

# **Concord Village Center Committee Summary of Results for Questionnaires**

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## **Executive Summary**

Concord Village Center Committee is striving to encourage public participation in the planning process, and the questionnaires are one of the strategies being used to gauge resident and visitor opinion of the centers. The questions garner feedback on how the respondents utilized the village centers, what they most liked and disliked, and what aspects of the village centers they would like to see changed.

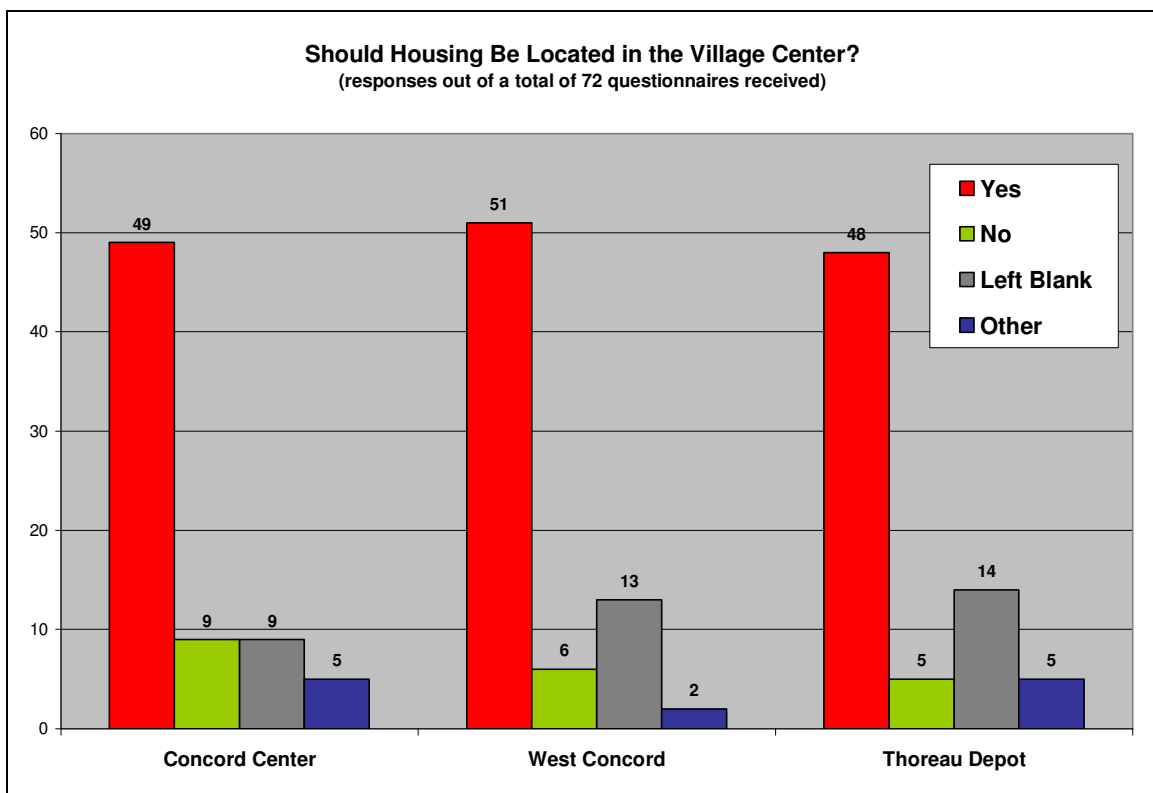
In each of the village centers, the questionnaires address the following areas: Housing, Activities, Favorite Features, Least Favorite Features, and Idealistic Changes. Questions related to housing indicate enthusiastic support for housing in the village centers, particularly on upper floors above retail shops. Categories that emerge as favorite features of the villages include walkability, architectural or physical character, restaurants, and a sense of community. The least favorite features potentially ripe for change are traffic and parking, aesthetic concerns and the character of some of the existing businesses. The top responses for idealistic ideas include improvements to parking and traffic; the addition of pedestrian spaces and bike lanes; allowing sidewalk cafes; the availability of more and different entertainment options; and a variety of different restaurants.

Many of the responses focus on physical improvements as well as express a general theme for maintaining the retail and economic character of the village centers. The theme of retaining independent businesses and of having businesses with practical services is expressed throughout the responses. Although not statistically representative of the community, the Village Center Committee could use the questionnaires as a sample of public opinion on preserving the qualities valued and on addressing undesirable aspects. Lastly, the questionnaires reflect idealistic long-term goals to provide vibrant, safe, socially attractive public spaces by means such as enhancing viable local businesses, aesthetic enhancements, traffic calming or active street life in the form of pedestrian spaces and sidewalk cafes.

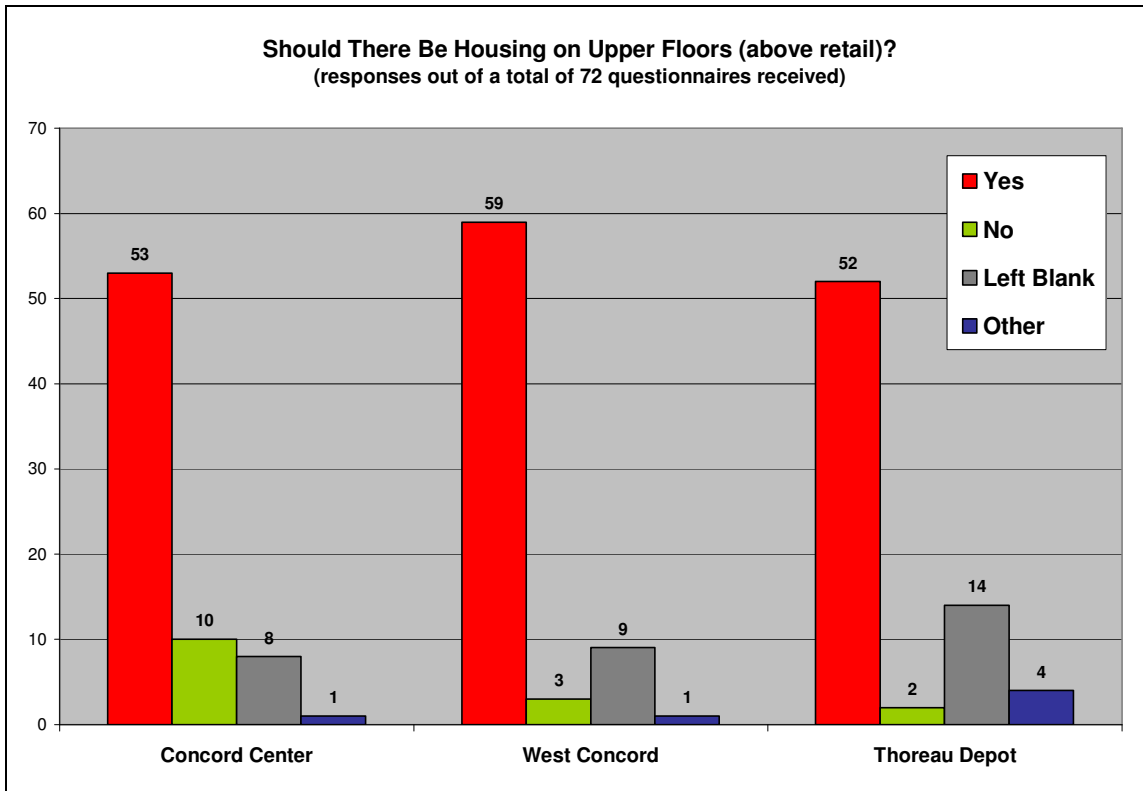


possibly intensifying the mixed-use character of the three village centers. There was an overwhelmingly favorable response to both questions, with a somewhat more affirmative response to housing on the upper floors. (See below Graph 1 and 2)

The majority of positive responses to housing on the upper floors indicate that there is support for housing on upper floors, above retail shops in the villages. Some people, who are against or undecided about housing in the centers in general, support housing on the upper floors. **If the Village Center Committee wants to encourage housing in the centers, it might be wise to initially focus on advocating for housing on the upper floors for which there may be more support in the general public as it will retain the first level retail.**



Graph 1



**Graph 2**

## **B. Usage, Likes, and Dislikes**

One goal of the questionnaire is to ascertain how the public interacted with each of the village centers. Multiple questions try to determine day-to-day uses, likes and dislikes as a basis for understanding the current functionality of the centers, the favorite qualities of each center and the undesirable characteristics associated with the centers.

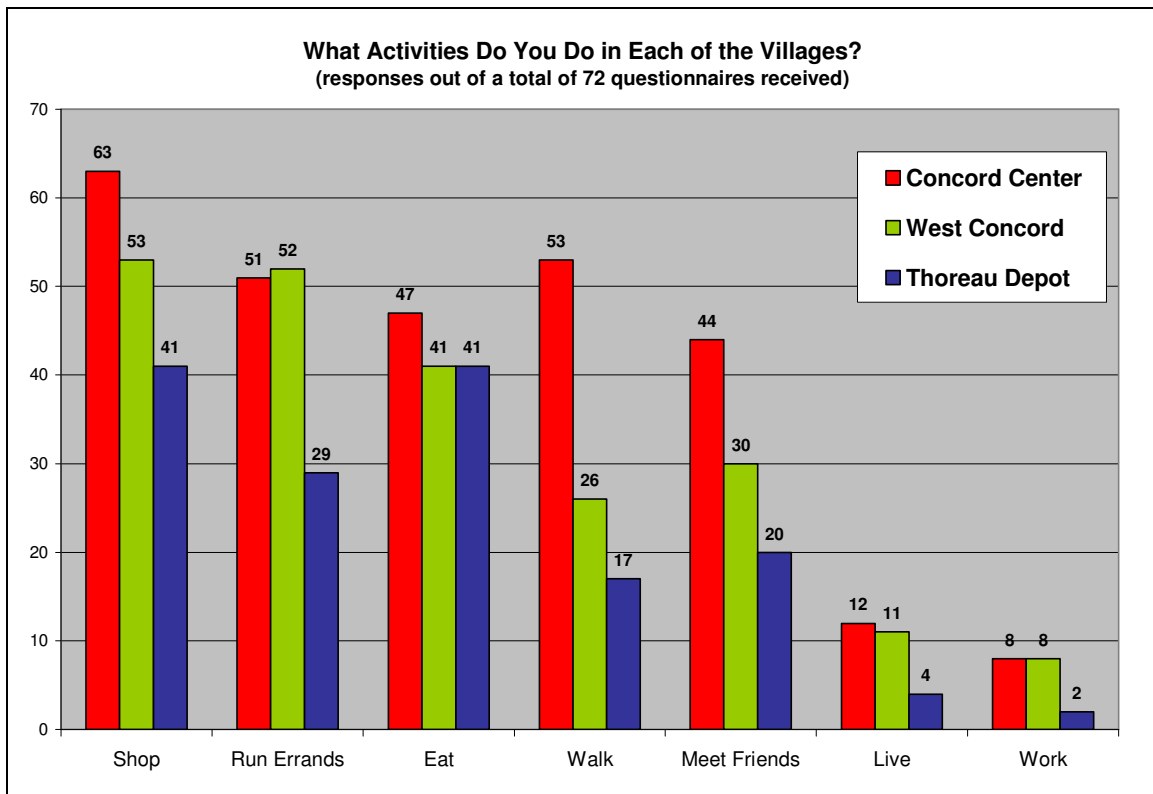
### 1. Activities

The questionnaires ask respondents to indicate how they used each center by checking a box next to prescribed activities such as shop, eat, run errands, walk, meet friends, work and live.

The responses almost mirrored each other on how people use the centers. Shop, run errands and eat appear to be the top activities for the centers from the options offered. Concord Center and West Concord generally parallel each other in proportion of responses for each category. Responses for Thoreau Depot may indicate people are using this center less for running errands, walking, or meeting friends or the overall number of responses might be less from Thoreau Depot. (See below Graph 3, which lists total number of responses received from left to right.)

The activities give a snapshot of the level of mixed use currently at each center. Walk, meet friends, live and work relates more to quality of life and sustainable living. **If the Village Center Committee wants to increase the mixed use of the centers, to add value to the overall experience with each center and to make the future growth of**

the center more sustainable, it might be important to try to balance the uses of the centers by focusing on enhancing pedestrian movement, creating opportunities to socialize and encouraging development for housing and work space.



Graph 3

## 2. Favorite Features

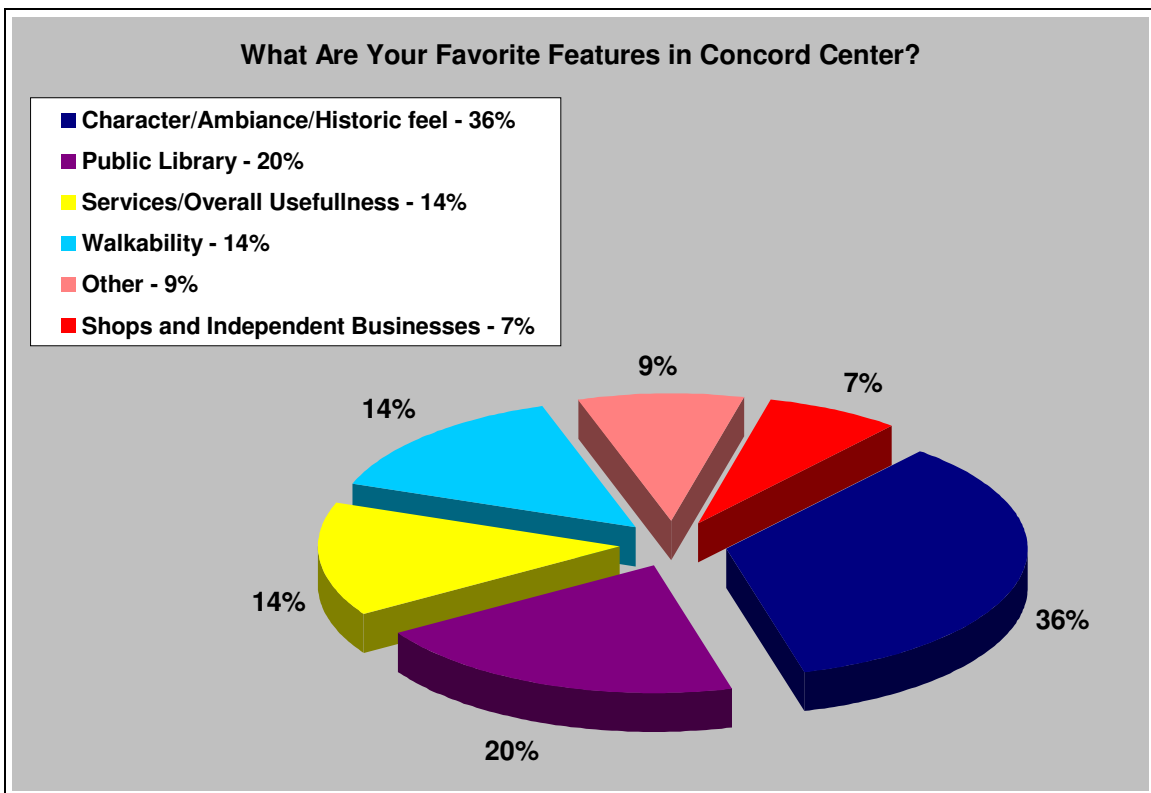
In an open ended question, the respondents were asked to indicate their favorite feature of each center, which are grouped into five described categories with a sixth category as “other”. The centers share some favorite features, while others are unique to each village center.

The categories that apply to each of the three centers are: 1) Character/Ambiance/Historic Feel, 2) Services/Overall Usefulness, and 3) Shops and Independent Businesses. Walkability appears for both Concord Center and Thoreau Depot; however, Food/Restaurants and Sense of Community appears for both West Concord and Thoreau Depot. (See below Graphs 4, 5 and 6 below for each of the centers)

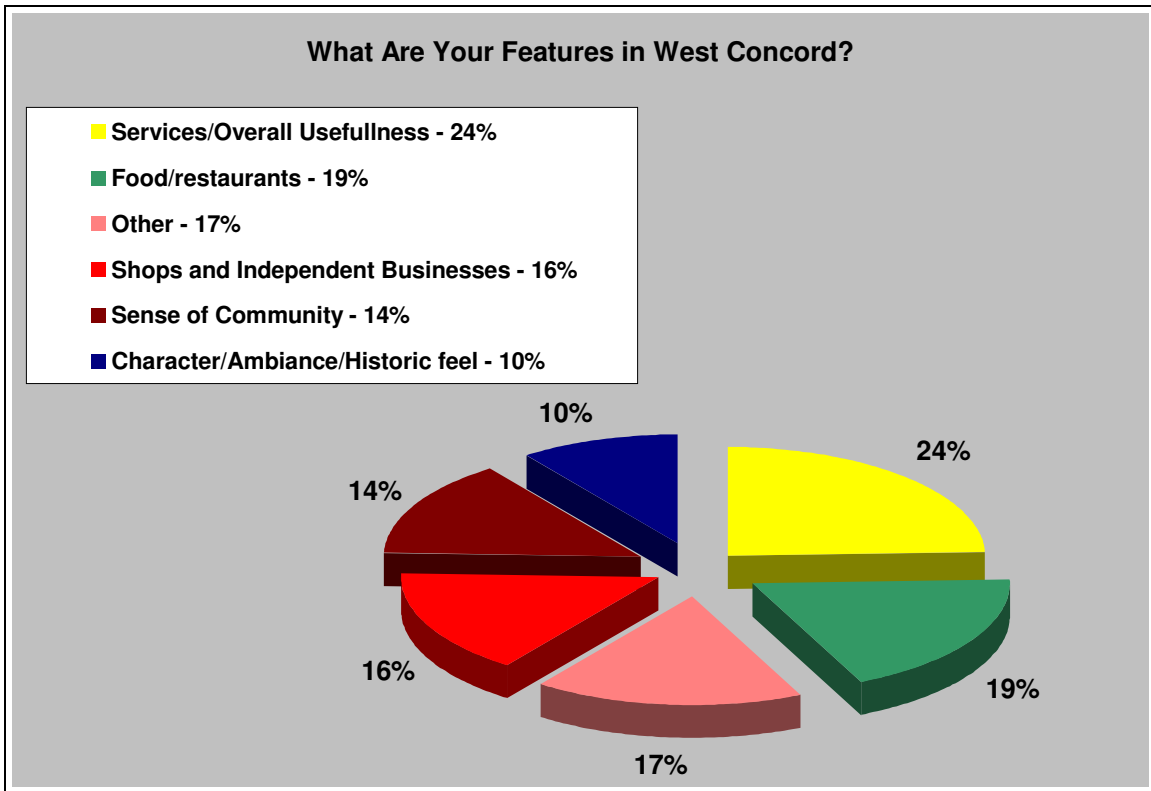
It is worth noting that the large category of “Character/Ambiance/Historic Feel” encompasses overlapping responses for each of the centers, but each center elicited differences in emphasis. The aesthetic and architectural integrity of Concord Center was referenced repeatedly as an element that elicits feeling of pride, which many wish to see continued. West Concord is affectionately referred to as “eclectic.”

Lastly, the category of “Other” reflects the miscellaneous responses that fell outside the five described groupings. Concord Center includes topics such as “pedestrian laws enforced,” and “the arts.” West Concord’s “Other” category—the third largest category for this center—comprises of several key features: the commuter rail, the Public Library, and Walkability. West Concord has the overall most diverse responses, keeping with its eclectic reputation. All of the responses for Thoreau Depot fell into one of the five favorite features categories. **The Village Center Committee may want to consider how to enhance, complement or combine these “Other” items such as “Walkability” when assessing potential planning changes in West Concord.**

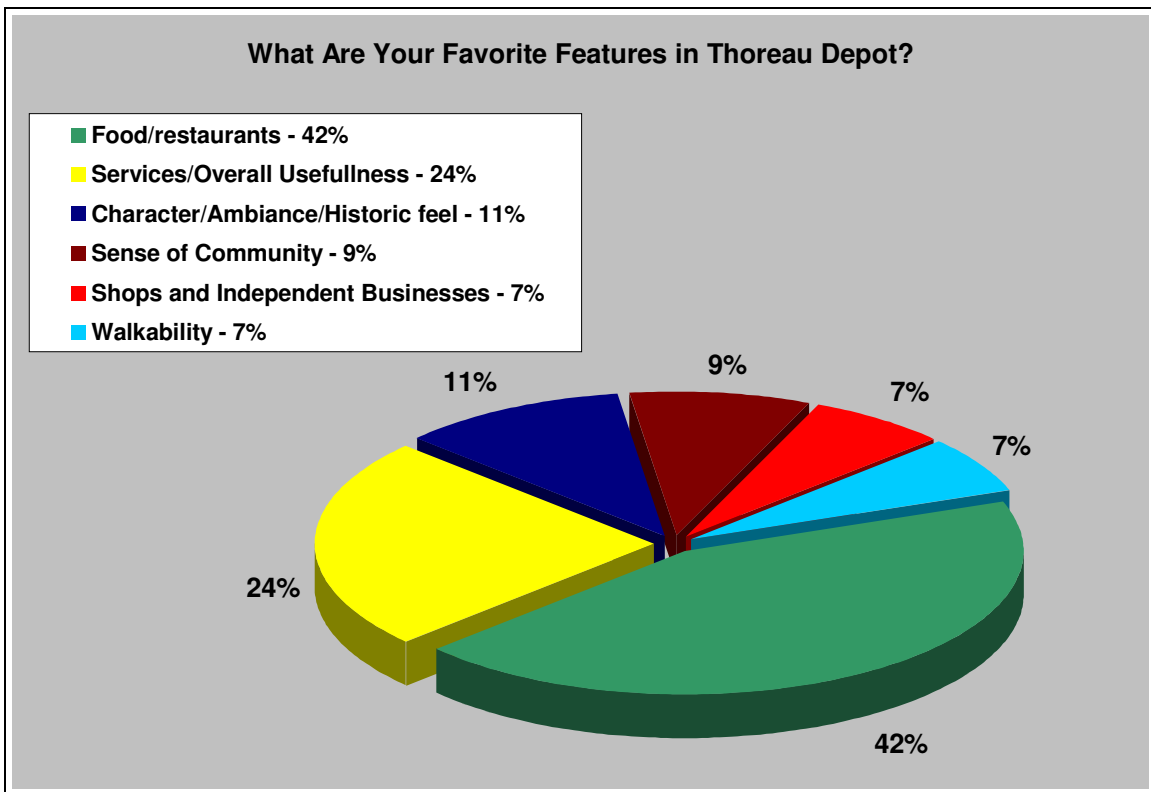
In sum, the identification of favorites feature gives input on how each center is valued by the community at this point in time. **Most importantly, the responses give an indication of the characteristics that should be preserved or enhanced. The Village Center Committee may want to look for opportunities to enhance these features, especially the sense of community for all three centers.**



Graph 4



Graph 5



Graph 6

### 3. Dislikes

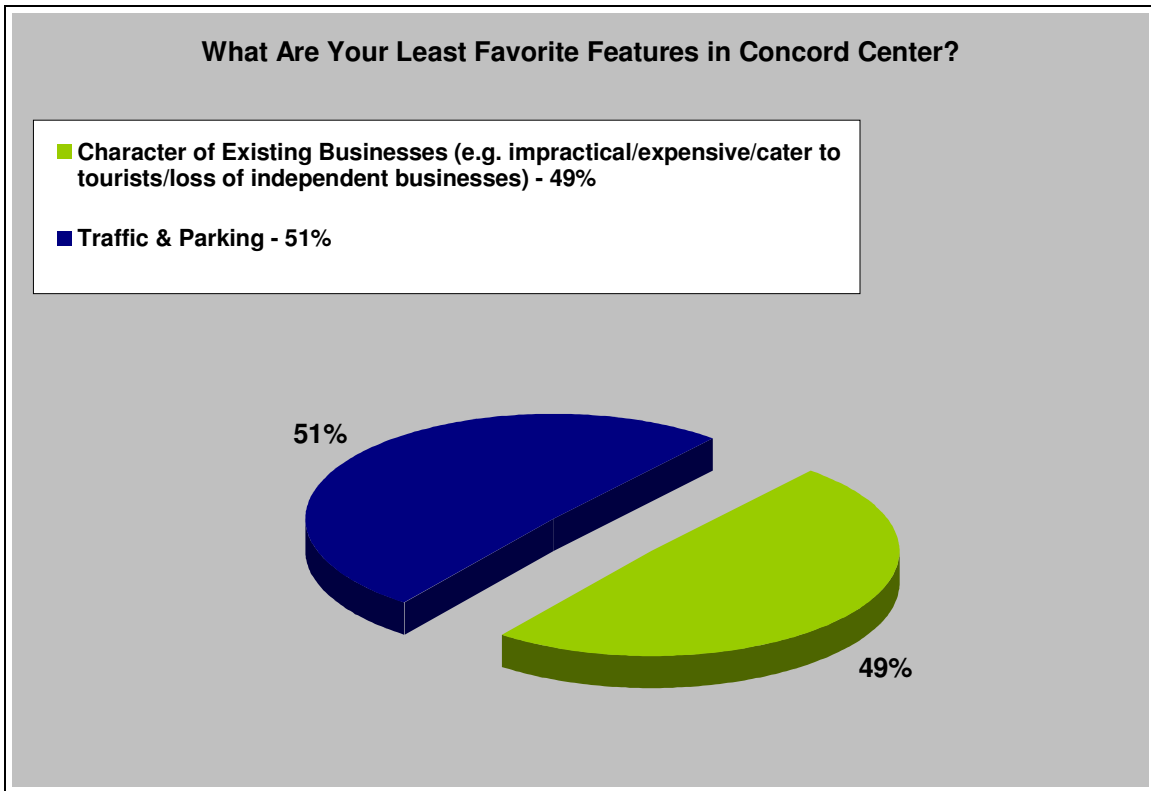
The respondents were asked to indicate their least favorite feature of each center, which clustered naturally around a few topics: 1) Traffic and Parking; 2) Character of Existing Businesses; and 3) Aesthetic Concerns. (See below Graphs 7, 8 and 9)

Traffic and Parking are the major concerns for all centers. Thoreau Depot is the only center to have responses in each of the three categories. As expected, most the traffic and parking concerns at Thoreau Depot specifically reference traffic entering and leaving Starbucks at the intersection of Thoreau Street and Sudbury Road as well as the overall congestion between the intersection and the commuter rail station.

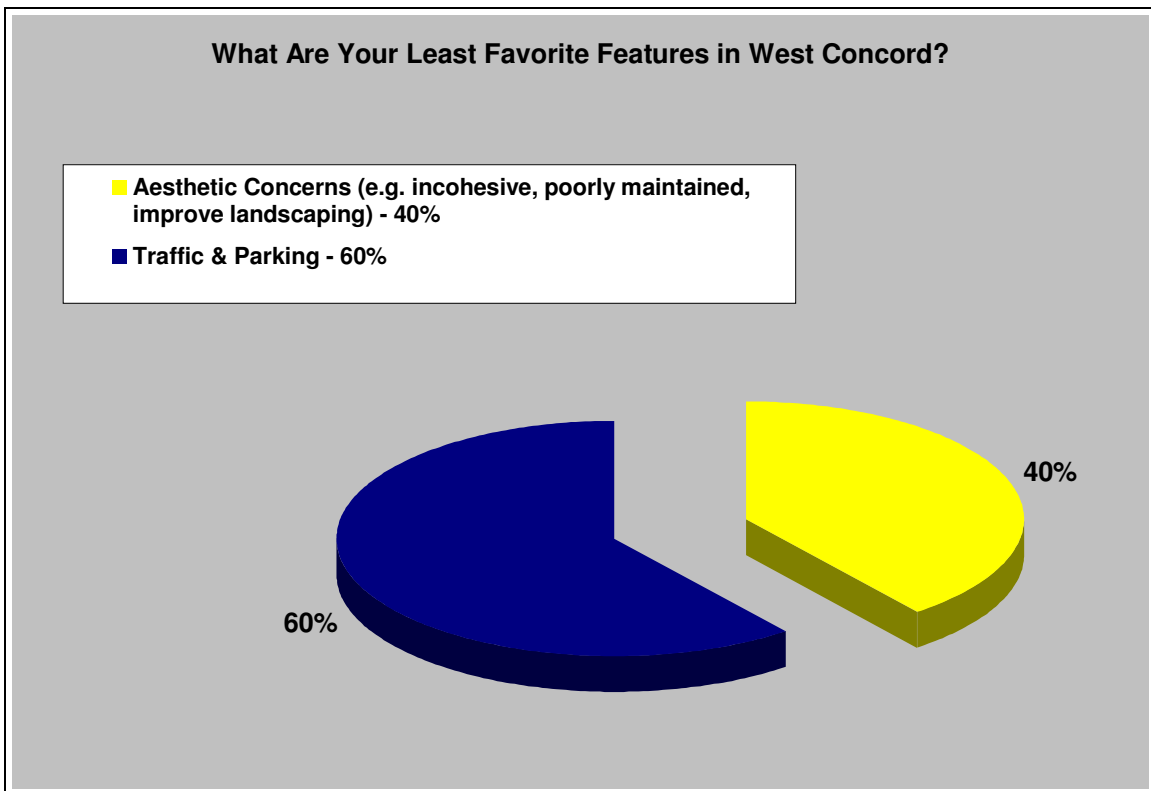
**In general, the Village Center Committee can focus on the few topics identified through the questionnaires as “least favorite” as these could be an indication of consensus for change. Traffic calming and parking measures will receive strong support for change in all three centers. Although this issue is likely outside of the purview of the Village Center Committee, which has its mission derived in zoning, the Village Center Committee can make recommendations to the Town for further studies or future changes.**

It’s interesting to note that, respondents expressed as “favorite features” the individual/independent businesses in Concord Center; however, respondents also reported their least favorite feature is the character of existing businesses. The Village Center Committee should understand these responses to mean that respondents want to maintain, and if possible, enhance the existing independent businesses in the center, but would like to see some businesses serving their practical needs, instead of catering to tourists.

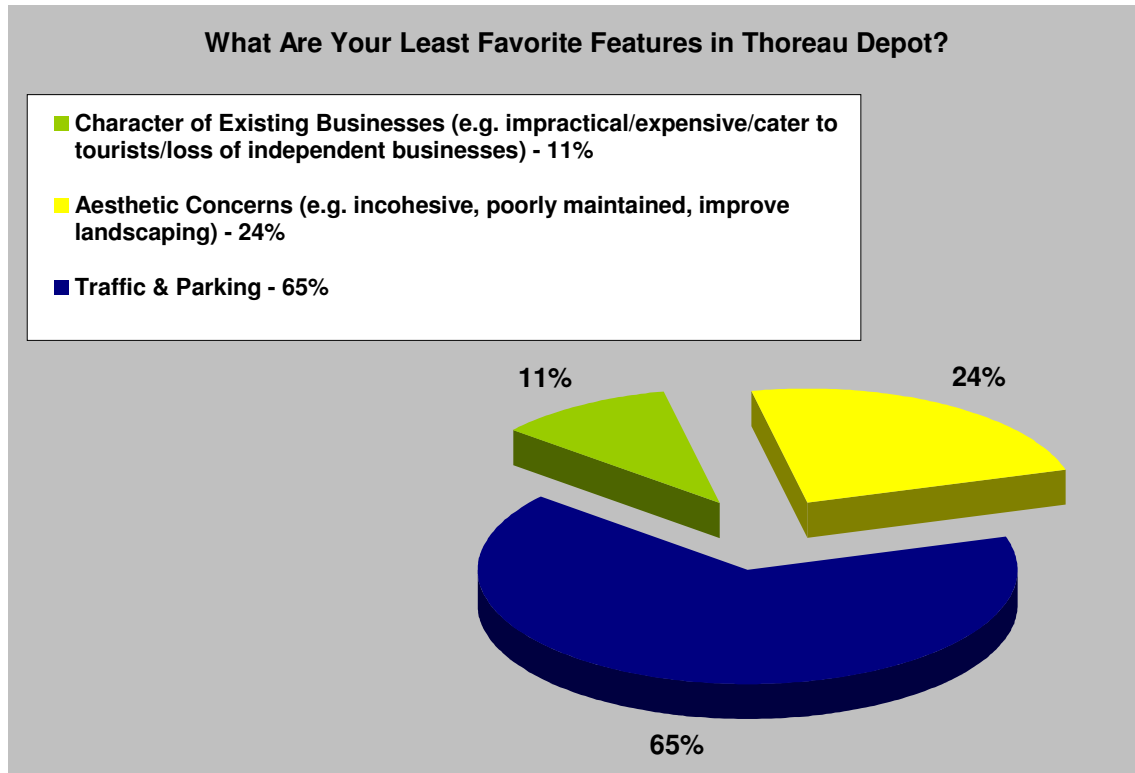
Given the economic conditions (i.e. high rent, high tourism area), it is unlikely the store owners can afford to serve day-to-day needs in Concord Center. Yet, there may be opportunities to provide some of these amenities. **The Village Center Committee may want to identify specific amenities/items that might make Concord Center more practical as some store owners might be able to meet some of these needs or it may serve as guidance to attract new shops.** The case may simply be that the practical services desired by the respondents are incompatible with the realities of high rent and other pressures on the area.



Graph 7



Graph 8



**Graph 9**

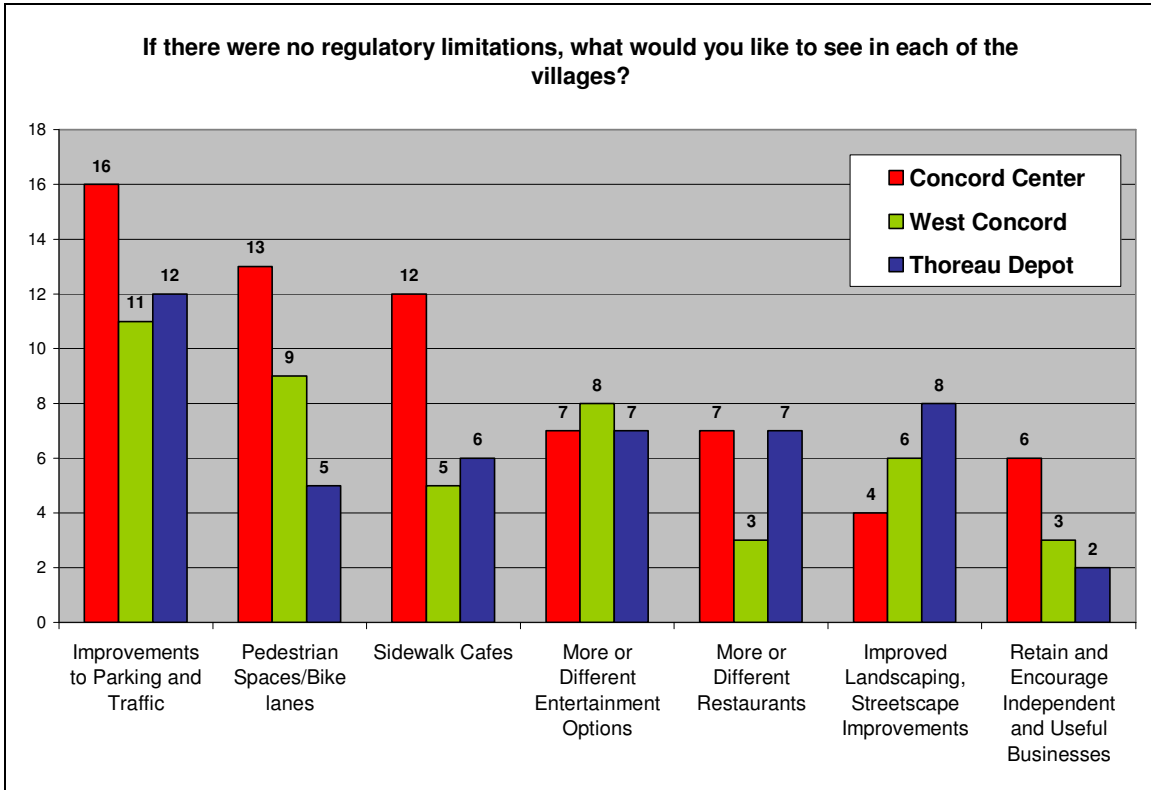
### **C. What Would You Ideally Like to See?**

One of the last questions is, “If there were no regulatory limitations, what would you ideally like to see in each of the villages?” While prior questions focused primarily on respondents’ current interaction with the centers, this question addresses potential opportunities for future positive change.

Results are clustered into seven categories, descending in order of total number of responses received: 1) Improvements to Parking and Traffic; 2) Pedestrian Spaces/Bike Lanes; 3) Sidewalk Cafes; 4) More or Different Entertainment Options; 5) More or Different Restaurants; 6) Improved Landscaping and Streetscape Improvements; and 7) Retain and Encourage Independent and Useful Businesses. (See below Graph 10)

Improved parking and traffic conditions are the number one request, which corresponds with the “Least Favorite Features” results. It should be noted that pedestrian spaces encompasses both general wishes for improved walking conditions and for pedestrian-only spaces such as a section of road closed off to auto traffic either periodically or permanently. More entertainment options represented a range of ideas such as cinema, a youth center, a bowling alley and venues for live music or arts. It should be noted that “Retain and Encourage Independent and Useful Businesses” may seem to have received the fewest responses; however, other categories such as sidewalk cafes, entertainment options and more restaurants are all subcategories under “Retain and Encourage Independent and Useful Businesses.” The separation of these suggestions allows more

specific recommendations to the Committee and the business community. **The Village Center Committee can use these results in conjunction with other outreach efforts to gauge the community support of making certain changes at specific locations (i.e. potentially higher public demand for improved streetscapes in Thoreau Depot and West Concord.)**



**Graph 10**

**IV. Conclusions**

The Village Center Committee can use the common themes and concerns emerging from the questionnaires to reaffirm and supplement public opinion on how to address the future growth and redevelopment of the centers. The results of the questionnaires should be a part of the continued public outreach effort as the questionnaires responses should be distributed back to the community. As the Village Center Committee moves forward to develop recommendations for future actions, the questionnaires offer insight into how residents view changes that will enhance economic vitality and quality of life.