



W A T E R T O W N
F O R W A R D

Watertown Community Survey Preliminary Report

Watertown Forward

April 20, 2021

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Executive Summary

Watertown Forward's 2021 Community Survey seeks to understand how residents view Watertown and its government. Our goal to help those involved in the Charter Review understand how community members feel about living, working, and playing here -- what is working well and what could be better. This information can help inform the CRC's deliberations on what should be changed in the Charter to serve Watertown for our next decade.

We also believe that this information will help all involved in Watertown's governance -- employees, the Town Manager, and Town Councillors alike -- to understand residents' priorities.

Key findings:

- Our location, strong sense of community, and diversity were the most often cited things that make Watertown a good place to live.
- Better schools and parks, more emphasis on strengthening our community, and a concern for affordability top the list of things that would make Watertown a better place to live.
- Watertown delivers well on the library, public safety, and public well-being. There is room for improvement in education, streets and sidewalks, and economic development.
- Two-thirds of respondents contact either a Watertown Councilor, the Town Manager, or a department. At the same time, one-third is unsure to contact with questions or issues.
- Roughly half of all respondents feel our government does a poor job of communicating with them, asking for input, and sharing priorities.
- The well-being of all community members seems core to what respondents want in a Watertown vision and values statement -- commitments to diversity & inclusion, community, addressing climate change, being welcoming, equity, and our schools.

Watertown Forward will share the preliminary results with the Charter Review Committee to support the Charter Review process. Additionally, these results are available to the general public. They will be shared with the Watertown community using the same channels we used to invite people to participate.

Report Methodology

This anonymous survey was sent to individuals, community groups, and organizations between March 12, 2021, and April 19, 2021, through social media and Watertown Forward's mailing. Due to both the methodology and small sample size of 420 people, the survey should not be interpreted as fully representing all ideas or opinions in Watertown.

The survey is still open for new respondents, and we will continue to promote it to get more feedback. We'll send another analysis when we close it or get enough new responses to warrant another interim report. The survey link is available on Watertown Forward's website: www.watertownforward.org

Note: Whole numbers indicate raw data, percentages include a percent symbol, and the number of respondents per question is located at the bottom of each graph or chart.

Authors:

Survey preparation and data collection provided by Nicole Gardner, Steering Committee Member, Watertown Forward

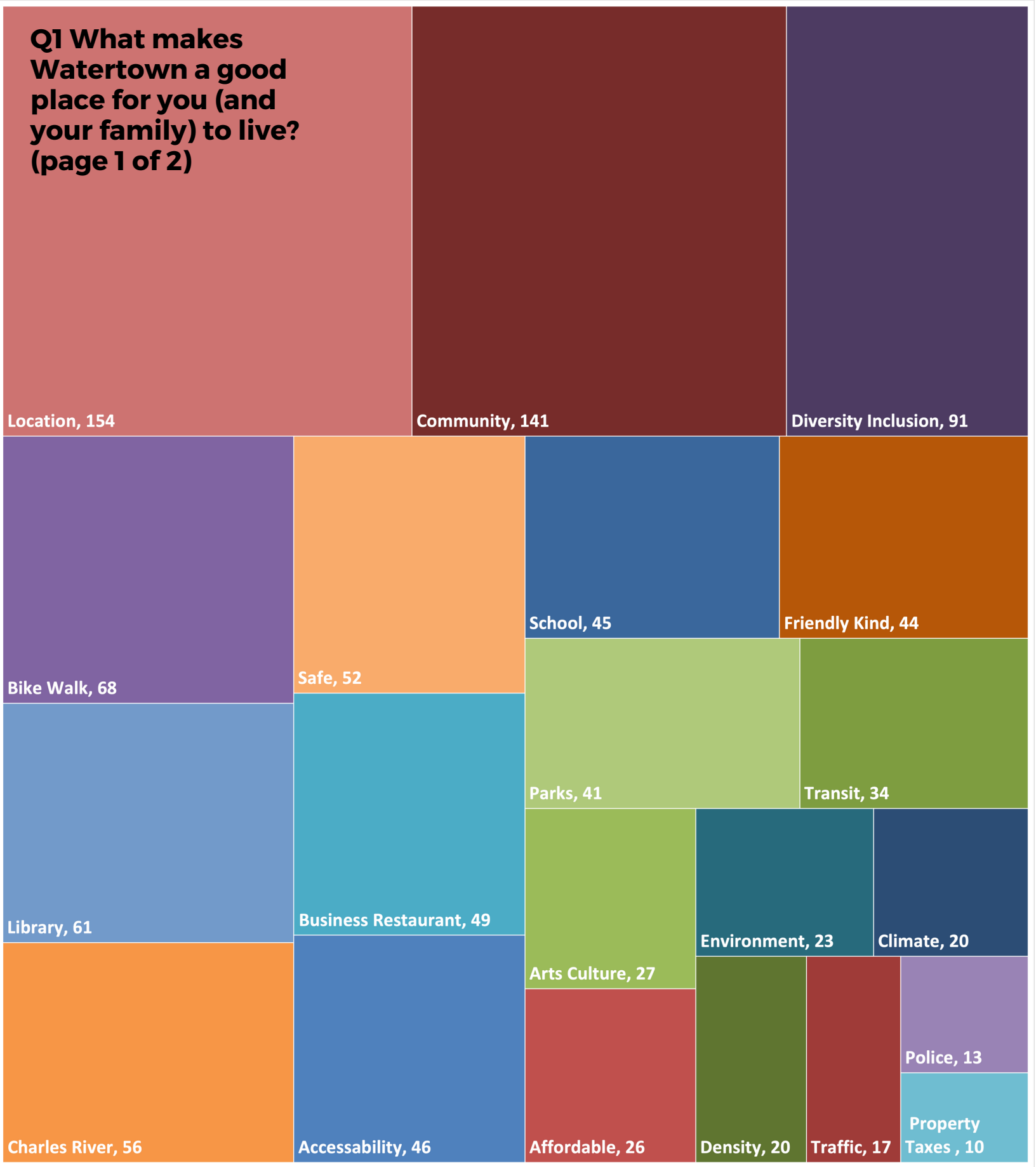
Survey distribution provided by the Outreach and Engagement Committee

Report analyzed by Emily Daman, Steering Committee Chair, Watertown Forward

Report edited by Marcy Murningham and Janis Hudson

Thank you to all the Watertown residents who took this survey and made your voices heard!

Q1 What makes Watertown a good place for you (and your family) to live? (page 1 of 2)



n=398

Q1 What makes Watertown a good place for you (and your family) to live? (page 2 of 2)

Watertown's location, strong sense of community, and diversity were the most often cited as things that make Watertown a good place to live.

"It's small enough to have a **sense of community** but still has enough of a **city feel** towards the square with **good transportation**"

"The **intimacy of geographic size**; the beauty of and access to the river; the intimacy of small, ethnic shops and restaurants; the **activism of residents**"

"We have **the best neighbors!** People **help each other out** and **know each other**. We're near delicious Armenian markets and wonderful restaurants. We're **close to Cambridge and Boston**, but we could afford our house and we even have a bit of backyard. "

"Location, **good green spaces** (river walk), great public services (**the library is the best**), and various great food options nearby."

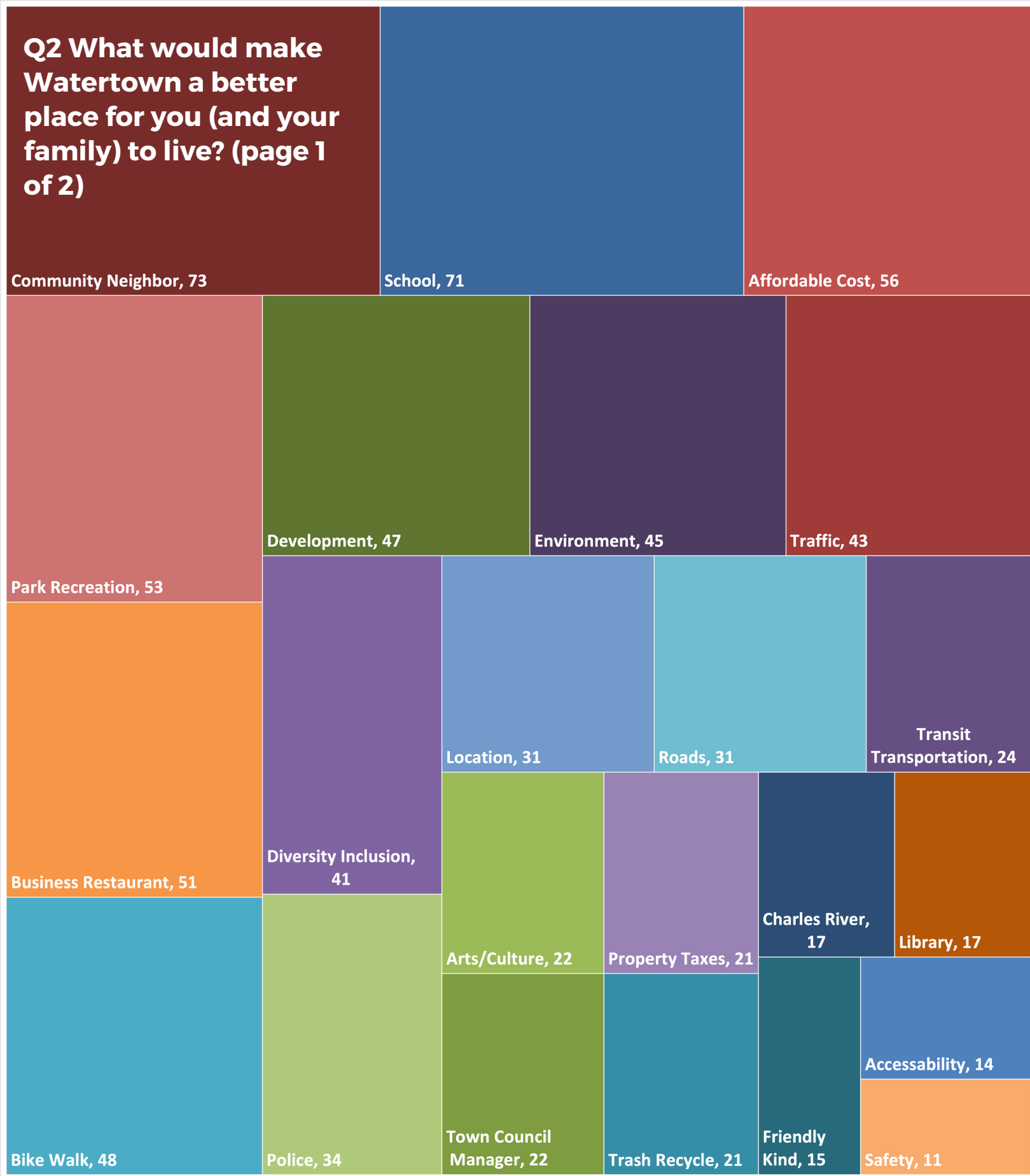
"We like that Watertown is **diverse**, is **walkable**, and has many **playgrounds and parks**."

"Friendly neighbors, good services, convenient location"

"**Location** to major transportation routes, easy access to a bike shop, a **well respected local theater**, **diversity**, dedicated **community of activists** who work to change things"

"Small(ish) town feel, pretty walkable, the **Charles River bike/pedestrian path, public library** (including Project Literacy), summer **farmers' market**. As a bike commuter, I've appreciated the modest expansion of bike lanes & paths in the time I've been living here."

Q2 What would make Watertown a better place for you (and your family) to live? (page 1 of 2)



n=396

Q2 What would make Watertown a better place for you (and your family) to live? (page 2 of 2)

Better schools & parks, more emphasis on strengthening our community, and a concern for affordability top the list of things that would make Watertown a better place to live

"Prioritizing education by investing more in school academic clubs for kids to participate in; i.e: chess club, lego club, robotics clubs. Watertown has strong athletics offerings but needs to expand academically. Investment in **public spaces/ create more green space**. Attract leaders in government that have a **new perspective and ideas for creating community**. If not moving to a mayoral system, **mandate that the Town Manager has term limits**, lives in Watertown and is invested and part of this community."

"We would like to feel that all of our **neighbors are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect**. I think most Watertown residents share this goal, but there are also people who seem to think that change is a threat to the community."

"More **low income housing to maintain diversity**. A long term strategy to **run a T line from Central Square**, down arsenal street, and into Watertown square."

"strengthening neighborhood and community ties and interactions - more community based projects , more **support for locally and independently owned businesses"**

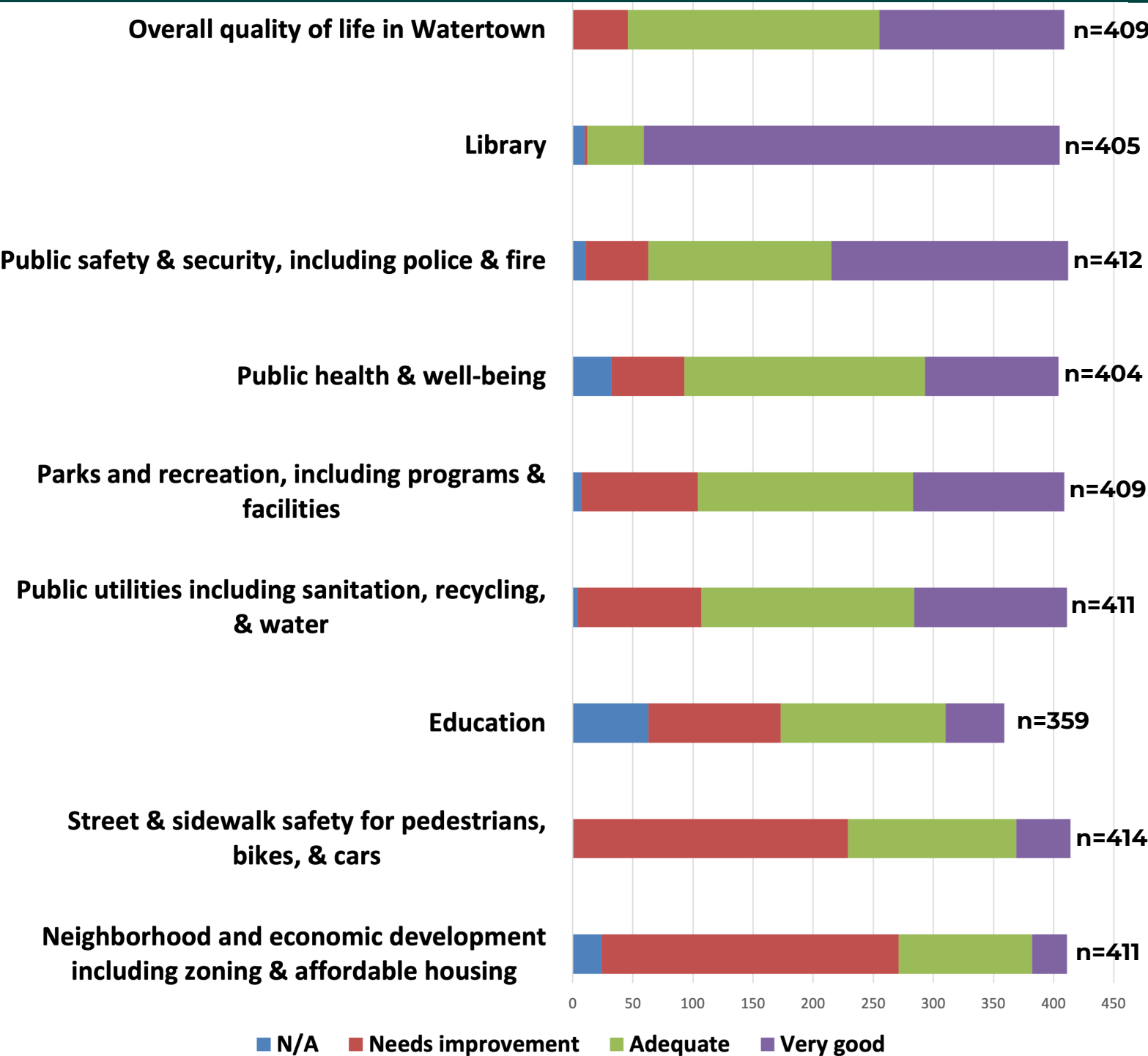
"More community events like faire on the square"

Better school system, less traffic, more **respect for green spaces** and not allowing constant building. More proactive anti-racism in schools and town government. Better responsiveness from the Town and counselors.

"Continued **improvements to streets, walkways, bike paths; Equity strategy** and actions in schools; strong **climate resilience** strategy; residents/town officials interactions to create long term vision and values; **transparent metrics for assessing government**; admin. and other support for councilors"

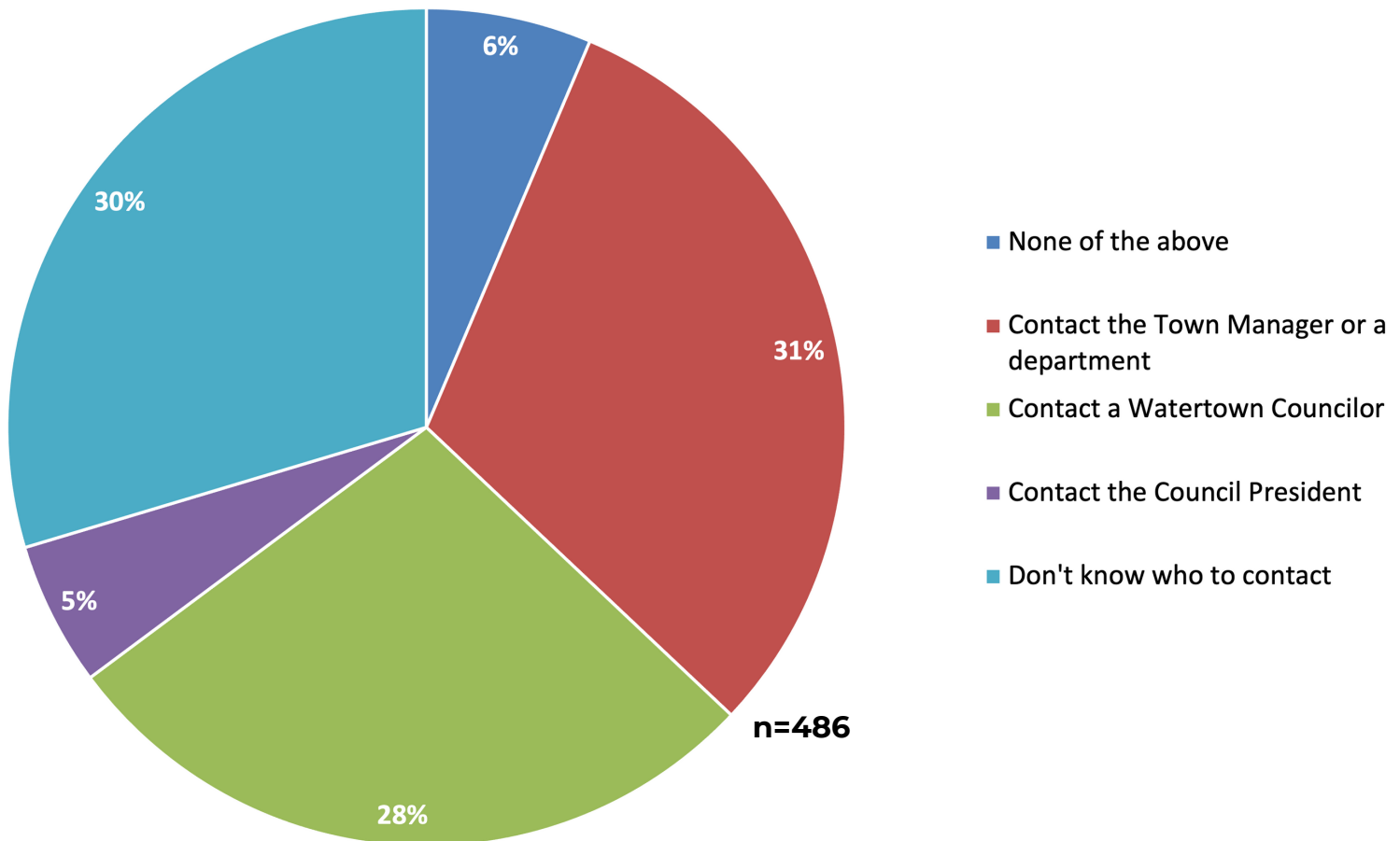
Q3 Our government delivers services to residents and local businesses, decides how our taxes are spent, and makes policies on a range of issues. Please rank how well you believe Watertown delivers the following services:

Watertown delivers well on the library, public safety, and public well-being. There is room for improvement in education, streets and sidewalks, and economic development.



Q4 When you have a question or a problem related to Watertown services or government do you

Two thirds of respondents contact either a Watertown Councilor, the Town Manager, or a department, while another third is unsure who to contact with questions or issues.



"It is very **hard to know who the town councilor for my neighborhood is**. Looked all over the Town website, still couldn't find it."

"It's often difficult for me to figure out who to contact for what issue (WPS vs. School Committee vs. Town Council or WPD)"

"It tends to be a round robin **bounced around from office to office**. And the hours are not conducive to those who work during the day...Maybe one late night each week for all offices?"

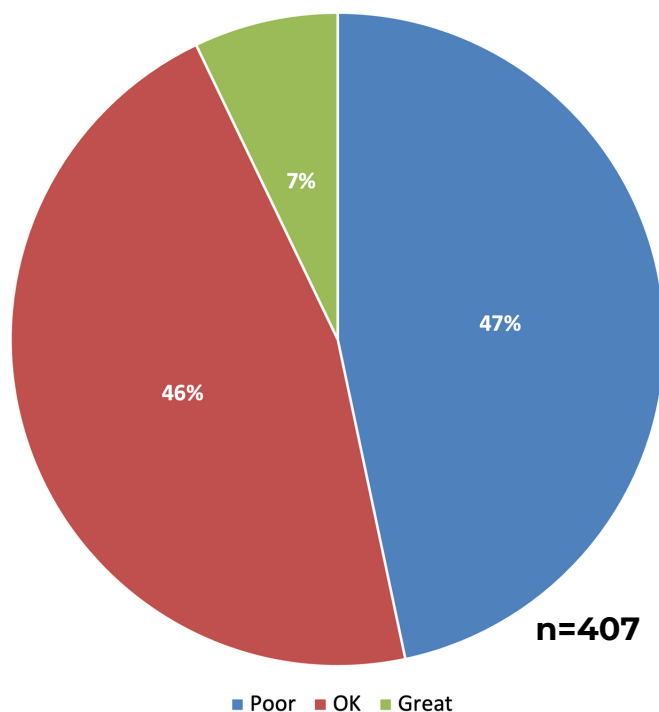
"**Councilor** for my district, and the Councilor at large, have **been very responsive**."

Q5 How well do you feel that our government asks you about and understands your needs?

Half of all respondents feel our government does a poor job of communicating with them, both in asking for input and in sharing priorities

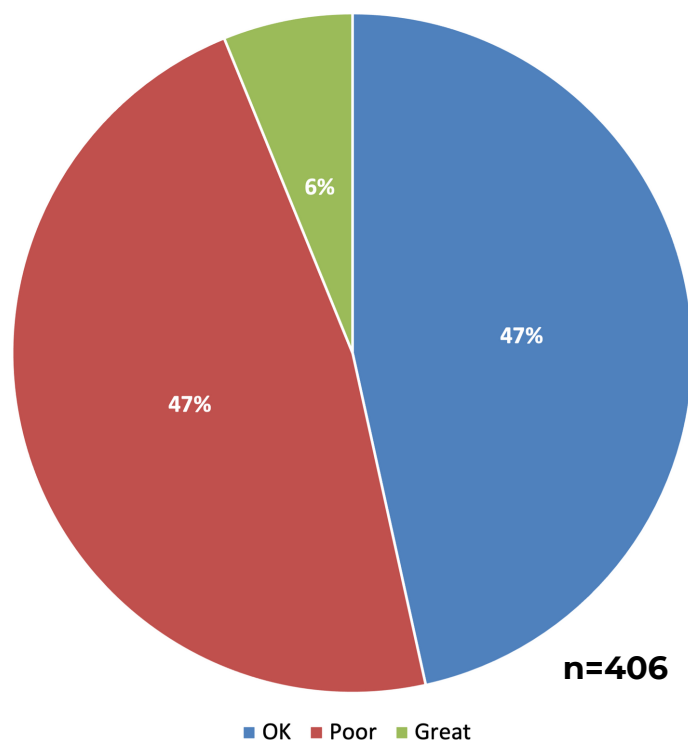
"...some agencies and councillors do a great job, but the city government, as such, is not."

"I am not sure I have ever been asked about my needs....and I would not know how to communicate them to the appropriate people.."



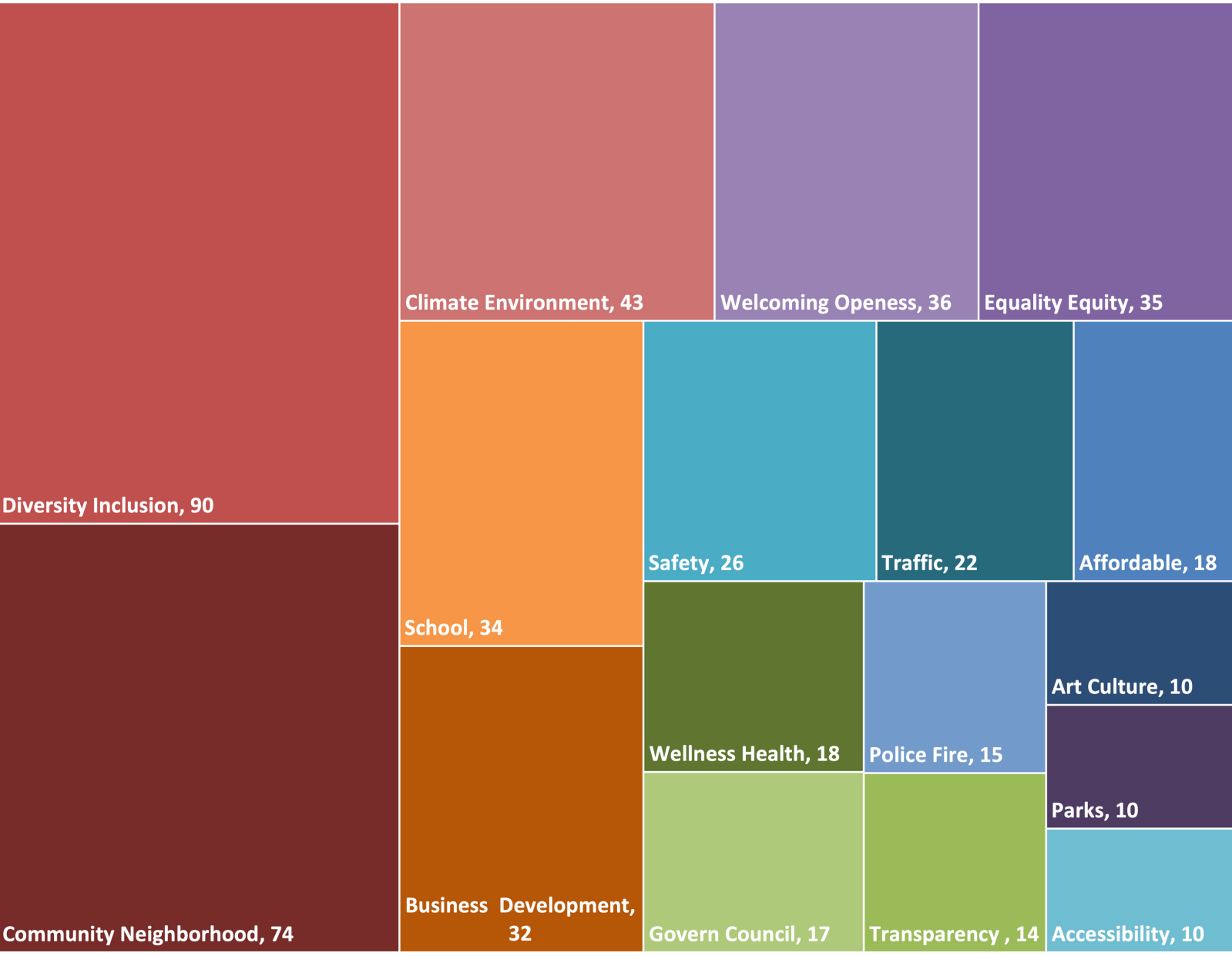
Q6 How well do you feel that our government tells you its priorities and areas of focus?

"The suggestions for **annual goal setting**, to go beyond simply fiscal concerns, an **annual state of the town address**, and **performance evaluation criteria** for key government administrative personnel would do much to identify priorities and focus"



Q7 What would you include in a vision and values statement for Watertown? (page 1 of 2)

The well-being of all community members seems core to what respondents want in Watertown vision and values statement -- commitments to diversity & inclusion, community, addressing climate change, being welcoming, equity, and our schools



n=260

"Making Watertown a safe, affordable, inclusive community that values ALL residents."

Q7 What would you include in a vision and values statement for Watertown? (page 2 of 2)

The well-being of all community members seems core to what respondents want in Watertown vision and values statement -- commitments to diversity & inclusion, community, addressing climate change, being welcoming, equity, and our schools

"Key themes such as **transparency, inclusivity, equity,** and a **priority for health and wellbeing,** in the most holistic sense. I'd like it to be **clear and concise,** written in a way all community members can grasp and appreciate."

"City **government is for and about it's by people.** There needs to be a permeability to allow the government to be well run on behalf of and with its residents."

"Wanting to be **proactive about including diversity** of all kinds in our neighborhoods"

"**Equity and inclusion** for all our residents; excellence in **education** and **environmental protection;** transparent, effective and **accountable governance;** and engagement of the public in policy-setting."

"Maintaining a **sense of community** for families who've lived here for generations, while also **being welcoming and inclusive** of newer residents. Also, that Watertown is a dense, **walkable/bike-able community** that also values and cares for its **abundant parks and natural resources.**"

"Emphasis on **community identity** and shared places to gather, especially the river"

"A city **actively seeking input from its citizens,** working to collaboratively prioritize actions to **improve our community** and **allocating funding to support the overall vision.**"

"**Inclusive, welcoming.** High value placed on attention to **environmental issues**"

Q8: Is there any other feedback you would like to give the Charter Review Committee? (page 1 of 2)

This question presented a wide range of answers, some relating to the CRC and the Charter Review process, and others about Watertown's government or general comments. 173 individuals responded to this question, and the general themes are captured in specific quotes

"More community meetings for input. **More outreach to the community** to let people know what is happening. Also, I am disappointed that some of the councilors do not seem open to the review process (have their minds made up but is that the feeling on their constituents?) and do they know the concerns of the people who it will affect. Maybe instead of doing a straw pole at the Charter review meetings the councillors need to do a straw pole in their communities and **begin conversations with the public.** "

"Small changes, if any. **The Charter works**"

"Please **show us you are interested in hearing from the public.** My strong sense is that you wish to rush the review process along in order to minimally change the way you've been doing things. **I know change is hard, but we the community are asking for change.**"

"The **Town Council** should be **professionalized**, and the role of **TC President should be elected by the Council** from among its members, not as a separate position."

"I support the Collins Center proposal"

"I think **the Charter Review Committee should be elected**, not appointed."

Q8: Is there any other feedback you would like to give the Charter Review Committee? (page 2 of 2)

This question presented a wide range of answers, some relating to the CRC and the Charter Review process, and others about Watertown's government or general comments. 173 individuals responded to this question, and the general themes are captured in specific quotes

"Next time, the process for **choosing CRC members should be more democratic** and representative"

"The leaders of Watertown have no long term vision - **the citizens should be able to participate in and be made aware of the Town's long term plan** - where will Watertown be in 10 years and how is the town and its residents going to get there?"

"Our **current form of government** is very good. Individual departments can always be improved, but **our framework is excellent.**"

"..look hard at the difficult issues and **[don't] be afraid of questioning transparency, accountability,** power dynamics, connections - opening up to **more communication between town personnel and citizens**"

"Make it as **easy as possible to run for office and get involved.** Hire a new Town Manager who can **bring our services and communication up to 21st C standards.**"

"There could be more **human right[s] activities.** Watertown tend to a bit quieter compared to neighboring cities and towns when it comes to civil right[s] issues."

Many respondents are grateful for the CRC's work:

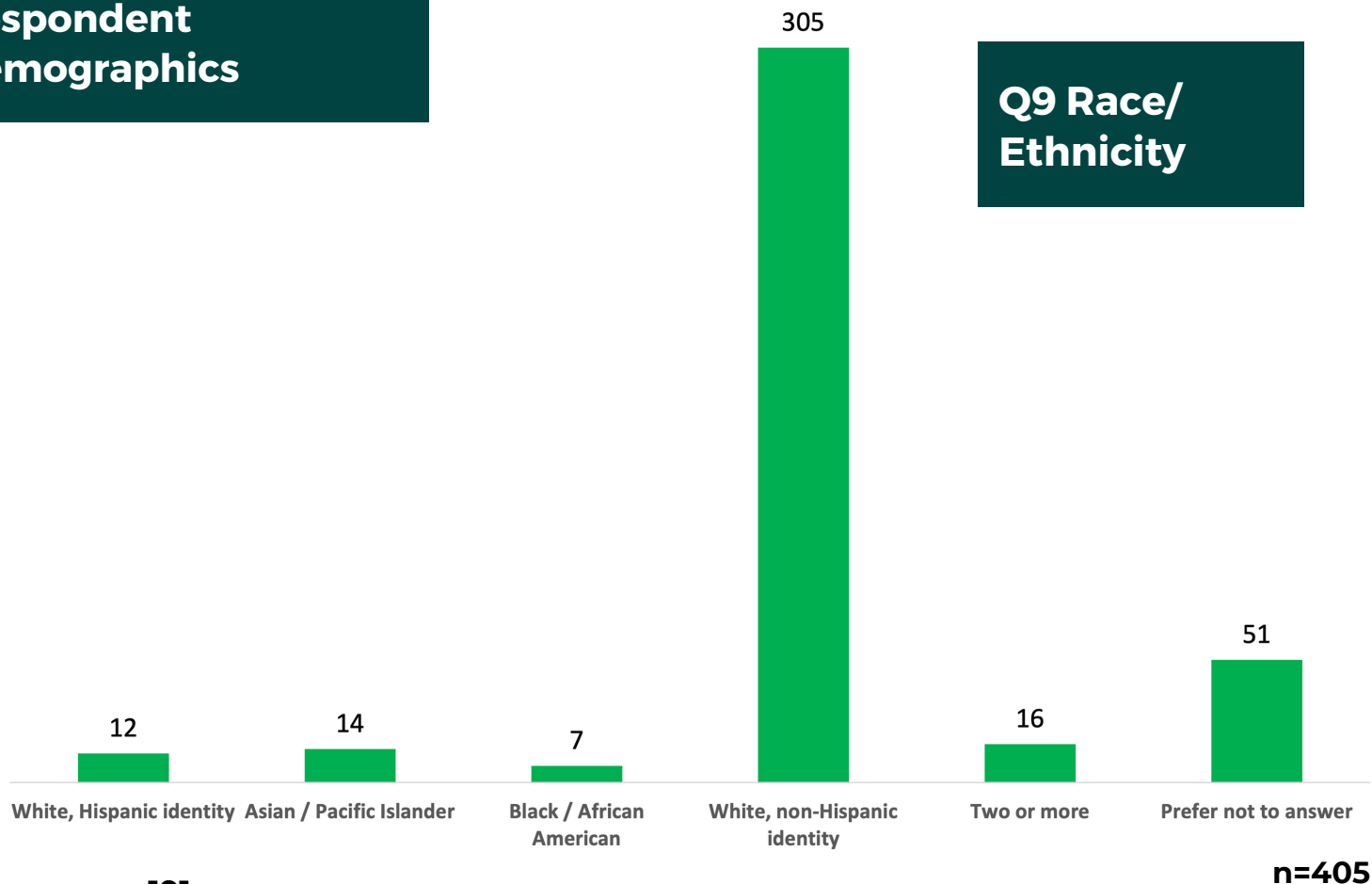
"Thank you for all your hard work!"

"I really appreciate all the work you're putting into making Watertown a better place!"

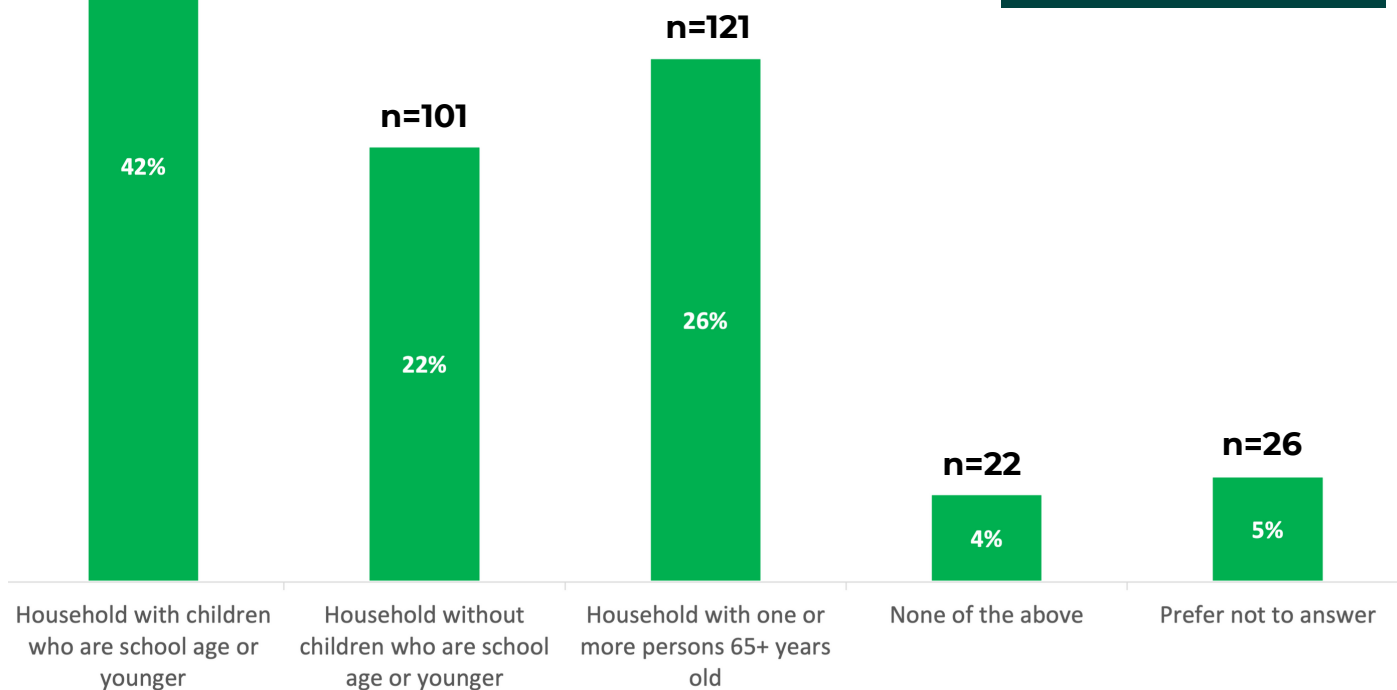
"[T]hank you for all that you are doing!"

Respondent Demographics

Q9 Race/ Ethnicity



Q10 Household Composition



**Watertown
Forward**

Thank You!

For Questions or comments on this
report, please contact us at
forwardwatertown@gmail.com

Appendix

Survey Questions:

1. What makes Watertown a good place for you (and your family) to live?
2. What would make Watertown a better place for you (and your family) to live?
3. Our government delivers services to residents and local businesses, decides how our taxes are spent, and makes policies on a range of issues. Please rank how well you believe Watertown delivers the following services:
 - a. Education
 - b. Public safety & security, including police & fire
 - c. Neighborhood and economic development including zoning & affordable housing
 - d. Street & sidewalk safety for pedestrians, bikes, & cars
 - e. Public utilities including sanitation, recycling, & Water
 - f. Parks and recreation, including programs & facilities
 - g. Library
 - h. Public health & well-being
 - i. Overall quality of life in Watertown
4. When you have a question or a problem related to Watertown services or government do you:
 - a. Contact the Town Manager or a department
 - b. Contact a Watertown Councilor
 - c. Contact the Council President
 - d. Don't know who to contact
 - e. None of the above
5. How well do you feel that our government asks you about and understands your needs?
 - a. Great
 - b. OK
 - c. Poor
6. How well do you feel that our government tells you its priorities and areas of focus?
 - a. Great
 - b. OK
 - c. Poor

7. What would you include in a vision and values statement for Watertown?
8. Is there any other feedback you would like to give the Charter Review Committee?
9. Optional demographic: race & ethnicity
 - a. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - b. Black/African American
 - c. Native American
 - d. White, non-Hispanic identity
 - e. White, Hispanic identity
 - f. Two or more
 - g. Prefer not to answer
10. Optional demographic: household composition
 - a. Household with children who are school age or younger
 - b. Household without children who are school age or younger
 - c. Household with one or more persons 65+ years old
 - d. None of the above
 - e. Prefer not to answer