2. PUBLIC PROCESS

Considering the ideas and aspirations of the public was at the heart of the planning process. An extensive public engagement effort yielded ideas that contributed to the development of the vision for the community. These ideas, values, and aspirations provided the foundation from which the Plan principles and objectives were derived.

Through this outreach campaign, more than 400 community members contributed their ideas and desires for the future of Wooster. Over 500 ideas were generated during this process through various input activities as described within this chapter.

2.1

public meetings

Overview

The City and Planning Team organized two public meetings to communicate the comprehensive planning process and to gather input and recommendations from the public. The meetings were designed to elicit open and transparent responses from the general public, City staff, and City officials. The public meetings involved an accessible approach, allowing citizens ample opportunity to share their hopes, visions, and ideas for the future of Wooster.
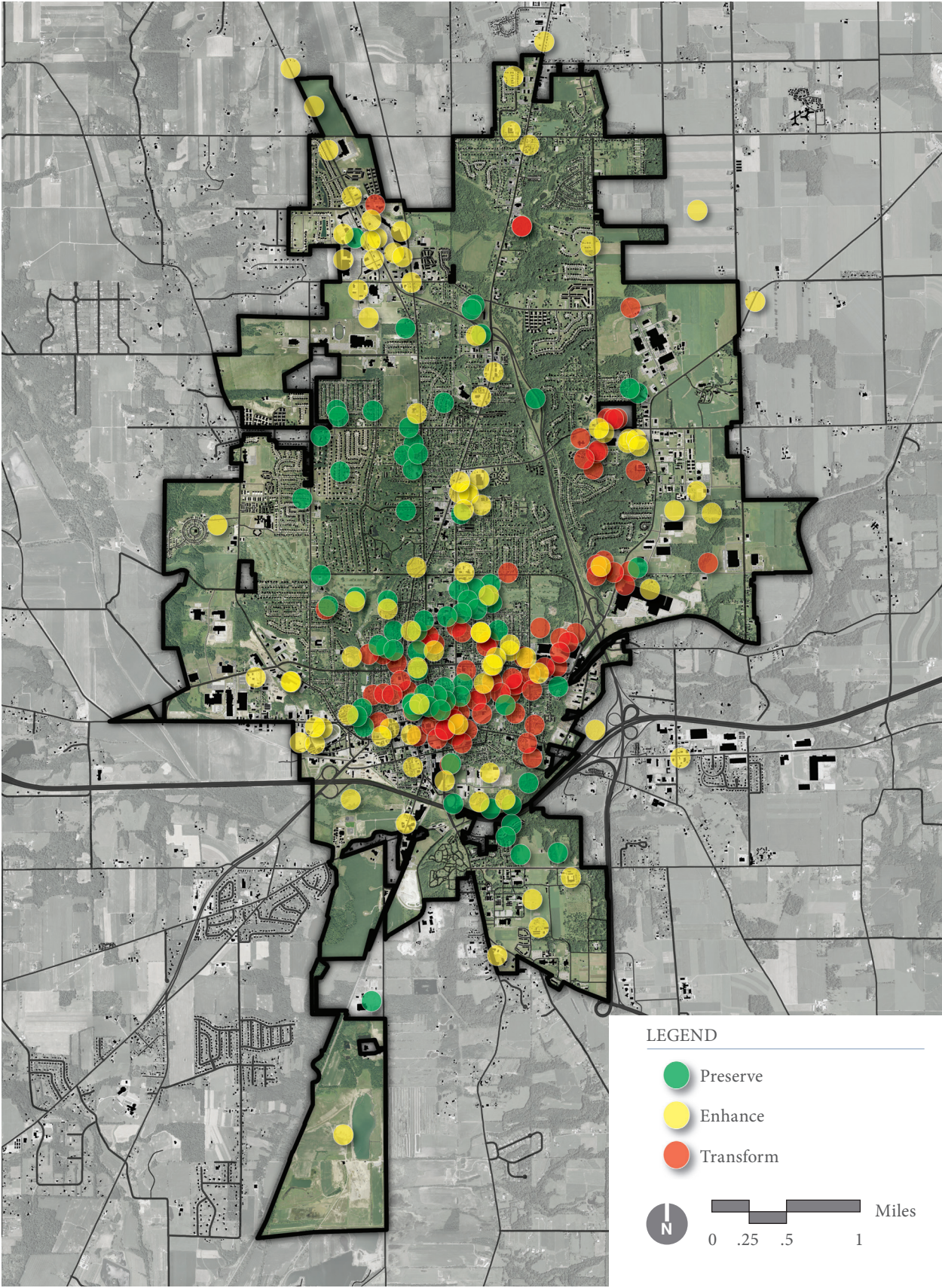
Public Meeting #1

The first public meeting encouraged participants to "think big", asking participants to consider the kind of community in which they want to live in the future. The meeting had two components; a presentation to give an overview of the planning process, key existing conditions findings, and an explanation of current trends affecting similar communities, followed by small group work during which participants worked with coordinators to generate ideas.

Participants within the small groups were asked to share their vision for the future of Wooster through an open idea generation activity as well as a mapping exercise. Participants were asked to place three different colored dots on a map of Wooster to signify areas they would like to see preserved (kept as is), enhanced (given a "facelift") or transformed (changed entirely). Figure 2.1 shows the compiled results of all mapping exercises undertaken throughout the planning process.

Public Meeting #2

The second public meeting offered the general citizenry an opportunity to review the draft policies of the updated Plan. The meeting utilized an open house format providing participants an opportunity to react directly to drafts of the Plan. Chapters and elements were displayed on large boards throughout the meeting and participants were asked to comment on each element of the Plan. Participants were also able to speak directly to the Consultant Team and City Staff about specific portions of the Plan.

PUBLIC OUTREACH - OVERVIEW

More than 400 community members participated in the planning process, contributing hundreds of ideas, and sharing their community values and aspirations for the future.

A variety of public input strategies were employed as part of this process, including the following methods:

- 100+ online participants, with more than 6,000 page views

- 300 telephone survey respondents

- 7 Steering Committee Mtgs. - 21 members

- 2 Public Meetings

- 1 Main Street Wooster Meeting

Figure 2.1: Mapping Activity Results

LEGEND

● Preserve

● Enhance

● Transform

N

Miles

0   .25   .5   1

2.2

steering committee meetings

Steering Committee members working on a small group exercise.

Steering Committee members working on a small group exercise.

A Steering Committee of 21 members was established to guide and inform the development of the Plan. A total of six Steering Committee meetings were held, each focusing on a unique step of the planning process. Each meeting built upon the previous meeting, resulting in a linear and iterative process in which members created the elements of the Plan. Below is a brief description of each meeting.

Meetings 1-3

The first three meetings were focused on orienting the Steering Committee to the project, including scope, schedule, and the overall purpose of the comprehensive plan update. These meetings included idea generation and mapping exercises as described in Public Meeting 1, as well as a detailed review of the existing conditions in the City for each element of the Plan.

The telephone survey was also developed and launched, and key findings were presented to the Steering Committee within the first three meetings. Meetings served as a project kick-off, where the Planning Team and City staff developed web and phone survey questions and reviewed existing conditions and findings from Wooster's previous comprehensive plan.

Meetings 4-7

The final Steering Committee meetings were aimed at identifying principles, objectives, and actions in order to complete the Plan. Committee members completed worksheets individually and worked in small groups to determine principles, objectives, and actions. These results were used to determine the implementation strategies found later in the Plan.

The Committee also completed worksheets to provide feedback on Priority Development Areas. The worksheets aimed to identify appropriate boundaries, existing conditions, design intent, possible concepts, and other areas on which to focus. These meetings were an important driver to the Priority Development chapter found later in this document.
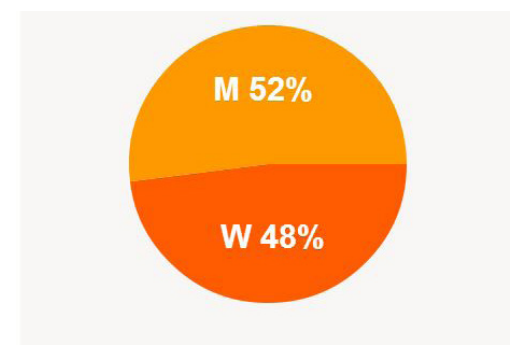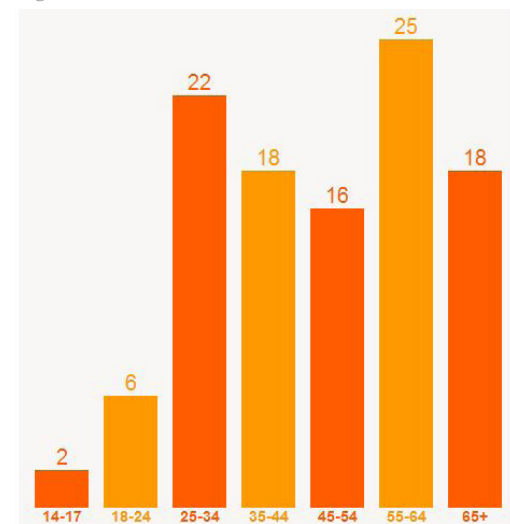
2.3

mindmixer

An interactive online engagement website was developed as part of this project. The purpose of the website was to provide a platform for engaging community members and to offer the public the convenience of joining a discussion from their own homes. The website created an opportunity for the continuation of discussions from previous meetings between City Staff, consultants, and citizens. Citizens were encouraged to visit and interact with the project website throughout the project.

During the course of the project citizens were engaged in a two-part format. In the first phase, the website was used to discuss and identify "big ideas" in Wooster, which provided guidance on what the public envisioned for the future of their community. The second phase involved citizens commenting on the major policy ideas and draft chapters of the Plan. The comments and ideas from the public during the second phase were considered by the Planning Team and Steering Committee and integrated into the Plan as appropriate.

Figure 2.2: MindMixer Traffic Reports

TOTAL TRAFFIC

Unique Visitors

1,051

Page Views

6,421

YOUR AVERAGE PARTICIPANT IS...

Male

48 Years Old

Living in these Postal Codes:

44691, 43230, 43054

Gender

M 52%

W 48%

Age

14-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
2	6	22	18	16	25	18

2.4

telephone survey

A 40 question telephonic survey was conducted as part of the public input process. The survey was conducted to solicit more targeted feedback from citizens, which provided strategic insight into the attitudes and beliefs of community members, as well as their level of satisfaction with specific City services.

Residents were randomly selected and interviewed telephonically. A total of 300 interviews were completed over five days, generating statistically sound results within a 5.63% margin of error 95% of the time. The 40 question survey took the average respondent 12.5 minutes to complete.

Figure 2.4: Profile of Respondents
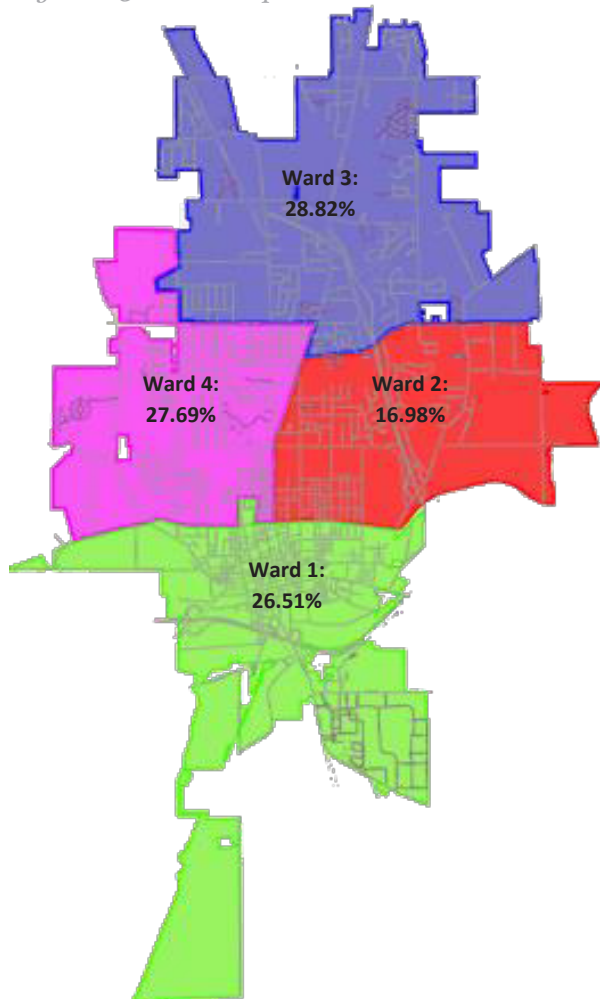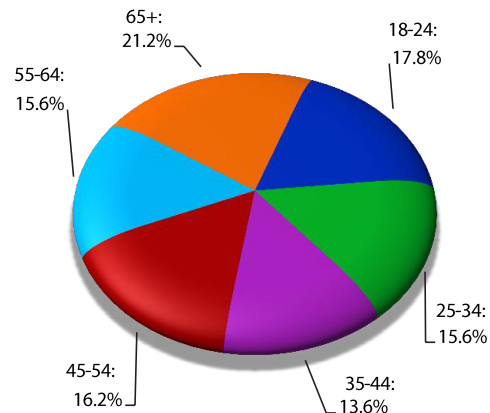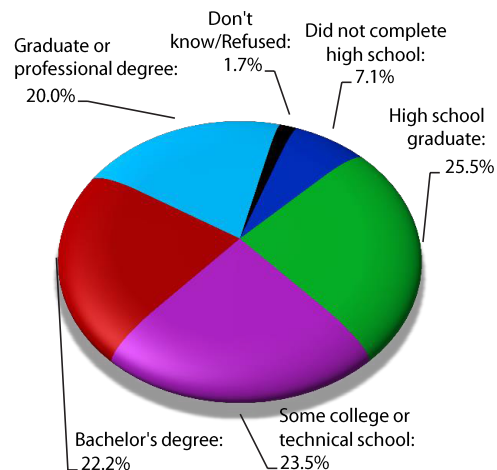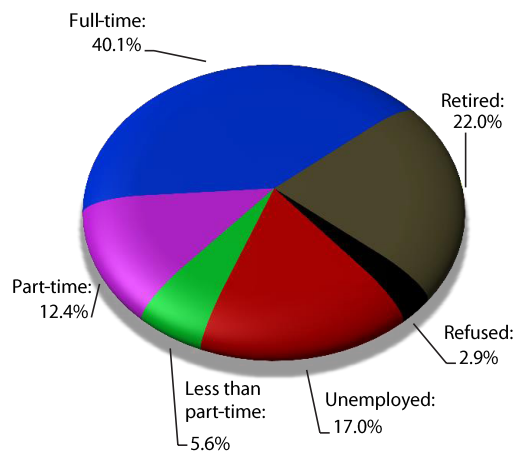
Age:

Figure 2.3: Ward Map

Ward 3: 28.82%

Ward 4: 27.69%

Ward 2: 16.98%

Ward 1: 26.51%

Level of Education:

Employment Status:
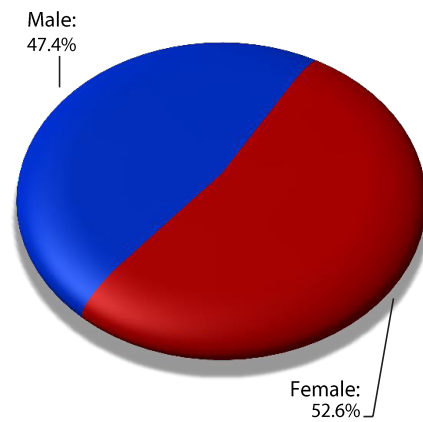
Full-time:
40.1%

Retired:
22.0%

Part-time:
12.4%

Refused:
2.9%

Less than
part-time:
5.6%

Unemployed:
17.0%

Gender:

Male:
47.4%

Female:
52.6%

Residents in household:

Five:
8.0%

Six:
1.6%

Seven:
4.0%

Four:
18.2%

Don't know /
refused:
1.6%

Three:
19.2%

One:
21.2%

Two:
26.3%

Time living in Wooster:

Don't
know/Refused:
0.7%

Less than 1 year:
1.4%

1-5 years:
6.0%

6-10 years:
10.8%

Over 20 years:
57.0%

11-20 years:
24.0%

Home ownership:

Own home:
71.1%

Don't know /
refused:
1.6%

Don't own home:
27.2%

Household Income:

$80,001 - 99,999:
11.9%

$100,000 or more:
7.6%

$60,001 - 80,000:
8.9%

$40,001 - 60,000:
21.9%

Don't know
/ refused
13.5%

Less than
$20,000:
14.1%

$20,001-40,000:
22.0%
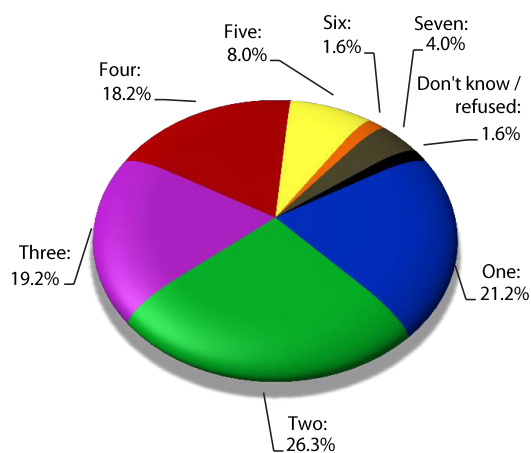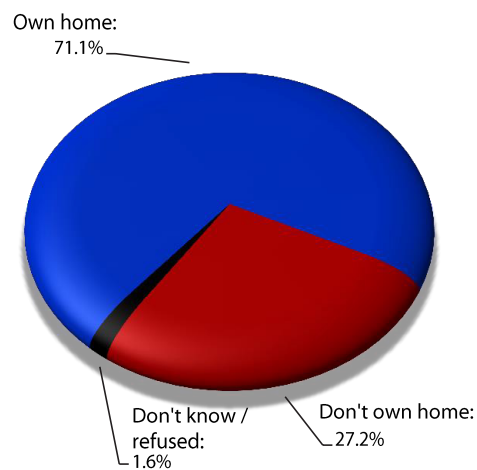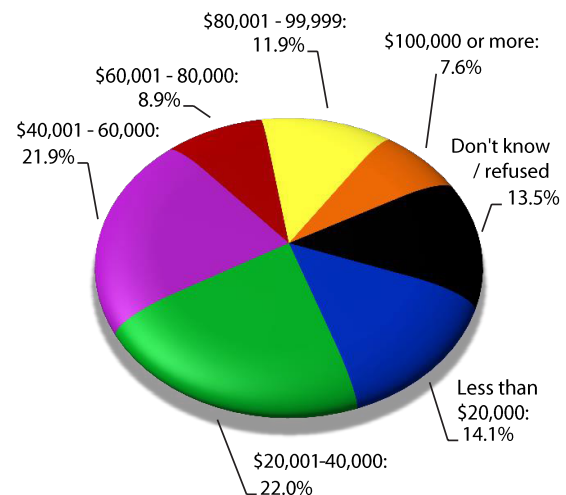
2.5

what did we learn?

Overview

As part of the planning process, public input was compiled and reviewed then used to develop key themes. This section includes a general overview of these key themes as well as a breakdown of the key themes by each chapter of the Plan. These key themes directly inform the Plan principles and objectives throughout this Plan.

Happy in Wooster

64% of citizens believe Wooster is headed in the right direction, while 21% believe it's on the wrong track. A 3:1 ratio of 'right direction' to 'wrong track' respondents indicates citizens are generally happy living in the City of Wooster and there is relative political stability. Citizens indicate they like Wooster's small town ambiance and friendly people most of all. Notwithstanding, there does appear to be some disparity between wards. Wards 1 and 3 have the most content citizens, while Wards 2 and 4 indicate a greater degree of discontent. Ward 4 citizens harbor the most negativity, with nearly twice the number of citizens believing things are on the wrong track than the City as a whole. There was also some disparity between age groups with citizens age 25-34 being most content and those 45-54 the most negative.

Mid-Career Concerns

Citizens are split over whether Wooster has the right mix of jobs and employment opportunities to support their families for the next ten years. 49% of residents say the jobs they need are present, while over 40% indicate concern. Women have quite a bit more anxiety about the situation with a majority reporting they do not believe Wooster has the right mix of jobs to support them in the future. Most notably is that residents age 35-54 exhibit the most apprehension about their future job prospects in Wooster. The lack of perceived career opportunities by 63% of those age 45-54 is noteworthy and presents an important planning consideration because they tend to be the highest earners contributing to the Wooster tax base. Job creation is by far the highest priority for citizens when they consider their quality of life in Wooster and an absolute imperative for the 45-54 demographic.

Redevelopment, Not Expansion

The citizens of Wooster have great clarity when it comes to their preference for future development. Nearly two-thirds indicate future development should be focused on redeveloping older areas near Downtown and another 18% want infill development within the city limits. Only 12% of residents believe expanding the city boundaries through annexation should be a priority. While there is a lack of consensus about what part of town should be

the highest priority for new development, it is clear that citizens perceive that plenty of in-fill and redevelopment opportunities exist and should be considered before expansion beyond the current city boundaries.

It's All Here! (Almost)

Nearly three-quarters of Wooster residents find the goods and services they regularly require locally. 85% of men see no need to travel beyond Wooster to meet their needs. In contrast, 61% of women and 40% of younger residents stay local. Medical services, retail diversity, and restaurants are the primary draw for those who feel they need to leave Wooster for the goods and services they require.

Downtown is the Cultural Center

Downtown Wooster truly serves as the cultural center of the City and a regular destination for the majority of citizens. Over half of residents report going Downtown 'all the time' and over 81% of them visit Downtown at least a couple times a month. Citizens primarily visit downtown to enjoy the restaurants, retail stores, entertainment, and the library. Not surprisingly, residents want more of the same. 73% of residents report that more retail, entertainment, and restaurants would encourage them to more frequently head Downtown. Finally, citizens note a desire for additional parking Downtown to make frequenting it's destinations more convenient.

Connectivity and Sustainability Matter

Nearly 74% of residents say connectivity is important with 52% indicating it is 'very important.' The vast majority of men and women in Wooster agree that it is essential that the community be connected with sidewalks, bike paths, and recreational trails. It is also clear that interest in these connections will only intensify over time. Over 80% of residents between the ages of 18 and 34 believe connectivity is important compared to 65% of senior citizens. It is equally important to the citizens of Wooster that the community become more sustainable by emphasizing green practices and policies. Over 69% of residents believe being a sustainable community is important. Women and the younger generations feel even stronger about it with 72% of women and 100% of 18-24 year olds signifying the importance of green practices.

City Services and Safety Viewed Positively

The City of Wooster gained high marks across the board for its many services and utilities. Of particular note is the high opinion of Wooster's public safety forces that directly contribute to the fact that 86% of residents feel safe and secure in the community. The only guidance relative to city services of note is the fact that some residents believe property maintenance is an issue and should be targeted on the south end of town.

A Family Town

Wooster is, by all accounts, a family town. 65% of residents believe when it comes to homes and amenities available in the community, it is families who are most attracted to making their home in Wooster. While 49% of citizens believe that families is exactly what Wooster should continue to attract, over 40% believe the community needs to attract more young professionals.

Future Priorities

In addition to guidance on redevelopment, connectivity and sustainability, residents provided some insight into the types of jobs they would prefer to see more of in the future. Nearly a third of residents want Wooster to attract light manufacturing jobs, while another third want more education and technology-oriented opportunities.

It is clear that the citizens of Wooster love their community and want to see it continue to evolve to provide even more opportunities for them to comfortably live, work, and play for generations to come. It is equally clear that economic development must be a priority and that it, more than any other consideration, has a significant impact on the ability of citizens to achieve their career goals without leaving town. The anxiety of those mid-career residents who are most invested in the community can be countered with a diversified and expanding job base that can support their next steps and their families. Equally important to consider is the next generation and whether they see Wooster as a place they can stay their whole life, rather than come back to later in life.

These challenges, and others, can be overcome with vision, leadership, planning, and innovative thinking. The citizens of Wooster have confidence in their city's leadership and are willing partners in building a community that continues to progress and thrive.