

NOVEMBER 2020

DESIGNING "BIG ENOUGH" HOMES IN A PANDEMIC: SURVEY RESULTS

**Pioneer Valley
Habitat for Humanity**

Summary and Data Report for
"Big Enough" small home design
survey results
November 2020



SURVEY GOALS

Designing small homes for a safe and equitable future

Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity is currently engaging in the planning phase of several small home projects. In striving to provide safe, durable, and affordable homeownership opportunities in Franklin and Hampshire counties, we asked potential homebuyers for design feedback. We also wanted to assess whether or not the Covid-19 pandemic and associated safety advisories (including the MA state government's Safer At Home advisory) impacted potential homebuyers' priorities when looking for an affordable small home.

This survey built upon previous home design surveys done as part of the Big Enough Project, and gathered both numerical and long-answer responses confidentially. The survey was sent via email to individuals who have previously expressed interest in an affordable home through PV Habitat, and was subsequently distributed via social media and the PV Habitat website to a broader audience. Demographic information on survey participants, including income levels, family size, and racial data, was collected anonymously and is listed in this report.

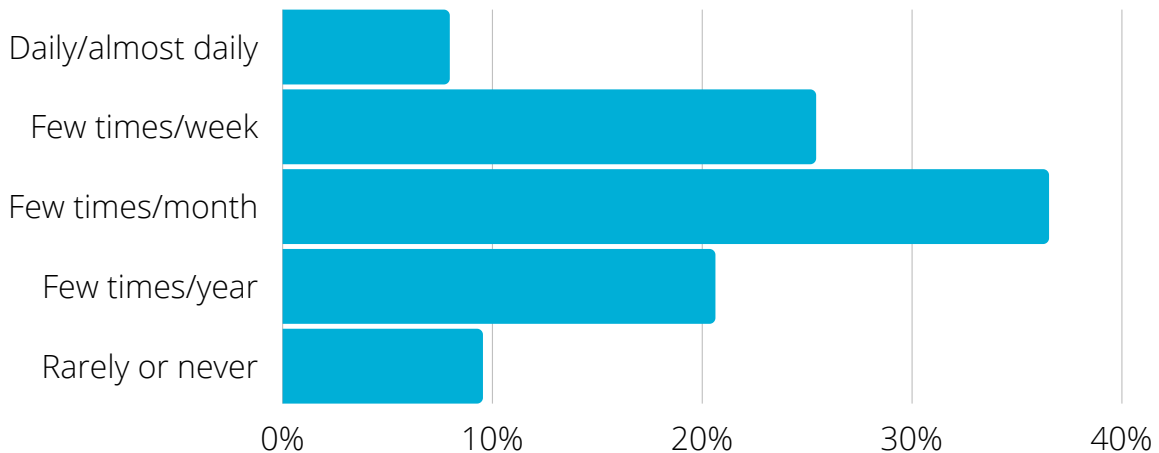
Participants were asked questions about their current home usage, different design features in a theoretical affordable home they would consider buying, and about how their home usage or priorities have shifted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Results indicate that outdoor space is a new priority, privacy may take precedence over open concept spaces, and that working or learning from home has significantly shifted ways respondents use their current homes.

The "Big Enough" Project aims to revolutionize how we think about affordable homeownership through the design and construction of small, simple, durable, and energy-efficient homes.

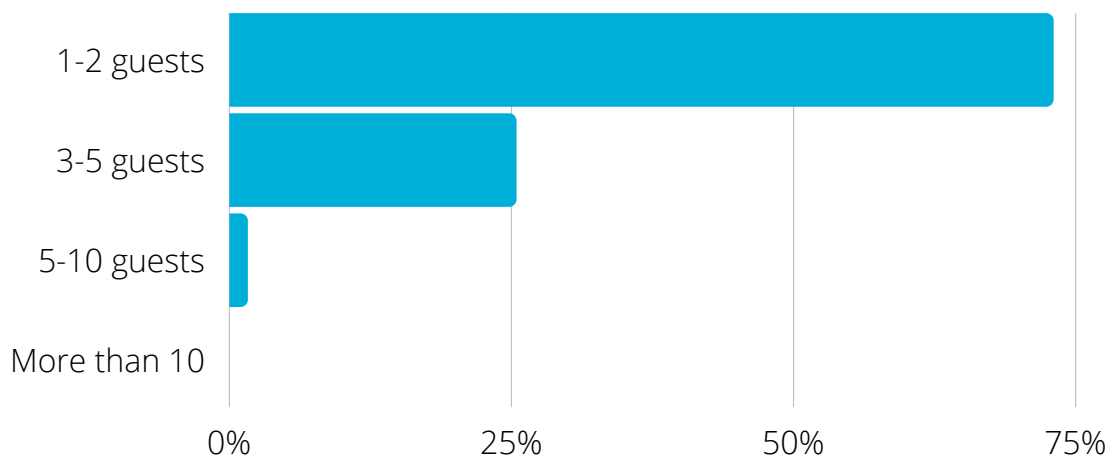
CURRENT HOME USE

How respondents make use of the space they currently have

Q1: How often do you have family/guests visit?



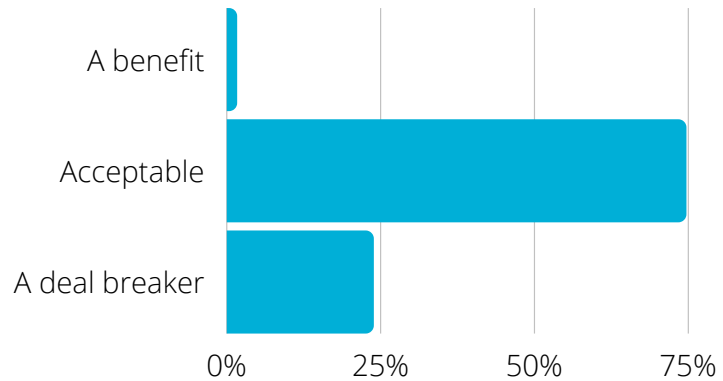
Q2: How many guests do you typically have visit at one time?



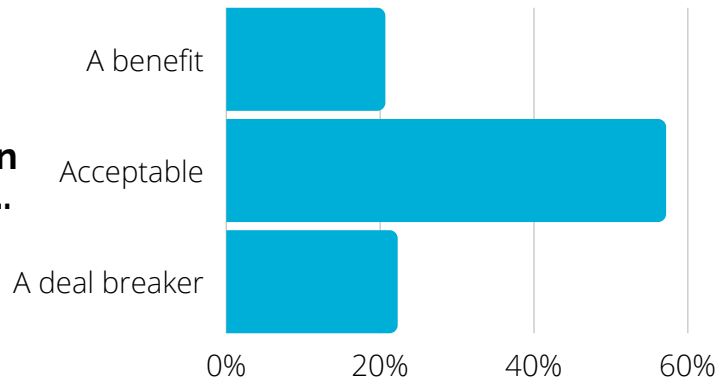
BUYING A NEW HOME

Priorities respondents have for purchasing an affordable small home

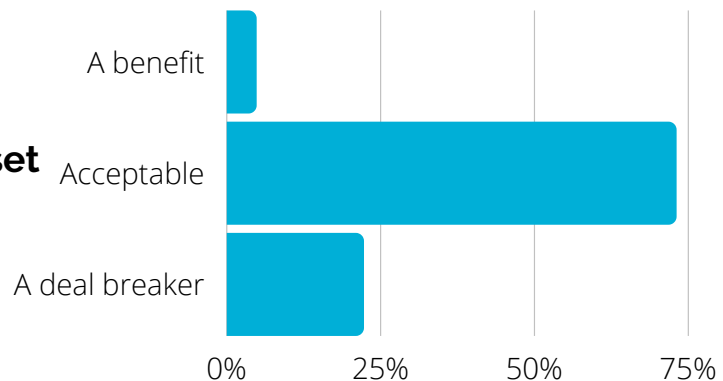
Q3: No spare bedrooms for overnight guests would be...



Q4: Bedrooms only on an upstairs floor would be...



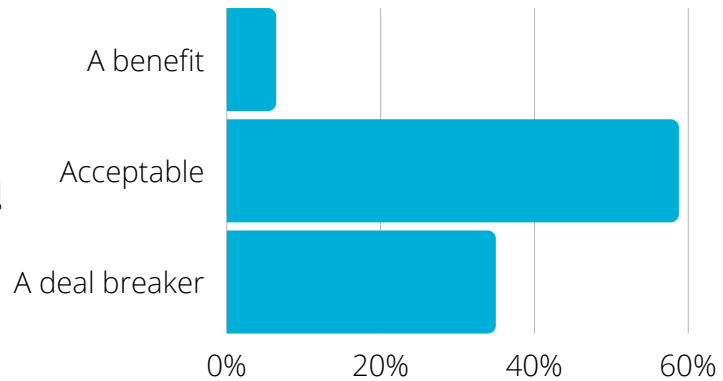
Q4: Closets without closet doors would be...



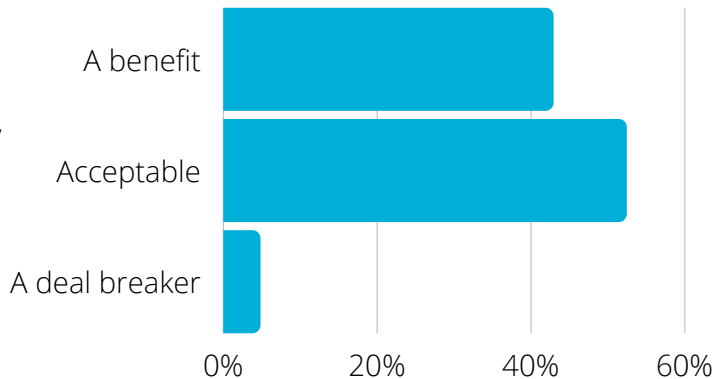
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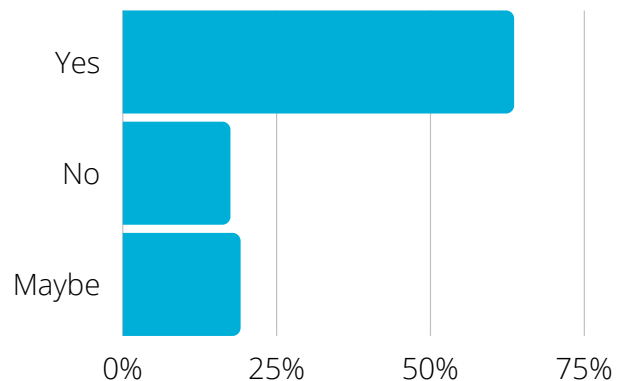
Q6: Having only one shared bathroom would be...



Q7: Built-in accessibility accommodations (for a wheelchair, lift, etc.) would be...



Q8: Would you or your family benefit from any health-based accommodations (due to allergies, asthma, etc.)?

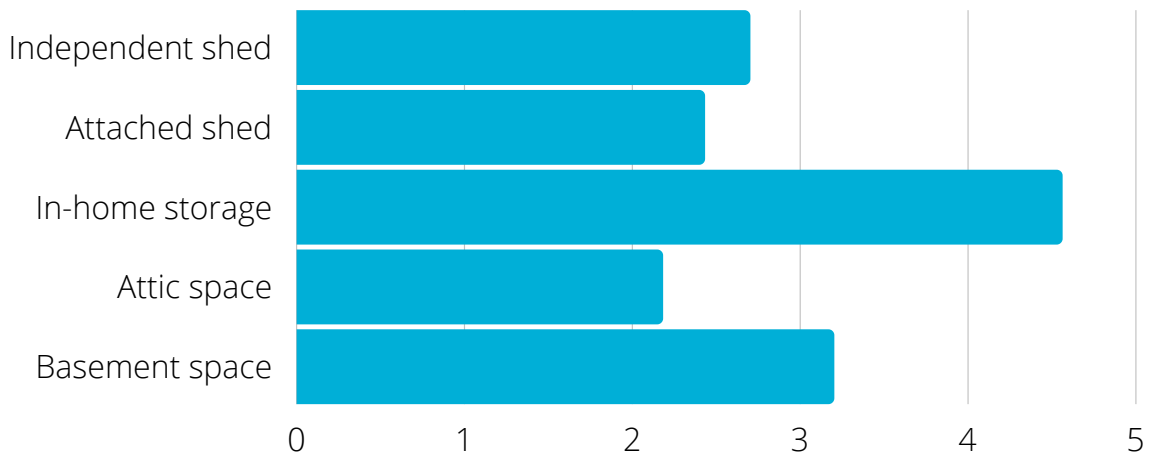


BUYING A NEW HOME

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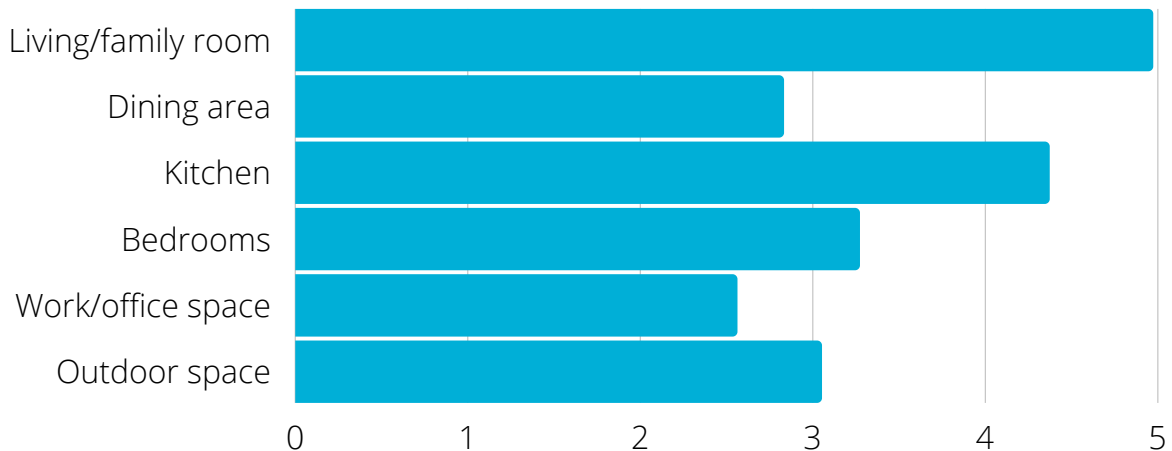
For these questions, responses are assigned a point value proportional to how many chose an option as their first choice, then second choice, and so on: points are added, and the option with the most points was chosen more frequently as a high priority.

Q9: Please rank these storage options in order from most to least important:



In this case, 75% of respondents chose in-home storage as their top priority.

Q10: Please rank the following spaces according to where you/your family spends/would spend the most time:



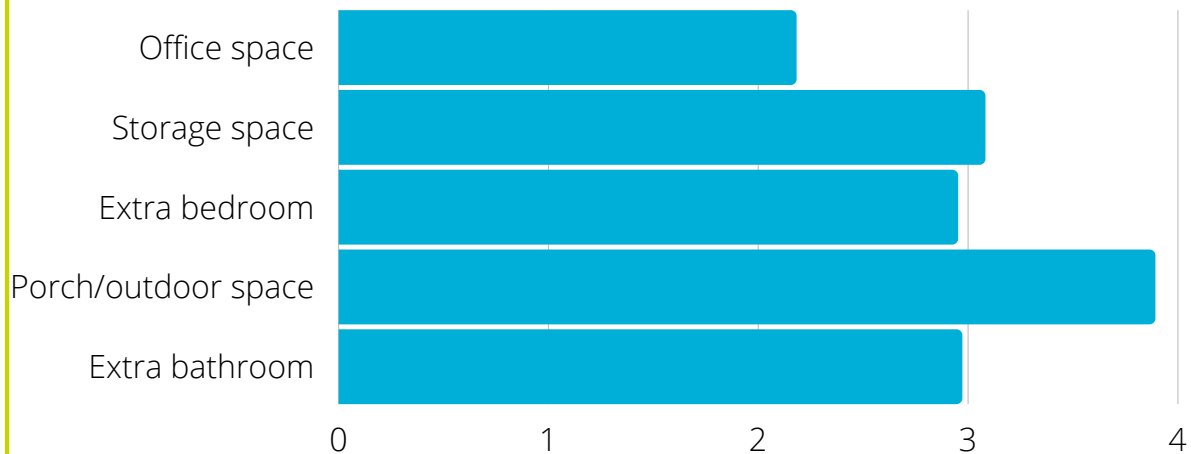
In this case, 72% of respondents chose the living room as one of their top two.

BUYING A NEW HOME

Priorities respondents have for purchasing an affordable small home

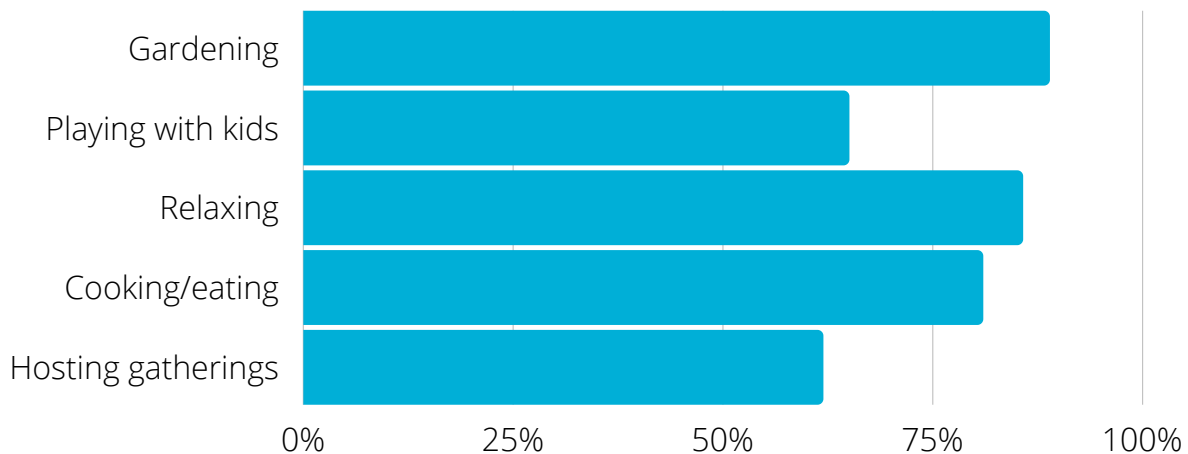
For the first question on this page, responses are assigned a point value proportional to how many chose an option as their first choice, then second choice, and so on: points are added, and the option with the most points was chosen more frequently as a high priority.

Q11: Which of these features makes a house most appealing to you? Please rank in order from most to least important:



In this case, half of respondents chose outdoor space as their top priority.

Q12: How do you/would you use outdoor space? Please choose all that apply.

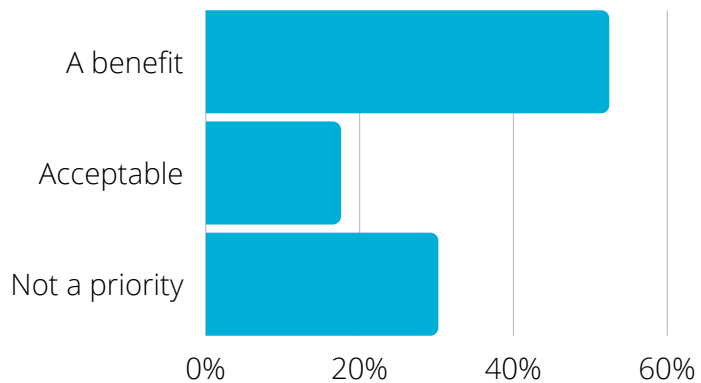


No respondents said they wouldn't use yard space. Some added that they would raise chickens or exercise with their dog.

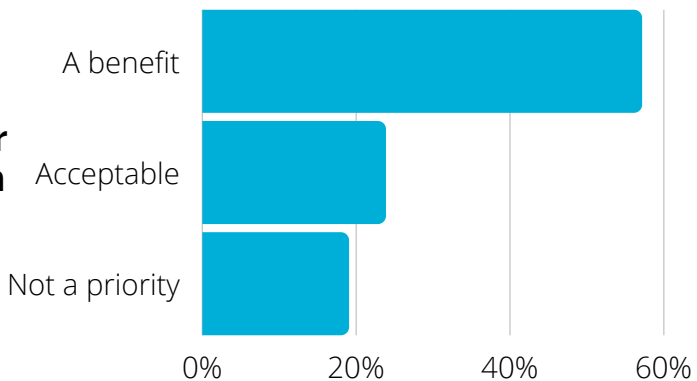
BUYING A NEW HOME

How respondents feel about non-essential features in a new home

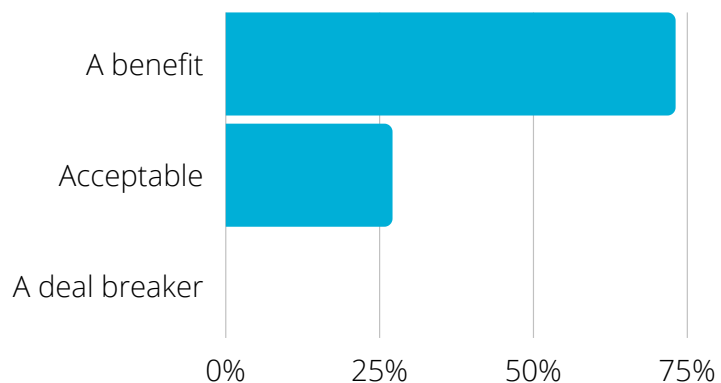
Q13: A space for a separate freezer would be...



Q14: A rain barrel or other way to gather water from the roof would be...



Q15: Learning to use an energy-efficient but unfamiliar heating & cooling system would be...



BUYING A NEW HOME

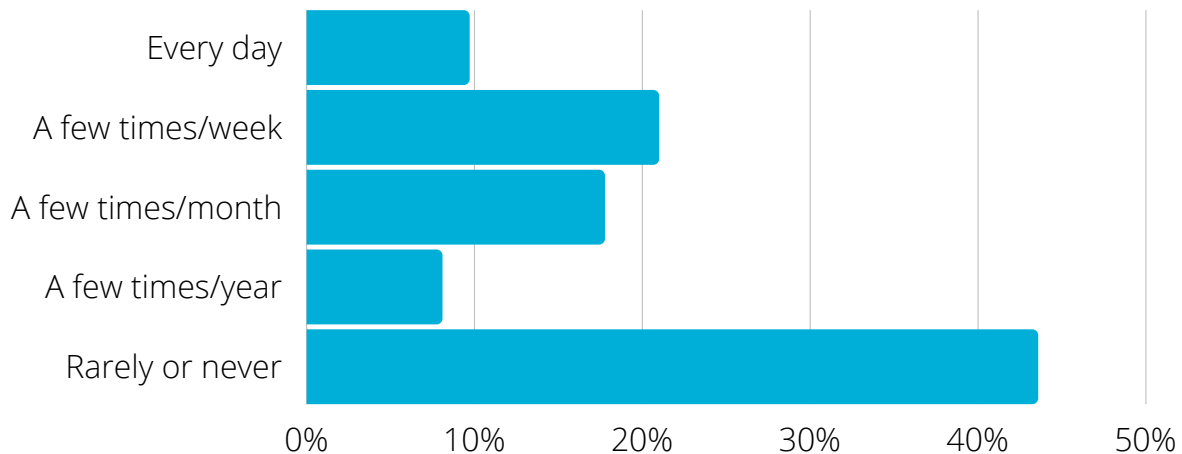
Respondent commentary on home buying priorities for small, affordable houses

- "I preferenced [sic] extra bedroom over office because the extra bedroom can also be an office. A screened porch or deck would be a wonderful feature... [and] can be an additional room 3 seasons of the year."
- "Raised bed garden for food, solar heat/electricity with battery backup, on demand hot water, grab bars, wheel chair/handicapped **livable** (not just "accessible")... this should be treated as a forever home and not just for now, Lots of accessible storage, solid surface, waterproof, smooth flooring such as vinyl plank, rainwater collection and gray water system, backup heat system, large shelved pantry with freezer for storing food... induction stovetop and convection oven are more energy efficient."
- "I think if you're buying a house there has to be something different then a apartment, [like] more space, closet doors"
- "I have a large family so most important is at least 1 1/2 bathrooms"
- "Energy-efficient, simple design/easy to access/maintain/repair (easy snow-removal), natural light, great neighbors/walking neighborhood with little traffic. Outdoor space for gardening."
- "I would like something like a covered entryway or porch or mud room entry. With small children and our New England climate, it is very beneficial to have a "landing" place to come in from the rain or mud, etc. before tracking it into the entire house."
- "Walkable neighborhood, proximity to public transit, and walking distance to wild areas - wood, a park, are also important."
- "One level living space is ideal with proper insulation and windows in a quiet, safe neighborhood would be ideal!"
- "Low fumes, non toxic pest control, away from toxic (laundry vents of people using fragrances), quiet, not a lot of light pollution, ability to access clean water, high ceilings for mental health, lots of sunlight!"
- "Having an indoor laundry space is important to me"

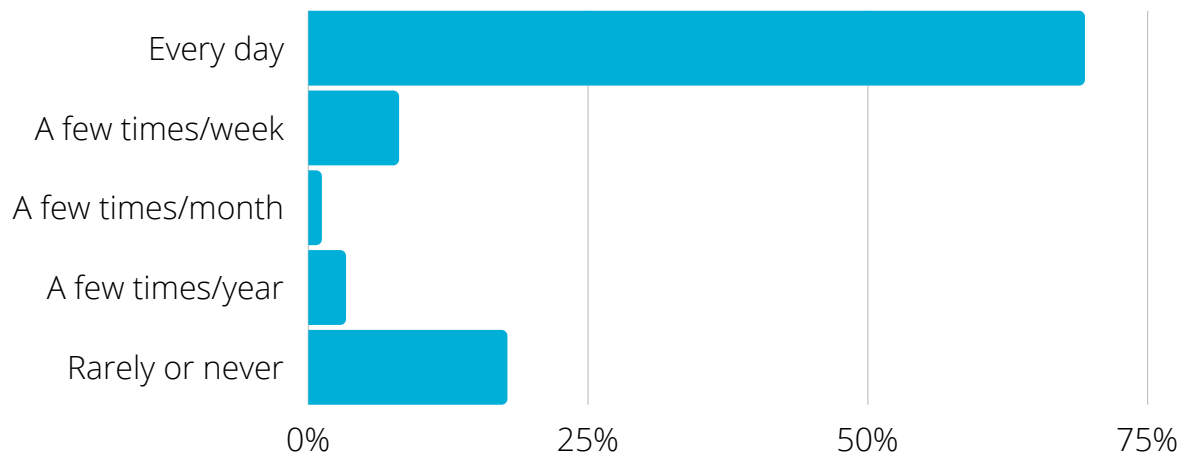
COVID-19

How the pandemic has impacted home use and home buying priorities

Q17: How often did you/your family members work from home (for a job, school, etc.) before the Covid-19 pandemic?



Q18: How often have you/your family members worked from home (for a job, school, etc.) during the Covid-19 pandemic?

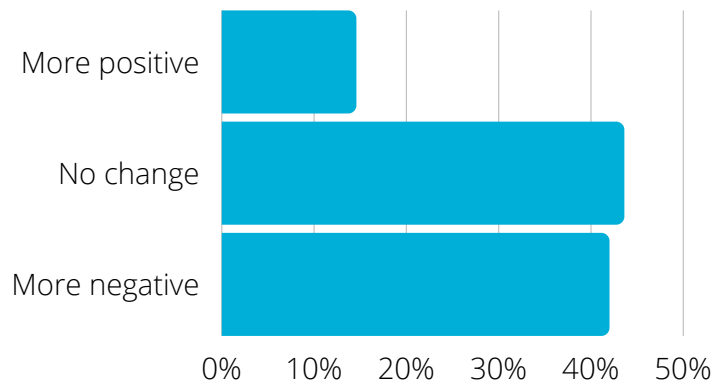


Respondents who rarely or never work from home decreased from 44% to 18%, while those who work from home every day increased from 10% to 70%.

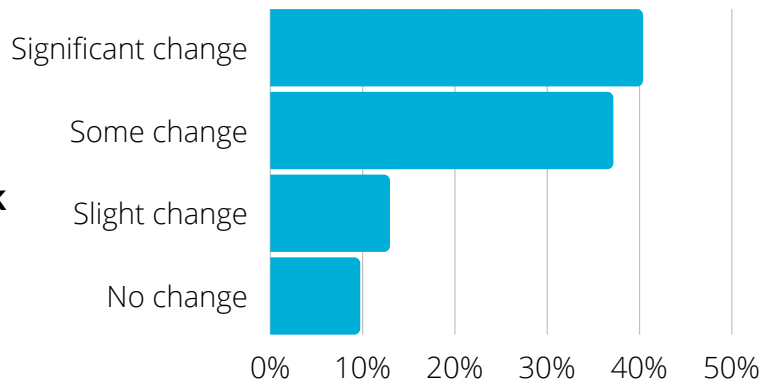
COVID-19

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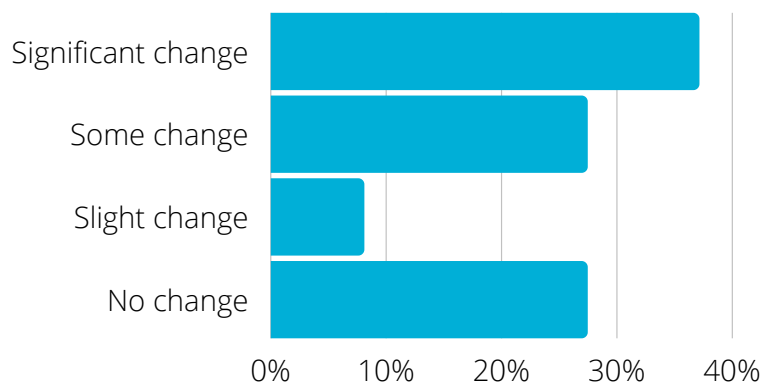
Q19: Have the Covid-19 shelter-in-place recommendations changed how you feel about your current living situation?



Q20: Have the Covid-19 shelter-in-place recommendations caused you to rethink or change how parts of your home work for you/your family?



Q20: Have the Covid-19 shelter-in-place recommendations affected your priorities when it comes to buying an affordable home?



COVID-19

Additional commentary from respondents about the impacts of Covid-19 on their housing

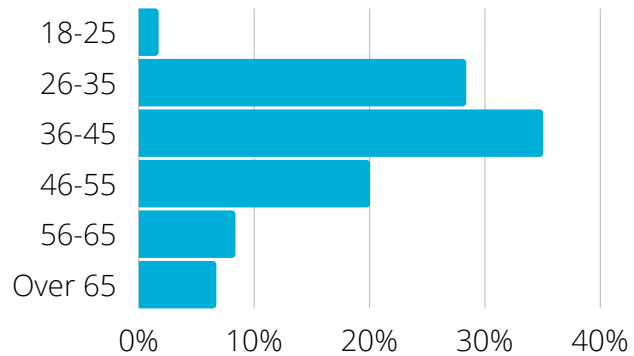
- "Open concept means I can never escape my workspace."
- "I have found that our apartment is far too small to stay in, with three students schooling at home... our living room has become an office, with the only refuge being the kitchen or the bedroom. I live in a 750 sq ft 2 bedroom apartment... This is not enough space for us."
- "I no longer host friends inside, though spend more time with friends in the yard... No utility bills and an affordable mortgage allow me to be housing-secure during this uncertain time."
- "I needed to create an office space in my home... it was only my bedroom where I can create such space, so my bedroom has been very cluttered."
- "It is now a priority that my living space be as comfortable as possible"
- "I had to purchase office furniture to create a office corner. Could use an extra room to have some privacy."
- "We've used outdoor spaces as work spaces for school and jobs. More storage spaces would allow us to stock up on food and household supplies more easily. Thoughtfully designed rooms would allow for better work spaces, Natural lighting became so important for all the video conferencing!"
- "I have a toddler and no fenced in outside space or the financial ability or permission from landlord to have any outdoor "play" equipment... Being able to use outside green space is VERY important when you have a tiny home AND a shelter in place order."
- "Spending a whole lot more time at home which is not very accommodating. Very unhappy."
- "I appreciate my home is quite accommodating- lots of outdoor space -but want to live much closer to extended family than before."
- "It's changed everything physically, mentally, and financially"

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic information of survey respondents

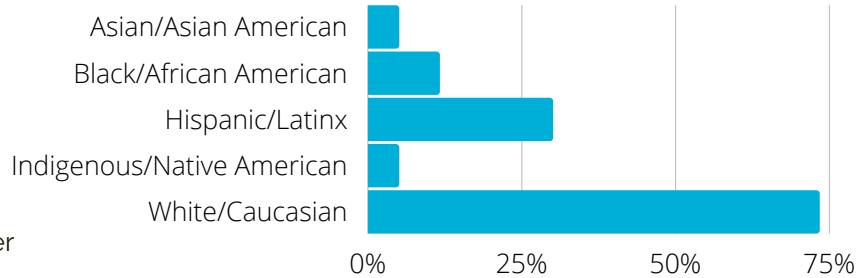
Of respondents who answered the question, **92%** had not owned a home within the last three years.

Respondent age

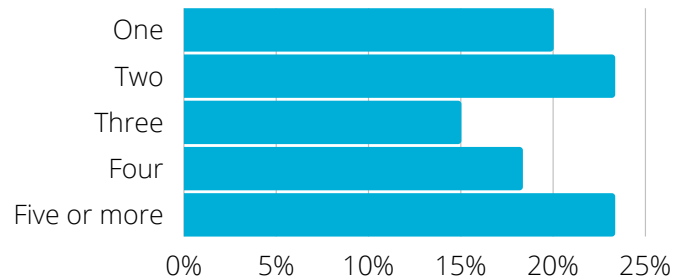


Respondent race/ethnicity (check all that apply)*

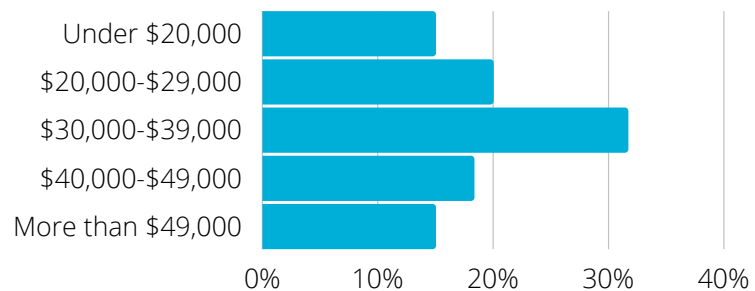
*No respondents selected Pacific Islander



Household size (by number of people)



Yearly household income



SURVEY SUMMARY

Designing small homes for a safe and equitable future

Small homes can be more durable, affordable, and energy-efficient than larger homes, but it is equally important that they be comfortable and desirable places to live. This design survey response emphasized the lack of affordable housing stock in the Western Massachusetts area and demonstrated that respondents' priorities when looking to buy an affordable home have also recently shifted due to the Covid-19 pandemic

The highest priority across questions was access outdoor space, and the pandemic has exacerbated that need as respondents expressed a desire to escape cramped living situations, meet with friends, or maintain healthy lifestyles. Other key themes that emerged from this survey include affordable housing not having enough space for multigenerational families, not feeling safe or comfortable (especially with residents home all the time or quarantining), and a distinct lack of accessibility features for individuals currently using wheelchairs or who hope to age in place. Respondents also answered positively when asked about "nonessential" home features, like space for a second refrigerator or a rain barrel for water collection.

Respondents currently living in homes they can afford (small or otherwise) reported much higher flexibility and satisfaction with their living situation. Respondents also touched upon several design features that would make small homes more comfortable and usable, including natural lighting, adequate privacy, and sufficient in-home storage. Ensuring that spaces can be flexible and serve multiple purposes is especially relevant now as more people work or study from home.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and emphasized many pre-existing issues with affordable housing stock in Western Massachusetts. For affordable builders (like Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity) moving forward, building "big enough" can ensure that small homes can reasonably accommodate multiple sizes of families while offering the privacy, safety, and stability that having your own four walls can provide.