



Looking Forward to 2025 Survey Executive Summary



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Mike Barclay	Bev Lane
Bill Canis	Dawn MacPhee
Ruth Carver	Susan Marcille
Stan Corey	Srinivasa Meka
Bill Denk	Gary Pan
Jennifer Falcone	Ed Phillips
Peter Falcone	Phil Pifer
Pam Grosvenor	Brandon Royal
Jennifer Halm	Laurie Rains Rowe
Gordon Harris	Fadi Shadid
Elizabeth Huebner	Paul Summers
Karen Keegan	Tim Thompson
Scott Knight	Jim Trent
Eric Knudsen	Sandy Walker
David Kondner	

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Great Falls Citizens Association

Executive Summary — Looking Forward to 2025 Survey

11 May 2020

The Great Falls Citizens Association (GFCA) Board of Directors and Committee Chairs undertook a survey in 2019 to gather feedback on what is important to Great Falls residents and where the association should direct its efforts and resources during the coming five years to 2025. The community had last been surveyed on a wide range of issues in 2007, and the board felt it was time for an update.

Over the past 50 years, Great Falls has changed from a semi-rural community to a suburb known for being a more natural, green community in the midst of the intensive development occurring at Tysons, Reston and Loudoun County. Parks like Great Falls and Riverbend, and historic attractions such as Colvin Run Mill, are major assets that draw visitors from near and far. An ever-growing volume of commuters bring new challenges for transportation and increasing residential density and infill development raise new environmental and land use issues for residents. How our elected officials manage these pressures is more important than ever. Representing evolving community viewpoints on these issues with our elected officials is GFCA's core mission.

Key Findings

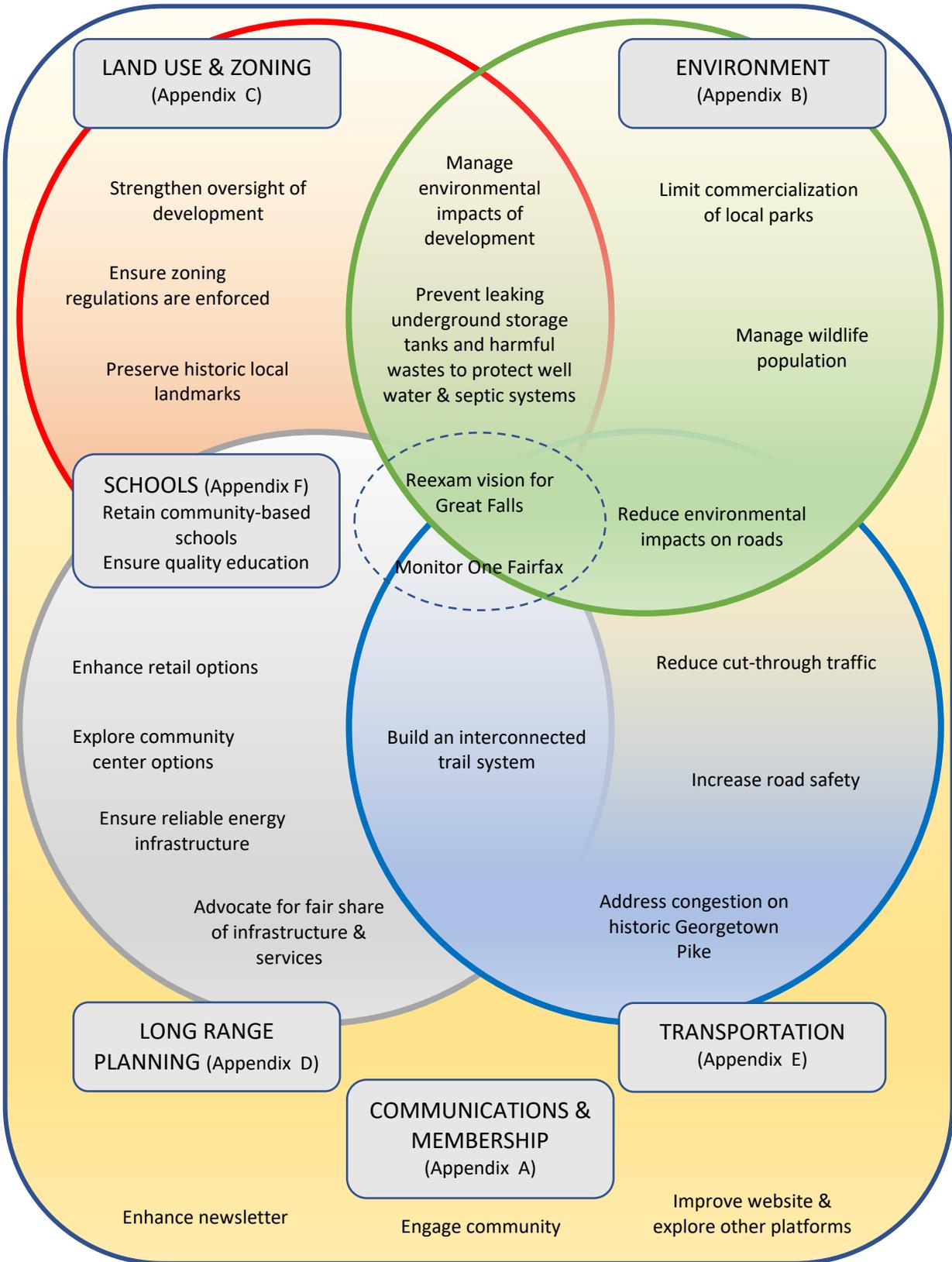
Key findings from GFCA's latest survey are shown below and expanded on in the analyses prepared by GFCA committees (Appendices A-F). Please note that these findings are NOT ranked in terms of importance across categories of issues, but rather serve to inform GFCA and the community of the relative importance of issues WITHIN specific categories, e.g. land use, transportation, environment, etc.

What was learned

Interests and issues that were raised in conjunction with the 2007 survey continue to be important to residents, particularly those related to development and how they may affect the quality of life in our community. The diagram on the following page summarizes proposed initiatives based on key findings from the current survey. Further detail on rankings can be found in the chart on page 5. Those with the highest priority span different topical areas (land use, transportation, the environment, and infrastructure); these initiatives include:

- Limiting density and infill development, i.e. managing growth (79%)
- Reducing cut-through and commuter traffic (73%)
- Advocating for development conditions to preserve trees and landscaping requirements in perpetuity (66%)
- Calming traffic and improving safety on local roads (64%)
- Ensuring a reliable energy infrastructure (63%)

GFCFA Survey: Key Findings, Initiatives and Overlapping Issues



The following were also of high interest to more than 40% of those responding to the survey:

- Setting limits for, and monitoring, stormwater runoff (46%)
- Monitoring underground storage tanks and harmful waste to protect well water and septic systems (44%)
- Ensuring property maintenance (42%)
- Creating an interconnected trails system and sidewalks in the commercial area (41%)
- Controlling the deer population and managing other wildlife (41%)
- Lighting and sign policies that support businesses while limiting light pollution and signage clutter (41%)

Initiative	High Priority %	Medium Priority %	Total %
Limiting density and infill development, i.e. managing growth	79	12	91
Reducing cut-through and commuter traffic	73	21	94
Advocating for development conditions to preserve trees and landscaping requirements in perpetuity	66	23	89
Calming traffic and improving safety on local roads	64	23	87
Ensuring a reliable energy infrastructure	63	28	91
Setting limits for, and monitoring, stormwater runoff	46	36	82
Monitoring underground storage tanks and harmful waste	44	32	76
Ensuring property maintenance	42	39	81
Creating an interconnected trails system and sidewalks in the commercial area	41	29	70
Controlling the deer population and managing other wildlife	41	34	75
Lighting and sign policies that support businesses while limiting light pollution and signage clutter	41	35	76

Chart: Summary of initiatives ranked in order of those with highest priority

Cross Cutting Issues

As illustrated by the overlapping circles in the diagram on page 4, many issues and initiatives are cross-cutting in that they affect other areas, particularly in regard to development. For example, reductions in the tree canopy and vegetation routinely occur as lots are cleared for construction of homes and commercial areas, and the amount of impervious surfaces expands as roads, driveways, parking areas, walkways and roofs increase. All of these lead to greater stormwater runoff that often floods roads and septic system drain fields, damages property, impairs water quality, erodes streams and land, and generally degrades the natural habitat for wildlife. As density in Great Falls and the surrounding area increases, so does the volume of traffic on our local roads and degree of congestion. While higher congestion results in slowing vehicle movement through Great Falls during the rush hours, residents increasingly observe unsafe driving practices such as illegal passing and high rates of speed at other times which can result in accidents. Changes in population distribution may affect school boundaries and, indirectly, the desirability of living in Great Falls and local housing prices.

Past Work and Next Steps

In analyzing the findings from the survey, GFCA felt that it would be useful to look at what has been done thus far on the five issues that had the highest priority (over 50%) in order to determine its next steps. The following is a summary of this review.

Limiting density and infill development, i.e. managing growth

In the findings from the 2007 survey it was reported that “If there is only one learner outcome one should take away that encapsulates the views of Great Falls residents it would be: the need to fight against overdevelopment.”

While the community has little influence in the case of “by-right” developments as long as a property owner adheres to zoning ordinances and county and state regulations, it does have sway over specific aspects of a development in instances when a property is being rezoned or when special exceptions are being requested. GFCA’s on-going involvement in the Rivermont residential development is one example, where we successfully advocated for a reduction in the number of home sites and a range of environmental protections. GFCA was actively engaged with the neighborhood in supporting watershed protection measures and crafting proffers agreed to by the developer, and it remains involved during construction, working with the adjacent neighborhoods and the staff of the Dranesville Supervisor to ensure that problems are addressed.

GFCA will continue to engage in and monitor local development projects and advocate to preserve what residents value about our community. In addition, GFCA will be investigating the feasibility and ramifications of designating Great Falls as a special planning district. Other localities have employed this approach to gain more control over development.

Reducing cut-through and commuter traffic

Cut-through and commuter traffic continues to increase as areas surrounding Great Falls are increasingly developed. While it is anticipated that a wider Route 7, once completed, will help to alleviate some of the congestion on local roads, more needs to be done. GFCA, along with McLean Vienna and Reston, advocated for improvements on the Route 7 corridor as traffic increased. GFCA continues to persist in efforts to have the partial interchange on Route 7 at Baron Cameron Avenue/Springvale Road built and remains committed to pursuing other alternatives such as lowering Dulles Toll Road fees and exploring transit options. We also advocated in Richmond for new tools that could control some cut-through traffic, legislation that was passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2019.

Although not in Great Falls, GFCA supports VDOT’s plan to redesign the Georgetown Pike/I-495 intersection and advocates for improvements to I-495. We will also continue to encourage our elected representatives to work with Maryland on widening the American Legion Bridge and exploring other alternatives to address increasing congestion on roads in Northern Virginia.

Advocating for development conditions to preserve trees and landscaping requirements in perpetuity

Closely related to the issue of limiting density and infill development, GFCA has historically advocated on behalf of the community to preserve the natural green environment in Great Falls.

Through GFCA's efforts, the designs for residential subdivisions like Rivermont (formerly Brooks Farm) and Summer Creek (on Challedon Road), and commercial developments like the TD Bank and Seneca Corner (where the new CVS is located), were modified to preserve trees and include native landscaping that are better suited to the local environment. The designs of several buildings were modified architecturally as well. More recently, GFCA has been coordinating with the County and the developer for the IntegraCare senior living facility (Verity) to preserve trees and limit lighting in the Colvin Run area.

As stewards for the community, GFCA will continue to advance measures that promote the overall health of Great Falls and wider community, regardless of whether these are in conjunction with development or initiatives to add to, or restore, what has been lost. Such is the case with GFCA's recent initiative coordinated with Fairfax County Park Authority – five white oaks were planted in Great Falls Grange Park last year near the playground. Previously, trees were planted in other local parks and at the library. GFCA also provides 500 free saplings each year to residents in a joint program with Fairfax ReLeaf.

Calming traffic and improving safety on local roads

It has been suggested that increasing congestion on local roads is linked in part to more aggressive driving behavior, including drivers who pass illegally, ignore stop signs, and go above the posted speed limit. This, in turn, impacts the level of safety for other motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

Traffic calming, which entails modifying a road's design and using physical barriers to improve safety and encourage more responsible driving, has been effectively used in Great Falls over the years. The GFCA-sponsored *Great Falls Village Traffic Calming & Circulation Study* in the early 2000s led to a reduction in the speed limit along Georgetown Pike in the village area in 2002.

The idea for the 2013 Walker Road "Diet" project—reducing five lanes of traffic to three—was conceived when GFCA decided that a crosswalk would be important to help pedestrians walk safely between commercial areas in the village and Great Falls Library. Since VDOT wouldn't allow an additional crosswalk on Georgetown Pike, it was decided that pedestrian access could be improved by narrowing Walker Road and adding bumpouts. The crosswalk now links the main commercial areas in the village. (The Great Falls Garden Club later raised funds to landscape the bumpouts).

GFCA continues to push for crosswalks that would connect the library to the commercial areas. In addition, GFCA plans to reexamine other recommended improvements and pursue those that are felt to be the most viable; other ideas for calming traffic will also be examined.

Ensuring a reliable energy infrastructure

Undergrounding of power cables in Great Falls has been a long-standing interest of residents. While improving the visual appearance along local roads, burying power lines in Great Falls would mean that the lines would be protected from wind, ice, and tree damage that are common causes of outages adversely affecting our community for hours or days.

Dominion Energy's Strategic Underground Program is designed to shorten restoration times following major storms by placing select outage-prone overhead electrical lines and equipment underground. One of the most significant challenges they face is securing the necessary easements from residents for the underground lines and above ground transformers. If only one homeowner refuses to grant an

easement then the project is cancelled, the company moves on to another neighborhood, and Dominion will not entertain undergrounding in that area for years to come.

Although undergrounding across the entire community at Dominion’s expense is unlikely because of the high costs involved, it may be possible if everyone in a particular neighborhood, or along a road, agreed to have an undergrounding fee added to their power bills for a specified number of years.

In May 2019, GFCA invited Dominion to address the community on its undergrounding program, including several planned projects in the Great Falls area. Given the interest in this issue, GFCA will continue to pursue undergrounding, reaching out to both residents and Dominion Energy to discuss options.

Long Range Plan

While an incremental approach to growth was suggested in conjunction with the 2007 survey results, the findings from the current survey suggest that a long-range plan for the community is needed—63% of respondents felt it was very important—and that an incremental approach to development needs to be further clarified given problems experienced with some recent projects. Specifically, GFCA should be ensuring that all growth be “smart growth”¹ that reflects the interests and needs of residents, enhances a sense of community, and preserves and protects the local environment. Given that Great Falls is a green oasis in a rapidly developing region as well as the watershed for a large stretch of the Potomac River, GFCA must consider the key issues identified in the survey when working with the community to develop a plan:

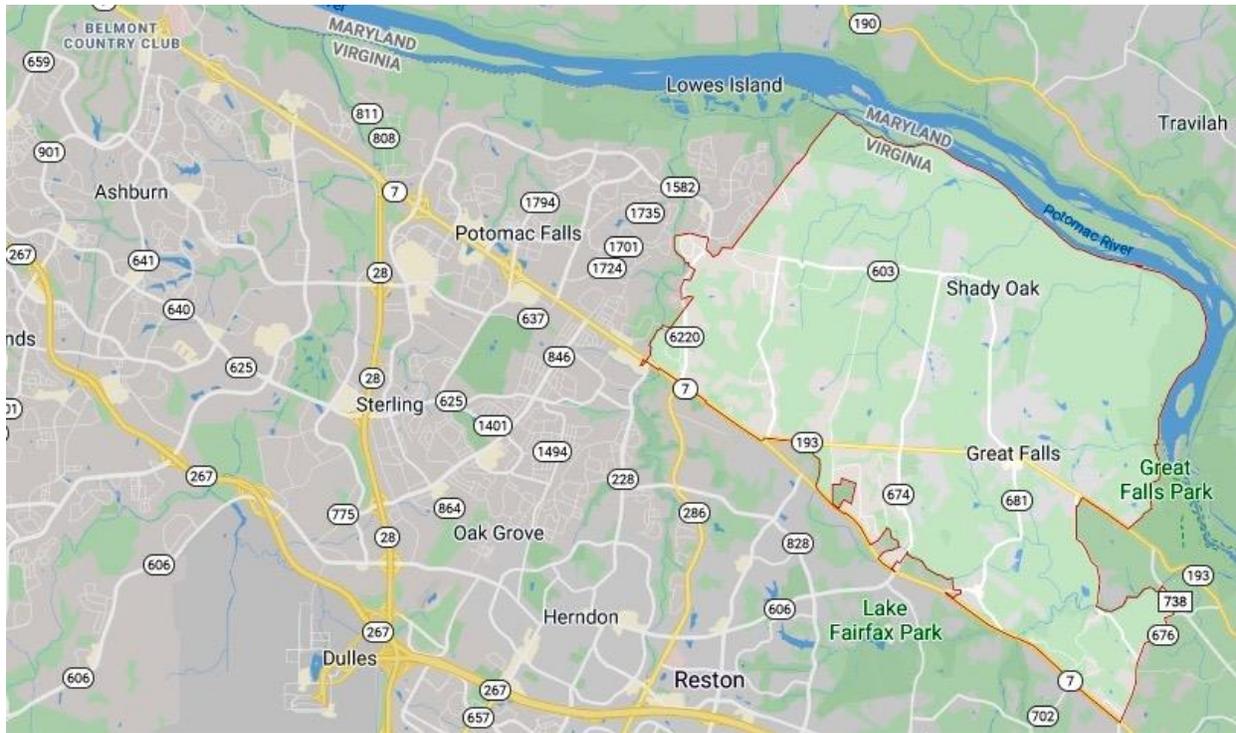
- Support a strong and sustainable local economy while honoring our historic roots.
- Promote the health and well-being of residents by ensuring a sound physical infrastructure, providing opportunities for an active lifestyle, personal connections, and intellectual engagement via local programs and facilities.
- Pursue multimodal mobility systems and networks, such as pedestrian facilities to reach commercial districts and local parks in order to support social activities.

As GFCA moves forward, the concept of a Great Falls as “a community that seeks to preserve its environmental and aesthetic character”, rather than a “semi-rural community”, may better describe what residents want.

Part of the strategic planning process would be to evaluate GFCA’s communication methodology. Feedback from the survey suggests that changes are needed in how GFCA provides information, actively engages its members, and gathers input. GFCA has already begun discussion on these issues.

In regard to community involvement, it is important to recognize that as an all-volunteer organization, not an elected body, GFCA works in an unofficial capacity to advocate with elected leaders at the county and state level on local issues. Unlike the community of McLean (with a citizens association, Chamber of Commerce, a large staffed community center, and the McLean Community Business Center (CBC) Task Force), Great Falls has fewer organized voices. Given the growing challenges that the community faces to retain what we value, residents need to not only voice their opinions and share ideas, but also be involved.

¹ Smart growth is often described as an approach to development that entails a mix of building types, diverse housing and transportation options, preservation of open spaces and critical environmental areas, and community engagement.



Great Falls — a community with agricultural roots and a historic past seeking to preserve its environmental and aesthetic character while being surrounded by rapidly-developing areas.²

Methodology

While the on-line survey was originally designed around standing committee issues and directed toward GFCA's 985 members³, it was subsequently opened to the wider Great Falls community. In addition to being internally promoted to members, the survey was widely advertised in local media, mentioned at public meetings and events, and included in Dranesville Happenings, Supervisor Foust's monthly newsletter. Email notifications were also sent to local nonprofit organizations and PTAs/PTOs/PSTAs. A total of 327 residents from the approximately 5,391 Great Falls households⁴ participated in the survey with an average completion rate of 85%. While a breakdown of respondents by GFCA member versus nonmember is not available, it is surmised that the majority of those who participated are affiliated with GFCA since over 60% of the responses were received before the survey was actively marketed to the community at large.

Given that (i) the sample size is limited and responses on certain topics may not be representative of the community at large and (ii) survey participants may interpret some questions differently, both the quantitative and qualitative data has been analyzed and interpreted based on experience and prior history with the subject matter in order to prepare this report.

² Image from Google Maps via Verizon FIOS.

³ Data drawn from GFCA membership records as of May 2019.

⁴ Data drawn from Fairfax County 2019 demographic profile. The profile indicates that 13,604 adults (ages 18 and older) reside in Great Falls. See: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demographics/community-profiles>.

Appendices

The graphics shown in the appendices, drawn from Survey Monkey, are for only illustrative purposes only.

Appendix A – Communications/Membership (COM/MEM)

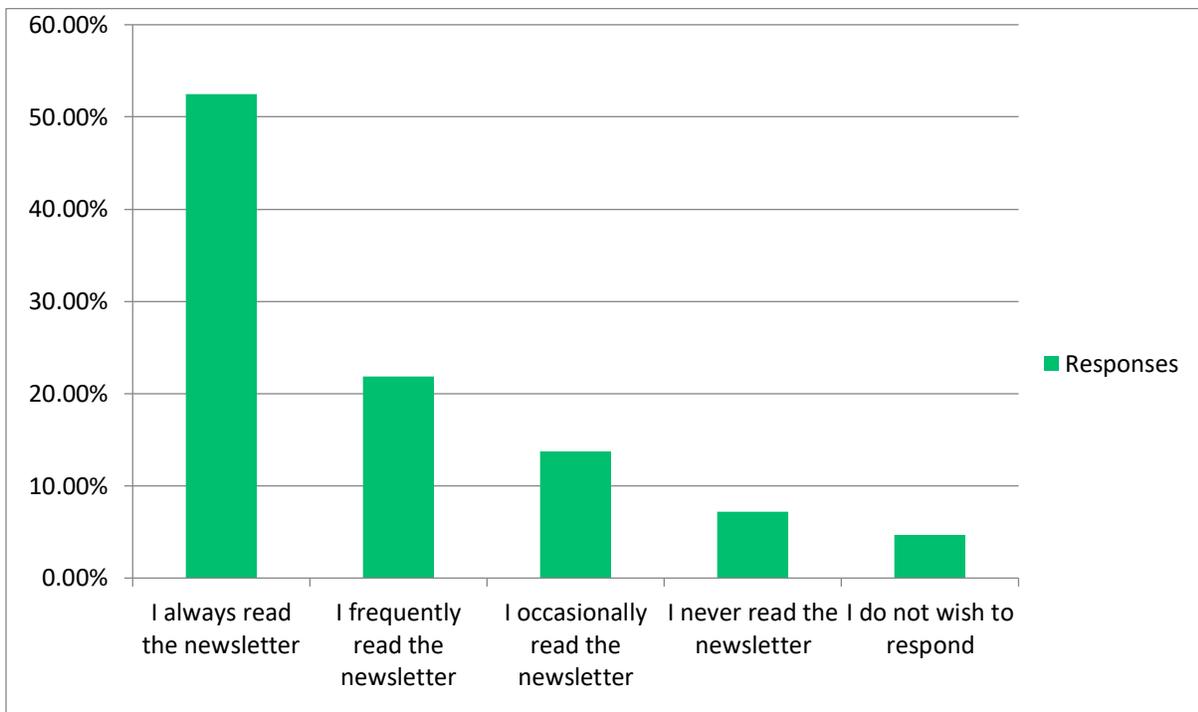
Introduction

The survey provides insights into the respondents' need for, and interest in, information on issues affecting the Great Falls community and their views on the approaches GFCA uses to provide the community with that information.

Key Findings — Hot-Button Issues/Concerns & Interests

Most GFCA members rely on the newsletter for information on community issues.

In response to the question of which best describes how often the respondent visits the GFCA website (Q1), slightly under 30% indicated that they never visit the website and only 66% occasionally visit it. This means that the website is not the primary source of information that members rely on regarding issues facing the Great Falls community. In fact, the GFCA newsletter is the most direct and effective mechanism that GFCA currently has to reach members with information of importance. Approximately 75% of those who responded to the question of how often they read the newsletter (Q3) indicated that they read it with some regularity, with about 53% reporting that they always read it and another 22% indicating that they frequently read it.



Q3: As a GFCA member, you receive the newsletter. Which of the following best describes how often you read it?

Only a small percentage of residents attend GFCA-sponsored public meetings.

While slightly under 40% of respondents to the question of how often they attend GFCA town hall meetings indicated that they occasionally attend, 50% never attend (Q4). Reasons for not attending vary; however, family or other commitments and work conflicts were the most

frequently cited reasons (Q5 – *If you never, or only occasionally, attend town hall meetings, what is the main reason that you don't attend?*). Notwithstanding, “hot ticket” issues (e.g. rezoning, school redistricting) tends to draw more residents to a meeting. One of the largest GFCA town halls was held in June 2019, attracting over 300 residents to discuss possible school boundary changes. As respondents’ comments tend to indicate, those who are interested in attending town hall meetings on an on-going basis may continue to be low. As such, GFCA is considering alternatives, including more live streaming and on-demand recordings.

There is significant interest in receiving timely, targeted information on issues facing the Great Falls community, preferably delivered on mobile devices.

Based on a review of written comments, there is a greater appetite for timely information on community issues that GFCA is not currently meeting – at least in a way many want to consume information. This suggests that GFCA should “push” information and alerts via email or text so that community members can be kept informed about issues that may be important to them.

Conclusion

GFCA is currently considering examining website options that not only meet GFCA’s critical internal needs such as membership management and document storage but also support an external communications outreach strategy. The website should be designed to support the approach to “pull” the community to the GFCA site from their mobile devices for more detailed, issue-specific information. Similarly, GFCA should emphasize mobility and “push” technologies (email/text/live streaming) to meet the informational needs of the community in the way they most want to consume it (bite-sized and focused). This is an opportunity for GFCA to improve website aesthetics and introduce additional functionality that will help increase site traffic. Concerns about social distancing in spring 2020 have prompted GFCA to move committee and public meetings to a Zoom platform, steps that may be continued when the pandemic subsides.

Appendix B – Environment and Parks (EP)

Introduction

The survey provides a basis to form a preliminary view of the sentiments of the respondents concerning the prioritization of specific environmental initiatives that the Environment and Parks Committee (EP) is undertaking, has undertaken, or could undertake in the future.

Key Findings — Hot-Button Issues/Concerns & Interests

Leaking underground storage tanks and harmful wastes were considered by respondents to be the highest priority environmental issues.

More than 44% of those responding to the question of how to prioritize environmental and parks issues over the next five years (Q7) considered monitoring underground storage tanks and harmful wastes (e.g. gas, heating oil, dry cleaning solvents, etc.) to be a high priority in order to protect our well water and septic systems; another 32% felt it is a medium priority. With respect to the question of how important is it that homeowners be required to have their septic systems periodically inspected by a licensed professional (Q8), over 78% thought that it is very to somewhat important (46% very/32% somewhat). Because of Great Falls' heavy reliance on well water, EP considers such significant environmental threats to our community to be our highest priority if and when they should occur.

Managing the growth of the deer population and other wildlife continues to be a priority.

Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents to question 7 also felt that managing deer and other wildlife is a high priority, while an additional 34% considered it a medium priority. EP regards these results as an endorsement that the committee should continue its work in these areas.

Limiting commercialization of local parks will help to preserve our green environment.

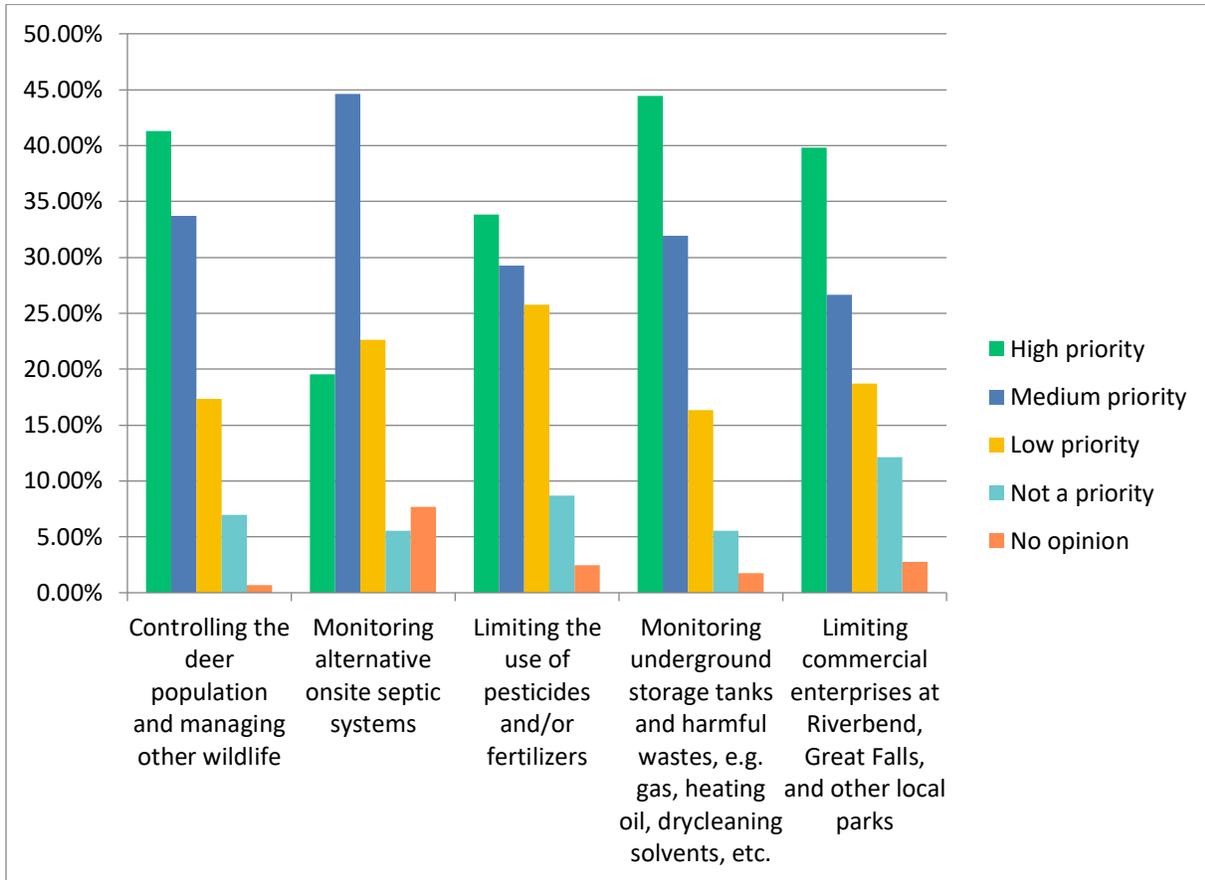
While managing deer and other wildlife is important, there is also strong interest in limiting commercial enterprises in local parks. Almost 40% of respondents indicated that this is a high priority; another 27% felt that it is a medium priority (Q7). Although not explicitly stated, many may feel that commercialization would increase traffic congestion on our local roads as well as result adversely impact the natural environment.

Environmental changes are affecting our roads.

Responses to the question of how frequently during the last five years a respondent's household has been impacted by flooding of roads or downed trees blocking roads in Great Falls (Q9) reveal that more than 60% have been affected three or more times, with 37% reporting that such incidents have impacted them frequently, i.e. more than five times in the last five years. Given these results, EP believes it is important that it continue exploring options to address stormwater issues with Fairfax County.

Comments made in conjunction with question 7 (*Over the next five years, how much of a priority should it be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and county & state officials on the following environmental and parks issues?*) and question 12 (*Please provide your comments and suggestions, if any, on environment & parks issues.*) provide additional information about environmental issues that the respondents would like EP to pursue. These include some that EP is already working on (e.g. legislation in the General Assembly to limit clear-cutting of trees) and others that the committee hopes to address

in the future (e.g. sustainable lawn care and pollinator gardens). EP appreciates the ideas and looks forward to implementing many of them with further community input going forward.



Q7: Over the next five years, how much of a priority should it be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and county & state officials on the following environment and parks issues?

Conclusion

As an overall cross-cutting theme, responses to questions throughout the survey seem to provide a mandate for both EP, and GFCA generally, to continue working on maintaining the character of Great Falls as a “wooded” community with a more natural environment.

Appendix C – Land Use and Zoning (LUZ)

Introduction

The survey provides a basis to form a preliminary view of the sentiments of the respondents regarding the broad categories of Growth Management, Zoning Administration, Environment, (as it relates to Storm Water Management in sub-divisions), and attitudes regarding Historic Districts and Landmarks.

Key Findings — Hot Button Issues/Concerns & Interests

Growth management, i.e. limiting density and infill development, is a high priority.

In response to the question of how much of a priority it should be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and county & state officials on land use and zoning issues (Q13), 79% indicated that limiting density and infill development in Great Falls is a high priority. Another 12% felt that it is a medium priority. LUZ interprets this response, as it relates to growth and development in the Great Falls community, as a reaction to the fast-paced development in our surrounding communities. For example, one respondent cautioned that the likely expansion of Tysons Corner would be important to monitor if Great Falls wishes to preserve its environment and aesthetic character. Other comments suggested that no further development is the solution. Yet these no-growth comments are offset by others who thought that development might be encouraged, provided it is a good use of land. Some suggest that landowners' "by-right" usage must be observed and that a superior and respectful design, proper engineering, and implementation could be encouraged. In examining the commentary, growth management ranks fourth in the top ten most specific comments made on issues/topics in the whole survey. GFCA can find validation in these responses to remain vigilant in monitoring planned residential and commercial development in Great Falls.

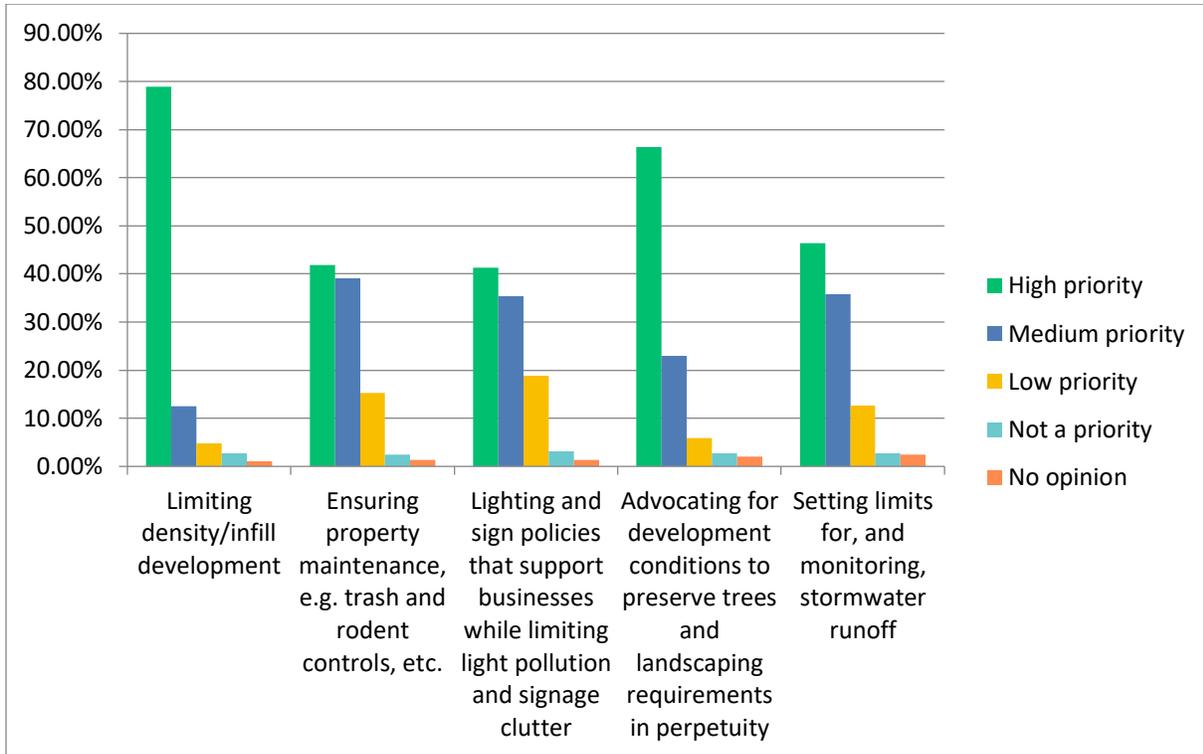
Zoning administration and the potential impacts of development on the environment are concerns.

LUZ aggregated the responses to the survey related to matters of zoning administration and code compliance and observed the following. Like managing growth and development in Great Falls, respondents have concern about the way current development is administered and regulated. For example, in Q13 over 89% of respondents felt that GFCA should advocate for development conditions that preserve trees and landscaping requirements in perpetuity (66% high priority/23% medium priority). More than 46% considered the job of monitoring regulatory requirements for managing the effects of stormwater runoff as a high priority, and 36% regarded it as medium priority. Furthermore, (i) almost 82% felt that it is either very important (53%) or somewhat important (29%) that all new residential and commercial development employ advanced filtration systems that would distribute stormwater and its treatment across the landscape and filter stormwater pollutants prior to discharge (Q14), and (ii) 65% indicated that they favored changes to the county's comprehensive plan and zoning rules to designate Great Falls as a special district in an effort to preserve the Potomac watershed (Q15). Regulating signage and lighting requirements are also considered a high (41%) to medium (35%) priority (Q13). Comments concerning zoning administration are among the top ten topics/issues cited in specific survey comments.

Our historic buildings need to be protected.

Just over 60% indicated that they favor a county ordinance to help protect historic structures against demolition through a permitting process that requires advance review of proposed

projects, regardless of whether such structures are located in historic overlay districts (Q16). However, at least one respondent observed that this form of regulatory control might pose an adverse impact on property owners, e.g., resale issues and financial burden. GFCA can interpret this survey feedback and formulate a plan that encourages action to preserve and/or recognize historic buildings and sites in Great Falls, as designated by Fairfax County, and work with appropriate officials to investigate the development of a rational process of reasonable regulation, accommodation, and the creation of community standards governing these sites, as is done in many other states.



Q13: Over the next five years, how much of a priority should it be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and county & state officials on the following land use and zoning issues?

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the survey responses and comments signal that GFCA should adopt a vigorous approach to monitoring future development in the community. In addition, GFCA needs to ensure that it advocates for policies that recognize the need to balance the fundamental rights of property owners to obtain the highest, best, use of their real property while weighing those rights against the importance of preserving the aesthetic and cultural identity of Great Falls.

Appendix D – Long Range Planning (LRP)

Introduction

The survey provides a basis to form a preliminary view of the sentiments of the respondents ensuring a more reliable energy infrastructure, enhancing the attractiveness of commercial areas, expanding an interconnected pedestrian trail system, and developing an overall vision for the community.

Key Findings — Hot-button Issues/Concerns & Interests

Ensuring a reliable energy infrastructure directly affects quality of life.

Question 18 asked how much of a priority it should be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and state & county officials on different long range issues over the next five years. Ninety-one percent (91%) felt that ensuring a reliable energy infrastructure and undergrounding electric lines is either a high or medium priority (63% high/28% medium).

Great Falls has a high frequency of large-scale electricity outages throughout the year. One of the major causes is above-ground electrical lines and an abundance of trees close to the lines. When power is lost here, homes and businesses generally lose not only lights, appliances, and HVAC but also well water and septic systems, Internet, and cable-based telephone service. Natural gas as an alternate energy source is not available to all in the community. Thus, a power outage causes much more serious and complete disruption in Great Falls than in other areas with public water, sewers, and better cellular coverage. In such circumstances, business and economic activity come to a halt.

LRP should continue the work started with Dominion Energy, appropriate government agencies, and our elected officials to build a case for improving Great Falls' electrical reliability, developing a jointly-agreed plan to implement solutions and monitoring the implementation of that plan. Solutions may include undergrounding some power lines, trimming trees, and improving line durability.

Enhancing the attractiveness of retail options (aesthetics, quality, assortment) is a priority.

"Improving the appearance of Great Falls Village and the Colvin Run and Seneca commercial areas" had the second highest priority in response to question 18. From the comments provided it is clear that assortment and quality of shops is also part of the issue, not simply appearance. For example, there were comments on assortment such as fewer banks, more food options, and perhaps antique stores. In addition, on average only 50% of shopping is in Great Falls (as reported in question 20 which asked what percent of shopping for "necessities", i.e. food/beverage, drugstore, gas, etc., is done in Great Falls). If less than 50% of a respondent's shopping is in Great Falls, the respondent was then asked the main reason(s) that shopping was done elsewhere (Q21). More than 60% indicated that it has more to do with the assortment and quality of products available elsewhere than other reasons.

Improvement in the appeal of our retail areas will depend upon upgrades to aesthetics, and changes in assortment and quality. Given the community's limited amount of commercially zoned land for retail, it is unlikely that Great Falls can develop successful "destination retail" which would draw shoppers from other areas. It is also uncertain that the community should, given current traffic problems and ingress/egress routes. The smaller population here will not support a large and diverse retail environment, instead requiring that retail additions be of a

nature to be commercially viable. There are other physical constraints, such as the lack of county sewer and water service in the village that limits the number of restaurants and certain other businesses.

Notwithstanding, GFCA feels that a plan that laid out a vision for better retail serving residents could be done in conjunction with the County. It might involve designating Great Falls as a “Special Planning District” conferring certain town planning and control authority even though Great Falls is unincorporated.

Building an interconnected pedestrian trail system will increase walkability.

GFCA’s “Direct How We Connect” survey in 2014 found support for pedestrian trails by 70% of respondents. This current survey shows similar strong support. In response to the question of how much a priority it should be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and county & state officials on a various transportation and trails issues over the next five years (Q26), 70% indicated that it should be a high to medium priority (41% high/29% medium). However, the trail system is not considered as urgent as reducing cut-through traffic. As new residents with children move into the community, there is more interest in pedestrian trails than 20+ years ago. Interest has also increased in connection with the current Covid-19 pandemic as residents realize the importance of being able to safely walk to local parks.

Over the past five years, GFCA and Great Falls Trailblazers have made good progress on trail development. Past community efforts were evaluated and what was learned led to a new strategy incorporated into new GFCA’s Trail Design and Construction Guidelines. Priorities of trail segments were set and GFCA’s Trails team has been working with the County on expanding the trail system. Recent successes include the opening of the Georgetown Pike Trail from Seneca to Utterback Store Road, and the County’s decision to complete a feasibility study of a trail connecting Utterback Store Road to the Village.

Due to funding restraints and the long lead times of government construction projects (which most of our trails must be so constructed as they will be built in VDOT road right-of-way), GFCA’s efforts are pursued over a multiple-year timeframe.

Strong support for a community center is unclear.

GFCA’s 2007 survey found that there was support for a community center in the village for recreation, children’s activities, civic organizations’ use, arts activities, and educational events. Again, in this survey, there is support for developing a community center, but it was fourth on a list of five long-range initiatives when both high and medium priorities are considered (Q18).

As a result of the prior survey and inability of the Park Authority to properly maintain the Grange and Old Schoolhouse, GFCA has been working with a coalition of civic organizations to take over management from the County. This effort, which could provide space for some types of community activities, has reached a critical phase where a foundation has been formed and a contractual relationship with the county proposed that would allow the foundation to take over management to revitalize the Grange. Even with new management of these historic buildings, they are not likely to provide space for a full-range of community activities.

An overall vision is needed to guide the community going forward.

Question 19 asked the importance of Great Falls having a long-range plan or defined vision for improving the community. The long range plan would be in addition to the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan. This was rated “very important” by 63% of respondents and “somewhat import” by another 29%.

Three years ago, LRP evaluated the benefit of developing a plan that would work to build a consensus within the community on key attributes of Great Falls that GFCA would work toward. The key areas identified were zoning and architectural control, retail development, preserving the local environment, controlling traffic, and maintaining the quality of our schools. The benefits of such a plan could be pivotal to the community if the process built (1) a consensus around these issues (2) an agreement with the County to support the key conclusions of the plan, and (3) the designation of Great Falls as a special planning district. If a plan could accomplish these things, it would reduce exposure that comes from being a relatively small community in a large county that applies the same rules everywhere, and it would give Great Falls residents a larger voice on local issues. Professional, experienced help would be critical. Community focus groups would have to be run over many months to surface issues, find potential solutions or answers, and develop a consensus. Such an effort would require a fair amount of time on the part of the key GFCA leadership; it was estimated that it might be done for \$100,000. An experienced firm was identified and work began.

Great Falls is not receiving its fair share of tax revenue in the form of infrastructure improvements and services.

Question 23 asked the extent to which survey respondents agreed or did not agree with the ideas that “local tax revenue is not coming back to the community via infrastructure improvements and services” and “Great Falls is not receiving its fair share of tax revenue”; 61% agreed, with 34% expressing strong agreement.

While Great Falls represents 1.7% of county population and an even greater percentage of county property tax revenue, this community receives improvement project spending at a rate of far less than 1%.

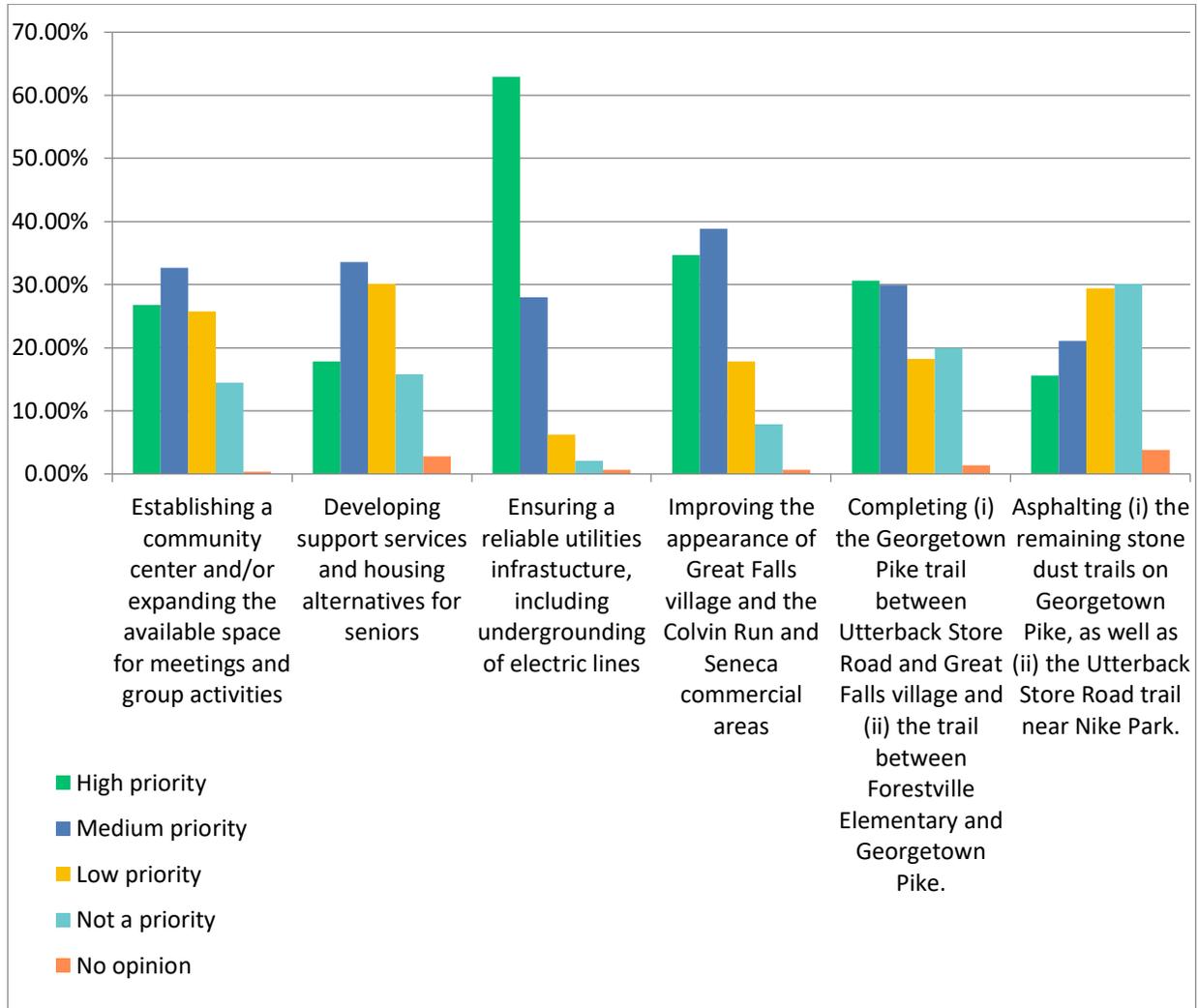
Great Falls is not receiving a fair allocation, and the county is underinvesting in Great Falls. In addition, spending on the right projects (traffic, retail, etc.) could increase the county’s tax base. This could and should be an important part of GFCA’s rationale each time funding for high-priority initiatives is requested.

One Fairfax⁵ and its implications are not fully understood .

While no questions were asked in the survey about One Fairfax or how it may impact school boundaries and other aspects in Fairfax County, there were several mentions in comments submitted by residents about redistricting and about One Fairfax. Due to the level of community concern, GFCA established the Special Committee on Schools (SCS). As SCS was not tasked with studying the broader impact of One Fairfax (of which redistricting is one issue), GFCA will

⁵ One Fairfax is a joint social and racial equity policy of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and School Board. It commits the county and schools to intentionally consider equity when making policies or delivering programs and services.

monitor this initiative; the GFCFA board met in Great Falls with the county official overseeing One Fairfax in January 2020.



Q18: Over the next five years how much of a priority should it be for GFCFA to work with residents, businesses, and state & county officials on the following long range issues?

Conclusion

Based on community feedback from the survey, LRP will be working to (i) develop a go-forward initiative to strengthen electrical reliability in Great Falls, (ii) coordinate with the Transportation Committee on reducing cut-through traffic, (iii) continue with the current Trails initiative, (iv) monitor One Fairfax, its objectives, motives, and possible implications for Great Falls beyond school boundaries, and (v) review the feasibility of a community-wide effort to develop a long-range plan, or vision.

Appendix E – Transportation (TRN)

Introduction

The survey provides a basis to form a preliminary view of the sentiments of the respondents regarding the broad category of transportation including traffic management, road construction, safety and historic preservation.

Key Findings — Hot-Button Issues/Concerns & Interests

Cut-through traffic continues to increase.

In response to how much a priority it should be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and county & state officials on a various transportation and trails issues over the next five years (Q26), almost 73% of respondents consider reducing cut-through traffic to be a high priority and another 21% regard it is a medium priority. Few Great Falls residents feel that they benefit from the Silver Line while almost all experience congestion that results from drivers who use Georgetown Pike to avoid paying ever-increasing fees on the Dulles Toll Road. When asked the extent to which respondents supports various measures that might limit cut-through traffic on Georgetown Pike and Seneca, Utterback Store, Springvale and Walker roads, over 57% strongly support, and additional 25% support, eliminating or reducing tolls on the Dulles Toll Road between Route 7 and I-495. The idea is to decrease commuting time on Route 7 in order to make it a more attractive route for drivers who travel between Reston/Loudoun and I-495/Maryland (Q28).

Safety on local roads is a concern.

Slightly over 64% of respondents consider traffic calming⁶ a high priority and 23% thought it a medium priority (Q26). Most respondents who commented on the issue recommended improving enforcement on Georgetown Pike and other major roads in Great Falls versus implementation of measures such as traffic circles or alternate surfaces. One-lane bridges still have support from a majority of the community although many are concerned that they do not discourage cut-through traffic. Implementing turn restrictions has been requested but may not be possible even under new state law as most through roads in Great Falls are part of the state's highway system.

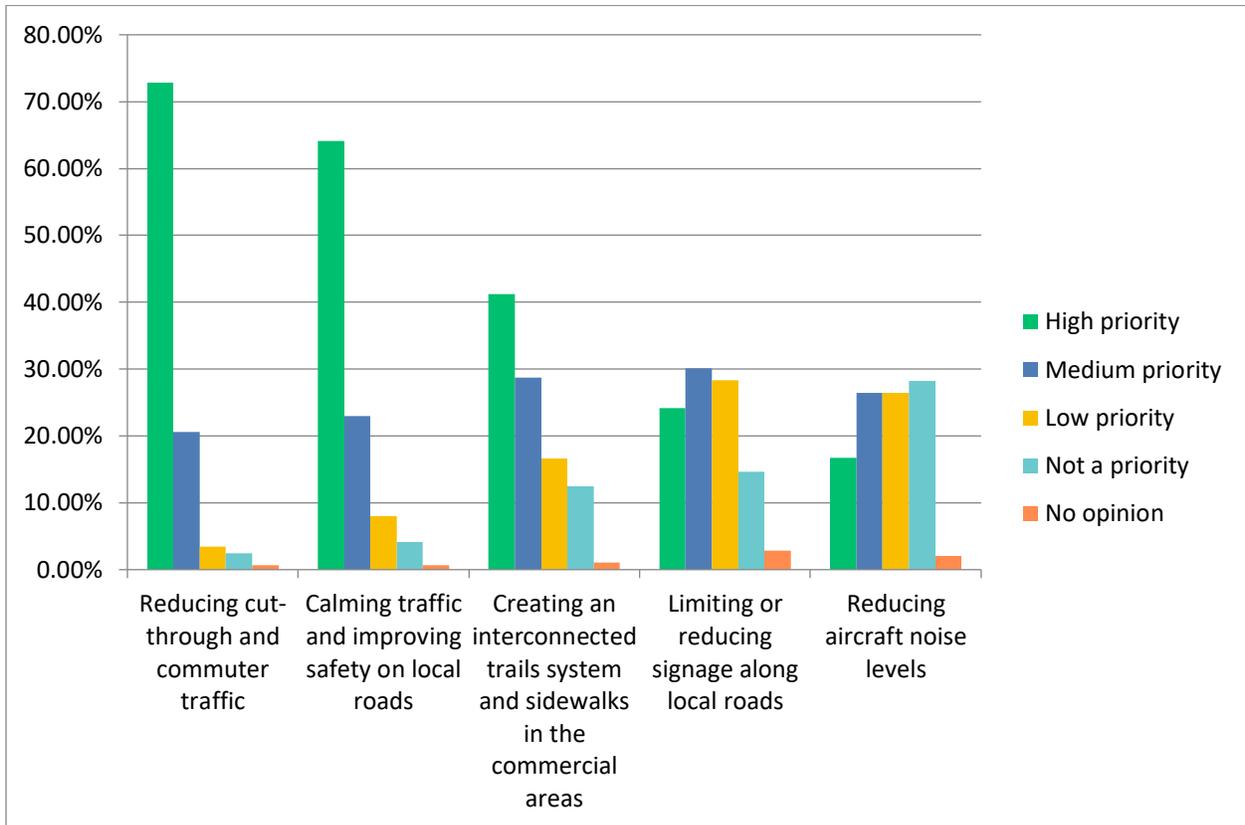
Congestion on Georgetown Pike, Virginia's First Historic and Scenic Byway, limits mobility.

Multiple respondents noted that Georgetown Pike is nearly impossible to access at times of the day because of the volume of cut-through traffic from Loudoun/Reston utilizing Georgetown Pike. However, respondents are strongly opposed to widening Georgetown Pike and some recommend protections be adopted for other roads in Great Falls, including Leigh Mill and Beach Mill Roads. Furthermore, multiple respondents expressed frustration about Georgetown Pike congestion between Spring Hill Road and I-495 and their interest in improvements at the I-495/Georgetown Pike intersection as part of the HOT lane expansion.

⁶ Traffic calming entails using a full range of physical methods to slow cars as they move through commercial and residential neighborhoods in order to improve safety and make the roads more compatible to pedestrians and cyclists.

Interconnected trails are needed to link people and places in our community.

Over 69% of respondents consider trails a high to medium priority – 41% high/29% medium (Q26). Most residents specifically request trails along Georgetown Pike and Walker Road, although some indicated that a trail system is not useful unless it includes all major roads in Great Falls. TRN will continue to work with the Long Range Planning, the committee leading this initiative, to secure additional funding. Unfortunately, given that funds are limited and many communities are completing, it is likely that a fully functional trail system will take many years.



Q26: Over the next five years how much of a priority should it be for GFCA to work with residents, businesses, and state & county officials on the following transportation and trails issues?

Conclusion

Cut-through traffic, specifically traffic from outside of Great Falls that creates gridlock on Georgetown Pike and other local roads, is impacting the quality of life in Great Falls. Police enforcement of speed limits and illegal passing need to be improved. However, GFCA must work with the Virginia and Fairfax County Departments of Transportation and local government to identify and implement other measures to encourage outside traffic to go around, not through, Great Falls. Such measures might include improved public transportation between Loudoun and Tysons on Route 7 as well as “out of the box” ideas to provide adequate public transport for the Maryland workforce to jobs in Tysons/Reston/Dulles, and residents living in Virginia to Maryland and D.C.

Appendix F – Special Committee on Schools (SCS)

Introduction

The topic of schools and school attendance boundaries was not officially part of this survey. The survey was designed and finalized before school boundaries started to be discussed as an issue for the Great Falls community. This issue gained more interest in the second half of 2019.

Community concern on this issue was evident at the June 19th GFCAs town hall with retiring Dranesville school board member, Jane Strauss. More than 325 residents filled the Forestville cafeteria to learn about whether school boundary changes are coming and impacting Great Falls. It was one of the largest public town hall meetings ever held in Great Falls.

As a result of concern expressed at that townhall and research on the issue, GFCAs organized the Special Committee on Schools in August 2019 to (i) ensure that Great Falls' interests are addressed by County institutions and elected officials, (ii) monitor County plans and policies, including boundary changes, (iii) inform the community of potential changes, and (iv) involve residents. This is the first time GFCAs has formed a schools committee. Over the last six months the committee has established itself as a strong voice with County officials, reports regularly to the community, and has met on several occasions with the new Dranesville school board representative, Elaine Tholen.

A GFCAs-sponsored debate with six school board candidates was held in September. The debate was attended by over 300 residents and offered further evidence of the wide concern and interest in the community on education issues.

Key Finding — Hot-Button Issues/Concerns & Interests

The Great Falls community at large is very concerned about schools and school boundaries as they relate to the quality of education and property values.

While no questions in the survey directly addressed the topic of school boundaries, residents used the comments sections to register their views on this topic. The following specific comments were made:

- The sense of community is fostered when Great Falls students go to the same schools and major boundary changes would undo decades of GFCAs' community-building
- Boundary concerns are already adversely impacting property values
- Great Falls should consider limited scope incorporation
- GFCAs should communicate schools issues more frequently
- Retain the current Langley pyramid
- One Fairfax seems to be driving elected officials' interest in school boundary changes
- Stop the school board from rezoning our students
- Building new schools is not necessary — instead use the bond referendum to renovate existing schools
- GFCAs should oppose changing boundary process in [the] School Board's Policy 8130

Conclusion

The Special Committee on Schools believes that the comments noted above and recent public meetings validate the need for the committee to continue operating under its approved GFCAs charter for the foreseeable future.