



Public Survey and Ideas Wall Summary December 23, 2020



Overview

The Township of Millburn is undertaking a Vision Plan to revitalize and re-envision its Downtown Business district. As part of the public engagement effort, an online public survey was developed to gather input from the community regarding their current use of downtown, the ongoing adjustments to life and work patterns due to COVID, and existing key issues experienced by the public. The survey included an “Ideas Wall” visioning exercise, where participants were invited to post open-ended comments on key thematic areas such as shopping, streetscape, parks, traffic, and more.

The online public survey was accessible from the Township of Millburn’s website¹ for approximately a month (November 19, 2020, to December 20, 2020). A total of 735 responses were received, which represents just over 9% of the total number of households in Millburn². This is considered to be an excellent response, in comparison to similar efforts in other communities. The survey was publicized through two e-blasts, social media, and the Township website. It was also highlighted during the first virtual public workshop on December 3, 2020, which was attended by approximately 140 members of the public.

The Ideas Wall was open for the same timeframe as the public survey. The total number of comments received was 161. The thematic areas of the Ideas Wall included: Parks and Open Space; Sidewalks and Streetscape; Arts, Culture, and Events; Shopping and Restaurants; Traffic and Parking; and Other Comments.

The total number of unique visitors to the Millburn Downtown Vision Plan public engagement page was 1,550, with a total of 747 users that provided comments on the Ideas Wall and/or participated to the public survey. Although the online engagement page is now closed for comments, the Ideas Wall can still be viewed at <https://bfjplanning.mysocialpinpoint.com/millburndowntownvision#/>.

¹ <https://twp.millburn.nj.us/556/Downtown-Area-Vision-Plan>

² According to the 2010 Census, Millburn had 6,813 households.

Public Survey Summary

Q1: Do you live in Millburn/Short Hills?

697 respondents, or 95% of the survey participants, are Millburn/Short Hills residents.

Q2: If you don't live in Millburn/Short Hills, where do you live?

Other than Millburn/Short Hills residents, the most mentioned communities where the rest of the respondents live (approximately 5% of total participants) are: Springfield, Chatham, Maplewood, and South Orange.

Q3: How long have you lived in Millburn/Short Hills?

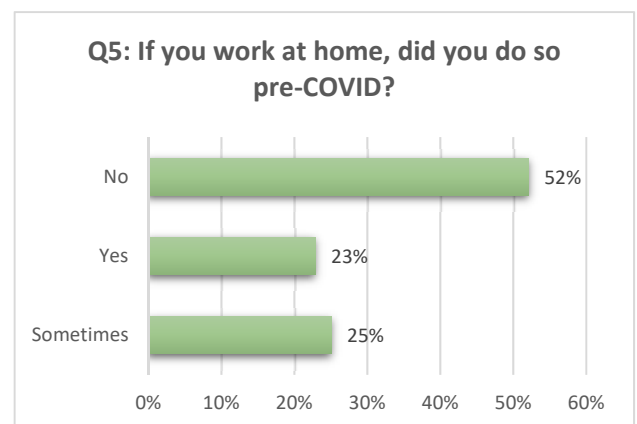
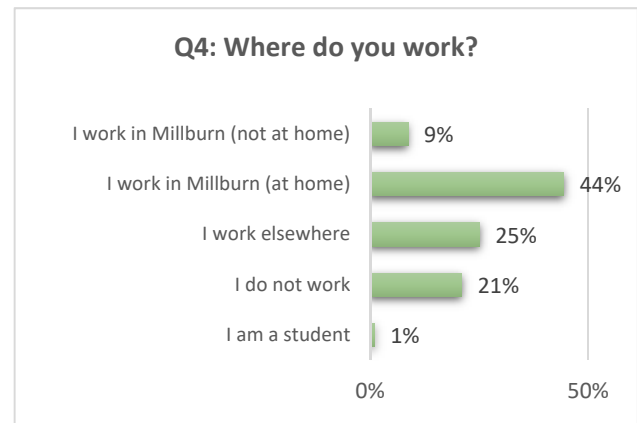
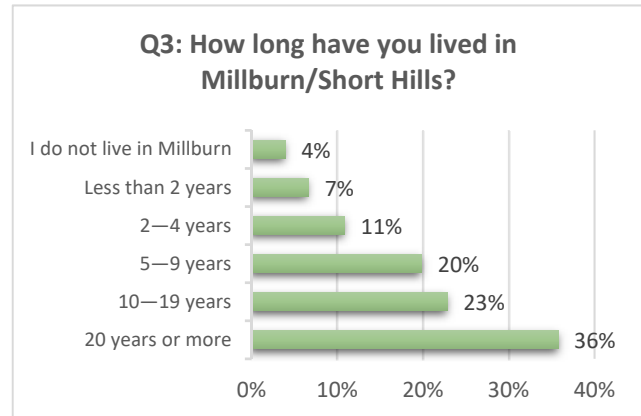
Over a third of the respondents (roughly 36%) are long-time Millburn/Short Hills residents, having lived here for 20 years or more. Roughly 23% have lived in the town between 10 and 19 years, followed by 5 to 9 years (20%) and 2 to 4 years (11%). Only 7% of the respondents have moved to Millburn/Short Hills within the last 2 years.

Q4: Where do you work?

Roughly 44% of the respondents indicated that they work from home at this time. This high percentage is most likely due to the current COVID-19 situation. Approximately 25% of the participants work elsewhere, 21% do not work and 9% work in Millburn (not at home).

Q5: If you work at home, did you do so pre-COVID?

To better understand typical work patterns, a follow-up questions showed that over half of respondents that work from home did not do so pre-COVID. About a quarter used to work from home occasionally, and 23% were already working from home prior to COVID.

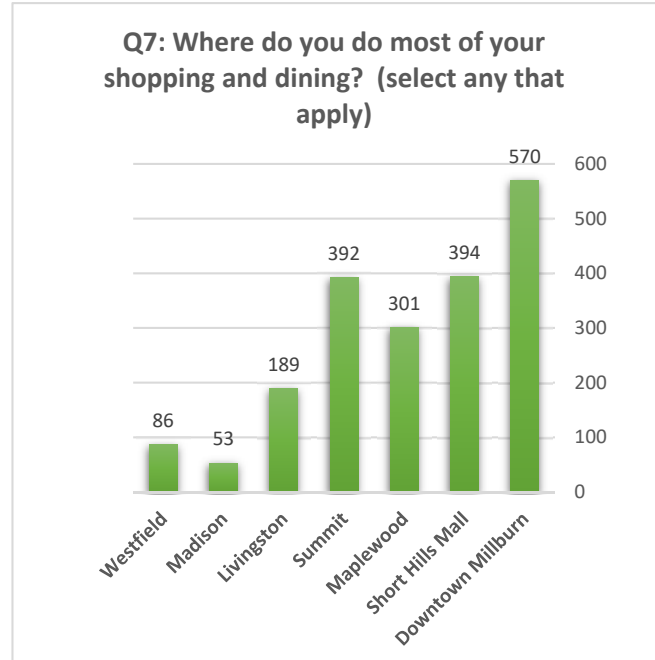


Q6 - If you work at home, are you planning on doing so even post-COVID?

A majority of respondents (roughly 67%) that are currently working from home, are planning to continue working from home even post COVID, at least part of the time. While some are still uncertain of whether they will return to the office or not (approximately 11%), 22% of respondents expect to go back to their workplace once the COVID crisis is over.

Q7: Where do you do most of your shopping and dining?

Participants were asked to select all the locations/commercial areas where they do most of their shopping and dining. The most picked location was Downtown Millburn, followed by Short Hills Mall, Summit, and Maplewood.



Q8: Is there another place that you frequently shop & dine?

Other than the locations listed in Question 7, the most mentioned places participants frequently shop and dine are Montclair, Chatham, East Hanover, Springfield, South Orange, and Morristown.

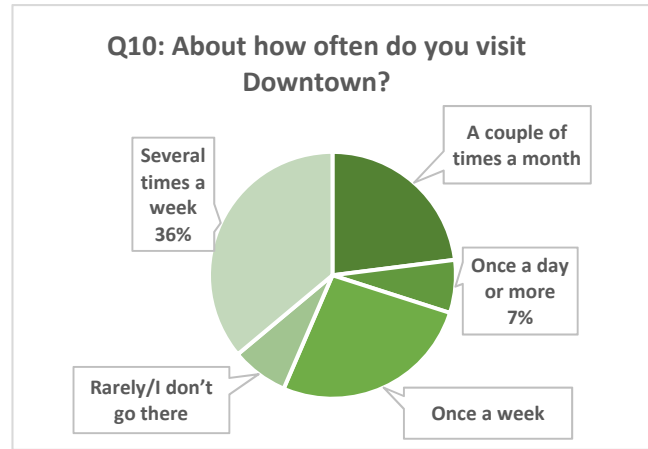
Q9: What deters you from shopping in Downtown Millburn?

The most commonly mentioned themes that deter respondents from shopping in Millburn were the following:

- Lack of variety of stores and restaurant choices (e.g. lack of international cuisine options)
- Parking issues (lack of parking at times; parking is not free)
- Bad traffic patterns, congestion and street configuration
- Not inviting to walk/stroll like other communities
- Not as vibrant as other Main Streets/downtowns, and many storefront vacancies

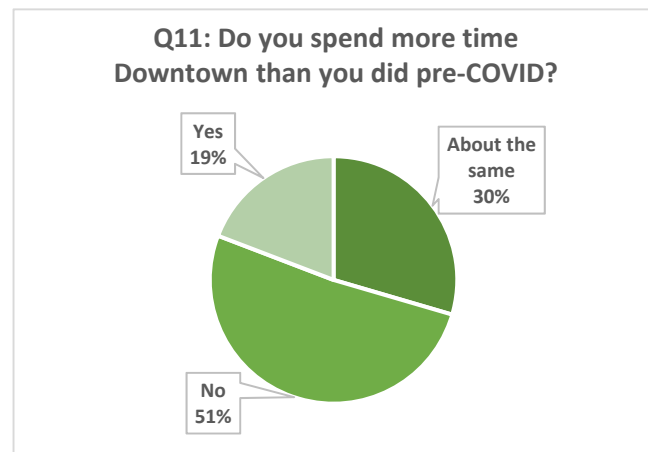
Q10: About how often do you visit Downtown?

Roughly 36% of survey participants visit Downtown several times a week, while 27% said they visit once a week and 23% a couple of times a month. Approximately 7% of respondents go Downtown once a day or more, and roughly the same percentage rarely (or never) visit Downtown.



Q11: Do you spend more time downtown than you did pre-COVID?

Just over half of the respondents (roughly 51%) do not spend more time Downtown during this COVID period. Approximately 30% of the participants spend about the same time as they used to pre-COVID, while 19% said they spend more time during this period than before.

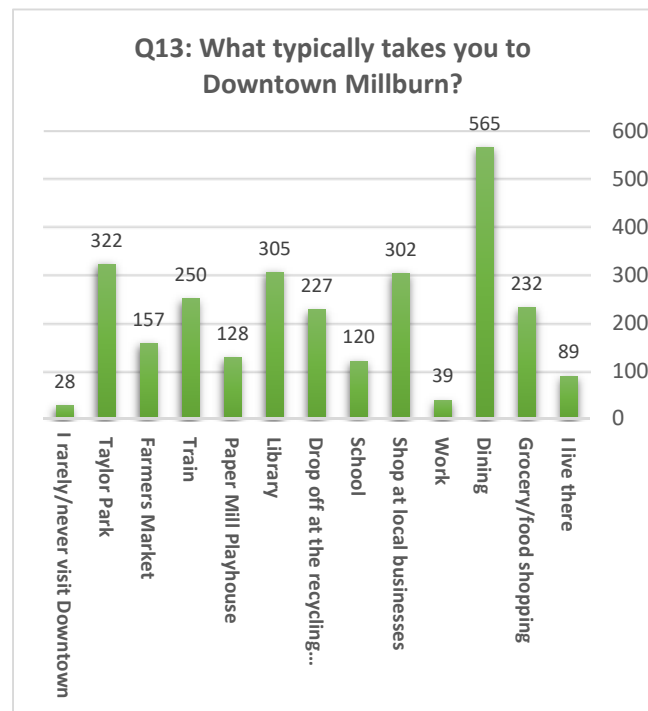


Q12: If you answered "Yes" to the above, do you see yourself continuing to do so post-COVID? Why / Why not?

Approximately 66% of respondents indicated that they will continue to spend more time Downtown even post-COVID. Some mentioned that they would like to support local businesses in the future and dine at restaurants more. On the latter, many respondents highlighted a desire for outdoor dining and the closing of Main Street to continue in the future.

Q13: What typically takes you to Downtown Millburn? (Select as many as you would like)

The most selected activity that brings survey participants to Downtown is dining (565 responses), followed by visiting Taylor Park (322), going to the library (305), and shopping at local businesses (302). Further typical activities are taking the train (250) and dropping off recyclables at the recycling center (227). The Farmers Market and the Paper Mill Playhouse are other two popular activities, with 157 and 128 responses, respectively.



Q14: Are there other activities that bring you to Downtown (that aren't listed above)?

Other than the activities listed in Question 13, the most commonly mentioned activities that participants do Downtown were the following:

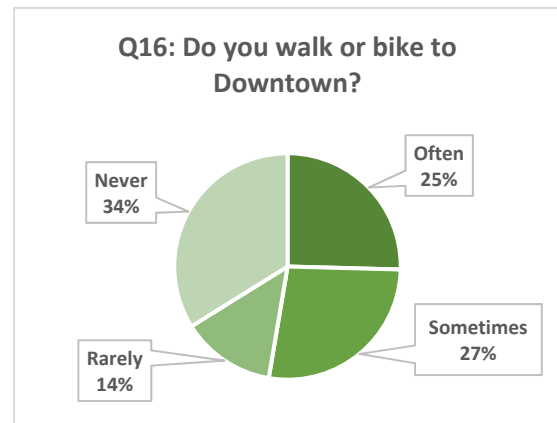
- Movie theater
- Bank
- Salon / Hair Dresser
- Coffee
- Events (street fairs, etc.)
- Kids-related activities
- Medical offices
- Walking / Exercising

Q15: Where Downtown do you have trouble parking?

More than 80% of the respondents indicated issues of parking, especially on the weekends. The most mentioned location where participants have parking issues is along Millburn Avenue. Some specified that lack of parking happens especially in the core downtown area, by the Deli and between Spring Street and Main Street.

Q16: Do you walk or bike to Downtown?

Approximately 34% of the respondents said they never walk or bike to Downtown, and 14% said they "rarely" do. Roughly one-quarter of respondents indicated they often walk/bike to Downtown, while 27% chose "sometimes."



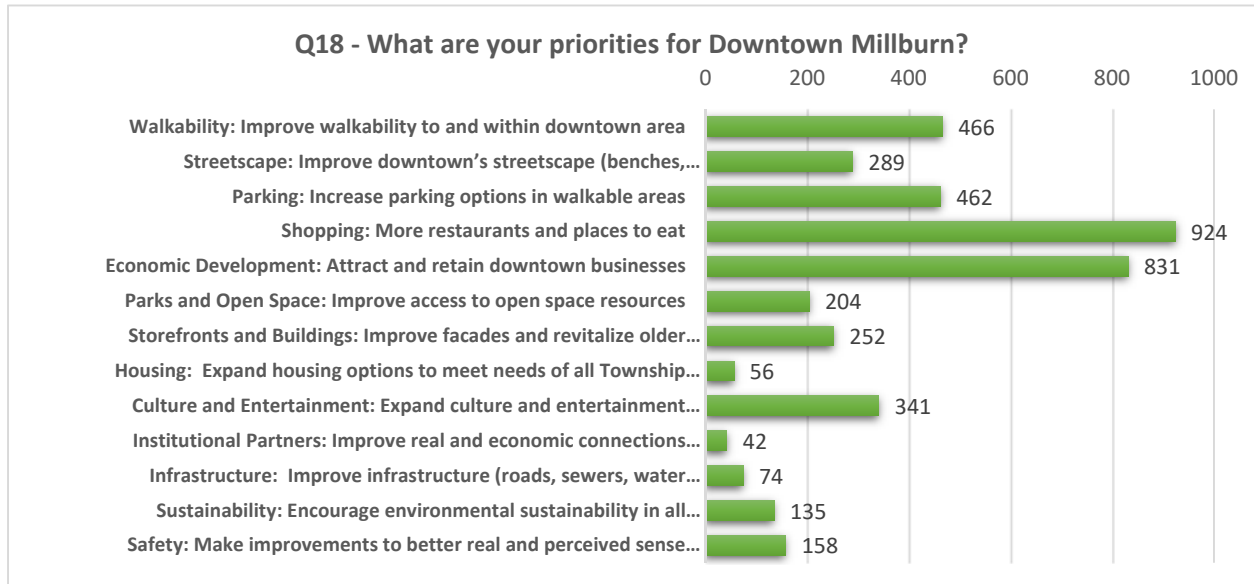
Q17: If you don't walk or bike, what prevents or deters you from doing so?

The most common reasons why participants don't walk or bike Downtown were the following:

- Downtown is too far from their house to walk/bike
- Feel unsafe walking or biking to Downtown. Often this concern was raised in connection with the following issues: lack of designated bike lanes and sidewalks leading into Downtown, aggressive driving, too much traffic, and perception of poor safety at crosswalks and in general.
- Lack of pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure (e.g. bike lanes, sidewalks). Additionally, some people raised the question of whether Downtown has enough bike parking.

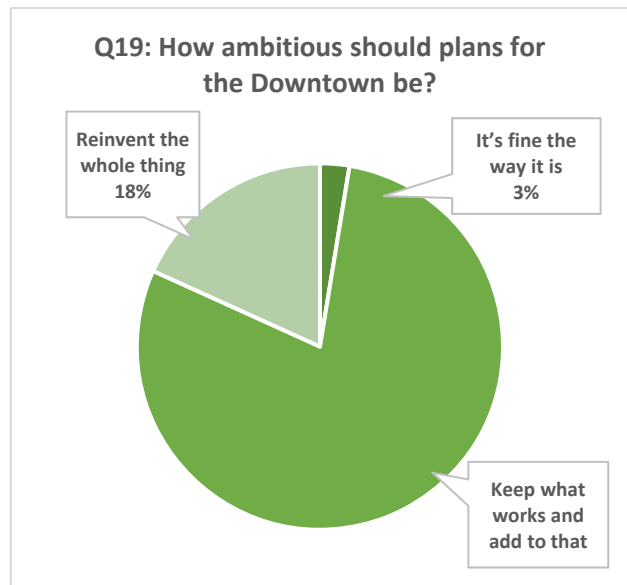
Q18: What are your priorities for Downtown Millburn? (Select at least 3 options)

The two most popular priority areas for Downtown Millburn were shopping (more restaurants and places to eat) and economic development (attract and retain downtown businesses). Following those, other two common themes were improve walkability and increase parking options. The first three choices that respondents selected were weighted (3 points for first choice, 2 points for second choice, and 1 point for third choice).



Q19: How ambitious should plans for the Downtown be?

Roughly 79% of respondents indicated that plans for Downtown Millburn should seek to keep what works and add to that, while roughly 18% said that plans should "reinvent the whole thing." Approximately 3% of respondents would like to keep Downtown the way it is.



Demographic Questions

Q20: Please tell us your age

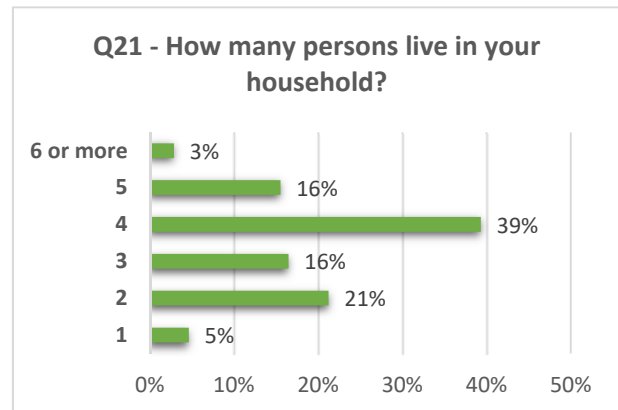
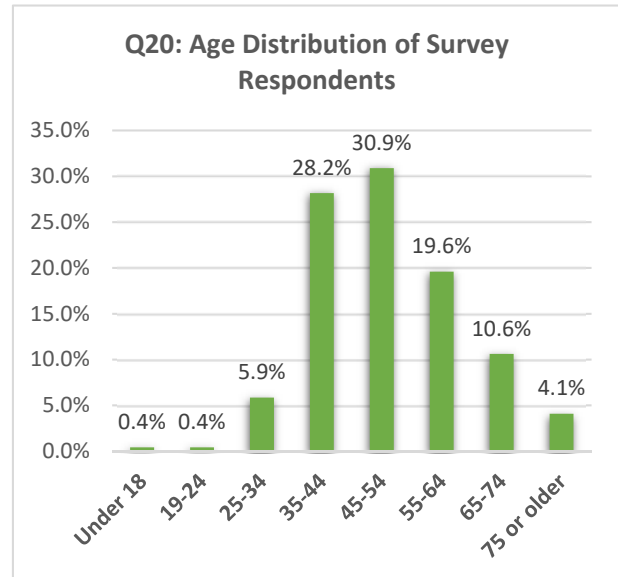
The survey had a good representation of three age groups: 45-54 (30.9%), 35-44 (28.2%), and 55-64 (19.6%). The senior population accounted for 10.6% between 65 and 74, and 4.1% for over 75. Age category 25-34 was 5.9%, while age groups 19-24 and under 18 were at roughly 0.4% each.

Q21: How many persons live in your household?

Roughly 39% of respondents live in a household of 4 persons, 21% in a household of 2 persons, and 16% each in a household of 3 and 5 persons. Only approximately 5% of participants are single-person households, while 3% are 6-person households. This representation of the community seems generally aligned with 2010 Census data that indicate an average household size of 2.96.

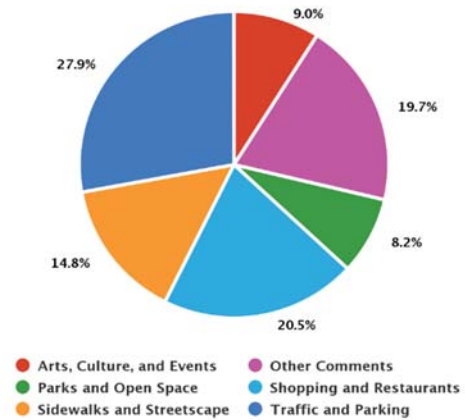
Q22: What is your annual household income? (Optional)

Roughly 65% of respondents of this optional question indicated an annual household income of \$250,000 or more. Given that, according to the American Community Survey 2015-2019, the median household income of Millburn is approximately \$225,227 (adjusted in 2019 dollars), the survey results seem to be consistent with the community as a whole.



IDEAS WALL

This visioning exercise was meant to brainstorm ideas for what is most needed in the Downtown. A total of 161 open-ended comments were received. Participants had the opportunity to up- or down-vote other ideas presented. Comments were grouped into the following areas: Parks and Open Space; Sidewalks and Streetscape; Arts, Culture, and Events; Shopping and Restaurants; Traffic and Parking; and Other Comments. The following chart shows the breakdown of public comments by category.



Sidewalks and Streetscape (23 comments)

Popular ideas included burying power lines (or moving them behind the buildings) to improve the overall look of Downtown and avoid power outages; turning Main Street into a permanent Open Street (only for pedestrians); widening the sidewalks; transforming parking along Millburn Avenue into outdoor dining / expanded area for shopping; and adding decorative planters and attractive pavers.

"Stop the downtown expressway!"

"Parallel parking is a challenge."

"Bury power lines. Summit has done so and the streets look much cleaner and it provides a less cluttered look and avoids power outages."

"Making the next block of Millburn Ave visually enticing would be welcome."

"Pedestrian connections from Short Hills to downtown must be improved."

"We loved when Main St. was closed for outdoor dining."

"Turning Main Street into an Open Street (i.e. pedestrianizing it) is a great amenity and attraction for the Downtown."

Parks and Open Space

(11 comments)

Topics and ideas frequently mentioned, and that received the most “up votes” from other participants, included: programming and new activities in the Bauer Center in Taylor Park to maximize its use; enhance Taylor Park and use some of its sections for new uses (e.g. mini-botanic garden); create a small dog park; and add green spaces wherever it’s possible.

“The Bauer Center in Taylor Park can be so much better.”

“I love the idea of a corridor leading hikers from the reservation to Taylor Park.”

“Incorporate the waterfront into the new downtown Millburn concept!”

“I would definitely use the park more, and therefore Downtown, if dogs were allowed in [Taylor] park.”

Arts, Culture, and Events

(12 comments)

Taylor Park and the Bauer Center were mentioned in this category too, highlighting the potential for the park to host a craft fair or similar, and the idea to transform the Bauer Center into an Arts and Community Center. Recurring topics included a desire to see more community events, cultural celebrations and street fairs in general. Public art such as murals were also mentioned, as well as music festivals and events/activities that target middle and high school age kids. Lastly, the library was identified as an asset that could be leveraged to host cultural events and concerts, as well as other activities such as a local café.

“The town should upgrade the interior of the Bauer Community Center so that it can be used as an arts and community center...This will drive more community engagement and also bring more people to the downtown.”

“I would love to see more community activities and businesses targeted to Middle and High School kids.”

“Encourage people to make the community more colorful with murals (please check out Summit). ”

“Would love to see Millburn attract a fine crafts fair in Taylor Park.”

“Please expand the farmer's market options - more organic foods.”

Shopping and Restaurants (39 comments)

Popular topics that received the most “up votes” are the following: move the recycling center operations; close Main Street to traffic permanently, and promote more outdoor dining in other locations too (including live music); create a weekend event with food trucks, local chefs and local crafters; and have a gourmet food store. A few comments raise concerns about stores that remain vacant for a long time, and indicate a desire to increase the selection of stores and restaurants – and explore ways to encourage more businesses/restaurants to move to Millburn.

"Please find ways to encourage businesses and restaurants! I love shopping in Maplewood and Summit. They both have a much better selection of stores and restaurants."

"Make the approval process user friendly to attract retailers."

"MOVE THE TOWN DUMP."

"Make the closure of Main Street to vehicles, with the in street dining, permanent."

"If we can't have a weekend Farmer's Market, how about creating a fun food event utilizing food trucks and local chefs and caterers?"

"I would LOVE to see someone open up a gourmet food store in downtown Millburn"

"Way too many properties allowed to sit vacant and not take care of their buildings."

Traffic and Parking (44 comments)

The most common ideas that were discussed included Complete Streets, safety, and traffic patterns. The following, in particular, received the most “up votes”: the Complete Street project should be tweaked to reduce congestion; raised flex parking and no left turn into Essex Street should be removed; one-way traffic results in excessive drivers speed and is detrimental to businesses; issues of speeding and double-parking on Essex Street; make clear that the parking garage is available for public parking (e.g. install signs); and continue offering 15 minutes of free parking.

"Complete Streets needs to be tweaked."

"Get rid of the flex parking and fix Main Street to allow a left turn onto Essex Street."

"More bike racks near the train!"

"Essex is a racetrack."

"Millburn Ave. and Essex) can be easily converted to two ways traffic with ample space for BIKE LANES, parallel parking and large sidewalks for pedestrians and outdoor seating for restaurants."

"Traffic on Old Short Hills Rd was perfect when Main St was closed. Let's keep it closed."

"Install a sign at the parking garage that indicates that it is available for public parking."

Other Comments (31 comments)

Comments under this category covered some of the themes specified in the other topic areas, and especially the desire of an increased mix of stores, more restaurants and events, and the permanent closure of Main Street for outdoor dining – all themes that were also raised in the “Shopping and Restaurants” category. New topics included the idea to expand the Farmers Market; close the streets on weekends; convert vacant buildings into shared work spaces; consider adding senior housing and individuals with disabilities in Downtown; and consider the Upper Millburn Shopping District for improvements.

"I loved the street closure that allowed for outdoor dining. With the lights strung across the street, it felt fun and vibrant."

"Move utility poles away from Millburn Avenue."

"Provide disabled access to NJ Transit."

"An indoor swimming pool for year-round swimming would be excellent."

"Upper Millburn Shopping District seems to be permanently ignored. I wish there was some creative thinking with regards to diversity of retail - no more nail salons, banks or cleaners."

"Increase community events to promote local businesses."

"Empty buildings could be converted into shared work spaces like WeWork."

"It's time to consider senior housing in Millburn."