

# Town of Harvard Planning Board

## **2020 General Residential Survey Results**

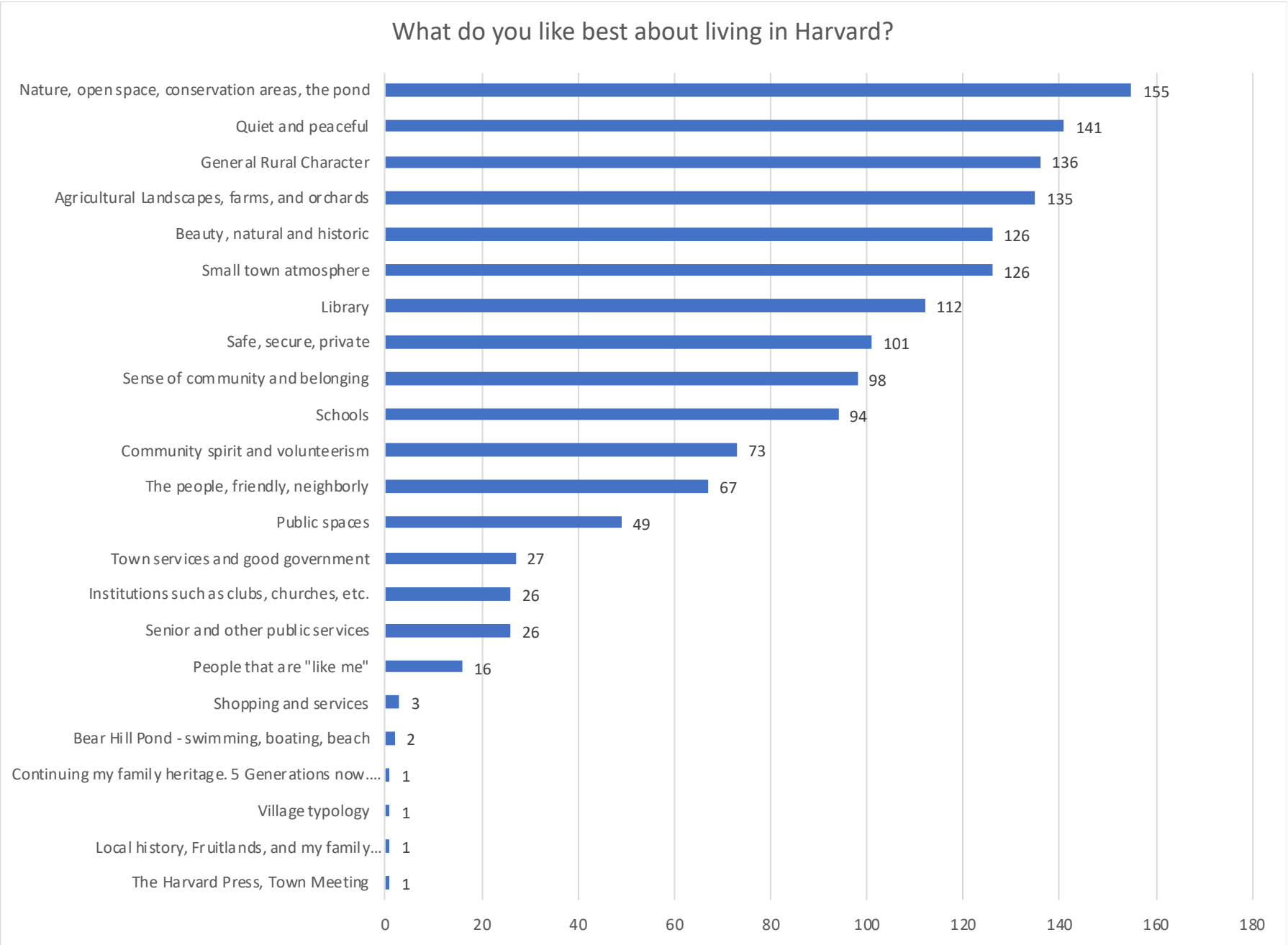
### **January 2021**



# Basic General Residential Survey Facts

- Survey instrument developed by Planning Board Working Group and Staff and Evaluated by Board and COA Reps
- Survey open roughly in December.
- Total of 202 Responses
- Gender responses 54% female with 9% choosing not to say.
- Nearly 50% of respondents over age 60 with nearly 36% between 40 and 60, nearly 10% between 31 and 40 and 5% under 20.
- Respondents largely come from southeast Harvard, north Harvard, Harvard Center, and east Harvard.
- Nearly half of respondents have lived in town for over 20 years or their entire life with a fairly even distribution split between. 1-20 years, 6-10 years, and 1-5 years.

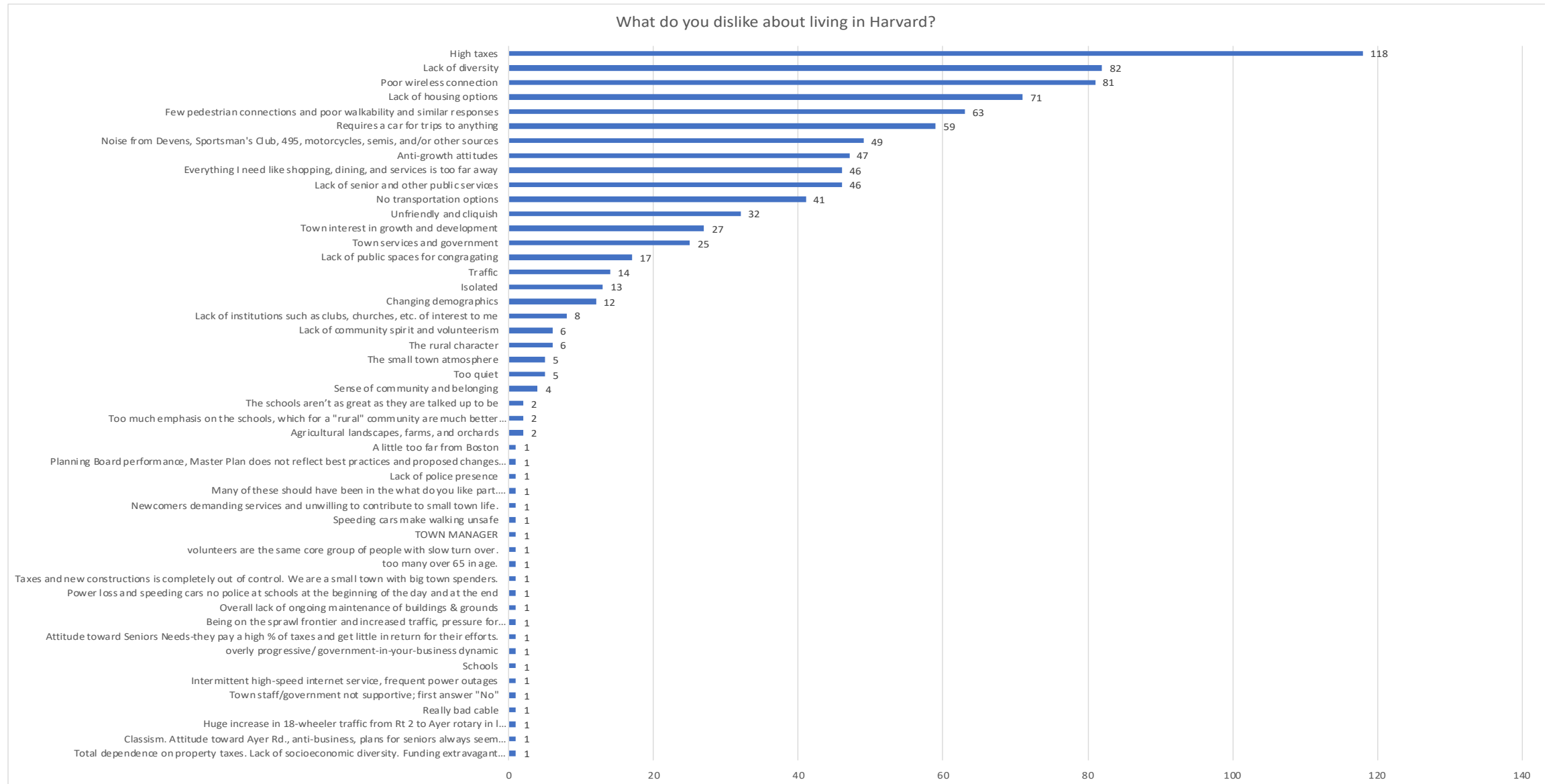
# Question 1



## Question 1 - Like Best

The overwhelming responses for what people like best about living in Harvard fall into the categories of the 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.

## Question 2

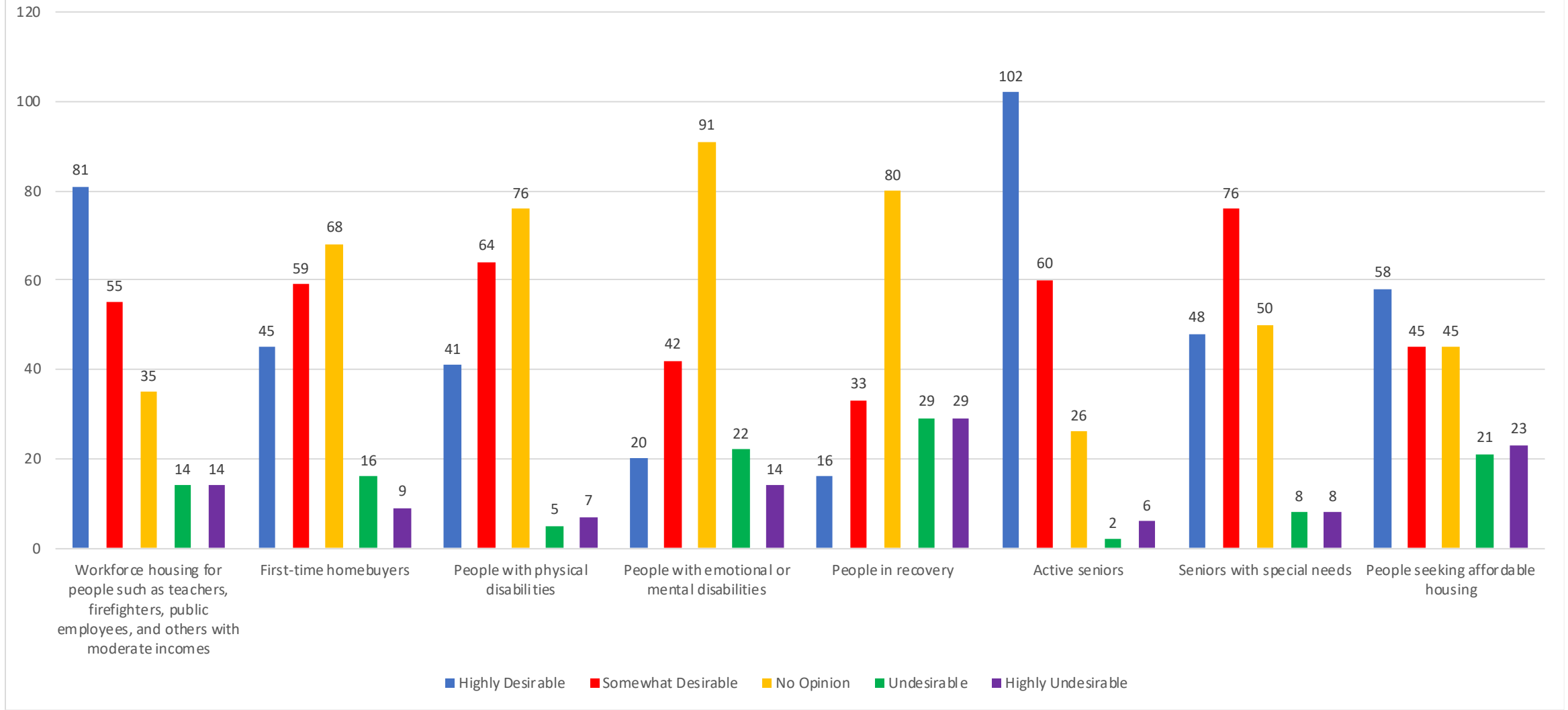


## Question 2 - Dislike

Standing alone as the most disliked thing about Harvard was “high taxes” 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.

# Question 3

The 2016 Harvard Master Plan has identified specific housing needs in Harvard such as senior housing and affordable housing. Please note what you think about a range of potential housing market needs that Harvard could pursue.

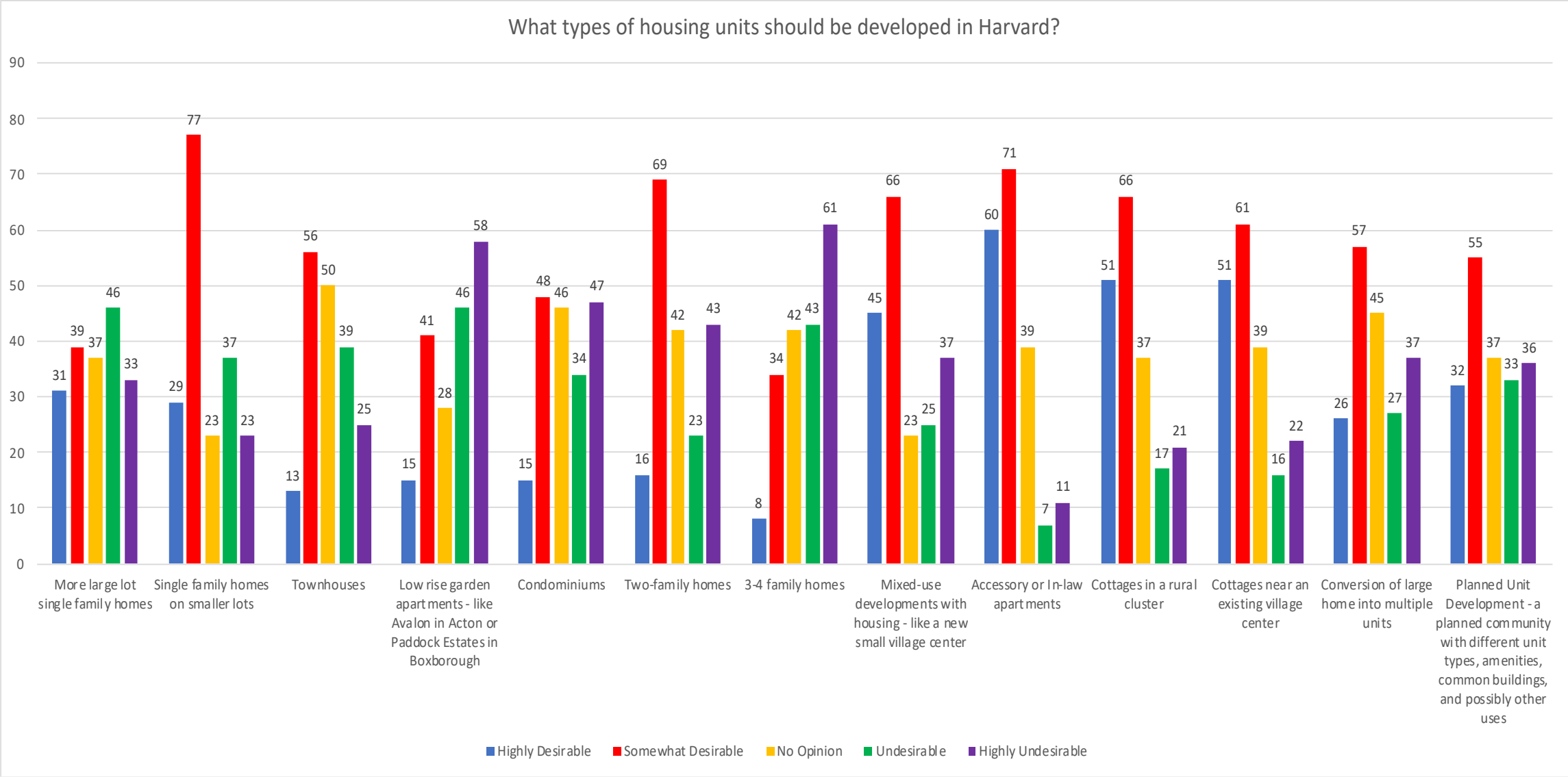


## Question 3 - Housing Market Needs

The most highly desirable housing types identified as needs included housing for active seniors (102), workforce housing (81), and affordable housing (58). Combining the desirable and highly desirable categories showed a similar pattern with active seniors, workforce housing seniors with special needs, and affordable housing receiving the top four responses. The most highly undesirable categories included people in recovery and affordable housing.



# Question 4



## Question 4 - Types of Units

Types of housing units most frequently identified by respondents as highly desirable include accessory apartments (60), cottages in a rural cluster or near an existing village center (both 51), and mixed-use developments in a village center (45). Combining highly desirable and desirable categories provided the same profile with single-family homes on smaller lots coming in 5<sup>th</sup> at 106 combined responses. The units deemed most highly undesirable included 3-4 family homes (61) and garden apartments (58).

## **Questions 5 & 15**

**Please describe any other type of housing that Harvard should consider if we did not capture it in the previous question.**

**AND**

**Are there any other types of housing options that we did not discuss in this survey that you think we should consider?**

Seven (7) Key Categories of Responses

1. No New Development or Similar Sentiments
2. Specific Housing Type
3. Specific Housing Pattern or Development
4. Policy Recommendations
5. Style, Design, Size
6. Location
7. Other Comments

## **Q's 5 and 15**

## **No New Development or Similar Responses**

Several respondents felt that we had enough (or too many) seniors and enough housing and should not build any more housing so that we would not add more seniors or school students.

Some felt that what has worked in the past should continue to work, keeping Harvard the same, not changing the rural character.

One respondent felt that lower priced existing homes should be eliminated and turned into conservation land.

Another felt that smaller homes and properties subsidized the larger homes and was not interested in that.

## **Specific Housing Type**

Co-housing was mentioned by four (4) respondents. Other suggested options included rental units(3 responses), low- or moderate-income units, assisted living, senior housing generally, in-law apartments, housing for singles or single parents, cottages, and a CCRC.

## **Specific Housing Pattern or Development**

Cluster development was mentioned twice as was small accessory homes on existing large lots.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Support for growth or greater density was expressed but qualified based on location, design, and fit. Growth was encouraged to increase tax receipts and expand housing market. Another respondent noted that the town does not need any more “McMansions” while another promoted the “pilot project concept”. One respondent suggested increasing home ownership opportunity rather than rentals and another a balanced approach to expanding the market over a period of years

## **Q's 5 and 15**

### **Style, Design, Size**

Comments included recommendations for modest sizes (1800 s.f. or less), single-level master suites, tiny houses for seniors (3), visual design fit for Harvard, tiny home cluster for artists, net zero energy, house-ell-barn design preserving NE feel, unique designs, green construction, more cul-de-sac developments, clustered village senior housing with a shared space, in-law apartments, and sidewalks nearby.

### **Location**

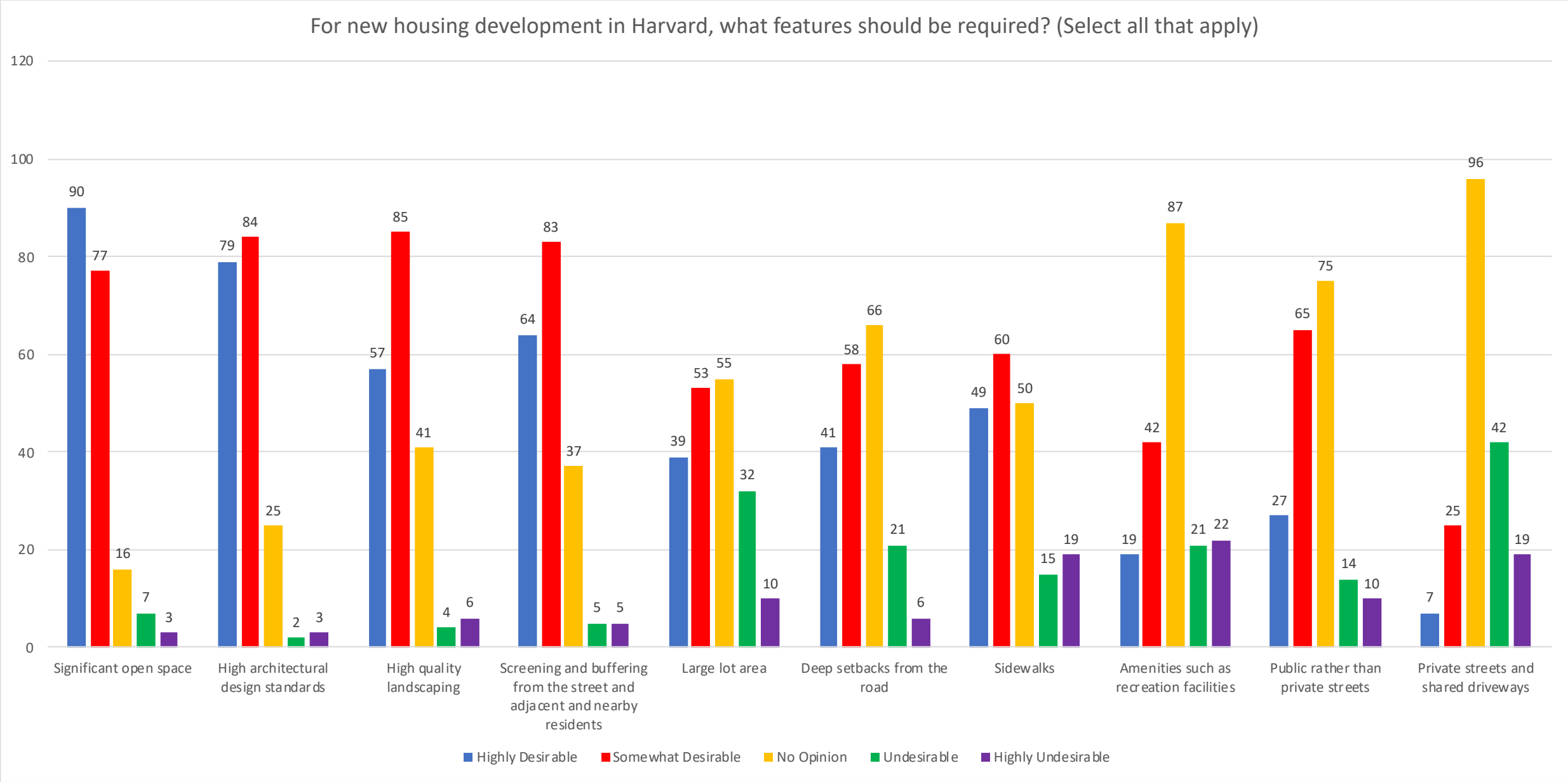
Ayer Rd. commercial corridor a frequent location suggested by respondents while close to the Center was another popular option with walkability and services mentioned as reasons. Another respondent suggested out at the edge of town or near a highway. Another suggested that affordable housing should not be clustered.

### **Other Comments**

Adding bike lanes and sidewalks were mentioned here.

# Question 6

For new housing development in Harvard, what features should be required? (Select all that apply)

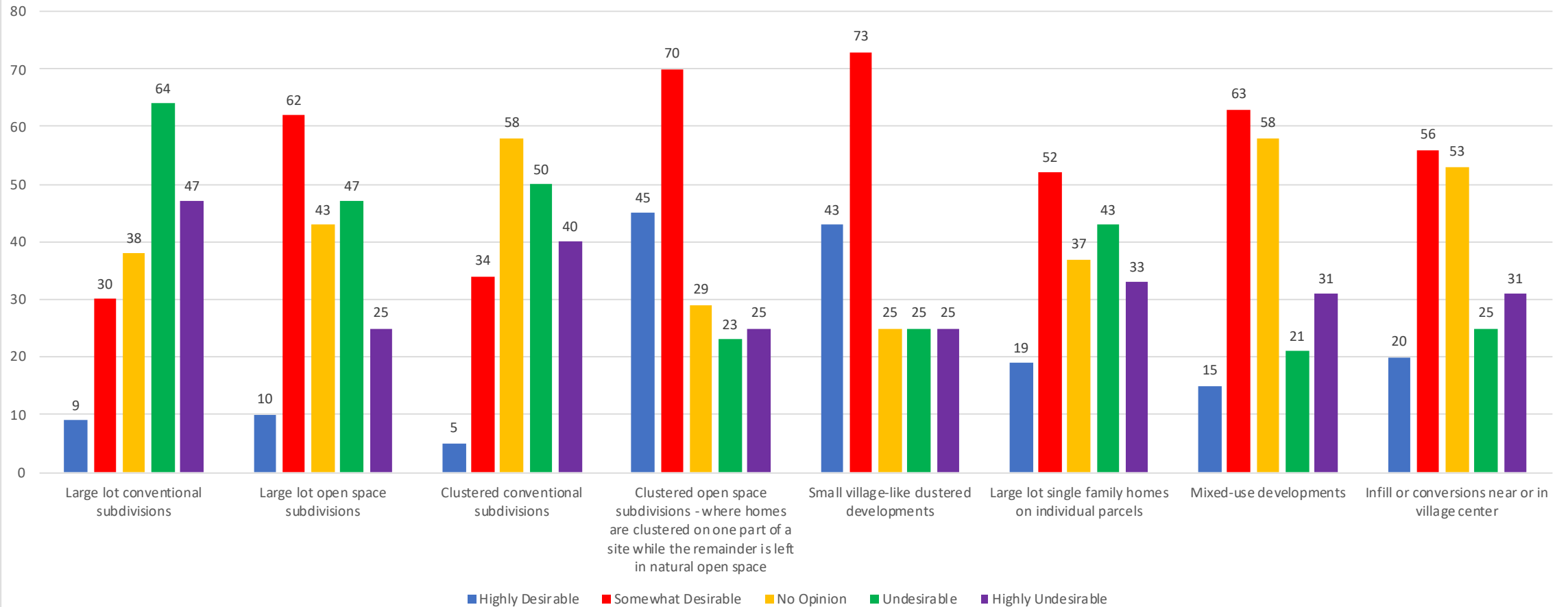


## Required Features

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).

## Question 7

For new housing development, please note your preference for siting of residential units.

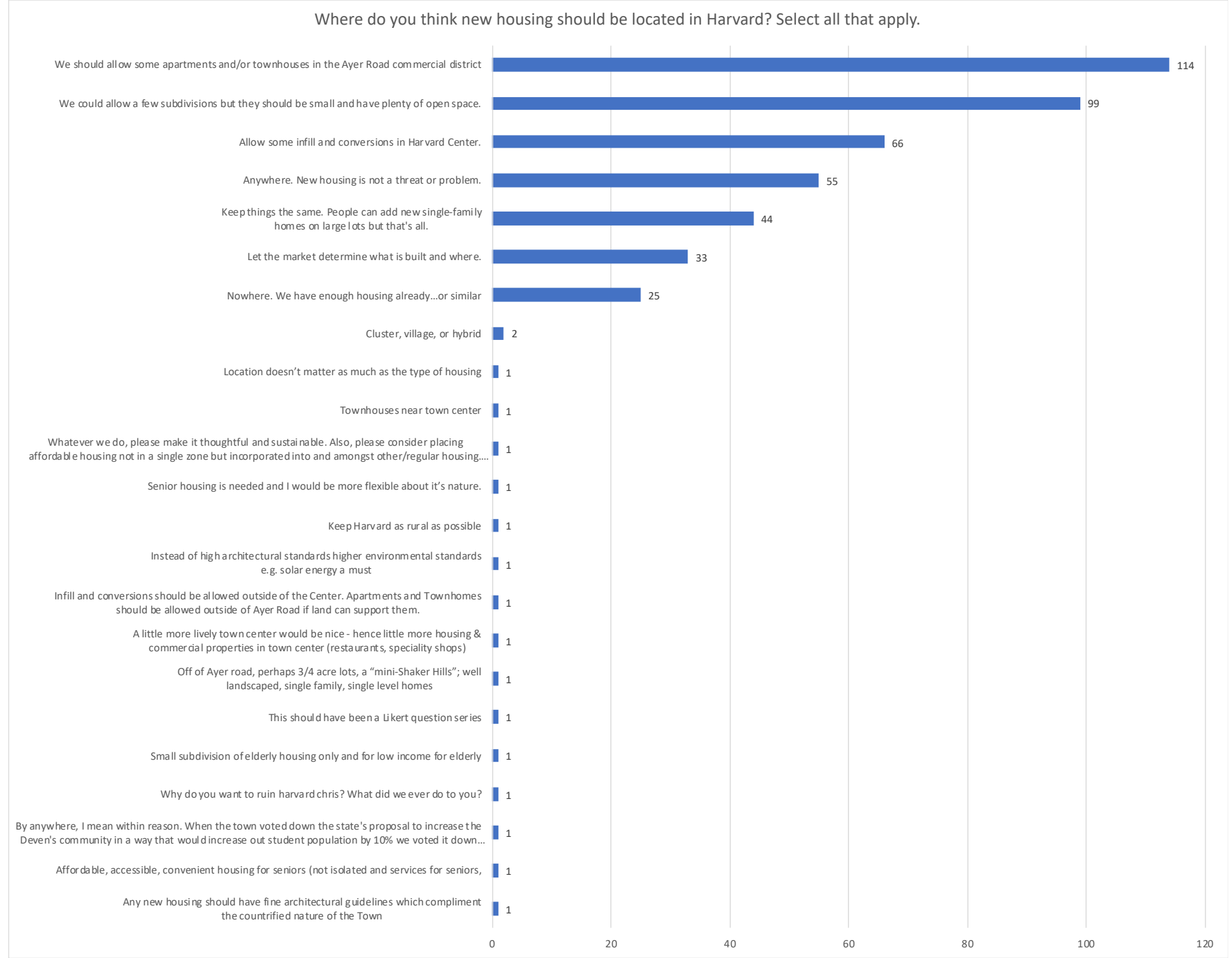




## Siting Preferences

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.

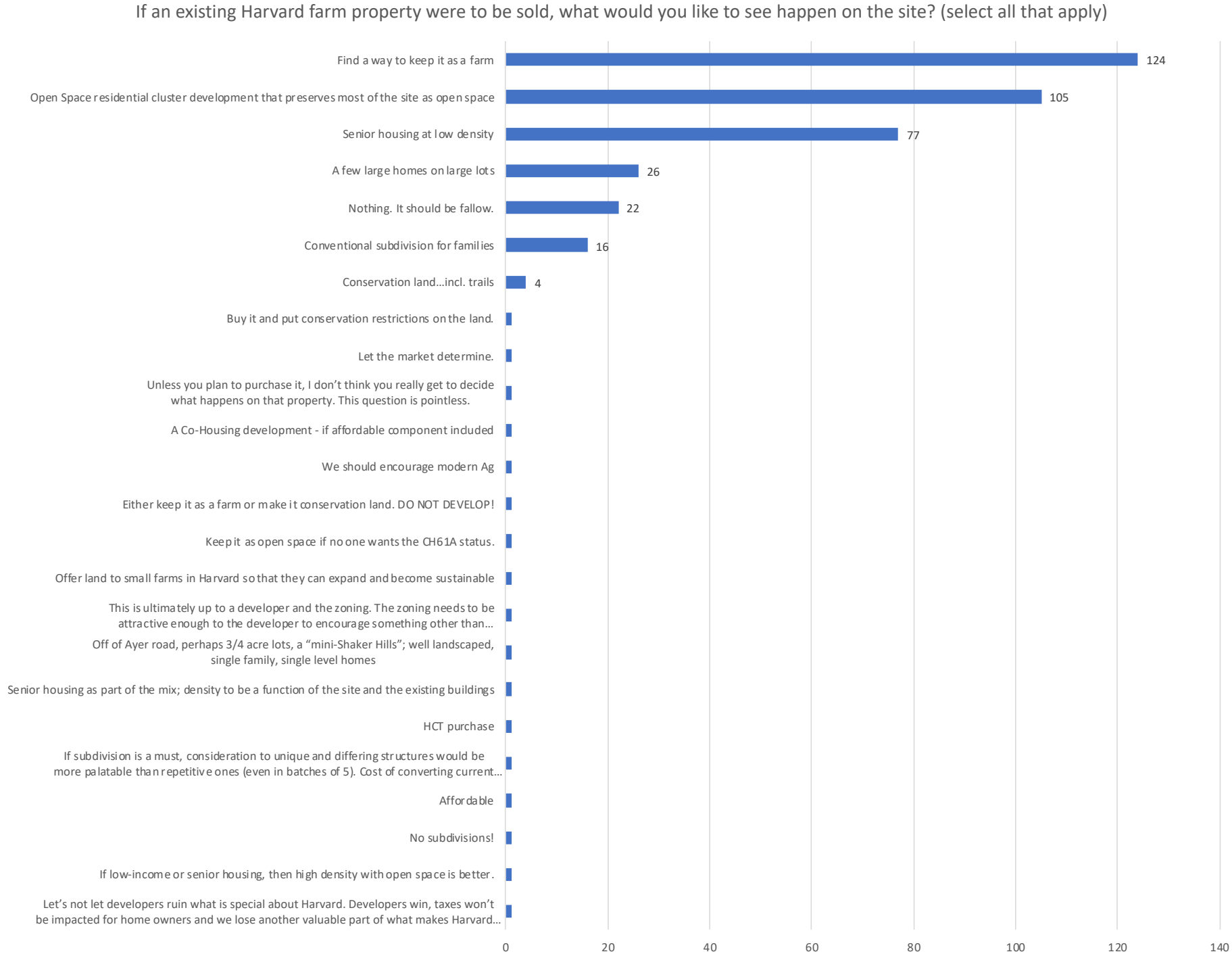
# Question 8



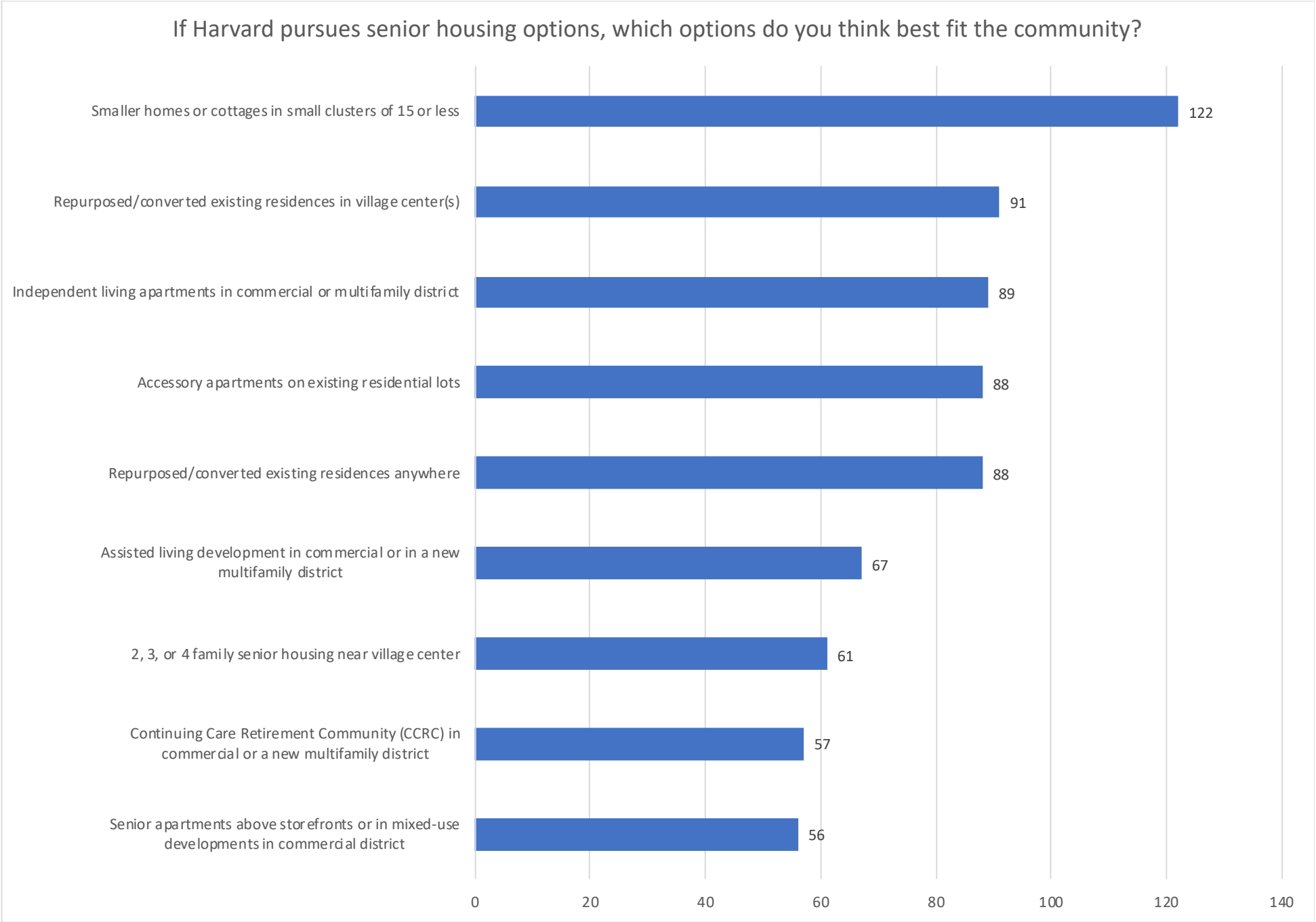
## Where in Harvard?

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 more lively town center, and emphasizing that senior housing is indeed needed.

# Question 9



# Question 10



## Question 10 - Best Options for Senior Housing in Harvard

The most frequent response as to what the best options were for senior housing in Harvard was smaller homes or cottages in small clusters of 15 or less (122 responses). The second most frequent was to allow conversions in the village center (91), followed by independent living developments in commercial or multifamily district (89), and accessory apartments on existing lots and conversions anywhere (both 88).

Question 11 – Regarding the senior housing options in the previous question, if you had to pick the top three (3) that Harvard should focus on, which should they be?

### **Overview of Top Three Options**

The top three mentioned types of housing were: small homes or cottages in clusters of 15 or less; repurposing or converting existing residences; and there was a tie between independent living apartments in a commercial or new multifamily district and accessory apartments on existing lists.

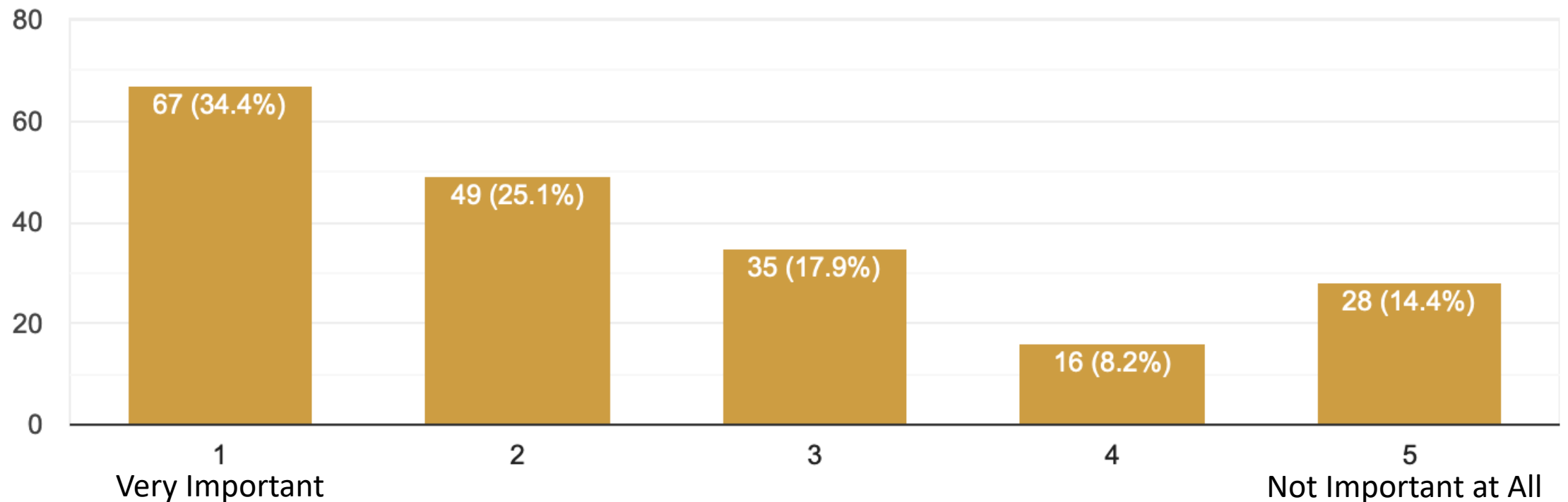
When analyzed, there is a desire among participants to keep Harvard rural. The clusters should be in a “rural setting,” conversions keep Harvard looking as it does, and accessory apartments are simply additions to an existing residential lot. With these there is no risk of changing the “face” of Harvard with multi story, large buildings that look out of place, which are some of the concerns of the opposition.

Note that the data was summarized as ranked first, second, or third choices. Some of the participants may have cognitively made this choice, others may have simply listed their top three that Harvard should focus on.

## Question 12

How important is it to you that Harvard offer a wide variety of housing options for people with different lifestyles and at different phases of life?

195 responses





## Question 12 - Importance of Housing Variety

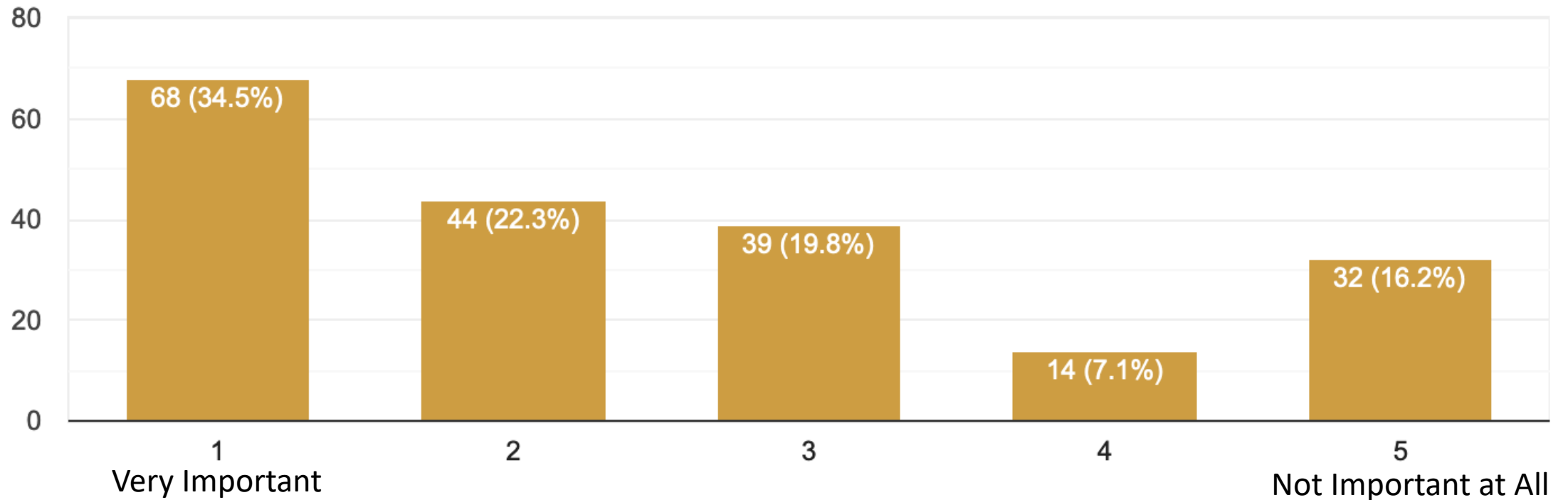
Respondents were asked how important is it for Harvard to offer a wide variety of housing options for people with different lifestyles and different phases of life. Recall that “lack of diversity” was the second highest characteristic that residents responded on the question asking what they disliked 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.

## Question 13

How important is it to you that Harvard provide housing in various price ranges to people and families of differing incomes?



197 responses



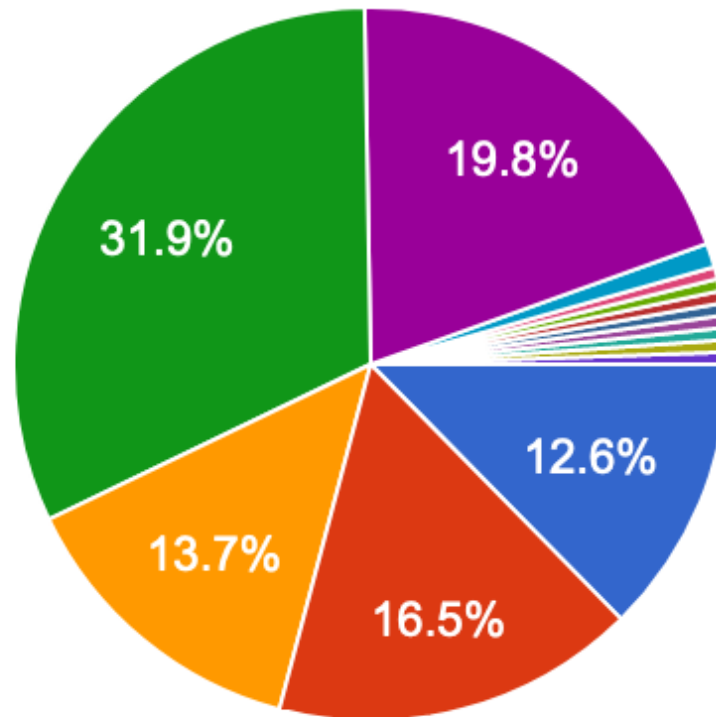
## Question 13 - Importance of Housing Price Options

In a similar question, respondents were asked how important it was 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.

This question relates to affordable housing, a key goal in both the 2016 Master Plan and the 2017 Housing Production Plan. We recommend that you please visit <https://www.harvard.ma.us/economic-development/pages/affordable-housing-primer> for a summary of issues related to affordable housing before completing this question. Related to affordable housing, would you prefer...?

182 responses

## Question 14



- Harvard takes a reactive stance and deals with 40B affordable apartment projects as they come.
- Uses a market-based approach and zones land for multi-family where townspeople think they should be located.
- Allows multifamily projects in the commercial district only.
- Proactively passes an inclusionary housing bylaw which reduces the likelihood of unfriendly 40B projects
- Takes an aggressive approach and goes all out to try to provide a variety of affordable housing products.
- Use existing by laws that allow repurposing of existing homes. This keeps the rural character of our town, prevents urban sprawl.
- Start slow; experiment. To do otherwise is to assume you have the answer; you don't. The demand is not so great as to demand a universal, comprehensive approach.
- Keep pumping up the taxes that will keep development out.
- Harvard should not allow developers into this town. Neighboring towns offer these options in many varieties. If someone must move there for financial reasons, it is not the role of the town or the housing authority to try and level the playing field. The real estate market, as a free market system, provides opportunity for people at all income levels. Towns like Ayer and Littleton have safe housing options for all income levels.
- I'm unsure how to answer. But I'm considering inclusionary housing bylaw. Just feel I'm not fully loaded with all the right knowledge other than what our town is providing in the reference page.
- Sort of prefer a combination of having inclusionary housing bylaw but also look for approaches to provide a variety of housing projects. I don't think we have the staffing to just do the latter
- Sort of prefer a combination of having inclusionary housing bylaw but also look for approaches to provide a variety of housing projects. I don't think we have the staffing to just do the latter
- Get rid of 40b
- Rather than changing an entire bylaw, have the town vote on one senior housing project, with location and sketches ready, and that it should be dedicated only for Harvard residents. Then, if it passes and gets built and fills up, we will know that it worked. If not, we stop talking about senior housing.

## Question 14 - How to Address Affordable Housing Issue in Harvard

Building on the previous question, the following question asked respondents what would be 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.

**Question 15 – See Question #5 above**

**Q 16: How should Harvard balance the need for senior housing with the desire to preserve the town's rural New England character? (For example: Achieve balance by where we put it? By what types of buildings we allow? By how many buildings we allow?)**

Most respondents (75%) think that achieving a balance is important and doable. 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

- *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.*

**Q 16 (CONTINUED): How should Harvard balance the need for senior housing with the desire to preserve the town's rural New England character? (For example: Achieve balance by where we out it? By what types of buildings we allow? By how many buildings we allow?)**

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.”* 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.



## **Q16: In the Respondents' Own Words...Select Responses**

*"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, 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."*

*"...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."*

**Q 17: Please add any other comments that you feel we should consider in drafting bylaws intended to meet the needs of Harvard as a community.**

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

**Q 17 (CONTINUED): Please add any other comments that you feel we should consider in drafting bylaws intended to meet the needs of Harvard as a community.**

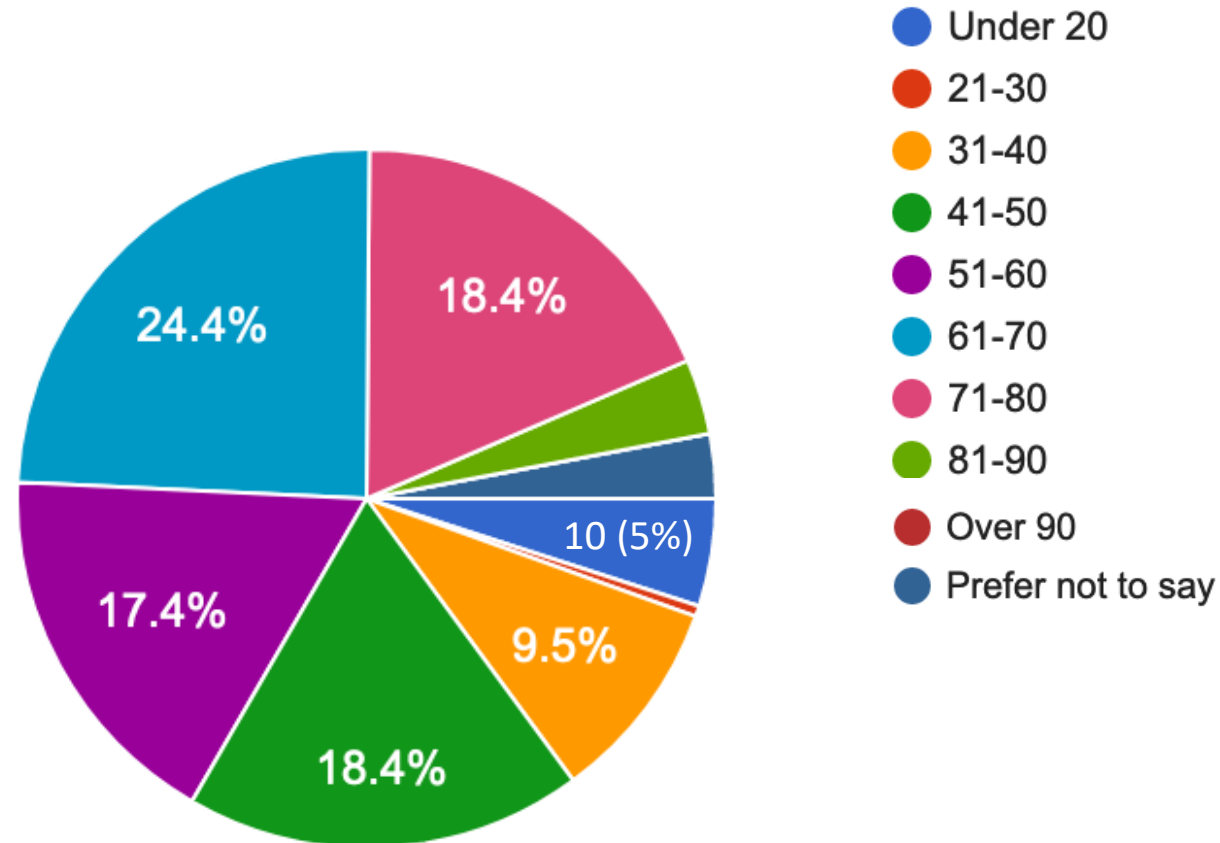
*The two categories most useful to the Planning Board currently are #4 and #5. Below are highlights of those comments.*

- *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 .*

# What is your age?

201 responses

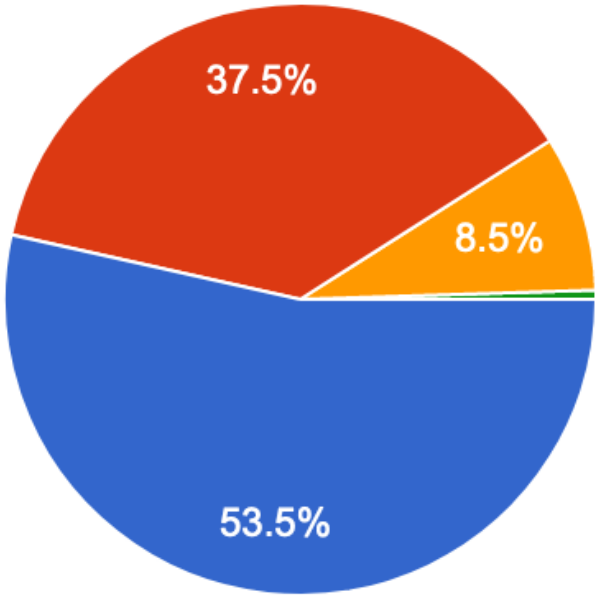
## Question 18



A good distribution of ages of respondents with ten from the Under 20 cohort and nearly 10% between 31-40. Yet the largest is the 61-70 cohort or a subset of the Senior Housing domain.

What is your gender?

200 responses



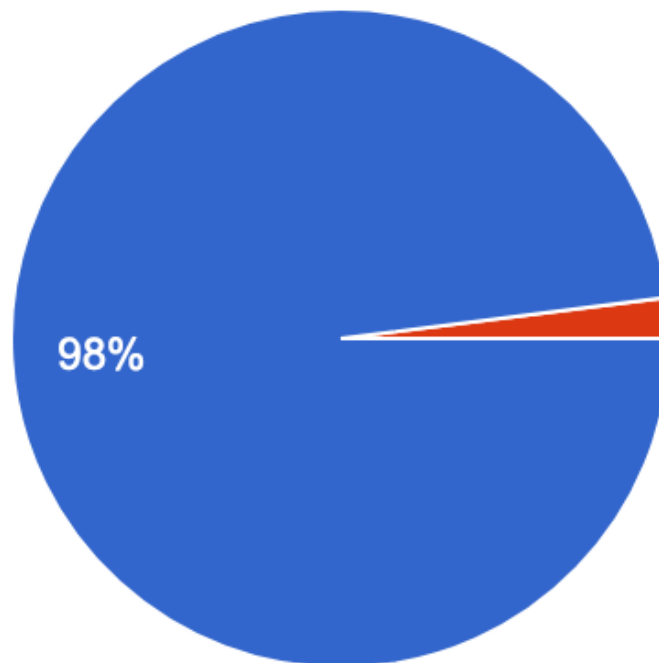
Question 19

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- My husband and I filled this out together

Are you a Harvard resident?

201 responses

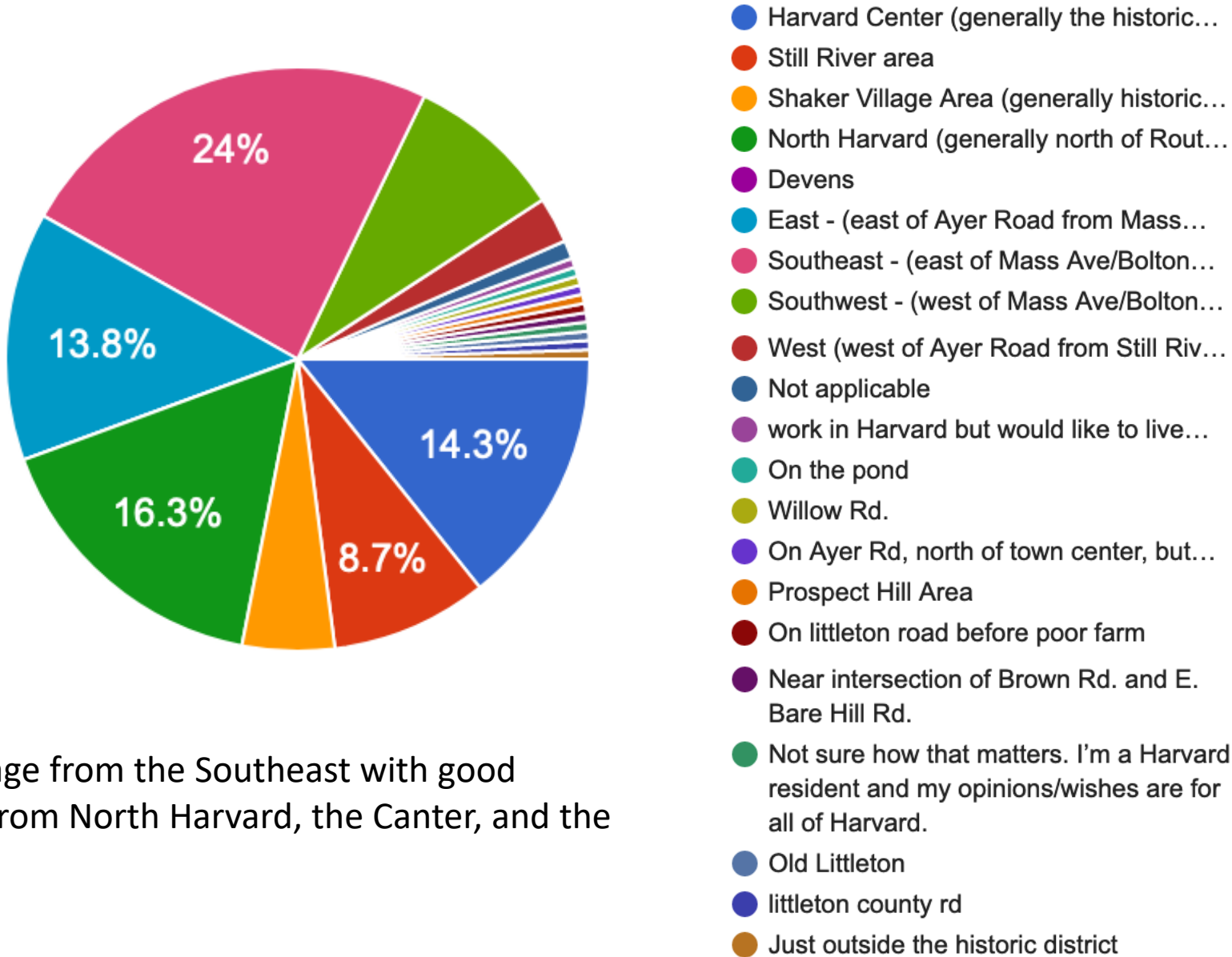
Question 20



What part of Harvard do you live in? Please select one geographic area of town that you live in. While there may be more than one choice that seems to apply, pick one that is the best fit in your view.

Question 21

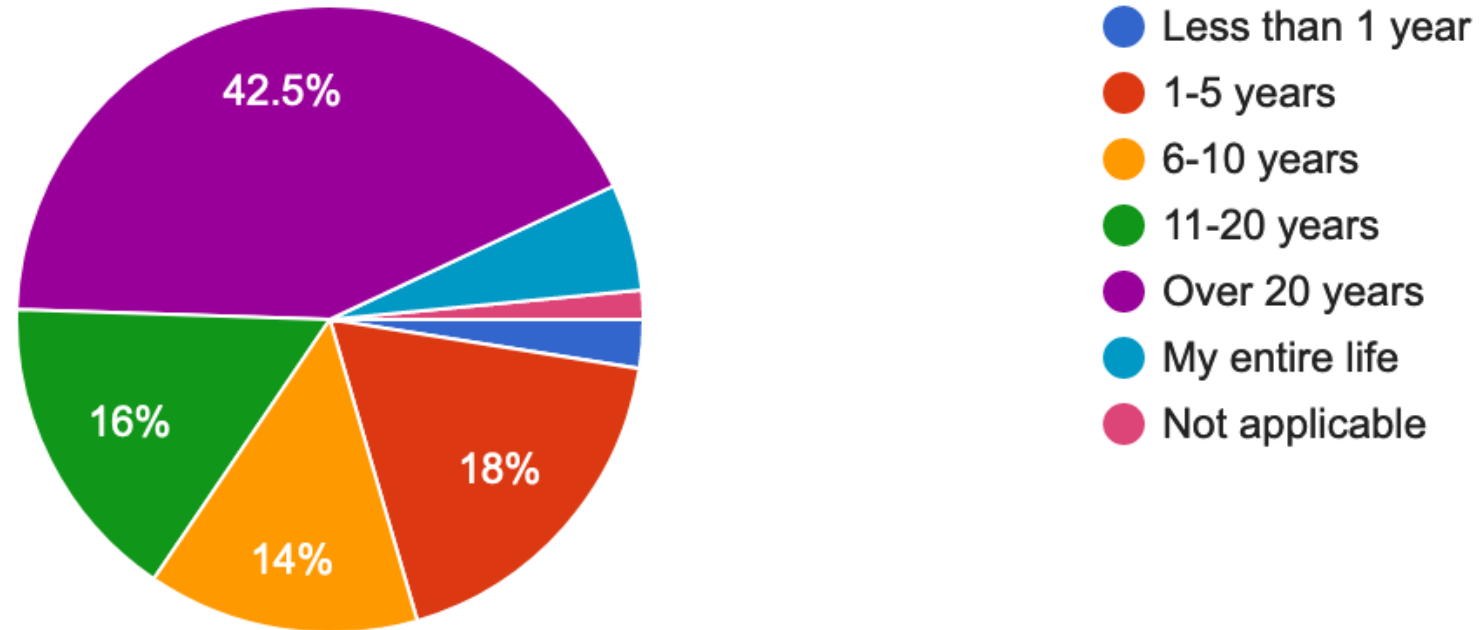
196 responses



Largest percentage from the Southeast with good representation from North Harvard, the Canter, and the East.

## How long have you lived in Harvard?

200 responses



Largest percentage by far were those who have lived in Harvard for “Over 20 years” but a good representation from those here from 1-5 years.