

BELFAST COMMUNITY SURVEY ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Belfast Comprehensive Plan Committee, with the assistance of The Musson Group, launched the Belfast Community Survey as the first form of public engagement in the Comprehensive Plan drafting process. The Community Survey was open from February 1st, 2021 through May 1st, 2021. The survey was publicized on the City's website and social media accounts and promoted by Comprehensive Plan committee members, City Council, and City staff. Paper copies of the survey were made available at the City Hall and local locations including the Chamber of Commerce, library, and at the Waldo County General Hospital's vaccine clinics.

The Community Survey received 1,029 responses including over 100 paper surveys. Of the 1,029 respondents, 72% are year-round residents of Belfast. This survey will serve as a starting point that will help the Committee begin to understand the community's vision of the City, as it is today, and the community's values and needs. As the Committee drafts the City's vision for the next 10 or more years, the Community survey will serve as an informative part of the public process.

The Belfast Community Survey was conducted while the Committee was simultaneously engaging with key stakeholders in the City and region. The Comprehensive Plan public process will continue throughout the summer and fall of 2021 with Community meetings.

KEY FINDINGS

Survey Respondent Background:

- 1,029 survey responses
- 72% respondents are year-round residents
- Of the year-round residents who responded – 62% own their home; 10% rent their home
- While 91% of respondents stated their housing is adequate to for their needs, only 70% stated their housing is affordable based on their needs.
- Of year-round Belfast residents who responded, 92% stated their housing is adequate, and 68% stated their housing is affordable
- Over 50% (53.8%) of respondents are between the ages of 55 and 74.

According to survey respondents, Belfast is best described as **“An historic, coastal community that serves the day-to-day needs of residents.”**

Majority of respondents (90.5%) are likely to recommend Belfast to others as a place to call home. The majority responded (64.8%) that Belfast has become a better place and 59.3% responded that Belfast will become a better place in the next 5-10 years.

July 2021

Respondents like Belfast the most for its access to the coast, community feel, and because it is a safe community. Least liked are high property taxes, lack of housing options, and needed infrastructure improvements.

Priority of goals over the next 10 years:

Top priorities

- Expansion of high-speed broadband
- Protect marine resources
- Take measures to address the impacts of climate change
- Protect undeveloped open space, fields, and forested land

Other goals with high/moderate priority

- Maintain and improve roads
- Encourage more diverse housing options

Goals that are low/not a priority are

- Limit residential development
- Improve public safety services

Policy Updates:

When asked if survey respondents agree or disagree with specific policy updates, respondents strongly agree that the City should consider **zoning amendments that address the impacts of climate change**. There was somewhat strong agreement for zoning amendments that would **encourage creative housing development opportunities**, as well as **for allowing and encouraging both residential and commercial development outside the bypass**.

City Investments:

While respondents strongest support is for **improvements to broadband connectivity in underserved areas**. There is somewhat strong support for the following:

- Purchase of open space land for conservation and passive recreational use
- Resources and assistance to help seniors continue to live within the community
- Construction and improvements of bicycle and pedestrian access and facilities
- Increasing police and public safety capacity, including additional police training in areas of nonviolent intervention and mental health awareness
- Resources and assistance to help low-income residents continue to live within the community
- Resources and assistance to those experiencing housing insecurity

City Facilities:

Respondents rated the following facilities and services as exceptional/adequate:

- Winter road maintenance
- Transfer station

- City Hall services
- Library programs and resources

The area rated as needing improvement is **broadband service availability**.

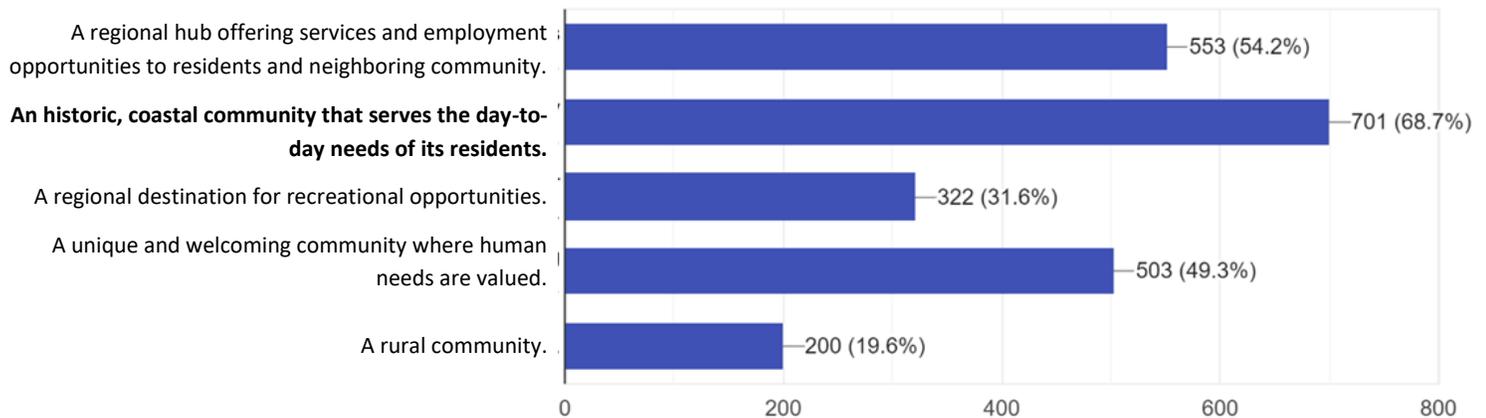
Two other areas that are adequate/needs improvement are **activities for youth** and **activities/programs for at-risk residents**.

SURVEY RESULTS

Below is a full comprehensive summary of the results including demographic analysis and categorization of open-ended survey responses. All open-ended responses may be found in the Appendix.

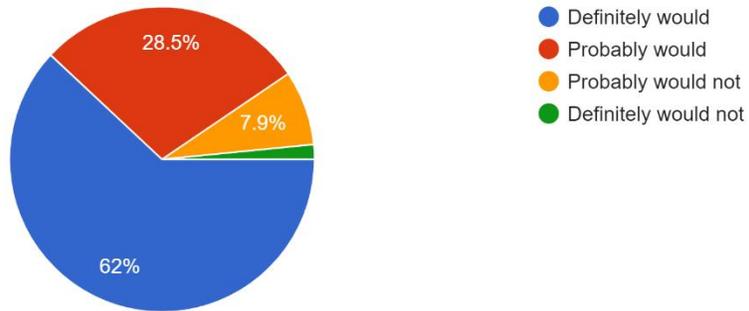
1. Which of the following best matches how you would describe the City of Belfast? Select all that apply.

1,020 responses



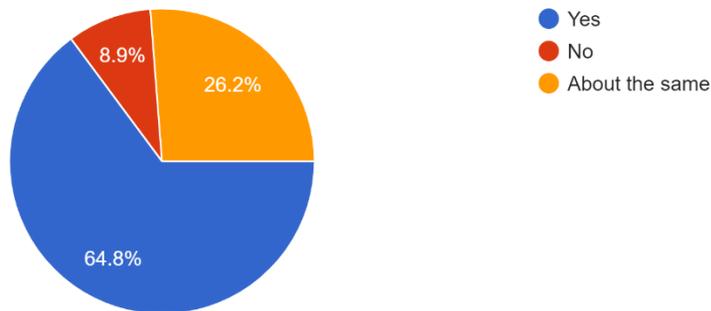
2. Would you recommend Belfast to others as a place to call home?

1,023 responses



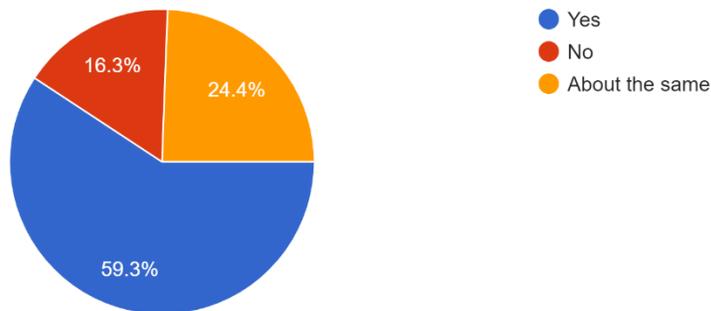
3. In the time you've lived or done business in Belfast, has it become a better place?

1,018 responses



4. In the next 5-10 years, do you expect Belfast will become a better place to live or do business than it is today?

1,016 responses



5. What do you like most about Belfast? <i>(top answers from 1,017 responses)</i>	Responses	
	#	%
Access to the coast	727	71.5%
Community Feel	719	70.7%
Safe Community	658	61.8%
Access to recreational opportunities	252	24.8%
Regional location	236	23.2%
Community planning and investment for long-term sustainability	179	17.6%
Public Services	132	13%
Strong municipal staff	102	10%
Strong elected leadership	89	8.8%
Strong schools	83	8.2%
Regional Services	76	7.5%
Mix of housing options	57	5.6%
Good job opportunities	49	4.8%
<i>Other Comments:</i>		
Arts & Culture	21	--
Businesses/Owners/Coop	19	--
6. What do you like least about Belfast? <i>(top answers from 981 responses)</i>	Responses	
	#	%
High property taxes	539	54.9%
Lack of housing options	412	42%
Needed infrastructure improvements, such as roads, broadband etc,	337	34.4%
Lack of job opportunities	250	25.5%
Weak schools	141	14.4%
Lack of community planning and investment for long-term sustainability	140	14.3%
Excessive commercial development	114	11.6%
Excessive population growth and residential development	107	10.9%
Traffic challenges	89	9.1%
Poor water quality	45	4.6%
Poor public services	37	3.8%
Lack of access to recreational opportunities	23	2.3%
Lack of community feel	22	2.2%
<i>Other Comments:</i>		
Council/Leadership	23	--
Proposed aquaculture	21	--
Shopping/retail options	17	--
7. In your opinion, what level of priority should the City place on the following goals over the next 10 years?	Responses	
	Priority Level	
Encourage more diverse housing options	Highest/Moderate	
Improve the school system	Highest/Moderate	
Encourage new commercial development	Moderate	
Improve public safety services	Moderate/Low	
Improve mental health services and facilities	Moderate	
Protect undeveloped open space, fields, and forested lands	Highest	
Maintain and improve roads	Moderate	
Alternative transportation options	Moderate	
Improve bicycle and pedestrian connections and safety	Moderate	
Increase recreational opportunities	Moderate/Low	

Protect marine resources	Highest
Improve harbor facilities	Moderate
Limit residential development	Low
Provide more programs for seniors	Moderate
Provide more programs for youth	Moderate
Provide more programs for at-risk residents	Moderate
Encourage economic development initiatives focused on job creation	Highest/Moderate
Expansion of high-speed broadband	Highest
Take measures to address the impacts of climate change	Highest

8. Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
The city should allow and encourage increased residential development within the bypass (downtown)	Agree/Neutral
The City should consider zoning amendments that would encourage creative housing development opportunities throughout the city (ie. infill, Accessory Dwelling Units, conversion of large single-family homes into multi-family homes)	Strongly Agree/Agree
The City should allow and encourage increased residential development outside the bypass	Strongly Agree/Agree
The City should allow and encourage increased commercial development outside the bypass	Strongly Agree/Agree
The City should review zoning codes to ensure mental health services, residential and commercial, are able to be developed	Agree
The City should consider zoning amendments that address impacts of climate change	Strongly Agree
9. Please rate your support of the City investing in each of the following.	
Improvements to harbor facilities	Support
Improvements to road networks	Support
Purchasing of land for recreational purposes	Support/Neutral
Purchase of open space land for conservation and passive recreational use	Strongly Support/Support
Resources and assistance to help seniors continue to live within the community	Strongly Support/Support
Construction and improvements of bicycle and pedestrian access and facilities	Strongly Support/Support
Increasing police and public safety capacity, including additional police training in areas of nonviolent intervention and mental health awareness	Strongly Support/Support
Improvements to broadband connectivity in underserved areas of the City	Strongly Support
Extension of infrastructure such as water and sewer	Support/Neutral
Resources and assistance to help those struggling with mental health issues to continue to live within the community	Support

Resources and assistance to help low-income residents continue to live within the community	Strongly Support/Support
Resources and assistance to those experiencing housing insecurity	Strongly Support/Support
Alternative transportation options (public transit, ride share programs etc.)	Support
Electric Vehicle charging stations	Support
10. How would you rate the following existing facilities and services?	
Winter road maintenance (ex. plowing, sanding)	Exceptional/Adequate
Summer road maintenance (ex. paving, ditching)	Adequate
Transfer Station	Exceptional/Adequate
City Hall Services	Exceptional/Adequate
Library programs and resources	Exceptional/Adequate
Activities for those 55 and older	Adequate
Activities for youth	Adequate/Needs Improvement
Activities and programs for at-risk residents	Adequate/Needs Improvement
Public Safety and Fire	Adequate
Regional School District	Adequate
Local health care service options	Adequate
Broadband service/availability	Needs Improvement

11. Is there anything else you would like the Belfast Comprehensive Plan Committee to know? Categories of open-ended responses (364 responses):			
General Response Category:			Detailed Response Category:
Development/Growth	72	20.9%	6 – preserve historic 6 – outside bypass 2 – inside bypass 3 – excessive growth/too fast/limit
Community/Diversity/Quality of Life	68	19.8%	15 – positive re: community 7 – increase/ encourage diversity 6 – priority on quality of life 4 – maintain/protect identity
Public Services:	56	16.3%	
15 General comments			
12 Health			6 – mental health; 4 – lack of health services
10 Police/Public Safety			4 – positive; 3 – negative; 2 – training
8 Transfer Station/Waste Management			4 – has declined/needs improvement
8 Parking			3 – improve
3 Plow			3 – excessive
Housing	54	15.7%	25 – lack of/need more affordable housing 8 – limit short term rentals/Airbnb 3 – low-income housing
Climate/Environment/Sustainability	50	14.5%	22 – climate crisis, address/plan for climate change 5 – renewable/green energy
Aquaculture	44	12.8%	33 – opposed 8 – in favor
Infrastructure:	38	11.0%	

12 General			
8 Sidewalks/Pedestrian			8 – need to improve/safety
7 Roads			
6 Water/Sewer			
5 Transportation			4 - need public/alternative transportation
Property Taxes/Valuation	33	9.6%	28 – need to lower/too high
Council/Leadership/City Hall	29	8.4%	6 – negative re: listening/respect/representing citizens 6 – need changes 4 – term limits 3 – positive
Broadband/Internet	15	4.4%	8 – improve/expand 3 – essential 2 – affordability
Retail/Shopping	15	4.4%	8 – limit/no box stores/big business 7 – more/bigger shopping options
Jobs/Employment	12	3.5%	7 – increase job opportunities/job creation
Comprehensive Plan - General	9	2.6%	
Schools/Education	8	2.3%	4 – need improvement
Survey	8	2.3%	
Tourism	8	2.3%	3 – positive impact 2 – negative impact
Young Families/Children/Youth	8	2.3%	4 – need to attract 3 – losing/being left behind
Parks/Recreation	7	2.0%	2 – facilities at parks 1 – improve 3 – suggesting specific activities
Arts/Culture	5	1.5%	5 – need to support
Low Income Residents	5	1.5%	4 – help for
Airport	4	1.2%	4 – need to grow/develop/improve/utilize more
Harbor/Bay/Marine Resources	4	1.2%	
Seniors	4	1.2%	
Drug epidemic	1	0.3%	

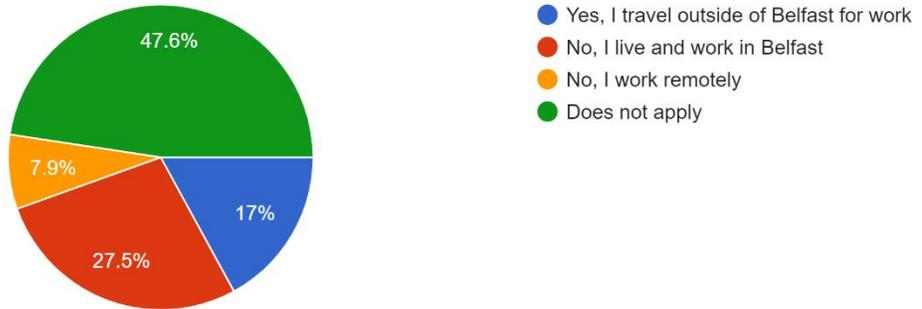
Demographics

12. Are you a*:		
	#	%
Year-round Belfast resident who owns their home	616	61.9%
Belfast business owner	111	11.2%
Year-round Belfast resident who rents their home	103	10.4%
Employee who works in Belfast but lives elsewhere	100	10.1%
Seasonal Belfast resident who owns their home	51	5.1%
Director of a Belfast-based organization	46	4.6%
Non-resident Belfast property owner	42	4.2%
Seasonal Belfast resident who rents their home	6	0.6%

*64 respondents (6.4%) identified that they live in a nearby/neighborhood town or Waldo County

13. Do you regularly travel outside of Belfast for work?

1,004 responses

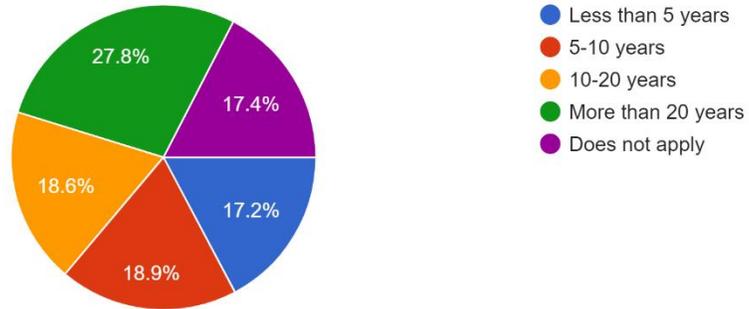


14. If you answered “yes” to question #13, where is your work based?
(117 year-round Belfast residents responded)

Camden	11
Bangor	10
Augusta	8
Rockland	7
Searsport	6
Rockport	5
Lincolnville	4
Bucksport	3
Midcoast	5
Wald County	5
Knox County	3
Other Maine	34
Out of State	8

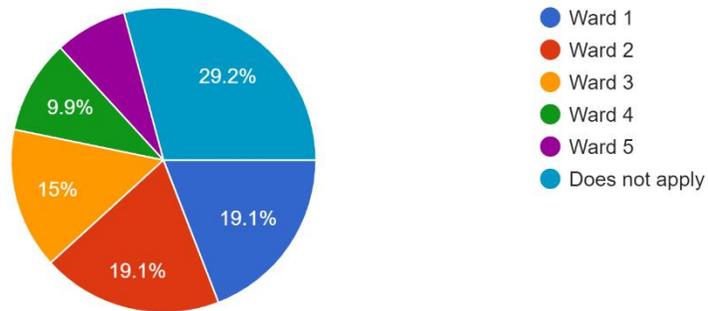
15. How long have you lived in Belfast?

1,004 responses



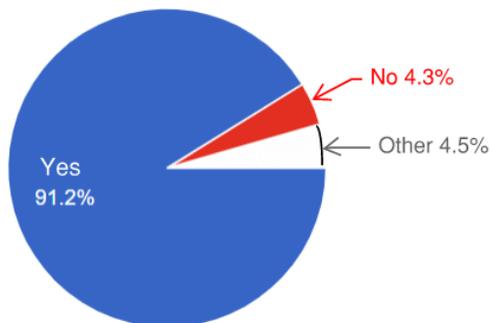
16. What Ward do you live in?

915 responses



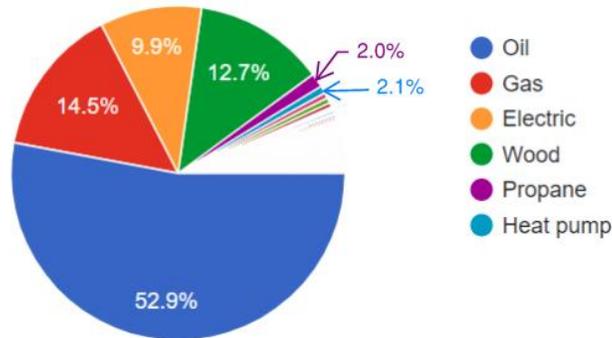
17. Is your housing adequate for your needs?

966 responses



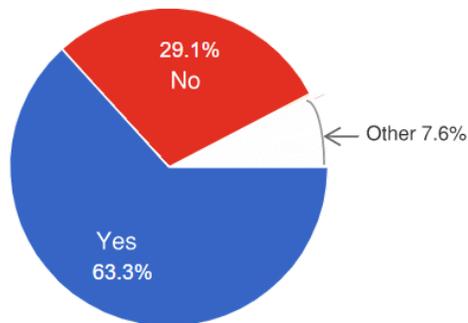
How do you heat your home (primary fuel source)?

954 responses



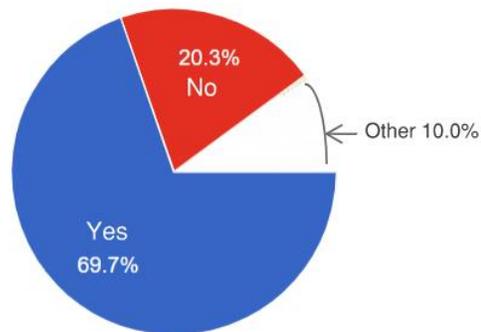
Do you have the ability to effectively cool your home?

956 responses



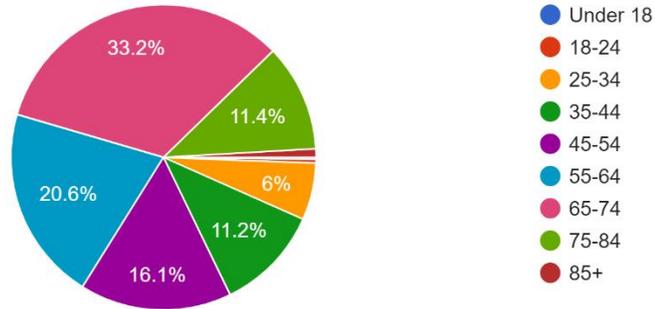
18. Is your housing affordable based on your income (do you pay more than 30% of your income for housing)?

967 responses



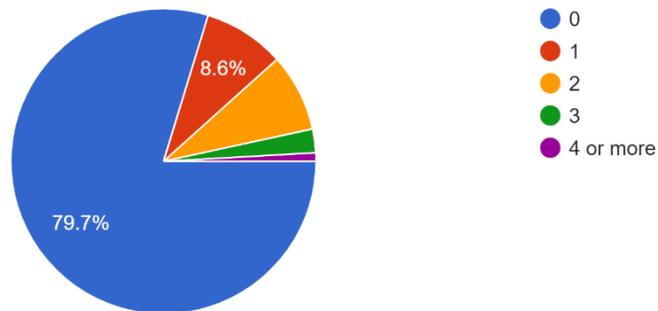
19. How old are you?

994 responses



20. How many school age children live in your household?

996 responses



21. Which of these best describes your personal income in the last year?

992 responses

