



DOWNTOWN HOUSING PLAN

PALO ALTO DOWNTOWN HOUSING PLAN

Report: Service Employee Focus Groups and Survey Results

As a part of community outreach and engagement strategy for the Downtown Housing Plan (DHP), the project team gathered feedback from various community members including property owners, downtown residents, market rate and affordable developers, housing advocacy groups, and business owners through workshops, pop up events, a survey, and stakeholder interviews since the project kicked off in March 2024.

An important yet underrepresented voice was those who are essential and service employees in Palo Alto. To address this gap, in the spring of 2025, WRT and CBI convened focus groups with childcare and senior caregivers and conducted a bilingual (English and Spanish) survey focused on receiving input from essential workers and downtown Palo Alto service employees. The project team coordinated the effort with DHP Community Advisory Group (CAG) members who have direct relationships with these groups. The project team engaged with 53 service and essential workers from downtown businesses and organizations — 20 through focus groups and 33 via a survey that targeted employees. A summary of the outreach is below.

WHERE RESPONDENTS LIVE: The following reflects the percentages of respondents who live in Palo Alto, and for those who do not live in Palo Alto, the distance from where they live to their workplace.

Within Palo Alto	21%
Less than 10 miles from Palo Alto	32%
10-20 miles from Palo Alto	25%
20-30 miles from Palo Alto	15%
Greater than 30 miles from Palo Alto	7%

DURATION OF COMMUTE: The following reflects the percentage of respondents' usual commute time to and from their places of work.

Less than 15 minutes	30%
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15-30 minutes	30%
30-45 minutes	21%
45-60 minutes	6%
More than 60 minutes	13%

HOW RESPONDENTS TRAVEL TO WORK: The following reflects the percentages representing modes of transportation respondents use to commute to work.

Walk	4%
Bike	2%
Car	85%
Public Transportation	9%

CURRENT HOUSING TYPES: The following reflects the percentages of housing types where respondents currently live.

Single Family Home	22%
Condominium	5%
Studio Apartment	7%
1 Bedroom Apartment	34%
2-4 Bedroom Apartment	32%

Participants also ranked the biggest challenges they face in their current housing situation. Over 80 percent of respondents ranked the cost of rent or mortgage as their greatest challenge. A majority selected fatigue associated with commuting, limiting time with family and social and community activities as an additional significant challenge.



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HOUSING AFFORDABILITY: The following reflects the percentages of what respondents consider affordable monthly rent or mortgage payments.

Less than \$1,500 per month	35%
\$1,500-\$2,000 per month	27%
\$2,000-\$2,500 per month	25%
\$2,500-\$3,000 per month	5%
\$3,000-\$3,500 per month	3%
More than \$3,500 per month	5%

HOUSING OPTIONS

the following reflects the percentages of how likely respondents would be to live in Palo Alto, if more housing choices were made available in the downtown.

Very likely	62%
Somewhat likely	18%
Not likely	12%
I would not choose to live in Palo Alto	8%

In total, 20 percent of respondents selected that they would be unlikely or would not choose to live in Palo Alto. Those respondents indicated the following plurality of reasons for their selection:

Strong ties to the community where they currently reside	15%
Preference for different housing types not likely to be available in downtown	8%



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Feel more comfortable or welcome in the community where they currently live	21%
Concern that affordable housing in Palo Alto won't be stable or long term	18%
Preference to live away from where they work to maintain a separation between home and work	8%
The overall cost of living and services in Palo Alto is too high	28%

SUPPORTING HOUSING AMENITIES

When asked to rank what supporting amenities would make housing options attractive, more than 80% of respondents identified parking and in-unit laundry facilities. Approximately 50 percent of respondents ranked balconies and patios, central air conditioning, and pet-friendly housing options as a priority amongst the other options provided.

APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. I currently live
 - a. in the City of Palo Alto
 - b. less than 10 miles from Palo Alto
 - c. between 10-20 miles from Palo Alto
 - d. between 20-30 miles from Palo Alto
 - e. More than 30 miles from Palo Alto
2. How long is your usual daily commute to Palo Alto?
 - a. Less than 15 minutes
 - b. 15-30 minutes
 - c. 30-45 minutes
 - d. 45-60 minutes
 - e. More than 60 minutes
3. How do you commute to work?



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- a. Walk
 - b. Bike
 - c. Car
 - d. Public transportation
4. What type of housing do you currently live in?
 - a. Single family house
 - b. Condominium or townhouse
 - c. Studio apartment
 - d. One bedroom apartment
 - e. 2–4-bedroom apartment
5. What are the biggest challenges you face as a result of your current housing situation and commute (rank responses 1= not a challenge; 5= major challenge))
 - a. Long distance between home and workplace
 - b. High rent or mortgage costs
 - c. Limited living space for household needs
 - d. Reduced time for family or personal activities due to commute
 - e. Fatigue or low energy levels linked to commuting
 - f. Difficulty managing childcare or family routines
 - g. Limited time to participate in social or community activities
6. What do you consider an affordable monthly rent or mortgage?
 - a. Less than \$1,500
 - b. \$1,500-\$2,000
 - c. \$2,000-\$2,500
 - d. \$2,500-\$3,000
 - e. \$3,000-\$3,500
 - f. More than \$3,500
7. If more housing choices were available in downtown Palo Alto, how likely are you to live here?
 - a. Very likely
 - b. Somewhat likely
 - c. Not likely
 - d. I would not choose to live in Palo Alto



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8.b Follow-up (if c or d is selected): What are the main reasons you would not want to live in Palo Alto? (Select all that apply)

- a. I have strong ties to my current community (family, friends, schools, etc.)
- b. I prefer a different type or size of housing to what might be available downtown
- c. I feel more comfortable or welcome in the community where I currently live
- d. I'm concerned that affordable housing in Palo Alto won't be stable or long-term
- e. I prefer to live away from where I work to keep some separation between work and home
- f. The overall cost of living (beyond housing) in Palo Alto would still be too high for me

8. What supporting amenities would make a housing option attractive to you (rank your responses: 1= not important, 5= very important)

- a. Parking
- b. In-unit laundry facilities
- c. Central air conditioning
- d. Patios and balconies
- e. On-site fitness center/gym
- f. Pet friendly
- g. Community room or shared social space
- h. Bike storage or repair station