



The Voices of Sonoma Valley

Results of Sustainable Sonoma's Listening Sessions, 2018

By Sustainable Sonoma, Sonoma Valley, California

October 2018

www.SustainableSonoma.net

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Abstract

Sustainable Sonoma reports that its listening sessions recorded over 1600 comments about what Sonoma Valley residents and workers want for the future of their community. By far the most common opinion expressed is that Sonoma Valley should have more affordable housing of many types and prices. Other common opinions recorded included protecting open space; increasing mobility options such as walking, biking, and public transit; seeing more connection and inclusion across our community; and providing better opportunities for young people. Sustainable Sonoma will use these findings to inform their choice of issues that affect our whole community, to take action on together.



The Voices of Sonoma Valley

Results of Sustainable Sonoma's Listening Sessions, 2018
Executive summary



Sustainable Sonoma is a forum where a diverse group of Sonoma Valley people—businesses, environment, social justice, nonprofits, and government—take action on solutions to our community's biggest challenges.

Before choosing which compelling issues to act on together, Sustainable Sonoma conducted listening sessions across the community to understand what people most want to see in the future of Sonoma Valley. Over 1600 comments were recorded by about 350 people at in-person meetings and online at 20 Sustainable Sonoma listening sessions between March and October 2018.

The opinion expressed most often, twice as often as the next most common opinion, was that Sonoma Valley should have more affordable housing of many types and prices. People want to see a wider variety of housing options, that can be afforded by people who work in the Valley, at all income levels. The next most commonly expressed comment was that the Valley needs more and better public transportation, from buses to trolleys. In third place were three priorities with roughly equal weight: more options for bicycling, the need to protect our open space and rural character, and the importance of a fair community that provides access and opportunity for all.

Sustainable Sonoma cautions that the listening sessions collected qualitative information that reflects only a partial snapshot of our community's opinions. The Sustainable Sonoma Council will consider the findings of the listening sessions, together with other information about Sonoma Valley and their own knowledge, to select compelling issues to act on, together, over the next year.

A report on Sustainable Sonoma's listening sessions and their findings is available [here](#).



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Full Report

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1. Purpose

The listening sessions of 2018 were intended to inform the selection of priority actions of Sustainable Sonoma, by helping to:

- Identify overlapping community interests
- Look for alignment in those interests
- Look for divergence
- Inform choices for future projects that Sustainable Sonoma could pursue
- Hear about potential interventions
- Advance and inform community dialogue

2. Findings

All listening session responses, the codes used to organize the comments, and the codes applied to individual comments, can be viewed online as a Google Sheet spreadsheet [here](#). Readers are urged to browse the raw comments.

By the numbers:

Listening sessions: 20

Participants: 350

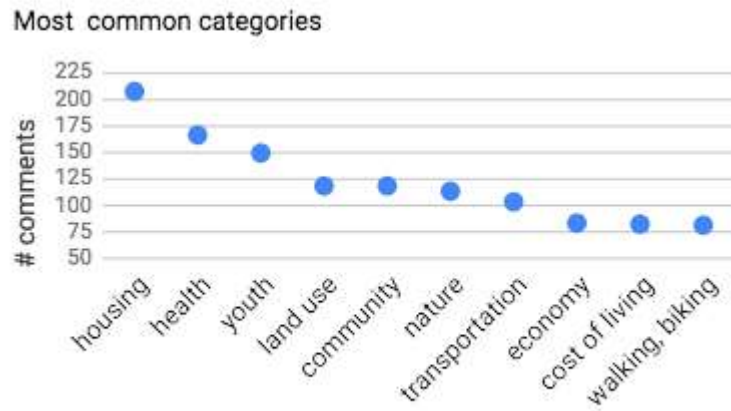
Standard questions: 9

Responses (sticky notes): 1098

Comments (individual opinions expressed): 1604

2.1. Highlights

The most common topics of comment are shown in the following graph. Of the 19 topics, the most common was housing, with 207 comments. A typical comment coded as belonging in the "housing" topic: "Allow innovative housing development, via granny units, tiny houses."



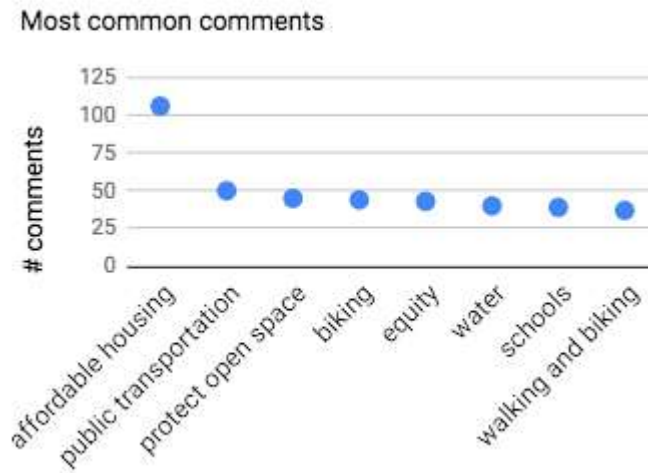
Healthy people and healthy communities was the second most common topic, with 166 comments. Typical comments: “More information on how to eat healthy.” “Easy access for all for medical care.”

Supporting youth and children was the third most common topic, with 149 comments. Typical comment: “Support for families who support children.”

Land use, the fourth most common topic, with 119 comments, covers patterns of development that people want to see, including protecting open space, developing in core areas, and similar concepts. Typical comment: “The biggest challenge is to find the "sweet spot" between preservation and development.”

“Community” was a very common topic, with 118 comments. This was striking because the listening session questions did not ask about community specifically. Comments in this category talk about the wish for more fellow-feeling among Sonoma Valley residents, more communication across barriers, more connection. A typical comment: “Being open and accepting of everyone.”

The most common comments--that is, individual desires expressed--are shown on the second graph. Of these, by far the most common comment was the desire for more affordable housing, with 106 comments. A typical comment coded as “affordable housing:” “We need to find a way to provide more affordable housing... so that people who grow up here can afford to stay here.”



Many people (50 comments) wanted to see more and better public transportation, and had specific ideas for it. Typical comments: “Invest in the bus system.” “Make buses free. Run a trolley up and down Hwy 12.”

It was striking that the desire for more opportunities for biking and walking were very common comments, both appearing in the most 8 common comments for a total of 81 comments. Typical comments: “A walking path on Arnold.” “Incentives to bike vs drive.” “Walkable towns” a grocery, hardware, coffee, bookstore, that people can walk to.”

Because comments can nest within other topics, there are an infinite number of ways to parse the comments.

Example 1: There were 106 comments that used the term “affordable housing,” as shown in the graph above. But there were additional codes related to the high cost of housing, including the codes for “rent is too high,” “people are getting pushed out (or have already been pushed out) because they can’t afford to live here,” “more housing that middle-income earners can afford,” and “people who work here should be able to afford to live here.” Adding these comments to the 106 for “affordable housing” brings the total to 181, very much larger than the next most common comment of public transportation. A typical comment: “I think you need more living places that are accessible to families with less resources.”

Example 2: Similarly, “protect open space” was a common comment, with 45 comments. However, adding related comments, coded as “I want to see more open space,” “more and bigger parks,” and “access to open space,” brings the total to 96 comments, which is substantially more than the second-most common comment, “public transportation.” A typical comment: “Find pockets of land for developing without losing rural landscape, and insure wildlife corridors.”

Depending on how related comments are combined, other rankings of the most common opinions could be constructed, but it appears that housing affordability would always easily be the top issue.

Less frequent comments that were voiced 25 to 30 times included:

- Youth need more support for career pathways other than college. Typical comment: “Anything but college has become akin to failure in our society. We need to respect all forms of work.”
- Healthcare should be affordable and accessible to all.
- Jobs need to pay a living wage.
- Fix traffic congestion and parking problems.
- People need to eat healthier food.
- Young people need more and better activities outside of school.

Critical comments were limited by the positive framing of the questions, but there were some. Comments about the need to diversify agriculture or “too many grapes” numbered 19. Critical comments about the desire to “reduce tourism” or “run the economy for locals, not tourists” numbered 25.

Cross-cutting themes appeared in the responses. For example, comments coded as “affordable housing” appeared in other questions about as many times as they appeared in the question that was specifically about housing availability and affordability.

2.2. Limits

The community input gathered through the listening sessions is a “convenience sample” of the community’s opinions, not a complete, comprehensive, quantitative, or rigorous survey. The benefits of a convenience sample are:

- It moves quickly, spending less time designing the process.
- It leverages established relationships.
- It plugs into existing, calendared events where possible.

The limits of a convenience sample are:

- It may have duplicated respondents.
- It provides a limited snapshot of just some community members.
- It requires caution in interpreting the findings.

3. Methods

3.1. Input collection methods



Community input was collected in three ways:

1. Public listening sessions, geographically spread across Sonoma Valley.
2. Interest-based listening sessions with groups of people in similar professions or with similar interests, to help participants be more comfortable, and to take advantage of pre-existing meetings.
3. Online This Is My Vision page on the Sustainable Sonoma website

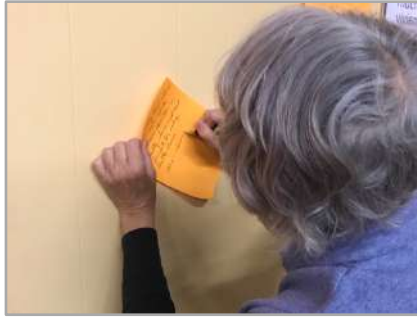
Below is a list of the listening sessions covered by this report. In total, approximately 350 people provided input during these 20 listening sessions between March and October, 2018.

Interest represented	Listening session description	Date
Youth	Sonoma Valley High School Earth Club, 30 min discussion within their meeting	3/6/2018
Environment	meeting with leadership at Sonoma County Regional Parks	4/9/2018
Public, for the Springs area	Hosted by Springs Community Alliance, 90 minute standalone meeting	4/19/2018
Affordable housing	SV Housing Group, 2 hour conversation within their meeting, first 1 1/2 hours about SuSo generally	4/22/2018
Tourism	Visitors Bureau + Tourism Improvement District Board, 20 minute conversation within their meeting	5/10/2018
Health	Sonoma Valley Health Roundtable, Community Health Workers	5/17/2018

Public, for southern Sonoma Valley	30 min discussion, mostly with people already involved with SuSo: advisors, staff, Council and Steering Committee members, a few members of the public	6/1/2018
Environment	Multiple environment and open space groups invited, 90 min within Transition Sonoma Valley meeting	6/12/2018
Seniors	Vintage House Board	6/25/2018
Latino	La Luz 4th of July float making event	7/2/2018
Public, for the Glen Ellen area	Hosted by Glen Ellen Forum, 90 minute standalone meeting	7/14/2018
Public, for the Kenwood area	90 minute standalone meeting	7/19/2018
Faith	Sonoma Valley Interfaith Ministerial Association meeting, 40 min discussion co-led by Hidden in Plain Sight authors	7/25/2018
Youth, Latino	Sonoma Valley Health Center Back to School Health Fair	8/11/2018
Public, for Southern Sonoma Valley	90 minute standalone meeting at Vintage House	9/19/2018
Environment	Sonoma Ecology Center staff, 30 mins within their meeting	7/9/2018
Public, Emergency Preparedness	Emergency Preparedness Fair, public walk-through event hosted by Sonoma Valley Community Health Center	08/13/18
Latino, youth	¡Celebrar el Verano/Celebrate Summer! event at La Luz	08/15/18
Latino	A small part of a Fire Anniversary event at La Luz. Attendees wandered by the table with the questions. Some attendees could not read or write.	10/8/18
Business	Chamber of Commerce Board, 30 mins within their meeting	10/11/18

Most listening sessions began with a presentation about Sustainable Sonoma. Participants then walked around the room to visit posters with a set of nine standard questions written on them. People wrote their responses to the questions on sticky notes and put the sticky notes on the poster for each question.

English-to-Spanish translators were available at all public listening sessions, and the question posters were in English and Spanish.



Some listening sessions, usually those fitted into shorter periods of time within standing meetings of interest-based groups, did not use sticky notes, but instead were conversations recorded by SuSo staff, who later pulled out main ideas from notes, an audio recording, and/or a transcript.

The nine standard questions asked people to describe their desired future conditions in Sonoma Valley. All the questions began with some version of "What's most important to you about..." or "What do you want to see in relation to..." Seven of the questions were aimed at particular topics (housing availability and affordability, transportation, health, children and youth, opportunity for all, the natural environment, the economy). Each question had a prefatory sentence that in some cases conveyed the values of Sustainable Sonoma, so the framing was not meant to be objective. The exact wording of the prefatory sentences and questions is below:

What's most important to you about the future of our community?
¿Qué cosa le importa más con respecto al futuro de nuestra comunidad?

There has been much discussion since the fires about housing, especially affordable housing, in the Sonoma Valley. What do you believe is most important for our community when it comes to housing availability and affordability?

Luego de los incendios se comentó mucho la falta de vivienda, especialmente vivienda asequible en nuestro Valle. ¿Qué cree es más importante para la comunidad con respecto a la vivienda disponible y asequible?

Tourism, grapes, and wine are major engines for our local economy. What would a healthy, diversified, and resilient economy look like in Sonoma Valley?

El turismo, la uva y el vino están a la base de nuestra economía. ¿Cómo sería una economía fuerte, capaz de recuperar, y saludable para todos en el Valle?

Many people want every single young person in Sonoma Valley to have a high quality education and access to opportunities. What do you think is most important for our children and youth?

Hay mucha gente que desea que cada joven en el Valle de Sonoma reciba una educación de calidad y acceso a todas las oportunidades. ¿Qué apoyos para nuestros niños y jóvenes le parecen más valiosos?

Many people in Sonoma Valley value our rural character—wide-open spaces, limited

development, beautiful wildlife and plant communities. What do you think is most important when it comes to our natural environment and your quality of life in Sonoma Valley?

Mucha gente aprecia el carácter rural de nuestro Valle de Sonoma – campo abierto, urbanización limitada, la Hermosa naturaleza. ¿Qué le importa más con respecto al medioambiente natural y la calidad de vida aquí en el Valle de Sonoma?

A lot of people are unhappy with how we get around: traffic, cars, air pollution. How could we change our transportation system to be better for everyone?

Mucha gente se lamenta del tráfico, tantos carros, el aire contaminado. ¿Cómo podemos cambiar nuestro sistema de transporte para que sea mejor para todos?

Think about the different types of diversity in our community--immigration status, income, race, education, sexual orientation. What's most important to you about creating a community that offers fair opportunities for all to succeed?

Refleje sobre la diversidad en nuestra comunidad en sus distintas formas – el estatus migratorio, los ingresos, la raza, la educación, la orientación sexual. ¿Qué le parece más importante con respecto a la meta de crear una comunidad que ofrezca oportunidades justas para que todos tengamos éxito?

Large numbers of people in our community suffer from poor health. What do you most want to see, when it comes to having a healthy community full of healthy people?

Hay muchas gente en nuestra comunidad que padece la mala salud. ¿Qué cree que más necesitamos para realizar una comunidad saludable llena de gente sana?

What concerns you most about the future of Sonoma Valley?

These questions were developed and framed using the following resources:

- Sustainable community development research/practice literature
- Assessment and measurement tools, particularly the [STAR Communities framework](#)
- Sustainable Sonoma's values as articulated in its [Charter](#).
- Sustainable Sonoma Council input
- Early stakeholder focus groups convened by Sustainable Sonoma in 2015 and 2016



3.2. Analysis methods

Each sticky note was given a row in a spreadsheet. The row recorded the name of the listening session that the sticky note came from, and the question it responded to (where applicable). The written words on the sticky note were entered verbatim in the row. After reviewing the mass of the material, staff developed codes to capture the category (topic, theme, issue area) of the comments, and the specifics of the comment (the opinion, point, or wish conveyed by the comment). If a sticky note had more than one main idea, we recorded codes for each main idea, so a sticky note could produce up to 4 codes.

After all the input was coded, codes that had 1 or 2 comments were eliminated, and those comments re-coded to the code closest in meaning. This left 84 codes remaining, plus “?” for uncategorizable comments.

4. Next steps

In late 2018, the Sustainable Sonoma Council will use the findings from the listening sessions to focus their work together. They will consider the listening session input, together with other information and their own knowledge and perspectives, to inform their selection of two to three compelling issues (e.g. affordable housing, infill development, public transportation) to act on together over the next year, and subsequently to choose more specific Action Priorities for each of those issues.

Sustainable Sonoma will use the findings from the listening sessions in public education and marketing efforts.

We will learn from this process to guide future rounds of community input undertaken by Sustainable Sonoma when it prepares to refresh its work priorities.

5. Acknowledgements

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