

Results of Town Meeting Survey

Sharon Governance Study Committee

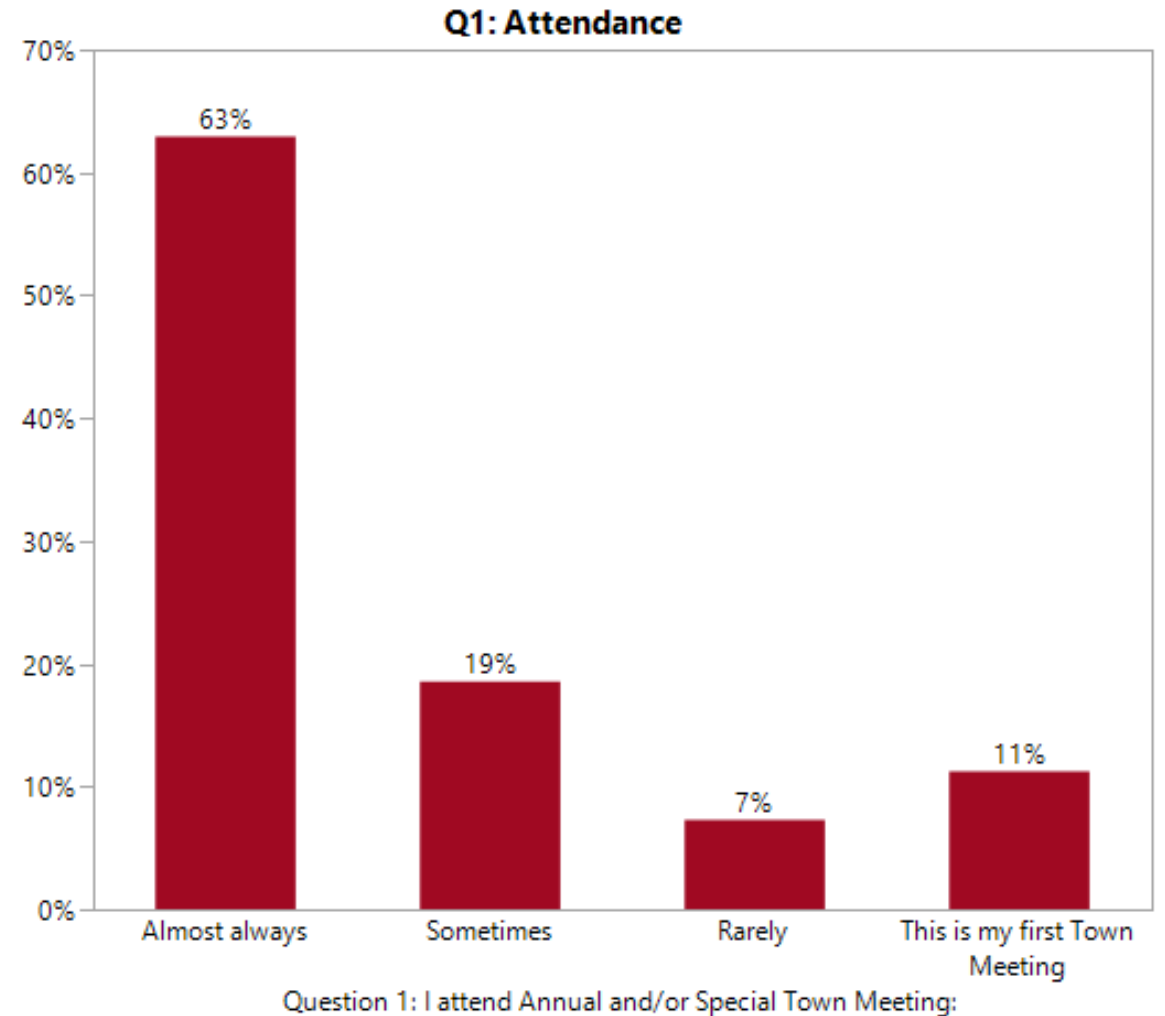
May 2022

Attendance

- 193 residents attended Town Meeting on May 2
- Turnout represented 1.5% of registered voters
- Attendance was the lowest for an Annual Town Meeting session in a non-pandemic year since 2012
- 151 voters at the meeting completed our survey
 - 78% of attendees participated in study

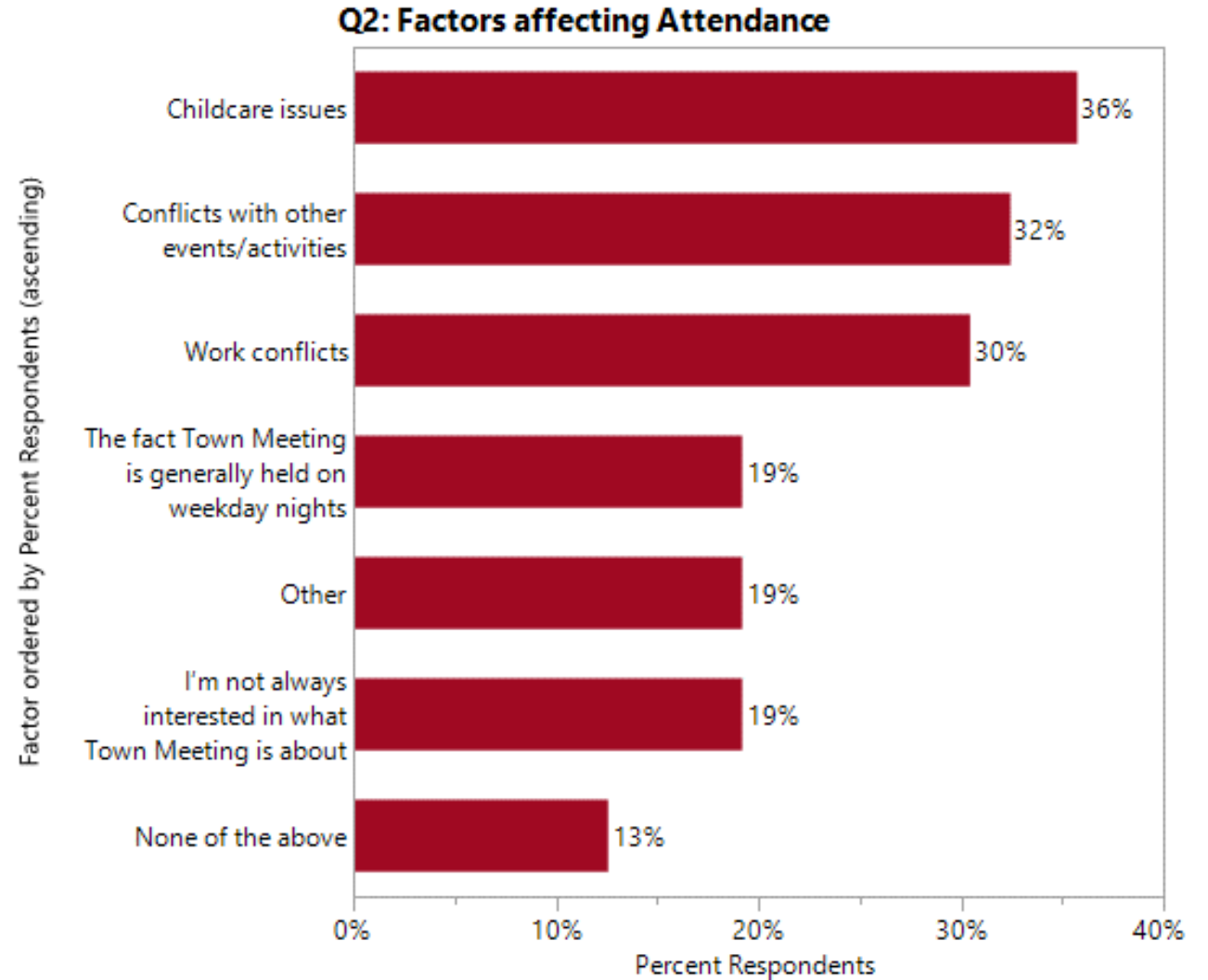
Frequency of attendance

- 63% of voters said they almost always attend Town Meeting
- 11% said they were there for the first time



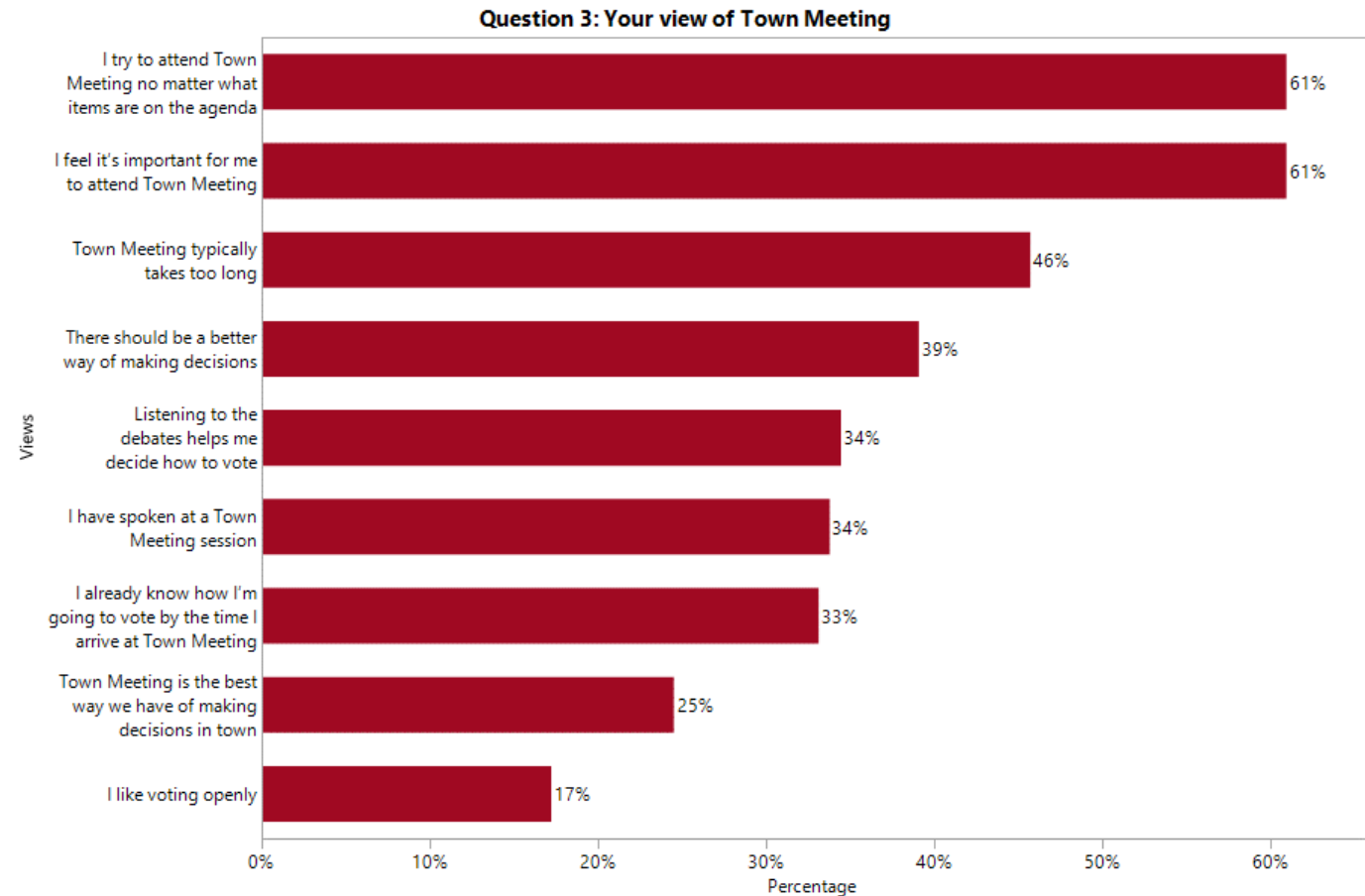
Factors affecting attendance

- 36% said childcare responsibilities affected their attendance
- 32% cited conflicts with other activities and 31% pointed to work obligations
- 19% said holding meetings on weekday nights kept them from meetings
- 19% said they weren't always interested in the subject matter



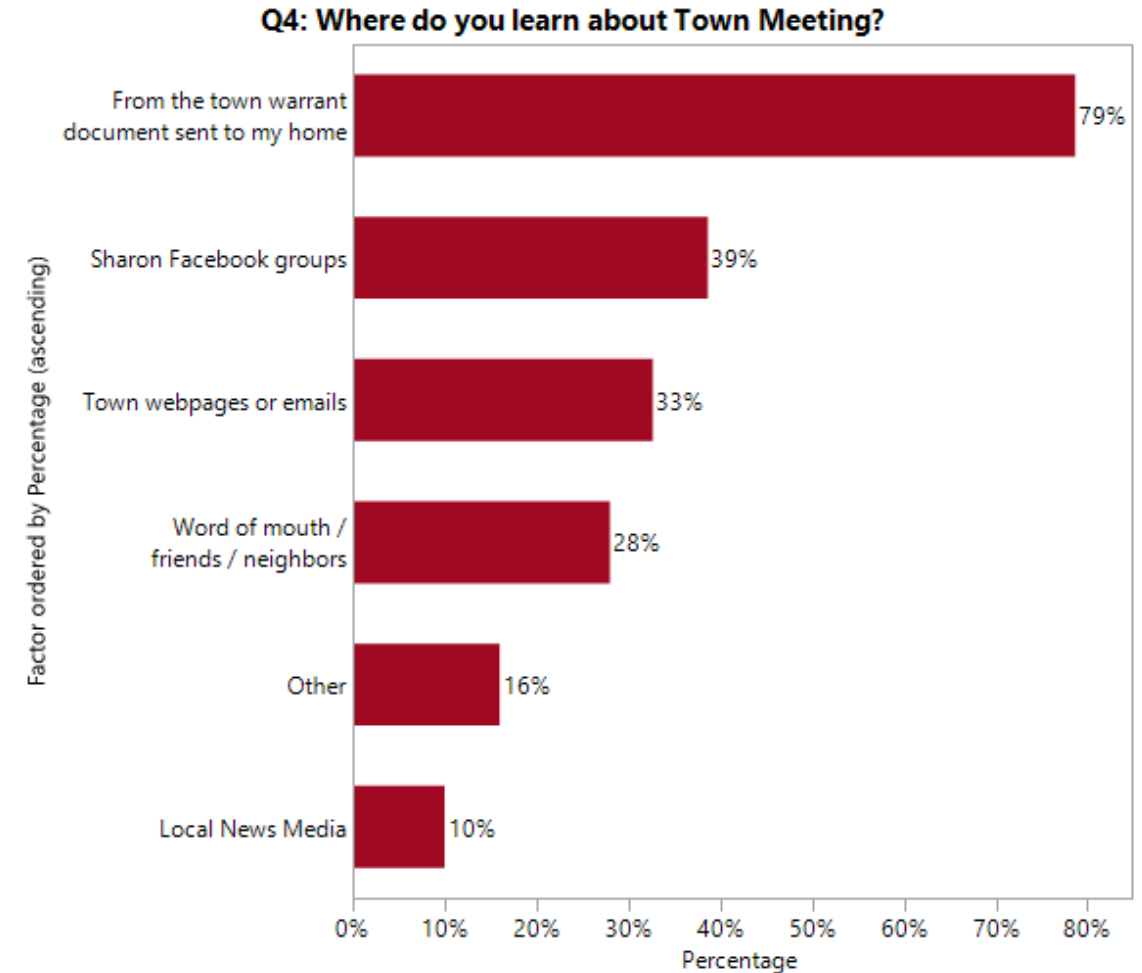
Opinions about meeting

- 61% said they try to attend Town Meeting no matter what
- 46% say meetings take too long
- 39% believe there's a better way to make decisions in town
- 34% say listening to debates helps voting decisions
- 33% know how they're going to vote beforehand



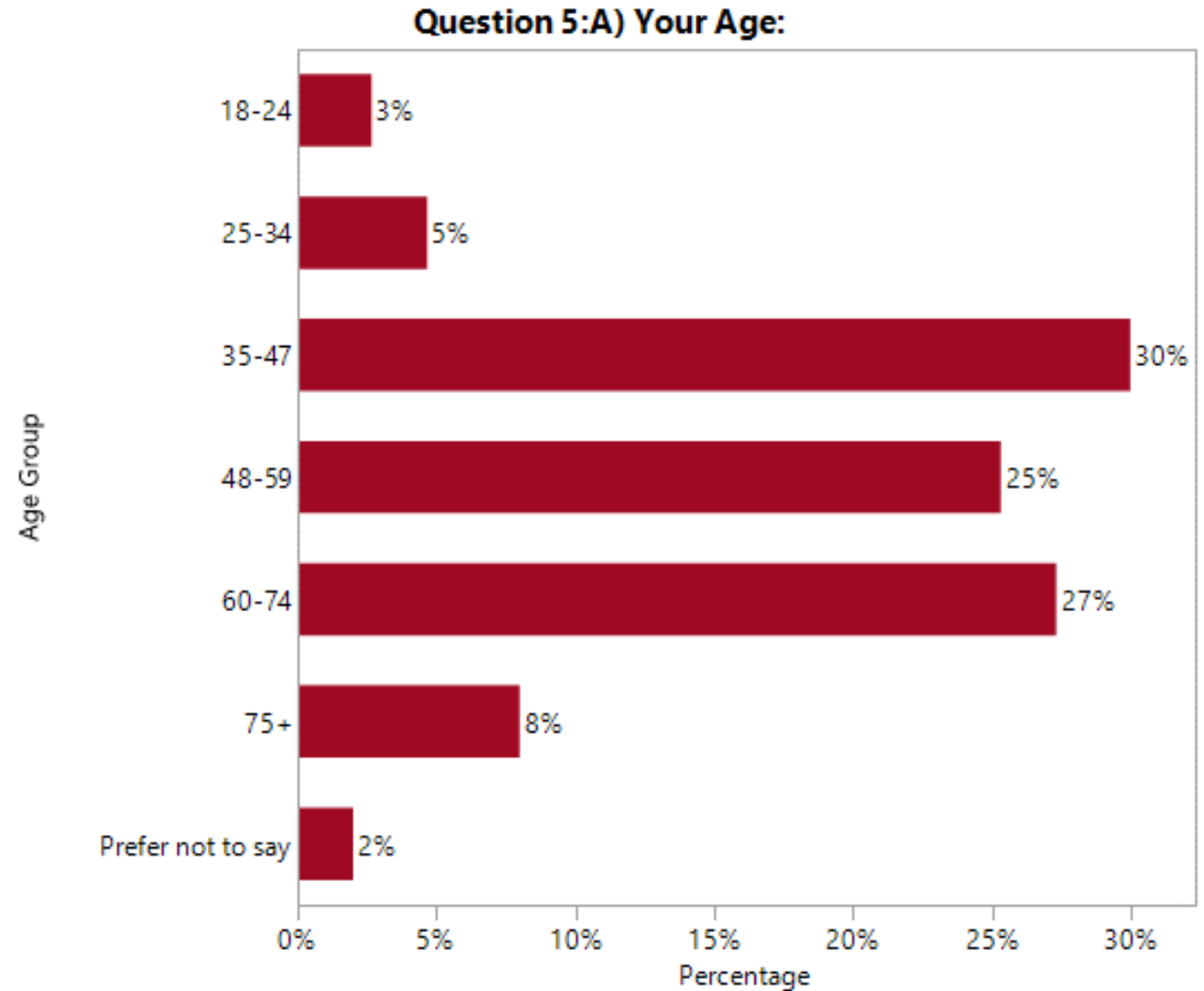
How voters learn about Town Meeting

- 79% said they got information from the town warrant booklet
- 39% said Sharon Facebook groups
- 33% said town webpages or emails
- 28% said they learned from friends or by word of mouth



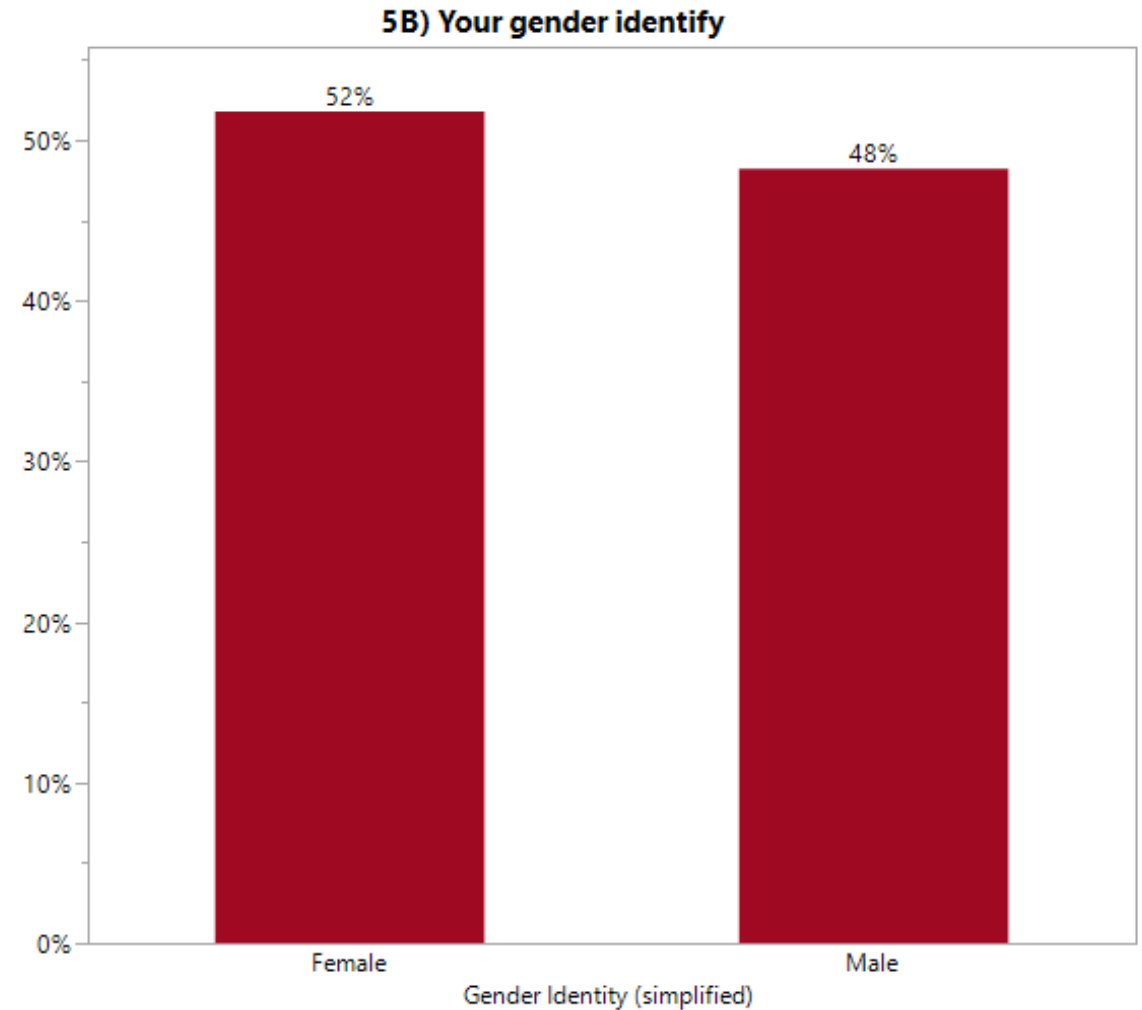
Demographic information: Age

- Average age of attendees: ~54
- 55% are between 35 and 59
- 35% are over 60



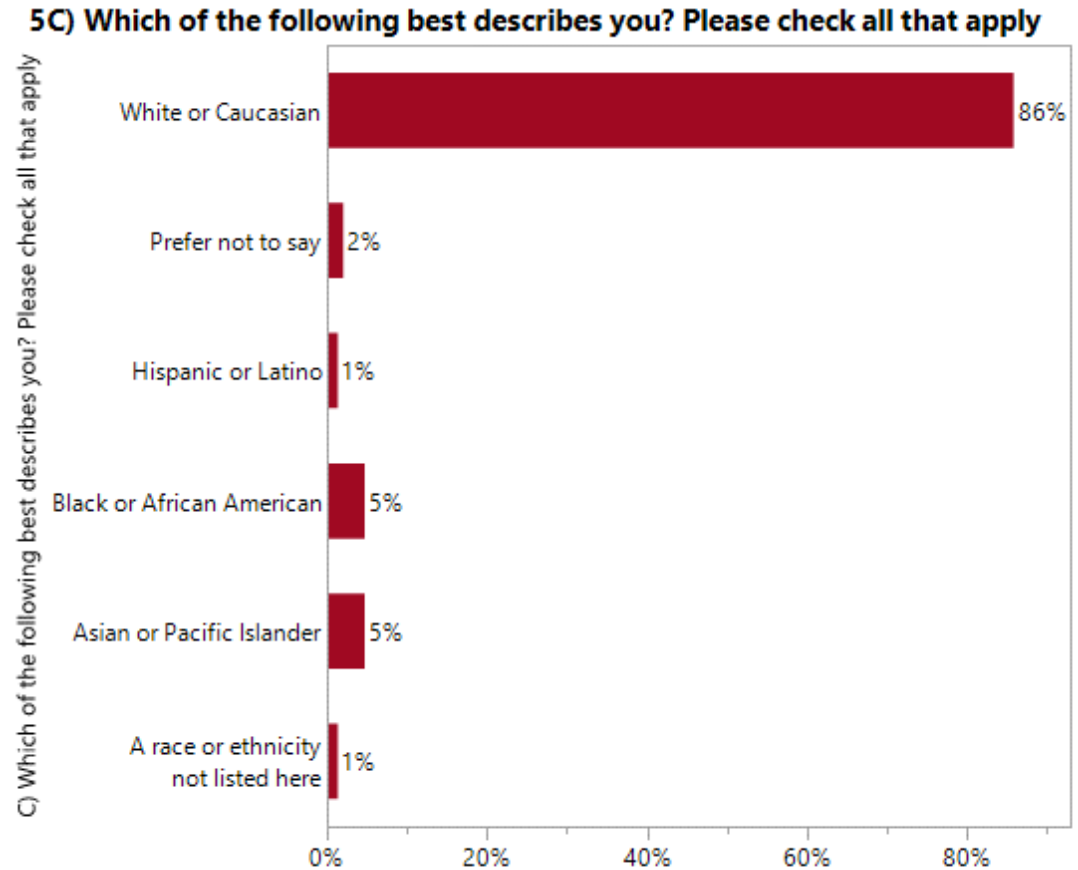
Demographic information: Gender

- 52% of respondents identified as female
- 48% identified as male



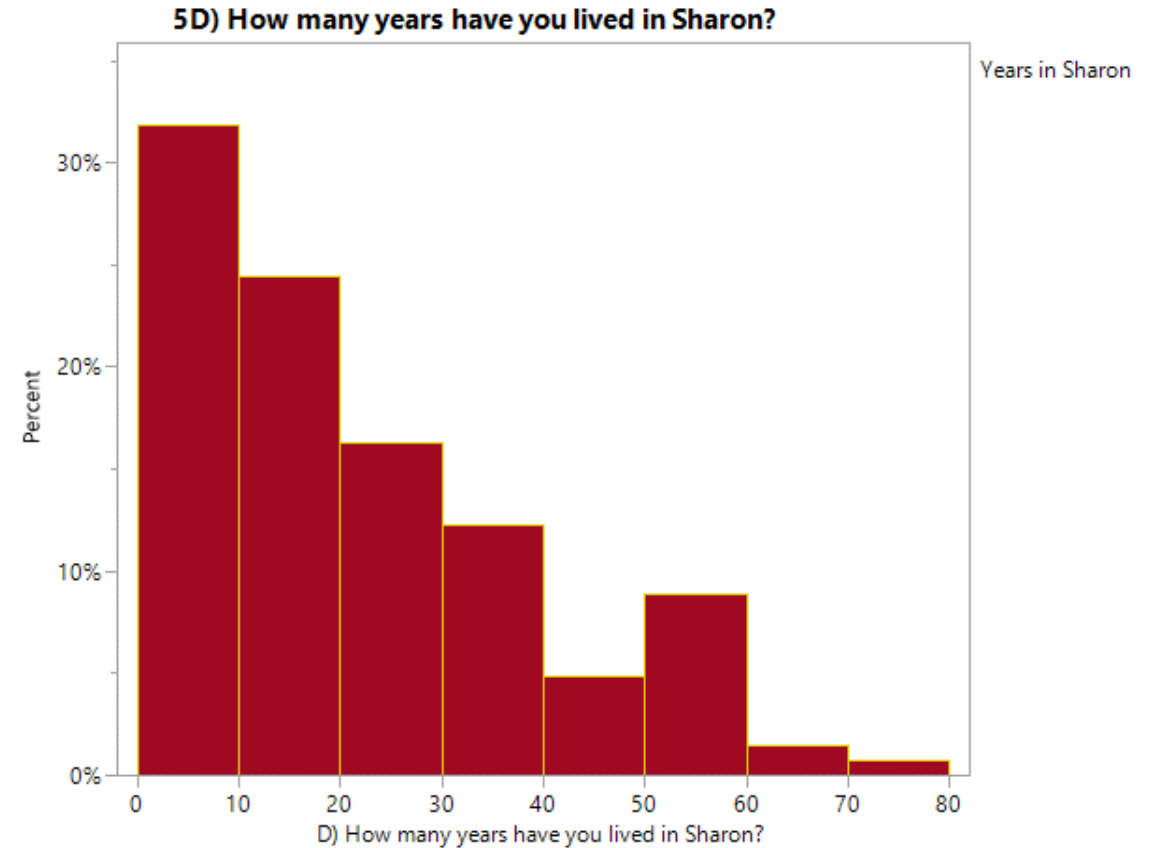
Demographic information: Race and ethnicity

- 86% of respondents identified as white or Caucasian
- 11% identified as people of color



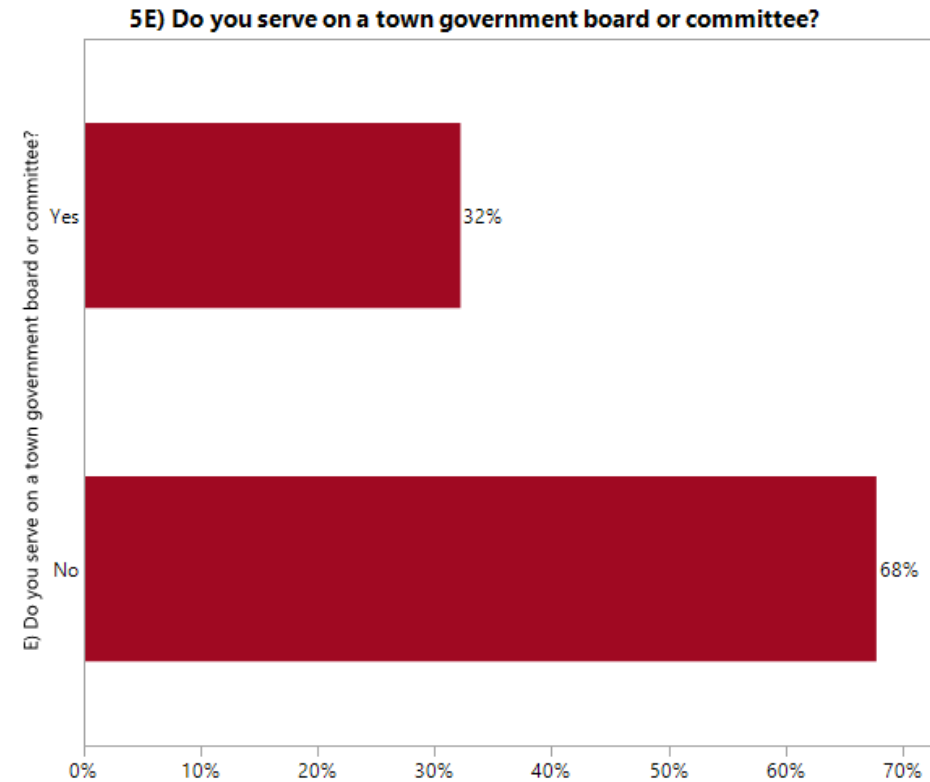
Demographic information: Years in Sharon

- Average length of residency in Sharon: 21 years
- Median length of residency: 17 years
- About one-third have lived in town less than 10 years



Demographic information: Town service

- Nearly 1 in 3 attendees serve on a town government board or committee





Sharon Governance Study Committee
Town-Wide Survey | August 2022

Updated using available data as of August 21, 2022
 1,213 on-line responses
 28 paper responses
 1,241 TOTAL RESPONSES

Question 1: How long have you lived in Sharon
 Average (mean): 21.1 yrs Median: 18 yrs

Question 2: Where do you learn about town government? (Check all that apply)
 Top 4 are bolded (> 50% of respondents)

Source	# choosing	% of total respondents
Local news media (Wicked Local/ Patriot Ledger/ Weekly Shopper etc)	239	19.3
Sharon Community TV	216	17.4
Banner on Main Street	430	34.6
Sharon Facebook groups	628	54.6
From the town warrant document sent to my home	705	56.8
Word of mouth / friends / neighbors	783	63.1
School communications (from principals/ PTOs/ etc.)	305	24.6
Town web pages or emails	628	50.6
Twitter or Instagram	57	4.6
Flyer postings or bulletin boards	71	5.7
Other	59	4.8

Question 3: Are you a registered voter in Sharon? (% do not sum to 100 due to rounding)

Yes – 1134 (92%)
 No – 82 (7%)
 Not sure – 21 (2%)

Question 4: Did you attend Sharon's Annual Town Meeting in...?

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018 or before
Yes	148 (12%)	213 (17%)	236 (19%)	404 (33%)	639 (51%)
No	1012 (82%)	930 (75%)	855 (69%)	649 (52%)	455 (37%)
Don't remember	18 (1%)	31 (3%)	67 (5%)	97 (8%)	77 (6%)
Blank	63 (5%)	67 (5%)	73 (6%)	91 (7%)	70 (6%)
I have never attended an Annual Town Meeting -- 290 (23%)					

Q4A: Respondent attended at least one of past 4: 523 (42%)

NOTE: 772 (62%) said they attended in 2018 or before OR at least one of the past 4, leaving 469 who answered "No" about having attended any of these meetings. Yet, 290 respondents said "Yes", I've never attended a town meeting. There is a gap between the 469 who reported non-attendance and the 290 who said they've never attended. For the further analysis, classified those who said 'no' to all cited meetings as nonattending, rather than use the responses to the final part of Q4.

Question 5: If you didn't attend a meeting, which of the following kept you from attending? (Check all that apply) Percentages are % of 1241 respondents; bold indicates top 4 reasons

Schedule conflict (work etc.) -- 540 (44%)
 Caregiving responsibilities -- 346 (28%)
 Transportation or parking -- 46 (4%)
 Concern about COVID-19 -- 368 (30%)
 Town Meeting is too long -- 482 (39%)
 I prefer my vote to be anonymous -- 163 (13%)
 I don't think one vote makes a difference -- 49 (4%)
 Not informed about the issues -- 187 (15%)
 Not interested -- 75 (6%)
 Other -- 180 (15%)

Question 6: Which form of town government do you think would be best for our town of Sharon?

Keep the Select Board and the open Town Meeting in which all voters meet at least once each year and can speak on issues and vote on their own behalf. -- 523 (42%)
 Keep the Select Board but change to a representative Town Meeting in which voters elect a body of people to vote on their behalf. -- 195 (16%)
 Replace the Select Board and Town Meeting with a town council elected by voters to make decisions on behalf of the town. -- 338 (27%)
 No preference -- 151 (12%)
 Blank -- 34 (3%)

Question 7: Would you be more likely or less likely to attend Town Meeting if it were moved from Monday evening to...?

	More likely to attend	Neither more nor less likely to attend	Less likely to attend	Did not respond
Any other weeknight other than Monday	133 (11%)	927 (75%)	85 (7%)	96 (8%)
Saturday evening	210 (17%)	404 (33%)	525 (42%)	102 (8%)
Sunday afternoon	361 (29%)	422 (34%)	354 (29%)	104 (8%)

Question 8: Would you prefer than Sharon public meetings (Select Board, School Committee, etc.) be...?

In person live-streamed meetings where I can watch from home but have to attend in person if I want to speak -- 357 (29%)

Fully hybrid meetings where I can both watch and speak from home or in person -- 741 (60%)

Fully remote meetings where everyone attends online -- 106 (9%)

No Response – 37 (3%)

Question 9: How many members do you think the Sharon Select Board should have?

Three -- 156 (13%)

Five -- 729 (59%)

No preference -- 277 (22%)

Other -- 62 (5%)

Question 10: Should non-citizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as "green card," refugee, other visa, etc.) be permitted to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting?

Yes -- 711 (57%)

No -- 398 (32%)

No preference -- 97 (8%)

Blank – 35 (3%)

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Age

18-24 -- 6 (.5%)

25-34 -- 49 (4%)

35-47 -- 356 (29%)

48-54 -- 224 (18%)

55-59 -- 119 (10%)

60-74 -- 346 (28%)

75+ -- 88 (7%)

Prefer not to say -- 44 (4%)

Blank – 9 (1%)

1232 responses, 9 blanks

Your gender identity [US Current Population Survey (CPS) reports 52.2% female]

Male -- 596 (48%)
Female -- 574 (47%)
Nonbinary / Nonconforming -- 2 (0.2%)
Prefer not to say -- 58 (5%)
Blank -- 11 (1%)

Are you a U.S. citizen? (datausa.io figure is 94.8%)

Yes -- 1163 (95%)
No -- 65 (5%)

Which of the following best describes you? (Check all that apply)

White -- 900 (73%) (US CPS says 75.4% white)
Black or African American -- 24 (2%) (CPS 1.6%)
American Indian or Alaska Native -- 6 (0.5%) (CPS 0.1%)
Asian -- 198 (16%) (CPS 17%)
Hispanic or Latino -- 22 (2%) (CPS 4.6%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Island -- 4 (0.3%)
Other -- 63 (5%)

Do you serve or have you served on a Sharon town government board or committee?

Yes -- 153 (12%)
No -- 1076 (87%)
Blank -- 12 (1%)



Town-wide Governance Survey

Sharon Governance Committee

Final Report

August 31, 2022

Background

Survey conducted on-line and on paper in July and August 2022, promoted via Town emails, postcards to every residence, Facebook groups and other social media.

Sample size: n = 1,241 Sharon residents, ages 18 and older

Part 1: Executive Summary

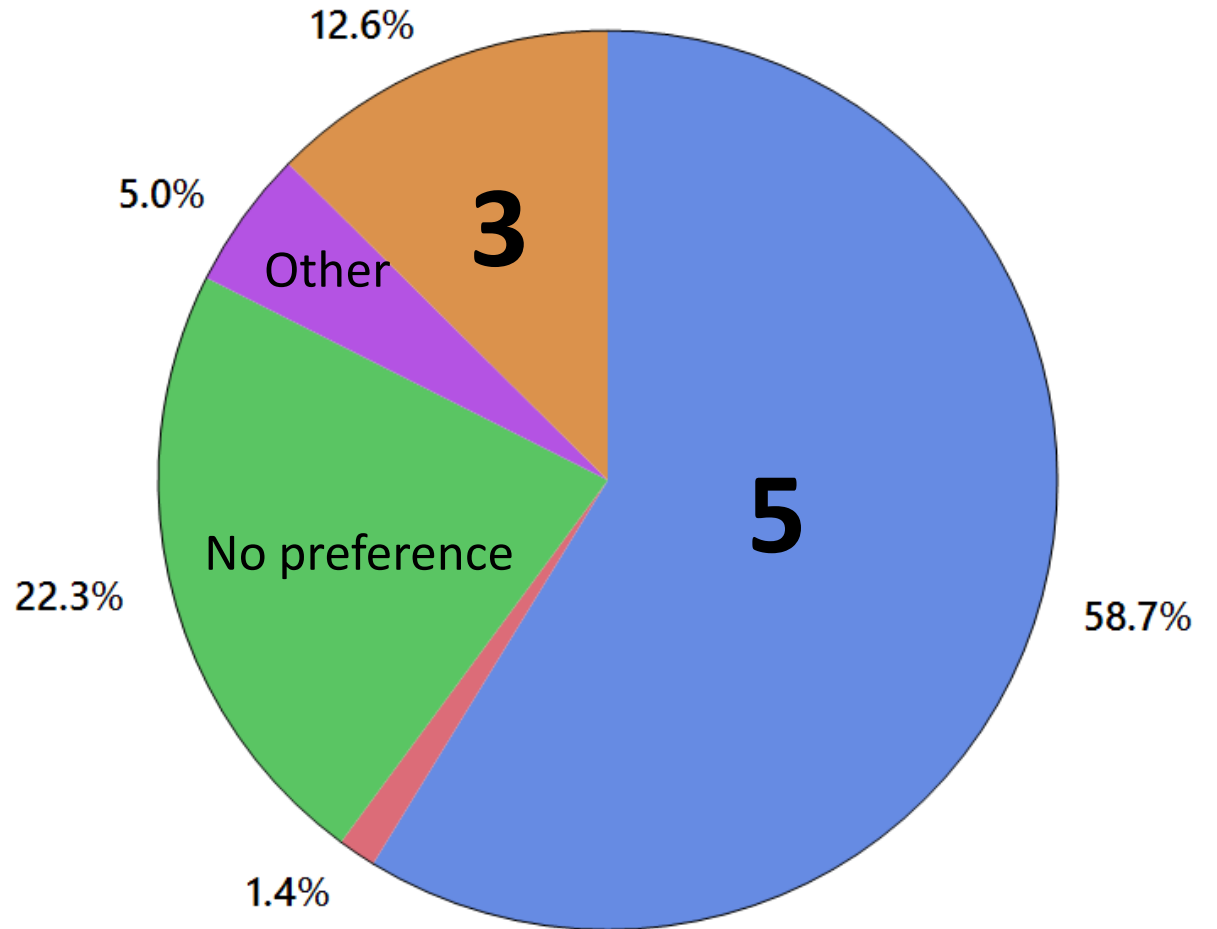
Executive Summary—3 Key Findings

- **Select Board**: A majority of respondents prefer a 5-member board
- **Form of government**: A plurality would keep the Open Town Meeting and Select Board. Slightly more favor another way of governing.
- **Noncitizen voting**: A majority of respondents favor permitting noncitizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as “green card,” refugee, other visa, etc.) to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting.

Part 2: Review of 3 Key Issues

3 Key Issues: Select Board

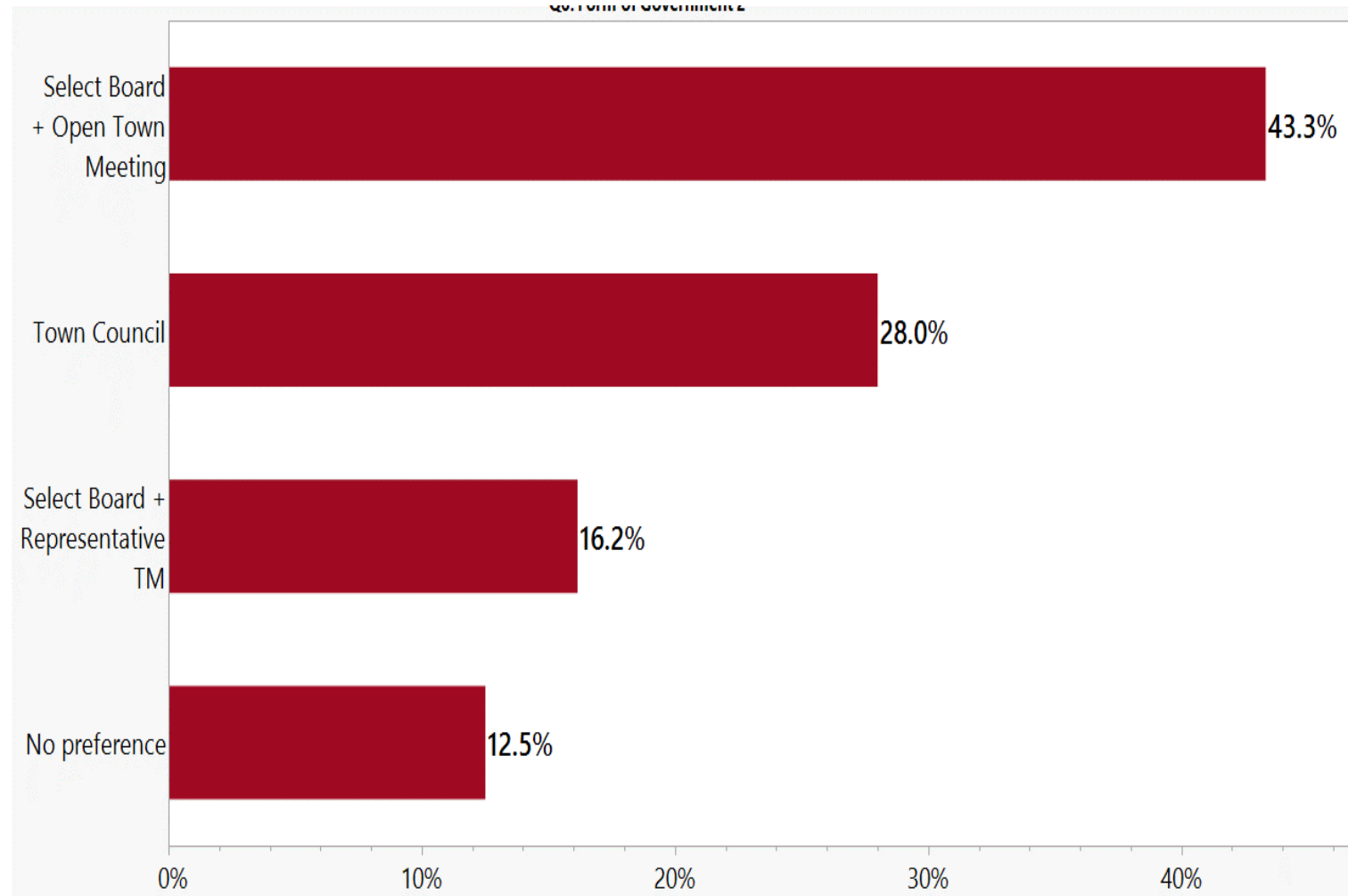
- **59%** prefer a 5-member board
- **22%** expressed no preference
- **12%** support having a 3-member board



Question 9: How many members do you think the Sharon Select Board should have?

3 Key Issues: Form of Government

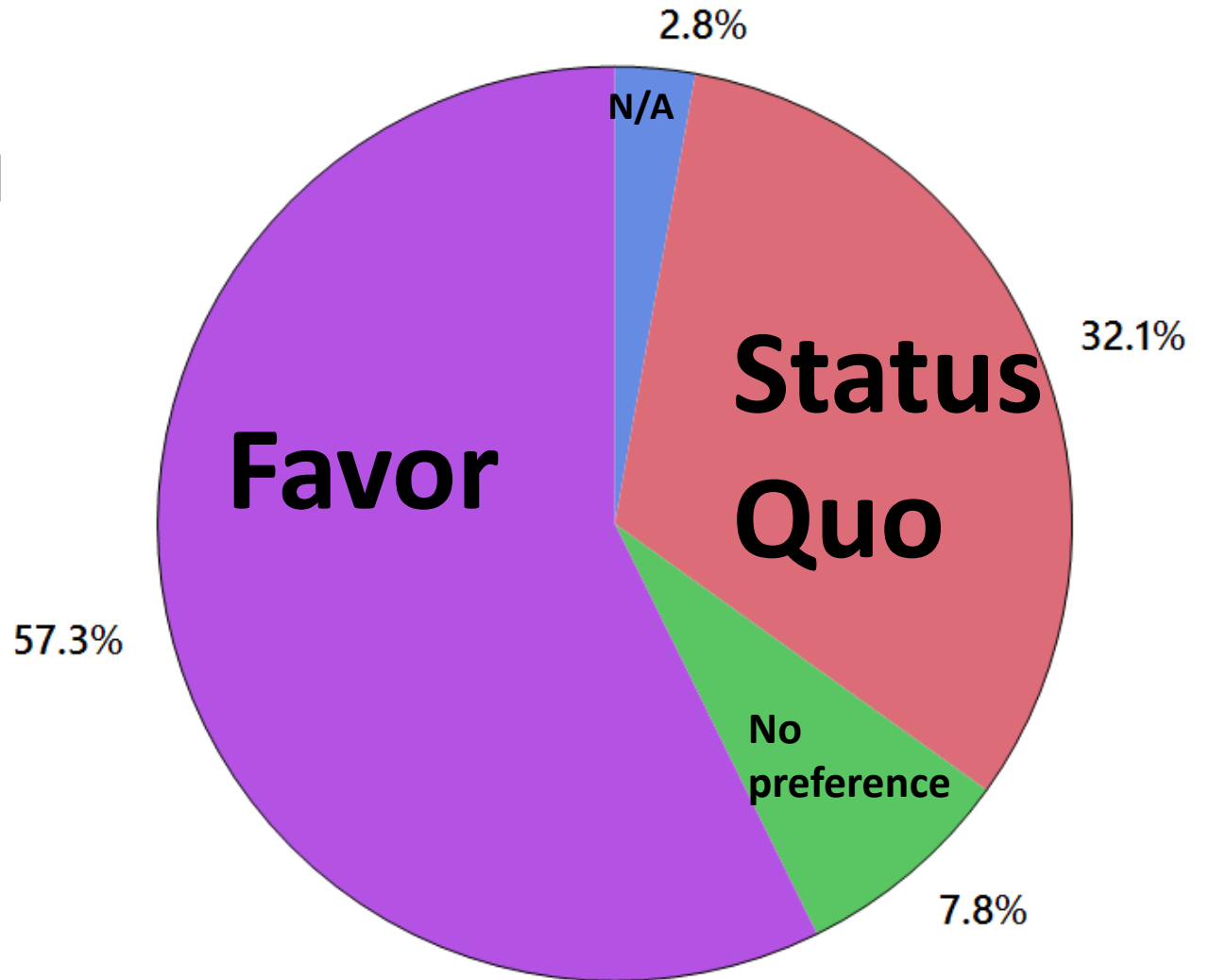
- **43%** would retain the Open Town Meeting and Select Board
- **28%** would replace the current system with a town council
- **16%** would replace the current system with a Representative Town Meeting and Select Board



Question 6: Which form of town government do you think would be best for our town of Sharon?

3 Key Issues: Noncitizen Voting

- **57%** would permit noncitizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as “green card,” refugee, other visa, etc.) to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting.
- **32%** do not support allowing noncitizens to vote in town elections (*status quo*)

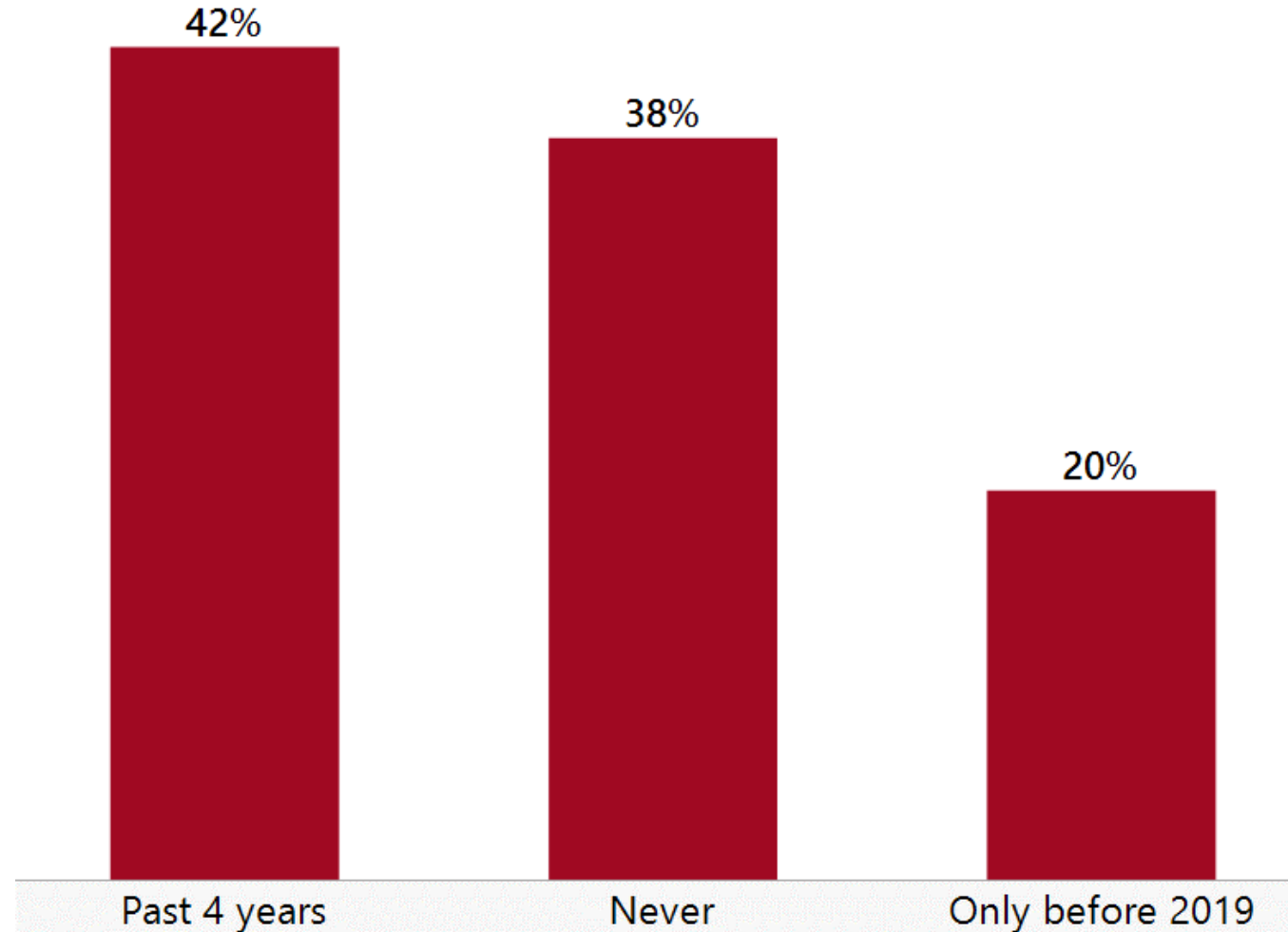


Question 10: “Should non-citizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as “green card,” refugee, other visa, etc.) be permitted to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting?”

Part 3: Town Government and Communications

Government and Communications: Going to Town Meeting

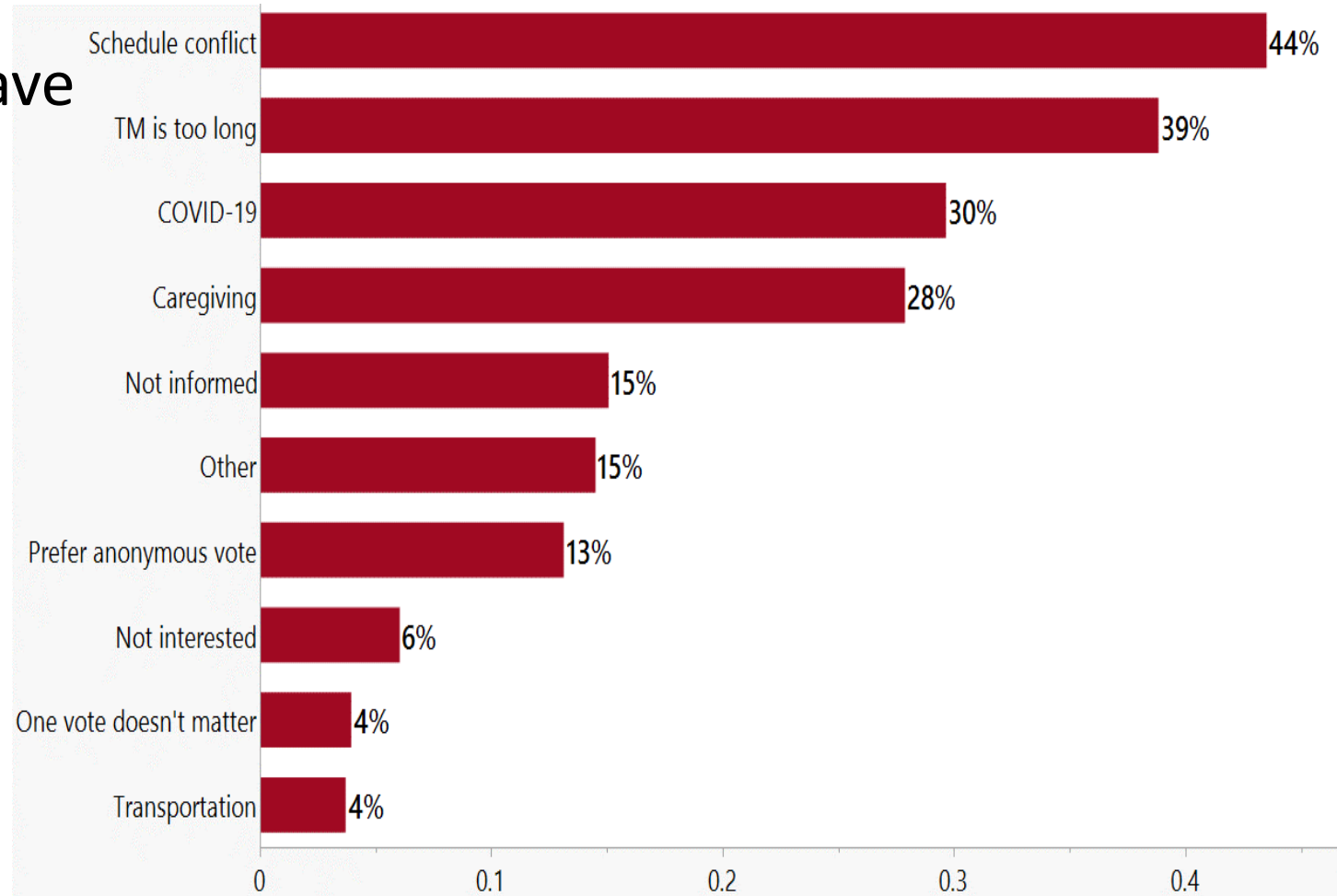
- **42%** say they've attended Town Meeting within the last 4 years
- **38%** have never attended a Town Meeting session
- **20%** attended before 2019, but not since



Question 4 asked about attendance at prior Town Meetings

Government and Communications: Barriers to Attendance

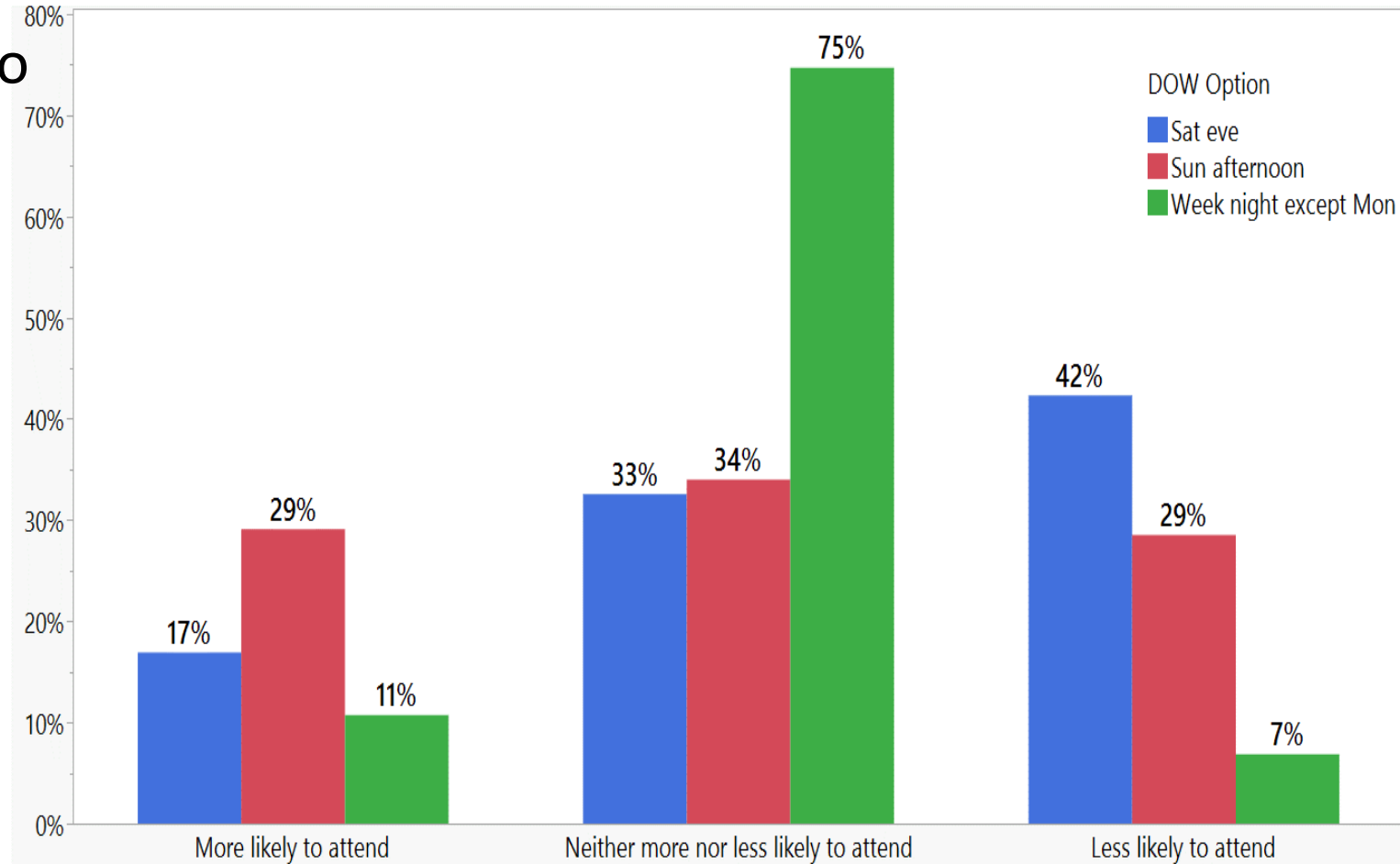
- **44%** say scheduling conflicts have kept them from attending Town Meeting
- **39%** say Town Meeting is too long
- **30%** were concerned about COVID-19
- **28%** say caregiving responsibilities were a barrier



Question 5: If you didn't attend a meeting, which of the following kept you from attending? (Check all that apply)

Government and Communications: Day of Town Meeting

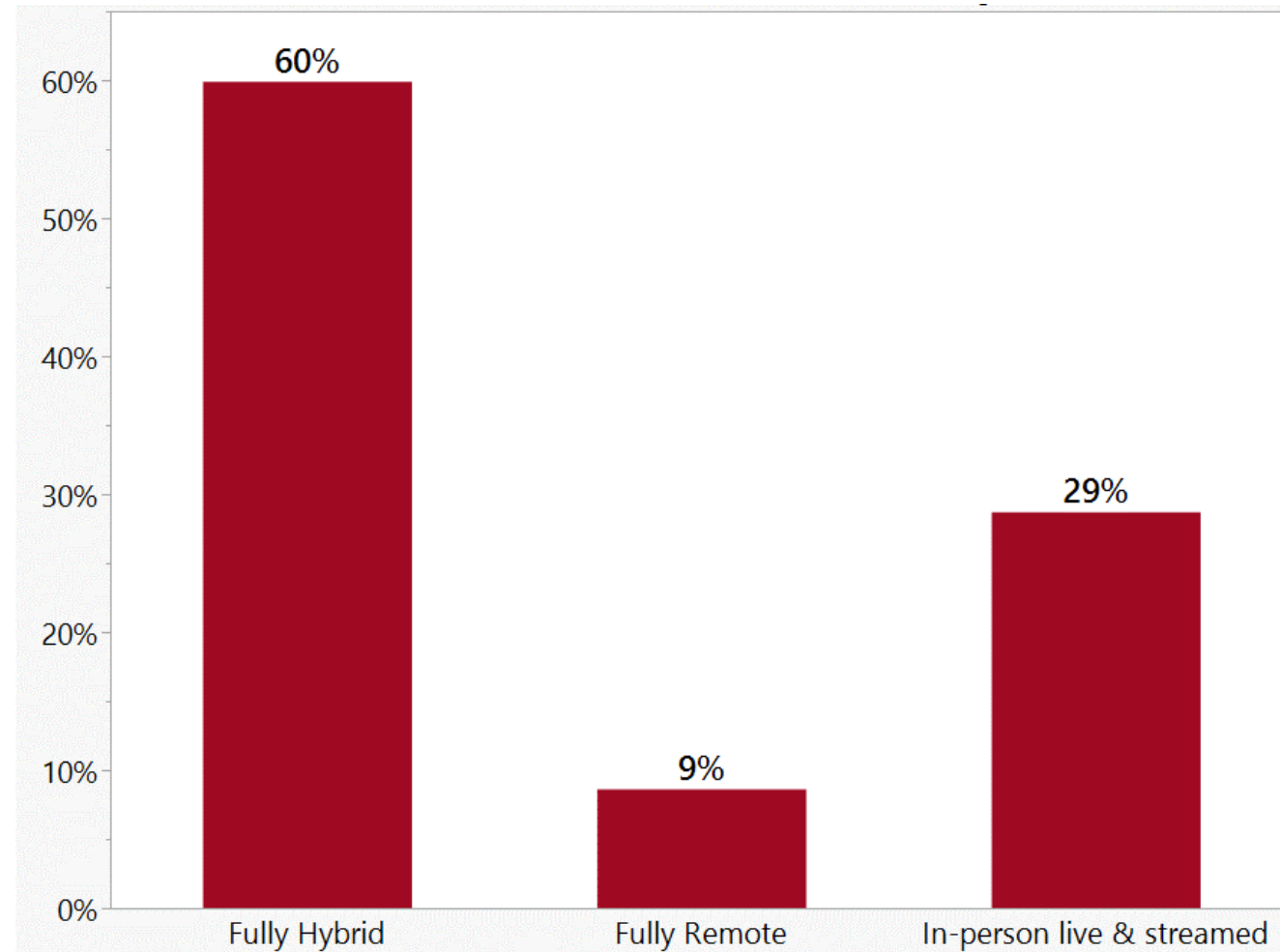
- **11%** say they'd be more likely to attend Town Meeting if it started on a weeknight other than Monday
- **17%** would be more likely to attend if Town Meeting were held on a Saturday evening
- **29%** would be more likely to attend if sessions were held on Sunday afternoons



Question 7 asked respondents about their likelihood of attendance if Town Meeting met at some time other than a Monday night

Government and Communications: Should Board Meetings Go Hybrid?

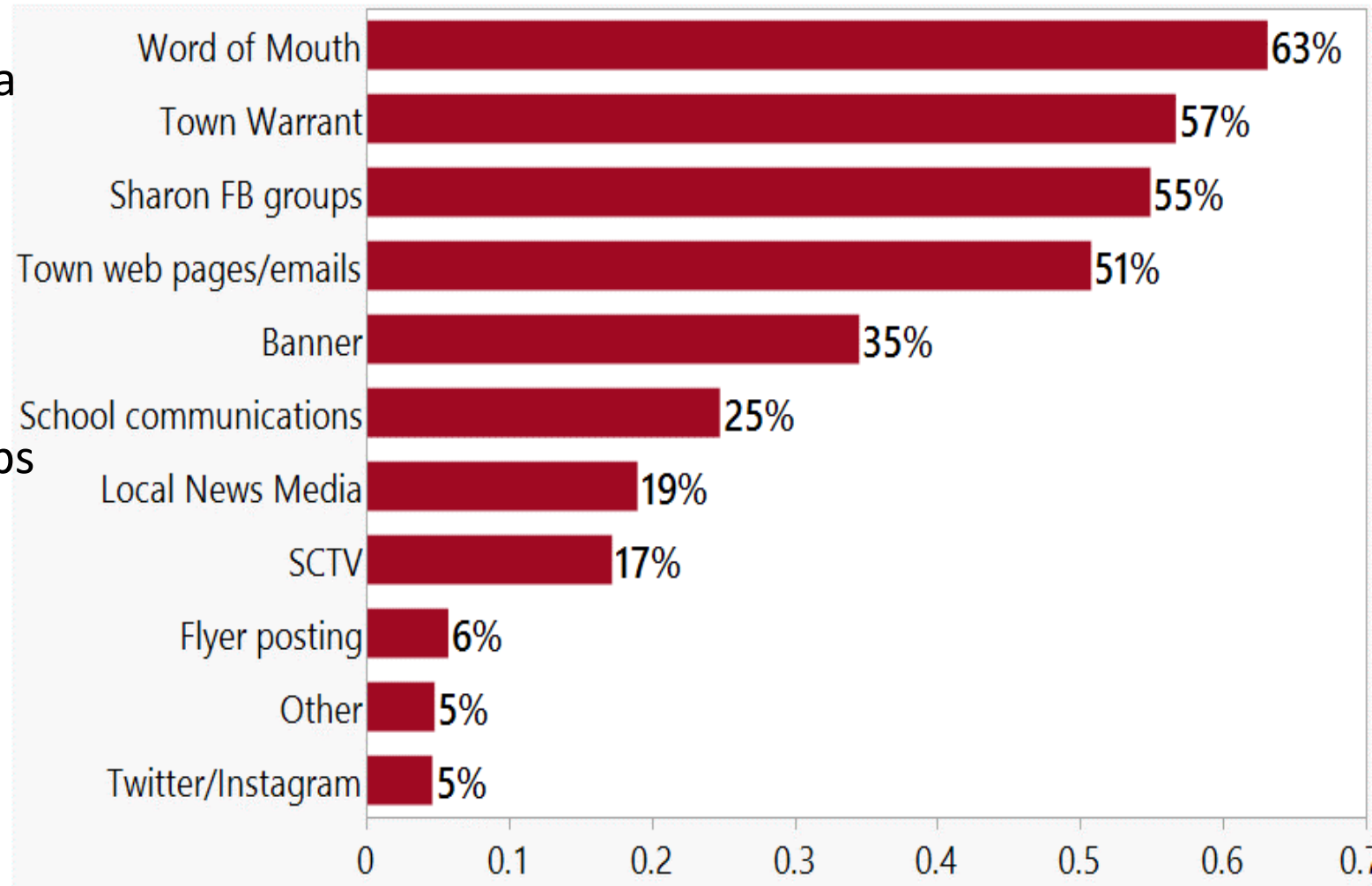
- **60%** want town boards to have hybrid meetings, with residents being able to speak from home
- **29%** -would like to town boards and committees to conduct in-person meetings, while showing the proceedings live on Sharon TV and the internet
- **9%** favor fully remote meetings with all participants online



Question 8: Would you prefer than Sharon public meetings (Select Board, School Committee, etc.) be...?

Government and Communications: Where Residents Learn About Government

- **63%** say friends and neighbors are a source of information
- **57%** learn about town government from the Town Meeting Warrant
- **55%** rely on Sharon Facebook groups
- Others get information from:
 - Town website/ emails (**51%**)
 - Banner on Main St (**35%**)
 - School communications (**25%**)



Question 2: Where do you learn about town government? (Check all that apply)

Part 4: Analysis

Analysis: Favor Open Town Meeting

- Respondents over age 47
- Long-time residents: 27 years or more
- People who have attended OTM
- Those who did not report conflicts impeding attendance

Analysis: Favor Town Council

- Residents for less than 27 years
- People ages 48 to 59
- Respondents who haven't attended town meeting in the last 4 years or who have never attended Town Meeting
- People reporting barriers to OTM participation
- Non-members (current or former) of town boards or committees

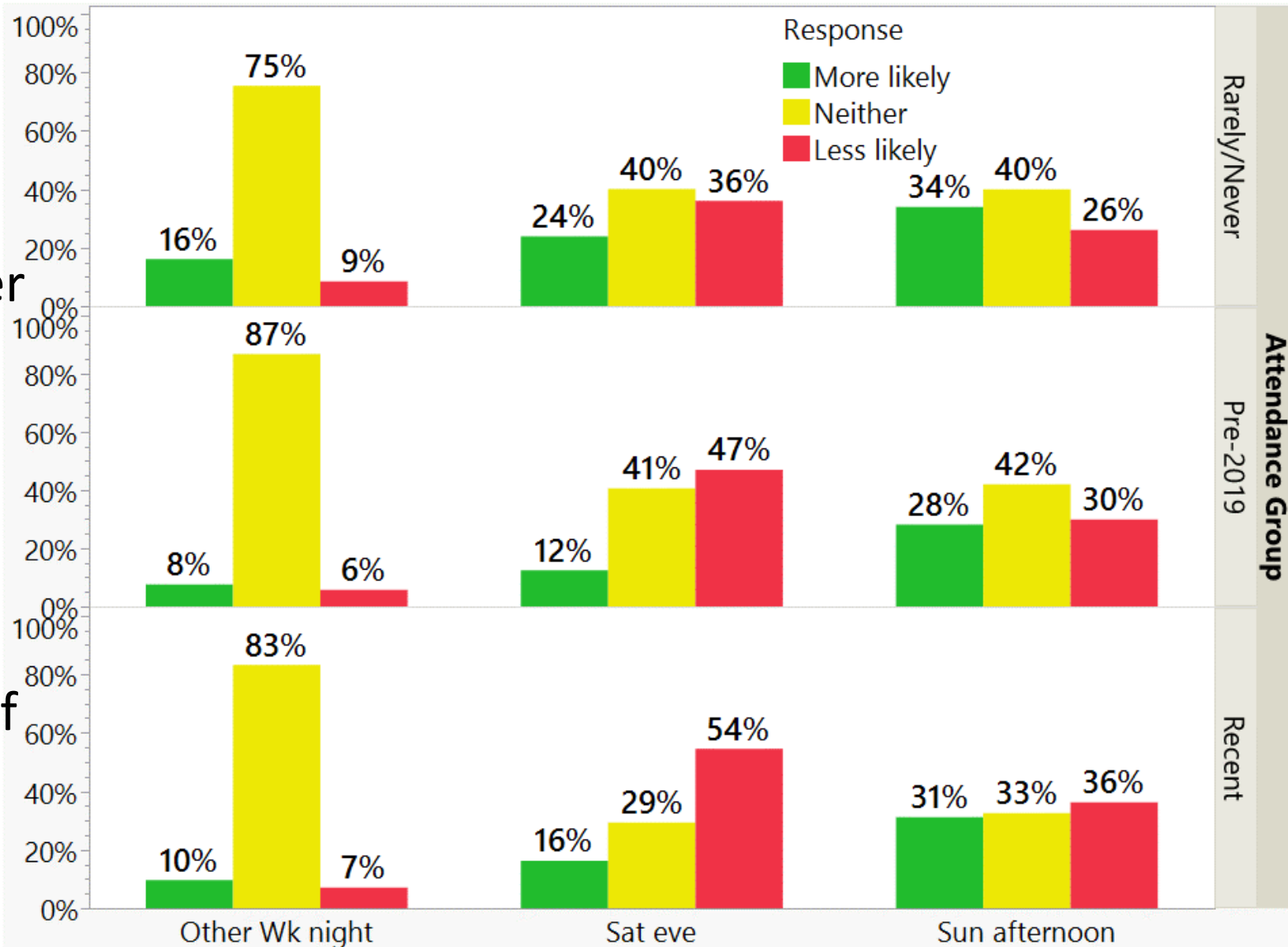
Analysis: Favor Representative Town Meeting

- Respondents ages 60+
- Respondents who've lived in Sharon 27+ years
- Current & former members of town boards or committees
- People who report barriers to OTM attendance
- People who have only attended TM before 2019

Analysis: Impact of Changing Day of Week

Do responses vary among those who rarely, sometimes, often attend?

- Patterns are similar across all 3 groups among those who responded.
- Other weeknight might encourage people who've never come
- Saturday night would discourage more than encourage.
- Sunday *might* potentially encourage more people to engage, at the risk of discouraging a larger fraction of recent attendees.

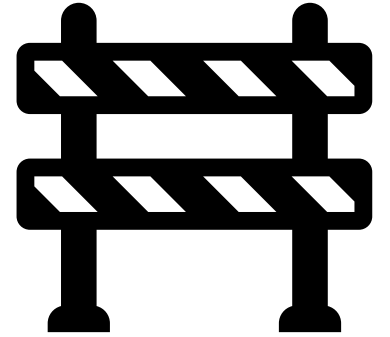


Analysis: Favor Noncitizen Legal Resident Voting

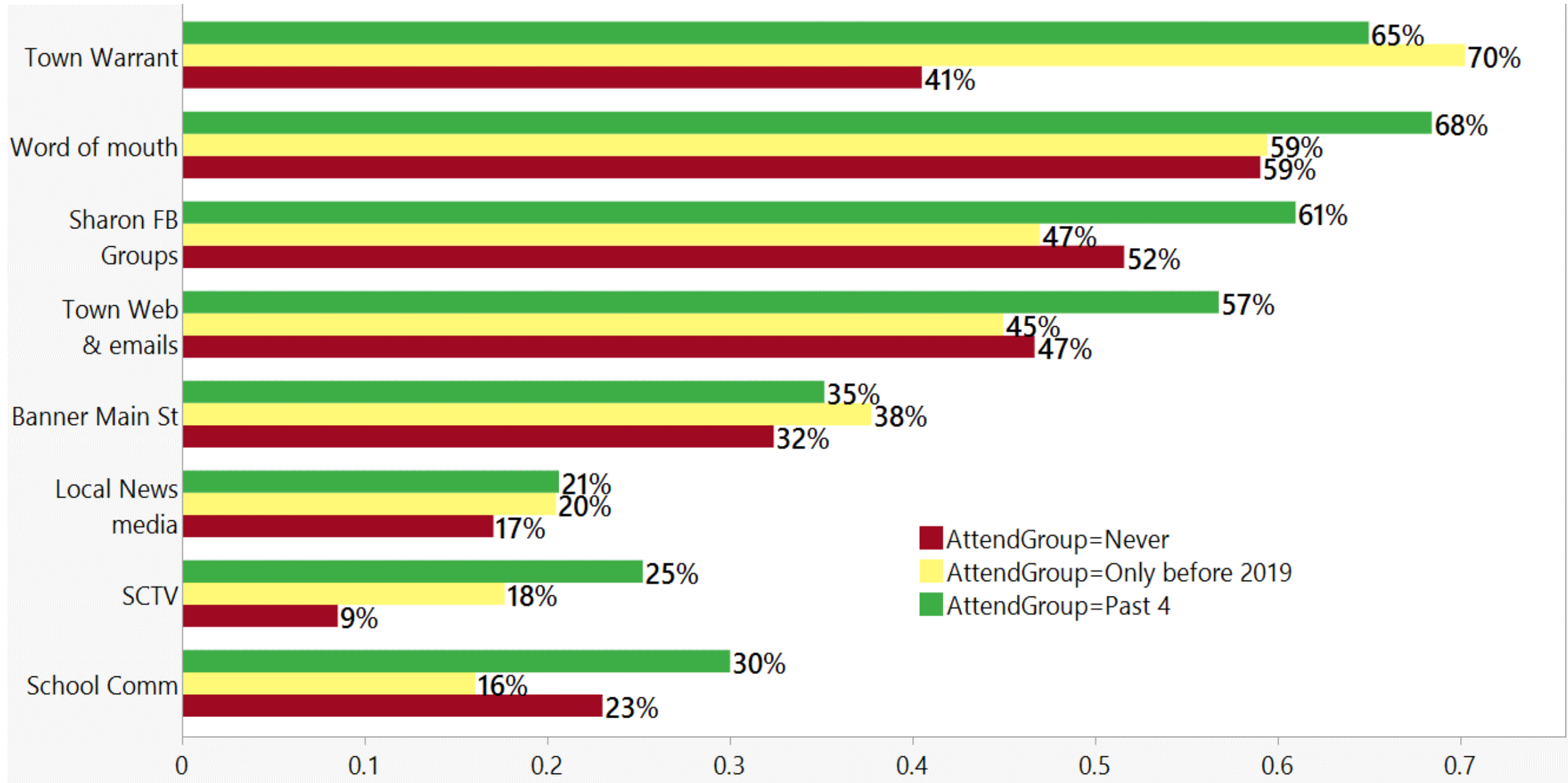
- **99%** of noncitizens
- **55%** of U.S. citizens
- Younger respondents

Analysis: Barriers to Participation

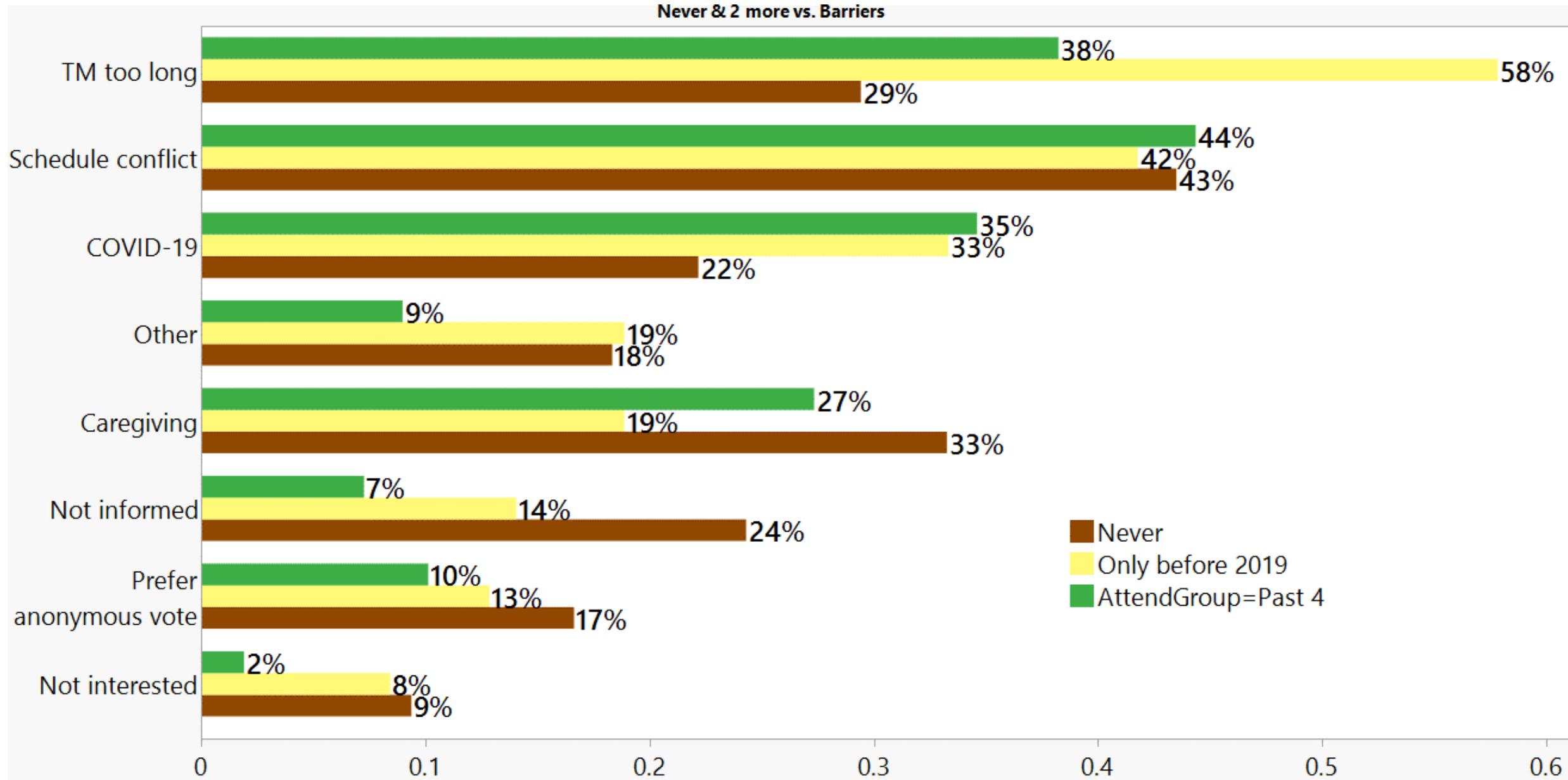
- Those identifying scheduling conflicts as an issue (44%), tend to be younger
- Those citing caregiving (28%) are more likely to identify as female, younger
- Those citing COVID-19 (30%) are more likely to identify as female
- Those citing length of Town Meeting (39%) tend to be male, registered voters who have lived in town 11 to 26 years



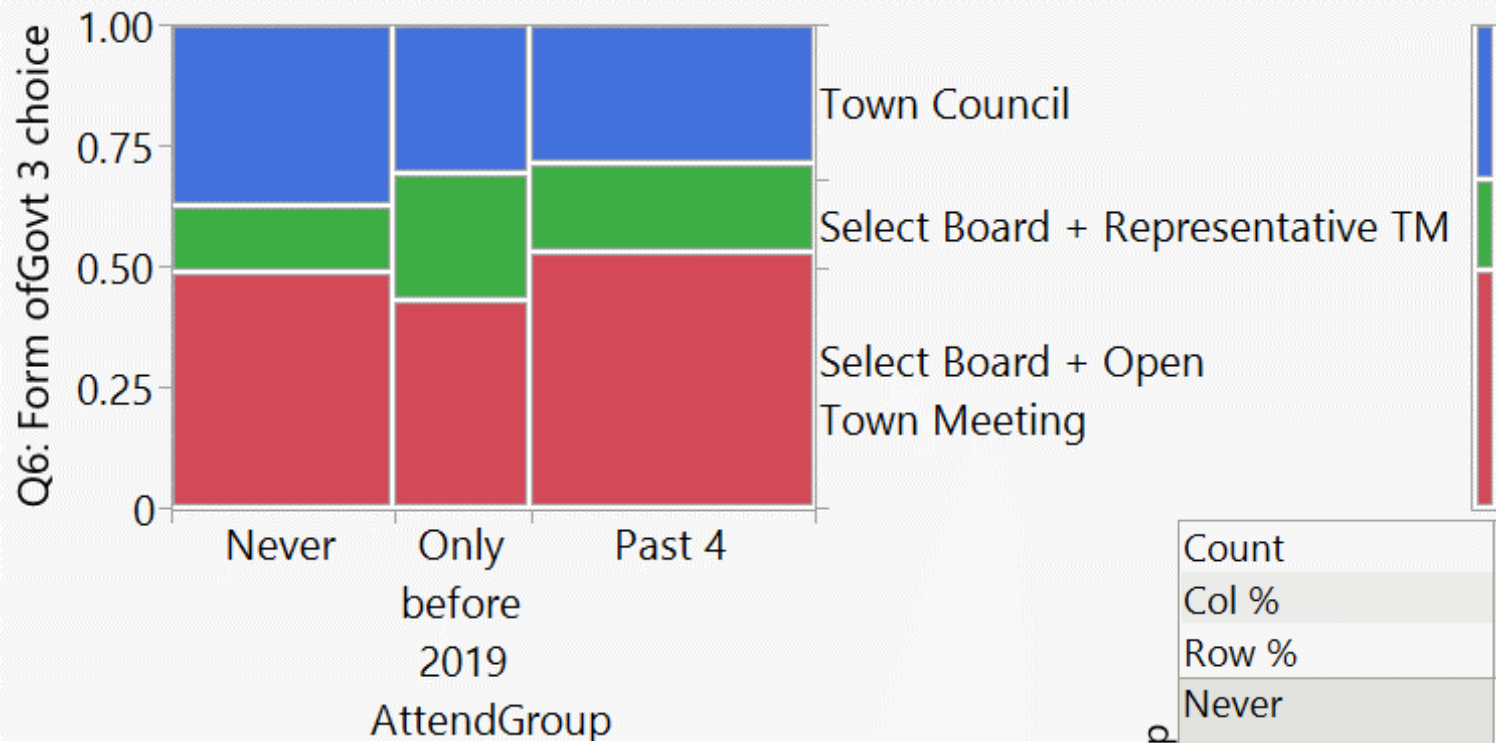
Analysis: Information Sources by attendance groups



Analysis: Barriers Reported by attendance groups



Analysis: Governance Preferences Across Attendance Groups

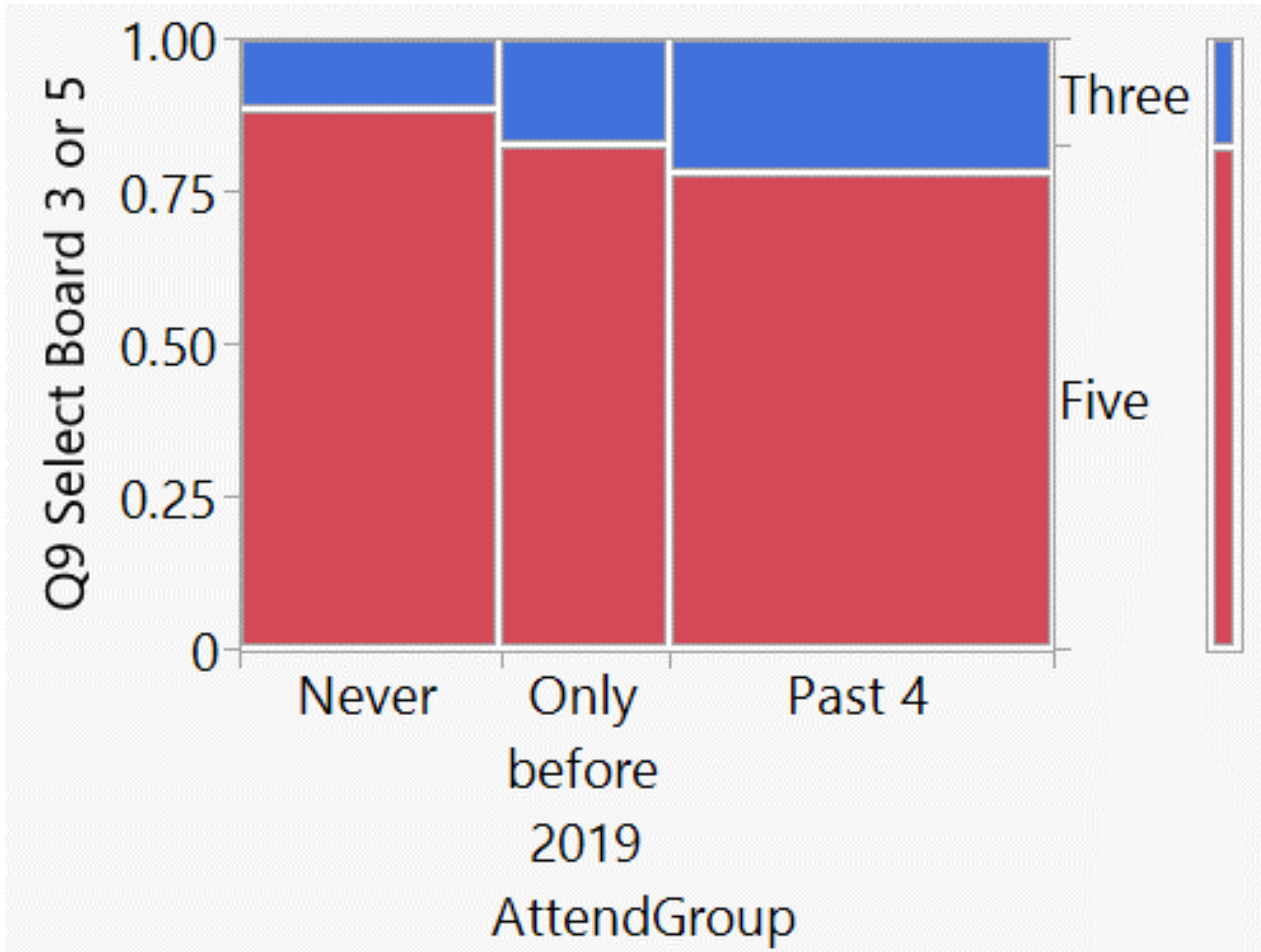


Q6: Form ofGovt 3 choice

AttendGroup	Count	Col %	Row %	Total
Never	179	34.23	48.91	366
	51	26.15	13.93	
	136	40.24	37.16	
Only before 2019	97	18.55	43.30	224
	58	29.74	25.89	
	69	20.41	30.80	
Past 4	247	47.23	53.00	466
	86	44.10	18.45	
	133	39.35	28.54	
Total	523	195	338	1056

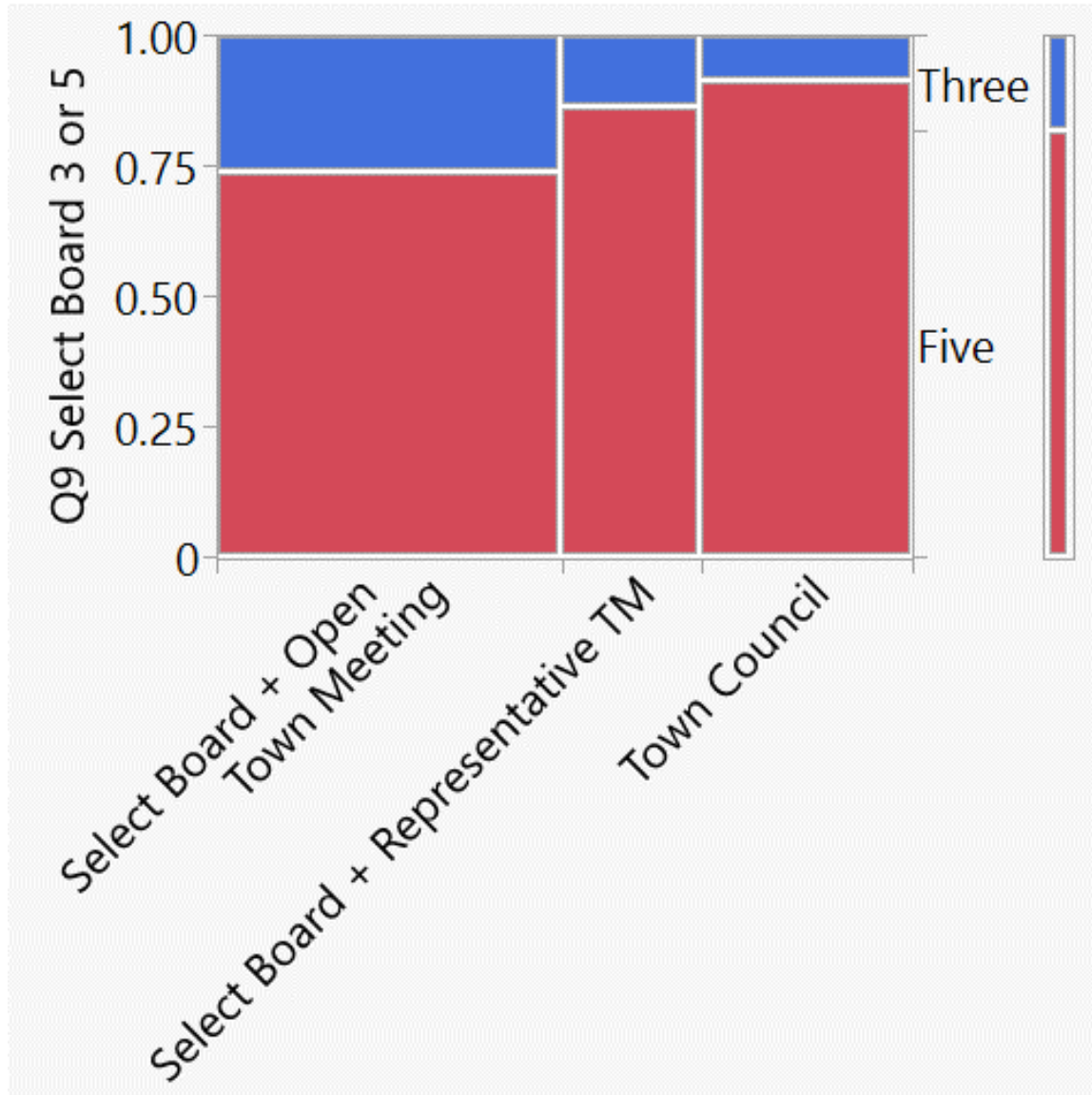
In the graphic above, the heights of the blocks are proportional to the number of people favoring each form of governance, and the widths of the blocks are proportional to the number of people in each attendance category.

Analysis: Select Board Size preferences Across Attendance Groups



		Five	Three	Total
AttendGroup	Count			
	Col %			
	Row %			
	Never	251	33	284
		34.43	21.15	
		88.38	11.62	
	Only before 2019	152	32	184
		20.85	20.51	
		82.61	17.39	
	Past 4	326	91	417
	44.72	58.33		
	78.18	21.82		
Total	729	156	885	

Analysis: Select Board Size and Governance Preferences



Q9 Select Board 3 or 5			
	Five	Three	Total
Count			
Col %			
Row %			
Select Board + Open Town Meeting	289	102	391
	44.88	70.83	
	73.91	26.09	
Select Board + Representative TM	136	21	157
	21.12	14.58	
	86.62	13.38	
Town Council	219	21	240
	34.01	14.58	
	91.25	8.75	
Total	644	144	788

Q6: Form of Govt 3 choice

Part 5: Appendix

- The next few slides describe the respondents, with comparisons to understand how well this group of people represent the entire town.
- The survey was publicized by a postcard sent to all of Sharon's residential households, emails to a list managed by the Sharon Department of Public Works, posts on Sharon Facebook groups and other methods
- The survey was made available on-line and in paper versions at several public locations (e.g. Library, Town Hall, Senior Center)

Total Survey Participants

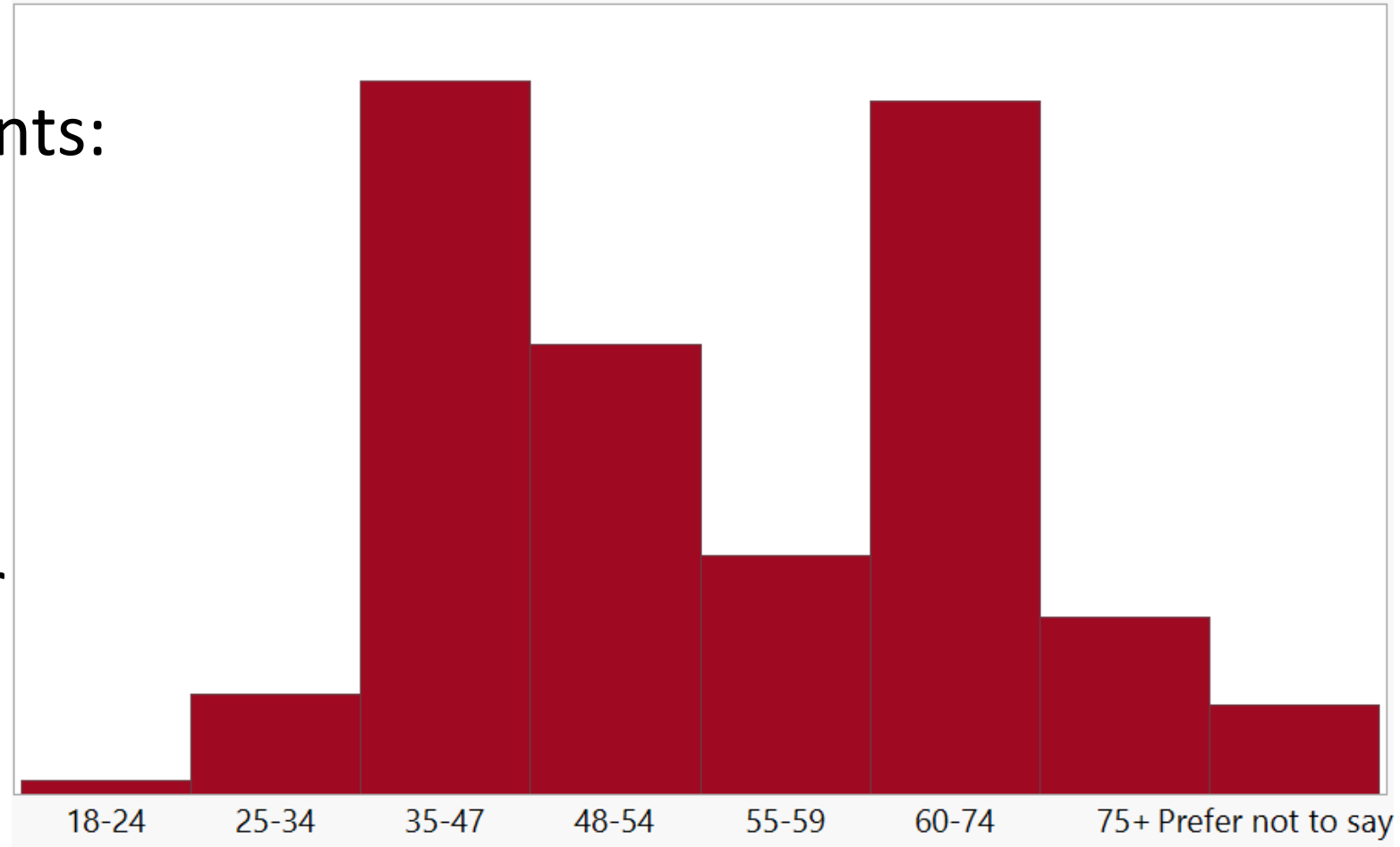
- Participants in survey: **1,241**
 - The number is the equivalent of 9.5% of the Sharon's 13,132 registered voters
- **92%** of respondents are registered voters in Sharon
- **12%** of respondents currently or formerly served on a town government board or committee

Demographic Information: Age

- Average age of respondents:

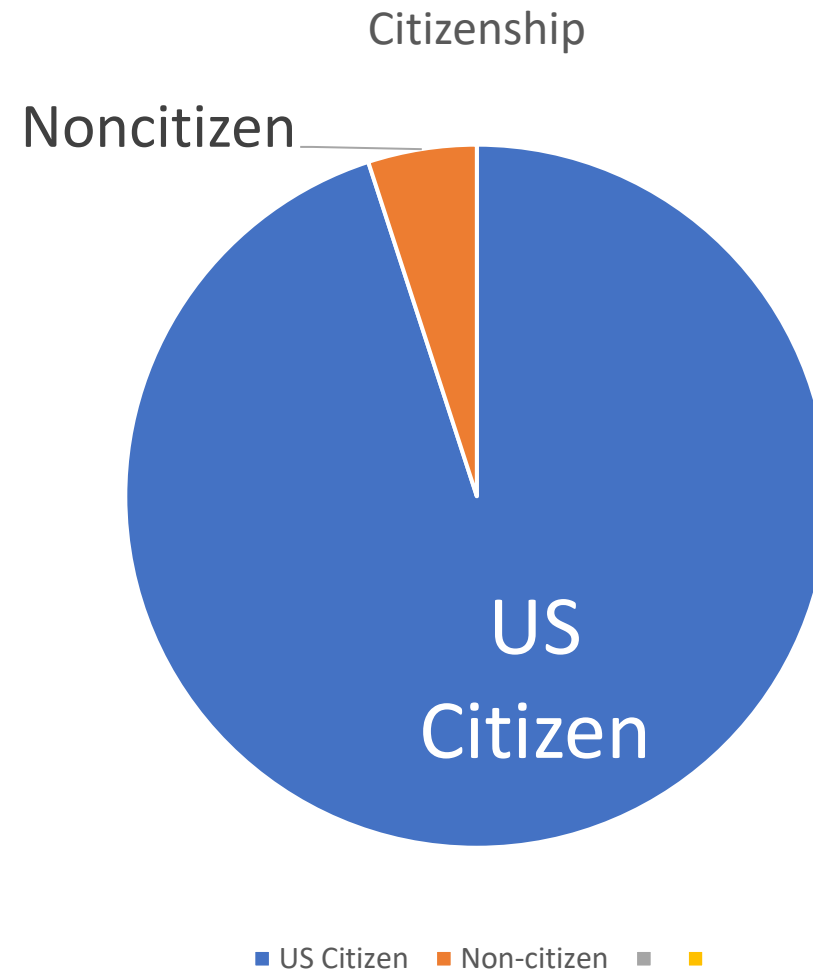
55 years

- **61%** are under 60 years
- **35%** are 60 years or over



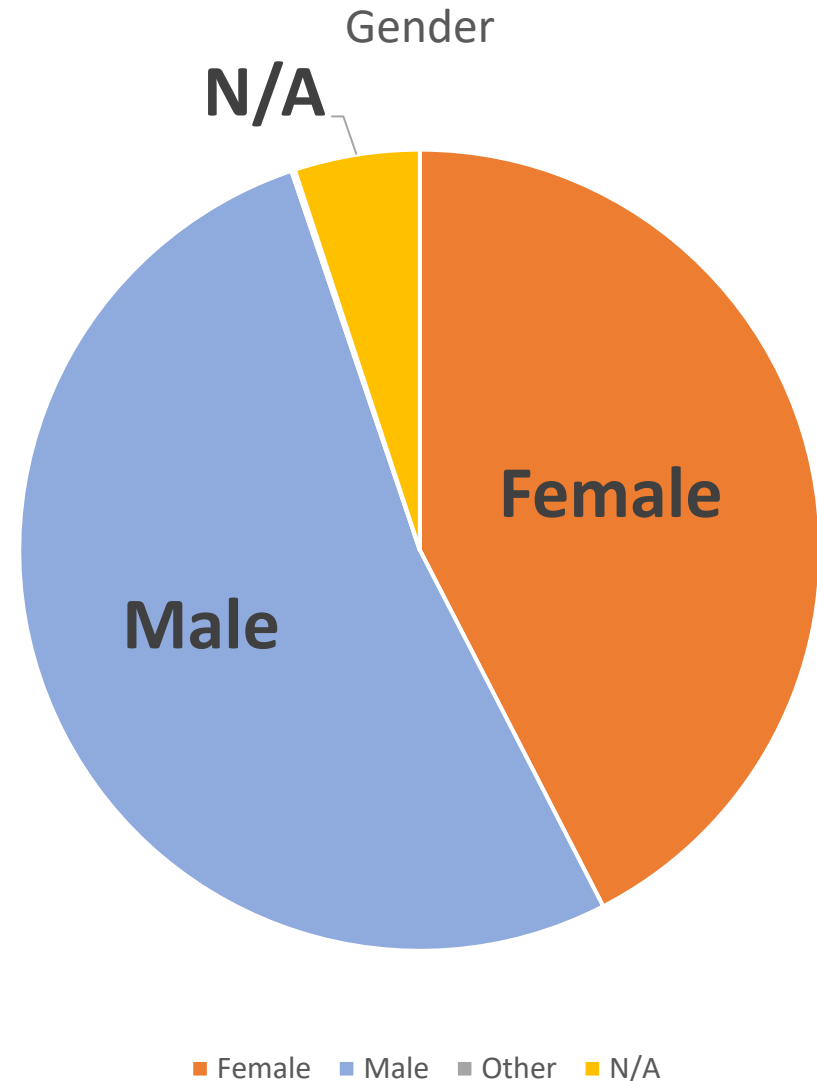
Demographic Information: Citizenship

- **95%** of participants are U.S. citizens
- **5%** are noncitizens
- Quite similar to entire town



Demographic Information: Gender

- **47%** of participants identify as female (per US Census, Sharon is 52% female)
- **48%** identify as male



Demographic Information: Race and Ethnicity

- **73%** of participants identify as Caucasian
- **17%** identify as Asian
- **2%** identify as Black or African-American
- **2%** identify as Hispanic or Latino

Demographic Information: Years in Sharon

- Average length of residence in Sharon:
21.1 years
- Median length of residence in Sharon:
18 years



SHARON GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE
Survey of Town Meeting Attendees
Conducted May 2022

The Governance Study Committee conducted a survey of voters who attended the 2022 annual Town Meeting at the Sharon High School auditorium.

The anonymous paper survey was designed to gather information about who attended the meeting; what they like or do not like about the town's form of government; and other topics.

Of the 193 residents who attended the meeting, 78% completed a survey.

Note: Some responses below total more or less than 100% due to rounding or in cases where participants were allowed to choose more than one option.

TOTAL RESPONSES: 151

QUESTION 1: I attend Annual or Special Town Meeting ...

Almost always	95	62%
Sometimes	30	20%
Rarely	11	7%
This is my first Town Meeting	17	11%

QUESTION 2: Which of the following factors might have affected the frequency of your attendance – or the attendance of someone in your household – at Town Meeting?
Check all that apply.

Factor	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
Childcare issues	54	36%
Conflicts with other events or activities	49	32%
Work conflicts	46	30%
The fact Town Meeting is generally held on weekday nights	29	19%
I'm not always interested in what Town Meeting is about	29	19%
Religious observances	8	5%
I believe the town is well run	8	5%
Mobility or health considerations	3	2%
Transportation or parking issues	2	1%
Other/no response	4	3%
None of the above	19	13%

QUESTION 3: Which of the following statements describes your view of Town Meeting? Check all that apply.

Statement	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
I try to attend Town Meeting no matter what items are on the agenda	94	62%
I feel it's important for me to attend Town Meeting	93	62%
Town Meeting typically takes too long	70	46%
There should be a better way of making decisions	61	40%
Listening to the debates helps me decide how to vote	53	35%
I have spoken at a Town Meeting session	51	34%
I already know how I'm going to vote by the time I arrive at Town Meeting	50	33%
Town Meeting is the best way of making decisions in town	37	25%
I like voting openly	26	17%
I attend only when there's an issue that interests me	25	17%
I don't like voting openly in public	19	13%
It's often hard for me to find the time to get to Town Meeting	18	12%
Town Meeting typically covers the topics in an appropriate amount of time	13	9%
Other/no response	2	1%

QUESTION 4: Where do you learn about Town Meeting? Check all that apply.

Source	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
From the town warrant document sent to my home	118	79%
Sharon Facebook groups	59	39%
Town web pages or emails	49	32%
Word of mouth / friends / neighbors	44	29%
Local news media (Times Advocate, Wicked Local, etc.)	13	9%
Flyer postings or bulletin boards	12	8%
School communications (from principals/ PTOs/ etc.)	6	4%
Twitter or Instagram	3	2%
Other/no response	1	1%

QUESTION 5: Please tell us about yourself! These questions will help us better understand who attends Town Meeting.

Your age

18-24	4	3%
25-24	7	5%
35-47	45	30%
48-59	38	25%
60-74	41	27%
75+	12	8%
Prefer not to say/no response	3	3%
Average:	54 years	

Your gender identity

Female	73	48%
Male	68	45%
Nonbinary/nonconforming	4	2%
Prefer not to say/no response	7	5%

Which of the following best describes you?

White or Caucasian	127	84%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7	5%
Black or African American	7	5%
Hispanic or Latino	2	1%
A race or ethnicity not listed here	2	1%
Prefer not to say/no response	6	4%

How many years have you lived in Sharon?

Median:	17 years
Average:	21 years

Do you serve on a town government board or committee?

No	101	67%
Yes	48	32%
No response	2	1%