

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS SECTOR PLAN



2024-2025 Engagement Summary



November 2025

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INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In the fall of 2024, Montgomery Planning (M-NCPPC), in partnership with engagement and urban planning consultant Brick & Story, launched the community engagement effort for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan (FHSP).

Friendship Heights is a cross-jurisdictional and transit-oriented neighborhood uniquely positioned at the Washington, D.C.-Maryland border. It is well-known for its proximity to transit, amenities (including healthcare services) and accessibility to parks and trail networks. In the last 20 years, the commercial uses of downtown Friendship Heights have changed, and its role as a regional retail destination has shifted. Montgomery Planning is in the process of updating the 1988 Friendship Heights Sector Plan to create a modern vision for Friendship Heights, MD, that responds to the current challenges and opportunities of this area.

The Sector Plan follows on the heels of the 2024 Friendship Heights Urban Design Study, which analyzed how people experience open spaces, pedestrian and transit networks, activity centers and public life in Friendship Heights.

The Sector Plan will consider existing conditions, stakeholder input and established County policy and initiatives to ultimately make recommendations on zoning, land use, housing, transportation, parks and open space, the environment, schools, economic development and more. The phases of the Plan are:

- Pre-Scope Engagement (Fall 2024)
- Scope of Work (Winter 2025)
- Existing Conditions Analysis (Winter - Spring 2025)
- Visioning (Spring 2025 - Fall 2025)
- Preliminary Recommendations (Winter 2026)
- Working Draft (Summer 2026)
- Public Hearing and Planning Board Draft (Fall 2026)
- County Council Public Hearing, Council and Executive Review (Winter 2027)
- Approval and Adoption (Spring 2027)

This engagement report summarizes feedback gathered through major events and outreach efforts; additionally, Planning staff gave dozens of presentations sharing information about the Plan, including introducing the months-long existing conditions analysis work.

PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

In 2024-2025, the FHSP engagement effort was an opportunity to invite all voices to participate in the Sector Plan process. Engagement efforts aimed to identify community goals/priorities and develop the vision for the future of Friendship Heights, MD.

Plan-specific engagement goals included:

- Reach a wide range of stakeholders
- Deliver clear and straightforward messaging
- Provide a variety of opportunities so that people of all ages and stages can participate
- Collaborate with community partners and agencies
- Meet people where they are



Planning staff share information about the Plan with Somerset House residents.



Wide Sidewalk + Variety of Seating | Philadelphia



Feedback on precedent communities at the in-person Spring Workshop.



At the Fall Meeting, Planning staff lead stakeholders through discussion of three opportunity sites in the Plan Area.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

ENGAGEMENT REACH

From fall 2024 through fall 2025, the team hosted ten events and presented at more than 30 meetings or community events to share information about the project. Through engagement, the team received:



FEEDBACK FROM 377 PEOPLE
AT PRE-SCOPE EVENTS,
WORKSHOPS, & FOCUS GROUPS



702 ONLINE
QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES



174 RESPONSES ON WEB-
BASED VISIONING EXERCISE

TOTAL OF 1,268 STAKEHOLDER TOUCHPOINTS

It is important to note that some of these touchpoints overlap; many people attended all of the workshops, and many of those people submitted questionnaires. For that reason, this report does not provide a count of unique participants.

Brick & Story supported Montgomery Planning in designing an engagement strategy that focused on strengthening existing community relationships, while expanding the Plan's engagement reach.

Image 1: Friendship Heights Sector Plan (FHSP) Study Area

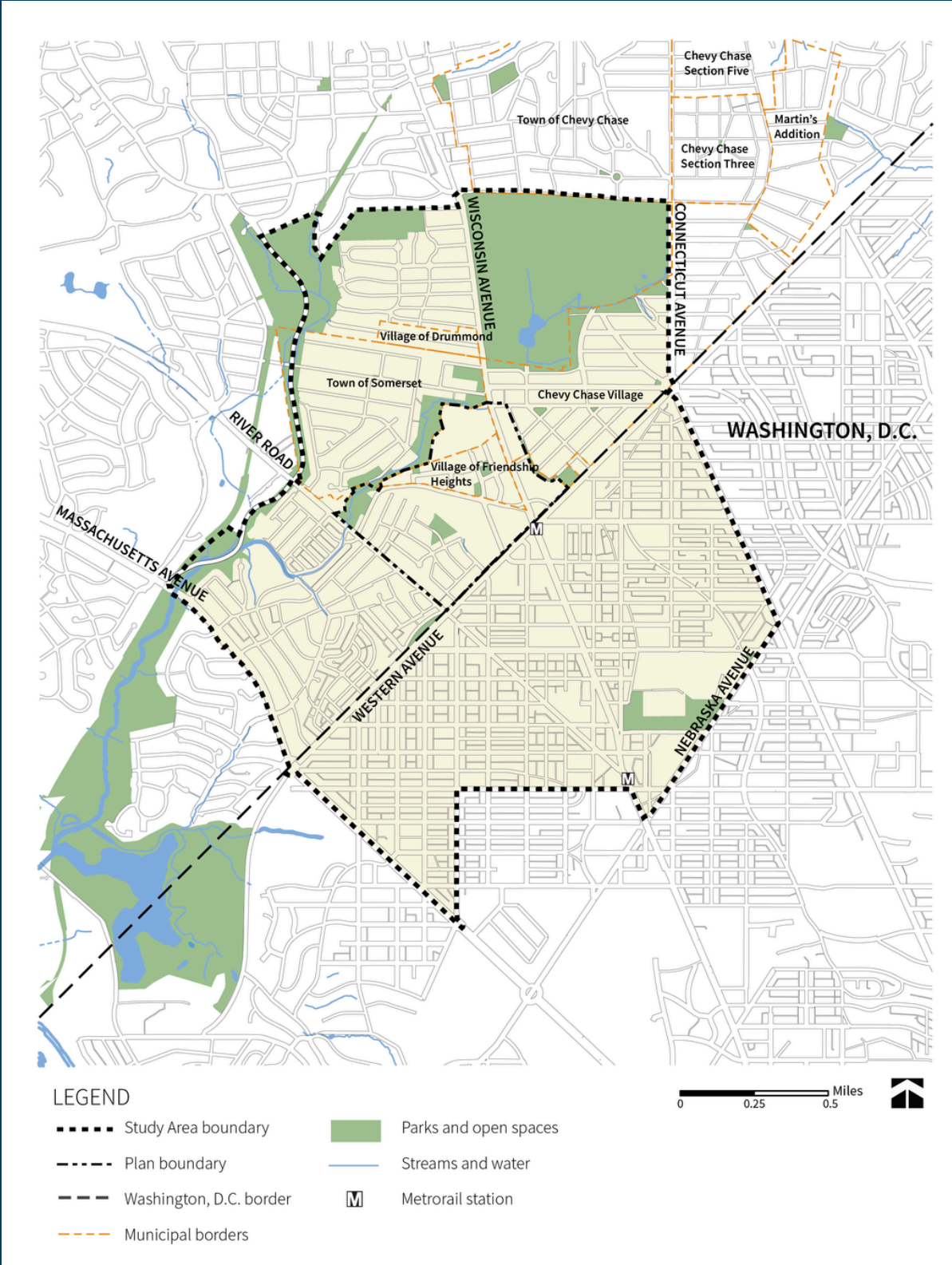


Image 2: Friendship Heights Sector Plan (FHSP) Area



The Friendship Heights Sector Plan (FHSP) Area (Image 2) includes only the Maryland side of the Friendship Heights downtown core; however, the Study Area (Image 1) is the larger context of the Plan, including the D.C. neighborhoods immediately across the border. The Study Area is predominantly used in analysis because the neighborhood's cross-jurisdictional nature and retail corridor mean that Plan stakeholders live, work, and play beyond the Plan boundaries.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

A few important notes about collected demographics and corresponding analysis:

- **Exit survey data was collected anonymously;** anecdotally, some participants were engaged repeatedly at the major points of engagement: Kickoff events, Spring Workshops, online questionnaires, and the Fall Workshop.
- **Demographics are a sampling of all stakeholders engaged** as not everyone completed exit surveys, and of those who did complete the questionnaire, not everyone shared demographic information.
- Because Friendship Heights is cross-jurisdictional and a regional destination, staff defined stakeholders broadly as those who live, work, shop, and visit the Study Area (see Image 1). **Nearly all (95%) participants live within the Study Area.**

Historically, young people, renters, and non-White households have been more difficult to reach in Friendship Heights planning processes. To assess engagement reach, Tables 1 and 2 compare participation of these groups to their presence in the Plan and Study Areas.

Table 1: Demographic Comparison of Sector Plan Area (Image 2)

Demographic Group	% of Sector Plan Area	% of FHSP Engagement	% Difference
Seniors (65+)	35.9	46.7	+10.8
Renters	56.9	13.3	-43.6
Non-White Households	33.2	20.2	-13

Table 2: Demographic Comparison of Study Area (Image 1)

Demographic Group	% of Study Area	% of FHSP Engagement	% Difference
Seniors (65+)	24.8	46.7	+21.9
Renters	34.3	13.3	-21
Non-White Households	27.6	20.2	-7.5

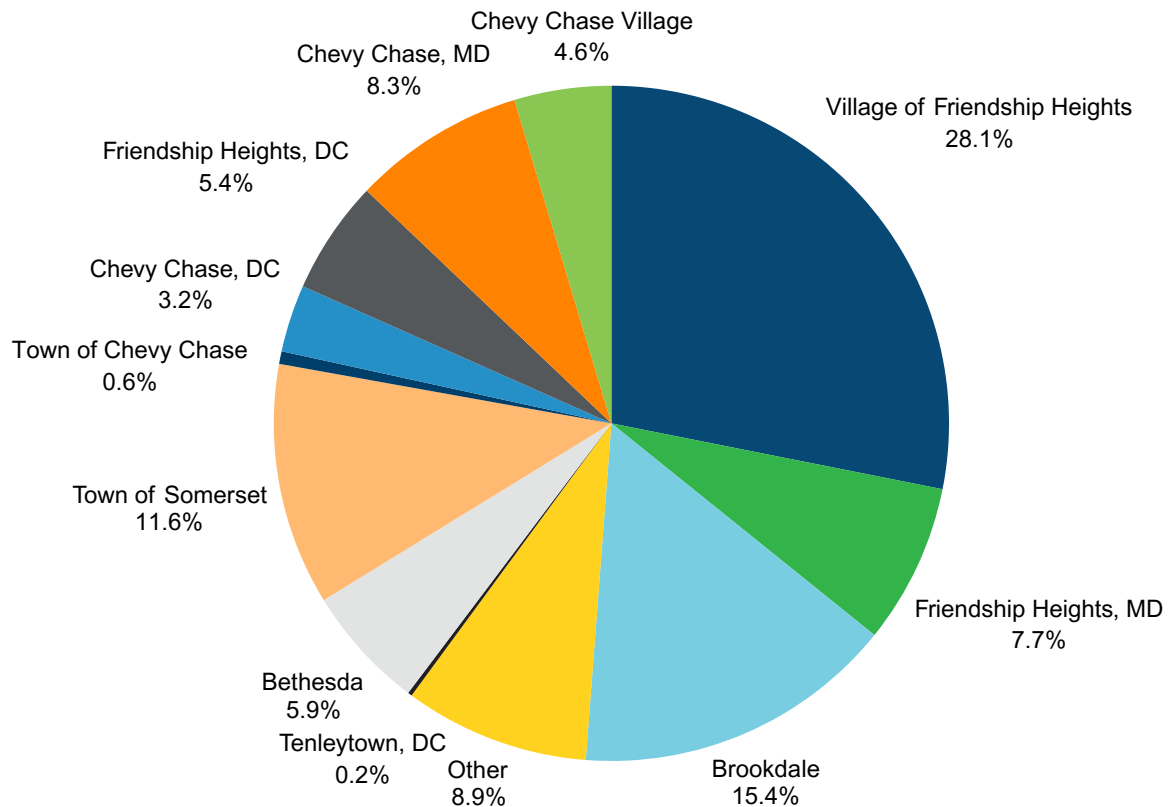
NEIGHBORHOOD

The team successfully reached stakeholders within the Sector Plan Area (Image 2), including those who live in the Village of Friendship Heights, downtown Friendship Heights, and parts of Brookdale. The team also engaged stakeholders in the larger Study Area (Image 1) and beyond including Bethesda, Chevy Chase Village, the Town of Somerset, and the neighborhoods on the D.C. side including AU Park and Tenleytown.

Across all touchpoints, the team engaged most with Village of Friendship Heights residents (27.9%), followed by Brookdale Neighborhood residents (15.3%). As the two central neighborhoods comprising the Plan Area, the Village of Friendship Heights and Brookdale were consistently the most engaged neighborhoods at both in-person and virtual engagements. In addition to public meeting outreach and invitations to the larger geography of stakeholders, the team specifically reached out to residents of the Town of Somerset and Chevy Chase Village with targeted questionnaires to ensure the perspectives of Friendship Heights' most immediate neighbors were considered in the planning process.

NEIGHBORHOODS ACROSS ALL EVENTS

(Total Participants = 1031)

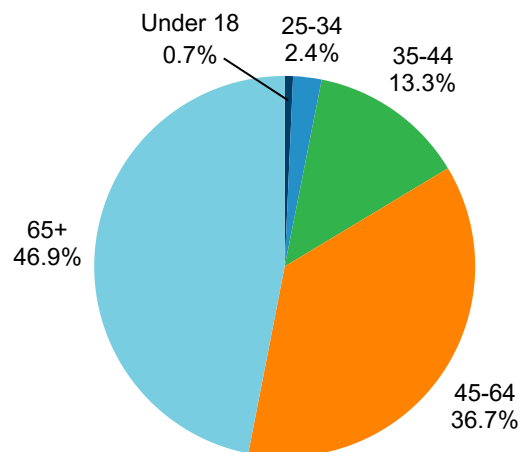


Village of Friendship Heights and Brookdale were the two most represented neighborhoods in this engagement phase.

AGE

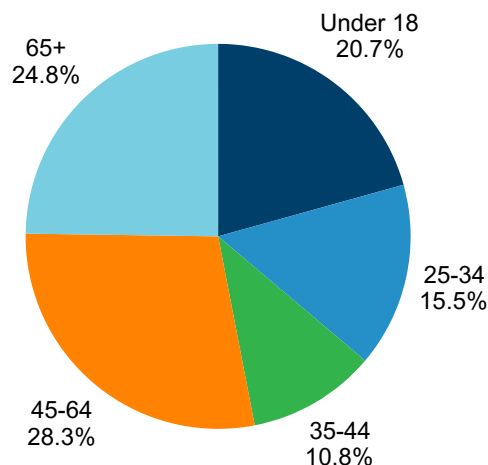
Nearly half (46.7%) of all participating stakeholders were over 65. Online tools, like the questionnaire, reached more young people (though it is worth noting that the questionnaire was also the most heavily used tool). Notably, 78% of respondents under 35 engaged with the Plan using online engagement tools. This difference holds true for live events conducted virtually via Zoom. For in-person events, over half (59.2%) of participants were over 65. Comparably, at virtual events, 44.6% of participants were over 65. Staff designed targeted outreach for younger people, namely a focus group for parents of children 0-18 in the area and a youth workshop for the Friendship Heights Alliance's Youth Advisory Council.

AGE GROUPS ACROSS ALL ENGAGEMENTS (Total Participants = 1018)



Nearly half of all participants (46.7%) were over 65.

AGE GROUPS IN STUDY AREA



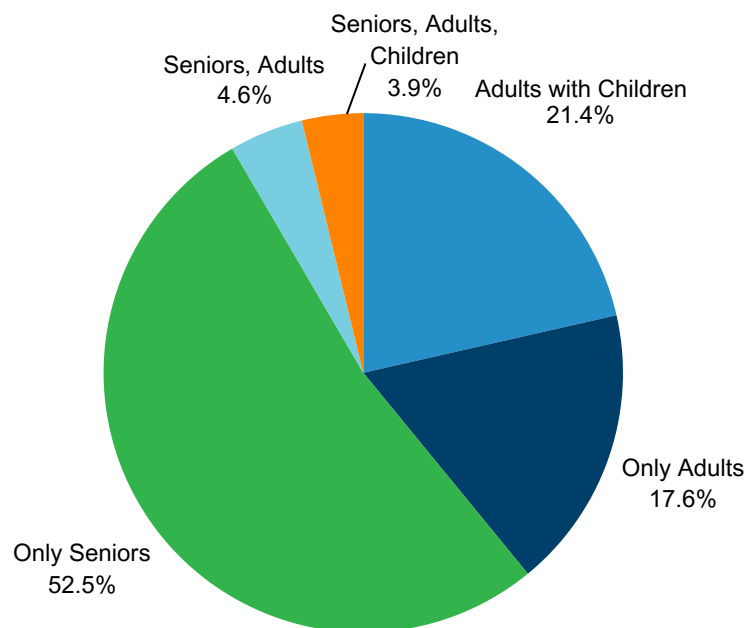
A smaller percentage (24.8%) of residents in the overall Study Area population are 65+. Source: American Communities Survey (ACS), 2023.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Across engagements where household composition was accurately collected, 25.3% of participants indicated they had children in their household. Over half of participants (52.5%) reported they have only seniors living in their household, and a total of 61.1% of participants reporting having at least one senior member of their household. The team looked at how households with children were most engaged in the Plan process in an effort to identify any lessons learned to better engage young families as they have proven more difficult to reach. Nearly all (91%) of participants who reported living with children engaged using a virtual tool (including the questionnaire) which underscores the importance of multi-modal engagement and flexibility.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION ACROSS ENGAGEMENTS

(Total Participants = 471)



The majority of households were only seniors (52.5%), followed by adults with children (21.4%). This data does not include the questionnaire because it did not give the opportunity to choose more than one option.

NOTES ON HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION DATA

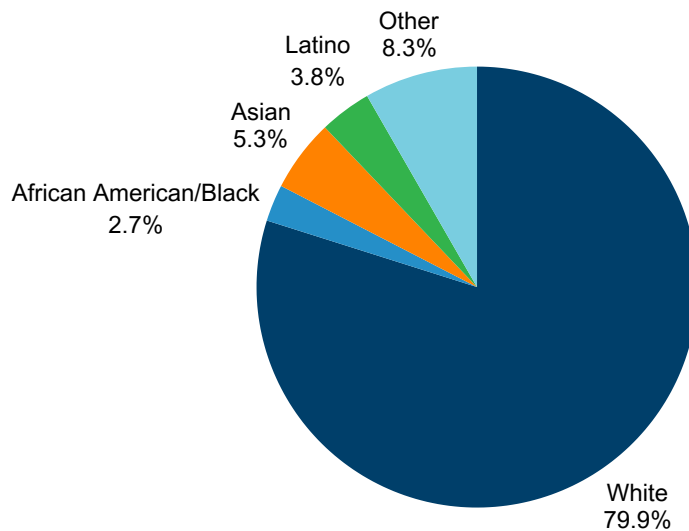
Due to a formatting error, the online questionnaire did not give respondents the option of choosing more than one household composition (live with children, adults, or seniors). Given that the questionnaire is the largest data point, this impacted the team's collection of household composition data. Across engagements, exit surveys used slightly different age brackets, defining seniors as either 60 or 65 years and older. This report has grouped them as seniors despite the slight discrepancy. Despite this, the collected data proved representative of the Study Area and therefore useful in this analysis.

RACE/ETHNICITY

The majority of participating stakeholders were White (79.8%). Of non-White participants, the majority (70%) were engaged using online engagement methods – suggesting that virtual tools are useful in broadening reach across demographic groups. For example, 54% of total non-White participants engaged through the online questionnaire.

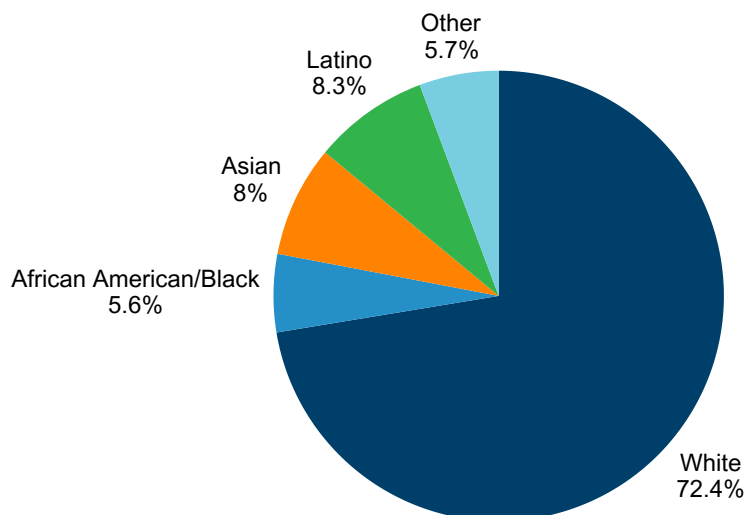
RACE ACROSS ALL ENGAGEMENTS

(Total Participants = 991)



The majority of all participants were White (79.8%).

RACE IN STUDY AREA



In the overall Study Area, a slightly smaller majority (72.4%) are White.

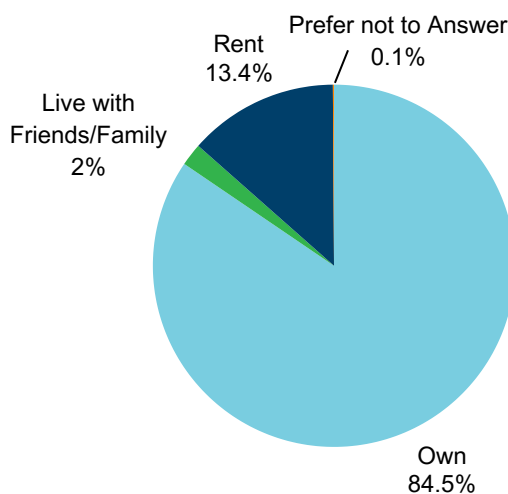
HOUSING TENURE (HOMEOWNER V. RENTER)

Homeowners made up the large majority (84%) of participating stakeholders. Knowing that renters are traditionally a harder-to-reach group in public engagement processes, the FHSP team hosted two focus groups to meaningfully engage renters and collected qualitative feedback about needs and priorities for this community through facilitated discussion.

Similar to observations about participation of diverse racial/ethnic groups, 88% of all renters engaged participated using one of the virtual tools. In particular, 70% of renters engaged during the process participated via a questionnaire.

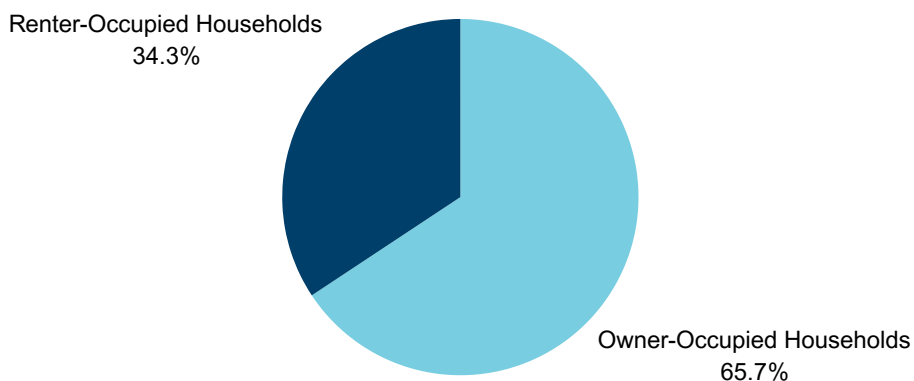
HOUSING TENURE ACROSS ENGAGEMENTS

(Total Participants = 1041)



The vast majority of participants were homeowners (84.5%).

OWNER OCCUPIED V. RENTER OCCUPIED HOUSING IN STUDY AREA



In the total Sector Plan Study Area a higher percentage of people live in owner occupied units (65.7%) Source: American Communities Survey (ACS), 2023.

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS & TOOLS USED

In order to engage both a variety and vast number of stakeholders, Montgomery Planning and Brick & Story employed a range of tools designed to reach diverse groups:

Table 3: FHSP Engagement Opportunities

Engagement Event	In-Person/ Virtual	Date	Event Type	# of People Reached
Plan Kickoff Event 1	In-person	11/20/2024	Presentation and Small Group Discussion	55
Plan Kickoff Event 2	Virtual	12/3/2024	Presentation and Small Group Discussion	57
Existing Conditions Webinar	Virtual	5/20/2025	Presentation	68
Friendship Heights Alliance Youth Advisory Council Meeting	In-person	4/10/2025	Hands-on Activity	15
Spring Workshop 1	In-person	6/11/2025	Workshop with Boards	52
Spring Workshop 2	Virtual	6/24/2025	Workshop with Boards	48
Parents Focus Group 1	Virtual	7/29/2025	Focus Group	5
Parents Focus Group 2	In-person	8/6/2025	Focus Group	10
Business Owners Focus Group	Virtual	7/29/2025	Focus Group	6
Renters Focus Group 1	Virtual	8/1/2025	Focus Group	2
Renters Focus Group 2	Virtual	8/4/2025	Focus Group	5
Questionnaire	Online	Live for 6 weeks (8/4-9/15/2025)	Questionnaire	564
Town of Somerset Questionnaire	Online	Live for 6 weeks (8/4-9/15/2025)	Questionnaire	84
Chevy Chase Village Questionnaire	Online	Live for 6 weeks (8/4-9/15/2025)	Questionnaire	54
Fall Workshop	In-person	9/30/2025	Presentation and Small Group Discussion	69
Web-based Visioning Exercise (same content as Fall Workshop)	Online	Live for 2 weeks (10/1-10/15/2025)	Questionnaire	174

Table 4: FHSP Key Feedback Events

Engagement Event	Event Description	Engagement Tools Used
Kickoff Events (virtual and in-person)	Share information about the FHSP update and solicit feedback on community priorities/concerns, precedent communities, and neighborhood identity	Facilitated small group discussions on the following questions: (1) When you think about future change in Friendship Heights, what are you most excited about? (2) Talking about future change can also cause worry or concern. What are you most worried or concerned about as we launch into the Sector Plan? (3) What makes Friendship Heights different from other neighborhoods around it? What about Friendship Heights do you hope will be preserved in the future? (4) Are there other communities in the area that would be good models or that offer learning lessons for Friendship Heights?
Spring Workshops (virtual and in-person)	Share information gathered at the kickoff events and solicit feedback on specific Plan Areas: vision, pedestrian network, amenities, parks and open space	Feedback stations: (1) Exercise ranking amenities (2) Exercise sharing which parks are most visited and accessible (3) Write-in visioning exercise, "In 20 years, I hope Friendship Heights will be..." (4) Mapping activity identifying type and location of needed pedestrian network improvements (5) Write-in feedback about public spaces along Wisconsin Avenue (6) Write-in feedback about precedent neighborhoods
Fall Workshop (in-person)	Present on Sector Plan implementation and the connection between development and delivering major amenities Provide feedback on land use, connectivity and amenity preferences at three opportunity sites: GEICO, Saks/The Collection, 5550 Friendship Boulevard	Presentation from Planning staff and facilitated small group discussions about each opportunity site guided by the following set of questions: (1) Assuming that most new development in Friendship Heights will be housing with either retail or amenities integrated into the project, what types of housing do you envision? What about other uses? (2) Given the earlier discussion about how amenities are realized, what would you hope to see incorporated here? (3) Given the context of this particular site, how tall do you think new development should be? What should the mix of maximum building heights on this site be? (4) How should the new development on this site relate to the context around it? How should it connect to the neighboring properties/sites?
Web-based Visioning	Provide feedback on land use, connectivity and amenity preferences at three opportunity sites: GEICO, Saks/The Collection, 5550 Friendship Boulevard	Recorded presentation from Planning staff Multiple choice and open-ended questions on project website

ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

The Brick & Story team assisted Montgomery Planning in designing engagement tools to collect high-quality stakeholder feedback, especially from harder-to-reach groups including young families, renters, and business owners. To make the Plan's engagement as accessible as possible, the team offered both virtual and in-person opportunities tailored to the needs of each audience. Participants could share input through quick online questionnaires for convenience or join more in-depth workshops and focus groups for deeper discussion. Engagement included workshops with small-group discussion facilitated by Planning staff, meetings with community organizations, and focus groups. While most focus groups were virtual to limit barriers to participation, a parents focus group was hosted in-person at Red Panda Art (an art studio for children in Friendship Heights) who provided free childcare to make participation easier for families.

The engagement strategy blended qualitative and quantitative methods across various engagement formats. Discussion groups and map comments captured narrative feedback, while questionnaires and prioritization exercise boards provided measurable input. To expand its reach, the team issued mailers to share information and advertise engagement opportunities with a larger number of stakeholders. The team also hosted targeted focus group conversations with parents, renters, and business owners to reach a more diverse group of stakeholders.

The questionnaire reached the largest number of respondents, helping to establish a broad demographic baseline for analysis. Combined with qualitative insights from the focus groups, the collected feedback offers a balanced understanding of community priorities and experiences across different populations. Two-thirds of all respondents under the age of 45 participated via the online questionnaire.



Attendees at the Spring Workshop offer feedback on pedestrian network improvements in the Plan Area.



At the Friendship Heights Alliance Youth Advisory Council Meeting, Planning staff lead teens through a hands-on development activity.

ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT

In addition to outreach conducted by Montgomery Planning and Brick & Story (see Table 3), the Sector Plan team attended meetings with community groups. Between October 2024 and October 2025, staff attended more than 30 meetings with civic associations, government agencies, elected representatives, and property owners (see Appendix for full list of additional events). At these meetings, staff shared Plan updates, answered questions about the plan, promoted upcoming engagement opportunities, and solicited general feedback.

Event Spotlight: Friendship Heights Alliance Youth Advisory Council

In April 2025, the team ran a workshop for teens as part of the monthly Friendship Heights Alliance Youth Advisory Council meeting. The planners first talked to the teens about their vision for the future of Friendship Heights, generating a list of uses and amenities they would love to see in the future. Around 15 teen participants were then split into two groups, and each group was given a unique density requirement and list of amenities. Teams were tasked with prioritizing amenities and determining where the required density should be located. Teens had to determine what mix and size of amenities were most appropriate for the future.

This event was a way of teaching teens about development and the master planning process, with an opportunity to collect qualitative feedback from young people (under 18), a cohort that is traditionally hard to reach during the planning process.

COMMUNICATIONS

The team shared information about engagement opportunities via the Plan e-newsletter and community partner publications including nearby special taxing districts and municipalities and the Friendship Heights Alliance (FHA). Montgomery Planning issued mailers to households in the Sector Plan Area sharing project information and encouraging people to sign up for the e-newsletter. To recruit participants for the focus groups, staff asked local parents' groups, apartment building management, and business-supporting organizations like FHA to spread the word and sign up for focus groups. The team also sent an e-newsletter to invite stakeholders to sign up for focus groups.

Beyond those who attended a virtual/in-person event or completed a questionnaire, it is estimated that several hundred additional people received information about the planning process through the e-newsletters, partner publications, or Montgomery Planning issued mailers:

- Over 2,530 households received mailers
- 771 subscribers to the e-newsletter as of October 16, 2025



Fall Workshop attendees provide feedback on land use, connectivity and amenity preferences at three opportunity sites.

ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Across all engagements, Planning staff heard similar feedback from Friendship Heights stakeholders:



Differing Opinions about Growth: Overall, community members were supportive of added population and hoped for more diversity in Friendship Heights, specifically families with children and young people, renters, and people of color. However, when presented with building types that would best allow for diverse users (e.g., apartment buildings), some stakeholders were opposed to mid-rise (60'-100') or high-rise (100'-200') development. Many were adamant the neighborhood needed at least one large, community-serving amenity (library, community center, movie theater etc.) and businesses to fill empty storefronts. At the same time, many participants feared the potential impacts of development like the loss of neighborhood character and green space, and increased traffic.



Additional Housing, with Limits: In any discussion of housing, community members emphasized the need for diverse, affordable housing, specifically housing for seniors, young families, and first-time homeowners. However, there was some discrepancy between participants' desire for more affordable housing and a general dislike of denser building types and strong preference for mid/low-rise development. Feedback suggested that stakeholders' overarching concern was that future high-rise development will fundamentally change the neighborhood retail corridor into a high-rise regional retail destination (like Bethesda).



Mixed Support for Transit-Oriented-Development: Mixed-use, high/mid-rise was considered most acceptable at and around the Friendship Heights Metro station, with transitions to low-rise development (most popularly townhomes) farther from the station. Elsewhere, participating stakeholders were most comfortable with mid- and low-rise development.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Pedestrian Safety is a Priority: Participants highlighted the need for connections to and around Friendship Heights to be improved to make for safe passage between destinations. This was of particular importance to parents who are concerned about the car-centric nature of the Friendship Heights downtown area. Seniors, on the other hand, expressed concern about safety at night, asking for additional lighting at key hubs and along corridors. Participating stakeholders suggested a range of solutions to improve pedestrian safety including protected walk and bike lanes, adjusted wait times (how long a person waits to cross at a location), and bounded pedestrian-only areas.



Preserve Open Space & Greenery: Open, green space is a priority for stakeholders both as a way of maintaining the neighborhood's connection with nature and as outdoor community space. Across engagements, one of participants' biggest concerns about any future development was the loss of existing open space. Additionally, stakeholders are concerned about preserving the neighborhood's existing trees, particularly the mature trees on the GEICO site.



Plan for a Variety of Parks: Stakeholders asked for a range of park spaces, such as a village green, active recreation spaces, contemplative gardens, and dog parks. Parks were discussed at every engagement opportunity, and stakeholders' often expressed concerns that redevelopment will decrease access to green space.



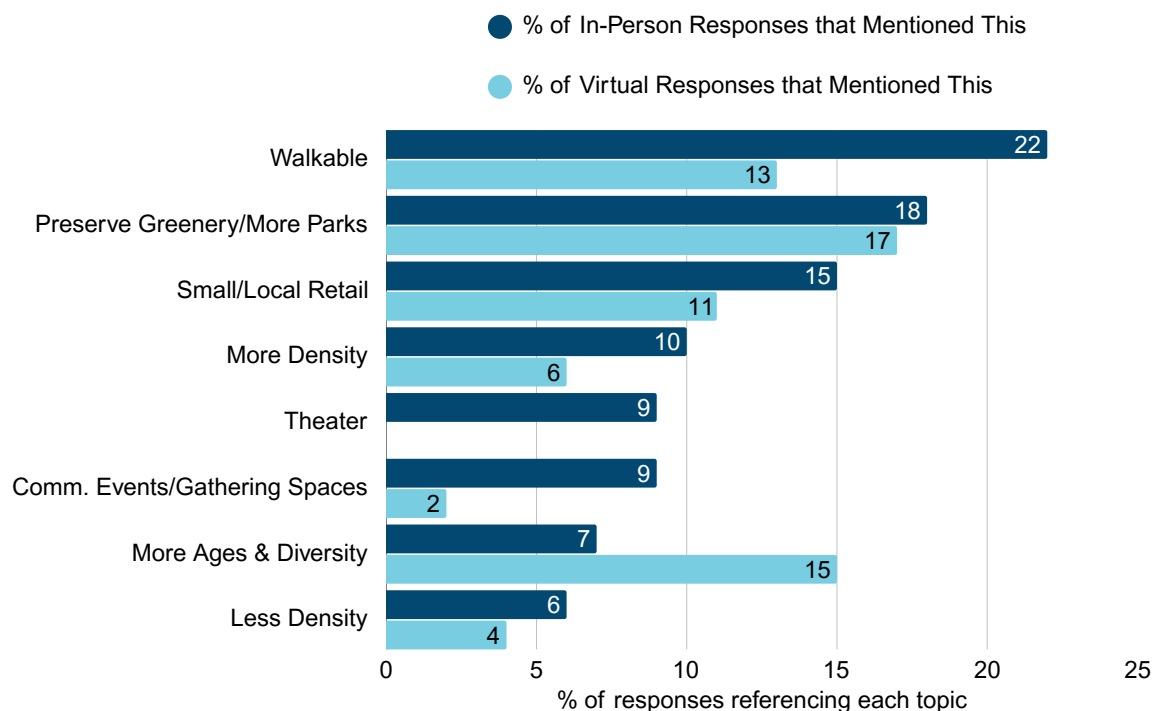
Amenities to Build Community: In conversation about amenities and parks, participating community members emphasized the need for community gathering spaces, both private and public. Outside of park space, a movie theater was the most requested community amenity. Many noted the loss of a local movie theater in 2021 that was a well-loved amenity because it was relatively inexpensive, not weather dependent, served people of all ages and at all times of day. Other highly requested amenities include a library and pharmacy with extended hours.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

A DIVERSE & WELCOMING COMMUNITY

At the Kickoff events and Spring Workshops, attendees were asked to finish the sentence, “In 20 years, I hope Friendship Heights will be...” Their answers were used to clarify the future vision for the neighborhood. During small group discussions at the Kickoff events, many stakeholders called for more neighborhood diversity, worrying that current housing prices and amenities don’t meet the needs of young families/young people. This was echoed at the Spring Workshop series; when the team prompted stakeholders to share their hopes for Friendship Heights in 20 years, “more ages and diversity” was the second-most common write-in at the virtual workshop and seventh-most common write-in at the in-person workshop.

IN 20 YEARS, I HOPE FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS WILL BE...



When asked to finish the sentence, “In 20 years, I hope Friendship Heights will be...,” attendees at the in-person Spring Workshop most mentioned walkability and preserving green space. Note that staff did not pre-populate responses; this chart is simply a grouping of like-responses.

Focus group participants echoed the call for a diverse and inclusive community. Business owners, for instance, came from different backgrounds and owned different types of businesses in the area; however, they shared a desire for a more walkable, family-friendly, and affordable environment that supports customers, employees, and young families. Parents who participated in the focus group series said that they were drawn to Friendship Heights because of its “strong sense of community and neighborhood connection,” and they hoped that in 20 years, the neighborhood was still (and perhaps better) able to attract young families/people.

SOME STAKEHOLDERS CALL FOR NO CHANGE

Some participating community members requested no change to the neighborhood’s current character. Of these stakeholders, many have lived in Friendship Heights for years and chose the neighborhood for its community, access to open space, and retail amenities. They worried that future development’s attempts to make the neighborhood more affordable would result in more high-rise buildings and fundamentally change the neighborhood they love.

PRIORITIZING CONNECTIONS TO NATURE

For many, the appeal of Friendship Heights is its proximity to nature and accessibility to nearby urban centers/amenities. At the Spring Workshop series, when asked to describe what they hope for Friendship Heights in 20 years, maintaining green space was the second-most common response, referenced in 18% of all in-person workshop comments and 17% of all virtual workshop comments.

CALL FOR WALKABLE, NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL

As one of the county’s four downtowns, Friendship Heights is a destination for many in the area. The many empty storefronts downtown have community members concerned about the future of local business in Friendship Heights.

The desire for re-invigorated retail was one of the most common requests across all engagements. For instance, in the online questionnaire, a quarter of those participants who felt positively about neighborhood growth explicitly referenced the opportunity for more neighborhood retail/entertainment.

The Spring Workshops tell a similar story: 15% of in-person workshop responses and 11% of virtual workshop comments referenced small/local retail as part of participants' visions for the future of Friendship Heights.

Participants at the Kickoff events and Spring Workshops were asked to identify communities that represented their vision for the future of Friendship Heights. The model communities participants cited at the Kickoff events and Spring Workshops reflect the desire for vibrant neighborhood retail. Bethesda, MD, was well-regarded for its mix of uses and active commercial corridor. However, most participants would like to see local retail, not chain stores, in Friendship Heights. Participants pointed to Cleveland Park, D.C., Clarendon, VA, and Chevy Chase, MD, as models of this local retail mix.



Attendees at the in-person Spring Workshop offer feedback on specific Plan Areas: vision, pedestrian network, amenities, parks and open space.

CREATING AN UNDERSTANDABLE IDENTITY

Getting clarity about what makes Friendship Heights unique was a top priority both for the project team and for participating stakeholders. When staff asked what made the neighborhood stand out, participants in every focus group (business owners, parents, renters) agreed that Friendship Heights does not have a distinct identity. Enhancing the neighborhood brand and identity was one of the top priorities for participating business owners because such a brand would help draw in customers. When asked about tools/strategies for creating an identity for Friendship Heights, business owners suggested better marketing support and tools like a local business directory to raise visibility.

Many stakeholders related the neighborhood's non-identity to the lack of gathering spaces in which to meet and develop community. At the in-person workshops, people mentioned everything from outdoor spaces to coffee shops/cafes, to larger destination amenities like arts centers and theaters.

When asked about public spaces along Wisconsin Avenue, participants at the in-person Spring Workshop called for more activation of public spaces through programming and events. Suggestions ranged from music and art to farmers' markets and recreational amenities. Specific sites, such as Bloomingdale's Plaza, the Saks Fifth Avenue site, and the Plaza at The Collection, were considered important opportunities for transformation – specifically for their potential for green, gathering spaces, retail diversity, and flexible programming. In Fall Workshop discussions, people were interested in more places to socialize, especially in the evening, in downtown Friendship Heights.

TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY

Across demographic groups, walking and transit access were highly valued amenities in Friendship Heights. As a group of parents who live in the area verbalized at a focus group, people love Friendship Heights because it is walkable, community-centered, transit rich, and offers quick access to key amenities. However, pedestrian safety proved a major challenge for community members. Throughout the engagement process, the team explored people's experiences getting around Friendship Heights, its connections to surrounding neighborhoods, and possible improvements to transportation and connectivity for the future.

THE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE IN FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

Pedestrian safety within the Sector Plan Area was mentioned at every engagement event, highlighting its importance. Stakeholders shared concerns about pedestrian and bicyclist safety along Wisconsin Avenue and Willard Avenue. At the Kickoff meetings, participants described downtown Friendship Heights as unfriendly to pedestrians – lacking adequate pedestrian infrastructure, traffic calming and safety measures, and green space. This was echoed at the Spring Workshops, where stakeholders' most common hope for the future of Friendship Heights was improved walkability (22% of responses).



Map responses identifying needed public realm improvements along the pedestrian network from the in-person Spring Workshop.

During the in-person Spring Workshop, participants placed stickers on a map of Friendship Heights to indicate where they would like to see improved lighting, street crossings, Friendship Heights neighborhood shuttle stops and benches. Participants flagged the biggest lighting needs along Willard Avenue, followed by North Park Avenue and the connection between the current GEICO property and the Brookdale Neighborhood. A few people wanted benches added on Friendship Boulevard near the Wisconsin Place Community Recreation Center. Participants called for improved street crossings at the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Oliver Street, near Bloomingdale's on Friendship Boulevard, and along Willard Avenue at Willard Towers and the Willard Avenue Park trail crossing. No participants requested additional shuttle stops in the Study Area.



At Bike to Work Day, Montgomery Planning staff share information about the project and solicit feedback on planner bikeways.

At Bike to Work Day, staff heard a lot about the need for improved bike infrastructure including protected bike facilities in Friendship Heights. Bikers requested that future bike paths connect to existing/planned bike lanes in D.C. that would help bikers reach specific locations including Bethesda and the Capital Crescent Trail. Planning staff heard that people need to be able to bike to and safely store their bikes at the Friendship Heights Metro station. Several bikers shared that they feel unsafe biking along Wisconsin Avenue.

At the Spring Workshops and during the focus groups, participants highlighted the need to improve the pedestrian experience. In one focus group, parents who live in the area noted that different parts of Friendship Heights offer very different experiences, with some walkable and pedestrian-friendly areas, while others are dominated by cars. Wider sidewalks, more places to sit and rest, greener walkways, and breaking up superblocks were all mentioned as improvements that would help make Friendship Heights friendlier to pedestrians. Specific intersections and streets that were called out for improvements included:

- The intersection of Willard Avenue and River Road
- Intersection of Western Avenue and Friendship Boulevard
- Areas along River Road
- Generally, crossings along both Wisconsin Avenue and Western Avenue

Those who highlighted pedestrian safety and access issues proposed a variety of possible solutions:

- Protected bike lanes, specifically lanes along Wisconsin Avenue
- Traffic calming measures
- Improved crossing signals to reduce wait times
- Protected street crossings
- Better lighting to increase safety at night
- Street activation via vibrant retail
- More seating areas throughout the downtown corridor
- Street trees and shade structures

TRAFFIC & PARKING

Traffic was a key concern for any future development or added density. For those online questionnaire respondents who felt negatively (both “somewhat negative” and “very negative”) about increased population, traffic, parking and congestion were the central concerns: 64.4% of responses cited either traffic and/or congestion as a key issue with increased population.

Parking was a common concern for participating community members. At multiple engagement events, stakeholders worried that more people in Friendship Heights would increase the demand for parking near the Metro.

Business owners also highlighted the need for parking, and specifically how it impacts their customers and employees. They shared that because there is a dearth of public parking in Friendship Heights, several privately owned parking lots are serving as public parking in Friendship Heights. Business owners were concerned that if those parcels are redeveloped, people who come to Friendship Heights to shop will have nowhere to park.

CONNECTIONS TO EXISTING NETWORKS

At the Spring Workshop series, participating community members were asked to identify what types of pedestrian network improvements they would like to see and where. Write-in comments on the dot exercise show that the community prioritizes connecting downtown Friendship Heights to nearby networks. Participants would like to see paths and trails that improve connectivity towards the Capital Crescent Trail (CCT), Rock Creek Park, the Metro and other walking paths. They were also interested in a walking loop trail that connects all of the parks on the East and West sides of Wisconsin Avenue, serving as an extension of the existing trail on Belmont Avenue.

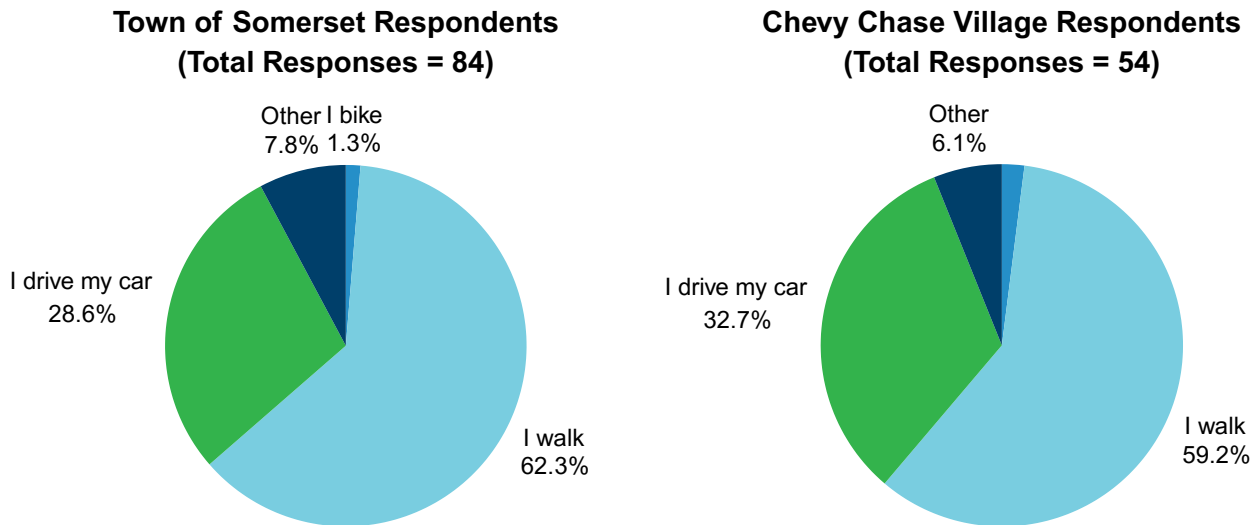
During discussions about the redevelopment of the GEICO property, stakeholders shared suggestions for the way new development should interact with and connect to the Brookdale Neighborhood. People wanted to ensure there are buffers to transition from Brookdale into the future redeveloped GEICO property. However, people also wanted to make sure Brookdale residents have adequate access to downtown Friendship Heights. Some stakeholders recommended creating pedestrian walkways along the edge of the GEICO property to help connect Western Avenue to Willard Avenue and Willard Avenue to Friendship Boulevard. Other comments specifically highlighted the need to connect Brookdale to the Metro; many of these comments came from parents living in the area. Finally, stakeholders recommended finding a way to connect the Brookdale Neighborhood Park to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park as a way to increase connectivity and expand the neighborhood's green spaces.

ACCESSING FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS FROM NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES

Friendship Heights is a regional destination, so it is key to ensure that stakeholders in surrounding neighborhoods can easily and safely reach downtown. In conversation and write-in comments at the Kickoff events and Spring Workshops, stakeholders focused on pedestrian network connections to nearby neighborhoods, most notably connections from Brookdale to downtown Friendship Heights. Some attendees at the in-person Spring Workshops went further and called for connections from Brookdale not only to Friendship Heights, but to Western Avenue and Willard Avenue specifically.

In July and August of 2025, the team invited stakeholders in two abutting neighborhoods (Town of Somerset and Chevy Chase Village) to share more about how they currently interact with the Plan Area and how they access downtown. Of the 84 Town of Somerset stakeholders who shared their feedback, 62% of respondents walk to Friendship Heights, and 29% drive their car. Only 1% reported riding their bike to get to Friendship Heights. For those who walk from Somerset to Friendship Heights, slightly more people use the Marnie Shaul Trail than Wisconsin Avenue. Nearly 10% of respondents use both pedestrian pathways to get to Friendship Heights.

WHEN YOU GO INTO FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS, HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

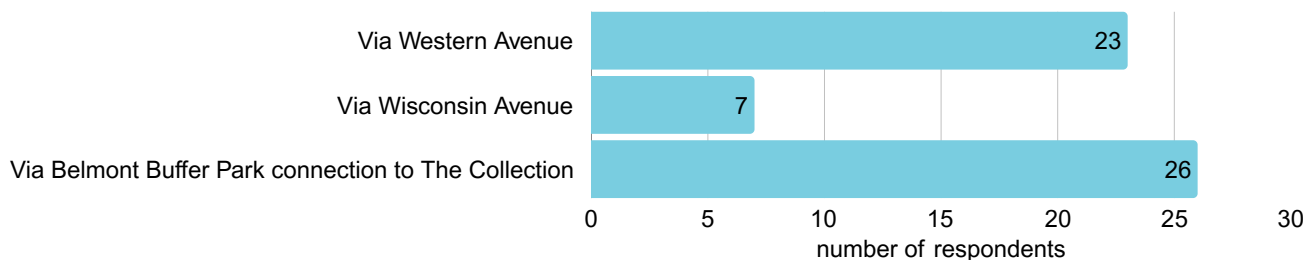


According to the Town of Somerset Questionnaire, the majority of people who visit Friendship Heights walk. According to the Chevy Chase Village questionnaire, the majority of people who visit Friendship Heights walk.

The team asked stakeholders in Chevy Chase Village the same questions through a separate questionnaire. Of the 54 respondents, 59% walk and 33% drive to Friendship Heights. Only 2% bike between Chevy Chase Village and Friendship Heights. For those who walk from Chevy Chase Village to Friendship Heights, a nearly equal number of people use Western Avenue and the Belmont Buffer Park. Only 13% of respondents reported using Wisconsin Avenue to walk between these two neighborhoods. A small number of respondents (13%) also use two or all three of these pathways to access Friendship Heights from Chevy Chase Village.

IF YOU WALK, HOW DO YOU WALK FROM CHEVY CHASE VILLAGE TO FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS?

(Total Responses = 54)



Of those Chevy Chase Village respondents who walk, most use the Belmont Buffer Park, or, to a lesser extent, Western Avenue.

HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

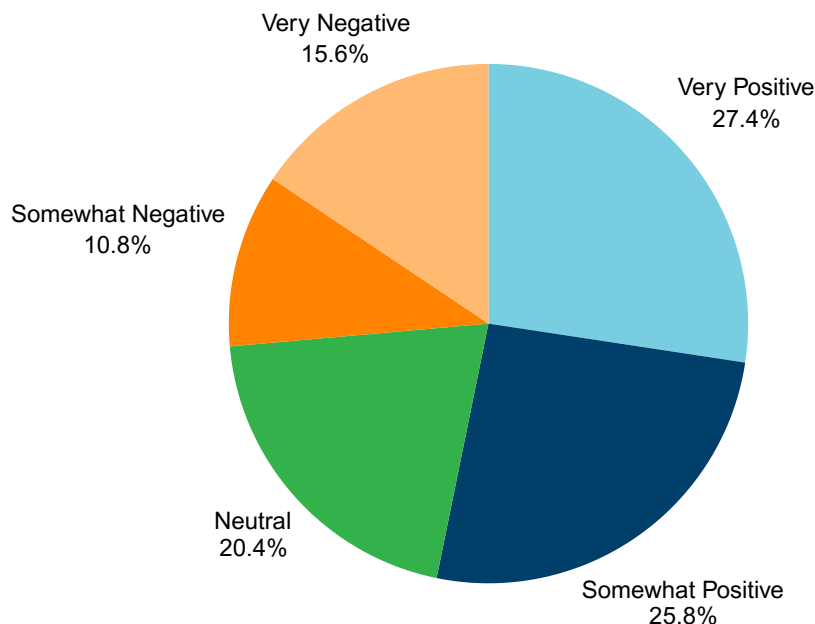
PERCEPTIONS ON INCREASED POPULATION

Housing and development were topics on the top of stakeholders' minds; so, to better understand where people stood on these issues ahead of the Fall Workshop, the questionnaire asked stakeholders how they felt about increased population. Then, at the Fall Workshop, the engagement team invited attendees to weigh in on housing types for each of the three specific sites explored.

According to the questionnaire, most stakeholders felt positive about future growth in Friendship Heights. When asked "How do you feel about more people in Friendship Heights?" 27.4% of respondents felt "very positive" about increased population, followed by 25.8% of respondents who felt "somewhat positive." Those who indicated feeling "very negative" about more people in Friendship Heights were in the minority at 10.8%. Broken down by age group, a majority (56.3%) of young people (18-34) felt "very positive" about increased population. There was no meaningful difference in response between homeowners and renters.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT MORE PEOPLE IN FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS?

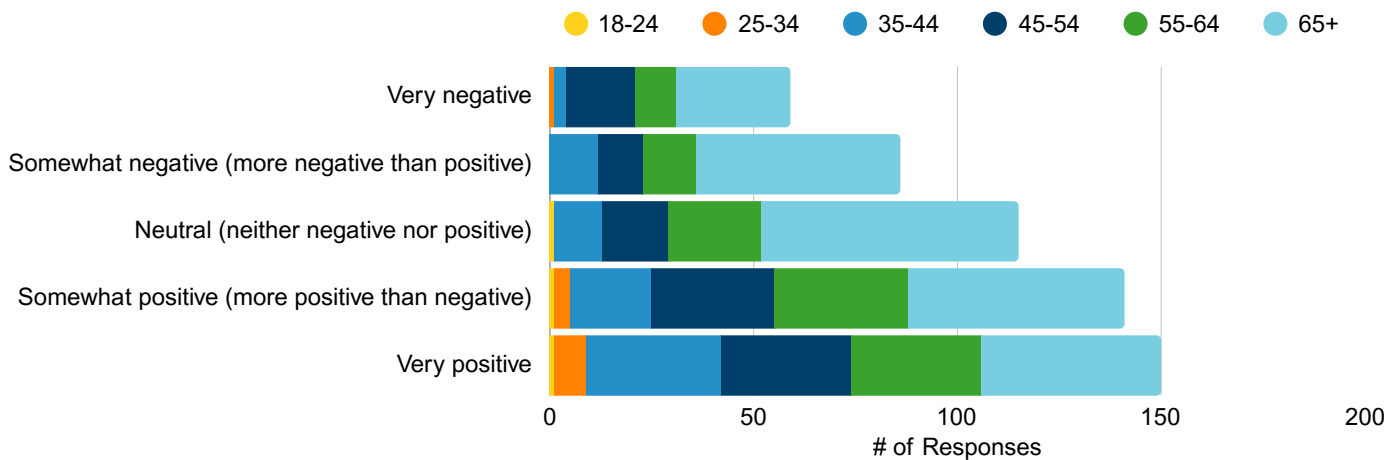
(Total Responses = 564)



Most questionnaire respondents felt positively about more people in Friendship Heights.

SENTIMENT ON INCREASED POPULATION BY AGE

(Total Responses = 551)



Broken down by age group, more younger people felt more positively about additional people coming to Friendship Heights.

When asked what made people feel positively about increased population, many connected increased density to opportunities for more amenities and retail in the neighborhood. For those who felt positively about increased population, 46.8% of responses included the importance of retail, entertainment, and amenities.

Though most respondents felt positively about more people in the neighborhood, there were concerns about the impacts of future development. Traffic, parking and congestion were key concerns in 34.2% of write-in comments on the online questionnaire. For those who felt negatively (both “somewhat negative” and “very negative”) about increased population, this was a key issue: 64.4% of their responses cited traffic and congestion. Second to traffic concerns, infrastructure concerns, including school overcrowding, were referenced in 21% of negative responses. While there are no schools in the Sector Plan Area, Somerset Elementary School and Westbrook Elementary School are proximate to Friendship Heights.

HOUSING NEEDS: DIVERSITY & AFFORDABILITY

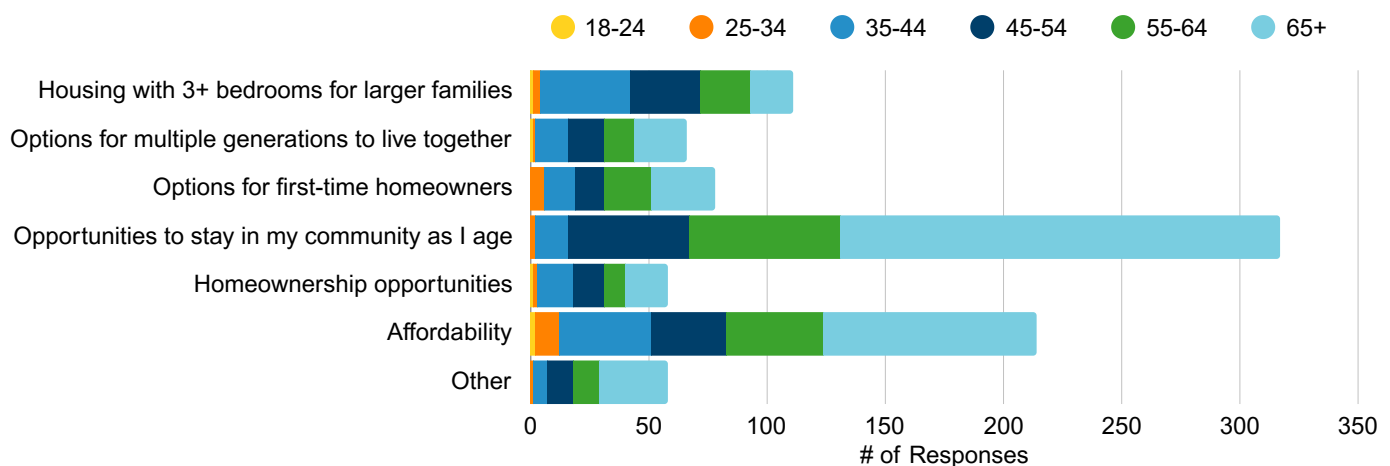
To ensure that the Plan meets the needs of current and future residents, staff asked stakeholders to identify and prioritize their housing needs at several engagement events. In focus groups, facilitators asked renters and parents if their current housing fits their needs and to share their long-term plans. In the online questionnaire, respondents were asked to prioritize their family's housing needs. At the Fall Workshop, attendees discussed what types of housing they envisioned on each opportunity site. Stakeholders at each of these engagements called for diverse and affordable housing to support a range of users, including local consumers and employees, young families, seniors aging in place, and first-time homeowners looking to purchase a home in Friendship Heights.

In response to the question, “When you think about you or your family’s housing needs, what is most important to you? (select top 2)”, questionnaire respondents identified “opportunities to stay in my community as I age” (33.5%) as the top priority, followed by “affordability” (22.7%). Prioritizing aging in place aligns with the fact that most respondents (52.6%) were over 65.

Broken down by age group, priorities shift. Respondents over 65 make up over half of the responses for “opportunities to stay in my community as I age.” The top priority for respondents 18-44 was “affordability” (29.1%), followed by “housing with three or more bedrooms for larger families” (24%). Of adults aged 18-44, only 9.1% of responses selected “opportunities to stay in my community as I age” as a top priority. These results make sense: priorities vary depending on a person’s life stage.

HOUSING NEEDS BY AGE GROUP

(Total Responses = 958)



Housing needs varied by age group; older participants were concerned about aging in place whereas younger people were concerned about housing that accommodates larger families and homeownership opps.

These results, along with anecdotal feedback from small-group discussions at workshops, indicate that housing prices and availability are central concerns for most stakeholders. As one renter who participated in the focus group said, “Affordability will be the main factor in [our] long term plans. I would love to own in the area, but that depends on what is available. I would love to see newer construction.” Business owners shared that the lack of affordable options limits their ability to hire and keep employees.

Even those who own homes in the neighborhood expressed concern that current housing prices don’t meet the needs of young families/young people. In conversation, stakeholders voiced worry about high price points and new units that are either too small or too big for first-time homeowners. Participants at every in-person engagement event requested denser, more affordable housing, but were often unsure and misaligned about what that would look like in practice.

DIVIDED ON DENSITY

While there was general agreement about the need for diverse, affordable housing in the area, stakeholders disagreed about the mix and style of future development, specifically allowable density and building heights. Many advocated for mixed-use development because of its ground-floor retail space.

At the Kickoff events, attendees expressed a desire for more vibrant retail, with some hesitancy about the need for more people to support that additional retail. Some participants feared the loss of “neighborhood character” with the addition of denser developments. In lieu of apartment buildings, those participants advocated for only low-rise development (townhomes).

The debate over density re-emerged at the in-person Spring Workshop; some supported increased density for housing and amenities, while others strongly preferred maintaining a lower-density development, mostly in the form of townhomes.

Taking all feedback into account, stakeholders expressed concerns about the built environment and physical feel, not the people it would attract. They clearly want to attract more diverse people to the area, but many are concerned about the increased building heights that would require. Most stakeholders who share concerns largely wanted to see future development be compatible with its surroundings. They mentioned things like transitioning heights from taller buildings down to single family home neighborhoods, establishing buffer zones and allowing setbacks. Many stakeholders fear over-development with too many high-rise apartments. When pressed, they expressed concerns that additional height would reduce light and air downtown.

To this end, participants at the Fall Workshop were most open to high-rise development around the Metro station, while also calling for a transition to the low-rise housing that surrounds Friendship Heights (though the rate of transition was debated, as outlined in the next section).

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AT OPPORTUNITY SITES

In September 2025, the engagement team convened stakeholders in-person and virtually to discuss their visions for three opportunity sites in the Sector Plan Area: the GEICO property, Saks/The Collection, and 5550 Friendship Boulevard. (Note that opportunity sites in the Plan Area are not limited to these three; rather, staff selected them to prompt focused discussion at the Fall Workshop and through a companion web-based visioning exercise.) These discussions aimed to inform how the Sector Plan guides development on three sites with flexible development potential.

In facilitated small-group conversations, participants shared feedback on future housing, amenities, connectivity, and building heights/density for each site. For stakeholders unable to attend in-person, the same questions were posed online, allowing a broader range of input. Across both engagement formats, most participants agreed that affordable housing and/or senior housing should be prioritized at each opportunity site. While there was general support for including housing on all three properties, the key points of debate were how much housing to build and what form it should take.

Fall Workshop attendees provide feedback on land use, connectivity and amenity preferences at three opportunity sites.



Preserving green space was a recurring theme – particularly at the GEICO site and 5550 Friendship Boulevard – where attendees emphasized that maintaining access to open areas and natural light was a critical community value.

Discussions at the Fall Workshop and data from the online exercise indicated a preference for medium-density housing across all three sites such as townhomes, duplexes, and mid-rise multifamily buildings. Detached single-family homes received moderate interest, while other housing types had minimal support.

Preferences for building height closely mirrored these housing trends:

- Most participants favored lower and mid-rise development (under 100', or up to 10 stories), especially at the GEICO and Saks sites.
- High-rise buildings (100'–200') had limited support, mainly for 5550 Friendship Boulevard and parts of the Saks site.
- Buildings taller than 200' were the least preferred overall.
- Participants consistently emphasized that new development should fit within the neighborhood's existing scale and character, avoiding a sense of overdevelopment.

From the web-based visioning exercise specifically:

- Respondents most preferred single-family attached housing for the GEICO property, and mid-rise multifamily for both Saks/The Collection and 5550 Friendship Boulevard.
- When asked about height, they largely preferred low-rise development at GEICO, mid- to low-rise at Saks, and mid-rise at 5550 Friendship Boulevard.



GEICO Property



Saks/The Collection



5550 Friendship Boulevard

SITE-BY-SITE FINDINGS

GEICO Property: The GEICO property redevelopment frequently surfaced across engagement activities, particularly during the Kickoff events. The site was viewed as a major opportunity for mixed-use development and community-serving amenities, but many participants feared it could be overdeveloped with high-rise apartments.

At the Fall Workshop, participants strongly advocated for preserving existing green and open space on the site. Many expressed a willingness to allow higher building heights along Friendship Boulevard if doing so helped retain green space and limit massing along Willard Avenue. Attendees preferred townhomes or low-rise buildings along Willard to maintain compatibility with adjacent residential areas.

Most concerns centered on the impacts of increased density, including parking challenges, traffic, and reduced access to light and air downtown. Online respondents reinforced these themes, showing the strongest support for townhomes at the GEICO site.

Saks/The Collection: Most Fall Workshop participants preferred low-rise development (no more than four stories) on the Saks site. Many expressed concern that additional high-rise buildings would be incompatible with the surrounding neighborhood and could change the character of downtown Friendship Heights. These comments underscored a strong desire for context-sensitive design that preserves the area's walkability and visual coherence. Online respondents leaned toward both attached single-family and mid-rise multifamily housing, reflecting openness to modest density if carefully scaled and designed. Conversely other stakeholders were supportive of higher density near the Metro to create more housing near transit and to cluster taller buildings downtown (i.e., transit-oriented development).

5550 Friendship Boulevard: Participants were somewhat more supportive of higher-rise development at this site compared to the others, noting that its context – surrounded by denser, taller buildings – made it more suitable for additional height. However, stakeholders emphasized that preserving open space and maintaining light and air flow were essential conditions for support. Many referenced the adjacent senior living community, whose residents frequently use the existing open space across the street.

Participants largely agreed that added density could be acceptable if redevelopment preserved or replaced open space. Online and in-person feedback reflected this balance, with preferences split between mid-rise and high-rise multifamily housing for this site.



Fall Workshop attendees provide feedback on land use, connectivity and amenity preferences at three opportunity sites.

COMMUNITY AMENITIES

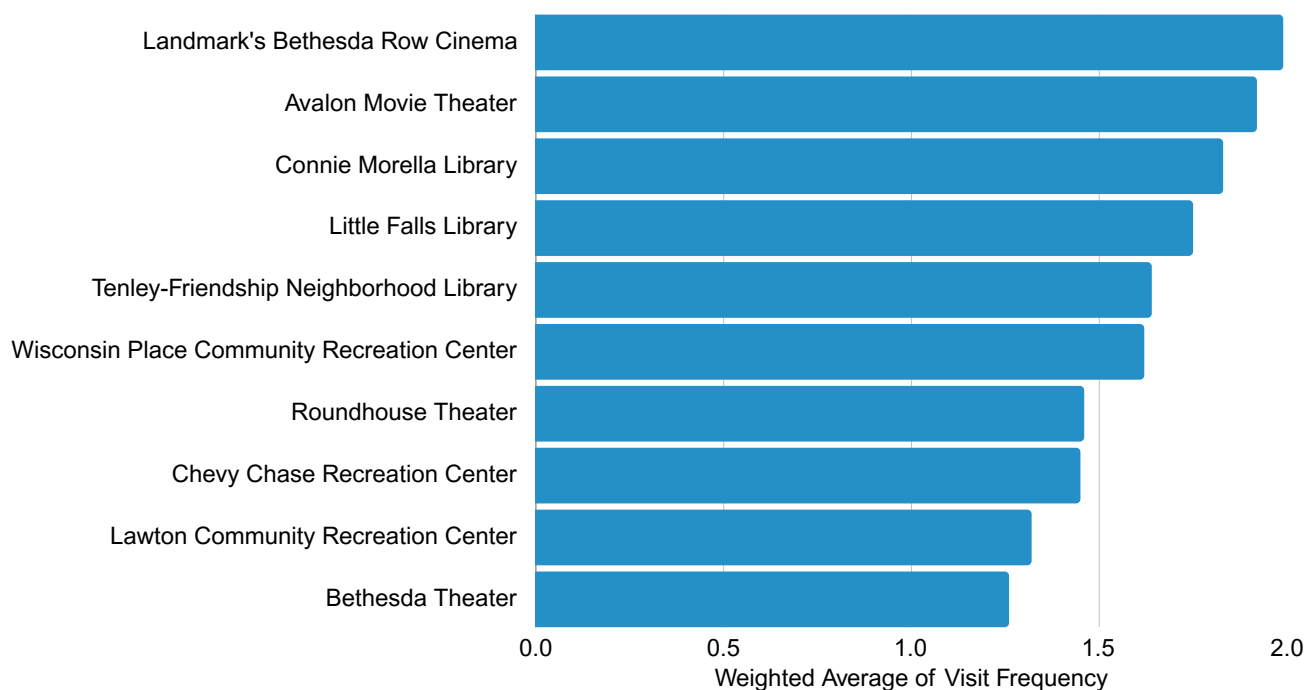
AMENITY USAGE

The Sector Plan has the ability to make recommendations for future community amenities in Friendship Heights. Part of this engagement effort was ensuring that the Plan recommends an amenity or amenities that fit with the community's vision for the future. The team collected data about amenity preferences at the Spring Workshops, focus groups, online questionnaire, and Fall Workshops. Across engagements, stakeholders shared a similar short list of community amenities.

In the online questionnaire, respondents were asked to share how often they visit a list of amenities in the area. This question aimed to identify how stakeholders use (or don't use) the amenities that currently exist in order to make an informed recommendation about any future amenities. Respondents selected between the following visit frequency options, which the team then assigned numbers to calculate weighted averages showing how often stakeholders visit each amenity: never been (1), visit a few times a year (2), visit once a month (3), visit once a week (4). Based on this analysis, amenities where people reported visiting most frequently have higher averages than those visited less often.

WEIGHTED AVERAGE OF VISIT FREQUENCY TO AMENITIES

(Total Respondents = 564)



Landmark's Bethesda Row Cinema was the most visited amenity, followed by the Avalon Theater.

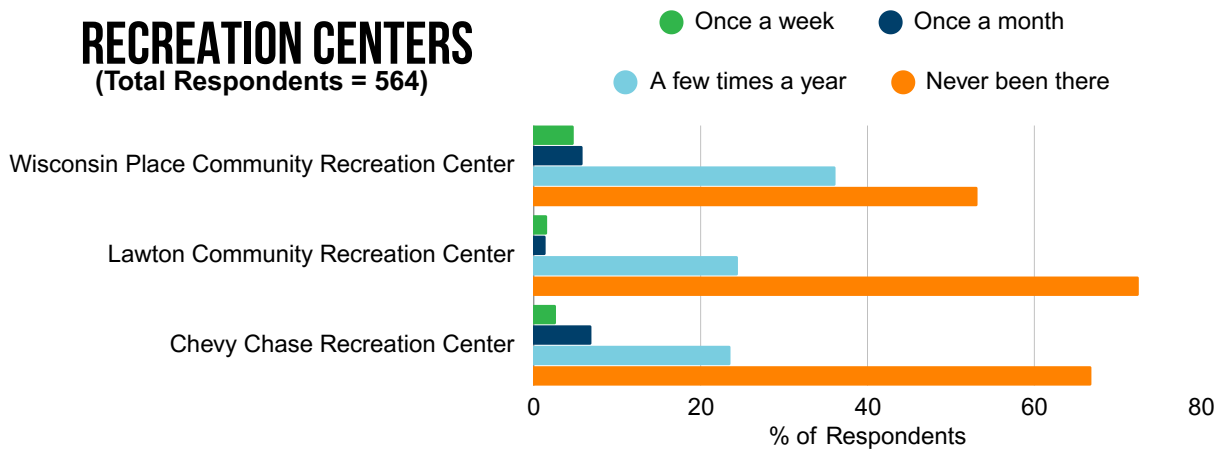
The Landmark's Bethesda Row Cinema was the most visited amenity, followed by the Avalon Theater. Only 16% of respondents indicated they have never been to Landmark's Bethesda Row Cinema; 84% reported going at least a few times a year. 27% of the respondents indicated that they have never been to the Avalon Theater.

Conversely, The Lawton Community Center and Bethesda Theater were the least visited amenities; 72.5% and 76.1% of respondents, respectively, indicated they have never attended.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT, IF AT ALL?

RECREATION CENTERS

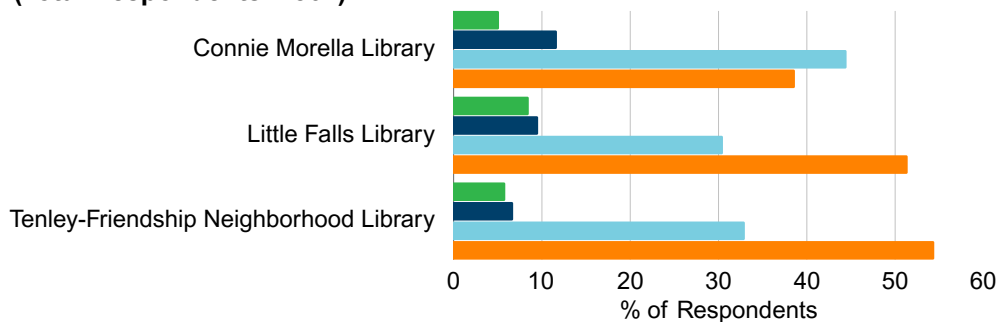
(Total Respondents = 564)



Wisconsin Place Community Recreation Center was the most visited recreation center of the three listed.

LIBRARIES

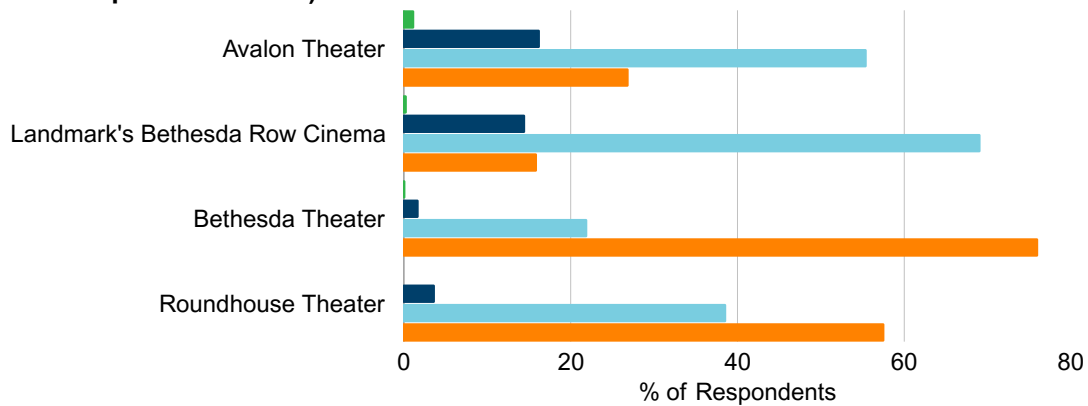
(Total Respondents = 564)



Connie Morella Library in Bethesda (MCPL) was the most visited library of the three listed.

THEATERS

(Total Respondents = 564)



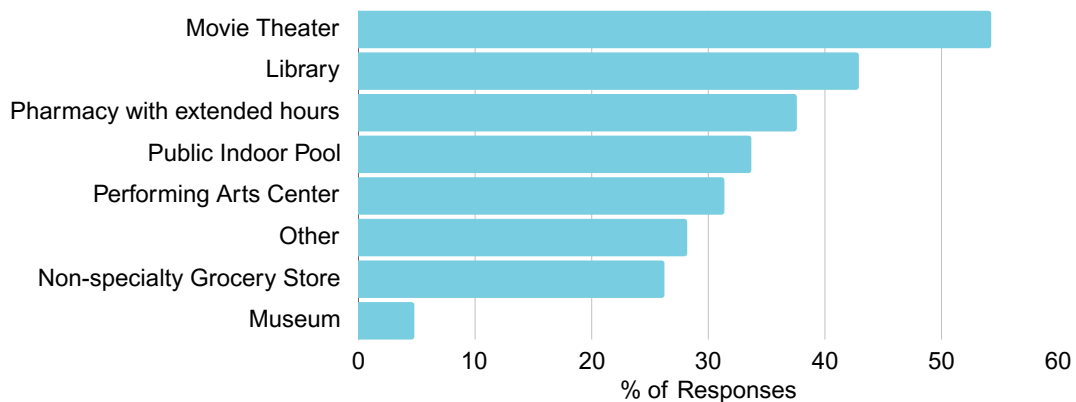
Landmark's Bethesda Row Cinema was the most visited theater of the four listed.

AMENITY REQUESTS

The online questionnaire asked respondents to choose their top three amenities from a list of the most popular suggestions gathered during engagement thus far. As the question clarified for respondents, the list did not include parks because they were already established as a Plan priority.

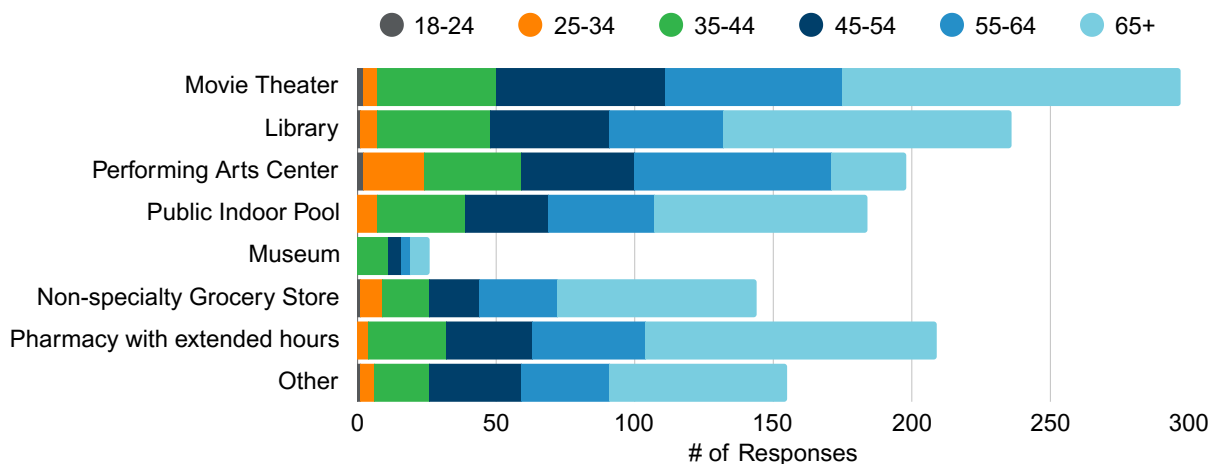
Overall, a movie theater was the most requested amenity, followed by a library and a pharmacy with extended hours. The breakdown of responses is consistent across housing tenure and age.

MOST REQUESTED COMMUNITY AMENITIES (Total Responses = 1,302)



A movie theater was the most requested amenity with over 50% of the responses, followed by a library and pharmacy with extended hours.

TOP AMENITIES BY AGE GROUP (Total Respondents = 564)



The top amenities requested are consistent when broken down by age groups. Most respondents were seniors, who were most interested in a grocery store and pharmacy with extended hours.

The questionnaire results echo the feedback heard at the workshops and focus groups about major community-serving amenities:

- Parents in the focus group underscored that future amenities should serve families. A movie theater or museum offers young people and young families an opportunity to socialize together.
- At the Kickoff events, participants asked for more places to socialize, especially in evenings – calling out specifically a performing arts center or movie theater.
- At the Kickoff events and Spring Workshops, seniors stressed that they value medical service access in Friendship Heights and would benefit from a pharmacy with extended hours (like CVS or Walgreens). According to questionnaire results, pharmacy access was not as high a priority for those under 65.
- Renters in the focus group asked for community-centered retail like affordable dining options, a variety of grocery stores, and a public convening place like a library or community center.

REALIZING COMMUNITY AMENITIES AT OPPORTUNITY SITES

At the Fall Workshop, Planning staff presented the Sector Plan process, how amenities are realized, and precedent projects in the County. This presentation aimed to ground participants in the reality of how large community amenities recommended by Sector Plans are built – often with County-owned land (not a possibility in this Plan Area due to the lack of County-owned land), or through private development, which sometimes includes incentives for developers (example: additional building height).

With the understanding that any community amenity developed at any site in Friendship Heights would likely be realized through private development, staff facilitated a discussion of three opportunity sites in the Plan Area with flexible development potential. The following amenity requests emerged from the discussions:

- Active recreation opportunities at the GEICO site (ballpark, pool, park).
- Large community amenity at GEICO or Saks/The Collection site. The Saks site was, in particular, identified for its ability to house a larger amenity like a theater, grocery, or community center.
- More gathering places to build community (e.g., meeting spots, coffee shops, open spaces). Participants believed Saks/The Collection was well-suited to house such spaces. This feedback was echoed in the business owner and renter focus groups; participants requested spaces to socialize, especially in the evening, in downtown Friendship Heights.

PARK USAGE & REQUESTS

At the in-person Spring Workshop, attendees prioritized the amenities they would like to see in Friendship Heights from first choice to fourth choice. Gardens, a dog park, and food truck areas were the highest ranked amenities in the prioritization exercise. Additionally, 18% of all write-in comments were requests for preserving green space. A participant later commented that these requests show how stakeholders want more spaces for activities and engagement in their neighborhoods.

Rank	In-Person Spring Workshop	Virtual Spring Workshop
1	Gardens	Shaded Gathering Spaces
2	Dog Parks	Gardens
3	Food Truck Areas	Community Lawn
4	Public Art	Stage
5	Benches	Dog Parks
6	Shaded Gathering Spaces	Benches
7	Community Lawn	Nature Play
8	Picnic Areas	Public Art
9	Nature Play	Swings
10	Pickleball Courts	Food Trucks



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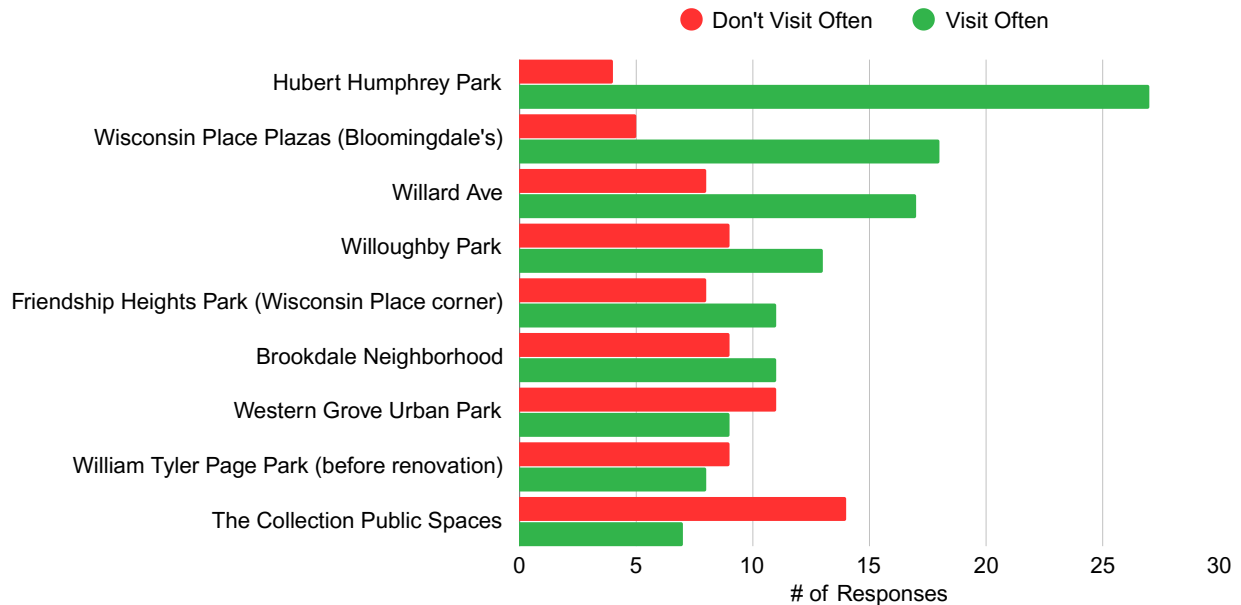
To a lesser extent, a dog park was discussed at most in-person events. Some participants had strong feelings about the subject, but there was no clear consensus about whether this was a welcome or unwelcome addition to the neighborhood.

At the in-person Spring Workshop, attendees were asked to share how often they visit nearby parks (a red dot indicated they did not visit often; a green dot indicated they visited often). By far, Hubert Humphrey Park was the most visited (see chart below), followed by Wisconsin Place and Willard Avenue.



Attendees at the in-person Spring Workshop participate in the park dot exercise.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS? (Total Responses = 482)



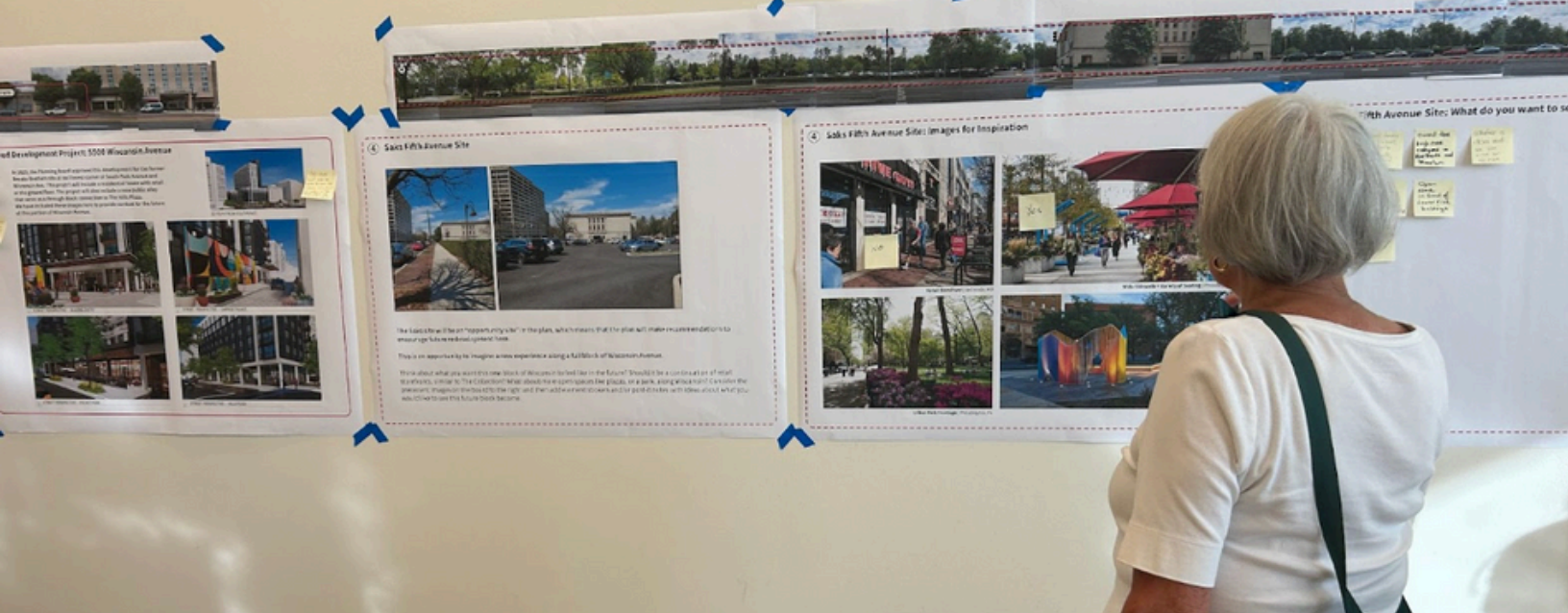
According to feedback at the Spring Workshop, Hubert Humphrey Park is by far the most visited.

PARKS AND PLAZAS ALONG WISCONSIN AVENUE

In June 2025, the engagement team hosted an in-person and virtual Spring Workshop to collect feedback on future amenities, open space, and parks. As part of this conversation, attendees were asked to provide written feedback on the existing parks and plazas along Wisconsin Avenue: Hubert Humphrey Park, William Tyler Page Park, Willoughby Park, Friendship Heights Park (Wisconsin Place corner), Western Grove Urban Park, The Collection public spaces, Wisconsin Place Plazas (Bloomingdale's), Willard Avenue, and Brookdale Neighborhood.

Participants expressed a shared desire for greener, more comfortable, and better-connected public spaces along Wisconsin Avenue. Many saw these parks and plazas as key opportunities to make Friendship Heights feel more livable and community-oriented, rather than merely a corridor for shopping and transit. Common themes across sites included the need for shade and trees, comfortable seating, and green buffers to soften the urban environment. Participants also called for safer pedestrian crossings, more accessible gathering areas, and occasional programming such as pop-ups, performances, or local cafés to bring new energy to underused plazas. Overall, the feedback reflects a vision for Wisconsin Avenue as a more welcoming, human-scale corridor anchored by a series of inviting public spaces that encourage people to pause, gather, and connect.

- **Bloomingdale's Plaza:** In-person and online participants consistently described Bloomingdale's Plaza as underutilized and uninviting, noting that it lacks amenities or features that draw people in. Some emphasized the need for public art, shade structures, and comfortable seating to improve the space's visual appeal and usability. Traffic noise was mentioned as a barrier, suggesting that plantings or sound buffers could help make the plaza more comfortable.
- **5454 Wisconsin Avenue Plaza:** Feedback focused on enhancing comfort and visual appeal. Participants called for more shade trees, landscaping, and benches, as well as pedestrian-friendly design elements to make the plaza more inviting. Several envisioned it as a potential community gathering space, noting that greenery and small-scale programming could transform it into an active public node along the corridor.
- **Plaza at The Collection:** Participants viewed this plaza as having strong potential but criticized it as feeling too commercial and hard-edged. Respondents suggested adding green space, public seating, and soft landscaping to create a more approachable environment. A few mentioned that outdoor dining or pop-up markets could help enliven the space, while others expressed concern about tall surrounding buildings limiting sunlight and comfort at the pedestrian level.



Attendee at the Spring Workshop offers feedback on precedent communities and public spaces along Wisconsin Avenue.

- **Saks Fifth Avenue Site:** While feedback here was limited, participants expressed concerns about additional high-rise development further restricting light and air. Many urged that any future redevelopment incorporate green buffers, trees, and human-scaled plazas to maintain openness and visual relief along Wisconsin Avenue.
- **Benches near Metro:** This location generated the most comments, underscoring its visibility and importance. Participants called for comfortable, shaded seating, improved pedestrian safety, and clearer pathways connecting to nearby shops and parks. Several described it as a “missed opportunity” for a welcoming public space at a key transit node, recommending more trees, plantings, and lighting to enhance comfort and safety.
- **Western Grove Urban Park:** Western Grove was frequently cited as a positive example of what participants would like to see replicated elsewhere: a lush, shaded park that feels natural and serene. In-person workshop attendees described it as a “real park experience” and praised its greenery, quiet character, and balance between activity and calm, suggesting that similar design principles should guide other public spaces along Wisconsin Avenue.
- **Friendship Heights Park (Wisconsin Place Corner):** Participants viewed this park as a prime opportunity for reinvestment and a potential connector between retail and residential areas. They called for more trees, benches, and shade structures, along with improved safety and access. Respondents emphasized the potential for this corner to become a central community space if redesigned for comfort and activity.
- **William Tyler Page, Hubert Humphrey, and Willoughby Parks:** Feedback on these smaller parks focused on maintenance, greenery, and connectivity. Participants sought cleaner, better lit, and more accessible parks, with consistent landscaping and opportunities for rest. While less prominent than Wisconsin Avenue’s plazas, these spaces were recognized as important parts of the neighborhood’s green network, providing relief and continuity between larger activity nodes.

PARKS AT OPPORTUNITY SITES

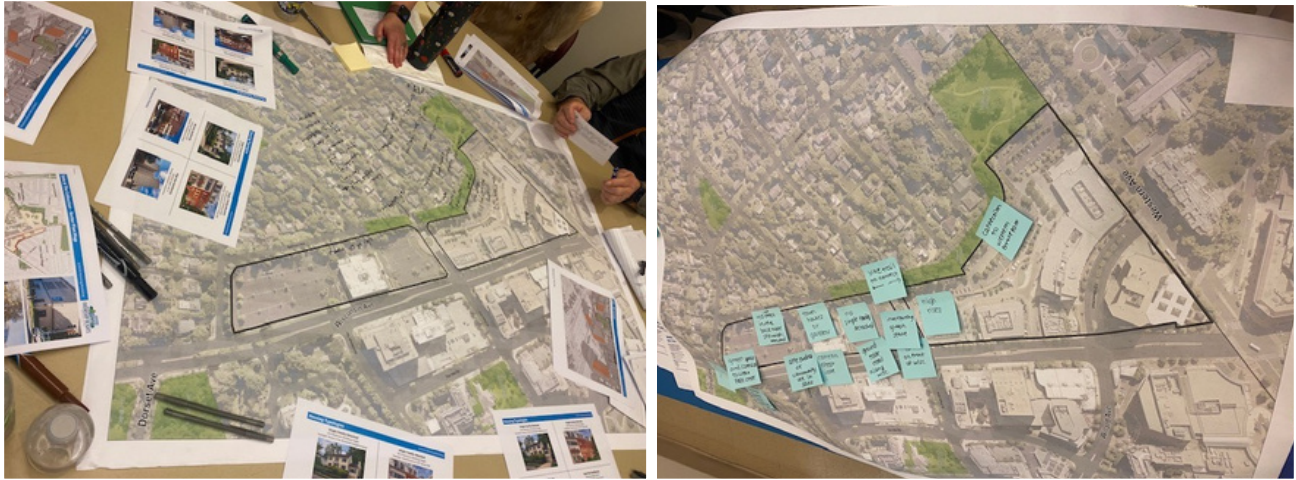
The Fall Workshop and web-based visioning exercise underscored the already overwhelming call for green, open space on all three opportunity sites. While participants agreed that preserving and/or creating parks and open space was a priority for the Sector Plan, the type of open space desired varied by location. Across comments from both in-person and online engagement, participating community members emphasized that open space contributes to Friendship Heights' identity, livability, and character. Many saw green areas as essential public amenities and as opportunities to enhance pedestrian connections, tree canopy, and neighborhood gathering spaces.

GEICO Property: Participants strongly requested that the current green spaces be maintained and enhanced with new areas for active recreation, such as a ballfield, pool, or playground. They expressed an understanding that concentrating density in select areas of the site could help preserve larger open spaces elsewhere, though there were concerns about parking and traffic associated with any new community amenity.

Many participants suggested creating a “village green” or central park space as part of any future development, emphasizing that it should remain publicly accessible. Comments also highlighted opportunities to connect the site to nearby parks and natural corridors – specifically linking Brookdale Neighborhood Park with Willard Avenue Park to form a stronger, continuous green network. Write-in feedback reinforced these ideas, often framing the GEICO site as a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity to create a true public park.



Fall Workshop attendees provide feedback on land use, connectivity and amenity preferences at three opportunity sites.



Participants' comments on a map of Saks/The Collection during the Fall Workshop discussion.

Saks/The Collection: Attendees requested a village green or plaza that provides meaningful outdoor gathering space and a high-quality landscape to balance surrounding commercial and residential uses. Many noted that Friendship Heights lacks accessible, attractive outdoor space for daily use, and saw this site as a chance to establish a well-designed “heart” for the neighborhood. Participants wanted a mix of seating, shade, and landscaping rather than expansive paving or ornamental design.

5550 Friendship Boulevard: Participants were particularly concerned about the impact of future high-rise development on the block’s light, air flow, and sense of openness. Notably, on this site, stakeholders were most concerned about maintaining existing green space, not asking for new green space. They called for open space to break up building mass and provide outdoor gathering areas for the adjacent senior living community, whose residents frequently use the existing open lawn. Many participants supported added density on this site only if it includes accessible, high-quality open space. Comments also pointed to opportunities for small gardens, shaded seating, or pocket parks that would maintain visual relief and greenery amid a denser context.

ENVIRONMENT

Across engagement, stakeholders expressed concerns about the environmental impacts of future development and emphasized the need to preserve and enhance the area's natural character. Participants at both the Spring and Fall Workshops consistently called for the preservation of existing street trees and the addition of new ones along key pedestrian corridors. "Walkable" and "green" were among the most frequently used words in the visioning exercise and shaded gathering spaces ranked among the highest priorities for future parks and open space. Attendees highlighted the need for shade structures and tree cover along Wisconsin Avenue, particularly near Bloomingdales' Plaza and 5454 Wisconsin Avenue, to make walking more comfortable during hotter months.

Participants also voiced concerns that additional high-rise development at sites like Saks/The Collection or 5550 Friendship Boulevard could further limit light and air at the street level. At the GEICO property, however, participants saw unique opportunities to strengthen the area's connection to nature. Roughly 30 web-based visioning respondents mentioned the importance of preserving mature trees along Willard Avenue, envisioning a continuous green corridor that buffers new development and provides shade and visual relief. Several also referenced the stream running along the GEICO property and Cortland Road, urging that it be recognized and protected as a natural feature and potentially integrated into a trail or greenway network connecting Brookdale Neighborhood Park and Willard Avenue Park.

In addition, more than 50 web-based visioning respondents commented on the pedestrian bridge and path between GEICO and Brookdale, describing it as a heavily used and valued link to Metro, bus routes, and neighborhood amenities. They encouraged planners to retain and improve this connection for pedestrians and cyclists while keeping it closed to vehicle traffic. Together, these comments underscore a strong community desire to preserve trees, enhance natural features, and maintain green, walkable connections as central elements of Friendship Heights' future identity.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders are invested in seeing Friendship Heights come back to life as a regional retail destination with new local, neighborhood retail. The neighborhood's different economic sectors, like medical/doctor's offices, continue to bring people to Friendship Heights. However, the neighborhood's many unoccupied storefronts have community members concerned about the future of local business in Friendship Heights.

Participating stakeholders also seemed to accept that additional population would be needed to sustain future retail/amenities. As referenced in the *Housing & Development* section of this report, for those questionnaire respondents who felt positive about increased population, nearly half (46.8%) of responses included the importance of retail, entertainment, and amenities that come with increased population.

Business owners who participated in the focus group expressed frustration at the regulatory environment and permitting barriers they've encountered operating in Montgomery County, and acknowledged Northern Virginia's business-friendly policies are enticing. Despite this, all business owners expressed a desire to stay in Friendship Heights either for personal connections to the area or to maintain their established customer bases.

Business owners also highlighted the need to increase connectivity and walkability in the area to encourage more foot traffic and pedestrian-oriented shopping. Business owners pointed out that connectivity improves the economic climate by allowing people to chain trips together rather than drive to one location and then get back in their cars to visit a second location.

Many stakeholders bemoaned the absence of third places to gather in the neighborhood like once-existent coffee shops, bookstores, and fast casual dining options. When attendees at the Kickoff events were asked to identify precedent communities for any future development, Bethesda, MD, was the most cited precedent, but was often mentioned as both an example for its appealing retail options and restaurants and as a non-example for its chain retail and high density. Other model communities included Rockville, MD, and Cleveland Park, D.C. for their activated commercial corridors and neighborhood feels. At most engagements, community members shared similar preferences for small, local retailers.

REFLECTIONS ON ENGAGEMENT

The Montgomery Planning team will use this stakeholder feedback, along with market and existing conditions analyses, to draft preliminary recommendations that will be shared with the community and the Planning Board.

For those looking to stay engaged in the planning process, we recommend signing up for the e- letter to receive project updates and visiting the FHSP webpage which is updated regularly to reflect the current status of the project.

As outlined in the Engagement Reach section of this report, the engagement team made concerted and creative efforts to connect with a range of Friendship Heights stakeholders. When participant demographics are compared to Study Area demographics, there are a few groups under-represented: young people/young families, renters, and non-White residents. In-person events reflected these gaps as most participants were White homeowners over 65. While in-person workshops were helpful in soliciting qualitative feedback from stakeholders, the questionnaire reached the broadest number of people and provided more quantifiable metrics. Along those lines, a few tools proved especially useful in reaching key demographics:

- **Online Questionnaire:** The online questionnaire reached the greatest number of respondents by far. It also reached a younger, non-White audience compared with in-person engagements. The popularity of the questionnaire suggests that quick, online feedback opportunities are best suited for reaching the largest number of people and should be leveraged at key engagement touchpoints.
- **Focus Groups & Targeted Engagement:** Knowing that attendees at in-person events tended to be older, White, and predominantly homeowners, the team used focus groups to reach key stakeholder groups and solicit in-depth qualitative feedback. While recruitment was somewhat difficult, the informal discussion allowed meaningful, high-quality feedback from stakeholder groups who would otherwise have been underrepresented in this engagement effort. When recruiting for focus groups, Planning staff did targeted engagement that resulted in many people subscribing to the e-letter, even if they did not attend a group. This helped widen the reach in advance of the launch of the questionnaire.

- **Small Group Discussion:** Exit surveys and anecdotal evidence show high satisfaction with the small-group discussion of opportunity sites at the Fall Workshop.

Continued use of both quick-response tools and facilitated small-group discussions will help ensure that diverse voices inform future projects.

As a cross-jurisdictional neighborhood and one of the County's four downtowns, it was important to reach those who live, work, shop, and play in the Plan Area. However, it proved more difficult to engage some neighboring towns/neighborhoods in the Sector Plan update. Planning staff issued a questionnaire specifically to the Town of Somerset and Chevy Chase Village in an effort to increase engagement in those communities. The majority (64%) of respondents in the Town of Somerset reported not knowing about the Sector Plan but were interested in participating in the planning process (half requested to sign up for the project e-newsletter). More Chevy Chase Village respondents were aware of the Plan (72%), but despite knowing about the Sector Plan, a third of respondents reported not participating thus far because they were "not that interested in the process." The County should investigate ways to better engage indirect stakeholders in the planning process(es) going forward.



Montgomery Planning staff present information about the Plan at the in-person Kickoff event.