



Apex PeakFest



Villages of Apex Community



Deer Creek Townes

Apex Affordable Housing Plan

Summary of Public Survey Responses & Themes

October 22, 2020

Town of Apex Affordable Housing Plan Public Input Survey

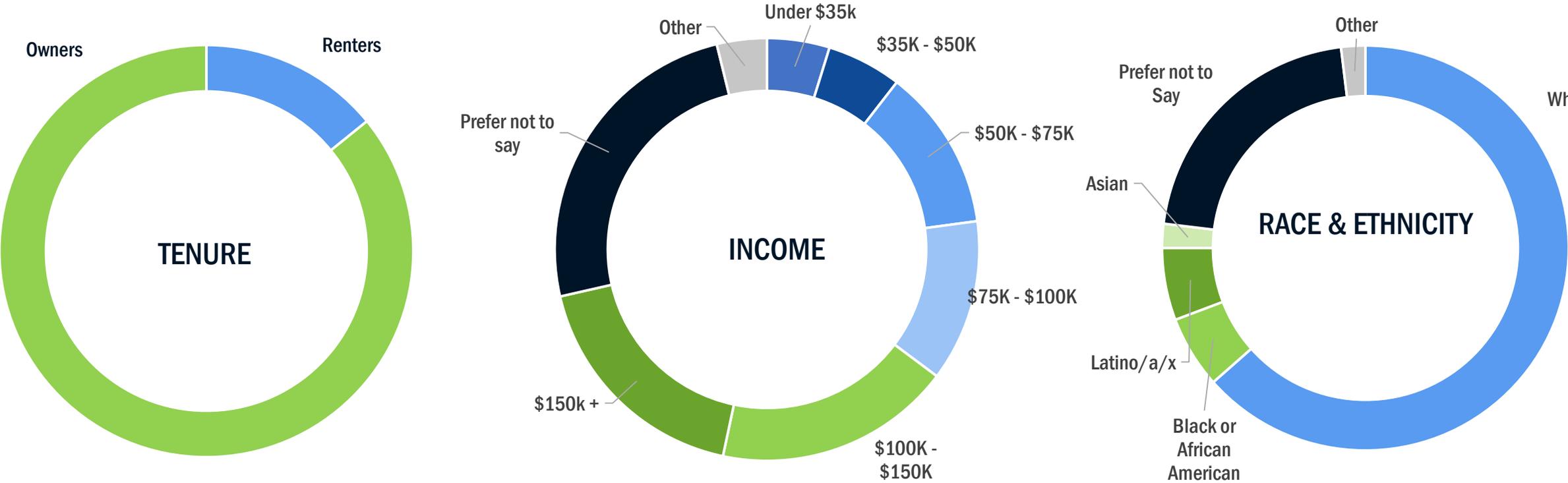
A survey was conducted between July 17, 2020 and August 31, 2020 to help the Town of Apex better understand the extent to which current Apex residents, hopeful Apex residents, and Apex workers can find affordable, safe, quality housing in the Town of Apex and to gather initial input related to recommendations to address affordable housing.

The survey opportunity was advertised through direct mail, email, social media, the Town of Apex website, posters, flyers, and targeted outreach to non-profit organizations and religious institutions.

The results of the survey are intended to help inform recommendations in the Affordable Housing Plan.

This summary is intended to identify themes that emerged from the survey. Full survey results are also available at <http://www.apexnc.org/affordablehousing>.

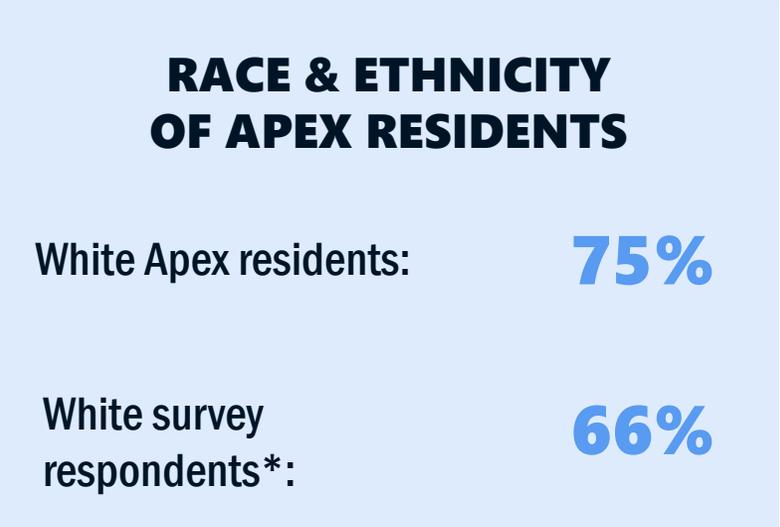
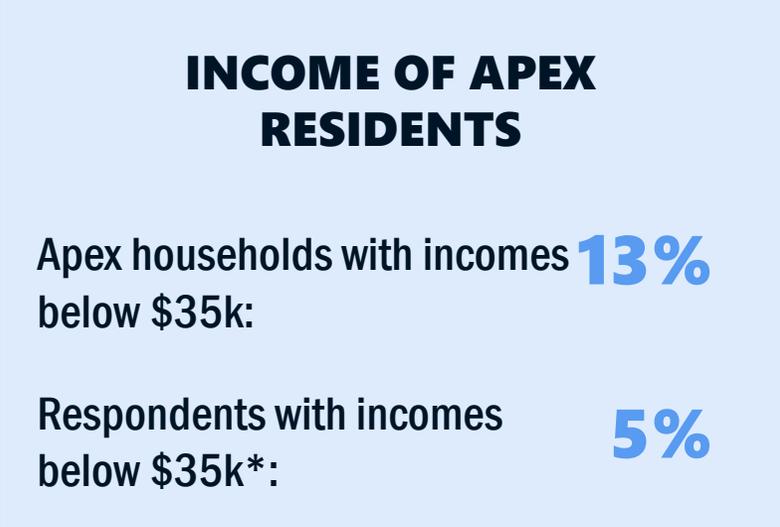
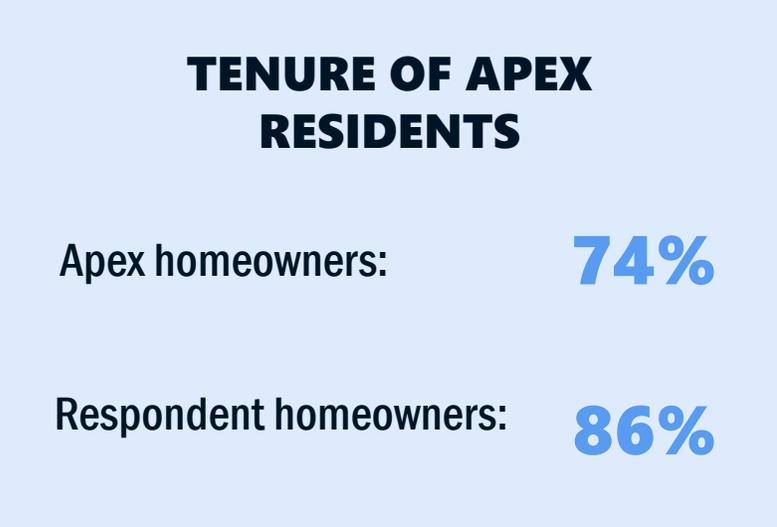
The public survey received 1,200 responses offering a range of perspectives on housing in Apex.



89% of respondents were Apex residents, with the remaining from Holly Springs and Cary. While the survey reached a broad audience, most respondents were white homeowners, and only about 20% of respondents had incomes below \$75,000.

Source: Public survey responses

Higher income homeowners are overrepresented in the survey, but representation exceeded the goals of the Public Engagement Plan (PEP) guiding outreach for the Affordable Housing Plan.



PEP Goal: 50 renter respondents
Reached: 139 renter respondents

PEP Goal: Responses from all income groups, including low-income.

PEP Goal: 60 non-white respondents
Reached: 150 non-white respondents

The project team supplemented the survey with targeted interviews to reach lower income households.

*Source: Public survey responses. *26% of survey respondents declined to state their household income and 22% of survey respondents declined to state their race/ethnicity. Apex residents under the age of 35 are also underrepresented in the survey.*

Respondents described the challenges that they see others face.

“

*Many of the lower-income families would like to stay in Apex to give their children a better life. Many are forced to move to areas that have less access to resources. **We would love to see Apex stay balanced** and not become a place accessible only for a certain demographic.*

“

*I have family that would like to move to be near, but housing prices and **accessible houses are extremely limited.***

“

***People retiring have to move** to Fuquay or Holly Springs to downsize.*

”

“

*I know many Latino families that have moved away from Apex because of rising housing cost. This **racial/class gentrification by means of rising housing costs**, reduces social and economic diversity which hurts everyone's quality of life.*

”

”

“

*Couples in their **late 20s and early 30s with young children** I know had a hard time affording a single-family house in this area.*

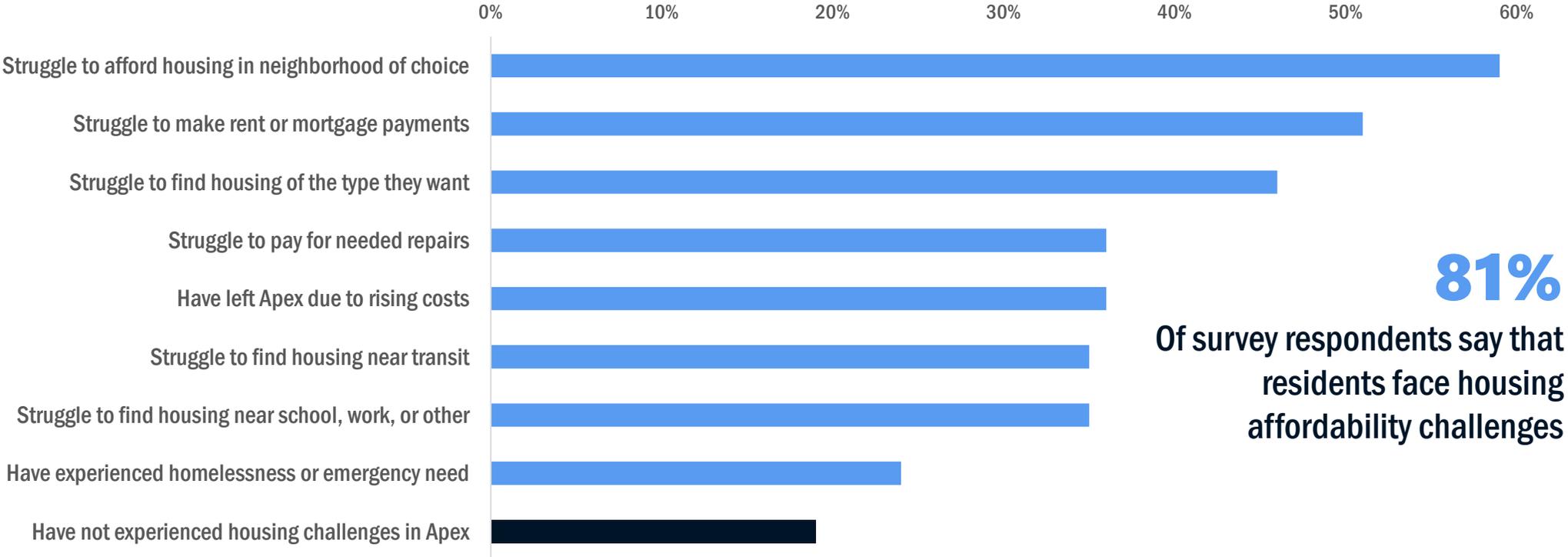
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Source: Public survey responses

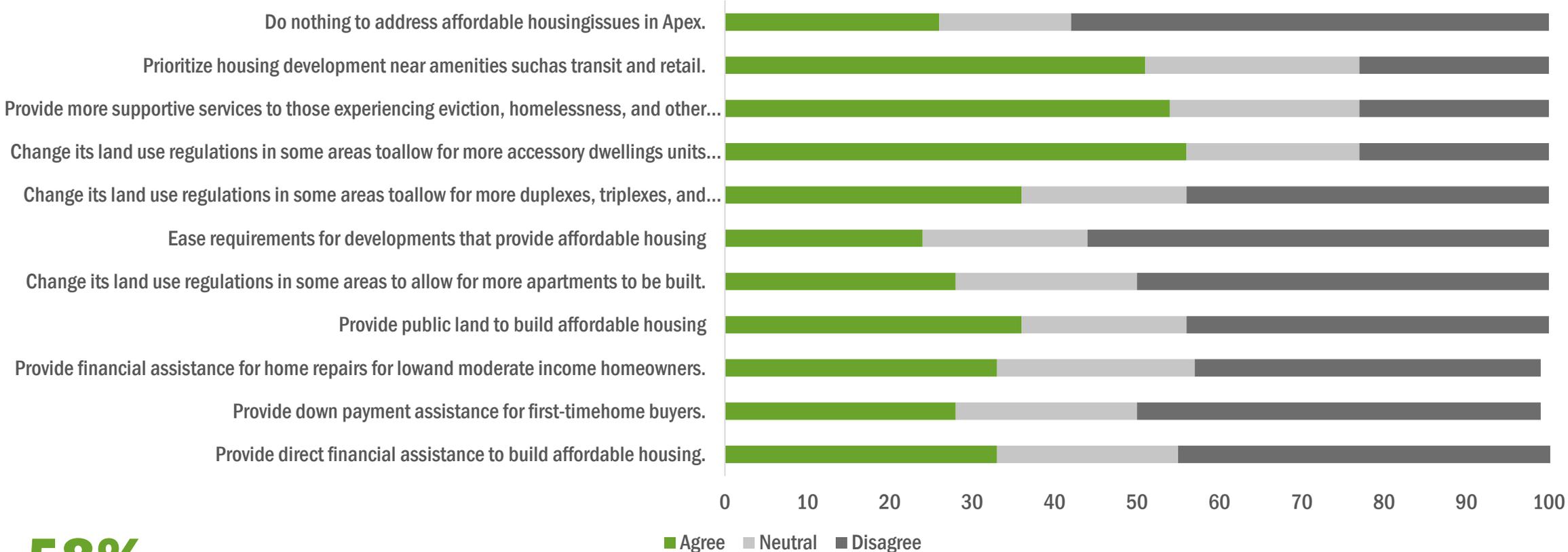
Survey respondents agree that housing affordability is a challenge in Apex.

Do you think that people in Apex...



Source: Public survey responses

But there is less agreement about what role the Town should play in addressing affordable housing.



58%

Of survey respondents think the Town should address affordable housing, but few types of potential tools received majority support

Source: Public survey responses

Many respondents expressed uncertainty about the role of the Town in housing affordability or needed more information to provide input on possible strategies.

“

*It should not be the towns responsibility to provide financial assistance or down payment assistance. **There are federal programs available** to support those needs.*

“

*I think we should try and help others who struggle, but **I do worry about creating new programs**. I just don't know what the city has in mind so I would err on the side of just saying no.*

“

*I agree the **Town should be the implementer** of affordable housing and not hinder it through arbitrary zoning and land use laws. But I do not agree it is the Town's obligation to finance.*

“

*I feel Apex should **alter land use regulations** to allow more-affordable housing to be built, but don't use tax money to actually build.*

“

*I believe the Town should be looking at ways to **work with local and county organizations** to develop more affordable housing.*

Source: Public survey responses

Responses varied most significantly by housing tenure.

I agree that.....

	Owners	Renters	Incomes \$75k and Above	Incomes \$35k and Below
Everyone deserves access to safe, quality housing that is affordable to their income	62%	85%	68%	82%
Those that work in Apex should be able to live in Apex	54%	82%	61%	75%
Displacement of Residents is a concern in Apex	31%	55%	37%	41%
The Town should provide direct financial assistance to build affordable housing	23%	50%	26%	52%
The Town should offer down-payment assistance for first-time home buyers	19%	51%	24%	57%

Source: Public survey responses

The survey responses demonstrate:



Broad acknowledgement that housing affordability is an issue in Apex

Most respondents acknowledge that other Apex residents struggle to afford housing, particularly seniors, young people, Town staff, and service workers.



Uncertainty about the correct response and the Town's role to play

Over 70 percent of respondents agree that everyone deserves access to safe, affordable housing, that accommodating a range of housing is important for a diverse community, and that people who work in Apex should be able to live in Apex. However, very few Town interventions received substantial support in the survey and there were requests for additional information.



A need to clearly communicate the connection between potential tools and the issues identified

Given the acknowledgement of housing issues and support for a diverse community, clearly communicating the connection between potential housing tools and the issues and goals they can address will be important.

Themes from the Town of Apex Affordable Housing Plan Public Input Survey

In addition to the multiple choice questions, over 2,000 individual written comments were provided by 1,200 respondents to the Town of Apex Affordable Housing Plan survey. This summary is not intended to report every individual comment, rather to identify themes that emerged from the public responses to inform the plan's vision, goals, and recommendations.

CHALLENGES PEOPLE ARE HAVING:

Many of the multiple-choice questions asked what types of housing issues people have personally experienced or knew that others are experiencing in Apex. Some respondents provided additional information about the **challenges they are facing or are aware of**:

- Difficulty making home repairs.
- People are leaving Apex for Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, and outskirts due to affordability.
- It is difficult to find homes that will accept Housing Choice Vouchers and that are within the set rent limits.
- It's hard to save for a down payment while paying rent.
- Housing that would be affordable seems to be scooped up and rented at a higher price than a first-time homebuyer could afford.
- People are over-bidding on homes because there is not enough inventory.
- I'm in constant fear of being homeless.
- It is tough to afford to live here as a Town employee.
- I was able to purchase a home in Apex when I did, but would not be able to now.

CONCERNS ABOUT COSTS:

Some **respondents expressed concerns about the increase in cost of living** compared to the lower rate of increase in wages and salaries. Specifically, commenters noted:

- Overall concern about increasing property taxes.
- Fear that increases in taxes to support affordable housing plan will actually put too much burden on those who are paying taxes and struggling to get by.
- Increasing utility costs.
- That rental rate increases are outpacing wage increases, noting specific relevance for Town employees.

EMPATHY:

A major theme emerged from the comments **related to different degrees of empathy and how to help** people who are struggling with housing affordability.

Some commenters strongly empathize with those experiencing housing issues and expressed that local government should have a role in helping.

- Most people who are evicted are working at least two jobs...I don't like the idea of living in a community in which there is no diversity, but, most of all, that does not recognize the human right for shelter.
- "Poor" people are human too. They want homes that are safe and comfortable, they want safe places for their children to play and safe streets to go shopping and socializing.

Many commenters expressed sentiments that people should live within their means and/or work their way to improve their own lives. There was a strong theme regarding the value of hard work. The use of the word “deserves” in the survey question “Everyone deserves access to safe, quality housing that is affordable to their income” received criticism.

- People should simply live where they can afford to.
- People may have to adjust their expectations to fit within their budget, but this is something everyone has to do.
- If you cannot afford to live here - get an additional job and work your way up.
- Affordable housing could discourage initiative for people to help themselves.
- It's not necessary for people to be able to live here just because they work here.
- I do not think anyone is undeserving of safe and affordable housing but I also don't think anything free needs to come without conditions. Homeownership is a big responsibility in addition to being a right.
- The rising costs are due to more and more tech companies relocating to the Triangle. Housing those innovators and entrepreneurs matter more if we want to increase the value of our town. There are nearby towns such as Fuquay with more affordable housing. I don't think Apex is the town for affordable housing projects.

Some commenters expressed varying degrees of empathy based on a person's circumstances. In particular, there was more willingness expressed for helping people who:

- Are elderly,
- Have a disability,
- Served in the military, or

- Already live in Apex and are being priced out (i.e., more empathy for current residents with low incomes compared to inviting new residents in).
- I would support some services that provide temporary housing assistance to people who have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own and who are truly in need (lost job, illness, etc.) until they are back on their feet. I would not be in favor of providing housing to people on a permanent basis with new taxpayer subsidized entitlements.

FEAR OF THE IMPACTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

Many commenters expressed **fears related to both change and the potential impacts of affordable housing**, citing the lack of adequate school, transportation, and water infrastructure; concerns about the natural environment; maintenance and aesthetics of affordable housing units; negative impacts on existing property values; and the potential for increased crime and safety issues.

- Affordable housing will lower property values.
- Affordable housing will attract criminals.
- Every city that has embraced these liberal projects has destroyed itself over time.
- I love Apex how it is. Don't change it.
- We don't have the transportation infrastructure to support more housing.
- Concerns about more development impacting open space and trees.
- Concerned about impacts of affordable (subsidized) housing on property values.
- We don't have the school infrastructure to support more housing.
- I don't want affordable housing near me.
- I moved away from an area with affordable housing and I don't want it here.
- Affordable rental units are not built nor maintained well.
- I agree with more affordable housing. I am concerned about losing the aesthetics of our community. It should be placed in appropriate areas and not in the middle of town or bordering established neighborhoods.
- Serious consideration needs to be made to road impact, school requirements, traffic patterns and effect of densely populated areas requiring more police and fire personnel.

Others argued that sentiments regarding growth and impacts are unfounded and may actually be **symptoms of systemic racism and fear of diversity**.

- I am discouraged by the proponents of "NIMBY" or who express concerns for the natural resources now that "they got theirs". Do these residents believe that no trees were cut down to make room for them?

- There are too many NIMBYs who don't want people who are not like them living near them or in our community. They say they are trying to protect property values, but what they are really saying is that they do not want diversity in race and class. It's time to stop listening to these people. Systemic racism is alive and well in our development regulations and decisions.

THOUGHTS ON GROWTH:

Commenters provided input on both **the amount and type of growth** today, and thoughts on what type of growth may be needed, or should be avoided, in the future:

We need less:

- Growth in general. Growth is out of control. Over-building is the problem.
- National builders.
- Multi-family buildings.
- Townhomes.
- Homes being built with starting prices over \$300K.
- Large, multi-story homes, too close together.
- Cookie-cutter luxury neighborhoods.
- High-end apartments.

We need more:

- Condos.
- Duplexes.
- Small single-family homes – especially, attractive, small, single-family homes.
- Accessory dwelling units.
- Tiny homes and tiny homes for those age 55+.
- Homes for seniors and people with disabilities (elevators, single-story).
- Neighborhoods and apartments without high-end amenities.
- Seems that a zero lot line scenario that provide a better side yard option, or providing design alternatives to encourage attaching units and providing more rear yard or shared open space in the community. These could still look like the detached version but resolve some of the site issues.

In addition, some commenters provided specific concerns about growth trends and patterns:

- Concern about loss of mobile homes and other naturally-occurring affordable housing.
- Apartments need to be near services, not just where land is available.
- This problem is common to all of Western Wake County.
- Concern about all of the building on limited water resources.
- Growth is good for Apex, but it needs to be thoughtful - too many cookie cutter developments at a similar price range.
- We can't always just build more housing. While more housing is probably warranted, too much will ruin the vibe of Apex. Also, new housing is generally more expensive.
- There are no/very limited options in Apex for people who don't have cars. You need a car just to get to bus stop.
- There seems to be a camp fighting development but also pushing "affordable housing" not knowing that is a contradiction.

FOCUS ON PEOPLE:

There were many comments that focused on the people who could be served by the Affordable Housing Plan. Many commenters focused on **people as a reason supporting the affordable housing plan**. These comments mentioned varying needs depending on life stage, supporting the essential workforce and service providers, and economic and racial diversity.

- Need housing for those with mental health issues.
- Not many options for student living.
- Concerns about growing children being able to afford to live in their hometown.
- The plan is needed in part because more seniors and young people are living here.
- Concerns about being able to age in place.
- Concerns about being able to live in Apex as a single parent.
- It is difficult trying to transition from renting to buying.
- Housing is not available for professions like teachers, entry-level, and non-technical jobs.
- Support the affordable housing plan as an effort to provide housing options for people who work in the community.
- The Town has become polarized as far as income, education, racial and cultural make-up.
- It's important that Apex can be home for people with a range of incomes.
- A survey of the median salary level's for jobs should be done within the boundary of Apex and housing developed to match that.
- People who provide services in the town should be able to afford to live in the place they work. That is the definition of a community.
- How can we better integrate our neighborhoods, instead of having the "black" and "white" sides of town (divided by Williams Street)?
How can we use housing planning as a way to create a true sense of community for all here in Apex?

- Support affordable housing as an effort to diversify the town.
- I know many Latino families that have moved away from Apex because of rising housing cost. This racial/class gentrification by means of rising housing costs, reduces social and economic diversity which hurts everyone's quality of life.
- The majority of the people in my community have been displaced and moved out of the community. They could not afford to even pay the taxes on the property that THEY once owned.
- Apex has done a good job of welcoming businesses to balance bedroom communities, affordable housing is the next step to keep our community welcoming to everyone.
- Why do we want to attract low wage earners?
- We are not welcoming to people below a certain level of income in Apex.
- You don't need affordable housing to have a diverse community.
- Not enough variety in price point (rental or sale) to support a more diverse community.
- I would also love to see Apex be a welcoming place to people of all races and socioeconomic classes and believe that developing attractive affordable housing is one way to begin this process.
- If Apex really wants to go back to being The Peak of Good Living, it needs to start with helping out existing communities. Look at apartments near historic downtown - ones that haven't been built in the last 5 years. See what people are paying to live in there. See what sorts of injustices they have to put up with on a daily basis.

NEED FOR THE PLAN AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

A common theme emerged questioning **the need for the Affordable Housing Plan** and whether it is **the role of local government** to address housing affordability.

Several respondents asked for more information and some expressed concern about the survey and process:

- Need more information about what affordable housing is, where it will go, what it will look like.
- The survey structure and questions are skewed. Biased.
- Survey results may be skewed because of people's current situation due to COVID19.
- Do not trust that the responses will be listened to.
- If you want to make such drastic changes, put it on a ballot and let people vote on it.
- Is there an actual need?
- First the town should tell us just how much of the population needs assistance and how much it will cost.

Some commenters expressed support for the Affordable Housing Plan and its purpose:

- Full support for the Affordable Housing Plan.
- Apex can be a model for the sustainable housing in our county.
- We need to stop talking about it and just do it. I have lived here for 25 years, and to my knowledge, we're no further along than we were in 1995.

Others are generally happy with housing in Apex and don't see an issue with housing affordability.

- There are housing options for everybody in Apex.
- We already have a wide variety of housing.
- Housing and living experience has been great.

Many comments expressed a concern that tackling affordable housing is an overreach for local government, often suggesting that market forces should be allowed to control the type and cost of housing.

- The increase in property values is a good thing.
- The entire idea of an Affordable Housing Plan is misguided and a waste of money.
- Apex has a lack of focus of initiatives.
- Against socialism.
- The market should set the price for housing. Let capitalism and supply and demand dictate pricing.
- Stop social engineering.
- The government's job is not to build housing.
- I think someone is trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist likely for political purposes.
- This issue should not require the use of tax payer funds to subsidize home loans.
- It should not be the Town's responsibility to provide financial assistance or down payment assistance. There are federal programs available to support those needs. Local tax dollars should not be used for those reasons.

STRATEGIES

There were numerous comments related to strategies that should be considered as part of the Affordable Housing Plan.

Some of the strategies were related to **building more housing and building more affordable housing** (also see comments under Growth):

- Building the RIGHT mix of housing will help keep housing costs lower, not just building more housing.
- Building more housing is not the issue, making it affordable is the issue!

- Please place low income housing in Apex in close proximity to medical services, grocery stores, public transportation, and public services such as police and fire/EMS!
- Build smaller homes in beautiful neighborhoods.
- The existing affordable housing is old and needs improvement.
- Certain percentage of property and housing in a town like Apex should be set aside for affordable/reduced rent, rather than all growth catering to developers of higher-income homes.
- I would love to see Apex take leadership in developing new communities with well-built, attractive, energy-efficient, smaller single family homes that are not only accessible, but also desirable, to families with lower incomes.
- Apex should have safe, clean, temporary shelters for situations involving social services.
- Expensive land nullifies most of the attempts by town for affordable housing. So, Town should encourage duplex, quadplex, accessory units.
- I would fully support a voucher program which helps with rent payments for low income individuals/families where landlords are required to accept these vouchers as payment.
- Maybe Apex should allow mobile home developments with ownership of the land and mobile home unit by individuals and/or families.
- Land should be located for building more affordable homes, but not at the expense of the tax payers or the town. Affordable housing should be built separate and apart from existing neighborhoods and neighborhoods that won't be negatively impacted (equity) by homes of lesser value.
- And for goodness sake, stop thinking of affordable housing only in term of apartments. Housing needs to be diverse, just like our population needs to be diverse. Look at models in Oregon, for example, where small pods of townhouses for seniors are built facing inward toward a community garden, with a small building with meeting, exercise and library space.

Other suggested strategies focused on **leveraging partnerships and existing programs**:

- Recommend working with Habitat for Humanity.
- Recommendations should lean on nonprofits that promote budgeting and homeownership plans rather than government-subsidized plans.
- Support services - if this is generally a county function than I feel it should continue as such but with town providing direct referrals and ensuring residents are actually connected to the needed services.
- I'm not sure that the Town needs to directly assist people with housing or supportive services when we have other groups like Western Wake Crisis Ministry already providing them. If the Town wants to support those areas of need, it should consider supporting WWCM and similar organizations financially and/or through other means.

- Wake County should provide the services for eviction, homelessness and other housing instability. The Town of Apex should not be involved with this at all.
- Eviction and housing instability is a County wide issue. Wake County should partner with Apex to take the lead with these issues.
- Town should coordinate efforts with the County to prevent duplication and fill gaps.
- There are lots of programs related to housing that are run by the federal government and state government. I don't think the town needs to reinvent the wheel.
- Repair assistance: that is available through various community out-reach programs (churches and social organizations). The Town should not be assisting residents with home repairs.

Other comments focused on **zoning and the development review and approval process:**

- Since the council all requests “pet” additions to the housing plans the price of housing is driven up by them. Housing becomes more expensive when one asks for solar, another asks for added RCA another asks for increased trees, a fourth asks for sidewalks and finally the fifth asks is it affordable. Of course it isn’t affordable anymore when the council directly causes the price to go up!
- There has to be a deliberate discussion about residential zoning procedures and preferences which favor traditional single-family homes.
- Overregulation by Town leaders has contributed to skyrocketing costs.
- Land prices, cost of commodities and development cost are not items the Town of Apex can control so we need to look into what we can control...to help attract the type housing needed to bring affordable housing here.
- Changing building regulations and requirements is a bad idea and will not make housing more affordable. The people that will benefit from changing building regulations are the developers and landlords and their supporters who will be making a lot of money off the residents of Apex, while simultaneously destroying Apex through more crowding, more traffic, fewer trees, crowded schools, etc.
- One option is to have the town require developers of rental properties set aside a percent of the units as affordable rental units. Rents in these types of units are generally 20% or so less than the standard rents in the development but the renters must meet income levels to support that rent and their assets are also considered.
- Government restrictions in the form of Euclidean zoning, minimum lot sizes, and set-backs drive up the price of housing. Eliminating these problems should be our top priority, and it should be something both sides of the political aisle can get behind.
- Land swaps, developer tax breaks, repurposing underutilized property, backfill, mixed use projects, higher density projects.
- What can be done to encourage HOAs to be more ADU friendly?
- I have become frustrated with town council members who state they are pro-affordable housing, yet they want to force stricter regulations on developers increasing development and housing costs or are anti-density which creates sprawl and is more costly to serve.

- Developers should have to incorporate affordable housing into their new developments to create mixed housing type communities and pay much more into infrastructure development including transit and schools.
- All high end builders should be required to provide for affordable housing in the way they are required to provide a percentage of open space.
- The town has promoted policies that have discouraged affordable housing and has denied projects that would have created more affordable options.
- Please consider how zoning regulations contribute to inequitable growth and development, which has contributed to the affordable housing crisis. Do we really need single family zoning? Why can't duplexes or four-plexes be mixed into neighborhoods? Do we consider the increased cost to home builders when establishing new regulations (like the idea that every tree removed during development should be replanted or paid for!)? Do not we consider the cost implications of housing when we ask home builders to lower density to appease neighbors? I think there needs to be serious conversations about priorities because we can't have it both ways.

New and revised policies and priorities were also recommended:

- Ask builders to allot a percentage to affordable housing.
- Cut bonds going to parks and rec in half and use some toward housing.
- Require a percentage of apartment units be offered at affordable rents.
- Have a program for teachers to buy here.
- Help families get out of rental situations and into homeownership.
- Look at incentives for Town employees to live in town.
- What type of support, concessions and/or code modifications are you willing to give to Apex based employers so that the business community can employ more low income level folks who need a good job in order to advance?
- If we are going to increase the affordable housing in apex, there should be a requirement to work in apex. Why should we subsidize workers from other towns?
- It's important that landlords and apartment rental owners accept housing choice vouchers (section 8) to allow low income people to live in Apex.
- Policies must be put in place to ensure that affordable housing units remain affordable over time (i.e. do not jump up in price after the first affordable housing tenant moves out).
- The responsibilities of landlords should be more clearly defined & renters should have a simple pathway to find support/recourse if these responsibilities are not met.

Some suggestions were related to **reducing taxes and the cost of living**:

- I have watched along 1010 as lower income families of color were pushed out of long-time homes as new subdivisions grew around them and taxes increased. If we truly value diversity, some people should be grandfathered and their tax rates should be attached to the actual value of homes like them, not jacked up based on the McMansions surrounding them.
- Find ways to reduce taxes for those age 70+ who fall below the poverty line.
- Apex should separate out utility costs so you can choose not to have trash pickup. Right now it is all or nothing.
- Need to be able to suspend utility services.
- Can we consider the establishment of low cost internet? There are very few internet options and the base price is extraordinarily high.
- Could we also consider utility grants to underserved households. No one should have to worry about electricity, internet, gas or otherwise.

There were also suggestions related to **supporting infrastructure, services, and programs**. Some of these suggested focusing on related needs:

- Focus more on bringing better jobs to Apex.
- Focus on bringing better education to Apex.
- Options for public transportation are too limited.
- Encourage people to save...offer courses to teach financial planning and managing decisions.
- Apex needs a subsidized repair program for the disabled, elderly, and low income.
- Fix healthcare first. Healthcare costs directly affect housing affordability.
- Focus on attracting and supporting businesses.
- I think educating people that affordable housing is not bad. People have such a stigma about it and it's viewed as a bad thing or that it will lower people's property values.
- The town should use a large variety of tools to address this issue, as it is complex and not easily solved.
- I understand the town wants to be more inclusive, but we should strive more to finding the businesses that provide the income for people to afford homes in Apex and increase wages to the town's employees so they can afford to buy in town if they choose so.
- We need a clearinghouse for social services - a one-stop 24/7 location to send people in need of assistance.
- Work to address this issue in as holistic a way as possible, it cannot be solved in a silo. Education, Infrastructure, access to health care, quality affordable food, systemic racism, etc. all play a role in why those affected by a lack of affordable housing are affected. Simply giving a family a price break will not address the larger, more fully encompassing reasons that exist, and sustainable solutions must address many of these underlying factors if we expect them to work.