

## NORTHWEST BELLEVUE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Bellevue is a city of neighborhoods. And while each neighborhood is unique, the city strives to ensure every neighborhood is safe, resilient, welcoming, adaptable, socially connected, and provides a high-quality environment. This overarching vision is outlined in the Neighborhoods Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”  
 ~ Jane Jacobs

Neighborhood Plans bring the city’s broader Comprehensive Plan to life in a local way. They provide residents, businesses, city staff and other stakeholders guidance as each neighborhood grows and evolves.

The **Great Neighborhoods** program has been the process for developing these plans. Over the past year the Great Neighborhoods team collaborated with residents and stakeholders to develop plans that reflect the values, vision and priorities of community members. The Northeast Bellevue Neighborhood Plan lays a foundation that will help ensure a future as a livable, inspiring, vibrant, and equitable community.

## OVERVIEW OF OUTREACH PROCESS

The Neighborhood Plan is built around a template that includes the following sections:

- A vision statement that outlines the communities core values and hopes for the future.
- A neighborhood profile that shares key data about the community.
- The context of the key opportunities and challenges facing the neighborhood.
- Specific goals and policies to guide future development.



The engagement process used the template as a guide. Each section was tackled sequentially through a phased approach.

- **Phase 1 (summer 2020)** – Build Awareness of the planning process and understand the community’s core values.

- **Phase 2 (fall 2020)** – Define the vision and develop the neighborhood profile.
- **Phase 3 (winter & spring 2021)** – Explore challenges and opportunities and develop the policies.

## COVID-19 & ENGAGEMENT

The Great Neighborhoods program launched in June 2020. In-person gatherings were prohibited and most people, including city staff, were working from home. At the time it was unclear how long restrictions would be in place and protecting the health of the community was the top priority.

The Great Neighborhoods team had to adapt to a new engagement landscape. Plans to attend community events, table at local gathering spots, or go door-to-door were cancelled. In-person events were transitioned to online platforms. This meant that many traditional avenues for building project awareness by meeting people where they shop, work, and play were not available. The result was a smaller list of people who were informed about the planning process and signed up to receive updates and invitations to participate.

There was a learning curve as both staff and community members figured out how to use new tools and create welcoming and inclusive spaces in the virtual world. Flexibility and creativity were the watchwords, but the staff was committed to moving forward and the community proved willing to embrace new ways of participating.

## OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATION

The Great Neighborhoods team worked to engage a broad range of community members that was representative of the community's diversity. Overall, we had:

- 222 people provide feedback online at [www.engagingbellevue.com](http://www.engagingbellevue.com)
- 66 people participate at one or more virtual events
- 255 return our mailed survey
- 24% of participants at virtual events were people of color<sup>1</sup>
- 34% of participants online were people of color

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<sup>1</sup> More detailed demographic information is available at the end of this report.

It's important to note that participation was based on self-selection; people chose whether or not to engage in the planning process. Awareness of the project, relevance to the individual, sense of urgency about the decisions to be made, culturally appropriate engagement, and comfort with city processes are all factors that drive or depress participation.

The team addressed those factors in a variety of ways. Robust social media and digital advertising was used to build awareness. Four digital ad campaigns reached between 2,301-7,971 people, with between 108 – 399 clicking on the ads to learn more about the project. The city's Next Door account provided an opportunity to target residents in Northwest Bellevue; posts inviting people to participate online or attend virtual events were seen by 209-1258 people.

Additionally, to ensure that residents were informed of the neighborhood planning process and had the opportunity to provide input the Great Neighborhoods team prepared two mailings to every household in Northwest Bellevue. In November 2020 a postcard was sent that invited residents to take the Values Survey and in March 2021 each household received a postage paid questionnaire asking people to weigh in on key issues related to housing and mobility.

To support culturally relevant outreach the Great Neighborhoods program piloted the use of Cultural Outreach Assistants. Part-time staff with connections and experience working with key cultural communities in Northwest Bellevue supported outreach and engagement by conducting one-on-one meetings with community members, delivering presentations to community groups, posting online, evaluating contents, and connecting with key businesses. The four Cultural Outreach Assistants contributed to this process by:

- Conducting 76 meetings with individuals and organizational leaders
- Giving 7 presentations to community groups
- Reaching over 2500 people via social media

This type of intentional outreach was new and provided an important learning opportunity that will impact future outreach efforts. It is important to note that these efforts were also impacted by the community response to COVID-19. Organizations that serve various cultural groups were navigating their own shift to virtual engagement while also addressing the concerns raised by COVID-19. Community festivals were cancelled and it was not possible to table in front of grocery stores or other businesses that serve diverse communities.

## OVERVIEW OF OUTREACH EVENTS

### Values & Vision

The planning process began with an exploration of what core values should guide the future of the development. Starting with values as opposed to specific issues allows both the community and staff to understand the why behind the goals and policies and build a foundation based on shared understanding of what's important to the community. To understand what the community's core values the team conducted an online survey and hosted virtual community conversations.

88 people took the online survey and 21 people attended the values conversation. The top five core neighborhood values identified through the survey include:

- Safety
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Aging-in-Place
- Economic Well-Being

*"I mostly would like to see a thriving multi-generational community; people being able socioeconomically to be able to live in Bellevue all their life, and opportunities for their children and grandchildren to live here prosperously."*

~ Comment from Values Survey

This information helped inform the next step of the planning process which involved exploring residents' vision for the future. A core group of 12 residents met virtually to imagine a future where the core neighborhood values had been realized. Participants were invited to think about what would be the same and what would be different. At the end of the workshop participants had the chance to develop their own vision statement.

*In the future **diversity** will play a vital role in NW Bellevue. By focusing on **empathy**, we can help people **interact** and bring a new **sense of community** to Northwest Bellevue.*

~ Resident Vision Statement

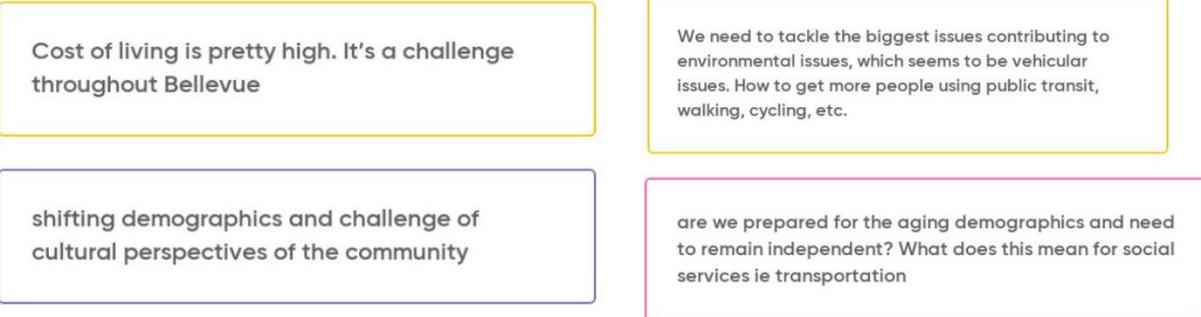
Input gathered through these efforts was used to craft Vision Statements that reflected the community's values and their aspirations for the future of Northwest Bellevue.

## Data Walks

Before diving into the issues that needed to be addressed in the neighborhood plan, the Great Neighborhoods team wanted to make sure the community had a clearer sense of what was going on in the neighborhood. Working with city staff from multiple departments the team developed a Data Walk. During the event participants had the opportunity to look at information, ask questions and reflect on what the data said about the strengths and challenges facing the community. The Data Walk included information related to:

- Income
- Diversity
- Housing Costs
- Places to Gather
- Access to Shopping & Services
- Traffic Safety
- Commute Patterns
- Walkability
- Access to Transit
- Access to Parks
- Tree Canopy
- Carbon Emissions

19 people attended the Data Walk live virtual event and 60 people viewed the Data Walk materials online at [www.engagingbellevue.com](http://www.engagingbellevue.com). Participants left the event with a broader perspective about their community and better prepared to engage in creative brainstorming around key issues.



Cost of living is pretty high. It's a challenge throughout Bellevue

We need to tackle the biggest issues contributing to environmental issues, which seems to be vehicular issues. How to get more people using public transit, walking, cycling, etc.

shifting demographics and challenge of cultural perspectives of the community

are we prepared for the aging demographics and need to remain independent? What does this mean for social services ie transportation

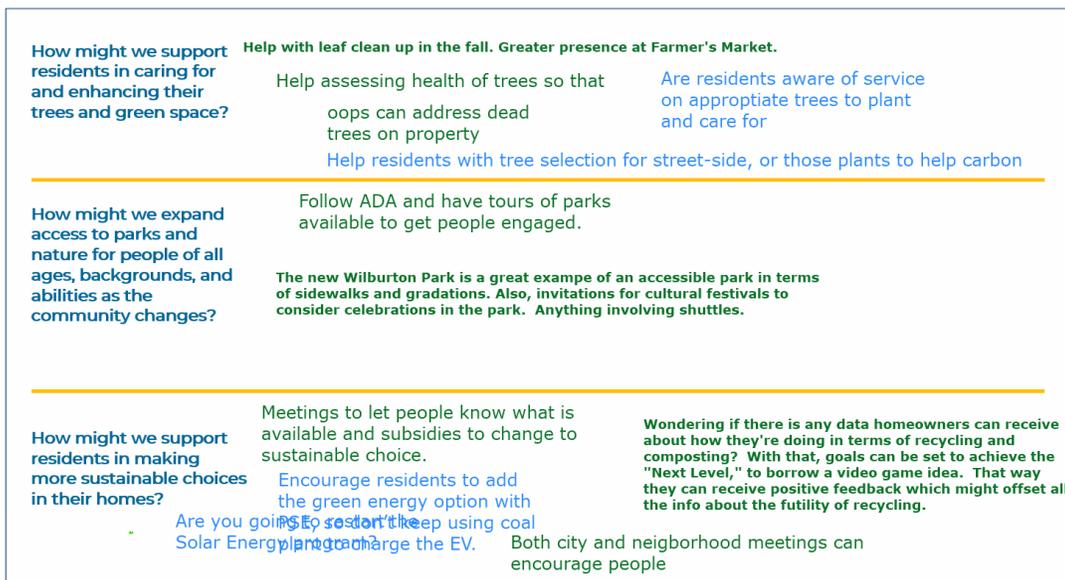
Sample of comments provided via Mentimeter during November 17, 2020 Data Walk

## Community Brainstorming Sessions

Through February and March of 2021, the Great Neighborhoods team hosted four Community Brainstorming Sessions. These virtual events brought residents together with subject matter experts from Transportation, Neighborhoods, Environmental Stewardship and Planning to discuss key issues and develop community-based ideas for addressing challenges.

During each session participants revisited key data and considered current citywide goals. Then they broke up into small groups for rapid brainstorming where the goal was to generate as many ideas as possible. After a short debrief, the small groups reconvened to further discuss their ideas. Staff facilitators used that time to learn more about which ideas were most exciting and why residents supported them.

27 Individuals participated in at least one Community Brainstorming Event and 38 individuals visited the online Community Brainstorming Tool at Engaging Bellevue.



Example of virtual whiteboard from March 3, 2020 Community Brainstorm

Input gathered through the Brainstorming Events helped inform the Goals and Policies sections of the Neighborhood Plan by shining a spotlight on issues that were of special concern to the community and that needed to be addressed in policy.

## Policy Open House, DADU/Backyard Cottage Conversation, Placemaking & Survey

Before completing the Draft Neighborhood Plan, residents had several opportunities to review the goals and policies and provide feedback. Three virtual events were held in April 2021, each one with a slightly different focus and agenda.

- Policy Open House** – during this drop in event, participants were able to rotate between breakout rooms focused on various policy areas for open-ended discussion. Each breakout room was facilitated by a staff expert who could answer questions and take notes on feedback. Participants were able to spend as much time as they wanted in each breakout room.

- **DADU/Backyard Cottage Conversation** – the city’s Comprehensive Plan and Affordable Housing Strategy provide direction to address the issues of detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs), also referred to as backyard cottages, through the neighborhood planning process. Discussion of DADUs and ADUs came up in every event and tool related to affordability, but a separate event was scheduled to ensure this important issue was given additional attention. During this discussion, participants learned more about the role DADUs could play in providing housing options, what current city regulation allows for, and what other cities who allow DADUs are finding. Then participants were invited to engage in open ended discussion with staff to ask questions, share concerns, and provide feedback. Several attendees appreciated the additional information provided in the presentation and felt like they had a better understanding of the issue.
- **Placemaking Discussion** – the neighborhood subareas, by design, cover many smaller “sub-neighborhoods,” each with its own distinct feel. To better capture these distinctions and identify ways to support these unique characteristics through policy the team held a discussion specifically related to placemaking in Northwest.

20 people came to at least one of the above virtual policy-focused events

- **Policy Survey** – an online survey was also provided on EngagingBellevue so residents who were unable to attend events could still weigh in and give feedback on the full draft Goals and Policies section of the plan. 393 individuals visited the survey and 57 of them completed it, providing their input on both specific policies and how they fit together as whole.
  - **86%** of respondents support all or most of the Environment goals and policies.
  - **81%** of respondents support all or most of the Sense of Place goals and policies.
  - **77%** of respondents support all or most of the Sense of Community goals and policies.
  - **77%** of respondents support all or most of the Mobility and Access goals and policies.
  - **53%** of respondents support all or most of the Housing Affordability goals and policies.

The range of support expressed for the Housing Affordability goals and policies matches what was heard throughout the process. There were participants who expressed a strong desire to see more housing options like duplexes, triplexes and backyard cottages allowed in the neighborhood and there were others who wanted to see the single-family character of the neighborhood preserved.

*I want seniors, young people and modest income people to be able to rent backyard cottages and stay in the Northtown neighborhood where I live. I want duplex or triplex units to be allowed which would be the same scale and mass as the McMansions now being built after the smaller, original ramblers where I live, and rent get torn down.*

~ Comment from Values Survey

*I don't agree with ADUs in my neighborhood. Not enough sidewalks - actually none. Increased housing in my neighborhood puts more vehicles on the roads, which are not designed for multifamily living. Lots of people walk, with pets, children, and families. Several use walking assisted devices. My neighborhood should remain designated for only single-family homes.*

~ Comment from Policy Survey

## MAJOR THEMES & KEY ISSUES

Over the course of the planning process clear themes emerged and key issues were raised multiple times. Changes that are happening regionally are felt at the neighborhood level and, in their comments and in discussions at events, residents grappled with how to respond. In many instances, participants want to see a citywide response to issues that are impacting their neighborhoods.

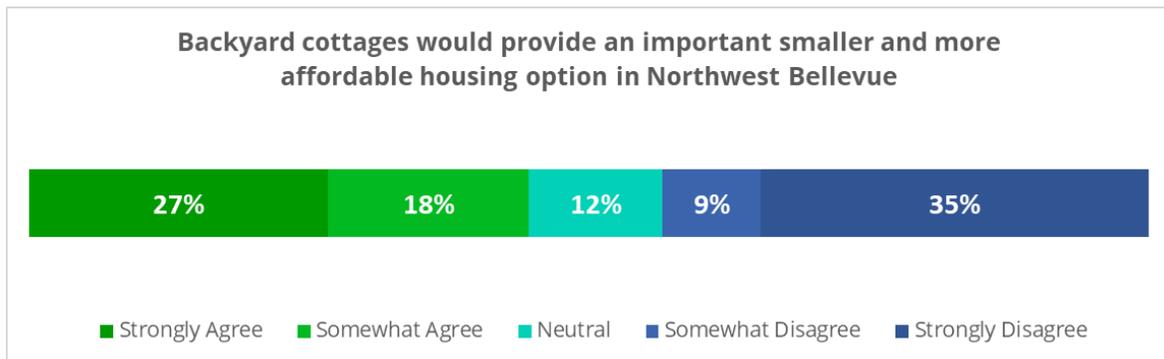
**Affordability of Housing** is, by far, the biggest concern of community members. Affordability is directly related to several of the key neighborhood values – Aging-in-Place, Diversity, Sustainability and Economic Well-Being. Rising property taxes are a challenge for seniors who want to stay in their home. Lack of affordable housing choices limits diversity in the neighborhood and makes it harder for people to access jobs without having to endure long commutes that increase the city’s carbon footprint. Northwest Bellevue is in close proximity to job centers like Downtown Bellevue, BelRed, and Microsoft, putting further pressure on the demand for housing.

*I want to be able to invest in my life here and not already know I have to move when my income changes because of high property taxes. I chose to live in this area because of what it has to offer - if it gets too expensive, my investment in friends, community, etc. is wasted - plus the community loses my loyalty.*

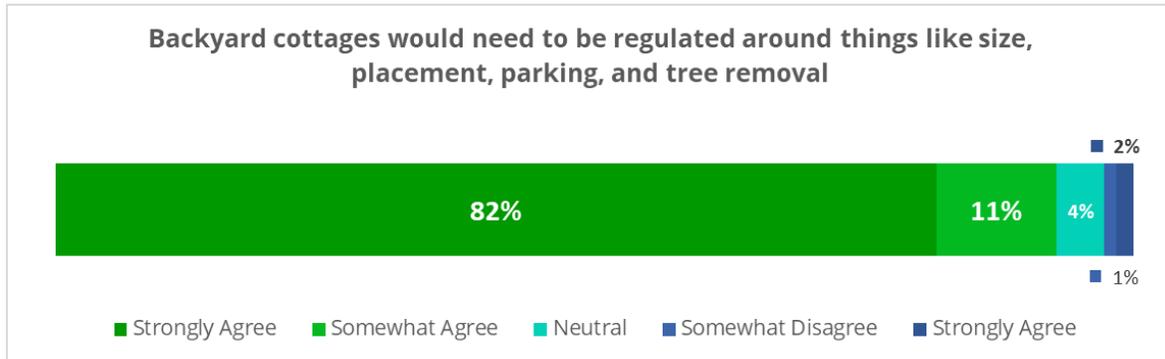
~ Comment from Values Survey

Commenters offered a variety of solutions including freezing property taxes for seniors on fixed incomes, requiring developers to include affordable units in new buildings, and more investment in transit-oriented development.

**Backyard Cottages/DADUs** were discussed as a one possible approach to adding more housing that would be affordable to people making between 80%-100% of area median income. Suggestions to look at the possibility of DADUs came up throughout the process both online and at virtual events. The questionnaire, which was sent to every household in Northwest Bellevue, gives the clearest picture on community sentiment and shows that residents are evenly divided.



Support for backyard cottages is dependent on regulation. Respondents expressed concern about loss of trees and impacts to parking and traffic that might come if backyard cottages were permitted. There was also a strong desire for regulation around owner occupancy and strict limits on short term rentals.



It’s important to note that commenters brought up other housing types in addition to backyard cottages. There was interest in revisiting regulations around attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and in allowing duplexes or triplexes.

**Tear-Downs and “Mega-Homes”** were another concern that was frequently raised by community members. This is unsurprising given the fact that Northwest Bellevue has seen the most redevelopment of single-family lots out of all the neighborhoods in the last ten years. Many people expressed concern about the removal of mature trees that comes with building out to the lot line. Others see larger homes as another sign that their neighborhood is becoming less affordable and would rather see duplexes or triplexes. And still others see the character of their neighborhood changing as smaller homes that were built in the mid-twentieth century are replaced.

*My concern is about the scale of development in my neighborhood. Five million-dollar mega-mansions are becoming the norm in a neighborhood of original Bell and Valdez homes. The result is skyrocketing property taxes and setback to setback homes that are in the neighborhood of 6,000 square feet. It is not comfortable to live next door to a home that towers to a height of three stories and "peers" into your yard.*

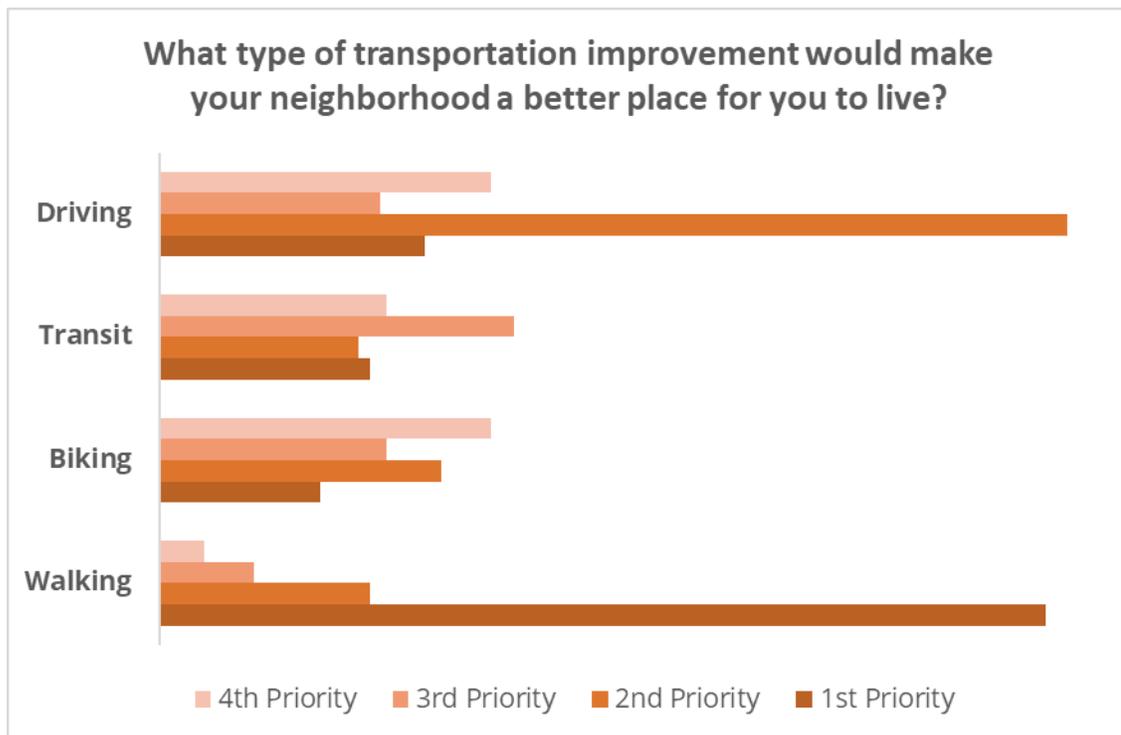
~ Comment from Policy Survey

**Mobility and Access** were frequent topics of discussion. Residents’ concerns around mobility and access touch on several neighborhood values as well. Sidewalks and safe crosswalks contribute to feelings of safety and are important for seniors who want to age-in-place. Bike lanes, sidewalks, and safe crosswalks would give residents more alternatives to driving which can help the community be more sustainable. Finally, a neighborhood that encourages walking and makes it easy for people to get to services contributes to a sense of community when neighbors can run into one another when they are out and about or schedule a meet up at a local café.

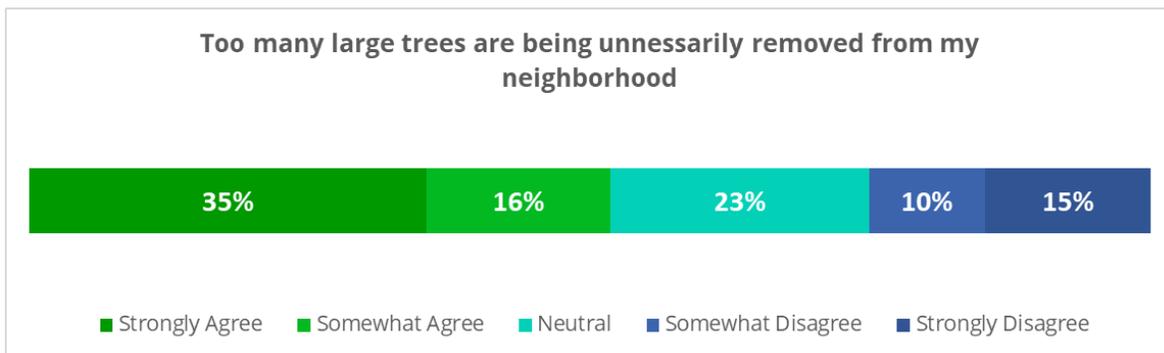
*Need to deal with the traffic issues, given Bellevue was designed as a “car centric” city and is now evolving to walkable/cycles given the density and philosophy around mixed use development.*

~ Comment from Data Walk

While there is a desire to see improvements around all modes of transportation, the questionnaire showed a strong preference for focusing on sidewalks and walkability.



**Trees and the Environment** are another important concern. Residents in Northwest Bellevue have a deep appreciation for trees and the natural environment. Mature trees and parks add to the unique neighborhood character. Trees are also an important environmental asset providing habitat, clean air, and shade in an urban setting. Many people are deeply concerned about the loss of mature trees and want to see the city take urgent action, particularly in how other neighborhood concerns such as redevelopment impact the Neighborhood’s tree canopy. However, it is important to note that some sub-neighborhoods prioritize their view of the lake or mountains or otherwise feel that the current pace of tree removal is acceptable. Responses to the questionnaire show this spread of opinion as well.



In the Community Brainstorming Session and in comments residents offered many ideas for preserving and enhancing Northwest Bellevue’s tree canopy including more tree care education, support for tree maintenance, and updates to the city’s tree code.

The parks, trails and other green space are well loved by residents and are seen as the neighborhood’s biggest asset. Improving access and recreation opportunities and acquiring land for additional parks would all be considered worthwhile investments by the community.

## CONCLUSION – FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

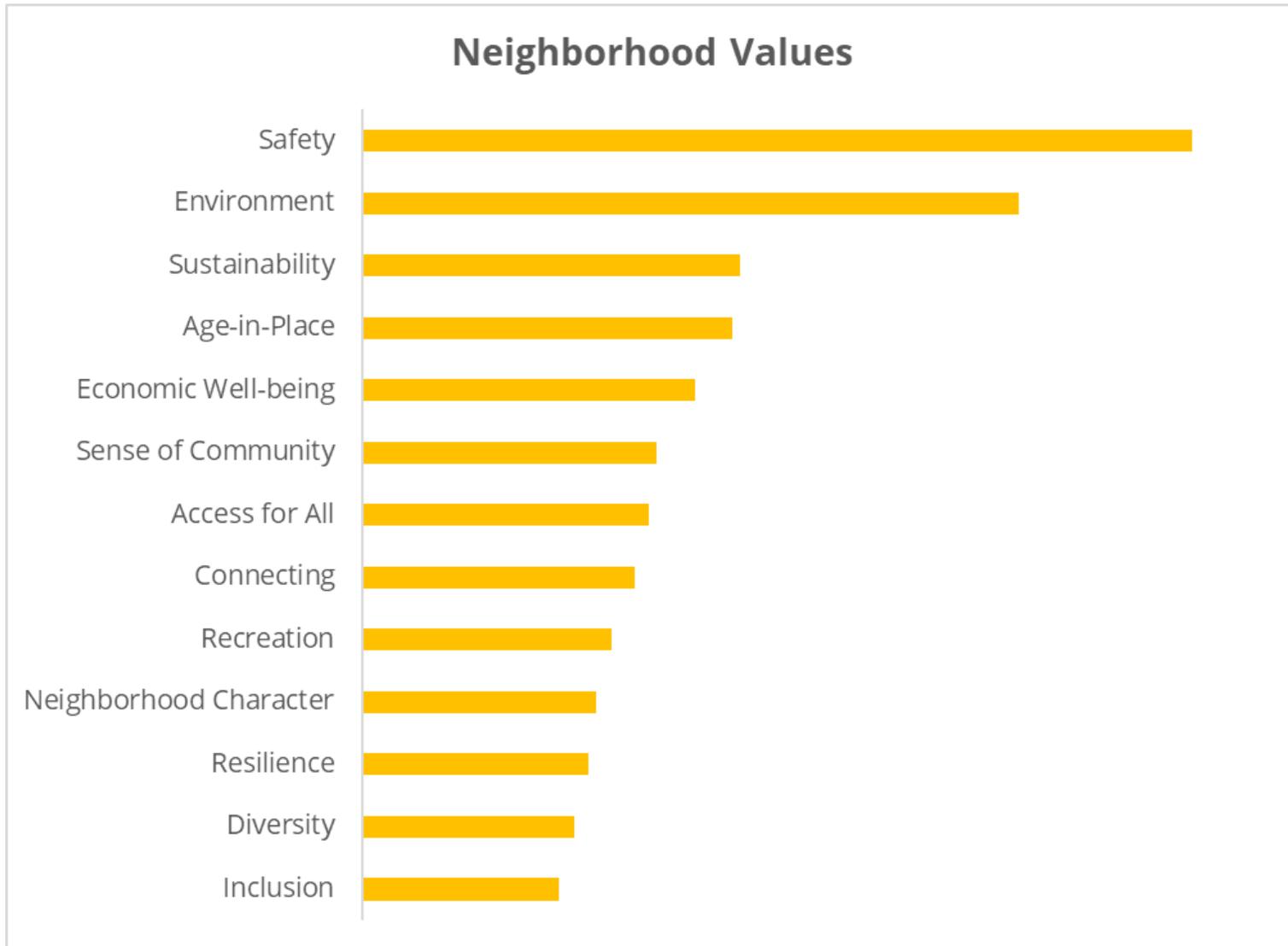
Bellevue has a long tradition of engaging residents and stakeholders in planning for the future. The city's Comprehensive Plan outlines clear goals and policies related to engagement that include encouraging broad participation that is user-friendly, informative, and that provides multiple methods and opportunities for engagement. The Comprehensive Plan also calls on staff to provide culturally relevant engagement and equitable access for people with disabilities or language barriers. Finally, the Comprehensive Plan encourages the use of innovative methods and technologies that can reach people who might not normally participate.

This planning process has sought to implement these goals and policies in a variety of ways, from bringing on Cultural Outreach Assistants to incorporating new platforms that make virtual engagement more participatory and accessible. That said, there are still opportunities for learning and growth. Reaching renters and other residents in multi-family buildings remains challenging; engaging historically underserved populations takes an ongoing commitment to relationship building; and there are social media platforms and communication methods that need further exploration.

The lessons learned through this process will inform future efforts as the city continues to work with residents to make Bellevue “the place you want to be.”

**Values Survey**

88 Respondents



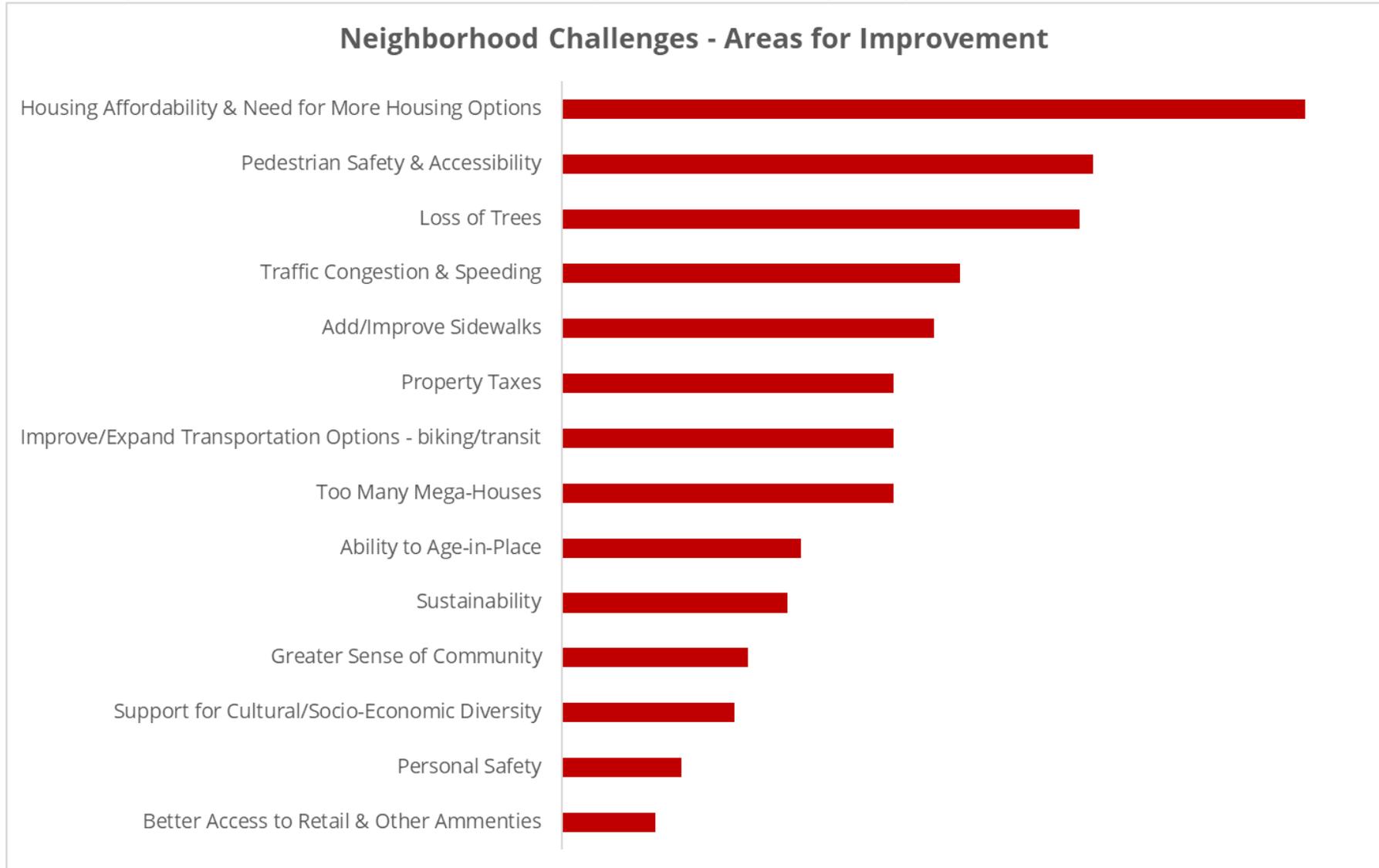
### Comment Analysis – Neighborhood Assets

Review of open-ended comments from the Values Survey, Questionnaire, Policy Survey, and Virtual Events



### Comment Analysis – Neighborhood Concerns

Review of open-ended comments from the Values Survey, Questionnaire, Policy Survey, and Virtual Events



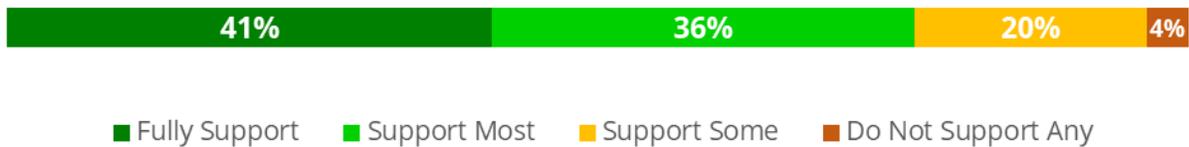
### Policy Survey

57 Respondents

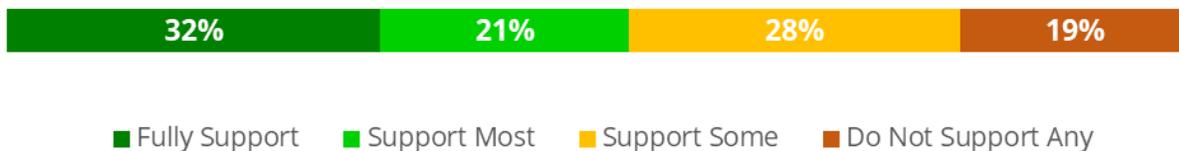
#### Sense of Place Goals & Policies



#### Sense of Community Goals & Policies



#### Housing Affordability Goals & Policies



#### Mobility & Access Goals & Policies

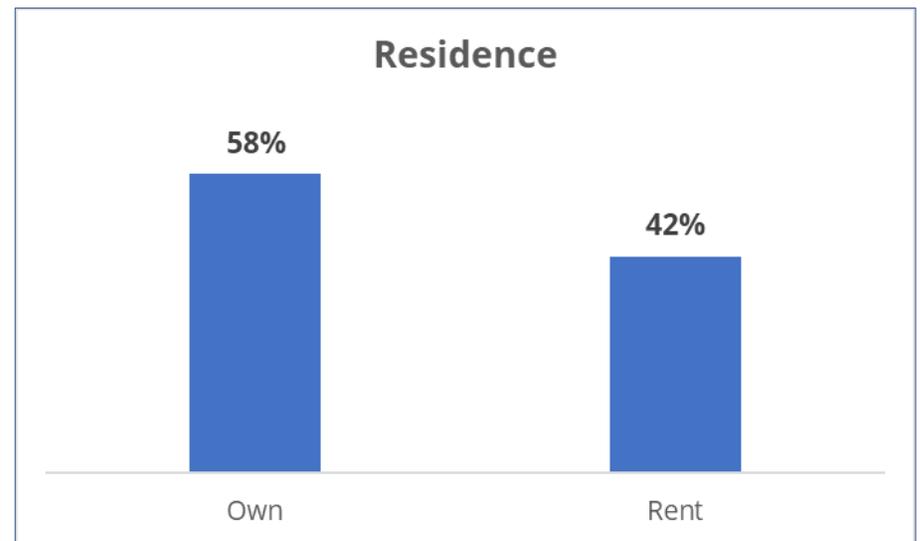
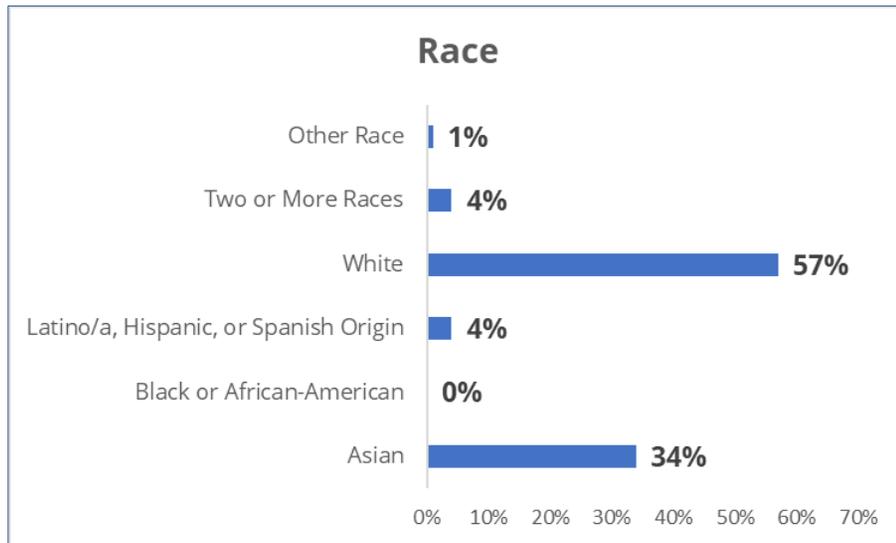
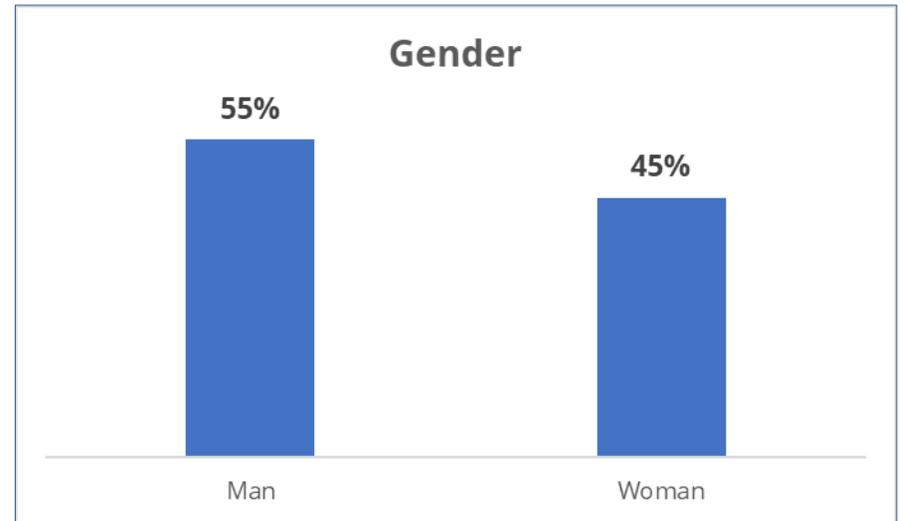
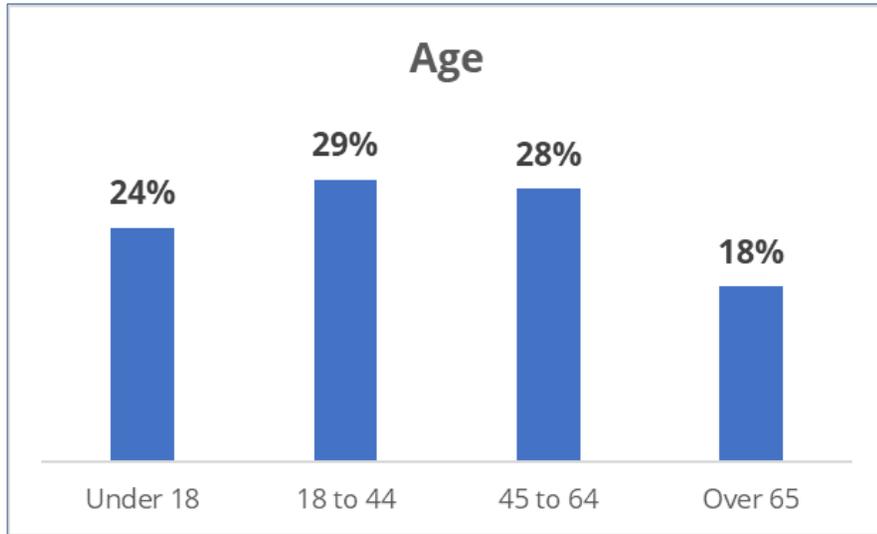


#### Environment Goals & Policies



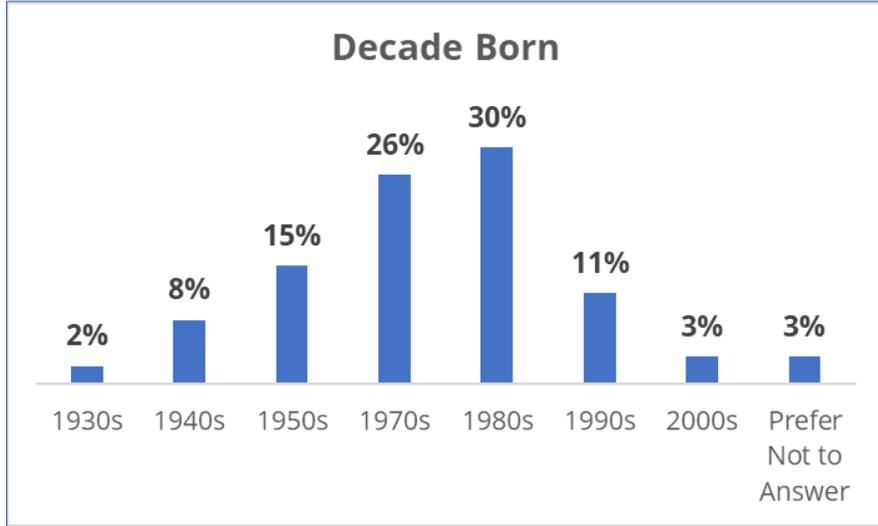
**Northwest Bellevue Demographics**

Data calculated by City of Bellevue staff based on King County Assessor records (2020) and US Census Bureau American Community Survey (2018) tables.

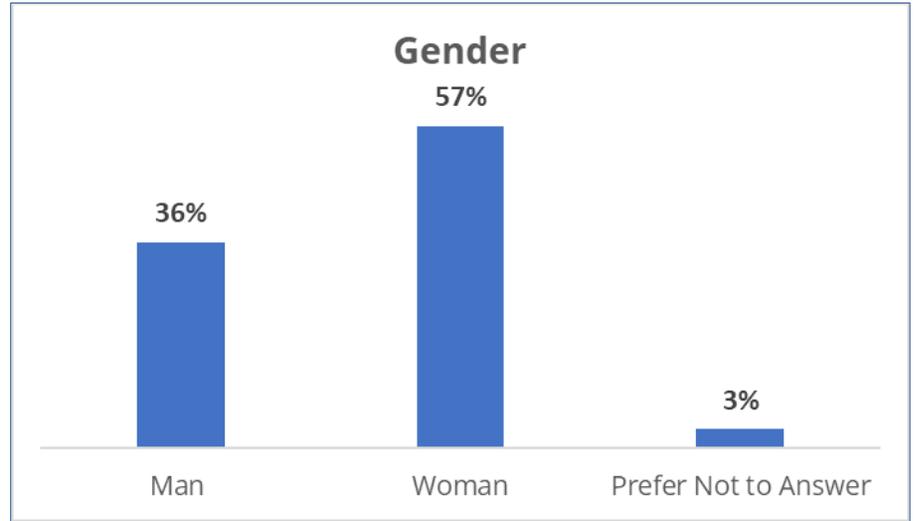


**Values Survey – Demographics**

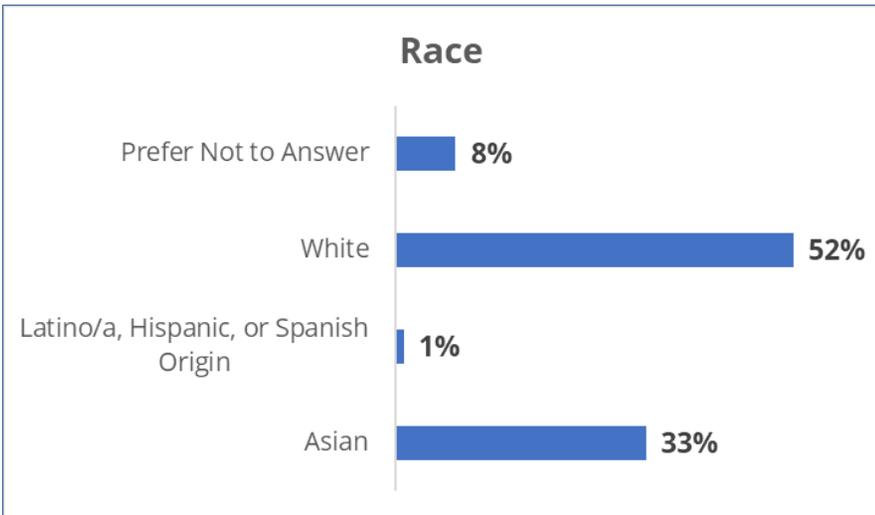
88 Respondents



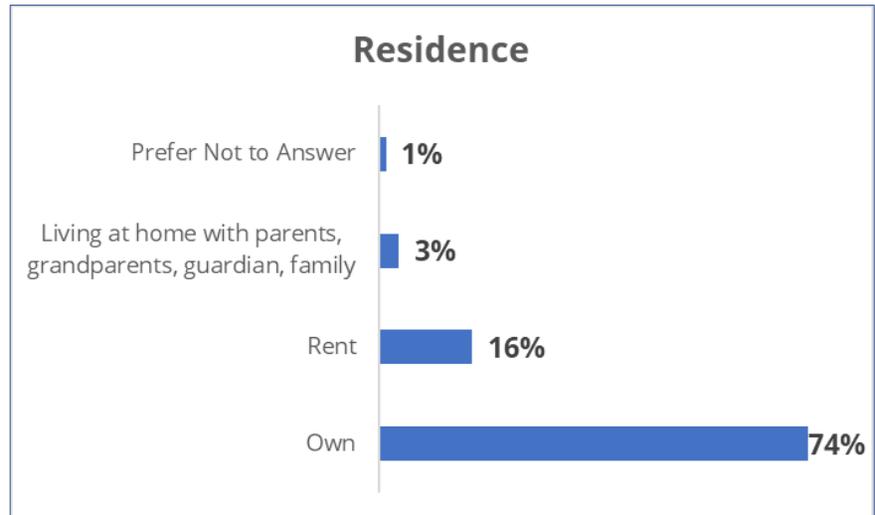
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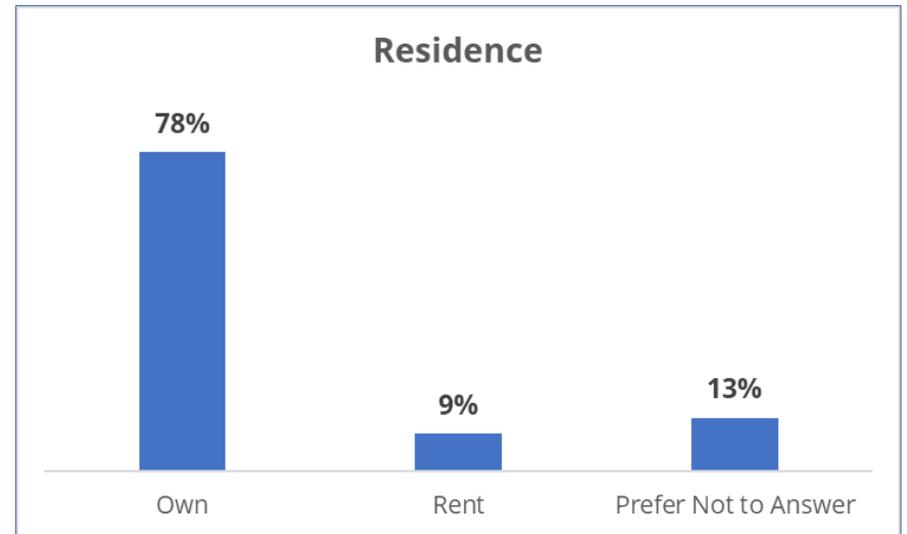
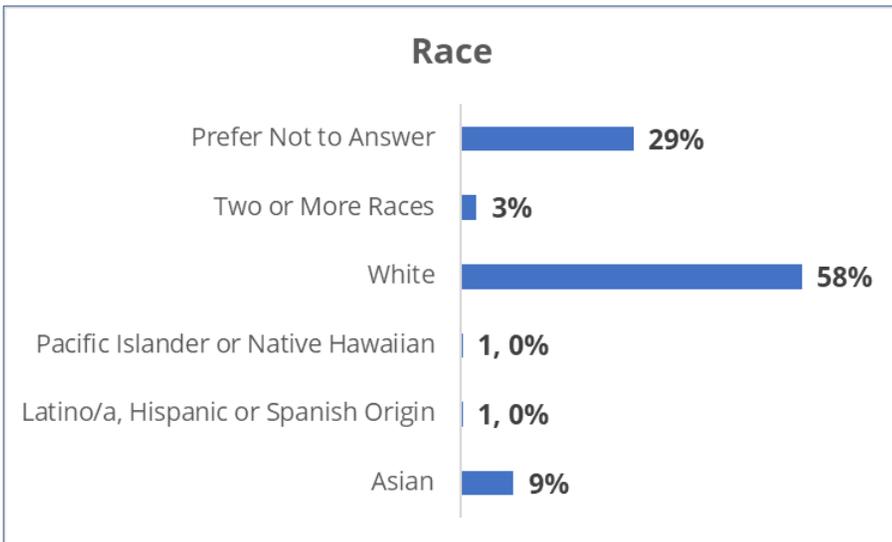
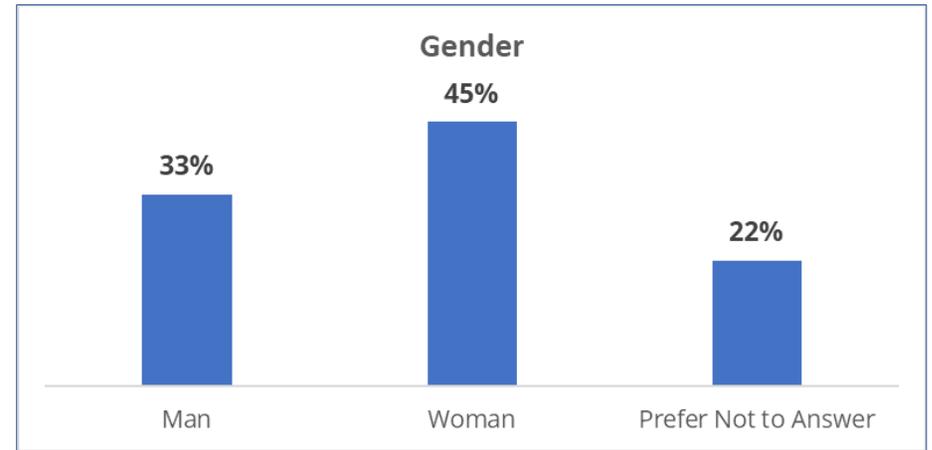
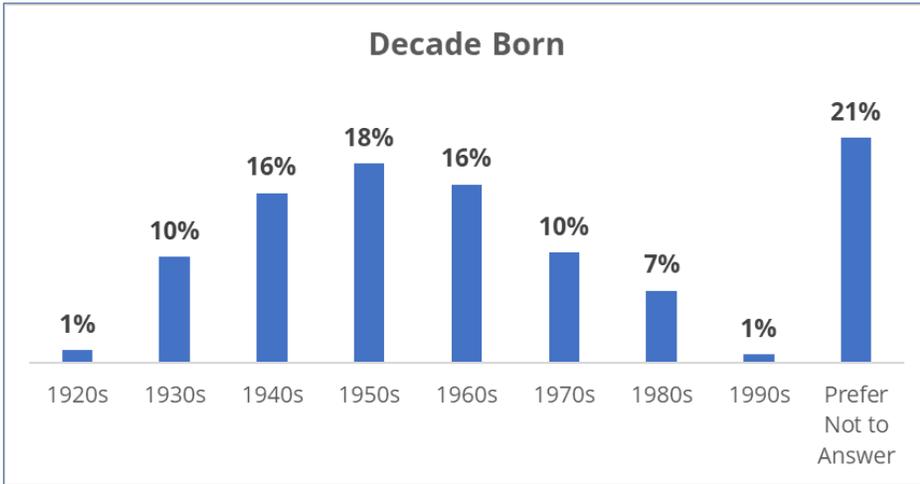


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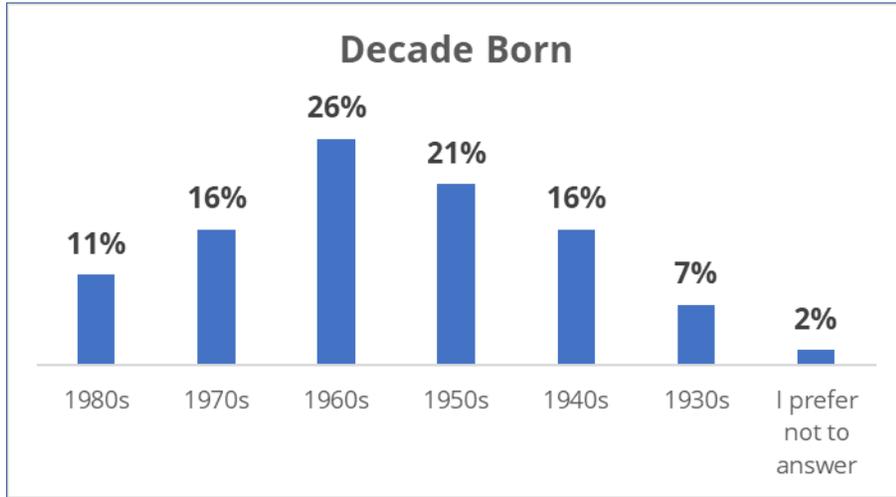
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**Questionnaire Demographics**  
 255 Respondents

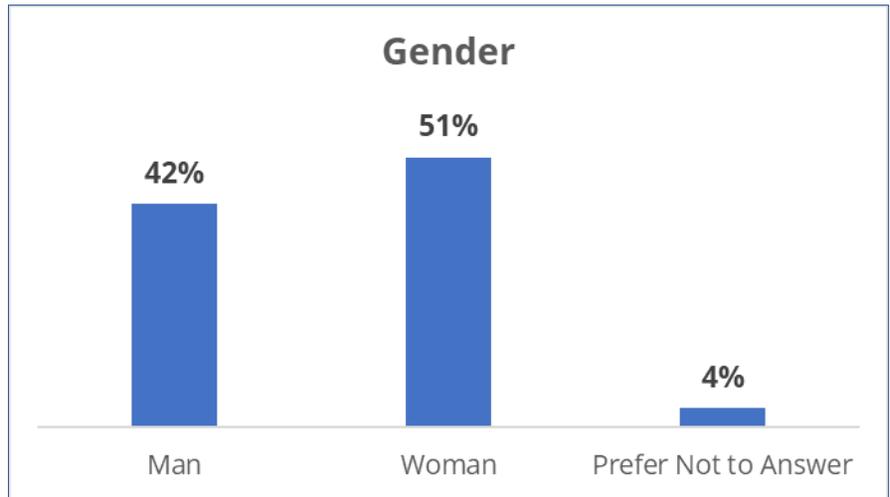


**Policy Survey Demographics**

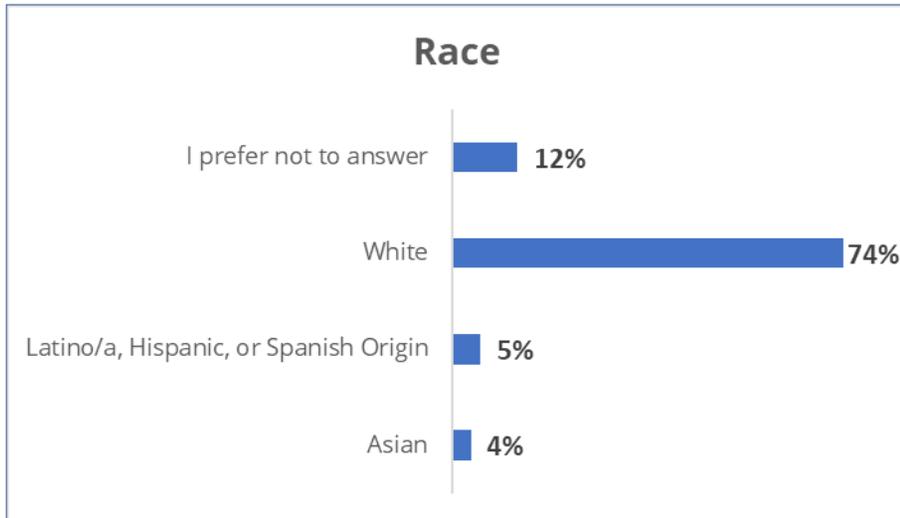
57 Respondents



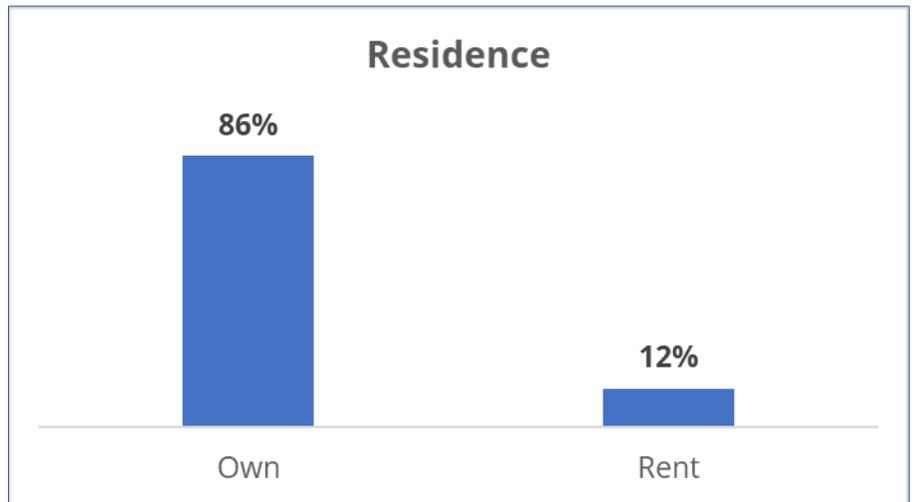
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**Event Demographics**

Data available for 61% of participants

