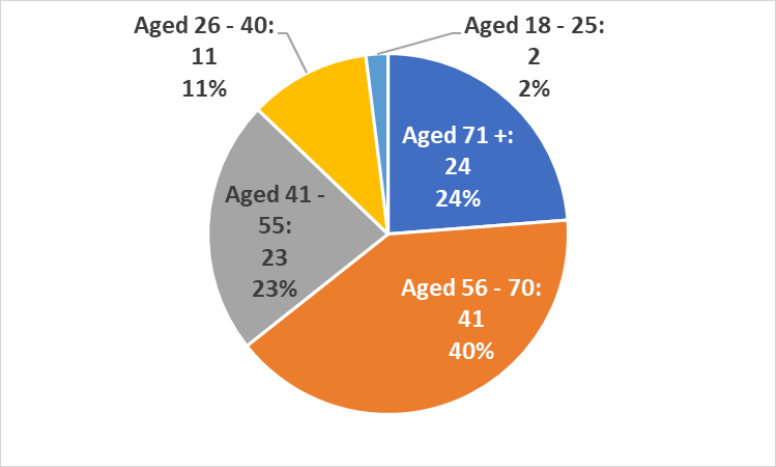
Wheelock Community Survey

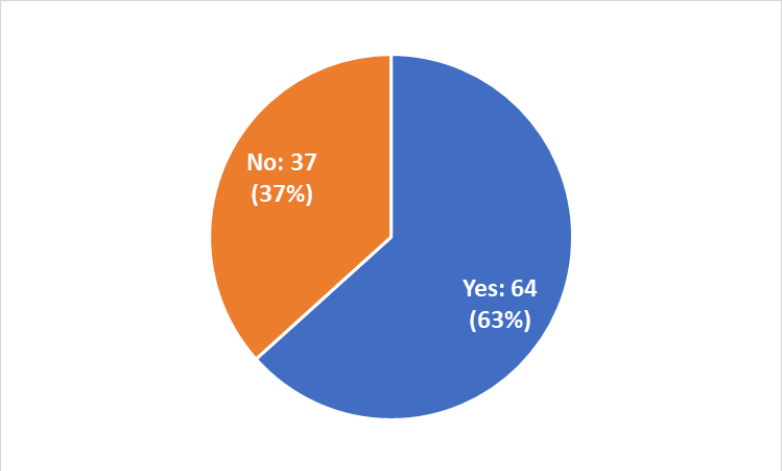
In March of 2026, the Wheelock Planning Commission distributed surveys both online and via paper copies. The Planning Commission sent out postcards with a QR code names on the Town's Grand list and voter checklist (about 600 names). Paper copies were distributed at Town Meeting Day as well. There were 104 respondents, although not every respondent answered every question.

Responses will help to inform the update of the Wheelock Town Plan, which is comprehensive, researching areas such as Land use, Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas, Transportation, Town Facilities, Town Services, Utilities, Housing and Population, Energy, Adjacent Communities, Economic Development, and Flood/Drought Resiliency.

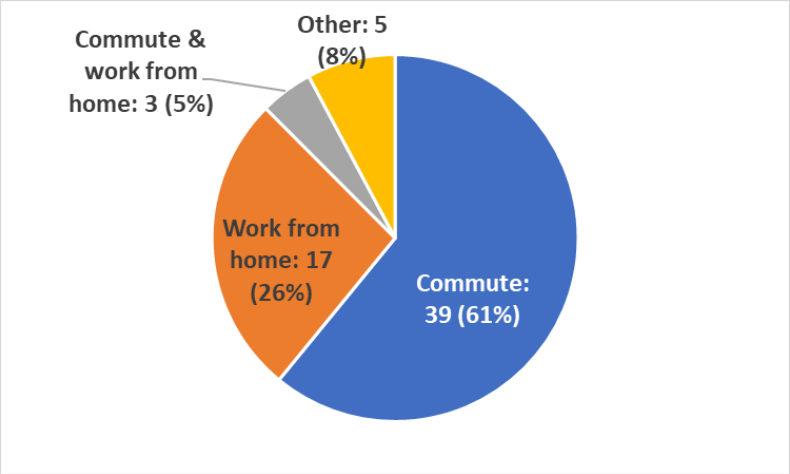
1. What is your age? *(101 responses)*



2. Are you employed? *(101 responses)*



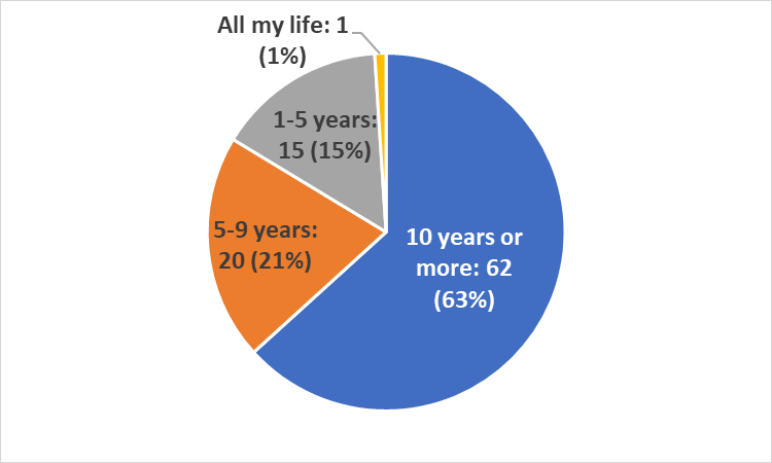
3. If yes, do you: *(64 responses)*



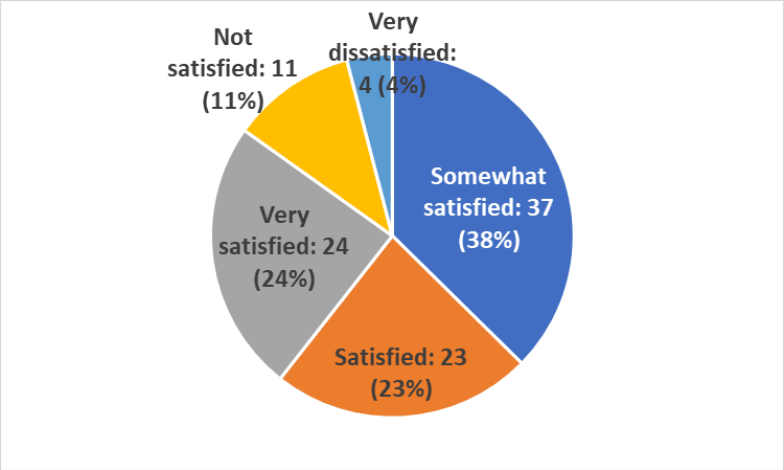
4. If you moved to Wheelock within the last decade, what brought you to the community? *(49 responses)*

- **Affordability and Property (17):** Moving to Wheelock was driven by affordable housing, finding a house in the price range, or the opportunity to purchase land, including for homesteading, investment, or to acquire generational family land.
- **Lifestyle and Environment (14):** The quiet, peaceful, and remote atmosphere, natural beauty, and access to nature, along with the appeal of a rural Vermont community and a "free and open lifestyle."
- **Community and Family Ties (10):** Moved to or returned to Wheelock due to family ties (parents, spouse), a desire to be closer to friends and family, or the opportunity to return to a favorite location.
- **Minimal Regulations (5):** The ease of building, low taxes, and minimal regulations on land and building.
- **Specific Opportunities (3):** Other reasons included finding the right house and community, attending the Academy, specific home opportunities, or seeking a rural region like the NE Kingdom.

5. How long have you lived here? *(98 responses)*



6. How satisfied are you with the quality of life in our community? Consider factors such as safety, amenities and management of our town's resources. *(99 responses)*



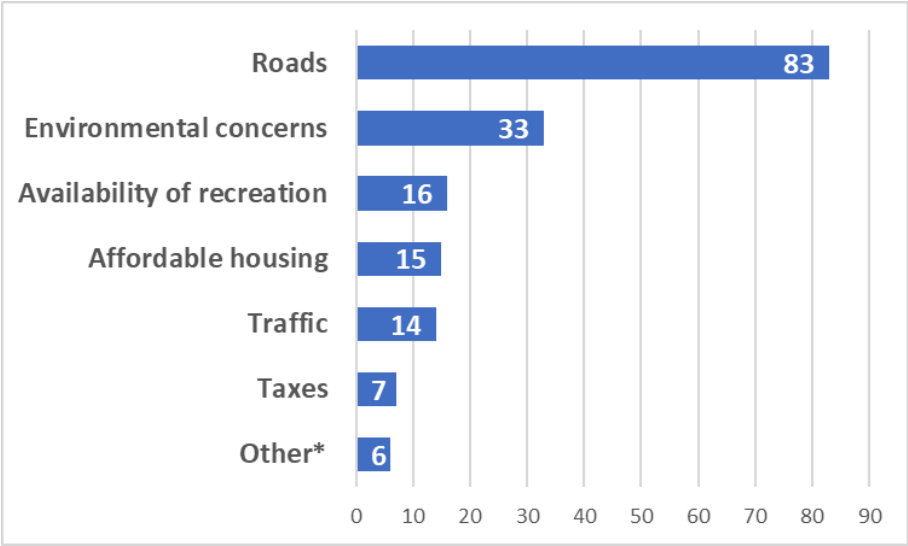
7. What are three things you like the most about living in Wheelock? *(86 responses)*

- **Quiet/Peaceful and Rural Setting (46):** Respondents value the quietness, peacefulness, and privacy, alongside the rural nature of the area, its beautiful landscape, and open spaces.
- **Community and Neighbors (17):** Residents appreciate the friendly, helpful, caring, and compassionate neighbors, as well as the strong sense of community and the small-town feel.
- **Lack of Zoning and Regulations (13):** Responses cite the absence of zoning or having very few regulations and permits as a major benefit, allowing for freedom in property utilization and lifestyle.
- **Proximity to Amenities and Recreation (5):** Positive aspects include proximity to larger communities and necessities (like a good hospital and Lyndonville), access to I-91, and opportunities for recreation such as snowmobiling, ATV riding, hunting, and hiking.
- **Other (4):** Responses included cheap land, not run down, and privacy.

8. What are three things that you are least satisfied with about living in Wheelock? *(75 responses)*

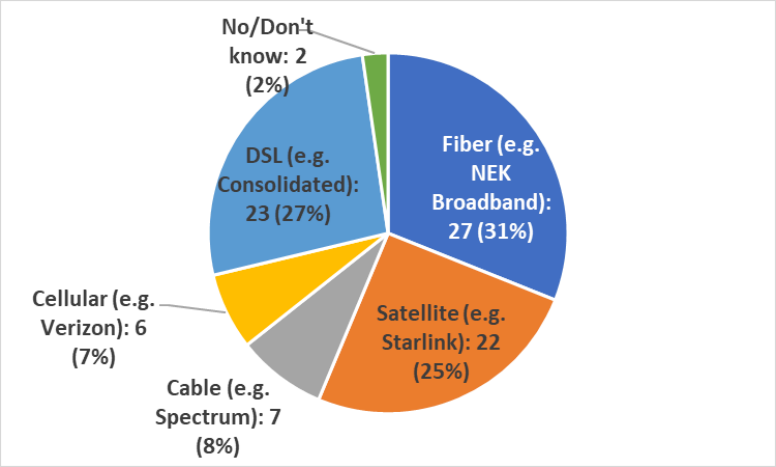
- **Infrastructure and Taxes (47):** The most frequent complaints are about road conditions (including dirt roads, potholes, washboards, and debris) and high property taxes/assessments. Related concerns include taxes being too high compared to services received, a lack of paving, and the high cost of trash bags.
- **Community and Communication (10):** Respondents are dissatisfied with the lack of community feel/events, the absence of an ADA-accessible community meeting space (with the Town Hall being non-compliant), and the lack of facilities like sidewalks and a playground. Other issues include constant friction/divisiveness, political infighting, town gossip, and a small group being critical or cynical about town government.
- **Government and Development (9):** Concerns include a perceived lack of swift action/organization by the Selectboard and town management, an unwillingness of residents to volunteer for town positions, and a desire for more forward thinking. A significant issue is the lack of zoning or development rules, leading to unhealthy/hazardous sites, dilapidated houses, and junkyards.
- **Safety and Environment (7):** Specific concerns include speeding on Route 122, garbage management (litter on roadsides, not picking up dumped trash, transfer station negativity/situation), and issues related to non-residents buying property. Others mentioned the vulnerability of the town garage in a floodplain and the frequency of flooding.
- **Other (19):** Miscellaneous responses cited excessive state regulations, frustration with Act 250 changes, lack of cell coverage, long commutes and employment challenges, "drug people," and flooding.

9. Which local issues impact your daily life or well-being? (Select all that apply) *(94 responses)*



**Other included crime, littering, trespassing, unleashed dogs, internet availability, and impacts to healthcare.*

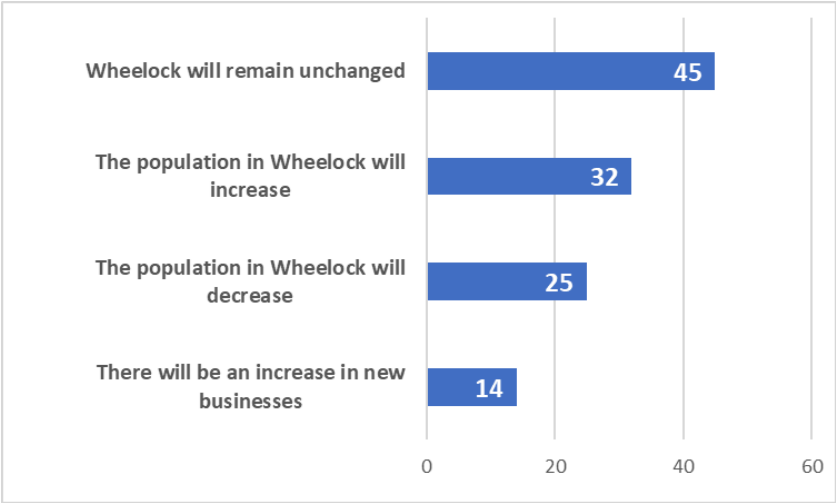
10. Are you connected to the internet? If yes, how are you connected? *(87 responses)*



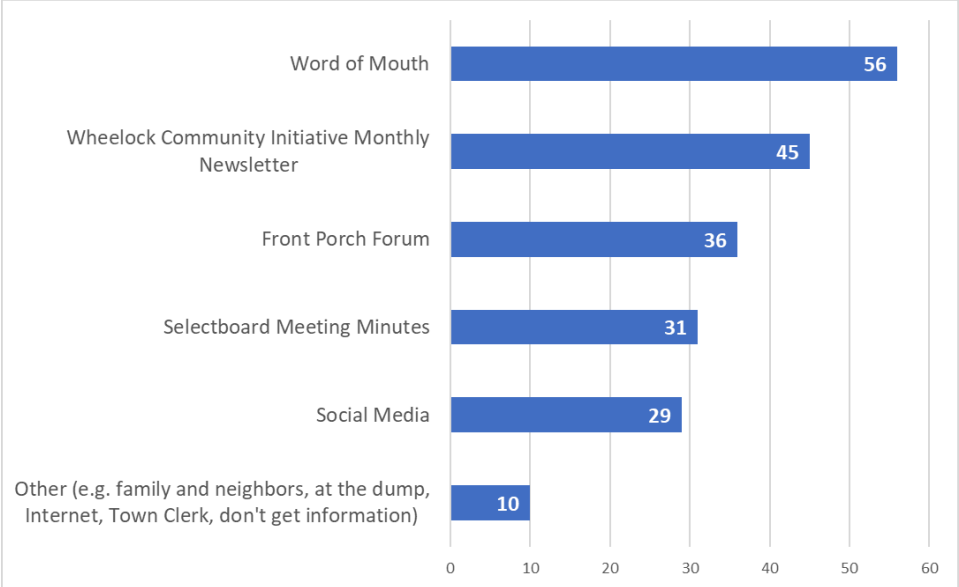
11. If you are not connected, why? *(17 responses)*

- **Availability and Infrastructure (8):** The primary reasons for not being connected include internet service being unavailable or limited in the area, or lacking hard-wired internet access and having to rely on satellite.
- **Off-Grid Status and Location (4):** Several respondents are off-grid, sometimes by choice, but occasionally due to external factors like property disputes preventing the installation of wires, or simply having no option for service. This also results in no cell service for some.
- **Existing Service Quality Issues (3):** Before the availability of NEK Broadband, some reported existing services (5G internet and DSL) were terrible or unusable, leading to a desire for reliable broadband.
- **Financial and Logistical Barriers (2):** Barriers include lack of funds, not having electricity, or waiting a long time for broadband installation. One respondent mentioned significant financial hardship making services unaffordable.

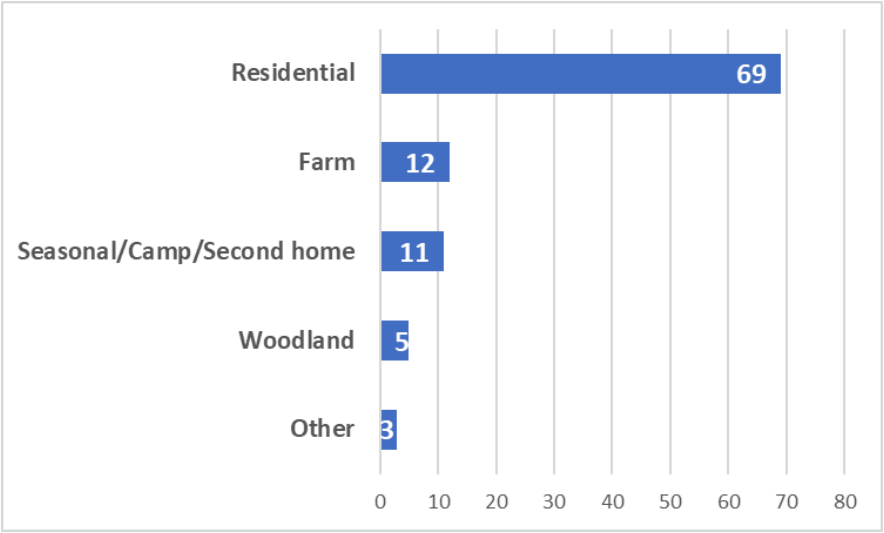
12. What are your projections for Wheelock in the next 10 years? (Select all that apply) *(96 responses)*



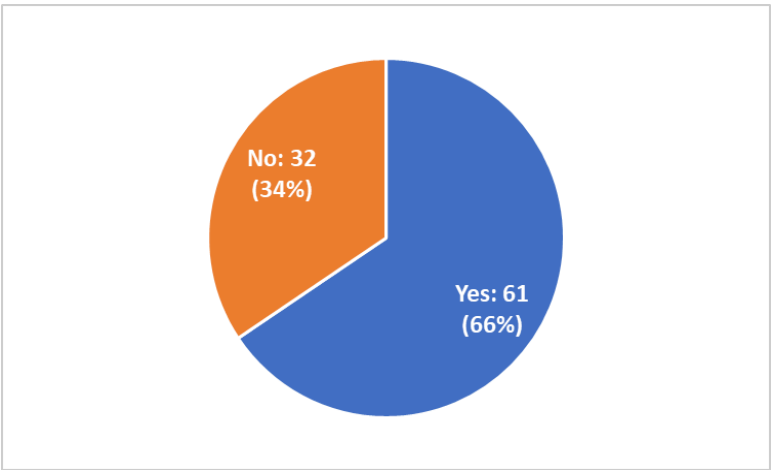
13. How do you currently learn about town issues? (Select all that apply) *(99 responses)*



14. How would you classify your land? *(100 responses)*



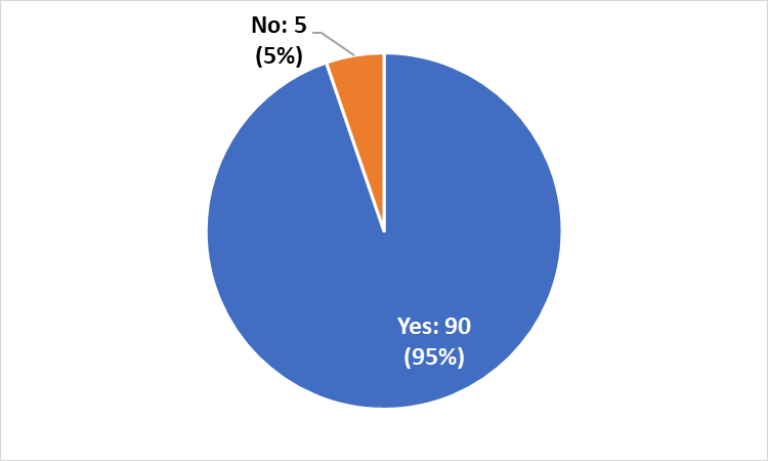
15. Would you like to see a system of walking/biking trails, hiking paths and multi-use recreational paths/trails? *(93 responses)*



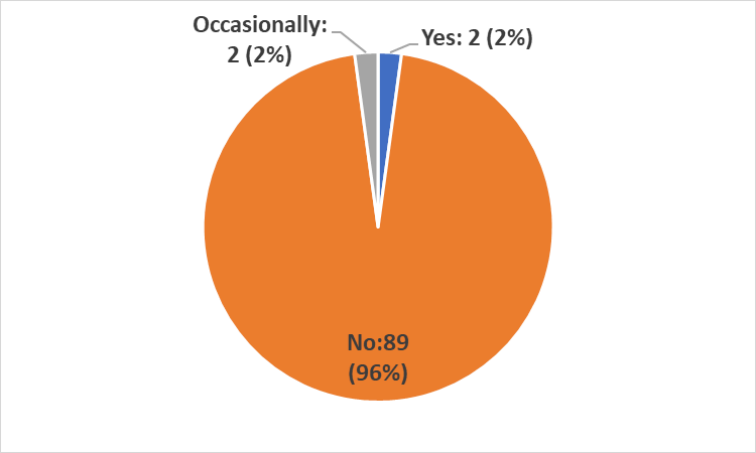
16. Name three scenic and iconic areas in Wheelock. *(60 responses)*

- Chandler Pond/Farm: 21
- Stannard Mountain (views from and of): 12
- Town Hall: 10
- Flagg Pond: 9
- Cemeteries: 8
- Miller's Run: 6
- Wheelock Mountain: 5
- Steammill Pond/Area: 4

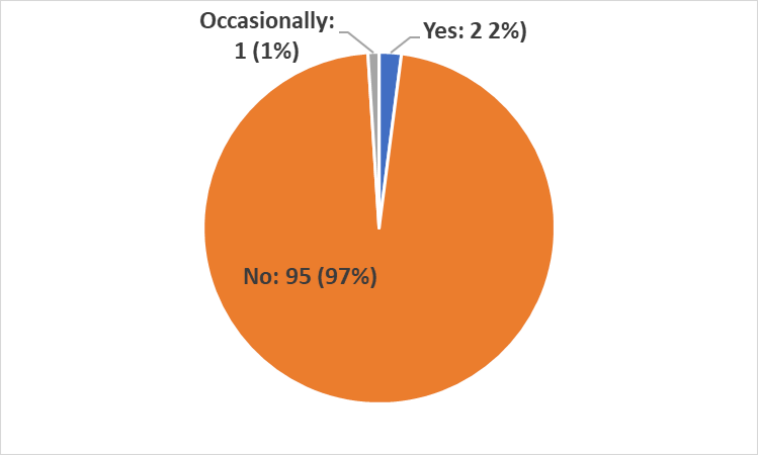
17. Should Wheelock continue to maintain historic sites, structures, and graveyards? (95 *responses*)



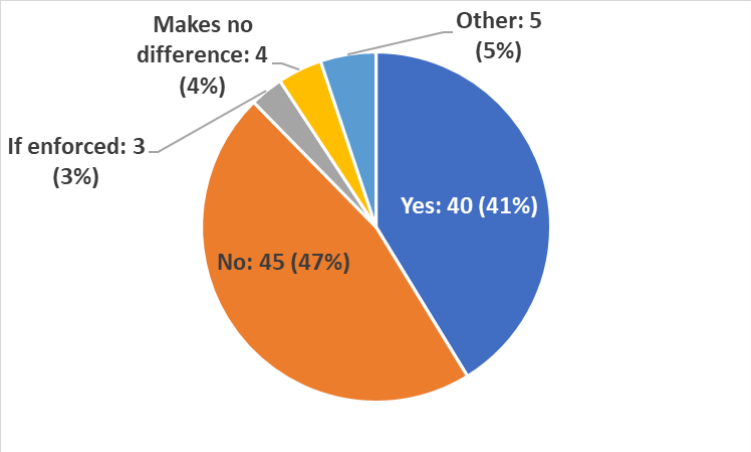
18. Do you use RCT? (93 *responses*)



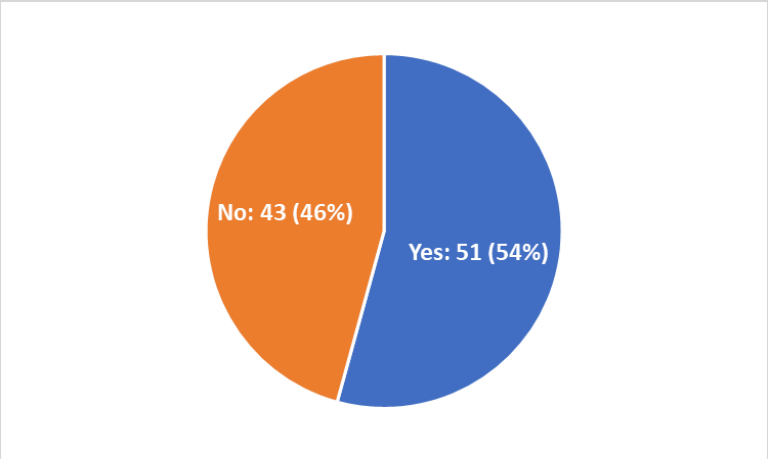
19. Do you currently rely on others for transportation? *(98 responses)*



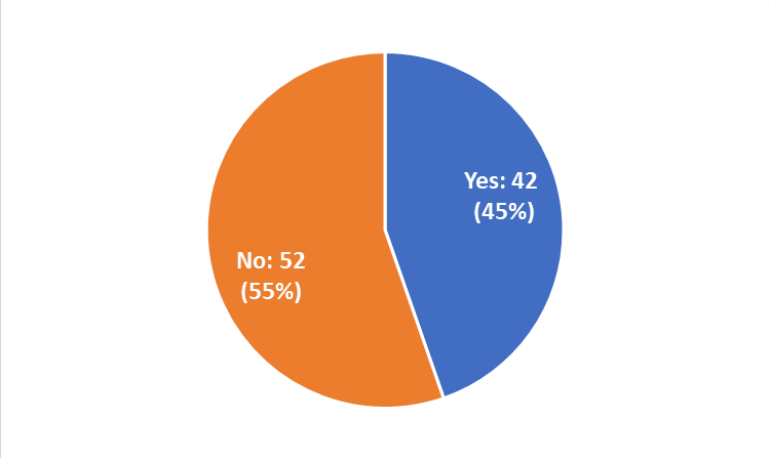
20. Should we work with the VT Department of Transportation to lower the speed limit to 25 mph within the Village limits? *(97 responses)*



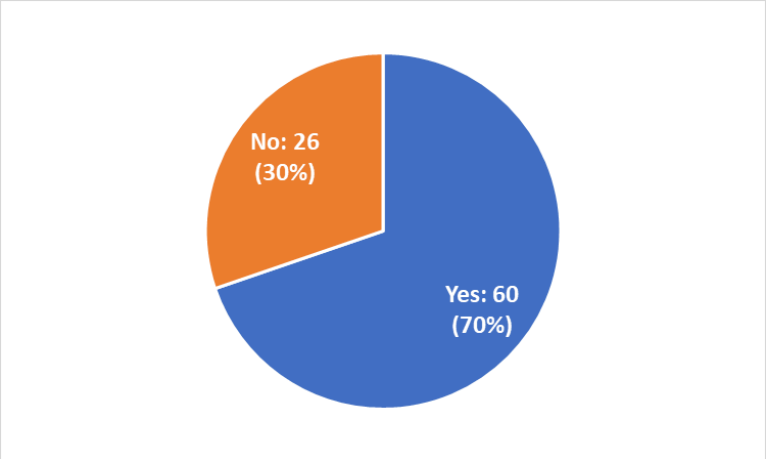
21. Would you like to see speed alert devices to deter drivers from excessive speeds in Wheelock on Route 122 and The South Wheelock Road? *(94 responses)*



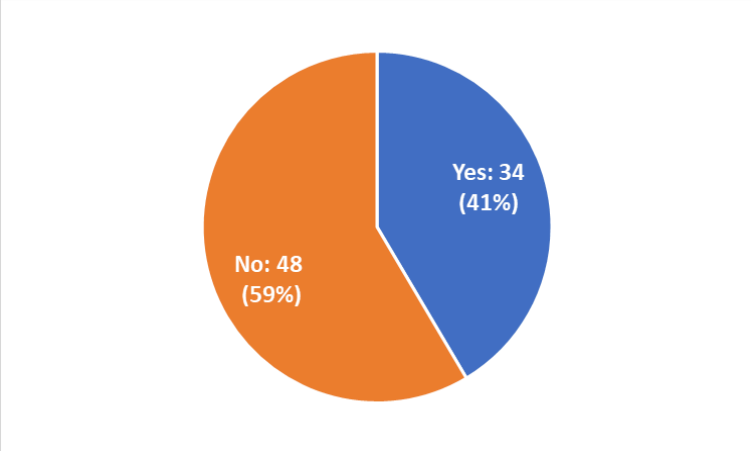
22. Would you like to see pedestrian walkways and/or sidewalks in the Village? *(94 responses)*



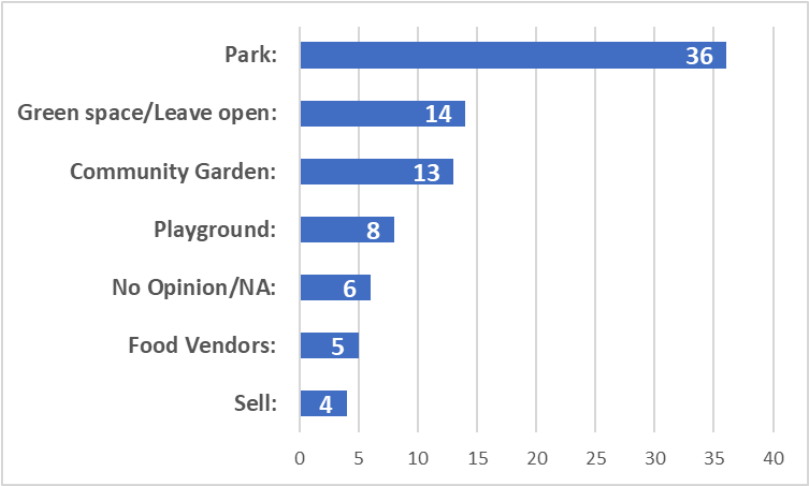
23. Should the Town Garage be moved out of the flood plain? *(86 responses)*



24. Would you support efforts to improve the Town Garage in its existing location? *(82 responses)*

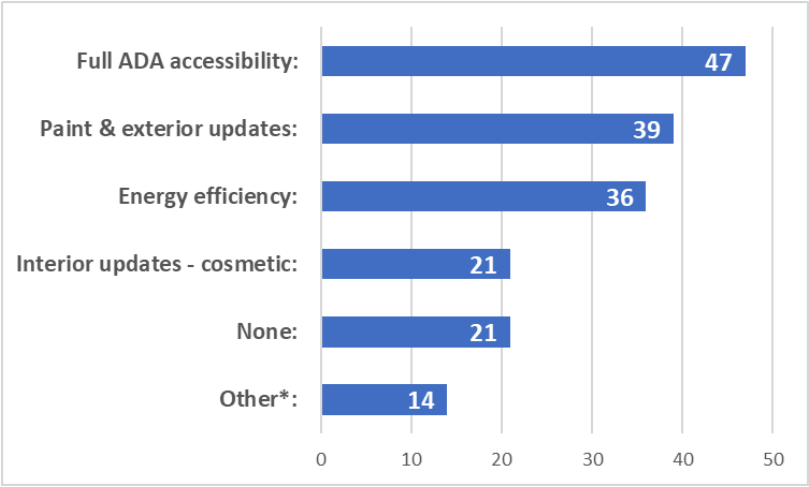


25. If the Town Garage was moved, how should we use the original location? (*84 responses*)



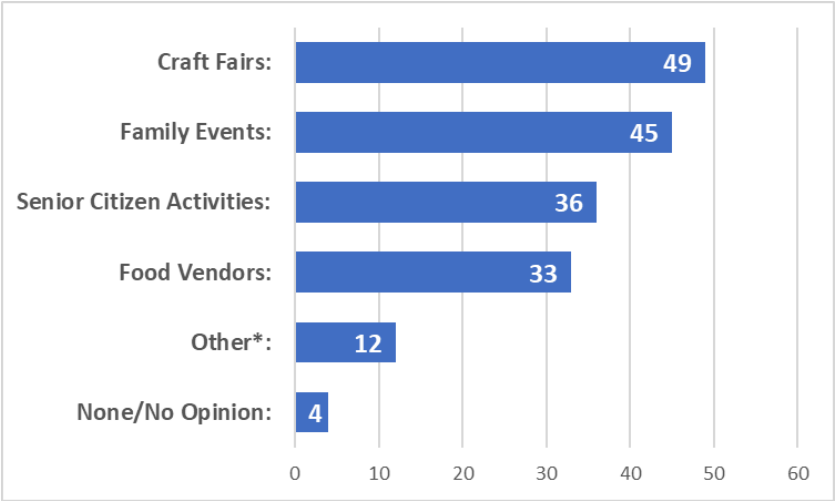
Note: Paper copy listed "playground" but was missing a checkmark.

26. What, if any, improvements would you like to see at Town Hall (Select all that apply.) (*94 responses*)



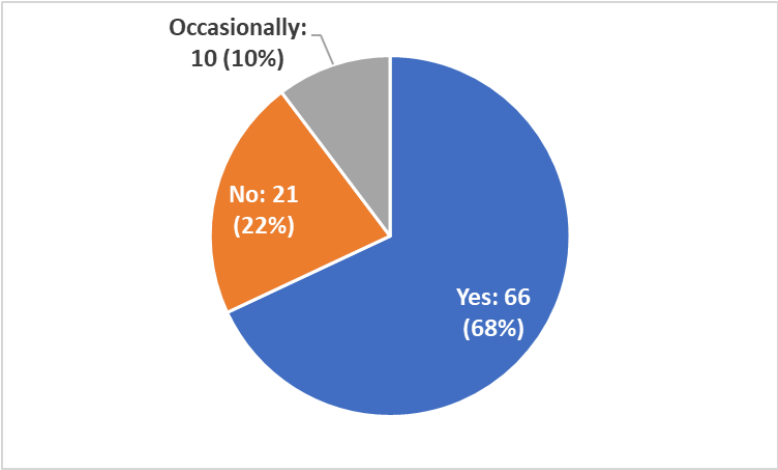
**Other included moving office and vault out of basement, adding a small kitchen, historic preservation, paving the parking lot, adding a park and grilling area, working within a budget, add a resilience hub/community center, elevator to downstairs, regulatory issues only.*

27. Would you like to see more community events at Town Hall? If yes, select all that apply. (*70 responses*)

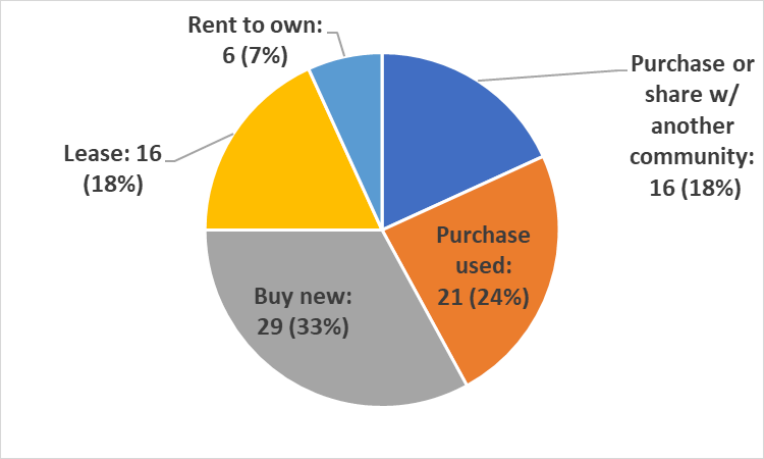


**Other includes things that produce revenue for the Town, art shows, live music, doggie days, chicken pot pie dinner, dances.*

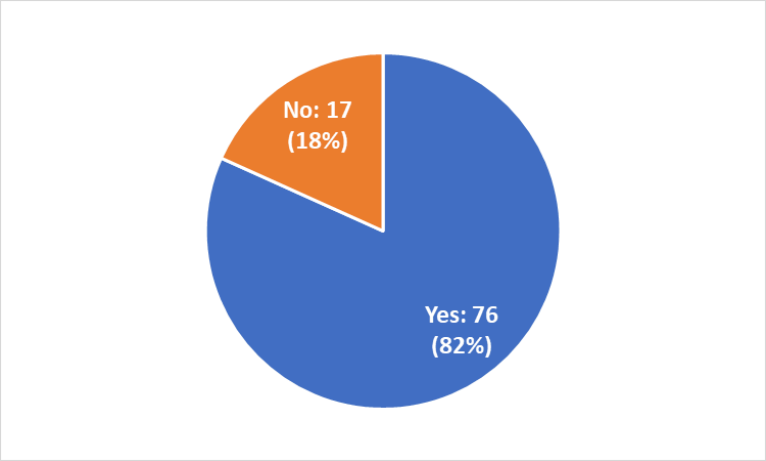
28. Do you utilize the Transfer Station? (*97 responses*)



29. Concerning replacement of town heavy equipment, do you believe the town should: *(88 responses)*



30. Do you support the Select Board reviewing town road classifications? *(93 responses)*

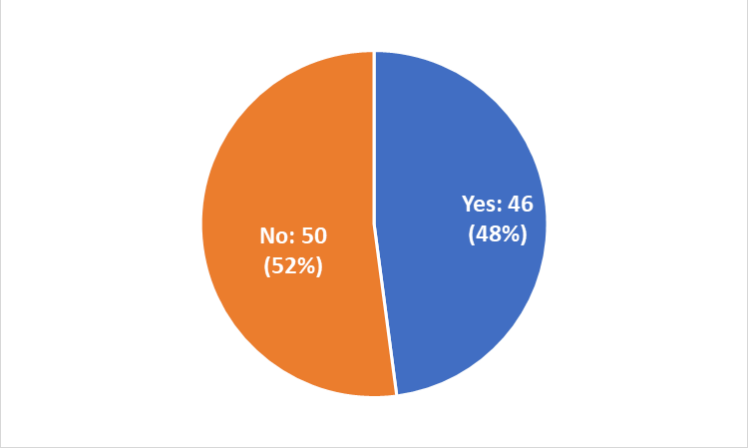


31. Do you have any ideas on how the Town can generate income without raising taxes? (e.g. more Community events, concerts, etc.) *(44 responses)*

- **Increase Tax Base through Development:** Encourage homebuilding, attract and retain businesses to generate large amounts of tax dollars, and developing affordable housing units. (The latter cited an example where a 31-unit development increased tax revenue by over $220,000 annually for another town.
- **Maximize Use of Town Facilities and Land:** Make the Town Hall ADA compliant for renting out for events (such as weddings, birthdays, social meetings, craft fairs, educational programs, and concerts); charge trail users to park at the Town Hall; sell unused town property, and create small campgrounds or assisted living units.
- **Seek External Funding:** Actively apply for grants from State and Federal sources and working with organizations to secure funding.

- **Improve Fiscal Management & Reduce Spending:** Reduce overall spending, spend smarter, audit current allocations, review the budget with taxpayer input, and prioritize collecting delinquent taxes and fees.
- **Generate Revenue through Community Events & Recreation:** Host various community events for fundraising (such as festivals, winter fairs, potlucks, and theatre festivals), selling Wheelock merchandise, and increasing outdoor recreation opportunities to attract tourists (e.g., mountain bike trails, connection to Kingdom Trails, skiing).

32. Do you have, or intend to, install solar or other alternative energy sources at your residence? (*96 responses*)



33. If no, why not? (*41 responses*)

Cost and Return on Investment (ROI) (21): The high cost and long ROI, with many believing the payback is not worth the expense, or that the return makes no financial sense compared to paying an electric bill.

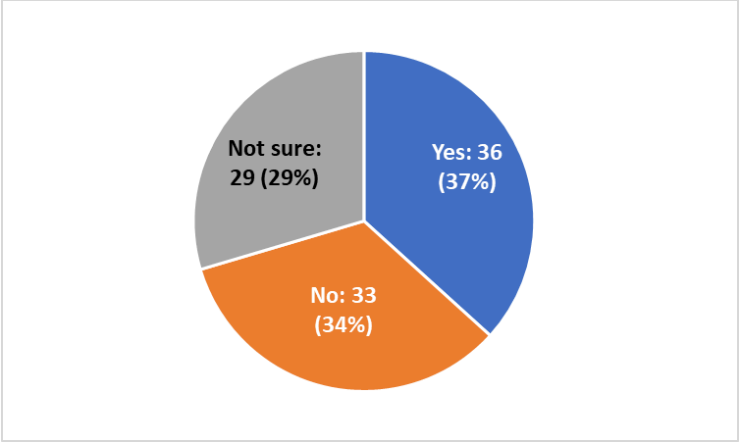
Lack of Necessity and Existing Alternatives (9): Respondents stated they have no need or don't want solar, often because they already use wood heat and minimal electricity, or have already installed heat pumps.

Practicality and Viability (6): Local factors, such as insufficient sunlight (facing North), being in a very cloudy state, or having a heavily wooded area, making solar energy not viable.

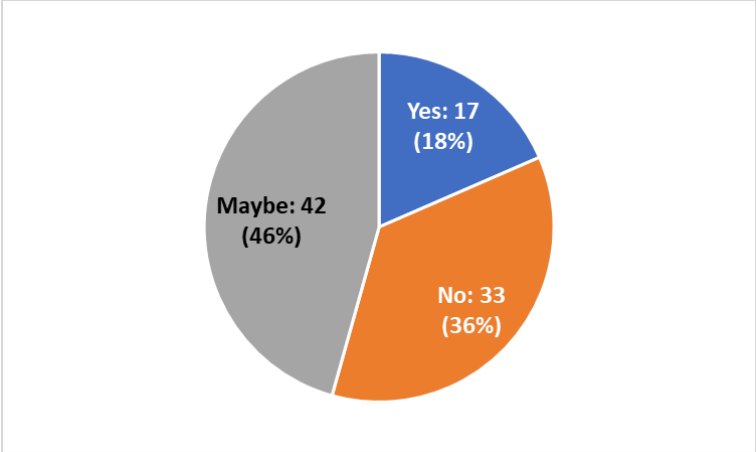
Other Objections (4): Other reasons include the appearance (ugly/unsightlyness), issues with the electrical infrastructure maintenance, and belief that the process is a "gimmick," a "sham," or involves "too much red tape."

Environmental and Material Concerns (2): Concerns exist about the environmental impact, including the short lifespan, disposal (becoming "just trash"), and hazardous materials, with one respondent stating lithium batteries are no better than burning wood and pellets.

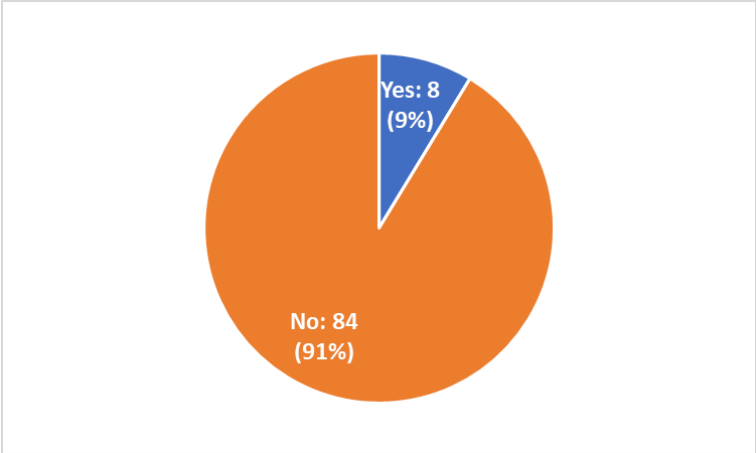
34. Would you support a community solar field? *(98 responses)*



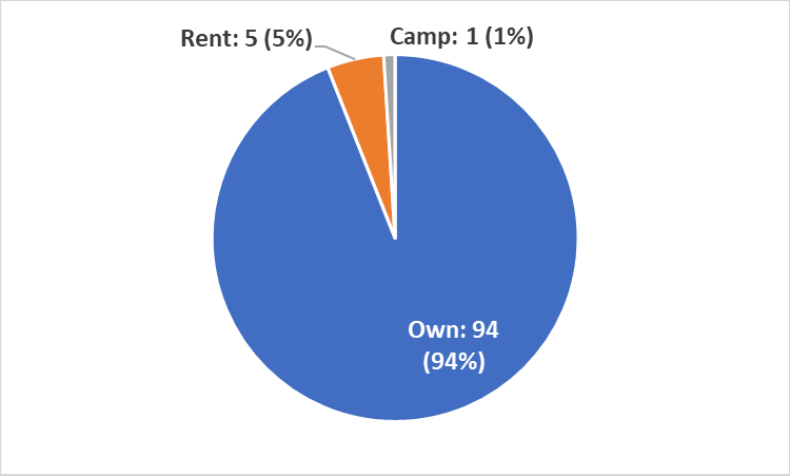
35. Should electrical lines be buried within the Village limits? *(92 responses)*



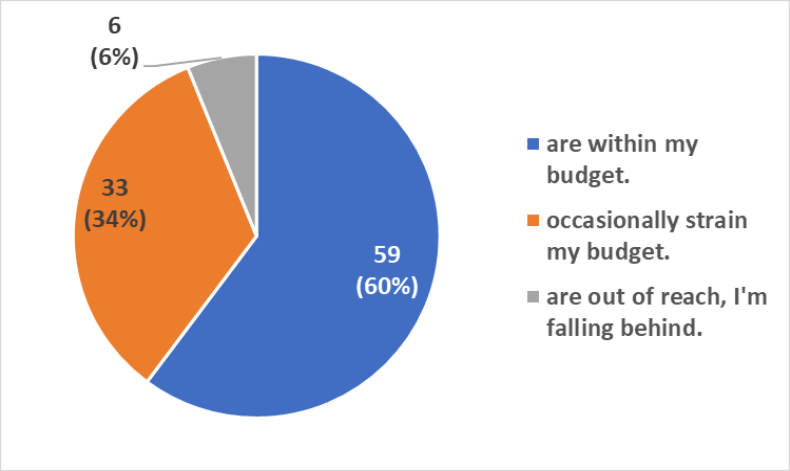
36. Are you on the Fire District Water Supply? *(92 responses)*



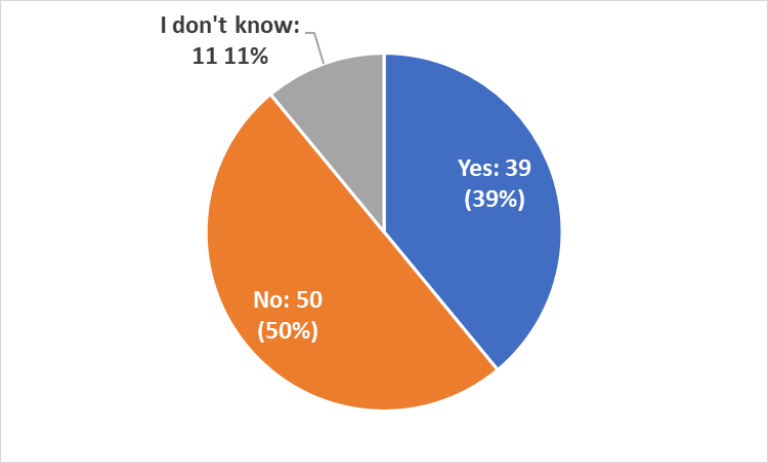
37. What is your housing situation in Wheelock? *(100 responses)*



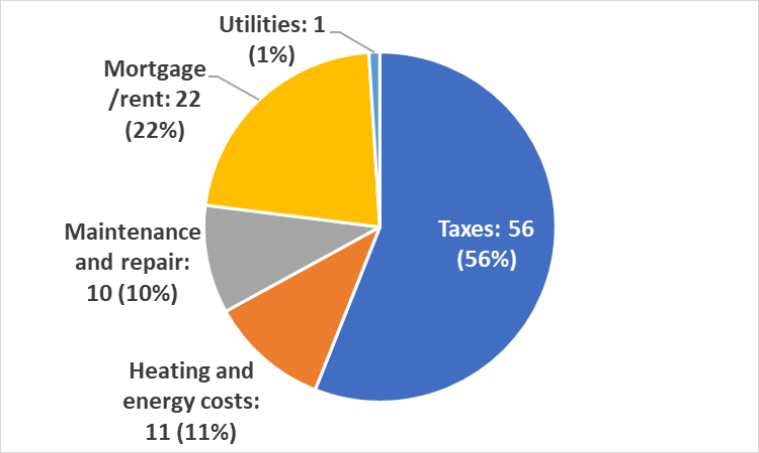
38. My housing costs: *(98 responses)*



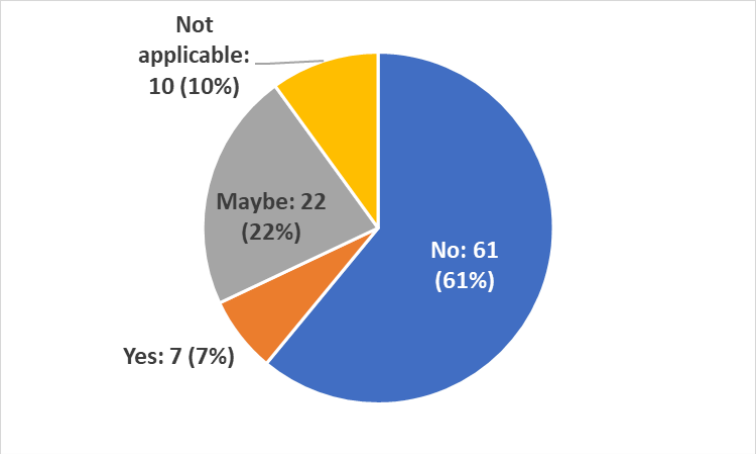
39. Does your housing need major repairs or renovations in the next three years? *(100 responses)*



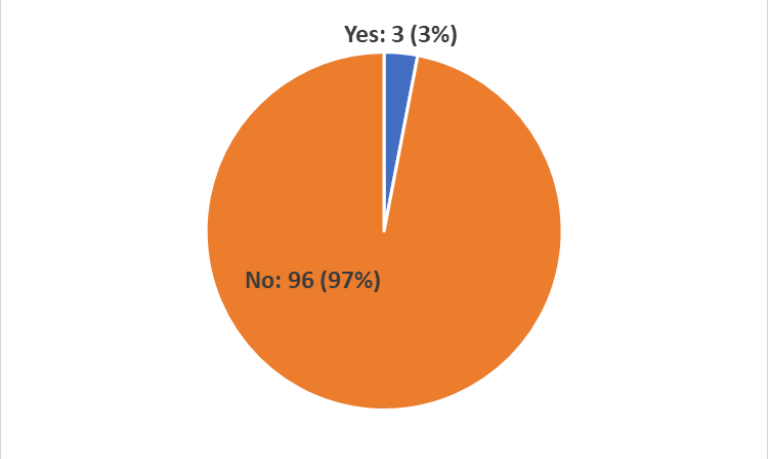
40. What is the SINGLE biggest expense of your housing? *(100 responses)*



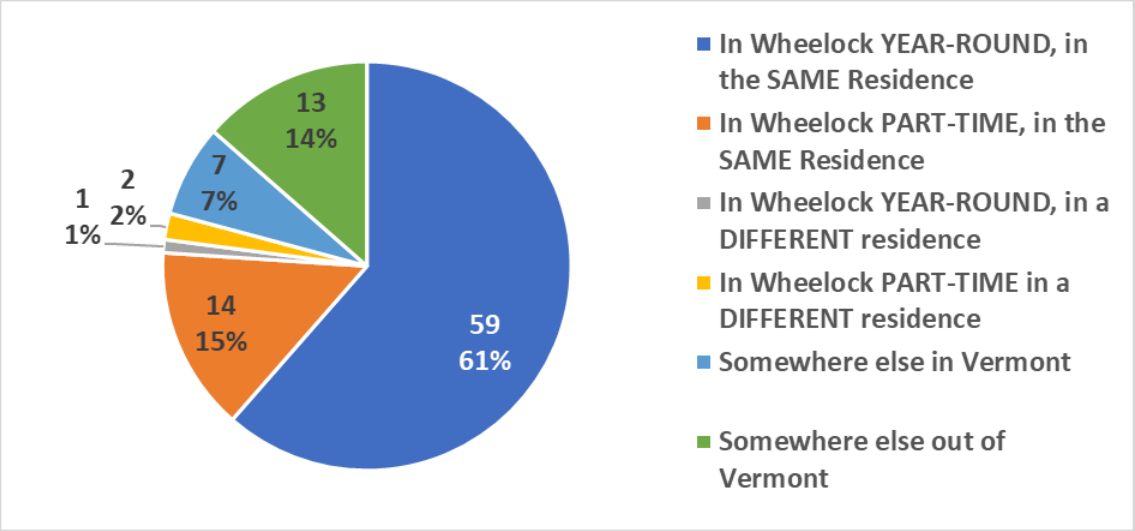
41. Would you ever be interested in creating an apartment as a source of income in your house or on your property? *(100 responses)*



42. Do you currently generate income renting either in your house or on your property though Airbnb, Virbo, or some other agency? *(99 responses)*



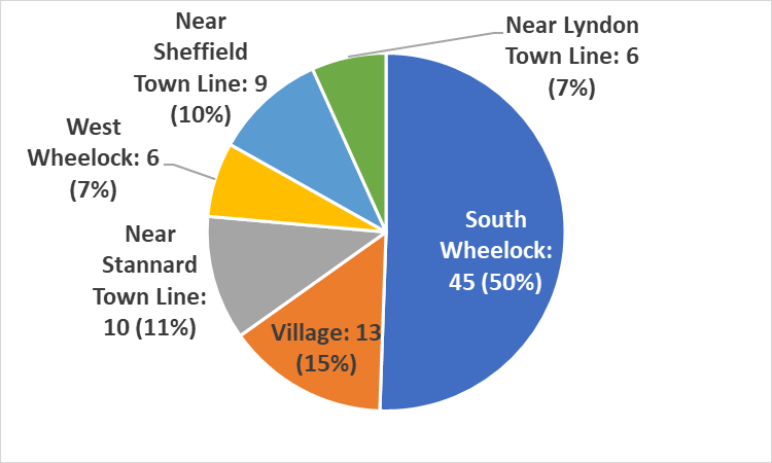
43. Where do you see yourself living in the next decade? *(96 responses)*



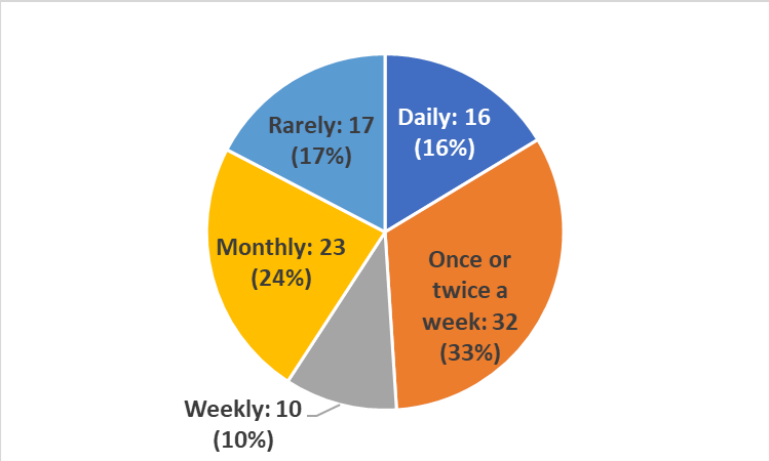
44. What else can you tell us about your housing in Wheelock? *(37 responses)*

- **Property Status and Future Plans (11):** Respondents noted a range of housing types, including an ADA accessible ranch, a well-maintained log home, a non-profit land trust/intentional community, and camps/non-residential land. Several plan to improve their homes to keep them standing or noted issues like insulation needs.
- **Tax Concerns and Affordability (7):** Multiple respondents expressed that taxes are too high, with concerns that they are not proportional to the quality of their houses compared to other properties, and worries that tax increases might force them to move.
- **Off-Grid and Remote Living (6):** Responses indicated living off-grid, utilizing solar power only, with some properties being camps or cabins that lack running water, electricity, or septic systems, often located on remote or Class 4 roads.
- **Road Maintenance Issues (2):** Concerns were raised about road conditions, including a paved section being converted back to dirt with poor maintenance (dust and potholes), and issues with Class 4 roads causing navigation problems for those following GPS.
- **Other (11):** Miscellaneous responses indicated general satisfaction with their homes or neighbors (or in some cases, dissatisfaction with environs and neighbors).

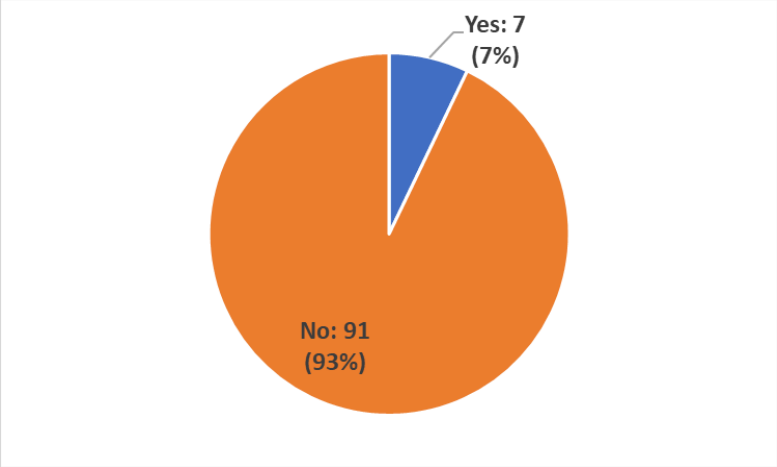
45. Where do you live in Wheelock? *(89 responses)*



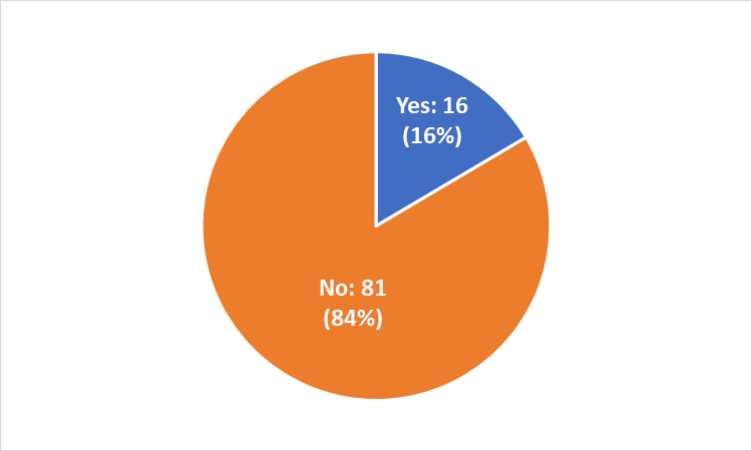
46. How often do you come into the Village of Wheelock? *(98 responses)*



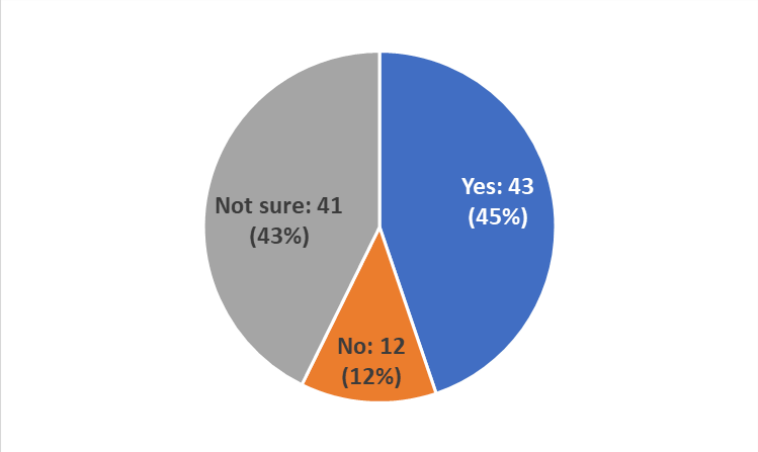
47. Are you a caregiver for someone in your home? *(98 responses)*



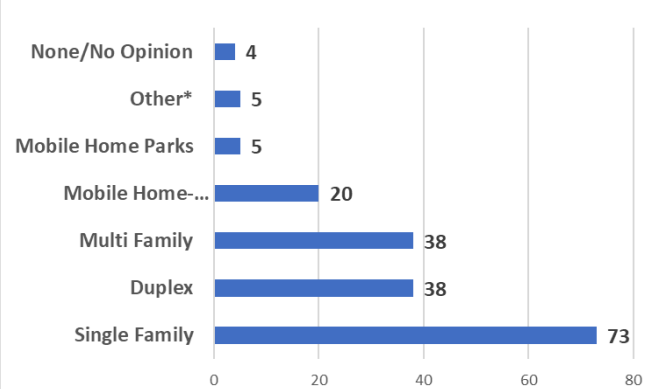
48. Do you have school-aged children in your home? *(97 responses)*



49. Do you feel there is a lack of affordable housing in Wheelock? *(96 responses)*

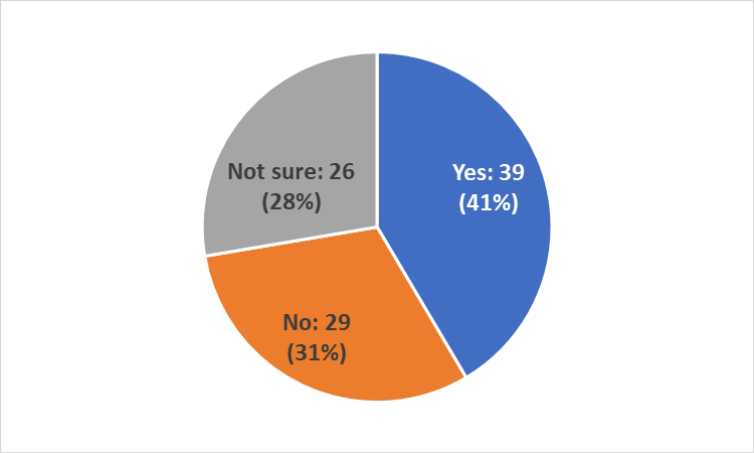


50. Which type of housing development should be encouraged in Wheelock? (Select all that apply) *(89 responses)*

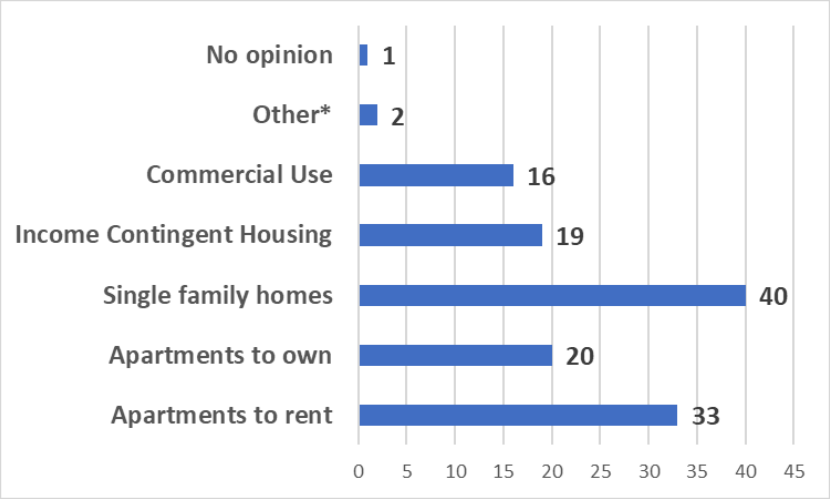


**Other includes apartments, accessory dwelling units, co-housing, community housing, homeless/transitional housing.*

51. Do you think the Town of Wheelock Selectboard should promote more housing and development in the Village? *(94 responses)*

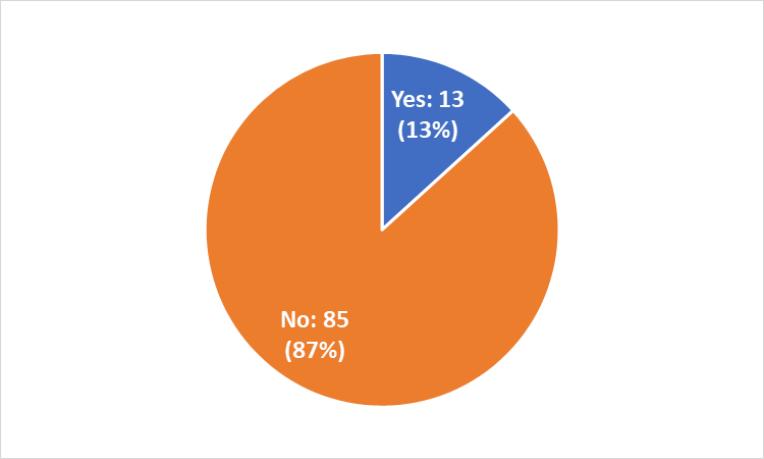


52. If yes, would you like to see: (Select all that apply) *(54 responses)*

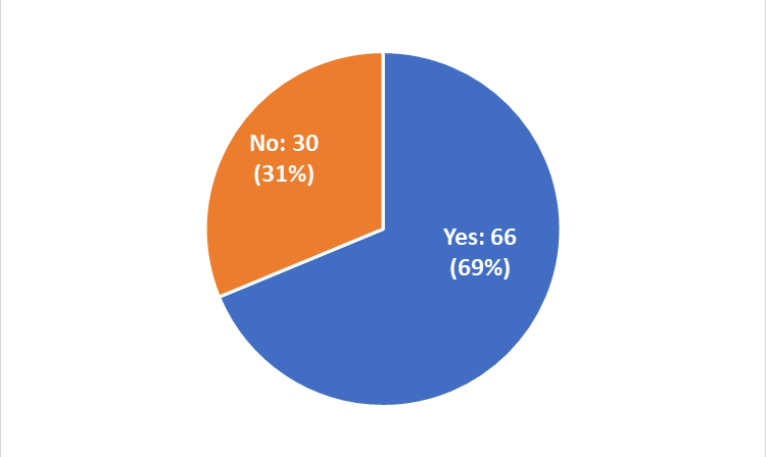


**Other includes mixed use and arts district.*

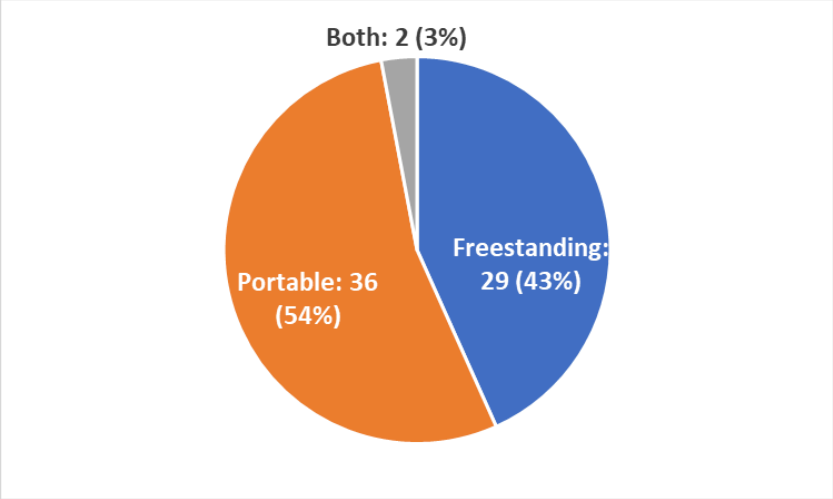
53. Are you fully off the grid? (*98 responses*)



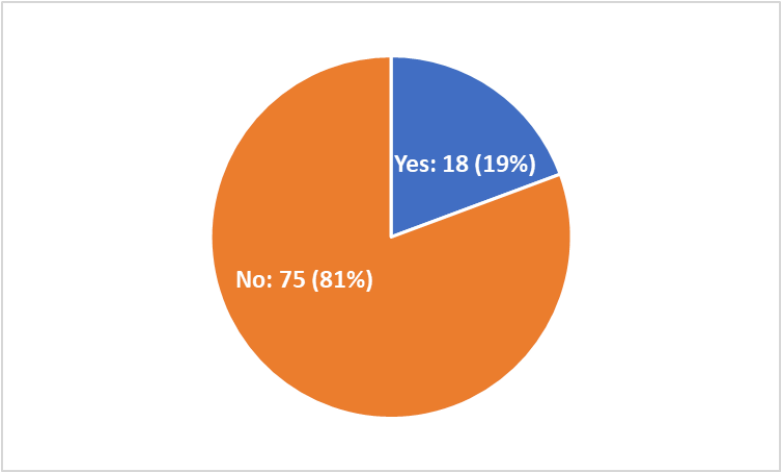
54. Do you have a backup generator? (*96 responses*)



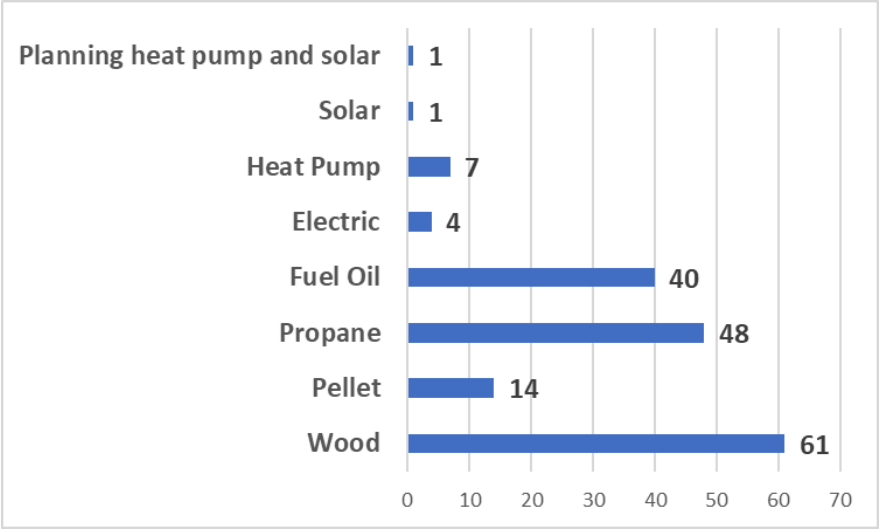
55. If you have a backup generator is it: (*67 responses*)



56. Did you attend the Energy Fair held at the Wheelock Town Hall last year? *(93 responses)*



57. What are your energy sources for heat? (Select all that apply) *(98 responses)*



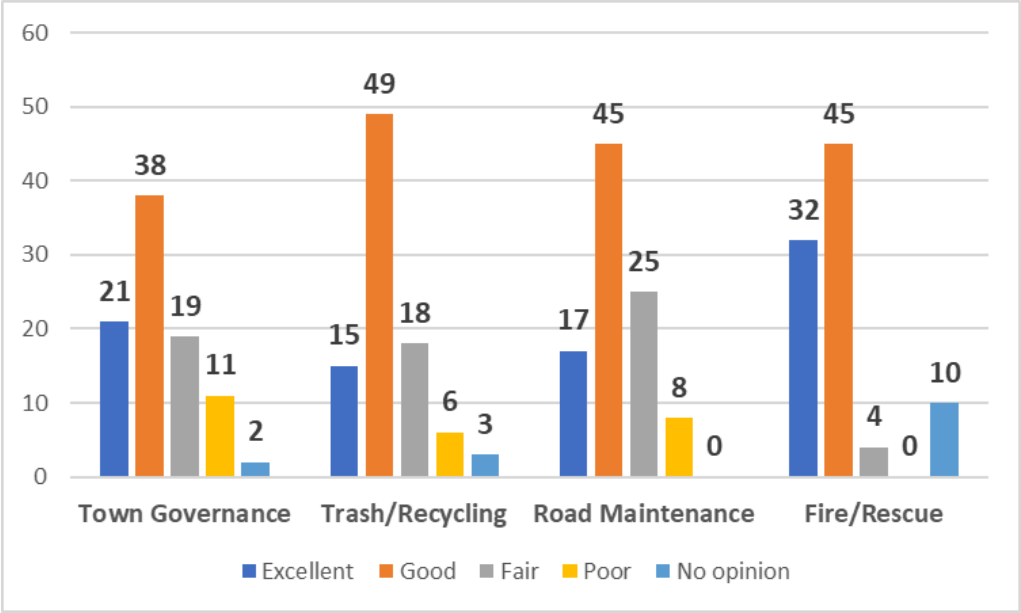
58. If you were impacted by previous flooding events, please specify how? Please specify specific areas of the town, roads, culverts, bridges, etc... *(36 responses)*

- **Infrastructure Damage and Road Closures (25)** The most common impacts were washed-out roads (including specific mentions of Burroughs Road and South Wheelock Road), damaged driveways (some privately repaired), and issues with bridges (e.g., Minister Hill Bridge developing a sinkhole, one bridge missing for two floods, and another being partially washed out). Several responses mentioned damaged culverts, specifically citing Route 122/Fall Brook Road, and the Sparhawk culvert. Impacts included being cut off for a couple of days due to washed-out roads and a restaurant having to close.
- **Property Damage (7):** Impacts to private property included basements getting wet, loss of yard items, water flowing through properties and into houses, and loss of land into streams.

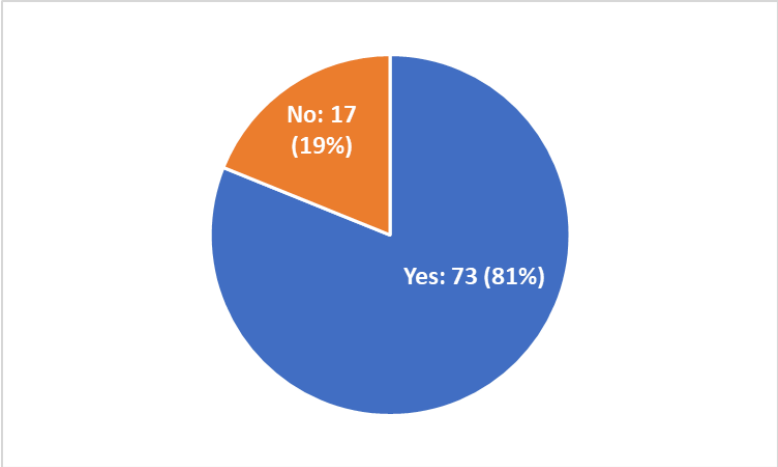
One respondent noted minor damage under $2,000, and another mentioned having to borrow a tractor to fix a washed-out driveway without FEMA assistance.

- **Other Areas of Impact (4):** Specific locations cited for issues include Burroughs Road, South Wheelock Road, Route 122, the culvert by Fall Brook Road, Class 4 roads, and Peak Road runoff.

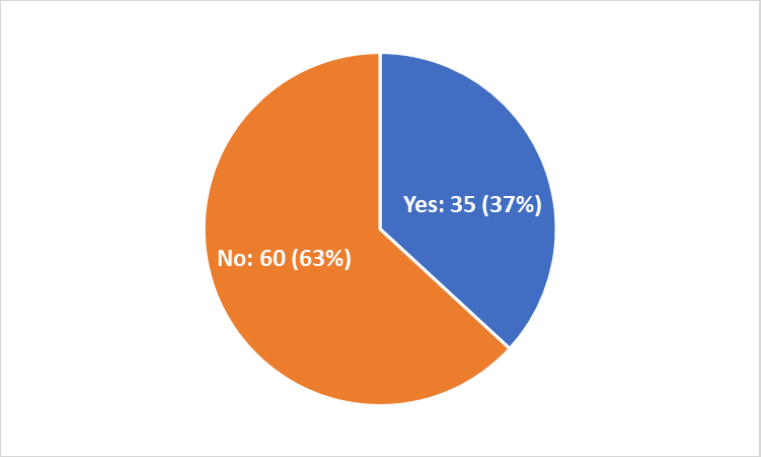
59. How do you rate the following?



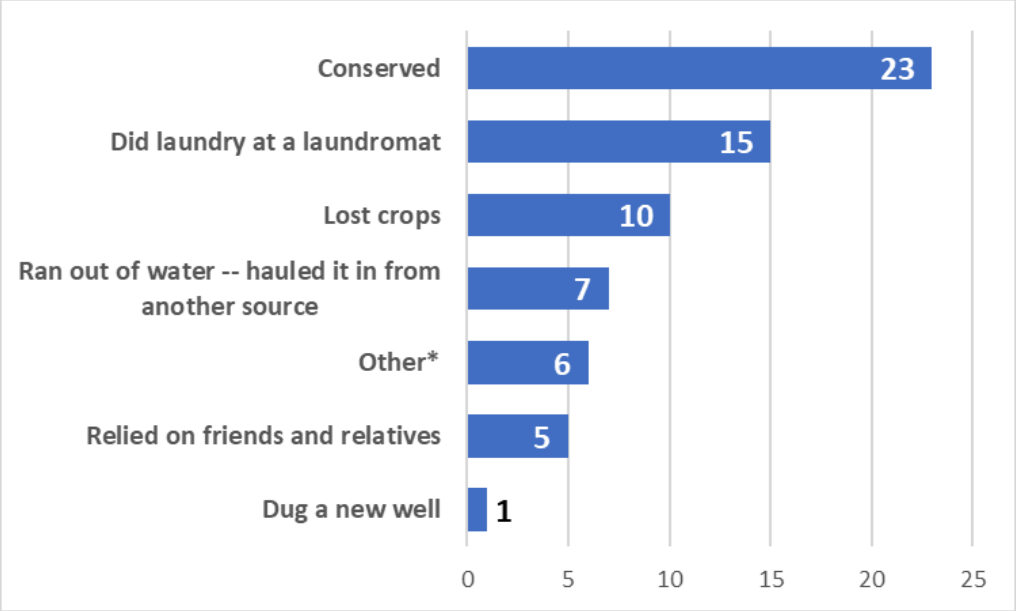
60. Do you feel that Wheelock would benefit from stormwater control and flood resilience by taking steps to protect the areas around rivers? *(89 responses)*



61. Are you affected by the current drought? *(95 responses)*

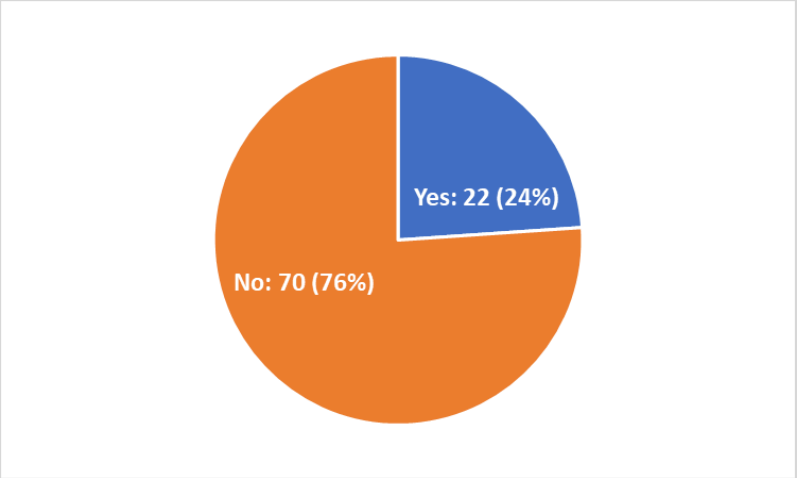


62. If yes, how are you affected? (Select all that apply) *(38 responses)*



**Other included collected rainwater, worried, pond and streams dried out, water level in pond dropped, lived like the Clampetts, trees stressed, affected by neighbors.*

63. Do you attend Select Board Meetings either in-person or virtual? (*92 responses*)



64. If no, why do you not participate? (*60 responses*)

Timing/Scheduling Conflicts: A significant number of respondents cite conflicts with meeting times, stating they are held at inconvenient times for people who work typical full-time jobs, during dinner time, or due to evening work obligations, time differences (for overseas work), or general time constraints/busyness.

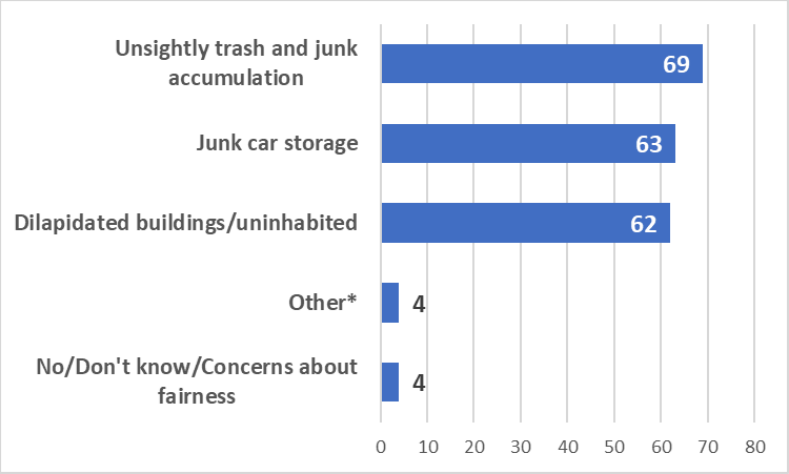
Lack of Information/Awareness: Respondents are unaware of when meetings are held, keep missing them, or were never invited.

Perceived Ineffectiveness/Governance Issues: Individuals feel participation is not an effective use of their time, believing the board/select board will do what they want regardless of citizen input, do not listen to taxpayers, show resistance to change, or run their time "like a regime," leading to a sentiment of being unheard.

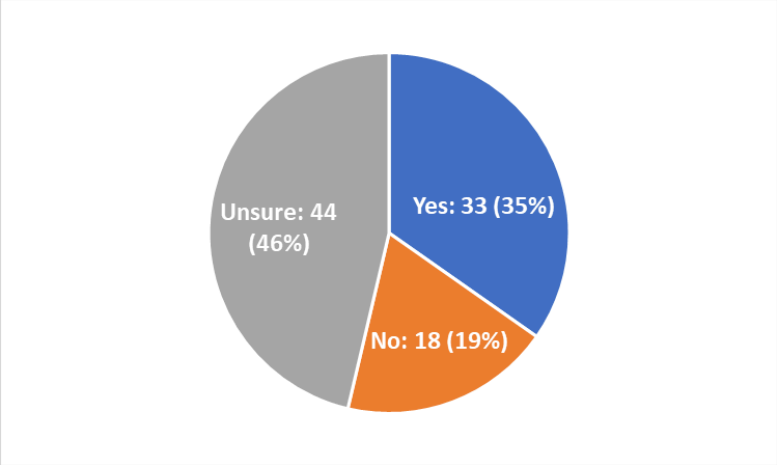
Logistical/Accessibility Barriers: Challenges include poor virtual connection quality, lack of home internet access, inability to drive after dark or due to physical problems, distance/too far to drive, and lacking the necessary equipment (e.g., a computer camera).

Lack of Interest/Priority: Some respondents state they simply don't care, lack interest, haven't made it a priority, only look for relevant topics/major issues, or are satisfied with the Selectmen's current performance. Others don't live in town.

65. Should the town be more aggressive in enforcing ordinances pertaining to: (Select all that apply.) *(78 responses)*



66. Do you feel Wheelock is headed in a positive direction? *(95 responses)*



67. Please explain your answer. *(61 responses)*

- **Governance and Leadership (25):** The current Select Board is frequently praised as actively engaged, solid, great, smart, and knowledgeable, with the chair credited for effective grant work. However, concerns exist regarding past select board issues, frequent turnover of selectmen and road crew, and a lack of swift action leading to community dissent.
- **Community Involvement and Atmosphere (13):** Some feel the town is stagnant, old, and not changing, lacking jobs, and holding meetings at unconventional times. There is a perceived lack of transparency, with the select board allegedly changing items that were voted on, and a low level of participation from townspeople, though communication efforts by the Select Board and the Wheelock Community Initiative (WCI) have been noted as positive.
- **Financial and Tax Concerns (6):** Respondents noted that taxes are increasing too quickly and becoming unaffordable, especially with recent appraisals, while feeling they receive no benefits. There is a belief that money is being wasted.

- **External and Systemic Issues (4):** The town is struggling due to restrictions from State lawmakers, problems with education quality and costs, and a reliance on mostly older volunteers, suggesting a shift to a county government structure with paid professionals for sustainability is needed. The loss of economic vitality in the region (NEK) and the impact of state-level rules on Wheelock are also concerns.
- **Infrastructure and Projects (2):** Frustration over the inability to overcome the "hump" regarding the town hall/garage project. Lack of road maintenance (grading and plowing) suggests funding or spending improvement is needed.
- **Other (9):** Some did not have an opinion or were not informed enough. Others expressed satisfaction, while another voiced frustration with general stagnation.

68. What are the three biggest challenges you feel the town is currently facing? *(69 responses)*

- **Financial and Tax Burden (25):** Issues include financial challenges,rising property taxes, a limited tax base, overspending, and the unaffordability of living here. Difficulty in securing funds impacts the ability to plan long-term and address immediate needs like road maintenance and facility improvements.
- **Socioeconomic Issues (15):** Challenges include substance abuse, crime, a lack of regional employment with good-paying jobs, and limited affordable or middle housing options.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities (13):** Concerns include around the poor condition and maintenance of roads, culverts, and bridges. Additionally, the Town Hall is not ADA accessible, and there is a need to move the town garage out of the flood zone due to flood vulnerability.
- **Community Engagement and Demographics (6):** The town faces challenges with an aging population, a lack of youthful leadership, and a limited sense of community engagement, with many citing a need for greater participation in town governance and events. There is also concern about attracting young families and building a stable local economy.
- **Climate and Resilience (4):** Issues with flood resiliency and the need for regulations, catching up on deferred maintenance damaged by flooding, and dealing with overall climate change impacts (more droughts and floods).
- **Other (6):** Miscellaneous responses include lack of participation in local government, frustration with state government, and lack of goods and services.

69. Are there any issues you feel the planning committee should address when updating the town plan? *(41 responses)*

Fiscal responsibility and taxation (6): Respondents emphasized the necessity of cautious expenditures to ensure the community remains financially accessible to its residents.

Making the Town attractive for development (5): Several individuals highlighted the importance of fostering an environment conducive to new residents and employment opportunities. While some suggested addressing the removal of scrap vehicles and property clutter—noting the limited efficacy of monetary penalties—another proposed that enhancing the municipal water infrastructure would be a primary driver for local business attraction.

Municipal Infrastructure and Amenities (12): Feedback regarding town assets included prioritizing ADA accessibility and historic preservation at the Town Hall. There is also interest in developing the surrounding grounds into community spaces like parks or playgrounds, alongside requests for village sidewalks and general road maintenance. Administratively, respondents expressed a desire for increased grant-seeking capabilities and better staffing, provided these don't inflate the budget.

Environmental Resilience (6): The Town Garage's susceptibility to flooding remains a point of concern. Suggestions included enrolling in the National Flood Insurance Program, general floodplain management, and revising the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. Building community resilience through regional partnerships and mutual aid networks was also proposed.

Governance and Mandates (6): While some residents called for stricter ordinances regarding noise, traffic speed, and land use, others warned against excessive governmental interference. Specifically, certain state-level regulations like the Act 181 Road Rule and Tier 3 designation were viewed by some as overstepping local authority.

Conservation and Landscape (4): Maintaining the area's rural identity, protecting contiguous forest lands, and preventing over development were cited as concerns.

Additional Feedback (2): One participant stressed the importance of gathering public input prior to finalizing the town plan, while another sought clarification on the municipality's stance regarding potential school district changes.