# Age-Friendly Community Assessment:
# Town of Derry

Photo: Derry Library

## August 2017

# Town of Derry
## 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

Derry, NH is located in Rockingham County, abutting the towns of Auburn, Chester, Sandown, Hampstead, Atkinson, Salem, Windham and Londonderry.  It is the second-largest community in the SNHPC region, with a walkable downtown as well as many residential areas and commercial developments.



An event in MacGregor Park

Although first settled in 1719, Derry was not incorporated until 1827. For over 100 years it was part of Londonderry, which also included all of Windham and portions of Manchester, Salem, and Hudson. The town was named for the Isle of Derry, Ireland, the Gaelic word Doire meaning oak woods. Derry is the location of poet Robert Frost's homestead, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites, and the birthplace of both General John Stark and astronaut Alan Shepard. Two of the oldest private schools in America were founded here as well, Pinkerton Academy, founded in 1814 and still in operation, and the Adams Female Seminary.  As of 2015, Derry's estimated population was 33,202, making it the fourth-largest municipality in New Hampshire and second-largest in the SNHPC region.



**Derry Population by Age Group, 2010**
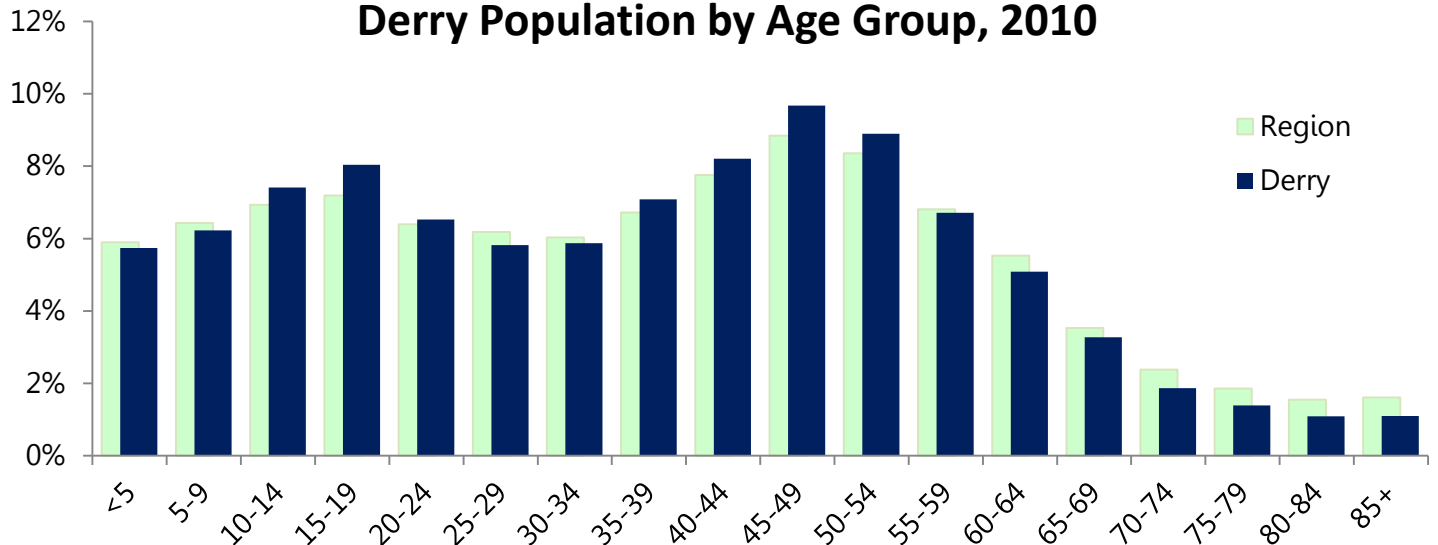
Derry's population closely reflects that of the region but unlike its neighbors (i.e. Windham), the cohort of 10-19 and 35-55 populations exceed the regional averages.

## Community Assessment: April 4, 2017

15+ in attendance, including reps from Planning Dept, Senior Services, Recreation Dept, Library, Church, Community Caregivers, Community Alliance for Teen Safety, several senior residents

## What is the community doing well?

- Derry offers a wide variety of housing types.
- The rail trail is a cherished asset and growing recreational draw for all ages.
- Downtown walkability is generally well-rated.
- Pinkerton Academy is a great educational/cultural resource.
- Community Alliance for Regional Transportation (CART) and Caregivers are great resources.

## Where is there room for improvement?

- Derry has one of the highest property tax rates in the state.
- More central transit system would be helpful for bus commutes.
- There is a need for higher-paying jobs to keep millennials and others from commuting south to Greater Boston.
- There could be more assisted and affordable 55+ living.
- Although a robust organization, Caregivers' senior ride program only has 150 volunteers & has had to turn away seniors in need due to a lack of volunteer drivers.

# Transportation & Connections

## Highlights:
- Downtown walkability rated between 4 and 7 of 10 (best) by participants. Walkability varies greatly depending on where you are in town.
- The rail trail and its advocacy group are a huge boon to the town.
- Stop, Look, Wave pavement markings unique in Southern NH region.

## Assets (in no particular order):
- CART
- Community Caregivers
- Green Cab
- Rail trail – investments have been made, and there is a great link to downtown.
- Stop, Look, Wave pavement markings work.

## Barriers/Opportunities:
- Rail trail expansion
- Fixed-route transit service
- Lack of a designed central transportation system – "wait for the bus, get on and go"
- 25-minute drive from one side of community to the other
- No bike lane downtown
- Walking downtown at night is especially dangerous; some sidewalks poorly-maintained, lighting can be poor
- Misplaced crosswalks
- Rotary is very dangerous
- Pinkerton congestion(drop off) is cataclysmic; can take hour to get through it

## Basic Data:

| *Mi. of town roads* | *WalkScore* | *Rail Trail Length* | *Nearest Interstate* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 165 | 78 of 100 | 4 miles | 1 mile |

## Access to Internet:
- There is free public Wi-Fi at the Library, but NOT at municipal center
- Broadband reliability depends upon provider, but town is generally well-covered

# 🏠 Housing

## Highlights

- Just about every type of housing is allowed in some part of Derry
- In the last five years, most new builds have been single-family in East Derry
- There have also been some two-bedroom townhouses
- 13 market-rate units on Fordway were recently constructed; these are marketed to young professionals due to proximity to downtown and I-93

## Assets:

- Easy access to highways
- Variety of cozy neighborhoods.
- A lot of housing types are available near the town center of Derry, making it easier to walk from home to most places.

> "Many apartment complexes are considered 'affordable' at $1,100-1,200 per month."
>
> – **Derry resident**

## Barriers/Opportunities:

- Property tax rates a HUGE issue: $30 per $1,000, 20th highest of all NH municipalities
  - 2/3 of taxes go to school system
  - School budget ~ $80 million, $100 million with Pinkerton
  - Only tax relief for being blind or a veteran
- Another barrier is that seniors do not have assistance available when moving
- Building and land costs are high; estimate for a low/average-priced lot: $120k
- Tax relief for veterans and the blind
- More assisted living and AFFORDABLE 55+ living
- More resources for aging in place

**8,633**
*Single Family Units*
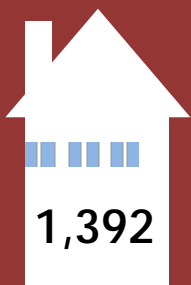
**1,392**
*Two to Four Units in Structure*
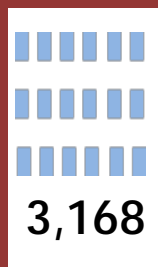
**3,168**
*Five or more Units in Structure*

**416**
*Mobile Homes and Other Housing Units*

# ecreation & Engagement

## Highlights:
- The main library (and to a lesser extent, Taylor Library) provide many useful services and programs for all ages, including free access to public computers and wifi
- A Derry Senior Advisory Committee works with the police department to prevent senior scams, among other services
- Local churches offer many other outreach programs

## Assets (in no particular order):
- Derry History Museum in basement of opera house
- Several cinemas/theatres, including Stockbridge (Pinkerton)
- Frost Farm/Hyla Brook Poets
- Places of Worship
    - o First Parish
    - o Transfiguration
    - o St. Thomas
    - o Synagogue


Photo courtesy of Derry Public Library

- 2 breweries, 1 winery
- Go Green Club (gardening)
- Multigenerational opportunities
- Accessible trails
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- Splash Pad
- Broadview Farm public garden
- Parks & Rec Department coordinates with sports leagues
- Marion Gerrish Center – serves meals on wheels, other senior programs
- Veterans Hall, Library Meeting room heavily used
- 12 parks, playgrounds, etc., including Hood Park, Carr Park, Ball Park, McGregor Park
- Adult classes proliferate at area schools

## Barriers/Opportunities:
- Partnerships between local organizations
- Better marketing of town programs
- A centralized information source for town happenings/events
- Inadequate parking at library
- A new town website that is more confusing than the last one

# 💵 Business & Economic Development

## Highlights:

- Tupelo Music Hall just moved to Derry from Londonderry
- Taxes are stifling; the rates are unfriendly to business development

## Assets (in no particular order):


Derry CBD

- T-Bones & Hannaford offer senior discounts
- Many pharmacies will deliver
- Community allows for mixed-use zoning
- Yarn & Fiber store caters to senior needs
- Rail Trail Café caters to millennials
- Chamber of Commerce

## Barriers/Opportunities:

- High taxes
- Lack of available land
- Higher-paying jobs would attract more millennials; currently, they are lured to significantly higher pay scales 45 minutes to the south in Boston

# 🤝 Partnerships



- Police/fire internship programs
- Parks & Rec department/Caregivers
- Parks & Rec/school – senior-senior dance
- HS/ MS/volunteer ops
- Heritage Commission/Library
- Many, many others!

# ✎ 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 to gather ordinary citizens' input on topics including recreation, transportation, housing, and beyond.  A total of 641 responses were received, including 61 from Derry.

## What is your age?
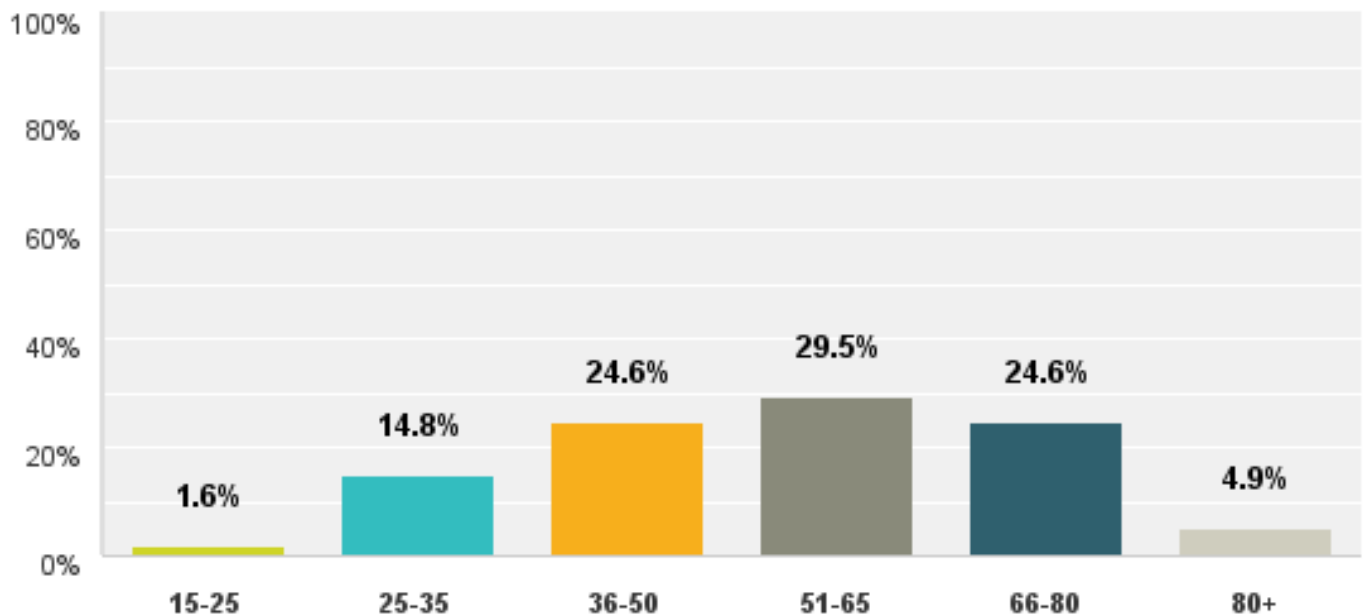


There was a fairly diverse range of respondent ages; a greater percentage of respondents came from the 36-50 age category (24.6%) than in other towns, or the region as a whole.

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

An equal percentage (44.3%) deemed Derry a "good" or "excellent" place to live as they age as thought it a "fair" place to live. 11.5% of respondents judged it a "poor" place to age.



Excellent
3.3% (2)

Poor
11.5% (7)

Fair
44.3% (27)

Good
41.0% (25)

## Community Value



- You feel valued as a resident of your community: 7%, 26%, 36%, 23%, 8%
- Your community is working to keep older residents in town: 3%, 25%, 38%, 21%, 13%
- Your community is working to keep younger residents in town: 8%, 30%, 28%, 27%, 7%

Legend:
- Yes, all of the time
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Not usually
- No, not at all
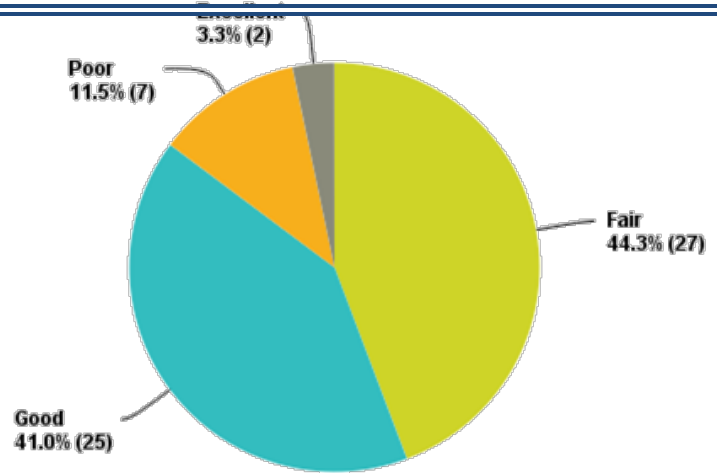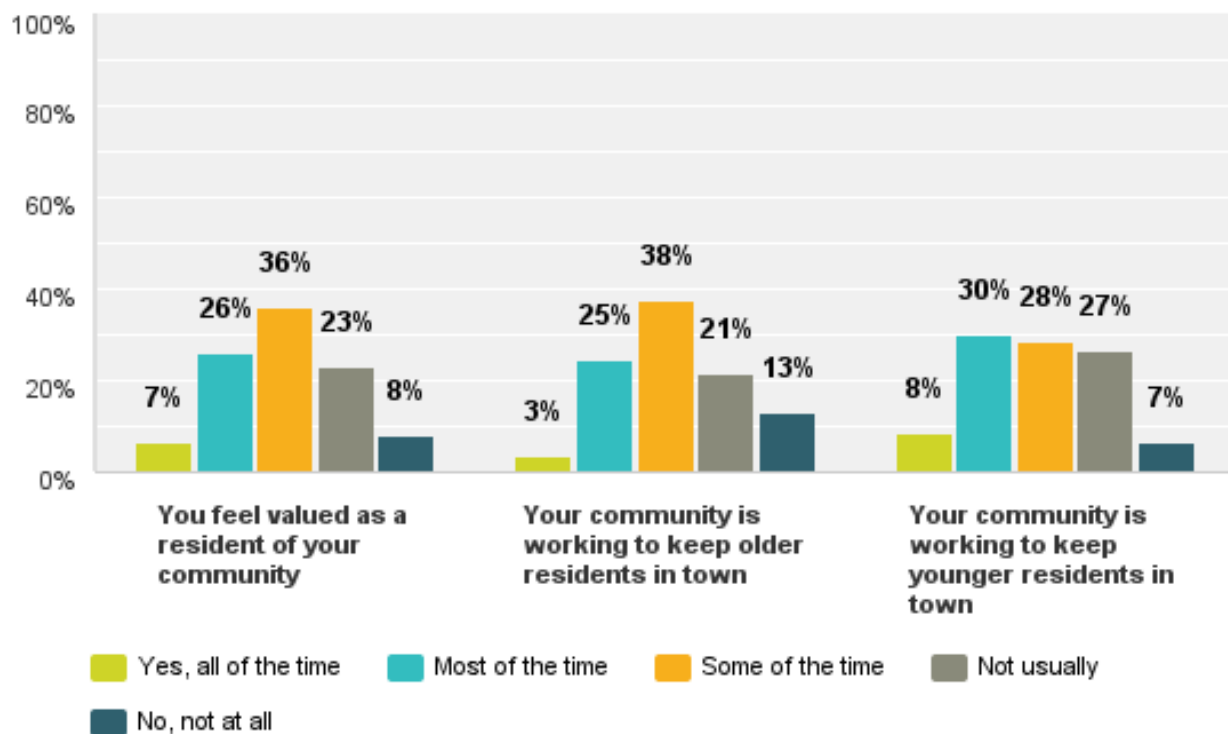
In contrast to Goffstown, where 79% of residents felt valued most or all of the time, that number was only 33% in Derry. Nearly an equal amount (31%) responded "not usually" or "not at all" to this question. While the reasons behind this are not fully known, there were some comments regarding entrenched political interests in town, and the inability of those outside the "inner circle" to have their voices heard.

Only 28% felt that the community was working to keep older residents in town most or all of the time – 38% felt the same way about younger residents. 34% responded "not usually" or "not at all" to this question.

## What concerns you the most about aging in your community?
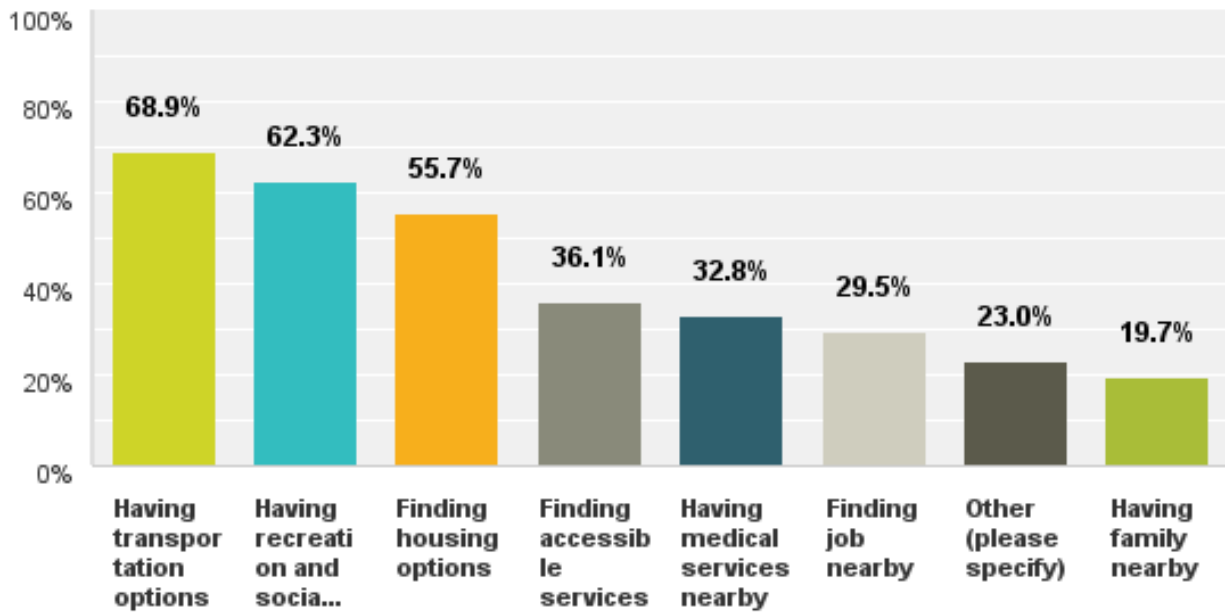
The top three concerns among Derry residents were transportation options (68.9%), Recreation (62.3%), and Housing (55.7%). None of the other concerns registered over 36.1%.

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



Taxes and transportation were mentioned most, followed by community, affordable housing, and services.

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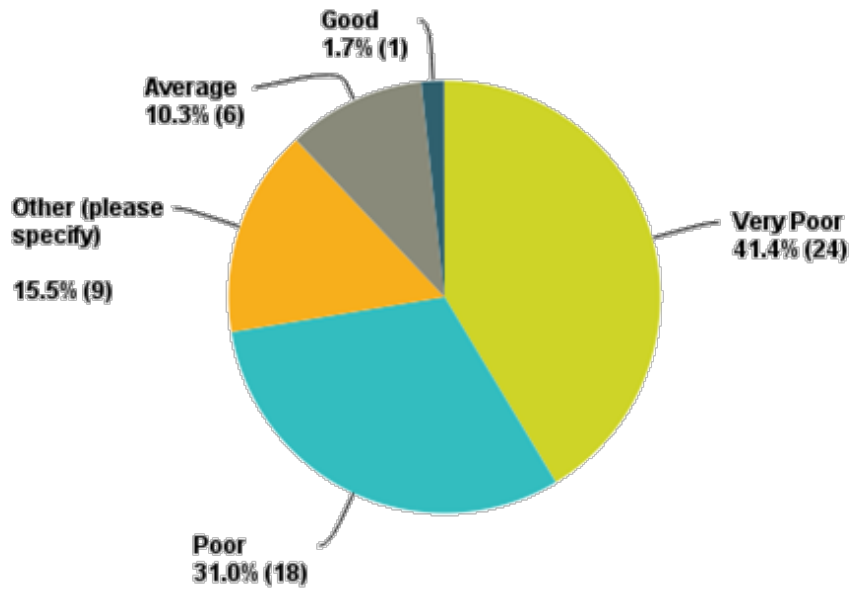


In terms of transportation options, only 1.7% (1 person) responded "good"; 72.4% responded "poor" or "very poor", mirroring trends seen in nearly all SNHPC communities.

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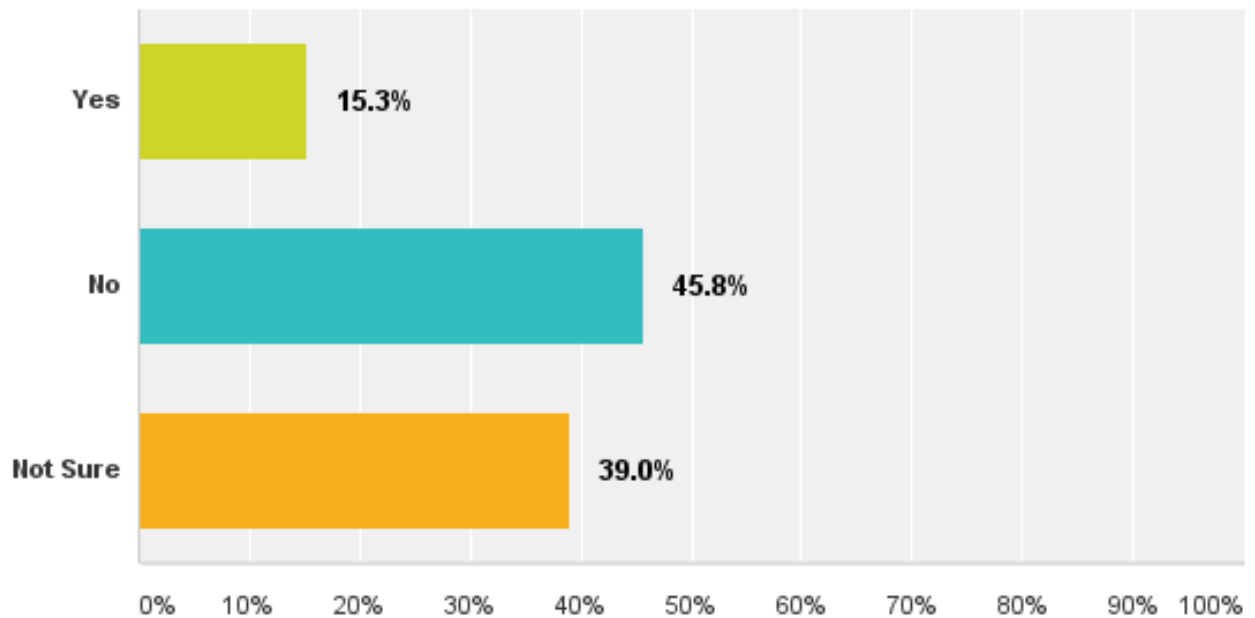


Only 15.3% of respondents thought the community offers appealing alternatives if one wanted to move into his/her first unit or a smaller home. This was far less than other municipalities in the SNHPC region.

# How do you find information about community services and events?
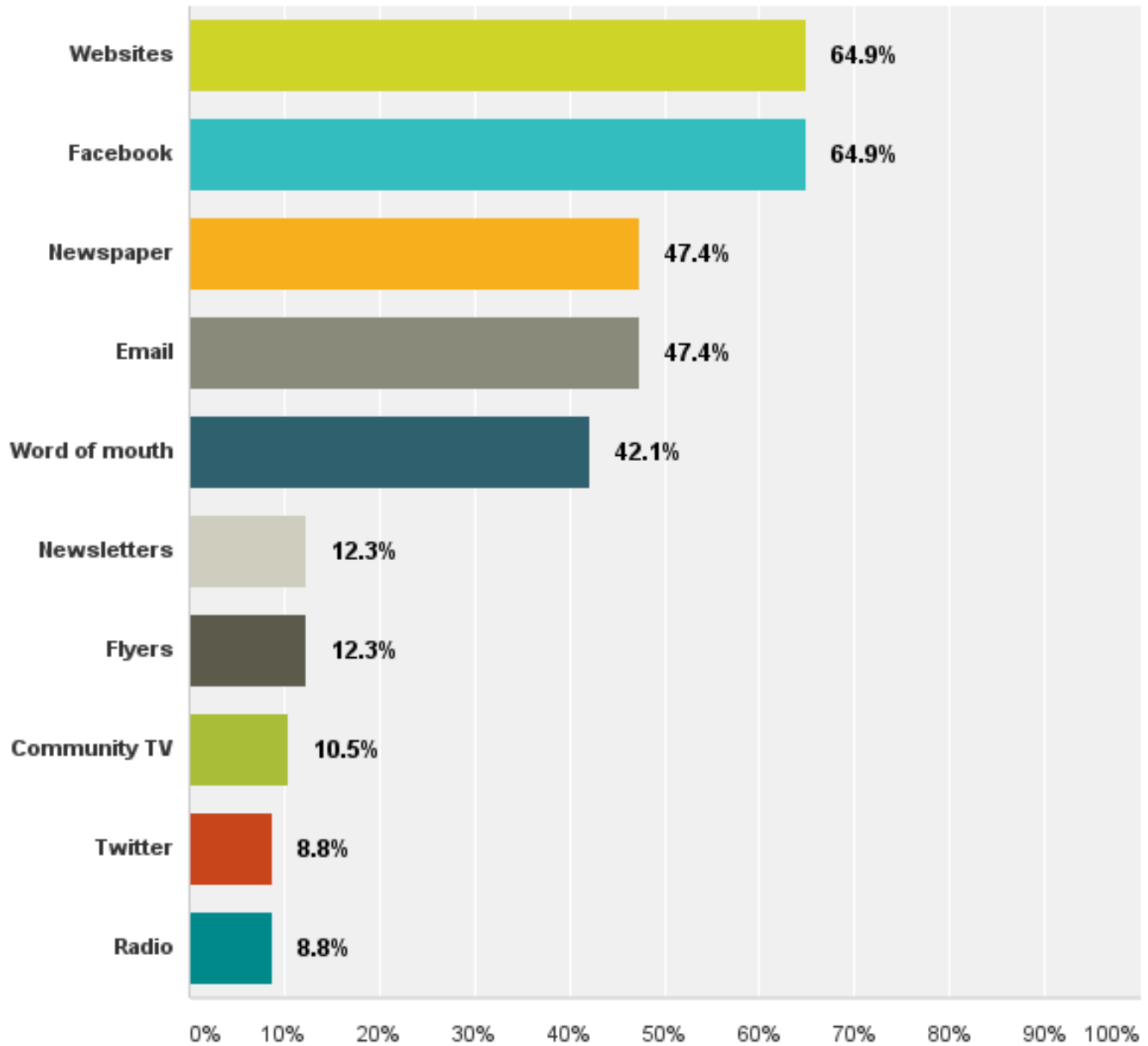


Websites and Facebook tied as the #1 method of finding information about community services/ events. However, newspapers and email also ranked highly (47.4% each). Radio and Twitter (8.8% each) were the least common methods of getting information about services and events.

# Acknowledgements