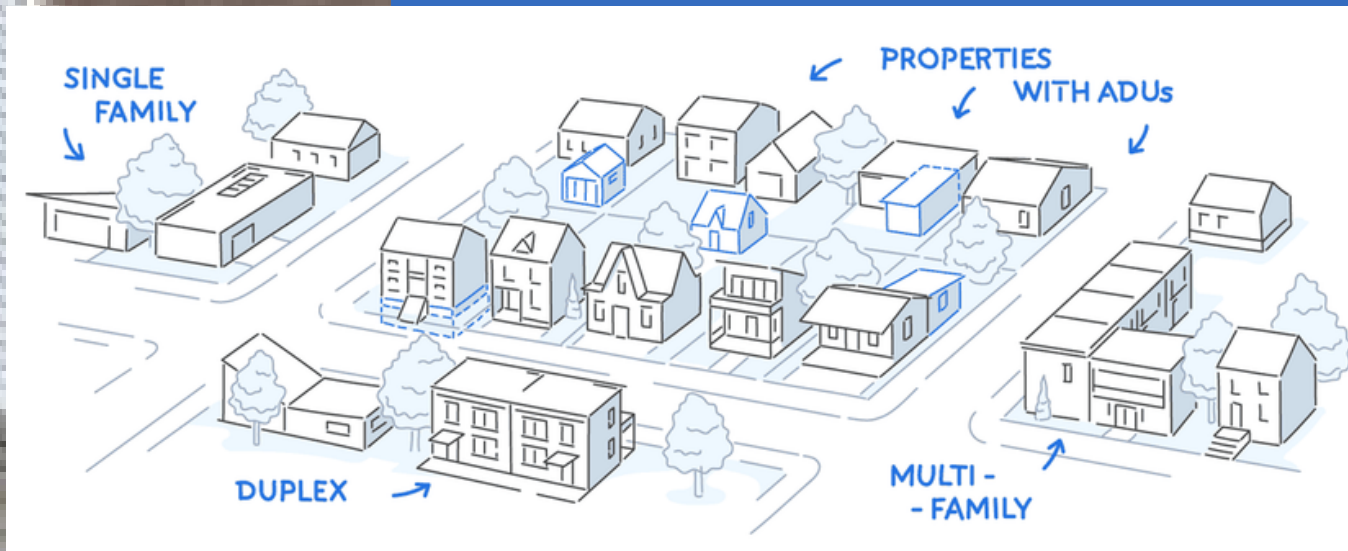


2021

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY IN BLACKSBURG



Results from Phase II
Public Engagement

AMENITIES,
HOUSING TYPES, AND DENSITIES

OVERVIEW OF INVOLVEMENT, PROCESS & PEOPLE

This document summarizes the feedback and key themes from Phase II of the Town's public engagement process regarding Housing Affordability in Blacksburg. This second phase asked respondents to provide input on preferred community and neighborhood amenities, housing types, and housing densities.

A major goal of the survey was to better understand how community members feel about a variety of higher density (and potentially more affordable) housing types than the traditional single-family home on a 1/4 acre lot. Providing opportunities for greater variation in housing type and density with preferred amenities could help bring more affordable housing to the town.

This phase of engagement was open for six weeks on the Let's Talk Blacksburg project page and:

- received 1,700 visits and feedback from 1,041 respondents
- received 165 more views of the local housing trends video
- had 100 downloads of phase 1 public engagement report and
- had 38 views of the regional housing study presentation.

PHASES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS



VALUES

Community Values,
Concerns and
Priorities

HOUSING & COMMUNITY

Preferred Amenities,
Housing Types and
Density of Development

STRATEGIES

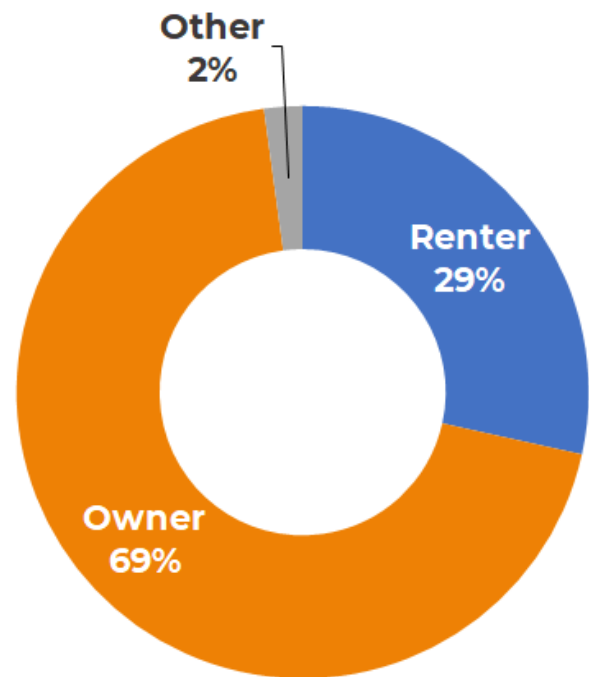
Compare and Prioritize
Strategies and
Investment

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Renters vs. Owners

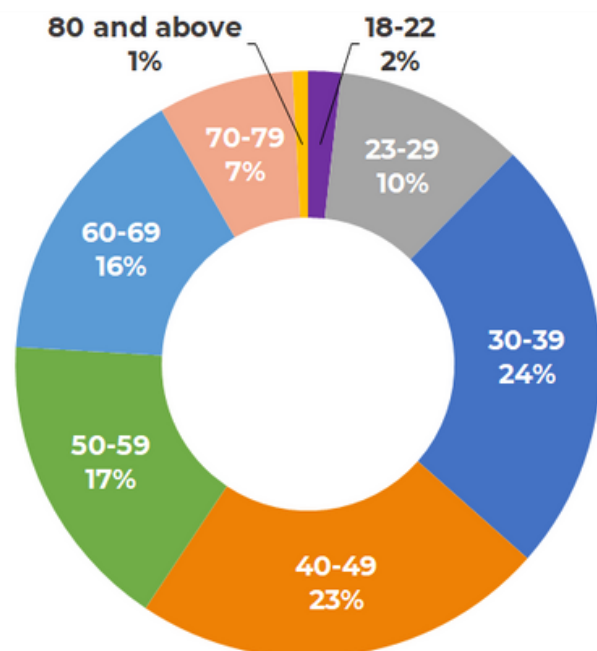
This survey was specifically focused on seeking non-student resident input.

The proportion of survey respondents that are homeowners versus renters does not reflect Blacksburg's actual occupancy type, which is comprised of 70% rental units and 30% owner-occupied units. However, the 9,500 rental units in town are largely occupied by students. Therefore, we believe that the survey responses received are actually in line with the makeup of our non-student permanent resident population.



Respondents by Age

This survey was targeted at non-student permanent residents living either within Blacksburg town limits, adjacent to Blacksburg, or those looking to purchase a home within Blacksburg. The number of survey respondents by age group generally mirrors our actual population estimates if we removed the students. We received a slightly higher response rate from ages 60+ and slightly fewer responses from 23-29 year-olds.



SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY LOCATION

Northwest (175)

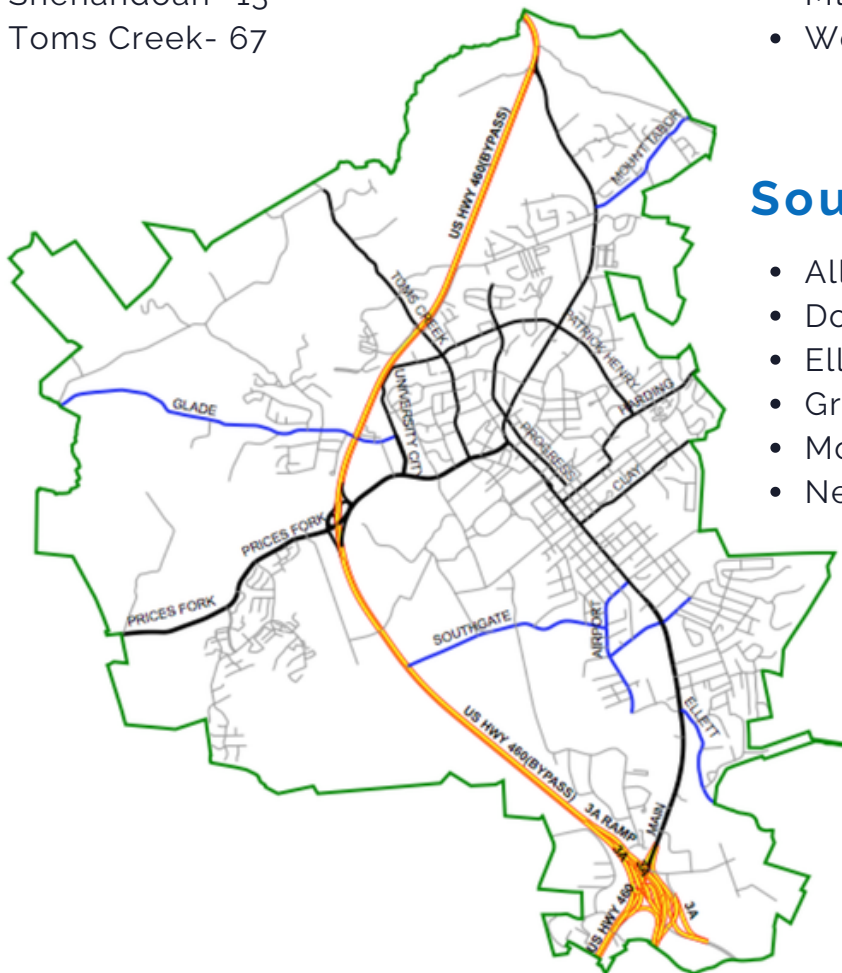
- Glade/Westover- 34
- McBryde- 40
- Northside Park/Givens Ln - 21
- Shenandoah- 13
- Toms Creek- 67

Northeast (139)

- Apperson Dickerson- 28
- Bennett Hill/Progress- 22
- Maple Ridge- 21
- Mt. Tabor- 34
- Woodbine/Wyatt- 34

Southeast (165)

- Alleghany- 22
- Downtown/Eastside- 24
- Ellett/Jennelle- 24
- Grissom/Highlands- 51
- Mountain View- 25
- Nellies Cave- 19



Southwest (100)

- Airport Acres- 17
- Hethwood- Prices Fork- 48
- Miller Southside- 30
- University- 5

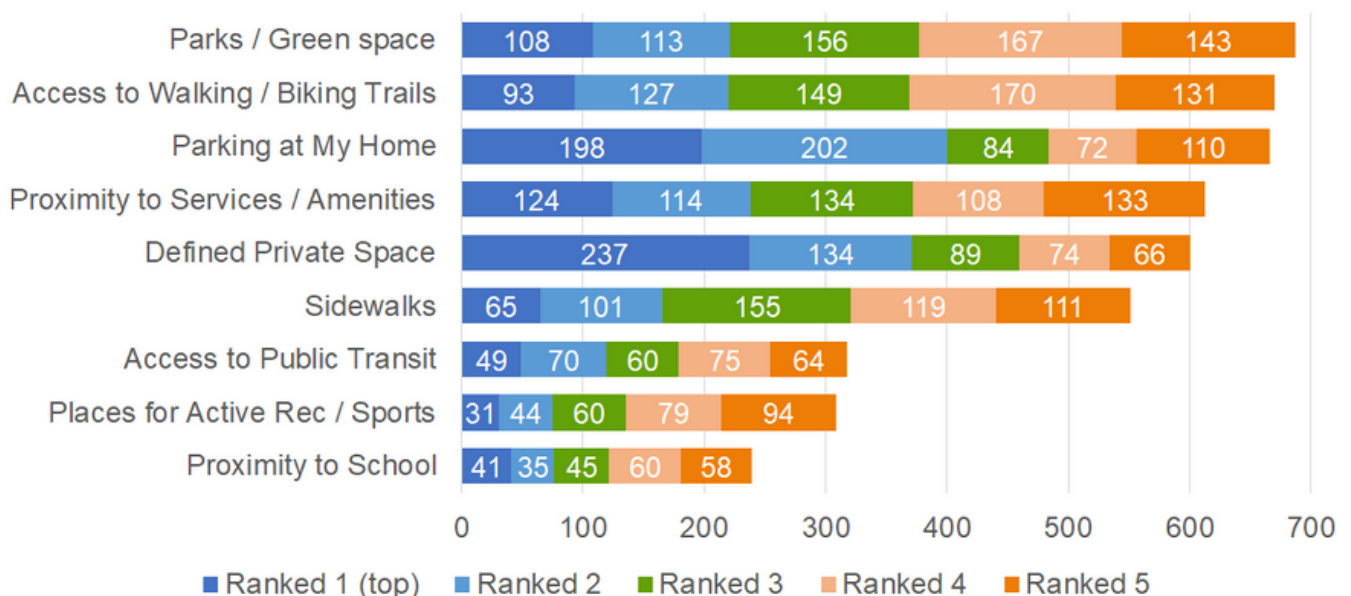
Other Areas

- Other areas in Town - 89
- Just outside Town- 106
- I don't live in Blacksburg - 55
- Non-response - 212

NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY AMENITIES

Survey respondents were asked to rank their top 5 neighborhood and community amenities in order of priority. The top five selected included defined private space, parking at the home, greenspace, bike/walking trails, and proximity to services/ downtown. These were closely followed by sidewalks. Fewer respondents chose transit, proximity to schools, and places for active recreation. Other priority amenities, not included on the list, but suggested by survey respondents in the comments included internet access and streetlights.

Which Amenities are Most Important to You When Choosing a Place to Live?
In Ranked Order



The top priority amenities were private space and parking at the home.

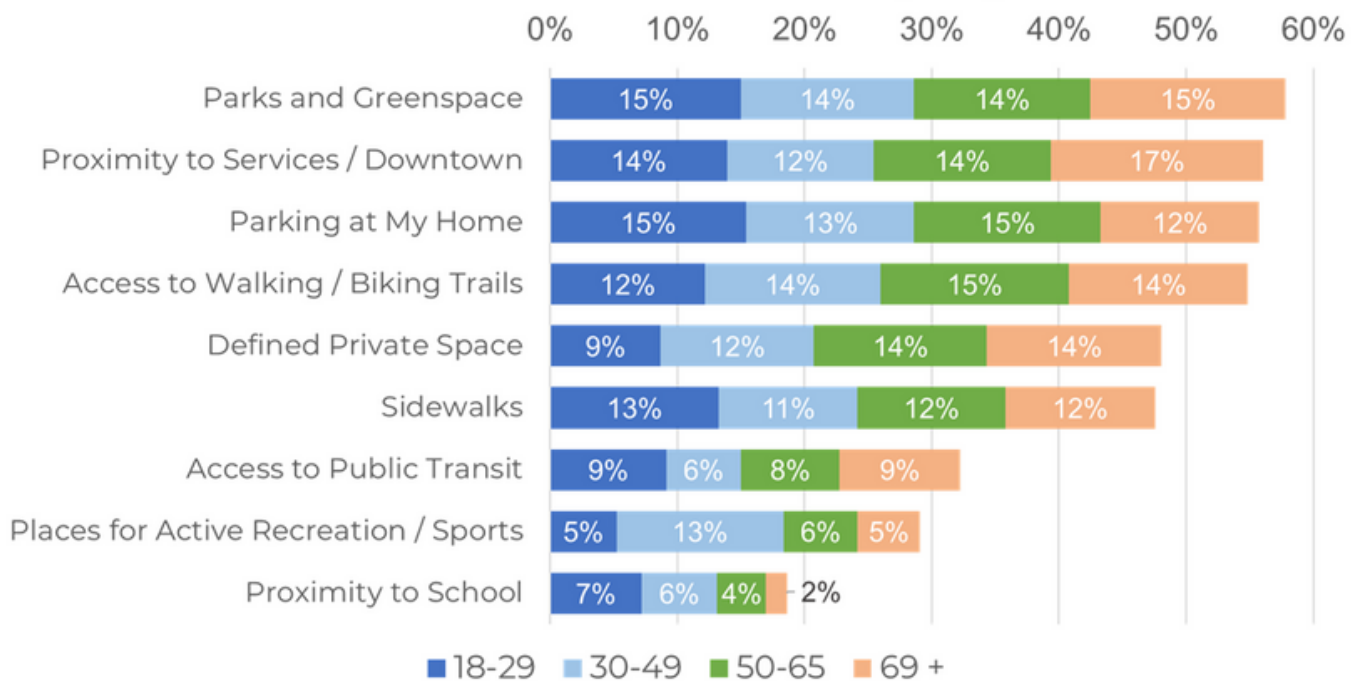
Respondents noted that an individual yard or balcony was important, even if it wasn't very large. They also noted that parking was important for daily convenience. A few respondents noted how insufficient parking for students is having spillover impacts on single-family neighborhoods while others noted that student parking was excessive and that space could be used for other purposes.

The most commonly selected amenities were access to green space, walking/biking trails, and proximity to services.

Many respondents noted the benefits of trails for recreation and wellbeing. Many also noted the importance of creating connectivity and safe access points to both trails and greenspaces throughout town. Trails are a preferred mode of transportation to work and services, especially when located closer to downtown/services.




Preferred Amenities by Age



Some amenities were valued consistently by all age groups but others like places for active recreation, proximity to schools, or the need for private space differed among age groups.



Housing Types



Survey respondents were asked to share how supportive they would be of 9 different proposed housing types specifically for nonstudent households. These housing types were organized by level of density. This section provides an analysis of their responses.

LOWER DENSITY HOUSING TYPES

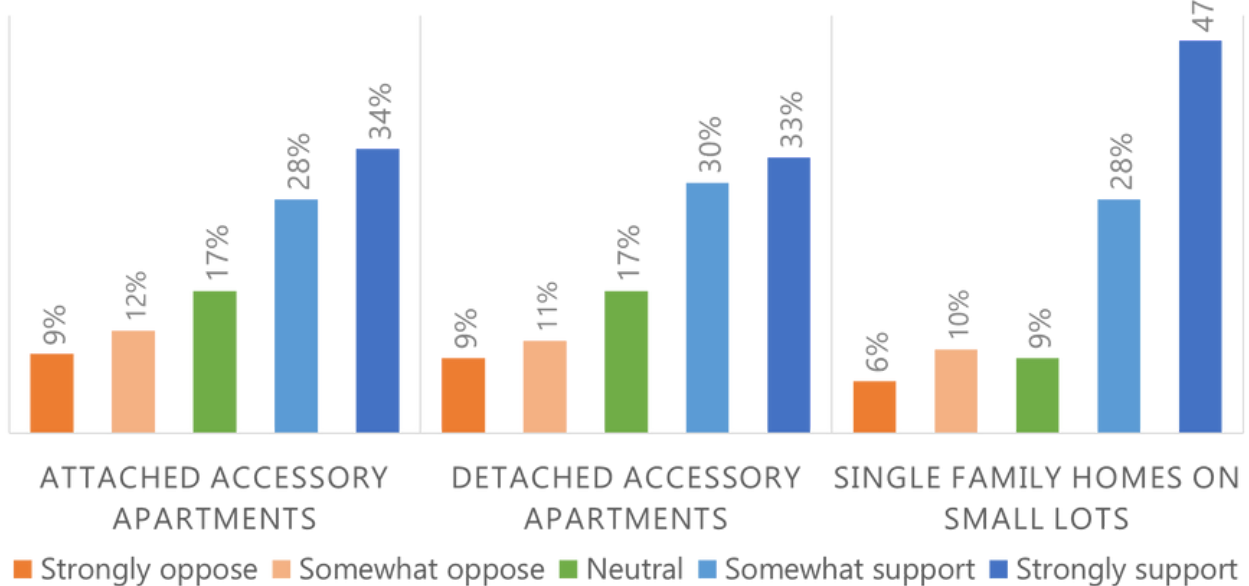
Overview

The lower density housing types presented in the survey include single-family detached homes on smaller lots, as well as attached and detached accessory apartments. Outside of duplex/triplexes covered in the next section, respondents preferred these lower density housing types more than any other housing type.

The following were predominant themes expressed in the comments:

- There is a need to protect single-family neighborhoods for full-time residents. Accessory apartments may result in more students and rentals in areas we want to protect for families and homeownership.
- Even though detached small lot homes would be desirable for many, these homes may still not be affordable to low and middle-income households, if priced over \$300,000.
- To keep our small-town feel and to account for the loss of individual yard space, incorporating common greenspace, trails, and community gathering places throughout a neighborhood development will be important.
- A handful of respondents noted that they wished more single-level detached homes with minimal yards were available.

LOWER DENSITY HOUSING TYPES



Small Lot Development

- Concerns that this level of density feels more like NoVA.
- Concerns that this development type is not dense enough to account for the housing demand.
- Preference for homes to be less cookie cutter and have a unique look and feel.
- There should still be sidewalks, shared green space, and community spaces (playground, community gardens, etc.)
- New developments should include standards and restrictions to protect owner occupancy.



"I strongly support this option for areas with existing single-family homes. I do not support this option for new developments, because the housing crisis is so severe that I believe new developments should be reserved for moderate density at the bare minimum, preferentially high density."



Accessory Apartments

- Concerns that they will primarily be rented by college students or used for short-term rentals.
- Concerns about sufficient enforcement of rental restrictions.
- Strong desire to maintain the atmosphere of our single-family home neighborhoods.
- The Town doesn't need an owner-occupancy requirement if you can limit students.
- Excitement for this option by young professionals and for extended families.



MODERATE DENSITY HOUSING TYPES

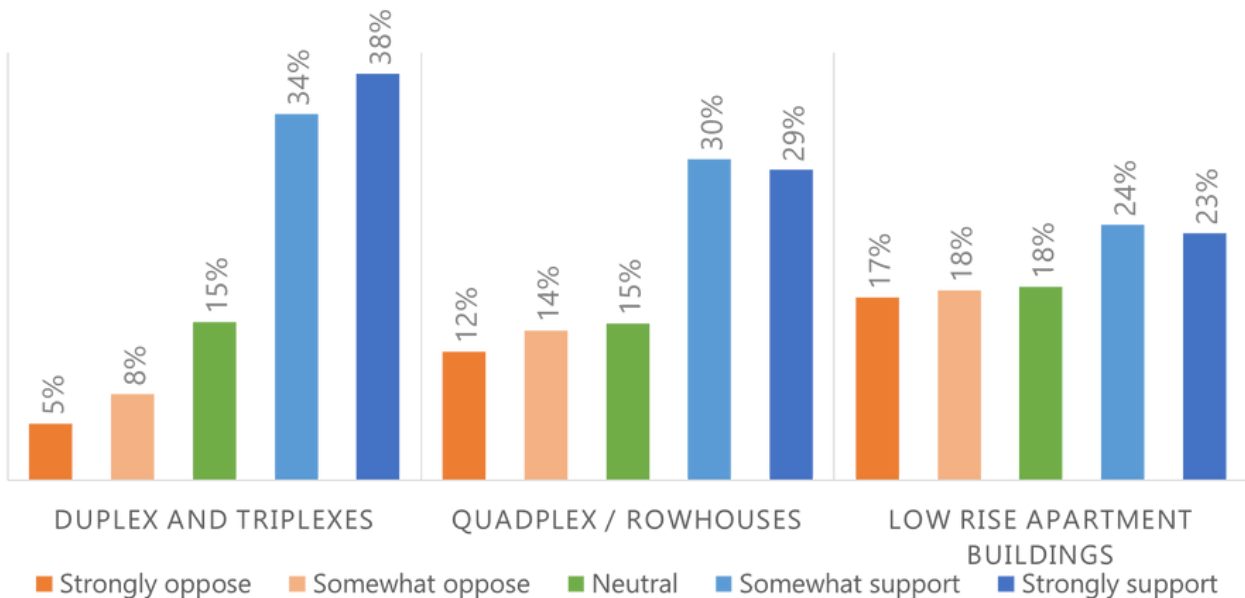
Overview

The moderate density housing types presented in the survey included duplexes/triplexes, rowhouses, and low-rise (1-3 story) apartment buildings. All of these housing types had more supporters than opponents, especially for duplex/triplexes.

The following were predominant themes expressed in the comments:

- Even though more townhomes would be well supported, when looking at current for-sale prices of existing townhomes there were concerns about their affordability for low and middle-income households.
- There are already too many low-rise apartment complexes in the community and we shouldn't build anymore if we can't prevent them from being rented by students,
- There are concerns about the design, quality, and durability of these housing types, based on those that currently exist in our community.
- Some respondents noted that they would like to see additional moderate density housing types including co-housing, group housing, and permanent supportive housing (housing with services), as well as more single-level homes appropriate for seniors or those with disabilities.

MODERATE DENSITY HOUSING TYPES



Attached Townhomes

- Concerns these will be bought by parents of college students or investors.
- Concerns this housing type detracts from the appeal of Blacksburg (unique look/feel).
- Concerns about the quality of construction, design, and lack of green space in current townhome developments.
- Concerns about property management companies not maintaining for rent townhomes.
- A desire for more single-story townhome options.



"We have SO many apartment complexes that already exist or are being re-built right now. BUILD UP NOT OUT! No more low-rise cookie-cutter apartment complexes on the edges of town! Build up DOWNTOWN, to limit sprawl that is ruining the lovely green farms and spaces on the edges of town."



Low Rise Apartments

- Many concerns that too many exist already.
- Preferences for building up than creating more lower-rise apartments.
- They should only be in defined areas of town and incorporate careful site design to make them more attractive.
- Need for quality soundproof construction and incorporation of balconies.
- Concerns about poor property maintenance.
- A good option only if they restrict students.
- Consider condos to help create a pathway for ownership versus just rental.



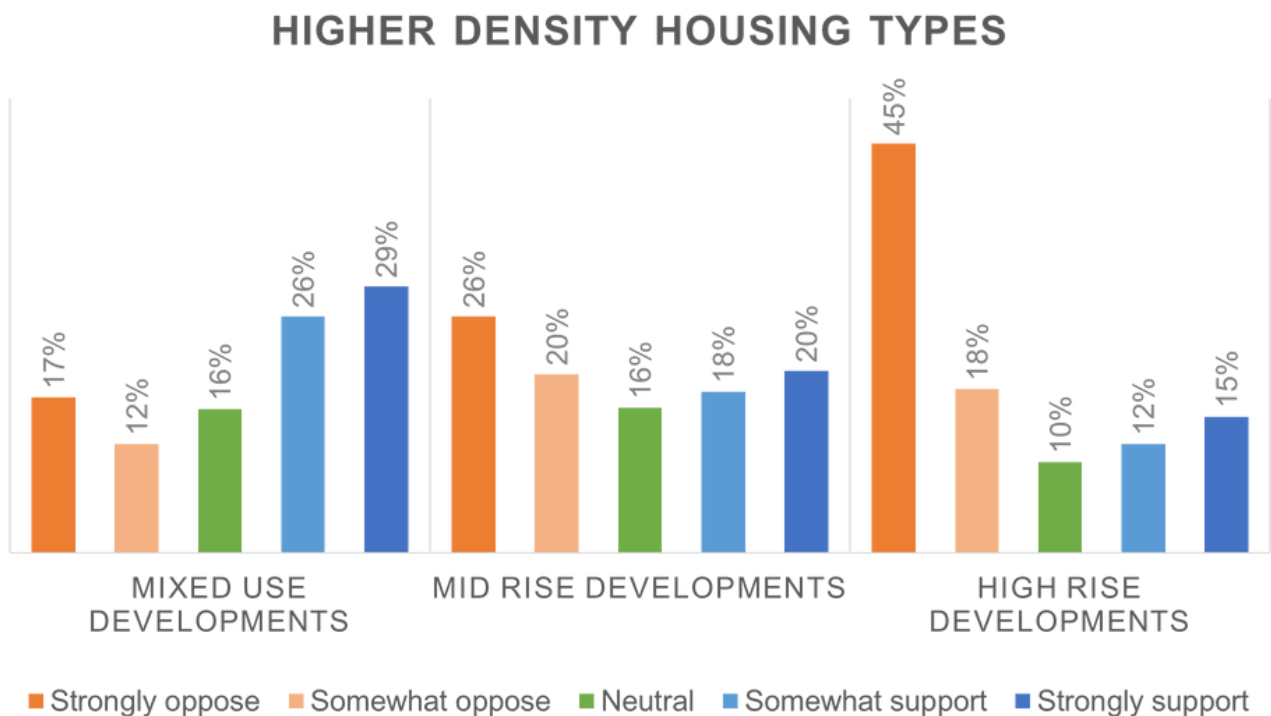
HIGHER DENSITY HOUSING TYPES

Overview

The higher density housing types included mixed-use developments as well as midrise (4-6 story) and highrise (7+ story) apartments. Respondents were more supportive of mixed-use developments than mid and high-rise apartment housing types, which had more opposition than support.

The following were predominant themes expressed in the comments:

- These mid and high-rise developments are meant for a city and not consistent with maintaining a small-town feel.
- They may have a place in the downtown area if developed with seniors and young professionals (versus students) in mind.
- Higher density housing would allow for more walkability and bike-ability, less driving, more amenities close by, and less sprawl.
- There are concerns about whether these options would be affordable and if they would generate too much traffic.



Mid-Highrise Apartments

- Many concerns about building up and Blacksburg feeling more like a city than a small town.
- More support for this housing type if it is located closer to downtown and along Main Street.
- Concerns that these would result in increased downtown traffic and create a bottleneck.
- Some noted a preference for this option over a single-family home or living in other localities.
- Concerns that the nonstudent mid-rise apartments that do exist are mostly game-day homes and rentals.



"Main Street is turning into a canyon. The town is becoming a copy of the suburban towns in NOVA; I moved back here to get away from that. You used to be able to see the mountains as you drive into town. Everything that made Blacksburg special is being destroyed."




Mixed Use Development

- Concerns that it has been difficult to fill our existing mixed-use developments with ground-floor businesses. We don't need more retail space.
- Many like this option more than midrise development alone since it increases accessibility to amenities.
- Concerns about the purchase of apartments by out-of-towners for football weekends.
- Best located along Main St. and targeted to young professional pricepoints.





Tradeoffs



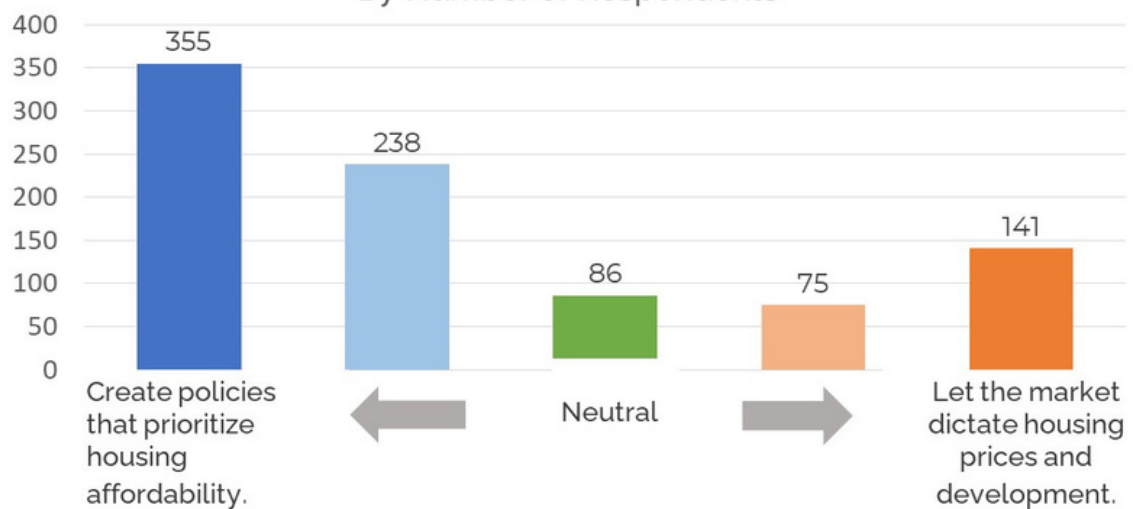
Survey respondents were asked to wrestle with 6 key tradeoffs that can impact overall housing affordability. The following section includes an analysis of their responses and a sampling of perspectives provided in the survey comments.



HOUSING POLICY LEVERS TO PROMOTE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Local governments can play a critical role in addressing housing affordability challenges since decisions over land use—what types of housing can be built in which locations- are largely made at the local and state level. Zoning tools, like caps on building height, minimum lot sizes, minimum setbacks, and parking requirements can all impact the cost of housing. Housing policies can also help create and preserve dedicated affordable housing units, align housing supply with market conditions, help households access and afford market-rate homes and protect against displacement and poor housing conditions. This survey question was meant to gauge the interest and willingness of the community to employ new policy levers to support the development of more affordable housing in Blacksburg. Respondents were largely in favor of the Town intervening and applying new policy levers to support the production of more affordable housing.

How Much Should the Town Intervene with Market Forces?
By Number of Respondents



POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Below are some different perspectives of survey respondents:

"Let the market decide. The Town can incentivize/ disincentivize the market through taxes/credits."

"The Market' has delivered endless 'luxury' housing for students -- and the slum-quality upkeep of older student housing. It has proved its failure to meet the real need of the community."

"There is a place for both, and it depends on proximity to town centers and amenities. For instance, housing ON bus routes should be prioritized for affordability. New housing close to the county line, on previously undeveloped land, should let the market dictate."

"Make sure these policies are in favor of residents, not students."

"The only reason Blacksburg is having this issue is that the town has forced higher prices with their zoning requirements and extra regulation."

"Private capital drives housing production. The industry is reliant on financial metrics in order to justify the risk of developing and building housing. The market needs to dictate the product decisions."

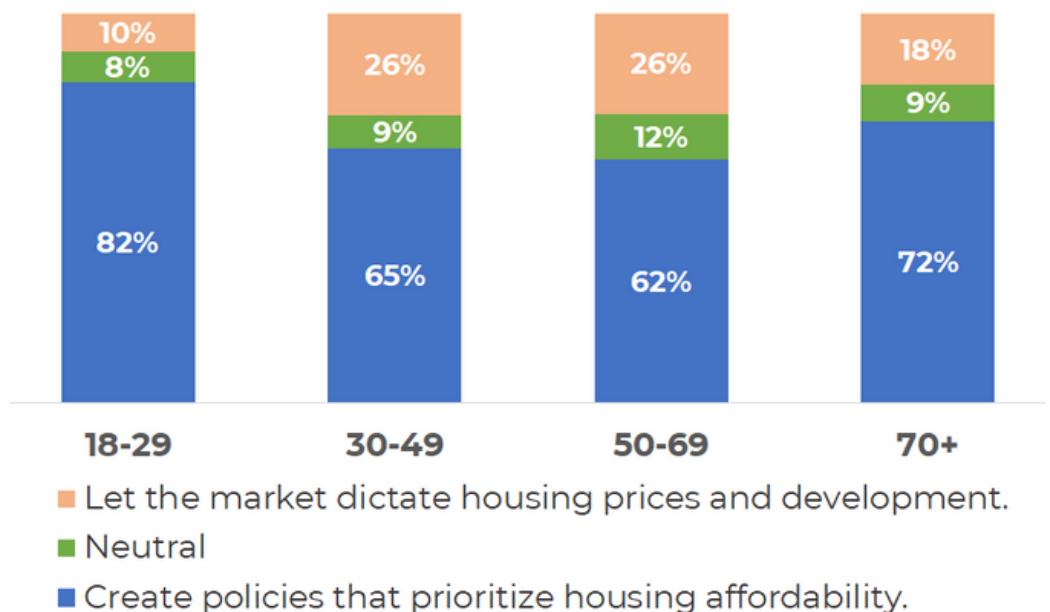
"Absolutely do not let the housing market do anything. Affordability is the priority."

"This market will never allow for affordability when people can make money off of students. Set policies to prevent this."



Policy interventions are supported by all age groups, but especially by younger respondents who are likely more impacted by the Town's high housing prices.

How Much Should The Town Intervene with Market Forces?
By Age of Respondent



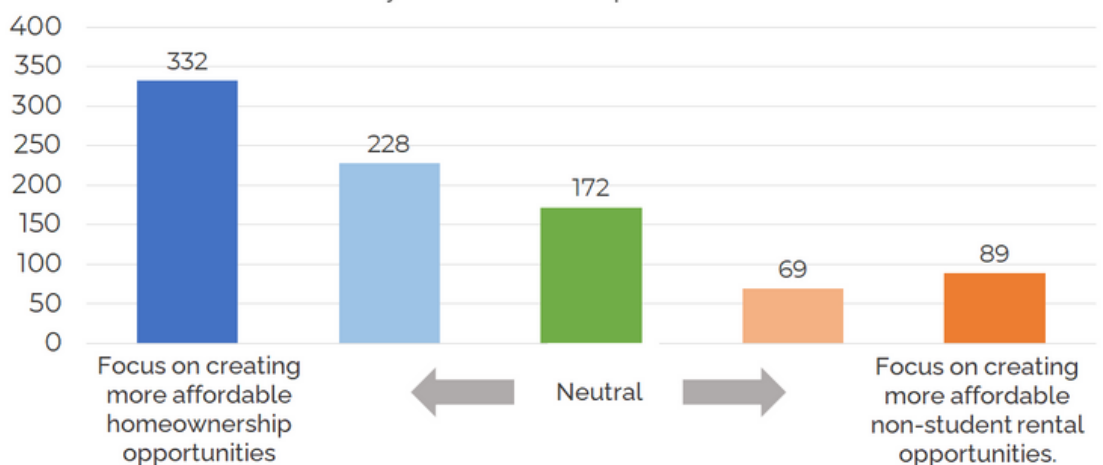


FOCUS ON CREATING MORE AFFORDABLE RENTAL OR HOMEOWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Town of Blacksburg needs more affordable rental and homeownership options at a variety of price points. We need it all! However, it takes time and resources to focus on developing more affordable housing. It often requires multiple forms of public investment or development incentives to bring this housing to the market. This question was meant to gauge community priorities when comparing affordable rental or homeownership. Survey responses suggest that the Town should start by creating affordable homeownership options for permanent residents. Many who chose 'neutral' as a response provided the comment that the Town should really be focused on both.

What Should We Focus On Next, Affordable Rental or Homeownership?

By Number of Respondents



RENTAL VS. OWNERSHIP

Below are some different perspectives of survey respondents

"Most of the renters I know would rather own, so it seems like you should err on the side of getting renters who want homes into those homes, thus freeing up space for people who actually want to rent."

"It depends on the quality of the rental opportunities. From what I've seen of the Blacksburg rental and (for-sale) housing market, I don't see how either of these will work with the number of realty companies and second home homeowners dominating either option."

"Although there will always be a need for rental, homeownership should be encouraged through every mechanism we can develop."

"The problem with affordable houses is that they will be snapped up and nothing prevents mommy and daddy buying jr a house. What you need are ways to ensure locals can buy local homes."

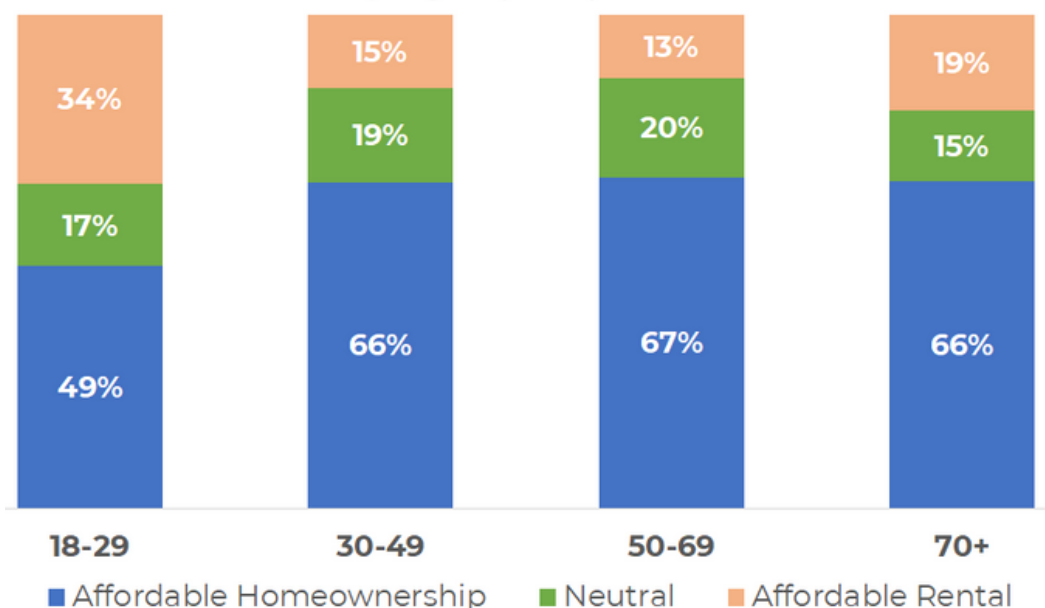
"Focus on both so people have options!"

"I'm a current renter and would love more affordable homeownership opportunities, but we do also need affordable rentals for non-students. It's too expensive to rent and I also can't afford to buy a house, so I'm kind of stuck."

"Ownership inspires hard work and a sense of accomplishment."

What Should We Focus On Next, Affordable Rental or Homeownership?
By Age of Respondent

All age groups felt affordable homeownership was more important, even among younger respondents who are struggling to compete with investors for lower priced properties.



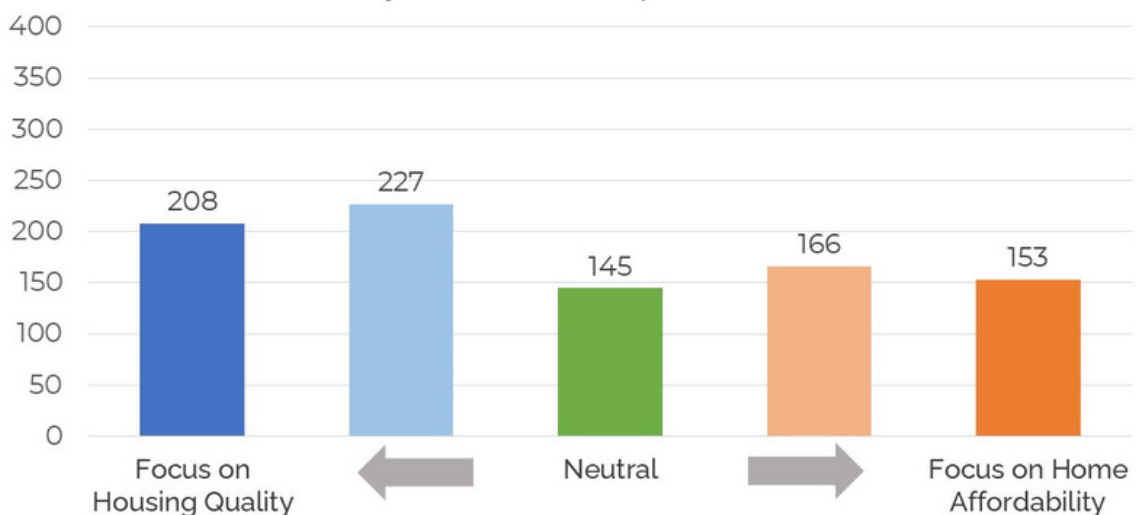


HOUSING QUALITY VS. AFFORDABILITY

A variety of factors contribute to the cost of new single-family and multifamily homes. Many of these factors fall within the broad category of housing “quality”—that is, the combination of features that make a house or apartment building a safe, comfortable, and well-functioning place to live. Key determinants of housing quality that affect cost include the type of building materials used, particularly for major components like roofing, windows, and doors, and siding, the level of interior and exterior finishes, the size, and the availability of amenities. For example, homes built with triple-pane windows, ample insulation, and other energy-efficient upgrades typically have higher upfront costs than homes built to comply with minimum building code requirements, but these features can also save the homeowner money over time. Survey responses indicate that quality is slightly more important, but most wanted to find a middle ground between quality and affordability. Responses suggest that a diversity of entry-level and higher-end homes are desired.

Where Should The Town Focus on Housing Quality or Affordability?

By Number of Respondents



HOUSING QUALITY

Below are some different perspectives of survey respondents:

"There should be a balance, but definitely prefer quality over quantity."

"Allow a basic structure and let homeowners make remodels and improvements as they can afford to make a house their home."

"No one can afford to live in these new ridiculous neighborhoods that start at \$460k!! Maybe if the town didn't require sidewalks everywhere and so many ridiculous codes and permits to jump through people could afford to live here."

"We need lower-priced houses for incoming families and young adults, and the cost of doing the higher-end materials and amenities is going to be prohibitive. I'd say standard materials, fewer luxury amenities, but no compromise on actual building code."

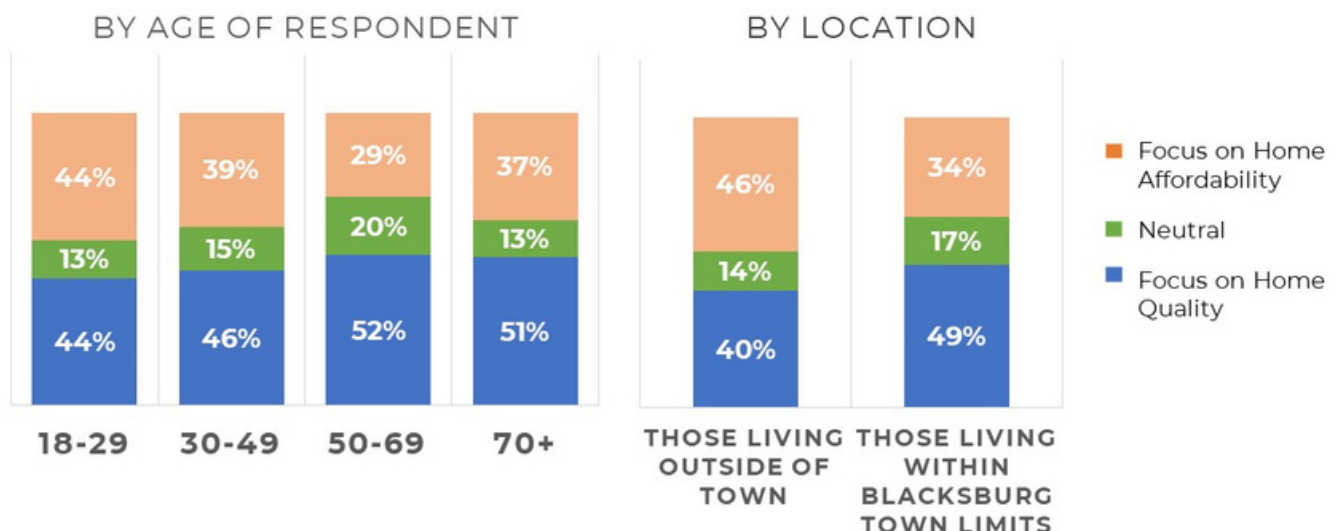
"You can see a cheaply built house immediately, this ultimately creates 'blight' and 'misfit' within neighborhoods. Also, we should have much stricter landlord requirements on any single homes that are rented."

"Just because someone makes less than \$50k a year doesn't mean they should have to put up with crap construction. Don't need marble counters but sidewalks and a nearby playground, sure. Energy-efficient windows, yes; 2-car garage, no.."

"In the long run, efficiency and amenities pay for themselves."

"We need more affordable housing, but qualities like energy efficiency and access to amenities should not be compromised. The Town needs to develop in an ecologically responsible manner."

Where Should Housing Developers & The Town Focus?

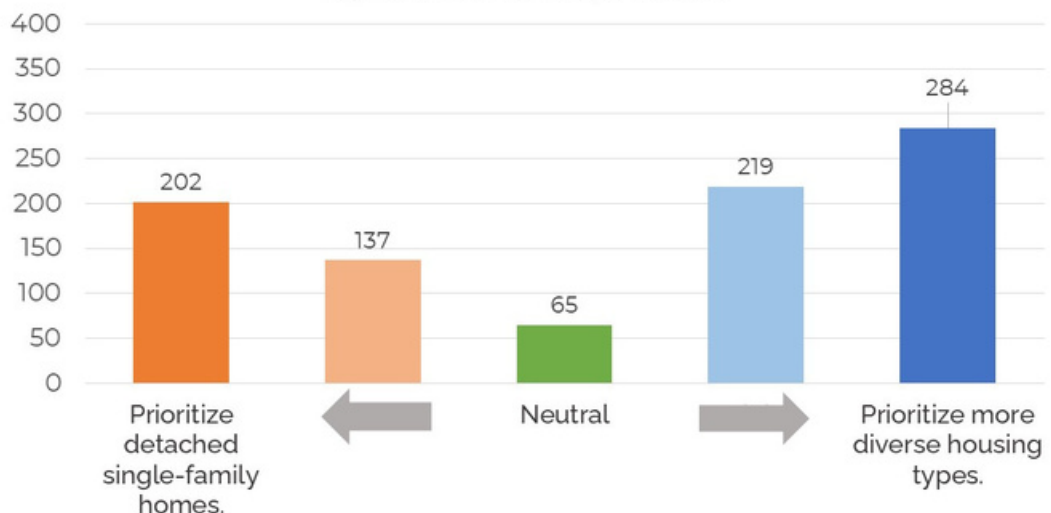




SINGLE-FAMILY VS. DIVERSE HOUSING TYPES

Owning a single-family home with a big backyard has been an essential part of the American dream. Blacksburg's residential zoning currently prioritizes this form of single-family development. However, this zoning is also a contributing factor to our higher than average home prices, and many find their dream of homeownership in Blacksburg less attainable. This Phase II survey question was meant to gauge which direction is of greatest interest to the community- maintaining a strong focus on detached single-family homes or providing a greater mix of housing types. The answer to this question was mixed, with a preference towards more diverse housing types. While building more homes of any sort will help ease our housing shortage, it's a greater diversity of housing types and multifamily construction that could provide more affordable housing in Blacksburg. Research has also shown that communities and neighborhoods with diverse housing types (i.e., a mix of single-family homes, duplexes, small and large multifamily buildings) have greater racial and income diversity. Both affordability and living in a diverse community were priorities expressed by respondents in the Phase I survey.

**Where Should Our Focus Be
On New Residential Development?**
By Number of Respondents



HOUSING CHOICE

Below are some different perspectives of survey respondents:

"I believe that in order to maintain the small-town feel, single-family homes would be preferable to giant apartment complexes. But the main priority in residential development should be mostly on financially accessible housing for all."

"I prefer diverse housing types, but would prefer that they be more individualized vs. generally contracted. Every house looking the same just gives a neighborhood less character."

"Diverse housing types afford more flexibility and allow younger families/couples to reside in town."

"We have to concentrate on single-family homes and age-in-place homes. We already have too many apartments and condos."

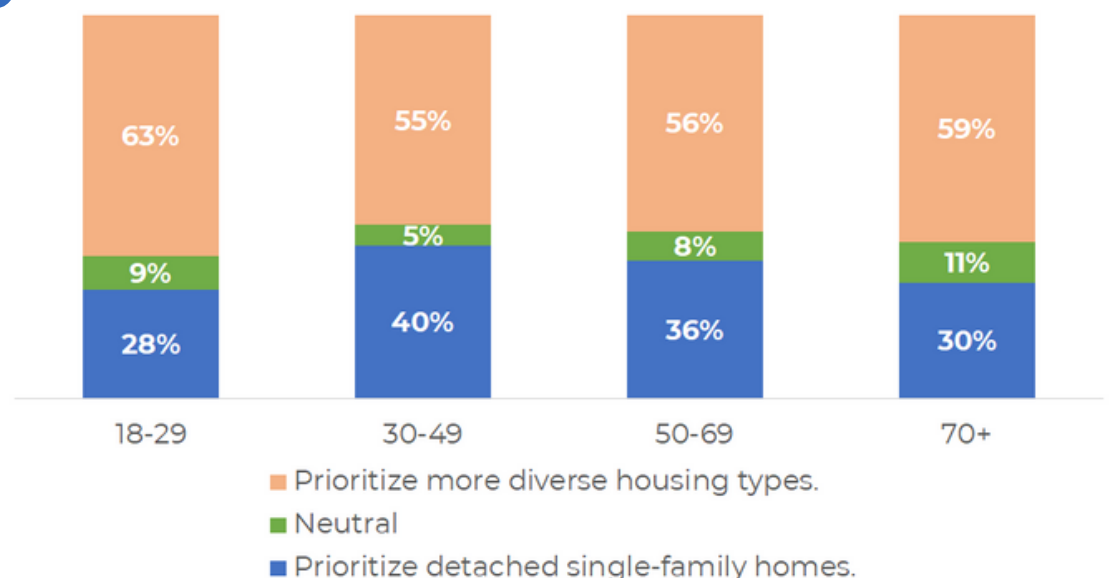
"First, if we deny new student housing we are the reason rentals move into established areas. We need to support new student housing and at the same time push new OWNED professional, family, and workforce housing. Our current denial of new housing plans is what is actually creating the squeeze."

"Adopt a policy that the bigger a single-family house is going to be, the further it should be from downtown. Prioritize small, space-efficient houses close to downtown. If people want McMansions, put them way out of town and let those people drive-in."

"This town is lacking in affordable single-family homes. Most families want something that they can call their own and have privacy not continue to rent in buildings with a lot of tenants."

Where Should Our Focus Be On New Residential Development?

By Age of Respondent



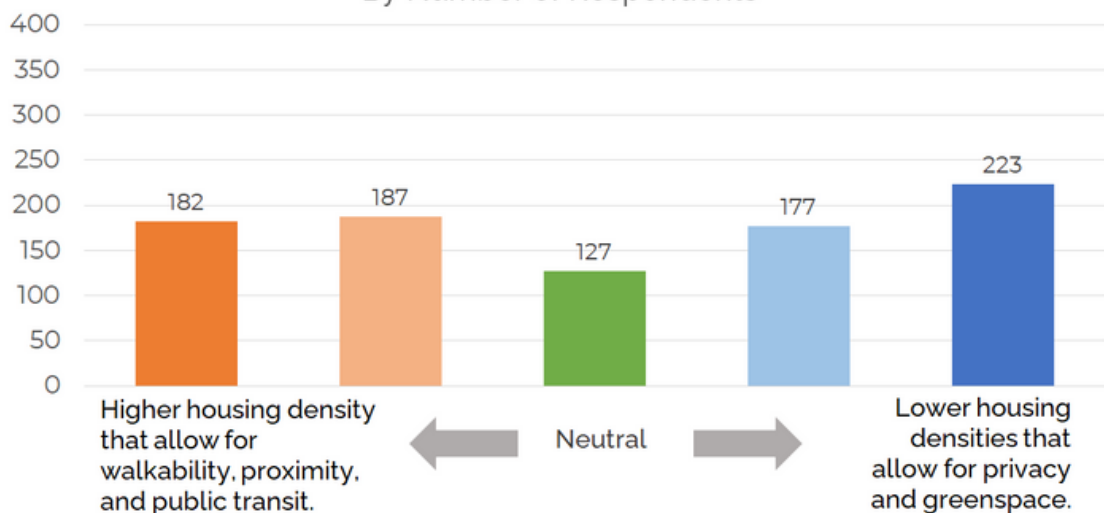
All age groups prefer a greater focus on diverse housing types, but especially younger respondents and seniors.



HOUSING CLOSER VS. FURTHER FROM TOWN

As our town grows it will get harder to achieve home affordability, space, privacy, and proximity to amenities. The debate over where to live has no right answer because it should be based on individual needs and preferences. However, it is important to understand the collective impacts of our individual choices so that we can plan accordingly to minimize impacts. If we focus on infill and redevelopment in town to support proximity, it will have the greatest effect on the existing way of life for established communities and the people who live there. If we allow for more growth in undeveloped areas even more people will live further from job centers and our town will continue to experience increased commuter traffic and loss of open space. Public transit needs a minimum of 6-8 homes per acre to be successful. Based on survey responses, there was an even split in the amenities desired. Most of the comments expressed an understanding that there was a contradiction between their personal preferences and what they thought would be best for the community- for example- the desire to have more personal space but that this contributes to increasing traffic.

Which Kind of Housing Provides the Amenities You Desire?
By Number of Respondents



AMENITIES BY LOCATION

Below are some different perspectives of survey respondents:

"A mix is necessary, but our family would most prefer to have access to a backyard and private space."

"I moved here for green space and privacy 35 years ago. With growth, things will change. And that growth, while sad for me, if done carefully can be good for others trying to make a life."

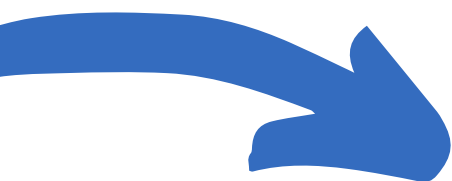
"We can have higher density housing AND green space, although public. Mixed-use, high-density housing downtown Blacksburg could leverage Virginia Tech greenspace, for example, the green space across from the Lyric. Sprawl causes so many long-term problems. I urge the Town to reduce sprawl and focus on high quality, dense housing."

"I currently live in a low-density area. As I age, I am more drawn to the amenities of higher-density living. The desire for lawn is rapidly becoming the burden of lawn."

"It's becoming increasingly obvious that walkability to schools, amenities, etc... is highly sought after in Blacksburg. Given how few amenities are available downtown, that's fairly remarkable. But more people living in the downtown would lead to more and better services." "Moderate densities with family-sized and priced housing should be favored."

"I think Blacksburg Transit could be expanded to cover more residential areas, and development in those expanded areas need not be huge houses on huge lots."

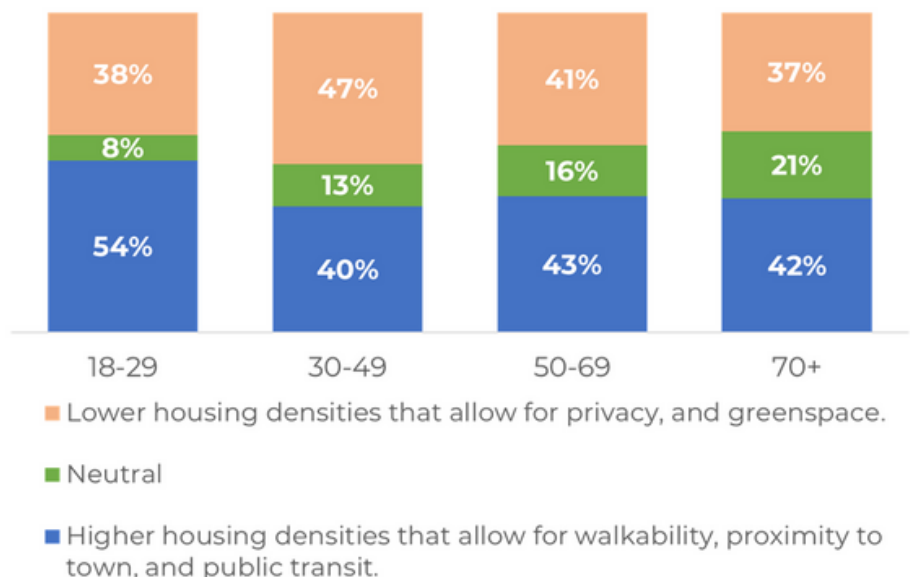
"We can effectively manage growth, maintain green space and resources with an assertive stance on a more dense urbanized town that maximizes all of the outdated properties and parking lots in our downtown, north main, and south main cores."



Age groups differed in their preferred amenities. Younger and older age groups prefer proximity, while the middle age group prefer more privacy and space.

Which Kind of Housing Provides the Amenities You Desire?

By Age of Respondent



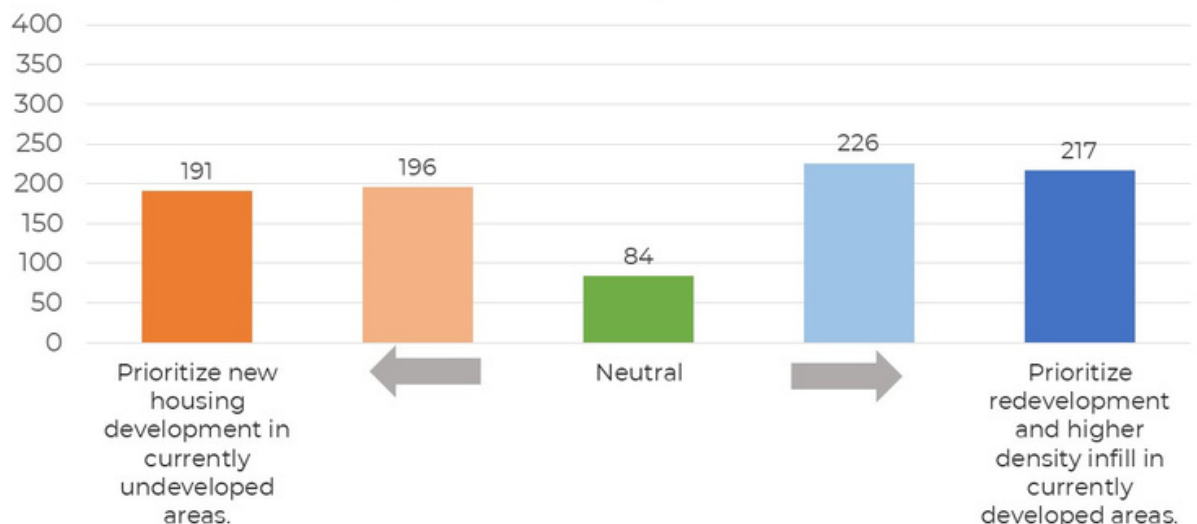


PRIORITIZE NEW HOUSING IN DEVELOPED OR UNDEVELOPED AREAS

Growth can create great places to live, work and play—if it responds to a community’s own sense of how and where it wants to grow. Smart growth policies focus on planning where development should or should not go. They encourage growth in town, where businesses can thrive on a walkable main street and families can live close to their daily destinations. Smart growth also emphasizes protecting the rural landscape to help preserve open space, protect air and water quality, provide places for recreation. This survey was meant to gauge what level of 'sprawl' was acceptable in our community. Survey respondents felt it was important to encourage more redevelopment and infill development. At the same time, many also felt it was important to allow for well-planned moderate density development in currently undeveloped areas that allows for more affordable single-family development and the protection of open space.

How Should We Accommodate Future Growth and Residential Development?

By Number of Respondents



DEVELOPMENT BY LOCATION

Below are some different perspectives of survey respondents:

"Loss of open space with little boxes will ruin our beautiful part of Virginia. PLEASE do not let Blacksburg become another NOVA."

"This is a hard one, usually, I would prioritize higher density, but based on what is currently being built, more single-family homes are needed, but for a lower cost point. 3 bed, 1.5 baths, less than 2,000sq ft, less than \$300,000."

"I support both. The 'infill' development depends very much on the precise location and the scale of the infill structure."

"I prefer to minimize the development of undeveloped areas to keep more open, green space and not "crowd" the town with additional buildings. It is better to reuse/redevelop existing space."

"We need to use infill as a strategy to preempt sprawl. Start in the core areas first."

"If it's possible for redevelopment near downtown I'm in favor of high density."

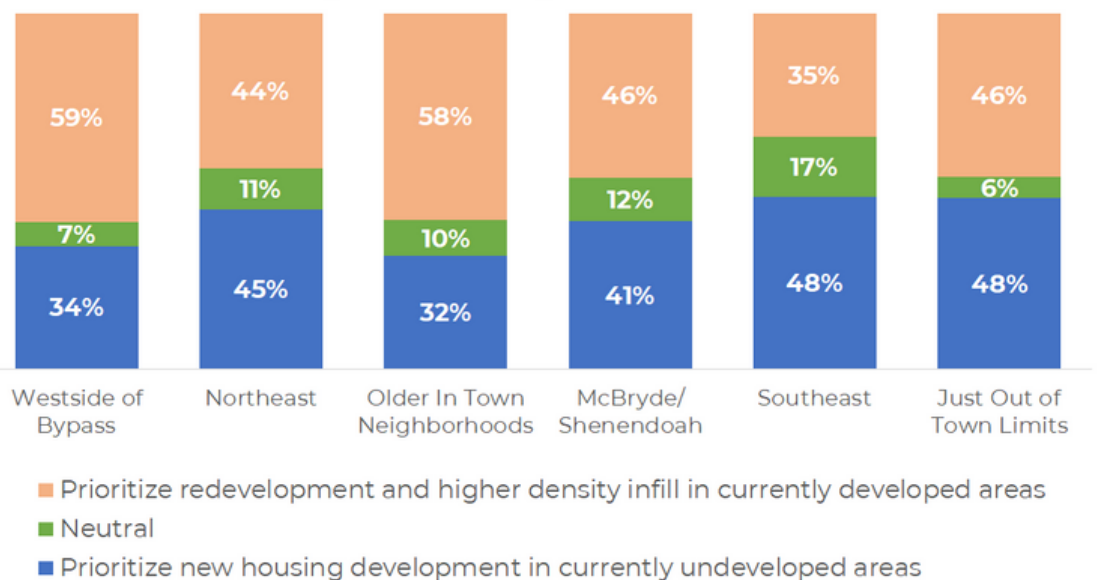
"How about using already developed space and making it mixed-use for single families, permanent residents, older graduate students, and seniors."

"Need growth away from downtown."

"Prioritizing undeveloped areas will allow Blacksburg to both grow and slowly update traffic/roads/infrastructure to support future growth in already developed areas."

"We shouldn't lean one way or the other as a policy, we should encourage smart growth and approve/deny projects based on merit and demand/need."

Accommodating Growth Perspectives by Area of Town



Respondents living in older in town neighborhoods and those living west of the bypass preferred higher density infill development rather than in undeveloped areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Key Takeaways

Community members are willing to accept slightly higher levels of residential density and greater diversity in housing types if:

- It results in more affordable housing,
- It prioritizes housing for permanent residents and not students and investors,
- Preferred amenities like trails, green space, and parking, are still provided in new housing developments, and
- Moderate standards of housing quality/construction, energy efficiency, and visual appeal are incorporated.

Considerations

- What changes need to be made to our zoning and land use regulations to support these desired priorities and housing types?
- How can we work more effectively with developers and major employers like Virginia Tech to produce the housing types desired at affordable price points?
- What strategies can we implement to provide more homeownership opportunities for first-time homebuyers?
- What strategies can we implement to provide more affordable rental opportunities for young professionals and wage workers?

