



## Community Feedback Report

February 13, 2025

### Introduction

In 2024, Montgomery Planning Staff began the Germantown Employment Area Study, an effort to evaluate the recommendations of the 2009 *Germantown Employment Area Sector Plan* (“2009 Plan”) and assess the state of employment in the plan area. The study included community outreach and engagement, an employment and economic analysis, and scenario modeling of potential alternative futures for the Germantown activity centers along I-270. The initial findings of the study indicated that a plan amendment is necessary to respond to changing market conditions and provide recommendations that will better guide the plan area’s future. During the Planning Department’s Fall Semiannual presentation on November 12, 2024, the County Council approved an update to the Planning Department’s work program to transition the Germantown Employment Area Study into an amendment of the 2009 Plan.

This report summarizes the outreach and engagement conducted for the Germantown Employment Area Study, which serves as the initial phase of public engagement for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment. Efforts included an online community questionnaire and various in-person opportunities to engage with residents, community groups, property owners, commercial tenants, and other stakeholders to receive feedback to better understand the community needs and desires for the plan area. Through our combined engagement efforts, we heard from over 300 community members. The findings highlighted in this report will inform the subsequent phases of engagement and plan development.

## Plan Area Demographics

The 2009 Plan area is composed of a mix of employment centers, shopping centers, and residential neighborhoods on both sides of I-270. The Germantown Study Area, which is based on the ten U.S. Census tracts that best match the 2009 Plan area, is a highly diverse place, with nearly equivalent representation across four major races and ethnicities. Compared to the county, the plan area has a higher proportion of Asian, Black, and Hispanic residents and a smaller proportion of white residents (Figure 1).

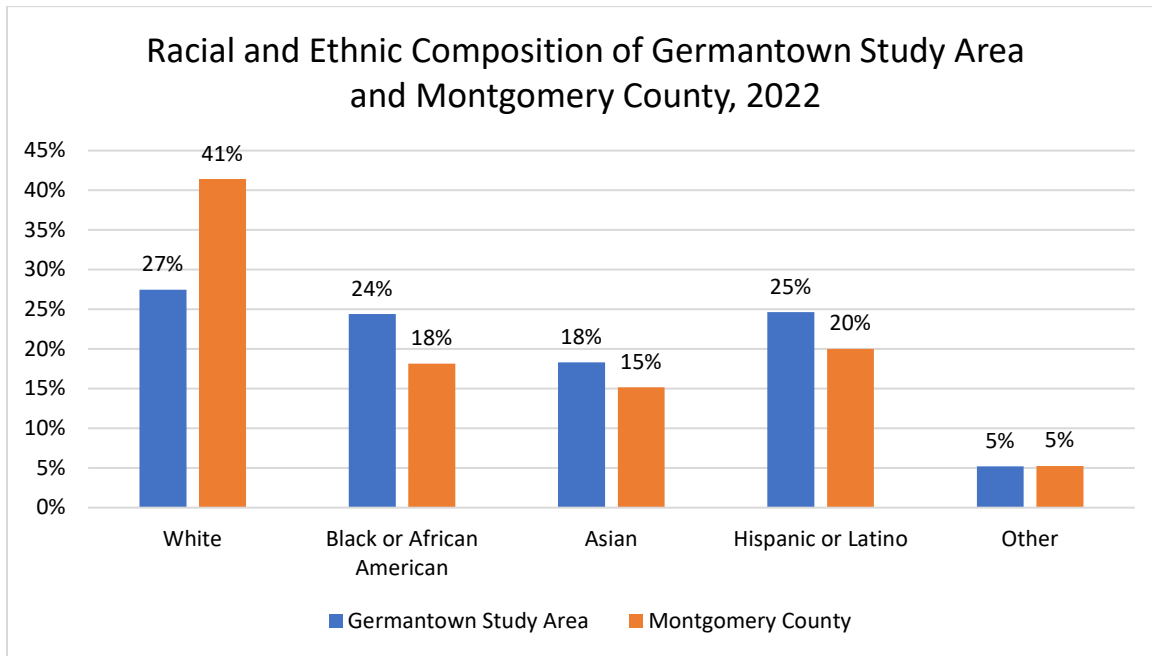


Figure 1: Demographics of the Germantown Plan Area compared to the County

In addition, more than a third of the Study Area's residents are foreign-born and about 50% of residents speak a language other than English at home. Compared to the county, Germantown has a larger share of townhomes and renter occupied housing units.

## Outreach and Engagement Approach

Montgomery Planning's Communications Team began getting the word out about the study with a news release on January 29, 2024. The release outlined the study's purpose and invited the public to sign up for the Germantown eLetter, which the team uses to provide project updates and advertise engagement opportunities. Planning staff teamed up with local partners to share information and spread awareness about the project. These partners include Councilmember Marilyn Balcombe and the Upcounty Regional Services Center Director. In addition, staff from the County Executive's Montgomery County Business Center distributed flyers to 149 businesses in Germantown.

## Community Outreach Events

The table below summarizes the study's in-person engagement efforts which included a combination of public meetings, attendance at special community events, and pop-ups around the plan area.

Date	Activity or Event
April 15, 2024	Presented at Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board (UCAB) meeting
April 27, 2024	Montgomery County GreenFest at Blackrock Center for the Arts
May 8, 2024	Pop-up at Germantown Transit Center
May 11, 2024	Pop-up at BlackRock Artisan's Market
May 15, 2024	Community Open House Kick-Off Meeting at Germantown Library
June 21, 2024	Flyer Distribution at area businesses
June 24, 2024	Community Open House #2 at Germantown Elementary School
June 26, 2024	Community Open House #3 at Fox Chapel Elementary School
August 6, 2024	National Night Out – Community Event
October 5, 2024	Germantown Oktoberfest - Community Event

As shown in the map below, activities were concentrated in the Germantown Town Center. The community open houses in June were held outside of the Town Center to expand our reach to other neighborhoods. The next phase of engagement will explore alternative methods to connect with the neighborhoods outside of the Town Center.

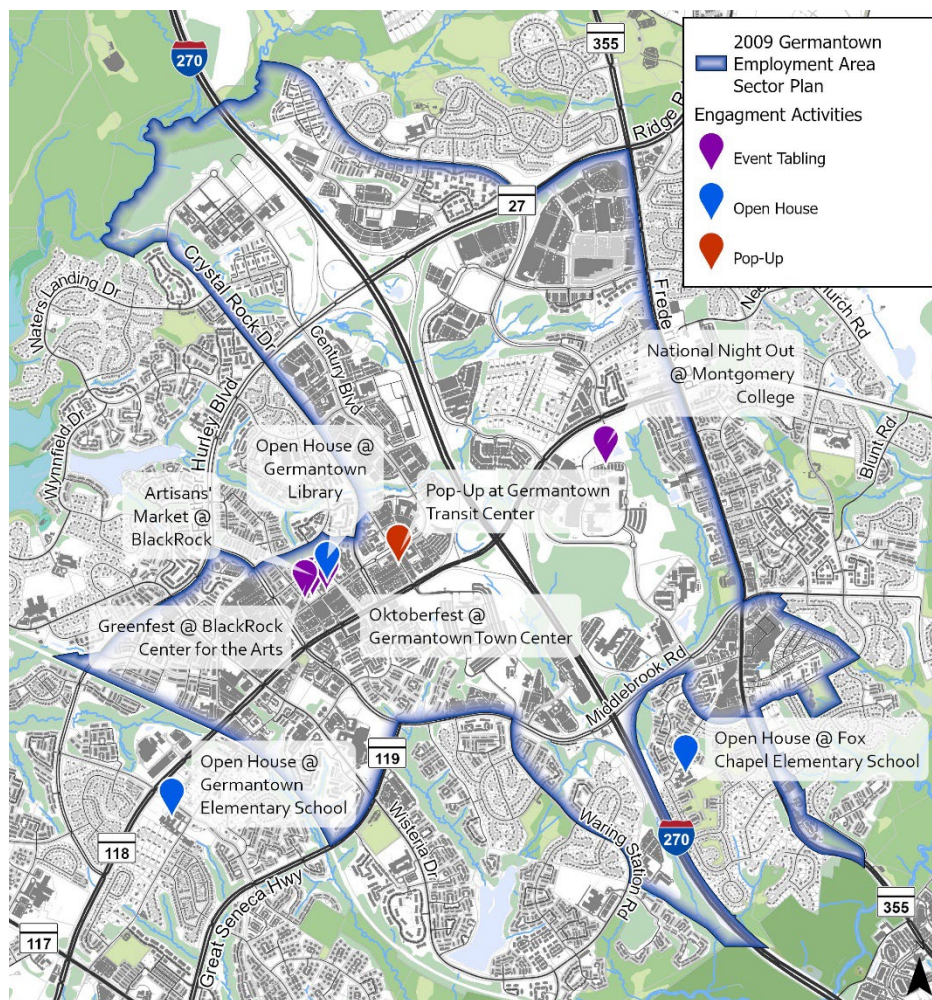
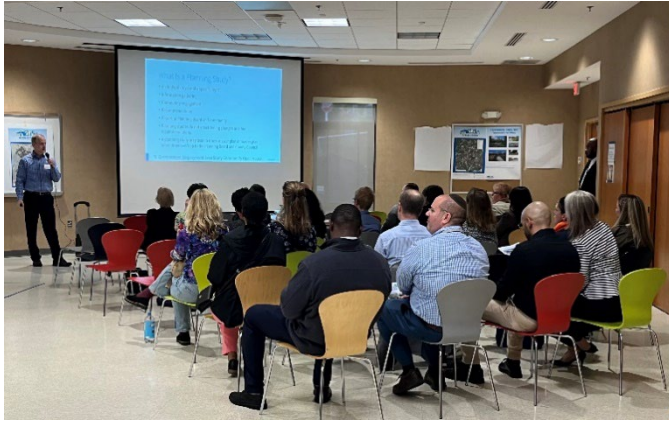


Figure 2. Map of Engagement Activities in the Plan Area

## Community Open Houses

The GEAS team held three “open house” community meetings between May and June 2024. These meetings were each held in a different part of the area. The community was informed about the locations and times of these meetings through different mediums such as newsletters, pop-up events, flyers, social media and press releases.



The open house meetings were designed to inform participants about the study’s goals and to engage in in-depth conversations with community members and stakeholders. They served as listening sessions where participants could share feedback about what they like and don’t like about the area and how it can be improved. Feedback was collected through notetaking during discussions and collecting notes on maps and engagement posters. Montgomery Planning staff interacted with residents from in and around the Plan Area, employees, students, and representatives of civic associations. The first meeting, at the Germantown Library, was the most well-attended, with approximately 40 attendees.



## Community Events and Pop-Ups

Members of the GEAS team also attended several community events to spread awareness about the study and online questionnaire. Staff set up a Montgomery Planning tent, handed out informational flyers, and engaged in conversations with members of the public. The Germantown National Night Out and Oktoberfest attracted thousands of young families with kids, a population that is typically difficult to reach. Similarly, community pop-ups help to expand our reach by meeting people where they are.

## Engagement with Community Organizations and Area Businesses

The planning team sought input from local experts such as community organizations and business leaders to better understand the unique needs of stakeholders in the Study Area. Planning staff met with the following organizations and stakeholders during the study duration:

### Organizations

- Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce
- Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC)
- Visit Montgomery
- Maryland SoccerPlex
- BlackRock Center for the Arts
- Montgomery County Small Business Navigator

### Businesses, Land Development Companies, and Legal Representatives

- Regal Cinemas
- HIP Projects (manages the Fairchild Apartments and several of the shopping centers in the Town Center)
- Sheridan Road Properties (SRP)
- Minkoff Development Corporation
- Lerner Enterprises
- Miles & Stockbridge
- Lerch, Early & Brewer

### Key Points Raised

The following points are the main ideas we heard in our discussions with these organizations and members of the business community:

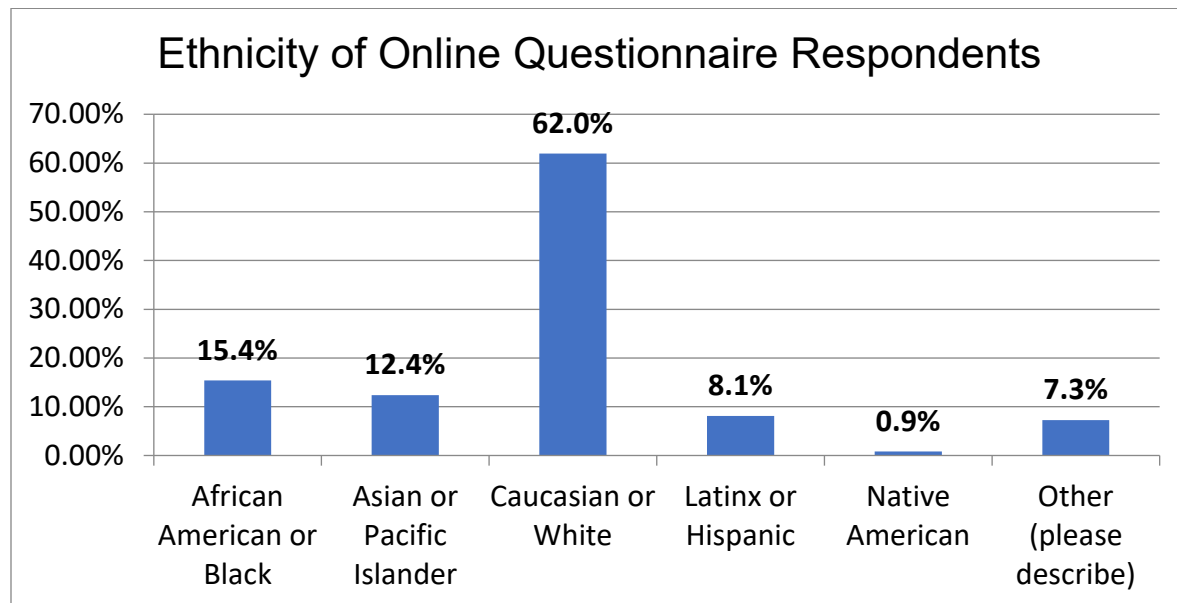
- Germantown's main geographic asset is that it's halfway between DC/downcounty and Frederick, so it's a good commute trade-off.
- For commercial real estate, Germantown is competitive in flex spaces—for life sciences and other industrial uses—that are one-to-two stories tall with relatively high ceilings. Participants notes that a lot of existing buildings may not be convertible to this type of use.
- There is broad agreement that office demand is not coming back in the foreseeable future. The only new offices will probably be those in labs or light industrial spaces.
- Germantown's population currently does not support more retail, but it's unclear how much new population is needed or what kind and how much retail will work. Anecdotally some restaurants have closed or declined to locate in Germantown.
- Multi-family and rental units built within the last ten years have been successful, but currently it seems that townhouses are the only things that will work. This can change depending on factors like interest rates.
- Better connectivity is important, but true connectivity will probably require expensive projects to bypass I-270 or other obstacles.
- There is a desire for Germantown to be more of a "destination."

## Online Questionnaire

Planning staff used an online questionnaire to collect ideas and feedback from community members. It was available on the project website from mid-March through early July of 2024. The questionnaire included questions on voluntary demographic information, opportunities and challenges in the community, as well as spaces to provide additional feedback. Planning Staff promoted the questionnaire at the various in-person engagement activities and received 337 responses, which is much higher than similar surveys used in the past.

### Who We Heard From

The largest group of respondents were Caucasian or white (62 percent), followed by African American or Black (15 percent), Hispanic or Latinx (8 percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (12 percent), Native American (1 percent) and other (7 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. More than 99 percent of the respondents selected English as their primary or preferred language.



Respondents were able to select multiple categories.

Of the 337 responses, 295 (87.5%) respondents indicated that they live and/or work in the Germantown area. Nine respondents indicated that they are a business owner or employer in Germantown, two own or manage commercial property there, and 31 selected a none-of-the-above response. Refer to the appendix for the survey questions and detailed results.

## Key Takeaways

The Planning team consolidated results and the comments from the questionnaire and comments from community meetings. The key takeaways are summarized below:

- Community members enjoy the diversity of Germantown, convenient access to everyday needs, and existing parks, trails and natural features.

- While people love parks and open space, they wish there were more amenities available. Specifically, people want to see more trails, playgrounds, programming, and activations. Black Hill Regional Park is popular, but people wish it were easier to get to. People wish there was more to do in Germantown Town Center Urban Park.
- There is a strong desire among residents and commercial stakeholders for Germantown to be more of a “destination,” with more upscale restaurants, night life, entertainment, and other things to do.
- Comments reflect rising concerns about safety in Germantown, the rising cost of living, and traffic.
- Over 97 percent of the questionnaire respondents stated that they use a personal automobile to travel around the area. 43 percent of respondents indicated that they walk, bike, or roll around the area, and around 15 percent use bus or rail transit.
- When asked to rate the comfort or safety of streets, sidewalks, and trails in Germantown, many respondents stated that it is “just okay.”
- Community members would like to see transportation improvements such as bike lanes, trails, sidewalks, and other safety improvements needed for pedestrians.
- Comments indicate that the plan area feels disconnected. There is a desire for better connectivity to be able to walk more places.
- When asked about any problems with public transit in Germantown, people stated that it’s not viable outside of rush hour, the service is too infrequent, and that access to residential communities is very limited.
- Online questionnaire responses show a disproportionately large percentage of respondents who identify as White, English speaking. These findings underscore a need to employ tactics in the next phase of engagement to reach more diverse voices, especially those typically not included in these conversations. Findings also indicate a need to reach people that work in the plan area.
- Engagement activities for the study were largely clustered around the Town Center, a primary activity center in Germantown. Additional efforts to reach beyond this area are necessary in the next phase of engagement.

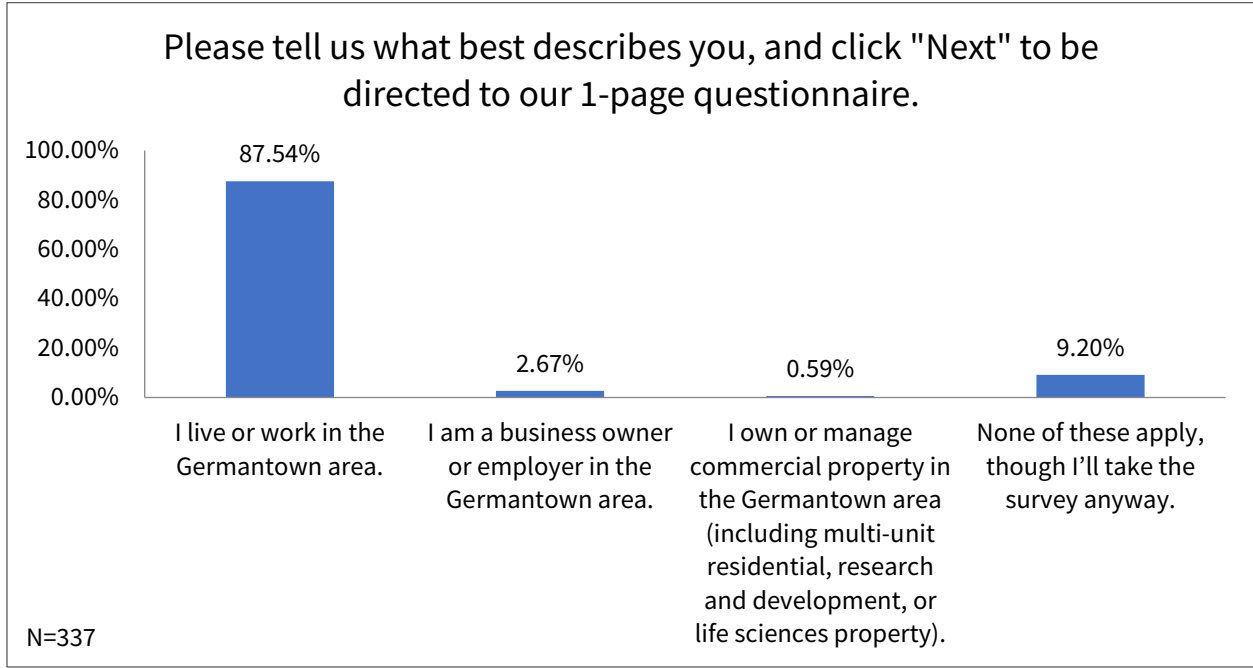
## Conclusion & Next Steps

Community feedback, through robust outreach and engagement and meaningful participation in the planning process, is critical to the success of a master plan. By employing a combination of engagement strategies for the Germantown Employment Area Study, planning staff has gained essential knowledge to inform the upcoming community visioning and emerging ideas for the Germantown Sector Plan Amendment.

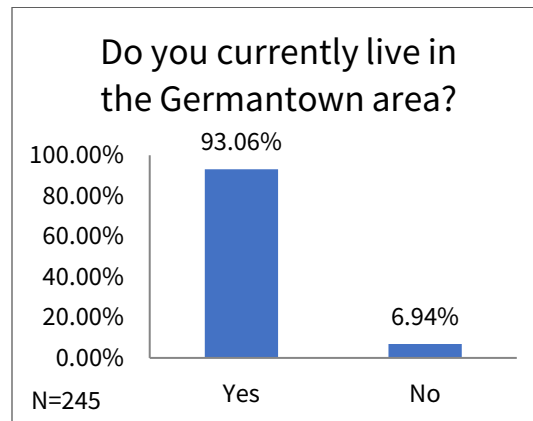
These findings also help us adjust strategy moving forward to expand our reach to populations in the plan area who are not typically represented in planning processes and/or have not participated thus far. With support from an engagement consultant, additional outreach and engagement activities and ongoing coordination with property owners and agency partners are anticipated in the coming months to inform the Working Draft of the Plan, expected to be released by the fall of 2025.

## Appendix – Questionnaire Results

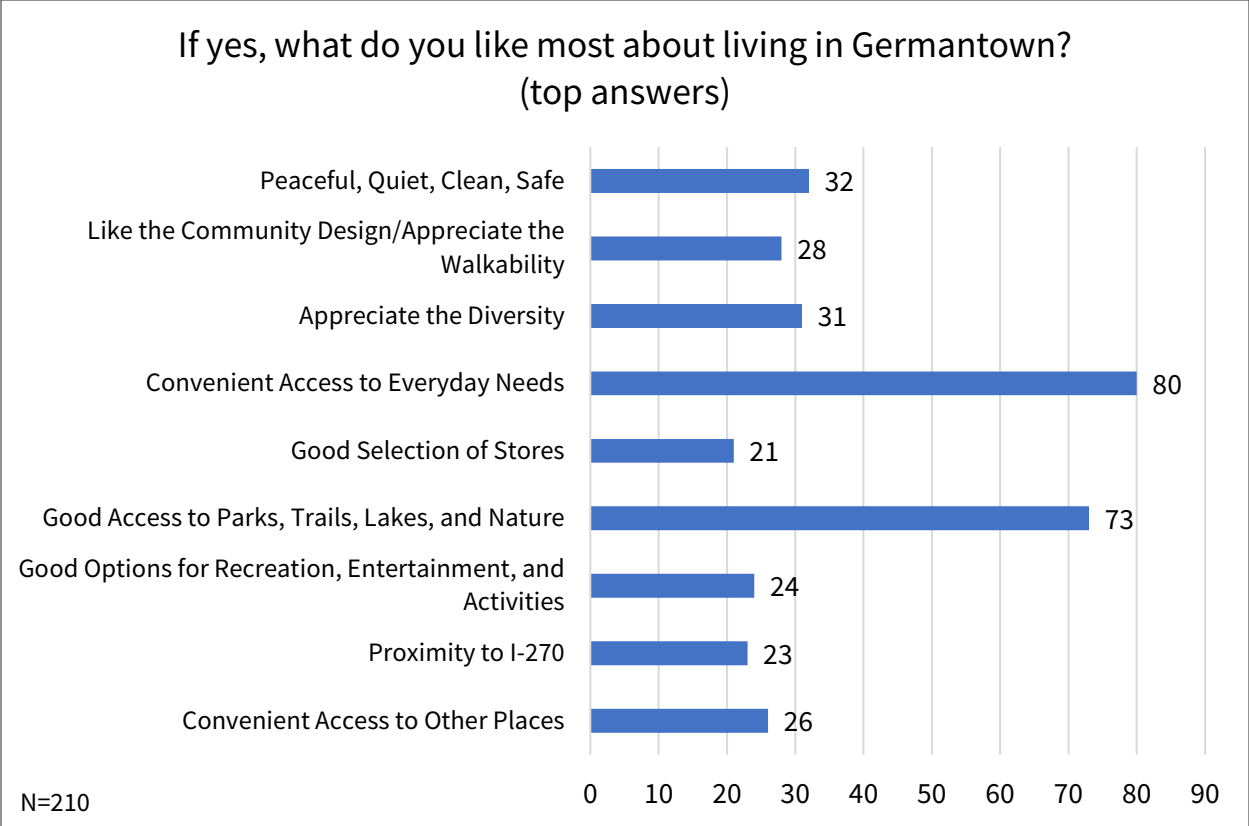
The charts and narrative text below summarize the results of the questionnaire answers from those who indicated they live or work in Germantown. The number of responses received for each question is shown in the lower left corner of each chart.



Of the 337 responses, 295 (87.5%) respondents indicated that they live and/or work in the Germantown area. Nine respondents indicated that they are a business owner or employer in Germantown, two own or manage commercial property there, and 31 selected a none-of-the-above response.

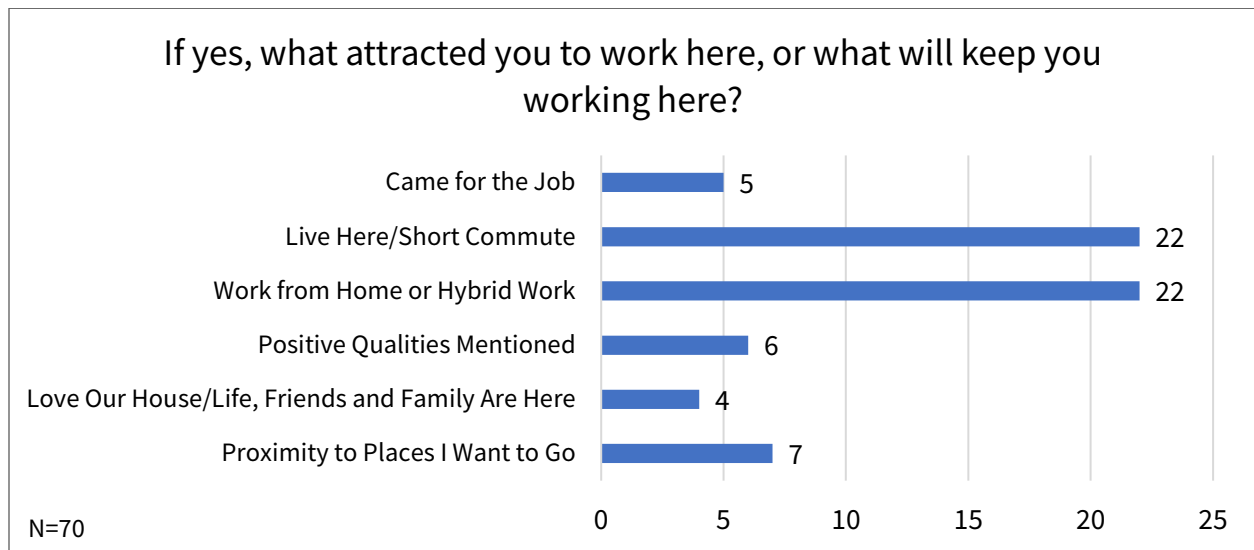
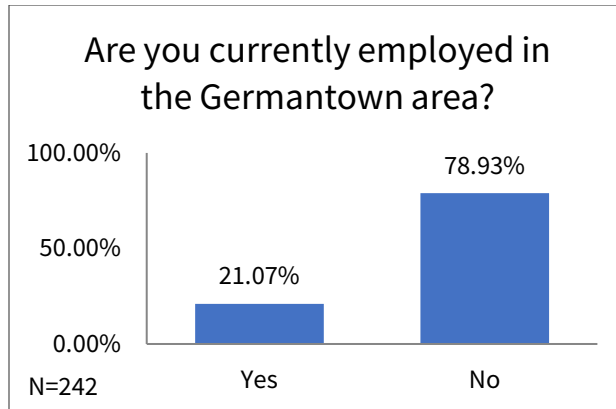






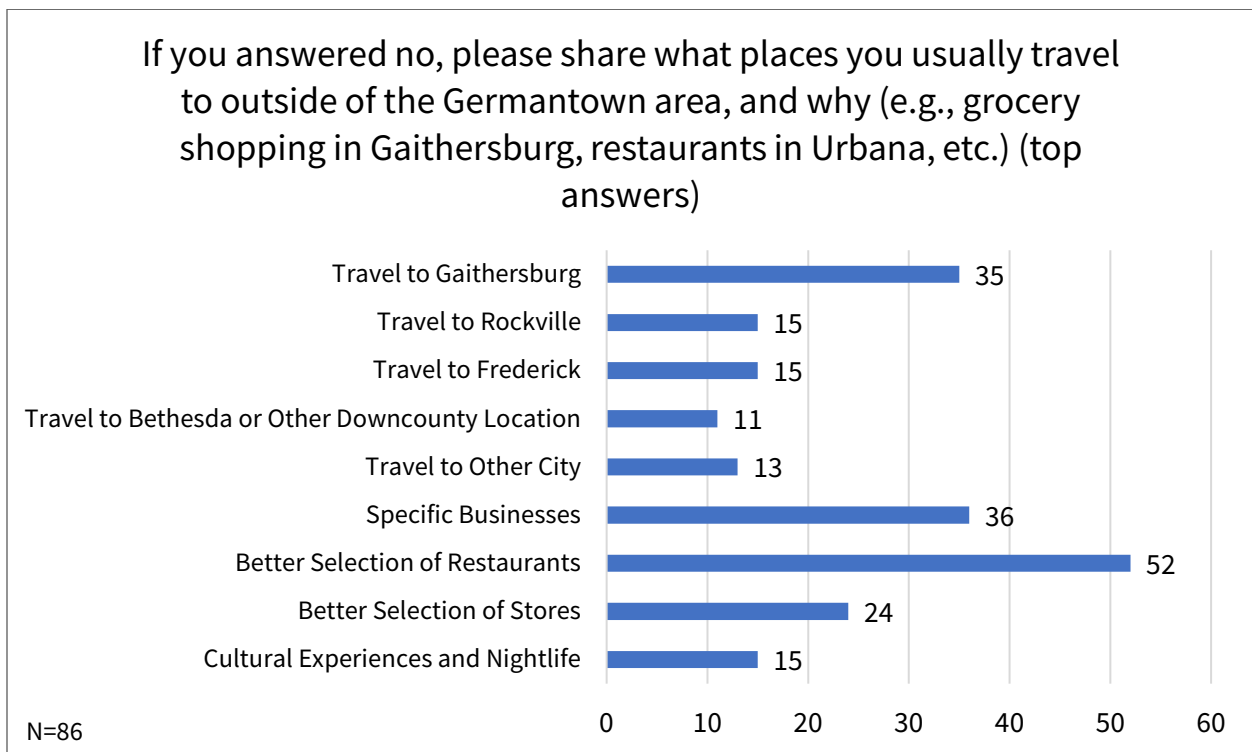
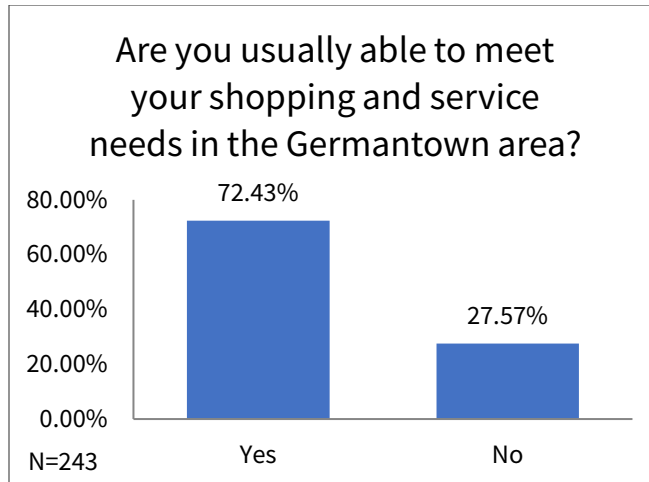
As the chart shows, convenient access to everyday needs and to parks, trails, and nature were by far the most common responses. Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- Like the Community Design/Appreciate the Walkability:** plenty of free parking; big lots, big trees, plenty of parking in driveway, yet still walkable to things; suburban feel without urban density; town appears to be very well thought out for commercial uses; smart development with green spaces; village concept from earlier plans worked
- Good Options for Recreation, Entertainment, and Activities:** BlackRock; SoccerPlex; recreation facilities; movie theater; pools
- Good Public Amenities:** library; fire and police stations
- Convenient Access to Other Places:** larger metro areas; DC; Virginia; Rockville; Bethesda; Frederick; Baltimore; Gaithersburg; Mt. Airy; Downcounty; Ag Reserve; Montgomery College
- Negative Issues Mentioned:** going downhill; crime; unaffordable housing; too expensive; overcrowded



Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- **Positive Qualities Mentioned:** peace and quiet; natural beauty; manageable traffic; low crime; more affordable; relaxed work atmosphere
- **Challenges to Working in Germantown:** taxes, traffic; few opportunities in some fields; increasing crime, failing schools, closing businesses

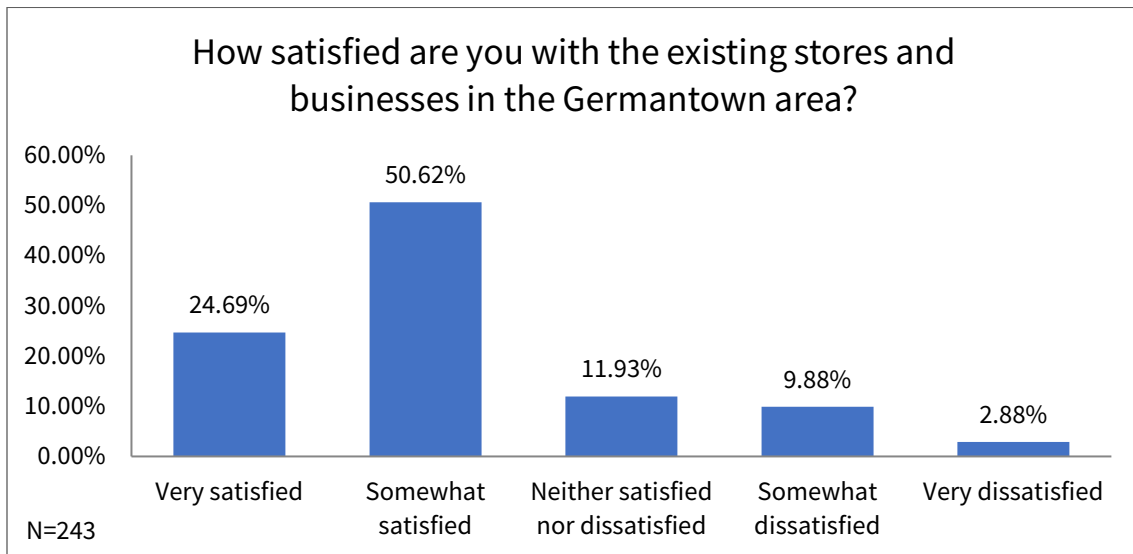


This question was primarily aimed at those who indicated that they are not usually able to meet their shopping and service needs in the Germantown area. Not surprisingly, most people who travel outside of Germantown go to nearby places like Gaithersburg and Rockville, but many travel further afield. The most common reason for leaving Germantown for 52 of the 86 people who responded to this question is because of a better selection of restaurants elsewhere. Comments from individuals indicate that there are plenty of fast-food and fast-casual options, but not many unique sit-down restaurants.

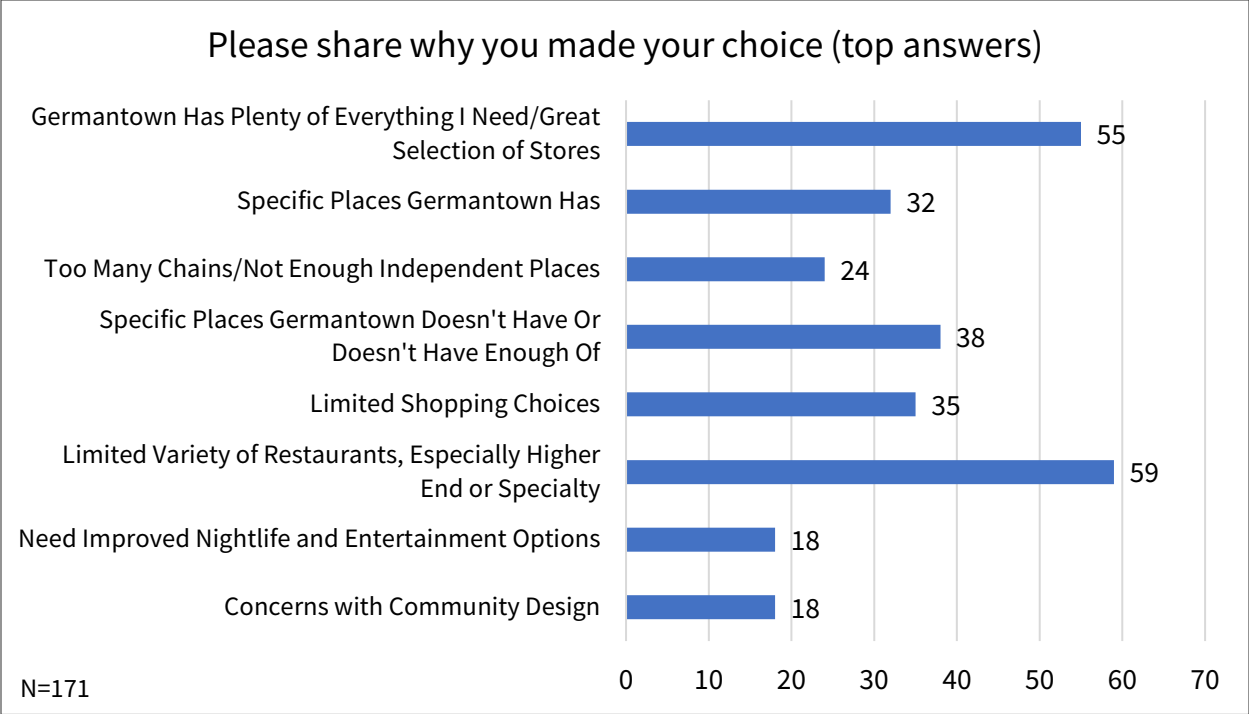
Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- **Usually Able to Meet My Needs in Germantown:** shopping centers; fast food; groceries; household items; dry cleaning; library; big box stores; medical needs; gas stations
- **Travel to Bethesda or Other Downcounty Location:** Bethesda; Silver Spring; Wheaton

- **Travel to Other City:** Clarksburg; Urbana; DC; North Potomac; Laurel; Virginia; Laytonsville
- **Specific Destinations:** Rio; Kentlands; Pike & Rose; Downtown Crown; airports
- **Specific Businesses:** grocery stores; warehouse clubs; bakeries; malls; outlets; furniture stores; tanning salons; hair salons; fitness clubs; coffee shops; farmers markets; plant nurseries; churches, synagogues; bookstores; specific restaurants
- **Concerns about Germantown:** crime; housing options; ADA issues; language barriers in stores; unclean stores; busy stores



As can be seen in the chart above, over 75% of respondents indicated they are somewhat or very satisfied with the existing stores and businesses in Germantown. Just under 13% are somewhat or very dissatisfied.

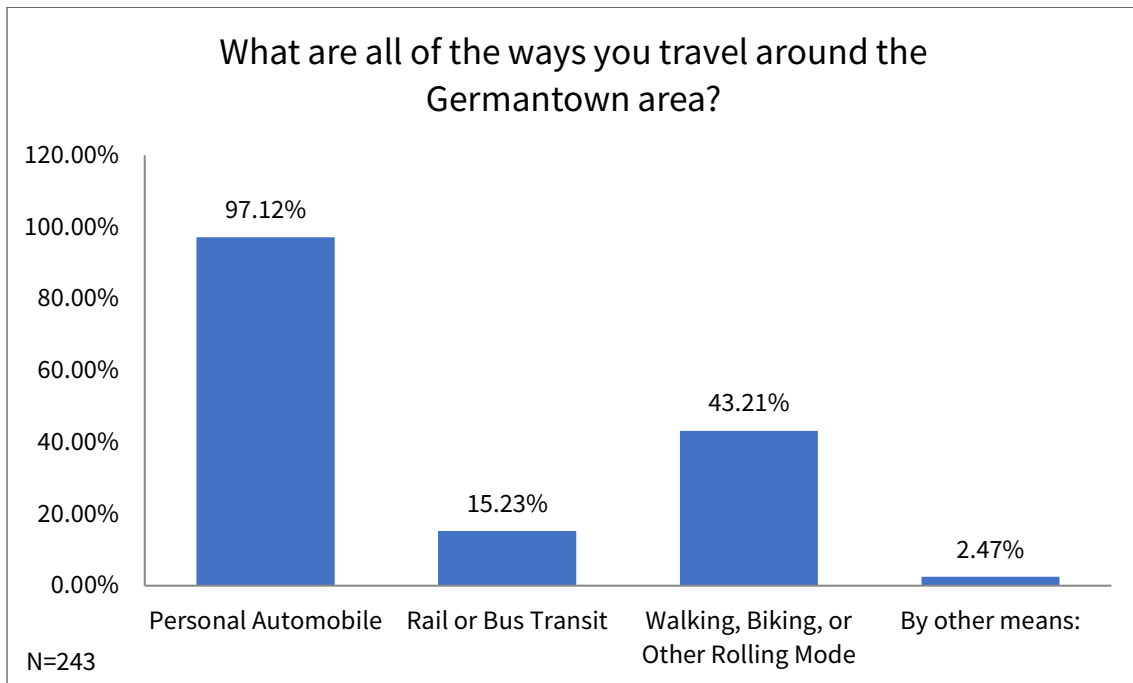


When asked why they responded the way they did to the previous question, 59 out of 171 respondents said they would like to see a better selection of nicer restaurants. Almost as many said that Germantown has a great selection of stores, and they can meet most of their shopping done there.

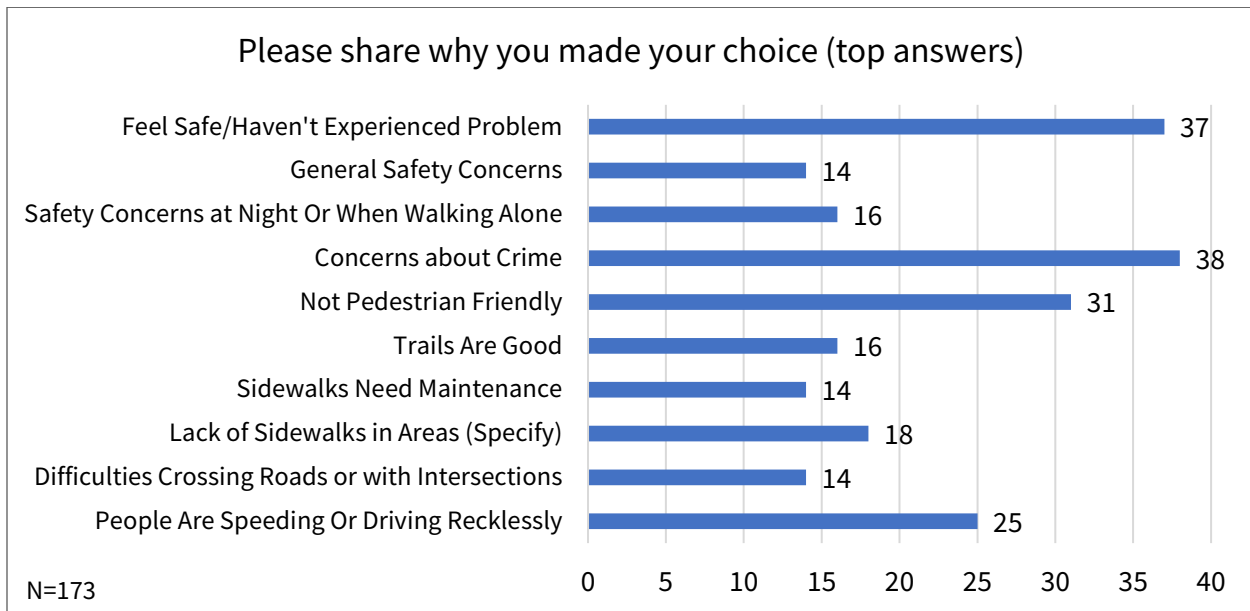
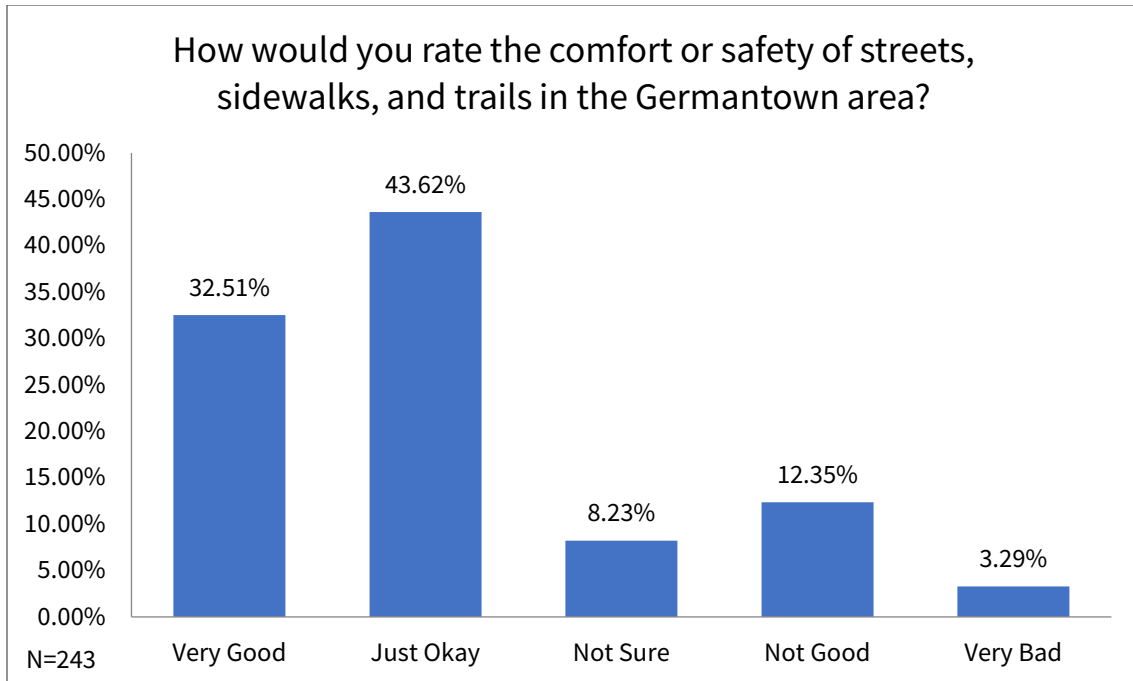
Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- **Other Cities Where I Shop or Dine:** Clarksburg; Rockville; Frederick; Gaithersburg; Silver Spring; Tyson's Corner; Bethesda; Laurel; Northern Virginia; Downcounty; DC
- **Specific Places Germantown Has:** vape/tobacco/smoke/cannabis shops; grocery stores; big box stores; home improvement retail store; discount department store; movie theater; chain restaurants; medical facilities; recreational activities; hotel; shoe store; card store; lower-end shops; auto stores; Top Golf; household and office supplies; Laperaux restaurant; Asian grocery store; Halal restaurants; auto service; drugstores; ethnic restaurants; ethnic grocery stores; UPS
- **Specific Places Germantown Doesn't Have Or Doesn't Have Enough Of:** steakhouse; outlet stores; discount department stores; Ikea; German restaurant; great restaurants in the Town Center; ice skating rink; roller skating rink; batting cage; clothing stores; bike store; cheese shop; bakeries; churches; warehouse club; healthy fast casual restaurants; specialty or organic grocery stores; coffee shops; breakfast and brunch spots; gyms; specialty stores; medical facilities; home goods stores; sporting goods store; gift shops; antique shops; family-style restaurants; formal wear shop; auto rental; book store; fitness/yoga place; smoothies place; local/mom-and-pop stores/restaurants; hair salons
- **Need Improved Nightlife and Entertainment Options:** live music; arts and culture events (e.g. street festivals); theater options; bowling alley; pub; spaces for festive events; community events; plays; concerts; classes; arts; sports bar; liquor laws are stifling; bars

- **Concerns with Community Design:** wish more was in walking distance; no focused pedestrian area/town center/town square/community gathering space; limited outdoor seating; outdated design of buildings and community; transit center needs a facelift; not enough parking in the town center; no sense of community; area is overdeveloped; need to build human connections; places are looking dated; outdoor spaces to take my family; not well decorated
- **Other Concerns:** vape/tobacco/smoke/cannabis shops are too close to schools; crime; store quality; store cleanliness; too car-centric; used to be quieter; too much dense housing; stores are more expensive here; too much traffic; stores are too busy; schools need to improve; housing is too expensive; merchandise has gone downhill; empty shelves; need more transit options; feels unsafe; existing stores are geared towards older people



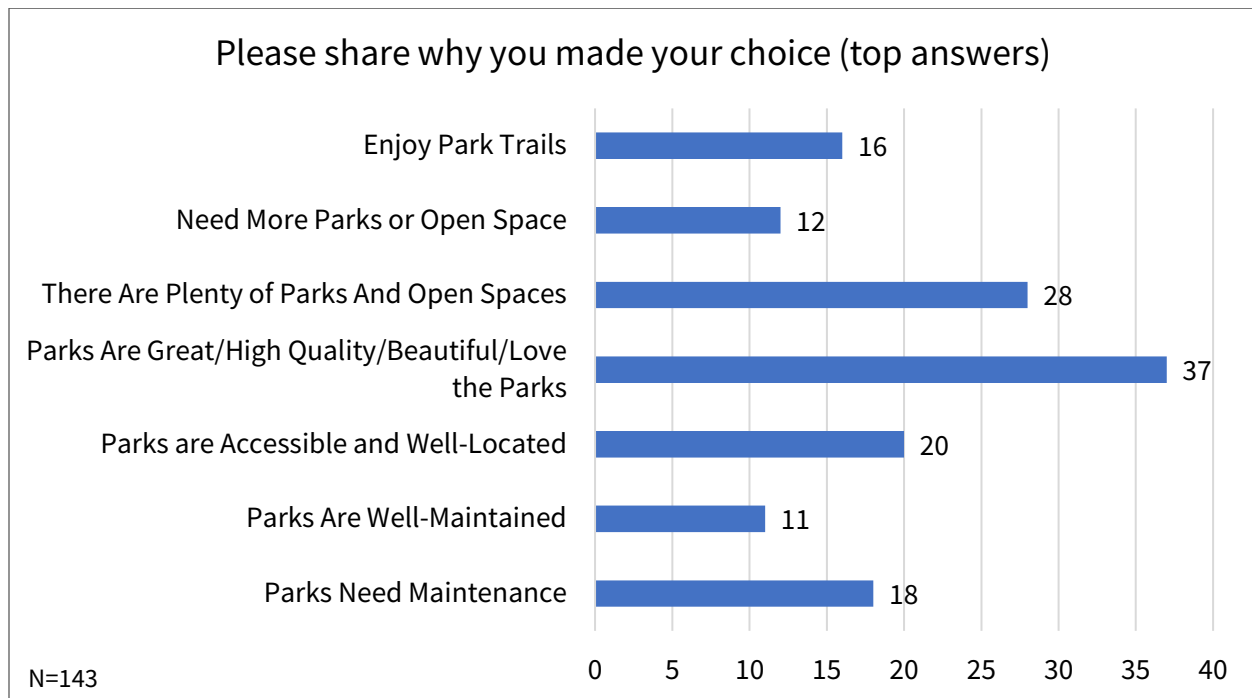
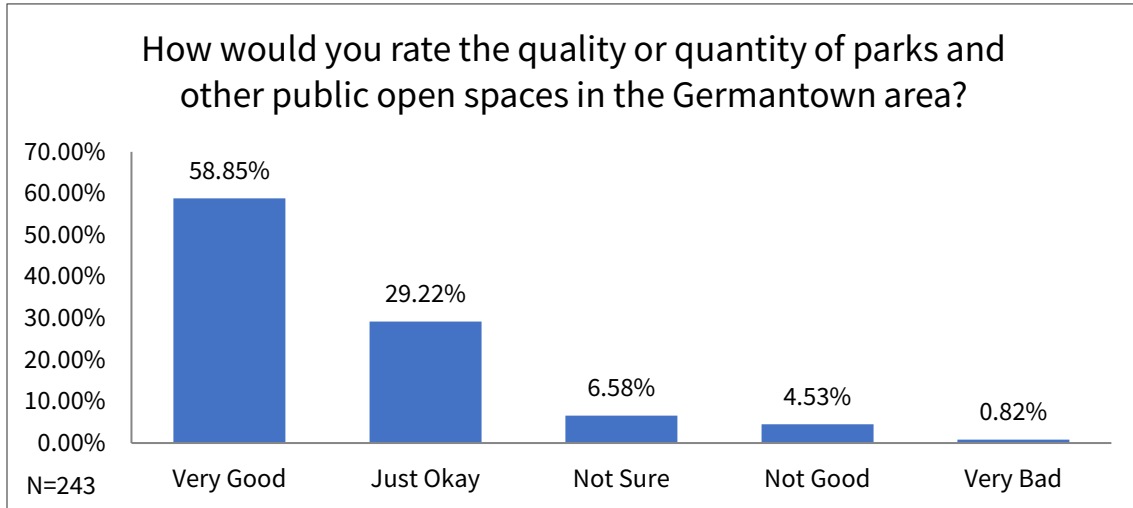
**Other means listed:** Metro Paratransit; Uber; Lyft; Metro Access



Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- Sidewalks Need Maintenance:** along Middlebrook Road, Aircraft Drive, Germantown Road; uneven sidewalks; winterization of sidewalks is overdone; trip hazards from tree roots; snow isn't always removed; too narrow; overgrown vegetation
- Lack of Sidewalks in Areas (Specify):** Clopper Road, Riffle Ford Road leading to SoccerPlex, near the police station (could be Century or Aircraft), Brink Road, parts of Frederick Road, Middlebrook Road near Scenery Drive; some streets have none or only on one side; too narrow for sidewalk seating; not accessible everywhere; too close to roads

- Other Concerns:** Black Hill trails need maintenance; noise from modified exhausts; poor response to requests to repair lighting; don't need more bike lanes; too far to walk to Seneca Highway trail; landscaping is in awful shape; streets are too wide; lack of enforcement; traffic; high school students are messy and rude; many places too far to walk; walking isn't always an option; police are not patrolling

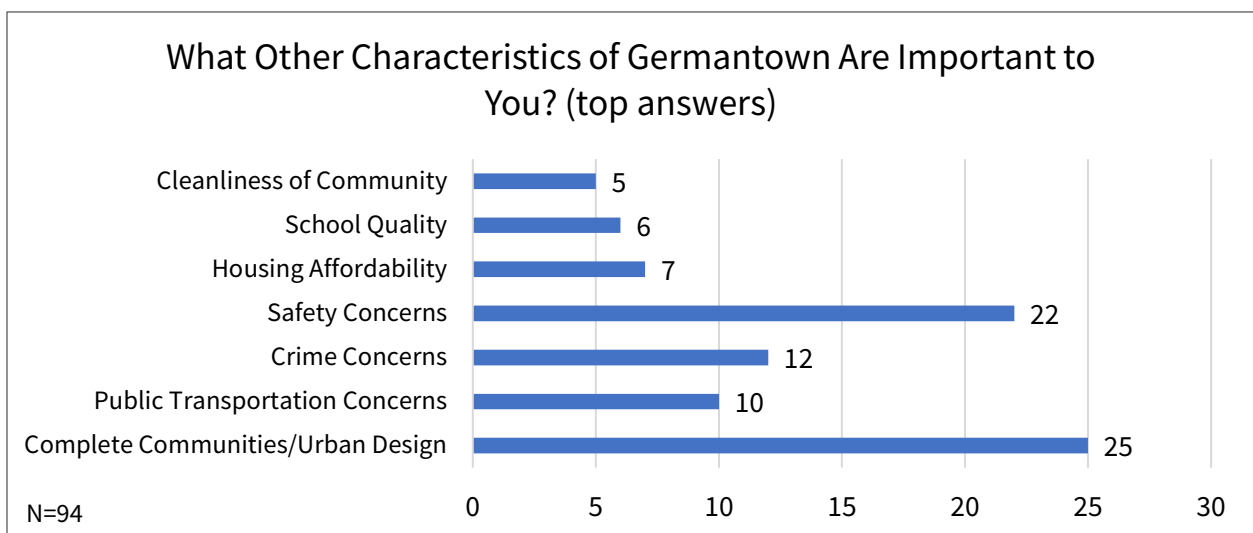
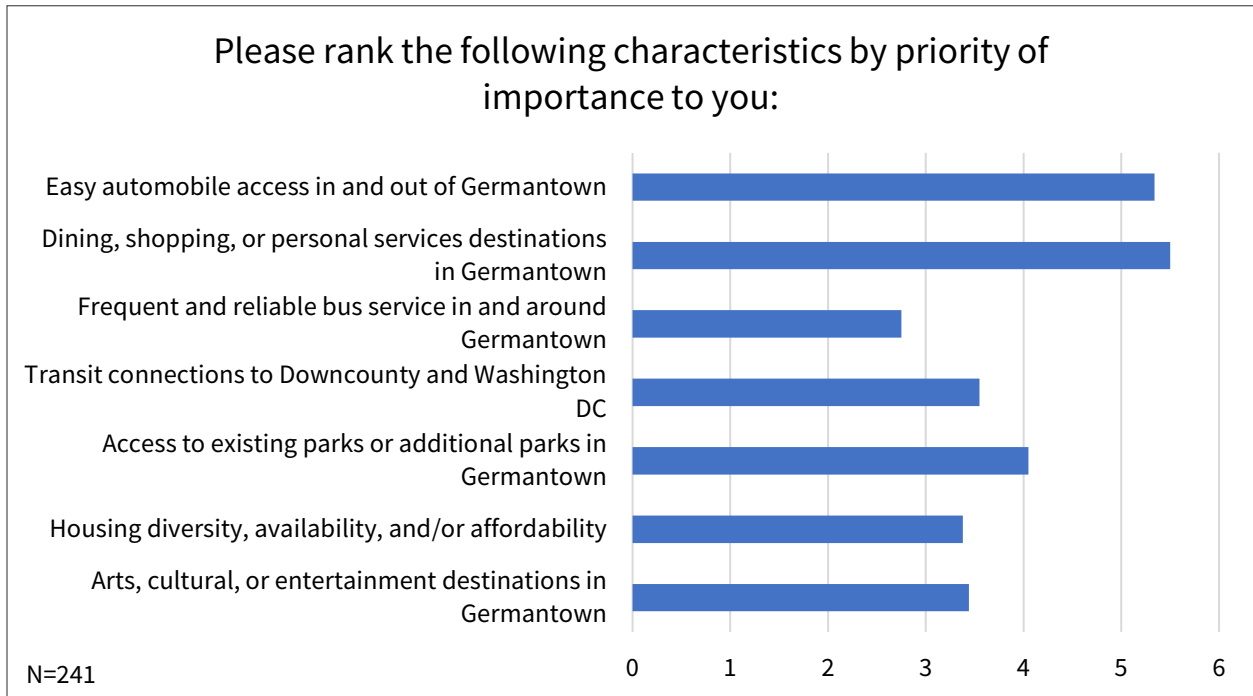


Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- Parks Mentioned:** Black Hill; Adventure Playground; SoccerPlex; Pools; Germantown Rec Center; Town Center UP; Seneca Creek SP; Little Bennett RP; Gunners Lake; Ridge Road Rec Park; Waters Landing LP; Lake Churchill; Swim Center; Schaeffer Farms; Lakes; small NPs; school playgrounds; C&O Canal; smaller parks off MD 28



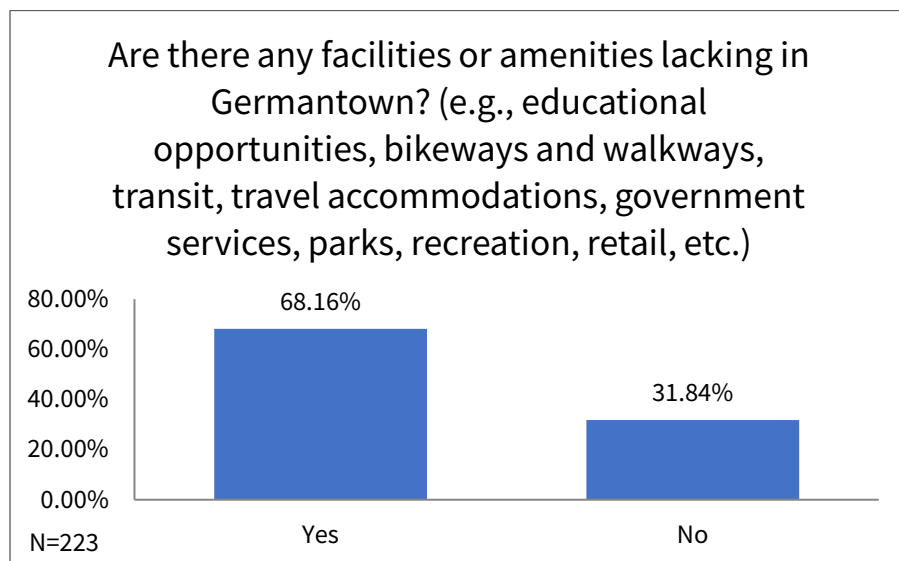
- **Parks Need Maintenance:** litter; Adventure Playground; fields; playground equipment; some parks are unusable by children; need better grounds and trails upkeep; gazebo has been closed for a few years; dog waste bags everywhere; bathrooms; older kids and adults are too hard on equipment; out-of-date equipment; Gunner's Lake park; boardwalk near Sally K. Ride ES; room for improvement; more trash cans, emptying more often
- **Parks Need More Amenities (Specify):** Downcounty parks have more amenities; Town Center Urban Park is terrible; dog park; more bike trails; not much to do in local parks; more trails on east side of town; more impaired mobility paths; more gazebos, places to relax, places to watch kids play, interactive art

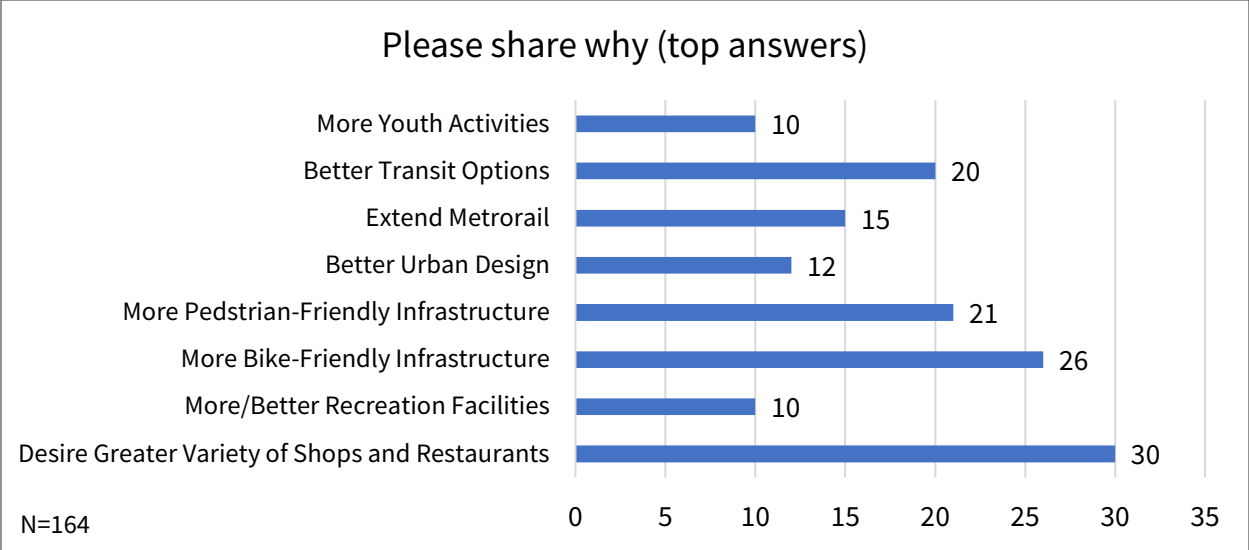


Many respondents brought up safety and crime concerns throughout the survey, and many of their answers reflect ideas of complete communities and thoughts on Germantown's urban design.

Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- **Safety Concerns:** unprotected bike lanes; speeding; parking enforcement; panhandling; pedestrian access to South Germantown Park; enforce vehicle-related laws; transit center after dark; pedestrian safety; bicycle safety; sidewalks on major roads
- **Public Transportation Concerns:** expand Metro; free or cheap shuttle connecting to Town Center; buses don't work for families with kids' activities; need easy access to Metro; MARC needs to run more frequently; linkage to Northern Virginia; bus routes and timing, service to Northwest High School; need better connections to DC
- **Complete Communities/ Urban Design:** bike trail between Town Center and Black Hill RP; county services are excellent, need more small businesses; unattractive community (gas stations, looks old); downtown is like a ghetto; mish-mash of architectural styles, need more upscale and uniform look, design of library and BlackRock is good; don't replace greenspace with development; more public gathering spaces; need more gyms; need non-fast-food restaurants; need more parks; too much high density; need more nightclubs or lounges; too many apartments; disjointed community design; improve walkability, bikeability; current design is car-centric, not wheelchair friendly; appreciate rec center; need more commercial activity outside the Town Center; housing density is high; make more family-friendly; need community identity; fewer chain stores; needs more "third places"
- **Other Important Characteristics:** apartments are devaluing area homes; parking problems in some locations; cell service; noise from cars with modified exhaust; need more road maintenance; roads are crowded; need functional HOAs; need tenants associations; need more tech jobs; make it easier to build more housing and businesses; cultural diversity

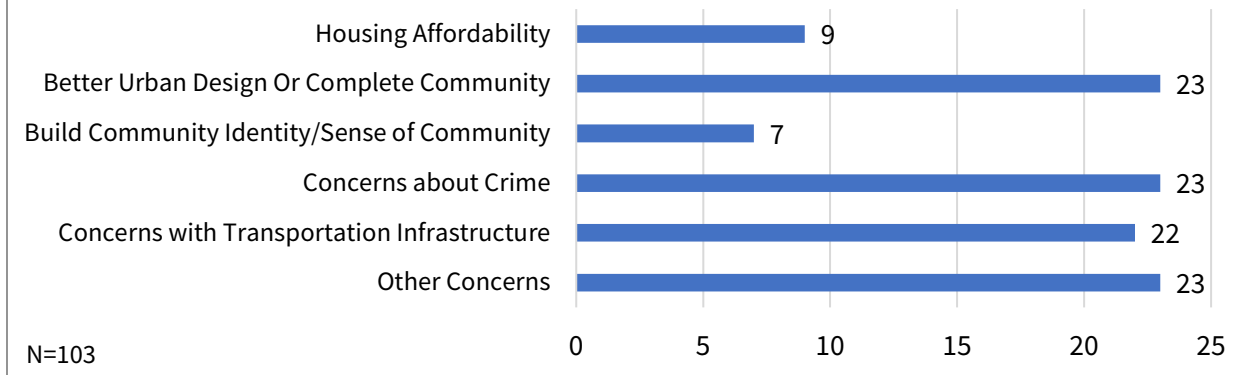




Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- Better Transit Options:** to airports; to MARC; to Metro; to Downcounty; parking at MARC station was tight pre-pandemic; improved bus stops; MARC hours; between Damascus and Germantown throughout the Day; destinations and transit time; routes; reliability; on Brink Road
- Better Urban Design:** downtown doesn't foster engagement; a place for events; better town square; no charm or community character; shopping mall preferable to strip centers; everything is low-quality; need more parking at townhouses; more inviting, walkable, connected community; places to lounge around; lacking investment in community development; places to hang out; more vibrant town center
- More Parks or Park Facilities:** dog park; playgrounds; picnic areas; educational opportunities; recreation opportunities; exercise equipment; nicer parks
- More/Better Recreation Facilities:** adult soccer league; recreation opportunities; gyms; bowling alley; roller skating rink; pools; community center; rec center; trampolines; skate park
- Other Needed Improvements:** farmers/flea market promotion; affordable place to show locally made films; attracting small businesses; better school planning for new housing; history tour, food tour; higher-rated hospital; cheese shop; bakery; better schools; places of worship; brunch location; move the transit center; better movie theater; young adult activities; more trees and protected land; more entertainment; need an urban district; shopping mall; another library; health centers; more arts and culture; trash, noise; government services; self-service car emissions testing stations; corner stores in neighborhoods; more shops in neighborhoods; housing for disabled people; need better connection between Germantown and Black Hill RP; need more housing; event space; event facility; expand Montgomery College; county trash pick-up; BlackRock used to be better; upscale hotel; better liquor laws; entertainment

Is there anything else you would like to share about the Germantown area that this study should consider? (top answers)



Comment summaries for a few of the answers to the above question:

- **Praise for Living in Germantown:** centrally located and convenient; best-kept secret in Montgomery County; amazing, clean, well-maintained, friendly and helpful people; wonderful area
- **Build Community Identity/Sense of Community:** the transit center is badly located; relocate the auto repair shops; consider where luxury and affordable housing are built with respect to the transit center; consider more single family homes; there is enough housing; need places to "hang out"; need open space; need sidewalk cafés; don't replace greenspace with development; need to attract more businesses and residents to be able to support BlackRock; focus on quality; need more cultural activities and learning programs; stop building apartment buildings; ground signs clutter our roads; need bigger and better town center; upgrade or move the trailer park; more park-like space in Town Center; encourage interaction of residents; restaurant hours; investigate Netherlands' practice of "autoluw" (Dutch term for "nearly car free" or "car-lite"); more mid-level eating places; too crowded and built up; stop urban sprawl; more things for the youth to do; invest in a downtown for all ages; increase access for those who do not drive
- **Concerns about Safety:** speeding, unsafe driving near high school; obey walk signals; more pedestrian friendly
- **Concerns with Transportation Infrastructure:** better connection to Black Hill RP; need improved signal timing; build Dorsey Mill Road overpass; rethink planned BRT because of increased remote work; roads are overcrowded; relocate the transit center; need better transit options; keep area car-centric, don't extend Metro; extend Metro; remove bike lanes; parking is tight; I-270 traffic; updated bus stops; east-west traffic across I-270; signal timing; promote biking and walking; traffic
- **Other Concerns:** litter; not happy with the types of people moving in; don't encroach on the Ag Reserve; stray shopping carts; graffiti; need better cell service; Thrive 2050 is terrible: the Upcounty should have a different plan than Downcounty; noise from modified cars; need better accountability from multifamily housing management companies; panhandling; do not

incorporate city; homelessness; more resources for single mothers; county liquor laws; protect wildlife and water quality; clean up neighborhoods; library maintenance and accessibility issues; BlackRock is underfunded; Upcounty Regional Services Center unwelcoming and has bad signage

