



Harmony Place Mobile Home Park Community Survey: Summary of Findings

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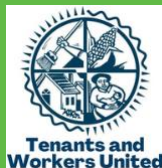


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Introduction

Located on the Route 1 corridor in Fairfax County, Harmony Place Mobile Home Park is home to 84 households. Many Harmony Place residents have lived in the community for 10 years or more, and all are concerned about displacement due to the widening of Route 1 to accommodate bus rapid transit (BRT) as a result of the adoption of the Embark Richmond Highway revitalization plan. Recently, residents' concerns have been heightened due to news of the proposed sale of the park. In addition to fear of displacement, residents are negatively affected by environmental and infrastructure issues. Two-thirds of the site is located in a flood plain, and years of deferred maintenance by the park owner have contributed to deteriorating conditions within the park.

Benignly neglecting the multiple mobile home park communities along the Richmond Highway corridor, the County lacks basic information about the residents who live there. The purpose of this study is to provide the County with demographic information about the Harmony Place community, as well as information on residents' concerns, priorities and vision for the future as this area of Fairfax County undergoes significant redevelopment.

The Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance (NVAHA) and Tenants and Workers United (TWU) conducted this study in partnership with Harmony Place residents using a community-engaged research framework (described in detail in the "Community Engagement Supplement"). Nine community leaders helped design and administer the survey, and interpret the results. The entire community was invited to learn about and provide feedback on the results during an in-person data sharing event. Feedback from the community leaders and the community as a whole is included throughout the report to provide vital contextual information.

To our knowledge, this is the first survey of a mobile home park in Northern Virginia, and the first in the state to employ a community-engaged research framework. Mobile homes and other types of manufactured housing are the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the United States. Fairfax County is home to several mobile home parks, and there is a critical need to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic characteristics of park residents, and to address the issues of housing preservation, displacement and equity that affect these communities. These concerns were acknowledged in the recommendations of the Fairfax County Affordable Housing Preservation Task Force Mobile Homes Work Group, and through the formation of the County's Manufactured Housing Task Force.

By using a community-engaged research framework, this study leverages residents' lived expertise to build a more complete and accurate understanding of who lives in Harmony Place, and what the concerns and priorities are for residents of this vibrant and cohesive community. We hope this report will provide the basis for continued partnership with Harmony Place residents to advance shared goals and support community-engaged decision-making.

Executive Summary

Key findings from the survey include:

- Most Harmony Place residents own their homes outright, although many (39.47% of survey participants) do not have a written lease agreement
- Most residents pay around \$900 per month to rent their mobile home pads (some residents pay additional rent on their mobile home units)
- *At least* 62.12% of survey participants are housing cost-burdened (this is likely an underestimate due to survey error)
- In 2019, more than half of survey participants were unable to pay for necessities, including medical expenses, due to the high cost of housing
- Fear of displacement was prevalent in the community, even before the proposed sale of the park
- Residents are also concerned about the cost of housing and the quality of the roads in the community
- Residents value the community's proximity to many amenities, including public transit, and their positive relationships with one another

Outside of these survey results, follow-up conversations with community leaders and written feedback collected during the data sharing event revealed that the community was greatly impacted by COVID, with many residents contracting the virus and/or losing income due to the pandemic. During the data sharing event, several residents submitted written comments expressing a desire for the County to buy the land, or work with the community to identify an alternative preservation strategy that will enable residents to stay in their homes.

Section I: Participation & Demographics

There are 86 mobile home pads at Harmony Place, 84 of which are occupied. Out of these 84 households, 76 completed the survey – a 90.48% response rate. The majority of participants (56.57%) have lived in Harmony Place for 5 or more years, and about one-third (32.89%) have lived in Harmony Place for more than 10 years.

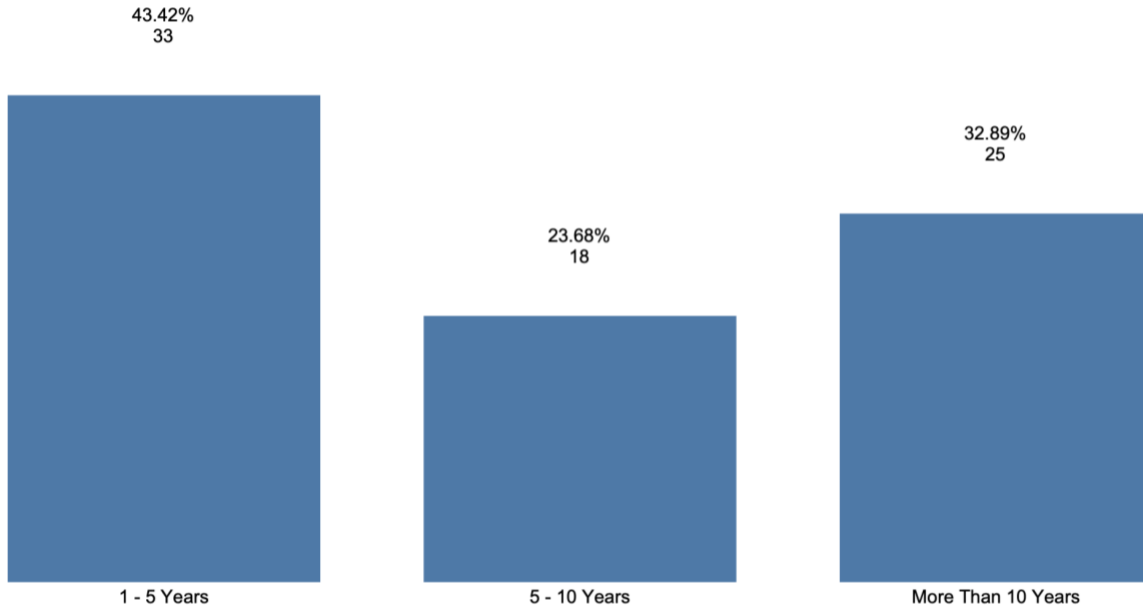


Fig. 1: Years living at Harmony Place
N = 76, NA/Missing = 0

The average household size reported in the survey was about four occupants, and the average number of children under 18 was 1.46 per household. The minimum household size reported in the survey was one occupant and the maximum was 8 occupants. The minimum number of children was 0 and the maximum was 4. Most households (61.84%) included both male and female members, while just under 20% of households identified as either male only (19.74%) or female only (18.42%).

The majority of participants who reported the race/ethnicity of the people living in their household identified as Hispanic/Latino (93.33%). Three participants (4.00%) reported the people living in their household are Asian and two participants (2.67%) reported the people living in their household are white. One participant declined to report the race/ethnicity of the people living in their household.

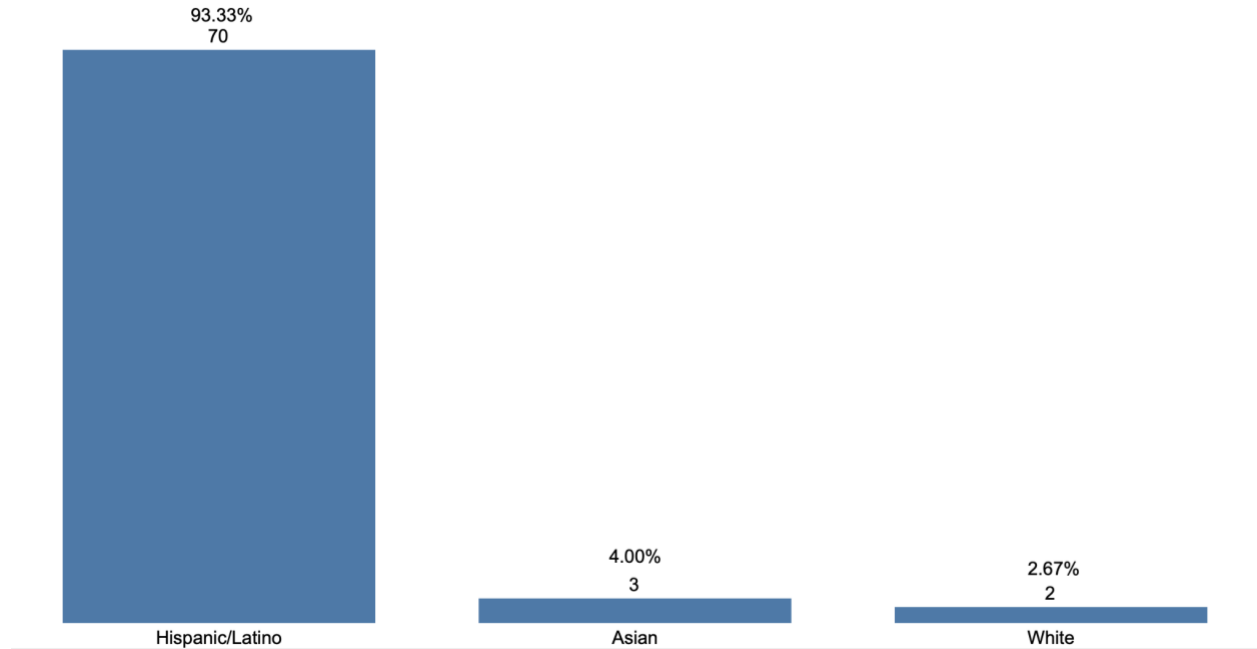


Fig. 2: Race/ethnicity of household members
 N = 75, NA/Missing = 1

The majority of participants (88.16%) reported Spanish is the primary language spoken in their household. Other primary languages spoken by participating households included English (3.95%) and Thai (1.32%). Four households (5.26%) identified as bilingual in Spanish and English, and one household (1.32%) identified as bilingual in Thai and English.

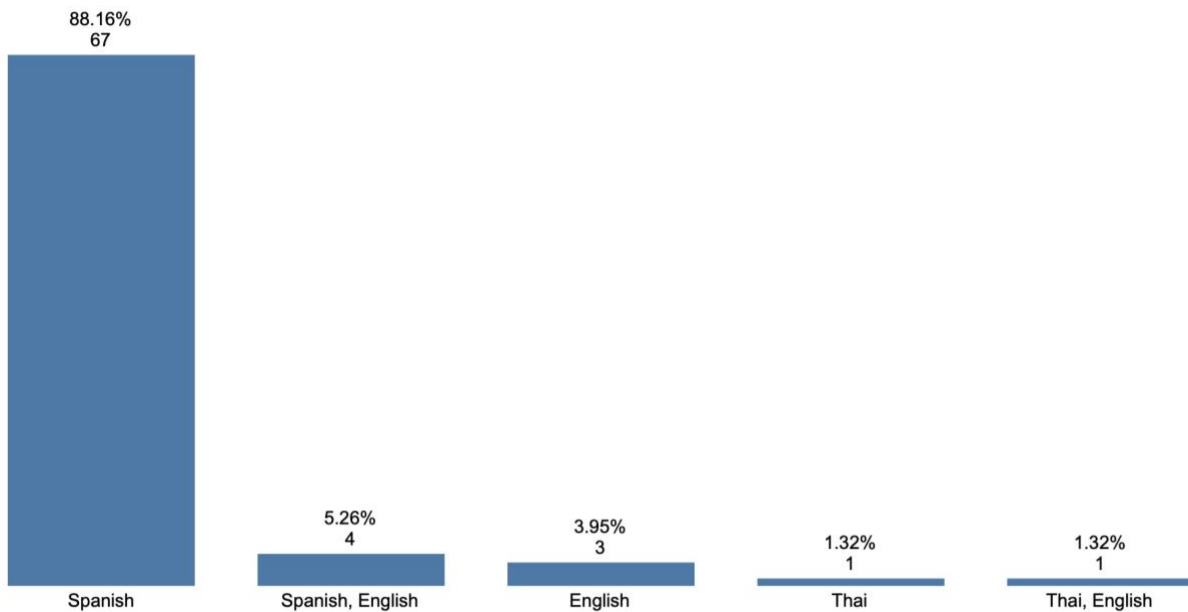


Fig. 3: Primary language spoken by participating households
 N = 76, NA/Missing = 0

Section II: Homeownership & Lease Agreements

The majority of participants (78.95%) own their mobile home units outright, and pay to rent their mobile home pads. The remaining participants reported making rent (18.42%) or mortgage payments (2.63%) on their mobile home units, in addition to renting their mobile home pads.

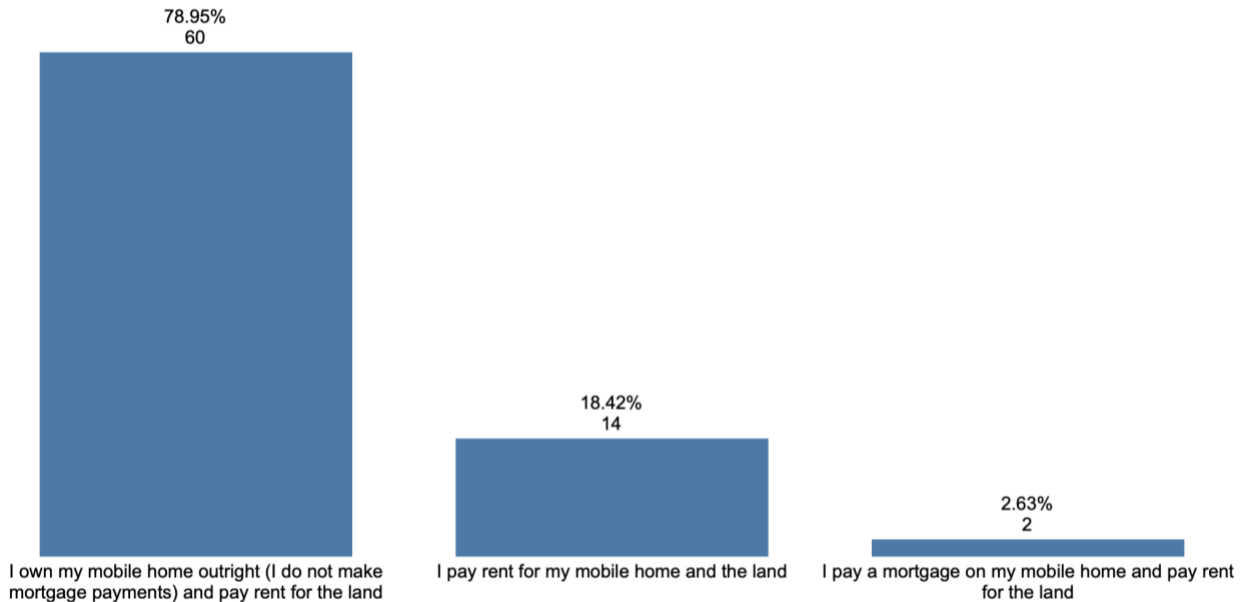


Fig. 4: Ownership status
N = 76, NA/Missing = 0

Participants were asked whether they had a lease agreement to rent their mobile home unit and their pad, their mobile home pad only or no lease agreement. A number of respondents who previously indicated they own their units outright and one respondent who indicated they own their unit with a mortgage also reported having a lease to rent their unit (see Fig. 5). While these discrepancies make it difficult to understand the lease terms for those with a written lease agreement, a key take-away from the survey is that nearly 40% of participants do not have a written lease agreement. During a discussion with Supervisor Lusk and county staff at the in-person data sharing event, one resident emphasized that community members who do not have a written lease are experiencing heightened anxiety over the proposed sale of the park. Some residents have also been pressured by the Park owner to enter into short-term lease agreements that expire at the end of the year, further contributing to fear of displacement.

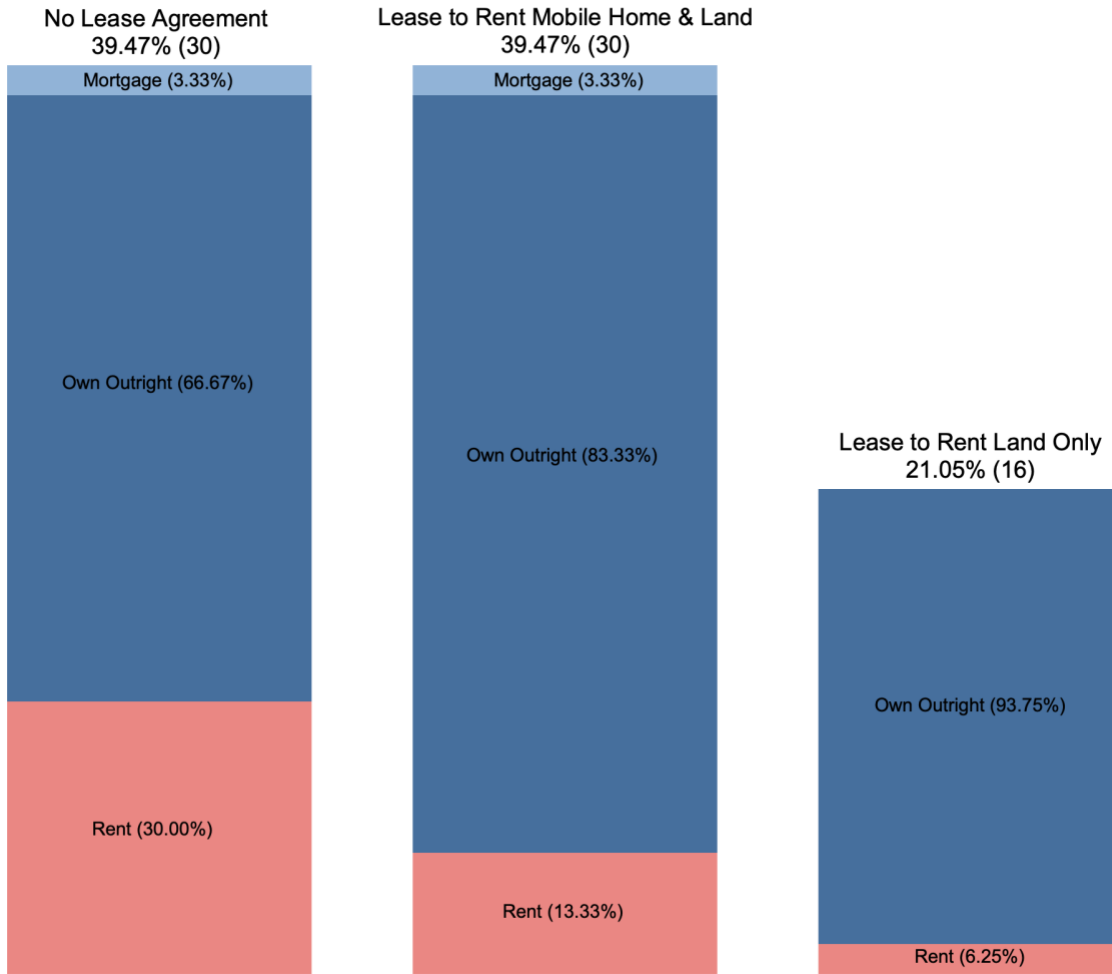


Fig. 5: Lease agreement by ownership status
N = 76, NA/Missing = 0

Section III: Income & Housing Costs

Participants reported paying an average of \$927.83 per month in rent. The median reported rent payment was \$900. The lowest reported rent payment was \$500 and the highest was \$1,400. During the data sharing event, 11 residents submitted written feedback stating that they pay around \$900 per month in rent. Four of these residents indicated they pay around \$900 to rent their mobile home pads (versus the pad and the unit). During a discussion of the survey results, the community leaders also stated that \$900 is around the cost most residents pay to rent their mobile home pads, and that residents who rent their mobile home units pay more.

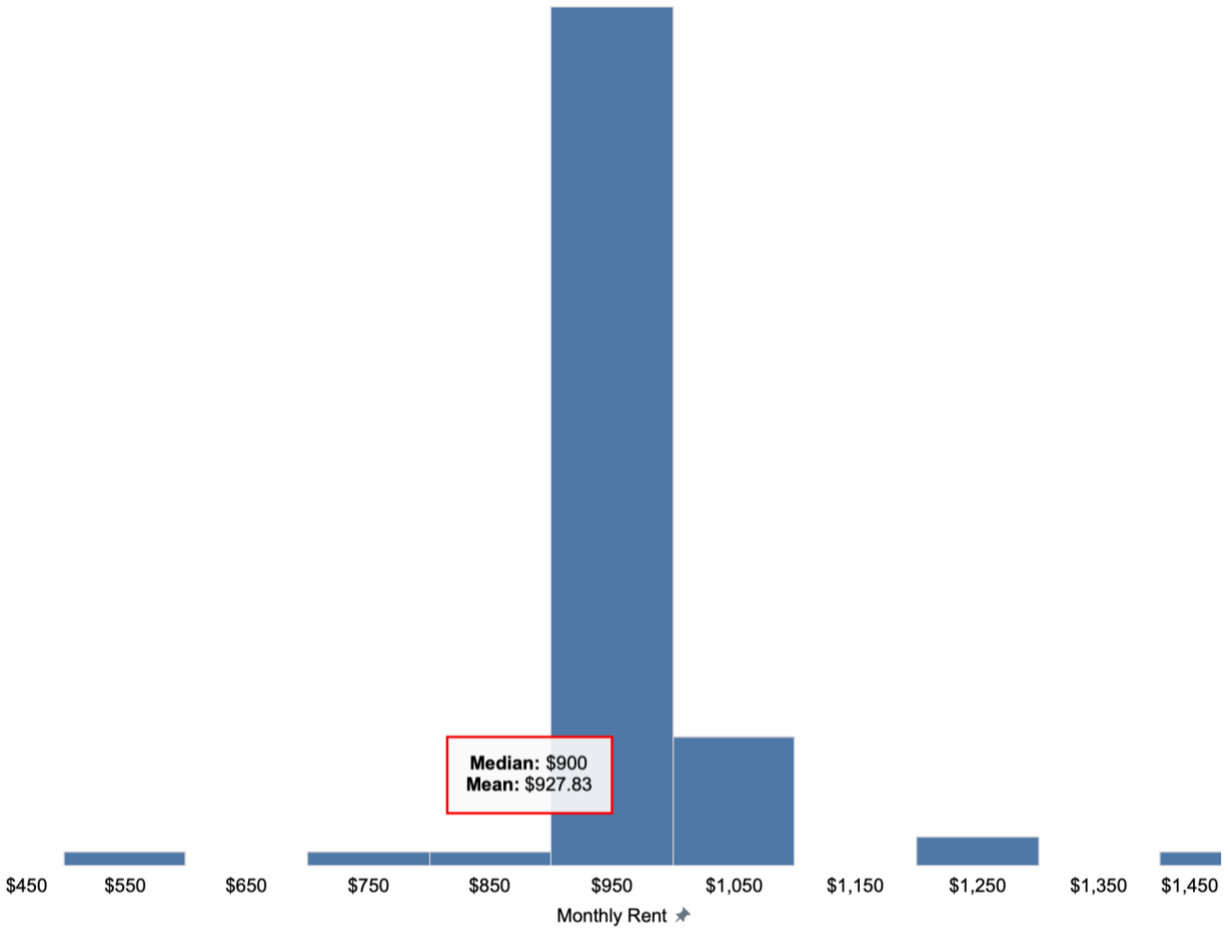


Fig. 6: Monthly rent
N = 75, NA/Missing = 1

There were discrepancies between participants' responses regarding ownership status and mortgage payments. For clarity, the question on monthly rent and mortgage payments is included below (Fig. 7).

10. How much do you pay for your rent/mortgage each month? *(Please answer using numbers only. If not applicable, leave blank.)*

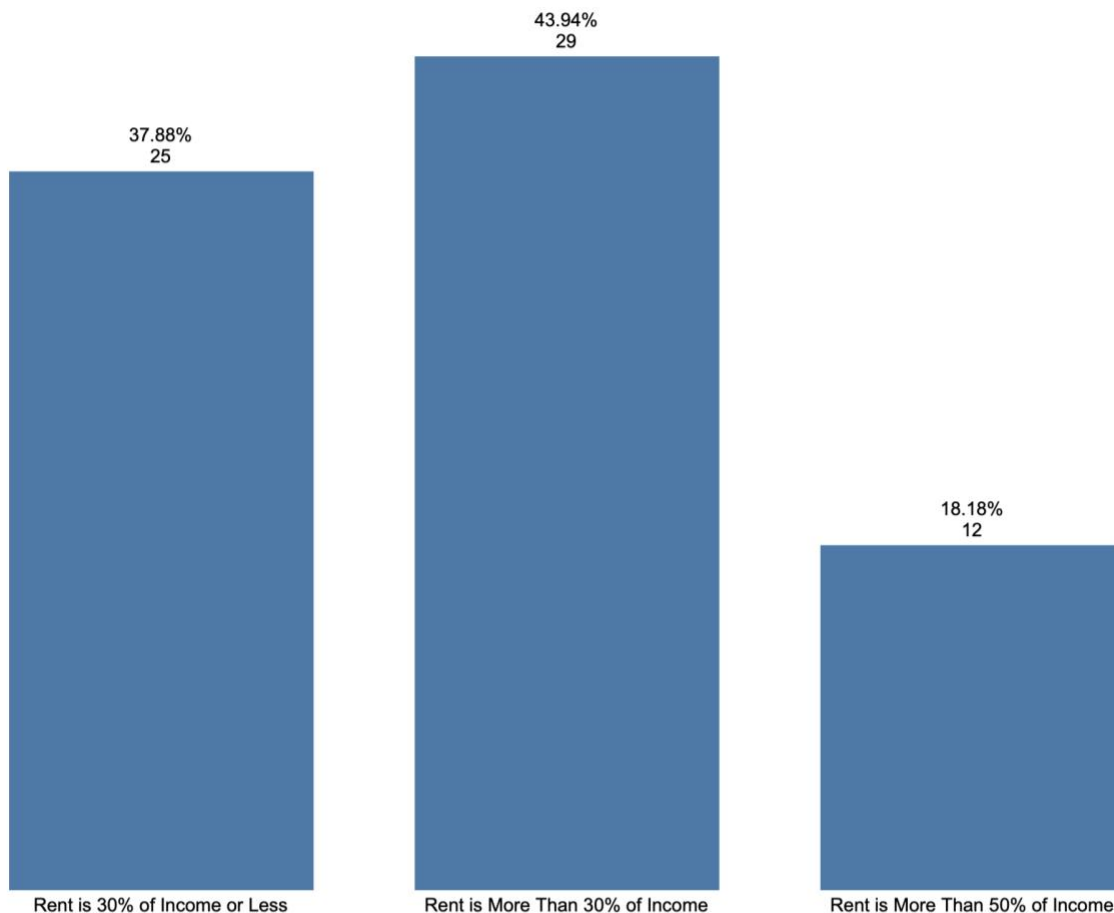
Rent	<input type="text"/>
Mortgage	<input type="text"/>

Fig. 7: Survey item on monthly rent and mortgage payments

Six participants reported a monthly payment amount in the “mortgage” field. However, only two participants reported owning their mobile home units with a mortgage (versus renting their units or owning their units outright) in response to a previous question regarding ownership status, and only one of these participants reported their monthly mortgage payment amount. The other five participants who reported a monthly mortgage payment amount all previously reported renting their mobile home units.

In light of feedback from the community leaders and residents suggesting that most participants entered the amount they pay to rent only their mobile home pads in the “rent” field, it is possible that the five participants who reported renting their mobile homes and subsequently reported making mortgage payments, reported the amount they pay to rent their mobile home pads in the “rent” field and the amount they pay to rent their units in the “mortgage” field. One of these five participants even indicated via write-in response that the amount they entered in the “rent” field was the payment for their mobile home pad and the amount they entered in the “mortgage” field was the payment for their unit.

Because it is not possible to definitively determine how all five participants who reported renting their mobile homes and subsequently reported making mortgage payments interpreted the question on monthly rent and mortgage payments, and because less than 10% of participants who answered this question entered a payment amount in the “mortgage” field, we made the decision to exclude data on mortgage payments from our analysis. It should be noted that the true housing costs of the six participants who reported making mortgage payments are greater than the costs reported in this summary. In addition, excluding data on mortgage payments may have resulted in an underestimation of the percentage of participants who are housing cost-burdened (see Fig. 8).



*Fig. 8: Percentage of participants who are housing cost-burdened
N = 66, NA/Missing = 10*

Data on participants' monthly rent and monthly take-home pay was used to calculate the approximate percentage of participants that are housing cost-burdened (paying more than 30% of their income on rent) and severely cost-burdened (paying more than 50% of their income on rent). Sixty-six participants reported both their monthly rent and their average monthly take-home pay. Nearly 20% of these participants are severely cost-burdened. An additional 43.94% are cost-burdened. We also received written feedback during the data sharing event from two residents who stated that they pay more than 50% of their income on rent.

In addition to excluding data on monthly mortgage payments, the estimated percentage of participants who are cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened does not take into account additional housing expenses (such as utilities and service fees). Reports of additional housing costs ranged from \$0 per month to \$1,800 per month with an average of \$476.78 per month, and a median of \$350 per month. Six residents (8.96% of those who reported additional housing expenses) pay over \$1,000 per month in additional housing costs, skewing the average upwards. It is likely that the median reported payment is closer to the amount most residents pay for additional housing costs each month.

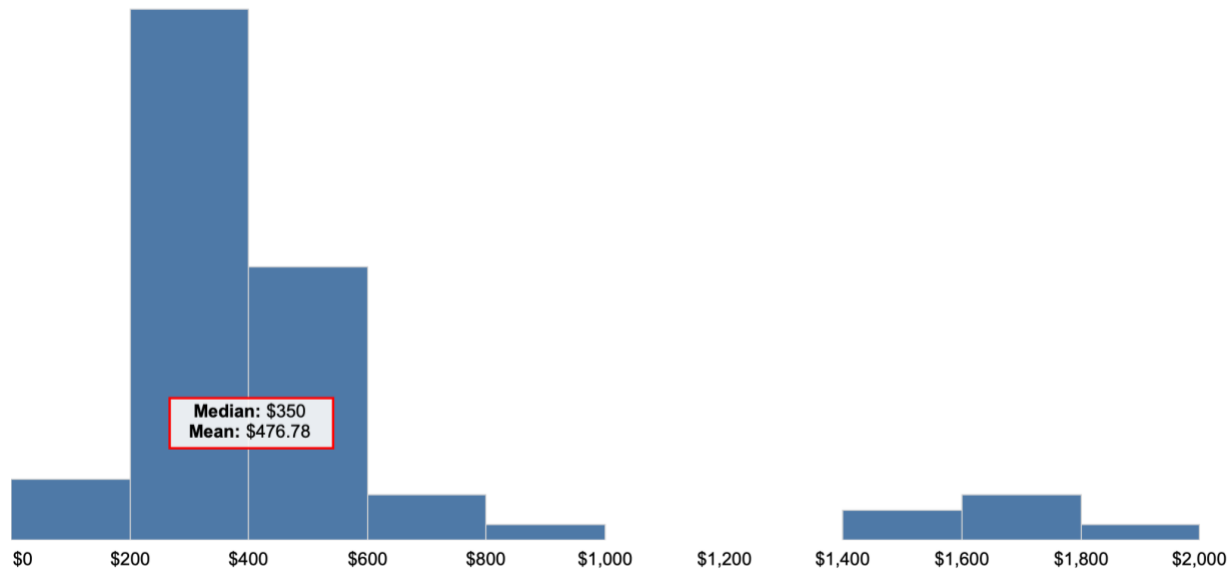


Fig. 9: Other housing costs
N = 67, NA/Missing = 9

Six residents submitted written feedback about their other housing costs during the data sharing event. Most of these residents reported paying between \$135 - \$350 per month, with the exception of one resident who reported paying around \$600 per month for water and electricity. Three residents reported the amount they pay for water and electricity, and three reported the amount they pay for water only. High water bills were also identified as a concern by several participants in the survey (see section V). Feedback received from the community leaders and during the data sharing event suggests that residents' additional housing expenses fluctuate from month-to-month and from household-to-household, and that water and electricity are two main sources of non-rent housing expenses.

Section IV: COVID Impact & Non-Housing Expenses

In a discussion of the survey results, the community leaders emphasized that the community was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many residents losing income, becoming sick, experiencing long-haul COVID symptoms and accruing significant medical debt due to lack of insurance. During the data sharing event, one resident submitted written feedback stating they lost income due to the pandemic.

The results from the survey suggest that not only did the park owner raise residents' rent during the pandemic, but no adjustments were made to account for the economic impact of the pandemic. More than half of participants reported a rent increase in both 2020 and 2021. The average rent increase in 2020 was \$33.97 per month, and the median was \$35 per month. The average rent increase so far in 2021 is \$36.53 per month, and the median rent increase is again \$35 per month.

In order to understand how housing costs affected community health and well-being prior to the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were asked whether housing costs (including rent/mortgage and utility payments) ever prevented them from paying for other necessities in 2019. In light of the prevalence of housing cost-burden and the impact of additional housing expenses, it is not surprising that more than 70% of participants who responded to this question reported an inability to pay for other necessities due to housing costs. Most commonly, participants reported being unable to pay their phone bills (66.20%) or for medicine (64.79%) and doctor’s appointments (64.79%). Participants’ inability to pay for medical expenses due to housing costs is particularly perturbing given subsequent discussion with community leaders and residents about the impact of the pandemic on the community.

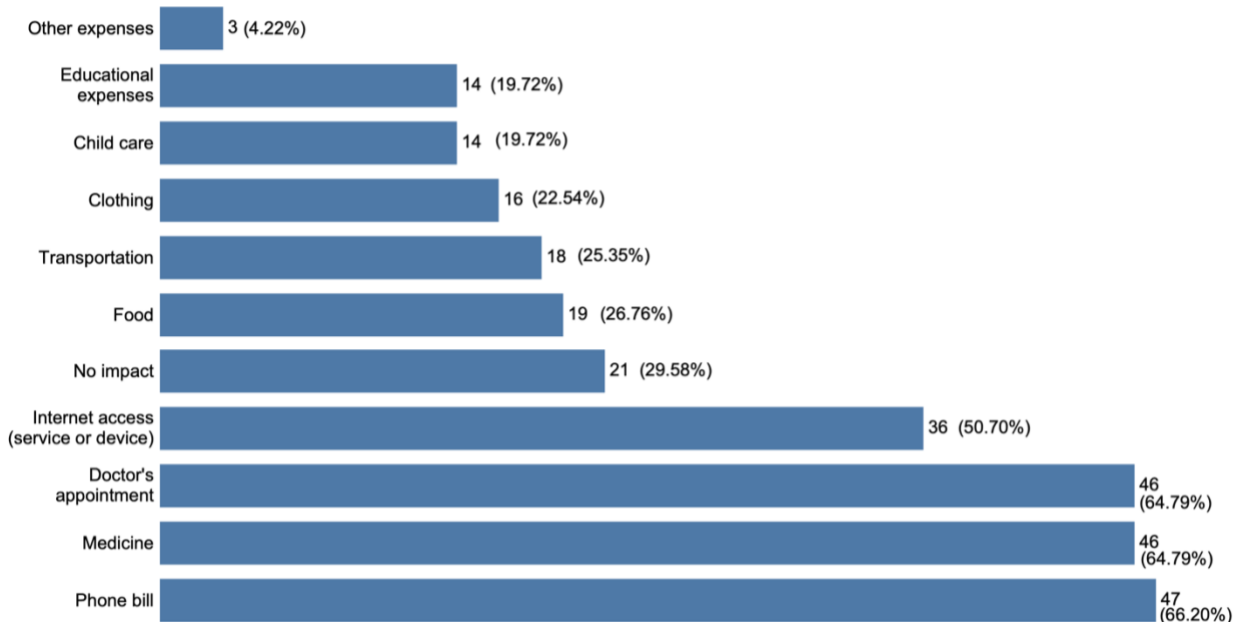


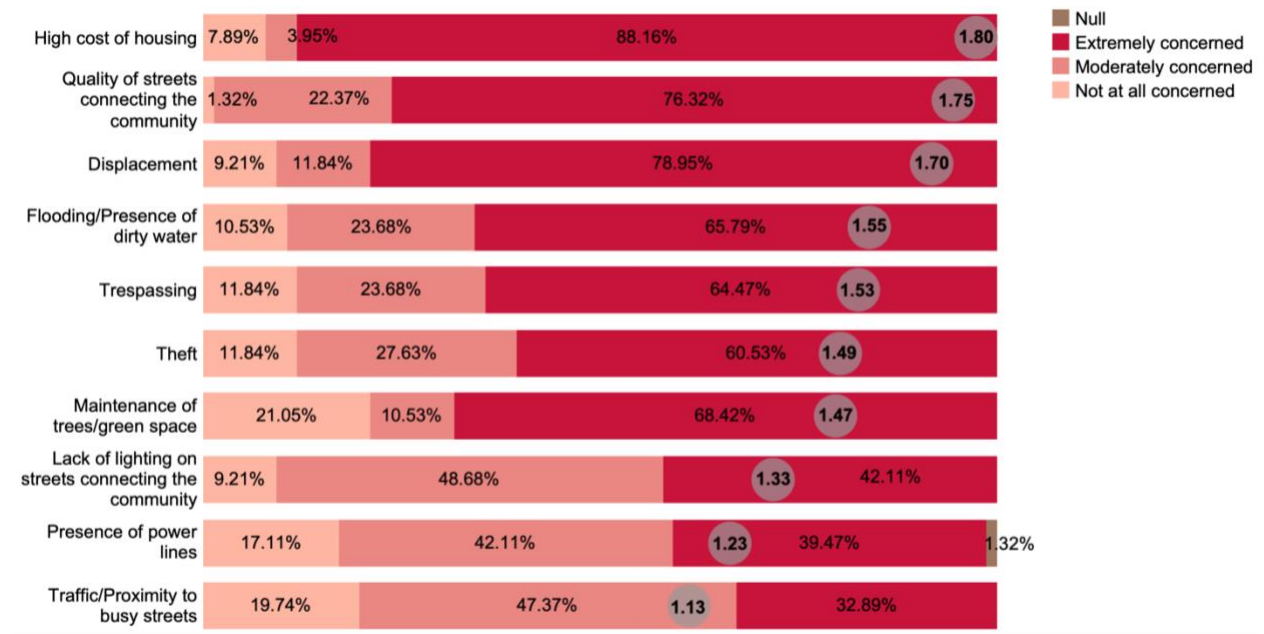
Fig. 10: Impact of housing costs on ability to pay other expenses
 N = 71, NA/Missing = 5

Section V: Community Concerns & Values

In total, 74 participants indicated whether they are interested in participating in a conversation about community ownership with Fairfax County. Out of these 74 participants, 93.24% are interested in participating in a conversation with the County. During a discussion about the survey results, the community leaders suggested that the participants who did not express interest may be hesitant to work with the County rather than uninterested in community ownership.

During the data sharing event, community members submitted written feedback suggesting several reasons some residents may be hesitant to work with the County, including fear of getting in trouble and being displaced from their homes, and frustration after participating in previous conversations with the County and seeing no follow-up action. Despite these hesitations, several community members submitted written feedback expressing a desire for the County to buy the land, as well as for the County to be more engaged with the community and to be more clear and transparent in their decision-making processes.

Although the survey was conducted before residents learned about the proposed sale of the park, fear of displacement due to sale of the land/redevelopment already ranked among participants' top three concerns on a three-point scale of "Not at all concerned (0)" to "Extremely concerned (2)." The other top concerns reported in the survey were the high cost of housing and the poor quality of the streets connecting the community. All three of these concerns were echoed in written feedback collected during the data sharing event.



Gray circles represent average ranking of resident concerns on a scale of 0 ("Not at all concerned") to 2 ("Extremely concerned")

Fig. 11: Community concerns
N = 76, NA/Missing = 0

Participants were given space to write in other concerns beyond the items listed on the survey. Four of the twenty-four participants who wrote in other concerns (16.67%) reiterated their fear of displacement. Additional concerns identified via write in response included: the high cost of water, safety and security and "blackwaters," which the community leaders confirmed refers to flooding in the community.

Seven of the participants who wrote in their other concerns (29.17%) identified singular issues that were not raised by other participants. These were condensed into the category "other concerns." "Other concerns" included the lack of a park for children to play in, a desire to relocate from the community, lack of parking, the high cost of rent, fear of the river overflowing, fear of trees causing damage to homes and fear of a return to homelessness.

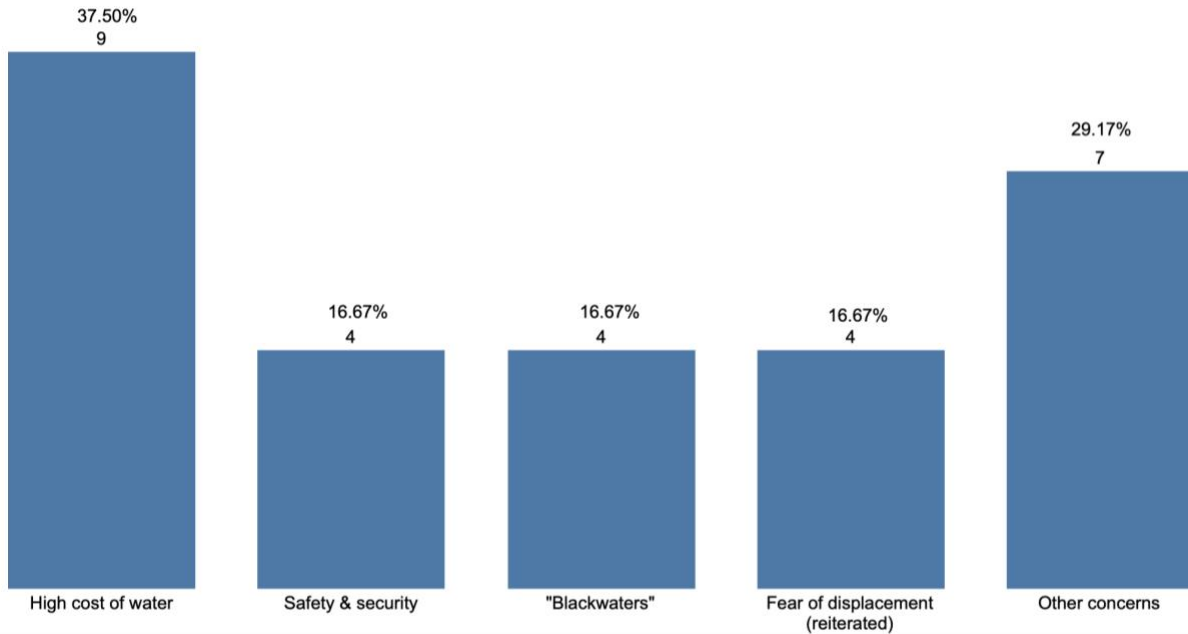


Fig. 12: Other community concerns
N = 24, NA/Missing = 52

Despite these concerns, participants identified many things they like about living in Harmony Place. The aspects of the community that participants reported valuing most include the ability to walk to the store and to complete other essential tasks, access to public transit, positive relationships with neighbors and the relatively affordable cost of housing compared to other parts of the County. During the data sharing event, many community members submitted written feedback stating that they want to stay in Harmony Place and avoid displacement.

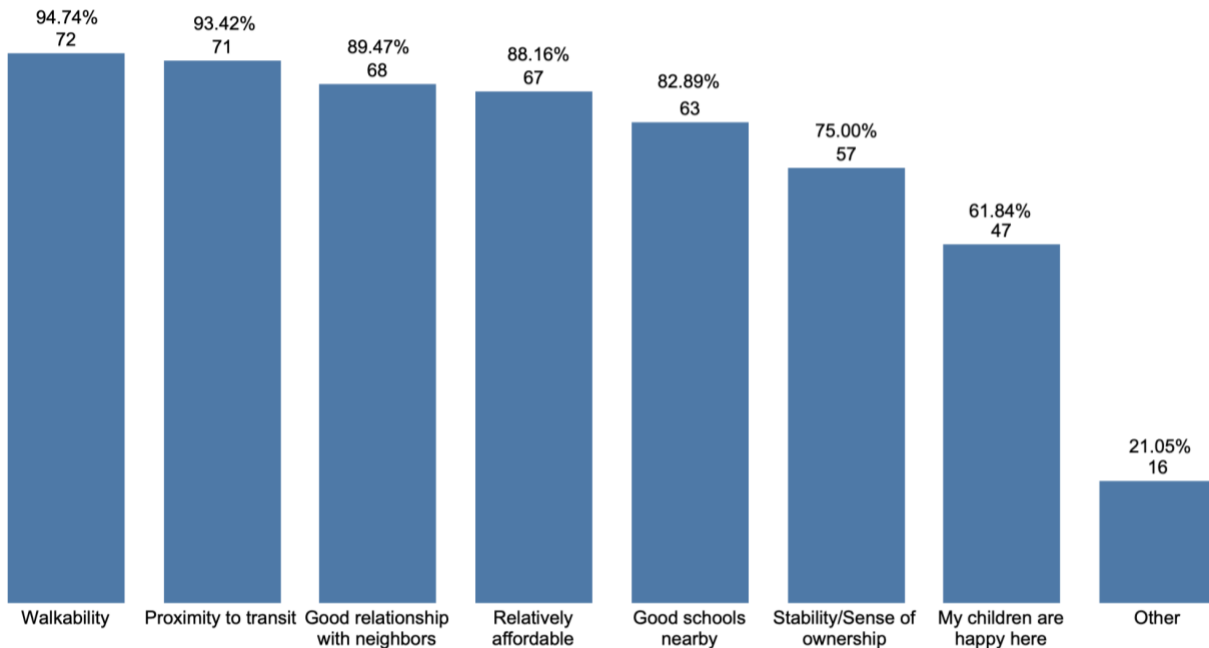


Fig. 13: Community values
N = 76, NA/Missing = 0

Participants were given space to write in other aspects of their community they value beyond the items listed on the survey. Many participants who wrote in additional values reiterated that they value positive relationships with their neighbors (37.50%), and stated that they appreciate that their community is calm and peaceful (37.50%). Two participants (12.50%) reiterated that they value the sense of ownership they feel over their home. Four participants (25.00%) wrote in that they like living in Harmony Place without providing additional details as to why. These responses were condensed into the category “other values.” Two participants (12.50%) indicated that, while they like living in Harmony Place, they have concerns over safety and the poor condition of the property. These responses were condensed into the category “other concerns.”

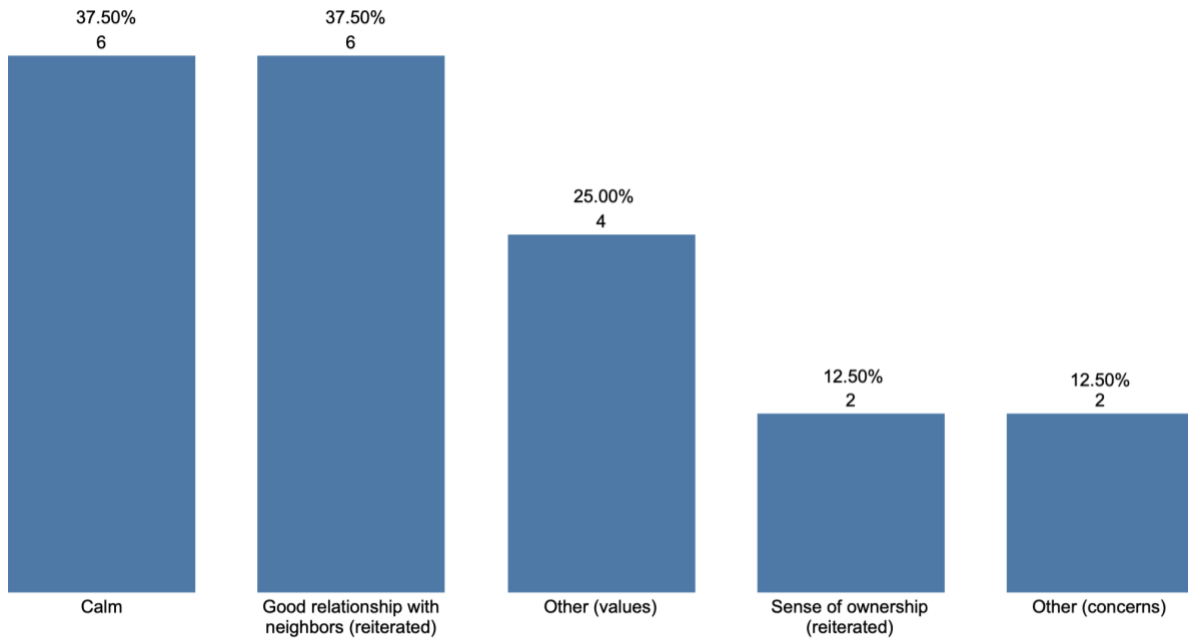


Fig. 14: Other community values
N = 16, NA/Missing = 60

Conclusion

Beyond providing the County with information on the demographics and housing costs of Harmony Place residents, this survey and subsequent feedback show that residents are greatly affected by the fear of displacement, and would like to see their community preserved. Harmony Place residents value their positive relationships with neighbors, the calm atmosphere of the community, the sense of stability they feel as mobile home owners, and the park's walkability and proximity to good schools and public transit. However, residents would like to see improvements to the community once the immediate concern of displacement is addressed, including repaving the roads within the community and addressing the high cost of housing and utilities. The successful implementation of a community-engaged research process contributed to an exceptionally high survey response rate. We believe this process furthered the goals of listening to and empowering residents to engage with confidence in civic dialogue regarding their vision for the future.

Acknowledgment

This project would not have been possible without the ongoing support and engagement of the Harmony Place Mobile Home Park community. We especially would like to thank the community leaders: Amilcar Benitez, Denia Yolani, Kenny Medrano, Keydy Zapata, Maricela Camacho, Mirna Gonzalez, Nancy Perez, Reynaldo Hernandez and Gregorio Parada. The community leaders provided critical input on the design of the survey, and were essential to the successful administration of the survey and the accurate interpretation of the results.

We would also like to thank Tenants and Workers United (TWU) – our community-based partner organization. TWU served as a liaison between NVAHA and the community leaders, provided interpretation during community meetings, oversaw the administration of the survey and contributed significantly to the planning and execution of the data sharing event. We gratefully acknowledge their partnership, which was vital to this initiative.

We would like to thank all the community residents for their participation in the survey, and for attending the data sharing event, where we received feedback that helped inform and enrich this report.

Finally, we would like to thank Virginia Housing, the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority and Truist Bank for their financial support.