

Community Issues + Opportunities Survey: Summary of Results

March 2021



Survey Overview

The City of Ventura is in the process of updating its General Plan, which will result in a new long-range planning document that aims to improve the quality of life for all residents, protect what is unique and special about the city, and address existing and emerging challenges. As one of its first outreach activities, the City launched an online Community Vision + Opportunities Survey (survey), which was open from early November 2020 through late January 2021.

The purpose of this survey was to evaluate current quality of life, identify assets to preserve and issues to address, and consider effective strategies to engage the public through the duration of the project. Specifically, survey response data will be used to lay the foundation for the General Plan's Vision and Guiding Principles, which will shape policy direction across a range of topics, such as land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and sustainability.

The survey was made available in both English and Spanish, and a total of 2,415 unique responses were recorded. This document summarizes the combined responses of both English- and Spanish-language participants. Raw survey results are included as Appendices.

Survey Participation

Demographics

Participants were asked several demographic questions during the survey. These questions are intended to help City staff ascertain whether any groups were over- or underrepresented in the survey. Key takeaways are summarized below:

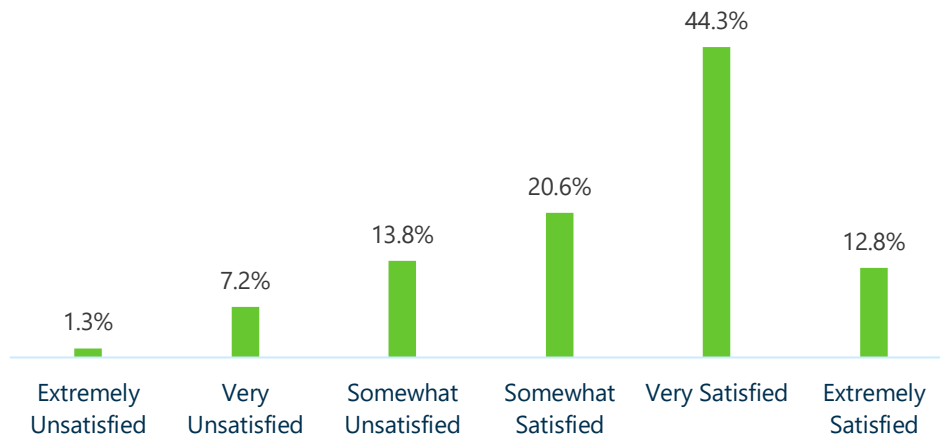
- Almost all respondents (87.5 percent) are residents of Ventura, and well over half (58.6 percent) work in Ventura.
- Of all residents who responded, more than half (51.4 percent) have lived in Ventura for at least 21 years. Meanwhile, residents of one year or less comprised less than four percent of all respondents.
- Nearly half of all respondents (43.2) were between the ages of 45 and 64. Meanwhile, seniors comprised nearly another fifth (18.4 percent) of respondents.
- Generally, the response rate by neighborhood was proportionate to residential population size. Residents of large neighborhoods like the East Side (33.7 percent) and Midtown (20.6 percent) responded most frequently, whereas smaller neighborhoods like Pierpont (4.7 percent) and Downtown (5.5 percent) were less represented.
- Overall, survey respondents were somewhat representative of the City's demographic character. Overrepresented groups included Non-Hispanic Whites (74.0 percent to 55.7 percent citywide), females (62.2 percent to 50.3 percent citywide), and residents between ages 35 and 84 (83.9 percent to 53.5 percent citywide). Meanwhile, underrepresented groups included Hispanic and Latino individuals (15.0 percent to 36.0 percent citywide), males (33.6 to 49.7 percent citywide), and residents under age 35 (15.8 percent to 43.9 percent citywide).

Survey Results

Quality of Life

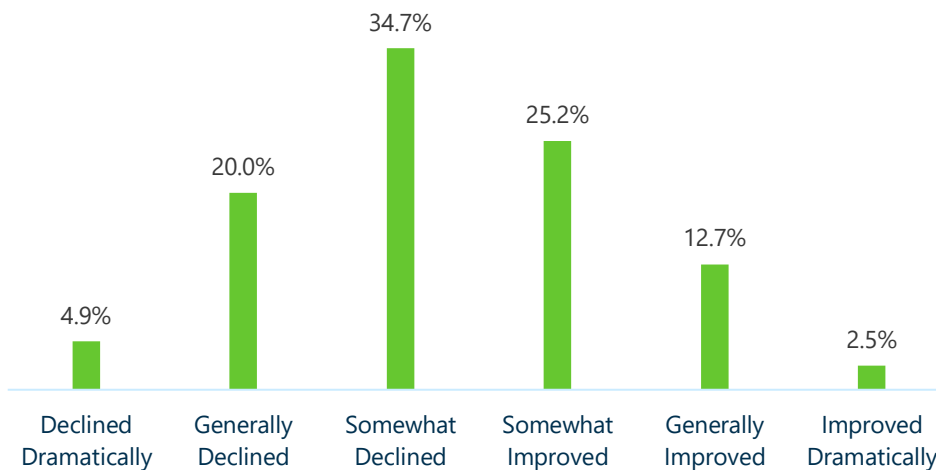
Respondents were asked to rate their quality of life on a sliding scale from 0 (Extremely Unsatisfied) to 5 (Extremely Satisfied). Most respondents (77.7 percent) indicated that they are at least somewhat satisfied with their quality of life in Ventura, and more than half (57.1 percent) are very or extremely satisfied. Only 8.5 percent are very or extremely unsatisfied.

How satisfied are you with your quality of life in Ventura?



Respondents were then asked to rate how their quality of life has changed in the last 10 years, using a sliding scale from 0 (Declined Dramatically) to 5 (Improved Dramatically). Unlike in the previous question, well over half of all respondents (59.5 percent) indicated that their quality of life had declined to some degree. Meanwhile, only 15.2 percent of respondents indicated that their quality of life had generally or dramatically improved.

Over the last 10 years (or since you moved to the City if within 10 years), how has the quality of life changed?

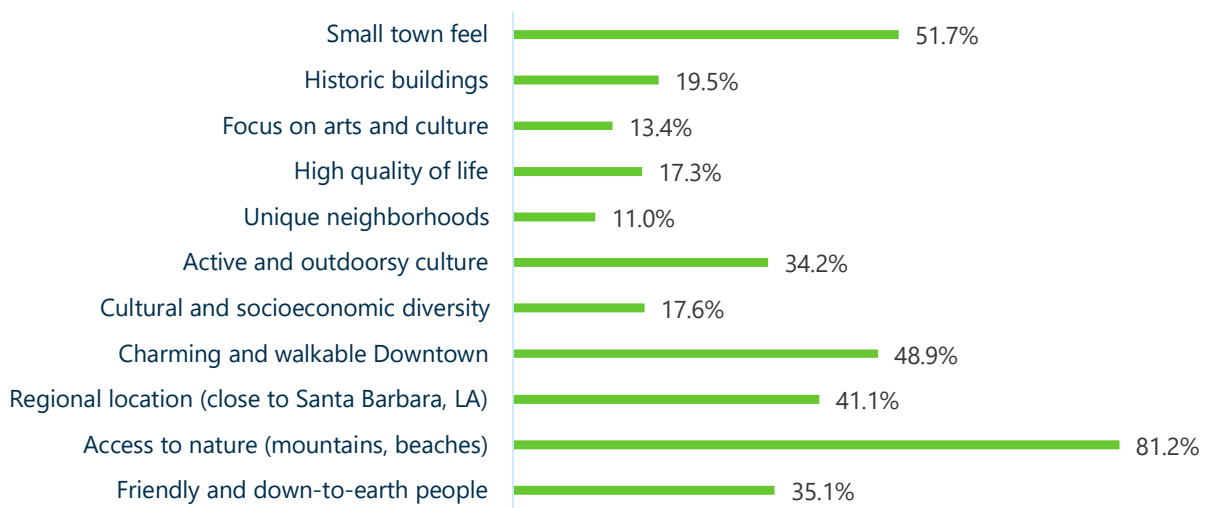


Community Assets

Choosing from a list of eleven options, respondents were asked to identify Ventura's top four "unique and special" attributes that they wish to preserve. Answers are summarized below:

- Access to nature (81.2 percent) was overwhelmingly deemed the most important community attribute.
- Other popular attributes included small town feel (51.7 percent), charming and walkable Downtown (48.9 percent), and regional location (41.1 percent).
- Ventura's unique neighborhoods (11.0 percent) and focus on arts and culture (13.4 percent) were considered lowest priority.

What is unique and special about Ventura that you don't want to change? Pick your top 4 answers



In addition to the above, respondents were asked to note any other unique and special attributes. Key themes from the open-ended responses are summarized below:

- Great proximity and easy access to the beach (most common response).
- More affordable and down-to-earth community than other beach towns and cities in the region, like Santa Barbara and Los Angeles.
- Ventura retains a "funky" and "blue-collar" character that is unique on the California coast.
- Small town charm with historic architecture, slow pace of life, and strong sense of community.
- Family-oriented community with several unique residential neighborhoods.
- Wide array of small businesses and "mom and pop" shops that make the city unique.
- Strong access to high quality parks and open spaces across town, including the Botanical Gardens in Grant Park.
- Low traffic congestion in Ventura compared to nearby cities, such as Santa Barbara.
- Walkable Main Street and vibrant Downtown core that has something for everyone. The "Main Street Moves" closure has been a great project and should be considered on a more permanent basis.
- Access to all the "Big City" amenities without having to live in one – perfect balance.
- Beautiful undeveloped hillsides, which provide great views and opportunities for recreation.

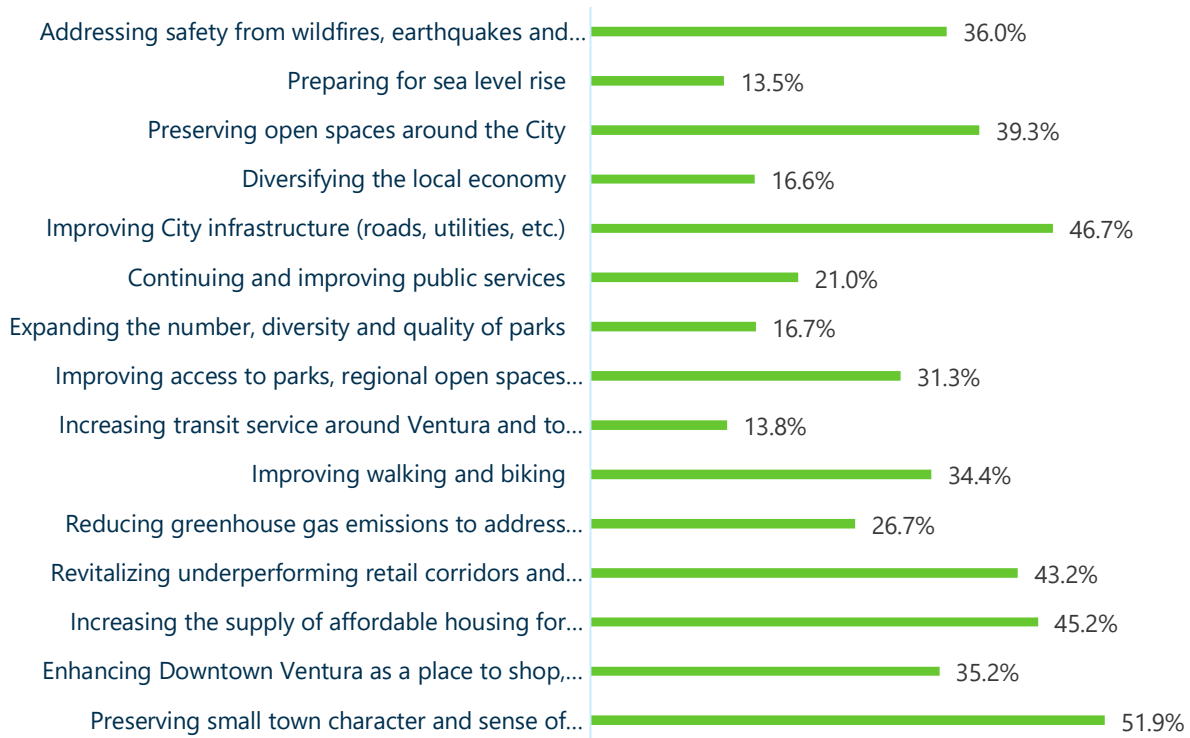
- Agricultural lands and orchards located within the urban fabric.
- Clean beaches, streets, and air quality.
- Ample free parking.
- Accessible pedestrian and bicycle paths which connect to great amenities, like the beach.

Community Challenges

Choosing from a list of 15 options, respondents were asked to choose the top five issues and challenges that need to be prioritized in the future. Answers are summarized below:

- More than half of all respondents (51.9 percent) prioritize preserving Ventura’s small town character and sense of community moving forward.
- Several other options received significant support, including improving City infrastructure (46.7 percent), increasing the supply of affordable housing (45.2 percent), and revitalizing underperforming commercial areas (43.2 percent).
- Preparing for sea level rise (13.5 percent) and improving transit (13.8 percent) were considered the lowest priority.

Ventura will continue to grow and evolve over the next 20-to-30 years. What issues and challenges need to be addressed to ensure a high quality of life for all? From the list below, please rank your top five (5) priorities.



In addition to the above, respondents were asked to note any other issues or challenges facing the city over the next 25 years. Key themes from the open-ended responses are summarized below:

- Significant increase in homelessness across the city (most common response).

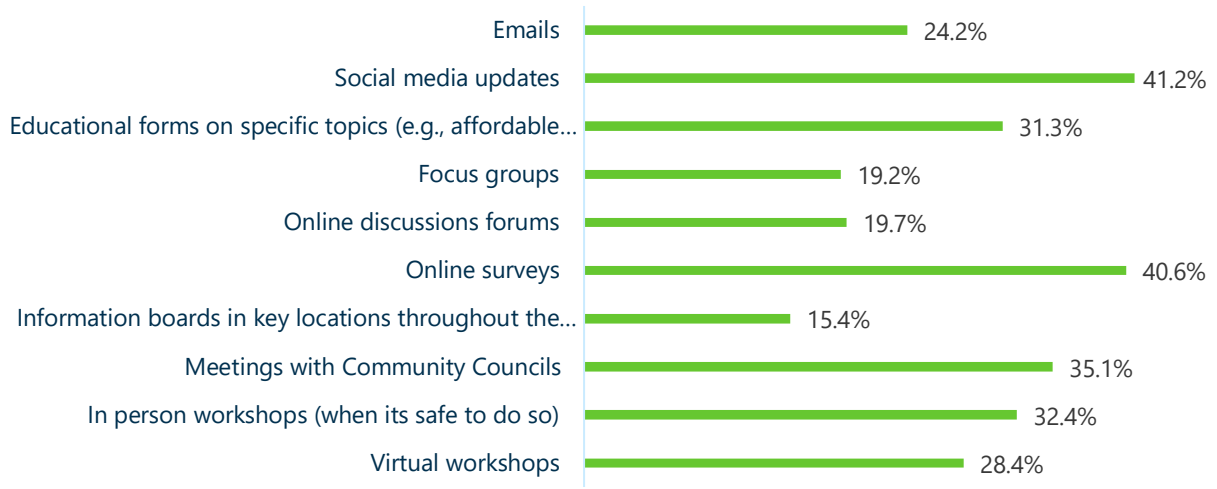
- High population growth and overbuilding are threatening Ventura’s small town charm and character.
- Negative impact of high-density development on existing viewsheds.
- Public open spaces, which are cherished by the community, are increasingly lost to housing development, which undermines community character.
- Lack of affordable housing, particularly for long-time residents and lower-income groups.
- High cost of living that prevents younger families from either moving to or staying in Ventura.
- Increased traffic congestion and lack of parking availability, particularly near beaches.
- Poor transit options – Ventura needs a real plan for transit.
- Increasing crime rate, which threatens quality of life, may cause residents to leave the city.
- Overcrowding, congestion, and poor maintenance at beaches.
- Inadequate support for small businesses – too much regulation and bureaucracy that makes the cost of doing business too high.
- Disinvestment and lack of amenities in East Ventura (e.g., retail, grocery stores, schools).
- Roadways in disrepair (particularly in East Ventura).
- Diminishing water supply and the prospect of drought threatens community welfare.
- Negative impact of the oil and gas sectors on the local environment.
- Lack of economic diversity, as the City is overly dependent on public sector jobs.
- Growing threat of climate change, including sea level rise and more wildfires.

Outreach and Engagement

Choosing from a list of 10 options, respondents were asked to choose the three best methods to support community engagement for the General Plan Update. Responses are summarized below:

- Social media updates (41.2) and online surveys (40.6 percent) were most frequently cited as the best engagement methods.
- Information boards (15.4 percent), focus groups (19.2 percent), and online discussion forums (19.7 percent) were the least recommended options.

Community engagement is critical to the success of the General Plan. In your opinion, what are the best ways to engage the community in the process? (please pick the 3 most important ideas)



Finally, respondents were asked to share any additional ideas to raise awareness and increase community participation. Suggestions included:

- Leverage social media platforms like Nextdoor, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to advertise and get the message out to residents.
- Increase transparency and public outreach from City Councilmembers. Elected officials should also proactively attend meetings held by local community groups (e.g., community council meetings).
- Hold a public comment period earlier in City Council hearings so more people are willing to share their thoughts.
- Conduct focus groups prioritizing disadvantaged and hard-to-reach populations, including homeless, lower-income, and other minority groups.
- Advertise through radio announcements.
- Continue hosting virtual workshops to make participation more accessible.
- Ask local businesses and institutions, like churches and Ventura College, to share the word with their staff and communities.
- Host block parties.
- Send out emails and newsletters, including mailers on water bills.
- Hold information booths (when safe) at popular public places.