

Manchester LCD Visioning – Summary of Engagement Fall 2020

Manchester has embarked on a planning process to rethink its Limited Commercial District and to proactively plan for mixed-use, mixed-income development. This would advance two principal goals of the 2019 Master Plan: increase Town revenue through planned development in that area of town, and support a diversity of housing options throughout town.

To achieve these goals, in 2019 the Town began exploring a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District, a state program that encourages cities and towns to implement zoning that allows compact, mixed-income, by-right development. Over the course of 2019, the Town invited state staff to provide an overview of 40R districts to Town boards, created a 40R assessment team to discuss the opportunities and potential impacts of a 40R district, and hosted a community meeting and a Planning Board meeting on the subject. Based on this work, the Planning Board voted unanimously to study the feasibility of a Smart Growth Overlay District and the Town engaged the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to provide technical assistance.

To confirm and refine the Town's vision for the LCD area, the Town and MAPC conducted engagement throughout the fall of 2020, including a virtual Q&A session, an online survey, two virtual focus groups, and interviews with landowners. The findings from this outreach are summarized below.

Key takeaways

The input received through the fall generally affirmed the goals of the Master Plan. Key takeaways include:

- Any development in the LCD should complement, not compete with, Manchester's downtown. Commercial uses should be service-based or businesses that residents currently leave town for.
- New residential development should provide housing options that do not currently exist in town, especially smaller homes for downsizing seniors and starter homes affordable to young families.
- New development should have a net positive impact on the Town's finances.
- Alternative modes of transportation—walking, biking, and potentially a shuttle or buss—should be highly encouraged both within the district and when traveling between the district and other areas of town.
- Any new development should demonstrate Manchester's commitment to sustainability, particularly through compact development and low-impact site design that manages stormwater runoff.

Focus groups

In October 2020 the Town and MAPC hosted two focus groups to discuss possibilities for the LCD. The first, held on October 5, was attended by four downtown business owners and focused primarily on ways in which a potential new district in the LCD might interact with downtown. The second, held on October 14, was with nine members of various Town boards and commissions, including the Parks and Recreation Committee, Manchester Affordable Housing Trust, Bike and Pedestrian Committee,

Downtown Improvement Project Committee, Zoning Board of Appeals, Sustainability Committee, and Board of Assessors. This discussion dealt more broadly with goals and vision for a new district. Attendees for both groups were recruited by Town staff.

In terms of land use, there was widespread agreement among both groups that any new businesses in the LCD should not compete with those downtown, and should instead provide services that residents currently must leave town for. Business owners noted that occasionally people come downtown to eat or browse while their children are at tennis lessons at the MAC; all agreed that this relationship should be strengthened and that development in the LCD could increase the vitality of downtown as more people come to the LCD for recreation or errands and then go downtown for shopping and dining.

Uses discussed included:

- Medical offices and wellness activities, such as yoga or pilates.
- Family-friendly businesses such as daycare, recreation, or family entertainment like mini-golf.
- Hotel with the potential for event space. A hotel would be a strong revenue generator for the Town, and may bring guests who would likely patronize downtown businesses.
- Brewery or other specialty food or beverage business
- Specialized food market that would not compete with downtown businesses
- Artist studios and incubator spaces were mentioned, though participants acknowledged that there might not be sufficient demand to support these uses.

Participants acknowledged the tension between the desire for a vibrant neighborhood where people wanted to congregate, and the knowledge that the uses that would most likely support this sort of activity—such as restaurants, cafes, and retail—would likely compete with downtown businesses.

Participants from both groups highlighted the shortage of particular kinds of housing in town, especially places for seniors to downsize and starter homes. Most participants in the business focus group knew someone who would like to move to Manchester, or who was currently renting in town and would like to buy a home there, but were unable to find options they could afford. The committees focus group focused on the need for affordable ownership opportunities for young families, and acknowledged that this could take many forms, from cottages to townhouses to small condominium buildings. While the group supported the idea of senior housing, they were more interested in the concept of a multigenerational neighborhood.

The committees focus group discussed the possibility that quality open spaces could provide this vibrancy and serve as a place to gather. Participants stated that, alongside family-friendly housing options, the new neighborhood would need family-friendly open spaces where residents of all ages can play and gather. There was also widespread agreement that new development in the LCD should connect to and provide increased access to the Town's robust trail system. Walkability and bikeability should be central throughout the district, which should be a place where all are comfortable traveling on foot.

Both groups felt strongly that a robust connection between downtown and a future neighborhood in the LCD was needed – whether to avoid bringing more cars downtown or to provide more sustainable modes of transport. Specific ideas included a shuttle (including autonomous) or even a trolley, CATA

routes, a shared bike system, and prioritizing bicycle access on School Street, especially over the highway. Most felt that if these alternative modes were available, they would be well-used.

Finally, participants emphasized the need for sustainable development that followed advanced green site design and building principles and that did not negatively impact the surrounding wetlands.

Landowner interviews

MAPC staff interviewed four landowners within the LCD to understand what types of uses might actually be expected if the area's zoning were to change. While these individuals' goals varied, there was generally a desire to be able to do more than what is currently permitted under the LCD regulations. As one landowner described, he built a storage facility on his land because that was the only thing he could get permitted. There was also a desire for simplified permitting procedures.

There was overlap between potential uses envisioned by landowners and potential uses that have been part of the public discussion, including a hotel, senior housing and assisted living, workforce housing, daycare, and medical offices, as well as maintaining the Manchester Athletic Club. Most of the landowners noted that the area's terrain and the need to mitigate stormwater runoff would likely make development more complicated, but not infeasible. All expressed a willingness to work with the Town as it continues to explore the possibility of a Smart Growth Overlay District.

Q&A session

On September 24, the Town held a virtual discussion that was attended by nearly 70 people. The session began with an overview of Manchester's Limited Commercial District and 40R Smart Growth zoning, followed by a live question and answer session. Topics discussed during the Q&A session included: how the Town would ensure that new development is high quality; the size and scope of potential new development; how the Town would ensure that new development did not negatively impact Town finances or infrastructure capacity; how sustainability and stormwater runoff will be handled; whether new housing is needed, and what types of housing are needed; and how the 40R Smart Growth Overlay District processes. A recording of the discussion can be viewed [here](#), and a list of questions and responses can be found [here](#).

Survey

After the virtual discussion, residents were invited to participate in a survey about priorities for the LCD area. The survey was available for approximately two weeks and was completed by over 225 people. A summary of the survey results and key takeaways are included at the end of this document. A full list of comments received through the survey is available [here](#).

Working Group

A project working group, made up of representatives from Boards and Committees in town, is guiding communications and assisting with community outreach. The working group met twice during the visioning process. At a kickoff meeting in August, the group reviewed Smart Growth Overlay District requirements and discussed strategies for engagement. At a second meeting in October, the group reviewed the results of the survey and discussed goals for the district. These included the need for more housing options even after the Town reaches the state goal of 10% affordable housing, the prerequisite that new development generate revenue, and the desire that a new district connect to the community. The group also discussed messaging and the need to distinguish between the 40R Smart Growth Overlay District and the proposed 40B development on the west side of School Street.

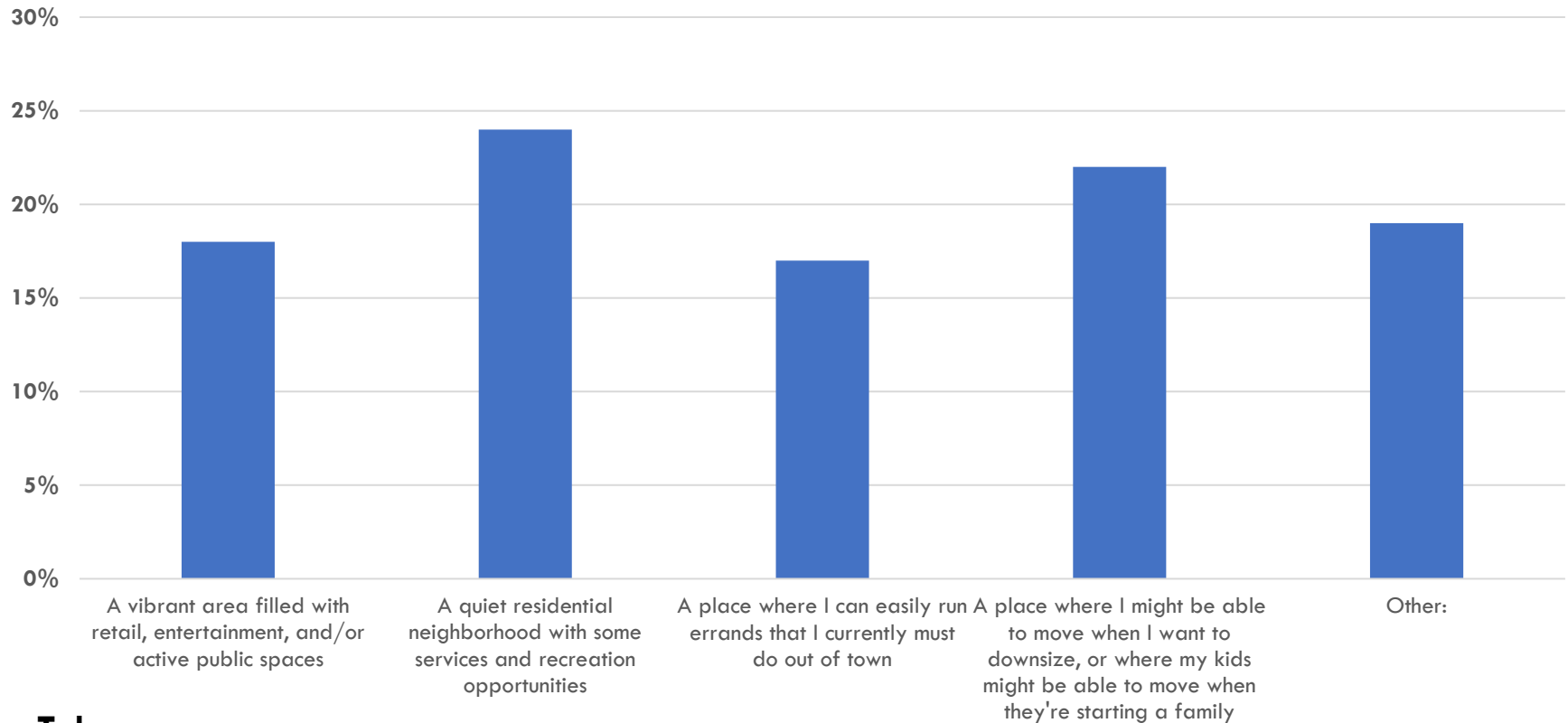
Manchester-by-the-Sea

Proposed Smart Growth Overlay District Survey Results

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS: 228

October 16, 2020

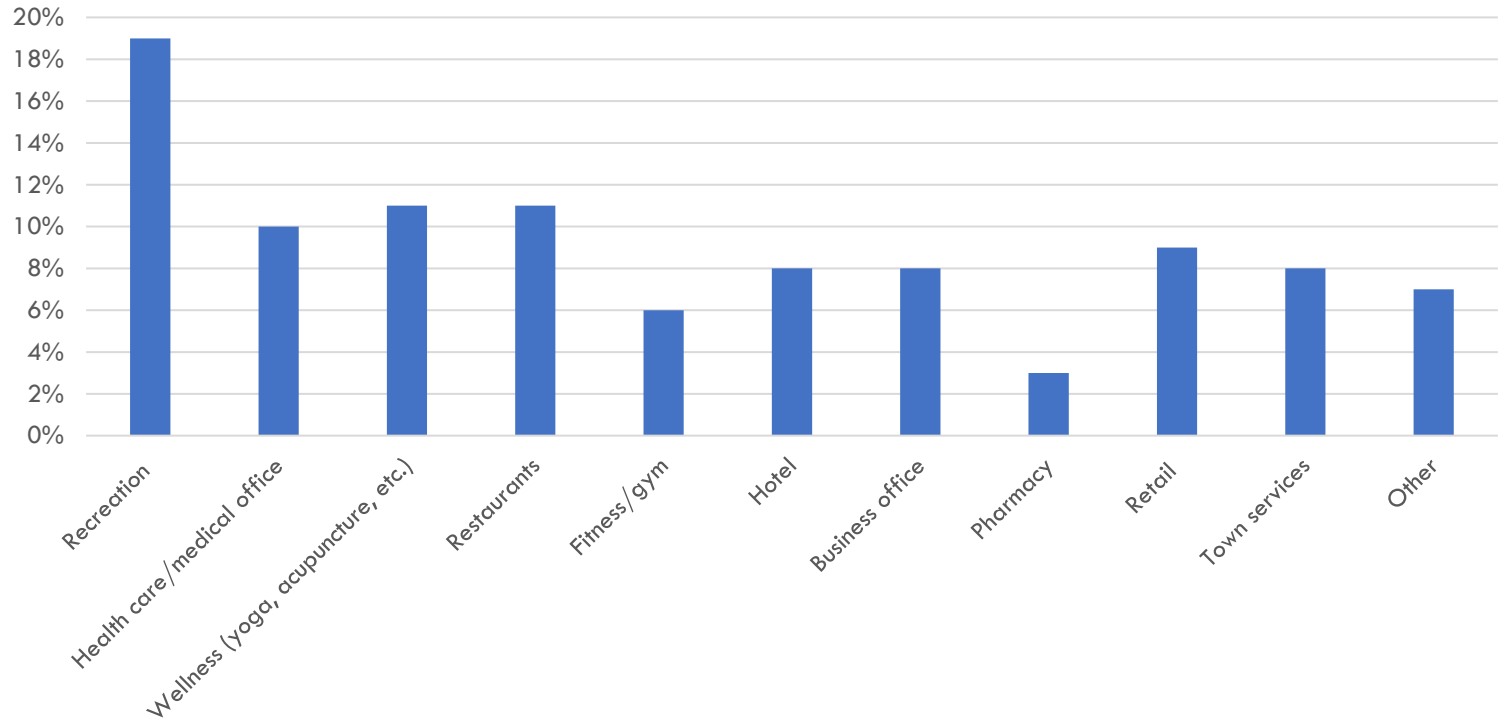
What sort of place would you like the LCD to become?



Takeaways

- The highest percentage of respondents would like a quiet residential neighborhood with some services and recreation opportunities
- This is followed by a place to downsize or for young families.
- “Other” had a wide variety of responses with the consensus being a focus on housing for an aging population and ensuring the area does not compete with downtown (i.e., not retail-focused)
- The top choices are compatible with each other and suggest a different type of neighborhood from the downtown, one that complements it

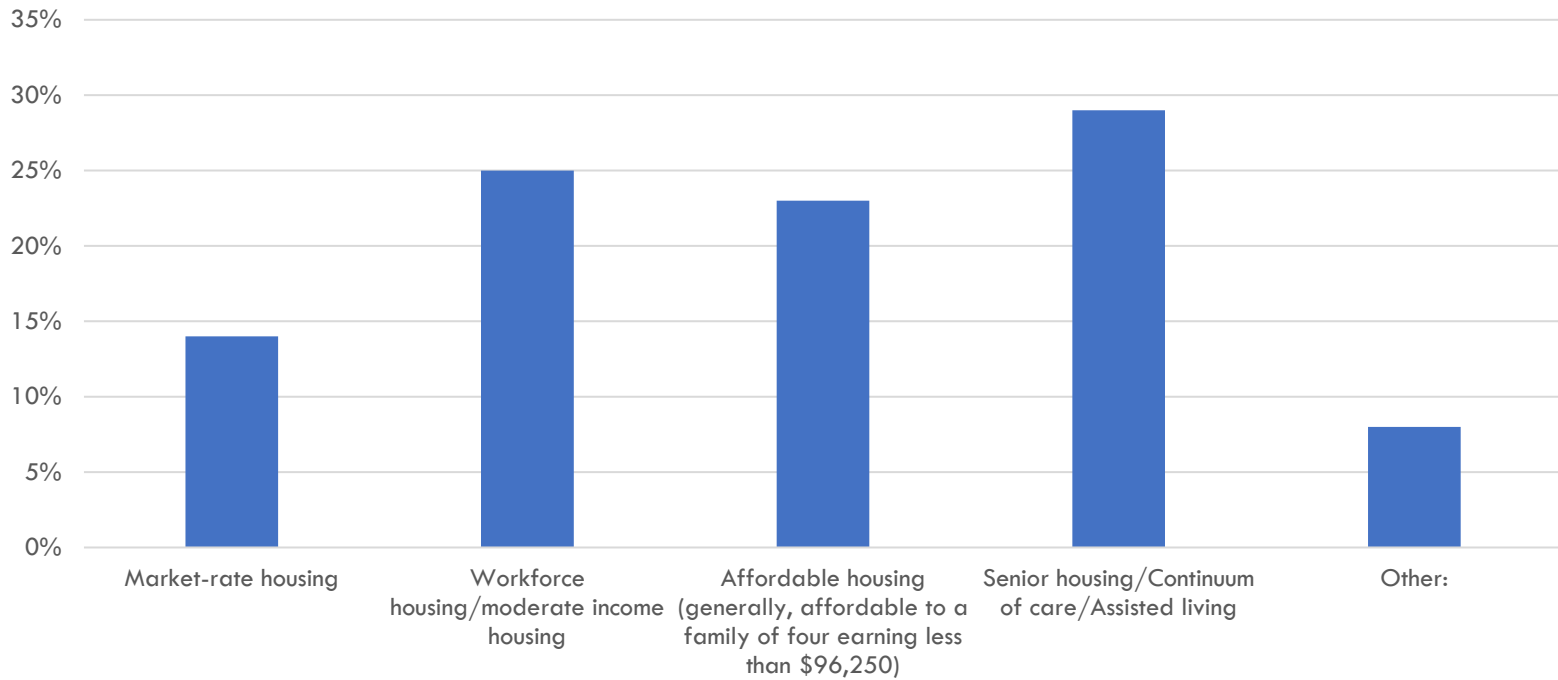
What type of business activities would you like to see in the area?



Takeaways

- A wide variety of responses with none gathering more than 20%
- Most respondents would like to see recreation opportunities in the LCD
- Most common Retail option included grocery and clothing stores
- Most common Town Services by far was a senior center
- Given the lack of clear consensus, the Town may wish to allow for a wide variety of commercial activities, keeping in mind concerns about uses that would “compete” with the downtown

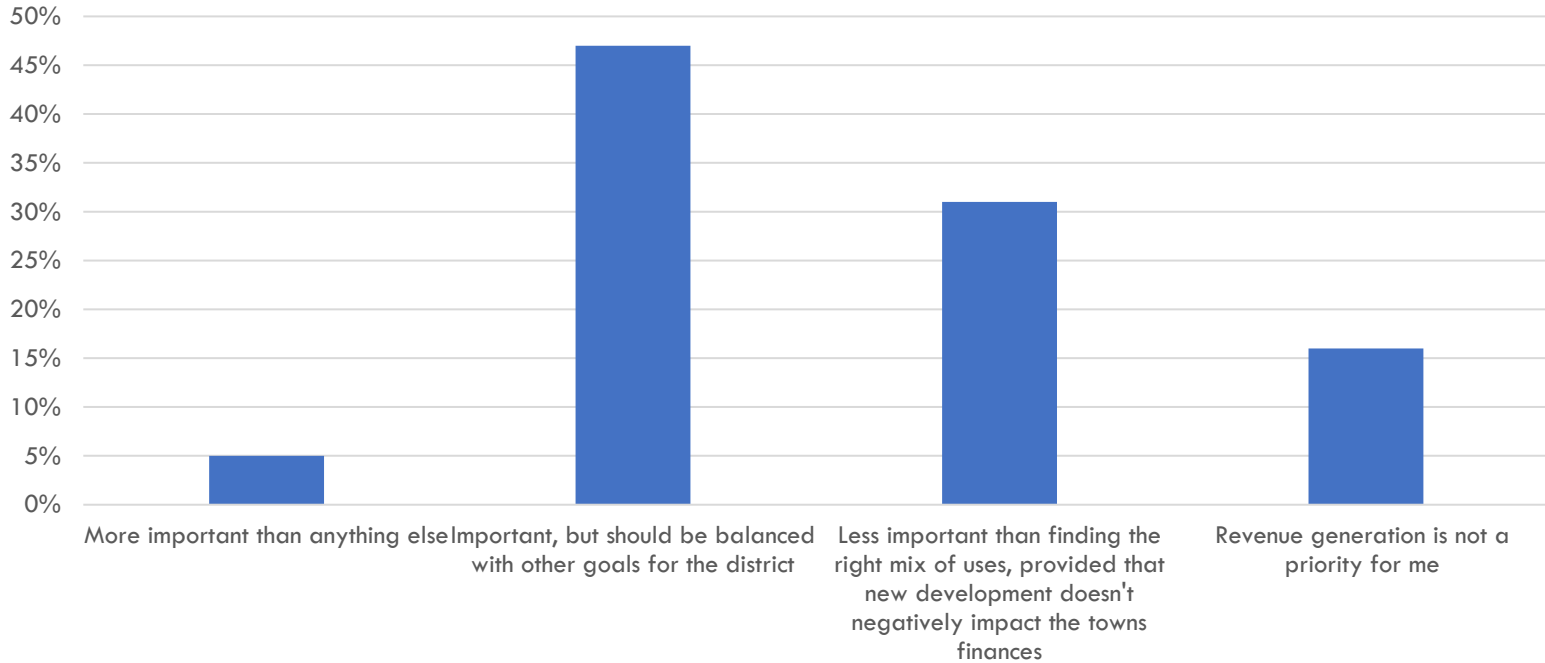
What kind of housing should be considered in the LCD?



Takeaways

- Responses indicated a need for housing for residents across the socio-economic spectrum and age cohorts.
- Market-rate housing was identified as the lowest need.

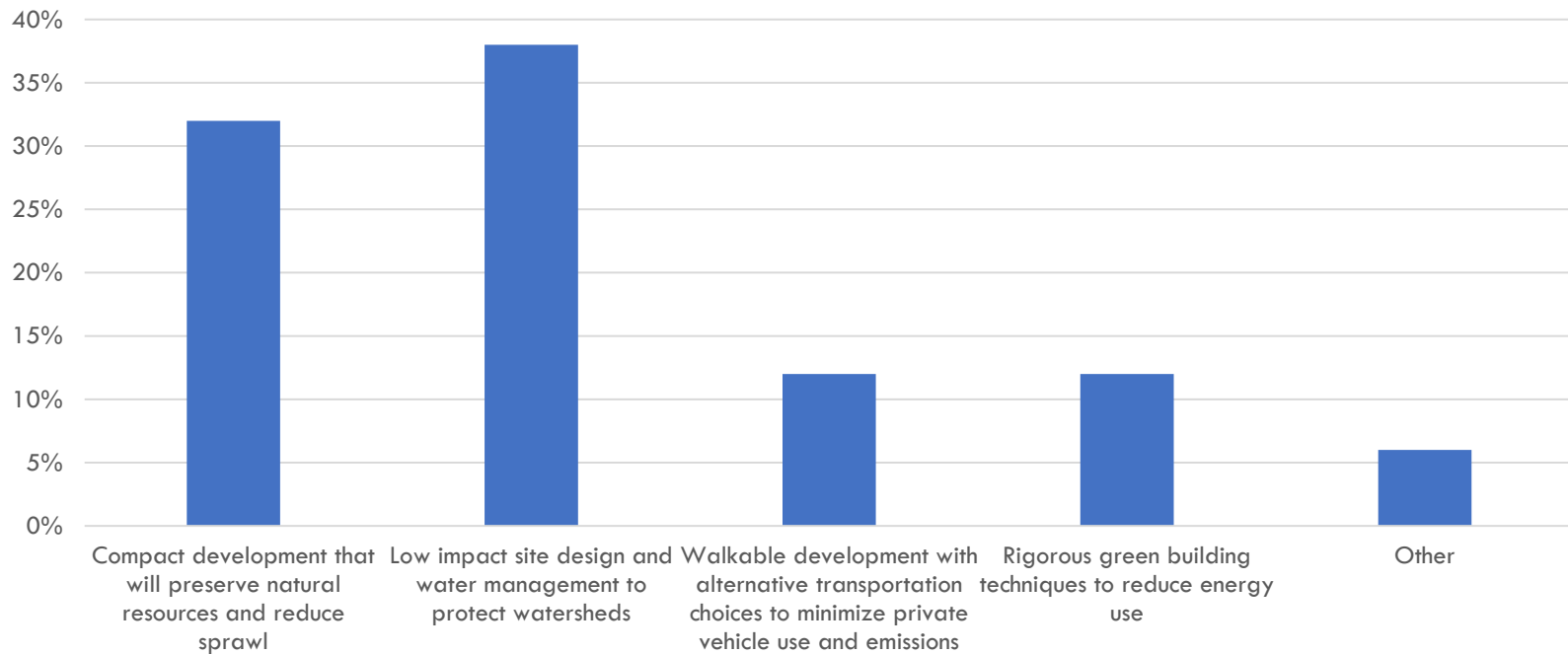
How important is it that uses in the LCD generate income for the Town?



Takeaways

- Almost half of residents felt revenue generation was less important priority (as long as it didn't negatively impact municipal finances) or not a priority at all.
- Another 46% felt it was important but should be balanced with other goals (e.g., increasing housing opportunities)
- Only a very small percentage thought it is a top priority

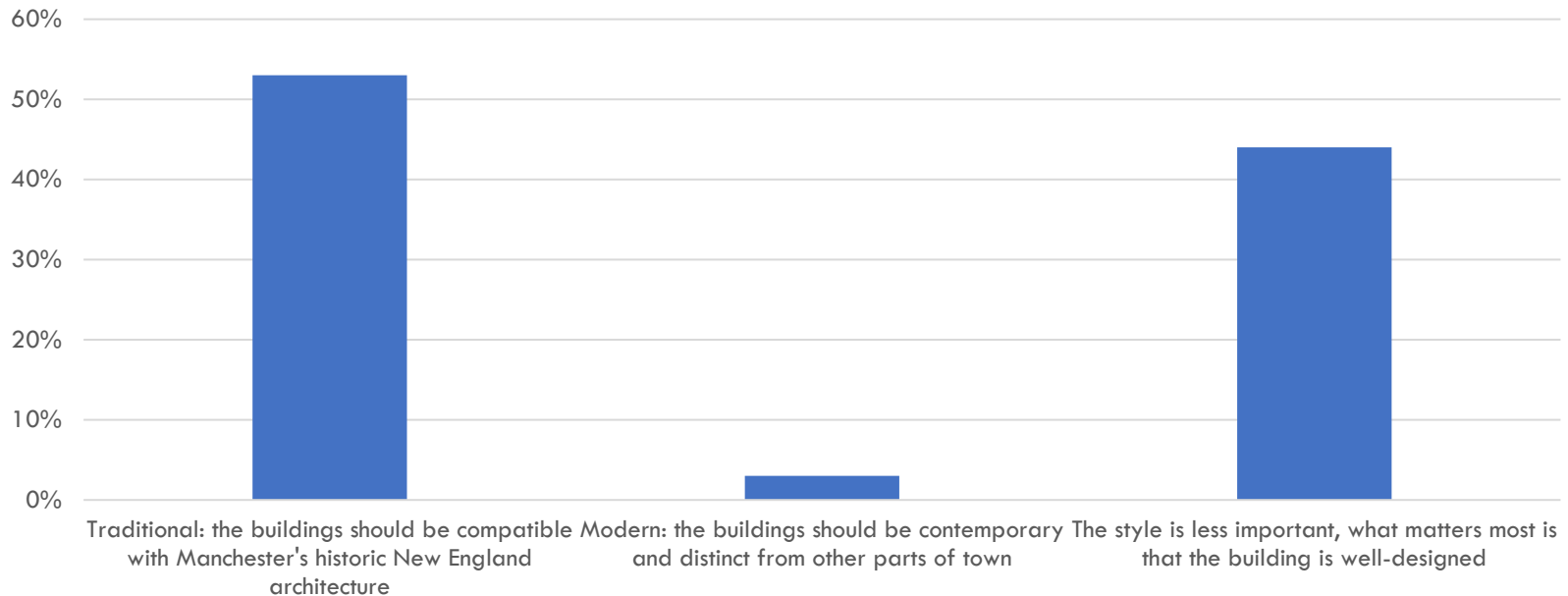
What are your top two environmental goals for the area?



Takeaways

- Preserving the natural environment is the top goal, through compact design and low-impact design methods (thus allowing for increased natural open space)

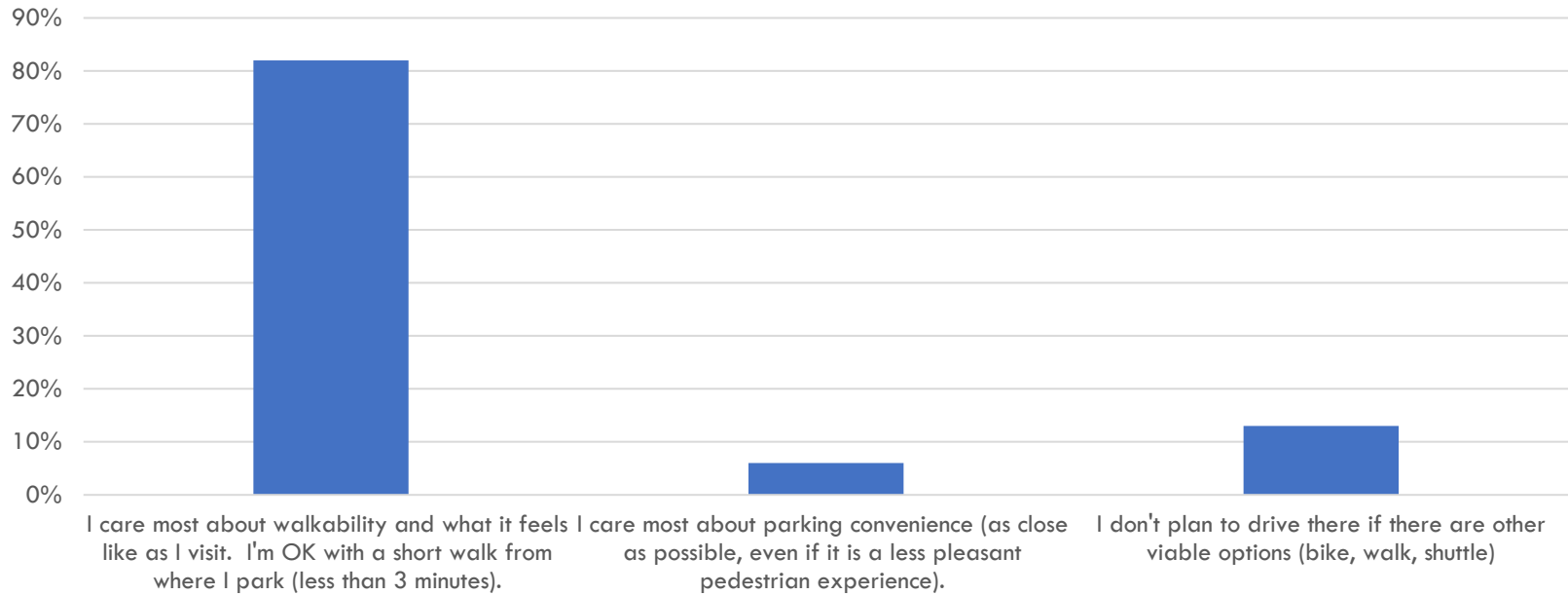
What should buildings in the District look like?



Takeaways

- More than half of respondents would like traditional style architecture.
- 43% do not have a preference between traditional and contemporary architecture, as long as it's "well-designed"
- Very few respondents desire modern buildings over traditional

What are your priorities between location of parking and the pedestrian experience?



Takeaways

- This is the first question where a clear super-majority (82%) have a clear preference.
- The implications of this question point to a critical need for site plan design to locate parking discretely, even if it results in a slightly longer walk than typical suburban mixed-use developments

Choose the buildings you think would make sense in the district (top choices)



Cottages (58%)



Mixed-Use (50%)



Multi-family (39%)



Townhomes (31%)



Townhomes (27%)

Takeaways

- Cottage cluster development was the most popular choice, which is compatible with the desire for low-impact development techniques.
- Other traditional typologies were also popular.
- Larger-scale mixed-use and modern style buildings were the least popular choices

What should the character of streets be in the new district (top choices)?



Streetscape: 50%



Streetscape: 42%



Streetscape: 36%



Streetscape: 27%



Streetscape: 25%



Streetscape: 21%

Takeaways

- The top choice and others show outdoor seating associated with restaurants. Having too many eating establishments could harm the downtown, but there could be an opportunity for a small area in the district

Takeaways

- Overall, having landscaping and seating seem to be key aspects to respondents' choices

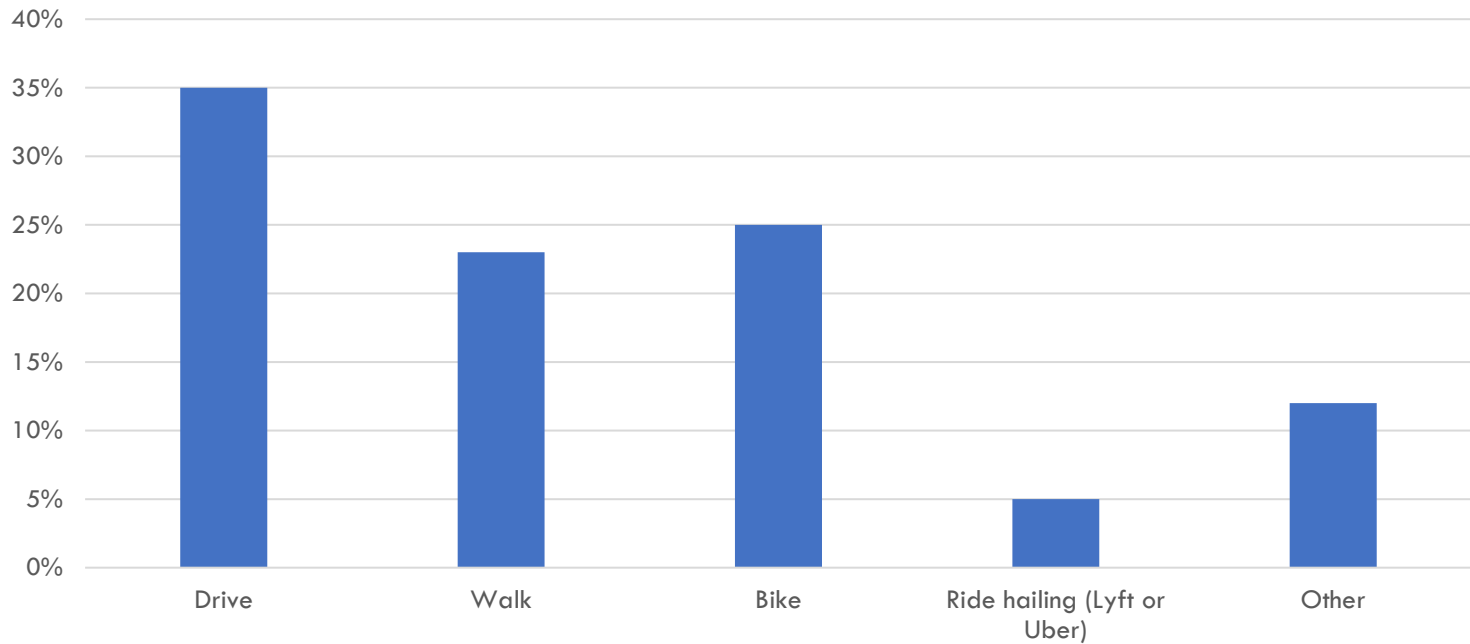
What should the character of open spaces be in the new district (top choices)?



Takeaways

- All open spaces were chosen by high percentages of respondents
- The plaza with yellow box was highest rated (87%)
- Surprisingly, the picture with natural trails was lowest, although still supported by 41%
- In general, respondents support a wide variety of types of open spaces in the district

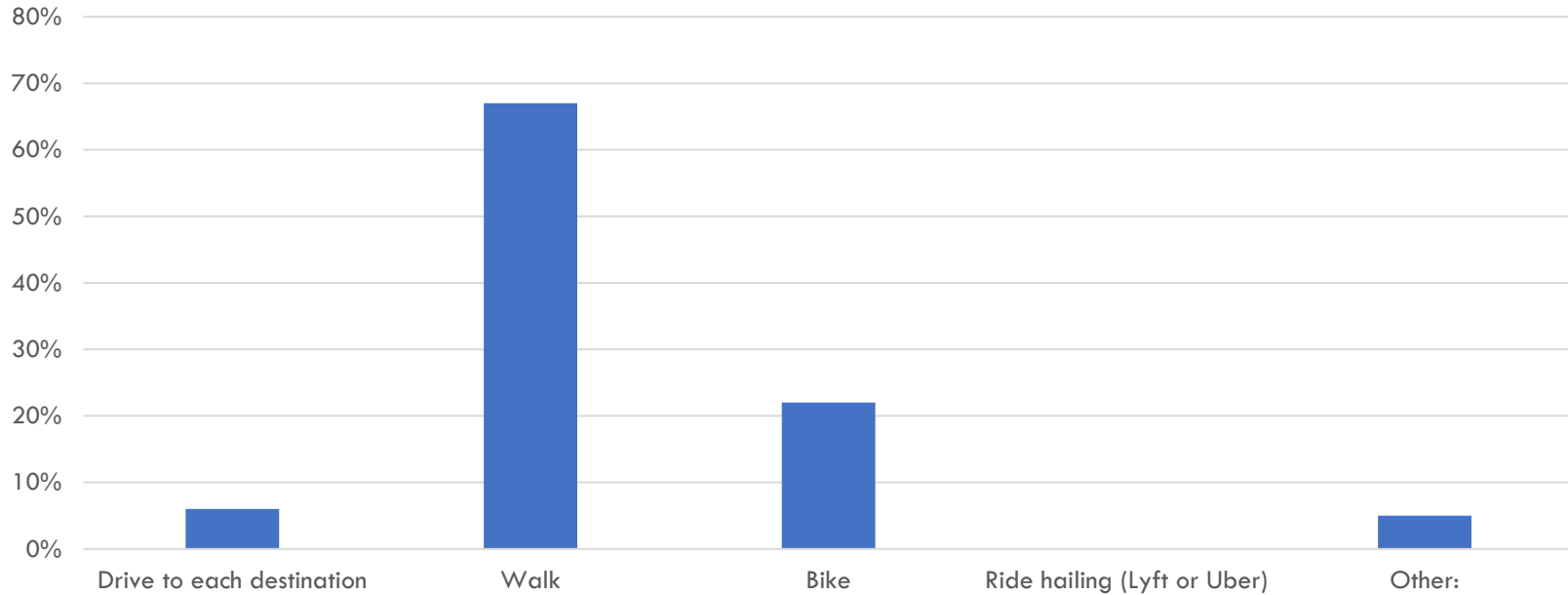
How would you prefer to get to the District from your home?



Takeaways

- A high percentage of respondents would prefer to travel to the district by means other than driving
- The percentage that would prefer to drive (35%) is lower than would be expected based similar projects, underscoring the need for multi-modal options to/from the District
- The most common Other option was for a shuttle bus, especially one that connected to the downtown

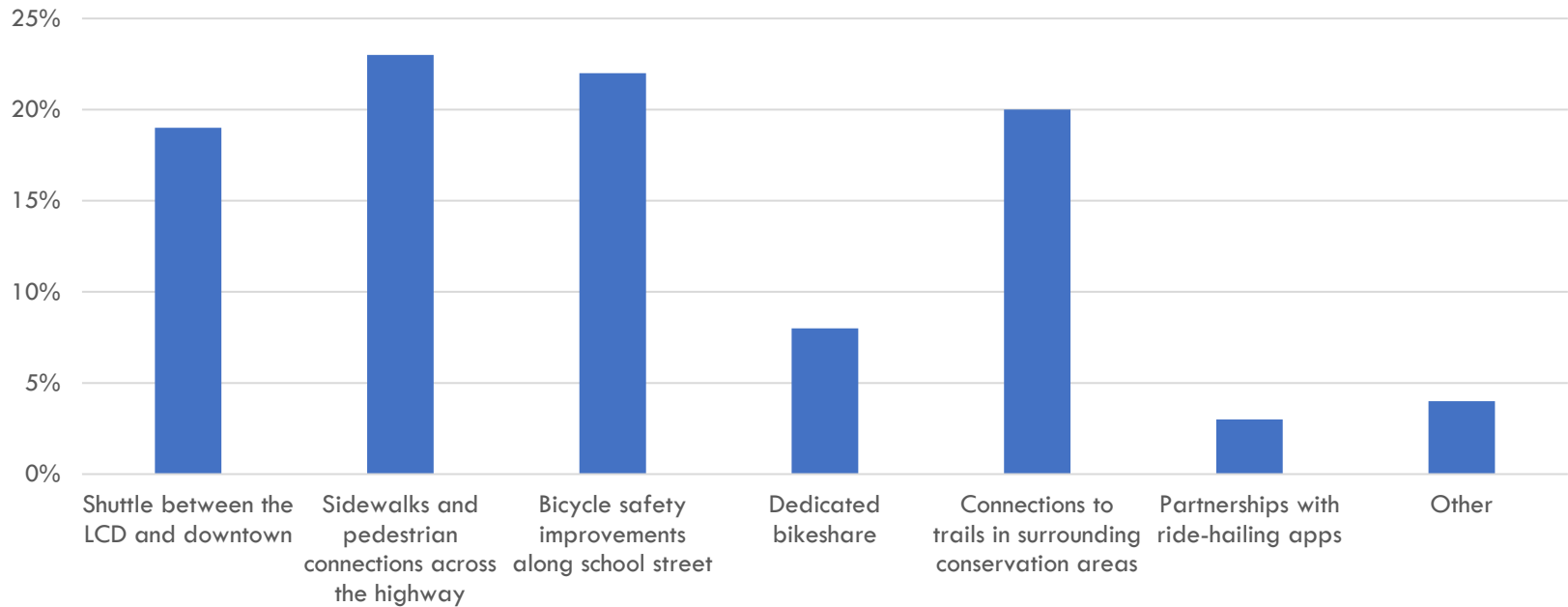
Once within the District, how would you like to get around?



Takeaways

- Almost everyone would like to park once (if driving) and then bike or walk around

How should the District connect to other areas in Town?



Takeaways

- A multi-prong approach can help best connect the District with the downtown and other parts of Town.
- The most popular choices were to implement “complete streets” elements to increase walking and biking safety + comfort
- A shuttle was also a popular choice (although it is not clear at this point if this is feasible)