



Montgomery Planning

West County Planning

November 2025

# Friendship Heights Sector Plan Update

## Engagement Summary: What We've Heard



# Agenda

- Engagement overview
- Who we've heard from
- What we've heard
- Next steps





# ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

# Sector Plan Engagement

- 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



# Engagement Metrics

3 in-person workshops

2 virtual workshops

1 web-based interactive activity

1 webinar

5 focus groups

3 questionnaires

30+ meetings with community groups

2500+ postcards mailed

**750+ e-letter subscribers**

**Over 1,200 stakeholder touchpoints**

# Pre-Scope Engagement: Fall 2024

**Introduced the Sector Plan process and starting listening to the community**

- November 2024 – January 2025
- Two workshops: in-person and virtual
- Meetings with community groups
- Tabling and flyers



# Engagement: Spring 2025



# Visioning: June – October 2025

**Worked with the community to develop a vision for the future of Friendship Heights**

- Workshops
- Focus Groups
- Questionnaires
- Web-based visioning activity



# Visioning: June – October 2025

## Expanded the stakeholder base of the Plan through outreach

- Postcards
- E-letter (added 300 subscribers)
- Announcements in community newsletters/listservs



**WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS?**

The Friendship Heights Sector Plan will create a vision for the next 20 years of Friendship Heights. Montgomery Planning needs your input to develop the plan! Join us for an interactive workshop focusing on how the sector plan will shape future development. The workshop will include discussion groups about opportunities for future growth in Friendship Heights.

  
September 30, 2025  
6:30 – 8:30 pm  
Wisconsin Place Recreation Center  
5311 Friendship Boulevard  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

  
Scan the QR code to learn more about the plan, RSVP for the workshop and sign-up for our e-letter.

  
**FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS**  
SECTOR PLAN

# Visioning: June – October 2025

## Spring Workshops

- What do you want Friendship Heights to be like in 20 years?
- Prioritizing park amenities and understanding access
- Pedestrian network needs
- Focus on Wisconsin Avenue



# Visioning: June – October 2025

## **Focus Groups**

- Renters
- Parents of children 0-18
- Business Owners

## **Questionnaires**

- Chevy Chase Village
- Town of Somerset
- Community-wide on amenities and housing

# Visioning: June – October 2025

## Fall Workshop/Web-based Activity

- Focus on Sector Plan implementation – development and amenities
- Discussion groups around housing and amenities at three major sites:
  - GEICO
  - Saks/The Collection
  - 5550 Friendship Boulevard



# We've been talking to.....

## Sept 2024 – November 2025

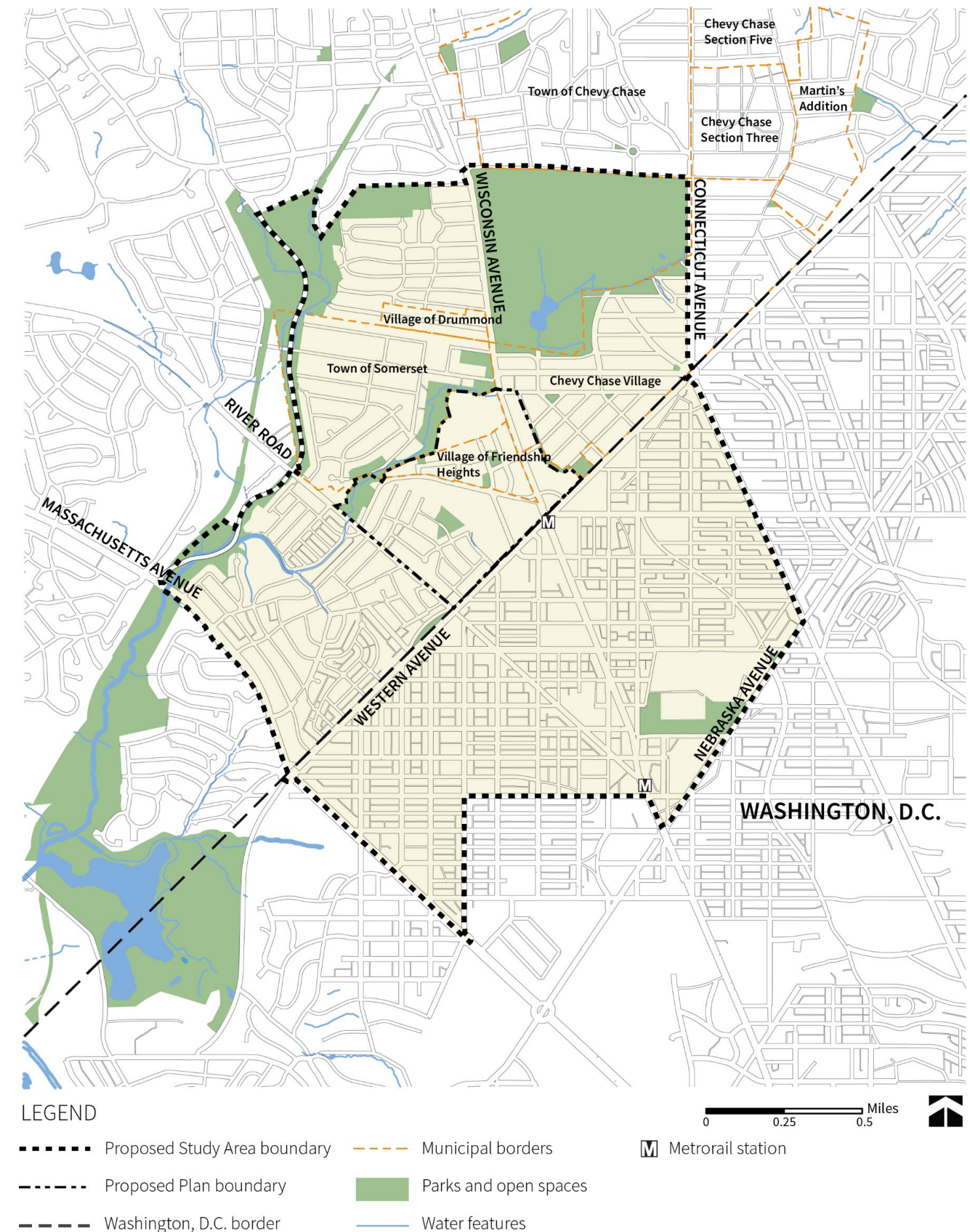
- Village of Friendship Heights
- Chevy Chase Village
- Town of Somerset
- Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
- West Friendship Association
- Brookdale neighborhood
- Friendship Heights Transportation Management District
- Western Montgomery Citizens Advisory Board
- Friendship Heights Urban District Advisory Committee
- Friendship Heights Alliance + Youth Advisory Council
- Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce
- Friendship Heights Neighbors Network
- Little Falls Watershed Alliance
- Various property owners
- Somerset House (condos)
- 4620 North Park Avenue
- NAIOP
- ANC 3E (DC)
- DC Office of Planning



# WHO WE'VE HEARD FROM

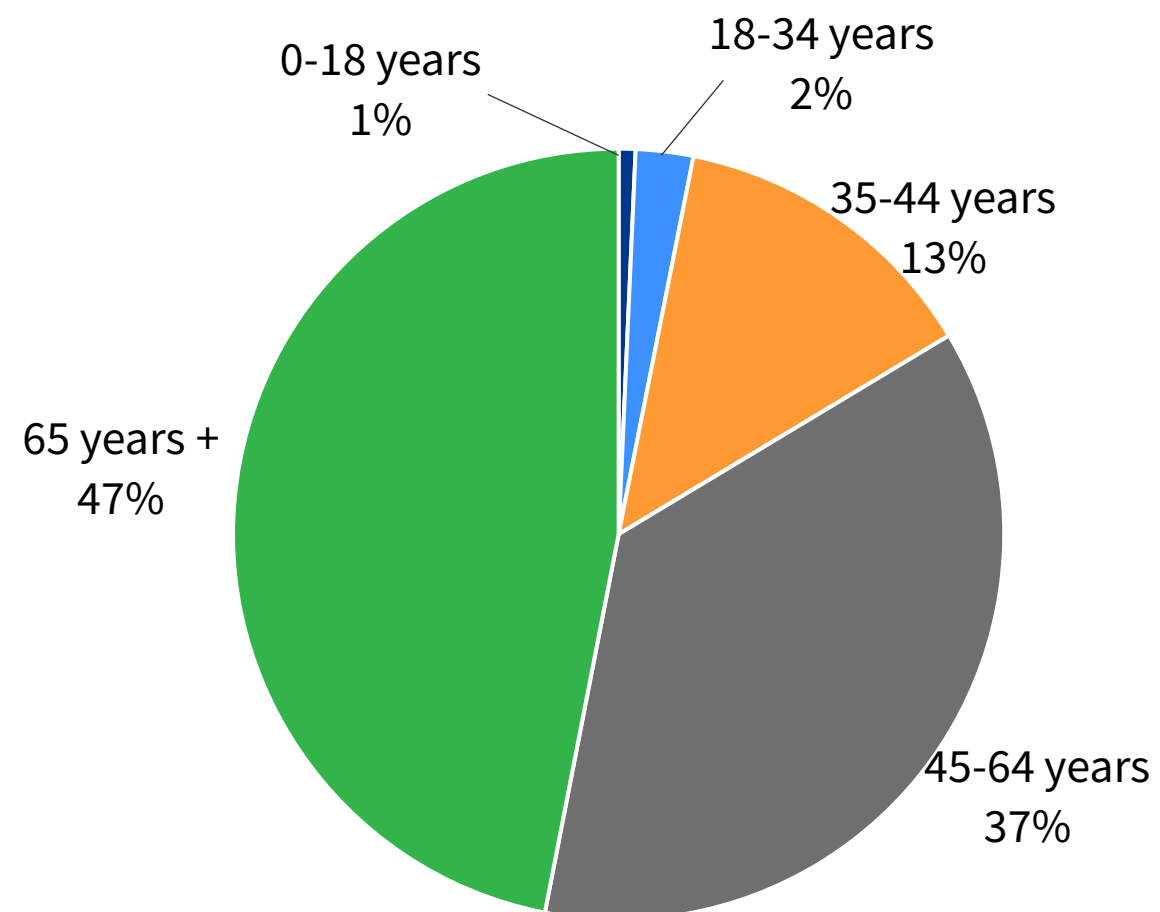
# Engagement Demographics

- Most participants who were residents live in the Study Area
- 95% of questionnaire respondents live in Study Area

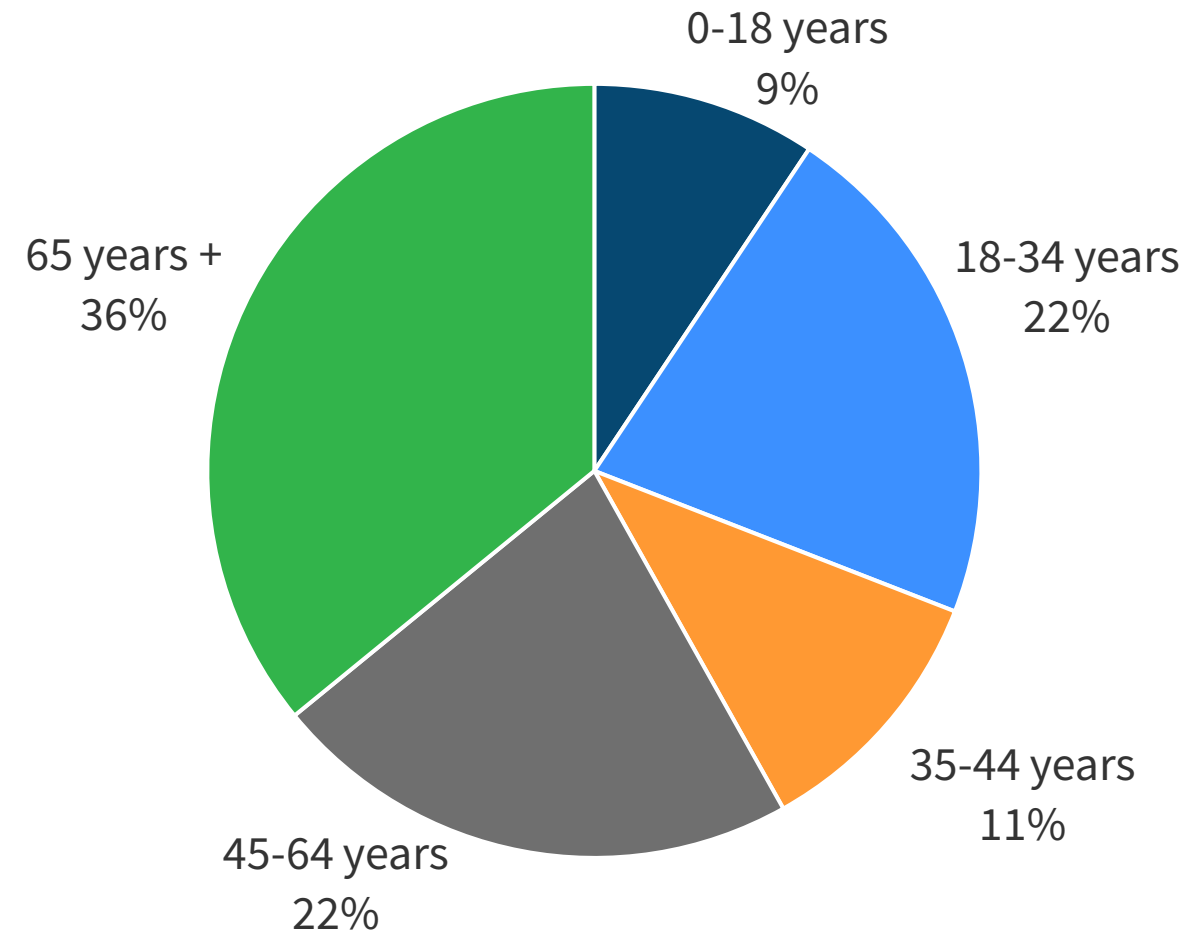


# Demographics: Age

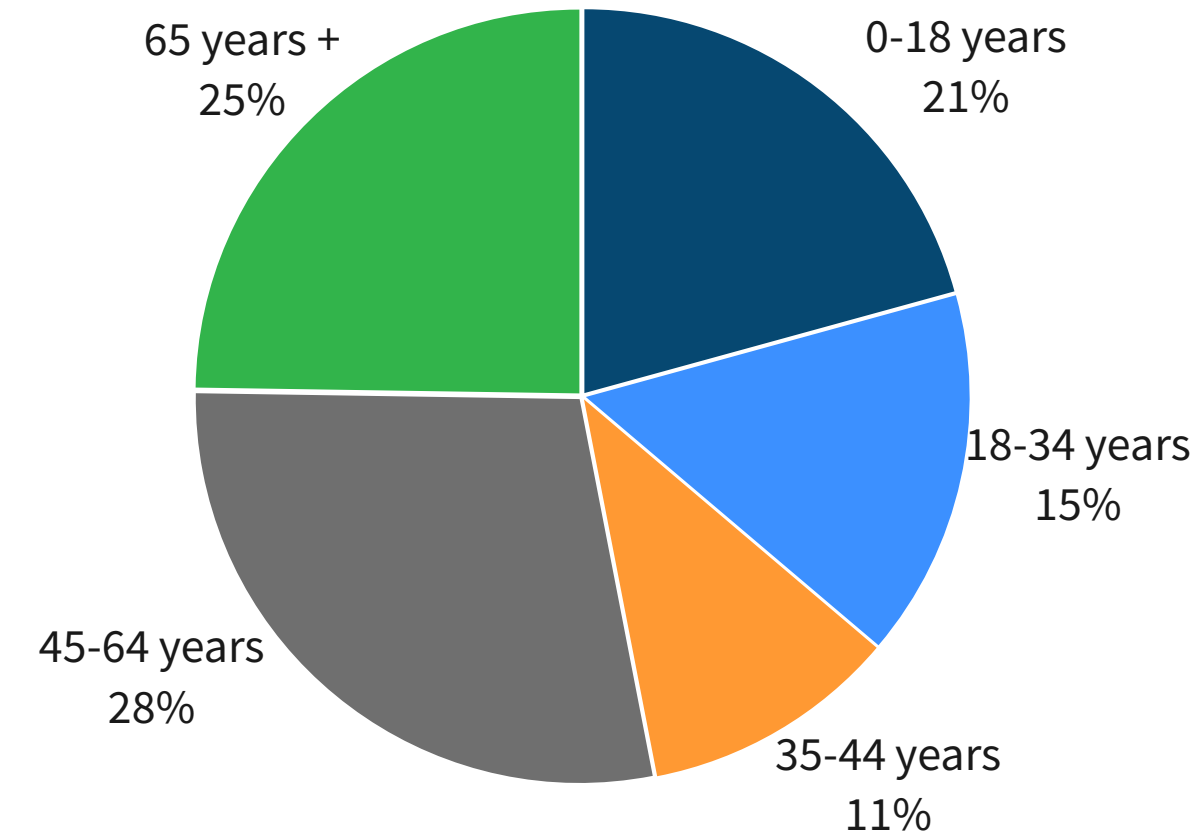
## Plan Engagement



## Plan Area



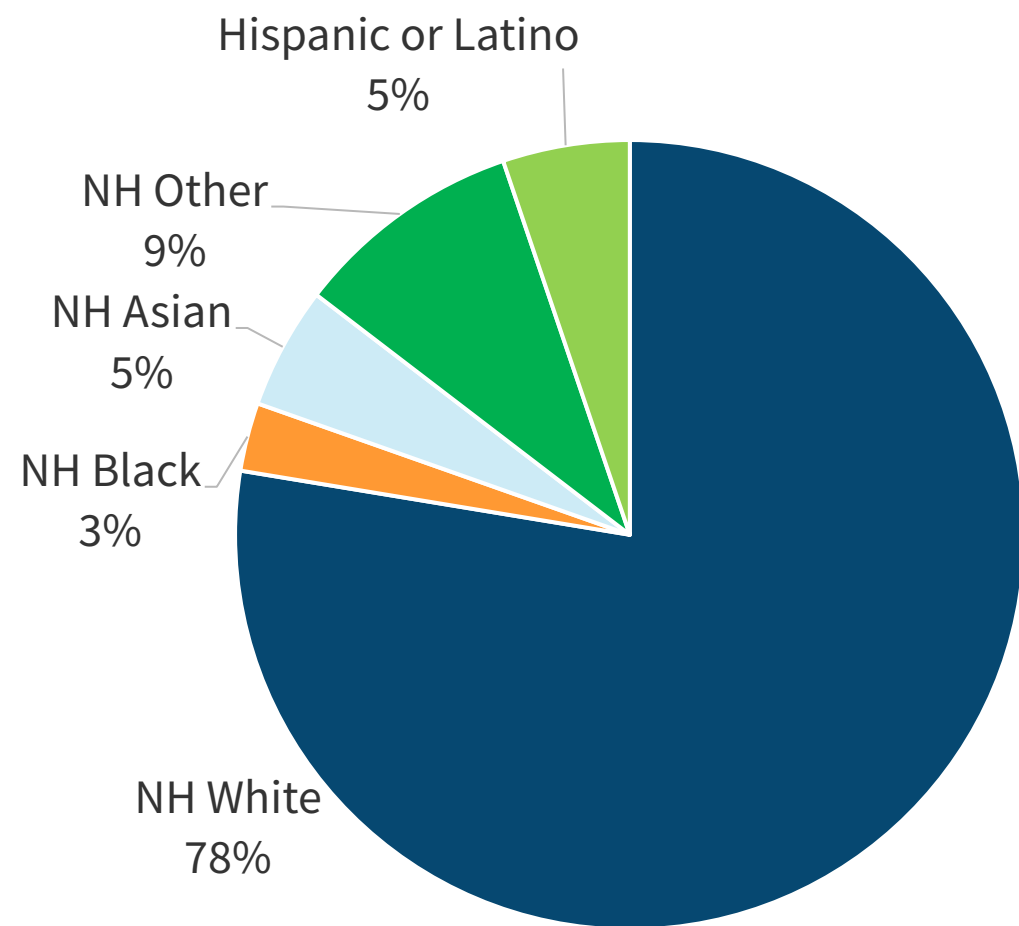
## Study Area



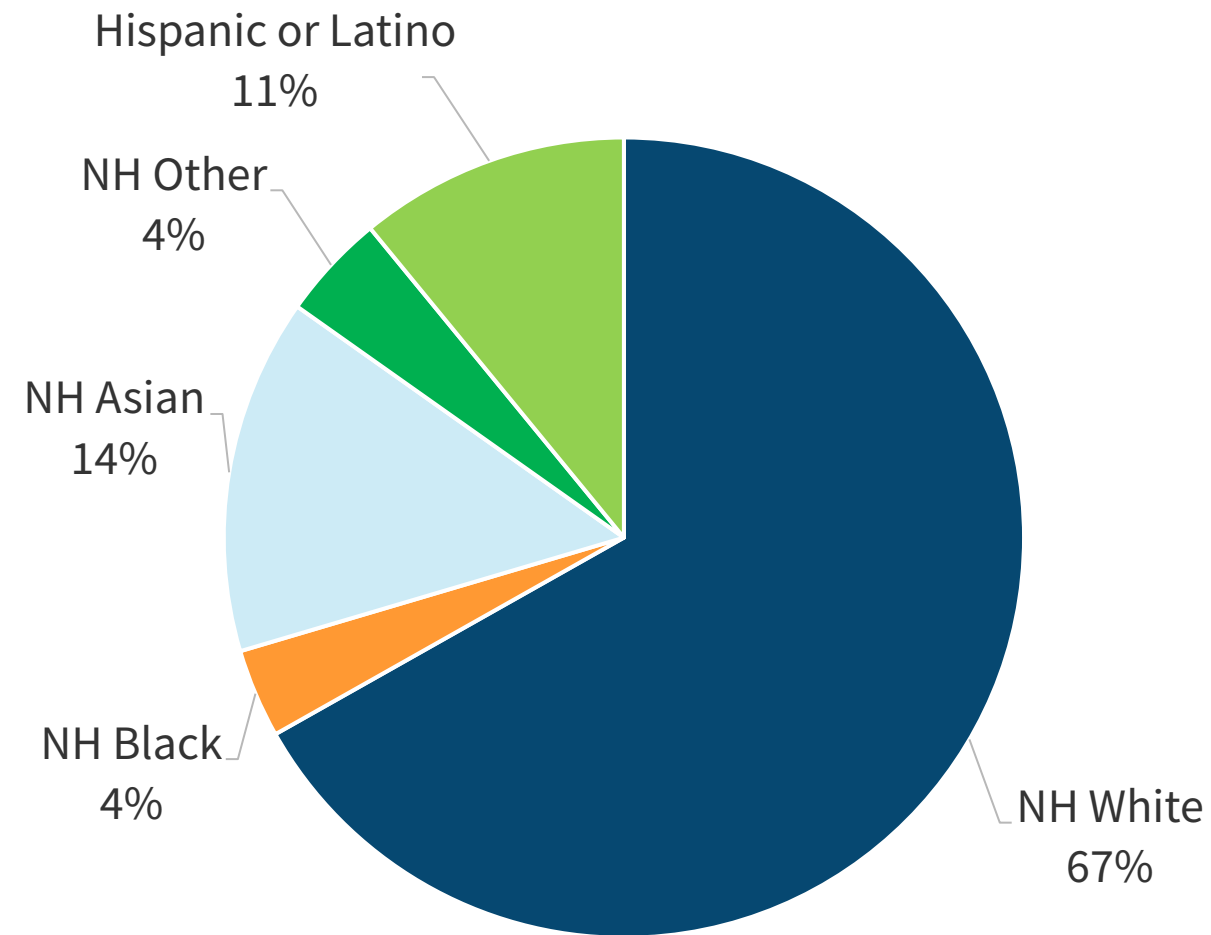
0-18 years 18-34 years 35-44 years 45-64 years 65+ years

# Demographics: Race/Ethnicity

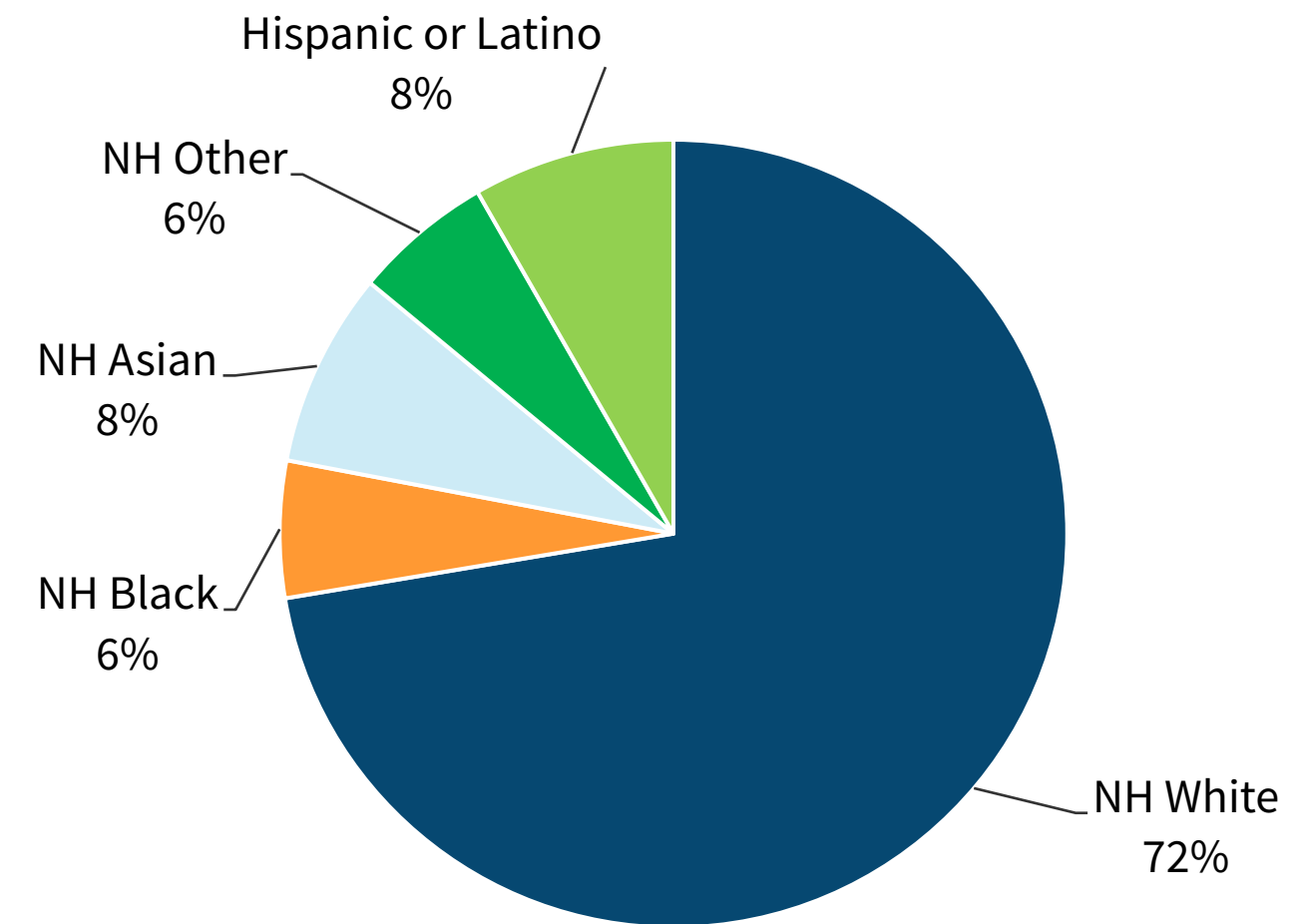
## Plan Engagement



## Plan Area



## Study Area



■ Non-Hispanic White ■ Non-Hispanic Black ■ Non-Hispanic Asian ■ Non-Hispanic Other ■ Hispanic or Latino

# Demographics: Household Type + Tenure

- 23% of engagement participants live with children 0-18
- 25% of households in the Study Area include children ages 0-18
- Only 13% of participants were renters, which is far below the Plan and Study area metrics for renter-occupied households.



# WHAT WE'VE HEARD

# What We've Heard: Overview

## Key takeaways about:

- Community Identity
- Land Use and Development
- Housing
- Amenities
- Transportation
- Parks
- Environment



# Community Identity: Takeaways

Today....

- Friendship Heights does not currently have a strong identity or brand
- Business owners find the lack of identity a marketing challenge
- “Where is Friendship Heights?”



# In 20 years Friendship Heights should be...

Vibrant, mixed-use, multi-generational neighborhood

Affordable, local retail and restaurants

As much fun to hang out in as Bethesda

Walkable, accessible, affordable

Unchanged, about the way it is now

Safe, vibrant commercial district

Green, walkable, pedestrian-friendly

Diverse and inclusive

A denser, more thriving urban area

Small town vibe

# Land Use and Development: Takeaways



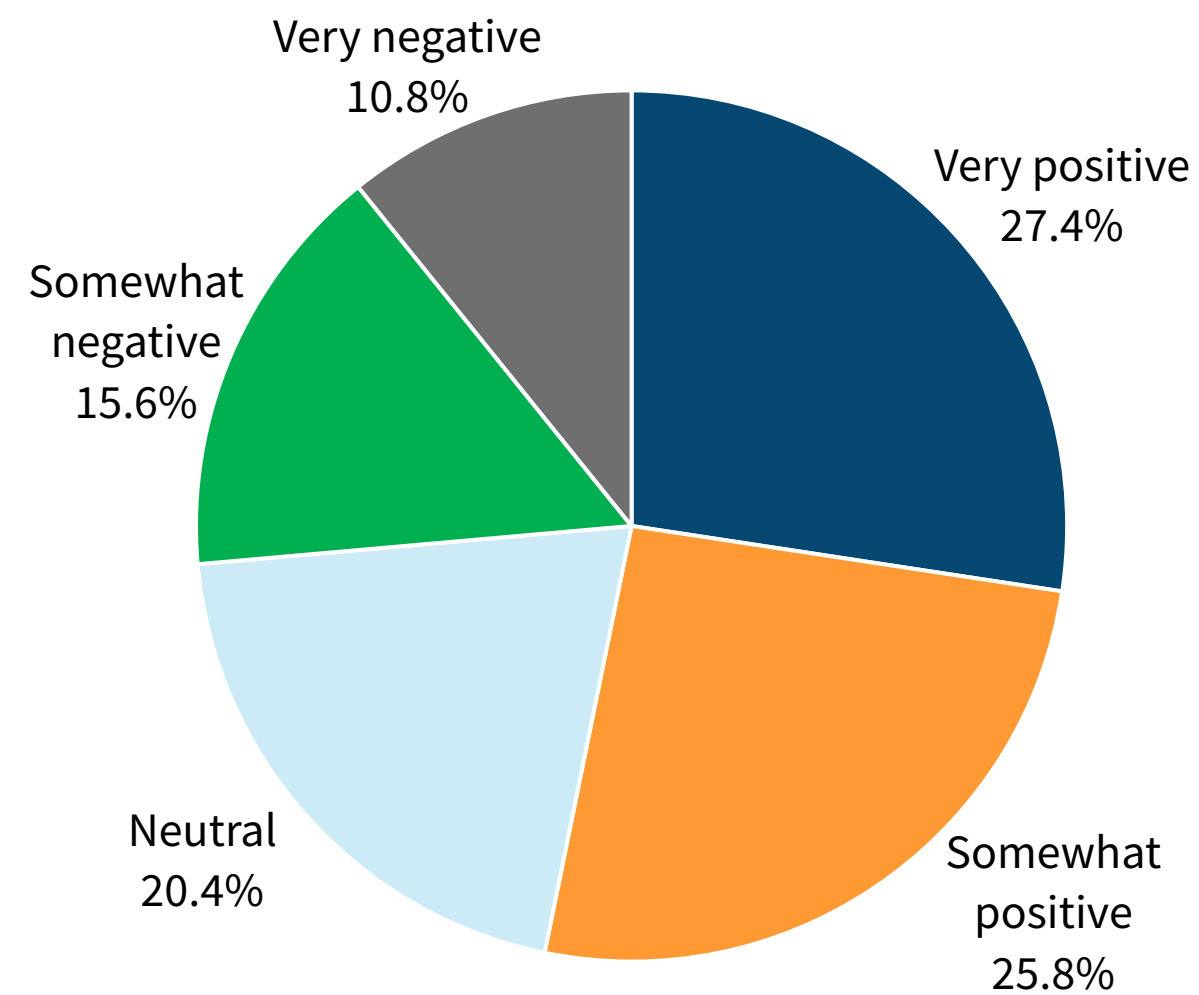
Majority of participants feel that more people in Friendship Heights will **support economic development**, strengthen retail market, **create more vibrancy** with more opportunities for social interaction.



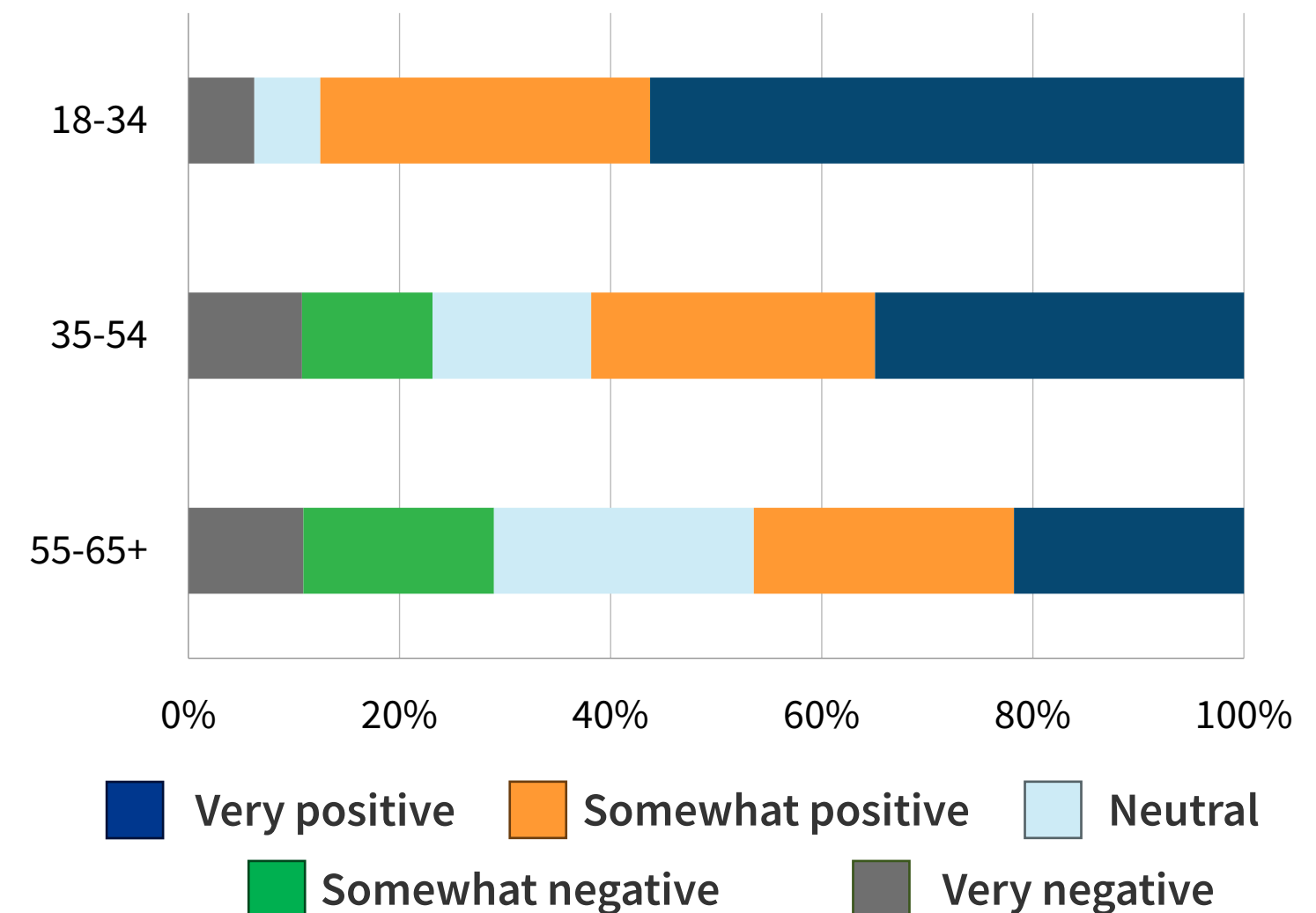
However, many are concerned that increased development will be a strain on existing **infrastructure** and will **increase traffic**.

# Land Use and Development

How do you feel about more people in Friendship Heights?



*Sentiment on Increased Population by Age*



# Housing Takeaways



Desire for population diversity, but **differing views around housing density**



Need for **affordable housing**, but tension between affordability and housing type



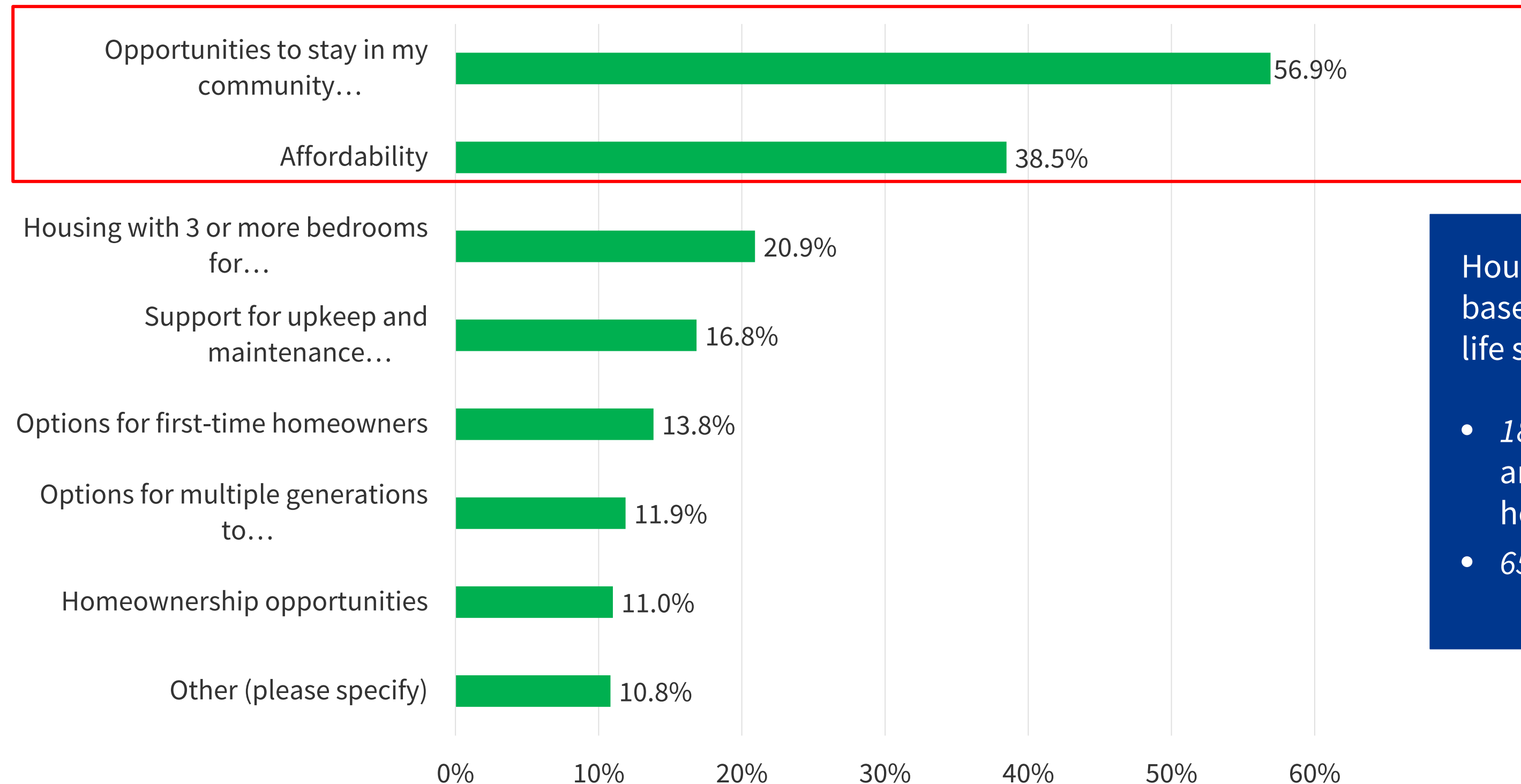
Varied opinions on **mix and style of future development**



**Concerns** around future housing are related to the **built environment**, not the people it would attract

# Need for Diverse and Affordable Housing

When you think about you or your family's housing needs, what is most important to you? (Select up to 2)



Housing needs shift based on one's current life stage:

- 18 to 44: Affordability and family-sized housing
- 65+ - Aging in place

# Renter Focus Group Takeaways

- Friendship Heights is a great location with access to the Metro
- Need for greater diversity of grocery stores and restaurant options
- Housing affordability and availability is a key concern and barrier
- Desire for better activation of existing public spaces

“Affordability will be the main factor in long term plans. I would love to own in the area, but that is dependent on what is available. I would love to see newer construction.”



# Views on Housing Density

What types of housing do you envision for new development in Friendship Heights?

- Overall support of plans to build housing, but debate over how much and what types
- Range of responses from no density to pro-density
- Considerable support for townhouses, moderate support for mid-rise buildings, concerns around high-rise buildings

How tall do you think new development should be?

- Development should be compatible with the surrounding environment and not be at the cost of green and open space
- Mid- to high-rise development concentrated around the metro station
- Transition to low-rise development away from the downtown

# Amenities: Takeaways



Nearly all participants want to see new future amenities in Friendship Heights that will enhance life in the Plan Area and draw visitors to the area from the region.



Opinions are divided on what the highest priority amenity should be for the area.

# Amenities

- Movie theater, library, arts center and a pharmacy with extended hours have been most popular suggestions across all engagement events
- Over 60% of questionnaire respondents visit a nearby library at least once a month
- At least 80% of questionnaire respondents visit a movie theater in Bethesda or DC at least a few times a year.



# Transportation Takeaways



Friendship Heights is a **highly walkable neighborhood with a good transit hub.**



**Pedestrian safety is a key concern** in Friendship Heights, especially due to speeding and conditions at intersections and crosswalks.



**Traveling outside the plan area is challenging**, particularly for those walking and biking, due to lack of bicycle infrastructure and buffers separating surrounding neighborhoods from the Plan area.

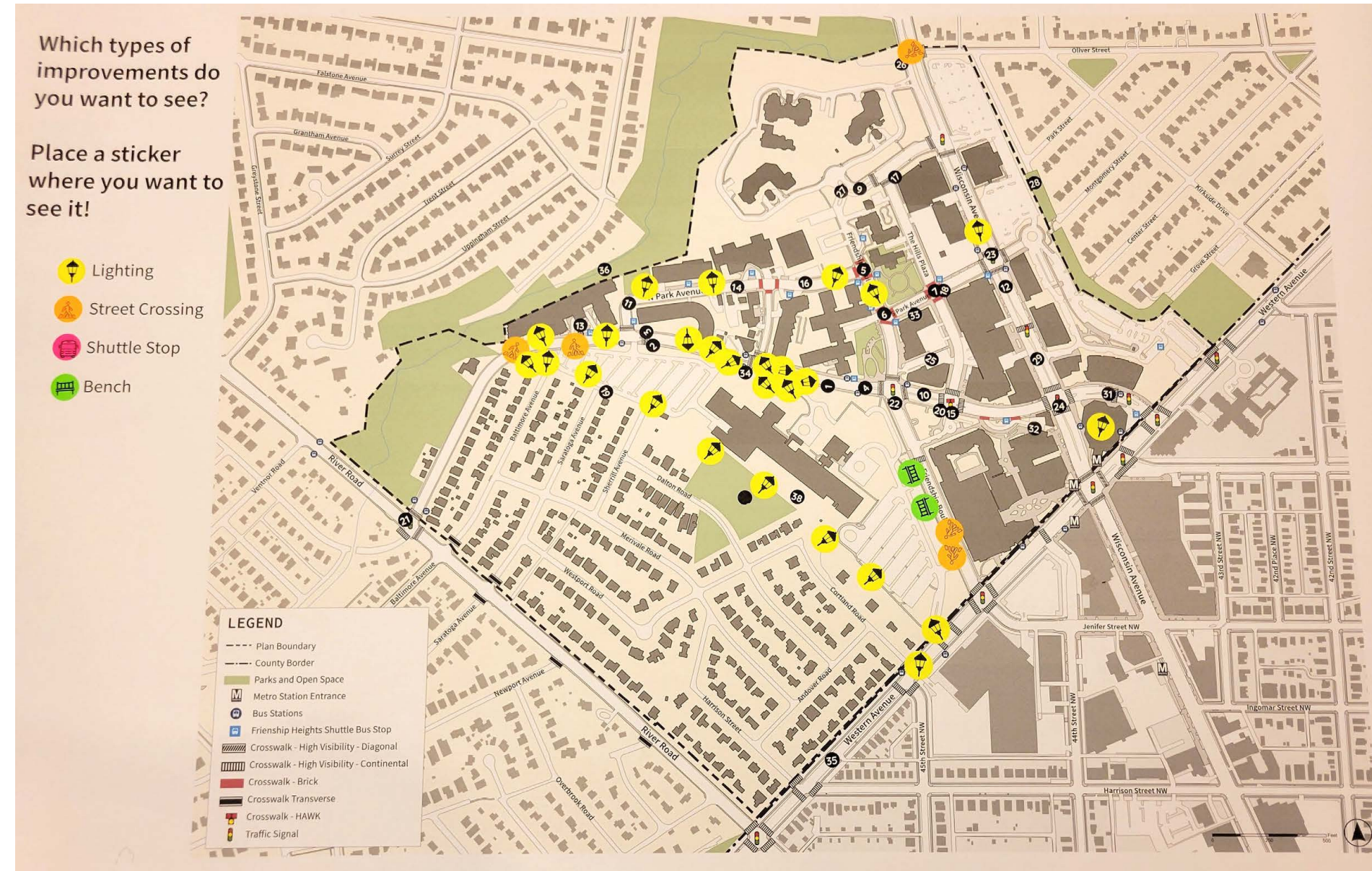


Concerns about **increased traffic and lack of parking** due to future development.

# The Pedestrian Experience

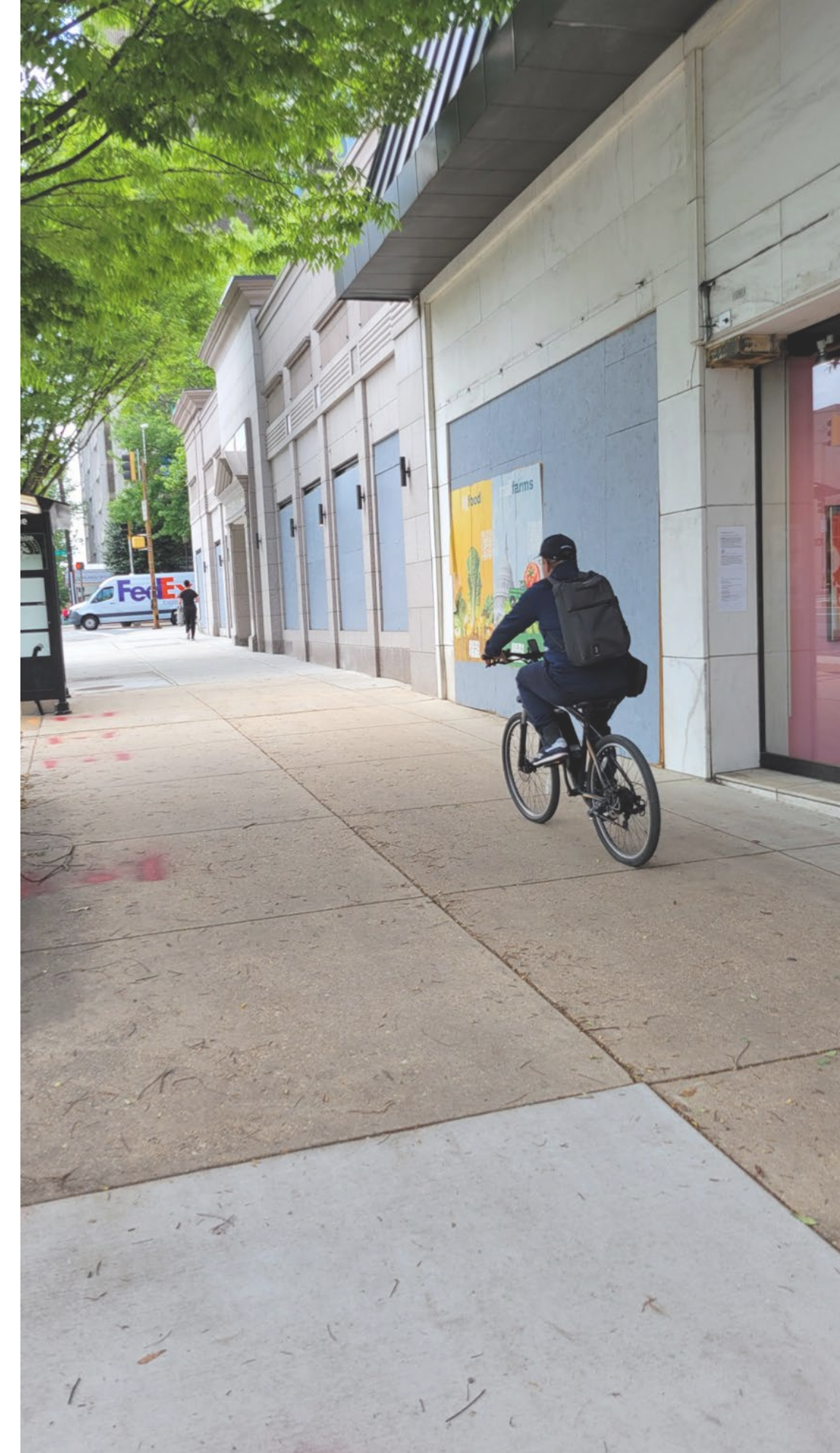
## Which types of improvements would you like to see?

- Lighting at the Metro bus station, along Willard Ave, N Park Ave, and in between the GEICO site and the Brookdale neighborhood
- Street crossings along Wisconsin Ave, Willard Ave and Friendship Blvd
- Seating along Friendship Blvd
- There was no interest in additional shuttle stops



# Additional Takeaways

- Desire for connections to the Capital Crescent Trail and current GEICO site
- More bus service to Bethesda
- Improved Wayfinding
- Speeding/Cut through traffic
  - S Park Ave and The Hills Plaza
  - S Park Ave and Friendship Blvd
  - Willard Ave



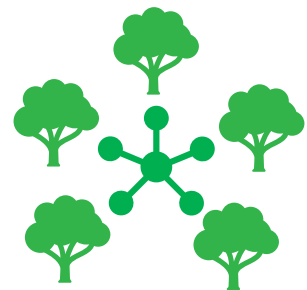
# Parks and Public Spaces Takeaways



**Parks & Open Spaces are a priority for the community.**



Residents value and wish to preserve the neighborhood's **connection with nature.**

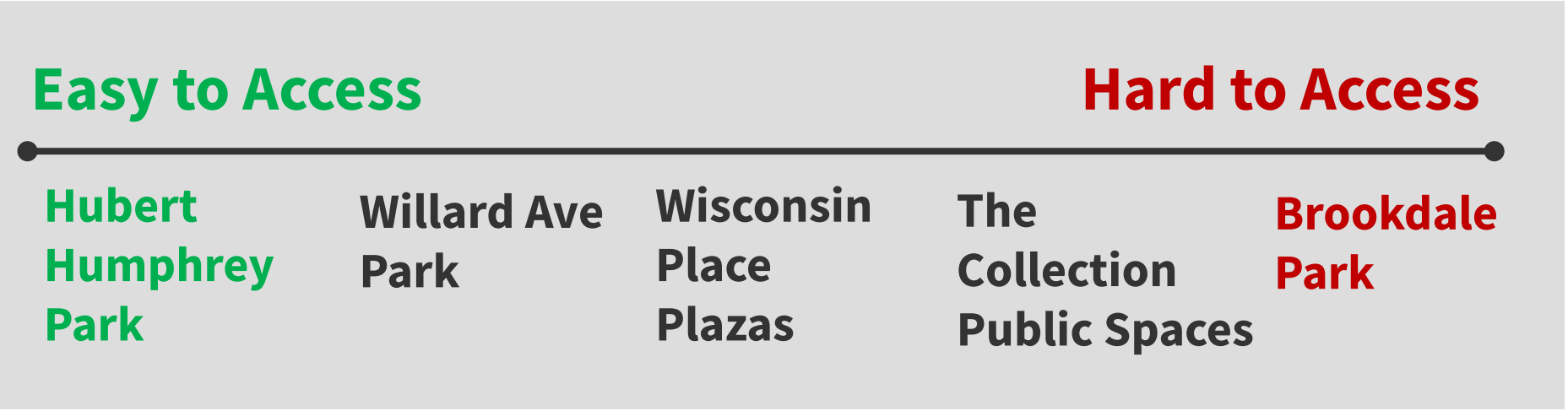
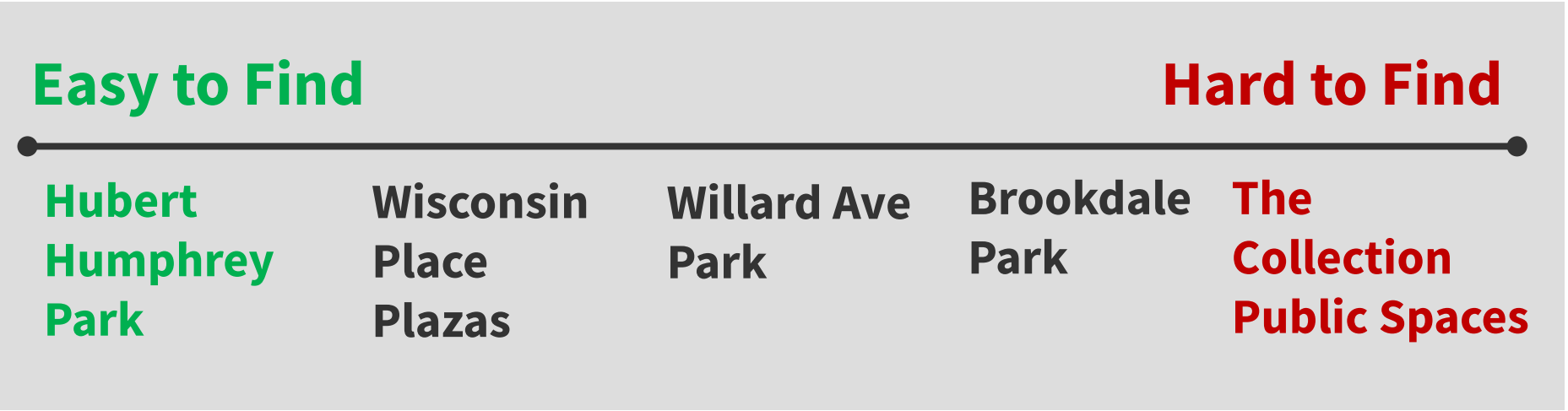


The community wants **better connections** to the existing parks and public spaces within the Plan Area and Study Area.



New future park and public spaces at larger development sites should provide more areas for **community gatherings** and **active recreation**, including **evening use.**

# Park Access Results



# Top Future Park Amenities

1<sup>st</sup> – Decorative Gardens

2<sup>nd</sup> – Dog Park

3<sup>rd</sup> – Food Truck Areas

4<sup>th</sup> – Public Art/Bench

5<sup>th</sup> – Shaded Gathering Spaces



1

2

3

4

Rank of Future Park Amenities

# Environment: Takeaways

- Many participants called for preserving the existing large trees and tree canopy in the area, including the mature trees on the GEICO site and in existing parks and public spaces.
- People noted the need for more shade on the many plazas in Friendship Heights, and along Wisconsin Avenue.
- Many are concerned about the health and protection of the stream that runs along the southwest edge of GEICO, as well as portions of Little Falls Branch that fall in the Plan Area.



# Plan Schedule

- Pre-scope engagement - Fall 2024
- Scope of Work + Boundary – Winter 2025
- Existing Conditions – Spring 2025
- Visioning – Spring-Fall 2025
- ➔ • Preliminary Recommendations – Winter 2026
- Working Draft – Summer 2026
- Transmit to Council – Fall 2026
- Council + Executive Review – Winter 2027
- Approval and Adoption – Spring 2027

