

# Town of Gordonsville Community Survey Results

## Background

In the fall of 2011, the Town of Gordonsville sent out a community survey to all of its water customers, 780 customers in all, to gain public input on the update of the Town's comprehensive plan and the future that Town residents saw for themselves and the Town. In addition to being mailed out to each water customer, the survey was made available through the Town's website. The Town also notified all website subscribers to the Town Council Agenda that the survey was available online. Collection boxes were placed at six different locations throughout Town to make returning the survey as easy as possible without anyone having to incur the cost of mailing it back to the Town.

In all, 77 responses, about 10% of the surveys sent out, were received. Although it seems low, this 10% return rate is typical and is considered a good response rate for a mail-out survey.

The responses provided by Town citizens were thoughtful and reflective of the deep sense of community pride, as well as concern for the Town's future, felt by the people who live here. Generally, there were several sentiments that were repeated over and over again. These were:

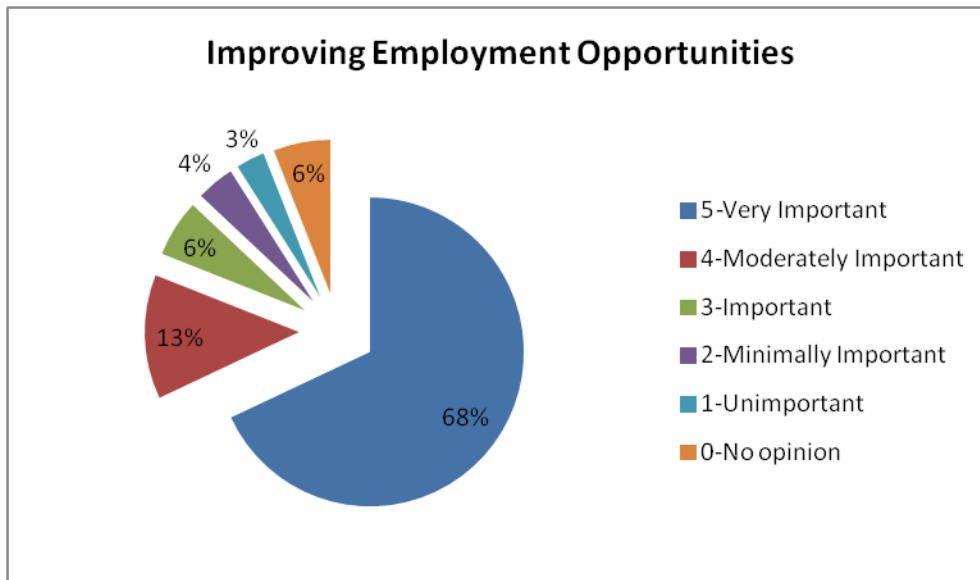
- Gordonsville is a lovely, small rural Town that is a wonderful place to live and raise a family.
- More jobs are needed, as are more shopping opportunities for the average wage earner within the Town.
- Young people in the community have nothing to do—more activities need to be made available to them in order to keep them healthy and safe.

The balance of this report provides a graphic and narrative summarization of the responses to the Town of Gordonsville Community Survey. The full results of the survey may be found in the raw survey data compilation available in the Town Planner's office in Town Hall.

## Survey Responses

Question #1 of the survey asked citizens to rate the importance of a list of issues and then provide a reason as to why they gave a certain response. The following is a summary of responses by issue. The reasons given for the rating of each issue are also summarized below—a listing of the specific reasons given may be found in the raw survey data compilation.

## *Improving Employment Opportunities*

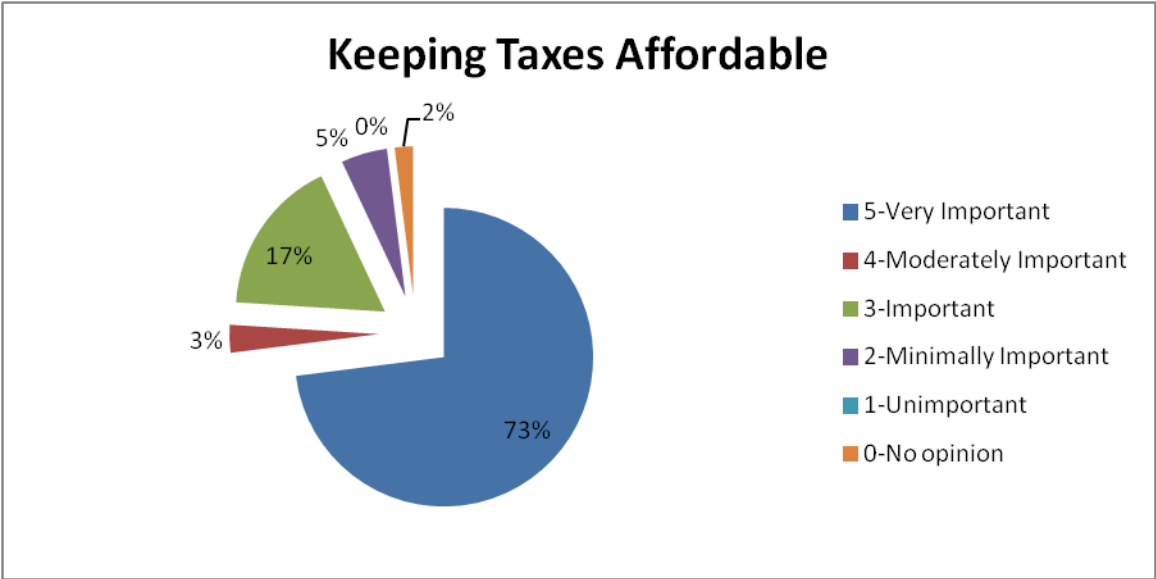


The current state of the local, national and world economy, no doubt, played a significant role in compelling Town citizens to rate this particular issue as highly important. More than 85% of the survey respondents gave this issue a rating of important, moderately important or very important. The graph above shows a breakdown of the responses to this question. Those who rated this issue as very important stated that providing jobs for people in the Town will help those people who recently lost their jobs due to plant closures, will help keep people in the community, will give people reasons to move to the community, and will ultimately keep Gordonsville an economically viable town.

Those respondents who rated this issue as moderately important stated three general reasons for their response: improve tax base, people who work here will spend money here, and the recent job losses in Gordonsville that resulted from the closing of American Press, one of the Town's larger employers. Those respondents who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant stated that they were either retired or worked outside the area. One respondent in particular noted a concern that job opportunities are sufficient in and around Town and to provide more jobs may compromise the charm of the Town, its primary draw.

## *Keeping Taxes Affordable*

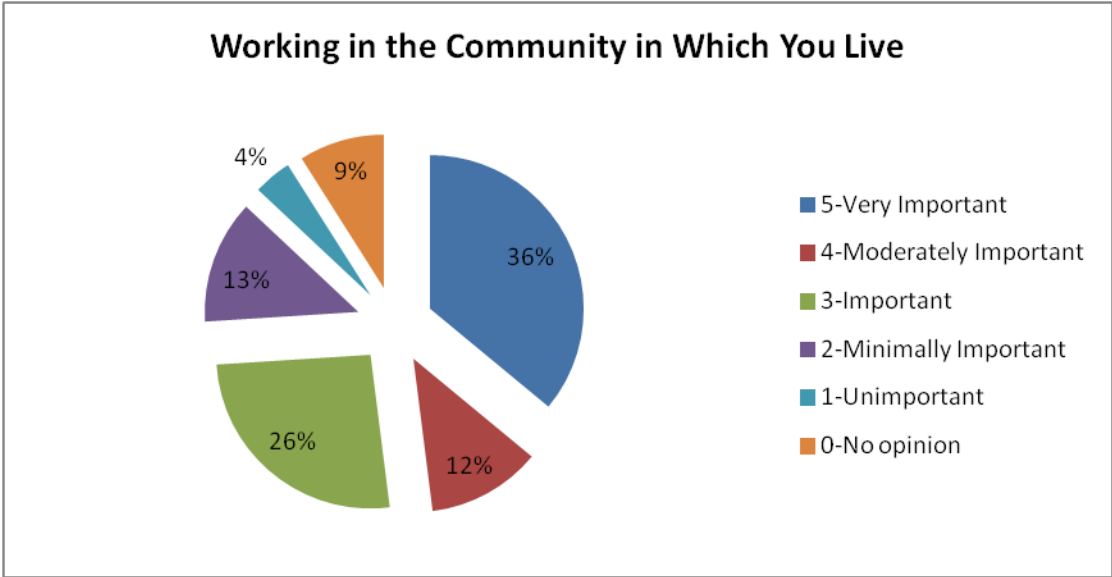
Overwhelmingly, 92% of the survey respondents rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. The graph at the top of the next page illustrates the breakdown of all responses:



Repeatedly, the reasons cited for this strong, yet expected, response included the fact that many people in the Town are retired and are living on a limited or fixed income, and the fact that many people are out of work and cannot afford an increase in taxes. One respondent who rated this issue as minimally important noted that the Town’s taxes are lower than that of an adjoining locality, and another stated that government services cost money, and the services provided by the Town are a good value.

*Working in the Community in Which You Live*

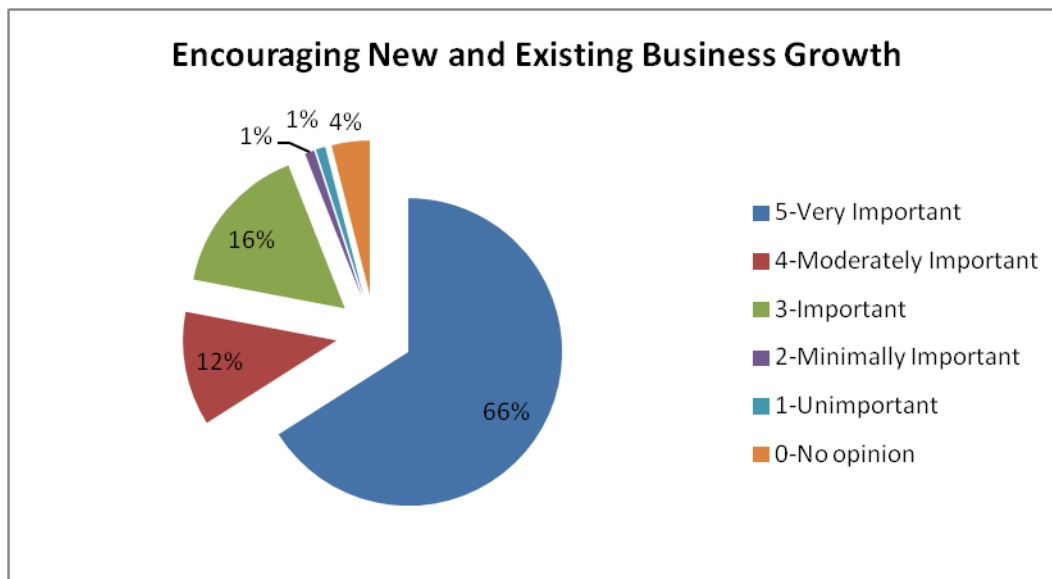
Nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents rated this particular issue as important, moderately important or very important. The following graph displays the breakdown of all the responses:



Creating a sense of community, saving gas, and keeping revenue in the Town were listed several times as reasons for the importance of this particular issue. Those who gave this issue a rating of minimally important or unimportant noted that there are job opportunities in surrounding localities or that they are retired and this issue does not apply to them.

### *Encouraging New and Existing Business Growth*

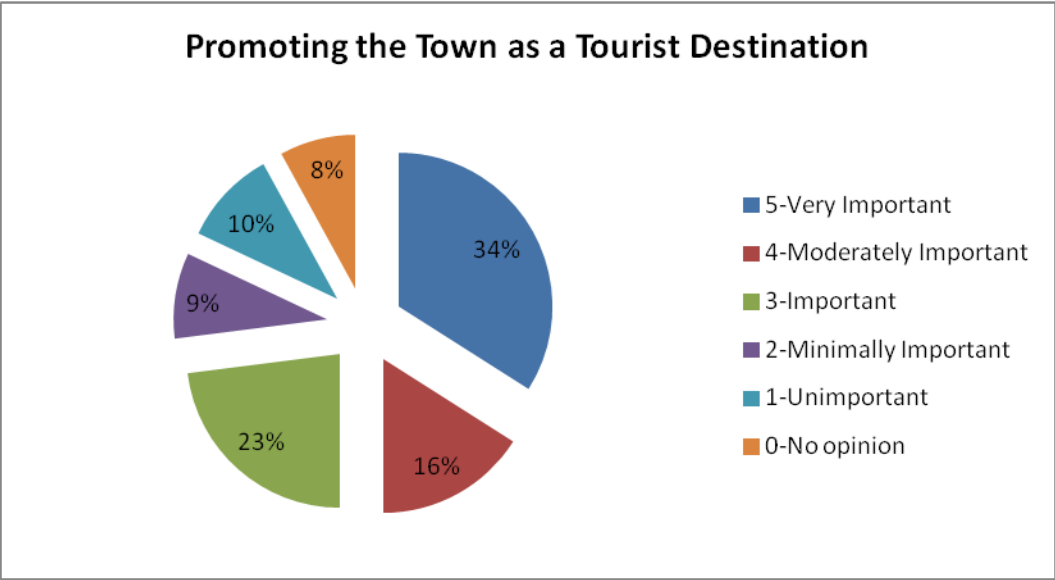
Consistent with the rating of some of the other work-related issues in this survey, encouraging new and existing business growth was rated as very important by more than 65% of the survey respondents. In fact, 94% of the respondents rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. Below is a graph that shows the breakdown of all the responses:



The survey respondents who rated this issue as very important repeatedly stated that the Town needs more business to bring more revenue to the town and to provide more jobs for residents. They also stated that the tax base of the Town needs to be broadened and the Town needs to grow economically in order to survive. The few respondents who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant noted concerns that too much business growth could change the character of the Town and that the retention of current businesses and the promotion of tourism are important.

### *Promoting the Town as a Tourist Destination*

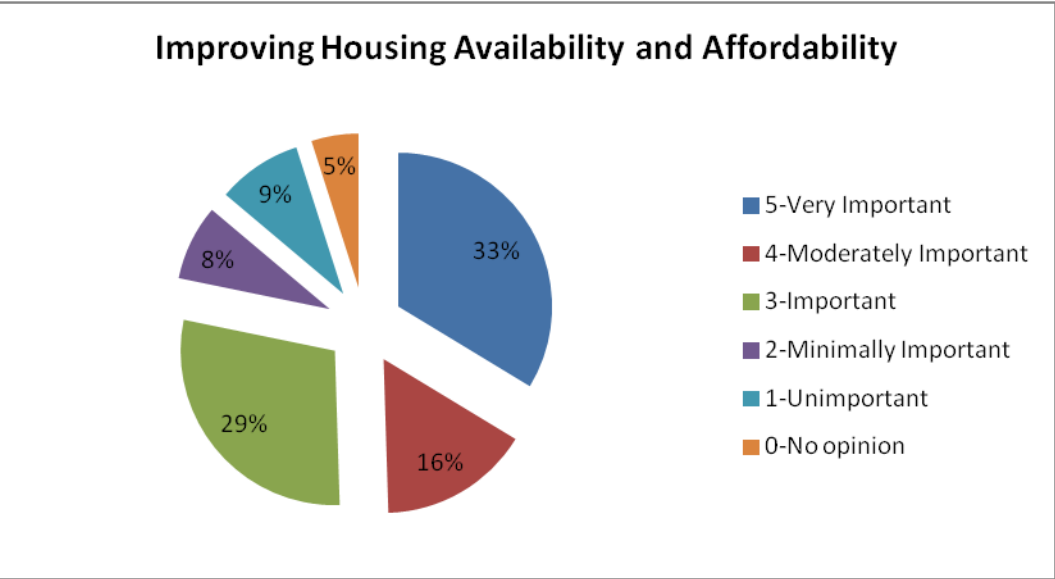
Nearly three-quarters of respondents to the community survey rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. The breakdown of responses is shown on the following graph:



Respondents who rated this issue as very important stated that promoting the town as a tourist destination does not cost the Town citizens, and in fact will increase the Town’s tax base and help to relieve the tax burden on residential property owners. They also noted that increased tourism in the Town will benefit local shop owners. Those respondents who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant stated that the Town only tries to attract one type of person and that there are other areas that are more promising for historical sites. They also noted that increasing tourism in the Town only removes practical stores, like Dollar General, from the Town and replaces them with boutique stores, which is not helpful for residents of the Town.

*Improving Housing Availability and Affordability*

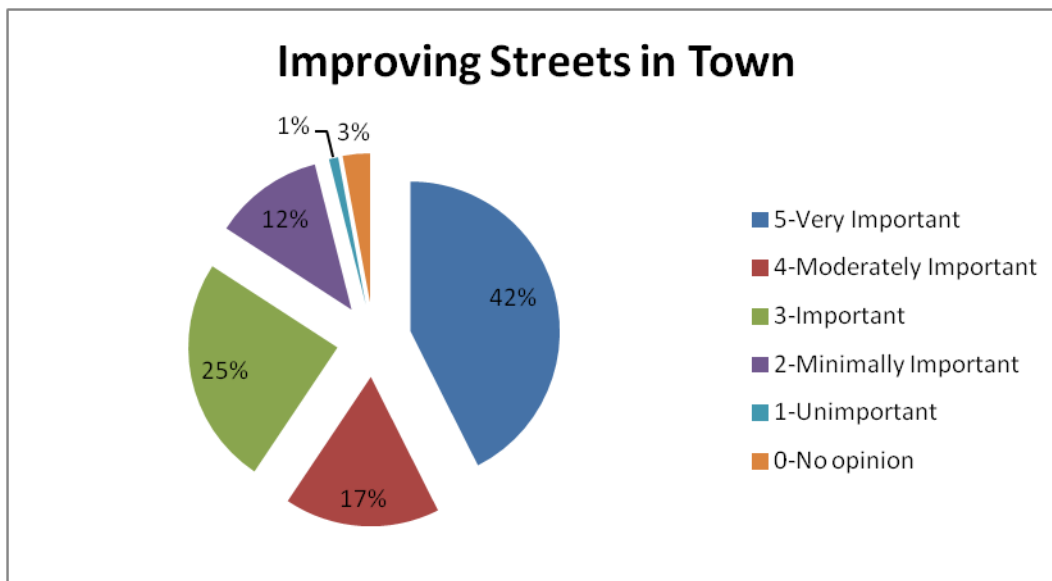
For this particular issue, more than three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that improving housing availability and affordability is important, moderately important or very important. The graph below shows the breakdown of all survey responses:



Thirty-three percent (33%) of respondents to the survey rated this issue as very important and supported their rating by stating everyone needs a house they can afford, and that home ownership helps to build families and keep people in the community. Promoting housing variety and diversity in a way that is compatible with the character of the Town was also cited as a reason for rating this issue as important. Those survey respondents who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant stated that the Town has limited areas for additional growth and that there is no need for additional housing within the Town. They also noted that the Town already has adequate affordable housing and that funds should be made available to residents wishing to renovate and upkeep the historic homes in Town.

### *Improving Streets in Town*

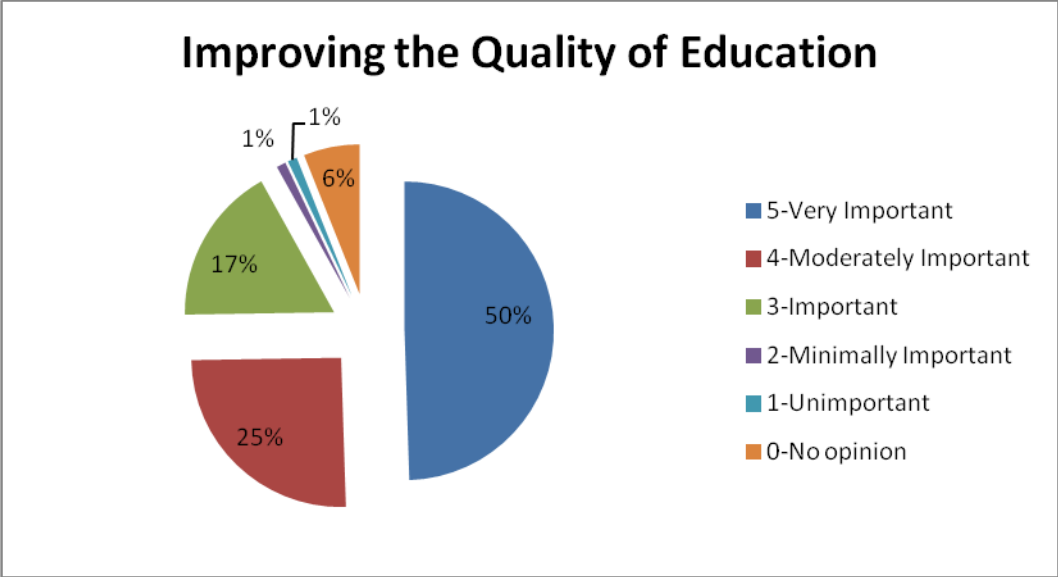
With regard to improving streets in Town, 85% of the survey respondents indicated that this issue is important, moderately important or very important. Nearly half of those indicated that improving Town streets is very important. The graph below shows the breakdown of all the respondents:



Generally, survey respondents to the issue of improving Town streets noted there are places in Town where streets and sidewalks need improvement as there are many people who walk in Town for exercise and the streets and sidewalks need to be safe. In addition, improving the streets (and sidewalks) in Town will encourage more people to walk, which is good for the community. Many of the respondents who indicated that this issue is minimally important or unimportant noted that they feel the streets in Town are in good shape.

*Improving the Quality of Education*

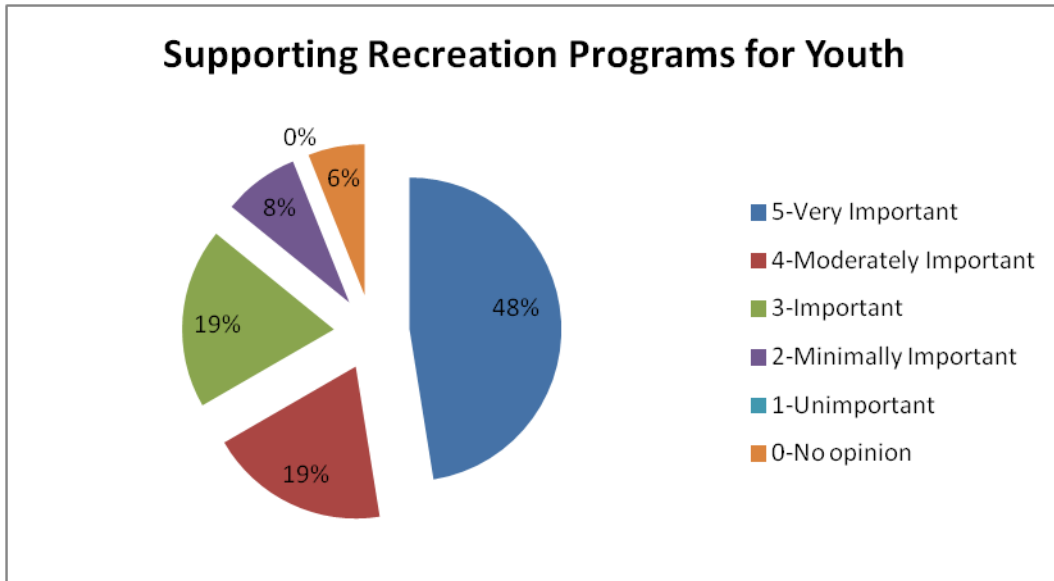
This issue is clearly important to survey respondents; over 91% indicated it is important, moderately important or very important. Below is a graph that shows the breakdown of all the respondents:



Fifty percent of those responding to the survey indicated that the issue of improving education is very important, while 25% indicated it is moderately important to them. Those who stated reasons as to their rating of this issue noted that good schools are vital to the future success of children and of the community, and that having good schools is an attraction for business development. Some also expressed the need for programs for continuing education and seniors.

*Supporting Recreation Programs for Youth*

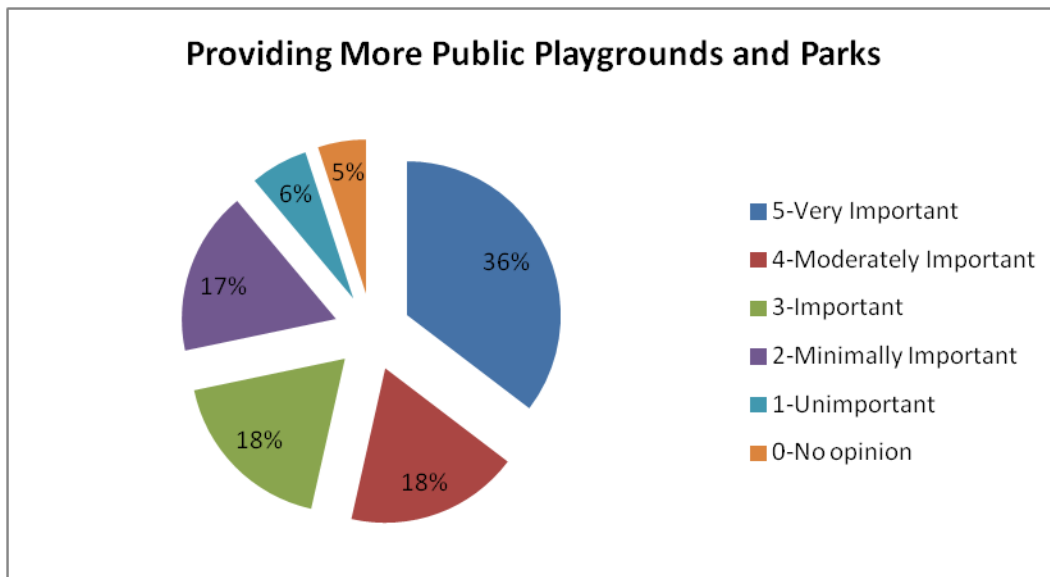
As with education, survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that supporting recreation programs for the young people in our community is important. Specifically, over 85% rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. The following graph shows the breakdown of all respondents:



Nearly 50% of survey respondents rated this issue as very important, while 19% rated it as moderately important. Over and over again, respondents stated that providing activities for the young people of our community would keep them off the streets, out of trouble and in a healthy, safe, and structured environment. The respondents who rated this particular issue as minimally important stated that the Town has limited resources to provide recreation programs and kids today don't play organized sports.

#### *Providing More Public Playgrounds and Parks*

As with supporting recreation programs for children in the community, survey respondents were just as supportive of providing more playgrounds and parks within the Town. More than 70% of the respondents to the survey rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. The graph below shows the breakdown of all responses received:

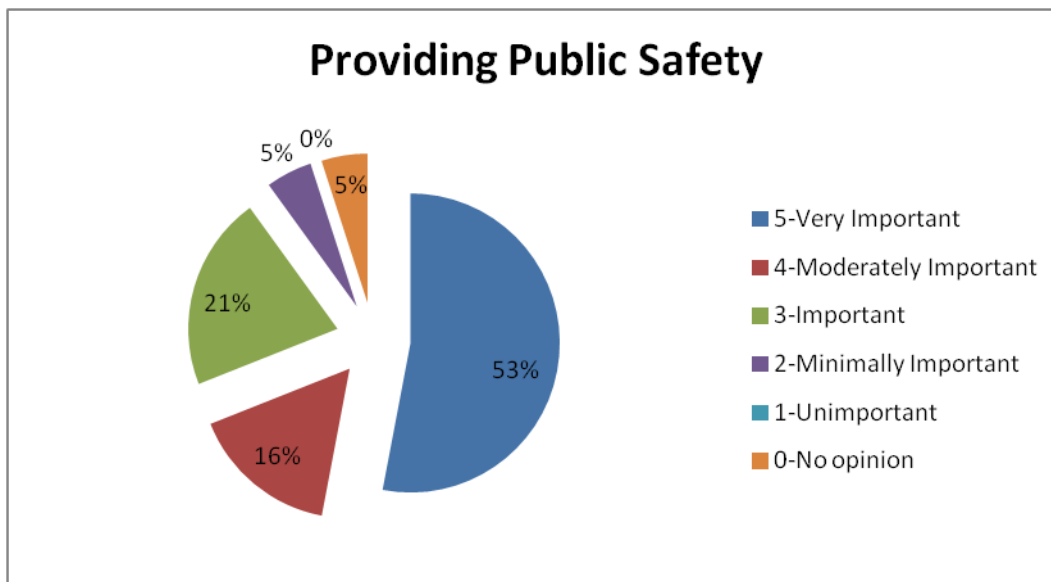




More than one-third of survey respondents rated the issue of playgrounds and parks as very important. As with recreation programs, respondents indicated that having more public playgrounds and parks would give the children of the Town something to do. Those who rated this issue as important indicated that having more parks and playgrounds would make the Town more appealing for families and would enhance tourism efforts. Repeatedly, respondents cited the need to also take care of existing park facilities within the Town, recognizing that the facilities we have are nice but need to be maintained.

### *Providing Public Safety*

As one might expect, providing public safety was rated as important, moderately important or very important by 90% of the survey respondents. The graph below shows the breakdown of all responses:

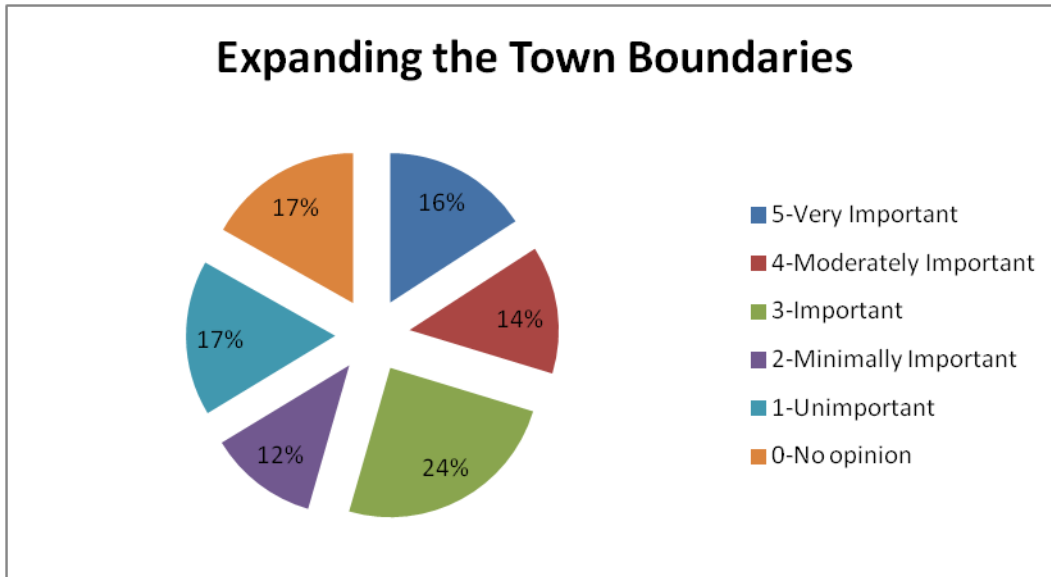


More than half of the respondents rated this issue as very important, noting that security is important to the elderly population of the Town and that a safe town gives people the freedom to shop and walk in Town. Those who rated this issue as important noted that the Town is already doing a great job with regard to public safety, and that successful public safety is a home, neighborhood and community partnership. Some respondents did express concern about a lack of police presence in their community, and that speeding through Town needs to be better enforced.

### *Expanding the Town Boundaries*

Of all the issues rated in the community survey, expanding the boundaries of the Town got mixed ratings. Slightly more than half rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important, while nearly 30% rated this issue as minimally important or

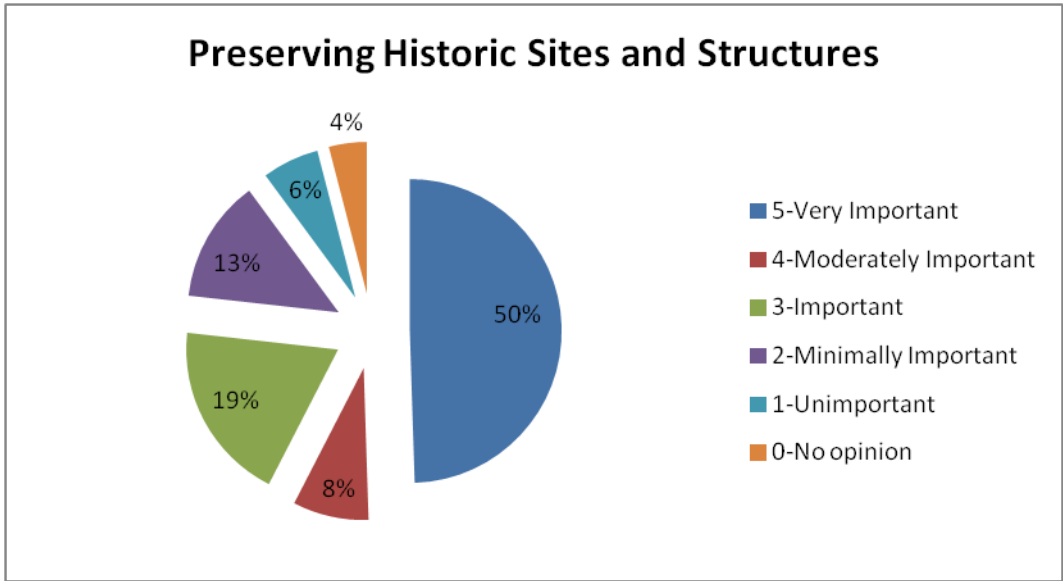
unimportant. Seventeen percent of survey respondents offered no opinion on this issue. The graph below shows the breakdown of respondents:



As shown in the graph above, Town residents are clearly more evenly divided in their opinion of this issue. Those who rated this issue as important noted that expanding the boundaries of the Town would help expand the tax base and spread the cost to provide water and sewer to a greater customer base. Those who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant stated it is important to first develop those areas of Town that are undeveloped rather than expand the Town boundaries to create new areas for development. Those who expressed no opinion indicated they did not know enough about the issue to rate it as important or unimportant.

### *Preserving Historic Sites and Structures*

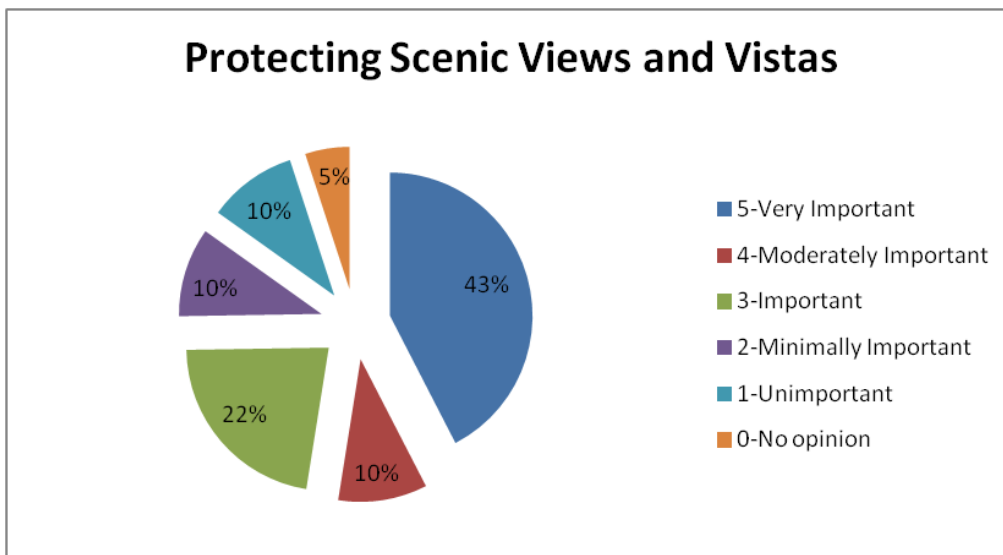
It is clear that the residents of the Town really like its historic character. More than three-quarters of the survey respondents indicated that preserving historic sites and structures within the Town is important, moderately important or very important. The graph at the top of the next page illustrates the breakdown of all the responses:



Fifty percent (50%) of those responding to the survey indicated that this particular issue is very important for the Town, and more than one-quarter of respondents rated this issue as moderately important or important. By and large, respondents who felt this issue is important noted that preserving historic sites and structures not only serves to inform future generations of the Town, but it also enhances the Town’s tourism efforts. In the words of one respondent, preserving historic sites and structures “makes this town special and beautiful!” Those who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant gave few reasons as to why they rated it this way; however, one respondent stated that historic preservation is a job for private foundations and not the Town.

*Protecting Scenic Views and Vistas*

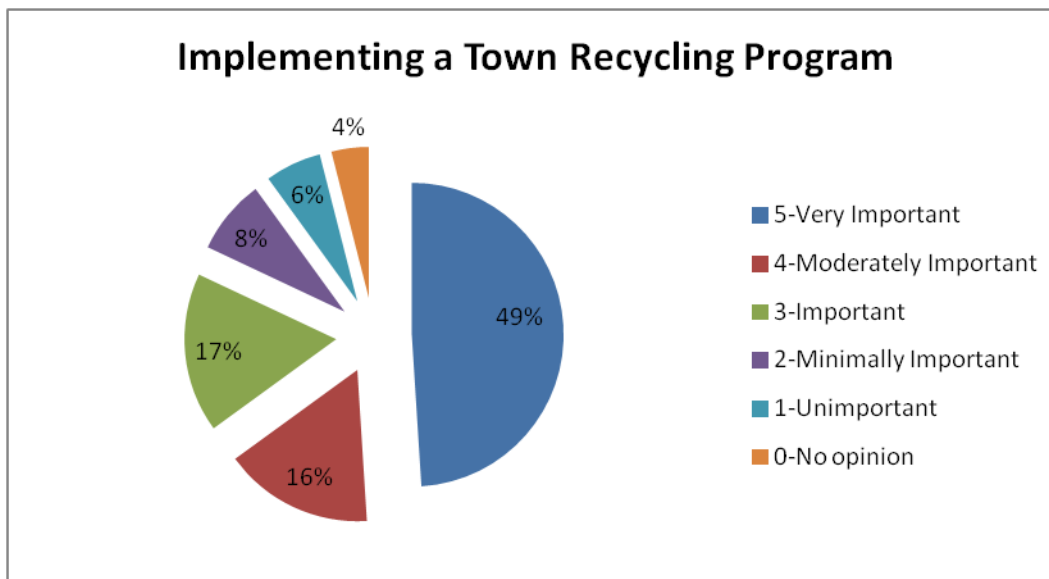
Gordonsville is a pretty Town, and survey respondents have repeated this sentiment over and over in their survey answers. Nearly three-quarters of those who responded rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. Twenty-five percent of respondents indicated that this issue is minimally important, unimportant, or they had no opinion. The graph at the top of the next page shows the survey response breakdown on this issue:



As with protecting historic sites and structures, the survey respondents who rated the issue of protecting scenic views and vistas as important noted that the “small Town charm” of Gordonsville, as evidenced through scenic views and vistas within and surrounding the Town, is vital to the Town’s tourism efforts. Protecting this asset will also serve to help protect the natural environment within the Town.

#### *Implementing a Town Recycling Program*

Recycling in the Town is an issue that is of significant importance to those who responded to the community survey. More than 80% indicated that this issue is important, moderately important or very important. Below is a graph that illustrates the breakdown of all responses received:

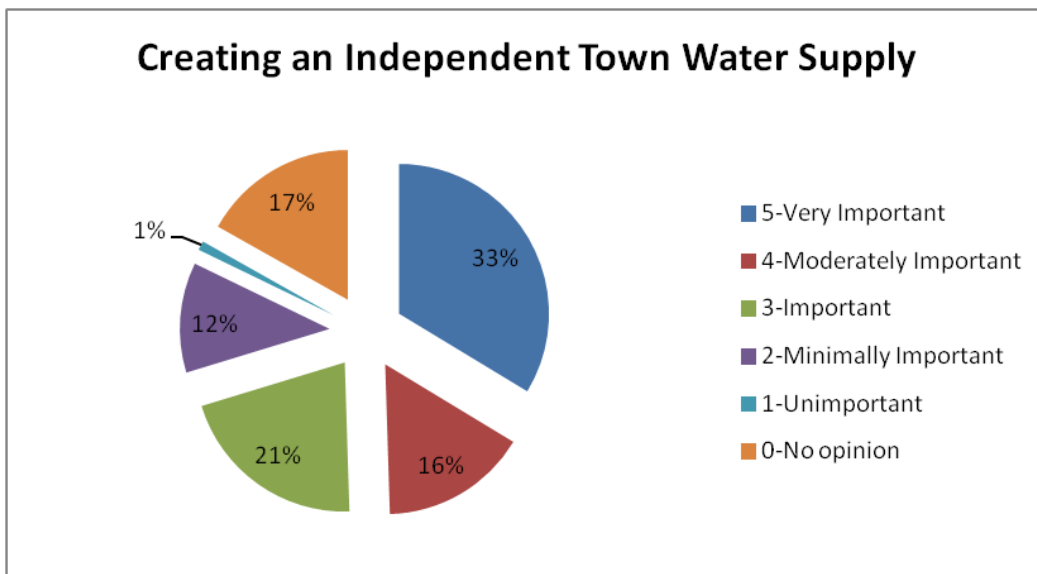


Nearly half of all respondents indicated that implementing a Town recycling program is very important, and approximately one-third of the survey respondents indicated that having such a program in Town is moderately important or important. Those who rated

this issue as important noted that having a recycling program in Town would reduce the waste going to the landfill, thus reducing landfill costs. They also cited “saving the environment” and “convenience” as other reasons for the Town to implement its own program. Those who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant expressed concerns that such a program would be too costly or cumbersome to implement.

### *Creating an Independent Town Water Supply*

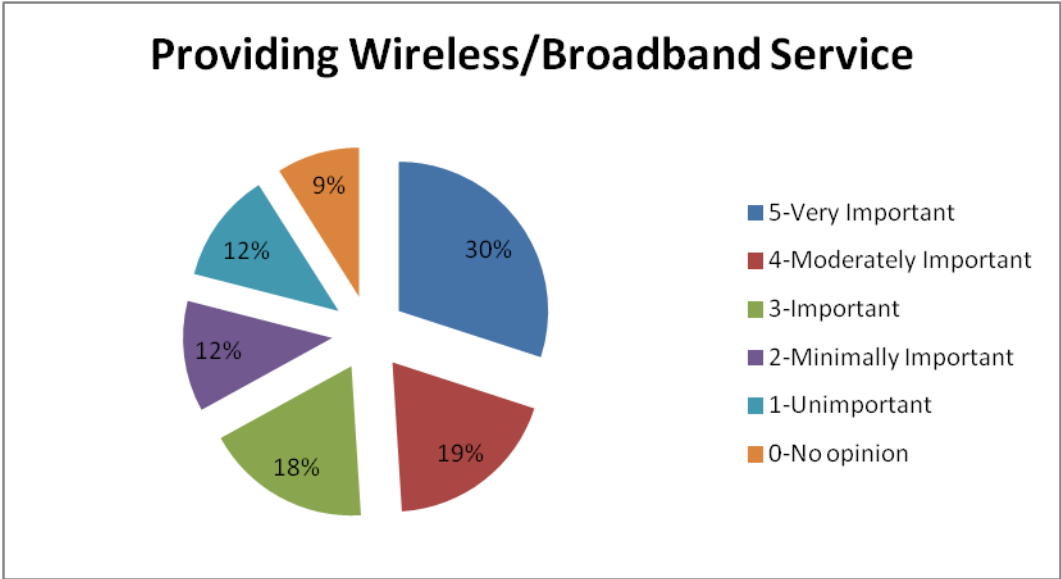
More than 70% of survey respondents rated the creation of an independent Town water supply as important, moderately important or very important. The graph below shows a breakdown of responses received:



More than a third of respondents rated this issue as very important, and noted that having an independent water supply is desirable provided it saves the Town money and provides a water supply to fall back on in the event of a drought. Those who rated this issue as minimally important or unimportant expressed concerns about the cost to the Town to create an independent water supply.

### *Providing Wireless/Broadband Service*

In this last category of issues to be rated in Question #1 of the community survey, responses were more evenly split in terms of importance in comparison to some of the other issues rated. The graph at the top of the next page shows the breakdown of responses received:



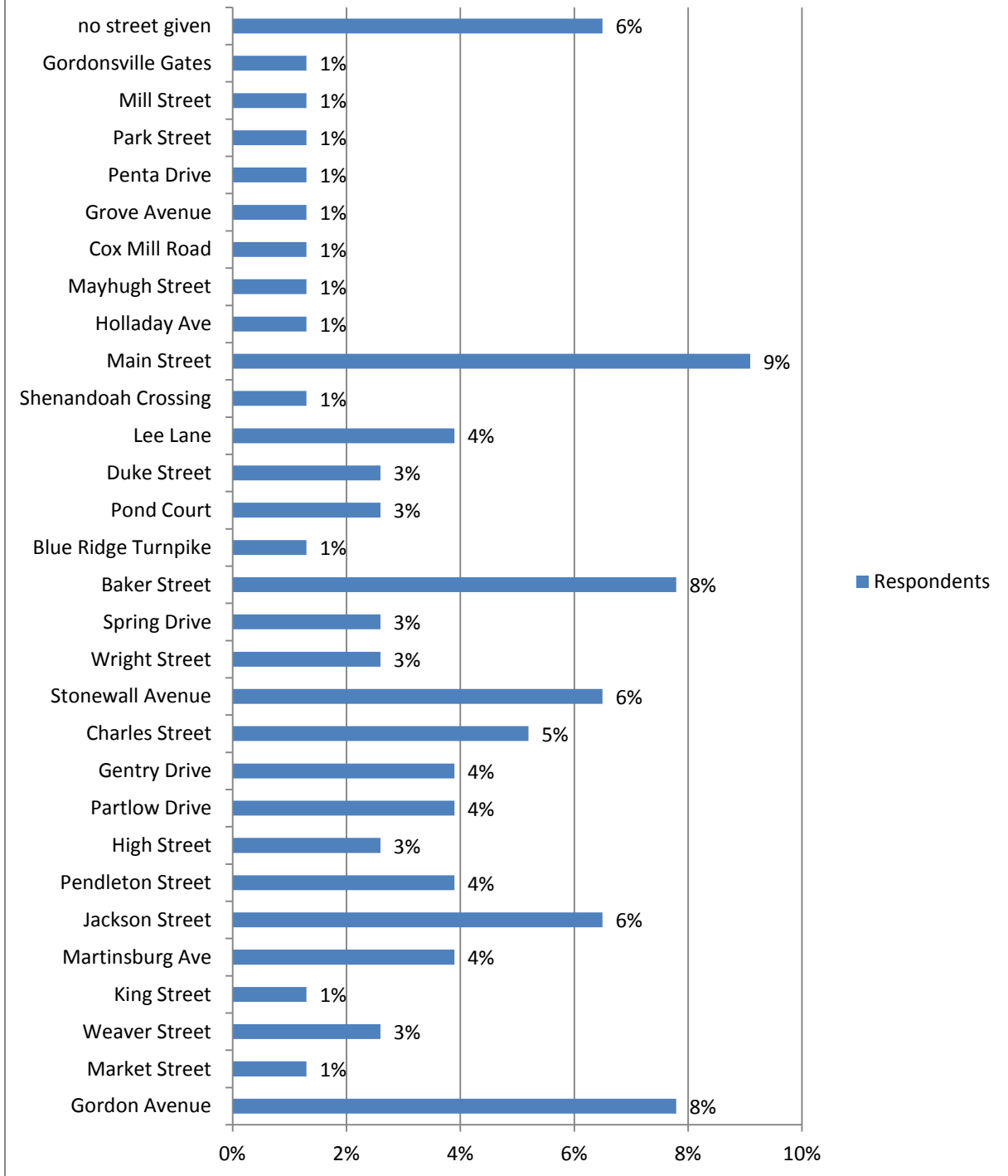
More than 65% of survey respondents rated this issue as important, moderately important or very important. Citing complaints about internet service in the area, respondents noted that providing wireless or broadband service to the Town would bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and would benefit residents, visitors and businesses alike. Those who indicated that this particular issue is minimally important or unimportant to them noted that this would have no benefit to the Town and that people already have enough choices when it comes to accessing the internet.

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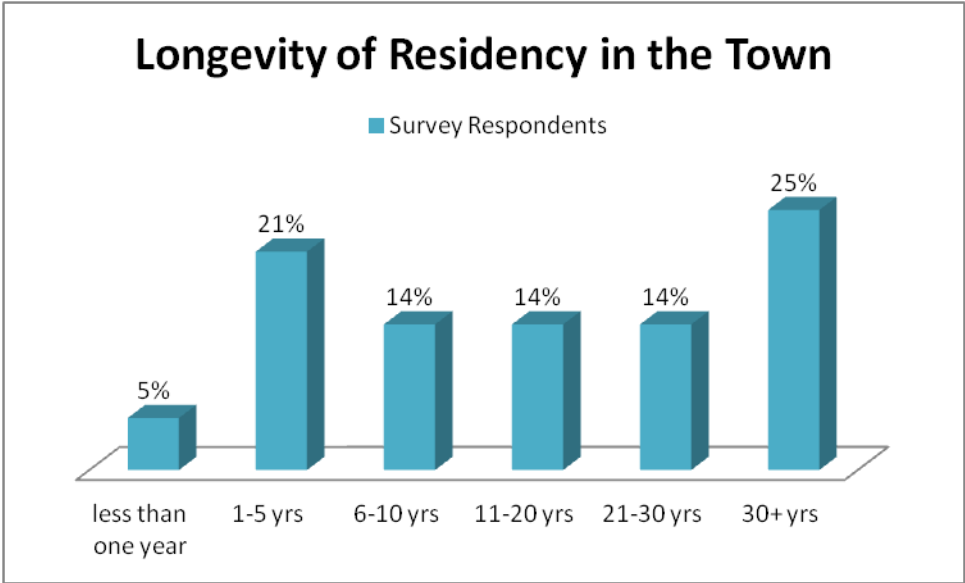
Questions 2, 3 and 4 of the survey attempted to get a sense of the demographic of the survey respondents by asking questions about what street they live on, how long they have lived there and whether they own or rent their home.

The following bar graph illustrates where survey respondents live:

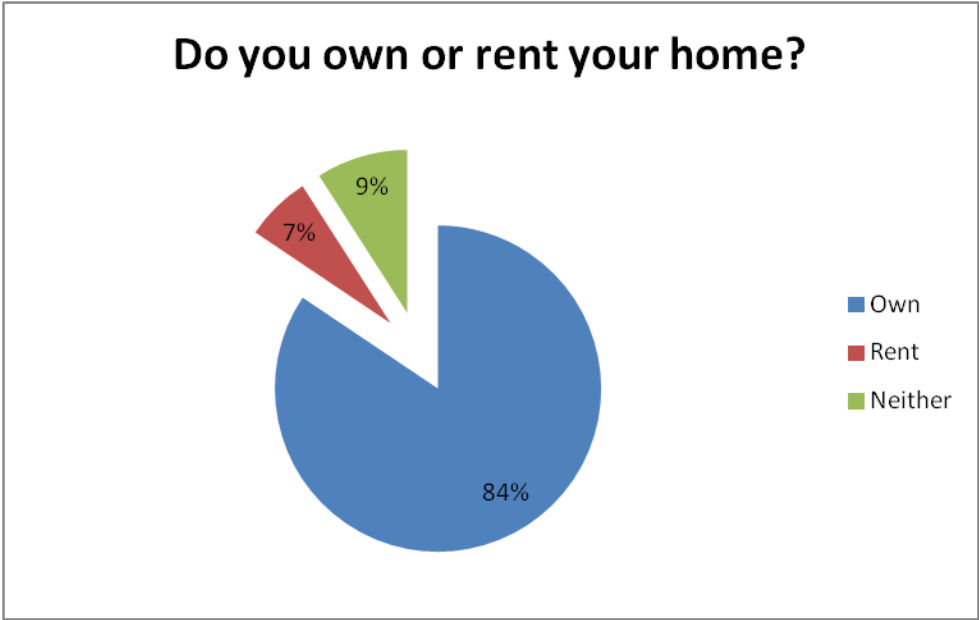
## Location of Survey Respondents



Twenty-five percent of survey respondents indicated they had lived on their street for 30 years or more, while 5% of respondents had lived on their street for less than a year. Twenty-one percent of respondents had lived on their street for 1-5 years. The following graph illustrates longevity of residence for survey respondents:

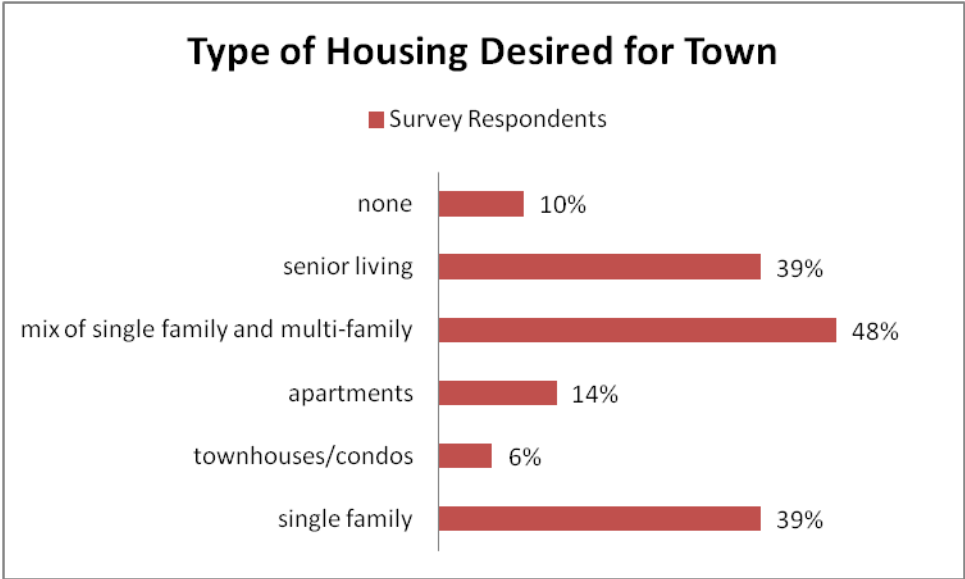


With regard to homeownership, a majority of survey respondents indicated they own their home, as illustrated by the graph below:



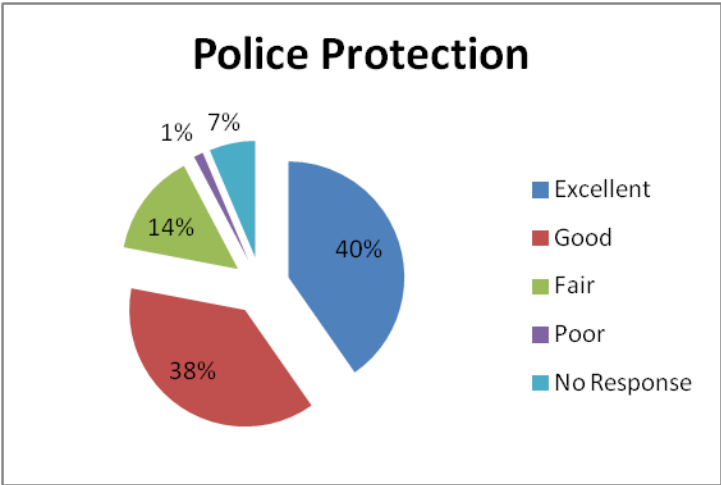
Question #5 of the survey asked respondents what type of housing they felt is needed in the Town. A mixture of single family and multi-family housing got the most votes (49%), while single family housing and senior living tied at 39% each. Ten percent of respondents indicated that no additional housing is needed in Town. The graph at the top of the next page shows the breakdown of all the responses received:





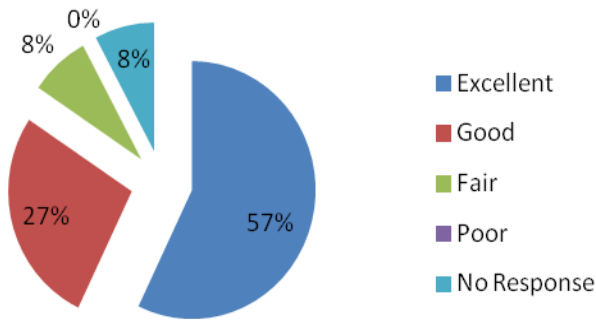
The current housing stock in the Town is predominantly single family, with multi-family units located in various developments on the periphery of the Town. Throughout Town, scattered single family units are divided and rented as duplex units. From the information shown in the graph above, it can be inferred that Town residents like the character of their Town and prefer that any future development be not only reflective of that character, but also provide housing that is affordable for all income levels.

In question #6 of the community survey, respondents were asked to rate a number of services provided either by the Town or the County (in the case of schools, library, etc.). The following graphs show how each service was rated and whether respondents are willing to pay additional taxes to improve or expand the services they rated.



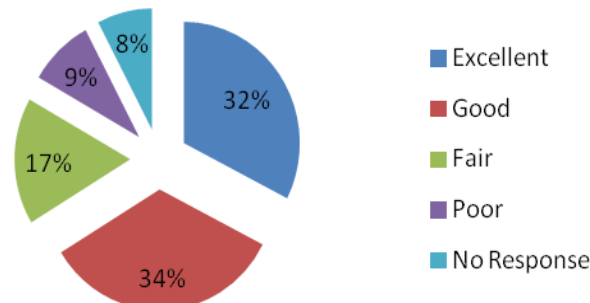
19% of respondents who rated this service said yes to a tax increase to improve or expand services. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranges from 1% to 5%.

### Fire Protection



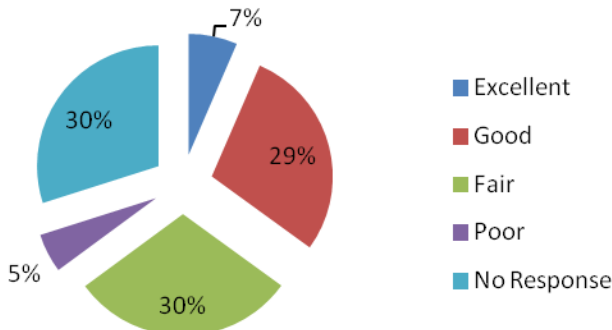
25% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand fire protection services. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 5%. One individual indicated he would be willing to pay a 30% increase in taxes to support this service.

### Rescue Service

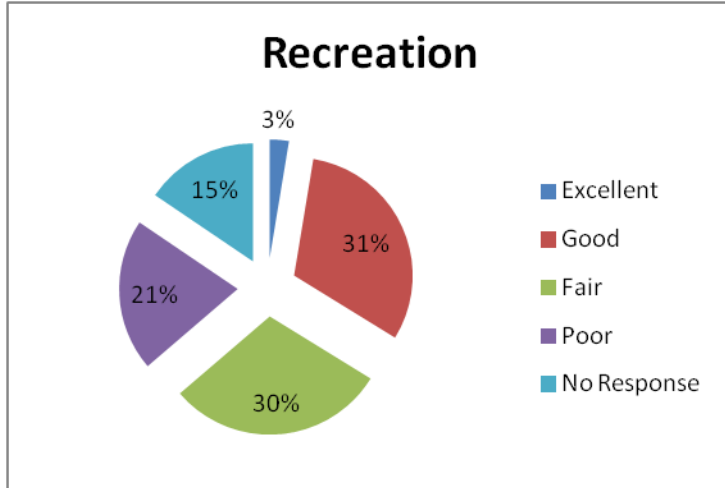


30% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand rescue services. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 5%.

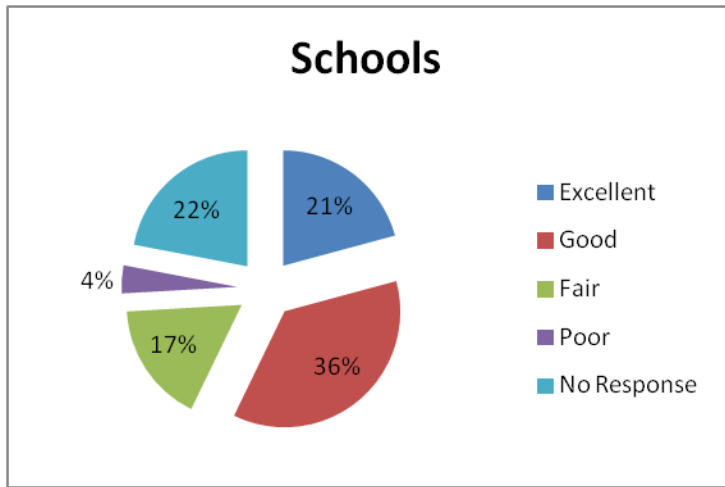
### Health and Social Services



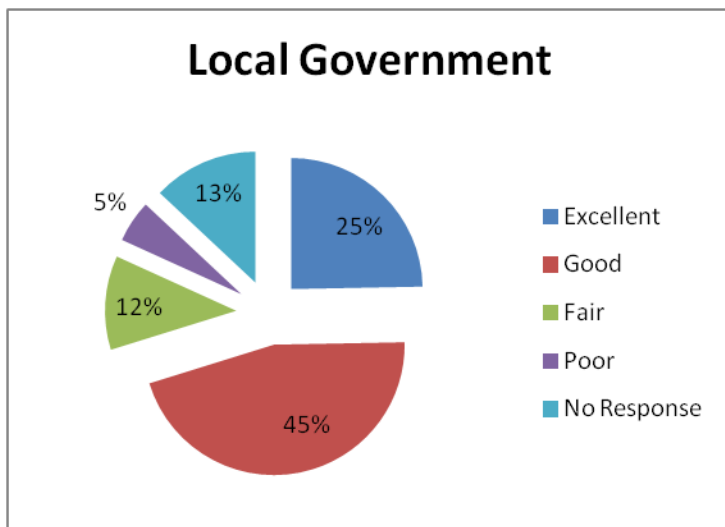
17% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand health and social services. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 10%.



31% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand recreation opportunities in the Town. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 10%.

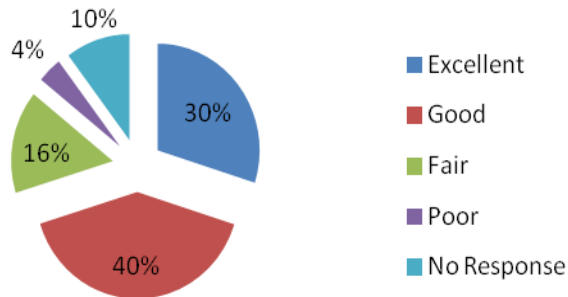


18% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand schools. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 3% to 5%.



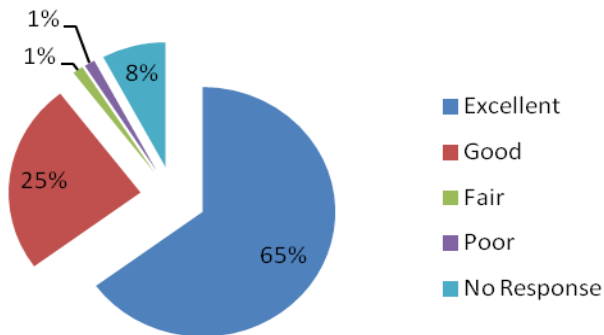
15% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand local government services. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 10%.

## Trash Collection - Disposal



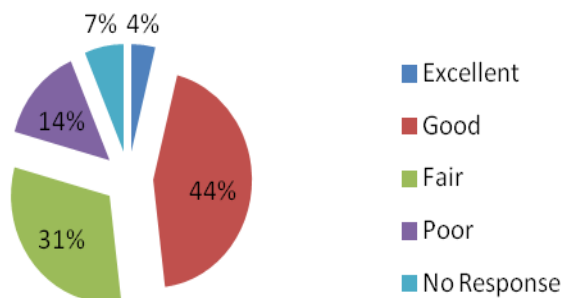
14% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand trash collection – disposal. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 5%.

## Library



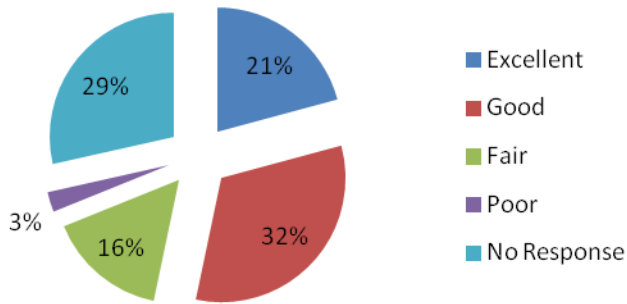
17% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand library services. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 2% to 15%.

## Streets and Sidewalks



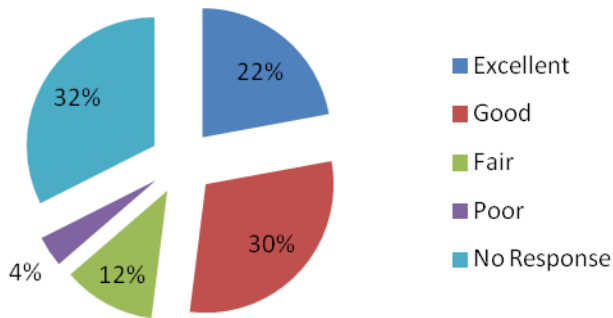
24% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand streets and sidewalks. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 1% to 10%.

### Town Website



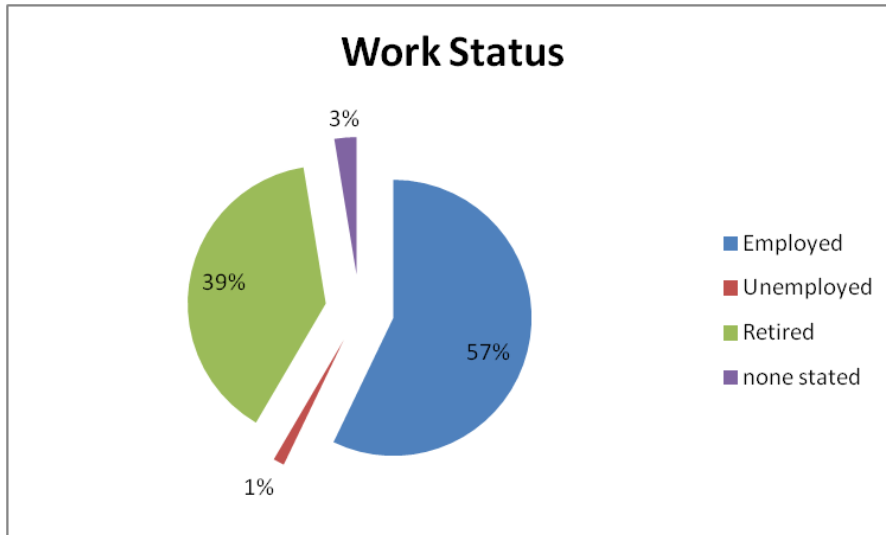
9% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand the Town website. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 2% - 3%.

### Learn to Swim Program

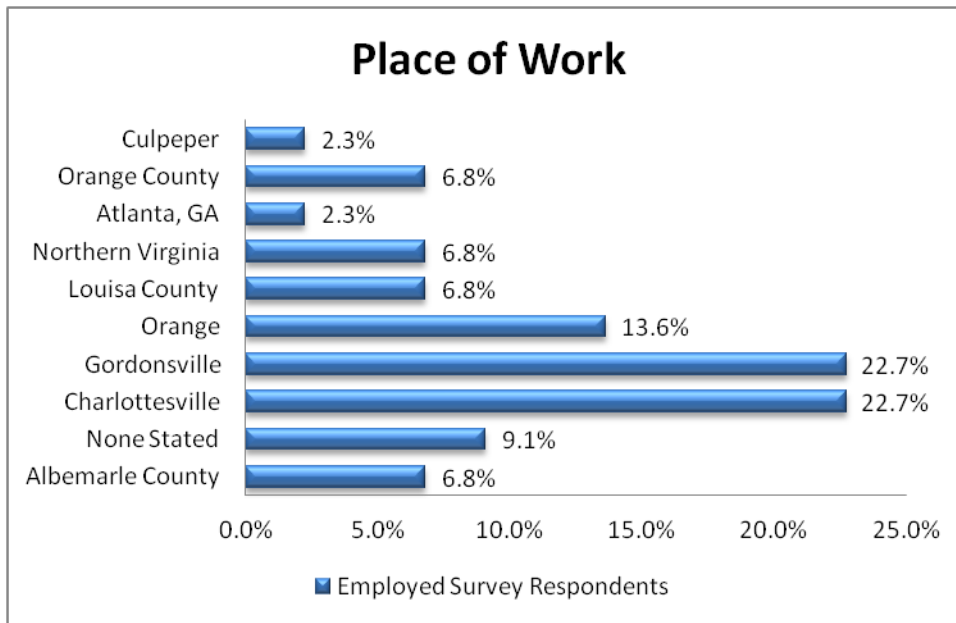


10% of respondents who rated this service said they would be willing to pay increased taxes to improve or expand the Learn to Swim program offered by the town. The tax increase some respondents indicated they would be willing to pay ranged from 2% - 5%.

Questions #7 and #8 asked citizens about their employment status, where they work, and what type of employment opportunities they would like to see in Town.

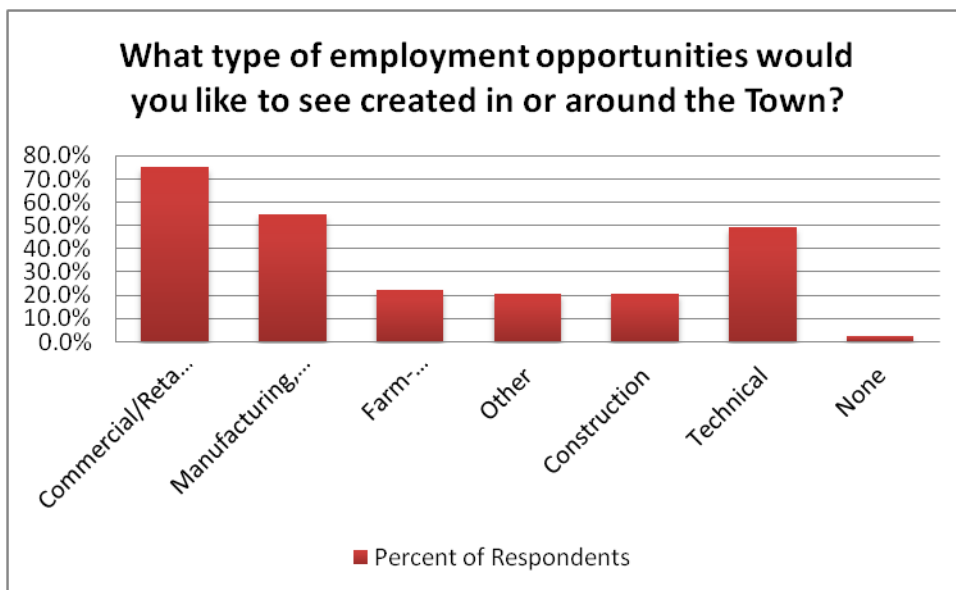


As illustrated in the graph above, more than half of the survey respondents are employed, and nearly 40% are retired. Those who are employed work in a myriad of places in the area, which is reflective of the Town’s central location in the region and supports the comments made in the survey that Gordonsville is conveniently located for both business and job opportunities. The graph below shows the breakdown of where survey respondents are employed:



People go where the jobs are, especially in this current economy. Fortunately, Gordonsville is situated in proximity to areas like Charlottesville where jobs are available. The fact that as many of the survey respondents work in Gordonsville as work in Charlottesville is encouraging given the sentiment expressed in Question #1, where a majority of survey respondents indicated the importance and benefits of working in the place where you live.

The types of jobs most preferred by survey respondents included commercial/retail/wholesale; manufacturing, processing and distributing; and technical jobs. The graph below shows the breakdown of the different job preferences indicated in the survey:



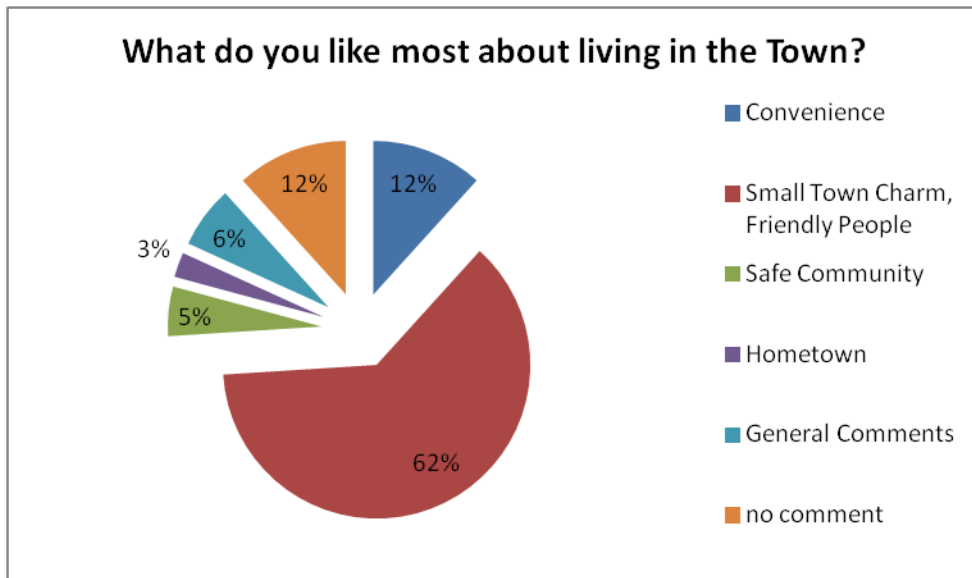
The “other” types of employment that survey respondents indicated they would like to see in or around Town included more grocery stores, small businesses, any clean manufacturing, satellite campus of a junior college or technical training school, health related services, and stores where locals can shop.

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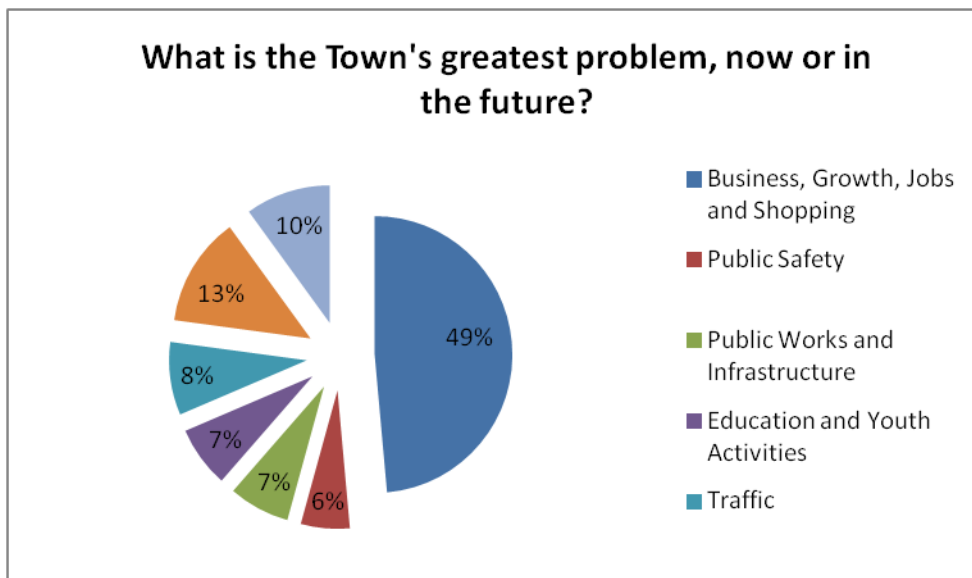
Questions 10 and 11, the last two questions of the community survey, were open-ended questions that asked what people liked most about living in the Town of Gordonsville, and what is the greatest problem for the Town, now or in the future. The information below is a summary of responses. A complete breakdown of all the responses is available in the raw data compilation on file in the Town Planner’s office.

For the first question, the responses were broken down into the following categories: convenience; small town charm, friendly people; safe community; hometown; and general comments. Over and over again, survey respondents commented that the small

town charm of Gordonsville was one of the things they liked most about living in Town. The graph below illustrates the breakdown of all the responses:



With regard to the greatest problem for the Town, now or in the future, survey respondents stated that business, growth, jobs and shopping are the greatest challenges. Other categories of concern are public safety, public works and infrastructure, education and youth activities, traffic, and general comments. The graph below illustrates how survey takers responded to this question:





Consistently, survey respondents stated that more shopping opportunities for the average Town citizen are needed because the current shops cater more to those with higher incomes and who do not live in Town. They recognize that more business opportunities will lead to more shopping opportunities that eventually will bolster the economy of the Town. A greater revenue stream that comes from increased business and shopping opportunities will have a positive effect on all facets of Town services, such as public safety and public works, and ultimately will help to relieve the tax burden on the citizens of the Town.

## **Conclusion**

Developing a clear and achievable vision for a community requires that the citizens within that community provide their input and feel vested in their responses. From the responses provided for this community survey that was sent out by Town Council and the Planning Commission in October 2011, it is clear that the people of the community care about their families, their neighbors, and their Town. They want to see more job opportunities, more shopping opportunities, more things for the youth of the community to do, and adequate provision of public services, all in the context of a small, rural, charming Town. They want what's best for their community, both now and for the future. While only 10% of the surveys that went out were completed and returned, the sentiments expressed in those 77 surveys provides clear and consistent direction for the Town's future and dovetails nicely with the public comments made during the Town's comprehensive plan public meetings that took place in the fall of 2011. There is no doubt that the future of the Town is bright as long as citizens and business owners remain committed to achieving a common vision for success.