

Memorandum

DATE: October 9, 2024

TO: Rochester Hills Planning Commission

FROM: Jill Bahm, AICP, Partner, Joe Tangari, AICP, Principal Planner Julia Upfal, AICP, Senior Planner, Ian Hogg, Staff Planner, Giffels Webster

SUBJECT: Rochester Hills Master Plan Scenario Engagement Results

Introduction

The City of Rochester Hills's efforts towards a new Master Plan are well underway and will soon culminate in a framework and policy lens for land use and development in the City over the next 10-15 years. This process is not just about predicting the future but also about understanding how the community's values and aspirations can shape potential outcomes.

Through the scenario planning process, the Planning Commission is encouraging thoughtful conversations about community values and how those values could lead to innovative long-range strategies. Planning in this way helps the City take a proactive approach. Rather than simply reacting as needs and concerns arise, the City can anticipate and prepare for them, ensuring a more sustainable future for the community. Scenario planning helps us:

- **Identify key uncertainties:** By understanding the range of possible futures, we can anticipate challenges and opportunities that may arise in areas such as housing, transportation, community health, economic development, and natural features.
- **Explore trade-offs:** Balancing competing interests, such as economic development and environmental protection, is a complex task. Scenarios provide a framework for considering these trade-offs and making informed decisions that address the needs of our community.
- **Align decisions with values:** Our community's values, as expressed in our Master Plan, are central to our decision-making. Scenarios help us ensure that our actions are consistent with these values and support a vibrant and sustainable community.

Three scenarios were created as a tool to help guide the Planning Commission in setting policy directions for the Master Plan. The Planning Commission has met several times to discuss the three potential scenarios, which are intended to illustrate outcomes based on needs and wants of the community. Additionally, the small groups that met in April were reconvened in September to discuss and share feedback on which scenario they believe should guide the Master Plan. A survey was also created and shared with the community to gauge values and goals for key community indicators. Based on the answers participants provided, they would be matched with one of the three scenarios. An overview of the community engagement regarding the scenarios is provided in the following sections. As a reminder the "bottom line" of the three scenarios are:

Scenario #1: Tomorrow as Today

This scenario has strong appeal for maintaining stability and the typical suburban lifestyle, but there are significant trade-offs, especially around inclusivity, sustainability, and future-proofing the community.

Scenario #2: Enhancing Connections

This scenario presents a progressive, future-oriented vision that could improve connectivity, reduce environmental impacts, and diversify the community. However, it comes with significant financial, social, and political trade-offs, especially related to housing affordability and the challenges of managing transitions.

Scenario #3: Rochester Hills Reimagined

This scenario reflects a forward-thinking, sustainable vision that addresses key urban issues, such as housing, mobility, and community engagement. However, it requires careful planning to manage resistance from certain groups, mitigate displacement, and ensure that infrastructure improvements keep pace with development.

Overview of the Planning Commission Study Sessions

June 18th, 2024 Planning Commission Study Session

An overview of the Preferred Scenarios was presented to the Planning Commission. The three scenarios presented were: Tomorrow as Today, Enhancing Connections, and Rochester Hills Reimagined. Data supporting each of these scenarios was also presented and discussed with the Planning Commission.

July 16th, 2024 Planning Commission Study Session

The Planning Commission participated in an exercise that covered the Preferred Scenarios from the previous meeting. Planning Commission members were asked to list the pros and cons of each scenario and decide which scenario would guide the next phase of the Master Plan Update. The result of the discussion was a decision to continue working on the Preferred Scenario that most closely aligns with the wants, needs, and values of the community.

September 17th, 2024 Planning Commission Study Session

The Planning Commission met again to continue their discussion on which Scenario should guide the Master Plan process. Members of the Commission participated in an interactive work session where they were assigned roles based on different stakeholders in the community. These ranged from young families, senior citizens, and large businesses. The exercise led to a good discussion that resulted in a clearer consensus of which scenario should be used as a guide. Additionally, members of the Planning Commission were interested in receiving the feedback from the small group workshops and the results from the scenario survey.

Summaries of Engagement

Small Group Workshops

On September 23rd, key stakeholders were once again invited to participate in a facilitated discussion on the future of Rochester Hills. The discussion centered on the three scenarios that were presented to the Planning Commission. Participants, many of whom were present for the Phase 1 small group discussions (April 2024), were asked to share their feedback on which scenario should influence the Master Plan process. In the following section a summary of the discussions for each of the groups is provided.

Eight different groups participated in the discussions.

1. Local Business Leaders
2. LDFA Committee Members
3. Places of Worship
4. Key Staff
5. Nonprofits
6. Residents
7. Boards and Commissions

Each small group had a different perspective on the scenarios during the discussion. Summaries of each group's responses are below.

Local Business Leaders

Six local business leaders attended the scenario discussion. There were a variety of different businesses that were represented. These ranged from local restaurants to insurance companies, and retail stores.

Scenario #2 represents a realistic future for the City of Rochester Hills.

During the discussion of the proposed scenarios, the businesses leaders and representatives shared that they view Scenario #2 represented the most feasible and realistic path for the Master Plan to use as a guide. Participants believed this scenario made the most sense and understood that it is difficult to change the pattern of development, but also expressed a desire for the City to advance and meet the needs of the future.

There is interest in implementing new housing types in the community to attract new residents and make housing more attainable.

Housing was a key aspect of the discussion. Many of the participants shared that they were interested in learning more about the housing choices described in Scenario #2 and Scenario #3. They understood that housing is expensive and shared that their employees may not be able afford to live in Rochester Hills if they don't already live in the City. Some of the discussion revolved around looking to examples from other communities in the United States and in other countries to see how they make housing more affordable and attainable.

There are generational shifts occurring in the workforce, especially with younger generations.

The businesses representatives shared they have noticed a shift in the way younger generations work and interact with the world. Scenarios #2 and #3 were seen to address these generational shifts and shifts in preferences by providing more walkable and attainable housing for younger families, but also providing resources and options for seniors. Scenario #1 was viewed as a path of least resistance, but there were concerns about the cons associated with this scenario and not addressing changes in spending and living patterns.

LDFA Committee Members

Three members of the Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA) participated in a discussion of the proposed scenarios.

The three scenarios should be implemented in different parts of the City.

The general consensus of participants was that each of the scenarios could be implemented in different sections of the City. They believed that there were benefits to applying aspects of all three of the scenarios in parts of the City where those details made the most sense and where they were most appropriate.

Redevelopment is an important part of a community's viability, but long-time residents' concerns should be top of mind.

Two of the three participants were long-time residents of Rochester Hills and there were concerns over the potential changes that were listed in Scenarios #2 and #3. However, as members of the LDFA they understood that redevelopment of sites within the community will play a role in the future. They believed that there would need to be a balance of innovating and advancing the community, but long-time residents concerns should be prioritized and be included in any future decision.

Affordability is a concern for current residents and attracting new residents.

The affordability concerns mentioned in Scenarios #2 and #3 are real and the City should look to redevelop and develop in a way that balances the needs of current and potential residents. Downsizing for seniors is difficult with the cost of living and the housing options available to them and the same can be said for potential residents and younger families looking to live in the City. Developments like the Brooklands and the Trio Apartments were mentioned as examples of ways the City could redevelop and address affordability concerns in the future.

Places of Worship

There was only one representative from a place of worship within Rochester Hills. The pastor from First Baptist Church provided insight into which scenario they believed should influence the Master Plan.

Scenarios #2 and #3 provide a way for a wider variety of individuals to have stronger ties to Rochester Hills and their places of worship.

The participant expressed an interest in Scenarios #2 and #3 as they provided a way for a more diverse congregation in their organization. They believed that a congregation that ranges all ages and incomes leads to a stronger community. The pastor also shared that there are a fair number of parishioners that drive and live outside the City and the variety of housing options listed in Scenarios #2 and #3 were seen as a way to bring current members and future members to their place of worship.

Housing affordability and providing housing options for younger generations was a concern.

The pastor shared that he lives just north of the city, and at first preferred Scenario #1, but eventually was drawn to prefer Scenarios #2 and #3 because of the affordability concerns that continue with the first scenario. The participant mentioned that his children were interested in living in Rochester Hills and buying their first home in the City but were not able to afford a home. There was support for providing more housing options and finding ways to attract young people and younger families.

Key Staff

Eleven City Staff members attended the facilitated discussion. Several different departments were represented, with Staff sharing which scenario should be considered for the Master Plan update.

Scenario #1 was seen as the most realistic and feasible from a city administration point of view.

A majority of staff members saw the first scenario as the most reasonable and feasible, however there were a few participants that believed the other scenarios could be implemented. Additional housing and density were a potential concern for public safety staff members as they shared that greater density could make it more difficult to fight fires. Additional building code updates would be required to make sure that residents were safe. There were some concerns over attracting younger families in order to sustain the school system.

Providing different transportation options could potentially address current traffic concerns, but there is no clear answer.

Staff understood that there were traffic issues and safety concerns but were apprehensive to some of the transportation options listed in Scenarios #2 and #3. Regional transit would be difficult without the support of surrounding communities. Advancing the transportation systems in the City is appealing, but how the City does that was unclear and seen to be difficult with the second and third scenarios.

Nonprofits

Ten leaders from local nonprofits attended the discussion on September 23rd. These leaders provided feedback on how non-profit organizations and their point of view interpreted the three proposed scenarios.

A blend of details from Scenario #2 and #3 provides the City with the best opportunity address current issues.

The general consensus of participants was that a mixture or combination of the second and third scenario would best equip the City with the right resources and tools to address current issues. The main issues that needed to be addressed were housing affordability and walkability within the City. There are very few affordable senior living communities and there are limited housing options for seniors looking to downsize. Younger families are also finding it difficult to afford to live in the City. However, there were some concerns over the potential for displacement, which affects people of all ages.

Improving walkability and accessibility needs to be practical and relevant for residents in the City.

Improving overall accessibility, walkability, and mobility were seen as important issues that need to be addressed. However, there were concerns over how these aspects of the community would be improved. Participants shared that they would like to see solutions that connect the community and link isolated sections of the City that are walkable.

Residents

Residents were offered the opportunity to come and participate in the scenario discussion. Two residents from the Streamwood Estate subdivisions attended the discussion. They shared their input on which scenario should guide the Master Plan.

Scenario #2 was viewed as a realistic solution for the City but could potentially be overdone.

The two residents that participated in the discussion expressed an inclination towards Scenario #2. They viewed this scenario as the most realistic and had concerns over maintaining the status quo or the potential of greater density. The first scenario did not appeal to them, they believed the City needs to advance and progress in order maintain its level of services and amenities for residents. The third scenario and its more dense and urban features did not appeal to the participants.

Attracting and retaining younger generations should be a priority for the City.

There were concerns over the current affordability issues surrounding housing in the City and surrounding communities. Younger people and younger families are having a difficult time buying or even renting housing that fits within their price range. The participants expressed a desire for a mix of generations in order to support the school system, City amenities, and way of living. By providing additional housing options and more walkable areas, the City could find a way to bring younger families into the community and retain younger people.

Boards and Commissions

Five members from the Zoning Board of Appeals, Historic Districts Commission, and Avondale School Board were able to attend the conversations and provide their perspective on which scenario the Master Plan should refer to during the update process.

Scenario #2 was viewed as a logical guide for the Master Plan.

Maintaining the status quo was not seen as sustainable and not with the character of the community. Scenario #3 was interpreted as too much of a change and would be difficult to implement. The second scenario provided residents with the most realistic scenario and provided the City with a good balance of maintaining the character while progressing the City. Preserving historical aspects of the community and the community's character should be a priority for any future planning efforts and take into account when decisions are made.

Shifts in the preferences of younger generations will need to be addressed in the future.

Younger generations are prioritizing walkability and are relying less on personal vehicles. More dense and accessible living arrangements are attractive to younger people and Scenario #2 provides a good blend of providing new housing options while maintaining the low density feel of the community. Affordability was a concern especially for the local workforce, which may be unable to afford to live in the City.

Youth Council

14 members of the Youth Council were able to participate in the scenario discussion on October 2, 2024. They were able to share which scenario should be used as a guide for the Master Plan.

Scenario #2 provides a balance between each of the potential scenarios.

Generally, members of the Youth Council believed that Scenario #2 provided the most realistic future while addressing current issues. There was some appeal for the first scenario because the City is a great place to live, but participants believed that some aspect of change will be required. Scenario #3 was viewed as potentially difficult and too much change, but improving walkability, increasing public transportation options, and emphasizing health and wellness were details that appealed to the group. Scenario #2 was deemed to meet the City's motto and desire for innovation and that should be prioritized during the Master Plan process.

Most members expressed a desire to move away after high school but would love to come back and raise a family in Rochester Hills.

When asked if where they see themselves living in the future, many members of the Youth Council shared that they saw themselves living elsewhere while attending college and starting their careers. However, many of them wanted to come back and buy a home in Rochester Hills and start their families here. There was a clear consensus that the members enjoyed growing up in the City and would like to return here one day in the future.

“Thinking About the Future” Survey Results

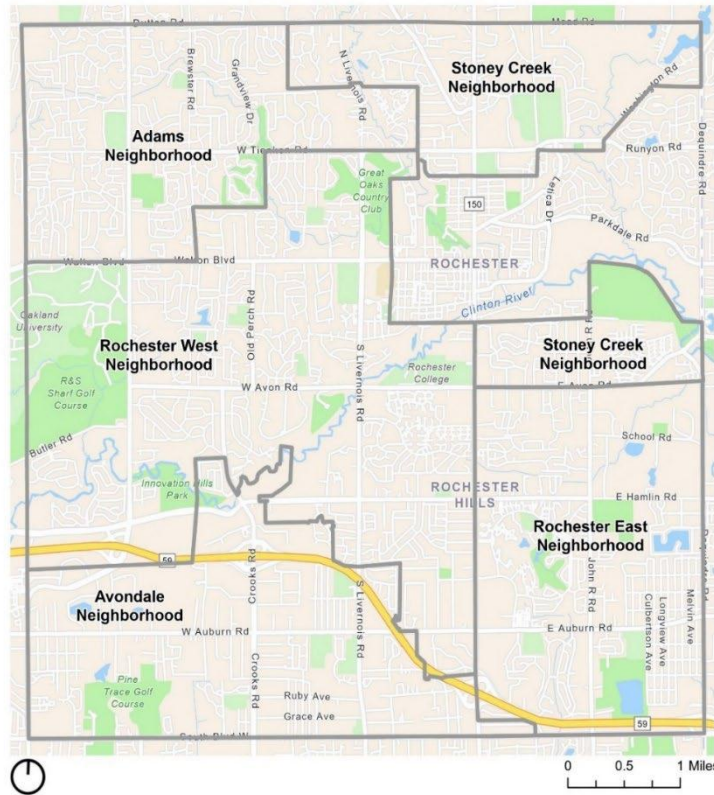
A survey was designed to gain further insight from the community as to the values given to key community elements. This insight can help the Planning Commission consider which scenario should be used as a guide for the Master Plan process. Each participant was asked to answer a set of questions that covered a variety of planning challenges and select which answer most aligned with their way of thinking. Based on the answers the participant provided they would fall into one of the three scenarios.

Overall, 751 responses were recorded. The first question asked each participant to share which neighborhood/high school district they reside. An overview of the survey results for each of the planning areas is provided in this section. The map to right serves as a reminder of the planning areas used during the Master Plan process.

Each answer was assigned a point value of either 5 points, 3 points, or 1 point. It is important to note, that this was for grouping purposes, and is not intended to indicate “right” or “wrong” answers. When the participant answered all the questions, the total value of their responses was calculated. Their final score was associated with one of the scenarios.

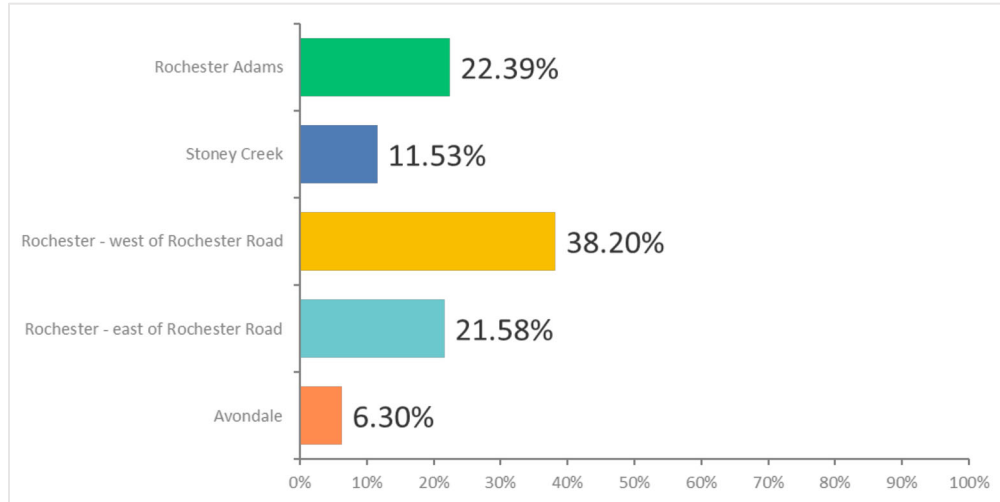
- Scenario #1: 1-10 points
- Scenario #2: 11-20 points
- Scenario #3: 21-30 points

A summary of the survey results is in the following section. The responses suggest that the values stated by participants reflect the need for a balanced approach to development over time; the positions on housing, transportation, and natural features mean that resources and development will be required. For instance, while community values the preservation of natural features, this does not mean that all development is incompatible with other goals. A balanced approach to development can ensure that the City continues to thrive while protecting its natural resources.



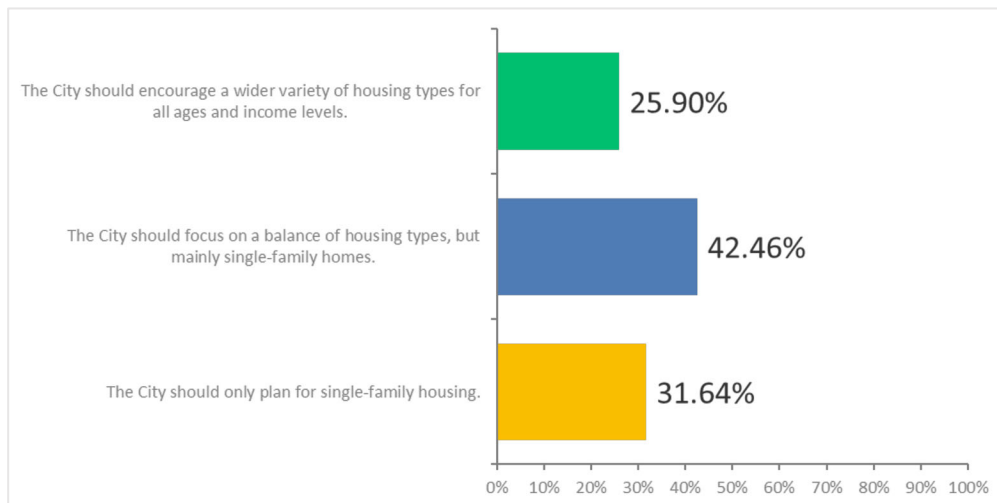
Question #1: For this Master Plan process, we're looking at high school districts as neighborhoods to deepen our understanding of the needs/wants of the community. Please indicate which high school district you live or work in.

746 participants shared which planning area they reside in. Rochester West had the largest share of survey takers, followed by Rochester East, Adams, Stoney Creek, and Avondale.



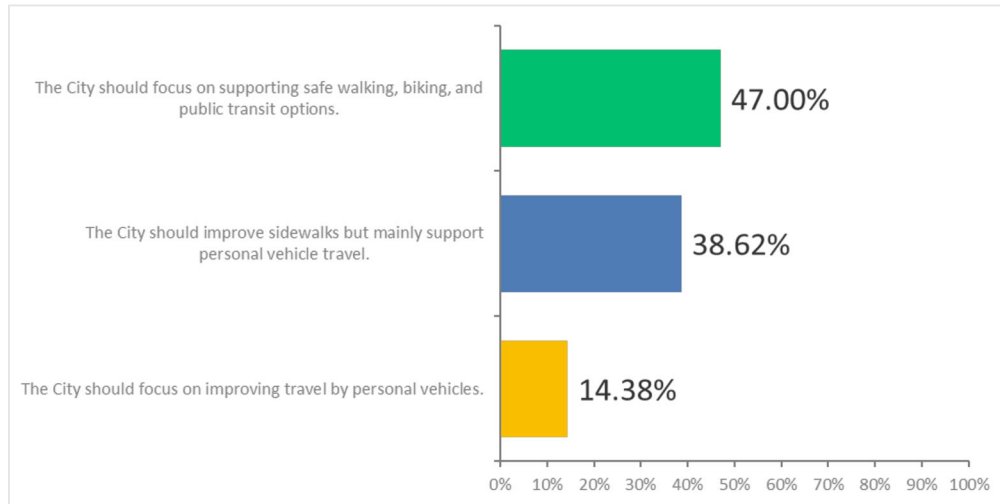
Question #2: What do you think about planning for future housing in the City of Rochester Hills?

Question #2 asked participants to share how they think the City should plan for housing in the future. Just over a quarter (25.90%) of respondents believed the City should focus on a variety of housing types and for housing for all-income levels. The largest share of respondents nearly half (42.56%) shared that the City should have a balance between housing types, but still prioritize single-family homes. Lastly, nearly a third (31.64%) of respondents think the City should only consider and plan for low-density, single-family homes.



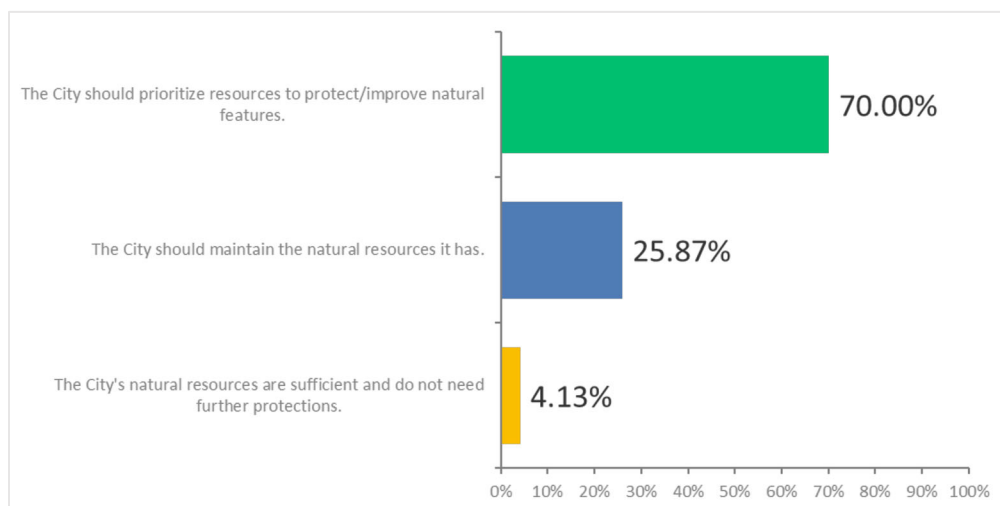
Question #3: What do you think about planning for the City's future transportation?

Question #3 was geared towards asking participants to share how they envision transportation should be planned in the City. Almost half (47.0%) of responses indicated that people think the City should plan and support a variety of walking, biking, and public transit options in the City. Over a third of participants (38.62%) believe the City should implement more sidewalks, but still plan for continued use of a personal vehicle. Lastly, only 14.38% of individuals shared that the future transportation system should solely focus on improving travel by personal vehicles.



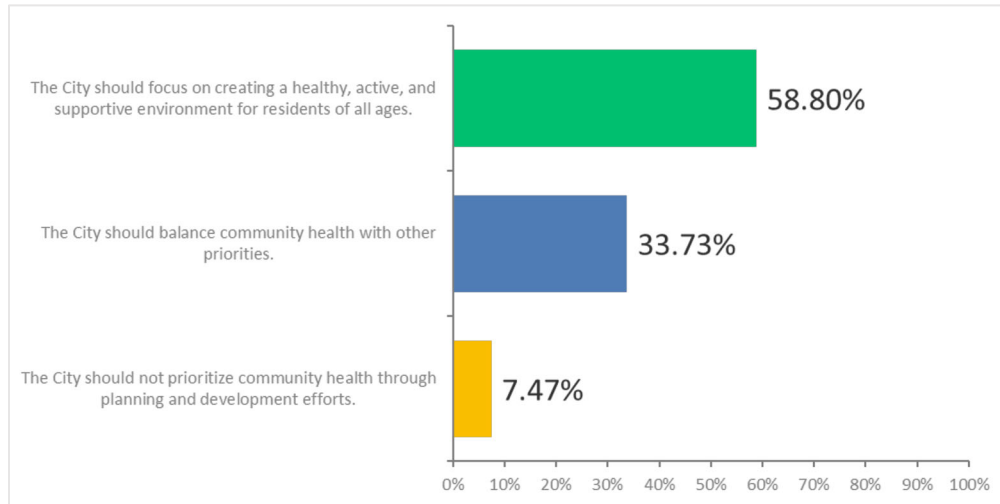
Question #4: What do you think about planning for the City's natural resources, like open spaces, wetlands, woodlands, waterways, and parks?

Question #4 focused on asking survey takers to share how they believe natural resources and open spaces should be managed in the future. Most respondents (70%) shared that the City should prioritize protecting and improving natural features. Whereas a quarter of responses (25.87%) indicated that the City should only maintain the natural resources that already exist. A small percentage (4.13%) of participants believe the current level of natural resources is sufficient and no future protections are required.



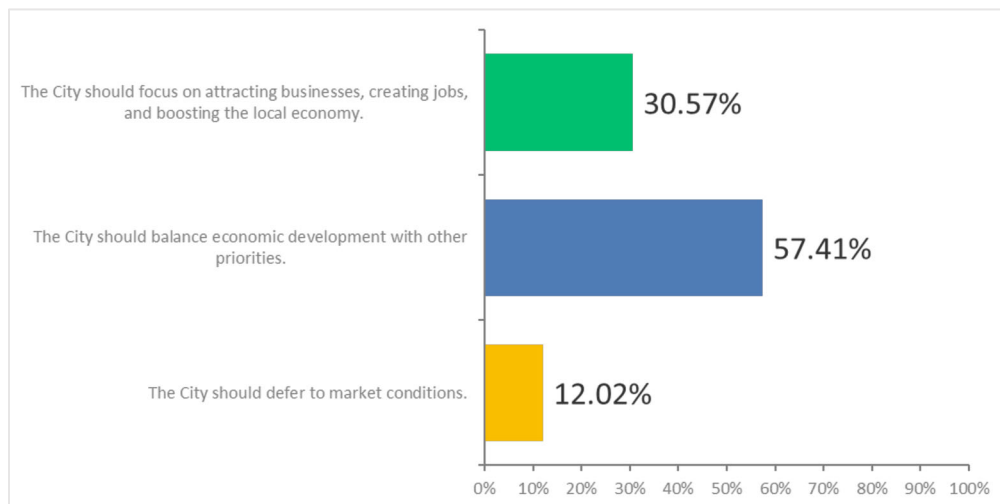
Question #5: How important is it for the City to prioritize health and well-being in future planning and development?

Question #5 asked participants to share how important they believe planning for community health and well-being should be for the City. Just over half (58.80%) of responses showed a desire for the City to focus on creating an environment that is supportive of healthy and active lifestyles for all people. Slightly over a third (33.73%) of participants believe the City should balance community health with other initiatives and priorities. Only 7.47% of respondents shared that the City should not prioritize community health.



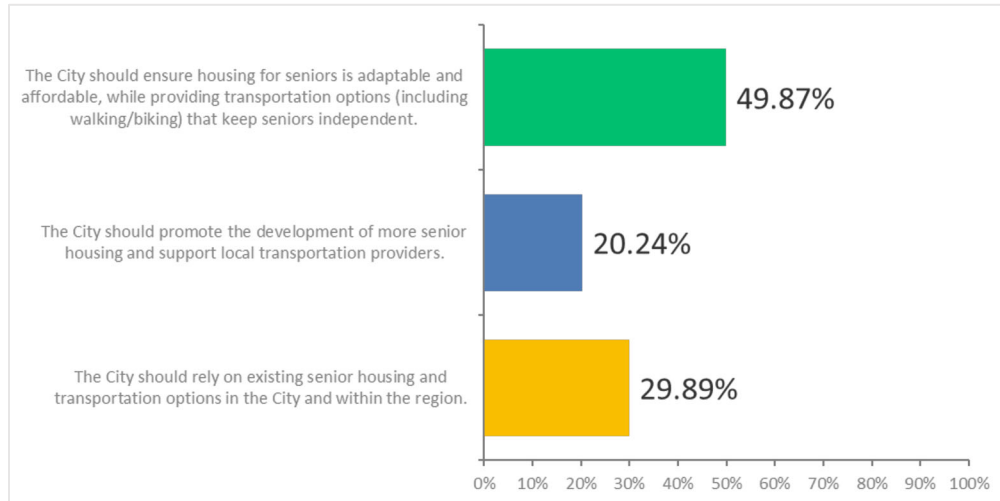
Question #6: How important is it for the City to prioritize local economic development in its long-range planning?

Question #6 asked individuals to share their way of thinking of how the City should prioritize the local economy in their planning efforts. Just under a third (30.57%) of people responded that the City should focus on boosting the local economy. Over half of participants (57.41%) think the City should balance economic development with other initiatives and programs. Only 12.02% of answers fell under the choice that stated the City should defer to market conditions rather than plan in a way that focuses on improving the local economy.



Question #7: How should the City plan for its aging residents?

The last question of the scenario survey asked participants to share how they think the City should plan for its aging population. Nearly half (49.87%) of respondents answered by sharing that the City should plan for affordable senior housing and provide seniors with transportation options. A fifth (20.24%) of respondents indicated that they believe the City should encourage more senior housing and transportation options, but not focus on ensuring that housing is affordable. Just under a third (29.89%) of survey takers shared that the City should rely on existing infrastructure in the region.



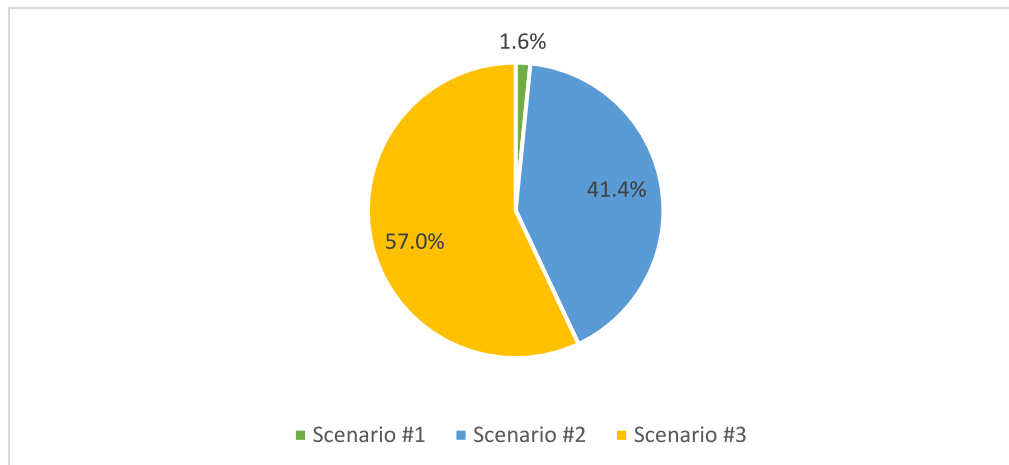
Preferred Scenario by Planning Area

In the following section a breakdown of which scenario participants' answers aligned with. As a reminder, the range of the total points indicated which scenario the participants' final score fell under.

- Scenario #1: 1-10 points
- Scenario #2: 11-20 points
- Scenario #3: 21-30 points

Citywide: Scenario #3

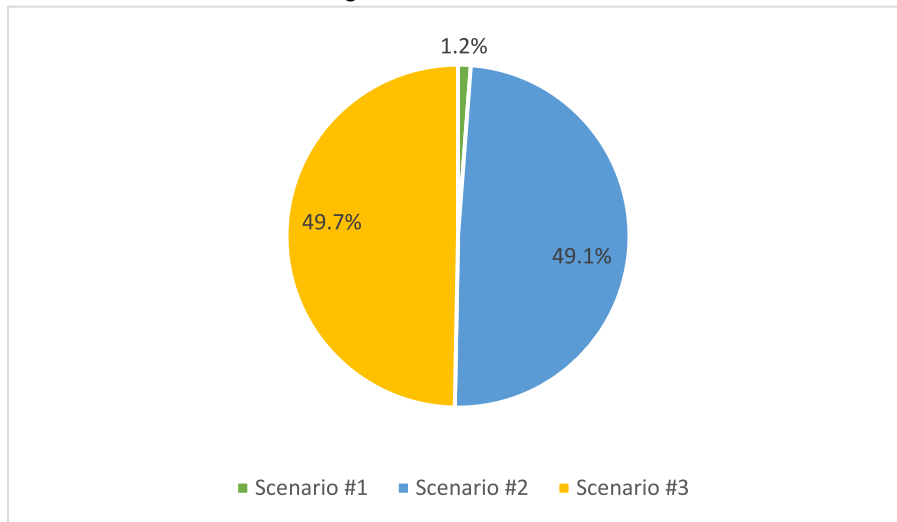
Overall, 57.0% of respondents had a score that aligned with Scenario #3. 41.4% participants' answer choices indicated they prefer Scenario #2. Only 1.6% of participants believed the City should use Scenario #1 as the guide for the Master Plan.



The citywide results mostly align with the feedback that was shared by the small group workshops and meeting with the Youth Council. Participants believe the City should plan in a way that enables the City to advance and innovate. One note regarding the citywide results is that 99 responses were near the threshold between Scenario #2 and Scenario #3. These 99 responses had a score of either 21 or 22 points. If these results were to be included in the Scenario #2 range, the total score breakdown would be 54.6% for Scenario #2 and 43.8% for Scenario #3.

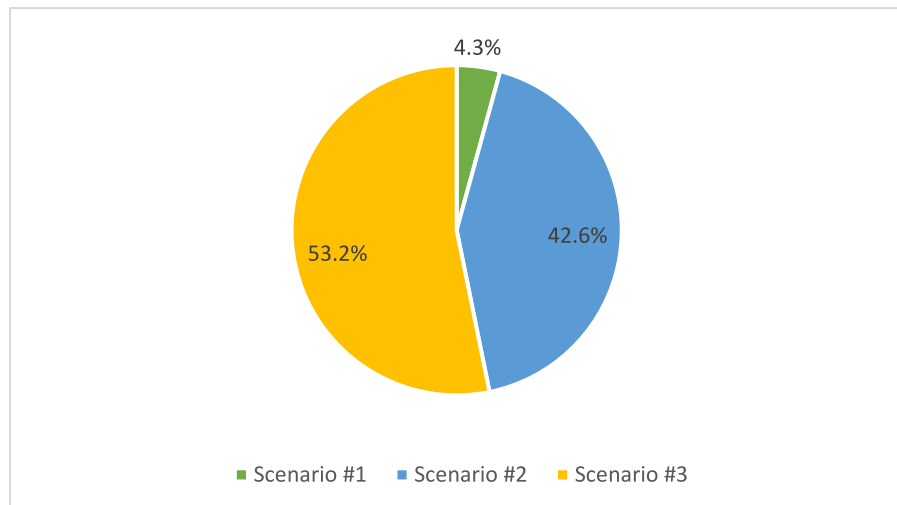
Adams: Scenario #3

Survey participants that shared that they live in the Adams Planning Area had a nearly even split between Scenario #2 and Scenario #3. 49.1% of respondents answered that Scenario #2 should be used as the guide for the Master Plan. Whereas 49.7% of participants answered in a way that indicated that Scenario #3 should be the preferred scenario. Only a small percentage (1.2%) of participants answered in a way that indicated they preferred Scenario #1. This nearly perfect split between Scenario #2 and Scenario #3 implies that residents in the Adams Planning Area have a desire for a blend between the two scenarios.



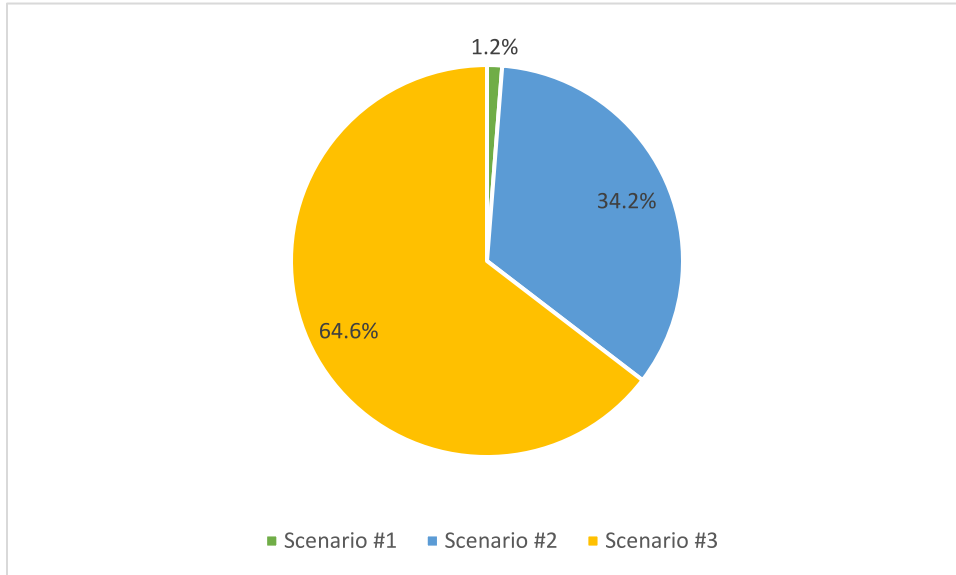
Avondale: Scenario #3

Similar to the citywide results, the answers provided by the residents in the Avondale Planning Area aligned with Scenario #3. With just over half (53.2%) of the responses falling within the range that represented Scenario #3. Scenario #2 received 42.6% of the total responses and Scenario #1 received 4.3% of the total responses. The share of responses shows a desire for the City to move forward and innovate while also maintaining key aspects of Rochester Hills.



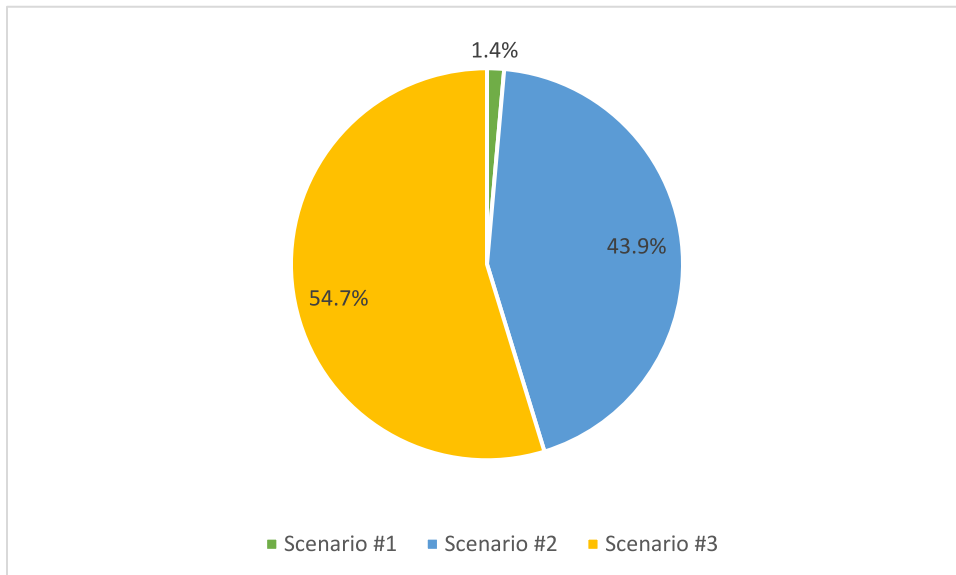
Rochester East: Scenario #3

The results for Rochester East demonstrate that a larger share of the responses aligned with Scenario #3 when compared to the citywide results and other Planning Areas. Nearly two thirds (64.6%) of total scores resulted in participants to align with Scenario #3. Just over a third (34.2%) of respondents' way of thinking aligned with Scenario #2. A small percentage of respondents (1.2%) expressed a desire for Scenario #1. The residents in Rochester East may be more interested in planning efforts that fall under Scenario #3 with some characteristics that include aspects of Scenario #2.



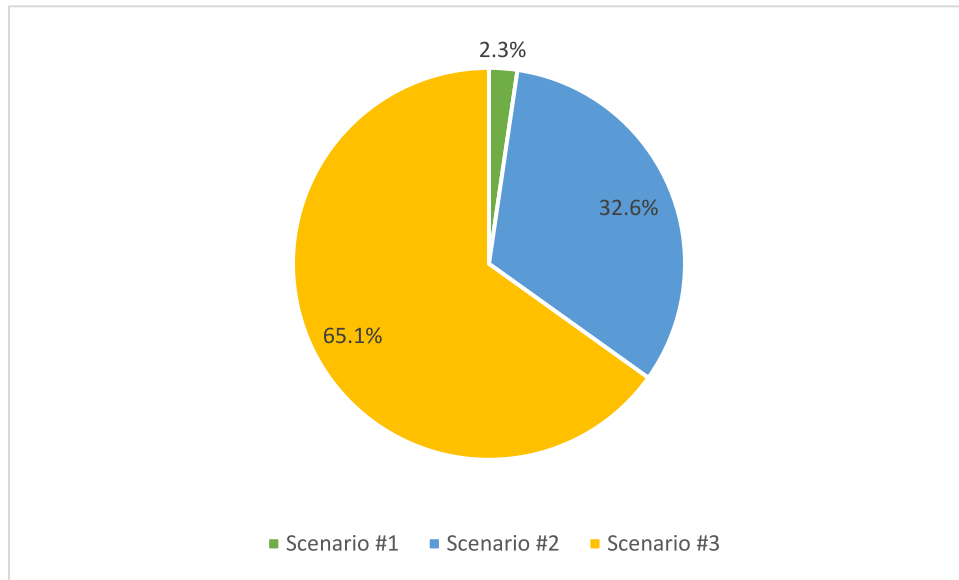
Rochester West: Scenario #3

Residents in Rochester West provided answers that are more closely associated with the citywide results. Over half of responses (54.7%) fit within the range for Scenario #3. A slightly smaller percentage of responses (43.9%) indicated that Scenario #2 is the preferred scenario for the Master Plan. As with other Planning Areas, a small percentage (1.4%) of answers fell within the range for Scenario #1.



Stoney Creek: Scenario #3

The largest share of responses for any Planning Area that is associated with Scenario #3 was found in Stoney Creek. Nearly a third (65.1%) of answers demonstrate that residents responded in a way that matched Scenario #3. Scenario #2 had a smaller share of response (32.6%) but had a larger share of responses than Scenario #1 (2.3%). Overall, residents in Stoney Creek may prefer that the Master Plan be guided by aspects of Scenario #3 with some details and aspects of Scenario #2.

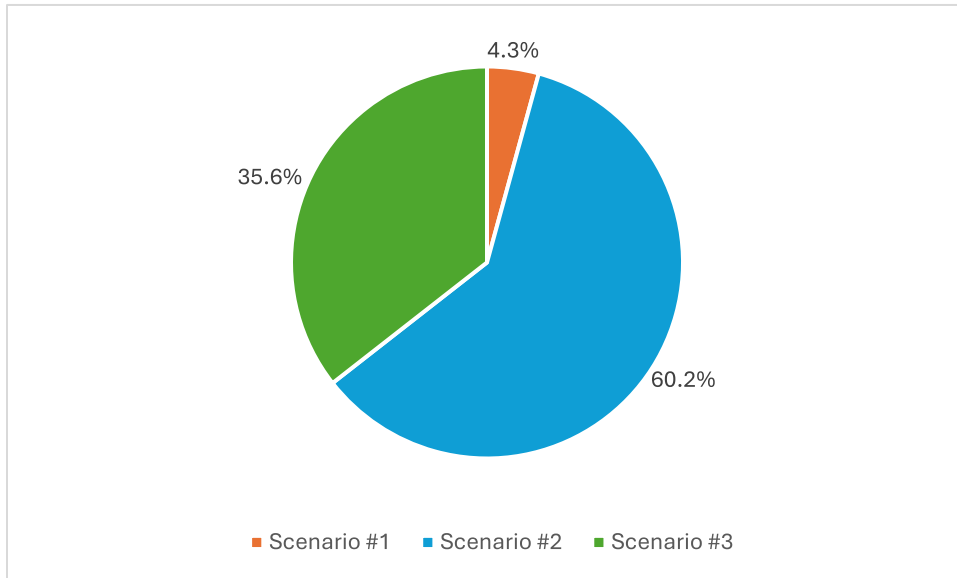


Alternate Survey Results

While the beginning of this survey summary section noted the relationship between values and balanced strategies for the future, we did consider how the question on natural features could have been interpreted by some to imply a higher value on natural features such that development would be minimized in the future. To see how that could impact the results, we reversed the point allocation for question 4, so that the strongest support for prioritizing natural features was given 1 point, reducing the number of total points for that question. The findings with this modification follow.

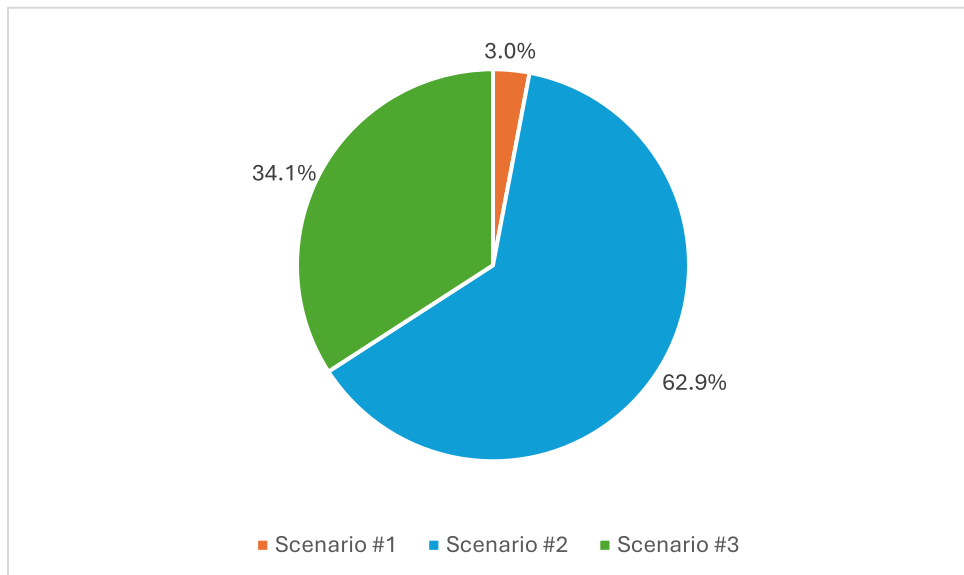
Citywide Results

Points	Scenario	Number of respondents	Percent of Responses
1-10 Points	Scenario #1	32	4.3%
11-20 Points	Scenario #2	452	60.2%
21-30 Points	Scenario #3	267	35.6%



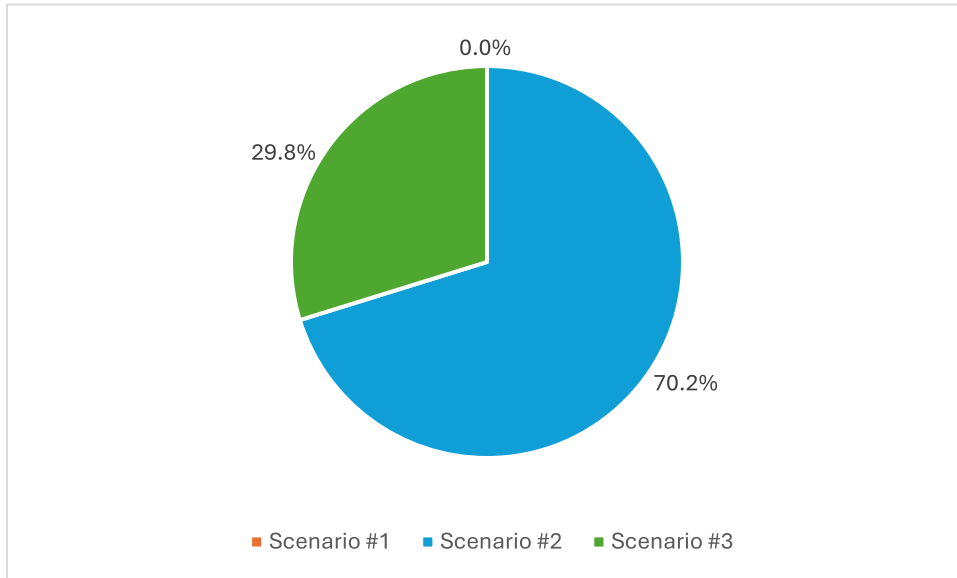
Adams Results

Points	Scenario	Number of respondents	Percent of Responses
1-10 Points	Scenario #1	5	3.0%
11-20 Points	Scenario #2	105	62.9%
21-30 Points	Scenario #3	57	34.1%



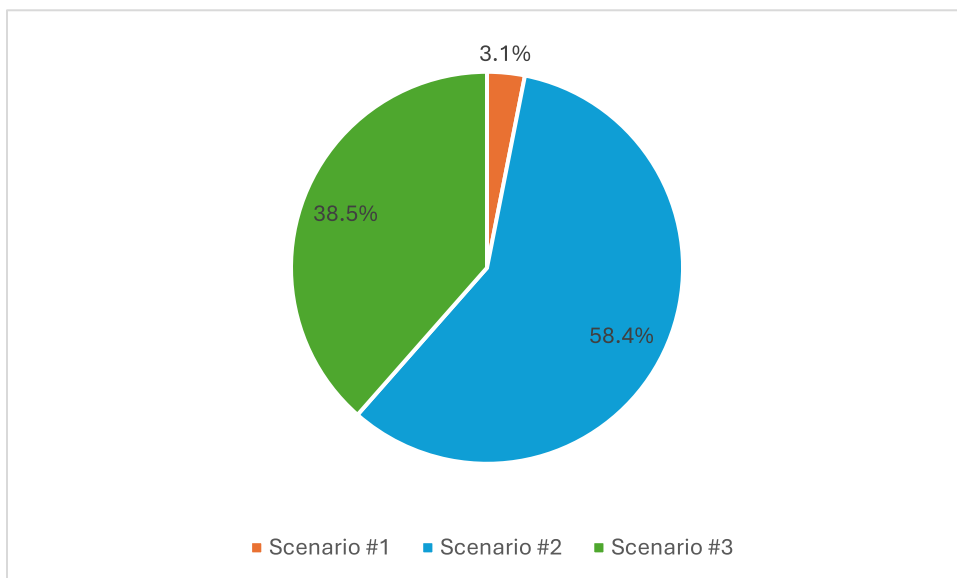
Avondale Results

Points	Scenario	Number of respondents	Percent of Responses
1-10 Points	Scenario #1	0	0.0%
11-20 Points	Scenario #2	33	70.2%
21-30 Points	Scenario #3	14	29.8%



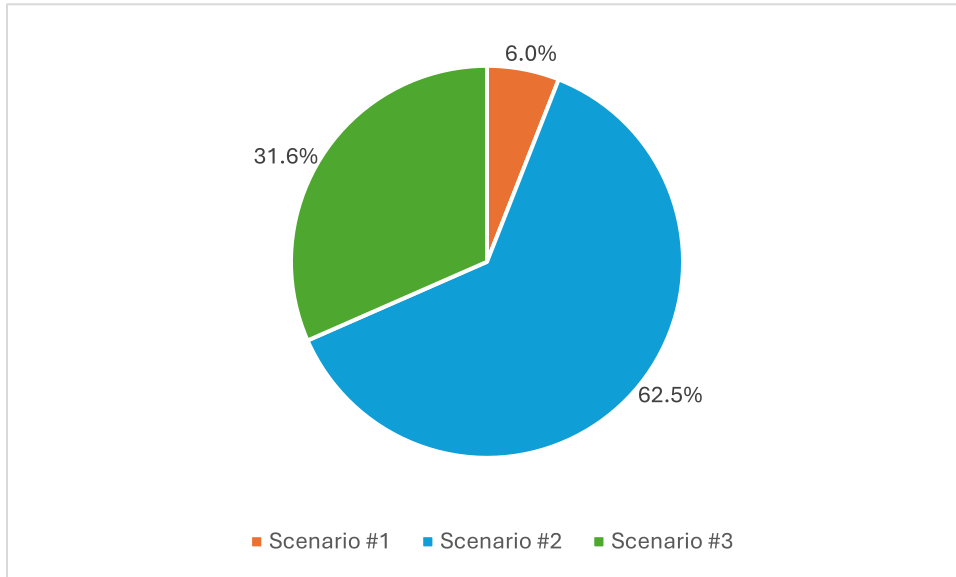
Rochester East Results

Points	Scenario	Number of respondents	Percent of Responses
1-10 Points	Scenario #1	5	3.1%
11-20 Points	Scenario #2	94	58.4%
21-30 Points	Scenario #3	62	38.5%



Rochester West Results

Points	Scenario	Number of respondents	Percent of Responses
1-10 Points	Scenario #1	17	6.0%
11-20 Points	Scenario #2	178	62.5%
21-30 Points	Scenario #3	90	31.6%



Stoney Creek Results

Points	Scenario	Number of respondents	Percent of Responses
1-10 Points	Scenario #1	5	5.8%
11-20 Points	Scenario #2	40	46.5%
21-30 Points	Scenario #3	41	47.7%

