

# **MO22 COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT**

MID-COURSE STRATEGIC ADJUSTMENT & EMPHASIS



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Completed in December of 2020, the MOMENTUM2022 (MO22) Community Survey serves as a barometer of the community's challenges, interests, perception, and opportunities of life in Topeka, Shawnee County. This survey was first conducted in 2016 as a preliminary assessment toward the creation of the MO22 five-year strategic plan - a consensus-based and collaborative community approach focused on efforts that involve everyone to create positive change for everyone.

The primary pillars and focus areas of the strategic plan include:

- **Collaborate for a Stronger Community:** Foster and Promote a Diverse and Inclusive Topeka Shawnee County; Encourage a Healthy, Safe, and Engaged Community.
- **Promote A Positive Image:** Align and Boost Marketing Messaging Efficiencies and Impact; Project a Positive Image to Residents and Outside Talent.
- **Grow A Diverse Economy:** Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Enhancement; Maintain Economic Development Best Practices; and Pursue Policies that Support Holistic Economic Development.
- **Develop Homegrown Talent:** Talent Pipeline Alignment; Kindergarten Readiness; College and Career Preparation; and Expanded Adult Education.
- **Create Vibrant and Attractive Places:** Optimize Quality of Life Tools and Programs; Dynamic Core Development; and Quality of Life Infrastructure Investment.

Initial implementation of the plan involved 5 goal areas, 14 strategic objectives and 46 proposed actions for consideration by the community. To date 25 additional actions have been added as the community works the five-year strategic plan.

The half-way point of plan was reached in June of 2020, the 2020 Community Survey was conducted via online form between August and December, and 2,165 respondents completed the survey matching the 2016 submissions of 2,150. The form was available in both English and Spanish.

A comparison review of both surveys was conducted, resulting in key findings, proposed mid-course recommendations, and strategic adjustments to ensure that the MO22 Strategic plan is responsive to changes, new gaps realized, and interests as work continues to make Topeka-Shawnee County a better place to live, work, play, and do business.

It should also be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic suspended activity of volunteer led work groups for five months of 2020, while some efforts continued to advance, some initiatives did not move as quickly as intended and some expectations, community interests, and gaps realized may have changed due to the pandemic.

It is affirmed that other objectives and/or actions not listed are still important but additional intervention may not be needed to realize improvements and/or there are actions underway toward reaching the communities goals.

It is recommended the following pillar objectives be of focus for the remainder of the MO22 five-year strategic plan towards finishing strong through the conclusion of the current timeframe and as the community transitions to a new strategic plan in December of 2022.

The targeted objectives include:

**Develop Homegrown Talent – Enhanced career counseling, and educational training.**

- 1.3 Prepare Students for College and Careers

**Create Vibrant and Attractive Places – Continued development of multi mixed-use development that includes improved housing options, quality of life restaurant, retail, and arts and entertainment options.**

- 2.1 Optimize Tools and Programs to Improve Quality of Place that concentrate on Housing incentives, options, and availability.
- 2.2 Develop a Dynamic Regional Core

**Grow a Diverse Economy and Collaborate for a Strong Community – By enhancing entrepreneurial and minority small business offerings through incentives and mentorship.**

- 3.1 Enhance the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
- 4.1 Build Physical Infrastructure
- 5.1 Foster and Promote a Diverse and Inclusive Topeka-Shawnee County

**Promote a Positive Image – Unified community message.**

- 4.2 Project a Positive Message to Residents and Outside Talent

**Additionally** - the following objectives represent new priorities to be added into MO22 strategic plan, they include:

- Improved digital equity and broadband access.
- Retain young professional talent.
- Greater incorporation and alignment of the Arts into economic quality of life endeavors

## IN SUMMARY

To date, the MOMENTUM 2022 strategic plan has resulted in a more collaborative and positive community that has realized successes during the first half of the five-year plan. Topeka-Shawnee County is more hopeful, exhibiting a higher level of esteem and willingness to counter negativity. While we acknowledge that gaps still exist, and there is work to be done, we also realize that this community has the capacity to be better than the day before as we adapt to our changing landscape, be intentional with our efforts, and involve everyone as we all work to create positive change for everyone.

# REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations represent a review of key findings within the 2020 community survey, realizing continued challenges and progress on the objectives and actions to be implemented within the MO22 Strategic Plan; a comparison review of the 2016 survey; and awareness of strategic activity throughout the community. The recommendations address enhancements in the areas of education, economic development, quality of life, and diversity.

## EDUCATION

In the area of education, key findings reveal that while the perception between good vs inferior school districts continues, the survey results also indicate respondents perceive throughout Topeka-Shawnee County that students are experiencing high quality education.

The findings also show the business community and education is committed to supporting quality, public K-12 education. However, the greatest decline from the 2016 to 2020 survey measured the attention received to provide career preparation offerings is considered not adequate.

Areas to improve education in general included increased funding, greater diversity, and additional offerings for low-income communities.

The recommendations proposed center around more collaborative and comprehensive engagement between business, community, and education. Building awareness of the opportunities and resources available. Assess career guidance, college counseling, and additional talent development strategies and their impact. These efforts will complement and support the community goals toward Developing Homegrown Talent, Grow a Diverse Economy and Quality of Life.

The proposed area to be targeted is:

### **Develop Homegrown Talent – Enhanced career counseling, educational training.**

- 1.3 Prepare Students for College and Careers

Potential Education Actions include:

- Development of a community wide education/industry taskforce targeting career counseling, training and recruitment beginning at an earlier age, if determined appropriate.
- Assessment of industry specific internship and mentorships training opportunities that align with targeted industry segments ie. bio-sciences, aviation, animal health, ag and financial tech.
- Communications plan to the resources and opportunities available.
- A comprehensive group focused on post secondary education.

## ECONOMY

Topeka-Shawnee County has experienced a dramatic ebb and flow in the economy due to growing economic development vs. the detrimental economic impact from the COVID-19 crisis. Throughout the strategy, efforts have focused on small business support, entrepreneurial initiatives, and reaching new industry segments. The Community Survey reveals that these continue to be the priorities. The findings demonstrate great passion from a small segment of highly vested stakeholders in the community yet a lack of general awareness to the offerings currently available. The offerings of mentorship, startup support and small business training have been well received and exceptionally produced. It is proposed that steps be taken to formalize a strategic framework to increase awareness and make offerings and incentives more readily available.

The proposed area to be targeted includes:

**Grow a Diverse Economy – By enhancing entrepreneurial and minority small business offerings through incentives and mentorship, and expanding industry segments.**

- 3.1 Enhance the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Potential Economic Actions include:

- Increase the awareness of local angel investment groups in good standing and other financing opportunities.
- Increase awareness of innovation and entrepreneurial services, programs and resources.
- Build pool of volunteer mentors.
- Build targeted database.
- Increase connections to our entrepreneurial base (small business and start-ups).

## QUALITY OF LIFE

Our Quality of Life is comprised of the attributes, amenities, and the esteem of the community. The past several years the community has begun efforts to address a-number-of community gaps in the areas of housing and market research, building support for public private partnerships, upgrading parking strategies and infrastructure, completing streets initiatives, and public safety initiatives to reduce crime.

There has long been a desire by the community for improved amenities, that include more restaurants, retail, and entertainment options. The respondent perspectives of affordability and need for improved amenities directly align with the age of the responder. The younger the respondent, a higher degree of dissatisfaction. The younger the respondent, the more likely they may leave the community, especially in the age groups of 18 to 34 years of age. Our greatest weakness in this age range is that we are not considered a “cool” place to live.

Quality of life is an economic development issue and based on local, regional, and national data toward long-term success, we must improve population growth and do all we can to eliminate outmigration of young professionals by improving the attributes, amenities, and esteem of the community. Greater interest in the walkability of the community is also an important component with the locality of amenities and perceived quality of life should be a consideration. The masterplan of the dynamic core move us in this direction as do a number of other studies completed which lay a strong foundation.

Targeted efforts should include:

### **Creative Vibrant and Attractive Places – Continued development of multi mixed-use development, that includes improved housing options, quality of life restaurant, retail, and arts and entertainment options.**

- 2.1 Optimize Tools and Programs to Improve Quality of Place that concentrate on Housing incentives, options, and availability.
- 2.2 Develop a Dynamic Regional Core

### **Promote a Positive Image - Targeting young professionals and the creative class.**

- 4.2 Project a Positive Message to Residents and Outside Talent

Potential Quality of Life Actions include:

- A Retail Study conducted to better understand the amenities needed and desired by the community that will garner appropriate impact.
- The development of housing construction incentives toward the development of increased housing options and availability.
- The creation of a business development and recruitment strategy toward the development of the Dynamic core in response to the City of Topeka’s Master Plan.
- Community-wide branding and marketing campaign.

## DIVERSITY

Topeka-Shawnee County's history is steeped in stories of diversity and entrenched division and lack of care in other areas of the community, like East Topeka and East 6th Street. The strategic framework of all efforts, both public and private, must ensure we create optic positive change for everyone.

### Collaborate for a Strong Community

- 5.1 Foster and Promote a Diverse and Inclusive Topeka-Shawnee County

Potential Diversity Actions include:

- The development of a faction audit to be utilized prior to any new action being initiated to determine appropriate stakeholders and skill sets required representing the diversity of the community.
- Continued efforts to increase diversity on local non-profit boards.
- Encourage greater diversity on corporate boards.

## ADDITIONAL AREAS OF INTEREST

It is further recommended the following focus areas to be added and/or elevated in the MO22 strategic plan include:

- **Improved digital equity, and broadband access:** Improved broadband access and digital equity has long been a point of interest with very little forward movement. The COVID crisis has highlighted the challenges and gaps. While immediate needs have been addressed in response to the COVID crisis, long term infrastructure and public/private digital equity initiatives need to be addressed.
- **Incorporate and align the Arts into economic quality of life endeavors:** As quality of life is an economic development issue, greater alignment between businesses and art amenities can prove beneficial to the community offerings and esteem.
- **Increased efforts to retain young professional talent:** Efforts to retain young professional talent should be a themed intentional approach in all that we do across all MO22 Pillars.



# KEY FINDINGS

The survey notes below were focused on questions not related to demographics. Otherwise annotated differently, all comparisons are related to the initial M2022 survey.

**Question 14:** More than half of those who took the survey have either “attended” or “their kids attended a K-12 school” in Topeka. This was an increase of almost 15 percentage points.

**Question 16:** There were approximately 110 more responses for question #16. “Please respond to the following statements about the school district with which you are most familiar.” All the statements in question #16 had a lower weighted average score, ranging from -0.50 to -0.07; where 1 is the lowest score and 4 is the highest score.

- Ranking change, **decline:** The statement “Career education receives adequate attention” had the most drastic change in term of ranking. Previously this statement was ranked #5 out of 10, where #1 is the best. Now this statement is ranked #9. There were many comments related to the need of additional career counselors, as well as additional focus on career education.
  - The statement “Schools provide high quality career guidance and college counseling services” was ranked #10, which means this statement had the lowest weighted average score. This statement could be closely related to the statement above, regarding career education.
- Ranking change, **improvement:** The statement “The business community is committed to supporting quality, public K-12 education” moved from ranking #7 to ranking #4. There were a few comments related to how either the GTP or the business community want to improve the local education system.
- Overall score: the statement “Children in this district receive a high-quality education” has the highest weighted average score and subsequently the best ranking, at #1.
- Open comments (less than 50 out of more than 2,000)
  - Perception and reputation of school districts. Zillow rating scores, media coverage, and general misconception of certain “bad” school districts. The following are actual comments: “I think overall in Topeka the perception is that the school districts within the city limits (501, Highland Park...) are inferior to the school districts outside of the city limits (Seaman, Washburn Rural, Shawnee Heights...). So, I would say changing that perception would help ensure people continue to live within the city limits or would cut down people requesting to be transferred into another school district.”
  - The need for additional counselors
  - The need for additional funding

**Question 17:** How to improve the school district. There were 614 comments. Most of the comments came from survey takers with a higher level of education (Bachelor's degree+) The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general topics:

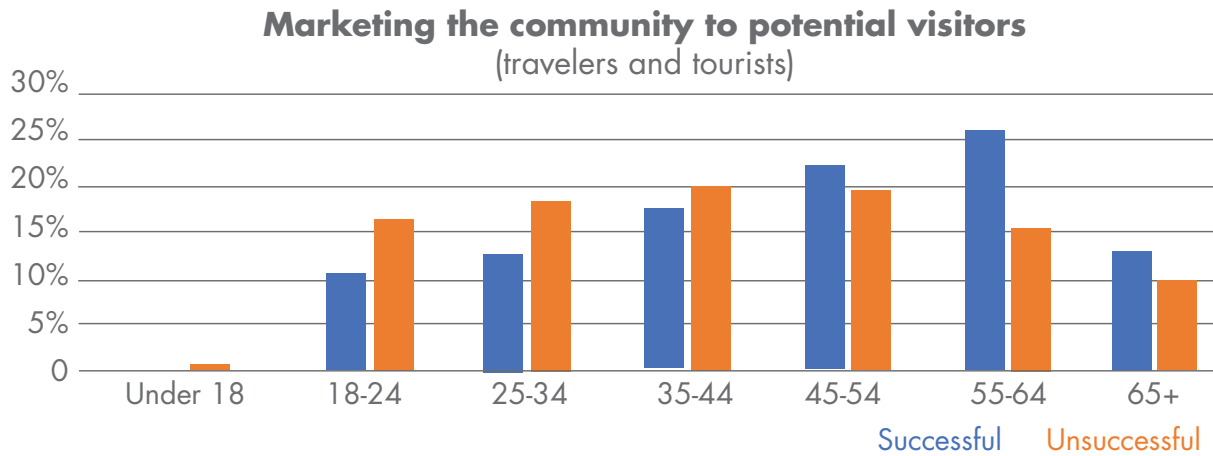
- Additional funding and audit of those funds. Smaller classes. Supplies for teacher should be funded by the district or the business community, and not teachers who are underpaid. High administration salaries/expenses with lower investments in teachers/classrooms. Promoting teaching as a career to attract new talent.
- More diversity in teachers, administrators, etc.
- Extra curricular activities should support student's critical thinking skills. This support could be targeted to low-income communities.
- School perception "bad" vs "good" schools.
- Improve parents and teacher involvement.

**Question 22:** The statement "Small Business Development Support" continues to be the highest rated statement ranked at #1 out of 8; although its weighted average score decline.

**Question 23:** How to improve the local entrepreneurial capacity. There were 582 comments. The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general topics:

- Implement a "spot" incubation program for small businesses. Turn abandoned office buildings into space for multiple startups.
- Free or low-cost available venues to host social events, or events for local businesses. This could aid further expansion of current struggling small enterprises. Incubator needs to have a low cost/barrier to entry.
- More fundraisers for small businesses.
- Entrepreneurial group in the Chamber of Commerce or as an advisory group.
- Create a program/partnership with high schools, Washburn, local government, and GTP incubator. There needs to be an education path from Washburn to the bio-science incubator.
- Improve the awareness of business support and small business loans. Everyone should know about the resources available.
- Use empty buildings.

**Question 26:** In question #26, the statement “Marketing the community to potential visitors (travelers and tourists)” had the lowest weighted average score, and the worst ranking among all 7 statements. There is a difference between the group who feels that the community has done a good job (successful + very successful) marketing to potential travelers, compared to the group who feels the opposite (unsuccessful + very unsuccessful) when age is a factor.



**Question 28:** The question “Please evaluate the following statements as they relate to your company or employer’s plans for the next five years” shows that local businesses are more likely to add more jobs in Topeka, and highly unlikely to relocate away from Topeka. While this question needs more research, at this time, this could be attributed to the good relationship between the Partnership and the business community.

**Question 29:** From the standpoint of ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, what do you believe to be the community’s GREATEST STRENGTH OR ASSET as it seeks to grow quality jobs that elevate standards of living for its residents? There were 572 comments. The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general comments.

- Low cost of living and affordability
- Leaders
- Opportunities to be involved
- Washburn and Washburn Tech
- Economic development incentives

**Question 30:** From the standpoint of ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, what do you believe to be the BIGGEST CHALLENGE facing Topeka-Shawnee County as it seeks to grow quality jobs that elevate standards of living for its residents? There were 644 comments. The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general comments.

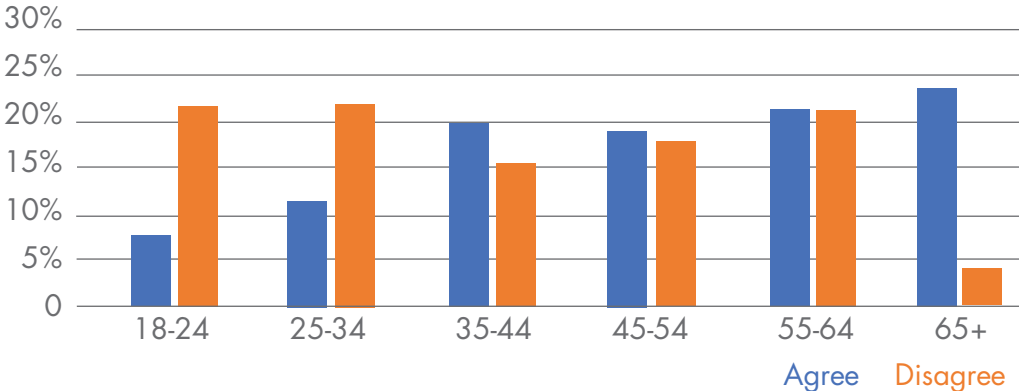
- There is a perception issue about Topeka, this includes: crime, east side vs west side of Topeka
- Younger residents living to larger metros like KC
- Low wages, this comment requires additional work. But there could a difference between education level and the issue of low wages
- Localized amenities by smaller geographies
- High taxes?
- Housing options

**Question 31:** The statement “Please rate the following aspects of Topeka-Shawnee County’s quality of life, based on your experiences where you live.” On average there was a decline of 1,000 responses for this question compared to the initial survey. Variances in answers were only minor.

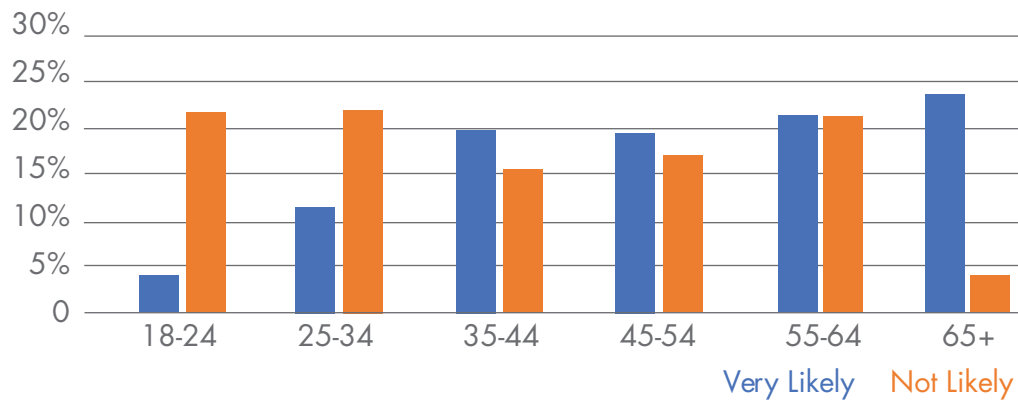
- Volunteer opportunities remained the best ranked answer, with the highest weighted average score
- Ability to access shops, restaurants, and services without using a car was ranked to worst, with the lowest weighted average score
  - There were a few comments in question 30 where this issue was discussed
- Dining opportunities moved from ranked #9 out of 14, to #5 out of 14. At the same time, when segmented by age, this question has a lower score among younger population.

**Question 35:** The statement “Please indicate if you disagree or agree with the following statement about young professionals (working ages 25-34):” shows once again a large reduction in responses. But there is no change between scores.

- The statement “Young professionals can afford to live in Topeka-Shawnee County” remains the choice with the highest score and the best ranking. Although there is a difference among age groups. The chart below shows the frequency of both, strongly agree + agree (blue bars) and strongly disagree + disagree (orange bars) There is a big difference in responses among the 18-24 and the 65+ group.



**Question 36:** Once again lower response rate, but there is almost no significance change in results. The statement “Likelihood you will continue to live in Topeka-Shawnee County” has the highest score and the best ranking, but it varies a lot among age groups. The younger groups are very likely to leave the community.



**Question 41:** “In your opinion, what is Topeka-Shawnee County’s GREATEST STRENGTH as a place to live, work, visit, and do business?” There were 685 comments. The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general comments.

- Affordability. Most of the survey takers who mentioned “affordability” or “cost of living” as the greatest strength have a higher level of education and have a significantly higher NPS (-0.14) compared to the entire sample (-31). There were around 150 comments related to the topic or around 22%
- People, family and community. Those who mentioned “people” or “community” as the greatest strength had a positive NPS at +32. There were around 100 comments related to the topic or around 15%
- Financial stability
- Diversity
- Commuting
- Washburn University

**Question 42:** “In your opinion, what is Topeka-Shawnee County’s GREATEST WEAKNESS OR CHALLENGE to overcome as a place to live, work, visit, and do business? There were 700 comments. The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general comments.

- Shopping places, entertainment, unique restaurants. Our local mall has signs of possible failure.
- Public services in the east part of Topeka
- West side vs east side. Lack of services in the east side of Topeka, compared to the west side
- Crime
- Perception of not being a “cool” place to live

**Question 43:** “Imagine that you went home, packed your bags, and didn’t return to Topeka-Shawnee County for 10 years. What would you want to see different (if anything) about the community when you return?” 720 comments. There is little difference between those who left a comment and those who didn’t answer question 43, with their respective NPS between the two groups. The initial assumption was that those who left a comment would have a lower NPS compared to those who didn’t answer question 43.

The bullets below are a sample of some the most mentioned general comments

- Shopping places, entertainment, unique restaurants.
- More outdoor activities, more green space
- Investment; economic development
- Decrease crime
- More development in downtown

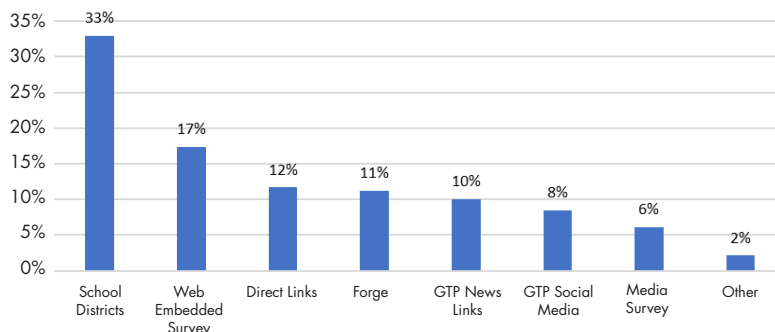
## STRATEGIC ADJUSTMENTS

A more intentional approach and comprehensive collaboration with public and private entities is key to the strategies ongoing success. It is recommended that a faction audit be conducted prior to beginning a new action and/or project. We must always work to ensure all appropriate skillsets and direct stakeholders have a seat at the table to inspire collective purpose toward reaching community goals.

## PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the survey is to assess impact as the half-way point is reached of the five-year strategic plan. The information gathered from the survey will help better understand gaps, opportunities, perspectives, and the development of priorities to focus on during the next 22 months of the MO22 strategic plan scheduled to conclude December of 2022.

The survey was conducted online and available in both English and Spanish. Outreach and promotion of the survey included various media outlets, community influencers and social media outreach. Key targets approached to obtain survey participation and zip code coverage included school districts, churches, minority organizations, business associations, and social service and non-profit organizations.



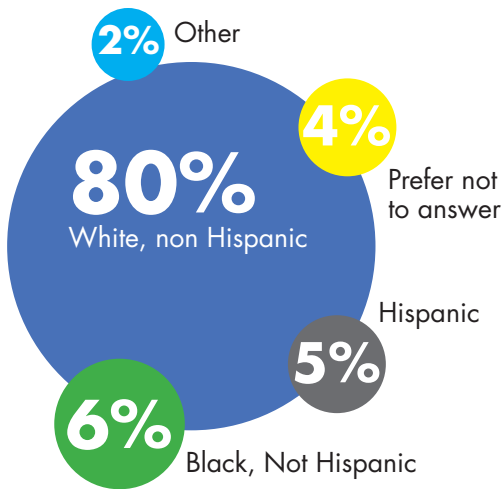
# RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The questions were developed for the 2016 survey by Market Street, consultant of the four-phase strategic process toward developing the strategic plan. The 2020 survey included additional questions to better understand COVID-19's reflection on survey responses:

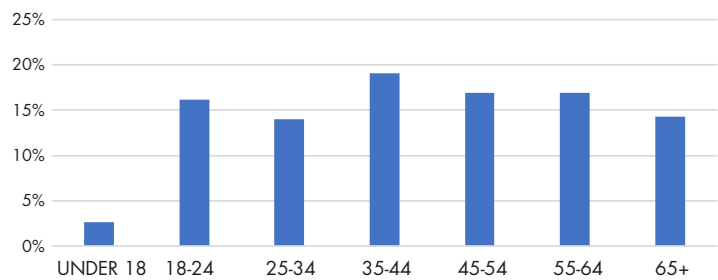
The survey included a total of 44 questions. Sections of survey are basic demographics, geo-spatial, community, education, and economic development.

Key respondent demographics of the 2020 survey include:

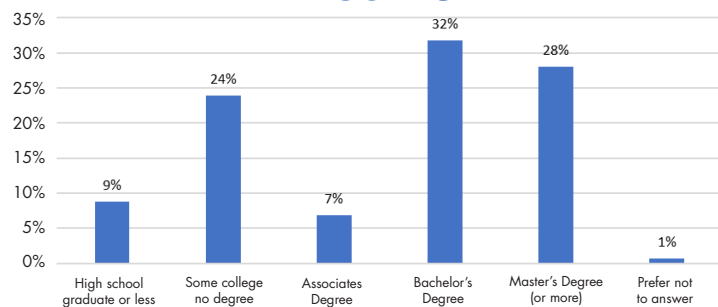
## RACE & ETHNICITY



## AGE



## EDUCATION



## TOP RESPONDENT ZIP CODES

66614, 66604, 66610, 66605, 66606, 66611, 66618, 66617, 66609, 66615, ...

# CONCLUSION

The results of the survey have demonstrated an increased level of collaboration, hope and success within the community, demonstrating greater resiliency, perseverance, and creative adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic. However it should not be forgotten that there are still many challenges and areas within our community in and in the next 22 months, we have the ability and responsibility to continue advancing objectives and affect the challenges that remain.

