

The background of the slide is a photograph of the Darien Town Hall, a two-story brick building with arched windows. In front of the building are three tall white flagpoles. The leftmost pole flies the American flag. The middle pole flies a blue flag with a white seal. The rightmost pole flies a white flag with a blue seal. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The foreground features green grass and several large, light-colored rocks.

DARIEN Plan of Conservation & Development **2026**

Town-Wide Survey Results

June 2025

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Introduction

The purpose of the Town-Wide Survey is to gauge residents' opinions about a wide range of topics in Darien. The results of the survey will highlight the aspects of the Town that are working well—that people value and enjoy today—and identify topics of current and future dissatisfaction or concern among residents and other members of the community.

1,189 Darien residents completed the survey. This represents approximately 8% of the adult population of Darien. While the survey was open to non-residents (e.g. business owners, visitors, etc.), only 28 non-residents completed the survey. Therefore, all of the results showcased in this report are those of residents.

The survey consisted of four short, open-ended questions and a longer main section that asked residents to rank a series of topics in four categories. The topics and categories, which are listed on the right side of this page, are generally consistent with the structure of Darien's *2016 Plan of Conservation & Development* (POCD).

The survey asked people to rate their opinion about each topic by selecting one of the following responses:

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral (in the middle)
- Dissatisfied / Concerned
- Very Dissatisfied / Very Concerned
- No Opinion

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide comments on each topic.

Community Amenities, Facilities & Services

- Business & Economic Development (permitting, regulations OR business mix, quality)
- Parks & Recreation (facilities)
- Public Schools (facilities)
- Transfer Station (trash, recycling, swap shop)

Conservation

- Coastal Resources (habitat, marine life, water quality, access)
- Historic Preservation (of buildings, landscapes)
- Land Preservation & Conservation (open spaces, habitats)
- Natural Resources (water and soil quality; protection of trees, native plants, wildlife, pollinators)

The Built Environment

- Community Character (overall scale, form, feel)
- Commercial & Mixed Use Development (Downtown, Noroton Hts.)
- Multifamily Residential Development (apartments, condos)
- Single Family Homes
- Sustainable Buildings (greener buildings and homes)

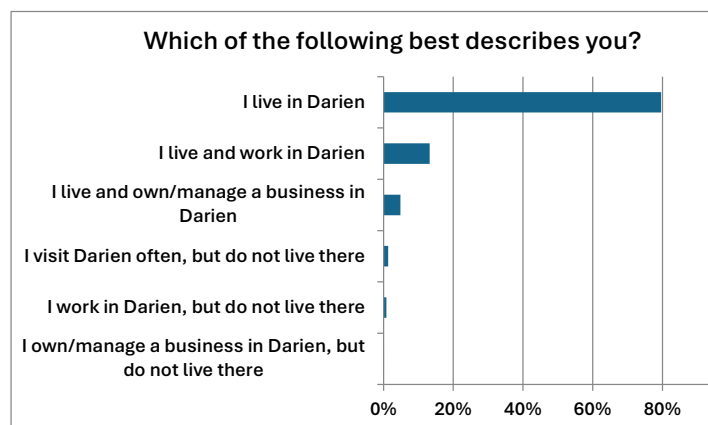
Transportation & Infrastructure

- Biking (on- and off-road paths, racks)
- Driving (traffic, signals, signs, safety)
- Parking (Downtown, train)
- Public Transportation (rail, rail stations, bus)
- Walking (sidewalks, signals, crossings, lighting, safety)
- Stormwater Management (drainage)
- Climate Adaptation (to stronger storms, inland and coastal flooding, heat)

Q1-Q4: About the Respondents

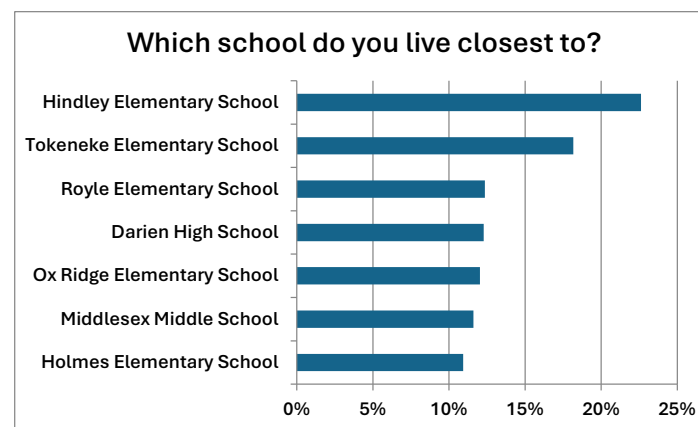
1,189 Darien Residents Completed the Survey

This represents approximately **8%** of the adult population of Darien. While the survey was open to non-residents (e.g. business owners, visitors, etc.) only 28 non-residents completed the survey. All of the results showcased in this report are those of residents.



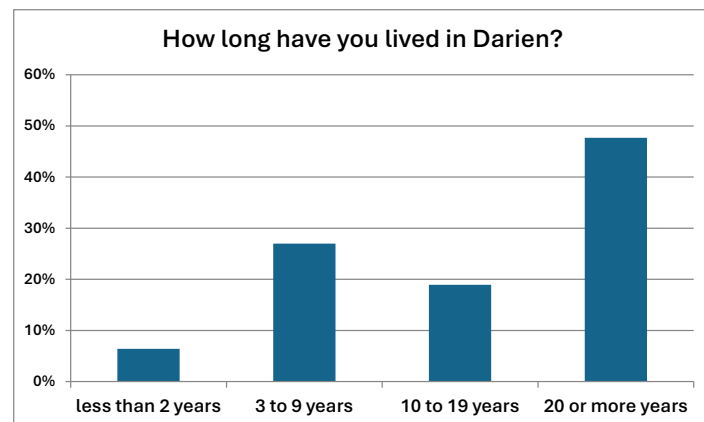
Geographic Distribution of Respondents

More than 20% of responses came from residents who live closest to Hindley Elementary School, which is located in the southern part of Darien south of Post Road. More than 10% of respondents live closest to each of the other schools.



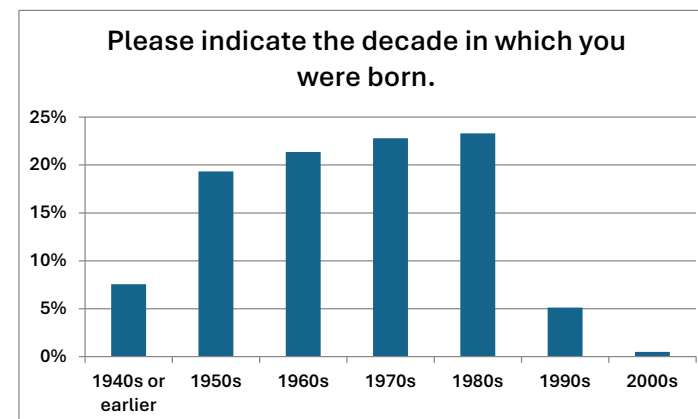
Years Lived in Darien

Almost 50% of survey respondents have lived in Darien for at least 20 years. Only 5% of respondents are new Darien residents who moved to town within the past two years.



Age Distribution of Respondents

The number of respondents is fairly evenly distributed for those born in the decades between the 1950s and 1980s, but only 5% of respondents are people born in the 1990s (ages 25 to 35).



1. Excellent Schools

2. Access to Water and Beaches

3. Strong Sense of Community

4. Small-Town Feel with Urban Access

5. Convenience and Location

6. Safety and Cleanliness

7. Natural Beauty and Green Spaces

Word Cloud. The larger the word in this word cloud, the more

Word Cloud. The larger the word in this word cloud, the more frequently it was mentioned by respondents in their responses.

8. Amenities and Town Resources

Darien's amenities, such as the library, YMCA, parks, recreational programs, and local events, are highly appreciated by respondents. Many respondents mention the variety and quality of activities for children and families.

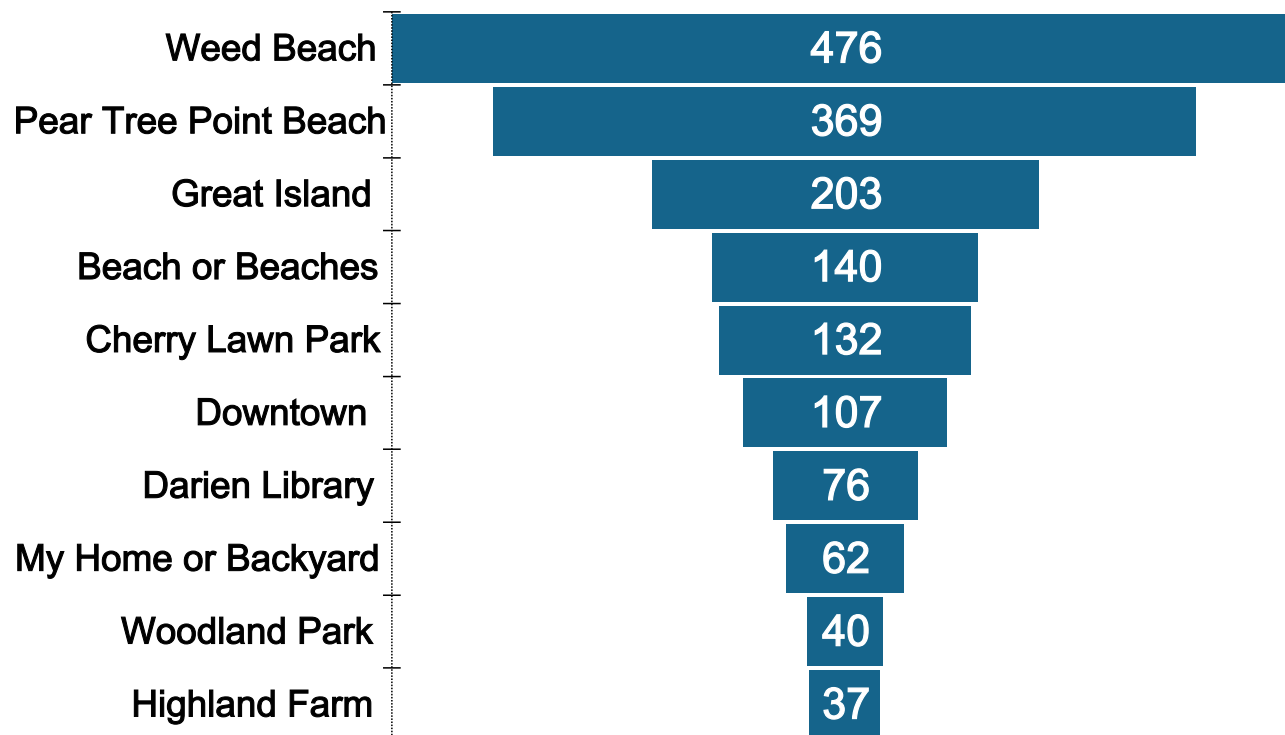
9. Family-Friendly Environment

Respondents describe Darien as a great place to raise children, with safe neighborhoods, family-focused events, and a welcoming atmosphere.



Family-oriented, small town feel, offering great schools, great amenities (parks, beaches, gyms, grocery, country clubs, etc.), and good proximity to NYC for commuting.

Q6: What are your two favorite places in Darien?



Darien's Beaches Top the List of the 10 Favorite Places in Town

Survey respondents clearly value Darien's parks, open spaces, and/or recreation amenities, with **Weed Beach** and **Pear Tree Point Beach** topping the list. **My Home or Backyard**, **Downtown** and the **Darien Library** are the only places in the top 10 that are not parks, open spaces, and/or recreation amenities. Beyond the top 10 (see table to the right) are a wide variety of places that respondents value, including neighborhoods, commercial districts, boat and country clubs, businesses, parks, and churches.

*The rest of the responses
(with at least 10 mentions)*

Tokeneke	31
Sellecks Woods	23
Darien Commons	23
Parks	22
Ten Twenty Post	19
Darien Boat Club	16
YMCA	16
My Neighborhood or Street	14
Darien High School	14
Long Neck Point	13
Noroton Heights	13
Ziegler's Cove	12
Grove Street Plaza	11
Wee Burn Country Club	11
Corbin District	11
Noroton Yacht Club	10
Palmer's	10
Noroton Presbyterian Church	10
Trader Joe's	10
St. Luke's Church	10

Q7-Q10: Opinions on Topics in Four Categories

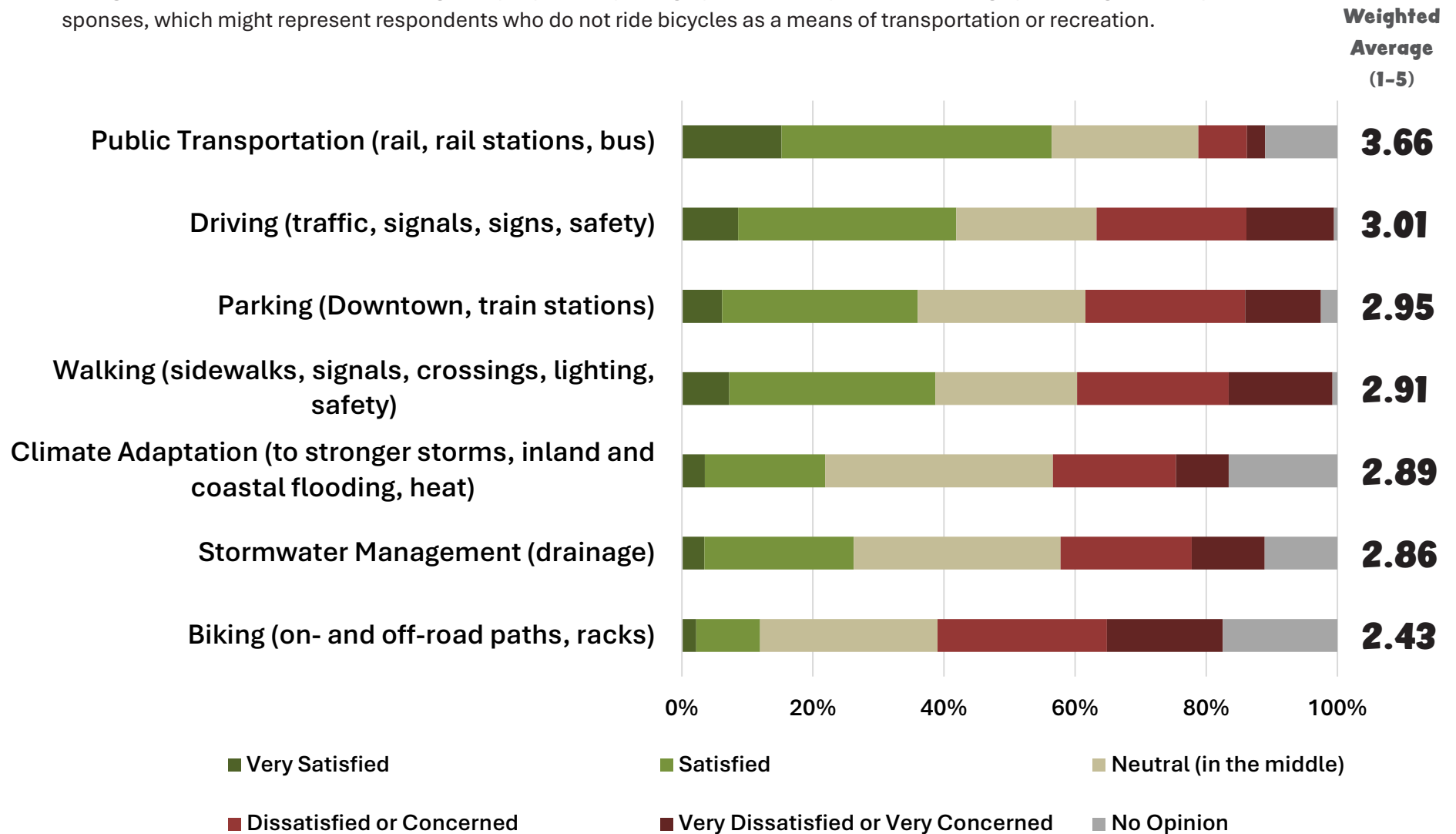
The table on this page lists the weighted average of each topic. A 5 was assigned to the response *Very Satisfied*, a 4 to *Satisfied*, a 3 to *Neutral*, a 2 to *Dissatisfied or Concerned* and a 1 to *Very Dissatisfied or Very Concerned*. *No Opinion* was also an option, but it was not assigned a number. **Public Schools** and **Transfer Station** have the highest weighted average while **Multifamily Residential Development** and **Biking** have the lowest weighted averages.

Category	Topic	Weighted Avg	
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	Public Schools (facilities)	3.97	   
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	Transfer Station (trash, recycling, swap shop)	3.97	
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	Parks & Recreation (park and beach facilities)	3.78	
The Built Environment	Single Family Homes	3.72	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Public Transportation (rail, rail stations, bus)	3.65	
Conservation	Coastal Resources (habitat, marine life, water quality, access)	3.46	
Conservation	Historic Preservation (of buildings, landscapes)	3.42	
The Built Environment	Community Character (overall scale, form, feel)	3.41	
Conservation	Land Preservation & Conservation (open spaces, habitats)	3.37	
Conservation	Natural Resources (water, soil quality; protection of trees, native plants, wildlife, pollinators)	3.21	
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	Business & Economic Development (permitting, regulations OR business mix, quality)	3.20	
The Built Environment	Commercial & Mixed Use Development (Downtown, Noroton Heights, Boston Post Road)	3.13	
The Built Environment	Sustainable Buildings (greener buildings and houses)	3.08	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Driving (traffic, signals, signs, safety)	3.01	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Parking (Downtown, train stations)	2.93	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Walking (sidewalks, signals, crossings, lighting, safety)	2.91	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Climate Adaptation (to stronger storms, inland and coastal flooding, heat)	2.88	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Stormwater Management (drainage)	2.85	
The Built Environment	Multifamily Residential Development (apartments, condos)	2.58	
Transportation & Infrastructure	Biking (on- and off-road paths, racks)	2.43	

Q7: Transportation & Infrastructure Topics

Public Transportation Ranks Highest in Satisfaction, Biking the Lowest

- Approximately 60% of respondents are *Very Satisfied* or *Satisfied* with **Public Transportation** (i.e., Metro North rail service), although many respondents provided specific complaints in their comments that are summarized on the following page.
- Biking** has the lowest satisfaction rating of any topic in any category in the survey. It also has a high percentage of *No Opinion* responses, which might represent respondents who do not ride bicycles as a means of transportation or recreation.



Public Transportation

Summary of the 232 Comments Received

1. Respondents who commented value having two Metro North train stations in Darien, citing convenient access to New York City and the benefits to community and property values.
2. However, respondents who commented are generally frustrated with the condition, appearance, and prolonged construction at both the Darien and Noroton Heights stations.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Train Station Conditions and Construction Delays

- Many respondents who commented described both stations, especially Noroton Heights, as unattractive, outdated, and run-down
- Many respondents believe that the work on Darien station is taking too long, with frequent disruptions and limited access to platforms and parking. Respondents hope for faster completion and more communication about progress.
- Nonetheless, there is strong support for station upgrades, with hopes that improvements will enhance the commuter experience.

2. Train Service Quality

- Metro North service is generally appreciated, with many describing it as reliable and essential for commuting.
- Trains are slower than in previous years, with longer travel times to NYC and overcrowding during peak hours leading to some trains being standing room only.
- There are limited schedule options after the removal of certain express trains.

3. Parking and Accessibility

- Parking at both stations is a challenge, exacerbated by construction and limited spaces.
- Long waitlists for parking permits are a source of frustration, and some suggest parking should be prioritized for Darien residents.
- Access between platforms is inconvenient, with multiple calls for pedestrian bridges or overpasses to improve safety and reduce walking distances, especially at night or in bad weather.
- Accessibility for seniors and those with mobility issues is also a concern.

4. Station Amenities and Maintenance

- Calls for better waiting areas, more shelter on platforms, and amenities like coffee carts.
- Cleanliness and maintenance are lacking, with mentions of graffiti, dirty facilities, and neglected waiting rooms.
- Some suggest beautification efforts, such as landscaping and improved benches.

5. Bus and Other Public Transit

- Bus service is viewed as limited, infrequent, and poorly integrated with train schedules. Bus stops are not well marked or sheltered, and buses often block traffic due to lack of pull-off lanes.
- Many respondents do not take the bus and rely on cars or ride-shares.
- Suggestions include more frequent service, better signage, and shuttle/trolley connections between stations, Downtown, and local destinations.
- Some respondents would like to see public transportation improvements to keep pace with town growth and reduce car dependency.

Driving

Summary of the 494 Comments Received

1. Respondents who commented are dissatisfied with current traffic conditions and concerned about traffic worsening with new development.
2. Some respondents who commented expressed appreciation for road repaving efforts, but this is overshadowed by congestion, speeding, and safety issues.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Traffic Congestion

- Many respondents who commented report that traffic is congested in Downtown, especially along Post Road and around Noroton Heights, and expect it to worsen with new developments (Corbin District, Darien Commons, new apartments).
- Peak-hour backups are common, worsened by poor traffic light timing and I-95 overflow traffic using Darien as a shortcut.
- Respondents identified several problem intersections/areas: West Ave/Noroton Ave, Ledge Road/Noroton Ave, Mansfield/Sedgwick, and the Post Road near the train station.
- Many respondents blame worsening traffic on new housing and commercial development.

2. Speeding and Reckless Driving

- Many respondents complained about excessive speeding, running red lights and stop signs, and aggressive or distracted driving (especially phone use).

- Speeding is a major concern near schools (Ox Ridge, MMS, DHS, Hindley) and residential streets (e.g., Hollow Tree Ridge Road, Brookside, Leroy Ave).
- Lack of police enforcement is frequently mentioned.

3. Infrastructure Problems

- Many intersections lack turning lanes, causing bottlenecks.
- Requests for more left-turn signals and better traffic light synchronization.
- Poor signage, confusing or missing crosswalks, and pedestrian safety issues are recurring concerns.
- Some roads are poorly maintained with potholes, especially Downtown and near Noroton Heights.

5. Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety

- Crosswalks are often ignored by drivers.
- Calls for more sidewalks, better crosswalk visibility, and more enforcement to protect pedestrians.
- Concern about kids on e-bikes and scooters behaving unsafely around cars.

6. Suggestions for Improvement

- Add turn lanes and turning signals at key intersections.
- Install speed cameras, speed bumps, and more visible pedestrian crossings.
- Improve timing and coordination of traffic lights.
- Increase traffic enforcement, especially for speeding and stop sign violations.
- Implement better traffic management near schools and busy shopping areas.

Parking

Summary of the 408 Comments Received

1. Parking in Downtown and at the train stations is widely seen by respondents who commented as inadequate and likely to worsen with ongoing development.
2. Respondents who commented are frustrated by long permit waitlists, the proliferation of reserved spaces, and poor planning.
3. There is optimism that new parking facilities under construction may help, but also concern about whether they will be appropriate for the town's character and needs.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Insufficient Parking Supply

- Many respondents who commented believe that there is not enough parking in Downtown or at the train stations, especially near popular destinations such as CVS, Barrett Bookstore, and 1020 Post Road.
- Respondents noted a lack of handicap-accessible parking spaces near shops and key locations.
- Some respondents believe that improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure could reduce parking demand.

2. Reserved and Permit Parking

- Respondents note that many parking lots have spaces reserved for specific businesses, offices, or permit holders, leaving few spots for general shoppers and diners. They often observe the reserved spots to be empty, while public spaces are occupied.

3. Waitlists

- The waitlists for train station parking permits are extremely long.

4. Parking Space Size and Layout

- New lots, especially in the Corbin District and Noroton Heights, are described as having spaces that are too small and lanes that are too tight, making parking and maneuvering difficult.

5. Poor Planning and Communication

- Many respondents criticize the Town's planning process, citing a lack of foresight in accommodating increased demand.
- Signage is often described as confusing, and there is a desire for better information about alternative parking options.

6. Impact on Local Business

- Some respondents report shopping in other towns due to parking difficulties, and business owners express concern that paid or metered parking would hurt their operations.

7. Construction Disruption

- Ongoing construction is a major source of current parking issues, with hopes that completion will alleviate some problems, though skepticism remains.

8. Mixed or Positive Views

- Several respondents report no issues finding parking, usually because they live within walking distance or use alternative transportation.
- Some respondents appreciate that parking is free in town and hope this remains the case.
- A few respondents believe that the new parking garage(s) under construction may help, but others feel these structures are unattractive and out of character for Darien.

Biking

Summary of the 445 Comments Received

1. Most respondents who commented report that biking in Darien is unsafe and difficult for both children and adults.
2. Respondents who commented hope to see improved biking infrastructure, such as dedicated bike lanes, off-road paths, and better sidewalks.
3. Many respondents who commented express frustration over the lack of progress or planning for bike-friendly improvements.

- Concerns about kids riding recklessly without regulation, licensing, or helmets.
- E-bikes often violate traffic rules and are perceived as a hazard to drivers and pedestrians.

4. Road Conditions

- Many roads have poor maintenance: potholes, sand, debris.
- Lack of sidewalks or sidewalks in bad condition worsens the danger for both pedestrians and bikers.

5. Behavior of Cyclists and Drivers

- Some complaints about large cycling groups taking over the roads and ignoring traffic laws, while cyclists feel endangered by aggressive and inattentive drivers.

6. Desire for Improvements

- Strong interest in adding protected bike lanes, better signage, safe crossings, and off-road bike paths.
- Calls for better integration of biking into town planning, especially as traffic increases due to new developments.
- Some respondents would like to see more sidewalks, better street lighting, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

7. Mixed Opinions

- Some respondents feel bike infrastructure isn't necessary and that biking won't increase meaningfully even with improvements.
- Others feel that focusing on biking takes away from other community needs, such as pools or better public spaces.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Lack of Bike Infrastructure

- There are almost no bike lanes, bike paths, or off-road trails in Darien.
- There are very few bike racks downtown or near parks and schools.
- There are no safe, designated bike routes for children, families, or recreational riders.

2. Safety Concerns

- Roads are too narrow, windy, and crowded, making biking dangerous.
- Heavy traffic, blind curves, speeding, and distracted driving create major risks for cyclists.
- Parents are especially concerned about children's safety biking to school or parks.

3. E-Bike and Scooter Issues

- Rapid growth of e-bikes and scooters is seen as dangerous.

Walking

Summary of the 474 Comments Received

1. Respondents who commented broadly agree that Darien's sidewalk infrastructure is inadequate for a safe, walkable community.
2. While recent improvements are appreciated, there is a consistent call for more sidewalks, better maintenance, safer crossings, and a comprehensive plan to make Darien safer and more accessible for pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Widespread Demand for More Sidewalks

- The majority of respondents who commented want more sidewalks throughout Darien, especially on main roads, near schools, train stations, parks, and residential neighborhoods.
- Many respondents feel that the current sidewalk network is incomplete, with sidewalks often ending abruptly or missing entirely in high-traffic areas.

2. Safety Concerns

- Many respondents who commented do not feel safe walking due to: the lack of sidewalks forcing pedestrians into the street; speeding and inattentive drivers; poorly marked or insufficient crosswalks; inadequate street lighting, especially at night; dangerous intersections and blind corners; inconsistent or malfunctioning pedestrian signals
- Numerous respondents mention that some sidewalks are in poor condition, uneven, narrow, or obstructed by tree roots, utility poles, or overgrown vegetation. Respondents also note that some new sidewalks are already deteriorating.

3. Accessibility Issues

Several respondents note that sidewalks are not accessible for people with mobility devices, strollers, or wheelchairs due to poor design, narrowness, or lack of curb cuts.

4. Specific Locations Frequently Mentioned

- Ox Ridge area: Notably lacking sidewalks, making it unsafe for children walking to school.
- Mansfield Ave, Hoyt St, Middlesex Rd, Hollow Tree Ridge Rd, Old Kings Hwy S, Nearwater Lane, Edgerton St, Brookside Rd, Tokeneke Rd, Pear Tree Point Rd: These roads are often cited as needing sidewalks or repairs.
- Downtown and Post Road: While some improvements are noted, more crosswalks, better signage, and safer crossings are requested.
- Near schools and train stations: High foot traffic areas cited as particularly hazardous without adequate sidewalks or crossings.

5. Positive Feedback and Recent Improvements

- Some respondents acknowledge recent sidewalk additions and repairs, especially on Leroy Ave, West Ave, and near train stations, but emphasize that much more needs to be done.

6. Desire for a More Walkable Community

- Many respondents are disappointed that Darien is not more pedestrian-friendly, especially compared to neighboring towns like New Canaan. Respondents want a town where children can walk to school and friends' houses safely, and where walking is a viable alternative to driving.

Climate Adaptation

Summary of the 197 Comments Received

1. The majority of respondents' comments reflect frustration and concern, with a desire for more aggressive, coordinated, and transparent action on climate adaptation, flood mitigation, and environmental protection.
2. There is also a desire for balancing development with conservation and for the Town to take a more proactive leadership role.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Flooding and Drainage Issues

- Many respondents who commented are concerned about frequent and worsening flooding, both coastal and inland, especially after storms. Many areas lack adequate drainage infrastructure, leading to flooded streets, basements, and public spaces. Specific flooding locations mentioned include Noroton Bay, Pear Tree Beach, Nearwater Lane, Holly Pond, Old Kings Highway North, and under train bridges.
- Many respondents mention flooding and erosion at Pear Tree Beach and other waterfront areas and report concerns about beach water quality, frequent closures after storms, and the need for wetland expansion as a mitigation strategy.

2. Tree Removal and Vegetation Loss

- Many respondents are displeased with the removal of trees by both the Town and Eversource, citing increased heat, loss of shade, and worsened flooding due to reduced stormwater absorption.
- Calls for stricter tree protection ordinances, more tree planting, and policies favoring native plants and green infrastructure. Concerns about clear-cutting trees for development and utility maintenance.

3. Development and Impermeable Surfaces

- Many respondents believe that development is exacerbating flooding and environmental stress, with too much pavement and not enough green space.
- Some respondents believe that conservation is not prioritized alongside new construction and business recruitment.

4. Town Response and Preparedness

- Respondents have mixed perceptions about the Town's efforts. Some see improvements (e.g., tree trimming, drainage cleaning, coastal resiliency plans), while others see little progress or coordination.
- Several respondents are not aware of any concrete plans or actions, while some believe that the Town is behind peer communities in climate adaptation.

5. Power Outages and Utility Management

- Frequent power outages during storms are a major issue, which some respondents attribute to above-ground power lines and inadequate tree management. Some respondents advocate for burying power lines, especially along main roads.

6. Air Quality and Noise

- Some respondents would like to see restrictions of gas-powered leaf blowers to reduce air and noise pollution.

7. Suggestions and Requests

- Implement stricter building and zoning regulations near vulnerable coastal areas.
- Increase monitoring and enforcement of post-development site plans.

Stormwater Management

Summary of the 268 Comments Received

1. The majority of respondents who commented are concerned and frustrated about persistent and widespread flooding issues throughout the town, particularly after heavy rainfall or storms.
2. While some respondents note improvements in certain areas, many feel that progress is slow, inconsistent, or insufficient given the scale of the problem.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Frequent Flooding Hotspots

- Many respondents who commented report frequent and severe flooding at: underpasses and bridges (especially Leroy Ave, Post Road, and near the Darien train station); Goodwives Shopping Center, Noroton Heights, Salt Box Lane, Coachlamp Lane, Cherry Street/Ash Street/Hecker Ave; and Pear Tree Beach Streets near Tilley Pond, West Ave, and Old Farm Road. Flooding often makes roads impassable, damages property, and disrupts daily life.

2. Overdevelopment and Infrastructure Strain

- Many respondents blame increased flooding on overdevelopment, citing too many new homes and large buildings replacing permeable surfaces; insufficient upgrades to drainage and stormwater infrastructure to match new construction; loss of trees and natural buffers, which previously helped absorb runoff.

3. Maintenance and Upkeep

- Poor or infrequent maintenance of storm drains is a common complaint among respondents. Drains are often clogged with debris, leaves, or garbage, reducing their effectiveness.

- Some respondents call for more regular, proactive cleaning and repair, especially before and after storms.

4. Environmental and Health Concerns

- Respondents report stormwater runoff as polluting rivers, marine ecosystems, and even drinking water aquifers. Beach and shellfish bed closures reoccur due to contaminated runoff.
- Some respondents are frustrated that the Town and residents continue to use chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

5. Town Response and Planning

- Some respondents acknowledge recent improvements and targeted projects (e.g., Salt Box Lane, Noroton Heights, rain gardens)
- Other respondents feel that the Town is reactive rather than proactive, and that projects are too localized or delayed.
- Some respondents criticize the approval of new developments without adequate infrastructure investment.

6. Personal Impact

- Some respondents report no issues because they live on higher ground or have private drainage solutions. Others recount repeated, costly flooding and property damage, sometimes lacking insurance or FEMA coverage.

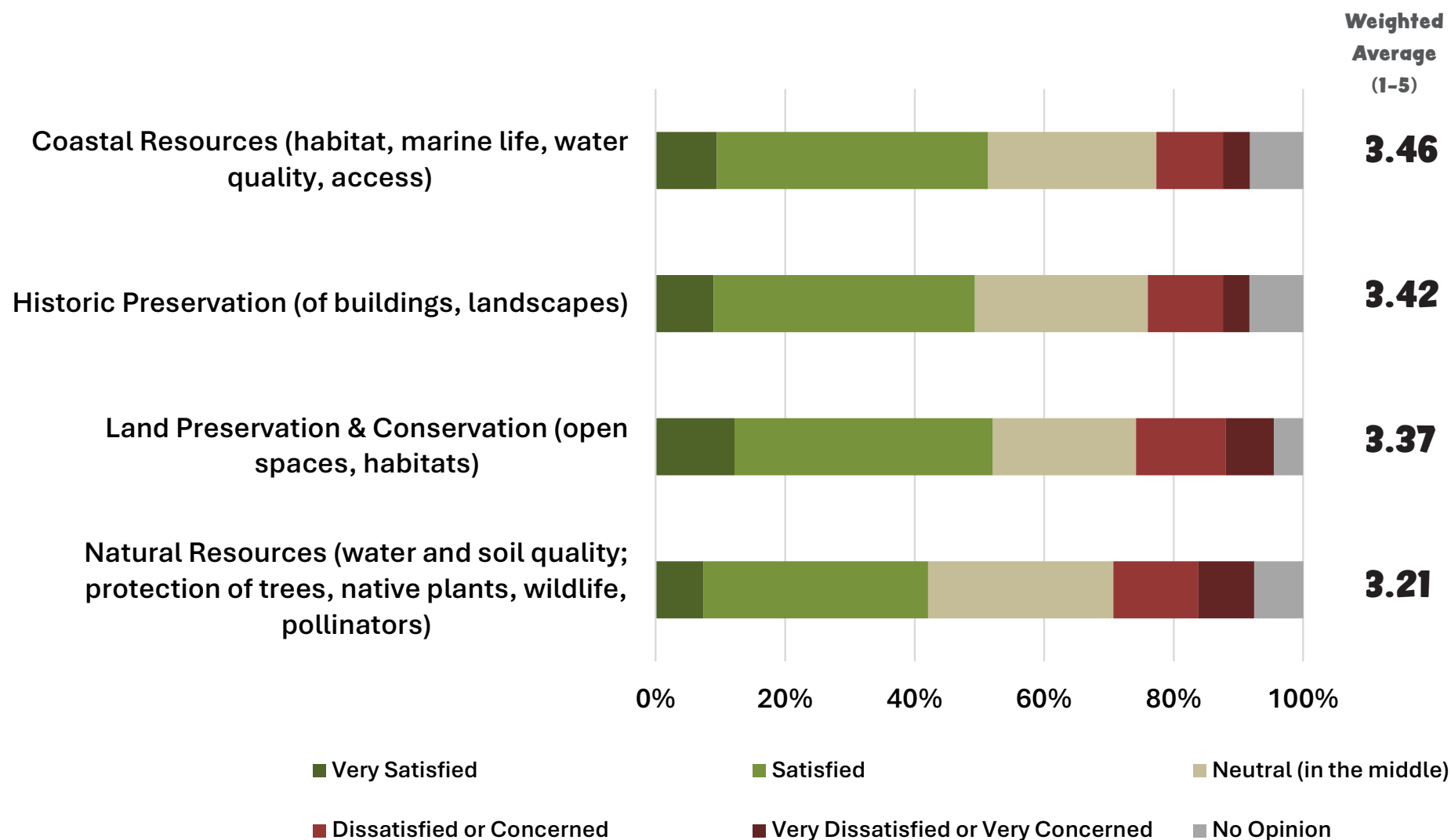
7. Suggestions and Requests

- Comprehensive, town-wide stormwater management planning.
- Upgrade aging infrastructure and increase capacity for current and future needs.
- More stringent regulations on development, tree removal, and stormwater runoff.
- Better education of homeowner stormwater best practices.

Q8: Conservation Topics

Respondents are Generally More Satisfied than Not with the Conservation Topics

- Natural Resources and Land Preservation & Conservation had the highest percentages of respondents who reported being *Dissatisfied or Concerned* and *Very Dissatisfied or Very Concerned*. Respondents who responded accordingly had many comments to share (see pages 20-21).



Coastal Resources

Summary of the 167 Comments Received

1. The majority of respondents who commented express concern and frustration with current conditions and Town management regarding conservation and water quality
2. Many respondents who commented hope for stronger environmental protection, better public access, and more transparent, proactive governance.
3. Some respondents acknowledge improvements and ongoing efforts, but most believe that recreation, development, and preservation of Darien's coastal resources needs to be better balanced.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Water Quality Concerns

- Many respondents who commented are concerned about poor water quality in the Long Island Sound, local beaches, and ponds. Issues cited include pollution, floating trash, algae, toxins, sewage spills, and runoff from fertilizers and pesticides.
- Several respondents mention the negative impact of chemicals fertilizers on lawns and lack of sufficient water testing, with calls for stronger regulation and enforcement.
- Some respondents note improvement in water quality over decades, but most feel current conditions are inadequate, with frequent beach closures due to contamination.

2. Conservation and Environmental Protection

- There is a strong desire for more robust conservation efforts, including better protection of wetlands, marshes, and tree canopies.
- Many respondents are disappointed about ongoing development,

tree removal, and perceived prioritization of development over the environment.

- Some respondents would like a Tree Commission, stricter rules, and more education/enforcement.
- Some respondents are concerned about the loss of wildlife habitat, especially for pollinators and migratory birds, due to habitat destruction and overdevelopment.

3. Access to Coastal Resources

- Respondents value access to beaches and water, but some feel access is limited or exclusionary, especially at Great Island, which is seen as inaccessible to those unable to walk long distances.
- There are requests for more docks, kayak racks, and expanded water access points, and improved maintenance.
- Some respondents praise the variety of recreational opportunities, but others feel the focus is more on recreation than preservation.

4. Management of Public Spaces and Town Actions

- Some respondents praise the Darien Land Trust and property acquisitions like Great Island and Ziegler Property, while others criticize lack of transparency, slow progress, and insufficient public input.
- Some respondents feel the Town spends too much on conservation at the expense of usability, while others believe not enough is being done to protect natural resources.

5. Specific Issues and Suggestions

- Frequent mention of the need to dredge waterways, address flooding (especially at Pear Tree Point), and improve stormwater management.
- Some respondents suggest looking at policies from neighboring communities (e.g., pesticide bans in Westchester County, NY and leaf blower regulations in Westport).

Historic Preservation

Summary of the 169 Comments Received

1. Many respondents who commented are concerned by the rapid demolition of historic homes and buildings, replaced by larger, modern structures (“McMansions”) and multi-story developments. This is seen as eroding Darien’s traditional New England small-town charm and unique character.
2. The comments express significant concern about the loss of natural landscapes—mature trees and open green spaces—with several comments lamenting clear-cutting and the diminishing of scenic vistas, particularly in areas such as Long Neck and Weed Beach.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Positive Feedback and Preservation Successes

- The Mather Homestead and Darien Historical Society are noted by a number of respondents as positive examples of preservation efforts.
- The acquisition of Great Island is generally viewed by respondents who commented as a success, although there is concern about its future use and potential overdevelopment.

2. Critiques of Town Policy and Leadership:

- Some respondents who commented feel that Town policies and zoning regulations favor new development over preservation, with insufficient incentives or protections for maintaining historic structures.
- Some respondents are frustrated at the lack of a coherent or visible historic preservation plan, and a perceived lack of enforcement or incentives for restoration over demolition.

- There are complaints about unsightly new developments, loss of familiar stores, and the replacement of historic or unique buildings with generic, unattractive architecture.

3. Mixed Opinions

- While the majority of respondents advocate for more preservation, some respondents argue that too much emphasis is placed on historic buildings and that resources should focus on current community needs rather than the past.
- A few respondents are neutral or indifferent on the issue, or feel that private organizations are doing a good job where the Town is not.

4. Suggestions and Hopes

- Many respondents call for stronger regulations, tax incentives, and preservation of both buildings and landscapes.
- There is a desire for more thoughtful, community-oriented development that maintains Darien’s character.
- Some hope for better maintenance of existing historic sites and more pride in the town’s history.

Land Preservation & Conservation

Summary of the 279 Comments Received

1. Many respondents who commented support open space preservation, are concerned about overdevelopment, and want to keep acquisitions like Great Island natural.
2. Many respondents believe that Darien's green spaces are valuable and that thoughtful management and transparent planning are needed going forward.
3. Some respondents who commented feel too much land is being preserved, limiting housing and tax revenue, or criticize the cost and planning of recent acquisitions.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Strong Support for Land Preservation and Open Space

- A number of respondents praise the town and the Darien Land Trust for acquiring and preserving open spaces like Great Island, Highland Park, and the Ziegler Estate.
- Many respondents appreciate green spaces, with calls for more land to be preserved, more parks, and greater emphasis on conservation.

2. Concerns About Overdevelopment

- A number of respondents express frustration with ongoing and increasing development.
- Many respondents feel that overbuilding is eroding Darien's traditional charm, green space, and New England character.
- There is particular concern among respondents about development encroaching on or near existing open spaces and the impact on traffic, density, and the environment.

- Many respondents want a balanced approach that preserves open space while allowing for sensible development and public use.

3. Mixed Views on Great Island Acquisition and Use

- While many respondents praise the purchase as a major win for the Town, there is division among respondents over how the property should be managed. Some respondents want it kept as a natural sanctuary with minimal human impact, limited programming, and no cars or large events. Others suggest it should generate revenue through events or be made more accessible with parking and paths.
- Some question the cost and financial priorities of land acquisitions, particularly Great Island, suggesting funds might be better spent on schools or other needs.

4. Critique of Town Planning and Stewardship

- Several respondents feel that the Town lacks a comprehensive, strategic plan for open space management and conservation.
- Some respondents point to insufficient maintenance, stewardship, and coordination between departments and with knowledgeable local organizations.
- Some respondents remarked that the Town prioritizes development and revenue over conservation, and that policies such as zoning favor large homes and reduce green space. Some respondents believe the opposite is happening.

5. Appreciation for the Darien Land Trust

- The Land Trust is widely credited with playing a crucial role in preservation efforts, though some note limitations in its ability to act against development pressures.
- There are suggestions for closer collaboration between the Trust and the Town to identify and acquire additional parcels.

Natural Resources

Summary of the 186 Comments Received

1. On the whole, respondents who commented are frustrated with the current state of environmental stewardship in Darien, especially regarding tree loss, overdevelopment, and lack of proactive Town policies.
2. While some respondents acknowledge positive steps, the sentiment is that much more can be done to protect and restore the Town's natural resources through leadership, regulation, and education.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Widespread Tree Removal

- A number of respondents who commented are concerned about the extensive cutting of mature and old-growth trees by both private developers and public entities (e.g., Town, Eversource, Metro North). Many respondents lament the lack of meaningful replacement efforts and the loss of the Town's character, ecosystem features, and beauty. There are repeated calls for a tree ordinance and/or a commission to regulate removals and require replanting.

2. Overdevelopment and Zoning

- Many respondents feel that rapid development, especially clear-cutting for large homes and commercial projects, is degrading open space, increasing impermeable surfaces, and diminishing the Town's appeal. Zoning is seen as too lenient, with developers being able to circumvent environmental protections.

3. Lack of Town Action and Oversight

- Multiple comments express frustration that only private organizations (e.g., Darien Land Trust, Pollinator Pathway) are taking meaningful

steps, while the Town is perceived as disengaged, lacking policies, education, or enforcement regarding conservation, invasive species, and pollution.

4. Noise and Air Pollution from Landscaping

- Some respondents support banning or restricting gas-powered leaf blowers and mowers due to their noise and pollution, with some suggesting embargoes on certain days and a switch to electric equipment.

5. Water and Soil Quality Issues

- Concerns include poor water quality (e.g., beach closures, runoff, sewage, PFAS, lead), lack of maintenance for local waterways (e.g., Gorham's Pond), and the negative impact of pesticides, fertilizers, and lawn chemicals on human and ecosystem health.

6. Invasive Species and Native Planting:

- Several respondents note a proliferation of invasive plants and a lack of Town-led efforts to remove them or promote native species. There is a call for more pollinator gardens, native meadows, and educational initiatives on the importance of native flora.

7. Loss of Wildlife Habitat

- The removal of trees and use of pesticides are seen as harming pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Some mention increased sightings of coyotes and foxes, and the need for coexistence education.

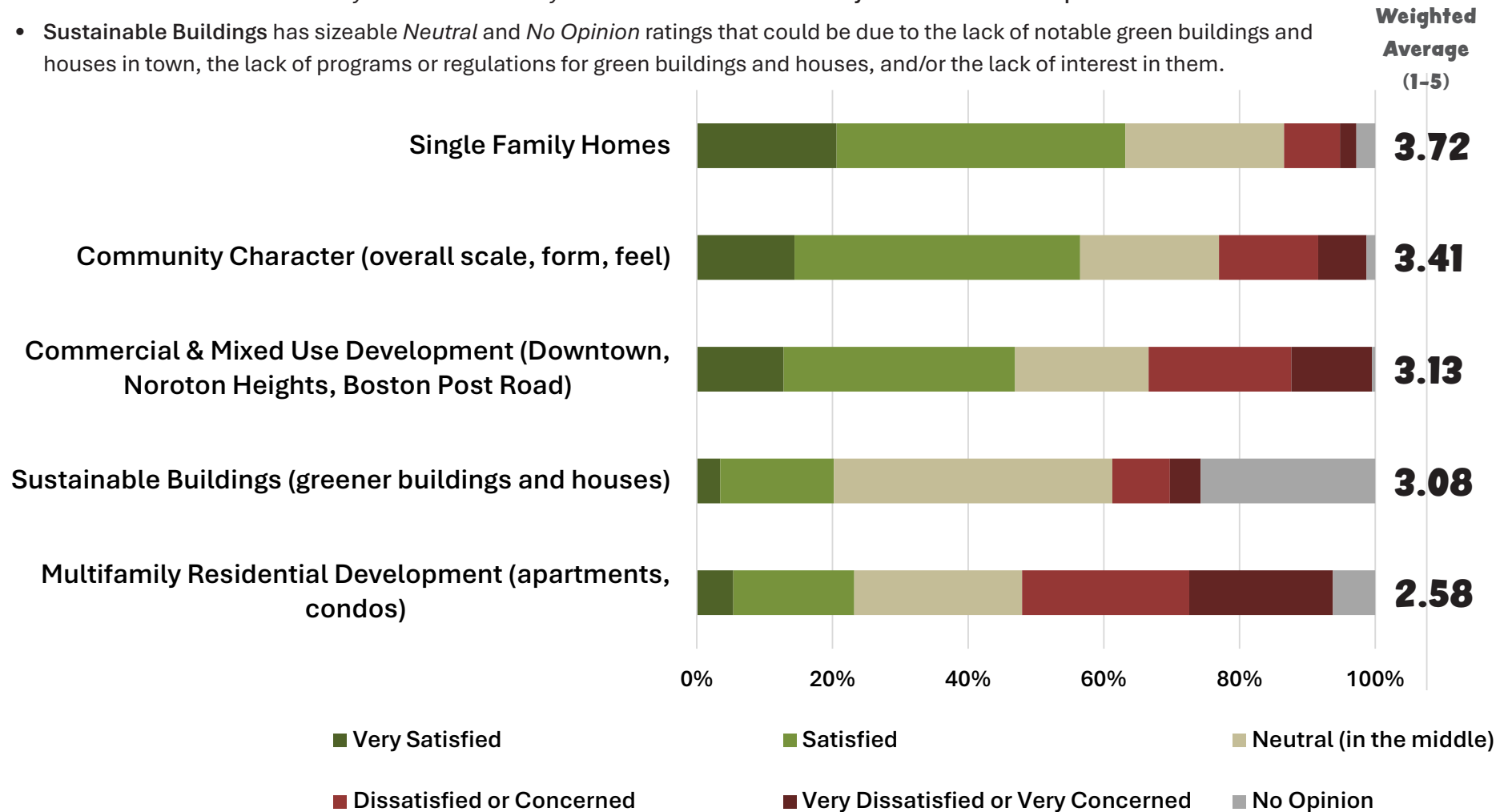
8. Town Beautification and Public Spaces

- Some positive feedback is given for efforts like pollinator flower beds at Town Hall, but there is criticism of haphazard tree planting, poor maintenance, and missed opportunities for beautification and ecological restoration in parks and public areas.

Q9: Built Environment Topics

The Majority of Respondents Do Not Have a Favorable Impression of Multifamily Residential Development

- Despite the many concerns from respondents (see page 25) about Darien losing its small-town feel due to development, the majority of respondents—almost 60%—are *Very Satisfied* or *Satisfied* with **Community Character**.
- Almost 45% of respondents are satisfied with **Commercial & Mixed Use Development** while the majority of respondents are *Dissatisfied* or *Concerned* and *Very Dissatisfied* or *Very Concerned* about **Multifamily Residential Development**.
- Sustainable Buildings** has sizeable *Neutral* and *No Opinion* ratings that could be due to the lack of notable green buildings and houses in town, the lack of programs or regulations for green buildings and houses, and/or the lack of interest in them.



Single Family Homes

Summary of the 177 Comments Received

1. Respondents who commented feel that current trends threaten the affordability, diversity, and character of their town.
2. While some respondents who commented appreciate the beauty and upkeep of many homes, the majority of comments reflect the sentiment that unchecked development and high costs are making the community less accessible and less reflective of its traditional values.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Affordability and Housing Diversity

- Many respondents who commented are concerned about rising housing costs, noting that houses have become unaffordable for young families, first-time buyers, and even previous residents who wish to return or downsize.
- Several respondents would like to see more affordable, smaller single-family homes, starter homes, and options for seniors or down-sizers.

2. Tear Downs

- A number of respondents pointed out the trend of tearing down smaller, older houses and replacing them with very large, expensive houses that are out of proportion with their lots and the surrounding neighborhood. They identify potential negative impacts such as the loss of mature trees, reduced green space, and increased flooding.

3. Zoning and Permitting

- Numerous comments criticize current zoning regulations as either too lenient (allowing oversized homes on small lots) or too restrictive (making it difficult to build more affordable or diverse housing).
- There are calls for stricter enforcement of house-to-lot ratios, setbacks, and architectural standards to maintain neighborhood character and prevent overbuilding.
- Some respondents feel the zoning and permitting process is inconsistent, with questionable approvals and inadequate enforcement.

4. Suggestions and Other Concerns

- Suggestions include creating incentives for green building, requiring tree replanting, using permeable driveways, and addressing abandoned or blighted properties.
- Some respondents advocate for more flexibility with accessory dwellings, while other respondents warn against them, fearing negative impacts on neighborhoods.

Community Character

Summary of the 335 Comments Received

1. The majority of respondents who commented express concern, frustration, or disappointment with the scale and pace of new development in Darien.
2. Many respondents who commented feel that the town is losing its historic “small town” New England character due to overbuilding, particularly with large apartment complexes and commercial projects.
3. A smaller group of respondents who commented appreciates the new amenities, restaurants, and the aesthetic improvements of certain projects.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Loss of Small Town Character

- Frequent references to the loss of Darien’s unique, quaint, and historic feel.
- Many express nostalgia for a quieter, less developed town, and regret that Darien is becoming more like larger, less distinctive cities (e.g., Stamford, Norwalk, Westchester).
- Concerns that new buildings are generic, oversized, and out of scale with the traditional architecture.

2. Overdevelopment

- Many respondents commented that there is too much development, especially in Downtown and Noroton Heights and are worried about the number and size of apartment buildings overwhelming schools, roads, and other infrastructure.
- Some mention that new developments are “cookie-cutter,” “cheap,” or “out of character” for the town.

3. Traffic and Infrastructure Strain

- Many comments cite worsening traffic congestion, insufficient parking, and inadequate roads as a result of rapid development.
- Concerns that infrastructure (schools, utilities, roads) is not keeping pace with growth.

4. Environmental and Aesthetic Concerns

- Repeated calls for more green space, trees, and sustainable development practices.
- Criticism of large parking structures and lack of attention to landscaping and drainage.
- Some positive remarks about projects that have tried to preserve or enhance green space.

5. Mixed Opinions on Specific Developments

- The Corbin District receives both praise (for design and amenities) and criticism (for scale and impact) from respondents.
- Respondents tend to criticize the Noroton Heights projects for being too large, generic, and lacking green space.
- Some respondents appreciate new dining and shopping options, but worry about long-term sustainability and impact on local businesses.

6. Positive Opinions

- A few respondents are optimistic, citing improved amenities, more dining/shopping options, and architectural upgrades.
- Some respondents are excited to see the final results of ongoing projects and believe the changes will ultimately benefit the town.
- A few comments note an increase in diversity, which some view positively.

Commercial & Mixed Use Development

Summary of the 466 Comments Received

1. The majority respondents who commented express concern and frustration about the scale, speed, and impact of new development projects in Darien, particularly in Noroton Heights, Corbin District, and along Post Road.
2. While there are some positive remarks about improvements and new amenities, the dominant themes are negative, highlighting issues of overdevelopment, loss of small-town character, infrastructure strain, and aesthetic dissatisfaction.

- Many respondents are concerned that traffic and parking issues will worsen as more projects are completed and occupied.

3. Strain on Infrastructure and Schools

- Respondents worry that the town's infrastructure (e.g. roads, utilities, schools) cannot support the influx of new residents and businesses.
- Respondents worry about overcrowding in schools and the need for expanded budgets, classrooms, and teachers.

4. Loss of Community Character and Aesthetics

- The new buildings are often described as too tall, dense, generic, or “cookie-cutter,” lacking the architectural charm and diversity that previously defined Darien.
- Several comments lament the loss of green space, sunlight, and the “quaint” or “New England” feel of the town.

5. Commercial Mix and Economic Viability

- There is skepticism about whether Darien can support so many new retail and restaurant spaces.
- Some feel the new businesses are too high-end, repetitive (e.g., too many pizza places), or dominated by chains rather than local shops.
- A few express hope that new dining and retail options will revitalize the town and make it more vibrant.

6. Suggestions and Positive Notes

- Some respondents praise the intentional development, new amenities, and improved appearance in some areas.
- Suggestions include adding more green space, improving walkability, burying power lines, and ensuring better architectural standards.
- Some appreciate the mixed-use developments and the convenience of new shops and restaurants, provided growth is balanced.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Overdevelopment and Density

- Many respondents feel Darien is being overbuilt, with too many large-scale projects happening simultaneously.
- The town is perceived as losing its small-town, historic charm and starting to resemble larger places like Stamford, Norwalk, or even communities in Westchester.
- There is a strong sense that the rapid pace of development is overwhelming and not well-managed.

2. Traffic and Parking

- Increased traffic congestion is a major concern, especially near Noroton Heights, Corbin District, and along Post Road.
- Parking shortages are frequently mentioned, with several noting that new developments do not provide adequate parking for residents, shoppers, or commuters.

Sustainable Buildings

Summary of the 146 Comments Received

1. The majority of respondents who commented express concern about a lack of sustainable or green buildings in Darien.
2. Many respondents who commented are either unaware of existing green buildings or believe there are very few, with the Darien Library being the most frequently cited example.
3. There is a desire for more visible, tangible efforts toward sustainability in both public and private construction.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Lack of Awareness and Visibility

- Many respondents state they do not know of any green or sustainable buildings in town. Some mention only the library as an example, with little knowledge of other initiatives.

2. Desire for More Action and Leadership

- Numerous respondents suggest that the Town: require or incentivize green building practices (e.g., LEED certification, solar panels, rain-water capture, green roofs); upgrade municipal buildings (schools, town hall) to higher sustainability standards; offer tax breaks, grants, or more flexible permitting for green construction and retrofits.

3. Critique of Current Development Trends

- Respondents raised concerns about: large new homes replacing trees and increasing impervious cover, leading to runoff and environmental degradation; a perceived focus on marketing "green" rather than achieving real environmental impact; missed opportunities to incorporate sustainability in new developments and renovations.

6. Mixed Views on Regulation and Responsibility

- While many want more regulation and incentives, some believe green building should remain a private sector or federal issue, not a town mandate.
- A few respondents suggest that sustainability should not be a focus or requirement.

7. Calls for Education and Community Engagement

- Several respondents note the need for better education, outreach, and community involvement to raise awareness and encourage sustainable practices.

8. Specific Suggestions Offered

- More solar panels, especially on large roofs (e.g., schools).
- Solar canopies in parking lots.
- EV chargers, drought-resistant landscaping, and gray water reuse in commercial areas.
- Stricter building codes and regulations to enforce sustainable practices.
- Incentives for homeowners to plant trees or install pollinator gardens.

Multifamily Residential Development

Summary of the 473 Comments Received

1. The overall sentiment among respondents who commented is negative toward the current pace and scale of apartment development in Darien.
2. The most common concerns about respondents who commented are overdevelopment, loss of small-town character, infrastructure strain (especially on schools and traffic), and lack of affordable or suitable downsizing options for seniors.
3. Some respondents who commented welcome the increased housing diversity, but generally agree that future growth should be more carefully managed.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Overdevelopment & Character Concerns

- The majority of respondents who commented are concerned that Darien is experiencing rapid and excessive apartment development.
- Many respondents feel that Darien is losing its small-town charm and is becoming too urbanized.
- There is a strong sentiment that development is happening too quickly and on too large a scale for the town's size and infrastructure.

2. Strain on Infrastructure and Services

- Respondents worry about the ability of local infrastructure, especially schools, roads, parking, and emergency services, to handle the increased population.
- School overcrowding is a major concern, with many respondents questioning how the district will absorb new students.

- Traffic congestion and lack of adequate parking are frequently cited as negative consequences of the new developments.

3. Affordability and Housing Mix

- While some respondents appreciate the increase in housing options, many note that the new apartments are expensive and do not address the need for affordable or workforce housing.
- A number of respondents would like to see for more condos (especially for downsizing seniors) and townhouses, rather than just rental apartments.
- Some respondents point out the lack of affordable options for seniors and young adults, with several suggesting that more diverse and inclusive housing would benefit the community.

4. Quality, Design, and Suitability

- Several respondents criticize the architectural quality and aesthetics of new developments, describing them as out of character with Darien's traditional look.
- There are concerns about large-scale developments being built in inappropriate locations, such as near nature preserves or in flood zones.

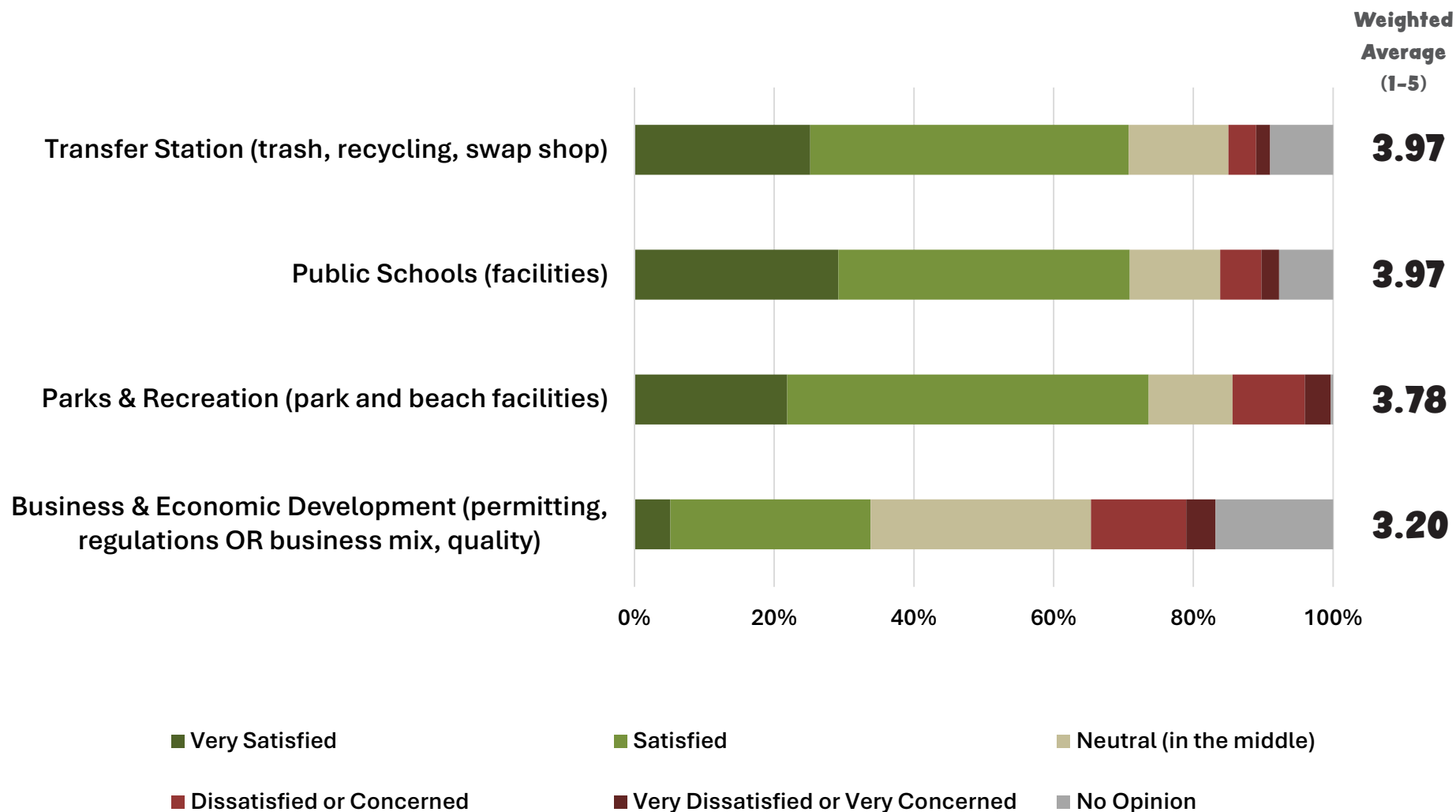
5. Community and Social Impact

- Some respondents are concerned that a high proportion of rental units will lead to a more transient population, undermining long-term community bonds and engagement.
- Several respondents are concerned about the impact on property values and the potential for higher taxes due to the strain on services.
- Some respondents acknowledge that growth is necessary but urge a more measured, thoughtful approach, with better planning and infrastructure upgrades.

Q10: Community Amenities, Facilities & Services

Respondents are Very Pleased with the Town's Community Amenities, Facilities & Services

- Respondents on the whole are satisfied with Darien's Public Schools, Transfer Station, and Parks & Recreation facilities.
- Despite a high level of satisfaction about all of the categories in this topic, respondents had plenty of concerns and suggestions to share that are summarized on the following pages.



Transfer Station

Summary of the 196 Comments Received

1. The respondents who commented widely appreciate the transfer station as a valuable and well-managed town asset, with many praising its organization, recycling options, and composting program.
2. The swap shop is seen as a great concept and resource for recycling and community sharing, but its current operation is a major source of frustration.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

Transfer Station Operations

- Many respondents who commented would like longer hours, especially later on Saturdays and opening on Sundays, to better accommodate residents' schedules.
- Calls for improved signage, clearer directions for recycling and yard waste, and better traffic management to prevent accidents.
- Some confusion exists about single-stream recycling versus separation, and concerns that recyclables are sometimes mixed with trash. Requests for more recycling options (e.g., plastic bags, bottles), better enforcement, and public education are frequent.
- The food scrap program is highly praised, with suggestions to expand it town-wide and into schools and restaurants.
- Respondents want more bulk recycling/shredding events, easier disposal for items like oil and gasoline, and improved handling of demolition materials to prevent tire damage.
- Several respondents would like Town-managed trash and recycling pickup instead of relying on private companies, citing cost and inefficiency.

Swap Shop Operations

- Many respondents want the swap shop open more days and for longer, more consistent hours. They find the current limited hours inconvenient, especially for working people and families who can only visit on weekends.
- Parking is described as inadequate, hazardous, and chaotic. Several suggest relocating the swap shop or expanding its space to improve access and traffic flow.
- Some respondents complain about volunteers or “pickers” taking the best items for themselves, sometimes aggressively, which discourages others from using the shop. Some suggest more oversight, paid staff, or changes to volunteer practices.
- The swap shop creates congestion and traffic issues, especially during peak times, which some feel impedes the flow for other transfer station users.
- Some respondents note that the swap shop is messy, poorly organized, and accepts too many unusable items, calling for better management and stricter guidelines.
- Suggestions from respondents include allowing non-residents limited access, online passes, and more communication about open hours.

Public Schools

Summary of the 206 Comments Received

1. The respondents who commented are highly invested in the quality of Darien's public schools, viewing them as central to property values and the town's appeal.
2. Many express pride in the schools, but there is widespread concern among respondents who commented about the future due to budget constraints and rapid town development.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Facilities and Infrastructure

- Many respondents who commented welcome ongoing renovations and upgrades, especially at elementary schools, noting that some buildings were overdue for improvements.
- Several respondents mention outdated facilities, insufficient parking, lack of air conditioning, and poor maintenance of school grounds.
- Some respondents feel that the focus on building upgrades comes at the expense of investing in teachers and educational resources.

2. Budget and Funding

- Strong calls to prioritize school funding, with worries that recent and proposed budget cuts will erode educational quality and property values.
- Concern that Town spending on projects like Great Island is crowding out funds for schools.
- Some feel the school budget is unsustainably large and question whether taxpayers are getting value for money, while others argue the budget is being cut too much.

- Some respondents believe that administrative positions should be reduced in favor of hiring more and better teachers.

3. Class Size and Enrollment

- Overcrowding is a recurring theme, with worries that new apartments and condos will further strain school capacity.
- Some parents report that large class sizes overwhelm teachers and negatively impact learning and discipline.
- There are calls for better planning to accommodate population growth and for building new schools if necessary.

4. Academic and Extracurricular Programs

- Many value the schools' academic standards but worry about cuts to programs, paraeducators, and extracurriculars.
- Some feel the schools are too focused on sports at the expense of other interests and mental health supports.
- Calls for more innovation, such as banning phones, teaching mindfulness, and preparing students for real life.
- Concerns about uneven resources and quality among the five elementary schools.

5. Property Values and Community Impact

- Respondent agree that strong schools are vital to maintaining property values and attracting families.
- Some non-parent respondents feel their taxes are disproportionately funding schools, suggesting alternative tax structures.

Parks & Recreation

Summary of the 292 Comments Received

1. Most of the respondents who commented value Darien's parks, beaches, and green spaces, frequently describing them as one of the best aspects of living in town.
2. Respondents generally appreciate the recent improvements, but many believe that maintenance and upgrades are lagging behind growing demand and development.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Great Island

- Many respondents who commented are excited about the acquisition and potential of Great Island, but are concerned about the lack of a clear plan, slow pace of development, and consultant costs. Opinions differ on whether it should remain mostly natural or be developed with amenities such as walking trails or a pool.

2. Pear Tree Point Beach

- Respondents frequently mentioned Pear Tree Point Beach as needing upgrades, especially to its bathhouse, concession stand, parking lot (notably flooding issues), and general cleanliness.
- Some respondents want it left largely undeveloped, while others see it as an eyesore compared to Weed Beach and want significant improvements.
- Some respondents would like the concession stand to be reopened.

3. Weed Beach

- Weed Beach is generally well-regarded, but there are concerns about overdevelopment (e.g., pickleball courts, skate parks), loss of quiet/natural space, and recent tree removal.

- Some playground facilities are described as in disrepair, and there are requests for more shaded areas, and better sand and bathrooms.
- Many respondents suggest expanding or improving facilities, but with caution to preserve the beach's character.

4. Town Pool

- Many respondents expressed desire for a Town pool, with some noting that neighboring communities have public pools.

5. Playgrounds and Fields

- Some respondents want playgrounds, especially in underserved neighborhoods (e.g., Holmes, Noroton Heights), and for playgrounds to be accessible during school hours.
- Respondents have mixed reviews of new playgrounds. Some praise them, while others criticize them as unsafe, too tall, or unnecessary replacements for existing structures.
- Athletic fields are in high demand, with complaints about insufficient space, poor drainage, and late practice times for kids. Adult sports, especially soccer, lack adequate field access.

6. Dog Facilities

- Many respondents want a year-round, fenced dog park and more off-leash options, especially with new apartments bringing more dogs.
- There are also complaints about dog waste and calls for better enforcement of leash and dog regulations.

7. Maintenance and Cleanliness

- Many respondents want better maintenance of parks, beaches, and facilities (bathrooms, picnic tables, trash cans, sand, etc.)
- Some believe the Town focuses too much on acquiring new land or building new amenities instead of maintaining current assets.

Business & Economic Development

Summary of the 189 Comments Received

1. Residents who commented are generally concerned about overdevelopment, loss of community character, and the burden on infrastructure in the town.
2. Many respondents who commented are frustrated with the permitting and regulatory process, citing both excessive bureaucracy and inconsistent enforcement.
3. Some respondents who commented are seeking more diverse and higher-quality businesses, especially restaurants. While there are some positive remarks about recent additions, the majority of comments call for more thoughtful and balanced approach to growth that preserves the town's unique qualities.

3. Permitting and Regulation Issues

- The permitting process is described as slow, bureaucratic, inconsistent, and burdensome for both homeowners and businesses.
- Some respondents feel the Town is too lax in approving new developments, while others complain about overregulation and arbitrary enforcement.

4. Business Mix and Economic Concerns

- Respondents want more diverse and higher-quality restaurants and retail options, and fewer redundant businesses.
- Some respondents believe that many new businesses do not survive due to high rents and competition.
- Some respondents would like to see more independent stores and fewer chains or private equity-backed businesses.

5. Town Governance and Oversight

- Some respondents believe that the Town approved too many projects without considering the long-term impact.
- There are concerns about a lack of strategic vision and too many decisions being made without public consultation.

6. Suggestions and Requests

- Calls for a moratorium on new developments until current impacts are assessed.
- Suggestions for infrastructure or development fees to offset costs.

7. Mixed and Positive Feedback

- Some respondents appreciate the new restaurants and businesses, noting some positive changes and progress.
- Some respondents are content with the current business mix or believe the permitting process is appropriate.

Themes & Issues Raised in Comments

1. Overdevelopment and Loss of Character

- Many respondents who commented expressed concern about excessive commercial and residential development, describing Darien as becoming “overbuilt,” “too dense,” and losing its “quaintness” and “small-town feel.”
- Some respondents feel that new developments, such as Noroton Heights and those along Post Road, are unattractive or out of scale.

2. Traffic, Parking, and Infrastructure Strain

- Respondents generally blame increased development for worsening traffic congestion and parking difficulties.
- Several comments question whether the Town's infrastructure (roads, utilities, schools) can support the rapid growth.

Does Demographic Variation Make a Difference?

The Town-Wide Survey asked residents two demographic questions:

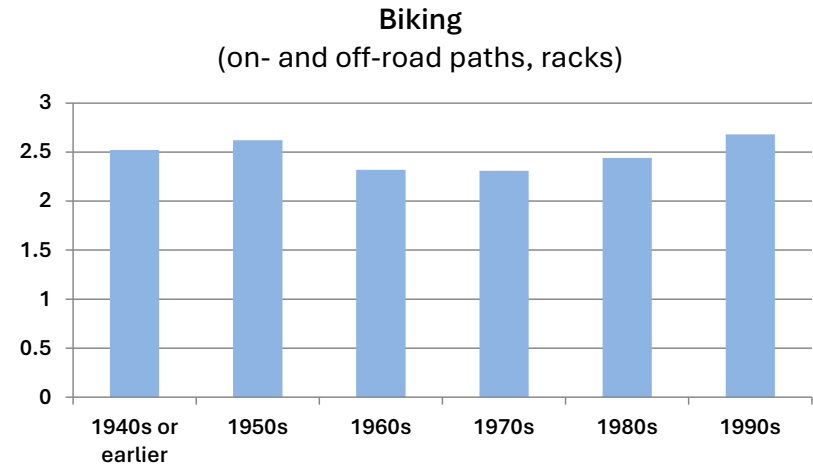
- How long have you lived in Darien?
- Please indicate the decade in which you were born.

The purpose of these questions is to showcase the distribution of the age of respondents and how long they've lived in Darien. The other purpose of these questions is to crosstabulate the results to analyze the degree to which the results vary by these two variables.

The results of all of topics in each of the four categories were examined, and the only category that has topics that demonstrate any distinguishable trend is **The Built Environment**. One might expect that the topic **Biking**, under the category **Transportation & Infrastructure** might reveal a pattern but, as the chart on the right shows, there is only slight variation among the age groups and no discernible pattern.

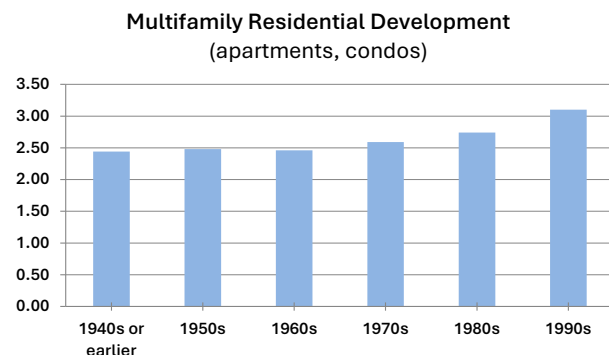
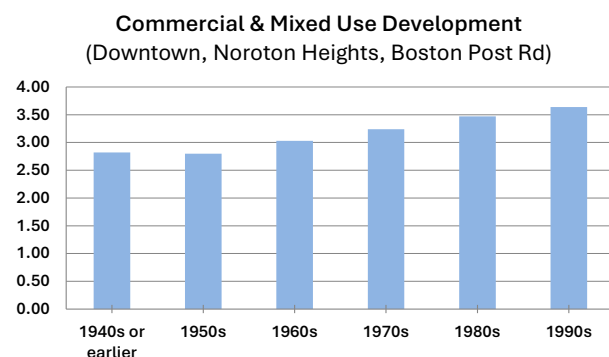
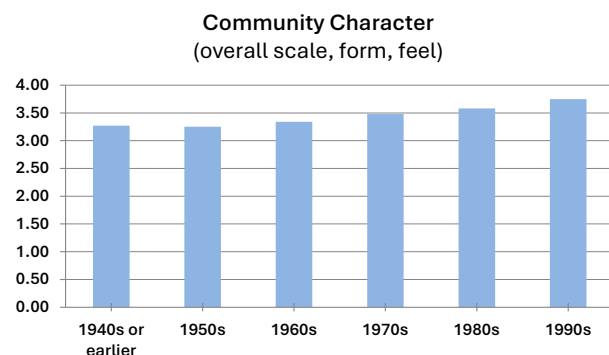
The charts on the next page show the results of crosstabulating the variables Decade of Birth and Years Lived in Darien with several topics in **The Built Environment: Community Character, Commercial & Mixed Use Development, and Multifamily Residential Development**. The chart on the left side of the next page shows that the younger the respondent, the greater the level of satisfaction of these three topics. The chart on the right side of the next page shows that the more recently respondents moved to Darien, the greater the level of satisfaction of these three topics.

Level of Satisfaction of Biking By Decade of Birth of Respondent



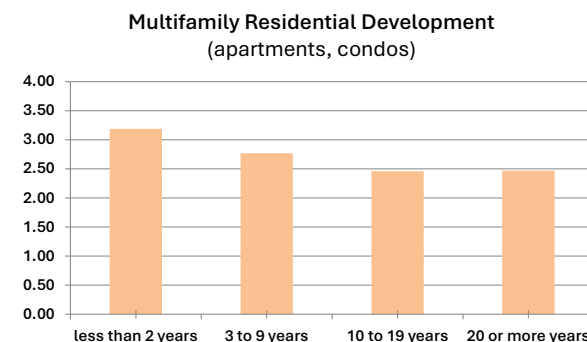
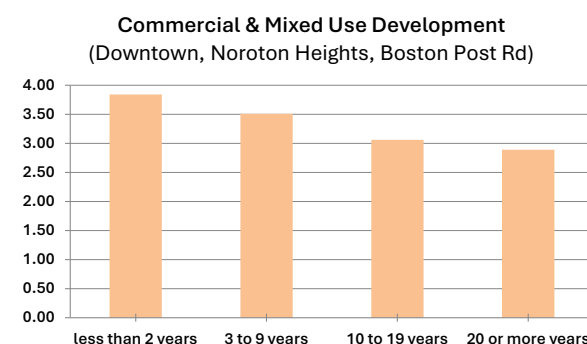
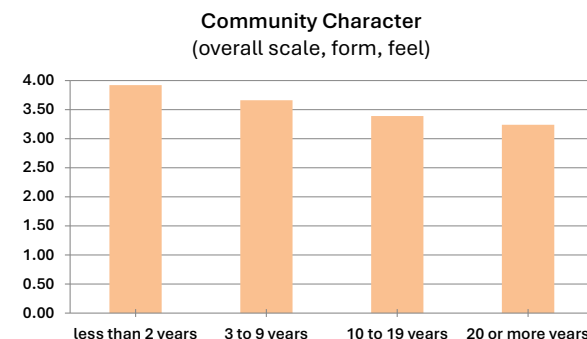
Level of Satisfaction of Select Built Environment Topics By Decade of Birth of Respondent

There is a gradual increase in level of satisfaction within each of the topics below as the ages of the respondents decrease.



Level of Satisfaction of Select Built Environment Topics By Years Respondent Has Lived in Darien

There is a gradual decrease in level of satisfaction within each of the topics below as the number of years living in Darien increases.



1. Many respondents are concerned about the pace and scale of development in Darien, with many fearing loss of community character, increased traffic congestion, and strain on schools and infrastructure.
2. Environmental preservation, affordability, diversity, and responsible governance are also major themes. While some appreciate new amenities and revitalization, the prevailing sentiment is a desire for more thoughtful, balanced, and community-driven growth that preserves what makes Darien unique.

- Parking shortages, both for residents and businesses, are a frequent concern.
- Some respondents mention dangerous driving, lack of sidewalks, and the need for better pedestrian and bike infrastructure.

- Many respondents worry that the influx of new residents from apartments and condos will overwhelm the public school system, leading to crowded classrooms and diminished educational quality.

- Many respondents are concerned about rapid and large-scale development, especially the construction of multi-family apartment complexes and commercial buildings.
- Many respondents feel that this growth is eroding Darien's traditional small-town charm and making it feel more like neighboring cities such as Stamford, Greenwich, and Westport.
- Specific concerns cited by respondents include oversized new homes ("McMansions"), unattractive or out-of-place new buildings, and the perception that development is being driven by outside interests or developers rather than community needs.

- Many respondents blame development for worsening traffic congestion, especially in Downtown and on major roads like Post Road.



- There are repeated calls for better planning to ensure infrastructure (roads, sewers, schools) can handle the increased population.
- School budget cuts and concerns about maintaining educational excellence are a major concern, with some fearing declining property values if school quality drops.

4. Environmental and Green Space Concerns

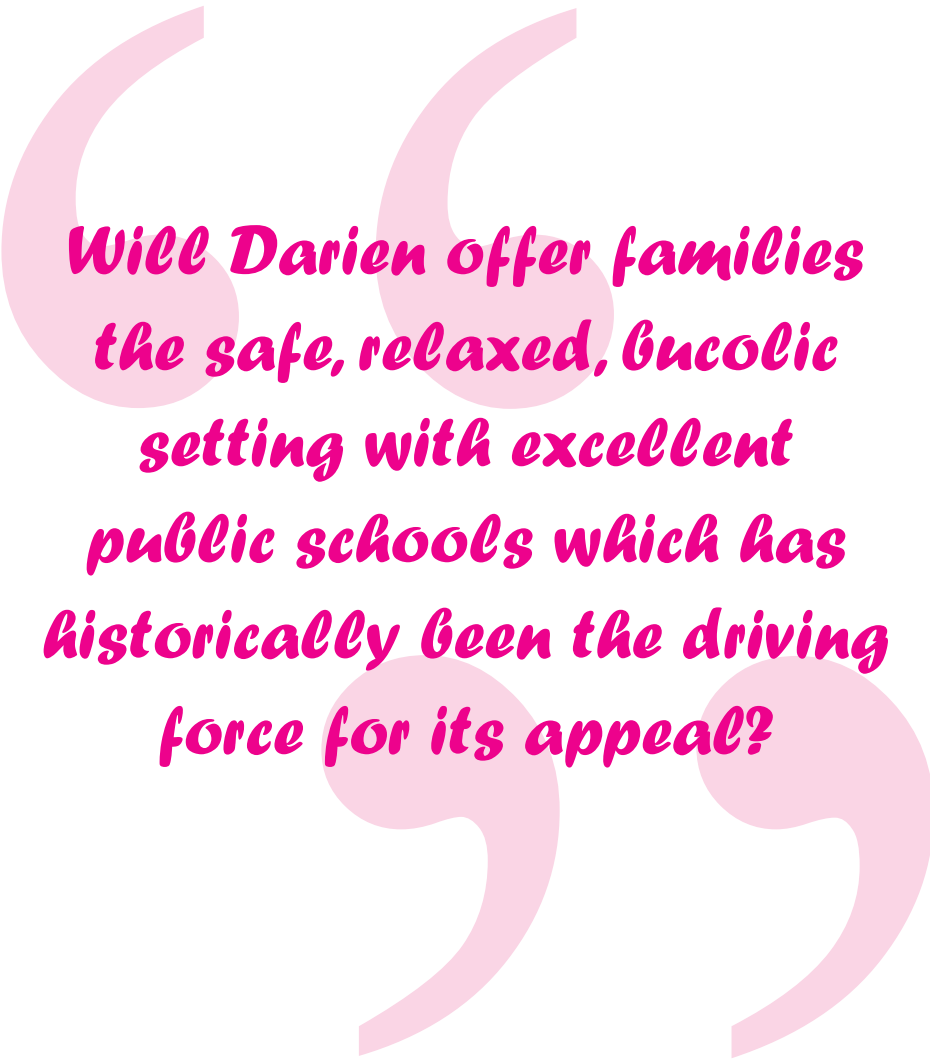
- Loss of trees, green spaces, and the natural environment due to over-building is a significant concern among respondents.
- Specific issues include clear-cutting for development, inadequate conservation efforts, and better tree and land management.
- Some call for more parks, playgrounds, and a community pool, as well as stricter regulation of noise and air pollution (e.g., from gas-powered lawn equipment).

5. Affordability, Diversity, and Housing Options

- Some respondents see the rising cost of housing pricing out seniors, middle-class families, and first-time buyers, leading to concerns about lack of economic, racial, and cultural diversity. Furthermore, there is a perceived shortage of affordable and appropriate housing for seniors and downsizers, with too much focus on rentals rather than ownership options like condos.
- Some respondents express concern about the Town becoming an enclave for the ultra-wealthy.

6. Governance, Planning, and Fiscal Management

- Frustration with Town leadership, planning boards, and perceived lack of transparency or responsiveness is common.
- Respondents are divided over large expenditures, notably the purchase and future use of Great Island, with many questioning whether these investments are justified or well-planned.
- Concerns about rising taxes, debt, and the allocation of Town resources, especially between schools and other projects.



Will Darien offer families the safe, relaxed, bucolic setting with excellent public schools which has historically been the driving force for its appeal?

Q12: Do you have any other questions, comments, suggestions, or ideas?

Summary of the 499 Responses Received

1. The responses reflect a community that is proud of its heritage and quality of life, but very concerned about the pace and scale of recent development.
2. Respondents prioritize preserving Darien's character, improving infrastructure, and adding community amenities, while urging caution, transparency, and thoughtful planning for the future.

1. Concerns About Overdevelopment

- Many respondents are not in favor of continued large-scale development, particularly apartments and commercial properties. Concerns include traffic congestion, infrastructure (e.g., roads, sewers, schools), loss of small-town character, and environmental impacts.
- Some respondents would like to see a moratorium or slowdown on new construction to assess cumulative effects and allow the town to absorb recent changes.

2. Desire to Preserve Town Character and Environment

- Respondents value Darien's small-town feel, coastal charm, and open green spaces.
- A number of respondents want the Town to prioritize conservation, limit tree removal, and maintain or expand parks and nature areas. Suggestions include creating a Conservation Commission, embedding environmental considerations in planning, and adopting stricter zoning and architectural review standards.

3. Infrastructure and Traffic Issues

- Traffic congestion, especially on Post Road and near new developments, is a major concern.

- Calls for improved traffic flow, synchronized lights, more left-turn lanes, and alternate routes.
- Many requests for expanded and improved sidewalks and bike lanes for safety and walkability.
- Specific complaints about inadequate parking, particularly at the library, train stations, and Great Island.

4. Community Amenities and Facilities

- The most repeated request is for a public town pool, similar to those in neighboring towns, to serve families who cannot access private clubs.
- Requests for more playgrounds, dog parks (especially fenced, off-leash areas), and recreational facilities.
- Suggestions for more community events, cultural activities, and gathering spaces to foster a sense of community.

5. Great Island Master Plan

- Respondents' opinions are mixed. Some want minimal development to preserve natural beauty while others support adding amenities like parking, walking/biking paths, and/or a pool.
- Respondents are concerned about accessibility, cost, and ensuring the investment benefits all residents.
- Some respondents suggest selling part of the island to offset costs or using it for community-building projects.

6. Town Services and Communication

- Some respondents expressed appreciation for Town leadership and volunteers, but call for more transparency, modern communication channels (like social media), and greater community input on major decisions.

- Requests for better maintenance of existing assets (parks, beaches, roads) and focus on repairing rather than expanding.
- Some want less reliance on outside consultants and more use of local expertise.

7. Schools and Taxes

- Strong support for maintaining high-quality schools, with concerns about rising property taxes, especially for those without school-age children.
- Worries about the impact of new developments on school capacity and budgets.
- Calls to avoid cuts to arts and educational programs.

8. Public Safety and Enforcement

- Requests for stricter enforcement of dog leash and waste rules, noise ordinances, and traffic laws.
- Concerns about crime, especially car burglaries, and suggestions for security cameras at town entry points.

9. Other Suggestions

- Bury power lines to improve aesthetics and reliability.
- More diverse, affordable, and family-owned businesses and restaurants.
- Improved childcare and after-school program options.
- Better signage for visitors and improved wayfinding.
- Addressing flooding, drainage, and water quality issues.

We have amazing resources in our open spaces, parks, schools, and our vibrant Downtown. We have wonderful community spirit. Let's please prioritize [the things that] make Darien special.

- The themes in 64 responses are generally consistent with of the results of the Town-Wide Survey.

