

Town of Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan

Community Survey Summary

February 18, 2021



HIGHLAND PLANNING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
PROJECT BACKGROUND	1
ABOUT THE SURVEY	2
PROMOTION AND DISTRIBUTION	2
TOPIC AREAS	3
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	4
QUALITY OF LIFE	4
LAND USE	8
FUTURE VISION	10
RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS	11
FILTERS	14

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the Town of Bethlehem offered a survey to community members in late 2020 that sought input on quality-of-life factors, land use, and a future vision for the community. The survey garnered almost 1,800 responses. Nearly 100% of people who responded to the survey said they live in Bethlehem. Those who completed the survey said they chose to live in Bethlehem because of schools, neighborhoods, and proximity to Albany. Overall, these community members are happy with the quality of life in Bethlehem, saying it is “excellent” or “good” because of the schools, walkability, and amenities. Community members also value the community’s safety and low crime rates, the parks and recreation offerings, the sense of community, and reputation.

Community members are concerned about challenges facing the town. Chief among those challenges are property taxes, preserving/conserving rural character, and traffic congestion. Other concerns are related to new housing development, climate resiliency, and affordable housing. Residents would like to encourage certain kinds of land uses (restaurants, coffee shops, low-density housing, outdoor recreation) and discourage others (big box commercial and apartments).

Those who responded to the survey want to see the town invest in sidewalks/bike facilities, and traffic calming, preserve open space and farmland, and create a more sustainable community. In the long-term, community members envision a safe, friendly, and diverse community that is sustainable, inclusive, walkable, and affordable.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In Fall 2020, the Town of Bethlehem initiated the Comprehensive Plan Update process to develop a plan that will guide development and community-related decisions toward the community’s vision for years to come. The Town’s current Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2005, has provided the Town’s elected and appointed officials with valuable context and guidance for development-related decisions and capital investment. It established a vision for the community’s future, articulated guiding principles and goals, and recommended specific actions or strategies that would move the Town toward the community vision. Updating the comprehensive plan requires a thorough and inclusive community discussion about the current state of the town, the community’s values and aspirations for the future, and the strategies that should be used or actions that should be taken to achieve the community’s vision for the future.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Promotion and Distribution

Consistent with the Community Engagement Plan, the Town developed and distributed a community survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather feedback from the community about challenges, opportunities and preferences related to the overall quality of life in the town. The survey was prepared and distributed using an online platform and posted at the Town’s project website. Paper copies were made available upon request. (Paper copies of the survey were mailed to approximately 250 property owners in the town.)

The survey was available for eight weeks. It was launched on Monday, November 9, 2020 and was open to all members of the public until the close of business on Thursday, December 31, 2020.¹

The survey responses are anonymous and confidential. The survey was promoted using a variety of methods, as described below:

- Postcard mailer
- Press release to local newspapers
- Project website (www.BethlehemForward.com)
- Social media posts (via project pages on Facebook and Instagram)
- Virtual public meeting on December 8, 2020
- Virtual Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) meetings
- Email blasts to multiple stakeholders list serves
- Lawn signs
- Decals on Town vehicles
- Door-to-door outreach by CPUC members
- Mailed to large landowners (5+ acres)
- Bethlehem Public Library and Ravena Coeymans Selkirk Community Library display boards

¹ This survey was designed to be qualitative and exploratory. It employed an opt-in methodology (i.e. non probability), meaning some members of the population had zero chance of responding. The results cannot be used to infer from the sample to the general population in statistical terms. The survey is one of multiple public engagement activities to be undertaken during the Comprehensive Plan Update for the purpose of gathering feedback from the public.

Topic Areas

The survey sought input from community members about the following topics:

Quality of Life: Questions relating to quality of life inform us about why respondents choose to live in or visit the Town. Understanding the qualities and characteristics that attract people to the Town will help guide decisions about future growth. *(Q 2, 3, 4, 5)*

Land Uses: Understanding what types of land uses and businesses the community will encourage and discourage provides insight into preferences for future development and growth. *(Q 7, 8, 9)*

Our Future and Vision: Respondents answered a few questions about the future of Bethlehem. Feedback provided about the desired state of the Town in the next 10 – 15 years provides guidance for future policies. *(Q 10, 11, 12, 17)*

The survey also gathered information about who participated survey. *(Q 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25)*

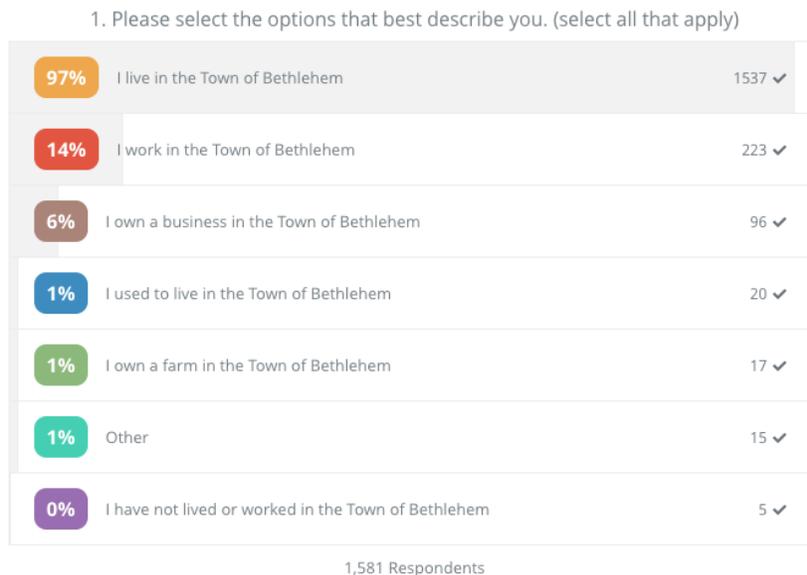
This memo contains a summary of the survey results. The detailed survey results, including all answers to open-ended questions, can be accessed at <https://publicinput.com/Report/alsagycwhs>.

For more information about the project and the associated outreach efforts, please visit www.BethlehemForward.com or send an email to bethlehemforward@townofbethlehem.org.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Town received 1,790 responses to the survey, which included 1,758 online responses and 32 paper responses. Not all respondents answered every question, so the total number of responses for each question did not always equal the total number of participants.

Almost all respondents who filled out the survey (97%) reported they live in Bethlehem or used to live in Bethlehem. About one percent of respondents said they used to live in the town. One percent said they live nearby, live on the border, or had a family member that lived there. Respondents were asked to check all that apply. The chart below shows the distribution of responses.



Quality of Life

Q2 asked respondents to select the top three reasons they choose to live or visit the town. The top three reasons selected by respondents were “Schools,” with 60%, “neighborhood and local community” with 55%, and “location within the Albany region” with 51%. The bottom three reasons were “commercial amenities” (4%), “employed in Bethlehem” (7%) and “historic character” (11%). The chart below shows the distribution of responses.

2. Why do you choose to live in or visit the Town of Bethlehem? (select up to three (3) of your top reasons)

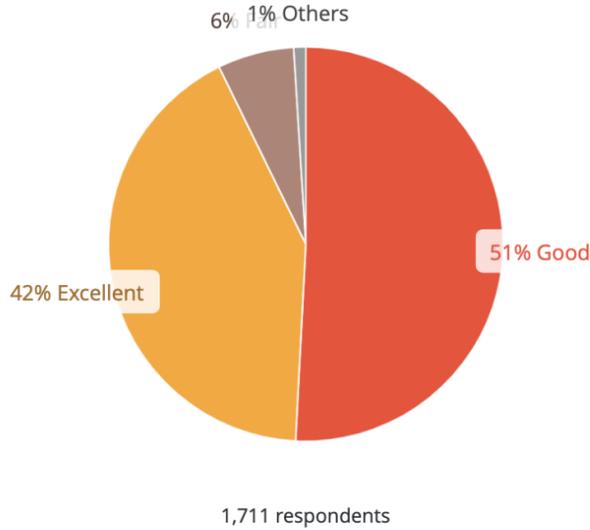
60%	Schools	937 ✓
55%	Neighborhood and local community	857 ✓
51%	Location within the Albany region	797 ✓
29%	Relatives and friends nearby	456 ✓
29%	Walkability	456 ✓
20%	Rural character and active farmland	314 ✓
15%	Recreation options	239 ✓
13%	Vibrant hamlet area	208 ✓
13%	Housing options available	194 ✓
11%	Historic character	171 ✓
7%	Employed in Bethlehem	104 ✓
6%	Other	87 ✓
4%	Commercial amenities	60 ✓

1,552 Respondents

Q3 asked respondents to rate the quality of life in the town. Approximately 93% said the quality of life is either “good” or “excellent,” while six percent said “fair.” Q4 asked respondents what factors led them to select their quality-of-life rating in the previous question. There were 994 responses to this open-ended question. The most frequently mentioned keywords that appeared in those responses (as measured by the number of times the word was tagged) were “schools,” “walkability,” “community” “services and

amenities,” and “safety.” A detailed list of open-ended responses to this question can be found at <https://publicinput.com/Report/alnsagycwhs>.

3. How would you rate the quality of life in the Town of Bethlehem?



4. What factors led you to select the quality of life rating?



Q5 asked respondents to select characteristics of the town were most important to them. The top three selected options were “safety/low crime,” (70%) “schools” (68%) and “parks and recreation” (58%). The options selected least frequently were “public transit” (8%), “arts and culture” (9%) and “Senior community” (11%). The chart below shows the distribution of responses.

5. Of the following, which are the most important characteristics that are found in the Town? (select all that apply)

70%	Safety/low crime	1089 ✓
68%	Schools	1061 ✓
58%	Parks and Recreations services and programs	900 ✓
56%	Lack of large malls and overbuilt commercial areas	874 ✓
49%	Neighborhood appearance	766 ✓
48%	Sense of community	742 ✓
47%	Town services	733 ✓
47%	Local/small businesses	724 ✓
45%	Diversity of landscapes: rural, businesses, homes, parks/preserves	696 ✓
39%	Reputation of neighborhood/area	601 ✓
34%	Rural character and active farmland	532 ✓
31%	Housing quality	485 ✓
28%	Transportation options: walk, bike, bus, drive	437 ✓
21%	Historic architectural character	319 ✓
17%	Hamlet areas	260 ✓
11%	Senior community (people age 65+)	169 ✓
9%	Arts and culture	147 ✓
8%	Public transit access	129 ✓
2%	Other	26 ✓

1,549 Respondents

Q6 asked respondents about the most important challenges facing the town for the next ten years. The top three selected options were “property taxes” (52%), “preservation or rural character and farmland” (49%), and “traffic congestion” (46%). The bottom three choices

were “housing for seniors (9%), “business expansion” (14%) and “equitable delivery of services to all parts of town” (15%).

6. What are the most important challenges you see for the Town during the next ten (10) years? Please select your top five (5) from the list below and feel free to identify others.

52%	Property taxes	785 ✓
49%	Preservation of rural character and active farmland	746 ✓
46%	Traffic Congestion	697 ✓
39%	Neighborhood connectivity and walkability	587 ✓
38%	Conservation of natural resources	572 ✓
33%	New housing developments	496 ✓
31%	Social issues and racial diversity	468 ✓
26%	Sustainability/resiliency to address climate change	396 ✓
24%	Affordable housing	369 ✓
20%	Preservation of historic and cultural resources	309 ✓
17%	Business attraction	261 ✓
16%	Availability of shopping and amenities	244 ✓
16%	Property owner rights	236 ✓
15%	Equitable delivery of services to all parts of the town	225 ✓
14%	Business expansion opportunities	212 ✓
9%	Housing for senior citizens	132 ✓
3%	Other	52 ✓

1,515 Respondents

Land Use

Q7 asked land uses respondents would encourage or discourage in the town. The top three land uses respondents selected to encourage were “public outdoor recreation” (92%),

“protection of natural areas” (90%), and “restaurants” (80%). The top three land uses respondents selected to discourage were “big box commercial” (74%), “motels/hotels” (67%), and “residential multi-family apartments” (44%). Q8 asked respondents to suggest other land uses they would like to encourage. Detailed responses to that question can be found at: <https://publicinput.com/Report/alsagycwhs>.

Q9 asked what types of businesses and services respondents routinely use and wish where located closer to home or located in the town. There were 776 responses to this open-ended question. The most frequently mentioned keywords that appeared in responses (as measured by the number of times the word was tagged) were “restaurants,” “large stores” “coffee shops” “local businesses.” Detailed responses to this question can be found at the results website link provided above.

9. What types of businesses and services do you routinely use that you wish were closer to your home, neighborhood, or located in the Town?



For Q10, respondents were asked to prioritize four options presented about planning for future residential development. Respondents prioritized “low-density residential development of single-family housing” (64%), followed by a “mix of housing types” (61%), “in-law suites” (54%). The remaining 20% listed other options, such as senior housing, affordable housing, short-term housing for professionals, preservation and reuse of existing homes, and none of the above.

10. When planning for future housing/residential development, which of the following should the Town prioritize?

64%	Low-density residential development of single-family housing	Rank: 1.67	763 ✓
61%	Mix of housing types (ownership and rental) and price points to attract and accommodate individuals and families with a variety of income levels.	Rank: 1.73	718 ✓
54%	In-law suites and other housing options to accommodate young professionals and senior citizens.	Rank: 1.90	638 ✓
20%	Other	Rank: 2.19	231 ✓

1,184 Respondents

Future Vision

Q11 asked respondents what topics should have additional emphasis over the next ten years. The top three topics selected were “investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities” (70%), “conserve open space and farmland” (60%), and “creating a sustainable community” (51%). The bottom three topics were “more public transit” (16%), “hamlet development” (17%), and “more senior citizen programs” (17%).

11. During the next ten (10) years, what things would you like to see get additional emphasis in the Town? Please select as many as apply (the following list is not in any order of priority)

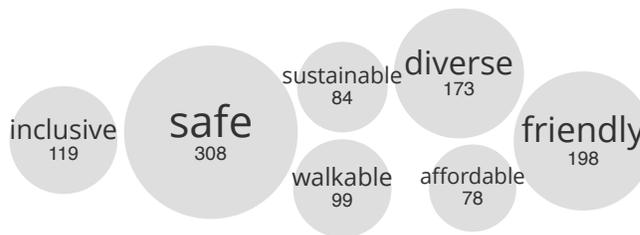
70%	Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities	976 ✓
60%	Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland	830 ✓
51%	More emphasis on creating a sustainable community	708 ✓
50%	Traffic calming	693 ✓
49%	More parks and recreational facilities	687 ✓
44%	More variety of stores, restaurants and other commercial services	606 ✓
37%	More active farms/agricultural businesses	513 ✓
37%	More emphasis on creating an inclusive community	509 ✓
34%	Historic Preservation	473 ✓

33%	More housing available for individuals, families and senior citizens supporting a variety of income levels	463 ✓
29%	More youth programs	404 ✓
21%	More businesses and jobs	295 ✓
17%	More senior citizen programs	238 ✓
17%	Hamlet development	231 ✓
16%	More public transit	218 ✓
4%	Other	55 ✓

1,391 Respondents

Q12 asked respondents about their vision for the future using three words they would like to use to describe the town in 15 years to their friends/children/grandchildren. The most frequently suggested words were “safe,” “friendly,” and “diverse.”

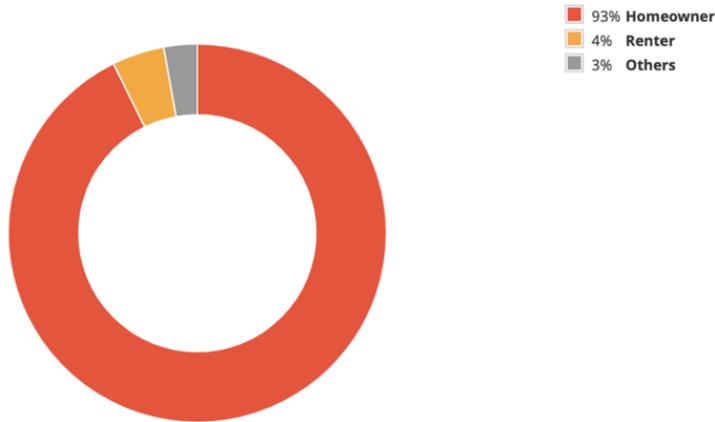
12. In fifteen (15) years, what three words would you like to be able to use to describe the Town of Bethlehem to your friends/children/grandchildren?



Respondent Demographics

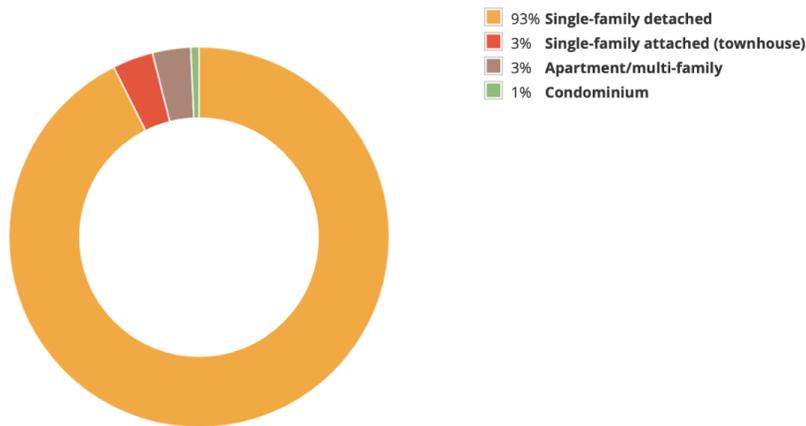
Approximately 93% of respondents reported they were homeowners and 93% reported they live in a single-family detached dwelling. Q16 asked respondents to list what factors led them to select the type of housing they live in. The most frequently suggested words were “family,” “homeownership,” and “privacy.”

14. Please select the option that best describes you:



1,435 respondents

15. In what type of dwelling do you live?



1,444 respondents

16. What factors led you to choose to live in this type of housing?



Just over 61% of respondents reported living in a household with 2-4 occupants. About nine percent of respondents lived in one-person households, while two percent lived in households with six or more occupants. About 52% of respondents reported that zero children under 18 lived in their household, while 23% reported having two children under the age of 18. One percent reported having four or more children under 18 living in the household. Approximately 84% of respondents reported they identify as White, while one percent reported they identify as Black or African American. Two percent identify as Hispanic and two percent identify as Asian.

The largest proportion of respondents reported their household income is between \$100,000 and \$149,999 (24%), while 18% reported household income between \$150,000 and \$199,999. About 17% reported income over \$200,000. About 23% of respondents were over the age of 65.



Respondents were asked how they get news about the town. Fifty-eight percent selected from “neighbors and friends,” while 52% selected “town newsletter” and 48% said “town website.” About 47% of respondents said they get their news from social media and 41% said from the newspaper.

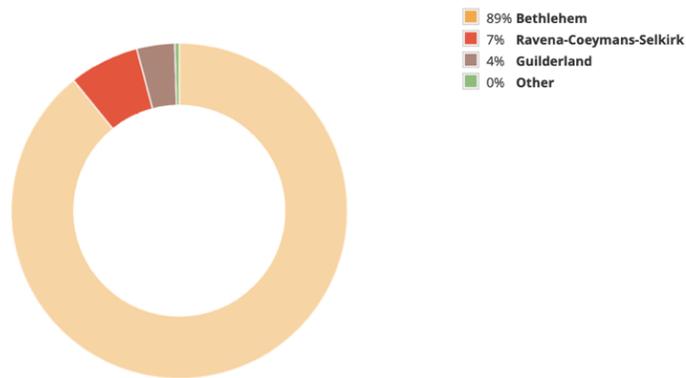
The largest proportion of survey respondents said they live in the hamlet of Delmar (49%), followed by Glenmont (14%) and Slingerlands (12%). Almost 90% of respondents said they live in the Bethlehem School District, followed by Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk (7%) and Guilderland (4%).

24. Which hamlet do you live in?

49%	Delmar	694 ✓
14%	Glenmont	201 ✓
12%	Slingerlands	169 ✓
12%	Elsmere	162 ✓
8%	Selkirk	118 ✓
2%	North Bethlehem	32 ✓
1%	Other	19 ✓
1%	South Bethlehem	10 ✓

1,404 Respondents

25. Which school district do you live in?



1,422 respondents

Filters

To better understand challenges and preferences among respondents, filters were applied to selected questions, as described below.

Base questions	Filter Questions
Q6: What are the most important challenges for the Town?	Q1: Live in town, work in town, other
Q11: What things would you like	Q14: Homeowner/renter/other

to see get additional emphasis?	Q24: Hamlet of residence
---------------------------------	--------------------------

In response to Question 1, approximately 14% (223) of respondents noted that they work in the Town of Bethlehem, nearly 6% (100 respondents) noted that they own business, and 1% (17 respondents) owned a farm. These responses were filtered according to Question 6 (challenges) and Question 11 (preferences). Among those who said they work or own a business in Bethlehem, the majority selected “property taxes” as the major challenge for the Town during the next ten (10) years, followed by the “preservation of rural character and active farmland.” Additionally, around 47% (89) of respondents who work in the Town expressed concerns about “traffic congestion,” and around 53% of farm owners noted “property owner rights” as a major challenge.

Q 14 asked respondents to select whether they were homeowners, renters, or other. The majority (93%) of survey respondents identified themselves as “homeowners.” Of those, 96% live in “single-family detached” housing. Of the 4% survey respondents who identified themselves as “renters,” a majority live in “apartment/multi-family” housing. Homeowners identified “property taxes” (52%) as a major challenge along with “preservation of rural character and active farmland” (50%), and “traffic congestion” (47%). Renters, on the other hand, expressed concerns about “affordable housing” (62%), “neighborhood connectivity and walkability” (41%), “property taxes” (36%), “preservation of rural character and active farmland” (36%), and “social issues and racial diversity” (36%).

Question 24 asked respondents which hamlet they live in. The Town of Bethlehem includes seven (7) hamlets: Delmar, Glenmont, Slingerlands, Elsmere, Selkirk, North Bethlehem, and South Bethlehem. These hamlets have no formal boundaries but are generally known areas that residents associate with a unique character and/or from a historic perspective.

To better understand challenges and preferences among respondents across different hamlets, responses to Questions 6 and 11 were filtered by hamlet of residence. Table 1 summarizes the challenges and preferences filtered by hamlet.

Table 1 Challenges and Preferences by Respondent’s Hamlet of Residence

Hamlet	Top two challenges among hamlet residents (Q6)	Top three preferences among hamlet residents (Q11)
Delmar (49% or 694 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation of rural character and active farmland (51%) • Neighborhood connectivity and walkability (45%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (74%) • Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland (60%) • More parks and

		recreational facilities (54%)
Glenmont (14% or 201 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property taxes (66%) Preservation of rural character and active farmland (47%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (67%) Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland (63%) Traffic Calming (58%)
Slingerlands (12% or 169 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property taxes (62%) Preservation of rural character and active farmland (48%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (68%) Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland (55%)
Elsmere (12% or 162 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic Congestion (59%) Preservation of rural character and active farmland (53%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (76%) Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland (65%) More emphasis on creating a sustainable community (57%) Traffic calming (57%)
Selkirk (8% or 118 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property taxes (64%) Preservation of rural character and active farmland (44%) Conservation of natural resources (33%) Equitable delivery of services to all parts of the town (21%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (60%) Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland (59%) Traffic calming (54%) More emphasis on creating a sustainable community (50%)
North Bethlehem (2% or 32 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property taxes (70%) Preservation of rural character and active farmland (47%) Equitable delivery of services to all parts of the town (37%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More parks and recreational facilities (73%) Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (73%)
South Bethlehem (1% or 10 respondents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property taxes (78%) Traffic Congestion (78%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with interested landowners to conserve open space and farmland (78%) Investment in sidewalks and bicycle facilities (67%)

Note: Detailed survey results, including all answers to open-ended questions, can be accessed at <https://publicinput.com/Report/alsagycwhs>. Summary charts are shown in Appendix A.