

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT APPENDIX

INTRODUCTION

The Great Seneca Plan: Connecting Life and Science (Plan) is an update to the 2010 *Great Seneca Science Corridor Master Plan* (2010 Plan), which envisioned the transformation of the Life Sciences Center, shown in Figure 1, into a walkable hub for life sciences research where people could live, work, and build community. Since the adoption of the 2010 Plan, the Life Sciences Center has flourished as a world class research and innovation hub and has attracted thousands of new residents.

In many ways the vision has been implemented, but the pieces that tie the uses together—that create a sense of place—continue to elude the area. The Great Seneca Plan seeks to fill in the missing pieces from the 2010 Plan—the public realm, the integration of uses and the public spaces—while continuing to support the successes of the area.

The Great Seneca Plan seeks to craft a new community vision, building upon the 2010 Plan. This Plan strives to include people who have historically been excluded from planning processes and consider the impacts of the process on racial equity and social justice. The vision of the area should serve everyone and be accessible for all who live, work, and visit there.

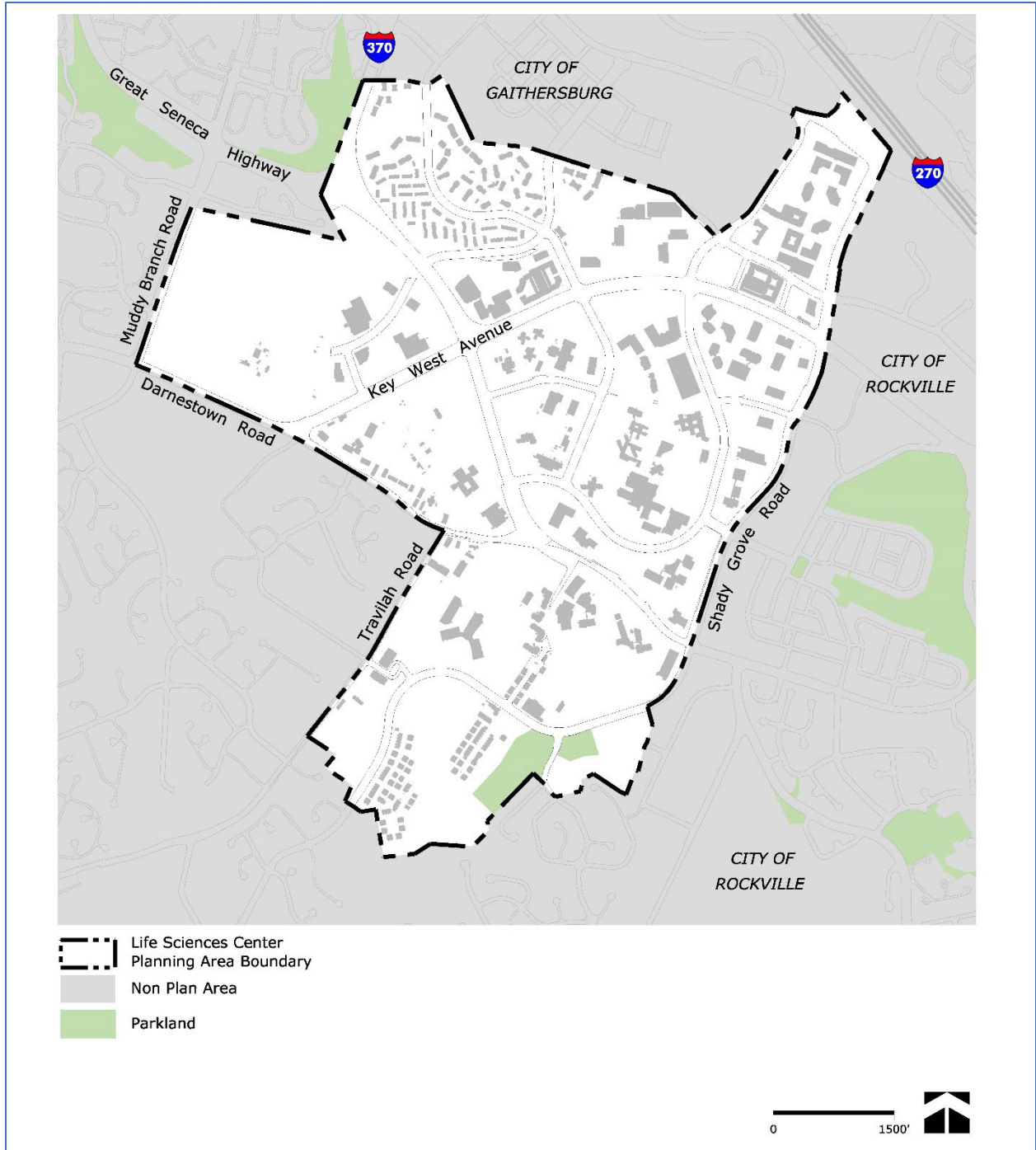


Figure 1: The Life Sciences Center

TARGET POPULATIONS

The boundary for the Plan is unique and noncontiguous, as shown in Figure 2. It contains the core area of the Life Sciences Center as well as a variety of areas adjacent to the City of Rockville, the City of Gaithersburg and the Town of Washington Grove. While the boundaries appear complex, people do

not live their lives according to administrative boundaries; people travel through all these areas to work, live, shop, and recreate.

Planning staff took a broad approach to community engagement. In addition to engaging residents, workers, and students in the Life Sciences Center—the focus of the Great Seneca Plan—Planning staff collected feedback and ideas from residents in the areas adjacent to the municipalities as well as residents of the City of Gaithersburg, the City of Rockville, and other surrounding communities who do not live in the Plan boundary. All these people are crucial stakeholders in the future of the Plan area.

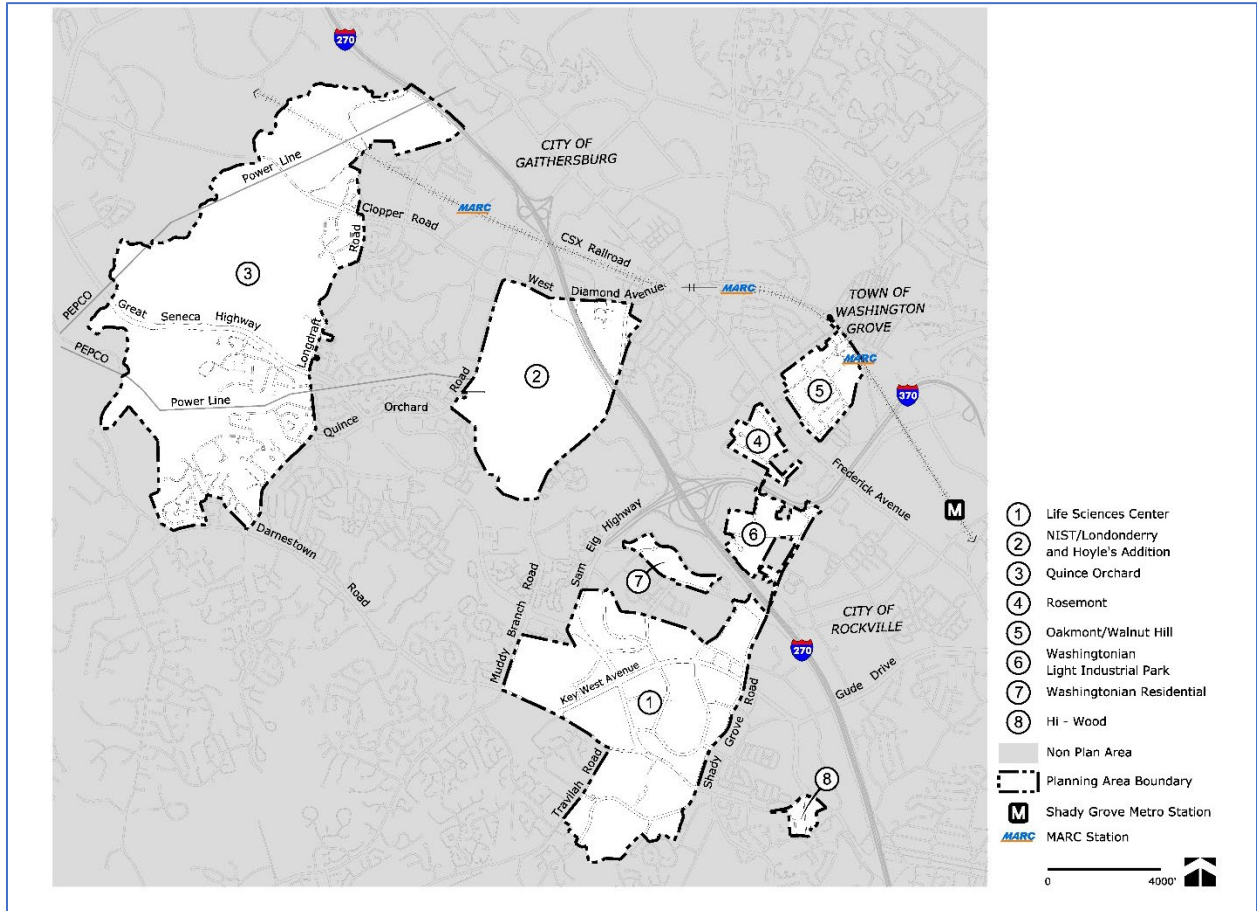


Figure 2: The Great Seneca Plan Area

APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

Master plans like the Great Seneca Plan create a vision for the future with specific recommendations to help implement that vision. Robust community engagement and meaningful participation in the planning process are critical to developing that vision. Planning staff’s engagement strategy focused on meeting people where they are.

- Physically – Master plan recommendations affect the daily lives of residents; however, it can be challenging for parents, workers, and those with unpredictable access to

transportation, among others, to engage in the planning process. The Great Seneca Plan process provided varying engagement options including in-person and virtual meetings, live and on-demand activities, door-to-door canvassing, as well as pop-up events throughout neighborhoods to offer great flexibility to participants.

- In community – Learning and working in the community is a powerful tool. Enabling people to participate in the planning process with the people and organizations they already feel comfortable with fosters honest feedback and discussions. Planning staff partnered with local groups, organizations, and institutions to share information about the Plan and discuss needs, wants, and concerns.
- Informationally – People come to the planning process with distinct levels of experience, backgrounds, and access to information. Planning staff sought to level the informational playing field by translating Plan-related materials and holding meetings in the languages most spoken by Plan stakeholders, providing access for people who are visually and hearing impaired (as needed), and distributing educational material that explains the Plan process and key concepts.

This comprehensive approach to engagement allowed Planning staff to target and reach stakeholders that comprise significant portions of the area’s population. As shown in Figure 3, compared to the county, the Great Seneca Plan area:

- has a higher proportion of Asian residents and a smaller proportion of white residents than the county overall;
- has over 50 percent of residents who speak a language other than English at home;
- has more than 60 percent of residents who are renters, compared to 34 percent countywide, and a considerable number are students.

There are also important groups not captured in demographic data such as students who commute to Universities at Shady Grove, life sciences employees and companies, and healthcare professionals.

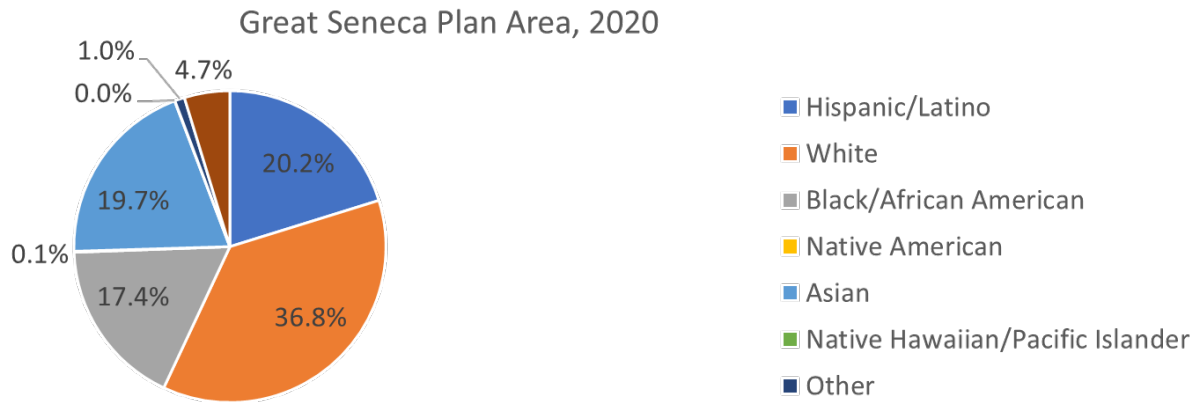


Figure 3: Plan Area Demographics

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The remainder of this report details the outreach and engagement strategies employed in support of the Great Seneca Plan, the people engaged, and the feedback received. Key takeaways from the feedback received to date include:

- Residents overwhelmingly enjoy living in the Great Seneca area.
- Housing affordability and attainability is a concern across demographics. For the most vulnerable populations, the rising cost of housing represents an existential threat.
- People love parks and open spaces but wish there were more spaces available. Specifically, people want playgrounds, gathering/performance spaces, and fields and courts.
- Transit is insufficient to meet the needs of most people, even though there are many who rely primarily on transit for transportation.
- Traffic and parking remain a concern throughout the Plan area.
- People enjoy walking and biking and wish there were more trails for recreation and more transportation connections.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Community engagement efforts in the Great Seneca area began in spring 2022 and continued through fall 2023. Planning staff employed a variety of strategies and tactics to reach people where they are were throughout the plan process. These strategies were open to anyone and presented in a variety of

formats to provide many possible avenues for connecting with people. The strategies are summarized below and discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this report.

- “Pop-ups” to meet the community where they were: at farmers’ markets, coffee shops, commercial centers, food distribution sites, and grocery stores
- Door-to-door canvassing, through a partnership with Everyday Canvassing (EDC), focused on knocking on doors of individual units in multifamily buildings
- Co-hosted meetings with community organizations, including the Chinese Culture and Community Services Center, Identity, and the Great Seneca Science Corridor Implementation Advisory Committee
- An online mapping tool, ReactMap, which utilizes signage in significant locations to elicit community response
- In-person and online visioning meetings where the community could explore their vision for the future
- Online questionnaires allowing people to rank priorities and share ideas
- Focus groups with life sciences companies and developers

POP-UP EVENTS

Pop-up events aim to raise awareness of the Plan and gain insight into residents’ feelings about the future of the area at the greatest ease to them. Planning staff chose a variety of strategic locations in and around the Plan area to meet people during their daily activities and answer questions, distribute materials, sign residents up for new letters and later events, and hear from people about their community. Some pop-up events included:

- April 19, 2022 at Dunkin’ Donuts
- April 30, 2022 at Giant grocery store
- May 20, 2022 Bike to Work Day at Falls Grove Village Center
- August 17 and September 7, 2022, at Shady Grove Wednesday Farmers’ Market
- October 5, 2022 on Medical Center Drive
- October 6, 2022 at Downtown Crown
- October 12 and November 9, 2022 at Manna Food Choice Market at The Universities at Shady Grove

These locations were chosen to be distributed throughout the Life Sciences Center as much as possible, within the guidelines of appropriate commercial areas with a significant amount of foot traffic. Additionally, they were scheduled at a variety of times, including morning, midday, early evening, and weekends to engage different people who are active at these times.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

Pop-up events are a casual way to collect people’s thoughts, concerns and positive feelings about their community. Due to the informal nature of the conversations, demographic data was not often collected. Planning staff heard from residents, life sciences and healthcare workers, students, commuters, and people seeking food assistance.



Figure 4: Planning Staff at 2022 Bike to Work Day at Falls Grove Village Center



Figure 5: Planning Staff speaking with community members at Manna Food Choice Market at the Universities at Shady Grove

WHAT WE HEARD

After each pop-up event, Planning staff combined all comments received and reviewed them. The most frequent comments we heard were about:

- intensifying efforts towards upkeep and preservation of natural resources;
- the need for more parks and recreation options with activities for all ages to promote physical fitness, mental wellness and social interactions in the community;
- improved open spaces to eat and relax, as well as gathering spaces for community members to come together and connect with their neighbors to foster a sense of community and belonging among community members;
- needing safe pedestrian crossings, wider sidewalks, and comfortable bike paths to improve walking and biking connections, promote active mobility, and reduce the risk of crashes;
- an improved, frequent public transit system that would reduce commute times and facilitate more efficient travel to commuters' destinations;

- concerns about the affordability and availability of housing. Community members indicated a need for more affordable and different types of housing options to accommodate the diverse needs of residents; and
- the appreciation for the convenience and proximity to the various amenities such as stores, shopping centers, and restaurants in and around the Plan area.

EVERYDAY CANVASSING

With the goal of specifically capturing the wants and needs of renters, and particularly lower-income renters, Planning staff worked with Everyday Canvassing (EDC), a local nonprofit that aims to learn and record people’s stories and connect them with activism and services. EDC reached out to the management of several multifamily housing complexes in and around the Plan Area and gained access for a team of planners and volunteer canvassers to knock on about 5,000 individual doors. This allowed Planning staff to hear the personal challenges, perspectives, and needs of many people who reside in the Plan Area but who likely would not have participated in other engagement methods.

Multifamily buildings canvassed include:

- Eaves Washingtonian Center
- Sawyer Flats
- Camden Shady Grove
- Bell Shady Grove
- Mallory Square
- Londonderry Towers
- Londonderry Apartments
- Montgomery Club Apartments
- The Willows



Figure 6: Everyday Canvassing Volunteers and Planning Staff knock on doors

WHO WE HEARD FROM

To gain insights into the various issues and better understand the needs and perspectives of different communities, canvassers engaged with individuals of varying demographics. The age, ethnicity, and

preferred language information summarized below represents participants that engaged with the canvassers and chose to share their specific demographic information.

Age Of Participants

The largest proportion of canvassing participants were between the ages of 20 and 40 (46 percent of all participants), followed by participants between the ages of 40 and 60 (19 percent of all participants), those 60 and older (10 percent of all participants), and those between the ages of 8 and 20 (5 percent of all participants). Over 20 percent of participants did not share their age.

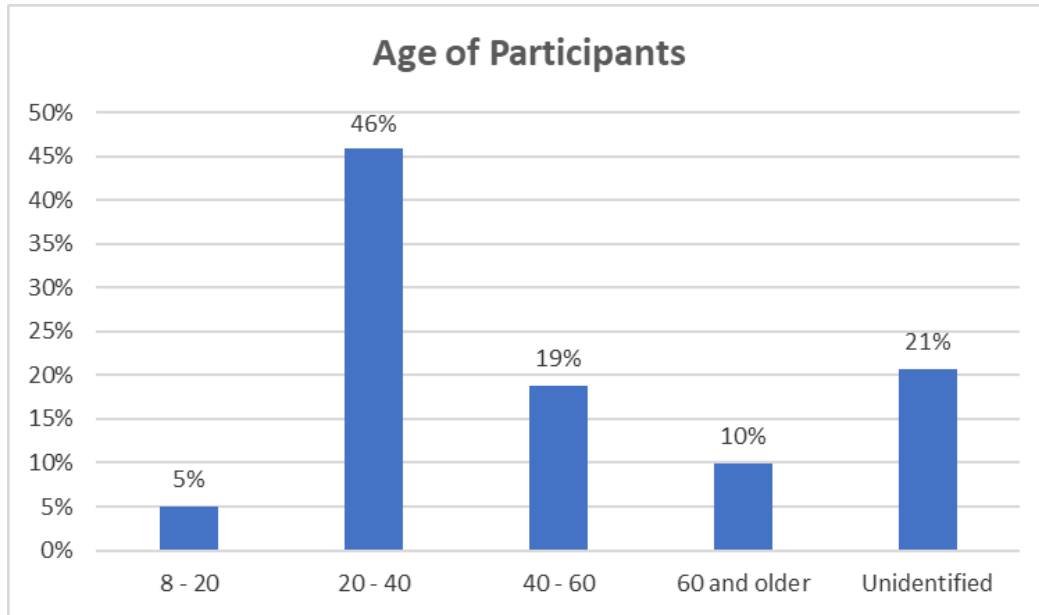


Figure 7: Age Distribution of Canvassing Participants

Ethnicity

The largest proportion of participants identified as Hispanic or Latinx (26 percent of all participants) and African American or Black (24 percent of all participants) followed by Asian or Pacific Islander (15 percent of all participants). The smallest ethnicity was Caucasian or white (13 percent of participants).

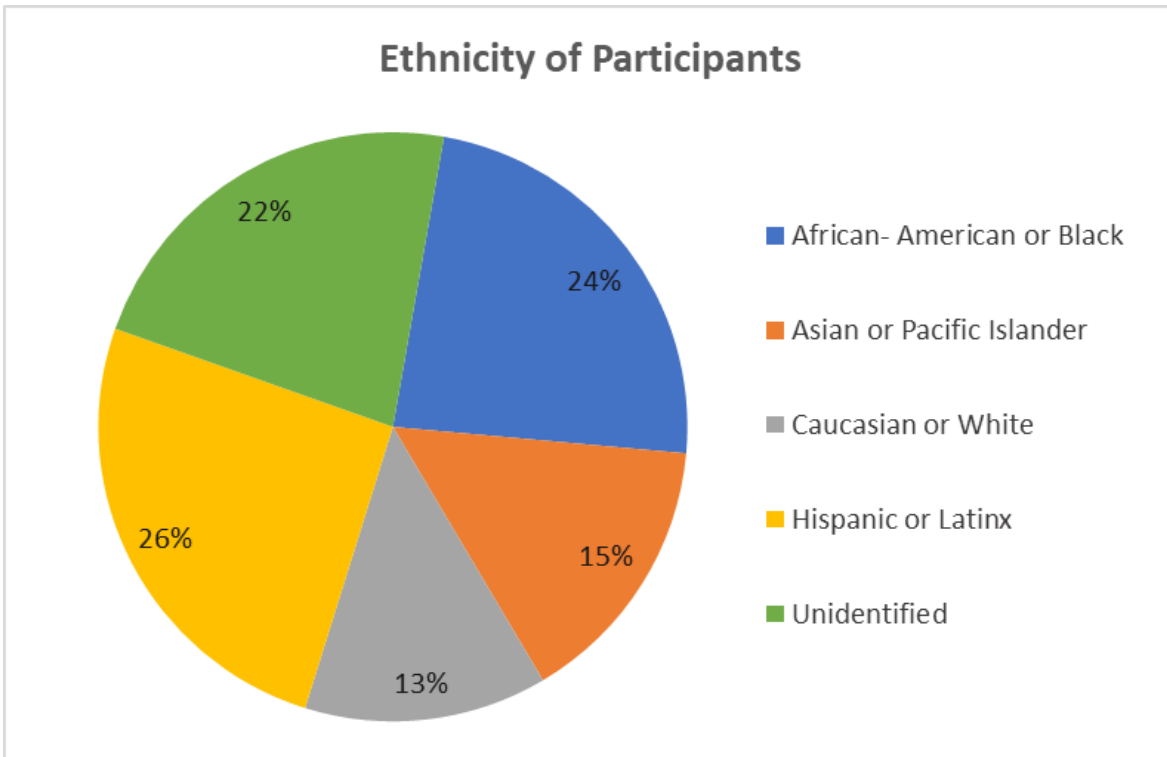


Figure 8: Ethnicity of Canvassing Participants

Language

Flyers advertising the Plan were available in English, Spanish, Mandarin, French, and Korean which represented the languages most frequently spoken at home in the Plan Area. Volunteer interpreters were available as well. If canvassers did not speak the language of the person answering the door, they would call back with someone who did. Most participants (71 percent) identified as English speakers.

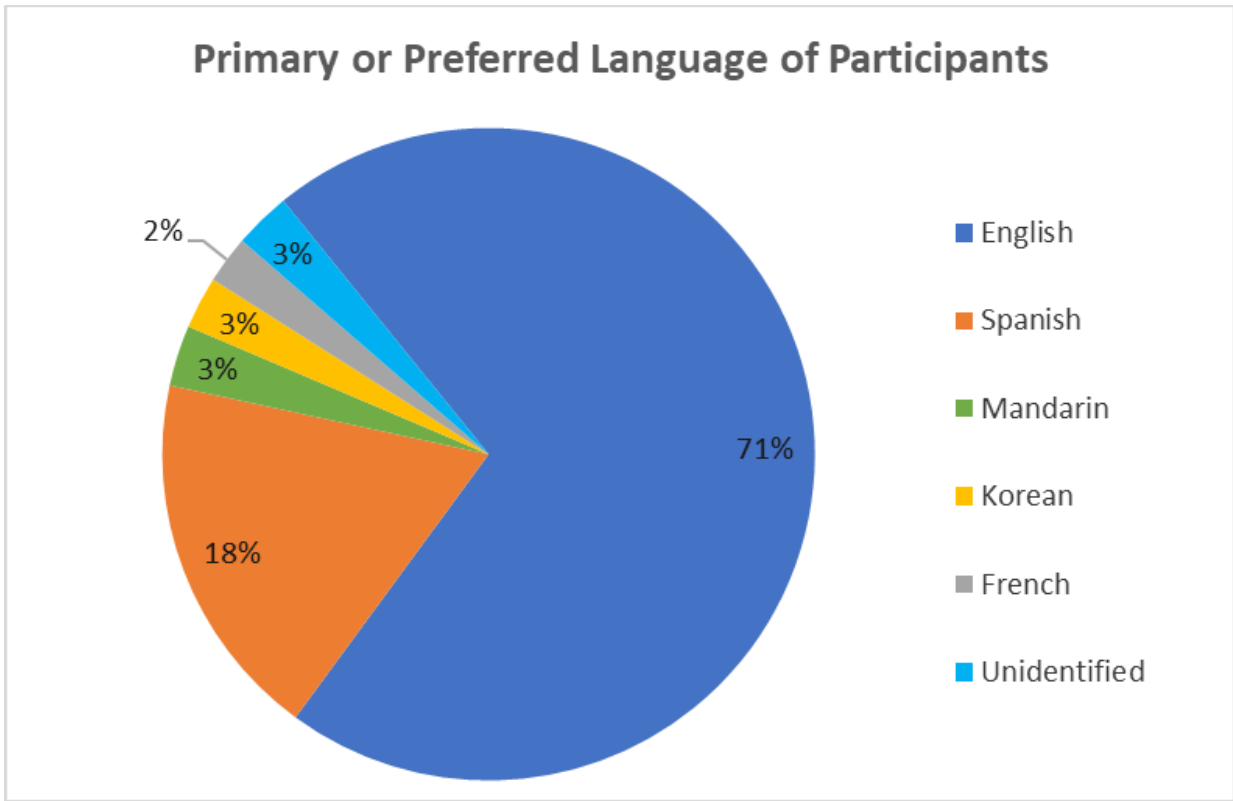


Figure 9: Primary or Preferred Language of Canvassing Participants

Where Participants Live

The multifamily buildings targeted were in the Great Seneca Plan Area or in nearby Gaithersburg.

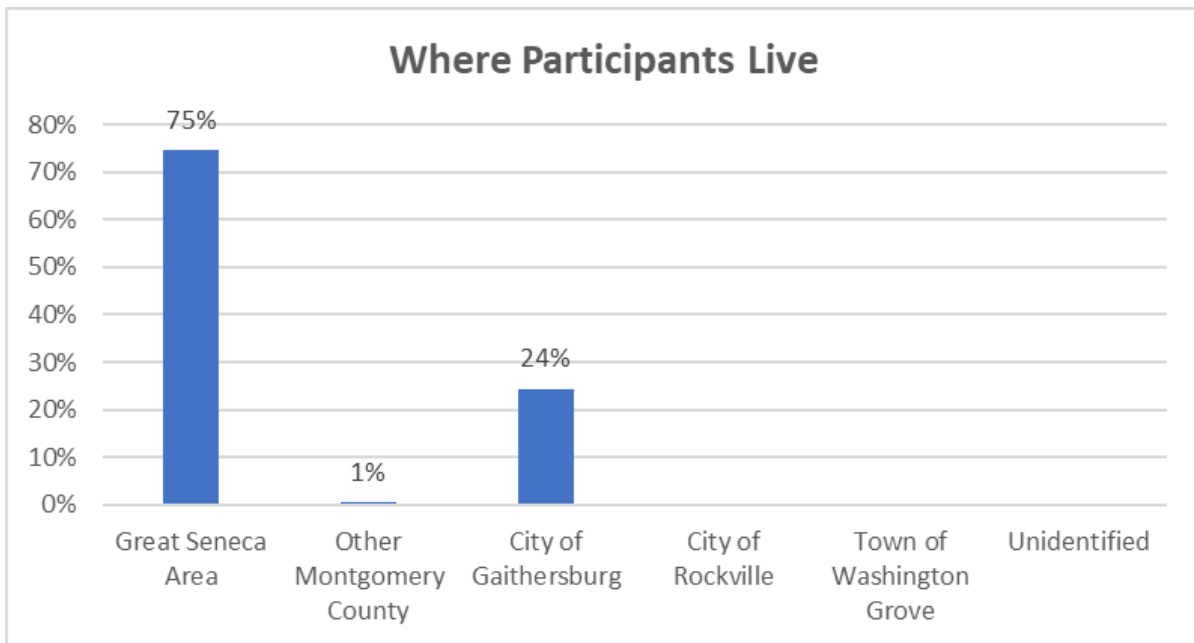


Figure 10: Where Canvassing Participants Lived

What We Heard

During the canvassing efforts, Montgomery Planning and Everyday Canvassing gathered in-depth feedback from residents. The key takeaways from the hundreds of comments are summarized below.

- Fear around housing affordability. Rent is high and housing is scarce. Residents often requested rental assistance.
- Frustration with the lack of sufficient parking at their buildings. The lack of on-site parking leads to parking in other parts of the neighborhood and risking their safety walking home on unsafe roads. Roads were identified as unsafe due to crime and inadequate infrastructure.
- Concerns about the frequency and reliability of transit service, especially for those who rely on transit services to meet daily needs.
- Concerns about traffic congestion.
- Desire for more walkable communities with wider sidewalks and improved pedestrian safety measures.
- Exasperation with property management related to evictions, waste management, and pest and animal control.
- Need for more parks and recreational facilities such as sports fields, playgrounds and recreational centers.
- Fear of growing crime. Residents reported incidents of shootings, robbery, theft and car vandalism, and expressed a desire for more police presence to increase security.
- Valuing green spaces and trees in their neighborhoods and would like to see more.
- Need for healthcare and rental assistance.
- Difficulty finding employment in the area and the desire for job training programs and assistance with job searches.
- Appreciation for mixed-use activity centers such as shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues near their houses.

Canvassing is an incredibly valuable tool to meet people where they are and hear first-hand about challenges, opportunities, and desires. However, it is important to acknowledge that canvassing can result in comments and feedback that are beyond the purview of a master plan, such as challenges

with property management, crime, rental assistance, and job training programs. Everyday Canvassing strives to connect community members with resources and services to address challenges and struggles, through printed flyers and follow-up telephone conversations. Montgomery Planning also shares comments and feedback with other county agencies and municipalities to ensure that this valuable information is disseminated.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

VISIONING MEETINGS

Visioning meetings are designed as collaborative activities where planners and participants discuss a future vision for the area. Community members speak about their and their families' aspirations for the community. Different from pop-up events, ReactMap, or canvassing, community members had to intentionally participate in the meetings.

Montgomery Planning hosted one in-person visioning session at Rosemont Elementary School, as well as two virtual visioning sessions. The community was informed about the locations and times of these meetings through different mediums such as newsletters, pop-up events, flyers during canvassing, and press releases. At these meetings, planners gave an overview of the Plan's history and goals and then facilitated discussions. Participants were encouraged to contribute their lived experiences to the planning process and provide feedback on challenges, opportunities, and desires for the future. Feedback was collected through notetaking during discussions, a digital interactive whiteboard, posting notes on maps and posters, and ranking priorities on posters.



Figure 11: Digital Interactive Whiteboard used to capture comments from virtual kickoff meeting

Who We Heard From

During these visioning meetings, Montgomery Planning staff interacted with residents from in and around the Plan Area, workers, students, and representatives of civic associations. Each meeting had 10 to 40 participants. Demographic data was not collected during these meetings.

What We Heard

During the meetings Planning staff and participants discussed a wide range of topics related to the goals of the Plan and identified some key opportunities for positive change. Residents most frequently commented that they wanted:

- better transportation options with reliable and frequent service to meet their needs;
- consistent maintenance of nature, trees, and green spaces;
- more walkable areas with clusters of retail, housing, and life sciences;
- more trails for walking and biking;
- continued development of the life sciences industry to be regionally and nationally competitive;
- to be kept informed and involved in the planning process;
- to be an active partner in ensuring that development is done right, understanding that although change can be scary, continued development is a necessity.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS MEETINGS

Planning staff held virtual and in-person community meetings in October 2023 to provide an overview of the Plan's organization and preliminary recommendations for the built, social, natural, and economic environment, as well as recommendations for implementation. Planning staff responded to questions and received feedback on the Plan's preliminary recommendations at both meetings. Staff issued a press release and eletter, as well as promoted the meetings through social media and community organizations, including the GSSC IAC, to encourage participation in the meetings.

CO-HOSTED MEETINGS

In addition to general meetings open to the public, Montgomery Planning collaborated with community organizations to host meetings to hear the specific needs and desires of their constituents. Partnering with local organizations was a crucial piece of the engagement approach to reach people who typically have not participated in other forms of outreach.

While some of the comments Planning staff received are beyond the scope of the Plan, Montgomery Planning staff coordinated with the City of Gaithersburg and appropriate county agencies to relay concerns and specific complaints.

CHINESE CULTURE AND COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER

The Chinese Culture and Community Services Center (CCACC) is a community organization that provides healthcare, education, recreation, and other community services to the Chinese community in the region. Planning staff co-hosted two meetings with the CCACC. Both meetings were bilingual; materials were distributed in English and simplified Chinese and Mandarin interpreters provided simultaneous translation. During the first meeting in November 2022, Planning staff introduced Montgomery Planning and the master plan process, and asked community members about their desires, priorities, and concerns for the future. The second in April 2023 focused on presenting the big ideas from the Plan and connecting these ideas to the comments the CCACC provided in the previous meeting.

Participants in both meetings were Asian or Pacific Islander, specifically of Chinese descent. People of Chinese descent are one of the largest ethnic groups in the Plan Area and had been underrepresented in many other engagement mediums. These meetings were crucial for building connections and hearing from a more demographically representative group of people.



Figure 12: CCACC Meeting, November 2022

The most frequent comments given to Planning staff were:

- a desire for frequent, rapid bus service connecting to the Shady Grove Metrorail Station;
- a need for better road maintenance;
- concerns about ample parking with future developments;
- observations that sidewalks and bike lanes are not fully connected into a complete network;
- the convenience of current park space and shopping centers within walking distance;
- desires for more public realm spaces like pickleball courts and farmers' markets;
- better maintenance of lawns and parks;
- support for sustainable practices like solar panels and better tree care;
- the need for improved municipal water quality;
- the desire for further community integration with the Universities at Shady Grove;
- addressing marijuana use in public schools; and
- the need for more healthcare facilities with a growing population.

IDENTITY

Identity is a community organization that primarily supports underserved Latino youth and families in the Gaithersburg area through its work on academic support, workforce development, and recreation. Planning staff collaborated with Identity to hold a virtual focus group in Spanish.

Planning staff conducted the meeting entirely in Spanish, discussed the community planning process, and provided time for people to voice questions or concerns. All participants were Latina women who received services through Identity.

The most frequent comments heard were:

- concerns about crime and public safety and a feeling that police were not prioritizing action in their communities;
- inadequate pedestrian infrastructure;
- the need for more parks and recreational opportunities, specifically a dog park and playgrounds for children;

- limited access to nearby retail and a desire for more mixed-use development – many participants did not drive and had difficulty walking or taking transit to nearby destinations;
- concerns about the lack of affordable housing and rising cost of housing, especially with stagnant wages.

THE UNIVERSITIES AT SHADY GROVE

The Universities at Shady Grove (USG) is a higher education campus within the Life Sciences Center comprising six different universities in one location. A significant part of the life sciences community, USG has a mission to serve non-traditional college students—students who commute to campus, who may be first generation, have a family of their own, or work full-time. USG currently serves approximately 3,500 students but plans to double its capacity. USG students, faculty, and staff comprise a substantial share of people who live or commute to the Life Sciences Center daily.

In collaboration with USG, Planning staff hosted an in-person meeting in March 2023 at the Biomedical Sciences and Engineering building on campus. The meeting was open house style and, although geared to the USG community, it was open to all. Boards describing the plan process and emerging big ideas were set up throughout the room and staff were available to discuss the Plan and the big ideas with participants. The most frequent comments were:

- concerns about adequate transit access;
- excitement about the possibility for new parks and open space programming in the area;
- concerns about the cost of housing.

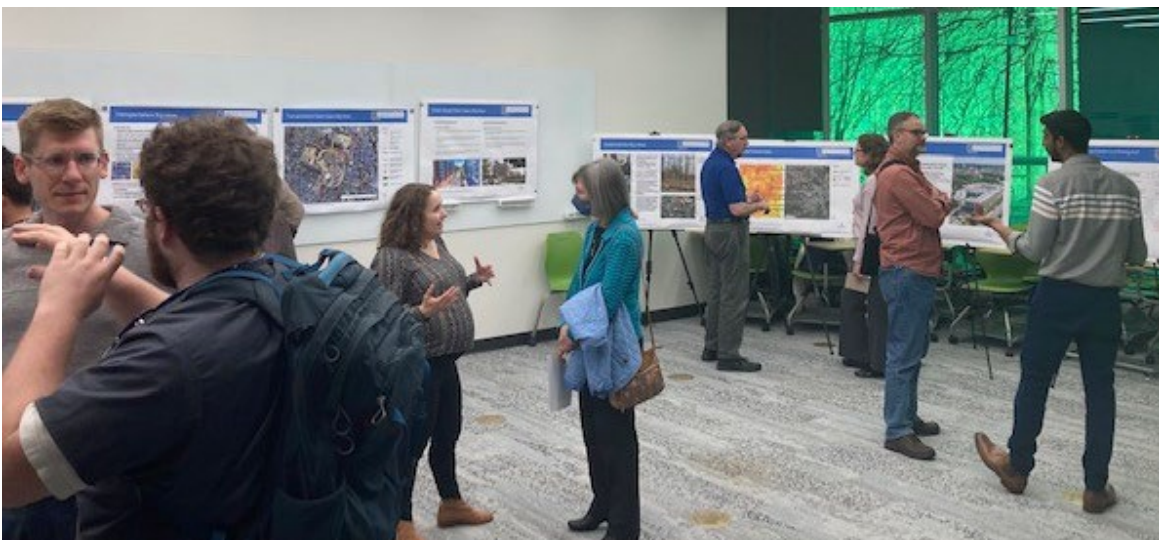


Figure 13: Open House at the Universities at Shady Grove

GREAT SENECA SCIENCE CORRIDOR IMPLEMENTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

County Council Resolution #16-1325 approving the 2010 *Great Seneca Science Corridor Master Plan* included the following requirement to establish an advisory committee:

The Planning Board must establish an advisory committee of property owners, residents, and interested groups (including adjacent neighborhoods in Gaithersburg and Rockville), with representation from the Executive Branch, the City of Rockville, and the City of Gaithersburg that are stakeholders in the redevelopment of the Plan area – to evaluate the assumptions made regarding congestion levels, transit use, and parking. The committee’s responsibilities should include monitoring the Plan recommendations, monitoring the CIP and Growth Policy, and recommending action by the Planning Board and County Council to address issues that may arise, including, but not limited to, community impacts and design, and the status and location of public facilities and open space.

Since 2010, members of the Great Seneca Science Corridor Implementation Advisory Committee (GSSC IAC) have reviewed and provided input on a variety of development plans in the Life Sciences Center (LSC) district of the Great Seneca Science Corridor Master Plan; provided feedback and guidance on the Design Guidelines for the LSC Loop Trail; contributed to the GSSC section of the Biennial Master Plan Monitoring Reports in 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019; and provided input on the Great Seneca Science Corridor Minor Master Plan Amendment and Corridor Forward: the I-270 Transit Plan.

Planning staff have continued to engage the GSSC IAC throughout the process for the Great Seneca Plan, through largely virtual meetings. Staff provided updates on outreach and engagement efforts, encouraged Committee members to participate in ongoing engagement activities, and presented updates on the Plan background, vision, and elements. Planning staff discussed the Plan’s big ideas on land use, urban design, parks, open space, sustainability, transportation, and implementation and requested input and feedback from the IAC on each element. Staff also presented the Plan’s preliminary recommendations and shared the Working Draft of the Plan. Staff anticipates a forthcoming meeting with the IAC prior to the Planning Board’s public hearing for the Committee to discuss the Plan, ask questions of Planning staff, and determine whether the IAC will transmit comments to the Planning Board as part of the public hearing process. Agendas and recordings of the GSSC IAC meetings are available at the following website:

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/midcounty/great-seneca-science-corridor/great-seneca-science-corridor-plan>.

REACTMAP

The ReactMap program involved strategically positioned yard signs that were placed in the public right-of-way at significant locations. Each sign had a unique, engaging question in English and Spanish. The signs included a QR code that people passing by could scan to answer the question or share other thoughts. The QR code linked to the ReactMap website where responses were displayed

based on the geographic location of the yard sign. People could also share thoughts and interact with others' comments by directly visiting the ReactMap website.

Questions mainly focused on the nature of transportation and general impressions of the Plan area. They ranged from walkability, pedestrian crossings, comfort, proximity to amenities, and what people would like to see in their neighborhoods.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

No demographic data was collected for respondents. The signs were placed at 11 locations in the Plan Area.

WHAT WE HEARD

The most frequent comments that emerged were:

- the dire need for more housing and housing options;
- concerns about the heavy traffic leading to long wait times during peak hours in the community;
- the need for more transit with improved frequencies that provide direct service to and from the Shady Grove Metrorail Station;
- the lack of walking and biking connections and the need for wider sidewalks and paved bike paths;
- the need for more open spaces to eat and relax;
- the lack of speed cameras and speed limit signs to reduce speeding. They said it feels unsafe for them and the children in their neighborhoods.



Figure 14: Reactmap signs placed throughout the Plan area



Figure 15: Reactmap signs were in English and Spanish

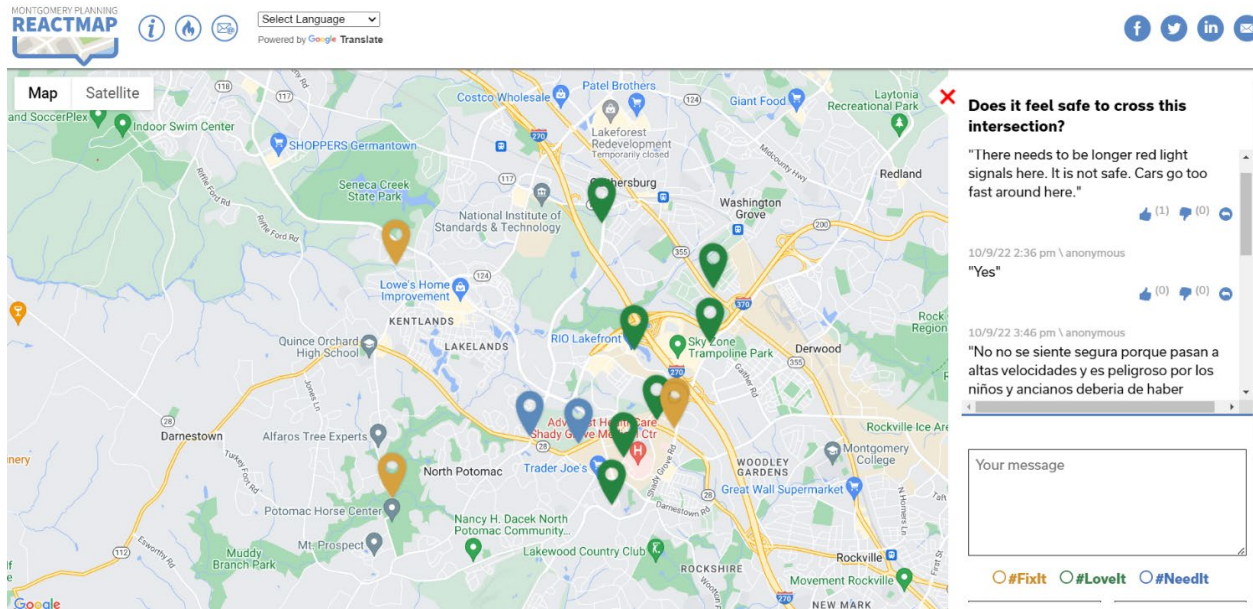


Figure 16: Reactmap website displays the location of the signs and feedback received

QUESTIONNAIRES

Planning staff also used an online questionnaire to collect ideas and feedback from community members. Questionnaires proved to be a versatile tool. Many people completed the questionnaires at a time and place convenient to them, however Planning staff also used tablets loaded with the questionnaires to engage people at pop-up events.

The questionnaire included questions on voluntary demographic information, opportunities and challenges in the community, what they would like to see going forward, as well as spaces to provide additional feedback. The questionnaire also included opportunities to further connect through the newsletter or upcoming meetings, and it asked people about what sorts of events would be most accessible to them; this information influenced the continued development of engagement events. The questionnaire was promoted at many other engagement events, including pop-up events, canvassing, and visioning meetings.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

The largest group of respondents were Caucasian or white (47 percent), followed by African American or Black (19 percent), Hispanic or Latinx (14 percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (11 percent), Native American (2 percent) and unidentified (9 percent). The group “unidentified” includes individuals who did not wish to disclose their ethnicity as well as those who identified with ethnic categories other than those listed.

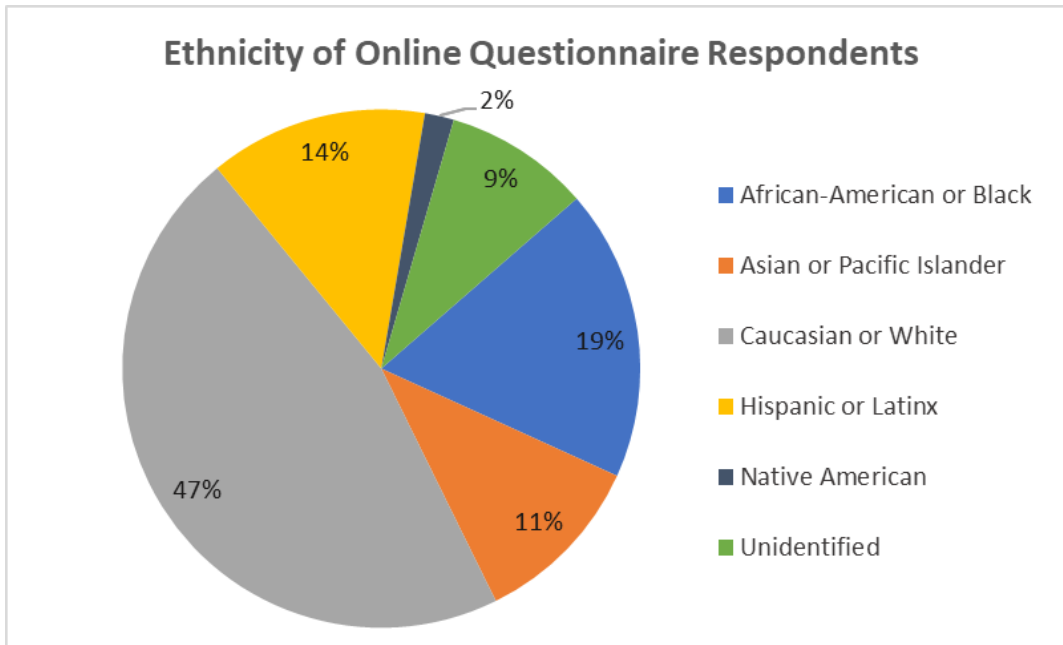


Figure 17: Ethnicity of Online Questionnaire Respondents

Language

The majority of respondents preferred to use English as their primary language, making up 84 percent of respondents. The next most common preferred language was Mandarin at 11 percent, followed by Spanish at 4 percent, Russian and French each at 1 percent.

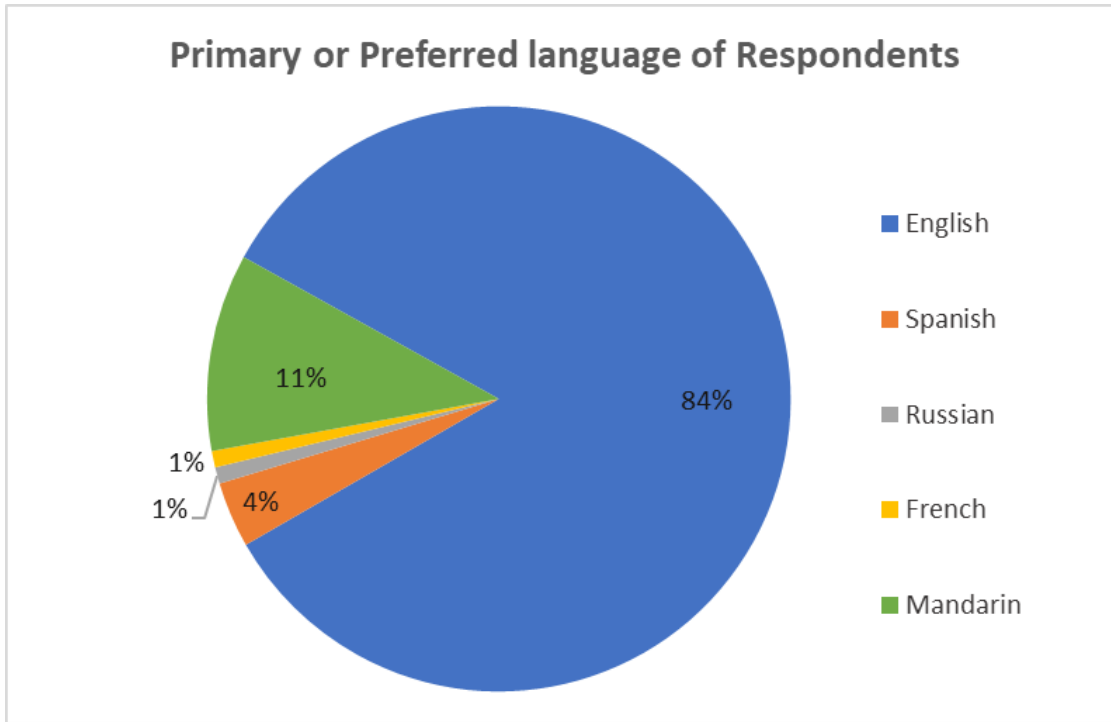


Figure 18: Primary or Preferred Language of Respondents

Where Respondents Live

The largest percentage (41 percent) of respondents live in the Great Seneca area. However, respondents represented the City of Gaithersburg, the City of Rockville, and the Town of Washington Grove as well as other parts of unincorporated Montgomery County.

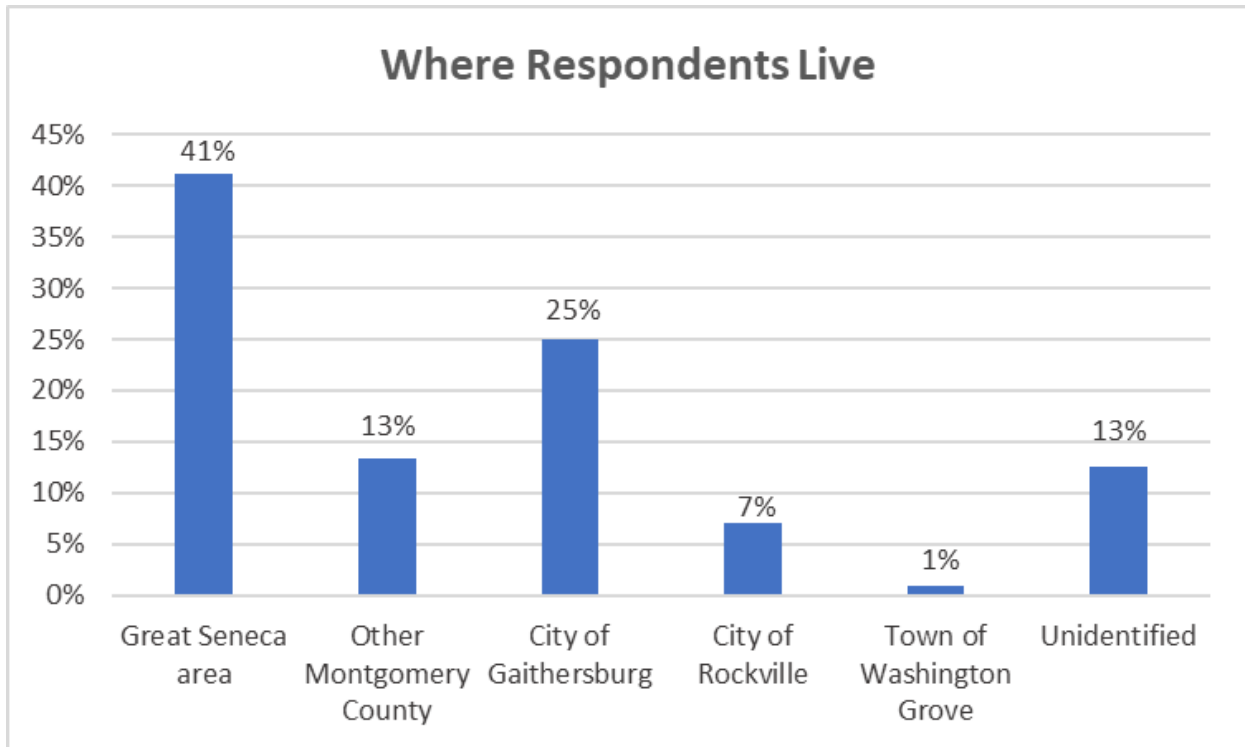


Figure 19: Where Respondents Live

WHAT WE HEARD

The top comments received were related to:

- frustrations with traffic congestion, insufficient parking spaces, and parking limits;
- drivers speeding through neighborhoods;
- desires for more frequent and rapid buses and transit connections;
- the need for improved walkable, connected communities with safe paths for walking and biking;
- the high cost of rent and lack of affordable, diverse housing options;
- preserving green spaces, trees and farmlands;
- more retail options and gathering spaces with seating for events (concerts, etc.); and
- more parks and recreation centers with fields/courts for basketball, tennis, soccer and pickleball as well as an improved trail network.

DEVELOPMENT AND LIFE SCIENCES INDUSTRY

The Great Seneca area is anchored by the Life Sciences Center, a world-class hub for life sciences innovation and research and a key employment center for the county. To support the growth of this critical industry, planners engaged with industry stakeholders to understand their unique needs.

ULI TAP

Montgomery Planning staff participated in a technical assistance panel (TAP) with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) that took place September 20-21, 2022. The TAP consisted of planners, land use attorneys, real estate developers, and architects. The TAP received background materials, took a tour of the area, and met with major stakeholders.

The ULI TAP developed recommendations which were focused around four areas:

- creating a network of hubs to promote walkability and community;
- incentivizing the creation of affordable and workforce housing to shorten commutes and attract more talent to the region;
- prioritizing improvements to the existing transportation infrastructure, including more pedestrian-friendly roadways and circulator bus routes; and
- utilizing branding techniques to create a stronger identity within the area and using a consistent name for the area across agencies and businesses.

FOGUS GROUPS

Planning staff convened two focus groups in October 2022 with members of the life sciences industry and with real estate developers specializing in real estate. Through staff discussions with these stakeholders, participants identified opportunities and challenges to supporting and growing the life sciences industry in the area. Below is a summary of the discussions.

- There is less venture capital funding in this area compared to other top-tier hubs.
 - For businesses, this makes it tougher to attract talent from elsewhere, and it's why businesses will have corporate headquarters in other locations.
 - For the real estate industry, this increases the risk profile of leasing to life sciences businesses.
- There is a cap on the viability of office-to-lab conversions.
 - For the real estate industry, demand exists but it is limited. Conversions were also a speculative investment play during the pandemic when the value of traditional office investments plummeted.

- Developers and businesses recognize the value of more urbanized lab space in terms of recruiting workers, but not all developers will take the risk and not all businesses can afford premium lab space, particularly start-ups.
- There is a lack of smaller lab space (500 - 2,000 square feet).
- Smaller companies could benefit from shared resources and facilities such as vivariums and storage facilities.

INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

STATE AND LOCAL PUBLIC ENTITIES

Seeking input from local government experts is crucial to developing and refining ideas and recommendations. Agency partners help identify potential issues and opportunities as well as the feasibility of recommendations. Planning staff has met with, among others:

- Montgomery County Department of Transportation
- Montgomery County Department of General Services
- Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration
- Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation
- Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Upcounty Regional Services Center
- Shady Grove Transportation Management District
- Housing Opportunities Commission
- Montgomery County Public Schools
- City of Gaithersburg
- City of Rockville
- Town of Washington Grove
- Office of the County Executive

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

Planning staff continues to coordinate with institutions and federal land holders in the area throughout the Plan process, including:

- The Universities at Shady Grove
- Adventist Healthcare Medical Center at Shady Grove
- The National Institute for Standards and Technology
- National Cancer Institute

CONCLUSION

Community feedback, through robust outreach and engagement and meaningful participation in the planning process, are critical to the success of a master plan. For this reason, Planning staff has engaged community members, particularly those traditionally underrepresented in the planning process. By employing a combination of engagement strategies, including in-person and virtual meetings, pop-up events, door-to-door canvassing, partnerships with community organizations, and online tools Planning staff has gained essential knowledge that has informed the Plan's emerging big ideas, preliminary recommendations, and draft Plan.