



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REVIEW, & ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Public Participation Process

Focusing on public participation is an important part of a comprehensive plan update to ensure that the community's wants and needs are addressed. It's important to engage with the public early in the process, using an array of techniques and strategies, and to include as many opportunities for participation in the process by as many people as possible. It's easy to ask the community for input, but ensuring that participation is productive and equitable may be more difficult given the situation with COVID-19 and the restrictions in place limiting in-person gatherings. However, by utilizing digital engagement, and outreach strategies, combined with gathering information at more controlled, and smaller, information/participation events, the results of the public participation process will be satisfactory.

By actively engaging the public throughout the duration of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan update, citizens have the chance to influence decisions that are important to them. Public involvement is essential to gather enough information to accurately represent the public. Engaging the public early in the process is important. Additionally, it's important to have a clear, concise, and realistic message that's consistent throughout the planning process. This will help to garner support and ensure trust in order to keep the focus positive and the planning process moving forward.

Public involvement is essential for a Comprehensive Plan to be considered valid.

Rockford City Market Engagement Efforts

Included open discussions and information provided to community members, a visioning board, and a community survey was given as an option to participate. Additionally, with the assistance of the Region 1 Planning Council, city staff had a booth at two Friday night Rockford City Market events; once in July, and again in August of 2021.

High school Career Fairs

City staff attended two local high school career fairs where we had the ability to discuss topics that were important to teenagers that live in the region. A half day was spent at both Boylan Catholic High School and Jefferson High School. Students also had the ability to take a survey to help us determine areas the city is doing well in and areas that may need improvement. Results from these two events were combined with the other online surveys.

Online Community Survey

The survey consisted of 11 questions that varied from basic demographic information, multiple choice, rankings, funding options, and an open ended comment section. The survey went live in February 2022, and was closed before the DRAFT Plan Comment Period. At that time, there was a total of 930 completed surveys. The results of the survey are to follow this chapter. The complete list of written comments are contained in the Public Participation Appendix Results.

Public Notice of 30-Day Comment Period

Based on the comments received during the public notice of 30-day comment period city staff is confident that all of the concerns addressed are covered in the current version of the plan.



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Colin Belle

Planning & Design Coordinator

April 10th, 2023

Phone: (779) 500-6580

Email: Colin.Belle@rockfordil.gov

PUBLIC NOTICE OF 30-DAY COMMENT PERIOD

City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan Update

ROCKFORD, IL – The City of Rockford is pleased to announce that we'll be accepting public comments on the update to the City's Comprehensive Planning document.

The Comprehensive Plan acts as a guide to coordinate and align zoning and land-use, transportation infrastructure, economic development investments, natural resources, open space protection, and the general needs and concerns of community members. The plan serves as the community's voice and portrays what the future could look like while serving as the decision-making tool for elected and appointed officials regarding overall development, conservation, and public investment within the City and just beyond its borders.

This plan update will allow the City of Rockford to refine its vision to maintain and enhance the quality of life for our community well into the future while remaining resilient. This will be accomplished through specific implementation strategies and goals which are outlined in each chapter. The plan was developed with help from the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee which was made up of members of the public, professionals, elected officials, civic leaders, and city staff.

The public comment period will begin on April 10th, and conclude on May 10th, 2023.

A digital version of the plan is located on the front page of the City of Rockford website, <https://rockfordil.gov/>, and hard copies of the Draft Comprehensive Plan are located at the following locations:

- Rockford City Hall - 425 East State Street, Rockford IL, 61104. First floor Permit Window
- Rockford Public Library (Hart Interim) – 214 North Church Street, Rockford IL, 61101
- Rockford Public Library (Montague Branch) – 1238 South Winnebago Street, Rockford IL, 61102
- Rockford Public Library (East Branch) – 6685 East State Street, Rockford IL, 61108

Comments may be submitted electronically to the following email address: Colin.Belle@rockfordil.gov

Next Steps in the Process to Adopt the 2040 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan

During the September 18th, 2023 City Council meeting the 2040 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan was referred to the Planning & Development (P&D) Committee for a presentation and public hearing for the following week.

On September 25th, 2023 a presentation was given outlining the overall planning process that lead to the development of the 2040 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan. After which a brief discussion was had by the committee members. The Planning and Development Committee unanimously recommended the approval of the 2040 Plan through the execution of an ordinance. The opportunity for public hearing as required by the Illinois Municipal Code (65 ILCS 5/11-12-7) was rescheduled to the October 2nd, 2023 regularly scheduled City Council Meeting.

The 2040 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan was adopted by City Council vote on October 2nd, 2023.

WIFR News Article on Community Survey

The City of Rockford turns to residents to fill out survey regarding future plans for the region

By Quini Amma

Published: Mar. 23, 2022 at 6:23 PM CDT

ROCKFORD, Ill. (WIFR) - The City of Rockford calls on all of its residents to take part in a survey that will help revamp and improve the area.

“You name the kind of food or the kind of coffee or maybe if you’re into sports or martial arts they have quite a variety,” says resident Matt Fogarty. Rockford city leaders want to take the pulse of the people who live here. They would like everyone to take the online survey about things they enjoy about their city and areas they believe need to be fixed. “The new murals that are popping up in the community they’re making the city in downtown look really nice,” says resident Valeria Castello.

The survey, which has about a dozen questions, covers everything from streets and sidewalks to events and housing. Colin Belle is a planning and design coordinator with the City of Rockford. He helped put the survey together and says the answers will help leaders update Rockford’s comprehensive plan for the next 10 to 20 years.

“It’s a really important part of that planning process is public participation and public involvement,” says Belle.

The City of Rockford turns to residents to fill out survey regarding future plans for the region



Rockford City Market Community Survey

Community Survey



Process & Results

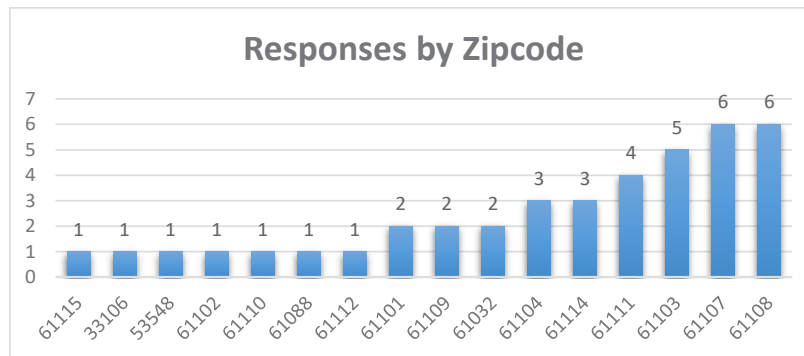
The following survey was administered over two days (August 13th, 2021 & September 10th, 2021) to members of the public while at the Rockford City Market. In total 40 surveys were completed. Additional participants chose not to complete a survey but rather to leave a short written comment on our message board.

The answers you provide will be used to help rank the importance of the range of topics covered in the plan

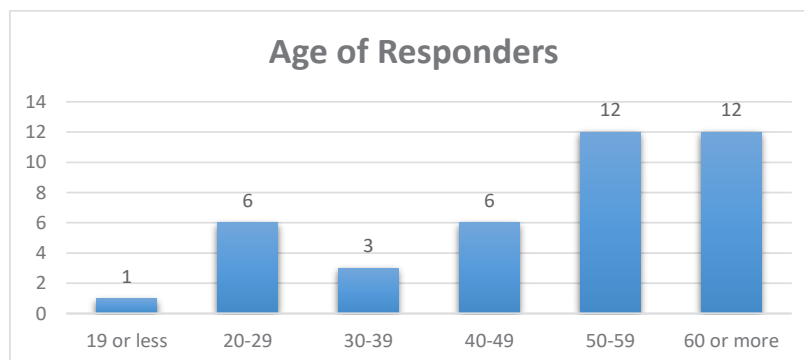
1. Do you live in Rockford? **83%** Yes | **16%** No

Do you work in Rockford? **53%** Yes | **48%** No

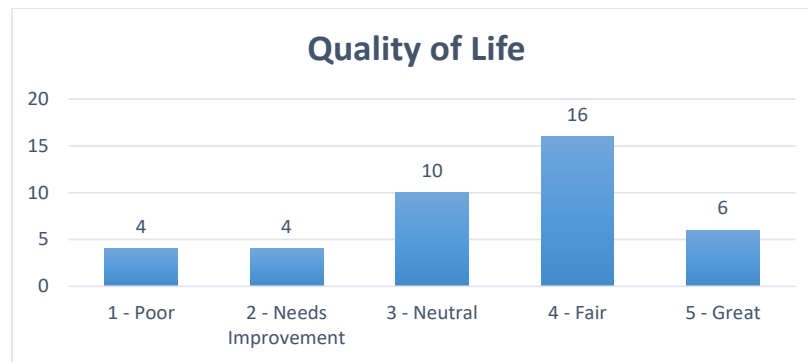
2. What Zip Code do you live in?



3. What category best describes your age?



4. How would you rate the quality of life in Rockford?



5. Respondents were asked to rank important community assets with 1 being most important. These were the results.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Public Safety & Health | 6. Parks, Recreation, & Open Space |
| 2. Education | 7. Arts, Culture, & Historic Preservation |
| 3. Economic Development & Workforce | 8. Environment & Natural Resources |
| 4. Housing | 9. Land-Use Planning |
| 5. Transportation & Mobility | |

6. Respondents were asked to rank how important the following types of housing options are to them with 1 being most important. These were the results.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Single-Family Homes | 4. Multi-Family Homes |
| 2. More Affordable Housing Options | 5. Newly Constructed Homes/Apartments |
| 3. Senior/Assisted Living Facilities | 6. Low-Income/Rent Assisted Housing |

7. Respondents were asked where investment in Urban Areas should be focused with 1 being the most important. These were the results.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Affordable Housing | 6. Parks & Recreation |
| 2. Transportation Improvements | 7. Retail Stores |
| 3. Bike & Pedestrian Facilities | 8. Agriculture/Food Production |
| 4. Tourism/Event Venues | 9. Other |
| 5. Commercial/Industrial Development | |

8. Respondents were asked where investment in Suburban Areas should be focused with 1 being the most important. These were the results.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Parks & Recreation | 6. Tourism/Event Venues |
| 2. Affordable Housing | 7. Retail Stores |
| 3. Bike & Pedestrian Facilities | 8. Agriculture/Food Production |
| 4. Commercial/Industrial Development | 9. Other |
| 5. Transportation Improvements | |

9. Respondents were asked where investment in Transportation should be focused with 1 being the most important. These were the results.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Roadway Improvements | 4. Passenger Rail Service |
| 2. Bicycle Paths, Lanes & Other Bike Facilities | 5. More Public Transportation Options |
| 3. Sidewalks, Crosswalks, & Pedestrian Facilities | 6. Bridges & Overpass |
| Passenger Rail Service | 7. Other |

10. Respondents were asked which 3 topic are the most important issues facing our city. The results are listed in order of highest importance with each category showing detailed responses.

Crime – Reducing Violence – Public Safety – Police Related Concerns

Violence and Crime	11		
Public Safety	4		
Stop Police Violence	1		
More Police	1		
Police Transparency	1		
Parks unsafe	1		
Illegal Drug Use	1		
LGBTQ Population is Unsafe	1	21	29%

Transportation – Roadway Infrastructure & Bridges – Pedestrian Safety – Bicycle Concerns

Improve Roads and Bridges	7		
Improve Sidewalks/Pedestrian Safety	3		
Outdated Transportation Infrastructure	1		
RR Pedestrian Crossing Unsafe Downtown by Taco Betty's	1		
Improve Public Transportation, RMTD	1		
Increase/Improve Bicycle Safety	1		
More Bike Lanes	1		
11th St. Road Repair	1		
Beautify Streets	1	17	23%

Jobs – Education

More Jobs	5		
Improve Schools/Education	3		
Buses for all children not just a certain distance from school	1	9	12%

Taxes – Government Budgets – Government Transparency/Corruption

Government Spending/Balanced Budget	3	7	10%
Lower Taxes	2		
Government Transparency	1		
Government Corruption	1		

Poverty – Blight – Property Maintenance Concerns – Homelessness

Disinvestment and Poverty in Westside	2	7	10%
Blight/Property Maintenance	2		
Homelessness	2		
Address Abandoned Businesses	1		

Business Concerns – Economic Development

Small Business Assistance	1	4	5%
Attract More Diverse Businesses	1		
Economic Development	1		
Remove Cherryvale Mall/Replace Cherryvale Mall with Outlets	1		

Housing Concerns

Affordable Housing	2	4	5%
Reduce Public Housing Assistance	1		
Housing Availability	1		

Other

Gas Prices	1	4	5%
More Downtown Activities	1		
Need More Ice Rinks	1		
Make Downtown More Welcoming	1		

11. Respondents were then asked to provide any additional thoughts or feedback related to the City of Rockford on areas that need improvement or any positive thoughts they have.

- Fix crime issues
- The crime needs to come down. I wish everyone would understand and get along
- Take care of the Native American mounds
- Rockford or Freedom
- More restaurants downtown
- Support for small businesses
- Community gardens
- Activities at City Market for kids to do
- Maps for bike paths
- Overall Rockford is a great place to live. With more improvements to our City this place would be great to live.
- Thank you to everyone who works hard to make Rockford better!
- I've only lived in Rockford a short while but already see it has so many strengths!
- Make crossing the train tracks more wheelchair accessible
- RTD expansion, public transportation

Additionally, there was a 30x40 message board that allowed city market attendees the opportunity to leave comments about our city. The responses are outlined below.

- Additional incentives are needed for start-up/new businesses due to costs being too high. Carmel Indiana has a program that works well for an example.
- Great public parks and playgrounds in Rockford
- Great parks and bike paths but need more on street bike lanes
- City market, more public events such as summer/winter concerts
- More bike lanes downtown
- Gun violence
- Bike maps that make sense and are easy to read
- More small businesses downtown
- Reduce property taxes
- Reduce crime
- RTD needs more routes, more often. Ride rates are not too high though
- Golf. Pay attention to golf pass holders in fall.

Online Community Survey



Rockford Community Survey

Thank You for Taking Our Survey!

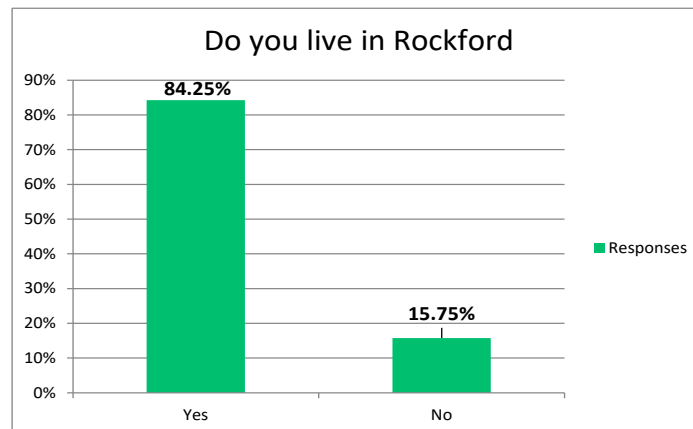
Your individual responses will be kept confidential, and won't be shared. The information collected will be used to help update the City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan.



Rockford Community Survey

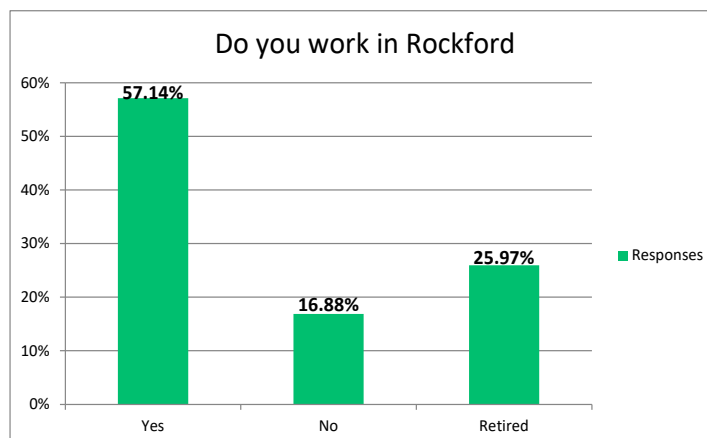
1. Do you live in Rockford?

927 total responses



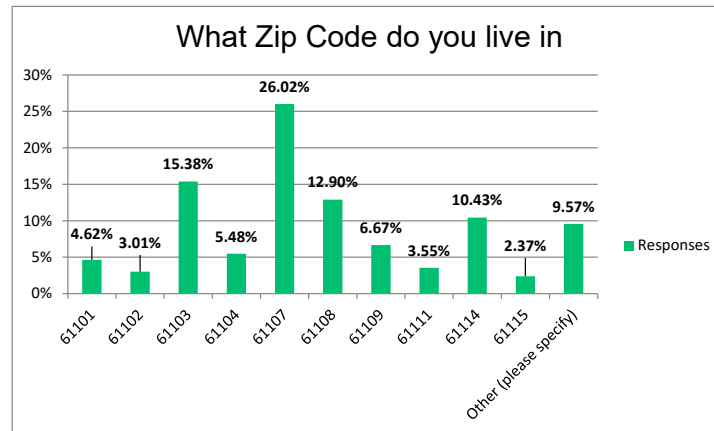
2. Do you work in Rockford?

924 total responses



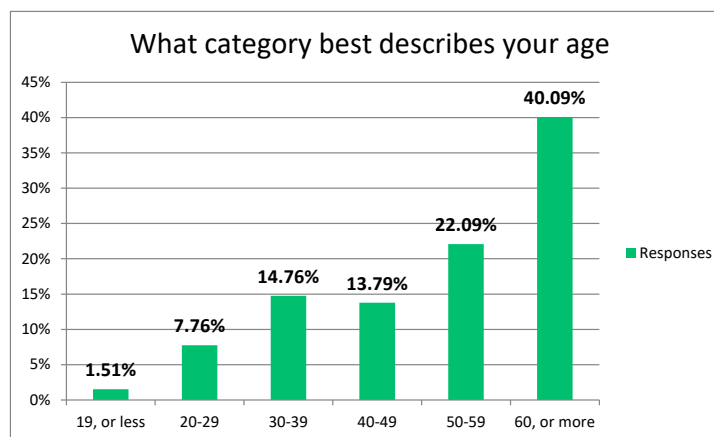
3. What Zip Code do you currently live in?

930 total responses



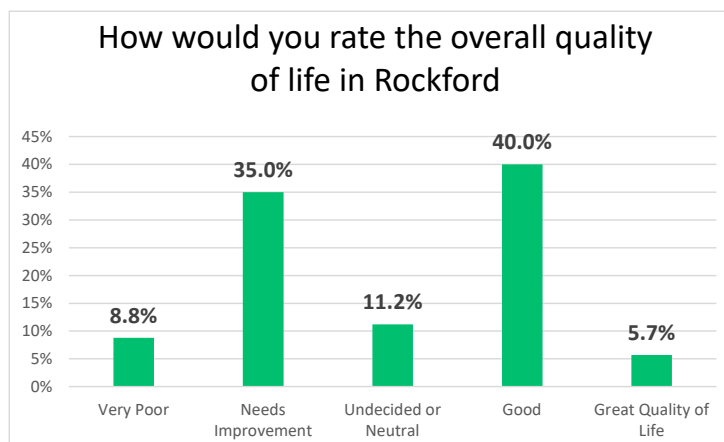
4. What category best describes your age?

928 total responses



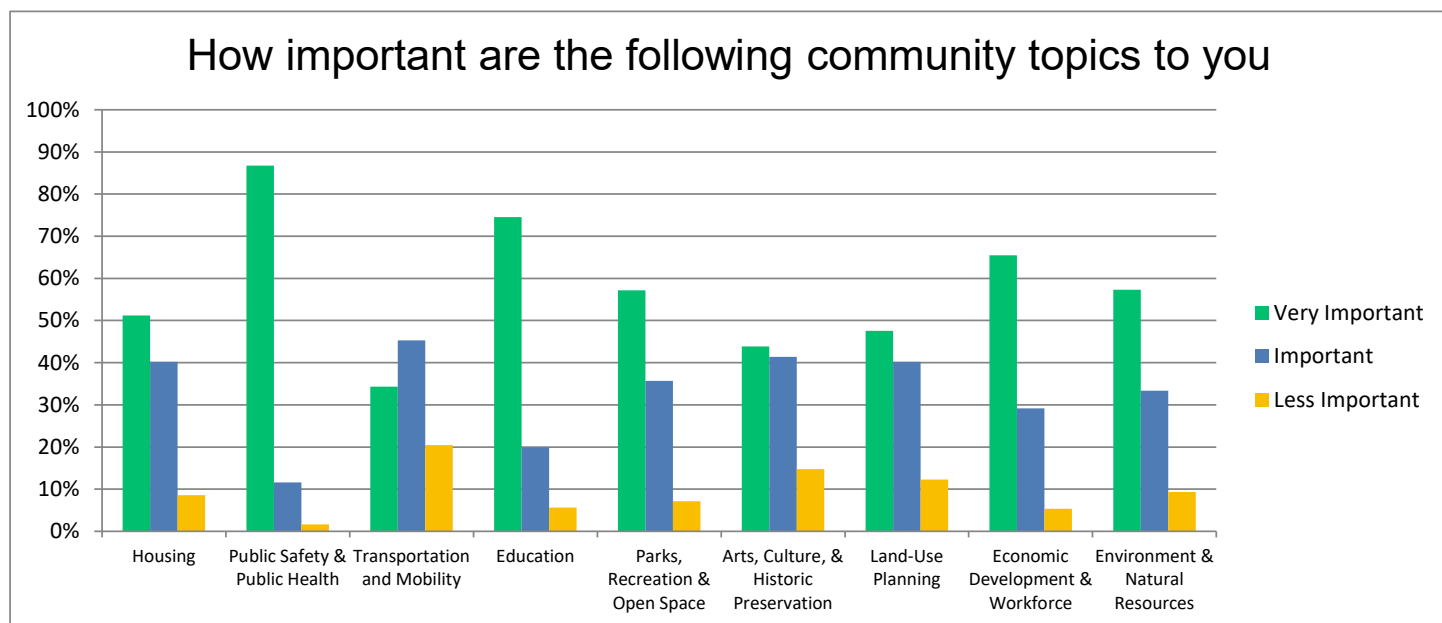
5. How would you rate the overall quality of life in Rockford?

924 total responses



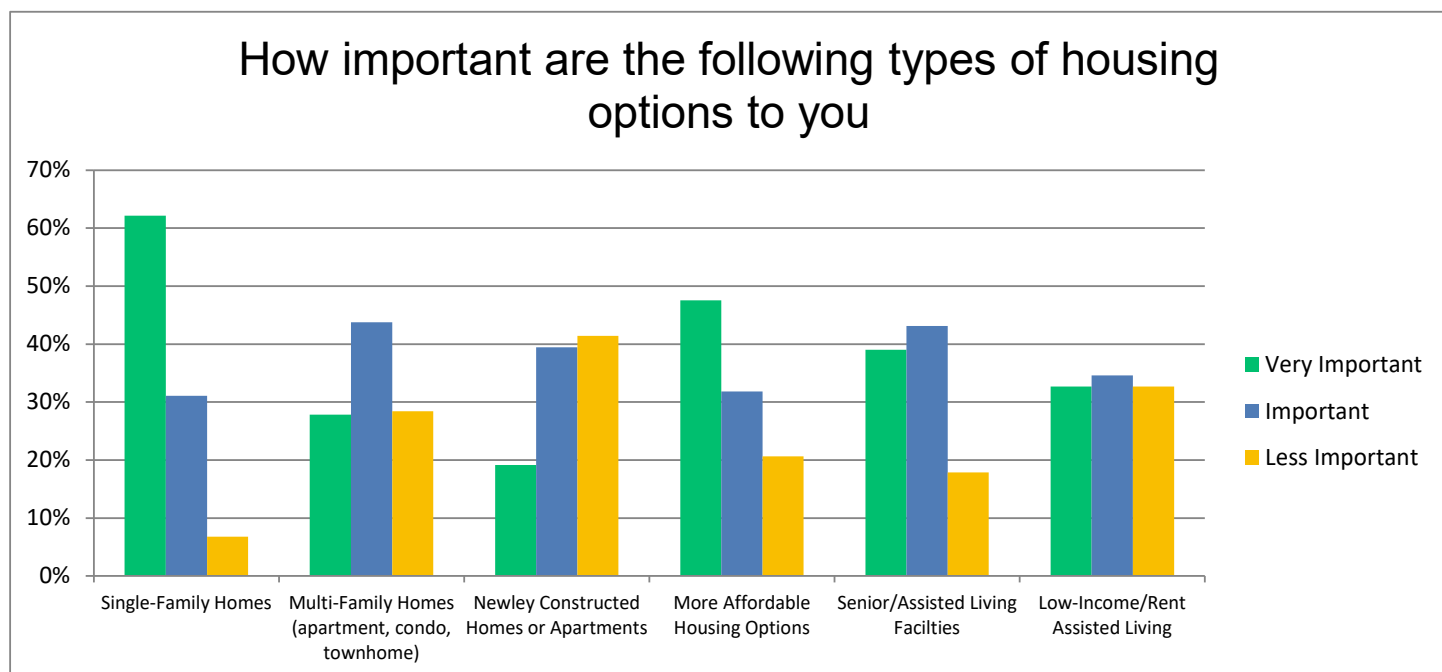
6. How important are the following community topics to you?

930 total responses



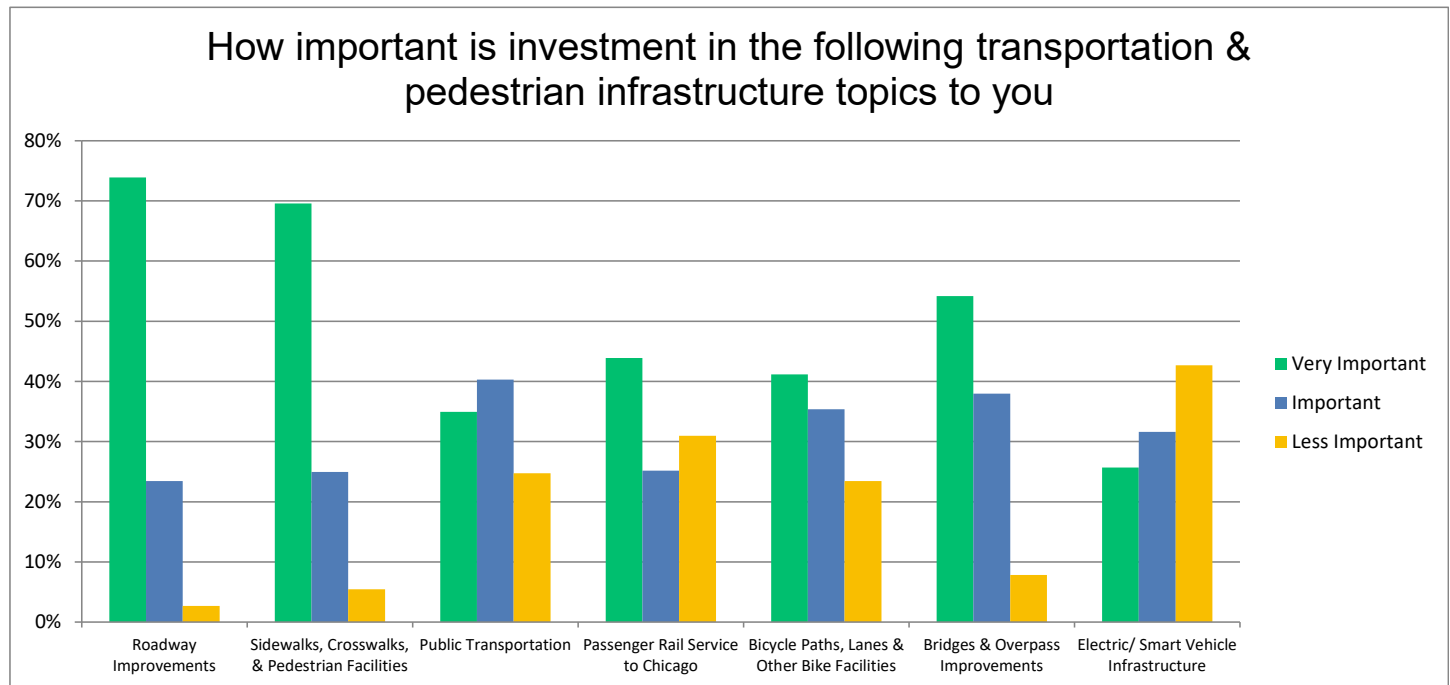
7. How important are the following types of housing options to you?

930 total responses



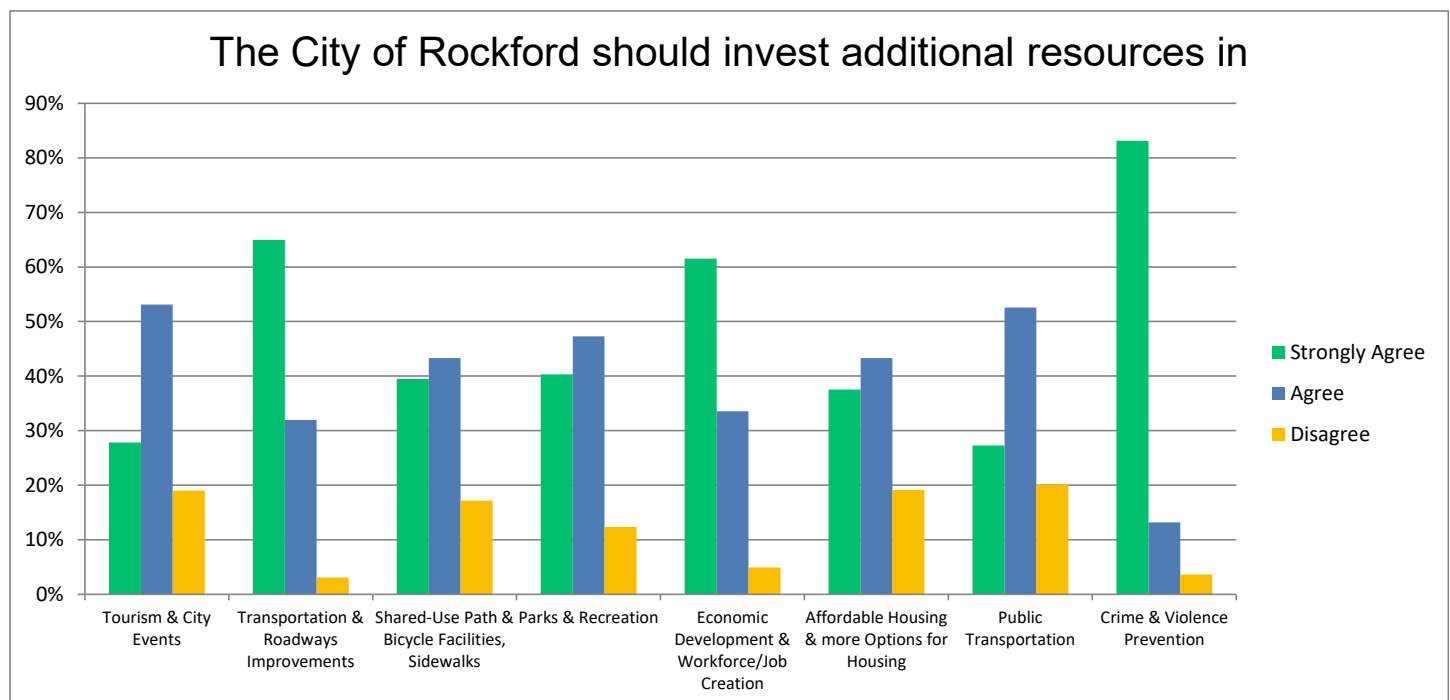
8. How important is investment in the following transportation and pedestrian infrastructure topics to you?

930 total responses



9. How important is investment in the following transportation and pedestrian infrastructure topics to you?

930 total responses



10. What are the most important issues currently facing our city?

Below is a sampling of the almost 900 total responses to this survey question from the public.

Our family recently moved to Rockford from just outside of Atlanta, Ga. We spent a lot of time looking for a home here starting back in October of 2021. We have no attachment to Rockford and my wife and I are both from the south. The one thing I found interesting is when we would tell people we met here during our many trips up that we were looking to move here we would often have people ask us "why would you do that?" or tell us to not move here and stay in the south. It's so disheartening here people speak so ill of the place they live. We are currently renovating the house we bought in the Edgewater neighborhood and renting a home nearby in the area.

Affordable housing. Transitioning from low income housing/government assisted housing to affordable housing/single family residences is a generational culture changer.

Continue to support agencies that create decent and affordable housing. It is equally as important to provide assistance with repairs that are necessary to keep existing homes in good condition for homeowners who have financial struggles.

Transportation accessibility, attracting & maintaining workforce/population, reducing violence in struggling areas.

Honestly - the residents. There seems to be an increasing number of people who simply don't care about the community. So much trash thrown out car windows, speeding down rural streets particularly where children are playing, not doing anything to take care of the appearance of their home, and most certainly the amount of violence especially from younger offenders. Also, panhandlers - crime and very high property taxes and sales tax.

The perception, whether real or not, that Rockford is no longer a safe and vibrant place to live.

Bike or walking path connection between Highcrest road and the river. It's extremely dangerous in its current state.

More youth programs to mitigate crime/violence. Stop lights need better timing in this entire city!! People speed just to get through the lights. Need more West side investments too!!"

Crime, blighted properties, housing and public safety.

Making Rockford safe for all it's population. Crime, childhood trauma & poverty.

Improvements to our education, economic development, and physical infrastructure (including recreational) are leading indicators that deserve attention in order to address crime and violence, which are lagging indicators of a city's success.

Domestic violence reduction, violent crime, education improvements.

Education. Early childhood opportunities. We need rail to Chicago. Public green spaces along the river. Combating domestic violence and poverty.

Affordable housing, infrastructure, public health, education.

Reckless driving, public safety, and transportation options for all modes of travel.

The lack of a strong Mental Health component and its relationship to numerous social problems: crime, drug abuse, domestic violence and community violence, unenlightened punishment (not spending resources to rehabilitate persons in prison), lack of educational success, lack of a motivated/skilled workforce development, deteriorating neighborhoods, lack of a feeling of connectedness with each other by our citizens. We need to care about each other enough to step in and become active in the solution to our community concerns.

Generational poverty and how it is the root cause of so many issues in our community. Helping individuals build resources and become self-sufficient would be a great proactive approach the city could take.

Crime is hands down number 1. We need to start enforcing basic rules, such as speeding, and work up from there. Currently, people are way too lax with basic laws and it shows. Littering, speeding, rolling stops, etc. need to be reigned in.

Help return pride to the neighborhoods. Community standards, curb appeal from trash, to abandoned cars, out of date tags on cars parked all over.

The stranglehold that Schnucks has on the neighborhoods that once had accessible grocery stores. We have a need to educate the influx of new residents about community standards. We need more bilingual communications, and less litter and bottles pitched out of car windows.

We need ability to walk or ride bikes across the Whitman St. Bridge better. We need snow sidewalk plows that keep walkways open and discourage people from walking in the street, especially Auburn St.

Equitable education for all, living wage employment, grocery stores in food deserts of town.

Aging population and infrastructure (mainly roads and bridges) need more upkeep.

Diversity and spreading resources throughout the entire city not just the East side of town. Every side of Rockford should have something similar to 173/251 with grocery stores, restaurants, etc. I have been told there is not enough money on that side of town. No way possible Those same people travel to the grocery store, restaurants, and shopping.

Lack of affordable housing options for the working class. High number of pedestrian deaths caused by vehicles. General lack of safety for people traveling by foot or bike in the city. Over reliance on policing as a means of fostering public safety when stats do not pan out. Continued development of downtown to make it pedestrian friendly and sustainable.

Rising cost of living, rent, utilities, food, basic necessities - This is a national and global issue that creates barriers for those who are low income to lifting themselves out of poverty, and hurdles for the middle and working classes to maintain standards of living, leading to animosity and divisiveness. This leads to two parents working, or single parents working multiple jobs, which leaves less time for time with youth and impacts poor graduation rates and education outcomes. Support for families with affordable housing, student meal support, transportation and fee coverages for sports and extra curricular activities, etc. can keep people fully engaged, and help families provide the time and care they want to for their children. High cost of living also drives people out of our community (on top of taxes) which reduces our tax base.

Other issues: Low opportunities for rehabilitation, social support, workforce training and support for justice-involved individuals to fully participate in society. Low graduation rates and school performance.

Housing in disrepair, vacant buildings and homes. Need push to identify landlords and homeowners at risk of losing homes due to back taxes or due to ongoing neglect, and options to buy them out to create affordable housing or to allow them to fix their home/building with the addition of a lien or with long-term, low-interest loans to pay contractors to complete repairs.

Environmental sustainability. Protecting land and water. Environmental health of soil, water and air. Mitigating climate change. TREES!

11. What do you like about Rockford?

Below is a sampling of the almost 900 total responses to this survey question from the public.

The wonderful options to take part in socially, culturally, and environmentally. I think Rockford is heading in a positive direction. It is a wonderful big city/small town combination!

I love the diversity. Our strength is in our community of people. People of all stripes. Community organizations are tremendously valuable.

I love the old homes as well as the intercity feel. I'm from the Atlanta metro area and lived in the city for 7 years before moving out to the suburbs. Rockford feels a lot like what inner city Atlanta felt like 7-8 years ago.

Downtown, parks, affordable housing, proximity to Chicago and Madison

I appreciate the diversity of this community. This diversity allows groups of people and individuals to come close to each other. It is hard to hate someone once you are close to them.

I love the diversity of the community and the wonderful people that work hard to help our city improve.

I like that it has a wealth of locally owned businesses, a great local art scene, and is easily accessible from so many large cities.

I moved here from Madison, WI as house prices became unaffordable. Housing is affordable here. I live in 61111 so I do not see the direct impact of crime or other things downtown, but being outside of the center but still close to Rockford. I like that folks don't sugar coat it here and it is a working class vibe. Nothing to hide. I've lived in southern California before and it has the same vibe here.

Downtown has developed little by little by individuals giving it character instead of one developer. The river flows through town and there are marinas and boaters. There are ample parks and recreational programs.

Although I don't live in Rockford, I shop and dine out in Rockford many times per week. I like the dining, shopping, and entertainment options.

City is full of history and some really impressive houses. It could be so much better and a place that people want to relocate to, because of what is offered.

I'm from a really small town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, so to me, Rockford is a pretty great place to live. Access to lots of shopping, close proximity to big cities, plenty of outdoor recreational space.

Love, love that the downtown is slowly coming back to life with housing!! People in market rate apartments walking around shopping/eating, etc.. is lovely. I love the arts community - West Side Show Room is such a wonderful addition. I love the art shows throughout the year and the diversity of people who frequent them. I love the preservation of the buildings and am encouraged by the small businesses opening up and being supported by our community. I like the progressive minded thinking of our city leaders and the willingness to do new things.

I like the direction that Rockford is going with investments in the city's downtown--I love the downtown. The growing airport as a hub and job training in the air industry.

It's a big small town. We have beautiful places (of course, we need to stop tearing down the old buildings!). We have nice events. City Market, Stroll on State, Greenwich Art Show, etc. We have some great history.

Size, diversity, open spaces, the Rock River, proximity to Chi, Mad, Mil; cost of living, the city market...

For the most part we have dedicated and skilled staff and community leaders, all doing their part to make life better for all of us. We have numerous groups and individuals dedicated to addressing all of our deficiencies. We have a lot of people who CARE.

I was raised in Oregon IL. Rockford is like living in a big small town with better activities, diversity and shopping and health care

Walkable downtown, parks & recreation (i.e. mountain biking and hiking)

Many things, but I'm grateful for the solid education I got in Rockford, from kindergarten through college. The education is here to get if people want it. We need a city-wide effort to create an environment where the students appreciate what they have and stop complaining about the actual work. How do I know this is the problem? I substitute taught in 82 schools in 7 districts locally. I have seen that negative attitudes and fighting amongst the adults is giving the kids excuses to not do their work, which means they're not learning the basics; they're trying to find ways out of doing the work by creating chaos in the room, the halls and with the assignments.

Hubby and I moved here in 1996 and really can't complain about any certain thing. We like that there are many different stores and restaurants to choose from to patronize. We also like that our police officers who have responded to a call from us have been patient and respectful! We also like that our garbage is always picked up and the streets are kept decently clean!

Our potential. We have a great quality of life - for some residents. If we can understand that ALL residents should have that same QOL, I believe we will be an attractive city that will draw more opportunity, increased resident base, lower crime, and lower taxes... but we have to be willing to understand our potential and the root cause issues that persistently keep us from reaching our potential.

Cultural activities, parks, libraries as well as the beauty of the city. The caring people, enormous possibilities for over-all improvement & location in the US to other major cities.

The beautiful old architecture. The parks and recreation are outstanding compared to other places, and they should be promoted and invested into as the highlight of our city. We have the potential to be a really great city- geographically speaking we have easy access in every direction. Our city has a rich history and so much to offer residents and tourists alike. I truly believe Rockford has the potential to be considered one of the greatest US cities to live in if only we would put all efforts into attracting and keeping the residents that pay the expenses required to maintain or improve a city. This does not mean get rid of low-income; instead, we need to focus on putting all our energy into attracting great homeowners (aka taxpayers) which will snowball into allowing more opportunities for low-income improvements. When you have an overflow of growth, everything gets improved by default.

It's a big small town. We have beautiful places (of course, we need to stop tearing down the old buildings!). We have nice events. City Market, Stroll on State, Greenwich Art Show, etc. We have some great history.

Rockford is really a great city with many positive attributes and many caring people. Unfortunately, as is true everywhere, media focuses on the negative aspects of the news, and not enough positive. Overall, I think the City leaders are doing a commendable job.

With a vehicle it's easy to navigate - traffic isn't intimidating like other large cities. Easy access to plentiful nature spaces. Many types of communities to join. A large amount of retail options to buy pretty much anything you could need. A responsive city government that is working to improve lives of all citizens not just the wealthy or voter base.