

Strong Neighborhoods: A Quality of Life Survey in New Auburn, Auburn, Maine

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Executive Summary

This project was completed in collaboration with the City of Auburn's Department of Community Development and the Citizens Advisory Committee in order to help determine the allocation of funds from a potential Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Block grant for the city of Auburn, Maine. This project involved conducting a quality-of-life survey of local residents in order to evaluate the current situation in the three blighted neighborhoods. The overall goal was to gather public opinion so that the Citizen's Advisory Committee and the Director of Community Development could make informed decisions about future neighborhood projects and improvements.

Urban blight is often defined as simply the decay and deterioration of an urban area due to neglect or age. However, "... an ambiguous conceptualization of blight can lead to mismatches between actual urban conditions and codified public policy targets" (Weaver and Bagchi-Sen, 2013, 61). Weaver and Bagchi-Sen make it clear in this quote that because it is difficult to define or conceptualize blight, it is often poorly addressed with public policies. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that urban blight is a complex and dynamic term. Furthermore, it is important to remember that it is often faulty city planning, and not the people themselves, that result in the dilapidation of urban areas. People do not embody blight. It is important to distinguish people living in blighted areas and blight itself (Weaver, 2013, 62).

Although it is often traditionally those in power who are given the opportunity to determine the content of a landscape, it is those directly experiencing blight who can provide the best advice on how to address issues in their neighborhoods. Therefore, for this project we will be conducting quality of life surveys in three Auburn neighborhoods affected by blight: New Auburn, Union Street, and Downtown. The implementation of a survey seems to be the most effective first step towards improving the quality of life in an urban neighborhood because it is taking into account the needs of the actual residents, rather than the ideals of the policy-makers. Residents were asked to judge their respective neighborhoods based on several characteristics ranging from attractiveness to infrastructure.

The primary results from this project suggest that residents in the New Auburn neighborhood specifically would like to see the expansion of green spaces such as community gardens, bike and jogging trails, and easy access to river areas. A large percentage of residents also want to see "better" housing, although they were not asked to specify in what way. In general, residents throughout Auburn do not take full advantage of the bus system. Residents among all three neighborhood would also like to see improvements to sidewalks and unsafe street intersections.

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Introduction

Urban Blight, Renewal, and Real-World Ramifications

The development of cities is a complex process. Furthermore, words used to describe cities and development such as urban blight and renewal are hard to grasp and even more difficult to define. In situations of collaboration -- between the community, the government, and us, students, in this case -- it is integral to develop applicable and easily accessible working definitions for all the different players to utilize. In terms of this project and specifically the HUD grant, two simple words seem to hold particular importance in providing background information for our research: urban renewal and urban blight. In this section we will suggest how we can approach these topics specifically in Auburn.

Urban Renewal

Samuel Zipp provides us with a brief history of the development of urban renewal. It began with the Housing Act of 1949 that extended federal support to local governmental entities to redevelop and improve cities. The Act influenced policy-makers greatly to reevaluate the way they approached development and change in their neighborhoods, districts and states. Zipp uses the phrase "ethic of city rebuilding" to indicate the ideological building blocks upon which this movement was based (Zipp, 2012, 367). After decades of industrial poverty and city decay, this sort of mentality caught like wildfire -- modernization through "modern housing" and updated architecture forced a complete reimagining of living space. This excited policy-makers and architects alike, causing a real shift in cities. However, this mentality and movement affected different members of the community in vastly differing ways. Hand-in-hand with the "ethic of city rebuilding" arrived the concept, and implementation, of urban blight and slum clearance.

Urban Blight

Urban blight is a general concept that is integral to understanding how urban renewal works as a whole. Urban blight had a very specific definition in the 1950s, which is summarized well by Baumann and Schuyler (2008, 384):

"Modernistic planners, even those with humanistic inclinations like Bacon, focused on the city's physical plight, not on the social and economic distress, racial segregations, and income inequality underlying the evidence of urban decay. Words like "blight" and "obsolescence" slipped easily from the planners' and reform politicians' tongues. Redevelopment meant expunging those moldering old neighborhoods that planners and business leaders saw strangling the downtown economy."

Since this concept was developed, it has undergone many changes. Today, the Merriam-Webster definition of "blight" is multifaceted, ranging from "something that frustrates plans or hopes" and "something that impairs or destroys" to "a deteriorated condition," specifically in respect to urban blight. We can see that this definition still unclear and subjective.

Urban blight is often described in terms of stakeholders. This is because much of the process of treating blight within cities is approached as strictly

economic. As a result, insufficient, incorrect and often inappropriate methods of reducing blight may be utilized instead of those that may be most useful (Weaver, 2013, 62-65). Quick economic fixes to potentially long-term problems are common:

“... an ambiguous conceptualization of blight can lead to mismatches between actual urban conditions and codified public policy targets. Even the most well-intentioned of blight policies, including those that aim to fix the problem via trickle-down economic effects, insubstantially reduce blight because they fail to understand its spatial and dynamic properties” (Weaver and Bagchi-Sen, 2013, 61).

This quote highlights the importance of evaluating and understanding the physical space within cities. Once the physical space is approached in a multi-faceted and dynamic way, it is easier to assign city-wide, state-wide or even nation-wide initiatives that will better quantify urban blight. Again, the combination of “deteriorating real property conditions in a given urban area” and the ability for policy-makers or stakeholders to evaluate these issues in more than a solely economic way is crucial (Weaver, 2013, 69).

Due to the lack of objective definitions, those who are in positions of power -- the policymakers themselves -- are able to create or warp unclear definitions to best fit whatever purpose serves them. These kinds of manipulations lead to the further impoverishment of marginalized people. Our group members are not aware of the inner workings of the City of Auburn and therefore do not mean to suggest in any way that this abuse of power is currently occurring here. We simply aim to show how historically the lack of concrete definitions for development terms has led to social injustices.

Clearly, defining these terms as objectively as possible is crucial when it is being used to leverage and control physical space in cities. Therefore, the definition we wish to propose for this project is as thus: urban blight occurs when specific kinds of development within cities marginalizes, intentionally or not, certain underprivileged populations. This type of action causes an unbalanced distribution of resources, often affecting already underprivileged populations disproportionately.

Real World Ramifications

Slums, tenements, or low-income housing communities often contain some of the least privileged people in urban areas. Those in power often frame renewal and development as positive, which can perpetuate or amplify certain stereotypes of people without power. This can significantly influence the public’s opinion of certain communities, linking negative ideas of the city with negative stereotypes of those that live in the area. Ironically, it is often faulty city planning, and not the people themselves, that results in the dilapidation of urban areas:

“People cannot constitute blight. It is essential to separate the two –First, it is somewhat unfair to include classes of citizens – renters, the impoverished, the unemployed, the less educated, and female heads of household—as blighting factors” (Weaver, 2013, 62).

It is integral to question the definitions that are generally given for things involving the livelihood of people. Using specific techniques, like surveying the people who

are actually affected by urban blight, we can better understand what the most effective urban renewal initiatives will be. We will therefore be conducting quality of life surveys in Auburn neighborhoods in order to gauge what changes people would like to see in their community. This way, when the City of Auburn receives a HUD Grant, they will be able to confidently and effectively brainstorm and implement specific changes to address urban blight.

The Importance of the Survey

Before planning an urban renewal project, certain important aspects must be considered in order to avoid irreversible changes to the community. For example, misplaced housing developments or unnecessary changes to public infrastructure could pose a new set of problems to a community. In order to consider the real-world ramifications of urban renewal, one must avoid a top-down approach and examine the problems from the ground-up, as is evidenced in Bauman and Schuyler's case study of Philadelphia's urban renewal plan in 1957. The plan was very idealistic, and only considered the opinions of a certain subset of people (the white, upper-class men who designed the plan). The needs of the local residents were not taken into account, which had disastrous consequences. In this case, there was a large, forceful displacement of whole groups of people, which caused a devastating disruption of their culture (Bauman and Schuyler, 2008, 377).

There are problems other than displacement that can arise after urban renewal, affecting the social quality of life. In a fantastic example of a "local knowledge" study, eighty in-depth interviews were conducted on families who had experienced housing instability to reveal the stresses that housing programs can cause (Mayberry et. al, 2014). The study revealed how the current urban housing situation could be improved through the use of personal stories and anecdotes. The implementation of a personal interview or survey seems to be the most effective first step towards improving the quality of life in an urban neighborhood because it is taking into account the needs of the actual residents, rather than the ideals of the policy-makers.

The importance of understanding the history of Lewiston/Auburn

In order to situate these definitions within our project, a brief history of the physical space in which we are investigating blight and renewal is necessary. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Lewiston/Auburn emerged as a textile-manufacturing center. Specifically in Auburn, shoe manufacturing became the dominant industry by the late nineteenth century. Following World War I, the mills faced a significant decline. This was due to many reasons including: domestic competition from southern mills, strong competition abroad, the increased use of synthetic fibers, and the inability of New England mills to adapt (Leamon, 1976, 28). Despite strong efforts, the mills failed to sustain the profitability they once had. The mills provided the primary source of employment for many residents. Therefore, the decline of the mills disrupted the economic base of the community and had serious effects on the lives and livelihoods of the community members.

Since World War II, Lewiston/Auburn has strived to develop a more diversified economy to replace the previously dominant industries (Leamon, 1976, 6). This transition has been challenging. Certain neighborhoods in Auburn continue to experience high rates of poverty and unemployment, which we will show in our results and discussion section. It is crucial that we have a strong understanding of the history of Lewiston/Auburn and how dominant and alternative cultures are manifested in the physical landscape. Denis Cosgrove, a cultural geographer, describes the importance of recognizing these different cultures because they can provide insights into power dynamics in the community. Traditionally, those in power determine the content of a landscape. These actors will decide “what (and who) will be included, and what (or who) will be excluded” (Cosgrove, 2008, 176). We know that social power is reproduced through landscapes -- and this is very explicitly visible through housing (Ibid).

The HUD Grant and Potential Impact

The City of Auburn is currently applying for a HUD Community Block Grant. The goal of the HUD Grant is to “develop strong communities by providing *decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expanding economic opportunities*, principally for low- and moderate- income persons” (CDBG). In the past, this grant has provided funding for projects including “economic development projects, installation of public facilities, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, clearance/acquisition, microenterprise assistance, code enforcement, and homeowner assistance” (CDBG). The activities that are most frequently funded by this grant deal with the improvement of public infrastructure. This includes projects that ensure *safe streets and transit-ways*, build community centers and *public parks*, or other projects that help support local communities and economies.

It is important to introduce this research within the lens of the HUD Grant. We will be conducting a survey in the New Auburn neighborhood along with two other groups of Bates students who will be surveying the Downtown and Union Street neighborhoods. The results of this survey may influence what is done with this HUD grant, which will likely be used to change the landscape of Auburn not only through housing development but by adding new green spaces, improving sidewalk conditions, and expanding and improving transportation. We aimed to capture a diverse set of voices with this survey to disrupt who traditionally determines how the landscape will be constructed.

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Methods

Quality of Life Survey

Our community partner Reine Mynahan, the Community Development Director for the city of Auburn, provided us with a survey that had been used in the past to assess the condition of a variety of physical and social aspects of Auburn neighborhoods. There were many problems with the initial survey and we had to make some significant changes before we could start the administration process.

The survey we were given was nine pages long and we speculated it might take up to an hour to administer. Our first task was to determine which sections of the survey were most important and could not be removed. Certain sections did not pertain directly to the specifications of the HUD grant, such as sections about shopping options and schools. Other sections were redundant, such as the city services section, and were too similar to other parts of the survey. The initial survey was apparently designed to make sure responses were consistent, and we decided we could sacrifice consistency for speed in hopes that we could administer more surveys within our time constraints. After much discussion with Reine Mynahan and the other groups, we eventually cut the survey down to five pages before we began administration.

After a week of administration, we were able to gauge resident's reactions to some of the questions and we realized certain questions were too confusing or simply unnecessary. Therefore, we further reduced the survey and disregarded irrelevant sections from the survey that we had already administered. The final result was a three and a half page packet that included the seven most important sections from the initial survey. These sections were: Neighborhoods, Your Feelings About Your Neighborhood, Attractiveness of Your Neighborhood, Housing, Transportation, Future Priorities, and a final Personal Information section. Questions varied in format, but all consisted of checkboxes rather than short answer sections. Some sections included an "additional comments" option in order to capture more personal and specific responses, but these areas were frequently left unutilized. Although personal anecdotes and comments are not quantifiable survey data, they were recorded and will be included in an appendix.

Survey Administration

Our administration period was the entire month of October. During the last week of September we explored the New Auburn neighborhood, to seek out large public spaces where people gathered. See Maps 1 and 2 for the three neighborhoods utilized in this project as well as our specific neighborhood space. A few of the best spots we found were a playground on South Main Street, a bar across the street, and the Boys and Girls Club on 2nd Street. We intended to survey people out in public, or in public spaces, rather than going door-to-door. Unfortunately, weather quickly became a detriment to our outdoor surveying efforts. There was torrential rain during the first few weeks of October. Therefore, given our time constraints, we decided to shift our methods to door-to-door surveying. When the weather improved later in the month, we still found it difficult to find people out in public that were willing to take the survey because they were

often on their way to work, or could not stop to chat. In the end, our best method was to approach people at their homes.

When approaching possible subjects, we stated clearly that we were students working with the city of Auburn to administer a quality of life survey. We informed them of the purpose of the survey, and that it took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. If they agreed to participate, we gave them the option of us reading the questions aloud and recording their responses, or the option of filling it out themselves.

Attempting to reach a broad range of residents, we went up and down streets in different sections of the neighborhood. We never entered a home unless the resident invited us in, and we did not press people who made it clear they were not interested in participating. We tried to go during different days of the week, occasionally making weekend trips, but a large majority of the surveys were conducted during our weekly lab time, from 1:00 to 4:00 PM on Thursdays, because that was one of the few times that we were all free. Our most successful survey administration tactic was to stand outside the polls during the midterm elections because people from many different areas and backgrounds were at the polls, and many of them were willing to participate. The surveys were administered between October 1, 2014 and November 4, 2014 and 33 surveys were completed in total. The data was transferred into an analysis program on SurveyMonkey.com, a series of figures were created using the website's software, and qualitative data was recorded in lists as well.

The Sun Journal Interview

Several members of the larger group -- one from each neighborhood of New Auburn, Downtown and Union St. -- met with Scott Taylor, a reporter from the Sun Journal, and Reine Mynahan, our community partner, in order to disseminate information about the survey and our project as a whole to the greater community. The article appeared shortly after our interview and is located in Appendix E.

Results

Disclaimer: The results featured in this final report are not comprehensive. The figure numbers do not correlate to the question number on the survey. The results have been organized in such a manner to better encourage easy reading and comprehension. The survey will be attached in the appendix. All surveys were administered in the neighborhood of New Auburn, Auburn, Maine.

Section 1: New Auburn

Sense of community and community engagement

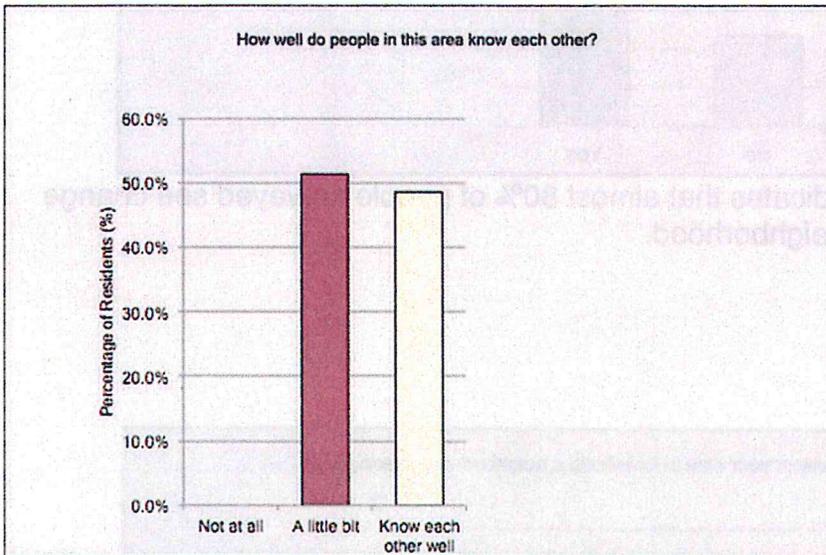


Figure 1: This figure shows a comparatively equal amount of people reporting that neighbors either know each other "a little bit" (51.4%) or "well" (48.57%) with no one reporting that people do not know each other at all.

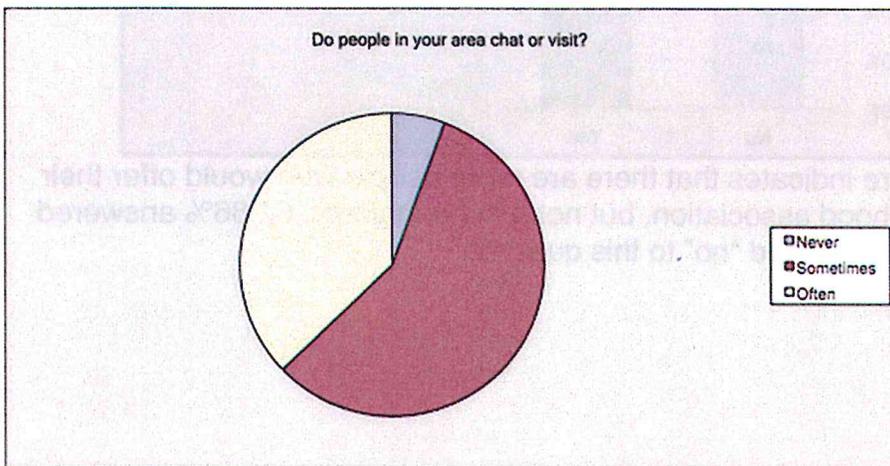


Figure 2: This figure reflects on the same topic of Figure 1, showing that the majority of people either chat or visit "sometimes" (57.13%) or "often" (37.14%) and a negligible percentage (5.71%) never do.

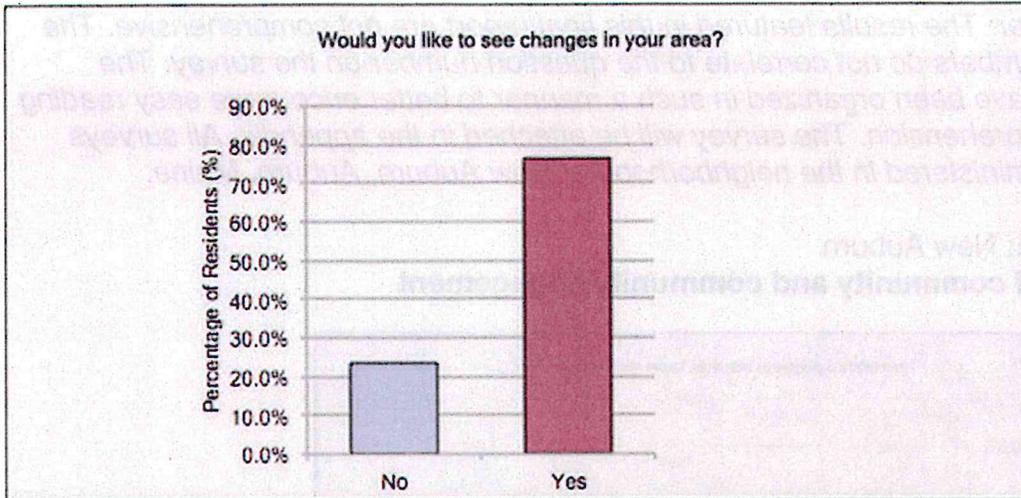


Figure 3: This figure indicates that almost 80% of people surveyed see change as necessary in their neighborhood.

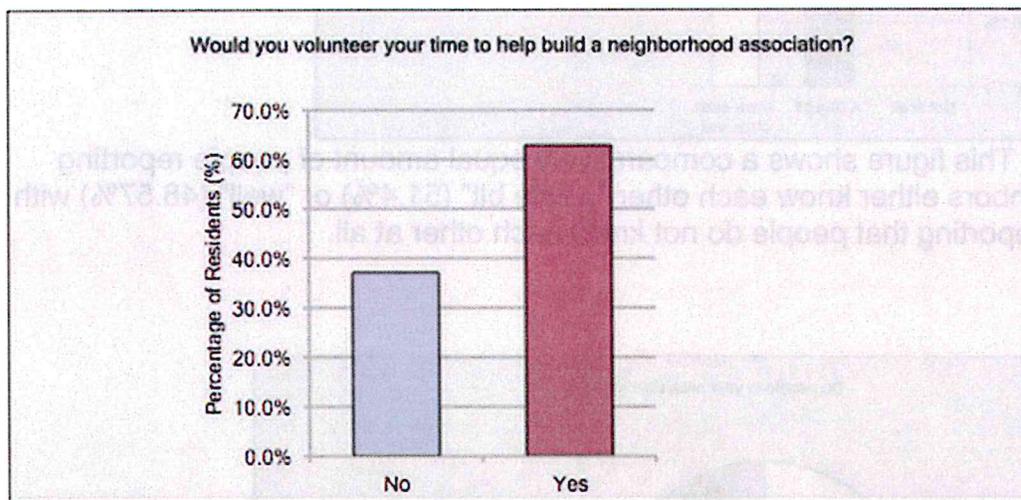


Figure 4: This figure indicates that there are more people who would offer their time to a neighborhood association, but not a huge majority. 62.86% answered "yes" while 37.14% reported "no" to this question.

Feelings about neighborhood and desired changes

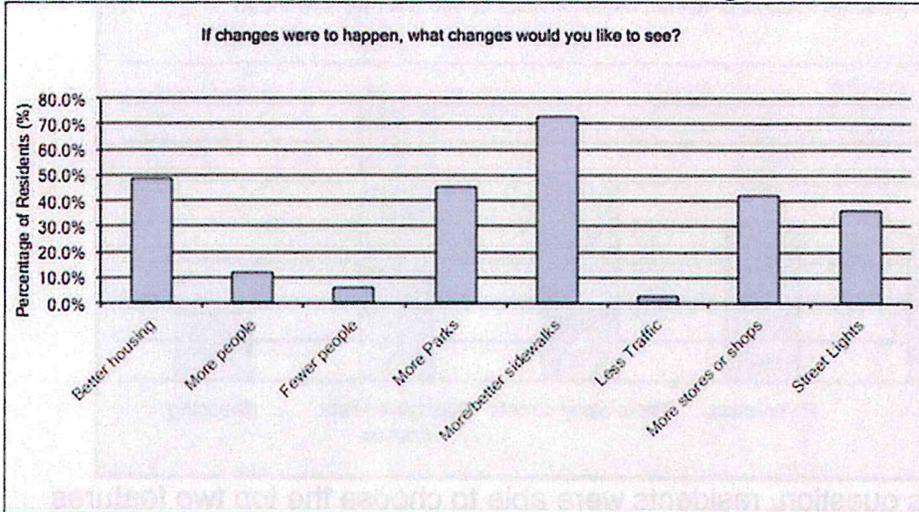


Figure 5: With respect to specific changes that are most needed or desired, those surveyed were able to select multiple categories in terms of changes they wanted to see. “More/better sidewalks” received the highest percentage, almost 30% higher than the other three highest: “better housing,” “more parks” and “more stores or shops.”

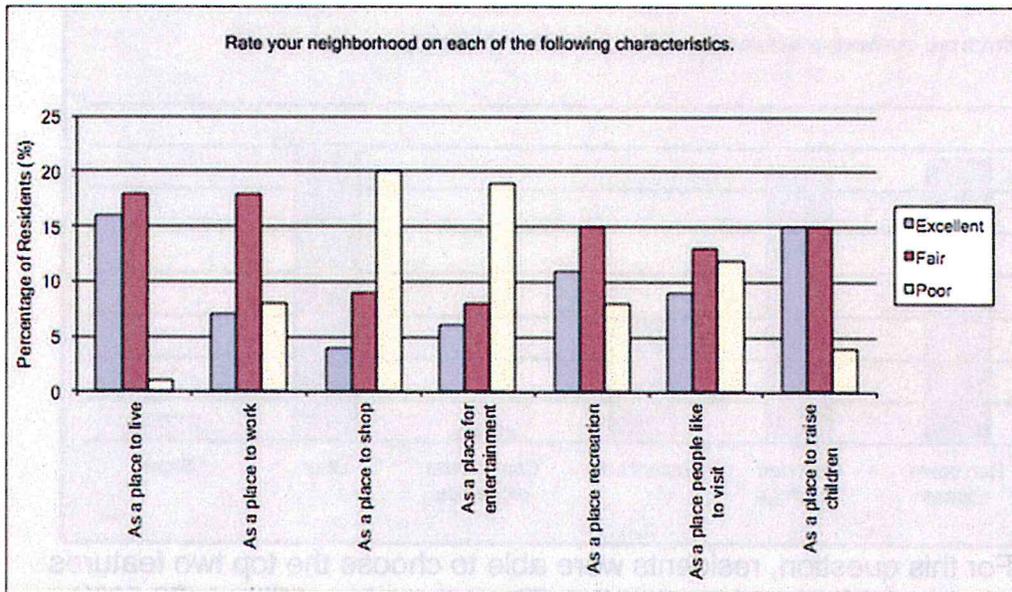


Figure 6: Those surveyed were asked to rate various categories on a scale of “poor,” “fair” and “excellent.” The categories which were selected predominantly as “poor” were New Auburn as “a place to shop” and “a place for entertainment.” “As a place to live” and “as a place to work” both received the most “fair.” None of the answers were ranked “excellent” as a majority.

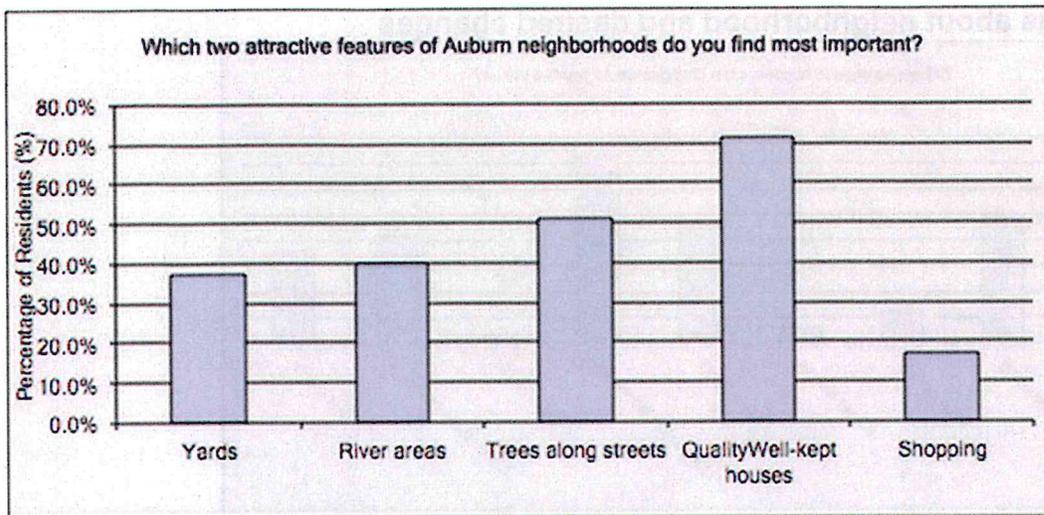


Figure 7: For this question, residents were able to choose the top two features that make their neighborhood attractive. This figure indicates that people think that “quality or well-kept houses” (71.43%) and “trees along streets” (51.43%) are the most attractive features of Auburn.

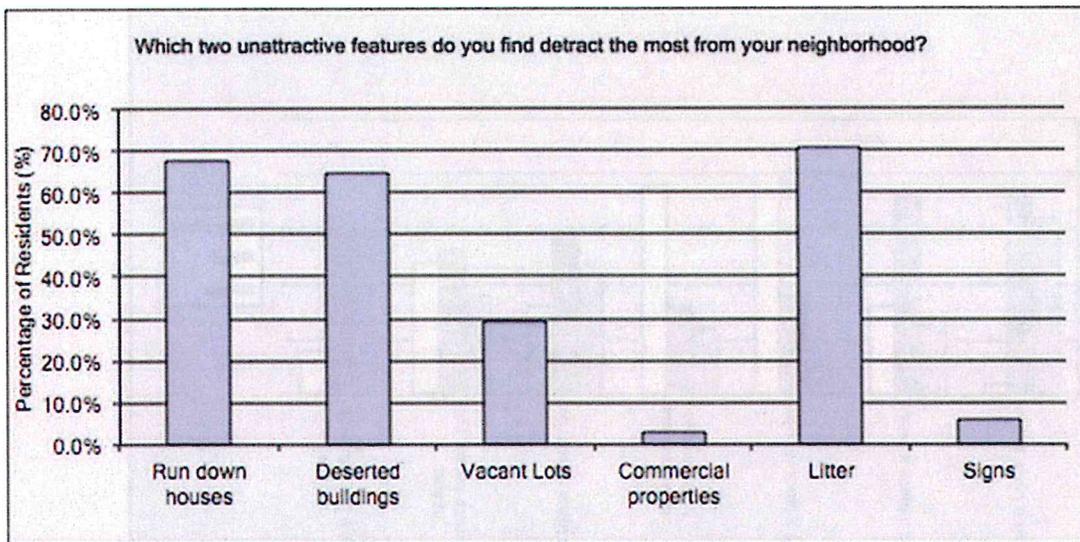


Figure 8: For this question, residents were able to choose the top two features that make their neighborhood unattractive. The categories of “litter” (70.59%), “run-down houses” (67.65%) and “deserted buildings” (64.71%) were all statistically significant.

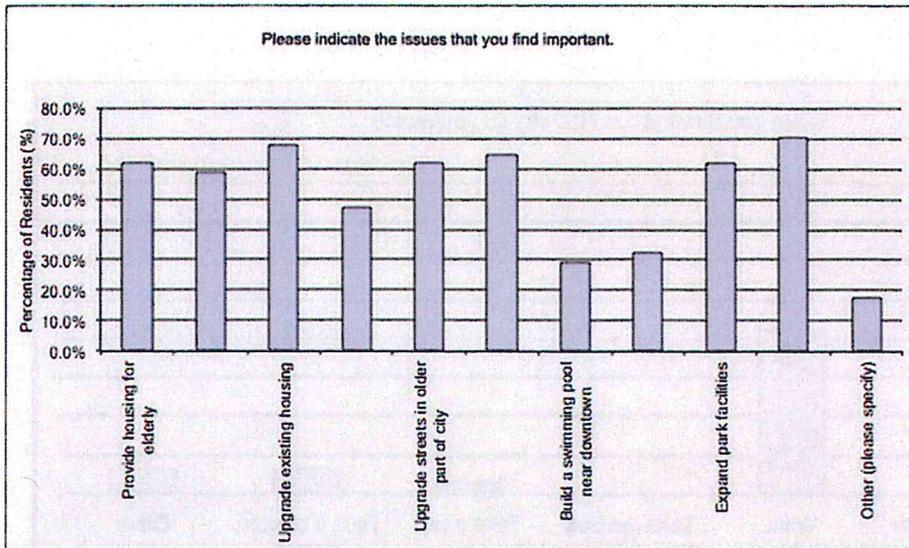


Figure 9: For this question, residents were ask about what issues they find most important and changes they would like to see. As seen through the graph, almost all of the questions were selected by over 50% of the residents. The three highest ranked include “build bike/jogging trails,” “upgrade existing housing,” and “continue improvements in downtown.” The next highest ranked question was a three way tie between “provide housing for elderly,” “upgrade streets in older part of city,” and “expand park facilities.”

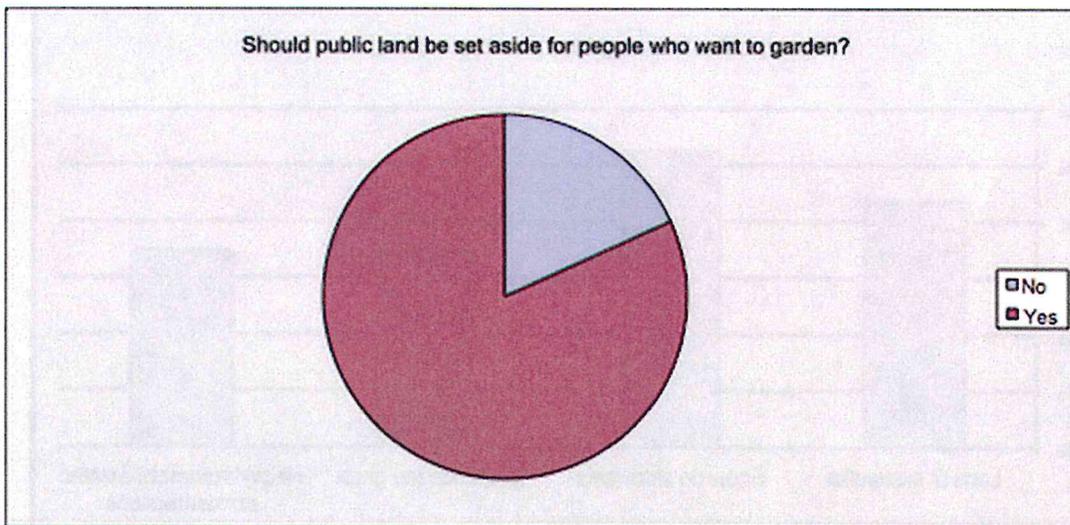


Figure 10: This graph indicates that many residents believe that public land should be set aside for people who want to garden (81.82%). A small group of residents did not agree with this (18.18%).

Transportation

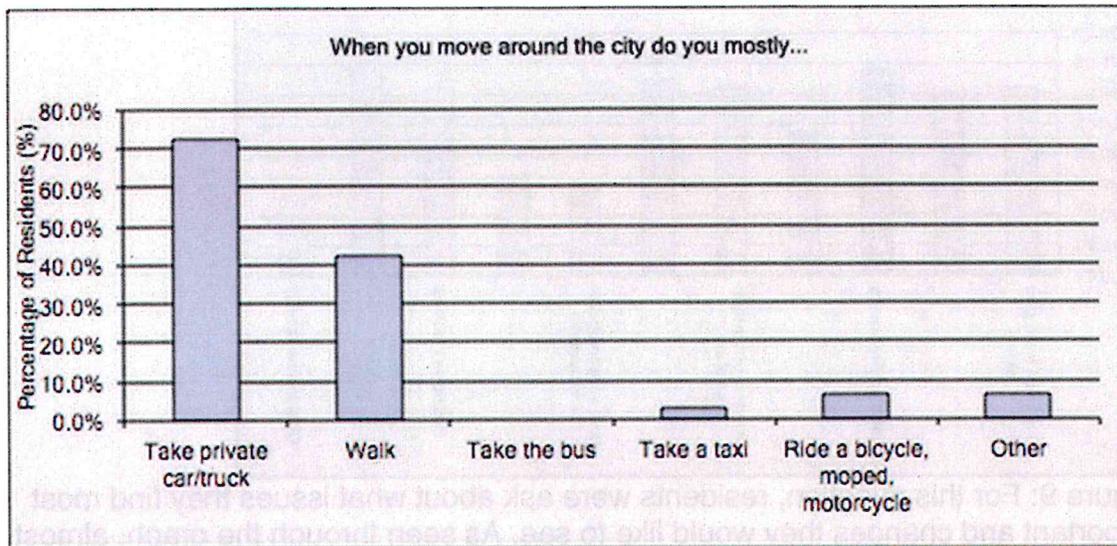


Figure 11: In regards to mode of transportation, a majority of residents from this neighborhood responded that they take a private car/truck (72.73%). The next highest response was to walk (42.42%). The other three options ranked very low: "Ride a bike, moped or motorcycle" (6.06%), "Other" (6.065), "Take a taxi" (3.03%), "Take the bus" (0%).

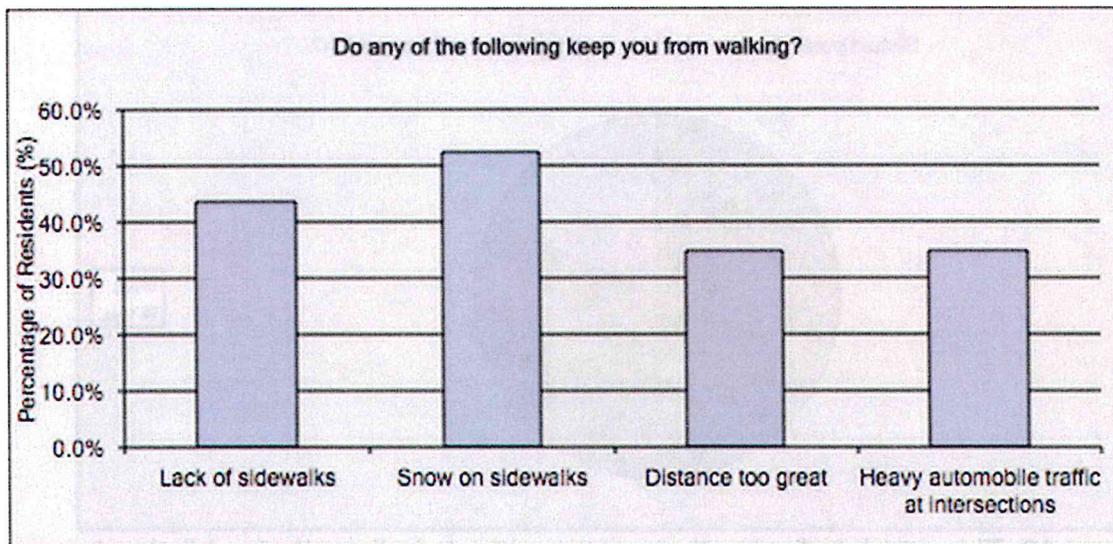


Figure 12: This questions provided some barriers that may prevent residents from walking. Residents responded that all of these barriers to walking affect them relatively equally. "Snow on sidewalks" was slightly higher than the rest with 52.17% although the other three trailed closely behind with "Lack of sidewalks" at 43.48% and "Distance too great" and "Heavy automobile traffic at intersections" tied at 34.78%.

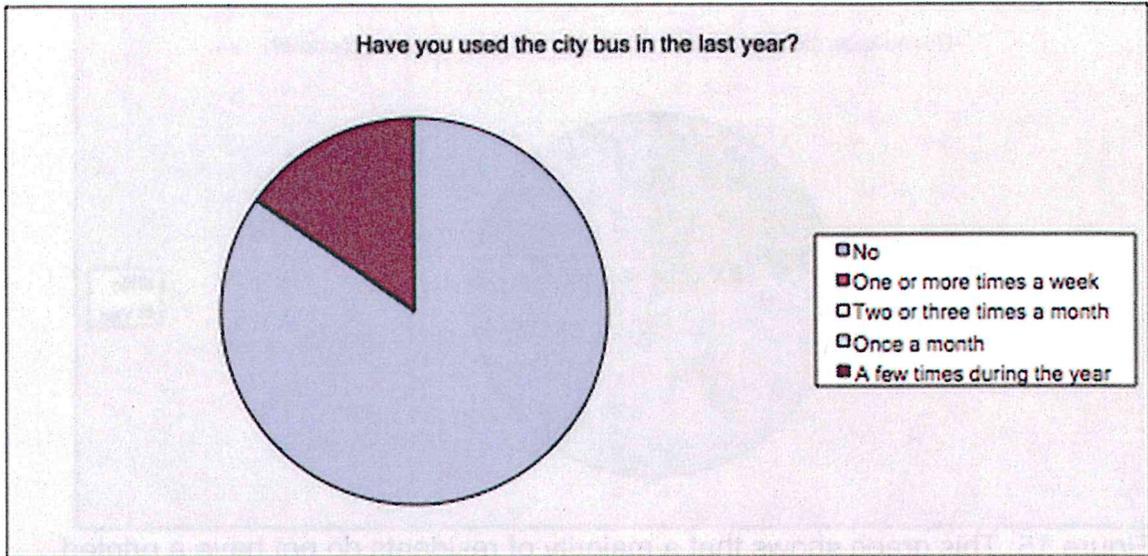


Figure 13: This graph clearly shows that the majority of residents surveyed have not used the city bus in the last year (84.85%). A small amount of residents (15.15%) said they had used the city bus a few times in the past year. There was no in between.

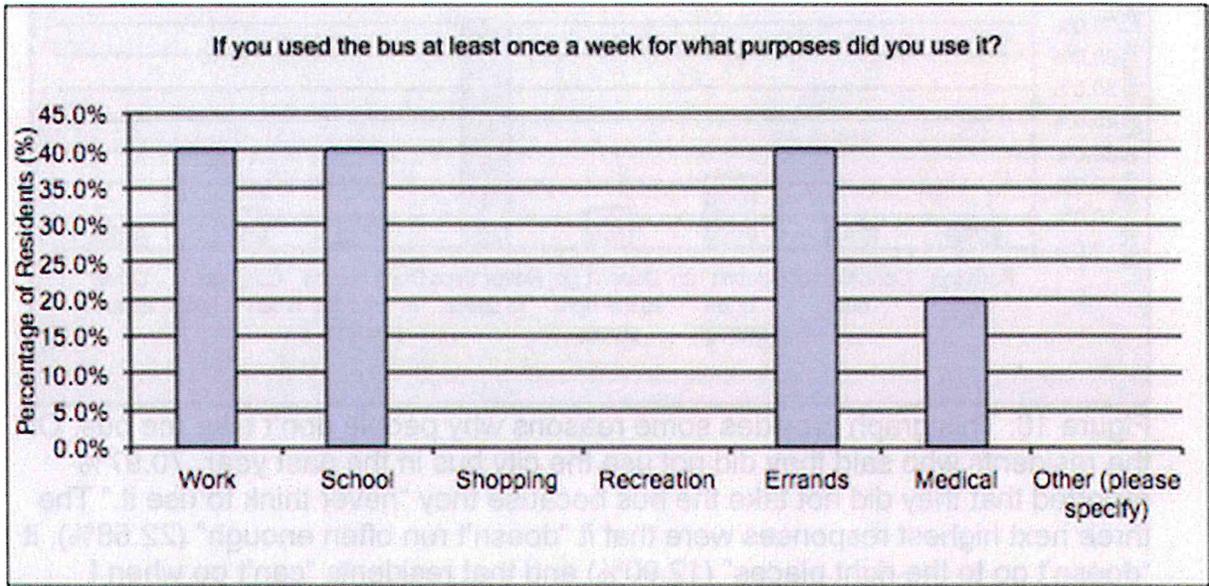


Figure 14: Of the 15.15% of residents who said they did use the bus in the past year, they mostly used it for work (40%), school (40%), errands (40%), or medical reasons (20%).

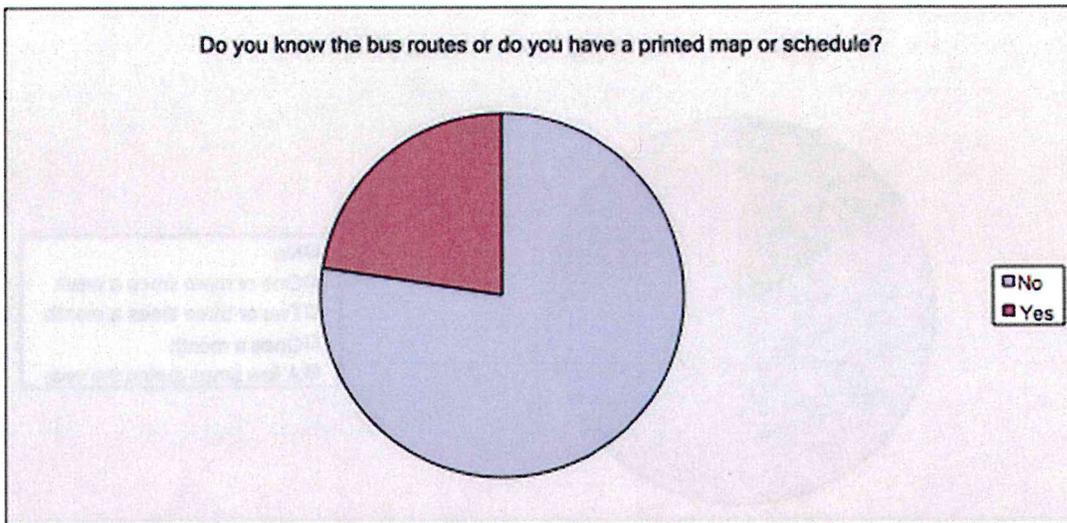


Figure 15: This graph shows that a majority of residents do not have a printed map or schedule of the bus routes (77.42%), while 22.58% of residents do.

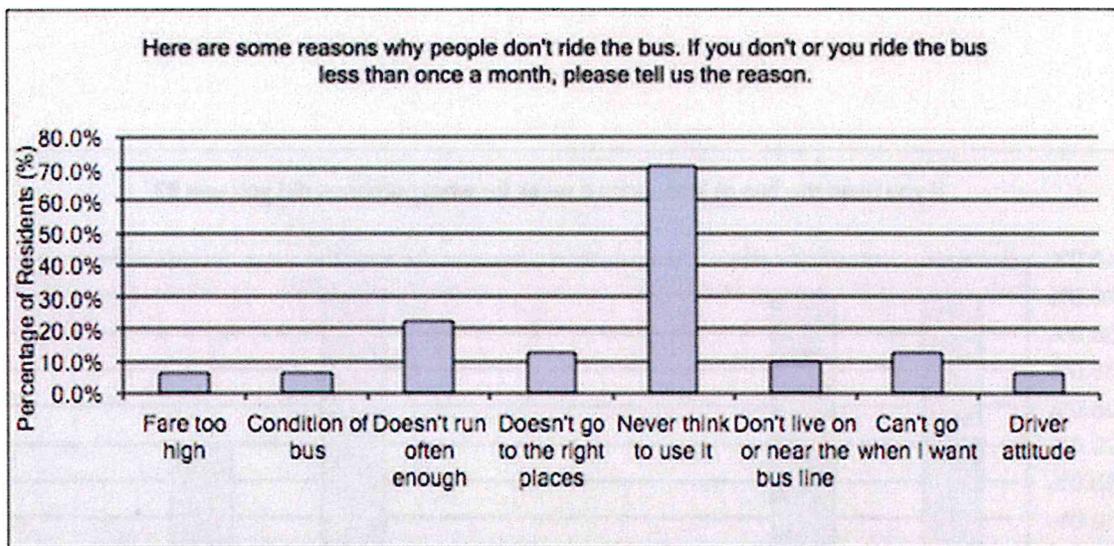


Figure 16: This graph provides some reasons why people don't take the bus. Of the residents who said they did not use the city bus in the past year, 70.97% reported that they did not take the bus because they "never think to use it." The three next highest responses were that it "doesn't run often enough" (22.58%), it "doesn't go to the right places" (12.90%) and that residents "can't go when I want" (12.90%).

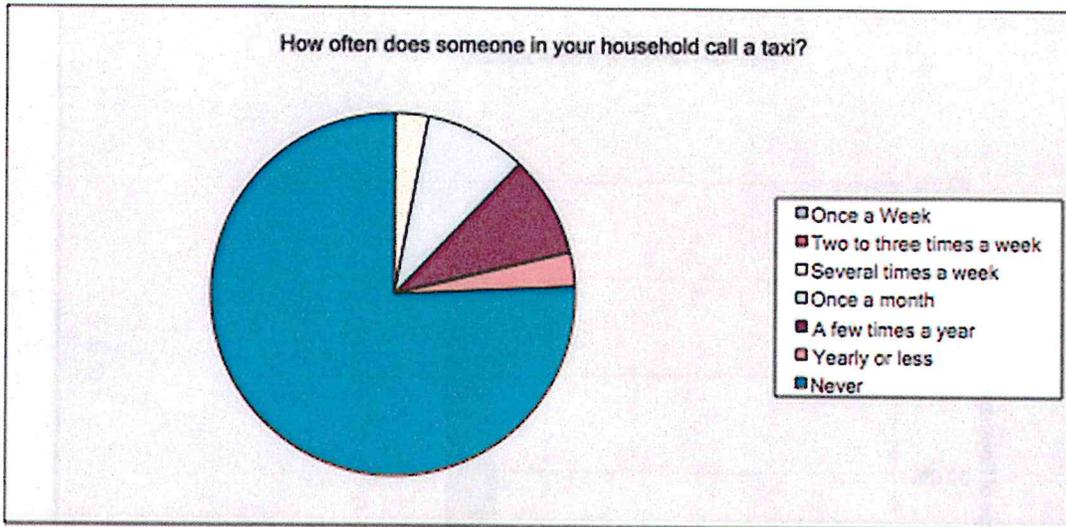


Figure 17: This figure indicates that a majority of resident's households never call a taxi (75.76%). A small set of those surveyed would call a taxi once a month or a few times a year (9.09% each) and a very small set called a taxi several times a week and yearly or less (3.03% each).

Demographics

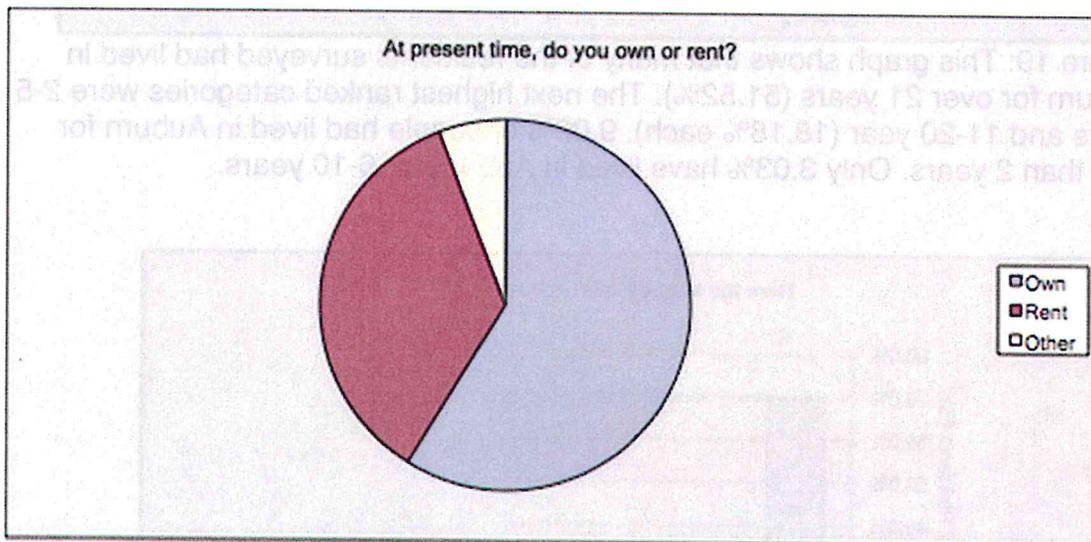


Figure 18: This figure shows that a majority of residents in the New Auburn neighborhood own their homes (58.82%), while 35.29% rent.

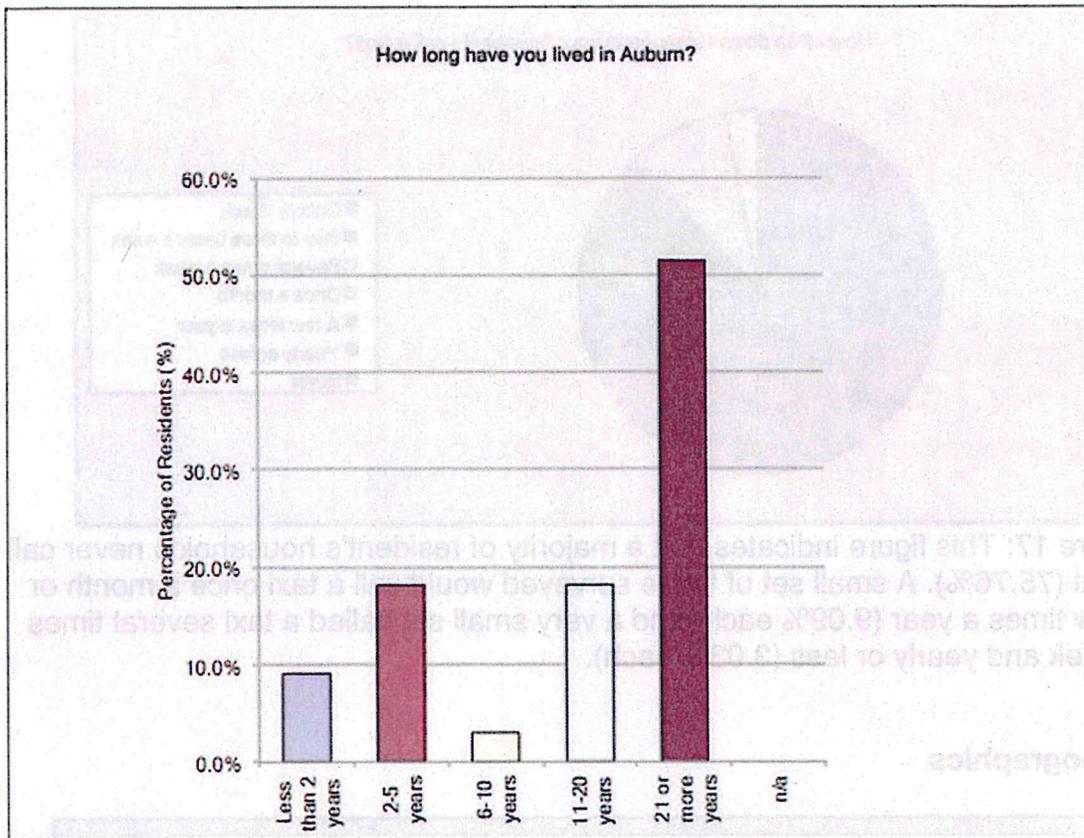


Figure 19: This graph shows that many of the residents surveyed had lived in Auburn for over 21 years (51.52%). The next highest ranked categories were 2-5 years and 11-20 year (18.18% each). 9.09% of people had lived in Auburn for less than 2 years. Only 3.03% have lived in Auburn for 6-10 years.

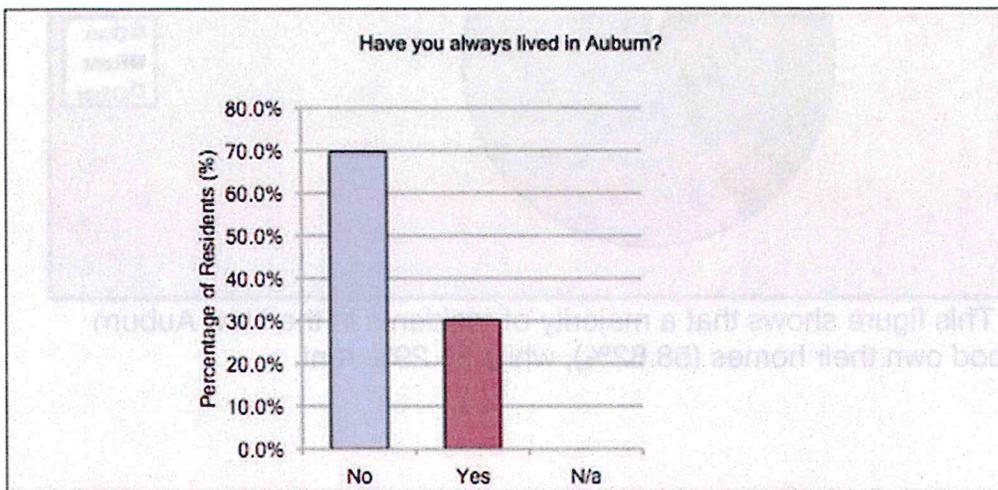


Figure 20: As shown through the graph, 69.70% of residents surveyed have lived somewhere other than Auburn. On the other hand, 30.30% had always lived in Auburn.

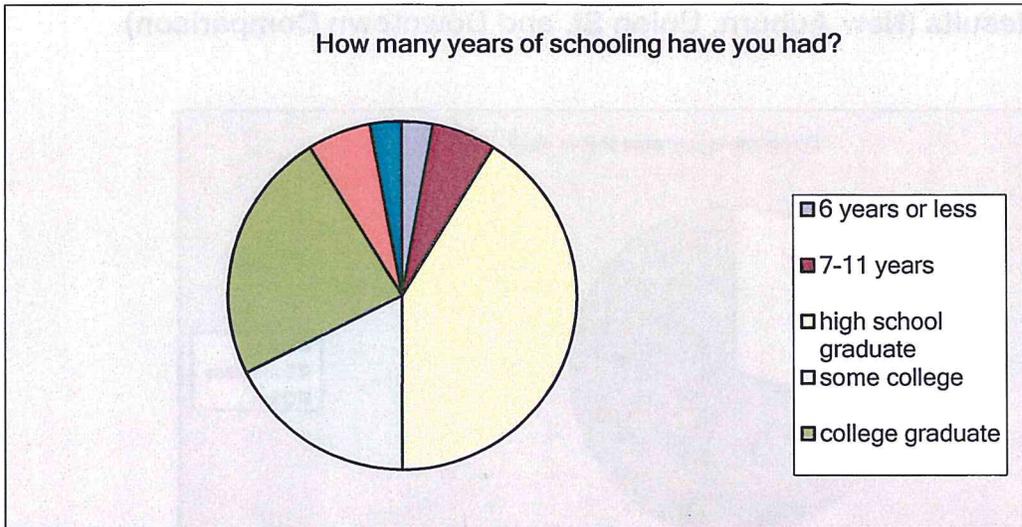


Figure 21: This graph indicates that a majority of residents surveyed were high school graduates (41.18%). Many were also college graduates (23.53%) or had some college education (17.65%).

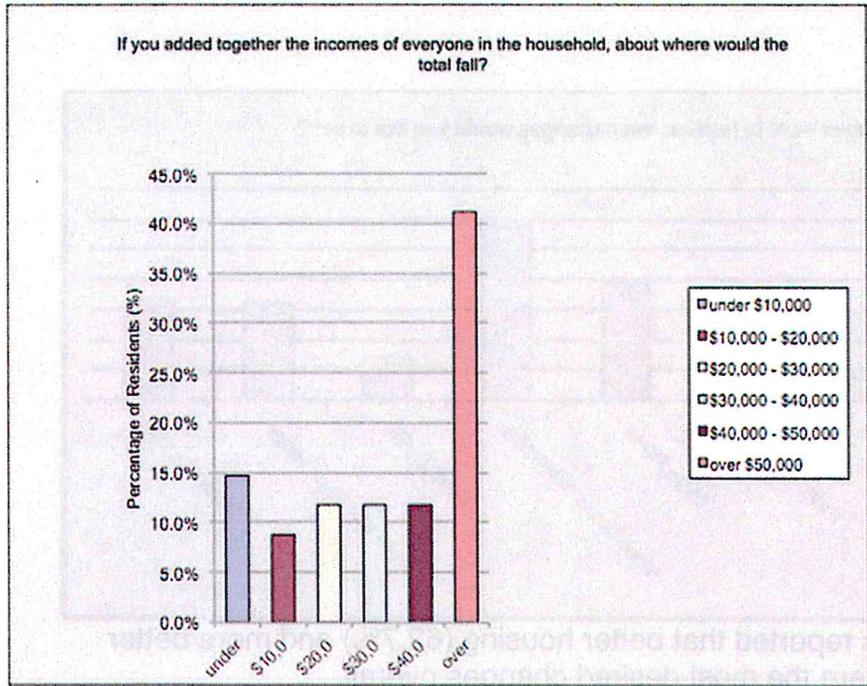


Figure 22: Of the residents surveyed, a majority said that they household income fell "over \$50,000" (41.18%). The next highest response was "under \$10,000" (14.71%). The three income brackets between \$20,000 and \$50,000 all tied with 11.76%.

Results (New Auburn, Union St. and Downtown Comparison)

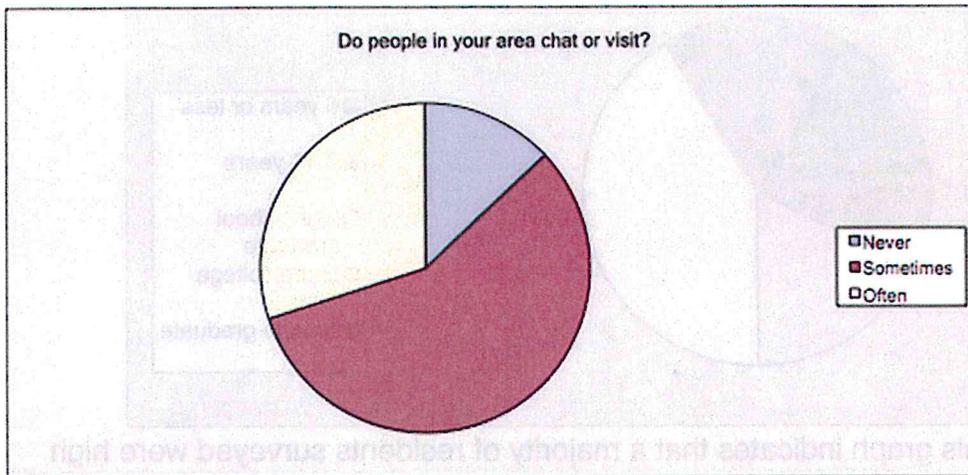


Figure 23: Concerning all three neighborhoods, the vast majority of residents (57.1 %) reported that people “sometimes” chat or visit.

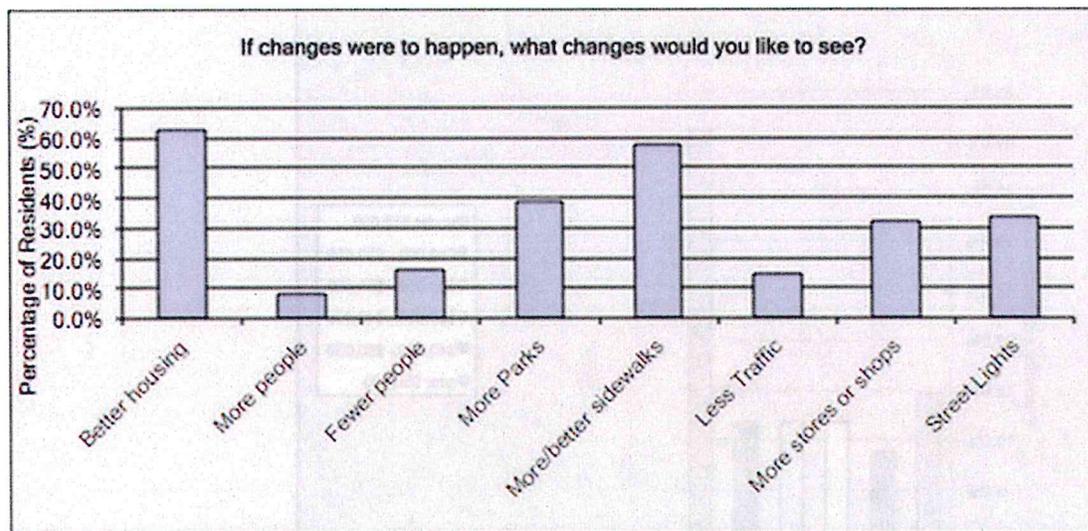


Figure 24: Residents reported that better housing (62.7%) and more/better sidewalks (57.3%) were the most desired changes overall.

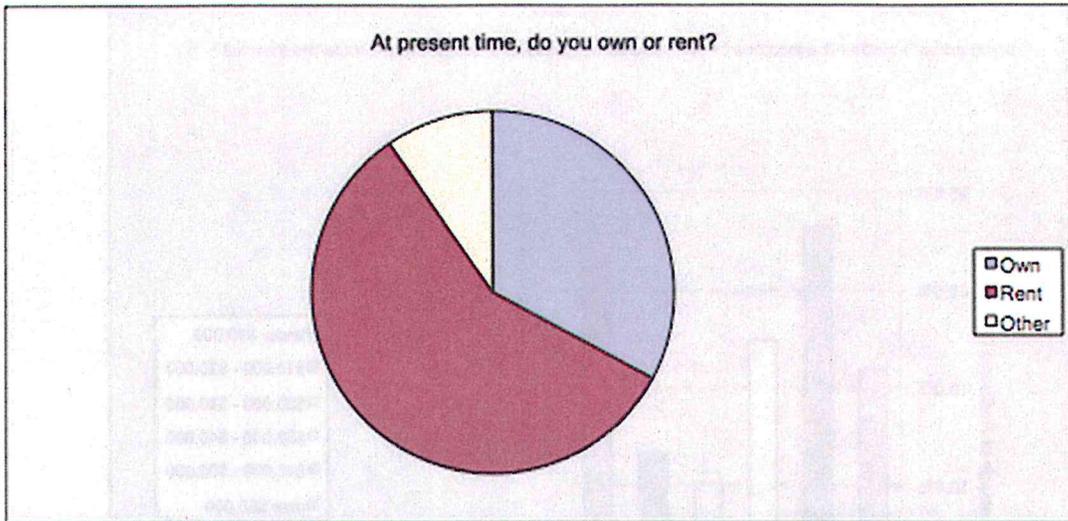


Figure 25: In New Auburn the majority of residents own their residences. In contrast and in respect to all three neighborhoods more people (57.5%) rent.

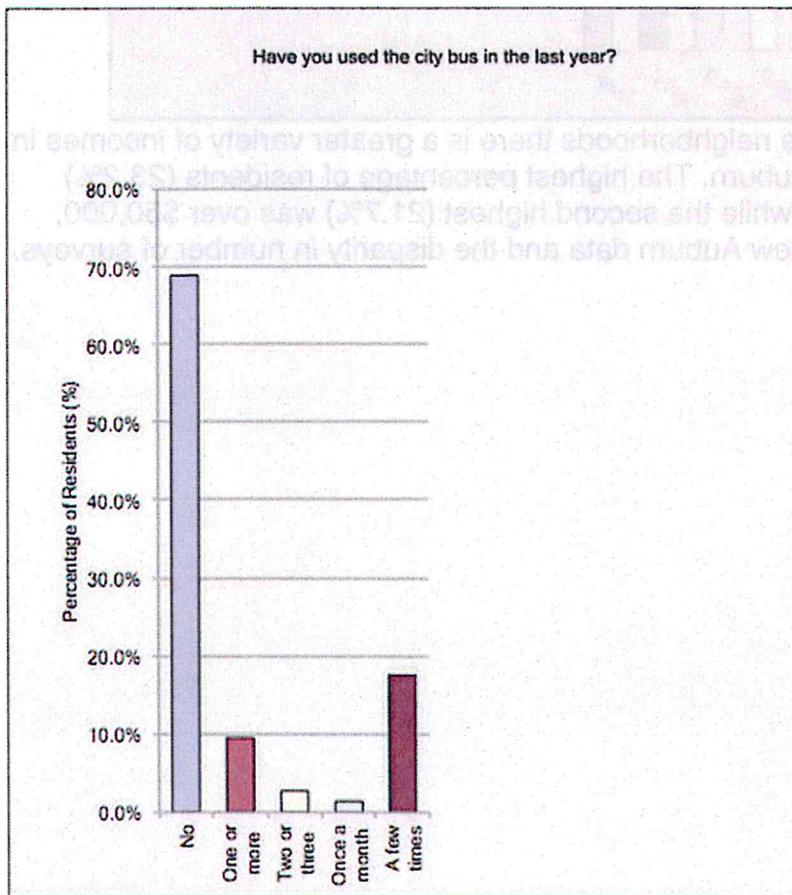


Figure 26: Slightly more people take bus overall through all three neighborhoods, but this figure indicates that people throughout Auburn don't use the bus very often, reporting only 17.6% using it a few times during the year.

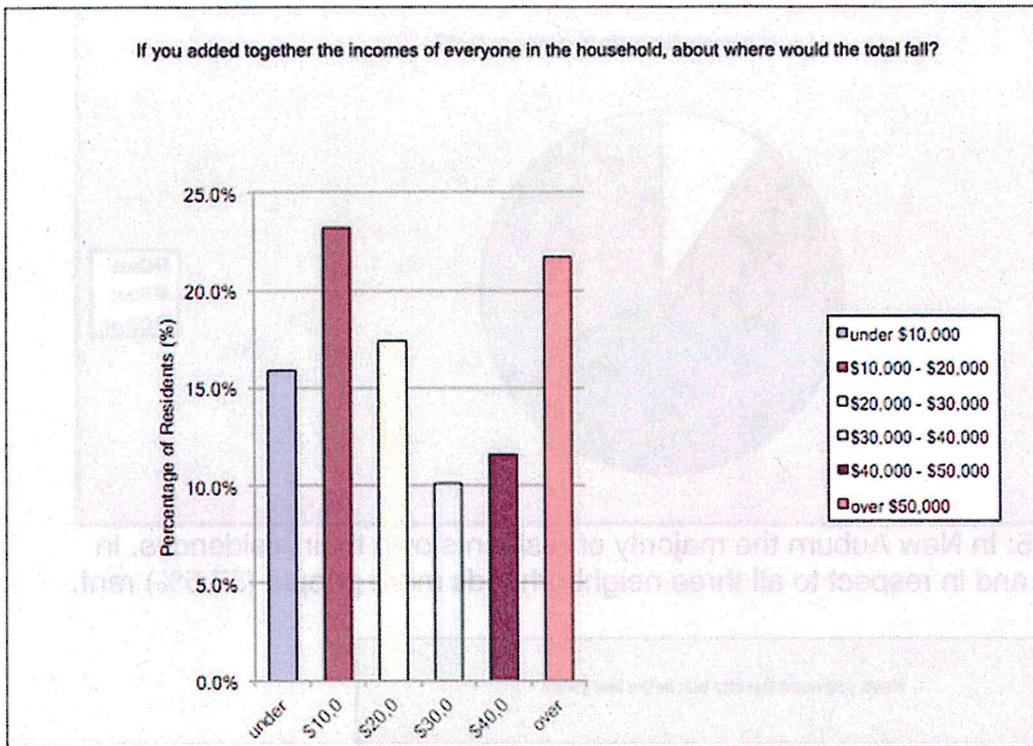


Figure 27: Across all three neighborhoods there is a greater variety of incomes in comparison to just New Auburn. The highest percentage of residents (23.2%) reported \$10,000-20,000 while the second highest (21.7%) was over \$50,000, strongly affected by the New Auburn data and the disparity in number of surveys.

Discussion (New Auburn, Union St. and Downtown Comparison)

HUD Community Block Grant

Our group, having worked in New Auburn, feel that the city of Auburn is a strong contestant for this HUD grant, particularly because the majority of residents want to see safer streets and intersections, better sidewalks for moving around the city, and the expansion of public parks and green space. We know that the City is already thinking of implementing programs to increase public space and set aside land for gardening, which corresponds greatly to the fact that 85% of residents surveyed in New Auburn actively want to see this happen. This means that the City already has idea of what residents want to see changed. The results from this survey have the potential to strengthen and improve the conversation and relationship between these two parties.

Nature of Survey

Due to time constraints, our group surveyed predominantly on Thursday afternoons and Saturday or Sunday mornings. We often encountered residents who were on their way to work and did not have time to take the survey. Therefore, we believe that these results could be skewed to represent households where one member does not work, a member is retired, etc. This means that households where all members work may be underrepresented. These surveys also represent the houses we were physically able to access. There were many cases in which we were not able to access the front door because of certain physical barriers. Finally, we were often unable to access apartment buildings if the front entrance was locked, meaning that these results are most likely skewed to represent family, owner-occupied housing. These are all important points, which are reflected in our results and must be considered in this analysis.

Neighborhood Feel and Community Pride

We first analyzed the data to obtain a general sense of how people feel about their neighborhoods and we looked at their personal information for a general idea of New Auburn's demographics. Based on our results, it is evident that a majority of people in New Auburn are somewhat close with their neighbors. Most reported that they chat and/or visit each other "sometimes" ranging to "often" with no huge disparity. Furthermore, residents responded that people in the neighborhood knew each other either "a little bit" or know each other "well". This suggests that this is a tight-knit community, which at first we thought might indicate that this neighborhood could be conducive for neighborhood action or community pride.

However, a key point in this discussion and analysis of data is considering more than just quantifiable statistics. Because we spent upwards of fifteen or twenty minutes with each person surveyed, all three members of our group had the unique opportunity to speak with the residents of New Auburn on a more dynamic, nuanced way through conversation that may have been based on, but was not limited to, the survey. Because of this, it is extremely important to note

that although the survey shows potential for neighborhood or community action, actual conversations did not tend to support this assumption.

Potential Change

It is clear from the results of this survey that a majority of residents across the three neighborhoods want to see changes made in the city (86.30% wanted to see changes while only 13.7% said no). However, when asked whether they would want to start a neighborhood association, 34.78% of respondents said no while only 65.22% said yes. In short, 86.30% of residents want to see changes made but only 65.22% would be willing to actively participate in making these changes. It is important to understand why this discrepancy exists. We found in many of our interactions with community members that people feel disenchanting by the local government and reluctant to believe changes would ever be made. Many residents did not want to take our survey because they claimed they had already been bombarded with surveys over the years and had lost faith that any concrete changes would be made. We see this lack of community pride, reluctance towards collective action, and disenchantment with the local government as a significant barrier -- and an indication of the pressing need for real change.

Specific Change

Among residents who agreed to take the survey, we found similarities across what they wanted to see changed and what they found attractive and unattractive in the neighborhood. The top three changes residents across all three neighborhoods would like to see are: better housing (62.7%), more/better sidewalks (57.3%) and more parks (38.7%). For attractive qualities, well-kept houses ranked first with 60.87% of the votes, followed by trees along streets (47.83%), yards (42.03%), river areas (28.99%), and shopping (17.39%). For unattractive qualities, run down housing was most popular with 79.71%, followed by litter (69.57%), deserted buildings (65.22%), vacant lots (28.99%), signs (4.35%), and commercial properties (2.90%). Clearly, we can see a common theme that residents want to see improvements in housing and expansion of green space. With respect to aspects that make their neighborhood unattractive, issues with housing make up 70% of the responses (rundown houses, deserted buildings and vacant lots) while well-kept housing ranked number one for being an attractive feature. Furthermore, as far as what makes their neighborhood attractive, features pertaining to green space (trees along streets, parks, river areas) earned 60.3% of the total votes.

Renting vs. Owning

In terms of demographics, the majority of our population in New Auburn owned (58.8%) vs. rented (35.3%) their property and had a combined household income of over \$50,000 (41.1%). On the other hand, when combining the results from all three neighborhoods, we found that the majority of people rented (57.3%) vs. owned (32.8%) and resident's incomes were more dispersed. With respect to housing, according to the 2008-2012 census, the majority of houses

were built in 1939 or earlier (45.2%). Also, in the most recent census, 59.6% of housing was owner-occupied while 40.4% was renter-occupied housing.

Traffic

Another trend we saw was in terms of transportation and unsafe traffic intersections. The majority of residents we surveyed had not ridden the bus in the last year (69%) and used a private vehicle for their main mode of transportation. About half of the resident's answered Question #15 about unsafe streets or intersections. Some of the most popular responses were: Broad Street, South Main Street, the intersection at Rolly's, and the poor condition of sidewalks in general. A complete list of intersections mentioned are recorded in Appendix D. This information is extremely valuable. The HUD grant focuses particularly on safe streets and transit-ways. Therefore, the City has the potential to improve these dangerous streets and intersections through this grant.

Outcomes and Implications

The results of this project indicate that not only are there many physical and structural problems within Auburn that need attention, but there is also a fairly widespread loss of faith in the local government's ability to make changes.

The Housing and Urban Development grant is most often used to fund the improvement of public facilities. One of the most important findings of the survey is that the majority of New Auburn residents support improvements to housing, sidewalks, and green spaces. "Well-kept houses" was ranked as the most attractive feature of neighborhoods, and "run-down houses" were ranked as the most unattractive feature of the neighborhood, showing that New Auburn residents greatly value the quality of their neighborhood's housing, and are concerned about its current state. The city of Auburn should consider housing improvement the top priority for allocation of funds to the New Auburn neighborhood. That being said, an attempt to improve the housing situation would be an extremely ambitious endeavor, considering that New Auburn seems to contain more owner-occupied and private housing than the other two neighborhoods (Downtown and Union Street).

Therefore, the next most important priorities are the improvement of walking spaces and the addition of green spaces. Residents had a lot to say about certain dangerous intersections, as well as the problems with the sidewalks. These problems include general disrepair, being covered with snow in the winter, and even the lack of sidewalks in some areas completely. As far as green spaces, residents highly value neighborhood greenery, local parks, and the areas along the rivers as some of the most attractive features of New Auburn. New Auburn also garnered the most enthusiasm for the addition of a public garden, when compared to the other neighborhoods, and setting aside public land within this neighborhood would be a great step in the right direction.

Next Steps

This project is only the first of many steps toward creating the community that Auburn residents want to live in. There are a multitude of other projects which could be taken on in the future, either by the City of Auburn or another Bates Capstone group. We have created a list of options for these future projects, in the hope that they will be utilized to create a community that all residents can be proud of.

- **Comprehensive Bus/Transportation Study** - The lack of bus use in all three neighborhoods studies suggests that improvements could be made to the system. There was a CityLink study done by a Bates Capstone group a few years ago, but it only focussed on the bus system in Lewiston. We think that thorough research into the seeming disuse of Auburn's buses would be beneficial to the future of the bus program. There could be a comparison drawn between the Lewiston and Auburn programs, to discover why the Lewiston CityLink seems to be utilized more often. Or instead, alternative transportation programs could be researched to determine the what would work best for the residents of Auburn.
- **Allocation of Development Funds** - The majority of questions we received about the survey were about clarification and specificity issues. One of our major findings is that Auburn residents, in our neighborhood especially, are most concerned about better housing. However, what exactly does better housing mean? We suggest a further study into the specific housing development projects Auburn residents hope to see. Whether there are safety concerns, qualms about the unattractiveness of housing, or general concerns about the quality of living, the city should investigate the issue of providing better housing because it is the top priority to Auburn residents.
- **Community Gardens** - In regard to New Auburn, our area of study, we have concluded that green space is a major concern to the residents. In addition, we had the highest percentage of residents say "Yes" to the setting aside of public land for the creation of a community garden. Therefore, we think that a future project determining the location and eventually the physical creation of the garden, is in order. A small team could organize and lead a group of volunteers in breaking land, creating plots, and fencing off an area which could then be opened up to the public.
- **Sidewalk Repair** - New Auburn residents, as well as residents in other neighborhoods, had a lot to say about the sad state of the sidewalks in the city. A comprehensive study should be done to pinpoint areas that need the most attention, and the city should order repairs to these areas as soon as possible.
- **Safer intersections** - New Auburn residents, as well as residents in the other neighborhoods, stressed the need for safe street intersections.

Through our qualitative data on this question, the City will be able to see which intersections residents determined were the most unsafe. Additional studies should be conducted to further specify and confirm these intersections. However, the city should begin brainstorming ways to improve these intersections since many residents have already experienced or witnessed accidents.