

# Town of Stonington Zoning Update Housing and Residential Districts Workshop Summary

4/10/24

## Overview

FHI Studio conducted a workshop at 6:00 pm on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at the Board of Education Building in Stonington. The workshop was promoted on the Town website and through social media. Thirty members of the public attended the workshop.

The workshop consisted of a presentation by the FHI Studio team regarding the zoning update process and issues related to housing and the Town’s residential zoning districts. As part of the presentation, an interactive survey was conducted. The presentation and survey were followed by break-out sessions. Attendees were divided into three groups of approximately ten people. Each group was tasked with an assignment to discuss issues surrounding housing and housing need in the Town and the Town’s residential zoning districts. This was followed by a mapping exercise to identify areas of Town where residential development should be encouraged, diversified, or discouraged. The break-out sessions lasted one hour. Discussion was documented on flip charts and a zoning map of the Town. Each break-out group reported their findings to all groups at the end of each session.

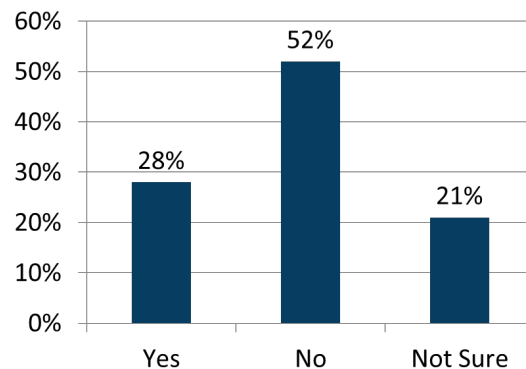
### Workshop Agenda

- 6:00-6:25: Presentation
  - Introduction to the team
  - Review of project purpose, approach, and schedule
  - Review of zoning’s role in regulating housing development
- 6:25-6:50: Interactive Survey
- 6:50-8:00: Breakout Sessions
  - Session 1: 6:50-7:15, Report back 7:15-7:25
  - Session 2: 7:25-7:50, Report back 7:50-8:00
- 8:00: Conclusion

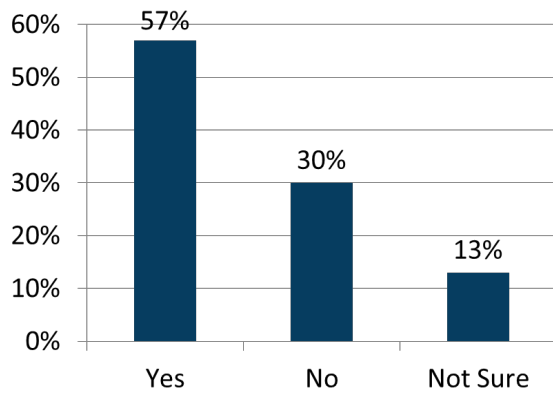
## Interactive Survey Summary

The interactive survey was comprised of nine questions and twenty-five images. All attendees participated in the survey. Participant viewpoints were mixed on the subject of housing and the Town’s residential zoning districts. Half of participants believe that the Town does not adequately or appropriately regulate development in its residential districts.

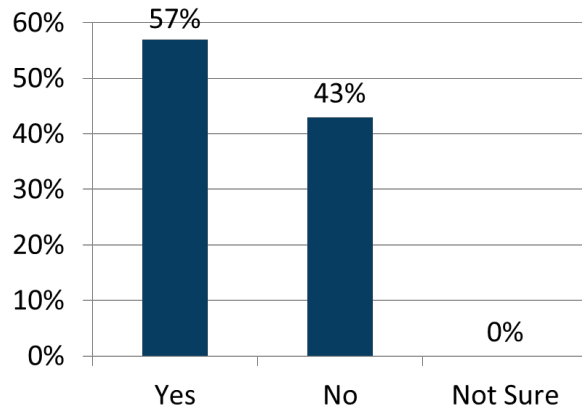
### Q.1 Do the existing zoning regulations adequately and appropriately regulate development in the Town’s residential districts?



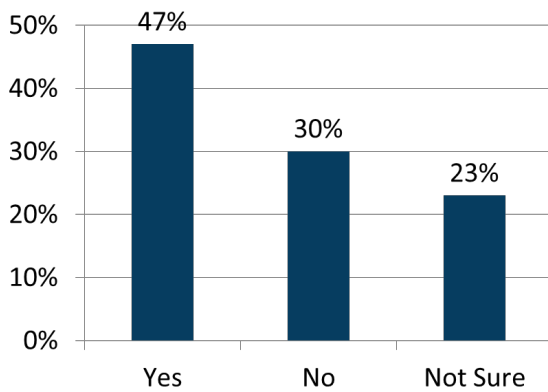
**Q.2 Does Stonington need more housing?**



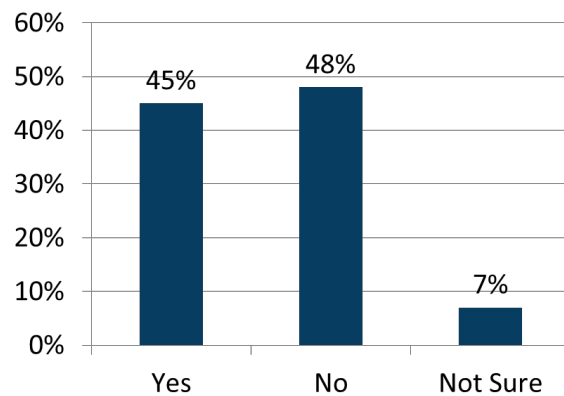
**Q.3 Does Stonington need to allow for a greater diversity of housing types?**



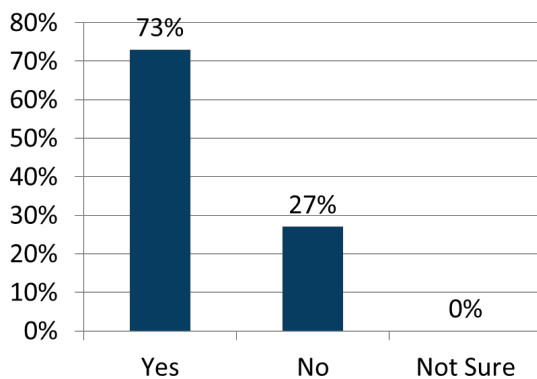
**Q.4 Does Stonington need more housing for seniors such as age-restricted housing and assisted living facilities?**



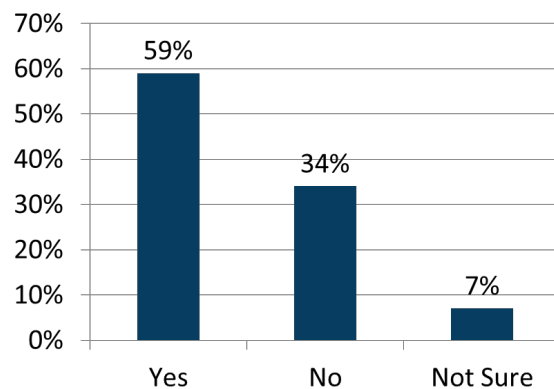
**Q.5 Should a higher density of housing be permitted in village areas and other areas that are already highly developed?**



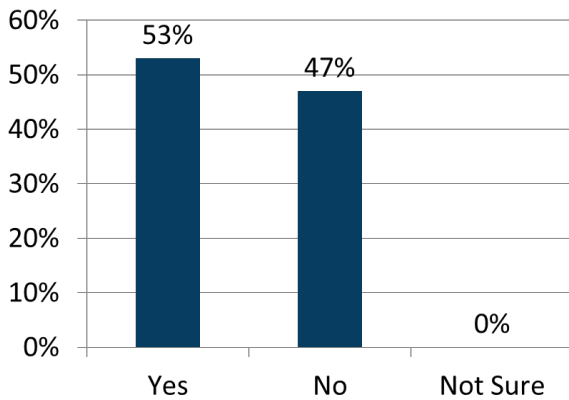
**Q.6 Should the development of housing in coastal areas be more restricted?**



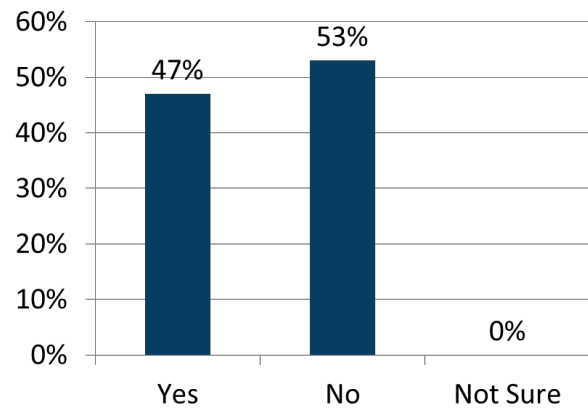
**Q.7 Should the regulations be changed to allow for the development of more Accessory Dwelling Units?**



**Q.8 Should more housing be built as mixed-use developments?**



**Q.9 Should the Town allow multi-family residential (apartment or condo buildings) to be built in more places?**



**Visual Preference Component of Survey**

Attendees were presented twenty-five images of various forms of housing and asked to quickly respond by rating each image on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being least preferred and 5 being most preferred). Participants were instructed to rate the images for suitability of that type of housing for somewhere in Stonington.

The six most favorable and six least favorable images are shown below. The responses to all twenty-five images are provided as an attachment to this summary report.

**Most Preferred Images**





***Least Preferred Images***



## Breakout Session 1: Housing Discussion

During this session, which lasted 30 minutes, participants were asked to engage in a discussion responding to the following questions:

- What is your vision for residential areas and housing in Stonington in the future?
- Can or should Stonington accommodate a larger population?
- What type of housing does Stonington need more of?
- What type of housing does Stonington not need more of?
- What are the recurring issues/problems in the Town's residential areas related to land use and zoning?

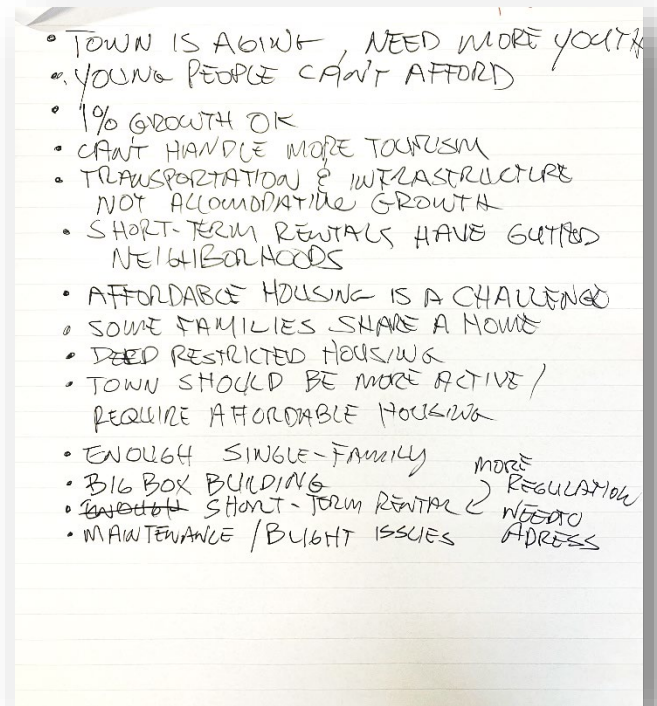
The discussion was documented on flip charts and groups reported back the key points of their discussion to the rest of the room. The key themes that emerged from the three group discussions are summarized below.

Groups were mixed on the question of growth with responses as follows:

- The Town is aging and more youth are needed to maintain a stable population.
- Population growth is ok but it needs to be sustainable (such as 1% per year).
- Growth will jeopardize the character of the town, which is aspirational. "We like Stonington the way it is." And "We want to protect single family homes."
- Growth will increase the cost of living as taxes will be raised to cover the burdens on utilities and schools.
- Growth that occurs to offset the resident housing that is lost to short-term rentals is not a solution to making Stonington more affordable.
- Negative growth is a problem for commerce and the tax base.
- Preventing growth presents problems of affordability, particularly for younger generations.
- The schools and utilities in some areas of town have capacity for growth and there are checks in checks in balances to prevent too much growth, such as the sewer moratorium.
- Density can be increased but doing so has potential to hurt the community if short-term rentals are not regulated at the same time.

Types of housing that Stonington needs more of or does not need more of:

- Elderly housing and housing for 55+, but that housing should be built to meet the needs of those occupants.
- High-density apartment buildings are not preferred as a form of housing.



- There was debate on whether the town needs more single-family housing with some in favor and others opposed.
- Single-family conversions to multifamily homes or multigenerational homes and ADUs might be appropriate for new housing but design standards may be needed to preserve the look and feel of the town. This type of housing could make short-term rentals more prevalent.
- The town needs more two-family homes and single-floor condominium/townhouses (for seniors and those with mobility limitations)
- More multi-family homes are needed.
- More housing is needed across the town.
- The Town needs more housing that is deed-restricted for civil servants or for income-constrained households.
- Stonington does not need more big-box type buildings, whether residential, mixed use or commercial.
- Short-term rentals are a huge issue that needs to be addressed. It has hollowed out neighborhoods, particularly in places such as Mystic.
- Multigenerational housing is needed to allow for multiple generations of one family to live together.
- Affordable housing is a priority, particularly so that children who grow up in Stonington can afford to move back and rent or purchase a home.
- The Town would benefit from more mixed-use development with a substantial residential component.

Other comments:

- Stonington is a bedroom community and a place for families
- People who work in Stonington should be able to live in Stonington.
- Young adults and young families have difficulty finding housing in Stonington that is affordable to them.
- The Town cannot handle the impacts of more tourism, should be more focused on Stonington as a home to its residents.
- Transportation infrastructure and transit services are not keeping up with the growth that the Town has experienced.
- Providing affordable housing in Stonington is challenging. The Town has not met the State's goal of 10% affordable housing.
- Due to housing demand and affordability, some families share a single-family home.
- There are maintenance and blight issues with some larger residential properties/buildings that should be addressed. The Town may need stronger ordinances to control blight.
- It's important that new housing has a consistent appearance and architecture as housing in the Town (a New England style).
- Affordable housing should be located near services.

## Breakout Session 2: Mapping Exercise

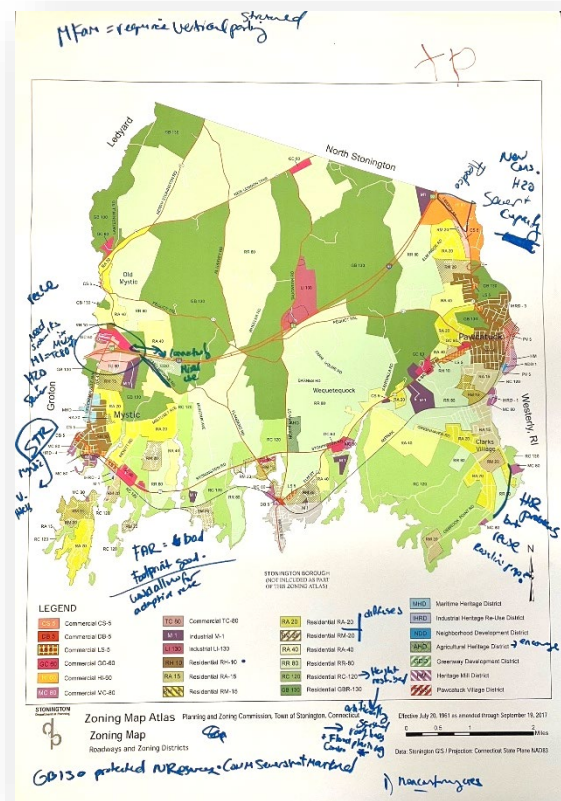
During this session, which lasted 30 minutes, participants were asked to think geographically and mark up a zoning map of the Town with the following guidance:

- Where in Stonington are the opportunities for new housing development?
- What areas should be restricted or limited for new housing development?
- Where are the issues relative to housing development and land use regulation in Stonington's residential districts?

The discussion was documented on a zoning map and groups reported back the key points of their discussion to the rest of the room. The key themes that emerged from the three group discussions are summarized below.

Areas that may be most appropriate for new housing development:

- Near Exit 92: City water already exists and there is significant sewer capacity.
- Around Exit 90: adaptive reuse opportunities. Existing water and sewer. Less sewer capacity than near Exit 92. TC-80 and GC-60 very similar with exception of uses. Created to accommodate non-confirming uses. Opportunities to increase connectivity, specifically sidewalks, to existing development that is zones Greenway Development District.
- The Greenway Development District is well suited for mixed-use development.
- The GB-130 is not appropriate for more housing development, development should be directed away from the district to protect natural resources.
- New development should be restricted or prohibited in flood hazard areas along the shore.
- Infill development, redevelopment, and mixed-use residential development should be encouraged in the Town's villages.
- Duplex or triplex housing should be considered in the Town's rural residential (such as the RR-80) if it could be constructed to look like a single-family home.
- Cluster development in the form of small homes clustered closely together with open space preserved surrounding such development should be allowed/supported in the Town's rural residential districts.
- Housing should be developed and concentrated near commercial corridors like Route 1 and I-95, Exit 91 in particular.
- Short-term rentals should be restricted to specific zones.
- More housing should be developed at Clark Village .



Areas where there are issues surrounding land use regulation and enforcement:

- Short-term rentals in Mystic are eroding the fabric of the village due to empty homes and transient residents.
- The flood elevation requirements and height restrictions of the RC-120 place significant limitations on what can be built, potentially resulting in one-story structures that are squat and spread out.
- The Floor Area Ratio (FAR) regulations are restrictive of expanding home to accommodate a second housing unit.

Other opportunities or ideas for new housing development:

- Large, older homes in the Town's villages should be allowed to be converted to multiple dwelling units provided those structures can be otherwise preserved.
- There should be an affordability requirement for development with 3 or 4+ units in all districts across the Town.
- Vacant and underutilized sites should be redeveloped as housing.
- There may be adaptive reuse opportunities in some areas.



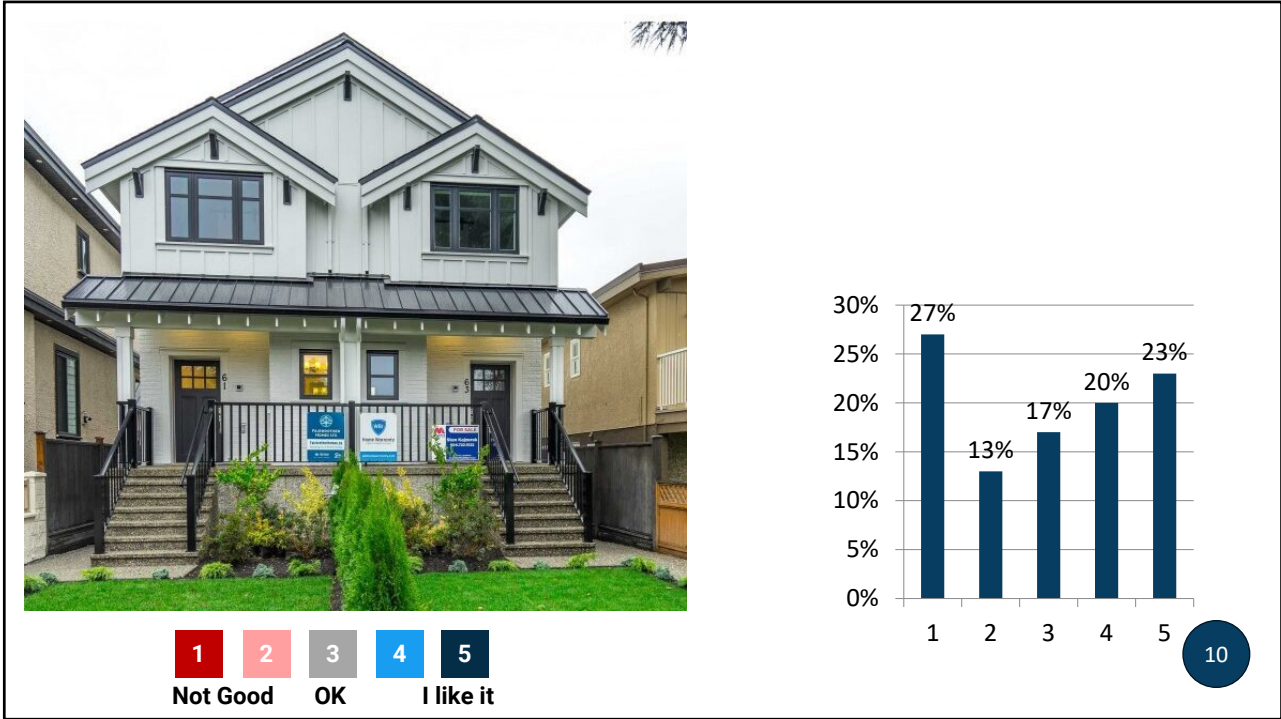
## Visual Preference Survey Results



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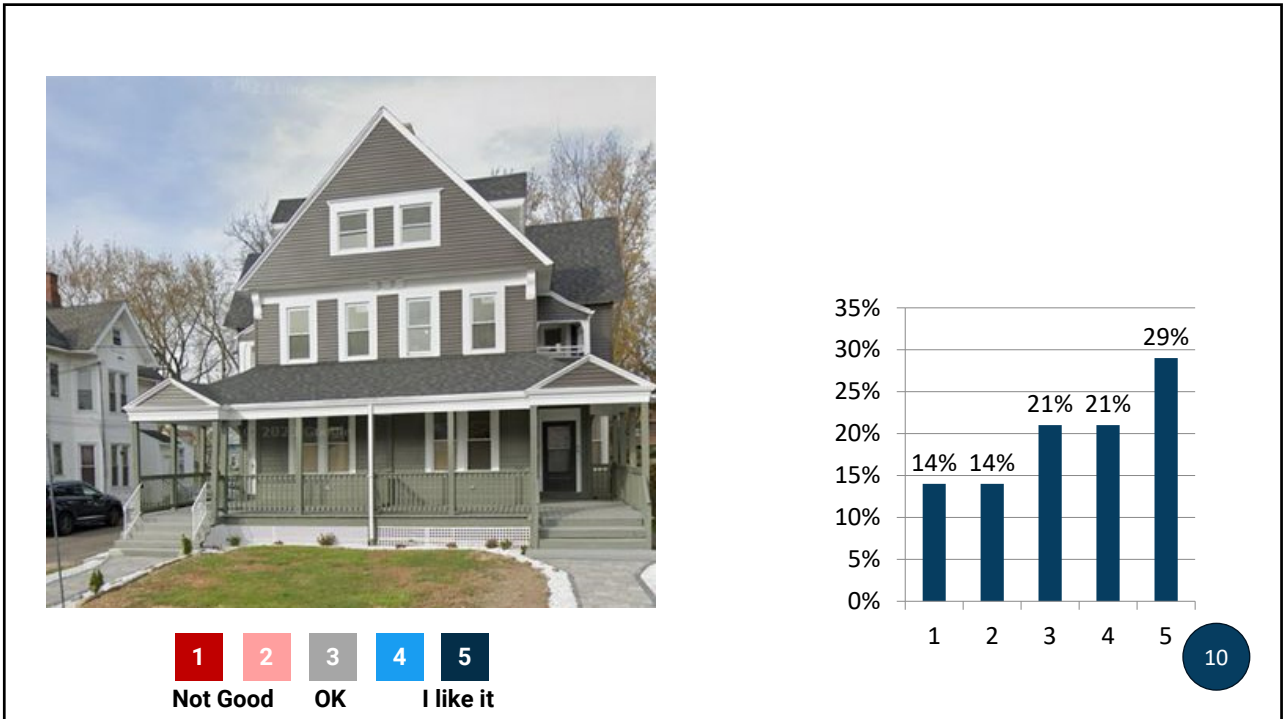
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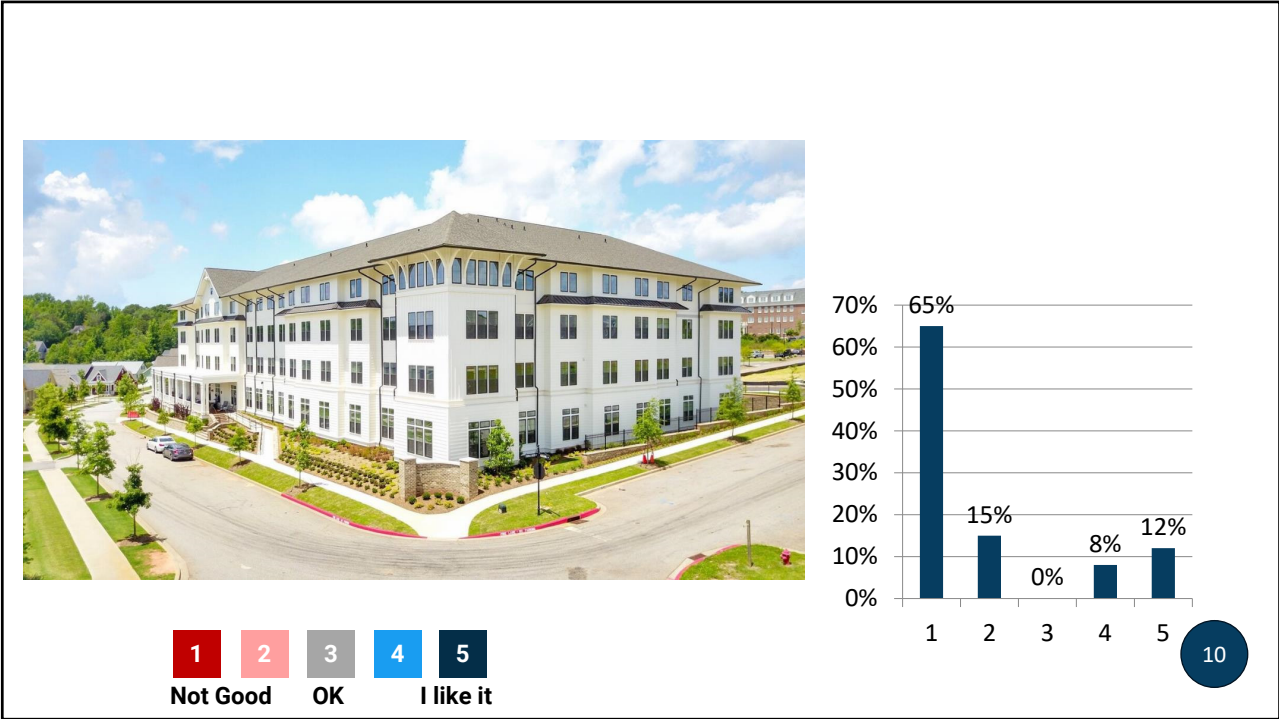
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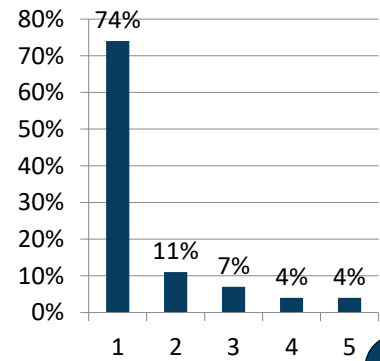
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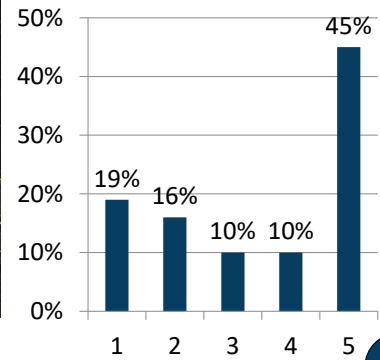


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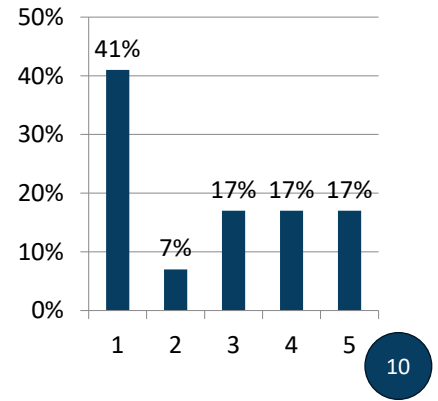


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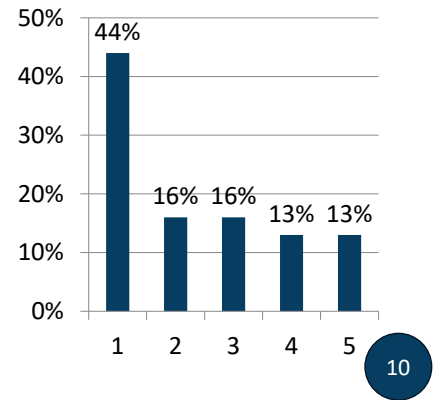
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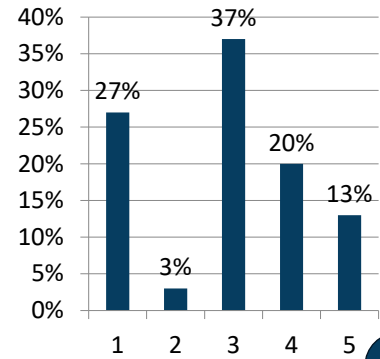
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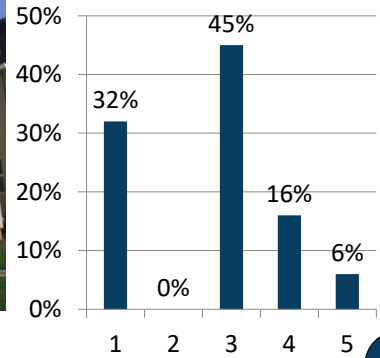


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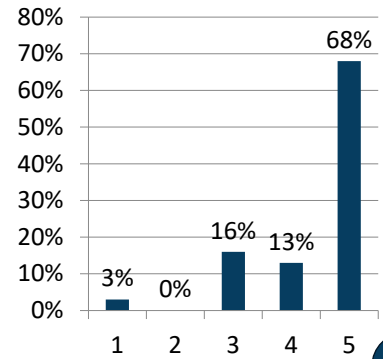
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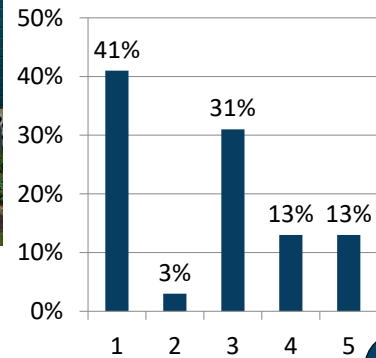




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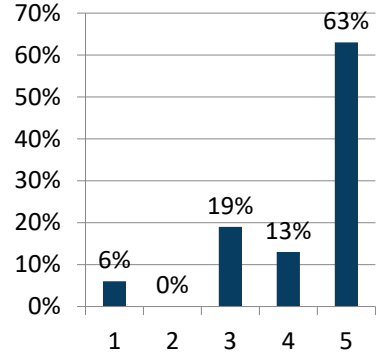
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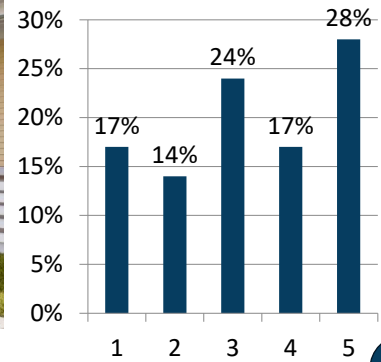
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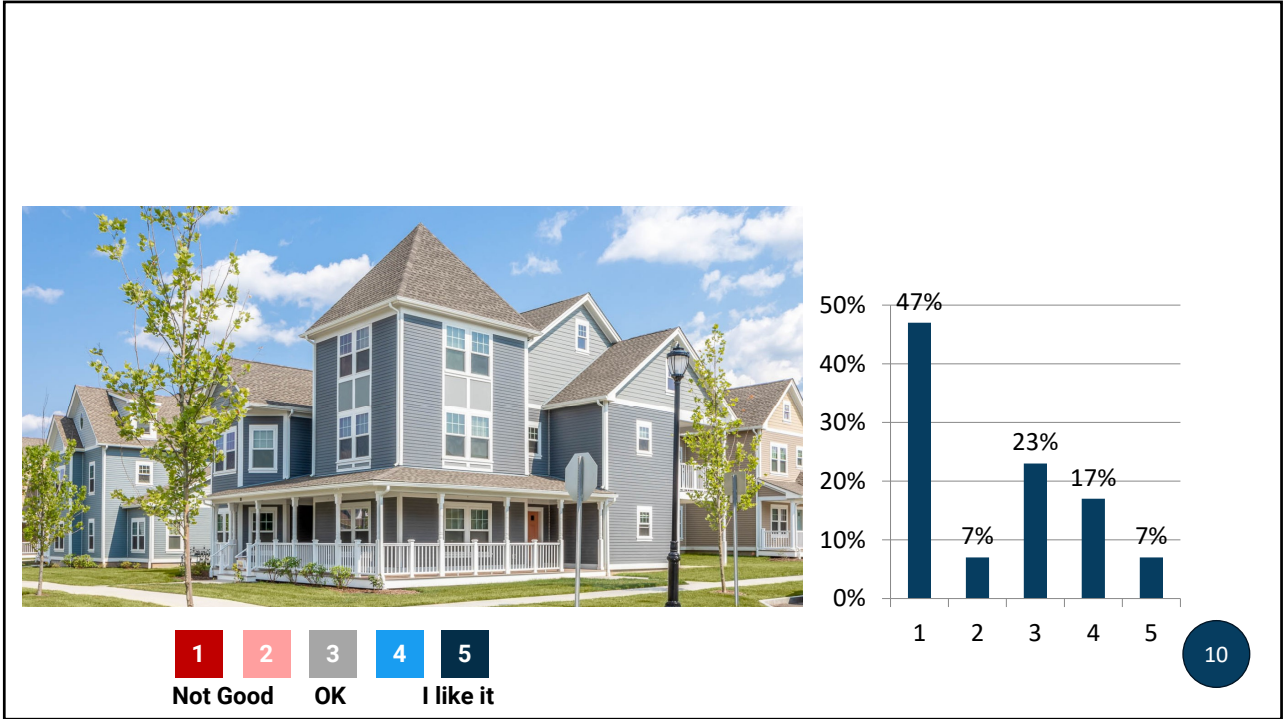
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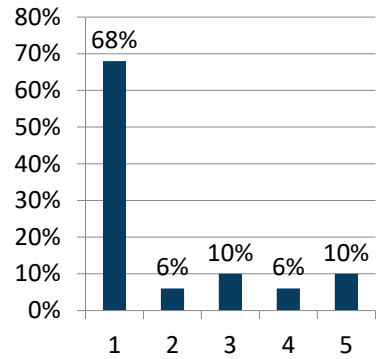
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