

Clear Creek County Master Plan Citizen Survey Results

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Prepared for:

Clear Creek County

SE Group

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to collect public feedback on a variety of issues in Clear Creek County related to the Comprehensive Plan Update, including economic development, quality of life, recreation, health care, transportation, and other issues. A survey was mailed to a randomly selected list of 3,000 property owners in the county; participants could respond either online or via the mailed paper survey. A total of 631 completed responses were submitted (513 mail surveys returned, and 118 responses via the web survey), for a response rate of 21 percent. Additionally, a separate but parallel online survey was available for anyone in the county to submit their opinions, even if they did not receive a survey in the mail.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SE Group and RRC Associates conducted a citizen survey as a component of the Master Plan Update for Clear Creek County, CO.

The purpose of the study was to collect public feedback on issues related to the Master Plan Update process, including economic development, quality of life, recreation, health care, transportation, and other issues. Data from this survey show that satisfaction with the quality of life in Clear Creek County is high.

Some research highlights follow.

- Satisfaction with the overall quality of life in Clear Creek County is high, including as a place to live, as a place to retire, and as a place to raise children. The exception is for Clear Creek County as a place to work or as a place to start a business, for which satisfaction is lower. Indeed, over half of survey respondents work outside Clear Creek County.
- According to survey respondents, opportunities for improving the economy in Clear Creek County include infrastructure improvements, expanding outdoor recreation and tourism branding/marketing, and expanding the diversity of economic activity.
- Similarly, challenges for Clear Creek County's economy were infrastructure improvements, increasing job availability, and expanding the diversity of economic activity.
- Increasing job availability, incentives for new and startup businesses, and improving the business climate were seen as additional opportunities for improving the economy in the county.
- Wages, housing availability, and housing affordability were seen as additional challenges to economic growth.
- About one-quarter of respondents said that they have found it difficult to find affordable or acceptable housing in Clear Creek County. Of those respondents, 60 percent said that

mortgage payments/rents are too high, 56 percent said locations are too far from employment, and 26 percent indicated poor quality of space.

- In terms of the single most significant home ownership barrier in Clear Creek County, among all respondents, one-third (32 percent) said that rising home prices is the biggest hurdle, followed closely by limited availability of housing (28 percent). Lack of affordable housing and the quality of housing were each selected by about ten percent of respondents.

Additional findings related to trails and open space include the following:

- High support for more trails, trailheads, and trailhead parking areas.
- High support for increased promotion of outdoor recreation for economic development.
- Mixed support for acquisition of more open space, with a blend of the purpose of more open space for outdoor recreation and for wildlife habitat preservation.

Please see the main body of the report for more detail on these and other topics.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted using primarily using a mail survey (“invitation” survey), with a secondary “open link” survey available to those who were not within the survey sampling frame. Those receiving the survey in the mail could respond either by returning the mail survey or by submitting their responses online. The analysis herein primarily focuses on responses from the invitation sample.

The list source used for the mailing was a combination of the Clear Creek County Assessor’s Office list and third-party list purchased from Gravis Marketing, a marketing agency that specializes in political polling. Gravis provides consumer lists for U.S. addresses as well as automated robocalls (phone calls reminding respondents to complete their survey). Use of the Gravis list includes renters in addition to homeowners, and residents who are not registered to vote in addition to registered voters. Follow-up robocalls were utilized for this study to further encourage survey response.

A total of 3,000 surveys were mailed to a random sample of Clear Creek County residents in January 2016. The final sample size for the mail-back survey was 631 (21 percent response rate). The resultant margin of error is approximately +/- 3.9 percentage points for questions at 50% response.¹ The open link survey received an additional 116 responses.

¹ For the total invitation sample size of 631, margin of error is +/- 3.9 percent calculated for questions at 50% response (if the response for a particular question is “50%”—the standard way to generalize margin of error is to state the larger margin, which occurs for responses at 50%).

The underlying data were weighted by age to ensure appropriate representation of Clear Creek County residents across different demographic cohorts in the sample. Using the U.S. Census 2013 American Community Survey five-year estimates, the age distribution within the invitation respondent sample was matched to the 2013 demographic profile of Clear Creek County. Due to variable response rates by some segments of the population, the underlying results, while weighted to best match the overall demographics of residents, may not be completely representative of some sub-groups of the population.

Segmentation analysis was conducted on some of the questions in order to illustrate key differences among demographic cohorts. Segments explored include residence within the county and by age group. Results should be interpreted with caution as some segment sample sizes are relatively small.

The survey also asked several open-ended questions to elicit more in-depth comments from respondents on their opinions and experiences. A full listing of comments is provided under separate cover.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This section details the demographic and residential characteristics of the invitation sample respondents. The American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Clear Creek County as reported by the Census are illustrated beside the weighted demographic profile of respondents to provide context. All analysis in the remainder of the report focuses on results from the invitation sample, with the exception of the section describing open link results.

- Gender. The invitation sample had a higher proportion of males (56 percent) than females (44 percent).
- Age. About one in three (29 percent) invitation sample respondents are under age 45, with roughly half (54 percent) between the ages of 45 and 64. Seventeen percent are age 65 or older. The average age was 52.5 years old, consistent with the somewhat older age profile of the area.
- Annual Household Income. Annual earnings of less than \$75,000 a year were reported by approximately a third (36 percent) of respondent households. An additional 40 percent indicated that they earn between \$75,000 and \$149,999 each year, and 24 percent reported annual household incomes of \$150,000 or more.

Note that the margin of error is different for every single question response on the survey depending on the resultant sample sizes, proportion of responses, and number of answer categories for each question. Comparison of differences in the data between various segments, therefore, should take into consideration these factors. As a general comment, it is sometimes more appropriate to focus attention on the general trends and patterns in the data rather than on the individual percentages.

- Number of Years Lived in Clear Creek County. Thirty percent of the invitation sample respondents have been in Clear Creek County for more than 20 years. An additional 27 percent have been in the area between 11 and 20 years, while 21 percent have lived in Clear Creek County between 4 and 10 years. Finally, 22 percent have lived in Clear Creek County three years or less (including 6 percent who have lived in the county less than a year).
- Primary Residency. Eighty-seven percent of invitation survey respondents live in Clear Creek County; the other 13 percent do not live in the County (property owners).
- Location of Residence. The primary areas where survey respondents live (or most closely associate) include Idaho Springs (18 percent), Floyd Hill/Beaver Brook (13 percent), Georgetown (13 percent), and Upper Bear Creek (12 percent). Additionally, 5 percent indicated they most closely associate with Dumont/Lawson/Downieville and Squaw Pass, with an additional 4 percent residing in St. Mary's.
- Total Number of Household Members. The largest share of invitation respondents reported that there are two people living in their home (52 percent), while 18 percent indicated that they live alone. Twenty-nine percent said there are three or more people in their home. On average, 2.3 people live in invitation respondent households.
- Number of Household Members Under Age 18. Two-thirds of the invitation sample (76 percent) do not have household members under the age of 18. Those who do have children have kids of a variety of ages, ranging from under 1 year of age to 18 years old.
- Number of Household Members Over Age 55. Half of survey respondents are not part of a household with members age over 55.

EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUTING

Respondents were asked about their employment and commuting patterns. This section highlights some of those results.

- Over half of the survey respondents work outside Clear Creek County (52 percent), indicating the relative lack of jobs in the county. Nineteen percent work in Clear Creek County outside their home, with an additional 12 percent who work at home/telecommute. Twenty percent of the respondent sample is retired, while the remaining 2 percent do not work.
- Twenty-nine percent of those who work indicated that they own their own business.
- The average one-way commute is about 21 miles, with 36 percent indicating a one-way commute of over 30 miles.
- Utilization of public transportation for commuting is quite low, with 92 percent saying they do not use any public transportation (including carpooling). Three percent carpool, 2 percent ride RTD from Bergen Park, and 1 percent ride RTD from El Rancho.
- The most important factors for considering public transportation are convenience to home/work, a schedule that runs when needed, and appropriate routes.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Survey participants were asked about opportunities and challenges for the economy in Clear Creek County. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below illustrate the response patterns to these questions.

- “Infrastructure improvements” was the top factor for both challenges and opportunities to improve the economy in Clear Creek County.
- Expanding outdoor recreation and tourism branding/marketing was the number two opportunity identified by survey respondents for improving the county economy.
- Expanding the diversity of economic activity was both an important challenge and an important opportunity for improving the economy Clear Creek County.
- Increasing job availability, incentives for new and startup businesses, and improving the business climate were seen as opportunities for improving the economy in the county.
- Wages, housing availability, and housing affordability were seen as challenges to economic growth.

FIGURE 1
BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLEAR CREEK COUNTY TO IMPROVE ECONOMY

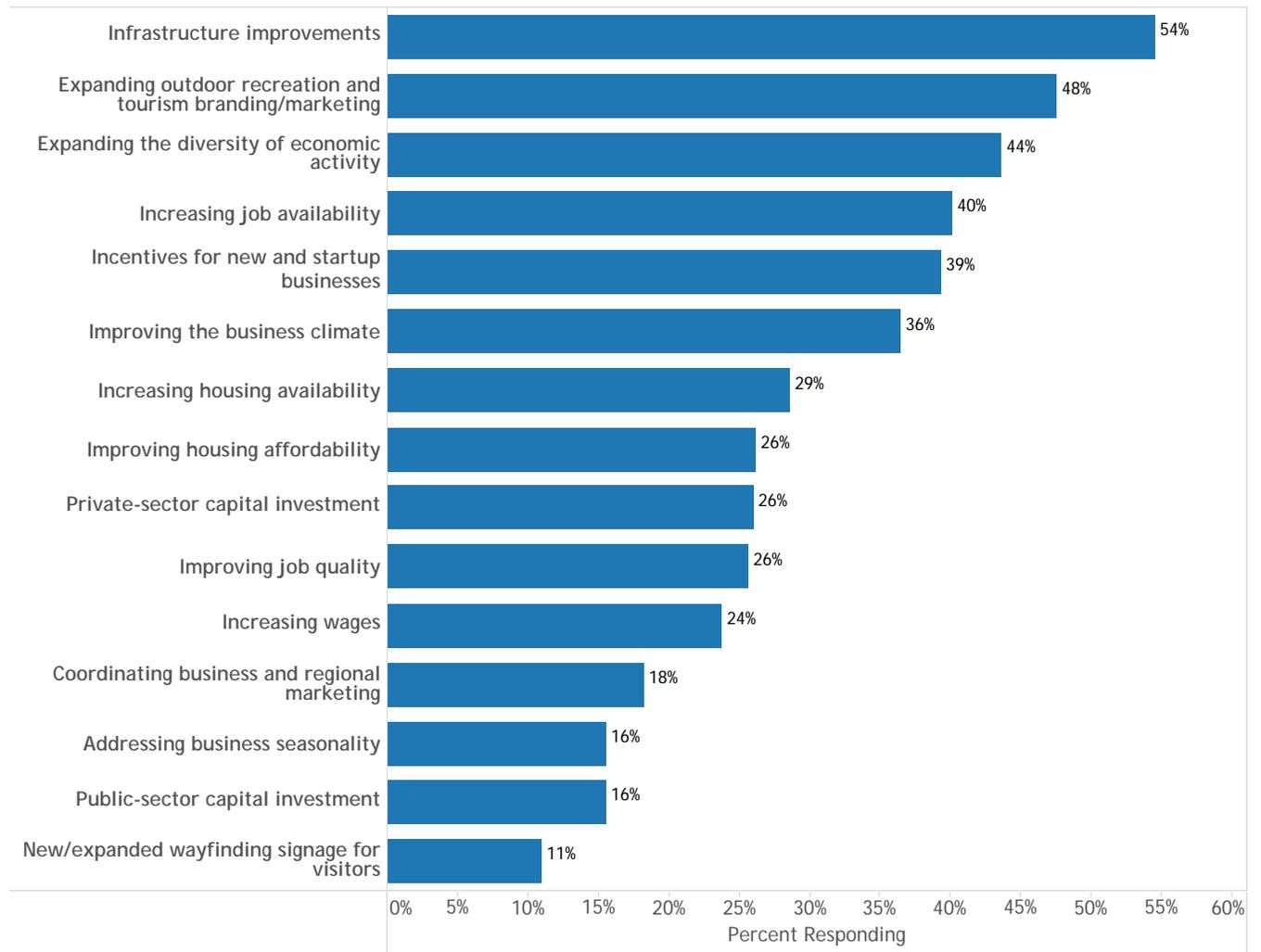
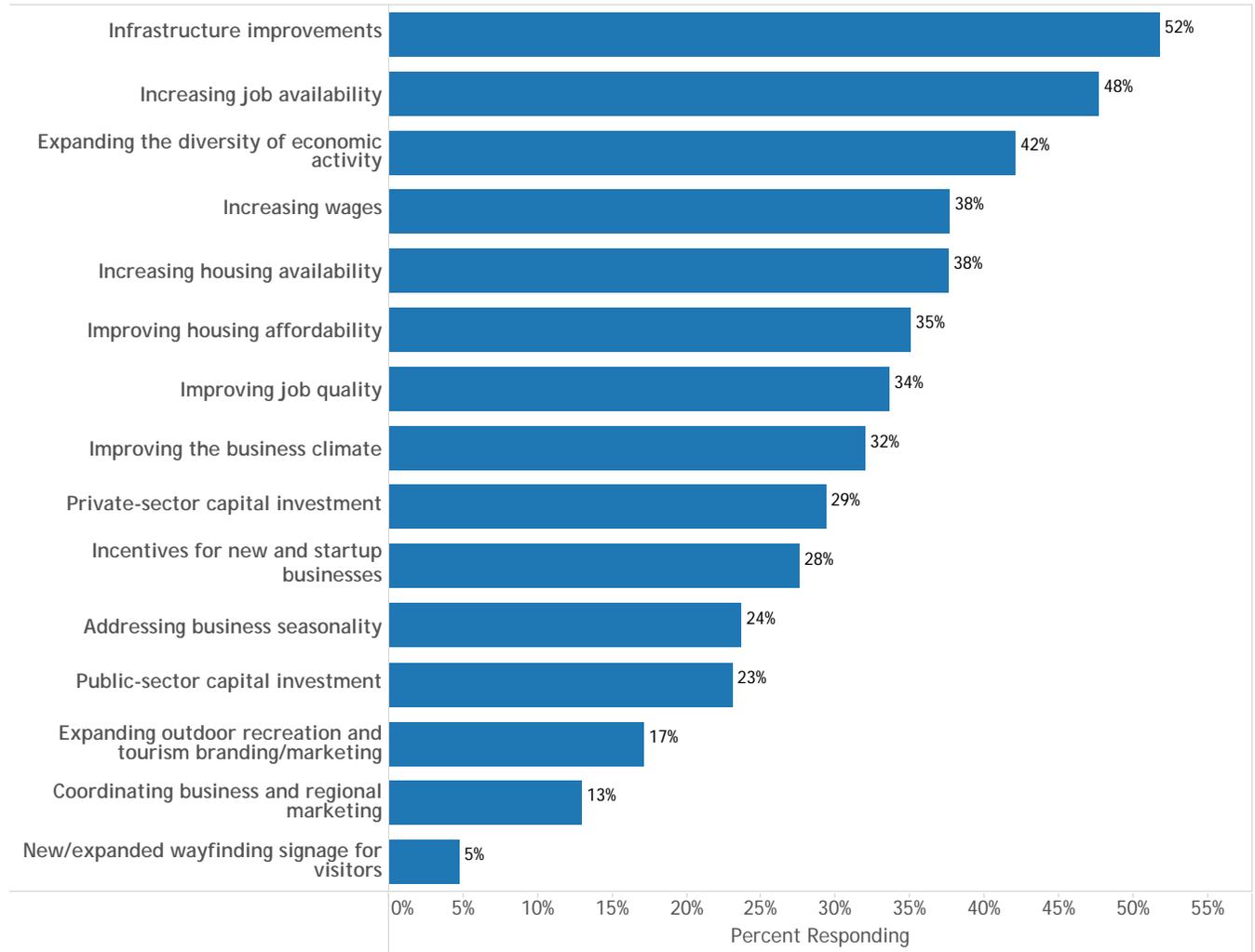


FIGURE 2
BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR CLEAR CREEK COUNTY TO IMPROVE ECONOMY



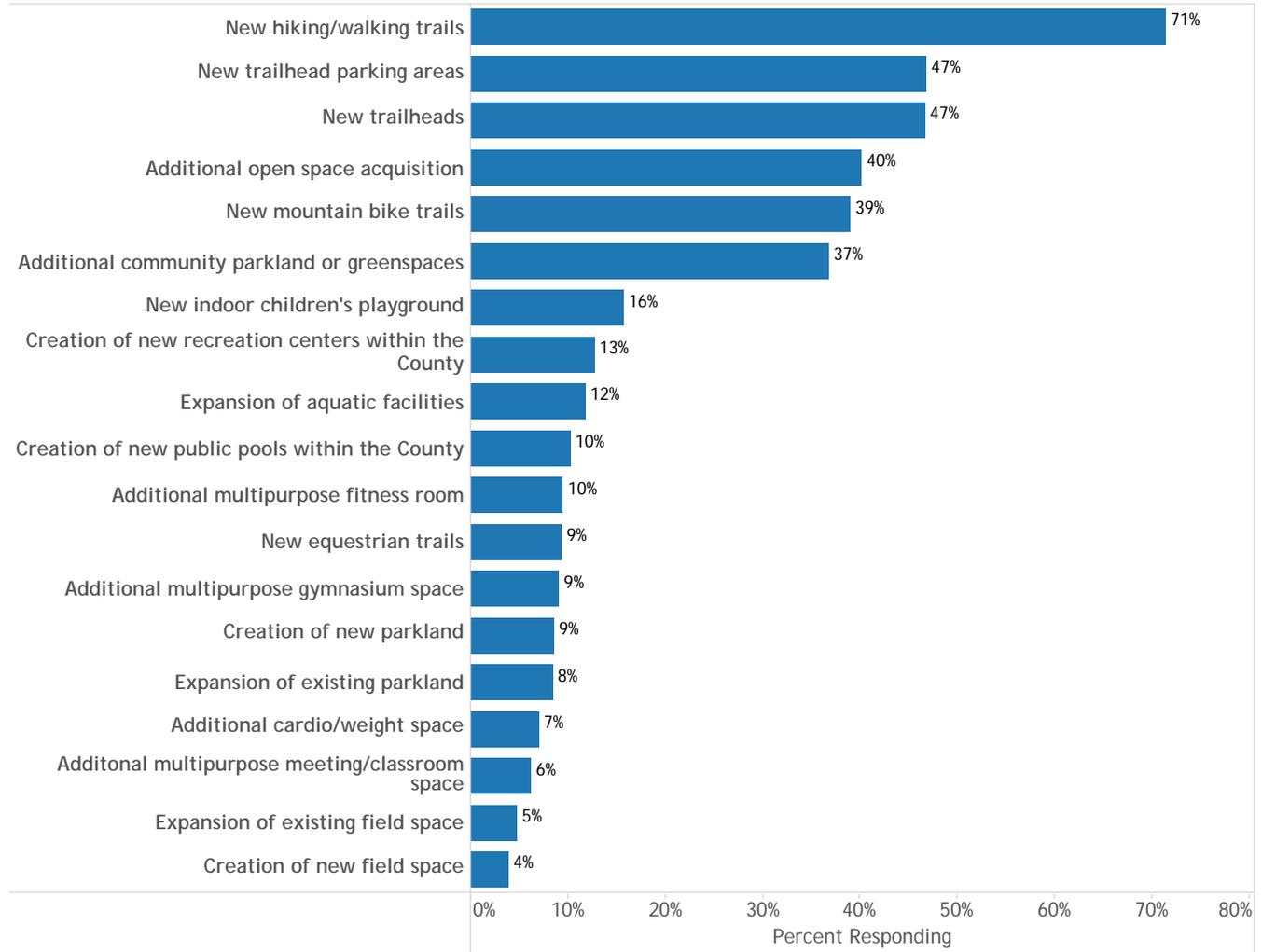
RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Recreation was identified as “very important” by a strong majority (79 percent) of survey respondents. An even higher percentage (89 percent) engage in recreation in Clear Creek County.

The most popular recreational activity by far that survey respondents participate in is walking, jogging, or hiking (85 percent). Also popular are skiing/snowboarding (47 percent), snowshoeing/cross country skiing (36 percent), fishing (34 percent), camping (31 percent), mountain biking (29 percent), off-highway vehicle use (25 percent), and bird/wildlife watching (23 percent), among others.

New recreational opportunities that survey participants would like to see are presented in Figure 3 below. New hiking/walking trails, new trailhead parking, and new trailheads were the most popular improvements to recreational opportunities identified in the survey research.

FIGURE 3
NEW RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE



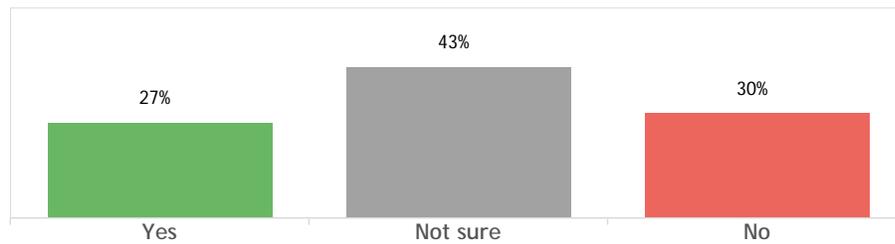
OPEN SPACE

The respondent pool was split as to whether the county has enough Open Space. Thirty percent said that the county does not have enough Open Space, 27 percent thought the county does have enough Open Space, and the plurality (43 percent) were not sure.

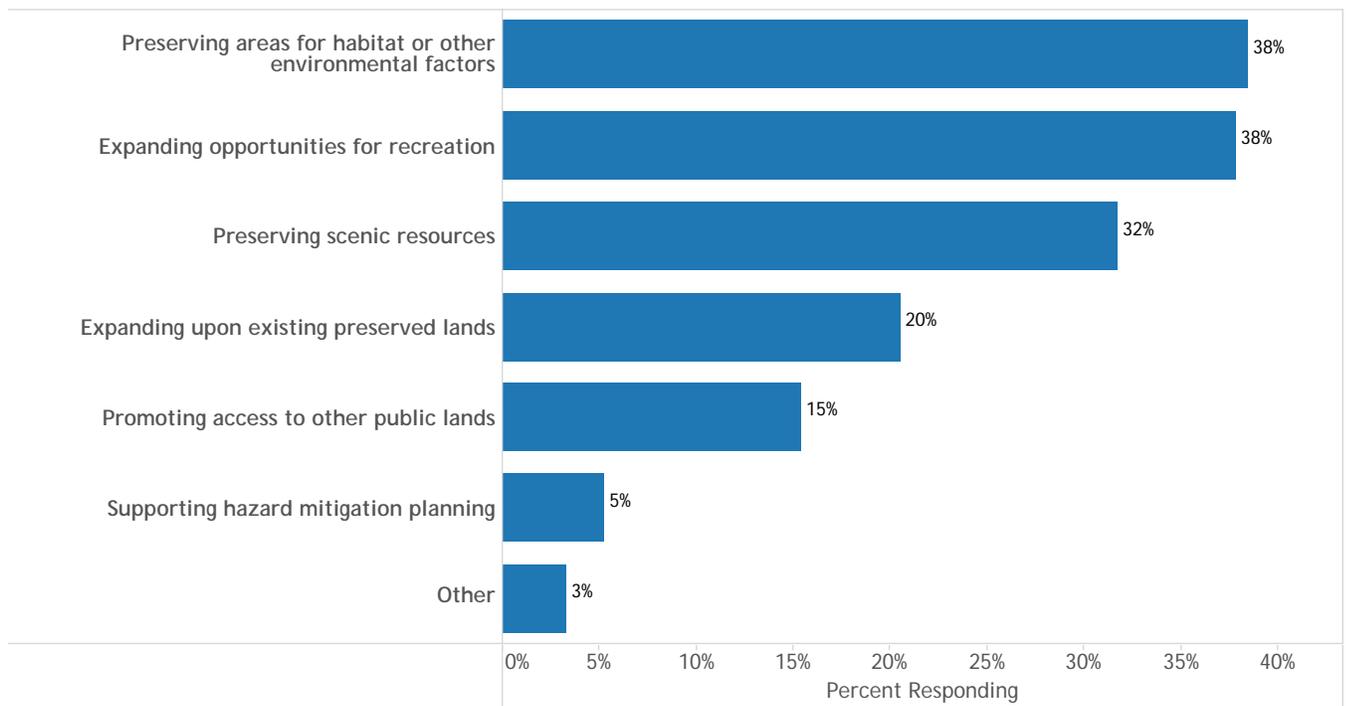
The purpose for newly acquired Open Space, according to survey results, is split between preserving areas for habitat/other environmental factors and expanded opportunities for recreation (38 percent each). Preserving scenic resources (32 percent), expanding upon existing preserved lands (20 percent), and promoting access to other public lands (15 percent) were also identified as important purposes of newly acquired Open Spaces.

FIGURE 4

DO YOU FEEL THE COUNTY HAS ENOUGH OPEN SPACE?



PRIMARY PURPOSE OF ACQUIRING NEW OPEN SPACES



HOUSING

Among survey respondents, 95 percent own their home, and 4 percent rent (1 percent have “other” housing tenure). The age of the housing stock varies, with the majority constructed prior to 1980. Seventeen percent were built since 2000 and 26 percent between 1980 and 1999.

The typical respondent spends 20 to 30 percent of their monthly income on housing. The average percentage is 23 percent (including those who spend nothing on housing).

About one-quarter of respondents said that they have found it difficult to find affordable or acceptable housing in Clear Creek County. Of those respondents, 60 percent said that mortgage payments/rents are too high, 56 percent said locations are too far from employment, and 26 percent indicated poor quality of space.

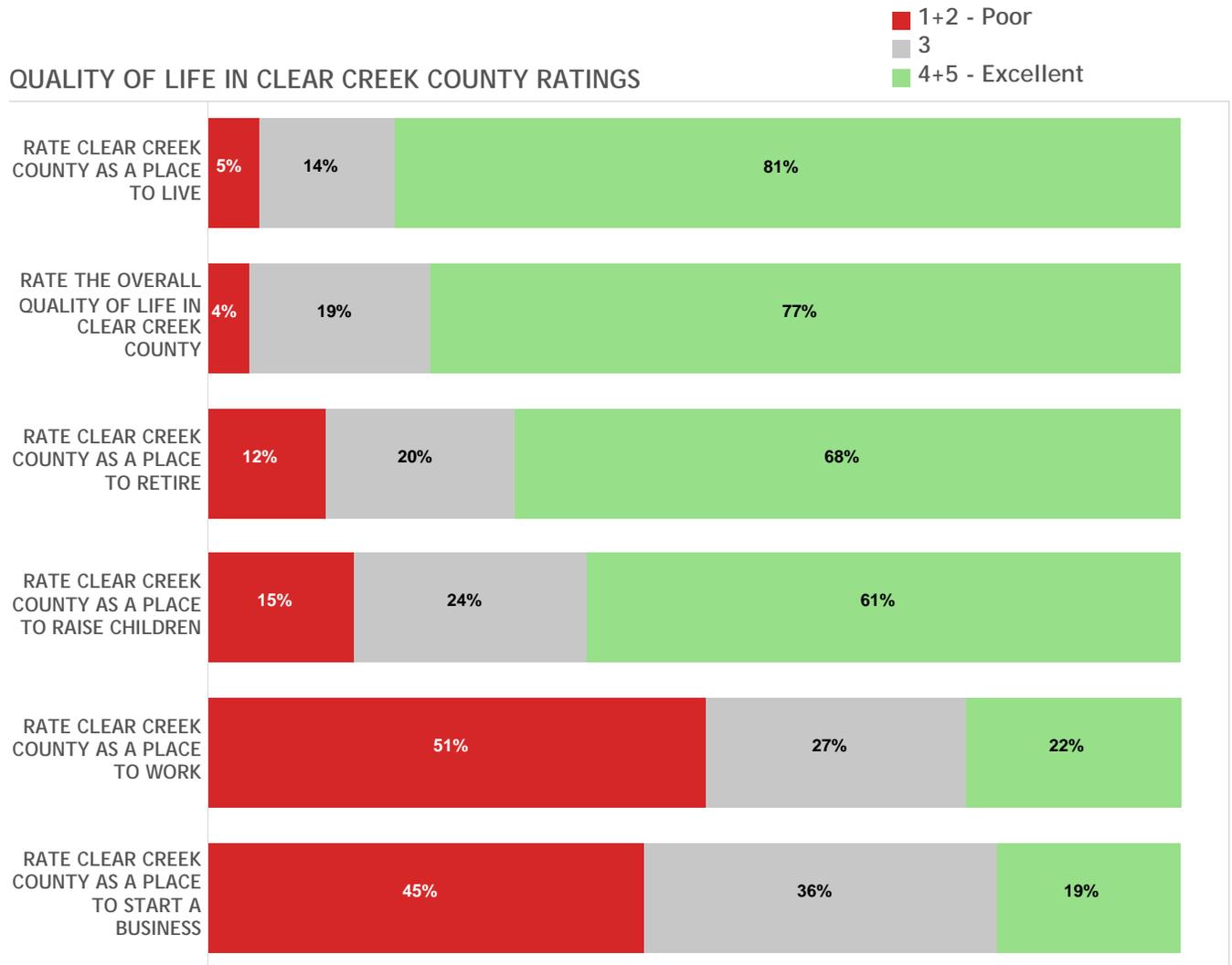
In terms of the single most significant home ownership barrier in Clear Creek County, among all respondents, one-third (32 percent) said that rising home prices is the biggest hurdle, followed closely by limited availability of housing (28 percent). Lack of affordable housing and the quality of housing were each selected by about ten percent of respondents.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Overall Quality of Life

The satisfaction with the quality of life in Clear Creek County is high, including as a place to live, as a place to retire, and as a place to raise children. The exception is for Clear Creek County as a place to work or as a place to start a business, as presented in Figure 5 below.

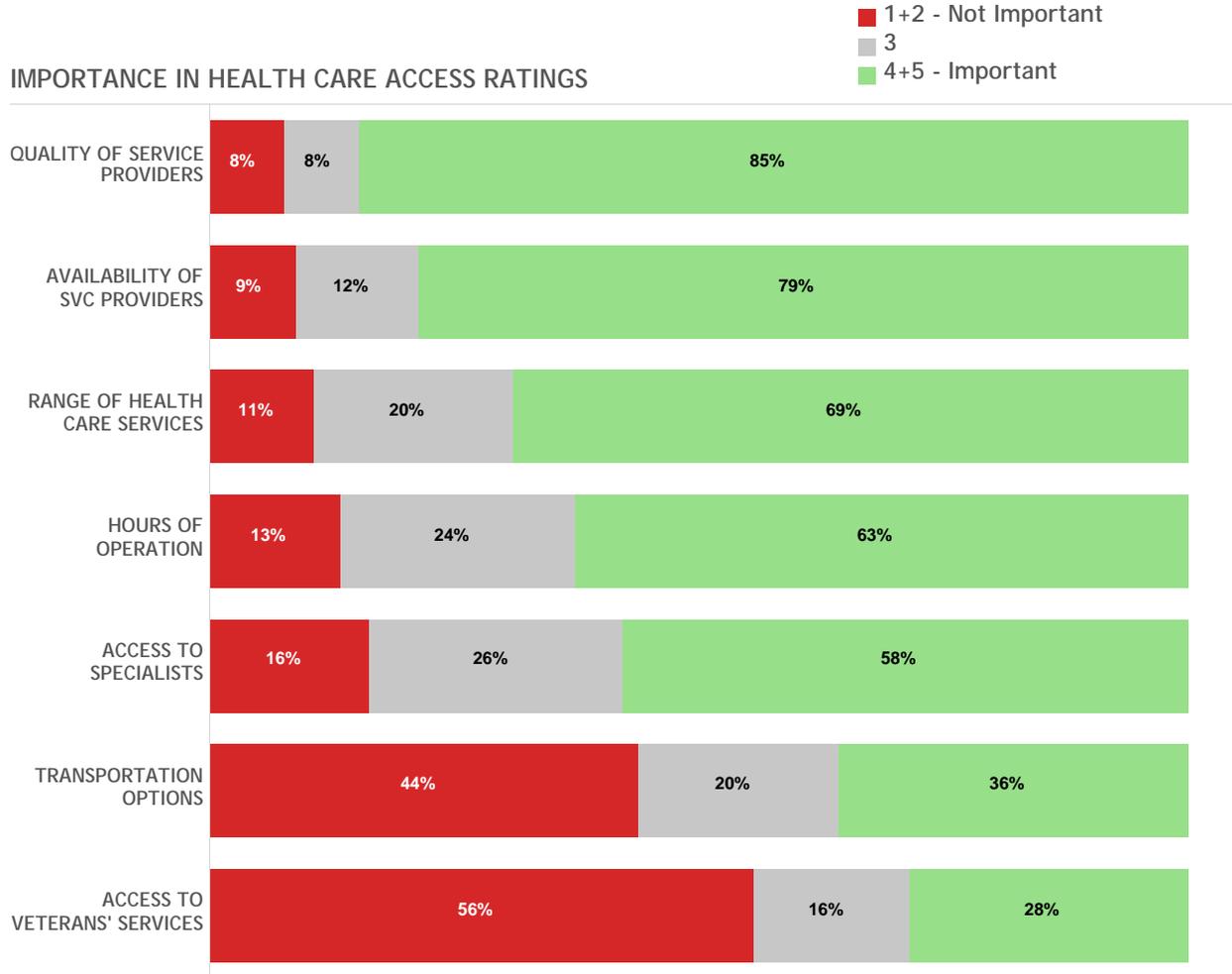
FIGURE 5



Health Care

In terms of the importance to access to health care, the most important factors are the quality of the service providers, the availability of service providers, the range of health care services, the hours of operation, and the access to specialists. Transportation options and access to veterans' services were relatively less important, at least to the overall respondent sample, as seen in Figure 6 below.

FIGURE 6



Retail/Grocery Stores

The importance in access to grocery stores and other retail stores was queried on the survey. The most substantial issues with grocery/retail shopping are the lack of variety, the availability, the costs, and the hours of the stores. These each had a similar response rate, as illustrated in Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 7

