

# Community Survey Summary

## Introduction / Methodology

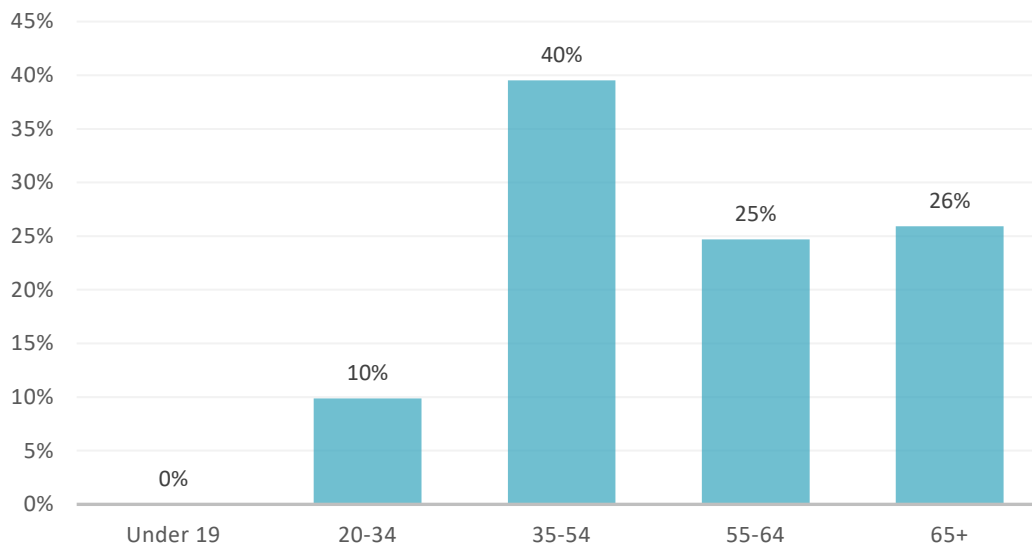
As part of the public engagement process for the Van Buren 2025 Comprehensive Plan, the Town conducted a community survey from June 24 through August 8, 2025. The survey was made available online, with hard copies offered at Town Hall for those preferring a paper version; however, all 163 responses were submitted online. The goal of the survey was to gather input from residents about the Town's most valued assets, concerns about current and future challenges, and community priorities for the next 10–15 years. Questions included a mix of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended formats to capture both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

In terms of demographics, the survey reflected a strong cross-section of residents, with responses coming from a variety of neighborhoods throughout the Town. While the survey is not a statistically representative poll, it provides valuable community feedback that highlights prevailing sentiments and recurring themes. Respondents engaged thoughtfully, with many providing detailed written comments in addition to their selections, offering context that helps illuminate the numbers.

Key takeaways from the survey include:

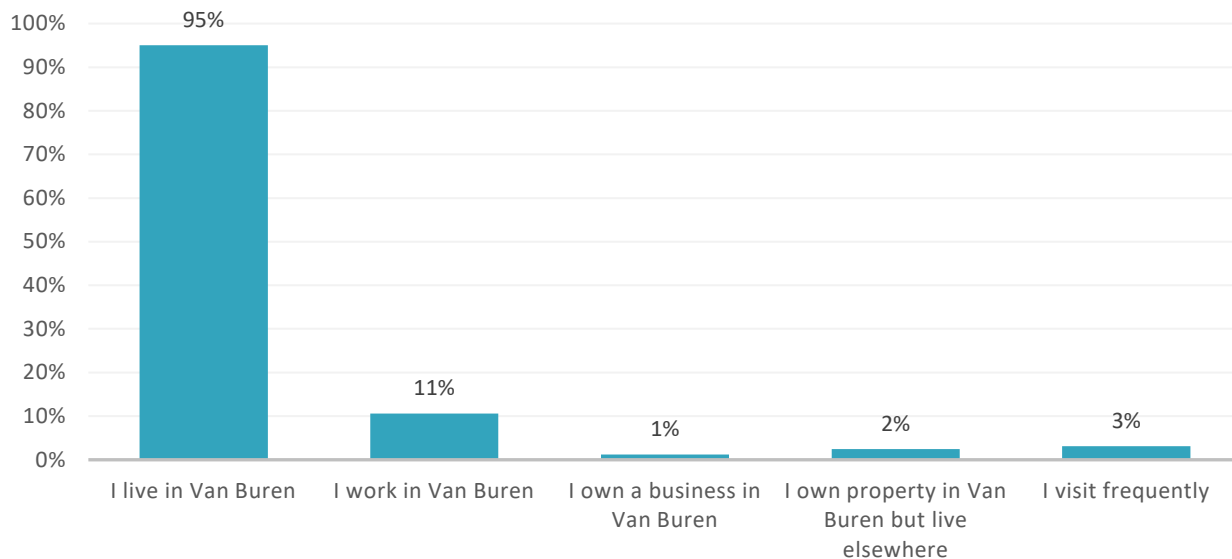
- Preservation of community character emerged as a top priority, with strong concern about overdevelopment and a desire to protect farmland, open space, and the Town's rural identity.
- Traffic congestion and infrastructure strain were frequently mentioned, with residents urging that road, sewer, and sidewalk improvements keep pace with any new growth.
- A strong sense of community, safety, and family-friendly environment were consistently identified as the Town's most important strengths.
- Expanded recreational opportunities, such as walking and biking trails, public waterfront access, and community events, were widely supported.
- Balanced, smart growth was favored: residents expressed openness to new businesses, senior housing, and affordable housing, provided development is directed to areas with existing infrastructure and designed to fit the Town's character.
- The survey revealed that residents value Van Buren's small-town feel, natural resources, and quality of life, and they want future planning efforts to focus on protecting these qualities while addressing infrastructure needs and carefully guiding development.

## Q1: Age Distribution



The survey received responses across all age groups, except the under 19 year olds. Compared to the Town's overall population distribution, the 35–54 age cohort was notably overrepresented, while younger cohorts, particularly those under 19 and those between 20–34 were underrepresented. This skew suggests that survey responses may reflect more of the priorities and perspectives of middle-aged residents rather than younger community members.

## Q2: What is your relationship to Van Buren?



The majority of survey participants indicated they are residents of Van Buren, while only a small number identified as business owners in the community. This shows that the survey results primarily reflect the perspectives of those who live in the Town, with limited input from the business community.

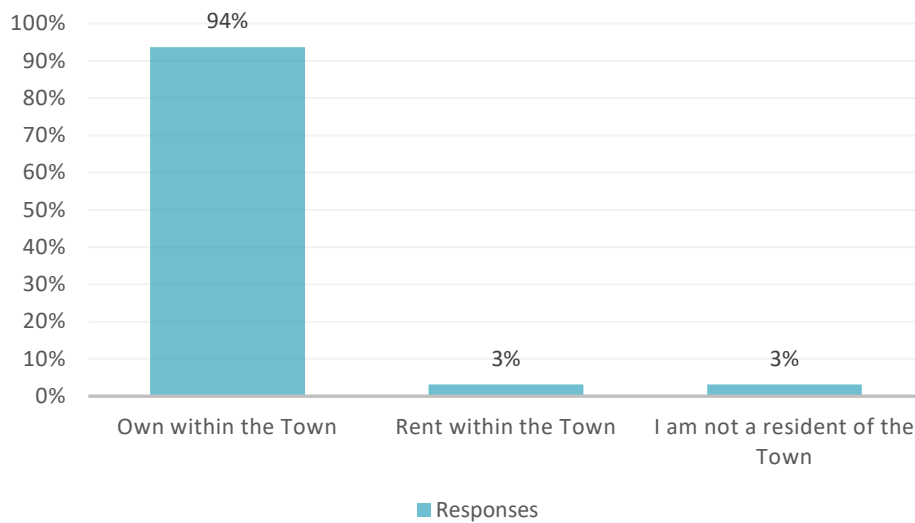
Other (Please specify):

- I used to live in Van Buren
- Enjoy the community opportunities
- I represent property developers within the community

## Q3: Street / Neighborhood

The survey responses show that Harbor Heights was the most represented neighborhood with 56 responses, followed by Seneca Knolls (16), Village Green (12), and Crego Road area (10). Other neighborhoods with smaller but notable representation include Marion Meadows (7), the Village of Baldwinsville (6), and Canton Street (6). A handful of responses came from areas such as East Sorrell Hill Road, Treybrook (Lexi Lane), and Memphis, each with 3 responses.

#### Q4: Do you own or rent your residence?

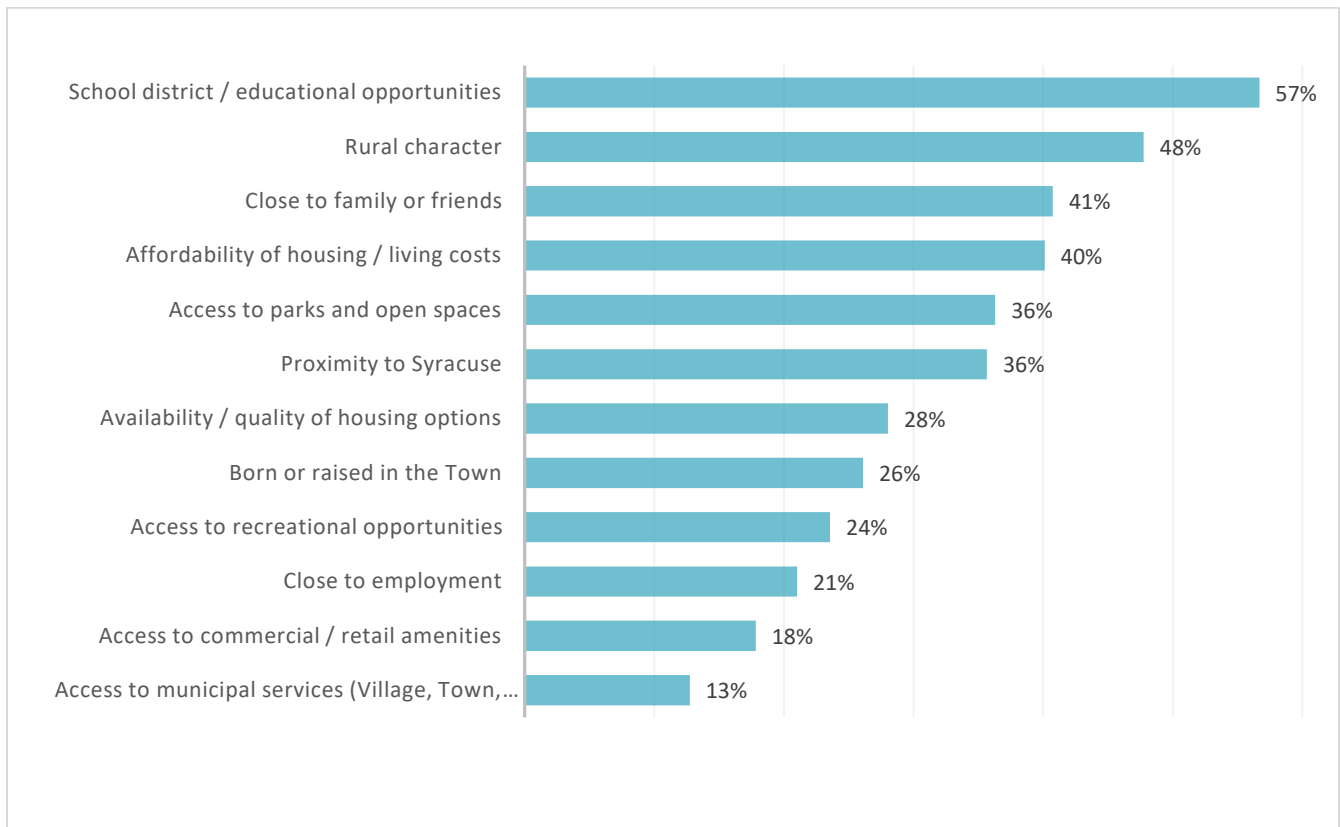


The vast majority of survey respondents (97%) reported that they own their home in Van Buren, while only about 3% indicated they rent. This response distribution is consistent with the Town's housing composition, which is predominantly single-family, owner-occupied housing.

Other (please specify):

- Live in the area but don't own or rent
- Own a house but do not live year round in town
- Floral park

## Q5: Which of the following had the greatest impact on your choice to live and/or invest in the Town of Van Buren?

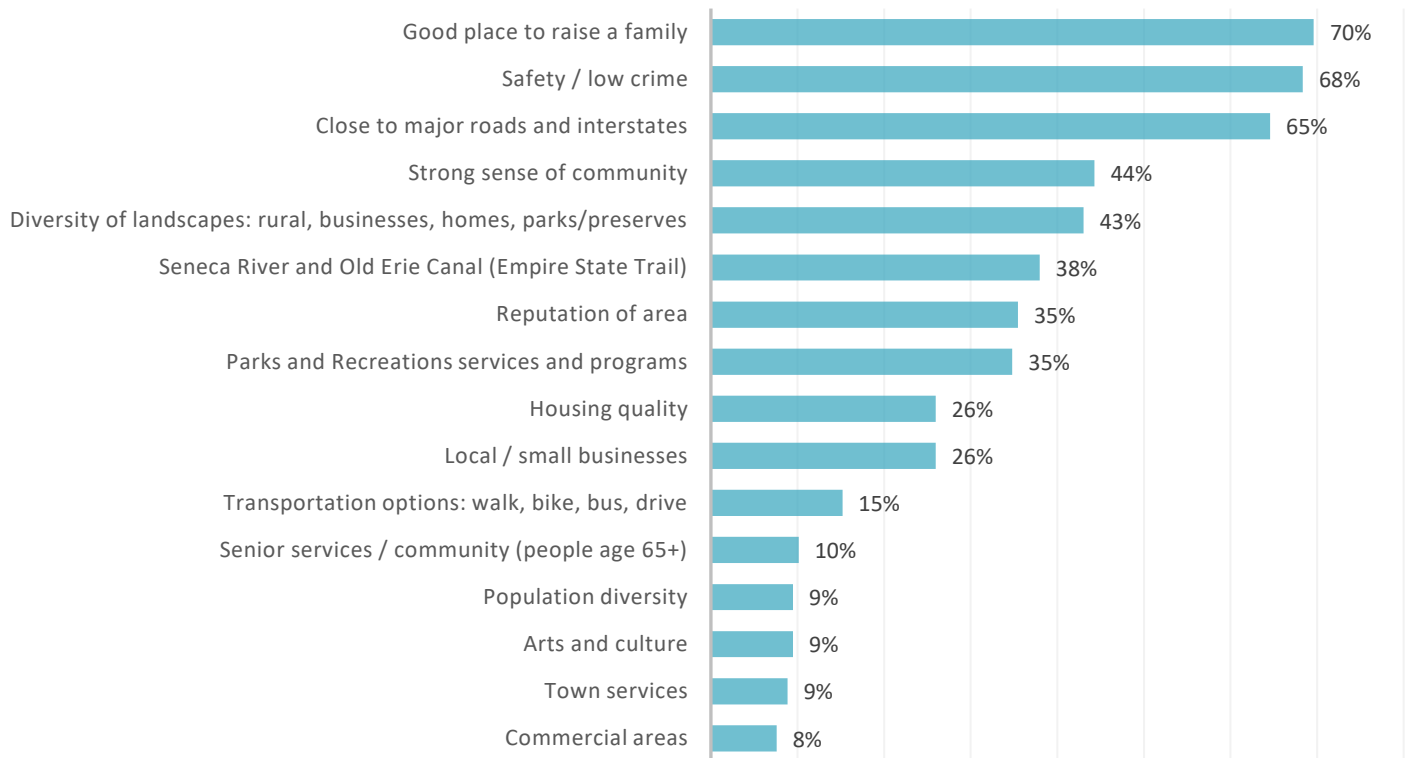


Survey respondents most often cited Van Buren’s school district / educational opportunities and the rural, small-town character as the primary reason for choosing to live or invest in the community. Other major factors included affordability of housing, access to parks and open spaces, and the Town’s convenient proximity to the Syracuse Metro area for employment opportunities.

These findings highlight the strong appeal of Van Buren’s balance between rural charm and regional accessibility. Residents value the ability to enjoy open space and a close-knit community while remaining connected to jobs, services, and amenities in nearby urban centers.

“Other” responses further reinforced this theme, emphasizing the Seneca River and waterfront access, avoidance of dense housing development, and the importance of family ties and community atmosphere. Accessibility to major transportation routes and amenities like the Fire Department also factored into decision-making. The responses reflect a population that prioritizes community character, natural assets, and affordability when choosing to reside in Van Buren.

## Q6: What are the most important characteristics found in the Town?

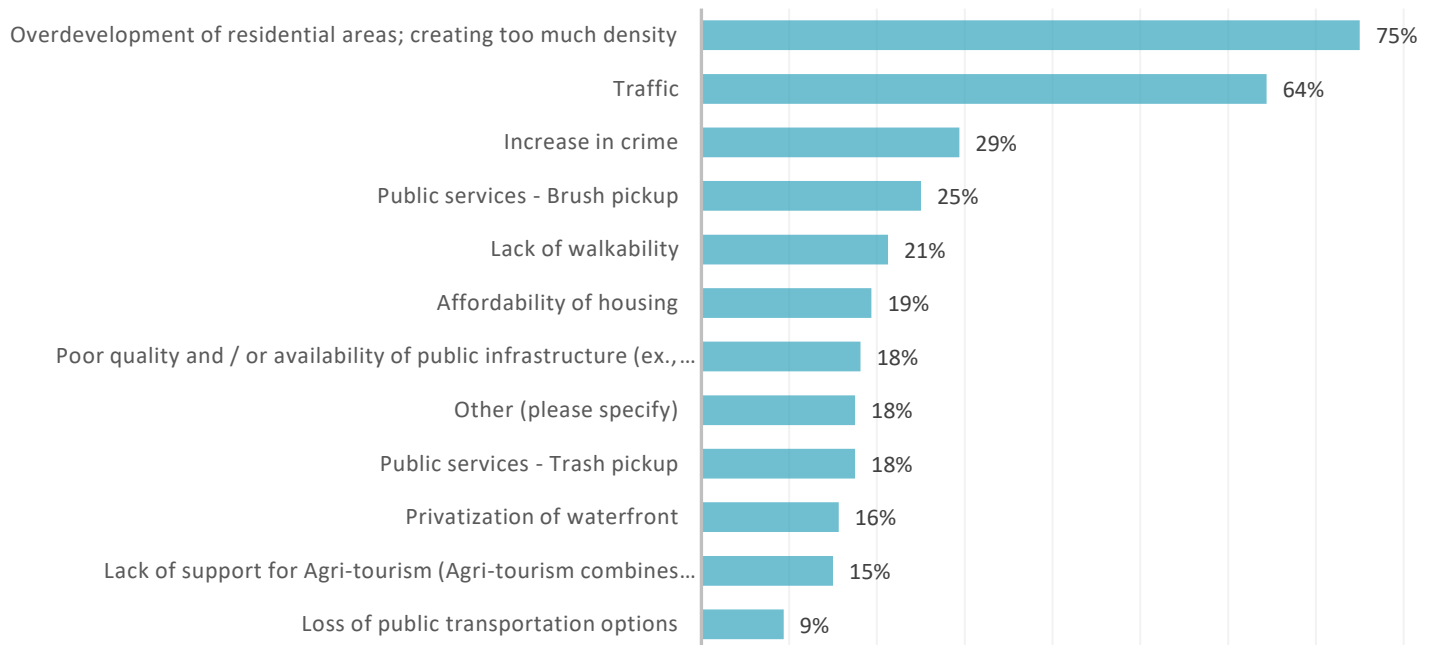


The most common response to this question was that Van Buren is considered a good place to raise a family. This was followed by safety/low crime rates, proximity to major roads and interstates, and a strong sense of community. Respondents also highlighted the importance of the Town's natural resources, including the Seneca River, recreational spaces, and open farmland.

These results suggest that residents place the highest value on Van Buren's family-oriented environment and safety, while also recognizing the convenience of the Town's location within the region. The strong sense of community and access to natural resources further reinforce Van Buren's appeal as a rural but well-connected community.

In the "Other" responses, residents emphasized the Town's low population density, farmland and forests, community heritage (including churches and schools), and relatively low taxes. A few noted concerns about the declining aesthetics of the village and questioned whether it remains as strong a family environment as in the past. The data reflects a community that takes pride in its safe, family-friendly, and connected rural character.

## Q7: My biggest concerns in the Town are.... (Select up to 4)



The top concern among survey respondents was overdevelopment of residential areas and loss of open space/farmland to increased density. This was followed by traffic, walkability and pedestrian safety, and affordable housing.

The results highlight a tension between growth and preservation in Van Buren, with many residents worried about development pressures threatening the Town’s rural character. Traffic issues, often linked to new housing construction and concerns about speeding, were seen as a growing problem. Walkability also emerged as a priority, with requests for more sidewalks, lighting, and pedestrian safety measures, particularly along Route 48. Affordable housing was another key concern, reflecting both availability and cost pressures.

In the “Other” comments, respondents elaborated on infrastructure challenges, such as limited sewer service (especially near the Seneca River), stormwater management, aging septic systems, and deteriorating roads. Additional concerns included loss of farmland and wildlife areas, lack of enforcement for property maintenance and builder accountability, high-speed truck traffic, inadequate lighting, noise, power outages, and rising taxes. Some residents also pointed to graffiti, cannabis shops, flooding, and declining aesthetics as issues affecting the Town’s quality of life.

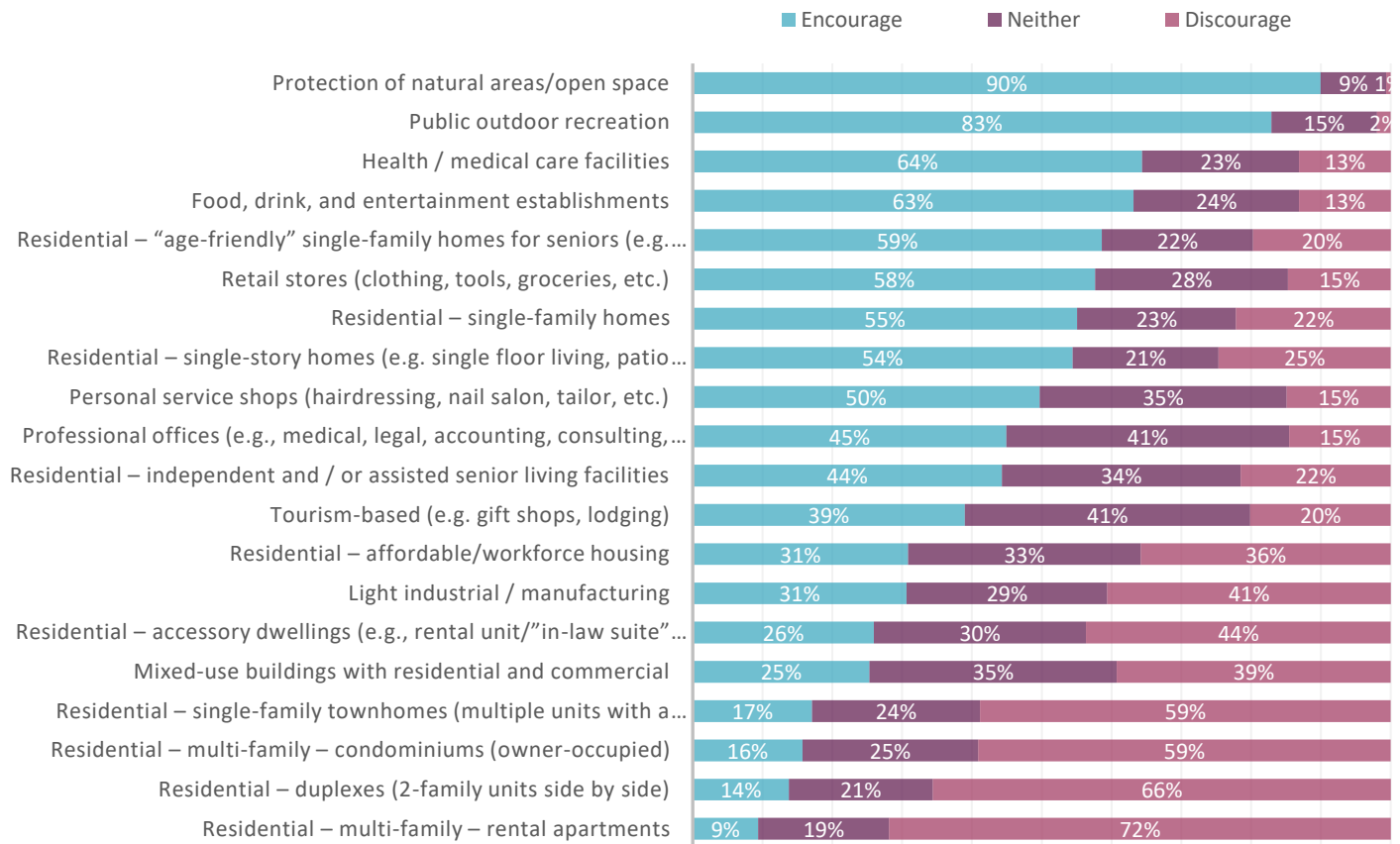
**Q8: Please use the space below to briefly explain your concerns or share specific examples related to the issues you selected in the previous question.**

Overall, the open-ended responses to Question 8 reflect widespread concern about overdevelopment and its cascading impacts on traffic, infrastructure, schools, and quality of life. Residents strongly value Van Buren’s rural character and open space, but feel it is being eroded by rapid housing growth and dense subdivisions. Traffic congestion at key intersections and speeding on local streets were frequently mentioned as growing problems, compounded by inadequate infrastructure such as limited sewers, drainage issues, and lack of sidewalks. Many respondents would like to see growth managed in a “smart” way. Concerns about taxes, overcrowded schools, and declining neighborhood character further underscore a desire among residents to balance growth with preservation, safety, and improved services.

**Top Categories of Concern (97 responses)**

- 1. Overdevelopment / Loss of Rural Character & Open Space – 41 responses (42%)**
  - Concerns about rapid housing growth, loss of farmland and open space, too many apartments/townhomes, and erosion of Van Buren’s small-town/rural character. Specific areas like Harbor Heights, Treybrook, Village Green, and Marion Meadows were often cited.
- 2. Traffic & Transportation Issues – 29 responses (30%)**
  - Heavy congestion at the Baldwinsville Four Corners, Downer Street, and Syracuse Street; unsafe intersections; speeding on residential roads; truck traffic; and lack of a bypass.
- 3. Infrastructure & Public Services – 18 responses (19%)**
  - Sewer expansion needs (especially near the Seneca River), drainage and flooding issues, deteriorating roads, frequent power outages, lack of sidewalks, trails, and lighting, and absence of brush/trash pickup services.
- 4. Schools, Taxes, and Public Resources – 12 responses (12%)**
  - Concerns about school overcrowding, rising property taxes without improved services, and frustration over costs for recreation and senior programs.
- 5. Safety, Crime, and Community Character – 10 responses (10%)**
  - Worries about increasing crime, graffiti, drug/cannabis shops, unsafe crosswalks, speeding, and a decline in community aesthetics and cohesion.

## Q9: What types of development would you encourage or discourage in the Town?



Survey responses to Question 9 show that residents generally support growth that enhances community amenities and preserves Van Buren’s rural identity, such as more parks, trails, local businesses, and farmland protection. There is also interest in housing that serves community needs, particularly affordable and senior housing. In contrast, respondents strongly oppose high-density residential growth, large subdivisions, and apartment complexes, which are seen as threats to rural character and traffic conditions. Large-scale industrial projects, solar farms on farmland, and big-box commercial development were also discouraged.

## **Q10: If you'd like to expand on any of your answers to Question 9 or specify geographic locations, please do so here:**

Responses to Question 10 reinforced the themes seen in earlier survey questions. Residents encourage redevelopment of vacant commercial sites, more affordable and senior housing, and expanded small-scale businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues. There is also interest in infrastructure upgrades, walkability improvements, and eco-friendly outdoor amenities.

On the other hand, residents strongly oppose large new housing subdivisions and apartment complexes, especially when they replace farmland and open space. Many fear overdevelopment is eroding Van Buren's rural, small-town character and straining roads, schools, and services. Cannabis dispensaries and luxury-focused housing were also discouraged.

### **Top Encouraged Development Themes**

- 1. Affordable & Senior Housing (12 mentions)**
  - Many stressed the need for affordable starter homes for young families and affordable senior housing/independent living options.
  - Respondents felt current housing is skewed toward luxury and high-end developments, leaving gaps for lower- and middle-income residents.
- 2. Redevelopment / Reuse of Existing Sites (10 mentions)**
  - Strong support for reinvesting in underutilized or vacant commercial areas (e.g., Tri-County Mall, Rite Aid, Big M Plaza, 84 Lumber site).
  - Many prefer adaptive reuse and infill over building on farmland or open space.
- 3. More Small-Scale Businesses, Restaurants & Entertainment (8 mentions)**
  - Interest in more food and retail choices (family-style restaurants, grocery, local shops).
  - Calls for more community entertainment, events at Paper Mill Island, and recreational venues (e.g., roller rinks, mini golf).
- 4. Infrastructure & Walkability (5 mentions)**
  - Requests for sidewalks, safe pedestrian connections, better traffic flow, and services to support growth.
  - Example: sidewalk connection from Marion Meadows to Syracuse St, improved roads, traffic management.
- 5. Eco-Friendly & Outdoor-Oriented Development (3 mentions)**
  - Some expressed interest in development that highlights Van Buren's natural assets (e.g., trails, eco-friendly spaces, outdoor-focused community).

### **Top Discouraged Development Themes**

- 1. Large Housing Developments / Apartments (15 mentions)**
  - Widespread opposition to additional subdivisions, condos, or apartments, often tied to traffic, overcrowding, and loss of rural character.
  - Many called for "no more housing," especially on farmland and open space.
- 2. Loss of Farmland / Rural Character (10 mentions)**
  - Concerns that development is displacing farmland, green space, and the "small-town feel."
  - Fear Van Buren could become like Clay, Cicero, or Liverpool — overdeveloped and urbanized.
- 3. Overdevelopment in General (8 mentions)**
  - Broad concerns about population growth outpacing infrastructure, schools, and services.

- Sense that the Town is approving too much growth without planning for impacts.
- 4. **Cannabis Stores (3 mentions)**
  - Explicit opposition to cannabis dispensaries, viewed as hurting the town's image.
- 5. **High-End / Luxury Focused Housing (2 mentions)**
  - Pushback against expensive developments that don't meet the needs of average residents, especially young families and seniors.

## Q11: What types of businesses or services do you wish were closer to your home or neighborhood?

When asked what types of businesses or services respondents would like closer to home, residents overwhelmingly identified more diverse and higher-quality restaurant options as their top priority, ranging from family-owned sit-down dining to bakeries, cafes, and affordable fast food alternatives. The second most common request was for better grocery options, with Wegmans being the clear favorite, followed by Trader Joe's and more specialty/local produce markets.

Residents also expressed a strong interest in healthcare services, including medical, dental, and veterinary facilities, as well as car washes and basic auto services. Smaller but notable desires included specialty retail shops, entertainment venues, and community amenities like a YMCA or dog park.

### Top Categories of Desired Businesses/Services

1. **Restaurants & Food Options (36 mentions)**
  - The single most common request.
  - People specifically asked for:
    - Locally owned restaurants, family-style diners, cafes, bagel shops, bakeries, sub shops, coffee shops.
    - A desire for greater variety (not just pizza/pasta or bars).
    - Some want higher-quality fast food (Chipotle, Taco Bell, Panera, Trader Joe's salad-type options).
    - Others emphasized affordable restaurants and sit-down dining.
2. **Grocery Stores (18 mentions)**
  - By far the most requested specific business: Wegmans (mentioned 9 times).
  - Some also wanted Trader Joe's, a better quality grocery option than Tops/Aldi, organic/health-focused groceries, or more variety.
  - A few suggested year-round farmers markets for local produce.
3. **Medical / Healthcare Services (10 mentions)**
  - Multiple references to medical and dental offices, healthcare facilities, animal hospitals, urgent care.
  - Several respondents said they miss having medical offices in Radisson.
4. **Car Washes & Auto-Related Services (7 mentions)**
  - Specific calls for good car washes, Delta Sonic, bottle/can return, basic auto services.
  - While some said there are already "too many auto shops," the car wash demand stood out.
5. **Small Shops & Specialty Retail (6 mentions)**
  - Requests for clothing stores, shoe stores, barber shops, gift shops, neighborhood convenience stores, variety stores.
  - A few mentioned home improvement stores, landscape services, daycare, pet services, gun shop/armory.

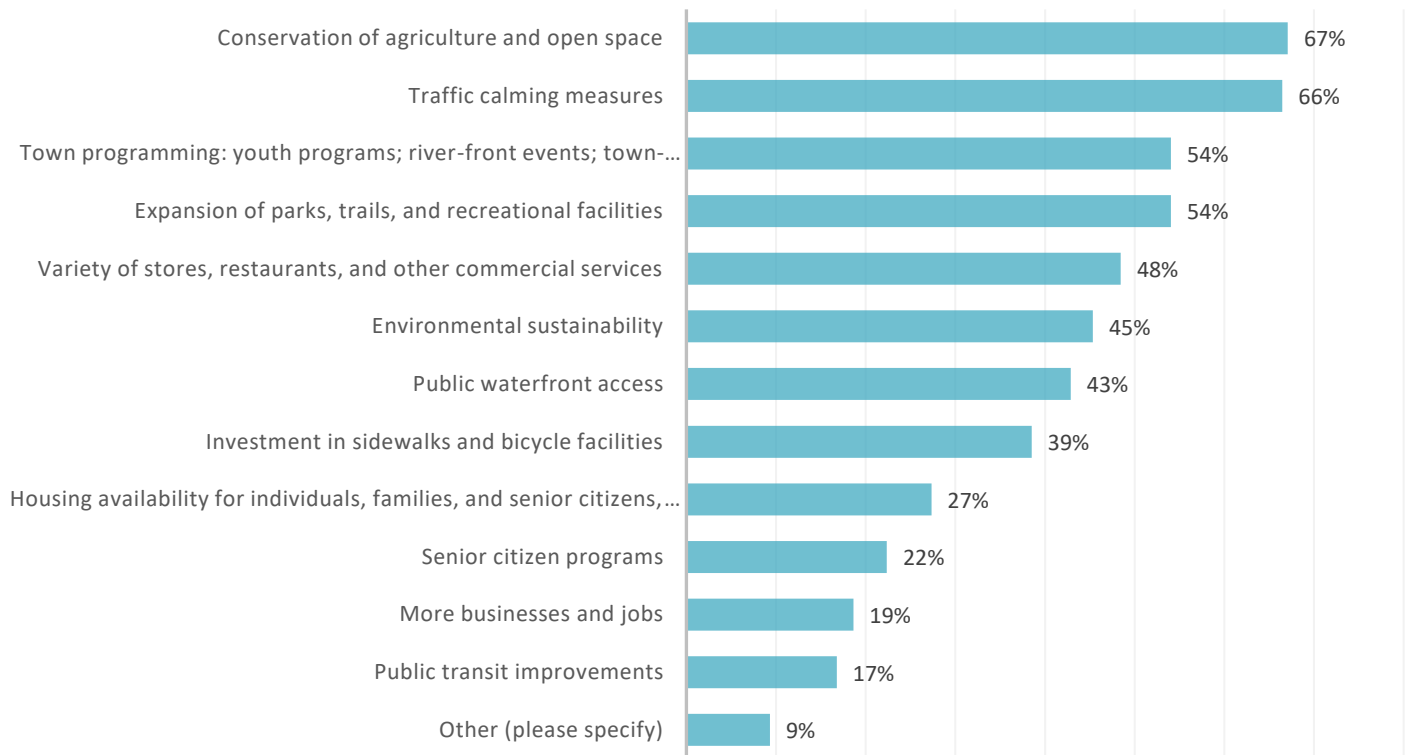
## **Q12: What types of recreational opportunities would you like to see improved or added? (e.g. walking/biking trails, athletic fields, public waterfront access, community events, etc.)**

When asked what recreational opportunities should be improved or added, residents most frequently called for expanded walking and biking trails, often with safer connections to existing routes and the ability to link neighborhoods to the village and regional trail systems. Public waterfront access was the second most common theme, with residents expressing strong interest in boat launches, fishing areas, and general riverfront improvements. Many also emphasized the importance of community events and entertainment, such as festivals, free concerts, and better use of Paper Mill Island. Rounding out the top responses were requests for parks and athletic facilities (including pickleball and soccer fields), as well as interest in dog parks and small-scale amenities like sidewalks and playground upgrades. Responses reflected a desire for recreation that enhances Van Buren's sense of community, provides more access to natural resources, and supports both families and older residents.

### **Top Categories of Recreational Opportunities**

- 1. Walking & Biking Trails (42 mentions)**
  - By far the most frequent response.
  - Requests included more walking paths, bike lanes, trail connections to the village and regional systems (Onondaga Lake Park, State Fair Blvd, Village Green), and safer pedestrian/bike routes.
- 2. Public Waterfront Access (28 mentions)**
  - Strong interest in expanding boat launches, fishing areas, marinas, river trails, and general public access to waterways.
  - Many specifically mentioned the Seneca River and desire for more access points.
- 3. Community Events & Entertainment (23 mentions)**
  - Calls for more festivals, arts & crafts fairs, community concerts, Paper Mill Island programming, and winter/summer events at parks.
  - Some referenced reviving the old Paper Mill Island concert series.
- 4. Parks & Athletic Facilities (15 mentions)**
  - Requests for athletic fields (especially soccer), pickleball courts, playground upgrades, splash pads, indoor recreation (pickleball, golf), and general green space in neighborhoods.
- 5. Dog Parks (6 mentions)**
  - Several respondents specifically requested an off-leash dog park at Van Buren Park or elsewhere.

**Q13: In the next ten (10) years, what would you like to see get additional emphasis (investment, permitting, policy changes, etc.) in the Town as a whole? Please select as many as apply (the following list is not in any order of priority)**



When asked what areas the Town should emphasize over the next ten years, the top priorities identified by survey respondents reflect a strong desire to maintain Van Buren’s rural character and to address concerns about congestion and road safety. These priorities were closely followed by calls for expanded town programming and community events and the expansion of parks, trails, and recreational facilities, underscoring the community’s interest in fostering a vibrant, family-friendly environment with greater recreational opportunities.

Overall, the “Other” comments (9%) reinforce the broader survey themes: residents want to preserve rural character, improve infrastructure, expand recreational and community amenities, and address quality of life issues, while remaining wary of overdevelopment.

## **Q14: Please describe your vision for what you hope the Town of Van Buren will be like in 10 to 15 years.**

The responses reflect a community that overwhelmingly wants to preserve Van Buren's small-town and rural character while improving quality of life through better infrastructure, recreation, and modest economic growth. Residents envision a town that remains safe, quiet, and family-friendly, with farmland and open space preserved, and without the congestion, overdevelopment, or loss of identity that they see in nearby communities like Cicero, Clay, or Liverpool.

At the same time, many respondents want to see practical improvements: expanded sidewalks and trails, more public waterfront access, stronger community programming and events, and infrastructure upgrades like sewers and traffic management. A subset of respondents also call for more diverse housing options (especially affordable and senior housing) and a broader range of businesses and services, but with an emphasis on filling vacant spaces and revitalizing existing areas rather than sprawling into farmland.

### **Categorized Responses (with frequency)**

- 1. Preserve Small-Town & Rural Character (40 responses)**
  - Desire for minimal growth or none at all; protect farmland, forests, and open space.
  - Fear of "overdevelopment" and "cookie cutter" subdivisions.
  - Calls to "keep it small," "quiet," and "exactly as it is."
- 2. Infrastructure & Traffic Improvements (25 responses)**
  - Traffic congestion is one of the most consistent concerns.
  - Strong calls for the long-discussed bypass and general traffic calming.
  - Desire for expanded sewers, sidewalks, and safe bike/pedestrian connections.
  - Calls for maintenance of roads, bridges, and utilities.
- 3. Manage Growth & Housing (20 responses)**
  - If growth occurs, it should be well-planned, sustainable, and not overly dense.
  - Support for affordable housing and senior housing (but not large developments).
  - Interest in balanced residential growth paired with infrastructure.
  - Concerns about rental properties, overpopulation, and maintaining community identity.
- 4. Recreation, Parks, & Community Amenities (20 responses)**
  - Interest in more walking/biking trails and public waterfront access.
  - Requests for dog parks and better use of Paper Mill Island (concerts, events).
  - Calls for family-friendly activities, youth programs, and town-wide events.
- 5. Business & Economic Development (15 responses)**
  - Calls for more local restaurants, shopping, and nightlife.
  - Support for revitalizing existing plazas and vacant buildings rather than building new.
  - Desire for small businesses, cafes, and retail (Township 5/Fairmount Fair mentioned as models).
  - Interest in expanding the commercial/industrial tax base to relieve residential burden.
- 6. Quality of Life & Community Values (15 responses)**
  - Strong emphasis on safety, low crime, good schools, and family-friendliness.
  - Calls for inclusivity: meeting the needs of all ages, including youth and seniors.
  - Interest in affordability: cost of living, housing, and local taxes.

### Q15: The one thing this survey failed to address is:

Many respondents to this open-ended question noted that the survey seemed heavily focused on growth and development, which created the perception that the Town is prioritizing new projects over other community values. While the survey included questions about conservation of agriculture, preservation of open space, and expansion of parks and trails, simply asking about “types of development” caused some residents to feel the process was tilted toward pro-development outcomes. Several comments voiced frustration that overdevelopment and dense housing seemed to be assumed rather than questioned, and residents expressed concern about impacts such as traffic congestion, loss of rural character, and strain on infrastructure.

At the same time, the responses show that residents are not opposed to all growth rather, they want it to be thoughtful and balanced. A strong theme across the feedback was preserving farmland, open space, and the Town’s small-town character while directing new development only to areas where infrastructure already exists. In other words, respondents support a smart growth approach: protect the qualities that make Van Buren unique, maintain rural and agricultural land, and ensure any future development enhances rather than diminishes community character.

#### 1. **Overdevelopment & Land Use Concerns (15 responses)**

- Strong opposition to unchecked development, density housing, and specific projects (e.g., Harbor Heights, Rt. 31, land near Tops, solar farms).
- Calls for transparency in land purchases and rezoning decisions.
- Desire to protect farmland, rural feel, and neighborhood character.

#### 2. **Infrastructure & Traffic (12 responses)**

- Frustration with congestion at Baldwinsville’s four corners; repeated calls for a second bridge or bypass.
- Concern over road conditions, potholes, water issues, and infrastructure upkeep.
- Requests for sidewalks and better planning for parking (e.g., Papermill Island events).

#### 3. **Taxes, Fiscal Policy, and Code Enforcement (10 responses)**

- Rising property taxes and frustration with how tax dollars are spent.
- Calls for better code enforcement (junk properties, fireworks, rentals, noise).
- Complaints about inequities between village and town taxpayers.

#### 4. **Environmental & Public Safety (8 responses)**

- Flooding risk, waterchestnut invasion, and impacts of solar farms.
- Interest in green energy and environmental protections.
- Concerns over crime, drugs, and lack of police presence.
- Noise pollution from I-690 and fireworks.

#### 5. **Governance, Communication & Community Voice (5 responses)**

- Desire for more transparency in development decisions.
- Requests for clearer communication channels to voice everyday concerns (e.g., potholes, traffic lights, nuisances).
- Some general dissatisfaction with direction of local government.