

Pelham Community Survey

Planning Board

February, 2023

In 2022 the Planning Board received a District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) grant from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to conduct a comprehensive review of Pelham's bylaws. As part of that process we conducted a town-wide survey to assess opinions about long term growth and development in Pelham.

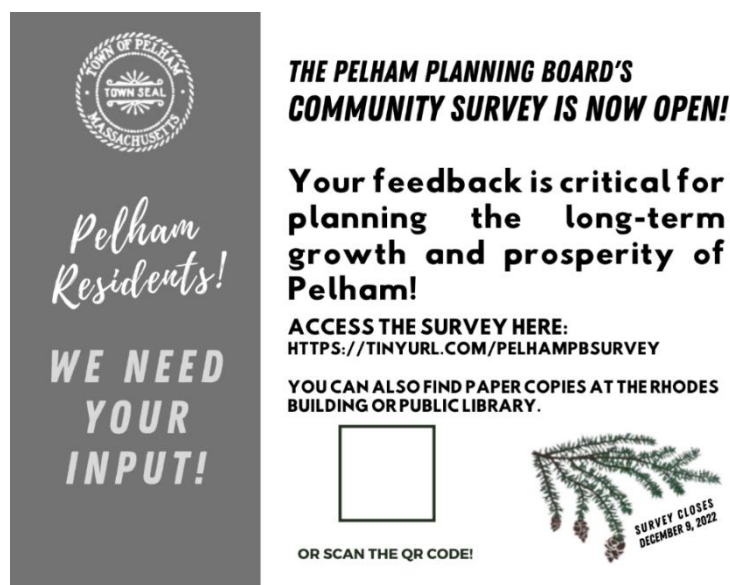
Methods

Ken Comia, Deputy Director of Land Use and Environment at PVPC who has been working closely with the Planning Board on the DLTA, designed the survey with input from the Planning Board and the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee. We organized the survey to elicit residents' opinions regarding growth and development in Pelham within the Village Center and more broadly throughout town. The questions asked participants to select from a list of responses reflecting their opinions. In addition there were several opportunities for participants to write in other responses or comments.

The survey was programmed in Alchemer Survey (alchemer.com/survey) and administered on-line through the software. Paper copies were available at the Library and Town Office.

We mailed postcards announcing the survey (Figure) to all 528 Pelham households on November 23, the date on which we opened the survey. We advertised it on the town website, with posters in the Rhodes Building and at the library, and an announcement in the weekly newsletter sent to parents of students at Pelham Elementary School. The Police Department distributed flyers at their annual Toy and Food Drive. We contacted town committee and board chairs and requested that they remind their members to participate in the survey. Planning Board members and other town residents spread the word informally. We closed the survey on December 12.

Figure. Postcard announcing survey



Results.

Of the approximately 1000 adult residents in Pelham, 161 completed the survey (response rate 16%). Three people completed the survey on paper and the rest completed it on-line.

Development.

Two questions asked participants their opinions on development. One question asked what type of development they would like to see in Pelham. Respondents could select more than one answer (Table 1) and were given the opportunity to write in other responses. A majority of respondents said that they would like to see commercial development (67%), residential development (59%) and agricultural development (51%). A few residents (8%) indicated that they would not like to see any development in Pelham.

Twenty-three respondents wrote in other comments. Two participants mentioned affordable housing. Other types of development mentioned included small shops and businesses, sustainable businesses, outdoor and recreational activities, and forest and land preservation.

Table 1. What type of development would you like to see in Pelham's future? Check all that apply. (n=154)

Response	Selected	
	n	%
Residential	91	59
Commercial	103	67
Agricultural	79	51
Educational	69	45
Industrial	17	11
...don't want to see development ...	12	8

The second question asked what type of businesses respondents would like to see in Pelham (Table 2). Again respondents could select more than one response and could write in other types of businesses. The most frequently selected type of business was "Coffee shop/ Deli" selected by 78% of respondents. Bakery was selected by 62% of respondents and Home based business was selected by 52%. This time 9% of respondents indicated they would not like to see any development in Pelham.

Seventeen respondents wrote in other comments. A few people mentioned concerns for the local economy and residents. Coffee shop, bakery, small grocery and small restaurant were mentioned as were an art gallery and small performance space. Other suggestions included an urgent care facility, veterinarian, group home and small day care for children or elders. Outdoor tourism, cannabis and a Post Office were also mentioned.

Table 2. What type of business(es) would you like to see developed in Pelham? Check all that apply. (n=157)

Response	Selected	
	n	%
Pharmacy	28	18
Gas station	28	18
Grocery	69	44
Brewpub	69	44
Coffee shop/ Deli	122	78
Bakery	98	62
Fast food	6	4
Bookstore, gift shop, or other small retail	76	48
Home Based Business	81	52
...don't want more business development ...	14	9

Rural Character

To ascertain participants' opinions about the character of the town, we listed fourteen aspects of rural character and asked participants to choose the five most important to them and to rank them from most important to least important. For each item a rank score was computed. Items ranked most important were given a score of 15; those ranked second a value of 14 and so on. The summary score is the sum of the rank scores given by the respondents who chose that item.

Table 3 presents the results sorted in order from the highest to lowest aspect of rural character considered important to respondents. The five aspects of rural character that were selected most often and received the highest rank scores were Wildlife viewing and habitat protection; Dark night skies; Quiet safe streets; Small, high quality elementary school; Water supply and watershed protection for public and private drinking water. Three respondents said that they do not value any of the aspects listed.

Table 3. Rank the top 5 aspects of rural character that are most important to you? (n=160)

Item	Participants who ranked this item	Summary rank score*
Wildlife viewing and habitat protection	91	1263
Dark night skies	89	1240
Quiet safe streets	79	1130
Small, high quality elementary school	81	1106
Water supply and watershed protection for public and private drinking water	72	990
Open spaces	65	885
Priority on local rather than chain store businesses in town	63	849
Community connections	55	724
Civic engagement and participation in town affairs	49	664
Privacy	45	608
Recreation	44	569
Active agriculture in town	37	469
Fewer rules and regulations	24	308
The architecture of buildings	22	271
I do not value "rural character" in Pelham	2	
I do not value any of the aspects listed above in Pelham	1	

*The score is the sum of the ranks given by the respondents who chose that item. Most important = 15, least important = 11.

Growth

We asked several questions about where and what type of growth people would like to see in Pelham. We asked participants to rate their support for three general growth strategies (Table 4). A majority of the respondents supported or strongly supported all three strategies. Only 15% of respondents supported making no changes to current zoning bylaws.

Table 4. Please indicate your level of support for each of the following growth strategies

Strategy	Strongly Oppose n (%)	Oppose n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Support n (%)	Strongly support n (%)	Total n(%)
Encourage "cluster development" requiring homes to be built closer together so remaining land can be protected as open space	12 (8%)	21 (14%)	40 (26%)	42 (28%)	38 (25%)	153 (100%)
Zone some areas for agricultural uses and very low density residential uses only	11 (7%)	13 (9%)	32 (21%)	60 (40%)	36 (24%)	152 (100%)
Allow higher density housing types (e.g. homes on smaller lots, duplexes, town homes, tiny homes)	32 (21%)	8 (5%)	21 (14%)	41 (27%)	48 (32%)	150 (100%)
Make no changes in current zoning bylaws	28 (24%)	22 (18%)	51 (43%)	11 (9%)	7 (6%)	119 (100%)

The Village Center in Pelham allows denser housing on smaller lots. We asked about support for growth strategies that would extend the Village Center along Harkness Road where public water and sewer are available (Table 5). Fully 69% of respondents supported (33%) or strongly supported (36%) extending the Village Center to encourage additional affordable housing. A majority of respondents also supported or strongly supported extending the Village Center to encourage higher density housing and to encourage commercial development.

Table 5. Please indicate your level of support for enlarging the Village Center along portions of Harkness Road for each of the following growth strategies:

Strategy (number of respondents)	Strongly Oppose n (%)	Oppose n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Support n (%)	Strongly support n (%)	Total n (%)
Encourage higher density housing that is served by sewer and water	18 (12%)	19 (13%)	27 (18%)	44 (30%)	41 (28%)	149 (100%)
Encourage additional affordable housing that is served by sewer and water	20 (14%)	7 (5%)	19 (13%)	48 (33%)	52 (36%)	146 (100%)
Encourage commercial development that is served by sewer and water	26 (17%)	18 (12%)	29 (19%)	40 (27%)	37 (25%)	150 (100%)
Encourage development of light industry that is served by sewer and water	37 (25%)	27 (18%)	42 (29%)	21 (14%)	20 (14%)	147 (100%)
Make no changes in current zoning for the Village Center	26 (23%)	19 (17%)	49 (43%)	13 (12%)	6 (5%)	113 (100%)

We asked in what ways participants would like to attract more people to Pelham (Table 6). A majority of respondents (62%) said they would like to attract more people to live here. Smaller percentages would like to attract people for recreation, business or to spend money in Pelham. Twenty percent of respondents said they did not want to attract more people to Pelham.

Table 6. In what way(s) would you like to attract more people to Pelham? Check all that apply. (n=152)

Response	Selected	
	n	%
To live here	95	62
To recreate here	53	35
To have businesses developed here	74	49
To spend money here	56	37
I don't want to attract more people to Pelham	30	20

We asked whether Pelham should explore creating new recreational resources in town. We listed 8 active recreational activities (Table 7). A majority of respondents indicated that the town should create new resources for hiking (78%) and bicycling (64%). Very few selected snowmobiling and All-Terrain Vehicle resources (7% each). Some additional activities suggested by respondents include: pickle ball courts, swimming, track for walking or running, bird watching, off leash dog areas and others.

Table 7. The town should explore creating new active recreational resources for: Check all that apply (n=148)

Response	Selected	
	n	%
Snowmobiling	11	7
All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails	11	7
Horseback riding trails	50	34
Places for hunting and fishing	28	19
Camping	45	30
Skiing	64	43
Bicycling	95	64
Hiking	115	78

Cannabis.

Now that cannabis growing and use are legal in Massachusetts, the Planning Board was interested in town support for commercial growing, selling, warehousing or processing in Pelham (Table 8). A majority of respondents (59%) indicated that commercial growing should be allowed. Between 41% and 46% indicated that the other activities should be allowed. Thirty-seven participants wrote a comment indicating that they do not support any commercial activity around cannabis use.

Table 8. With respect to cannabis, Pelham should allow. Check all that apply (n=135)

Response	Selected	
	n	%
Commercial Growing	80	59
Selling	62	46
Warehousing	55	41
Processing	56	41

Taxes

We asked participants if Pelham should “tax residential and commercial development differentially in order to increase revenue?” Of the 142 respondents who answered that question, 98 (69%) said “yes”. Among the 98 who said yes, 43 (45%) said yes to the follow-up question: “should home occupations (as distinguished from Major Home Occupations) and Air B&Bs be exempt from commercial taxation? “

Conclusions

The responses to the survey provide valuable insight into the attitudes of Pelham residents toward growth and development. These residents value the natural beauty and resources of the town including habitat protection, water supply and watershed protection and dark night skies. They also value the relatively quiet streets and the small high quality elementary school.

Most respondents to the survey would welcome commercial and residential development. In particular they support denser housing on small lots throughout the town as well as expansion of the Village Center where such housing is already permitted. They also support zoning some areas for agricultural use and lower density housing, which helps to preserve open space.

With regard to commercial development, they support home-based businesses and small businesses like coffee shops and delis. There is only modest support for commercial development around cannabis use.

Limitations

The 16% of Pelham residents who responded to the survey may not be representative of the entire town.