

Falls Church Vision 2040



Community Survey August 1 through September 9, 2016 Survey Report

Summary

City staff administered an online and paper survey to collect public input on the City's visioning effort. The survey was open from August 1, 2016 to September 9, 2016. A total of 472 responses were submitted. The survey asked questions about community character, desired uses, important public investments, and the most important principles for developing the City.

Community Character

Respondent feedback on the issue of community character and urban form is mixed. Respondents generally favor the small-town charm of Falls Church and want to keep its sense of place. Many written comments called for no more large-scale development. However, respondents overwhelmingly think the Spectrum (86%) and Harris Teeter (77%) have contributed to the City's character.

When asked which kinds of places in the region they liked best, respondents selected Old Town Alexandria and Shirlington. Respondents liked Tysons Corner and Ballston least.

Specific Uses

In regard to specific uses, respondents would like to see more of the following in the City:

- restaurants (casual, fine dining, and coffee shops/cafes),
- clothing stores,
- microbreweries,
- book stores,
- sporting goods stores,
- a swimming pool, and
- an ice rink.

Public Investments and Transportation

Respondents regard the parks as very important and believe pedestrian accessibility is the most important transportation enhancement that contributes to community character.

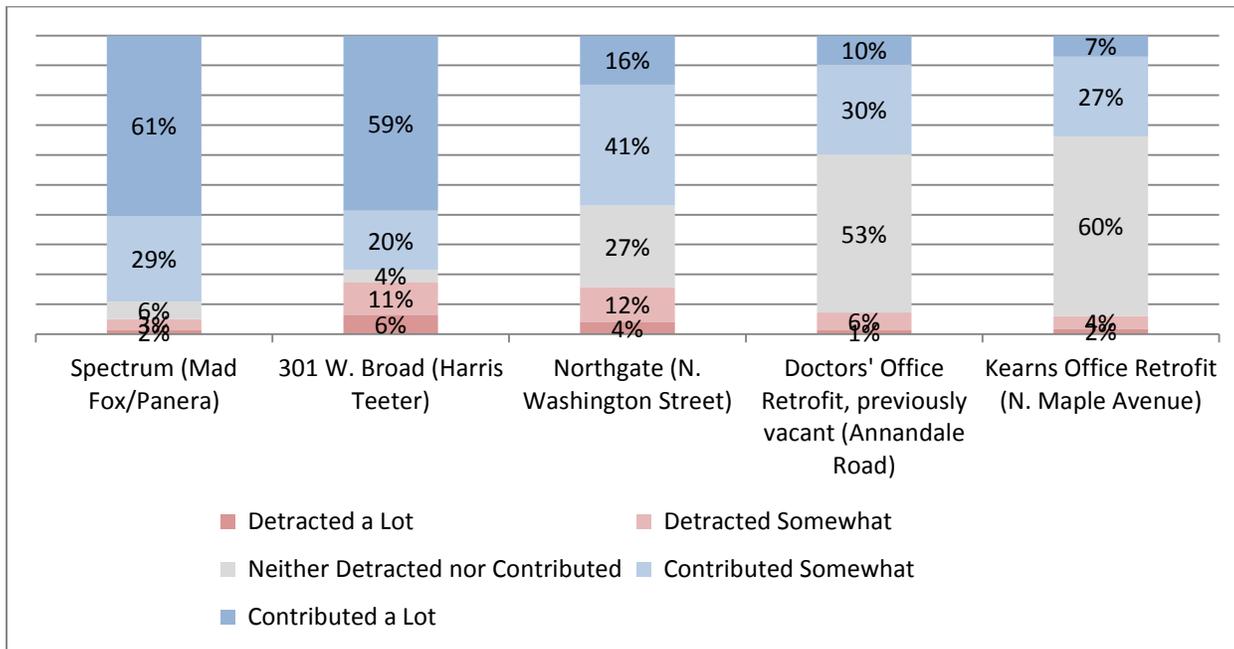
Principles

Of the principles that should be included in the City's future vision, community character, the environment, and education were rated most important.

Question 1: For each of the COMMERCIAL REDEVELOPMENT example projects below, mark whether you think the projects contributed to or detracted from Community Character within the City according to the scale provided.

More than half of respondents think that the Spectrum and Harris Teeter developments contributed a lot to the community character of Falls Church, and nearly 90 percent and 80 percent respectively think Spectrum and Harris Teeter are positive additions to the City’s character. Yet nearly 17 percent of respondents think Harris Teeter detracts from the City’s character. Most respondents were indifferent toward the doctors’ office and Kearns office retrofits.

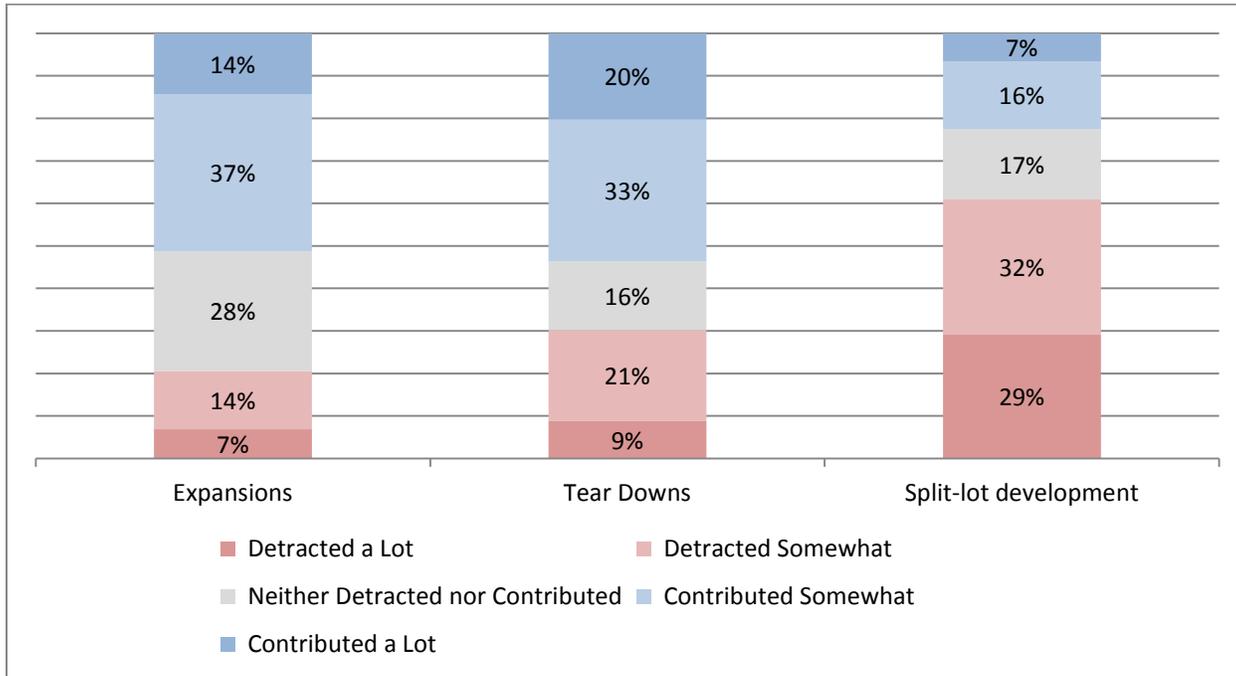
It is likely that respondents are unfamiliar with the two retrofit examples. The favorability of Spectrum may be attributable to the public space and openness of the development, as well as the uses there (Mad Fox, Panera). Harris Teeter seems to be a welcome addition to the City.



Questions 2: For each of the RESIDENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT example projects below, mark whether you think the projects contributed to or detracted from Community Character within the City according to the scale provided.

Approximately half of respondents thought that tear-downs and expansions contribute to the community character of Falls Church; whereas, about 60 percent of respondents regard split-lot development as detracting from community character.

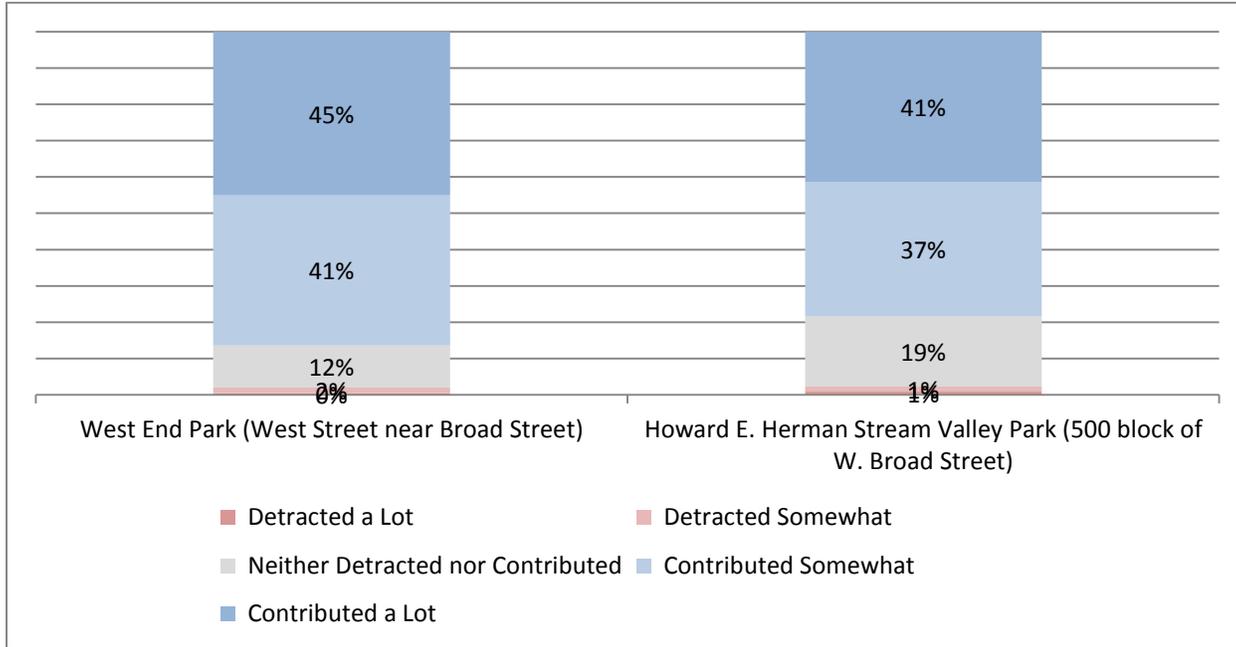
The fact that tear-downs and expansions are generally favored suggests that respondents like the look of new and larger homes in the City. What this suggests about number and type of household is unclear.



Question 3: For each of the INVESTMENT IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE example projects below, mark whether you think the projects contributed to or detracted from Community Character within the City according to the scale provided.

Overwhelmingly, respondents think that West End Park and Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park contribute positively to the community character of Falls Church.

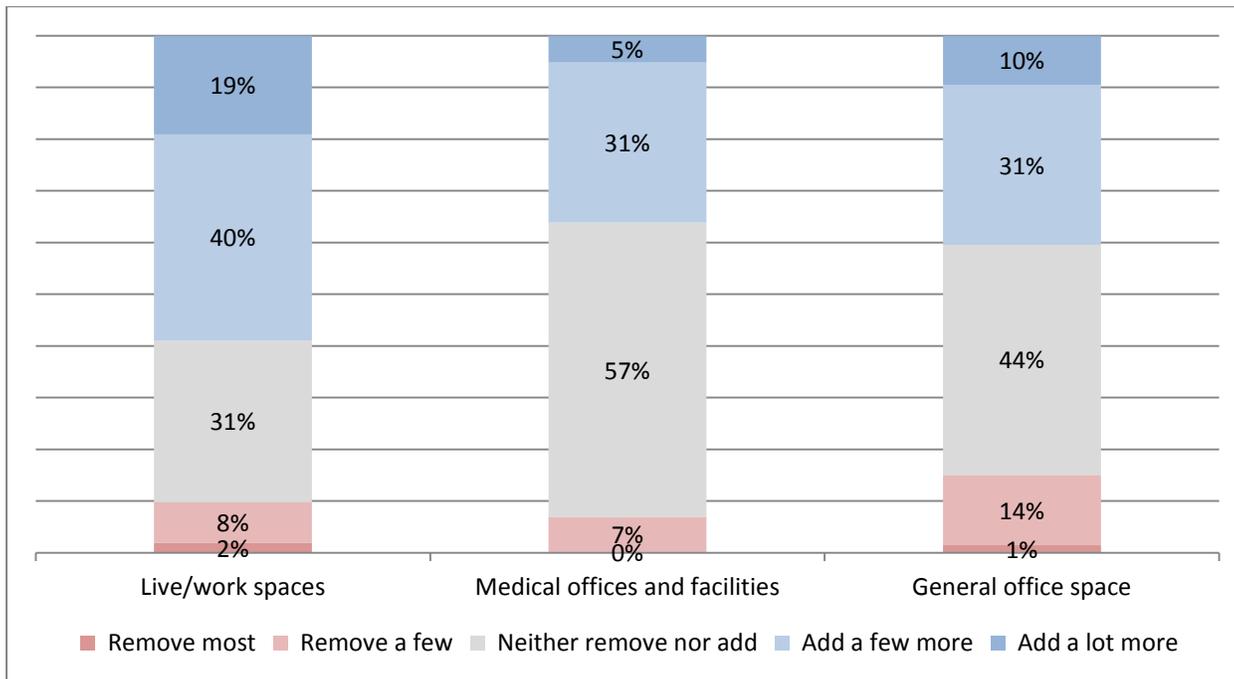
This result suggests that respondents would strongly favor further investment in City parks.



Question 4: For each of the OFFICE examples below, select whether the City needs more or less of the identified uses according to the scale provided.

More than a third of respondents think the City needs more medical offices and facilities, but more than half are indifferent about adding or removing some. More respondents (about 40 percent) favor adding general office space, but still some 44 percent are indifferent. Nearly 60 percent of respondents favor adding live/work space.

The fact that these office examples have broad support and little opposition suggests that the City might expand on office uses without opposition.

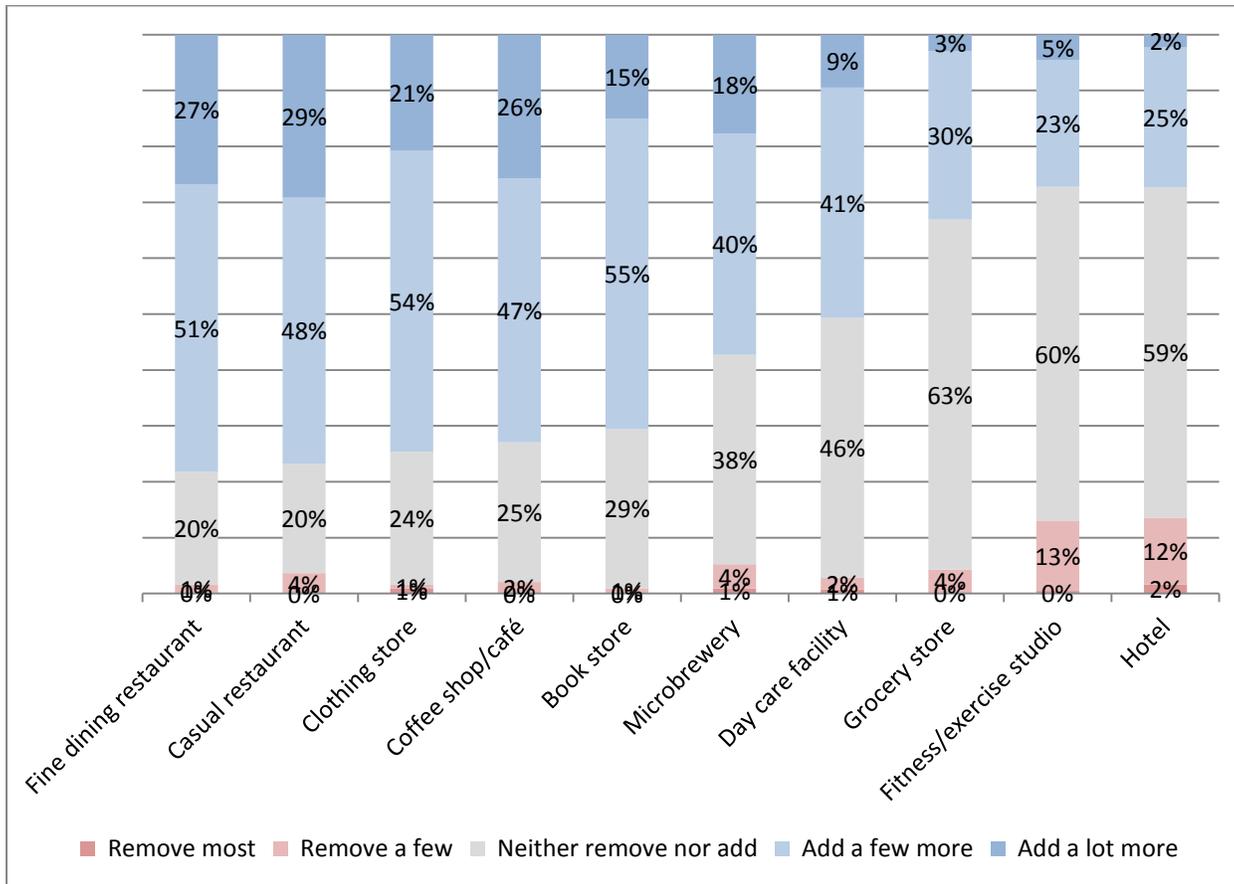


Below are selected comments in response to Other office examples:

- Add a “central square” area, a plaza of some sort where the community members gather that is clean and safe both during the day and night.
- The city should seek out law firms or other businesses that can bring in more revenue to help the city with taxes.
- The city is already overbuilt.
- A Container Store or IKEA, a specialty store that is a regional draw
- Book store, bakery, deli, Italian ice place, sporting goods

Question 5: For each of the RETAIL examples below, select whether City needs more or less of the identified uses according to the scale provided.

The retail uses that respondents would like to see a lot more of include: casual restaurant, fine dining restaurant, and coffee shop/café, with clothing store, microbrewery, and book store being favored as well. There was considerable indifference (about 50 percent) toward adding or removing hotel, grocery store, and fitness/exercise studio.



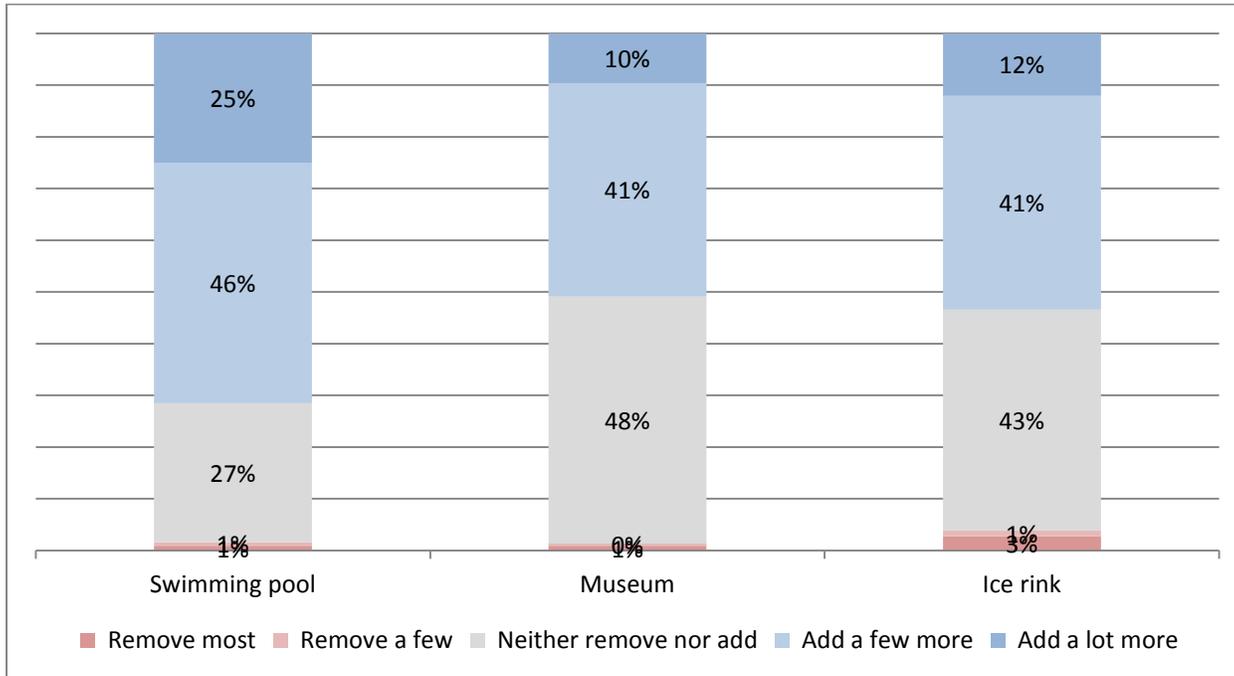
Below are selected comments in response to Other retail examples:

- Small stores should be able to share space and rent, like they do with incubator office space for startups.
- No more yogurt or pizza places, please.
- It is INSANE that you can't buy a dress shirt in the City.
- Book stores, shoe stores, unique women's clothing stores, gift stores, bakeries, delis, are all in short supply.
- Catering hall!
- Specialty shops like olive oil or small gifts
- Trader Joe's
- Pottery Barn, Apple Store, Wegmans tapas restaurant
- No more Starbucks
- Wine bar

Question 6: For each of the CULTURAL AND CIVIC examples below, select whether the City needs more or less of the identified uses according to the scale provided.

Of the three cultural and civic examples proposed, a swimming pool was regarded by a wide majority (more than 70 percent) as desired. A museum and an ice rink were also favored by about half of respondents.

It is notable that all of these examples had high levels of support and would be welcome in the City.



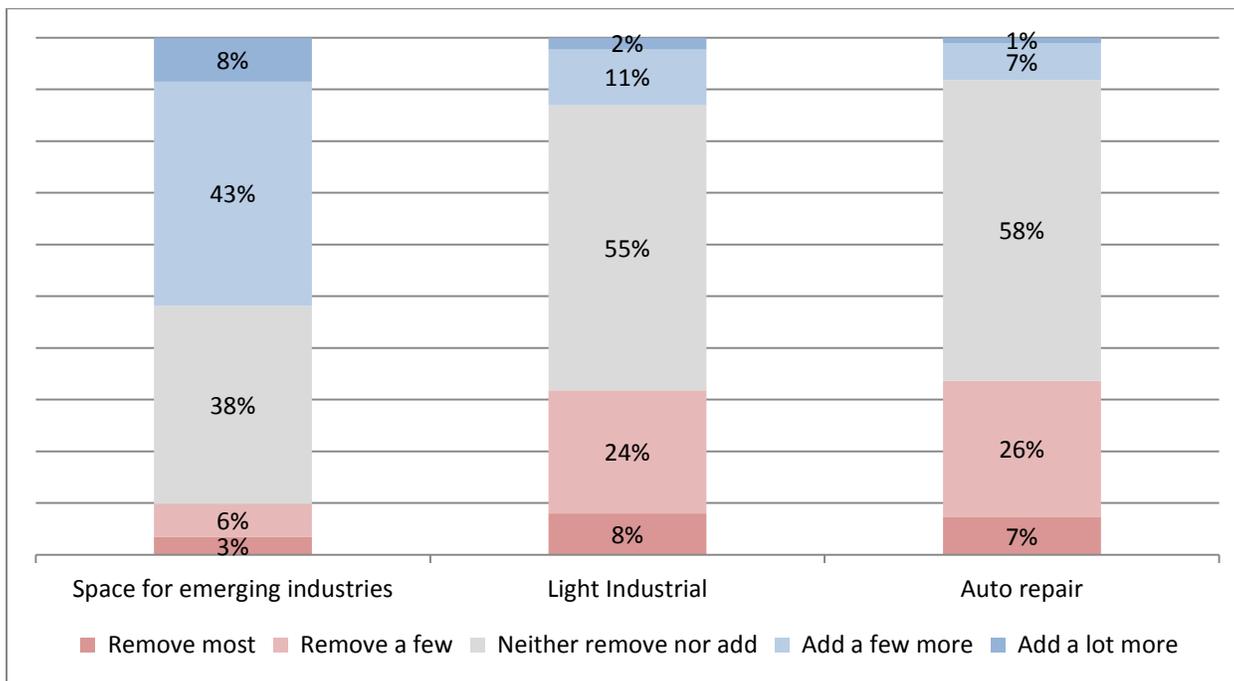
Below are selected comments in response to Other cultural and civic examples:

- Expansion of homeless shelter (FFCHS) to provide more assistance to the needy
- Convert the current library to a museum, incorporate a pool, ice rink, and expanded library into the new high school
- We need a public pool!
- Theaters – both movie and live stage
- Recreation (i.e., minigolf, arcade)
- Roller skating would be great
- Splash park, dog park

Question 7: For each of the INDUSTRIAL examples below, select whether the City needs more or less of the identified uses according to the scale provided.

There was considerable indifference about adding or removing auto repair and light industrial uses from Falls Church, and a substantial percent of respondents (33 and 41 respectively) thought these uses should be removed. More than half of respondents did favor adding space for emerging industries.

This is the only question where there is more support for removing uses than adding them, except for emerging industries, which suggests that the City’s industrial space needs to be repurposed.

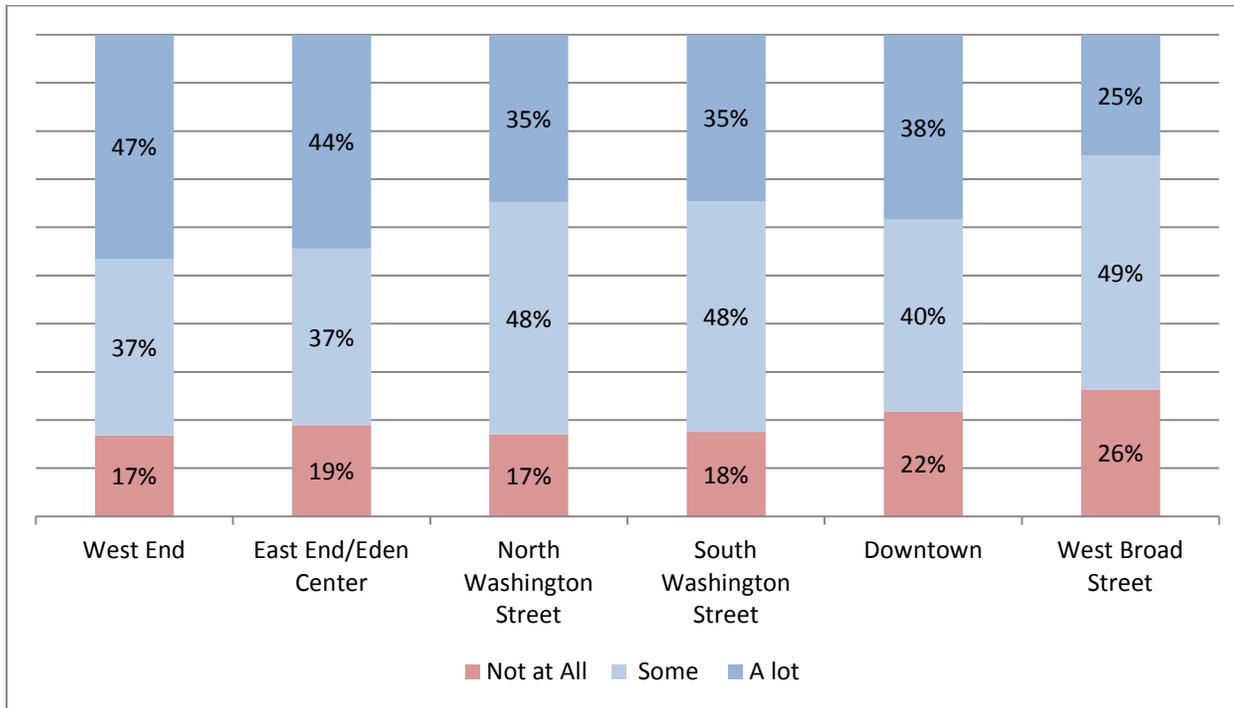


Below are selected comments in response to Other industrial examples:

- I love Dixie Sheet Metal, Sister’s Stone, and long standing businesses who give back to the community in so many ways
- Falls Church needs less light industrial like where the cement plant and repair places [are] on Gordon Road
- European Drive, Craftsman, and perfect auto detail are incredible. Please don’t take them away. However, it is strange that there are so many used car dealerships in such a small city.
- Remove the gun stores!

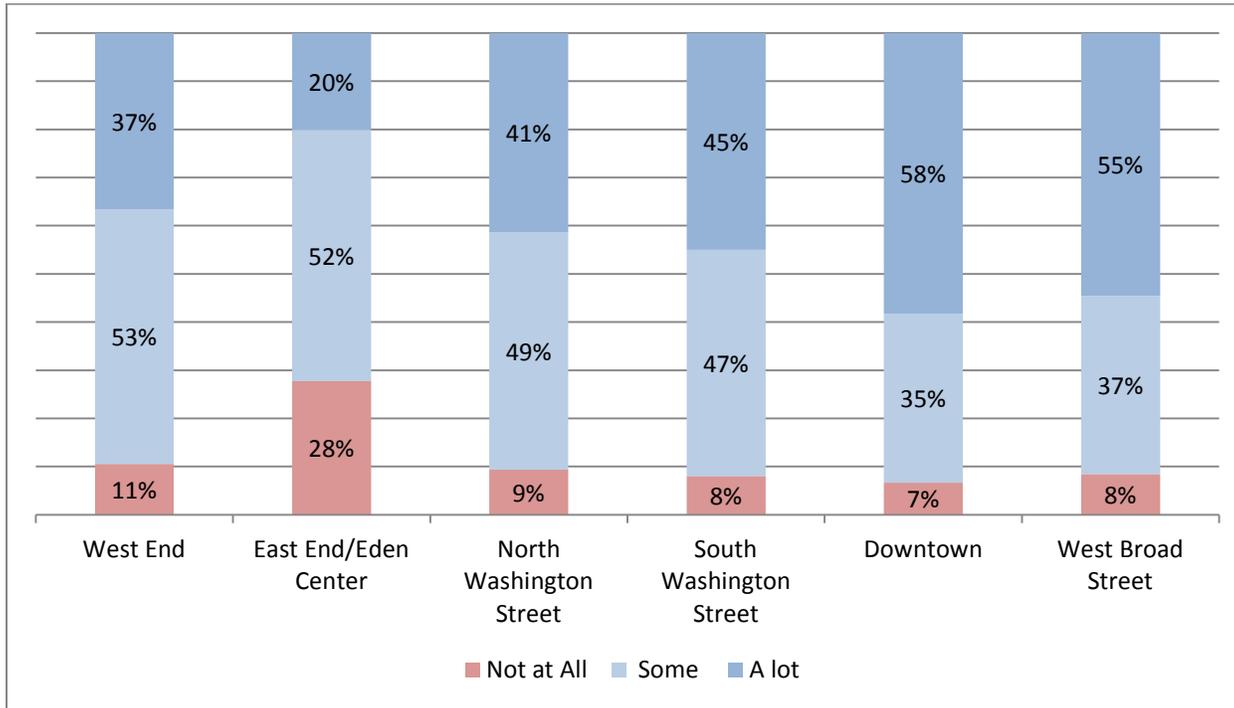
Question 8: To what extent should REGIONAL DRAWS be located in the following areas (see map for locations)?

There was only minor variation in how people responded to the question of where to locate regional draws. All six locations were considered suitable for some or all regional draws, but West End and East End outweighed the other locations as suitable; whereas, downtown and West Broad were considered least suitable. About 26 percent of respondents thought regional draws should not be located on West Broad Street.



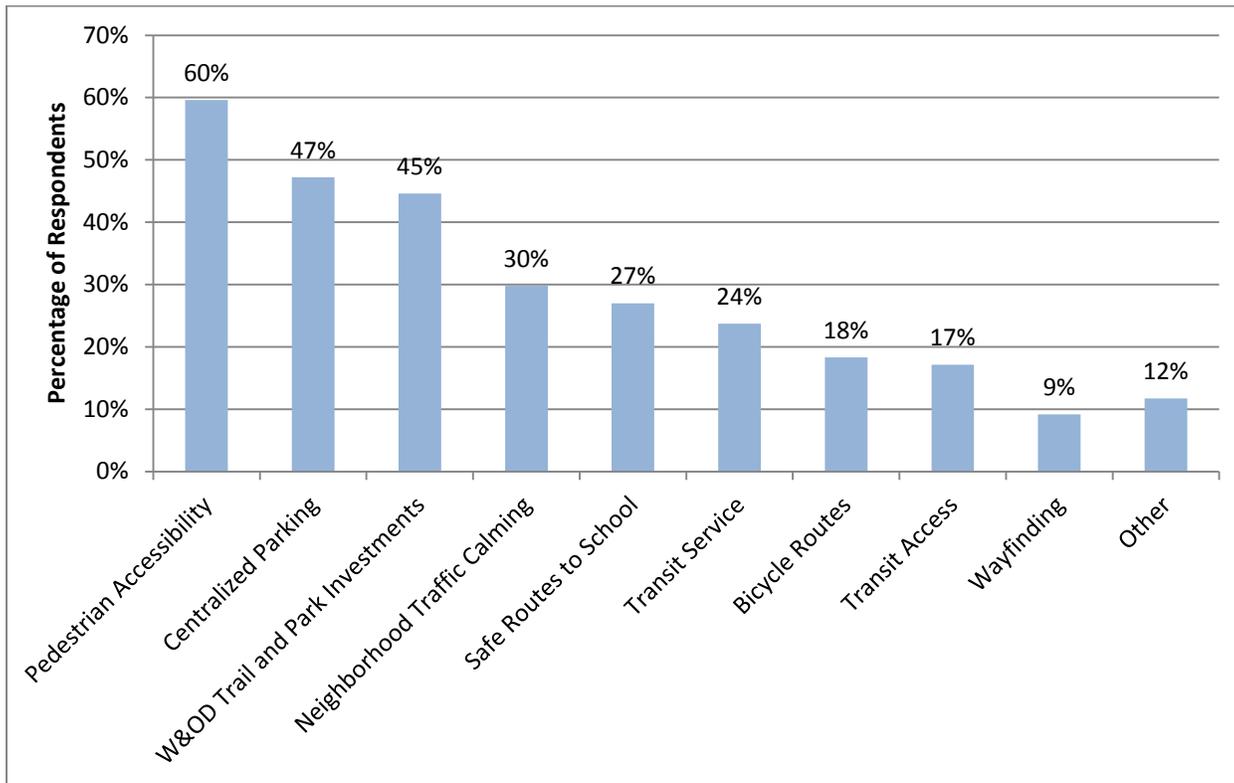
Question 9: To what extent should NEIGHBORHOOD-SERVING DRAWS be located in the following areas (see map for locations)?

Downtown and West Broad Street were considered most suitable for neighborhood-serving draws (as they were considered unsuitable for regional draws), while East End/Eden Center was considered least suitable.



Question 10: Which three efforts would most contribute to sense of place in the City? Choose up to three.)

Of the nine transportation-related initiatives, respondents thought pedestrian accessibility would contribute most to sense of place in Falls Church. Also rated high were centralized parking and W&OD Trail and park investment. Considered least contributory was wayfinding .

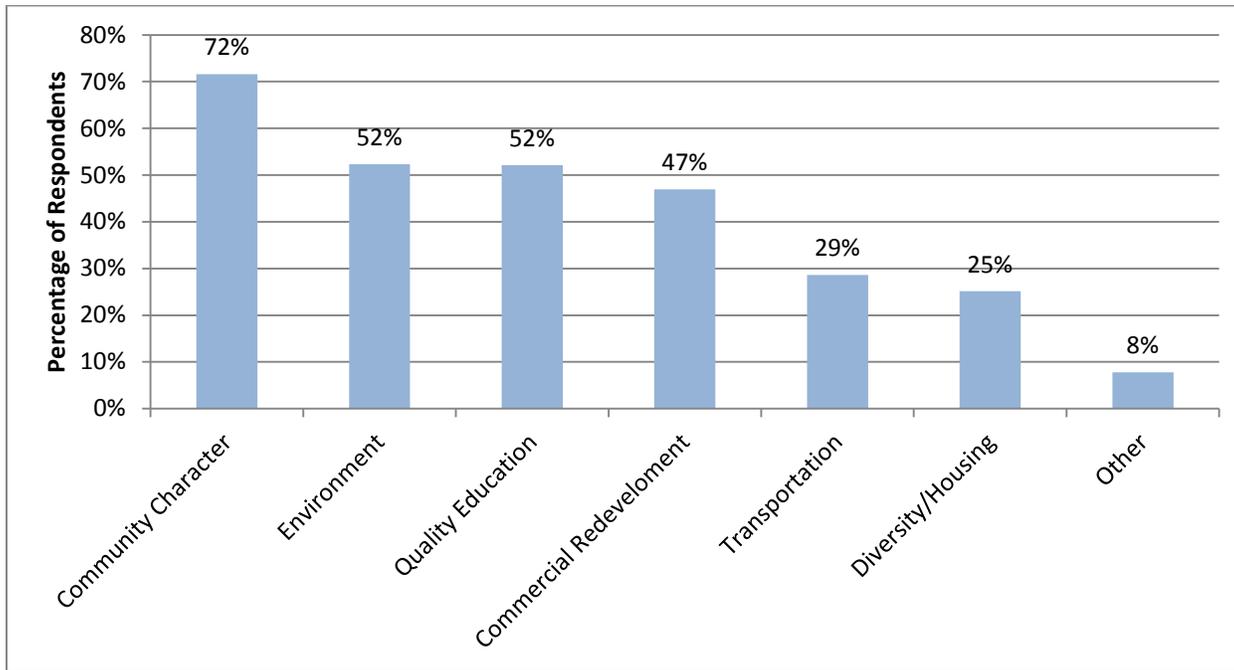


Below are selected comments in response to Other examples of transportation-related initiatives:

- No bike paths through our City parks!
- Sidewalks on both sides of residential streets
- Local bus service to connect local residential and commercial areas to Metro
- A study to change the lights on Broad Street to limit daily congestion
- Slow down traffic on all city streets to 20 mph
- In about 600 crossings of Great Falls Street, I have seen only 2 bicyclists stop

**Question 11: Which of these values do you think are most important to include in an updated Vision Statement?
Choose up to three.**

Of the six principles or values in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan that respondents think should be included in an updated Vision Statement, the highest rated was Community Character. Environment and Education were also rated high. Rated lowest were Diversity/Housing and Transportation.



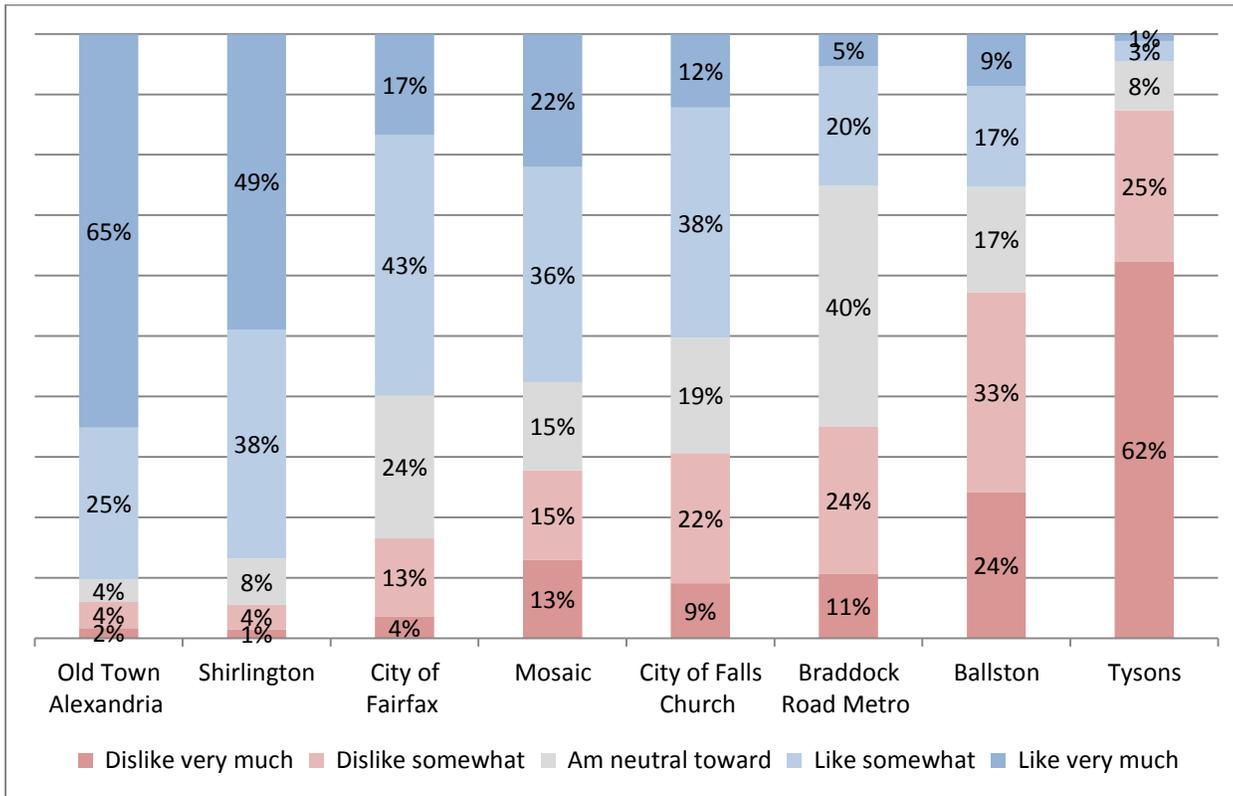
Below are selected comments in response to Other principles:

- We need more gathering spots close to a place you can get a cold soda and sit and read the paper or watch kids play in a fountain or draw on the concrete with chalk. We need more community engagement and interaction so people can learn about their city and the people in it.
- New housing harmonious in scale, allow all incomes to thrive here.
- Keep the quietness, the antique shops, the old feel of a historic community. We don't want urbanization.
- No more mixed use. We have yet to see it flourish!
- Regarding diversity of housing, there is an entire group that is not taken into account: the middle-income residents, particularly those who have lived here all their lives and want to stay here now that they are retired.

Questions 12-19: Please rate these examples.

Of the eight activity centers in Northern Virginia, respondents very much liked Old Town Alexandria (65 percent); in fact, only 6 percent disliked Old Town Alexandria somewhat or very much. Second most liked was Shirlington, with 49 percent liking it very much and 38 percent liking it somewhat. Other well-liked centers included the City of Fairfax, Mosaic, and Falls Church. Least favored are Tysons (87 percent disliking it somewhat or very much) and Ballston (57 percent disliking it somewhat or very much).

Overall, respondents appeared to favor small-scale areas—some historic, some infill—and to find large-scale developments like Tysons and Ballston quite unappealing.



Written Comments and Suggestions

Question 20: Please add any additional comments or suggestions here:

The comments below are generally representative of the hundreds that were submitted. Many comments addressed the overall character of Falls Church, with an emphasis on the need for good parks and walkable streets. A substantial number of comments argued against further commercial development.

Community Character

- It would be nice if it could be an updated small town – not overly cookie cutter, not overly built up but not seedy or industrial.
- More small parks with playgrounds. A splash park or fountain would be great!
- I would like to see our playgrounds upgraded.
- Falls Church is great! Adding parks and keep[ing] the small city charm is what will keep me wanting more! The large developments...do not add charm.
- Definitely stop the ridiculous lot division with super-ugly “craftsman” style narrow and long houses with giant garages right in front.
- No city can truly be considered a CITY without a proper outlet for arts. A performing arts center with space for rehearsal, performance and the development of local (and beyond) talent would make a huge impact.
- Falls Church City needs to capitalize on its history and utilize existing structures or build new structures to look historic and quaint. There is very little creativity in the new commercial architecture.
- I would really like to see more restaurants in the city and places for our kids to go and be active. Like movie theaters, roller rinks, trampoline parks.

Economic Sustainability

- NO MORE COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT. No more mixed use. No more apartments/condos. Enough is enough.
- I would like to see fewer high rise buildings – they are literally casting shadows on the city. More restaurants and coffee shops would be ideal. The schools, library, and open spaces (parks, playgrounds, W&OD Trail) are central to what makes FCC great.
- Gordon Road Triangle has been in a holding pattern way longer than anything else. It is time to either get it done or quit thinking of it.

Transportation

- Better pedestrian walkways with safer crosswalks would add a lot to this walkable city that has potentially perilous intersections.
- If we want to be a walkable, desirable community, we need to make sure that there are wide sidewalks, sufficient crosswalks, and speed bumps to ensure the safety of pedestrians.

Environment

- Please include energy efficiency and low carbon footprint for the city as a must in the Comprehensive Plan.
- People need more green space.

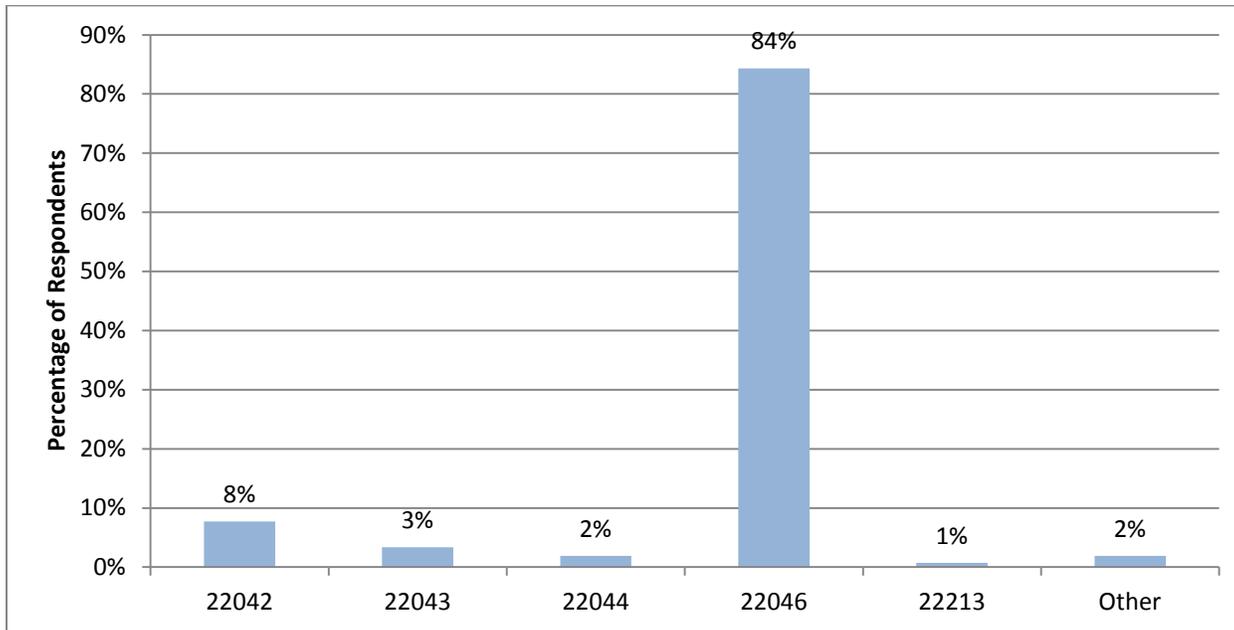
Housing/Diversity

- Seniors and low income need not apply.
- It would be great to have a place where people of all backgrounds can commune to enjoy this great city. Also, affordable housing for working professionals is a must.

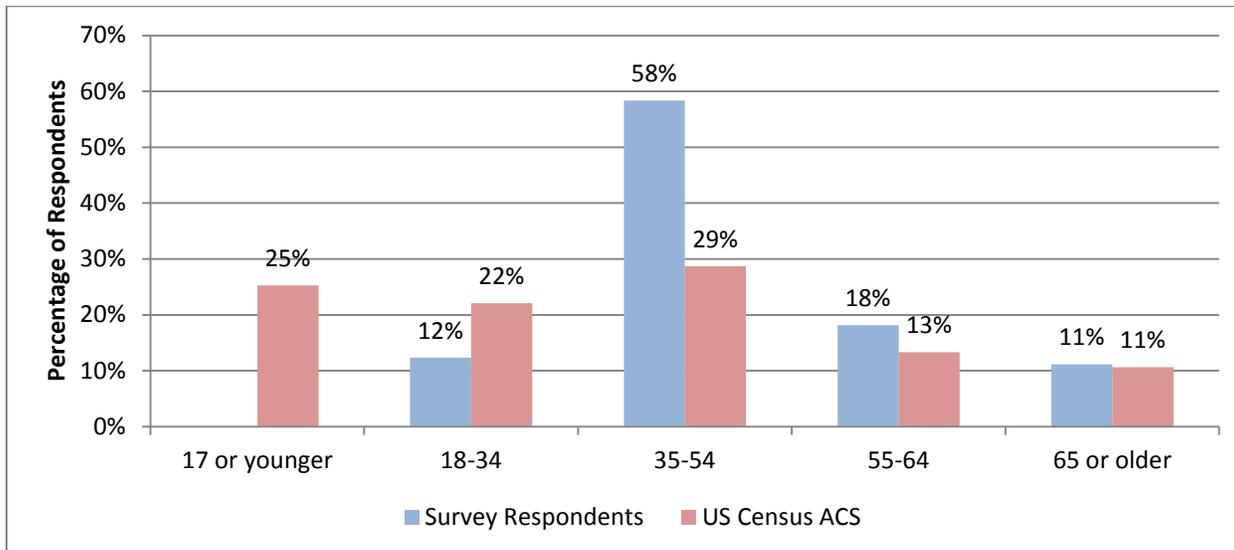
Demographic Analysis

Survey respondents were primarily (84 percent) from the 22046 zip code. More than half (58 percent) were in the 35-54 age range. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) were women. This generally conforms with the City's population as a whole, although the percentage of female respondents was substantially higher than the 51 percent of females in the City.

Zip Code



Age



Male / Female

