
Williamsburg Town Facilities and Services Survey

Report to the Facilities Master Plan Committee

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February 3, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2016, the town of Williamsburg created a Facilities Master Plan Committee to help support the town's Board of Selectmen in their decisions about several major issues facing the town. The most significant of these were decisions about the location and style of a town safety complex and what to do with the site of the former Helen E. James School. However, the town is facing many other issues concerning its infrastructure, including tax/investment tradeoffs, issues related to how the town promotes healthy and active living, and the future of its senior center, and the Committee wanted a better understanding of residents' priorities. Healthy Hampshire, a community organization that is part of the Mass in Motion initiative funded by the MA Department of Public Health, offered to design and analyze a survey that would provide information to the Committee as it makes its recommendations.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPATION

The survey was administered on paper and electronically. Survey distribution began on September 14, 2016 and the survey was closed on December 7, 2016. Paper forms were made available in town buildings, including the Town Hall, library, and senior center, and the link to the electronic survey was distributed through Facebook and newsletters. Respondents were offered a chance at winning small prizes from town businesses as an incentive to complete the survey.

There were 454 complete responses to the survey, as well as 20 partial responses. Responses were skewed toward people who are older and well-established in the town:

- About half of respondents had lived in Williamsburg for over 20 years
- About half of respondents were age 60 or over
- About one-quarter of respondents were in their fifties.¹

Although many survey respondents were older, a little over 30% reported having at least one child under the age of 18 in their home.

About two-thirds of respondents reported that they live closer to Williamsburg Village, with the remaining reporting that they live closer to Haydenville.

The annual household income of participants was skewed high, with about one-third of survey respondents reporting an income of less than \$50,000 per year, 25% with an income of \$50-75,000 per year, and 44% with incomes of at least \$75,000 per year.² About 35% of survey respondents reported that their income is primarily fixed.

¹ As a comparison, the 2010 Census reported that 24% of Williamsburg residents are age 60 or over, and an additional 21% are age 50-59.

² The 2015 American Community Survey reported that 43% of Williamsburg residents had incomes of under \$50,000 per year, 13% had incomes between \$50-75,000 per year, and 44% had incomes above \$75,000 per year.

FINDINGS

Burgy/Haydenville Divide

The town of Williamsburg has two distinct town centers, known as Williamsburg (Burgy) and Haydenville. Until recently, two elementary schools served the two town centers, and each maintains some parallel services (for example, each village center currently has its own fire department and library). However, while physical locations of town services are split between the two village centers (for example, the Highway Department and elementary school are in Burgy and the Town Offices and Police Department are in Haydenville), the majority of town services are shared by the two villages. Town government officials often feel they need to be attentive to the needs of people near each town center in making decisions for the whole community.

The survey results indicate that about three-quarters of Williamsburg residents do perceive a divide in the town, but over 80% do not see it as an important consideration in siting municipal facilities.

Chart 1: Does Williamsburg feel to you like a single community, or do Burgy and Haydenville feel like separate communities?

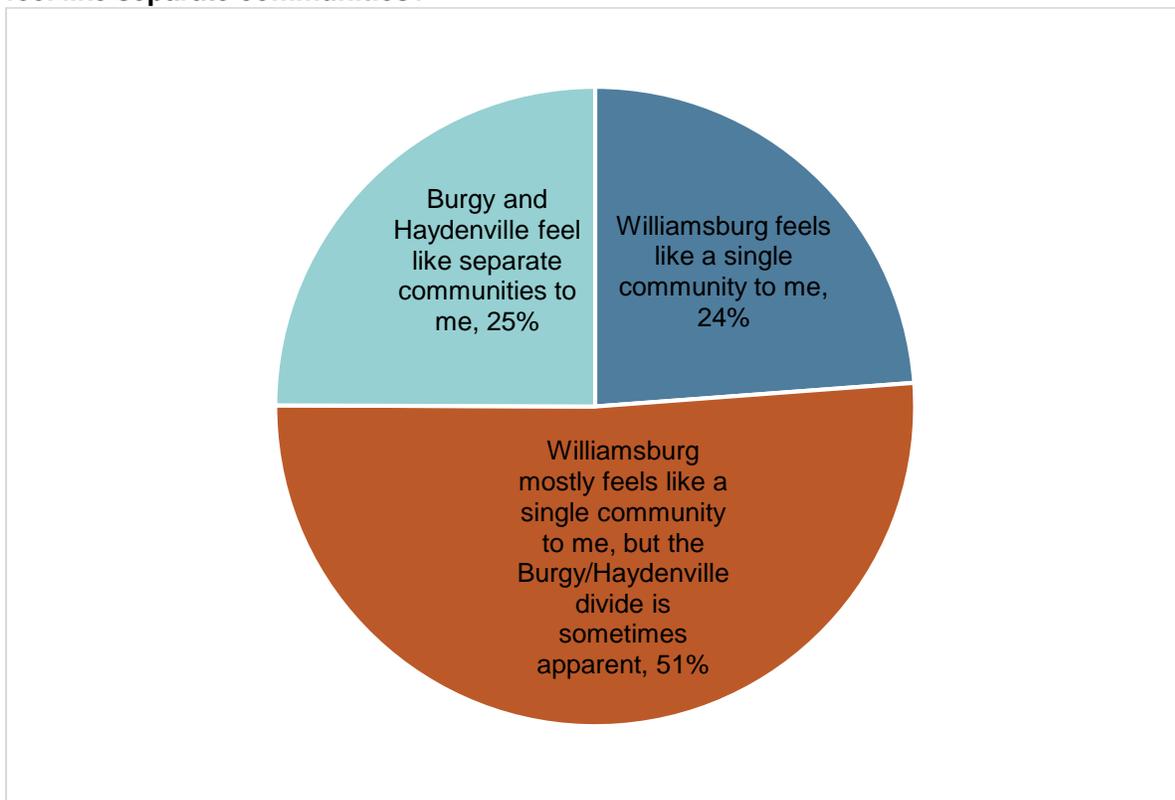
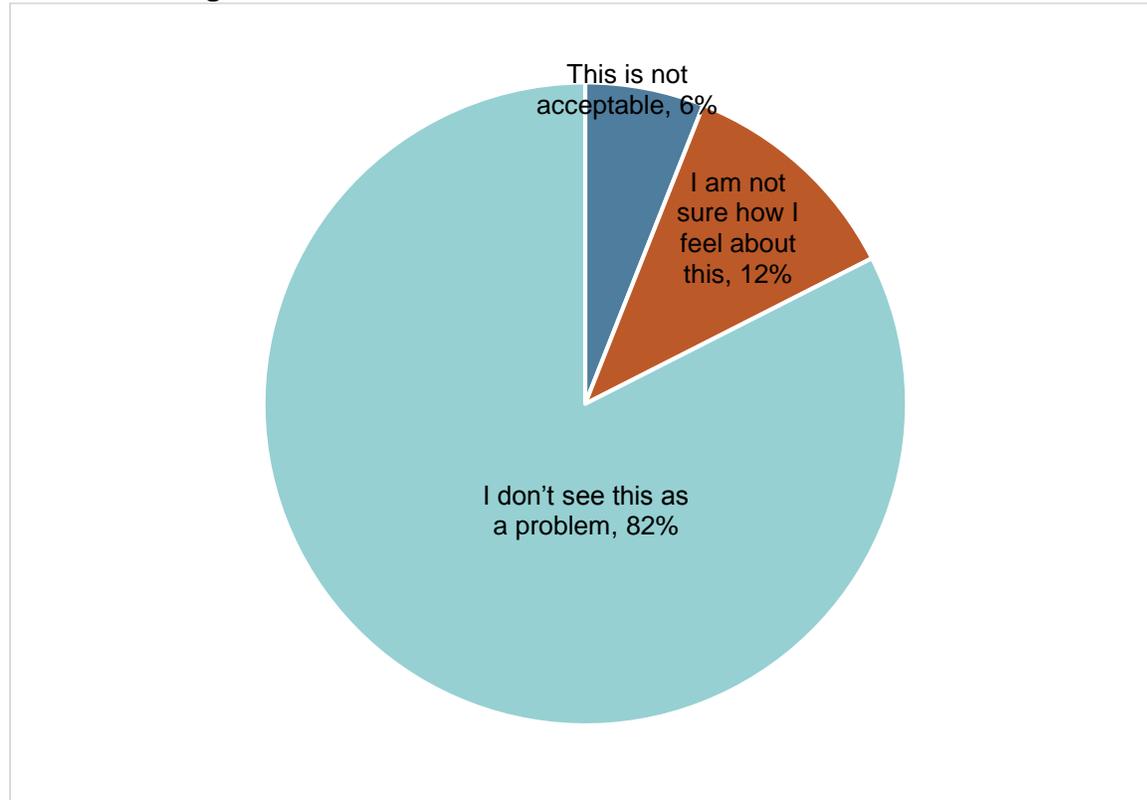


Chart 2: Does it matter to you if most of the town’s municipal departments are located in only one of the village centers?



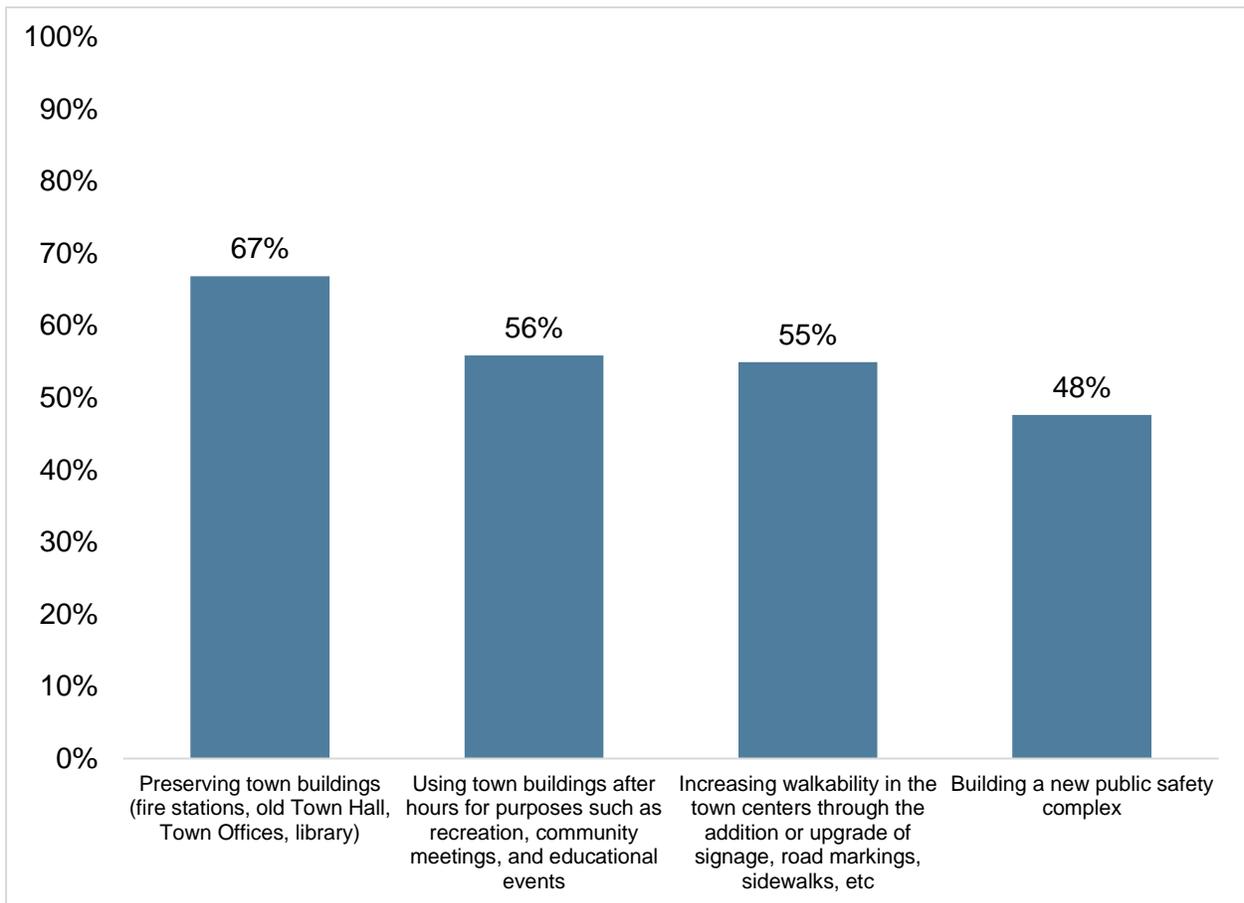
There was a difference in responses to this question for residents of Williamsburg and Haydenville, with Williamsburg residents more likely to report that they don’t see a problem with siting departments in only one of the village centers (88% of Williamsburg residents vs. 72% of Haydenville residents).

Openness to Tax Increases

About two-thirds of survey respondents are open to reasonable tax increases to preserve town buildings, a little over half would be open to tax increases for using town buildings after hours and increasing walkability, and just under half are open to reasonable tax increases to build a new public safety complex.

In addition to tax increases, a little over 60% of survey respondents reported that they would “probably” or “definitely” support the sale or lease of town-owned buildings to the private sector in order to raise funds and/or reduce town costs. When asked what uses they would like to see the town prioritize for those buildings, the most frequently selected responses were privately funded community services such as exercise facilities or daycare; affordable housing; and businesses or business incubation. Only about a third of respondents prioritized “whatever generates the most revenue for the town,” indicating that the nature of the businesses coming into town is important to many survey respondents.

Chart 3: Please indicate whether or not you would support a reasonable tax increase for each of the purposes listed.



Spending Priorities

Survey respondents were asked to sort town functions by whether they consider them to be high priority, medium priority, or low priority for the town. The items most frequently ranked as high priority were fire services, schools, police services, road maintenance, and the library. Cemeteries, grounds maintenance, inspectional services, and the Board of Health were least likely to be ranked as high-priority.

Table 1: Which of the following should the town prioritize for continued spending on services or physical infrastructure?

	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Fire services	67%	29%	5%
Schools	65%	27%	9%
Police services	49%	37%	14%
Road maintenance	48%	49%	4%
Library	47%	31%	22%
Senior services	34%	56%	10%
Building maintenance	31%	62%	8%
Trails and Recreation	28%	35%	36%
Veterans programs	22%	47%	31%
Sidewalk construction and maintenance	21%	48%	30%
Town government	19%	55%	26%
Solid waste management	19%	62%	19%
Town finance and administration	19%	55%	26%
Board of Health	15%	54%	31%
Inspectional services	10%	47%	44%
Grounds maintenance	8%	55%	37%
Cemeteries	5%	32%	63%

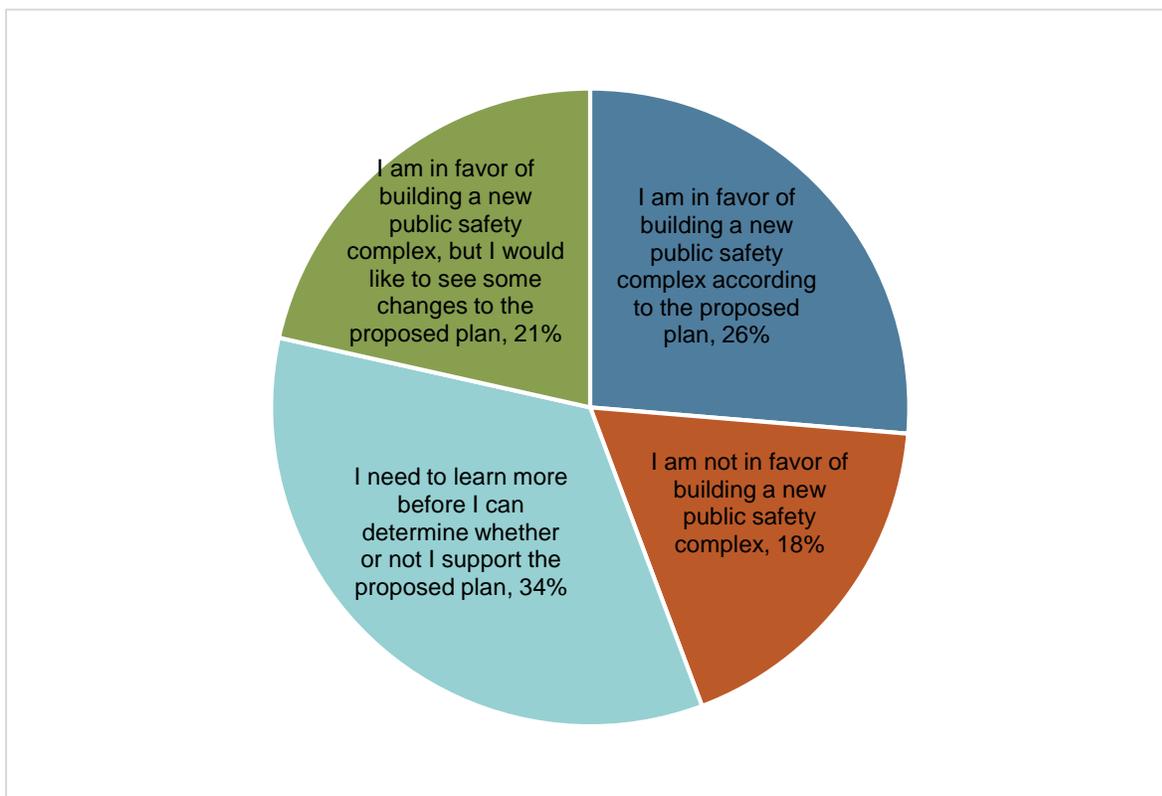
Public Safety Complex

A little over half of the survey respondents were familiar with the proposed new public safety complex. **Of those who reported that they were familiar with the proposal:**

- Around 35% reported that they would want to learn more about the proposal before making a decision about supporting the proposed plan
- About one-quarter were in favor of building a public safety complex according to the proposed plan
- A little more than 20% were in favor of building a public safety complex, but with changes to the proposed plan³
- A little less than 20% were opposed to building a public safety complex.

Of those who were not familiar with the proposal, nearly 90% said that they would want to learn more about the proposal before making a decision, but nearly 10% of those not familiar with the proposal were opposed to building a public safety complex (about 15% of survey respondents overall, including those familiar with and not familiar with the proposal, opposed building a public safety complex).

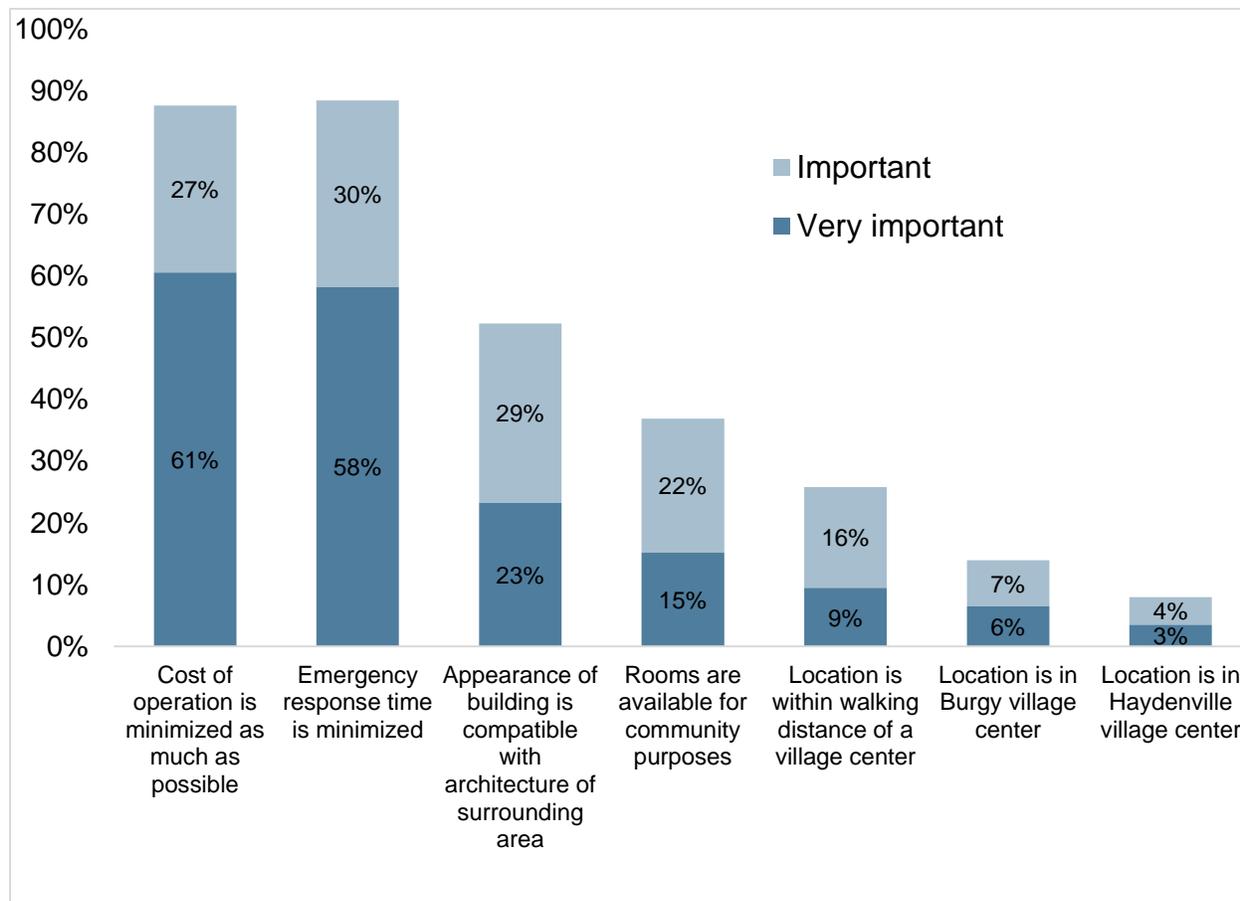
Chart 4: Attitudes Toward the Proposed Public Safety Complex, of Those Who Were Familiar with the Proposed Plan (n=228)



³ People who selected this option were invited to describe the changes they would like to see. Their responses, along with responses to an opportunity to provide general comments, are summarized in Appendix I.

Survey respondents believed the most important features of a public safety complex were minimized cost of operation and minimized emergency response time; in fact, these features were rated as “very important” for around 60% of respondents and “important” for most of the rest.

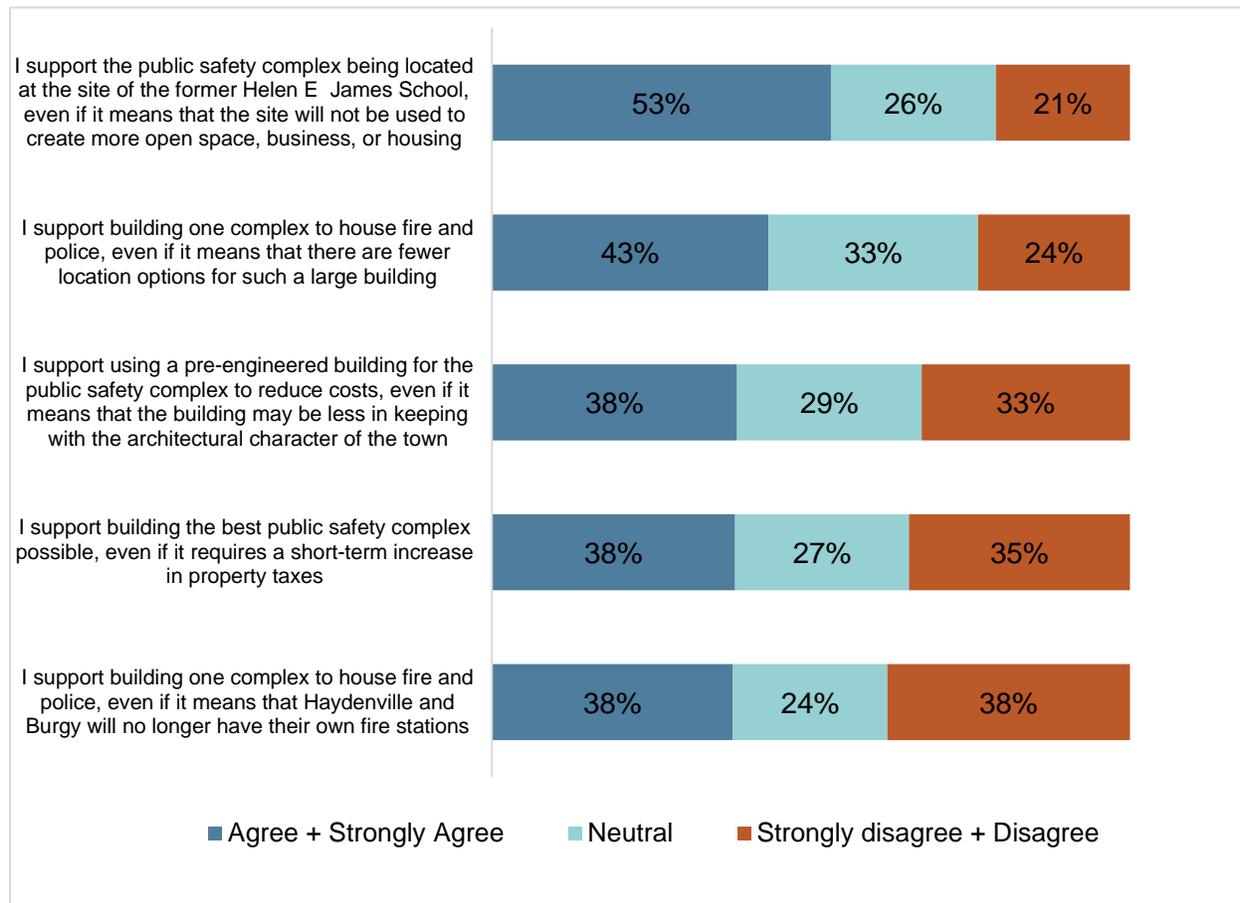
Chart 5: Percent of Respondents who Rate Each Feature as “Important” or “Very Important”



Survey respondents had mixed opinions about the tradeoffs represented in building a public safety center. Of a group of statements proposing certain courses of action (see Chart 6, below, for details), only one of the options presented (locating the complex at the former James school) received support from a majority of respondents. Agreement and disagreement levels were roughly balanced for the following statements:

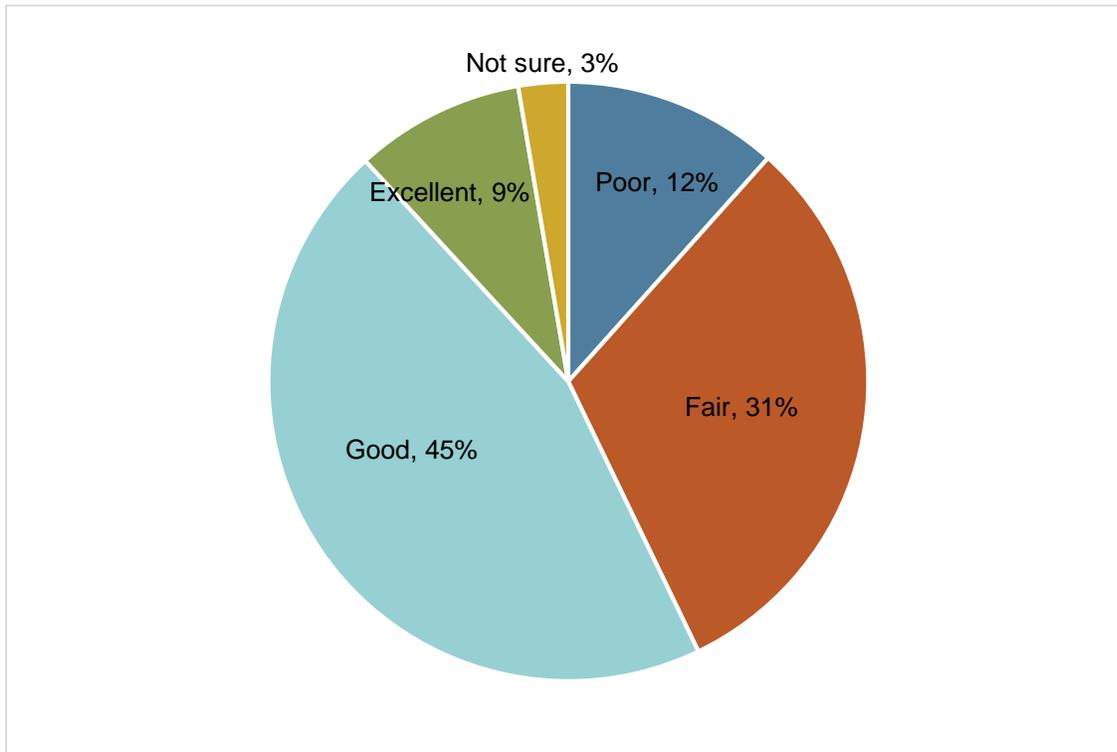
- I support using a pre-engineered building for the public safety complex to reduce costs, even if it means that the building may be less in keeping with the architectural character of the town
- I support building the best public safety complex possible, even if it requires a short-term increase in property taxes
- I support building one complex to house fire and police, even if it means that Haydenville and Burgy will no longer have their own fire stations

Chart 6: Agreement Levels with Tradeoffs Involved in Building a Public Safety Center



Healthy and Active Living

A series of questions addressed issues of how Williamsburg supports healthy and active living, primarily through promoting walking and biking in the two town centers. Over half of survey respondents rated the two Williamsburg town centers as either good or excellent for walkability. Respondents who live closer to the Williamsburg (Burgy) town center were more likely than those who live in Haydenville to rate the town centers’ walkability as good or excellent (58% vs. 48%).

Chart 7: How would you rate the current walkability of the two town centers?

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they walk or bike within Williamsburg, with separate questions for walking/biking to get to a destination or for pleasure/exercise.

- Respondents were more likely to report walking or biking for pleasure or exercise than to reach a destination
- Over half of survey respondents never or rarely walk or bike to destinations in Williamsburg
- Roughly equal proportions of survey respondents walk or bike for recreation either never/rarely, a few times per month, or several times per week.
- A little over 25% of respondents responded that they never or rarely walk or bike in Williamsburg either to get to a destination or for pleasure/exercise.
- Respondents who live near the Williamsburg town center were more likely than those near Haydenville to walk or bike, either to reach destinations or for exercise/recreation (78% vs. 66%).

Chart 8: How often do you walk or bike with the purpose of arriving at a destination in Williamsburg? (Not simply for the enjoyment or benefits of walking)

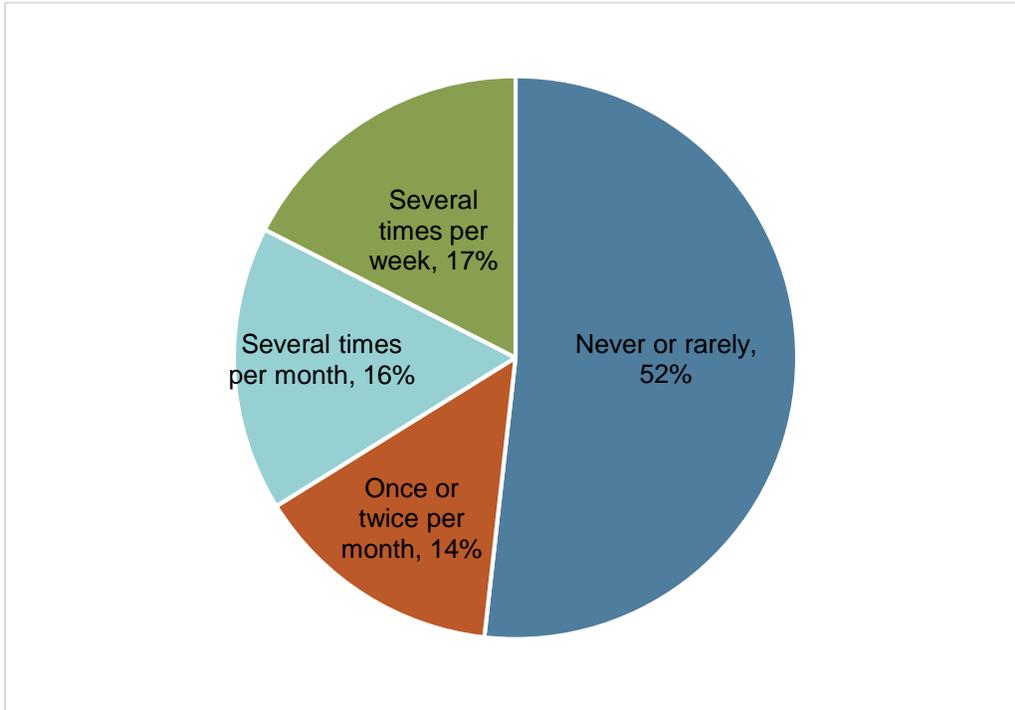
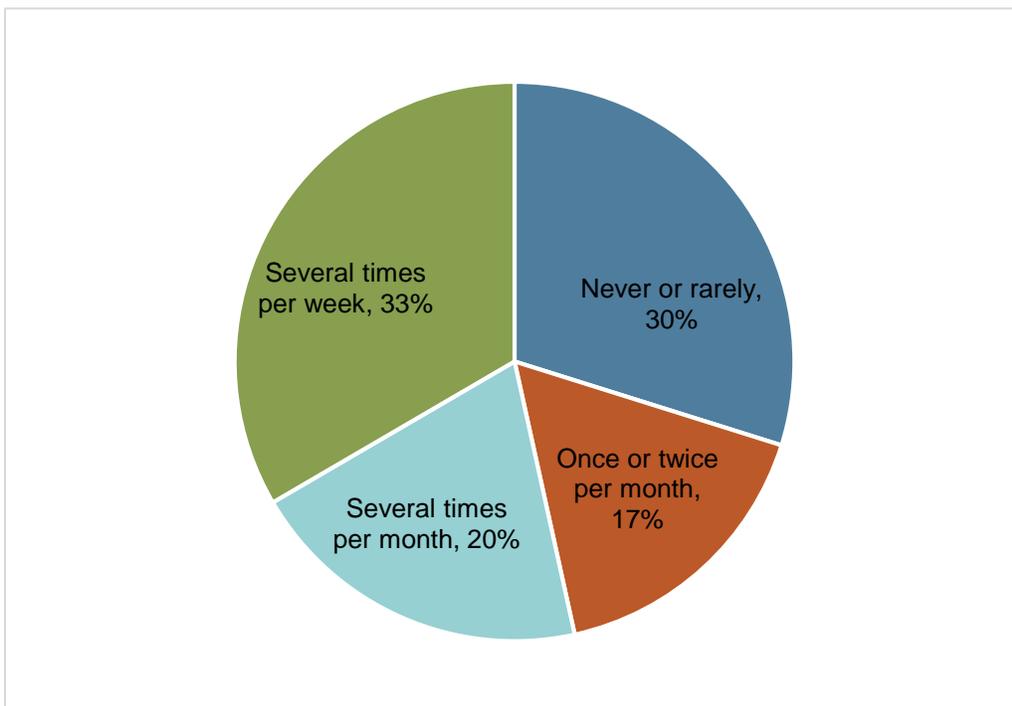
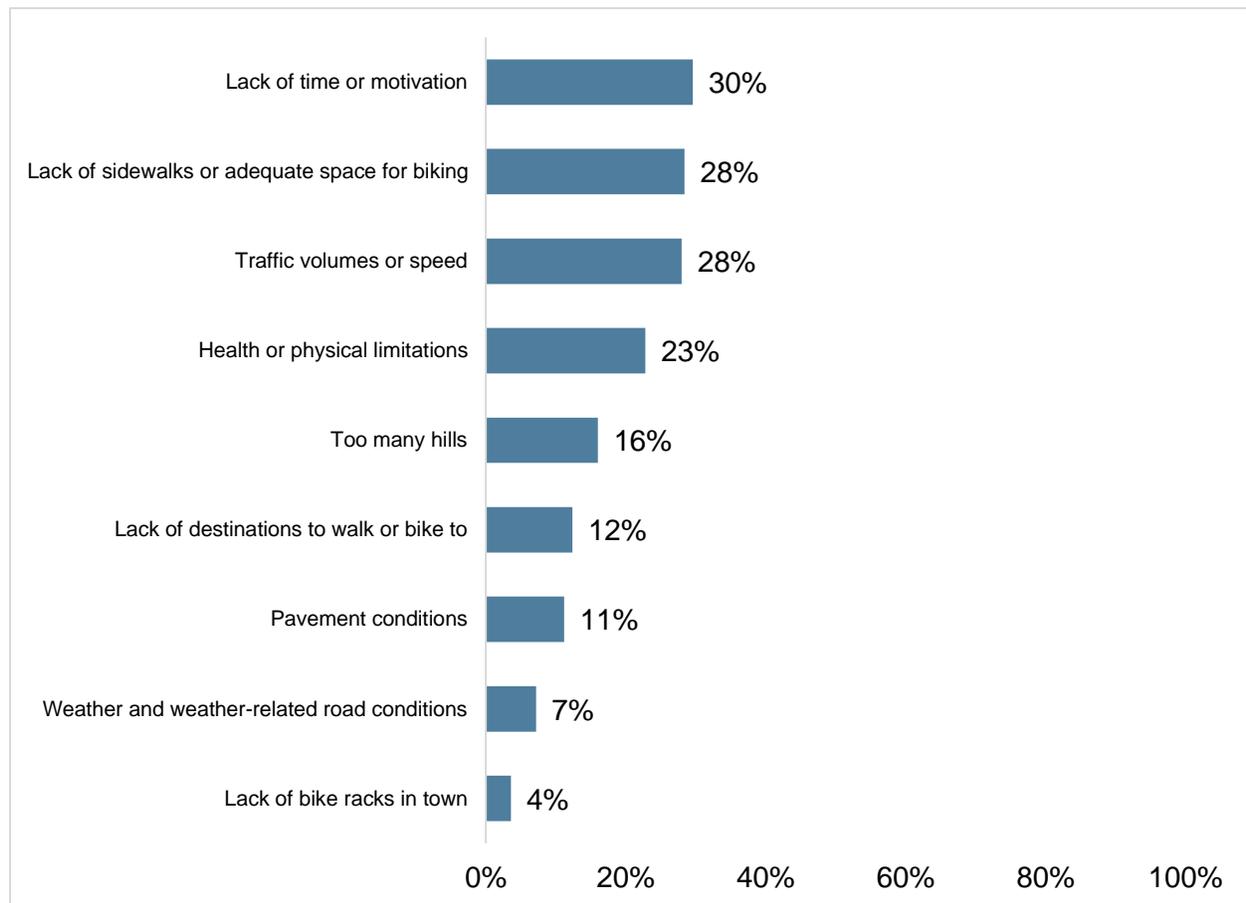


Chart 9: How often do you walk or bike for recreation or exercise in Williamsburg?



When respondents who responded “never or rarely” were asked what prevents them from walking or biking more often, they most frequently cited a lack of time or motivation, a lack of sidewalks or space for biking, and traffic volumes or speeds. Health limitations were also a factor for more than 20% of survey respondents. Pavement conditions, weather conditions, and a lack of bike racks in town were not impediments to walking or biking for most survey respondents who never or rarely walk or bike.

Chart 10: What prevents you from walking or biking more often? (n=250)



The Senior Center

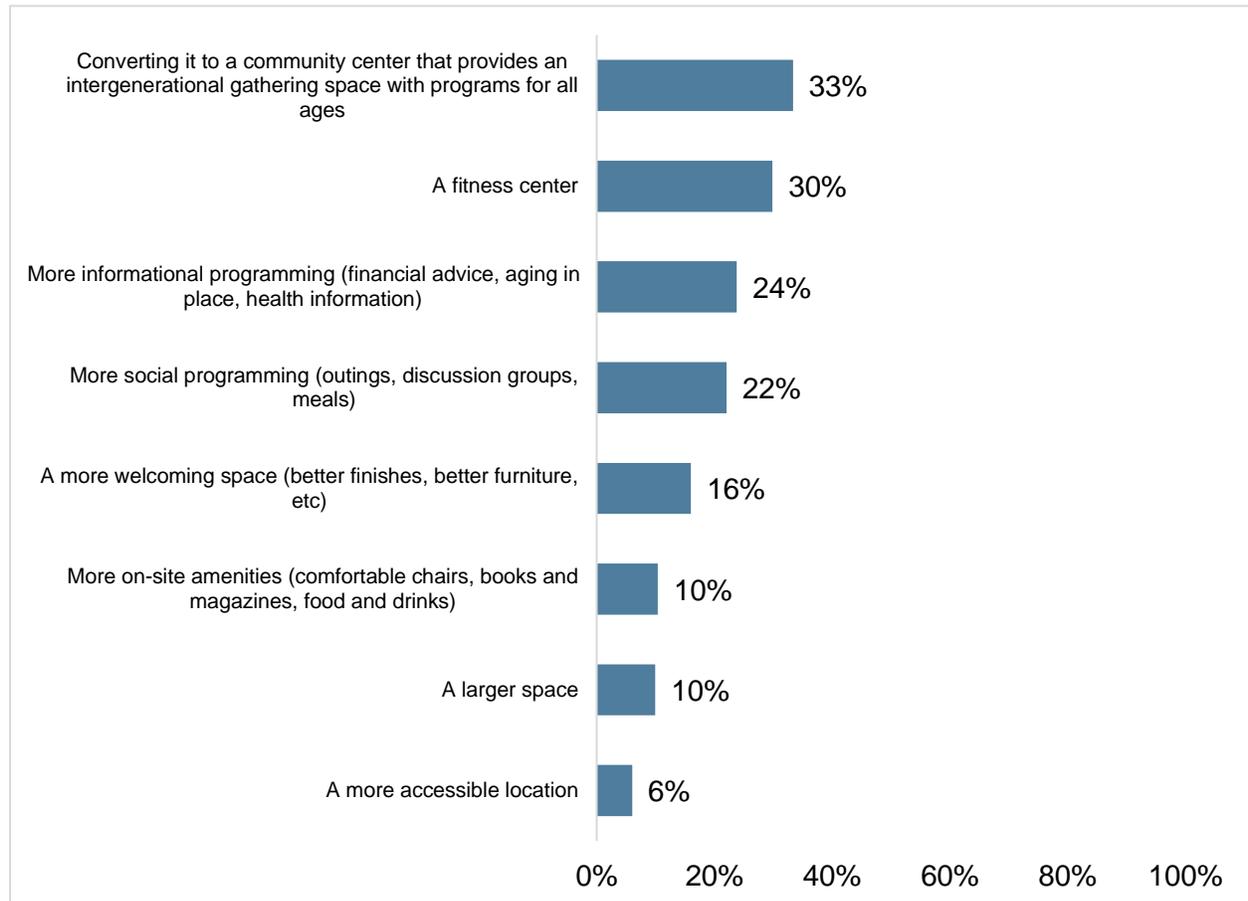
Survey respondents who reported that they are over the age of 60, or who are caring for a loved one over the age of 60, were asked:

- If they or their loved one benefit from the services of the Williamsburg Senior Center, and
- Whether there are any services or amenities that would make them or their loved one more willing to use the Senior Center (regardless of whether they are already using it).

About 23% of survey respondents in these two categories reported that they benefit from the services that the Senior Center provides. When asked what services or amenities would make them or their loved one more willing to use the Senior Center, the most popular response was to convert it

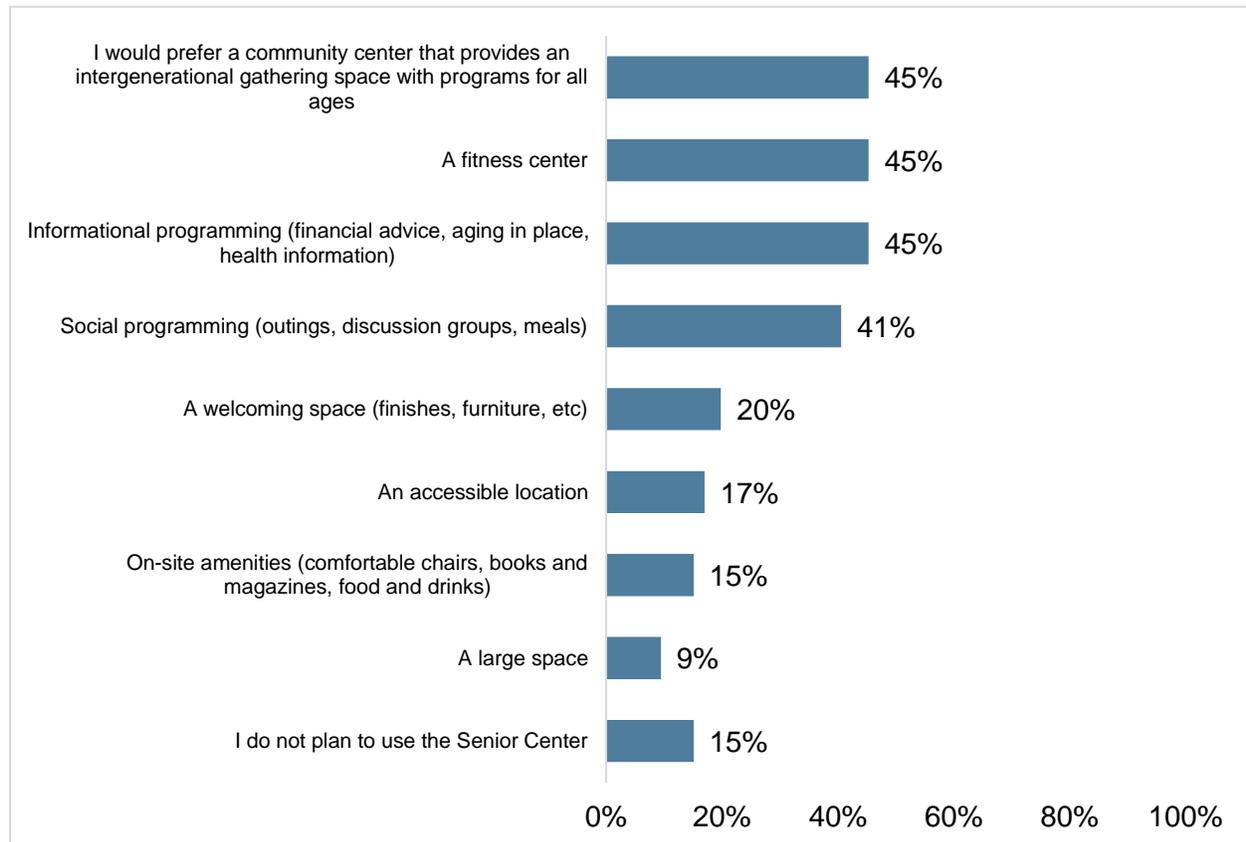
to an intergenerational community center rather than focusing on programming for senior citizens. Other frequently-chosen responses included providing a fitness center, providing more informational programming, and providing more social programming.

Chart 11: Are there any services or amenities that would make you (or your loved one) more willing to use the Senior Center? (n=231)



Survey respondents who reported that they are in their fifties were asked what Senior Center activities and amenities would interest them the most once you are over 60. Their responses were similar to those provided by current seniors.

Chart 12: What Senior Center activities and amenities would interest you the most once you are over 60? (n=106)



CONCLUSION

The survey indicates that many Williamsburg residents are open to increased investment in their town’s infrastructure, even if it means increased taxes. In addition, they are not concerned with the location of town facilities in relation to town centers. However, survey respondents have reservations about the new safety complex, and are not in strong agreement over the tradeoffs that will be required to build it. Many believe that they need additional information before they can come to a decision about the safety complex, including about a third of those who have already seen the plans.

Residents generally view the town centers as walkable, but rarely walk or bike to Williamsburg locations as a destination. They were more likely to walk or bike for exercise. Those who do not walk or bike mentioned traffic and lack of sidewalks, as well as their own lack of time or interest, as a reason.

The Senior Center is only used by about quarter of survey respondents over the age of 60. They reported that they would be more likely to use the senior center if it were a community center for all ages, and/or if it offered a fitness center or informational programming. Survey respondents in their fifties expressed similar preferences for their future use of the Senior Center.

Appendix I

Summary of Open-Ended Responses

People who reported that they are in favor of building the new public safety complex, but who would like to see changes to the proposed plan, were offered the opportunity to comment on the changes they would like to see. The themes of the responses and the number of people mentioning each are listed below.

Please provide additional comments on the changes you would like to see to the proposed public safety complex plan:	
Explore alternative locations/against using James School site	12
In favor of using James School Site	11
Support for using James School building	10
Scale down/simplify plan/program/services	8
Repurpose space in existing buildings	7
Keep costs low	6
Against losing greenspace	6
Scale up plan/programs/services	3
Against using James School building	3
Keep Commons in James School	3
Concern about flooding	3
Address needs of police and fire separately	1
Support for pre-engineered building	1

All survey respondents were given the opportunity to offer additional comments. The themes of the responses and the number of people mentioning each are listed below.

Please use this space to provide any additional comments you have on the decisions the town is facing regarding facilities, services, and investments: (Public Safety Complex = PSC)	
Support for renovating/maintaining existing buildings	27
Support for pedestrian/bike infrastructure and traffic calming	27
Opposition to tax increases	26
Preserve existing character/history	13
PSC - Explore alternative locations/against using James School site	12
Total opposition to PSC	12
PSC- Keep costs low	11
PSC- Repurpose space in existing buildings	11
PSC- In favor of using James School site	9
PSC- Support for using James School building	8
PSC- Support for pre-engineered building	8
PSC- Address needs of police and fire separately	7
Support for tax increases	6
PSC- Against using James School building	5
Support for long-term planning	5
Support for CPA	5
Against losing greenspace	4
More parking needed in Burgy village center	4
PSC- Scale down/simplify plans/program/services	3
Support for community gardens	2