COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Pooler 2040 ultimately belongs to the citizens of Pooler.

Through the Community Participation Plan Element, the Pooler 2040 team sought to gather the community's opinions, priorities, and visions about the future of the area. An in-depth public engagement effort was made in the months leading up to the draft of Pooler 2040, and included a public survey, pop-up events, and virtual meetings.

Specifically, this community participation plan sought to engage the public on issues addressed in the comprehensive plan.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

The vision for Pooler 2040 represents the voice of our community. Through the two-year planning process, Pooler community members shared their unique perspectives on what makes their community great and their suggestions for improvements. The goal of the engagement process was to bring as many voices into the planning effort as possible to get a wide range of ideas and perspectives and build a broad base for implementing Pooler 2040.

The Pooler 2040 process collected valuable input from diverse platforms, community members, and stakeholders to shape the Plan's vision and goals. The outreach process involved a variety of different approaches, which are listed below:

- 14 Virtual Public Meetings
- 10 Email Blasts
- 6 Quarterly Newsletters
- MPC Annual Report
- Press Releases (Traditional Media Interviews)
- City of Pooler Online Promotion
- Online Interactive Comment Mapper (~300 Comments)
- Social Media (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)
- Utility Bill Messages
- Pop-up events
- Billboard
- Dedicated Plan 2040 Website
- Online Survey (914 Participants)

POOLER
2040
NATURE

COMMUNITY SURVEY & SWOT ANALYSIS

Survey Overview

MPC staff developed a survey aimed at collecting a wide range of input. The survey was intended to be more in depth than previous comprehensive plan updates and took approximately 25 minutes to complete. The survey aimed to collect a wide range of input and covered various topics including:

- Quality of Life
- Housing
- Land Use
- Natural Resources (Sea Level Rise)
- Transportation
- Economic Development

The 24-question survey consisted of multiple choice and open-ended response questions. The MPC staff participated in the survey development and made suggested changes prior to publication. The survey was available online and in print versions, and was offered in Spanish for communities where English is not the primary language.

The survey was open from October 23, 2020 to January 19, 2021. A total of 914 responses were received from Pooler's residents.

Survey Respondents

To get a better understanding of the citizens that participated in the Plan 2040 Survey, additional information about each respondent was requested.

The survey informational questions included:

- What is your race/ethnicity?
- What is your age?
- Which housing category describes you?
- What is your highest level of education?
- What is your primary mode of travel?

Steering Committee SWOT Analysis

The Steering Committee participated in an exercise called a SWOT analysis which identified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) in Pooler.

The SWOT analysis was designed to identify priority needs and opportunities, both internally and externally, for Pooler and was used as a basis for shaping the future vision and goals for the city.

Steering Committee input helped determine the city of Pooler's needs and opportunities as part of the comprehensive planning process. The results are incorporated into the body of the plan. On the following page is the results of the Steering Committee's SWOT analysis.

Survey Respondents By The Numbers

RACE/ETHNICITY

- **69%—White or Caucasian**
- 12%—Black or AA
- 2%—Asian
- 13%—Prefer not to answer
- 1%—Other
- 4%—Hispanic, Latinx

AGE

- 0%—Under 18
- 16%—18–34
- **34%—35–49**
- 29%—50–64
- 18%—65 and Older
- 3%—Prefer not to answer

HOUSING OWNERSHIP

- **89%—Homeowner**
- 9%—Renter
- 2%—Rental Property Owner
- 0%—STVR Owner
- 0%—Other

EDUCATION

- 0%—Less than High School
- 5%—High School Diploma
- 23%—Some College
- 34%—Bachelor's Degree
- **36%—Graduate Degree**
- 2%—Prefer not to answer

MODE OF TRAVEL

- **97%—Drive alone**
- 2%—Carpool
- 0%—Bus
- 0.5%—Bike/Walk
- 0%—Rideshare
- 0.5%—Other

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Continual business development and bringing new people into the city (residential and commercial growth)
- Convenient location perfectly placed within the county
- Public safety presence is strong and well known
- Close proximity to Savannah and tourism (both people and dollars brought into the community)
- Diversity of businesses. There is a combination of small and large businesses throughout the city
- Large amount of well-maintained recreational opportunities, parks, etc., throughout the city
- Very low property tax rate
- Process of permitting and development is streamlined. Pooler is good at attracting and working with commercial and retail businesses
- Available land for development (This can also be both strength and a threat due to the possibility of land being bought and developed quickly)
- Family-friendly, although there is a lack of available schools

WEAKNESSES

- Need more people to both work here and live here
- Schools: lack of public and private schools
- There is also a lack of neutral ground for schools to be built on
- Lack of dedicated housing areas or communities for seniors
- Age in place housing is needed
- Traffic and congestion
- Lack of connectivity with regards to sidewalk and trail networks so residents can ride/walk to various areas without having to get in a car
- Look at adding bike lanes to existing and proposed road systems
- Public transit needs to be instituted to employment nodes such as Tanger Outlets, Publix and near City Hall
- Affordable, first-time home buyer housing, single family and senior housing should be the city's top priority over the next 20 years
- Lack of community centers, including communal garden

OPPORTUNITIES

- Broaden housing options for residents both new and existing
- Define areas and uses in the Zoning Code to allow film studios to locate in Pooler
- Complete a recreation evaluation and Master Plan
- Work to expand recreation program to bring in sports tournaments to utilize existing recreation space
- Research expanding the number of multi-purpose recreation fields for soccer, etc.
- Leverage the growth of the nearby international airport
- Create convention center and amphitheater
- Code Updates
- Create incentives for desired types of development

THREATS

- Pressure to rezone R-A to industrial/port related uses
- Tax abatement activity through Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA)
- Possible economic downturn: Pooler needs diverse businesses outside of retail and businesses that are sustainable during an economic downturn
- Lack of diversity in housing, especially in regard to senior housing
- Flooding and traffic due to increased growth in areas directly in and around Pooler
- No tax benefit for places with more warehouses, like Pooler, Port Wentworth, and Garden City (Benefits go to Savannah and Chatham County)
- Increased price for raw land

PLAN 2040 SURVEY QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Quality of Life

1. How strongly would you agree with the following statements about the quality of life topics?
2. Please rate your satisfaction with the following public amenities and services in your community?
3. In your opinion, what are the most important historic preservation actions?
4. Do you have any additional comments about quality of life?

Housing

5. Which categories describes you?
6. How strongly would you agree with the following statements about housing topics?
7. Please rank the following housing options in order of how they should be prioritized in the next 5 years, with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest?
8. In your opinion, do we need more, less, or about the same of the following housing types?
9. Do you have any additional comments about housing?

Land Use

10. Compared to recent trends, do you think we should encourage the following types of development more, less, or about the same over the next 10 years?
11. Please rank the following growth scenario in terms of your preference. On each map below, Chatham County's existing populated areas are shown in orange and possible areas of new growth under that scenario are shown in yellow.
12. Do you have any additional comments about land use?

Natural Resources

13. How strongly would you agree with the following statements about natural resources?
14. How important are the following objectives to you?
15. Which of the following strategies would you support to protect resources from hazards related to climate change?
16. Do you have any additional comments natural resources?

Transportation

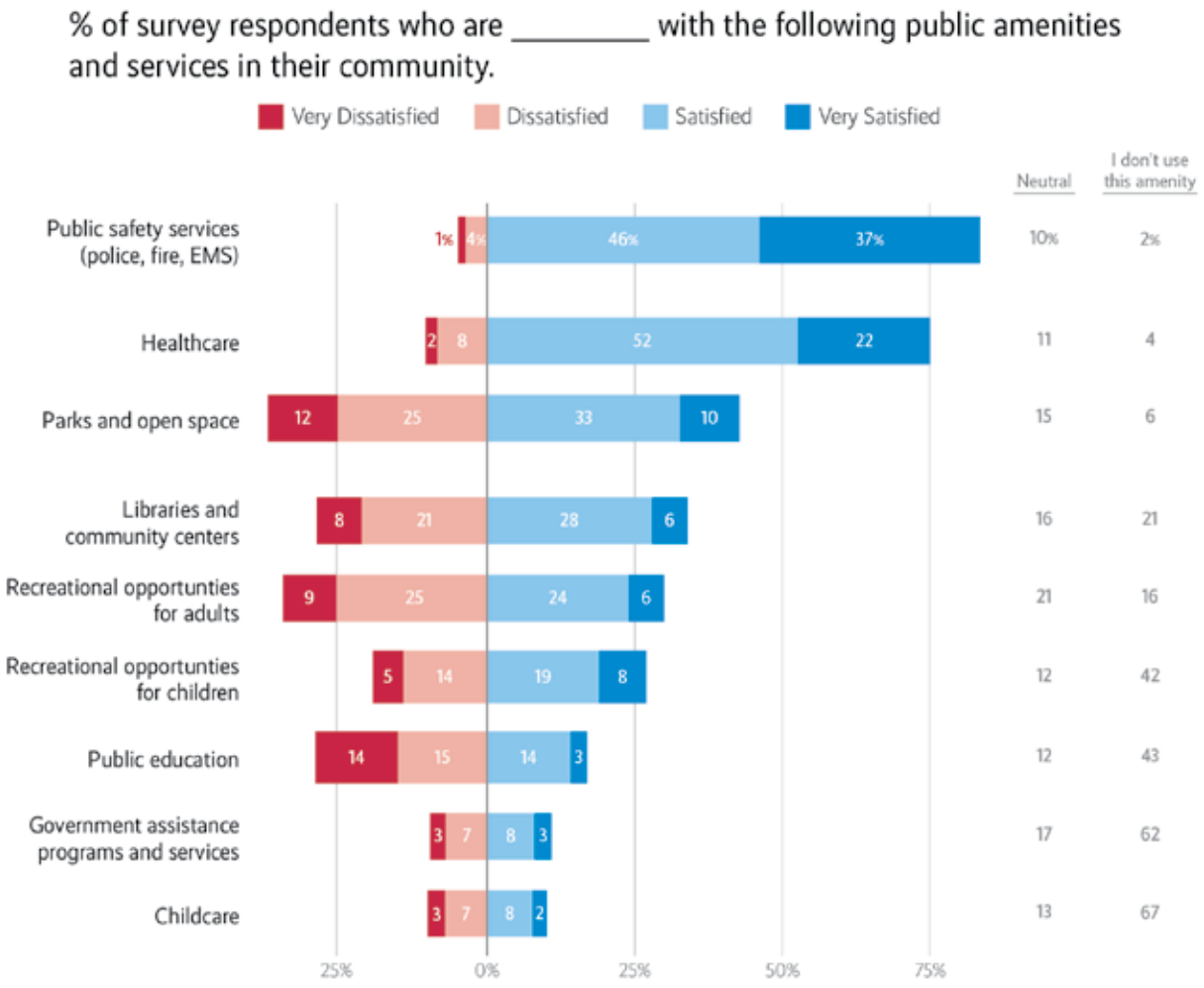
17. What is your primary mode of travel?
18. How strongly do you agree with the following statements about transportation?
19. Do you have any additional comments about transportation?

Economic Development

20. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive, how would you rate the general growth in the past 5 years?
21. How strongly would you agree with the following statements about economic development?
22. How important are the following objectives to you?
23. Do you have any additional comments about economic development?
24. Are there other priorities or issues not covered in this survey that you think are important to consider as part of the Comprehensive Plan?

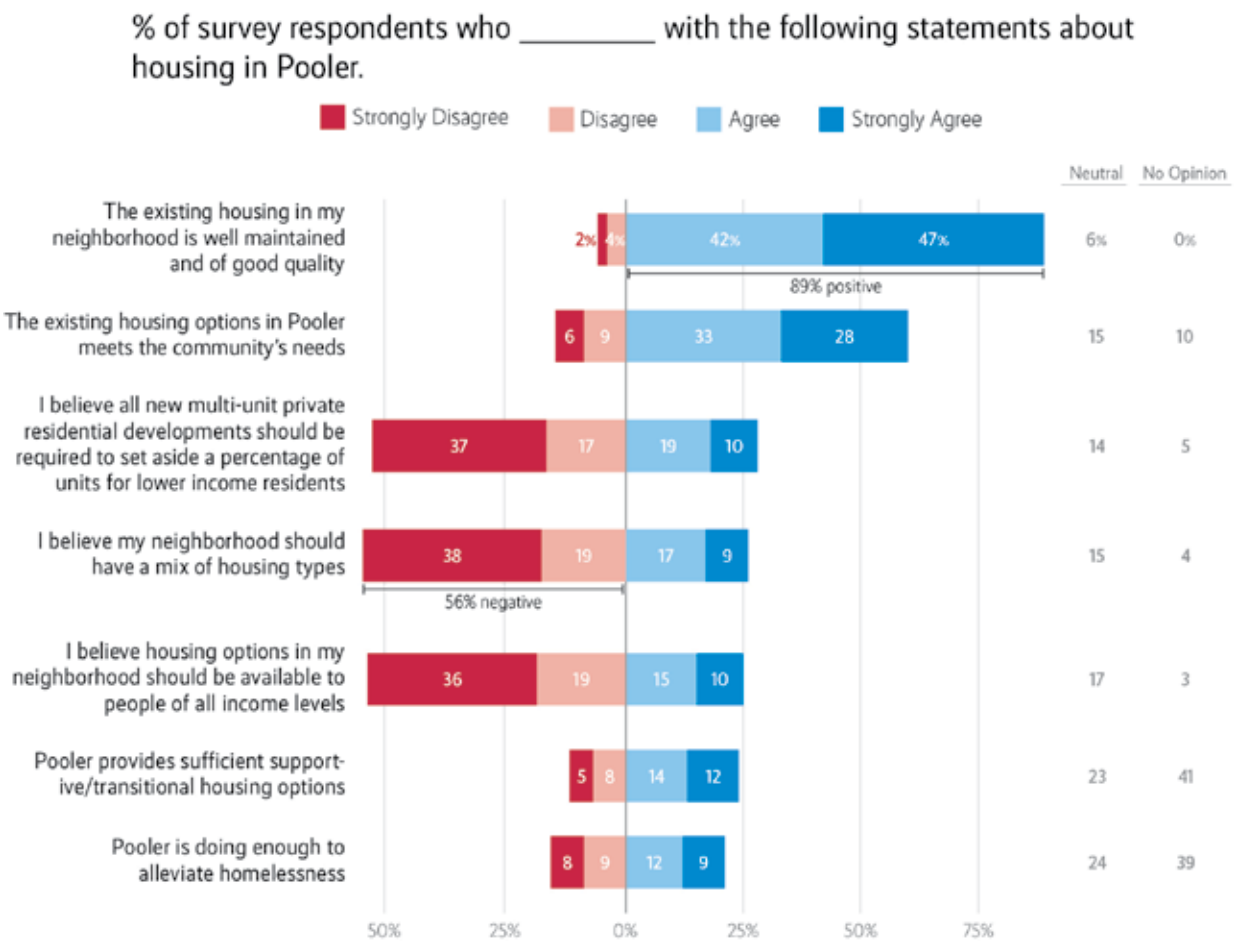
Quality of Life

1. How strongly would you agree with the following statements about the quality of life topics?
2. **Please rate your satisfaction with the following public amenities and services in your community?** (Results Below)
3. In your opinion, what are the most important historic preservation actions?
4. Do you have any additional comments about quality of life?



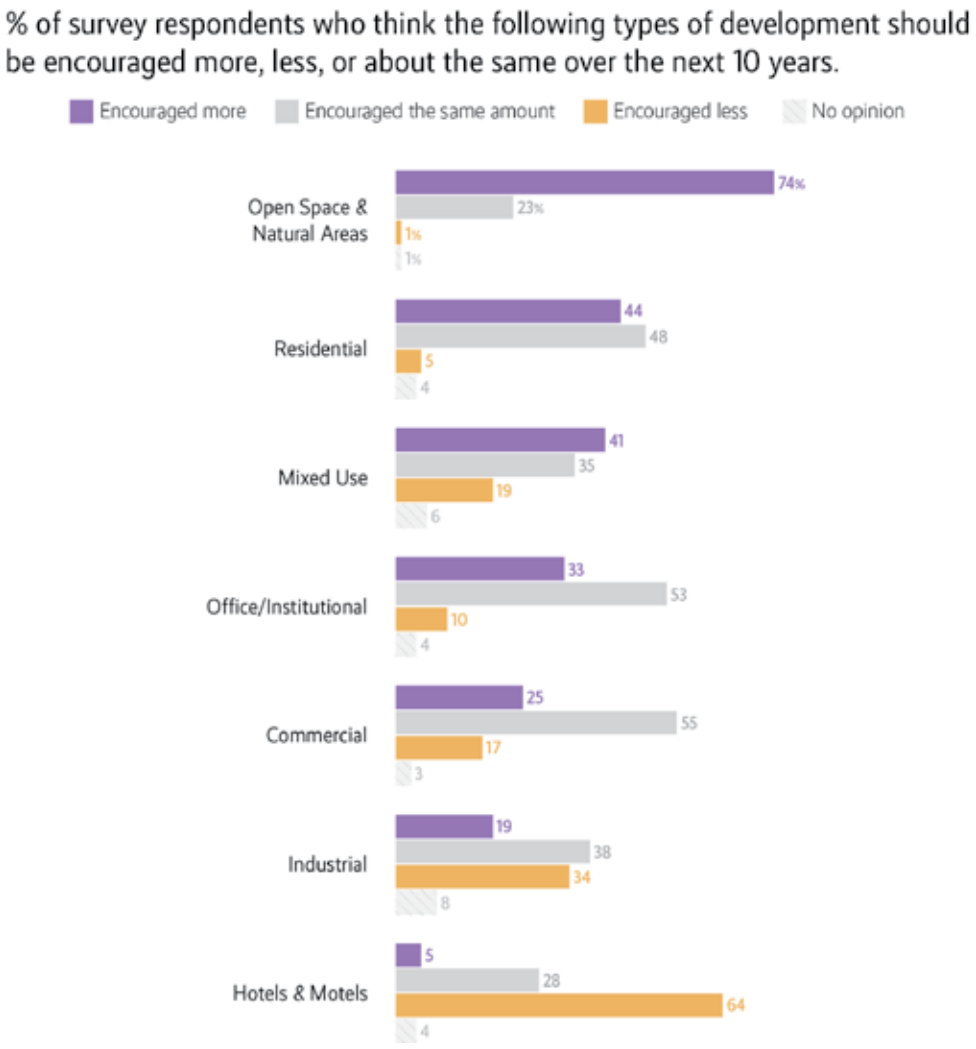
Housing

1. Which categories describes you?
2. **How strongly would you agree with the following statements about housing topics?** **(Results Below)**
3. Please rank the following housing options in order of how they should be prioritized in the next 5 years, with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest?
4. In your opinion, do we need more, less, or about the same of the following housing types?
5. Do you have any additional comments about housing?



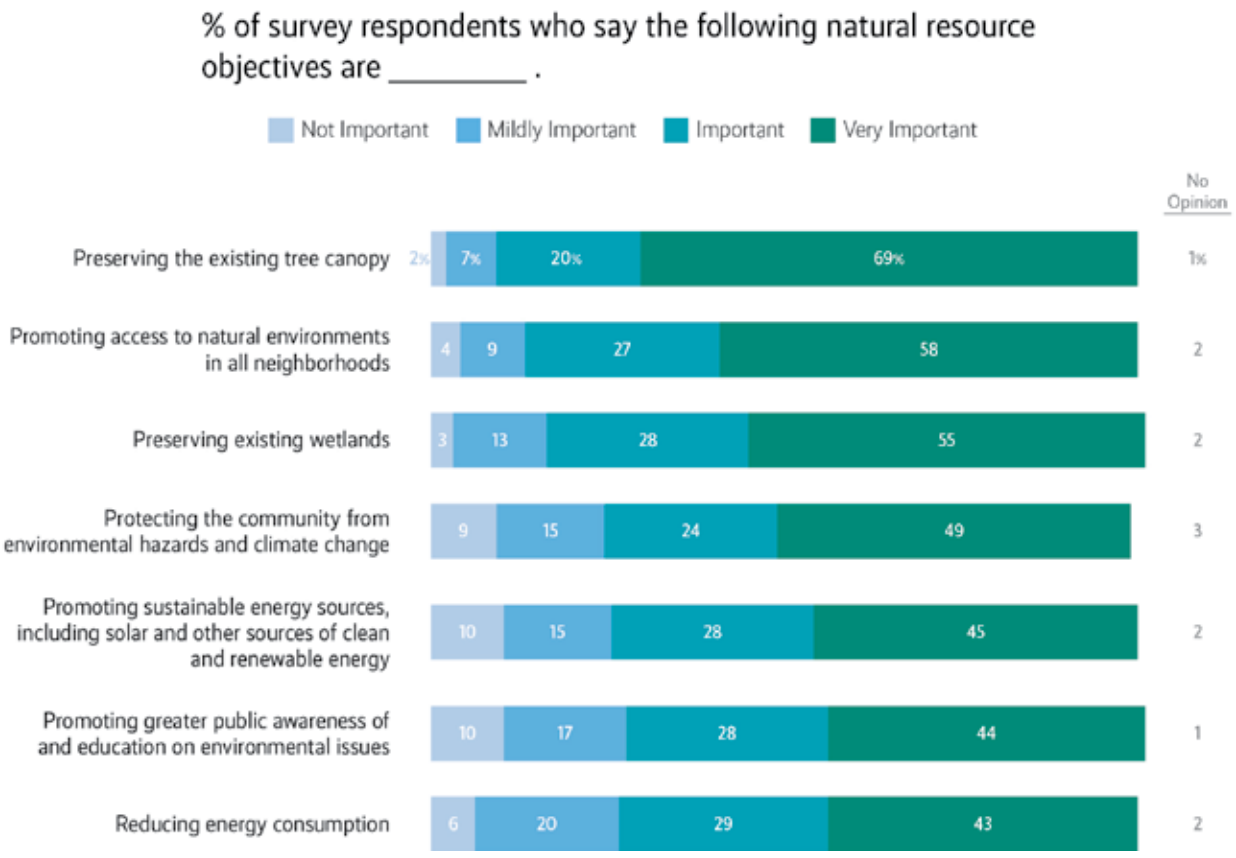
Land Use

1. **Compared to recent trends, do you think we should encourage the following types of development more, less, or about the same over the next 10 years?** (Results Below)
2. Please rank the following growth scenario in terms of your preference. On each map below, Chatham County's existing populated areas are shown in orange and possible areas of new growth under that scenario are shown in yellow.
3. Do you have any additional comments about land use?



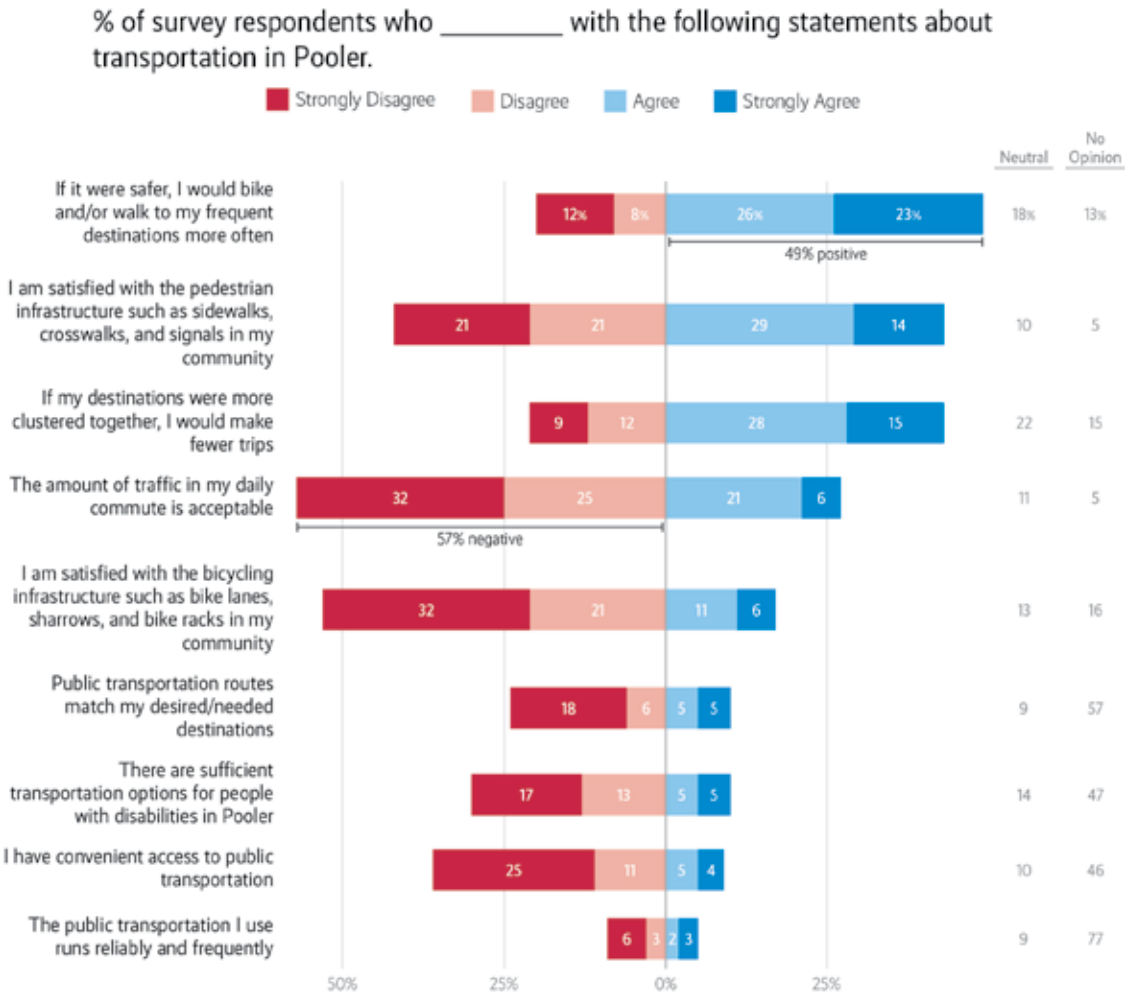
Natural Resources

1. **How strongly would you agree with the following statements about natural resources?** (Results Below)
2. How important are the following objectives to you?
3. Which of the following strategies would you support to protect resources from hazards related to climate change?



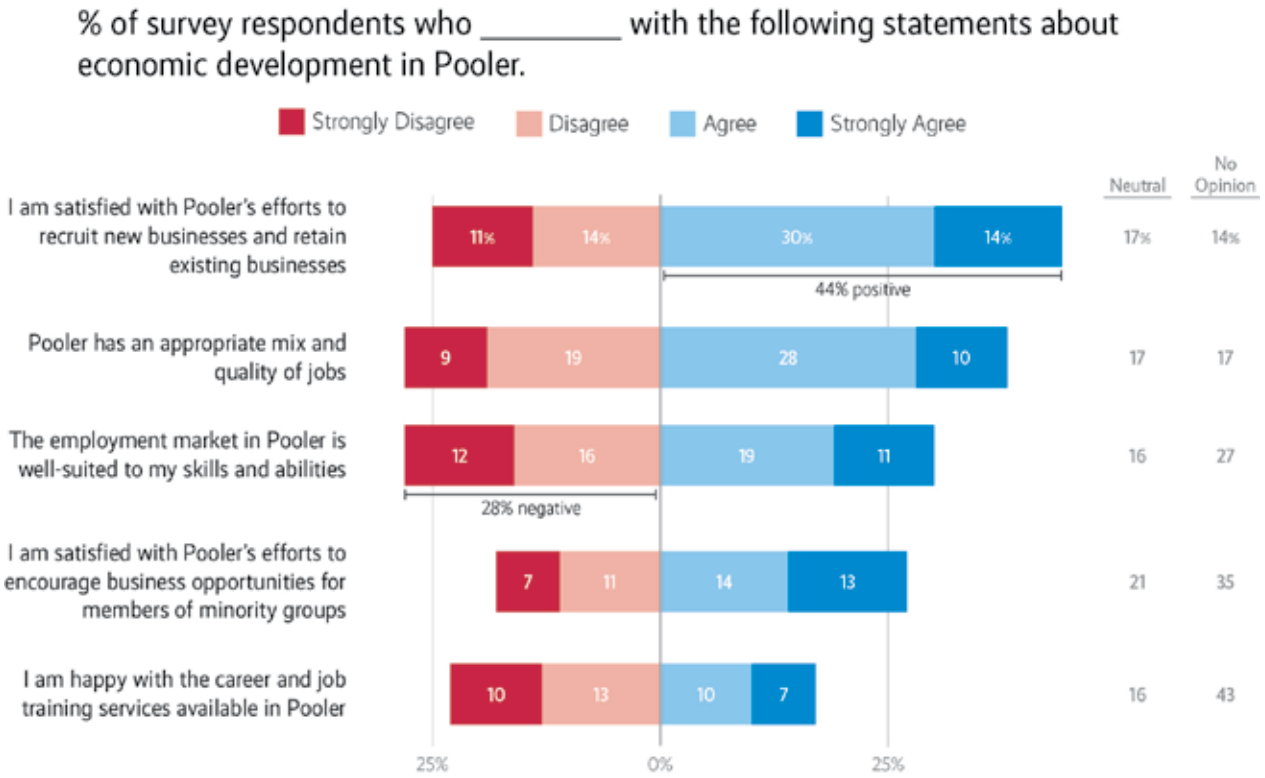
Transportation

1. What is your primary mode of travel?
2. **How strongly do you agree with the following statements about transportation?** **(Results Below)**
3. Do you have any additional comments about transportation?



Economic Development

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive, how would you rate the general growth in the past 5 years?
2. **How strongly would you agree with the following statements about economic development?** (Results Below)
3. How important are the following objectives to you?
4. Do you have any additional comments about economic development?
5. Are there other priorities or issues not covered in this survey that you think are important to consider as part of the Comprehensive Plan?

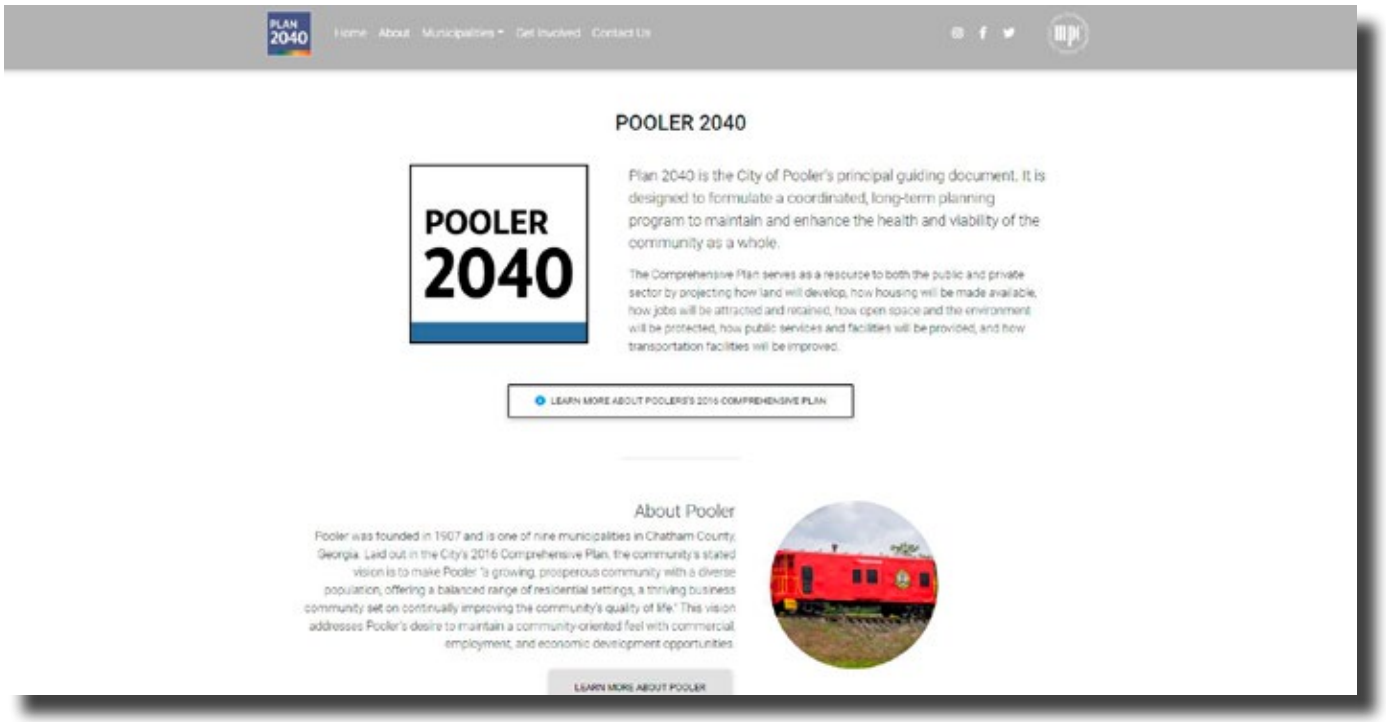


WEB PAGE

Web Page Overview

To engage the community further, Pooler 2040 team designed and maintained a web page to be a dedicated platform for all planning, public outreach and social media information.

The web page was set up and designed to be user friendly, easily read, and interactive for all users. The page included a diverse mix of information including a project summary, history, a virtual meeting library, comment mapper, draft elements, and a bulletin board of upcoming events.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media Overview

While the web page served as a platform for all of the planning documents, the social media page served as an advertising platform to engage the public on upcoming events, meetings, pop-up events, and announcements. The social media platforms used to advertise Pooler 2040 included Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

COMMENT MAP

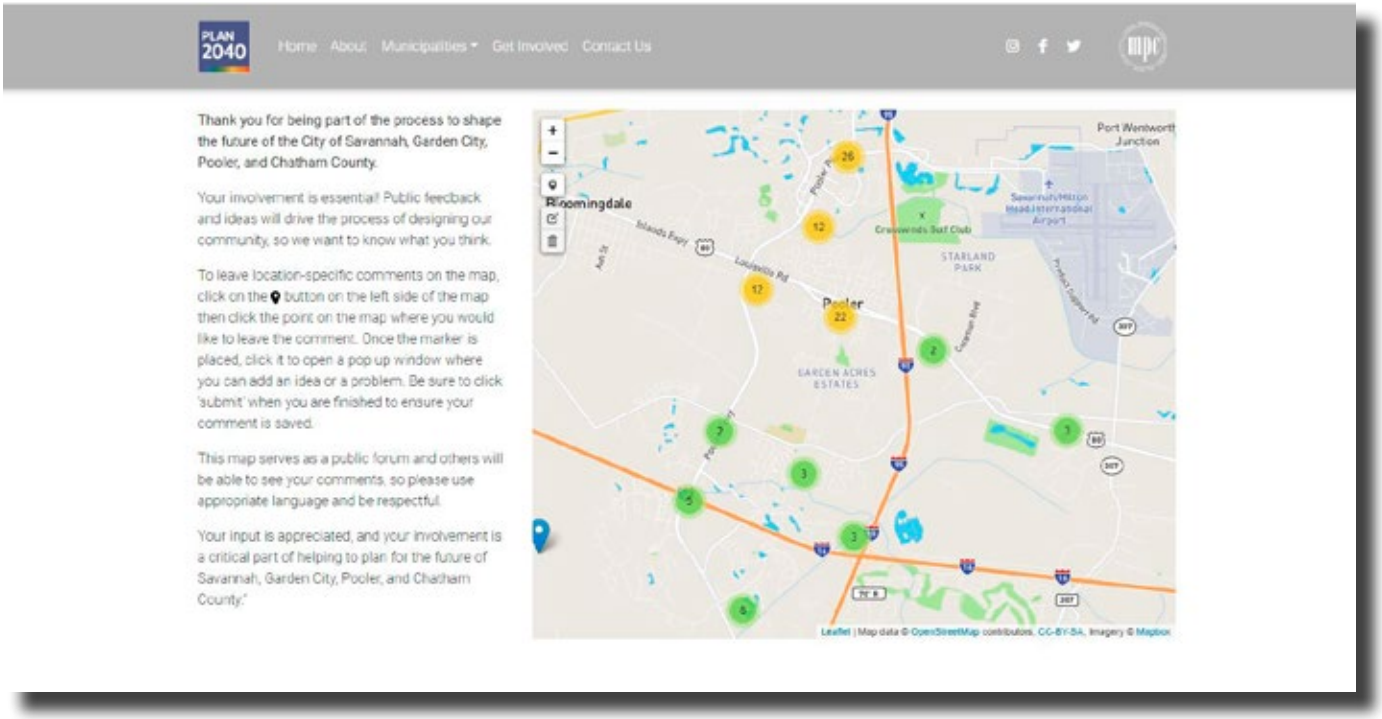
Comment Map Overview

To ensure that the Pooler 2040 public outreach methods were widespread and equitable, the Pooler 2040 team created a comment mapping tool to collect additional feedback. This technique was a new tool that allowed the community members to anonymously geolocate "Ideas" and "Problems" in their community.

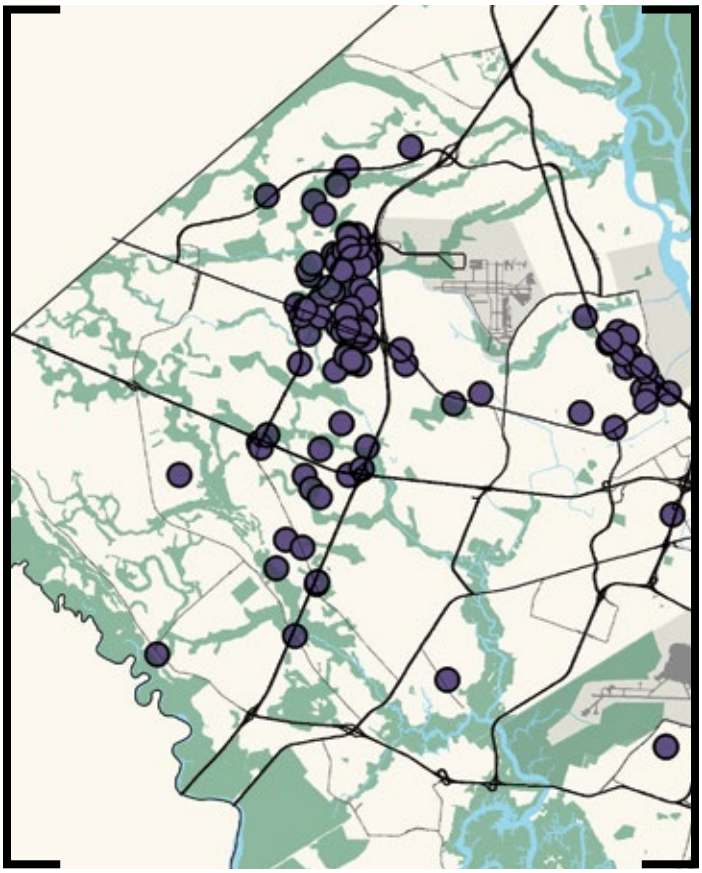
The collection process revealed opportunities in the community and provided insights into where future neighborhood plans and corridor studies might be needed. It also served as a starting point for future public outreach.

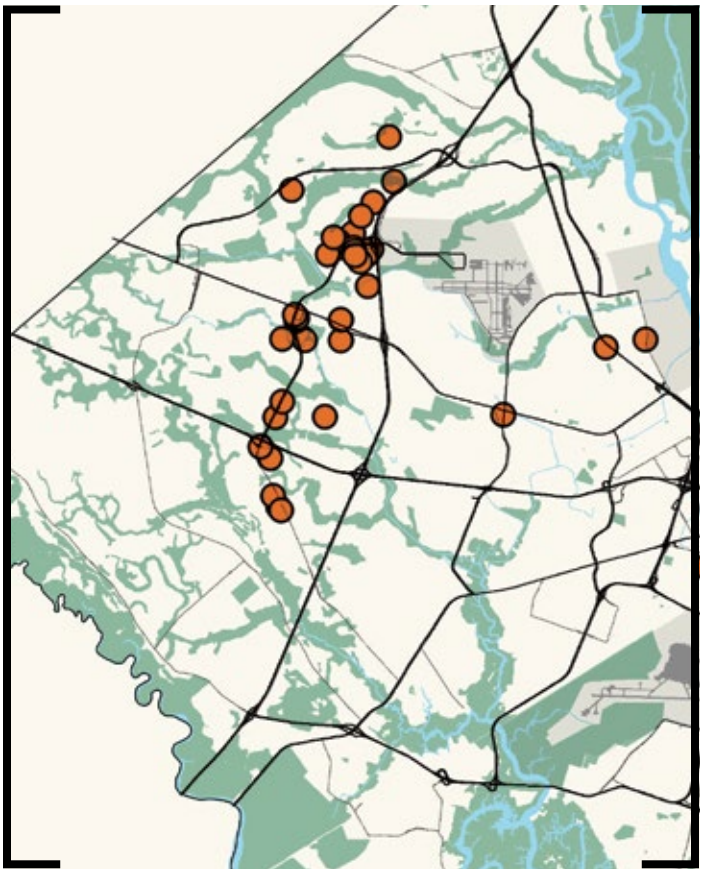
The major "Ideas" and "Problems" that were uncovered with the comment mapper revealed that food insecurity, neighborhood trash/maintenance, and walkability are hindering the quality of life of the citizens of Pooler.

The data represented to the right is from October 23, 2020 to June 10, 2021. This resource will remain active and will be used as an additional method of public comment for future Pooler 2040 engagement opportunities.



Response Locations





What We Heard

IDEAS

- Community Center
- More Sidewalk Connections
- Mixed Use Housing
- Street Lighting
- Dog Park
- Bike Lanes
- Movie Studios
- Community Beautification Projects

PROBLEMS

- CAT Bus Stops Needed
- Traffic Congestion
- Flooding
- Lack of Housing Options
- Incomplete Sidewalk Connections
- More Tree Canopy
- Major Ditch & Canal Drainage Improvements Needed

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community Outreach Overview

The Pooler 2040 team conducted a series of four community pop-up events throughout Chatham County. The pop-up events were held at various times to reach as many residents as possible across the county.

Following CDC recommended COVID-19 safety measures, the Pooler 2040 team also offered virtual meetings to supplement the community outreach effort.

There were six rounds of virtual meetings that included an overview of Pooler 2040, polls, and opportunities for community feedback on progress.

These events were advertised and offered to community or faith-based organization responding to email blasts and other communications.

- Chatham Recycles—"Haunted Recycling" (October 24, 2020)
- Starland Yard—"Mini-Market" (October 28, 2020)
- Forsyth Park—"Farmer's Market" (November 21, 2020)
- Forsyth Park—"Farmer's Market" (December 21, 2020)

Over 100 Chatham County residents attended these pop-ups and provided over 500 comments.

MEETINGS

Internal Meetings & Committee Meetings

- Georgia Coastal Indicators Coalition—(August 19, 2020)
- TCC & CAC—(August 20, 2020)
- ACAT—(August 24, 2020)
- CORE MPO—(August 26, 2020)
- Georgia Coastal Indicators Coalition—(October 7, 2020)
- Pooler Steering Committee Meeting—(October 10, 2020)
- UGA Graduate Studies Class—(October 14, 2020)
- TCC & CAC—(December 3, 2020)
- ACAT—(December 7, 2020)
- CORE MPO—(December 9, 2020)
- Pooler Steering Committee Meeting—(January 22)
- TCC—(February 18)
- CORE MPO—(February 24)
- Georgia Coastal Indicators Coalition—(March 5)
- Georgia Coastal Indicators Coalition—(June 2)
- Pooler City Council Meeting—(July 12)
- Pooler City Council Meeting—(July 19)

Public Meetings

- Virtual Meeting Round 1—(January 26)
- Virtual Meeting—(January 27)
- Virtual Meeting Round 2—(February 22)
- Virtual Meeting—(February 23)
- Virtual Meeting Round 3—(March 30)
- Virtual Meeting—(April 9)

NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES

QUALITY OF LIFE

- Poor Quality of Education
- Little Interest in Historic Preservation
- We Need More Schools
- Areas Where Crime Needs More Attention
- Need More Places for Children & Youth
- Issues with Noise from Planes
- More Transparency with Upcoming Development
- No Unified Vision for Pooler (Design Guidelines)
- Be Careful with Historic Area Redevelopment
- Billboards & Advertising are an Eyesore
- A Better Library is Needed
- More Government Transparency Needed

HOUSING

- Lack of Workforce and Lower Income Housing
- People are Being Priced Out
- No Desire for Apartments and Low-Income Families Moving In
- More Single-Family Housing Needed
- More Gated Communities Needed

LAND USE

- Pooler Attracts the Wrong Types of Business
- Too Much Development in Pooler
- Not Enough Green Space
- More Interest in High-End Retail vs. Outlet Needed
- Pooler Bike/Walking Trail Needed
- Dog Park Needed
- Would LIke More RV Resorts
- Less Chains and More Local Businesses Desired
- Entertainment Industry is a Priority
- Too Many Restuarant & Store Chains
- Limit Hotels & Strip Malls
- A True Master Plan for the City is Needed

NATURAL RESOURCES

- Restrict Development in Flood Zones
- Pipemaker's Canal is a Critical Area Needing Protection
- Continue Working on Drainage Issues
- Noise Levels Have Risen from Cutting Tree Buffers
- More Protection of Tree Canopy Needed
- Issues with Water & Air Quality

TRANSPORTATION

- Light Rail Should be Evaluated
- Start Targeted Public Transport for Seniors
- Public Transit only at Certain Nodes and Employment Centers
- Too Much Roadway Congestion
- Traffic is Overwhelming
- Sound Barriers from Roadways Needed
- Build & Upgrade Roadways

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- No Local Adult Education & Training
- Workforce Development Needed