

# South Berwick Community Opinion Survey Results Summary / Comprehensive Plan

January 2023



**Prepared by:**

Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission

**Prepared for:**

South Berwick Comprehensive Plan Committee



*Town of South Berwick*

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# Key Takeaways

## ***South Berwick residents are engaged and responsive.***

- The committee received approximately 1,230 survey responses! This represents an excellent 16.5% of the town's total population (est. 7,460 as of 2020 Decennial Census).
- Slightly more than half of all surveys were completed online, with more than 500 hard copy surveys submitted.

## ***South Berwick is concerned about traffic and congestion.***

- 75% of respondents strongly agree that traffic congestion and safety is a serious issue facing South Berwick in the next 5 years.
- 65% of respondents include maintenance and upgrading of roads in their top 5 priorities for municipal spending.
- 85% believe improved town roads are important to have available in the future.

## ***South Berwick values the historic village and small-town nature of the community.***

- 78% say the "small town character" is why they enjoy living in South Berwick.
- About 70% of respondents think "keeping town as it is" is very desirable or somewhat desirable. Over 70% of respondents say a walkable village downtown is desirable as well.
- Single-family homes remain the most desirable residential form of development.

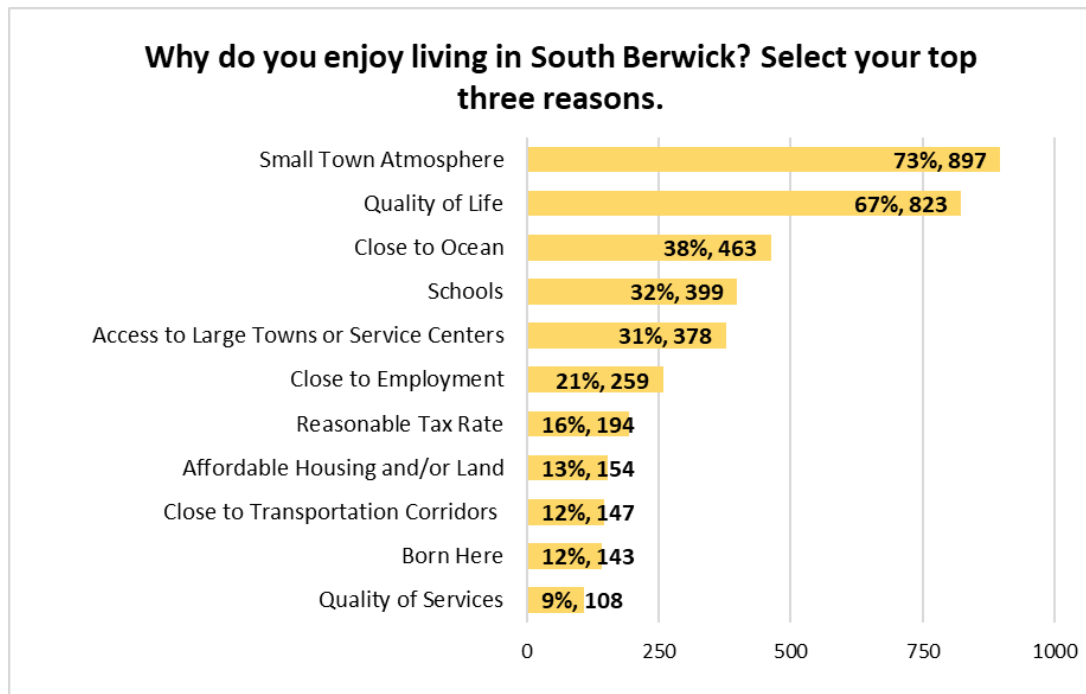
## ***South Berwick values open space & natural resources.***

- Over 75% say open space and wildlife areas are important to have available in the future.
- 69% say Maintaining Open Space is a serious challenge for the town in the next 5 years.
- More than 50% of respondents thought it was important to allocate local tax dollars to the preservation and creation of natural resources & recreation assets in every category.

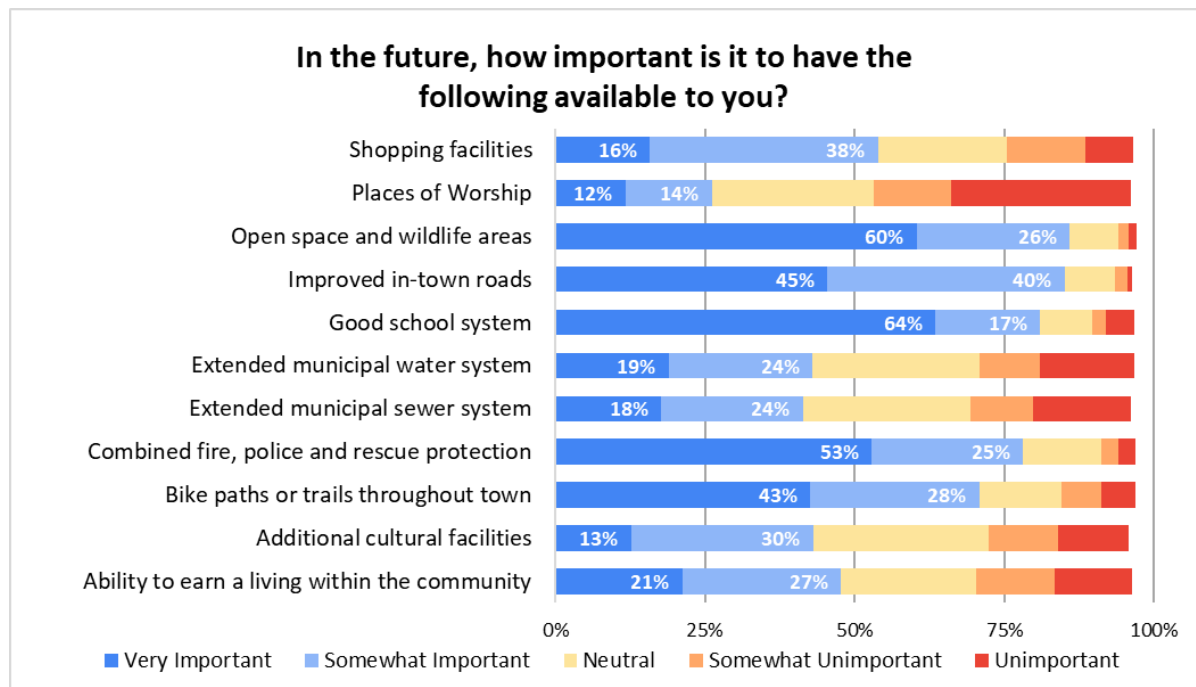
## ***South Berwick supports reasonable development and growth.***

- Over 75% of respondents believe maintaining rural character will be a serious challenge facing South Berwick in the next 5 years.
- 33% of respondents thought residential growth in the last 10 years has been too rapid. 20% thought commercial growth in the same period wasn't fast enough.
- Over 50% of respondents thought restaurants, retail stores, arts & cultural centers and essential serves were all desirable commercial development.

## General Opinions



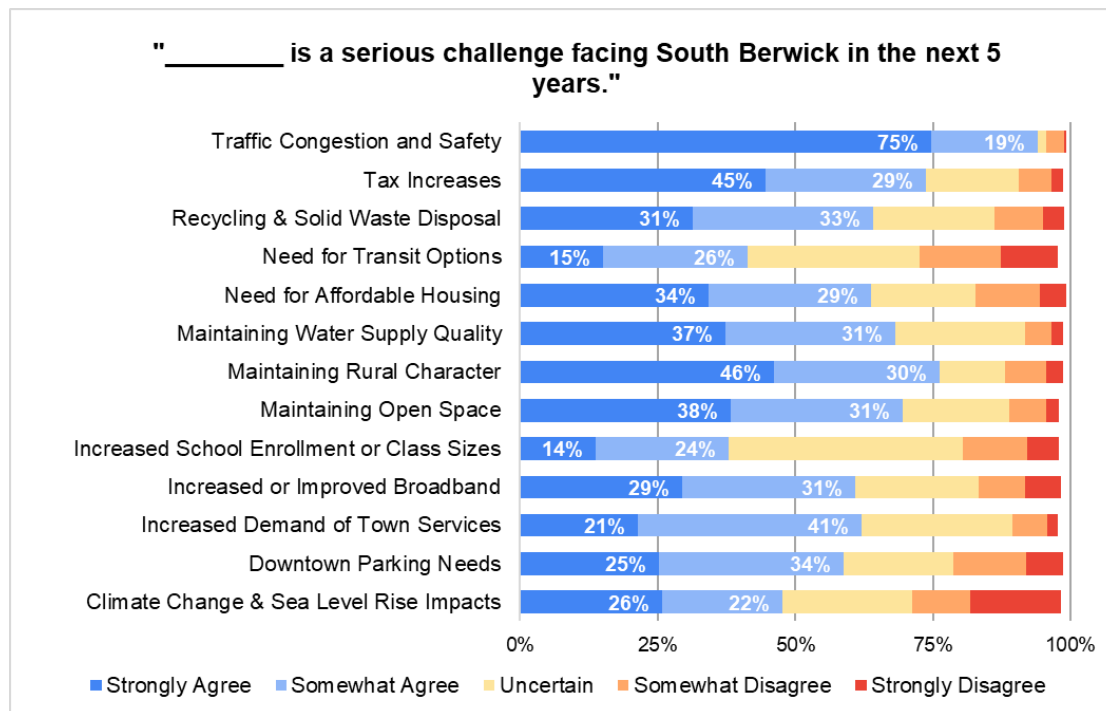
- The reasons respondents from the 2022 survey enjoy living in South Berwick is close to the same as it was in 2003, with the top 5 reasons ranking in the same order both years.



- In 2022, top items are **1) Open space and wildlife areas (86%) 2) Improved Town Roads (85%) 3) Good school system (81%) 4) Combined fire, police and rescue protection (81%) 5) Bike paths through town (71%)**

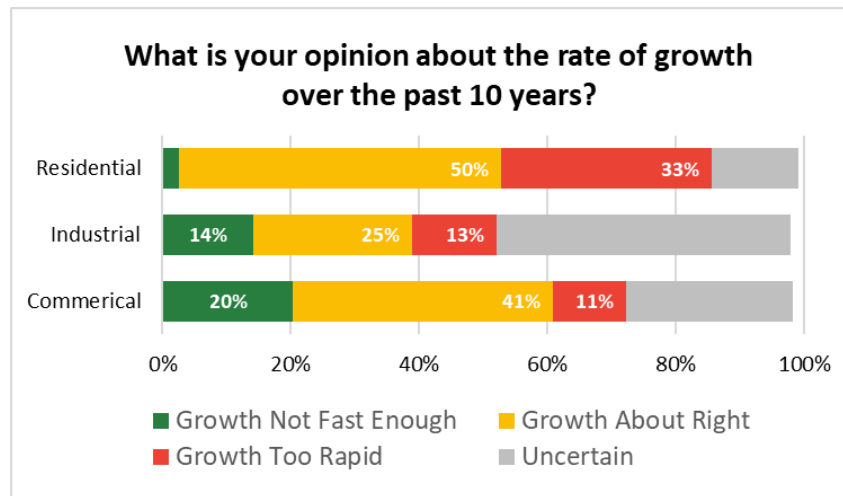
## South Berwick Community Opinion Survey Results Summary January 2023

- In the 2003 survey, top items were **1) Good Fire Department** (78% VI) **2) Good Police department** (72% VI) **3) Good School system** (72% VI) **4) Open space and wildlife areas** (51% VI) and **5) Combined fire, police and rescue protection** (44% VI).
- **Improved In-Town Roads** ranked very important at 45%, representing a jump from 23% in 2003.



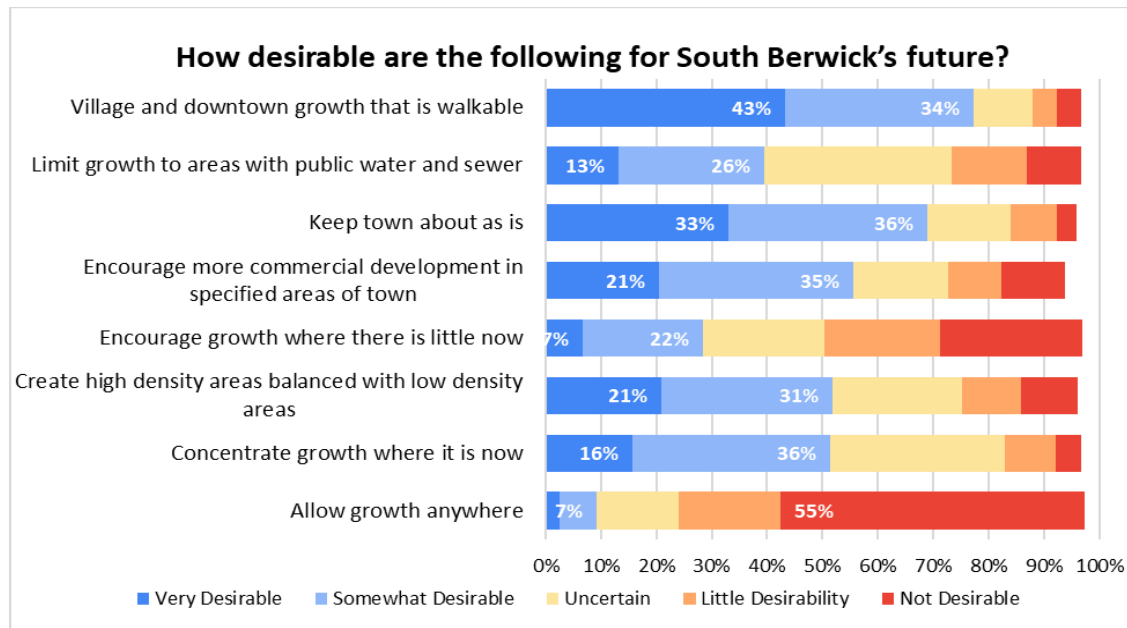
- Our 2022 survey shows that **Traffic Congestion and Safety** remains a serious challenge with 75% who strongly agree, and another 19% who somewhat agree. In 2003, 80% of respondents strongly agreed that **Traffic** is a serious challenge, with another 15% who somewhat agree. Clearly, concerns about this have not been swayed.
- In 2022, 45% of the respondents strongly agreed that **Tax Increases** were a serious challenge, representing a drop from 2003, where 60% of respondents strongly agreed that **Tax Increases** were a serious challenge.
- Concerns about **Maintaining Rural Character** remained the same, with 46% of respondents who strongly agreed in both 2022 and 2003 and 30% and 27% somewhat agreeing respectively.

## Development & Growth



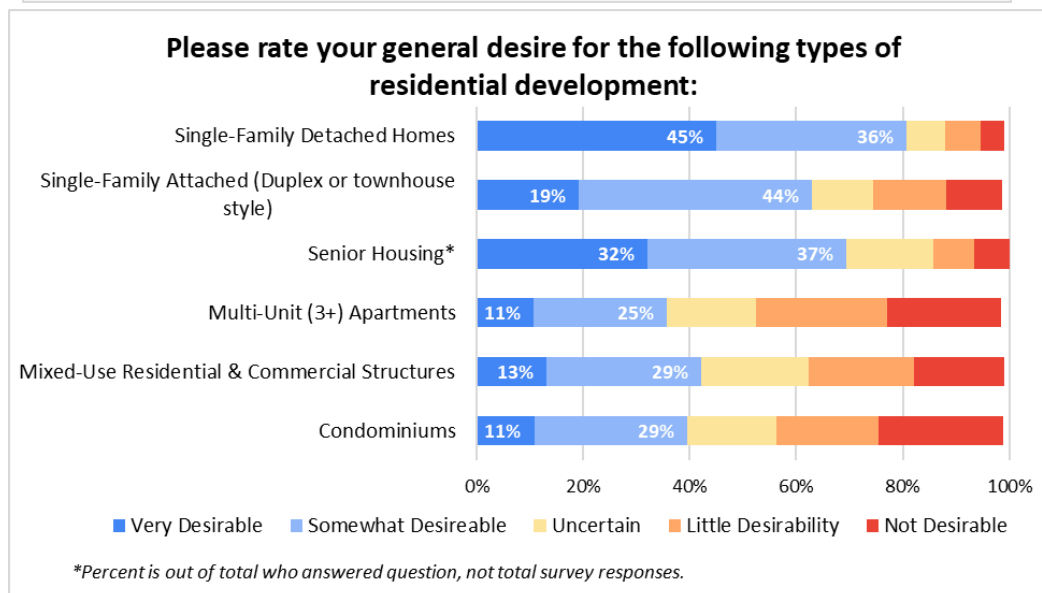
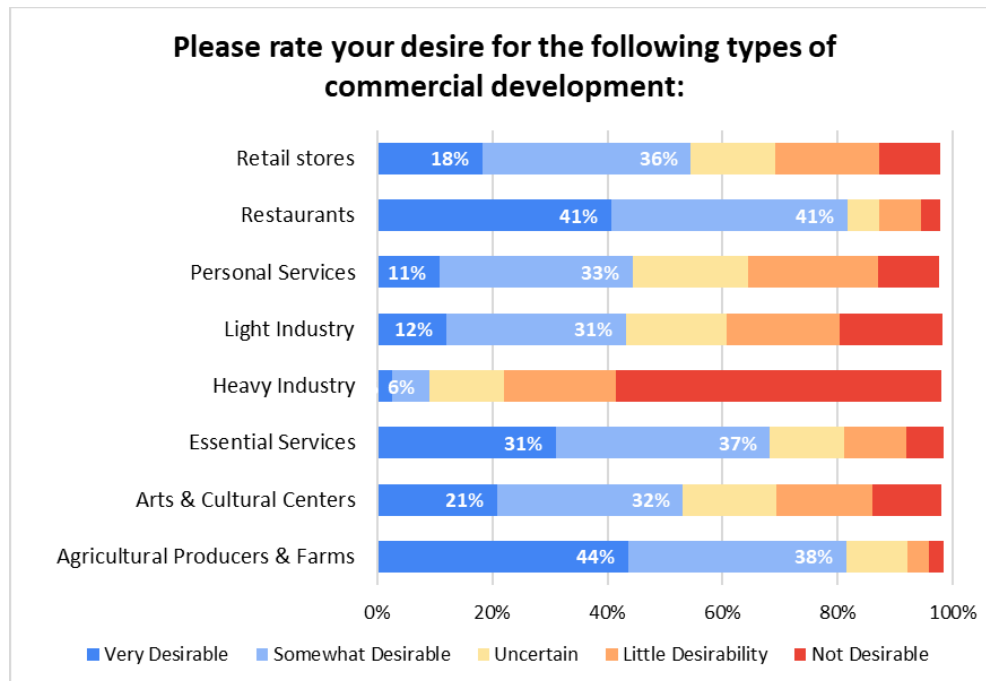
- In 2022, respondents said **residential growth was too rapid**, at 33%, represents a significant drop from 63% in 2003. That said, 50% in 2022 **said residential growth was about right**.
- Sentiments are similar for commercial growth in 2022, where 20% responded that **commercial growth was not fast enough** and 41% responded that **commercial growth was about right**.
- In 2022, the desire for industrial development has dropped by almost half from in 2003, where over 30% of respondents **thought that commercial and industrial growth was not fast enough**.
- Interestingly, 48% in 2022 responded **uncertain about industrial growth**.

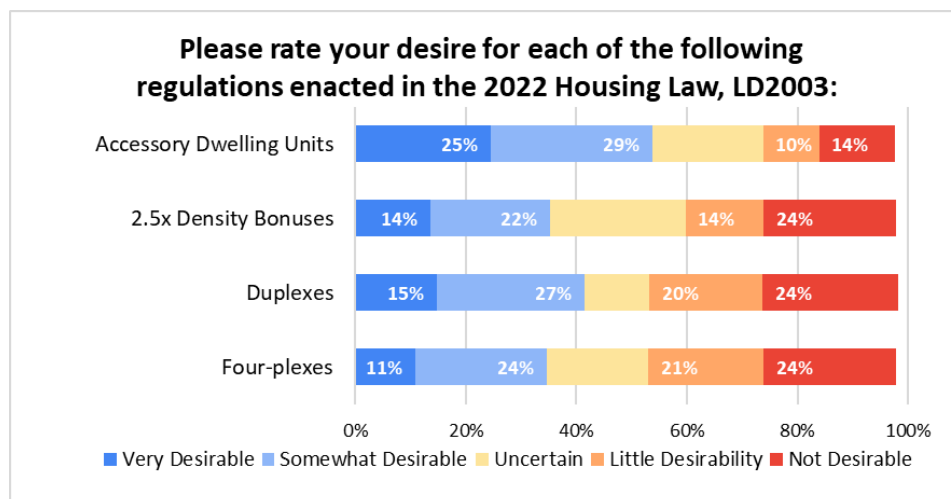
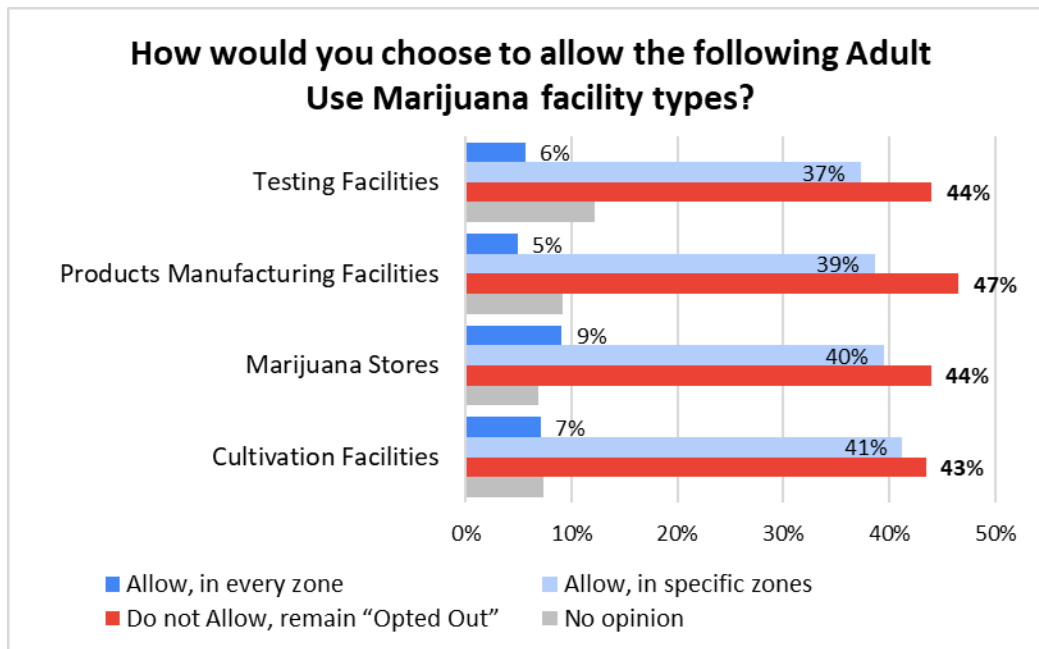
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- The new survey options in the 2022 survey showed that respondents' areas of desirability for the community were **"village and downtown growth that is walkable"** at 77% and **"encourage more commercial growth in specified areas of town"** at 56%. Both were perceived as more desirable than most other options.
- Overall, sentiments about development patterns in 2022 are similar to 2003.
- **Keeping town about as it is** was most desirable in 2022 is at 33%, representing a slight decrease from 2003 at 40%.
- 13% in 2022, said **limiting growth to areas with public water and sewer** was very desirable, whereas 19% in 2003. In both years, about 25% saw it as somewhat desirable.
- **Encourage growth where there is little now**, and **allowing growth everywhere** were undesirable in both surveys.

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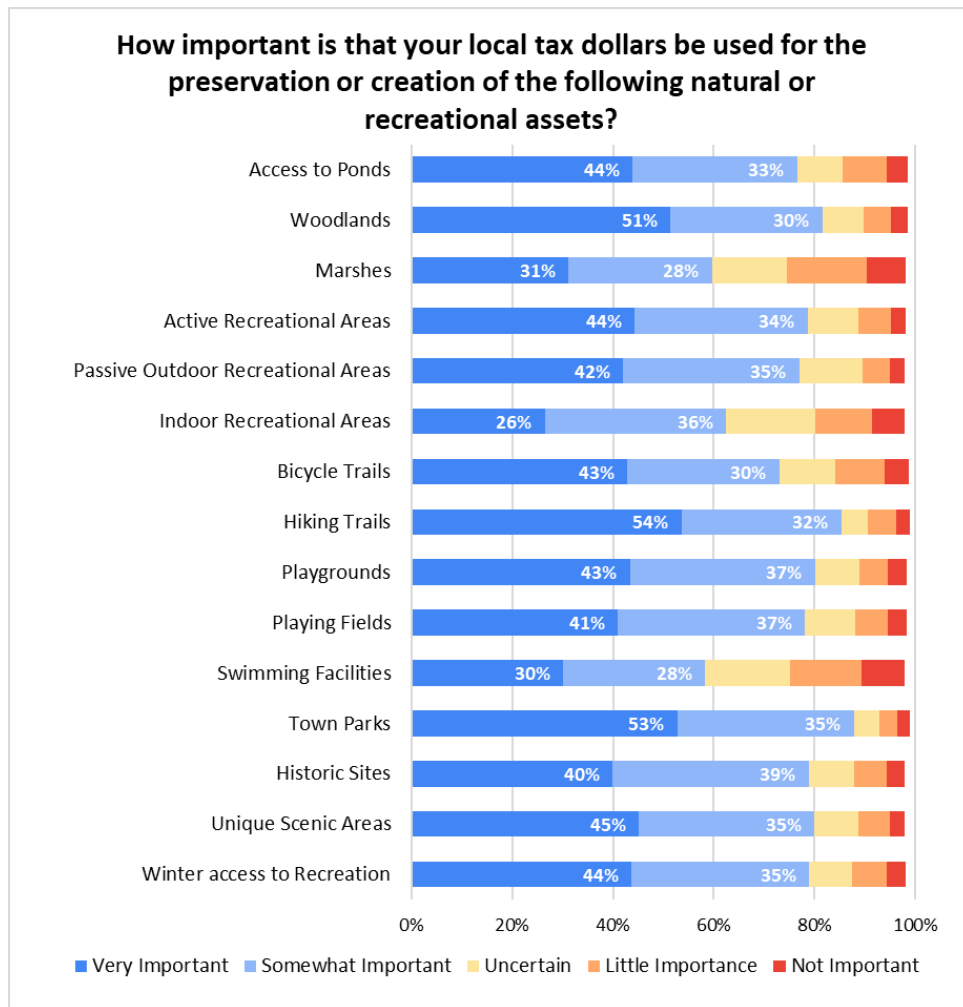






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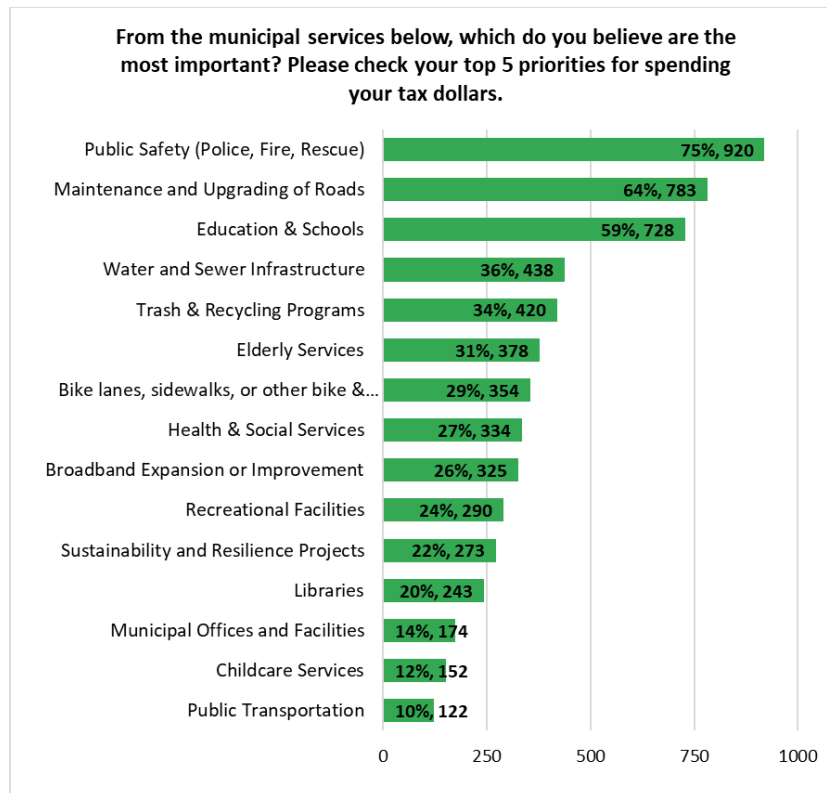
## Town Services & Taxes



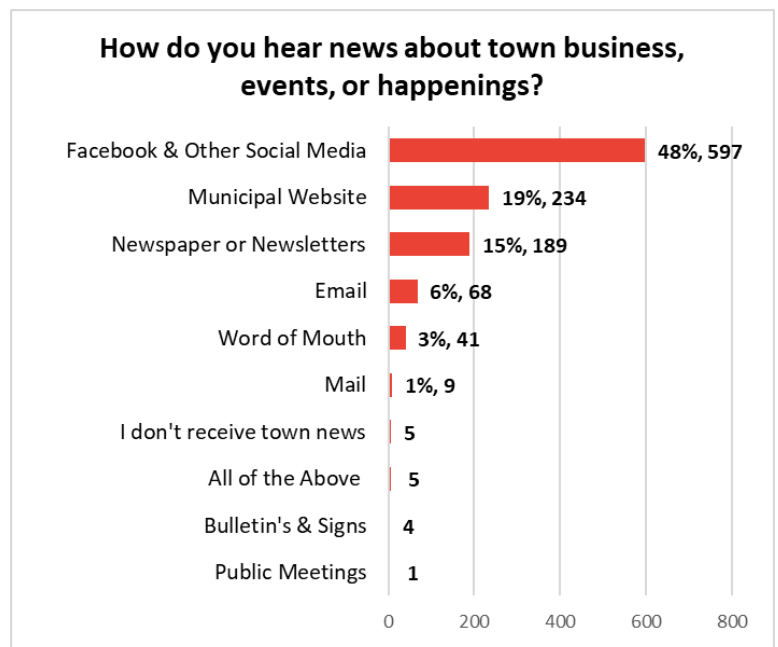
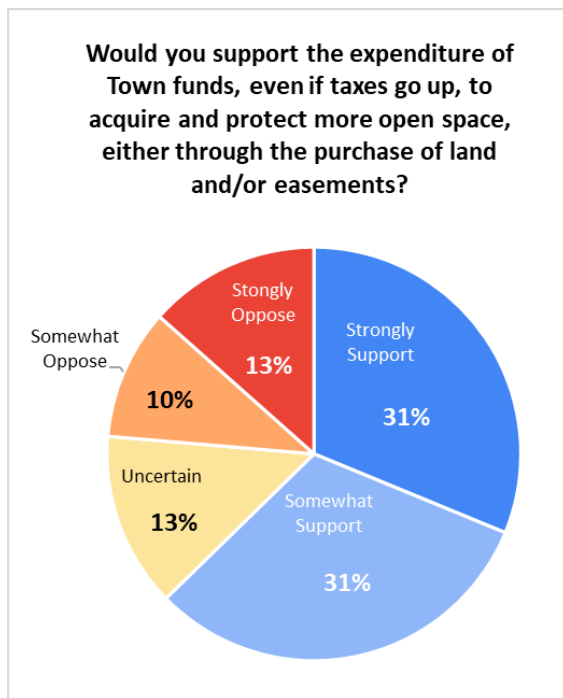
Natural or Recreational Asset	2003 % Very Important
Access to ponds	17%
Woodlands	31%
Marshes	16%
Active recreational areas	19%
Passive outdoor recreational areas	22%
Indoor recreational facilities	12%
Bicycle trails	21%
Hiking trails	22%
Playgrounds	23%
Playing fields	21%
Swimming facilities	15%
Town parks	29%
Historic sites	22%
Unique scenic areas	26%

- 2022 respondents showed that the **importance of spending tax dollars on the preservation and creation of natural and recreational assets** has increased significantly across the board since 2003.
- For almost every asset, the number of respondents in 2022, who think **the preservation and/or creation of natural and recreational assets** is very important has almost doubled since 2003.

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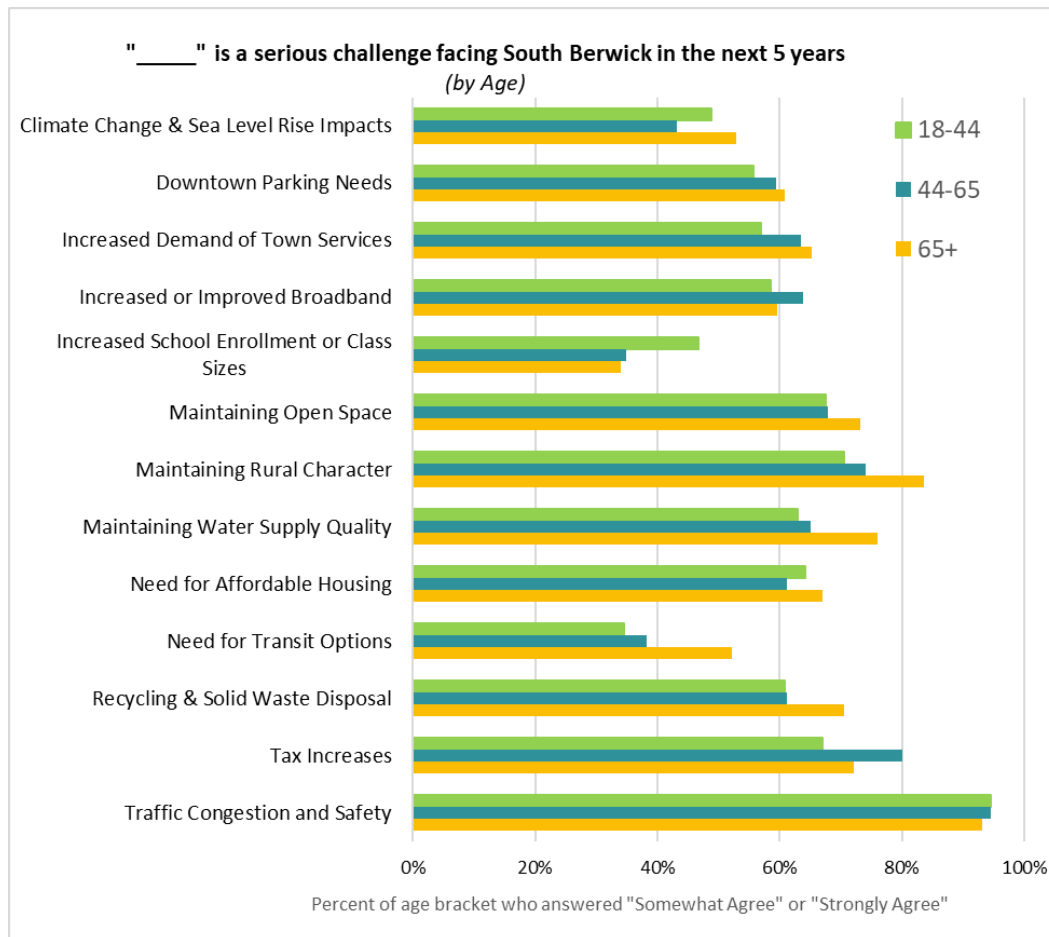


- Sentiments in 2022 are comparable to what respondents said in 2003, with **Public Safety and Maintenance and upgrading of roads** ranking highest in both surveys. **Schools** ranked third in 2022, whereas **Water and Sewer infrastructure** ranked higher than **Schools** in 2003.



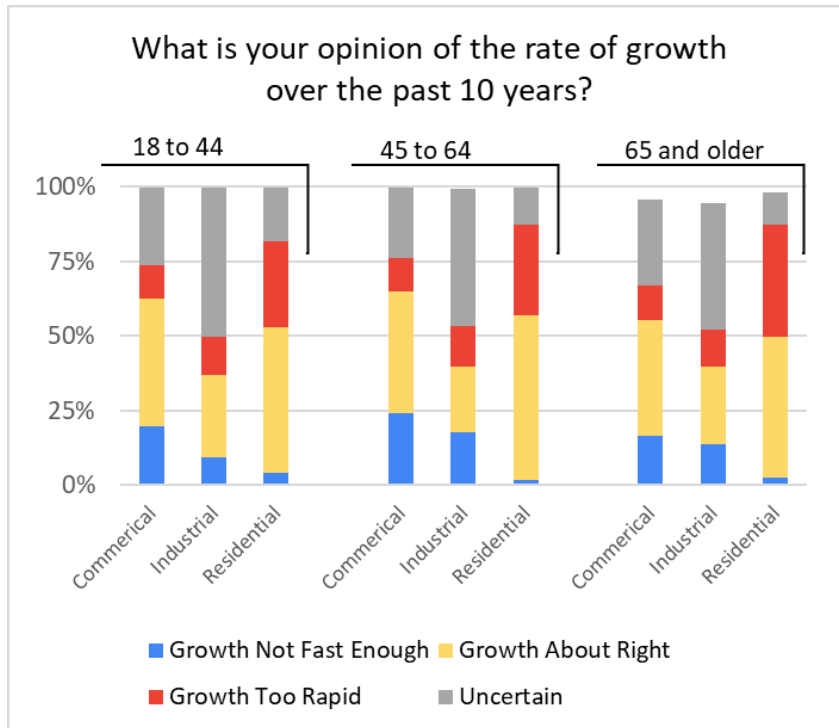
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## Responses by Age

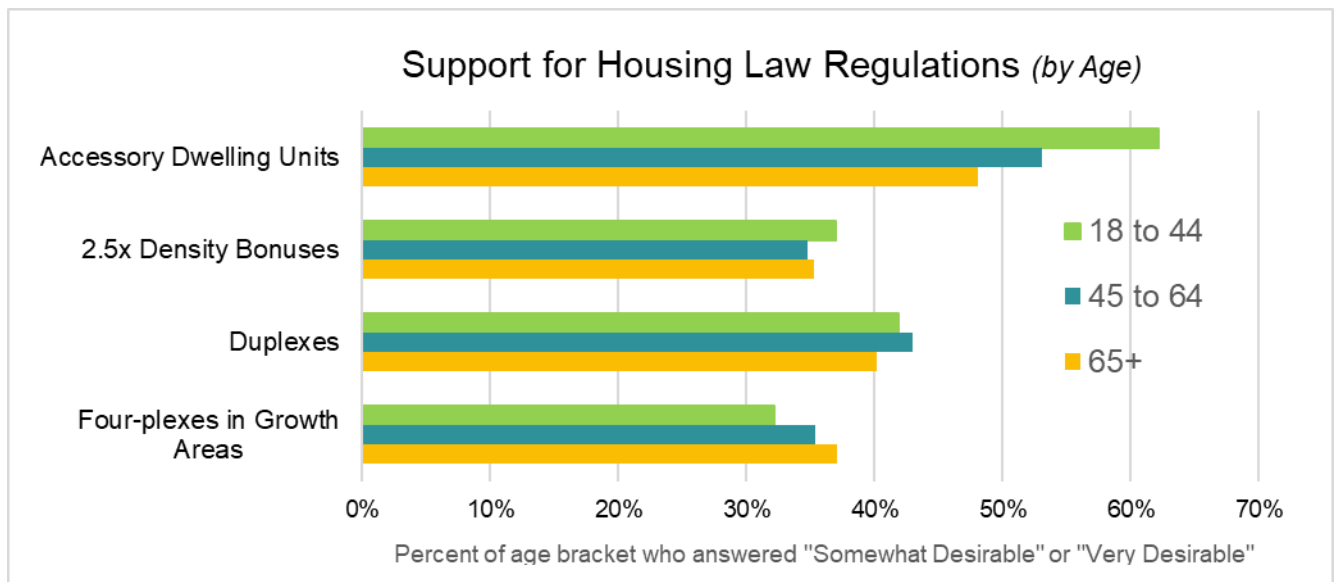


- Almost all respondents agree that **Traffic Congestion and Safety** is an issue, regardless of age.
- Respondents over 65 are more concerned about **Maintaining Rural Character** than other age groups.
- Respondents over 65 are more concerned about the **Need for Transit Options** than other age groups, pointing to the need for transit for other populations without access to vehicles or drivers.

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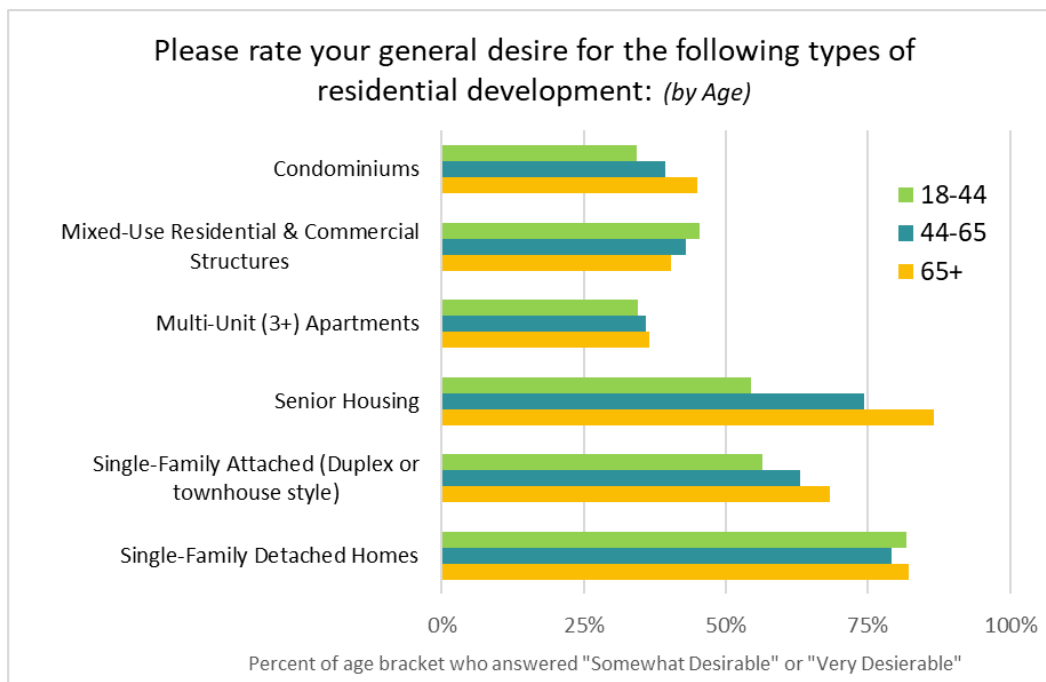
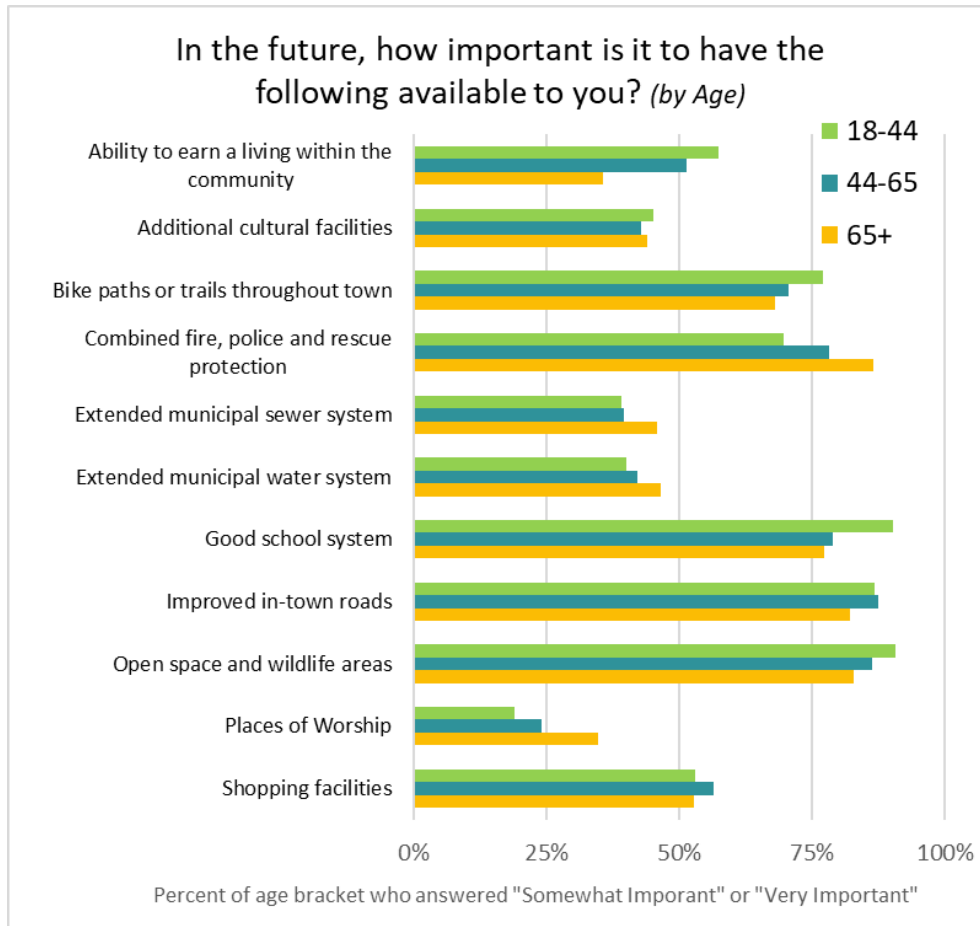


- Opinions about the rate of growth are similar across age groups. Those under 65 had a slightly stronger desire for more commercial development.

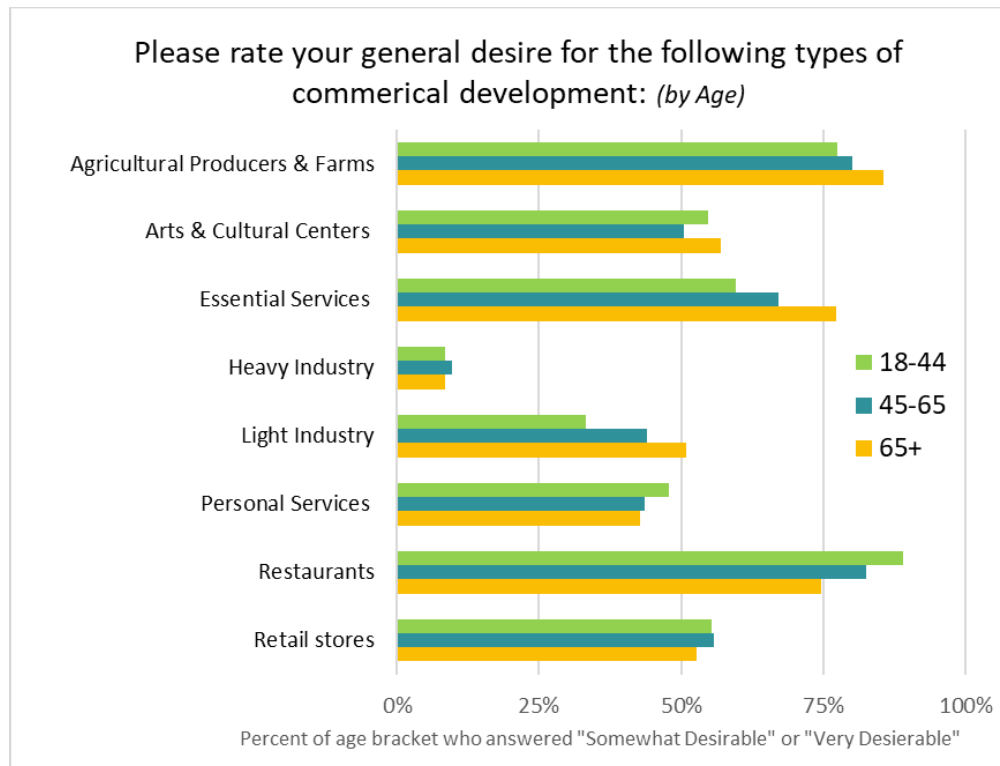


- Those ages 18-44 had the strongest desire for accessory dwelling units allowed throughout the community.
- Less than half of all respondents through the rest of the housing regulations were desirable, with little difference regardless of age group.
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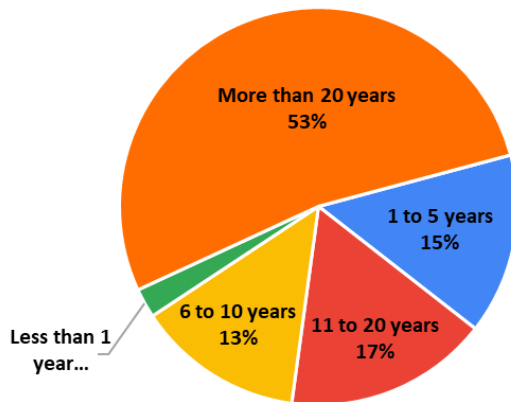


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## Demographics

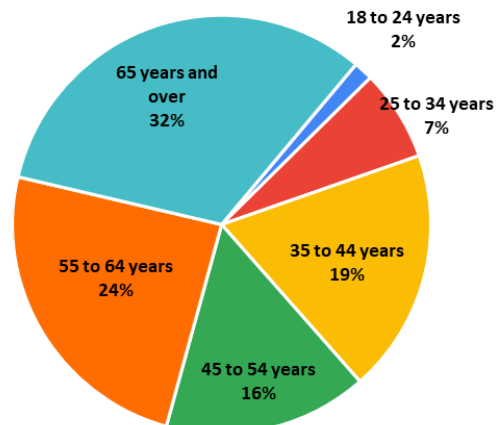
Residency Status	Count	Percent
Year-round resident (more than 6 months/year)	1170	95%
Seasonal resident (less than 6 months/year)	23	2%
Non-resident property owner	18	1%
Non-resident business owner	2	0%
No Answer	18	1%

**How many years have you lived in South Berwick?**



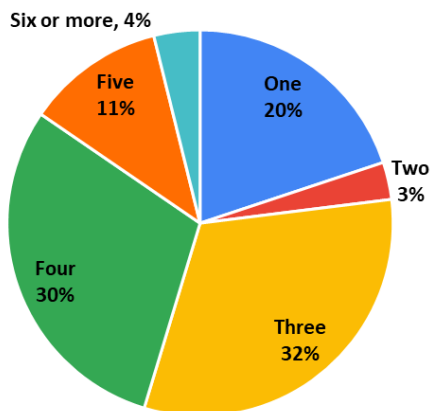
Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
2% of respondents did not answer.

**What is your present age?**



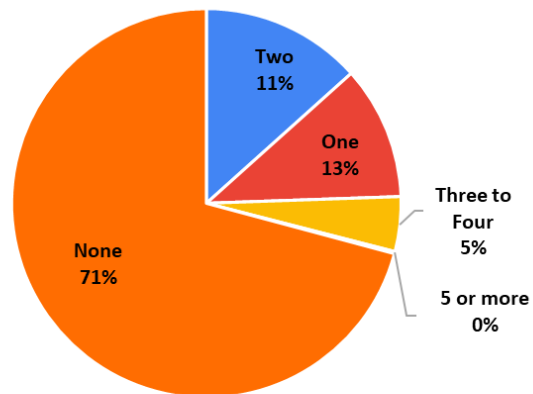
Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
2% of respondents did not answer.

**How many people live in your household?**



Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
45% of respondents did not answer.

**How many children do you have in school (K-12)?**

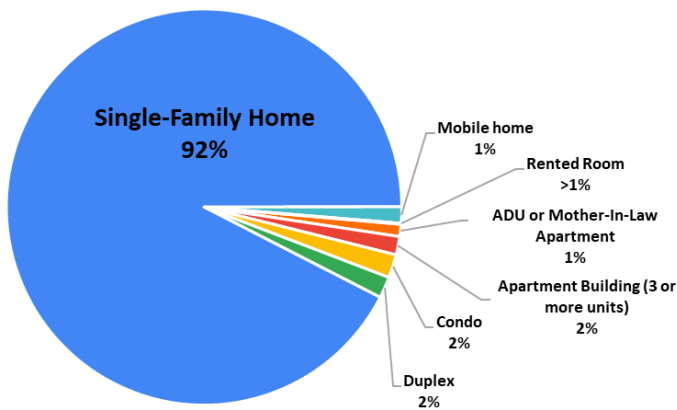


Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
7% of respondents did not answer.

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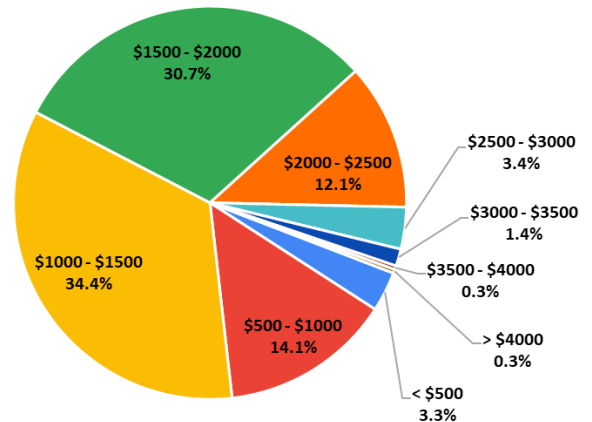
Do you own or rent your primary residence?		
Own	1160	94%
Rent	45	4%
No Answer	26	2%

What type of home do you live in?



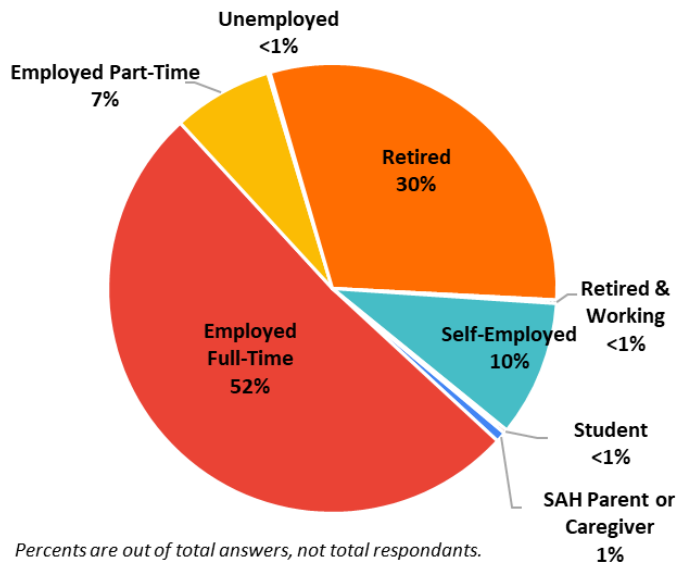
Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
2% of respondents did not answer.

How much is your monthly rent or mortgage?



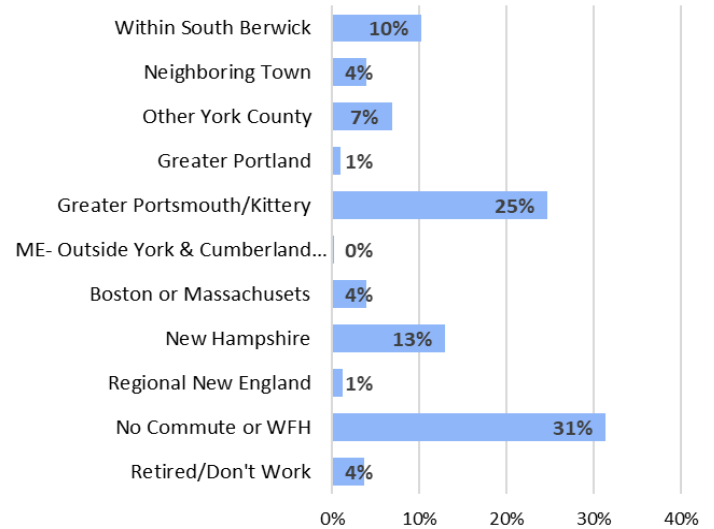
Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
48% of respondents did not answer.

Describe your employment status:



Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
3% of respondents did not answer.

Describe your work commute:



Percents are out of total answers, not total respondents.  
3% of respondents did not answer.

- **Describe your work commute:** Low number of “Retired/Don’t Work” responses compared to the employment status question is due to “Retired” not being an option in the work commute question. Some respondents entered “Retired” as an “Other” option, but many likely responded “No Commute/WFH” which was intended for working adults with no commute.



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