



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL
IN PLACES YOU LOVE

Memorandum

Date: February 28, 2022
To: Cranford Township Committee
From: Topology
SUBJECT: **ANALYSIS + SUMMARY OF OUTREACH**
North Avenue Redevelopment Planning

The following memo summarizes the outreach process, data collected and trends from the in-person and virtual outreach performed for the North Avenue Redevelopment Plan outreach effort. The data and feedback collected at each public outreach opportunity is summarized below. Based on our team's conversations, research, the below data, and best practices, we recommend the following:

1. Focus redevelopment along North Avenue with a strong architectural/gateway feature at the corner of North Avenue and Springfield Avenue. These structure(s) should not exceed four stories, should have neighborhood and downtown business owner involvement in the façade treatment and most likely be two separate buildings to allow for proper site circulation. This project should consist of the 40 residential units contemplated by the Township's Housing Element & Fair Share Plan (the "Affordable Housing Plan"). Topology could provide some layout options that would fit along this frontage and allow for the adequate provision of affordable units required if desired.
2. From the feedback received, we do not believe it would be in the Township's best interest to lose the public parking/open space at the corner of Springfield Avenue and N. Union Avenue or fire station with redevelopment. Efforts should be made to improve this area consistent with public feedback.
3. The redevelopment plan should require the developer to provide their parking needs at their own cost. This should include consideration of locations for an off-site parking deck within walking distance (i.e. 400 feet), of the redevelopment areathat provides parking for mass-transit commuters, municipal services, and new uses generated within the redevelopment area. There are multiple nearby parking lots, including Lot 3 at the Train/Bus Station and the Municipal Building that could expand current parking capacity, would not be directly visible from the street and would resolve many of the concerns related to the redevelopment area raised by the public.
4. There were many questions and concerns related to fiscal impacts such as school-aged children, emergency services, and traffic impacts. The redevelopment plan should require detailed, considerate studies of these matters to understand any impacts that will need to be mitigated.
5. A redeveloper should be required to make the following public improvements:
 - a. Provide affordable housing units.
 - b. Enhance the existing parking lot at Springfield and N. Union to provide more flexible open space and spacing to properly service the fire station.
 - c. Improve streetscaping and pedestrian realm for all frontages within the redevelopment area.
 - d. Study and improve circulation/pedestrian movement at North + Springfield and North + Centennial.
 - e. Inclusion of stormwater retention tanks for stormwater management of the redevelopment area.

- f. Include improvements to the Rahway River for trail usage and the Crane-Phillips House.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

In total, there were six stakeholder meetings: four to kick off the process and two towards the end with the business owners in and around the redevelopment area. The first four meetings included representatives from: Downtown Management Corp (DMC) Board, SID property and business owners, the Environmental Commission and Green Team, the Planning Board, the Historic Preservation Advisory Board, the Parking Committee, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee, the Cranford Jaycees, the Centennial Village Committee, the Cranford Chamber of Commerce, the Newcomers, and the Cranford Woman's Club.

The following were the major concerns and observations from these four stakeholder sessions:

1. People moved to and stayed in Cranford because of its walkability, schools, attractive/active downtown, average property taxes for New Jersey, access to a commuter rail station.
2. They would like to see more connections to the Township's natural assets, particularly the Rahway River and find a connection to the East Coast Greenway.
3. There were extreme concerns with the intersections of Springfield Avenue/North Avenue and Centennial Avenue/North Avenue for all users, but particularly pedestrians and cyclists.
4. Attendees desired: a one-seat ride to the NYC via the train, more busing for school kids if street safety is not improved, more retail opportunities in the evening hours, coordination of traffic lights—especially along North Avenue, incorporation of green infrastructure and resiliency measures, new rooftop dining and architecture that signifies an arrival point within the redevelopment area.
5. General concerns about building height/massing, flooding, exacerbating traffic impacts from bus lane median, ensuring that any traffic studies for the redevelopment area include new and proposed projects in adjacent communities and any potential impact on schools.

ONLINE RETAIL/HOUSING SURVEY

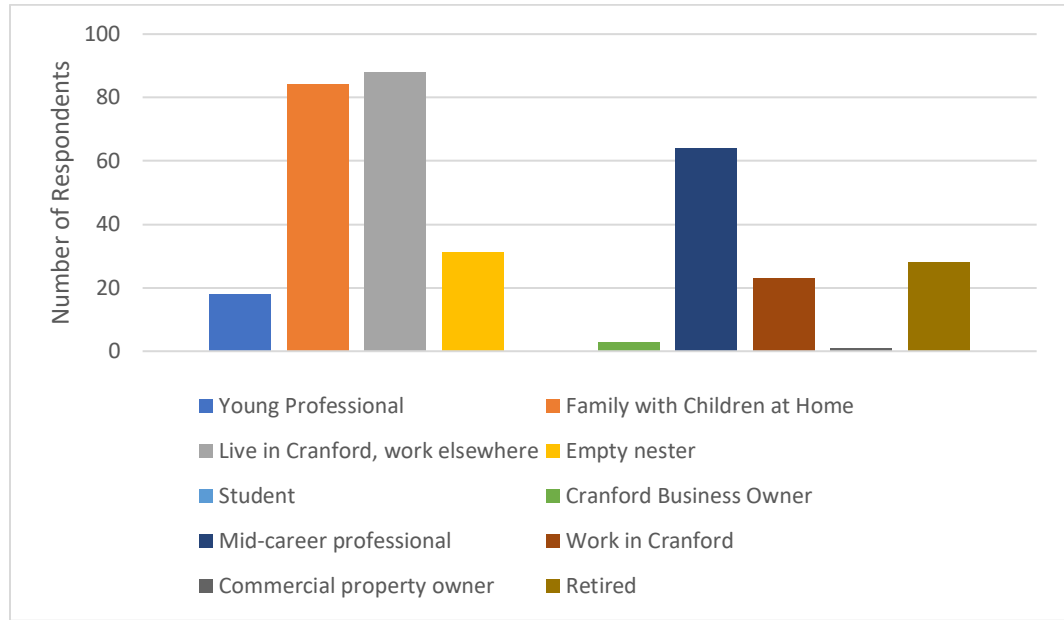
The online housing and retail preferences survey, hosted via SurveyMonkey, collected 149 responses between the dates of September 27th and December 6th. The survey asked a series of questions on the public's preferred retail options, housing characteristics, along with general demographic indicators. This was to understand potential demand for new construction and unmet supply. The results of this survey are summarized below.

Respondent Profiles

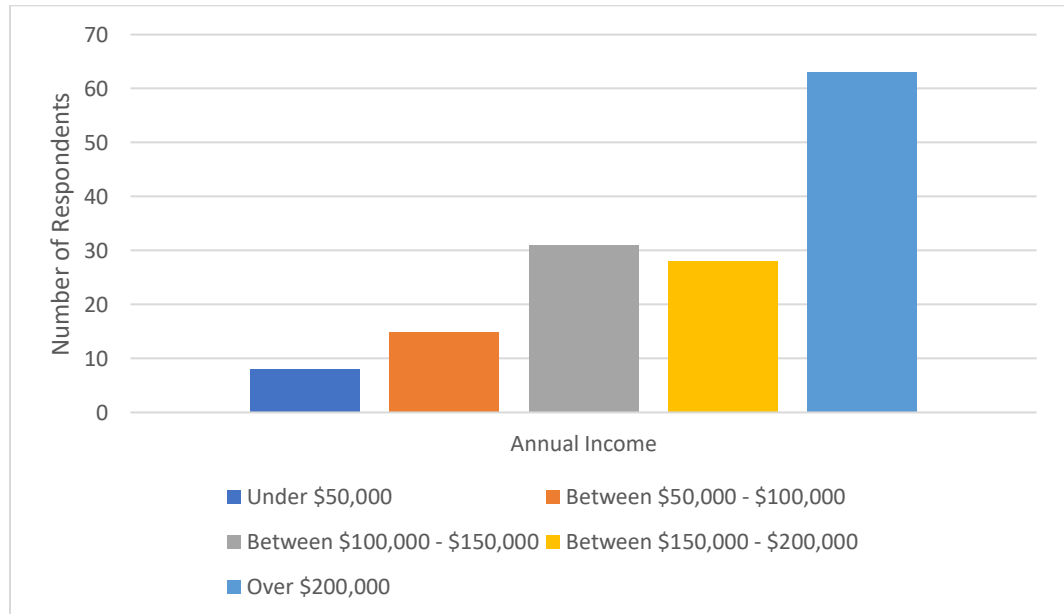
Average Respondent Age: 49

Average # of Years of Cranford Residency: 22 Years

Respondent Profiles:

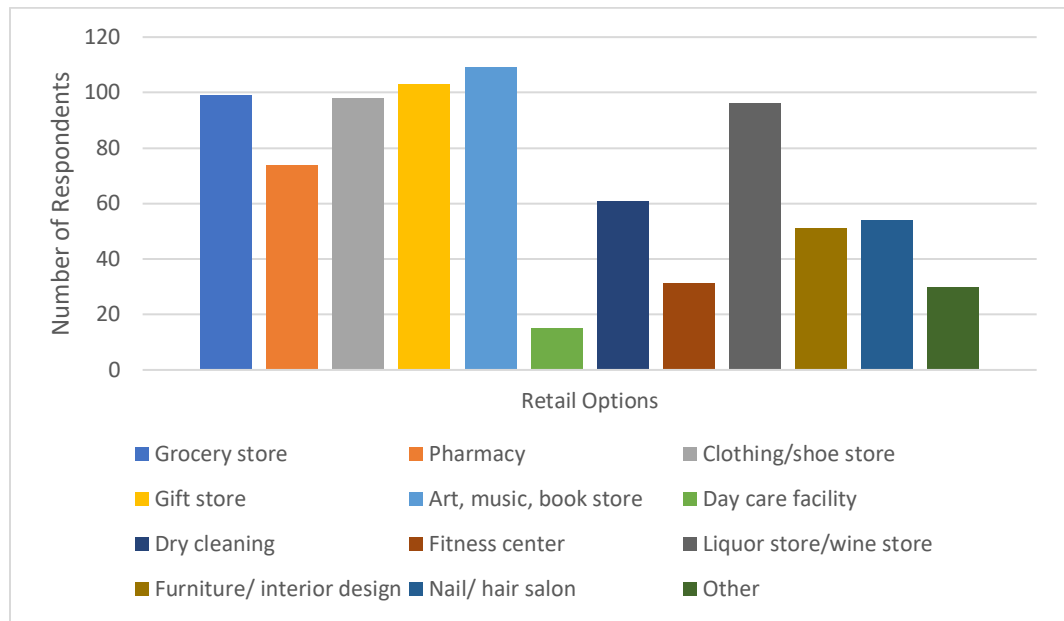


Annual Household Income

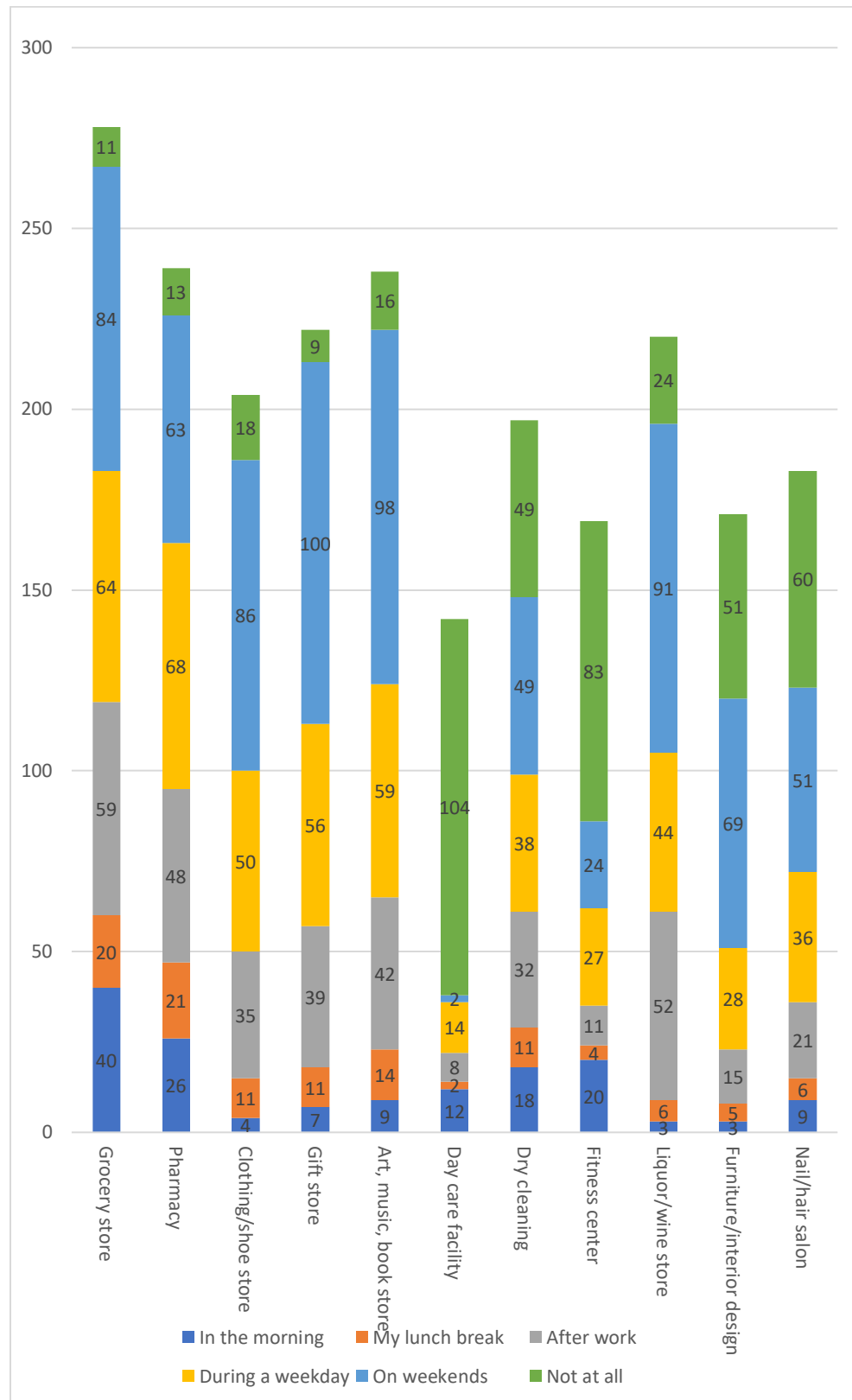


Retail Preferences

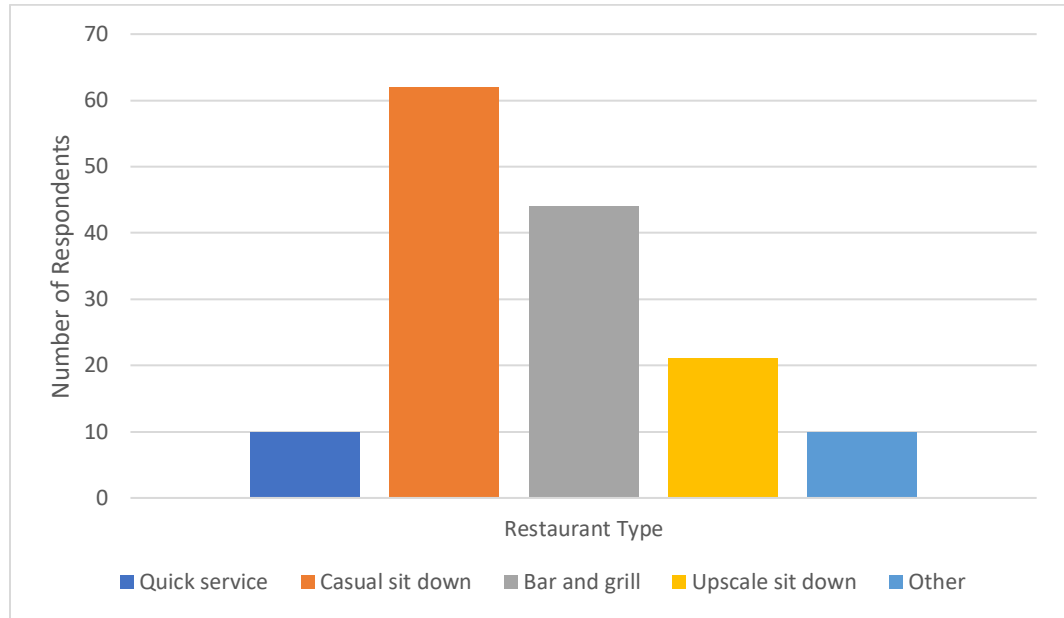
Which of the following downtown services would you likely patronize?



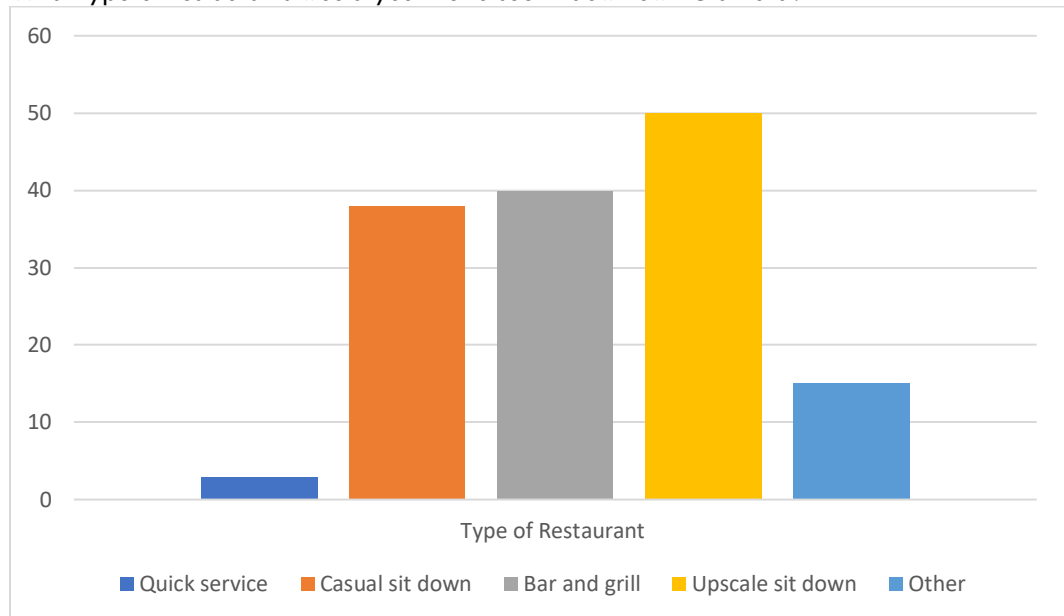
When would you likely patronize those services?



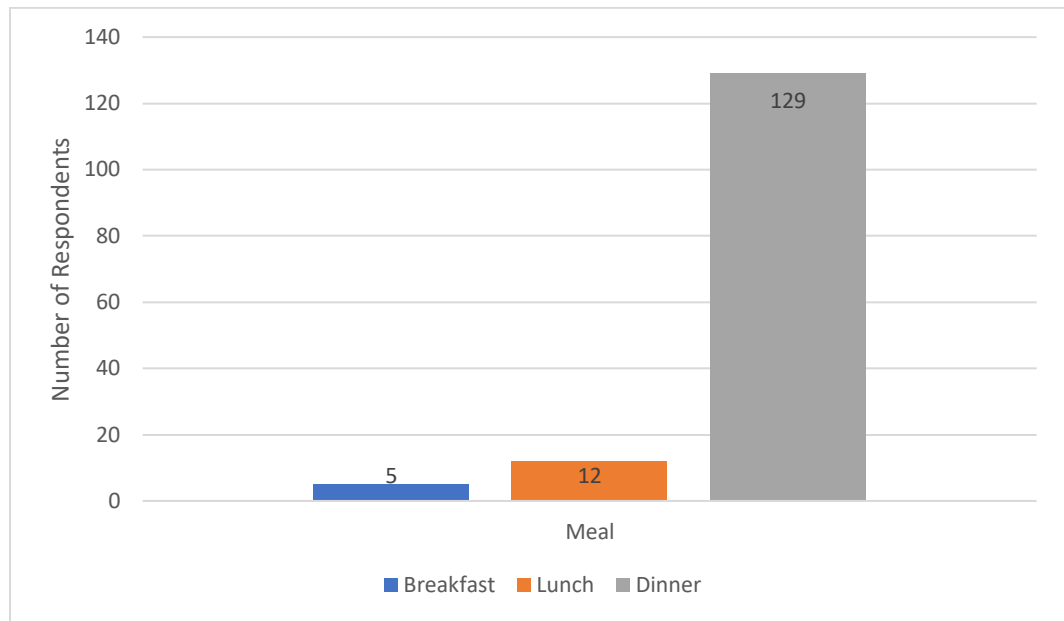
What type of restaurants do you frequent downtown?



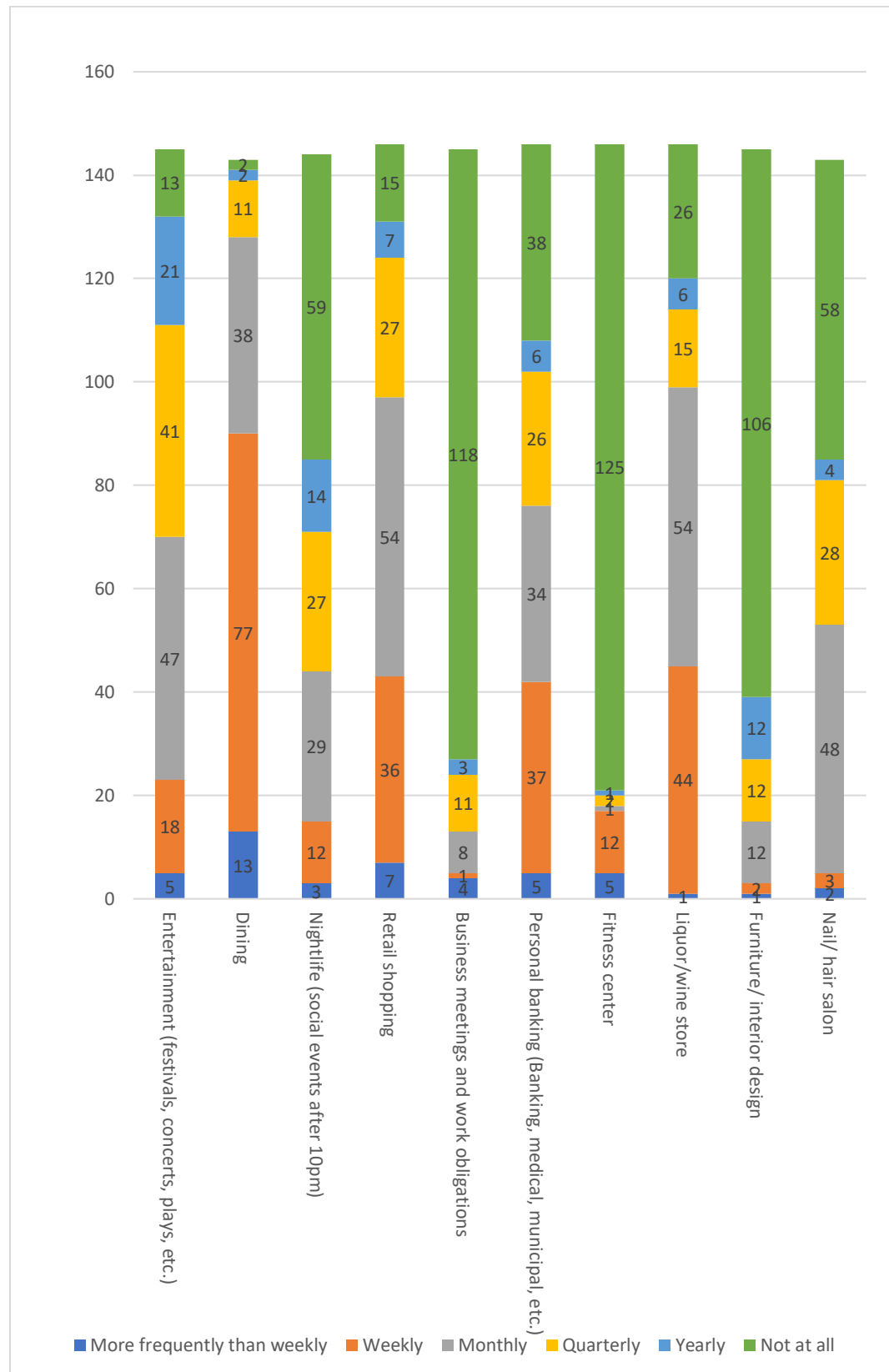
What type of restaurants would you like to see in downtown Cranford?



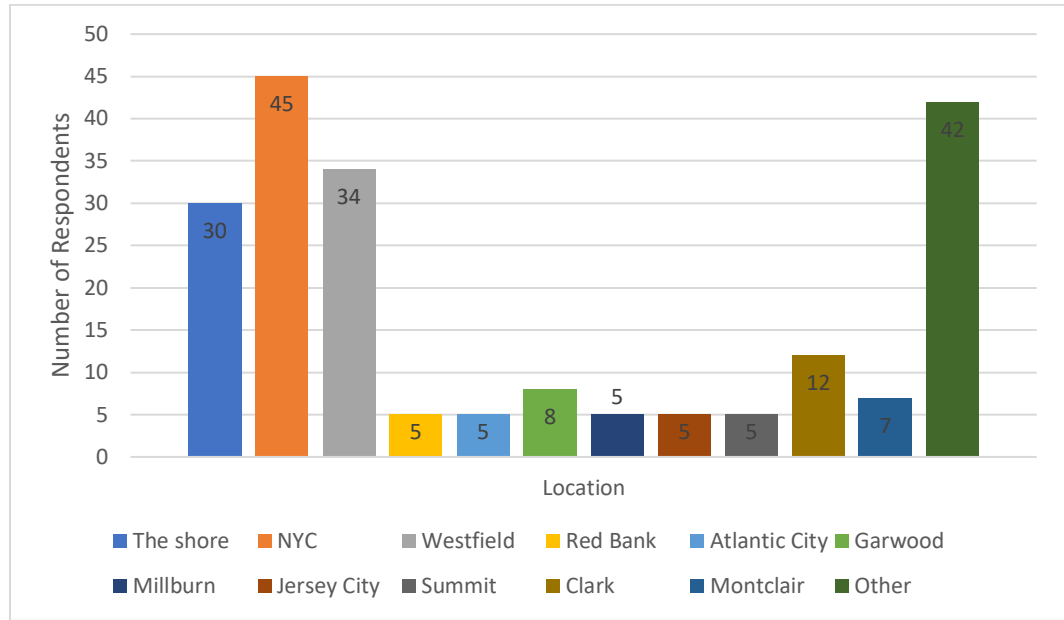
What meal are you most likely to eat at a downtown Cranford restaurant?



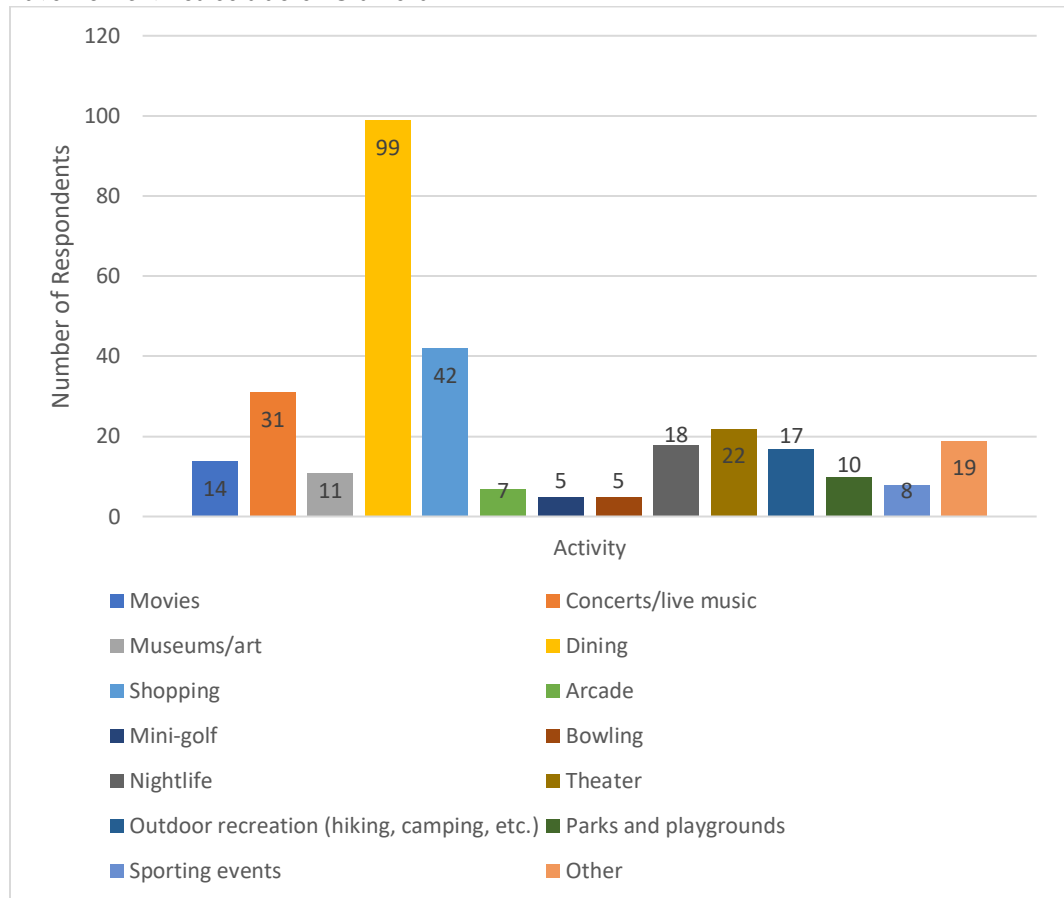
How often do you visit downtown for the following activities?



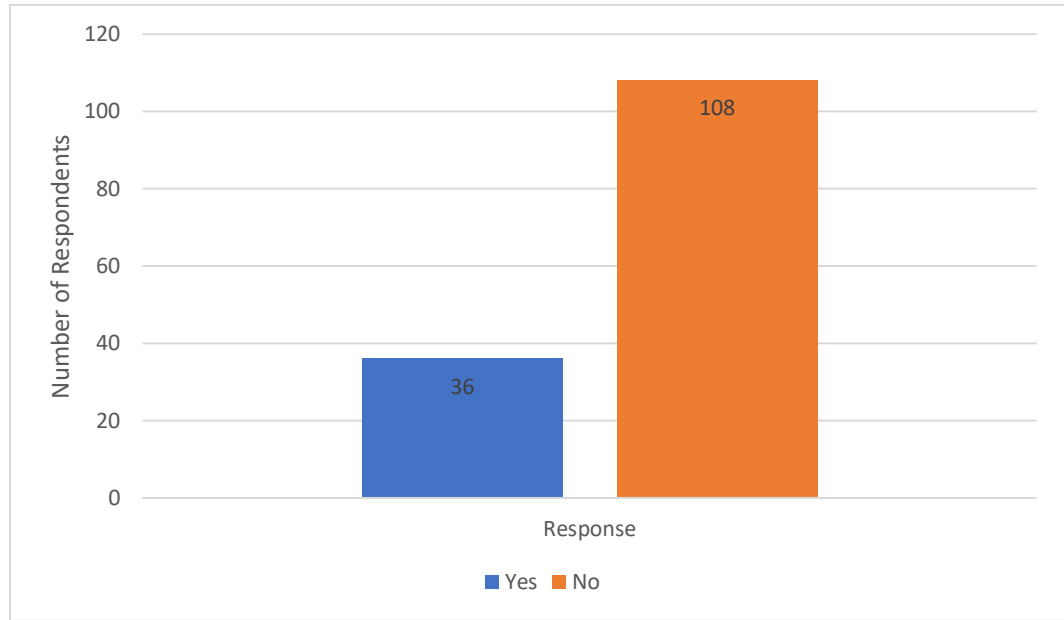
Favorite entertainment destinations outside of Cranford



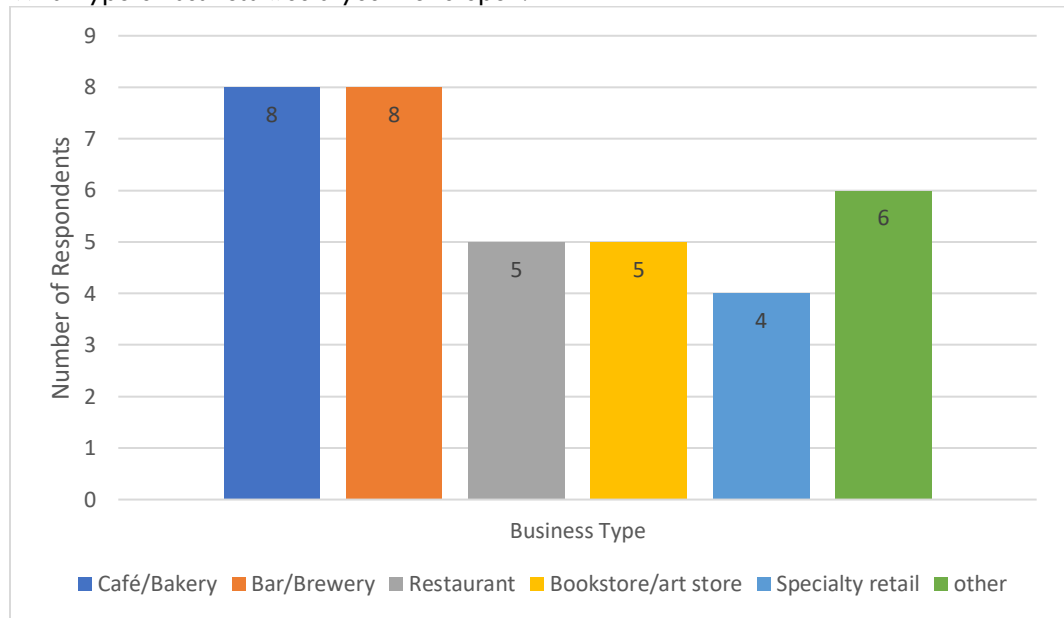
Favorite Activities outside of Cranford



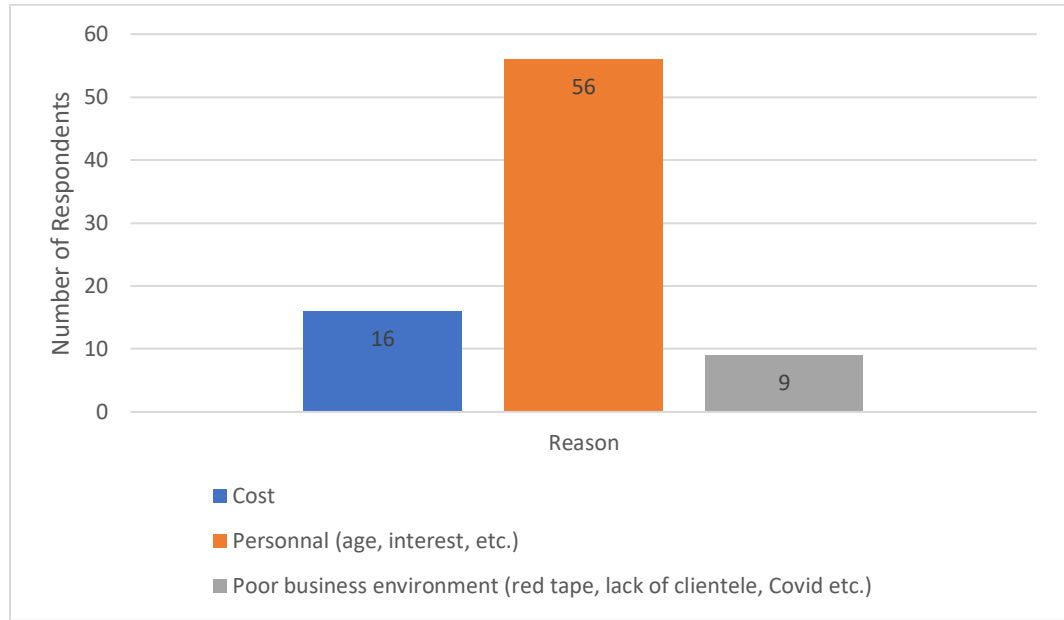
Would you consider opening a business in downtown Cranford?



What type of business would you like to open?

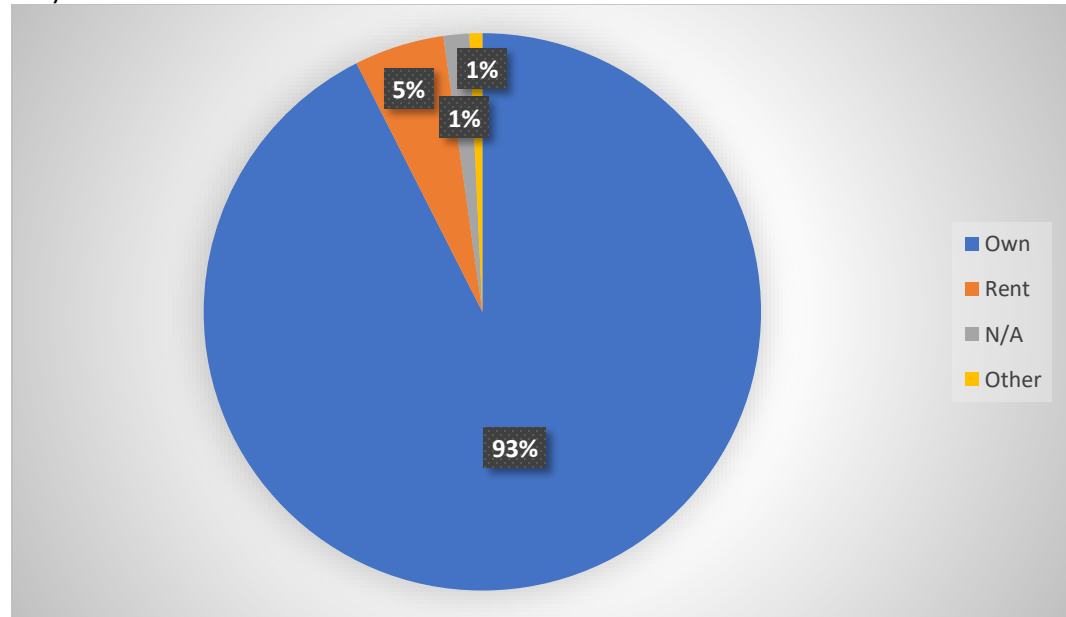


If you would not open a business, why not?

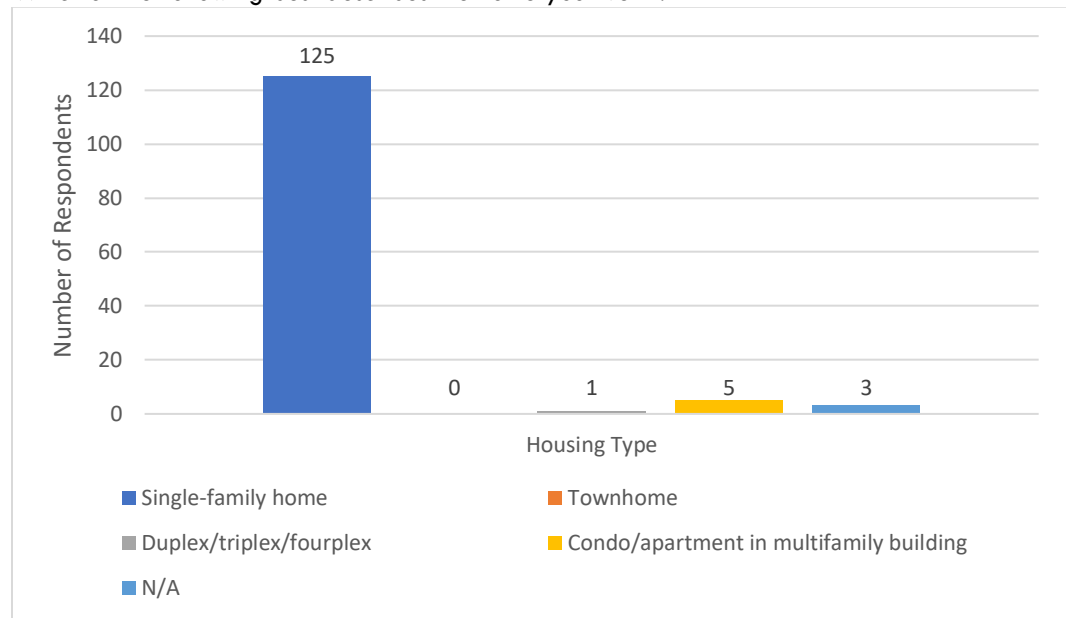


Housing

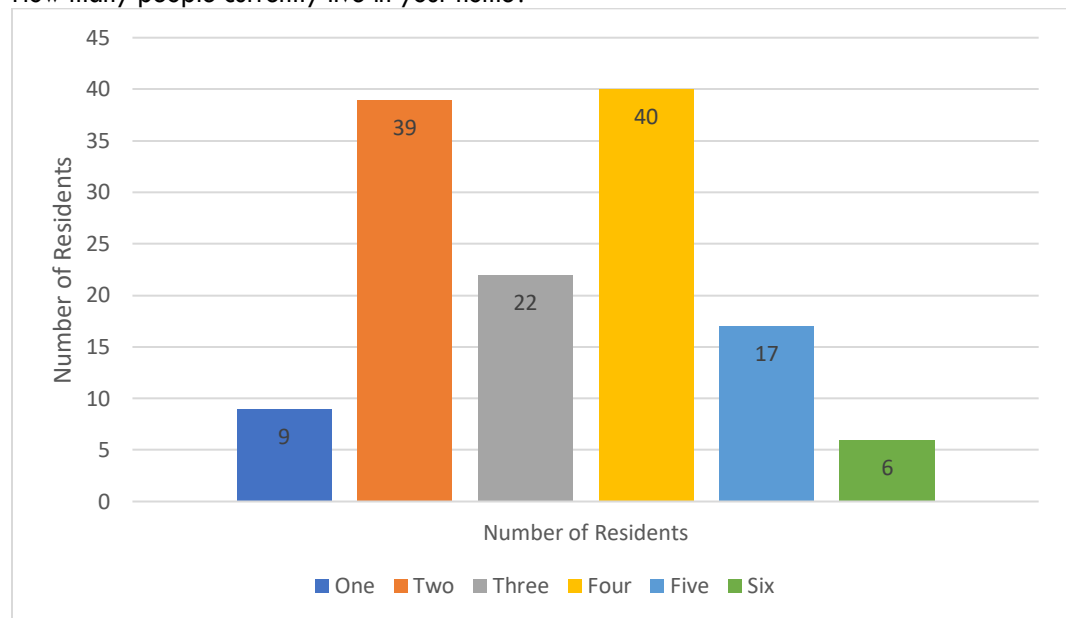
Do you own or rent a home in Cranford?



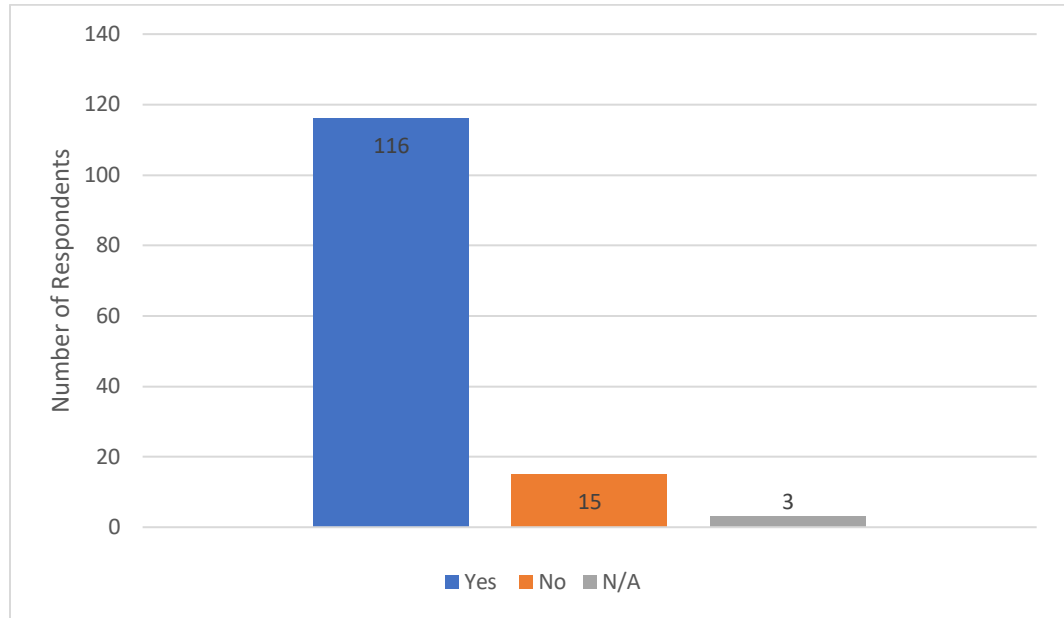
Which of the following best describes the home you live in?



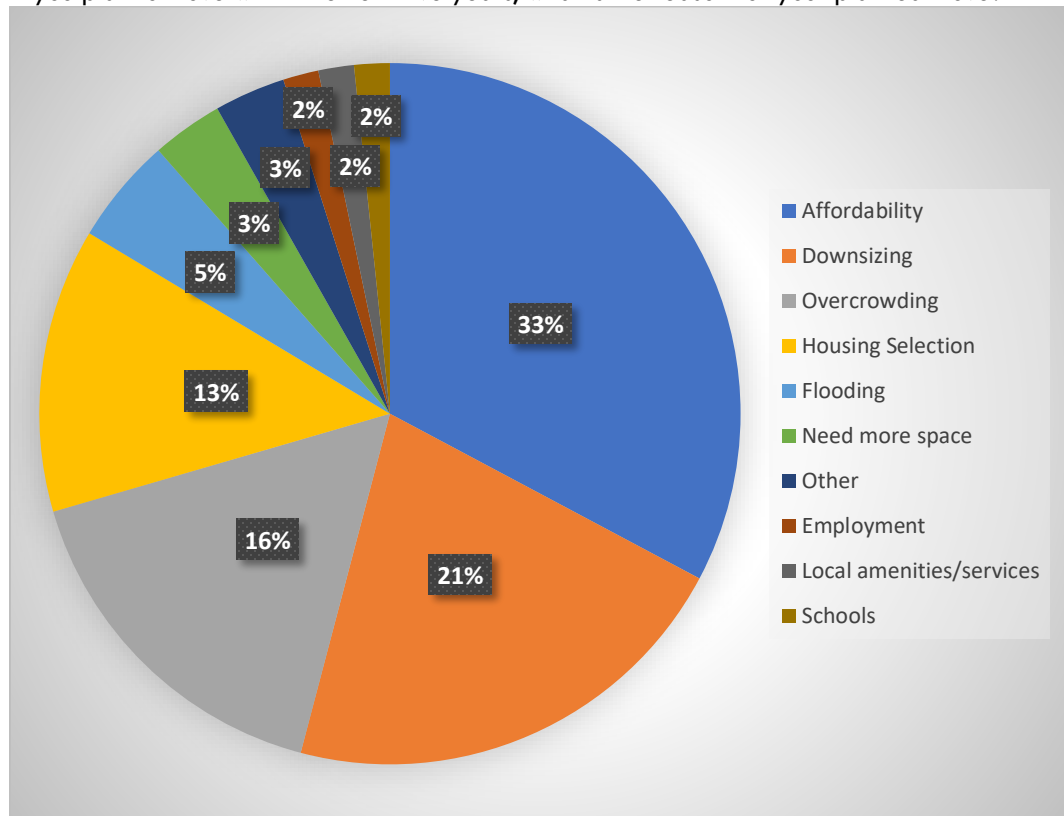
How many people currently live in your home?



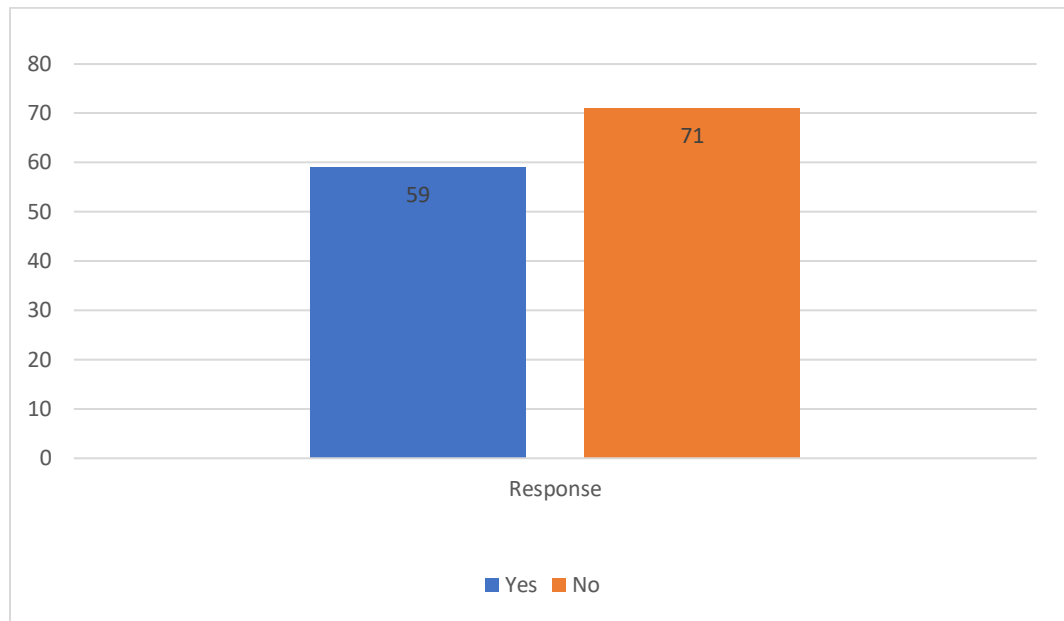
Do you plan on staying in your current home for at least 5 more years?



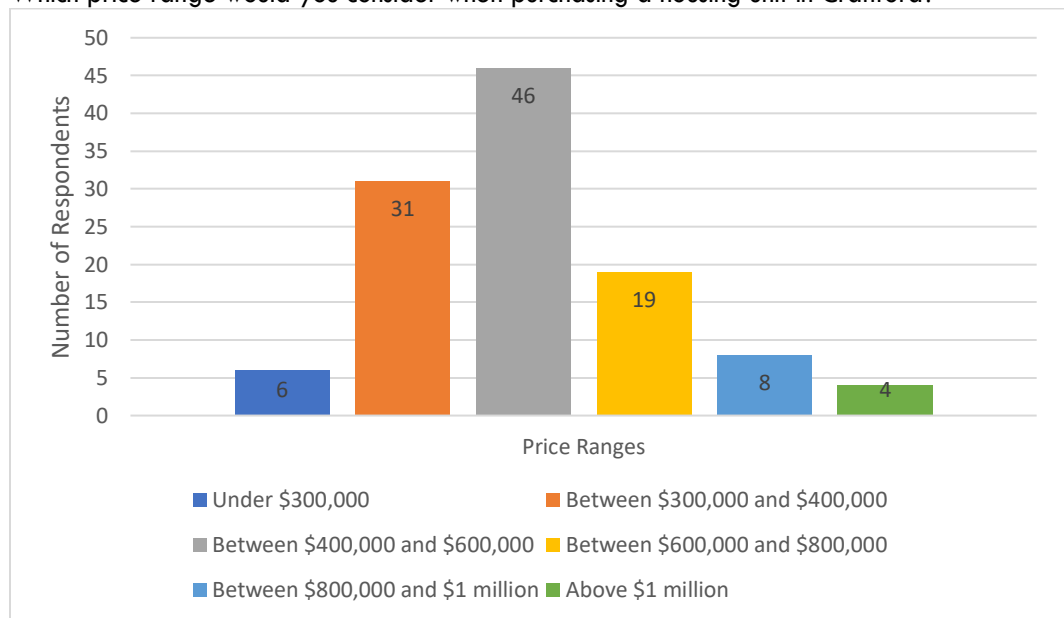
If you plan to move within the next five years, what is the reason for your planned move?



Would you be interested in moving downtown if what you were looking for was available?



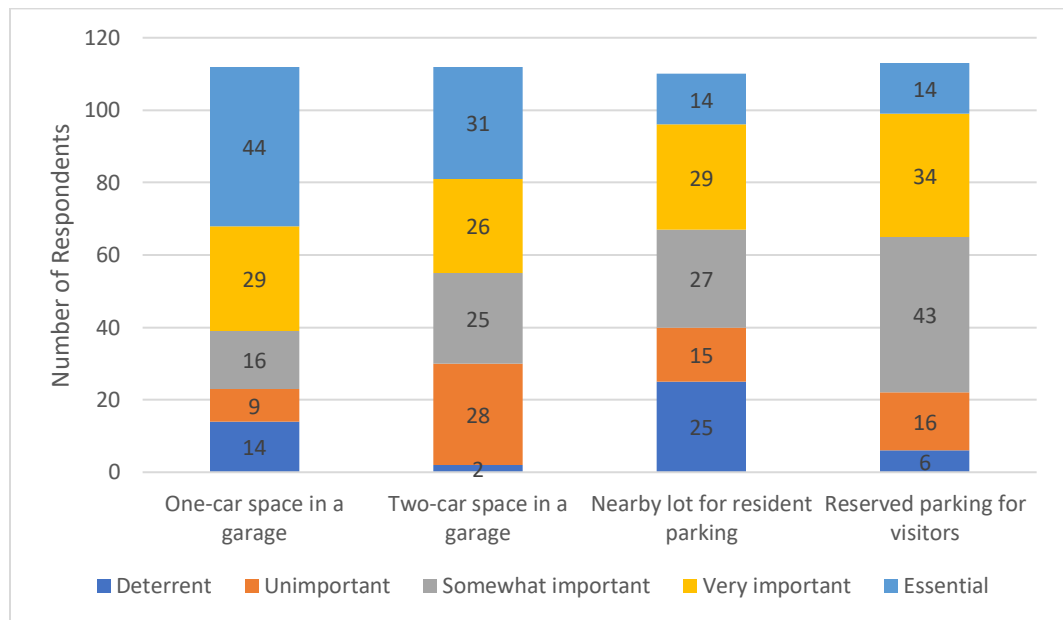
Which price range would you consider when purchasing a housing unit in Cranford?



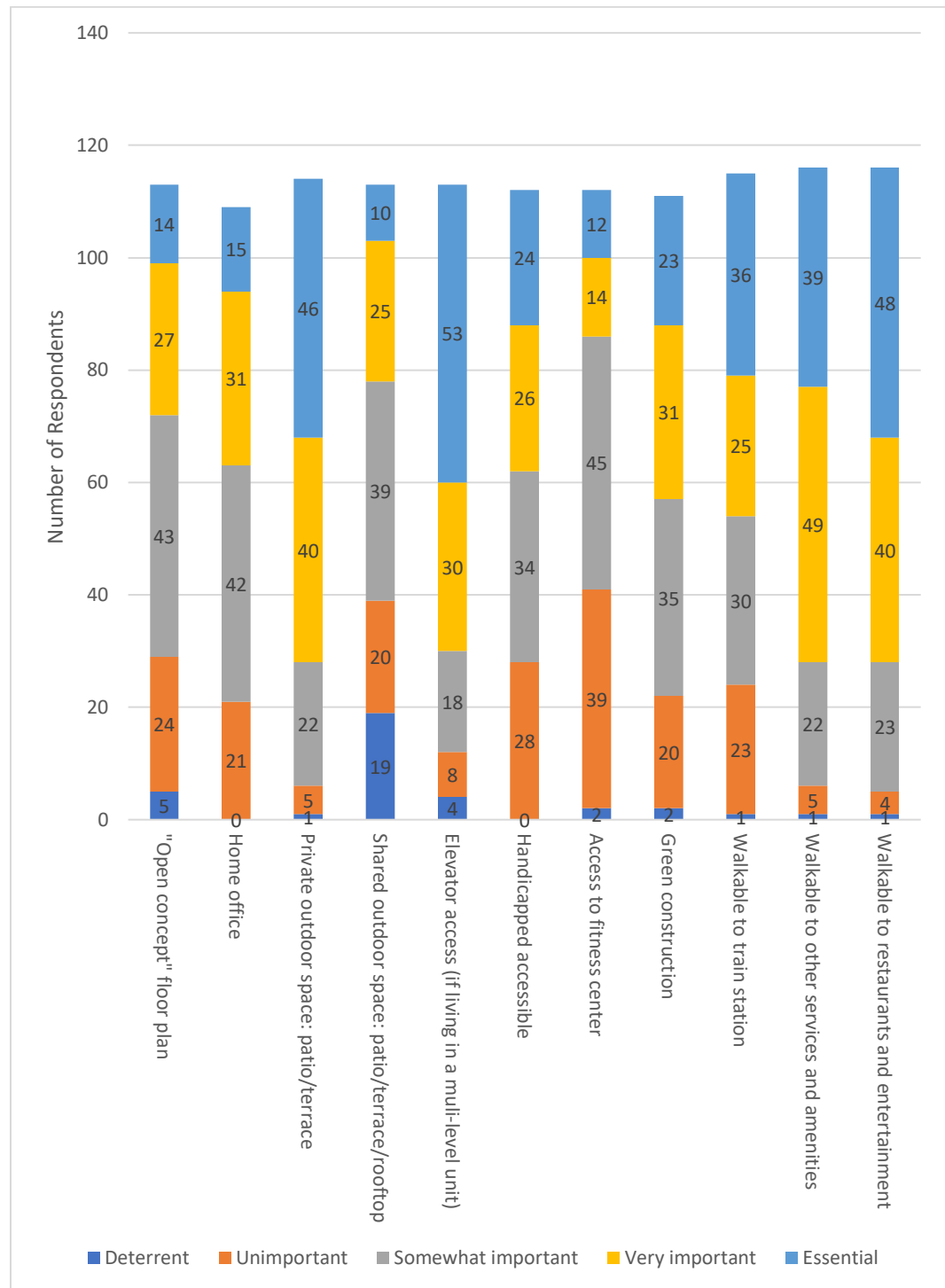
What would you be willing to pay in monthly rent to live in Cranford?



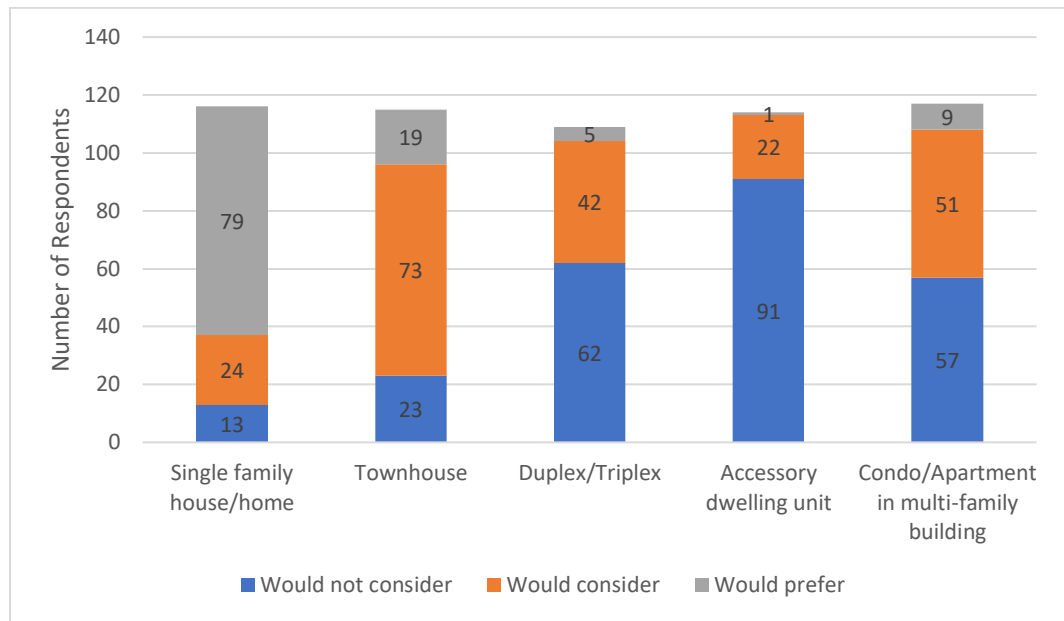
How important would each of the following parking options be in your consideration of a housing unit in Cranford?



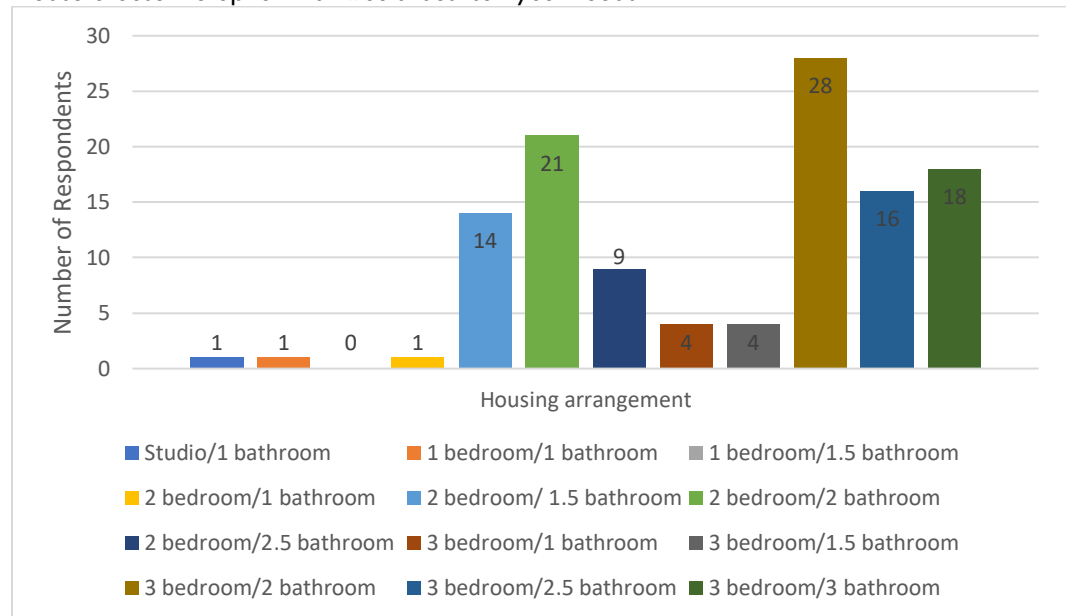
How important would each of the following housing features be in your consideration of a housing unit in Cranford?



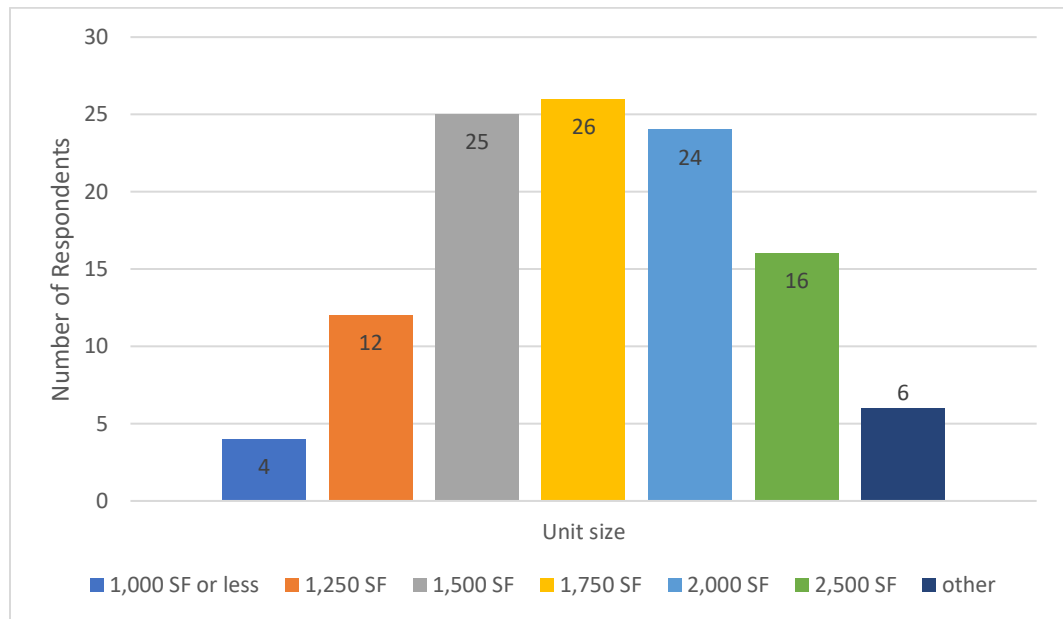
Please choose the building type that you would either "prefer," "would consider," or "would not consider" purchasing or renting in Cranford)



Please choose the option that would best suit your needs



What size unit would you desire if purchasing/ renting a unit? (Please take into consideration the increased expense of a larger unit)

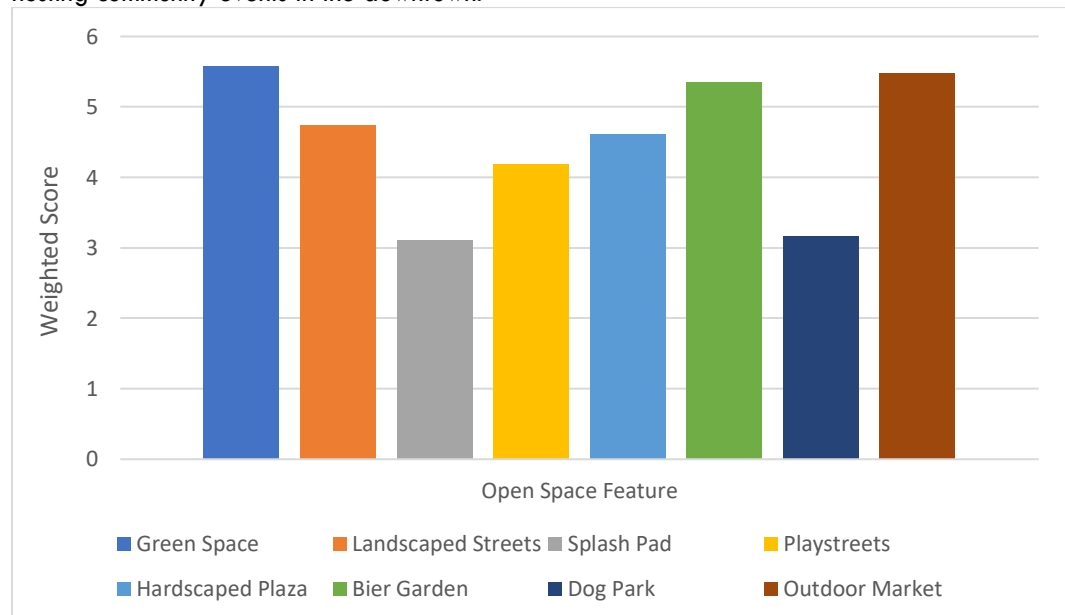


ONLINE PREFERENCE SURVEY

The online development preferences survey, hosted via SurveyMonkey, collected 137 responses between the dates of September 27th and December 6th. The survey asked a series of ranking style questions to help the planning team assess the public's preferred site elements. The results of this survey are summarized below.

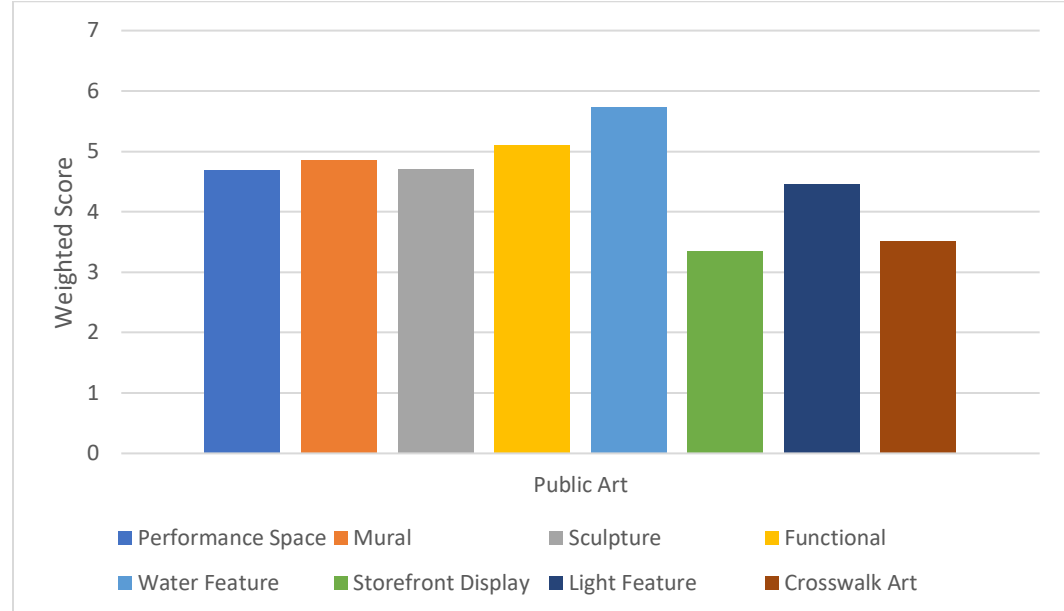
Open Space Preferences

Among survey monkey respondents, open green spaces emerged as the most popular response. Outdoor markets also proved to be a popular choice among survey respondents, as well as an outdoor bier garden, suggesting the popularity of flexible outdoor spaces for socializing and hosting community events in the downtown.



Public Art Preferences

Water features and functional art pieces emerged as the top choice among survey respondents for public art preferences, indicated a preference for something interactive.



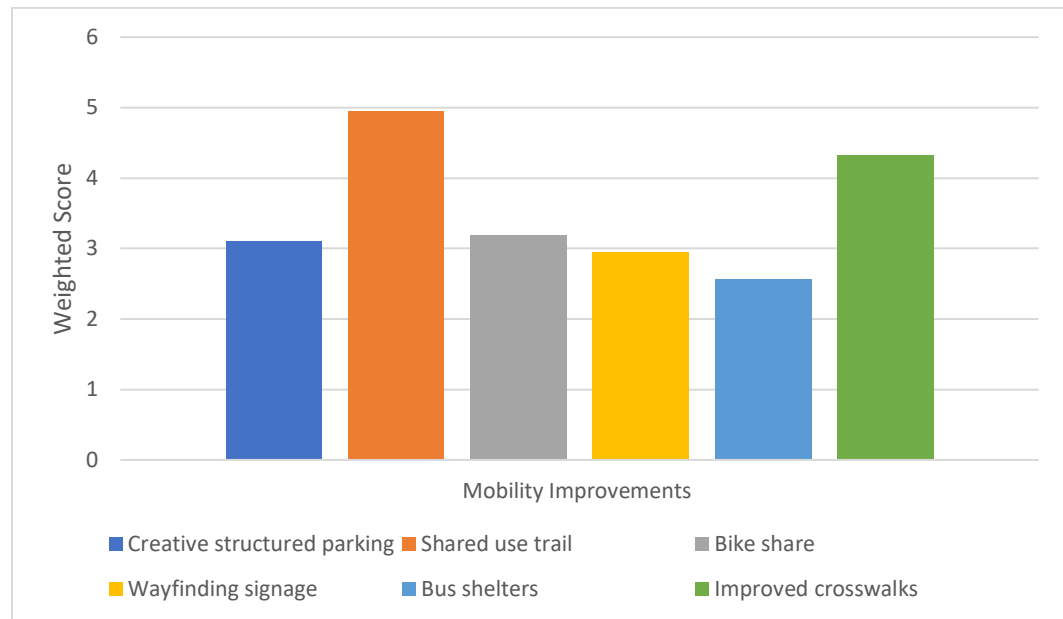
Architecture

Respondents to the survey appeared to favor more traditional styles of architecture. Masonry residential design emerged as the favored architectural preference among survey respondents. Contrary to the results from the public forum, survey respondents expressed a more favorable attitude towards mixed use buildings, though the use of masonry and brickwork in facades was a distinguishing feature of all top choices.



Mobility

Participants selected shared use trails and improved crosswalks as their most preferred option for mobility enhancements. Taken into consideration with the number of outreach participants expressing concern over nearby crossings, particularly the intersection of Centennial Avenue and North Avenue East, pedestrian safety is a high priority for site development. The nearby Rahway River was often highlighted as an ideal opportunity for a new trail.



DROP-IN SESSIONS

The planning team held four Drop-In sessions, where stations were set up in prominent public spaces throughout the downtown with the intention of meeting people where they were. When possible, these sessions were conducted during established events to maximize participation and capture the feedback of stakeholders that may not have been aware of the engagement effort. The sessions were held on the following dates and locations:

1. October 10th – Cranford Street Fair
2. October 15th – Eastman Clock Plaza
3. October 16th – Downtown gazebo at the corner of Springfield Avenue and N. Union Avenue
4. October 18th – Corner of Centennial Avenue and Lincoln Avenue

Participants in these drop-in sessions expressed several concerns regarding the impact of a prospective redevelopment project, including concerns for the operation of the Fire Department, the availability of parking, strains on stormwater management infrastructure, the exacerbation of localized flooding problems, and the aesthetics of the area. Many of these concerns overlapped and carried implications for multiple areas, such as an expressed aversion to a structured parking deck because of its appearance and any potential loss of the existing parking lot which provides both parking and flexible open space for community events. Overall, many participants expressed the sentiment that much of the site should be maintained in its present state, particularly the northern portion of the site, and the area of the Fire Department building. In addition, participants raised concerns about increased traffic congestion and pedestrian safety surrounding the site.

Participants also shared their preferences for what they would like to see in a potential redevelopment project inclusive of both site features and allowable uses. The most popular site feature was the inclusion of open space that could be programmed in a manner similar to the existing gazebo space on the site. While participants expressed a desire to see a mixed-use development with a retail component, some also expressed opposed the inclusion of retail, citing concerns over the presence of vacant storefronts. Other desired components included dedicated senior housing, and green infrastructure installations for stormwater management.

TOWN HALL

Held October 19th, the Town Hall served as an opportunity for a brief presentation to the general public and an open opportunity for those in attendance to ask any questions about the

redevelopment process that remained before the public forum. The following items were discussed:

1. The need to engage the businesses immediately adjacent to and within the redevelopment area in their own session (which were later held on December 3rd and the 6th).
2. There are concerns regarding where the First Presbyterian Church's need for parking, which is currently satisfied at Lot 1 within the redevelopment area, will be addressed on Sundays. Additionally, how parking for court will be met on Fridays that utilizes the same lot.
3. There were several requests to see the area on the southern side of North Avenue, where Swan Cleaners is located, added to the redevelopment area to preserve one or more of the existing municipal uses within the redevelopment area.
4. There were several issues raised regarding the need for surface parking immediately adjacent to the commercial uses at 108 North Union Avenue for their proper functioning.
5. There was an expressed desire to see maintain a viewshed of the Presbyterian Church as you are coming up Springfield.
6. As with all session, concerns regarding stormwater management for the site, especially with its proximity to the Rahway River were brought up.

PUBLIC FORUM

On the evening of December 9th, the public was invited to participate in an interactive forum with various stations established to discuss specific aspects of redevelopment including existing site features, sustainability, open space, public art, and architecture. The attendees were asked to participate in voting exercises to express their preferences in each of the areas which are detailed below.

Existing Features

When asked about which existing site conditions were the highest priority for preservation, participants selected the Fire Department followed by the existing surface parking lot, largely reflecting the sentiments expressed during previous outreach events.

Sustainability

Participants in the Town Hall meeting and drop-in sessions placed a strong emphasis on the inclusion of sustainable site features, particularly for stormwater management. In response, the planning team devoted a station exclusively to this discipline at the public forum. Forum participants continued to prioritize stormwater management in their expressed preferences. The most popular choice among participants was the inclusion of underground stormwater retention basins followed by rooftop rainwater harvesting basins. The most popular site feature not related to stormwater management was solar panels which enjoyed comparable levels of support to green roofs, another stormwater management measure.

Open Space Preferences

By a wide margin, workshop participants selected open air markets as their open space use of choice. The second most popular choice among participants was a bier garden, followed by hardscaped plazas and open green spaces. These selections, particularly open green spaces and open-air markets also enjoyed popular support among online survey respondents suggesting the popularity of flexible outdoor spaces for socializing and hosting community events in the downtown.

Public Art

The most popular choice of public art installations chosen among forum participants were storefront displays, followed by functional art installations. These choices reflect a practical taste in public art to transform vacant storefronts and banal objects such as benches or bike racks into attractive placemaking features.

Architecture

The most popular choice of architecture featured a masonry exterior in a more traditional looking style, followed by townhome-style buildings with brick accenting.

Mobility

Participants selected improved crosswalks as their most preferred option for mobility enhancements. Taken into consideration with the number of outreach participants expressing concern over nearby crossings, particularly the intersection of Centennial Avenue and North Avenue East, pedestrian safety is a high priority for site development.