

Online Survey Summary

San Marcos Design Standards and Guidelines Update

The City of San Marcos is engaged in an effort to update the design standards and guidelines. As part of these efforts, an online survey was designed to collect community feedback. This survey followed initial focus group meetings that were held in April. The goal of the survey was to provide an initial engagement opportunity for the community and collect feedback regarding design issues and successes downtown.

Two links to the survey were posted on the project webpage - one in English and one in Spanish - in order to increase accessibility. The survey opened on May 1 via SurveyMonkey and ran for approximately one month, closing on May 28. Over the course of these four weeks, 549 people responded to the surveys (546 on the English survey and three on the Spanish survey.)

This document summarizes the survey findings of the results collected. The following sections provide an explanation of each part of the survey and the answers provided by survey participants.

SURVEY COMPOSITION

The survey consisted of two sections - demographic questions and design questions. The demographic questions collected important information regarding the affiliation(s) with San Marcos held by each of the survey participants. These questions also allowed participants to enter their name and email address, if desired, in order to stay up-to-date with the project process.

The second set of questions in the survey asked participants their opinions about recent development and design characteristics in downtown San Marcos. There were five questions in this section of the survey. The first was a multiple choice question while the other four were open ended.

SURVEY RESULTS COMPILATION METHODOLOGY

After closing and downloading the raw data from the survey results, compilation of the results began. First, the responses from the Spanish survey link were added to those of the English survey link. The results from the multiple choice questions were updated to include the Spanish survey results and were turned into pie charts, which can be seen in the “Survey Questions” section below.

The data from the remaining questions was then tallied in order to visualize the common results. The answers from each question were tallied by one person for consistency in interpretation, although human error is still a factor. Each written response was read and examined for the common theme, which was entered into a spreadsheet. As the results from each survey question were read, the chart of tallies and common answers expanded. After the tally was complete, each question had over 50 answers, although many of the responses were only stated by one survey participant. In order to visualize the survey results in a concise way, graphics generated incorporate only the top ten (10) responses. The full compiled data is available upon request.

The screenshot shows the beginning of an online survey. At the top left is the City of San Marcos logo. The title is "City of San Marcos Design Guidelines and Standards Update: Kickoff Survey Demographics". The first question is "1. Name (Optional)" with a text input field. The second question is "2. Email (optional; please record your email if you'd like to be added to a project mailing list to be notified about upcoming participation opportunities)" with a text input field. The third question is "3. Are you a:" followed by radio button options: "San Marcos resident", "San Marcos business owner", "Architect", "Developer", "TX State student", "Prefer not to specify", and "Other OR more than one of the above". Below the options is a text input field for specifying other categories.

The screenshot shows a map titled "Design Contexts - Downtown Boundary". The map displays the downtown area of San Marcos, including streets like Highway 1825, Broadway, and Approach, and landmarks like the "Texas College of Art and Design". A legend indicates the "Downtown Design Contexts" area. Below the map is question 4: "4. How do you feel about the current trends in the scale (building height and size) of new buildings in the downtown area. Select one of the following:" with radio button options: "Very appropriate", "Somewhat appropriate", "Neutral", "Somewhat inappropriate", and "Very inappropriate".

The two excerpts above illustrate a sample of the questions provided in the online survey. Following the demographic questions, the Design Contexts map provided context for the content questions that followed.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The eight questions in the survey range in question format and response type. For each of the questions below, the question will be stated along with the number of participants that responded, the number that skipped the question and the top 10 answers provided, if applicable. The raw data and the tallied data spreadsheets are available upon request.

Question 1: Name

The first survey question was open ended and provided an opportunity for participants to record their name, if desired.

- Answered by 249 participants
- Skipped by 300 participants

Question 2: Email

Similar to the first question, the second offered participants an opportunity to provide an email address to receive future information about the project process. This question was also optional.

- Answered by 179 participants
- Skipped by 370 participants

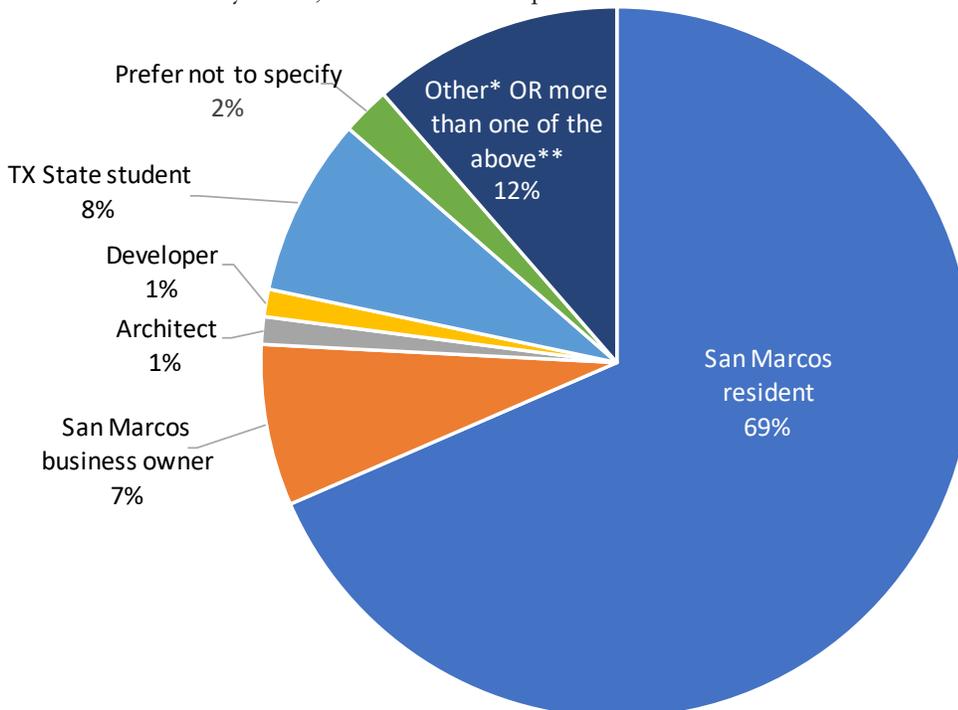
Question 3: Are you a:

Question 3 focused on demographics and asked participants about their role in the San Marcos community. This question had the best response rate of the entire survey:

- Answered by 549 participants
- Skipped by 0 participants

This was one of the two multiple choice questions in the survey, but the final answer option allowed participants to note that they fit into one or more of the available categories. Results show that over two-thirds of the participants are San Marcos residents, and many also have another affiliation including property owners, business owners and affiliation with Texas State. The final option also allowed participants to write-in a role that was not offered through one of the multiple choice answers. While the write-in responses are just calculated as part of the “Other” category shown in the pie chart below, the bullet list below notes a few of the most common write-in responses:

- Texas State alumni
- Property owner
- Work in San Marcos
- Live outside the city limits, but work and shop in San Marcos



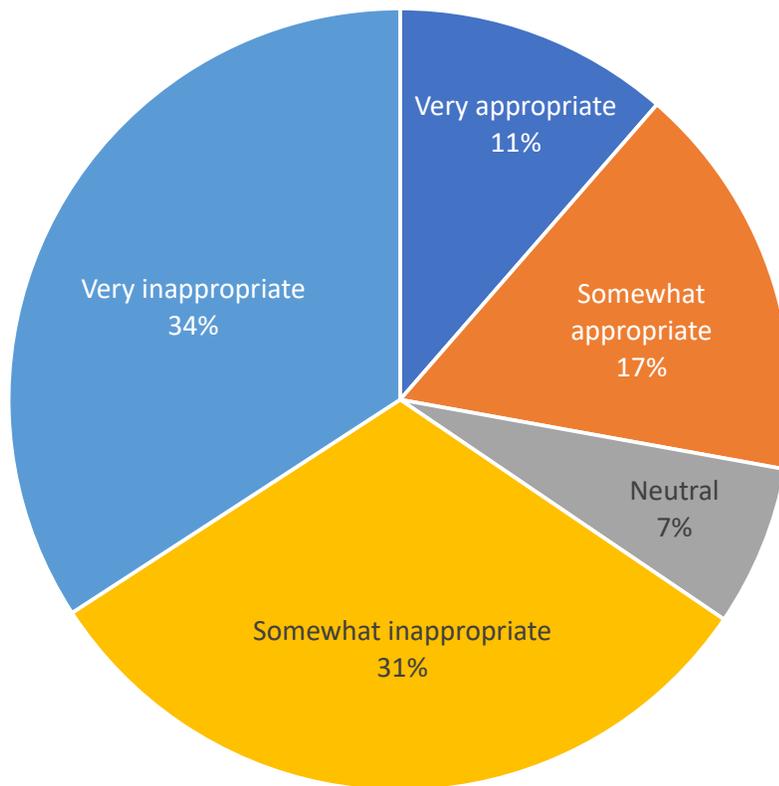
The pie chart above illustrates answers to Question 3. *Refers to the list of “Other” responses added in by participants and ** refers to the fact that responses that indicated being part of two or more of the groups noted in the listed categories were added to those categories.

Question 4: How do you feel about the current trends in the scale (building height and size) of new buildings in the downtown area? Select one of the following: very appropriate; somewhat appropriate; neutral; somewhat inappropriate; very inappropriate.

The second and final multiple choice question of the survey provided participants an opportunity to respond generally to the scale of new development downtown. While the response rate was not as high as question 3, this question was still answered by a majority of participants:

- Answered by 316 participants
- Skipped by 233 participants

As seen in the pie chart below, over 60% of respondents believe that the scale of new development downtown is either very inappropriate or somewhat inappropriate, compared to the 28% of respondents that indicated the scale is somewhat or very appropriate. This strong response indicates the need for reexamining the permitted scale of buildings downtown. While this question only provided a multiple choice answer option, the questions that follow expanded on this and related design topics, and provided an opportunity for participants to write in their own answers.



The pie chart above illustrates answers to the question “How do you feel about the current trends in the scale of new buildings in the downtown area? As seen through the results percentages, over 60% of respondents believe that the scale is inappropriate.

Question 5: What recent development projects downtown have had successful designs? Can you identify specific elements (such as building mass, a transition from a sensitive residential area, building materials, etc.) that made the design successful?

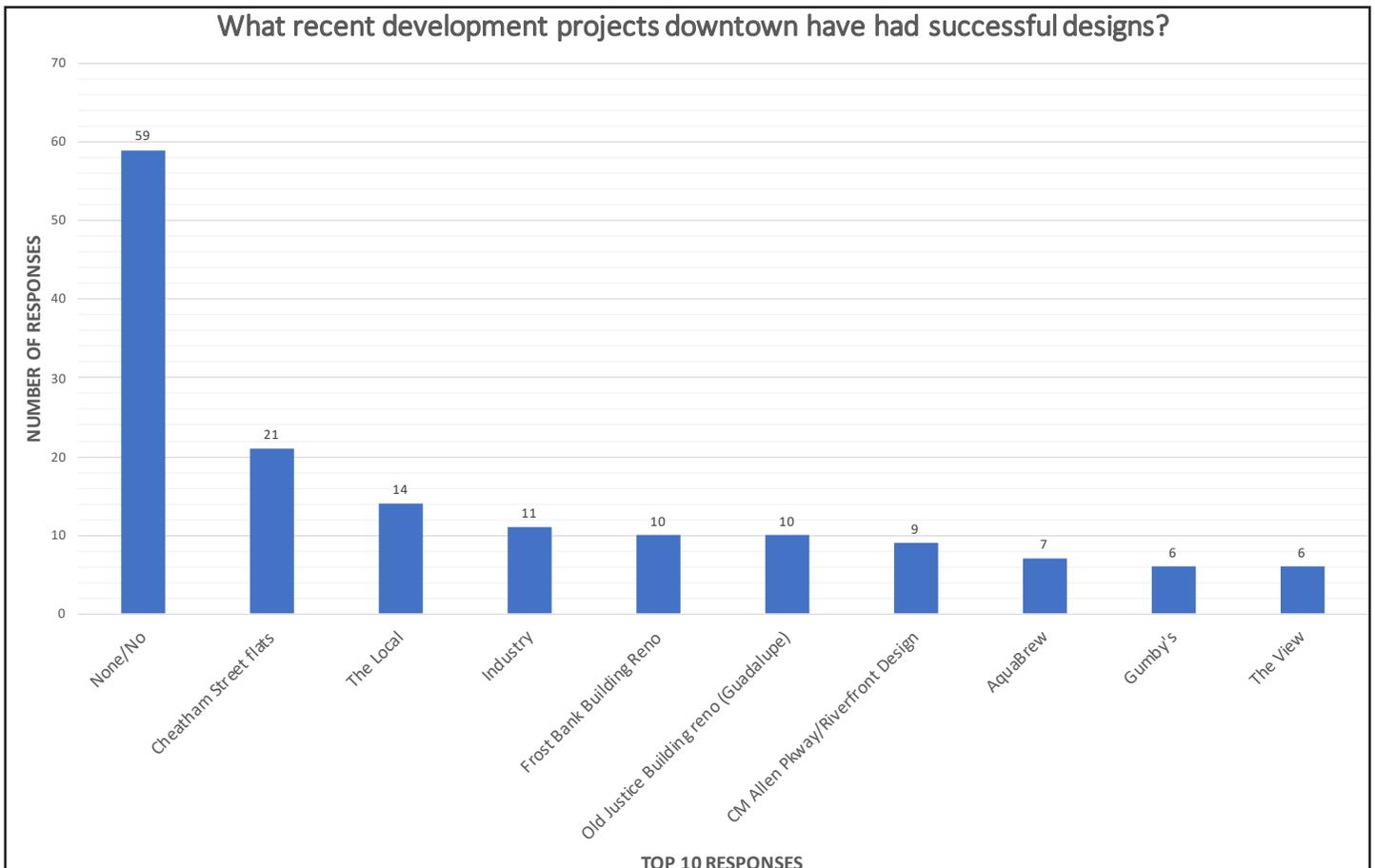
The first open ended question on the survey asked participants to think of recent development projects and businesses that have been successful in their design.

Approximately half the survey participants responded to this question:

- Answered by 269 participants
- Skipped by 280 participants

Over 60 projects/locations were mentioned in the written responses, with the majority of responses receiving one or two votes. In compiling the responses, if someone mentioned more than one development project, each project received a tally. In order to create an easy to understand graphic of responses, the top 10 most common responses were included, as seen in the chart below. Also important to note is that the top response was “none”, “no” or a similar response. However, this response can mean a few different things. “No” could refer to the respondent believing there are no recent successful new development projects, or it could also mean that they could not think of a project to name. “None” could mean the same, but most likely refers to respondents believing recent development projects are not successful. Some respondents whose vote contributed to this response category included additional notes. Common responses in these additional notes included:

- All too tall
- Too much density - density should be focused away from existing residential neighborhoods
- Too big and bulky
- Ruining the skyline



Question 6: What, if any, design issues related to building design do you see in downtown?

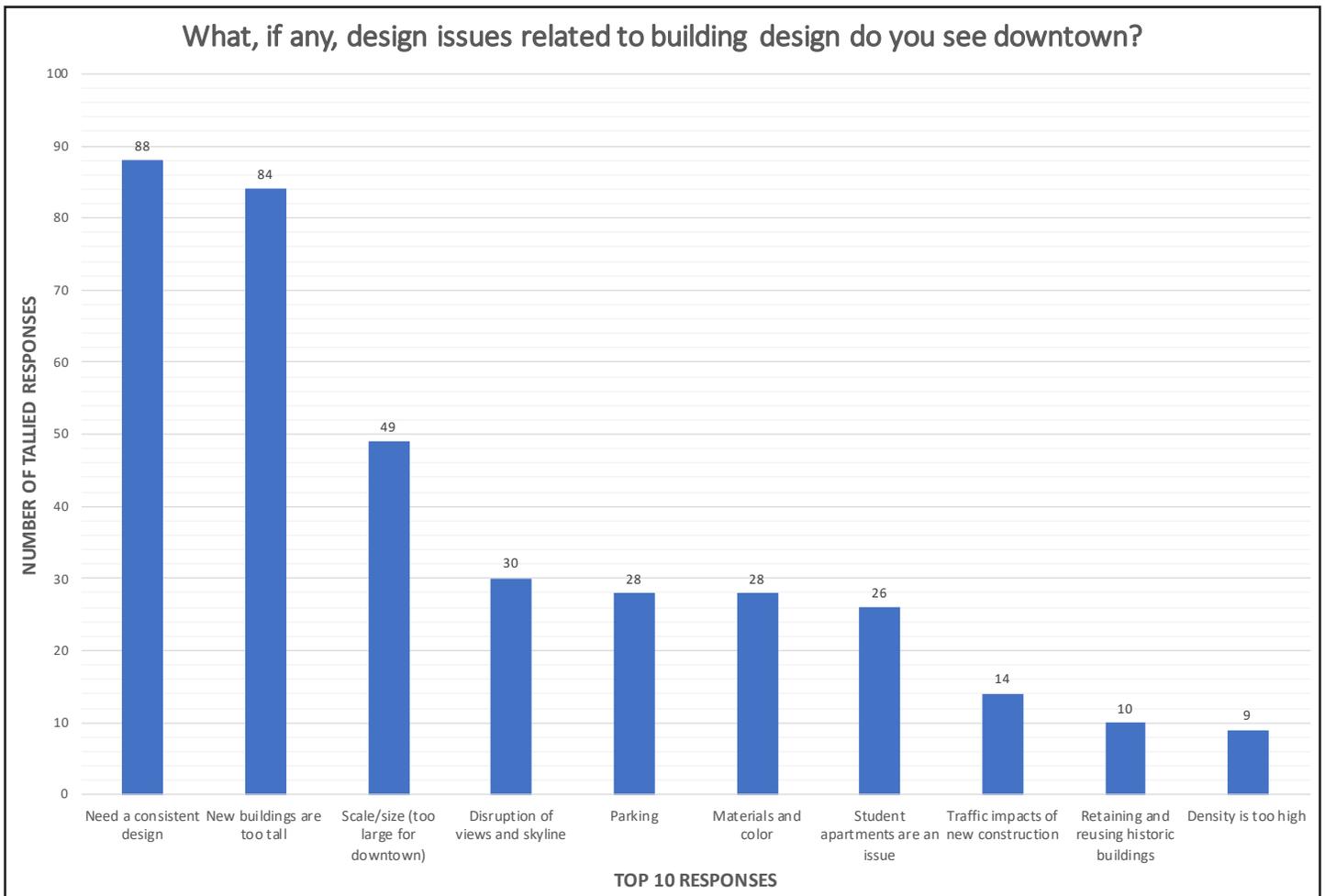
The second open-ended content question asked participants to consider design issues that have been raised by new development downtown. This question had a similar response rate to Question 5:

- Answered by 276 respondents
- Skipped by 273 respondents

The written responses were tallied for this question and two key design issues emerged:

- A more consistent design is needed in new buildings. This design should respect and be sensitive to historic resources, and should maintain the eclectic, small town character of San Marcos.
- New buildings are too tall.

While the other eight top responses shown in the chart below illustrate very common responses, an additional 34 responses that did not make the graph were also recorded. Two key topics - parking and height - were broken down into further categories based on the specificity of written responses. For instance, responses that addressed parking often noted that there was not enough parking or that the parking is not in the right places. A few responses also mentioned that there is too much parking. Height was broken down into a maximum of 3 or 4 stories and a maximum of 2 stories. While these more detailed categories were also tallied, the high level topics were also included in the tallied responses as not all responses included specific comments and instead just wrote “height is too tall” or “parking.”

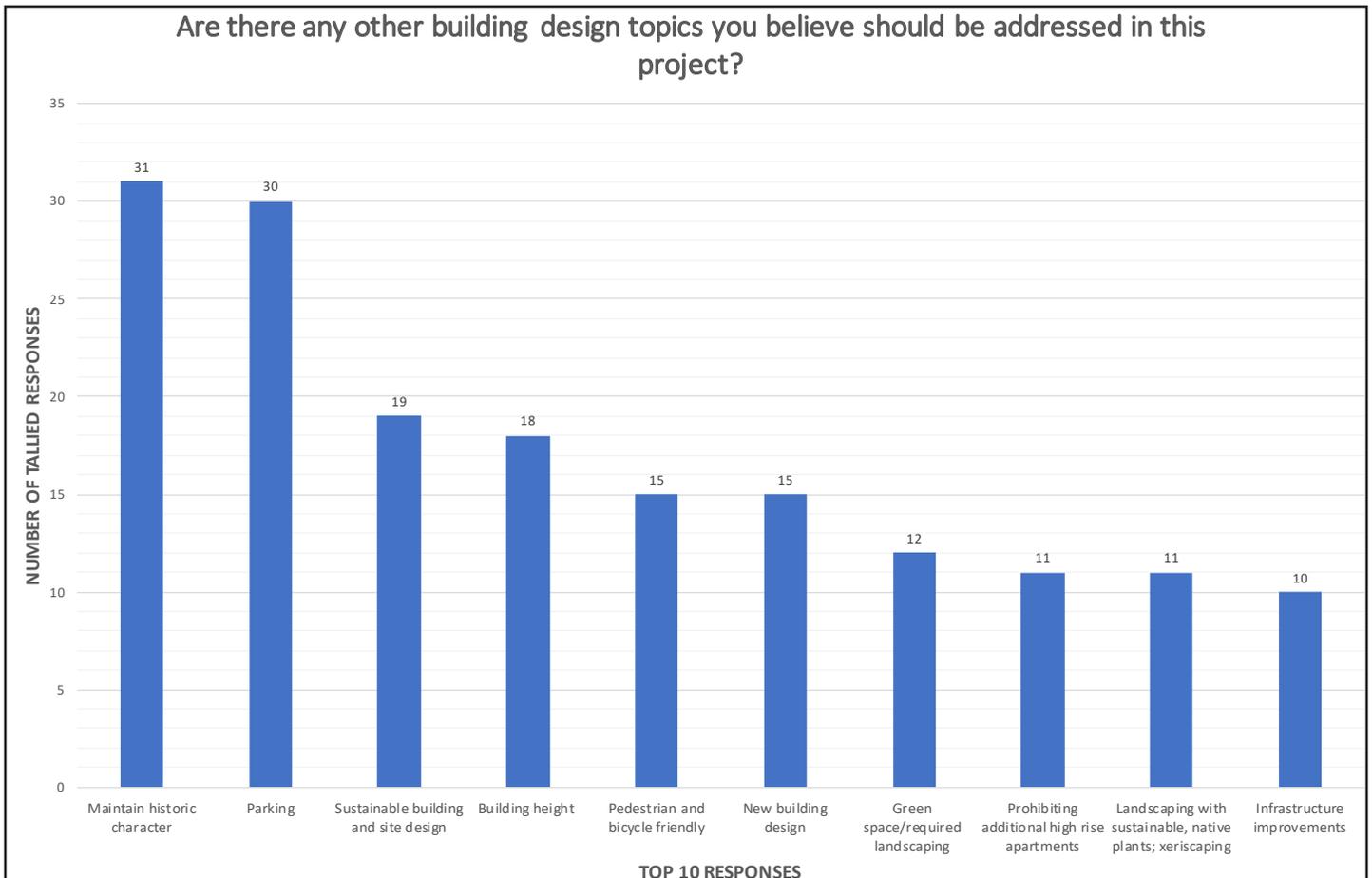


Question 7: The following topics will be addressed during this project: massing and articulation of buildings; building materials; street level building design that activates the public realm; transitions from high density zones to abutting sensitive edges. Are there any other building design topics you believe should be addressed in this project?

This question provided an opportunity for participants to note topics they hope to see addressed by this project. Less people responded to this question:

- Answered by 223 participants
- Skipped by 326 participants

Upon tallying the written responses to this question, over 50 specific topics emerged. While about half of the topics received only between one and three votes, the top 15 answers received 10 or more votes. The top 10 answers are shown in the chart below. Similar to the top answer in question 6, participants hope that this project will result in the maintenance of San Marcos’s historic character, which includes the preservation of historic buildings, ensuring new development is compatible with historic buildings, the importance of maintaining a sense of place and emphasizing San Marcos’ unique identity. The second most mentioned topic was parking, although there were a wider variety of opinions about parking. While the comments did not focus as much on the appropriate amount of parking, they did mention that parking garages should be considered and that their location should be on the periphery of downtown so as not to break up downtown development. They also mentioned that students bring their cars from home so adequate on-site parking should be provided for residential buildings. While not all topics mentioned in responses to this question will be addressed in this project, their mention by participants is important and a list of topics to be addressed later will be provided to the city.



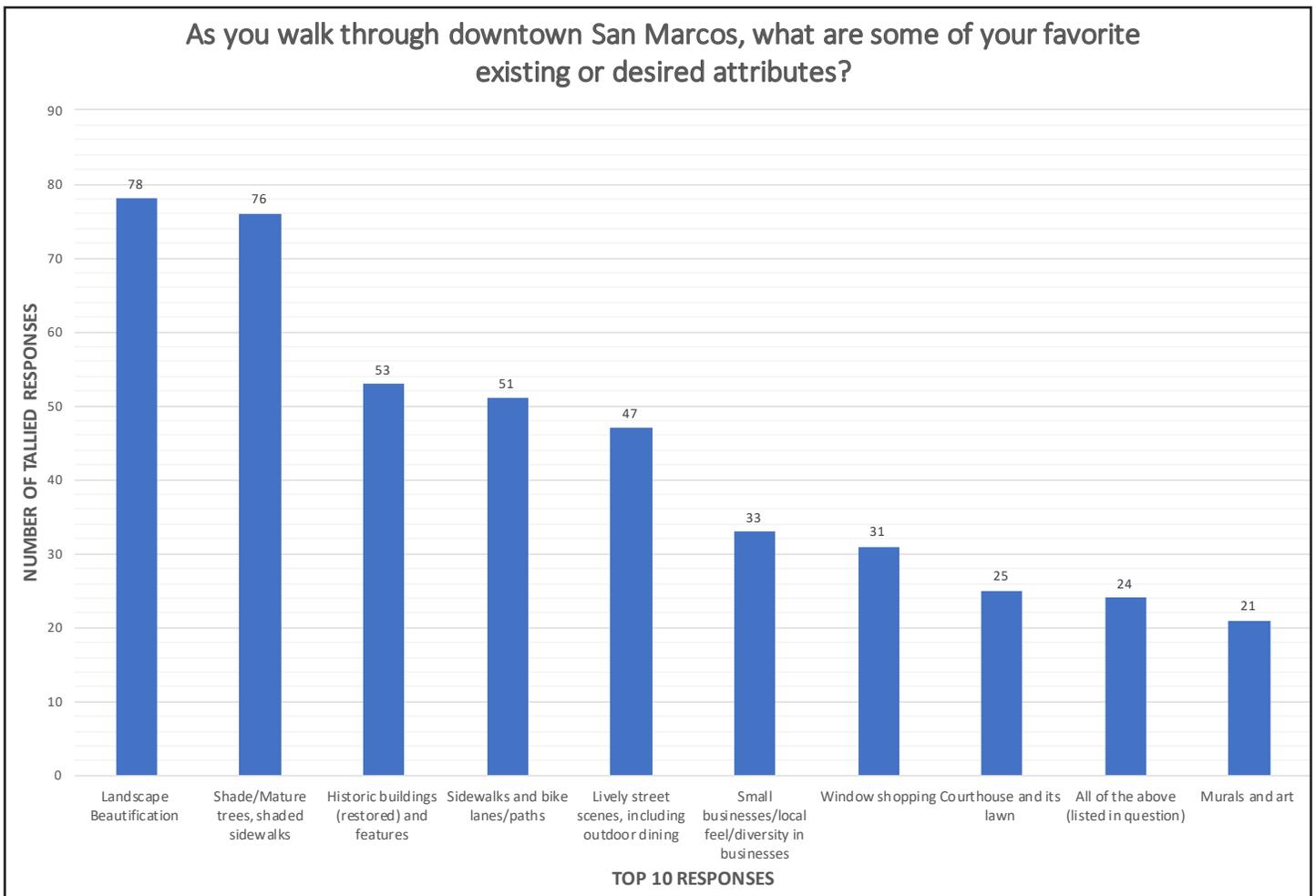
Question 8: As you walk through downtown San Marcos, what are some of your favorite existing or desired attributes? (ex: shaded sidewalks, lively street scene, saying hi to passersby, window shopping, landscape beautification, etc.)

The final survey question asked participants to consider their favorite attributes of downtown San Marcos. The participant response rate for this question went back up to a similar rate for questions 5 and 6:

- Answered by 276 participants
- Skipped by 273 participants

Written responses to this question were tallied into 59 different categories, with approximately half of the categories only receiving between 1 and 3 responses. The suggestions in the question prompt did appear in the answers provided, although not all fell in the top 10. The top two responses focused on landscaping - one on the importance of landscape beautification including near sidewalks and in public areas, as well as the importance of including native Texas plantings. The second response was specific to the importance of shade trees to make the summers more tolerable and to incorporate more green downtown. The response common to many of the questions in this survey appeared again as the third most common response - the importance of historic buildings and features including stone street signs and horse ties.

While many of the responses focused on the importance of adding the elements mentioned, responses also recognized the work that the city has already put into making downtown an enjoyable experience, especially in regards to landscaping, sidewalks and art.



SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This first opportunity for community engagement in the update to the San Marcos Design Standards and Guidelines showed that the community is ready to contribute. The survey turnout of over 500 participants, and over 200 responses for each question is a clear sign that people are ready to weigh in on the conversation and to help guide the process of updating the standards and guidelines. While a wide variety of community opinions were expressed through the questions in this survey, the top 10 responses for the questions aligned with the responses collected during the Focus Group meetings. Most notably, responses continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining a sense of place and the distinct identity of San Marcos, while promoting design excellence for all new development. Similarly, responding to context and balancing old and new also appeared as themes in the survey responses.

The results from this survey are an important first step for community feedback in this project. They will inform the presentation materials and the activities planned for a community workshop to be held later this summer.