



Washington Historic Commercial Square

Historic District Survey Results

Prepared by Marcia Klopf, Master of Urban Planning 2016 Candidate

September 28, 2015



Washington Historic District Survey

Dear Survey Participant,

This is part of a survey for Washington residents to assess the status of historic preservation in the City and to improve the knowledge of Washington's history. This survey is part of a larger capstone project I am conducting as part of my Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in partnership with the City of Washington. This project is focusing on Washington's historic Downtown Square and ways to bring more focus to this historic area of the City. The survey is an opportunity for you to provide your perspective on the downtown area and what changes you would like to see in the future. You may answer as many or as few questions as you would like.

Please pass along the online survey information to family members, friends, and other Washington residents that may be interested in shaping future historic preservation efforts throughout the City. Participation in the survey is voluntary, but we are hoping for many responses in order to gauge knowledge, interest, and goals for Washington's future.

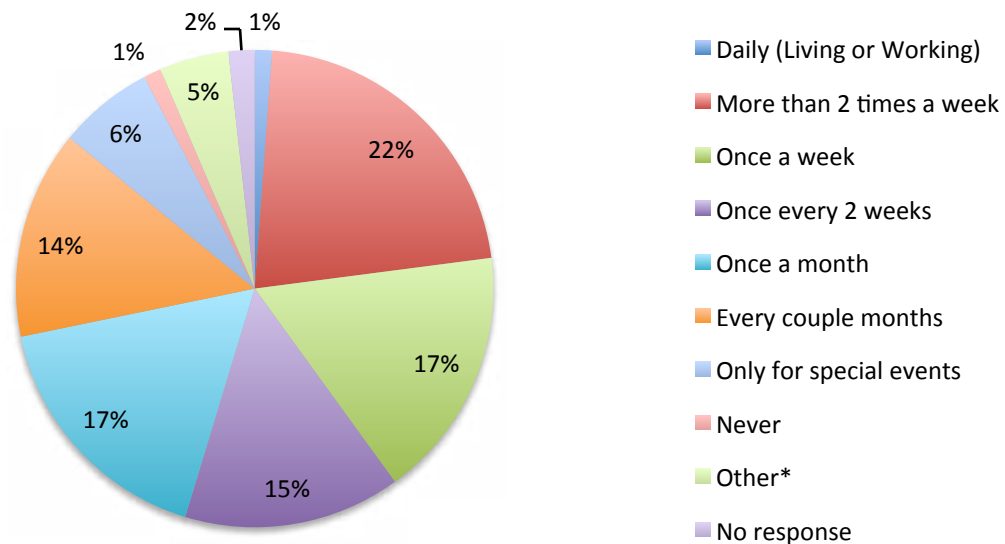
If you decide to complete the survey, please read the questions carefully. It should only take between 5 and 20 minutes to complete, but we hope to receive full and honest answers from participants. Should you have any questions about the survey or about the questions in the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone or Jon Oliphant at joliphant@ci.washington.il.us.

Thank you so much for taking time to complete this survey. We look forward to your responses and to community efforts to support preservation in Washington.

Sincerely,
Marcia Klopf
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marcia.klopf@gmail.com

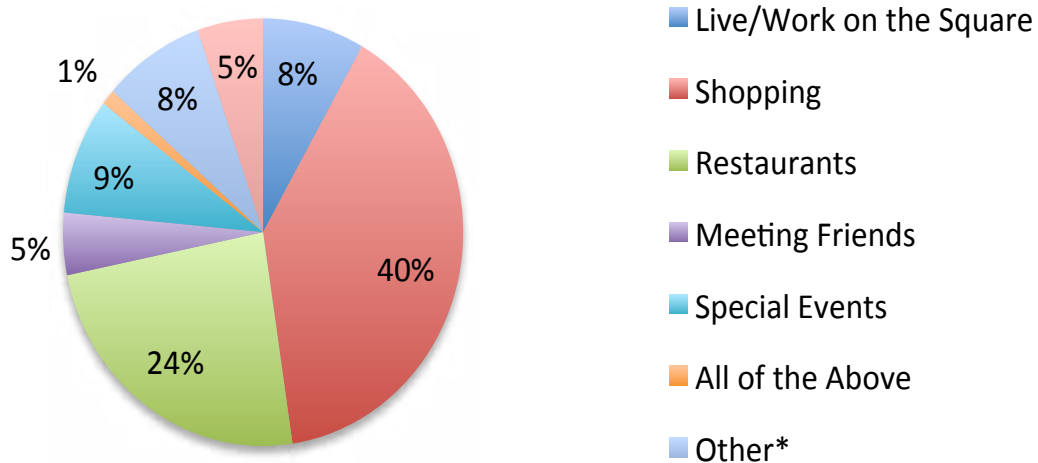
The Washington Historic District survey is the first step in the overall project and has been an important first tool of data collection regarding the Square, its historic uses, its role in the Washington Community, and the future of the Square. The survey was disseminated from Jon Oliphant, Planning and Development Director for the City of Washington, and Chevie Ruder, Executive Director of the Washington Chamber of Commerce. There was additional publicity through the Peoria Journal Star and the Illinois chapter of the American Planning Association. As of September 29, 158 people had participated in this survey. As results continue to come in, this document will be updated to reflect the overall results. The following pages outline each question of the survey and its subsequent results.

How Often Do You Visit the Historic Washington Downtown Square?



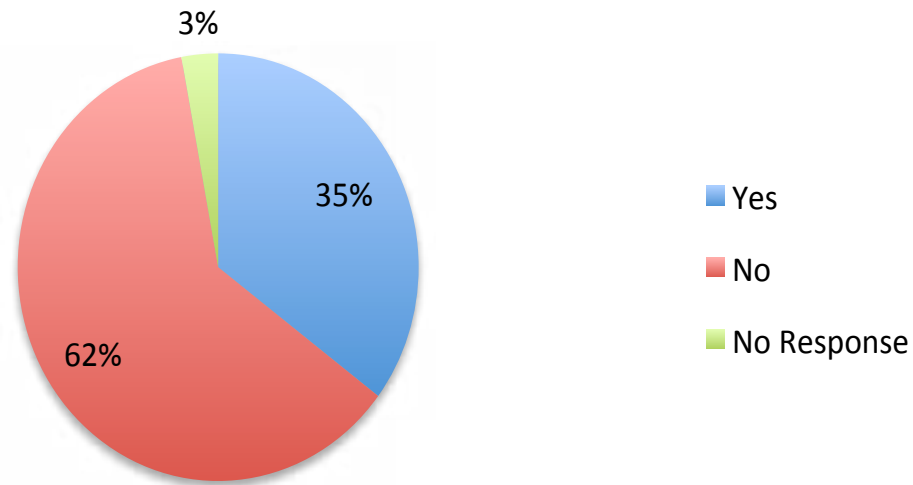
The first section of the survey is titled “Historic Washington” and asks questions regarding the participant’s perceptions and knowledge of the historic aspects of Washington and its downtown area. This particular question targets the frequency that participants visit the historic Washington downtown square. Overall, most participants visited at least once a month, with the highest number of responses at more than 2 times a week, once a week, and once a month. While only 1% had never been to the historic square, another 1% also indicated that they visit the Square everyday because they live there. Another important group to note is the 6% of people that visited only for special events, providing an opportunity for more events on the Square or programming that would increase the regular use of the Square compared to the use only for special events. There were a few write-in responses to note that did not fit the survey, including “a few times a year”, “driving around the round-a-bout”, “meet friends”, and “driving through it daily”.

What is Most Often Your Primary Purpose for Visiting Historic Washington?



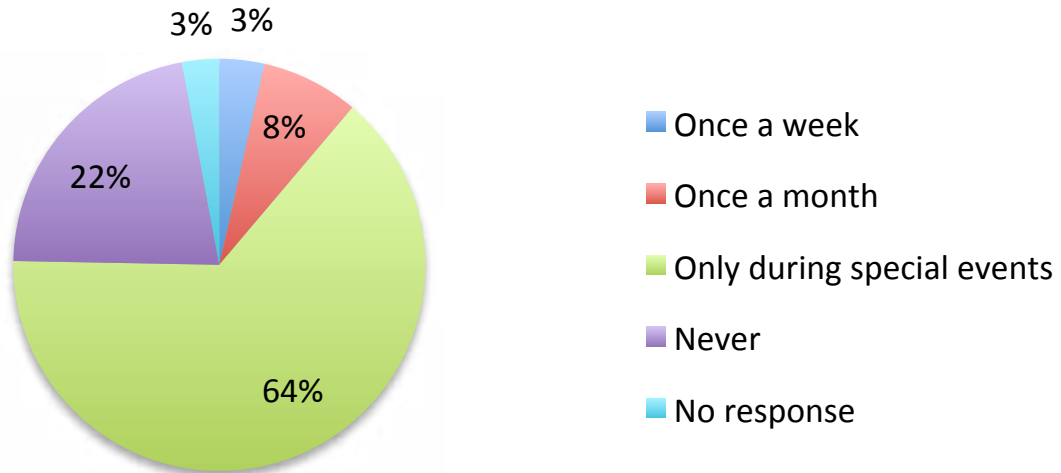
The second question address the variety of purposes that people may come to the Square. The majority of visitors came for the shopping, with a close second in 24% of the visitors making a trip to eat on the Square. Here, it is important to note that 8% of respondents noted living or working on the Square, and again 9% of the people noted visiting only for special events. The “Other” category for this question is 8% and comprised a variety of uses. While some people mentioned visiting the Square to see family, the majority of people mentioned “Business” as a write-in option, highlighting the Square’s importance to the daily business happenings of Washington. While this does not directly say that people do not visit the Square after normal business hours, it would be interesting to see the time of day that people make use of historic downtown Washington. Other write-in responses in the “Other” category include “Meetings at the Chamber”, “Using the Post Office”, “Merle Norman”, and “To Buy Gas”. While there are a variety of uses on the Square, a few participants even noted that they participated in all of the suggested uses.

Have You Visited and/or Taken a Tour of the Zinser House in the Past 5 Years?



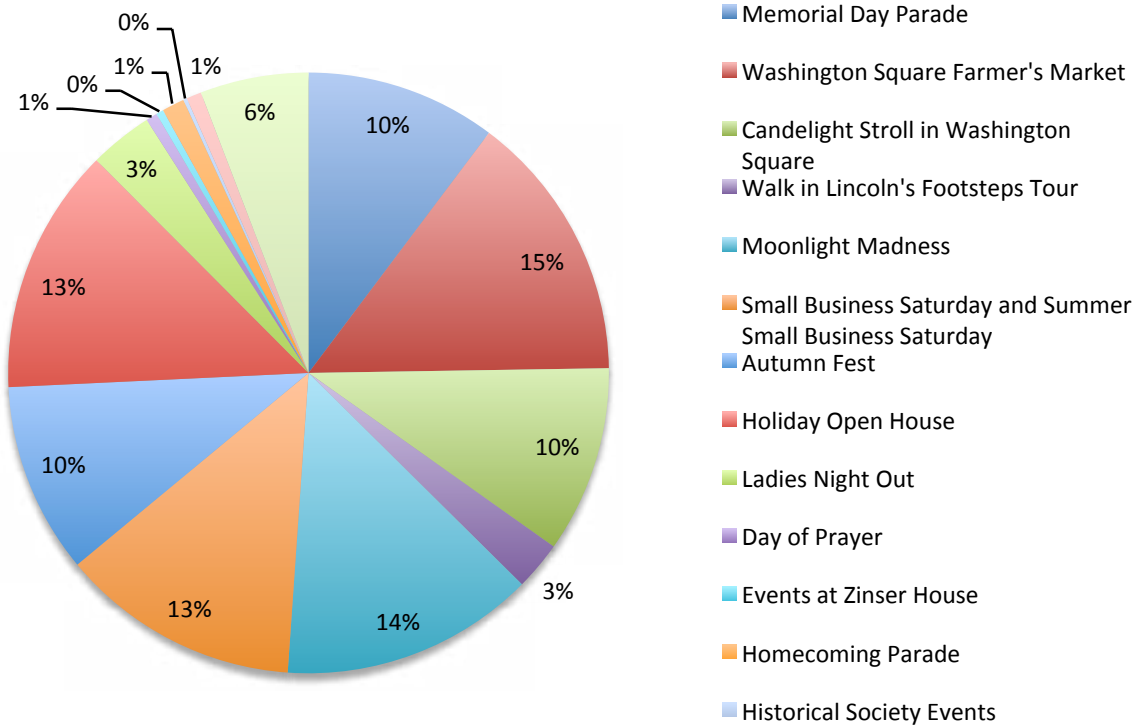
Located just north of the historic downtown Square, the Zinser house is an extremely important historic resource for the City of Washington. The home was built in 1858 and is one of the oldest remaining homes in the City. It is the home of the Washington Historical Society and all of their materials, which people are welcome to use during open hours, and there are tours throughout the house as well. However, as seen in the survey, the majority of participants have not been to the Zinser house within the past five years. While this is just one of many important historic resources throughout Washington, the low numbers of people that have visited in recent years provides a chance for an event or for additional recognition of the importance of this house just north of downtown.

How Often Do You Utilize the Public Space in the Middle of the Square?



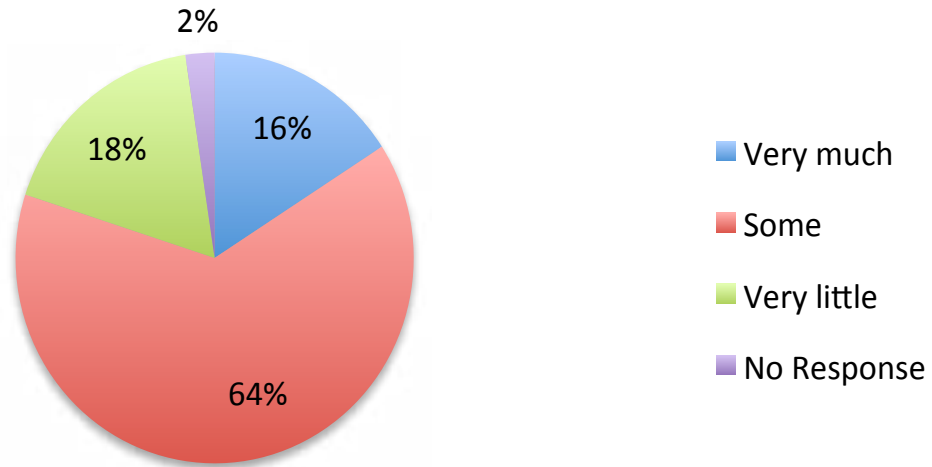
One of the most notable features of historic downtown Washington is the space within the square itself. The sidewalks all lead to the central fountain, which replaced the historic bandstands; additionally, smaller monuments and benches line this interior space. While it is a notable and recognizable feature of downtown Washington, the majority of participants noted that they only use the space during special events. An additional 22% noted that they have never used this square space. While a few participants mentioned that they use it up to once a week, the overwhelming majority – 64% - do not feel they have the opportunity to use this space on a regular basis. This could be for a variety of reasons including the safety hazard of crossing traffic lanes moving quickly around the round a bout. Regardless of the reason, this lack of the use of the interior space can provide a chance for the City and its organizations to continue planning events for this interior space, to create ways to use it more casually, and to make the space safer to enter and exit.

What Annual Festivals in the Square Do You Attend?



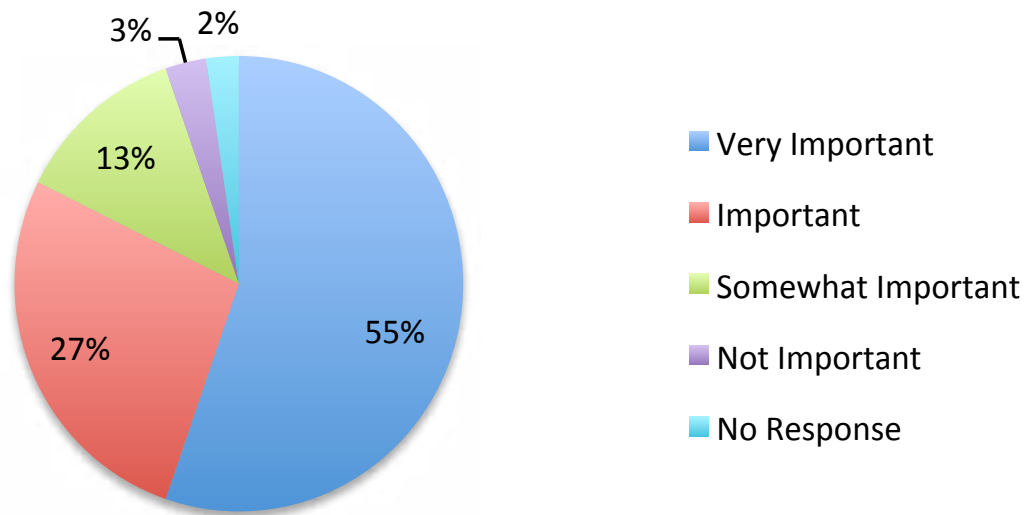
This question provided an opportunity of participants to mention the variety of events they attend throughout the year. With almost 500 individually noted festival attendances in this response, it is easy to tell that the annual festivals are well-liked by the survey participants. There is also a fairly even distribution among the top events – the Homecoming Parade, the Washington Square Farmer’s Market, Moonlight Madness, and the Holiday Open House. A few events followed closely behind including the Candelight Stroll in Washington, the Memorial Day Parade, and Autumn Fest. These two categories of events include events that occur throughout the year, providing regularly scheduled events that continue to bring recognition to the Square. Important to note, however, is that the Walk in Lincoln’s Footsteps Tour is only attended by about 3% of survey participants. This is arguably the event most closely associated with recognizing Washington’s history. This event could either be done more often or with relation to additional historical events in Washington to increase participation. In addition to the events mentioned on the survey, numerous participants wrote in “Events at the Zinser House”, “Historical Society Events”, and “Day of Prayer”. While these still had fairly low rates among survey participants, they are obviously important to the variety of respondents that wrote them in and should continue to be supported as events in the Square.

How Much Do You Know About Washington's History?



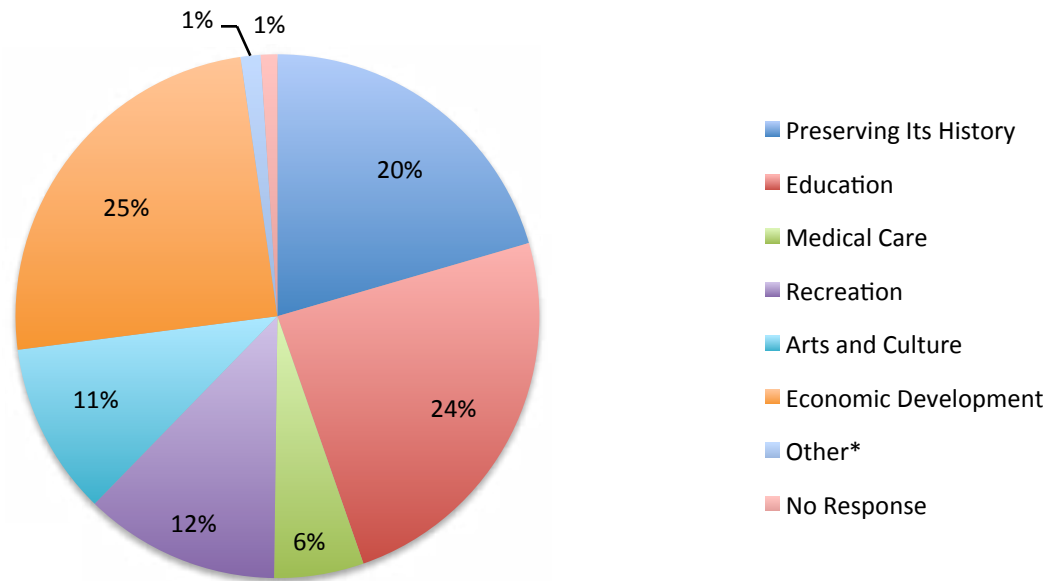
While simplistic in nature, this question is important as it provides the opportunity for participants to think about their knowledge of the place they live in or come to for work. The majority of participants noted that they only know “Some” about Washington’s history, while 18% responded that they know “Very Little”. Regardless of age of the participants, this is an important opportunity to provide events and resources to continue educating Washington’s residents and workers about their historic city.

How Important Do You Think Preserving Washington's History is to the Current Status of the City?



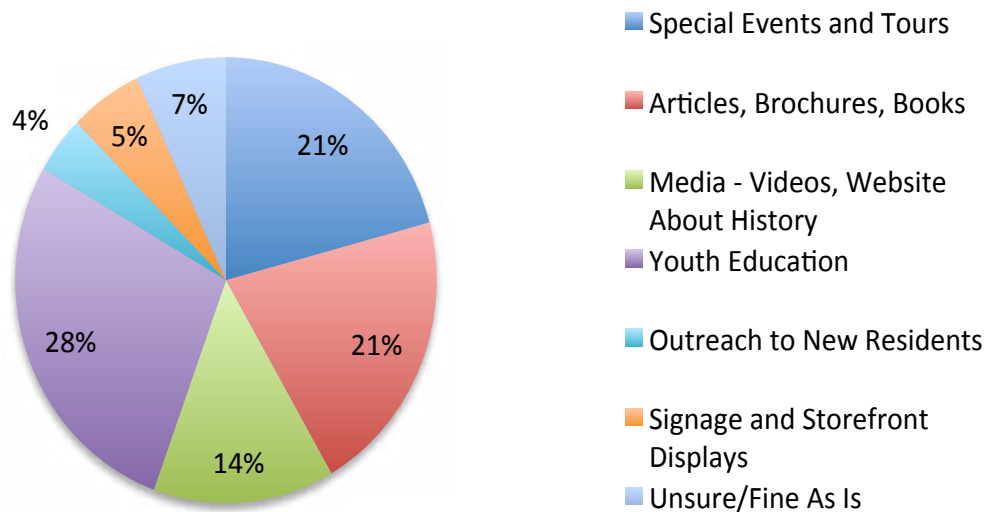
In conversation with the previous question, this question allows participants to help with the future planning of the City of Washington. While a majority noted that they did not know very much about the history of the city, 55% noted that they think it is “Very Important” for the City of Washington to preserve its history as it continues planning. Another 27% of the participants noted that they think it is “Important”. While 3% noted that the history is “Not Important” to the current status of the city, the overwhelming majority indicate that the history of Washington is an important part of their notion of the City as a whole.

Top 3 Things for Planning Washington's Future



The final question of this first section of the survey provides an opportunity for participants to share their opinions on the future planning of the City, and the most important issues to address moving forward. This format allowed participants to pick the top 3 things (order not important) they hope the City plans for moving forward. While a variety of issues were selected and even written in, three issues emerged as the most popular among participants. The participants noted “Economic Development”, “Education” and “Preserving Its History” as the most important issues to address moving forward. “Recreation” and “Arts and Culture” received 12% and 11% of votes, respectively, and are still to be noted as important pieces for the future planning. While most participants chose at least two of their three responses from the given list of choices, write-in answers included “Affordable Housing and Development”, “Tourist Destination”, “Christian Faith”, “Downtown Parking”, and “Traffic”. This question especially shows that while participants want the history of Washington to continue to be preserved and planned as an important part of the City’s future, there are also other important issues that people want addressed that will make Washington a well-rounded and attractive community.

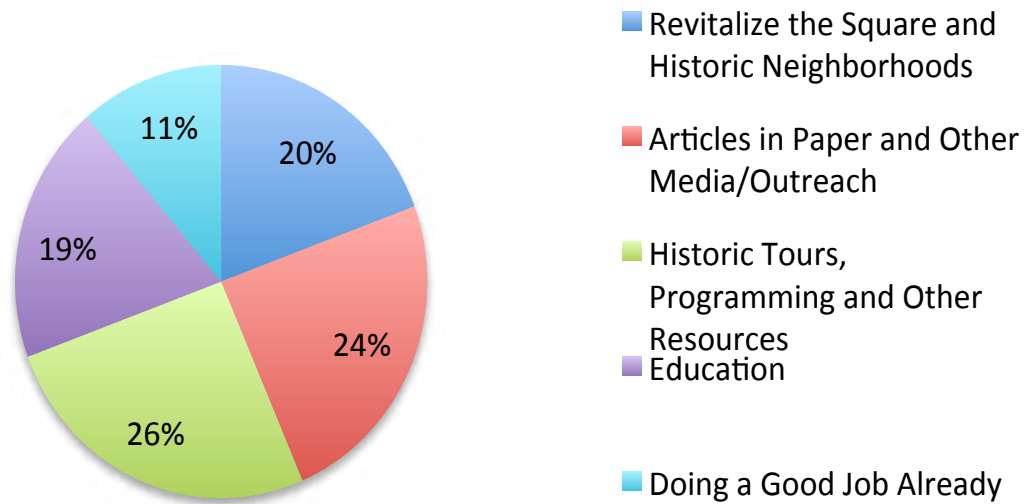
What Would You Do To Enhance Education About Washington's History?



This question starts the second section of the survey titled “Planning for Washington’s Future,” and provided a space for participants to write responses; therefore the categories shown on the charts reflect popular categories that emerged from multiple responses. It is also important to note that this section of the survey had a lower rate of answers, as not everyone felt inclined to answer every question; therefore, results charts do not show 100% of the answers/non-answers but instead focus on the answers that were shared.

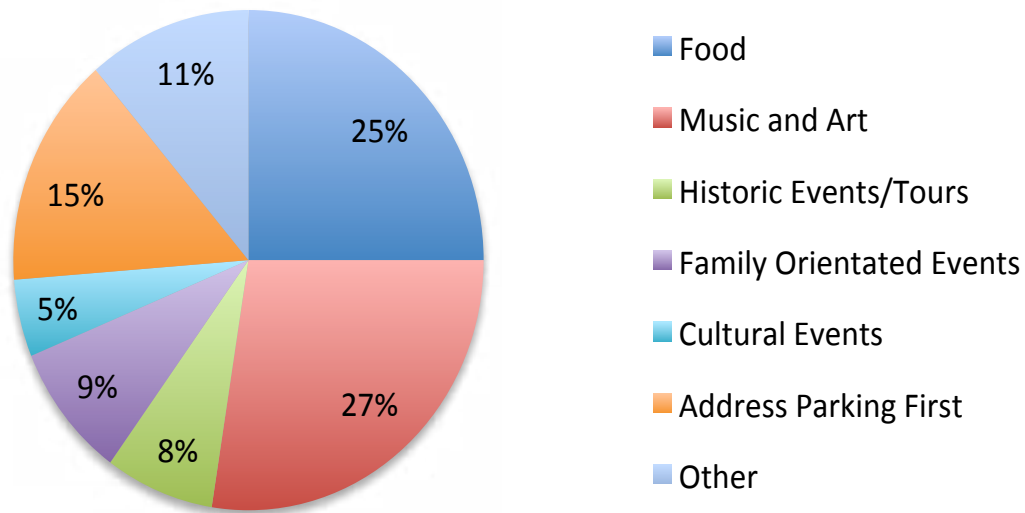
This particular question showed that participants thought the first way to enhance education about Washington’s history would be to start with the youth; people suggested curriculum programs in particular grades, field trips, and even Saturday morning programs that would be available for students and their families. Participants were also very excited about the use of written word to spread the story of Washington’s history. People suggested restarting the regular weekly article in the newspaper, sending out flyers or brochures about upcoming historical events, and providing storefront display blurbs to highlight the building’s importance. Media was a closely related category that emerged, but instead of focusing on the written word, this responses highlighted the need for an augmented website or website connected with the Chamber and the City’s websites to provide a more comprehensive look at the City. This section also mentioned the possibility for video to highlight the history. Other categories mentioned the need for more frequent tours and new tours such as a bike tour; and the need to target new residents and include them on these events to educate them about their new home. Regardless of all of the suggestions, multiple participants noted the success of the Historical Society and the importance of the organization within the City.

What Would You Do To Strengthen Washington's Value of Historic Preservation?



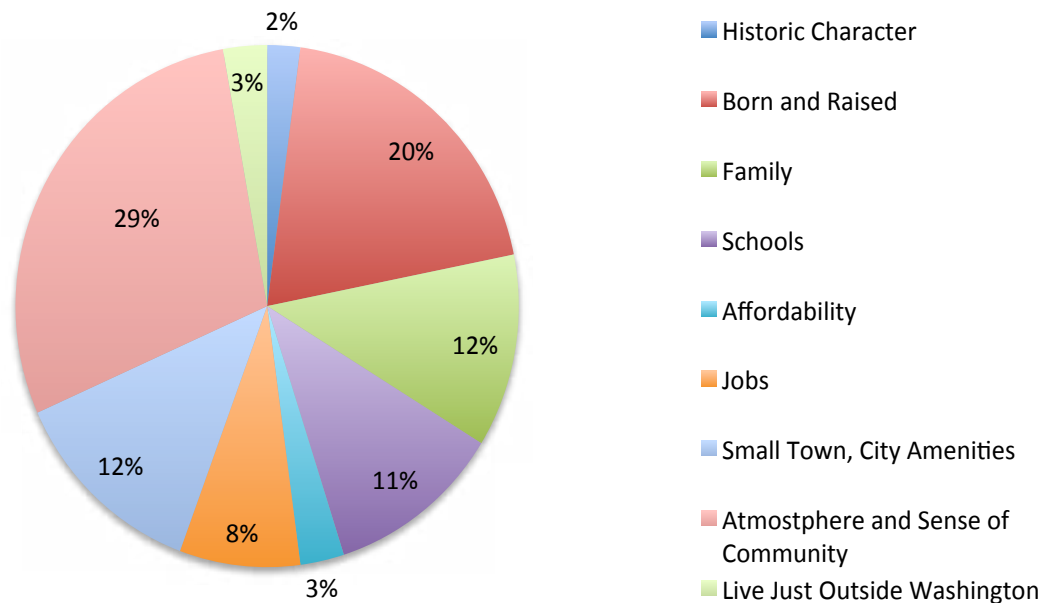
The second question in this section focuses on the additional actions that would strengthen the City's value of historic preservation. Most importantly was the category of "Historic Tours, Programming and Other Resources" that emerged – participants suggested signs for historic places, continuing the Lincoln Footsteps tour, and creating new tours that highlight partnerships throughout the City. Participants also noted the need for articles and media outreach. As categories of responses emerged, it was interesting to note that many of the same categories emerged between the previous question and this question. The only completely new category for this response was the need to "Revitalize the Square and Historic Neighborhoods". While most people just noted that they wanted to preserve the historic neighborhoods, sidewalks, and streets, some even went as far to say that they wish the brick streets, especially around the Square, would be restored. Again, it is noted that the City and the Historical Society are doing a great job with their efforts and should continue the tours and other programming to highlight Washington's historic downtown.

What Types of Events Do You Suggest For the Square?



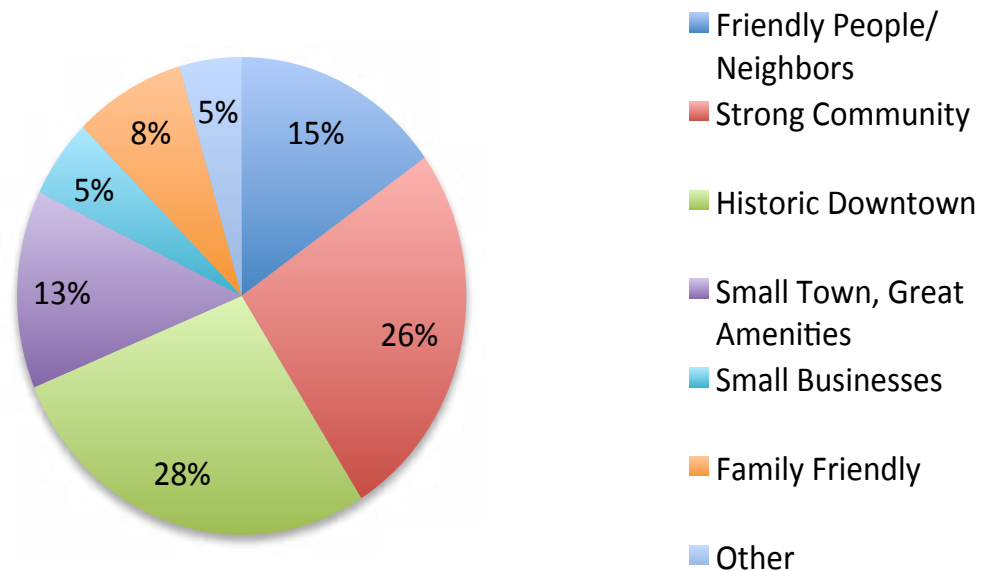
Through this question regarding types of events that should be held in the Square, participants are able to influence future development. Overall, most participants hoped for an increase in events including music, art and food. Some people even mentioned the historic bandstand that has since been replaced by the fountain, and the hope that a similar bandshell could be rebuilt to encourage more music activities. Other participants mentioned events such as the Farmer’s market and “Taste” that could come back to the Square. Participants also suggested a BBQ festival, a Christkindlemarket, an occasional beer garden, square dancing, seasonal food trucks, and more. The wide range of possible events shows the hope that the Square will be used for an increasing variety of events, some that will be new, but also some that used to be held in the Square. Participants also stressed the importance of providing events that focus on families such as magicians, Trunk or Treat, gingerbread house contests and demonstrations of historic trades such as welding. In addition to the variety of events, many participants commented on the vehicular traffic and the lack of parking that make events difficult within the Square. While some suggested the need to address/increase parking before planning actual events, others suggested closing off the streets within and right around the Square to provide a larger and safer space for events to happen. While this would need to be arranged with IDOT and could be tricky, it would provide more space and help create a safer environment for pedestrians during such events. Overall, most participants were very pleased with the variety of events that happen throughout the Square but hope that more events can be held here throughout the year through additional programming and solving traffic and parking problems.

Why Did You Decide to Live in Washington?



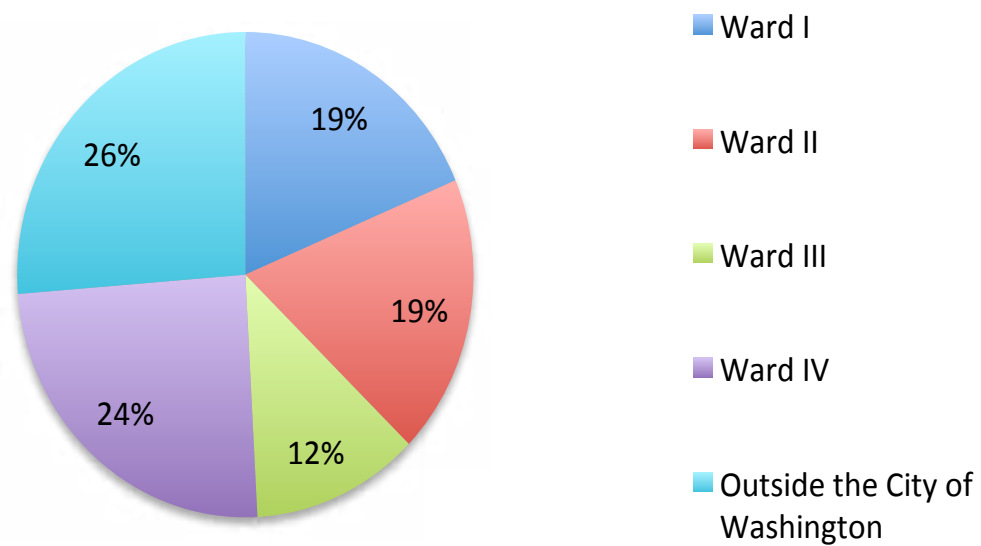
This question asks about why people live in or have moved to Washington. The most repeated response was that they really enjoyed the “Atmosphere and Sense of Community” – some people even noted the appreciated for historic preservation as a major part of the downtown. Closely related to this response was the response of “Small Town, City Amenities” – also noting the value of the historic character, but that they could do all their shopping in Washington and also be close enough to Peoria for a quick trip. Interestingly enough, there was quite a large percentage of “Born and Raised” participants (20%) and those that moved there because of a spouse or family that already lived in Washington (3%). This means that over 1/5th of Washington’s residents have lived here for the majority of their lives. Some people in these categories even noted that they moved away for a short time but missed Washington’s character and atmosphere too much and had to move back; others noted that they moved away for a brief time, but once they had kids they moved back because of the great school system. About 11% of participants noted education and the schooling system as the primary reason they decided to live in Washington. Others noted that they moved to Washington because they found a small farm right outside of town, or that they visited family in the city and fell in love with it themselves. While 8% of respondents noted that they moved to Washington for a job, the majority of residents live in Washington because of other factors.

What Makes Washington Unique?



As the final question in this short response portion of the survey, “What Makes Washington Unique” allows participants to describe what they really enjoy about Washington, also getting at why they chose to live/work in Washington. Three major categories emerged from this question – with over 25% of participants noting their appreciation of the historic resources, namely the Square, that Washington offers. Participants also mentioned the strong community and sense of spirit that residents have. Multiple participants also noted the great impact of this strong community after the tornado a couple years ago. The final main category of response included many comments about how friendly the people are in Washington and how it’s very easy to get to know their neighbors. Overall, this category brought up a lot of responses that had been expressed before such as the importance of family-friendly events, small businesses, and the historic downtown to the overall feel of Washington. Responses were extremely positive to this question, showing that survey participants love Washington, and through an increase of events and other activities hope that it can continue to be a place where people want to live.

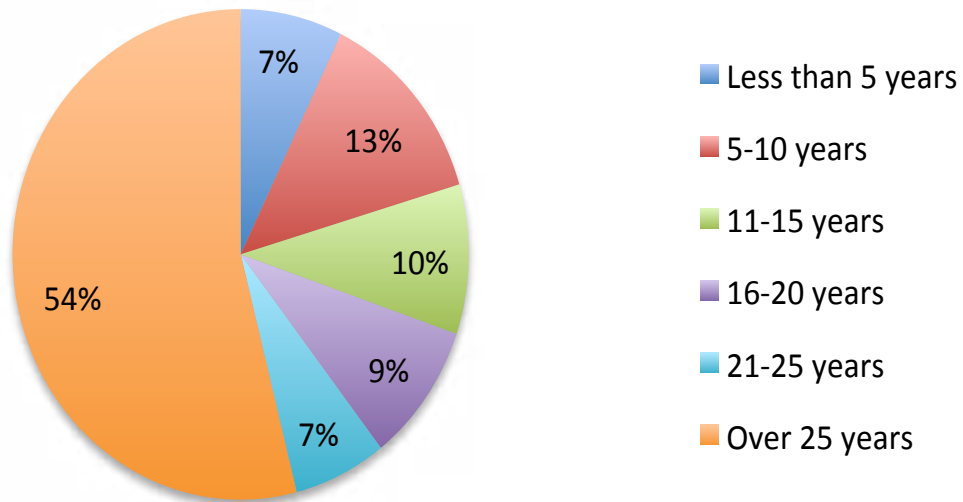
What Area of Washington Do You Live In?



The final section of questions collected sociodemographic information from respondents so as to get a better idea of who participated in the survey.

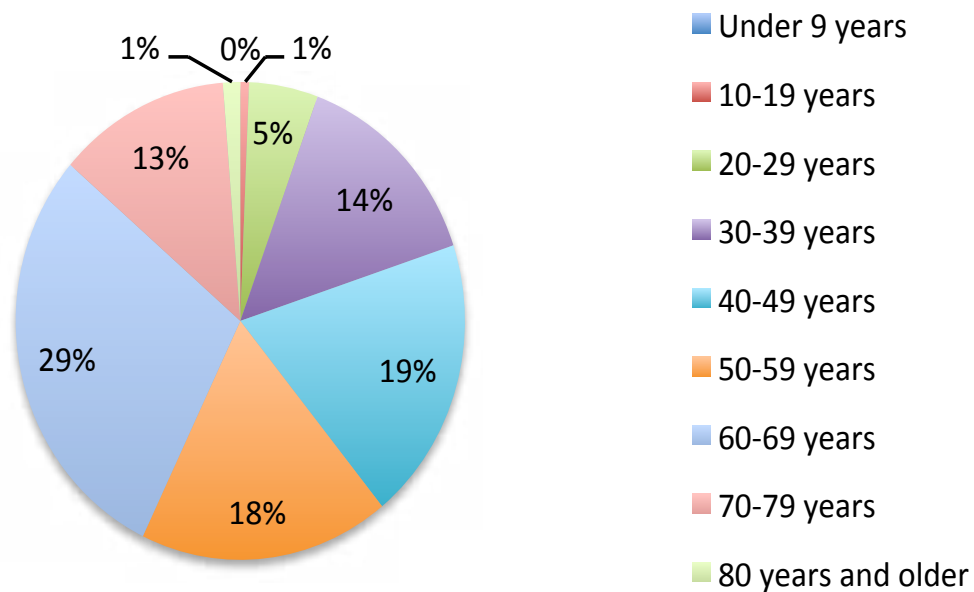
This first question simply asked about the location of the homes of participants based on Ward designation. As can be seen, the participation was fairly uniform with almost 30% living outside of Washington and a fairly even split between Wards I, II and IV. Important to note is that the Square lies in Ward II, so a majority of the respondents to the survey did not particularly live in this area.

How Long Have You Lived In Washington?



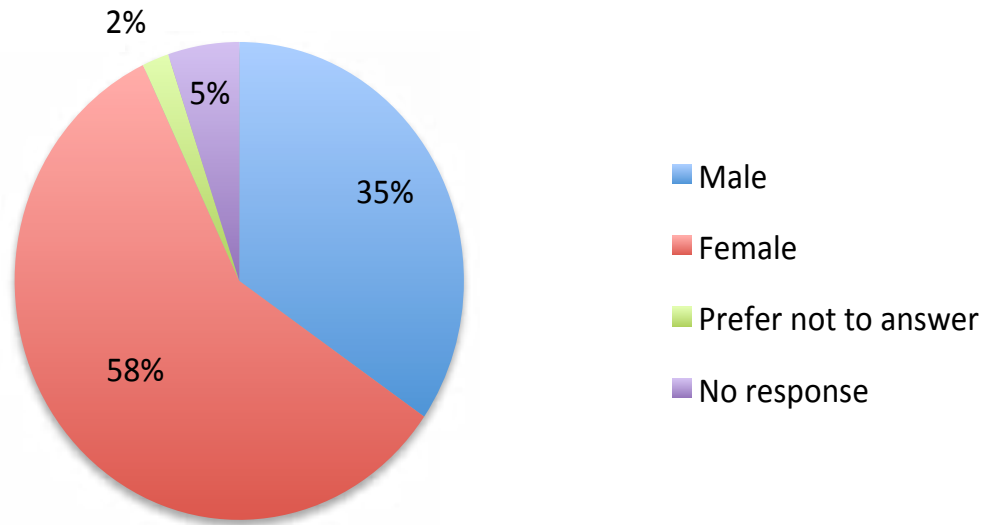
The second question regarding the participant's characteristics is their time lived in Washington. Overall, more than 50% of the survey respondents have lived in Washington for over 25 years. Not only does this briefly comment on the possible age of the respondents, but it also may comment on the type of people that were excited to participate in the survey. While the largest group by far is those that have lived in Washington for over 25 years, the second largest group were the participants that have lived in Washington between 5 and 10 years. This shows increasing rates of people that have been moving to the area; based on results from other survey questions, this is an area that Washington can begin to try to capitalize on in order to continue bringing new residents.

What Is Your Age?



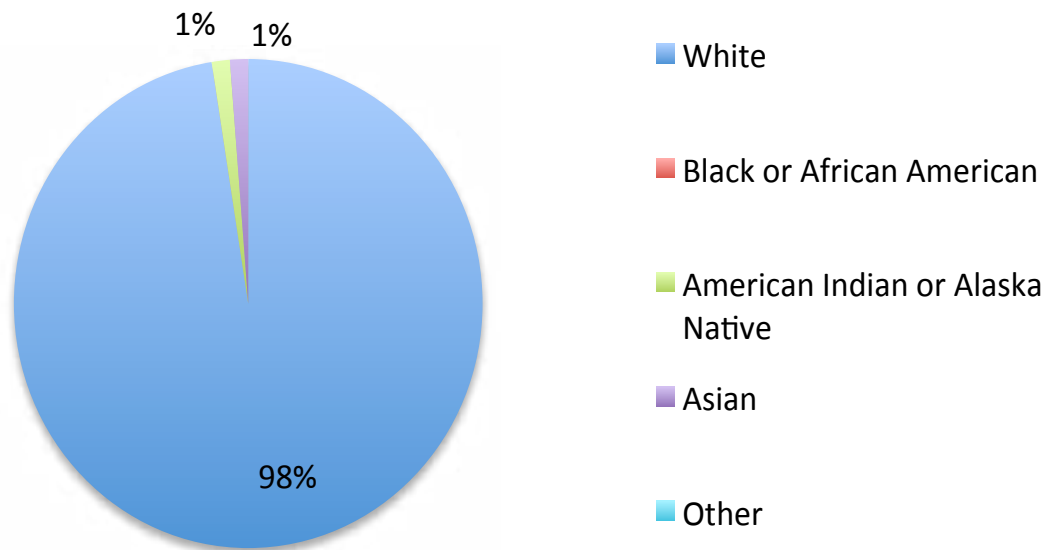
Those that completed this survey about Washington were primarily between the ages of 40 and 69 – covering 66% of the survey participants. While almost all age categories were represented (except for under 9 years old), the distribution sharply dropped with those under the age of 30, which could in part be to the distribution methods of the survey. Further study would to capture a more even distribution of ages would be interesting to add onto the current survey answers.

What is Your Gender?



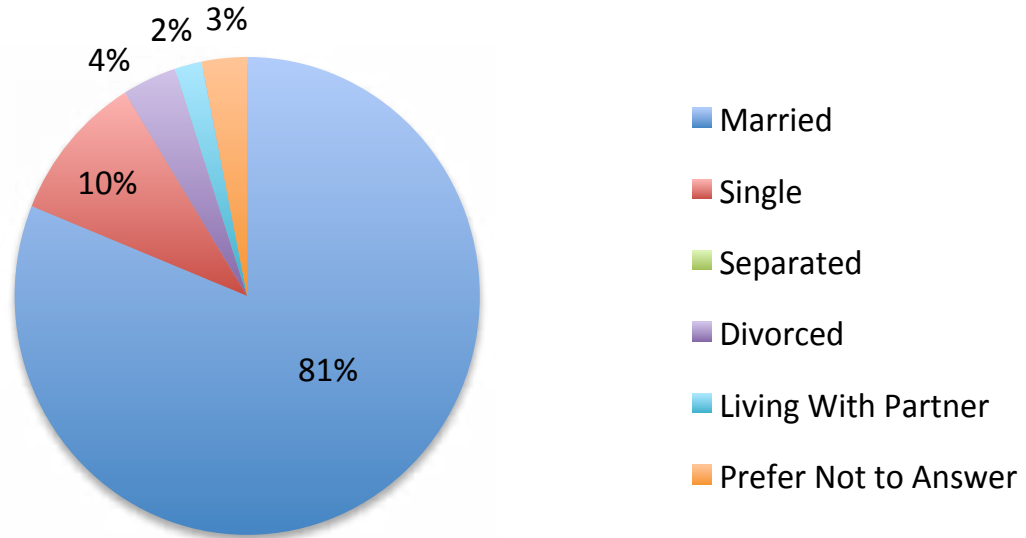
Survey participants were overwhelmingly female, with only 35% of participants being male. Also noted in this question are those that did not want to respond and those that preferred not to answer.

Which Race Do You Consider Yourself To Be?



Participants in the Washington survey almost all considered themselves to be white, with a few noting Asian or American Indian or Alaska Native as a secondary race that they identified as. While 98% white is an extremely high rate, this is strongly correlated with the 96.2% of residents in Tazewell County that identify as white alone, seen in 2014 Census data.

What Is Your Marital Status?



The majority of survey participants were married, while another 10% identified as single. A few participants listed their marital status as divorced and living with partner, but no participants listed separated as their marital status.



Additional Comments, Suggestions, and Improvements

Overall, the Washington Historic District Survey provided a lot of insights from those that live and work in Washington regarding their hope for the future of the City. The most effective part of the survey was the middle, short answer section where participants were able to voice their opinions regarding future programming for the Square. Overall, there were many good ideas regarding events that used to be in the Square, that should be returned to the Square, that could be created for the Square, and ways for the Square to become more effectively used for the Washington community. Participants also noted the need to continue to plan for all age groups, but focused on the youth and young families through particular interactive events throughout the year.

Most importantly, this survey showed the importance of the historic resources to the community members who hope that they continue to be a focus of future planning and continue to be preserved. While some note the need for more focus, others express that there is already sufficient focus on these through the great work of groups such as the Historical Society and while we need to continue the maintenance of these resources, focusing on other future development such as education and economics would be beneficial for the future of Washington.

Moving forward, Washington can use the information collected in this survey to continue the “Annual Events in the Square” that are popular, and consider suggestions of future events and ways to utilize the Square in order to continue making it a successful place in Washington and an integral part of the character of the community.