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FINDINGS AND KEY QUESTIONS

Findings

- A huge outreach effort got the Comprehensive Plan process off to a strong start. Over 1,700 people who live, work, and play in Normal responded to the PlanIt Normal survey. Thousands more encountered the planning process through a variety of media and community meetings and events. Respondents shared what they like and want to see improved; the factors most important to them when choosing a neighborhood; and their priorities for the Town's future.

- Broadly speaking, respondents characterized Normal as a safe, quiet, family-friendly town with good schools and friendly neighborhoods—much like a small town in that respect—with city-like amenities in the form of excellent higher education institutions, and a long list of cultural, shopping, and entertainment options. Uptown Normal, the Constitution Trail (and other walking and biking infrastructure), and parks and recreation facilities were particular magnets for positive comments. The Town's leadership was frequently commended for its future-oriented thinking and effective implementation of ambitious plans.

- Certain neighborhood qualities, such as safety and cleanliness, affordable housing, walkability, attractive public spaces, parks, schools and proximity to work, are almost universally desirable. Other factors were particularly important to certain demographic groups. For example, aging in place was rated highly by people aged 45 and up; public transportation was rated most highly by lower income respondents.

- The survey revealed relatively few pressing concerns. Most were calls to build on the Town's existing amenities: infrastructure maintenance, more Uptown redevelopment, more bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, increased access to public transit, and curbside recycling for apartments, among others. There was some disagreement between student and non-student respondents regarding housing and law enforcement issues.

Key Questions

- How can the Town continue to maintain its balance of a small town feel and big-city amenities as it grows? How can the Town continue to improve its quality of place, which is highly regarded by its residents, in an era of dwindling resources? How can residents participate?

- How can the varied priorities expressed by different demographic groups be accommodated? How can the Town continue to balance the sometimes conflicting needs and preferences of students and non-students? What role should the university play?

- As the Town plans the development of future neighborhoods, how inclusive can they be in terms of age, income, race and ethnicity?

- How should the Town continue to balance infrastructure maintenance and upgrades with the ongoing expansion of infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation?

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During the community outreach phase, a variety of traditional and electronic methods were used to engage residents in this planning process. These outreach efforts are critical to understanding the community's needs and crafting a vision for the future. The PlanIt Normal community survey, shown in Figure 2.1.1, was a core tool during this process.

The survey design; distribution; data processing; and an analysis of the survey results are included in this chapter. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the information collected from more than 30 key stakeholder groups.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

SURVEY DESIGN

The survey was composed of a mix of open-response (short answer) and multiple-choice questions (see Fig. 2.1.1). Two open-response (Q3 and Q4) and two multiple-choice (Q5 and Q6) questions formed the core of the survey; the rest were demographic questions to provide context.

The open-response questions allowed respondents to express, in their own words, what they like about Normal (Q3) and what they want to see improved (Q4). Answers to an open-response "additional comments" question (Q13) were re-

Figure 2.1.1. Snapshot of the survey instrument

It is time to update the Town of Normal Comprehensive Plan. We want to hear your ideas, hopes, and dreams for the future of Normal.

To take the survey online or to check the progress of the plan, visit:

www.PlanItNormal.com

@PlanItNormal @PlanIt_Normal

PlanIt Normal

#planitNORMAL

1. What brought you to Normal or the area?
   ○ Work ○ Student ○ Family ○ Lifestyle aspects _____ *(like Schools, Arts & Culture)*
2. How long have you lived here?
   ○ Less than 5 years ○ 5 to 15 years ○ More than 15 years ○ Lifelong resident
3. What about living in Normal or the area do you like the most?
   _____
4. What issues would you like to see addressed immediately in Normal?
   _____

5. Which of the following factors did you consider when choosing the neighborhood in which you live? Please rate the following factors.

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Quality public schools	○	○	○
Parks and recreational opportunities nearby	○	○	○
Walking distance to destinations such as the university, restaurants, and public facilities	○	○	○
Cleanliness and safety	○	○	○
Affordability of housing	○	○	○
Historic home or historic neighborhood	○	○	○
Ability to live in my house as I get older	○	○	○
Neighborhood with :			
Mixture of housing types (single family, townhomes, apartments)	○	○	○
Racial and ethnic diversity	○	○	○
Mixture of ages and incomes	○	○	○
Connections to the Constitution Trail	○	○	○
Attractive public spaces that foster interaction among neighbors	○	○	○
Features such as sidewalks that encourage walking	○	○	○
Public transportation- access and frequency	○	○	○
Schools within walking distance	○	○	○
Proximity to work	○	○	○

6. As we look into the future of the community, what should be the top priorities? Please rate these priorities.

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Stable Economy: Efforts to attract, retain, and expand employment opportunities and investment in the area.	○	○	○
Regional Cooperation: Increased collaboration among public entities, higher education institutions and the private sector.	○	○	○
Support for Existing Neighborhoods: Continuous efforts to enhance existing neighborhoods for long-term fiscal and environmental sustainability.	○	○	○
Healthy Community: Promotion of active and healthy lifestyles through access to healthy/nutritious food, recreational opportunities, and healthcare facilities.	○	○	○
Environmental Sustainability: Protection of our natural resources such as air, water, and farmland.	○	○	○
Human Elements: Cooperative efforts to establish an inclusive community that addresses the diverse needs of its residents.	○	○	○
Transportation Alternatives: A regional transportation system that expands public transit and is designed to accommodate vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles.	○	○	○
Arts, Culture and History: Incorporation of arts, culture and history into the fabric of our community.	○	○	○
Technology: Access to high-speed internet connections via broadband and other emerging technologies.	○	○	○

6. Your Age: ○ 17 & under ○ 18-24 ○ 25-34 ○ 35-44 ○ 45-54 ○ 55-64 ○ 65+
7. I identify my gender as: ○ Female ○ Male ○ Other: _____ (please specify)
8. Home Ownership: ○ Owner ○ Renter
9. Highest Level of Education: ○ No high school diploma or GED ○ High school diploma or GED ○ Some college ○ Bachelor's degree ○ Graduate degree ○ Other: _____
10. Annual Household Income: ○ Under $30,000 ○ $30,000 - $60,000 ○ $60,000 - $100,000 ○ More than $100,000
11. If English is not your primary language, please list:
12. Please provide your address or nearest intersection:
13. Additional Comments:

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RESPONDENTS PROFILE

1,718 RESPONSES RECEIVED

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO NORMAL OR THE AREA?

- Work 37%
- Family 26%
- Student 31%
- Lifestyle Aspects 6%

HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED HERE?

- Less than 5 yrs. 31%
- 5 to 15 yrs. 22%
- More than 15 yrs. 32%
- Lifelong Resident 15%

ANNUAL INCOME?

OWNER VS. RENTER

OWNER VS. RENTER

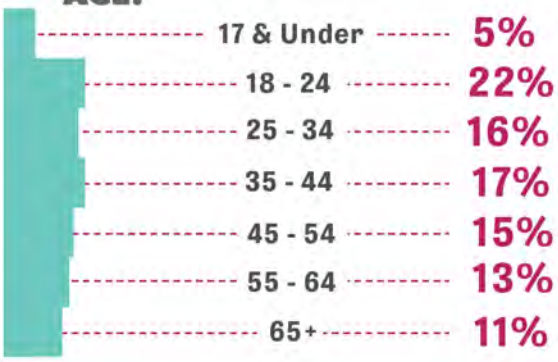
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

- No High School or GED 3%
- High School diploma or GED 8%
- Some college 26%
- Bachelor's degree 33%
- Graduate degree 27%
- Other 3%

FEMALE VS. MALE

61% FEMALE VS. 39% MALE

AGE?



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viewed as well. The multiple-choice questions, meanwhile, aimed to establish Normal residents' preferences and priorities on an array of issues of interest to both planners and the general public, particularly those related to physical growth and development. The housing, transportation, and land use sections of the final plan will be shaped in part by the answers to these questions.

It is important to note that this is not a controlled scientific survey, meaning that the respondent pool is not a demographically controlled sample of the Town's population. The goal was to reach as many people as possible, not only to gather their input for the plan, but also to highlight the importance of their involvement for the future of the community. Despite targeted outreach efforts, some groups like the college-aged population, males, and residents with low incomes were underrepresented.

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

The McLean County Regional Planning Commission and the Town of Normal worked together to disseminate the survey through multiple channels, both in paper form and electronically. Over 1,700 residents responded to the survey, and the outreach process reached thousands more at home, online, or at community meetings and events.

The paper survey was distributed in a number of ways:

- *Newsline:* The Town of Normal publishes a community newsletter, Newsline, which it delivers to every resident. The September 2015 Newsline included a pull-out survey inside the newsletter for respondents to complete and mail back. The survey also had the URL for the Comprehensive Plan website on the front, so attendees could fill out the survey online if they preferred (see Fig. 2.1.1).
- *Community events and meetings:* Paper surveys were handed out directly at dozens of community events and meetings regarding the Comprehensive Plan.
- *Community partners/stakeholders:* In addition to meeting with and interviewing a wide variety of key stakeholders to gather their input, MCRPC formed partnerships with Connect Transit, ISU, the Normal Public Library, rental property managers, and a variety of social service agencies to distribute the paper survey among their patrons and constituents.

The electronic survey, hosted by SurveyMonkey®, provided another way for individuals to share their thoughts. The survey was accessible through a link that took respondents directly to the survey form. The link was made available through:

- *Town and MCRPC websites*: The Town of Normal and MCRPC made the survey link prominently available on their own websites and on the website for the Comprehensive Plan, www.planitnormal.com.
- *Social media promotion*: MCRPC and the Town of Normal used Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to increase awareness of the Comprehensive Plan process and make the survey link available through those platforms.
- *Community partners*: Community partners

SUMMARY OF OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

27 COMMUNITY PARTNERS

PUBLIC OUTREACH EVENTS **12**

CONDUCTED NEARLY **40** STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

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were free to share the link with constituents or anyone else to whom they were electronically connected.

- *Spanish- and French-language outreach*: Spanish- and French-language versions of the survey were created for the benefit of the Town's Hispanic and Congolese populations, respectively. Unfortunately, the outreach efforts in these languages resulted in no responses.

DATA PROCESSING

The survey data required different types and amounts of processing. SurveyMonkey 's built-in analysis tools were used to analyze the multiple-choice questions. For open-response questions, NVivo, a dedicated qualitative analysis program, was used to code the short answer responses, a process necessary to make it possible to analyze the more than 3,800 responses (two open-response questions and additional comments from over 1700 surveys). This process necessarily involved some simplification and interpretation, but great care was taken to ensure that the resulting codes accurately represented the full responses.

Q3 AND Q4 (LIKES AND IMPROVEMENTS)

Responses to the survey's three open-response questions—Questions 3, 4, and 13 (see Fig. 2.1.1)—reveal much about the attitudes and preferences of Normal residents. This subsection discusses the data gathered from all three of these prompts in order to give a holistic, comprehensive picture of what respondents like and want to see improved in Normal.

The aforementioned coding process made it possible to organize the 3,800-plus responses into several dozen distinct themes. These themes were further distilled into eight broader topic areas: *Small Town Feel with Big City Amenities, Uptown Normal, Economy, Mobility, Community Health, Colleges and Universities, Government, and Infrastructure.* Most of the results are discussed further below under the headings corresponding to these topic areas. In addition, a few general things can be said about the responses that cut across those categories.

Overall, respondents shared largely positive sentiments about living in Normal. Some of this positivity reflects recent developments, most notably the revitalization of Uptown and the expansion of the Constitution Trail. However, many of Normal's most popular amenities—its safety, sense of community, and remarkable variety of educational, entertainment and cultural amenities for a town of its size—have been in place to some extent for decades. Normal's recent changes have reinforced, not altered, its longstanding identity.

Along similar lines, while a few respondents called for the Town to substantially cut taxes and general spending, stop embarking on major capital projects, and focus its efforts on basic city services like infrastructure maintenance, most improvement requests were for more growth and progress or refinements (street resurfacing, more alternative transportation infrastructure, etc.) that will not drastically alter the way the Town operates.

Certain demographic groups exhibited distinct patterns of responses. The clearest patterns in the open-response results manifested around students and senior citizens. Normal's demographic profile skews considerably younger than most cities due to the student population, but like most of the developed world, it is in the midst of a gradual graying of the population (see Section 1: Chapter 2 – Demographics and Projections). Much of the Town's development over the next twenty years will be driven by the needs and preferences of these groups.

SMALL TOWN FEEL WITH BIG CITY AMENITIES

One of the dominant themes emerging from the survey responses is that Normal mixes the traditional benefits of small towns with features typically associated with larger cities. The small town/big city dynamic goes beyond physical size, population, and density, which occupy a middle ground between a small town and a major city. The presence of four colleges and universities, employment options, and a variety of shopping, dining, and arts and entertainment amenities gives Normal a more cosmopolitan feel than is typical in a small town; however, the town still has "small town" or "suburban" features such as low crime, good schools, and a lower cost of living than in larger cities. Respondents were not unanimous in terms of

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ONE

of the dominant themes emerging from the survey responses:

Normal balances many of the traditional benefits of small towns with features typically associated with larger cities.

SMALL TOWN FEEL

AFFORDABILITY
Cost of living is low compared to larger cities, though some worried costs are rising.

CONVENIENCE AND PROXIMITY
Most parts of town are accessible and within a 15 to 20 minute drive of home.

SAFE, CLEAN, AND QUIET
Normal was described as "clean", "safe" and "quiet," either literally or metaphorically.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY
Frequently cited were friendly people and neighborhoods, the presence of old friends and family, community organizations and churches, and a general feeling of being at home.

FAMILY FRIENDLINESS
Good schools, nice neighborhoods, and a variety of family-friendly activities were among the most commonly highlighted amenities.

SHOPPING
The variety of shopping options within a short drive, walk, or ride and the unique small shops are poplar features.

DINING, CAFES, AND BARS
Normal's many options were cited as a favorite feature.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES
Children's Discovery Museum, festivals, and Parks and Recreation facilities like the Aquatic Center were all mentioned as affordable things for families to do.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS
The Sugar Creek Arts Festival, the Sweet Corn Blues Festival, and other public events were listed among opportunities to have fun and meet people.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
The culture and energy of ISU and HCC were cited as postive to the community.

ARTS/CULTURE/ENTERTAINMENT
Music, film, theatre, and sports keep residents entertained. Teenagers and young adults would like more options that fit their interests.

BIG CITY AMENITIES

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which of these features they cited as most attractive. Some liked its city-like attributes, some preferred its small-town traits, and some said they like the balance of the two. The fact that Normal can appeal in such different ways to different groups of people is one of the Town's unique characteristics.

Sample Comments

"The town is the perfect size: between Bloomington and Normal, we have everything we need in terms of shopping, dining and recreation. But together, the twin cities are still small enough to get around, to navigate and to feel like home. "

"Vibrant, young, developing town with a great university. Feels like things are always moving forward/improving. Clean, safe, lots to do for a small town."

"Small but not too small, plenty of culture and events for all age groups."

"A lot to offer families w/o being too big."

UPTOWN

Uptown Normal was by far the most frequently discussed area of town, and one of the most frequently mentioned topics overall. Most comments about Uptown showed satisfaction with what it currently offers. Uptown's cultural amenities, compact and walkable layout, and abundance of available activities were all mentioned often and approvingly. College-aged respondents praised Uptown more than other groups.

Most of the respondents who suggested improvements to Uptown asked for more development or refinement of what is already there. Calls for an Uptown grocery store, development of a currently vacant area ("the Hole in the Ground" or "the Pit"), and suggestions advocating either an overpass or underpass to connect Uptown with the area south of the tracks are all examples of such comments. A few respondents criticized the inconvenience of parking at certain facilities (the Library, Uptown Station, and the Children's Discovery Museum, most notably).

The ongoing development in Uptown has encountered vocal opposition in some quarters. Among respondents critical of the Uptown redevelopment efforts, many are philosophically opposed to what they view as a government that funds "flashy" projects over essentials.

Sample Comments - Likes

"…I have largely supported all of Normal's Uptown revamping. It's a beautiful uptown. I enjoy visiting the shops, I've spent countless hours at the CDM, the variety of restaurants is nice, and it just looks so much nicer than it did 15 years ago…"

"…Uptown is hip but approachable. As a parent of young children, I feel confident taking them to events in Uptown and exposing them to the great cultural opportunities available without worrying about feeling out of place among the college-age crowd…"

"...Walking around the Uptown area is the highlight of this city to me. There's a sense of community, of culture...In a sense, I feel like I'm connected to the community...."

"...Love hanging around the Uptown Circle when it's warm out."

Sample Comments - Improvements

"Continued uptown development - go under the railroad tracks, more new construction on the circle and trail. Get a medium size employer to locate uptown."

"…Keep the public library in uptown and increase parking."

"…grocery store in Uptown or closer to campus…"

ECONOMY

The responses to Question 6 (discussed later in the chapter) made it clear that respondents place high value on the stability of the local economy. Normal and the BN metro area have proved to have a stronger and more shock-resistant economy than other parts of the state and country. Perhaps as a result of this strength, only 15% of respondents directly discussed the state of the regional economy in the open-ended responses.

Of these 15%, a little over half called for

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NEARLY **1/3** of all respondents addressed **UPTOWN** and related subjects

Uptown appeals to every demographic, but 18-24 year olds were drawn to it slightly more than others

70% Love Uptown As Is

30% Suggested Improvements

WHAT PEOPLE LIKE ABOUT UPTOWN

UPTOWN CIRCLE
The circle and the activities that take place in the circle were almost always mentioned positively. Respondents appreciated the **sustainable elements** featured in the circle and the **unique culture** it brings to the community.

ACCESSIBILITY
People love the **Constitution Trail** connection to Uptown, its **pedestrian and bike friendliness** augmented by its **central location,** and its close **proximity to campus.**

ATTRACTIONS
Respondents like the variety of Uptown's **shops & restaurants**, including the many small businesses that create unique community culture. Community facilities like the **Normal Theater** and the **Children's Museum** are popular attractions.

REDEVELOPMENT
Respondents enjoyed the recent **redevelopment and rebranding** of Uptown. Many looked forward to additional growth and progress here.

ACTIVITIES
Uptown is viewed as a "fun place to be" with an abundance of things to do. **Loungeabout in the Roundabout, summer activities, the music scene, and events and festivals** are all cited positively.

LIBRARY
Many respondents appreciated the Library and suggested expanding it, preferably in Uptown. Many urged improving the parking situation.

IMPROVEMENT SUGGESTIONS

PARKING & TRAFFIC PATTERNS
About a quarter of the improvement suggestions for Uptown revolved around the need for additional on-street parking or fixing traffic patterns.

UPTOWN DEVELOPMENT
Many respondents wanted to see "The Pit" redeveloped. Some respondents were eager to see improvements on the south side of the tracks, as well as access improvements either under or over the tracks.

GROCERY STORE
A few respondents wanted to see a grocery store in or around Uptown close to the campus

WATCH SPENDING
Contrary to the sentiment among most respondents, a few suggested reining in the spending in Uptown.

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improvements. Most frequently mentioned were affordability and cost of living issues; in general, respondents seemed to consider the cost of living sufficiently low except in the realm of housing, where many (especially students) complained about high rents and others (especially seniors) about property taxes. Employment was a less frequent topic of discussion, although some pointed to the announcement of the imminent Mitsubishi plant closure and uncertainty regarding State Farm's future presence in the community as causes for concern. Comments touching on Normal's business community were largely positive. Respondents liked the Town's small businesses, many of which are clustered Uptown. A few respondents suggested measures to attract more businesses to the community.

While most respondents did not address Normal's economic status directly, they did frequently talk about community features that are important to the local economy. For example, hundreds of respondents discussed schools, higher education, and the student population. Similarly, hundreds of respondents talked about Uptown, a key focus of development initiatives in recent years and a center for economic activity. On these issues more indirectly related to the state of the economy, residents were typically very positive.

A few respondents noted the convenience of the Town's location within two to three hours of Chicago, St. Louis, and Indianapolis. Though it was not generally mentioned by respondents, this central location is one of Normal's fundamental economic advantages.

In sum, respondents frequently expressed their appreciation of specific features and amenities that contribute to the local economy, but they generally did not talk about the status of the economy as a whole unless they had major concerns.

Sample Comments - Likes

"A lot of opportunities with good employment and universities"

"Lots of small local shops and restaurants (we love Uptown!)"

"Moderate home prices"

"...great schools, lots of free or inexpensive entertainment/programs"

Sample Comments - Improvements

"Housing/renting costs, especially anywhere remotely close to campus areas. Increase job opportunities for blue collar workers, especially with Mitsubishi closing."

"Cost of living has been great, but is beginning to go up which is of a concern."

"Repurposing abandoned/run down companies, buildings and home areas to improve the safety of the town, the appearance of the area and provide new jobs for the area."

"concerns with SF moving so many people to other cities"

MOBILITY

Roughly 45% of survey responses were related to transportation in Normal and the B-N metro area. Responses covered both how long it takes to get across town in a car and the quality and availability of features that facilitate walking, biking, and public transit. These responses came in the context of increasing public debate about how to strike the correct balance between supporting the dominant auto-oriented infrastructure and encouraging alternative modes.

Cars: Among respondents who discussed traveling by car, most appreciated the limited street traffic and congestion that allow them to easily commute to work and travel across the community in a short period of time. However, a large number of respondents criticized the surface quality of the streets and roads. Some also highlighted problems with parking, traffic signals, and street layout in certain areas of the community (particularly Uptown and near campus).

Alternative modes of transportation: The Constitution Trail, on-street bicycle infrastructure, and walkability around Uptown and the campus area were mostly identified as "likes." However, many respondents identified room for improvement. Common improvement suggestions in these areas

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included Constitution Trail expansions; safer intersections between Constitution Trail and streets; more on-street bike lanes and sharrows; improved driver awareness of bicyclists and motorists; and improved quality and availability of sidewalks. Some also asked for bus service improvements, including better accessibility for people with disabilities, longer daily hours of operation, and Sunday service (the latter two being of particular concern to students and low-income respondents).

Sample Comments - Likes

"I like being able to walk down the trail to Uptown and back. I like the shops in Uptown and being able to walk to library…"

"…Easy to get around town by car..."

"…easy to get around by bike or bus if you live in the central part of town…"

"…light traffic, centralized Uptown…"

Sample Comments - Improvements

"…More connected Constitution Trails. Bike lanes on major throughways."

"Continuing to improve the alternative transportation opportunities, including bikes, walking, and bus. This will require culture change around driving as well."

"I would like to see sidewalk/street crossing improvements, particularly in older areas…"

"More bike education for community, rules of the road for bikes … maybe through DMV."

"Public transportation such as the city buses should run on Sundays. Just because it is Sunday does not mean that hard working people don't have work. I personally depend on public transportation to get to school, work, and home."

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Public health is affected by a myriad of factors, including innate personal traits, lifestyle choices, social forces, living and working conditions, and the health of the natural environment (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991). Many of these factors can be addressed through planning, improving health outcomes. This subsection covers the more than 40% of responses most relevant to the health of the community: community facilities that affect physical and mental health, social conditions, and the natural environment.

Personal health: Fitness amenities such as Normal's many parks and the Constitution Trail were among the most commonly identified "Likes" in this survey. As discussed in the Mobility subsection, respondents generally appreciated the existing on-street bike infrastructure and walkability circa Uptown, but many respondents requested continued expansion of bike infrastructure, along with better sidewalks and crossings and expanded public transportation.

A few respondents expressed appreciation for available local food options (such as farmers markets and restaurants sourcing local food), but more called for an increase in the number of such options.

Given the ongoing debate in local government and the local media about the county's mental health care crisis, it is perhaps surprising that only a few respondents discussed this issue. Those who did so unanimously called for more and better mental health services.

Relatively few respondents discussed the Town's major healthcare systems, OSF and Advocate BroMenn. Those who did generally said that they like having their healthcare providers nearby.

Social health: Individual and community health can also be affected by social issues such as homelessness, crime, or inequality based on age, race, ethnicity, income, and other criteria. These issues were not among those most frequently discussed by respondents, but some did call for the Town to increase its efforts to address these problems. On the positive side of the ledger, respondents generally appreciated Normal's "sense of community" (i.e., elements of social cohesion such as the friendliness of neighbors, community pride, and opportunities to be socially involved).

Environmental health: Comments about environmental health primarily touched on recycling.

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Less frequent topics included greenhouse gas and other pollution; the effect of sprawling development on McLean County's prime farmland; and vestiges of the natural environment, such as trees. As mentioned in the Colleges and Universities subsection, college-aged respondents were particularly concerned about recycling, as many student apartment complexes do not have recycling receptacles on-site.

These responses likely understate the degree to which the respondents value environmental stewardship. As demonstrated by the responses to Question 6, respondents believe environmental sustainability should be one of the Town's highest priorities over the next 20 years (see Q6 results).

Sample Comments - Likes

"...Access to good medical care…"

"Trails, bike friendly … ease of recycling…"

"…I think Normal is one of the most pro-active communities in the area in addressing the environment…"

"Constitution Trail gets me outside daily."

"great people, Town spirit, still has somewhat of a small-town feel"

"The mature trees..."

Sample Comments - Improvements

"More access to recycling for students in off-campus apartments"

"…food desert (maybe bring back the farmers market)?"…

"I think addressing the needs of the low income population is important –from affordable housing, to dental care, to educational opportunities."

"… Expand options for senior citizens living alone. Optimally, locate near small groceries and other services, to facilitate walking."

"Avoid sprawl. McLean County has the best farmland in the world."

"...Protection of natural resources. More green spaces & prairie restoration."

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Higher education institutions are vital to Normal's identity. Roughly 40% of residents are enrolled in and thousands more are employed by ISU and the community's other three colleges and universities. Roughly 20% of survey responses mentioned colleges and universities or the student population, with responses going beyond the obvious educational benefits to discuss the institutions' cultural influence, relations between students and the rest of the Town, and collaboration between ISU and Town leadership.

Institutions: Respondents discussing higher education institutions were generally happy to be living in a college town with the attendant educational, cultural, and entertainment benefits. Most comments concerned ISU, though a few also discussed one or more of the other three institutions. A few respondents complained that ISU leadership has too much influence over Town policy, but more called for increased cooperation between ISU and the Town.

Students: Students and their concerns were almost as frequent a topic of discussion as the schools themselves. The tenor of these comments varied considerably based on the source. Students were typically happy with the Town (particularly Uptown, which is adjacent to campus and more popular with 18-24-year-olds than with any other group) and proud of being at ISU. However, some were displeased with what they see as unfair treatment at the hands of police, whether based on their student status or due to race. Perhaps the most common area of concern for students is housing. Many complained about high rents and a lack of recycling facilities at student-oriented apartment complexes. ISU Greek organizations lobbied for easing of zoning restrictions to enable more Greek housing near campus.

Non-students had mixed opinions of the student population. Some detailed noise concerns, obtrusive student housing, and other ways in which the student presence can disrupt neigh-

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About **43%** of respondents discussed issues relating to personal, social, or environmental health.

HEALTH

55% Like the Healthy Living Options

Constitution Trail

Mentioned by over 15% of respondents comments regarding the trail were generally positive.

Respondents use the trail for fitness, transportation, and recreation.

Typical improvement suggestions included expansion of the trail and on-street bike network, safer trail and road intersections, and more connections to popular places around town.

Environmental Stewardship

Normal's trees and green space and the Town's recent commitment to sustainability were usually mentioned as positives.

But some respondents would like more active efforts to reduce emmissions, conserve farmland, and the natural areas.

Parks

Responses were overwhelmingly positve and characterized the parks as attractive, fun, and provided facilities for physical activity.

Recycling

Current recycling efforts received mostly positive responses; college students requested more recycling options in the apartment complexes.

45% Suggested Improvements

Healthy Food Options

Not mentioned often; respondents did note options were limited; a few specifically asked for grocery stores in Uptown or near campus.

Mental Health

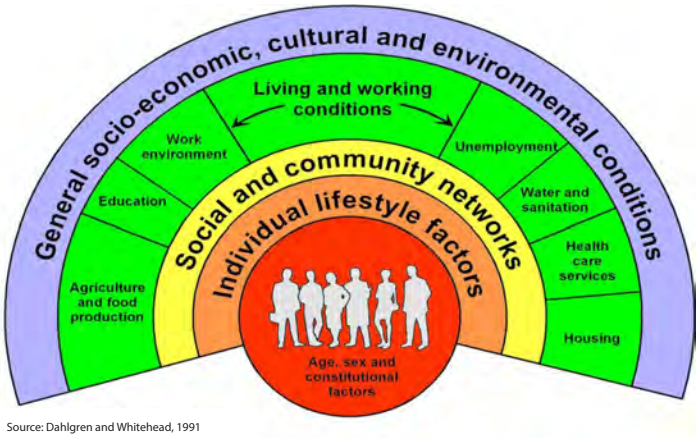
Infrequently discussed; most comments in this area called for better and more available mental health services.

Recreational Facilities

A small number of respondents asked for more indoor recreational facilities and activies to get through the winter months.

Social Health

A small but non-negligible number of comments mostly addresssed homelessness, racial and income inequality, and a lack of diversity in some aspects of town life.



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991

Comprehensive Planning and Health

Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991) showed that many internal and external factors - including social conditions and the natural environment - can affect health. Community features as disparate as transportation facilities, social services, and environmental stewardship are now considered critical to achieving favorable public health outcomes.

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borhood life. Others, however, said they enjoy the energy and diversity brought by the student body.

Sample Comments - Likes
"…emphasis on higher education…"

"College town w/what goes w/that: theatre, music, sports, college town atmosphere, etc…."

"Due to the university, the education level is fairly high and I am able to find like-minded friends"

"Safe, Uptown is beautiful, I Love Constitution Trail"

Sample Comments - Improvements
"….Keep the student apartments from expanding further into the neighborhoods, especially the historic areas. (Ban frat parties!)…"

"student houses surrounding the university need to be better about picking up trash & generally being responsible. But the student behavior has vastly improved!"

"The police need to see the difference between college students being college students & college students being stupid/unsafe."

"…the apartment companies are definitely taking advantage of students with exorbitant prices for living…"

"More access to recycling for students in off-campus apartments"

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure forms the framework on which society runs, but much of it is either literally or figuratively "out of sight, out of mind." The Town's roads, parking facilities, trails, bike lanes, and bus stops are the infrastructure elements people are most likely to consciously interact with on any given day, and these were by far the most frequently discussed infrastructure subjects. Fewer respondents shared their opinions about parking, water, sewers, utilities, and other aspects of infrastructure. Overall, about 45% of respondents discussed infrastructure issues.

Roads: Almost every respondent discussing roads wanted them to be improved; usually this meant fixing potholes and other surface issues. However, road quality appears not to be a major impediment to mobility for most people: most respondents who discussed traffic and travel times said they like the present situation, and only a relative handful of responses included complaints on that score. In these critical comments, certain areas of town were singled out as areas of concern, such as Uptown and campus.

Alternative transportation infrastructure: See the Mobility subsection.

Technology/Broadband: Technology was identified as a high priority in Question 6, but only a few responses in the open-ended questions touched on this subject. Almost all of these were in the Improvement column—either complaints about the price of currently available broadband service or requests that the Town provide service on its own.

Sample Comments - Likes
"Constitution Trail. You can get anywhere in 10-15 minutes…"

"easy access by automobile anywhere in the twin cities."

"I like that I can either walk anywhere I need to go or take public transportation."

Sample Comments - Improvements
"INFRASTRUCTURE! Our streets and roads are crumbling."

"Nothing other than basic services – like roads and sewers. The rest can wait until limited revenue is not already paying down debt."

"More parking on the streets of UPTOWN – Closer parking for the handicapped."

"I was very hopeful when the town was considering a town wide Internet. I believe that would be a great service to the community."

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NORMAL IS A COLLEGE TOWN

3 Higher Education Institutions

About **40%** of Town's population is students

Nearly **50%** hold a bachelor's degree or higher

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

School Pride: Generally, students are satisfied with their choice of college or university.

Culture and Entertainment: Opportunities, both on campus and off, are popular with students.

Uptown: Uptown's proximity to campus and variety of affordable things to do are attractive to students.

Housing: Many students complain about exorbitant rents, insufficient Greek housing close to campus, and few if any recycling programs at local apartment complexes.

Police: Relations between students and police are somewhat strained; some students believe they are unfairly targeted for traffic and other violations.

WHAT "TOWNIES" SAY

Culture and Recreation: ISU sports, plays, concerts, art shows, speakers, etc. are generally popular.

Energy: Students bring youthful energy to the community. A few complain about the rowdy behavior.

Housing: Some complain about unattractive student housing creeping into residential neighborhoods.

20% of all respondents discuss issues related to higher education

22% of respondents were aged 18-24

31% of respondents came to the Town to be students

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GOVERNMENT

Respondents discussed a variety of aspects of Town government, including Town leadership, city service provision, and taxing and spending. Over 40% of responses mentioned at least one of these issues, with opinions varying significantly and reflecting different philosophical viewpoints about the role and scope of local government.

Leadership: Responses addressing the performance of Town leadership were typically positive, characterizing the Town's leaders as competent and forward-thinking.

Public safety: Most respondents discussing public safety issues left favorable comments. Respondents referring to police activity specifically, however, were more often critical, with a substantial percentage of these respondents complaining about the police's treatment of students and minorities or a perceived excessive focus on traffic violations at the expense of more serious crime prevention. The latter concern was not unanimous; some respondents asked for a greater crackdown on speeding, texting while driving, and other traffic offenses.

Town services: Waste-related comments were mostly centered on recycling and were split among those who said they like the current levels of service and comments calling for increased access to recycling for apartment dwellers. Water, snow removal, and other services were less frequently discussed; when they were, responses were generally either favorable but non-specific or requests for better service in specific areas (e.g., more prompt snow removal on the respondent's street).

Taxes and spending: About 13% of all respondents addressed taxing and spending issues. Much of this discussion was no doubt triggered by the sales tax increase that was approved by the Town Council the same week the survey was released. Property taxes were also criticized by many respondents. Some of the responses in this category advocated a limited local government focused strictly on basics like infrastructure and public safety.

As noted earlier, most respondents discussing Uptown redevelopment and other initiatives either applauded them or asked for more along the same lines. Respondents in the limited government camp took the opposite stance on the grounds that these initiatives are too expensive and take the Town away from its core duties.

Sample Comments - Likes

"Excellent fire & police protection; excellent public services (trash, snow removal, etc.)"

"... the curbside recycling program!"

"We have watched Normal & the surrounding area grow & improve over the 49 years we have lived here. Normal leadership has been positive & forward-thinking…"

Sample Comments - Improvements

"Have police focus on serious crime. Minor traffic violations (speeding and jay walking or random stops *to engage the residents) are NOT REAL CRIME."*

"crackdown on ISU students and their street-crossing stupidity and parties, Normal Avenue needs speed bumps/police presence (students are driving 50+ mph)."

"Lower taxes, lower water rates, lower real estate taxes. Stop improvements to Uptown area and put that toward fixing roads and lowering taxes."

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INFRASTRUCTURE

About **45%** of all respondents discussed issues with infrastructure with three major themes emerging: Auto-Oriented, Alternative Transportation, and Utilities.

Auto Oriented

Roads
Nearly 200 responses discuss the condition of Normal's streets and roads; most want surface or other improvements.

Parking
Mostly critical comments, particularly centering on Uptown facilities such as the Library, Uptown Station, and the Children's Discovery Museum.

Alternate Transportation

Trails
Mostly positive; connections with Uptown, workplaces, and various establishments frequently mentioned; improvement responses mostly suggest expansion and safer intersections with streets.

Sidewalks and crossings
Most comments call for better sidewalks and safer pedestrian crossing areas.

On-street bicycle infrastructure
Most comments ask for more on-street bike lanes.

Utilities

Water
Relatively few comments, mostly positive.

Residential broadband
A few complaints about the high price of broadband and requests for availability of ultra-high-speed internet in residential areas

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Q5 (NEIGHBORHOOD PREFERENCES)

The goal of this question was to find out which factors respondents considered important when they chose their current neighborhoods. Respondents were asked to rate 16 different factors as Very Important, Important, or Not Important, including mobility features, types and affordability of housing, proximity to work and amenities, and the character of public spaces in neighborhoods. Responses to this question will help shape the Visioning and Land Use facets of this Comprehensive Plan and aid in the planning of future neighborhoods.

Figure 2.1.2 provides a snapshot of the results and divides the 16 factors into three groups:

- Group 1 factors were rated Very Important or Important by at least three-fourths of respondents who answered the question. They include **Cleanliness and safety; Affordability of housing; Features such as sidewalks that encourage walking; Proximity to parks and recreational opportunities; Quality public schools; Proximity to work;** and **Attractive public spaces.** There was little disagreement about these features among different groups of respondents, and all will be weighted heavily during future planning processes.
- Group 2 factors were rated Very Important or Important by more than 50% but fewer than 75% of respondents. These include **Walking distance to destinations; Connections to the Constitution Trail; Ability to live in my house as I get older; Mix of ages and incomes; Schools within walking distance; Racial and ethnic diversity;** and **Public transportation – access and frequency**. As explained below, these factors were somewhat more demographic-sensitive (that is, some groups prioritized them more than others) than those in Groups 1 or 3.
- Group 3: Two factors—**Mix of housing types** and **Historic home or neighborhood**—were rated as Not Important by most respondents. Although having a variety of types of housing is key to achieving affordability of housing and neighborhood diversity—both of which rate higher than the "mix of housing types" factor—respondents did not make these connections, which are likely more familiar to planners than to the general public. In the case of historic homes and neighborhoods, most of Normal's growth has happened since the 1960s, so most of the Town's homes and neighborhoods are too new to be deemed "historic." A family who considered living in a historic home or neighborhood a high priority would find few options in Normal.

GROUP 2 FACTORS

Neighborhood factors within Group 2 showed substantial variation across demographic groups, and are therefore examined here in greater detail[(1.1)].

Walking distance to destinations (68% overall) was most important to 18-24-year olds, with 25-34-year-olds not far behind, and least important to respondents aged 35-44 (see Figure 2.1.3). With regard to income (Figure 2.1.4), the vast majority of those making under $30,000 rated it as important

1.1 A Note on Demographic Analysis

While the survey included several demographic questions, the respondent's age and household income were particularly determinative of their choices. Other demographic categories that appear to have been determinative are themselves functions of age and income—for example, whether the respondent is an owner or a renter appears to be important to various responses, but whether one owns a home is strongly determined by age and especially income. For that reason, this analysis focuses primarily on the age and income variables.

These demographic differences determined the information presented here. For Groups 1 and 3, there is little disagreement among people of different ages and incomes: Group 1 is important to nearly everyone, and in fairly intuitive ways, while Group 3 is unimportant to most respondents. Group 2, on the other hand, sees more variation across demographic groups than these other two, and therefore is examined in greater detail.

Note that respondents aged 17 and under are not included in any of the age analyses. Respondents in this cohort were too few and their concerns too different from the other age groups to be part of the same analyses.

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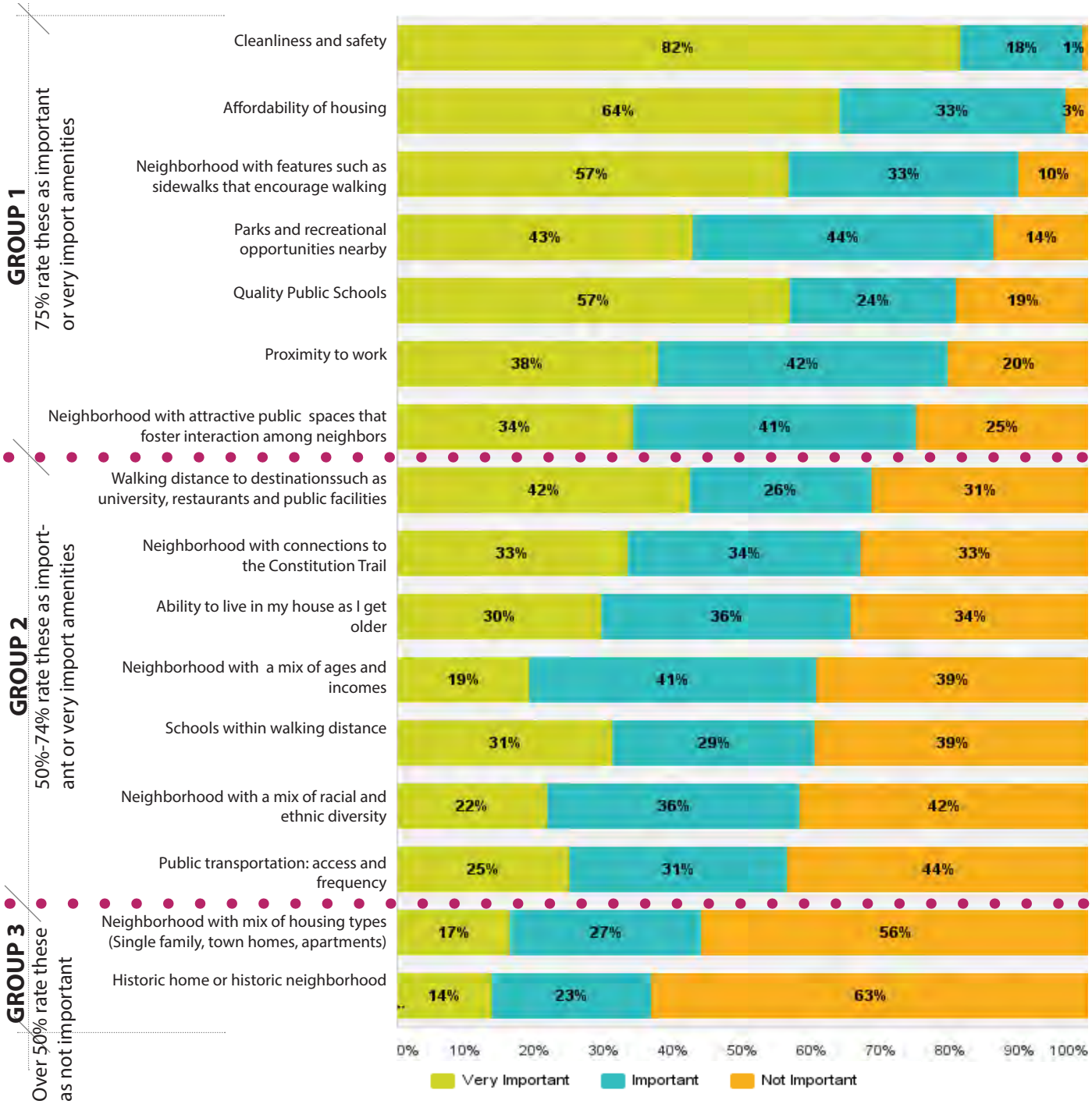
Figure 2.1.2. Q5: Which of the following factors did you consider when choosing the neighborhood? (Rating scale: Very Important, Important, Not Important)

Answered: 1,702 Skipped:16



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or higher, but it became progressively less important as income increased.

Connections to the Constitution Trail (67% overall) were most important to 25-34-year-olds and least important to senior citizens (Figure 2.1.5).

The ability to live in my house as I get older (i.e. "age in place"; 66% overall) was relatively unimportant to 18-44-year-olds, but starting with the 45-54 age bracket this factor became dramatically more important, peaking with senior citizens (see Figure 2.1.6). People with lower incomes were slightly more likely than people with higher incomes to rate this as important.

Living in a neighborhood with a mixture of ages and incomes (61% overall) was more important for lower-income people than for higher-income people (see Figure 2.1.7). It was also most important for respondents who were older or younger than the median age group, with 35-44-year-olds providing the lowest ratings (see Figure 2.1.8).

Living within walking distance of schools (60% overall) was most important to 18-24-year-olds. This choice was originally intended to establish the amount of interest parents have in being within walking or biking distance of their children's elementary, middle or high schools. However, most of the favorable responses to this choice were from college-aged students, for whom "school" naturally means "college." Low-income respondents were also more likely than other income groups to rate this factor highly.

Racial and ethnic diversity (58% overall) was most important to lower-income and younger respondents, with slightly more than half of those earning $100k or more saying this was not important (see Figure 2.1.10). This may reflect greater representation of nonwhite people among low-income and young demographics, differences in social attitudes among those demographics, or both.

Public transportation access and frequency (57% overall) was very important to 18-24-year-olds as well as respondents aged 55 and up (see

Figure 2.1.3. Walkability to destinations by age

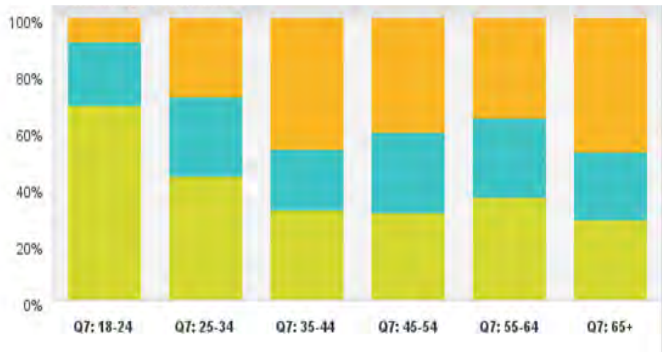

Figure 2.1.4. Walkability to destinations by income

Figure 2.1.5. Connections to the Trail by age

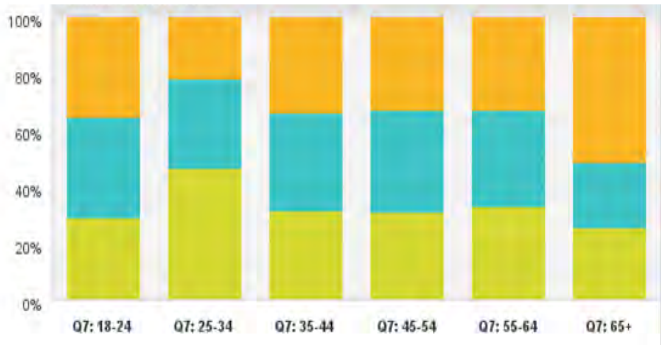

Figure 2.1.6. The ability to live in my house as I get older (i.e. "age In place") by age

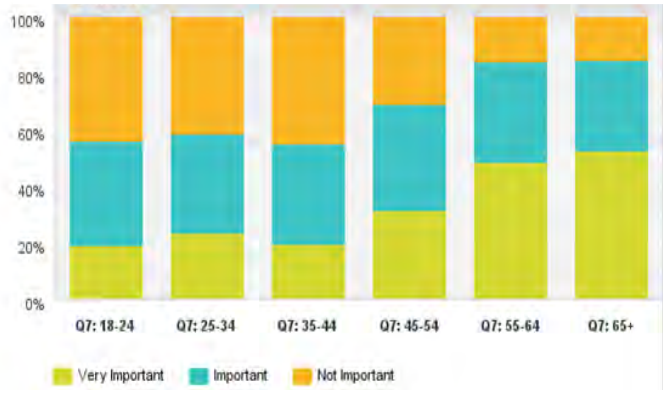

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Figure 2.1.7. Living in a neighborhood with a mixture of ages and incomes by income

Figure 2.1.8. Living in a neighborhood with a mixture of ages and incomes by age

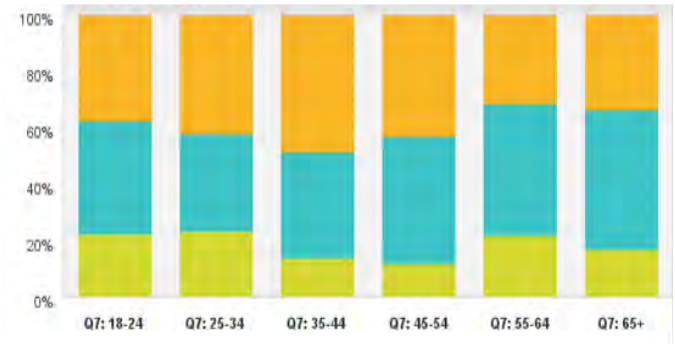


Figure 2.1.10. Racial and ethnic diversity by income

Figure 2.1.11. Public transportation access and frequency by age

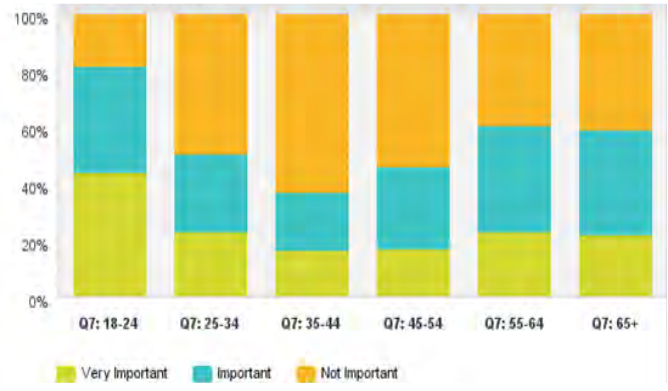


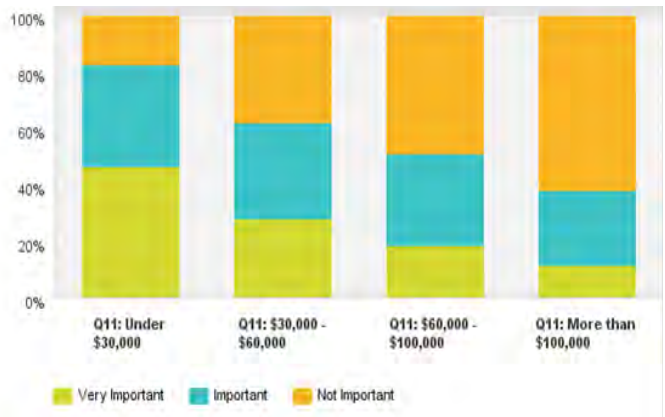
Figure 2.1.11). Under-$30k earners also prioritized public transportation more than other groups. Majorities of 35-44-year-olds, 45-54-year-olds, and $100k+ earners said that public transportation access and frequency were unimportant to them (see Figure 2.1.12.

Q5 CONCLUSIONS

Overwhelmingly, respondents said they prioritized safety and cleanliness; affordability; walkability; proximity to quality parks, public schools, and employment opportunities; and attractive public spaces when choosing their neighborhoods. Beyond these universal basic requirements, residents of different ages and socioeconomic situations had different priorities. Young and low-income respondents sought neighborhoods with racial, ethnic, age and income diversity; connections to public transportation networks; and walking distances to classes and amenities. Senior citizens wanted to be able to age in place in neighborhoods with people of a variety of ages and incomes. People in between, in their prime earning years, typically expressed somewhat less desire for alternative modes of transportation and gave less weight to diversity.

The Visioning Committee must closely examine the priorities of these different demographic groups, because they are crucial to predicting, however imperfectly, what will be important to Normal residents over the next twenty years — which, above all, will be the primary driver of how the Town and its neighborhoods grow during that time.

Figure 2.1.12. Public transportation access and frequency by income



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Q6 (FUTURE PRIORITIES)

While Question 5 helped identify and rank neighborhood-level features that are important to residents, Question 6 (see Figure 2.1.1) aimed to guide town- and regional-level policymaking by establishing which of nine priorities respondents considered most important to Normal's future. Respondents were asked to rate the priorities as Very Important, Important, or Not Important.

The priorities in Question 6 were chosen based on widely accepted planning principles and past Town of Normal planning and outreach efforts. All nine were rated Very Important or Important by at least 82% of respondents (see Fig. 2.1.11), suggesting that all should be points of emphasis over the next 20 years. Still, there were some minor differences in the degree of importance assigned to each area. Five of the nine—**Stable Economy, Environmental Sustainability, Healthy Community, Technology, and Supporting Existing Neighborhoods**—were rated Very Important by over 50% of respondents, and can therefore be considered the "top of the top" priorities (see Fig. 2.1.11).

Figure 2.1.13. Q6: As we look into the future of the community, what should be the top priorities?
(Rating scale: Very Important, Important, Not Important)

Answered: 1,704 Skipped: 14

Stable Economy: Efforts to attract, retain and expand employment opportunities and investment in the area

Environmental Sustainability: Protection of our natural resources such as air, water and farmland

Support for Existing Neighborhoods: Continuous efforts to enhance existing neighborhoods for long-term fiscal and environmental sustainability

Technology: Access to high-speed internet connections via broadband and other emerging technologies

Regional Cooperation: Increased collaboration among public entities, higher education institutions and the private sector

Healthy Community: Promotion of active and healthy lifestyles through access to healthy/nutritious food, recreational opportunities, and healthcare facilities

Human Elements: Cooperative efforts to establish an inclusive community that addresses the diverse needs of its residents

Transportation Alternatives: A regional transportation system that expands public transit and is designed to accommodate vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles

Arts, Culture and History: Incorporation of arts, culture and history into the fabric of our community

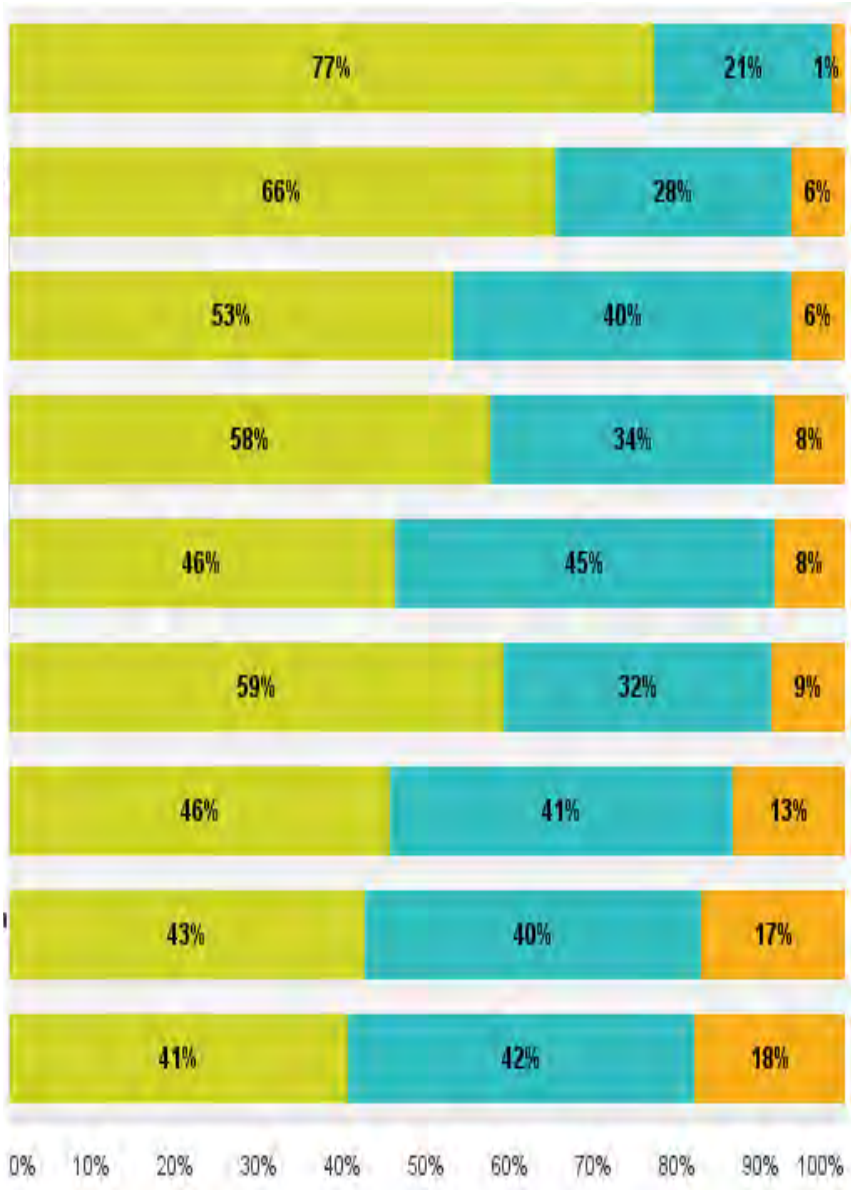

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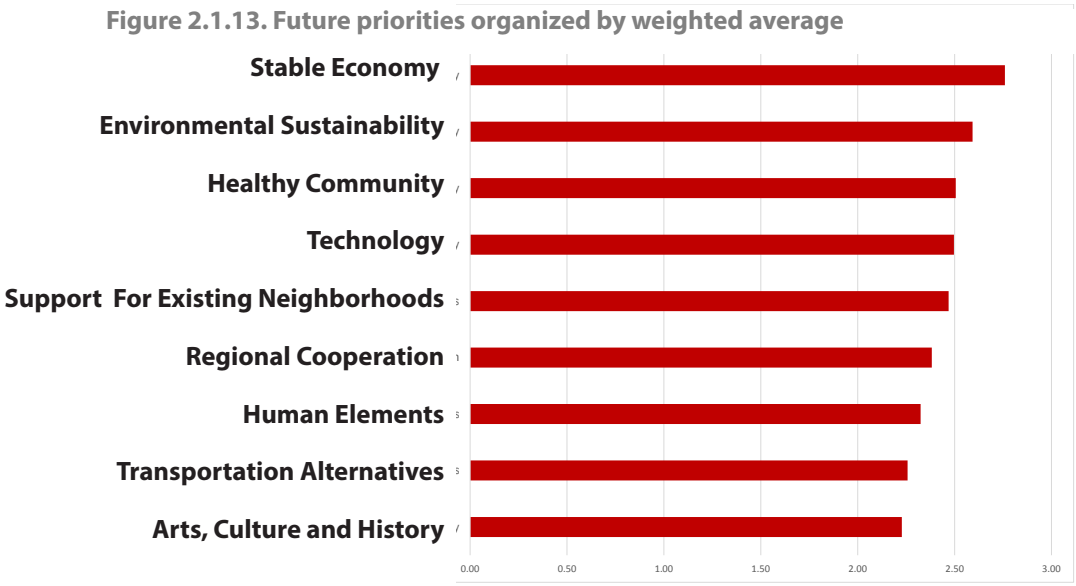
Figure 2.1.13. Future priorities organized by weighted average



All nine of the Q6 priorities were rated as Very Important or Important by the vast majority of respondents, but some had a particularly large proportion of Very Important ratings while others were more likely to be rated Important. In order to capture these differences, we used a weighted average that assigned three points to a rating of Very Important, two points to a rating of Important, and one point to a rating of Not Important. The maximum possible weighted average is 3 (100% rated it Very Important) and the minimum is 1 (100% rated it Not Important). For example, both Technology and Regional Cooperation were rated Very Important or Important by 92% of respondents, but Technology was rated Very Important by 58%, compared to 46% for Regional Cooperation. As a result, Technology's weighted average is slightly higher than Regional Cooperation's.

There is considerable overlap among the nine priority areas. Staying abreast of the latest technology is crucial to ensuring a stable economy, especially as the pace of technological development gets more and more rapid; the Town will have to coordinate with other local and regional actors to be an effective steward of the environment; and so on. While it is vital to understand the ways in which these priorities reinforce each other, knowing how residents value each one individually will help prioritize initiatives during the visioning and comprehensive planning processes.

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