



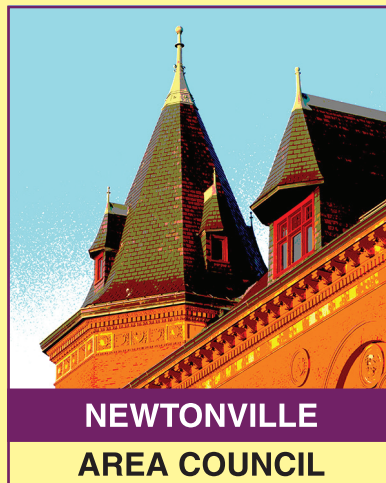
Envisioning Washington Street

NEWTONVILLE AREA COUNCIL

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Public Opinion Survey on the
Future of Washington Street

October 2018



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WHY PUBLIC OPINION MATTERS

Development is to be guided to reflect the character held or sought by residential neighborhoods, protecting the qualities of that which exists.... In all of the places in the City, the well-considered views of that place should be given great respect in land management policies and decisions.

— From Newton’s *Comprehensive Plan*, p. 3-6

We should provide a clear statement of intentions and goals both for the City as a whole and ... for each of our neighborhoods, village centers, and other places....The process of articulating those statements should critically involve those who, live, work or have other stakes in those places. That can result in guidance for which they feel real proprietorship and responsibility, not something imposed on them...

— From Newton’s *Comprehensive Plan*, p. 2-4

Too many so-called plans are chiefly descriptive of what exists or is predicted to exist, with little or no expression of what is wanted or intended by the community.... They don’t make explicit either the value-laden choices about what kind of future the community really wants, or the almost equally value-laden choices about how best to achieve that future. Instead, the “plan” simply describes what is likely to be, then states a series of seemingly determinate public responses to how to accommodate that unalterable future.

— From the lecture “Swamp Yankee Planning: Making Plans That Work” by Newton resident Professor Philip Herr

1. INTRODUCTION

The Newtonville Area Council (NAC) sincerely thanks those of you who took our challenging survey. We also thank the rest of you for your interest in our work.

This full report on our survey is the penultimate step in a process that began in October 2017, when the NAC began planning for the Envisioning Washington Street charrette held in February 2018. Next came the public opinion survey (June 12-30), which was based on charrette topics (housing, business mix, transportation, physical character, community benefits, and community impacts) and to which more than 2500 people responded. The Preliminary Results, including survey highlights, was released in August. This document represents our full analysis of the survey and soon we will complete the process with a public meeting to discuss the results.

Why This Survey Analysis Is Important

The NAC is committed to discovering what residents want along Washington Street. A major purpose of our independent survey was to raise awareness in the community and help people on the north side (Wards 1-3) and throughout Newton understand what friends, neighbors, and fellow residents are thinking about the burning development-related issues of the day. We hope this analysis will help you better advocate for your positions vis-à-vis the powers in city government and the private sector that make planning decisions. You can read the results at <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/91117>.

To the Mayor, City Council, other government officials, and the developers, we say *read our survey results and this report*. You all have indicated that it's important to learn about resident opinion regarding new development. Our survey provides the most relevant and credible information on this subject, and *there is major new information in this analysis to take into account*.

For example, our survey ensured that the opinions gathered were representative of people local to Washington Street, and we know that because we asked people to identify which wards and precincts they live in. This allows us to interpret responses by residential area. We have analyzed opinion at those local levels – especially in our target area, Wards 1-3: Nonantum, Newton Corner, Newtonville, and West Newton. We also asked questions about specific but inchoate development plans that have been bruited about — near Whole Foods and the Barn, thus grounding our results in realities that residents are facing today or perhaps tomorrow.

We believe you will find this survey helpful when deciding how to control proposed new developments, and when considering new zoning policies and special permit applications.

Highlights

Here are some major highlights of our survey analysis:

- Most respondents like the character and scale of Newton as it is now and would prefer that new development be in line with current village character and not overpoweringly large or dense. These were also the sorts of preferences voiced in the NAC's 2014 survey.
- Half of all respondents feel only a small obligation or no obligation toward helping the Greater Boston area build more housing.
- Most respondents aged 60 or older want to remain in their own homes, while fewer than 5% want to move into high-rise apartments with elevators.
- Respondents lean slightly against but are largely undecided about reducing the number of through traffic lanes on Washington Street.
- There is positive support for bike lanes.
- If development occurs on Washington Street, most respondents want it to be mixed-use, with 79% of those with opinions wanting it to be at least 50% commercial.

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2. DEMOGRAPHICS

Why We Asked About Demographics

Demographic information allows us to see to what extent our respondents represent the populations in our *target area* and the city. (The target area is defined as the wards along Washington Street — Wards 1-3 — from Newton Corner through West Newton.) To better interpret our results, we especially looked at which groups and wards might be either overrepresented or underrepresented.

In the tables below, survey statistics are compared with estimates from 2016 census from Factfinder.census.gov (American Community Study [ACS], supplementing the decennial census). Since American FactFinder does not provide ward or tract data, we rely on data for the three ZIP codes closest to our target area for comparison.

Highlights

- Respondents are older, better educated, and earn more than the state average. Likewise, they exceed Newton’s averages in these categories.
- Survey respondents are overwhelmingly homeowners.
- Nearly 30% of respondents have children in public schools.
- The young, who are likely to be high school and college students, and those in lower income ranges are underrepresented. Political scientists have found that the young and the less affluent vote at lower rates than their elders and their professional and managerial counterparts. These tendencies are paralleled in our survey results.

Ward Residence

Q44. Please enter your ward, precinct and ZIP code

Some 83% of respondents who indicated their ward live in the NAC’s target area.

Ward	Corresponds Roughly to This Village	% Survey Respondents*
1	Nonantum, Newton Corner	21%
2	Newtonville	36%
3	West Newton, Newtonville	26%
4	Auburndale, Lower Falls	8%
5	Waban, Upper Falls, Newton Highlands	4%
6	Newton Centre, Thompsonville	3%
7	Chestnut Hill, Newton Corner	2%
8	Oak Hill, Newton Highlands	1%

* Calculation is based on 2008 respondents: 2529 total minus 499 who skipped the question and a scattering (23) who gave invalid answers.

Age

Q2. What is your age?

The youngest residents are most underrepresented. Those 50 and older are most overrepresented.

Age Group	% Survey Respondents	% Target Area Pop.	Difference
16-29	4%	19%	-15%
30-39	10%	15%	-5%
40-49	18%	20%	-2%
50-59	23%	18%	+5%
60-69	25%	15%	+10%
70 +	20%	14%	+6%

Education Level

Q4. What is your highest level of education?

Survey respondents are highly educated: 64% have postgraduate degrees. The percentage with bachelor's degrees matches the NAC's target area and city, while those with less than a bachelor's degree are underrepresented.

Education Level	% Survey Respondents*	% Target Area Pop.**	Difference
Less than high school	1%	4%	-3%
High school/GED	3%	12%	-9%
Associate degree/some college	6%	12%	-6%
Bachelor's degree	27%	27%	0%
Postgraduate degree	64%	45%	+19%

* The ACS categories differed slightly from ours, so we had to make adjustments. For full comparability we excluded about 40 participants under 25. The adjustments left the figures above unchanged, with one exception. The number of persons 25 and older who did not complete high school drops to .3% from .6% (1% when rounded), because they are 18 or under, and have not finished high school.

** Figures represent residents in Wards 1-3 who are 25 years and older.

Household Income

Q34. What is your household income?

Respondents with lower household incomes (\$50,000 or less) are underrepresented.

Household Income	% Survey Respondents*	% Target Area Pop.	Difference
< \$25K	2%	6%	-4%
\$25K-\$50K	5%	10%	-5%
\$50K-\$75K	7%	8%	-1%
\$75K-\$100K	13%	9%	+4%
\$100K-\$150K	19%	18%	+1%
\$150K-\$200K	19%	14%	+5%
\$200K or more	36%	35%	+1%

* 504 respondents checked "Decline to answer." The percentage is calculated using those who answered.

For all categories earning more than \$50,000, the percentage of respondents corresponds fairly well to their percentage in the target area population.

Homeowners and Renters

Q33. Do you or your family own or rent your residence?

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents are homeowners. They are overrepresented in the sample, as renters are underrepresented.

Own or Rent	% Survey Respondents	% Target Area Pop.	Difference
Own residence	87%	68%	+19%
Rent residence	13%	32%	-19%

Household Size [Q35]

Q35. What is your household size? (adults and children)

The most common household size is 2, chosen by 37% of respondents. The median household size of respondents is 2, and the mean household size is 2.82. The median family size in Newton and our target area is roughly 3. Aside from the fact that respondents are much less likely to live alone than their counterparts in the target area and city census estimates, the household sizes of our respondents jibe well with proportions in the target area.

Household Size	% Survey Respondents	% Target Area Pop.	Difference
1-person household	14%	24%	-10%
2-person household	37%	33%	+4%
3-person household	18%	16%	+2%
4+-person household	32%	27%	+5%

According to American FactFinder, the average household size of an owner-occupied unit in Newton was 2.77 and a renter-occupied unit was 2.23.

Children in Newton Public Schools [Q3]

Q3. Do you have any children in the Newton Public Schools?

Currently, 28% of respondents have children in Newton public schools.

3. WASHINGTON STREET AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Why We Asked About Washington Street and Everyday Life

Since we are especially interested in the opinions of those who live near and use the survey’s target area — Washington Street from Newton Corner through West Newton, we wanted to find out what sorts of relationships our respondents have with the area and what they think about how much and how it should change. Here’s a brief rundown.

Highlights

- Almost all respondents have a direct relationship with the Washington Street area.
- Many (70%) feel Washington Street is run-down in a few places or that it is fine the way it is, whereas 30% feel it is substantially run down and in need of dramatic change.
- A majority of respondents want to *preserve* their village centers and keep them *distinct*.
- Respondents prefer that new buildings have an historical feel/architecture (52%) or a mix of styles (41%), rather than a contemporary feel/architecture (8%).

Washington Street Area Is Relevant to People’s Lives

Q1. What is your current relationship with the Washington Street area ...?

The following table shows the most common responses:

Use the services or shop at a business at least once a week	76%
Live near the Washington Street area	68%
Commute along Washington Street	51%
Substantially impacted by Washington Street traffic	47%

For the vast majority of respondents, Washington Street is directly relevant to their lives: They live there or shop there; they commute or travel along Washington Street area, making traffic a relevant issue. Only 3% of respondents have no relationship with the Washington Street area. Thus, we conclude that respondents gave informed, meaningful answers to survey questions.

Washington Street is Relatively OK the Way It Is

Q23. Which of the following statements best describes the condition of Washington Street?

Run-down in a few places, but mostly thriving economically	58%
Substantially run-down, not thriving economically, and in need of dramatic change	30%
Already successful, and fine the way it is	11%

This is a recommendation for small-to-moderate development, rather than aggressive development.

Preserving Village Centers and Keeping Them Distinct

Q10. Which more accurately reflects your view of the three village centers ... on Washington Street?

Keep village centers distinct	68%
Prefer a unified tone, allowing village centers to grow toward each other	32%

18% of respondents answer “No opinion.” Figures were calculated without them.

More than twice as many respondents want to keep the village centers distinct as want a unified tone that allows village centers to blend together — 56% to 26%.

Q11. How important do you feel it is to preserve the character of the village you live in?

Very important	42%
Important	28%
Neutral	20%
Unimportant	7%
Very unimportant	4%

A heavy majority, 70%, consider it important or very important to preserve the character of the village they live in. Only 11% consider it unimportant or very unimportant.

Q9. I prefer new construction that: *[architectural feel/style]*

Respondents informed us what kind of architectural feel/style they’d prefer to see in the villages if new developments are built.

Historical feel to the style/architecture	52%
A mix of styles	41%
Contemporary feel to the style/architecture	8%

9% of respondents answered “Other (please specify).”

Here, as in the other questions, most people seem relatively loyal to the status quo and averse to dramatic change.

4. HOUSING: HEIGHT AND DENSITY

Why We Asked About Housing Height and Density

New real-estate development is currently a major issue along the Washington Street corridor. A large developer received approval from the City Council to construct a 140-unit mixed-use building — Washington Place — at Washington and Walnut streets. That project is now under construction; it will be four- and five-stories high. Meanwhile, the developer plans to create more projects at various other locations along Washington Street. While we do not yet know of any specific plans, the developer has at various times suggested that the result will be about 1000 more rental units plus associated retail space between Newton Corner and West Newton.

Washington Place was the focus of much opposition, but there was no survey to find out how widespread pro- or anti-development sentiment were, or what their natures were – for example, were people happy or unhappy about size? Number of units? Density? Style? Other social costs and benefits? To make up for this lapse, this survey focused strongly on the issue of development along Washington Street. We tried to ascertain what attitudes are held by our residents toward development and related issues like affordable housing. In 2014 the NAC’s survey on the Austin Street project found that 82% of respondents wanted no more than three stories, and 80% wanted no more than 40 units. Our own survey’s findings, though drawn from a larger and more geographically diverse net, are much in line with those earlier findings.

Note: This section had many “Don’t know,” “Need more information,” “No opinion,” and “Not sure” responses. In other sections we usually analyzed questions using these kinds of responses. But in this section, the other housing section (next), and the transportation section, we generally look at all responses minus “Don’t know” and similar responses. Thus, percentages are calculated only from respondents who expressed an opinion. We are not surprised that so many survey-takers did not know how to answer some of our questions about housing, since the city’s plans are still somewhat unformed. For more information, see *How “Don’t Know” and “Need More Information” Responses Were Analyzed* on page 34.

Highlights

- There is a strong preference for lower building heights: three or four stories.
- There is a strong preference for not-too-dense development, that is, buildings with fewer units.
- While these results hold for all wards, they are strongest in the *north-side wards*, defined as Wards 1-4.

Building Height

Q7. Provide your preference for maximum building size along Washington Street.

Respondents strongly prefer three- or four-story buildings.¹ Most respondents, 72%, express a specific height preference. Of these, 41% want a three-story maximum, while another 18% favor a four-story maximum. Above four stories, 12% are favorable. In other words, 59% prefer four stories or fewer versus 12% who prefer five stories or more. (For respondents' comments about building design, see *Character and Design* on page 40.)

As for the 28% who say that “architecture and site placement are more important than height,” they did not have the opportunity to also indicate their preferences for height. Of those respondents who expressed an opinion about height, 82% prefer four stories or fewer:

Answer Choices	All Respondents	Respondents with a Height Preference*
3-story maximum	41%	57%
4-story maximum	18%	25%
5-story maximum	8%	11%
Greater than 5-story maximum	4%	5%
Architecture and site placement are more important than height	28%	0%
I prefer a mix of building heights ranging from 1 to (enter below) stories tall**	0%	

* This column is calculated only from the total number indicating a height preference, i.e., leaving out those who indicate that architecture and site placement are more important.

** The raw results included a sixth alternative – “I prefer a mix of building heights ranging from 1 to (enter below) stories tall.” 413 of 420 respondents entered the specific number of stories. We moved those numbers into the other appropriate categories to create a corrected set of results.

We suspected that people from the north-side wards (Wards 1-4) would be more likely to want lower buildings than people from Wards 5-8, where Washington Street is not as salient. In fact, relatively more north-siders prefer less height than south-siders, though majorities of both prefer lower buildings.

Answer Choices	Wards 1-4*	Wards 5-8*
3-story maximum	58%	52%
4-story maximum	26%	18%
5-story maximum	10%	21%
Greater than 5-story maximum	6%	10%

* These columns are calculated only for respondents who indicated their opinions about height, in the same manner as the previous table.

¹ The answer choices were phrased in terms of number of stories. Thus, *building size* effectively means building height in this question.

Q8. Would you support the construction of four-story and five-story buildings next to single-family and two-family homes?

The results here reinforce what we saw above – that lower heights are widely preferred. While on the north side, the ratio of No to Yes is more than four-to-one, in the rest of Newton it is slightly less than two-to-one.

Answer Choices	All Respondents	Wards 1-4	Wards 5-8
No	57%	59%	43%
Yes	14%	13%	24%
Depends on other factors	28%	28%	32%

Density of New Housing Units

Q15. 68 new housing units have been approved for Austin Street and 140 for Washington Place. How many additional housing units do you think are appropriate along Washington Street?

Here we switch from the issue of building height to the closely related issue of density. How many new units do residents want along Washington Street? (For respondents’ comments about density, see *Densification* on page 38.)

The pattern here is similar to what we saw before. The theme is “Less is better!” We can see this clearly by summarizing the various response options. For those who had a specific opinion, 86% support 500 or fewer units, compared to the 14% who want more. The south side is somewhat more interested in having more units constructed in the city’s northern wards than the north side wants for itself.

Number of Units	Total	North (Wards 1-4)*	South (Wards 5-8)*
0	35%	36%	31%
1-100	22%	22%	17%
100-250	17%	18%	8%
250-500	11%	11%	16%
500-750	4%	4%	10%
750-1000	3%	3%	8%
1000 or more	6%	5%	10%

* These columns are calculated only for respondents with opinions for the reasons given in the note on page 8.

Let’s also note that 35% of our sample said they didn’t know how to respond. This is similar to the percent of non-respondents in another density-related question, Q18, below.

Q16. As reported in The Boston Globe, Mark Development, LLC is considering constructing “450 housing units and 60,000 square feet of shops” on the land between Kempton Place (The Barn) through Dunstan Street in West Newton. Would you support this plan?

No, but I could support a mixed-use development with fewer housing units	28%
No	25%
No, but I could support a commercial-only development	4%
No, but I could support a housing-only development	1%
Yes	19%
Don't know/need more information	17%
Other (please specify)	5%

The answers are somewhat difficult to interpret because the answer choices cover several different dimensions of the plan. However, this much is clear: When it comes to number of units, the total No responses outweigh the Yes responses by 58% to 19%, though the numbers are less exact than in the questions above. The most popular option here specifically asks for fewer housing units (28%) and another 4% reject more units in favor of commercial-only development for a total of 32%. Finally, another 25% say No to the plan, but their objections are not made clear. Certainly some of these are objecting to the number of units. So, the total percentage who wants fewer units is at least 32%, and could range to 58%, or from an almost two-to-one to a four-to-one ratio against the “Yes” option. While majorities in the north and the south favor No positions, the north-side wards are half as inclined to indicate Yes on the project as south-side wards (18% versus 35%).

Q18. If housing is approved for the tract behind Whole Foods, how many housing units would be appropriate?

Here, the desire for fewer units is very striking: 54% want 150 or fewer units, while only 13% want 150 or more. As with Q15, one-third of respondents answered “Don’t know/need more information.” If we look only at responses expressing an opinion, we find that 81% throughout the city want 150 or fewer units, with 83% on the north side and 66% in the rest of Newton expressing such opinions.

New Units	Respondents with Opinions	North* (Wards 1-4)	South* (Wards 5-8)
None	20%	21%	16%
1-150	61%	62%	50%
150-300	11%	11%	20%
300-400	3%	3%	6%
400-500	1%	1%	4%
500+	3%	3%	4%

*34% indicated “Don’t know” or “Need more information.” Figures are calculated without them.

Q22. Newton is considering increasing its housing density. Where should such development take place?

Answer Choices	Total	North (Wards 1-4)	South (Wards 5-8)
Nowhere; maintain city's current density	36%	36%	35%
Equal in both higher-density and lower-density areas	31%	31%	31%
Mostly in lower-density areas throughout the city	17%	18%	9%
Mostly in higher-density areas throughout the city	16%	15%	25%

It is striking that the most popular answer choice (36%) is to have NO increase in Newton's density. Another 31% would accept some increase in density, distributed equally in low-density and high-density areas.

For the remaining 33% of respondents, we see a difference between north and south. North-siders prefer new development to be in low-density areas, while south-siders prefer it to be in high-density areas.

Overall, high-density areas are the least popular place for new development, contrary to what the Planning Department and major developers appear to be envisioning.

5. HOUSING: AFFORDABILITY AND FAIRNESS

Why We Asked About Housing Affordability and Fairness

Rising housing prices and the declining supply of moderately priced housing has been a major contributor to our nation’s growing inequality. Here in Newton, the prevalence of tear-downs and McMansions, median house prices over \$1 million and rising rents have squeezed out many middle-class and poor people and made life more difficult for those who remain. Newton’s response to this crisis has been to step up its efforts to help the Greater Boston area meet its housing goals by fostering new construction near transit stops and promoting a plan to rezone the city for greater density. Of course, these steps are also intended to meet affordable housing goals, such as helping seniors downsize from houses to apartments and enabling the less affluent to stay in Newton or move here. Our survey’s headline facts, however, show that Newton residents often have a mind of their own on these issues. (For respondents’ comments about affordability and fairness, see *Fairness* on page 37 and *Affordability* on page 39.)

Highlights

- Some 55% of respondents feel a *small* obligation or *no* obligation to help Greater Boston create more housing, while 45% assert Newton has a moderate or large obligation.
- Less than 5% of our senior respondents want to downsize into “high-rise apartments with elevators.”
- The less affluent are much more strongly for affordable housing, especially *subsidized* affordable housing, than the affluent.
- Most respondents want new housing targeted at those making \$50,000-\$120,000.
- Most believe that adding large amounts of new market-rate housing will make it more difficult for the less affluent to remain in Newton.

Obligation to Create Housing

Q21. To what extent does our city have an obligation to help the Greater Boston area by creating more housing throughout Newton?

Answer Choices	Respondents with Opinions*
Large obligation	17%
Moderate obligation	28%
Small obligation	20%
None at all	35%

* 8% of respondents answered “Don’t know.”

These attitudes contrast sharply with the large-scale planning that was revealed last spring, when Governor Baker’s administration released a list of cities and neighborhoods where major

housing growth was planned. Newton’s contribution, it noted, would be 2500 new housing units along Washington Street, although Director of Planning Barney Heath clarified that 850 of those would be on Needham Street and 650 would be at Riverside Station. Whatever the exact plans, the upshot from the standpoint of most of our respondents is that the city wants to go well beyond what they’d prefer – which is relatively constrained growth.

Unlike most other questions in this section, the responses of various demographic groups are surprisingly similar for Q21. Among wards, however, there is striking variation. Wards 1-4 see little or no obligation, as does a bare majority in Wards 6-8. But Ward 5 (Waban/Newton Highlands) expresses a much stronger sense of obligation, as 33% of its respondents indicate a large obligation and 34% a moderate obligation — attitudes more in step with the Planning Department’s visions than those of the other wards.

Ward	Obligation			
	Large	Moderate	Small	None
Wards 1-4	17%	28%	20%	36%
Ward 5	33%	34%	16%	16%
Wards 6-8	26%	24%	12%	38%

What Do Seniors Want?

Q42. If you are over 60 years of age, what do you eventually hope to do about your housing?

Answer Choices	Respondents Aged 60+*
Stay in my current home (with possible modifications)	54%
Stay in my current home, but add an accessory apartment	4%
Move to a high-rise building with elevators	5%
Move to a low-rise building	5%
Move to a smaller home in Newton	6%
Move out of Newton	10%
Move to an assisted living facility	3%
Move to public or cooperative housing	3%
Other (write-in comments)	11%

* These figures exclude several hundred people under 60 who responded to the question, despite its guidelines, and were included in our preliminary results.

A surprising and important finding of Q42 is that less than 5% (4.74%) of our senior respondents eventually hope to downsize into “high-rise apartment buildings with elevators,” while more than twice as many, 10.2%, would prefer to move out of Newton.

As for what most people want, 58% hope to stay in their own home: 54% with possible modifications and 4% doing so if they can add an accessory apartment. Majorities in all wards made these same top choices.

Household Income Affects Home Ownership

Q33. Do you or your family own or rent your residence?

Own	87%
Rent	13%

By income:

Household Income	% Rent	% Own
\$25,000-\$50,000	36%	64%
\$50,000-\$75,000	27%	73%
\$75,000-\$100,000	24%	76%
\$100,000-\$150,000	18%	83%
\$150,000-\$200,000	10%	90%
\$200,000 or more	4%	96%
Decline to state	8%	92%

Income makes a crucial difference as to whether people rent or own a home. The relationship is simple and direct. The higher a household's income, the more likely it is to own a home. Moving up the income scale — from households earning \$25,000-\$50,000 to more than \$200,000 per year — the home-owning percentage increases steadily from 64% to 96%.

It is interesting that our less affluent respondents making \$25,000-\$50,000 have a homeownership rate as high as the national average for all income groups — 64!¹ Seemingly, this is due to many of our older residents having bought their homes long ago at more affordable rates, since more than 90% of our respondents over 50 own their own homes.

Middle Class Is Favored

Q36. Apartments in newer complexes in Newton have median rents of \$2,700/mo. for one-bedroom and \$3,500/mo. for two-bedroom apartments. By government standards, these are affordable to households earning at least \$108,000 and at least \$140,000, respectively. On which income level(s) should Newton place the most emphasis for new housing? Select all that apply.

Income Groups to Focus Housing On	%
Less than \$20,000	18%
\$20,000-\$50,000	36%
\$50,000-\$80,000	59%
\$80,000-\$120,000	50%
\$120,000-\$140,000	21%
More than \$140,000	13%

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau. *Quarterly Residential Vacancies and Home Ownership, Second Quarter 2018*. Release Number: CB18-107, July 26, 2018.

Our respondents want Newton to emphasize housing for households making from \$50,000 to \$120,000, that is, basically from the lower-middle to the upper-middle class. While the \$20,000 to \$50,000 group ranks third in support, it is interesting that there is more support for targeting housing toward those in the \$120,000 to \$140,000 range than to those making less than \$20,000. Still, the message that comes through loudest is that middle-class housing, not luxury housing, is what most of respondents prefer.

Affordable Housing

Q37. Newton requires larger private developments to provide a percentage of the residential units to be subsidized for low- or moderate-income residents. How much subsidized affordable housing would you like to see in any new buildings on Washington Street?

Less than 15%	19%
15%	15%
20%	22%
25%	19%
30%	11%
More than 30%	13%

The first table shows that 65% favor 20% or more subsidized housing units in new developments.

The second table breaks preferences down by household income and shows that households with smaller incomes are more likely to support subsidized affordable housing than households with higher incomes.

By income:

Household Annual Income*	What % of New Housing Should Be Subsidized and Affordable						Total 20%+
	<15%	15%	20%	25%	30%	>30%	
\$25,000-\$50,000	11%	6%	27%	19%	11%	27%	84%
\$50,000-\$75,000	13%	8%	19%	16%	17%	27%	79%
\$75,000-\$100,000	12%	14%	21%	25%	13%	15%	74%
\$100,000-\$150,000	16%	15%	23%	21%	14%	11%	69%
\$150,000-\$200,000	18%	19%	24%	18%	11%	10%	63%
More than \$200,000	22%	18%	25%	20%	7%	8%	60%

* Households making less than \$25,000 a year were excluded, since they constitute too few cases to be statistically significant, i.e., 1.3% of the total.

Q38. The most common way of providing affordable housing in Newton is to use revenue from market-rate units to subsidize the affordable units. A higher percentage of affordable units require a greater number of total units to offset the cost. Given this relationship, how would you trade off building size against the percentage of affordable units?

Limiting size is my priority, so I'd reduce the percentage of affordable units	32%
Limiting size is my priority, but I wouldn't go below (enter below) % affordable units	22%
Affordability is my priority, so I'd be flexible on building size	29%
Affordability is my priority, but I wouldn't want to go over (enter below) stories	17%

By a 54% to 46% majority, respondents prefer limiting building size to providing affordable housing. This result is largely a consequence of the disproportionately high representation of more affluent groups in our sample.

Household Annual Income	Priority	
	Limiting Size %*	Affordability %*
\$25,000-\$50,000	43%	57%
\$50,000-\$75,000	44%	56%
\$75,000-\$100,000	48%	52%
\$100,000-\$150,000	48%	52%
\$150,000-\$200,000	57%	43%
More than \$200,000	58%	42%
Declined to state income	60%	40%

* The figures in Limiting Size % and Affordability % were calculated by adding the percentages for the two response categories corresponding to each of them. Their full description is shown in the previous table.

Even though the less affluent have shown in their responses to many questions that they prefer to limit building size, they nevertheless tend to prioritize affordable housing over limiting the size of buildings when the two goals conflict. Consistent with the previous question (Q37), those making over \$100,000 per year made the opposite choice and prefer to constrain building size.

Q39. There are alternative ways of providing affordable housing. Which of the following would you like to see Newton actively explore? Select all that apply.

Public housing	23%
Rent control	37%
Cooperative housing	46%
Housing developments by nonprofit organizations	54%
None of the above	18%
Other (please specify)	11%

There is majority support for housing developments by nonprofit organizations, and this support varies little by income category.

Impact of Market-rate Housing

Q43. 75% to 85% of apartments in new, large developments will rent at market rate. What impact will large numbers of market-rate apartments have on rents and property taxes and the ability of less affluent people to stay in the neighborhood?

By a better than four-to-one margin (70% to 16%), respondents think large amounts of market-rate housing will make it more, rather than less, difficult for the less affluent to stay in Newton, while 14% think the effects would be neutral.

Answer Choices	Respondents with Opinions*
It will be harder for less affluent people to stay, because rents, property values, and property taxes will rise	70%
It will be easier for less affluent people to stay, because more housing and more taxpayers will create downward pressure on rents and tax increases	16%
It will have little or no effect on whether less affluent people can stay	14%

* 20% of respondents answered “No opinion.”

While lower income groups want affordable housing more than the affluent, they also are much more fearful that if it is accompanied by large amounts of market-rate housing that that will make it more difficult to remain in Newton.

The following table shows the percent of respondents by annual income who believe that large numbers of new market-rate housing will make it harder for less affluent people to stay here:

By income:

Household Annual Income	Percent*
\$25,000-\$50,000	82%
\$50,000-\$75,000	87%
\$75,000-\$100,000	84%
\$100,000-\$150,000	68%
\$150,000-\$200,000	74%
More than \$200,000	54%
Declined to state income	72%

* 20% of respondents answered “No opinion.”

6. BUSINESS MIX

Why We Asked About Business Mix

The survey asked about business mix, because during the February charrette attendees were concerned about what kinds of new businesses would be entering the community. The biggest concern was that large, national chains would replace distinctive, locally owned stores where “everybody knows your name,” representing a loss of community.

Business mix is a thorny issue, because small retail stores have been having a tough time competing against the price and convenience of the Internet. Many storefronts are vacant, both because rents are high and neighborhoods are in flux. This means residents cannot meet all their consumer needs in their own village without resorting to car travel. Also, the right mix of businesses can create community by binding residents and commerce — providing “smaller restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores, gyms, parks and playgrounds,” basically “places where people can come together to socialize or interact.” (For more comments, see *Open-Ended Responses* on page 35.)

Some business people and urban planners have suggested that the city look for ways to subsidize the rents of small businesses, including start-ups. Our respondents have also indicated they would like developers to do this. If the city and/or developers cooperated to implement such policies and if they had the intended outcome of producing a plethora of small businesses, this would be welcome news for a city interested in creating walkable villages. Then residents would have stores to walk to, which likely would be both interesting and affordable.

Highlights

If development occurs along Washington Street:

- Respondents want new developments to be *mixed-use* (79%) which is defined as one or more buildings that are both commercial and residential within a single development.
- As for the mix of commercial and residential, half of respondents (50%) want a 50-50 mix of commercial and residential; another 29% want it to be 75% commercial and 25% residential.
- Locally owned stores — eateries, retail, and service — are much preferred over national chains.
- Overwhelmingly, respondents endorse affordable or subsidized rents for small, locally owned businesses.

Mixed-use Development

As noted earlier, a *mixed-use development* is one or more buildings within a single development project that are both commercial and residential. Two examples of such developments currently under construction are 28 Austin Street and Washington Place.

During the Envisioning Washington Street charrette in February, diverse viewpoints were expressed about mixed-use development. Among those who favored mixed-use development if development were to occur, there was no consensus on height; nor was there a consensus on the number of units. Thus, we thought it was important to ask questions related to mixed-use development in the survey, to get a better sense of what a larger audience wanted to see along Washington Street.

Q40. If areas along Washington Street are redeveloped, what would you prefer? Select all that apply.

Mixed-use development, with a mixture of commercial and residential use	79%
Residential development with individually owned (condominium) units	26%
Commercial-only development	16%
Residential-only development, such as a townhouse development	15%
Residential-only development, such as an apartment building	10%
None of the above	3%

6% of respondents answered "Other (please specify)."

As the table shows, mixed-use development, with a mixture of commercial and residential uses, is far more popular than single-use alternatives.

Of single-use residential choices, individually owned condominium units are preferred by 26%, and townhouses by 15%, indicating that both are significantly more popular among respondents than apartment buildings (10%). So, too, is commercial-only development (16). Also suggesting distaste for large apartment buildings are the responses to Q13, below.

Q13. What is your preferred ratio of commercial space to residential space on Washington Street when development is finished? Note: commercial property is taxed at twice the tax rate as residential property.

50% commercial and 50% residential	50%
75% commercial and 25% residential	29%
25% commercial and 75% residential	21%

8% of respondents answered "Other (please specify)."

While most real estate developers want a mix of at least 75% residential and 25% commercial, that is the choice of only 21% of our respondents. The overwhelming

majority, 79%, want 50% commercial or more! More specifically, 29% prefer 75% commercial and 25% residential, while 50% prefer 50% commercial and 50% residential.

Kinds of Businesses

Q12. New or renovated developments may provide commercial space on Washington Street. How favorable are you to the following kinds of businesses?

Local stores are much preferred over chains. Here are the results:

- 98% have a *favorable* impression of *locally owned eateries* (for example, restaurants and bakeries), while only 16% have favorable views of chain eateries (for example, Applebee's, Panera), suggesting that Newton residents value culinary distinctiveness in their dining experience.
- 91% have *favorable* attitudes toward *locally owned retail businesses* (for example, shoe store, hardware store). Chain retail businesses, such as Trader Joe's and CVS, on the other hand, are moderately popular (43%).
- 92% have *favorable* attitudes toward *locally owned service businesses* (for example, dry cleaners and barber shops), but only 24% view their chain service counterparts, like Citizens Bank and Century21, that way.

If commercial space were to be used for other kinds of businesses, attitudes are more moderate, and there is no clear-cut favorite. Generic office space, medical offices, exercise facility, and co-working space are roughly the same:

- 59% favor medical offices (for example, dentist, physical therapy).
- 59% favor exercise or gym facilities.
- 55% favor business incubators and co-working spaces.
- 48% favor generic offices (for example, accounting, legal, R&D).

Affordable Commercial Rentals

Q14. Do you think Washington Street developments should be required to include affordable rental spaces for small, locally owned businesses?

Yes	87%
No	13%

Respondents overwhelmingly believe that new developments should include affordable or subsidized rents for small, locally owned businesses (87%). Perhaps the city, developers, or both would be willing to help provide subsidies or rent controls for these types of businesses. It also suggests that developers should divide up commercial floor space in small units.

7. TRANSPORTATION

Why We Asked About Transportation

Both planners and residents are concerned about traffic volume, environmental impact, and available parking. The essential issue for planning is to strike a balance between (a) *enabling automobile use* – providing easy access to local businesses and quick commutes, and (b) *cutting down on automobile use* – because of environmental and safety concerns and because lower automobile use contributes to walkable environments. (For respondents’ comments about traffic, parking, and transportation, see *Open-ended Responses* on page 35.)

Highlights

- Most of our sample (71%) is directly impacted by traffic on Washington Street.
- Most of our sample thinks development on Washington Street will have a negative impact on traffic flow (77%) and ease of parking (76%).
- Among the transit-oriented benefits that developers could provide, respondents are most interested in enhanced sidewalks and walking paths (77%).
- Most people who commute to work (78%) use their automobiles; another 16% take public transit (train, subway, bus). A small 5% bike or walk.
- However, for non-work travel, there is much more walking, somewhat more use of public transit, and somewhat less driving. Bicycle use is modestly higher.¹
- There is solid potential for bike use to increase. Only 3% use bicycles now to commute, but 27% say they would use them if lanes were provided.
- All the north-side wards want more parking in their village centers, but this differs a good deal by ward. In Ward 1 and Ward 4, 47% of each ward want more parking, while in Ward 2 and Ward 3, 68% of each ward want more parking.
- The vast majority (76%) reject the idea that parking spaces for new developments should be fewer and smaller.
- Our sample rejects the idea of reducing the number of lanes on Washington Street. Only 13% approve of it in one question (Q24) and 37% in another (Q26). And the latter drops to 34% in Wards 1-4. But at the same time there’s not a majority for keeping the four-lane structure. People seem uncertain what is best.
- We asked whether Newton should be able to charge developers to help pay for investments in infrastructure. The answer was near unanimous: 90%.

¹ No numbers here, because the index of non-work travel is inexact. However, it is precise enough to warrant these conclusions.

Context and Overall Views

Q1. What is your current relationship with the Washington Street area? ... Select all that apply.

Only choices specifically relevant to transportation are shown.

I commute via automobile along Washington Street	51%
I am substantially impacted by Washington Street traffic	47%
I use public transportation along Washington Street	17%
I travel by bike along Washington Street	13%

In total, *71% of respondents* were impacted by one or more of the four items above.²

Q5. Community benefits are public benefits funded by a developer. Select up to 5 benefits that are most important to you in the Washington Street area.

The choices specifically relevant to transportation are shown. Percents are of all respondents.

Sidewalks and walking paths	77%
Improved train and bus stations	47%
Improved traffic signals	39%
Bike lanes	35%

The most prominent desire is for improved sidewalks and walking paths.

Q19. Do you think development on Washington Street will have a positive or negative impact on the following issues?

The choices specifically relevant to transportation are shown.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Traffic flow	7%	77%	16%
Ease of parking	6%	76%	17%

Respondents have a negative outlook on the future of traffic and parking.

² Explanatory example: Paul bikes along Washington Street. He is impacted in one way out of four. Ann also bikes, but uses public transit, too, so Ann is impacted in two ways out of four. Both Paul and Ann are among the 71% who are impacted. All respondents who checked *one or more* of the transportation choices are part of the 71%. All respondents who checked none of the choices are *not* impacted and are part of the 29% who are not impacted.

**Q24. If the Washington Street roadway were redesigned, what would be your priorities?
Select up to 5 items that are most important to you.**

Crosswalks with prominent warning lights	54%
Dedicated turn lanes	53%
Improved traffic signalization	52%
More parking	52%
Bike lanes	42%
Wider sidewalks	33%
Slower speed limits and more cautionary signage	30%
Bump-outs at crosswalks	22%
Reduced number of traffic lanes	13%

Observations: (1) The top three items are all concerned with safety. (2) At the other extreme, bump-outs are not a priority with most, and reducing the number of traffic lanes has very little support. See Q26 below, where we focus on this issue of how many traffic lanes to have. There we also see low support (37%) for a two-plus-turning design, though higher than here.

How People Get Around Presently

Q27. If you travel to work, what is your usual mode of transportation?

	Of Those Who Travel to Work
Personal vehicle	78%
Train/subway	9%
Bus	7%
Bicycle	3%
Walking	2%
Lyft, Uber, Zipcar	1%
Taxi	1%

A fifth (22%) of respondents work at home or are not working.

Among those respondents who travel to work, most (78%) use their automobiles, and another 16% take public transit – train, subway, and bus.

The question for the future is whether auto commuters will transition to other modes that are less polluting and/or healthier. New technologies and business models will undoubtedly change the balance – witness LimeBike, Uber, and possible autonomous vehicles – but the results are unpredictable. Ride hailing has actually increased the traffic burden, and autonomous vehicles may do the same. People may not need to own cars, but that doesn't mean that cars will disappear from the roads. There is one change, however, that is highly likely; based on responses to Q25 (below), bicycle use will increase above the 3% of current work commuters.

Q28. Other than commuting to work, what kinds of transportation do you use to live your everyday life (e.g., shop, dine, transport kids, attend events)? Please indicate the approximate percentage of trips you use each of the following:

	Never	1-10%	10-25%	25-50%	50-75%	75-90%	>90%	Summary Index ³
Personal vehicle	1%	2%	4%	8%	16%	28%	41%	45
Walking	3%	42%	30%	13%	6%	3%	3%	18
Train/subway	25%	51%	14%	6%	2%	1%	1%	11
Bus	58%	29%	7%	3%	1%	1%	1%	8
Lyft, Uber, Zipcar	33%	56%	8%	2%	1%	0%	0%	7
Bicycle	49%	32%	13%	4%	1%	1%	0%	11
Taxi	59%	38%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	4

Let’s contrast the results from these two questions: how people get to work (Q27) and how they get around in everyday life (Q28). (We are contrasting percents (Q27) with an approximate non-percent index (Q28) where the maximum is also 100. It’s a rough comparison but instructive nonetheless.)

	How People Get to Work – from Q27	How People Get About in Everyday Life – from Q28	Difference: Non-work – Work Usage
Muscle: Walking	2%	18	+16
Muscle: Bicycle	3%	7	+4

Car: Personal vehicle	78%	45	-33
Car: Lyft, Uber, Zipcar	1%	8	+7
Car: Taxi	1%	4	+3

Public: Train/subway	9%	11	+2
Public: Bus	7%	6	-1

What we see is that people drive their own vehicles a good deal less (-33) for personal trips than for work trips. However, their overall vehicle use is not as different (-23), because they use Lyft, taxis, and other vehicles more for their personal trips. The lower use of vehicles for personal trips is counterbalanced by a net +20 increase in the use of muscle power, along with a very small +3 net in public transit.

³ The Summary Index measures everyday life usage. The column is a weighted average of figures from all the other columns, then adjusted so that each index number has a maximum of 100. Of necessity, the index is imprecise because the raw data were in ranges rather than precise numbers. However, the index is a fair representation of frequency of use. The index numbers add to more than 100, because of the way the original question was constructed.

What’s important is the relative difference between the index numbers. For example, in the upper chart, people walk (18) about twice as much as they use the bus (8) for non-work transportation.

How People Might Get Around in the Future

Q25. If bike lanes were created on Washington Street, would you use them?

Answer Choices	%*
No	57%
Yes	27%
Yes, but only if protected by a barrier	16%

* 12% of respondents answered “Not sure.” Figures were recalculated after these responses were excluded.

What’s striking is the relatively large group of people who say they would or might use bike lanes along Washington Street, 43% in total. This represents a substantial potential reservoir of support for bike lanes and, maybe an indication that the lanes might be well used.

Q29. The City wants to promote reduced car travel. Would you use a shuttle bus that runs along Washington Street, stopping at village centers and other key points, such as Newton-Wellesley Hospital and a Green Line station?

Yes	48%
No	52%

21% of respondents answered “Don’t know.” Figures were recalculated after these responses were excluded.

The table shows that about half would use a shuttle bus. However, income makes a big difference here. The higher one’s income, the less likely one is to use a shuttle. This is shown in the table below. Now, recall that our sample is underrepresented on the non-affluent side. So actual demand in the Newton population for a shuttle service would exceed 50%. That’s substantial support for instituting a Washington Street shuttle.

Household Income	% Yes	% No
Less than \$25,000	65%	35%
\$25,000-\$50,000	61%	39%
\$50,000 - \$75,000	57%	43%
\$75,000 - \$100,000	60%	40%
\$100,000 - \$150,000	54%	46%
\$150,000 - \$200,000	54%	46%
\$200,000 or more	41%	59%
Declined to state income	40%	60%

Parking

Q30. Is more public parking needed in your village?

Answer Choices	Respondents With Opinions*
Yes	69%
No	31%

* 14% of respondents answered “Not sure.” Figures were recalculated with these responses excluded.

Overall, 69% of respondents with an opinion say they need more parking in their villages.

When we break it down by wards (our approximations of villages), we see that Ward 2 and Ward 3 feel substantially more in need of parking (~20 points) than Ward 1 and Ward 4.

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4
Yes	47%	68%	68%	47%
No	33%	18%	20%	42%
Not sure	20%	13%	12%	12%

Q32. What is your preferred parking option along Washington Street?

On-street parking	32%
Municipal parking lots	40%
Patron parking (free for patrons of a specific business)	22%
Not applicable	5%

Although there was no decisive winner, municipal parking lots are preferred.

Cutting Down on Car Ownership and Use

Some in Newton believe that we ought to discourage automobile ownership and use in favor of walking, bicycles, and other healthy and/or environmentally positive modes. We’ve already seen in Q25 that many residents might use bike lanes if they appeared on Washington Street.

Here are several other questions relevant to the overall idea of cutting down on private automobile use.

Q31. The City has allowed new developments to have fewer and smaller parking spaces compared to older developments. Do you support this change?

Answer Choices	Respondents with Opinions*
Yes	24%
No	76%

* 14% of respondents answered “No opinion.” Figures were recalculated with these responses excluded.

Contrary to the view that parking and driving should be made more difficult, 65% reject the idea that new parking spaces should be fewer and smaller.

Q26. Would you support reducing the number of through traffic lanes from 4 to 2, with a third lane for turning?

	All Respondents	Respondents in Wards 1-4	Respondents in Wards 1-4 with Opinions	Respondents in Wards 5-8 with Opinions
Yes	37%	35%	45%	58%
No	42%	43%	55%	42%
Not sure	22%	22%	—	*

* 28% of respondents in Wards 5-8 answered “Not sure.”

Only about one-third of our whole sample supports the idea of lane reduction (a so-called *road diet*). But those who reject the idea don’t hold sway either. In Wards 1-4, 55% of those who have opinions oppose the idea. Still, we believe that in the main, a large minority of people are uncertain what the best answer would be, and the issue could swing either way. It’s clear to us that this issue needs more public debate.

On the other hand, while lane reductions are often promoted with the argument that traffic fatalities are four times more likely if a vehicle is traveling at 40 MPH than if it’s moving at half that speed, of all the many ways of slowing traffic, lane reductions are the least popular (only 13%) of the priorities listed in Q24. (For the results of Q24, see page 24.)

Road Infrastructure

Q20. New developments require investments in infrastructure (e.g., schools, roads, utilities). Do you think Newton should be able to charge developers to help pay for these investments?

Yes	90%
No	4%
No opinion	6%

This idea is probably the most popular in the whole survey!

8. Community Benefits and Public Space

Why We Asked About Community Benefits and Public Space

Buildings tell us about private indoor space, which the survey probed with a number of questions about height, size, and density. How public space is created and used is just as important, because it tells us what you value about the space you share with your neighbors — whether you’re strolling along Washington Street, chatting with other diners in an outdoor eatery, or reading a newspaper on a park bench.

We need to know what you value in community life, because when development proposals are undergoing approval, the Land Use Committee of the City Council can ask the developer to fund improvements that benefit the entire community, like public venues and schools. The small public plaza under construction at 28 Austin Street in Newtonville is an example of a community benefit being built by the site developer. In East Somerville, massive development brought more than \$100 million in community benefits. With so much at stake, the City Council needs to know what you think.

Highlights

- Respondents chose “green space, trees, and plantings” as the most popular community benefit. (After all, Newton is the Garden City!)
- The #1 use of outdoor public space was recreation areas and playgrounds.

Community Benefits

Q5. Community benefits are public benefits funded by a developer. Select up to 5 benefits that are most important to you in the Washington Street area.

The following table shows the top-five community benefits in descending order:

Green space, trees, and plantings	82%
Sidewalks and walking paths	77%
Improved train and bus stations	47%
Improved traffic signals	39%
Bike lanes	35%

19% of respondents answered “Other (please specify).”

Less popular benefits were recreation areas and playgrounds (34%), noise abatement (30%), set-aside funds for schools (29%), new community center/facilities (22%), improved street lighting (20%), and park benches (17%). However, this is not the whole story. Among the 461 respondents who wrote in an “Other” response, more parking was the heavy favorite, with 103 write-ins.

Clearly, green space, trees, and plantings (82%) as well as wider sidewalks and walking paths (77%) are overwhelming favorites as community benefits. It suggests to us that residents value natural beauty as they stroll along Washington Street.

However, the survey didn't ask where specifically you want green space added, and what kind of green space you prefer. For example, would you like to see additional trees along the south side of Washington Street? Do you want to see plantings in Newton Corner near Centre Street? It seems to us a public discussion is necessary to help decide what the community would truly like.

Bikes lanes are popular among 35% of respondents. Interestingly, in Q24, 42% considered bike lanes a priority, and in Q25, 38% indicated they would bike if lanes/protected bike lanes were provided. Although only 3% of respondents bike to work now, and bike use increases only modestly during daily life, it seems that bike use is likely to increase if bike lanes are provided. (For more details about Q24 and Q25, see *Transportation* on page 22.)

Public Space

Q6. What kinds of functions should outdoor public space support? Select up to 5 functions that are most important to you.

The following table shows the top-five functions of public space in descending order:

Recreation areas and playgrounds	76%
Park benches	67%
Outdoor dining	60%
Public performances	46%
Community art work	44%

13% of respondents answered "Other (please specify)."

Three other choices are less popular: water feature (30%), sculpture garden (22%), and chess, checkers, and other table games (17%).

As noted in the Q5 discussion, respondents overwhelmingly endorse green space, trees, and plantings. In Q6, respondents suggest a use for that green space – recreation areas and playgrounds (76%) and park benches (67%).

Outdoor dining is popular at 60%, notably with more affluent respondents (households making \$100,000 or more).

The choice of public performances by 46% and community art work by 44% suggests that residents want the arts in the public sphere.

9. METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION AND DATA VALIDITY

Survey Preparation

To complement its Envisioning Washington Street charrette held last February, the NAC established a working group to compose our public opinion survey regarding business and development issues along Washington Street. Over several months, we solicited questions from NAC members and residents, then wrote, edited, entered (into SurveyMonkey), pretested, and uploaded the survey in early June.

We based the survey questions on issues discussed at the charrette: community benefits, business mix, physical character, community impacts, housing, and transportation. The entire council approved the survey and thus created a comprehensive instrument requiring thoughtful reflection rather than quick, superficial responses. It contained 37 substantive questions, designed to explore issues of importance to the public — like roads, traffic, parking, housing, and Newton’s physical character. We were curious, too, about how residents live in Newton today, and what they hope Washington Street looks like tomorrow. Other questions pertained to demographics and open-ended responses. Questions outside the purview of the local government were not included, for example, air rights over the Mass Pike and MBTA issues.

Data Collection: Background and Recruitment

The council had several discussions about who should be recruited to take the survey. Random sampling was not possible because it was too expensive and demanded more time than the council had available. In the end, we decided that the survey should target *all households in Wards 1, 2, and 3* for these reasons:

- As noted in *Why Public Opinion Matters* (page v), Newton’s Comprehensive Plan asserts that residents most affected by developments should be given special consideration. We wanted to give voice to residents in these wards especially, as they abut those parts of Washington Street that are being envisioned as the scene of new developments.
- When a random sample isn’t possible, it’s important that every relevant person in a population have an equal chance to respond. To allow all eligible voices in Wards 1-3 to have an equal opportunity to be heard, we cast a wide net throughout these three wards.

To do this, we mailed a bright yellow postcard, designed by a graphic artist on the council, to virtually *all* of the 10,809 households in Wards 1-3, using a residential street list provided by the City Clerk. All residents aged 16 and above were invited to complete the survey online or on paper. A paper version could be requested via telephone. The telephone number was advertised on the postcard. Due to scarce resources, only Wards 1-3 could fill

out the paper version. We reinforced this blanket mailing to Wards 1-3 by using the Beautiful Newtonville/NAC mailing list and local listservs.

Residents in other wards were also invited to participate, but not as systematically. To announce the survey and invite people from all over Newton, we had a letter to the editor published in the *Newton Tab* and asked other civic organizations and all city councilors from Wards 1-3 to publicize it and urge all their members and constituents to take it. A link to the survey was also posted on Village 14. In addition, Mark Development, a major developer on Washington Street, urged people to take the survey in a Facebook posting for *Hello Washington Street*.

The postcard arrived in mailboxes on June 12. All told, 2529 residents responded — almost all were done online and 46 on paper — during the period June 12-30. The survey introduction informed participants that they did not need to answer all of the 46 questions for their responses to count, and that they could skip any questions.

Representativeness

Because we did not use a random sampling procedure, it was important to collect ample demographic data to compare with our survey results. The demographics, as noted, allowed us to learn which groups were represented in the sample and how much so. To the extent that some groups were overrepresented or underrepresented, this helped us to extrapolate a better-balanced picture of the attitudes of the whole target population and of Newton.

In addition, the survey analysis allowed us to look at differences across demographic categories, so that we were able to see, for example, how people in the target area or the whole north side might differ compared to people elsewhere. We included the following demographic information:

- Household income
- Age
- Education level
- Household size
- Children in Newton public schools
- Whether respondents own or rent
- Ward

Demographics on page 3 shows the full results.

Wards as Units of Analysis

Our analysis shows that:

- Eighty percent of the respondents (2008) identified their wards.
 - A large majority of these, 83%, were from the target wards (Wards 1-3).
 - The remaining 17% came from Wards 4-8.
- Twenty percent of respondents did not specify a ward, largely due to the placement of the ward question (Q44) at the end of the survey.
- There was uneven participation by wards.

In much of our analysis, we have combined the 161 respondents from Ward 4 with those from Wards 1-3. The first reason is because Ward 4 is on the north side of the city and runs along Washington Street, just as Wards 1-3 do. Second, Ward 4 has a history of voting similarly to the other north-side wards and is the site of a large development around Riverside Station. Third, its residents responded to our survey very similarly to those of our target wards. For a breakdown of respondents by ward, see *Ward Residence* on page 3.

Looking then at the rest of the city, we are left with Wards 5-8, with 72, 64, 35, and 14 respondents, respectively, for a total of 185. Together, they can make for meaningful contrasts with the north-side wards. And on the more controversial housing and transportation questions, we have seen that they, and especially Wards 5 and 6, often respond quite differently from the north-side wards. Whether these differences are truly typical of these wards or the product of a score or two of self-selecting residents is a question for further research. Nevertheless, by combining the results of these four wards, and sometimes looking at the larger two by themselves (Wards 5 and 6), we have made suggestive, if not conclusive, contrasts with our target area.

Data Validity

Given the on-line method we used to collect data, there was a possibility of a person taking the survey multiple times, thus distorting the results. Checking this, we found that such behavior (akin to “voter fraud”) was negligible. Recall that our postcards invited all members of each household (16 years and older) to take the survey. Therefore, we expected multiple responses from many households.

But these were all within reasonable bounds. For instance, a single survey came from each of 1845 IP addresses, and 2 surveys came from 256 IPs. There were 34 IP addresses from which 3 surveys came, but that does not seem unreasonable, since half of Newton families have 3 or more members. One IP address had 4 survey-takers, one had 5, one had 6, and the Main Library’s IP had 8. Forty-seven surveys were submitted from the Newton Senior Center’s IP address: 46 paper surveys’ data were entered there by several NAC members, and 1 resident

took the online survey there. In short, the numbers of multiple respondents above, relative to our total, were too small to have significantly distorted the results, which featured more than 75% of surveys coming from unique IP addresses or paper surveys.

Also, looking at the many comments written by respondents about possible bias, 11 comments asserted that the survey was biased in favor of development, while 9 asserted the opposite. This close balance suggests that the survey was relatively neutral.

The survey included a question (Q45) for respondents to confirm that they lived in Newton and took the survey only once. Checking whether there was any difference in results between those who confirmed and those who didn't, we found virtually no difference. Indeed, comparing results for each question for the oath-takers versus the overall sample, out of about 265 possible answer choices to all the questions, the difference between the two samples was *never* more than 1.5 percentage points for any of these questions. Unfortunately, the confirmation question came at the end of the survey, and by that time 20% of respondents had stopped answering questions. Thus, we attribute these non-answers to that question to the "fatigue factor," not cheaters. As noted, we had similar problems getting people to indicate their wards.

How "Don't Know" and "Need More Information" Responses Were Analyzed

Unlike our preliminary results, which featured raw results and always included "Don't know," "Need more information," and similar responses, in this report we also analyzed the results without them. The recalculated percentages of the remaining respondents, therefore, become correspondingly higher and the contrasts of varying positions become clearer. That is why this report often uses this method of analysis. It is important to note that in this report we always indicated "Don't know," "Need more information," and similar responses, since they are important in their own right.

10. OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Q47 provided survey participants with the opportunity to write open-ended responses. Almost 700 of the more than 2500 survey respondents chose to tell us what they think about:

- Development on Washington Street
- Interesting developments in other communities (page 41)
- The Envisioning Washington Street survey (page 42)

We urge all residents, City Councilors, the Mayor, and citizens to read through these responses to get a fuller idea of residents' visions for Washington Street. The open-ended responses are posted on the city's website at <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/91118>.

Development on Washington Street

More than 400 respondents wrote about development issues: traffic, parking (page 36), transportation (page 36), fairness (page 37), densification (page 38), affordability (page 39), character and design (page 40), planning (page 40), and schools (page 41).

Traffic

In all, 90 respondents used the word *traffic* in their comments.

- 64 (71%) say traffic congestion is already terrible and have grave concerns that residential and commercial development will exacerbate traffic on Washington Street, nearby side streets (not designed to handle increased traffic), and on Walnut Street near NNHS.
- Traffic negatively affects pedestrian safety, increases commute time, and worsens air pollution, making life on Washington Street noisier and miserable.
- Many respondents feel the current reality is "Newton is a car town." Public transit is considered unreliable and spotty. People will still drive in our climate, because they have "kid carpools, groceries, and obligations that require more than a bike."
- Traffic on Washington Street and environs merits its own thorough study.
- Many respondents do not understand how reducing the number of lanes on Washington Street will improve traffic flow in nearby neighborhoods.
- Some ideas to improve traffic include:
 - Decking over the Mass Pike, which would allow for redesign of traffic flow
 - Adding bridges to cross the Mass Pike and the Charles River
 - Improving road infrastructure

Parking

A total of 50 respondents expressed concern about automobile parking. A chief concern is how increased development will exacerbate the current difficulty with finding spaces convenient to village businesses. If parking continues to be inaccessible, they say, local businesses will suffer.

Multiple respondents made such comments:

I love patronizing local businesses, but I've also got a life to lead; if the only way I can go to L'Arma ... or Elements ... is to walk or bike there, let's face it, I'm not going to go. I've already stopped going to the nail salon ... in West Newton because it's so hard to park.... Please don't ... take away parking with the assumption that people will walk or bike The businesses will die and we will end up driving even more to get to businesses across town or in other towns.

Please, PLEASE stress the importance of parking I have already decreased the frequency of shopping in Newtonville due to the lack of parking in the municipal lot It stands to follow that unless (adequately sized) parking spaces are a priority, then businesses may continue to suffer.

People say that the lack of easy access to parking causes an overflow of parked cars on nearby streets. "Traffic and parking end up on small side streets that can't deal with the impact."

The cost of parking is a concern to some. The installation of expensive parking meters near stops "where commuters used to park free" might discourage people from using public transportation....It's short-sighted and self-defeating.

A few commented that developers have gotten special permits to include fewer and smaller parking spaces than current ordinances allow. This advances the city's goal of reducing automobile use, but the city should plan wisely, they said, lest the city *reduce*, not increase, the use of public transportation. One respondent says reduced parking "has to be done *after* other options are available, not as an incentive to residents to use other (currently awful) transportation options." Right now, "You always need a car..."

Transportation

Some 52 respondents wrote about transportation-related issues.

Mass Transit Not a single respondent says that public transit is good or even adequate.

I'm all in favor of reducing traffic in Newton, but that has to be done *after* other options are available, not as an incentive to residents to use other (currently awful) transportation options.

Not nearly enough attention to possible public transit / commuter rail improvements. Express buses & the commuter rail run right along Washington Street, so it's a very pertinent topic.

We need timely and regular public transportation. People do not use transportation as it is not regular or on time and that makes people use their cars.

Some people would like a shuttle along Washington Street: “We need better public transportation options (and possibly the suggested shuttle bus depending on scheduling and stops) to get people out of their cars.”

Bikes About 25 comments (48%) mention cyclists, bike lanes, and bike parking. Some respondents (9) favor bike lanes, preferably protected bike lanes, because safety should be a priority and because the current situation is dangerous for both cyclists and drivers.

I would like to see more bike lanes, preferably protected, with strong enforcement by police. These should connect the villages to public transit ..., with covered bike parking. Ideally this could be combined with a bikeshare program.

However, respondents (6) also express very strong negative opinions against bike lanes, mostly because some cyclists don't follow the rules of the road: “If you allow more bikes on the road then make sure there are enough police to see that they don't break the law! They are a menace because so many of them break the law constantly.” It suggests to us that the city should undertake a rules-of-the-road program for cyclists, especially for youngsters.

According to some, the needs of cyclists must be balanced against those of drivers. First, cars are much more prevalent than bikes: “Efforts to encourage bike and walking are great if you are in City Hall, but not great if I have to buy eggs at the grocery store or get to work.”

Second, cars are essential in a town where public transportation is unreliable. With cold, snowy winters and hot, humid summers here, many seniors need their car all year round.

Walking Pedestrian safety is mentioned by a handful of respondents. “Efforts **must** be made to make walking safer, including enforcing traffic signals and shoveling ordinances” The safety of schoolchildren is of special concern.

Roads An equal number of respondents favor narrowing Washington Street as those who want to keep it as it is. Here are two diametrically opposed comments:

I'm for narrowing Washington Street to make it safer for bikes and pedestrians.

The thought of reducing Washington St. from 4 lanes to 2 lanes might be the dumbest idea I've heard in a very long time.

Several respondents criticize the condition of Washington Street and nearby roads. Pave the roads, maintain lane markings and crosswalks, and update the street signs, respondents say.

Fairness

After traffic, the largest number of comments (88) deals with the idea of fairness. This issue often evokes a depth of feeling. The majority (58%) express negative views about developers as a group, as they are seen as directly competing with the interests of residents. Residents view

developers as interested in making profits at the expense of ordinary citizens: “The primary beneficiaries seem to be the developers, not our Newton community.” The aggressive pace of development along Washington Street is viewed as alarming: “I am really at a loss as to why Washington Street has become open season for developers looking to build enormous projects and rake in gigantic profits to the detriment of those of us who live here.”

Residents view developers’ promises as hollow when compared to the actual effects on the community: “Caving to developers to secure a handful of affordable units is a mistake that will negatively impact schools, traffic, green space, quality of life. Please stop.” Others wonder what the relationship is between developers and city officials, speculating that an inside game is being played.

In addition, several residents feel strongly that having a single developer with so much power to develop Washington Street is “not good business.” One writes, “I don’t like the idea of one very rich person making decisions as to how Washington Street will look.” Another feels that the developer is “taking over our city.” One questions the developer’s reasoning that large projects are required to compensate for affordable units, and demanded transparency: “What is his profit margin?”

Several respondents focus on the obligations of developers to help improve city services in return for the privilege of development. Some suggestions are that they repair and improve roads, upgrade the commuter rail stations, and help pay for increased impact on city schools. Yet there is little confidence that developers would be held accountable. Some worry that developers have no real stake in long-term improvements.

Issues of fairness are not limited to concerns about developers. Many residents (42%) point out other relationships that would be upended with current plans. Class difference are a concern, as respondents worry that new developments will be far more expensive than the residences they would displace, privileging the affluent. Many people point to the relationship between the north side of the city and the rest, expressing the opinion that large-scale development is being concentrated unfairly there. One respondent sums up the argument: “I have not heard about any serious proposals for similar development ... in Newton Center, Waban, West Newton Hill or Newton Highlands. This is unreasonable ...”

Finally, several respondents worry that large developments will require infrastructure expenditures that would create an undue tax burden on existing residents.

Densification

Of the 62 respondents addressing densification, a large majority (74%) oppose increased density. Several indicate that they had moved to Newton precisely because it was suburban in nature, especially valuing the “Garden City” designation, with green space as a particularly

appealing aspect of the environment. For example, one respondent comments: “Please keep Newton leafy and beautiful and preserve the distinct lovely villages that make Newton unique. Do not urbanize our city!” Others are concerned with population density having an impact on the general quality of life, citing negatively such urbanized areas as Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, and Watertown. Several specifically comment on the replacement of small-scale homes and duplexes with apartments and condos. For example, one respondent suggests that “new developments should be no denser than what they replace,” while another simply writes, in caps, “NO HIGH DENSITY!”

A minority of respondents (26%) welcome density. Some would restrict it to specific areas, such as “transit hubs,” for example, “I support 1000 new units of housing at every MBTA stop” Others express a general favorability toward increased housing and “amenities.”

Affordability

There is near unanimity regarding the issue of affordability, with 95% of the 61 responses indicating that affordability is of deep concern. Many write that people with modest or low incomes are being priced out of Newton. “Smaller, independently owned two- and three-family homes have historically had lower rents, and were more affordable to lower income families. These are being torn down...” Some reference specific areas which are becoming increasingly expensive. One wrote, “I am concerned about gentrification of the north side of Newton. Residential development should include units targeted at all income levels not just high and low.” Another respondent says that “market rents for the current Newtonville projects are currently set really high.” Even “affordable” rents in the new developments are questioned. One writes, “I could not afford the type of rents you called affordable!”

Several write that housing costs are changing the demographics of Newton: “Families with young children cannot afford to move to Newton without substantial income and/or significant personal/family wealth.” Others worry about seniors, veterans, city workers, and the disabled. Another suggests that “market rate rental units will decrease economic diversity in Newton, driving out the less affluent people and favoring the wealthy, especially on the north side of the city, where the less affluent people live.” Another sums up the sentiment with the comment that “we need a diverse community in Newton and an inclusive one.”

Finally, some suggest that Newton should take proactive steps to deal with the housing crisis. One respondent suggests that “Newton needs to explore other possible ways to create and finance affordable housing besides private developers.”

Character and Design

About 75 respondents commented on the character and design of Washington Street. Most are anxious and angry about the possible loss of unique village character: “Keep villages!!!” “Avoid the feel of Needham Street on the North Side.” A smaller cohort says the villages are “shabby” and “outdated,” needing significant upgrading.

Comments about building size are varied. Some crave small-scale buildings. Others see denser mixed-use development with lots of green space as the way to build a community-oriented environment. Very few want mega-complexes: “We don’t need Needham Street North on this side of town.” The senior community Century Village was cited as a good model: buildings are three or four stories, pretty dense but low-rise, with areas where residents can socialize. A mix of one-, two-, and three-story buildings serves our needs better than tall buildings. No matter the building size, good architecture is important; we need “buildings that catch the eye.”

Where possible, respondents ask that the “historical aura” of Newton be integrated with modern features. For example, new buildings should have touches of the Masonic Building in Newtonville. Several respondents urge that buildings be constructed of steel beams for safety, not cheap plywood. Others demand that design should push accessible, sustainable, and environmentally conscious buildings.

Open space, small parks, trees, and greenery are *extremely* important to many residents. “Open space and green space very important.” “Keep Newton green and buildings in proper scale!”

According to some respondents, amenities should include a community theater, a renovated movie theater, and cultural venues, like music spaces and small galleries.

Planning

Twenty-two respondents wrote about planning. Many seem concerned that the city has not presented a solid plan for development and demand that the residents have a strong voice in determining the design, stronger even than the developer.

Respondents reject the “ad-hoc nature of development,” “piece-meal decisions,” and “quick decisions based on no information.” Do serious research about the impact of development on schools, traffic, and other issues, they say.

Respondents blame the city for poor planning around parking and traffic and reject the assumption that new residents will have only one car, park on the street, or walk a lot. Development, they fear, will add residents but won’t add traffic and parking capacity. “Allowing high density development with inadequate provision for parking and automobile traffic is just wrong.” “Transit in the Washington Street corridor is woefully inadequate for this development plan. Study transit needs and build new transit before starting any major development.”

Schools

While the survey did not ask directly about the impact of development on public schools, 62 respondents express grave concern about this issue. The responses emphasize overcrowding (32), less safety for children walking or biking to school, and extra costs required to build new schools and hire more teachers. One person writes, “Taxes are very high now, who will pay for these new services?” Another wonders, “The overcrowding of schools really ... worries me.” A third emphatically states: “The number of school children who ride their bikes to and from school is significant and the safety of our children ... far exceeds the interests of developers....”

Interesting Developments in Other Communities

More than 50 respondents made suggestions about interesting developments in other communities they thought were worth considering.

Waltham: The Merc, a mixed-use development on Moody St. has nice architecture, but rents are too-high. Good job with municipal parking lots behind commercial buildings on Moody St.

Wellesley: Great selection of stores with parking; why shop in Newton. Linden St. near Wellesley Square is great: bike path and walking trail, wide roads, and quality businesses.

Cambridge: Co-housing developments; Brattle St., River St., Beacon St., Western Ave., and some parts of Huron Ave. The route from Central Sq. to Porter Sq. is a good model for connecting centers. Deemphasizing autos and prioritizing pedestrians, public transport, bikes.

Somerville: Davis Square. Welcoming to mixed-income/mixed-age people. Assembly Square.

Needham: Town center is well done. Small community feel all incomes welcome; grows without high rises; limits most buildings to three stories. Great selection of stores with parking.

Newton: Mixed-use building on Elm in West Newton. Riverside Office Park: parking is hidden from road; sidewalk is separated from road; plantings add visual interest. The Streets in Chestnut Hill: shops/restaurants Constantine Place. Wegman’s shopping center. Curve St.

Boston: New Balance, Brighton: need anchor store; good stuff follows. Greenway, Roslindale Square. Serenity Apartments (Olmstead Park) – nice building. Macallen Building – green design. Charlesview Residences – affordable housing. The Circle renovation, Cleveland Circle.

Brookline: Coolidge Corner is ideal development model. 90 Longwood Ave (Brookline Housing Authority) for senior/disabled housing – location means that Coolidge Corner amenities and trains are walkable. Do this near Newton Highlands, with shuttle to stores.

Other: Mass. Ave. in Lexington center. Leonard St. in Belmont. Town centers: Winchester and Falmouth. Dedham: Legacy Place. Watertown: Residence Inn. Toronto: Sidewalk Labs.

The Envisioning Washington Street Survey

About 34% of respondents (236) wrote comments about the survey itself. The overwhelming response is positive – eight positive for every negative one. Here is a typical sample:

- “...this was a good survey. Very comprehensive, and brought up things I hadn’t thought of.”
- “The survey was so much more on point than the ... “Hello Wash St” survey, their survey was ... pick what kind of urban you want as opposed to asking us what we REALLY want ...”
- “I appreciate knowing more and being able to offer opinions. Thank you.”
- “...this survey was long but well done considering everything that needed to be evaluated.”
- “This survey is more intelligently constructed than ... others... thank you for all the work ...!”

Many people found the survey comprehensive and thorough; some found it too long. The survey working group recognized that it is difficult to balance the comprehensiveness needed to adequately explore complex issues with the length needed to keep respondents’ attention. In the end, we struck a balance with roughly 40 thought-provoking questions.

We also realized respondents would have varying levels of knowledge, expertise, and interest in different aspects of development. Although many questions had an introductory explanation, 22 respondents felt the survey did not provide enough background, context, or information to answer some questions to their satisfaction. One commenter writes: “Survey was good but many questions have no larger context or enough information ... on proposed developments ...”

We realized the some of the material is complex and as-yet undefined, and so we allowed respondents to skip questions that they felt unable to answer intelligently or had to guess at. On the other hand, these comments underscore how the city administration and developers need to provide Newton residents with more real information on development issues.

Twenty respondents want more or different choices to some questions:

The survey is thoughtful, but in some instances I felt too restricted by the available responses. Including more responses and/or more “other” boxes would ameliorate this issue. (And paradoxically, ... more difficulty getting people to finish, and lower the rate of return. Tough call)

Was the survey biased? The comments suggest that it wasn’t, as noted earlier, we had about the same number who thought the survey was anti-development (9) as pro-development (11).

Some respondents wanted questions on topics that were not included. These questions pertain to environmental impact, inclusion, accessibility, diversity, affordability, inequality, pressure on public services, respondents’ professions), Newton Corner, and air rights development.

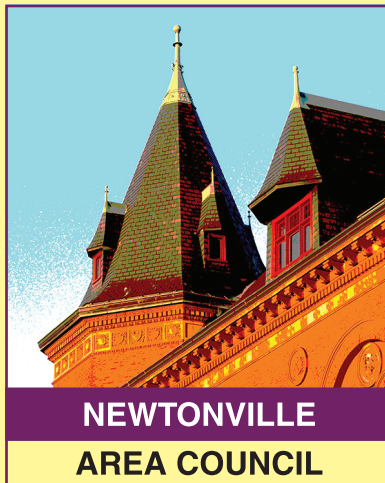
Conclusion: Residents are hungry for information about development and eager to express their opinions about what’s going to happen along Washington Street.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The NAC is committed to public outreach around development issues. We have worked diligently for almost a year preparing and holding the Envisioning Washington Street charrette; writing, advertising, and distributing the Envisioning Washington Street public opinion survey; releasing preliminary results; analyzing the full survey results; and writing this survey analysis report.

We could not have accomplished our mission without the assistance of these people and organizations:

- Fred Arnstein, a survey researcher, suggested survey questions and contributed greatly to the shaping of this report. His support was invaluable.
- Pamela Shufro, an education consultant, helped write the “Development on Washington Street” section of *Open-ended Responses*.
- Professors Lori H. Rosenthal and Thomas Zawisza of Lasell College generously provided their expertise regarding survey research methodology, statistical interpretation, and SPSS.
- Five Babson College students suggested questions and served as scribes at the February charrette: Hoyt He, Sarlott Ji, Clark Jiang, Ethan Jin, and Rahul Suthar.
- Boyd’s Direct did an excellent job printing our beautiful yellow postcards.
- Other Newton residents pretested the survey, and we would like to thank them.



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