Community Engagement for the Envisioning Williamstown

2035 Comprehensive Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Williamstown is creating a Comprehensive Plan that will address the future of the Town through 2035. Unlike the previous Town Plan, *Envisioning Williamstown 2035* incorporates the lenses of sustainability and community resilience and diversity, equity, and inclusion. A key component of equitable and inclusive town planning is gathering input from as many community members as possible.

As students in ENVI 402: Environmental Planning taught by Professor Sarah Gardner, we were assigned this project to assist the Town government in its outreach efforts. The Town is currently in the second phase of the planning process: Envisioning the Future of Williamtown. To assist our clients, Andrew Groff and the Town of Williamstown, the Williamstown Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, and Resilience Planning & Design, we conducted outreach to five groups underrepresented in planning: 1) Youth, 2) Seniors, 3) Low income residents, 4) People employed in Williamstown, and 5) Williams College students. After conducting various forms of passive and active outreach,[1] we found that the five groups had both unique and overlapping priorities for the future of Williamstown.

Youth and students enjoyed Williamstown's outdoor environment but wanted more sustainability initiatives, like composing, renewable energy, and accessible recycling. This group also sought affordable, allergy-friendly food options and increased variety in businesses, including grocery and retail stores. Non-college youth expressed desires for public athletic facilities and a teen center. Many youth and students wanted more town-sponsored events, increased opportunities to bring together the College and the Town, and more access to transportation, including increased

[1] For more details, see "Methods" (pg. 21).

protected bike lanes, a bike/ride share program, and improved public transportation to nearby communities, including North Adams, Lanesborough, Pittsfield, and Albany.

Seniors expressed a strong desire for more robust public transportation to locations farther than North Adams and to Williams College events, including to audit courses. They also requested specific renovations to the Harper Center,[2] and free Town WiFi, as many did not have WiFi at home. In addition, seniors wanted adult recreation events and increased physical accessibility and affordability of items on Spring St.

Low income residents, who we tried to reach by surveying subsidized housing residents and patrons at the Williamstown Food Pantry, shared a desire for future investment in sidewalks, transportation, and cheaper food options. However, our survey received a total of 2 responses, so it is not a representative sample.

Williamstown employees were dissatisfied with current housing options in Williamstown and wanted affordable housing for people who do not qualify for subsidized housing or meet income restrictions, more starter homes, and denser multi-family zoning. This group also sought increased public transportation, cheaper food and later restaurant hours, more medical care options, more places to purchase groceries or everyday items, and increased attention to business development on Water St. Local employees were highly satisfied with green spaces and trails, but were looking for more public recreation and event facilities, benches and tables, renewable energy infrastructure, and town-managed recycling and composting.

Based on our findings, we developed priority recommendations under five categories from the Williamstown Existing Conditions Report.[3] Under Housing, our recommendation is to increase

[2] See pg. – for Harper Center renovations.
[3] See "Recommendations" (pg. 36) for the full list.

affordable housing. Under Economic Development, we recommend working with businesses to create cheaper food options with more hours. Under Transportation, we recommend increasing bike and foot infrastructure (through sidewalks, bike lanes, and a bike rental program) and creating more robust public bus routes and schedules. Under Public Facilities and Services, we recommend creating a youth council, hosting more community events, building a new senior center, and creating a new teen center. Finally, under Parks, Open Space, and Recreation, we recommend 1) increasing benches and tables in public parks, 2) increasing/improving composting and recycling infrastructure, 3) improving public outdoor recreation facilities, and 4) increasing access to indoor recreation facilities.

It is our sincere hope that this report, "Community Engagement for the Envisioning Williamstown 2035 Comprehensive Plan," demonstrates the importance of engagement, partnership, and co-creation in an inclusive planning process. After all, *Envisioning Williamstown 2035* is by—and for—the people who live, work, learn, and play in our community.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Goal

The goal of this project is to gather input from community members to inform our clients, Andrew Groff and the Town of Williamstown, the Williamstown Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, and the Committee's consultant, Resilience Planning & Design, on issues and challenges in Williamstown and what people envision for the future. We connected with three underrepresented groups in the town's planning process that our clients identified (youth, seniors, and low income residents) and two groups we identified in collaboration with the Town of Williamstown (Williamstown employees and Williams College students). Through our outreach, we also addressed our clients' planning lenses of 1) sustainability and community resilience, and 2) diversity, equity, and inclusion.[4] The Steering Committee, along with Resilience Planning and Design, will develop language and recommendations for *Envisioning Williamstown 2035* based on our findings. Ultimately, the Steering Committee hopes the project encourages residents to get involved in planning while capturing the needs, hopes, and dreams of the community.

1.2 Background

Municipal comprehensive planning enables communities to take stock of the present and consider both the direction and quality of the future. Successful planning gathers input from a diverse cross-section of local residents and stakeholders to build a comprehensive plan that improves residential neighborhoods and increases the quality of—and access to—open spaces,

[4] Town of Williamstown, *Existing Conditions Analysis Executive Summary* (Williamstown, MA: Resilience Planning and Design, RKG Associates, FB Environmental, and JM Goldson, 2022), 6.

public facilities and services, and natural resources while supporting economic development. In The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, city and town comprehensive planning is mandated under Chapter 41, Section 81D of the General Laws. According to the statute, a comprehensive plan must include a municipality's goals, policies, and strategies for the following elements: growth and development, land use, housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, public services and facilities, and transportation.[5]

The Town of Williamstown is currently undergoing the planning process for its new Comprehensive Plan, *Envisioning Williamstown 2035*. Unlike the previous 2002 Master Plan, *Envisioning Williamstown 2035* incorporates two overarching topics as lenses integral to successful long-term planning for the entire community: sustainability and community resilience and diversity, equity, and inclusion.[6] The Steering Committee has broken down the planning process into three phases: 1) Analyze Williamstown Today and What's Changed, 2) Envision the Future of Williamstown, and 3) Write the Plan.[7]

The Town and the Steering Committee, in collaboration with consultants at New Hampshire-based firm Resilience Planning & Design, have completed the first phase of the process by conducting an extensive review of local and regional plans and data to understand the "conditions, trends, challenges, issues, and opportunities" in Williamstown.[8] They identified and researched eight areas of interest specific to Williamstown and in accordance with state requirements:

1. Housing
2. Economic development

[5] Mass. Gen. Laws c. 41, § 81D.
[6] Town of Williamstown. *Existing Conditions Analysis Executive Summary*. Williamstown, MA: Resilience Planning and Design, RKG Associates, FB Environmental, and JM Goldson, 2022, 6.
[7] "About *Envisioning Williamstown 2035*," Williamstown Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, accessed October 27, 2022, https://resilience.mysocialpinpoint.com/williamstown-comprehensive-plan/about.
[8] Ibid.

3. Transportation
4. Public facilities and services
5. Natural resources
6. Parks, open space, and recreation
7. Cultural and historic resources
8. Land use

The Town is currently working on Phase 2, during which they gather input from community members on their observations, priorities, and suggestions for the future. On October 13, 2022, the Steering Committee and Resilience Planning & Design held an open house at the Williamstown Youth Center. While the event encouraged attendees to interact with planning and share their thoughts in a variety of ways, the group was self-selective. Only people who felt comfortable in the space and held a combination of time, access to transportation, and some level of familiarity with the event were able to attend and participate.

The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee recognizes that there are barriers to participation and has asked our team to gather opinions, ideas, and feedback from groups historically underrepresented in the Town's planning efforts. This desire builds on a formal commitment the Town has made to "equality, access, and opportunity for all its residents," and the Town's belief in the "vital importance of a diverse community" through the passing of Article 36, the "Not in Our County Pledge," and Article 37, an equity petition, in August of 2020.[9] By actively engaging youth, seniors, low-income residents, Williams College students, and people who work in Williamstown, we acted on the Plan's commitment to equity and inclusion and attempted to capture the needs and desires of community members with different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, genders, income levels, and other intersecting identities.

[9] Town of Williamstown, 11–12.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective outreach to underrepresented groups in the Williamstown comprehensive planning process requires two major areas of research and learning: 1) the state of Williamstown as it exists today and 2) best practices for community outreach and engagement. Furthermore, in reading the existing planning literature on community engagement and speaking with experts in the field, we also sought to develop a strong understanding of the importance of engaging community members in the first place. As community engagement was the basis of our project, it was important to ground ourselves in the critical question not only of *how* to engage people, but also of *why*, especially as we recommend that the Town continue to actively engage each of the groups we worked with as the planning process moves forward.

2.1 Williamstown Today

Existing Conditions Analysis Executive Summary, Town of Williamstown, 2022

As part of the first phase of the comprehensive planning process, the Resilience Planning team has conducted extensive research on the state of Williamstown today and published an existing conditions report. Their publicly available report provides insight into the key issues shaping the Town. The executive summary of the *Existing Conditions Analysis* is broken up into the eight sections that will be incorporated into *Envisioning Williamstown 2035*. We asked each group about a combination of these topics, choosing those that were relevant to different groups' experiences in the Town. Key to our outreach are the report's lenses of community sustainability and resilience, which will address residents' current challenges while planning for the needs of future generations in the context of climate-change induced hardships, and equity and inclusion.

In the process of engaging community members, these overarching frameworks drove our efforts to meaningfully engage with people who are often left out of town planning.[10]

Finally, among the many topics it covered, the report also spoke to the relationship between Williams College and the Town, as the College is seen both as a heavy driver of economic and cultural resources and as having a large physical and cultural presence in Town.[11] Thinking about the key relationship between the College and the Town inspired us to include Williams College staff and students in our outreach and contextualized our analysis of the data.

Listening and Learning Project Report, Mount Greylock Regional School District, September 2021

Before going into local schools, we wanted to better understand the context we would be working within. Conversations with Liza Barret (the librarian at Mount Greylock Regional School) and Kaatje White at the Williams Center at Mt. Greylock gave us a sense of how to best introduce students to the planning process and gather meaningful input in a limited timeframe. We also read through diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant Courtney Tunis' *Listening and Learning Project Report*.

This report explains that bias shows up in Williamstown schools on two levels: widely-felt biases (preferential treatment for athletes and top academic performers and socioeconomic bias) and specific biases (race, gender, and minority political ideology).[12] The report also provides methodological guidance by showing survey strategies and response rates that Tunis used in her research (response rates to her surveys varied from 15.9% among grades 9-12 to 37.9% among

[10] Town of Williamstown, 7.
[11] Town of Williamstown, 13.
[12] Cortney Tunis, *Mount Greylock Regional School District Listening and Learning Project*, September 2021, 5.

grades 5-6).[13] The report recommends future data collection include snapshot surveying (which takes place numerous times over the course of a school year and asks very few questions, instead of gathering repeated data) and expanded one-on-one conversations. While snapshot surveying is not feasible due to time limitations on our outreach, we facilitated small-group discussion and one-on-one conversations to increase the qualitative depth of our outreach to all groups. The report's recommendations also guided our written and face-to-face communication at Mount Greylock Regional School (MRGS) and Williamstown Elementary School (WES), ensuring that our language was as clear and inclusive as possible.

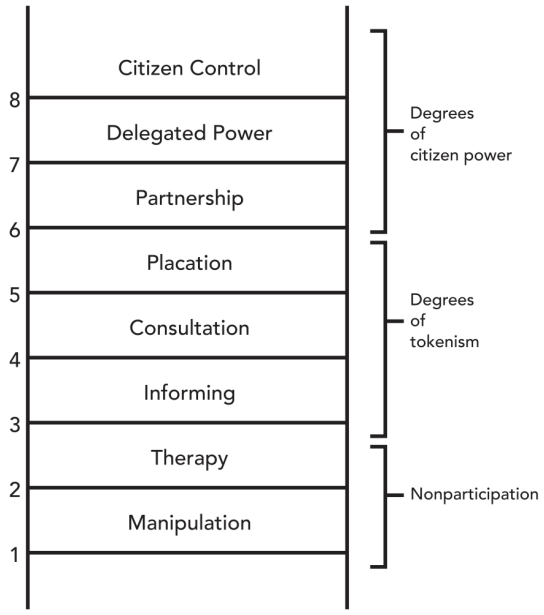
2.2 Best Practices for Outreach and Engagement

"A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Sherry R. Arnstein for *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 2019

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation provides a helpful way to visualize the different levels of community engagement. While not an all encompassing or perfect way to think about community engagement, Arnstein's ladder pushed us to be more intentional and thoughtful in how we approached each group. Reaching the upper rungs of her ladder is challenging. It is important that truly participatory planning not settle for merely informing residents about the process. Considering the fourth rung of the ladder, consultation, Arnstein writes that "inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. But

[13] Tunis, 4.

if consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation… it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account."[14]



Informed by Arnstein and other planning literature, we worked with Andrew Groff and the Resilience team on each step of outreach to ensure that the input we received from community members would be incorporated into Resilience's ongoing work and shape the *Envisioning Williamstown 2035* plan. The questions we asked and data collected are all comparable to those asked by Resilience at the October 13, 2022 Youth Center Forum (and subsequent online surveys). Furthermore, all the raw data we collected is also shared with Resilience and being analyzed by them as the planning process moves forward. This collaboration is important as Resilience is contracted to bring together the input received and use it to create a plan that meets the needs of all members of the community. Our close collaboration is a key part of our group's effort to meet Arnstein's challenge to meaningfully partner with citizens.

"Depoliticising Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation," Sarah C. White, for *Development in Practice* 1996

Sarah White builds on key concepts found in Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation and furthers it by specifically considering the politics of the very idea of participation. She walks

[14] Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 85, no. 1 (2019): 28.

through how participation is seemingly everywhere in the context of development and planning, and how this is in many ways, an important step as many groups have long fought for the right to participate in the planning process. However, "sharing through participation does not necessarily mean sharing in power."[15] By incorporating underrepresented voices into planning processes, it is possible to lay claim to a "participatory planning process" without actually letting the public shape plans and policy. As White puts it, "incorporation, rather than exclusion, is often the best means of control."[16] According to White, there are two key questions when it comes to the politics of participation in planning: "the first is the question of who participates… The second regards the level of participation… the involvement of the local people… is not enough. For a fully participatory project, they should also take part in management and decision-making."[17]

Considering what it would mean to create spaces of transformative participation, White argues that "the idea of participation as empowerment is that the practical experience of being involved in considering options, making decisions, and taking collective action… is itself transformative. It leads on to greater [political] consciousness" of key issues and "greater confidence in their ability to make a difference."[18] In the long run, this leads to communities that are more engaged and resilient in the face of the many challenges that face them.

Like Arnstein's ladder, these concerns surrounding the nature of participation are ones we must address. Our goal most certainly was not to replicate processes of participation that merely allowed community members to share thoughts which would ultimately go unheard and unincorporated. The challenge before us lay in building legitimate trust in the four of us, as

[15] Sarah C. White, "Depoliticising Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation," *Development in Practice* 6, no. 1 (1996): 6.
[16] White, 7.
[17] Ibid.
[18] White, 8-9.

stewards of the planning process, and more so in the process itself. This happens by way of how we choose to engage with community members and how we incorporate their perspectives into the Comprehensive Plan itself. Again, these are not simple tasks, and taking into account the ways in which White complicates the idea of participation enables us to more meaningfully engage community members in the process of envisioning and making real a plan for a better Williamstown.

Guest Presentation, Cat Bryars, November 3, 2022

Former planner at the Bennington County Regional Commission Cat Bryars shared her knowledge and some foundations in citizen outreach in the U.S. context, including Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) and the four types of citizen participation (informing, consulting, involving, collaborating).[19] In conversation with Bryars, we solidified our plan to offer a raffle for small monetary incentives to survey respondents who work in Williamstown or live in subsidized housing in order to thank them for their time and attention. She also highlighted the importance of a multistep process, beginning by building familiarity with the planning process and the sometimes unfamiliar vocabulary relating to it.

Another strategy for effective community engagement that Bryars shared was partnering with a trusted member of the given demographic that you are trying to reach when conducting outreach. While it is important to develop your own relationships with different communities, having someone who is already part of a specific group join in leading the outreach process helps build trust and demonstrate that you are serious about community engagement. This showed up in

[19] Catherine Bryars, "Comprehensive Planning," guest presentation in ENVI 402: Environmental Planning Workshop, Williams College, Williamstown, MA, November 3, 2022.

our outreach efforts at local schools. When a teacher actively participated and encouraged their students, more students engaged in the focus groups and did so to a deeper level (in that we were able to glean more ideas beyond the surface level of "Williamstown is boring" from these conversations than ones where we did not have an active partner). Having that support made the sessions more meaningful. Bryars also encouraged us to put together an in-person "pizza and planning" type event at one of the subsidized housing properties if possible. She raised the concern that the online and paper surveys that we mailed or dropped off would not garner many responses. This was indeed the case, as described in our Findings section. Finally, our conversation also prepared us for our session with seniors at the Harper Center.

"How to Facilitate Inclusive Community Outreach and Engagement," Sheryl Trent for *Public Management,* May 2021

Consultant Sheryl Trent stresses the importance of local governments being "deliberately inclusive" in community engagement strategies in an increasingly diverse world.[20] She explains that many studies have shown inclusivity leads to more creative ideas, strengthened communication, more robust support for results, and deeper relationships.[21] While Trent highlights the importance of consulting (defined as obtaining input and feedback from community members), she also explains governments must focus on collaboration and empowerment through facilitation. Wherever possible in our outreach, we acted as *facilitators* rather than *presenters* (facilitation is 80% listening, 20% presenting).[22] As Trent suggests, we asked questions and created opportunities

[20] Sheryl Trent, "How to Facilitate Inclusive Community Outreach and Engagement," *PM.Public Management* 103, no. 5 (2021): 27.
[21] Trent, 27.
[22] Trent, 29.

for community members to share their thoughts while encouraging new ideas and listening actively. We also worked to follow best practices described by Trent in collaboration with her community participants. These included 1) meeting people where they are (literally and figuratively), 2) listening to learn, improve, and understand, and 3) partnering with established groups in the community.[23] For this project, we worked with established community groups and organizations including the Harper Center and the Williamstown Food Pantry.

"Improving Stakeholder Engagement in Local Strategic Planning – Experience Sharing Based on Portuguese Examples," Maria Eduarda Fernandes, Ana Sofia Lopes, and Ana Lúcia Sargento in *Policy Studies,* June 2019

Maria Eduarda Fernandes, Ana Sofia Lopes, and Ana Lúcia Sargento offer a framework for key practices to enhance stakeholder engagement in participatory government processes. They describe how a growing body of literature shows that citizen participation increases local government's accountability and openness, helps government achieve decisions aligned with public preferences and local needs, and brings multiple and diverse views into the debate.[24]

We used some of the facilitation and engagement techniques laid out by Fernandes, Lopes, and Sargento. For each outreach type, we started with a short, initial clarification of concepts and goals.[25] Examples include simple, age-appropriate infographics explaining town planning concepts and the importance of peoples' ideas and opinions (Figures 1 and 2), verbal explanation of town planning concepts and goals during focus groups, and written explanations at the

[23] Trent, 28.
[24] Maria Eduarda Fernandes, Ana Sophia Lopez, and Ana Lúcia Sargento, "Improving Stakeholder Engagement in Local Strategic Planning – Experience Sharing Based on Portuguese Examples," *Policy Studies* 42, no. 4 (June 2019), 382–383.
[25] Fernandes, Lopez, and Sargento, 390.

beginning of online surveys. When appropriate, we encouraged and facilitated small groups to alleviate "power imbalances" between community members and prevent individuals from dominating the conversation.[26] Finally, at Mount Greylock Regional School and Williams College, we sent out online surveys after our in-person sessions. This allowed MRGS focus group participants and Williams open house participants to take more time with their responses and give deeper feedback while opening up opportunities for students we did not meet in person to share their thoughts.[27]

"6 Pandemic-Proof Ways to Engage Youth in Comprehensive Planning," Rachel Greenwald for *Planning Magazine,* April 2022

Many of the above readings and conversations were broadly helpful in guiding our outreach strategy. As youth engagement was one of our client's top priorities, we also did considerable research into how to meaningfully engage youth of various ages in the planning process. Researcher Rachel Greenwald suggests keeping messaging "understandable and approachable" while creating space to hear as much as possible from youth in an open-ended format rather than asking specific, guiding—and potentially leading—questions.[28] Greenwald calls for going beyond the one time, 45-minute school visit, as this can create a transactional relationship.[29] Instead, Greenwald points towards elevating young people in the planning process, forming a two-way relationship, and ensuring that youth learn and become genuinely engaged in the planning process. While time constraints and the highly scheduled school day at MGRS made this difficult, we

[26] Ibid.
[27] Fernandes, Lopez, and Sargento, 392.
[28] Rachel Greenwald, "6 Pandemic-Proof Ways to Engage Youth in Comprehensive Planning," *Planning Magazine*, April 8, 2022, 35. Also informed by conversations with our client, Andrew Groff.
[29] Greenwald, 37.

scheduled multiple engagement sessions over the course of a week and then followed up in December to establish a deeper relationship with students and school staff. At WES, we saw and spoke with many of the same students multiple times over the course of a week, attempting to forge some sense of a relationship as Greenwald recommends.

"A City for all Citizens: Integrating Children and Youth from Marginalized Populations into City Planning," Victoria Derr, Louise Chawla, Mara Mintzer, Debra Flanders Cushing, and Willem Van Vliet, 2013

"A City for all Citizens" discussed a program called "Growing Up Boulder" in Boulder, Colorado from 2009 to 2012 which had the goal of joining "participatory approaches of growing up in the cities with the rights-based focus of the Child Friendly Cities initiative in order to integrate the perspectives of children and youth into urban planning and design."[30] Growing Up Boulder worked to integrate the ideas and concerns of young people into the redesigning of specific parks and civic spaces as well as helping the city identify issues for city planning. They incorporated action groups in which they interacted directly with youth, for example asking the youth what they liked and did not like about the city of Boulder, which is a strategy we used extensively as well with all age groups in our outreach. The authors of "A City for all Citizens" state that the biggest lessons they learned from the program are that "engagement needs to be on youths' terms, with methods that they find exciting and relevant"[31] and that "the most effective way of engaging youth is to go where they are, whether it is in a classroom or out-of-school

[30] Derr et. al., *A City for All Citizens: Integrating Children and Youth from Marginalized Populations into City Planning,* July 2013, 483.
[31] Derr et. al., 499.

program"[32]. We did our best to prioritize face-to-face conversation and use engaging methods in order to maximize the effectiveness of our outreach.

"Engaging Schools in Urban Revitalization," Deborah L. McKoy and Jeffrey M. Vincent, 2007

"Engaging Schools in Urban Revitalization" discusses a program called "Y-PLAN" (an acronym for Youth - Plan, Learn, Act, Now!) in Berkeley, California from 2000 through 2005 that "partnered graduate level mentors, high school students, government agencies, private interests, and other community members to work together on a real-world planning problem."[33] This program concluded that there are three conditions that lead to successful school and student participation in urban revitalization. These three pillars can be summarized as follows:

1. Foster a "community of practice" including local government, planners, residents, educators, and students;
2. Shared decision making between youth and adults;
3. Build from successes and relationships to facilitate the success of future projects.[34]

These conditions deal more with the long term process of planning and decision-making, and we were limited in time and scope, but we endeavored to foster this kind of "community of practice" the best we could under the circumstances. As an outreach group gathering data on priorities and preferences of the public regarding the Comprehensive Plan, we acted as the intermediary between the local government, planning consultants, residents, educators, and students. While we were not at the writing phase of the comprehensive planning process, we explained to those in our outreach that their opinions would be seen by the Steering Committee, the Town, and Resilience and would substantively shape the Comprehensive Plan (as discussed above, a key part of how this has and

[32] Derr et. al., 500.
[33] Mackoy and Vincent, *"Engaging Schools in Urban Revitalization"*, June 2007, 389.
[34] Mackoy and Vincent, 390.

will continue to happen is through our step-by-step collaboration with Andrew Groff and the Resilience consulting team). Williams students have completed projects regarding town planning in recent years, but those projects did not involve the same kinds or level of community engagement that ours did, so we often had to establish our own relationships and foundation for outreach.

"The Potential of Youth Participation in Planning," Kathryn I. Frank, 2006

In "The Potential of Youth Participation in Planning", Kathryn I. Frank performs an extensive summary of previous studies on youth participation in planning. She observes the impacts that involvement in planning has had on youth and the capacity of youth to participate in planning, and determines five lessons for effective practice. Frank states that the potential impact that involvement in planning have on youth is "the most persuasive reason for involving youth in community development and environmental care, because the impacts would lead society toward the ideals of sustainable development"[35]. She asserts that the majority of impacts that participation in planning has on youth are positive, for example increasing civic activity, raising awareness of problems, addressing youth concerns, and improving livability for all[36]. She also found that youth were "enthusiastic about participating and capable of engaging in a wide range of planning activities"[37]. The five lessons that Frank suggests based on her findings are as follows:

1. Give youth responsibility and voice;
2. Build youth capacity;
3. Encourage youthful styles of working;
4. Involve adults in the process;

[35] Kathryn I. Frank, "The Potential of Youth Participation in Planning," *Journal of Planning Literature* 20, no. 4 (2006): 359.
[36] Frank, 369.
[37] Ibid.

5. Adapt to sociopolitical context.[38]

She summarizes that the main implication of her findings is that we should encourage youth participation in planning because of its wide range of benefits, which means giving youth a place in the traditional public involvement process and making the needs and recommendations of youth a habitual consideration.[39] She also emphasizes that planners must prioritize "win-win-win projects that clearly serve the interests of planners, youth, and the community" in order to make youth participation a more positive experience.[40]

As was the case in "Engaging Schools in Urban Revitalization", Frank focuses more on building a self-sustaining system of youth participation in planning. While we hope to help create something like this, our project was narrow in scope, and this kind of system didn't already exist. Our role was specifically to give a voice to youth and other members of the community that are often overlooked in the planning process. Visiting schools and talking to youth represents the first step of building their capacity. We performed our outreach at the schools, especially at WES, in a youthful way, encouraging conversation and creativity. Several teachers and mentors were especially helpful in our conversations with youth. We did our best to adapt to the sociopolitical context of young people of all ages by trying to meet them where they were at, but it was sometimes difficult because different students had different sociopolitical contexts and we did not have existing relationships with the students at MGRS and WES.

This project is one that everyone connected to Williamstown can benefit from, and so involving youth in the community can be a positive experience. Ultimately, it would be ideal to have a system in place that puts into practice the principles discussed by Frank, especially towards

[38] Frank, 367.
[39] Frank, 370.
[40] Ibid.

helping youth to have more intimate involvement in the planning process and being able to see the results of their work in planning.[41]

[41] One recommendation that we come to later in the report (see Findings or Recommendations) is the idea of establishing a Youth Council. Modeled intentionally and given a serious voice and role, such a youth council could help fulfill what Frank discusses.

3. METHODS

3.1 Youth and Students

Youth are rarely integrated into town planning processes but have unique needs and experiences. If given the opportunity, they share valuable information about their communities. Through fun and engaging activities, we asked youth to think about possible improvements in parks and green space, sustainability initiatives, public transportation, and other Town infrastructure and services. In early November, we attended six directed studies periods at Mount Greylock Regional School (MGRS) to conduct focus groups. These directed study focus groups allowed us to meet with a random sample of students in each grade level at the school (grades 7-12). We also attended a Multicultural Student Union meeting and a Student Council meeting. During our thirty-minute sessions, we passed out an infographics describing town planning (Figure 1) and explained the purpose of our outreach. Then, we encouraged students to share 1) what they liked and disliked about Williamstown and 2) how the Town could better meet their needs and wants. We provided the questions on poster paper and asked students to write their ideas on sticky notes while facilitating a large-group discussion for students who preferred to communicate verbally. We also moved around the classroom to listen to students who were more comfortable sharing in small groups or in one-on-one conversations. Through these focus groups, we met with approximately 100 students in 7th-12th grade in person.

In addition to the focus group sessions, we put up four posters to conduct passive outreach outside the school library. These posters invited students to share their thoughts on 1) What they like about Williamstown; 2) How Williamstown could better meet their needs and wants; 3) how the Town could be more environmentally sustainable; and 4) how the Town could be more

inclusive and equitable. These posters were up for about a week and a half, but did not receive any responses. To continue engaging middle and high school students, we also designed an online survey that was sent to all students by Liza Barret, the MGRS librarian. This survey, which garnered 61 responses, asked students about key comprehensive planning topics such as public transportation and outdoor recreation. In addition, we also used the online survey to ask for more open-ended responses to topics that came up frequently during our in-person focus groups. These included questions about spaces for teens to hang out in, cheaper food options, town sponsored events, and interest in forming or being part of a local youth council.

On December 6, 2022, we returned to MGRS to present our findings during a Greylock Talks session to students and engage them in further discussion. This step of sharing what was learned is important in developing stronger relationships in the planning process and demonstrating that public input is valued.

At Williams Elementary School (WES), we conducted focus groups at recess for grades K-6 using the poster and sticky note method. We asked both of our original questions from MGRS as well as others tailored to a younger demographic (ex. "Tell me about your dream park in Williamstown?"). We provided students with chalk to write their ideas on the ground as well as the markers and sticky notes. Students had the chance to engage visually by drawing pictures of their dream playground. The WES sessions were informal and more self-selecting than at MGRS because students were not required to participate. We engaged approximately 50 elementary school students during these recess sessions.

In addition to youth, Williams College students make up 28 to 32% of the Town's population.[42] As temporary yet significant members of the community, Williams student voices

[42] Town of Williamstown, 10.

should be included in the planning process. During lunch on November 14, 2022, we hosted a two-hour open house in Baxter Hall at the Paresky Student Center to talk to students about the Comprehensive Plan. We provided posters and sticky notes, and students were able to write down what they liked and disliked about the town and offer suggestions for improvement. In addition, we asked students to write ideas on how the town could be 1) more sustainable and 2) more inclusive and equitable. We also sent out a survey to students through Williams College Daily Messages (an all-student daily email with announcements) and the Center for Environmental Studies email listserv. The survey asked students to share their thoughts on public transportation, outdoor recreation, employment opportunities, town businesses and services (including dining and food options), community events, collaboration between the Town and the College, and how the Town could become 1) more equitable and inclusive and 2) more environmentally sustainable and resilient.

3.2 Seniors

Seniors are often overlooked in town planning. However, when actively reached out to, seniors share key thoughts on how towns can meet their specific needs. As of 2021, seniors comprise 21.4% of Williamstown's population.[43] Outreach to this sizable group is necessary in an inclusive planning process. On November 15, 2022, we visited eight seniors present at the Harper Center for 90 minutes to gather input for the comprehensive plan. While we originally planned to prioritize one-on-one conversations, the setting was more conducive to a group conversation. While facilitating discussion, we wrote seniors' feedback on large posters. Brian O'Grady, director of the Harper Center, also provided a printed list of suggestions. Overall, seniors were

[43] US Census Bureau Quick Facts 2021, Williamstown, MA.

invested in the conversation, excited to be included in the planning process, and appreciative of our visit.

3.3 Subsidized Housing Residents and Food Pantry Outreach[44]

In an effort to reach the broad category of residents who fall under "low income," (one of the five groups included in our scope of outreach) we attempted to reach residents of three subsidized housing properties in Williamstown, as well as reach people during food distribution at the Williamstown Food Pantry. Low income residents are often challenging to reach in planning efforts, but their voices are vital to an inclusive and equitable long-term planning process. We developed a survey with questions on transportation, housing, parks, open space, recreation, employment opportunities, businesses and services, and how the Town could become 1) more equitable and inclusive and 2) more environmentally sustainable and resilient. The survey was linked via QR code on an infographic, which we printed out as flyers (Figure 2).

We received approval to drop off these flyers (with the QR code to the online survey) and paper copies of our online surveys at 330 Cole Ave. from Berkshire Housing Services, Inc., which manages the property. We dropped off flyers at doors at 330 Cole Ave. on November 21, 2022. We also mailed flyers and printed surveys to the subsidized housing developments at Spring Meadow and Church Corner. Residents who filled out the survey could include their mailing address to enter a raffle for four $10 Visa Gift Cards (Visa Gift Cards allow recipients to use funds at their discretion). We also contacted the Williamstown Food Pantry, which serves residents in need from Williamstown, New Ashford, Hancock, and Pownal, VT, to distribute flyers. During

[44] In the interest of transparency and specificity, we have labeled the relevant subsection headings and parts of the table of contents that point to outreach directed at low income residents as "Subsidized Housing Residents and Food Pantry Outreach."

the Food Pantry's pre-Thanksgiving food distribution on November 16, 2022, Li distributed flyers to Williamstown residents and encouraged them to fill out the online survey. She also assisted with food distribution and spoke to Carol and Carin DeMayo, who run the Food Pantry. Such in-person relationship building is an important part of active community engagement.

While none of our surveys to any demographic group asked for respondents income levels (which is not an uncommon demographic question), in addition to responses received on the surveys sent to folks at the food pantry and subsidized housing properties, we received lots of input on issues relating to affordability from people who work in Williamstown

3.4 Williamstown Employees[45]

As individuals who work, spend time, and contribute to the economic development of Williamstown, local workers should be included in outreach efforts for *Envisioning Williamstown 2035*. According to the Existing Conditions Report, approximately two-thirds of people that "work in Williamstown do not live in Williamstown."[46] As such, local workers may not be reached by traditional outreach methods, such as the October 13, 2022 Youth Center forum.

We considered holding an in-person event for Williams College faculty and staff but decided against this due to equity and bias concerns. Instead, our client Andrew Groff sent out an online survey we designed that was distributed by email to Clark Art Institute employees, Williams College employees (similar to Williams College students, this was sent via faculty and staff daily messages), and the Williamstown Chamber of Commerce ListServ. This survey was also

[45] This refers to people who work in Williamstown, not specifically Town of Williamstown employees. For conciseness, section headings and the table of contents refer to this population as "Williamstown Employees."
[46] Town of Williamstown, 12.

incentivized by the $10 Visa Gift Card raffle, and the questions mirrored those posed in the survey for affordable housing residents. In addition to these questions, the employee survey asked respondents if they lived in Town. This survey received 50 responses.

Using an online randomizer, we selected four gift card winners among respondents to the employee and subsidizing housing and food pantry surveys. In December, we mailed these gift cards out, along with hand-written thank you notes. When mailing these out, we also included information on how people could continue to follow along and engage with the planning process by including the web address for Resilience's *Envisioning Williamstown 2035* site.[47]

[47] "About *Envisioning Williamstown 2035*," Williamstown Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, accessed October 27, 2022, https://resilience.mysocialpinpoint.com/williamstown-comprehensive-plan/about.

4. FINDINGS

After gathering our survey results and focus groups responses, we compiled our results and grouped them into categories that matched the comprehensive plan categories. We had findings relevant to the categories of housing, economic development, transportation, public facilities and services, and parks, open space, and recreation. We did not have many finds relevant to the categories of natural resources, cultural and historic resources, or land use. The following findings came up several times and are relevant to our clients' work.

4.1 Youth and Students

Key themes in our youth findings are consistent across students at the three groups we surveyed: WES, MGRS, and Williams College. We present these findings in one section due to the overlap in themes and ages. During our in-person outreach, we engaged approximately 100 students at MGRS, approximately 50 students at WES, and approximately 25 students at Williams. Our MGRS online survey garnered 61 responses and our Williams online survey garnered 63 responses. Of the respondents of the MGRS survey, about 60% of respondents live in Williamstown.

In parks and open space, students across all ages found the environment beautiful and appreciate the four seasons of Williamstown. However, they expressed a desire for more places to sit outside, such as benches or picnic tables, so that students can hang out or do homework. This was particularly requested in Linear Park and Cole Field. Students also offered ideas related to environmental sustainability like recycling education, more accessible recycling, composing programs, increasing renewable energy, more street lights, more paved sidewalks, and more dog

parks. Williams College students wanted more interactions between the Zilkha Center and College's Environmental Studies Department and the Town. Students at the College also wanted to change zoning laws and increase affordable housing, describing these as improvements to the environment and culture of Town. One Williams student wrote:

> Change the Town Planning board members, change school committee members!! create affordable housing, change Rural 1 zoning rules to allow multi-family units, allow in-law and other apartments on existing plots, indigenous rights, returning lands to Mohicans, work to recognize white privilege, college dominance, & male privilege—very much alive and well in our community.

Regarding recreation, many youth and students shared that they enjoy hanging out on Spring St. and using athletic facilities provided by Williams College. A common request across students at WES and MGRS was that community athletic facilities be separate from College facilities so they would not have to rely on the schedule of Williams' athletic teams and programs. Community facilities could include public basketball courts, tennis courts, skate parks, rock climbing, and soccer fields. Middle and high school students expressed that there are few places for them to spend time with friends aside from their own houses, sharing ideas for a teen center that would be open after school. The teen center could host activities such as trivia, art classes, dances, and roller skating while providing indoor seating for students to talk and eat snacks. One student shared, "There's nothing to do around here. No mall, no activities, no nothing. If we had anywhere that's kind of private but can be social with comfortable seating and snacks, it'd be a hit." Another wrote, "School can be stressful at times and seeing friends and getting a laugh with the people you enjoy being around will make our day that much less stressful."

Middle and high school students were interested in town-sponsored events such as street fairs, music festivals, town picnics, parades, outdoor movies, or game nights. One student wrote, "Everything is more the college than the town and the town kinda needs more community activities

so we're not just a college town but a town with a college." Another said, "Contra dancing and dance halls were a big part of communities in the past, and it's something I'd love to see again, especially because they are part of rural New England's history." Some students acknowledged the town already hosts events (including the Reindog Parade, WPD kickball, and Sundays at 6), but that events are not always advertised clearly. More advertising could happen through signage, school announcements, or a Town newsletter. A number of middle and high school students were also interested in attending Williams College programming.

Another key area of reflection was economic development. While many appreciated the existing businesses, particularly Tunnel City, Lickety Split, The Log, and Spoon, over 60 students expressed a desire for more affordable food options on Spring St. For existing establishments, students wanted more allergy-friendly and vegetarian options and shared that most food establishments in Town close before school ends, so they would appreciate later hours. Beyond food, students communicated a desire for a greater variety in businesses, such as grocery stores, clothing stores, and chain stores. Dozens of students requested businesses like Trader Joes, Starbucks, Burger King, a larger movie theater, etc. Students also expressed a desire for a mall or grocery store to obtain everyday items more easily. One elementary schooler shared, "My nana is getting older and needs some things she can only get by going to the North Adams Walmart." Williams College students expressed the desire for meal swipes/Eph Points to be redeemable on Spring St. as a way to support businesses in Williamstown as well as increase equity in dining.

Williams College students expressed a desire to integrate the College with the community, such as Williams requiring community service as a graduation requirement, Williams performance groups performing in the community, using CLiA to sponsor more community connection opportunities, and increased advertising of town meetings so college students can get involved in

local politics. High school students also expressed interest in a youth council where they can participate directly in city government (ex. Pittsfield and Cambridge, MA).[48] In a follow up conversion about the Youth Council with MRGS students after our December 6, 2022 Greylock Talks presentation, students shared specific ideas on the role this council could play. For example, one student said that a youth council could be given direction and a sense of agency to actually tackle issues if the Town tasked them with specific areas to focus on.

Students of all ages were interested in bike rental programs, public Wi-Fi, and an indoor farmers' market during the winter. They also expressed that the town could be more accessible for those with disabilities. One Williams College student wrote, "A number of students (and locals of Williamstown) have mobility issues and most buildings do not have elevators/ have heavy doors/ steep inclines to access them/ etc." Some WES students wanted the school lottery to expand to more towns and for increased affordable housing. One elementary school student wrote, "I wish New Yorkers didn't take all the houses as second homes." Middle and high school students explained that 1) bus schedules and stops are unclear and 2) it is difficult to get to Lanesborough from Williamstown. Students of all ages expressed interest in transportation to North Adams, Lanesborough, Pittsfield, and Albany; a desire for a bike share program; and more protected bike lanes.

Finally, some students at MGRS want more diversity programming in schools, more diverse representation in town decision-making, and diversity/bias training for public school teachers.

[48] Similar programs officially incorporating youth into local government exist in other parts of Massachusetts. See https://www.cityofpittsfield.org/news_detail_T2_R521.php for more on Pittsfield's youth commission and https://sites.google.com/view/cambridge-youth-council/ for more on Cambridge's youth council.

4.2 Seniors

We engaged with eight seniors at the Harper Center focus group. Seniors at the Harper Center expressed a strong desire for more robust public transportation. Many residents shared that they do not own cars and/or cannot walk long distances, so they rely on both Harper Center transportation and public transportation. Seniors said they wanted the buses to run later (the current Harper Center buses only run until 3:30 p.m.) and to travel farther distances beyond North Adams. They also shared that they would like to attend events or audit courses at Williams College, such as the Berkshire Symphony and academic talks, but that transportation does not currently run to the College. Seniors also expressed a desire for more paved sidewalks, curbs that don't require steps, and benches for resting along existing walking paths.

In addition to public transportation, seniors also had requests for renovating the Harper Center itself. They explained that 1) renovations have been made to various other town buildings like local schools and the Police Department and 2) their center has inadequate facilities for the large population it serves. Seniors wanted a board room, office rooms, a new computer lab, private meeting rooms, a kitchen, an additional entrance, a health care room, an exercise room, and another meeting room so that more than one event can be held at once.

Seniors also wanted free Wi-Fi because many do not have Wi-Fi at home. Other ideas were for adult recreation events like summer picnics, holiday celebrations beyond Christmas, fairs, attending performances at the schools, and bringing speakers to the Harper Center.

Seniors who have lived in Williamstown for decades expressed the sentiment that shopping on Spring St. and housing in Williamstown have become inaccessible. They shared that Spring St. often feels congested and overwhelming and wanted a store with cheaper essential items.

4.3 Subsidized Housing Residents and Food Pantry Outreach

Our survey of subsidized housing residents and patrons at the Williamstown Food Pantry received 2 total responses, thus it is not a representative sample. While 68 flyers with QR codes to the online survey and printed paper surveys were mailed or dropped off to doors at 330 Cole Ave., Church Corner, and Spring Meadow, we only received one response from residents of these properties. The other response to this survey came from someone we spoke to at the food pantry, further demonstrating how important in-person outreach is to successful community engagement. While we reached far fewer Williamstown residents during our time at the food pantry, the survey response rate was far more successful with that form of outreach than with the mailers or flyer drops.

Respondents shared a desire for future investment in sidewalks, transportation, and cheaper food options. One person wrote, “They need to allow more businesses geared toward the middle class and seniors.” Both shared that costs were high for houses, particularly for the 65+ population. Another wanted “more programs for the elderly and things for the elderly to do.”

4.4 Williamstown Employees

Our survey for people who work in Williamstown received 50 responses. 74% of respondents live in Williamstown.

A vast majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the existing housing inventory and shared a desire for affordable housing for people who do not qualify for subsidized housing or meet income restrictions, more starter homes, and denser multi-family zoning. One person wrote, “I work in Williamstown and spend a lot of time here, but I have always had to rent in North Adams because most homes are unaffordable for my income bracket, and the majority of

rentals are either astronomical, owned by the college, or owned by a very small number of landlords who do not maintain them well enough for the amount they charge." Another person explained their experiences with the housing market in Town:

> I used to live in town. I loved it. I walked to work and I shopped local. I supported the community however I could. But rising rent costs, homes that were unaffordable for me (I have an excellent job in STEM) and rising cost of living combined with my employer's failure to keep up with those costs (even with my cost-saving measures) meant I had to leave. I cut back spending as much as I could, but [it] wasn't enough. The cost of housing skyrocketed and it was either become homeless or leave the town I loved.

In addition to housing, respondents expressed desire for increased public transportation, particularly rail access to Boston and Albany. Other transportation requests include rental car options, more paved roads, snowblowing, and increased lighting at night.

Local employees were generally satisfied with existing businesses and economic development but shared a desire for cheaper food and later restaurant hours, more medical care options, more places to purchase groceries or everyday items, and increased attention to business development on Water St. One respondent wrote, "Most businesses close early, do not offer affordable options. It is hard for workers to make time to run errands." However, they expressed difficulty in finding affordable childcare options, particularly for kindergarteners, and wanted free pre-school and better schedule coordination with the College and between WES and daycares.

Local employees were highly satisfied with parks and open space, particularly the trails. They wanted more benches and tables, renewable energy infrastructure, town-managed recycling and composting, outdoor community gathering places, and athletic recreation sites. One person wrote, "There should be a village green, a central park where outdoor concerts or other events would happen. There should also be a teen center where adolescents gather to play foosball or ping pong, or other games in a safe place. This would provide bored youths with a hang out place."

Topics that yielded contrasting opinions were development of the Spruces and the existing street lights.

Regarding inclusivity, respondents were interested in community-wide education events. One respondent wrote, “Change starts with awareness. Seeking information from marginalized folks, accepting their criticism without getting defensive, and compensating them for their time would likely be a good starting point.” Another said, “Better education for the entire community on what it means to be inclusive and how to be an advocate for all members of the community no matter what their gender, race, ethnicity, ability or financial level.” Some respondents wanted more queer-friendly events and spaces.

5. OUTREACH MATRIX

We conducted ten different kinds of outreach to youth, seniors, and low-income residents (though outreach to subsidized housing residents and patrons at the Williamstown Food Pantry). Outreach was active (focus groups, forums), passive (flier drop, surveys), and a combination of the two (speaking with Food Pantry patrons while handing out flyers). The matrix summarizes the kinds of engagement conducted and the data received from each outreach effort. Different techniques may work for different groups, so the categories are unranked.

OUTREACH	Number of People Engaged	Engagement Techniques	Face-to-face Contact	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Mount Greylock Regional School Focus Groups (grades 7-12)	≈ 100	On site, random sampling, required participation	Yes	None	Many specific details and some recommendations
Williamstown Elementary School Recess (grades K-6)	≈ 50+	On site, opt-in participation	Yes	None	Big ideas/critiques and some recommendations
Harper Center Focus Group	8	One-time event, on site, opt-in participation	Yes	None	Many specific details and recommendations
Williamstown Employee Survey	50	Opt-in online survey, incentivized	No	Enough responses to 1-5 survey questions to determine significant patterns	Many specific details and recommendations
Williams Student Forum (Paresky Student Center)	≈ 25+	One-time event, on site, opt-in participation	Yes	None	Big ideas/critiques with some recommendations
Youth Center Forum	≈ 90	One-time event, opt-in participation	Yes	None	Many specific details and recommendations
Community Survey	2	Opt-in online survey and flyer, incentivized	No	Few responses to 1-5 survey questions	Big ideas/critiques with some specifics
Williams Student Survey	63	Opt-in online survey sent out in Williams Daily Messages	No	Enough responses to 1-5 survey questions to determine significant patterns	Many specific details and recommendations
Mount Greylock Regional School Survey	61	Opt-in online survey	No	Enough responses to 1-5 survey questions to determine significant patterns	Many specific details and recommendations
Cole Ave Flyer Drop	0	Flyer drop	No	None	None/irrelevant

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

After compiling our findings, we have recommendations for our clients using five major categories from the Williamstown Existing Conditions Analysis report: 1) Housing, 2) Economic Development, 3) Transportation 4) Public Facilities and Services, and 5) Parks, Open Space, and Recreation.

Housing	• Affordable housing options that don't have strict income restrictions • Denser multifamily zoning
Economic Development	• Cheaper food options • Grocery store • More stores that are not food, ex. Clothing • Allergy friendly/vegetarian options at existing restaurants • Later hours at restaurants/stores • Teen night at restaurants/Images, etc • Integration of Eph Points / College Dining services with restaurants • Businesses geared towards middle class and seniors
Transportation	• Bike rental program • Protected bike lanes • More paved sidewalks • Clearer bus schedules and more robust bus route (at least to Walmart) • Middle/high school student bus discount • More public transportation to Pittsfield, North Adams, Lanesborough, and Albany • Rideshare/carpool program • Transportation from harper center to the college for events

Public Facilities & Services	• Free community wifi
	• Accessibility for people with disabilities
	• Youth Council
	• Benches/picnic tables in green spaces
	• New Senior Center with more space and better facilities
	  • Board room, office rooms, new computer lab, private meeting rooms, kitchen, new entrance, health care room, exercise room, space for more than one event to be held simultaneously.
	• Better childcare schedule coordination between Williams, WES, and daycare
	• Town newsletter with events and updates
	• Community events
	  • Winter farmer's market (once a season?)
	  • Live music/concerts appropriate for teens and children
	  • Children's plays at the 62 center
	  • More youth/teen oriented movies at Images
	  • Street fair, music festivals, game night, outdoor movies, parades, town picnic
	  • Food drive - food pantry already doing some of this
	  • Non-college performance venue – outdoor stage?
	  • More robust townwide recycling and composting programs

Parks, Open Space & Recreation	• More and improved public outdoor recreational facilities (improved basketball courts) for public/non-College use
	• Increased access to indoor recreational facilities (owned by the College or otherwise) for colder months (climbing wall, indoor basketball courts)
	• Teen center
	  • Indoor space with seating
	  • Trivia
	  • Art - materials and classes
	  • Skating

7. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE OUTREACH

As with any data-collection exercise, it is difficult to obtain a true representative sample while only involving a small portion of the population. This was especially true of our efforts to gather input from low-income residents in Williamstown. We found the most effective outreach methods were face-to-face conversation and group discussion. However, we were unable to conduct these kinds of outreach with residents of subsidized housing (who represent one subgroup of low-income residents) because of time limitations and logistical constraints. While we distributed flyers with a QR code to our survey and printed paper copies of the survey, only two individuals responded. Despite a financial incentive, some community members may not respond to outreach done only by flyers for a variety of reasons including—but not limited to—time constraints, limited Internet access, little desire to fill out a survey that may feel removed from (or irrelevant to) their lives and experiences, unfamiliarity with the language and processes of town planning (which can be confusing and/or intimidating), and uncertainty about how or if their responses will be incorporated in the planning process.[49] Indeed, one response we received did mention that some of the questions asked did not make sense to the respondent.

To address these limitations in future outreach, we recommend turning to some ideas mentioned in our conversation with Cat Bryars. In-person outreach must be prioritized as our results show the difference it can make in compiling robust input. In addition, it is important to go back to groups multiple times in a multistep process and work to build trust and familiarity with both the planning process and with those conducting the outreach. We were most successful in this

[49] We are not attempting to make assumptions about any specific groups or individuals lives or capabilities. Rather, we list the above reasons as some things to consider when trying to engage members of the community.

multistep process of engagement at MGRS, where we did initial in-person focus groups, passive poster outreach, an online survey, and a follow up presentation. Whenever possible, it is crucial to do this same kind of repeated outreach to all groups. This requires time and resources, but we hope that our work this fall has contributed to laying a foundation for future community engagement. Our efforts also show that the Town can continue collaborating with students at the College, whether through coursework, internships, or other opportunities as a way to get hands on community engagement done.

One final constraint we faced was the timeline of the project. Our first meeting as an outreach team with our client was on October 5, 2022. Much of the focus of our work upfront involved confirming in-person outreach times with partners at the school district (it takes more time to get yourself confirmed on the calendar in schools than in other places like the Harper Center simply because of their highly scheduled academic days) and developing an outreach strategy that would benefit and easily be incorporated into Resilience's ongoing outreach.[50] After that, we had less than one month to hold focus groups, mail and distribute surveys, and host in-person events before we had to compile results and report back to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. In total, we were able to conduct outreach that engaged approximately 359 people and compile some significant findings.[51] However, *making outreach an ongoing process with opportunities for community feedback and collaboration is key* to a truly equitable town planning process that reflects the needs and interests of all members of the Williamstown community.

[50] One concrete suggestion for future Williams College students attempting to engage students at MRGS and WES: reach out to College staff at CLiA who are responsible for coordinating engagement among students at the College and local K-12 students. They can help fast forward this process and put you in contact with the appropriate school district personnel. In our case, for outreach at MRGS, this meant working with Liza Barrett at Mount Greylock Regional School and Kaatje White at the Williams Center at Mt. Greylock.

[51] Of the approximately 359 people we engaged in the planning process, 183 were in-person and 176 were online. 211 of the approximately 359 were K-12 students, 150 of which was from in- person outreach.

Making community outreach and engagement a more regular and frequent process will empower residents to be more active stakeholders in their community and help the Town continue to shape policies that better meet the needs of all members of the community.

8. CONCLUSION

Deliberate outreach to groups who have been underrepresented in the planning process is vital to co-creating a better, more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive Williamstown. The Comprehensive Plan that Williamstown is working towards provided an opportunity to participate in direct outreach, and we hope it was a very informative and enriching experience for those who participated. We engaged children and teenagers, seniors, workers, and low-income residents in order to find out what each group values about their community and what they would like to change in their community. We also wanted to provide these groups with an opportunity to have their voices heard and to be involved in the planning process, especially given that these groups have been historically overlooked when it comes to town planning.

Some lessons that we saw in the literature about involvement of youth in planning were confirmed through our experiences, especially the ideas of meeting people where they are at, prioritizing face-to-face contact, and making the process fun and engaging for those involved. The outreach was most effective when we were able to talk to the residents face-to-face and engage them in a conversation about what they cared about. When we did this, we received lots of constructive feedback that we can apply to the Comprehensive plan, and we also started to build relationships of trust with those in the community that may have been overlooked in the past (and as such did not already have a trusting relationship with town government). We hope that these relationships of trust can be built upon in the future.

In sharing our results with the community through a Greylock Talk and at the Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee meeting, we were able to speak to residents and found that there are still questions people have about this process and still so much work to be done. Moving forward, we recommend that outreach be performed on a more consistent basis,

perhaps by a town youth council or by college students, in order to keep people engaged in the planning process as well as with local political issues and to make their voices heard. In doing so, we believe that the community will develop a healthier relationship between government and constituents and that the community will have greater capability to identify and address any problems that are of concern to the residents of Williamston.

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Much of our outreach focused on local schools, and we are indebted to partners at Mount Greylock Regional School District as well as the College's Center for Learning in Action. A special thanks to Liza Barrett at Mount Greylock Regional School for going above and beyond to make our experience with 7th-12th graders as meaningful as possible. Also, many thanks to Kaatje White at the Williams Center at Mt. Greylock for helping facilitate this work between the College and Mt. Greylock. Finally, thank you to Cindy Sheehy, Jake Schutz, Joe Bergeron, and Jonathan Nopper from the school district for their collaboration.

Perhaps most importantly, thank you to each and every member of the Williamstown community, from kindergartners to senior citizens who joined us in envisioning the future of

Williamstown. This comprehensive plan is for you all, and we are so grateful for your participation in the process.

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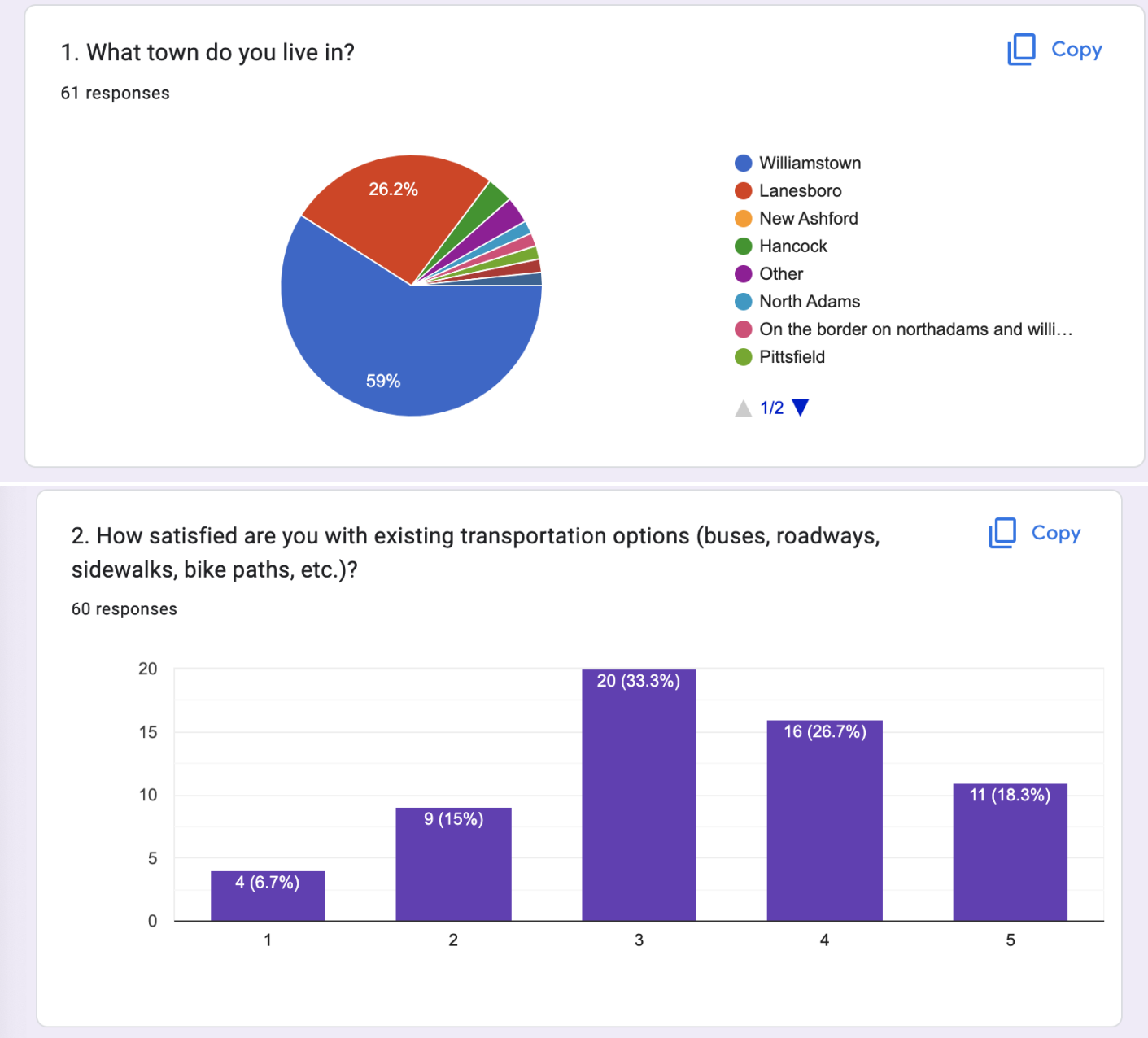
Appendix

Figure 1: Infographic for elementary-age students introducing them to the planning process.

Figure 2: Infographic for Williamstown residents introducing them to the planning process.

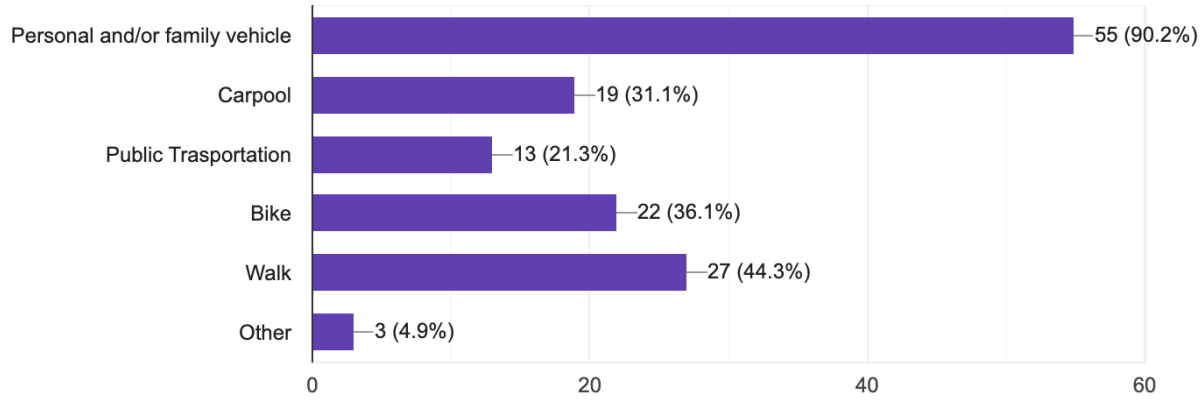
Figure 3: Quantitative outreach responses from Mount Greylock Regional School students (grades 7-12).



3. How do you typically get around?

Copy

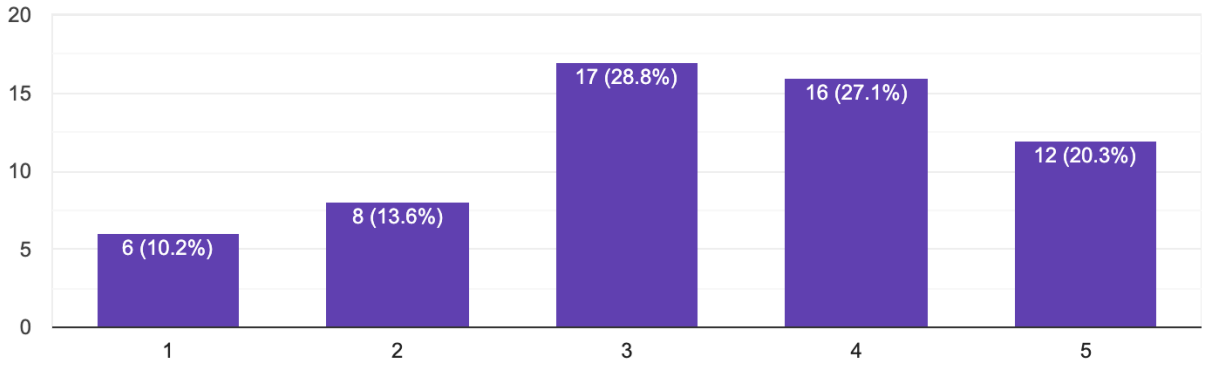
61 responses



9. How likely are you to attend a town-sponsored event, such as a town "mountain day" or a town street fair?

Copy

59 responses



Many cities in Massachusetts and elsewhere have town government "youth councils" in which youth can participate directly in city government (Examples: Pittsfield and Cambridge, MA). If there were to be a Town Government "Youth Council," how likely would you be to join?

Copy

58 responses

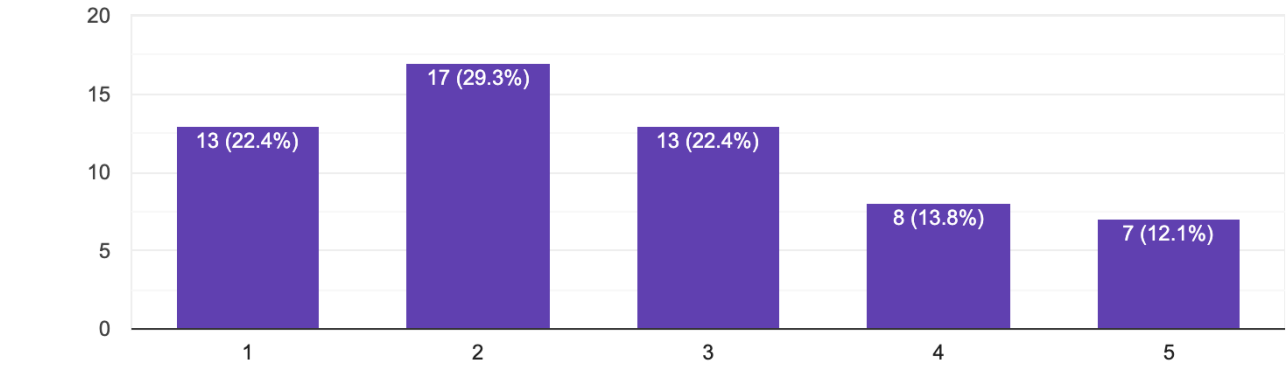
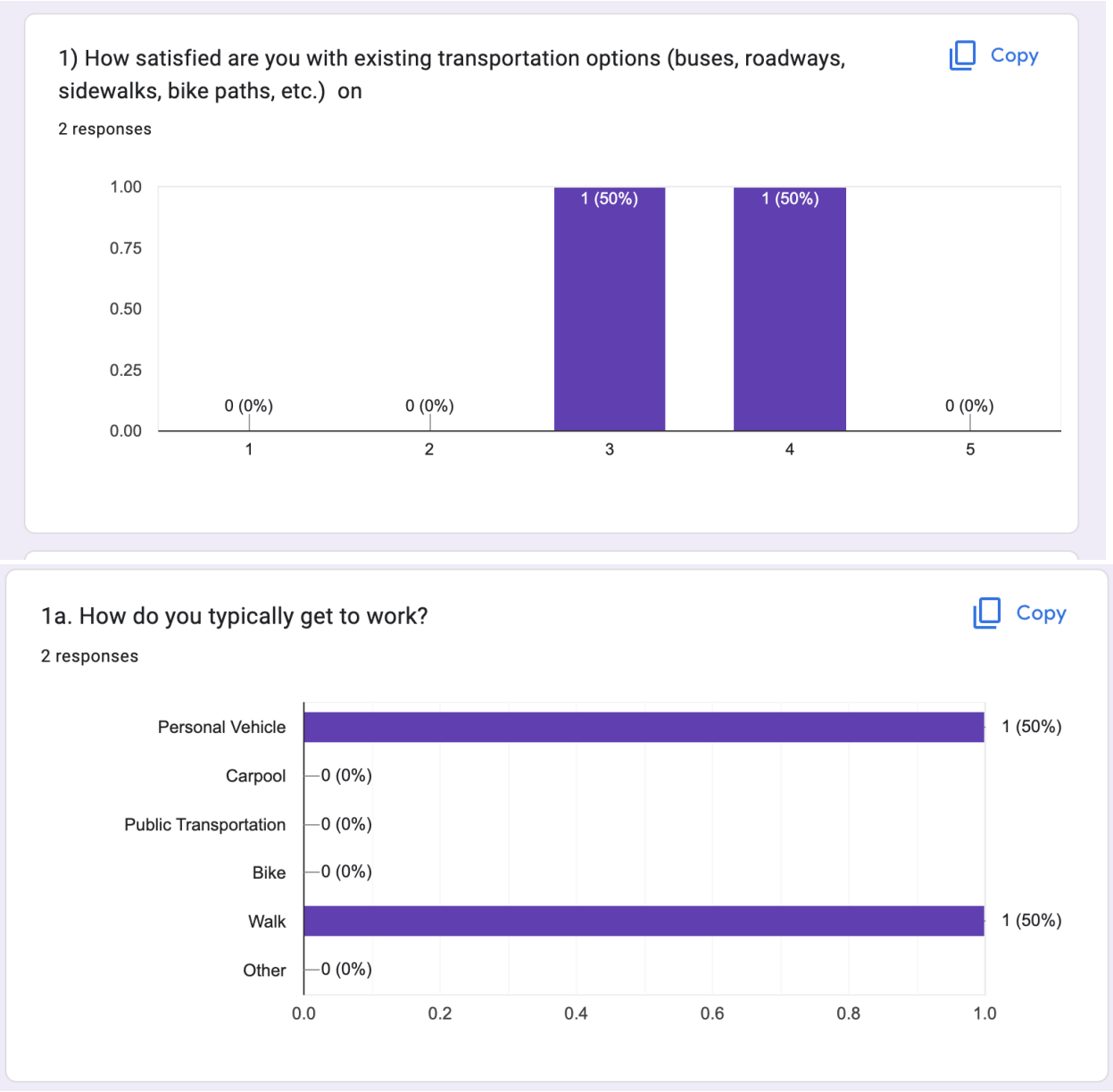


Figure 4: Outreach at Williamstown Elementary School students (grades K-6).

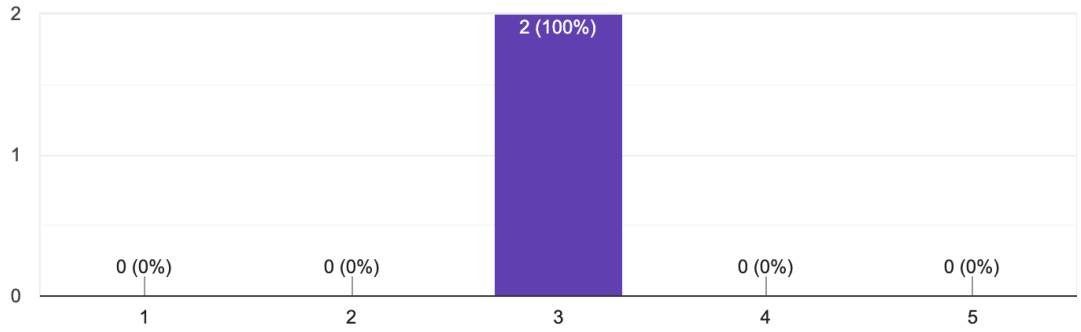
Figure 5: Quantitative outreach responses from residents of subsidized housing.



2. How satisfied are you with the homes for sale or for rent in Williamstown?

Copy

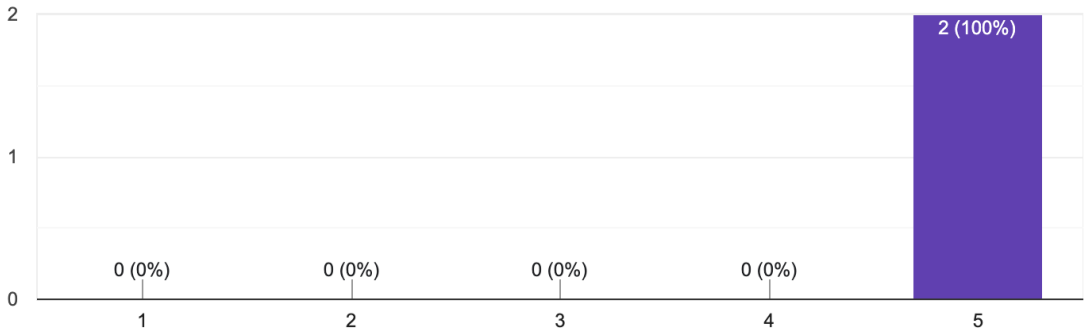
2 responses



3. How satisfied are you with the parks, open space lands, and recreational offerings in Williamstown (including cultural and social programs, sports, trails, fields, parks, etc.)?

Copy

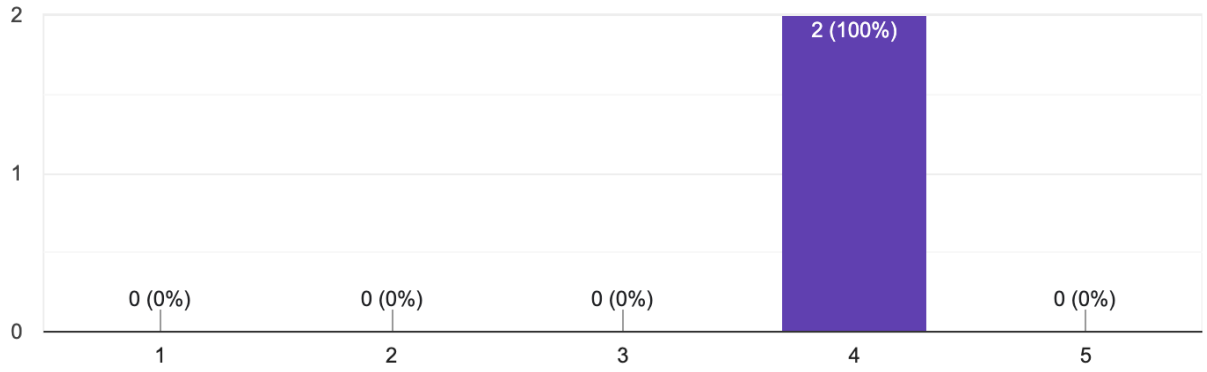
2 responses



5. How satisfied are you with employment opportunities in Williamstown?

Copy

2 responses



6. How satisfied are you with the businesses and services available in Williamstown?

Copy

2 responses

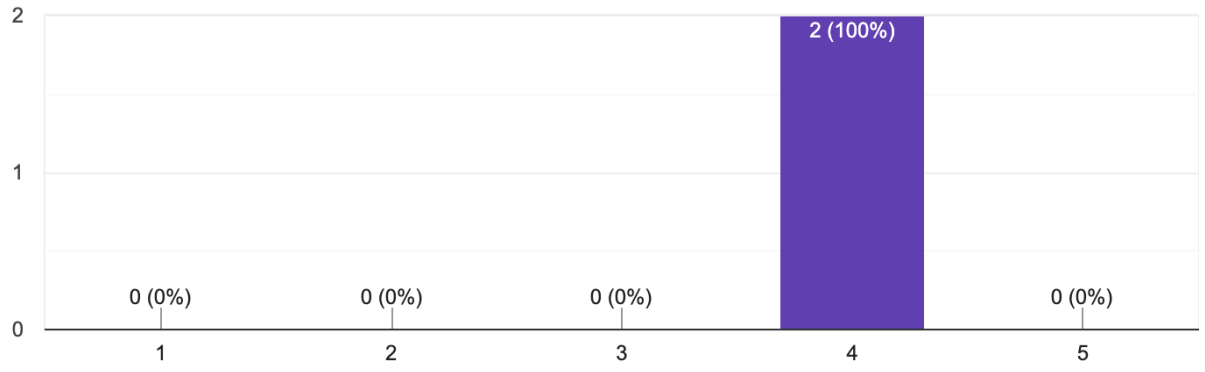
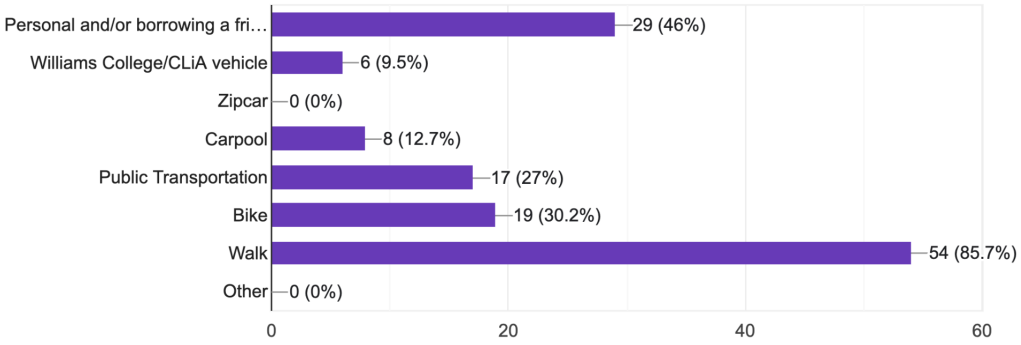


Figure 6: Quantitative outreach responses from Williams College students.

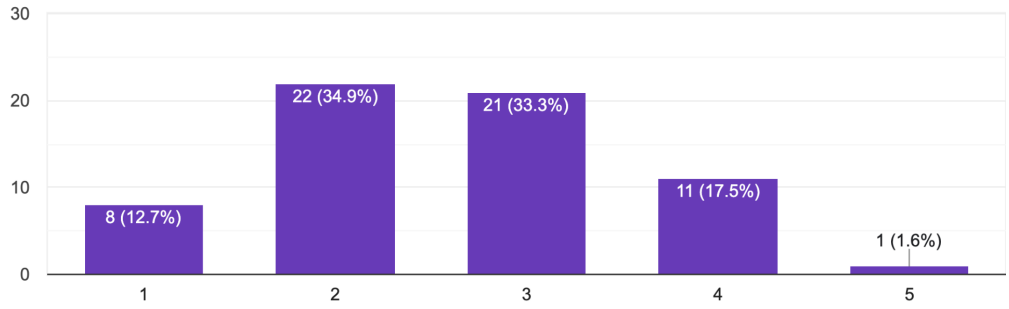
1. How do you typically get around?

63 responses



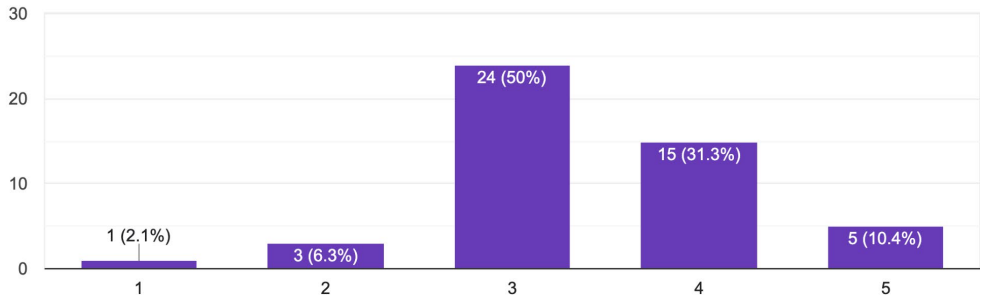
2. How satisfied are you with existing transportation options (buses, roadways, sidewalks, bike paths, etc.)

63 responses



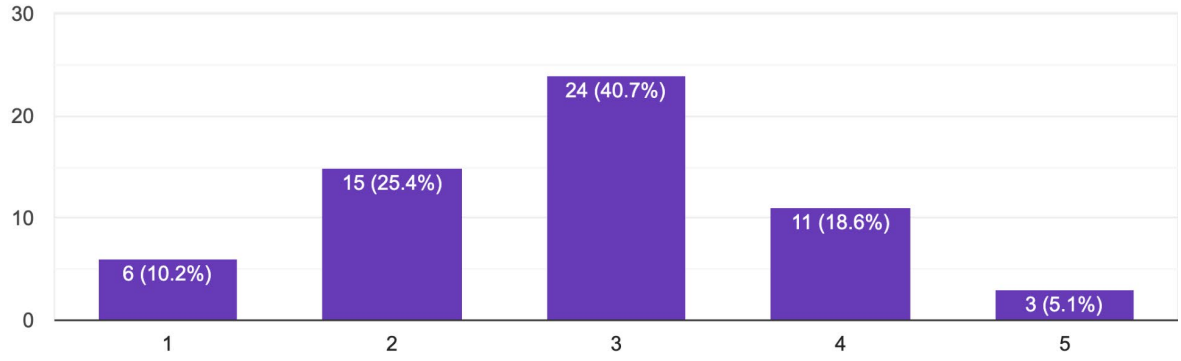
5. How satisfied are you with employment opportunities in Williamstown?

48 responses



6. How satisfied are you with the businesses and services available in Williamstown?

59 responses



8. How likely are you to attend a town sponsored event, such as a town mountain day or a town street fair?

58 responses

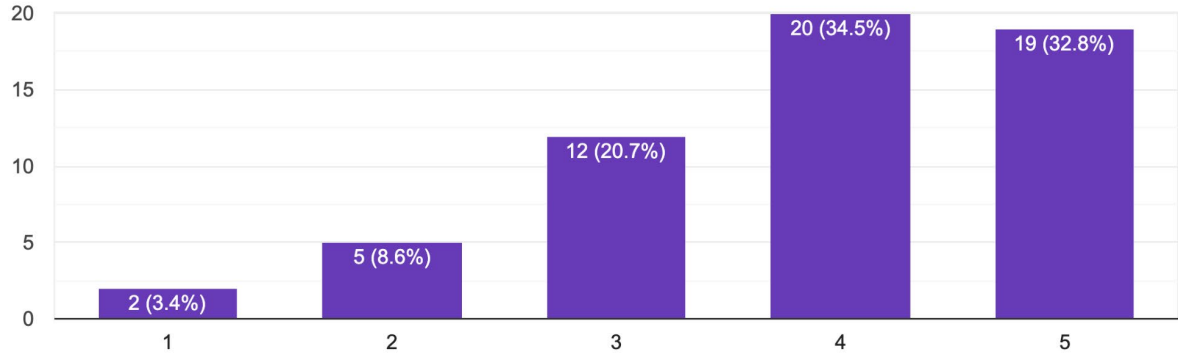
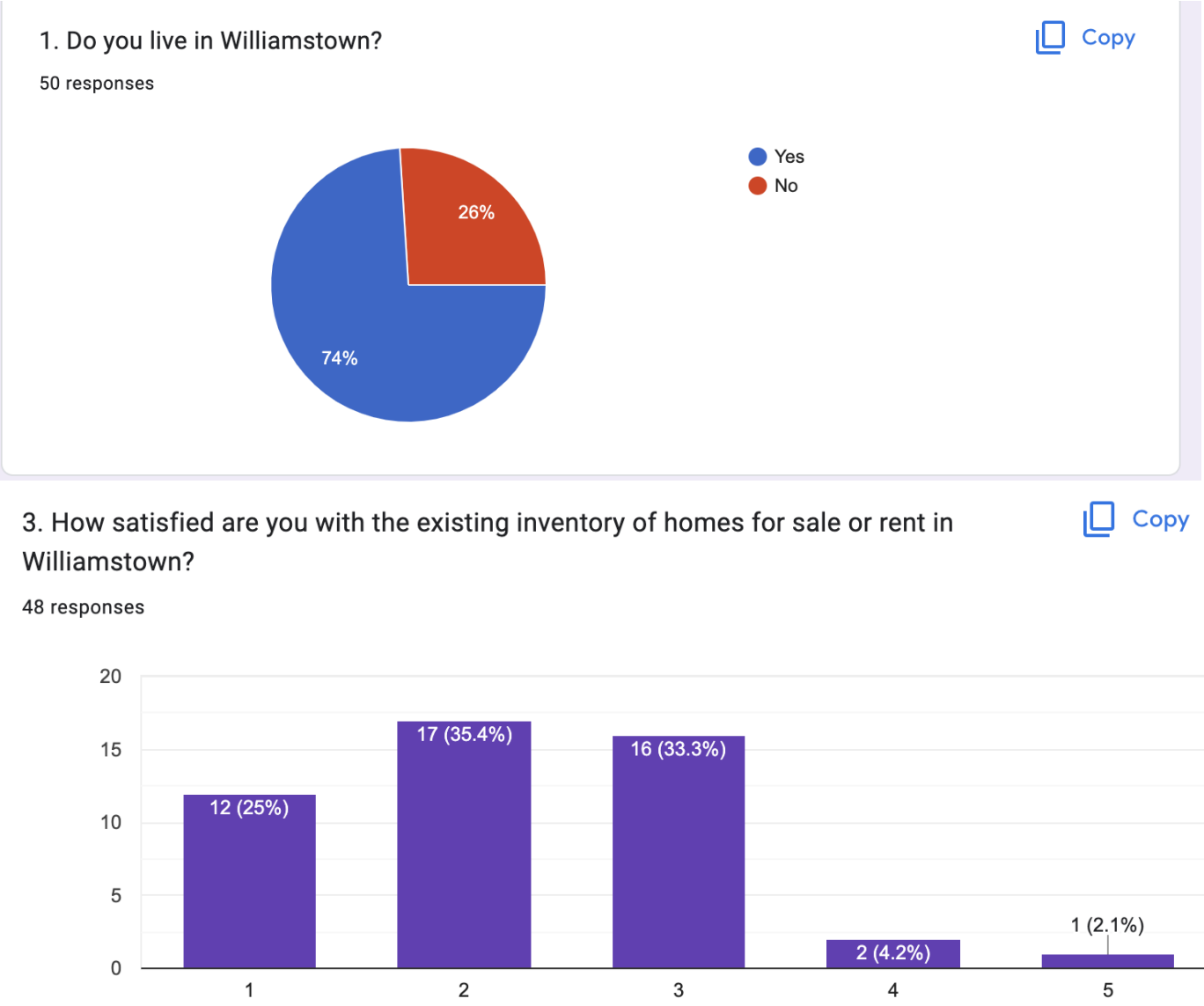


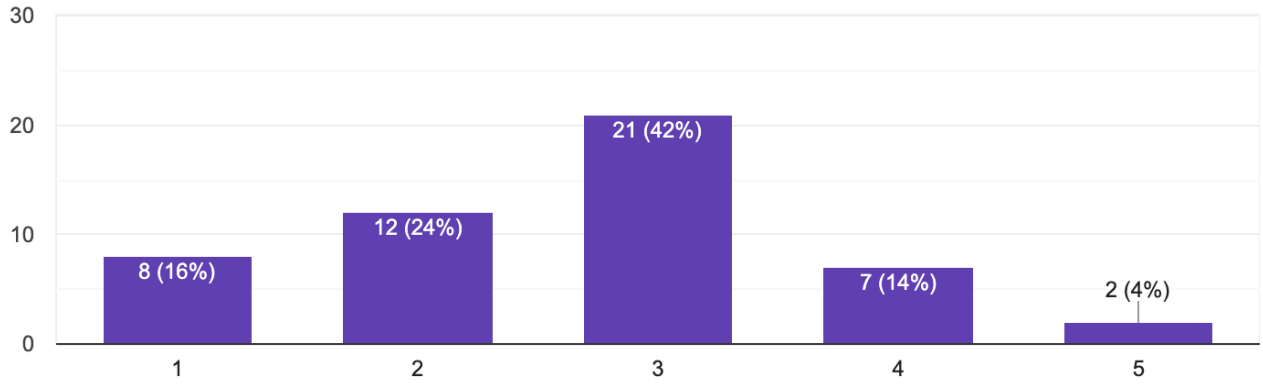
Figure 7: Quantitative outreach responses from Williamstown staff.



4. How satisfied are you with existing transportation options (buses, roadways, sidewalks, bike paths, etc.)

Copy

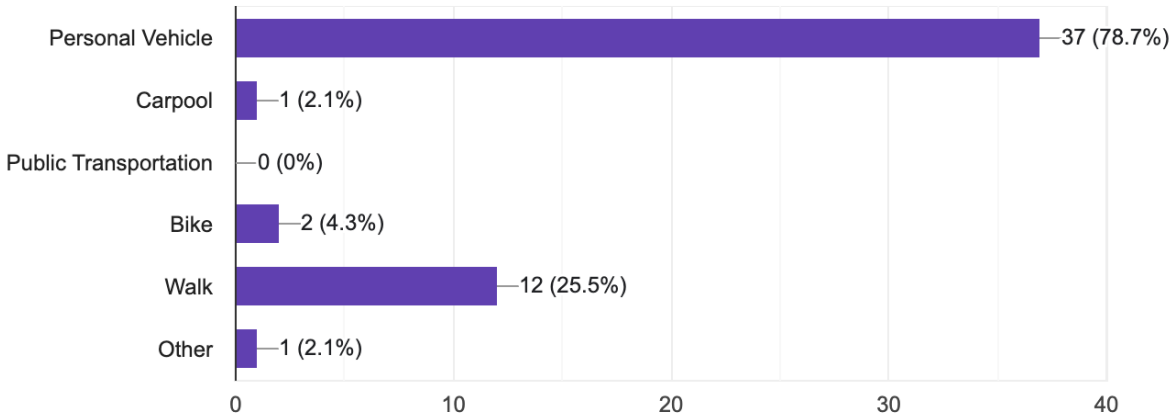
50 responses



4a. How do you typically get to work?

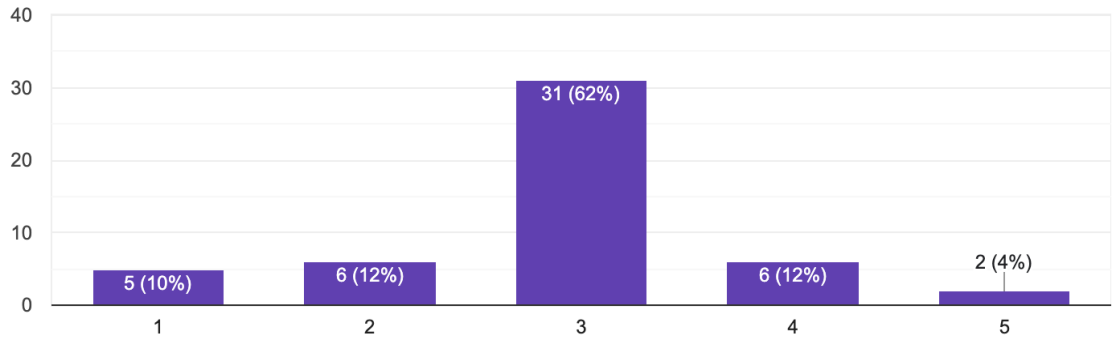
Copy

47 responses



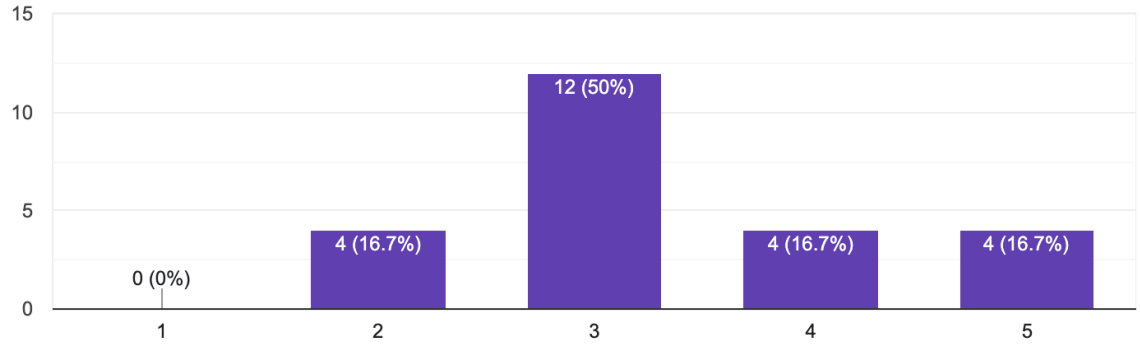
5. How satisfied are you with the businesses and services available in Williamstown? Copy

50 responses



6. *If applicable:* How satisfied are you with the existing childcare options? Copy

24 responses



7. How satisfied are you with the parks, open space lands, and recreational offerings in Williamstown (including cultural and social programs, sports, trails, fields, parks, etc.)? Copy

50 responses

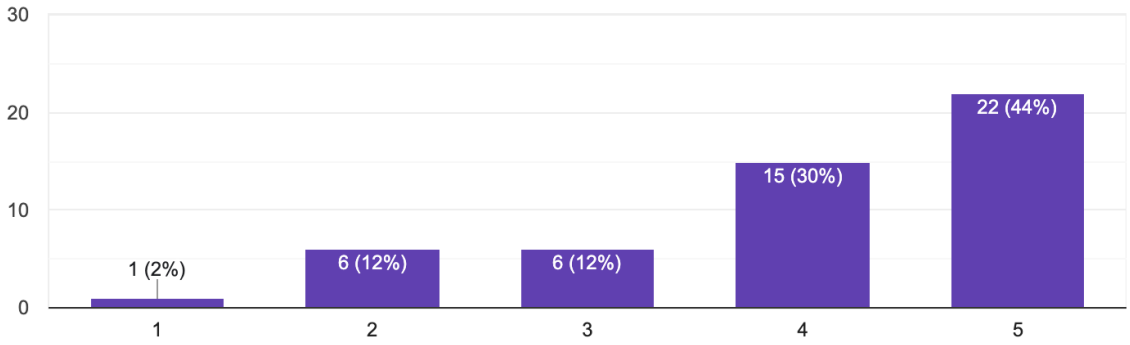


Figure 8: Outreach at the Harper Center.