

# Town of Lexington

## Summary of Survey

The Survey was conducted during the Fall, 2022. A total of 338 survey responses were received.

**Q 1 through Q6 explored the demographics of respondents.** Respondents were a relatively even mix of full time (54%) and part time (46%) residents. All locations of the town were represented by participants, but there were more from Spruceton Valley, N. Lexington, and the hamlet area. About 55% were residents living in Lexington for more than 16 years, while 22% were new (here 1-5 years). While all ages were represented, there were more aged 41-46 years old, and the second most prevalent age group were those over 65 years old. Sixteen percent of respondents were aged 20-40. Over half of the respondents were full time residents (54%). Most respondents did not have children spending time with them in the household (216 of the 338 did not). 122 respondents indicated they have children spend time with them in the household. Only 38 children of those respondents attend local schools.

### **Q7. What do you like the most about the Town of Lexington?**

A wide variety of answers were given to this question. Several responses dominated this question: The top responses were (in order of frequency):

- The quiet and peaceful nature of the Town
- The Town's natural beauty, environment and views
- Community spirit, friendly people, neighborliness
- The rural, small nature of Lexington
- The undeveloped natural environment

Other responses included mountain views, hiking and skiing access, lack of large development, community events, the farmers market, the Town's history and historical buildings, a good location and proximity to other areas, open spaces, and the creeks.

### **Q8. What do you think are the strengths of the Town of Lexington?**

Similar to Q7, many of the same features were identified. However, there was a significant emphasis in responses on Lexington's sense of community and the people here. Community spirit, involvement, and caring people was by far the most frequent response to this question. The second most frequent response related to the beauty and natural environment of Lexington. Other aspects considered strengths include proximity to ski areas, hiking trails, its peaceful and quiet atmosphere, a responsive town government, its rural/small nature, history and historical buildings, the undeveloped nature of the Town and a growing number of young people who have interest and excitement about the Town. There was also a long list of other strengths mentioned by one or two people. These include features such as the fire department, access to nature, amazing small businesses in Town, a recognition of a growing number of young people in Town, and blending of new and old residents.

### **Q9. What would you like to change?**

A diverse set of answers were given to this question. The top responses were (in order of frequency):

- More commercial activity needed (but correlated with those being small in scale and intensity and consistent with the character of Lexington. Gas station, medical office, café/restaurant, and convenience store were those businesses at the top of the list)
- Nothing – many people didn't want to see any changes
- Fewer short term rentals
- More community activities
- More enforcement and control of traffic, speeding and road issues including ATVs on roads (There is a good deal of concern about the increase in traffic)
- Do something about the dilapidated and vacant buildings that need to be demolished
- The need to make downtown improvements

Other responses that were made, but by fewer people, were varied and ranged from the need to clean up roads, have more cell towers, have more enforcement of laws that the town already has, have more parking needed at trailheads, develop more affordable housing, improve access to the West Kill, take better care of roads, and revive the swimming hole.

### **Q10. What is your biggest concern about the future of Lexington?**

The most frequent response to this question was overwhelmingly the fear of overdevelopment and the ramifications that could have on town character, the environment and quality of life. This was the top concern. Other major concerns were (in order of frequency) too many short term rentals and their impact on availability of affordable housing, loss of character, and loss of people living in the community; loss of younger families and the next generation; and there concern that there will be no place for the next generation to come and live. Many associated comments were related to this including an aging population, gentrification, lack of housing, lack of employees for businesses, and absent landowners not caring for the community. Other frequent responses include lack of affordable housing, fear of ecological damage or changes to the environment, traffic, and continued deteriorating and poor maintenance of buildings. While less common, multiple people also brought up concerns related to high taxes, flooding, the rehabilitation center, lack of a center for small businesses, the town not being friendly to new businesses, too many restrictions for landowners, too many part-timers, and political divisiveness.

The following list are those concerns that were mentioned, but not frequently (between two and five different respondents): Too many new houses, new residents that want to change the town, lack of EMS services, loss of character, a single landowner owning too much land, corporate land buys, lack of time people have for community involvement, DEP land purchases, climate change, pot dispensaries coming to town, and lack of cell service.

### **Q11. For each of the Town services listed below, please indicate whether you think the level of service currently provided is adequate or needs improvement.**

All the services listed in this question were identified as adequate by the majority of respondents. Those services felt by the most people to be adequate include roads (74%), snow plowing (84%), town hall services/hours (75%), availability of buildings/pavilion for public use (61%), and Fire/EMS (60%). Even

though more people felt they were adequate, the following services had a moderate number of people indicate that improvements were needed. Those services needing improvement included:

- Public recreational opportunities (35%)
- Community events (32%)
- Police protection (29%)
- Building/Code Enforcement (25%)
- Roads (22%)

**Q 12. Are you satisfied with the following services from our local town government?**

Most people were satisfied with almost all of the local government services listed. However, many people had ‘no opinion’ on this question – most likely because they don’t use that particular service. (For example, the question about the zoning board of appeals had 39% of respondents said it was satisfactory, 6% said they were not satisfied, but 55% said they had no opinion.) Broadband accessibility (22%) and building and code enforcement process (18%) received the highest percentage of ‘not satisfied’ results, but those sentiments were not the majority. Hours of operation for town offices (74%) and access to town officials and employees (71%) received the highest ‘satisfied’ results. This question does point out however, where improvements could be made to meet needs not currently served adequately.

**Q13. What recent changes, if any, have you noticed that have had positive impacts on our community?**

Over 25 different kinds of responses were given to this question. The most frequent positive change identified included the new general store (Van Dusens). That store was mentioned as a positive 77 different times and was clearly a very positive change. The next most frequent response was provision of more broadband services. Other important positives mentioned (in order of frequency) include the farmers market, road and bridge repairs, adoption of the short term rental law, the West Kill Brewery, having more, younger people in town, town government (including having meetings available on zoom), river access, ATV permits on roads, the Spruceton Inn, the new highway superintendent, and the Town septic system.

**Q14. What recent changes, if any, have you noticed that have had negative impacts on our community?**

Like other questions, a variety of answers were given for this question. The most frequently mentioned negative change related to traffic and speeding, especially on Spruceton Road. Some indicated they thought this traffic was resulting from the West Kill Brewery. Lots of concerns were raised about these traffic changes that result in safety problems, as well as changes in character. At about the same frequency, many people feel there are too many short-term rentals that have wide ranging negative impacts on the Town. A few people noted that they feel existing short term regulations themselves have negative effects and stymie economic growth. It is important to note that many people did not think any negative impacts had occurred. Other less frequently cited impacts were related to the rehabilitation center, lack of parking for trailhead areas, part-time and absent landowners from urban

areas, loss of the Mosquito Point swimming hole, continuance of dilapidated buildings, opting in to cannabis use, and lack of local enforcement of traffic and short term rental rules.

**Q16. How often do you participate in any of the following activities in Lexington?**

At least 50% of respondents indicate they patronize local businesses, do nature watching, and jog, walk or hike. More than 50% of respondents said they do not hunt, camp, cross country ski, snowmobile, or ride ATVs. The activity most often participated in was nature watching, followed by jogging/walking, patronizing local businesses, and hiking. Alternatively, there was a majority of respondents who never participate in snowmobiling ( 85% of respondents), riding ATVs (76%), hunting (72%), cross country skiing (69%), and camping (59%).

**Q16. Currently the New York City Department of Environmental Protection(NYC DEP) owns over 3600 acres of land in the Town of Lexington to supply and protect the New York City reservoirs and water supply. NYCDEP stipulates how land can be used by residents and visitors. Would you encourage or discourage continued land acquisition by the NYC DEP?**

49% of respondents encourage the continued land acquisition by NYS DEP. 32% discourage this, and 19% had no opinion. The comments received recognize that there are pros and cons to this land ownership. Many comments were offered explaining the many benefits to the NYS DEP land acquisition program related to maintenance of the environment, beauty, and character of the Town and offering recreational opportunities. These were the majority of comments. Some people, however, do feel there are negative affects by loss of land for sale and other uses, economic impacts, and desire to have more local control of lands.

**Q17. Please select the primary reasons you chose to live in/own property in Lexington.**

The natural beauty and resources of the town was chosen as the #1 reason why people live/own property here (95% of respondents). 83% said rural character, 64% said small town size, 48% said sense of community, and 35% said safety. Other features were less important as follows: proximity to NYC (30%), ability to own and use firearms (24%), grew up here (19%), low housing costs (13%), local businesses (11%), investment opportunity (10%), good public school districts (7%).

**Q18. Lexington contains many special places that make the community unique. Tell us about ones that are important to you.**

Many special places have been identified in Lexington. Most frequently mentioned were the many hiking trails in Town. This was followed in frequency by the creeks and streams, the West Kill Brewery, the Town's natural beauty and mountains, the Farmers market, and the West Kill Community Center. Other places of special importance that were identified include the general store, Spruceton Inn, the Arts Center, Diamond Notch, everything in the Spruceton Valley, West Kill Post Office, Mosquito Point, the Lexington pavilion, creek access points, Vinegar Hill, and the old buildings in the hamlet.

**Q19. Would you encourage or discourage the following DEVELOPMENT in Lexington?**

The following developments were identified as those that should be encouraged by > 50% of respondents (in order of frequency):

- Green building
- Residential development of single family homes
- Long term rentals
- Commercial retail
- Housing for all incomes
- Senior housing

The following developments were identified by > 50% as uses to be discouraged (in order of frequency):

- Industrial development
- Manufactured home parks
- Multifamily homes
- Short term rentals

There were mixed feelings about whether to encourage or discourage the following:

- Campgrounds
- Event venues

**Q20. Would you encourage or discourage the following LAND USES in Lexington?**

The following land uses were identified as ones to be encouraged by > 50% of respondents. Note that most of those land uses desired to be encouraged had an overwhelming positive response (well over 60%. For instance, 96% of respondents want to encourage plant based agriculture.

- Animal agriculture
- Plant agriculture
- Public greenspace
- Wildlife preserves
- Protection of air, soil, water, forests, wetlands, streams, aquatic habitats
- Bike paths/lanes
- Trails for horses
- Private solar
- Conservation easements
- Private windmill (63%)
- Cell Tower (60%)
- Dog parks (52%)

The following land uses were identified by more people as those to be discouraged. Each of these had at least 65% of respondents indicating they should be discouraged.

- ATVs on trails
- Construction over 2400 foot elevation
- Steep slope construction

Large windmills  
 Large solar facilities  
 Building in the floodplain  
 Large scale logging

There were mixed feelings and no consensus about whether to reroute streams (37% encourage, 40% discourage, and 24% no opinion).

**Q21. Do you think it's important to bring new businesses to Lexington?**

70% of respondents said yes, it is important to bring new businesses to Town. 19% said no and 11% had no opinion. (Editors note – while an overwhelming majority answered that it was important to bring new businesses to Town, other questions on the survey indicate that not all businesses are desired, and that the scale, intensity and location of the business matters.)

**Q22. What do you think will attract businesses to Lexington?**

62% indicated that grants from the County or State were needed. 49% said that tax breaks were needed. 35% had other ideas. The most common idea offered was to ensure that Lexington is a community supportive of businesses and business development and you have the infrastructure and broadband services to support those businesses. Comments also concentrated on the desire for small businesses – not any business. Having a business friendly government, assistance in business planning, smart community planning, a town economic development plan that included marketing and signage, initiating a chamber of commerce, creating a visitors center at the post office, and housing for employees were other ideas offered on ways to encourage businesses.

**Q23. What type of business development would you like to encourage or discourage in the Town of Lexington?**

The following businesses were identified as those to be encouraged by the most respondents:

- Gas station/convenience store
- Grocery/retail store
- Breweries, distilleries, winery
- Home based businesses
- Private farm stands
- Electric vehicle charging stations
- Businesses centered on tourism
- Service businesses (dog grooming, kennels, car repair, salon)
- Art galleries
- Non-alcoholic beverage production

The following businesses had a majority of respondents say they should be discouraged:

- Chain discount stores
- Chain restaurants

Light industry and manufacturing  
 Golf club  
 Lounges for cannabis  
 Rehabilitation center  
 Short term rentals

There were mixed opinions about whether to encourage or discourage the following businesses:

Private event venue  
 Public event spaces  
 Bars/lounges for alcohol  
 Cannabis dispensaries  
 Campground

**Q24. What type of community and municipal development would you like to encourage or discourage in the Town of Lexington?**

All of the options included in this list were felt to be community and municipal development that could be encouraged by a majority of respondents. However, there was less support for co-worker spaces, churches/religious institutions, and commercial community kitchens: These had the lowest 'encourage' response of 58%, 50% and 46% respectively. All the others had very strong support. For example farmers markets had 95% of respondents say they encouraged this type of use. Uses to be encouraged include community center, community swimming pool, library, day care, elder care, community vegetable garden, community beautification and landscaping, and makers spaces/shared art studios.

**Q25. What infrastructure items do you feel need improvement in the Town of Lexington?**

It appears as though the community feels that the current infrastructure in Town is mostly adequate. Many people indicated that none of the infrastructures mentioned needed improvement (19%). No one specific infrastructure had high numbers of respondents indicating improvement was needed. However, there were a few that had at least a third of respondents say improvements were needed. These were flood mitigation (48%), roads (37%), and emergency shelters (30%). The remaining infrastructures that were adequate include bridge rebuilding, public sewer, public drinking water, public parking, street lighting, sidewalks, and helicopter pad/runway. All had less than 15% of respondents indicate they needed improvement.

**Q26. Please share any other comments.** 89 different comments were received. They were wide ranging and thus are difficult to summarize to see patterns and consensus. Many people left comments thanking the Town for doing the survey. But taken together, many of the same sentiments were expressed: people love the Town, don't want to see a lot of development, are fearful of changes, want to see appropriate business development, and don't want to see anything happen that will change the fundamental small, rural character of the Town. Traffic and speeding concerns were part of many comments here. Editors note - there are many good ideas and sentiments and ideas for future actions in these comments and the Comprehensive Plan Committee should read and gleaned ideas for action item recommendations of the Plan. The quotes can be used to highlight the deep sentiments people have for the Town.

**Q27. What is your preferred method to receive information about community news/events, board meetings, etc?**

The Town of Lexington website and the Town of Lexington email list were by far the most preferred methods to receiving information (> 63%). The other methods offered were not as favored: Post office bulletin board (22%), word of mouth (21%) and social media (30%).

**Q28. Email Addresses.** This was offered so that people could add their email address if they wanted to be added to the Town of Lexington email list. This information has been transferred to the Town. 161 people left their emails for this purpose.