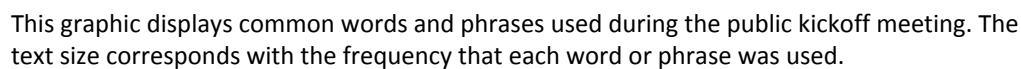




Report from the

# Public Kickoff Meeting

April 2014







# Public Kickoff Meeting Report

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## Overview and Summary of Findings

This report reviews input from the Public Kickoff community event for the Graham 2035 Comprehensive Plan held on April 8, 2014 at the Graham Recreation Center. The objective of this report is to synthesize and review the concerns, ideas, and aspirations expressed at the event. This information will be critical as work on the City of Graham's 2035 Comprehensive Plan moves forward.

The community input provided during the kickoff meeting revealed several important overarching challenges and opportunities. The common overlapping themes included the following:

1. **Downtown** is critical to the city's success and should be the focus of new investments and development, including adaptive reuse projects, public art installments, building restorations, use diversification, infrastructure upgrades, small business development, and more.
2. The **historic character** of Graham is essential to the city's future and should be preserved in order to promote economic development. Historic preservation and using Graham's history as an asset could also help develop a sense of community identity.
3. Graham's **public schools**, and the perception of the public schools, are key factors in the future life of the community and there are opportunities for improvements.
4. Many of Graham's residents want to be able to **walk safely** to parks, museums, stores, and restaurants and believe that the new plan should improve the accessibility of these assets to future and existing neighborhoods.
5. The community's **demographics are changing** and efforts should be made to accommodate new families and make them want to stay. Attracting more high-wage jobs into Graham should be a high priority.
6. **Housing options** are limited and a new plan should explore ways of diversifying the housing stock to accommodate a range of incomes and family types, as well as promoting and protecting private property investments.
7. Graham is unique because of its **small town character, great parks, and access to regional opportunities**. This is very important to residents and visitors and should be maintained and enhanced. One area needing attention is expansion of regional transit options.

# 1. Background

The public kickoff meeting provided a platform for members of the community to voice their concerns, aspirations, and ideas for the future of Graham. Attendees provided individual input on poster boards and collaborative input using keypad polling and small group discussions. Advertisements for the meeting included an insert in the city's water bills, a press release to local media, posting of flyers in English and Spanish at various sites throughout the community, and a contest for children that went home with all elementary and middle school students. The meeting took place on Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup> at the Graham Recreation Center located on 311 College Street.

The meeting began with an open house which provided community members the opportunity to explore a series of plan and information stations and share their knowledge and ideas. The information stations included the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation, Graham Police, Graham Parks and Recreation, Centro la Comunidad, and the Alamance-Burlington School System (ABSS). The plan stations were organized according to Critical Community Needs, Considerations for the Future of Graham, Downtown 2035, Opportunities to Improve Health within the Community, and New Projects.

Following the open house, community members sat at round tables with keypads, pens, large paper maps, and small group forms. Mayor Jerry Peterman provided opening remarks and the consultant team then provided background information about the comprehensive plan process and existing trends in Graham. This set the stage for posing a series of questions to participants using a keypad polling technology and subsequent table discussions.

**Ayúdenos a planear el futuro de Graham!**

- Déenos su opinión sobre los cambios que le gustaría ver en el futuro
- Otorgue ideas sobre cómo mejorar salud en la comunidad
- Comparta su opinión sobre los servicios y programas actuales
- Aprenda más sobre otras organizaciones de la comunidad

**El Futuro de Graham**  
Reunión Pública  
Martes, 08 de abril  
18:00 - 20:30  
Graham Recreation Center  
311 College St, Graham

Agenda de la Conferencia  
6:00 - 6:45 p.m. - Recepción Informativa  
6:45 - 7:45 p.m. - Presentación y actividad en grupos  
7:45 - 8:30 p.m. - Recepción Informativa  
- Puede ganar un premio: Graham Soda Shop, Graham Cinema and Colonial Hardware  
- Le ofrezcamos refrescos y cuidado infantil  
- Información disponible en Español

para más información:  
Melissa Guillen, City Planner  
mgullen@cityofgraham.com  
336 - 570 - 6705

No puede atender? Visite nuestra página web para compartir sus ideas - [cityofgraham.mindmixer.com](http://cityofgraham.mindmixer.com)

Logos: ABSS, GRC, PARKS, Centro La Comunidad, Graham 2035

**Help plan the future of Graham!**

- Let us know what changes you would like to see in the future
- Give ideas on how to improve health in the community
- Share your opinion on current facilities and programs
- Learn about other community organizations

**The Future of Graham**  
Public Workshop  
Tuesday, April 8  
6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Graham Recreation Center  
311 College St, Graham

Workshop Agenda  
6:00 - 6:45 p.m. - Open House  
6:45 - 7:45 p.m. - Presentation and Small Group Exercises  
7:45 - 8:30 p.m. - Open House  
- Door prizes from Graham Soda Shop, Graham Cinema and Colonial Hardware  
- Refreshments and child care for 4 and up provided  
- Información disponible en Español

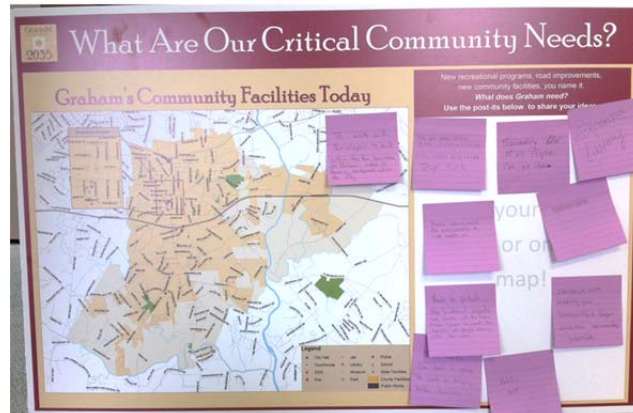
For more information:  
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Unable to make it? Visit our website to give your ideas - [cityofgraham.mindmixer.com](http://cityofgraham.mindmixer.com)

Logos: ABSS, GRC, PARKS, Centro La Comunidad, Graham 2035

## 2. Critical Community Needs

The Critical Community Needs planning station allowed members of the community to provide their ideas for important recreation programs, infrastructure improvements, community facilities, and anything else that they believed was needed in the city of Graham. Major themes included providing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, bringing more jobs to Graham, and focusing development and investment on the downtown, in addition to expanding access to Graham's parks and libraries.



### Community Input

Work with developers to build within the run down areas of Graham instead of housing developments outside the city

More road improvements

Dog park

Swimming pool that all people can go to

Expansion library

Splash park

Paved walking trails for kids/parents to ride bikes on

Protect the historic aspects we have while growing to meet the needs of people moving into the area

Continue making our community a safe walkable community - sidewalks!

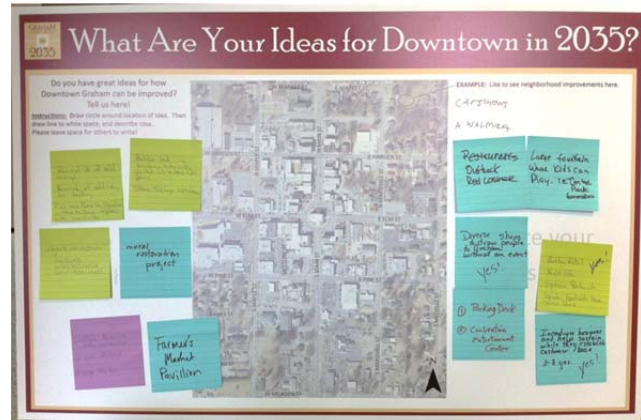
Public art

Sidewalks

We need a group to work on bringing better business

### 3. Future for Downtown

Downtown is a major asset for the City of Graham and most members of the community considered it a critical piece of the city's identity. The Downtown 2035 planning station allowed attendees to provide their ideas for making downtown a better place. Most people wanted to attract more businesses to downtown, increase the diversity of uses, enhance public spaces, and improve the downtown's walkable historic character.



Community Input
Large fountain where kids can play
Better Retail
Nightlife
Upscale restaurant
Mixed use apartment buildings
Incentivize business and help sustain while they establish customer base
Parking deck
Convention entertainment center
Diverse shops to draw people to Graham without an event
New restaurants
Farmer's market
Pavilion
Unique farm to table restaurant
Arts district
Yoga studio
Mural restoration project
Vibrant downtown with residents small business and more restaurants
Remove metal awnings and metal siding on buildings
Better look: benches, sidewalks, new light poles, stone signage
Car show and Walmart

## 4. Keypad Polling Results

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Using keypads, members of the community answered 22 questions posed in the presentation. The answer choices measured the values attendees placed on community concerns and opportunities. 45 people participated in the polling activity. 72% of the participants currently reside in Graham and half of those have lived in Graham for more than 20 years. 52% of the respondents work in Graham. The two largest age groups represented at the meeting were people in their 30s and people aged 60 and over.

Most community members believed that Graham's most valuable assets include its downtown, regional accessibility to jobs and other assets via the interstates, and the city's historic character. When asked about how important downtown is to the future of Graham, 89% of all respondents answered either "Very important" or "Most important." People also overwhelmingly responded that they most valued Graham's small town environment with access to regional assets, as well as the community's affordability. Respondents also took pride in Graham's small town feel and its system of parks.

Several concerns consistently appeared among poll responses. They included low perceptions regarding the quality of public schools, lack of shopping and entertainment amenities, lack of job opportunities, as well as concern with housing and transportation options. When asked about schools, 66% responded that the condition of schools "Need improvement" or are "Problematic" and no one believed the condition of schools to be "Outstanding." Pedestrian safety and accessibility was also seen as a major concern. 52% of respondents believed sidewalks were an important transportation need within the community.

Generally, community members want to see improvements in the quality and perception of schools, expanded downtown vitality, rehabilitation of housing, and more entertainment and shopping options nearby. 46% of respondents believed that improving public schools is the most important action to take over the next twenty years, making that the action considered most important. One third of respondents thought that either enhancing the downtown or creating a distinct community identity is the most important thing.

Several members also thought that improving health within the community is the most important thing for Graham to accomplish over the next 20 years. In order to improve the health of Graham's residents, attendees suggested that the best methods are to enhance park activities and facilities, provide more trails, bike paths, and sidewalks, improve access to locally grown foods, and to make sure homes are located within walking distance of shopping and recreation opportunities.



## 5. Small Group Exercises

During the small group exercises, each group assigned a moderator and note taker to guide and track the input provided during table discussions. Groups discussed the following questions:

1. What was surprising or significant in keypad polling responses?
2. What is the biggest challenge facing Graham?
3. What are the major opportunities in Graham's future?



Groups were then asked to consolidate the challenges and opportunities into the five most important. The results from those conversations highlighted many of the challenges and opportunities revealed during the polling questions, and several additional opportunities. The following themes were most common during group discussions:

### **Revitalize Downtown**

Downtown was a theme used to discuss a variety of challenges and opportunities. Most groups believed that improvements in pedestrian and bicycle access within downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods are an important way of improving safety and accessibility, especially for children and families. Many groups agreed that new investments in Graham should be directed toward infill development on empty lots, adaptive reuse of vacant structures, and upgrading of underutilized properties. Generally, people believed that revitalization of downtown and within the surrounding neighborhoods could be used as a method of attracting new businesses and tourists, retaining young people and new residents, building the tax base, and fostering a sense of place and identity. People expressed an interest in additional small local businesses and restaurants, growth in cultural elements like public art, and infrastructure enhancements.

### **Improve schools and education**

The quality of schools is critically important as a tool for improving a community's quality of life and to develop its economy. Most groups expressed the desire to improve schools within Graham. Several groups believe that schools in Graham are already high quality with excellent teachers and that the school system is only perceived to be troubled. Other groups expressed a general concern with the quality of schools and student test score rankings. Almost everyone believed that some action needed to be taken to improve the school situation. Some groups discussed the possibility of providing more educational opportunities outside of school for students and young people in the community.

## Demographics are changing

Some groups expressed concern with the outward flow of young people from Graham and attributed that to a lack of high quality jobs, poor perception of schools, and the absence of diverse businesses and entertainment. Some groups expressed optimism regarding the increasing diversity and the inflow of young hardworking immigrant families. Generally groups believed that it is necessary to retain more young people and families who move to the City.

## Leverage existing assets

Several groups believed that Graham already has many great assets that are underutilized and should be better marketed. The Children's Museum, Graham Cinema, and the history and architecture of the City were considered underutilized assets. The small town feel, cost of living, existing parks, and free events are also considered to be assets. The increase in diversity and dual language programs in schools were also expressed to be community assets.



## 6. Conclusion

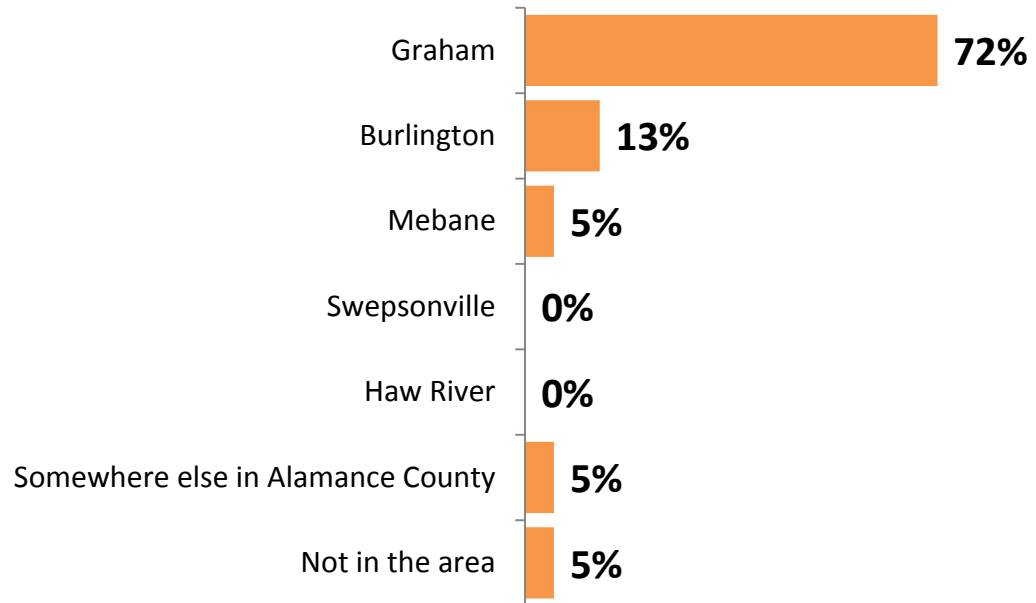
This Public Kickoff Meeting was a valuable opportunity to accomplish several objectives: Introduce the community to the 2035 Comprehensive Plan initiative, learn about public opinion and priorities, and provide information about community service.

Next steps in the process will be to develop goals, strategies, and recommended action to address these community aspirations.

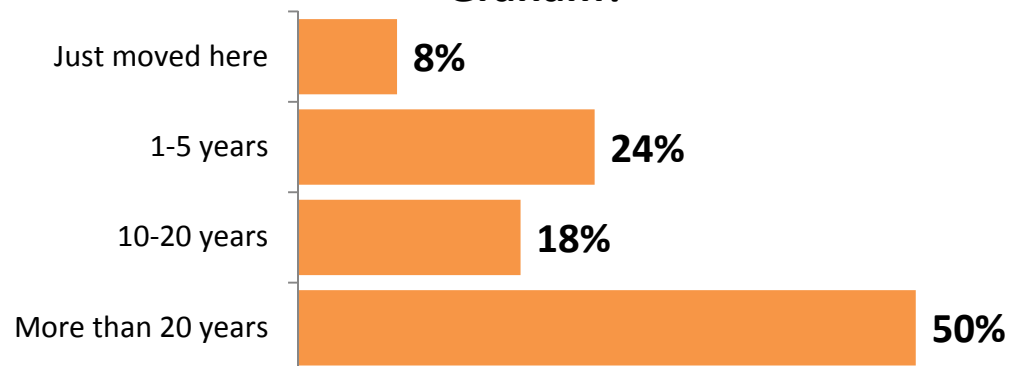
## Appendix: Keypad Polling Results

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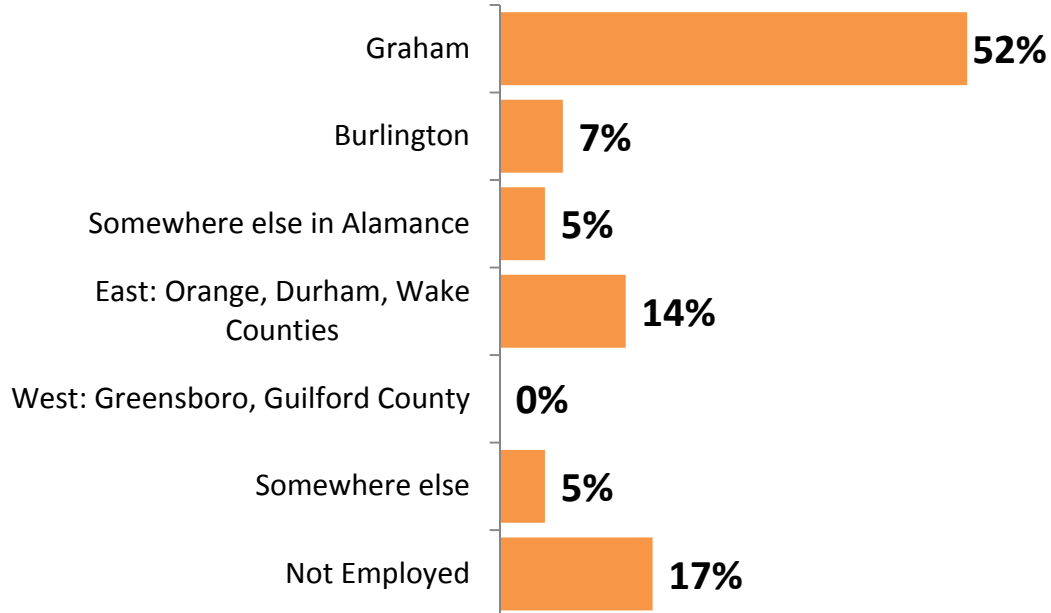
### Where do you live?



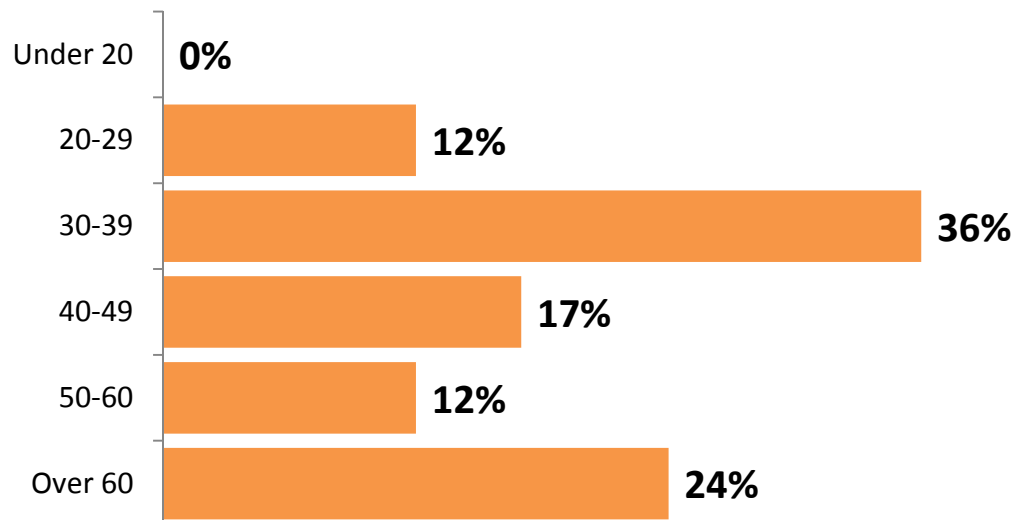
### How long have you lived in or around Graham?



## Where do you work?



## How old are you?

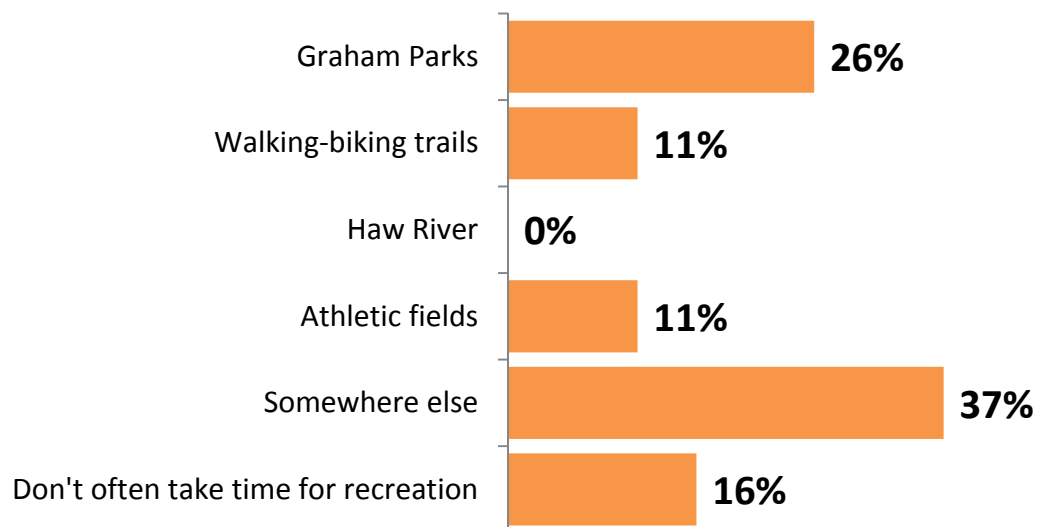




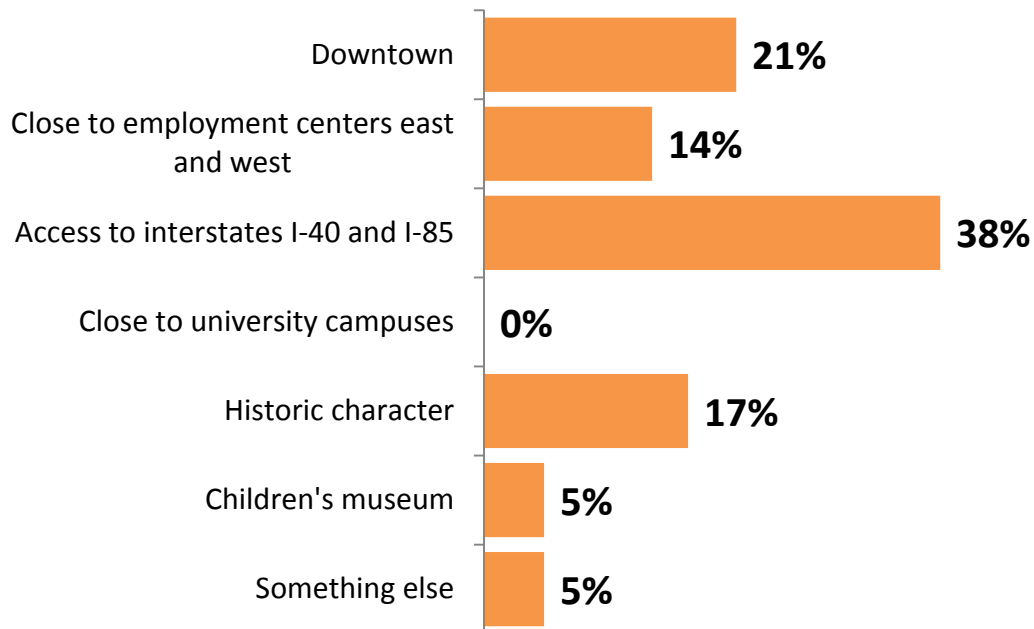
## Do you own or rent your residence?



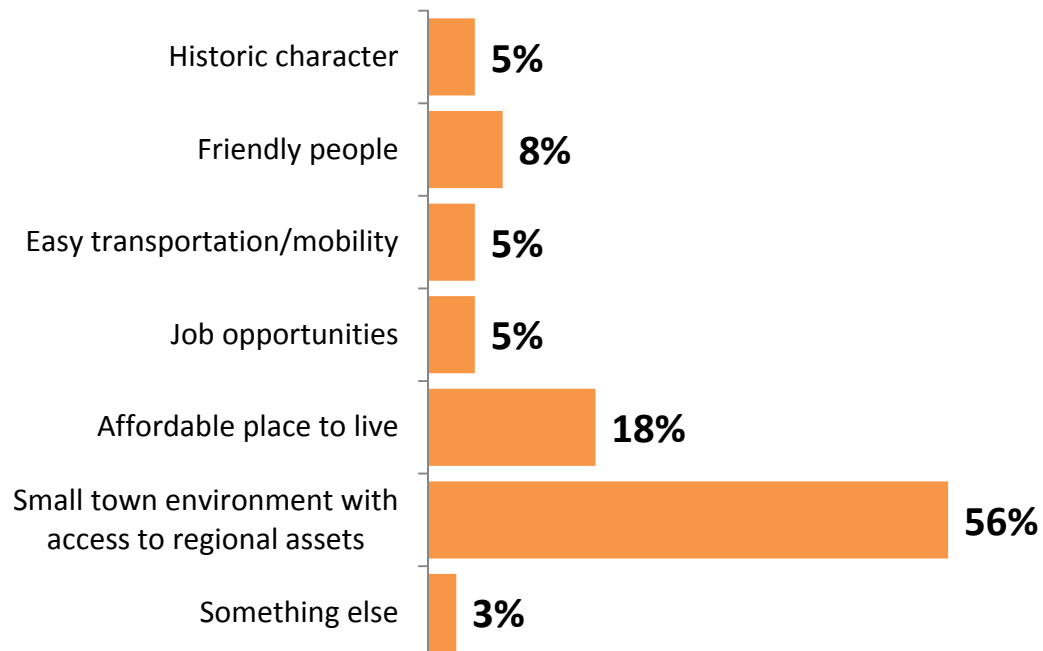
## Where do you go for recreation?



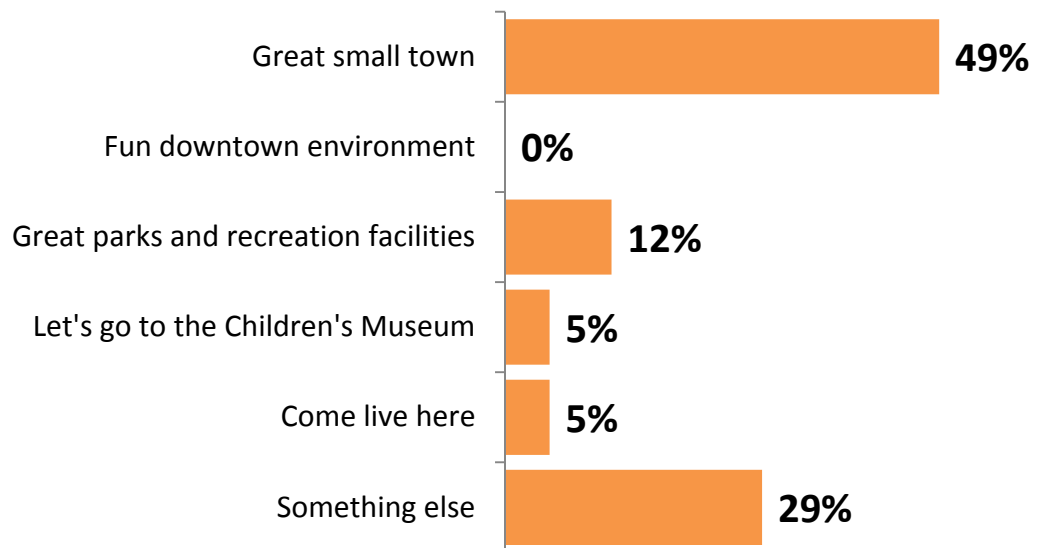
## What do you see as Graham's most valuable asset?



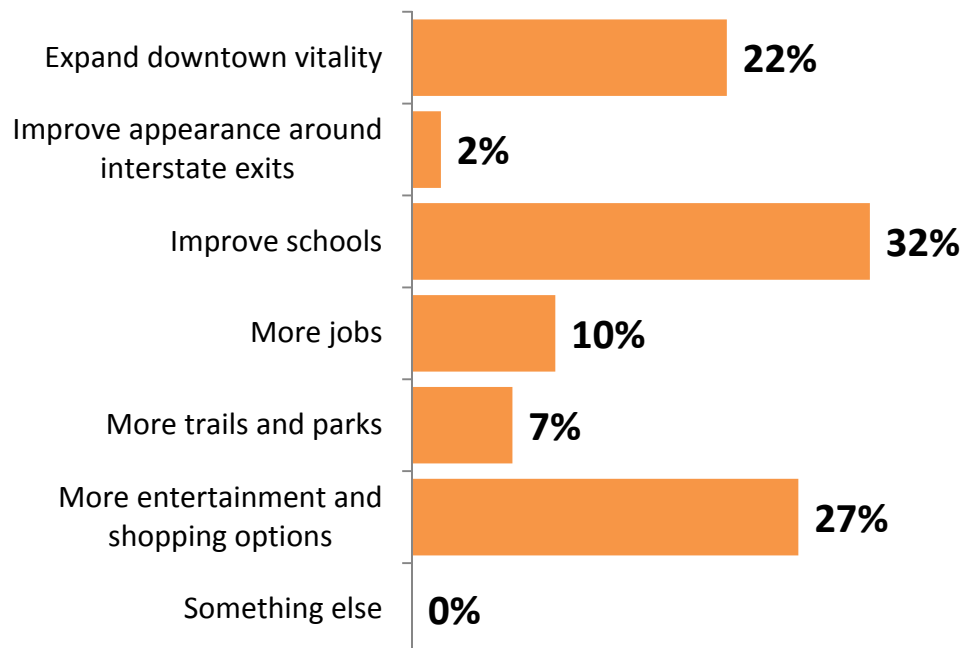
## What do you value most about living/working in Graham?



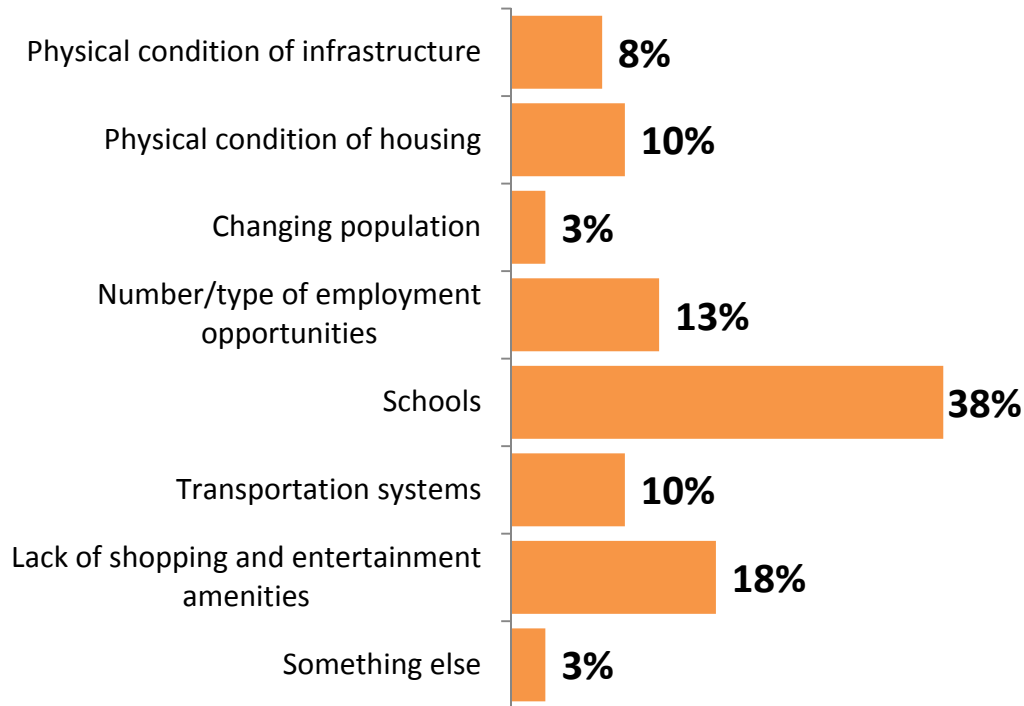
## What do you say about Graham to friends and relatives visiting you?



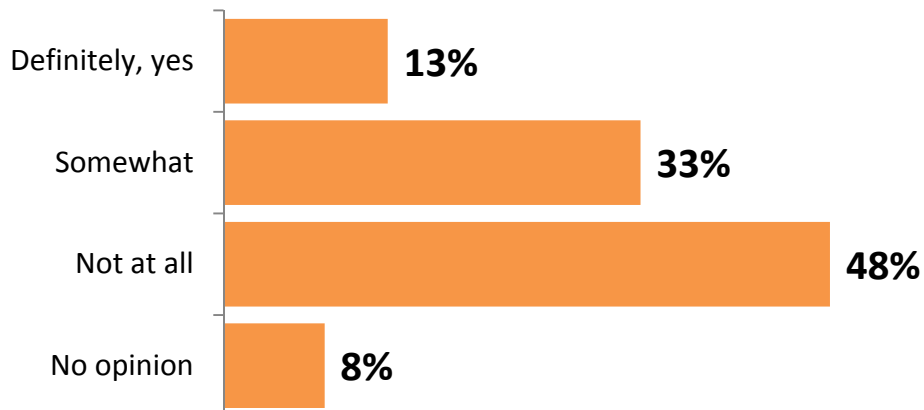
## What is most important to you as the community grows and changes?



## What concerns you most about the City of Graham?

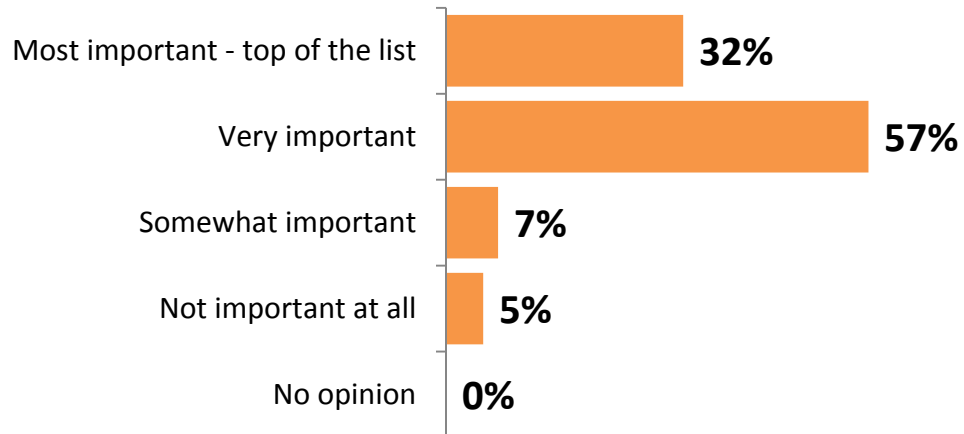


## Do you think Graham has a distinct identity to the outside world?

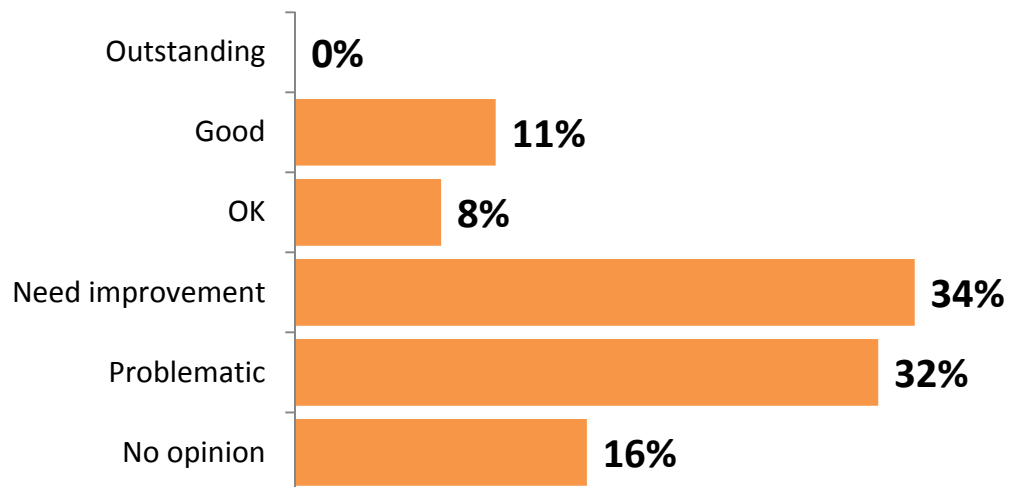




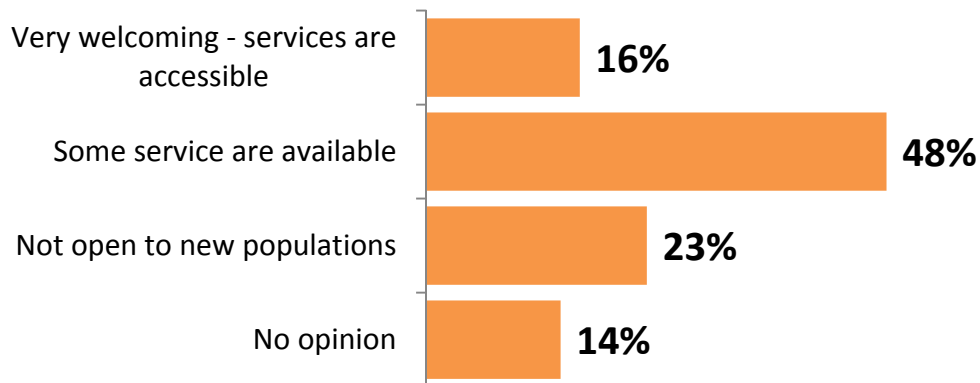
## How important is downtown to the future of Graham?



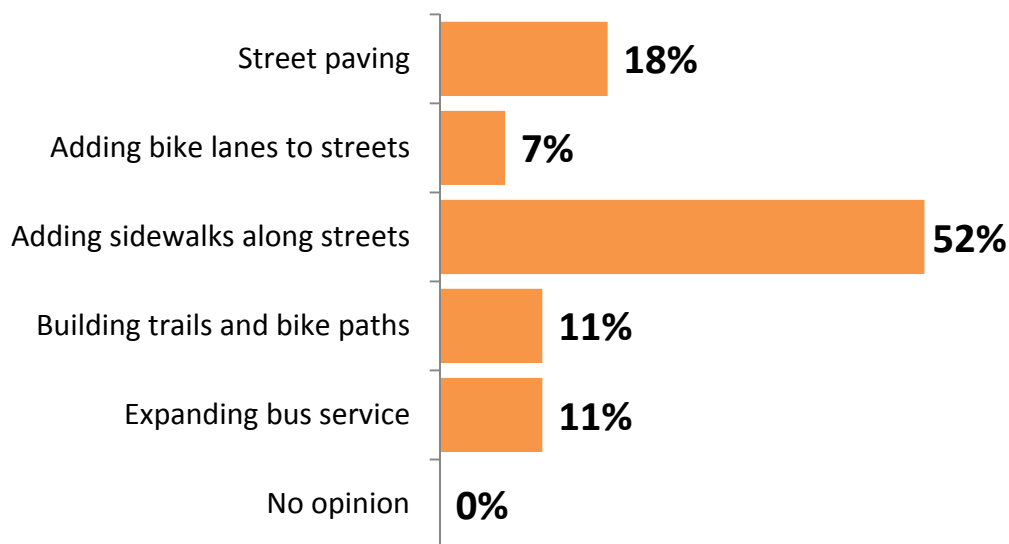
## What is your opinion about public schools in Graham?



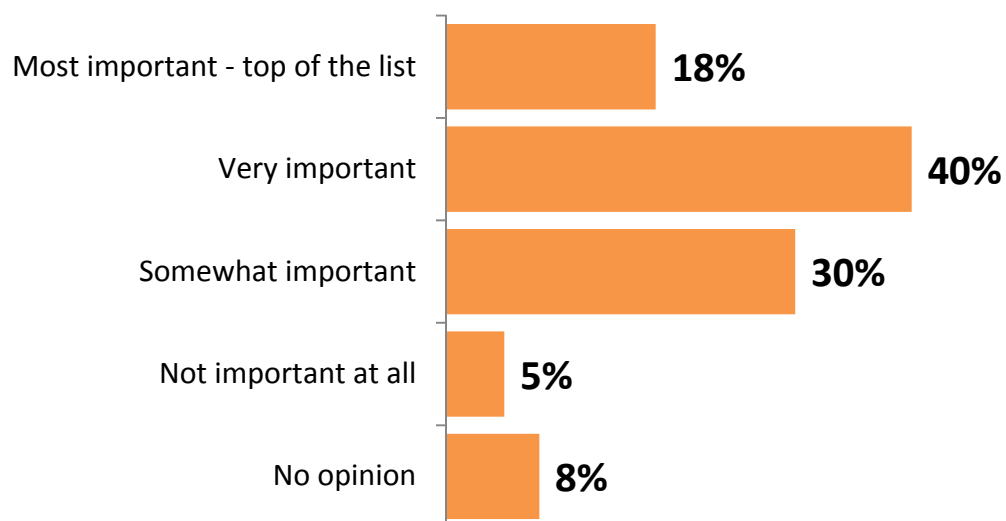
## How well is Graham doing in welcoming new population groups?



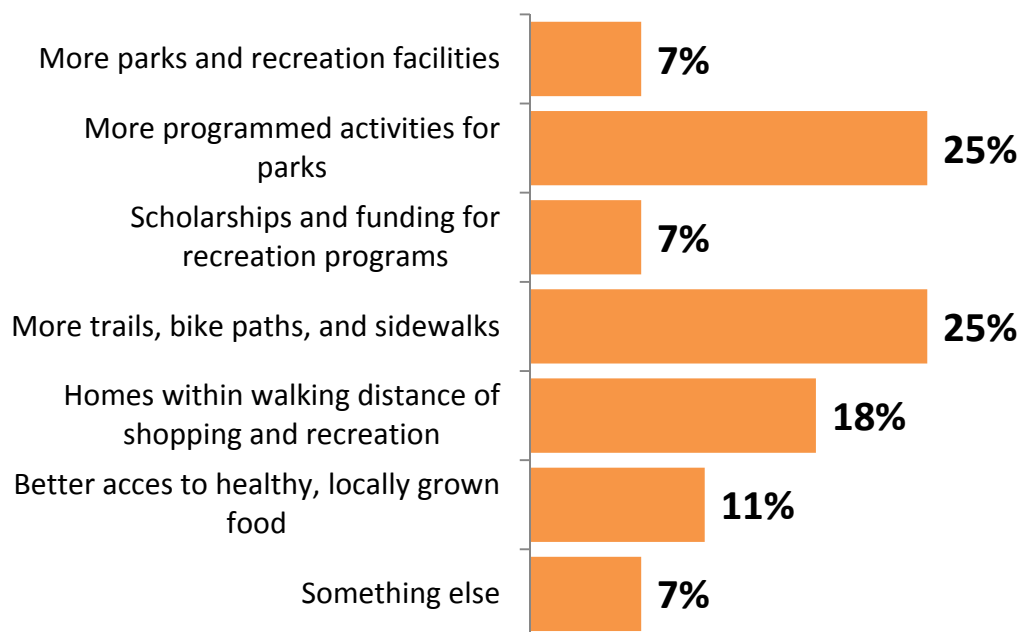
## What are the most important needs for transportation improvements?



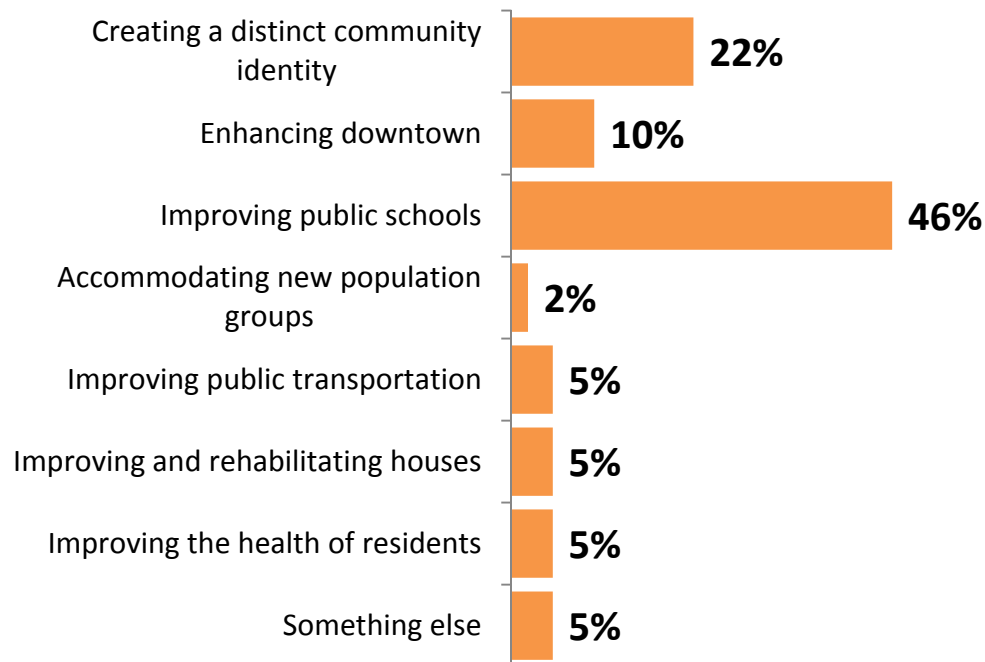
## How important is it to improve and rehabilitate houses?



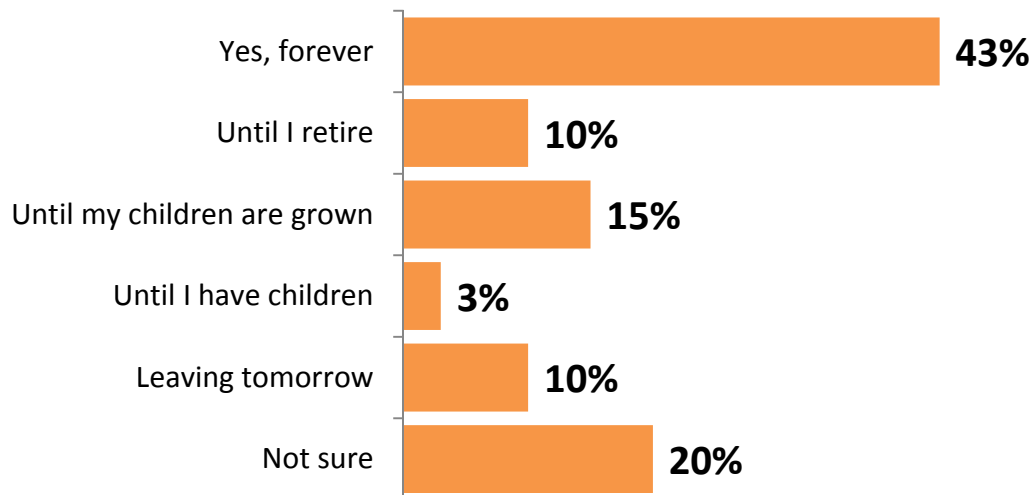
## What are the best opportunities for improving health of residents?



## What is most important for Graham to achieve in the next 20 years?

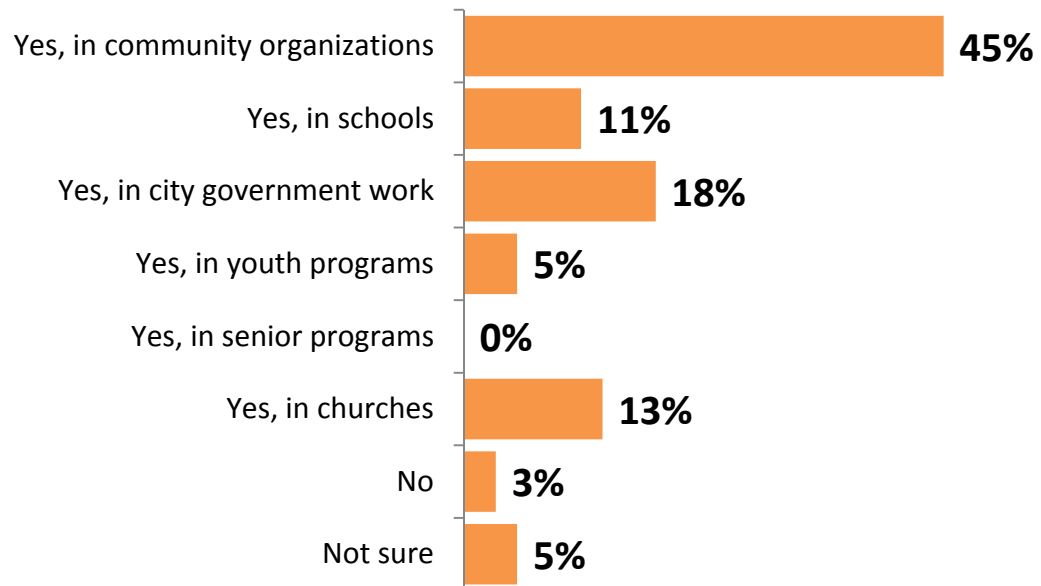


## Do you intend to remain in Graham?





## Do you see opportunities for volunteering and participating in Graham's community activities?



## If you are interested in City government, which boards or activities?

