



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, June 8, 2017

7:30 p.m.

Essex Town Hall – Auditorium

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Seating of Members

Chairman Alan Kerr called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. In attendance were Members George Sexton, Tom Danyliw, and Ralph Monaco. Alternate Erin Bogan was seated for Member John Bairos. Also in attendance were Alternate Jane Siris, Planner John Guskowski, and several members of the public.

2. Approval of Minutes: May 11, 2017 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of May 11, 2017 by Ralph Monaco, seconded by George Sexton.
Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

There was no new business

4. Old Business

a. Housing Needs Survey – Presentation of Results

John Guskowski presented a brief overview of the Housing Needs Survey results, which generated over 300 unique responses from residents. Overall, the survey indicated support for the concept of expanding housing options in Essex, with residents indicating that additional options were needed for young professionals, young families, and senior citizens. He discussed next steps for the promotion of housing option expansion including the newly-established Ad-Hoc Committee. [A copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes]

b. Ad-Hoc Committee on Housing Options

At the conclusion of John Guskowski's review of the Housing Survey, Chairman Kerr pointed out the goals of the Plan of Conservation & Development and its focus on expanding housing options. He noted that the Planning Commission doesn't have a great deal of statutory authority to take action beyond studies and recommendations. The Ad-Hoc Committee will study the potential tools and options for expanding housing choices and seek to set specific goals. He then invited comment from members of the public and other Commissions who had joined the meeting.

Zoning Commissioner Russ Smith asked about how the recent housing development in Old Saybrook and the under-construction Essex Station affect demand for affordable housing. John Guskowski noted that only portions of those two developments are set-aside as affordable, and that the definition/financial threshold for "affordable" is relatively high because of the area's median income. He also noted Janice Atkeson's point of a few meetings ago that finding appropriate development locations was the most significant challenge. Chairman Kerr noted that the Ad-Hoc Committee's efforts may have to focus on dispersing housing opportunities throughout town, including accessory apartments.

John Guskowski and Kayleigh Lombardi of the Partnership for Strong Communities then updated the Commission on House Bill 6880, which recently passed the General Assembly, tweaked the Affordable Housing Appeals Act (CGS 8-30g) by lowering the threshold for a municipal moratorium and extended eligible units. Essex Housing Authority member Dawn Belanger noted that getting appropriate locations for housing construction and particularly cobbling together financing is a serious challenge. She noted that demand is high and will continue to be high, stating that Essex Place still has a lengthy waiting list. Chairman Kerr asked whether an Ad-Hoc Committee's efforts would be helpful. Ralph Monaco stated that the identification of options and opportunities to add density and vitality to the villages and the gateway were important tasks.

Tom Danyliw stated that he was distressed that fully 1/3 of the survey respondents believed that increasing housing options in Essex would negatively impact the community and he feared that the Town was becoming increasingly exclusive and homogenous, which he believes to be problematic. He noted the PoCD vision statement which included statements that Essex should be inclusive and welcoming. He stated that Zoning Regulations and the Zoning Commission's approach was a very important factor in addressing this and making the Town more accessible.

Chairman Kerr noted that the Zoning Commission is in the middle of a re-write of the Zoning Regulations, and stated that their input would be very important to the Ad-Hoc Committee's aims. Zoning Chairman Al Wolfgram commented in his role as a private engineer and representative that Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations were frequently an effective way to encourage housing development in a more diffuse way without having to overhaul Zoning Regulations completely. John Guskowski agreed and noted that the Zoning Commission has the authority to adopt PUD regulations but has not done so. Russ Smith stated that this could be a task for the Ad-Hoc Committee. Tom Danyliw stated that the Zoning Commission had the authority of change Regulations, Zoning Districts, and the way in which land uses and densities were segregated, and that it would be very useful if the Zoning Commission were amenable to the changes proposed in the Plan of Conservation & Development. Zoning Chairman Wolfgram stated that the Zoning Commission could consider these recommendations.

Chairman Kerr repeated his invitation to the Zoning Commission to participate on the Ad-Hoc Committee, which he said would ultimately have between 8-10 members:

c. Zoning Revisions Subcommittee – Update and Discussion

John Guszkowski stated the Working Group was preparing to complete its work on the “clean-up” of the Zoning Regulations, which would be done in June, and then presented to the Zoning Commission for an initial review this summer, with a public hearing (and Planning referral) to follow. He stated that this effort was a cleanup, not an overhaul, but the Planning Commission was being invited to identify a short list of top-priority tweaks that could be added to advance the goals of the PoCD. Tom Danyliw noted the PoCD recommended a comprehensive re-write of the Zoning Regulations within two years of the November 2015 adoption, and asked whether this effort would accomplish that. John Guszkowski replied that this would be the question the Planning Commission would have to answer in reviewing the proposed Regulations when they were referred to Planning prior to the public hearing; but stated again, this was a cleanup, not an overhaul.

Zoning Chairman Wolfgram stated that the current Regulations were old, disorganized, and difficult to navigate. The Zoning Commission had decided to take a two-step approach: 1) clean up the current set; and then 2) introduce a number of major changes per the recommendations of the PoCD and other updates. He stated that the Planning Commission would be invited to introduce a few specific additions to the cleanup phase as well. Chairman Kerr stated that he was pleased that the Zoning Commission was planning to take on the updates after the cleanup and hoped that the Planning Commission would be actively involved in that phase. Tom Danyliw stated that it did not appear that the current cleanup was a comprehensive re-write as recommended by the PoCD, but was not judging whether this was a reasonable or unreasonable approach.

Chairman Kerr asked about the status of the Planning Commission’s pending Accessory Apartment amendment request before the Zoning Commission, which had been the subject of correspondence to Zoning. Zoning Chairman Wolfgram stated that the Commission’s policy on amendments was to ensure that all Regular Commissioners were present before acting, and they had been having absences for the past few months. He stated that he would push the item forward on the agenda at the next meeting. Russ Smith stated that the Zoning Commission had experienced very full agendas recently. John Guszkowski stated that he was dismayed about the delay because if the applicant was anyone other than the Planning Commission, the matter would have been resolved nine months ago.

5. Report of Committees and Officers

a. Report from Inland Wetlands Representative

The Planning Commission has no active representative to the Wetlands Agency. John Guszkowski stated that the Selectmen are working with the Town Attorney to prepare a modification to the Ordinance that governs the Wetlands Agency to eliminate the requirement that a Planning and a Zoning member sit on that board.

b. Report from RiverCOG Representative

Alan Kerr reported that the RiverCOG meeting was held, but quorums were difficult to achieve, given that several municipalities had not appointed representatives. There was a

referral discussion on Farm Wineries and events in otherwise rural residential areas. The COG is updating their regional Plan of Conservation & Development and was seeking input, looking for “pop-up” events to discuss regional development with members of the public. The COG office would be moving from Centerbrook to Haddam in August.

c. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

George Sexton reported that the EDC meeting was set for the following week.

d. Planner's Report

John Guszkowski reported that he had been working on several potential and current grants, including Community Connectivity (sidewalk work) to address a few gaps in the pedestrian network, particularly at the foot of Main Street, Champlin Square, and at the Piano Factory. He was continuing to work on the STEAP grant for Centerbrook sidewalks and streetscapes. The Walnut Street Bridge replacement contractor had been selected: NERI, Inc., and work would begin before the end of June. He met with Ivoryton Playhouse leadership about a potential NEA “Our Town” grant for public art and performance. He updated the Commission on legislation that recently passed, including SB 922 concerning Temporary Health Care Structures.

6. Correspondence & Invoices

There was a contract extension proposal from CME Associates for planning services and clerical services for the Planning Commission. **Motion to authorize the Chairman to sign the contract extension** by Ralph Monaco, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.**

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Erin Bogan, **seconded** by Ralph Monaco. **Motion carried unanimously.**
Meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

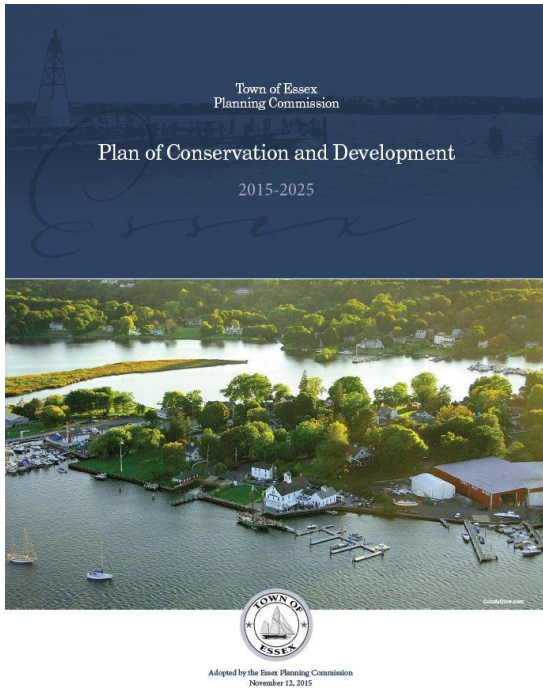
John Guszkowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
06/07 2017 at 11:57 A.M.
Erin M. Foglia
ESSEX, CT - ASSIST. TOWN CLERK



Essex Housing Needs Survey

Presentation of Results
Planning Commission Meeting
June 8, 2017



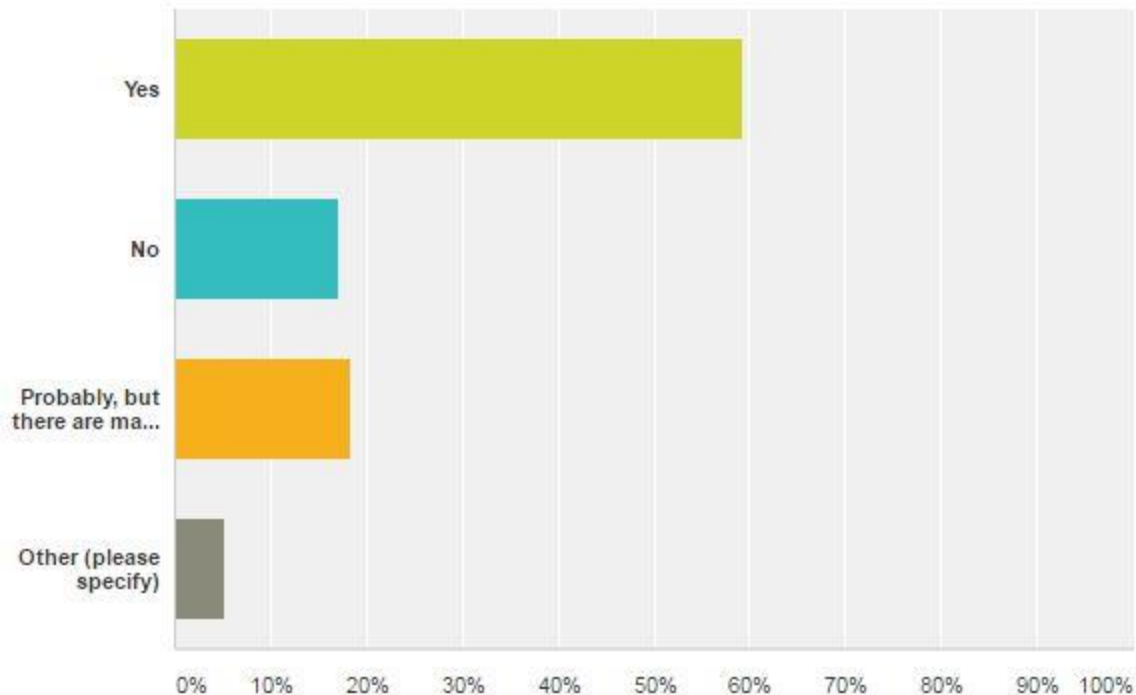
Many Connecticut municipalities are devoting attention to whether they have the right mix of housing choices. Longtime residents are interested in downsizing out of larger single-family homes, adult children would like to return to Town after college, and many businesses are looking for housing nearby for their workforce at prices that are attainable.

The Essex Planning Commission, which recently completed an update to the comprehensive Essex Plan of Conservation & Development, has a special interest in housing in Town, and believe that a wider array of housing opportunities will be important to maintaining Essex's special vibrancy and competitiveness as a residential community. Along with the Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Commission, and Essex Housing Authority, the Planning Commission is interested in the public's perspective of Essex's housing situation.



Do you think that having a wide range of housing types and costs is an important factor in Essex's growth and vitality?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 3

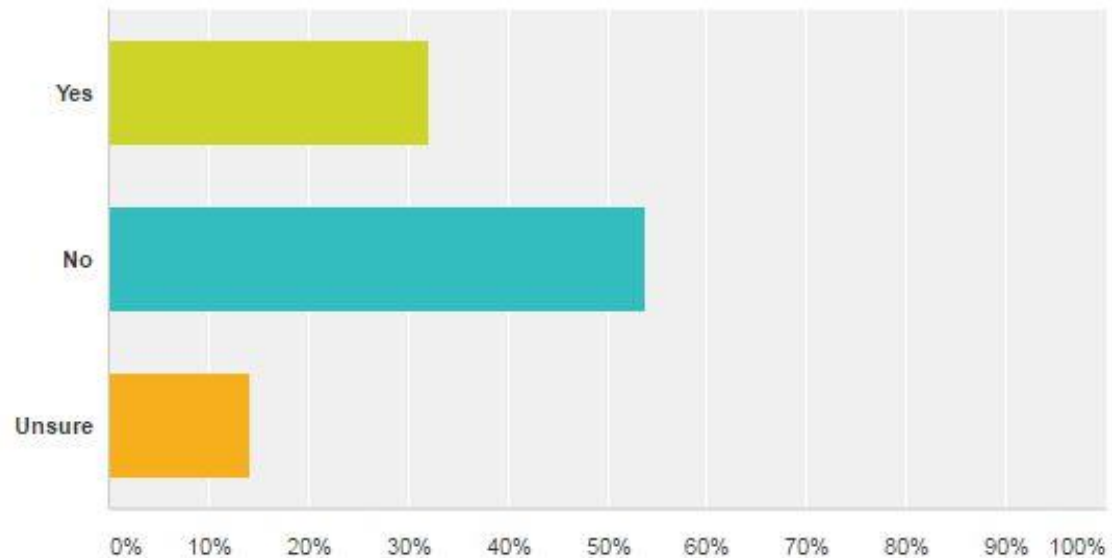


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	59.21%	180
No	17.11%	52
Probably, but there are many more important factors	18.42%	56
Other (please specify)	5.26%	16
Total		304



Do you think that there are currently enough housing options in Essex?

Answered: 305 Skipped: 2

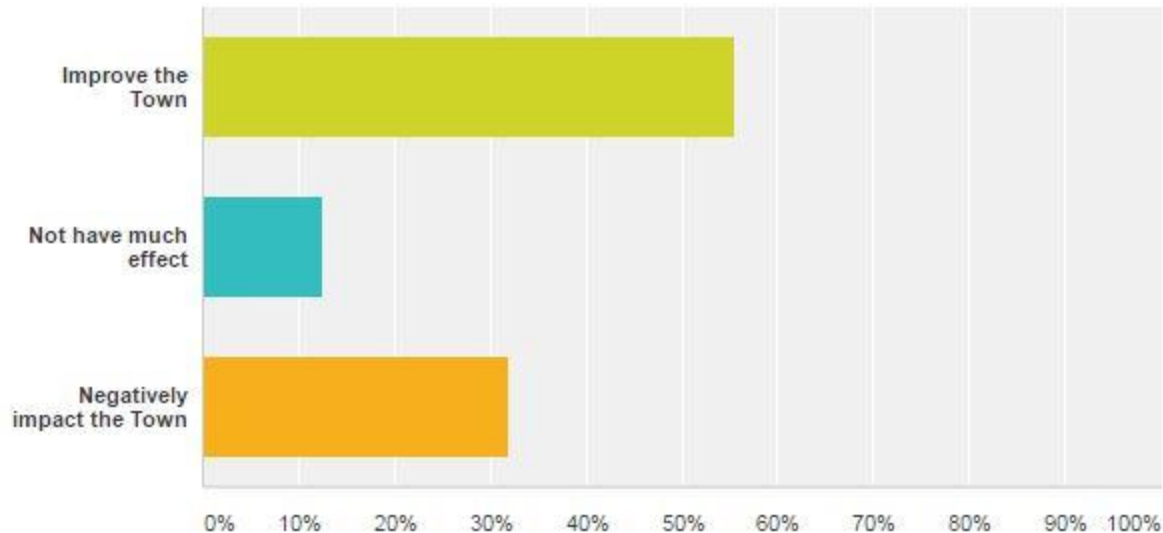


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	32.13%	98
No	53.77%	164
Unsure	14.10%	43
Total		305



Do you believe increasing the housing options in Essex would help improve the Town, negatively impact the Town, or not have much effect on the Town?

Answered: 297 Skipped: 10

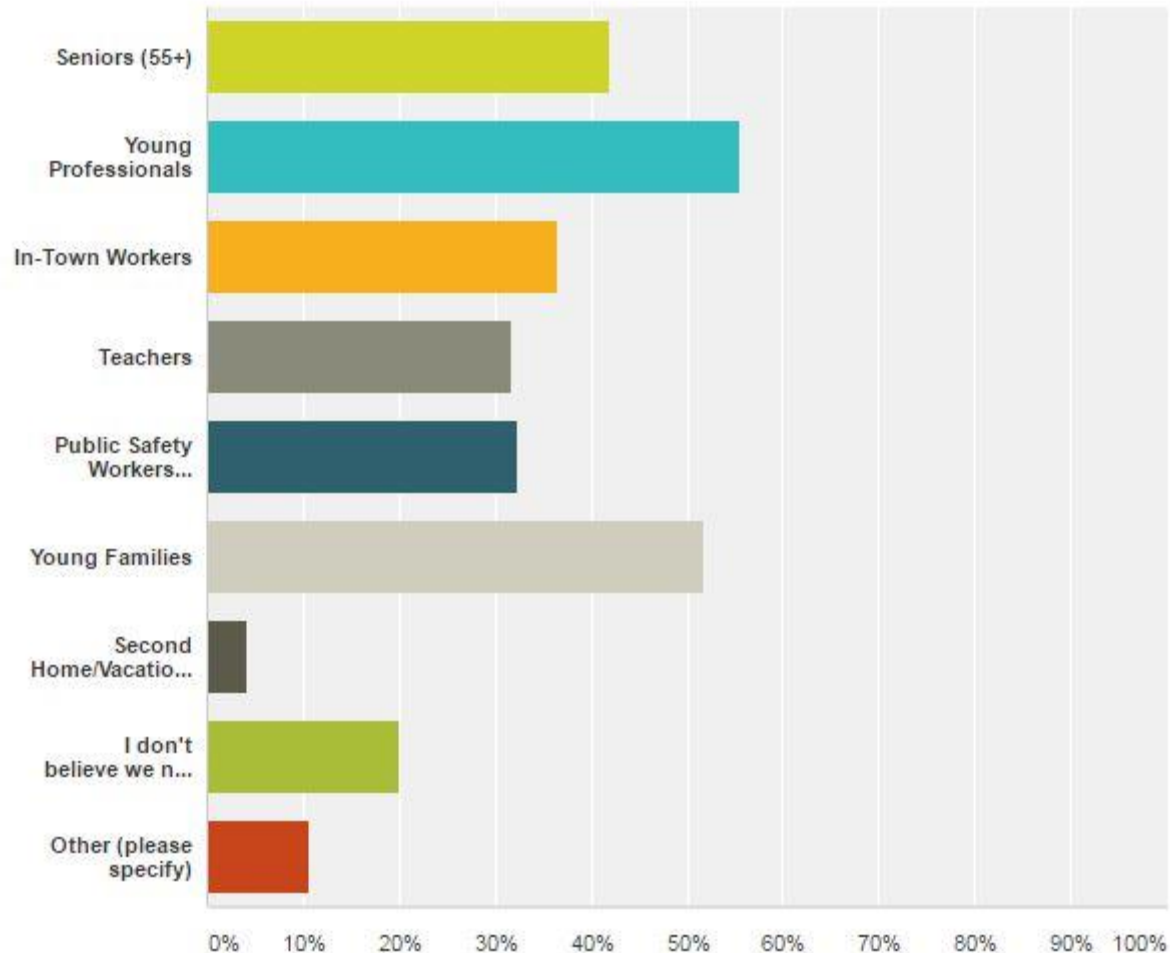


Answer Choices	Responses	
Improve the Town	55.56%	165
Not have much effect	12.46%	37
Negatively impact the Town	31.99%	95
Total		297



If you believe that more housing options are needed in Essex, for whom do you think they are most needed? (Select as many choices as you believe are necessary)

Answered: 293 Skipped: 14



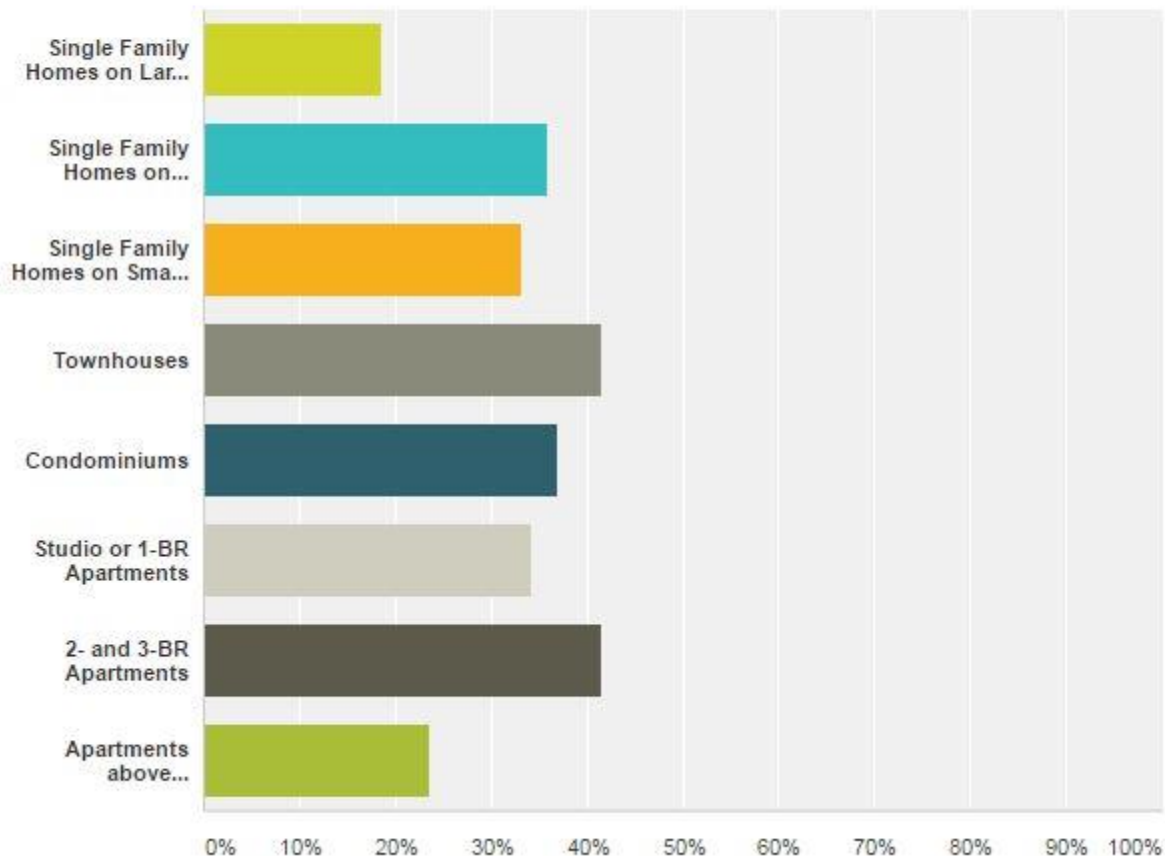
For whom do you think housing options are needed...

Answer Choices	Responses	
▼ Seniors (55+)	41.98%	123
▼ Young Professionals	55.63%	163
▼ In-Town Workers	36.52%	107
▼ Teachers	31.74%	93
▼ Public Safety Workers (police, fire, ambulance)	32.42%	95
▼ Young Families	51.88%	152
▼ Second Home/Vacation Homes	4.10%	12
▼ I don't believe we need more housing options	20.14%	59
▼ Other (please specify) Responses	10.58%	31
Total Respondents: 293		



**If the Town of Essex were to focus on developing new types of housing, what types do you think would be needed most?
(Select as many choices as you believe are necessary)**

Answered: 284 Skipped: 23



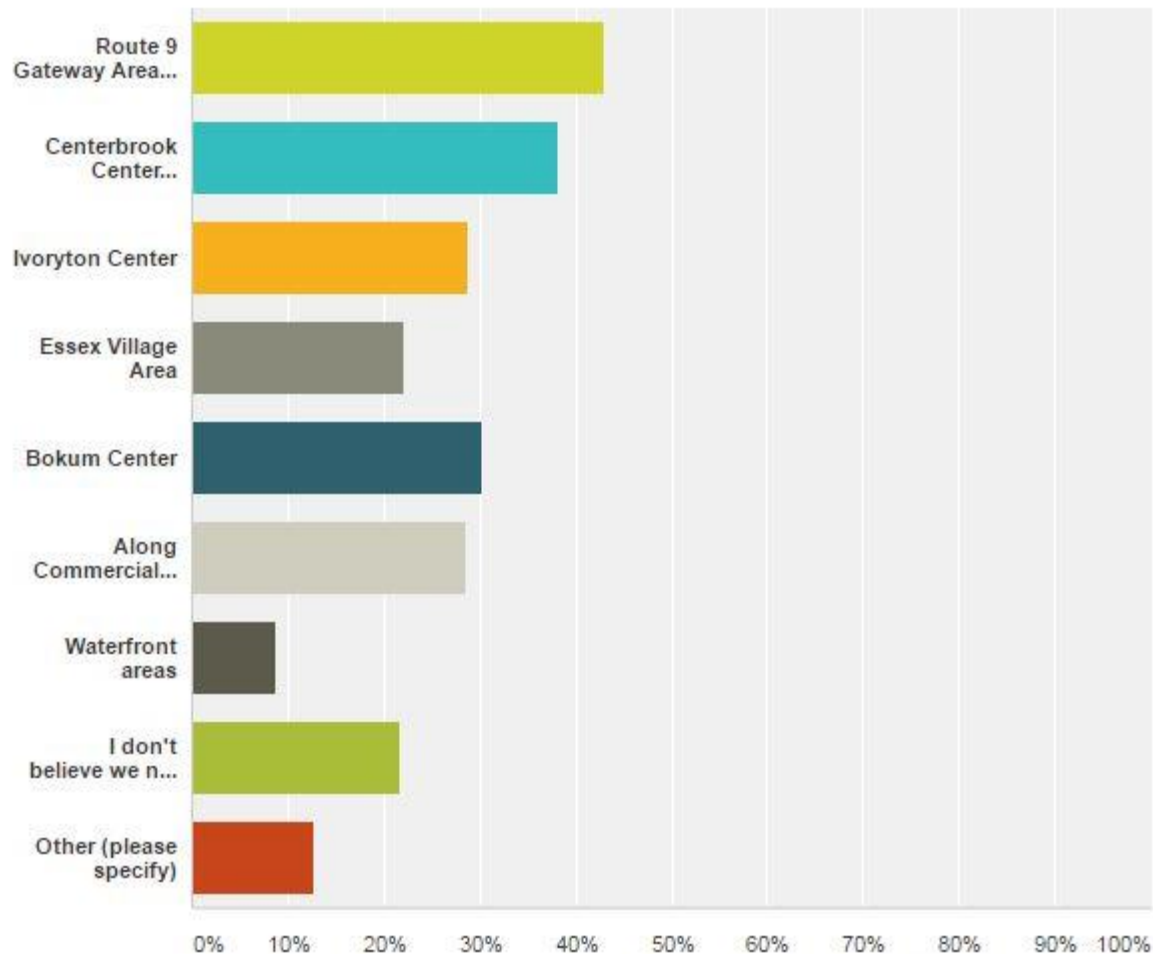
What types of housing are needed...

Answer Choices	Responses
Single Family Homes on Large (2 acre+) Lots	18.66% 53
Single Family Homes on Moderate (0.5-2 acres) Lots	35.92% 102
Single Family Homes on Small (Less than 0.5 acre) Lots	33.10% 94
Townhouses	41.55% 118
Condominiums	36.97% 105
Studio or 1-BR Apartments	34.15% 97
2- and 3-BR Apartments	41.55% 118
Apartments above Retail/Office Uses	23.59% 67
Total Respondents: 284	



Similarly, if the Town were to focus on developing new housing options, which do you think are the highest priority locations?

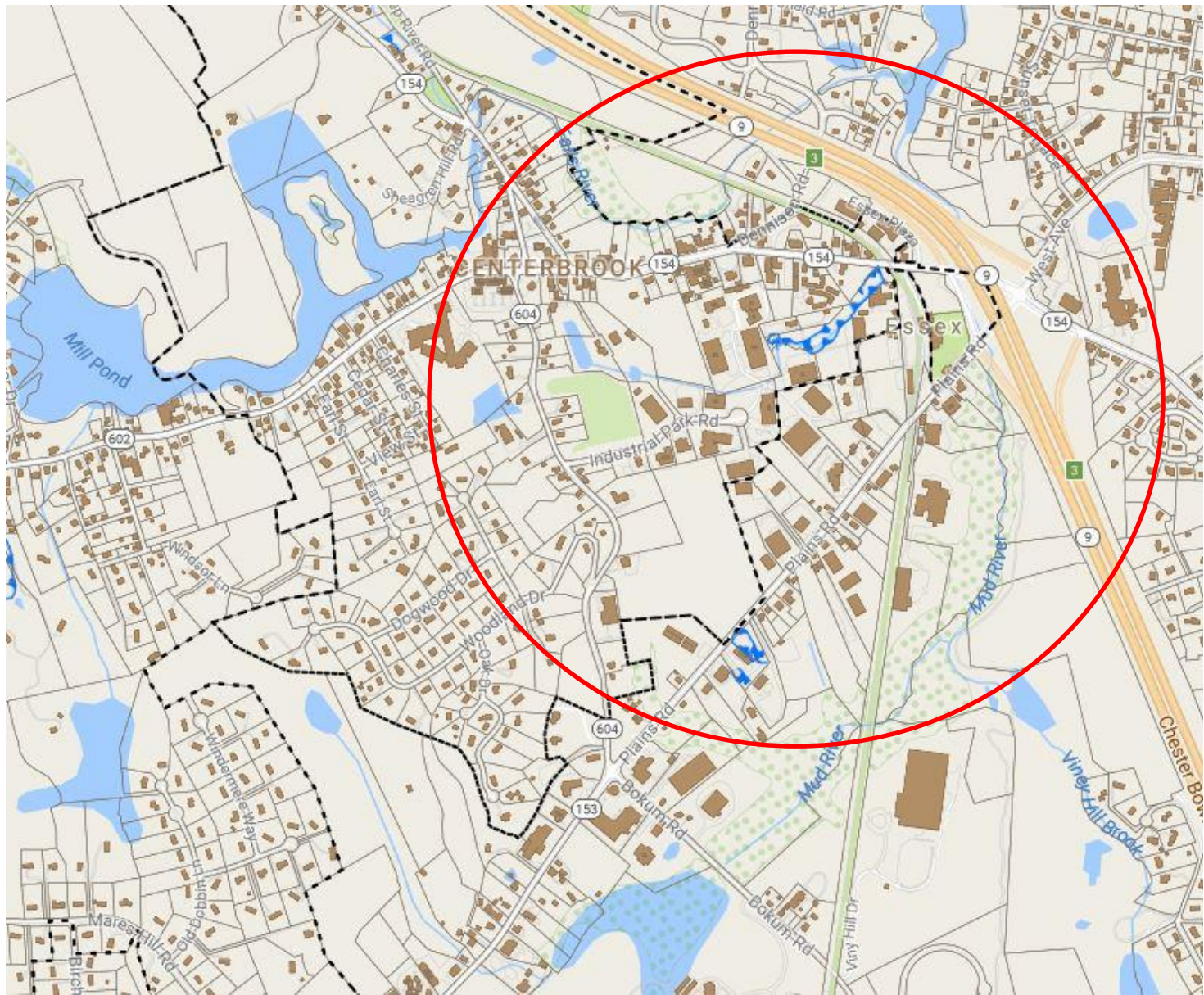
Answered: 298 Skipped: 9



Priority locations...

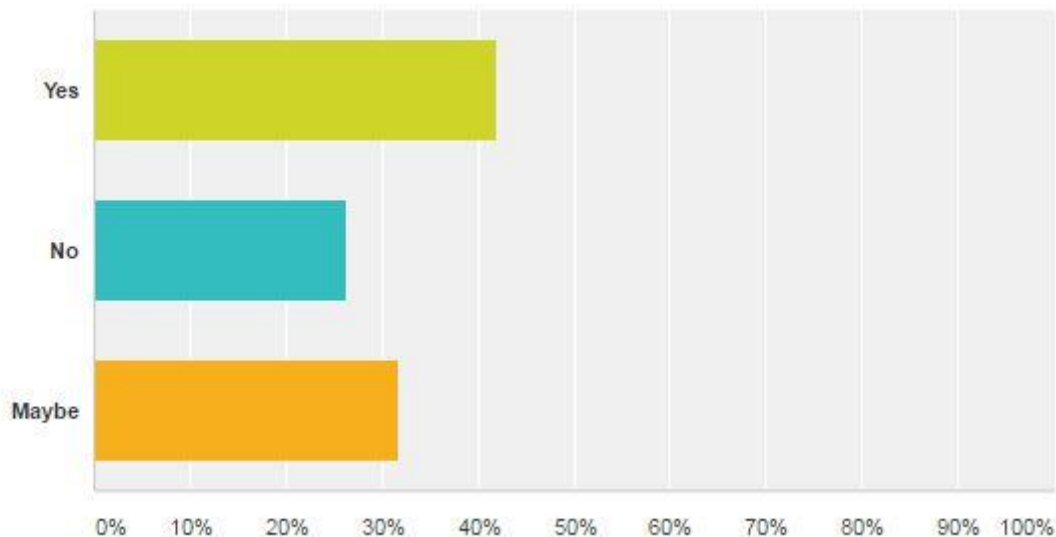
Answer Choices	Responses	
▼ Route 9 Gateway Area (near Essex Steam Train and Witch Hazel factory)	42.95%	128
▼ Centerbrook Center (Spencer's Corner/Cumberland Farms area)	38.26%	114
▼ Ivoryton Center	28.86%	86
▼ Essex Village Area	22.15%	66
▼ Bokum Center	30.20%	90
▼ Along Commercial Strips (Main Street, Plains/Westbrook Rd.)	28.52%	85
▼ Waterfront areas	8.72%	26
▼ I don't believe we need more housing options	21.81%	65
▼ Other (please specify) Responses	12.75%	38
Total Respondents: 298		





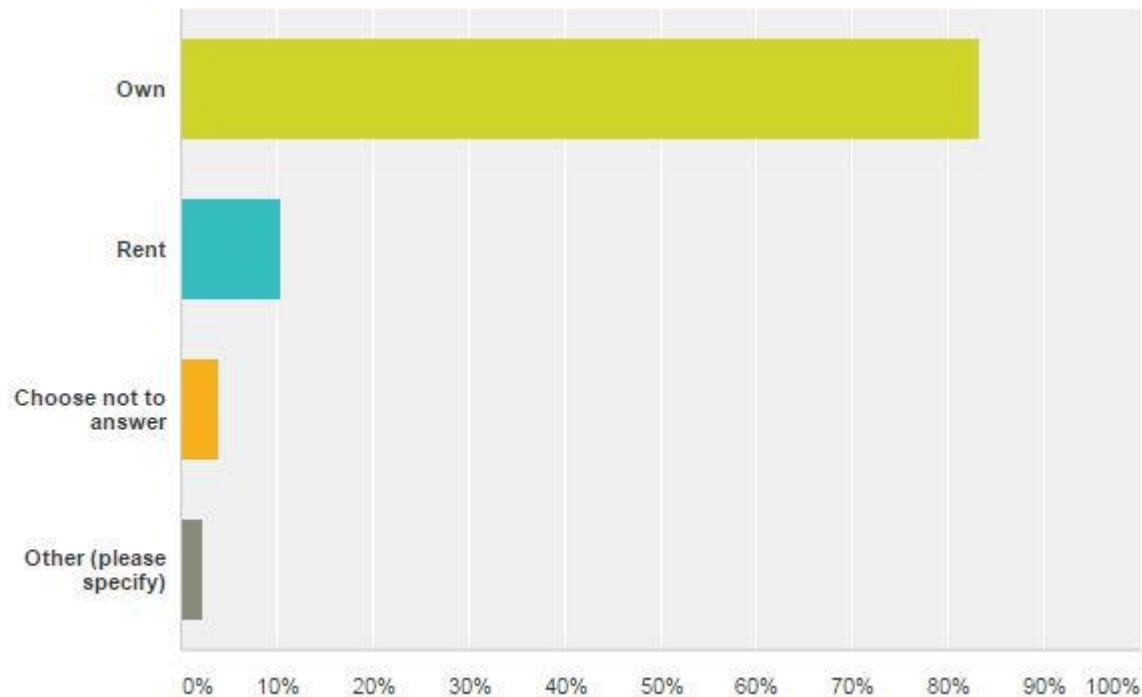
Essex's current housing stock is weighted to single-family homes; 79% of units are single-family and nearly half of the Town's multi-family units in the age-restricted Essex Meadows complex. Many Towns facing a similarly skewed housing stock are building smaller homes and multifamily units for rental or ownership. Would you like to hear more or participate in a discussion about why other Towns believe that this is in their interest and why it might be in Essex's interest to pursue these approaches?

Answered: 303 Skipped: 4



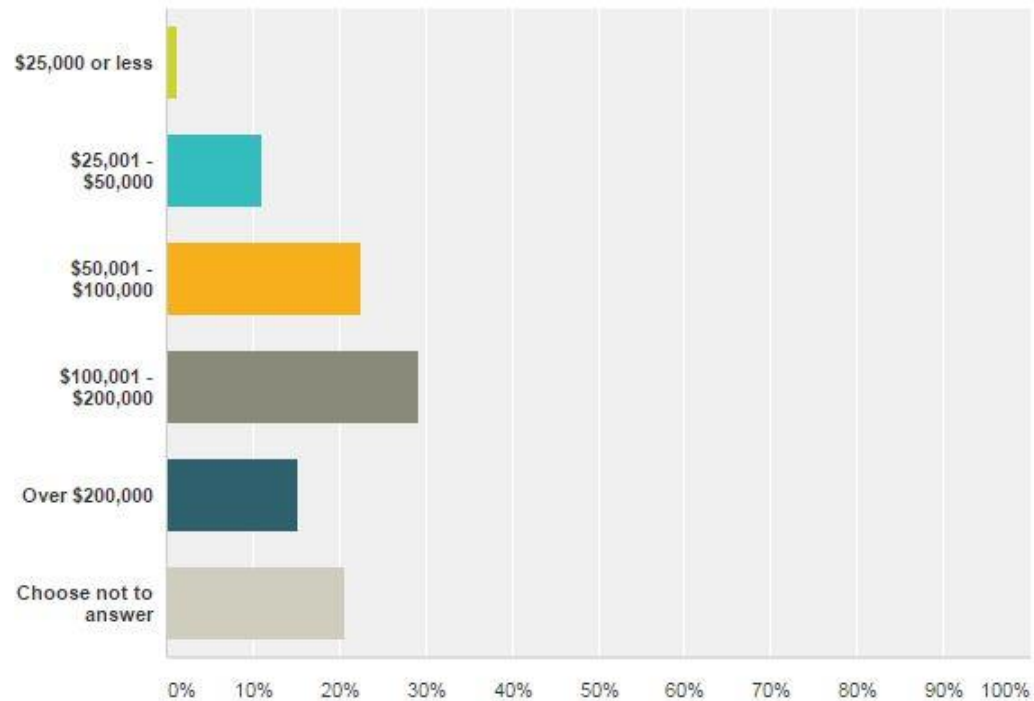
For demographic purposes, it would be helpful to have a sense of the household income and ownership status of those responding to our survey. Individual responses to these questions will not be shared with the public or any outside entities. Do you own or rent your current residence?

Answered: 306 Skipped: 1



What is the range of your total household income?

Answered: 301 Skipped: 6

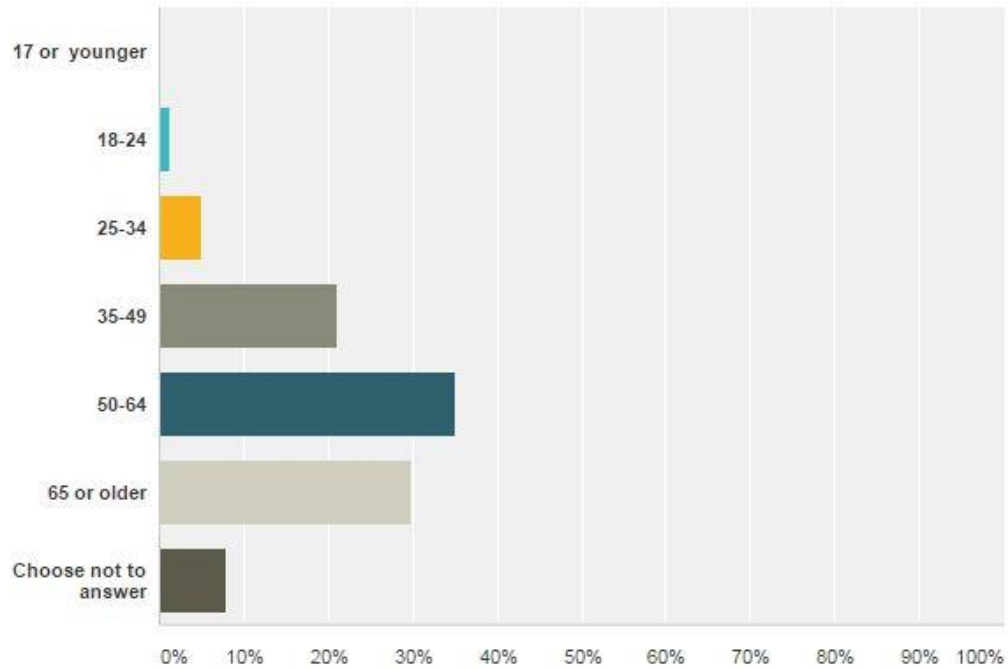


Answer Choices	Responses
▼ \$25,000 or less	1.33% 4
▼ \$25,001 - \$50,000	10.96% 33
▼ \$50,001 - \$100,000	22.59% 68
▼ \$100,001 - \$200,000	29.24% 88
▼ Over \$200,000	15.28% 46
▼ Choose not to answer	20.60% 62
Total	301



What is your age?

Answered: 305 Skipped: 2



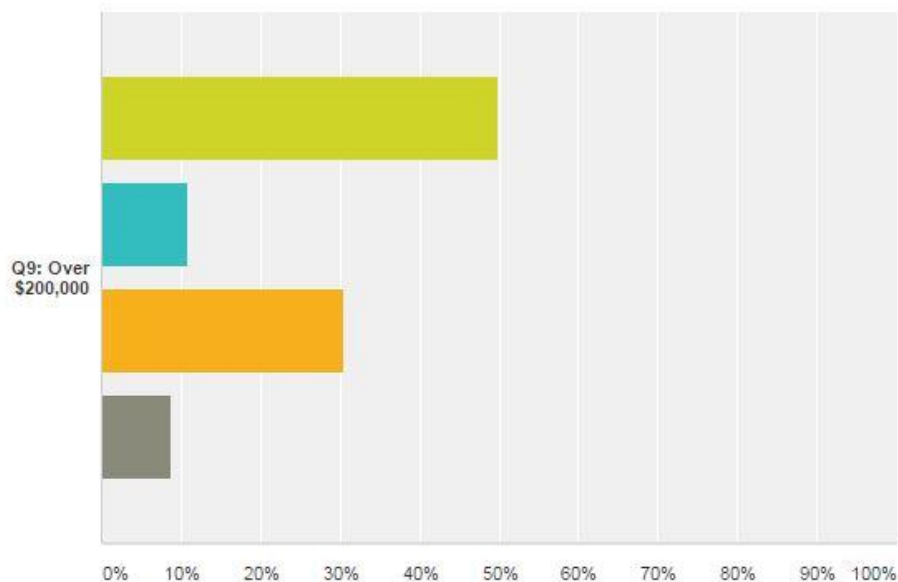
Answer Choices	Responses
17 or younger	0.00% 0
18-24	1.31% 4
25-34	4.92% 15
35-49	20.98% 64
50-64	35.08% 107
65 or older	29.84% 91
Choose not to answer	7.87% 24
Total	305



Crosstab for \$200,000+ Respondents

Do you think that having a wide range of housing types and costs is an important factor in Essex's growth and vitality?

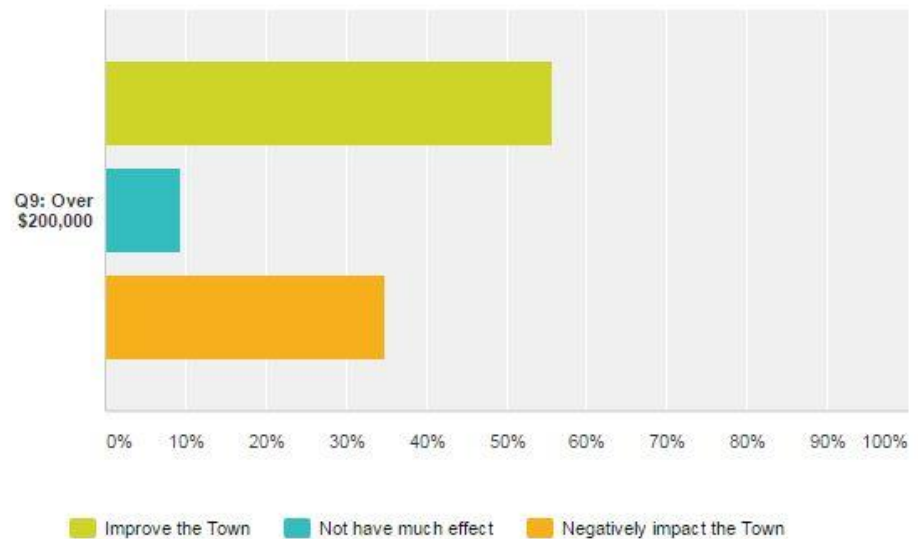
Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



Yes No Probably, but there are many more important factors
Other (please specify)

Do you believe increasing the housing options in Essex would help improve the Town, negatively impact the Town, or not have much effect on the Town?

Answered: 43 Skipped: 3

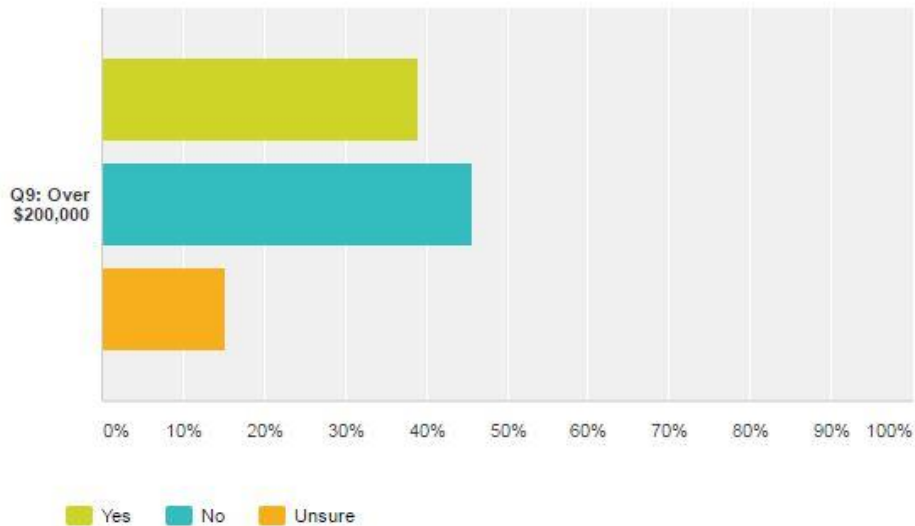


Improve the Town Not have much effect Negatively impact the Town

Crosstab for \$200,000+ Respondents

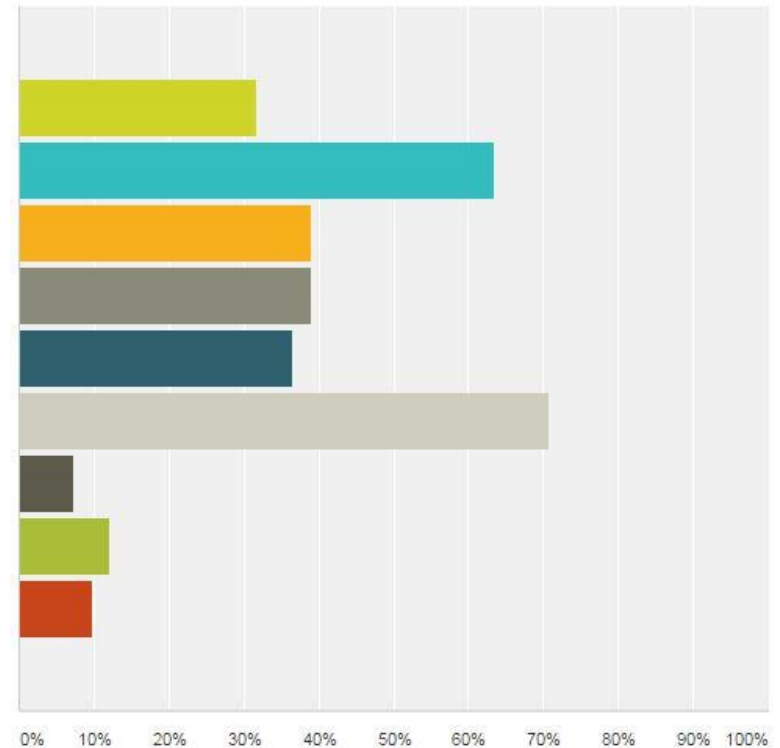
Do you think that there are currently enough housing options in Essex?

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



If you believe that more housing options are needed in Essex, for whom do you think they are most needed? (Select as many choices as you believe are necessary)

Answered: 41 Skipped: 5

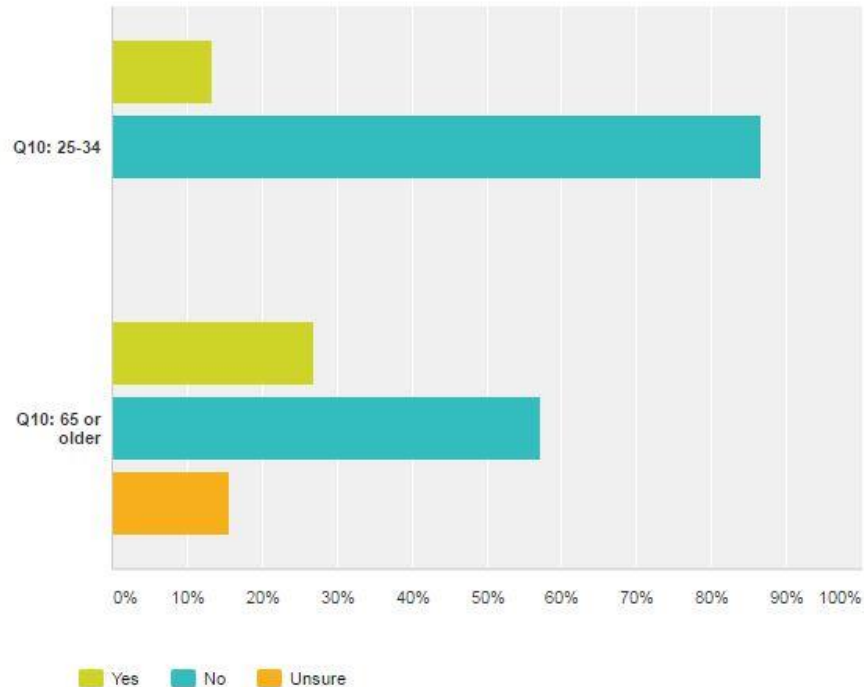


Seniors (55+) Young Professionals In-Town Workers Teachers
Public Safety Workers (police, fire, ambulance) Young Families
Second Home/Vacation Homes I don't believe we need more housing options
Other (please specify)

Crosstab for Older and Younger Respondents

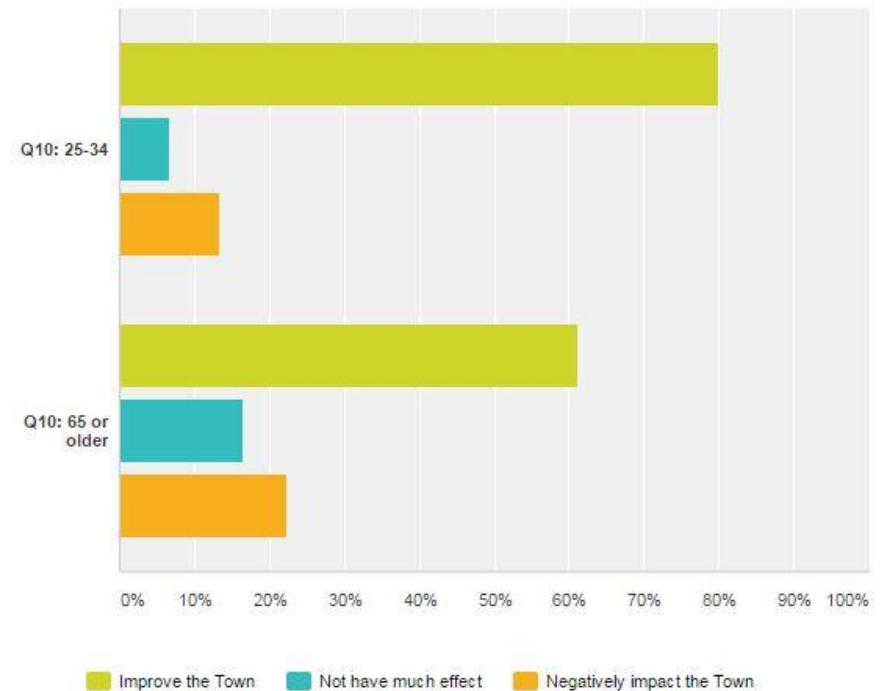
Do you think that there are currently enough housing options in Essex?

Answered: 104 Skipped: 2



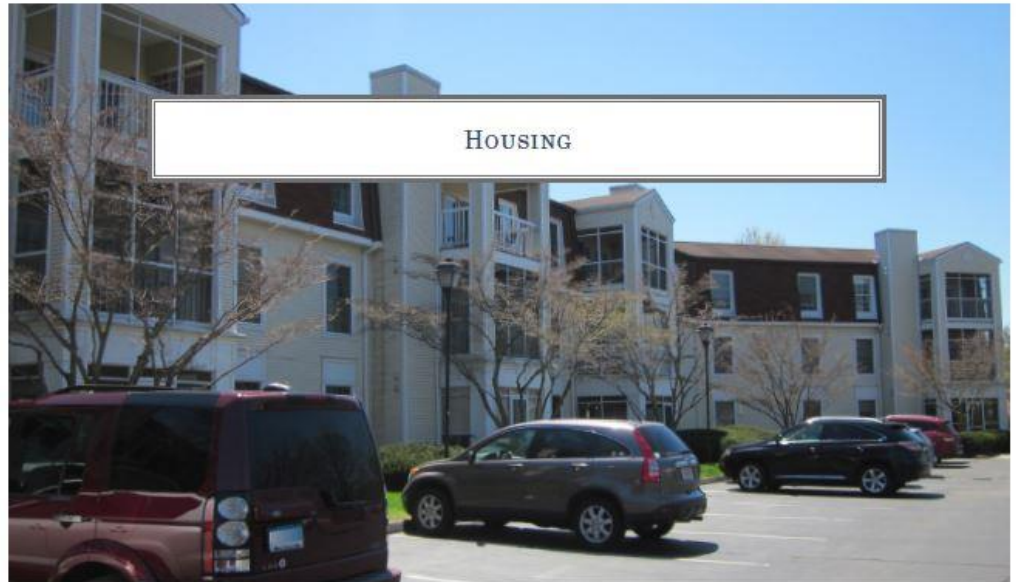
Do you believe increasing the housing options in Essex would help improve the Town, negatively impact the Town, or not have much effect on the Town?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 6



Next Steps

- Ad-Hoc Committee of Planning Commission
- Essex Senior & Affordable Housing
- Shoreline Basic Needs Task Force
- Development Partnerships?



4.

Expand the variety of housing options available throughout Essex, including more affordable housing opportunities in both mixed use developments and within traditional subdivision development.



Questions/Comments

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