

Community Sentiments on Key Issues  
Regarding the Update to the  
General Plan for the City of Santa Barbara

Analysis of Responses to a Survey Conducted  
By Allied Neighborhoods Association  
In Spring 2007

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## **Introduction and Purpose of Survey**

The City's approach to the General Plan Update was initially to go out into the community to gauge its sentiments as to key issues and concerns. Allied shared that thinking and decided that one way to do this - or at least to supplement that effort - was to prepare a questionnaire and distribute it to as many people in the community as was within our capability. In preparing the questionnaire, we selected questions that, in our experience, seemed to address the most commonly expressed concerns. We attempted to pose the key questions as objectively as possible – which was a delicate and difficult task.

Beyond just seeking expressions of residents' wishes, desires, and concerns, we posed questions that sought a ranking or prioritization of those concerns and desires. Furthermore we posed some questions addressing fundamental and key issues that sought choices: we asked people to think about priorities that were potentially competing, and to choose – if push came to shove – which merited being pursued at the expense of the other.

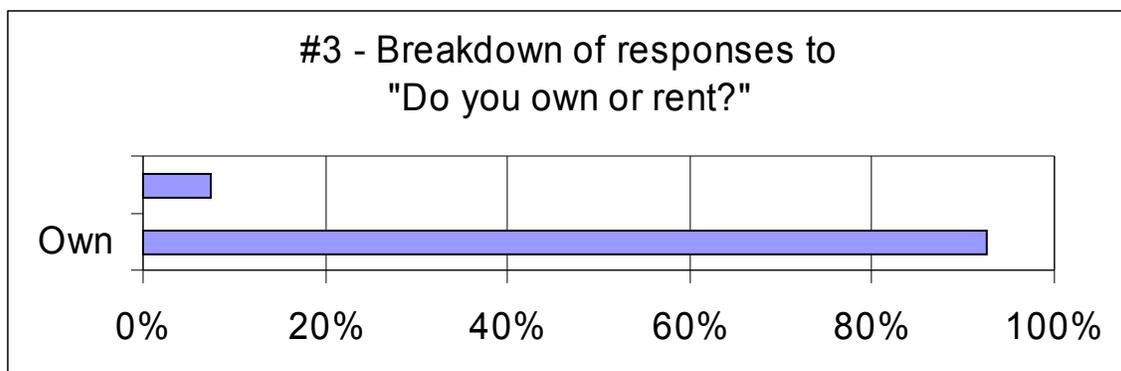
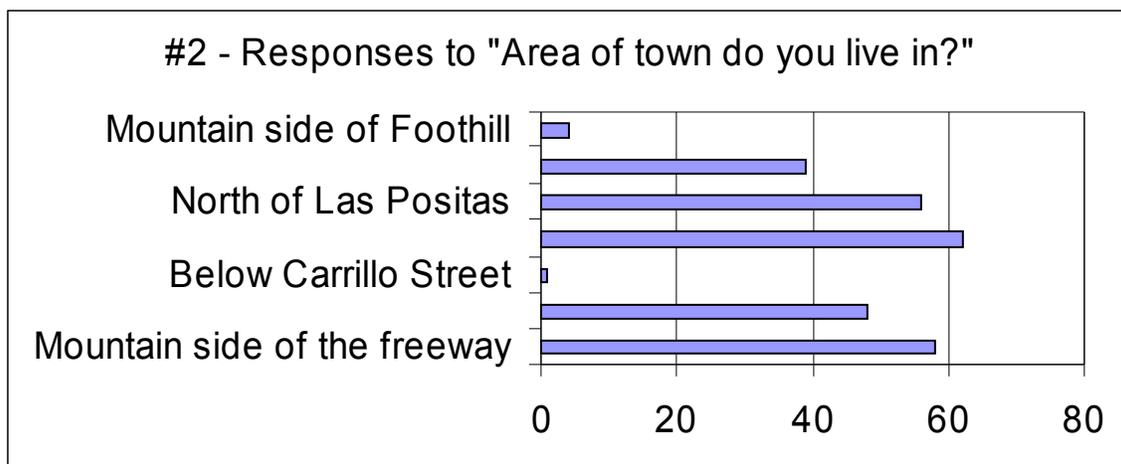
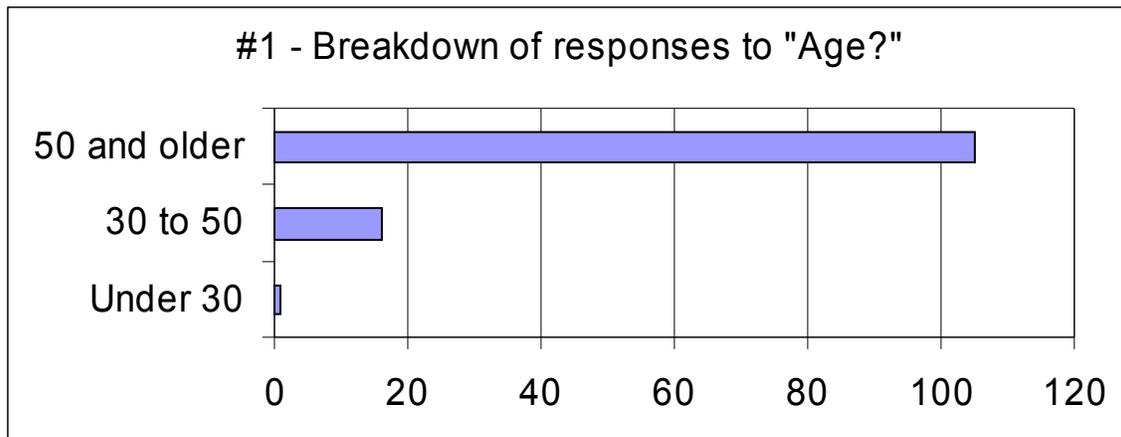
## **The Sample**

Of course the significance of the results of a public survey is dependent upon the quality of the sample. We do not suggest that our sample represents a true cross-section of the community – we simply did not have the resources to attain anything approaching that level of distribution. We distributed these questionnaires, both in paper form and electronically (allowing respondents to e-mail responses), to our neighborhood associations, with the request that it be passed on to as many residents – members or otherwise – as possible.

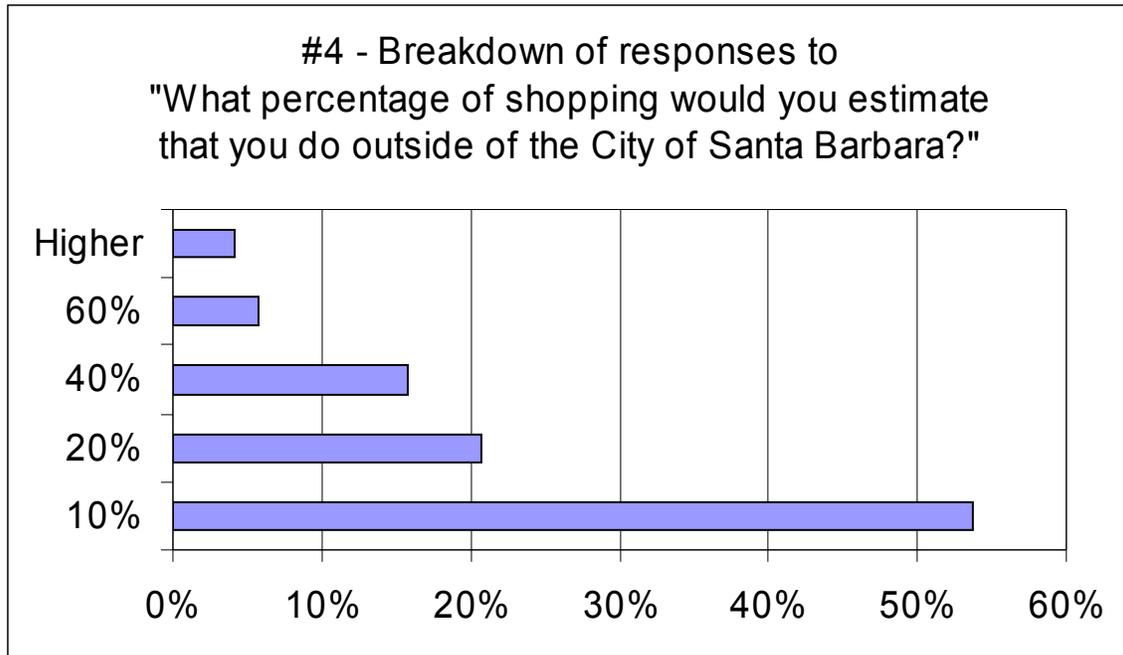
We make no claim that our sample of responses depicts an accurate profile of the City's resident population. As you will note in the following analysis, the respondents were predominantly older homeowners. That said, it should be noted that such a sample represents people who have contributed significantly to this community, are aware of and actively involved in civic affairs and, incidentally, vote in significant numbers.

## Analysis of Results

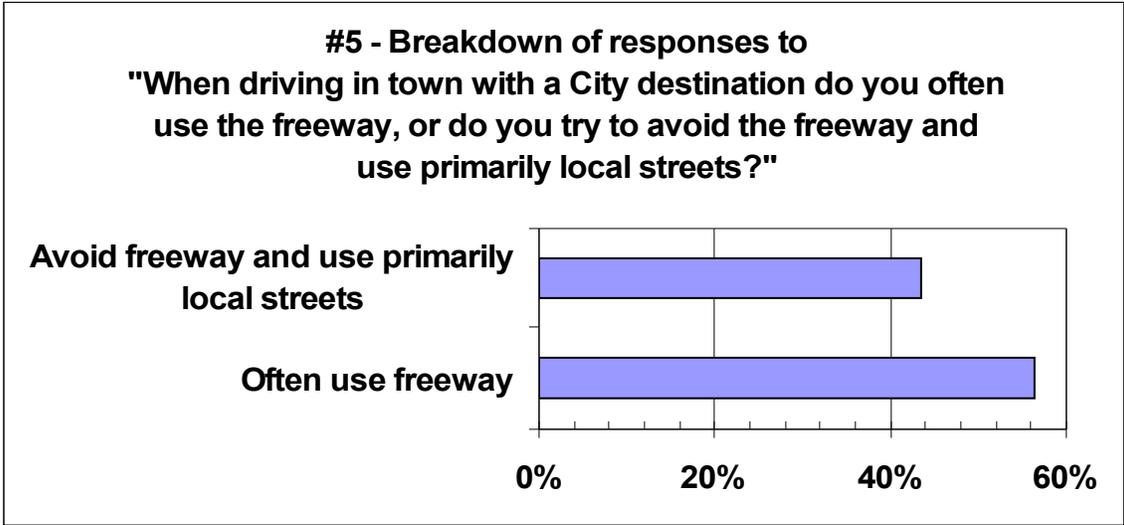
We received 122 completed responses to our survey questionnaire. Below are plots showing the questions and responses, followed by our analysis and reflections upon the compilation of the responses.



Charts #1 and #3 above indicate that the demographic bias in our response sample clearly favors older homeowners.

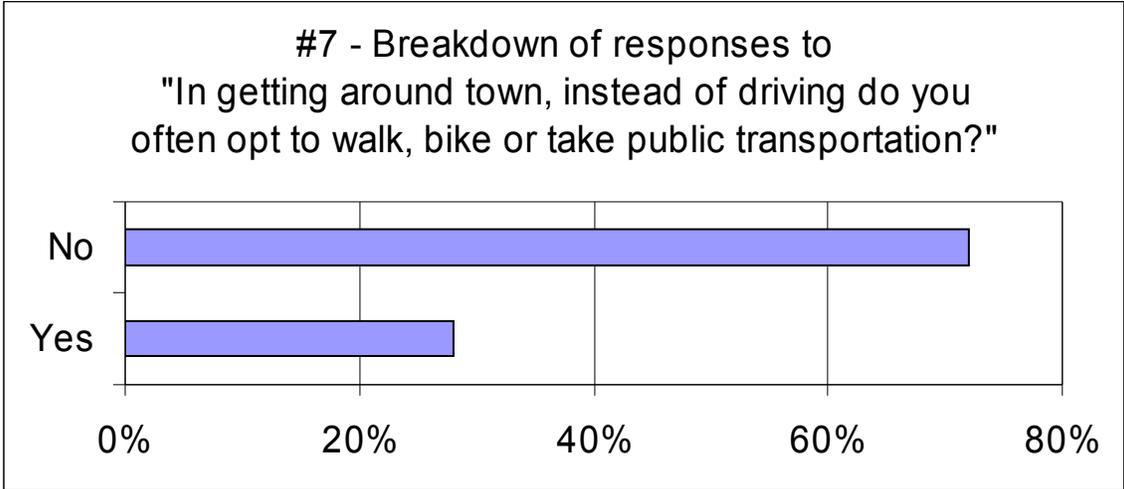


The answers to question #4 have significance not only as to sales tax implications, but also upon assumptions behind initiatives to concentrate housing densities in the urban core. If one of those assumptions is that such residents will shop primarily in the area (and, presumably, drive less and shorter distances), it indicates, at least, some existing predilections: our sample shows *older* residents inclined to do a majority of shopping in town. How younger residents might respond would be enlightening, especially since the goal of such in-city housing developments is to house "workforce" age people.

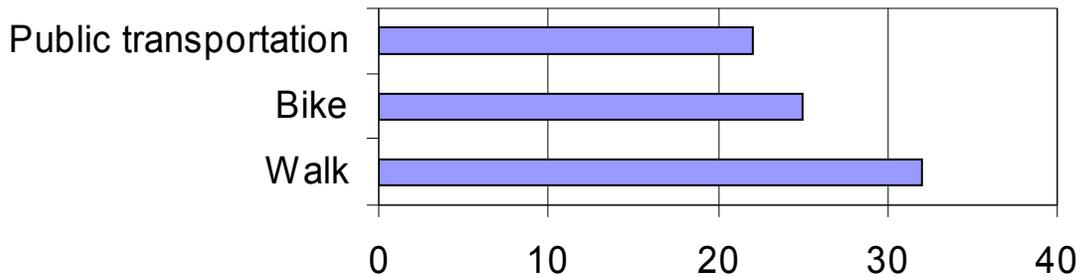


Reliance upon freeway use for local travel has obvious implications in transportation planning. The inclination to heavy use of freeway for local travel (even by older residents) might be an indicator of potential “latent use” of the freeway, casting doubt upon efficacy of freeway capacity increases (widening, etc.)

There is no way easily to compile the individual responses to question #6 concerning intersections that the respondents tend to avoid, but the detailed information in the questionnaire database is available to transportation planners.

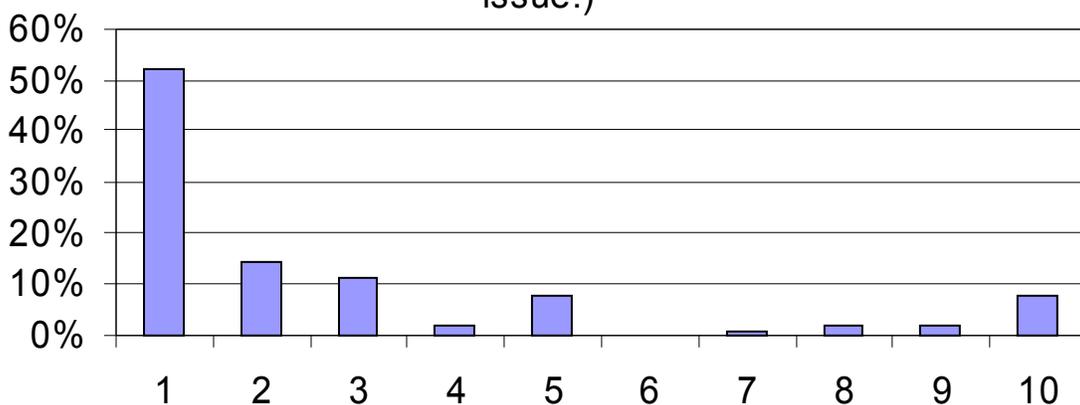


#8 - Number of responses in each category to "If you answered Yes to #7, indicate by ranking by number the means of transportation used most and least, (with 1 being the most, 3 the least.)"



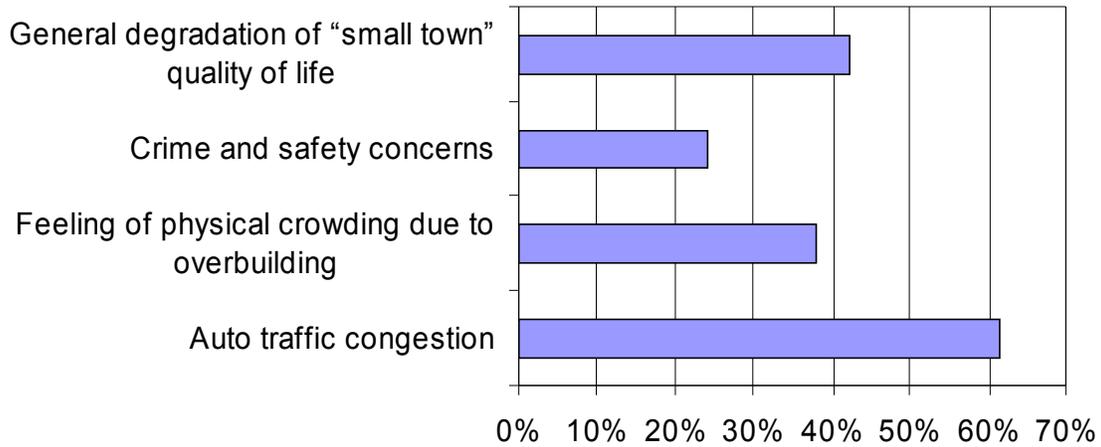
Responses to question #7 show a heavy inclination towards car use for in-town getting-around, but it is also notable that of those who use alternate transit, public transit ranked third behind biking and walking. This bears on assumptions behind hopes for heavy use of public transit, were it to be made more accessible or available.

#9 - Histogram of responses to "How important do you consider the issue of City growth in the new City General Plan. (Rate on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the most important issue.)"

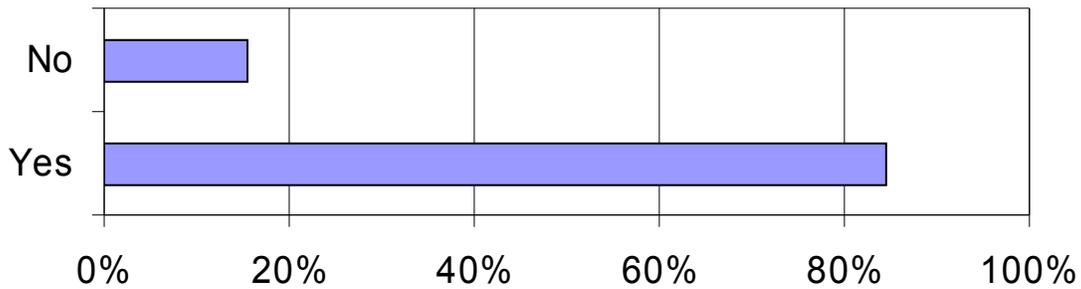


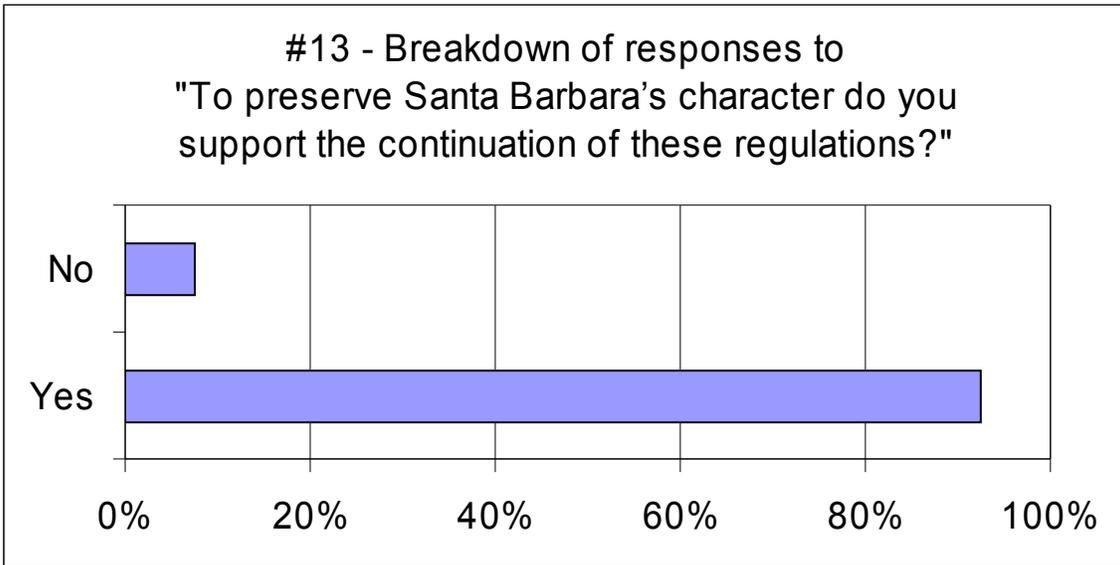
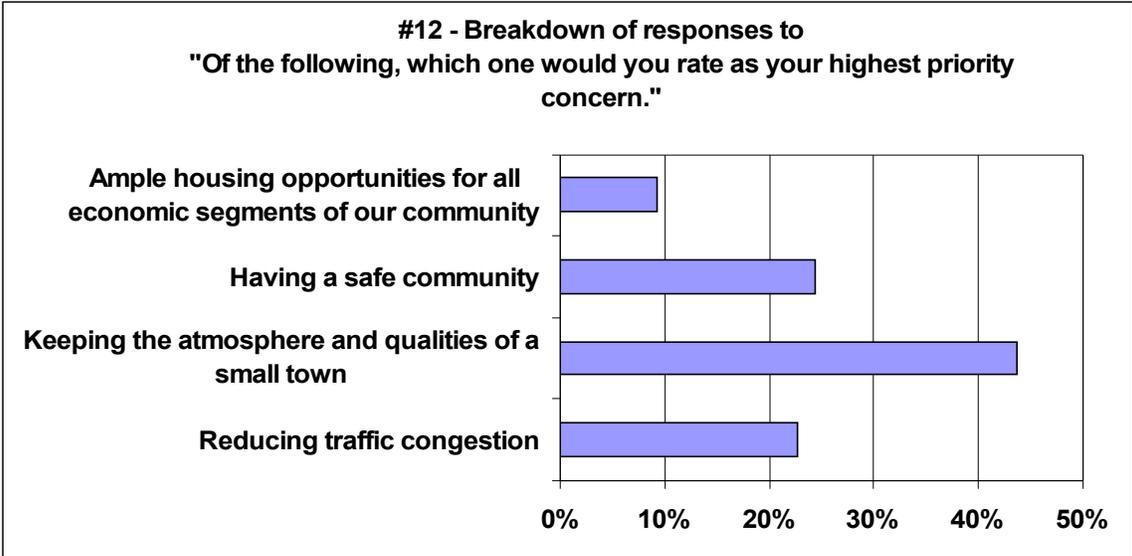
The responses to question #9 simply illustrate, not surprisingly, that in spite of our limited growth in recent years, the traditional concern about City growth is still a primary one. Over 50% rated it the #1 concern.

#10 - Percent responding as #1 priority to  
"If you think an increase in population would have a negative  
effect, rate each of the following in order of impact."

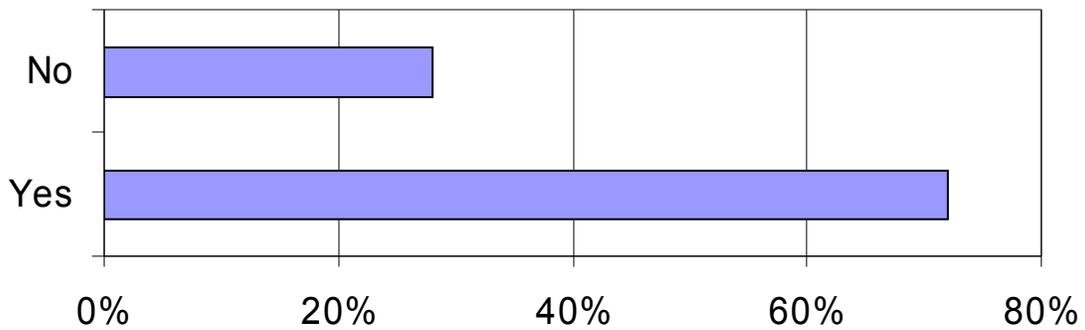


#11 - Breakdown of responses to  
"Do you think a community should, through regulatory  
measures supported by the majority of its citizens,  
seek to limit the population?"

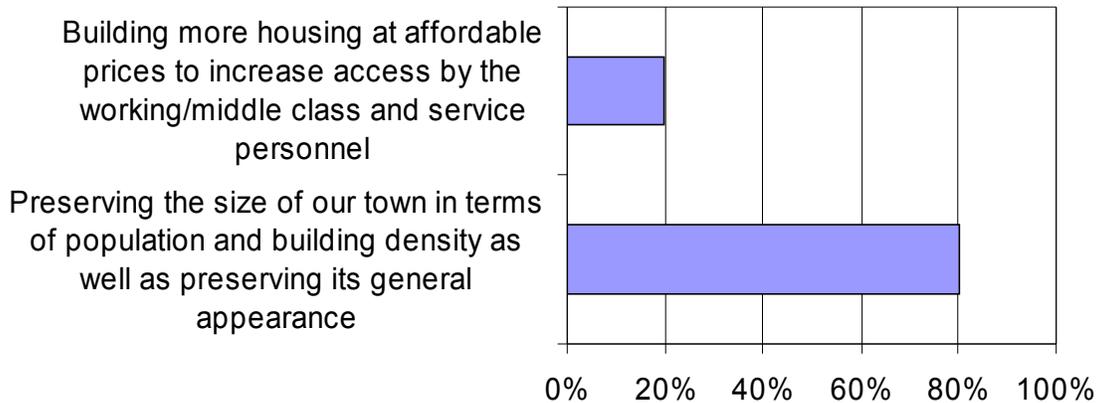




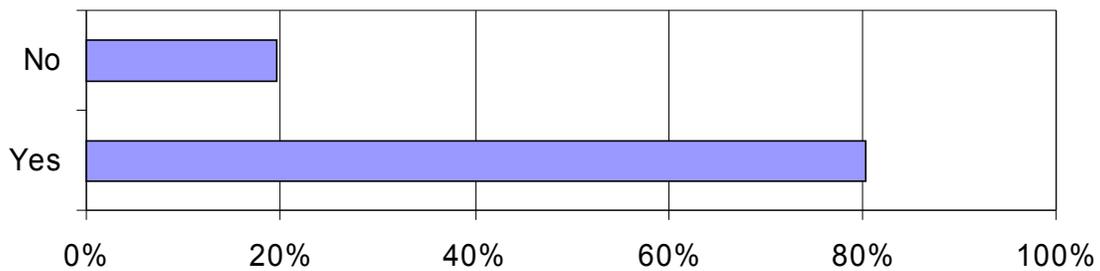
#14 - Breakdown of responses to  
"Would you consider even more restrictive height  
regulations of commercial buildings?"



#15 - Breakdown of responses to  
"Which one of the following is more important to you? "



#16 - Breakdown of responses to  
"Do you support some restrictions on a property owner's ability to  
make modifications to his property in order to preserve the historic  
character of certain buildings? "



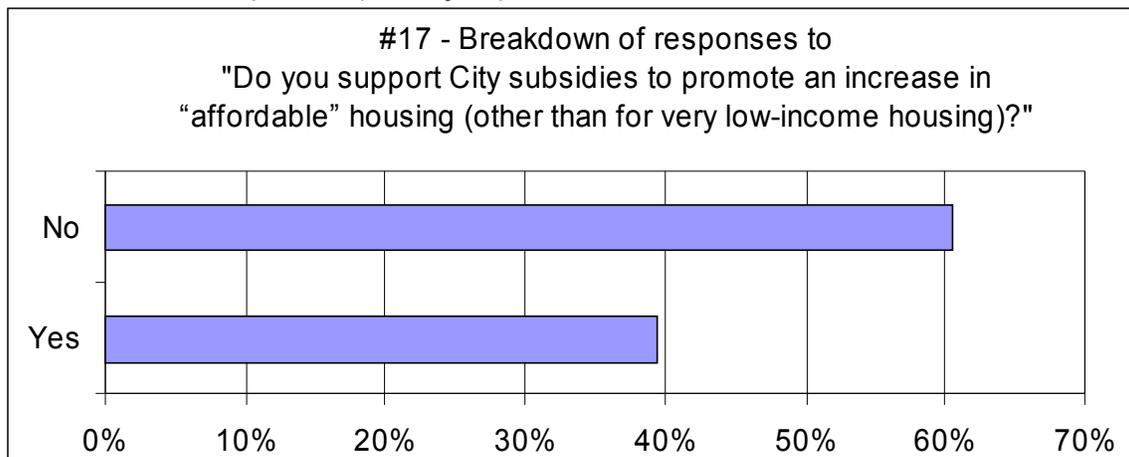
Questions 10 through 16 seek to gauge attitudes toward the *effects of growth*, which seems to be the City's primary focus when it comes to growth issues. These have implications both politically and in terms of planning policy (the efficacy on the latter often being dependent upon the former).

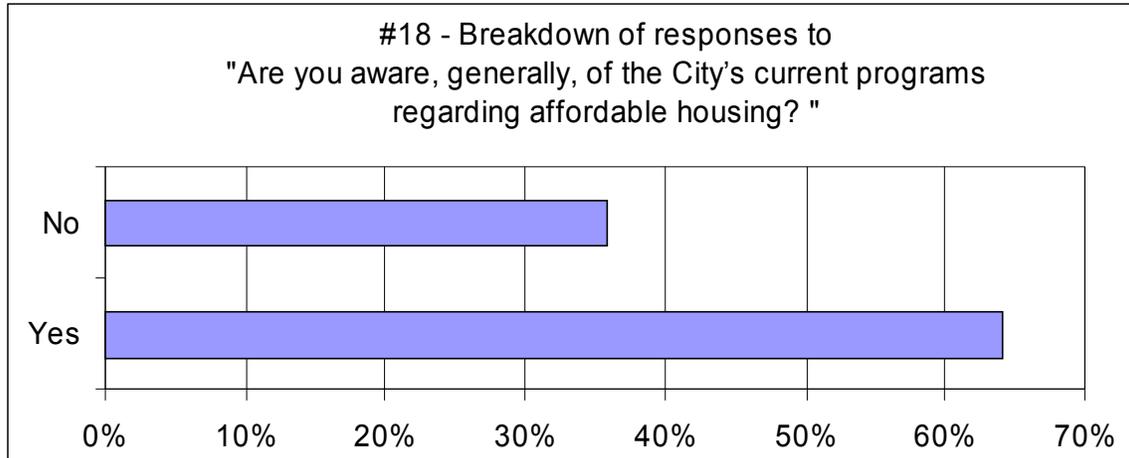
While traffic seems to be the main concern (61% replied that the biggest threat of population increase was traffic), its fairly close second, ("small town qualities", 43%), as well as the response to the more bluntly-stated "rating" question (#12) indicates that "small town qualities" trumps the narrower traffic concern.

As to whether or not the urban skyline profile is a key element of the "small town quality" perception, the answers to the questions on building height limitations (13 & 14) seems to provide an overwhelming indication that it is.

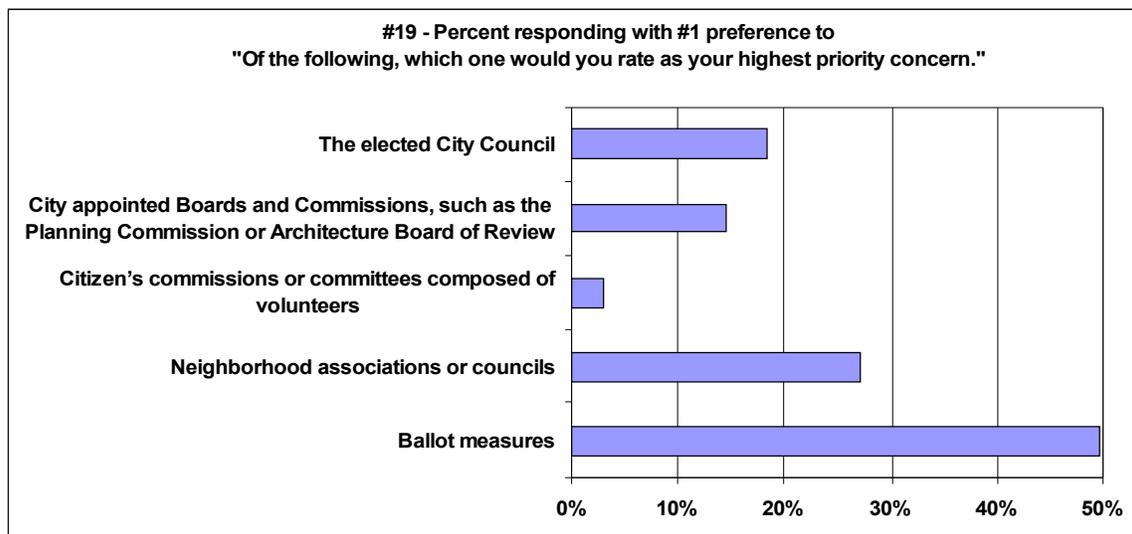
Question #15 seeks to pose a key policy-choice question, where a political choice may loom between potentially competing community priorities. Would one put the size of the City, in terms of population and those aspects of its general appearance that are related to its existing density level, at risk for the sake of initiatives that promise more new housing availability for workforce? Our sample (of potentially politically influential residents), by a margin of 80% to 20%, would not put "small town" qualities at risk for the sake of the housing initiatives.

We tossed question #16 in to test the community's tolerance for property rights-impinging measures for enforcement of quality of life preservation measures (in this case, relating to historical resources). The overwhelming nature of the response (80% yes) was notable.

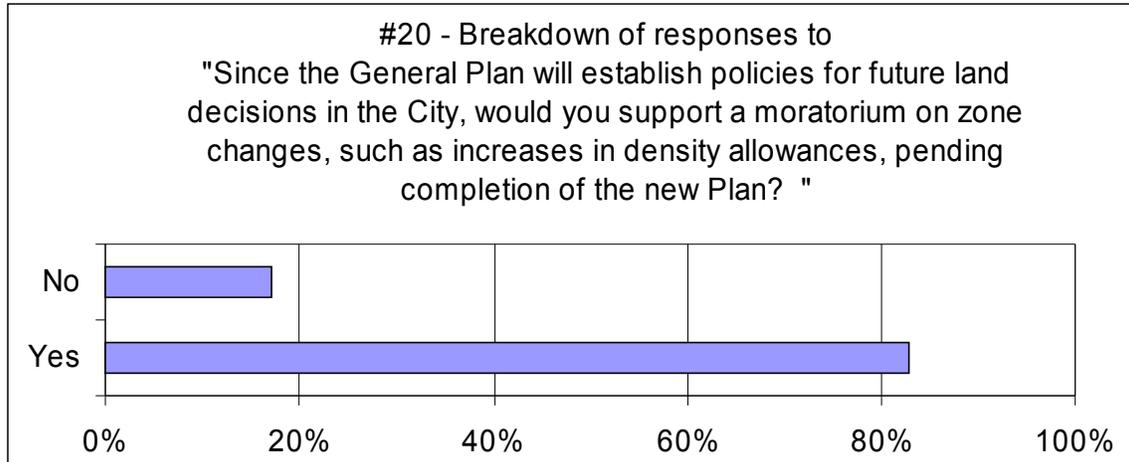




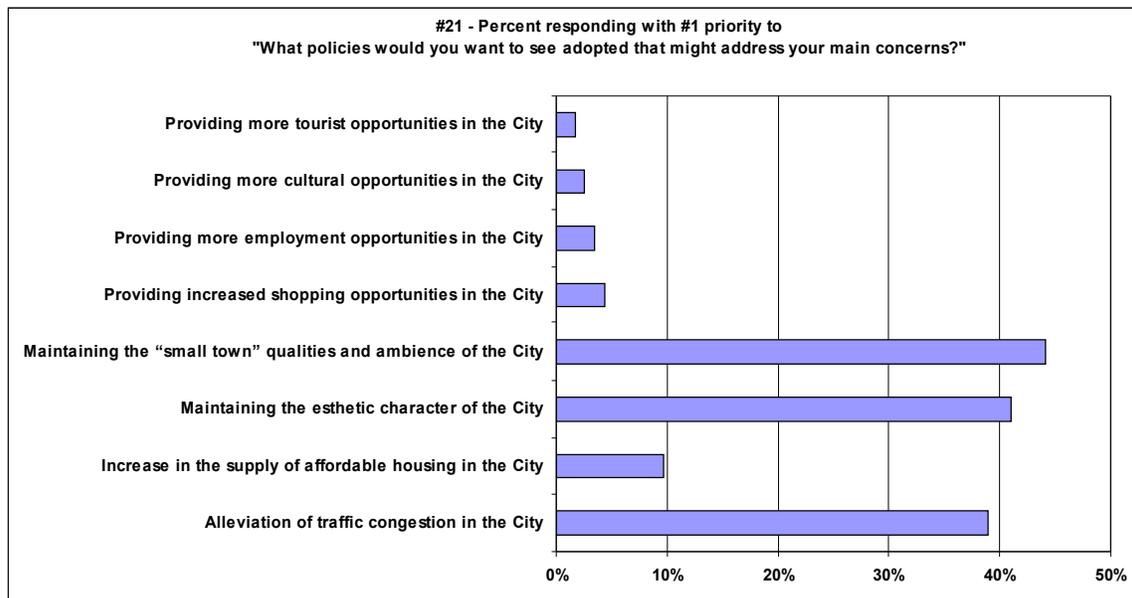
Following in a political vein, Question #17 tested the community's appetite for familiar City initiatives that grant dispensations of one sort or another ("subsidies") to promote building of more middle-income housing ("other than for very low-income housing"). (Question #18 indicates the level of familiarity with those programs.) Our sample revealed a 35% / 65% negative response, which might also amplify the "community qualities preservation" priorities revealed in the preceding questions.



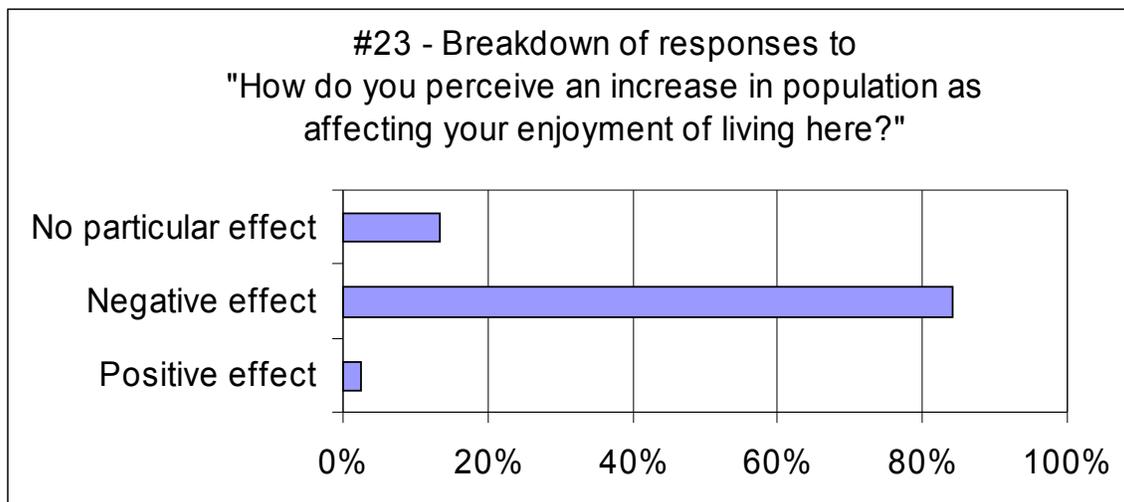
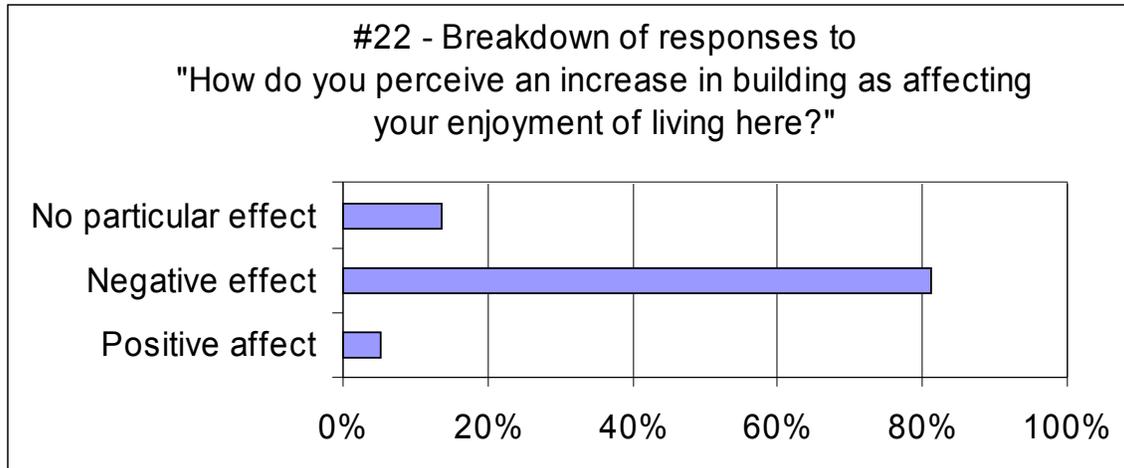
Anticipating that the General Plan Update will be taken seriously, and that it will provide the forum for making some key decisions that so badly need to be made, Question #19 gauges public confidence in whom to entrust those decisions. Ballot measures seem to win hands down - rated the #1 choice by 49%, it was by far the leading choice among the 5 alternatives. (At 19%, the elected City Council ran a weak third!)



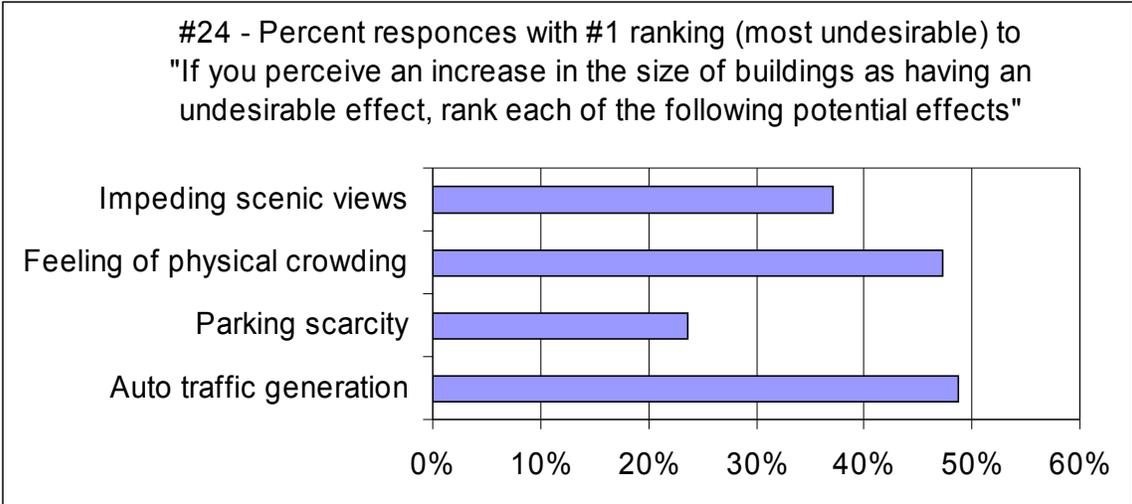
If the City decision makers were concerned as to how proposals for interim protective measures might fly politically, the 83% positive response to question #20 is a healthy indication (even when the question used the word “moratorium” – suggested by some officials as sounding too radical or threatening).



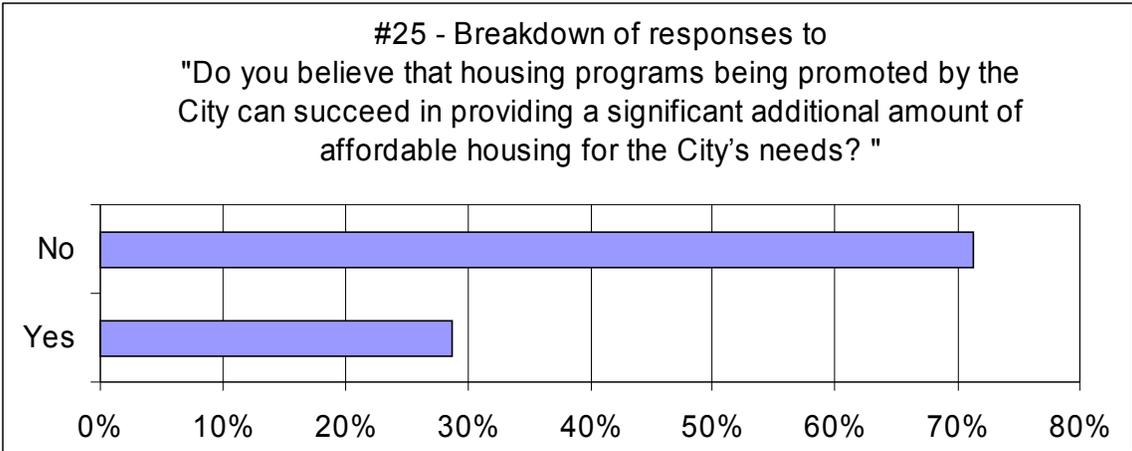
Returning to the question of ranking of community priorities, Question #21 sharpens the focus somewhat: to the matter of policies (government action) intended to address those priorities. Those involving ambience - esthetics, small-town qualities - clearly trumped everything else, including traffic congestion measures. 86% selected these “preservation” measures as #1 choices.

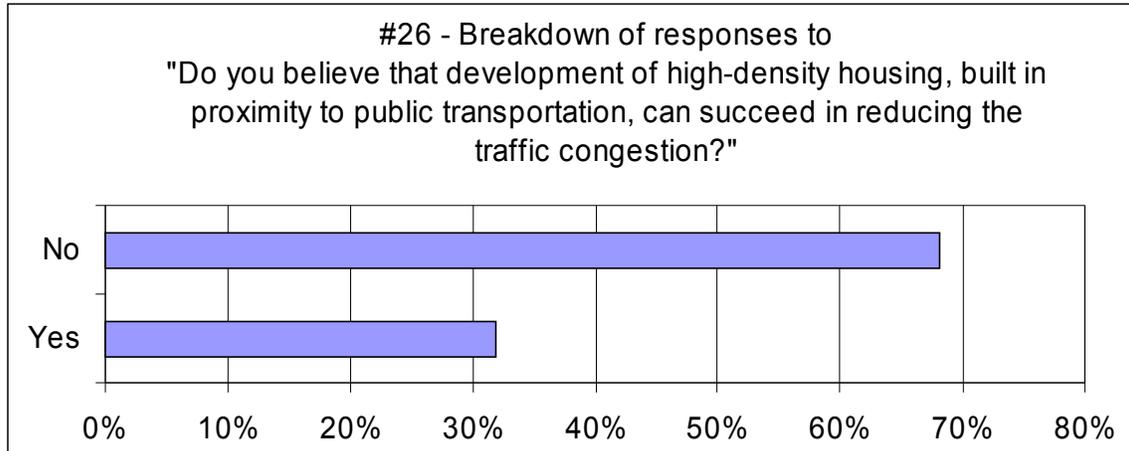


Questions #22 and #23 also shift back to “growth” attitudes – both built-environment and population components – to gauge general attitudes. Our sample certainly reveals that a strong “anti-growth” sentiment still exists here (over 80% “negative effect” response).

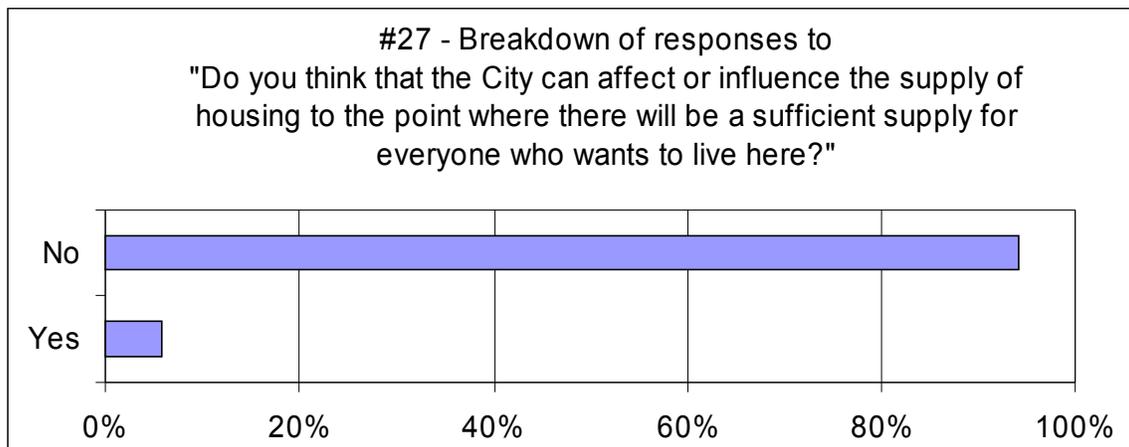


Question #24 focuses on “built environment” factors, specifically attitudes about larger buildings – and more specifically, what it is about them that might bother the respondent. We came up with a tie between the traffic-generation aspect and (significantly) the “ambience” concern (“feeling of crowding”).





Questions #25 and #26 were intended to gauge the degree of public “faith” in the assumptions behind some of the City’s efforts. (Without using the actual term, whether some of the key “smart growth” tenets, as applied to this City - e.g. “village” type, and “inclusionary” concepts - can produce the desired results.) We thought these were key questions because public perception within the community might be influential in the ultimate success of the endeavors, and because the City had never before posed such a question to the residents. Our sample exhibited little of the (presumably requisite) faith (around 70% negative on both questions).



We asked this final question, #27, at the risk of criticism for asking something so seemingly rhetorical or “loaded”, but thought it might be worthwhile for no other reason than to get a response to a sentiment that is, in fact, expressed by a significant number of people in the community. The response (94% rejecting the notion of a possibility of a sufficient supply of housing for all who seek it) was hardly surprising.