



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL
IN PLACES YOU LOVE

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 22, 2020
TO: Long Hill Master Plan Committee
FROM: Topology
SUBJECT: LAND USE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Master Plan Committee Preface

The 2020 Long Hill Township Master Plan Land Use Assessment Survey was conducted this Spring by Topology, a Town Planning consulting firm based in Newark, NJ. Focusing upon the Township's village sections and Valley Road Business District, over 400 respondents completed the Survey and shared their thoughts through written comments.

In general, residents would like to see unappealing properties removed and replaced with more aesthetically desirable options focusing upon tasteful, small-scale retail/business establishments and social spaces for entertainment and dining. These views are consistent with open space, environmental and sustainability considerations, including measures to protect local waterways and create walkways/trails to link the distinct and unique sections of the Township.

Overall, residents continue to enjoy the semi-rural and small scale feel of Long Hill which echoes the general survey conducted in 2016.

The Master Plan Committee would like to thank the over 400 residents who responded to the Assessment and look forward to incorporating this information in the Master Plan Land Use Element.

Overview

This assessment was designed to collect input on various land use planning concepts as part of the adoption of Long Hill Township's Master Plan. The assessment was open to the public from April 20, 2020 to May 22, 2020, during which time, 411 individuals participated. The 30 questions included a mix of multiple choice, ranking and open-ended response fields which

explored the respondent's personal connections to Long Hill, and proposals for each of the Township's distinct Villages and commercial areas. Respondents were not required to answer each question, and as such the percentages included are a reflection of the total number of comments received for a particular category among respondents for that specific question. Advertisements for the survey were published in the Echoes-Sentinel newspaper, and links were posted on the Township website.

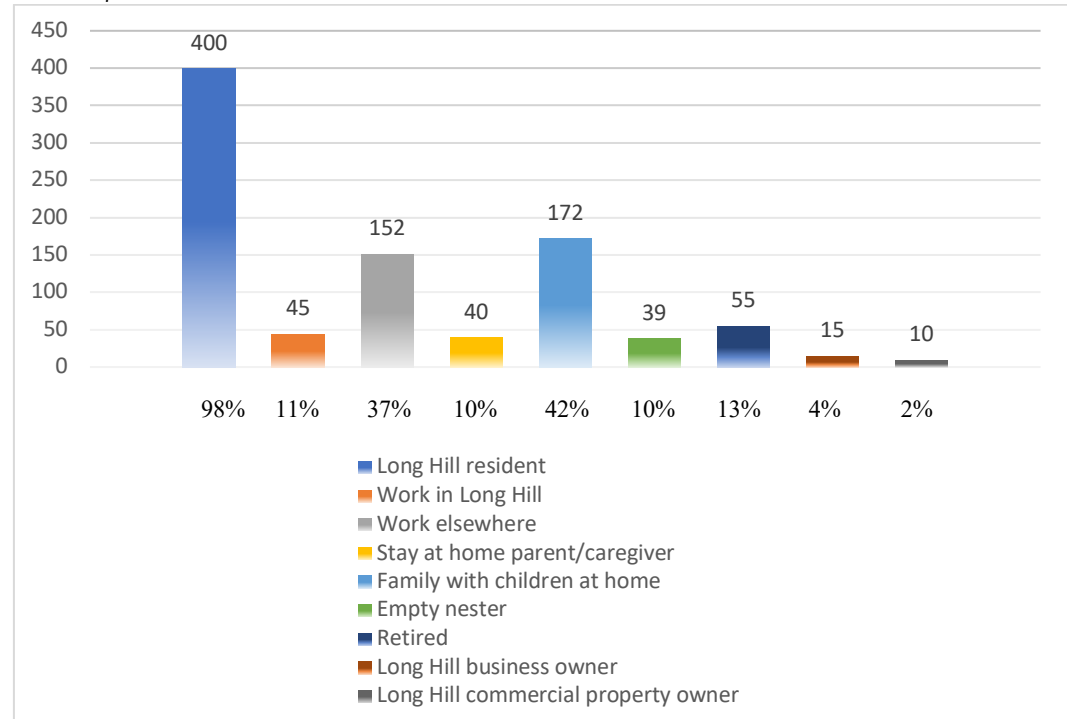
Demographics

Average Years of Long Hill Residence: 19

407 respondents

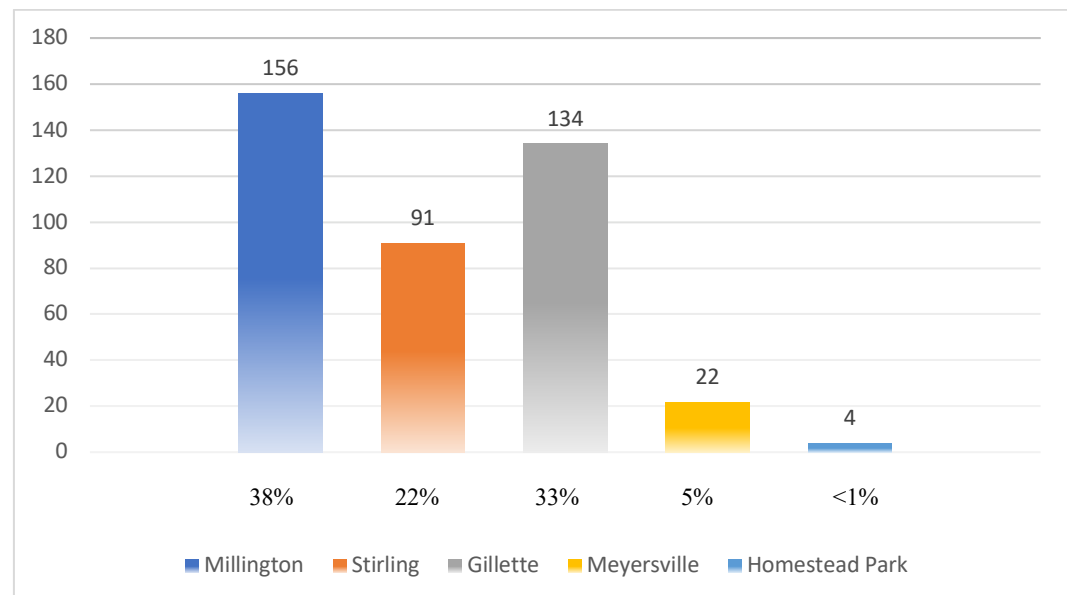
Respondent Profiles:

410 respondents



In which part of Long Hill do you live?

407 respondents

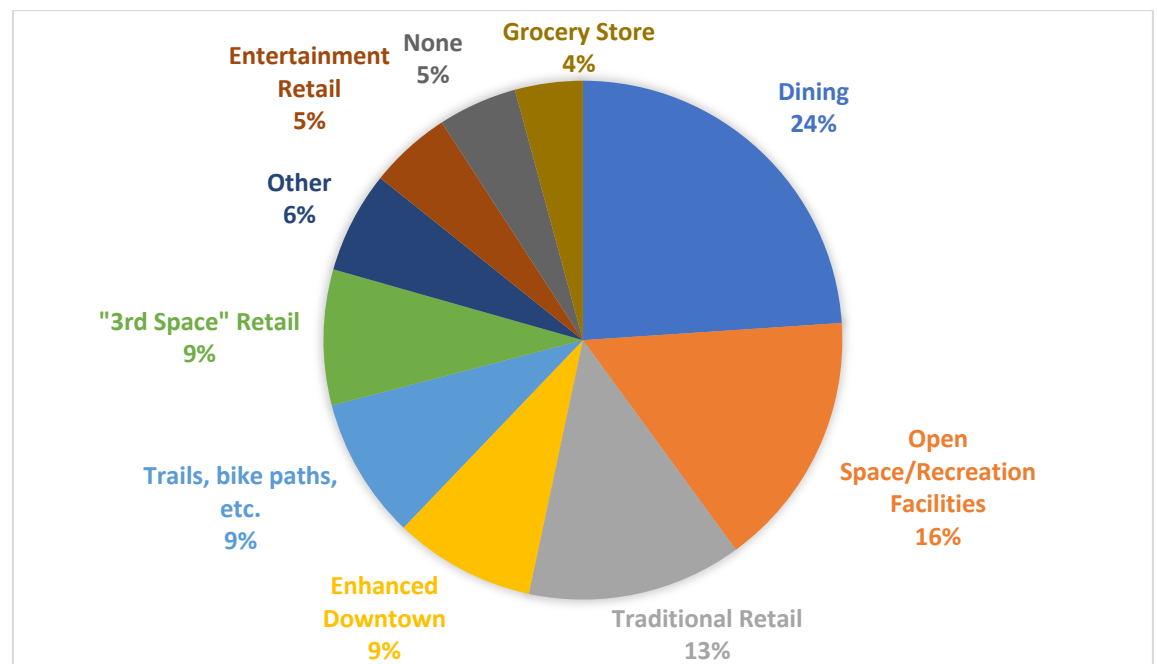


Facilities/Amenities/Shopping and Entertainment

351 respondents

When asked about which facilities, amenities, shopping, and entertainment options were most needed in Long Hill, survey respondents indicated a preference for destinations such restaurants, public open spaces, and "3rd Space" retail options like coffee shops. Connectivity, particularly to destinations such as train stations, parks and commercial districts also emerged as a high priority for respondents.

Interpretation: The frequency of responses expressing an interest in more social spaces indicated a high degree of desire among respondents for more places to gather with their fellow residents.

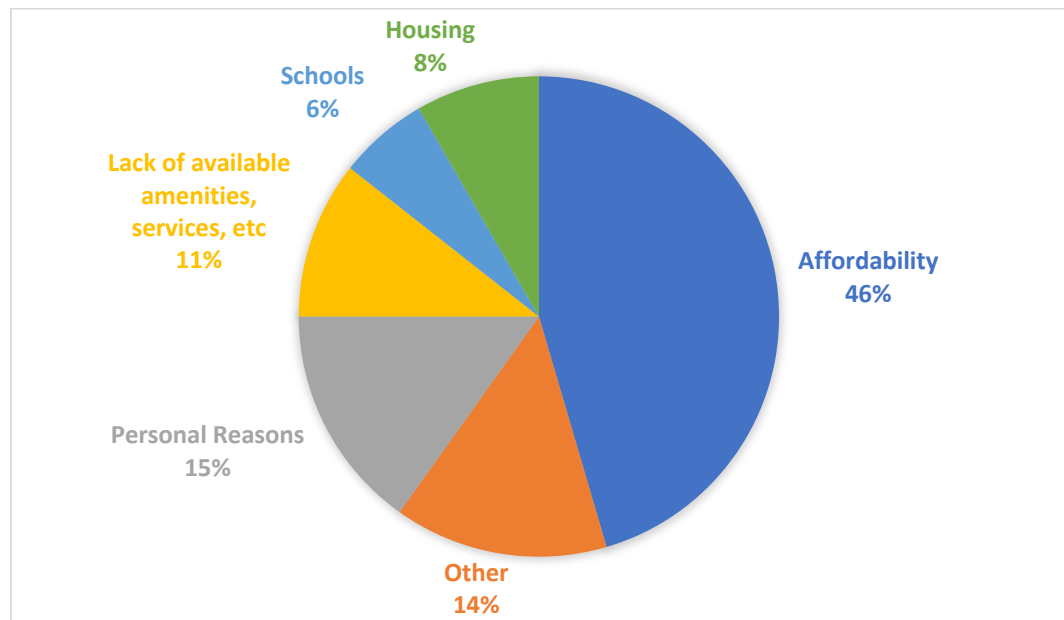


Reasons for Leaving the Township

401 respondents (112 intend to leave within 10 years)

Among the reasons that the approximately 28% of Township residents who indicated they were likely to leave Long Hill within the next ten years, those associated with the cost of living were the most common. Other reasons included dissatisfaction with the school system, available amenities, a lack of suitable housing options, and various other quality of life factors.

Interpretation: The overall percentage of residents stating they intend to leave the Township is comparable to other communities where this question has been posed. The explanations offered appear to reflect difficulties with the cost of living in northern New Jersey such as taxes and the expense of real estate, goods and services.



Support for Sustainability Strategies

404 respondents

Apart from increased electric vehicle charging stations, all proposed sustainability strategies enjoyed a net positive level of public support. Bio-retention strategies for stormwater management enjoyed very strong support with over 50% of respondents rating them as “very important”.

Strategy	Weighted Average (1 – 5)*
Environmental standards (EnergyStar, LEED, etc.) in new building and remodeling projects	3.67
Vegetated buffers and green infrastructure to protect local waterways from run-off pollution	4.19
Increase the availability of electric vehicle charging stations	2.49
Solar panels in areas unsuitable for development, over parking lots, or on rooftops	3.09
Expand the availability of recycling and composting facilities	3.52
Discourage the use of single-use plastic items such as shopping bags and water bottles	3.14

* 1 = not important; 5 = very important

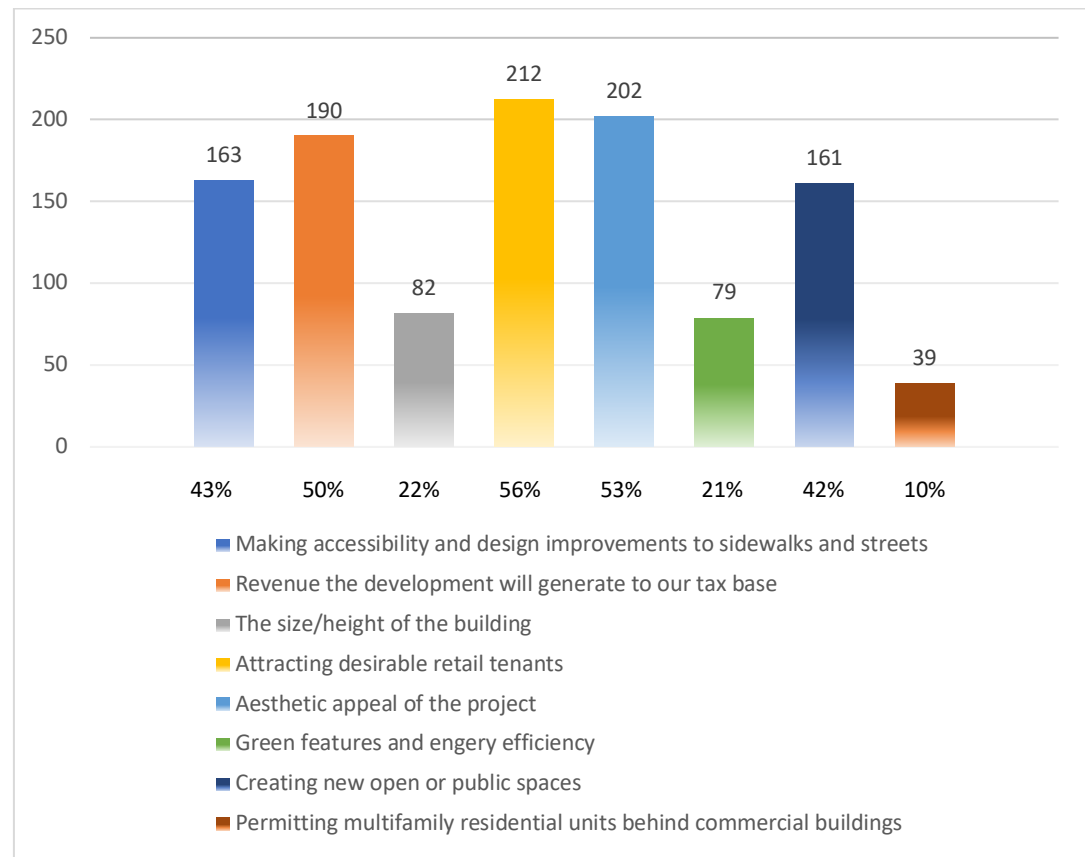
Downtown Long Hill (Valley Road)

What is most important to you in consideration of potential development in the Valley Road Business District? Pick your top three and explain why.

379 respondents

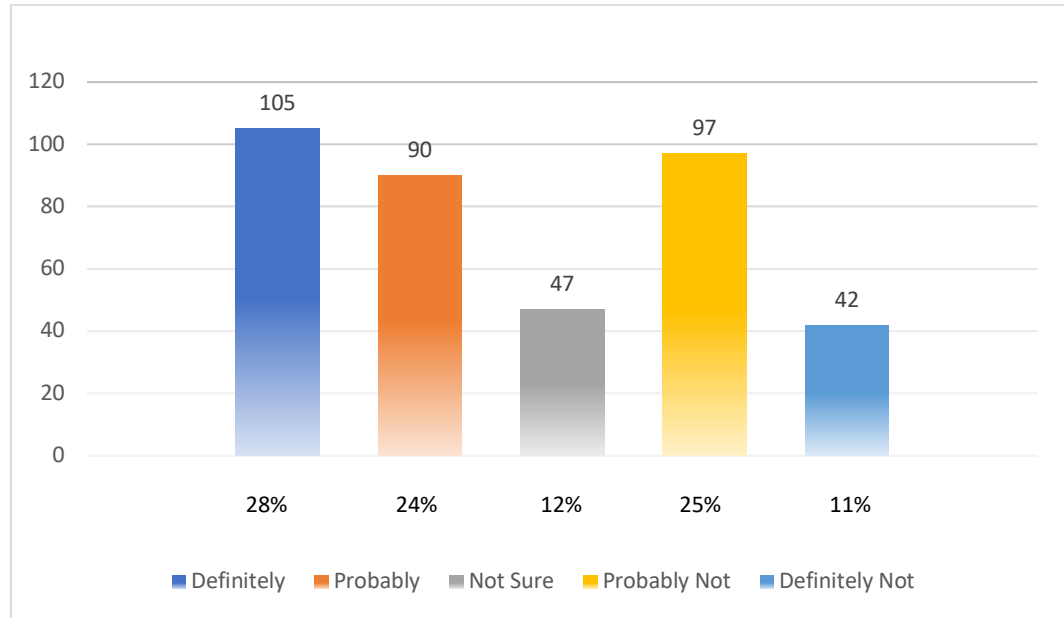
Respondents indicated that additional commercial destinations would be the most important consideration for them regarding development along Valley Road. They also prioritized the fiscal impact of any future development in the Valley Road district, with many expressing their approval for ways to increase the presence of ratables and lower tax burdens on residents. Aesthetic concerns were another high priority, with many respondents expressing the desire for more attractive storefronts and landscaping, as well as the hope that dilapidated buildings along Valley Road could be either renovated or removed.

Interpretation: Overall, responses showed a larger theme of wanting to see a human-oriented shopping district that is safe to traverse, pleasant for families to dine or relax in, and containing a healthy mix of retail options that could appeal to a wider range of patrons.



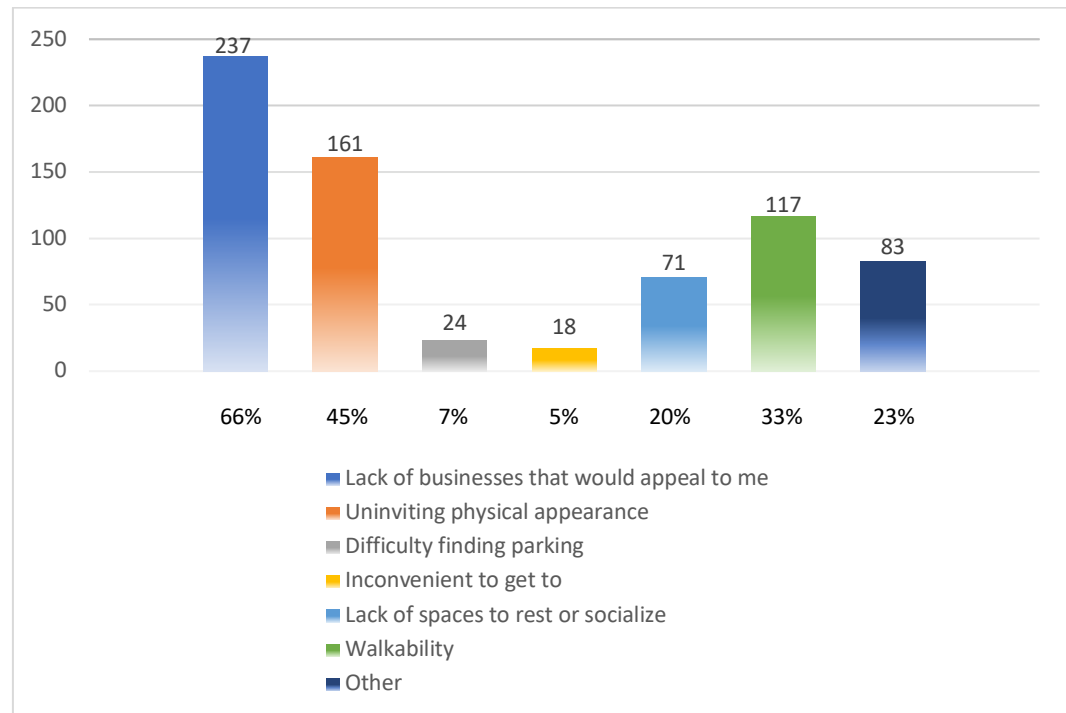
Would improved pedestrian connectivity to the Valley Road Business District from the various residential neighborhoods of the Township increase your patronage of the businesses in this area?

381 respondents

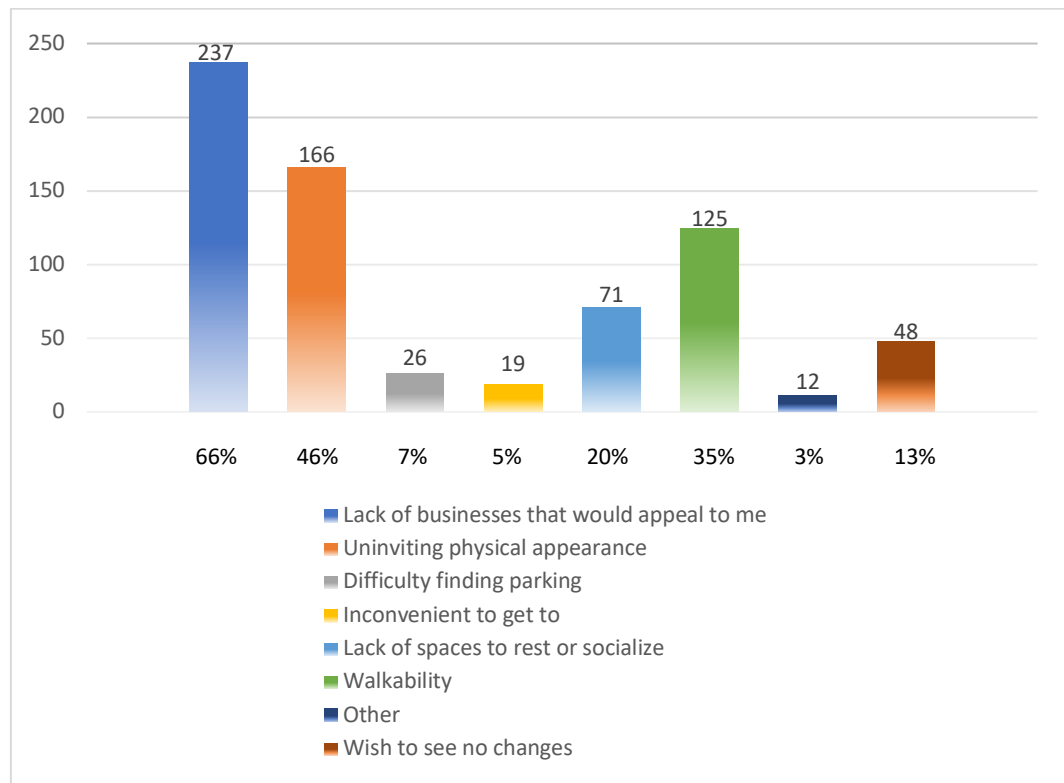


What keeps you from patronizing the shops and services in the Valley Road Business District more frequently? (Check all that apply)?

358 respondents



When asked to identify the factors which keep residents from utilizing the shops and services in the Valley Road Business District, the lack of appealing businesses emerged as the most prevalent reason.

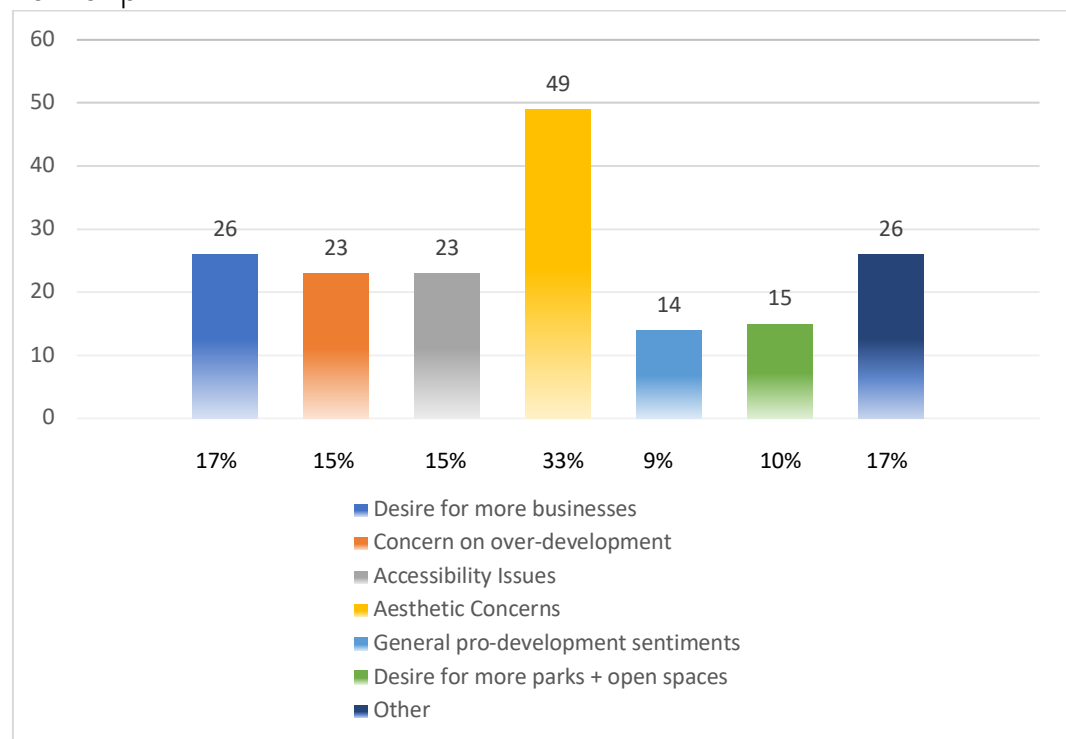


For those who selected “Other”, most indicated that there was nothing that could be done that would increase their utilization of the District, with many praising its existing features and not wishing to see them changed. Other comments received could be categorized into one of the response categories above. The table below illustrates the responses to this question with those responses added to the prior selections. The “other” in this instance includes respondents whose comments were either not relevant to Valley Road or those expressing concerns about the long-term viability of “brick and mortar” retail.

Valley Road General Comments

150 respondents

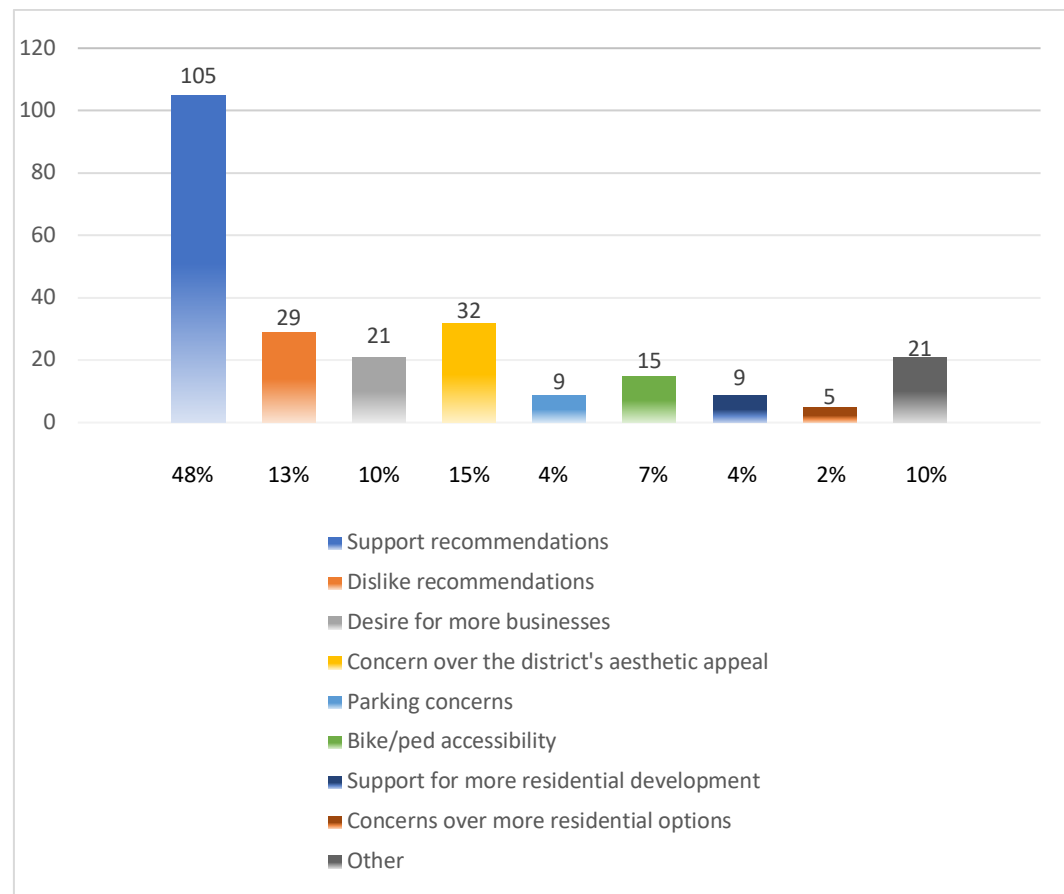
General feedback received from the public regarding the Valley Road Business District identified some aspects of the District residents felt needed the most improvement, along with concerns residents had for the district's future. The lack of appealing businesses in the area emerged as the most prevalent concern among respondents when asked what kept them from utilizing the Valley Road commercial areas more frequently. General concerns for the district appeared to be centered around the aesthetic appeal of the area. Among the respondents who cited the area's physical appearance as a major concern, 16 specifically identified the vacant buildings on the north side of Valley Road (eg: Thermoplastics, car wash) as particularly troubling areas. Comments received that are categorized as "other" included those who took the chance to voice their opposition to affordable housing or to offer suggestions for unrelated parts of the Township.



Stirling Village

220 respondents

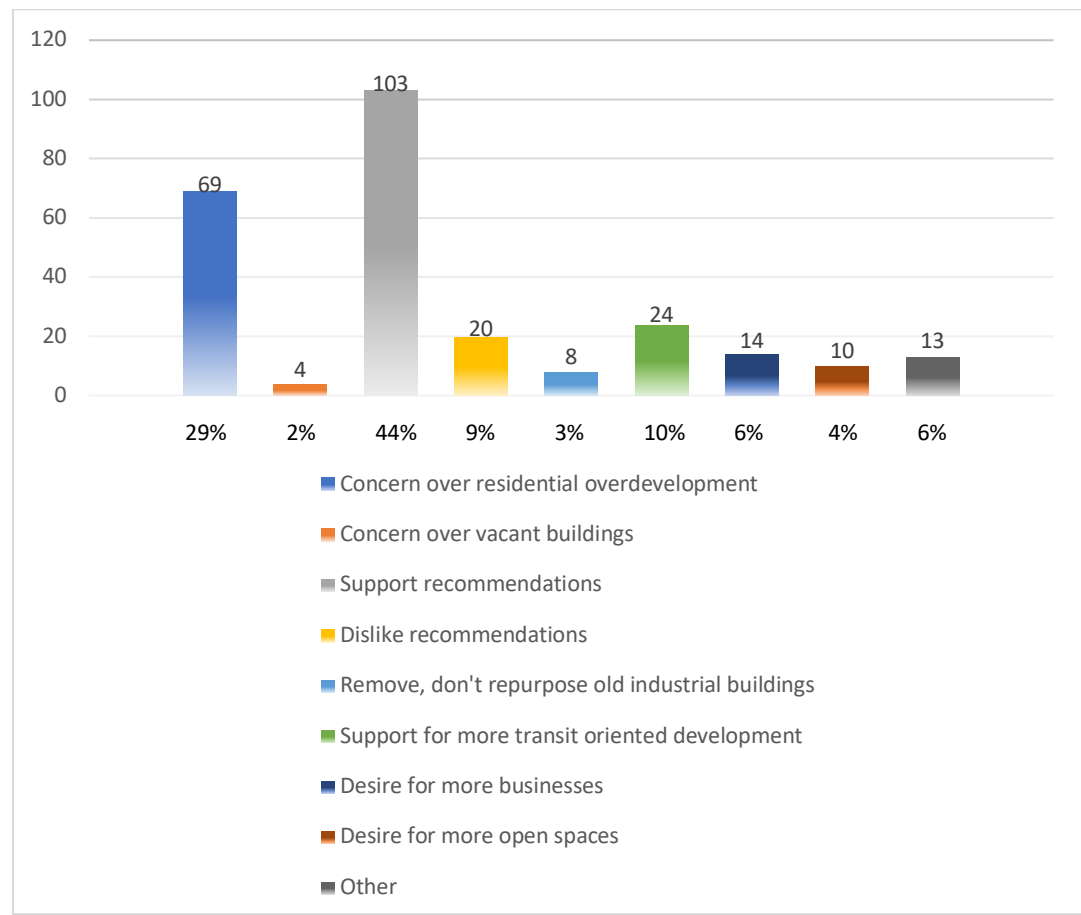
After an explanation of the Master Plan's intent to preserve and enhance the character of the *Stirling Workers Historic District*, this Assessment asked respondents to share their thoughts on extending streetscape features such as lighting and benches along Main Avenue to Valley Road, as well as the installation of vegetative street buffers at pedestrian crossings. Respondents indicated a generally high level of support for the concepts proposed. Other comments received offered specific concerns for the district including the appearance of certain properties, accessibility, and a lack of businesses. Among those who disapproved of the concepts proposed for the Village, most conveyed concerns over potential maintenance costs or questioned the viability of the concepts given insufficient service from NJ Transit.



Millington Village

235 respondents

This Assessment sought feedback on prior planning recommendations for a modestly scaled mixed-use development offering live/work units on the Barrett's property currently zoned for office use. In addition, respondents were asked if consideration should be given to repurposing industrial buildings in the area. Responses regarding the future of Millington Village were the most nuanced of the Assessment. While the recommendations regarding Millington Village enjoyed measured support, many respondents simultaneously raised concerns over excessive residential development in the area. Some respondents felt that recommendations should pursue transit-oriented development more aggressively, while others advocated for the inclusion of more businesses or more open spaces specifically. Concerns over the proper remediation of industrial sites were also common among respondents. Restaurants and smaller scale retail were the most frequently cited businesses among those who expressed support for additional commercial uses in the Village.

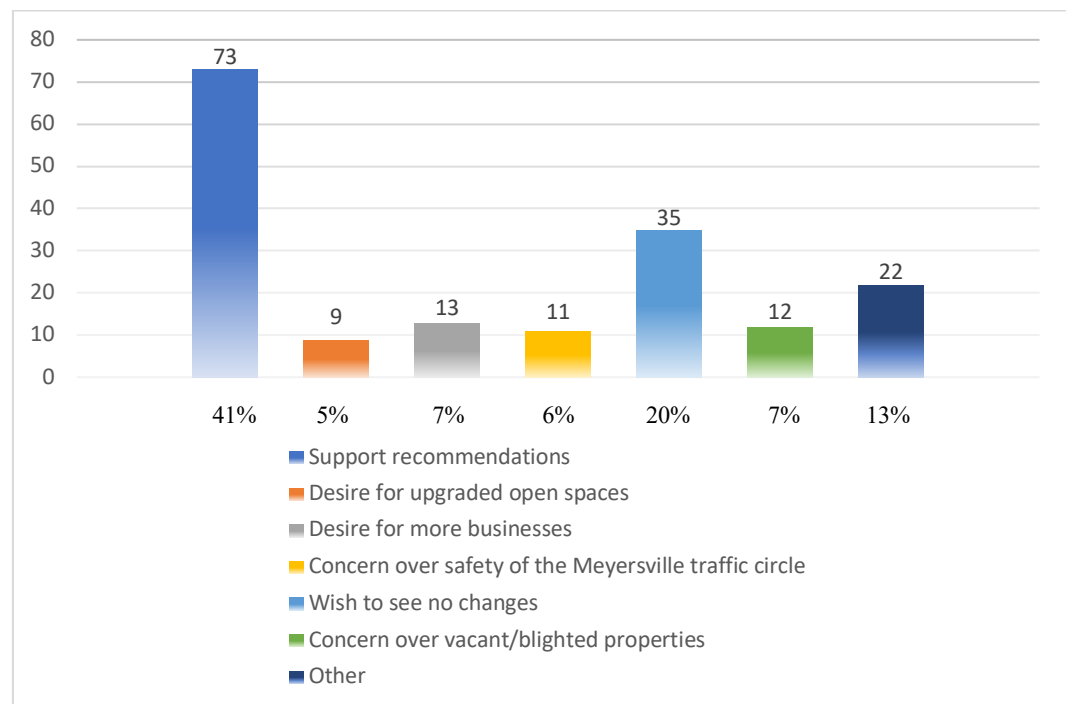


Meyersville Hamlet + Homestead Park

176 respondents

Respondents appear to be generally supportive of the approach envisioned in the assessment to largely leave these areas alone with the addition of trails that connect to other sections of the Township. While some took a more ardent stance of leaving the areas alone entirely and to not proceed with the construction of new trails, others indicated a desire for upgrades to the vitality of Meyersville's business district and traffic circulation.

Interpretation: Residents place a high premium on the unique, natural qualities of Meyersville Hamlet and Homestead Park, and wish to see them preserved. The collective 61% of those who wished to see no major changes for these areas either with or without new trails is a strong affirmation of maintaining these areas largely as they are from a land use planning perspective.



Gillette

243 respondents

The Assessment asked if the area zoned for commercial use at the intersection of Valley Road and Mountain Avenue should be expanded to include an additional parcel to the north along Mountain Avenue. Additionally, feedback was sought on the addition of open green spaces to complement the shops located there, and new sidewalks to connect the area to the Gillette train station. Respondents appeared to be generally supportive of the concepts proposed for the Gillette business zones, along with the improved connectivity to the train station. Some provided additional nuance, supporting one component while expressing concerns about other recommendations for Gillette. Among those concerns were: (i) avoid competition with the Valley Road commercial area, (ii) large increases in traffic congestion, (iii) potential disruptions to the quiet residential nature of the area and (iv) concerns over costs associated with building new sidewalks.

