Central Street Neighbors Association
Survey on Evanston City Size, Density, & Development
Preliminary Report • June 4, 2025

From May 13-23, CSNA ran an opt-in online survey of Evanston resident opinions about city size, density, housing, urbanness, and character. The message to membership stated the purpose:

> **"**Evanston is advancing a comprehensive plan makeover. This re-write will set standards for zoning and development decisions for the next 20 years, affecting residential neighborhoods, business districts like those on Central Street, and more. Once a 'plan' is in place, the City will begin considering re-zoning of residential and other neighborhoods.
>
> This Envision Evanston 2045 process, however, never asked Evanston residents some foundational questions about overall desired community size and direction. Does Evanston even want to grow larger? Or smaller? Taller? More urban? More suburban? Or is the porridge just right? To help bridge some of these gaps, please take our quick survey about Evanston population size, density, housing, and development. Results will be used to advise our Board as well as City policymakers."

The survey also explored feelings about housing affordability in Evanston, and tried to probe general attitudes about single-family housing, existing purposes of zoning embodied in Evanston code, and the future of low-rise business areas such as Central Street's B1a and overlay districts.

Executive Summary

Response rate, many times CSNA membership, far exceeded expectations. Nearly 900 residents completed it and provided personal information requested for verification. Despite natural skew toward CSNA demographics, input was citywide, allowing some conclusions:

- concern about future challenges to being able to afford living in Evanston are widespread, affecting even those who currently have little to no difficulty meeting monthly costs
- higher taxes are the overwhelming greatest concern for homeowners, and, for non-homeowners, higher rents, but significant numbers of respondents express other worries
- there is no widespread clamor in Evanston for greater density or a larger population; the pro-density point of view has adherents but is distinctly a minority opinion
- by and large, Evanstonians want Evanston to maintain its existing urban-suburban balance and, if anything, believe that Evanston is already overdeveloped, not underdeveloped
- people believe that additional density will make it more expensive to live here
- preserving existing neighborhood character is widely supported, even by those who don't own property, as is preservation of low-rise business districts like Central Street
- single-family homes are appreciated and valued as an integral part of Evanston

Discussion as well as charts for most of the answers follow.

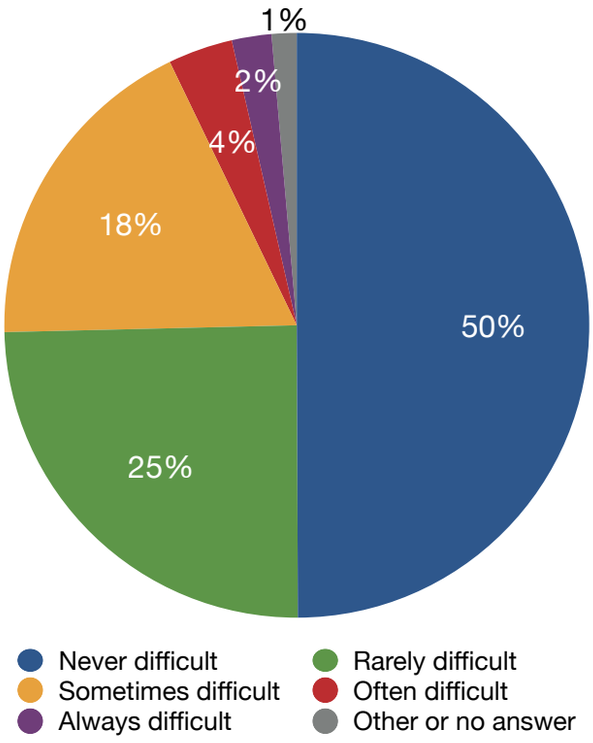
Discussion

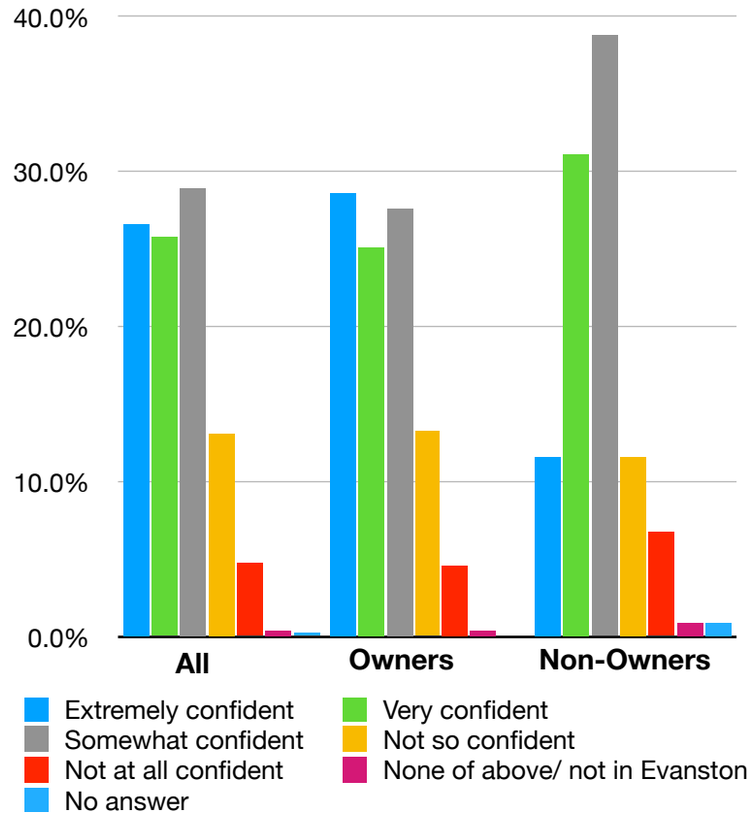
Housing Affordability. Discussion of housing affordability understandably focuses on those with difficulty. That may sometimes obscure the fact that, also understandably, a large majority of residents are comfortably housed. Housing is a market and people generally move to where they can afford to live within their means. Roughly 3/4 of all Evanston respondents indicated that they had little to no difficulty making their monthly housing costs, with homeowners, as expected, encountering slightly less difficulty than renters.

Somewhat surprising is that only half of all respondents indicate high levels of future confidence in that ability. In other words, even among those currently comfortably housed, there is a considerable segment of anxiety as to future conditions changing. Delving deeper into why, respondents indicated that taxes were the greatest concern. However, breaking that out further into owners v. non-owners yielded a different nuance. Non-owners were far less likely to indicate taxes as a concern and far more likely to be apprehensive about rent increases (although the two are, in fact, closely related).

Additionally, a concern of a not-insignificant minority is of economic factors other than direct housing costs, i.e., loss of income, or increases in non-housing costs such as health care.

Housing Cost: Present Difficulty, Future Confidence





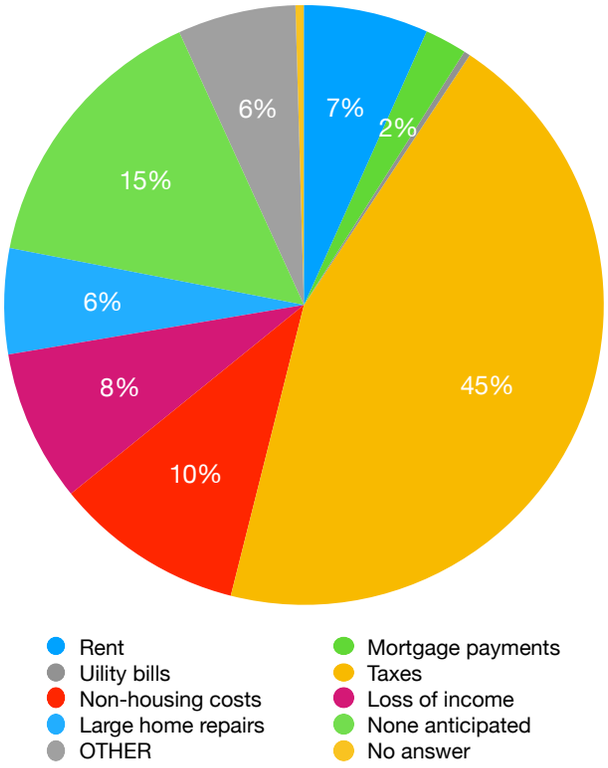
For this question, "Housing costs" includes mortgage payments, rent/fees, taxes, assessments, utilities, insurance and/or maintenance and repairs. In a typical month, is it difficult for you to cover your housing costs?

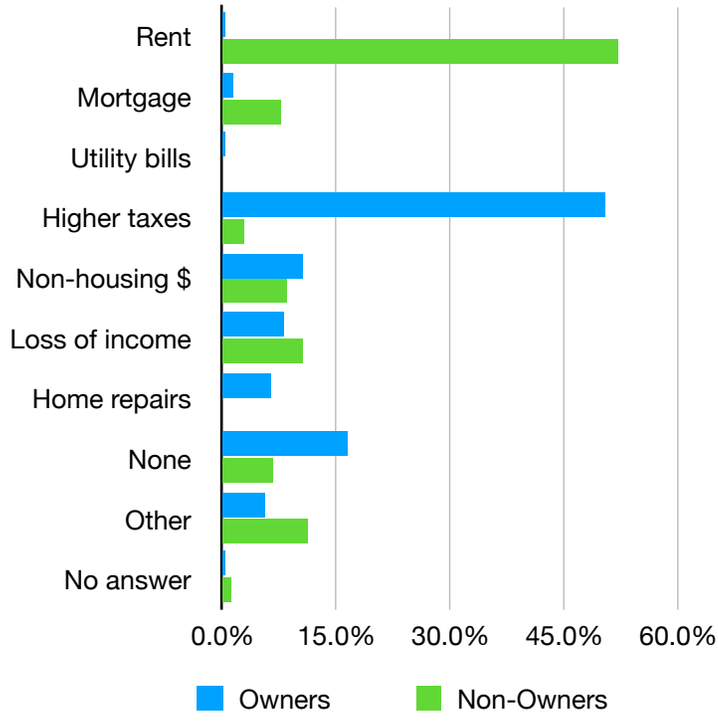
	All	Own	Non-own
Never difficult	49.8%	51.2%	39.8%
Rarely difficult	24.6%	24.2%	28.2%
Sometimes difficult	18.2%	18.0%	19.4%
Often difficult	3.6%	3.4%	4.9%
Always difficult	2.2%	2.0%	3.9%
Other or no answer	1.4%	1.2%	2.9%

How confident are you about your personal ability to afford to live in Evanston over the next 5-10 years?

	All	Own	Non-own
Extremely confident	26.6%	28.6%	11.7%
Very confident	25.8%	25.1%	31.1%
Somewhat confident	29.0%	27.7%	38.8%
Not so confident	13.1%	13.3%	11.7%
Not at all confident	4.8%	4.6%	6.8%
None of the above / I don't plan to live in Evanston	0.5%	0.4%	1.0%
No answer	0.2%	0.1%	1.0%

Challenges to Evanston Affordability





What is the greatest future challenge you anticipate in being able to afford living in Evanston?

	Overall	Owners	Non-Owners
Higher rent	6.7%	0.5%	51.9%
Higher mortgage payments	2.3%	1.6%	7.5%
Higher utility bills	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%
Higher taxes	44.6%	50.3%	2.8%
Increased costs other than housing (e.g. medical bills)	10.2%	10.5%	8.5%
Loss of income	8.2%	7.9%	10.4%
Large home repairs	5.7%	6.5%	0.0%
No affordability challenges anticipated	15.1%	16.3%	6.6%
OTHER	6.4%	5.7%	11.3%
No answer	0.5%	0.4%	0.9%

Population and Density

Respondents were asked in two different ways about the direction they would like to see Evanston grow (or not). The results confirm that at most a small minority of Evanstonians favor greater density. **By roughly 3:1 margins, Evanston would like to maintain or even reduce density.**

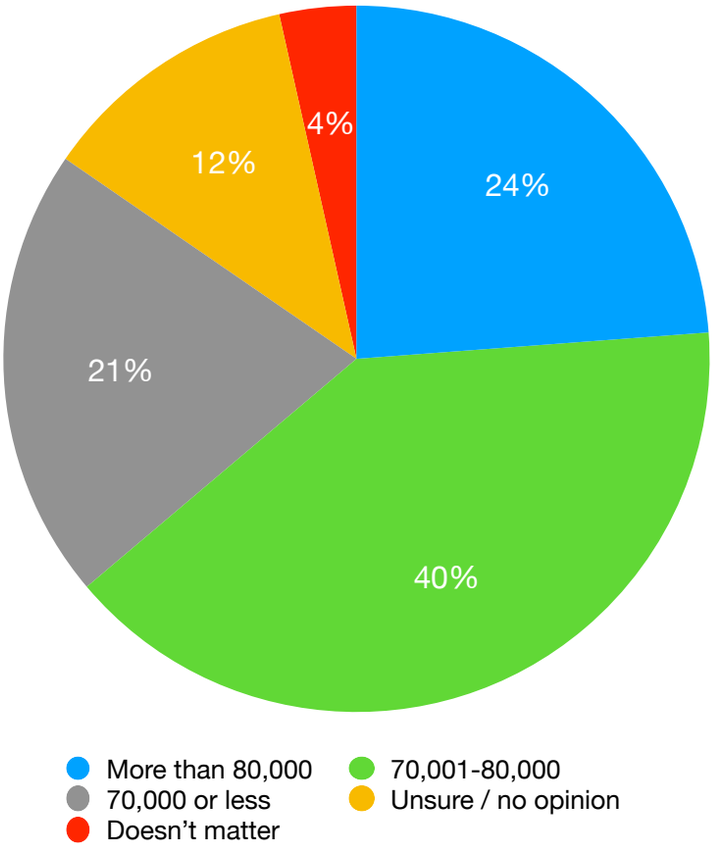
The survey did not assume that all respondents knew what Evanston's current population and density are, and so supplied that. The survey did not supply negative or positive prompts.

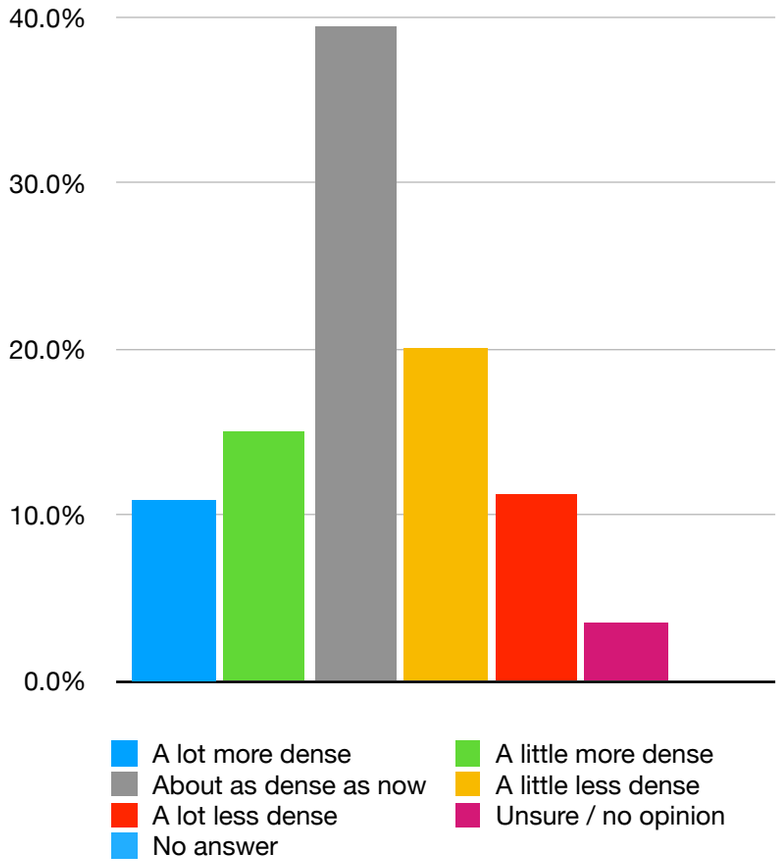
Veteran observers of Evanston would not be surprised by the finding that most respondents do **not** want to see Evanston increase in population or density. Somewhat surprising was the quantum of opinion that Evanston should be *less* dense or that its ideal population would be *smaller* than at present, both of which are demographically unlikely. Whether that was a "statement" answer by a number of those so responding or accurately reflects a feeling within a significant sector of the population that Evanston has already overdeveloped is difficult to say without interview or a different series of questions.

A small spike in those indicating a preference for growth was apparent and was concentrated amongst non-owners/multi-unit residents, showing the successful impact of a coordinated outside effort to skew the survey results (posters on social media urged trying to "spam" and "hijack" the survey). Given the large sample size, the attempt was noticeable but did not significantly change the overall result.

Notwithstanding the unethical tactic, the point of view should not be dismissed.

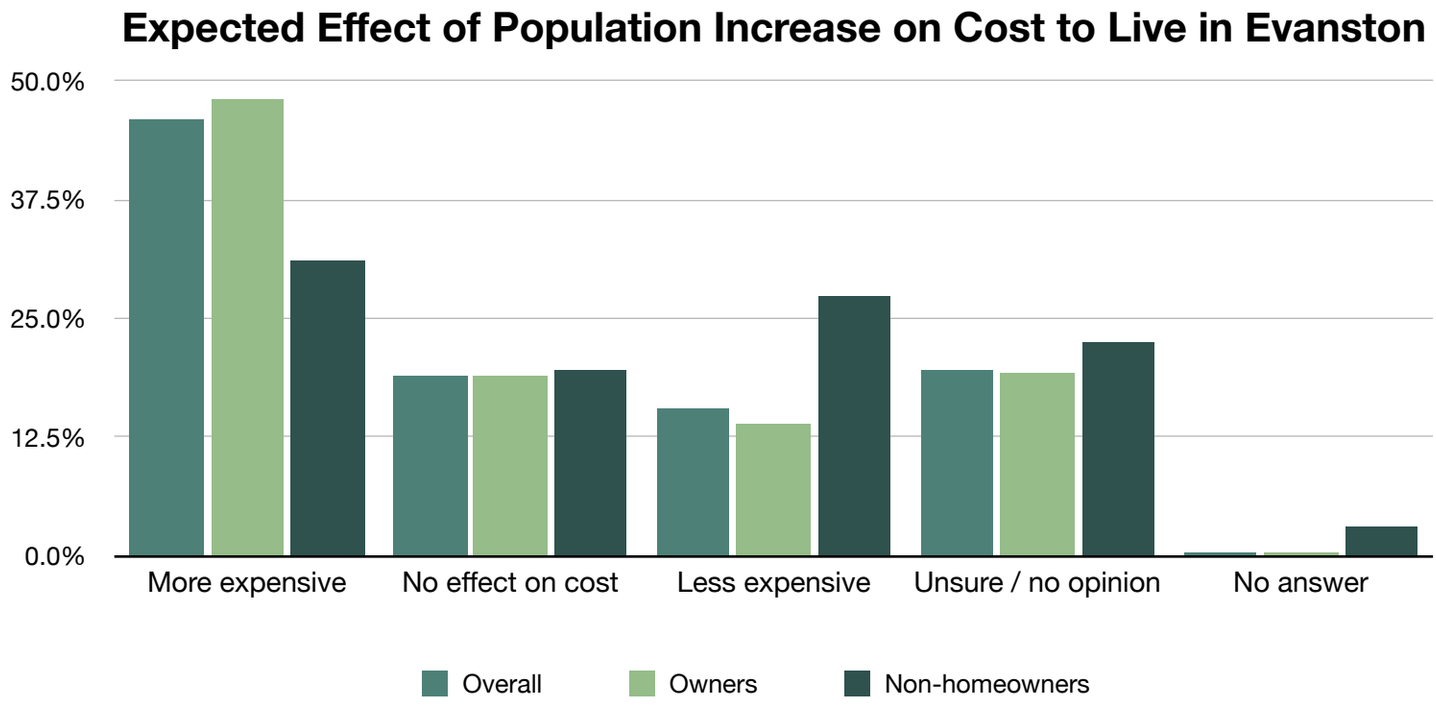
Evanston Population and Density Preferences





Optimal Evanston population (choices combined)	
More than 80,000	23.9%
70,001-80,000	40.2%
70,000 or less	20.8%
Unsure / no opinion	11.9%
Doesn't matter	3.5%

Preference for Change in Density	
A lot more dense	10.9%
A little more dense	15.0%
About as dense as now	39.5%
A little less dense	20.0%
A lot less dense	11.1%
Unsure / no opinion	3.5%
No answer	0.0%



Question: "Evanston government is considering plans to grow population by 8,000+ people over the next 20 years. Ideas differ as to how this would affect Evanston's economy, housing market, schools, government services, and taxes. How do you think an increase in Evanston population would impact the cost of living in Evanston?"

	Overall	Owners	Non-homeowners
Would make it more expensive to live in Evanston	45.9%	47.9%	31.1%
Would not affect how expensive it is to live in Evanston	18.9%	18.8%	19.4%
Would make it less expensive to live in Evanston	15.3%	13.7%	27.2%
Unsure / no opinion	19.6%	19.2%	22.3%
No answer	0.3%	0.4%	2.9%

Urban v. Suburban

Two questions following initial query about population and density attempted to probe the *qualitative* direction in which Evanston might change. Rather than use abstract terms like "urbanization" the more concrete and immediate examples of neighboring cities was used. This is also valid because of Evanston's historic identity of exceptionalism and its expressed desire to be different from both Chicago to its south or the rest of the North Shore to its north. For consistency and to avoid prejudice the term "Chicago" was used rather than the neighboring community of "Rogers Park" which may have undue negative connotations for many Evanston residents.

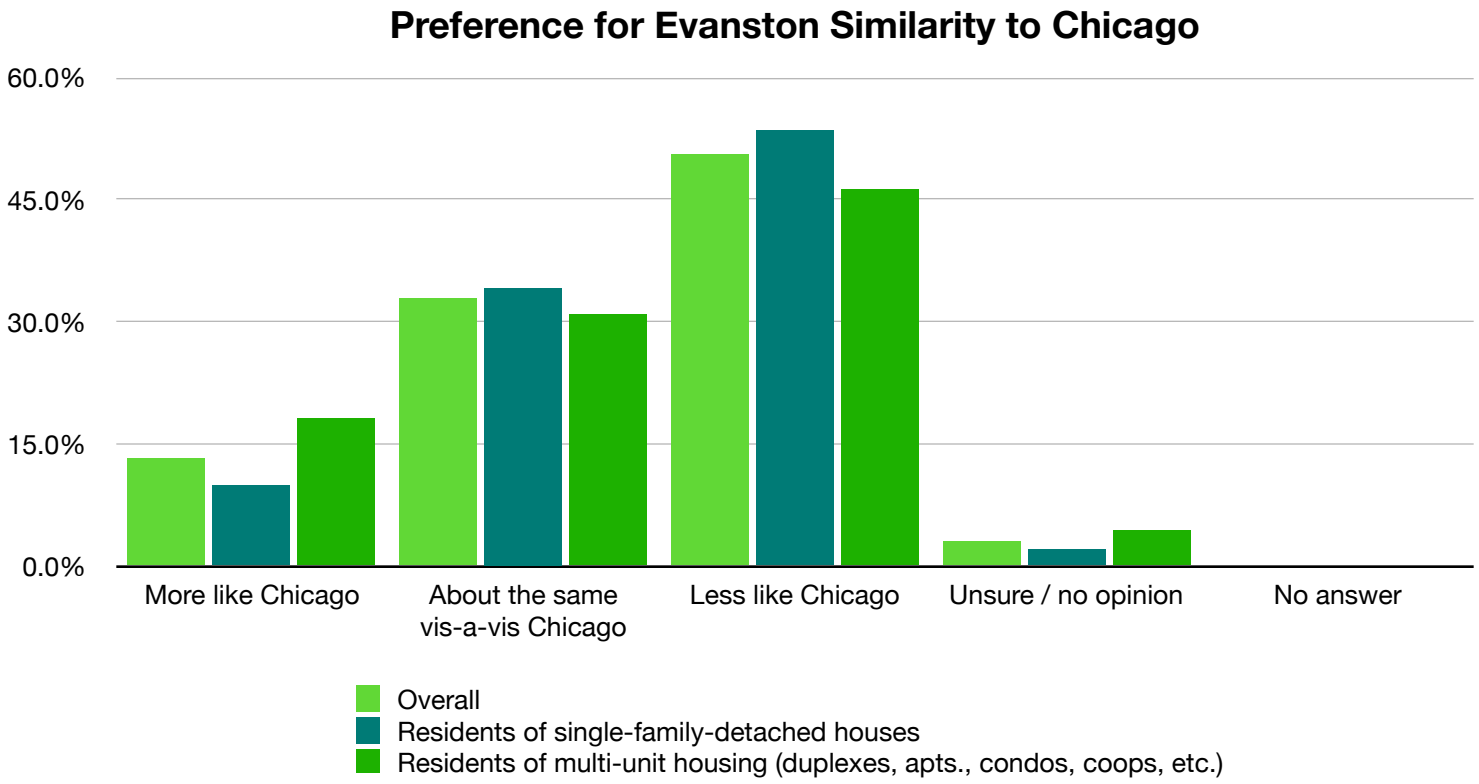
The results were consistent in that, as Evanstonians have expressed since the community's founding, **a strong majority — 83% — does not wish to be more like Chicago**. To the contrary, there is appeal to the idea that Evanston should be *less* like Chicago than it already is.

Notably, the support for being "more like Chicago" even dropped off a smidge when Wilmette and Skokie were added as alternatives, but the over 50% who indicated in the Chicago-only question that they wanted to be "less like Chicago" did not translate into an equivalent number who wanted to be more like either Skokie or Wilmette. The inference is that, similar to how a generic, unnamed party candidate often performs better in polls than when actual named candidates for that party are offered, the abstract idea of being "less like Chicago" has more appeal for some until they consider where that might lead. Being more like Evanston's two suburban neighbors has some appeal but is also a minority point of view.

A slightly different and perhaps simpler inference is that Evanston residents perceive there to be an "Evanston-ness" that is not like any other neighboring community and that they would just like what they feel is unique to be emphasized and maintained, not characteristics of any other town.

For both questions, a breakdown was undertaken after survey closure to probe for differences between residents of single-family-detached housing (often referred to as "single-family homes," but single-family attached is also single-family housing) and multi-unit structures, who might be expected to be more open to being "more like Chicago" since Chicago is dominated by such housing, even more so than Evanston. While the pro-Chicago sentiment ticked up somewhat in this group, *multi-unit dwellers by more than 3:1 still want Evanston to be more like Skokie, Wilmette, or just Evanston* than to be more like the big city.

No attribute of Chicago, Wilmette, or Skokie was supplied to the respondents. So there are limits in inferring what was on respondents' minds: schools, safety, taxes, culture, traffic, greenery, noise, and pace of life are all possibilities, but the question, on its face, asked only in general, suggesting at most a gestalt.



Question: "Evanston is bordered by much larger Chicago on the south and the two cities have both similarities and differences. Thinking about why you live in Evanston and your future life here, would you say you'd like Evanston to be"

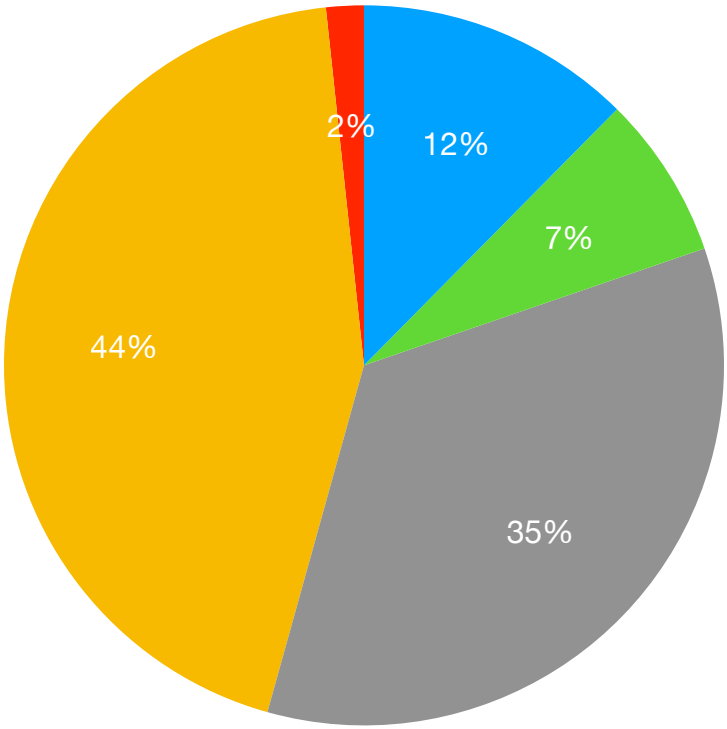
	Overall	Residents of single-family-detached houses	Residents of multi-unit housing (duplexes, apts., condos, coops, etc.)
More like Chicago	13.2%	10.0%	18.2%
About the same, relative to Chicago, as now	32.9%	34.1%	30.9%
Less like Chicago	50.6%	53.3%	46.2%
Unsure / no opinion	3.1%	2.2%	4.4%
No answer	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%

Evanston vis-a-vis Neighboring Towns

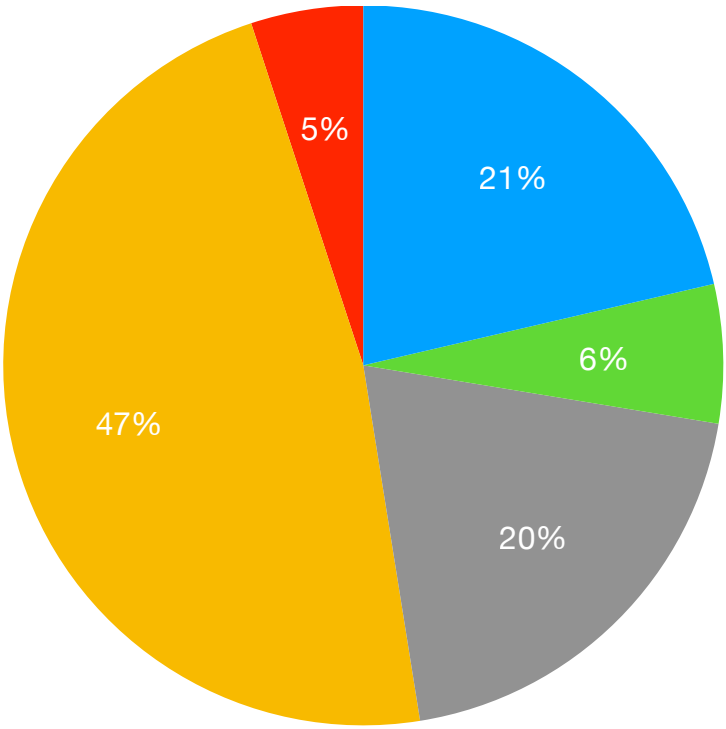
Evanston is also bordered by Skokie and Wilmette, with similarities to and differences from those neighbors. Thinking about why you live in Evanston, your future life here, and how Evanston might change, would you prefer Evanston to be

- More like Chicago
- More like Skokie
- More like Wilmette
- About the same, compared to others, as now
- Unsure, no preference, or no answer

Single-family-detached residents



Multi-unit housing residents



Preference for changing to be more like neighboring municipalities	
More like Chicago	12.4%
More like Skokie	7.3%
More like Wilmette	34.6%
About the same, compared to others, as now	44.0%
Unsure, no preference, or no answer	1.7%

Preference for changing to be more like neighboring municipalities	
More like Chicago	21.4%
More like Skokie	6.2%
More like Wilmette	19.9%
About the same, compared to others, as now	47.5%
Unsure, no preference, or no answer	5.0%

Development

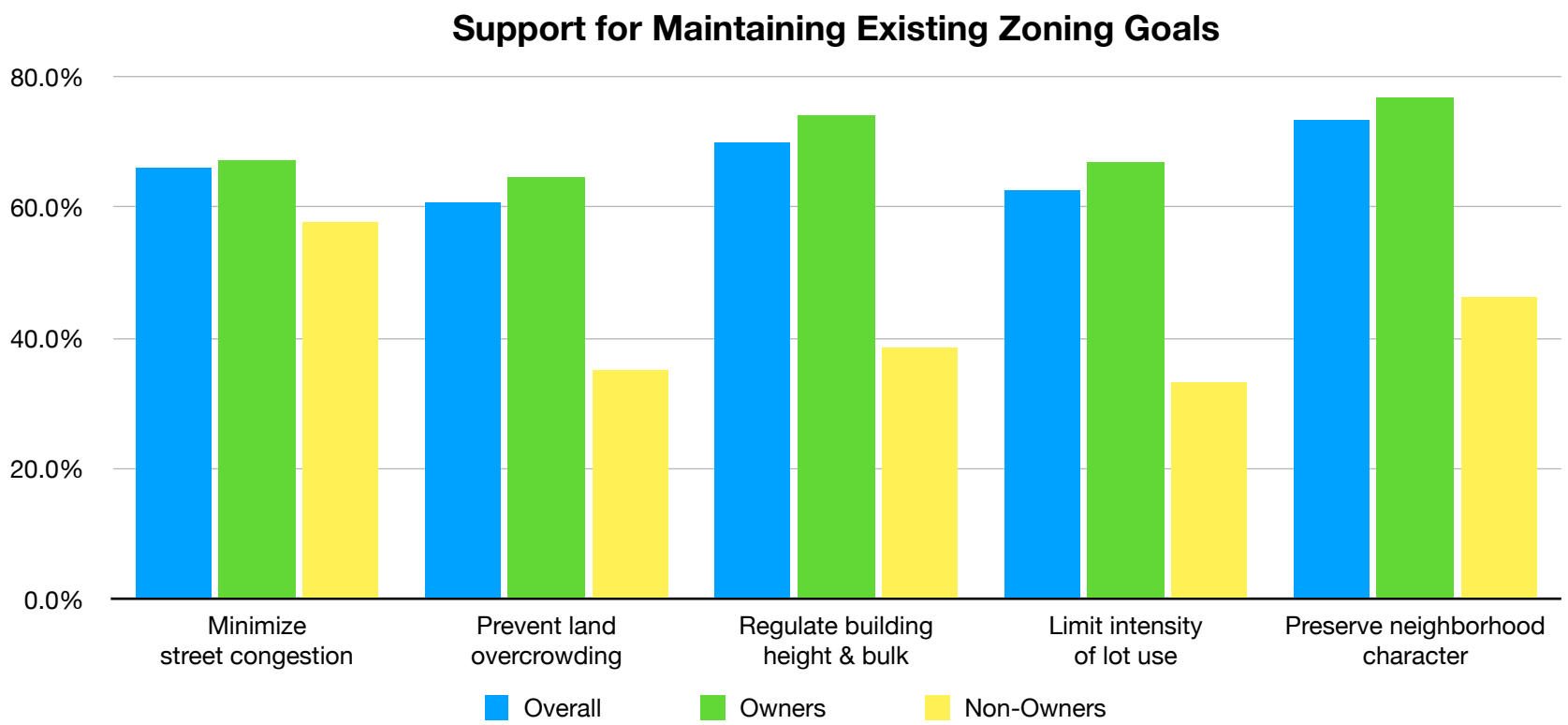
The next two questions aimed first at generalities regarding development and then at the specific issue of vintage business districts, which CSNA has long championed. The first question took five existing goals directly from the Evanston zoning code and asked, without any characterization, which if any the respondent thought should be retained as goals by the City. The second question asked about alternatives for districts such as the Central Street business district protected by the Central Street Master Plan overlay, altho the question was not limited to that.

Support for existing zoning goals is very strong, with, perhaps surprisingly, “neighborhood character” receiving the strongest support. All five existing goals received over 60% support. Both questions touched upon preservation and that, too, received strong support.

Support, though still substantial, was significantly less from non-owners than from those who own their homes. Here the impact of a concerted effort to impact the survey was noticeable. Also, however, the “unsure” numbers rose significantly. It should be recognized that zoning is opaque to most residents, and that non-property-owners will typically have far less cause in their residencies to become involved in zoning questions.

An improved survey would ask the questions individually rather than agglomerated, and with pro, con, and unsure choices for each question.

There is no majority or consensus for redeveloping areas like Central Street into urban corridors.

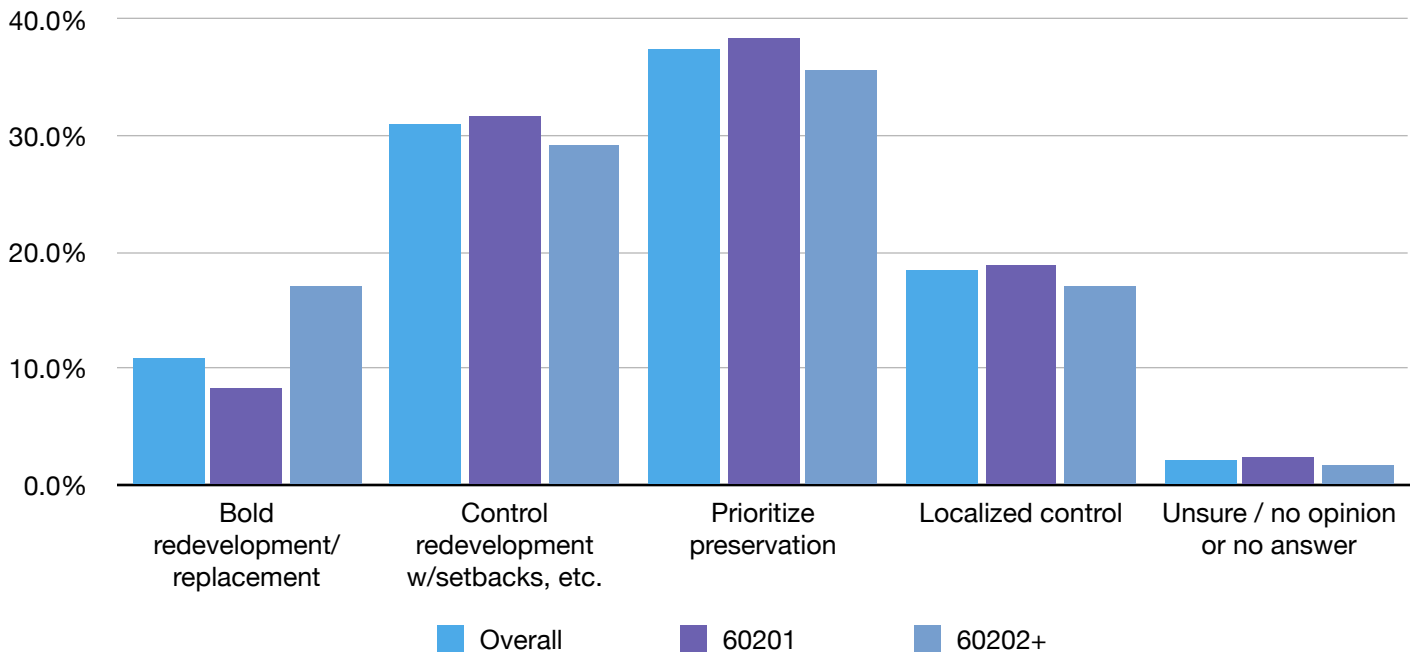


Question: By law, the City must consider the following goals when making planning and zoning decisions, but the City is considering changing these. Which of the following should continue to be Evanston goals? (check any or all that you support)

	Overall	Owners	Non-Owners
Minimize congestion in public streets	66.1%	67.3%	57.5%
Prevent overcrowding of land	60.9%	64.4%	34.9%
Regulate height and bulk of buildings	70.0%	74.3%	38.7%
Limit intensity of use on one lot	62.7%	66.8%	33.0%
Preserve existing character of neighborhoods	73.3%	77.0%	46.2%
No choices checked	9.3%	7.6%	21.7%

Note: Respondents could check 0, 1, or up to all 5 choices. As shown, over 90% of respondents checked at least one existing goal; however, the option to check more than one may not have been clear.

Preferred Approach to Existing Low-Rise Business Districts



Question: "Some Evanston business districts (some of downtown; Chicago Ave.) are heavily developed with apartments or condo units well above street level. Other business districts (such as Central Street; Davis Street west of the L; or Dempster & Chicago) have a more vintage, less intense feel, mainly 1-3 stories tall. What best describes how you'd like existing vintage low-rise business districts treated?"

	Overall	60201	60202
Bold redevelopment. Demolish old buildings and replace with modern 5- to 6+-story structures to create urban corridors	10.8%	8.4%	17.2%
Controlled redevelopment. Prioritize adaptive reuse, with height limits of ~3 or 4 stories and strict setbacks to require human scale at sidewalk	31.1%	31.8%	29.3%
Preservation. Maintain existing look and feel and low-rise character, using zoning, landmarking, and similar tools	37.5%	38.4%	35.6%
Local control. Tailor each district to the look and feel and preferences of that neighborhood	18.4%	18.9%	17.2%
Unsure / no opinion/answer	2.2%	2.4%	1.7%

Single-Family Houses

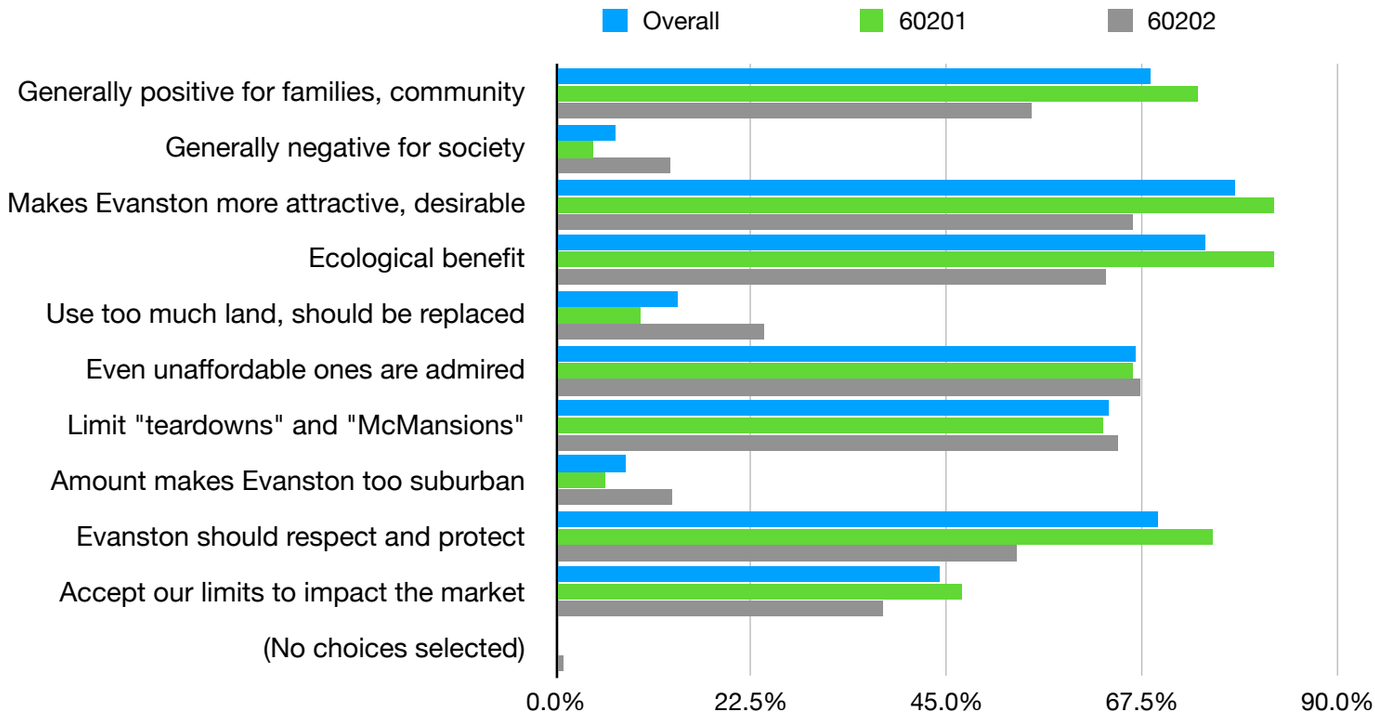
A consistent sub-theme of some upzoning advocates and some of the text in Envision Evanston 2045 drafts, that has sparked some of the greatest opposition in "The City of Homes," has been negative characterizations of single-family-zoned neighborhoods or, by extension or implication, their structures or inhabitants. The final question gave respondents a chance to select positive or negative statements about single-family homes, as well as one neutral-market-based statement.

The responses were overall strong and positive about such housing, by wide margins. As further inquiry, a breakdown by ZIP tested, albeit crudely, whether that was just a regional attitude. There was little difference in responses. Overall, on almost all assertions 60201 was just slightly more supportive, with one exception.

The strongest agreement citywide was with the statement that single-family houses make Evanston more attractive and desirable. Interestingly, the one question where 60202 was even more in agreement than 60201 was with the statement that houses unaffordable to the respondent still are admirable. By and large Evanston appears to be blessed with a lack of envy, and/or an appreciation for architecture and landscaping, as evidenced by annual house walks and garden walks.

Time has not yet allowed formal correlations between responses on various questions but it is fair to say from preliminary review of the responses that the same minority that has negative views of single-family houses also wants Evanston to be more like Chicago, more populous, more dense, and its vintage business districts corridorized.

Positive or Negative Views of Single-Family Houses



Detached single-family houses, many 70-100+ years old, are only 30% of Evanston housing units but characterize much of Evanston's visual look and feel. Please check all the statements you agree with.

	Overall	60201	60202
Single-family house ownership is generally positive for families, neighborhood, and community	68.4%	73.9%	54.8%
Single-family house ownership is generally negative for society and should be discouraged and made more difficult	6.8%	4.1%	13.0%
The age, architectural quality, and diversity of Evanston's single-family houses makes it a more attractive and desirable community	78.0%	82.6%	66.5%
Birds, wildlife, air quality, and Evanston as a whole benefit from the trees and green space on single-family properties	74.7%	82.6%	63.2%
Single-family houses occupy too much land and should be replaced with apartments, condominiums, and attached housing (duplexes, townhomes, etc.)	14.0%	9.7%	23.8%
There are many Evanston houses that I can't afford but whose looks I admire and appreciate	66.6%	66.6%	67.4%
We should limit "teardowns" and the building of "McMansions"	63.5%	62.9%	64.9%
The amount of single-family homes on Evanston streets makes it too suburban	7.9%	5.7%	13.4%
Evanston should respect and protect its single-family homeowners and neighborhoods	69.2%	75.6%	53.1%
There is little land in Evanston on which to build new single-family homes and we should accept that, and not try to change the market	44.2%	46.7%	37.7%
(No choices selected)	0.2%	0.0%	0.8%

Survey design

Issues relating to growth, urban planning, population, and density are complex and could warrant over 100 different questions. For a focus group, something closer to that might be warranted or possible. However, this survey was at a very basic meta level, seeking broad attitudes about questions unasked during the ongoing planning, and the limits of online questioning dictated fewer than a dozen substantive ones.

Background/demographics:

3 demographic/contextual questions about housing type, housing arrangement, and employment status were asked; additional demographic info (such as ward) could be gleaned from address but as yet has not been undertaken.

Substantive questions:

— 3 questions about affordability including chief expected contributing cause were asked; choices for cause were randomized across surveys to avoid primacy bias

— 3 questions about density and population preferences, supplying minimal info; not randomized; "first ballot position" was purposely given to choices for greater density and greater population

— 2 abstract questions about Evanston vis-a-vis Chicago, then vis-a-vis Chicago/Skokie/Wilmette, were designed to tease out general preference for Evanston's place in the urban/suburban mix (and also to test answers re Chicago by asking in two different ways)

— 1 question incorporating five existing goals from Evanston's municipal code, asking whether respondent supported preserving the goal, was asked; the goals were randomized and respondents could could select multiple, all, or none

— 1 question was asked as to preference for treatment of low-rise business districts

— 1 question was asked as to agreement or disagreement with various statements, both favorable and unfavorable, about single-family homes; these were randomized

A number of respondents desired additional questions that were not asked. More is always an option. However, the prompts from the software were that the survey was already at the limit where additional questions would cause a falloff in response rate. Based on the high degree of interest indicated by respondents, additional surveys are likely to follow that can go more into depth on specific types of housing (such as duplexes) or more targeted development issues (such as downtown).

Bias avoidance. Nothing positive or negative was said about density, population, Evanston, Chicago, Skokie, or Wilmette, nor about the existing zoning standards from which language was taken, so as not to prompt respondents. The aim was to let respondents' preferences guide how they answered. Nor did CSNA steer or direct any particular response in its communication to members or mailing list recipients about this survey, nor in its website or social media posts about the survey. Bigger/smaller and urban/suburban had equal billing.

CSNA is aware of multiple attempts made in local social media by self-styled "YIMBY" or pro-density advocates both to drive like-minded persons to participate in the survey and to respond to questions in a certain way; to CSNA's knowledge no other person or community group did such a thing. However, no attempt was made to identify and cull the orchestrated "YIMBY" responses because (a) if Evanston residents, they count as much as any other residents and (b) they do provide counterweight to what was likely to be a homeowner-heavy respondent group. However, the generally extreme nature of this orchestrated input into the survey did have a noticeable and mildly distorting statistical effect, throwing off normal bell curves.

Evanston population was represented in the preface to the question about density as 77,000. That figure is both a midpoint between 2020 census and 2024 ACS estimates and consistent with the amount of housing built in the past 20 years. For context, on assumption that abstract numbers may mean little to many respondents, density figures of other north-Chicagoland suburbs and a few large US cities were supplied. To avoid confound and prejudice, denser suburbs of Chicago such as Berwyn and Cicero, possibly perceived as less desirable than Evanston, were not included; the only more-dense suburb included (there are not many) was Oak Park, generally perceived as similar to Evanston in many ways, and which was also included in EE45 materials for that purpose:

In the table provided, Evanston is the 4th-most-dense municipality listed, or between the 16th-and 20th percentile. This was done so as not to prejudice respondents by overstating Evanston density. In reality, Evanston is in the top 1% or 2% of all U.S. municipalities, so this table gave a soft boost to a pro-density response by suggesting that Evanston had a long way to go to reach the density levels of NYC.

Municipality	Density per mi²	Municipality	Density per mi²
Northbrook	2,600	Niles	5,200
Winnetka	3,300	Park Ridge	5,400
Glenview	3,500	Milwaukee WI	5,700
Waukegan	3,750	Skokie	6,400
Naperville	3,800	Minneapolis MN	7,900
Schaumburg	4,100	Los Angeles CA	8,300
Des Plaines	4,200	**Evanston**	**10,000**
Denver CO	4,700	Oak Park	11,300
Wilmette	4,870	Chicago	12,000
St. Louis MO	5,000	New York NY	29,300

In another question, the fact that household size has decreased was stated so as to explain the fact that population has stayed within a 70,000-80,000 range despite the known and obvious construction in the past several decades. The intent of adding that preface was, again, to *mitigate* against any "scare" that there has been a population surge, because Evanston, in fact, had more people at its peak in the 1970s.

The single-family home question had both negative and positive statements as choices, for fairness. There were slightly more positive than negative statements because studies show single-family housing remains a preferred form. Since no attempt has been made in the EE45 process to acknowledge this fact let alone identify why this is so and adapt to that, the question was primarily to fill that knowledge gap.

The single-family-detached-home question was prefaced with the statement that such homes account for only 30% of Evanston's housing units but account for much of its visual look and feel. These factual statements were intended to provide some explanation for even asking the question, and also to counter the figure floated that single-family-detached is more akin to 32%. As evaluation of construction figures shows, the single-family-detached percentage may be as low as 29% presently.

Attitudes toward many governmental actions are not necessarily along a single continuum. Recognizing that some may not want to plan at all, the survey in several questions offered options for those inclined to take a more economic libertarian/laissez-faire approach to development and zoning.

Nothing in any question or the survey in general was intended to point respondents to respond in any particular manner. Explicit effort was made to avoid "push poll" confounds. In the interest of balance, and to accommodate contrary opinions, any respondent who so chose had ample opportunity to state that they preferred a *higher* population for Evanston, that they preferred Evanston to be *more* dense, that they preferred Evanston to be *more* like Chicago, and that single-family homes take up too much land, make Evanston too suburban, and/or should be discouraged, and that low-rise business districts should be re-developed and corridorized. The coordinated effort to "spam" the survey (their words, not mine) amply demonstrated that those of such a mind had no difficulty doing so. The results are clear that they do not represent Evanston.

Distribution mechanism

Initial distribution was to CSNA membership, former members, and others who have indicated interest in receiving info from CSNA. That was buttressed by a post on our website and by one on the CSNA Facebook site. However, circulation to the broader community was encouraged. CSNA being a volunteer group, distribution efforts were informal and not comprehensive.

Because the initial query was only to the CSNA community, there was no introductory blurb or ID of "Central Street Neighbors Association" on the survey. That remained unchanged

even as distribution spread because all respondents should confront the same document. However, it may have confused some respondents.

As word spread, other individuals and groups asked if they could redistribute. Several community leaders including specifically in south Evanston were additionally asked to distribute so that the results could reach beyond north Evanston.

Several pro-density advocates, as noted, used social media to secure response from the like-minded. These had some success as indicated by distinct spikes of responses.

Response

We were hoping for at least 250 resident responses. That was greatly exceeded. Interestingly, the completion rate was much higher than that predicted by Surveymonkey. The median time a respondent spent on the survey was 7.2 minutes duration, about as predicted. The median time spent by those who did not provide a name and address was less than three minutes, however, a significant difference.

Engagement levels were extremely high. The vast majority of respondents completed the entire survey. Every question had a response rate above 99%, and some were 100%. Additionally, there was generous use of the Comment boxes.

It is fair to say that the survey hit a chord with many and that many Evanston residents were eager to supply their opinions and felt that they hadn't been asked before. This suggests that there has been a significant population missed by the formal City planning engagement process, or that important questions have not been asked, or both.

Notes and Initial Analysis of Responses

North/South Evanston. The percentage responding from 60201 was a little over 2x that of south Evanston; however, the number responding from 60202 was still sizable.

Retirees. The minority of respondents indicating they were retired, although a minority, was somewhat higher than the percentage reported in the general population. This is not unnatural given that the CSNA membership area includes three significant senior living communities, and also given the widely understood current general aging of Evanston's population.

Home Ownership. Most Evanston households, like most American households, own their homes, and so any random survey will result in most responses being from homeowners. Additionally, homeowners typically participate at a greater rate than renters in civic activities ranging from block clubs and PTAs to elections. In Evanston, during the academic year as many as 20% or more of adults are students, who overwhelmingly do not own property and who participate at an extremely low rate in municipal affairs. So as expected, the survey response was on the homeowner-heavy side. Still, over 100 renters with verifiable addresses responded, a significant sample.

Future affordability. While two-thirds of the retirees who said they currently have no difficulty or rare difficulty in making monthly housing costs have high confidence in being able to do so going forward, the flip side of that is that almost 1/3 of retirees have shaky to no confidence in future ability to afford Evanston.

By far the largest affordability challenge anticipated by retirees is higher taxes, selected by over 42%. However, that was also the most common response for non-retirees, in fact with a slightly higher selection rate of 44%.

Loss of income is a significant fear and is most likely among those employed full-time, and most of those who selected that as their #1 fear are homeowners, likely because they are the most likely to have mortgages taken out on assumption of that income. Nearly 85% of *homeowners* expressed anticipated challenges with being able to continue to afford to live in Evanston and, while by far the largest concern is taxes, there are many other serious concerns.

Surprises

I didn't expect so many would say they'd like Evanston to be less dense or less populous. Obviously this is both impractical and unlikely. However, since it was asked simply as a "preference" without regard to practicality or probability, it represents a significant feeling that Evanston is already overdeveloped. That was not specifically asked.

Even among non-homeowners, preserving existing character has majority support as a continuing goal, and the most common statements with which they agree are about the value of SFHs. Even if they can't afford them. Even among non-homeowners, none of the anti-SFH home statements have majority support despite organized effort.

Differences in Respondent Subgroups

Homeowners have moderately less difficulty making housing costs and feel more secure about the future. Given correlation of homeownership with economic stability, this is expected.

A slight majority of non-homeowners have some to a lot of doubt about ability to afford over the next 5-10 years. Biggest challenge is higher rents. Almost no renters identify taxes as a contributor to this although, of course, landlords pay rent and pass this on to tenants.

Renters express more difficulty in affording Evanston; still, a majority said it is never or rarely difficult; 46% said they were not so confident or not at all confident about the future; overwhelmingly, renters' greatest expected challenge was higher rent, followed by loss of income. Only 5% said higher taxes.

Only 31% of renters thought that more density would make Evanston more affordable. OTOH 31% do, although this is largely accounted for by the YIMBY attempt to manipulate the survey.

The idea that greater density will make Evanston more affordable is a minority viewpoint that, however, has had some penetration, and the issue deserves discussion. It finds its greatest appeal among those who profess economic insecurity and who view higher rent or loss of income as their greatest future economic challenge.

Room for Improvement

With more time there would have been a more concerted effort to get more even citywide distribution; however, the degree of response from the homeowning-predominant neighborhoods of Evanston was unanticipated.

"Co-ops" were not specifically provided as a housing type option, nor were senior units with a paid-up contract status. The former were aggregated with condominiums and the latter either as "owned" or as "non-owned" OTHER depending on what the respondent indicated in comments.

There is a tradeoff between brevity and exacting accuracy and the language of the business district question could be revisited. Generalizations about multiple unique business districts are difficult and some, such as Dempster or Main west of Chicago Ave., are not as low-rise as Central Street or west Davis Street. A phrase other than "controlled development" might have been used; the intent was not to suggest that other choices would be "uncontrolled" but some respondents may have perceived that.

In a perfect world a Spanish-language version would have been provided.

In that same world the survey would not have been opt-in, reducing both sampling error and any effects of attempt at manipulation. As is, however, it is still a significant aggregation of data, and at minimum represents a large comment portal by which Evanston residents took opportunity to offer input on questions fundamental to community planning.

Jeff Smith
President, Central Street Neighbors Association