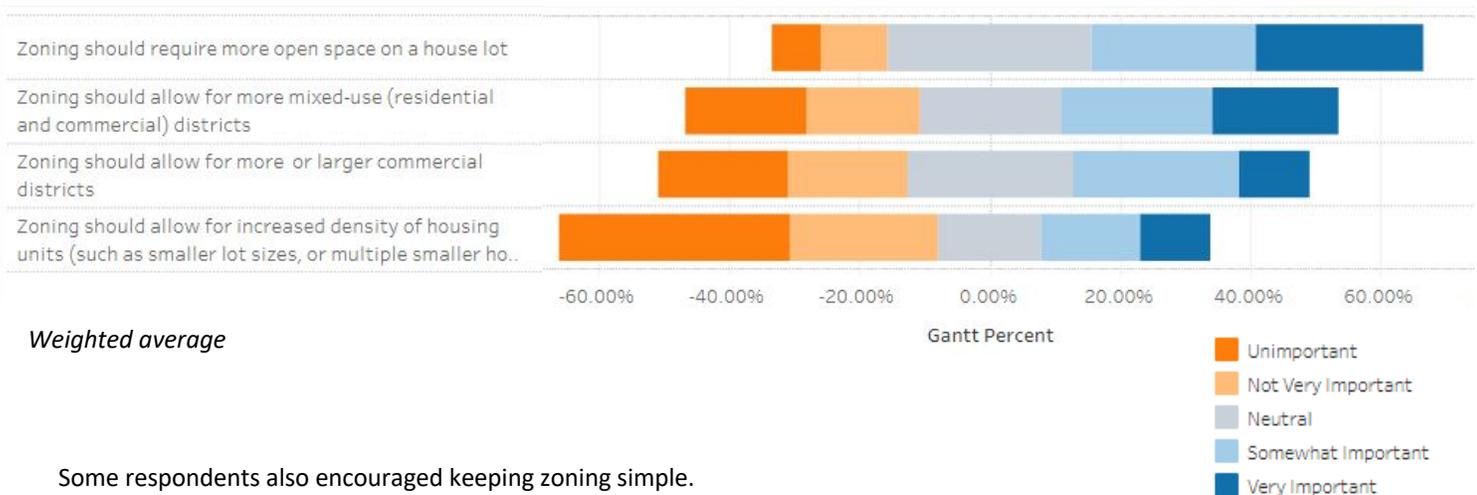
# 10. Zoning

Responses for the zoning section in the survey were in line with other survey responses on the general attitudes and perceptions about development. Thirty-five percent of responses “Totally Disagree” that zoning should allow for increased density of housing units. Similarly, 27 percent of responses “Strongly Agree” that zoning should require more open space on a house lot.

*“Lynch is being overcrowded by two families home replacing single families. Please fix the zoning laws on our side of town.”*

*“We need to address the problem of overbuilding. Until it stops we will never have enough money for our schools... Stop adding housing/bedrooms, require 50% open space on lots, stop the teardowns.”*

## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN WINCHESTER?



Some respondents also encouraged keeping zoning simple.

*“Zoning should be relatively in line with past [zoning regulations] as [zoning regulations] are too complicated and too [many] interest group[s] involved in either side. I think Winchester is great town is because of its old-fashioned lifestyle and we need keep it as is and not trying to change that too much to lose its charm.”*

Business owners, in contrast, felt that zoning should allow for increased density, mixed use, and larger commercial districts. This group felt that open space on house lots was less important. Some sample responses are shown below:

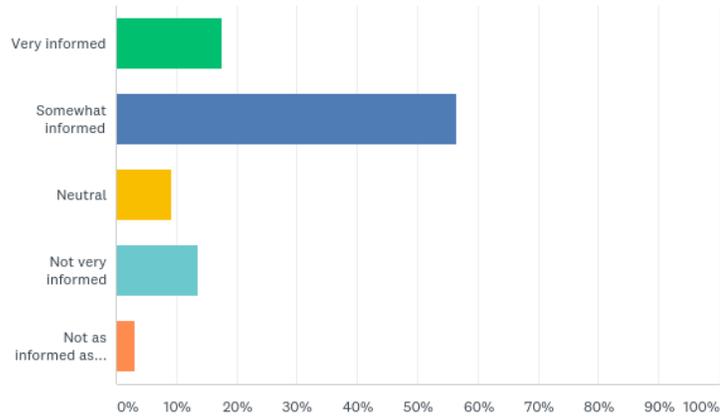
*“More density in downtown is key. We should be ahead of 40B and encourage that development in areas that do not require vehicles.”*

*“Zoning needs to be relaxed to allow more businesses to come to the town, and a town tax should be assessed, not to create new projects but to manage the ones we have and improve what is already in place.”*

# 11. Outreach Methods

The majority of participants (74 percent) felt that they were either very informed or somewhat informed by issues facing Winchester. The most popular outreach method among respondents was through their personal networks—friends and family, e-newsletters, social media, and online.

## HOW INFORMED DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ISSUES THE TOWN IS FACING?

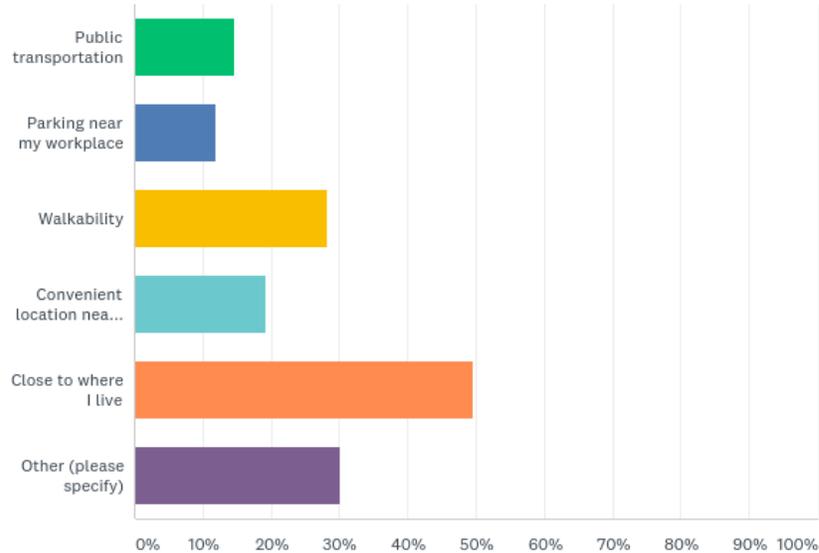


## TOP 5 MOST EFFECTIVE OUTREACH METHODS

OUTREACH METHOD	PERCENT
Friends and Family	59
Emailed Newsletters	57
Social Media	51
Online News Sites	52
Town website/calendar/notifications	43

## 12. Doing Business in Winchester

### WHAT MAKES WINCHESTER A GOOD PLACE TO WORK



### WHAT BUSINESS OWNERS PRIORITIZE

While parking was the top issue among business owners who answered this survey, there were several other responses for what the town could do to support businesses including:

- Lower requirements of seating to serve alcohol/beer
- More opportunities to be visible
- Be more business friendly
- Do not make businesses have to jump through hoops for every single change they want to make in their shop.
- Co-working Space
- Parking
- Include more rentable office spaces around town.
- Work with business owners and encourage/incentive to make the changes that you try to put through while making zoning changes
- Better snow removal
- Better transportation. More affordable housing. Better center business district management.

*“Be more business friendly—do not make businesses have to jump through hoops for every single change they want to make in their shop.”*

*“Better parking options, more diverse uses for the town that would drive people to down town.”*

## 13. Other Topics

There were several topics that come up in the comment sections of the survey, including diversity and inclusion, sustainability and stewardship, and commercial development.

### DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In other sections of the survey, respondents noted that they wanted to increase the diversity of food offerings, retail and service options, and housing choices. Respondents also noted that they value Winchester's age, economic, and race/ethnicity diversity. Several participants noted specifically that Winchester needs to be more inclusive to all people.

*"The town should focus on collaborating with as many groups as possible; be inclusive where all groups can have voices regardless of their differences."*

*"Increasing the ethnic and racial diversity in this town is really important to me..."*

### RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Sustainability, hydrology, and ecology are important issues highlighted in the comment sections of the survey. Specifically, participants expressed concern over tree removal with new developments, and flooding in specific areas around town.

*"Protecting the environment, hydrology, and ecology are important and not even mentioned in this survey."*

### ATTRACTING COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

While development was addressed tangentially throughout many questions, survey respondents had a lot to say specifically on attracting commercial development. While many are wary of residential development (especially developments that are out of scale of existing neighborhoods), many participants expressed a strong desire to attract commercial development—both in the Town Center and other areas. They noted the benefits of tax revenue for the town, additional places of employment, and an increased mix of services and restaurants. Some sample responses are below:

*"Winchester should encourage the development of town owned lots and private lots near the town center into dense, mixed used development to add housing and retail / restaurants."*

*"I support Winchester to build out the town center like Wellesley did in the past, keeping the historic charm and reducing taxes."*

# Recommendations

This analysis indicates a few key considerations to incorporate in Winchester’s Master Plan process, including further targeted outreach to underrepresented populations and additional topics for deeper exploration.

## Further Targeted Outreach

The demographic section of this report demonstrates that the majority of survey participants were parents of children age 18 and below. This was due to the success of an email from Winchester’s Superintendent through the school system. To ensure representation from other age groups and backgrounds in the Master Plan process, further outreach is needed—particularly to youth and younger adults, adults without children, and those age fifty and older.

In addition to these age groups, outreach efforts should focus on targeting the 18 percent of Winchester residents who speak a language other than English in their home. An emphasis on bi- or tri-lingual materials, offering simultaneous interpretation at community workshops and other events, and working closely with local community groups would help strengthen participation from these non-English groups.

There were limited questions in the survey targeting business owners. Additional conversations with business and land owners would help identify the needs, opportunities, and preferences of local business and land owners.

## Additional Topics Beyond the Statutory Elements

*Land Use, Economic Development, Transportation, Housing, Historic and Cultural Resources, Open Space and Recreation, and Public Facilities and Services*, are all elements covered in every Master Plan. Based on comments from the survey, we recommend including and emphasizing additional topics beyond these seven areas, including issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, issues of sustainability, and the potential impacts of climate change. This may include city policy, resident perceptions and attitudes, social services or resources, or housing issues.