

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

A community’s identity derives from its member’s common interests, shared experiences and cultural history. It is “how people in a geographic area refer to or define themselves by social interactions, values, religion, culture, and other norms among their neighbors”¹. One identity that Oronoco already enjoys, is that of the city’s annual Gold Rush Days.

According to the most recent city comprehensive plan from 2006, “Residents desire to maintain positive aspects of the small-town character and life-style currently found in Oronoco as the City accommodates new development. Preserving and enhancing the city is an important community priority.”² Keeping these previous and still relevant statements in mind while planning for future development will assist the city with keeping the small town feel while still incorporating new commercial and residential development.

What is a word(s) that you would use to describe Oronoco?

Residents were asked to think about Oronoco and provide a word or phrase that they feel best describes the city. No sample words were provided, but the 100 results were placed into groups of the words listed below based on their individual meaning. The most common answers were related to the town and its size. Most common was ‘Small Town Feel’, ‘Quiet’, ‘Bedroom Community’, and ‘Ready to Grow’. There were also some negative comments in this section that should also be noted as there may be solutions to overcoming these downfalls. The most common negative comments included the words ‘Corrupt’, ‘Divided’, and ‘Out of Date’.

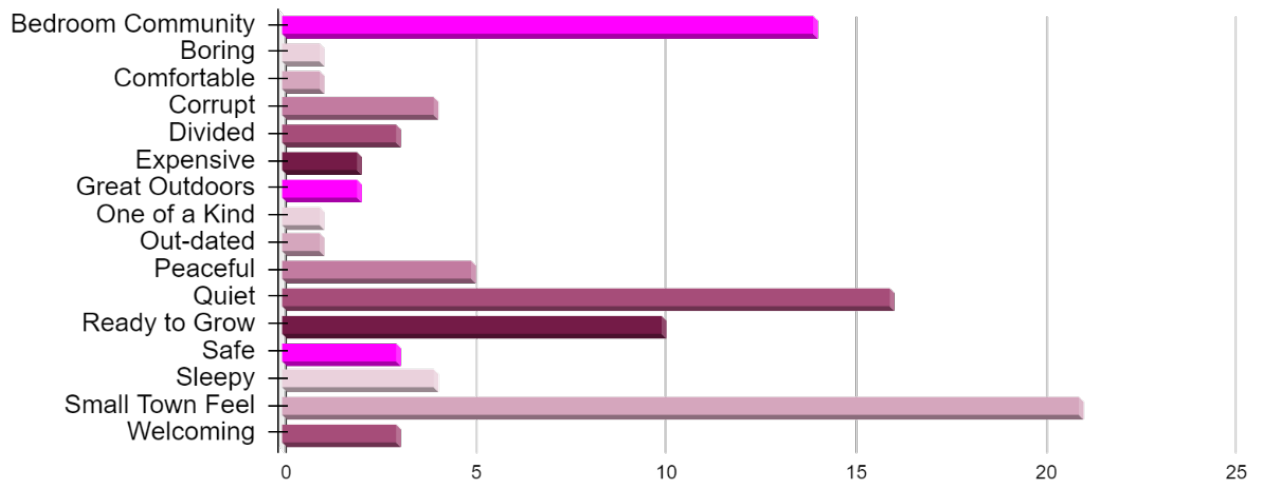


Figure 70: Words to Describe Oronoco

¹ "Community Identity, Community Guidelines | DSA & Other Legal Resources", 2024, www.ipl.org/Community-Identity

² "Community Values and Vision | City of Oronoco Comprehensive Plan", 17 July 2006, Pg. 11

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

What do you feel is the best thing about living in Oronoco?

For this question, all 110 written responses were placed into categories of common words that are displayed in figure 71, below. Residents identified that being close to, but not in Rochester was

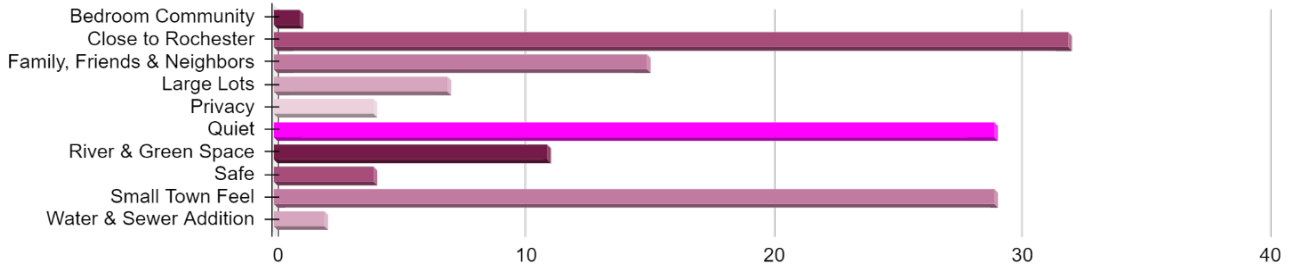


Figure 71: Words to Describe Oronoco

one of the largest benefits to living in Oronoco. This correlates with the next two benefits which are that the city is ‘Quiet’ and that the city has a welcoming “Small Town Feel”. These two benefits received the same number of responses for the number two spot. Finally, the third most identified benefits mentioned was ‘Family, Friends & Neighbors’. In short, these participants believe that it is the people of Oronoco that makes the city such a great place to live. Understanding what residents believe are the largest benefits to living in a community, aids city planners and leaders in knowing what types of actions and development that should be continued or strengthened in the coming years.

What do you think is the worst thing about living in Oronoco?

For this question, the 95 written responses were placed into categories of common words that are displayed in the figure 72. There was a larger variety of responses to this question than the previous question about the best things. The two most mentioned disadvantages to living in Oronoco received the same number of comments, and are the actions and perception of City Council, and the city’s ‘Lack of Businesses and Services’. The latter of the two correlates with the next two most mentioned items which are having to leave town for everything and that there is no Grocery store. Please note that at the time of the survey, it had not yet been announced that the Dollar General Market will be opening in the next year and therefore already addresses some of the concerns that were identified.

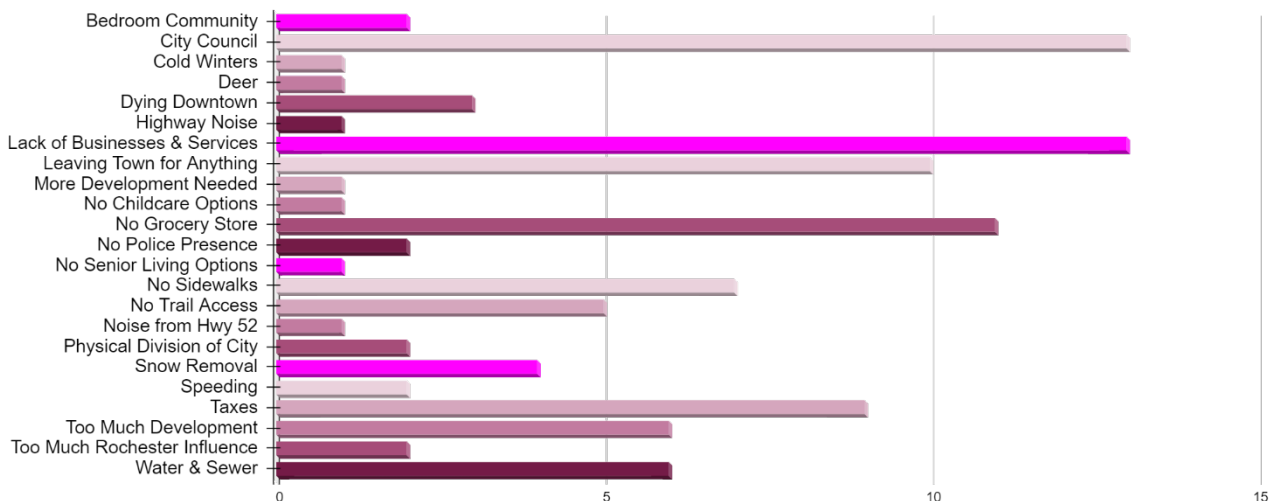


Figure 72: Worst Things About Living in Oronoco

If you could change one thing about Oronoco, what would it be?

For this question, all 75 written responses were placed into categories of common words that are displayed in figure 73. This question allowed residents to be more creative and share their own ideas about what they would like to see added or changed in the community. The most common request from citizens was to add more ‘New Bars & Restaurants’ to the community. Residents are seeking to have a variety of options available to them, that do not require them to have to leave town. The next most common change that people submitted was the desire for a ‘New City Council’. Concerns that have been shared by residents should be noted, but the city is unable to address this directly as the Council is elected by the residents themselves. The next most popular items that residents would change would be to add ‘Trail Access’ and ‘Install Sidewalks’ within the city to provide a safe way for residents of all ages and abilities to be able to get around the city and to keep active for their physical and mental health.

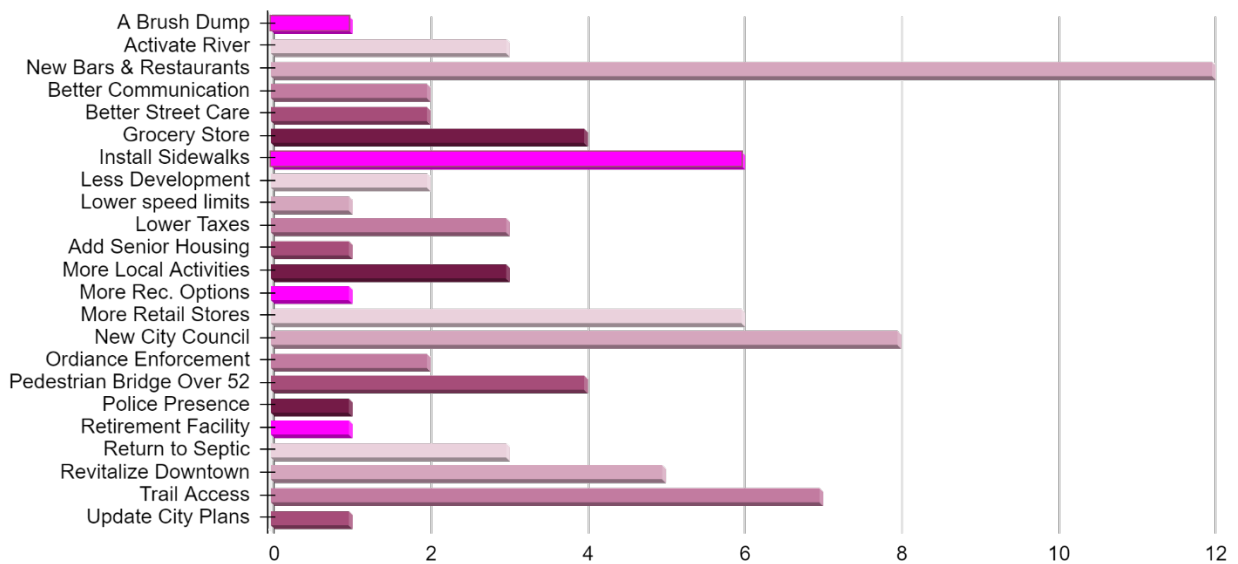


Figure 73: If Residents Could Change One Thing

Do you feel welcome in the community?

When asked about how welcome each resident feels in the community, more than 93% of the community states that they do feel welcome. That does leave 6.4% who do not feel the same. All 111 residents who took part in this question were given the opportunity to provide written comments to further explain their selection.

Those who do not feel welcome in the community provided three different answers as to why they feel that way.

- 62% - Feel that the City Council is dishonest and only advances personal agenda.
- 25% - Feel that the community is divided between East & West, and those who are in favor of, or against new development, both commercial and residential.
- 12.5% - Do not get along with their neighbors.

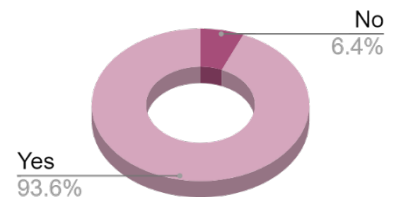


Figure 74: Do Residents Feel Welcome?

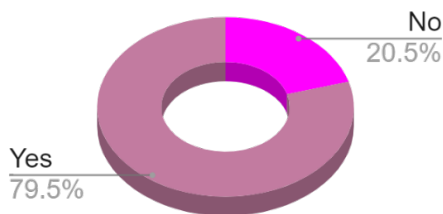
COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Those who do feel welcome in the community also provided written responses to why they feel the way they do.

- 93.8% - Feel that they have excellent friends and neighbors who also live in the city.
- 6.3% - Are proud of the hired city staff and all the hard work they do for the city.

Do you feel that the community does enough to support diversity in the community?

Diversity, by definition, is “the condition of having or being composed of different elements or qualities”³. Diversity in community development typically refers to a diversity in the types of housing styles, income levels, amenities and types of businesses within it. This concept created confusion for some residents who only associate diversity with DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), which is an organizational framework that seeks to promote fair treatment of people



and has been politicized in recent years. While diversity does include people within communities, the question within the survey relates to the existence or desire for a wide variety of amenities, services, housing types, events and identities. Based only on the participant’s own perception of diversity, 79.5% believe that the city does support diversity in the community.

Figure 75: Does the City Support Diversity?

There were a few different types of diversity that were stressed in the written responses to this question. The most common written responses were related to housing. Specifically, a desire for different sized lots, as the city has large residential lots that seniors and those with disabilities are unable to maintain. Many residents expressed a desire for rentals, senior housing/facilities and workforce housing. None of these types of housing are based on the income of the renter, but are more affordable to ensure the city can attract families and young professionals.

³ “Diversity | Merriam-Webster Dictionary”, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity>

COMMUNITY IDENTITY GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Communities are a source of identity that is experienced by all individuals. “Every community has its distinct traditions, values and norms. Communities provide a wealth of deep-rooted knowledge, which builds from countless interactions of various socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural attributes that occur over time. This knowledge becomes the property of that particular community and plays an important role in shaping the identity structures of its members.”⁴ The city of Oronoco is well known for its annual Gold Rush Days that takes place every July. This is one of the community’s identities and it is useful in the recruitment of businesses and residents and also to increase tourism to the community.

There has been a shift across all generations, reprioritizing the role that communities play in our daily lives. “People are looking for more out of the places they live and work. Cities and towns that understand and tap into that can attract quality talent and businesses beyond what incentives alone ever could.”⁵ The identification and marketing of community identity is an important way to enhance its impact on business and resident recruitment.

Identified Goal 1: Commence a community branding process. Community branding is the process of defining a community’s values and beliefs and has become a new form of economic development. A brand defines neighborhoods, revitalizes districts, packs restaurants and creates an economic buzz. Branding can include logos, taglines, imagery, marketing and other actions to draw positive attention and lure new businesses, residents and visitors to the community. Branding is more than just coming up with a brand or idea, it is about pinpointing what truly makes a place or area unique.

- The City Council and EDA should explore hiring an agency, such as the local Krakerjak Marketing and Sales Strategies firm, to assist the city with a community branding process that involves both community leaders and residents, and explores the history of a community and its marketing strategies to form the most effective branding.
- The EDA should seek to identify potential state and local funding sources to assist with financing of the branding process.

Identified Goal 2: Maintaining the ‘Small Town Feel’ of Oronoco. Within the survey, an overwhelming portion identified the desire to maintain the ‘small town feel’ of the city. This should be kept in mind by all city leaders when making any changes or additions to the community. The separation of residential and commercial spaces should be well defined and offer privacy to residents from public spaces.

⁴ “Community, identity, and knowledge: a conceptual framework for LIS research | Library and Information Science Research e-journal”, Afzal Waseem, (18)1, <https://doi.org/10.32655/LIBRES.2008.1.7>

⁵ “Why Community Branding is Important | Haven Creative”, 2024, <https://havencreativeagency.com/why-community-branding-is-important/>

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

- Planning & Zoning should ensure that all development continues to maintain the feeling of a small town, while also increasing the residential and commercial areas of the city and offering housing with different density levels.
- EDA should ensure that all commercial development within the city's downtown, old or new, maintains the feeling and aesthetics of a small town.
- The city should develop a new website that offers relevant information on the city's history, values, leaders, businesses, engagement opportunities and other relevant information in a format that is easy to use and maintain.