



Age-Friendly Community Assessment: Town of Chester



Photo: Chester NH Front Porch Chatter, Facebook

August 2017

Town of Chester

Age-Friendly Community Assessment



Introduction

The community assessment process—part of the larger Becoming Age-Friendly program—began in early 2017. The SNHPC team visited all 14 communities in its region, engaging town staff, board members, citizens, and other stakeholders. Staff led conversations on issues that affect seniors and millennials among the following topic areas:

- Transportation & Connections
- Recreation & Engagement
- Housing
- Business & Economic Development

While attendance was robust in most towns—despite SNHPC’s efforts to engage diverse age groups—it should be noted that results from these conversations may not necessarily reflect overall town demographics. For instance, some towns’ attendees were primarily seniors; therefore, responses may naturally be more senior-oriented. Feedback gleaned from community conversations has been supplemented with sample data from a community survey that was widely distributed, and which saw 641 responses from across the region.

These two sources of information dovetailed to create this document: a 12-page summary of age-friendliness in each municipality, most of which came from townspeople themselves. The hope is for these documents to become a valuable resource to assess current age-friendliness, as well as to constructively evaluate what improvements might lead municipalities toward a more age-friendly future.



Photo: SNHPC Staff



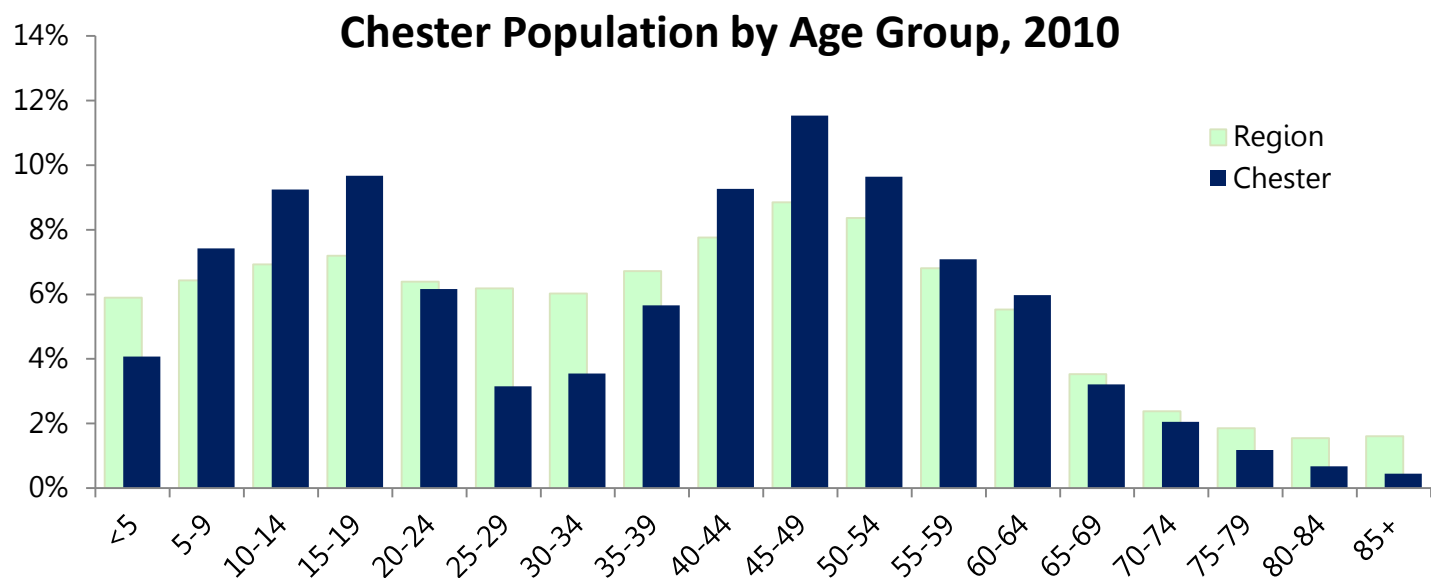
Community Snapshot

Chester, NH is located in Rockingham County, abutting the towns of Auburn, Candia, Raymond, Fremont, Sandown, and Derry. Chester is a rural community with connectivity to NH Route 101 outside the town via NH Routes 102 and 121.



The name Chester came from Cheshire County, England, whose county seat is also Chester. Several surrounding towns were actually carved from an original 100 square-mile settlement grant made by the Governor of Massachusetts in 1722, including

Derryfield—present-day Manchester. The Chester Academy serves students from kindergarten through 8th grade, and high schoolers attend Pinkerton Academy in Derry. The town is especially renowned during the fall season for its widely participated-in display of scarecrows along major roads, drawing visitors from across the region.



Chester has a much higher ratio of children age 5-19 than the regional average. The millennial population shrinks down fast relative to the regional average. The share of senior residents 65 and better also is less than the regional average, suggesting that seniors may face challenges with housing or transportation choices.

Community Assessment: March 24, 2017

20 in attendance, including town residents and representatives from Fire Dept., Police Dept., Zoning Board, Lions Club, Maintenance Dept., Planning Board, Building Dept., Conservation Commission, and Library Board of Trustees.



What is the community doing well?

- Chester's recreational opportunities draw visitors from all of NH; Raymond Rd. **Scarecrows and Halloween festivities** are popular.
- **Community is dynamic with sharing info** via town website, Chester Cable TV, town sign, Tri-Town, and social media pages.
- Town incentivizes developers who supply diverse housing with **significant density bonuses** (25%) if certain conditions are met.
- There is **property tax relief** for seniors, veterans, and persons with disabilities.



Where is there room for improvement?

- **Non-vehicular transportation options** (including sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure) **are non-existent**. There is a desire to connect the town's trail network(s), but no collective effort to make it happen.
- Seniors looking to downsize have **very few housing choices**.
- Although there is a desire for larger commercial presence, limited commercial zones and abutter concerns combine to create a **challenging development atmosphere**.



Transportation & Connections

Highlights:

- Residents agree it is impossible to get around town without a car
- Available transportation options: volunteer or private rideshare only (such as Lyft or Uber)
- Community walkability: rated 1 out of 10 by participants (1 being the worst or lowest score, 10 the best or highest score).
- Services like Green Cab and Uber exist, but are either expensive or not widely used.

Assets (in no particular order):

- Two exits to Route NH 101 are nearby (via Towns of Auburn and Candia)
- Less than 50 miles from the ocean, big city (Boston), and the mountains
- Only 15 miles from Manchester-Boston Regional Airport
- Derry Community Caregivers serves Chester residents

Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

- No fixed-route transit available
- With neither sidewalks nor shoulders along the roads, walkable and bikeable choices are extremely limited in Chester.
- Trail system does not function as a connection between points for most residents—connecting the dots could significantly improve community livability.

Basic Data:



Road Maintenance
Road Agent



WalkScore
28 of 100



Transit available?
Very Limited



Nearest Highway
3 miles

Access to Internet:

Broadband Coverage:

- WiFi available at town office, library, schools, etc.
- Broadband connectivity and radio signal are weak in several parts of town, specifically near Lane Road.

Housing

Highlights

- The majority of housing types in Chester are single families; however, there are allowances for more diverse options.
- There are a number of proposed and under construction open space subdivisions.

Assets(in no particular order):

- There are significant density bonuses to developers that want to build senior or affordable housing (25%) driven by market conditions
- There is property tax relief for veterans and seniors.

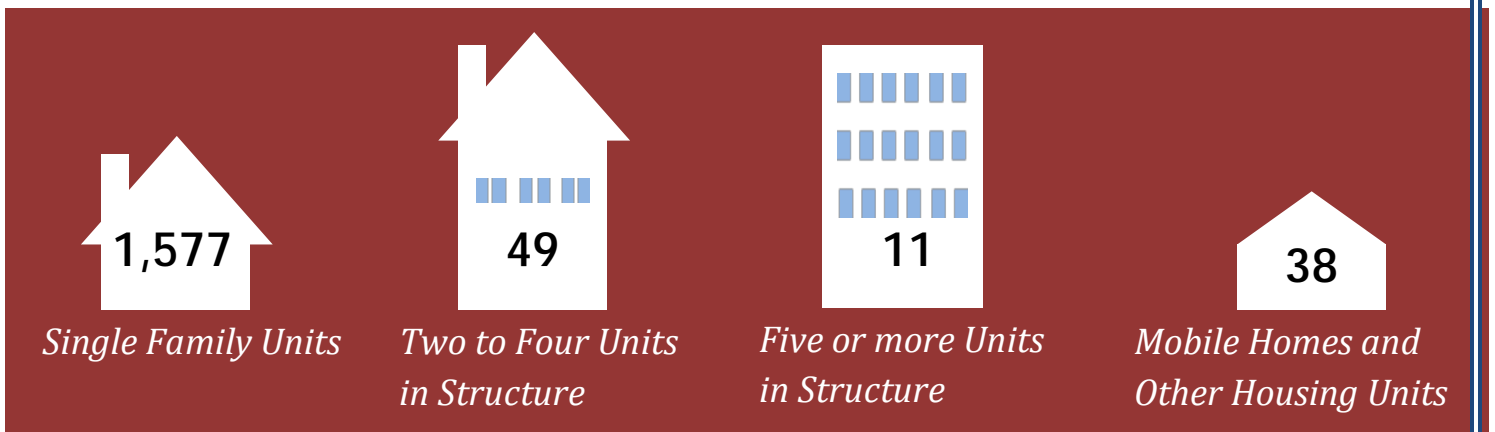


“The big problem for our youth is that they don’t have options to rent or buy anything affordable in town. The product just is not there in Chester.”

-Chester Resident

Barriers/Opportunities(in no particular order):

- Some developers were interested in building continuing care retirement communities but backed away due to lack of precedent in community.
- Concerns around groundwater supply could hinder further development/growth.
- Conversions of single-family homes to multi-families are prohibited.
- Universal design considerations could be made to accommodate senior concerns.
- Very little housing diversity, especially a lack of options for first homebuyers or seniors wanting to downsize.





Recreation & Engagement



Photo: Chester NH Front Porch Chatter, Facebook

Highlights:

- Chester Police's "Good Morning, Chester" program connects police with aging community members (as availability lets them) to call/visit during the day and see how they are doing.
- Chester NH Front Porch Chatter Facebook Page and Tri Town Times are successful at communicating local happenings to residents

Assets (in no particular order):

- Chester Public Library – features free public wi-fi and puts on numerous programs
- Stevens Memorial Hall & Chester Historical Society
- Parks & Recreation Department's activities and facilities are heavily used
- Chester Academy
- Perception is that Chester is effective at marketing events
- Cops & Bobbers Fishing Event
- Town Fair

Barriers/Opportunities (in no particular order):

- Breweries or bars would go a long way among Chester residents of all ages.
- Organizing volunteers with community need.



Business & Economic Development



Photo: Chester NH Front Porch Chatter, Facebook

Highlights:

- Many residents agreed that some type of facility for the elderly—like assisted living or an aerobics studio—would be welcome additions to Chester.
- There is curiosity among developers to construct self-storage facilities in Chester.

Assets:

- Some businesses offer a senior discount (Comcast and Hamm Septic Services were specifically mentioned by the focus group).
- NH-102 connectivity to Derry businesses is very popular among residents
- Chester General Store
- Civic facilities at intersection of Raymond Road and Chester Street succeed as placemakers, thereby giving a local identity to the town center and its businesses.

Barriers/Opportunities:

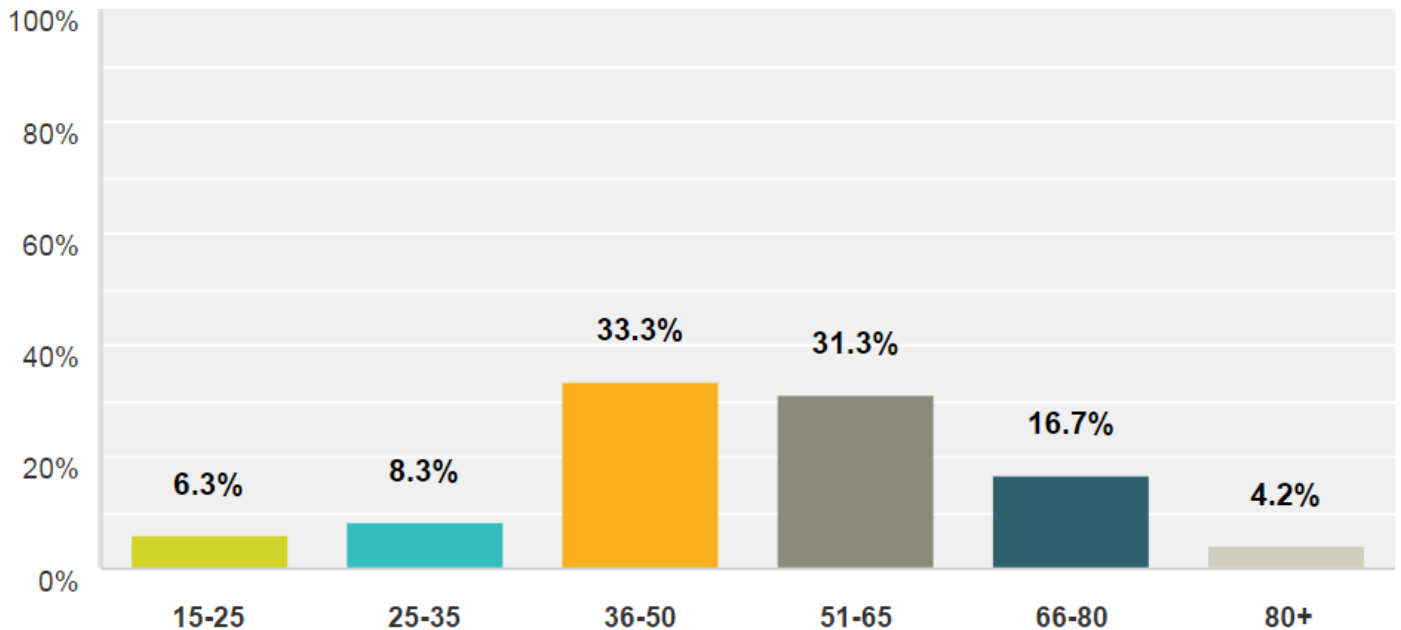
- Lack of water, sewer, and gas is an obstacle to business growth in some areas.
- Transportation improvements would be helpful for seniors trying to frequent local businesses, especially as more of them age.
- Few businesses in Chester beyond agriculture—opportunities to expand upon agrotourism in Chester exist.
- Millennials said the presence of at least one fast food or fast casual chain in town would be desirable, such as a Dunkin Donuts or McDonalds.



Survey Says...

From February through April of 2017, The Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC) embarked on a “Becoming Age-Friendly” program. A resident survey was hosted by SNHPC and sponsored by AARP, Tufts Health Plan Foundation, and the City of Manchester Health Department to gather ordinary citizens’ input on topics including recreation, transportation, housing, and beyond. A total of 641 responses were received, including 48 from Chester.

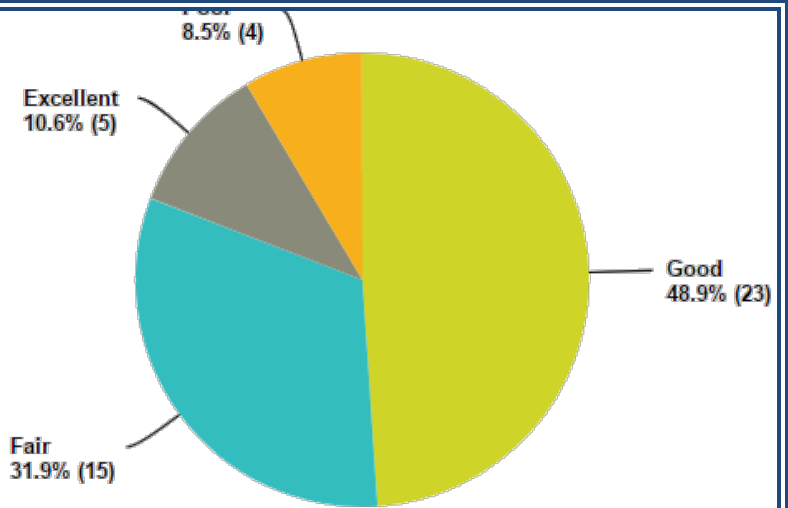
What is your age?



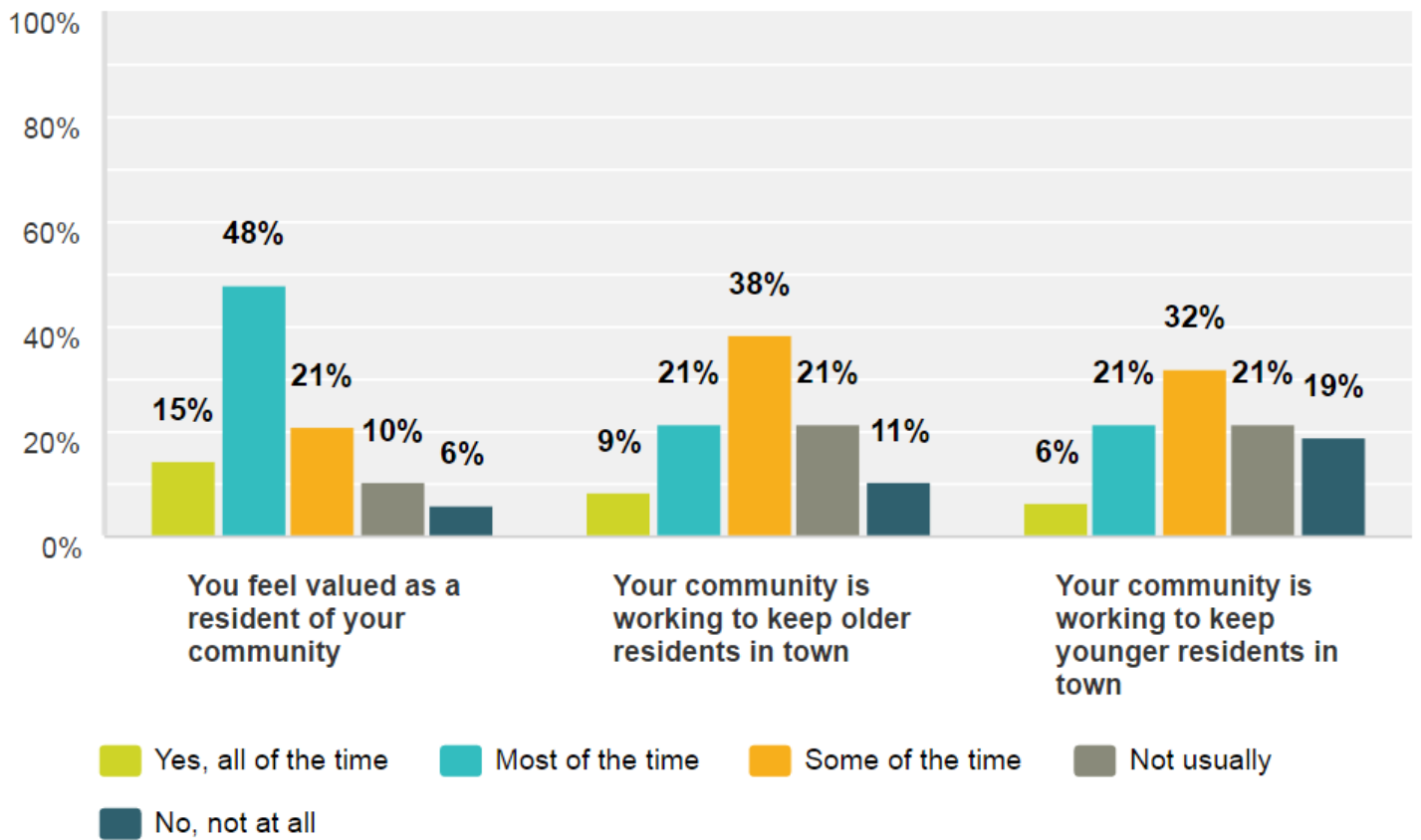
The response rates from residents aged 36-50 were much higher than other communities in the SNHPC region, whereas the response rates from residents aged 25-35 and 66-80 were lower.

How would you rate your community as a place for people to live as they age?

Nearly 60% of residents surveyed agree Chester is a good or excellent place to live as residents age. This was consistent with the rating for the region as a whole.

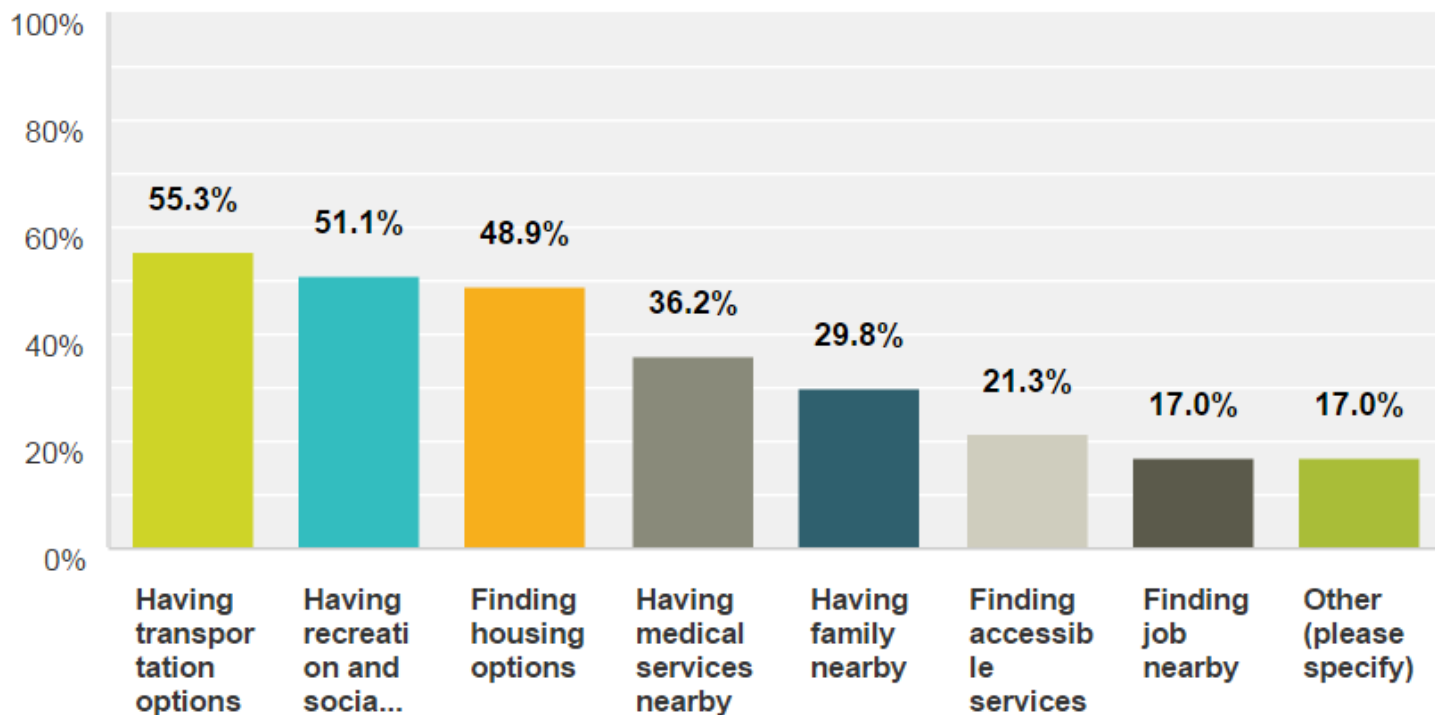


Community Value



More than half of Chester residents surveyed (63%) feel valued as a resident all or most of the time. There is a similar distribution of residents surveyed on how they feel their community works to keep older residents and younger residents in town.

What concerns you the most about aging in your community?



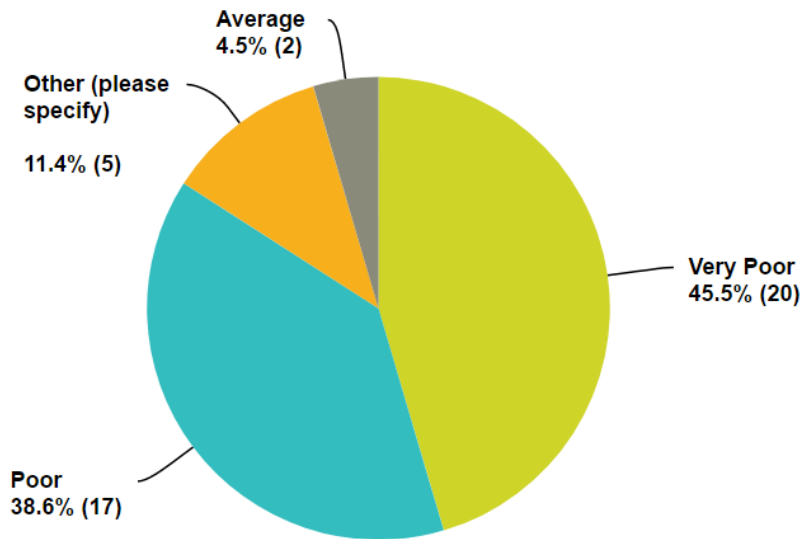
Transportation was the top concern among surveyed Chester residents, followed closely by having recreation and social engagement opportunities and housing options. This was consistent across most communities in the study area. Several stakeholders at the community assessment discussed a desire to see better road connectivity through Chester, especially if it reduces congestion on NH-102 and provides shorter walking alternatives to residents.

What is the single most important change that would enable you to stay in your home/community?

Town Offer **Transportation** Family **Taxes**
Community **Affordable Housing Cost**

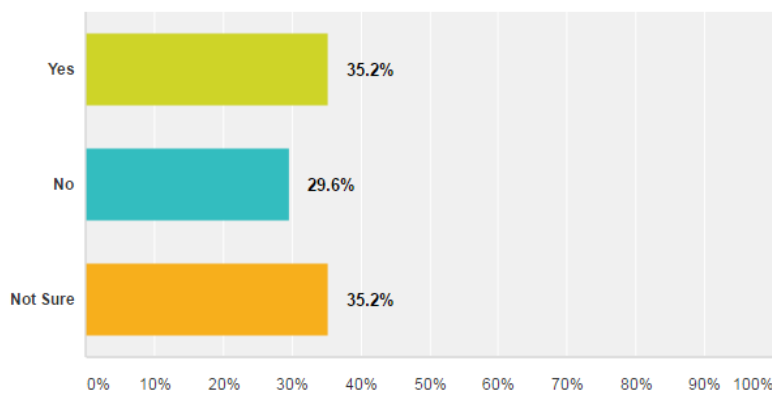
Like many other municipalities, transportation and lower taxes were mentioned most, followed by Affordable Housing.

How would you rate your community's transportation options if you were unable to drive?



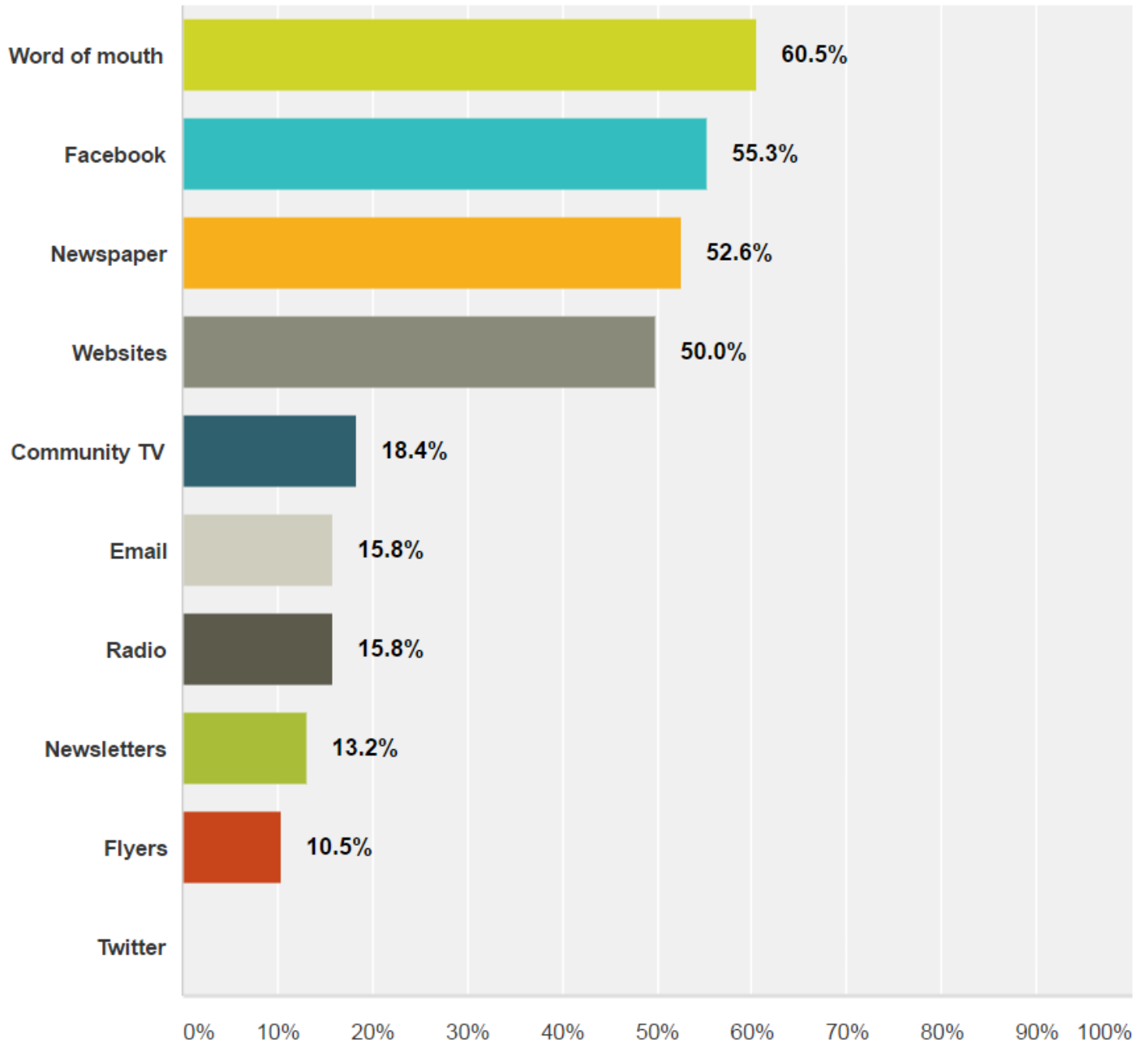
In terms of transportation options, no residents responded "good"; 84.4% responded "poor" or "very poor", which was among the highest of SNHPC communities. Without any multi-modal infrastructure, a lot of residents agree more can be done to improve transportation.

Whether you wanted to move into your first home/unit or move into a smaller home/unit, does your community offer appealing alternatives?



The distribution of resident responses was pretty evenly distributed on this question.

How do you find information about community services and events?



Word of Mouth and Facebook proved to be the #1 and #2 methods of finding information about community services/events, followed by newspaper and websites. Not a single resident surveyed claims to use twitter to learn about community services/events. Although Chester features its own community TV—a feature not offered in some communities—only 18.4% of residents surveyed claim they find information about community services/events through that medium.



Acknowledgements

The Becoming Age-Friendly program was administered by the *Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC)*, and funded by a grant from the *Tufts Health Plan Foundation*. The program received funding and resource support from *AARP NH* and *City of Manchester Health Department*.

Becoming Age-Friendly received regional support from many stakeholders across the Greater Manchester region, including members from the following organizations:

Access Portsmouth	Manchester Young Professionals Network
Alliance for Healthy Aging	NH Builders Association
Bike Manchester	NH Department of Health & Human Services
Community Caregivers	NH Endowment of Health
Easterseals	NH Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)
EngAGING NH	NH Institute of Art
Granite YMCA	NH Institute of Politics
Grantmakers in Aging	NH State Committee on Aging
Greater Derry Londonderry Chamber of Commerce	Plan NH
Infinity Realty Group	Regional Trails Coordinating Council
InTown Manchester	Saint Anselm College
JSA, Inc.	Service Link
Manchester-Boston Regional Airport	Southern New Hampshire University
Manchester Chamber of Commerce	Stay. Work. Play.
Manchester Community College	Transport NH
Manchester Public TV	Union Leader
Manchester Regional Area Committee on Aging	UNH Institute on Disability
Manchester Transit Authority	UNH Manchester

The Town of Chester featured dozens of participants between the community assessment and the resident survey. The program’s Community Representatives from Chester included:

Andrew Hadik	Deb Munson
Debra Doda	Stephen Landau

This town report was prepared by the Becoming Age-Friendly team and staff from SNHPC:

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