



Cherry Hill Master Plan  
Prepared for Cherry Hill Township by  
Group Melvin Design in partnership with  
Urban Partners

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## INTRODUCTION

The statements that follow within the Public Outreach Executive Summary report represent the major findings that emerged from the public outreach process for the Cherry Hill Master Plan update. The text presents the most commonly expressed questions, comments, and concerns, organized into topic areas. These areas are: community character, housing opportunity, employment opportunities, commercial development, and community amenities.

By thoroughly understanding the values, concerns, and hopes of the public, recommendations made within master plan elements can be made with the community's goals in mind. The Public Outreach Executive Summary report is meant to be used as a tool to frame the community input received for future application to recommendations made within the Land Use and Economic Development Elements.

For a full presentation of the outreach see [Public Outreach Report](#).

## KEY FINDINGS

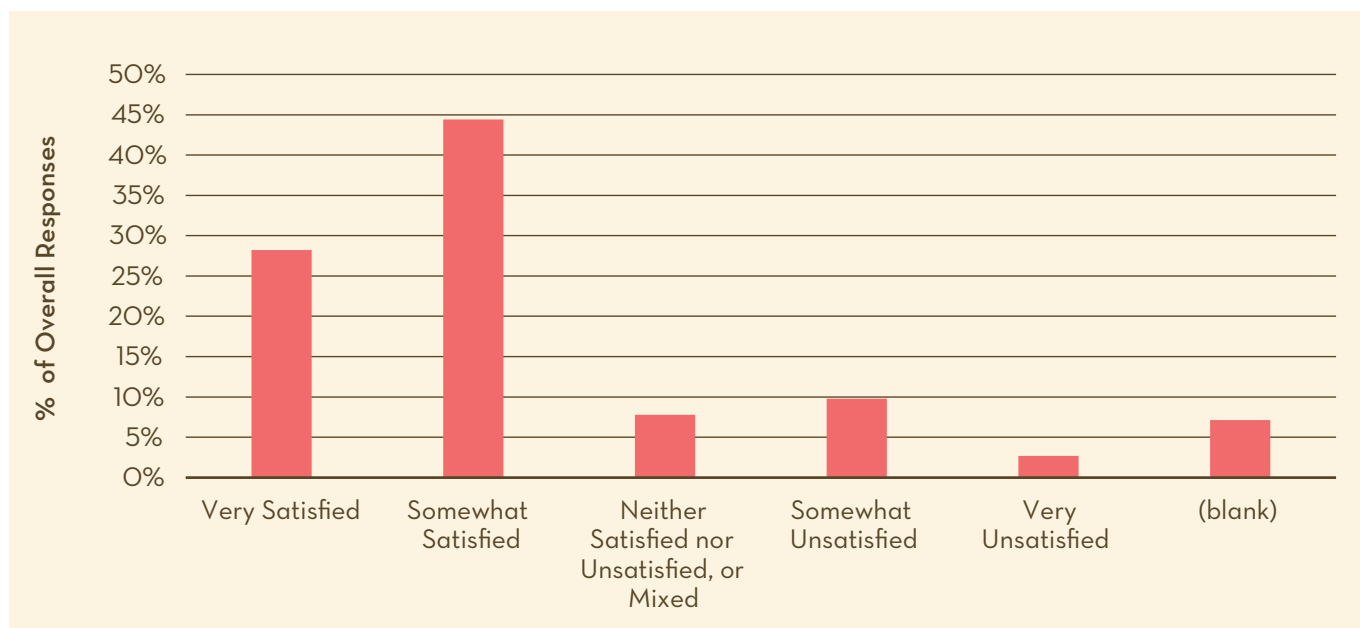
### Community Character

Some of the most striking conversations that were held between the project team and the public involved topics surrounding “community character,” commonly referred to as the look and feel of the Township. Many residents were first attracted to the Township for its quaint suburban character, and numerous amenities, and there was a general concern that its distinct sense of place has been degraded over time.

#### Residents Enjoy Living in Cherry Hill

Although residents acknowledge there is always room for improvement no matter what community you may be in, it should be noted that most residents of Cherry Hill said they genuinely enjoy living in the Township. They appreciate the suburban quality of the neighborhoods, with walkable parks and schools, and access to open spaces and recreational facilities. They also enjoy the unrivaled access to Philadelphia, New York City, and the arger region. Only *15% of online survey participants said they were not satisfied with living in Cherry Hill, while 28% were very satisfied (Figure 1).*

Figure 1. Satisfaction with Living in Cherry Hill



## Neighborhoods are seen as a strong asset for the Township

Residents viewed their neighborhoods as walkable, tight-knit communities, and considered them “high-value.” Characteristics that residents identified as reasons they liked living in their neighborhood include affordability and safety as well as access to Philadelphia, good schools, recreation facilities, and other amenities.

## Cherry Hill’s Transition into a “Metropolitan Subcenter”<sup>1</sup> Is Impacting the Suburban Charm of the Township in the Minds of Many Residents

“Haphazard” was commonly used to describe the pockets of commercial and office development that have begun to creep into neighborhoods bordering arterial and collector roads such as Haddonfield-Berlin and Rt 70. Residents felt that development, particularly along major roadways, lacked a cohesive vision and expressed concern that areas are evolving without proper guidance. It was a major concern of residents that one-off residential-to-office conversions and larger scale commercial development are not regulated strongly enough to protect the adjacent neighborhoods. Reflecting this, 35% of residents felt that more commercial development would have a negative or very negative impact on Cherry Hill.

Residents expect the demand for commercial development to increase in the future and want commercial development to be more tightly regulated to fit the character of the Township. They also wanted to see buffers improved between commercial areas


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<sup>1</sup> DVRPC identified six Metropolitan Subcenters in its *Connections 2040* Plan for Greater Philadelphia. Metropolitan subcenters are the second tier in a seven-tier system, only less compact, dense, and economically significant than the Metropolitan center (Center City/University City/Camden Central Business District). Cherry Hill’s identification as a metropolitan subcenter reflects the magnitude of jobs and commercial activity present in the area.

In *Connections 2040*, DVRPC explains that “by concentrating growth around and within Centers, the region can both preserve open space and reduce infrastructure costs. The densities and mixed-uses inherent within Centers can enhance the feasibility of walking, bicycling, and public transit as alternatives to the automobile.”

Figure 2. Public Outreach Photos





and residential neighborhoods, and measures taken to prevent traffic from cutting through neighborhoods to avoid congestion on major roadways.

Furthermore, residents felt that to non-residents and visitors, the image of Cherry Hill is primarily that of commercial strip corridors and the Cherry Hill Mall and that the neighborhoods are no longer seen as the jewel of the Township as they once were. Residents want the suburban character and charm of their neighborhoods to continue to be preserved, and desire for this charm to extend into the commercial areas. Instead, they see the low-quality character of commercial areas negatively influencing adjacent residential areas. Residents also felt that there was an unmet need for retail designed to serve local or neighborhood needs. These shopping centers would ideally be accessible by walking or biking, rather than solely by car as they are today.

### **Cherry Hill Lacks a Downtown/Community Gathering Space**

Residents repeatedly stressed a desire for the Township to have a downtown. Sixty-three percent of residents who responded to surveys felt that a “real downtown” would have either a very positive impact or a positive impact on the Township. When elaborating on a need for a downtown, residents expressed that they wanted a walkable town center or “Main Street” that is accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists and close to transit. They hoped this downtown would be a gathering space and hub for community activities. They wanted a central gathering space for events such as festivals or outdoor concerts, and a higher density of niche retail and non-chain restaurants, as well as more high-quality retail offerings. Residents used words such as authentic and organic and mentioned the success of areas such as Haddon Avenue in Collingswood and Kings Highway in Haddonfield as local success stories. Several residents suggested that a downtown connect to Haddonfield would be successful and highly popular.

### **The East/West Divide Continues to be a Pervasive Issue for Community Identity**

The feeling persists among community members that there is a divide between the eastern and western portions of Cherry Hill Township, better known as the east/west divide. This issue is felt most strongly when discussing schools. However, residents and business owners also commonly expressed distress that residential areas in the western portion of the Township faced higher commercial development pressure and housing prices were suffering. Additionally, residents felt that more apartment construction was clustered in the west, and wondered if this would increase the burden unfairly on Cherry Hill West high school. Other issues such as an uneven distribution of recreational and other amenities such as dog parks were also a concern. Residents were interested in the prospect of centralizing services within the Township to make them more easily accessible.

### **Housing Opportunity**

Cherry Hill residents see the Township first as a community of neighborhoods, and secondly as a commercial and employment hub. It is unsurprising, therefore, that housing issues were paramount in the minds of many residents. Concerns expressed over housing ranged from access to quality housing, to the ability to age in place, to the means of maintaining the housing stock as it ages.

### **Stigmas around Housing Types and Affordability Present a Barrier for Residents when Finding Needed Housing in the Township**

While residents understand the desire by younger generations and empty-nesters for housing options such as apartments, small single-family homes, duplexes or townhomes, the online survey revealed very little support for this type of development found in online survey results. Further, there was the concern that non-family households were becoming more common. While this phenomenon is accurate, it should be noted that most residents were concerned with the implications of this condition, such as an





excess of parking on narrow streets, rather than a concern over non-familial households themselves.

50% of residents who participated in the online surveys felt strongly that more housing that is affordable to low-income residents would have a negative impact on the Township. However, 25% of survey respondents also found it either difficult or very difficult to access quality affordable housing. There stigma surrounding low-income and rental housing in the Township was apparent during outreach. This contradiction represents an opportunity for further education about affordable housing, one of the most misunderstood issues in New Jersey. According to the survey, less than 10% of residents said that they were confident that they could explain how affordable housing requirements impact Cherry Hill.

The demographic make-up of survey participants is worth noting in regards to the above finding. Of 450 total resident survey participants, 92.4% were home-owners, while only 2.4% were renters. 53.11% of participants had children that currently lived with them, while 42.2% did not. Furthermore, 79% of participants identified as white. This indicates that the survey may not have reached an audience reflective of the demographic diversity present in the Township.

### **Ad-hoc Development of Apartments has Created Tension around Housing**

Where new housing types such as large-scale apartment complexes were introduced, residents were less concerned with the apartments themselves and uneasy that apartments being built were not high enough quality, and were inconsistent with the form of neighborhoods. Residents feel that apartment complexes do not blend into the existing neighborhoods, but rather exist as isolated islands, dropped at random into the Township.

Residents also stressed at public meetings that dense housing such as apartment complexes are being built in areas throughout Cherry Hill with little thought given to transit accessibility. They felt that locating dense housing near transit would support greater

transit ridership and reduce the traffic generated from new development. Residents were supportive of land use patterns such as transit-oriented development that would allow for higher density housing, but only in places where the number of vehicles added to the roads from development might be offset by alternative means of transportation. Some of the areas where multi-family TOD development was viewed favorably included the Garden State Park and Woodcrest, near the PATCO station.

### **Residents Want to Stay in Cherry Hill Long-term**

The population in Cherry Hill is aging, and residents are aware that many of the young families that moved to the Township 20-30 years ago are now empty nesters who want to remain in place. In fact, one-quarter of the population of Cherry Hill has been living in their home for 25 years or longer, and the median age is 42 years of age, up from 29 in 1970. To support the aging segment of the population, there was great support at public engagement sessions for services to assist with aging in place, and the construction of more 55+ communities. Some residents also wanted in-law suites to be allowable in single-family neighborhoods so that residents could live with their children but retain some measure of independence. As mentioned above, some residents also wanted to see more options for multi-family housing or small single-family homes so that empty-nesters are able to downsize from their large homes that were designed to hold their families and which now present maintenance and financial hurdles.

### **Residents Acknowledge the Population is Aging and it will Impact the Housing Market**

Residents in the Township wonder what the Township's housing market can support as a large portion of the population retires. If everyone wants to sell their homes at the same time, will the housing market support the glut, or will homeowners be forced to sell their homes for less than desired? Residents expressed their concerns that national trends of families having fewer children and not buying larger houses will impact Cherry Hill where large homes proliferate.



### **Some Residents Worry Their Homes Are Too Large and Costly to Maintain for New Buyers**

Many open house participants stated that young families, such as their children and spouses, also want “starter homes” or other smaller, more easily maintained housing. Conversely, most houses on the market are 3+ bedrooms and come with a higher price tag and value resulting in a higher property tax burden that many families are unwilling—or unable—to bear. This was reflected in open-ended survey questions asking what the worst part of living in Cherry Hill was. This question was frequently answered by “high property taxes” and “high housing costs.” While residents are unhappy about the burden, some potential homeowners view the Township, county, and state as a non-starter due to the high tax burden.

### **The Housing Stock is Aging**

Residents also face some uncertainty about the health of the housing stock in Cherry Hill. During public outreach sessions, there was broad support for strengthening and protecting existing neighborhoods. The neighborhoods have faced challenges that residents want to see addressed through policies and support services. Economic conditions during the Great Recession led to increased abandonment of homes, which has only just begun to recover. Even more concerning to residents is the age of most of the housing stock in the Township. 70% of homes in the Township were built as part of large-scale tract development between 1940 and 1980. This means that homes are close to 80 years old. Older homes are perceived as more work and therefore less desirable to homeowners, particularly first-time homeowners. These homes, however, are proving desirable to flippers. Investors will flip homes that haven’t been touched in decades which are then commonly used as rental properties, rather than being improved and sold to owner-occupiers. Residents are concerned that neighborhoods have more renters, who are perceived as having less interest in property maintenance and upkeep, and as being less active community members.

### **Commercial Development**


The booming success of the Cherry Hill Mall is possibly the most defining characteristic in the history of Cherry Hill Township. In the decades since the mall opened, commercial development has continued to spread throughout the Township, and to prosper there, creating a regional hub for shopping, dining, and entertainment. However, the large successes for commerce have not come without their own challenges. Residents feel that commercial development in the Township lacks connection to local needs and lacks accessibility and that national chains are replacing the mom-and-pop shops that Cherry Hill was once famous for.

### **There Is a Tension between Commercial and Residential Development**

Residents in Cherry Hill feel that commerce is king, and the demand for attracting retailers to the Township is held higher than the needs of residents. In short, residents feel like their needs are subordinate to the wants and needs of developers with no vested interest in the Township. Residents further expressed that when commercial areas were built, their layouts and access points presented huge barriers to walkability. Several residents expressed frustration that although their neighborhoods bordered commercial areas, these commercial centers were not walkable or accessible from the neighborhood, and were not pedestrian friendly.

### **Commercial Development Supports National Chains and Forces Out Smaller, Locally Owned Businesses**

Residents felt that small businesses in the Township needed greater community support, and events such as street fairs should be encouraged so that mom and pop shops have more opportunities to interface with the public. Many residents recalled that the Township, in past decades, was home to a larger amount of locally owned businesses, but that these businesses have been pushed out by the higher rents demanded by property owners looking to attract national chain retailers. These newer commercial developments, such as the



Garden State Park or expansions at the Cherry Hill Mall, cater to these national chains and shoppers who come from the greater region rather than catering to local shoppers.

Furthermore, residents expressed regret that areas such as Erlton, which still house local businesses, are struggling and hoped that more could be done to support these areas of the Township. In Erlton in particular, residents wanted to see a main street similar to Haddon Avenue in Collingswood or Kings Highway in Haddonfield, complete with walkable mom-and-pop restaurants and shops with outdoor dining opportunities.

## Employment Opportunity

As the third largest job hub in the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington Metropolitan Area, over 50,000 people work in the Township on a daily basis. The Township, however, also accommodates a large percentage of daily inflow/outflow of workers (few people both live and work in Cherry Hill) due to the industry sectors that the Township currently offers, which are primarily administration and support, health care and social assistance, and retail trade, and fewer “white collar” jobs.

### Residents Want Opportunities to Work in Cherry Hill

Only 4,800 residents both live and work in the Township. Residents expressed that they wanted more high-quality job opportunities within the Township so that they are able to both live and work in Cherry Hill. Eighty percent of survey participants felt that better employment and job opportunities would have a positive or very positive impact on the Township and 79% felt that better access to jobs and employment would have a positive impact. Residents commented that growth sectors, such as health care, could present new job opportunities for Township residents.

### Residents Believe Job Training Could Support New and Existing Economic Sectors

Over 70% of survey participants also felt that more

job training opportunities would have a positive impact on the Township. This was echoed by public meeting participants who supported the idea of bringing additional post-secondary educational institutions to the Township. Four-year universities were the most heavily favored, but community colleges and trade/tech schools were also supported. Residents felt that having these amenities within the Township would allow residents greater access to high-quality educational opportunities as well as job training programs, which could support the existing manufacturing sector in the Township. Job training programs could also prove useful for the projected growth in the medical/health care sector.

## Circulation

### Residents See Traffic as a Major Issue

When asked about the “worst part of living in Cherry Hill” they largely responded that congestion and traffic, and the necessity of driving everywhere, ranked highest. Likewise “Less Traffic on Major Streets” was one of the three most popular responses to what would have the biggest positive impact on Cherry Hill, and “Less Traffic on Residential Streets” was only slightly behind that.

This sentiment was strongly echoed during public engagement open houses. Traffic and congestion throughout the Township is the paramount concern to many residents. Residents want to see more varied options for transportation, such as bus service, bike, and pedestrian improvements. They also want to see land uses along roadways that don’t strongly impact traffic flow, citing gas stations and convenience stores along major roadways and intersections as common conflict points.

### Residents Want to See Better Options for Multi-Modal Transportation

Public transportation options are viewed as plentiful in the Township, and bus and PATCO ridership is increasing. However, at present, *37% of online survey respondents felt that it was either very difficult or difficult to access public transportation (Figure 3). 54%*



Figure 3. Access to Public Transportation

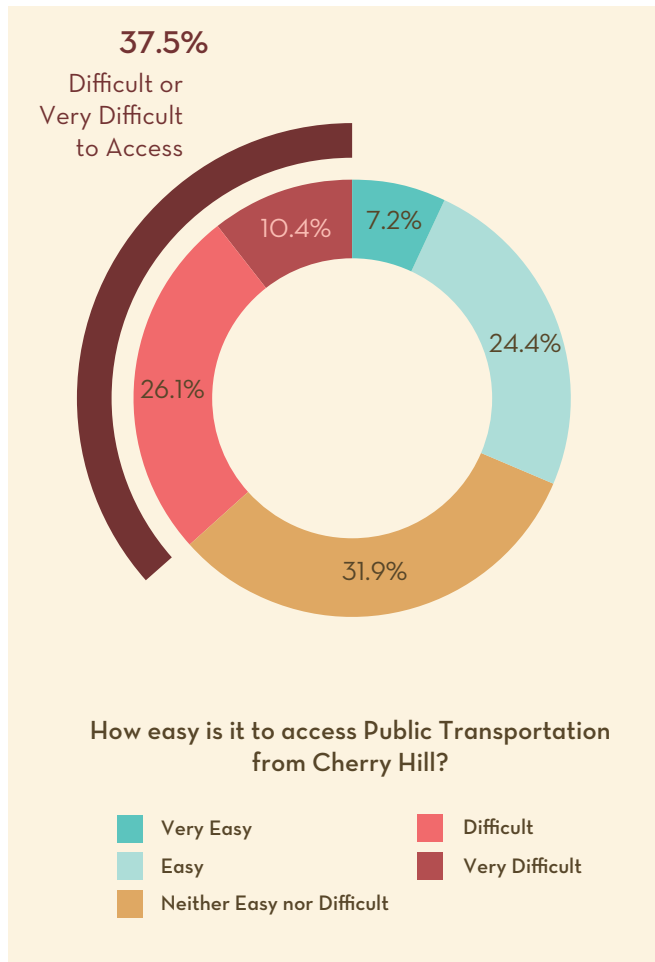
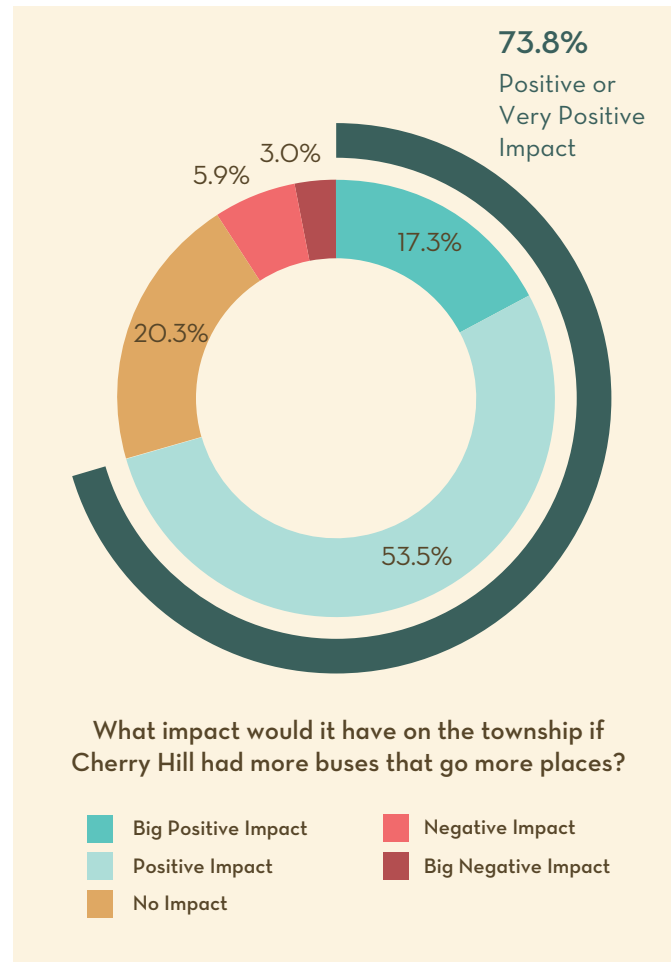


Figure 4. Impact of Additional Bus Routes



of residents responded in an online survey that busses that go to more places would have a positive impact on Cherry Hill, and 17% of residents felt it would be a very positive impact (Figure 4). Residents also expressed that more frequent bus service would have a positive impact. The quality of the bus stops themselves was also a concern for residents, with many lacking shelter or amenities such as benches, trash cans, or lighting.

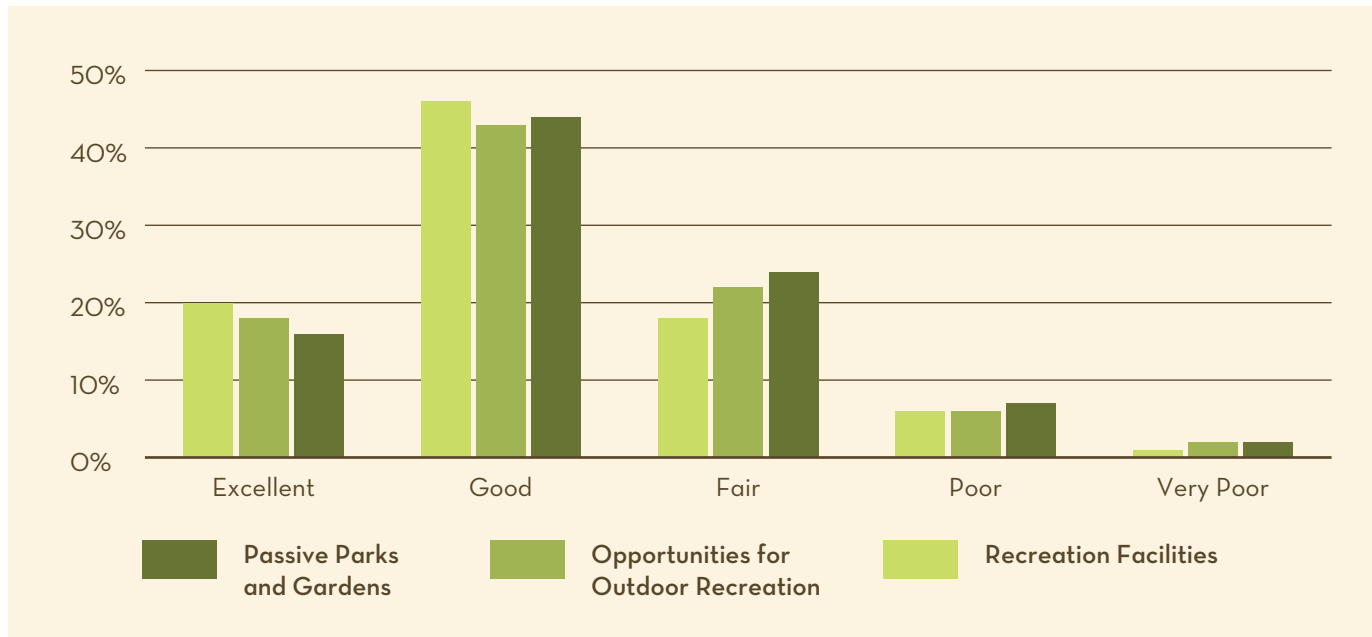
Residents also commented that bus companies such as Bolt Bus lack a safe option for picking up and dropping off riders; buses currently load and unload on the side of Route 38 across from the Cherry Hill Mall at a very busy intersection. This presents a safety concern not only for riders who must then cross the intersection, but also for vehicles whose sight lines are blocked by buses, and for vehicles attempting to pick up or drop off riders.

Several public outreach participants wanted bike networks expanded along roadways so that residents can bike to work. The ability to use multi-modal transportation to access jobs and commercial areas was seen by many as a missing link. In fact, 69% of residents who participated in the online survey felt that more bike lanes would have a positive or very positive impact on Cherry Hill.

### The Fragmentary Sidewalk Network Thwarts Walkability and Pedestrian Safety

A connected sidewalk network is viewed as important to residents. Some neighborhoods within the Township, such as Batesville, have no internal sidewalk network, and others have only a piecemeal system. Residents expressed a desire for their children

Figure 5. Quality of Open Space and Recreation Facilities in Cherry Hill



to be able to walk to school, or for local amenities such as parks and playgrounds, along a connected sidewalk system. Seventy-seven percent of residents felt that more sidewalks would have at least a positive impact.

Furthermore, pedestrian safety is paramount. Some major roadways are viewed as dangerous to walk across, and more/better crosswalks would benefit the Township. The proliferation of curb cuts and the location of crosswalks were also points of concern to residents and stakeholders. Those who volunteered their time to participate in public outreach expressed a strong desire to see greater safety measures taken to increase walkability.

### Residents Support the Expansion Of A Path/ Trailway System

Many residents commented that they are walking and biking more in their daily lives. They are excited about the potential for a path and trail system that will link them to amenities. They suggested the system be designed to support both recreation and transportation needs. These systems were particularly important for access to transportation hubs such as PATCO and NJ Transit Stations, as well as retail


destinations and outdoor amenities such as Cooper River Park.

## Community Amenities

Residents often stated that the wide variety of community amenities—in addition to the strong school districts—was one of the reasons they moved to the Township. For a township the size of Cherry Hill, residents felt that amenities were plentiful, but wanted to see some improvements.

### Residents Want To See Existing Community Amenities Improved and Expanded

According to survey results, *66% of residents feel that the quality of recreational facilities within Cherry Hill Township is either excellent or good. Similarly, 60% of residents felt that passive parks, gardens, and green spaces were either excellent or good, and 61% felt that opportunities for outdoor recreation were either excellent or good (Figure 5).* However, when asked what the Township should have more of, parks and open space was always a popular answer. Residents felt that the garden-like quality of neighborhoods and parks was one of the greatest assets of Cherry Hill, and



wanted those types of amenities to be strengthened and expanded. Survey respondents and open house attendees also wanted to see more events like street festivals, more public gathering spaces such as plazas and town centers, and more recreation centers and sports fields. They also wanted the Township to invest in better connections to historical/natural amenities such as Cooper River Park, Croft Farms, and Barclay Farms.

Residents also expressed a concern that some of the existing playgrounds, recreational facilities, and sports fields require additional maintenance and upkeep to remain in good condition, or should be replaced with newer facilities. There was also a growing concern that high-quality recreation offerings are private, such as swim clubs or soccer leagues, and expressed a desire for more sports leagues and recreational opportunities that are accessible to families regardless of income.

## Industrial Areas

### Changing Industrial Areas are an Opportunity

Industrial parks in Cherry Hill are beginning to struggle as modern manufacturing practices are evolving, leaving industrial buildings obsolete. Stakeholders were especially concerned that these areas were being re-purposed for other uses without a comprehensive plan for how these areas should evolve. Residents and stakeholders were welcoming of unique uses such as warehousing, houses of worship, museums, offices, exercise, and niche industrial (e.g., winemaking, brewing, etc.). However, they wanted to see infrastructure improvements that would make such spaces safe for the new types of users who will be attracted to the area.

## Understanding Land Use Tools

### Cherry Hill Residents are Not Confident in their Understanding of Key Planning Topics

Less than 10% of respondents were confident that they could explain any of the following terms:

- How New Jersey Affordable Housing requirements impact Cherry Hill
- The role of the State and County in managing roads within Cherry Hill
- How zoning is used to shape the look and feel of Cherry Hill
- The benefits and drawbacks of using Redevelopment to further Township goals

Between 20% and 35% of respondents were somewhat confident, depending on the topic. This low level of familiarity with important topics is likely adding to confusion and exacerbating the amount of misinformation that is in the public discourse.

