

General Residential Development Survey

Summary of Findings

Overview of Survey Participants

- 202 people participated in the survey
- Genders were fairly evenly split
- Age groups of respondents roughly mirror the age group distribution of adult residents of Harvard, although weighted more heavily toward those over 60.
- Both long-time and more recent residents represented – 43% over 20 years, 16% 11-20 years, 14% 6-10 years, and 18% 1-5 years.

Their Perceptions of Harvard

What They Like About Harvard

The overwhelming responses for what people like best about living in Harvard fall into the categories of the rural character of Harvard. Attributes like quiet, peaceful, rural, historic, with a small-town atmosphere. They cited the natural beauty, the farms and rural landscapes exemplified by open space, conservation areas, and the pond. The safe, secure, and private nature of the community was also a frequent choice. Both the Library and Schools were high selections that residents felt strongly about.

What They Dislike About Harvard

Top tier:

- High Taxes (59%)
- Requires car to go anywhere / no transportation options (50%)
- Lack of diversity (41%)
- Poor wireless connection (41%)
- Lack of housing options (36%)
- Few pedestrian connections / poor walkability (32%)

Also note: 14% say “Town interest in growth and development”, and 6% don’t like “Changing demographics”, but offset by 24% “anti-growth attitudes”.

Standing alone as the most disliked thing about Harvard was “high taxes” (59%), but the only detail regarding this was the taxes seniors pay without getting an equivalency in return. Other disliked characteristics receiving the most responses included social characteristics like lack of diversity, anti-growth attitudes, unfriendly and cliquish, and isolated. Also things like poor wireless connection, lack of housing options, few pedestrian connections, noise from Devens and elsewhere, and the fact that a car was required for trips to anywhere. Other lesser responses included lack of services, town government including their interest in growth, traffic, and changing demographics.

Their Thoughts on Future Housing Development in Harvard

When asked general, non-specific questions about the importance of diversifying our housing stock, you get a moderate level of support...

Importance of Housing Variety

Respondents were asked how important it is for Harvard to offer a variety of housing options for people with different lifestyles and different phases of life...60% said “very important” or “important”. 23% said “not important at all” or “not important”.

Recall that “lack of diversity” was the second highest characteristic that residents responded on the question asking what they disliked about living in Harvard. Those answering this question who chose “Very Important” numbered 67 or 34.4% and Important was 49 or 25.1%. Of the 195 responses to this question, 116 or 59.5% felt it was of some importance. Specific answers within the survey that expounded on this suggested offering more rental housing, offering options for singles and single parents, and many responses related to a variety of housing types that suggested different household types.

Importance of Housing Price Options

Respondents were asked how important it is for Harvard to offer a variety of housing options for people with different lifestyles and different phases of life...57% said “very important” or “important”. 23% said “not important at all” or “not important”.

In a similar question, respondents were asked how important is it that Harvard offer a variety of housing options for people with different incomes. Those answering this question who chose “Very Important” numbered 68 or 34.5% and Important was 44 or 22.3%. Of the 197 responses to this question, 116 or 56.8% felt it was of some importance. While this question purposefully did not phrase the question with the term “affordable housing” included, it does suggest that providing more affordable options is valued by respondents.

...but when you get down to specifics, people show a high level of support for specific housing options...

How Desirable or Undesirable Are Various Types of Housing That Harvard Could Pursue? (8 Housing Types Listed)

- **1st Tier:** Active senior housing comes out the clear winner here. It not only received the highest ranking for “highly desirable” and for “highly desirable” and “desirable” combined, it received the lowest ratings for “highly undesirable” and for “undesirable”...very little polarity here.

83% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable

4% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable” (lowest undesirability rating)

13% “no opinion”

- 2nd Tier: Workforce housing (housing for people with moderate incomes, such as teachers, firefighters, and public employees) and “Seniors w/ Special Needs (aka assisted living?)” were respondents’ second choices.

Workforce housing:

68% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
14% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
18% “no opinion”

Seniors w/ Special Needs

65% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
8% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable” (2nd lowest undesirable rating)
26% “no opinion”

- 3rd Tier: A mix...

People Seeking Affordable Housing:

54% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
23% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
23% “no opinion”

1st Time Homebuyers:

53% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
13% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
35% “no opinion”

People w/ Physical Disabilities:

54% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
6% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
39% “no opinion”

The two housing types that were rated the lowest on the desirability scale (housing for people in recovery and housing for people with emotional or mental disabilities) were also rated the first and third most undesirable. Perhaps not coincidentally, these two housing types got the highest scores for “no opinion”, reflecting, possibly, that there is not so much an aggressive dislike here than a sense of lack of need. (???)

Housing for People in Recovery:

26% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
31% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
43% “no opinion”

Housing for People with Emotional or Mental Disabilities:

33% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
19% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
48% “no opinion”

How Desirable or Undesirable Are Various Types of Units (Structures) That Harvard Could Pursue? (13 Housing Types Listed)

- Accessory Apartments comes out the clear winner here. It not only received the highest ratings for “highly desirable” and for “highly desirable” and “desirable” combined, it received the lowest ratings for “highly undesirable” and for “undesirable”. Very little polarity in evidence here.

70% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
 10% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
 21% “no opinion”

Three housing types that are organized in groups came in next in popularity. They are as follows:

- Cottages in Rural Clusters
 61% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
 20% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
 19% “no opinion”
- Cottages Near an Existing Village Center
 59% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
 20% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
 21% “no opinion”
- New Small Village Center Housing – Mixed Use Development with Housing
 57% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
 32% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
 12% “no opinion”
- Single Family Homes on Smaller Lots was ranked a close 5th in this group of the most desired unit types.
 56% rated “highly desirable” or “desirable”
 32% rated “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”
 21% “no opinion”

The three types of structures that were rated the lowest on the desirability scale are: 3-4 Family homes (22% “highly desirable” or “desirable”), Low-rise Garden Apartments (30% “highly desirable” or “desirable”), and Condominiums (33% “highly desirable” or “desirable”).

Interestingly, the structure that ranked 10th out of the 13 options (and was rated only a bit more desirable as that bottom grouping described above) was More Large Homes on Large Lots. Only 38% of respondents rated this choice as “highly desirable” or “desirable”, and 42% rated it as “highly undesirable” or “undesirable”. (High polarity.)

Respondents rated Conversions of Large Homes into Multiple Units in the middle of the pack in answering this question. (43% “highly desirable” or “desirable”). This is a bit surprising, as conversions rank high in a question on this survey about senior housing and ranked high on the Senior Survey as well.

If an Existing Harvard Farm were to be Sold, What Would You Like to See Happen on the Site? 198 respondents / 391 responses...respondents could select as many as apply

The responses here were a bit surprising. What was not a surprise was that the choice selected by the highest number of respondents was to keep farms as farms. *(64% of respondents selected this option).*

What perhaps is surprising is that the next two most popular options were for different and arguably, more inclusive housing types: open space residential cluster development (53% of respondents) and senior housing at low density (39% of respondents).

Here's what respondents didn't want...more large homes on large lots (13% of respondents) or conventional subdivisions (8% of respondents)

Other Types of Housing Harvard Should Consider

There is a contingent that prefers Harvard do nothing (13) for reasons including: adapt what we have and don't expand, don't subsidize low-income people, we have too many old people, limit our tax exposure by not increasing student and senior demographics. Write-ins for other types of housing included: co-housing, rental units, affordable housing, assisted living options, and a CCRC.

Development patterns mentioned included small clustered affordable housing dispersed throughout town and construction of small second houses on lots of 1.5+ acres for immediate family-only residence.

Policy recommendations covered encouraging growth that maximizes tax income, no more McMansions, propose one senior housing project for Harvard seniors and see if it passes (pilot project model), and aim affordable housing towards increasing home ownership for all income levels.

Style, Design and Size are categories of write-in comments. The majority desired modest (1800 sq. ft.) to tiny homes where seniors could move to from larger homes. Building on that the tiny homes could be in clusters, around a barn serving as a community space, and they should be green construction. Another mentioned cul-de-sac type neighborhood. Most stated that the New England style of houses, for example house-el-barn, should be maintained.

Location was split among survey participants between building multi-family and affordable in commercial areas and building senior housing and affordable housing close to town for a more vibrant town center.

Features That Should be Considered

Types of housing features most frequently identified by respondents as highly desirable include:

- Significant open space (90),
- High architectural design standards (79),
- Screening and buffering (64), and
- High-quality landscaping (57).

The features deemed most highly undesirable included private streets and shared driveways (96) and recreation facilities (87).

Siting Preferences

The unit siting preferences most frequently identified by respondents as highly desirable include clustered open space subdivisions (45) and small village-like clustered developments (43). Combining highly desirable and desirable categories provided the same profile with 115 and 118 responses combined respectively. The siting deemed most highly undesirable included large lot conventional subdivisions (64) and clustered conventional subdivisions (50), clearly rejecting the conventional model of development.

Where in Harvard Should New Housing Be Developed?

The most frequent response as to where new housing should be located in Harvard was to allow some apartments and townhouses in the Ayer Road Commercial District (114 responses). The second most frequent was to allow a few subdivisions but small and with plenty of open space (99). The remaining response categories were each smaller by at least 10 responses each. There were a few interesting singular responses of note including that type is more important than location, being thoughtful and sustainable, higher environmental standards, creating a livelier town center, and emphasizing that senior housing is indeed needed.

Their Thoughts on Senior Housing in Harvard

What senior housing types best fit the community?

189 respondents / 719 responses...respondents could select as many as apply)

The answers here can be ranked into three tiers:

- First tier: two-thirds (65%) of respondents selected “Smaller homes or cottages in clusters of 15 or less”
- Second tier: Four (4) types were selected by about half of respondents:
 - Repurposed / converted residences in village center (48%)
 - Repurposed / converted residences anywhere (47%)
 - Accessory apts. on existing residential lots (47%)
 - Independent living apts. in commercial or multi-family district (47%)
- Even the third tier drew votes from about one-third of respondents:
 - Assisted living development in commercial or new multi-family district (35%)
 - CCRC in commercial or new multi-family district (30%)
 - Senior apartments above storefronts or in mixed-use development in commercial district (30%)

These answers reflect a pattern that we have seen before... a preference for independent living-style housing...a preference for clustering houses, but not in large groupings...and a strong interest in adapting existing structures to new uses.

Note that while the question did not offer respondents the choice of “Harvard shouldn’t pursue senior housing”, anyone who was opposed to senior housing could have opted out and just not

answered the question. The vast majority didn't opt out, however. 94% of those who took the survey answered this question and answered it enthusiastically...people found, on average, 3 or 4 of the nine options offered to be housing types that would fit our community.

If You Had to Pick the Top Three Senior Housing Options from the Previous Question for Harvard to Focus On, What Would They Be? (Q 11)

Respondents answers here were absolutely consistent with their answers to the previous question. The top three types of housing identified were:

- 1st PLACE: small homes or cottages in clusters of 15 or less
- 2nd PLACE: repurposed or converted existing residences
- TIED FOR 3rd PLACE: independent living apartments in a commercial or new multifamily district
- TIED FOR 3RD PLACE: accessory apartments on existing lots

When analyzed, there is a desire among participants to keep Harvard rural. The clusters should be in a "rural setting," conversions keep Harvard looking as it does, and accessory apartments are simply add-ons to an existing residential lot. With these there is little risk of changing the "face" or "character" of Harvard with multi-story, large buildings that look out of place, which are some of the concerns expressed.

How Do They Think Harvard Should Balance the Need for Senior Housing with the Desire to Preserve the Town's Rural Character?

The answers here do not differ significantly from those we saw in the results to the Senior Survey.

Like the senior respondents, a small percentage (9%) suggest we should not or cannot achieve such a balance, and therefore should do nothing. *"No senior housing." "It just shouldn't happen, and it doesn't make sense."* And, like those who responded to the Senior Survey, an equally small group (10%) think the scales have been weighed against seniors in Harvard for long enough. They see no need to balance (because there's so much non-senior housing and open space) or they aren't interested in balancing. They just want to see senior housing.

Most respondents (75%), however, think that achieving a balance is important and doable. Like the responses we saw in the Senior Survey, the strong message here is that they see and value ways to add senior housing in a way that preserves...and even enhances, the town's rural character.

Just how to achieve this balance? In summary, the answer here is...by defining, in a broad way, what senior housing would look like. This doesn't mean building design alone. It also means maintaining open space, requiring setbacks, limiting the number of buildings, and limiting where it can be located

The numbers:

- 61% believe the answer lies in some combination of where we put senior housing, what type we allow, and how many buildings we allow.
- 39% believe the answer lies in specifying what the senior housing can look like (building design + setback requirements + open space preservation), along with where, what type, and how many buildings we allow.

In the Respondents' Own Words...

I think that the design of the housing is key, and it can be designed to enhance the Town's character...It does not matter where it is located if it is designed well.

"Avoid big apartment complexes. Scatter this housing all over. Do not create "senior ghettos."

I suspect a lot of these concerns can be answered with design...If buildings are designed to look like they fit into a traditional New England village, I suspect that will solve a lot of problems.

Thoughtful limited developments near the town center and on Ayer Road would be acceptable if done tastefully.

I do not think large multi-family development projects should be put in...they would take away from the charm of the town.

Achieve balance by location, size (no large developments), and strict design requirements.

Seniors do not want housing in areas where a car is necessary for every need...architecturally well-designed cluster housing with open spaces where seniors can walk to all the amenities of the town center...including Hildreth, Fivesparks, and the library.

Building Residential Bylaws

How to Address Affordable Housing in Harvard

Building on the previous question, the following question asked respondents to identify the best strategy to address the issue of affordable housing in Harvard. With the understanding that at an affordable housing percentage of 5.8% in 2020, (short of the 10% Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) minimum requirement for immunity from forced MGL 40B projects) the clear preference from respondents was the option, "Proactively passes an inclusionary housing bylaw which reduces the likelihood of unfriendly 40B projects." Which was the top choice at 31.9% followed by "Takes an aggressive approach and goes all out to try to provide a variety of affordable housing products." (19.8%) and "Uses a market-based approach and zones land for multi-family where townspeople think they should be located. (16.5%). Thus, 68.2% of respondents feel that measures should be taken to address affordable housing proactively.

What Else Should We Consider When Drafting Bylaws Intended to Meet the Residential Needs of Harvard? (Q17)

46 substantive responses

No single message predominated here, but about 80% of the responses fell into six categories.

1. Address Taxes
2. Address Diversity / Mix / Affordability
3. Keep /Make Harvard More Walkable and Bicycle-Friendly
4. Act Now
5. Housing Bylaw Specifics
6. Do Nothing

The two categories most useful to the Planning Board currently are #4 and #5. Below are highlights of those comments.

- *Incremental Approach: An incremental approach to change should be utilized. Making broad changes to current zoning may not yield the intended outcomes.*
- *Don't Overregulate: Provide a path to approval rather than roadblocks or impossible standards; Make sure that the bylaws allow for economically viable projects or the Town will not make progress on this; Do not dictate everything in the bylaw...encourage a collaborative process between the Town and a developer.*
- *Design: A Special Permit from the Planning Board with required Design Review would be a spectacular mechanism to moderate development to fit the landscape without applying a blanket statement.*
- *Timing: The need is urgent, given any development will take 3-5 years to develop*
- *Act Now: The important thing is to take some action...Harvard moves at a glacial pace. Don't complicate the process. Limit choices. You cannot please everyone all the time.*
- *Act Now: These are serious needs that have been ignored for too long. I hope the public will support the Planning Board initiatives to serve the needs of the community rather than insist on maintaining a freeze frame of what an individual perceives as Harvard at the present time.*
- *Act Now: The time for action is now. The tax rate [and] home values are rising...and pricing out "average" folks.*

Thoughts Moving Forward

Preliminary Conclusions

Those respondents who supported taking action emphasized the slow pace the Town takes in addressing needs like senior housing and the risks if we do not act. They also noted with some merit that taking even some form of action was not necessarily negative since the Board can learn from implementation. On the other hand, the Board should proceed with sufficient caution to maximize success at Town Meeting.

Clearly siting and design were key concerns and important criteria that the Board can gain support by adhering to. The Town currently has a set of design guidelines for the Commercial (C) district and while guidelines are typically not enforceable, a combination of guidelines and requirements for design related to certain residential development types could be a solution. This is also something that open space and landscaping regulations can address.

For single-family and other non-apartment or townhouse type developments, there was an overwhelming interest and support for small residential clusters--either close to town center and also in small clustered developments mimicking a small village. There are a number of models and examples for this throughout New England that can be reviewed and visited for ideas.

There was also support for accessory apartments and modest support for infill and conversion projects, although for the latter, much additional thought must be given to how such projects will fit in with their surroundings and not detract from proximal character.

The Ayer Road commercial district seemed appropriate to some for larger scale or mixed-use projects that include a residential component. There was also some support for allowing senior housing in a multifamily zoning district should one be created in Harvard.

There was strong support to provide housing for other demographic cohorts that does not presently exist in Harvard. There was also support for “diversity” and affordable housing in Harvard. While beyond the present scope of this project, it does suggest that Harvard, in seeking to become more proactive related to the affordable housing question, could consider an inclusionary housing bylaw that thoughtfully addresses this specific question. Regarding other housing market segments, the Town, and by extension through leadership from the Planning Board

Options

Based on the preliminary conclusions noted above, the pace of proceeding with bylaw amendments for senior housing specifically should address the most urgent and implementable needs first and follow with more ambitious amendments shortly thereafter, perhaps in several phases over 2-3 years. This is a change from the prior initiative of bundling all senior housing types in a large bylaw and expecting it all to garner initial support.

Combining simplicity and initial support, perhaps tweaking existing bylaws for accessory units to encourage more for a senior population, amending assisted living provisions to make this development more feasible, and adding and strengthening design criteria would be a good first step.

In order to serve as an overarching framework for all senior housing goals and objectives, a shell or guiding bylaw could be developed that will ultimately refer to all intended typologies but begin with a few low hanging fruit items as noted in the preceding paragraph.

Later phases can respond to the desire for small clustered village-like developments by adhering to the soon to be proposed Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw intended for a broader reach than just senior housing but could be an important part of the senior housing solution, particularly since some respondents noted that they did not want a “senior ghetto” and that seniors did not want to be segregated from a wider range of ages. The options could include

Multifamily development for seniors and other populations could be addressed by making changes to the ARV-SP allowing a broader mixing of residential and other uses or apartment projects that were more in line with New England architecture and urban design and less like typical garden apartments. Adding a mapped area to the existing multifamily residential district currently on the books could be an additional way to appropriately site such development.

Next, to facilitate infill and conversions, including for senior housing, in village center areas, the Town could, as the 2016 Master Plan calls for, develop a village center zoning bylaw that includes such provisions along with other criteria.

Finally, at some point, as recommended by a large percentage of respondents, Harvard can develop an inclusionary housing bylaw to address how affordable housing in town can be pursued according to local goals, and not be reactive to MGL 40B.