



# **WE HEARD YOU**

**In order to propose funding priorities to the Austin City Council for the Project Connect anti-displacement funds for FY 2023 to 2025 the Community Advisory Committee engaged with the community to help guide them.**

## How would you invest \$75 million in Project Connect Anti-Displacement Funds?

# Engagement Overview

The Project Connect Community Advisory Committee (CAC) hosted community engagement sessions throughout late September and early October 2022 to help establish the priorities for the next three years of anti-displacement funding and make recommendations to the Austin City Council.

**Three in-person events** were held in areas at risk of displacement within a mile of Project Connect lines and **two virtual sessions** were offered as well. Community members could also join the conversation on SpeakUp Austin.

**A total of 104 people participated throughout the 5 sessions and on SpeakUp Austin.** See Appendix A for participant demographics.

The feedback from this engagement will be used by the Community Advisory Committee in combination with the Nothing About Us Without Us Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool, strategy discussions with City of Austin Housing & Planning staff, and conversations with key stakeholders to establish funding priorities for FY23, FY24, and FY25.

# Anti-Displacement Goals

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During the sessions, members of the CAC presented 4 anti-displacement goals to guide conversation:

1. Expand affordable housing opportunities for those most in need
2. Empower and stabilize tenants
3. Assist and support homeowners
4. Provide services to residents and preserve local businesses

These goals built on the recommendations of the *Nothing About us Without Us* Report and also incorporated insight from other sources, including: the City of Austin Displacement Mitigation Strategy, the Community Powered Workshop Community Investment and Wealth-Building Strategies Report, the Texas Anti-Displacement Toolkit (Uprooted Study), the Anti-Displacement Task Force Report, The People's Plan, Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities Report, and the Fair Housing Action Plan.

See Appendix B for a list of strategies discussed in the meetings.

The CAC offered strategies to help meet each goal and invited thoughts and feedback from community members based on their lived experience.

Participants were given the opportunity to help prioritize the goals through an online voting platform.

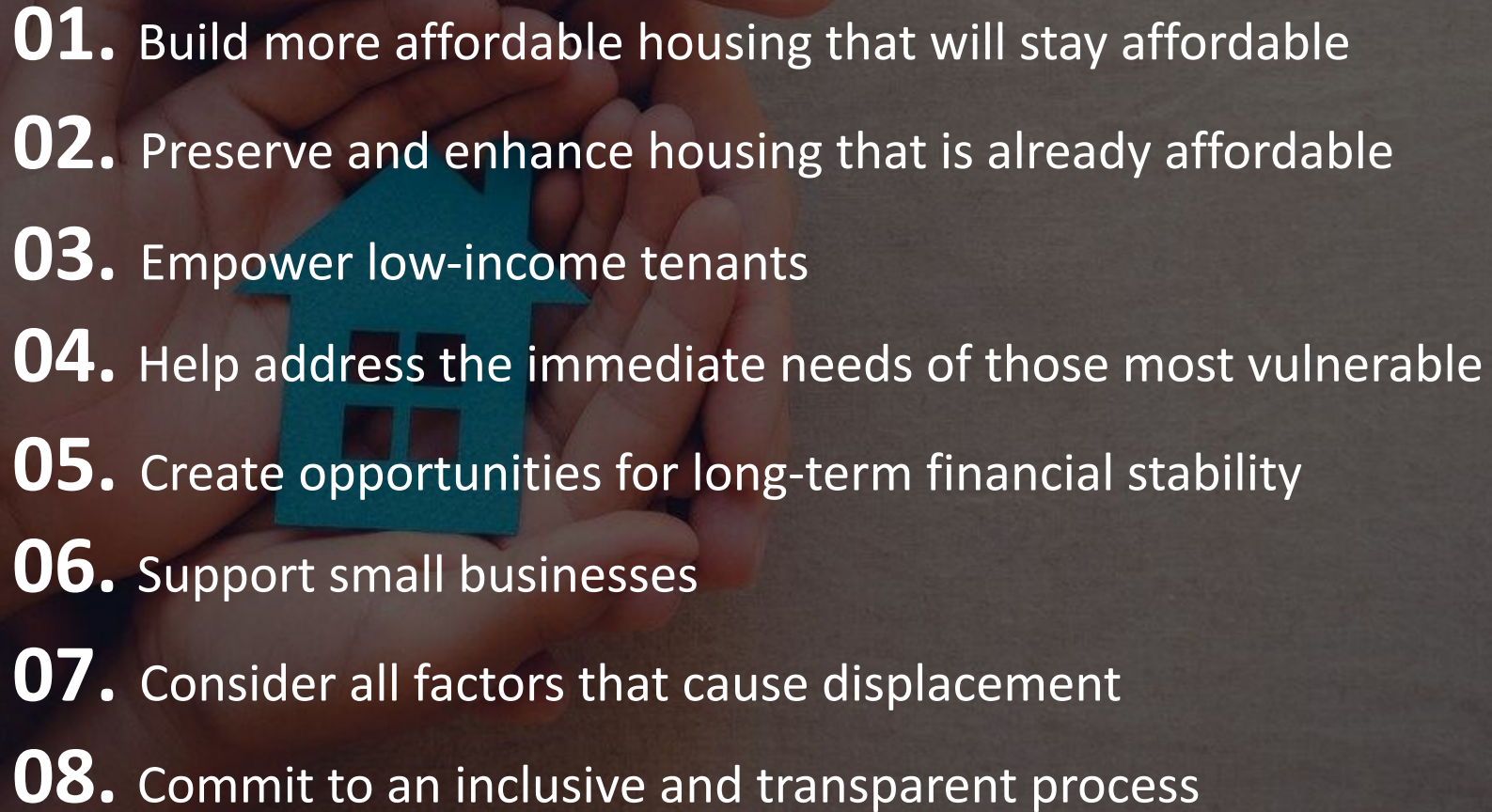
75 percent of those who voted ranked “Expand affordable housing opportunities for those most in need” as their highest priority. This included both the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

**In addition, 8 primary themes surfaced during the discussions.**

### **Highest Priority:**

*Expand affordable housing opportunities for those most in need*



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- A pair of hands is shown from a top-down perspective, cupped together and holding a teal-colored paper cutout of a house. The house cutout has a gabled roof, a chimney on the right side, and two windows. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly sand or a similar material. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the hands and the cutout.
- 01.** Build more affordable housing that will stay affordable
  - 02.** Preserve and enhance housing that is already affordable
  - 03.** Empower low-income tenants
  - 04.** Help address the immediate needs of those most vulnerable
  - 05.** Create opportunities for long-term financial stability
  - 06.** Support small businesses
  - 07.** Consider all factors that cause displacement
  - 08.** Commit to an inclusive and transparent process



**01.**

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**BUILD MORE AFFORDABLE  
HOUSING THAT WILL STAY  
AFFORDABLE**

Community members directly at risk of displacement and advocates talked about the need to have **more affordable options**. They also want to see measures put into place to ensure that new units can remain affordable long-term.

While some advocated for an increase in supply in order to stabilize prices, others insisted that the focus must be on adding below-market options. Community members stressed how few options there are for **decent, safe, affordable housing**.

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## 01. Build more affordable housing that will stay affordable

“ If they give us the minimum, we should have at least affordable housing with dignity that we can afford. ”

“ We can’t just build indiscriminately. ”

“ Providing a lot more housing for our growing region is essential. No possibility of lessening displacement without lots and lots of units. ”

“ More housing yes, but not more market rate. ”



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## 01. Build more affordable housing that will stay affordable

### Ideas to expand affordable housing opportunities included:

- Creating new rent-stabilized housing or fixed-rent housing
- Prioritizing investments in land to create affordable housing through land banking
- Partnering with community organizations to expand opportunities
- Supporting land trusts and cooperatives housing models
- Buying hotels and turning them into housing
- Creating city-owned mobile home park areas
- Separating housing from investment and encouraging decommodified housing models
- Supporting “Abundant housing for all” within walking distance of transit
- Fostering Self-sustaining communities





**02.**

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**PRESERVE AND ENHANCE  
HOUSING THAT IS  
ALREADY AFFORDABLE**

“ We have housing but people living there are not living comfortably or safe. ”

“ We want to make sure apartments don't flip, how do we make sure that doesn't happen? ”

“ ...how do you stop it from getting torn down? ”

Conversation participants expressed fear that rents will continue to rise and that existing affordable housing will continue to be torn down and replaced with expensive units.

The need to preserve what is affordable today, so that people can stay where they are surfaced as a priority. The participants also focused on the need to expand good quality housing.

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## 02. Preserve and enhance housing that is already affordable



## Ideas to preserve affordable housing included:

- Prioritizing the preservation of existing multi-family housing that is affordable or naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH)
- Leveraging the fact that a lot of affordable market-rate housing is in close proximity to existing and future transit infrastructure.
- Remodeling existing apartments so they are safe, up to code, and provide a quality home for people
- Supporting landlords by helping them make upgrades so that homes are safer, more comfortable, and more energy efficient
- Partnering with community organizations to operate the housing

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## 02. Preserve and enhance housing that is already affordable



**03.**

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**EMPOWER LOW-INCOME  
TENANTS**

Conversation participants focused on the vulnerability tenants face in the housing market and stressed the need to address this.

There was significant focus on helping individuals and communities advocate in their own best interest, and supporting community organizations do this work.

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### 03. Empower low-income tenants

“ Empowerment can come through successes on smaller things, too. For example, if neighbors in a mostly rental neighborhood say they would like more picnic tables in the park, try really hard to get them more picnic tables in the park. So when the big power moment comes, like an eviction threat, folks already know they can get wins. ”

“ We have organizations like BASTA that are doing this work of supporting renters. Start with them and grow out from there. Those are the experts. ”

“ What we have been hearing is that there are a lot of abuses. Which is why I put legal help as a priority. We need to let people know their rights. What they can and cannot expect. What landlords can require of them. That’s why I put legal assistance as number one. ”



## Ideas to empower low-income tenants included:

- Providing legal guidance and representation to tenants
- Providing emergency rental assistance and other financial assistance to tenants to ensure household stability
- Supporting tenant organizing efforts and the creation of tenant associations
- Expanding and strengthening laws that protect tenants
- Exploring small ways to give power to the people most impacted
- Partnering with and supporting existing organizations that do this work

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### 03. Empower low-income tenants



**04.**

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**HELP ADDRESS THE  
IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF  
THOSE MOST VULNERABLE**

“ I’m one utility bill away from being forced out. ”

“ What can be done right now for displacement? ”

“ Who is going to help us and protect us? ”

“ We are in times of crisis and it’s affecting low-income people. ”

“ People are fighting for their kids and with their hearts to pay bills and rent. ”

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**04.** Help address the immediate needs of those most vulnerable



“ A lot of people don’t know where to go...We need a place where we can go in person and explain our needs. You can go to this place and someone will listen.... A library or community office. When you have a problem your mind is blank. You don’t know what way to go... We don’t have a place. ”

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**04.** Help address the immediate needs of those most vulnerable

### Ideas to address immediate needs included:

- Expanding programs and services to assist low-income residents
- Providing immediate emergency financial support
- Making services more accessible by adding flexibility to eligibility requirements, making it easier to apply, and providing assistance in submitting paperwork
- Ensuring that affordable housing services are accessible online and other formats
- Being intentional with outreach and in advertising services such as going door-to-door and sharing information in existing community spaces
- Exploring consolidated access to services so that people who come in for one need can access other support systems at the same time.
- Providing culturally responsiveness services and expand multilingual communication



**05.**

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**CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
LONG TERM FINANCIAL  
STABILITY**

Conversation participants focused on the need to provide financial stabilities for families and households in the long run.

While recognizing the importance of addressing immediate community needs, participants shared their desire to access opportunities that would make them self-sufficient.

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## 05. Create opportunities for long-term financial stability

“ We don’t need money to pay our rent for a month but to give us something that will help us pay the rent in the long term. ”

“ I’m most concerned about regaining Austin’s status as a place where working-class people can live good lives, affordable lives. ”

“ If they are going to increase taxes, they should also increase our wages. ”



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## 05. Create opportunities for long-term financial stability

### Ideas to support long-term stability included:

- Providing services such as the following to support existing homeowners
  - Foreclosure prevention
  - Home repair
  - Legal services and estate planning
  - Financing for homeowners to build accessory dwelling units to support family or generate income
- Providing tenants with down payment assistance and other support to enter homeownership
- Exploring opportunities for tenants to purchase their rental properties
- Expanding education and training to increase income
- Providing financial literacy to encourage people to diversify their assets
- Creating opportunities for residents to build equity through business ownership



**06.**

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**SUPPORT SMALL  
BUSINESSES**

“ Along with housing are we also talking about jobs as well? We see small businesses going out of businesses. ”

“ I’m concerned that businesses will disappear, and chains will replace small businesses ”

The need to support small businesses surfaced in many of the conversations, including the need to address construction impacts.

Community members were supportive of incorporating local businesses and cultural institutions into station area and other future planning efforts.

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## 06. Support small businesses



## Ideas to support small businesses included:

- Providing free marketing materials for local businesses so they can increase their reach
- Exploring the ability to utilize voluntary development bonus programs to create affordable commercial spaces, similar to the housing bonus programs, including providing a first refusal opportunity
- Preserving small business by making the areas around them more walkable
- Providing businesses near stations the opportunity to carry out renovations while construction is underway
- Fostering land ownership as a way to build power
- Utilizing affordable leases and commercial land trusts and cooperatives to maintain long-term affordability

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## 06. Support small businesses



**07.**

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**CONSIDER ALL FACTORS  
THAT CAUSE DISPLACEMENT**



Conversations at each session focused on the variety of factors that cause displacement, in addition to housing affordability.

They stressed the need to address displacement through a holistic and multifaceted approach, including enacting relevant policy changes.

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**07.** Consider all factors that cause displacement

“ Just building housing won’t address all of the needs. We need innovation, thoughtfulness, and intentionality. Identify gaps and barriers of things that have not been funded yet. We need to look at all the tools. ”

“ I want to make sure we’re looking at the whole picture of affordability. When looking at displacement pressures, not just looking at housing costs but also other things like energy costs, food costs, that will help us address the full picture. ”

“ It’s not just the affordability. We have to look at whole households and whole families to create solutions. ”

## Factors highlighted by participants that can impact displacement pressures included:

- Addressing the following varied costs households have to manage.
  - Utility bills
  - Taxes and fees
  - Grocery and food costs
  - Childcare
  - Transportation costs
  - Healthcare
  - Insurance
- Addressing other structural barriers that impact residents.
  - Immigration status
  - Criminal justice involvement
  - Rental history and previous housing instability.
- Addressing issues with property development and management

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**07.** Consider all factors that cause displacement

Conversation participants acknowledged the challenge of assessing potential transit-induced displacement in the context of historic displacement pressures.

Participants also discussed the need to enact policy changes, both at the local and state level, to address displacement concerns, in addition to funding housing programs and other services.



**08.**

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**COMMIT TO AN INCLUSIVE  
AND TRANSPARENT PROCESS**

Community members stressed the need for an open, honest, transparent, and accountable process.

Some participants shared about their experience with past processes where the community's voice was not reflected in the outcome.

Others shared **hope** that this process will be different and talked about the opportunity for collaboration that this funding offers.

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## 08. Commit to an inclusive and transparent process

“ I want Austin to be moving in the right direction. Want the disenfranchised to be sustained. Collaboration and partnerships are important to me. I don't have the resources but I have the care and the determination. That determination needs to meet wisdom. Wisdom, and determination need to partner in order to go forward.”

Why should we trust the City now for this process?

Today I felt I spoke by heart. I speak for those who can't talk. Thank you for not cutting me to 1-4 minutes like others. Thank you for giving us the space.

## Ideas to support an inclusive and transparent process included:

- Engaging community members in decision-making
- Ensuring community representation and fostering community power
- Incorporating previous city and community plans in the planning process
- Conducting a transparent and thorough analysis of funding decisions to assess the impact.

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**08.** Commit to an inclusive and transparent process

**“ I saw in the winter storm how much the community can move mountains. ”**

**“ [Give us] a voice with a platform. Especially increasing the outreach to prove the city cares and has resources. ”**

# Next Steps

- **Finalized Recommendations:** Funding priority recommendations will be finalized at the February 9 Community Advisory Committee meeting
  - **Council Approval:** Funding priorities for FY23, FY24 and FY25 will be presented as a set of recommendations at the February 23 City Council meeting
  - **Announcement of Funding Decisions:** Once approved by Council, finalized funding priorities will be shared directly with community members who engaged with the process and posted on the City's website
  - **Staff Implementation:** City of Austin Housing & Planning staff will begin planning to invest funds following direction from Council.
  - **Community Engagement:** Ongoing engagement with community members at risk of displacement will continue as funds are invested
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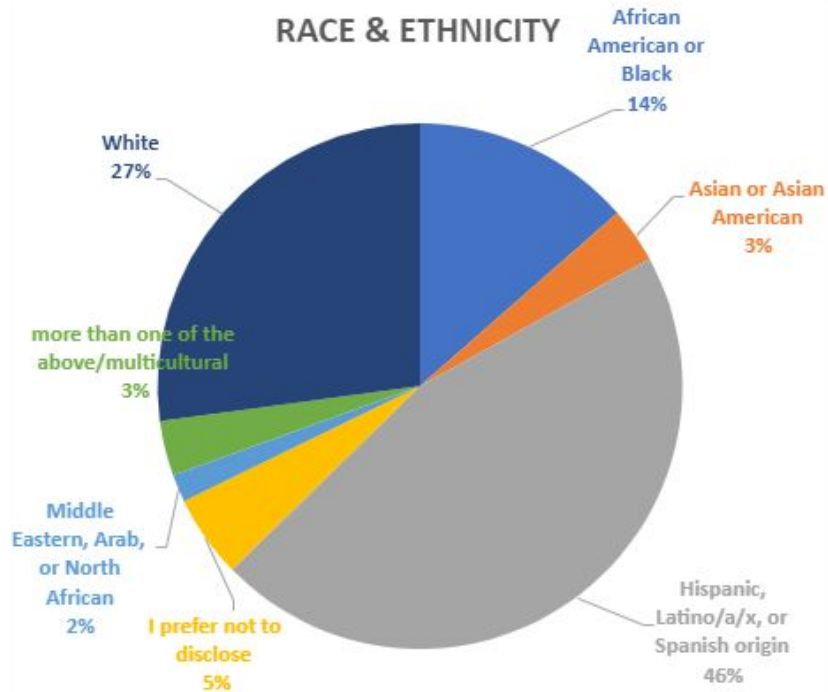
## Key dates

- February 9
- February 23

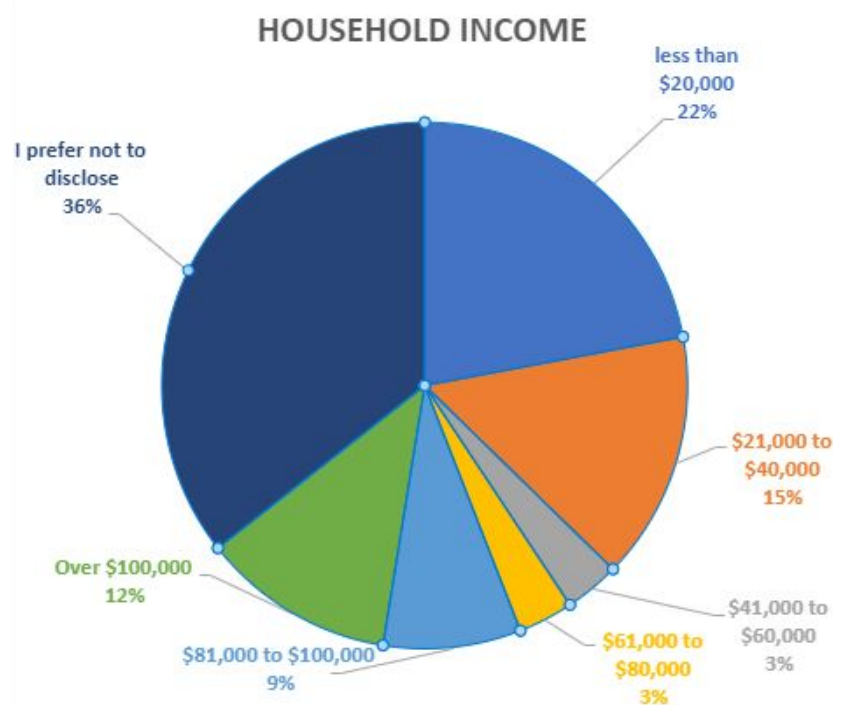
# Appendix A: Who did we hear from?

151 people registered for the five engagement sessions and a total of 95 attended. 59 of those attendees provided demographic data upon registration. Those demographics are captured in the charts below.

## RACE & ETHNICITY



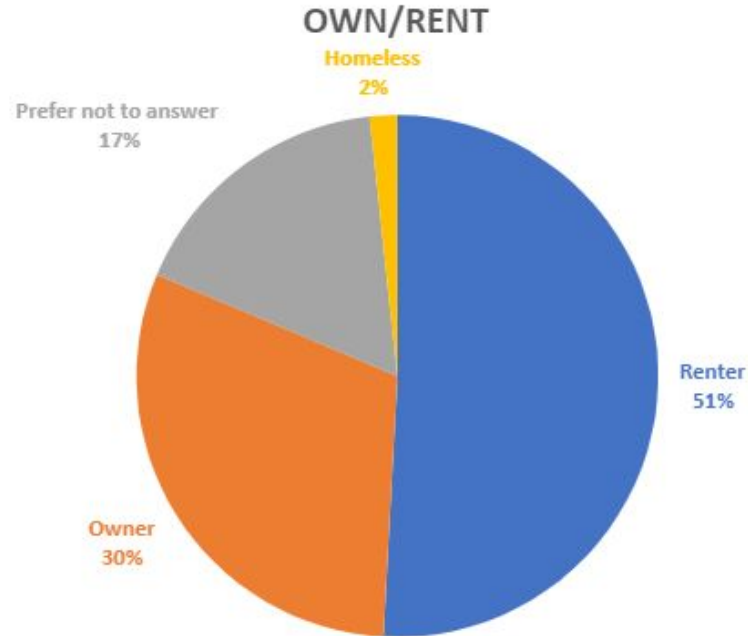
## HOUSEHOLD INCOME



# Appendix A: Who did we hear from?

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# Appendix B: Goals and Strategies

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## **Goal 1: Expand affordable housing opportunities for those most in need**

- Expand affordable housing through land banking and preserving existing multifamily housing
- Build new affordable housing for low-income tenants and owners
- Provide housing and other support for unhoused people

## **Goal 2: Empower and stabilize tenants**

- Empower tenants by supporting tenant organizing and protections
- Provide emergency rental assistance or other financial help to keep tenants in their homes
- Provide legal help to tenants to prevent evictions and avoid landlord harassment

# Appendix B: Goals and Strategies

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## **Goal 3: Assist and support homeowners**

- Provide home repair and rehabilitation for low-income owners
- Provide legal help so that families can stay in their homes
- Expand affordable homeownership through financial assistance and counseling

## **Goal 4: Provide services to residents and preserve local businesses**

- Provide financial assistance to low-income households to pay off utility bills
- Help residents at risk of displacement access affordable housing services
- Preserve small businesses and community and cultural assets