



# **Summary of the City of Plattsburgh's LWRP/Comprehensive Plan Stakeholder Survey**

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## Overview of Process

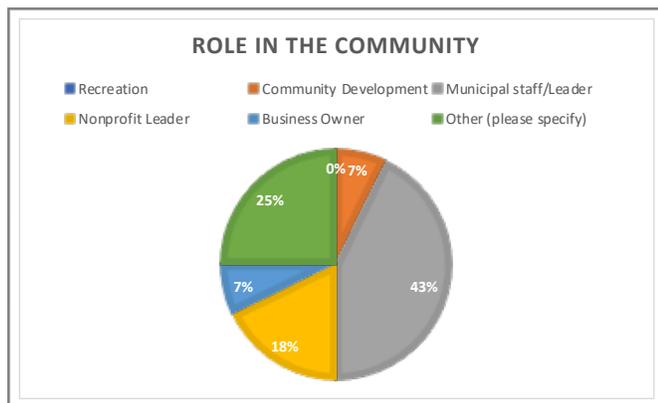
As part of the City of Plattsburgh’s community engagement portion for finalizing the City’s Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) and developing a new Comprehensive Plan, a survey (Appendix A) was sent to 39 municipal, nonprofit, and business leaders. The group was selected based upon recommendations from the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan/Comprehensive Plan Planning Committee as well as City of Plattsburgh Community Development Office staff, and project consultants. Twenty-nine people responded to the survey which gives the sampling a 99% confidence level with a 3.44 confidence interval.

The goal of the survey was to identify community assets, challenges and opportunities for the City of Plattsburgh and add this information to the community engagement data that has been collected as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) projects. City of Plattsburgh Planner Malana Tamar sent a link to the 39 community leaders who were given two weeks to complete the 9 question (5 multiple choice and 4 short answer) question survey. The survey was designed and analyzed by Finch Network, LLC. All of the qualitative data, a total of 97 entries was coded, analyzed and compared to the multiple choice answers in the report below.

## Summary of Findings

### ***Role in the community***

Respondents were asked what their role in the community was with the most common response being in the “other” category. The other category was comprised of: 3 members of the planning board, 1 member of the zoning board, a college administrator, someone in legal services and someone in education.



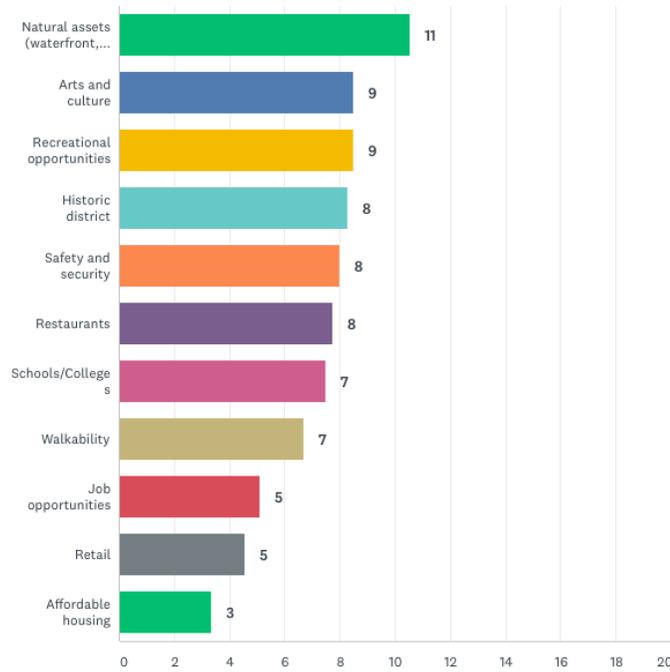
### ***Assets***

In exploring what stakeholders thought the assets of the City of Plattsburgh were asked the open ended question “What do you like about the City of Plattsburgh? What are you proud of?” (Question 8) The responses, order of noted importance, were: natural resources, sense of community, a safe clean place, arts and culture, ties to history, convenience, schools, downtown core and location.

These responses support the other asset question, “What makes the City of Plattsburgh special? ” (Question 2) that was posed to respondents which shows similar findings that Natural resources, arts and culture and recreational opportunities are highly valued by stakeholders.

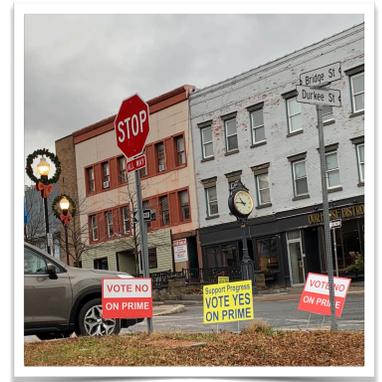
What makes the City of Plattsburgh special? Please pick your top 3 with 1=1st choice, 2=2nd choice, and 3=3rd choice.

Answered: 28 Skipped: 1



### Challenges

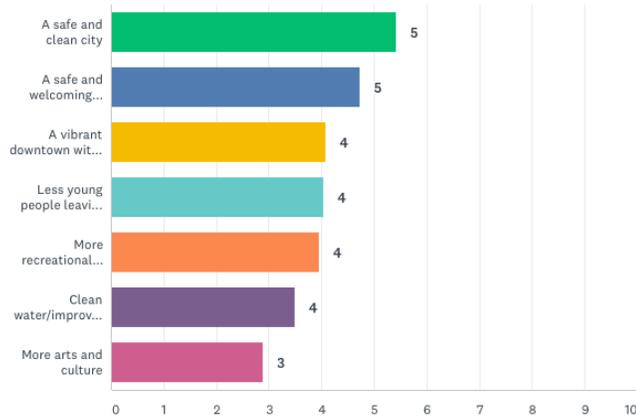
In order to determine what challenges stakeholders felt were facing the City, the survey included two questions to assess their concerns. The first, "How important is it for the City of Plattsburgh to have the following (Question 6, with a list of issues), a safe and clean community, and a vibrant downtown core topped the list of most important projects. It is interesting to note that arts and culture was at the bottom of this list but near the top of the assets in the City of Plattsburgh list.



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Please rank how important is it for the City of Plattsburgh to have (1=most important-7=least important):

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



The second question, “What’s the biggest challenge facing the City of Plattsburgh in the next 10-20 years?” (Question 5, an open ended question) most responses centered around financial concerns noting a need for a bigger tax base, a bigger budget for projects (notably City infrastructure), and a need for more development in a city that has limited areas for development.

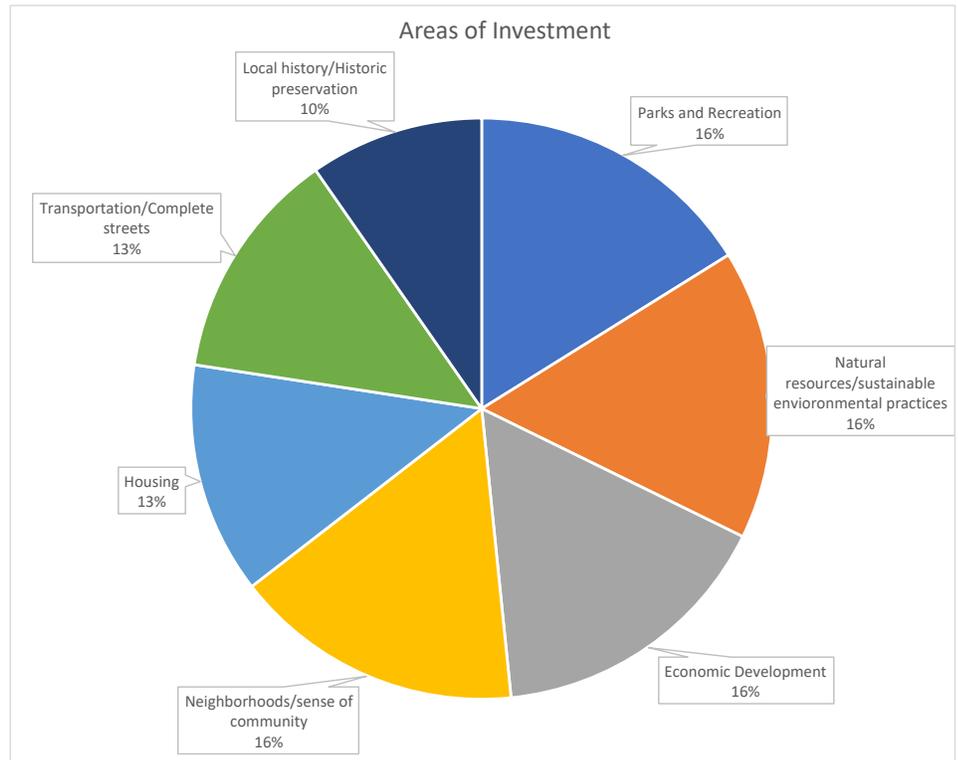
Respondents expressed split opinions regarding proposals for infill and redevelopment projects in the downtown. Additionally, respondents noted a resistance to change culture that makes development challenging. This quote from one respondent captures this sentiment o“Defiance to opportunities to develop and grow our community, and a commitment to maintain the status quo. I'm not opposed to homegrown growth, but the fact of the matter is that no one locally has taken on challenging development and redevelopment projects over the years. Without downtown investment, the tax rate will skyrocket, there will not be any incentive for our existing property owners to improve or care for their buildings, jobs will continue to grow in the Town, and any recreational/streetscape/etc. investments will eventually decay without sustainable funding and economic growth. Without adding value to the property tax base, we'll just be a micropolitan unable to expand in an economically efficient way.”

Housing was noted as a key element to any successful growth for the City (this will be explored more in the Opportunities section). Finally, a resistance to change and a culture of not wanting to change the status quo was noted by several respondents.

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## Opportunities

The survey included three questions that asked respondents to describe what they'd like the City of Plattsburgh to look like in the future. The first of these questions asked, "Please rank the areas you'd like the City of Plattsburgh to invest in over the next 10 years?" (Question 4): Parks and recreation, natural



resources and sustainable environmental practices, economic development, and neighborhoods with a sense of community were tied for the top choices for investment areas with housing, transportation/complete streets following

closely behind.

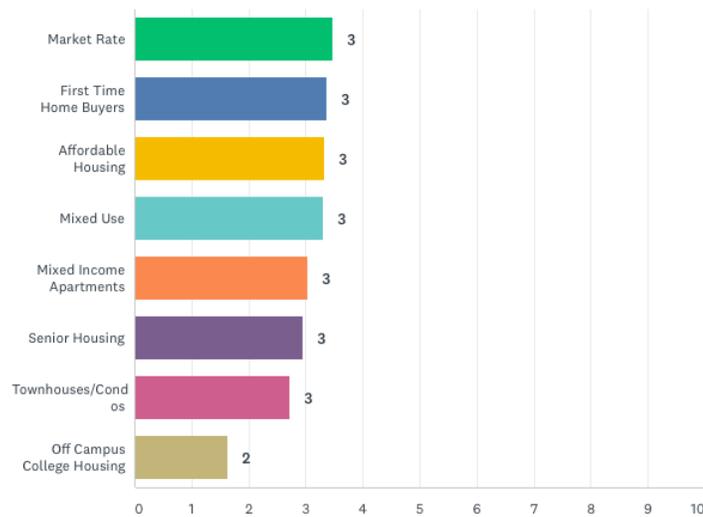


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The next question, “What type of housing is most needed in Plattsburgh” delves a bit deeper into what type of housing is desirable to the stakeholders. (Question 7).

### What type of housing development do you think is most needed in the City of Plattsburgh?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



Responses to this question doesn't yield much direction for housing and would indicate a need for deeper on the topic. The Plattsburgh Housing Authority is considering a housing study which could yield much more detailed analysis of the city's housing market, gaps, and opportunities.



The final opportunity question was “ When you envision Plattsburgh 20 years from now, please describe what projects you'd like to see completed by the municipality and the community?”. Waterfront development and access to the waterfront were overwhelmingly the most popular response. A recreation facility, parks and trails was second, followed by arts and culture and downtown development. Additional suggestions were: to address the challenge of the railroad going through the city center, affordable housing, improved

infrastructure, re-use of the NYSEG site, recruit new business to the city, improve transportation, and revive/increase community events.

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### **Other Comments**

The last question, Question 9, in the survey as respondents if they had any other idea or concerns they wanted to share with the committee and this question elicited a variety of responses. Below are the respondents' comments:

### **Development**

- Considerations for mixed use development throughout the city. The city moved away from residential/commercial uses that built neighborhoods in the past. This should be explored again.
- The City needs to evaluate the benefit/detriments to the residents of historic districts.
- The City needs to evaluate its excess recreation space for development.
- Allow the City some breathing room to develop naturally without too heavy a design hand, and prioritize smaller diverse projects over massive monolithic ones.
- Investment and preservation in our waterfront is critical. Complete streets and multi-modal transportation will help us thrive. Economic development with a focus on sustainability and public waterfront access
- Need to be careful about the changing of the parking requirements too quickly, before public transportation is fully implemented. Parking requirements are the main tool used to control density and protect quality of life.
- Economic development will happen if the city is an attractive option for companies with infrastructure for moving people/employees from one section of the city to another, good water/sewer, broadband, cable, power, available buildings, etc. Growth will naturally happen if the underlying structure is in place.
- We need to grow.
- With the limited tax base we have and the extensive services we offer ( Paid Fire,Police,) and big recreation facilities we cannot afford to be adding anything without eliminating something. GET BACK TO BASICS! We need to focus on doing what is essential well and not a bunch of stuff poorly.



### **Priorities**

- I believe that the city needs to invest more money into existing infrastructure.
- More public art and green space

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## **Codes and Zoning**

- Move towards form based/performance based code and zoning. Generally permit more development more flexibly - allow everything from super small-scale development to our "next increment" of development. Stop focusing on parking - if we have things that people want to do, like restaurants/retail, and/or things people need to do (like to go work) people will find places to park and walk as far as necessary to get to their destination. I truly believe that deferred property maintenance, rising housing costs, small business growth, tax rates, and numerous other things will take care of themselves if we allow appropriate development to occur in all parts of the city, and permit increased density everywhere.

## **Suggestions from Respondents for the Comprehensive Plan Process**

- What is our comprehensive plan for downtown? If the community does not want re-development of Durkee Street by Prime, then what?
- Community driven policies are always the most successful and the City has a great head start by having a public that is already informed and engaged. Any steps the City takes should be a reflection of what the citizens want and the City should be able to demonstrate how the City's actions reflect what the citizens have said with both qualitative and quantitative data.
- It will be very important to set expectations regarding the outcome of the LWRP/Comp Plan to the public, specifically the messaging for progressive changes with the future in mind.
- The City needs to be careful about the changing of the parking requirements too quickly, before public transportation is fully implemented. Parking requirements are the main tool used to control density and protect quality of life.
- The City should have strong goals and plans, but be adaptable!



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## Next Steps

The survey also identifies some areas where more discussion and/or research should be completed:

### ***Activities Related to the Comprehensive Plan***

- A discussion with the City's Planning and Zoning Boards to identify policies and codes (e.g. flexible zoning) that would encourage new businesses to locate within the City limits and support growth of current businesses.
- Examining zoning and code policies that support sustainable environmental practices.
- Examining zoning and code policies that support mixed used development with particular attention paid to historic preservation.
- Stakeholder interviews with housing, economic development, zoning/code experts.
- A PAC meeting to discuss findings, review the draft vision statement and discuss next steps for the Comprehensive Plan and continued community engagement activities.
- Update on the Comprehensive Plan process for the City's webpage.
- Participate in a "Late Night for the Planet" panel discussion about the Comprehensive Planning activities. Anticipated to be held in February 2021.
- A public meeting to discuss the vision for the Comprehensive Plan and the draft plan. Format and agenda to be determined by the PAC. Anticipated to be held early 2021.

### ***Suggested Activities that Fall Outside the Scope of the Comprehensive Plan***

- The Prime project on Durkee Street continues to be a project where stakeholders, and community members, are divided as to how to move forward. Transparency, communication, and community engagement around this topic will continue to be important. Reflection on lessons learned about this process and how it can inform and shape future policies and procedures could be useful.
- Parking continues to be a hot topic in the community and continued transparency, communication and opportunities for the public to stay engaged and informed on the topic is a desired activity.
- Working with the Plattsburgh Housing Authority to conduct a comprehensive housing analysis to determine the specific needs and gaps in housing in the City would be helpful in determining the need and areas for investment.
- It could be beneficial to work with the Press Republican to do a series of articles about infill and redevelopment projects in the City. Case studies and best practices for these types of projects could be highlighted to help broaden residents' understanding of how these types of projects have worked/not worked in other communities.
- Respondents voiced a strong desire for community/neighborhood activities and opportunities to build a stronger sense of community. In a post-COVID City of Plattsburgh, there is strong support for festivals and events that bring together our residents and attracts tourists to the City.

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## Conclusion

Many of the recommendations found in this survey echo the community wide surveys conducted for the DRI streetscape (2018) and DRI Marketing survey/community outreach sessions (2019). In the streetscapes survey, City of Plattsburgh residents voiced their support for improve recreational opportunities in downtown, increased Waterfront access and increasing programming space for events were met with “enthusiasm and optimism”. In the DRI Marketing survey/public engagement stands, residents noted that “scenic beauty along the Saranac and Lake Champlain, diverse dining choices and special events (Battle of Plattsburgh, Fourth of July, Mayor’s Cup) were noted as downtown’s top three assets.”

Building upon these findings, this stakeholder survey supports:

- The desire to preserve and highlight the City’s natural assets and to look for ways to increase public access, particularly to the waterfront.
- Continued support for, and expansion of, recreational opportunities including trails connecting the City as well as a recreational facility.
- Continued support for, and expansion of, arts and culture as well as reviving and increasing community programming.
- Continued commitment to keeping the community clean and safe.
- Activities and policies that support a positive sense of neighborhoods and community.

Appendix A-List of Survey Questions

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## **Appendix A- List of Survey Questions**

1. What is your principle role in the community
2. What makes the City of Plattsburgh special? Please pick your top 3 choices (Natural assets, Arts and Culture, Recreational Opportunities, Historic District, Safety and Security, Restaurants, Schools and Colleges, Walkability, Job opportunities, Retail, Affordable Housing).
3. When you envision Plattsburgh 20 years from now, please describe what projects you'd like to see completed by the municipality and the community.
4. Please rank what areas you'd like the City of Plattsburgh to invest in over the next 10 years:
  - a. Parks and recreation
  - b. Economic development
  - c. Neighborhoods/sense of place
  - d. Natural resources
  - e. Transportation/multi-modal
  - f. Housing
  - g. Local History/historic district
5. What is the biggest challenge facing the City of Plattsburgh in the next 10-20 years?
6. Please rank how important it is for the City of Plattsburgh to have:
  - a. A safe clean city
  - b. Less young people leaving the area/more job opportunities for young people
  - c. More arts and culture
  - d. More recreational opportunities and facilities
  - e. Clean water/improved environmental practices
  - f. A safe and welcoming community
  - g. A vibrant downtown with a diverse range of retail and culinary options
7. What type of housing development do you think is most needed in the City of Plattsburgh (not needed at all, slightly needed, needed, strong need for this in the city, extremely necessary for the city): Affordable housing, mixed income apartments, Townhouses/Condos, Mixed use, Market rate, Off Campus College Housing, Senior Housing, First Time Homebuyers, Other.
8. What do you like about living in Plattsburgh? What are you proud of?
9. Please share any other comments, concerns, or suggestions you'd like to share with the Committee: