



# Reflecting Raleigh

THE NEXT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Raleigh  
Planning

**PHASE 1** Engagement Summary

DECEMBER 2025

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# Executive Summary



**The Comprehensive Plan describes how Raleigh should grow and develop in a way that is environmentally sustainable, financially feasible, and socially equitable. It includes goals, policies, and actions that guide future land use development, align future infrastructure and services, and coordinate public investment with anticipated growth.**

Raleigh's 2030 Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2009 and updated in 2019. Reflecting Raleigh is a five-phase process of creating a new Comprehensive Plan with Raleigh residents, elected officials, and other community leaders.

The first phase of Reflecting Raleigh (August 2024 – July 2025) included a range of engagement activities designed to share information with the public on best practices, key challenges, and opportunities as Raleigh grows and to collect information from the public on priorities, community assets, and solutions.

Throughout Phase 1, residents emphasized that transparency and accountability are essential to fostering trust and sustained engagement. One goal of this report is to demonstrate to all who took the time to engage that their input was received and to show how their input will be incorporated into the plan for Raleigh's next 20 years

## Emerging Priorities

During Phase 1, more than 12,000 people participated in Reflecting Raleigh in some capacity, virtually or in-person. Across activities, five priorities emerged from participant input.



**12,000+**  
people  
participated





## Community Education and Engagement

At every in-person event and in all the project's online surveys, residents expressed a desire to engage with the city. Raleigh residents appreciate and want more opportunities to learn about and contribute to creating vibrant neighborhoods.

*"The Reflecting Raleigh series has been excellent! I encourage continuing to educate us citizens with these topics. It has broadened my knowledge of what it takes to run and to envision the future of a city."*

*– Online survey participant*



# Community Education and Engagement

## Takeaways for the Plan

### Resident reflections

People appreciate and want more opportunities to learn and engage. The city should continue to share information and be creative in communicating what resources are already available for residents.

#### → Already in motion

This feedback can inform programmatic planning at the strategic plan and department planning levels that are already in place.

#### → On the horizon

Public engagement for Reflecting Raleigh will continue to be a two-way learning opportunity. Residents will have an opportunity to learn about important issues from city staff and other experts and city staff will have an opportunity to learn from residents about what they value and how they'd like to balance different trade-offs.

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### Resident reflections

Creative engagement strategies can help reach under-represented residents. Demonstrating how resident input shapes the plan is important for establishing trust and sustaining engagement.

#### → Already in motion

The Reflecting Raleigh process will continue to leverage a variety of engagement strategies and show how input will be used to shape the plan. This report is an example.

#### → Already in motion

Public input will continue to guide plans and projects in the shorter term. Raleigh's Strategic Plan includes an initiative to enhance how resident input shapes services.



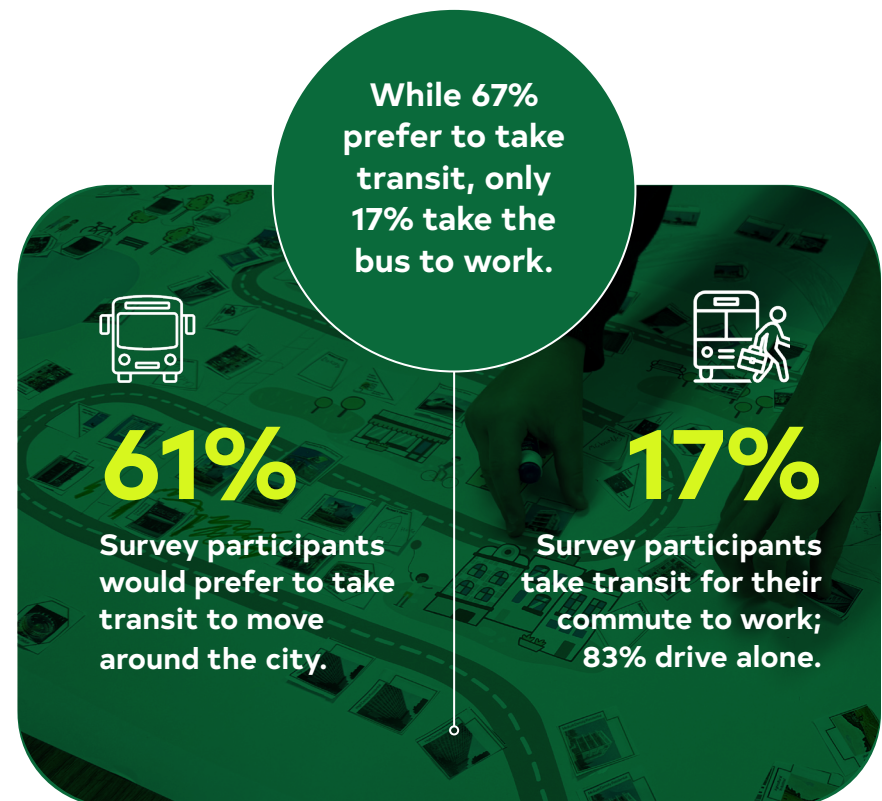
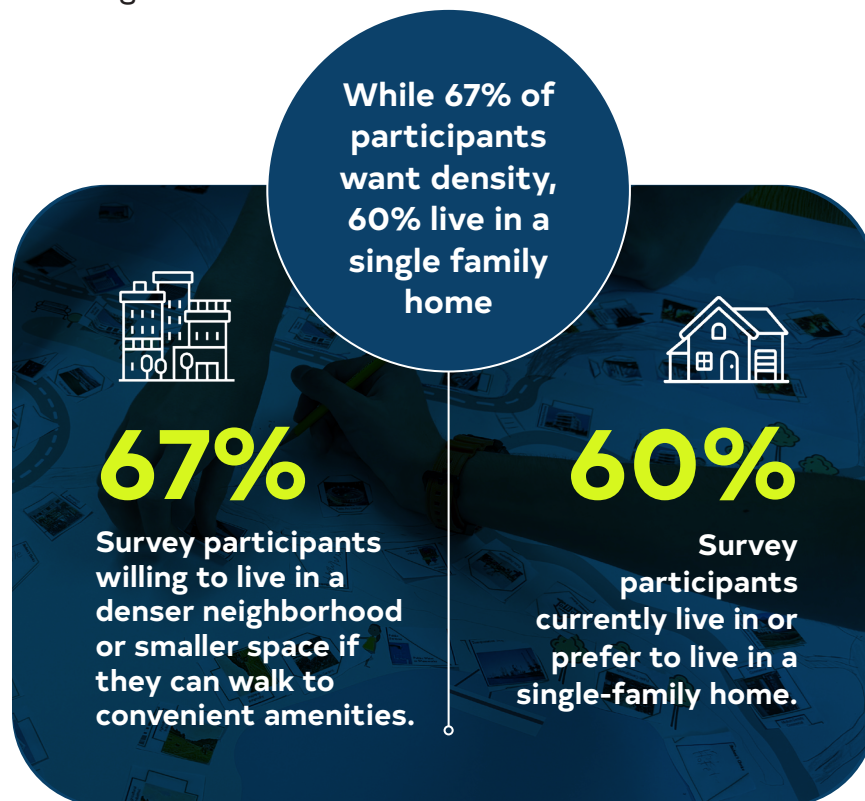
# Smart growth through strategic density and connectivity

Managing the location, pace and intensity of continued growth was another dominant theme across engagement activities. Many residents want to see strategic, distributed density and public investment in transit and multimodal transportation options. At the same time, comments and conversation highlighted a tension between stated priorities, and the preferences people revealed through their choices of where to live and how to get around.

*"I believe that focusing on walkable communities, frequent and reliable public transportation, and infill development is crucial to the success of Raleigh."*

*– Online survey participant*

*"In the future, Raleigh...will be the premier city in the southeast and the leader in urban public transit."* – Comment card



# Smart growth through strategic density and connectivity

## Takeaways for the Plan

### Resident reflections

People either would like to see additional density or will accept density if it facilitates more walkable neighborhoods with places to walk to, like neighborhood-scale retail, and safe ways to get there, like additional sidewalks. At the same time, most people who took the housing online survey either live in or prefer to live in a single-family home.

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### Resident reflections

People want to see investment in a robust multimodal network and would prefer to take transit to move around the city. At the same time, most people currently commute by driving alone.

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### Resident reflections

Residents make choices about where to live and how to get around based on what's convenient, safe, and available, even if it's not what they prefer.

### → On the horizon

As part of the process for developing the Next Comprehensive Plan, the technical teams and the civic assembly will evaluate the city's current growth framework to strategically focus density as Raleigh grows. Allowing a range of housing types will give more people the option of living in a mixed-use, walkable neighborhood.

### → On the horizon

The Next Comprehensive Plan will leverage and align with existing plans like the Wake Transit Plan, the Active Mobility Plan, and plans for Bus Rapid Transit to support a safe, reliable, and well-connected multimodal network.

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### → On the horizon

The Next Comprehensive Plan will include policies that support housing and transportation choices by facilitating the development of a range of housing types and the development of a robust, multimodal transportation network. Allowing different options will give residents flexibility to choose what works best for them.





## Housing affordability, variety, and supply

Among those that engaged in Phase 1, residents universally agreed that housing in Raleigh is becoming increasingly unaffordable, though residents were divided on how best to address affordability. Residents who expressed concerns about rapid growth and development often cited increasing housing costs and fear of displacement as primary reasons to keep density low. At the same time, other residents called for higher-density development to provide additional housing, acknowledging that increasing Raleigh's housing supply is an essential component of keeping housing costs low in a growing city.

*"It's three times my income just to rent."*

*– World Café participant*

*"More affordable housing could be an option, but everything is going up except wages."*

*– World Café participant*

*"[There is] too much focus on creating denser neighborhoods without preserving what makes Raleigh appealing and livable - the tree canopy and streams, open areas, community spaces, new construction that is scaled to existing structures, walkability, buffer zones between differing land uses."*

*– Survey participant*

*"Update policies to make it easy to develop in a way that supports the city's goals. With high land costs and overly restrictive ordinances, a \$1m+ teardown McMansion is often the only profitable development option. We want more affordable options, which will only pencil out with increased density. Reduce regulations to allow increased density in more residential zones."*

*– Survey participant*





**75%**

of survey participants describe their ideal neighborhood as offering "a variety of housing types that serve households of different size, income, and stage in life."

**50%**

want to preserve existing density and built character, even if it means homes become more expensive.

**50%**

would like to allow denser housing types even if it means a change in a neighborhood's physical character.

Survey participants were evenly split on how to address development in highly desirable neighborhoods.





# Housing affordability, variety, and supply

## Takeaways for the Plan

### Resident reflections

People agree that housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable as rising housing costs have not kept pace with household income.

#### → Already in motion

The Department of Housing and Community Development continues to offer a range of programs that fund or partially fund affordable housing development, improve existing affordable housing, revitalize older neighborhoods, and support related human services.

#### → On the horizon

The numbers tell the same story. Over the last 10 years both sales price and rent have increased at a rate faster than household income. As part of developing the Next Comprehensive Plan, the city is exploring strategies and innovative ways that other growing cities have been able to reduce and stabilize housing prices.

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### Resident reflections

There is support for a range of housing types.

#### → On the horizon

Recent changes to Raleigh's development regulations (UDO) allow more types of housing to be built in more places in the city. The next phase of Reflecting Raleigh will look at policies that can further support a range of housing options at a range of prices.

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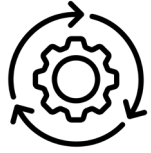
### Resident reflections

There is also debate over where to build them. Residents are divided over where to build new units and how to balance housing development with other community priorities.

#### → On the horizon

Most community conversations included a question about where new growth and additional density should be distributed. Most people indicated that denser residential development should be close to transit, with access to food, employment, and other resources. In Phase 2 of Reflecting Raleigh, the Civic Assembly will provide recommendations on what the neighborhoods within and around frequent transit corridors should look like, including how dense they should be and how much of the city's new residential development they should absorb. Technical Teams will also weigh these different priorities when developing housing and land use policies for the Next Comprehensive Plan.





# Sustainable Development

With rapid and consistent growth, residents shared that sustainable infrastructure is a priority, acknowledging both financial and environmental impacts of city planning decisions.



*"Adding people to our city is a positive attribute to our city, but we should build vertically instead of sprawling outward and using up all of the land we have."*

*– World Café participant*

*"Infill and tear down/rebuilds in older neighborhoods with limited stormwater infrastructure continues to increase stormwater issues. Increased density is fine if adequate stormwater infrastructure exists; however, this is not the case in many older neighborhoods like Five Points."*

*– Survey participant*

*"Continued sprawl will only further burden future generations with a tax base unable to maintain the required infrastructure of low-density development. A robust comprehensive plan that outlines a future Raleigh that incorporates suitable/sustainable density to enable a viable mass transit system and a better quality of life is essential."*

*– Survey participant*





**12%**

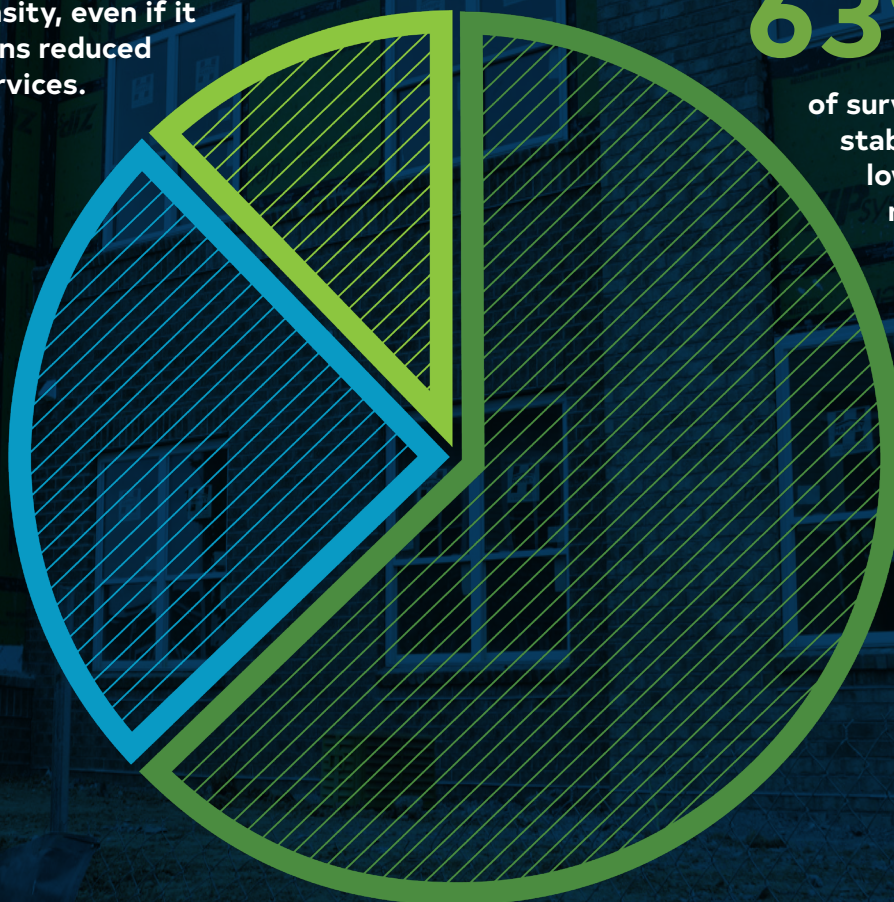
of survey participants  
prefer low taxes and low  
density, even if it  
means reduced  
services.

**63%**

of survey participants prefer  
stable city services and  
low taxes, even if it  
means more dense  
development.

**25%**

of survey participants  
prefer low-density and  
stable services, even if  
it means higher taxes.







# Sustainable Development

## Takeaways for the Plan

### Resident reflections

People acknowledge that density allows for more efficient, and cost-effective, service delivery. Strategic density can be more fiscally sustainable for the city.

### → On the horizon

Phase 2 of Reflecting Raleigh will focus on developing policies that support mixed-use centers connected by strong transit system and distributed density. Long-term goals will focus on the efficient distribution of infrastructure and services, and making it so that residents have less far to travel between home and other destinations.

### → On the horizon

Phase 2 will also include a robust evaluation of the net costs of continued growth, better linking cost metrics with different patterns of development.

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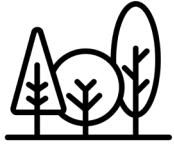
### Resident reflections

The community is divided on the environmental benefits of density. In conversations and survey comments, many noted that a denser land use pattern can reduce transportation emissions and preserve natural resources at the city's edges. Others mentioned the benefits of minimizing additional impervious surface by building in areas that are already developed. Still other residents noted the potential for density to increased urban heat, the potential loss of mature and heritage trees in infill areas, and the impacts of additional infill development on aging stormwater infrastructure.

### → On the horizon

The Next Comprehensive Plan will align with the recently updated Stormwater Design Manual as well as the Community Climate Action Plan and evaluate best practices and state standards for floodplain management.





## Preservation and Distribution of Natural Resources

Raleigh residents take pride in their City of Oaks. Community input reflected a desire to protect, restore, and celebrate Raleigh's trees.



*"Everyone should be responsible for supporting the environment. City Council sets policy, city employees follow policy, and city residents and neighborhood groups do their part. But we also need more educational opportunities for residents to understand the benefits of taking action."*

*– World Cafe participant*



# Preservation and Distribution of Natural Resources

## Takeaways for the Plan

### Resident reflections

Future planning policy should prioritize the preservation of mature trees, habitat continuity, and the equitable distribution of resources. Policy should also address future climate impacts like heat and flooding.

#### → On the horizon

In Phase 2 of Reflecting Raleigh, a Technical Team of natural resource experts and practitioners will advise on land use policy that will protect connected habitat and strategic natural resources and think about equitable access to those natural resources.

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### Resident reflections

Partnerships with resident volunteer groups, private development, and other institutional and community organizations are key to reaching the city's ambitious goal, particularly with respect to increased park access, and environmental stewardship.

#### → On the horizon

This feedback will inform goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan and guide the implementation of the city's long-term goals through the strategic plan as well as operational and programmatic plans like the Parks Master Plan.



# Other Insights by Topic

## Housing Choice

The Reflecting Raleigh Community Conversation series kicked off with a day-long Affordable Housing Summit, which featured seven different presentations from city staff, academics, and technical experts on housing finance and housing policy. Bookending the series, the final event featured a screening of the Summit's keynote presentation, "Homelessness is a Housing Problem," followed by a World Café, or series of facilitated tabletop conversations. The final event was fully bilingual, hosted in English and Spanish with interpreters to support the World Café dialogue.

An online housing priorities survey was completed by 332 people, 260 attended the Housing Summit in August of 2024, and 51 people attended the Housing Summit Recap event in August of 2025.



# 332

people completed  
housing priorities survey



# 260

people attended the  
Housing Summit



# 51

people attended the  
Housing Summit Recap

# Housing Choice

View a [summary of the World Café](#).

View the [results of the online survey](#).



## Café Questions

1. What has been your experience with housing in Raleigh?
2. While building more homes can be good for the city, putting too many in one area could cause certain issues for a neighborhood. What do you think is a good way to distribute development equally across the city?
3. How important is affordable housing to you compared to other city priorities? What do you think the biggest trade-offs are in making housing more affordable?

## Housing Insights

- » **People identified three major issues related to affordable housing:**
  - Not enough housing options for people earning 30% or less of the area median income (\$30,600 for a 3-person household).
  - Housing that is available is located far from retail and employment centers and requires a long commute and/or the use of a private vehicle.
  - Not enough housing available at different price points.
- » **Most people think that the strategies and programs presented at the summit could work in Raleigh. These included a housing-first program to end homelessness in New Orleans, and a revolving loan fund for affordable housing development, piloted in several cities across the county.**
- » **When asked what their experience with housing in Raleigh has been, World Café participants at every table shared that the dramatic increase in housing cost is adding strain to their daily lives.**
- » **People who engaged cited a lack of housing as a main contributor to the affordability crisis, calling for small, affordable options over luxury homes, and supporting increased housing density near transit and amenities.**
  - "A really thoughtful engagement effort around why equitable distribution [of affordable housing] is important is needed"
- » **When asked how important affordable housing is compared to other city priorities, most World Café participants explained that it was the No. 1 priority. Other priorities that participants identified in relation to housing included food access, public transportation, and social connectedness.**



# Stormwater

The second theme in the Reflecting Raleigh Community Conversation series was "Weathering the Storm: Stormwater Management and Priorities." The two-day event featured a presentation on the basics and evolution of stormwater management from staff at an environmental engineering organization, a fireside chat between Raleigh's Stormwater Manager and a local environmental justice leader, and a World Café conversation.

A total of 145 people completed the stormwater survey, and 85 attended the two Community Conversation events.



145

people completed the  
stormwater survey



85

people attended the  
two Community  
Conversation events.

# Stormwater

View a [summary of the World Café](#).

View the [results of the online survey](#).



## Café Questions

1. What are your biggest concerns related to stormwater in Raleigh?
2. Raleigh is likely to continue to grow. How much of new growth do you think should be focused in already developed areas? How much should be closer to the city's edges?
3. What do you think would motivate private residents and developers to make voluntary stormwater improvements, beyond what they're required to do?
4. Have you heard of stormwater management strategies in other cities that you think could work in Raleigh? What local organizations or other groups should Raleigh partner with to improve stormwater management or expand existing programs?

## Stormwater Insights

» **People ranked the following as their top concerns related to stormwater:**

- Pollution in streams, creeks and rivers.
- Flooding in neighborhoods and streets from smaller streams and pipes.
- Aging infrastructure.

» **People worry the most about the following risks:**

- Climate change and the increasing severity of storms.
- Failure of aging infrastructure.
- Greenfield development in areas that were most recently forests or farms.

» **Participants want to see the city increase investment in green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) and repairing and replacing aging infrastructure.**

» **World Café and survey participants both noted they would like to see increased environmental education for residents as well as developers.**



# Transportation

"A City in Motion: Traffic and Transportation Solutions" featured presentations from a national researcher on transportation and equity, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, local and regional transportation leaders, as well as a state of the city presentation from Raleigh's Assistant Transportation Director.

A total of 163 people completed the transportation survey and 68 attended the two Community Conversation events.



163

people completed the transportation survey



68

people attended the two Community Conversation events

# Transportation

View a [summary of the World Café](#).

View the [results of the online survey](#).



## Café Questions

1. As Raleigh expands outward, how do you think we should get people where they need to go?
2. Think about a trip you made today - to the store, to your kid's school, to work, to this meeting. How did you travel? What made your trip easy, or challenging?
3. Have you heard of transportation solutions in other cities that you think could work in Raleigh? What partnerships should Raleigh pursue to improve or expand existing programs?

## Transportation Insights

- » Travel time is the biggest factor in determining mode choice for survey participants.
- » As Raleigh continues to grow, residents would like to see the city prioritize investment in the following:
  - Crosswalks and sidewalk connectivity.
  - Increased transit frequency.
  - Improved greenway connectivity and greenway-oriented development.
- » Residents would like to see a variety of transportation options beyond driving, including better support for biking, walking, public transit, first-and-last-mile connections, and park-and-ride facilities.
- » World Café participants underscored that how the city grows will directly impact transportation. Participants felt that strategic land use decisions can make it easier to get around without a car, notably by increasing density and walkability, planning for mixed-use neighborhoods, prioritizing infill over greenfield development, and encouraging housing near transit.
- » Transit efficiency and transportation safety were other common themes in the World Café discussion.



# Trees and Urban Ecosystems

"Branching Out: Trees and Urban Ecosystems" featured a keynote presentation from the director of Trees Atlanta, a non-profit organization focused on tree conservation and environmental education, a state of the city presentation on Raleigh's tree canopy, programs, and regulations in from Parks and Planning staff, and a World Café conversation.



**163**

people completed  
the online survey



**77**

people attended  
the two in-person  
Community  
Conversation events

# Trees and Urban Ecosystems

View a [summary of the World Café](#).

View the [results of the online survey](#).



## Café Questions

1. Raleigh is expected to continue growing. In what areas of the city should Raleigh focus new development to accommodate this growth?
2. Which groups do you believe are responsible for supporting and protecting Raleigh's natural resources? What are their specific responsibilities? How should they coordinate their efforts?
3. Have you heard of tree protection and expansion programs in other cities that you think could work in Raleigh? What partnerships should Raleigh pursue to improve or expand existing programs?

## Urban Forestry Insights

- » Residents prioritized the following concerns related to environmental resources in Raleigh:
  - Loss of mature trees in developed areas.
  - Loss of tree canopy in areas that are undeveloped.
  - Loss of shade and increased urban heat.
- » Residents would like to see resources divided across programs ranging from tree planting, to green stormwater infrastructure, to invasive species management to support and protect urban ecosystems as Raleigh grows.
- » When asked where Raleigh focus new growth World Café participants shared that the city should "build up and not out" and focus new growth, where impacts are lower, such as in already urbanized areas. Participants also highlighted that tree conservation and natural resource access should be prioritized in historically under-resourced parts of the city.
- » World Café participants also shared that everyone has a role in protecting Raleigh's natural resources, highlighting a need for education and strong partnerships between the city, non-profit organizations, and private property owners.



# Neighborhood Change

The first night of "Rooted and Growing: Neighborhood Change" featured a keynote presentation from a senior fellow at the Center for Community Progress, followed by a panel discussion with local leaders in historic preservation, community development finance, and affordable housing. Raleigh's Assistant Planning Director delivered a state of the city presentation on the history of the city and current trends in neighborhood development. A World Café conversation completed the event.

163 people completed the online survey and 77 attended the two in-person Community Conversation events.



163

people completed  
the online survey



77

attended people  
the two in-person  
Community  
Conversation events

# Neighborhood Change

View a [summary of the World Café](#).

View the [results of the online survey](#)



## Café Questions

1. Share a story about how your neighborhood has changed over time.  
What has been your experience with that change?
2. How do you feel about your neighborhood accommodating a wider range of housing types, such as four-unit apartments or townhouses, even if that means more physical change?
3. What is your vision for your neighborhood? In the next 20 years what would you like to see your neighborhood become?

## Insights about Neighborhood Change

- » Most people would prefer to a neighborhood should offer a variety of housing types that serve households of different size, income, and stage in life, compared with neighborhoods comprised of homes that are all similar in terms of size, layout, and price.
- » Most people are willing to live in a denser neighborhood with a smaller space if it means they can walk to convenient amenities.
- » Participants in the World Café noted changes in housing cost, housing types, and rapid development. Some of the strains people observed included a lag in infrastructure to serve a growing population, a lack of transportation connectivity and a change in community identity.
- » Participants noted the tension between historic and cultural preservation and additional density and affordability. While the tradeoff between new development and neighborhood character protection came up frequently in conversation, several survey participants framed the tension as a false dichotomy with potential compromises.
- » In the future, Raleigh residents want their neighborhoods to be well-connected with affordable housing and public places where neighbors can connect with each other.



# Sustainable Infrastructure and Services

"Sustain-A-City: Infrastructure and Services" rounded out the Community Conversation topics, with a keynote presentation from the lead of Urban 3, a planning and design firm focused on helping cities understand the cost of different land use decisions. The Raleigh Planning Director brought these concepts home to the local context. The event concluded with a World Café conversation.

A total of 129 people completed the survey and 94 attended the Community Conversations.



129

people completed  
the survey



94

people attended the  
Community Conversations

# Sustainable Infrastructure and Services

## Café Questions

1. Which city services are working well, and which ones need improvement?  
Which additional services and resources would you be willing to pay more for?
2. Which two of the three are most important to you: density of development, quality of services and infrastructure, cost of property taxes? What do you think the relationship is between development density, public services, infrastructure, and cost of property taxes?
3. What do you think are the biggest challenges for serving new and existing residents as Raleigh grows?  
What do you think are the biggest opportunities?

View a [summary of the World Café](#).

View the [results of the online survey](#).



## Infrastructure and Service Insights

- » The majority of survey participants rated city services highly, with most rating them as excellent or above average. These results align with the results of Raleigh's bi-annual community survey.
- » Most survey participants would be willing to pay higher taxes for enhanced transportation and parks infrastructure and services.
- » People who engaged on this topic would prefer to see new development focused in areas with existing infrastructure, rather than or prior to expanding to Raleigh's edges.
- » Most people believe that developers and private property owners should be responsible for the upfront costs of public infrastructure and that the city should be responsible for long-term maintenance, though many responded that should depend on the size and scale of the development.
- » Key themes from the community conversation included:
  - "Smart" and sustainable growth.
  - Walkability and accessibility.
  - High quality city services.
  - Affordability.
  - Trees and green space.
  - Community recreation.



# Meeting Engagement Goals

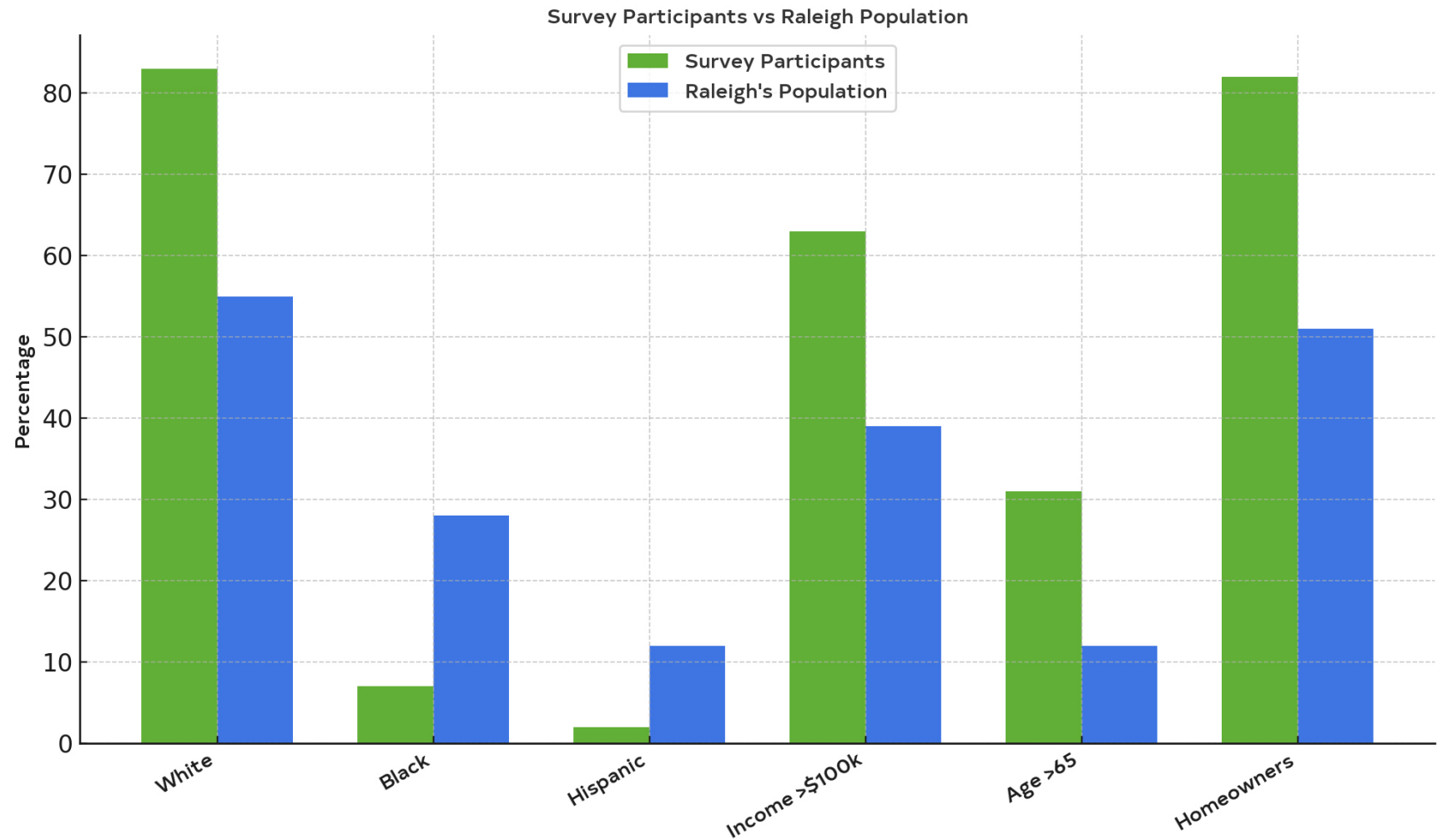
Engagement with staff, elected and community leaders, and with residents is essential to developing a successful plan. The Reflecting Raleigh process is built around four primary engagement principals, with the goal of hearing from a broad, representative cross-section of the Raleigh community.

- 1. Facilitate Inclusive Participation.**
- 2. Enhance Awareness and Understanding of Planning.**
- 3. Incorporate Community Feedback.**
- 4. Promote Effective Public Communication and Coordination.**

A common standard for public engagement in Comprehensive Planning is to reach 3% of the total population. With over 12,000 unique touchpoints in Phase 1, Reflecting Raleigh is well on the way to reaching 15,019 people, or 3% of the 500,639 residents.

Beyond the quantity of engagement, the Reflecting Raleigh process aspires to create meaningful engagement opportunities aligned with the principles above and to engage with residents who represent the range of perspectives, lived experiences, and demographic characteristics of everyone who calls Raleigh home.

Of the 1,650 survey participants, only one in three provided their demographic information.





For a detailed summary of engagement demographics, see the full report.

The project team is not able to track the demographic characteristics of who engaged on YouTube or social media, though this kind of online engagement made up nearly 40% of all of Phase 1 engagement.

To balance out overrepresentation online, the project team prioritized hosting and attending in-person events located in neighborhoods with or likely to reach a higher proportion of resident of color, youth, and younger adults. Attendees at in-person events were not asked to provide any demographic information but based on the location and attendance at these events, it is likely that residents who engaged in Phase 1 are more diverse than what is reflected in the survey data alone.



The most successful events in terms of connecting with residents who have not engaged with the city previously were at Black and Hispanic Churches, where church leadership promoted our events to their members.

Future engagement strategies will leverage these partnerships to connect with residents who do not often engage with the city. Future phases will seek to engage with more residents of color, individuals earning below the area median income, youth and young adults, and renters.



# What's Ahead



Reflecting Raleigh is a 2.5-year process with five phases. Phase 2 will incorporate the emerging themes and topical insights from Phase 1 into the recommendations for the Next Comprehensive Plan's vision, goals, and long-term planning policies. A series of Technical Teams will bring together local subject matter expertise to inform the technical content of the plan. A Civic Assembly will bring together a representative group of residents to provide more targeted input on values, priorities, and how to balance trade-offs.



Want to learn more about what the community is saying? This document is a summary of the thousands of comments and survey responses collected during Phase 1. The full report includes additional details.





# Reflecting Raleigh

THE NEXT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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[raleighnc.gov](https://raleighnc.gov) search: Reflecting