

Dalton Master Plan Update

Outreach & Engagement Summary Report

October 18, 2021; revised 11/8/2021 per Planning Board feedback



Introduction

Outreach and Engagement Process

In August of 2021, the Dalton Planning Board began an update to the town's master plan which was last refreshed in 2011. The foundation of any community's master plan are the values and goals of its citizens and property owners. As such, the Planning Board worked with North Country Council to create multi-faceted outreach and engagement strategy intended to solicit input on the master plan from a wide representation of Dalton stakeholders. Opportunities to provided input included both in-person events and a survey available online and in hard-copy by request.

- In-Person Events:
 - Three (3) Opportunities were Provided (Town Square Fair & Dalton Transfer Station)
 - 39 people provided input
 - The events were advertised through press releases in local newspapers, shared posts on social media, and on the Town's website.
- Survey Responses:
 - The survey was available online and in paper format by request and remained open from August 13, 2021 until October 12, 2021.
 - 108 people completed the survey
 - The survey was advertised through press releases, shared posts on social media, the Town's website, and through post card mailers sent to each registered voter and property owner in Dalton.

Report Format & Outline

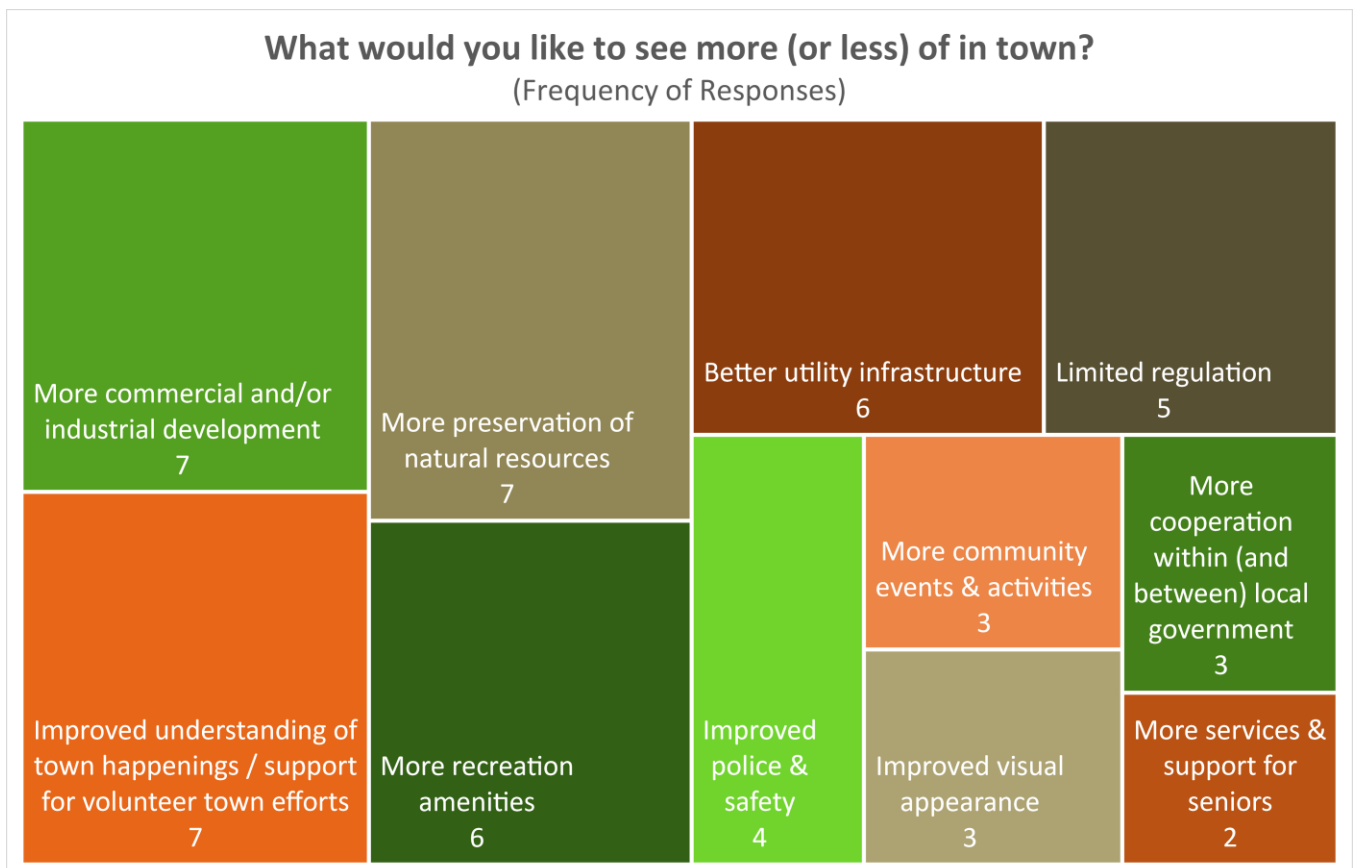
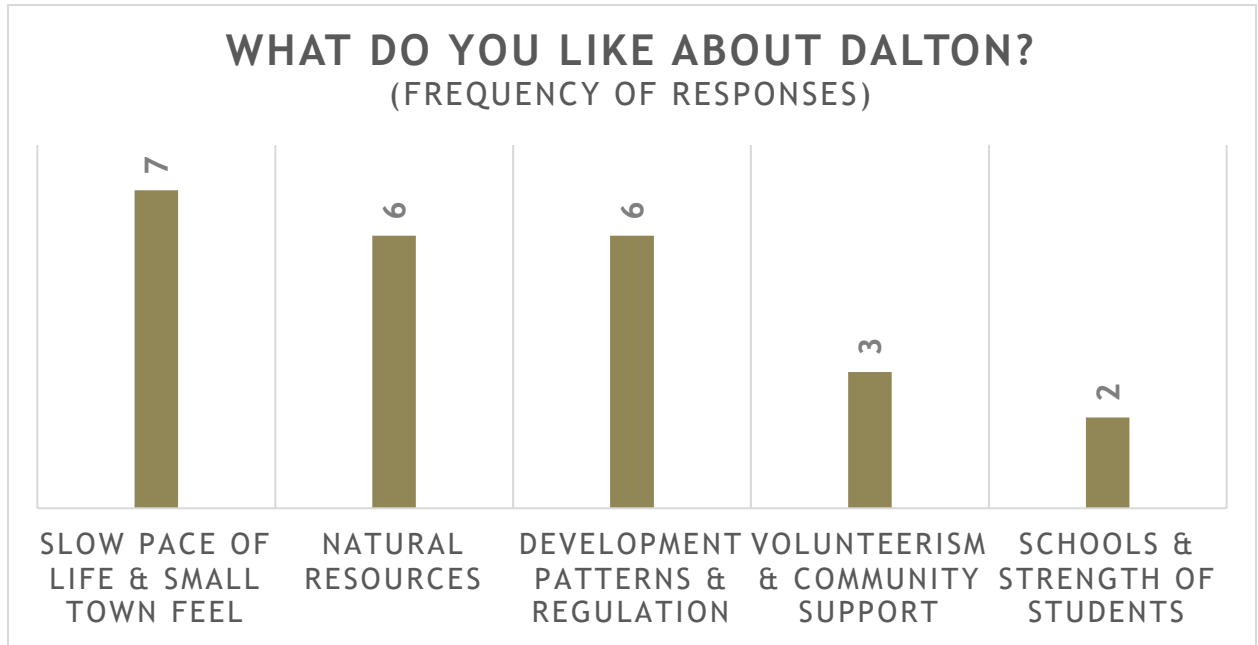
This report provided summary results of the survey and in-person input received as part of the Master Plan update. Overall, this report is broken into two (2) sections including a summary and analysis of the responses received and recommendations from North Country Council on way to consider incorporating the feedback received into the 2021 Dalton Master Plan. Scroll or click below to navigate to a section.

- Summary of Responses
- Recommendations for Integration

Summary of Responses

In-Person Events

The Dalton Planning Board and North Country Council (NCC) prepared outreach materials and targeted questions to engage community members in a dynamic and time-limited way while they attended the Town Square Fair and Chicken BBQ (a long-standing community event) or visited the transfer station (a common and cross-cutting gathering spot). Residents were asked key questions to help update the community vision within Dalton's 2021 Master Plan. The results below are broken-out under each key question.



How do you picture the town in 10 years (20 years)?

Responses	Frequency
With very limited change from today	7
Without a landfill	3
With a larger resident population	3
With areas of commercial or industrial development identified	2
With improved bipartisan problem solving	2
Lower taxes	2
With better community events	1
With many property owners unable to keep up with tax bills (due to decreased population, increasing county budgets, and fixed town expenses) and a depleted unrestricted account	1
With a Chamber of Commerce	1
With more second homeownership (due to the town encouraging it)	1
With more pride in personal property	1
With a healthy forest and a balance of conservation	1

When Looking at a Map of Dalton:

What Needs to be Preserved?	What Needs to Be Changed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the river and river walk trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve approaches to town (gateways)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No landfill in Dalton (7 responses) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the town center
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great walking and biking trails all around (2 responses) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring back the Mud Run
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create trails in forested area at Forest Lake State Park
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the landfill is developed, center other industry in the same area (3 responses)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold more events at Forest Lake State Park like a 5K, 1st Day Plunge, Fundraisers, etc.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring back community events for families and kids like swimming lessons and arts & crafts days (2 responses)

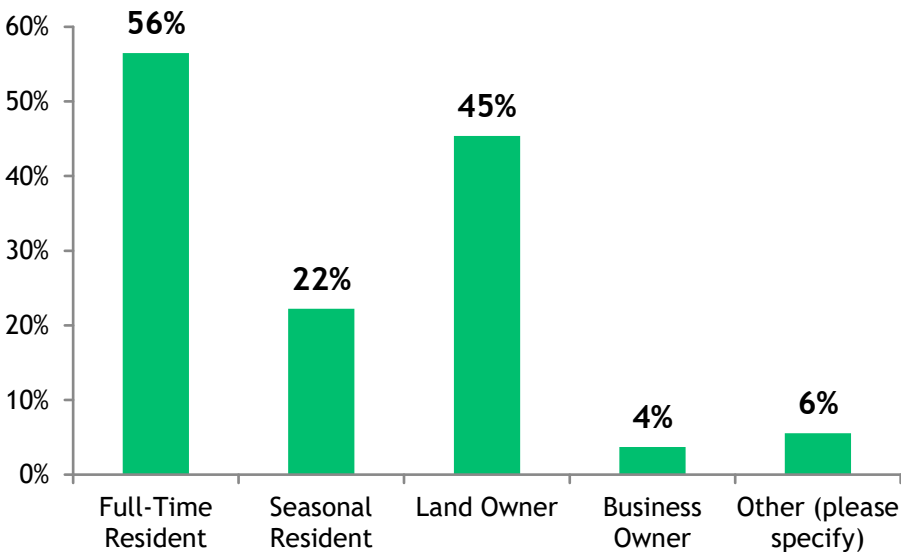
Survey Responses

To create a broad reach of participation from members of the Dalton community a survey was deployed in order to provide an opportunity for feedback to each household and/or property owner in Dalton.

The purpose of the survey will be to identify shared goals, needs, and opportunities for the town in each topic area of the 2021 Master Plan.

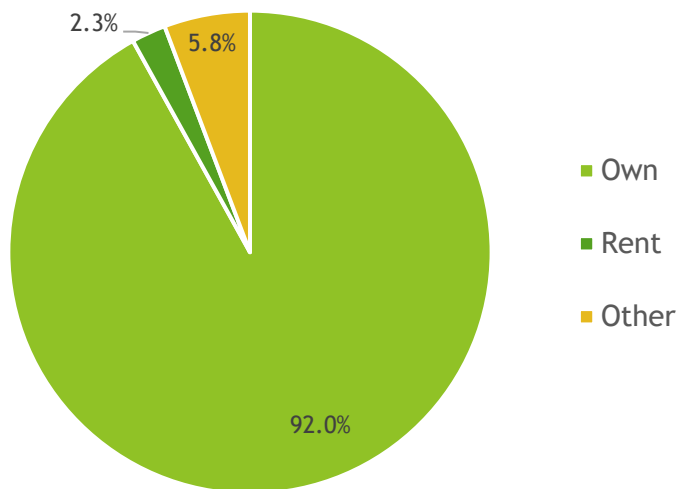
A postcard mailer was developed to inform the public about the master plan update invite people to complete the survey either electronically (preferred) or in paper format by request. An active link to the survey was also provided on the town of Dalton website and two press releases were distributed to local newspapers in order to spread the word. The results below come from analysis of the survey results completed as of October 12, 2021.

Are you a Dalton: (Select all that apply.)



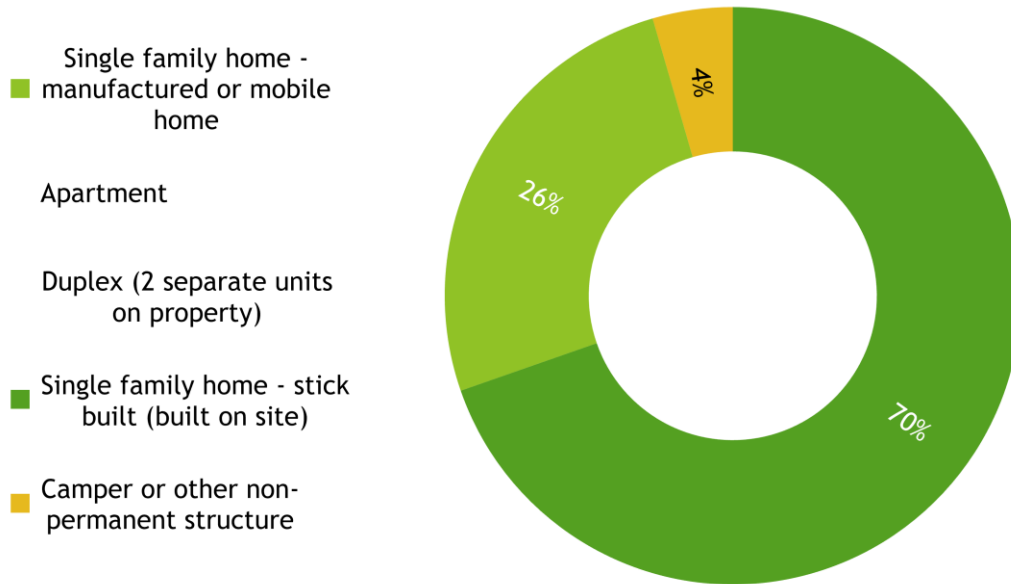
*Other responses included four (4) persons who live in Dalton more than seasonally but not year-round, and two (2) vacation home owners.

If you are a Dalton resident, do you own or rent your home?

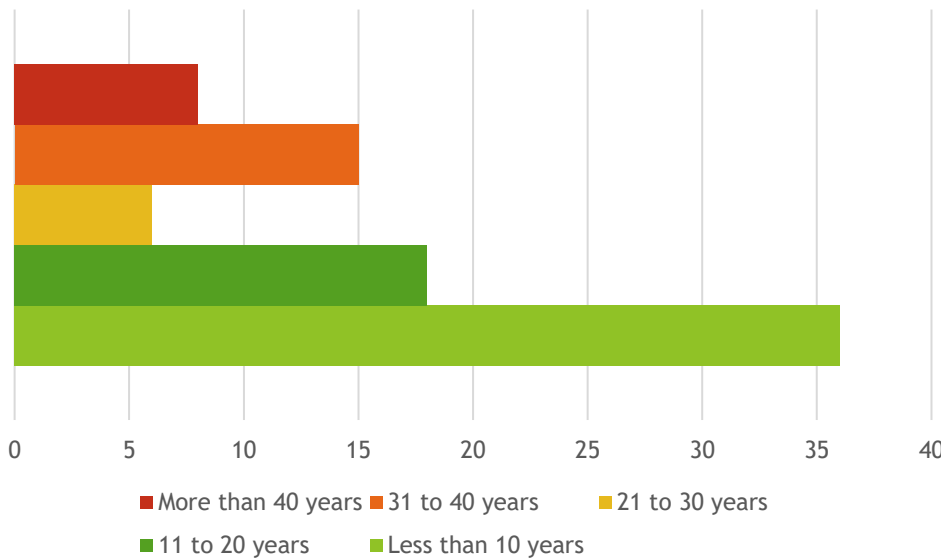


- Of the 87 resident respondents the vast majority own their homes.
- Persons who responded other included those who own land and plan to build and seasonal residents.

What best describes your Dalton home?



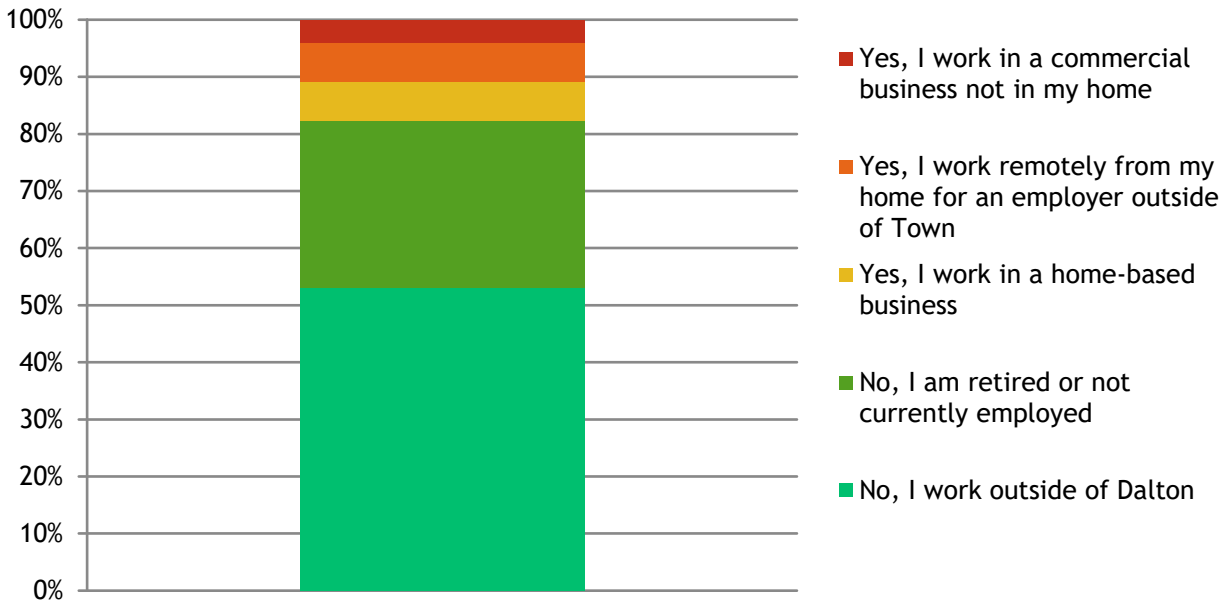
How long have you lived in Dalton?



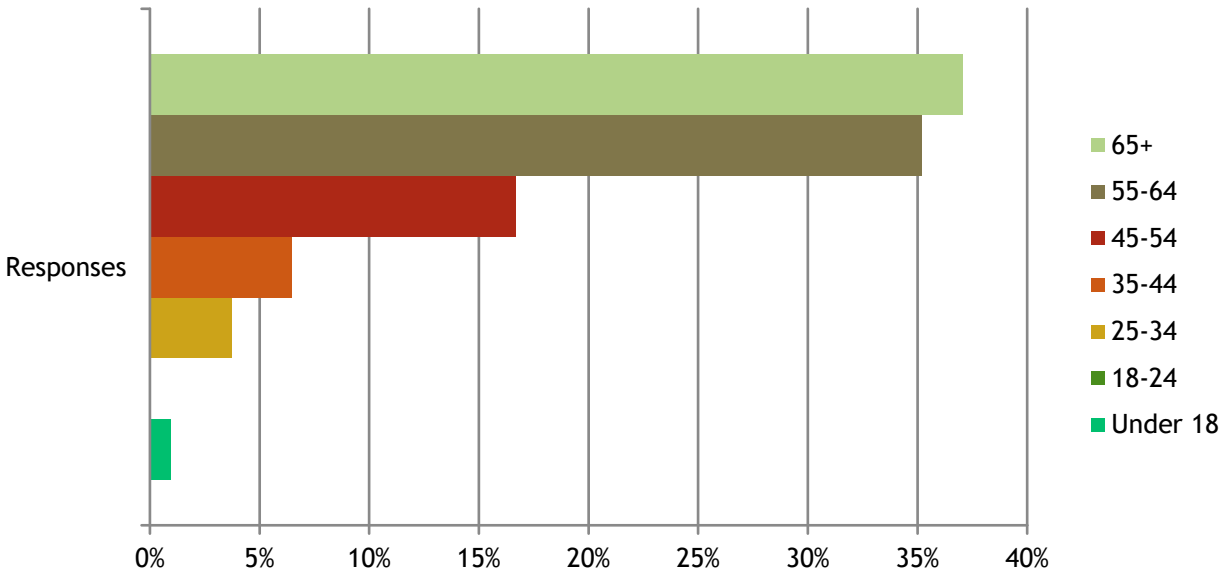
- The average respondent has lived in Dalton for 19 years.
- 43% of respondents have lived in Dalton for less than 10 years.
- 26% have lived in Dalton for less than 5 years.

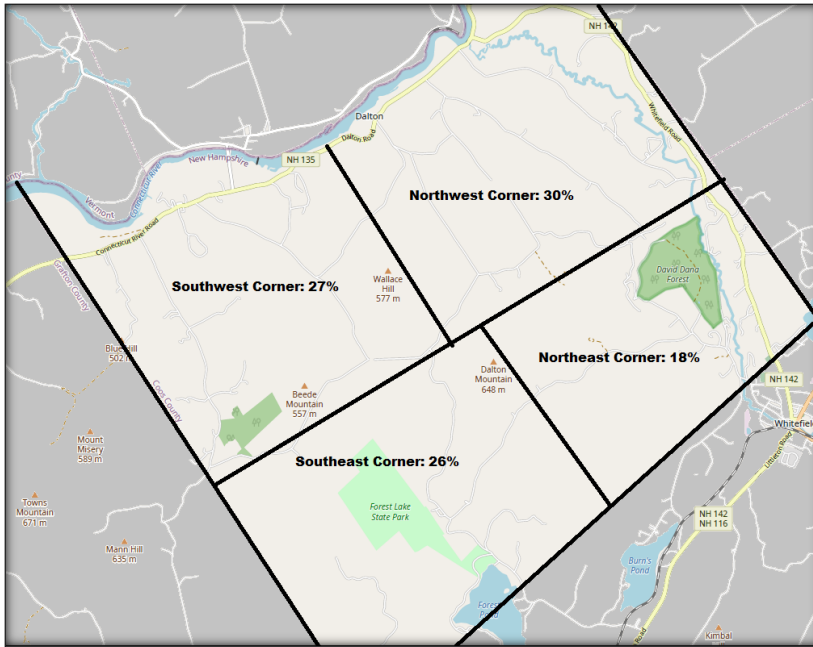
14 respondents operate businesses within the Town of Dalton. Of those 14 respondents more than 50% have operated their business for more than 20 years and more than 25% have started that business within the last three (3) years.

Do you work in Dalton? (Select the option that best describes your work location.)

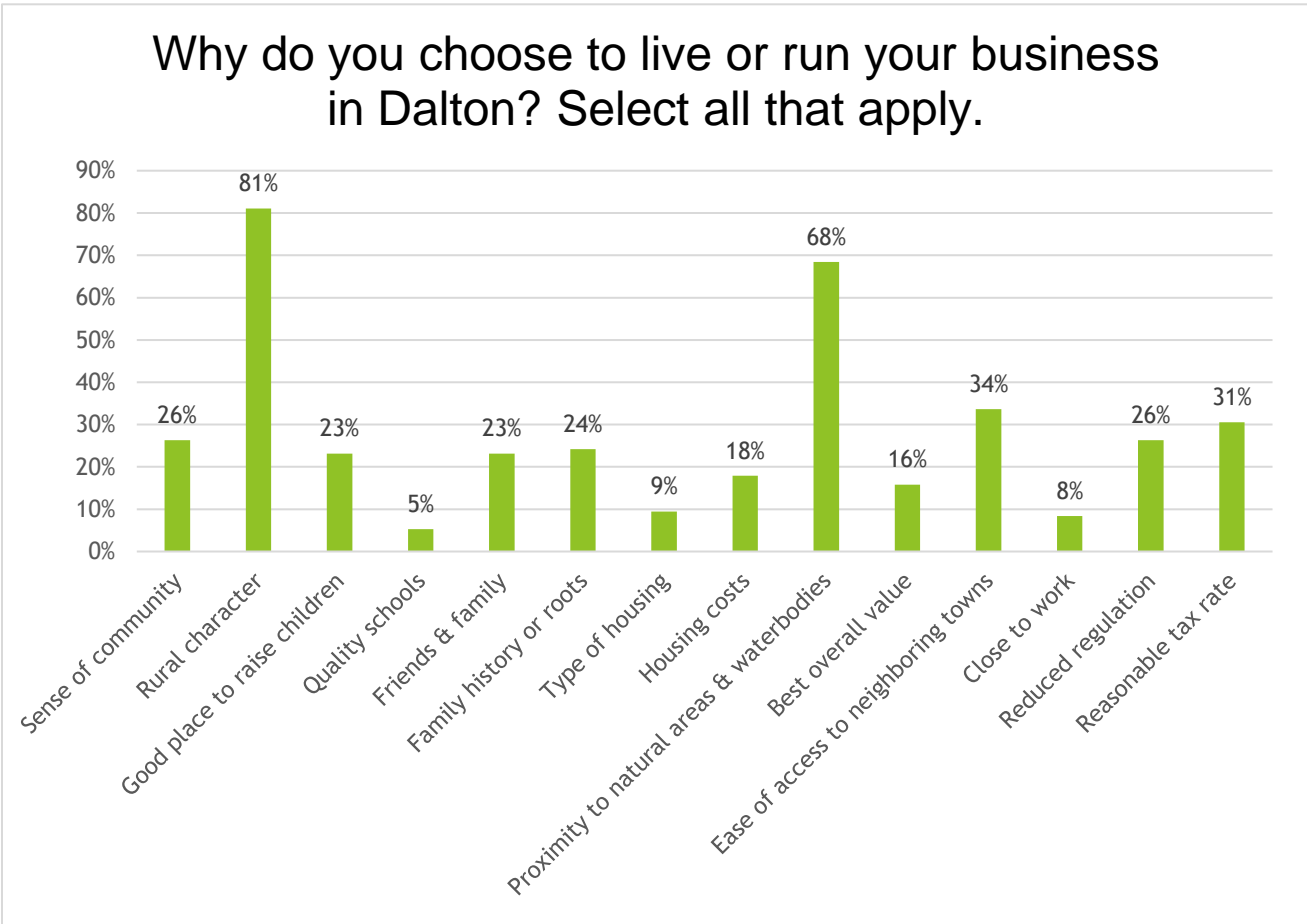


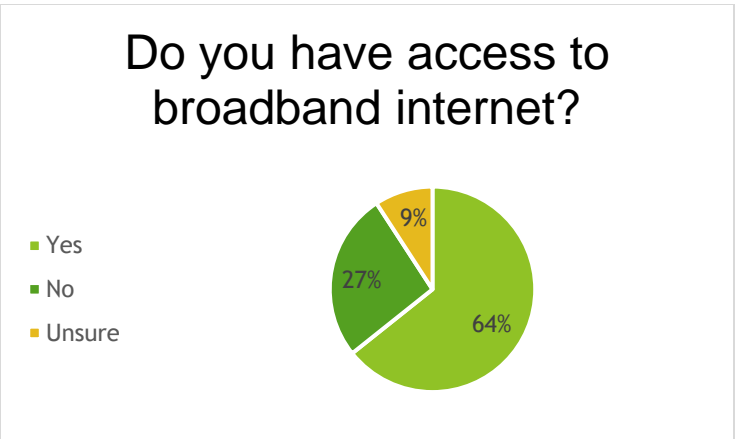
What is your age group?





Survey responses appear fairly well distributed across the community





When asked to share their biggest hope for the future of Dalton, themes emerged around: The word cloud displayed below is a tool to display the most common words appearing in open-ended responses.



- KEEP RURAL CHARACTER /REMAIN UNCHANGED (24%)
- PROTECT/CONSERVE ENVIRONMENT (18%)
- LOWER, STABILIZED, DIVERIFIED TAXES (13%)
- MODEST (SMALL) BUSINESS GROWTH (12%)
- NO LANDFILL (11%)
- STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY (10%)
- ZONING (8%: 2% pro & 6% con)*
- BETTER INTERNET (7%)

*Of respondents who discussed zoning as a ‘‘hope,’’ 2 hoped for zoning (1 from the SW quadrant, and 1 from the SE quadrant); 6 respondents hoped for no, or limited zoning (3 from the SW quadrant and 3 from the SE quadrant).

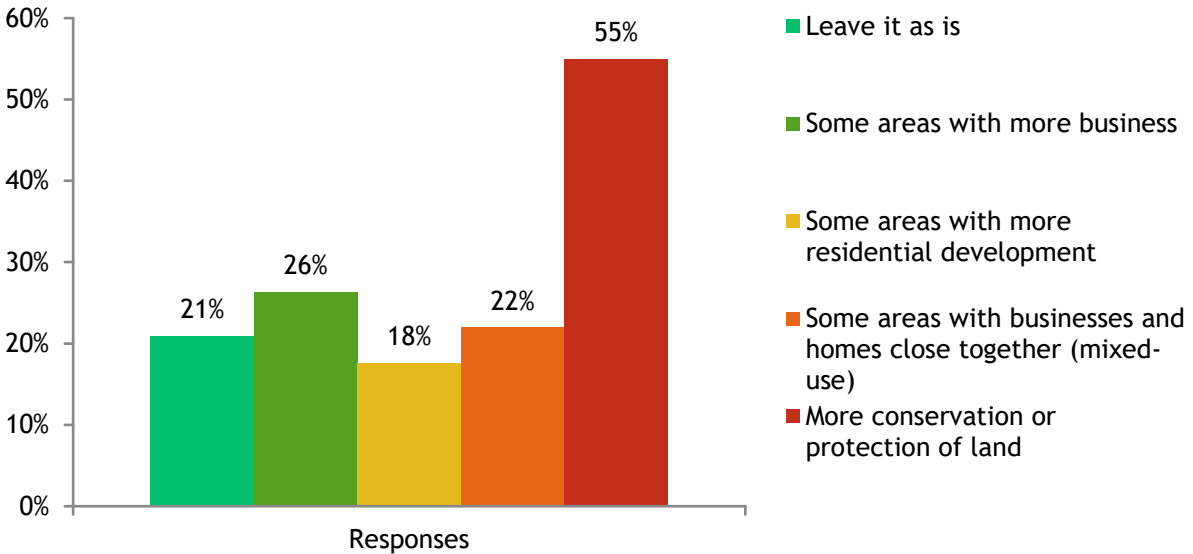
When asked to share their biggest concern about the future of Dalton, themes emerged around: The word cloud displayed below is a tool to display the most common words appearing in open-ended responses.

- DEVELOPMENT OF A LANDFILL (32%)
- INCREASING TAXES (13%)
- BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (PRO SMALL & CON LARGE)(13%)
- ZONING (7%: 4% pro & 3% con)**
- IMPACT OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT (9%)
- PROTECTION/DEGRADATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES (7%)
- POLLUTION (7%)

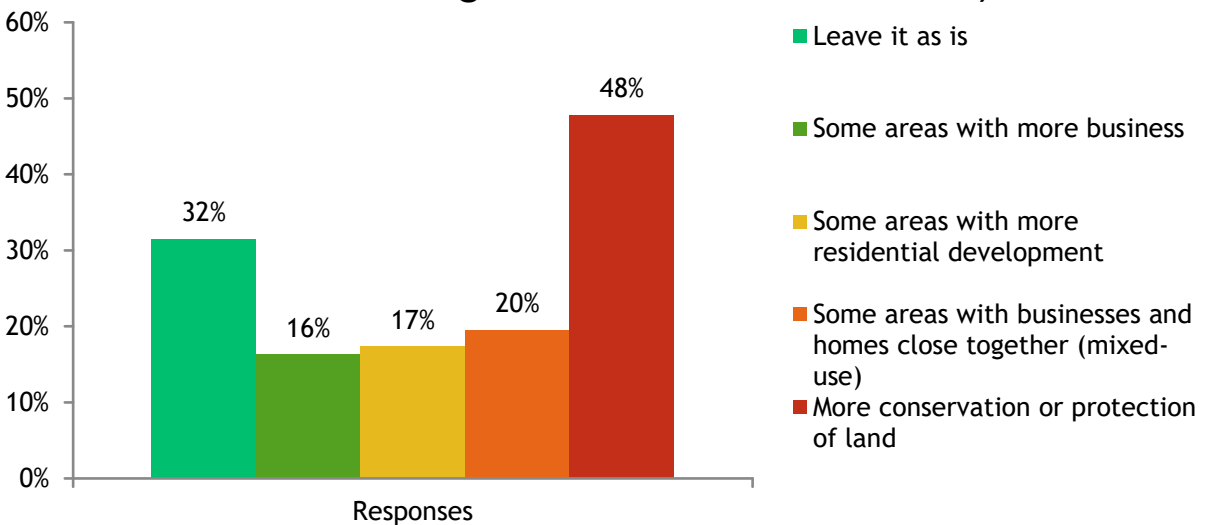


** Of respondents who discussed zoning as a “concern,” 3 were concerned about a lack of zoning (2 from the SW quadrant and 1 from the NW quadrant); 4 were concerned about adopting zoning (3 from the SW quadrant and 1 from the NW quadrant).

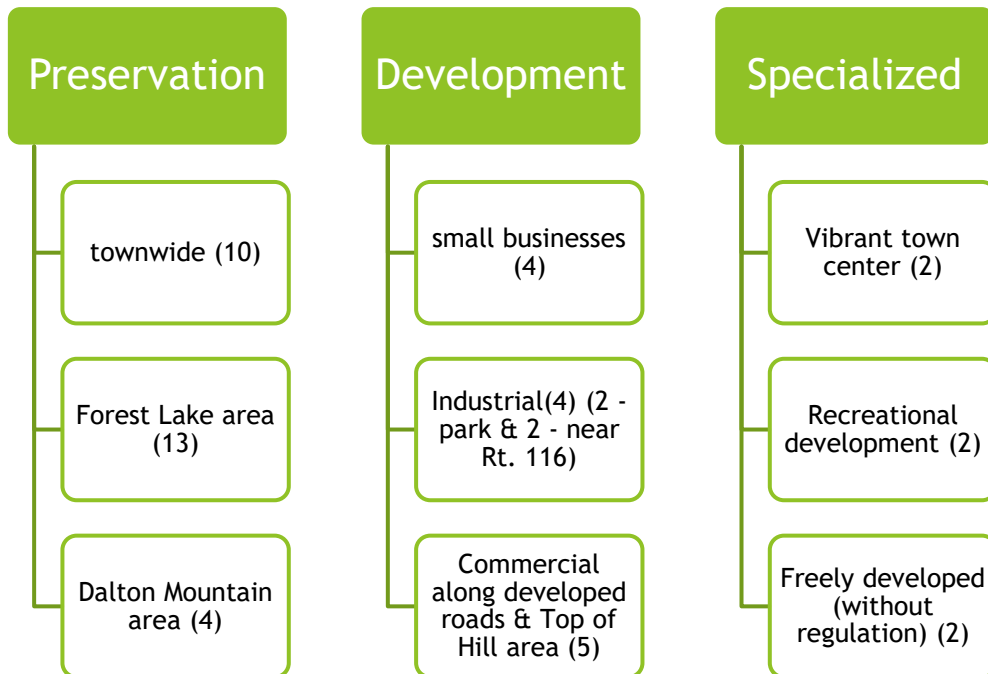
What would you like to see happen to the Rt. 135 corridor? (The 135 Corridor is Dalton Road connecting to Littleton and Lancaster.)



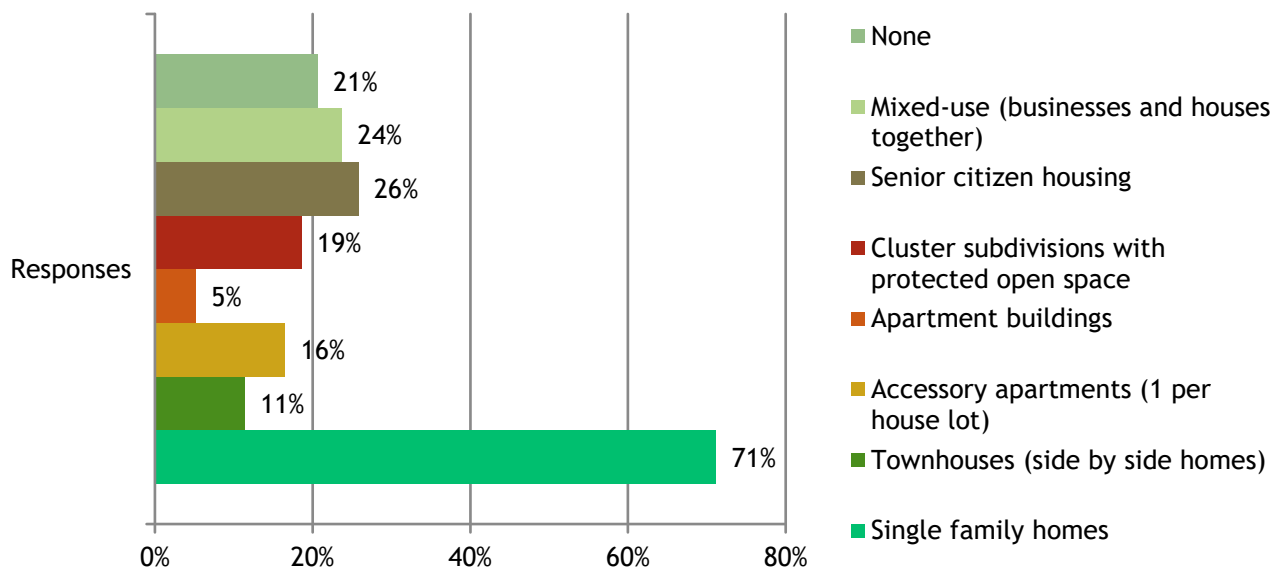
What would you like to see happen to the Rt. 142 corridor? (The 142 Corridor is Whitefield Road connecting to Dalton to Whitefield.)



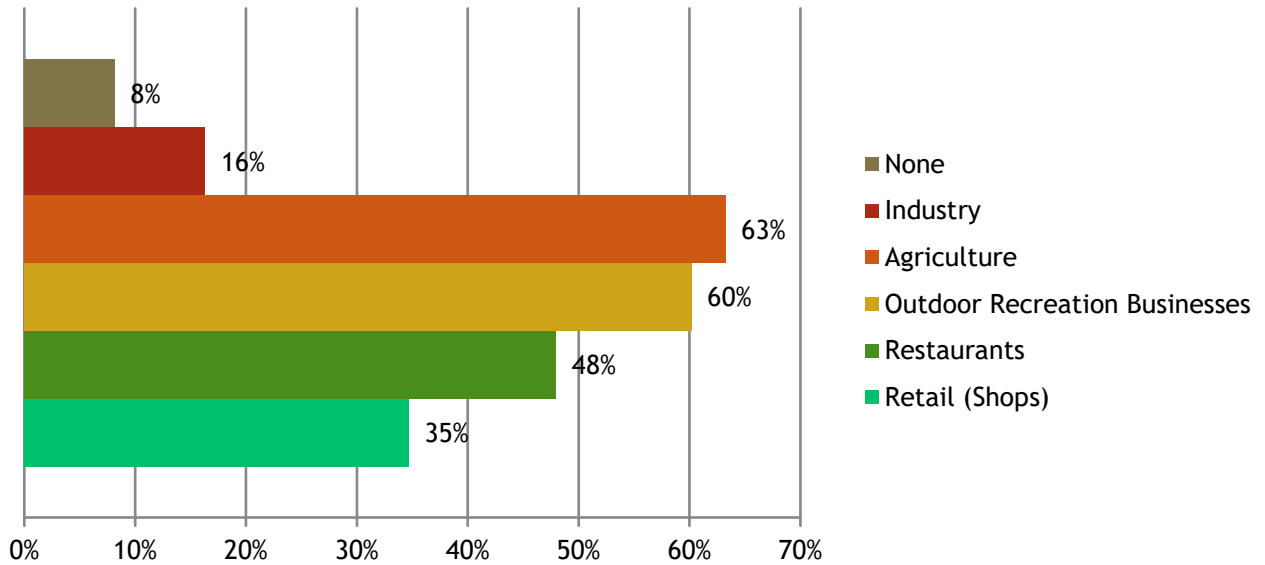
In addition to the corridors specifically asked about in the survey, respondents identified others areas of Dalton in which they would like to see more development or preservation as follows:



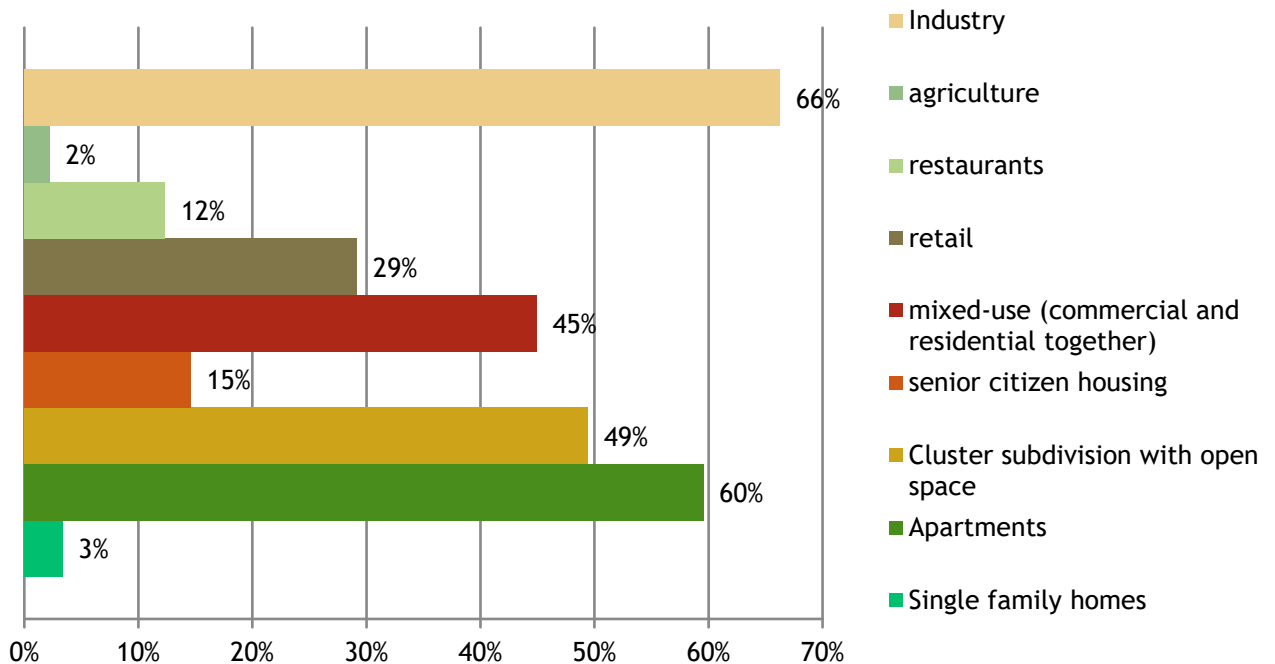
What kind of new residential development would you like to see in the future? (Select all that apply.)



What kind of non-residential development would you like to see in the future? (Select all that apply.)



What kinds of new development would you not like) to see in Dalton? (Select all that apply.)



When asked to share opinions on Dalton's greatest natural resource challenge and/or needs response trends centered around:

- A need for increased or continued preservation of natural spaces, including forested areas, water resources, wetlands, wildlife habitats and the Forest Lake State Park area
- The challenges of the proposed landfill, increased business development, climate change, loss of property owner control, and lack of zoning

When asked to share opinions on Dalton's greatest economic development (or business) challenge or need response trends centered around:

- A need to increase the tax base for the community in order to stabilize taxes and reduce residential tax burdens
- A need to increase opportunities for businesses Dalton. Primarily focused around small businesses with limited impacts to the area. Environmental, recreational, and tourism based businesses were highlighted, as well as business that provide employment for Dalton residents
- A few respondents called out the lack of high-speed internet as a challenge

When asked to share opinions on Dalton's greatest transportation challenge or need response trends centered around:

- Road maintenance needs, particularly those of dirt roads were identified as well as areas for improvement along route 135 & 142
- A need for increased public transportation, and transportation services to meet the needs of aging seniors
- Some minor trends around increased bicycle and pedestrian conditions, improved enforcement of traffic laws, and impacts of truck traffic (both current and potentially increased in the future)

When asked about expanded or new social, or community services response trends centered around:

- More services or activities for seniors
- More services and activities for children & families
- Increased volunteerism
- Use of town center for community events
- Improved/maintained trails
- Police
- *(a trend also emerged around no new or expanded services)*

When asked to identify any specific issues in neighboring town which are of importance to Dalton response trends centered around:

- Communities with which water resources are shared, including those upstream and downstream along rivers were identified. The development there impacts things in Dalton and Dalton's development impacts the waters downstream as well.
- Increased development in Littleton, Whitefield, and Lancaster were identified as impacting Dalton's affordability, and future community development in Gilman and Whitefield was called out as another impact to Dalton.
- The impact of recreation and trails based development in the area was identified as a topic which could impact Dalton.
- The town of Bethlehem and its operational landfill were identified as impactful and an opportunity to coordinate and learn from neighbors. Additionally, a potential future landfill in town was identified as a way in which Dalton may impact its neighboring communities.

Recommendations for Integration

Master Plan

The information collected through this outreach and engagement process provides valuable direction on how the desires, concerns, and needs of Dalton community have changed and remained the same since the Master Plan was last updated in 2011. Below are a series of recommendation on how the 2011 Master Plan may be revised based upon the input received and summarized here.

- Data collected affirms Dalton's rural setting and reasonable property values as features which retain existing and attract new residents including both year-round and part-time or second homeowners.
- Data collected demonstrates a growing need to determine what scales and locations of businesses are acceptable to Dalton's community members. While there is continued support for disbursed small-scale and home-based businesses; a wide range of opinions were expressed regarding the larger commercial and industrial operations, with some expressing an interest in identifying areas for such development, some looking to prohibit it entirely, and some who do not wish to see any land use regulation. The 2011 plan can be enhanced by further discussing this topic as it relates to industry or commercial land uses in the town.
- Data collected provides some indication that Dalton stakeholders may be interested in seeing a more vibrant and active town center. The 2011 plan describes the building present in the town center however this statement could be enhanced by explaining the possible roles and uses of the town center as a place for civic engagement, community events, and volunteerism.
- Data collected affirms the 2011 plan's emphasis on the importance Dalton's rural character. Residents continue to desire new residential development to be primarily single-family construction, however this statement would be updated by including discussion of senior housing needs. Additionally, language around resident interest in strict property maintenance standards should be softened to describe a balance between regulating residential properties and allowing property owners to use residential lots as desired.
- Data collected further supports the discussion in the 2011 Vision Statement & Land Use element regarding the impact of part-time residents, second homeowners, and increased tourist populations as an area of impact. This section can be strengthened by identifying opportunities to improve civic engagement and the need to knit new community members moving to the community into the historic cultures and traditions of Dalton in order to improve civic health, community trust, and cooperation.
- Data collected highlights the concerns of Dalton taxpayers upon the diversity, stability and size of the municipalities tax base. Many residents are concerned about increasing tax rates due to new or expanded services.
- Data collected continues to support the value placed upon Dalton's natural resources and landscapes. Continue efforts for preservation and protection of key resources is important to both residents' quality of life and the possible growth of recreation and tourism based economic ventures.

Other Possible Uses of this Information

While the primary purpose of the community input survey and in-person engagement events were to provide direction to the 2021 Master Plan Update often the information shared by participants relates to topics of municipal services offered, public safety, community connections, and regulations. Trends observed by NCC staff planners within these categories are described above for Dalton's consideration.

- **Municipal Services:**
 - Increased hours of operation at Town Hall, increased access to formal municipal documents and agenda materials, increased (and continued) digital streaming and participation of board meetings, increased information regarding day-to-day town operations were mentioned by multiple respondents.
 - Increased sense of trust and connection to local government representatives was discussed by multiple respondents.
- **Public Safety:**
 - Concerns regarding public safety were expressed by multiple respondents. This topic included opinions on past and current performance of police services. While there are a wide range of views on municipal policing costs as compared to benefits, the importance of a robust public safety program was observed as a trend.
- **Community Connections:**
 - Desires for more community activities were expressed by a wide range of respondents. Events and activities that celebrate Dalton’s natural resources, promote trail and waterway use, and provide opportunities for children and seniors were the most often desired.
 - A need for more community members to contribute to volunteer and community efforts was expressed by multiple respondents.
- **Regulation:**
 - Opinions regarding the role of zoning, or land use regulation in Dalton were expressed by many respondents, however there was not a clear trend or majority interest regarding such a topic. Respondents opposed to regulation fear loss of property rights, interference with existing operations and land uses, and increased costs of development and municipal services. Those in favor of regulation are largely in favor of limiting heavy land uses such as waste disposal and landfill within the community. However, several stakeholders noted a desire to see heavy land uses located in specific areas of town if they will be permitted. Opinions regarding regulation of residential properties and accessory land uses were greatly mixed.